

Faith leaders say populist extremism is 'incompatible with religion'

**POPULIST** extremism rejects fundamental moral and ethical principles of Christianity and other religions, and accordingly must be actively resisted by faith communities.

Such was the core conclusion of an inter-faith peace event in Edinburgh on "Faith, Peace and Global Politics in the Age of President Trump", held by Edinburgh Inter-Faith and Uniting for Peace.

Professor Jolyon Mitchell, Director, Centre for Theology and Public Issues, Edinburgh University, said the separation barriers now within and between many countries - from Cyprus and Northern Ireland to Israel-Palestine and USA-Mexico - symbolised the deep divisions in today's world.

"The past 12 years have seen 6,000 miles of new separation walls and barriers erected in 65 countries." Overcoming these divisions and building peace required both top-level action by leaders and local-level action by activists and communities, and also "the often neglected middle-level action where religious leaders are very important."

Imam Amin Buxton of Annandale Street Mosque said the current time of great uncertainty - also "a deeply religious age" - called for "a pact of the virtuous, unity of faiths against oppression, and solidarity of the wise against the corrupt."

Purification of the soul was a vital element in creating non-violence and reconciliation. "Recycling the heart of the individual is essential to help rectify the world."

Imam Hassan Rabhani said close engagement by Muslims with non-Muslim society was the best way to tackle Islamophobia caused by ignorance and lack of contact: "we need to build bridges."

The Rev Brian Cooper, Uniting for Peace Inter-Faith Secretary, said populist extremism in Europe and in the USA had significant negative features: racial and religious intolerance, appeals to fear and hate, xenophobia, scapegoating of 'the other' and minorities, emotionalism at the expense of reason, creation of divisions, rejection of global compassion and responsibility.

"By appealing to base instincts, and lacking concern for human rights, safeguarding minorities, solidarity and internationalism, populist parties present a fundamental moral challenge to long-held social ethics shared by Jews, Christians, Muslims, those of other faiths - and Enlightenment humanists."

"The very notion of compassion, rooted in Europe's Judeo-Christian heritage and shared by Islam, is absent from populism."

# New body aims to mediate while seeking peace outcomes

**PEACEMAKER** Mediators (www.peacemakers.ngo) was launched on Saturday 6 May at Christ Church, Virginia Water.

The new body aims to be a catalyst for peace-making, especially where 'minorities are persecuted, where justice is denied, human rights are suppressed or reconciliation is needed'.

The director, the recently retired vicar of Christ Church, the Rev Stephen Sizer, said he wants to work with other peace-making charities, with a specific role of dealing with causes not consequences.

Patrons of the charity are Archbishop Mounser Anis (Jerusalem and the Middle East) and the former Archbishop of Uganda, Henry Orombi.

The Panel of Reference includes Bishop Michael Langrish, former Bishop of Exeter.

Speaking from this Sunday's lectionary he noted that Ephesians 2:14 reads "Christ is our peace who has broken down the dividing wall to make peace". The cross, which was a priestly and prophetic act is not a victory over hatred, Bishop Langrish said. Jesus was not winning a conflict but putting an end to conflict.

Pouring millions into peace-keeping only keeps warring parties apart. The Christian community struggles to keep reconciliation alive. "This charity is committed to keep that witness alive," he said, "a vocation to which Christ calls us and for which he gives us the grace."

Stephen Hofmeyr QC spoke of his experience of being brought up in Cape Town where he lived "under the horrors of a



majority who were persecuted." His experience taught him that reconciliation and true peace only come from God. This involves "truth, dealing with the realities and all the issues, not sweeping them under the carpet".

"God works when people pray," he said, noting that at a final meeting to secure peace in South Africa, agreement failed at the last hurdle. Chief Buthelesi left and boarded a plane. After take off the plane developed a fault and had to return. Chief Buthelesi was asked to go back into the meeting, where finally the deal was done. People had been praying.

Canon Garth Hewitt, the founder of Amos Trust, and a trustee of the charity, gave a concert with guitar and harmonica. His songs had lines such as

"In the tents of God's mercy all are accepted... God is still waiting with wide open arms".

"I believe in the way of peace, I believe in the way of freedom, "Oh in my heart I do believe, In the way of peace and the way of Jesus."

And referring to the Bethlehem Wall, "No injustice will last forever, one day the wall will fall."

"When we do not speak up so the truth dies, it's the devil's moment. Kyrie eleison."

A painting called 'The Devil's Moment' was auctioned in aid of the new charity.

Several members of the panel of reference referred to the courage that Rev Stephen Sizer had shown under significant pressure, from people, one contributor noted, who were afraid of what he was saying.

Canon Chris Suggden welcomed the launch of Peacemaker Mediators as timely for the UK because from a Christian perspective, making peace and achieving reconciliation

depends on truth.

"Truth is the only defence the powerless and marginalised have against the powerful. If morality is reduced to personal opinion and preference, and if criticism of any position is taken as unacceptable offence, then all we have is a power-game and those in the minority are judged to be sick and suffering from some phobia or other."

"We must ensure the freedom to speak and seek the truth in the public square in our own country. Some will be pressing the parties in the forthcoming election to include the provision of conscience clauses in many of the current and contentious articles of legislation already on the statute book and environment."

*Pictured: (from left) Canon Garth Hewitt, Bishop Michael Langrish, the Rev Stephen Sizer and the painting 'The Devil's Moment' by Daniel Baruel.*

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