

Tony Speaks at Common Word Conference

Speech by the Rt Hon Tony Blair to "A Common Word Between Us and You: A Global Agenda for Change"

Georgetown University, Washington DC, 7 October 2009

A Common Word is the largest Muslim interfaith initiative towards Christians to date, has provided Muslims and Christians with a framework to address religious, historical, social and practical issues between two world communities.

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We, Christians and Muslims, represent around half the world's population. In an era of globalisation, when nations are interdependent, change happens at a rate unsurpassed in human history and people of varied races, colours and creeds are thrown together as never before, getting on together matters. Actually, if we can get on, the twenty first century world can get on.

It's true we are different. But then so were our founders. Jesus Christ was a Jew who gave birth to Christianity. The Holy Prophet was steeped in study of the books of the Bible and was chosen to recite the Qur'an. Each was made to feel an outsider. Each stood out against the conventional teaching of the time. Each believed in the universal appeal of God to humanity. Each was a change-maker.

If we reflect sensibly on the state of our respective faiths in the world today, we see we face common challenges. We are people of faith. We see how faith shapes our lives and the lives of others. We watch, in sadness, as it is abused to do wrong. We passionately want it used to do good. We believe in the power of faith to change lives for the better.

We face the challenge of relevance - showing how faith can be a force for the future, for progress, that it will not fade as science, technology and material prosperity alters the way we live. We face an aggressive secular attack from without. We face the threat of extremism from within.

These challenges are not for Muslims alone or Christians or Jews, Hindus or Buddhists for that matter. They are challenges for all people of faith.

Those who scorn God and those who do violence in God's name, both represent views of religion. But both offer no hope for faith in the twenty first century.

The best hope for faith in the twenty first century is that we confront all of this together. This is not because we intend to have the same faith. We don't. Our separate beliefs will remain. But our coming together, will allow us to speak in friendship to one another about our own faiths; and also speak to the world about faith.

So how do we make our relations, so fraught in the past, fruitful in the future? First, we need to understand each other, learn about our roots, how and why we are as we are, learn the essential

spirituality, peacefulness and goodness of the others' faith. This means we educate each other about each other.

Secondly, we need to respect each other. We must do this, not pro forma, to be polite or courteous but do it deeply, beyond tolerance or acceptance. We say it is Love that motivates us. We must demonstrate it in our dealings with each other, as indeed both our Lord and the Prophet exhorted us to do. One reason why peace between Israel and Palestine matters so much is: that it is a test, not just of conflict resolution but of even-handedness and respect. We share our common heritage in Abraham and Moses. Peace between Jews and Muslims in the Land holy for all of us, would be such a powerful symbol of peaceful co-existence of faiths as well as nations or peoples.

Third, we must act. Our relationship with each other and both of us with Judaism that in time I'm sure will be part of the Common Word, will best be judged in action, in the work we can do together in relieving poverty, fighting injustice, preventing disease and bringing hope to those in despair. That's why I am so delighted to see four of my Faiths Act Fellows here today with us.

Love your God; love your neighbour as yourself. These simple admonitions are the guiding light of our faith. They give us the possibility of 'A Common Word.' When we lose our way, Christians or Muslims, this is the light by which we re-discover our true path. So: understand each other, respect each other, act with each other; and in doing so, show why humanity is not made poorer by faith, but immeasurably enriched.

Wednesday 07 October 2009 | [Link to this](#)