

Welcome by the Warden of St Antony's College, Professor Roger Goodman

Your Excellency. Vice-Chancellor, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a great privilege for St Antony's to welcome Mr Seyed Mohammed Khatami to our College this afternoon.

Mr Khatami is in the UK for a brief visit and has just received an Honorary Degree and opened a new Centre of Iranian Studies at St Andrew's University. We appreciate that having visited the oldest University in Scotland he should be able to find time to visit us in the oldest University in England. As everyone in our audience today will know, Mr Khatami was President of the Islamic Republic of Iran from 1997-2005. Both inside and outside Iran, he is widely recognised as someone who supports the cause of reform, seeking to bring government more closely in touch with its citizens, and make it more open and accountable. As a scholar of Islamic and Western philosophy, he has also made a major contribution to encouraging international dialogue, a contribution that was recognized by the UN General Assembly in adopting his slogan 'Dialogue of Civilizations' for the year 2001. 'Dialogue of Civilizations' is, of course a rebuttal to Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations' thesis and it is of huge importance for the world as a whole that, as President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and before and since, he has maintained his commitment to endorsing and disseminating his belief in this dialogue. To this end, he has indeed recently established The International Institute for Dialogue Among Civilizations based in Geneva and Tehran and with outreach offices in Paris and Vienna. And of course that is why he is here today.

Less well known outside Iran are Mr Khatami's work and contributions other than as President of his country. He studied both in the Islamic madrasah system in Qom and in the state universities of Isfahan and Tehran. He worked for several years as Director for the Islamic Centre in Hamburg, was a member of parliament for two years, had two periods as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, and from 1992 to 1997 was Director of Iran's National Library, a post which allowed him to pursue his academic interests. Already as a student he developed an interest in the relationship between Islamic and Western philosophy and culture, and in intellectual and philosophical responses to the technological and globalizing changes of the modern world. He is the author of a large number of articles and books on a wide range of subjects, including democracy and political development, globalization, religion, and contemporary social issues. The title of his talk today - Religion and the Promotion of Democracy – suggests that he will touch upon almost all of these areas in his address to us. He has also kindly agreed to take questions following this address and this discussion will be chaired by my colleague, Edmund Herzig, Professor of Persian Studies in the University.

I know, your Excellency, that you can rely on your audience to listen very attentively to what you have to say. Dialogue among Civilizations could stand as the motif for what St Antony's does: we have been the base in the University that has nurtured, developed and supported area studies for the past fifty years, and we have had at the heart of all our activity an insistence on the importance of open and non-judgmental discussion within and between those areas. It is my particular pleasure, therefore, your Excellency, to invite you to address us now.