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“Crossing Boundaries: Mobilizing Faith, Diversity and Dialogue”

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**ABSTRACT**

“Transforming Interfaith Dialogue to Inter-religious Solidarity for Justice”

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The theme of this paper is based on how the great upsurge of interfaith conferences in the aftermath of Pope Benedict’s Regensburg speech of October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2005, and the contemporaneous intra-faith conferences that year following the Amman Message of July, 2005, focus on interfaith understanding through the single perspective of love. They fail adequately to address the practical purpose of interfaith understanding, which is interfaith cooperation in promoting justice. This paper will first critique from the point of view of justice the Open Letter to the Pope, on October 12, 2006, in which thirty-eight authoritative Islamic scholars from every branch of Islam for the first time spoke with one voice about the true teachings of Islam. This paper will then critique in some detail the follow-up letter of September 13, 2007, by 138 authoritative Islamic scholars, titled, “A Common Word Between Us and You,” which was even more inclusive than the first one, and for the first time since the days of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) declared the “common ground” between Christianity and Islam. In November, 2007, a group of scholars at Yale Divinity School drafted a reply to A Common Word, titled, “Loving God and Neighbor Together: A Christian Response to ‘A Common Word Between Us and You,’ ” which was endorsed by more than 300 leading Christian scholars in an effort to re-orient Muslim-Christian relations away from “a clash of civilization.” This, in turn, led to the first of a series of conferences at Yale University on July 24<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup>, 2008, to be followed by four more at Cambridge University, UK; The Vatican, Italy; Georgetown University, Washington, DC; and the Royal *Ahl al-Bayt* Institute in Jordan. This critique of the series of path-breaking conferences will include a detailed analysis of the Madrid Conference on July 16-18<sup>th</sup>, 2008, which expanded the dialogue to include leading Jewish scholars in a courageous effort by Saudi King Abdullah to address issues of justice, including freedom of religion, and most notably a behind the scenes initiative by King Abdullah to institute a new international law criminalizing malicious attacks on any religion. This presentation will then address the common understandings of justice in the world religions and the holistic methodologies needed to produce a universal code of human rights rooted in faith-based compassionate justice and faith-based reconciliation. This, in turn, is offered as a basis for a new perspective on interfaith dialogue and peacekeeping to guide and mobilize a new generation of spiritual and religious scholars active in the public square on behalf of faith, pluralism, and cooperation in the pursuit of justice.