Appreciative Conversation: The Archbishop of Canterbury’s “Building Bridges” Seminars

Lucinda Mosher, Th.D., Staff Assistant
Network of Inter Faith Concerns of the Anglican Communion

On 17-18 January 2002, the Most Rev’d and Right Honorable George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury, presided over a gathering of thirty-nine Christian and Muslim scholars who had been summoned to Lambeth Palace (London) to discuss Building Bridges: Overcoming Obstacles in Christian-Muslim Relations. Thus was inaugurated an ongoing international Christian-Muslim dialogue under the auspices of his office. Subsequent seminars have been convened by Dr. Carey’s successor, Rowan Williams in Doha, Qatar (7-9 April 2003); Washington, DC (30 March through 1 April 2004); Sarajevo (16-18 May 2005); and again, Washington, DC (27-30 March 2006). As a Christian ethicist in the Anglican tradition, I specialize in inter-religious concerns. From that vantage-point, I find in the Building Bridges seminar a compelling model for appreciative and fruitful inter-religious conversation. This paper will describe the first five years of this project, then offer some reflections on application.

The founding meeting

Dr. Carey was joined in hosting the 2002 meeting by Prime Minister Tony Blair and HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan; Professor Gillian Stamp of the Brunel Institute of Organisational and Social Studies, facilitated. The rosters of Christians and Muslims each were fairly diverse both in terms of location (Europe, the US, Africa, and the Middle East), and of denominational/sectarian or theological bent. Notably, many of the Christians were not affiliated with the Anglican Communion.

By means of pairs of lectures (one by a Christian, one by a Muslim), formal responses, and discussion from the floor, plenary sessions explored lessons gleaned from 1000-plus years of Christian-Muslim interaction, plus the challenges and opportunities posed by today’s world. Conversation continued informally over meals as well. The intent was “to create an environment for bridge-building in the sense of “creating new routes for information, appreciation and respect to travel freely and safely in both directions between Christians and Muslims, Muslims and Christians.”

While to an extent this inaugural meeting may have been more ceremonial than substantive, the sense prevailed that it was itself significant, and heralded a project of considerable potential to address such concerns as: how Muslims and Christians can together establish peace, justice and righteousness (thus addressing disease, poverty, and corruption) in ways that are true to each tradition; examination of the root causes of violence; and the relationship between globalization and violence; co-citizenship and human rights and responsibilities; the dilemma of assimilation versus isolation; the interpretation of scripture.

This last notion—that much could be gained through better understanding of each others’ ways of reading sacred texts—has become foundational to what is now called the “Building Bridges” seminars, as has the notion of alternating between Muslim- and Christian-majority venues, and a commitment to having the bulk of the work at each seminar take place in pre-assigned small groups. Participants are called to three full days of deliberation, each day
addressing a particular theme related to the year’s overarching topic by means of pairs of public lectures, and closed plenaries, and small-group sessions.

**The series of seminars**

**2003: Doha, Qatar**

In spite of being convened mere kilometers from the so-called “Podium of Truth” just as US troops entered Baghdad, the Qatar meeting maintained its intended focus on the topic of *Scriptures in Dialogue: Christians and Muslims Studying the Bible and the Qur’ān Together*. In preparation, participants were asked to write a short response to the question, “When, where, how and with whom do I read scripture?” Many of these essays are quite moving; taken together, they reveal a range of approach and multiple levels of engagement among members of both communities of faith.

Plenary presentations on the meeting’s first general theme, *Listening to God, learning from scripture*, included an account of “how, for Christians, the Bible is perceived and how it can function;” an explanation of the prominence of listening as a Qur’anic theme; and a reflection on the Qur’ān as theophany. Papers on the second theme, *Legacies of the past, challenges of the present*, considered “The ethics of gender discourse in Islam,” and examined the history of biblical interpretation—with a report on the exegetical approaches of African women theologians. The various challenges of modernism, post-modernism, and fundamentalism were raised in the introductions to the third theme: *Scripture and the Other*.

The bulk of the seminar was spent in groups of four (two Muslims, two Christians), in intense discussion of study of pre-selected pairs of Bible and Qur’ān texts:

- Day Three (the “Other”): Jonah 3 & 4 and al-‘Imrān (No. 3) 113-15; John 14:1-14 and al-‘Imrān (No. 3):19-20, 85.

**2004: Washington, DC (I)**

On the eve of 2004 meeting, in a public lecture provocatively entitled *Analysing atheism: Unbelief and the world of faiths*, Archbishop Rowan proposed that, because “we can learn better how to understand other religious believers if we learn better how to understand unbelievers,” more interfaith-dialogue time be invested in “looking at what is disbelieved in other religious discourses.” The result would then be twofold: the emergence of “a conceptual and imaginative world in which at least some of the positive concerns of diverse traditions are seen to be held in common;” but also, the discovery of “the appropriate language in which difference can be talked about rather than used as an excuse for violent separation.”

This third seminar, hosted by Georgetown University, would take up the topic of *Bearing the Word: Prophecy in Biblical and Qur’ānic Perspective*. Themes for the three days were: the prophet’s encounter with God; prophets and their peoples; and, the place in prophetic religion of Jesus and Muhammad. Twenty-nine scholars spent six small-group sessions in
“scripture dialogue”: intensive close reading of pre-selected pairs of texts related to these themes, for which commentary was also provided:

- The Calling of Prophets: Tā Hā (No. 20):1-36 and Exodus 3:1-14
- The Calling of Apostles: al-Muzzammil (No. 73) and Acts 9:1-22
- Prophecy and Conflict: Hūd (No. 11): 25-49 and Jeremiah 26
- Prophecy and Society: al-Shu’arāʾ (No. 26): 25-49 and 1Kings 21
- The End of Prophecy: al-Ahzāb (No. 33): 40, al-Māʾidah (No. 5): 3 and Hebrews 1:1-4

As had been the case in Qatar, small-group discussion was preceded and punctuated by plenary lectures (some of them public). The gathering was primed to take up the first theme by means of two lectures. Miroslav Volf applauded the “great deal of methodological sophistication” operative at the 2003 meeting, in spite of (or perhaps because of) there having been “virtually no reflection on method” by that gathering. Where Volf celebrated the “momentous decision” to make “the practice of Christians and Muslims reading their scriptures together” the main feature of that seminar, Mustansir Mir called it into question, asking whether the Qur’ān can indeed be said to support “the very possibility of scripture-based dialogue,” yet ultimately asserting that a credible Qur’ān-based “post-prophetic theology of inter faith dialogue” is both necessary and possible.

Introductory lectures on Day Two considered respective understandings of the nature of prophecy as an institution, and of prophets as individuals. Exploration of the third theme, Jesus and Muhammad, was prefaced by Mahmoud Ayoub’s answer to the question, “Who is the Muslim ʿĪsā in relation to Jesus Christ as Christians understand him?”—which is different from asking “Who is Jesus for Muslims?”; and Daniel Madigan’s effort at giving “a Christian response to the Muslim understanding of Muhammad”—which, he notes, is “distinct from a response to Muhammad.”

In reflecting on this meeting as a whole, Michael Ipgrave stresses that Muslims and Christians alike perceive themselves as communities gathered “around the Word which has been entrusted to them,” thus with “responsibility to apply and interpret the guidance of that message to the situation of their own lives, to commend to others the promises and warnings it conveys, and to enter more and more deeply through its medium into union with the divine source from whose mercy it flows….For Muslims and Christians, our mutual recognition of one another as people who bear within ourselves the transforming burden of the divine Word is the surest ground on which to build friendship, trust and cooperation.”

2005: Sarajevo

Hosts for the fourth seminar were Rais al-Ulama Dr. Mustafa Cerić, Metropolitan Nikolaj, and Cardinal Vinko Puljić. Sessions were held at the Bosniak Institute and various other venues around Sarajevo. In choosing to focus on Muslims, Christians, and the Common Good, this fourth iteration of “Building Bridges” turned to some of the specific concerns raised by very first meeting in London in 2002: “Faith and national identity”, for we are both believers and
citizens; “Governance and justice”, taking into account both majority and minority situations for Christians and Muslims as well as the implications of secularism; and, “Caring together for the world we share”.

As in the past, pairs of lectures illuminating the theme of the day from a Muslim and a Christian perspective were given in open plenary. The third theme was allocated two public sessions: one concentrating on global poverty; the other, on envirnomental concerns. Closed-door plenaries featured presentations of regional case-studies on the day’s theme: the Bosnian and British contexts on Day One; and the Bosnian, Malaysian and West African contexts on Day Two. As in the past, participants were assigned to one of four break-out groups, each with a chairperson and a recorder, which remained constant throughout the seminar. However, in place of the close reading of texts that had been central to the meetings in Doha and Georgetown, discussion was driven by questions provided by the day’s lecturers.

Beyond the departure from text-study, the Sarajevo programme was distinctive in that it included opportunities for the Muslim and Christian delegations to be entertained separately on two occasions. And, more than any other venue chosen for a Building Bridges seminar, the setting itself was in real sense a “participant” in the dialogue. As one attendee noted, “Sarajevo was a very holy place that had been sanctified by prayer and suffering. You felt that in the meetings.” In Sarajevo, “more than anywhere else,” Michael Ipgrave asserts, “the actual holding of the seminar had an impact on a religiously divided society.” As the meeting neared its conclusion, “most participants paid a visit to Mostar, where the destroyed and reconstructed bridge did indeed prove a powerful symbol of the place of religious difference in Bosnia-Herzogovina, especially in light of the title of our project.”

2006: Washington, DC (II)

The seminar returned to Georgetown University for its fifth meeting, with President John J. DeGioia hosting. Entitled Justice and Rights in Christian and Muslim Traditions, its focus was Christian and Muslim understandings of divine justice, political authority, and religious freedom—all of which had been concerns marked for further discussion back in 2002. Methodologically, this meeting returned to the practice of close reading of texts, but with a considerably broader range of texts to be studied than previously.

Day One, the theme for which was “Scriptural Foundations,” began with public lectures on “Divine Justice and Political Authority” from the perspectives of the Bible and of the Qur’ān and Hadīth. Small-group text-study was preceded by brief introductory presentations by Ellen Davis and Mustansir Mir for the morning session, and Michael Ipgrave and Tim Winter in the afternoon.

Day Two focused on the theme of “Evolving Traditions” by means of public lectures on “Political Authority and Religious Freedom” by John Langan (the Christian tradition) and Vincent Cornell (the Islamic). Today’s small-group work was devoted to close reading of “pre-modern” texts: passages from The Correction of the Donatists by Augustine of Hippo, paired with a debate between a Jewish dhimmi and Granadan Mufti Abu Sa’id Faraj Ibn Lubb [d. 1381]; Martin Luther’s 1523 treatise On Temporal Authority, with excerpts from al-Ghazali’s Faysal al-tafriq bayn al-Islam wa’l-zandaqa [The Sword of Discrimination between Islam and Heresy]—introduced in plenary by Rowan Williams, Vincent Cornell, Miroslav Volf, and Azim Nanji, respectively.

Day Three, on the theme of “Justice and Rights: The Modern World,” opened with public lectures on religious freedom from the perspectives a Christian (Malcolm Evans) and a
Muslim (Maleiha Malik), followed by closed small-group discussion of 20\textsuperscript{th}-century texts: the Barmen Declaration\textsuperscript{25} and an excerpt from the writings of Ruholla Khomeini\textsuperscript{26} in the morning session; and in the afternoon, Dignitatis Humanae (the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on Religious Freedom) in conversation with the Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights (1981) and the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (1990)—with introductory remarks on each text provided in plenary.

While unapologetically an Anglican Communion initiative, Building Bridges has been intrinsically ecumenical since its inception—a fact made all the more evident at the 2006 meeting. This was the second time the seminar had been the guest of Georgetown University—a Jesuit institution. As had been the case at every meeting, only some of the Christians at the table were Anglicans. Further, it is worth noting that none of texts selected to amplify Themes Two and Three come from the Anglican Christian tradition or context explicitly.

In fact, several participants have noted, in retrospect, certain problems inherent in the option to use non-scriptural texts such as these. While each is interesting in itself, none of the Christian texts are indisputably authoritative for all Christians (not even for all in attendance), nor is it likely that all of the Christian attendees would have had deep prior knowledge of them; the same can be said of the relationship of Muslims to the Muslim texts. Further, these selections were too long for truly close reading in the time allotted.

Clearly, the discussion of texts other than scripture was a different experience from “scripture-dialogue.” While some found it frustrating, others hope it has a place in future meetings. “More than just scriptural reasoning,” Vincent Cornell insists, “we have to look at what is based on scripture in various contexts.” Be that as it may, there remains overwhelming support for dialogical reading of scriptures as the “spiritual heart” of the Building Bridges methodology. Some have noted the scarcity of opportunities for a Muslim to study the Qur’ān with a Christian, or for a Christian to study the Bible with a Muslim. One participant describes it as “interaction among believers grappling with a scriptural word they cannot relativize or dismiss…in front of other members of their own faith community and in front of member of the other community and their questions.”

\textbf{Reflections}

\textbf{The claim of uniqueness}

The “Building Bridges” seminar, the Archbishop reminded the gathering at Georgetown University in March 2006, “was brought into being to fill what was thought to be a gap; a gap not at the diplomatic or political level but a gap of a lack of opportunity for serious, reflective, and fairly loosely-structured encounter between Christian and Muslim scholars.”\textsuperscript{27} Was there indeed a gap in need of filling? How unique is it?

Significantly, participants are chosen for their prowess as scholars, but also because they are persons committed to, and active in, their respective communities of faith. Thus Building Bridges falls into the category of dialogical projects marked by both religious conviction and academic rigor. Commonalities can be discerned between Building Bridges and the annual International Theology Conference sponsored by the Center for Religious Pluralism of the Shalom Harman Institute in Jerusalem—in which leading Muslim, Christian, and Jewish theologians engage together in mini-seminars, public forums, and the traditional Jewish practice of scripture study with a partner; or with The Societies for Scriptural Reasoning—
“circles of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim text scholars and theologians who bring both their sciences and their faiths to the table while they engage together in extended periods of [comparative] scriptural study;” or with the work of the Elijah Interfaith Institute in Jerusalem. Several Building Bridges regulars are veterans of one or more of these other dialogues; but Building Bridges differs sharply from all of them in that it limits itself to the Christian-Muslim conversation. In this it is similar to the Groupe de Recherches Islamo-Chretien, but that is a dialogue in French, whereas Building Bridges is conducted in English.

Not only is Building Bridges conducted in English, texts are studied through English translations. Those participants charge with the task of introducing scripture passages to the group always make reference to the original language (Hebrew, Greek, or Arabic) in their remarks. However, few participants are proficient in all three scriptural languages.

A further uniqueness is that the Archbishop of Canterbury himself participates in every aspect of Building Bridges each year. Dr Williams’ personality and intellect are instrumental to the success of the project, making it “an exercise of the highest order,” one Muslim participant asserts. Another notes that the fact that Building Bridges is convened by the Archbishop’s office sends an immediate signal to Muslims in England and elsewhere that this is a serious project.

Assessment

Measuring the success of dialogical projects is never straightforward. It is rare that a formal measuring instrument is administered to participants prior to the start. Much of what transpires in such projects takes the form of “seed-planting”, the fruit of which may take years to ripen. Nevertheless, after five years of any project, it is wise to take stock of what has been accomplished, whether to continue, and if so, where to head next. Thus after the fifth meeting, the Office of the Archbishop of Canterbury did contact most of the scholars who had attended at least one of the seminars between 2003 and 2006, to solicit narrative responses to a list of some sixteen questions. Replies were received from fifteen of the Christians and thirteen of the Muslims, and the summary of their input will bear on whatever next steps are taken. Surveys are valuable, but in the case of the Building Bridges seminar, another level of analysis—particularly, one involving formal interviews of all past participants—might prove quite valuable.

The attempt to keep the ratio of Christians to Muslims nearly equal at each gathering has been fairly successful. Most participants have been male, but one woman, Professor Mona Siddiqui (a Muslim), has been at all five meetings; Professor Ellen Davis (a Christian) has attended the last four. Every seminar has had at least one Christian woman and one Muslim woman among the lecturers. Every seminar roster has included both Sufi and non-Sufi Sunni Muslims; and every gathering has had at least one Shi’ah Muslim participant. Still, says one of the veteran Christians, “it has to me felt a very Sunni-oriented conversation throughout.”

To date, Building Bridges venues have alternated intentionally between Christian-majority and Muslim-majority contexts. Attitudes vary as to the merit of continuing this practice. In the future, the choice of venue may depend on where the organizers most want to motivate trust and dialogue, some have suggested. As for geographic distribution, Building Bridges has drawn scholars from seventeen countries: Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, England, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Kenya, Lebanon, Malaysia, Nigeria, Scotland, Serbia, Switzerland, Turkey, and the US. There is an acknowledged need for more breadth. Particularly, South America has never been represented; Asia has been underrepresented; no
attendees have come from South Africa. Yet, one participant points out, there has never been any claim that the participants in this project represent a geographical or national constituency—and they need not.

In fact, the issue of “representativeness” is contentious. While the intent may be to create a dialogue circle that is varied and balanced, some participants have pointed out that “representativeness” can become a tool for excluding someone deemed “not orthodox enough.” Others have expressed discomfort with the presence of converts on the roster. Still others have advocated for making room for young, emerging scholars. At best, however, a gathering of approximately 15 Christians and 15 Muslims is small. It is quite difficult to balance too many variables with only thirty seats at the table.

**Continuity and trust**

The topics taken up by “Building Bridges” have gotten steadily thornier since 2003. The seminar has been “able to tackle more and more difficult and delicate subjects,” Dr. Williams suggests, because “trust and…mutual affection has developed among us.”

This claim is interesting when we analyze the rosters of the seminar’s five iterations: at least eighty-five scholars have been involved; the number of participants per meeting has ranged from 25 to 39. However, only four have been present at all five meetings; three have been present at all but the inaugural in 2002; and another nine have participated in three of the five gatherings. The number of newcomers per meeting has ranged from five to sixteen. With so little overlap, one wonders how the necessary trust and affection was able to evolve.

It is relevant to raise this question, says one veteran of multiple meetings. It is has been the seminar’s custom to reserve about one-third of the seats at the table for scholars from the host country and host institution. Each year, a substantial number of new people at the table “have to re-learn everything from the beginning,” and that has been somewhat distracting. Nevertheless, “there has been a development of trust because there is a core of people who have been involved in the process almost from the beginning,” asserts Vincent Cornell. “These seminars really are an attempt to understand, and to understand critically. To talk together about the serious problems that doctrinal and social barriers create among religious groups requires a certain level of knowledge, a lot of trust, and a willingness to be self-critical. It has been very valuable that the Archbishop has been very careful to select as regular ongoing members people who have depth of knowledge of their own tradition, who also are willing to be self-critical, and are willing to encourage others to be self-critical.” A Christian veteran concurs: “I think that, as a corporate body, we are more than we are as individuals—by quite a lot. There is a trust that builds in the corporate sense; we’re not starting over each time in the corporate sense, so it works in that way.”

**Style**

Building Bridges meetings are marked by oscillation “between public and more private modes of discourse;” and “between “classic themes from the heartlands of our faith and the contemporary applications of religious teachings and values.” Their style has been described as “formal, yet welcoming and friendly.” A number of participants applaud the fact that it has been possible to move beyond “making nice.” Indications are that, five years later, the style can still be described (as it was in 2002) as an exercise in “appreciative conversation”— during which one remains rooted in one’s background
“whilst at the same time reaching beyond it.” Appreciative conversation—distinguished as it is by “courage, grace, imagination and sensitivity in addressing and retreating from painful issues”—is an exchange in which “people listen without judgement, do not seek consensus or compromise, but share the sole purpose of continuing the conversation in order to sustain relationships of mutual respect.”

This resonates with David Lochhead’s definition of the dialogical relationship: a relationship of openness and trust which is clear, unambiguous, and has no other purpose than itself. One veteran participant notes that “the ‘doing it for its own sake’ ethos [of Building Bridges] is liberating, and is very different from many other [inter faith] events.”

Has the Building Bridges project qualified as dialogue? Daniel Yankelovich asserts that the term denotes a transformative activity—a constellation of strategies employed for the purpose of strengthening relationships or solving problems. Darian DeBolt discerns three defining characteristics: (1) Its method is dialectical: it is “repicrocal discourse.” (2) Its purpose is the gaining of clarity on a matter, not “winning the discussion or argument” or dominating another participant; thus it is distinct from debate. (3) Its participants will be “roughly equal participants in the discussion”, will “treat each other courteously”, and will “practice forbearance or tolerance of each other.”

“A Christian community,” Lochhead asserts, “can enter a new relationship (dialogical or otherwise) with another religious community only insofar as the new relationship can be construed as a form of faithfulness.” (Logically, the same assertion must be made of Muslim communities.) In this vein, Dr. Williams has spoken of Building Bridges as an exercise in “listening to each other listening to God,” which enables us to “become better able to listen to each other.” The result, he suggests, is the development of “a virtuous circle,” rather than a vicious one.

Impact
In his comments on the 2004 meeting, Michael Ipgrave remarks that “dialogue is better thought of as a continuing process rather than a specific event. So the ‘Building Bridges’ dialogue will be carried on not only in any future gatherings but in the ways in which participants reflect on the encounter in their own situation.” What, then, has been “carried on” thus far? Has there been a “trickle-down effect”? Given that it is an initiative of the Archbishop of Canterbury, it is logical to assume—as does one Muslim participant—that impact would be greatest within the Anglican Communion. But the worldwide Anglican Communion comprises some forty-four autonomous and very diverse ecclesial bodies—an estimated 78 million Christians. Family resemblance persists in spite of differences of language, culture, economics, politics, experience of colonialism, and experience of (and attitude toward) the Other-Than-Christian. Not surprisingly, we find a multiplicity of temporal, geographical, and contextual particularities in the relationship between Anglicans and Muslims. Anglican-Christian engagement with Muslim fellow citizens and communities may take the form of coexistence and cooperation in some contexts, but competition or confrontation in others. This given, as a member of the Anglican Communion myself, I am well aware that Anglicans are as likely to be suspicious or dismissive as welcoming of the work of Building Bridges.

My attitude has always been that the Building Bridges project exists for the benefit of us all. Yet Building Bridges remains one of the Anglican Communion’s best kept secrets. To an
extent, this may be according to Dr. Williams’s wishes. “We’ve not sought great publicity or high profile;” he has noted; “we’ve attempted quite simply to understand one another better on what I think is quite a good theological basis; that it is by the accumulation of local and personal bits of understanding that things actually change in the long run.”

So I ask: How can the richness of the Building Bridges project have broader impact? Could the reports enjoy wider circulation? Could they be made available in French and Arabic, and possibly Turkish, Farsi, and Urdu as well? Vincent Cornell seconds the notion of translating the published reports. But, he cautions, the norm among his fellow Muslim scholars today is to think and act politically and socially; “the kind of theological investigation that is normal and ordinary from the Anglican perspective is something that has to be revived from the Muslim perspective. For my part—and I think my opinion is shared by a few other Muslims who have been involved—the effect of these meetings may be to stimulate Muslim intellectuals to think theologically more often than they have for the past 100 years or so. These new insights will then get to the community in various ways.”

It is also problematic, he notes, that seminar proceedings have so far been published by only Anglican houses. “Because the times are the way they are, anything put out by the Archbishop of Canterbury will be seen by certain people as a quasi-imperialistic attempt to say what Islam is supposed to be. But I think there would be plenty of other Muslims who would be interested in learning more about what has taken places in these meetings. It might help them focus, to become a bit more effective and sophisticated in their own approaches to dialogue.”

Application

For several years, I have commended Building Bridges to my students as a replicable dialogical model. I therefore celebrate the fact that consideration is being given to the notion of satellite Building Bridges dialogues, perhaps at national or regional levels. This could indeed be valuable.

However, I believe Building Bridges has piloted and spawned materials that can and should be put to use even more locally—material that Muslim and Christian congregational leaders could work on together quite fruitfully over time—in pairs, or as a group. So could the many Muslim and Christian laypersons with sufficient background, curiosity, and perseverance to form a “reading circle” committed to systematic discussion of the texts and essays from one or several of the Building Bridges seminars—perhaps by meeting weekly or monthly. While it is quite possible to distill everything necessary for mounting a successful dialogue from Michael Ipgrave’s published reports, laypersons and local religious leaders might prefer a handbook format which guides them rather explicitly.

If Anglicanism brings a unique charism to interreligious dialogue, it lies in its very nature as a branch of Christianity both Catholic and Reformed. As *communio oppositorum*, it is an experienced hand in holding “difference” together. The Building Bridges project makes fine use of these attributes, but its progress since its founding in 2002 is due as much to the deep commitment made to it by the participants themselves—Muslim and Christian alike. As practitioners of appreciative conversation, they have much to teach us.

---

1 This previously unpublished article was written in 2007 and was originally due to appear in a Special Edition of *The Muslim World* which was unexpectedly cancelled.
Lambeth Palace is the London home and offices of the Archbishop of Canterbury, who has oversight of the thirty dioceses of the Church of England in southern England. He is also the Primate of all England, and the spiritual leader of the worldwide Anglican Communion. While he does not have ecclesial authority over all Anglicans, his visibility is an important aspect of Anglican Christian identity. Dr. Carey was enthroned as the 103rd Archbishop of Canterbury in April 1991, and held this office through October 2002.

Dr Williams was enthroned as the 104th Archbishop of Canterbury on 23 February 2003.

A meeting planned for Malaysia in Spring 2007 was cancelled; as of this writing, a meeting is scheduled for December 2007 in Singapore.

I have been assisted greatly in this task by the Rev’d Dr. Michael Ipgrave’s excellent reports of the first three seminars. He and Canon Guy Wilkinson, National Inter Faith Relations Adviser & Secretary for Inter Faith Relations to the Archbishop of Canterbury provided me with various materials, among them the Rev’d Dr. David Marshall’s digest of the Building Bridges participants survey of 2007. All of the above informs this article, as do interviews with Professors Vincent Cornell (Emory University) and Ellen Davis (Duke University). Clare Amos (Anglican Communion Director of Theological Studies) read an early draft and offered corrections, as did Wilkinson, Ipgrave, and Cornell. This article is stronger for their help; all short-comings, however, are mine. A further note: unattributed quotations can be assumed to come (directly or in paraphrase) from the survey, interview transcripts, or email exchanges.


The Rt Rev’d Dr. Tom Wright, Bishop of Durham, presenting.

Professor Vincent Cornell, then Director, King Fahd Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies, University of Arkansas, presenting.

Tim Winter, Lecturer in Islamic Studies, Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge.

Dr. Mona Siddiqui, Head, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Glasgow, presenting.

Dr. Esther Mombo, Academic Dean, St. Paul’s United Theological College, Limuru, Kenya, presenting. She reported on *The Circle*, an established group of female theologians—some of them Christian; others, Muslim; and others, adherents of African indigenous religions.

Presenters: Professor Frances Young, Professor of Theology, University of Birmingham; Dr. Basit Kosheul, University of Virginia, and Lecturer in Comparative Religion, Concordia College (MN).


Ibid.

Mustansir Mir is Professor of Islamic Studies, Youngstown State University (OH). See his “Scriptures in dialogue: are we reckoning without the host?” in *Bearing the Word*, 13-19.

Wadad Kadi, “What is prophecy? Reflections on a Qur’anic institution in history,” and Ellen F. Davis, “‘My devoted friend: The prophet as the intimate of God,’” in *Bearing the Word*, 45-66. Kadi is Professor of Islamic Thought, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago; Davis is Professor of Bible and Practical Theology, Duke University.

Mahmoud Ayoub is Professor of Islamic Studies and Comparative Religion, Temple University, Philadelphia; the Rev’d Dr. Daniel Madigan SJ is Director of the Institute for the Study of Religions and Cultures, Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome. See Ayoub’s “‘Īsā and Jesus: Christ in Islamic Christology” and Madigan’s “Jesus and Muhammad: The sufficiency of prophecy” in *Bearing the Word*, 87-99. Emphasis mine.

21 Respectively, these lectures were given by Ellen Davis (Duke University); and Hashim Kamali (Professor of Law, International Islamic University, Malaysia).

22 Donatism names a “rigorist” view of church and sacraments arising in Roman north Africa in the 4th century. Its distinguishing attitude was that an unworthy minister invalidates any sacrament he administers.

23 A treatise in which Luther lays out his “Two Kingdoms” doctrine.

24 Al-Ghazali’s argument against his Muslim contemporaries who condemn their opponents as unbelievers or heretics, an assertion that the Qur’an and Hadith can be interpreted on five levels: the ontological-existential, the experiential, the conceptual, the intellectual, and the metaphorical. See Vincent J. Cornell, Practical Sufism: An Akbarian Basis for a Liberal Theology of Difference, http://secondspring.co.uk/articles/cornell.htm. Last accessed: 30 August 2007.

25 The Theological Declaration of Barmen 1934 is a document, authored principally by Karl Barth, articulating the opposition of the Confessing Church to Germany’s Nazi-supported Unified Church.

26 Taken from Hamid Algar, translator and editor, Imam Khomeini: Islam and Revolution (KPI, Ltd., 1985).


28 I am told that the notion of expanding Building Bridges to include Jewish participants has been discussed repeatedly, however. To date the decision has been to stay with the Christian-Muslim dynamic.

29 This aspect of Building Bridges is not without its critics. Some Muslims have asserted that it should be held in Arabic.

30 Bible texts are provided in the New Revised Standard Version; Qur’ān passages are taken from the translation by participant M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (now published by Oxford University Press, 2004).

31 By my analysis of the rosters, 20 Muslims and 19 Christians were present at the first meeting in 2002; at Georgetown University in 2004, there were 14 Muslims to 15 Christians. The ratios at the 2005 and 2006 meetings were almost as good: 13 Muslims to 11 Christians, and 14 Muslims to 17 Christians respectively. The 2003 meeting (Qatar) was least balanced, due to last-minute drop-outs: 11 Muslims to 14 Christians.

32 The highest ratio of women to men occurred at the Qatar meeting: nine women; sixteen men. Twice, only five women have been on the roster.

33 Interestingly, a bias against meeting again in the United States has emerged, due to the difficulty Muslims too often have in obtaining a visa.

34 Dr. Rowan Williams, Remarks at dinner…., op. cit.


36 Professor Vincent Cornell, the Rev’d Dr. Michael Ipgrave, the Right Rev’d Michael Nazir-Ali, and Professor Mona Siddiqui—and one may assume that Dr. Zaki Badawi would have been at Georgetown in March 2006, had death not taken him just two months prior.

37 The Qatar gathering (2003) included 17 newcomers; Georgetown (2004) included 13 from the Qatar roster, one present in 2002 but not 2003, and 15 newcomers; Sarajevo included 15 who had been at Georgetown, four who missed Georgetown but had been present in either London or Qatar, and six newcomers; the Georgetown meeting of 2006 included sixteen from the Sarajevo roster, five not at Sarajevo who had been at one of the earlier meetings, and ten newcomers.


Lochhead, *op. cit.*, 40.

Rowan Williams, *Remarks at a dinner…*, *op. cit.*

Michael Ipgrave, “Reflections from the dialogue,” in *Bearing the Word*, *op. cit.*, 116.


By far the most interesting and thorough study of classical Anglicanism’s engagement with Islam and Muslims is Nabil Matar’s *Islam in Britain 1558-1685* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).


Archbishop Rowan Williams, *Remarks at dinner…*, *op. cit.*

Church House Publishing (London) and Church Publishing (New York). The possibility that Georgetown University Press will publish the proceedings of the 2005 and 2006 seminars is under discussion.