

SPECIAL REPORT:
Highlights of press coverage for
July 16th to July 18th Madrid Conference

On his weekly radio program *State Of Belief*, Interfaith Alliance President Welton Gaddy interviewed Rabbi Brad Hirschfield about this conference, which both Gaddy and Hirschfield attended. Rabbi Brad Hirschfield is author of *You Don't Have To Be Wrong For Me To Be Right: Finding Faith Without Fanaticism.*

To begin with, Gaddy rued that this conference received very little press attention. He said that it was unique, maybe even unprecedented, that this conference was convened by Muslims and hosted by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. Gaddy called the meeting historic and reported that “...*leaders from many different faiths, Christian, Jewish, Buddhists, Sikhs and Hindus agreed that this event was a big step for the future of religious tolerance in this world.*”

Hirschfield called the conference “a remarkably hopeful event.” He was very moved to hear King Abdullah bring together people of different faiths “...and declare before them that diversity is a sacred principal in the tradition he calls his own.” Hirschfield also was very pleased that Saudi TV broadcast images of so many leaders of various faiths engaging in dialogue. He said that this was in stark contrast to the usual depiction of people of other religions as “crusading monsters” and “Zionist devils.”

When Gaddy asked whether he thought that this conference had political motives, Hirschfield replied that none of us have “pure” motives. He also referred to an old rabbinic tradition that says “from impure motives or from less than selfless motives come pure and selfless acts.”

Following this discussion of the Madrid conference, Gaddy & Hirschfield discussed Hirschfield’s new TV program *American Pilgrimage*, in which he engages in interfaith dialogue with leading Imams and Muslim thinkers.

Rabbi Michael Lerner, head of Tikkun and co-founder of the Network of Spiritual Progressives also attended the Madrid conference. He was initially skeptical, even planned to skip the conference due to various grievances he has against Saudi Arabia. He did attend, however, and was surprised “to hear the Saudi King not only affirm the centrality of tolerance and dialogue...” but to express opinions and concerns very similar to Lerner’s own. For instance, Lerner reported that the King affirmed the goal of religious tolerance, stating that “Religions have not caused wars... but rather extremists who have misused religion in a hurtful and harmful way.” Lerner reports the King said people respond to extremists “Because there is a deep spiritual crisis in the world, and it is that crisis which creates the conditions in which exploitation, crime, drugs, family breakdown and extremism flourish.” Lerner also reported the King saying, “... it should be the task of the various religious communities of the world to work together to overcome that spiritual crisis,” and that such action would require religious cooperation, mutual respect and tolerance.

Lerner also said, "It remains to be seen whether the King can impose his new tolerance over a Saudi society which has not done much yet to embrace this new tolerance.

Lerner observed:

"This was obviously a new direction being articulated by the King of Saudi Arabia. Moreover, it was not just being articulated for a Western audience. The King had convened a similar meeting of Islamic scholars and thinkers in Saudi Arabia six weeks before, and there had championed this new approach for Islam as the one most authentically rooted in traditional Islam."

Links to Press Coverage of the Conference

July 18, 2008: *Christian Science Monitor*

An in-depth two page report on the conference

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0718/p04s07-woeu.html>

July 26-27 episode of TIA's *State of Belief* radio program

Scroll to bottom of "July 26-27, 2008" section of this webpage, then click on control to listen to program online (or go to *State of Belief* homepage and download podcast). NOTE: the program is about 35 minutes long. The segment in which TIA's Welton Gaddy discusses the Madrid conference with Rabbi Brad Hirschfield begins at the 19 minute mark and lasts about five minutes.

Following their discussion of the Madrid conference, Gaddy and Hirschfield discuss Hirschfield's new interfaith program, *American Pilgrimage*, which appears on Bridges TV.

<http://www.stateofbelief.com/show-archive/133-july-26-27-2008->

July 20, 2008 report by **Rabbi Michael Lerner of Tikkun** on his experiences at conference (19 page report)

<http://www.spiritualprogressives.org/article.php?story=20080720154203145>

July 15, 2008 *New York Times*

Very brief report stating that Madrid conference will be held

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/15/world/europe/15briefs-ACONFERENCEO_BRF.html?scp=4&sq=saudi%20arabia%20madrid&st=cse

July 28, 2008 *Newsday*:

Newsday did not report on Madrid conference prior to its happening.

However, they did report on a subsequent call by Al-Qaida for the killing of King Abdullah for leading the conference.

<http://www.newsday.com/news/nationworld/world/sns-ap-al-qaida-tape,0,729416.story>

NOTE: This link may get truncated. If so, then you must manually type the missing string (including commas) into the web browser address box.