



## IVY LEAGUE CONGRESS ON FAITH AND ACTION

Omni New Haven Hotel, Yale

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### Introduction

Well David, thank you very much. Now, just to make me feel at home for the first few minutes, any of you been to London? Anybody like what you saw when you were in London?

Anybody want to go back? It's strange how the numbers keep sort of dwindling. But of course, you're wonderful here and it's a great privilege to be with you. Everything in America, we always learn from our part of the world, is so much bigger.

I mean you have an entire league, an Ivy League of these universities. We only have two. And, it's a choice that you have, and it's a serious choice. It's the choice between heaven and hell. And, there are some who have chosen hell, but I was at Cambridge.

The Foreign Minister of Israel was a man called Abba Iban and he had been educated in England. He was interviewed by a journalist and he said to him, "But Mr. Iban, you speak with such a perfect Oxford accent." And, he looked at him and said, "It was Cambridge. But in public life, I expect to be insulted."

So, this is my first visit here and thank you so much again for the invitation. It's my first visit to this part of the world, my first visit to a conference of this kind, and my first visit to a Christian union to speak on this topic. And, it reminds me of the opera singer in Italy who take opera seriously, as you know and he was doing his first opera, the first night.

And, he sang the great aria, and there were cries of encore, encore, so he sang it again. And, there were cries of encore, encore, encore. He sang it again, and there were cries again of encore, encore. And he said, I'm so sorry, we will have to get on with the opera, it's so kind of you, when someone out of the back raised his hands and said, 'you sing it again and again until you get it-a-right.'

## **Background**

So, I'll try tonight, and if I can't, we'll get it right tomorrow. I suppose that I ought, just for a few minutes, to tell you a little bit about myself, so that you get a context of what I want to talk about. I was born in South Africa in very dark days. I grew up with a very real passion for justice in South Africa, a passion that didn't seem to be answered by the churches at all. If anything, the majority church was aligned with the apartheid government, and I grew up as a Marxist.

I was probably 18 or 20 with a burning sense of justice that God, if He ever existed and I didn't think then that he might have had nothing really to answer to the criminal injustice of the country. It was, of course, those of you might not remember, but your history books will tell you this was 1968.

All sorts of things were happening in 1968 during the world, the protest movements grew and we were no different in South Africa. But, there was within me always this burning sense of injustice that never seemed to be able to be answered except, as I then believed, in the works of Karl Marx.

I then had the great opportunity of going to Cambridge University. And whilst I was there, it struck me that there might be an amazing ability of Marx to understand man and understand people, but there was nothing that he could do that could really understand or change the disposition of individual people.

And, in a Christian union of this kind, which is one of the reasons why I'm so pleased to

be here, a number of people actually started talking to me about the nature of faith. I had been growing up...

### **Faith And Globalization**

...Tony Blair delivered his seminal lecture on the issue of faith and globalization. Now, this was an extraordinary thing for him to have done, firstly, because his assistant, Alistair Campbell, in the debate that he had while he was Prime Minister was doing a broadcast and wanted to end the broadcast by saying, God bless you. And, Alistair Campbell, his press assistant, scolded out and said, "We don't do God."

And, the assumption was for a politician, as it is for you and me at university, I well remember somebody trying to speak to us in our rooms in Cambridge about the Christian faith. And as we saw him coming these two friends of mine, both of whom run a church at the moment ducked under the table and we covered ourselves with the tablecloth. We didn't want to talk about religion. We didn't want to talk about God. It had nothing to do with the real world.

So, Tony Blair never spoke of it in any serious form, but he has now spoken of his faith. And he says, "One of the oddest questions I get asked in interviews, and I get asked a lot of odd questions is: Is faith important to your politics?"

It's like asking someone whether their health is important to them or their family. If you are someone of faith, it is the focal point of your life. There is no conceivable way that it couldn't affect your politics.

Faith is not something incidental to action, very important as you come to consider faith and action. Faith is not something incidental to action. It is the wellspring, the fount, the origin, the thing that makes people who they are and what they do.

Now, it's not easy territory to talk about faith because there is some sort of understanding

that actually it is something you can do like golf on the weekend, and does and it really shouldn't affect your life.

But you know, the world is globalizing. And throughout the global world, we're also seeing the changes of major international corporations moving to the developing world, moving East. When we're used to the names that are familiar, the big international companies, we assume a natural value system that is underpinning all these various corporations.

But, what happens in your generation when that moves across? What values are these corporations going to have? How are they going to relate to their employees that do not understand the issues of faith?

The 21st century will be the century of faith, and sadly, there will be a clash. How are we going to handle it? How will the boardroom handle the issues that will be faced in multicultural expectations, of the way people think?

Faith is not what you do on a Friday night, or on a Sunday. It is the entire way in which you approach the work that you're doing, your response to the people around you, your commitment to other people, and your concern for the poor, the marginalized, and the disadvantaged. And also, your commitment to profitable corporations they are indivisible.

So, I believe that faith language is going to become very important, which is why it's so important that you're examining these issues now, before you venture into the workplaces. It's the practical advice on how to be successful in life, minimize stress associated with our complex everyday lives, and begin to live values based workplace living.

I mean it is extraordinary that religion has been airbrushed out of polite conversation and critical thinking. The university professors don't want to talk about it, but irritatingly to

modern commentators, religion refuses to fade out of the picture. In a recent article in the "Spectator" magazine, which is one of our weekly magazines, one of our leading atheist, I have to say and militantly secularist commentators wrote this about the dominance of the teachings of Jesus. He was Matthew Parris.

He says, "There is an annoying amount of gristle at the very centre of the Christian church and it is called Christ. Chew and chew though Christians do time and time again, pushing this indigestible discomfoting and in some ways unlovely object to the edge of the ecclesiastical plate, they cannot obliterate it."

"It is not least for this that I, an avowed atheist feel such huge respect for Jesus. When we consider all those painfully counterintuitive sayings and parables: The prodigal son, the idea that it is no good restraining actions if your thoughts are bad, the impatience with good works and when we consider how Jesus keeps saying from the point of view of one giving some thoughts, the wrong thing, it becomes ever clearer that he must have been real."

"If Jesus had been a hoax, the Church would have invented someone so much more convenient." The inconvenient truth of our time is not climate, important as it is, but Christ. After 2000 years he continues to make his presence felt and to dust and made it clear that our hearts were made for God and will not rest until they are rested on him."

And so it is that after a long modernist darkness, religious discussion is now coming out.

### **Finding Meaning And Purpose In Life**

When I attended the World Economic Forum in Davos once a year, there is a discussion group that happens in Switzerland, with major politicians and government organizations and other hangers on like me. The former President of Mexico, I heard the former President of Mexico Vicente Fox give a startling conclusion to an address.

And he said this, "No aspect of contemporary life is more notable and less understood than the Spiritual discontent and restlessness that is spreading worldwide. This unease is present amongst those who are safe and wealthy, as well as amongst the poor and the desperate. We can now see throughout the world a rejection of crass materialism and an intense undirected desire for Spiritual rebirth."

See, finding meaning and purpose in life is, I believe, the greatest global challenge of our time and it is true for every person, for those of faith and of no faith. This search is essential to establishing lasting peace, sustainable economic activity and strong communities at ease with each other. It is as great a challenge as any of the others, climate change, the elimination of extreme poverty or globalization."

When Fox describes this renewal as intense, I believe he is right. There is an intensity in the search for values and a meaningful way of life. Perhaps not at the desk but in the clubs afterwards, the topics of discussion are increasingly taking on an ethical and a religious dimension and this is not surprising.

There is a surge in Spiritual hunger, particularly in people of your generation, which has increased the institutional church, which increasingly. Unfortunately the institutional church as largely found itself unable to provide the necessary fruit.

So many people searches continues outside of the established churches and they find undirected guidance, which leads into the extraordinary dead ends of contemporary Spiritual fads. But it is into this desire for Spirituality that you and I need to test our faith and show in our action that faith actually is the motivating force that enables us to find a true Spirit uality, based upon the revelation of Jesus Christ.

And we need to discover a new way of discussing moral and religious topics, precisely because the questions being asked are of fundamental importance to the world in which we are living. During the drought of the dominance of modernist thinking our parched souls have not ceased to search for meaning.

The God issue simply won't go away. But what has happened is that we have lost the grammar of ethical and religious discourse. It needs an urgent rediscovery as a vital tool for the understanding of the work that we are trying to do in the world.

You might have seen the book of Harry Lewis, the book on education in our universities when he spoke about "Excellence Without a Soul" was the title and I believe that you generation which is why it is a challenging, it is exciting to be here with you. For you as a new generation what you are looking for and indeed what all your contemporaries worldwide are looking for, is excellence and soul.

And in soul I mean not a mystical slightly gooey expression of the nonmaterial that you can some specially heightened circumstances or under particular guidance of some very rarified individuals, to be found in strange communities. Soul is to be found in the living scriptures of the living God for the Spirit gives life.

And you see what has happened is that we have lived in this globalized world, we seem to think that the great Professor Hayeks economic man was the only determinant of what mattered, money, economic prosperity and you have to listen to the debates going on believe me, we are living in a complicated enough world, financial crises around us,

I don't want to minimize that, but satisfying the desire of a detached rationale and probably agnostic person has, for most of our lives, been the litmus test for success. But there is a wider and more pressing holistic agenda emerging, which requires a understanding of corporate social responsibility, personal commitment and sustainable human partnerships as well as pure economics.

### **Rediscovering Faith And Faith In Action In The Workplace**

Globalization was meant to weaken religious activity in favour of a homogenized international fusion culture, dominated by economics and it has turned out to have the

opposite effect. And we need to be the ones that are able to articulate into this globalized, searching, unsure, insecure generation.

In a language that they are able to understand, not only our faith but also the action that grows out of our faith, because there is an urban myth that material prosperity and material success creates happiness. But the urban myth is that this postwar generation was supposed to make us happier, they are making us more prosperous, has simply turned out to be a myth.

We have elevated capitalism to what it never was and could never come to be, the apotheosis of perfection. Capitalism is a mechanism perhaps the best we know, but it can't and never could set out to provide a purpose for life.

It cannot answer the question: why? The market mechanism is not the index of successful ambition. Christians and indeed those faith groups who seek a values based way of doing business have to assert repeatedly that the market mechanism is a powerful servant and a poor master.

There needs to be a values based context within which the system operates. In rediscovering faith and faith in action in the workplace. We are not acting out of selfish individualism, but of self interested, which is a difference. People can sound for their communities and trying to underpin the places of their work with a new ethic for business.

This is the challenge that you will face. Believe me you will not be out of this place for a week and you will start facing the issues that you wished you had dealt with now. So deal with them now, talk about them now, talk about the ethical issues, the moral underpinning of your faith, discuss them now, keep the dialog going, because the prevailing view that the workplace was just where you left your faith outside the door will not continue into this new generation.

## **Ambitious Christians**

So then, what is the modern ambitious Christian look like at it is very heart? I believe there is a very personal sense of calling, a deep internalized sense of destiny with the desire to leave the world a better place.

It is important as you consider that as you note that you form for yourself perhaps this weekend as the Spirit of God leads you and you pray and you talk to other people, write down somewhere in a journal that you keep or in some memorable place, write down this question: what do I really want to achieve in the rest of my life? If you can't answer it, put a question mark.

And if you can honestly say that you want to leave the world a better place, that is a great promise. In 10 years timer and in five years time or whatever it is, meet someone else who was at this conference and ask: well what have we done on this path that left this world that we looked at to be a better place.

You see calling is not some random event, at least not to the Christian. Our presence in the world is not the result of some divine chaos theory, the flap of an angelic wing in the heaven lies resulting in my having to go to work on Monday.

The successful and ambitious person is therefore one who is convinced that he or she is called to fulfill a purpose greater than satisfying our own personal financial ambitions. That is why fulfillment in the search for purpose in life is so linked to our calling.

Os Guinness, the author has a telling phrase. He says, "The trouble with modern people is that we have too much to live with and too little to live for, too much to live with, and too little to live for."

We are confused as a generation and yet our calling is to come back and to ask the question, the geographic question: where is the Jesus? "For where I am, there my servant

will be also," as we read in the scripture. And it sounds the most benevolent simple question and I suppose I am reducing it to that, but don't forget it, is Jesus is present in the workplace, on the trading floors of our banks, in the lawyers' offices, in the science laboratories. Wherever he is, there his servants will be.

And that distinction, which kind of said that actually God is emigrated out of his world and left you and me to sort of muddle along has been a disaster for the understanding of God's way in the world.

There is a longing amongst people that we would meet to ensure that there is some way back into a fulfilled and purposeful living. And it is our task to be able to describe the way of life that will not be choked by stress and the obsessiveness that current economic conditions or work ethic demands of people: performances that cannot be fulfilled, timelines that can't be met, an entirely stressful way of living totally at odds with the original prospectus which we read about in the creation in Genesis.

And we cannot deal with the symptoms of stress without recognizing one unmistakable fact. In its very root, the stressful life we lead occur precisely as a result of our failure to follow the instructions for living set out within the Bible. Lives lived independently of God cannot but be stressful ones and learning dependence is learning freedom.

You lay the seeds now, the time when you have just been at university and just come out, you lay the seeds now of the fruit that you will eat later, of disciplined praying, Bible study, interacting in fellowship groups.

### **Surviving In The Workplace**

It is very important to consider the purpose of it. T.S. Elliot in "The Four Quartets," those of you who are reading English will know. It talks about "In the end is my beginning." One way to another to live a life of purpose means having to determine the direction in which we are travelling. Isaiah the Prophet writes that God knows the end from the

beginning.

And in the search for meaningful lives, we will not be able to find this in the atomized, unconnected activities of day to day living without finding some coherence for life. Therefore, all of us need to resolve this ultimate question: why am I doing what I am doing and is there any ultimate end to that activity? We need the energy for day to day living.

And of course, it is the resurrection that gives us hope for the future. How is that we survive in the workplace? We survive because of the hope that has been given to us to persevere every day, finding that new energy, that new source of God's creative work within us, to do that which he has called us to do and to do it well. And there are every day examples, my message to you is that God is at work in you every day.

Let me give you an example, when a trader buys securities, he exercises knowledge, analytical skill, judgment, conviction, quick wittedness, planning for the future, providing a service and communicating. If he buys at a fair price, another party benefits and the seed for a future and continuing win win relationship is established.

These are the attributes we share with God, not surprisingly we were created in his image. Of course if the trade is accompanied by greed, insider trading, unfair advantage, the transaction is tarnished. But the distortions that sometimes accompany commercial transactions should not lead us to the view that competition, trading, making profit are somehow wrong.

On the contrary, properly exercised, they are instruments of God given economy directed at efficiency and to the service of others. It is worth remembering the example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, that apostle of hope that was murdered by the Nazis, who had the opposite and much more Biblical view when he called Christians to be this worldly/.

By which he meant that we are to have a radical engagement with the every day world,

sharing its pains, its confusions, its pathologies, its crisis while struggling at work with the harshness of commercial compromises. All the while pointing to the joy and the hope of the risen Christ. In this respect, my workstation is also my worship station.

We have sadly become a generation that is knowledge long and wisdom short. At the end of one of the addresses to the Senate of the Church of England, the Queen said this, "When so much is in flux, when limitless amounts of information, much of it ephemeral are instantly accessible on demand, there is a renewed hunger for that which endures and gives meaning."

"The Christian church can speak uniquely to that need, for at the heart of our faith stands the conviction that all people, irrespective of race, background or circumstances, can find lasting significance and purpose in the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

I think that is a remarkable statement coming from the Queen that everyone can find lasting significance in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not a minority club, it is accessible to all who would be seeking wisdom in the world. And what is wisdom?

For me the most wonderful definition occurs in the introduction by Eugene Peterson to the "Book of Proverbs" when he says this "Wisdom has to do with being skilful in honouring our parents and raising our children, handling our money and conducting our sexual lives, going to work and exercising leadership, using words well and treating friends kindly, eating and drinking healthily, cultivating emotions in ourselves and attitudes towards others that make for peace."

## **Conclusion**

Threaded through all these items is the insistence that the way we think of in response to God is the most practical thing we do. In matters of everyday practicality, nothing, absolutely nothing takes precedence over God. Here lies the truth, God is at work in this world. His will is done on earth as it is in heaven, earth comes first. We know that God

knows no sacred or secular divide, wisdom is meant for the marketplace.

Our task is to bring glory to God, because that is what was Jesus' task on earth. "I came to do the work that you gave me and to finish it and to give you glory," he says in John's gospel. So it is for us that we need to look to see God's glory.

What is God's glory? The definition given by that early Father Irenaeus "A human being fully alive." And our first step is therefore to realign our patterns of living, our aspirations, our desires and achievements at work, realign them with the will of God.

Michael Caine, the actor, was once asked to differentiate between a great movie star and a great actor. And his reply was instructive, "The movie star says how can I change the script and the story line to fit my personality. The great actor says how can I change my personality to fit the script and to do justice to the story."

If we want to be written into God's script for the world, we therefore need to be prepared to change our plans if they are at odds with his purposes and to yield our programs if they are at variance with his priorities.

It is in conclusion something I would like to leave you with, a warning and an encouragement. A warning from the Book of Malachi in which God says to the people of Israel, "If they disregard his ways, he will curse their blessings."

We are blessed beyond imagination in our generation. We should be careful that those blessings do not turn out to become the very curses of prosperity, of ease, of living lives without the concern for others in a fragmented way.

And an encouragement, my prayer for you is that you would examine during this weekend the vital nature of action, as inspired by faith. That you would be ambitious for your careers, going forward, yet responsive to the needs and the concerns of others in the world; ambitious to hear God and to be obedient as he speaks to you; ambitious to

understand that he has created you uniquely, that he loves you individually, assures you of all that he has invested in you, God has made a remarkable investment in you and in me.

He wants us to reap the fruit of that investment in this world, in terms of lives lived at ease with God, at ease with our neighbours and at ease with ourselves and of course also in the world to come.

For if you do not take steps now to shape the nature of the Spirituality that you will live the rest of your life by, it will be shaped for you by the forces operating in the world that are not those that are dedicated to the freedom that Christ Jesus came to give us.

And that is the highest prize that we could ever have, which is to know that we are shaping our lives led by the Spirit of God, inspired by the word of God, encouraged by the people of God to live lives of faith and action, in a world where we can make a difference.

### **Shall we pray?**

Heavenly father, we thank you that you are with us. Thank you that by your Spirit, you are here. We thank you that you have given us words to think about, "For where I am, there my servant will be also." I pray Lord for this weekend for everyone here that your hand would be upon the tonight, as they rest you will speak, tomorrow and during the discussions, you will speak in words and scriptures, in argument and discussion and debate.

We think of the scripture Lord, which tells us "come let us reason together" that we might hear you and having heard you, that we might take action to fulfil the callings that you have for each one of us. And so we thank you for bringing us here. In Jesus name, Amen.