

## More Catholics in China than in Italy



In China, there are more Muslims than in Europe and more practicing Catholics than in Italy, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair told a Monterrey Mexico forum on faith and globalization.

“A new type of debate is taking shape,” said Blair, while addressing a gathering of students at Monterrey Technological University. “It can centre around immigration or protectionism but it is above all, about issues to do with culture and integration and it is altogether more vigorous and potentially more explosive.”

“In the Middle East, it is about whether the West fundamentally respects or does not the religion of Islam; and the Israel-Palestine dispute is caught up with it. In Europe, it is about whether our attempt to integrate cultures has succeeded or failed,” he said.

**Democracy and even economic change are not enough**, Blair cautioned. “There is a social challenge too. Do we want societies that are open to those who have different faiths and cultures to our own traditions; or do we want, in the face of insecurity and economic crisis, to close down, to look after what some would call “our own” first and foremost? And if we want open ones, what are the conditions for such openness to prevail?” Blair asked.

Religion is also key to understanding the Middle East, he emphasized. “If democracy (in the Middle

East) brings with it an open attitude not, just to the economy but to society and religion, it will be hugely beneficial. If it doesn't, by contrast, it will further the sense of anxiety and alienation between East and West," Blair warned.

**However, religion also plays a key role in other nations and regions.** "In China, where there are more Muslims than in Europe and more practicing Catholics than in Italy, and around 100m Buddhists, Faith shapes many lives," he noted. "It is true of course of India. The same could be said in Latin America and even if the numbers of practicing worshipers in Europe is lower, the importance of Judeo-Christian culture is palpable. In the USA who could say religious faith doesn't count?"

"So my point is very simple. Wherever you look today, religion matters. Faith motivates. Understanding faith, its adherents, its trends, its structures, can be as important as understanding a nation's GDP, its business, its resources. "Globalization is accelerating all these trends. We adjust or we are swept away," he concluded.

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