

## Tony Blair converts to Catholicism at service in Westminster

Last updated at 14:51 22 December 2007

Tony Blair has converted to Roman Catholicism, the former prime minister's official spokesman confirmed today.

The former prime minister's new faith was confirmed last night at a chapel in Westminster.

The move comes after years of speculation that Mr Blair, whose wife Cherie and four children are Catholic, would convert from Anglicanism after he resigned from Number 10 in June.

One of his last acts as prime minister was to visit Pope Benedict in June - his third trip to the Vatican in four years.



Tony Blair meets with the Pope earlier this year

The Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams wished the former Prime Minister well in his spiritual journey.

He said: "Tony Blair has my prayers and good wishes as he takes this step in his Christian pilgrimage.

"A great Catholic writer of the last century said that the only reason for moving from one Christian family to another was to deepen one's relationship with God.

"I pray that this will be the result of Tony Blair's decision in his personal life."

As long ago as 1996, Mr Blair was taking communion at Catholic ceremonies, until the then Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Basil Hume, told him not to.



Mr Blair's wife Cherie is a Catholic

Mr Blair was received into the Catholic Church by the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, in the chapel of the Archbishop's House in Westminster last night, a church spokesman confirmed.

Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor said: "I am very glad to welcome Tony Blair into the Catholic Church.

"For a long time he has been a regular worshipper at Mass with his family and in recent months he has been following a programme of formation to prepare for his reception into full communion."

Monsignor Mark O'Toole, the cardinal's private secretary, led Mr Blair through his period of spiritual preparation before last night's ceremony.

The cardinal added: "My prayers are with him, his wife and family at this joyful moment in their journey of faith together."

The Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC) reacted with surprise to the news of Mr Blair's conversion.

John Smeaton, SPUC's national director, said: "During his premiership Tony Blair became one of the world's most significant architects of the culture of death, promoting abortion, experimentation on unborn embryos, including cloned embryos, and euthanasia by neglect.

"SPUC is writing to Tony Blair to ask him whether he has repented of the anti-life positions he has so openly advocated throughout his political career."

Tory MP Ann Widdecombe who converted to Catholicism in 1993 told Sky News: "Well I think the crucial thing to remember is at the point you are received (into the Catholic church) you have to say individually and out loud 'I believe everything the church teaches to be revealed truth'.

"And that means if you previously had any problems with church teaching, as Tony Blair obviously did over abortion, as he did again over Sunday trading...you would have to say you changed your mind.

"And I think people will want to know that he did go through that process, because otherwise it will seem as if the church did make an exception for somebody just because of who he is."

Asked to comment on the suggestion there was a delay in Mr Blair's conversion because of clashes between running the country and being a "declared Catholic" Ms Widdecombe said: "It's perfectly possible to be a practising Catholic and play a very major role including the most major role in British politics in this country.

"One could really say, come on Tony, you should have been setting the example. You should have been demonstrating how possible it is. But really we don't know what the reasons for the delay were."

The Most Rev Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Birmingham, said: "The Catholic Church is always glad to welcome people who come into full communion. I pray that Mr Blair will now find great joy and consolation in the unity of his family."

Paul Woolley, director of Theos - a public theology think tank, said: "I think this is the right decision for Tony Blair and there's a lot of integrity attached in that - doing what he's wanted to do for a considerable period of time.

"It may well be his reticence in doing this may have been down to how it would have been interpreted.

"I wouldn't criticise him for that, more the culture we live in that would have jumped on him if he had converted in office."

He added: "I'm sure at some point we will see a Catholic prime minister. It's really important that does happen in a liberal and tolerant society.

"People with real religious convictions should be able to serve in public office and not be denied that opportunity."

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Even with three sixes under his forked tongue?

- Ruth, Manchester, UK, 22/12/2007 22:09

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So how does he explain to the Church his views on Gay couples etc when he voted in their favour for adoption etc whilst in power.

- Chris, Isle of Wight, 22/12/2007 22:00

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The Faustian scumbag why hasn't he been arrested.

- E Pryor, Gravesend UK, 22/12/2007 21:54

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He converted a Labour Government into a rightwing dictatorship without any bother; he converted the lie into the truth and this Country into an offshore satellite of Europe. He was a republican and a closet catholic while in office, why else were the IRA granted access to Parliament. The Roman church is welcome to him, I wonder what sins he will confess, and the lies he told to start the Iraq war?

- J. Birch, Exeter, England, 22/12/2007 21:54

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Just confirms what a gullible moron he is. Invades Iraq on spurious evidence of Weapons of Mass Destruction; converts to Catholicism on spurious evidence of the existence of a God. If you looked at the true facts Tony, in each case you'd get the correct answer: no WMD; no God.

- Paul Downes, Milton Keynes, Bucks, 22/12/2007 21:49

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He voted the "wrong way" on just about every issue and now he has been admitted into the RC church. Something's not right!

- Liz Ward, Huddersfield UK, 22/12/2007 21:47

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