

The Challenge of Religious Extremism: Understanding and Response

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Religious extremism is one of the most troublesome challenge we face today. The accompanying phenomenon of religiously motivated terrorism that often features constitutes a great puzzle. What's going on? We had thought, perhaps, that at least in Europe the wars and violent extremisms of religion had been well left behind. America might still produce a few Christian crazies, but they are an obvious aberration. Surely it is just Islam that manifests extremism and violence today – and that is a big enough problem in itself. However, today we see evidence not only of extreme violence emanating from some quarters of the Muslim world, but also in connection with other situations and religions.

In Myanmar it is innocent Muslims who suffer at the hands of militant Buddhists. Jewish extremists draw on the same well-springs as Christian extremists in carrying out bloody and violent acts. In India, Hindu extremists attack Christians and Muslim minorities with impunity. Either religion is being grossly misused for other nefarious purposes, or the religions themselves are susceptible to fomenting extremist ideologies and behaviours. In this series of talks and discussions we will explore something of this contemporary phenomenon, on the one hand confronting the hard reality of religions' dark side; on the other recognising that, as has been said, if religion is part of the problem, then it is surely also part of the solution.

You are warmly invited to attend any or all of the four-evening programme to be held during November at the Christkatholische Gemeindesaal, Kramgasse 10 (Nov 1 and 8) and St Ursula's Church, Jubiläumsplatz 2 (Nov 15 & 22). Each evening session begins at 19.30 (7.30pm).

Note on the Speaker

Douglas Pratt is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Waikato, New Zealand, and since 2011 Adjunct Professor in the Faculty of Theology, University of Bern. His research interests include Christian-Muslim relations, interfaith dialogue, and contemporary issues such as religious diversity and extremism. He has recently published *Being Open, Being Faithful: the journey of interreligious dialogue* (WCC, 2014) and the co-edited volume *Fear of Muslims? International perspectives on Islamophobia* (Springer, 2016). His 2005 text *The Challenge of Islam: encounters in interfaith dialogue* has been reissued in the Routledge Revival Library (2017). Also this year he has published *Christian Engagement with Islam: Ecumenical Journeys since 1910* (Brill, 2017) which was launched at Bern in May. On December 21st, again at Bern, his forthcoming *Religion and Extremism: Rejecting Diversity* (Bloomsbury, 2017) will be launched.

An Anglican priest from New Zealand, Professor Pratt is an Associate of the Centre for the Study of Religion and Politics [CSR/P] at the University of St Andrews, Scotland, and the New Zealand Associate of the UNESCO Chair in Intercultural and Interreligious Relations – Asia Pacific. He is currently a Team Leader on the University of Birmingham based, UK AHRC funded, *Christian-Muslim Relations – A Bibliographical History* research project. He is currently teaching a course on Religion and Extremism at the University of Bern.