

Al Azhar - Study Exchange Programme

Al Azhar Agreement Enhanced by Cambridge Visit

The visit to Ridley Hall Theological College, Cambridge, England by Shaykh Fawzy El-Zafzaf, President of the Committee for Dialogue with the Monotheistic Faiths of Al Azhar, the renowned Islamic university and Centre in Cairo, Egypt, marks a significant new development in the building of relations between the Anglican Communion and Al Azhar.

As part of the agreement signed by Archbishop Carey, then Archbishop of Canterbury, and Shaykh Tantawy, the Grand Shaykh of Al Azhar in January 2002, the two parties committed themselves not only to regular 'dialogue' meetings, but also to find other ways in which they might learn more about the faith of each other. It was agreed to seek to establish reciprocal study visits in which staff and students of Al Azhar would spend time at Anglican theological institutions, and Anglican theologians and theological students would similarly visit Al Azhar. Shaykh Fawzy's visit to Ridley Hall, October 5-11 2003, during which he was accompanied by Bishop Mouneer Anis, the Anglican Bishop of Egypt and North Africa will, it is hoped, prove to be the first of a number of such exchanges.

During his time at Ridley Hall, Shaykh Fawzy learned at first hand more about the training of Anglican clergy, as well as meeting with a number of key theologians, such as Professor David Ford and others from Cambridge's prestigious Divinity Faculty. Shaykh Fawzy commented how useful he had found the visit. He also expressed his belief that the visit was a visible expression of the love that existed between the Muslim and Christian communities of faith, and that the willingness of Al Azhar to participate in such an experience was a clear sign of how Muslims wished to reach out in friendship to others.

Canon Christopher Cocksworth, the Principal of Ridley Hall, said, 'Ridley Hall was honoured to host a week long visit of Shaykh Fawzy el Zefzaf and Bishop Mouneer Anis. The visit gave us - an Anglican Evangelical Theological College - the opportunity to extend our hospitality to a distinguished Muslim cleric, to improve our understanding of Islam and to explain Christian faith to him. We hope that it has encouraged Sheikh Fawzy in his vital bridge-building work between the faiths.

The study visit by Shaykh Fawzy was administered and facilitated by the Network for Inter Faith Concerns of the Anglican Communion (NIFCON) acting on behalf of the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury.