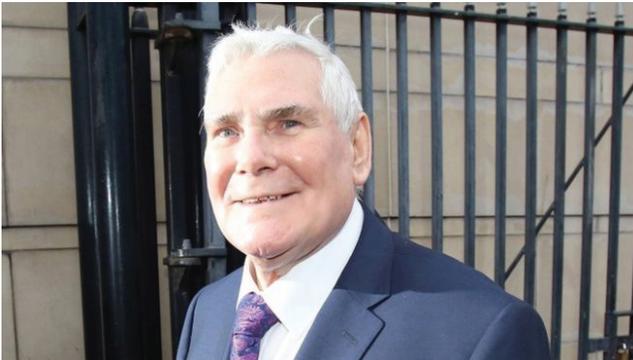




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The ambiguities of Pastor James McConnell



Pastor James McConnell

It is a little disconcerting to say the least to watch Free Presbyterians taking a prominent role in supporting Pastor James McConnell, as he appeared in a Belfast court on the charge of making "grossly offensive" remarks about Islam in his pulpit back in May 2015.

Undoubtedly, 'Free Speech' is on trial at this time but that vital issue will be subverted and any support given will be seen as an endorsement of James McConnell and his rather dubious beliefs and practices.

Back in July, one newspaper carried the headline: Christian pastor to be charged with HATE CRIME after calling Islam 'Satanic.'

Following the public protests from Muslim sources, which prompted a police investigation and an interviewing of James McConnell, the following statement appeared on Pastor McConnell's church, the Metropolitan Tabernacle's, website on June 6th.

"I wish to make a clarification statement with regards to statements made by me recently in relation to members of the Muslim faith.

I wish to emphasise that I had no intention of causing any offence or insulting any member of the Muslim community or to arouse fear or stir-up or incite hatred towards any member of the Muslim community.

I wish to apologise publicly for any distress I may have unwittingly caused on my part. My sermon was drawing attention to how many followers of Islam have, regrettably, interpreted the doctrine of Islam as justification for violence. I have qualified my comments by reference to those who use their religion as justification for violence. As a preacher of the word of God, it is this interpretation of the doctrine of Islam which I am condemning.

I abhor violence and condemn anyone, of any faith, who uses religion to justify it.

I have devoted 60 years of my life to the service of God and preached the word of God as a Pastor to thousands of people in our community over my lifetime.

I have worked tirelessly to promote my Christian doctrine. Many faiths and denominations have attended at the Whitewell Metropolitan Tabernacle, including members of the Muslim faith. My mission has created a community in Ethiopia which ensures over 600 children a day, including Christians and Muslims, have access to clean water and food. In addition, we fund a clinic in Kenya which provides 1200 people a month with access to medical care.

I believe in the principle of free speech and in freedom of religion.

Finally, I also will welcome any opportunity to attend at the Islamic Centre in Belfast in the near future.

- Pastor James McConnell

It is rather strange to think that a preacher could say what Mr McConnell said without realising that his blunt statements about Islam would cause offence amongst Muslims! After all, we have seen people attacked, assaulted, and done to death in the most horrible fashion, in many countries of the world, and that for saying much, much less than what Pastor McConnell said.



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No Quarrel

I don't quarrel with what he said. I have repeatedly called Islam a heathen religion which, like all religions other than the religion of Christ, has its origin with the devil. It is indeed Satanic.

No, I say 'good for him' for saying what does need to be said but having said it, he should not then have been surprised that it had annoyed anyone and, even more so, he should not have gone through an exercise of apologising and seeking to placate Muslims by saying that he would welcome an opportunity to visit Belfast's Islamic Centre (Belfast Telegraph, June 7th, 2015).

Here is how one newspaper, "The Guardian" reported the matter on 6th June, 2015.

Belfast preacher who denounced Islam as evil issues apology

Pastor issues apology just hours before Northern Ireland police question him about allegations he has been inciting hatred

A born-again Christian preacher who denounced Islam as "satanic" and the "spawn of the devil" has issued a public apology over remarks that ended up de-stabilising Northern Ireland's power-sharing government.

Pastor James McConnell of Belfast said he never had any intention to "arouse fear or stir up or incite hatred" towards any Muslim in the region.

The preacher's statement was issued just hours before the Police Service of Northern Ireland questioned him about his comments and allegations that he had been inciting hatred.

Northern Ireland's first minister, Peter Robinson, came under fire for initially defending McConnell. This week Robinson publicly apologised for comments he made in a Belfast newspaper stating that he would not trust Muslims who adhered to Sharia law. He delivered his apology on the steps of Belfast's Islamic centre.

In a statement on his Whitewell Metropolitan Tabernacle church website, McConnell said: "My sermon was drawing attention to how many followers of Islam have, regrettably, interpreted the doctrine of Islam as justification for violence.

"I have qualified my comments by reference to those who use their religion as justification for violence. As a preacher of the word of God, it is this interpretation of the doctrine of Islam which I am condemning. I abhor violence and condemn anyone, or any faith, who uses religion to justify it."

Last month, the founder of the evangelical Protestant church on Belfast's Lough Shore told his congregation that a "new evil has risen" and that there were "cells of Muslims right throughout Britain". He also praised Enoch Powell as a prophet whose infamous Rivers of Blood speech was coming to pass in the UK with the rise of militant Islam.

Later on Friday, outside Newtonabbey police station in Belfast, McConnell repeated his earlier statement that he had never intended to incite hatred against the Muslim community as well as his opposition to all violence.

As well as publicly apologising over his role in the controversy, Robinson this week met Islamic leaders from across Ireland. His Democratic Unionist party also backed a Sinn Féin motion condemning the recent upsurge in racist attacks, which have mainly been focused in the Greater Belfast area.

The Stormont parliament passed – without a formal vote – a motion calling for all parties to show leadership on the issue and urging the first and deputy first ministers to bring forward a racial equality strategy as a matter of urgency.



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Robinson intervened in the row because he sometimes worships at McConnell's church.

Let politicians apologise but for those who profess to preach the TRUTH of God, there can be no apologising if it is the TRUTH we have proclaimed.

Martin Luther's stance is what ours should be. "Unless I am convicted by scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other - my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen."

To be quite honest, singing the hymn, "I'm not ashamed to own my Lord" outside the court, seemed a little incongruous given the behaviour of Pastor McConnell in the wake of his making of the comments.



Peter Robinson apologised to Muslim leaders in their Belfast Islamic Centre on 4th June, 2015.

Equivocation

Sadly, equivocation has marked Mr McConnell's position in this controversy. That equivocation was demonstrated even more clearly during the trial. Amongst those he asked to speak on his behalf in the courtroom was a Roman Catholic priest.

Here is a quotation from the BBC report of 16th December.

"DUP MP Sammy Wilson and Catholic priest Fr Patrick McCafferty appeared as character witnesses for Pastor McConnell. Fr McCafferty said that in spite of their theological differences, the pastor and he shared a Christian love. 'He has no hatred,' he said."

The priest cleverly made his appearance on Pastor McConnell's behalf an endorsement of their "common Christian love." Trust Rome never to miss a chance. Pastor McConnell's anxiety to impress the court with his 'all-embracing views', provided the priest with just that chance.

This character witness is a hater of historic, Biblical Protestantism. In 1994, he gave as part of the problem in Ulster, the "ranting preachers who, out of the depths of their abysmal prejudice and ignorance, pour vitriolic scorn on the Mass and other Catholic beliefs. These sins call for repentance." (Belfast Telegraph, 20th July, 1994).

Since this priest gave a character witness for Pastor McConnell and they were photographed warmly hugging each other outside the court, it is clear that he does not see Pastor McConnell as being one of those who pours 'scorn on the Mass' but rather one that has repented of this "sin"!

No Biblical, separated Protestant will want to have any part in this pantomime of compromise.

Ivan Foster.

17th December 2015.