

The Coming One World Religion - pt 2

The next group that we will examine is the United Alliance of Civilizations. The website for the

United Alliance of Civilizations

<http://www.unaoc.org/>

Mission Statement

The Alliance of Civilizations (AoC) aims to improve understanding and cooperative relations among nations and peoples across cultures and religions and, in the process, to help counter the forces that fuel polarization and extremism.

The Alliance was established in 2005, at the initiative of the Governments of Spain and Turkey, under the auspices of the United Nations. In April 2007, the United Nations Secretary-General appointed Jorge Sampaio, former President of Portugal, as High Representative for the Alliance. The AoC is supported by a Group of Friends – a community of over 85 member countries and international organizations and bodies.

Working in partnership with governments, international and regional organizations, civil society groups, foundations, and the private sector, the Alliance is supporting a range of projects and initiatives aimed at building bridges among a diversity of cultures and communities.

The Alliance functions, both globally and within the UN system, in the following capacities:

A bridge builder and convener, connecting people and organizations devoted to promoting trust and understanding between diverse communities, particularly – but not exclusively – between Muslim and Western societies;

A catalyst and facilitator helping to give impetus to innovative projects aimed at reducing polarization between nations and cultures through joint pursuits and mutually beneficial partnerships;

An advocate for building respect and understanding among cultures and amplifying voices of moderation and reconciliation which help calm cultural and religious tensions between nations and peoples;

A platform to increase visibility, enhance the work and highlight the profile of initiatives devoted to building bridges between cultures; and

A resource providing access to information and materials drawn from successful cooperative initiatives which could, in turn, be used by member states, institutions, organizations, or individuals seeking to initiate similar processes or projects.

Objectives

Based on the recommendations made in the AoC High-level Group Report, the work of the Alliance of Civilizations is structured around the following three objectives:

Develop a network of partnerships with States, international organizations, civil society groups, and private sector entities that share the goals of the Alliance of Civilizations, to reinforce their interaction and coordination with the UN system;

Develop, support, and highlight projects that promote understanding and reconciliation among cultures globally and, in particular, between Muslim and Western societies. These projects should be related to the four main fields of action of the Alliance: youth, education, media and migration.

Establish relations and facilitate dialogue among groups that can act as a force of moderation and understanding during times of heightened cross-cultural tensions. In pursuing these objectives, the AoC will maintain and demonstrate through its choice of activities a universal perspective. At the same time, a priority emphasis on relations between Muslim and Western societies is warranted given that cross-cultural polarization and mutual fear are most acute within and between these communities and represent a threat to international stability and security.

The Next website organization that we will be discussing, is the Tony Blair Faith Foundation. The website for the

<http://tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/>

Mission Statement

The Tony Blair Faith Foundation aims to promote respect and understanding about the world's major religions and show how faith is a powerful force for good in the modern world.

Faith is vitally important to hundreds of millions of people. It underpins systems of thought and of behaviour. It underpins many of the world's great movements for change or reform, including many charities. And the values of respect, justice and compassion that our great religions share have never been more relevant or important to bring people together to build a better world.

But religious faith can also be used to divide. We have seen throughout history and today we still see how it can be distorted to fan the flames of hatred and extremism.

The Tony Blair Faith Foundation is a response to these opportunities and challenges. We will use the full power of modern communications to support and step up efforts at every level to educate, inform and develop understanding about the different faiths and between them.

At the same time, the Foundation will use its profile and resources to encourage people of faith to work together more closely to tackle global poverty and conflict. By supporting such inter-faith initiatives, the Foundation will help underline the religion's relevance and positive contribution.

The Foundation will not duplicate, let alone seek to replace the many successful initiatives by faith groups already taking place. The aim instead is to promote and enhance this work.

But where the Foundation believes more can be done, we will work with partners to fill the gap.

This means that the Foundation will keep evolving. But its core principles and priorities have been set. You can find out about them on this website. We ask for your help to realise them.

Tony Blair calls for faiths to act for global good

NEW YORK, May 30 2008 - Tony Blair launched his Faith Foundation with a call for the creation of a new coalition to harness the moral leadership of people of faith

to do good and to show the relevance of faith to the challenges of the modern world.

The event, moderated by Christiane Amanpour, included representatives of a number of the organisations the Foundation will partner with.

Dr Eboo Patel, founder and director of the InterFaith Youth Core, and Malaria No More campaigner Saleemah Abdul-Ghaffur addressed how the Foundation and its partners will help people of faith do more: they are part of the Faiths Act campaign - multi-faith action on eradicating deaths from malaria.

President Rick Levin and Professor Harry Stout from Yale University addressed different aspects of how the Foundation will help people understand more about how religion can go wrong and how it is at its best.

The goals of the Tony Blair Faith Foundation are:

to promote respect and understanding between the major religions;
to make the case for faith as a force for good; and
to encourage inter-faith initiatives to tackle global poverty and conflict.

Announcing the launch of the Faith Foundation Tony Blair said: "Religious faith will be of the same significance to the 21st Century as political ideology was to the 20th Century. In an era of globalisation, there is nothing more important than getting people of different faiths and cultures to understand each other better and live in peace and mutual respect; and to give faith itself its proper place in the future."

Tony Blair has argued that faith has to be rescued from those who would use it to divide and those determined to write it off as an irrelevance. By stressing the values of respect, justice and compassion which the great religions hold in common, he believes faith can help unite the World and shape its direction for the better.

The Tony Blair Faith Foundation is a response to these opportunities and challenges. It will use the power of modern communications to step up efforts to educate, inform and develop understanding about the different faiths and between them. At the same time, the Foundation will use its profile and resources to help mobilise people of faith to work together in concrete action to build a fairer and better world.

In the first three years of the Foundation, priority will be given to encouraging inter-faith initiatives to tackle global poverty and to improve understanding of the great religions through education at every level.

The speech by Tony Blair at the launch of the Tony Blair Faith Foundation at the Time Warner Centre, New York on Friday, May 30th, 2008

Last month in Westminster Cathedral, I set out the purpose of the Tony Blair Faith Foundation. It will concern itself with the six leading faiths: Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh and Jewish. Today we launch the first of a series of partnerships to give effect to that purpose.

Let me describe the reason for this Foundation. The world is undergoing tumultuous change. Globalization, underpinned by technology, is driving much of it, breaking down boundaries, altering the composition of whole communities, even countries and creating circumstances in which new challenges arise that can only be met effectively together. Interdependence is now the recognised human condition.

So, the characteristic of today's world is change. The consequence is a world opening up, and becoming interdependent. The conclusion is that we make sense of this interdependence through peaceful co-existence and working together to resolve common challenges.

In turn, this requires an attitude, a state of mind, an emotional as well as an intellectual response consistent with this conclusion. A sentiment that we are members of a global community as well as individual nations means we must be global citizens as well as citizens of our own country.

All this sounds impossibly idealistic.

But if the analysis of the nature of the world is as I set out, then it is in fact the only practical way to organise our affairs. Idealism becomes the new realism.

This is especially so since the world is changing in other ways too. Power is shifting east. The centre of gravity of political interest and political power is moving. The emergence of China and India, has been obvious, in prospect, for years. Now it is here in our lives, in practical impact. And not just in the Far East, but the near East too.

Just think of an institution like the G7; think of when it was founded and its members; think if it were invented today and how different that membership would be. The 20th Century order is history. There is a new reality. We have to come to terms with it. And it implies, at its fundamentals, peaceful co-existence or catastrophe.

So: religion matters and there is a lot of fear around between the faiths.

In summary, you cannot understand the modern world unless you understand the importance of religious faith. Faith motivates, galvanises, organises and integrates millions upon millions of people.

Here is the crucial point. Globalisation is pushing people together. Interdependence is reality. Peaceful co-existence is essential. If faith becomes a countervailing force, pulling people apart, it becomes destructive and dangerous.

If, by contrast, it becomes an instrument of peaceful co-existence, teaching people to live with difference, to treat diversity as a strength, to respect "the other", then Faith becomes an important part of making the 21st Century work. It enriches, it informs, it provides a common basis of values and belief for people to get along together.

I believe, as someone of Faith that religious faith has a great role to play in an individual's life.

But even if I didn't, even if I was of no faith, I would still believe in the central necessity of people of faith learning to live with each other in mutual respect and peace.

That is the "why" of the Foundation. Now for the "what".

There are many excellent meetings, convocations, conferences and even organisations that work in the inter-faith area. We do not want to replicate what they do.

We do not want to engage in a doctrinal inquiry.

We do not want to subsume different faiths in one faith of the lowest common denominator.

We want to show faith in action.

We want to produce greater understanding between faiths through encounter.

We want people of one faith to be comfortable with those of another because they know what they truly believe, not what they thought they might believe.

There will be four specific aspects to our work on which we concentrate today.

First, the Foundation aims to educate. We begin today with the association with Yale University. Yale's School of Divinity and School of Management will help design a new course called "Faith and Globalisation". It will run over three years.

I will lead a series of seminars each Fall, starting in September 2008. The idea is to create a course which, over time, can become an enduring part of Yale's teaching; can be spun off to other universities in different parts of the globe; can stimulate original research and be a resource for those working in this field.

We are going to use new and interactive media to engage young people of different faiths. Annika Small, who has done such a brilliant job with Future Lab in the UK bringing together software and education, has agreed to head up this part of the Foundation's work.

We are in discussion with leading publishers about a specific publishing imprint for the Foundation and with others to create a set of programmes explaining the world of faith. We will make announcements of these partnerships later in the year.

We will use the material we design not just for young people and faith communities but also for business and the worlds of commerce and politics.

We cannot afford religious illiteracy. No modern company would today be ignorant of race or gender issues. The same should be true of faith.

Secondly, we are announcing the first of our partnerships to mobilise those of faith in pursuit of the UN's Millennium Development Goals. Today we call on the 4 billion people of faith in the world to help do more to end the scourge of malaria that has killed so many millions of our fellow human beings and will kill many more unless eradicated.

We are joining with the Malaria No More Campaign, a wonderful organisation whose mission is to end death through malaria in the next 5 - 10 years. Saleema will talk more about it. Put simply over one million people die of malaria each year. Their deaths are preventable. In Africa, 40% of victims are Muslim. But across much of Asia, malaria continues to strike and combating it is a huge opportunity for people across the faiths - Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist as well as the Abrahamic faiths - to act in unison.

The solution lies in distributing bed nets and medicines. The resources are becoming available. But the need to get the bed nets and medicines to the people and see them properly used, is where the faiths, who are present in each of the affected communities, can help. Our purpose will be to help mobilise the different Faiths in pursuit of this goal.

Thirdly, we believe that inter-faith interaction can benefit from a physical structure to which people can come, to learn, to discuss and to contemplate. We have agreed to partner the proposal initiated by the Co-Exist Foundation to establish Abraham House in London.

Though expressly about the Abrahamic faiths, it will be open to those from the wider faith community. It will be a standing exhibition, library and convention centre for the inter-faith world. The extraordinary success of the "Sacred Texts" exhibition at the British Library last year shows the potential for such an initiative.

Finally, we will help organisations whose object is to counter extremism and promote reconciliation in matters of religious faith. Though there is much focus, understandably, on extremism associated with the perversion of the proper faith of Islam, there are elements of extremism in every major faith. It is important where people of good faith combat such extremism, that they are supported.

To summarise, the possibilities of a world of change are enormous.

This is a century rich in potential to solve problems, provide prosperity to all, to overcome longstanding issues of injustice that previously we could not surmount. But it only works if the values which inform the change are values that unify and do not divide. Religious faith has a profound role to play.

This brings us a close to the end of part 2 on the Coming One World Religion.