

Message from Rabbi Dr Tony Bayfield

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“What you are doing today puts many to shame.

Since the 1960s the world has been disfigured by a phenomenon which is often called ‘the rise of fundamentalism’. Whether the term is a satisfactory one or not, the phenomenon represents a global disaster, afflicting particularly those three closely related faiths Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Fundamentalism has five key characteristics. It begins as a fearful rejection of modernity which has challenged old ways of understanding the world and shaken old truths. It responds by reasserting those truths in an uncritical and simplistic way. It advocates a retreat into a past, simpler, purer way of life which never actually existed. And it sets out to seize political power. So that it can impose the truths and the way of life on all without consent and with resort to violence if necessary.

Fundamentalism afflicts Judaism, Christianity and Islam alike and, by and large, mainstream faith leaders have done all too little to resist. Some have been seduced into thinking that it is really this ‘old-time religion’ that is authentic. Some have placed organisational unity and stability above resistance. Some have felt justifiably threatened. Some have excused fundamentalist leaders by confusing the conditions under which the poor and oppressed who are duped and exploited with the cynical exploiters themselves.

As a result, fanaticism and terror, violence and intolerance flourish whilst mainstream religious leaders wring their hands.

Religions have a great deal to answer for. But we should never lose sight of the fact that there are fundamentalists amongst the secular as well, extremists who betray the same intolerance, dogmatism and willingness to use and justify violence.

The only salvation is for the silent majority, both religious and secular, to cease to be silent and for the moderates to demonstrate that moderation is not the same as acquiescence.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam, at their best, all advocate peace and tolerance as supreme values. As do moderate humanists and secularists. We have however to grasp the truth that we see on our television screens daily - namely that peace and tolerance are not universal values. They have to be asserted, worked for and even fought for. Our television screens tell us that both the good name of religion and the very future of societies all round the globe are at stake.

Thank you for ceasing to be silent and for showing intolerance of intolerance. Thank you for advocating the best of our shared values. Those Jews, Christians, Muslims and moderate secularists who are not standing shoulder to shoulder with you today have a great deal to thank you for. But this is only a beginning and we must lose no opportunity for joining the cause”.