leadership from Professor David Ford and the Cambridge Interfaith Programme, the Global Covenant is focused on delegitimising the use of religion as a justification for violence.

I’ve been a broadcast journalist, banker, marketing consultant, and author, among other things.

I had a long career as a criminologist, and have always been interested in the link between religion and violence, between verbal and physical violence, and the dangers of apocalyptic thinking in which the world divides into “children of light” and “children of darkness.” Such thinking can only lead to dehumanising “the other,” and dehumanising ultimately leads to violence.

One of the problematic aspects of religious belief, in some adherents, is the feeling of holding a monopoly on truth. This form of group narcissism and its danger is clearly manifest in the behaviour of groups like ISIS, who have become a scourge on the world.

There are social-science data that correlate religious certitude with authoritarian traits, such as intolerance, ethnocentrism, and prejudice. Spiritual questing, in contrast to certitude, tends to be negatively correlated with these traits.

There are contradictory texts in all the great religions that promote acceptance and respect as well as intolerance. For example, one of the most beautiful and beautifully pluralist is found in the Qur’an. I’ll paraphrase it: “If God had intended for all of us to be the same, he would have created us that way. Instead, he made us different so that these would be many paths to God.” It’s quite a contrast to the ideology espoused by ISIS, isn’t it?

I often hear people ask: “Where are the moderate Muslim voices? Why don’t they speak up in the face of terrorism?” To this I respond, “They aren’t! I’ve read and heard a great deal of opposition to Islamic extremism from Muslims. I was born in Budapest immedi­ately after the Second World War. Much of my family was murdered in the Holocaust, but my parents survived, and they campaigned for the rights of anti-immigration parties in the UK and elsewhere in Europe. It’s no coincidence that these parties promote anti-Semitic and Islam­ophobic attitudes.

To be the child of a Holocaust survivor is the wellspring of my motivation. Having experienced the ravages of religion-based hatred through my family, I’m deeply sensitised to the appropriation of religion for evil ends.

Also, as a young child, I had a di­verse upbringing. I attended a Christian Science Sunday school, long before I attended Hebrew School. I went to a summer camp in which I sang in a touring church choir. I even went through an Evan­gelical phase in which I kept spout­ing off about God, in my very juvenile way.

The US is a miraculous country, in that it has absorbed wave after wave of immigrants and given them access to the “American Dream.” So many minorities started out on the deepest end of contempt and discrimination, but by most measures, they’ve been able to rise above those beginnings to be fully integrated into American society. According to a survey by the Tanenbaum Center, even in the face of Islamophobia, American Mus­lims rank above average in education and affluence.

This doesn’t mean the US is the perfect society. It has deep flaws that get amplified or exacerbated by the politics of the moment. Race, class, and gender improvements are still deeply entrenched, and in­come inequality has grown. But part of America’s greatness is its aspirational nature: it aspires to equal opportunity, to racial har­mony, to be a meritocracy.

The main source of religious diversity in the UK is immigration. We’re witnessing two simultaneous and contradictory trends — growing secularisation and growing religious that drives so much more tired than my body. Just give me a good book and an engaging TV show, and I’m more moved by Motown, Motown energies, elates, and frees me.

I pray for an end to the ignorance and prejudice that has produced so much religious hatred in the world. Given that I’m Jewish, I’d be unlikely to find myself locked in a church; but if I were, I’d enjoy being trapped with Trevor Nunn and Simon Schama.

Dr Georgette Bennett was talking to Terence Handley MacMath. tanenbaum.org

HOT April days; the birds building, the skies high and still. On Sunday, I dressed for a procession, only to find children tying trinkets on an Easter tree. It was Sunday school with ceremony. But lunch was spring lamb and sherry.

Bad news from good friends: their cats are gone. I do not write back immediately, but ponder in my heart. It was news that had to come, by the sound of things. They spoke philosophically about their faith, and how good the children are.

Meanwhile, it is perfect spring­time, in early May, and the horses are eating their heads off in the meadow opposite and plunging them into glittering water tanks.

And so we come to that favourite of mine, St Mark the Evangelist, whose symbol is a winged lion, and whose capital is Venice; a glorious person. The young man who ran away naked when Christ was arrested in the Garden of Geth­semane, when the priests grabbed his garments, he was and his cousin Barnabas who accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey, John Mark, the young Pergamon, a lovely city, which would become one of the greatest art centres of the ancient world.

Young people continue to travel back and forth to destinations that promise spiritual goals. We, who lost our spiritual innocence long ago, worry about passports and suchlike impediments. I was brought up on those who criticised him and that inspiration. Leonard is British, and we have a home in London.

Fun? What’s that? Seriously, I work with some of the most interesting people in the world on some of the most interesting issues in the world. What could be more fun than that?

If I wanted to be true to the image that is best exemplified by the colour of my favourite sound is something clas­sical, like Rachmaninov. But the true version of me, more moved by Motown, Motown energies, elates, and frees me.

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Written by Mortons Printers and Publishers, Newspaper House, Morton Way, Horncastle, Lincolnshire LN9 6JR, registered as a newspaper at the Post Office.

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Back page interview ‘One problem is the feeling in some adherents that they hold a monopoly on truth’

Georgette Bennett president, Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, and founder of Multi­faith Alliance for Syrian Refugees

The single greatest threat to world peace is the misuse and abuse of religion. The reality of that threat is all over the headlines.

As a sociologist, I was taught that religion is the largest component of culture. One can’t be culturally literate without understanding religious account. One certainly sees this played out in the US.

I started my career as an academic teaching in universities, but I always felt a great need to get behind the headlines and be where the action is. My work in inter­religious relations is entirely consistent with that.

I founded the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding in 1992. It’s become the go­to organisation for programmes that combat religion­based hatred and misunderstanding in schools, healthcare, workplaces, and areas of armed conflict. We wrote a med­ical manual on religion­cultural compet­ence, which has been distributed to more than 10,000 healthcare providers and is also available on­line. The Tanenbaum Action network operates in 20 conflict zones around the world.

In 2013, I felt compelled to respond to the worst humanitarian crisis since the Second World War. I founded the Multi­faith Alliance for Syrian Refugees, mobilising the moral and religious authority of religious leaders behind the headlines and be where the action is. My work includes, among other things, fighting religious hatred and mistrust that a churchwarden would have condemned. For many years, I did it myself, scanning the papers, and trusting that a churchwarden would not arrive, as happened to the artist John Constable, who was trapped with Trevor Nunn and Simon Schama.

Life for cat and man is perilous and uncertain. For many years, I did it myself, scanning the papers, and trusting that a churchwarden would not arrive, as happened to the artist John Constable, who was trapped with Trevor Nunn and Simon Schama.

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