

**H.R.H. Prince Ghazi's Opening Remarks  
at the Yale 'Common Word' Conference, July 29, 2008**

*Bism Illah Al-Rahman Al-Rahim  
Wal-Salatu wal-Salaamu 'ala Khatim al-Anbiya wal-Mursalin*

*Al-Salaamu Aleikum wa Rahmatu Allah; Pax Vobiscum,*

Let me start by praising God الحمد لله for everything, and then by thanking all those more than 300 Christian Scholars and Leaders who generously responded on November 18<sup>th</sup> 2007 in the New York Times to the *A Common Word* initiative of October 13<sup>th</sup> 2007. It was this gracious response that opened the way for the current conference.

More particularly for the current historical conference we are indebted to President Levin of Yale University and Dean Harold Attridge of the Yale Divinity School for their support and vision; to Professor Emilie Townes; to Roseanne Moore; to Dr Andrew Saperstein; to Dr. Rick Love; to Mahan Mirza; to the excellent logistical staff behind the conference (in particular Amanda Jones, Melissa Yarrington, and Lindsay Cleveland); to Tareq Al-Gohary and Nuri Friedlander and their team who have been helping the team at Yale with everything; to my own team particularly Cesar, Barihan and Matt Collins for follow-up with the Muslim side; to Dr. Joseph Cumming, the Director of the Reconciliation Program---who has worked night and day over the last nine months to make all of this happen, by the Grace of God---and most of all to our very good friend Professor Mirolsav Volf, who has been the driving behind all of this, acting with true Christian *Caritas* towards Muslims---which we admire and appreciate---without for all that abandoning his Christian fervour, but rather *as a necessary part of it*. Permit me also like to thank Miroslav's mother, Mrs Volf, for her encouragement and prayers!

Finally, I would like to thank my friend Mr. Tim Collins who funded a good part of this conference and the work behind it. Without his support and vision none of this would have been possible. God says in the Holy Qur'an: *And God summoneth to the abode of peace, and leadeth whom He will to a straight path.* (Yunus, 10:25)

وَاللَّهُ يَدْعُو إِلَى دَارِ السَّلَامِ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ (يونس 25)

This conference is in fact the first of a number of important events and meetings based on *A Common Word* including, God Willing, meetings at Cambridge University and Lambeth Place in October; the Vatican in November; Georgetown University in March 2009, and possibly at the Baptism Site in Jordan in 2009 or 2010...

I would like to say here at the onset that the intention in sending out the *A Common Word* missive was simply to try to make peace between Muslims and Christians globally---it was and is an extended global handshake of religious goodwill, friendship and fellowship and consequently of inter-religious peace. Of course, peace is primarily a matter for governments, but Huntington's 1993 vision of global conflict between Muslims and Christians was wrong in one important sense: post September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, the only government as such to have opposed the West in its various demands is that of Iran (but even Iran has sided with the West against terrorism); 54 other Islamic nations have sided with the west. That is to say then that the governments of Islamic majority countries have not banded together against the governments of Christian-majority (much less in alliance to China) nor vice versa. Nevertheless, Huntington was very correct in his prediction of heightened tensions between Christian and Muslim populations as such *globally* after the collapse of atheistic communism, albeit with *religious-affiliated non-government actors taking the lead*.

Indeed, there seems to be 5 main factors driving global religious tensions: (1) Jerusalem and the Palestine question, (2) Discontentment with US Foreign Policy (especially the war in Iraq), (3) terrorism, (4) fundamentalism (on all sides), and (5) missionary activity (also on all sides). Thus now according to the results of the largest international religious surveys in history (as outlined in the seminal book by Professor John Esposito and Dalia Mogahed), 60% of Christians harbour prejudice against Muslims and 30% of Muslims reciprocate.

Now every student of history knows --- and good readers of the 8<sup>th</sup> book of Plato's Republic will surmise --- that with such an explosive mix, popular religious conflicts---even unto genocides--- are lurking around the corner. Indeed, one such happened a few hundred miles away from the where the Pope sits, 15 years ago in the heart of Europe, when 300,000 innocent Muslim civilians were slaughtered and 100,000 Bosnian women were raped as a method of war. We are honoured to have with us the Grand Mufti of Bosnia; please ask him about it. And my feeling is that, God forbid, a few more terrorist attacks; a few more National Security Emergencies; a few more demagogues; and a few more national protection laws, and then

internment camps---if not concentration camps---are not inconceivable in some places, and that these would inevitably spawn global counter-reactions.

The Holocaust of 6 million Jews---then the largest religious minority in Europe---65 years ago, still within living memory, is something that Muslims in the West, now the largest minority should contemplate as seriously as Jews do. For, unfortunately we are not now inherently immune to the crimes of the past, and our nature and worst potential has not fundamentally changed. Moreover, as the Gallup survey showed, we are now actually at the stage where we (as Christians and Muslims) routinely mistrust, disrespect and dislike each other, if not popularly and actively rubbish, dehumanize, demonize, despise and attack each other. This is the stage where Hutus and Tutsis (both Christian tribes, by their own confession at least) were at in Rwanda before the popular genocide by machete of nearly a million people in 1994. How much easier would it be for Muslims and Christians---who have been fighting for over a millennia and have viewed each other with deepest suspicion since St. John of Damascus---to slaughter each other? And how much more likely will this be when we are all finally struck with the apparently looming catastrophes of global climate change, and when competition for food and natural resources becomes more fierce? Indeed, it has not escaped many of us that there already have been prominent voices in both the West and the Islamic West calling for this.

This is the background behind the launching of *A Common Word*. It was addressed from religious leaders to religious leaders of the largest two religions in the world in the recognition that whilst religious leaders do not generally make public policy, they are nevertheless still the ultimate touchstones for morality and thus the final safety net for public opinion and non-government actors. This is not: "Politics by other means", but rather politics that recognizes "*that man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that issueth from the mouth of God*". It was not intended---as some have misconstrued---to trick Christians or to foist Muslim Theology on them, or even to convert them to Islam.

Neither was it intended to reduce both our religions to an artificial union based on the Two Commandments: indeed in Matthew 22:40 Jesus Christ the Messiah (*'alahi Al-Salaam*) was quite specific ("*On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.*" (Matthew 22:40): "*Hang*" not "*are* (reduced to)". It was simply an attempt to find a theologically correct pre-existing *essential* common ground (albeit interpreted perhaps differently) between Islam and Christianity, rooted in our sacred texts and in their common Abrahamic origin, in order to stop our deep-rooted religious mutual suspicions from being an impediment to

behaving properly towards each other. It, was and is, an effort to ensure that religions behave as part of the solution, and are not misused to become part of the problem. Indeed the Two Commandments give us guidelines and a shared standard not only to what to expect from the other but also to how we must ourselves *behave* and *be*.

We started with Christianity bilaterally simply because Islam and Christianity are the two largest religions in the world and in history, and so in that sense, Islamic-Christian dialogue is the most critical, but this does not preclude our having other conversations with those of other faiths, bilaterally or multilaterally, or even with those no faith at all. Indeed, we have for example been having a conversation with His Holiness the Dalia Lama and other Buddhists---with whom on the surface of things Islam has a lot less in common than with Christianity---and I would like to say this; he is a lot nicer than you Christians!

I would like to say also that *A Common Word* does not signal that Muslims are prepared to deviate from or concede one iota, one atom, of their convictions in reaching out to Christians---nor, I expect, the opposite. Let us be crystal-clear: *A Common Word* is about equal peace NOT about capitulation.

Indeed, some have suggested that framing our extended hand in the language of “love” is such a concession, but I assure you that this is not at all accurate, nor is it a ‘concession’: rather, it has been a particular pleasure to be able to focus in our initiative on this frequently underestimated aspect of our religion: the Grand Principle of Love. Indeed, we have over 50 near-synonyms for love in the Holy Qur’an --- English does not have the same linguistic riches and connotations: as we have already seen in the workshop, and as I am sure we will all discover this together here in the remainder of these “Yale days”. If Muslims do not usually use the same language of love as Christians in English, it is perhaps because the word ‘love’ for Muslims frequently implies different things for Muslims than it does Christians.

Our use of the language of ‘love’ in *A Common Word* is simply then a recognition that human beings have the same souls everywhere---however, corrupted or pure---and thus that the experience of love must have something in common everywhere, even if the objects of love are different, and even if the ultimate love of God is stronger than all other loves. God says in the Holy Qur’an:

*Yet of mankind are some who take unto themselves (objects of worship which they set as) rivals to God, loving them with a love like (that which is the due) of God (only) - [but] those who*

*believe are stauncher in their love for God.... (Al-Baqarah, 2:165)*

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَتَّخِذُ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ أَندَادًا يُحِبُّونَهُمْ كَحُبِّ اللَّهِ وَالَّذِينَ  
ءَامَنُوا أَشَدُّ حُبًّا لِلَّهِ (البقرة 165).

\* \* \*

Now I would like to recognize and introduce some of the Muslim guests here, starting with those coming from the Islamic World.

We have here from Algeria His Excellency the Algerian Minister of Religious Affairs, Dr. Bu Ghulam AbdAllah, who is one of the unsung heroes of the Islamic world, for he has helped reconcile the people of Algeria after a long and brutal civil war that killed tens of thousands of people.

Also from Algeria we have His Excellency Professor Dr Seyyed Mustafa Al-Cherif, former ambassador, former Minister of Education, expert on the Vatican and one of leading intellectuals and thinkers of the Arab world.

From Egypt we have Dr Salama Shaker, Egypt's Under-Minister for Foreign Affairs, one of the leading scholarly female voices in the Arab world.

From Morocco we have Dr Taha Abd Al-Rahman. Dr Taha is one of the most famous, most respected, most influential and most beloved philosophical minds in the Islamic world today.

Also from Morocco we have Professor Faruk Hamada, one of the leading experts on the crucial Islamic Science of Hadith (Prophetic sayings) in the world.

From Azerbaijan we have Allah Shakur Bashzada, the Grand Mufti not only of Azerbaijan but by election of the whole Caucas region. He is the world's only Sunni-Shi'i Grand Mufti: he gives Sunnis a Sunni answer and Shi'is a Shi'i answer to their questions: a paragon of religious plurality.

From Bosnia we have Grand Mufti of Bosnia Dr. Mustafa Ceric. He is another hero. He suffered and fought in the Bosnia genocide; then he fought in his heart and forgave, and today he fights for peace, as the senior religious authority of Europe's 20 million Muslims.

From Kosovo, the world's newest state we have Sheikh Naim Travna, who comes here despite the tensions and the delicate situation in his own country, which we all very much appreciate.

From Palestine we have His Eminence Chief Justice of Palestine Taysir Tamimi, a formidable and highly experienced figure who of late has been involved in interfaith dialogue and co-operation between Muslims, Christians and Jews.

From Indonesia we have Professor Din Syamduddin, the brilliant head—the youngest ever---of the Muhammadiyah party---the second largest party in Indonesia with 30 million members.

From Nigeria we have we have my dear friend Prince Bola Ajibola, the former Vice-President of the International High Court of Justice at le Hague; the former Nigerian Minister of Justice; the founder of both the Islamic Movement of Africa and the Crescent University.

From Iran we have Ayotollah Professor Seyyed Mustafa Mohaghag Damad, the former Attorney-General of Iran, and now perhaps the leading philosopher and expert on Shi'ite 'Irfan in Iran, if not in the world.

From Pakistan we have Pakistan Hafiz Mohammed Sohayl Umar, the director of the prestigious Iqbal Academy, a gentleman and a man of example of exemplary virtue.

From Afghanistan we have Professor Mohammad Hashim Kamali, who is recognized as the greatest expert on the relationship between *Shariah* and Modern Law in the world and has written the best and most acclaimed books on the subject.

From Gambia we have Professor and Ambassador Omar Jah, the head of the Muslims Scholars in his country and many other things, and a much beloved leader all over the Islamic world.

From the Yemen, we have Sheikh Habib Ali Jiffri. Habib Ali needs no introduction. He is one of the top ten most popular Islamic preachers in the world today, and amongst this top group, the youngest.

From Libya we have the brilliant Professor Aref Nayed, a leading pioneer in the field of Muslim-Christian relations and the first Muslim ever to graduate from the Gregorian.

From Tunisia we have Professor Hamida El-Naifar, one of the leading Muslim Theologians in the world and a historical figure in the Islamic movement in Tunisia.

From Turkey we have Dr. Ibrahim Kalin, the director of SETA (the leading Turkish think-tank) and a Professor at Georgetown University. He is brilliant scholar, administrator, political expert and musician. He is our group spokesmen for the conference.

From Oman we have Shaykh Ahmad bin Sa'ud Al-Siyabi, the Secretary-General of the Directorate of Grand Mufti, representing Grand

Mufti Shaykh Ahmad Al-Khalili and thus representing ultimate *Shari'ah* authorities in the Ibadhi Mathhab.

From the United Arab Emirates we have Prof. Dr. Muhammad Abd Al-Rahim Sultan-al-Ulama, Deputy-Dean of Scientific Research Affairs, UAE University, scion of an illustrious family of scholars and himself one of the leading Shafi'i scholars of the Arab world.

From Syria we have Dr Salah Al-Din Kuftaro who heads the Kuftaro Foundation founded by his great father the late Grand Mufti of Syria Ahmad Kuftaro, and who also heads the much-needed Islamic Center for Peace.

Originally from India, then Mozambique then Portugal, then the UK and now Jordan, we have Sohayl Nakhoda, the founder and editor-in-chief of what I think is now widely recognized as the best English Islamic Magazine in the world, *Islamica*.

From Jordan we have Senator Kamil Ajluni, the founder and first President of the Jordan University of Science and Technology; the founder of Jordan's National Diabetes Center, who was recognized only this year as the greatest endocrinologist in the world the American Board of Endocrinology. He has written extensively on sexual issues in Islam and Christianity and will no doubt remind us that whilst Christians and Muslims both reject Modern science's view of love as merely "heightened" or "sublimated" lust, nevertheless we must all recognize how our souls are generally habitually dominated, if not determined, by our bodies in this life--to the extent, at least, that we have not achieved liberation and enlightenment.

From Muslim minority countries in Asia we have Amina Rasul from the Philippines, whose voice is a leading one for peace, reconciliation and democracy, in that country where Muslims are beset on all sides.

From Europe, now, we have Dr Mohammed Bechari of France who seems to be head of everything connected with French Muslims and even European Muslims, and whom I know has just founded the Avicenna Center in Paris

From Belgium we have Dr. Mohammad Alwani Al-Sharif, the head of the European Academy of Islamic Culture and Sciences in Brussels, who has been one of the most influential Muslim intellectual and scholar of Europe in recent decades.

From Denmark we have Dr IsmatAllah Mojadadi, who as the president of the Council of Danish Muslims has been the calm in the eye of the storm caused by the sacrilegious cartoons in Denmark two year ago.

From Italy we have Imam Yahya Pallavicini a leading Muslim leading and author seeking always to make peace between Muslims and Christians.

From Great Britain we have Shaykh Abd Al-Hakim Murad, the Shaykh Zayed lecturer in Islamic studies at Cambridge University, who is widely recognized as being the most knowledgeable and influential native Muslim Western European.

Also from Britain we Dr. Seyyed Reza Shah-Kazemi, the author of four or five seminal and prize-winning books on such topics as: Mercy in the Holy Qur'an; the Qur'an and Interfaith Dialogue; Imam Ali and Spirituality, and comparative Mysticism.

Finally, from Britain, we have Dr. Naveed Sheikh one of the most brilliant upcoming historians of his generations. He joins here because a dialogue like ours cannot proceed without a historical memory. And since we have centuries of history together as Christians and Muslims, we must, in justice in our discussions, be aware of the past, in order to better work for the present or the future.

I will not introduce the 15 or so US and Canadian Muslim figures because you probably know them better than I do, but I will just briefly recognize them and thank them for coming: Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr, widely recognized as the greatest academic scholar on Islam in the world; Professor Ingrid Mattson, scholar, President of ISNA and modern role-model for the entire Islamic world; Sheikh Muzammil Siddiqui the historic founder of the North American Fatwa Council; Distinguished Professor AbdAllah Sclieffer, one of the greatest minds on media in our age; the charismatic (and now very famous) Imam Feisal AbdAl-Rauf of New York; Ali Lakhani, the Founder and Editor of the Sacred Web Journal; Professor Alan Godlas of Georgia University, founder of the most acclaimed website on Islam in the world and one of the world's leading translators; some brilliant upcoming scholars in their 30s my former colleagues Prof. Joseph Lumbard and Professor Caner Dagli; and the next generation God Willing of future Islamic scholars and leaders; Dr Hisham Hellyar; Dr Ahmad Rumi and Dr Aisha Chaudry; Dr Mona Hasan and Zarina Nalla. Last but not least, Dalia Mugahed, the Gallup Muslim World Poll director, who as mentioned earlier, is along with Professor John Esposito because of her work, perhaps the person most qualified in the world to say what Muslims all over in the entire world really want and feel.

Finally, I would like to welcome O.I.C Ambassador H.E. SaadEddin Taib, and Saudi representatives Dr. Anwar Majid Eshki, President of the Middle East Center for Strategic and Legal Studies and Dr Sadiq Al-Malki, Professor of Political Science at King Abd Al-Aziz University. I would also

like to welcome Dr Ali Abd Al-Baqi from the Azhar. Their presence with us as observers is a mark of how seriously the Islamic world, and in particular the top leadership in the OIC, Saudi Arabia and the Azhar is taking this dialogue.

Please forgive me if I have left any one out---there have been so many last minute changes it has been hard to keep track.

I have to say, however, that many of our most senior *fuqaha* (scholars of *Shariah*) did not attend---being of a certain age to no longer easily endure how Muslims have been treated at the airports since 9-11---but have sent supporting letters. However, had they known how well *we* have been treated by homeland security this week, more would have come, so we thank the US government for this..

In closing then let me quote from one of these great *fuqaha*, Sheikh Mohammed Said Ramadan Buti of Syria, in a letter to written this conference (which I know has been distributed). He says:

“Let us come together, brothers and sisters, to contemplate deeply before the mirror of our essential nature, in order to rediscover our true identity, which has been lost in the storms of discord and caprice. This mirror will show us our reality and say; we are all servants of God; we move under the grip of His Dominion, and live within the bounds of His kingdom, and all our journeys will end at His Presence. God reveals in the Quran: *(There is none in the heavens and the earth but cometh unto the All-Compassionate as a servant ﷻ Verily He knoweth them and numbereth them with (right) numbering. / And each one of them will come unto Him on the Day of Resurrection, alone. / Lo! those who believe and do good works, the All-Compassionate will grant them love.)*<sup>1</sup>”

إِن كُلُّ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ إِلَّا ءَاتَى الرَّحْمَنِ عَبْدًا ﴿٩٦﴾ لَقَدْ أَحْصَيْنَاهُمْ وَعَدَّهُمْ  
عَدًّا ﴿٩٥﴾ وَكُلُّهُمْ ءَاتِيهِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فَرْدًا ﴿٩٤﴾ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ  
سَيَجْعَلُ لَهُمُ الرَّحْمَنُ وُدًّا ﴿٩٣﴾ (مريم 93-96)

Thank-you, and *Al-Salaamu Aleikum*

<sup>1</sup> Quran: Chapter 19, Verses 93-96, Meaning of the Holy Quran, Translated by Marmaduke Pickthall