

A Further Step Forward for Muslim-Christian Relations

Christian-Muslim relations were high on the agenda last week when the world-wide debate launched by A Common Word took a further step forward with an international conference at Yale, one of the world's leading universities.



The conference was co-hosted by Professor Miroslav Volf of Yale's Divinity School and Center for Faith and Culture and by HRH Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal of Jordan. It attracted an impressive array of Christian, Muslim and Jewish religious leaders, scholars and intellectuals from around the world. The Tony Blair Faith Foundation was pleased to be represented at the meeting. A Common Word was the letter issued by 138 Muslim clerics, scholars and intellectuals, addressed to all Christian leaders across the globe, in October 2007. It was prompted by a deep concern over the state of Christian-Muslim relations and a firm conviction that Christians and Muslims are bound together by a common belief in the Unity of God and a shared commitment to the dual commands to love both God and neighbour. It invited dialogue on that basis.



Yale University/Harold Shapiro

In his opening remarks last week Professor Volf drew attention to the Christian-Muslim tensions which menace the modern world, but also sensed that a wind of hope was beginning to blow and new light penetrating the darkness, of which the Yale conference was a further manifestation.

The conference was dedicated to deepening understanding between the two faiths, a deepening which is absolutely necessary in a world where faith remains of vital significance to billions of people -how they think, how they behave, how they interact with each other. And in a globalised

world where travel, communications and migration are constantly pushing diverse people closer together, such understanding becomes urgent. Religion is not simply a private affair, a common misconception in the West in particular, but a force with profound implications for the public arena. Indeed, this is precisely what motivated Tony Blair to establish his Foundation in the first place. The dual command to love God and to love neighbour, which A Common Word is focused on, provides a powerful and practical way in which to address the many problems which we all share. Prince Ghazi stressed that this was not an attempt to create an artificial union between the two faiths but an endeavour to find an essential common ground, the better to ensure that religions are part of the solution and not an impediment.

Although primarily focused on Christian-Muslim relations, a number of Jewish representatives were present, because of the appropriateness of including insights from the third and oldest of the Abrahamic religions.

Momentum on A Common Word will be maintained through further meetings at Lambeth Palace and Cambridge University in the UK, the Vatican, Georgetown University in the USA and Jordan over the next year, demonstrating the seriousness with which the Common Word process is being taken.

The Yale conference was an important milestone in the dissemination and reception of A Common Word. And A Common Word, and the dialogue flowing from it, offers an important opportunity to help turn conflict into co-existence and suspicion into respect.

Source: www.tonyblairfaithfoundation.org