

Christianity vs. Secularism

✖ **March 6, 2009** – Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair warned this week that Christianity is at risk of being sidelined in England's secularist society, the *Daily Telegraph* reported.

In an interview published in the Church of England newspaper, Blair said he agreed with church leaders that Christianity is in danger of being viewed as a "personal eccentricity" rather than a significant influence on the nation.

He also criticized "ludicrous" decisions that have penalized Christians for expressing their faith in public. Among recent examples are Caroline Petrie, a nurse who was suspended for two months after offering to pray for a patient, and Jennie Cain, a school receptionist who still faces firing after seeking prayer support from church friends when her 5-year-old daughter was scolded for talking about hell in the playground.

"My view is that people should be proud of their Christianity and able to express it as they wish," Blair said, while admitting that conflict between religion and contemporary understandings of human rights are "inevitable."

"The real test of a religion is whether in an age of aggressive secularism it has the confidence to go out and make its case by persuasion," Blair added.

Blair, who converted to Roman Catholicism, was not outspoken about his faith while serving as prime minister, fearing he would be labeled a "nutter."

"Sometimes I think we as Christians are more sensitive than we should be although I say that as someone who when I was in office, although I was perfectly open about my Christianity, nonetheless kept it within certain boundaries that were restricted in terms of what I said publicly," Blair told the

Church of England newspaper.

"The position of prime minister puts you in a unique category. But in general terms in British society there is a risk that people see faith as a personal eccentricity."

Blair, however, said that while prime minister he believed equality and diversity trumped religion in the case of Catholic adoption agencies that were denied exemption from laws requiring them to consider placing children with gay couples.

"I happen to take the gay rights position," Blair said. "But at the time of the Catholic adoption society dispute I was also concerned that these people who were doing a fantastic job were not put out of business. You have got to try to work your way through these issues."

In May, Blair launched the Tony Blair Faith Foundation, which has a mission to promote understanding among the major religions and increase awareness of the role of faith in the modern world, according to its Web site.

Blair's comments came days after his wife commented in a documentary titled *Christianity: A History* that the religion seemed to be on a "terminal decline."

"Everywhere you look today churches are being closed," she said, "Christians are often being marginalized and faith is something few people like to discuss openly."