

Jonathan Sacks, author and former British chief rabbi, wins Templeton Prize

by [Chris Herlinger](#) in the [March 30, 2016](#) issue

Jonathan Sacks, a leader in efforts to promote interfaith understanding, has won the 2016 Templeton Prize, which recognizes “exceptional contributions to affirming life’s spiritual dimension.”

Sacks’s “future-mindedness” was a key reason he was chosen for the honor, said Jennifer Simpson, who heads the John Templeton Foundation Board of Trustees.

“After 9/11, Rabbi Sacks saw the need for a response to the challenge posed by radicalization and extremism, and he did so with dignity and grace,” she said in a statement. “He has always been ahead of his time and, thanks to his leadership, the world can look to the future with hope, something we are very much in need of right now.”

Sacks, 67, served as Great Britain’s chief rabbi from 1991 to 2013 and was often praised for his work in revitalizing Jewish institutions. At the same time, Sacks became a prominent public figure in advocating for religious institutions to turn away from extremism, including in his most recent book, *Not in God’s Name: Confronting Religious Violence*.

Sacks said he is particularly proud of his work developing close relations with Muslim groups in Great Britain; he has often stressed how much Judaism owes Islam for its intellectual traditions, particularly during the Middle Ages. “I have found a warm and sympathetic reception in the Muslim community,” he said.

He has been shocked and dismayed by the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe, calling it “the most horrific thing in my life.”

The future hope for religious traditions, he said, is in supporting and engendering the talents of young leaders of all faiths “who are willing to take a risk for peace.”

Sacks said he was humbled by the \$1.5 million prize—one of the world’s largest annual awards given to an individual—and viewed it as evidence the issues he was raising, alongside others, were gaining a larger hearing.

“It’s a sign that the kind of work I and others are doing is resonating,” he said. “This wonderful prize will deepen, extend, and intensify those efforts.” —Religion News Service

*This article was edited on March 15, 2016.*