

Rick's Report...
The Common Word Workshop & Conference
Yale University July 24-31, 2008

Sheik Tamimi, the Chief Justice of Palestine, couldn't have better summarized the Common Word conference: "The Common Word was unlike any other dialogue I have ever attended. I have been to many dialogues. But none reflected the intellectual rigor and gracious spirit exhibited by the participants. Warm relationships were developed and important differences were addressed in a beautiful way."

Many of our Muslim guests marveled at the hospitality we showed them during the Common Word conference. And because of this, they opened up their hearts to us. For example, I personally met Hamed Tamimi at the airport to make him feel welcomed. Then I tried to carry his luggage for him (but in good Arab fashion he fought me for it). Later he said that this little act of kindness made a big impact: "I had a negative image of Evangelical Christians before I came to the conference. But when you met me and tried to carry my luggage I was touched. I felt honored and now I think Evangelicals are great!" By showing hospitality to our guests in this way, we were able to address the most challenging theological and practical topics. Love paved the way for the truth!

Critics feared we would compromise the gospel and not address important doctrines of the Christian faith. But we proved them wrong! In the midst of positive and robust dialogue, the truth and beauty of the gospel were communicated. Joseph Cumming, Director of the Yale Reconciliation Program, gave a paper about the trinity and the cross. John Stackhouse of Regent College presented a paper on the Good Samaritan – which included the gospel story as the context for understanding "neighbor love." Miroslav Volf of Yale graciously and cogently spoke about the trinity. Leith Anderson, President of the National Association of Evangelicals gave a strong keynote address about the evangelical faith. One African leader of a dynamic mission said he heard a clear gospel proclaimed three times during the conference (and he didn't get a chance to attend the workshop).

I certainly had a lot of divine appointments. I spent 9 hours with Prince Ghazi in small group meetings. He is very smart and funny -- a man of integrity and vision. I also had some quality time with Hamed Tamimi and Sheik Tamimi (two brothers from Palestine). Sheik Tamimi is the Chief Justice of Palestine and Hamed is his older brother. I enjoyed my time with Ayatollah Damad (a high level Iranian cleric) as well as a group of younger Muslim leaders: Hisham, Reza, Ibrahim, Cander, and Joseph. They were all stimulating, devout and open-minded. I look forward to continuing friendships with these men.

Here is a significant statement from Hisham Hellyer, one of my new Muslim friends. In an opinion piece, Hellyer, a consultant in West-Muslim relations (he advises the British Government about terrorism), welcomed the "strong evangelical component" at the meeting. In a commentary published by The National, a newspaper based in the United Arab Emirates, Hellyer said, "These were religious people; they weren't interested in

diluting their faiths. And in that, a type of sincerity emerged that was perhaps the greatest benefit of the initiative."

There were many informal **"discussions about freedom of religion."** I had the privilege of helping facilitate one such meeting on this topic. There were tense moments, deep sharing and greater mutual understanding. One Muslim leader said, "I never realized that evangelism was a major pillar of the Christian faith!" It is clear that one of the outcomes of this conference was that Muslims began to understand our evangelical tenets. We will continue to talk about these things in the future.

Noteworthy quotes:

The most important thing that I have taken away from the conference—from scholarly contributions, from learned panel presentations, from formal and informal discussions, from the exchange of experiences during meals and breaks—is a deepened sense of the immense potential that the Common Word presents for mending relationships between Muslims and Christians.

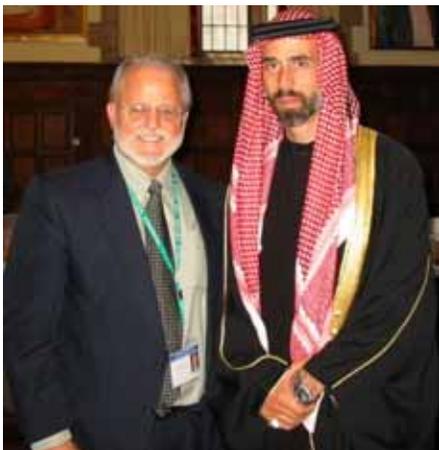
The people who attended the conference embodied the commitment to love God and neighbor.

I rank it among the most productive, interesting, and smoothly-run conferences I've ever attended.

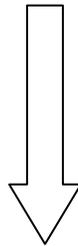
A stunning event

One of the most inspiring events I have ever participated in

I marveled over the exquisite spirit, high intellectual quality, candor and warm atmosphere.



Rick with Prince Ghazi of Jordan



More
Pictures
below



Rick with Ayatollah Damad



Rick with Hamed Tamimi



For a detailed summary of the conference see: <http://www.yale.edu/faith/rp/rp.htm>

For video clips of some speakers see:

<http://www.yale.edu/divinity/video/commonword/video.shtml>