

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY – WEDNESDAY, 21ST AUGUST 2024

PROFESSOR TINA BEATTIE – writer and Catholic theologian

Good morning.

The Home Secretary Yvette Cooper has recently ordered a review which will look at tackling violence against women and girls as a form of extremism.

Preparing to do Thought for the Day, I sometimes look for stories hidden beneath the headlines. There's never a week that goes by without reports of murdered women, usually as bylines to the main news of the day. Sometimes, public fear is allayed by the information that the murderer was known to the victim or it was a domestic incident, as if being killed by someone you have perhaps loved and trusted makes the news less shocking.

Whether it's a random attack by a stranger or an attack by a partner or family member, the killing of women, or femicide, is rarely, if ever, described as a hate crime. Yet such murders are at the furthest extreme of a spectrum of misogynistic language and behaviour that can run like a poison through the bloodstream of culture and religion. I doubt there's a woman listening who doesn't have a story to tell.

In the Christian tradition, misogyny has been given biblical justification by blaming Eve for bringing sin and death into the world. This idea is deeply rooted in cultures shaped by Christian interpretations of the Book of Genesis. It fuels the belief that the female sex is a dangerous threat to men, even driving them to violence. Instead of tackling the problem of male violence, blame is projected onto women who are still often held responsible for provoking men to attack them.

Yet I also believe that there is a promise hidden in plain sight at the heart of the Gospels, that if women were the first to be blamed, they are also the first to be redeemed. The women around Jesus are portrayed as his faithful followers and friends, praised for their courage, perseverance and faith. When he is asked to join in the condemnation of a woman accused of adultery and about to be stoned, he turns the lens on the violent mob. Let the one without sin

cast the first stone. It takes two to commit adultery. Where was the man? How many of the men in that murderous crowd were adulterers?

I believe that in the example of Jesus, there is a model of non-violent love, which is a rebuke to the institutional Church's long and continuing traditions of patriarchy and male privilege. That is, for me, a message worth struggling for, especially in a world in which violence against women remains so routine as to be hardly worth noticing. I hope that we may at last be willing to call it by its rightful name: a hate crime.