



LAUNCH OF THE SIXTH SEMI-ANNUAL MUNK DEBATE

Tony Blair and Christopher Hitchens to debate religion's impact on global affairs

October 12, 2010 – Toronto, Canada

The Aurea Foundation announced today the resolution and presenters for the sixth semi-annual Munk Debate to be held in Toronto on Friday November 26th.

To encourage a far-ranging discussion on one of humankind's most vexing questions, the sixth semi-annual Munk Debate will tackle the resolution: ***be it resolved, religion is a force for good in the world.***

The debate will focus on competing claims regarding religion's effect on human civilization, today and into the future. For example: In a world of globalization and rapid social change does religion provide the common values and ethical foundations that diverse societies need to thrive in the 21st century? Or, do deeply held religious beliefs promote intolerance, exacerbate ethnic divisions, and impede social progress in developing and developed nations alike?

Arguing for the benefits of religion will be **former British Prime Minister Tony Blair**. Tony Blair was prime minister of the United Kingdom from May 1997 to June 2007. Since leaving office, Mr. Blair has served as the Quartet Representative in the Middle East. He works for the USA, UN, Russia and EU to help the Palestinians to prepare for statehood as part of the international community's effort to secure peace. In May 2008, he launched the Tony Blair Faith Foundation*, which promotes respect and understanding among the major religions. This autumn he released his bestselling memoir, *A Journey: My Political Life*.

Speaking against religion will be author, journalist and literary critic **Christopher Hitchens**. Mr. Hitchens, one of the world's most prominent atheists, has been a columnist at *Vanity Fair*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Nation*, *Slate*, *Free Inquiry*, and a variety of other publications. His most recent bestselling books include *God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* and *Hitch-22: A Memoir*.

Rudyard Griffiths, co-director and moderator of the Munk Debates, comments: "This debate is not about the existence of God. We have asked Mr. Blair and Mr. Hitchens to wrestle with the more immediate question facing developed and developing nations: is religion a force for peace or conflict in the modern world?"

The Munk Debates provide a lively and substantive forum for leading thinkers to discuss the pressing issues of our time. Two debates are held each year in Toronto, one in the spring and one in the fall. The previous Munk Debate participants include Amb. Richard Holbrooke, historian Niall Ferguson, UN Special Envoy for HIV AIDS Stephen Lewis, Amb. John Bolton, columnist Charles Krauthammer and activist Mia Farrow.

The Munk Debates is a signature initiative of the Aurea Foundation, a Canadian charitable organization established in 2006 by philanthropist Peter Munk and his wife Melanie Munk to support Canadian institutions and individuals involved in the study and development of public policy.

“Our philanthropy is aimed primarily at improving the quality and vitality of public debate in Canada,” said **Peter Munk**, speaking about the rationale for the Munk Debates. “Whether it is the support we provide to the Munk School for Global Studies at the University of Toronto or the creation of the Munk Debates through our Aurea Foundation, Melanie and I are committed to broadening public knowledge, education and informed discourse,” Mr. Munk added.

The Munk Debates are open to the public. The religion debate will take place in Toronto on **Friday November 26th** at 7:00 pm EST. **Tickets go on sale to the public at 11:00 AM on Thursday, October 14th**. For information on purchasing tickets, please visit www.munkdebates.com. Seating is limited.

A live web-stream of the debate will also be available for anyone world-wide at www.munkdebates.com. For details on the web-stream and more information on the Munk Debates, including biographical notes for presenters appearing at the November debate and past debate proceedings, visit www.munkdebates.com.

*About the Tony Blair Faith Foundation: In an increasingly globalized world, religion is at the very core of life for billions of people and it cannot be ignored. The Tony Blair Faith Foundation aims to promote respect and understanding between the major religions. We empower, support and train young people to take multi-faith action against extreme poverty in over 100 countries, providing them with a positive alternative to those who try to use faith as a means to divide. We provide emerging and current leaders with the education and analysis to understand the role of religion in the modern world and we break down barriers between young people of all faiths and none by using new technology to connect them. www.tonyblairfaithfoundationus.org

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