Annual Lecture 2010

Religion and Public Order

Lord Blair of Boughton
Foreword by John Humphrys

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Theos is a public theology think tank which exists to undertake research and provide commentary on social and political arrangements. We aim to impact opinion around issues of faith and belief in society. We were launched in November 2006 with the support of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, and the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor. Our first report *"Doing God": A Future for Faith in the Public Square* examined the reasons why faith will play an increasingly significant role in public life.

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Religion and Public Order

Lord Blair of Boughton
Foreword by John Humphrys

The following is a transcript of the
Theos Annual Lecture 2010, given by Lord (Ian) Blair of Boughton,
former Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police.

The lecture was delivered on
16 November 2010 at One Birdcage Walk, Westminster.

It was chaired by writer and broadcaster John Humphrys,
whose introduction serves as the foreword.

foreword

Lord Blair was a very distinguished Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service. I have to declare a bit of a family interest in the lecture, and indeed in Ian and his past job, because I had a close relative who became a senior police officer in the Metropolitan Police, and I thought 'I wonder if there is a link between these two people that will enable me to introduce Ian tonight.'

On the face of it, it's not a very close link, it has to be said. My uncle – his name was John as well, though he was known as Jack – was born at the turn of the last century, in South Wales, into a poor, working-class family. He left school at the age of 14 as poor, working-class kids did in those days, walked to London looking for a job, ended up in the 'Met', and went on to become a senior police officer. I was trying to think of any interests and similarities between the two, but I suspect, on the basis of my uncle's career, that he wouldn't have lasted more than about 30 seconds in Ian's police service.

He viewed his job in very simple terms, to use the kind of language he would have used: "nickin' villains and making the streets safe for decent people" and I suppose there's not a huge difference there between the two of them, though Ian might use rather different language. Ian of course is slightly more educated than my uncle, holding a very good degree from a very good university. The other big difference is that Jack was - how can I put this? – somewhat less liberal than Lord Blair. His only contact with what we now refer to as the gay community was locking up as many of them as he could possibly get hold of. I rather suspect that if the force were described in his time as 'institutionally racist' he would have regarded that as a great compliment.

So there were differences between them. I searched like heaven to find the similarity between them, and here it is – and we'll discover in the next half-hour or so whether this is a fair comparison or not. Jack Humphrys was, for all his many faults (and he was a product of his age, and times have changed) a God-fearing Christian, and he believed that in his work as a police officer, doing what he believed had to be done, and a vitally important job, he was serving God in his own way. Now I don't know, because Ian and I have never talked about religion – we've talked about many things over the years, but what we haven't talked about is the relationship between religious faith and, for want of a better expression, "public order" – I don't know whether that motivation and sense of purpose is something Uncle Jack and Lord Blair would have in common. That is what Lord Blair, former Metropolitan Police Commissioner is going to talk to us about now.

John Humphrys

religion and public order

In July 1209 a besieging army lay outside the town of Beziers in southern France. It was commanded by a man called Simon de Montford – not that one, not the man we think of, slightly flatteringly perhaps both to ourselves and to him, as the father of the English Parliament - but his father, a French nobleman. The siege was part of the Albigensian Crusade, launched by Pope Innocent III, to suppress the heresy of Catharism, a millennial but entirely peaceful movement. Beziers was a stronghold of the Cathars but the town also contained many Catholics.

On 22 July, de Montford's army launched an assault which breached the town's defences and, as the defenders had previously refused to surrender when asked to do so, the customs of medieval warfare dictated that all of the inhabitants of Beziers should be put to the sword. A massacre began.

The spiritual adviser to de Montford's army was Abbot Arnaud-Amaury, head of the monastic order of the Cistercians, Papal Legate to France and Abbot of Citeaux. As the bloodshed began, the Abbot was allegedly asked what should be done to separate the Catholics known to be in the town from the Cathar heretics.

What Arnaud-Amaury is alleged to have said in reply has echoed down history; *"Caedile est: novit enim Dominus qui sunt eius"* - or "Kill them all, the Lord will recognize his own."

The Abbot afterwards wrote to the Pope in these terms: "Today, Your Holiness, twenty thousand heretics were put to the sword, regardless of rank, age or sex." – or, he might have added but interestingly did not, apparent religious adherence.

The purpose of my lecture this evening is simple: to explore something that was said at my dinner table recently. I want to try to understand how someone I am just starting to know, a good and educated woman, could have remarked that the Catholic Church was a source of evil, before correcting herself and saying that that was unfair and that all religions, she supposed, were sources of evil: why she could have said it and what could be done to change her mind.

In trying to do that, I am going to concentrate on the Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, although I will make some reference to other faiths, about which I know less. And in due course, I will explain why this lecture is entitled *Religion and Public Order*. But first, in considering the question of whether religions are sources of evil, I want to set the events at Beziers so long ago against the so-called prayer of St Francis. It is "so-called" because it appears to have first been published in 1912. Despite that, it has been described as a centrepiece of their faith by both Desmond Tutu and Mother Theresa. You will probably know the prayer already but I would like you to listen to it again, thinking of all the blood that was spilled at Beziers and before and ever since in the name of the Abrahamic God.

Lord, make me a vessel of thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is discord, harmony;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

What could be further away from the cruelty of Beziers? Yet people are still being killed across the world purely because of their faith. Often faith is a convenient excuse for an underlying political or even socio-economic motivation but, in our time, from the partition of India to the fields of Kenya and more recently in Iraq, Muslims, Hindus or Christians are killed because they are just that and therefore 'other'.

no other gods

But the Abrahamic faiths have a particular difficulty. We know that the Romans were puzzled when they first encountered the Jews, in that this appears to have been the first monotheistic religion that they had come across. The first of the Ten Commandments recorded in the book of Exodus states that "You shall have no other gods before me." But the Romans destroyed the Jewish Temple in 70AD and, important as their history and contribution had been, the Jews became a wandering people. The Christians inherited

the monotheism of Judaism, expressing it in the words of Jesus Christ as reported by St John: "I am the way and the truth and the life: no man comes to the Father save through me." And Islam, while revering the Jewish prophets among whom they certainly number Jesus, are clear that, as the Shahada states, "There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his messenger".

The tragedy for the world about these two faiths is that, particularly in the second millennium AD, they became synonymous with huge political spheres of influence in Europe and the Middle East, and their survival at all became intricately linked to the survival of the separate civilizations of Western Christendom and the Ottoman Empire and its predecessors. The faiths fought each other on land and sea for centuries. In our time, after the West finally overcame the horrors of fascism and of communism, the fracture lines between Islam and Christianity have reemerged with startling results. And we all know that, in our new century, individuals have carried out atrocities in the name of a distorted version of Islam and as a result one of the great Abrahamic faiths, a faith of peace, is being demonized.

What I want to talk about is how the absoluteness of the certainties that lie behind such evil have arisen, and how they currently affect faith in our time and in our country.

What I want to talk about this evening is how the absoluteness of the certainties that lie behind such evil have arisen, and how they currently affect faith in our time and in our country. And, in doing so, I want to reflect on the role and the responsibility of the laity in a religion because I think that it is in their role and activity that religion and public order, the title of my talk, coincide. I use public order in this context in the sense of orderliness, tranquility and public good.

similarity and diversity

The distinction between laity and priesthood is probably most obvious in the case of Christianity, where the priests have a special mediating relationship to the Divine but, while their theological role is different, Imams and Rabbis also have leadership roles, which differentiate them from other members of their congregations.

A character in George Bernard Shaw's play, *The Doctor's Dilemma,* remarks that "All professions are conspiracies against the laity." Whether all of them are may be a moot point but it is worth reflecting on what the relationship is in religions between the laity and the clerisy, if that is the correct term. In the last year or so, I have been involved in

some of the work of the Synods of the Church of England, at the invitation of my good friend, John Pritchard, the Bishop of Oxford. I have been struck by the considerable difference in the matters that concern people at the many different hierarchies of synod that lie between Parish Church Councils and the General Synod, the governing body of the Church. At a different period, while Commissioner, I became involved in interfaith dialogue in a number of ways and became aware of the many strands of Islam and of Judaism, which perfectly mirror the fissiparious nature of Christianity. And I wonder about how we got to here, a religious version of Babel.

A couple of my favourite stories may illustrate the theme:

A man is driving across a bridge over a deep gorge in, let us say, Tennessee. He sees that there is a woman standing on the other side of the parapet, clinging on to the wire, hundreds of feet above a far distant river. He stops the car and approaches her slowly.

> *"Sister", he says, "do not do this."*
> *"Why shouldn't I?" she asks.*
> *"Well, there's so much to live for!"*
> *"Like what?"*
> *"Are you religious?"*
> *She says, "Yes."*
> *The man says, "Me too. Are you a Christian?"*
> *"I am."*
> *"Me too. Are you Catholic or Protestant?"*
> *"Protestant."*
> *"Me too. Are you Episcopalian or Baptist?"*
> *"Baptist."*
> *"Wow. Me too. Are you Baptist Church of God or Baptist Church of the Lord?"*
> *"Baptist Church of God."*
> *" Marvellous, me too. Are you original Baptist Church of God, or are you Reformed Baptist Church of God?"*
> *"Reformed Baptist Church of God."*
> *"Amazing! Wonderful! Me too. Are you Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1879, or Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1915?"*
> *She says: "Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1915."*
> *"Ah", says the man, and pushes her off the bridge with the words: "Die, heretic."*

Or for another view, remember the two rabbis who were marooned on a desert island for years before they were rescued? When they were, the captain of the ship in which they sailed away from their captivity asked them why they had built two synagogues. "Well", they both replied, "the other one is the synagogue we don't go to."

The reason we go to different churches, mosques and synogogues is largely a matter of family upbringing and choice. I am an Anglican primarily because my family were. Within the Church of England, I am more comfortable with the higher Anglican style of worship, with an emphasis on sacred music and a concentration on the Eucharist and the liturgy, but I have friends among and respect those who favour other styles of worship within Anglicanism, as I have and do with Catholics, Greek Orthodox and the Congregationalist and Methodist traditions and, I am proud to say, with Sikhs, Muslims and Jews. And through those contacts and conversations, I am pretty sure that the relationship between these people in all these different buildings, Dissenting, Anglican, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Hindu and the Being they see as divine are very similar and relatively straightforward. People's private prayers are concerned with simple and immediate things about which they are concerned or anxious, about absent children and their safety, about relationships, health and money.

People's private prayers are concerned with simple and immediate things about which they are concerned or anxious

Take this example. A not very religious man who is in financial troubles comes to Church one Sunday and asks God to help him win the national lottery, explaining to God that otherwise he will go bankrupt, lose his house and business and his children will be out on the street. A second Sunday he comes back and prays in the same way, with even more fervour, stating that he only has ten days left. On the third Sunday, he prays again in desperate terms and is rewarded with a vision of light and a voice saying to him from above, "Anthony, make it easier for me, buy a lottery ticket, will you?"

Prayer, for the laity, is a very personal relationship with the Divine, little changed since childhood, based on a pretty simple determination of why we believe. But let me tell you briefly why I believe. Before I do so, may I make clear that this is not, on an occasion hosted by an organization which celebrates all religion, an attempt to proseletyse or to place Christianity in a different place of honour to other religions. It is just my story and it is a very simple one. I am sure that those of you from other faiths would be able to describe something similar. I sometimes describe my account of faith as "a detective's view of the New Testament".

a detective's view

I would like to believe in all of the following about Jesus Christ: a Virgin birth, turning water into wine, the loaves and the fishes, the miracles of healing, the raising of Lazarus, the Messiah entering Jerusalem on an ass and so on. But there is nothing like proof. I am capable of believing in some, though not all of those, only because of something else.

That something else comes out of reading not only the endings of all four Gospels but also the next book of the New Testament, known usually as the Acts of the Apostles. Because here is enough of what I believe to be evidence to enable me to believe, indeed, to *persuade* me to believe. I believe it is impossible objectively to read these passages without accepting that something extraordinary happened to the Apostles after the death of Christ.

A small group of frightened men and women, in immediately threatening circumstances, suddenly had the confidence to tell everyone with whom they came into contact a basically absurd story. Let us just consider the nature of the absurdity. It is centred on what the Apostles knew, like everyone else knows, of every religion and none throughout the history of the world, to be impossible. These men and women claimed that Jesus of Nazareth had died and, in some form, had come back from the dead.

A small group of frightened men and women, in immediately threatening circumstances, suddenly had the confidence to tell everyone with whom they came into contact a basically absurd story.

They claimed that, after his execution, he had appeared repeatedly to them, first to the remaining eleven of them in what is known as 'the Upper Room' in the house where they were hiding – significantly saying 'Salaam Alaycum, Peace be among you' - and then elsewhere to many more people, often in the open air. Blasphemously, they claimed that, by dying and being resurrected, Jesus had completed the Covenant that had existed between Jews and their God. They claimed that He was the Hope for which the Jews had waited long – and still wait – He was the Messiah, in Greek the Anointed One, the Christ. Not only that, however, and, as far as I know there was no precedent for this in Judaic writings, He was not only the Messiah but part of the Godhead itself. So God had been killed – an idea so impossible to comprehend that the Koran teaches that Jesus was substituted on the cross and Abyssinian crucifixes always show Christ on the cross with His eyes open because the idea of killing God is not bearable.

The Apostles then went further, in furtherance of the commands of this carpenter from Galilee; they announced a new Covenant to replace the old, a Covenant promising eternal life and the forgiveness of sins through the death of Jesus, they abandoned the dietary and other laws of Judaism and they opened up, after considerable internal argument, this new Covenant to those not of the Jewish faith, those that we call Gentiles. And they did this in Jerusalem, the centre of Judaism. And they did so in a Jerusalem occupied by the Romans who had just crucified Jesus and were only too capable of crucifying them.

And then, over the next 30 or so years, as recounted in the Acts and the Epistles, they preached this absurdity, converting enough people to begin the foundation of what we now know as Christianity, people many of whom are named in the Acts and the Epistles. And they did so alone or in pairs, learning as they did of the deaths usually by execution of almost all of their compatriots over those years, but continuing to preach until at least eleven of the once again twelve Apostles were dead.

Again, I emphasize that I tell this to explain my reason for my belief in this particular religion. But I do think it is fair to claim that the subsequent behaviour of these people indicates that something happened, something astonishing in its power.

a wideness in God's mercy

But what this means for me and for many is that the basis of my faith is very simple. I have a significantly incomplete understanding of the complexities of theology– and here I can only use Christian terms because I do not know the theology of other faiths – such as Transubstantiation and Consubstantiation, the Assumption of the Virgin or the doctrine of Papal Infallibility. I am not always crystal clear on some aspects of the doctrine of the Trinity. I do not understand the obsession in my own church over the ordination and now consecration of women (although I have been told that the reason why the women who originally found the tomb of Jesus empty then ran back to inform and fetch the male Apostles to the scene is that, as women, their evidence had no probative value – if this is true, then it is a poor reason for not welcoming the full ministry of women two millennia later on). I do not understand the Catholic Church's insistence on priestly celibacy. I do not understand the way in which the Anglican Communion is tearing itself apart over homosexuality. I do not understand why so many people have to die because of the challenge as to who is the rightful successor to Mohammed, peace be upon him, which manifests itself in the division between Shia and Sunni. I cannot even begin to imagine the reasons for the divisions between the different forms of Reform and Orthodox Judaism. And all of it makes me very sad.

There is a lovely hymn which begins with the words "There's a wideness in God's mercy that's like the wideness of the sea, there's a kindness in his justice". The hymn ends with these words:

> *But we make his love too narrow*
> *By false limits of our own;*
> *And we magnify its strictness*
> *With a zeal he would not own.*

All religions have as, their core belief, the need for love, for respect for others, for tolerance. Here are a selection of passages from the Talmud, from the Koran, from the sayings of the

Sikh Gurus, from the Hindu mystics. I am not going to tell you from which they come. What is striking to me is their similarity.

- There is only one breath; All are made of the same clay; Light within all, is the same.
- The poor long for riches, the rich long for heaven but the wise long for tranquillity.
- Prayer carries us half-way to God, fasting brings us to the door of his palace and alms-giving procures us admission.
- The highest form of wisdom is kindness: the divine spirit does not reside in any except a joyful heart.
- The other is my brother. (The 'other', that word again)

And I could go on. And I will, just one more time. She said, and I am sure you will guess who she is:

> *Our purpose is to take God and his love to the poorest of the poor, irrespective of their ethnic origin or the faith that they profess. Our discernment of all is not the belief but the necessity. We never try to convert those who receive to Christianity but in our work we bear witness to the love of God's presence and if Catholics, Protestants, Buddhists or agnostics become for this better men or women – simply better – we will be satisfied. Growing up in love, they will be nearer God and will find him in his goodness.*

And, of course, that was Mother Theresa.

I wrestled with faith. Through until my forties, I attempted to reach God through intellect alone. For me, the experience of reading the New Testament almost from end to end was the moment where my intellectual quest was satisfied with this view that something extraordinary, perhaps more extraordinary than anything in history, had happened. That was my route. From there, I was able to relax into God and, in that, I was helped by the experience of communal worship, by the practical application of what is termed Pascal's wager. Pascal suggested that, even though the existence of God cannot be determined through reason, a person should wager that God exists, because living life accordingly has everything to gain, and nothing to lose. When I began to go to Church regularly, I not only have been able to believe that I am sometimes in the presence of God but I also found myself among astonishingly decent people. And I should not have been surprised. And this is where I come to the nexus between "Religion and Public Order".

Pascal suggested that a person should wager that God exists, because living life accordingly has everything to gain, and nothing to lose.

faith and good deeds

Every synagogue, every temple, every gurdwara, every mosque, every church, prides itself on the charitable work of its congregation. I am always struck, for instance, by the provision of free food in every Gurdwara, open to all, or the amazing levels of money that are raised in Hindu temples and through Jewish charities. At its best, this is not for worshippers themselves or for co-religionists but for all. As Christian Aid puts it so well, "We believe in life before death."

Everyone of us here has seen the tiny, granular but persistent acts of charity pursued by religious people, not out of fear of divine retribution, but out of genuine love for other human beings. Everyone knows that many institutions dedicated to the relief of suffering, to the succour of children, of the elderly and of the disabled in mind and body have as their founding and continuing motive a compassion born of religious belief in the dignity of human beings. The greatest achievements and ambitions of human social history, such as the abolition of slavery and the provision of universal education or free health care for all have had their origins in religious impulse. Of course, it is not necessary to be religious to be humanitarian and compassionate but there are few religious people in the modern world who are not. And yet, all religions were seen by the woman I mentioned earlier as sources of evil.

Most people's faith is simple: most people's faith impels them to good deeds: but, in the 21st Century, we are losing the struggle to make that clear. We are losing the battle to make religion relevant and contemporary. To overcome that, I have to wonder whether the laity or whatever it is called in different faiths does not need now to require those in positions of spiritual authority to put aside the schisms that drive us apart, the claims of absolute certainty in divine revelation and the failure to embrace good people of all faiths in an attempt to redefine the position of religion. Because I will tell you how faith looks to most people: irrelevant, clannish, prejudiced, old-fashioned and violent. Let me quote you a short passage from Will Self, writing in this month's *Harper's Bazaar:*

> *Of course, religious faith has a bad press in a secular society: we unbelievers easily conflate it with fanaticism: faith, we think, would be all right if it kept itself to itself and remained entirely voluntary, like rubber fetishism, but it will insist on making converts, attacking other faiths and generally behaving at once loutishly and superciliously. And then there's the past, faith has baggage, whole Terminal 5s full of it. War, persecutions, pogroms – and the repression of all forms of enlightenment…*

He goes on for quite a while more but I think you will have been able to discern his basic point of view! And here I come to the main issue: the role of religion in public order and the decision to be taken as to the confidence with which we assert it, in the face of such widespread derision and dislike.

the role of religion in public order

Religion should be the most peaceful of all the agencies of social cohesion. Its infinite number of unseen and unsung acts of charity and love are not known individually but in total they are part of public consciousness. They should be and remain the glue that permits modern society to exist, particularly in an increasingly urbanized age: in other words, they are a bulwark of public order, in the sense of orderliness and tranquility.

Religion's infinite number of unseen and unsung acts of charity and love are not known individually but in total they are part of public consciousness.

But that is not the image of religion in this past century or this past decade. The Holocaust and the agonies of the Palestinian-Israeli relationship, the sectarianism of 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland, the protests against *The Satanic Verses,* the rediscovery of Jihad in a modern guise, the arrival of suicide bombers in the West and the lack of understanding shown by the West for the place in Islamic societies of the burqua or the ban on images of Mohammed, peace be upon him, produces a powerful portrait of religion as a cause of violence and pain. The horrors of clerical child abuse and the arguments over homosexuality – do you know that Gene Robinson, the first openly gay Bishop in the Anglican Communion, wore a bullet proof vest under his vestments for his consecration? – are obscuring the basic decency that comes from the commandments to peace contained in all religions, a commandment which in the Christian church, for instance, requires each member of a congregation at every service to greet his or her neighbours with the words "Peace be with you".

It is not helped by the development of a 24-hour global media that brings images of destruction from around the world, destruction too often wrapped in the coverings of faith, or the madness of one loony-tune preacher in the American south threatening to burn the Koran as the work of Satan. Nor are we helped by modern aspects of a celebrity obsessed and short term culture, seeing the troubles of the Church of England, solely in terms of Rowan Williams' success or failure, as if he was a football manager.

But that is where we are and we of faith must face up to those challenges. But I also think that we of Abrahamic faith have another problem. We need to acknowledge, as Karen Armstrong writes so powerfully in her book, *Holy War,* that there is a strong tradition of certainty, leading to genocide in our histories, fuelled for millennia by certainty of the right to occupy certain lands in the Middle East. After exile in Egypt, the heroes of the Old Testament or Torah, like Joshua, carried out the complete extermination of other nations who were occupying the land they believed to have been given to them by God. In 1099, when the Crusaders took Jerusalem from the Muslims at the climax of the Crusades, men are reported to have ridden through blood as deep as the knees of their horses, while the

conquest of Christian Constantinople in 1453 by the Ottoman Turks under Mehmet II was accompanied by similar atrocity.

And all that violence was based on certainty of being in the right and that, it seems to me, is where, after the bloodstained century that has passed and with the tensions that lie in front of us across the tectonic plates of different religions, the ordinary believers of all faiths need to reemphasize their rejection of this certainty. Christianity, in particular, has adapted its faith many times over the last two millennia and perhaps it is time to question whether the endless divisions of Christendom do not undermine Christianity's claim to be the only path to enlightenment, any more than Christians or Jews are any more required to obey those rules in the Book of Leviticus which have become inappropriate as the centuries have rolled by.

All thinking religious are afflicted by doubt. Unless your faith has been tested by doubt, it is not faith but just an attitude.

And apart from the humanitarian reasons for doing so, such certainty is the undoing of our contest with secularism. Ever since the enlightenment, Christianity, in particular, has tried to defend itself against the propositionality of the modern world, maintaining a belief in the significance of different aspects of being human, of a dimension that is spiritual, as well as those aspects which belong to the emotions and the intellect. This is our struggle in present times with those who have been described as militant atheists or extreme secularists. I have heard splendid lectures and sermons arguing that there is no conflict between Darwinism, for instance, and religious faith. It seems to me, however, that we cannot put forward a belief, as the Church of England expresses it, in "The Mystery of Faith" and then claim to be certain that our route to the mountain-top is the only one.

I have always liked Mark Twain's short story of a man going to heaven but on an occasion when something has gone wrong with the normal celestial arrangements. He finds himself in a queue of figures we would now think of as denizens of the Star Wars films. When he gets to the Gate, he is asked from which planet and which galaxy he has come. He replies that he is from the world that the Saviour saved and is answered by the reply that "He has saved them all: can you identify yours any more closely?"

I do not really understand quantum physics and string theory and relativity. I do not know what future centuries will uncover. I cannot be certain. All thinking religious are afflicted by doubt. Doubt is part of the mortar of a building faith. Unless your faith has been tested by doubt, it is not faith but just an attitude, a retreat from the modern world. Doubt in the very nature of faith can surely be a useful companion to a necessary lack of shrill conviction that our own faith is more valuable than that of another.

But beyond moving away from this level of certainty, what would be equally useful is if people of all faiths moved beyond arguments between and within different religions to recover their confidence in the beneficial nature of religion per se. Every day, all over the world, people of every faith in their own simple ways do try and do succeed in relating to God. And in doing that, they make clear to those around them the virtues implicit in all religions, compassion, charity, love, forbearance and courage and the values that underpin them.

I spent nearly 35 years being a police officer. It took me most of that time to understand what Sir Robert Peel, then Home Secretary and founder of the Metropolitan Police, meant by his remark that "the police are the public and the public are the police: the police being only members of the public that are paid to give full time attention to the duties which are incumbent on every citizen."

In the same sense, it is people of faith who can and do provide much of the basic civility which underpins their own neighbourhoods and charities, which is based on the long view, which provides the courage to face the otherwise bleak facts of sickness, death and tragedy. Let me give you a specific example, of the originally Quaker-based movement, known as Circles, who provide support to sex-offenders returning to life outside prison. I only came across the Circles movement a few months ago but it has existed for years, quietly and faithfully. It is time that not only should that kind of achievement be proclaimed but also that people of all faiths should move beyond what they do locally for and through synagogue and church and mosque and have the confidence and courage to speak up, to reject the certainties that divide us and proclaim, modestly but firmly, the good that we all do and the values we represent as good citizens in the world. We should be aware of the horrors which organized religions have inflicted on the world, we should respect the views of others without faith but be unapologetically confident that, now, in our society, the religious impulse provides goodness in a manner unequalled by any other aspect of our communal life.

We are wherever we are and faith should be the basis of a decent society, as the old prophets knew. It can be. It should be. It has a worthy place in our polity. The Prophet Jeremiah knew the significance of people of faith and the necessity of their involvement in good citizenship. Writing to the Jews in exile and captivity in Babylon, he told them to:

> *Seek ye the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jeremiah: 29.7)*

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Religion and Public Order

The former Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Lord Blair of Boughton, delivered the Theos Annual Lecture in 2010.

In a highly personal speech, in which he reflected on the nature of his own religious faith, Lord Blair acknowledged that religion could be a source of intolerance and violence in the world but said that it was principally a force for good - and should be at the basis of a decent society.

"All religions have, as their core belief, the need for love, for respect for others, for tolerance," Lord Blair said.

A practising Anglican, he noted that "The greatest achievements and ambitions of human social history, such as the abolition of slavery and the provision of universal education or free health care for all, have had their origins in religious impulse." However, he admitted that "This is not the image of religion in this past century or this past decade."

"The agonies of the Palestinian-Israeli relationship, the sectarianism of 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland, and the arrival of suicide bombers in the West are obscuring the basic decency that comes from the commandments to peace contained in all religions," he said.

Lord Blair, who was made a cross-bench life peer in Gordon Brown's Dissolution Honours List, held the top policing job in the country from 2004 until his resignation in 2008. After only five months in the role of Commissioner, the London bombings of 7 July took place.

This report contains the full text of Lord Blair's lecture, and the introduction, by writer and broadcaster John Humphrys, serves as a foreword.

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