

Constantinian Order & Slovak Embassy celebrate faith communities
& interfaith dialogue in Britain & Ireland

**“One candle breaks darkness and each and every one of us in the darkness becomes
that light that breaks that darkness”**

London 29 January 2020. The Sacred Military Constantinian Order of St George in Great Britain and Ireland, in partnership with the Embassy of Slovakia in London, hosted a reception in celebration of Britain’s multi-faith communities and those engaged in interfaith dialogue. The event was attended by over 100 personalities from the world of faith, politics, diplomacy, business and the charity sector.

Held at the Embassy of Slovakia in London on Thursday 16 January 2020, the event was co-hosted by the Slovak Ambassador to the Court of St. James’s, His Excellency Mr Lubomir Reháč and Constantinian Order Delegate for Great Britain and Ireland and Delegate for Inter-Religious Relations, Mr Anthony Bailey OBE.

Slovak Ambassador Lubomir Reháč said: “The President of Slovakia Mrs Zuzana Čaputová during her New Year’s audience with representatives of religious and faith communities last week made an interesting comparison: religions, she quoted, are like various colours on a lampshade. We look at the light inside of a lamp from various angles, through different colours. For me, she said, it is an image of unity in diversity of approaches. Assisting people in experiencing a proximity of God is a great mission of religions, contributing through it the acceptance of universal values. Values that are endangered by ideologists of hatred, intolerance, animosity or chauvinism”.

The Ambassador continued “We must unite our forces, use the strength of belief, ideals of good and confraternity to face and challenge negative phenomenons of today. This Embassy has always been opened for good ideas (Good Idea Slovakia is our official branding now). Our activities, quite naturally, have sometimes a religious component, reflecting our traditions and identity”.

Constantinian Order Delegate Anthony Bailey then said: “People are sadly defining themselves more about what they are standing against rather than what they are standing for. As a result, there is an increasing reluctance to engage with, talk to, and even listen to people with opposite views to our own.

“Therefore, we are living in a bubble, creating and encouraging a “them and us” atmosphere within our society. We need instead to create some sort of symphony style society and live like an orchestra where each instrument plays its own sound but under the baton of a global conductor, we can blend together and produce perfect harmony. This is what the Constantinian Order tries to do, and I know so many others do too”.

A keynote speech was delivered on behalf of Her Majesty's Government by the Minister of Communities and Faith in Britain, Rt Hon Viscount Younger of Leckie who said: “Our freedom to worship who and how we wish, or not to worship at all, is part of what makes Britain the resilient and vibrant country it is today..... We celebrate the fact that faith is a vital part of peoples’ identities and motivates many.... I believe people should feel secure in their religious identities.... We are making sure that the voices of people of faith are heard by Government.... We actively encourage interfaith dialogues across England. We

fund projects which foster understanding and respect between people of faith, and indeed those with no faith. The Government is also taking steps to tackle hate crime aimed at people's faith or race identities".

Further speeches were delivered by senior faith community leaders including His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos, Coptic Archbishop of London and Papal Legate, the Roman Catholic Auxiliary Bishop of Southwark Rt Rev Paul Hendricks and the Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) Harun Khan.

Archbishop Angaelos said: "At this time I'd like to commend especially the Constantinian Order and synonymously my dear friend Anthony Bailey because of the work you do, not only on these islands but around the world, bringing communities together. Bringing us all together, knowing that we represent something higher than the division that is spread within our communities. And knowing that in one another we have the strength to be able to empower and enable each other to respect others. And especially when we face the greatest obstacles to those rights that we cherish, not only for ourselves but for each other.

"You see as a Christian I believe one of the worst things I can possibly do is just look after Christians – because that would make me tribal. That would make me like those condemned by Our Lord, saying what good is that to you, for anyone loves those who are like him or her. And yet it is not only when we accept that when we love and cherish those who are different, that we show who we truly are.

"One of the greatest mistakes and tragedies of this decade and the decade before, I fear, was the concept of tolerance. Because we're told that tolerance is the base line. The problem is that if we fall below that base line we are intolerant. And yet when our base line is love and respect and human dignity – then if we fall below that we are still a long, long way from being intolerant. And so, it is with that spirit that I am very thankful that I'm here among you not only as a guest but now even being non-Catholic, as a member of the Order that is a great privilege that I carry."

The Archbishop thanked all those present wished them a blessed year ahead. He concluded: "One candle breaks darkness and each and every one of you in the darkness that may surround you becomes that light that breaks that darkness and together we become an infinitely greater light that breaks the darkness that tried to engulf us all."

Roman Catholic Auxiliary Bishop of Southwark Rt Rev Paul Hendricks said: "The need for dialogue is obvious. Whatever our faith tradition, we don't live in a bubble on our own. We live in the midst of a lively and varied community, enriched by the contributions of people from all over the world. Daily life is a constant dialogue, where we learn from each other. And just as religion challenges us to renew and to purify our intentions, so religion itself needs to be continually renewed and purified.

"I'm very happy to note the role of the Constantinian Order in supporting this evening's reception and it's very appropriate considering their longstanding commitment to inter religious relations in this country and internationally. The fact that their prior in Britain is Cardinal Vincent Nichols is a clear sign of the importance of their work and this is recognised."

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) Secretary General Harun Khan said: "Personally I'm not a great fan of the word tolerance. I'm born and bred in this country – and 'tolerance' is literally the last line. We need to be much more than that".

Mr Khan said he felt relations with Muslims in the UK were improving and pointed out that there are more Moslem parliamentarians in the UK than there are across Europe. He said Muslims are also well

represented across the professions. “Even though as a community we have our challenges, just like everyone else, we are working together with leaders like yourselves to build those relationships, build dialogue and demonstrate to the wider world that we can live together in peace and harmony.”

The Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and Kuwaiti Ambassador to the Court of St James’s HE Mr Khaled Al-Duwaisan, GCVO, attended heading a large group of senior London-based diplomats from across the world. Among them were the Dean of the Latin American Diplomatic Corps and Honduran Ambassador to the Court of St James’s HE Ivan Romero-Martinez, together with the ambassadors and charge d’affaires from Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Peru, Poland, Tajikistan, Serbia, the United Arab Emirates as well as the Head of the Taiwan Representative Office in Britain.

Council and delegation members of the Constantinian Order and the Royal Order of Francis I in Britain and Ireland, were also in attendance including HRH Princess Katarina of Yugoslavia, Sir Ewan Harper, CBE, Judge Patrick Clyne, James Drabble, Sister Ellen Flynn, Kevin Grant, Leslie Haywood, Kevin Hart, Clare Head, The Very Rev Canon Peter Newby, Professor John McIntosh, CBE, Brigadier Thomas Ogilvie-Graham, MBE, Andy Rogers, Professor John Ryan, Dr John Smail, Dr Colin Smythe, Dr Charles Tannock, MBE, Elizabeth Thornborough, The Rev Canon Christopher Tuckwell and Vivian Wineman.

Senior representatives of the archbishops and bishops of the Anglican, Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox, and Ukrainian Greek Catholic churches were in attendance.

Among those organisations represented were Aid to the Church in Need, the Arab-Jewish Forum, the Association of Jewish Refugees, the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the Christian Embassy, The Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul, the Faith and Beliefs Forum, Faith Forum for London, London School of Economics, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is, the University of Notre Dame, the Sir Sigmund Sternberg Charitable Foundation, the United Nations and Westminster Cathedral.

Archbishop Angaelos offered prayers for the recently deceased Archbishop Gregorios of Thyateira and Great Britain, a long-standing member of the Order and Head of the Greek Orthodox church in Britain and inter-faith champion who passed away in November 2019.

