

**Speech by HE The Delegate for Great Britain and Ireland and Delegate  
for Inter-Religious Relations of the Sacred Military Constantinian  
Order of St George, Mr Anthony Bailey OBE, GCSS,**

**Reception to celebrate faith communities and inter-faith dialogue**

**Embassy of Slovakia, London W8  
16 January 2020.**

Mr Ambassador, Your Royal Highnesses, Dean of the Diplomatic Corps,  
Your Excellencies, Your Eminences, My Lords, Minister,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It gives me very great pleasure as Delegate of the Constantinian Order in  
Britain to warmly welcome each of you this evening to this New Year's  
Reception and celebration of faith. First and foremost, I want to thank  
Lubomir for hosting us in this unique corner of Kensington which I have no  
doubt will always remain a faithful part of the European Union!

As someone well acquainted with Slovakia, the sentiments Your Excellency  
and your President have expressed mirror my own. I am only too aware  
of the important role that faith continues to play in your nation's  
proud history and at pivotal moments in it. I was, as you know, privileged to  
witness at first hand your compatriots determination to stand up for  
their freedom, their democracy and their faith during the Velvet Revolution of  
1989.

And for those of you here this evening who have not yet visited Slovakia,  
may I strongly urge you to do so. There is so much to see and you will come  
face-to-face with the warm and welcoming Slovak hospitality – just as we are  
all enjoying here this evening.

May I also, Ambassador, bring you the warmest greetings of Cardinal Vincent Nichols, our Order's Prior, and of the Chief Rabbi and of Lord Rowan Williams whom I met last night and asked to be remembered on this special occasion. I am also delighted that His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos, Coptic Archbishop of London and one of this nation's most senior interfaith leaders - honours us with his presence as does Lord George Carey, Bishop Paul Hendricks of Southwark and the Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain.

For those not acquainted with the Constantinian Order it is one of the oldest internationally recognised Roman Catholic, charitable Orders of Knighthood in existence today. The first known Irish knight was invested in 1728 and the first known British knight was in 1801.

Since the earliest origins, the Order has resolved to work for the defence of Faith and values the relationships of co-operation and trust it has built across the boundaries of faith, culture and race. Our Order is proud too that alongside our Catholic knights and dames are Anglicans, Orthodox, Protestants, Muslim, Jewish and Sikh believers.

We remain true to our Roman Catholic heritage yet are deeply proud of our diversity and hold firm to Saint John Paul II's conviction that what unites the faiths is far more important than what divides them, and his belief that religions need to be the primary bridge-builders in our fractured world.

Such gatherings tonight show how we are brought together because of our faith, and not in spite of it, and this message is one that needs to be heard loud and clear in our contemporary culture, which can perceive religious conviction as intolerant and even unwelcome.

Diversity and difference is everywhere, and we can either make something positive of that or something negative of that. To make something positive of it is to realise that we are less than we truly are when we cannot cope with the other.

Other people are not going away, and so we share the crises of modern life. So, the other person, the other religious group, the other culture or the other tradition, is in fact a resource in a shared crisis. We all have to seize the moment and draw out of each other the deepest resources to resolve a crisis and we should not be afraid to do so.

An occasion that struck home this point was when I was organising a street party in London to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. Within two hundred meters of my home I later discovered no less than 50 different nationalities, cultures, faiths and traditions. I thought that the street party would be a good occasion for the neighbours to gather and to my amazement I discovered that many had been living for decades next to each other, but it was the first time that many had even talked to one another. Such is the problem of modern neighbourhoods.

You might know the person either side of you but two away? three away? or opposite you? This breakdown in community is happening at a time of a rise in hate speech, which we know can quickly move to hate crime or even in parts of the world to out-and-out persecution.

People are sadly defining themselves more about what they are standing against rather than what they are standing for. As a result, there is an increasing reluctance to engage with, talk to, and even listen to people with opposite views to our own. Therefore, we are living in a bubble, creating and encouraging a "them and us" atmosphere within our society.

Gatherings like tonight, bring together people and organisations of good will and so I want to take this opportunity to thank all those present who take on these challenges and have become role models to others.

We also need to be realistic about the challenges. We need to create some sort of symphony style society and live like an orchestra where each instrument plays its own unique sound but under the baton of a global

conductor, we can blend together and produce perfect harmony. This is what the Constantinian Order tries to do, and I know so many others here do too.

Mr Ambassador, I am delighted to see here tonight so many representatives of states and territories where faith is an essential part of national identity today such as in Georgia, Honduras, Kuwait, Malta, Peru, Poland, and Serbia and other countries where governments have placed significant resources to restore and renovate places of worship such as in Hungary and Belarus, or in Taiwan which continues to lead a regional effort to promote and champion the freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Having recently returned from Grenada, I read their national motto was 'Ever Conscious of God We Aspire, Build and Advance as One People'. That must surely be at the heart of what draws us all here tonight.

It's now my pleasure to introduce the Minister for Faiths and Communities, the Rt Hon Viscount Younger of Leckie who will speak to us on behalf of Her Majesty's Government.

Thank you.