

AMSS 37<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL CONFERENCE

“Crossing Boundaries: Mobilizing Faith, Diversity and Dialogue”

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**ABSTRACT - BANQUET KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

“Religious Pluralism in the Qur’an:  
A Challenge to Today’s Muslims and non-Muslims”

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This presentation shows how historically the Qur’an reflects the spirit of religious pluralism and the recognition of the diversity of cultures and belief systems of Cyrus the Great, the ancient Persian emperor who allowed a number of his subject communities to freely worship their gods in their original homelands. This bold humanistic gesture earned the Persian monarch the honorific title “Yahweh’s Messiah,” bestowed upon him by the prophet of II Isaiah. Dynamic religious diversity, and hence religious pluralism, was, however, first concretely acknowledged and given a civilizational framework by Alexander the great. It was further strengthened by the universalistic religious systems of Christ and Mani. It was finally carried to its logical conclusion by the Qur’an. After situating the Qur’anic worldview of religious diversity and pluralism, specific Qur’anic verses that clearly support my contention will be explored. Following this, the challenge that this Qur’anic worldview presents to Muslims, as well as Christians and Jews in today’s troubled world will also be discussed. Finally, comments on the “A Common Word” document and its call for religious pluralism and tolerance will follow. Both the document itself and the Christian-Jewish responses to it are hopeful signs. I am convinced that the Qur’an is not aimed at converting Jews and Christians to Islam – although many did – but rather, creating an ecumenism of faith communities around the worship of God alone. Thus, both the call by Muslims to recognize that God alone is God, and the Christian and Jewish positive responses to this call constitute, a good first step in accepting this Qur’anic challenge. Appropriately, the Christian-Jewish and Muslim response to this Qur’anic call at the Yale University Conference of July 28-31, 2008, was an historic event which, hopefully, will lead to the true love of God and neighbor in word and deed.