

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

كَلِمَاتٌ سَوَاءٌ

A COMMON WORD

BETWEEN US AND YOU

5-Year Anniversary Edition

MABDA

English Monograph Series — Book No. 20

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ
سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا
اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ
بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ
فَإِن تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ

Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to a Common Word between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him).

The Holy Qur'an,
Aal 'Imran, 3:64

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2012

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5-Year Anniversary Edition

№ 20

MABDA

English Monograph Series

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CHAPTER 1

ABOUT 'A COMMON WORD'

THE 'A COMMON WORD BETWEEN US AND YOU' INITIATIVE (ACW) was launched on October 13th 2007 initially as an Open Letter signed by 138 leading Muslim scholars and intellectuals (including such figures as the Grand Muftis of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Oman, Bosnia, Russia, and Istanbul) to the leaders of the Christian churches and denominations of the entire world, including His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI. In essence it proposed, based on verses from the Holy Qur'an and the Holy Bible, that Islam and Christianity share, at their cores, the twin 'golden' commandments of the paramount importance of loving God and loving one's neighbor. Based on this joint common ground, it called for peace and harmony between Christians and Muslims worldwide. ACW was and is an extended global handshake of interreligious goodwill, friendship and fellowship and consequently of world peace.

[T]he more recent *A Common Word* letter echoed a theme consonant with my first encyclical: the unbreakable bond between love of God and love of neighbour, and the fundamental contradiction of resorting to violence or exclusion in the name of God (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, 16).

—H.H. Pope Benedict XVI, May 9th 2009,
at the King Hussein Mosque in Amman, Jordan

The appearance of the *A Common Word* [Open Letter] of 2007 was a landmark in Muslim-Christian relations and it has a unique role in stimulating a discussion at the deepest level across the world.

—H.G. Dr Rowan Williams,
the Archbishop of Canterbury, 2010

The *A Common Word* Initiative is the most significant initiative in Muslim-Christian relations since *Nostra Aetate* of the Second Vatican Council.

—Professor Miroslav Volf, Yale University, 2011

The Open Letter *A Common Word Between Us and You* (2007) was probably the single most important initiative ever taken by Muslim scholars and authorities towards Christians.

—Professor David F. Ford, Regius Professor of Divinity, University of Cambridge, U.K.
Director, Cambridge Interfaith Program, 2011

CHAPTER 2

FIFTH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

THE 5TH ANNIVERSARY OF the launch of the *A Common Word* (ACW) initiative offers an opportunity to look back at why and how it was launched, and the impact it has made.

ACW has generated a huge amount of debate, a multitude of articles and conferences and given rise to a host of other initiatives. All this has not led to peace between Muslims and Christians—which was the goal of ACW—but it has led to a reduction in the tensions between these two communities who together comprise over 55% of the world's population.

ACW is a document which uses religion as the solution to the problems of interreligious tensions. By basing itself on solid theological grounds in both religions—the twin Commandments to love God and love the neighbor—ACW has demonstrated to Christians and Muslims that they have a certain common ground (despite irreducible theological differences) and that both religions require them to have relations based on love not on hatred.

During the 5 years since its launch ACW has become arguably the most influential interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Christians in history. It has provided a common ground on which thousands of Muslim and Christian religious leaders have been brought together through:

- Initiating a multitude of conferences, seminars, workshops, training programs, university courses etc.
- Inspiring the publication of books, articles, dissertations and reports
- Founding the regular [every 3 years] Catholic-Muslim Forum which was first held at the Vatican in 2008, and then at the Baptism Site, Jordan, in 2011
- Winning awards for peace and bridge-building

It has also given rise to a variety of other actions which have in themselves become major peace initiatives:

- It formed the basis of the UN Resolution adopting the World Interfaith Harmony Week as an UN Observance Week [first week of February every year] starting from February 2011
- It was the impetus for a National Resolution in the USA — the Wamp–Ellison Resolution in the US House of Representatives in 2008
- It was the impetus in the Philippines for the House of Representatives to pass House Bill 6148 in June 2011 declaring the first week of February every year as World Interfaith Harmony Week
- It led to the formation of the Christian-Muslim peace delegation to Nigeria in May 2012
- It inspired the symposium at Oxford University ‘Love in Abrahamic Religions’ in October 2012

This is in addition to around half a million visitors to its website (www.acommonword.com) and thousands of newspaper reports on the activities inspired by it.

CHAPTER 3

THE UNCOMMONALITY OF 'A COMMON WORD'

Dr. Joseph Lumbard

INTRODUCTION

NOVEMBER 4, 2008 WAS an historic day. Not only did it mark a new chapter in the long and complicated history of race relations in the United States, it also marked an historic event in the long and multifaceted relationship between Islam and Christianity. For the first time in the history of Muslim-Christian relations, a delegation of 29 Catholic cardinals, bishops and scholars met with 29 leading Muslim authorities and scholars representing some of the most established figures in the Sunni and Shiite worlds. After two days of meetings that marked the first in a series of bi-annual seminars held by the newly established Catholic-Muslim Forum, they issued a fifteen-point final declaration that included an appeal for the defense of religious minorities and a call for Muslims and Christians to work together in promoting peace the world over. The declaration read, “We profess that Catholics and Muslims are called to be instruments of love and harmony among believers, and for humanity as a whole, renouncing any oppression, aggressive violence and terrorism, especially that committed in the name of religion, and upholding the principle of justice for all.”¹ In his comments at the final session, Pope Benedict XVI affirmed that Muslims and Christians share moral values and should defend them together:

* This is an updated version of a paper originally published by Brandeis University Crown Center, Crown Papers, Crown Paper 3, October 2009.

There is a great and vast field in which we can act together in defending and promoting the moral values which are part of our common heritage. We should thus work together in promoting genuine respect for the dignity of the human person and fundamental human rights, even though our anthropological visions and our theologies justify this in different ways.²

Time alone will let us know if this is indeed a watershed event in the history of interfaith understanding between Christians and Muslims. Nonetheless, the fact that this and other meetings among the world's religious leaders are taking place at all is historic. There is no previous record of leading Muslim authorities representing all branches of Islam engaging the Vatican as a single voice. That it is now happening should be cause for hope; for when two civilizations come to a greater appreciation of the humanity and the concerns of one another other, there is much less probability for misunderstandings, mistrust and the violence that can arise therefrom. At the very least, dialogue is better than indifference. At the very best, the collective moral voice of the world's two largest religious communities may help to prevent another Bosnia, another Iraq, or another Sudan. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr said in his closing comments to the first seminar of the Catholic-Muslim Forum,

Whether we are Christians or Muslims, we are beckoned by our religions to seek peace. As people of religion meeting here at the center of Catholicism, let us dedicate ourselves to mutual understanding, not as diplomats, but as sincere religious scholars and authorities standing before God and responsible to him beyond all worldly authority.³

THE BEGINNING

This historic Muslim-Christian exchange began in earnest on October 13, 2007, when 138 Muslim scholars from all corners of the

world, representing every branch of Islam, including such figures as the Grand Muftis of Bosnia, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Oman, Bahrain, and even Russia, delivered a fifteen-page letter entitled *A Common Word Between Us and You* (ACW) to the leaders of Christian churches and denominations throughout the world. Originally composed by Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad of Jordan in consultation with traditional Islamic scholars and under the auspices of King Abdullah II of Jordan, this letter was met with responses from Christian leaders the world over, ranging from independent scholars to the Vatican, the World Council of Churches, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Patriarch of Russia, among many others.⁴ The most public response was a letter initially signed by over 300 Christian leaders and scholars entitled “Loving God and Neighbor Together: A Christian Response to *A Common Word Between Us and You*” that was organized by the Yale Center for Faith & Culture and the Yale Divinity School and published in the *New York Times* on November 17, 2007. The most substantial theological response was penned by then Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Reverend and Right Honorable Dr. Rowan Williams, after prolonged consultation with Christian church leaders from several Orthodox churches, the Roman Catholic church, and a range of Protestant and Evangelical churches. The Archbishop’s response displays a subtle understanding of the limitations inherent to such a dialogue and the possibilities to which it opens. Since the initial launch, the number of Muslim scholars who have signed ACW has grown to over 300, with over 460 Islamic organizations and associations now endorsing it, and there are now over 500 signatories to “A Christian Response” in addition to dozens of additional Christian responses.

The initial letter and the many responses to it have given rise to a series of conferences between Muslim and Christian leaders. The first conference, “Loving God and Neighbor in Word and Deed: Implications for Christians and Muslims,” focused upon theological issues and was held at Yale University July 24–31, 2008. The second, “A Common Word and Future Christian-Muslim Engage-

ment,” focused upon scripture and was convened by the Anglican Archbishop and hosted by Cambridge University’s Inter-Faith Program at Cambridge University on October 13 and 14, 2008, with a final meeting at Lambeth Palace on October 15, 2008. The third was the first seminar of the Catholic-Muslim Forum hosted by the Vatican November 4–6, 2008. A second seminar of the Muslim-Catholic Forum was held at the Baptism Site in Jordan in November 2011. The fourth major conference, “*A Common Word Between Us and You: A Global Agenda for Change*,” held at Georgetown University in October 2009, focused upon the geopolitical implications of the ACW initiative. Smaller conferences that continue the work of these initial conferences have been held in Jordan (September 2010) and at the University of South Carolina (March 2009), Evangelical Theological Society in LA (November 2009), Georgetown University (2011) and Yale University (2011).

The United Nations Resolution to declare a worldwide interfaith harmony week for the first week of February every year is an important development that would not have been possible without the ACW initiative.⁵ Like ACW the World Interfaith Harmony Week calls upon religious leaders and followers the world over to employ the teachings of their respective traditions to promote peace and understanding of other religions. As H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad stated when presenting the proposal for an interfaith harmony week to the UN General Assembly;

The misuse or abuse of religions can thus be a cause of world strife, whereas religions should be a great foundation for facilitating world peace. The remedy for this problem can only come from the world’s religions themselves. Religions must be part of the solution, not part of the problem.⁶

In addition, ACW was the central impetus for the Wamp-Ellison Resolution adopted in the US House of Representatives on September 23, 2008. The official summary explains that the resolution;

Expresses the sense of Congress that the United States: (1) supports the spirit of peace and desire for unity displayed in interfaith dialogue among leaders of the three Abrahamic faiths; (2) encourages the many people of faith around the world who reject terrorism and extremism to join these and similar efforts to build a common bond based on peace, reconciliation, and tolerance; and (3) appreciates those voices around the world who condemn terrorism, intolerance, genocide, and ethnic and religious hatred, and instead commit themselves to a global peace anchored in respect and understanding among adherents of the three Abrahamic faiths.⁷

The ACW initiative has had a significant trickle down effect in many religious communities. It has given rise to grassroots and community level initiatives as far apart as Bangladesh, Indonesia, Canada and the United States. Development has begun on a joint website supported by the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, Yale University and Lambeth Palace that will recommend books in several languages so that members of each faith can read about the other faith as presented by its adherents rather than its opponents. Discussions are also underway for the development of a multi-university student drive ACW initiative in the United States.

In many instances these projects are a direct continuation of the practical accomplishments that have arisen from the conferences at Yale University, Cambridge University, the Vatican, and Georgetown University. In other instances these initiatives have arisen as a spontaneous response from international organizations and local religious communities. Together they indicate that ACW has become a global movement that continues to gain traction. As such, it has also become a subject of scholarly investigation with several books and articles having resulted from it.⁸

THE EVOLUTION OF A COMMON WORD

When discussing the development of the ACW initiative, many look to the polemical comments in “Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections,” a lecture delivered by Pope Benedict XVI at the University of Regensburg on September 12, 2007, to mark its inception.⁹ Others look to the initial Muslim response, entitled “An Open Letter to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI,” issued one month later, while others look to ACW. It must, however, be emphasized that the Catholic-Muslim Forum is only one aspect of this Christian-Muslim dialogue. In addition, it would be disingenuous to suggest that the Pope’s Regensburg address, wherein Islam was presented as a religion of violence and irrationality, was an invitation to dialogue.¹⁰ In fact the Vatican made no response to the open letter that sought to clarify the misunderstandings of the Regensburg lecture other than a perfunctory courtesy visit to H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, who had initiated the response.

The Vatican’s initial response to ACW also appears to have been miscalculated. In contrast to the positive responses that will be examined in greater detail below, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, went so far as to say that theological dialogue with Muslims would be difficult because “Muslims do not accept that one can question the Qur’an, because it was written, they say, by dictation from God. With such an absolute interpretation, it is difficult to discuss the contents of faith.”¹¹ It is remarkable that the president of any council for interreligious dialogue would be so dismissive of Islam’s rich and diverse hermeneutical tradition, wherein every word of the Qur’an is seen as having multiple layers of meaning. Cardinal Tauran’s statement is akin to Muslims saying that they cannot have dialogue with Christians so long as Christians maintain that Jesus is the Son of God. Cardinal Tauran also cast doubt upon the sincerity of the document and the efficacy of dialogue, saying: “... but some questions remain when we speak of the love of God, are we speaking about the same love.”¹² The Vatican’s opposition to open dialogue with Muslims appears to have changed after the

publication of the response orchestrated by the Yale Center for Faith & Culture: "Loving God and Neighbor Together: A Christian Response to *A Common Word Between Us and You*." Only two days after the appearance of this letter, the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, sent a reply to Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad on behalf of the Pope. Soon thereafter arrangements were underway for the formation of the Catholic-Muslim Forum. In this respect it seems that the positive response of so many other churches and Christian leaders may have forced the Vatican's hand.

While the Regensburg address may have been an unintended efficient or proximate cause for this exchange, it did not serve as its source. The source of this movement lies in the mechanisms for dialogue that Muslim scholars have been developing since 2003. Many who have followed the process from before its inception would put the starting point in July 2005 with the Amman Conference entitled "The International Islamic Conference: True Islam and its Role in Modern Society" and organized by the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought in Jordan, under the patronage of H.M. King Abdullah II. This groundbreaking conference marked the beginning of a process whereby Muslim scholars representing all schools of Islamic law and theology employed international consensus to address the challenges that face the whole of the Islamic world. In this way, an intra-Islamic initiative laid the groundwork for this interfaith initiative.

To understand the genesis of ACW, it is thus important that one take into account the accomplishments of the Amman Message of July 2005. On the one hand, the lead-up to the Amman Message established the mechanisms by which consensus could be reached among Muslim scholars of all branches. And on the other hand, the final declaration of the Amman Message answers one of the main objections that many have had to ACW, those who claim that Muslims need to denounce extremism before there can be true dialogue. Michael Gonyea expresses such concerns in *The American Thinker*, when he writes of the Catholic-Muslim Forum: "If in the upcoming forum a broad cross section of Muslim leaders

can be self-critical, if they can condemn the extremists, ...Christians will embrace them.”¹³ Such self-critical condemnation had in fact been achieved several years earlier in what Fareed Zakaria referred to as: “a frontal attack on Al Qaeda’s theological methods.”¹⁴

This frontal attack consists of three basic dimensions. Supported by seventeen *fatwas* from leading Sunni and Shiite authorities, it first established broad support for the eight schools of traditional Islamic law. This in itself was historic, as both Shiites and Sunnis came together to publicly affirm the validity of one another’s schools of law. They also emphasized that the schools of law are not regressive, but in fact moderate the religion by providing essential checks and balances. The second prong in this attack was to deny the legitimacy of *takfir*, or apostasizing others. The third was a reiteration of the traditional qualifications for issuing a *fatwa*. To outside observers this may seem to be a simple academic exercise, but it is in fact essential; for every act of terrorism that takes the name of Islam is preceded by an attempt at justification in Islamic terms. Within traditional Islam this is usually done through *fatwas*.¹⁵ Demonstrating the illegitimacy of *fatwas* that call for wanton violence thus strikes at the very root of extremist interpretations of Islam. That is to say that the problem of extremist interpretations of Islam is a textual, methodological problem that requires a textual, methodological solution. For no one commits terrorist acts without being convinced that terrorism is justified. Such justification requires a *fatwa*. The *fatwa* must be issued by one who is willing to distort the texts and sidestep the methodologies of classical Islamic law. Only by eradicating this pattern can one eradicate extremist interpretations of Islam and their attendant violence. The final declaration of the Amman Message and the collection of *fatwas* employed to support it was thus a crucial step in a true “war on terrorism” in which Muslims and non-Muslims can work hand in hand.¹⁶ Rather than striking at the branches of radical Islamism, it struck a blow to its ideological roots. The Amman Message was thus noteworthy for its innovative approach to building consensus across a broad spectrum of Muslim scholars, and for its

repudiation of the extremist interpretations of Islam. This laid the necessary foundations for a broad based interreligious exchange in which influential *ulama* from across the Islamic spectrum would be willing to participate and which they would be willing to endorse.

THE MESSAGE OF A COMMON WORD

ACW bears many similarities to the final declaration of the Amman Message of 2005. It employs the same form of consensus, addresses matters of crucial concern to the global Muslim community, and is grounded in classical Islamic teachings while building upon them. Like the final declaration of the Amman Message, the initial ACW letter was ratified at a conference in Jordan. The final form of the letter was presented at a conference in September 2007 entitled "Love in the Qur'an," held by The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought in Jordan under the patronage of H.M. King Abdullah II. As the ACW website states,

Never before have Muslims delivered this kind of definitive consensus statement on Christianity. Rather than engage in polemic, the signatories have adopted the traditional and mainstream Islamic position of respecting the Christian scripture and calling Christians to be more, not less, faithful to it.¹⁷

To effectively analyze this initial letter and the dialogue to which it has given rise, we must first allow the document to speak for itself. It begins:

Muslims and Christians together make up well over half of the world's population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world. The future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians. The basis for this peace and understanding already exists.

It is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths: love of the One God, and love of the neighbour. These principles are found over and over again in the sacred texts of Islam and Christianity. The Unity of God, the necessity of love for Him, and the necessity of love of the neighbour is thus the common ground between Islam and Christianity.¹⁸

The letter continues by citing verses from both the Bible and the Qur'an to demonstrate the manner in which these principles are underlined in scripture:

Of God's Unity, God says in the Holy Qur'an: *Say: He is God, the One! / God, the Self-Sufficient Besought of all! (Al-Ikhlās, 112:1-2)*. Of the necessity of love for God, God says in the Holy Qur'an: *So invoke the Name of thy Lord and devote thyself to Him with a complete devotion (Al-Muzzammil, 73:8)*. Of the necessity of love for the neighbour, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: *None of you has faith until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself.*

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ ﷺ said:

'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. / And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. / And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these. (Mark, 12:29-31)¹⁹

ACW then calls for dialogue and cooperation based upon these two principles—love of the One God and love of the neighbor—which it refers to as the two “Greatest Commandments” of the Bible. In this vein it states:

Whilst Islam and Christianity are obviously different religions—and whilst there is no minimizing some of their formal differences—it is clear that the Two Greatest Commandments are an area of common ground and a link between the Qur'an, the Torah, and the New Testament.²⁰

The letter concludes by saying:

So let our differences not cause hatred and strife between us. Let us vie with each other only in righteousness and good works. Let us respect each other, be fair, just and kind to one another and live in sincere peace, harmony and mutual good will.²¹

The title of the letter derives from a Quranic verse that commands Muslims to issue the following call to Christians and to Jews—the “People of Scripture” as they are known in the Qur'an:

*S*ay, “O People of Scripture! Come to a common word between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God.” (Aal ‘Imran 3:64)

A similar verse is cited at the beginning of the letter:

*C*all unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and contend with them in the fairest manner. Truly thy Lord is Best Aware of him who strayeth from His way and He is Best Aware of those who go aright. (Al-Nahl, 16:125)

Drawing upon these and other verses, ACW proposes that dialogue and even contention in the fairest manner are incumbent upon Muslims, and that the principles of devotion to the one God

and love of the neighbor are the strongest possible basis for mutual understanding, efficacious dialogue, and cooperation between Christianity and Islam, because they stem from the theological core of each religion. But unlike many other interfaith efforts, it does not seek to syncretize or to proselytize. Participants in this initiative have even taken pains to emphasize the need for recognizing the fundamental differences between the two traditions. Rather than watering down theological positions in the name of cooperation and thus bringing Christian and Muslim communities together at their margins, it asks both communities to speak from what is central and authoritative to each.

One of the letter's chief aims, according to the press release that accompanied it, is to provide a "common constitution" and a definitive theological common ground for the work of myriad groups and associations around the world who are carrying out interfaith dialogue. It points out that many of these groups are unaware of each other's efforts and often duplicate each other's work. By providing an authoritative "Christian-Muslim Constitution" grounded in scripture, the letter aims to unify and unite the forces working towards interfaith peace and harmony. The final section of the letter proposes that this is not a matter of choice but of responsibility:

Finding common ground between Muslims and Christians is not simply a matter for polite ecumenical dialogue between selected religious leaders. Christianity and Islam are the largest and second largest religions in the world and in history. Christians and Muslims reportedly make up over a third and over a fifth of humanity respectively. Together they make up more than 55% of the world's population, making the relationship between these two religious communities the most important factor in contributing to meaningful peace around the world. If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace. With the terrible weaponry of the modern world; with Muslims and Christians intertwined everywhere as never before, no

side can unilaterally win a conflict between more than half of the world's inhabitants. Thus our common future is at stake. The very survival of the world itself is perhaps at stake.²²

Some have ascribed ulterior motives to ACW, suggesting that its signatories and proponents intended to foist Muslim theology upon Christians, to reduce Islam and Christianity to an artificial union, to form a Muslim-Christian alliance against Judaism, or even to lull Christians into a false sense of complacency. But there has thus far been nothing in the movement that would support such contentions. As H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad explains:

We had honestly...only one motive: peace. We were aiming to try to spread peace and harmony between Christians and Muslims all over the world, not through governments and treaties but on the all-important popular and mass level, through the world's most influential popular leaders precisely—that is to say through the leaders of the two religions. We wanted to stop the drumbeat of what we feared was a growing popular consensus (on both sides) for world-wide (and thus cataclysmic and perhaps apocalyptic) Muslim-Christian jihad/crusade. We were keenly aware, however, that peace efforts required also another element: knowledge. We thus aimed to try to spread proper basic knowledge of our religion in order to correct and abate the constant and unjust vilification of Islam, in the West especially.²³

CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO ACW

The Christian responses to ACW have covered the full spectrum. Nonetheless, the majority have been very positive, with only a few cynical or dismissive responses. As there have been over 70 separate responses from bishops, priests, councils and individual scholars,

and as several of these responses have led to dialogues on many levels, each cannot be analyzed here. I will instead focus upon the aforementioned responses from the Yale Center for Faith and Culture at the Yale University Divinity School, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Vatican, for each of these has already borne fruit and each has the institutional backing to continue into the future. I will also draw attention to the response of the World Council of Churches (WCC), as it represents the widest and most diverse body of Christian denominations to have fully supported the initiative and subsequent developments, such as establishment for the World Interfaith Harmony Week.

YALE UNIVERSITY DIVINITY SCHOOL

The first broad-based Christian response to ACW was organized by Miroslav Volf and Joseph Cummings of the Yale Center for Faith & Culture at the Yale Divinity School. Signed by over 300 Christian leaders and scholars, “Loving God and Neighbor Together: A Christian Response to *A Common Word Between Us and You*” reaffirms the fundamental thrust behind ACW, saying: “Peaceful relations between Muslims and Christians stand as one of the central challenges of this century...” and that it is incumbent upon all who truly claim to uphold the values of these traditions to work together to meet this challenge.²⁴ It then reaffirms the centrality of the two commandments that were the focus of ACW, and in language that closely reflects that of ACW, concludes by saying:

“Let this common ground”—the dual common ground of love of God and of neighbor—“be the basis of all future interfaith dialogue between us,” which your courageous letter urges. Indeed, in the generosity with which the letter is written you embody what you call for. We most heartily agree. Abandoning all “hatred and strife,” we must engage in interfaith dialogue as those who seek each other’s good, for the one God unceasingly seeks our good. Indeed, together with you we believe that we need to move beyond

“a polite ecumenical dialogue between selected religious leaders” and work diligently together to reshape relations between our communities and our nations so that they genuinely reflect our common love for God and for one another.²⁵

Even before this letter was released, talks were underway for a conference and workshop that would bring Muslim and Christian theologians, evangelicals in particular, into greater dialogue. The conference and workshop, entitled “Loving God and Neighbor in Word and Deed: Implications for Christians and Muslims,” took place at Yale University from July 24–31, 2008. Several of the papers were published in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor* edited by Prince Ghazi Bin Muhammad and Miroslav Volf, Director of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture.²⁶ The workshop, on July 24–28, involved approximately 60 Christian and Muslim scholars, along with three Jewish scholars. The discussions, undertaken through the presentation of scholarly papers and through panels and informal conversations, focused on five major areas: “Love of God,” “Love of Neighbor,” “Love and Speech about the Other,” “Love and World Poverty,” and “God is Loving.” The larger conference, July 28–31, began with an address from Senator John Kerry. It included approximately 80 Muslim participants, 80 Christian participants, and 7 Jewish participants, extending the discussions of the scholarly workshop to a larger group of scholars and leaders.

While some of the participants, such as the Grand Mufti of Bosnia, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, David Burrell, and the members of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture were veterans of interreligious dialogue, many participants were new to interfaith gatherings. Even participants who were veterans of such gatherings remarked that the theological depth of discussion in the workshops was beyond any interreligious dialogue in which they had previously engaged.²⁷ The depth of these discussions helped move the dialogue beyond the platitudes that often plague such encounters. The participation

of many figures that are new to interreligious exchanges demonstrated the breadth of this movement. The inclusion of important religious figures, such as Leith Anderson, who was then President of the National Association of Evangelicals and Ingrid Mattson, who was then President of the Islamic Society of North America, and the opening address from Senator John Kerry demonstrate the ability of this initiative to move those who shape public opinion.

Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of the conference is that it brought together Evangelical Christians and traditional Muslims, two communities that have had little exposure to one another and often view one another with suspicion. In one keynote session of the conference, a leading Muslim scholar and ‘televangelist’ (for lack of better word) from the Arab world, Habib Ali al-Jifri, and a leading televangelist from America, Rev. Dr. Robert Schuller, the founding Pastor of the Crystal Cathedral who is known for his internationally broadcast “Hour of Power,” shared the same stage. This was an historic encounter in which two preachers from opposite ends of the world who have the ability to move millions within their religious communities, a traditional Islamic community and an American evangelical community that many believe to be in a clash with one another, spoke from the same podium and conveyed the same message. Never before has an international leader of the American evangelical movement and an international leader of traditional Islamic communities shared the same stage.

The final statement of the Yale Conference, which was agreed upon by all participants, reiterated the content of the previous letters, recognizing that Islam and Christianity share “an essential common ground” and “a common Abrahamic heritage.”²⁸ Reaffirming the commitment to promote peace, the final statement declared: “...ours is an effort to ensure that religions heal rather than wound, nourish the human soul rather than poison human relations. These Two Commandments teach us both what we must demand of ourselves and what we should expect from the other in what *we do*, what *we say*, and what *we are*.”²⁹ The Final Declaration also recognized that each religion affirms Divine unity and that

Divine love is central to the whole of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition. In addition it recognized that Christians and Muslims alike must not deny one another basic rights, nor tolerate the denigration or desecration of that which is central to either religion. The first point is of central importance to countering the claims of fringe Islamic groups that Christians worship multiple gods, a key factor in the argument of those who wish to declare them unbelievers. The second point helps to address the misunderstandings that arose in the wake of the Danish Cartoon controversy and the eruption over "The Innocence of Muslims" video trailer. It lays the foundations for Muslim and Christian leaders to confront insults against either community with one voice and thus avoid the violence that sometimes ensues in the wake of such effrontery.

The participants also discussed practical issues such as "world poverty, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the situation in Palestine and Israel, the dangers of further wars, and the freedom of religion."³⁰ In addition, the organizers committed to establishing mechanisms whereby the principles agreed upon could be conveyed to their respective communities. These include a website with recommended reading lists, the publication of study materials addressed to religious communities and setting aside a week every year wherein each community would seek to emphasize the good in the other community. The latter served as the catalyst for the aforementioned proposal to the United Nations to declare an annual World Interfaith Harmony Week.

While "Loving God and Neighbor Together: A Christian Response to *A Common Word Between Us and You*" and the Yale Conference received wide acclaim, some responses have also revealed the tensions to which dialogue between Muslims and Christians can give rise. This is most evident in the response of John Piper, a prominent Evangelical pastor and author, who released a video criticizing "Loving God and Neighbor Together" for failing to accentuate the unique nature of Jesus as the savior sent for "the propitiation of our sins."³¹ Piper goes so far as to say that the Islamic rejection of the Christian teaching regarding Jesus

indicates that Muslims and Christians do not worship the same God and that Muslims shall thus be “cast out into utter darkness.” Such criticisms have led some prominent Evangelicals who signed “Loving God and Neighbor Together” and who attended the first Yale conference in 2008 to explain their responses and modify their endorsements. Citing the difficulties of creating a document upon which everyone could agree, Leith Anderson writes: “While I am listed as the President of the National Association of Evangelicals I added my name as an individual and not as an institution.”³²

Such responses allude to tensions within the evangelical community itself, as some within the evangelical movement are hesitant to embrace any dialogue that would admit to a common ground between Muslims and Christians. Others think that engaging Muslims in such dialogue is the best approach to gain access and evangelize in the Muslim world. This intra-evangelical debate was evident at the 61st annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in November of 2009, where Joseph Cumming, the main impetus behind “Loving God and Neighbor Together,” along with Donald Smedley, a signatory to the same document, participated on a panel with John Piper and Albert Mohler, President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and a prominent Evangelical pastor and radio host, and two Muslim signatories to ACW, Professors Caner Dagli and Joseph Lumbard.³³ The discussion shed light on the subtle theological differences that “Loving God and Neighbor Together” revealed.

THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY
AND LAMBETH PALACE

While the response organized by the Yale Divinity School was a strong affirmation of ACW and was made all the more effective by the signatures of over 300 Christian scholars, the response from the Archbishop of Canterbury, *A Common Word for the Common Good*, has been the most trenchant and perspicacious response to date. Though written as a letter from the Archbishop himself to the signatories of ACW, the response was generated through extensive

discussion between the Archbishop and leaders of the Eastern, Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and leaders from other Protestant denominations. The Archbishop first met with academics and church leaders in advance of a larger meeting in June 2008 to discuss drafting a response to ACW. There was unanimous support among the academics and church leaders present for the Archbishop in sending a letter to Muslim leaders. He then wrote the final letter after further consultation with members at the meeting in June 2008.

A Common Word for the Common Good begins by reaffirming the open spirit of ACW and acknowledging that though the ways of understanding the Divine are different, Christianity and Islam are not mutually unintelligible and that they speak enough of a common language to address the concerns of humanity together. The Archbishop notes that such a dialogue can invite us to “think afresh about the foundations of our convictions,”³⁴ and then focuses upon five areas where continued cooperation can bear fruit: focus upon love and praise of God; love of neighbor that is rooted in love of God; grounding of this interfaith exchange in scriptures so that both traditions speak from that which is central and authoritative to each; respecting and discussing differences to avoid mutual fear and suspicion; and honoring a shared responsibility towards humanity and creation.

The subtle explanations of the Christian understanding of love offered by the Archbishop deserve extensive theological discussion that is beyond the scope of this survey. Suffice to say that he takes the opportunity to explain the manner in which Trinitarian theology leads many Christians to a deeper appreciation of the workings of love within the Divine Itself and that this is the foundation for love of the neighbor and of the stranger as the proper response to the gift of love from God. This discussion lays the foundation for an explanation of the deleterious nature of religious violence that exposes the theological hypocrisy that lies at the heart of extremist religious violence of any stripe:

The idea that any action, however extreme or disruptive or even murderous, is justified if it averts failure or defeat of a particular belief or a particular religious group is not really consistent with the conviction that our failure does not mean God's failure. Indeed, it reveals a fundamental lack of conviction in the eternity and sufficiency of the object of faith.³⁵

Based upon this observation, the Archbishop argues: "Religious violence suggests an underlying religious insecurity."³⁶ Keeping in mind that the Divine has no need of human 'protection' can then lead to the awareness "that to try and compel religious allegiance through violence is really a way of seeking to replace divine power with human."³⁷ This serves as the foundation for a vision of what can be accomplished through an extended dialogue between Muslim and Christian leaders:

What we need as a vision for our dialogue is to break the current cycles of violence, to show the world that faith and faith alone can truly ground a commitment to peace which definitively abandons the tempting but lethal cycle of retaliation in which we simply imitate each other's violence.³⁸

In this way he offers the hope that "our religious convictions can be a vehicle for creating peace where it is absent."³⁹ This does not oblige Muslims and Christians to reject their own truth claims or come to some neutral agreement in areas of theological dispute. Rather it seeks to demonstrate the manner in which transcendent truth claims can serve to expose the self-serving nature of all attempts to justify violence in the name of one ideology or another. This subtle analysis of the ideological roots of human violence and the ability of religion to counter it demonstrates the potential influence that the ACW initiative can have. As the Archbishop observes:

Our voice in the conversation of society will be the stronger for being a joint one. If we are to be true to the dual commandment of love, we need to find ways of being far more effective in influencing our societies to follow the way of God in promoting that which leads to human flourishing—honesty and faithfulness in public and private relationships, in business as in marriage and family life; the recognition that a person's value is not an economic matter; the clear recognition that neither material wealth nor entertainment can secure a true and deep-rooted human fulfillment.⁴⁰

An essential component of the Archbishop's letter that is not as fully addressed in other communiqués in this exchange is the need to understand and respect the different nature of scripture within each tradition. As he writes:

...for us as for you reading the Scriptures is a constant source of inspiration, nurture and correction, and this makes it very appropriate for Christians and Muslims to listen to one another, and question one another, in the course of reading and interpreting the texts from which we have learned of God's will and purposes.⁴¹

It is fitting that the Archbishop should have brought these observations to light, as the conference hosted at Cambridge University with a final meeting at Lambeth Palace October 13–15, 2008 concentrated upon scripture and interpretation. While the Yale University Conference hosted hundreds of scholars from around the world and addressed most facets of the ACW initiative, the conference convened by the Archbishop was limited to fifteen representatives from each faith tradition. Among these were some of the most prominent signatories, such as Abdullah bin Bayyah, whom many regard as the most knowledgeable living scholar of Sunni Islam, and Ramadan Buti, one of the most respected Sunni

Muslim scholars in Syria today, who have not attended any other events associated with the ACW initiative.

As with the Yale conference, the conference at Lambeth palace produced a final declaration that reaffirmed the core principles of ACW, love of God and love of neighbor. The document was, however, only signed by Ali Gomaa, the Grand Mufti of Egypt, and by the Archbishop. While reaffirming the central tenets of the others, this communiqué also offered a joint condemnation of the persecution of religious groups in Iraq, with a specific focus upon the recent persecution of Christian minorities. In the spirit of the conference, it also spoke in glowing terms of the experience of reading scripture together in a spirit of openness and cooperation:

One of the most moving elements of our encounter has been the opportunity to study together passages from our scriptures. We have felt ourselves to have been together before God and this has given us each a greater appreciation for the richness of the other's heritage as well as an awareness of the potential value in being joined by Jewish believers in a journey of mutual discovery and attentiveness to the texts we hold sacred. We wish to repeat the experience of a shared study of scriptural texts as one of the ways in which we can come, concretely, to develop our understanding of how the other understands and lives their own faith. We commend this experience to others.⁴²

For those who have been involved with interfaith dialogue and movements such as the scriptural reasoning project, this is not a remarkable observation in and of itself. But it adds greater significance and influence to the scriptural reasoning movement when the Grand Mufti of Egypt and the Archbishop of Canterbury join with imams and priests to encourage their followers to read the Bible and the Qur'an together. Muslims and Christians learning to read their scriptures in relation rather than in opposition and learning how the other communities understand their own texts could bear

unimagined fruits for future generations, especially when they are encouraged to do so by the religious authorities whom they most respect. This emphasis upon the possibilities inherent to scriptural reasoning indicates one of the important ways in which academics have played an important role in working together with religious leaders to shape the ACW initiative. One hopes that this encouragement will help a broader audience apply the tools of comparative scriptural inquiry that the scriptural reasoning movement has developed over the past fifteen years.⁴³

THE VATICAN

While the response coordinated by the Yale Divinity School and the letter written by the Archbishop of Canterbury have been overwhelmingly positive, the responses from the Vatican have been mixed. Statements by Cardinal Tauran have indicated that the Vatican would prefer to focus upon the development of the Catholic-Muslim Forum in conjunction with the ACW initiative, rather than be dispersed into other international interfaith initiatives, such as that initiated by King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud. Nonetheless, as noted above, the Vatican response to ACW was not at first positive, and the Vatican did not appear receptive to official dialogue with Muslims until it became apparent that other Churches had engaged ACW.

Given the multiple declarations regarding interreligious dialogue and interfaith relations that have been issued by the Vatican, beginning with *Nostra Aetate* in 1965, the Muslim-Catholic exchange must first be viewed in this broader context. Recognizing the tensions to which religious misunderstanding can give rise, *Nostra Aetate* sought to outline that which is common to all religions, especially the Abrahamic traditions:

The Church regards with esteem also the Muslims. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself, merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheart-

edly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will give their deserts to all those who have been raised from the dead.

The sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding; for the benefit of all, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values. (*Nostra Aetate*, 3)

In this vein, *Nostra Aetate* marked a momentous step forward in the official Catholic approach to people of other faith traditions and the reconciliation of traditional Catholic orthodoxy with modern pluralism. Nonetheless, although the Vatican has afforded greater recognition to Judaism and Islam, it continues to maintain that one can only be saved through a relationship with Christ that is mediated through “the Church” (*Dominus Iesus*, § 20). Regarding the prayers and rituals of other faiths, the Vatican has gone so far as to declare,

Indeed, some prayers and rituals of the other religions may assume a role of preparation for the Gospel, in that they are occasions or pedagogical helps in which the human heart is prompted to be open to the action of God. One cannot attribute to these, however, a divine origin or an *ex opere operato* salvific efficacy, which is proper to the Christian sacraments. Furthermore, it cannot be overlooked that other rituals, insofar as they depend on superstitions or other errors, constitute an obstacle to salvation. (*Dominus Iesus*, § 21)

In other words, other religions can be tolerated, but only in so far as they are a step towards full salvation in Christ. Viewed in relation to one another, *Nostra Aetate* and *Dominus Iesus* appear to say that error cannot be tolerated in and of itself, but that people who are in error still have rights that must be respected. Especially those who are well meaning and seek God, even if in a manner that the Church considers imperfect. Following upon *Nostra Aetate*, the late Pope John Paul II made unprecedented overtures towards other Christian denominations and towards people of other faiths, especially Jews and Muslims. Regarding Muslims he declared:

We Christians joyfully recognize the religious values we have in common with Islam. Today I would like to repeat what I said to young Muslims some years ago in Casablanca: 'We believe in the same God, the one God, the living God, the God who created the world and brings his creatures to their perfection.'⁴⁴

In contrast to Pope John Paul II's positive embrace of Muslims, many have sensed a different tone in the statements of Pope Benedict XVI, especially in his assertions that Europe is a Christian continent and in the unfortunate comments of his Regensburg address. In this context, many Muslims felt it necessary to engage the Catholic Church in the hopes of maintaining relations more similar to those that had been enjoyed during the tenure of John Paul II. It is in this vein that "An Open Letter to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI" delivered one month after the Regensburg Lecture was written. After correcting the factual errors of the Regensburg address, the letter states,

Christianity and Islam are the largest and second largest religions in the world and in history. Christians and Muslims reportedly make up over a third and over a fifth of humanity respectively. Together they make up more than 55% of the world's population, making the relationship

between these two religious communities the most important factor in contributing to meaningful peace around the world. As the leader of over a billion Catholics and moral example for many others around the globe, yours is arguably the single most influential voice in continuing to move this relationship forward in the direction of mutual understanding. We share your desire for frank and sincere dialogue, and recognize its importance in an increasingly interconnected world. Upon this sincere and frank dialogue we hope to continue to build peaceful and friendly relationships based upon mutual respect, justice, and what is common in essence in our shared Abrahamic tradition, particularly ‘the two greatest commandments’ in Mark 12:29-31 (and, in varying form, in Matthew 22:37-40), that, *the Lord our God is One Lord; / And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy understanding, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. / And the second commandment is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.*⁴⁵

The lack of response to this letter and the lack of media coverage it received, while many unproductive and counter productive reactions were reported, frustrated some Muslims. The desire to alleviate this frustration and to proactively prevent another Regensburg address by the Pope or by other Christian leaders gave rise to the ACW initiative in order to “move the dialogue toward the direction of mutual understanding.” The first impression is that this objective has been achieved, for in his remarks on the final day of the first seminar of the Catholic-Muslim Forum, Pope Benedict XVI sounded more like John Paul II:

I am well aware that Muslims and Christians have different approaches in matters regarding God. Yet we can and

must be worshippers of the one God who created us and is concerned about each person in every corner of the world. Together we must show, by our mutual respect and solidarity, that we consider ourselves members of one family: the family that God has loved and gathered together from the creation of the world to the end of human history.⁴⁶

While acknowledging that Muslims and Christians conceive of God in different ways and have a different understanding of the precise nature of the relation between the Divine and the human, he affirmed that they can nonetheless work together for the good of all humanity:

There is a great and vast field in which we can act together in defending and promoting the moral values which are part of our common heritage. Only by starting with the recognition of the centrality of the person and the dignity of each human being, respecting and defending life which is the gift of God, and is thus sacred for Christians and for Muslims alike – only on the basis of this recognition, can we find a common ground for building a more fraternal world, a world in which confrontations and differences are peacefully settled, and the devastating power of ideologies is neutralized.⁴⁷

Though he did not apologize for the remarks of the Regensburg address, Pope Benedict XVI did embrace the call for understanding that had been issued in the initial open letter addressed to him:

Dear friends, let us unite our efforts, animated by good will, in order to overcome all misunderstanding and disagreements. Let us resolve to overcome past prejudices and to correct the often distorted images of the other which even today can create difficulties in our relations; let us work with one another to educate all people, especially the

young, to build a common future.⁴⁸

None of these remarks are groundbreaking. They are nonetheless significant because they indicate that ACW has succeeded in countering the deleterious effects of the Regensburg address and in bringing Muslims and Christians into the type of dialogue to which *Nostra Aetate* opened and which Pope John Paul II had embraced. The cycle of recriminations to which the Regensburg address initially gave rise has thus been averted, and for the time being Catholics and Muslims are engaged in real dialogue rather than juxtaposed monologues. The second seminar of the Catholic-Muslim Forum, held in Jordan at the Baptism Site of Jesus on the River Jordan, developed upon the issues addressed by the first seminar and expanded upon the developments of other conferences. Whatever direction it may take, it is significant that Muslim and Catholics have committed themselves to a forum wherein they will be able to express their differences and work towards establishing better understanding between Muslims and Catholics. This will provide an open channel whereby unfortunate misunderstandings, such as those created by the Regensburg address, can be avoided and whereby, if they do arise, they can be addressed before any negative consequences are realized.

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The responses from the Yale Divinity School, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Vatican have given rise to more interaction between Muslims and Christians than have any others. But one should also take note of the response issued by the World Council of Churches (WCC): “Learning to Explore Love Together: Suggestions to the Churches for Responding to ‘*A Common Word*.’” Acknowledging their commitment to “fresh thinking about the relationship between Islam and Christianity,” the letter of the WCC encourages member churches to recognize the serious intent of ACW and “prayerfully consider its invitation to dialogue and cooperation.”⁴⁹ The Council then proposes that it will “create a

joint *planning group* to prepare steps towards common action, and seek Muslim and Christian initiatives of dialogue and cooperation at both regional and global levels.”⁵⁰

After committing to this “prayerful response” in the first page and a half, the remainder of “Learning to Explore Love Together” provides a thoughtful outline of the issues and difficulties that confront Muslim-Christian dialogue, noting that “signs of similarity must be held in tension with real divergences and hard to reconcile differences.”⁵¹ It then touches upon two central questions of Muslim-Christian dialogue: the relationship between *tawhid* and trinity; and the understanding of God’s word as revealed in Jesus and the Qur’an. Regarding the first it asks: “Are these contradictory doctrines, as the history of engagement between the two faiths attests, or is there a way in which they can be seen as complementary insights into the mystery of God?” Regarding the latter it asks:

Similarly, while both Muslims and Christians claim to receive revelation from God, what is meant when Muslims claim to perceive the will of God revealed in the Qur’an—what has been called the Word of God become book-, and what is meant when Christians claim to perceive God’s self revealed in Jesus Christ – who is called the Word of God become flesh?⁵²

Although the response from the World Council of Churches has not yet led to the same type of high-level interaction that those of the Vatican, Lambeth Palace and Yale the Divinity School have initiated, it is significant that the broadest and most inclusive international Christian organization has encouraged its 349 member churches in over 100 countries to participate in this movement. This can be an important step in helping Muslims and Christians to “strive to reach the point at which they can recognize and endorse what they hold in common with sufficient integrity to allow them to work together in the world.”⁵³ It is also of fundamental importance for the continued success of World Interfaith Harmony Week.

ANALYSIS

Outside of the official participants, the ACW initiative has received some criticism, though the response has been overwhelmingly positive. Though few outside the movement initially grasped its potential significance—what the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Ali Gomaa, has referred to as “something of a small miracle”⁵⁴—some are beginning to recognize the power that Muslims and Christians coming together for the common good can have. In the English speaking press one can now find over 700 articles addressing various aspects of the initiative. While this might seem substantial, it is but a drop when compared to the coverage of the Regensburg address, the Danish cartoon fiasco, or the “Innocence of Muslims” video trailer about each which tens of thousands of articles have been written. Given the secular inclinations of the mainstream media, it is not surprising that the vast majority of reporters are unable to distinguish the ACW movement from other interfaith initiatives and see what promise it may hold.

Three central features make ACW and the ongoing exchange a crucial, promising and historic step in Muslim-Christian dialogue: the grounding in scripture; the acceptance of theological differences; and the participation of religious leaders of the highest rank. As seen in the passages of ACW cited above, this dialogue has been grounded in scripture from its inception, and has even sought to expand the manner in which some Quranic verses are interpreted. The title is drawn from the famous verse:

*S*ay, ‘O People of the Scripture! Come now to a word common between us and you, that we worship none but God and that we do not associate anything with Him, and do not take each other for lords, beside God.’ (Aal ‘Imran, 3:64)

Several scholars have noted that this verse is usually interpreted in a polemical context and employed to support polemical objectives. The interpretive history of 3:64 is indeed polemical. Muham-

mad ibn Jarir Al-Tabari (d. 310/923), the dean of Quranic exegesis, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 606/1210), Abu 'Qasim al-Zamakhshari (d. 538/1144), al-Baghawi (d. 516/1122), and other influential exegetes tended to view this verse as a challenge to Christians.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, as with most verses of the Qur'an, there are many ways of understanding it. Other exegetes have seen 3:64 as an allusion to fundamental principles that all Abrahamic faiths are believed to share in common, saying of the phrase "a common word," "that is the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur'an do not differ regarding it, or there is no differentiation regarding it among the revealed religions (*shara'i*)."⁵⁶ And as the 18th century Moroccan Scholar Ahmad ibn 'Ajibah (d. 1224/1809) says in his commentary on the verse, "The paths are many and the goal is one, and it is pure unity (*tawhid*)."⁵⁷ Thus while the polemical strand of interpreting 3:64 may predominate in Islamic history, it is certainly not the only interpretive strand.

It is significant that many of the world's leading Islamic scholars have chosen to emphasize the more universal implications of 3:64 over the polemical interpretations. For it represents an integral component of this dialogue. Each community has taken it upon itself to tell the other how it understands the sources of its own tradition, while listening as leaders of the other community explains how they understand the sources and tenets of their respective traditions. As the Final Declaration of the Yale Conference states: "A Common Word is rooted in our sacred texts, arising from within, not imposed from without."⁵⁸ And as Archbishop Rowan Williams has written in his response to ACW, "... for both faiths, scripture provides the basic tools for speaking of God, and it is in attending to how we use our holy texts that we often discover most truly the nature of each other's faith."⁵⁹ This is an essential observation, for Christians and Muslims often find it difficult to relate to the theological subtleties of one another's faiths and are rarely swayed by references to great theologians that proponents of other religions may esteem. But given the centrality of scripture in their own tradition, they are able to relate to the

centrality of scripture in another tradition. In this way, scripture provides one of the best platforms for Muslim and Christian dialogue. Unfortunately, members of each tradition all too often refuse to afford another scripture the same leniency they have learned to give their own. They are thus less patient and less willing to allow the apparent naiveties, inconsistencies and contradictions of a scripture outside their own unfold into the profundities that they have come to expect of their own scriptural traditions. If, however, Muslims and Christians are able to read their scriptures together, they may come to see that in reading the scriptures of another tradition against that tradition, they have committed the very same errors of which they accuse the other tradition when it cites their scriptures against them. Comparative scriptural inquiry also has the potential to highlight dimensions of one's own scripture by showing them in another light.

The second feature that distinguishes the ACW movement is that the dialogue has not sought to ignore or deny theological differences, but rather to acknowledge and even embrace them. To paraphrase Archbishop Rowan Williams, this is to say that the dialogue does not seek to bring Christian and Muslim communities together at the margins of their historic identities, but by speaking from what is central and authoritative to each.⁶⁰ In this way, the ACW initiative avoids a major pitfall of much interfaith dialogue, wherein well-meaning believers barter away central tenets of their communities' creeds in the hopes of finding a common ground that is in reality a least common denominator. As if one were to say, "I'll give up the uncreated Qur'an, if you drop the Trinity." In the name of violating neither religion, this form of dialogue undermines religion as such, by accepting two unspoken premises: 1) that religions cannot reach common ground on religious terms; and (2) that in the modern period all people of religion must yield to the principles of secular humanism. This form of dialogue dilutes religion. It thus leads many to reject interreligious dialogue as anti-theological to the teachings of their own faith, or as a Trojan horse by which its central tenets will be undermined. This can in turn lead

to greater misunderstanding and mistrust. In addressing this issue, Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad has said of the initiative,

...I would like to say also that *A Common Word* does not signal that Muslims are prepared to deviate from or concede one iota of any their convictions in reaching out to Christians—nor, I expect, the opposite. Let us be crystal-clear: *A Common Word* is about equal peace, NOT about capitulation.⁶¹

The third feature that sets *A Common Word* apart from other interfaith initiatives is that it has the backing of many of the highest-ranking religious authorities in both the Christian world and the Islamic world. On the Muslim side this includes figures such as Ahmad El-Tayyeb, the Shaykh of al-Azhar, Abdullah Bin Bayyah, Ramadan Buti, Ayatollah Muhaqqiq-i Damad, regarded by many as one of the leading Shiite theologians of his generation, and the Grand Muftis of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Bosnia, Oman, and Russia, among many others. On the Christian side, this includes the Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the head of the National Association of Evangelicals, and the heads of most international Churches. The history of Christian-Muslim relations has never witnessed collaboration among authorities of this stature. In the extended version of his final address at the first seminar of the Catholic-Muslim Forum, Seyyed Hossein Nasr underlines the importance of their participation when he writes:

In this effort to reorient ourselves toward each other, all of us, Christian and Muslim alike, can play a role. But there is no doubt that the main responsibility lies on the shoulders of religious leaders, thinkers and scholars, those whom we call 'ulama' in Islam. Those who are guides and trailblazers in religious matters must come forward and seek to bring about understanding to those in their own communities who hearken to their call. They should

bring about further knowledge about the other whom they should present as friend, not enemy, to be loved and not vilified.⁶²

The involvement of such leaders has many ramifications and was central to the establishment of United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week. It is also likely that the ACW initiative served as a catalyst for the interfaith initiative launched by H.M. King Abdallah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud. But most importantly the participants in this initiative are the people who influence what is said on Friday and Sunday in mosques and churches, what is taught in schools, and what is heard on television. If these leaders are committed to this exchange, the message of ACW has the potential to change the way that Christians and Muslims conceptualize and approach one another throughout the world.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Despite the significant features mentioned above, it should be stressed that the crucial theological issues that divide Christians and Muslims have not yet been fully discussed in the exchanges brought about by ACW and that they may never be fully addressed in the context of the ACW initiative. For this is not at its heart a theological exchange. ACW is an initiative that seeks to promote peace by alleviating misunderstandings between Christians and Muslims through an emphasis on the love of God, devotion to the One God, and love of neighbor. In this way it allows the participants to maintain theological differences in creative tension while asserting what they hold in common and working for the greater good. As the World Council of Churches has expressed it:

[Muslims and Christians] should make it a priority to understand how the precious heritages that each hold can direct and even impel them to work together for justice and peace, recognizing their joint goals and responding

to the call of the One they worship and obey to come together not only in a common word but also in common action for the greater glory of God and the wellbeing of all.⁶³

Theological discussions may develop in the future, and this may be a role the academy can play in this dialogue; for those who do not represent large constituencies risk less when venturing new approaches to the faith. Perhaps in this way academics and theologians can help others to imagine what might be gained if Muslims and Christians sought to define themselves in relation to one another rather than in opposition.

One can hope that the spirit of this exchange will continue to be one of “vying in good works” in accord with the Quranic verse cited in ACW, *Perhaps God will create friendship between you and those you consider your enemies.* (Al-Mumtahanah, 60:7) As Daniel Madigan SJ observes in his response to ACW: “Where love replaces enmity, it is surely God at work, not just us.”⁶⁴ Let us hope that it can be so. For this interfaith endeavor is not only important for relations between Islam and Christianity, it is important for the response of religion to the forces of bigotry, terrorism and extremism. Some have argued that to avoid violent clashes between nations and peoples, religion must be abandoned altogether. But in the twentieth century—the bloodiest of human history—ideological conflicts and their attendant wars have demonstrated that it is humanity, not religion, which is responsible for the atrocities of the past and the present. Many employ religion to justify reckless ideologies and wanton violence. But in so doing they betray the very teachings of the religions they propose to represent. Perhaps by reaffirming the ethical teachings of their traditions together, Christians and Muslims can employ their collective moral voice to address injustices committed against peoples of all faiths.

The exchange initiated by ACW will not answer all of the questions that arise from religious diversity, nor will it ameliorate all of the tensions that arise from theological disputes and misunder-

standings. It could, however, offer reflections that will transfer the positive effects of Christian-Muslim dialogue from the pens and lips of theologians to the *minbar* and the pulpit, from where it can also reach into the schools and streets. Agreement may not always be reached, but by continuing to approach each other in good faith, Muslims and Christians can take important steps towards eradicating the extremism that corrodes from within and divides from without. Perhaps in this way, ACW can be one small step towards realizing the vision of the prophet Isaiah:

The nations will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.
(Isaiah 2:4)

ENDNOTES

1 “Final Declaration of the first Seminar of the Catholic-Muslim Forum,” Rome, November 4-6, 2008, p. 3.

2 “Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to Participants in the Seminar organized by the Catholic Muslim Forum,” Vatican City, Clementine Hall, November 6, 2008.

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20081106_cath-islamic-leaders_en.html.

3 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “We And You—Let us Meet in God’s Love,” 1st Catholic-Muslim Forum Seminar, Vatican City, November 6, 2008, p. 1.

4 The nature of these responses merits a study in and of itself. To see the 70 different responses go to <http://acommonword.com/index.php?lang=en&page=responses>.

5 See <http://worldinterfaithharmonyweek.com/>.

6 <http://worldinterfaithharmonyweek.com/newspost/h-r-h-prince-ghazi-bin-muhammad-delivers-kings-world-interfaith-harmony-week-proposal-at-un/>

7 H. Con Res. 374. For an outline of the history of the resolution see <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d110:HC00374:@@L&summ2=m&>.

8 The most important of these have been: *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor*, ed. Volf, Ghazi bin Muhammad, Yarrington (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2009); and *Muslim and Christian Understanding: Theory and Application of “A Common Word,”* ed. El-Ansary, Linnan (New York, Palgrave Macmillan,

2010).

9 This is the analysis offered by Samir Khalil Samir, SJ in "Pope Benedict XVI and Dialogue with Muslims," *Annals Australasia*, January/February 2008, pp. 20-25.

10 The entire Regensburg Lecture can be found on the Vatican website, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html. The polemical passage is as follows:

I was reminded of all this recently, when I read the edition by Professor Theodore Khoury (Münster) of part of the dialogue carried on-- perhaps in 1391 in the winter barracks near Ankara--by the erudite Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus and an educated Persian on the subject of Christianity and Islam, and the truth of both. It was probably the emperor himself who set down this dialogue, during the siege of Constantinople between 1394 and 1402; and this would explain why his arguments are given in greater detail than the responses of the learned Persian.

The dialogue ranges widely over the structures of faith contained in the Bible and in the Qur'an, and deals especially with the image of God and of man, while necessarily returning repeatedly to the relationship of the three Laws: the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Qur'an. In this lecture I would like to discuss only one point--itself rather marginal to the dialogue itself--which, in the context of the issue of faith and reason, I found interesting and which can serve as the starting-point for my reflections on this issue.

In the seventh conversation edited by Professor Khoury, the emperor touches on the theme of the jihad (holy war). The emperor must have known that surah 2, 256 reads: There is no compulsion in religion. It is one of the suras of the early period, when Mohammed was still powerless and under threat.

But naturally the emperor also knew the instructions, developed later and recorded in the Qur'an, concerning holy war. Without descending to details, such as the difference in treatment accorded to those who have the "Book" and the "infidels," he turns to his interlocutor somewhat brusquely with the central question on the relationship between religion and violence in general, in these words:

Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.

The emperor goes on to explain in detail the reasons why spreading the faith through violence is something unreasonable. Violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul.

God is not pleased by blood, and not acting reasonably is contrary to God's nature. Faith is born of the soul, not the body. Whoever would lead someone to faith needs the ability to speak well and to reason properly, without violence and threats... To convince a reasonable soul, one does not need a strong arm, or weapons of any kind,

or any other means of threatening a person with death....

The decisive statement in this argument against violent conversion is this: not to act in accordance with reason is contrary to God's nature. The editor, Theodore Khoury, observes: "For the emperor, as a Byzantine shaped by Greek philosophy, this statement is self-evident. But for Muslim teaching, God is absolutely transcendent. His will is not bound up with any of our categories, even that of rationality." Here Khoury quotes a work of the noted French Islamist R. Arnaldez, who points out that Ibn Hazn [sic] went so far as to state that God is not bound even by his own word, and that nothing would oblige him to reveal the truth to us. Were it God's will, we would even have to practice idolatry.

11 As quoted in "Cardinal Praises Muslims for "Eloquent" Letter", October 19, 2007. <http://www.zenit.org/article-20787?l=english>.

12 Tom Heneghan, "Vatican says Pope cannot sign collective response to Muslims", Reuters Blogs, October 23, 2007. <http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/2007/10/23/vatican-says-pope-cannot-sign-response-to-muslims/>.

13 Michael Gonyea, "Islam's Transcendent Challenge" American Thinker, October 12, 2008. http://www.americanthinker.com/2008/10/islams_transcendent_challenge.html.

14 Fareed Zakaria, "New hope: Defeating terror requires Muslim help and much more than force of arms", Newsweek July 18, 2005, U.S. Edition.

<http://www.fareedzakaria.com/articles/newsweek/071805.html>. "Now things are changing. The day before the London bombs, a conference of 180 top Muslim sheiks and imams, brought together under the auspices of Jordan's King Abdullah, issued a statement forbidding that any Muslim be declared *kafir* —an apostate [sic]. This is a frontal attack on Al Qaeda's theological methods. Declaring someone *takfir*—and thus sanctioning his or her death—is a favorite tactic of bin Laden and his ally in Iraq, Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi. The conference's statement was endorsed by 10 *fatwas* from such big conservative scholars as Tantawi; Iraq's Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani; Egypt's mufti, Ali Jumaa, and the influential Al-Jazeera TV-sheik, Yusuf al-Qaradawi. Signed by adherents of all schools of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), it also allows only qualified Muslim scholars to issue edicts. The Islamic Conference's statement, the first of its kind, is a rare show of unity among the religious establishment against terrorists and their scholarly allies."

15 For examples of the pseudo-*fatwas* issued by extremist elements see *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden*, ed. Bruce Lawrence. (London & New York, Verso, 2005). One is most struck by the lack of questions; for a traditional *fatwa* is always an answer to a question. But in Bin Laden's instance proclamations are presented as *fatwas*.

16 For the full text of the Final Declaration go to http://ammanmessage.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=20&Itemid=34.

17 <http://www.acommonword.com/>

18 "A Common Word Between Us and You" (Amman, The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute For Islamic Thought, 2007), p. 2. For access to the original document see <http://www.acommonword.com/index.php?lang=en&page=downloads>.

19 Ibid., p. 2.

20 Ibid., p. 12

21 Ibid., p. 16.

22 Ibid., p. 16.

23 Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, "A Common Word Between Us and You": Theological Motives and Expectations,' Acceptance Speech for the Eugen Biser Award Ceremony, November 22, 2008, pp. 5-6.

24 "Loving God and Neighbor Together: A Christian Response to *A Common Word Between Us and You*," New York Times, November 17, 2007.

25 Ibid.

26 *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor*, ed. Volf, Ghazi bin Muhammad, Yarrington (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2009).

27 From personal discussion with Reza Shah-Kazemi and Ibrahim Kalin, spokesperson for ACW, July 26, 2008.

28 "Final Declaration of the Yale Common Word Conference", July 2008, p. 1.

29 Ibid., p. 1.

30 Ibid., p. 1.

31 For John Piper's response to ACW see, http://www.desiringgod.org/Blog/1032_a_common_word_between_us/

32 Leith Anderson, "Signing the Letter to Islam": <http://www.nae.net/index.cfm?FUSEACTION=editor.page&pageID=500&IDcategory=1>

33 See <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/conference-messages/evangelicals-and-a-common-word>

34 Archbishop Rowan Williams, *A Common Word for the Common Good* (London, Lambeth Palace, 2008), p.2.

35 Ibid., p. 12.

36 Ibid., p. 12.

37 Ibid., p. 13.

38 Ibid., p. 13.

39 Ibid., p. 14.

40 Ibid., p. 14.

41 Ibid., p. 16.

42 The Most Reverend & Right Honorable Dr. Rowan Williams and H.E. Shaykh Prof. Dr Ali Gomaa Mohamed Abdel Wahab, "Communiqué from A Common Word conference", London, Lambeth Palace, October 15, 2008.

43 For an introduction to Scriptural Reasoning see: <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/ssr/issues/volume2/number1>

44 Insegnamenti, VIII/2, [1985], p. 497, quoted during a general audience on May 5, 1999.

45 "Open Letter to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI", October 13, 2006, p. 4.

- 46 “Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Participants in the Seminar organized by the Catholic Muslim Forum”, Vatican City, Clementine Hall, November 6, 2008.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 The World Council of Churches, “Learning to Explore Love Together”, p. 2: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/interreligious-trust-and-respect/20-03-08-learning-to-explore-love-together.html>.
- 50 Ibid., p. 2.
- 51 Ibid., p. 3.
- 52 Ibid., p. 3.
- 53 Ibid., p. 4.
- 54 As Quoted in an interview with Stryker McGuire, “A Small Miracle” *Newsweek*, October 21, 2008.
- 55 Several scholars have raised this point, but the only thorough study is that of Gordon Nickel, ‘“A Common Word” in Context and Commentary’, unpublished conference paper, Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Chicago, IL, November 3, 2008.
- 56 Mahmud b. Abdallah al-Alūsī, *Ruh al-ma'ani fi tafsir al-qur'an al-karim wa-l-saba' al-mathani* (Beirut: Dar Ehia al-Tourath al-Arabi, 1420/1999), vol. 3, p. 193.
- 57 Ahmad ibn 'Ajība, *al-Bahr al-madid fi tafsir al-qur'an al-majid* (Beirut: Dar al-Kotoob al-Ilmiyyah, 1426/2005), Vol 1, p. 330.
- 58 “Final Declaration of the Yale Common Word Conference”, July 2008, p. 1.
- 59 Archbishop Rowan Williams, *A Common Word for the Common Good*, p. 3.
- 60 Ibid., p. 2.
- 61 Ghazi bin Muhammad, “‘A Common Word Between Us and You’: Theological Motives and Expectations’, pp. 8-9.
- 62 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “We and You—Let us Meet in God’s Love”, (expanded version) forthcoming, *Sophia: The Journal of Traditional Studies*, Volume 14, no. 2, Winter 2009.
- 63 The World Council of Churches, “Learning to Explore Love Together”, p. 4.
- 64 Daniel Madigan, SJ, “A Common Word Between Us and You: Some initial Reflections”, p. 7.

*In the Name of God,
the Compassionate, the Merciful
Peace and Prayers be Upon the Seal of the Prophets,
Muhammad and his Kin*

CHAPTER 4 THE 'A COMMON WORD' TEXT

'A COMMON WORD BETWEEN US AND YOU'

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

On the Occasion of the *Eid al-Fitr al-Mubarak* 1428 A.H. /
October 13th 2007 C.E., and on the One Year Anniversary of the
Open Letter of 38 Muslim Scholars to H.H. Pope Benedict XVI,

An Open Letter and Call from Muslim Religious Leaders to:

His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI,

*His All-Holiness Bartholomew I, Patriarch of Constantinople, New
Rome,*

*His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All
Africa,*

His Beatitude Ignatius IV, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East,

His Beatitude Theophilos III, Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem,

His Beatitude Alexy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia,

His Beatitude Pavle, Patriarch of Belgrade and Serbia,

His Beatitude Daniel, Patriarch of Romania,

His Beatitude Maxim, Patriarch of Bulgaria,

*His Beatitude Ilia II, Archbishop of Mtskheta-Tbilisi, Catholicos-
Patriarch of All Georgia,*

His Beatitude Chrisostomos, Archbishop of Cyprus,
His Beatitude Christodoulos, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece,
His Beatitude Sawa, Metropolitan of Warsaw and All Poland,
His Beatitude Anastasios, Archbishop of Tirana, Duerres and All Albania,
His Beatitude Christoforos, Metropolitan of the Czech and Slovak Republics,
His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of All Africa on the Apostolic Throne of St. Mark,
His Beatitude Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians,
His Beatitude Ignatius Zakka I, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, Supreme Head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church,
His Holiness Mar Thoma Didymos I, Catholicos of the East on the Apostolic Throne of St. Thomas and the Malankara Metropolitan,
His Holiness Abune Paulos, Fifth Patriarch and Catholicos of Ethiopia, Tekle Haymanot, Archbishop of Axium,
His Beatitude Mar Dinkha IV, Patriarch of the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East,
The Most Rev. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury,
Rev. Mark S. Hanson, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and President of the Lutheran World Federation,
Rev. George H. Freeman, General Secretary, World Methodist Council,
Rev. David Coffey, President of the Baptist World Alliance,
Rev. Setri Nyomi, General Secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, General Secretary, World Council of Churches,

And Leaders of Christian Churches, everywhere ...

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

A COMMON WORD BETWEEN US AND YOU

(Summary and Abridgement)

MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS TOGETHER make up well over half of the world's population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world. The future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians.

The basis for this peace and understanding already exists. It is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths: love of the One God, and love of the neighbour. These principles are found over and over again in the sacred texts of Islam and Christianity. The Unity of God, the necessity of love for Him, and the necessity of love of the neighbour is thus the common ground between Islam and Christianity. The following are only a few examples:

Of God's Unity, God says in the Holy Qur'an: *Say: He is God, the One! / God, the Self-Sufficient Besought of all!* (Al-Ikhlās, 112:1-2). Of the necessity of love for God, God says in the Holy Qur'an: *So invoke the Name of thy Lord and devote thyself to Him with a complete devotion* (Al-Muzzammil, 73:8). Of the necessity of love for the neighbour, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: *None of you has faith until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself.*

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ ﷺ said:

'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. / And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. / And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

There is no other commandment greater than these.
(Mark, 12:29–31)



In the Holy Qur'an, God Most High enjoins Muslims to issue the following call to Christians and Jews—the People of the Scripture:

*S*ay: O People of the Scripture! Come to A Common Word between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him). (Aal 'Imran, 3:64)

The words: *we shall ascribe no partner unto Him* relate to the Unity of God, and the words: *worship none but God*, relate to being totally devoted to God. Hence they all relate to the *First and Greatest Commandment*. According to one of the oldest and most authoritative commentaries on the Holy Qur'an the words: *that none of us shall take others for lords beside God*, mean 'that none of us should obey the other in disobedience to what God has commanded'. This relates to the Second Commandment because justice and freedom of religion are a crucial part of love of the neighbour.

Thus in obedience to the Holy Qur'an, we as Muslims invite Christians to come together with us on the basis of what is common to us, which is also what is most essential to our faith and practice: the *Two Commandments* of love.



*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful
And may peace and blessings be upon the Prophet Muhammad*

A COMMON WORD BETWEEN US AND YOU

*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful,
Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair
exhortation, and contend with them in the fairest way. Lo!
thy Lord is Best Aware of him who strayeth from His way,
and He is Best Aware of those who go aright.
(The Holy Qur'an, Al-Nahl, 16:125)*

(I) LOVE OF GOD

LOVE OF GOD IN ISLAM

The Testimonies of Faith

The central creed of Islam consists of the two testimonies of faith or *Shahadahs*¹, which state that: *There is no god but God, Muhammad is the messenger of God.* These Two Testimonies are the *sine qua non* of Islam. He or she who testifies to them is a Muslim; he or she who denies them is not a Muslim. Moreover, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: The best remembrance is: *'There is no god but God' ...*²

The Best that All the Prophets have Said

Expanding on the best remembrance, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ also said:

*The best that I have said—myself, and the prophets that
came before me—is: 'There is no god but God, He Alone,*

*He hath no associate, His is the sovereignty and His is the praise and He hath power over all things*³.

The phrases which follow the First Testimony of faith are all from the Holy Qur'an; each describes a mode of love of God, and devotion to Him.

The words: *He Alone*, remind Muslims that their hearts⁴ must be devoted to God Alone, since God says in the Holy Qur'an: *God hath not assigned unto any man two hearts within his body* (*Al-Ahzab*, 33:4). God is Absolute and therefore devotion to Him must be totally sincere.

The words: *He hath no associate*, remind Muslims that they must love God uniquely, without rivals within their souls, since God says in the Holy Qur'an:

Yet there are men who take rivals unto God: they love them as they should love God. But those of faith are more intense in their love for God ... (*Al-Baqarah*, 2:165)

Indeed, *[T]heir flesh and their hearts soften unto the remembrance of God ...* (*Al-Zumar*, 39:23)

The words: *His is the sovereignty*, remind Muslims that their minds or their understandings must be totally devoted to God, for *the sovereignty* is precisely everything in creation or existence and everything that the mind can know. And all is in God's Hand, since God says in the Holy Qur'an: *Blessed is He in Whose Hand is the sovereignty, and, He is Able to do all things* (*Al-Mulk*, 67:1).

The words: *His is the praise* remind Muslims that they must be grateful to God and trust Him with all their sentiments and emotions. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

And if thou wert to ask them: Who created the heavens and the earth, and constrained the sun and the moon (to their appointed work)? they would say: God. How then are they turned away? / God maketh the

provision wide for whom He will of His servants, and straiteneth it for whom (He will). Lo! God is Aware of all things. / And if thou wert to ask them: Who causeth water to come down from the sky, and therewith reviveth the earth after its death ? they verily would say: God. Say: Praise be to God! But most of them have no sense. (Al-'Ankabut, 29:61-63)⁵

For all these bounties and more, human beings must always be truly grateful:

God is He Who created the heavens and the earth, and causeth water to descend from the sky, thereby producing fruits as food for you, and maketh the ships to be of service unto you, that they may run upon the sea at His command, and hath made of service unto you the rivers; / And maketh the sun and the moon, constant in their courses, to be of service unto you, and hath made of service unto you the night and the day. / And He giveth you of all ye ask of Him, and if ye would count the graces of God ye cannot reckon them. Lo! man is verily a wrong-doer, an ingrate. (Ibrahim, 14:32-34)⁶

Indeed, the *Fatihah*—which is the greatest chapter in the Holy Qur'an⁷—starts with praise to God:

In the Name of God, the Infinitely Good, the All-Merciful. / Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds. / The Infinitely Good, the All-Merciful. / Owner of the Day of Judgement. / Thee we worship, and Thee we ask for help. / Guide us upon the straight path. / The path of those on whom is Thy Grace, not those who deserve anger nor those who are astray. (Al-Fatihah, 1:1-7)

The *Fatihah*, recited at least seventeen times daily by Muslims in

the canonical prayers, reminds us of the praise and gratitude due to God for His Attributes of Infinite Goodness and All-Mercifulness, not merely for His Goodness and Mercy to us in this life but ultimately, on the Day of Judgement⁸ when it matters the most and when we hope to be forgiven for our sins. It thus ends with prayers for grace and guidance, so that we might attain—through what begins with praise and gratitude—salvation and love, for God says in the Holy Qur'an: *Lo! those who believe and do good works, the Infinitely Good will appoint for them love. (Maryam, 19:96).*

The words: *and He hath power over all things*, remind Muslims that they must be mindful of God's Omnipotence and thus fear God⁹. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

... *And fear God, and know that God is with the God-fearing. / Spend your wealth for the cause of God, and be not cast by your own hands to ruin; and do good. Lo! God loveth the virtuous. (Al-Baqarah, 2:194-5)*

... *And fear God, and know that God is severe in punishment. (Al-Baqarah, 2:196)*

Through fear of God, the actions, might and strength of Muslims should be totally devoted to God. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

... *And know that God is with those who fear Him. (Al-Tawbah, 9:36) ...*

O ye who believe! What aileth you that when it is said unto you: Go forth in the way of God, ye are bowed down to the ground with heaviness. Take ye pleasure in the life of the world rather than in the Hereafter? The comfort of the life of the world is but little in the Hereafter. / If ye go not forth He will afflict you with a painful doom, and will choose instead of you a folk other than you. Ye cannot harm Him at all.

God is Able to do all things. (Al-Tawbah, 9:38-39)



The words: *His is the sovereignty and His is the praise and He hath power over all things*, when taken all together, remind Muslims that just as everything in creation glorifies God, everything that is in their souls must be devoted to God:

All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth glorifieth God; His is the sovereignty and His is the praise and He hath power over all things. (Al-Taghabun, 64:1)

For indeed, all that is in people's souls is known, and accountable, to God:

He knoweth all that is in the heavens and the earth, and He knoweth what ye conceal and what ye publish. And God is Aware of what is in the breasts (of men). (Al-Taghabun, 64:4)

As we can see from all the passages quoted above, souls are depicted in the Holy Qur'an as having three main faculties: the mind or the intelligence, which is made for comprehending the truth; the will which is made for freedom of choice, and sentiment which is made for loving the good and the beautiful¹⁰. Put in another way, we could say that man's soul knows through *understanding* the truth, through *willing* the good, and through virtuous emotions and *feeling* love for God. Continuing in the same chapter of the Holy Qur'an (as that quoted above), God orders people to fear Him as much as possible, and to listen (and thus to understand the truth); to obey (and thus to will the good), and to spend (and thus to exercise love and virtue), which, He says, is better for our souls.

By engaging everything in our souls—the faculties of knowledge, will, and love—we may come to be purified and attain ultimate success:

So fear God as best ye can, and listen, and obey, and spend; that is better for your souls. And those who are saved from the pettiness of their own souls, such are the successful. (Al-Taghabun, 64:16)



In summary then, when the entire phrase *He Alone, He hath no associate, His is the sovereignty and His is the praise and He hath power over all things* is added to the testimony of faith—*There is no god but God*—it reminds Muslims that their hearts, their individual souls and all the faculties and powers of their souls (or simply their *entire* hearts and souls) must be totally devoted and attached to God. Thus God says to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in the Holy Qur’an:

Say: Lo! my worship and my sacrifice and my living and my dying are for God, Lord of the Worlds. / He hath no partner. This am I commanded, and I am first of those who surrender (unto Him). / Say: Shall I seek another than God for Lord, when He is Lord of all things? Each soul earneth only on its own account, nor doth any laden bear another’s load ... (Al-An’am, 6:162–164)

These verses epitomize the Prophet Muhammad’s ﷺ complete and utter devotion to God. Thus in the Holy Qur’an God enjoins Muslims who truly love God to follow this example¹¹, in order in turn to be loved¹² by God:

Say, (O Muhammad, to mankind): If ye love God, follow me; God will love you and forgive you your sins.

God is Forgiving, Merciful. (Aal 'Imran, 3:31)

Love of God in Islam is thus part of complete and total devotion to God; it is not a mere fleeting, partial emotion. As seen above, God commands in the Holy Qur'an: *Say: Lo! my worship and my sacrifice and my living and my dying are for God, Lord of the Worlds. / He hath no partner.* The call to be totally devoted and attached to God, heart and soul, far from being a call for a mere emotion or for a mood, is in fact an injunction requiring all-embracing, constant and active love of God. It demands a love in which the innermost spiritual heart and the whole of the soul—with its intelligence, will and feeling—participate through devotion.



None Comes with Anything Better

We have seen how the blessed phrase: *There is no god but God, He Alone, He hath no associate, His is the sovereignty and His is the praise and He hath power over all things*—which is the best that all the prophets have said—makes explicit what is implicit in *the best remembrance (There is no god but God)* by showing what it requires and entails, by way of devotion. It remains to be said that this blessed formula is also in itself a sacred invocation—a kind of extension of the First Testimony of faith (*There is no god but God*)—the ritual repetition of which can bring about, through God's grace, some of the devotional attitudes it demands, namely, loving and being devoted to God with all one's heart, all one's soul, all one's mind, all one's will or strength, and all one's sentiment. Hence the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ commended this remembrance by saying:

He who says: 'There is no god but God, He Alone, He hath no associate, His is the sovereignty and His is the praise and He hath power over all things' one hundred times in a day, it is for them equal to setting ten slaves free, and one

*hundred good deeds are written for them and one hundred bad deeds are effaced, and it is for them a protection from the devil for that day until the evening. And none offers anything better than that, save one who does more than that*¹³.

In other words, the blessed remembrance, *There is no god but God, He Alone, He hath no associate, His is the sovereignty and His is the praise and He hath power over all things*, not only requires and implies that Muslims must be totally devoted to God and love Him with their whole hearts and their whole souls and all that is in them, but provides a way, like its beginning (the testimony of faith)—through its frequent repetition¹⁴—for them to realize this love with everything they are.

God says in one of the very first revelations in the Holy Qur'an: *So invoke the Name of thy Lord and devote thyself to Him with a complete devotion. (Al-Muzzammil, 73:8)*

LOVE OF GOD AS THE FIRST AND GREATEST COMMANDMENT IN THE BIBLE

The *Shema* in the Book of Deuteronomy, 6:4–5, a centrepiece of the Old Testament and of Jewish liturgy, says:

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! / You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength*¹⁵.

Likewise, in the New Testament, when Jesus Christ the Messiah ﷺ is asked about the Greatest Commandment, he answers ﷺ:

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. / Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, / "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" /

Jesus said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ / This is the first and greatest commandment. / And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ / On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew, 22:34-40)

And also:

Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, “Which is the first commandment of all?” / Jesus answered him, “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. / And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. / And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark, 12:28-31)

The commandment to love God fully is thus the First and Greatest Commandment of the Bible. Indeed, it is to be found in a number of other places throughout the Bible including: Deuteronomy, 4:29, 10:12, 11:13 (also part of the *Shema*), 13:3, 26:16, 30:2, 30:6, 30:10; Joshua, 22:5; Mark, 12:32-33 and Luke, 10:27-28.

However, in various places throughout the Bible, it occurs in slightly different forms and versions. For instance, in Matthew 22:37 (*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind*), the Greek word for “heart” is *kardia*, the word for “soul” is *psyche*, and the word for “mind” is *dianoia*. In the version from Mark, 12:30 (*And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength*) the word “strength” is added to the aforementioned three, translating the Greek word *ischus*.

The words of the lawyer in Luke, 10:27 (which are confirmed by Jesus Christ ﷺ in Luke, 10:28) contain the same four terms as Mark, 12:30. The words of the scribe in Mark, 12:32 (which are approved of by Jesus Christ ﷺ in Mark, 12:34) contain the three terms *kardia* (“heart”), *dianoia* (“mind”), and *ischus* (“strength”).

In the *Shema* of Deuteronomy, 6:4–5

(Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! / You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength).

In Hebrew the word for “heart” is *lev*, the word for “soul” is *nefesh*, and the word for “strength” is *me’od*.

In Joshua, 22:5 the Israelites are commanded by Joshua to love God and be devoted to Him as follows:

But take careful heed to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to keep His commandments, to hold fast to Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul. (Joshua, 22:5)

What all these versions thus have in common—despite the language differences between the Hebrew Old Testament, the original words of Jesus Christ ﷺ in Aramaic, and the actual transmitted Greek of the New Testament—is the command to love God fully with one’s heart and soul and to be fully devoted to Him. This is the First and Greatest Commandment for human beings.

In the light of what we have seen to be necessarily implied and evoked by the Prophet Muhammad’s ﷺ blessed saying:

The best that I have said—myself, and the prophets that came before me—is: ‘There is no god but God, He Alone, He hath no associate, His is the sovereignty and His is the praise and He hath power over all things’,¹⁶

we can now perhaps understand the words ‘*The best that I have said—myself, and the prophets that came before me*’ as equating the blessed formula ‘*There is no god but God, He Alone, He hath no associate, His is the sovereignty and His is the praise and He hath power over all things*’ precisely with the ‘First and Greatest Commandment’ to love God, with all one’s heart and soul, as found in various places in the Bible. That is to say, in other words, that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was perhaps, through inspiration, restating and alluding to the Bible’s First Commandment. God knows best, but certainly we have seen their effective similarity in meaning. Moreover, we also do know (as can be seen in the endnotes), that both formulas have another remarkable parallel: the way they arise in a number of slightly differing versions and forms in different contexts, all of which, nevertheless, emphasize the primacy of total love and devotion to God¹⁷.



(II) LOVE OF THE NEIGHBOUR

LOVE OF THE NEIGHBOUR IN ISLAM

There are numerous injunctions in Islam about the necessity and paramount importance of love for—and mercy towards—the neighbour. Love of the neighbour is an essential and integral part of faith in God and love of God because in Islam without love of the neighbour there is no true faith in God and no righteousness. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: *None of you has faith until you love for your brother what you love for yourself.*¹⁸ And: *None of you has faith until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself.*¹⁹

However, empathy and sympathy for the neighbour—and even formal prayers— are not enough. They must be accompanied by generosity and self-sacrifice. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces²⁰ to the East and the West; but righteous is he who believeth in God and the Last Day and the angels and the Scripture and the prophets; and giveth wealth, for love of Him, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and to set slaves free; and observeth proper worship and payeth the poor-due. And those who keep their treaty when they make one, and the patient in tribulation and adversity and time of stress. Such are they who are sincere. Such are the pious. (Al-Baqarah, 2:177)

And also:

Ye will not attain unto righteousness until ye expend of that which ye love. And whatsoever ye expend, God is Aware thereof. (Aal 'Imran, 3:92)

Without giving the neighbour what we ourselves love, we do not

truly love God or the neighbour.

LOVE OF THE NEIGHBOUR IN THE BIBLE

We have already cited the words of the Messiah, Jesus Christ ﷺ, about the paramount importance, second only to the love of God, of the love of the neighbour:

This is the first and greatest commandment. / And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' / On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew, 22:38-40)

And:

And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these. (Mark, 12:31)

It remains only to be noted that this commandment is also to be found in the Old Testament:

You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbour, and not bear sin because of him. / You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD. (Leviticus, 19:17-18)

Thus the Second Commandment, like the First Commandment, demands generosity and self-sacrifice, and *On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.*



(III) COME TO A COMMON WORD
BETWEEN US AND YOU

A COMMON WORD

WHILST ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY are obviously different religions—and whilst there is no minimising some of their formal differences—it is clear that the *Two Greatest Commandments* are an area of common ground and a link between the Qur'an, the Torah and the New Testament. What prefaces the Two Commandments in the Torah and the New Testament, and what they arise out of, is the Unity of God—that there is only one God. For the *Shema* in the Torah, starts: (Deuteronomy, 6:4) *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!* Likewise, Jesus ﷺ said: (Mark, 12:29) *The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one'.* Likewise, God says in the Holy Qur'an: *Say: He, God, is One. / God, the Self-Sufficient Besought of all.* (Al-Ikhlās, 112:1–2). Thus the Unity of God, love of Him, and love of the neighbour form a common ground upon which Islam and Christianity (and Judaism) are founded.

This could not be otherwise since Jesus ﷺ said: (Matthew, 22:40) *On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.* Moreover, God confirms in the Holy Qur'an that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ brought nothing fundamentally or essentially new: *Naught is said to thee (Muhammad) but what already was said to the messengers before thee* (Fussilat, 41:43). And:

Say (Muhammad): I am no new thing among the messengers (of God), nor know I what will be done with me or with you. I do but follow that which is Revealed to me, and I am but a plain warner (Al-Ahqaf, 46:9).

Thus also God in the Holy Qur'an confirms that the same eternal truths of the Unity of God, of the necessity for total love and

devotion to God (and thus shunning false gods), and of the necessity for love of fellow human beings (and thus justice), underlie all true religion:

And verily We have raised in every nation a messenger, (proclaiming): Worship God and shun false gods. Then some of them (there were) whom God guided, and some of them (there were) upon whom error had just hold. Do but travel in the land and see the nature of the consequence for the deniers! (Al-Nahl, 16:36).

We verily sent Our messengers with clear proofs, and revealed with them the Scripture and the Balance, that mankind may stand forth in justice... (Al-Hadid, 57:25)

COME TO A COMMON WORD!

In the Holy Qur'an, God Most High tells Muslims to issue the following call to Christians and Jews—the *People of the Scripture*:

Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to A Common Word between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him). (Aal 'Imran, 3:64).

Clearly, the blessed words: *we shall ascribe no partner unto Him* relate to the Unity of God. Clearly also, worshipping *none but God*, relates to being totally devoted to God and hence to the *First and Greatest Commandment*. According to one of the oldest and most authoritative commentaries (*tafsir*) on the Holy Qur'an—the *Jami' Al-Bayan fi Ta'wil Al-Qur'an* of Abu Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir

Al-Tabari (d. 310 A.H. / 923 C.E.)—*that none of us shall take others for lords beside God*, means ‘that none of us should obey in disobedience to what God has commanded, nor glorify them by prostrating to them in the same way as they prostrate to God’. In other words, that Muslims, Christians and Jews should be free to each follow what God commanded them, and not have ‘to prostrate before kings and the like²¹’; for God says elsewhere in the Holy Qur’an: *Let there be no compulsion in religion.... (Al-Baqarah, 2:256)*. This clearly relates to the Second Commandment and to love of the neighbour of which justice²² and freedom of religion are a crucial part. God says in the Holy Qur’an:

God forbiddeth you not those who warred not against you on account of religion and drove you not out from your homes, that ye should show them kindness and deal justly with them. Lo! God loveth the just dealers. (Al-Mumtabinah, 60:8)



We thus as Muslims invite Christians to remember Jesus’ ﷺ words in the Gospel (Mark, 12:29–31):

... the LORD our God, the LORD is one. / And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. / And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.

As Muslims, we say to Christians that we are not against them and that Islam is not against them—so long as they do not wage war against Muslims on account of their religion, oppress them and drive them out of their homes, (in accordance with the verse of

the Holy Qur'an (*Al-Mumtahinah*, 60:8) quoted above). Moreover, God says in the Holy Qur'an:

They are not all alike. Of the People of the Scripture there is a staunch community who recite the revelations of God in the night season, falling prostrate (before Him). / They believe in God and the Last Day, and enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency, and vie one with another in good works. These are of the righteous. / And whatever good they do, nothing will be rejected of them. God is Aware of those who ward off (evil). (Aal-'Imran, 3:113-115)

Is Christianity necessarily against Muslims? In the Gospel Jesus Christ ﷺ says:

He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters abroad. (Matthew, 12:30)

For he who is not against us is on our side. (Mark, 9:40)

... for he who is not against us is on our side. (Luke, 9:50)

According to the *Blessed Theophylact's*²³ *Explanation of the New Testament*, these statements are not contradictions because the first statement (in the actual Greek text of the New Testament) refers to demons, whereas the second and third statements refer to people who recognised Jesus, but were not Christians. Muslims recognize Jesus Christ as the Messiah, not in the same way Christians do (but Christians themselves anyway have never all agreed with each other on Jesus Christ's ﷺ nature), but in the following way: ... *the Messiah Jesus son of Mary is a Messenger of God and His Word which he cast unto Mary and a Spirit from Him ... (Al-Nisa', 4:171)*. We therefore invite Christians to consider Muslims *not against*, and thus *with them*, in accordance with Jesus Christ's ﷺ words here.

Finally, as Muslims, and in obedience to the Holy Qur'an, we

ask Christians to come together with us on the common essentials of our two religions

That we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ... ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God ... (Aal 'Imran, 3:64)

Let this common ground be the basis of all future interfaith dialogue between us, for our common ground is that on which hangs *all the Law and the Prophets* (Matthew, 22:40). God says in the Holy Qur'an:

Say (O Muslims): We believe in God and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered. / And if they believe in the like of that which ye believe, then are they rightly guided. But if they turn away, then are they in schism, and God will suffice thee against them. He is the Hearer, the Knower. (Al-Baqarah, 2:136-137)

BETWEEN US AND YOU

Finding common ground between Muslims and Christians is not simply a matter for polite ecumenical dialogue between selected religious leaders. Christianity and Islam are, respectively, the largest and second largest religions in the world and in history. Christians and Muslims reportedly make up over a third and over a fifth of humanity respectively. Together they make up more than 55% of the world's population, making the relationship between these two religious communities the most important factor in contributing

to meaningful peace around the world. If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace. With the terrible weaponry of the modern world; with Muslims and Christians intertwined everywhere as never before, no side can unilaterally win a conflict between more than half of the world's inhabitants. Thus our common future is at stake. The very survival of the world itself is perhaps at stake.

And to those who nevertheless relish conflict and destruction for their own sake or reckon that ultimately they stand to gain through them, we say that our very eternal souls are all also at stake if we fail to sincerely make every effort to make peace and come together in harmony. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

*L*o! God enjoineth justice and kindness, and giving to kinsfolk, and forbiddeth lewdness and abomination and wickedness. He exhorteth you in order that ye may take heed (Al-Nahl, 16:90)

Jesus Christ ﷺ said: *Blessed are the peacemakers ...* (Matthew, 5:9), and also: *For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?* (Matthew, 16:26).

So let our differences not cause hatred and strife between us. Let us vie with each other only in righteousness and good works. Let us respect each other, be fair, just and kind to one another and live in sincere peace, harmony and mutual goodwill. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

*A*nd unto thee have We revealed the Scripture with the truth, confirming whatever Scripture was before it, and a watcher over it. So judge between them by that which God hath revealed, and follow not their desires away from the truth which hath come unto thee. For each We have appointed a law and a way. Had God willed He could have made you one community. But that He may try you by that which He hath given you (He hath made you

as ye are). So vie one with another in good works. Unto God ye will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein ye differ. (Al-Ma'idah, 5:48).

Wal-Salaamu 'Alaykum, Pax Vobiscum.

NOTES

1 In Arabic: *La illaha illa Allah, Muhammad Rasul Allah*. The two *Shahadahs* actually both occur (albeit separately) as phrases in the Holy Qur'an (in Muhammad, 47:19, and Al-Fath, 48:29, respectively).

2 *Sunan Al-Tirmidhi, Kitab Al-Da'awat*, 462/5, no. 3383; *Sunan Ibn Majah*, 1249/2.

3 *Sunan Al-Tirmidhi, Kitab Al-Da'awat, Bab al-Du'a fi Yawm 'Arafah*, Hadith no. 3934.

It is important to note that the additional phrases, *He Alone*, *He hath no associate*, *His is the sovereignty* and *His is the praise and He hath power over all things*, all come from the Holy Qur'an, in exactly those forms, albeit in different passages. *He Alone*—referring to God—is found at least six times in the Holy Qur'an (7:70; 14:40; 39:45; 40:12; 40:84 and 60:4). *He hath no associate*, is found in exactly that form at least once (Al-An'am, 6:173). *His is the sovereignty and His is the praise and He hath power over all things*, is found in exactly this form once in the Holy Qur'an (*Al-Taghabun*, 64:1), and parts of it are found a number of other times (for instance, the words, *He hath power over all things*, are found at least five times: 5:120; 11:4; 30:50; 42:9 and 57:2).

4 **The Heart:** In Islam the (spiritual, not physical) heart is the organ of perception of spiritual and metaphysical knowledge. Of one of the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ greatest visions God says in the Holy Qur'an: *The inner heart lied not (in seeing) what it saw. (Al-Najm, 53:11)* Indeed, elsewhere in the Holy Qur'an, God says: *[F]or indeed it is not the eyes that grow blind, but it is the hearts, which are within the bosoms, that grow blind. (Al-Hajj, 22:46; see whole verse and also: 2:9–10; 2:74; 8:24; 26:88–89; 48:4; 83:14 et al. ... There are in fact over a hundred mentions of the heart and its synonyms in the Holy Qur'an.)*

Now there are different understandings amongst Muslims as regards the direct Vision of God (as opposed to spiritual realities as such) be it in this life or the next—God says in the Holy Qur'an (of the Day of Judgement):

That day will faces be resplendent, / Looking toward their Lord; (Al-Qiyamah, 75:22–23)

Yet God also says in the Holy Qur'an:

Such is God, your Lord. There is no God save Him, the Creator of all things, so worship Him. And He taketh care of all things. / Vision comprehendeth Him not, but He comprehendeth (all) vision. He is the Subtile, the Aware. / Proofs have come unto you from your Lord, so whoso seeth, it is for his own good, and whoso is blind is blind to his own hurt. And

I am not a keeper over you. (Al-An'am, 6:102–104).

Howbeit, it is evident that the Muslim conception of the (spiritual) heart is not very different from the Christian conception of the (spiritual) heart, as seen in Jesus's ﷺ words in the New Testament: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* (Matthew, 5:8); and Paul's words: *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I am known.* (1 Corinthians, 13:12)

5 See also: *Lugman*, 31:25.

6 See also: *Al-Nahl*, 16:3–18.

7 *Sahih Bukhari, Kitab Tafsir Al-Qur'an, Bab ma Ja'a fi Fatihat Al-Kitab* (Hadith no. 1); also: *Sahih Bukhari, Kitab Fada'il Al-Qur'an, Bab Fadl Fatihat Al-Kitab* (Hadith no. 9), no. 5006.

8 The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

God has one hundred mercies. He has sent down one of them between genii and human beings and beasts and animals and because of it they feel with each other; and through it they have mercy on each other; and through it, the wild animal feels for its offspring. And God has delayed ninety-nine mercies through which he will have mercy on his servants on the Day of Judgement. (*Sahih Muslim, Kitab Al-Tawbah*; 2109/4; no. 2752; see also *Sahih Bukhari, Kitab Al-Riqaq*, no. 6469).

9 **Fear of God is the Beginning of Wisdom:** The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is reported to have said: *The chief part of wisdom is fear of God—be He exalted (Musnad al-Shahab, 100/1; Al-Dulaymi, Musnad Al-Firdaws, 270/2; Al-Tirmidhi, Nawadir Al-Usul; 84/3; Al-Bayhaqi, Al-Dala'il and Al-Bayhaqi, Al-Shu'ab; Ibn Lal, Al-Makarim; Al-Ash'ari, Al-Amthal, et al.)* This evidently is similar to the Prophet Solomon's ﷺ words in the Bible: *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of Wisdom ...* (Proverbs, 9:10); and: *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.* (Proverbs, 1:7)

10 **The Intelligence, the Will and Sentiment in the Holy Qur'an:** Thus God in the Holy Qur'an tells human beings to believe in Him and call on Him (thereby using the intelligence) with fear (which motivates the will) and with hope (and thus with sentiment):

Only those believe in Our revelations who, when they are reminded of them, fall down prostrate and hymn the praise of their Lord, and they are not scornful, / Who forsake their beds to cry unto their Lord in fear and hope, and spend of that We have bestowed on them. / No soul knoweth what is kept hid for them of joy, as a reward for what they used to do. (*Al-Sajdah, 32:15–17*)

(O mankind!) Call upon your Lord humbly and in secret. Lo! He loveth not aggressors. / Work not confusion in the earth after the fair ordering (thereof), and call on Him in fear and hope. Lo! the mercy of God is near unto the virtuous. (*Al-A'raf, 7:55–56*)

Likewise, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself is described in terms which manifest knowledge (and hence the intelligence), eliciting hope (and hence sentiment) and instilling fear (and hence motivating the will):

O Prophet! Lo! We have sent thee as a witness and a bringer of good tidings and a warner. (*Al-Ahzab, 33:45*)

Lo! We have sent thee (O Muhammad) as a witness and a bearer of good tidings and a warner, (Al-Fath, 48:8)

11 **A Goodly Example:** The love and total devotion of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ to God is for Muslims the model that they seek to imitate. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

Verily in the messenger of God ye have a goodly example for him who hopeth for God and the Last Day, and remembereth God much. (Al-Ahzab, 33:21)

The totality of this love excludes worldliness and egotism, and is itself beautiful and loveable to Muslims. Love of God is itself loveable to Muslims. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

And know that the messenger of God is among you. If he were to obey you in many matters, ye would surely fall into misfortune; but God hath made the faith loveable to you and hath beautified it in your hearts, and hath made disbelief and lewdness and rebellion hateful unto you. Such are they who are the rightly guided. (Al-Hujurat, 49:7).

12 This 'particular love' is in addition to God's universal Mercy *which embraceth all things* (Al-A'raf, 7:156); but God knows best.

13 *Sahih Al-Bukhari, Kitab Bad' al-Khalq, Bab Sifat Iblis wa Junudih; Hadith no. 3329.*

Other Versions of the Blessed Saying: This blessed saying of the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ, is found in dozens of hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ) in differing contexts in slightly varying versions.

The one we have quoted throughout in the text (*There is no god but God, He alone. He hath no associate. His is the sovereignty, and His is the praise, and He hath power over all things*) is in fact the shortest version. It is to be found in *Sahih al-Bukhari: Kitab al-Adhan* (no. 852); *Kitab al-Tahajjud* (no. 1163); *Kitab al-'Umrah* (no. 1825); *Kitab Bad' al-Khalq* (no. 3329); *Kitab al-Da'awat* (nos. 6404, 6458, 6477); *Kitab al-Riqaaq* (no. 6551); *Kitab al-I'tisam bi'l-Kitab* (no. 7378); in *Sahih Muslim: Kitab al-Masajid* (nos. 1366, 1368, 1370, 1371, 1380); *Kitab al-Hajj* (nos. 3009, 3343); *Kitab al-Dhikr wa'l-Du'a'* (nos. 7018, 7020, 7082, 7084); in *Sunan Abu Dawud: Kitab al-Witr* (nos. 1506, 1507, 1508); *Kitab al-Jihad* (no. 2772); *Kitab al-Kharaj* (no. 2989); *Kitab al-Adab* (nos. 5062, 5073, 5079); in *Sunan al-Tirmidhi: Kitab al-Hajj* (no. 965); *Kitab al-Da'awat* (nos. 3718, 3743, 3984); in *Sunan al-Nasa'i: Kitab al-Sahw* (nos. 1347, 1348, 1349, 1350, 1351); *Kitab Manasik al-Hajj* (nos. 2985, 2997); *Kitab al-Iman wa'l-Nudhur* (no. 3793); in *Sunan Ibn Majah: Kitab al-Adab* (no. 3930); *Kitab al-Du'a'* (nos. 4000, 4011); and in *Muwatta' Malik: Kitab al-Qur'an* (nos. 492, 494); *Kitab al-Hajj* (no. 831).

A longer version including the words *yuhyi wa yumit*—(There is no god but God, He alone. He hath no associate. His is the sovereignty, and His is the praise. He giveth life, and He giveth death, and He hath power over all things.)—is to be found in *Sunan Abu Dawud: Kitab al-Manasik* (no. 1907); in *Sunan al-Tirmidhi: Kitab al-Salah* (no. 300); *Kitab al-Da'awat* (nos. 3804, 3811, 3877, 3901); and in *Sunan al-Nasa'i: Kitab Manasik al-Hajj* (nos. 2974, 2987, 2998); *Sunan Ibn Majah: Kitab al-Manasik* (no. 3190).

Another longer version including the words *bi yadhi al-khayr*—(There is no god but God, He alone. He hath no associate. His is the sovereignty, and His is the praise. In His Hand is the good, and He hath power over all things.)—is to be found in *Sunan Ibn Majah: Kitab al-Adab* (no. 3931); *Kitab al-Du'a'* (no. 3994).

The longest version, which includes the words *yuhyi wa yumit wa Huwa Hayyun la yamut bi yadhi al-khayr*—(There is no god but God, He alone. He hath no associate. His is the sovereignty, and His is the praise. He giveth life, and He giveth death. He is the Living, who dieth not. In His Hand is the good, and He hath power over all

things.)—is to be found in *Sunan al-Tirmidhi: Kitab al-Da'awat* (no. 3756) and in *Sunan Ibn Majah: Kitab al-Tijarat* (no. 2320), with the difference that this latter hadith reads: *bi yadihi al-khayr kuluhu* (in His Hand is all good).

It is important to note, however, that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, only described the first (shortest) version as: *the best that I have said—myself, and the prophets that came before me*, and only of that version did the Prophet ﷺ say: *And none comes with anything better than that, save one who does more than that.*

(These citations refer to the numbering system of *The Sunna Project's Encyclopaedia of Hadith (Jam' Jawami' al-Ahadith wa'l-Asanid)*, prepared in cooperation with the scholars of al-Azhar, which includes *Sahih al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Sunan Abu Dawud, Sunan al-Tirmidhi, Sunan al-Nasa'i, Sunan Ibn Majah, and Muwatta' Malik.*).

14 Frequent Remembrance of God in the Holy Qur'an: The Holy Qur'an is full of injunctions to invoke or remember God frequently:

Remember the name of thy Lord at morn and evening. (Al-Insan, 76:25)

So remember God, standing, sitting and [lying] down on your sides. (Al-Nisa, 4:103)

And do thou (O Muhammad) remember thy Lord within thyself humbly and with awe, below thy breath, at morn and evening. And be not thou of the neglectful. (Al-'Araf, 7:205)

... Remember thy Lord much, and praise (Him) in the early hours of night and morning. (Aal 'Imran, 3:41)

O ye who believe! Remember God with much remembrance. / And glorify Him early and late. (Al-Ahzab, 33:41-42)

(See also: 2:198-200; 2:203; 2:238-239; 3:190-191; 6:91; 7:55; 7:180; 8:45; 17:110; 22:27-41; 24:35-38; 26:227; 62:9-10; 87:1-17, et al.)

Similarly, the Holy Qur'an is full of verses that emphasize the paramount importance of the Remembrance of God (see: 2:151-7; 5:4; 6:118; 7:201; 8:2-4; 13:26-28; 14:24-27; 20:14; 20:33-34; 24:1; 29:45; 33:35; 35:10; 39:9; 50:37; 51:55-58; and 33:2; 39:22-23 and 73:8-9 as already quoted, et al.), and the dire consequences of not practising it (see: 2:114; 4:142; 7:179-180; 18:28; 18:100-101; 20:99-101; 20:124-127; 25:18; 25:29; 43:36; 53:29; 58:19; 63:9; 72:17 et al.; see also 107:4-6). Hence God ultimately says in the Holy Qur'an:

Has not the time arrived for the believers that their hearts in all humility should engage in the remembrance of God ? (Al-Hadid, 57:16);

... [S]lacken not in remembrance of Me. (Taha, 20:42),

and

Remember your Lord whenever you forget. (Al-Kahf, 18:24)

15 Herein all Biblical Scripture is taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

16 *Sunan Al-Tirmithi, Kitab Al-Da'wat, Bab al-Du'a fi Yawm 'Arafah, Hadith no. 3934.* Op. cit..

17 In the Best Stature: Christianity and Islam have comparable conceptions of man being created in the best stature and from God's own breath. The Book of Genesis says:

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (Genesis, 1:27);

And:

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. (Genesis, 2:7)

And the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: *Verily God created Adam in His own image (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Kitab Al-Isti'than, 1; Sahih Muslim, Kitab Al-Birr 115; Musnad Ibn Hanbal, 2: 244, 251, 315, 323 etc. et al.).*

And We created you, then fashioned you, then told the angels: Fall ye prostrate before Adam! And they fell prostrate, all save Iblis, who was not of those who make prostration. (Al-A'raf, 7:11)

By the fig and the olive / By Mount Sinai, / And by this land made safe / Surely We created man of the best stature / Then We reduced him to the lowest of the low, / Save those who believe and do good works, and theirs is a reward unailing. / So who henceforth will give the lie to the about the judgment? / Is not God the wisest of all judges? (Al-Tin, 95:1-8)

God it is Who appointed for you the earth for a dwelling-place and the sky for a canopy, and fashioned you and perfected your shapes, and hath provided you with good things. Such is God, your Lord. Then blessed be God, the Lord of the Worlds! (Al-Ghafir, 40:64)

Nay, but those who do wrong follow their own lusts without knowledge. Who is able to guide him whom God hath sent astray? For such there are no helpers. / So set thy purpose (O Muhammad) for religion as a man by nature upright – the nature (framed) of God, in which He hath created man. There is no altering (the laws of) God's creation. That is the right religion, but most men know not—/ (Al-Rum, 30:29-30)

And when I have fashioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit, then fall down before him prostrate, (Sad, 38:72)

And when thy Lord said unto the angels: Lo! I am about to place a viceroy in the earth, they said: Wilt thou place therein one who will do harm therein and will shed blood, while we, we hymn Thy praise and sanctify Thee? He said: Surely I know that which ye know not. / And He taught Adam all the names, then showed them to the angels, saying: Inform Me of the names of these, if ye are truthful. / They said: Be glorified! We have no knowledge saving that which Thou hast taught us. Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Knower, the Wise. / He said: O Adam! Inform them of their names, and when he had informed them of their names, He said: Did I not tell you that I know the secret of the heavens and the earth? And I know that which ye disclose and which ye hide. / And when We said unto the angels: Prostrate yourselves before Adam, they fell prostrate, all save Iblis. He demurred through pride, and so became a disbeliever... / And We said: O Adam! Dwell thou and thy wife in the Garden, and eat ye freely (of the fruits) thereof where ye will; but come not nigh this tree lest ye become wrong-doers. (Al-Baqarah, 2:30-35)

18 *Sahih Al-Bukhari, Kitab al-Iman, Hadith no. 13.*

19 *Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Iman, 67-1, Hadith no. 45.*

20 The classical commentators on the Holy Qur'an (see: *Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Al-Jalalayn*) generally agree that this is a reference to (the last movements of) the Muslim prayer.

21 *Abu Ja'far Muhammad Bin Jarir Al-Tabari, Jami' al-Bayan fi Ta'wil al-Qur'an, (Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st ed, 1992/1412.) tafsir of Aal-'Imran, 3:64; Volume 3, pp. 299-302.*

22 According to grammarians cited by Tabari (op cit.) the word 'common' (*sawa'*) in '*A Common Word* between us' also means 'just', 'fair' (*adl*).

23 The Blessed Theophylact (1055-1108 C.E.) was the Orthodox Archbishop of Ochrid and Bulgaria (1090-1108 C.E.). His native language was the Greek of the New Testament. His *Commentary* is currently available in English from Chrysostom Press.

CHAPTER 5

LIST OF SIGNATORIES TO 'A COMMON WORD'

THE FOLLOWING IS A list of the original 138 signatories to the *A Common Word* (ACW) Open Letter. It is followed by a list of those who have endorsed ACW after its publication.

LIST OF SIGNATORIES

(in alphabetical order)

1. **His Royal Eminence Sultan Muhammadu Sa'ad Ababakar**
The 20th Sultan of Sokoto; Leader of the Muslims of Nigeria
2. **H.E. Shaykh Dr Hussein Hasan Abakar**
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3. **H.E. Prof. Dr Abdul-Salam Al-Abbadi**
President of Aal al-Bayt University; Former Minister of Religious Affairs, Jordan
4. **Prof. Dr Taha Abd Al-Rahman**
President of the Wisdom Circle for Thinkers and Researchers, Morocco; Director of Al-Umma Al-Wasat Magazine, International Union of Muslim Scholars
5. **Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf**
Co-founder and Chairman of the Board of the Cordoba Initiative; Founder of the ASMA Society (American Society for Muslim Advancement); Imam of Masjid Al-Farah, NY, NY, USA
6. **Sheikh Muhammad Nur Abdullah**
Vice President of the Fiqh Council of North America, USA
7. **Dr Shaykh Abd Al-Quddus Abu Salah**
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8. **H.E. Prof. Dr Abd Al-Wahhab bin Ibrahim Abu Solaiman**
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Former Rector of Wajda University; Morocco; Fellow of the Royal Moroccan Academy
114. **Prof. Dr Muzammil H. Siddiqui / on behalf of the whole Fiqh Council of North America**
Islamic Scholar and Theologian; Chairman of the Fiqh Council of North America, USA
115. **Shaykh Ahmad bin Sa'ud Al-Siyabi**
Secretary General of the Directorate of the Grand Mufti, Oman
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123. **Prof. Dr Ammar Al-Talibi**
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124. **Ayatollah Shaykh Muhammad Ali Taskhiri**
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125. **H.E. Prof. Dr Shaykh Ahmad Muhammad Al-Tayeb**
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126. **Prof. Dr Muddathir Abdel-Rahim Al-Tayib**
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128. **H.E. Shaykh Naim Trnava**
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189. **Shaykh Hasan Makjic**
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CHAPTER 6

LIST OF RESPONSES TO 'A COMMON WORD'

(see Appendix I for the actual text of selected responses)

WITHIN THE FIRST YEAR of its release, around 70 leading Christian figures responded to *A Common Word* (ACW) in one form or another, including H.H. Pope Benedict XVI; H.B. the late Russian Orthodox Patriarch Alexi II of Russia; the Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams; Presiding Bishop of the Lutheran World Federation, Bishop Mark Hanson; the President and General Secretary of the World Alliance of Reform Churches; the President of the World Baptist Alliance; Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia; the President of the World Council of Churches; the Council of Bishops of Methodist Churches; the Head of the World Evangelical Alliance; the Mennonite Church; Quaker leaders and a number of other Orthodox and Eastern Orthodox Patriarchs, Catholic Cardinals, Archbishops, Heads of National Churches, Heads of Theological Seminaries, well-known preachers, professors and leading Christian scholars of Islam. These responses were generally positive and friendly. For example, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, wrote the following in his response to ACW:

We find in it a hospitable and friendly spirit, expressed in its focus on love of God and love of neighbour – a focus which draws together the languages of Christianity and Islam, and of Judaism also Our belief is that only through a commitment to that transcendent perspective to which your letter points, and to which we also look, shall we find the resources for radical, transforming, non-violent engagement with the deepest needs of our world and our common humanity.

Perhaps the most remarkable of these responses was an Open Letter published in the New York Times in November 2007 from over 300 leading US Evangelical and ‘Mainline’ leaders and Christian scholars. It was written and organized by Professor Miroslav Volf and Yale Divinity School, entitled ‘Loving God and Neighbour Together’ (see Appendix I). This open letter led to the first major ACW Conference held at Yale University in July 2008.

In the meantime, the leading Muslim Scholars signing the initiative increased to over 300, with over 460 Islamic organizations and associations also endorsing it.

The following is a list of the most senior Christian religious leaders, academics and political leaders who have responded to ACW (The full text of all the responses can be accessed at www.acommonword.com). The following list is in the order the responses were received:

MAJOR RESPONSES TO ACW:

1. **Professor David Ford**, Cambridge University Regius Professor of Divinity, October 10, 2007
2. **Dr Rowan Williams**, Archbishop of Canterbury, October 11, 2007
3. **Bishop Rev. Mark S. Hanson**, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, October 12, 2007
4. **Richard Chartres**, The Bishop of London: October 12, 2007
5. **Yale Divinity School Scholars**, October 12, 2007
6. **Tony Blair’s Response to *A Common Word***, October 12, 2007
7. **Cardinal Tauran**, President of the Pontifical Council of Inter-religious Dialogue, October 12, 2007
8. **The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) response to *A Common Word***, October 13, 2007
9. **Iain Torrance**, President of Princeton Theological Seminary

- and Professor of Patristics, October 15, 2007
10. **Clifton Kirkpatrick**, The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), October 15, 2007
 11. **Rev. Dr Setri Nyomi, Rev. Dr Clifton Kirkpatrick**, President, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, General Secretary, October 15, 2007
 12. **Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia**, World Council of Churches (WCC), October 15, 2007
 13. **The National Council of Churches**, October 15, 2007
 14. **Abbot Mark Serna, O.S.B.**: Monastic Interreligious Dialogue, October 16, 2007
 15. **The Revd. David Coffey**, President of the Baptist World Alliance, October 16, 2007
 16. **Samir Khalil Samir, SJ**, October 17, 2007
 17. **Fr. Tom Michel**, United Catholic Asian News (UCAN), October 20, 2007
 18. **Prof. Kenneth Vaux**, Professor of Theological Ethics, Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary, October 21, 2007
 19. **Prof. John Esposito**, Professor of Religion and International Affairs, Professor of Islamic Studies and Founding Director of the Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University, October 22, 2007
 20. **Prof. Dr Christian Troll, S.J.**, October 22, 2007
 21. **Dr Paul D. Murray**, Director of the Centre for Catholic Studies, October 23, 2007
 22. **Hazel Blears**, UK Secretary of State for Communications, October 23, 2007
 23. **H.E. Cardinal Angelo Scola**, Patriarch of Venice, October 24, 2007
 24. **Staff members of the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI)** of Rome, October 25, 2007

25. **Prof. Karen Armstrong**, October 29, 2007
26. **Archbishop of Sydney**, October 30, 2007
27. **The Christian Century editors**, November 3, 2007
28. **James Schrag**, Executive Director, Mennonite Church USA, November 5, 2007
29. **Gordon Brown**, British Prime Minister's Statement, November 14, 2007
30. **The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)**, Britain Yearly Meeting, November 15, 2007
31. **H.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore**, Notre Dame University: Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, November 15, 2007
32. **300 leading Christian scholars** to *A Common Word* as published in its entirety as a full-page advertisement in the New York Times, November 18, 2007
33. **Leith Anderson**, on why he signed Letter of the 300, November 20, 2007
34. **H.H. Pope Benedict's Message** to H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad regarding *A Common Word*, November 27, 2007
35. **Karen P. Hughes**, Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, December 4, 2007
36. **Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**, December 5, 2007
37. **Metropolitan Mykhayil Javchak** the Archbishop of New York, December 9, 2007
38. **West Yorkshire Church Leaders' Statement of Support for Islamic Scholars' Report**, December 10, 2007
39. **Response to *A Common Word* from Building Bridges**, Cambridge, December 21, 2007
40. **Columbia Theological Seminary**, December 21, 2007
41. **Joint Muslim-Evangelical Christian endorsement of *A Common Word* in Libya**, January 3–6th, 2008

42. **Daniel Madigan SJ**, the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims, January 18, 2008
43. **Arab Orthodox Patriarchs** endorse A Common Word in the Final Communique of the Third International Conference of "Coexistence and Peace Making", January 22–23rd, 2008
44. **Mor Eustathius Matta Roham**, Archbishop of Jezira and the Euphrates, Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch, January 31, 2008
45. **GodVoter.org** Responds to *A Common Word* from Muslims, January 31, 2008
46. **Aram I** Armenian Orthodox Catholicos, February 6, 2008
47. **A Christian Response from an Indian setting** to the Letter of Muslim Leaders to the Pope and other Christian Leaders, February 08, 2008
48. **The Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations**, February 13, 2008
49. **The Annemarie Schimmel Forum**, March 3, 2008
50. **The World Community for Christian Meditation**, March 11, 2008
51. **The World Evangelical Alliance**, April 2, 2008
52. **Archbishop Yeznik Petrosyan**, General Secretary For Inter-Church Relations on behalf of His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, The Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, April 2, 2008
53. **The Danish National Council of Churches**, April 9, 2008
54. **Professor James S. Cutsinger**, Professor of Theology and Religious Thought, Department of Religious Studies, University of South Carolina, April 09, 2008
55. **His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II**, Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, April 14, 2008
56. **The Religious Society of Friends in Denmark**, April 25, 2008
57. **The Maranatha Community**, April 30, 2008

58. **Church in Wales**, July 18, 2008
59. **President and the General Secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches**, August 11, 2008
60. **Episcopal Commission for Interfaith Dialogue**, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, August 28, 2008
61. **National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA**, October 8, 2008
62. **OASIS group**, Italy, November 7, 2008
63. **His Beatitude Chrisostomos**, Archbishop of Cyprus, November 10, 2008
64. **The Methodist Mission and Ecumenical**, New Zealand, November 13, 2008
65. **The Revd. David Coffey, The Revd. Neville Callam, The Revd. Prof. Paul S. Fiddes, and The Revd. Regina Claas**, Baptist World Alliance, December 26, 2008
66. **United Methodist Council of Bishops' Response to *A Common Word Between Us and You***, January 5, 2009
67. **Uniting Church in Australia**, July 20, 2009
68. **The Presbyterian Church in Canada**, August 21, 2009
69. **Konrad Adenauer Stiftung**, October 1-4, 2009
70. **Prof. Richard Heinzmann of the Eugen Biser Foundation**, October 6, 2010

CHAPTER 7

MAJOR 'A COMMON WORD' EVENTS

THE YEARS IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING the release of *A Common Word* (ACW) saw major conferences held in the USA (Yale and Georgetown), UK (Cambridge University and Lambeth Palace) and the Vatican. These conferences were organized mainly by those religious leaders and academics who had worked on issuing the ACW document and by those who had officially responded. This was a natural development of the message. Thereafter, symposiums, lectures, workshops, conferences and other interfaith activities based upon ACW spread all over the world, spontaneously and without any co-ordination. These included the lectures and workshops in Cambridge University in February 2009; in Oman in March 2009; and in the Philippines; Richmond, Virginia; Egypt and Sudan over the course of 2009. Larger symposiums on ACW were held also at the Mediterranean Dialogue of Cultures in November 2008; at the Brookings Institute in Qatar in January 2009; at Fuller Theological Seminary in May 2009; at ISNA in July 2009; and at Yale University again in September 2009. Full-blown conferences were held on ACW in Portland, Oregon in March 2009; in the UAE and South Carolina simultaneously in March 2009; in Pakistan in April 2009, and in Australia in May 2009.

The following is a list and short description of some of the major ACW events. What is striking about the conferences is the breadth of representation from each religion. The Muslim and Christian attendees have not been representatives of just one tradition from within their respective religions, but rather have represented the diverse traditions and interpretations of each religion.

(for more details see <http://www.acommonword.com/events>)

I. THE CATHOLIC-MUSLIM FORUM
November 2008 & November 2011

Sponsored by the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought in Amman, Jordan, and the Pontifical Council for Inter Religious Dialogue.

2008 Seminar

Seminar I was held at the Vatican in November 2008 under the theme: “Love of God, Love of Neighbour: The Dignity of the Human Person and Mutual Respect.”

Attended by 24 scholars and 5 advisors from each side, this historic conference allowed the meeting of leading Muslim authorities with Catholic cardinals, bishops and scholars. H.H. Pope Benedict XVI concluded his address thus:

Dear friends, let us unite our efforts, animated by good will, in order to overcome all misunderstanding and disagreements. Let us resolve to overcome past prejudices and to correct the often distorted images of the other which even today can create difficulties in our relations; let us work with one another to educate all people, especially the young, to build a common future. May God sustain us in our good intentions, and enable our communities to live consistently the truth of love, which constitutes the heart of the religious man, and is the basis of respect for the dignity of each person. May God, the merciful and compassionate One, assist us in this challenging mission, protect us, bless us and enlighten us always with the power of his love.

The full address, as well as the address delivered by Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and the agreed upon Final Declaration can be found in Appendix II.

2011 Seminar

Seminar II was held at the Baptism Site, Jordan, in November 2011 and allowed 24 religious leaders and scholars from each side to discuss the following three themes: 1. Reason, 2. Faith, 3. The Human Person. Some papers from this conference were later published: *Reason and Rationality in the Qur'an* by Dr Ibrahim Kalin, and *The Concept of Faith in Islam* by Habib Ali Al-Jifri – both are available for free download at www.rissc.jo.

The Muslim delegation included H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, Grand Mufti Ali Goma'a, Grand Mufti Mustafa Ceric, Shaykh Abdallah bin Bayyah, Habib Umar bin Hafiz, and Habib Ali Al-Jifri amongst others.

The Christian delegation included His Eminence Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, His Beatitude Fouad Twal, H.E. Archbishop Pier Luigi Celata, H.E. Archbishop Giorgio Lingua, H.E. Paul Desfarges, S.I., H.E. Kevin McDonald, Rev. Father Prof. Christian Troll, S.I., Prof. Vittorio Possenti, Prof. Stefan Hammer, and Prof. Jane Dammen McAuliffe amongst others.

2. YALE UNIVERSITY: "LOVING GOD AND NEIGHBOR
IN WORD AND DEED: IMPLICATIONS FOR
MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS,"
July 2008

The workshop, on July 24–28, 2008, involved approximately 60 Christian and Muslim scholars, along with three Jewish observers. The discussions, undertaken through the presentation of scholarly papers and through panels and informal conversations, focused on five major areas: "Love of God," "Love of Neighbor," "Love and Speech about the Other," "Love and World Poverty," and "God is Loving." The larger conference, July 28–31, began with an address by Senator John Kerry, and involved approximately 70 Muslim participants, 70 Christian participants, and 7 Jewish guests, and

extended the discussions of the scholarly workshop to a larger group of scholars and leaders.

3. CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY: "A COMMON WORD AND FUTURE
MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN ENGAGEMENT"

October, 2008

This conference was hosted on October 15, 2008 by the Archbishop of Canterbury in collaboration with the University of Cambridge Interfaith programme and the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought. It was held at the University of Cambridge with a final session at Lambeth Palace. The Communiqué of the Conference states:

We are conscious that our meeting represented the most significant gathering of international Muslim leaders ever to take place in the United Kingdom, matched by a similarly wide diversity of traditions and geographical backgrounds amongst the Christian participants. We were greatly stimulated by the opening addresses to the conference by the Archbishop and His Excellency Dr Ali Gomaa, the Grand Mufti of Egypt, and the responses to their addresses by His Eminence Dr Mustafa Ceric, the Grand Mufti of Bosnia Herzegovina and His Beatitude Gregorios III, Melkite Greek-Catholic Patriarch of Antioch & All the East, of Alexandria and of Jerusalem.

We live in an increasingly global world that brings with it increased interdependence. The closer we are drawn together by this globalisation and interdependence, the more urgent is the need to understand and respect one another in order to find a way out of our troubles.

4. THE 2009 RUDOLPH C. BARNES SR. SYMPOSIUM “THEORY & APPLICATION OF A COMMON WORD”
March 2009

University of South Carolina and Zayed University of the United Arab Emirates and the USC Department of Religious Studies, together with the USC Islamic World Studies Program, March, 2009

This conference included the following papers:

- Waleed El-Ansary: *The Three Dimensions of Islam and Islamic Environmental Economics.*
- Cinnamon Pinon Carlarne: *Environmentalism as Modern Religion & Climate Change as the Secular Apocalypse: Reassessing the Role of Religion in Environmental Decision-making.*
- Douglas MacLean: *Nature and Christianity.*
- Nicholas Adams: *A Common Word and Human Rights as Minimal Rules.*
- David K. Linnan: *A Common View of Development?*
- Joseph M. Isanga: *The Common Word, Development, and Human Rights: African and Catholic Perspectives.*
- Marsudi Triatmodjo and Abdul Ghofur Anshori: *The Role of Islam in Developing the National Law of the Republic of Indonesia.*
- Father Daniel Madigan: *Mutual Theological Hospitality – Doing theology in the presence of the ‘other’.*
- Caner Dagli: *Spirituality and Other Religions: Meditations Upon Some Deeper Dimensions of A Common Word.*
- John Chryssavgis: *Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Interfaith Dialogue: Mystical Principles, Practical Initiatives.*
- Joseph Lumbard: *What of the Word is Common?*

- James Cutsinger: *Disagreeing to Agree: A Christian Response to A Common Word*.

5. "A COMMON WORD BETWEEN US AND YOU:
A GLOBAL AGENDA FOR CHANGE"
October 2009

Georgetown University and the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, with the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, October, 2009.

A two-day conference in October 2009 focused on the message of The *A Common Word* Initiative with the specific aim of focusing on practical and actionable projects to assure peace and harmony between Muslims and Christians globally.

Participants included Riz Khan, The Right Honourable Tony Blair, His Excellency Kjell Magne Bondevik, Dr John L. Esposito, Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, His Excellency Sheikh Mustafa Efendi Ceric, Sarah Joseph, Dr Ingrid Mattson, The Reverend Joel C. Hunter, Bishop Munib Younan, The Reverend Dr Thomas F. Michel, S.J., Dr John Voll, His Excellency Sheikh Mahmood A. Madani, His Beatitude Patriarch Theofilos III, The Reverend J. Bryan Hehir, His Excellency Sheikh Ali Gomaa, Dr Heba Raouf, The Rt. Rev. & Hon. Richard Chartes, D.D., F.S.A., Abdallah Schleifer, Sheikh Amr Khaled, Ken Hackett, Shamil Idriss, David Robinson, Dr Ibrahim Kalin.

The topics discussed included the following:

1. Muslim-Christian Relations in a 21st Century World
2. Religious Pluralism in the 21st Century
3. Religion, Violence and Peace-Building
4. The Role of International NGOs in a Pluralistic World
5. Wrap-Up Discussion: Where Do We Go from Here?

6. EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY 'EVANGELICALS AND A
COMMON WORD' NEW ORLEANS, LA
18 November, 2009

This conference panel included:

Part 1: "Muslim Perspectives on the Writing of A Common Word" - Caner Dagli and Joseph Lumbard

Part 2: "Christian Defenses of the Yale Response to A Common Word" - C. Donald Smedley and Joseph Cumming

Part 3: "Christian Concerns About the Yale Response to A Common Word" - John Piper and Albert Mohler

Part 4: Panel Discussion

Video and audio links can be found at <http://www.acommon-word.com/video/>

7. THE ROYAL AAL AL-BAYT INSTITUTE FOR ISLAMIC THOUGHT,
JORDAN, 'ISLAM, CHRISTIANITY AND THE ENVIRONMENT'
September 24-25, 2010

The event included dialogue sessions between a Christian delegation from the Eugen-Biser Foundation of Germany, a Muslim delegation from the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, and special guests H.R.H. Princess Areej Ghazi, Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III, H.E. Mr. Hazim Malhas, Minister of the Environment, Reverend Dr Trond Bakkevig and Father Nabil Haddad.

The scholars presented papers on various topics such as basic demands established in the Old and New Testaments to assume responsibility for the world, the protection of animals in Islam, the Islamic view on consumption and material development, and the

Christian concept of creation facing the ecological challenge today.

The Eugen-Biser delegation, comprised of Dr Richard Heinzmann, Dr Dietmar Mieth, Dr Martin Arneht, and Dr Andreas Renz, and The Muslim delegation was comprised of H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal, H.E. Sheikh Dr Mustafa Ceric, Dr Ingrid Mattson, Ambassador Dr Murad Hofmann, Dr Caner Dagli, Dr Joseph Lumbard, and Prof. Minwer Al-Mheid.

8. SCHOOL OF FOREIGN SERVICE — GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY,
“A COMMON WORD: RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGES OF
RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION”

April, 2011

The following discussions took place:

Panel 1: “Madrassa Curriculum Reforms in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Roles of Christian and Muslim NGOs”

Chair: Don Wagner (Bridges of Faith)

Panelists: Qamar-ul Huda (United States Institute of Peace), Bob Roberts (Northwood Church), Alp Aslandogan (Institute of Interfaith Dialog)

Respondent: Louay Safi (Georgetown University)

Panel 2: “Religion & Conflict Resolution in Nigeria”

Chair: Jonathan Brown (Georgetown University)

Panelists: Qamar-ul Huda (United States Institute of Peace), John Gana (Permanent Mission of Nigeria to the United Nations), John Paden (George Mason University), Shobana Shankar (Georgetown University)

Respondent: John O. Voll (Georgetown University).

Panel 3: “How Emerging Muslim American Leaders Understand and are Advancing *A Common Word*”

Chair: Shireen Hunter (Georgetown University)

Panelists: Shamil Idriss (Soliya), Leena El-Ali (Search for Com-

mon Ground), Henry Izumizaki (One Nation Foundation)
Respondent: John Borelli (Georgetown University)

9. YALE UNIVERSITY, USA, "BUILDING HOPE: MUSLIMS,
CHRISTIANS AND JEWS SEEKING THE COMMON GOOD."

June, 2011

The Reconciliation Program hosted a strategic conference of influential, mid-career Muslim, Christian and Jewish religious leaders June 13–23, 2011. Approximately ten leaders from each faith community, men and women with a proven record of leadership and clear future potential were chosen to attend this international gathering focused on seeking the common good. Participants had been carefully chosen by senior leaders in each faith community as representing those mid-career leaders most likely to be exercising the widest influence in their communities in 10–15 years.

The Final Statement of the participants included the following:

1. Our commitment to the building of personal relationships does not mean we dissolve our distinctive, historic beliefs into an imaginary "One World Religion." Rather, it means each community seeks to be authentically faithful to its historic beliefs and finds within those beliefs the resources to reach out to one another in love and to work together around common concerns.

2. We believe that our different religious beliefs do not negate the profound ethical teachings of our Holy Texts about respect and love for each other. We acknowledge, for example, that many sincere, devout believers view 'the other' as being outside of God's salvation in the life to come. Yet our different views of salvation and our serious theological differences do not preclude peaceful coexistence or constructive cooperation in this life.

10. LAUNCH OF THE MALAYSIAN EDITION
OF LEJLA DEMIRI'S BOOK "A COMMON WORD:
TEXT AND REFLECTIONS: A RESOURCE
FOR PARISHES AND MOSQUES"

April 2012

On April 8, 2012, five hundred spectators filled the auditorium of the Pusat Islam Grand Hall, Kuala Lumpur, to witness the launch of the Malaysian edition of Lejla Demiri's book "*A Common Word: Text and Reflections: A Resource for Parishes and Mosques*", which was distributed to key Muslim and Christian organisations throughout Malaysia. The edition was published in Malaysia by As-Sofa University jointly with Fajr Symphony Bhd.

Presiding over the event was H.H. Tunku Ali Rehauddin Ibnu Tuanku Muhriz. Also in attendance were Dato' Syeikh Muhammad Fuad Bin Kamaludin Al-Maliki (Chair of As-Sofa University, Seremban), Habib Ali Zain al-Abidin al-Jifri (Abu Dhabi), Dr Faruq Hamadah (Abu Dhabi), Professor Abdul Razak Als'adi (Jordan), Dr Abdul Mun'im Al-Ghumari (Morocco), and other leading scholars. The event was held jointly with the International Seminar "Insights from the Prophetic Legacy for Higher Education and Research" hosted by As-Sofa University.

11. GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY AND THE PRINCE ALWALEED
BIN TALAL CENTER FOR MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING,
"A COMMON WORD: THE BOUNDARIES OF RELIGIOUS
PLURALISM & FREEDOM: THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAIL"

Wednesday, October 31, 2012

This conference explores the challenge of religious pluralism and intercommunal conflicts in Christian-Muslim relations in post Arab Spring governments in Egypt and Tunisia as well as in Nigeria and Malaysia, and their impact on religious freedom, civil liberties and security, equality of citizenship and gender relations.

CHAPTER 8

PUBLICATIONS AND COURSES

OVER THE COURSE OF five years a number of academic books and journal articles have been written about ACW: H.R.H. Prince Ghazi, Prof. Miroslav Volf and Merissa Yarrington edited a book published by Eerdmans; another book was prepared by Professor Walid Ansary for Palgrave-Macmillan (released in 2010); Georgetown University's Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding published an Occasional Paper on it entitled 'A *Common Word* and the Future of Christian-Muslim Relations'; the journal *Sophia* in Washington DC dedicated an issue to it, as did the Beirut Theological Seminary; and in Jordan the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought issued a 'White Paper' booklet of all its most important texts.

There have also been hundreds of news articles — an updated selection of which can be seen at:

<http://acommonword.com/publications>

BOOKS ABOUT ACW

1. Borelli, J. (ed) (2009), *A Common Word and the Future of Christian-Muslim Relations*. Georgetown University: ACMCU Occasional Papers.
2. Colwell, Peter (2008), *Above Us and Between Us: An Introduction and Resource and Resource on the Letter: A Common Word Between Us and You Signed by 138 Muslim Scholars*. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.
3. Demiri, Lejla (2011), *A Common Word – Text and Reflections: A Resource for Parishes and Mosques*. Muslim Academic Trust.
4. El-Ansary, Waleed; Linnan, David K. (2010), *Muslim and Christian Understanding: Theory and Application of "A Common*

Word". Palgrave Macmillan.

5. Nnabugwu, Joseph (2011), *Analyzing A Common Word Between Us Muslims and You Christians: A Critical Discourse Analysis*. Xlibris Cooperation.
6. Troll, C.W.; Reifeld, H.; Hewer, C.T.R. (editors), (2010), *We have Justice in common: Christian and Muslim voices from Asia and Africa*. Berlin: Konrad-Adenauer-Siftung.
7. Volf, Miroslav; Ghazi bin Muhammad; Yarrington, Melissa (2010), *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor*. Erdmans.

BOOKS WITH CHAPTERS OR EXTENDED DISCUSSIONS ABOUT ACW:

1. Abdullah II bin Al Hussein, King of Jordan (2011), *Our Last Best Chance: The Pursuit of Peace in a Time of Peril*. Viking.
1. Burrell, David (2011), *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology*. Blackwell.
2. Ceric, Mustafa (2008), *Toward a Muslim Social Contract in Europe*. The Association of Muslim Social Scientists.
3. Dumler-Winckler, Emily (2011), "Common Grace: A Distinctive Resource for A Common Word" in Bowlin, John (ed.). *The Kuyper Center Review: Revelation and Common Grace*. (page 256). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.
4. Ford, David. F. (2011), *The Future of Christian Theology*. John Wiley and Sons.
5. Heck, Paul (2009), *Common ground: Islam, Christianity, and religious pluralism*. Georgetown University Press
6. Salinas, Moises F.; Abu Rabia, Hazza (2009), *Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: perspectives on the peace process*. Cambria Press.
7. Volf, Miroslav (2012), *Allah: A Christian Response*. HarperCollins.

8. Zwartz, Barney (2010), "A Common Word: Building Global Goodwill" in Engebretson, Kath. *International Handbook of Inter-religious Education* (page 709). Springer.

SELECTED JOURNAL ARTICLES

1. Allison, Anthony (2011), "A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on loving God and neighbor." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*.
2. Ferguson, Duncan (2011), "Common word, common ground: the love commandments and the understanding of God." *Theology Today*: Princeton Theological Seminary.
3. Fiddes, P. (2012), "The Root of Religious Freedom: Interpreting Some Muslim and Christian Sacred Texts." *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion*, pp.1-16
4. Hoover, Jon (2009), "A Common Word: More Positive and Open, Yet Mainstream and Orthodox." *Theological Review*.
5. "The Common Word - Dossier" (Feb 2009) *Islamica Magazine - Issue 21*, Islamica International Limited.
6. Lumbard, Joseph (2009), *The Uncommonality of A Common Word*: Volume 3 of Crown paper. Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University.
7. McCallum, Richard (2012), "Love: A Common Word between Evangelicals and Muslims?." *Political Theology - Vol 13, No 4*
8. Richter-Bernburg, Lutz (2008), "A Common Word between us and you: observations on the (mis)uses of Koranic exegesis in interreligious dialogue." Paper presented at the 42nd Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA), Washington, D.C., 22-25.
9. "A Common Word" (2009), *Sophia: The Journal of Traditional Studies*. Foundation for Traditional Studies.

UNIVERSITY DISSERTATIONS

ACW has also become the subject of a number of M.A. and M. Phil. dissertations in Western universities in various countries (including at Harvard University; the Theological Seminary at the University of Tübingen, Germany, and the Center for Studies of Islam in the UK), and it was studied also in various international interfaith conferences and gatherings including the World Economic Forum in the Spring of 2008. The dissertations include:

1. Edwin, Joseph Victor, (2011), MA: *A Common Word Between Us and You: A New Departure in Muslim Attitudes Towards Christianity*. Birmingham, UK.
2. Markiewicz, Sarah, (2012), PhD: *The Genesis and Fruits of the Document "A Common Word Between Us and You"*. Humboldt Universität zu Berlin.
3. Provencher, Laura Elizabeth, (2010), MA: *A critical analysis of the Islamic discourse of interfaith dialogue*. The University of Arizona.

COURSES BASED ON ACW

ACW is being taught in interfaith religious curricula in a number of universities including Cambridge University UK, and Georgetown University, Washington DC. See an updated selection at <http://acommonword.com/courses>

1. Hartford Seminary: "Renewal of Muslim Theology: 'A Common Word' and the Theology of Compassion (TH-686)". Dr Ingrid Mattson and Rev. Dr Lucinda Mosher.
2. Cambridge University – Department: Summer Interfaith Program: Cambridge Interfaith Program. By: Prof. David Ford. (UK). The Cambridge Interfaith Programme brings 30 students from Muslim, Christian and Jewish backgrounds around the world to Madingley Hall near Cambridge, for a three-week programme of interfaith education. Students learn about forms of interfaith engagement past and present, are trained in the prac-

tice of interfaith scriptural reasoning, and led through a process of reflection on the interfaith possibilities and challenges of their home contexts.

3. Yale University – Department: Yale Center for Faith & Culture: The Reconciliation Program. By: Dr Joseph Cumming. (USA). The Reconciliation Program is the newest program at the Yale Center for Faith & Culture. In its initial phase, the Reconciliation Program is focused primarily on bridge-building scholarly research on the major theological, political, cultural, social and ethical issues which traditionally divide Muslims and Christians, and on concerns which unite them.
4. Humboldt Universität zu Berlin – Department: Religious Studies and Intercultural Theology (Theological Faculty): Übung/Seminar: “*A Common Word Between Us and You*”. By: Sarah Markiewicz. (Germany). (Spring 2012)
5. University of Toronto, Victoria University – Department: Emmanuel College. “**A Common Word, That We May Know Each Other**”. By: Dr Zijad Delic, Rev. Dr Bruce Gregersen. Part of the Canadian Certificate in Muslim Studies.
6. TB Faith Foundation: Face to Faith: Video Conferencing Face to Faith: bringing 12–17 year old students together all over the world using digital technology. 70 schools in India have undertaken the programme with over a thousand pupils participating and 345 teachers trained. Students have connected with schools all over the world including the USA, UK, Australia, Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Indonesia, and Pakistan.

CHAPTER 9

OTHER FRUITS OF ‘A COMMON WORD’

UN WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF ACW, ‘Love of God and Love of the Neighbour’ form the basis of the fundamental principles used in the World Interfaith Harmony Week, these being ‘Love of God and Love of the Neighbour’ or ‘Love of the Good and Love of the Neighbour’.

In 2010, the World Interfaith Harmony Week was launched at the United Nations General Assembly. The resolution (A/Res/65/5) was adopted unanimously by the UNGA after considerable diplomatic efforts by Arab, Muslim, Central American countries and Russia. It reads as follows: The General Assembly,

1. Reaffirms that mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue constitute important dimensions of a culture of peace;
2. Proclaims the first week of February of every year the World Interfaith Harmony Week between all religions, faiths and beliefs;
3. Encourages all States to support, on a voluntary basis, the spread of the message of interfaith harmony and goodwill in the world’s Churches, Mosques, Synagogues, Temples and other places of Worship during that week based on Love of God and Love of the Neighbour, or based on Love of the Good and Love of the Neighbour, each according to their own religious traditions or convictions;
4. Requests the Secretary-General to keep the General

Assembly informed of the implementation of the present resolution.

It will be noted that the diplomatically unprecedented central phrase of the resolution—‘Love of God and Love of the Neighbour, or based on Love of the Good and Love of the Neighbour, each according to their own religious traditions or convictions’—excludes no one, of any religion or of no faith at all: every person of good will, with or without faith can and should commit to ‘Love of God and Love of the Neighbour’ or ‘Love of the Good and Love of the Neighbour’. Loving the Good and the neighbour is, after all, the essence of good will as such. And referring to ‘the Good’ obviously does not necessarily imply belief in God or in a particular religion, even though for monotheistic believers ‘the Good’ is God precisely: Jesus Christ (PBUH) said: No one is Good but God Alone [Mark, 10:18; Luke, 18:19, and Matthew, 19:17], and ‘the Good’ (‘Al-Barr’) is one of God’s Names in the Holy Qur’an [Al-Tur, 52:28]. Thus speaking of ‘the Good’ is an ingenious theologically-correct but inclusive formula—in so far as it goes—that unites all humanity and excludes no one.

GOVERNMENT RESOLUTIONS

ACW was the central impetus behind the Wamp–Ellison Resolution in the US House of Representatives which passed in 2008 and commended ACW.

It was the impetus in the Philippines for the House of Representatives to pass House Bill 6148 in June 2011 declaring the first week of February every year as a World Interfaith Harmony Week.

AWARDS

1. Eugen Biser Award, 2008, Eugen Biser Foundation, Germany,

2. Building Bridges Award, 2008, Association of Muslim Social Scientists, UK.
3. St Augustine Award for the Improvement of Inter-religious Dialogue in the Mediterranean, 2012, Milan, Italy.

MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN PEACE DELEGATION TO NIGERIA

ACW led to the formation of the Christian-Muslim peace delegation to Nigeria in May 2012.

Between 22–26 May, 2012 an international delegation of Muslims and Christians visited Nigeria. The visit was sponsored jointly by the Jordanian Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought (RABIIT) and the World Council of Churches (WCC). The visit was proposed in reaction to the numerous incidents of fierce inter-communal strife which have affected the lives of Nigerians in the period between 2000–2012, and the awareness that—at least since the Bosnian war of 1993–1995—Nigeria is a country that has experienced the most severe inter-communal violence between Christians and Muslims in the world.

The delegation sought to understand the reasons behind this violence. The objectives of the visit were as follows:

1. To fact-find and investigate first-hand, impartially and credibly, the situation on the ground in Nigeria, and the various factors that have led to the present tensions
2. To express clearly to both the political and religious leadership in Nigeria the concern and anxiety of the international community about the current situation
3. To demonstrate an international model of Muslims and Christians working together in an inter-religious engagement aimed at fostering peace and harmony between people of different religions
4. To identify areas or projects where religious institutes, persons, texts, or messages can help ameliorate the situation in Nigeria.

The full report can be found at www.acommonword.com/nigeria

LOVE SEMINAR AT OXFORD UNIVERSITY

A symposium entitled “Love in Three Abrahamic Religions” celebrates the fifth year of the issuing of *A Common Word Between Us and You: An Open Letter and Call from Muslim Religious Leaders*. It will be hosted at Regent’s Park College, University of Oxford 12–13 October, 2012. Speakers: H.R.H. Prince Ghazi Bin Muhammad, Miroslav Volf and Melissa Raphael.

MISCELLANEOUS

The most influential televangelist in the Muslim World, Dr Amr Khaled, has produced several videos on ACW. Links can be found at <http://www.acommonword.com/videos>.

ACW has been referred to in many important gatherings and speeches. Reverend Dr Sharon E. Watkins, the General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the US and Canada, referred to ACW during the main sermon at the traditional Post-Inauguration Service for President Obama at the National Cathedral on January 21, 2009.

Former Secretary of State Madeline Albright referred to ACW during her testimony before the US Senate the following month.

H.H. Pope Benedict XVI referred to ACW a number of times on May 8 and May 9, 2009 during His Holiness’s Holy Land Pilgrimage to Jordan. On Saturday May 9, during his address at the King Hussein State Mosque in Amman, H.H. Pope Benedict XVI said:

... and the more recent Common Word letter ... echoed a theme consonant with my first encyclical: the unbreakable bond between love of God and love of neighbour, and the fundamental contradiction of resorting to violence or exclusion in the name of God (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, 16).

In its second year, ACW yielded some practical steps and projects to ameliorate attitudes between Muslims and Christians: it was used by the NGO Habitat for Humanity as the basis for one of

their joint projects.

It also became the inspiration (and part of the Charter) for a new high-level Forum and Foundation/Institute dedicated to improving Muslim-Christian ties (the 'C-I').

A major documentary by 10,000 Films is being produced in Arabic and in English in order to bring ACW to a wider audience, God willing.

A sub-office of *A Common Word* opened in Sohan, Islamabad dedicated to improving Muslim-Christian ties in Pakistan.

A joint Christian-Muslim religious reading list resource was agreed upon by a number of Christian and Muslim religious authorities so that Christians may understand Muslims as Muslims understand themselves and vice versa (see www.acommonword.com).

ACW was singled out for commendation by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in the 2009 annual US Freedom of Religion Report, and it was also short-listed (together with the document's author H.R.H. Prince Ghazi of Jordan) for the 2009, 2011 and 2012 Nobel Peace Prize.

An updated selection of ACW fruits can be seen at:
<http://acommonword.com/fruits>

CHAPTER 10: THE GENESIS OF 'A COMMON WORD'

H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal

In the Name of God

A FEW DAYS AFTER H.H. Pope Benedict XVI's now infamous Regensburg lecture on September 12th 2006, I was on the plane going to the USA with H.M. King Abdullah II, and referring to the tensions in the Islamic World it had caused, he asked me to: "see what you can do to defuse the situation." Dr Caner Dagli was working in the Royal Court at the time as an Advisor on Interfaith Affairs. I asked him to write a response and we discussed the points I wanted him to put in. After he wrote his draft, I added in a few parts, notably the part about Christianity and Islam having love in common. Together with some friends, I organized for 38 Muslim Scholars to sign it (including ourselves) and we released it to the press as an Open Letter and sent it to the Vatican on October 13th 2006, exactly one month after the Regensburg lecture. We heard nothing until around December, when the Vatican Ambassador to Jordan came to my house in Amman with Archbishop Celata and another priest, who recommended to me that I should "write to the Vatican Secretary of State if I wanted to have a dialogue."

I was not satisfied with this rather insufficient response from the Vatican, so I decided to write a more extensive open letter on the theme of love, on which I had done a PhD about at Cambridge University in 1988–1993, and which I was very interested in. I myself wrote the letter, directly in English (not Arabic), whilst I was in Oman alone (except for my wife and children) at my in-laws home in the first 6 months of 2007. The first person to see the draft was my wife Areej, who corrected some typos. I consulted with my friend Shaykh Habib Ali Al-Jiffri and he spoke to some of the senior shaykhs (including Grand Mufti Ali Goma, Shaykh Abdullah bin

Bayyah, Shaykh Mohammad Said Ramadan Buti, Habib Umar bin Hafidh and the late Grand Mufti of Jordan Shaykh Nuh Al-Quda) and he said they were willing to try another Open Letter. I had taken some of them that year to the tree under which the Prophet Muhammad had sat in Jordan around 1500 years ago, and had in fact privately prayed there for the success of this initiative. The idea was to add 100 more shaykhs and scholars and issue a more public letter, widening the recipients, in order to gently embarrass the Vatican into a peaceful dialogue because there were voices in the Vatican claiming that “theological dialogue is not possible with Muslims as they believe the Qur’an is the Word of God”. I myself researched the historical order of precedence of Christian leaders and included them all, as best as I could. When the letter was finished I sent it to Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr to get his opinion. He read it all and liked it, and we discussed it on the phone. Meanwhile, Habib Ali had it translated into Arabic at Taba Foundation in the UAE and sent it to the shaykhs mentioned for their opinions and approval. Altogether (including Professor Nasr’s comments and those of the senior shaykhs) there were not more than six changes, and I have kept all the drafts with the different changes to this day. I decided to call the letter “*A Common Word* between Us and You” (now “*A Common Word*” for short) based on the Qur’an verse 3:64, which is cited in the text of the letter.

After this core group had thus reached a consensus on the text, we decided to approach others for their signatures on a ‘take-it-or-leave-it’ basis. There was an Aal al-Bayt Conference on love in Islam in September 2007, and we thought this would be an excellent platform to gather support for the Open Letter. Between the conference and the efforts of Habib Ali and Sohayl Nakhoda (he was the editor of *Islamica Magazine* at the time, and helped a lot with gathering signatures from academics with whom he was in touch) we managed to gather exactly 138 important signatures and in fact only two people of all those we approached declined to sign it. Right until September 2007, I was in two minds about going ahead because I was unsure it would be successful. It was

Habib Ali who pressed me and finally convinced me to go ahead. I then engaged a top publicity company for 3 months (Bell Pottinger, of London). Tim Ryan of Bell Pottinger kindly agreed to drop their usual (considerable) fees and charge us only \$100,000. H.M. King Abdullah II graciously provided the money, and this was the only major expense involved. I did, however, buy www.acommonword.com before the launch in order to immediately create a public website for the initiative. Professor David Ford of Cambridge (whom we also consulted) was very eager to promote Christian-Muslim dialogue, and so he arranged to release a positive response as soon as news of the Open Letter came out. The Bishop of London, Richard Chartres, also agreed to immediately do a positive television interview about the Open Letter; and the Archbishop of Canterbury's office agreed to also immediately release a positive response. This 'pre-loaded' the response from the Vatican and the other Christian leaders. On October 13, 2007—one year to the day after the 1st Open letter, and one year and one month to the day after the Regensburg address—we sent the *A Common Word* Open Letter out to all those to whom it was addressed. The rest is now history.

All praise belongs to God alone, *Al-HamduLillah Rubb al-'Alamin*

Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal

August 24th, 2012

Muscat, Oman

Postscript:

The shaykhs, Habib Ali and myself determined that we would not identify an author for the document—because what was important to Muslims would be who signed it; because such important shaykhs with such large followings had signed it, and because without their signatures the document would mean very little to either Christians or Muslims—and so we did not do so for at least a year after the release of the letter. Finally, we felt we had to release this

information subtly on the website because the media was attributing the authorship to scholars who were actually not involved.

APPENDIX I: SELECTED CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO 'A COMMON WORD'

A COMPLETE LIST OF THE major Christian responses to ACW can be found at www.acommonword.com/responses. The texts of some Christian responses are reproduced here.

1. **Bishop Rev. Mark S. Hanson**
Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
October 12, 2007
2. **Prof. John Esposito**
Professor of Religion and International Affairs, Georgetown University
October 22, 2007
3. **Response from H.E. Cardinal Angelo Scola**
Patriarch of Venice
October 24, 2007
4. **The Yale Response signed by over 300 leading Christian scholars**
November 18, 2007
5. **H.H. Pope Benedict XVI's Response**
From the Vatican, November 19, 2007
6. **Daniel Madigan SJ**
The Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims
January 18, 2008
7. **Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia**
World Council of Churches (WCC)
March 18, 2008
8. **His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II**
Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia
April 14, 2008
9. **The Most Revd. and Rt. Hon. Rowan Williams**
The Archbishop of Canterbury
July 14, 2008
10. **Extended response from the Baptist World Alliance**
The Revd. David Coffey, The Revd. Neville Callam, The Revd. Prof. Paul S. Fiddes and The Revd. Regina Claas
December 26, 2008

BISHOP REV. MARK S. HANSON

Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

October 12, 2007

*Greetings to you in the name of Almighty God,
our Creator and Sustainer.*

ON OCTOBER 11, A copy of a letter was delivered to me from Muslim scholars and religious leaders addressed to Christian religious leaders around the world. As presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and president of the Lutheran World Federation, I receive this letter in the sincere expression of faithfulness intended by its drafters, and with the hopeful expectation for peace that calls to us from the origins of our sacred texts and professions of faith. I encourage prayer and planning for communities of justice, peace, and security where Muslims, Jews, and Christians draw from these origins as from essential wells of living water.

The letter attests to both the love of God and our shared heritage of true hospitality to one's neighbor. These commandments convey prophetic witness for mutual and vital co-existence that Christians and Muslims must embrace in one another. The letter further references how the commands to love God and neighbor are linked "between the Qur'an, the Torah and the New Testament." I encourage everyone everywhere to read the beauty of these passages found in the sacred texts of the Abrahamic faiths, which signify God's vision for how and whom we love in a broken world. This common vision for Jews, Muslims, and Christians signifies fidelity and fellowship in a world where conflict offends our common heritage as children of God.

In 2005 I, along with an LWF delegation that included General Secretary Ishmael Noko, met with His Royal Highness Prince Ghazi, personal envoy and special advisor to King Abdullah II of

Jordan. Our delegation was grateful for the sincere hospitality and friendship that were so freely displayed in our conversation. The delegation spoke at length with Prince Ghazi about the origins of the Abrahamic faiths in that region of the world. In another meeting, Akel Biltaji, advisor to His Majesty the King, stated, “We are honored to be servants and custodians of the Holy sites.”

I acknowledge this letter in gratitude and recognition of the need for its further study and consideration. I likewise accept it in the belief that Jews, Muslims, and Christians are called to one another as to a holy site, where God’s living revelation in the world is received in reverence among the faithful and not in fear of our neighbors.

I pray for God’s continued blessings among Muslims, Jews, and Christians alike, and thank God for such displays of wisdom and humility from their leaders.”

—The Rev. Mark S. Hanson

*Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
President, The Lutheran World Federation*

PROF. JOHN ESPOSITO

*Professor of Religion and International Affairs,
Georgetown University.*

October 22, 2007

IN AN HISTORIC EVENT, 138 prominent Muslim leaders and scholars from around the world have reached out to Christian leaders in an open letter to the heads of all Christian churches and to all Christians around the world, emphasizing “the future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians.”

While the use of the term “historic event,” is sometimes overused in the history of Islam and the Muslim world, this is really the first time in history that we have an initiative where Muslims have collectively come together and agreed on the fundamental principles that bind them to Christians, love of the one God and of neighbor. It comes while relations between the Muslim world and the West are strained. As the signatories of the letter acknowledge more than half of the world’s population consists of Muslims and Christians and thus these two faiths are critical to meaningful world peace and justice.

A common question in recent years is “where are the moderate Muslim voices?”. This historic document is a crystal-clear message of peace and tolerance from 138 Muslim leaders from across the Islamic world. Recognition of this common ground provides followers of both Islam and Christianity with a shared understanding that can help to foster a greater sense of religious pluralism and a tolerance based upon mutual understanding and respect that can contribute to the diffusion of tensions between these two great monotheistic faiths. One can only hope that Christian leaders and scholars will join with Muslim leaders and scholars and take this initiative to the next step in a dialogue not only of discourse but of mutually supported action.

John L. Esposito is University Professor of Religion and International Affairs, Professor of Islamic Studies and Founding Director of the Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at the Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University.

The Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding's (ACMCU) mission is to improve relations between the Muslim world and the West and enhance understanding of Muslims in the West. The Center has become internationally recognized as a leader in the field of Muslim-Christian relations.

RESPONSE FROM H.E. CARDINAL ANGELO SCOLA

Patriarch of Venice

October 24, 2007

ON THE “A COMMON WORD” DOCUMENT

THE DOCUMENT IS CERTAINLY an encouraging sign. Above all what is of note is the number and quality of those who have signed the document. This is not only a media event, because consensus is for Islam a source of theology and law. The redactors of Oasis (www.oasiscenter.eu) have told me that even if those who have signed avoided a juridical formulation to the document, it is still true that no text produced by the most extremist salafi groups has ever been able to claim a consensus equal to that witnessed by the 138 signatures at the bottom of the open letter. The approach is realistic, ‘if Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace’, and at its core it simply aims to ‘say to Christians that we, as Muslims, are not against them and that Islam is not against them—so long as they do not wage war against Muslims on account of their Religion’. In that sense, the Muslim leaders willingly identify themselves with those ‘others’ of whom Jesus says: ‘who is not against us is with us’.

The document, in the prospective of that double love, of God and one’s neighbour, underscores a vein of the Muslim tradition which has been partially placed in the shade due to the growth of fundamentalism. The text affirms that man has ‘mind or the intelligence, which is made for comprehending the truth; the will which is made for freedom of choice, and sentiment which is made for loving the good and the beautiful’. On the other hand, one notes between the lines a condemnation of terrorism: ‘to those who nevertheless relish conflict and destruction for their own sake or

reckon that ultimately they stand to gain through them, we say [...] to sincerely make every effort to make peace and come together in harmony'. The fact that the text is rooted in the Muslim tradition is very important and makes it more credible than other proclamations expressed in a more western language.

This document is only the prelude to a theological dialogue, which, in an atmosphere of greater reciprocal esteem, proposes to investigate the contents of the two pillars (love of the one God and love of neighbour) in the two religious traditions.

During two different meetings organized by Oasis, at Cairo and in the USA, I had the occasion to discuss publicly with three signers of the document: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, Muzamil H. Siddiqui, and I was able to ascertain that this reciprocal esteem is real. The hope is that this document might be read and widely diffused in the Muslim world and in the West.

Certainly, the intervention of the Pope provoked a dynamic of great interest within Islam. As the same signers recognize, the interconnection between Christians and Muslims in the contemporary world is such to make it impossible not to take a position concerning the coexistence between different faiths.

The document indicates an important point of departure for an authentic dialogue. That always requires two conditions: the revelation of self in testimony and the search for a life that is good (*vita bona*). It seems to me that the signers of the letter are decidedly going in this direction from the moment that they invite Christians to a type of 'spiritual emulation', in a task to do the best: 'Let us vie with each other only in righteousness and good works'.

THE YALE RESPONSE
SIGNED BY OVER 300 LEADING CHRISTIAN
SCHOLARS

November 18, 2007

*In the name of the Infinitely Good God
whom we should love with all our Being*

PREAMBLE

AS MEMBERS OF THE worldwide Christian community, we were deeply encouraged and challenged by the recent historic open letter signed by 138 leading Muslim scholars, clerics, and intellectuals from around the world. A *Common Word Between Us and You* identifies some core common ground between Christianity and Islam which lies at the heart of our respective faiths as well as at the heart of the most ancient Abrahamic faith, Judaism. Jesus Christ's call to love God and neighbor was rooted in the divine revelation to the people of Israel embodied in the Torah (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18). We receive the open letter as a Muslim hand of conviviality and cooperation extended to Christians worldwide. In this response we extend our own Christian hand in return, so that together with all other human beings we may live in peace and justice as we seek to love God and our neighbors.

Muslims and Christians have not always shaken hands in friendship; their relations have sometimes been tense, even characterized by outright hostility. Since Jesus Christ says, *First take the log out your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye* (Matthew 7:5), we want to begin by acknowledging that in the past (e.g. in the Crusades) and in the present (e.g. in excesses of the "war on terror") many Christians have been guilty of sinning against our Muslim neighbors. Before we "shake your hand" in responding to your letter, we ask forgiveness of the All-Merciful One and of the Muslim community around the world.

RELIGIOUS PEACE—WORLD PEACE

“Muslims and Christians together make up well over half of the world’s population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world.” We share the sentiment of the Muslim signatories expressed in these opening lines of their open letter. Peaceful relations between Muslims and Christians stand as one of the central challenges of this century, and perhaps of the whole present epoch. Though tensions, conflicts, and even wars in which Christians and Muslims stand against each other are not primarily religious in character, they possess an undeniable religious dimension. If we can achieve religious peace between these two religious communities, peace in the world will clearly be easier to attain. It is therefore no exaggeration to say, as you have in *A Common Word Between Us and You*, that “the future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians.”

COMMON GROUND

What is so extraordinary about *A Common Word Between Us and You* is not that its signatories recognize the critical character of the present moment in relations between Muslims and Christians. It is rather a deep insight and courage with which they have identified the common ground between the Muslim and Christian religious communities. What is common between us lies not in something marginal nor in something merely important to each. It lies, rather, in something absolutely central to both: love of God and love of neighbor. Surprisingly for many Christians, your letter considers the dual command of love to be the foundational principle not just of the Christian faith, but of Islam as well. That so much common ground exists – common ground in some of the fundamentals of faith – gives hope that undeniable differences and even the very real external pressures that bear down upon us can not overshadow the common ground upon which we stand together. That this common ground consists in love of God and of neighbor gives hope that deep cooperation between us can be a hallmark of the relations

between our two communities.

LOVE OF GOD

We applaud that *A Common Word Between Us and You* stresses so insistently the unique devotion to one God, indeed the love of God, as the primary duty of every believer. God alone rightly commands our ultimate allegiance. When anyone or anything besides God commands our ultimate allegiance – a ruler, a nation, economic progress, or anything else – we end up serving idols and inevitably get mired in deep and deadly conflicts.

We find it equally heartening that the God whom we should love above all things is described as being Love. In the Muslim tradition, God, *the Lord of the worlds*, is *The Infinitely Good and All-Merciful*. And the New Testament states clearly that *God is love* (1 John 4:8). Since God's goodness is infinite and not bound by anything, *God makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous*, according to the words of Jesus Christ recorded in the Gospel (Matthew 5:45).

For Christians, humanity's love of God and God's love of humanity are intimately linked. As we read in the New Testament: *We love because he [God] first loved us* (1 John 4:19). Our love of God springs from and is nourished by God's love for us. It cannot be otherwise, since the Creator who has power over all things is infinitely good.

LOVE OF NEIGHBOR

We find deep affinities with our own Christian faith when *A Common Word Between Us and You* insists that love is the pinnacle of our duties toward our neighbors. *None of you has faith until you love for your neighbor what you love for yourself*, the Prophet Muhammad said. In the New Testament we similarly read, *whoever does not love [the neighbor] does not know God* (1 John 4:8) and *whoever does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen* (1 John 4:20). God is love, and our highest calling as human beings is to imitate the One whom we worship.

We applaud when you state that “justice and freedom of religion are a crucial part” of the love of neighbor. When justice is lacking, neither love of God nor love of the neighbor can be present. When freedom to worship God according to one’s conscience is curtailed, God is dishonored, the neighbor oppressed, and neither God nor neighbor is loved.

Since Muslims seek to love their Christian neighbors, they are not against them, the document encouragingly states. Instead, Muslims are with them. As Christians we resonate deeply with this sentiment. Our faith teaches that we must be with our neighbors – indeed, that we must act in their favor – even when our neighbors turn out to be our enemies. *But I say unto you*, says Jesus Christ,

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good. (Matthew 5:44–45)

Our love, Jesus Christ says, must imitate the love of the infinitely good Creator; our love must be as unconditional as is God’s—extending to brothers, sisters, neighbors, and even enemies. At the end of his life, Jesus Christ himself prayed for his enemies: *Forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing* (Luke 23:34).

The Prophet Muhammad did similarly when he was violently rejected and stoned by the people of Ta’if. He is known to have said,

The most virtuous behavior is to engage those who sever relations, to give to those who withhold from you, and to forgive those who wrong you.

(It is perhaps significant that after the Prophet Muhammad was driven out of Ta’if, it was the Christian slave ‘Addas who went out to Muhammad, brought him food, kissed him, and embraced him.)

THE TASK BEFORE US

“Let this common ground” – the dual common ground of love of God and of neighbor – “be the basis of all future interfaith dialogue between us,” your courageous letter urges. Indeed, in the generosity with which the letter is written you embody what you call for. We most heartily agree. Abandoning all “hatred and strife,” we must engage in interfaith dialogue as those who seek each other’s good, for the one God unceasingly seeks our good. Indeed, together with you we believe that we need to move beyond “a polite ecumenical dialogue between selected religious leaders” and work diligently together to reshape relations between our communities and our nations so that they genuinely reflect our common love for God and for one another.

Given the deep fissures in the relations between Christians and Muslims today, the task before us is daunting. And the stakes are great. The future of the world depends on our ability as Christians and Muslims to live together in peace. If we fail to make every effort to make peace and come together in harmony you correctly remind us that “our eternal souls” are at stake as well.

We are persuaded that our next step should be for our leaders at every level to meet together and begin the earnest work of determining how God would have us fulfill the requirement that we love God and one another. It is with humility and hope that we receive your generous letter, and we commit ourselves to labor together in heart, soul, mind and strength for the objectives you so appropriately propose.

Harold W. Attridge: *Dean and Lillian Claus Professor of New Testament, Yale Divinity School*

Miroslav Volf: *Founder and Director of the Yale Center, for Faith and Culture, Henry B. Wright Professor of Theology, Yale University*

Joseph Cumming: *Director of the Reconciliation Program, Yale Center for Faith and Culture*

Emilie M. Townes: *Andrew Mellon Professor of African American Religion and Theology and President-elect of the American Academy of Religion*

The following signatories consist of those featured in the November 18, 2007 New York Times publication of “Loving God and Neighbor Together,” as well as of a selection of other prominent signatories. These signatories were all confirmed via e-mail and in most cases were reconfirmed by further e-mail exchange.

Capt. Bradford E. Ableson, *Chaplain Corps, US Navy and Senior Episcopal Chaplain in the US Navy*

Dr Martin Accad, *Academic Dean, Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (Lebanon), Director, Institute of Middle East Studies (Lebanon), Associate Professor of Islamic Studies, Fuller School of Intercultural Studies*

Scott C. Alexander, *Associate Professor of Islam and Director, Catholic-Muslim Studies, Catholic Theological Union*

Dr Mogamat-Ali Behardien, *Minister, African Reformed Church, Paarl, South Africa*

Roger Allen, *Professor of Arabic and Comparative Literature and Chair, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, University of Pennsylvania, member of Middle East Study Group of the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania*

Jean Amore, *CSJ, for the Leadership Team of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Brentwood, NY*

Leith Anderson, *President, National Association of Evangelicals*

Rev. Daniel S. Appleyard, *Rector, Christ Episcopal Church, Dearborn, MI*

William Aramony, *Consultant*

Yvette A. Assem, *Student, Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia*

Harold W. Attridge, *Dean and Lillian Claus Professor of New Testament, Yale Divinity School*

Dr Don Argue, *Chancellor, Northwest University, Former President, National Association of Evangelicals, Commissioner, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom*

David Augsburg, *Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling, Fuller Theological Seminary*

Gerald R. Baer, M.D., *Minister of Christian Education, Landisville, PA*

Dwight P. Baker, *Associate Director, Overseas Ministries Study Center*

Dr Ray Bakke, *Convening Chair, Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding: An International Coalition, Tempe, AZ*

- His Lordship Bishop Camillo Ballin, MCCI, *Vicar Apostolic of Kuwait*
- Leonard Bartlotti, *Associate Professor of Intercultural Studies, Biola University*
- Charles L. Bartow, *Carl and Helen Egner Professor of Speech Communication in Ministry, Princeton Theological Seminary*
- Rt. Rev. Barry Beisner, *Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Northern California*
- Federico Bertuzzi, *President, PM Internacional, Latin America*
- James A. Beverley, *Professor of Christian Thought and Ethics, Tyndale Seminary, Toronto, Canada*
- J.D. Bindenagel, *former U.S. Ambassador and Vice President, DePaul University, Chicago, IL*
- Rev. Dr Thomas W. Blair, *The Second Presbyterian Church of Baltimore*
- Walter R. Bodine, *Pastor, International Church at Yale and Research Affiliate, Near Eastern Languages, Yale University*
- Rev. Timothy A. Boggs, *St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Washington, DC*
- Regina A. Boisclair, *Cardinal Newman Chair of Theology, Alaska Pacific University, Anchorage, Alaska*
- David Bok, *Independent Bible Teacher, Hartford Seminary, Hartford, CT*
- Rev. Jim Bonewald, *Pastor, Knox Presbyterian Church, Cedar Rapids, IA*
- Jonathan J. Bonk, *Executive Director, Overseas Ministries Study Center and Editor, International Bulletin of Missionary Research*
- Rev. Michael S. Bos, *Director, Al Amana Centre, Sultanate of Oman*
- Steven Bouma-Prediger, *Professor of Religion, Hope College, Holland, MI*
- Gerhard Böwering, *Professor of Religious Studies, Yale University*
- Mary C. Boys, *Skinner and McAlpin Professor of Practical Theology, Union Theological Seminary, New York, NY*
- Dan Brannen, *International Students, Inc.*
- Revs. Scott & Katarina Breslin, *Protestant House Church Network, Istanbul Turkey*
- Rev. Dr Stuart Briscoe, *Minister at Large, Elmbrook Church, Brookfield Wisconsin, USA; Founder, "Telling the Truth, Inc."*
- Rev. Douglas Brown, *Pastor, Valley View United Methodist Church Overland Park, Kansas*
- Joseph Britton, *Dean, Berkeley Divinity School at Yale*

- Huib Bruinink, *Developer of Marketing, PT. Puteri Mawar Sari, Central Java, Indonesia*
- John M. Buchanan, *Editor/Publisher, The Christian Century*
- James J. Buckley, *Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, Loyola College in Maryland*
- Eugene W. Bunkowske, *PhD, Fiechtner Chair Professor of Christian Outreach, Oswald Huffman School of Christian Outreach, Concordia University, St. Paul, Minnesota*
- John R. Burkholder, *Professor Emeritus, Religion and Peace Studies, Goshen College, Goshen, IN*
- David Burkum, *Pastor, Valley Christian Church, Lakeville, MN*
- Rt. Rev. Joe Goodwin Burnett, *Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska*
- Allen Busenitz, *International Student Ministry, West Lafayette, IN*
- Very Rev. Samuel G. Candler, *Dean, Cathedral of St. Philip (Anglican), Atlanta, GA*
- Juan Carlos Cárdenas, *Academic Director, Instituto Iberoamericano de Estudios Transculturales, Granada, Spain*
- Joseph Castleberry, *President, Northwest University*
- Rev. Colin Chapman, *Former Lecturer in Islamic Studies, Near East School of Theology, Beirut, Lebanon, and author of Whose Promised Land?*
- Ellen T. Charry, *Assoc. Professor of Systematic Theology, Princeton Theological Seminary*
- David Yonggi Cho, *Founder and Senior Pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church, Seoul, Korea*
- Hyung Kyun Chung, *Associate Professor of Ecumenical Studies, Union Theological Seminary in New York*
- Rev. Richard Cizik, *Vice President of Governmental Affairs, National Association of Evangelicals*
- Rev. Dr Emmanuel Clapsis, *Professor of Systematic Theology, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, Brookline, MA*
- William Clarkson IV, *President, The Westminster Schools, Atlanta, Georgia*
- Emily Click, *Lecturer on Ministry and Assistant Dean for Ministry Studies and Field Education, Harvard Divinity School*
- Corneliu Constantineanu, *Dean and Associate Professor of New Testament, Evangelical Theological Seminary, Osijek, Croatia*
- Robert E. Cooley, *President Emeritus, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Massachusetts*

- Rev. Shawn Coons, *St. Philip Presbyterian, Houston, TX*
- Harvey Cox, *Hollis Professor of Divinity, Harvard Divinity School*
- Joseph Cumming, *Director of the Reconciliation Program, Yale Center for Faith and Culture, Yale Divinity School*
- Daniel A. Cunningham, *Executive Pastor, Temple Bible Church, Temple, TX*
- Bryant L. Cureton, *President, Elmhurst College, Elmhurst, IL*
- Fr. John D'Alton, *President, Melbourne Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies, Melbourne, Australia*
- Fr. Joseph P. Daoust, S.J., *President, Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, CA*
- Rev. David R. Davis, *Special Projects Coordinator, The Evangelical Alliance Mission, Wheaton, IL*
- John Deacon, *Leader, Branch Out Ministries, The Olive Branch Community Church, Markham, Ontario, Canada*
- Rev. Joseph C. Delahunt, *Senior Pastor, Silliman Memorial Baptist Church, Bridgeport, CT*
- André Delbecq, *Thomas J. and Kathleen L. McCarthy University Professor, Center for Spirituality of Organizational Leadership and former Dean of the Leavey School of Business at the University of Santa Clara*
- David A. Depew, *President, Seed of Abraham Association, Broadcasting radio Bible studies in the Middle East*
- Keith DeRose, *Allison Foundation Professor of Philosophy, Yale University*
- Curtiss Paul DeYoung, *Professor of Reconciliation Studies, Bethel University*
- Andrew Dimmock, *Director, Doulos Community, Nouakchott, Mauritania*
- Chip Dobbs-Allsopp, *Associate Professor of Old Testament, Princeton Theological Seminary*
- Andrés Alonso Duncan, *CEO, Latinoamerica Global, A.C.*
- Kent A. Eaton, *Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Associate Dean, Bethel Seminary San Diego, California*
- Diana L. Eck, *Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies in Arts and Sciences and member of the Faculty of Divinity, Harvard University*
- Mike Edens, *Professor of Theology and Islamic Studies, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, LA*
- Mark U. Edwards, Jr., *Senior Advisor to the Dean, Harvard Divinity School*
- James Ehrman, *Director, Global Ministries Office, Evangelical Congregational Church*

- Bertil Ekstrom, *Executive Director, Mission Commission, World Evangelical Alliance*
- Nancie Erhard, *Assistant Professor of Comparative Religious Ethics, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia*
- John Esposito, *University Professor & Founding Director, Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University*
- Chester E. Falby, *Priest Associate, St. Catherine's Episcopal Church, Manzanita, OR*
- Thomas P. Finger, *Mennonite Central Committee, Evanston, IL*
- Rev. Dr David C. Fisher, *Senior Minister, Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, NY*
- David Ford, *Regius Professor of Divinity, Cambridge University*
- Marlene Malahoo Forte, *2007 Yale World Fellow, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA*
- Rev. Susan L. Gabbard, *St. John's United Church of Christ, Mifflinburg, PA*
- Millard Garrett, *Vice President, Eastern Mennonite Missions, Salunga, PA*
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- Warren C. Sawyer, *President and CEO, The Caleb Foundation, Swampscott, MA*
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- Mark Siljander, *Member of the U.S. Congress (r) & fm U.S. Ambassador to the U.N.*
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H.H. POPE BENEDICT XVI'S RESPONSE TO 'A COMMON WORD'

From the Vatican, November 19, 2007

Segreteria Di Stato

N. 7311/07/RS

Your Royal Highness,

ON 13 OCTOBER 2007 an open letter addressed to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI and to other Christian leaders was signed by one hundred and thirty-eight Muslim religious leaders, including Your Royal Highness. You, in turn, were kind enough to present it to Bishop Salim Sayegh, Vicar of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem in Jordan, with the request that it be forwarded to His Holiness.

The Pope has asked me to convey his gratitude to Your Royal Highness and to all who signed the letter. He also wishes to express his deep appreciation for this gesture, for the positive spirit which inspired the text and for the call for a common commitment to promoting peace in the world.

Without ignoring or downplaying our differences as Christians and Muslims, we can and therefore should look to what unites us, namely, belief in the one God, the provident Creator and universal Judge who at the end of time will deal with each person according to his or her actions. We are all called to commit ourselves totally to him and to obey his sacred will.

Mindful of the content of his Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* ("God is Love"), His Holiness was particularly impressed by the attention given in the letter to the twofold commandment to love God and one's neighbor.

As you may know, at the beginning of his Pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI stated: "I am profoundly convinced that we must not yield to the negative pressures in our midst, but must affirm the values of mutual respect, solidarity and peace. The life of every human being

is sacred, both for Christians and for Muslims. There is plenty of scope for us to act together in the service of fundamental moral values” (Address. to Representatives of Some Muslim Communities, Cologne, 20 August 2005). Such common ground allows us to base dialogue on effective respect for the dignity of every human person, on objective knowledge of the religion of the other, on the sharing of religious experience and, finally, on common commitment to promoting mutual respect and acceptance among the younger generation. The Pope is confident that, once this is achieved, it will be possible to cooperate in a productive way in the areas of culture and society, and for the promotion of justice and peace in society and throughout the world.

With a view to encouraging your praiseworthy initiative, I am pleased to communicate that His Holiness would be most willing to receive Your Royal Highness and a restricted group of signatories of the open letter, chosen by you. At the same time, a working meeting could be organized between your delegation and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, with the cooperation of some specialized Pontifical Institutes (such as the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies and the Pontifical Gregorian University). The precise details of these meetings could be decided later, should this proposal prove acceptable to you in principle.

I avail myself of the occasion to renew to Your Royal Highness the assurance of my highest consideration.

—Tarcisio Card. Bertone
Secretary of State

DANIEL MADIGAN SJ,

The Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims

January 18, 2008

A COMMON WORD BETWEEN US AND YOU: SOME INITIAL REFLECTIONS

PERHAPS THE BEST PLACE to begin trying to understand the motivation of *A Common Word* is at the end. The authors note that, since together we make up more than half the world's population, there will be no peace in the world unless Muslims and Christians find a way to live at peace with one another. They surely echo the feelings of many when they say that "our common future is at stake. The very survival of the world itself is perhaps at stake." In a world that increasingly ready to see our current situation as a winner-takes-all struggle between two incompatible civilizations, this is a welcome reminder that there is an alternative: we can still try to envision a common future.

The signatories rightly believe that the resolution of our conflicts lies not merely in political negotiation but in finding a common theological basis that can ground our mutual commitments and give them an authority beyond the calculations of temporary expediency. So they undertake to demonstrate the common ground we share in our belief in the unity of God, in the necessity of complete devotion to God and of love towards the neighbour. They quite rightly refuse to accept the idea, all too often expressed even by members of the Roman Curia, that Muslims are incapable of entering into theological dialogue.

However dramatic may be the current world context that prompted it, this open letter to Christian leaders by 138 Muslim scholars and authorities should probably be read against a longer timeline. Forty-some years ago over two thousand Catholic bishops at Vatican II approved an epoch-making statement that, as Pope

Benedict has several times reaffirmed, remains the official position of the Church with regard to Muslims. Though it did not deal with some of the more substantial differences between our faiths, *Nostra Aetate*, as it was entitled, focussed on the things we have in common, which are the basis for the esteem for Muslims that the Council professed. The bishops concluded:

Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Muslims, this sacred synod urges all to forget [‘transcend’ or ‘overcome’ might have been a better choice of words] the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all humanity social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.

The Catholic Church has a well-defined authority structure that makes possible the enunciation of such a clear change in policy, and its implementation through control over the training of priests and the appointment of bishops. Even so, the Council’s positions, especially with regard to Muslims, are still not broadly enough known or accepted. They are sometimes dismissed as just outdated pastoral advice appropriate for the optimistic 60’s, but hopelessly out of touch with twenty-first century realities.

No other religious community, Christian or non-, has such an authority structure. Everywhere else authority is more diffuse – we might even say democratic. It has to be painstakingly negotiated, and binding consensus is often elusive. We should therefore be particularly grateful to this group of Muslim scholars that they have succeeded in arriving at a statement like this, subscribed to by such a broad representation. One might read their letter as a first collective Muslim response to *Nostra Aetate*, a response that agrees to adopt the same approach as the Council: the bracketing of differences in order to affirm common beliefs, and an appeal to work together for justice and peace in the world.

A Common Word forms part of a larger project, focused in Jordan, to develop an authoritative consensus on what it means to be Muslim in our time. In so doing the Amman project seeks to fill a vacuum in the leadership of the worldwide Muslim community – a vacuum that has in recent years been filled by the extremist voices only too well known to us through the world’s media. In media terms, such reasoned and scholarly voices may be no match for the sabre-rattling diatribes that make for good television, but they deserve to be taken seriously and given the widest possible diffusion. We can only hope that this letter, though it may well have to struggle as *Nostra Aetate* does to be accepted as authoritative, will favour just as momentous a change of mentality.

The authors are not the “moderate Muslims” with whom everyone professes to be ready to dialogue. What a patronizing term that is! We seem to be looking for Muslims who “don’t take it all too seriously” and who are ready to tell us what we want to hear. It is against “moderates” of this kind in the Catholic Church that bishops fulminate at election time. “Cafeteria Catholics” – take the bits you like and leave the rest – are roundly condemned, but similarly picky Muslims are celebrated. The presumption seems to be that a commitment that takes seriously the whole Islamic tradition is incapable of dealing with the modern world. In fact the opposite would seem to be the case: the reactionary and intransigent ideologies that drive terrorism and puritanical repression are not drawing on the whole of the Islamic tradition, but rather a truncated and impoverished reading of it.

The group of scholars behind *A Common Word* are ignorant neither of the breadth and depth of the Islamic tradition, nor of Christianity. Among them are people like Mustafa Ceric, grandmufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina, who knows both the Western academic world and traditional Islamic learning, as well as having first-hand experience of the genocidal rage driving some Christians. We would be mistaken to think that they are pushovers who will settle for a ceremonial acknowledgement of fellowship without a serious intellectual and spiritual engagement, and frank political

talk. In their patient but insistent correspondence since Regensburg they have shown a determination to pursue this discussion with seriousness and respect.

For several decades, of course, it was the Church that made much of the running in interreligious dialogue, but our interlocutors feel that in recent years our pace has faltered somewhat and that, at least in Rome, there is no great energy for dialogue even if we still profess a commitment to it. It may be discomfiting for us, but the initiative seems now to be in the hands of others.

Though addressed to a long list of popes, patriarchs and other church leaders, *A Common Word* surely has another audience as well. In keeping with the aim of the Amman project, it is implicitly addressed to Muslims, modeling for them a methodology and a mode of discourse appropriate to a dialogical approach to relations with other believers, and also providing the authoritative textual underpinnings for it. The letter spends much of its energy on outlining the obligation on Muslims to be devoted completely to God, to love God and to be grateful for all God has given. In this context, one might have hoped for a more explicit recognition of the political implications of such devotion: the relativizing of all power, ideologies and political projects. However good and divinely-sanctioned they may seem to us, they are not God, and therefore are not ultimate. This will be an essential element in further dialogue; it is the theological key that takes us beyond mere disagreement about power relations and political alternatives.

I tend to bristle when I hear the words “all religions.” They usually accompany a hasty generalization that owes more to wishful thinking or projection than to attentive observation of what the various religions do actually claim or profess. It is surprising and disappointing to note how often even academic writing falls back on such pieties, and each religion is reduced to a particular variation on the generic theme of religion. *A Common Word* does not quite fall into that trap, since it confines itself to speaking only of the Abrahamic traditions of Christianity and Islam (with Judaism unfortunately only making the occasional, parenthetical appear-

ance. Yet the letter does open itself to a reductionist reading – one that Christians might want to examine more closely – when it says in part III, “Thus the Unity of God, love of Him and love of the neighbour form a common ground upon which Islam and Christianity (and Judaism) are founded.” There has been a slide from the unexceptionable affirmation earlier in the paragraph that the obligation to love God and one’s neighbour is a common element in the sacred texts of our traditions, to the more questionable claim that the dual commandment of love is the foundation of all three.

In fairness to our Muslim colleagues, it should be admitted that many Christians too will propose a shorthand rendition of Jesus’ saying about the greatest commandments as the kernel of his teaching and the foundation of Christianity. But are they right? Is that all there is to the Gospel? Does the Word become incarnate simply to remind us of a few important verses from Deuteronomy and Leviticus, verses that some of Jesus’ contemporaries among the rabbis would also have recognized as summing up “the Law and the Prophets”? Is Jesus’ mission primarily to remind us of an obligation already revealed centuries before? Is all the rest of his living, dying and rising somehow only ancillary to this?

We should note that when Jesus gives his answer to the question of the greatest commandment, it is always in the context of controversy. Matthew (Mt 22:35) and Luke (Lk 10:25) both note that it was a question intended to trap him. The cautious answer to a trick question can hardly be considered the foundation of a religion. If the subject under discussion is commandments, then surely those two are the greatest. But is there nothing to the Good News other than commandment and obligation? When the lawyer who poses the commandment question in Mark’s gospel warmly reaffirms Jesus’ reply, Jesus says to him, *You are not far from the Kingdom of God* (Mk 12:34). Not far from it, but not quite there. Commandments are fine as far as they go, but the Kingdom goes further than that. The Gospel is not a simple cut-and-paste job on the Torah, with a more pithy selection of commandments. Before all else it is about what God has done for love of us. What we are

to do flows from that and is made possible by it.

When *A Common Word* speaks of “the love of God,” it means our love for God, and that almost always in terms of obligation – as witness the repeated use of ‘must’ and ‘should’ in part I. Yet personal experience is enough to make us realize that true love cannot be commanded or conditioned; it is freely given and received.

No New Testament writer has devoted more attention to the question of divine love than the one known there as *the disciple whom Jesus loved* and whom we call John. In his first letter he says, *This is what love is: not that we have loved God, but that God has loved us ...* (1Jn 4:10). *We love*, John tells us, *because God first loved us* (1Jn 4:19). Throughout John’s work there is a constant outward movement of love: *As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you* (Jn 15:9). *Just as I have loved you, so you also should love one another* (Jn 13:34). That is Jesus’ “new commandment,” given to his disciples just before his death. A command not to love him, or the Father, but rather to dwell in the love he bears us. Dwelling in that love means allowing it to transform us so that we in our turn love others. In this context Jesus uses the telling image of a vine and its branches. The nutrient sap of the vine enables the branches to produce fruit, yet the fruit is for the benefit neither of the vine nor of the branches – it is for others. All love originates in God and flows ever outward from there, transforming all who will allow themselves to be suffused by it. It does not turn back on itself, demanding reciprocation, but pours itself out for the beloved – even for the ungrateful.

Both John and Paul recognize the central importance of the fact that it was not on the basis of our perfection or even repentance that God’s love for us was manifested, but while we were still sinners (1Jn 4:10; Rm 5:6). If there is a foundation to Christian faith this is surely a major pillar of it.

A similar understanding of divine love is not entirely lacking in the Islamic tradition, but it does not find a place in *A Common Word*, possibly because it confines itself to quoting Qur’ân and hadith in order to address the broadest possible Muslim audience.

Still, it might have appealed to the verse Q 5:54 in which it is said that *God will bring a new people: He will love them, and they love will love Him*. Commenting on this verse some Sufi writers have observed that God's love for human beings precedes their love for God, and if it were not for the fact that God had favoured us by His primordial love, mercy, and compassion, humanity could never have loved God and His creatures. In this lies an important point for our continuing theological dialogue.

Just as there are reservations about how foundational for Christianity is the commandment to love God, so also one must question whether the commandment to love one's neighbour is fundamental. There are two elements in the gospels that relativize it. The first comes from Luke's gospel where Jesus' questioner, having failed to trap him with the commandment question, has another try and asks, *And who is my neighbour?* (Lk 10:29). The parable Jesus tells in response – the Good Samaritan – actually turns the man's question on its head. After having described the extraordinarily generous and compassionate response of this religious outsider to a Jew in need, after two of the victim's own religious leaders had already failed him, Jesus asks, *Which of these three proved himself a neighbour to the man attacked by robbers?* The question is no longer who is to be included in the category of neighbour and so what are the limits of my obligation to love. It is, rather, how can I show myself a neighbour to others by responding to them in love?

The second and more striking element in the gospels occurs in both Matthew and Luke in slightly different forms. Here is Matthew's version:

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For He makes his sun to rise on the evil as well as the good, and his rain to fall on the righteous and unrighteous alike. (Mt 5:43-45)

Luke reports that it was in this context that Jesus said,

If anyone strikes you on one cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.... Love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Lk 6:29–31, 35–6)

If for Luke such exaggerated and disinterested generosity is the imitation of God's mercy, for Matthew it is the very definition of God's perfection: *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect* (Mt 5:48). Our perfection lies in loving our enemies just as God's perfection is shown in His loving us with a self-emptying love. God revealed that love in Jesus even while we were still sinners, preferring alienation from God to the peace with God that was our original human state.

This infinitely expanded definition of the neighbour and brother to include even enemies and attackers has not been easy for Christians to assimilate. We quickly fall back into a generic religious mindset where God loves only the righteous and we, who of course are the righteous, are entitled to hate those who are not. Just how radical is the demand placed upon us by Jesus' teaching can be seen if we could imagine the ubiquitous "God Bless Our Troops" bumper-stickers in the US replaced by ones that read "God Bless Osama." Or could we imagine banners in Occupied Palestine that wished life and blessing on Israel and the United States rather than annihilation? Transformations like these do not happen easily, yet one witnesses them again and again on a small scale. These are the seeds of the Kingdom taking root and sprouting here and there, but too often they are trampled underfoot by "realism" or the desire

for retribution. Perhaps our dialogue could focus on the words of Q 60:7,

Perhaps God will create friendship between you and those you consider your enemies. God is Powerful, Infinitely Forgiving, Most Merciful.

Where love replaces enmity, it is surely God at work, not just us.

A *Common Word* does not hide some rather problematic points, though perhaps their implications could be missed. The major example of this is where Christians are assured in Part III that Muslims “are not against them and that Islam is not against them.” Then come the conditions (stipulated in Q 60:8): *so long as they do not wage war against Muslims on account of their religion, oppress them and drive them out of their homes.* Though the original context is Mecca which oppressed its first Muslim citizens, the verse is given broad contemporary application. Many extremists will use precisely this verse to justify enmity towards Israel and anyone who supports it. George Bush’s catastrophic military adventure in Iraq, and his so-called “War on Terrorism” are easily interpreted as attacks on Islam. Given the religious rhetoric he employs for political advantage, and the outspokenness of many of his evangelical supporters, his wars can easily be portrayed as Christian wars and thus put in jeopardy all Christians. Even Western cultural hegemony is sometimes read as aggression and so taken as legitimizing a violent response against any members of that culture. The letter’s reassurance that Islam and Muslims are not against Christians entails a fairly major conditional clause. This is surely an important focus for our continuing dialogue with the group of 138 and other Muslims.

Although I suggested at the beginning that we might read this letter against the background of *Nostra Aetate* with its appeal to common elements of faith and practice, that should not be taken to imply that our dialogue will best proceed by a series of letters, however authoritative. These documents are important touchstones but we know from the history of Vatican II that they only grow

out of reflection on experience. Many of the signatories of *A Common Word* have long experience of an interfaith dialogue that goes beyond mere ceremony and requires commitment and openness. Documents like these not only grow out of personal encounter, ideally they also open the way to further interaction.

Both *Nostra Aetate* and *A Common Word* focus on positive common elements, and this is certainly a useful beginning. We do need to understand and appreciate each other at the level of ideals and norms, especially those we have in common. However, we also have in common our personal and communal failure to live up to those ideals. Speaking of our obligation to love God and neighbour is relatively easy. Even to speak about loving one's enemies is not that difficult. Talk, as they say, is cheap. It takes much more courage to acknowledge to each other our failures in loving, but that is where the real breakthrough will come – when the proud façades crumble and reveal a contrite heart.

Of course we are both quite sure that the other has plenty of which to repent compared to our high ideals and minor failings. Perhaps we both need to listen again to Jesus' advice about taking the plank out of our own eye before offering to remove the speck from another's eye (Mt 7:3–5). The dialogue of mutual repentance is the most difficult, yet most necessary of all, if we wish to move ahead.

Though the discourse of *A Common Word* is framed in terms of conflict between Muslims and Christians, an honest examination of conscience will not permit us to forget that our future is not threatened only by conflict between us. Over the centuries of undeniable conflict and contestation between members of our two traditions, each group has had its own internal conflicts that have claimed and continue to claim many more lives than interconfessional strife. More Muslims are killed daily by other Muslims than by Christians or anyone else. The huge numbers who went to their deaths in the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980's were virtually all Muslims. Scarcely any of the tens of millions of Christians who have died in European wars over the centuries were killed by Muslims. The greatest shame

of the last century was the killing of millions of Jews by Christians conditioned by their own long tradition of anti-Semitism and seduced by a virulently nationalist and racist new ideology. The last 15 years in Africa have seen millions of Christians slaughtered in horrendous civil wars by their fellow believers. A Catholic missionary is dozens of times more likely to be killed in largely Catholic Latin America than anywhere in the Muslim world. So let us not be misled into thinking either that Muslim-Christian conflict is the world's greatest conflict, or even that war is the most serious threat to the human future. What of the millions of African children who die every year for want of some clean water or a few cents worth of vaccines? What of the world's poor who live under crushing burdens of foreign debt and corrupt domestic tyranny? What of the devastating effects on the earth of our poor stewardship of its resources? The new stage in Muslim-Christian dialogue represented by *A Common Word* should not become the occasion for a further narrowing of our attention and a greater obsession with ourselves. If we wish to talk of love, we will not be able to ignore the cry of the poor.

Dan Madigan is an Australian Jesuit, founder of the Institute for the Study of Religions at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, and member of the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims. He has served as International Visiting Fellow in the Woodstock Theological Center, Georgetown University, Washington DC, where he worked on a book on Christianity for a mostly Muslim readership.

REV. DR SAMUEL KOBIA

World Council of Churches (WCC)

March 18, 2008

YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS, EMINENT signatories of *A Common Word Between Us and You*, Greetings in the name of the One God, whom we love and who loves us.

I received your letter to Christian leaders, *A Common Word*, with great joy and hope. I read it as a representative expression of the Muslim will to engage with the Christian community in dialogue for the sake of justice and world peace. I recognize and welcome the serious intent of *A Common Word* and your invitation to explore our shared concerns and visions for our common humanity.

The member churches of the World Council of Churches have for several decades been engaged in relationships with people of other faiths, especially with Muslims. The outcomes of the joint work include *Striving Together in Dialogue: A Muslim-Christian Call to Reflection and Action* (2001), which notes

While it is true that the complex history of Christian-Muslim relations has known much rivalry and war, it is often forgotten that there were rich and fertile encounters in the realms of life and ideas alike. Unfortunately, one of the features of our historical memories has been the way in which conflicts overshadow peaceful experiences and accusations drown the voices of understanding. Something similar happens at the level of religious views, when perceptions of difference displace common or shared principles.

The WCC welcomes the initiative and opportunity *A Common Word* represents, and will encourage our member churches and ecumenical partners to engage constructively and positively with their Muslim neighbours in the various local situations throughout

the world, and in the light of your letter we confidently look forward to you and your colleagues to reciprocate. Striving Together confirms that

Relations between Muslims and Christians are usually strongly influenced by local and regional histories and events. But broader developments also have a significant impact, especially when they contribute to destabilising societies previously characterised by peaceful relations of mutual acceptance. In situations where uncertainties of change begin to be felt, suspicion and fear can build up between communities leading to tension and possibly conflict.

Since my letter to you of 6 December 2007, we have commenced consultations with member churches and ecumenical partners, a number of whom responded with great enthusiasm. In the spirit of your invitation to a shared endeavour, I called a meeting of scholars engaged in the field of Christian-Muslim relations, representing member churches and wider ecumenical circles. Their deliberations produced a document entitled *Learning to Explore Love Together*, which I have sent to the member churches. This document is intended to encourage the churches to read and reflect on your Letter and engage constructively with their Muslim neighbours in exploring common concerns.

I have also offered the World Council of Churches' good offices to support our member churches' engagement with their Muslim neighbours. Specifically, I have asked our Inter-religious Dialogue and Cooperation programme staff to make a response to your initiative a top priority.

I want to take this opportunity to initiate a conversation with you about face-to-face dialogue events between you, the authors of *A Common Word*, and your Christian counterparts in order to expand and deepen the understanding between us of loving God and loving neighbour.

As a first step in preparing for such dialogue events, I would like to suggest that we together create a joint Muslim-Christian working group that will produce the plans, create the agendas and issue invitations.

I have instructed my programme staff in Inter-religious Dialogue and Cooperation to be in contact with your staff to explore further how a constructive cooperation might take shape so that we may move into the next phase of our relationship based on shared principles and a shared agenda.

Given the tremendous opportunity *A Common Word* presents, let me offer to send a delegation to Amman later this spring, perhaps in April or May, to meet with you to discuss further how a constructive cooperation might take shape so that we may move into the next phase of our relationship based on shared principles and a shared agenda.

I look forward to your response, and to the possibility of meeting face-to-face in the near future.

With my sincere wishes for peace,

—Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia,
General Secretary

HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH ALEXY II

Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia

April 14, 2008

RESPONSE TO THE OPEN LETTER OF 138 MUSLIM THEOLOGIANs

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK all the Muslim religious leaders and scholars who sent an open letter to representatives of Christian Churches and organizations including the primate of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Christians and Muslims have many similar aims, and we can unite our efforts to achieve them. However, this unity will not occur if we fail to clarify our understanding of each other's religious values. In this connection I welcome the desire of the Muslim community to begin a sincere and open dialogue with representatives of Christian churches on a serious scholarly and intellectual level.

Christianity and Islam are engaged today in a very important task in the world. They seek to remind humanity of the existence of God and of the spiritual dimension present both in man and the world. We bear witness to the interdependence of peace and justice, morality and law, truth and love.

As you rightly put in your letter, Christians and Muslims are drawn together first of all by the commandment of the love of God and the love of one's neighbor. At the same time, I do not think it is worthwhile for us to identify a certain minimum that seems to fix our convergences in faith and to be theologically sufficient for the individual's religious life. Any doctrinal affirmation in Christianity or Islam cannot be viewed in isolation from its unique place in the integral theological system. Otherwise, one's religious identity will be obliterated to give rise to a danger of moving along the path of blending the faiths. It seems to be more fruitful, therefore, to study

the integral faith of each side and to compare them.

In Christianity, a discourse about love of God and love of one's neighbor is impossible without a discourse about God. According to the New Testament revelation, God is revealed to human beings as Love. *Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love* (1 John 4:8). *And so we know and rely on the love of God has for us, God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him* (1 John 4:16). One cannot help seeing in this an indication that the Divine nature itself also has love as its most essential, characteristic and important property.

A lonely isolated essence of love can only love itself: self-love is not love. Love always presupposes the existence of the other. Just as an individual cannot be aware of himself as personality but only through communication with other personalities, there cannot be personal being in god bit through love of another personal being. This is why the New Testament speaks of God as one Being in three persons – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. God is the unity of three Persons who have the same divine nature, which belongs to each of them in its fullness so that they are not three but one God. God the Trinity is the fullness of love with each hypostatic Person bespeaking love towards the other two hypostatic Persons. The Persons of the Trinity are aware of themselves as I, and you: *just as you are in me and I am in you* (John 17:21), Christ says to the father. *He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you*, Christ says about the Holy Spirit (John 16:114). Therefore, every Hypostasis in the Trinity refers to the other Hypostasis, and, according to St. Maxim the Confessor, it is “eternal movement [of the Trinity] in love”.

It is only through the knowledge of God as love that the individual can come to the true knowledge of His being and His other properties. The love of god, not any other property of Divine nature, is the main principle and the main driving force of the Divine Providence for humanity in the cause of its salvation.: *For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* (John 3:16)

The Christian teaching on the incarnation of God the Word in Jesus Christ is also a natural manifestation of God's love of human beings.

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved god but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4:9-10)

Man created in the image and after the likeness of God (Gen. 1, 26), is able to experience Him in himself and, thus, come to know the love that God has for him. God's love is communicated to human beings to become their inner property, their living force that determines, penetrates and forms their whole lives. Love in man arises in response to God's love. *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! (1 John 3:1)*. God expects from man not so much a slave's devotion as filial feeling of love. Therefore the main prayer that the Lord Jesus Christ has taught Christians to say (Luke 11:2), man appeals to God as his Heavenly Father.

The manifestation of man's true love of God is possible only if man is free. This freedom makes it possible to do good by fulfilling the will of God by choice, not only out of fear or for the sake of reward. The love of God inspires in man the selfless desire to fulfill His commandments. For, according to St Isaac the Syrian,

Because of His great love, God was not pleased to restrict our freedom but was pleased to draw us near Him through the love of our own heart. Therefore, human freedom increases, extends and grows stronger as human beings grow in love of God, which is the core of human religious and moral perfection. Those who love God seek to emulate their Creator in their actions: *Be perfect, therefore, as your*

Heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 5:48).

My letter does not have the aim of setting forth the entire Christian theology. I only offer an example of reflection on God's love of man and man's love of God, which underlie the whole theological system of Christianity and which cannot be reduced to a few laconic formulations. It is my conviction that Christians and Muslim thinkers would benefit from regular studies of each other's doctrines in their fullness. In this connection, it seems desirable to develop a doctrinal of Christian-Islamic dialogue to broaden academic and research cooperation, to study doctrinal affirmations, to create an in-depth basis for developing multifaceted cooperation between our to religious communities.

The doctrinal dialogue between the Orthodox Church and Islam has considerably intensified recently. This happened not only because we have to communicate more intensively and to build societal life together, but also because Christians and Muslims have come to face the same challenges which are impossible to meet on one's own. We have together encountered a pressure from the anti-religious worldview that claims universally and seeks to subject all the spheres of life in society. We are also witness to attempts to assert a 'new morality' that contradicts the moral norms supported by traditional religions. We should together face these challenges.

Some people among both Christians and Muslims have expressed fears that the development of interreligious dialogue may lead to the religious syncretism, a review of the doctrines and obliterated borders between religious traditions. Time has shown however that a reasonable system of cooperation between religions helps to preserve and emphasize the unique nature and identity of each of them. Moreover, the development of appropriate forms of interreligious dialogue in itself has proved to be a serious obstacle for manipulations aims to establish a kind of universal super-religion.

Unfortunately, I have to state that our religions do have enemies who would like to see Christian and Muslims clash, on the one hand, or to bring them to a false 'unity' based on religious and

moral indifference, thus giving priority to purely secular concerns, on the other. Therefore we as religious leaders need each other, so that our faithful may preserve their identity in the changing world.

Noteworthy in this connection is the experience of co-existence between Christians and Islam in Russia. The traditional religions in our country have never come into conflict while preserving their identity for a thousand years. Russia is one of those rare multi-religious and multinational states whose history has not known the religious wars that have plagued various regions of the world.

The basic religious and ethical principles held by the traditional faiths in Russia invariably guided their followers toward cooperation with people of other religions and beliefs in the spirit of peace and harmony. Various religious communities lived side-by-side, working together and defending together their common Motherland. Nevertheless, they stood firm in the faith of their forefather, safeguarding it against encroachments from outside and often doing so together in the face of invaders from other countries. To this day, our compatriots have not come into any real conflict between them based on religious grounds. In this way, an affective system of interreligious relations based on mutual respect and good-neighborliness was established in Russia.

In today's Russia, there is an important mechanism for interreligious dialogue, namely, the Interreligious Council in Russia, which has been working fruitfully and successfully for over ten years now. Its example and experience has proved to be attractive for the independent states, which have been formed in the post-Soviet space. Religious leaders in these countries have formed a CIS Interreligious Council. Through these two bodies, together we seek to meet the various challenges of today and to show the whole world a positive experience of peaceful coexistence and cooperation between Orthodox Christians and Muslims who have lived in the same society for centuries. As is known, in other Christian countries, too, Muslims have had opportunities for developing their religious life freely.

In many Muslim countries, Christians have enjoyed invariable

support and have the freedom to live according to their own religious rules. But in some Islamic countries, the legislation prohibits the construction of churches, worship services and free Christian preaching. I hope that the letter of Islamic religious leaders and scholars proposing to intensify dialogue between our two religions will contribute to establishing better conditions for Christian minorities in such countries.

Doctrinally our dialogue could deal with such important themes as the teaching of God, man and the world. At the same time, on the practical plane the Christian-Muslim cooperation could be aimed at safeguarding the role of religion in public life, struggling with the defamation of religion, overcoming intolerance and xenophobia, protecting holy places, preserving places of worship and promoting joint peace initiatives.

It is my conviction that it is precisely the Christians and the Muslims that should initiate inter-religious dialogue on regional and global levels. Therefore, in the framework of international organizations, it seems useful to create mechanisms that make it possible to be more sensitive to the spiritual and cultural traditions of various peoples.

Once again I would like to thank all the Muslim scholars and religious leaders for their open letter. I hope further fruitful cooperation both in theological dialogue and the social sphere.

—Alexy, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia

THE MOST REVD. AND
RT. HON. ROWAN WILLIAMS

The Archbishop of Canterbury

July 14, 2008

A COMMON WORD FOR THE COMMON GOOD:

TO THE MUSLIM RELIGIOUS Leaders and Scholars who have signed *A Common Word Between Us and You* and to Muslim brothers and sisters everywhere.

Grace, Mercy and Peace be with you

Preface

Dear Friends:

We are deeply appreciative of the initiative you have taken and welcome “*A Common Word Between Us and You*” as a significant development in relations between Christians and Muslims. In your letter you have addressed 27 Christian leaders and “leaders of Christian Churches everywhere” and many of those addressed have already responded or set in motion processes through which responses will in due course be made. Having listened carefully to Christian colleagues from the widest possible range of backgrounds, most significantly at a Consultation of Church representatives and Christian scholars in June 2008, I am pleased to offer this response to your letter, with their support and encouragement.

We recognise that your letter brings together Muslim leaders from many traditions of Islam to address Christian leaders representative of the diverse traditions within Christianity. We find in it a hospitable and friendly spirit, expressed in its focus on love of God and love of neighbour – a focus which draws together the languages of Christianity and Islam, and of Judaism also. Your letter could hardly be more timely, given the growing awareness that peace throughout the world is deeply entwined with the ability of all

people of faith everywhere to live in peace, justice, mutual respect and love. Our belief is that only through a commitment to that transcendent perspective to which your letter points, and to which we also look, shall we find the resources for radical, transforming, non-violent engagement with the deepest needs of our world and our common humanity.

In your invitation to “come to *A Common Word*” we find a helpful generosity of intention. Some have read the invitation as an insistence that we should be able immediately to affirm an agreed and shared understanding of God. But such an affirmation would not be honest to either of our traditions. It would fail to acknowledge the reality of the differences that exist and that have been the cause of deep and – at times in the past – even violent division. We read your letter as expressing a more modest but ultimately a more realistically hopeful recognition that the ways in which we as Christians and Muslims speak about God and humanity are not simply mutually unintelligible systems. We interpret your invitation as saying ‘let us find a way of recognising that on some matters we are speaking enough of a common language for us to be able to pursue both exploratory dialogue and peaceful co-operation with integrity and without compromising fundamental beliefs.’

We find this recognition in what is, for us, one of the key paragraphs of your letter:

In the light of what we have seen to be necessarily implied and evoked by the Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) blessed saying: ‘The best that I have said—myself, and the prophets that came before me—is: “there is no god but God, He Alone, He hath no associate, His is the sovereignty and His is the praise and He hath power over all things”’, we can now perhaps understand the words ‘The best that I have said—myself, and the prophets that came before me’ as equating the blessed formula ‘there is no god but God, He Alone, He hath no associate, His is the sovereignty and His is the praise and He hath power over all things’ precisely

with the ‘First and Greatest Commandment’ to love God, with all one’s heart and soul, as found in various places in the Bible. That is to say, in other words, that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was perhaps, through inspiration, restating and alluding to the Bible’s First Commandment. God knows best, but certainly we have seen their effective similarity in meaning. Moreover, we also do know (as can be seen in the endnotes), that both formulas have another remarkable parallel: the way they arise in a number of slightly differing versions and forms in different contexts, all of which, nevertheless, emphasize the primacy of total love and devotion to God.

The double use of ‘perhaps’ in that passage allows for openness, exploration and debate – made possible because certain aspects of the ways in which we structure our talk about God in our respective traditions are intelligible one to the other. We read it as an invitation to further discussion within the Christian family and within the Muslim family as well as between Muslims and Christians, since it invites all of us to think afresh about the foundations of our convictions. There are many things between us that offer the promise of deeper insight through future discussion. Thus for us your letter makes a highly significant contribution to the divinely initiated journey into which we are called, the journey in which Christians and Muslims alike are taken further into mutual understanding and appreciation. The confession that “God knows best” reminds us of the limits of our understanding and knowledge.

In the light of this letter, what are the next steps for us? We draw from *A Common Word Between Us and You* five areas which might be fruitfully followed through.

First, its focus on the love and praise of God, stressing how we must trust absolutely in God and give him the devotion of our whole being – heart, mind and will – underlines a shared commitment: the fixed intention to relate all reality and all behaviour intelligently, faithfully and practically to the God who deals with

us in love, compassion, justice and peace. One of the areas we can usefully discuss together is the diverse ways in which we understand the love of God as an absolutely free gift to his creation. There are bound to be differences as well as similarities in the ways we understand and express God's love for us and how we seek to practise love for God and neighbour in return, and in what follows we consider how these might be explored in a spirit of honest and co-operative attention.

Second, its commitment to a love of neighbour that is rooted in the love of God (and which, for Christians, is part of our response to the love of God for us) suggests that we share a clear passion for the common good of all humanity and all creation. In what follows we shall seek to identify some practical implications for our future relations both with each other and with the rest of the world.

Third, the concern to ground what we say in the Scriptures of our traditions shows a desire to meet each other not 'at the margins' of our historic identities but speaking from what is central and authoritative for us. Here, however, it is especially important to acknowledge that the Qur'an's role in Islam is not the same as that of the Bible in Christianity; Christians understand the primary location of God's revealing Word to be the history of God's people and above all the history of Jesus Christ, whom we acknowledge as the Word made flesh, to which the Bible is the authoritative and irreplaceable witness. For the Muslim, as we understand it, the Word is supremely communicated in what Mohammed is commanded to recite. But for both faiths, scripture provides the basic tools for speaking of God and it is in attending to how we use our holy texts that we often discover most truly the nature of each other's faith. In what follows we shall suggest how studying our scriptures together might continue to provide a fruitful element of our engagements with each other in the process of "building a home together", to pick up an image popularised by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in a recent book.

Fourth, and growing out of this last point, the letter encourages us to relate to each other from the heart of our lives of faith before

God. However much or little ‘common ground’ we initially sense between us, it is possible to engage with each other without anxiety if we truly begin from the heart of what we believe we have received from God; possible to speak together, respecting and discussing differences rather than imprisoning ourselves in mutual fear and suspicion.

Finally, we acknowledge gratefully your recognition that the differences between Christians and Muslims are real and serious and that you do not claim to address all the issues. Yet in offering this focus on love of God and neighbour, you identify what could be the centre of a sense of shared calling and shared responsibility – an awareness of what God calls for from all his human creatures to whom he has given special responsibility in creation. In our response, it is this search for a common awareness of responsibility before God that we shall seek to hold before us as a vision worthy of our best efforts.

This response therefore looks in several directions. It seeks to encourage more reflection within the Christian community, as well as to promote honest encounter between Christian and Muslim believers; and it asks about the possible foundations for shared work in the world and a shared challenge to all those things which obscure God’s purpose for humanity.

THE ONE GOD WHO IS LOVE

At the origins of the history of God’s people, as Jewish and Christian Scripture record it, is the command given to Moses to communicate to the people – the *Shema*, as it has long been known, from its opening word in Hebrew:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. (Deuteronomy 6:4–5)

Such an imperative, as your letter makes clear, is of central au-

thority for Muslims too.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!:

The tawhid principle is held out in your letter as one of the bases for agreement. In addition to the passages you quote to demonstrate tawhid, we read in the Qur'an:

God: there is no god but Him, the Ever Living, the Ever Watchful. (Al-Baqara 2:255)

He is God the One, God the eternal. He fathered no one nor was he fathered. No one is comparable to Him. (Al-'Ikhlās 112:1-4)

This last text reminds the Christian that this great affirmation of the uniqueness of God is what has often caused Muslims to look with suspicion at the Christian doctrines of God. Christian belief about the Trinity – God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit – appears at once to compromise the belief that God has no other being associated with him. How can we call God al-Qayyum, the Self-sufficient, if he is not alone? So we read in the Qur'an,

The East and the West belong to God: wherever you turn, there is His Face. God is all pervading and all knowing. They have asserted, "God has a child." May He be exalted! No! Everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Him, everything devoutly obeys His will. He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth, and when He decrees something, He says only "Be," and it is. (Al-Baqara 2:115-117)

Muslims see the belief that God could have a son as suggesting that God is somehow limited as we are limited, bound to physical processes and needing the co-operation of others. How can such a

God be truly free and sovereign – qualities both Christianity and Islam claim to affirm, for we know that God is able to bring the world into being by his word alone?

Here it is important to state unequivocally that the association of any other being with God is expressly rejected by the Christian theological tradition. Since the earliest Councils of the Church, Christian thinkers sought to clarify how, when we speak of the Father ‘begetting’ the Son, we must put out of our minds any suggestion that this is a physical thing, a process or event like the processes and events that happen in the world. They insisted that the name ‘God’ is not the name of a person like a human person, a limited being with a father and mother and a place that they inhabit within the world. ‘God’ is the name of a kind of life, a ‘nature’ or essence – eternal and self-sufficient life, always active, needing nothing. But that life is lived, so Christians have always held, eternally and simultaneously as three interrelated agencies are made known to us in the history of God’s revelation to the Hebrew people and in the life of Jesus and what flows from it. God is at once the source of divine life, the expression of that life and the active power that communicates that life. This takes us at once into consideration of the Trinitarian language used by Christians to speak of God. We recognise that this is difficult, sometimes offensive, to Muslims; but it is all the more important for the sake of open and careful dialogue that we try to clarify what we do and do not mean by it, and so trust that what follows will be read in this spirit.

In human language, in the light of what our Scripture says, we speak of “Father, Son and Holy Spirit”, but we do not mean one God with two beings alongside him, or three gods of limited power. So there is indeed one God, the Living and Self-subsistent, associated with no other; but what God is and does is not different from the life which is eternally and simultaneously the threefold pattern of life: source and expression and sharing. Since God’s life is always an intelligent, purposeful and loving life, it is possible to think of each of these dimensions of divine life as, in important ways, like a centre of mind and love, a person; but this does not mean that God

‘contains’ three different individuals, separate from each other as human individuals are.

Christians believe that in a mysterious manner we have a limited share in the characteristics of divine life. Through the death and rising to life of Jesus, God takes away our evildoing and our guilt, he forgives us and sets us free. And our Scriptures go on to say that he breathes new life into us, as he breathed life into Adam at the first, so that God’s spirit is alive in us. The presence and action of the Holy Spirit is thus God in his action of sharing life with us. As we become mature in our new life, our lives become closer and closer (so we pray and hope) to the central and perfect expression of divine life, the Word whom we encounter in Jesus – though we never become simply equal to him. And because Jesus prayed to the source of his life as ‘Father’ , we call the eternal and perfect expression of God’s life not only the Word but also the ‘Son’. We pray to the source of divine life in the way that Jesus taught us, and we say ‘Father’ to this divine reality. And in calling the eternal word the ‘Son’ of God, we remind ourselves that he is in no way different in nature from the Father: there is only one divine nature and reality.

Because God exists in this threefold pattern of interdependent action, the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit is one in which there is always a ‘giving place’ to each other, each standing back so that the other may act. The only human language we have for this is love: the three dimensions of divine life relate to each other in self-sacrifice or self-giving. The doctrine of the Trinity is a way of explaining why we say that God is love, not only that he shows love.

When God acts towards us in compassion to liberate us from evil, to deal with the consequences of our rebellion against him and to make us able to call upon him with confidence, it is a natural (but not automatic) flowing outwards of his own everlasting action. The mutual self-giving love that is the very life of God is made real for our sake in the self-giving love of Jesus. And it is because of God’s prior love for us that we are enabled and enjoined to love

God. Through our loving response, we can begin to comprehend something of God's nature and God's will for humankind:

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. (1John 4:8)

So Christians go further than simply saying that God is a loving God or that love is one of his attributes among others. We say that God does not love simply because he decides to love. God is always, eternally, loving – the very nature and definition of God is love, and the full understanding of his unity is for Christians bound up with this.

Understanding the “breadth and length and height and depth” of the love of God is a lifetime's journey; so it is not remotely possible to consider it with satisfactory thoroughness within the confines of this letter. However, it is necessary at this point to stress two qualities of God's love that are crucially important for the Christian: it is unconditional, given gratuitously and without cause; and it is self-sacrificial .

In the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, the loving nature of God is revealed. We see how Jesus, both in his ministry and in his acceptance of a sacrificial death at the hands of his enemies, offers a love that is given in advance of any human response; it is not a reward for goodness – rather it is what makes human goodness possible, as we change our lives in gratitude to God for his free gift. In the words of a well-known English hymn, it is “Love to the loveless shown, that they might lovely be”. And because of this, it is also a love that is vulnerable. God does not convert us and transform us by exercising his divine power alone. So infinite is that power, and so inseparable from love, that no defeat or suffering, even the terrible suffering of Jesus on the cross, can overcome God's purpose.

So, when we seek to live our lives in love of God and neighbour, we as Christians pray that we may be given strength to love God even when God does not seem to give us what we think we want

or seems far off (a major theme in the writings of many Christian mystics, who often speak of those moments of our experience when God does not seem to love us as we should want to be loved); and we pray too for the strength to love those who do not seem to deserve our love, to love those who reject our love, to love those who have not yet made any move in love towards us.

We seek to show in our lives some of the characteristics of God's own love. We know that this may mean putting ourselves at risk; to love where we can see no possibility of love being returned is to be vulnerable, and we can only dare to do this in the power of God's Holy Spirit, creating in us some echo, some share, of Christ's own love. And in the light of all this, one area where dialogue between Christians and Muslims will surely be fruitful is in clarifying how far Muslims can in good conscience go in seeing the love of God powerfully at work in circumstances where the world sees only failure or suffering – but also, to anticipate the challenge that some Muslims might make in answer, how far the Christian tradition of accepting suffering on this basis may sometimes lead to a passive attitude to suffering and a failure to try and transform situations in the name of God's justice.

Thus, as Christians, we would say that our worship of God as threefold has never compromised the unity of God, which we affirm as wholeheartedly as Jews and Muslims. Indeed, by understanding God as a unity of love we see ourselves intensifying and enriching our belief in the unity of God. This indivisible unity is again expressed in the ancient theological formula, which we can trace back to the North African theologian Saint Augustine, *opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt* – all the actions of the Trinity outside itself are indivisible. So, although the Trinity has been a point of dispute with Jews and Muslims, and will no doubt continue to be so, we are encouraged that *A Common Word Between Us and You* does not simply assume that Christians believe in more than one god. We are, therefore, encouraged in the belief that what both our faiths say concerning the nature of God is not totally diverse – there are points of communication and overlap in the way we think about

the divine nature that make our continued exploration of these issues worthwhile, despite the important issues around whether we can say that God is love in his very nature.

It was, therefore, appropriate that Cardinal Bertone, in his letter to Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal welcoming “*A Common Word Between Us and You*” on behalf of Pope Benedict XVI, wrote:

Without ignoring or downplaying our differences as Christians and Muslims, we can and therefore should look to what unites us, namely, belief in the one God, the provident Creator and universal Judge who at the end of time will deal with each person according to his or her actions. We are all called to commit ourselves totally to him and to obey his sacred will.

To what extent do the Christian conviction of God as Love and the all-important Islamic conviction that God is “the Compassionate, the Merciful” (*Ar-Rahman Ar-Rahim*) represent common ground, and to what extent do differences need to be spelled out further? This is a very significant area for further work. But your letter – and many of the Christian responses to it – do make it clear that we have a basis on which we can explore such matters together in a spirit of genuine – and truly neighbourly! – love.

Responding to the Gift of Love

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. (1John 4:7–12)

God will bring a new people: He will love them, and they will love Him. (Al-Ma'ida 5:54).

What has been said so far is intended to highlight the way in which we as Christians see love as first and foremost a gift from God to us which makes possible for us a new level of relation with God and one another. By God's outpouring of love, we come to share in the kind of life that is characteristic of God's own eternal life. Our love of God appears as a response to God's prior love for us in its absolute gratuity and causelessness.

Thus to speak of our love for God is before all else to speak in words of praise and gratitude. And for both Jews and Christians, that language of praise has been shaped by and centred upon the Psalms of David:

1 I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever.

2 Every day I will bless you, and praise your name forever and ever.

3 Great is the lord, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable.

...

15 The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.

16 You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.

...

21 My mouth will speak the praise of the lord, and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever. (Psalm 145)

In words like these, we hear many resonances with the language of your letter, suggesting a similar kind of devotion expressed in words of love, praise and thanks. The language of the Psalms, like

the language you have used, looks to a God of ultimate creative power who is loving and compassionate, generous, faithful and merciful, and upholds justice. In the Psalms, generation after generation has found inspiration and encouragement in the heights, depths and ordinariness of human life. Countless Christians and Jews use them daily. They show, in the words of your letter, how worshippers “must be grateful to God and trust Him with all their sentiments and emotions”, and that “the call to be totally devoted and attached to God heart and soul, far from being a call for a mere emotion or for a mood, is in fact an injunction requiring all-embracing, constant and active love of God. It demands a love in which the innermost spiritual heart and the whole of the soul – with its intelligence, will and feeling – participate through devotion.”

The Psalms are the songs of a worshipping community, not only of individuals, a community taken up into love and adoration of God, yet acknowledging all the unwelcome and unpalatable aspects of the world we live in – individual suffering and corporate disaster, betrayal, injustice and sin. They are cries of pain as well as of joy, of bewilderment as well as trust, laments for God’s apparent absence as well as celebrations of his presence. They are a challenge to find words to praise God in all circumstances. Your letter, in opening up for us some of the riches of the devotion of the Qur’an helps us appreciate afresh the riches of the Psalms. Perhaps in future the statement in the Qur’an, “*to David We gave the Psalms*” (4:163), might encourage us to explore further together our traditions and practices of praise and how in our diverse ways we seek to bring to God the whole of our human imagination and sensitivity in a unified act of praise.

The Psalms teach us that the name of God, God’s full, personal, mysterious and unsearchable reality, is to be continually celebrated and the life of faith is to be filled with praise of God. We love God first not for what he has done for us but ‘for his name’s sake’ – because of who God is. Even in the midst of terrible suffering or doubt it is possible, with Job, to say: *Blessed be the name of the Lord* (Job 1:21). In the prayer which Jesus taught to his dis-

ciples the leading petition is: *Hallowed be your name* (Matthew 6:9). This means not only that honouring and blessing God is the first and most comprehensive activity of those who follow Jesus; it also encourages Christians to give thanks for all the ways in which God's name is proclaimed as holy and to be held in honour – by Christians, by people of other faiths and indeed by the whole order of creation which proclaims the glory of God .

9 Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!

10 Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds!

11 Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth!

12 Young men and women alike, old and young together!

13 Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven.
(Psalm 148)

So, with all creation, we join together in this chorus of universal praise – echoed so vividly in some of the phrases quoted in your letter.

Jesus said *I came that they [we] may have life, and have it abundantly* (John 10:10) and offering such praise and honour to God is in many ways the heart of the new life. The conviction that the love of God lives in us through his Holy Spirit, that to God we owe the very breath of life within us, is the motivation for our response to God's love – both in loving God and loving neighbour. We know from personal experience that true love can not be commanded or conditioned; it is freely given and received. Our love of God, as already indicated, is first and foremost a response of gratitude enabling us to grow in holiness – to become closer and closer in our actions and thoughts to the complete self-giving that always exists perfectly in God's life and is shown in the life and death of Jesus.

Towards this fullness we are all called to travel and grow and we shall want to learn from you more about the understandings

of love of God in Islam as we continue this journey, exploring the implications of this love in our lives and our relationships with each other. Jesus, on the night before he died, said, *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.* (John 13:34). Responding to this new commandment to dwell in the love he bears us means allowing it to transform us and, so transformed, to love others – irrespective of their response.

LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOUR

[Jesus said:] ‘You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.’
(Matthew 5:43–48)

We support the clear affirmation in your letter, through texts from the Qur’an and the Bible, of the importance of love for the neighbour. Indeed, your letter can be considered an encouraging example of this love. We endorse the emphasis on generosity and self-sacrifice, and trust that these might be mutual marks of our continuing relationship with each other. The section in your letter on love for the neighbour is relatively brief, so we look forward to developing further the ways in which the theme is worked out within our traditions. We believe we have much to learn from each other in this matter, drawing on resources of wisdom, law, prophecy, poetry and narrative, both within and beyond our canonical

scriptures to help each other come to a richer vision of being loving neighbours today.

For Christians, our love for God is always a response to God's prior free love of humankind (and all creation). Enabled by this gift of love, our love becomes by grace something that mirrors the character of God's love and so can be offered to the stranger and the other. A full exploration of the significance of this will only be possible as we grow in our encounters together but, within the confines of this letter, we would want to draw attention to two aspects of the love of neighbour that are important for Christians.

The first is illustrated in St Luke's gospel when Jesus, having given the Dual Commandment of love as the response to the question "what must I do to inherit eternal life?", goes on to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan when asked to explain "who is my neighbour?". Commentary on this parable frequently points to the way in which Jesus challenges the assumptions of the question; instead of defining a necessarily limited group of people who might fit the category of 'neighbours' to whom love should be shown, he speaks of the need to prove ourselves neighbours by compassion to whoever is before us in need or pain, whether or not they are akin to us, approved by us, safe for us to be with or whatever else. Such neighbourliness will mean crossing religious and ethnic divisions and transcending ancient enmities. So the 'neighbour' of the original Torah is defined by Jesus as whoever the 'other' is who specifically and concretely requires self-forgetful attention and care in any moment. Thus to be a neighbour is a challenge that continually comes at us in new ways. We cannot define its demands securely in advance; it demands that we be ready to go beyond the boundaries of our familiar structures of kinship and obligation, whether these are local, racial or religious. For that reason – developing a helpful symbolic reading of this parable – Christian thinkers have often said that Jesus himself is our first 'neighbour', the one who comes alongside every human being in need. We look forward to the opportunity to explore with you how this teaching about being a

neighbour relates to the Qur'anic imperative to care for neighbour and stranger (an imperative that seems to be derived here from the worship of God).

The second aspect, already mentioned above, is Jesus' teaching about the love of those who do not necessarily love you. We have quoted above the version attributed to St Matthew, but the Gospel according to Luke contains a similar passage:

If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you... But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:29–31, 35–36)

This radical teaching, which Jesus presents precisely as a higher interpretation of what it means to love the neighbour, is grounded, as we have seen, in the way in which God loves. It teaches us to recognise as neighbour even those who set themselves against us. This is partly required by humility before the design of God in history and the limited nature of our perspective, for we do not know, as Christians have often said, who among those who confront us in hostility today will turn out to be our friends on the last day, when we stand before our Judge. It is partly, too, 'that we may be children of our Father in heaven', learning to share the perspective of God, who reaches out and seeks to win all his creatures to his love, even those who turn away from it. This resonates with what is said in the Qur'an: "God may still bring about affection between you and your present enemies – God is all powerful, God is most forgiving and merciful" (*Al-Mumtahana* 60:7). Where love replaces enmity we can recognise the work and way of God.

SEEKING THE COMMON GOOD
IN THE WAY OF GOD

THE COMMON GOOD

Love works no ill to his neighbour (Romans 13:10)

Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers (Hebrews 13:1-2)

There are many practical implications that flow from our understandings of love of God and love of neighbour, including those mentioned in your letter regarding peacemaking, religious freedom and the avoidance of violence. In response we should like to offer a vision, grounded in absolute faithfulness to our respective religious convictions, that we believe we can share in offering to our fellow believers and our neighbours (in the widest sense).

To believe in an absolute religious truth is to believe that the object of our belief is not vulnerable to the contingencies of human history: God's mind and character cannot be changed by what happens here in the world. Thus an apparent defeat in the world for our belief cannot be definitive; God does not fail just because we fail to persuade others or because our communities fail to win some kind of power. If we were to believe that our failure is a failure or defeat for God, then the temptation will be to seek for any means possible to avoid such an outcome. But that way lies terrorism and religious war and persecution. The idea that any action, however extreme or disruptive or even murderous, is justified if it averts failure or defeat for a particular belief or a particular religious group is not really consistent with the conviction that our failure does not mean God's failure. Indeed, it reveals a fundamental lack of conviction in the eternity and sufficiency of the object of faith.

Religious violence suggests an underlying religious insecurity. When different communities have the same sort of conviction of the absolute truth of their perspective, there is certainly an intellectual and spiritual challenge to be met; but the logic of this belief ought to make it plain that there can be no justification for the sort

of violent contest in which any means, however inhuman, can be justified by appeal to the need to 'protect God's interests'. Even to express it in those terms is to show how absurd it is. The eternal God cannot need 'protection' by the tactics of human violence. This point is captured in the words of Jesus before the Roman governor: *My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight* (John 19.36).

So we can conclude that the more we as people of genuine faith are serious about the truth of our convictions, the more likely we will be to turn away from violence in the name of faith; to trust that God, the truly real, will remain true, divine and unchanging, whatever the failures and successes of human society and history. And we will be aware that to try and compel religious allegiance through violence is really a way of seeking to replace divine power with human; hence the Qur'anic insistence that there can be no compulsion in matters of religious faith (*Al-Baqarah*, 2:256) and the endorsement in your letter of "freedom of religion". It is crucial to faith in a really existing and absolute transcendent agency that we should understand it as being what it is quite independently of any lesser power: the most disturbing form of secularisation is when this is forgotten or misunderstood.

This has, indeed, been forgotten or misunderstood in so many contexts over the millennia. Religious identity has often been confused with cultural or national integrity, with structures of social control, with class and regional identities, with empire; and it has been imposed in the interest of all these and other forms of power. Despite Jesus' words in John's gospel, Christianity has been promoted at the point of the sword and legally supported by extreme sanctions; despite the Qur'anic axiom, Islam has been supported in the same way, with extreme penalties for abandoning it, and civil disabilities for those outside the faith. There is no religious tradition whose history is exempt from such temptation and such failure.

What we need as a vision for our dialogue is to break the current cycles of violence, to show the world that faith and faith alone can truly ground a commitment to peace which definitively abandons

the tempting but lethal cycle of retaliation in which we simply imitate each other's violence. Building on our understanding of God's love for us and, in response, our love for God and neighbour we can speak of a particular quality to the Christian approach to peace and peace-making: the moment of unconditioned positive response, the risk of offering something to one whom you have no absolutely secure reason to trust.

Many Christians have said that your letter represents such an offering – a gift with no certainty of what might be the response. We want to acknowledge the courage of such a move, and respond in kind. Let us explore together how this dimension of Christian language, born of the unconditional and self-sacrificial love of neighbour, can be correlated with the language of the Qur'an.

Such an approach can take us beyond a bland affirmation that we are at peace with those who are at peace with us to a place where our religious convictions can be a vehicle for creating peace where it is absent.

Such a commitment to seek together the common good can, we are convinced, sit alongside a fundamental recognition that, even with our commitments to love God and neighbour, we cannot expect to find some 'neutral' positions beyond the traditions of our faith that would allow us to broker some sort of union between our diverse convictions. Far from being a cause for concern, holding fast to our truth claims whilst rejecting violence does two very positive things at once. First it affirms the transcendent source of faith: it says that our views are not just human constructions which we can abandon when they are inconvenient. Second, by insisting that no other values, no secular values, are absolute, it denies to all other systems of values any justification for uncontrolled violence. Transcendent values can be defended through violence only by those who do not fully understand their transcendent character; and if no other value is absolute, no other value can claim the right to unconditional defence by any means and at all costs.

So, even if we accept that our systems of religious belief cannot be reconciled by 'rational' argument because they depend on the

gift of revelation, we rule out, by that very notion, any assumption that coercive human power is the ultimate authority and arbiter in our world. Given, as we have acknowledged, that Christian history contains too many examples of Christians betraying that initial turning away from the cycle of retaliation, we can only put forward such a vision in the form of a challenge to Christians as much as Muslims: how did we ever come to think that the truly transcendent can ever be imagined or proclaimed in a pattern of endless and sterile repetition of force?

And here we can together suggest a way in which religious plurality can be seen as serving the cause of social unity and acting as a force for the common good. As people of faith, we can never claim that social harmony can be established by uncontrolled coercive power. This means that we are not obliged to defend and argue for the legitimacy and righteousness of any social order. As the world now is, diverse religious traditions very frequently inhabit one territory, one nation, one social unit (and that may be a relatively small unit like a school, or a housing co-operative or even a business). In such a setting, we cannot avoid the pragmatic and secular question of ‘common security’: what is needed for our convictions to flourish is bound up with what is needed for the convictions of other groups to flourish. We learn that we can best defend ourselves by defending others. In a plural society, Christians secure their religious liberty by advocacy for the liberty of people of other faiths to have the same right to be heard in the continuing conversation about the direction and ethos of society.

And we can extend this still further. If we are in the habit of defending each other, we ought to be able to learn to defend other groups and communities as well. We can together speak for those who have no voice or leverage in society – for the poorest, the most despised, the least powerful, for women and children, for migrants and minorities; and even to speak together for that great encompassing reality which has no ‘voice’ or power of its own – our injured and abused material environment, which both our traditions of faith tell us we should honour and care for.

Our voice in the conversation of society will be the stronger for being a joint one. If we are to be true to the dual commandment of love, we need to find ways of being far more effective in influencing our societies to follow the way of God in promoting that which leads to human flourishing – honesty and faithfulness in public and private relationships, in business as in marriage and family life; the recognition that a person’s value is not an economic matter; the clear recognition that neither material wealth nor entertainment can secure a true and deep- rooted human fulfilment.

SEEKING TOGETHER IN THE WAY OF GOD

“*A Common Word Between Us and You*” issues a powerful call to dialogue and collaboration between Christians and Muslims. A great deal is already happening in this sphere on many levels, but the very wide geographical (43 countries) and theological diversity represented among the signatories of your letter provides a unique impetus to deepen and extend the encounters. As part of the common shape and structure of our language about God we can acknowledge a shared commitment to truth and a desire to discern how our lives may come to be lived in accordance with eternal truth. As we have noted above, the Christian understanding of love, coupled with our common acknowledgement of the absolute transcendence of the divine, encourages us towards a vision of radical and transformative non-violence. We are committed to reflecting and working together, with you and all our human neighbours, with a view both to practical action and service and to a long term dedication to all that will lead to a true common good for human beings before God.

This is a good moment to attempt to coordinate a way forward for our dialogue. We suggest an approach drawing on Dialogue and Proclamation, a 1991 Vatican document whose four categories of inter-religious dialogue have been found widely helpful. They are:

- a) the dialogue of life, “where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit”;

- b) the dialogue of action, “in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people”;
- c) the dialogue of theological exchange, “where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages”; and
- d) the dialogue of religious experience, “where persons rooted in their own religious traditions share their spiritual riches”.

This typology can be applied more generally to the whole pattern of encounter between Christians and Muslims, even where this is not directly described as ‘dialogue’.

Three imperatives are suggested by this:

- a) to strengthen grass-roots partnerships and programmes between our communities that will work for justice, peace and the common good of human society the world over;
- b) to intensify the shared theological discussions and researches of religious leaders and scholars who are seeking clearer insight into divine truth, and to realise this through building and sustaining of groups marked by a sense of collegiality, mutual esteem, and trust;
- c) to deepen the appreciation of Christian and Muslim believers for each other’s religious practice and experience, as they come to recognise one another as people whose lives are oriented towards God in love.

These different kinds of encounter need to be held together to ensure a balanced and effective pattern of encounter. The approach of your letter shows the importance of shared and attentive study of Biblical and Qur’anic texts as a way of ensuring both that all dimensions of encounter are present and also that Christians and Muslims are held accountable to, and draw on the riches of, their respective traditions of faith whilst recognising the limitations – at least initially – in our ability to comment authoritatively on the others’ scriptures.

As we noted earlier, the role of the Qu’ran in Islam is not really parallel to the role of the Bible in Christianity. For Christians, God’s

Word was made flesh in Jesus Christ. Our understanding of the Scriptures is that they witness to and draw their authority from Christ, describing the witness of prophets and apostles to his saving work. They are the voice of his living Spirit who, Christians believe, dwells among us and within us. Nevertheless, for us as for you, reading the Scriptures is a constant source of inspiration, nurture and correction, and this makes it very appropriate for Christians and Muslims to listen to one another, and question one another, in the course of reading and interpreting the texts from which we have learned of God's will and purposes. And for Christians and Muslims together addressing our scriptures in this way, it is essential also to take account of the place of the Jewish people and of the Hebrew scriptures in our encounter, since we both look to our origins in that history of divine revelation and action.

The use of scriptures in inter-religious dialogue has considerable potential, but there are also risks in this approach when we think we know or understand another's sacred texts but in fact are reading them exclusively through our own spectacles. We hope that one early outcome of studying and discussing together will be to work out wise guidelines, practices and educational resources for this element of our engagement.

Given the variety of forms of encounter which are to be held together as we deepen our engagement with each other, we can identify three main outcomes which we might seek together. They will depend on the establishment and maintenance of credible and durable structures of collegiality, trust and respect between key individuals and communities in our two faiths. The three outcomes are:

- a) Maintaining and strengthening the momentum of what is already happening in Christian-Muslim encounter. An important stream flowing into this will be the continuing conversations around your letter and the Christian responses to it. Reaching back before that also, there has been a growing corpus of action and reflection in this area at least from *Nostra Aetate* (1965) onwards. The recent gathering of Muslim religious leaders and

scholars in Mecca and the subsequent convening of a conference in Madrid, for example, is another promising development. It is important that any new initiatives acknowledge this wider picture of Christian-Muslim encounter, and position themselves in relation to it, learning from both its achievements and set-backs.

- b) Finding safe spaces within which the differences – as well as the convergences – between Christians and Muslims can be honestly and creatively articulated and explored. Our two faiths have differed deeply on points of central importance to both of us, points of belief as well as points of practice. It is essential for the health of our encounter that we should find ways of talking freely yet courteously about those differences; indeed, honesty of this kind has been described as the most certain sign of maturity in dialogue.
- c) Ensuring that our encounters are not for the sake of participants alone, but are capable of having an influence which affects people more widely – Christians and Muslims at the level of all our local communities, and also those engaged in the wider realities of our societies and our world. Seeking the common good is a purpose around which Christians and Muslims can unite, and in leads us into all kinds of complex territory as we seek to find ways of acting effectively in the world of modern global and democratic politics.

Within the wide diversity of patterns of encounter and participation, it will be desirable to establish some broad priorities in order to keep Christian-Muslim relations focused and effective around a number of core themes. Again, three steps seem worth establishing here:

- a) First, there is an urgent need in both our traditions for education about one another. We are all influenced by prejudices and misunderstandings inherited from the past – and often renewed in the present through the power of media stereotyping. Teaching and learning about the reality and diversity of Islam as Muslims practise their faith should be a priority as important to Christians as understanding of actual Christianity should be to Muslims. In concrete terms, such educational programmes might be initially

be focused on those preparing clergy and imams respectively for public inter-faith roles and on those providing religious education to young people.

- b) Second, opportunities for lived encounter with people of different faiths, both within and across national boundaries, need to be multiplied and developed in an atmosphere of trust and respect. These should take place on many different levels and in many different settings. Such opportunities might usefully be focused on educational projects, efforts towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals and shared work for reconciliation in situations of conflict and historic enmities.
- c) Finally, for encounters to be sustainable over a long period of time, there needs to be commitment to the process and to one another on the part of all participants. Such a commitment, growing into affection, respect, collegiality and friendship, will be an expression of love of neighbour; it will also be done in love for God and in response to God's will.

We believe that “*A Common Word Between Us and You*” opens the way for these steps to be approached in a new spirit. The limitations of making further statements or sending further letters in advance of meeting together are obvious, however good and friendly the intentions. We greatly look forward therefore to discussing face to face some of the questions arising from these exchanges of letters, exploring – as was said earlier – both the concepts that have been sketched and the new possibilities for creative work together for the good of our world.

So to your invitation to enter more deeply into dialogue and collaboration as a part of our faithful response to the revelation of God's purpose for humankind, we say: Yes! Amen.

In the love of God,
+ Rowan Cantuar

EXTENDED RESPONSE FROM THE BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE

Signed by:

The Revd. David Coffey,
President of the Baptist World Alliance

The Revd. Neville Callam,
General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance

The Revd. Prof. Paul S. Fiddes,
*Chair of the Commission on Doctrine and Inter Church
Cooperation of the Baptist World Alliance*

The Revd. Regina Claas,
*Chair of the Commission on Freedom and
Justice of the Baptist World Alliance*

December 26, 2008

TO THE MUSLIM RELIGIOUS Leaders and Scholars who have written or signed “*A Common Word Between Us and You*” May Grace and Peace be Yours in Abundance

PREFACE

Dear Friends,

Let our first word be one of our appreciation for the generous initiative you have taken, and of our delight in the eirenic and constructive spirit in which your letter has been written. Many of us have hoped for the kind of dialogue between Muslims and Christians that you offer, and now we have your invitation, opening up the way for conversation and deeper friendship. We believe that this letter is a unique moment in the history of Christian-Muslim relations. There have been similar efforts in the past, but none has been endorsed by so many Muslim scholars and religious leaders, representing such diverse traditions and groups within the Islamic faith. In the same way, the response so far by Christian leaders has been representative of a very broad spectrum of Christians, all expressing a warm reception of your invitation. In adding our voices

to theirs, we want to embrace your conviction that it is only the movement of human hearts and minds towards love and worship of the One God, creator of us all, that will begin to resolve the huge needs for peace, justice and love of neighbours in our world today. Your letter, then, is not only creative but timely.

The Baptist World Alliance has already made a brief response through its President, the Revd David Coffey, welcoming your letter. However, we now wish to make a more extensive reply from a wide group of Christian leaders within our Alliance, setting out some of the considerations that lay behind our initial response of appreciation. At the Annual Meeting of the Baptist World Alliance, gathered in Prague July 21–25, 2008, leaders from Baptist Unions and Conventions in 66 countries discussed your letter in an open forum. Many of them came from areas of the world in which they have experienced distressing religious conflicts, but there was a common desire to respond positively to your invitation, and a recognition of the friendly and hospitable intentions that lie behind it. They have therefore commissioned this response, and we who are writing and signing it have listened carefully to their experiences and views. We have also read and learned from written responses sent by leaders of Baptist churches in the regions of Asia-Pacific, the Caribbean, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America and North America.

At the very beginning of our reply, we want to affirm that you are right in identifying the double command to love God and neighbour as being at the heart of the message of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Gospels. We want to say ‘yes’ to your invitation to ‘come together’ with you to live in peace, respect and kindness. We wish to collaborate with you, wherever possible, in local projects for peace, justice and the giving of aid to those who are suffering and in need. And we do agree with you that future dialogue between us can be based on the ‘common ground’ of our obedience, within our own faiths, to the double love command, together with our fundamental confession of the unity of God.

In saying all this with a full heart, however, we want to clarify

what we mean by saying that we have a ‘common ground’ in the commandments to love God and our neighbour. We do not understand it to mean that this double command is the sum total of our two faiths: we do not think that the whole range of our beliefs about the relation between God and the world He creates and redeems can be reduced to this double command. We do not even need to assume at the beginning of our dialogue that we mean exactly the same thing by ‘love of God’ and ‘love of neighbour’. Rather, we understand ‘common ground’ to mean that this double command to love opens up a space or area (‘ground’) in which we can live together, talk with each other, share our experiences, work together to enable the flourishing of human life and explore the eternal truths to which our respective faiths bear witness. We can inhabit this ‘common ground’ together, of course, because we recognize that there is a sufficient overlap between the way Christians and Muslims speak about love of God and humanity for us to understand each other and open ourselves to mutual exploration. In this sense the ‘common ground’ is also a ‘common word’. Moreover, this common ground is not just a strategy for dialogue, but a gift of God to us all. In the end, it is God who gives the ground on which we stand, and God who opens up the space in which we can meet. We read your letter as having a similar view of what ‘common ground’ means, because you say: Whilst Islam and Christianity are obviously different religions – and whilst there is no minimizing some of their formal differences – it is clear the Two Greatest Commandments are an area of common ground and a link between the Qur’an, the Torah and the New Testament.

Part of the character of the common ground is its making of a ‘link’ between the Scriptures of three faiths – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – which acknowledge their roots in the faith of Abraham. On this ground the scriptures intersect in some way. We wish to follow your example of encouraging each other to read and reflect on passages from the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament and the Qur’an. It is by reading each other’s Scriptures that we shall come to understand each other better and learn better how we both

speak of God. Moreover, we wish to express our appreciation that you have given such a central place to passages from the Gospels in marking out the borders of the ‘common ground’ between us. It is in the words of Jesus recorded in Mark 12:28–31 (parallel in Matthew 22:34–40, cf. Luke 10:25–28) that the two love commands are brought together concisely into one saying. Here, when asked what is the ‘first commandment’, Jesus integrates two passages from the Hebrew Bible:

‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ (Deuteronomy 6:4–5).

The second [commandment] is this,

‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’. (Leviticus 19:7–8)

There is no other commandment greater than these.

The Torah itself does not bring the two commands together in one place, and neither – it appears – is there an explicit instance in the Qur’an. There are certainly examples of the double love command in Jewish writings of an early period, and in the Gospel of Luke the saying about ‘the first and second commandments’ is found on the lips of a Jewish scribe, whom Jesus approves; but the only instances of the saying in the sacred Scriptures of the three Abrahamic faiths are in the New Testament. We consider it to be a move of the deepest courtesy on your part, therefore, to define the ‘common ground’ in a way that is so familiar to your Christian audience.

However, your letter amply illustrates that the Qur’an and the Hadith contain commands to love both God and neighbour, and one particular saying of the Prophet Muhammad (on *the best that I have said*) seems, as you suggest, to echo Deuteronomy 6:4–5 (the *Shema*). You explain that love of the neighbour is always implied in love of God, since without love of neighbour there can be no true

faith in God. As the Prophet Muhammad said:

*None of you has faith until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself.*¹

This is akin to the verse in the New Testament:

Those who do not love a brother and sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. (I John 4:20)

A verse from the Qur'an clearly brings together the worship of God with doing good to the neighbour, which seems to be a close parallel to the double love command:

*W*orship God; join nothing with Him. Be good to your parents, to relatives, to orphans, to the needy, to neighbours near and far, to travellers in need, and to your slaves (Al-Nisa' 4:36).²

Further, you point out that the summons from the Qur'an (*Aal Imran* 3:64) to Christians to *come to A Common Word* implies not only a call to love of God (*worship none but God*) but also to love of neighbour; you argue that the command 'that none of us shall take others for lords beside him' is concerned with the religious freedom of all people in the face of human rulers, and that justice and freedom are a crucial part of love of the neighbour:

*S*ay: O People of the Scripture! Come to A Common Word between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. And if they turn away, then say: bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him).

As Christians in the Baptist tradition, we have from our origin been passionately concerned to defend freedom of religion for all people, not for Christians alone, and so we find it poignant that you associate love for neighbour so directly with this freedom. We wish to say more about this below, but it suffices for now to say that there can be no doubt that the appeal to the double love command places us on ‘common ground’.

In what follows, we wish to start the process of exploration that is facilitated by standing and walking together on the ‘common ground’. We hope that there will be opportunities, on a local or regional level, to continue this conversation face to face. When this happens, we hope that our present response will be used, alongside your original letter, as a set of guidelines for discussion. Here, then, we would like to suggest what may be fruitful lines of enquiry for such a dialogue among Muslims and Christians together in a variety of settings, to increase mutual understanding, and to lay a foundation for partnerships and shared programmes at the grass-roots of our communities.

GOD’S INITIATIVE OF LOVE

While the common ground we share with you is a familiar space, we find less familiar the emphasis you lay on love as obedience, devotion and constant praise to God. That these are indeed elements of love has been a welcome reminder to us from an Islamic perspective, and we have been prompted to think through again the words of Jesus and the *Shema*, to which you draw attention, that love is a matter of the ‘heart, mind, soul and strength’. We have learned a good deal from the way that you find love to be a matter of acknowledging the uniqueness, sovereignty and praise of God as summed up in the word of the Prophet Muhammad that:

The best that I have said – myself and the prophets that came before me – is: ‘There is no god but God, He Alone, He hath no associate, His is the sovereignty and His is the praise and He hath power over all things.’³

As you put it, ‘The words “His is the praise” remind Muslims that they must be grateful to God and trust him with their sentiments and emotions’. You remind us that the call to love is not a mere emotion or mood, but is a summons to an intentional devotion in which ‘the whole of the soul – with its intelligence, will and feeling’ participates, and that this will have an impact on the practice of everyday life. We are reminded here of the way that the New Testament urges us to link our praise of God with practical living according to the will of God:

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is ... be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father ... (Eph. 5:15–20).

In the light of this human response of love for God, the question which arises between us, however, is the way in which we understand the love of God Himself as a free gift which gets all human love started. Christians want to emphasize that the very nature of God is love, and this is always prior to our love for God. Indeed, we are only able to love God and each other because God has poured out His love towards us, lifting us to a new level of life in which love is possible. For Christians, this love is supremely displayed in the life, death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ. Through the love of God shown in Christ and in his self-sacrifice, we are enabled to love God and others. The power of the initiating or prevenient love of God, freely given, is expressed in such New Testament texts as this:

Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love ... Beloved, since God loved us so much, we ought also to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we

love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us (1 Jn. 4:7-12)

On first sight, this stress on the initiating love of God seems to be striking a different note from the text you quote from the Qur'an, where the love of God seems to be a consequence or reward of our love and obedience to God:

*S*ay, (O Muhammad, to mankind): if ye love God, follow me; God will love you and forgive you your sins. God is Forgiving, Merciful (Aal 'Imran, 3:31).

The impression of this saying is reinforced by your comment that God enjoins Muslims who truly love God to follow the example of the Prophet Muhammad, 'in order in turn to be loved by God'. However, we notice that the final emphasis of the saying is on the given fact that God is eternally forgiving and merciful, and does not acquire these properties when we are obedient. Moreover, you quote a highly relevant saying from the Prophet Mohammad in a footnote elsewhere:

God has one hundred mercies. He has sent down one of them between genii and human beings and beasts and animals and because of it they feel with each other; and through it they have mercy on each other; and through it, the wild animal feels for its offspring. And God has delayed ninety-nine mercies through which he will have mercy on his servants on the Day of Judgement. (Sahih Muslim, Kitab Al-Tawbah; 2109/4; no. 2752).

Here, just one of a hundred divine mercies is freely given to the whole creation, but it is enough to enable all the empathetic love ('feeling') and mercy that creatures show towards each other. Perhaps, then, the situation envisaged is one where divine mercy gets human love going, and then the exercise of love for God results

in still more love from God (the ‘ninety-nine mercies’ reserved for the Day of Judgement); it is as if the prevenient mercy of God demands responsible obedience. Christians, while stressing the prevenient love of God, have always recognized that there is a complex and often baffling relation between divine initiative and human response. We should not forget here the words of Jesus in John 14:23, that *Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them...* which seems to make God’s love conditional on the following of the commands of Christ. Also, in the Lord’s Prayer we are taught to say, *forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.* A discussion about the respective meanings of the love of God and the mercy and compassion of God in Christianity and Islam may then prove mutually illuminating as we wrestle with the mystery of the relation between grace and obedience. Moreover, as Christians we greatly appreciate the Islamic insight that the mercy of God is distributed throughout the created order and creates mercy not just among human beings but in the whole of the animal kingdom. There is a key ingredient here for a theology of peace and justice in the natural world.

THE ONENESS OF GOD AND THE LOVE OF GOD

While Christians are familiar with the double love command of Jesus, you give us a salutary reminder that the first and greatest commandment (*You shall love the Lord your God*) is quoted by Jesus from the Jewish *Shema*, which begins with a declaration of the oneness of God: *Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.* This is made explicit in Mark 12:28–31, while it is implicit in the parallel passages in Matthew and Luke. You therefore urge that the ‘common ground’ is not just the two greatest commandments, but the confession of the Unity of God in which they are rooted and out of which they arise. The threefold common ground you propose is the Unity of God, the necessity of love for Him and the necessity of love of the neighbour. While, as Baptist Christians, we affirm both the Oneness of God and the love of God, the fact that we do not often explicitly link them together gives us pause for thought.

By ‘Oneness’ we understand a range of affirmations about God. These include the fact that there is only one God (monotheism) and that this God is sovereign, but ‘oneness’ also means that God is unique and unclassifiable, unlike all objects in the world. The uniqueness of this One God means that God must be mysterious to human minds, and so human language will finally fail in describing God. As God declares through the Prophet Isaiah *To whom then will you compare me?* (Isa. 40:25) and *my thoughts are not your thoughts* (Isa. 55:8). Your letter links love and oneness mainly in terms of praise for the sovereignty of God, but there are also regions of thought to be explored which link love with the depths of the mystery of God. There is room for exploration here in ways that are illuminating but not contentious. However, when we speak of the love and mystery of God we must open out an area of belief that we know will be troubling to you, but which is absolutely essential for us in confessing the Oneness of God: we mean the doctrine of the Trinity, God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are well aware that Muslims believe the Christian idea of the Trinity contradicts the affirmation that God has no other being in association with Him. There are many texts in the Qur’an which affirm that *we shall ascribe no partner unto him*,⁴ and we may add the declarations that *He fathered no one nor was he fathered*⁵ and the denial that *God has a child*.⁶

We want to make clear that in holding to the doctrine of the Trinity, the Christian church has always denied that there are any other beings alongside the One God. In using the traditional word ‘person’ (hypostasis or ‘distinct reality’) of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the church has never thought that it is speaking of three personal beings like any persons we know in the world. Nor does it think that God has fathered a child with the same physical process that we see in the world around us. Rather, the church is attempting to express the truth that there are mysterious, unknowable depths to the personal nature of God. It is also aiming to be faithful to the truth of God which has been disclosed in the event of Jesus Christ in history. The church confesses that the life of God, who exists only

from God's self and from no other cause, is composed eternally of loving relationships which have some likeness to the relationships we know between a Father and a Son, or a parent and a child, and which are being opened up continually to new depths of love and hope by a reality that our Scriptures call 'Spirit'. While the 'persons' in God cannot be compared to beings in the world, there is some likeness between relationships of love in God and the world, since 'God is love'. We can know these relations, not by observing them or examining them, but only by participating in them as God calls us to share His life. Christians think that this is made possible for us through Jesus Christ: this is because the eternal Father-Son relation in God was fully displayed and actualized in the relation of Jesus to the God whom he called Father, and whom Jesus taught his disciples to call 'Father' as well. Christians see this vision of God as hinted at in a prayer of Jesus in the Gospel of John, that:

As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they [who believe in me] also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one. I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know what you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:20-3)

This is not the place for a fuller exposition of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, and nor have we said as much as we have in order to try and convince you of its truth. We write in order to make clear that we ourselves cannot think of God as love except in terms of an eternal communion or fellowship whose unity is dynamic and relational. While we rejoice to confess with you that there is one God, it is not possible for us to speak of the One God without also speaking of Trinity. It is, for us, because God lives in relations of self-giving and sacrificial love that we can say that God 'is' love as well as that God is 'loving'. It is this love which overflows in

astonishing generosity to us and draws us into participation in the divine life:

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us (Rom. 5:5),

and

when we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God ... and joint heirs with Christ. (Rom. 8:15-16).

We have also written about our belief in God as Trinity to explain why we think that we can inhabit a 'common ground' which is marked out by belief in the Unity of God, and why we can confess with you that *God has no associate*. It would be good to explore the way in which you and we occupy this ground from our different perspectives. It would be particularly useful to explore the impact that our different confessional stances make upon our actual practice of love and justice, in the everyday life in which – as we have seen – we are called to praise and obey God. We are encouraged to think that this kind of conversation is possible because, in your courtesy to us, you have refrained from interpreting the prohibitions of the Qur'an against ascribing any partner to God as a critique of the doctrine of the Trinity (especially in your comments on the appeal to 'come to *A Common Word*', *Aal 'Imran* 3:64).

THE EXTENT OF LOVE FOR NEIGHBOUR

We have already remarked on your declaration that 'in Islam without love of the neighbour there is no true faith in God'. But, with the scribe of Luke 10:25-8, we may ask 'who is my neighbour'? This teacher of the law had already asked Jesus 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' and had then answered his own question with the double love command, to love God and neighbour. When Jesus commended his answer, he went on to query the identity of

the neighbour. Jesus' own answer was contained in a story which has come to be known as 'The Good Samaritan', and whose point is essentially that our neighbour is anyone who is in need of our help, regardless of any boundaries of race, religion or class. A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead ... A priest and a temple-servant from the man's own people pass him by] ... A Samaritan, when travelling, came near him; and when he saw him he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn and took care of him Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers? He said, 'The one who showed him mercy'. We wonder whether the orphan, the needy, the 'wayfarer' and the slave in your quotation from the Qur'an (*Al-Baqarah* 2:177) may be interpreted, like the man in Jesus' story, as anyone from any race or religion. We read in *Al-Mumtahinah* 60:8 that the Qur'an bids Muslims to 'show kindness and deal justly' with all non-Muslims who do not resort to violence. We have already quoted above a saying from the Qur'an, in *Al-Nisa'* 4:36:

*W*orship God; join nothing with Him. Be good to your parents, to relatives, to orphans, to the needy, to neighbours near and far off, to travellers in need, and to your slaves.

It would be good to know how you understand the 'neighbour who is far off' in this command. It would also be helpful to know how the universality of the neighbour relates in your understanding to the Islamic ideal of the umma, or the world-wide community of Muslims which transcends national boundaries. We should say that Christians hear the story of Jesus as a word of judgement upon them, as they have so often failed to be the Good Samaritan throughout the history of the church.

There is a foundation for the idea of the ‘universal neighbour’ in the conviction, held within all three Abrahamic religions, that the creation of humankind by God points to the relation of all human beings with the Creator, and to their responsibility and accountability to God for their stewardship in the world. This can also be expressed in the idea of the creation of all humanity in the image of God. As you observe in a footnote, Christianity and Islam have comparable conceptions of human beings being created in *the best stature* (*Al-Tin* 95:1–8) and *from God’s own breath* (*Sad* 38:72). After quoting from Gen. 1:27 and Gen. 2:7, you recall the words of the Prophet Muhammad which occur many times in the Hadith: *Verily God created Adam in His own image*⁷.

The consequent responsibility of human beings is portrayed in a passage from the Qur’an (*Al-Baqarah* 2:30–35) where God announces to the angels that He intends to place Adam as a ‘viceroy’ in the earth, a scene akin to Psalm 8 (and quoted in Heb. 2:7–8): *You have made [human beings] only a little lower than the angels, and crowned them with glory and honour. You have given them dominion over the works of your hand; you have put all things under their feet*

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! In Gen. 2:19–20 Adam names the animals, while in the Qur’an (*Al-Baqarah* 2:30–35) he is given special knowledge of their names by God. Both texts understand the naming, or knowledge of the names, of the animals as a symbol of the responsibility given to Adam. We are all too aware how this God-given stewardship (‘dominion’) has become a domination and exploitation of the animals and the whole natural world, but human beings retain their dignity and value in God’s eyes regardless of their failure. Should we not then regard creation by God and accountability to God as part of our ‘common ground’? All human beings are to be held as of equal worth because of the equal responsibility and privilege given to all by the Creator God. Love for neighbour is thus rooted both in God’s love for us and God’s purpose in creation. We see here a common commitment to respect all fellow human beings, in face of their diversities of

race, culture and religion. In this shared vision we have a common project to work out our responsibility for the world before God in promoting the common good of society, the development of human life and care for the whole creation. It is when we work on such projects together that we feel the sense of being part of one human community, and are able to explore the spiritual concerns that have motivated us and the truths that have inspired us. In our very practice we find our feet on the common ground beneath us.

THE COSTLINESS OF LOVE FOR NEIGHBOUR

In the section of your letter on love of neighbour, you affirm that sympathy must be accompanied by something more – by ‘self-sacrifice’ and by ‘giving to the neighbour what we ourselves love’. These words seem to us to penetrate deeply into the meaning of neighbour-love, and we would like to set alongside them some words of Jesus in the Gospels which we think express these qualities. At their best, Christians have followed Jesus in commending a love which is vulnerable, which does not expect a return from the person loved, which persists even in the face of rejection of our love, and which is therefore love of enemies as well as those who do good to us.

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy”. But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even tax-collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Be perfect therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matt. 5:43–48)

In a passage just before the one above, Jesus speaks some very

hard words:

I say to you, Do not resist an evil-doer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well.

Jesus is really saying that we ourselves cannot lay down any limits to what love may demand. As the Apostle Paul says later, in the context of relations with the state, ‘Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another’ (Rom. 13:8). We ourselves are not to draw the line. In some circumstances, love may even demand non-resistance (or at least non-violent resistance) to those who want to harm us. The difficulty is knowing when these circumstances are. While some Christians have thus taken up a completely pacifist position, others have espoused a ‘just war’ theory which includes proportionate means for justifiable self-defence. Such ‘just war’ is not to be confused with a ‘holy war’ to advance the cause of Christianity, which we utterly repudiate. However, underlying these differences of view there is a common principle that we are to go beyond simply being at peace with those who are at peace with us; we are to be peace-makers, and love may demand self-sacrifice in this attempt. We are to break cycles of violence by generous actions. For Christians, this view of the costly nature of love stems from a vision of the triune God, where the ‘persons’ are ceaselessly engaged in self-emptying for the sake of the other, and whose self-giving love overflows into sacrifice in the world. The history of human warfare has, nevertheless, shown the constant failure of Christian people to embody the nature of God in this way, and sadly at times in relation to their Muslim neighbours.

It would be good, then, to discuss with you the implications of your appeal to ‘self-sacrifice’ in love of neighbour. It would be especially valuable to reflect further on the saying from the Qur’an that *Ye will not attain unto righteousness until ye expend of that which ye love* (Aal ‘Imran, 3:92), which you explain as: ‘without

giving the neighbour what we ourselves love, we do not truly love God.' This seems to us to be a profound reflection on the command to 'love your neighbour as yourself' which is found in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. It has far-reaching implications if we do not restrict 'what we ourselves love' to material goods, but consider all the things we love – including our security, our expectations, our status and our very selves. We look forward to reading these passages from our Scriptures together, as we agree with you that 'if Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace'.

THE IMPERATIVE OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

We are impressed by the case you advance for religious freedom, and for the frequency with which you return to the issue in your letter. You refer, for instance, to the saying *let there be no compulsion in religion* (*Al-Baqarah* 2:256) and the principle that God wills there to be variety in belief (*Had God willed He could have made you one community: Al-Ma'idah* 5:48). Most helpfully, you connect the need for freedom of religion with the supremacy of the sovereignty of God above all human power. The saying in *Aal 'Imran* 3:64 makes an appeal to come to *A Common Word* that *we shall worship none but God*; the linked command to 'ascribe no partner to God' is interpreted as meaning that none should be forced to disobey God's commands at the behest of human rulers who pretend to be lords alongside God, and this is expanded to mean that 'Muslims, Christians and Jews should be free to follow what God has commanded them'. In this way, a link is made between the command to love God and the command to love one's neighbour, understood as including justice and freedom of religion.

As Baptist Christians, we have always defended the right of religious freedom for all people, regardless of their religion, grounding this theologically in the sovereignty of God⁸. All people are responsible to God alone for their faith or lack of faith, and not to human powers. Key texts from the New Testament to which we have appealed have been Acts 5:29, *We must obey God rather than*

any human authority, and Romans 14:

Who are you to pass judgement on servants of another? It is before their own Lord that they stand or fall ... Why do you pass judgement on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgement seat of God. For it is written, 'As I live says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.' So then, each of us will be accountable to God. (Rom. 14:4, 10-12)

The appeal to the final judgement of God on human belief is reflected, it seems to us, in several sayings from the Qur'an, such as God is the Hearer, the Knower (*Al-Baqarah* 2:137) and Unto God ye will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein ye differ (*Al-Ma'idah* 5:48):

For each we have appointed a law and a way. Had God willed He could have made you one community. But that he might try you by that which He hath given you (He hath made you as ye are). So vie one with another in good works. Unto God ye will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein ye differ.

It seems to us that you are directing your argument in the first place to a defence of the right of Christians, Muslims and Jews to practice freely the religion in which they have been born, or which they already hold – ‘to follow what God has commanded them’. This is obviously of critical importance, and we can think of many local situations where tensions would be eased if this were more widely understood. It is not altogether clear to us whether you think that this principle can also cover the freedom of people to change their religion, or to move from a community of one faith to another of a different faith. As Baptist Christians, we believe that the same principle of accountability to the sovereign God gives freedom to

make such a change, from Christianity to Islam or from Islam to Christianity. Of course, we are concerned here with a person's own conviction that God is calling them into a different community of faith ('to follow what God has commanded them'), not with unjust human means of persuasion, inducement or compulsion. We recognize, therefore, that both Islam and Christianity are 'missionary faiths'. We affirm that there is a legitimate kind of mission in which people can, in appropriate ways, share their beliefs with others, and in which people seeking God should have the freedom to explore the way that God is calling them into faith. We believe that as Christians and Muslims we are faced by an important challenge in this age of globalization: that each tradition should develop further its ethical approach to mission, and that we should do this together wherever possible. We would like to engage in discussion on this matter, looking at specific local examples where tension or conflict has arisen between our two communities, and placing these in the context of our Scriptures.

A WAY FORWARD

We hope that our comments on your remarkable letter have made clear how much it has caused us to think, and how it has caused us to return with new insight to our own Scriptures. It has also prompted us to seek to become more familiar with the Qur'an than we have been. How, then, shall we build on this exciting and generous initiative?

First, throughout this response we have drawn attention to matters that we have said we would like to discuss further with you. We believe that this is best done, not by a central commission of the Baptist World Alliance, but by encouraging our regional unions and conventions of churches to engage in joint conversations and practical projects for aid and development with their Muslim neighbours, in ways that are appropriate for their own area. We will aim to encourage these local activities to give attention to the 'common ground' that we have both identified, and specifically to use your letter and our response in doing so. Wherever possible,

we would like to share ecumenically with other Christian churches in these events. We promise, as an Alliance, to keep ourselves informed of what is happening on a local level in interfaith dialogue and cooperation, to make sure that already existing projects are known about widely in our churches, and to encourage new initiatives where necessary.

Second, we have a deep concern for education, both of religious teachers and of the members of local congregations and mosques. We hope that both our communities might encourage a study, within our own training institutions, of the principles and the methodology that are contained in your letter, together with a reflection on some of the questions that we have raised in our response. In this way our two documents might well be of use in our own communities of faith, as well as addressed to each other. At the same time, we hope that opportunities can be found for joint study courses in our theological colleges, in which students from both faiths can participate. It is, however, too easy to keep a dialogue going at the high level of theological conversation alone. Somehow the theological vision which enlivens us must be received at the grassroots and change attitudes and prejudices there. Somehow the members of our communities need to be gripped by the value of respect and honour for all people because of the creation of all by the One God, and because of His love and mercy towards them, however wrong the beliefs of others may seem. Just one way this may happen is for religious teachers in both faiths to be careful about the rhetoric they use, which may have unintended effects on followers who are less aware of theological nuances, and which may even lead to violence. To be concrete, we have one suggestion for Baptist Christians, that they avoid words to describe evangelism (or telling the Gospel story) which appear threatening to others, such as 'evangelistic crusades'. Nor is it necessary to be critical of another faith in order to commend what we believe to be true in ours; the story of Jesus has power to persuade in its own right. It is easy to slip into a violent rhetoric which arouses unpleasant memories of conflicts in the past. We do not venture to suggest examples

of unhelpful rhetoric to you, our Muslim friends, but hope that you might be able to identify some for yourselves. Let our rhetoric be that of love, as you have already shown.

In this way, and in many others, we aim to show obedience to the two great commandments of love for God and for our neighbour. We have found this quality in your letter to us, and we hope that you can discern it in this response to you.

May God's grace and love be always with you.

Signed by

The Revd. David Coffey,
President of the Baptist World Alliance

The Revd. Neville Callam,
General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance

The Revd. Prof. Paul S. Fiddes,
*Chair of the Commission on Doctrine and Inter Church
Cooperation of the Baptist World Alliance*

The Revd. Regina Claas,
*Chair of the Commission on Freedom and
Justice of the Baptist World Alliance*

NOTES

1 *Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Iman*, 67–1, Hadith no. 45.

2 Translation from A New Translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford: OUP, 2005).

3 *Sunan Al-Tirmidhi, Kitab Al-Da'awat, Bab al-Du'a fi Yawm 'Arafah*, Hadith no. 3934.

4 More than ninety times in the Qur'an, e.g. 3:64; 4:36; 4:116; 5:72; 6:163.

5 *Al-Ikhlās* 112:1–4

6 *Al-Baqara* 2:115–17.

7 e.g. *Sahih Al-Bukhari, Kitab Al-Isti'than*, 1; *Sahih Muslim, Kitab Al-Birr* 115; *Musnad Ibn Hanbal*, 2: 244, 251, 315, 323 et al.

8 Thomas Helwys, pastor of the first Baptist Church in England, wrote: 'for men's religion to God, is betwixt God and themselves; the King shall not answer for it, neither may the King be judge between God and man. Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews, or whatsoever, it appertains

not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure': Helwys, *A Short Declaration of the Mistery of Iniquity* (Amsterdam, 1612), p. 69.

APPENDIX II

Statements from the First and Second Seminars of the Catholic-Muslim Forum

1. Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI
2. Address of Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr: ‘We and You—Let Us Meet in God’s Love’
3. Final Declaration of Seminar I
4. Final Declaration of Seminar II

THE ADDRESS GIVEN BY H.H. POPE BENEDICT XVI

*Seminar I of the Catholic-Muslim Forum
held at the Vatican, November 4–6, 2008.*

Dear Friends,

I AM PLEASED TO RECEIVE you this morning and I greet all of you most cordially. I thank especially Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran as well as Shaykh Mustafa Ceric and Mr Seyyed Hossein Nasr for their words. Our meeting takes place at the conclusion of the important Seminar organized by the “Catholic-Muslim Forum” established between the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and representatives of the 138 Muslim leaders who signed the Open Letter to Christian leaders of 13 October 2007. This gathering is a clear sign of our mutual esteem and our desire to listen respectfully to one another. I can assure you that I have prayerfully followed the progress of your meeting, conscious that it represents one more step along the way towards greater understanding between Muslims and Christians within the framework of other regular encounters which the Holy See promotes with various Muslim groups. The Open Letter “*A Common Word between us and you*” has received numerous responses, and has given rise to dialogue, specific initiatives and meetings, aimed at helping us to know one another more deeply and to grow in esteem for our shared values. The great interest which the present Seminar has awakened is an incentive for us to ensure that the reflections and the positive developments which emerge from Muslim-Christian dialogue are not limited to a small group of experts and scholars, but are passed on as a precious legacy to be placed at the service of all, to bear fruit in the way we live each day.

The theme which you have chosen for your meeting – “Love of God, Love of Neighbour: The Dignity of the Human Person and Mutual Respect” – is particularly significant. It was taken from the

Open Letter, which presents love of God and love of neighbour as the heart of Islam and Christianity alike. This theme highlights even more clearly the theological and spiritual foundations of a central teaching of our respective religions.

The Christian tradition proclaims that God is Love (cf. 1 Jn 4:16). It was out of love that he created the whole universe, and by his love he becomes present in human history. The love of God became visible, manifested fully and definitively in Jesus Christ. He thus came down to meet man and, while remaining God, took on our nature. He gave himself in order to restore full dignity to each person and to bring us salvation. How could we ever explain the mystery of the incarnation and the redemption except by Love? This infinite and eternal love enables us to respond by giving all our love in return: love for God and love for neighbour. This truth, which we consider foundational, was what I wished to emphasize in my first Encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, since this is a central teaching of the Christian faith. Our calling and mission is to share freely with others the love which God lavishes upon us without any merit of our own.

I am well aware that Muslims and Christians have different approaches in matters regarding God. Yet we can and must be worshippers of the one God who created us and is concerned about each person in every corner of the world. Together we must show, by our mutual respect and solidarity, that we consider ourselves members of one family: the family that God has loved and gathered together from the creation of the world to the end of human history.

I was pleased to learn that you were able at this meeting to adopt a common position on the need to worship God totally and to love our fellow men and women disinterestedly, especially those in distress and need. God calls us to work together on behalf of the victims of disease, hunger, poverty, injustice and violence. For Christians, the love of God is inseparably bound to the love of our brothers and sisters, of all men and women, without distinction of race and culture. As Saint John writes: *Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters are liars; for those who do not love*

a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen (1 Jn 4:20).

The Muslim tradition is also quite clear in encouraging practical commitment in serving the most needy, and readily recalls the “Golden Rule” in its own version: your faith will not be perfect, unless you do unto others that which you wish for yourselves. We should thus work together in promoting genuine respect for the dignity of the human person and fundamental human rights, even though our anthropological visions and our theologies justify this in different ways. There is a great and vast field in which we can act together in defending and promoting the moral values which are part of our common heritage. Only by starting with the recognition of the centrality of the person and the dignity of each human being, respecting and defending life which is the gift of God, and is thus sacred for Christians and for Muslims alike – only on the basis of this recognition, can we find a common ground for building a more fraternal world, a world in which confrontations and differences are peacefully settled, and the devastating power of ideologies is neutralized.

My hope, once again, is that these fundamental human rights will be protected for all people everywhere. Political and religious leaders have the duty of ensuring the free exercise of these rights in full respect for each individual’s freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. The discrimination and violence which even today religious people experience throughout the world, and the often violent persecutions to which they are subject, represent unacceptable and unjustifiable acts, all the more grave and deplorable when they are carried out in the name of God. God’s name can only be a name of peace and fraternity, justice and love. We are challenged to demonstrate, by our words and above all by our deeds, that the message of our religions is unfailingly a message of harmony and mutual understanding. It is essential that we do so, lest we weaken the credibility and the effectiveness not only of our dialogue, but also of our religions themselves.

I pray that the “Catholic-Muslim Forum”, now confidently tak-

ing its first steps, can become ever more a space for dialogue, and assist us in treading together the path to an ever fuller knowledge of Truth. The present meeting is also a privileged occasion for committing ourselves to a more heartfelt quest for love of God and love of neighbour, the indispensable condition for offering the men and women of our time an authentic service of reconciliation and peace.

Dear friends, let us unite our efforts, animated by good will, in order to overcome all misunderstanding and disagreements. Let us resolve to overcome past prejudices and to correct the often distorted images of the other which even today can create difficulties in our relations; let us work with one another to educate all people, especially the young, to build a common future. May God sustain us in our good intentions, and enable our communities to live consistently the truth of love, which constitutes the heart of the religious man, and is the basis of respect for the dignity of each person. May God, the merciful and compassionate One, assist us in this challenging mission, protect us, bless us and enlighten us always with the power of his love.

A video of the address can be viewed at:

<http://acommonword.com/events>

WE AND YOU—LET US MEET IN GOD’S LOVE

*Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr
University Professor of Islamic Studies at
The George Washington University
Address given at Seminar I of the Catholic-Muslim Forum
held at the Vatican, November 4–6, 2008.*

Bismi’llah Rahman al-Rahim

IN THE NAME OF God, the All-Good, the Infinitely Merciful, and blessings and peace be upon the Prophet Muhammad and upon all the prophets and messengers.

Your Holiness, Eminences, Excellencies, Distinguished Scholars:

It is asserted by the Word of God, which for us Muslims is the Noble Qur’an, *And God summons to the Abode of Peace*, and by Christ (may peace be upon him), who is the Word of God in Christianity and also a prophet of the highest order in Islam, *Blessed are the peacemakers*. The goal of attaining peace is thus common between our two religions and we are here precisely with the hope of attaining peace between Christianity and Islam. In fact, what can be more important and foundational in the quest for peace than creating peace between our religions—for only through this peace will it be possible to establish peace between peoples and nations, more specifically the Islamic world and the West. Whether we are Christians or Muslims, we are beckoned by our religions to seek peace. As people of religion meeting here at the center of Catholicism, let us then dedicate ourselves to mutual understanding, not as diplomats, but as sincere religious scholars and authorities standing before God and responsible to Him beyond all worldly authority. As Muslims, our lives have been punctuated since the advent of the Qur’anic revelation by the repetition of the Islamic testimony of

faith, *La ilaha illa'Llah* (“There is no divinity but God”), the One God proclaimed also in the *Shema* in the Torah, which we both accept as revealed scripture since we and you are both members of the family of Abrahamic monotheism. We are also aware that for nearly two millennia Catholic Christians have recited credo in unum Deum. For both us and you, God is at once transcendent and immanent, creator and sustainer of the world, the alpha and omega of existence—the Almighty whose Will prevails in our lives, the Loving whose love embraces the whole of the created order. He is also just and therefore we both yearn for justice in our individual lives as well as in society. We both believe in the immortality of the soul, the ethical content of human actions, in our responsibilities before God from which our rights issue. Furthermore, all the faithful, Christian and Muslim alike, believe that one day we shall stand before God and be judged by Him for our actions here below while we also beseech His Mercy. We both believe in the reality of sanctity and our histories bear witness to the lives of saints, whom Muslims call friends of God, men and women who have smelled the perfume of Divine Proximity. We both value faith above all else and pray to God, certain that He hears us.

When we look at the full spectrum of our theological traditions, we observe therein many diverse understandings of the relation between faith and reason, the question of the inscrutability of the Divine Will or Its knowability, of free will and determinism, the meaning of evil, and so many other crucial theological issues. What is remarkable is how the theological positions in one tradition have their correspondence in the other, *mutatis mutandis*. Our religions have both created major civilizations with their arts and sciences imbued with the presence of the sacred, and also we both claim universality for our message.

And yes, both our histories have been intermingled with periods of violence, and when religion has been strong in our societies various political forces have carried out violence in its name and in certain cases this violence has received legitimacy by religious authorities. Certainly we cannot claim that violence is the monopoly

of only one religion. With so many profound similarities, why then have we had such a long history of confrontation and opposition? The answer is that we of course also have our differences which have providentially kept Christianity and Islam distinct and separate. Let us mention just a few of them. We emphasize Divine Unity and reject the idea of a triune God, while you emphasize the Trinity while believing God to be One. We and you both revere Christ but in a different manner, and we do not accept the Christian account of the end of his earthly life. And yet, we Muslims also accept Christ as the Messiah (*al-Masih*) and expect his second coming at the end of the history of present humanity. We emphasize Divine Law (*al-Shari'ah*) as rooted in the Qur'anic revelation, while Christ asserted his break with the Law in the name of the Spirit. Therefore, Christians do not have the same conception of Divine Law as do Jews and Muslims. Nor do Christians have a sacred language as does Islam, but have used, and some still do use, several liturgical languages.

You and we, we both believe in religious freedom, but we Muslims do not allow an aggressive proselytizing in our midst that would destroy our faith in the name of freedom any more than would Christians if they were in our situation. The encounter of Christianity with modernism including secular humanism and rationalism associated with the Age of Enlightenment has also been very different from the experience of that encounter with Islam. Perhaps we can each learn something from the other in this very significant matter. We should join together in the battle against the desacralizing and anti-religious forces of the modern world, and joining effort should bring us closer together. Secularism should certainly not be a source for the creation of further distance between us. It is with full awareness of both our shared beliefs and our differences, and also in light of the contemporary situation of the followers of our religions, that we as Muslims from different schools of Islamic thought and countries have come together here to extend to you our hand of friendship, seeking to meet you in God's love, beyond all our theological differences and memories of

historical confrontations. Surely we, who respect and love Christ as you do, can meet and come together with you under the banner of what he has stated to be the two supreme commandments: to love God and to love the neighbor. We can also seek to extend, often in harmony with each other, the border of the definition of neighbor to include not only you and us but the whole of humanity, and even beyond that the rest of God's creation. As the Holy Bible asserts, With God, all things are possible. We submit to Him, and ask for His help and affirmation in carrying out this momentous task of meeting with you in friendship and peace under the banner of that Common Word that unites us. There can be no more blessed act in our times than the creation of deep accord between God's religions, especially the two religions that have the largest numbers of followers in the world, namely Christianity and Islam.

Indeed, God summons us to the Abode of Peace, and blessed are the peacemakers.

FINAL DECLARATION

First Seminar of the Catholic-Muslim Forum

Rome, 4-6 November 2008

THE CATHOLIC-MUSLIM FORUM WAS formed by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and a delegation of the 138 Muslim signatories of the open letter called *A Common Word*, in the light of the same document and the response of His Holiness Benedict XVI through his Secretary of State, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone. Its first Seminar was held in Rome from 4-6 November 2008. Twenty-four participants and five advisors from each religion took part in the meeting. The theme of the Seminar was *Love of God, Love of Neighbour*.

The discussion, conducted in a warm and convivial spirit, focused on two great themes: "Theological and Spiritual Foundations" and "Human Dignity and Mutual Respect". Points of similarity and of diversity emerged, reflecting the distinctive specific genius of the two religions.

1. For Christians the source and example of love of God and neighbour is the love of Christ for his Father, for humanity and for each person. *God is Love* (1 Jn 4, 16) and *God so loved the world that He gave his only Son so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life* (Jn 3, 16). God's love is placed in the human heart through the Holy Spirit. It is God who first loves us thereby enabling us to love Him in return. Love does not harm one's neighbour but rather seeks to do to the other what one would want done to oneself (Cf. 1 Cor 13, 4-7). Love is the foundation and sum of all the commandments (Cf. Gal 5, 14). Love of neighbour cannot be separated from love of God, because it is an expression of our love for God. This is the new commandment, *Love one another as I have loved you*. (Jn 15, 12). Grounded in Christ's sacrificial love, Christian love is forgiving and excludes no one; it therefore also includes one's enemies. It should be not just words but deeds (Cf. 1 Jn, 4, 18). This is the sign of its genuineness.

For Muslims, as set out in “*A Common Word*”, love is a timeless transcendent power which guides and transforms human mutual regard. This love, as indicated by the Holy and Beloved Prophet Muhammad, is prior to the human love for the One True God. A Hadith indicates that God’s loving compassion for humanity is even greater than that of a mother for her child (*Muslim, Bab al-Tawba: 21*); it therefore exists before and independently of the human response to the One who is ‘The Loving’. So immense is this love and compassion that God has intervened to guide and save humanity in a perfect way many times and in many places, by sending prophets and scriptures. The last of these books, the Qur’an, portrays a world of signs, a marvellous cosmos of Divine artistry, which calls forth our utter love and devotion, so that *those who have faith, have most love of God (2:165)*, and *those that believe, and do good works, the Merciful shall engender love among them. (19:96)* In a Hadith we read that *Not one of you has faith until he loves for his neighbour what he loves for himself (Bukhari, Bab al-Iman: 13)*.

2. Human life is a most precious gift of God to each person. It should therefore be preserved and honoured in all its stages.

3. Human dignity is derived from the fact that every human person is created by a loving God, and has been endowed with the gifts of reason and free will, and therefore enabled to love God and others. On the firm basis of these principles, the person requires the respect of his or her original dignity and his or her human vocation. Therefore, he or she is entitled to full recognition of his or her identity and freedom by individuals, communities and governments, supported by civil legislation that assures equal rights and full citizenship.

4. We affirm that God’s creation of humanity has two great aspects: the male and the female human person, and we commit ourselves jointly to ensuring that human dignity and respect are extended on an equal basis to both men and women.

5. Genuine love of neighbour implies respect of the person and her or his choices in matters of conscience and religion. It includes

the right of individuals and communities to practice their religion in private and public.

6. Religious minorities are entitled to be respected in their own religious convictions and practices. They are also entitled to their own places of worship, and their founding figures and symbols they consider sacred should not be subject to any form of mockery or ridicule.

7. As Catholic and Muslim believers, we are aware of the summons and imperative to bear witness to the transcendent dimension of life, through a spirituality nourished by prayer, in a world which is becoming more and more secularized and materialistic.

8. We affirm that no religion and its followers should be excluded from society. Each should be able to make its indispensable contribution to the good of society, especially in service to the most needy.

9. We recognize that God's creation in its plurality of cultures, civilizations, languages and peoples is a source of richness and should therefore never become a cause of tension and conflict.

10. We are convinced that Catholics and Muslims have the duty to provide a sound education in human, civic, religious and moral values for their respective members and to promote accurate information about each other's religions.

11. We profess that Catholics and Muslims are called to be instruments of love and harmony among believers, and for humanity as a whole, renouncing any oppression, aggressive violence and terrorism, especially that committed in the name of religion, and upholding the principle of justice for all.

12. We call upon believers to work for an ethical financial system in which the regulatory mechanisms consider the situation of the poor and disadvantaged, both as individuals, and as indebted nations. We call upon the privileged of the world to consider the plight of those afflicted most severely by the current crisis in food production and distribution, and ask religious believers of all denominations and all people of good will to work together to alleviate the suffering of the hungry, and to eliminate its causes.

13. Young people are the future of religious communities and of societies as a whole. Increasingly, they will be living in multicultural and multi-religious societies. It is essential that they be well formed in their own religious traditions and well informed about other cultures and religions.

14. We have agreed to explore the possibility of establishing a permanent Catholic-Muslim committee to coordinate responses to conflicts and other emergency situations.

15. We look forward to the second Seminar of the Catholic-Muslim Forum to be convened in approximately two years in a Muslim-majority country yet to be determined.

All participants felt gratitude to God for the gift of their time together and for an enriching exchange.

At the end of the Seminar His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI received the participants and, following addresses by Professor Dr Seyyed Hossein Nasr and H.E. Grand Mufti Dr Mustafa Ceric, spoke to the group. All present expressed satisfaction with the results of the Seminar and their expectation for further productive dialogue.

FINAL DECLARATION

*Second Seminar of the Catholic-Muslim Forum
Baptism Site, Jordan, 21-24 November 2011*

BY THE GRACE OF God, the second seminar of the Catholic-Muslim Forum was hosted by the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought and held at the Baptism Site of Jesus Christ in Jordan, from the 21st to 23rd of November, 2011 CE. Twenty-four Catholic and twenty-four Muslim religious leaders, scholars, and educators met in a respectful and friendly atmosphere. The forum participants, in continuation of the first Catholic-Muslim Seminar held in Rome in 2008, discussed together the theme: Reason, Faith and the Human Person. The participants were honored to call upon His Majesty King Abdullah II at Basman Palace on the 22nd November, shared with him some matters of current concern to Catholics and Muslims, and received his encouragement and insight. The participants agreed upon the following:

1. God has endowed human beings with reason through which to recognize the truth. Recognition of the truth illuminates our responsibilities before God and to one another.

2. Faith is a gift of God through which human beings discover that they are created by God and grow in their knowledge of Him.

3. The pure heart is the center of the faithful person, where faith, reason and compassion meet in adoration of God and love of neighbour.

4. The God-given dignity of human beings must be respected by all and protected in law.

5. In dialogue, believers must express their gratitude to God for all these gifts with mutual respect and compassion, and in a form of life in harmony with God's creation. Catholics and Muslims look forward to continuing their dialogue as a way of furthering mutual understanding, and advancing the common good of all humanity, especially its yearning for peace, justice and solidarity.

APPENDIX III: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. *What is this document really about?*

Simply put, it is about the Two Golden Commandments: Love of God and Love of Neighbor, and it is an invitation to join hands with Christians on such a basis, for the sake of God and for the sake of world peace and harmony.

2. *Why now (A Common Word was launched on October 13th, 2007)?*

The world is living in tension, if not turmoil, and the situation threatens to get even worse. We need peace and justice. The latest Gallup polls show that 60% of Christians worldwide harbour prejudice against Muslims and 30% of Muslims harbour prejudice against Christians. That is about 2 billion people of 4 billion Christians and Muslims in total disliking each other or misunderstanding each other (out of about 6.5 billion people on the planet). This is a recipe for worldwide combustion. Something had to be done.

3. *Is it not too late?*

Better late than never; and it is never too late for hope. The various signatories, and other Muslims, have been vocal before, but individually or in small groups. What is new is the successful getting together to speak with one voice; a voice of mainstream Islam.

4. *Is the group of signatures representative?*

Yes, in that it includes people with different profiles: religious authorities, scholars, intellectuals, media experts, NGO leaders, etc.; all people of knowledge (*ulama*) or society leaders (*ahl aqd wa hal*). It also includes people from different schools of mainstream Islam: Sunni (from Salafis to Asharis and Maturidis to Sufis — of all four ‘Madhhabs’ or ‘Schools of Jurisprudence’ — Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi’i

and Hanbali), Shi'i (J'afari, Zaidi, Isma'ili), and Ibadi. It includes figures from Chad to Uzbekistan, from Indonesia to Mauritania and from Canada to Sudan.

The document has been endorsed by over 300 Islamic leaders, thousands of ordinary Muslims and endorsed by 500 or Islamic organizations.

5. How representative can a mere 138 persons be?

Many of the individual signatories guide or influence millions of Muslims and hold positions of religious, social, and political responsibility. The accumulated influence of the signatories is immense and too significant to ignore.

6. The composition of the 138 seems to be really mixed from the very prominent to the junior?

Most are very prominent. Many of the most important influential *ulama* and preachers of the Islamic world have signed or supported it. There is value in a mixture of ages, experiences, and backgrounds. This is needed because prominence and influence are always in a state of flux. One must have people that look likely to be very influential in the future. No one mold of person can singlehandedly engage all the varied issues we face today. Jointly, the group is effective and important.

7. Who is the author of this document?

H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad of Jordan is the author of the document, but in fact the document is mostly a careful selection of essential quotations from Christian and Muslim (and Jewish) scriptures or sacred texts. Moreover, the document was thoroughly checked and approved by a group of senior Ulama including Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa of Egypt, Sheikh AbdAllah bin Bayyah of Mauritania, Sheikh Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti of Syria, Grand Mufti Mustafa Ceric of Bosnia, Habib Umar bin Hafith of the Yemen, Ayatollah Damad, T.J. Winter and Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr and signed by all 138.

8. *What were the mechanics of its production ?*

Momentum for it started with the Amman Message and its inter-faith components. Then the idea was mentioned in summary at the end of the October 2006 ‘Open Letter to the Pope’ from 38 Muslim Scholars (following the Pope’s Regensburg address of September 2006). The momentum continued to grow over the following year through several gatherings and conferences, the last of which was one on ‘Love in the Qur’an’ of the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, held in Jordan in September 2006. The final draft emerged out of that conference, and the process of signing began. The experience of having worked out a document in union to respond to the Pope the previous year made the final ACW draft easier to achieve. Shaykh Habib Ali Jiffri, Professor Aref Nayed, Professor Ibrahim Kalin, Shaykh Amr Khaled, Prof Ingrid Mattson, Sohayl Nakhooda and a number of other religious scholars and leaders were the ones building and maintaining the consensus.

9. *So, is this document really a consensus?*

Yes, in the sense that it constitutes a normative *ijma* by the Ummah’s scholars. This consensus will get stronger and stronger as more people sign it and uphold it. One mechanism for doing so, through the ACW website (www.acommonword.com), is already in place and others are in the making.

10. *Is this a Jordanian government document?*

No, it is not. It is a joint document by the Ummah’s scholars. Jordan is indeed a welcoming and respected nexus of peace and harmony, which makes it a good place for consensus building. H.M. King Abdullah of Jordan has indeed been extremely supportive, and this would not have been possible without his help. But the document is international in scope and from religious leaders to religious leaders.

11. *Is this a document of the Royal Aal al-Bayt Academy?*

Yes, but only in so far as that the Royal Aal Al-Bayt Academy in-

cludes 100 leading international scholars who offered a core base of signatories and supporters that could be expanded, and helped in the networking needed for achieving the document.

12. How will the gains made in consensus-building and peace-making be safeguarded against erosion and dispersal?

By 2008 a lot of traction had been achieved already by way of spreading the consensus at the highest levels, with major conferences at Yale University, Cambridge University and discussions involving the Archbishop of Canterbury and the H.H. the Pope himself (the document was the basis for the first Catholic-Muslim Forum held at the Vatican between November 4–6, 2008). Already MA theses in major universities have been written on it, and discussions have been held in joint Christian-Muslim groups in a number of countries all over the world. From 2009 the ACW initiative aims to move from ‘traction’ to ‘trickledown’ with a major independent institute being created to follow up its work; books and films being made about it; joint websites with approved Christian and Muslim reading lists being created as a basis for curricula, and a movement to bring it to political fruition, God Willing

13. Why are certain Eastern Patriarchs not addressed? Why are many Protestant Churches not mentioned?

The Eastern Patriarchs who are not mentioned (e.g. the Melkite, Maronite and Chaldaean Patriarchs) all recognize the Primacy of the Pope and are in Communion with the Catholic Church: they are therefore addressed through the person of the Pope. The mainline Protestant churches are mentioned, but since there are over 30,000 churches nowadays, it was evidently easier to address everyone with the phrase ‘Leaders of Christian Churches everywhere’. Thus everyone is indeed included.

14. Why is it that Jews are not addressed?

Jewish scriptures are invoked repeatedly and respectfully in the document. It is quite normal for documents to be bilateral without

implying the exclusion of others. Moreover, this is a Theological document and the problems between Jews and Muslims are essentially political and thus religious de facto and not Theological de jure, with both religions having essentially the same understanding of the Unity of the One God — as we see it at least. Also, Jewish Scholars and Rabbis have participated in the Common Word Conferences at Yale and Cambridge.

15. Why is it not addressed to people of other faiths, for example Hindus and Buddhists?

It makes sense to start with the two biggest, most intertwined and yet most conflicting religions in the world and try to help there first. More documents will be forthcoming, God Willing.

16. Are you deliberately excluding secularists and non-believers?

Muslims are concerned about all of humanity, and must respect and seek peace with every single human being, who were all made by God in the fairest image, but again it makes sense to start here first.

17. What if no one pays attention to this? What if it is simply ignored?

This has not been the case, by the Grace of God, but if it were, Muslims would have to keep trying to get through. That is a religious duty for all Muslims; to wish the best for humanity, no matter what the response is like. That is part of Love of the Neighbor, precisely.

18. What of the few skeptical responses?

Muslims should still strive to respond with more gentleness, compassion, and love. The Holy Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) teach Muslims to ward off bad with good. We have kept a very interesting special log of the 'naysayers' on the ACW website (in the news section). They are a small minority, but there is still a lot of bitterness.

19. Should you not fix your own problems first and stop your infighting before you address others?

The basis of inner-healing and reconciliation has already started with the Amman Message and the historical consensus on its ‘3 Points’ (see: www.ammanmessage.com). The two tasks are not mutually exclusive, and in fact must go together. Indeed, addressing others unites Muslim hearts in ways that can be healing to our own inner wounds. Only God’s compassion can unite people. The more compassion Muslims practice towards others, the more inner compassion they will have.

20. Why do you think a document between religions is so important? Religions always fought each other, but the world still spun on its axis.

Religion is too important a factor in human history and life to ignore. It is the single greatest impulse in the lives of the majority of people in the world and throughout history. It has tremendous energies that can have positive or negative consequences. It is very important to unite positive religious energies for the good of humanity. Religions must be used as part of the solution, not misused as part of the problem — and the problem includes violence, conflict, war, injustice and hatred. Love and understanding are the solution — compassionate love, with wisdom. The Twin Golden Commandments of Love, and the knowledge of them, are the basis of ACW — this is true religious love.

21. Isn’t your stark warning about the future of the world so exaggerated? Do you not think that you have overdone it?

No, not if you consider that Christians and Muslims jointly constitute half of humanity. One must also consider the amount of weaponry both sides have and the scales of misunderstandings and mutual stereotypes. Let us remember also the Bosnian Genocide 1995 (where 300,000 Muslims were killed by Christians just for being Muslims), or the 9-11 attacks (and others such in the UK, Spain, Russia, India and even many Muslim

countries) not to mention the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan from 2001 onward where over 1.5 million people have died and are still dying — it is impossible to overstate the case for the tragedy and ever-immanent danger of conflict and war.

22. *Is your reference to the danger to world peace a disguised threat?*

No, it is a compassionate plea for peace. Anyone who claims that it is a threat cannot have read the document properly and is attributing motives that are simply not there in reality.

23. *What use is this if terrorists are not going to heed your words?*

God Willing, this will influence young people, and will create an atmosphere in which hatred is less likely to thrive. There is no quick fix to problems, and a patient wholesome discourse is very much needed as a foundation for a better future. Whilst there will always be people who want to resort to violence for whatever grievances imaginary or real, we think that 99.9% of Christians and Muslims (and Jews of course, and all people in fact) would rather have peace, and want a way to achieve it.

24. *Why is it that the document does not address real issues like violence, religious freedom, women's issues, democracy, etc...?*

This document is a first step, but one that strives to lay a solid foundation for the construction of many worthy edifices. The document can not be expected to do everything at once. Moreover, many of these issues were already addressed in the Amman Message (see: www.AmmanMessage.com).

25. *Is this document just another form of propaganda?*

If you mean that it highlights the precedence Islam gives compassion and gentleness in order to achieve peace, then yes. If you mean that this is 'spin' merely for the sake of a hidden political agenda, then no. God sees our hearts. We want peace. We know from the generous and loving Christian responses that most Christians do

too.

26. How will you follow up on this?

Stay tuned and find out!

الحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds

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