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July 15, 2008: Meeting of Our Religions in Spain

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Title: Meeting of Our Religions in Spain

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7/15/2008--From today's New York Times News digest—King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia will open an international conference in Madrid on Wednesday meant to encourage representatives of the world's great religions "to get to know each other," organizers of the event said. Apparently the main point of the conference is to bring together rabbis, Christian leaders, and clerics of the Wahhabi sect of Islam dominant in Saudi Arabia, even though representative of other religions will also attend. It is easy to be cynical about an effort like this. The one Israeli rabbi who will be attending—David Rosen—is listed as an American, not an Israeli. Only one representative was invited from Shiite dominated Iran. The conference is being held in Spain and not in Saudi Arabia, it is being suggested, to avoid inviting so many Jews and Christians into the Kingdom. And yet. Despite the efforts of Bernard Avishai that I mentioned in an earlier post, Israel and its neighbors are not suddenly going to become secular commercial nations. They are going to remain religious. If they ever become secular, it will be a secularism that contains religious elements, such as Hallowed Secularism. This reality means that, as my friend Robert Taylor likes to say, there will never be peace there until there is peace among the religions. Maybe this conference will be a step in that direction. The choice should also remind of something else. Spain is using the conference to remind the world that it is the place where once all three of the monotheistic faiths—Islam, Christianity and Judaism—lived in peace and creative harmony. This is true. Jews call it the golden age of Spain. What we need to remember is that the golden age of peace ended when the Christians reconquered the peninsula. Peace and harmony reigned when Islam ruled. So those who say that Islam is an inevitably violent religion are simply wrong. Islam is not the problem. People are. We are.