

Former Chief Rabbi Awarded Prestigious Prize for Religious Work

Britain's former Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has won the 2016 Templeton Prize, worth 1.1 million pounds (\$1.5 million), for his efforts to help steer young people away from the message of extremists by encouraging religions to connect with them.

The John Templeton Foundation said Sacks, 67, was ahead of his time with his central message of respect for all faiths and his argument that only by recognizing the values of each of them could violence and terrorism be countered.

The prize, awarded to an individual who has made "exceptional contributions to affirming life's spiritual dimension", is one of the world's richest. Sacks said he was "absolutely knocked sideways" to have won.

"It just felt very thrilling and so my wife and I did a little dance together," he told Reuters Television in an interview earlier this week. "Not something we do that often, but it was lovely."

As Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, Sacks was the leading spokesman for British Jews from 1991 until 2013, leading what many considered to be the revitalization of Britain's Jewish community.

The Templeton Foundation praised his work tackling the spread of religious violence which he argued had been sparked by Western secularization that had failed to address young people's search for meaning, belonging and identity.

"Today the most powerful religious voices are coming from the extremes and I think that is terribly dangerous. They are

speaking to young idealistic kids and turning them really into murderers and we can't sit still and just let that happen," Sacks told Reuters.

"I think religious leaders have to give the same power and passion to the forces of reconciliation, compassion, forgiveness, love, friendship across the boundaries between faiths.

"We really need to connect young people to the sources of positive idealism and I am afraid those voices have tended to be screened out by what I see as quite a self-indulgent secular culture of the west right now."

Sacks joins a list of 45 former winners which includes South Africa's Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Mother Teresa and the Dalai Lama. Last year's winner was Canadian Jean Vanier who launched an international network of communities for people with learning difficulties. {eoa}

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