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Reports: The Mission of Scholarship: The Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University

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The Mission of Scholarship

The Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University

By John L. Esposito

The Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, renamed The Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding (ACMCU) in 2006, was founded in 1993 by an agreement between the *Fondation pour l'Entente entre Chretiens et Musulmans*, Geneva and Georgetown University to build stronger bridges of understanding between the Muslim world and the West as well as between Islam and Christianity.

The center's mission is twofold: to improve relations between the Muslim world and the West and to enhance understanding of Muslims in the West. ACMCU's activities are designed to address stereotypes of Islam and warnings of a clash of civilizations, as well as engage challenging questions regarding the compatibility of Islam and modern life, from democratization and pluralism, to the status of women, minorities, and human rights. We achieve our mission through a combination of rigorous scholarship and frequent publications (books, articles, use of the internet and blogging), a wide-ranging academic curriculum that contributes to the training of the next generation, conferences and seminars held at Georgetown and internationally, and public outreach. The center's audience includes academic, political, media, corporate and religious leaders and communities. By our eighth anniversary in 2001, we were an established and thriving center, building bridges of mutual understanding in the U.S. and internationally.

The terrorist attacks on 9/11 dealt a major blow to Muslim-West relations and to our mission. We traveled across America and the world addressing many of the fears and questions. Our faculty has played, and continues to play, a significant role in conferences across the US, Europe and the Muslim world, published books and articles and has blogged on key issues. They were among the leaders in international



In April 2012, The Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding (ACMCU) hosted a delegation from the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), the political wing of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood.

initiatives with the World Economic Forum, the Archbishop of Canterbury's Building Bridges program, the UN Alliance of Civilizations, and The Common Word project between major Muslim and Christian religious leaders. We were especially fortunate to receive a generous endowment from Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal, a global entrepreneur and philanthropist, that has guaranteed the permanent existence of the center and has enabled us to significantly expand our activities.

Today we face historic transformations, from the Arab Spring of 2011 (the toppling of authoritarian regimes and struggles to establish new more democratic governments), increased interreligious and intra-religious conflicts, the rise of Islamophobia in the West. As we approach our 20th anniversary, we look forward to the next decade of realizing our mission at home and abroad. ■

John L. Esposito is university professor, professor of religion and international affairs and of Islamic studies and founding director of the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University.