

Interfaith as a Global Necessity

2nd Anniversary of Center for Interfaith Study and Dialog / Nazareth College,
Rochester, NY / March 8, 2007

Assalamu alaykum.

Peace be on you, and good evening.

I don't know how many of you have noticed the front page news item that the Mint has issued about 50,000 new George Washington dollar coins with the words "In God We Trust" missing. I was just wondering if this was meant to be a challenge to CISD on its anniversary.

Distinguished Guests:

Let me begin by congratulating the leadership, the scholars, the staff, and all supporters of the Center for Interfaith Study and Dialog on this, the second anniversary of its founding. The existence and the activities of CISD are a tribute to the visionary leadership of Nazareth College and its enlightened community of scholars.

I bring to you the heartfelt greetings of The Fairfax Institute and its parent organization, the International Institute of Islamic Thought, commonly known as IIIT. We admire the focused and energetic efforts that CISD has made in the past two years to bring religious communities closer to one another. We are honored to be of

help to CISD, in achieving its mission-driven goals, and stand ready to engage in joint programs and activities. I also want you to know that IIIT is publishing an Interfaith Guide of which CISD's Dr. Muhammad Shafiq is one of the two authors.

Interfaith relationships and interfaith actions are directed to seeking ways to serve the vital and common interests of the parties engaged in this endeavor. People of faith come together to understand one another, so that they may solve common problems and achieve the common good, defined in the Catholic tradition, for example, as "the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment."

The fifth annual conference on "Globalization for the Common Good: An Interfaith Perspective" in Hawaii last year, stated in its final statement that "Globalization for the Common Good is dedicated to "rekindling the human spirit and compassion in globalization". Globalization for the Common Good means the promotion of ethical, moral, and spiritual values – shared by all religious and spiritual traditions – in the areas of economics, commerce, trade, and international relations. It emphasizes personal and societal virtues." The statement continued to say that "Globalization for the Common Good is predicated on a global economy of sharing and community, grounded in a value system whose aim is generosity, the opportunity to contribute to society, and the promotion of a just allocation of the world's goods."

A year earlier in its second such meeting, Elijah Interfaith Academy's Board of World Religious Leaders declared: "There is no crisis of God; the crisis is ourselves." They went on to say: "We must promote the concept of interdependence to solve the controversies of modern society and religious beliefs. Cooperation in this age of globalization is essential if we sincerely want to promote the social value of love. The holy nature of religion along with mutual learning and open-minded religious education is necessary to transform ourselves to be peaceful human beings. To this end, religions must develop practical projects for the mutual benefit of all."

Speaking on the necessity of interfaith dialog, Dr. Allen Hertzke, Professor of Political Science and Religious Studies at the University of Oklahoma, said at an event in 2002: "Globalization has not, contrary to some predictions, brought homogenization or universal civilization. Rather, it has brought people of different faiths and world views into closer proximity, competition, and sometimes bitter conflict. In light of this, we Americans have a unique responsibility as citizens of the globe's lone superpower. How will we carry out this awesome stewardship role? One of the best things we can do is provide a model of how people of diverse faiths can work together to achieve common democratic purposes. It was the American model, in part, which inspired the Catholic Church to embrace democratic pluralism at Vatican II. Perhaps the American model of religious freedom and tolerance can do the same in other parts of the world."

Finally, Akbar Ahmed, Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies and Professor of International Relations, at American University in Washington D.C. says in a paper in *The Middle East Journal*: “Although Muslims appear to be uncomfortable with globalization, the idea and practice of globalization are familiar to Muslim history. Islam’s vision of the world is by definition global. There is neither East nor West for God. Islamic history has had long periods in which we recognize elements from what we today call globalization: societies living within different ethnic, geographic and political boundaries, but speaking a language understood throughout, enjoying a common cultural sensibility and recognizing the same over-arching ethos in the world-view.”

One must conclude that as the globe shrinks to become the proverbial village, the necessity of gathering in the village square – to understand, to help, to care, to advance – becomes ever paramount. To this end, let us join hands, seeking the blessings of our One and Only Creator.

Thank you for your attention.