

Tony Blair “profoundly wrong” to imagine religion as a peacemaking tool

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Tony Blair's claim that religion can bring peace and prosperity to the world has been challenged as “profoundly wrong and counterproductive” this week by the President of the National Secular Society.

Former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair has said in a speech that religions must learn to respect each other in order to make the world a safer and fairer place for all. [Speaking](#) at the Royal Society for the Arts in London, Blair admitted that religion has a dark side and in recent years many had fallen under the influence of extremism. “Even a short stay in Israel and Palestine, where I now spend a lot of my time, would show you that, all too graphically,” he told the seminar which was attended by the usual gaggle of “faith leaders” and some development workers.

“But this, in a sense, is the dark side of strong belief,” he said. “People who hold deep convictions about life and its purpose necessarily can be prone to holding those views to excess or the point of prejudice. That danger is inherent in faith.” He also said it was not enough any more to speak of tolerating other religions. “Though we may disagree with those of another faith, though we hold true to our own faith, we should not have the arrogance merely to tolerate a person whose faith is different; but instead respect them as equals.”

Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society, said: “Tony Blair is on entirely the wrong path if he truly wants the world to progress to peace and prosperity. This obsession with ‘faith’ has clouded his judgment and brought his reputation to its knees – as well as bringing death and destruction on a major scale to the people of Iraq. This idea that religion — if it can settle its differences — has the capacity to save the world is an utter fantasy and completely contradicted by history. Religions have never been able to settle their differences and they never will. For every small truce declared by well-meaning people promoting ‘interfaith dialogue’ there are a dozen lethal religious conflagrations burning. The very nature of religion means that those that fundamentally disagree about what constitutes ‘the truth’ must always be at war. By constantly promoting the possibility of religion being a force for positive change, Blair stands in the way of the very progress he so obviously desires. It is only by looking at other ways to live together that don't involve religion that we are likely to be able to stop this crazy conflict over ‘faith’. Tony Blair should be using his influence to promote a secular solution, not encouraging people to put even more emphasis on the religion that causes them to hate each other so intensely.”

Tony Blair put his ideas in the Guardian's [Comment is Free blog](#). Note the response he gets.

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