



Viscount Combermere – 2000

THE 5th VISCOUNT COMBERMERE, who died in November, 2000, aged 71, devoted his life to promoting understanding between religious faiths; he was chairman of the World Congress of Faiths from 1983 to 1988.

A courteous, tolerant and unassuming man, Combermere became fascinated by the contrasts and similarities between different religions as a teenager, inspired by the interest shown by his local rector. In the early 1960s he joined the Universal Order, an organisation dedicated to finding common philosophical and spiritual ground between faiths.

Michael Wellington Stapleton-Cotton was born on August 8 1929, the eldest son of the 4th Viscount Combermere. He was educated at Eton, where he acquired a taste for adventure. After school, he spent a year with the Palestine Police Force and then two years with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. In 1950 he took a short service commission with the RAF, retiring in 1958 in the rank of flight lieutenant. He became a sales representative with an aviation manufacturer - Teleflex Products, in 1959.

He went up to King's College, London, in 1962, taking BA and MA degrees in Theology. Promoting religious understanding became his consuming passion. After taking a degree in Theology as a mature student, he founded a new Diploma in Religious Studies at London University's Department of Extra-Mural Studies, where he was a lecturer from 1972 to 1994. He was also senior lecturer at the Centre for Extra-Mural Studies, Birkbeck College, from 1988 to 1994; and as chairman of the World Congress of Faiths, he attracted scholars to address the organisation's annual conferences. From 1974 until his death he was a member of the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education, and co-led a ten day study-tour to Istanbul in January, 1974 on 'Islam in its Turkish context' ,jointly organised by the Shap Working Party and London University's Extra-Mural Studies Department.

An active member of the Church of England, Lord Combermere became extremely knowledgeable about all religious faiths and believed that such knowledge could bring spiritual enrichment.

He taught at the Muslim College in Ealing and at the West London Synagogue, under Rabbi Hugo Gryn. His last planned series of lectures was to have been on Celtic, Anglo-Saxon and Norse religions. He had inherited the Combermere peerages, and the baronetcy, on his father's death in 1969.

He sat in the Lords as a Crossbencher. He married, in 1961, Pamela Coulson, a clergyman's daughter. They had two daughters and a son, Thomas Stapleton-Cotton, born in 1969, who succeeded to the peerage