

**A COMMON WORD BETWEEN US AND YOU: A NEW
DEPARTURE IN MUSLIM ATTITUDES TOWARDS
CHRISTIANITY**

by

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Abstract

In October 2007, 138 Muslim scholars signed a document entitled “A Common Word between Us and You” (ACW) and addressed it to 28 Christian leaders worldwide. ACW invited Christians to a common ground; the belief in one God to work for peace in the world along with Muslims. ACW makes a case for this common ground with scriptural, Qur’anic as well as Biblical, underpinnings. This structure raises two important theological issues in the context of Christian-Muslim relations: first, the use of the Bible in ACW and secondly the belief in the unity of God.

The dissertation analyses and evaluates the contribution of this Muslim initiative to Christian-Muslim relations based on the following question: “What does ACW do to promote a new understanding between Christians and Muslims?” The study focuses on the above two theological issues that are central to ACW. The first chapter presents a discussion as to how these themes were treated by Muslim scholars in the early centuries of Islam. The second chapter considers how these same themes are treated in ACW with critical comments. The third chapter analyses how some selected responses from Christians evaluate this initiative. It shows that ACW sits well within the classical frame of Islamic thinking in its attitude towards the Bible and Christian belief in one God. What is noticeable is that, it avoids the polemics of the past and treats the biblical verses that it cites with respect and seriousness. By juxtaposing verses from the Bible and Qur’an it invites Christians and Muslims to live up to a common word.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation:

To the Children of St Joseph's School, Baramulla, Kashmir who showed me a

Way to enter into the lives of Muslims and to love them

To Shinoo and family who consider me one of their family and represented my

Parents at my ordination to diaconate at Vidyajyoti, Delhi

To Maulana Abdul of Civil Lines *Masjid* who considers me his brother and

Taught me the even-sweet Urdu with love

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Abbreviations

AM	The Amman Message
AIM	The Amman Interfaith Message
OL-38	Open Letter of 38 Muslim scholars
ACW	A Common Word between Us and You
Q	Qur'an

INTRODUCTION

On October 13, 2007, an open letter entitled **A Common Word between Us and You** (ACW) signed by 138 Muslim scholars and leaders was addressed to some 28 Christian leaders and their churches, inviting them to agree a basis for relations with Muslims.¹ This dissertation seeks to analyse and evaluate ACW and its contribution to Christian-Muslim relations based on the research question: “What does ACW do to promote a new understanding between Christians and Muslims?”

ACW and its significance for the present times

ACW is an important initiative as it appeared when tensions between Christians and Muslims were in a heightened state in the wake of the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York on September 11, 2001, the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and several bomb attacks on civilian populations involving European Muslims.² The Pew Global Attitudes Project in its report released on June 22, 2006 noted: “Many in the West see Muslims as fanatical, violent, and as lacking tolerance. Meanwhile, Muslims in the Middle East and Asia generally see Westerners as selfish, immoral and greedy – as well as violent and

¹ The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, *A Common Word*, <http://www.acommonword.com/index.php?lang=en> [accessed on December 10, 2010]. See: Appendix 7.

² The Madrid train bombings (March 11, 2004), the London bombings (July 7, 2005) and some 30 major failed plots in Europe happened in the five years following the Twin Tower attack. See: M. Perry and H.E. Negrin, eds., *The Theory and Practice of Islamic Terrorism: An Anthology* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008], 92.

fanatical.”³ Earlier, S. P. Huntington had predicted that the crucial and central aspect of conflict in the future would be between different civilisations. He wrote: “The fault lines between civilisations will be the battle lines of the future.”⁴ In the context of such a charged and negative atmosphere ACW appears to be an important and bold step as it invites Christians and Muslims to understand one another better and to work for peace in the world.⁵ It deserves to be studied for its moral courage amidst fear, suspicion, misunderstanding and negativity to propose a theoretical framework for peace and the determination to begin a new constructive relationship and collaboration between Muslims and Christians based on religious fundamentals.⁶

³ Pew Research Centre [Pew Global Attitudes Project], *The Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other*, <http://pewglobal.org/2006/06/22/the-great-divide-how-westerners-and-muslims-view-each-other/> [accessed on December 10, 2010].

⁴ S. P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no.3 [Summer 1993]: 22. The online version of this article is available at: <http://ikesharpless.pbworks.com/f/Samuel+Huntington,+The+Clash+of+Civilizations.pdf> [accessed on December 12, 2010]. Also see: S.P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* [London: Simon & Schuster, 1996], 213-214, 238, 242, 262, and 264.

⁵ H. Küng in a series of lectures that he delivered on Dialogue at the University of Tübingen in 1982 drew a conclusion: ‘No world peace without religious peace’. He later reformulated his conclusion as: “No peace among the nations without peace among the religions. No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions. No dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundation of the religions”. He emphasises that this formulation was the aim of his book, *Islam: Past, Present & Future* [Oxford: Oneworld, 2007], xxiii. Also see: H. Küng, “Christianity and World Religions: the Dialogue with Islam as One Model,” *The Muslim World* 77, [1987], 80-95. It appears that the purpose of ACW is based on this insight.

⁶ Christian-Muslim relations are shaped by theological traditions and historical conditions in which Muslims and Christians encountered one another. See appendix 16 for a note on: ‘How Christians and Muslims see each other.’

ACW is a theological document as it summons both groups of believers to a belief in one God based on (Q. 3:64)⁷ that invites both groups to affirm that they shall worship none but God, and that they shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of them will take others for lords beside God. In the same breath, ACW invites Christians to remember the words of Jesus in the Gospel (Mark 12:29-31)⁸ that affirms the oneness of God. ACW thus uses both the Bible and the Qur'an to build up a common platform for Christians and Muslims to come together for mutual understanding and cooperation.⁹ It is significant that ACW thus develops a particular way of dealing with these scriptures and the belief in one God in both these religious traditions by juxtaposing them. This is particularly the case since previously 'belief in one God' and 'the status of the Bible' have been two important themes for polemics between Muslims and Christians for centuries. Muslims bitterly contested that Christians believed in one God and regarded the Bible as corrupted scripture.¹⁰ In view of this it is important to investigate how ACW has

⁷ 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).

⁸ ... 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.

⁹ F. Magnis-Suseno writes: "What is so remarkable in this letter is that its argumentation is strictly theological. Working together because we are united by common values is already something very important. But this letter, by arguing in a theological way, goes a step further. It offers collaboration for peace in the world *before God!*" See: F. Magnis-Suseno, "A Common Word and What It Could Mean," in *We Have Justice in Common*, 26. Cf. Footnote no. 35.

¹⁰ This will be dealt with at length in chapter 1.

employed these very themes in order to improve understanding between Christians and Muslims.

ACW is also interesting from another angle as it is developed around the teachings of Jesus on love of God and neighbour.¹¹ Some of the commentators on ACW have found that this approach of ACW reflects the first encyclical of Pope Benedict '*Deus Caritas Est*'.¹² It is also a major landmark in that it was signed by Muslim scholars from different branches of Islam and was sent to Christian leaders who belong to different churches.¹³ Several Christian leaders have responded to ACW. A number of conferences and workshops have also been organised by universities, dialogue centres and faith communities since 2007 to discuss ACW and the possibilities it offers for Christian-Muslim relations.¹⁴ These initiatives indicate an ongoing interest in the issues raised by ACW. All these are compelling reasons to investigate the

¹¹ The literature review shows that this has been an important point for several commentators on ACW. Some of the Christian responses we have chosen for study too have not overlooked this aspect, though they pay focussed attention on the two themes: the belief in one God and the use of the Bible in ACW.

¹² See footnote 304.

¹³ One of the commentators of ACW writes: "This is a most serious breakthrough because the 138 speak before God." See: F. Magnis-Suseno, "A Common Word and What it Could Mean," in *We Have Justice in Common*, 40. Cf. Footnote 17.

¹⁴ Since its publication major conferences have been organised for example at Yale, Cambridge, and Georgetown universities, the Vatican has established The Catholic-Muslim Forum, and the World Council of Churches has organised meetings. A full listing of Christian responses can be found at The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, "Responses from Christian Leaders," *A Common Word*, <http://www.acommonword.com/en/a-common-word/2-general/161-qa-common-wordq-accomplishments-2007-2009.html> [accessed December, 10 2009].

research question: “What does ACW do to promote a new understanding between Christians and Muslims?”

Brief literature review

A few articles have appeared in journals considering in what way ACW promotes understand between Christians and Muslims. The following articles: “A Quest for A Common Word: Initial Christian Responses to a Muslim Initiative”, by Y.Y. Haddad (Georgetown University) and J.I. Smith (Harvard Divinity School)¹⁵ and “A Common Word More positive and open, yet mainstream and orthodox ” by J. Hoover (Nottingham University)¹⁶ are chosen for a closer study to understand what has been said about ACW in the Christian scholarly world.

Here are the reasons for choosing these articles.¹⁷ “A Quest for A Common Word: Initial Christian Responses to a Muslim Initiative” is chosen since the authors examine the context in which ACW appeared and the kind of responses given by Christian commentators on ACW. The article, “A Common Word: More positive and open, yet

¹⁵ Y.Y. Haddad and J.I. Smith “The Quest for ‘A Common Word’: Initial Christian Responses to a Muslim Initiative,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 20, no.4 [October 2009]: 369-88.

¹⁶ J. Hoover, “A Common Word: ‘More positive and open, yet mainstream and orthodox’,” *Theological Review* 30, no.1 [April 2009]: 50-77.

¹⁷ The articles from two reputable journals on Christian-Muslim relations have been chosen as well as a number of articles that have been published in two books that appeared after two international conferences on ACW: one in Yale and the other at Lake Como. See footnote 21 and 22.

mainstream and orthodox ” is chosen since its author evaluates the implications of the invitation theologically pointing out pertinent issues as outlined below.¹⁸

The authors of the first article contend that though ACW did not chart a new theological path, it is a major effort that invites Christians to affirm what they have in common when reactionary voices within each tradition decry one another in different parts of the world. First, they recognise that these Muslim signatories are committed to fresh thinking about relations between Islam and Christianity. Secondly, they affirm the importance of seeking a common ground, acknowledging both similarities and differences. Thirdly, they acknowledge ACW as a basis for future relationships. Fourthly, they admit that ACW reflects the possibility of dialogue rather than polemics. Fifthly, they remind the writers and readers of their concern for justice with regard to Christians living in countries with a Muslim majority.

The second article, after examining the contents of ACW, explains that this document does not call Christians to become Muslims and avoids traditional polemics in its invitation to a common word. However, the author, Hoover, considers that ACW retains the idea of the essential

¹⁸ It is also important to note that the literature available on ACW is scanty as it is a new document.

supremacy of Islam. He argues that ACW while proposing a common platform between Christianity and Islam does not pay sufficient attention to the differences between the two traditions. The traditional way is to deny Christian doctrines such as the incarnation, redemption, and the Trinity. According to Hoover, ACW treats these doctrines as simply ‘formal’ rather than essential and central expression of the Christian faith. Further Hoover reads ACW to say that both religions (Islam and Christianity) differ only as regards ‘forms’¹⁹ but not in the essence of faith.²⁰ Hoover’s reading of ACW is pertinent as it highlights ACW’s view of what it sees as essential to Christian faith and what is not. This will be further explored in chapter 2.

At the time of writing, only two books had taken up the challenge of ACW: that is *Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbour*²¹ and *We have Justice in Common: Christian and*

¹⁹ It will be noted later ACW does not explain what ‘formal’ difference means. See section 2.6.2.5.

²⁰ A curious similar attitude could be noted in the writings of Cardinal Nicolaus from Cusa (1401-1468). In his work *De pace fidei* he maintained that the three Abrahamic religions coincide in their fundamental truths, but differ in manifold customs and rites. See: M. Bauschke, “Islam: Jesus and Muhammad as Brothers,” in *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths*, ed. A. Race and P.M. Hedges [London: SCM Press, 2008], 196. However, later Nicolaus changed his views. J.M. Gaudeul writes: “Nicholas’ first attitude was based on a false optimism... which saw the opposition between Islam and Christianity as superficial and slight. He then began to study the question methodically as a true scholar, attempting to prove that the real meaning of the Qur’an was Christian.” See: J. M. Gaudeul, *Encounters & Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History I A Survey* [Roma: PISAI, 2000], 212. Also see: G. Anawati, “Nicholas de Cues et le problem de l’Islam,” in *Atti des Congresso di Bressanone 1964* [Univ. Padova, Sansoni, Firenze, 1964], 141-173.

²¹ M. Volf, Ghazi bin Muhamad, and M. Yarrington, eds., *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbour* [Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2010].

*Muslim voices from Asia and Africa.*²² The first is co-edited by one of the key initiators of ACW and the second comprises contributions from scholars and activists who come in the main from countries where large numbers of Christians and Muslims live together.

A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbour discusses issues connected with the central themes of ACW, as indicated above and dealt with in the responses to it. The two chapters in the first section highlight the present crisis in Christian-Muslim relations and seek to uncover the foundations on which Christians and Muslims jointly could build their peaceful co-existence. The Christian and Muslim authors of these essays argue that Christians and Muslims should draw on the resources of their respective faiths to understand one another better and jointly work for peace. They also draw attention to the importance of religiously affiliated non-government authorities taking a lead in building harmony between Christians and Muslims.²³

The second section presents readers with the Muslim perspectives on understanding love for God and love of neighbour. H.A. Al-Jifri tells the readers that the primordial conversation between God and pre-embodied

²² C.W. Troll, H. Reifeld and C.T.R. Hewer, eds., *We Have Justice in Common: Christian and Muslim Voices from Asia and Africa* [Berlin: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V., 2010].

²³ Ghazi bin Muhammad, "On A Common Word Between Us and You," in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbour*, 8.

souls [Q. 7:172] lays the foundation for love for God in the heart of the soul of every man and woman.²⁴ R. Shah-Kazemi argues that to understand love for God one should not look towards theologians but to those *sūfīs* who made the spiritual struggle the base for their lives.²⁵ The lives of millions of ordinary Muslims are touched and shaped by *sūfī* mystics.²⁶ For *sūfīs*: “love is at the very heart of being; the whole cosmos vibrates and pulsates with that love which eternally flows from the very heart of God”.²⁷ B.A.J. Ajibola in his short essay brings to light the teachings in the *hadīth* on the commandment to love God and

²⁴H.A. Al-Jifri, “Loving God and Loving Neighbour,” in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians Loving God and Neighbour*, 79-87. His reflection could be summarised as follows: God asked the souls of all men and women: “Am I not your Lord?” The question which is at the heart of theology awaits a positive response from the children of Adam. Allah waits for human recognition. They said: “yea, verily. We testify”. This human response to this divine question constitutes the nature of the human person. Moreover, the beauty of God’s words instils in the souls a natural longing to love what is beautiful, benevolent and perfect. God is the source of all benevolence, beauty and perfection. Deep love for God and devotion to him was instilled in the hearts of men and women even before they were clothed with their material bodies. Loving God is natural to men and women. God has created humanity with this natural disposition. By giving this disposition, God elevates the human person to love him. Life in this body is a test from God. One needs to rise above it to reach the eternal home. This view though argued well from the Qur’anic perspective appears not to give adequate attention to enfleshed men and women. The concreteness of human existence here and now appears to receive less attention in this perspective. This view regards human existence as a test and not as a gift. H.A. Al-Jifri continues that love of neighbour stems from love for God. We love our neighbours for the sake of God, since our love for our creator leads us to love his creation. Once again this approach stresses the ontology; the metaphysical nature of the being is emphasised without sufficient attention to the sin and suffering that human beings struggle with within their concrete existence in this world.

²⁵ R. Shah-Kazemi, “Loving God and Loving Neighbour,” in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians Loving God and Neighbour*, 88-109. It should be noted what *sūfīs* teach is not an academic theology; it is not a theory, but a theology that is lived and experienced. It is a theology that becomes a daily action shaping and making their lives in the way of God.

²⁶S.H. Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* [New York: HarperCollins, 2002], 215.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 97. These articles highlight two different dimensions on the love for God that are rooted in the teachings of the Qur’an: the theological and the mystical.

love one's neighbour.²⁸ These three articles establish how different Muslims understand the love for God and love of neighbour that arise from the Qur'an and *Sunna*, the two principal sources of Muslim beliefs. The Christian responses on this theme were written by M. Volf,²⁹ J.L. Cumming,³⁰ and D. Burrell.³¹ What these authors have to say on this subject, can be stated briefly as follows: "God is love in God's very being apart from God's relation to creation".³²

This volume pays close attention to the different perspectives in which Christians and Muslims understand the commandments to love God and one's neighbour. It does not analyse the theological issues that emerge from central themes such as belief in one God and the use of the Bible in ACW. It is interesting to note that the principal editor of this book, Prince Ghazi, who is also a key person to ACW process, does not raise the key issues like 'belief in one God' and 'the status of the Bible' in

²⁸ B.A.J. Ajibola, "The Concept of Loving Neighbour in the Qur'an and Hadith," in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians Loving God and Neighbour*, 118-121.

²⁹ M. Volf, "God is Love: Biblical and Theological Reflections on a Foundational Christian Claim," in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians Loving God and Neighbour*, 125-142.

³⁰ J.L. Cumming, "Understanding the Meaning of Love: Eternal or Temporal? Self-Giving or Gift-Giving," in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians Loving God and Neighbour*, 143-152.

³¹ D. Burrell, "Transforming Love," in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians Loving God and Neighbour*, 153-156.

³² M. Volf, "God is Love: Biblical and Theological Reflections on a Foundational Christian Claim," in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians Loving God and Neighbour*, 142. The Christian authors explain that God has revealed his love in Christ. It is important to note that this revelation is not a dialogue with human spirits but an enfleshed expression of God's ultimate love. God is not just elevating human beings to love God but God descends and enters into human history in and through the historical person of Jesus. The Muslim perspective points to God's glory in heaven whilst the Christian perspective shows God's incarnation in human history. They are rooted in two different faith experiences.

Muslim religious thinking.³³ Does this mean that these issues are not important? One reason could be that these issues have strong polemical overtones and are best to be avoided. However, it should be noted that these two issues are important and can not be avoided in a discussion on ACW, not because historically these issues frustrated any attempt to promote understanding between Christians and Muslims, but because ACW is woven around verses from the Bible and the Qur'an and invites both Christians and Muslims to a common platform,³⁴ the belief in one God. These issues need to be analysed in depth in order to answer the research question: "What does ACW do to promote a new understanding between Christians and Muslims?"

The other volume *We Have Justice in common* is a collection of Christian and Muslim voices from Africa and Asia. It pays attention to the issue of 'belief in one God' and 'the status of the Bible'. This collection draws on the lived experience of Muslims and Christians alongside people of other religious traditions. These voices reiterate the

³³ He writes: "There is deliberately no mention of the 'Christian Trinity' in 'A Common Word' because Jesus (peace be upon him) never mentions it in the Gospels – and certainly not when discussing the Two Greatest Commandments." See: Ghazi bin Muhammad, "On A Common Word Between Us and You ," in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbour*, 8. It should be recognised that though ACW does not mention this issue it can not be avoided in a serious theological conversation on Christian-Muslim relations.

³⁴ Al-Tayib Zain Al-Abdin notes that CW quotes copiously not only from the Qur'an but also from the Bible and comments: "which is not a common practice among Muslims". He recognises the importance of something new in ACW. See: Al-Tayib Zain Al-Abdin, "A Response to A Common Word from an African Perspective," in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbour*, 124.

need to respect one another and draw from the sources of one's faith to build communities of peace, justice and harmony.

The Christian authors F. Magnis-Suseno³⁵ and J.A. Mbillah³⁶ emphasise the significance of the theme: 'belief in one God' in ACW. Magnis-Suseno writes: "In this letter Muslims accept Christians as believers before God, something that, I should think, didn't come easily. It is a sign of theological empathy, something, still unusual on both sides."³⁷ He recognises newness as well as boldness in this theological initiative.

While Magnis-Suseno points out the quality of ACW's approach on this issue, Mbillah highlights the importance of the difference between the way in which Christians and Muslims understand their belief in one God. He considers that oneness of God is the core belief of both Christianity and Islam. Christians acknowledge that God is one and his nature is triune. Muslims acknowledge that God is one and alone (*Tawhīd*). Though both Christians and Muslims affirm their belief in one God they affirm it differently. While the Trinity is constitutive of Christian faith in one God *Tawhīd* is essential to Muslim faith in God. Mbillah writes "there must be mutual respect for our different understanding of the One

³⁵ F.Magnis-Suseno, "A Common Word and What it Could Mean," in A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbour, 25-51.

³⁶ J.A. Mbillah, "An African Reflection on a Common Word," in A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbour, 87-197.

³⁷ F.Magnis-Suseno, "A Common Word and What it Could Mean," in A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbour, 26.

God”.³⁸ He observes that Christians and Muslims should acknowledge their understanding of what this belief means in each religious tradition when they talk about the oneness of God in order to maintain the integrity of both faiths. Moreover, acknowledging differences does not put relations between the two communities at risk, “because God understands our differences”.³⁹ He also demonstrates that differences indeed did not jeopardise relations referring to the meeting Muhammad had with the delegation from Najran. While Magnis-Suseno was generous towards ACW initiative, Mbillah considers the critical importance of differences in any assertion about belief in one God. Hewer, another commentator, who writes in this volume, feels that the proposal on monotheism as outlined in ACW needs to be scrutinised.⁴⁰ A Christian critique of ACW is emerging clearly in this volume. An attempt will be made in this dissertation to consider this in more detail.

On the issue of ‘the status of the Bible’ Magnis-Suseno finds an interesting development in Muslim writers quoting extensively from the New and Old Testaments. He writes: “We know that for many Muslims both texts, the foundational texts of Christian belief, are falsifications.”⁴¹ He interprets this to imply that the signatories of ACW are distancing

³⁸ J.A. Mbillah, “An African Reflection on a Common Word,” in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbour*, 90.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 90.

⁴⁰ C.T.R. Hewer, “Comment on A Common Word and the Keynote Papers,” in *We Have Justice in Common*, 211.

⁴¹ F.Magnis-Suseno, “A Common Word and What it Could Mean,” in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbour*, 26.

“themselves silently from this theory of falsification, which for Jews and Christians is extremely insulting. In other words, the writers take our holy scriptures seriously.”⁴² Al-Tayib Zain Al-Abdin⁴³ though, recognises that bringing together the verses from the Qur’an and the Bible, to stress upon a shared value between Christians and Muslims itself, is something important and it is not a common practice among Muslims. He considers that ACW holds on to the classical view of Islam which considers that the Bible has been subjected to corruption. He makes clear that Christian scriptures are corrupted but “are still substantially authentic.”⁴⁴ Magnis-Suseno and Al-Tayib Zain Al-Abdin differ in their reading of ACW. While Magnis-Suseno and Al-Tayib Zain Al-Abdin both accept that ACW treats the Bible with seriousness but they consider the attitude of ACW towards the Bible from different points of view. An attempt will be made in this dissertation to consider this theme too in more detail.

In sum it should be said that the articles and books reviewed touch upon several issues that emerge in ACW. The substantial issue that is clarified in them is the positions of Christians and Muslims on love of God and

⁴² F.Magnis-Suseno, “A Common Word and What it Could Mean,” in A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbour, 26.

⁴³ Al-Tayib Zain Al-Abdin, “A Response to A Common Word from an African Perspective,” in A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbour, 124-135..

⁴⁴Ibid, 124.

love of neighbour.⁴⁵ *We have Justice in Common* and “*A Common Word*: More positive and open, yet mainstream and orthodox ” touch upon: ‘the belief in one God’ and the ‘status of the Bible’, but do not adequately discuss their significance for promoting better understanding between them. This dissertation seeks to discuss these themes in order to respond to the research question: “What does ACW do to promote new understanding between Christians and Muslims?”

Methodology

The writers of ACW adopt a deductive methodology to develop ACW. They choose Q. 3:64 that invites Christians to a common belief in one God and support their invitation further by citing Mark 12:29-31. From these key texts they deduce that there is a real chance for Muslims and Christians to come together on such a common platform so as to understand one another better and to work for peace in the world.⁴⁶ The common platform is their belief in one God. The adequacy of such methodology has been questioned by several Christian authors in the recent past, since such methodology would be panoptic and would not give serious consideration to the views of others. They suggest an

⁴⁵ Though it is important to clarify these positions, since ACW offers this as a common element of both faiths, it is not clear how a better understanding of these positions will lead Christians and Muslims to work for peace and harmony in the world. A number of serious issues between Christians and Muslims in different parts of the world do not arise merely from theological concerns but also from the practical implications of love of God and love of neighbour.

⁴⁶ It will be shown in Chapter 2, that while using these key texts ACW misses out the nuances of these texts that were elaborated in the exegetical traditions of both religions.

inductive methodology for interfaith relations.⁴⁷ However, given the fact that ACW follows a deductive methodology one has to take it as it is and find a proper method to analyse it in order to find its new contribution to Christian-Muslim understanding. This dissertation seeks to develop a method through which the themes: ‘the status of the Bible’ and ‘belief in one God’ are analysed in the formative period of Islam, in ACW itself and in the responses to ACW.

The phrase ‘new understanding’ in the research question indicates that ACW tries to bring a new perspective into those central issues: the ‘status of the Bible’ and ‘the belief in one God’. What is new emerges if one gives attention to the way in which these theological issues were dealt with in the past as over against the way in which ACW and the responses to it have tackled them.

⁴⁷ In deductive methodology conclusions are deduced from suitably selected scriptural quotes or from dogmatic pronouncements. The method proceeds from principles to one or a set of concrete applications. It is something like: God has established the Church as the means of salvation. Therefore other religions can only be inadequate and subordinate. In inductive methodology conclusion depends on experience and reflection. It is a movement from concrete realities to principles. The fruits of holiness in the believers of other religions – the presence and action of the Spirit/God in them are the starting point. It proceeds finally to emphasize God’s universal salvific will. See: K. Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” in *Theological Investigations* [London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966], 5: 115-34; J. Dupuis, “Méthode théologique et théologies locales: Adoption, inclusion, contextualization,” *Seminarium* 32, no.1 [1992]: 61-74; C. Geffré, *Le christianisme au risque de l’interprétation* [Paris: Cefr, 1983]; J. Dupuis, *Who Do You Say That I Am? Introduction to Christology* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994]; J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002]; M. Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009].

A consideration of the place of these two themes indicates that: ACW, by using certain chosen passages from the Bible and the Qur'an, shows that both Christians and Muslims have a common foundation: love for God and love of one's neighbour. ACW links Qur'anic passages (also a few *hadīth*), with a basic structure: Jesus' summary of the Law. As a result the teaching of Jesus on the love for God and love of ones' neighbour is the foundation on which ACW is built. This basic structure is theologically significant because Muslim scholars match the Islamic teachings with the teachings of Jesus and project a common ground between Christians and Muslims. The projected common ground links the Bible and the Qur'an. Thus, ACW cites selected passages of the Bible together with selected verses of the Qur'an. The attempts to correlate these two scriptures have a chequered history. Is it possible to assume that ACW considers those selected passages as authentic; one might ask, what is the criterion for recognising the passages as authentic? Does ACW indicate a new approach towards the Bible in Muslim religious discourse? These questions demand that careful attention is needed to the way in which the Bible is used in ACW. One cannot deal meaningfully with this phenomenon of the use of the Bible in ACW without paying careful attention to the past. This is considered in the first section of Chapter 1.

Similarly, the authors of ACW think that Muslims and Christians should legitimately ground their aspirations for better understanding and for peace by coming together on the basis of their belief in one God. It is

clear to some Christian commentators that the Muslim signatories of ACW affirm that Christians too like them believe in one God.⁴⁸ This theme also is theologically significant because in the formative period of Islam and subsequently, Muslim theologians bitterly contested that Christians believed in one God. In the second section of Chapter One some of the important theologians of the formative period are considered to show how they disagreed with the idea that Christians believe in one God. They argued that the doctrine of the Trinity compromised the unity of God and that Christian belief about God is riddled with error. This is considered in the second section of chapter 1.

The nature of the discussion on belief in one God in the early centuries of Islam was intellectual and rational in character. Both Christians and Muslims who were involved in such debates were familiar with the philosophical categories that they employed as tools for debate. The whole purpose of the debate was to prove the other party wrong. They judged the other according to their own criteria. This led to the stereotyping of the other. On the question of the status of the Bible, Muslim discussion remained mainly Qur'an based. It was rather a repetition of the same arguments with much force and vigour. The first chapter thus highlights some elements of the salient features of debates on these themes in the formative period of Islam.

⁴⁸F. Magnis-Suseno, "A Common Word what it could mean" in *We Have Justice in Common*, 26.

As noted in the last paragraph the first chapter will show that both ‘belief in one God’ and ‘status of the Bible’ has been dealt with in a polemical way in the early centuries of Islam. The dissertation at this juncture, moves from the early centuries to the contemporary period in which ACW appeared in order to investigate how it has dealt with these themes.

Serious theological scholarship should incorporate within itself the classical position but should also respond to the contemporary needs of modern man and woman in order to be truly contemporary and truly relevant. It could be said that *rootedness* in the classical position and *openness* to emerging realities would make a theological piece relevant. Such theological scholarship may be able to usher in new perspectives into theological outlooks. In order to proceed in that direction, the second chapter situates ACW in its historical as well as Qur’anic context, since the immediate history has an impact on ACW, and then carefully analyses both these themes in order to see how ACW differs or not from the scholars of the formative period. This chapter brings out the nature, character and complexity of ACW. It highlights the centrality of Qur’anic revelation in ACW in the way in which it deals with both issues: the belief in one God and the use of the Bible. On the one hand ACW is built on the teachings of the Bible and on the other hand the invitation is embedded in Q. 3:64. The chapter tries to bring out the complexity of links and assumptions in ACW.

As noted above the second chapter analyses the new approaches of ACW to Christian-Muslim from one perspective. There is a saying in many languages: ‘You cannot *clap* with one *hand* alone’. Many great results can be obtained if initiatives are responded to from different quarters generously and critically. In this case this ACW initiative will bring fruits if many Christians respond to it. It is therefore heartening that some Christian scholars have begun to respond to it.

The third chapter considers a selected sample of responses to see how they reply to and recognise the newness that ACW tries to bring into Christian-Muslim understanding. This chapter will again follow the same thematic approach to see how the Christian responses evaluate ACW based on the above mentioned themes of ‘belief in one God’ and ‘the status of the Bible’. The responses differ in length and in depth. They add several related themes and leave out some elements in their discussion. The focus of the chapter is to draw out the quality of discussion found in the responses and to gather and to analyse their reflections. An investigation of these two themes in the early centuries of Islam, in ACW and the way in which responses pay attention to them should broaden the understanding of ACW and its contribution to Christian-Muslim relations.

In conclusion, it will be shown that ACW sits well within the classical frame of Islamic thinking in its attitude towards the Bible and Christian

belief in one God. However, it avoids polemics of the past and treats the biblical verses that it cites with respect and seriousness and similarly it does not portray Christians as *kāfirun*. It maintains silence over the authenticity of the Bible and fails to acknowledge what is essential to Christian faith. However, by bringing together verses from the Bible and the Qur'an it invites Christians and Muslims to live up to the ethical demands of loving God and neighbour and thus indicates certain new departures in Christian-Muslim relations.

This dissertation follows the 'Chicago style' as laid out in the seventh edition of *A Manual for Writers of Research Paper, Theses, and Dissertation* for citations [notes-bibliography style] and for the issues of mechanics, such as capitalisation and abbreviations. There are a number of appendices added to this dissertation. The documents that trace the historical developments up to the publication of ACW are arranged in a chronological order. Following this, the responses from Christian scholars are arranged not according to its chronological order but according to the attention they give to the themes that are analysed in the dissertation. This is followed by a couple of appendices that help the over all strength of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 1

MUSLIM THINKING IN THE EARLY CENTURIES OF ISLAM

Introduction

As indicated in the Introduction ‘the corruption of biblical writings’ [the status of the Bible], and ‘the Trinity’ [the belief in one God] will be considered in detail in this chapter because they have been major themes for discussion among Christians and Muslims right from the early centuries of Islam. These themes are critical for an appropriate assessment of ACW. The discussion on these themes will be limited to debates which occurred from the 7th to the 14th centuries. These themes that were prominent in the discussions during this period continue to influence Muslim religious thinking. A careful study of these discussions on ‘the corruption of biblical writings’ and ‘the Trinity’ that occurred in the early centuries of Islam will lay a foundation for analysis and evaluation of the use of the Bible in ACW and its invitation to a common word respectively.

Theme One: The corruption of Christian scriptures is an important theme in Christian-Muslim theological debates. Many Muslim scholars, who will be considered in greater detail later, found reason to argue that the Jewish and Christian scriptures were corrupted. While some argued

that the text was deliberately corrupted, others explained corruption as the misinterpretation of the Bible.⁴⁹ ACW uses quotations from the Bible in its text without referring to the concept of *tah rīf* (corruption). Since the use of the Bible is central in ACW this will need to be looked at in some detail.

Theme Two: The Trinity will be the second theme in this chapter. ACW deals with this issue, indirectly. ACW identifies: ‘we will not worship other than God and not associate anything with Him’ (Q. 3:64) as the Common Word. ACW invites Christians to come to this Common Word. This invitation has a bearing on the way in which Christians understand the unity of God. They understand God’s nature as triune, which Muslims reject. The important question addressed in the second chapter of this dissertation is whether ACW in inviting Christians to come to a common word allows them space to retain the specificity of their Christian doctrine of God or if it invites them to come to accept the Islamic doctrine of *tawhīd*.

This chapter, as noted, concentrates on corruption of the Bible and Muslim opinion on Trinity in the early centuries of Islam. It is important to account briefly for what the Qur’an says about these topics since all Muslim scholars base their arguments on the teachings of the Qur’an (See sections 1.1.1 and 1.2.1).

⁴⁹ H. Küng, *Islam: Past, Present & Future*, 488; W.M. Watt, *Islam and Christianity today: A Contribution to Dialogue* [London: Routledge Library Editions: Islam, 2008], 1-3.

1.1 Corruption of the Bible

The purpose of this section is to present Muslim thinking on the issue of corruption of the Bible in the early centuries of Islam. This exploration will facilitate an understanding of the range of Muslim intellectual and theological positions on the Bible. The discussion will be useful in assessing how ACW treat the Bible, which will be dealt with in chapter 2.

1.1.1 The Qur'an about the Bible

The Qur'an teaches that prophets come to all the nations of the earth with essentially the same message (Q. 10:47; 16:38). Consequently, Muhammad taught his followers to believe in all the prophets: including Adam, Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus. Disbelief in Muhammad, he warned, constituted disbelief in all the prophets who came before him.⁵⁰ In Medina, Jews using their knowledge of their scriptures criticised Muhammad and rejected his claims to prophethood. The Christian attitude too was similar to that of the Jews. Muhammad was surprised and dismayed at Jewish and Christian attitudes towards him. At this context:

The chief point made in the Qur'an was that Islam is the religion of Abraham in its purity, and that Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, since he had lived before the revelation of the Torah to Moses or the Gospel to Jesus. The Jews and Christian on the other

⁵⁰ F. Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009], 164.

hand, had deviated from the revelation they had received and had introduced false doctrines, which the Qur'an explicitly refuted.⁵¹

In the words of Pulcini:

The Jews are accused of knowingly perverting (*yuharrifūna*) the word of God after having heard and understood it (2:75). Some actually “write the Book with their own hands and then say, ‘This is from God’” (2:79); these “transgressors changed (*baddala*) the word from that which had been given them” (2:59). Others corrupt the text by displacing words, changing (*yuharrifūna*) them from their right places (4:46, 5:14), or by “twisting their tongues and reading incorrectly”.

There is among them a section who distort (*yalūna*) the Book with their tongues. (As they read) you would think it is a part of the Book, but it is no part of the Book; and they say, “This is from God,” but it is not from God (3:78)

Of the Jews there are those who displace words... and say: “We hear and we disobey... with a twist (*layyan*) of their tongues... (4:46)”⁵²

Though all scriptures, including the Qur'an, *Tawrāt* and *Injīl* are taken from the preserved tablet (*al-Lawh al-Mahfūz*), as far as the Qur'an is concerned, Muslim scholars hold that it alone is preserved for all time by God and protected from error in its transmission.⁵³

Muslim authors have used the following four words in describing how the Jewish and Christian scriptures were corrupted: *taharrif* – to corrupt a book, *tabdīl* – to substitute one text for another, *layyan* – to turn one's

⁵¹ W.M. Watt, *Islam and Christianity Today: A Contribution to Dialogue*, 14.

⁵² T. Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998], 14.

⁵³ H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* [New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992], 13.

thought in one's mouth (mispronounce the revealed text in order to give it another meaning), *kitmān* – to hide, to hide a book or part of a book.⁵⁴ *Tah rīf* was understood as either the distortion of the biblical text (*tah rīf al-nass*) or the distortion of meaning (*tah rīf al-ma'ni*).⁵⁵ The charge of concealment of truth (*ikhfā'*) is also levelled against Jews and Christians (Q. 2:159; 2:174). They concealed the truth of the coming of Muhammad and make no reference to it in their scriptures. Jews were reprimanded for “dismembering the *tawrāt*, making it into separate sheets ‘for show’ which conceal much of its contents” (Q. 6:91).⁵⁶ Christians were told that they have forgotten a good part of the message that was sent to them.⁵⁷

1.1.2 The Muslim intellectual traditions

1.1.2.1 Is the biblical text altered?

Muslims and Christians in the early centuries of Islam often argued with one another about the truth value of their scriptures. Some of their discussions centred on alleged references to Muhammad in the Bible. Many Muslims argued that many biblical passages predicted the coming of Muhammad and the rise of Islam and maintained that several of such

⁵⁴ J.M. Gaudeul, *Encounters & Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History II Texts* [Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica (P.I.S.A.I), 2000], 207.

⁵⁵ C. Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism & the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabbān to Ibn Hazm* [Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1996], 223.

⁵⁶ T. Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 15.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

passages have been removed by Jews and Christians though some of them have escaped possibly because of their implicitness.⁵⁸ They drew a conclusion that the Bible was corrupt. Other scholars pointed out that the Bible is not trustworthy for moral and historical reasons. This section covers some of the prominent Muslim scholarly voices from the early centuries on these positions and presents their arguments. Their thinking influenced subsequent reflection on these themes. They differed in their approach to the issue but drew the same conclusion. For example, Ibn Hazm considered the Bible is corrupted textually where as al-Ghazali maintained corruption was due to erroneous interpretation.⁵⁹

Reference to Muhammad in the Bible deleted

The exchanges between Catholicos Timothy and Caliph al-Mahdi which occurred over two days [the date is usually given as 791 C.E] is a case in

⁵⁸ H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism*, 75; See also W.M. Watt, "The Early Development of the Muslim Attitude to the Bible," *Transactions*, Glasgow University Oriental Society 16 [1955 – 56]: 50-62.

The Jews and Christians who became Muslims found texts from their former scriptures which could support their argument that the Bible predicted Muhammad and the coming of Islam (See: C. Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism & the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm*, 5).

⁵⁹ Al-Ghazali's views appear in a book entitled *al-Radd al-jamīl li-Ilāhīyyāt 'Isā bi-s arīh al-Injīl* (Excellent Refutation of the Divinity of Jesus from the text of the Gospel). There is disagreement over the identity of the author of this work.

Scholars like Massignon and Chidiac held that the content of this book was the teaching of al-Ghazali; a student of his who attended his lectures compiled it as a book (See: H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 124. Also see: H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in Al-Ghazali* [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975]).

This view is rejected by H. Lazarus-Yafeh, who held that a Coptic Christian convert to Islam was the author (See: H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 124). J.M. Gaudeul, commenting upon this issue, affirms that though authorship could be a problem that should not prevent us from discussing the important point of view this book proposes regarding the Bible (J.M. Gaudeul, *Encounters & Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History: Survey*, 124).

point.⁶⁰ Caliph al-Mahdi argued that Bible had predicted Muhammad's prophethood. Many such references were deleted by Jews and Christians. He pointed to the foretelling of the Paraclete in the Gospel of John (John 14:16, 14:26) and to Isaiah's vision of one riding on a camel (Isaiah 21:7) as some of those references that escaped such editing. Catholicos Timothy answered the Caliph saying that he did not find a single verse in the Bible which mentions the name of Muhammad and his mission.⁶¹ As Pulcini writes:

As far as the charge of *tahrif*, Timothy advances several arguments to refute al-Mahdi's claim. First, if the scriptures had been altered at some point, there would exist versions of the Bible free of falsification. No such "unfalsified" versions are to be found, so how can Muslims know that the Gospel and other scriptures underwent corruption? Second, what would Jews or Christians gain by falsifying the scriptures? The Jews never felt the need to suppress the Messianic prophecies from their texts, even though they deny that Jesus is the Messiah; they do not dispute with Christians about the expectation of a Messiah, only about his identity. By analogy, Christians would have no need to expurgate from their books testimony to another prophet, even if they disagreed with Muslims regarding his identity... Why would Christians dare to change the Jewish scriptures, when they "contain all the teaching of Christ" and announce his passion, crucifixion, death, and resurrection? Furthermore, how would Christians and Jews, given the enmity between them, be able to agree on the same falsification? One need only compare the Jewish and Christian versions of the Old Testament to see that even after the passing of many centuries, they agree in every detail; Christians and Jews differ not on the words of the biblical texts but on how they are to be interpreted.⁶²

⁶⁰A. Mingana, "The Apology of Timothy the Patriarch before the Caliph Mahdi," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 12 [1928]: 137-298.

⁶¹ T. Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 16.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 17.

Similarly, when Harun al-Rashid (r. 786-809) invited the Byzantine emperor Constantine VI (r. 780-97) to embrace Islam, he presented in his letter several passages like Deuteronomy 18:18, 33:2, Psalms 9:20; 45:2-5; 149, Isaiah 21:6-9; 42:1-4; 10-12, and Habbakuk 3:3-6 as evidence of biblical texts that foretold Muhammad (T. Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 18).

Bible is corrupt for moral, theological and historical reason

Ibn Hazm (d.1064) who reflected on *tah rīf* in detail argued that the Bible is corrupt for moral, theological and historical reasons.⁶³ He considered *tah rīf* as deliberate tampering with the Bible.⁶⁴ In his *Treatise on Contradictions and Lies* he indicted Jewish as well as Christian scriptures as untrustworthy and corrupted.⁶⁵ He was not interested in providing proofs about the advent of the coming of Muhammad or Islam from the earlier scriptures as he considered them corrupted.⁶⁶ He gave several reasons to illustrate the corrupted and untrustworthy nature of Jewish scriptures as follows.⁶⁷

⁶³ Ibn Hazm was born in 994 CE in Cordoba. His father was an important official in the court of Caliph. Ibn Hazm learnt Qur'an, Arabic poetry and calligraphy at home. He wanted to pursue a political career. However, he could not take up a political career owing to the civil war that erupted in al-Andalus. He also found Islamic law an interesting subject to pursue. He began his training in the *Maliki* School. Later he came in conflict with them since for any contemporary issue, they gave so much importance to the earlier opinion of scholars. He joined the *Shafiites* for some time and finally joined the *Zahirites*, who advocated literal interpretation of the revealed sources. See: C. Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism & the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm*, 59-69.

⁶⁴ N. A. Newman, ed., *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue: A Collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries (632-900) Translations with Commentary* [Hatfield, Pennsylvania: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1993], 107.

⁶⁵ H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism*, 26-35. His knowledge was derived from the discussions he had with Jewish scholars. Did he have access to Jewish scriptures in order to criticise them? Certain scholars, like D. Powers think that Ibn Hazm did not read Jewish scriptures at all (See: C. Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism & the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm*, 137). Others believe that there is no hard evidence to support this, whereas M. Perlmann believes that even if he did not have full access to the Jewish and Christian scriptures, he definitely had access to certain abridged versions or to some extracts (See: M. Perlmann, *Medieval Jewish Life. Studies from the Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* [New York: KTAV, 1976], 147-168).

⁶⁶C. Adang, "A Muslim Historian on Judaism: al-Mutahhar B. Tahir al-Maqdisi" in *Contacts between Cultures*, Vol. I. *West Asia and North Africa*, ed. A. Harrak [Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992], 286-290. Also See: M. Perlmann, "Eleventh-Century Andalusian Authors on the Jews of Granada" in *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research* 18 [1948-49]: 269-290; H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism*, 26-35.

While Islam considers prophets immune from sin and error (*'is ma*), ibn Hazm maintained that the *Tawrāt* demeans prophets and contradicts this doctrine. Ibn Hazm highlighted a large number of examples from the Jewish scriptures showing the biblical figures whom Islam considers as prophets, indulging in incest, cheating and illicit sexual liaisons. He accused the Jews of attributing impiety to many of the prophets. He insisted that the texts considered sacred by the Jews are blasphemous because they attribute lies and inconsistencies to God. The *Tawrāt* depicts God as inconsistent. The Psalms attribute falsehoods to God. He also took offence at many similes that describe God. He held that all these texts indicate the corruption of the scriptures. Ibn Hazm argued that Jewish scriptures contain many arithmetical errors and they are full of historical and geographical errors and internal contradictions. He also claimed that the *Tawrāt* contains absurd passages impossible in nature. He took strong exception to the depiction of God in anthropomorphic terms and inappropriate imagery. He accused the Jewish scriptures of introducing human elements into the nature of God (*shirk*). The most sophisticated argument Ibn Hazm brought against the integrity of the *Tawrāt* is the charge that the original, unadulterated revelation to Moses could not have been transmitted accurately. He argued that those people

⁶⁷C. Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism & the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm*, 237-248.

who had been entrusted with the *Tawrāt* could not possibly have protected it from corruption due to their tumultuous history.⁶⁸

On turning his attention to the Christian scriptures, Ibn Hazm alleged that the authentic *Injīl* as proclaimed by Jesus disappeared due to persecution of Christians in the first three centuries. A multitude of alterations occurred in those times with regard to the New Testament Gospels.

Secondly, he found ambiguity in the Christian acceptance of Jewish scriptures since Jewish scriptures contradict Christian scriptures. He argued that Christian scriptures should be rejected as fallacious on the grounds that they blaspheme God by the erroneous doctrine of the incarnation, compromising the transcendence of God and asserting the divine sonship of Christ. He found fault with Christians for attributing imperfections to Jesus in the New Testament. He further argued that the New Testament depicted Jesus as a liar, a counterfeit miracle worker, and a subject of Satan. Ibn Hazm quoted extensively from the scriptures to substantiate his points. He also pointed out several contradictions between the Gospels and within each Gospel. He complained that the Gospels contain absurdities and falsehoods. He also maintained that

⁶⁸ T. Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 59-95.

certain passages in the New Testament remain uncorrupted and they could be recognised from the fact that they agree with the Qur'an.⁶⁹

Another theologian who followed this trend was al-Juwayni (d.1085). He argues in his book *Healing of the Thirsty through exposing the alteration that befell the Tawrāt and the Gospel*, that the Qur'an affirmed that the Bible announced the coming of Muhammad. However, he found Jews and Christians denying any such reference. He felt that Muslims have to find a resolution of this question either by interpreting some of the biblical texts to show that they foretell the coming of Muhammad or by proving that the biblical texts have been altered. Al-Juwayni preferred the second alternative. He explained that the alteration of the Jewish scriptures must have happened when Ezra wrote another copy under God's dictation once the *Tawrāt* had been burned, when the Jews were exiled to Babylon. He believed that such an alteration did happen as there are discrepancies between the Hebrew text and the Greek text of the Septuagint concerning the age of the patriarchs. According to him, as far as the Gospels are concerned, they were written long after the events and there are discrepancies between Gospel passages.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ T. Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 97-126.

⁷⁰ J.M Gaudeul, *Encounters & Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History – I A Survey*, 120-122.

The implication one can draw from the foregoing discussion is that the Bible has lost its authenticity due to human intervention. As a result the Bible is textually corrupted. The Bible stands in need of correction. Another revealed text which is not corrupt alone can help Christians to know the authentic teachings of the Bible, since all revelations come from God. The Qur'an fulfils that function. Christians needed to look up to the Qur'an for their re-learning.

1.1.2.2 Is the biblical texts interpreted erroneously?

Some of the scholars like al-Tabarī (d. c855 CE),⁷¹ al-Qāsim ibn Ibrahim (d. 860 CE),⁷² ibn Qutayba (d. 889 CE)⁷³, and al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048 CE) tended to accept the text but questioned the interpretation.

⁷¹ Al-Tabarī at times he also modified the biblical text to make it more acceptable to Islam (See: J.M. Gaudeul, *Encounters & Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History – I A Survey*, 45). He argues in his *Kitāb al-dīn wa 'l-dawla* (*The Book of Religion and Empire*) {Scholars like M. Bouyges and P. Peeters consider this document to be inauthentic whereas others like A. Mingana, H. Guppy, D.B. Macdonald, E. Fritsch and D.S. Margoliouth consider it to be authentic (See: C. Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism & the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm*, 19-20, 206)} that Muhammad was foretold by the Jewish prophets, by presenting a number of passages from both Jewish and Christian scriptures (Ibn Rabban, *The Book of Religion and Empire. A Semi-Official Defence and Exposition of Islam written by Order at the Court and with the Assistance of the Caliph Mutawakkil (A.D. 847-861)* by 'Ali Tabari. Translated with critical apparatus from an apparently unique MS in the John Rylands Library by A. Mingana [Manchester: The University Press, 1922], 77-146).

⁷² He argued that the interpretation of Christian scriptures was faulty. In his *Radd 'alā 'l-nasāra* (*Refutation of the Christians*), he refutes the Christian belief in the divinity of Christ (See: N.A. Newman, ed., *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, viii). He quotes from the Gospel of Mathew and argues that Christians have distorted the meaning of their scriptures. He did not question the text of the scriptures, but held that they had been falsely interpreted by Jews and Christians. He held that if interpreted correctly, they were sources of truth (See: W. Madelung, "Al-Qasim Ibn Ibrahim and Christian Theology," *ARAM* 3, no. 1&2 [1991]: 35-44).

⁷³ In his work *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa* (*Proofs of Prophethood*), argues that Jewish as well as Christian scriptures had foretold the coming of Muhammad (See: C. Brockelmann, "Muhammedanische Weissagungen im Alten Testament," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 15 [1895]: 138-142). He accepts the authenticity of

One of the most important theologians who argued this position is al-Ghazālī (d. 1111 CE). He, whom Muslims consider as the ‘proof of Islam’ and a great renewer of their religion,⁷⁴ and the best Muslim after Muhammad,⁷⁵ follows this second approach. He considers that Christian scriptures are misinterpreted and they need a Muslim interpretation. His views appear in a book entitled *al-Radd al-jamīl li-Ilāhīyyāt ‘Isā bi-s arīh al-Injīl* (Excellent Refutation of the Divinity of Jesus from the text of the Gospel).⁷⁶

Al- Ghazālī recognises, on the one hand, that Islam alone holds the truth for humanity, but at the same time he, holds that the Christian scriptures are authentic. The actual words of Jesus alone, he contends, convey the truth of his message.⁷⁷ It will be helpful to consider how al- Ghazālī looks at biblical texts. The author differentiates between three types of texts in the Bible. First, he focuses on the texts that deal with the

the earlier scriptures but finds fault with the way in which the People of the Book interpret their scriptures.

⁷⁴ R. Jackson, *Fifty Key Figures in Islam* [London: Routledge, 2006], 86-91.

⁷⁵ W.M. Watt, *The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali* [Oxford: Oneworld, 1998], 13.

⁷⁶ As indicated in foot note 59, there is disagreement over the authorship of this work and it cannot be assumed that al-Ghazālī wrote it.

⁷⁷ J.M. Gaudeul, quoting from French sources, [J. Jomier, “Jesus tel que Ghazali le presente dans al-Ihya,” *Mideo* 18 [1988]: 45-82 and *Se Comprendre* 88/07 (20/06/88): 25.] says that al-Ghazālī ignores the Canonical Gospels while gathering his information on Jesus for his major work *Ihya ulum al-din*. *Ihya ulum al-din* is undoubtedly the work of Ghazali. While Ghazālī ignores the Canonical Gospels, in *al-Radd al-jamīl li-Ilāhīyyāt ‘Isā bi-s arīh al-Injīl*, John’s Gospel is extensively used. It could be the reason for the scholars to doubt whether *Al-Radd* is genuinely his work.

divinity of Christ. He wants those texts to be taken allegorically.⁷⁸ As an example he presents the statement: “The Father and I are one” (John 10: 30), and insists that this has to be explained metaphorically.⁷⁹ Secondly, he picks out texts that imply the humanity of Christ; texts like the cursing of the fig tree (Mark 11:12-14) and ignorance of the hour (Mark 13:32) these have to be taken literally.⁸⁰ This may give an insight into al-Ghazālī’s mind. One can well infer that he views Christ as merely a human messenger. Thirdly he chooses texts like “the son will submit himself” (1 Corinthians 15:28), “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 1:16-17), “God is one, one is the mediator: the man Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5) and “a man who told you the truth” (John 8:39-40) and explains that Jesus uttered them with special permission from God.⁸¹

Examining the approach of al-Ghazālī, one realises that several trends are at work here. First, in *al-Radd*, while proposing that the Christian scriptures are authentic, al-Ghazālī explains that Christian scriptures belong to different genres. He accepts only the actual words of Jesus as conveying any real doctrinal message. His differentiation of the texts appears to be arbitrary. He calls for texts that deal with the divinity of Jesus to be taken metaphorically, texts that imply the humanity of Jesus to be taken literally and certain other texts as utterances of Jesus with

⁷⁸ J.M. Gaudeul, *Encounters & Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History: Survey*, 124.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

permission from God. His only assumption seems to be that Greek philosophy corrupted the revelations that Christians received. The impact of Greek philosophy distorted the Christian scripture to a great extent by bringing in several verses that cannot be taken literally and need to be treated metaphorically. He appears to believe that some of the sayings of Jesus have been accurately preserved in the Christian scriptures. Secondly, he takes the scriptures as they are and uses them against Christians. His explanation of the Prologue of John serves this purpose. He contends that Jesus is God's creation (John 1:14), Jesus is eternal in the sense of being in God's intention (John 8:56), and Jesus invites Christians to focus on God and not on him (John 4:17). Al-Ghazālī's understanding of Christian scriptures gives the impression that he not only believed that Christians missed their mark when they inculturated revelation, in their effort to present it to the Greeks, but also continue to fail to see that impact in the pages of the Bible. Thirdly, al-Ghazālī never speaks of the Bible as revealed text.

1.1.3 A summary

The Muslim scholars that have been discussed stress that Islam is a revealed religion and previous revelations point to the coming of Islam. They argue that all the Books revealed by God, including the Bible and the Qur'an contain essentially the same message. Muhammad came with the final message for humanity. The Qur'an confirmed what had been said in the earlier revelations, it corrects what has been misunderstood,

misinterpreted, corrupted, changed and concealed. As a result whatever conforms to the Qur'an is authentic and whatever does not, is unauthentic.

Two different trends appear in the arguments of the scholars discussed. First, several Muslim scholars argued that the earlier revelations had specific references to the coming of Islam and Muhammad. However, those references had been removed. They argued that this was a clear indication of corruption and human tampering with the Christian scriptures. They supported their argument on the basis of Qur'anic teachings.

Ibn Hazm also argued that the actual text of the Jewish and Christian scriptures is hopelessly corrupted. He denied any truth value to the Bible. His reasoning for corruption was that, since Christians were persecuted in the early centuries they could not have guaranteed faultless transmission. He concluded that since the Bible attributed immoral activities to the prophets it cannot be a revealed text.⁸²

⁸² He treated the scriptures of Jews and Christians as mere books of history or geography which were full of discrepancies. He did not recognise the different genres at play in biblical literature. Many of his accusations look untenable because the scriptures are not books of history, geography and mathematics. They contain religious truths which are recognised in the light of faith. It looks as if he completely ignored the dimension of faith. He expected that Jews and Christians too should have the same understanding of prophecy and of the office of the prophet as do Muslims.

Another approach *vis-à-vis* the Bible claims that if the Bible is interpreted rightly, it could be a source of truth. This trend claimed that Jews and Christians have interpreted their scriptures wrongly. Al-Ghāzī is an example of this trend. He approached the Bible dividing it into different categories and saying that each category had to be approached differently. His contention was that the Bible is authentic but it is a garland of different genres. Each genre should be interpreted in a particular way. A Muslim who knows the Qur'an and its message will be able to help Christians to understand the Bible better. In short, the Bible needs a Muslim interpretation. His approach is like that of Christians to Jewish scriptures. Christians interpret Jewish scriptures in the light of the Gospel. Similarly, al-Ghazālī seems to invite Christians to interpret the Gospels in the light of the Qur'an. Both these trends undermine in different ways the Jewish and Christian understanding of the scriptures.⁸³ Does ACW continue any of these earlier trends or does ACW take a different line? We shall look at these questions in Chapter 2.

⁸³ The Jewish and Christian scriptures are rooted in the religious experience of Jews and Christians. Jewish scriptures are rooted in the liberation experience of the Jewish people and the Gospels are faith reflections of the disciples of Jesus in the light of Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection on the third day. Moreover, the New Testament literature presents Christians with a theological vision in the light of Jesus' resurrection. The theological vision of the Qur'an is different and unique. Reading the Bible in the light of the Qur'an would not do justice to the different and unique visions of these two scriptures.

1.2 The Trinity (The Unity of God)

The purpose of this section is to present Muslim thinking on the Trinity during the early centuries of Islam. It will be shown that two major factors influenced Muslim theological thinking on the Christian belief of the Trinity in that period. First, that the Qur'anic teaching as explained by the exegetes had an effect on Muslim theological thinking. Secondly, that the Arabic-speaking Christian theologians' articulation of their faith in the Trinity also affected and shaped Muslim theological thinking. This exploration will help to clarify the Muslim intellectual and theological position on God in distinction to the Christian one. In Chapter 2 this will be contrasted with the way in which the authors of ACW deal with the issue.

1.2.1 The teaching of the Qur'an

The Qur'an makes several observations about different aspects of the Christian faith. Some of these observations, Muslim exegetes claim, deny the Christian teaching on the Trinity. The Qur'an seems to challenge Christians on three important aspects of their faith with regard to the triune nature of God. 1. Is Jesus God? 2. Is God, the third of three? 3. Does God have a son? A closer look at different passages elucidates this.

The following passage is said to address the first question:

They indeed have disbelieved who say: Lo! Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary. (Q. 5:17)⁸⁴

The following Qur'anic verse is said to concern the second question:

They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the third of three; when there is no God save the One God. If they do not desist from so saying a painful doom will fall on those of them who disbelieve. (Q. 5:73)

The following Qur'anic verse is understood to concern the third question:

O People of the Scripture! Do not exaggerate in your religion nor utter aught concerning Allah save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in Allah and His messenger, and say not "Three" – Cease. (it is) better for you! - Allah is only One God. Far is it removed from His transcendent majesty that he should have a son. (Q: 4:171)

Following the exegetes, Muslim theologians debated with their Christian counterparts on above mentioned questions.

⁸⁴ See also: "They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary." (Q. 5:72).

1.2.2 Theological exchanges between Christians and Muslims on the Trinity in the early centuries of Islam⁸⁵

One of the early Christian theologians, John of Damascus (d. 753 CE),⁸⁶ dismissed Islam as a heresy.⁸⁷ He believed that the Qur'an was an ignorant imitation of the Bible.⁸⁸ However the Arab Christian theologians, who came after John of Damascus, quickly realised that Islam cannot be dismissed as a heresy and it needed to be answered theologically.⁸⁹ The question relating to the nature of Trinity could not be avoided.

The Arabic-speaking Christians used *kalām* categories,⁹⁰ which were familiar to Muslim theologians in presenting their faith in the Trinity.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Students of Muslim writings on Trinity are hugely indebted to the long term work of Prof. David Thomas who has prepared critical English translations with foot notes and introductory essays on the key writers. These are the only accessible editions and therefore we are confined in the choice of both textual material and critical analysis.

⁸⁶ John of Damascus was an important official in the administration of the Umayyad Caliphs who retired from his position due to the diminishing influence of non-Muslims in the administration. See: G. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam* [London & New York: Routledge, 2000], 61-65.

⁸⁷ H. Goddard, *Islam: Towards A Christian Assessment* [Oxford: Latimer House, 1992], 13; J.W. Voorhis, "John of Damascus on the Moslem Heresy," *The Moslem World* 24 [1934]: 391-398.

⁸⁸ D.H. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, the "Heresy of the Ishmaelites"* [Leiden: Brill, 1972], 132-133.

⁸⁹ D. Thomas, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology*. [Leiden: Brill, 2008],

⁹⁰ *Kalām* is the "formal, intellectual exercise in the systematic defence of the credibility of religious doctrines". See: S.H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 46; See also: G.D. Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam* [Oxford: Oneworld, 2004], 120.

⁹¹ R.M. Frank, "The Science of Kalām," *Arabic Science and Philosophy* 2 [1992]: 9-37. See also: M. Cook, "The Origins of Kalām," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Languages* 43 [1980]: 32-43.

The debate between *Mu'tazilīs* and *Ash'arīs* itself, some scholars believe, was the fruit of their interaction with Christians.⁹² This view does not go uncontested.⁹³ *Mu'tazilī* scholars argued that God's essence is undifferentiated⁹⁴ and therefore the attributes have no real existence. *Ash'arīs*, on the other hand argued "that unless God's attributes are real, and derived from entities within the being of God, he cannot be endowed with them in any meaningful way."⁹⁵ Ammâr al-Baṣri (d. 850) who lived before Abu al-ḥasan 'Alī al-Ash'arī (d. 935/6) argued that God has real attributes,⁹⁶ and presented the Son as the knowledge attribute and the Holy Spirit as the life of God attribute. Ammâr al-Baṣri neither uses the Bible to defend the Trinity nor dismisses Islam as a heresy. He engages with Muslim theologians intellectually with the categories of Islamic

⁹² H. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Kalām* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976], 58-64.

⁹³ S. Rissanen, *Theological Encounter of Oriental Christians with Islam during the Abbasid Rule* [Åbo: Åbo Adademis Förlag-Åbo Adademi University Press, 1993], 11-17.

⁹⁴ "...therefore that the qualities listed in the Qur'an and deducible by reason, such as God's knowledge, power and life, could not derive from any really existent attributes that might be identified in addition to God's essence itself... God is knowing did not mean that he possesses an entitative attribute of knowledge, since this attribute would have to be eternal and formally distinguishable from God's essence, rendering his unity only relative..." (D. Thomas, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology* [Leiden: Brill, 2008], 4).

⁹⁵ D. Thomas, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology* [Leiden: Brill, 2008], 4

⁹⁶ ...that the defenders of God's absolute unity were illogical because when they denied he had an attribute of life they implied he was lifeless, and when they denied he had an attribute of knowledge they implied he was ignorant. Thus God must possess real attributes... life and knowledge had priority as constitutive parts of his being and as the origins of all his other attributes... (D. Thomas, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology* [Leiden: Brill, 2008], 4).

kalām. In his writings Christian dogmas and ideas are expressed in Arabic which Muslims (esp. *Mu'tazilīs*) could appreciate.⁹⁷

The dialogues between the Nestorian Catholicos Timothy I of Baghdad and Caliph al-Mahdi,⁹⁸ and between Hishām ibn al-Hakam and a Christian patriarch Bariha⁹⁹ also show that Christian belief in the Trinity was questioned by Muslims and defended by Christians. Timothy I explained that God's Word and God's Spirit endow God's essence with the characteristics of reason and life. There is no separation between God, God's Word and God's Spirit. God is wise and living through God's Word and Spirit and they are integral to God's being.¹⁰⁰ Timothy I emphasised that God knows and lives through his Word and Spirit. It should be remembered that the debate between Hishām ibn al-Hakam and Bariha was probably not historical, though it may reflect late 8th and early 9th century Muslim views of the Trinity. Both Caliph al-Mahdi and ibn al-Hakam in their arguments against the Trinity; “focus on what they identify as the contradiction within the Godhead between Persons who are both distinct from one another and also equal and identical.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ J.M. Gaudeul, *Encounters & Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History II Texts*, 39.

⁹⁸ N. A. Newman, ed., *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 163-268; W. G. Young, *Patriarch, Shah and Caliph* [Rawalpindi: Christian Study Centre, 1974].

⁹⁹ D. Thomas, “Two Muslim-Christian debates from the early Shi'ite traditions,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 33 [1988]: 63-65.

¹⁰⁰ A. Mingana, “The Apology of Timothy the Patriarch before the Caliph Mahdi,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 12 [1928]: 159.

¹⁰¹ D. Thomas, *Anti-Christian polemic in early Islam: Abū 'Isā al-Warrāq's "Against the Trinity"* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 31.

While Caliph al-Mahdi asked Timothy I “to explain how on the one hand he does not worship three Gods (*sic*), and yet how on the other the three Persons are not confused?”¹⁰² Ibn al-Hakam forced Bariha “to concede either that the Father and Son differ in their actions and so cannot be equal in status, or that they are completely identical and so are not in reality distinct.”¹⁰³

The Muslim authors use the same *kalām* categories to demonstrate that the Christian explanations were far from satisfactory. ‘Alī b. Rabbān al-Tabarī is one amongst them. In his work *Radd ‘alā al-Nasārā* (*The Refutation of the Christians*), he makes two important charges against the Christian belief in the Trinity.¹⁰⁴ First, he argues that titles like Father and Son “are deprived of their meaning when Christians claim that the Son is both like the Father in being eternal and unlike him in being generated, for the two titles then become interchangeable.”¹⁰⁵ Secondly, “if Father and Son are both almighty and omniscient, as the Creed states, they lose the characteristics of superiority and inferiority implied in their relationship, and the Father will no longer have the

¹⁰² Ibid., 31.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Alī b. Rabbān al-Tabarī’s treatment of Trinity is not complete. Ibn Taymīyya reproduces al-Tabarī’s arguments in his *Al Jawāb al-Sahīh liman baddala Dīn al-Masīh*, [Cairo, 1905], vol. II, 312 – vol. III, 3.; See also: T. F. Michel, ed., and trans., *A Muslim Theologian’s Response to Christianity: Ibn Taymīyya Al-Jawab Al-Sahih* [New York: Caravan Books, 1984].

¹⁰⁵ D. Thomas, *Anti-Christian polemic in early Islam*, 32.

authority to send the Son to earth.”¹⁰⁶ His conclusion is “that the language used by Christians does not afford any real description of God.”¹⁰⁷

Another contemporary Muslim theologian al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm in his *Radd ‘alā al-Nasārā* makes his point loud and clear: “God is one and so Jesus must be human, and that the divine God cannot be in relation with a human being.”¹⁰⁸ He too reflects on the titles ‘Father’ and ‘Son’: saying that if these titles are to be taken seriously then it is logical to say that one being brought the other being into existence in time, consequently “the doctrine of the Trinity cannot provide an accurate means of comprehending God, since the titles upon which it rests arise from an act that occurred at a particular time.”¹⁰⁹ Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm knew exactly the nuances of Christian explanations of the Trinity and attacked it logically.¹¹⁰ Both these theologians placed stress on the relationship between God and Jesus in their refutation of the Trinity. In their arguments, they “demonstrate the overriding influence of the Qur’an on the Muslim side of polemic.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 33.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 34.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ H. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1976], 320.

¹¹¹ D. Thomas, *Anti-Christian polemic in early Islam*, 35.

Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb b. Ishāq al-Kindī, another 9th century theologian, subjects the Trinitarian formula to the logic of Aristotle and shows the doctrine of the Trinity “as contradictory either with itself or with the precept that God cannot be composite.”¹¹² He has three arguments against the Trinity: first, since he understands that hypostases are composed of the substance as a reality and a distinguishing property, he concludes, “every thing which is composite must be caused, and nothing that is caused can be eternal.”¹¹³ Secondly, he shows that if individuals (in the case of the Trinity, three individuals) are eternal, they can not be restricted only to three, because “individuals are part of a species and bear accidents, and since a species is composed of a genus and a difference, it naturally follows that there will be more than three eternals.”¹¹⁴ Thirdly, using the philosophical system of Aristotle, he shows the contradiction in the proposition: three are one and one is three.

In this discussion, so far it is clear: first, that dismissing Islam as a heresy did not last long. Secondly, Christian thinkers who wrote in Arabic, realised the intellectual challenge of Islam and engaged with it on its own terms. Thirdly, some Muslim theologians had a clear understanding of the ways in which Christians defined the doctrine of

¹¹² Ibid., 37.

¹¹³ A. Abel, *Le Livre pour la refutation des trios sects chrétiennes* [Brussels, 1949], 4.12-17. This reference is cited by D. Thomas in *Anti-Christian polemic in early Islam*, 37.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 10. 5-8. As cited by D. Thomas in *Anti-Christian polemic in early Islam*, 37.

the Trinity. Fourthly, some of them, like ‘Alī b. Rabbān al-Tabarī and al-Qāsim ibn Ibrahīm, focused upon the Father–Son relationship and demonstrated the weakness of the doctrine. While on the one hand, Muslim theologians kept the Qur’an as the basis for their discussion, on the other hand, people like Abū Yūsuf Ya’qūb b. Ishāq al-Kindī used Aristotelian philosophy to oppose Christians. Fifthly, the Trinity was an important element in the anti-Christian polemical treatises composed by Muslim theologians in the early Muslim centuries. Several of these arguments are developed in the treatises of the three important theologians that are examined in some detail in the following section.

1.2.3 Muslims Theologians: Christian faith in the Trinity can not be rationally sustained

Abū ‘Īsa al-Warrāq, Al-Nāshi’ al-Akbar, and Abū Bakr al-Bāqillāni (all 9th century) have been chosen for consideration in this section. Before discussing their views on the Trinity it is necessary to establish that there is sufficient reason for choosing these particular scholars. All three showed in their discussions to their satisfaction that Christian faith in the Trinity cannot be rationally sustained. They felt that the doctrine of the Trinity was not only irrational but also challenges the Islamic doctrine of God.

Al-Warrāq (d. after 864 CE) was an extremely influential scholar and a provocative thinker who had a great expertise and interest in the religions known to him. He acquired a considerable knowledge of the Christian sects. He showed rigorous academic objectivity in his approach to understanding as well as attacking Christian faith. His work was the result of the most painstaking examination of the teachings of the Christian groups he encountered.¹¹⁵ His “Against the Trinity” is an important work in the history of Christian-Muslim relations. In his work, al-Warrāq attacks the doctrine of the Trinity in a sustained manner. He is a *Shī‘ite* scholar.¹¹⁶ Al-Akbar (d. 906 CE) though cannot be regarded as a major *Mu‘tazili* theologian - he was scorned even by Muslim contemporaries - his value is that he reflects late 9th century Muslim rationalist attitudes towards the Trinity. Al-Bāqillānī was a leading theologian from the *Ash‘arī* tradition.¹¹⁷

1.2.3.1 Abū ‘Īsa al-Warrāq

Al-Warrāq in his *Al-Radd ‘alā al-Tathlīth, al-juz’ al-awwal min kitāb al-Radd ‘alā al-Thalāth Firaq min al-Nasārā* (hereafter *al-Radd*)¹¹⁸ set out

¹¹⁵ D. Thomas, *Anti-Christian polemic in early Islam*, 3, 57.

¹¹⁶ W. Madelung, “Abū ‘Īsā al-Warrāq über die Bardesaniten, Marcioniten und Kant er” in H. Roemer and A. Noth, eds., *Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Vorderen Orients* [Leiden: Brill, 1981], 210-224.

¹¹⁷ D. Thomas, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology*, 31.

¹¹⁸ This work has two parts: the first part deals with the Trinity and the second deals with the doctrine of the Incarnation. The first part of his exposition dealing with the Trinity is particularly relevant in the context of this dissertation.

The English translation of *al-Radd* contains 150 paragraphs (D. Thomas, *Anti-Christian polemic in early Islam*, 3). The first 15 paragraphs contain teachings about

to “expose the shortcomings in Christian teachings, and to show Christians that their faith was riddled with inconsistencies.”¹¹⁹.

Al-Warrāq uses two kinds of arguments in *al-Radd*.¹²⁰ Both are effective and show his intellectual ability to employ philosophy and his knowledge of Christianity. The first kind of argument seeks to identify the incoherencies in explaining the Trinity and to show that the Christian opponents’ logical conclusions directly contradict their fundamental beliefs. He shows that if the Melkites believe the substance is completely identical with the hypostases it will contradict their faith. He argues that this faith conviction would lead to any one of the following conclusions:

the Trinity. In these paragraphs “Abū ‘Īsā gives an impressive demonstration both of his knowledge about Christianity and of the ease with which he can deploy his sources (D. Thomas, *Anti-Christian polemic in early Islam*, 55).” He also expects that his arguments could be of use to other polemicists of the era (See: S.H. Griffith, “ ‘Ammār al-Basrī’s Kitāb al-Burhān: Christian Kalām in the first Abbasid century,” *Le Muséon* 96, [1983]: 155f).

The first section (§16-69) examines the interpretation of the Trinity by Nestorians, Jacobites and Melkites. This major section has several sub-sections. In the first sub-section (§16-29), he questions the claim of Nestorians and Jacobites that there are three hypostases and one substance. In the next sub-section (§ 30-69), he examines the Melkite claims that the hypostases are identical with the substance but substance is not identical with them. He splits up this sub-section into three smaller parts and argues for the incompatibility of all possible alternative forms of this relationship: substance is identical with all the hypostases in all respects (§ 31-43), in some respects (§ 44-55) and in no respect (§ 56-69).

The second section (§ 70-125) examines the relationship between substance and hypostases; (§ 70-88) examine how the hypostases though uniform can be differentiated; (§ 89-105) scrutinize how they can possess different characteristics; (§ 106-118) attack the Christian groups’ tendencies to explain the Trinity based on analogy with created things; and (§ 119-125) use philosophy to counter arguments that suggest that hypostases exist necessarily. The third section goes from (§ 126-150). In this section he discusses the distinction between the hypostases (§ 126-128), shows the internal contradiction in hypostases as attributes of other hypostases (§ 129-131), discusses the generation of the Son from the Father (§ 132-140), and concludes by examining the various terms employed to explain the hypostases (§ 141-150).

¹¹⁹ D. Thomas, *Anti-Christian polemic in early Islam*, 3.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 59.

“either the comprehensive substance must be three specific substances like the hypostases and so three hypostases, or it must be a single specific substance like each one of them and so no longer the comprehensive substance, or hypostases must be a comprehensive substance like it, making two comprehensive substances.”¹²¹ The second kind of argument involves the demonstration of how the Christian presentation of the Trinity is incompatible with logic and common sense.¹²²

¹²¹ This kind of argument can be illustrated by the following quote. “We give emphasis to this by saying to them: If the substance is identical with the hypostases in every respect then it will be identical with them both in substantiality and in particularity which is hypostaticity or tripleness, the numerical aspect according to the Trinitarians. Now, if it is identical with them in substantiality, then either it will be three specific substances like them, and thus three hypostases; or it will be a specific substance like each of them, and thus a single hypostasis and not a comprehensive substance; or else they will be a comprehensive substance like it, allowing two comprehensive substances, which is a contradiction of the root principle; and further, if they are a comprehensive substance and also three hypostases then they will be one substance and three hypostases. Thus the whole issue reverts to the point where the substance is the hypostases, and the claim that the substance of the hypostases is other than them is negated.” (D. Thomas, *Anti-Christian polemic in early Islam*, 85).

¹²² If these three sects, or anyone from them, attempted a defence and said: We do not say that that in which the hypostases are uniform is either that in which they are differentiated or is other than it, then in saying this they would show the difference between themselves and their principles and the meaning of their statements and proofs. This is because the Jacobites and Nestorians claim that the substance in which the hypostases are uniform is the properties in which they are differentiated. And the Melkites claim that the substance in which the hypostases are uniform is other than the properties in which they differentiated. So if any of them declines to say whether the thing in which they are uniform is either that in which they are differentiated or other than it, then he has abandoned both statements together.

In addition, he must apply a similar judgement to the hypostases: so he cannot say that the Father is the Son in any respect or that he is other than him; neither can he say of the Spirit that it is the Father in any respect or is other than the Father, nor that it is the Son in any respect or is other than the Son. Rather, they must now set themselves against this proposition and reject this statement; they must claim that the Son is the Father as regards the substance and is other than him as regards the hypostases. So, according to this logic, they must claim that that in which the hypostases are uniform is that in which they are differentiated in one respect, and is other than it in another respect. This is all contradiction and confusion for whoever utters it, though they have no means of escape as long as they adhere to their principles. If anyone were to maintain the validity of each of two things and when asked about them said that each of them was not the other but not other than it, just as in this reply, there would be no difference between these people and him, and they would have no means of arguing

In both arguments, he lays emphasis on the three hypostases as three separate entities. These three hypostases are three separate actualities within one Godhead; i.e. three entities within one Godhead! He wonders how these three separate entities could be one? Moreover, he argues that substance if real is a fourth member of Godhead.¹²³ His preoccupation is to show that there would not be any fruitful discussion on the unity of God if Christians continue to hold on to their idea of the Trinity.

1.2.3.2 Al-Nāshi' Al-Akbar

Al-Nāshi' al-Akbar presents his refutation of Christian doctrines in his *Al-Radd 'alā al-Nasārā min Fī al-Maqālāt* (hereafter *Fī al-Maqālāt*). In *Fī al-Maqālāt*,¹²⁴ al-Akbar “shows no interest in exploring the structure of the doctrine in itself, insisting only that it does not make sense.”¹²⁵

against him. All this amounts to a rejection of what is fact and a negation of reality. (D. Thomas, *Anti-Christian polemic in early Islam*, 125.)

¹²³ D. Thomas, “The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Abbasid Era,” in *Islamic Interpretation of Christianity*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon [Richmond: Curzon, 2001], 85.

¹²⁴ *Fī al-Maqālāt* like *al-Radd* shows both interest in explaining how Christians presented their arguments in defence of the Trinity and employs vigorous counter-arguments to demolish any such claims. In the foregoing section al-Warrāq made every effort to understand the doctrine as it is presented by different Christians. He also explored the structure of the doctrine itself in order to understand and then debunk it. His long and complicated discussion revealed his efforts to understand the Trinity. It would not be an exaggeration to say that he approached his opponents with fairness and made every effort to seek the truth itself.

¹²⁵ D. Thomas, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology*, 31.

Al-Akbar ridicules Christians for saying that the three hypostases are identical and distinct from one another at the same time. He also points out “that if two things are utterly identical, as the Christians say the hypostases are, one cannot be the cause of the other. He underlines the ridiculousness of the Christian claim by showing that they both make distinctions between the three Persons and also insist there is no distinction between them.”¹²⁶ Al-Akbar insists that hypostases that are distinguished by causal relationships cannot be equal. He appears to miss a delicate nuance in presenting the relation between Father, Son and Spirit before criticizing it. Already in the time of al-Akbar, Christians explained the relationship between Father and Son in terms of generation. They term the relationship between Father–Spirit and Son–Spirit in terms of procession. Al-Nāshi’ appears to reduce this fine distinction to a simple causal relationship. He then presents two major arguments against the Trinity. Each argument counters the Christian thinkers’ presentation of the Trinity.¹²⁷ These arguments indicate to the

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ **Argument 1: Hypostases and accidents**

As indicated above Christians use Muslim *kalām* categories to present the Trinity, showing how the hypostases can be entirely identical with one another while at the same time keeping their distinction.

Christians argued that accidents in themselves are undifferentiated. However, when they inhere in a material, they bring about distinction. Black and white become black and white when they inhere in a material thing. One can distinguish between white paper and black paper. White paper gets its whiteness when the accident inheres in paper, and so also with black. White and black as accidents can be distinguished only in respect of being accidents of different qualities. Christians argued, “like accidents the divine hypostases can be considered both distinct and uniform.”¹²⁷ Al-Akbar presents three-counter arguments.

- The accidents are formally different from the material bodies in which they come to inhere. If hypostases are analogically compared to accidents, they are different from the substance (Godhead) and that would lead to multiplicity within the Godhead.

atmosphere of intense polemics surrounded any discussion on Christian faith in one God.

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- If hypostases, as accidents, are both uniform and distinct, then uniformity and distinction should arise from within themselves (that is not possible) or from a cause outside themselves, but in the case of hypostases it would entail an additional causal entity within the Godhead.
 - Hypostases can only be said to be uniform and distinct by an external agent. It would bring multiplicity within the Godhead.¹²⁷

Argument 2: God's attributes

The Christians argued that it is evident from the design of the universe that it has a maker. The maker of the universe should be knowing and living, since all intentional beings have these qualities. In Muslim circles the qualities of knowing and living were considered as God's attributes. In section 1.3.2, it was noted that the *Mu'tazilīs* and *Ash'arīs* clashed on this point. The *Mu'tazilīs* maintained that such attributes are human descriptions of God and such attributes are not integral to God. They opposed such attributes because in their opinion they would compromise the oneness of God. The *Ash'arīs* on the other hand used these attributes to say positively something about God.

Following 'Ammâr al-Baṣri, the Christians in the time of al-Akbar, made use of the *Ash'arīs's* interpretation and suggested that God's attributes of knowledge and life were in fact the Son and Holy Spirit as endowers of the qualities of knowing and living upon the being of God.

Al-Akbar rejected this argument with the following six counter-arguments. In the first four counter-arguments, he showed that divine attributes cannot be limited to two. It will be recalled here that 'Ammâr al-Baṣri had already counter-argued that the divine attributes may be many but life (Holy Spirit) and knowledge (Son) are pre-eminent ones. The next two counter-arguments appear to be weightier than the first four.

- If the creator is three hypostases and one substance, al-Akbar, following al-Kindi, argues that the hypostases must inhere in one substance and since they are differentiated the substance must be composite. The unity of God is violated. It brings God into the realm of a composite being.
- In a second counter-argument he showed that if God is explained in terms of substance (the human person too is made of substance), it will bring God into the realm of contingent being.
- Al-Akbar argues essentially that the doctrine of the Trinity is rationally unsustainable since it entails beings who are distinct in themselves and yet uniform with one another.

1.2.3.3 Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī

Al-Bāqillānī presents a good picture of the *Ash‘arī* tradition in his writings.¹²⁸ In his treatise, *al-Tamhīd*, he discusses the Trinity along with other doctrinal issues that came up in Christian-Muslim theological discussions.

Al-Bāqillānī first of all aims at rejecting the idea that God is a substance. He believes that if the idea of God as substance is eliminated, then the foundation of Christian faith is destroyed.¹²⁹ Secondly, he questions why Christians restrict hypostases to three?¹³⁰ Christians, in their discussions with Muslims, from the early 9th century onwards presented their faith in the Trinity in terms of one divinity that possesses two attributes: knowledge and life. Knowledge and life are traditionally equated with Son and

¹²⁸ Ibid., 119.

¹²⁹ He argues that Christians claim that God is substance. But, if God is substance, then he must be a noble and supreme substance. He pushes this a little further and concludes that if God is noble and supreme, he should be the highest instance of a series of beings. This conclusion implies a continuity of identity between God and the created order. However, he affirms that there is no continuity between the phenomenal world and the transcendent world. He argues that if Christians believe in some continuity of identity between God and the created order, then God must be temporal, and like all known substances, God’s substance too must bear accidents. Moreover, in the phenomenal world the agent of action is not a substance but a composite body in which substance inheres, so accordingly God must be a body. His argument appears to undermine the Christian idea of God as substance.

Al-Bāqillānī, appears to miss two important distinctions that Christians make when referring to God as substance. First, Christians affirm that *God exists because of himself* rather than because of *anything outside him*; God is not contingent. Al-Bāqillānī, however, appears to conclude that God exists because God can be observed. Secondly, when the Arabic-speaking Christian theologians used the term ‘*jawhar*’ for substance, they use it to refer to a self-subsisting agent, whereas Muslim theologians understood substance as the basic element of the material world out of which constituent parts of physical reality are constructed.

¹³⁰ The full text is translated in D. Thomas, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology*, 169-171.

Spirit. However, al-Bāqillānī cites power as another attribute. When Christians argue that it is identical with life, he disagrees with them. He argues that it is like knowledge and it should be fused together with knowledge or it should be considered as a separate attribute, as an additional hypostasis. He finds that to restrict hypostases only to three is arbitrary. Like the other two scholars discussed here, al-Bāqillānī also focuses his critique on the Christian faith in one God.

1.3 A summary

First, it is clear in our discussion that the Arabic-speaking Christian theologians used *kalām* categories to present their doctrine of the Trinity to Muslims. This had two consequences. The first consequence was, since the Christians used theological terms that Muslims understood, they were able to enter into dialogue with Muslims on an equal footing. This is a positive consequence.

Secondly, the Muslim theologians had a good grip of Christian understanding of the Trinity. In their response, there are two different approaches. Al-Warrāq made every effort to understand the Christian presentation of the Trinity. He perceived how different groups present the doctrine. Then he went on to show that it was riddled with inconsistencies. Al-Akbar appears to respond differently. He made serious efforts to understand the Christian arguments but did not show

interest in exploring the structure of the doctrine itself. Though both these scholars differed in their approach, they both conclude that Christian faith in the Trinity is rationally unsustainable.

Thirdly, the Muslim theologians appear to have concluded that the doctrine of the Trinity compromised the strict monotheistic unity of God (*Tawhīd*). The Christians' language of Father, Son, and Spirit did not provide any real description of God. The alternative version of God which the Christians tried to present in opposition to the Qur'anic presentation was riddled with errors. Christians and Muslims could not really find a common ground in their explanations about God. The implication is if Christians and Muslims want a common ground then Christians have to abandon their faith in Trinity and accept *Tawhīd*.

Both discussions: the 'status of the Bible' and 'the Trinity (belief in one God)' becomes extremely important because ACW uses the Bible and invites Christians to a Common Word: faith in one God. In this context the questions: 'Does ACW continue any of these earlier trends or does ACW take a different line?' (raised in the end of section 1) and 'Are the 138 Muslim theologians and scholars sympathetic to Christian faith in the Trinity or do they quietly dismiss it?' have to be considered to bring to light the new understanding ACW tries to bring into Christian-Muslim relations. This will be achieved by contrasting the views of the early centuries of Islam with that of ACW.

Chapter 2

ANALYSIS OF A *COMMON WORD*

Introduction

The first chapter outlined the polemical debates that surrounded the themes that are central to ACW: the ‘status of the Bible’ and ‘belief in one God’. It was shown that in the early Muslim centuries Muslim scholars argued that the Bible is a corrupted scripture and Christian understanding of God is riddled with error and consequently Christians and Muslims cannot find a common ground in their belief in one God. Their discussion brought about more heat than light.

At this point the dissertation moves from the early centuries of Islam to the immediate historical and textual context of ACW. As noted in the introduction, ACW will be placed in its immediate historical and textual Qur’anic context so that its relevance and its importance could be recognised. Then the above mentioned themes will be treated since the historical and Qur’anic contexts shape the way in which ACW treats them.

A movement towards the development of ACW can be seen in three important documents that appeared before ACW.¹³¹ These documents attracted many supportive signatories among Muslim scholars and thus contributed toward at least a partial consensus among the *'ulama*.¹³² They initiated a model for Christian-Muslim relations. These documents will be introduced before proceeding to ACW.

A brief résumé of the contents of ACW, together with details of its origins and structure, pointing out its apparent dependence on Jesus' summary of the Law will then be presented. The authors of ACW use Jesus' summary of the Law as their basic structure and highlight similar teachings in the Muslim tradition. They argue that the dual commandments of love stem from the one God and form a theological common ground between Christians and Muslims. This structure and its salient features will be examined.

Then the two important themes: 'the status and use of the Bible' in ACW and the 'implications of this invitation to a common word (belief in one God)' will be looked at in some detail. An evaluation of the method in which the Bible is used in ACW will be compared and contrasted to

¹³¹ The Amman Message (2004) [See: Appendix 1], the Amman Interfaith Message (2005) [See: Appendix 4], and the Open Letter to the Pope by 38 Muslim scholars (OL-38) (2006) [See: Appendix 6]. OL-38 was generated by 38 eight Muslim scholars in response to Pope Benedict XVI's Regensburg Address.

¹³² Note the centrality in Islamic theology of *ijmā'*, consensus; first, among scholars, then leading to consensus among all believers.

Muslim thinking in the early centuries of Islam as discussed in the first chapter. This will help to bring out what is new in ACW. Similarly the discussion on the second theme; i.e. the belief in one God and its implications for the invitation to a common word, will demonstrate the approach of ACW in dealing with Christians using the same methodology. In this section, since ACW gets its name from Q. 3:64, a discussion of the ‘occasion of revelation’ becomes important to understand the impact of the commentarial tradition on ACW. The investigation of these themes is crucial for a response to the research question: What does ACW do to promote understanding between Christians and Muslims?

2.1 Placing ACW in its immediate historical context

The immediate context of ACW stems from three important historical factors: (1) The Amman Message (AM),¹³³ (2) The Amman Interfaith Message (AIM),¹³⁴ (3) Regensburg Address,¹³⁵ and in response, (4) Open Letter of 38 Muslim scholars (OL-38).¹³⁶ In the course of the discussion it will be shown that ACW was influenced by these documents.¹³⁷

¹³³ See: Appendix 1.

¹³⁴ See: Appendix 4.

¹³⁵ See: Appendix 5.

¹³⁶ See: Appendix 6.

2.1.1 The Amman Message and the Amman Interfaith Message

In November 2004, H.M. King Abdullah II ibn al-Hussein of Jordan launched AM when he convened an International Islamic Summit. 180 leading Muslim scholars from 45 countries attended this conference.¹³⁸ It called upon Muslim communities to accept the ‘eight traditional schools of Islamic law’ as legitimate.¹³⁹ The Message exposed the illegitimacy of any *fatwa* which justifies acts of terror,¹⁴⁰ and also condemned the practice of *takfīr*, the pronouncement of unbelief against someone.¹⁴¹ It was supported by *fatwas* from 24 of the most important Muslim scholarly institutions.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Troll’s response, analysed in chapter 3, indicates Pope Benedict XVI’s first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* influenced the thinking of the writers of ACW. His reasons will be noted in footnote no 304.

¹³⁸ See: AIM, line 17 (For full text see appendix 4, line numbers are added by the researcher). A total number of 552 Muslim scholars and leaders from 84 countries endorsed The Amman Message. See the full list at: The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, A Common Word, http://ammanmessage.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=17&Itemid=31 [accessed on December 10, 2010].

¹³⁹ “Whoever is an adherent to one of the four *Sunni* schools (*Mathahib*) of Islamic jurisprudence (*Hanafi*, *Maliki*, *Shafi`i* and *Hanbali*), the two *Shi`i* schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*Ja`fari* and *Zaydi*), the *Ibadi* school of Islamic jurisprudence and the *Thahiri* school of Islamic jurisprudence, is a Muslim”. See: Three Points of Amman Message, appendix 2; line 5-8.

¹⁴⁰ AM, appendix 1, lines 136-138.

¹⁴¹ Three Points of Amman Message, appendix 2, lines 16-19.

¹⁴² *Fatwas* of the ‘*ulama*: *Sunni Fatwas*; H.E. Grand Imam Dr. Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, Shaykh Al-Azhar, Professor Dr Ali Jumu’a, Grand Mufti of the Egyptian Arab Republic, The Grand Council for Religious Affairs, Turkey, The late Grand Shaykh Ahmad Kuftaro, Grand Mufti of the Syrian Arab Republic, Shaykh Said Abd Al-Hafiz Al-Hijjawi, Grand Mufti of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, The Islamic Fiqh Academy, Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Shaykh Dr Yusuf Abdallah Al-Qaradawi, Director of the Sunna and Sira Council, Qatar, H.E. Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah, Vice-President of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, Saudi Arabia, Mufti Muhammad Taqi Uthmani, Pakistan and Shaykh Abdullah al-Harari al-Habashi, Lebanon. *Shi`i Ja`fari Fatwas*; Grand Ayatollah Al-Sayyid Ali Khamenei, Grand Ayatollah Al-Sayyid Ali Al-Sistani, Grand Ayatollah Al-Sayyid Muhammad Said Al-Hakim, Noble Najaf, Grand Ayatollah Shaykh Ishaq Al-Fayad, Noble Najaf, Grand

While insisting upon the importance of the practice of the pillars of Islam, AM exhorted Muslims to condemn all forms of extremism and indiscriminate killing.¹⁴³ It expressed its concern over the importance of correct training for religious leaders and of guidance for young people.¹⁴⁴ It could be said that AM moved decisively beyond defensive condemnations or even evasions, like the mantra ‘Islam is the religion of peace’, that have too often characterized the Muslim response to those acts of terrorism being committed in the name of Islam.

Its emphasis is on the oneness of humanity, informs the world that Islam stands for peace and that any violence in the name of Islam is contrary to its nature, and asks Muslims, their fellow believers, to condemn all forms of violence done in the name of Islam.¹⁴⁵ The number and the diversity of the political and religious scholars who signed the document indicate that a global voice for Islam on these questions is emerging.

Ayatollah Shaykh Bashir Al-Najan, Noble Najaf, Grand Ayatollah Al-Sayyid Shaykh Hassan Ismail Al-Sadr, Grand Ayatollah Al-Sayyid Fadil Lankarani, Grand Ayatollah Shaykh Muhammad Ali Al-Taskhiri, General Secretary, Forum for Proximity of the Islamic Schools of Jurisprudence, Iran, Al-Sayyid Muhammad Husayn FadlAllah, and The Imam Al-Khoei Benevolent Foundation, United Kingdom. Shi'i Zaydi Fatwas; Shaykh Muhammad bin Muhammad Ismail Al-Mansur and Shaykh Humud bin Abbas Al-Mu'ayyad, Shaykh Ibrahim bin Muhammad Al-Wazir (Zaydi), General Secretary, The Islamic Unification and Works Movement, Yemen. Ibadi Fatwas; Shaykh Ahmad bin Hamad Al-Khalili, Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman. A letter from His Highness the Aga Khan should be also mentioned.

¹⁴³ AM, appendix 1, lines 138-140.

¹⁴⁴ AM, appendix 1, lines 226-235.

¹⁴⁵ AM, appendix 1, lines 138-170.

In July 2005, following along the lines of AM, King Abdullah II of Jordan issued AIM. It aimed to build up relations between Jews, Christians and Muslims and not “merely to diffuse tensions between Muslims, Christians and Jews - the followers of the religions of Abraham (peace be upon him), and the believers in the One God - nor simply to promote tolerance between them, but rather to establish full acceptance and good will between them.”¹⁴⁶ King Abdullah’s message was based on the following Qur’anic injunction:

Say: O ye People of the Scripture, come to a common word between us: that we will not worship other than God and not associate anything with Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords besides God... (Q. 3:64).

AIM stressed belief in the unity of God, worship and devotion to God, and love and justice towards fellow human beings as central to the three Abrahamic religions.¹⁴⁷ It focused on theological roots for dialogue between Jews, Christians, and Muslims.¹⁴⁸ It expressed the belief that theology is a firm foundation on which the followers of the Abrahamic religions can base their commitment for dialogue.

AIM is directed especially towards Christians and Jews.¹⁴⁹ It aims at establishing wide acceptance and goodwill between Muslims, Christians,

¹⁴⁶ AIM, appendix 4, lines 37-42.

¹⁴⁷ AIM, appendix 4, lines 55-59.

¹⁴⁸ AIM, appendix 4, lines 60-66.

and Jews based on belief in one God. AIM's focus is on what is common to both Christians and Muslims without referring to the perennial debates on the nature of God. It also affirms that Jews, Christians and Muslims are linked to the faith of Abraham, thus echoing Louis Massignon's claim that Islam and Christianity share in a heritage from Abraham.¹⁵⁰ This message could be considered as a sign of a certain theological openness to engage with Christians in the area of Christian-Muslim relations.¹⁵¹

AM sets out an intra-Muslim process in which scholars from several branches of Islam participated and which promoted intra-faith cooperation. AIM represents the next step. It opened up the possibility of dialogue between Jews, Christians and Muslims in the realm of theology.

In these documents Muslims affirm their commitment to peaceful coexistence by denouncing all forms of extremism and indiscriminate killing in the name of religion and by calling upon fellow Muslims to live ethically and to build up a just society. AM and AIM point out the

¹⁴⁹ AIM is focussed on building up relations between the three Abrahamic religions as it springs from the West Asian (Middle Eastern) context. One criticism that could be levelled against AIM is that it fails to address the vast number of people who belong to Indic, Chinese and African traditional religions.

¹⁵⁰ N. Robinson, "Massignon, Vatican II and Islam as an Abrahamic Religion," in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 2, no.2 [1991]: 182-205.

¹⁵¹ King Abdullah II was awarded the John Paul II peace prize on 16 November 2005; the timing here is suggestive.

importance of theological engagement in intra- as well as inter-religious dialogue; thus both prepared the ground for ACW.

S. Nakhooda,¹⁵² one of the signatories to AM and ACW confirms this. He says: “the theological robustness and fecundity of the Amman Message gave rise to yet another and no less historic, development – the Common Word initiative. The AM already had the seeds of an interfaith message to the world that would be a reflection of the respect that moderate, traditional and orthodox Islam has for other religious traditions.”¹⁵³ D. Madigan,¹⁵⁴ a Catholic theologian based in Georgetown University (Washington) whose response to ACW will be analysed in the third chapter, in his reply to ACW notes that the Amman project tries to “develop an authoritative consensus on what it means to be Muslim in our time” and so prepared the ground for interfaith relations.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² S. Nakhooda was at that time the editor of *Islamica* magazine based in Amman and closely associated with the whole range of Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought initiatives. *Islamica* magazine has since been closed down and Nakhooda has moved on.

¹⁵³ S. Nakhooda, The significance of the Amman Message and the Common Word, www.acommonword.com/The-Significance-of-the-Amman-Message-and-the-Common-Word.pdf [Accessed December 30, 2008].

¹⁵⁴ Madigan (For full text see appendix 10, line numbers are added by the researcher).

¹⁵⁵ Madigan, appendix 10, lines 51-53.

2.1.2 Pope Benedict XVI's Regensburg Address and the Letter of 38 Muslim scholars

Before the first anniversary of the publication of AIM, Pope Benedict XVI delivered his controversial lecture "Faith, Reason and the University - Memories and Reflections" at Regensburg University on Tuesday, 12 September 2006. It was a lecture addressed to a university audience.

In his lecture, Pope Benedict XVI, while referring to a conversation between the Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus and an educated Persian on the truth of Christianity and Islam,¹⁵⁶ quoted the words of the emperor: "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."¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ T. Khoury published the conversations (controversies) between Manuel II Paléologue and the Persian. The Pope quoted an excerpt from the 7th "controversy" based on the French translation: "Manuel II Paléologue, Entretiens avec un Musulman. 7^e Controverse", *Sources Chrétiennes* n. 115, Paris 1966. The controversies also could be found in *Corpus Islamico-Christianum (Series Graeca)* ed. A. T. Khoury and R. Gleis an edition of the text in Greek and German with commentary: "Manuel II. Palaiologus, Dialoge mit einem Muslim", 3 vols., Würzburg-Altenberge, 1993-1996.

¹⁵⁷ Regensburg Address, lines 63-66. (For full text see appendix 5, line numbers are added by the researcher.)

J.L. Esposito writes: "The assertion that Muhammad commanded the spread of Islam by the sword was strenuously rejected by Muslim and non-Muslim scholars as inaccurate. Equally controversial and offensive to Muslims was the pope's assertion that the Quranic passage 'there is no compulsion in religion' (2:256) was revealed in the early years of Muhammad's prophethood in Mecca, a period 'when Muhammad was still powerless and under [threat]' but was superseded by 'instructions developed later and recorded in the Koran [Qur'an], concerning holy war.' Both of these statements are historically incorrect." See: J.L. Esposito, *The Future of Islam* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010], 187-188.

The Pope added his comments:

violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul... 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...¹⁵⁸

This reference to the medieval conversation shocked the Muslim world and provoked many angry and violent demonstrations and condemnations worldwide from Muslims.¹⁵⁹ Thousands of Muslims poured onto the streets in different parts of the world denouncing the comments. There was tension between Christians and Muslims in several cities and towns around the world. Becoming aware of the effects of his comments, the Pope added the following footnote to his lecture that was uploaded onto official web page of the Vatican:

In the Muslim world, this quotation has unfortunately been taken as an expression of my personal position, thus arousing understandable indignation. I hope that the reader of my text can see immediately that this sentence does not express my personal view of the Qur'an, for which I have the respect due to the holy book of a great religion. In quoting the text of the Emperor

¹⁵⁸ Regensburg Address, appendix 5, lines 68-74.

¹⁵⁹ Associated Press, "Religious Leaders across Mideast rage against Pope's comment on Islam," Fox News website: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,213930,00.html> [accessed November 10, 2010].

The Pope was speaking against a background of western oriental scholarship about Islam. F. Rahman writes: "... certain western critics like E. Renan and Sir W. Muir who contended that the social and economic backwardness of the late medieval Muslim society was due to the inherently inferior character of the Islamic civilisation. This, in turn, was alleged to stem from the inferiority of Islam as a religion, which was seen as a 'Bedouin' phenomenon alien to 'reason' and tolerance. At this stage of the argument, the medieval Muslim conflicts between philosophers and orthodox theologians were unreservedly identified as war between 'reason' and 'religion' and the net conclusion drawn was that Islam inherently opposes reason. This position was taken up by certain eminent Western scholars of Islam in the 19th century (echoes of which still continue to be heard in the West)..." [See: F. Rahman, *Islam*, 265]. The Pope's remark on reason and religion with a reference to Islam appear to reflect the views of those western critics of Islam.

Manuel II, I intended solely to draw out the essential relationship between faith and reason. On this point I am in agreement with Manuel II, but without endorsing his polemic.¹⁶⁰

In that lecture, the Pope reflected on the correlation between faith and reason. He said that faith and reason are not mutually exclusive. Reason is not contrary to God's nature.¹⁶¹ According to one commentator, the Pope was primarily concerned to reject clearly and unambiguously any religious justification for violence, no matter from where it might come.¹⁶²

An Open Letter (OL-38) was generated in response to the Regensburg Address.¹⁶³ Some thirty-eight senior Muslim religious scholars from different branches of Islam from around the world signed OL-38¹⁶⁴.

¹⁶⁰ See footnote 3 in the text of Pope Benedict XVI's lecture as given in the Vatican website. See: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html [accessed November 10, 2010].

¹⁶¹ Regensburg Address, appendix 5, lines 75-76.

¹⁶² C.W. Troll, *Dialogue & Difference*, 2.

¹⁶³ It has never been made public: who took the initiative, who were the authors/revisers, or how the Letter was circulated for counter-signing. Moreover, we do not find any monograph or article written by the signatories explain the process and the rationale behind the content of the Letter. (For full text see appendix 6, line numbers added by the researcher.)

¹⁶⁴ Among the signatories of the OL-38 were: Shaykh Ali Jumu'ah (Egypt), Shakyh Abdullah bin Bayyah (Mauritania), Shaykh Sa'id Ramadan Al-Buti (Syria), Ayatollah Muhammad Ali Taskhiri (Iran). HRH Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal (Jordan), Shaykh Hamza Yusuf (California, USA), Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr (George Washington University, Washington, D.C.), Tim Winter (University of Cambridge) and the Grand Muftis of Russia, Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo, Slovenia, Istanbul, Uzbekistan, and Oman. (For full text of OL see appendix 6, line numbers are added by the researcher).

OL-38 was released on 12 October 2006. The common opinion of commentators is that it was sent in a spirit of open intellectual exchange and mutual understanding. It responded to the remarks made by the Pope and challenged him pointing out what they saw as mistakes and oversimplifications in his remarks about Islamic belief and practice.¹⁶⁵

OL-38 laid out for the Pope the true nature of Islam as earlier had AM, thus developing a stream of Muslim scholarly opinion with a wide following behind this approach leading to ACW, which appeared one year later. This OL-38 can be seen as a precursor to ACW.

2.1.3 A summary

While AM offered the oneness of humanity as a theological ground for collaboration between Muslims, AIM goes beyond this oneness to belief in one God as a meeting ground for Jews, Christians and Muslims. OL-38 clarifies some more specific issues raised by the Pope Benedict XVI's Regensburg Address. ACW says that belief in this one God is the basis of all interfaith relations between Christians and Muslims.

These documents emphasise that resources for relations between the followers of the Abrahamic religions lie within their traditions. This is clear when AIM insists that if Jews, Christians and Muslims recognise their deepest shared values, they can break down the barriers of mistrust

¹⁶⁵ OL-38, appendix 6, lines 18-20.

and open the way for a better future. L-38 remains a helpful example of Muslim scholars' resolve to engage in conversations in critical times, thus paving the way for ACW.

2.2 A Common Word: origin, recipients, and structure

2.2.1 Origin and recipients

ACW was released on the first anniversary of OL-38, October 13, 2007, from The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute, Jordan. It has never been made public who took the initiative and who were the members of the drafting committee but the names of Prince Ghazi of Jordan, T. Winter and A. Nayed, both associated with Cambridge University, are widely held to have been central to the process.¹⁶⁶ The original text was developed in Arabic.¹⁶⁷ In the absence of any concrete information, the general hypothesis held is that the text as developed by a working party was reviewed and agreed upon by a wider consultancy group and circulated for endorsement and signature. There are no earlier drafts of the text available for studying the history behind the ACW text.¹⁶⁸ Any text circulated for counter-signature must be open to the possibility of

¹⁶⁶ Prince Ghazi was a key person in the Yale Conference and in correspondence with the Vatican. T. Winter was a link person with the Cambridge Conference, and led the Muslim delegation to the Vatican, according to the interview reproduced in Appendix 14. A. Nayed emerged as the official spokesperson dealing with the press after the release of ACW, he was listed as the Director of The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, Jordan, and replied to questions raised by Christian responses to ACW. He has since moved on and is now Founder-director of the Kalam Research and Media Centre in Dubai.

¹⁶⁷ Winter Interview, appendix 14, line 14. (For full text see appendix 14, line numbers are added by the researcher).

¹⁶⁸ Winter Interview, appendix 14, lines 54-55.

different signatories interpreting it differently. Monographs from a range of signatories to exemplify how they understand the message that they signed still have to appear.¹⁶⁹

ACW was originally signed by 138 scholars from different countries around the world.¹⁷⁰ It was addressed to 28 Christian leaders inviting them to affirm faith in one God and to work with Muslims for world peace.¹⁷¹ According to the official website of ACW,¹⁷² it has prompted several hundred responses from a range of scholars and churches.¹⁷³ More than 460 Muslim organisations and associations have declared support for ACW since it appeared.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ See the small number of brief articles on Common Word theme that is discussed in the Introduction, pages 8-15.

¹⁷⁰ Jordan (15), United States of America (14), Egypt (9), Morocco (8), Nigeria (6), Iraq (6), Saudi Arabia (5), UAE (5), Malaysia (4), UK (4), Lebanon (4), Kuwait (4), Syria (4), Bosnia Herzegovina (3), Algeria (3), Iran (3), Yemen (3), India (3), Sudan (3), Tunisia (2), Palestine (2), Oman (2), Turkey (2), Pakistan (2), Italy (1), Chad (1), Ukraine (1), Belgium (1), Azerbaijan (1), France (1), Indonesia (1), Canada (1), Switzerland (1), Russia (1), Brunei (1), Slovenia (1), Germany (1), Croatia (1), Gambia (1), Kosovo (1), Mauritania (1), and Uzbekistan (1), the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (1), Al-Khoei International Foundation (1), Risalah Satellite Channel (1), and The Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (1).

¹⁷¹ They include Pope Benedict XVI, Patriarchs and Metropolitans of both Orthodox and Oriental Churches. The addressees also include, as we mentioned in the introduction, leaders of Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, and the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches.

¹⁷² The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, Jordan, A Common Word, www.acommonword.com [Accessed on January 1, 2009]. See the full text in Appendix 7.

¹⁷³ The official web site of ACW records 71 responses in English [besides 1 in French and 4 in Italian] from different individuals and Christian groups (Orthodox, Catholic and Reformed), and three responses from Jewish groups. See the full list of Christian responses in Appendix 8. The official web site also lists 739 selected press clippings in English alone on ACW and events related to it. The French, Italian, Polish, Turkish, and Spanish press too have covered many reactions connected with ACW. A Common Word in the Media, <http://www.acommonword.com/index.php?lang=en&page=media> [Accessed on February 15, 2011].

ACW is partly intra Muslim in nature with signatories coming from different cultures, linguistic backgrounds and different schools of Islam.¹⁷⁵ Amongst them are *shaykhs*, *muftis*, *ayatollahs*, heads of ‘*ulama* bodies and university professors. It is also inter-religious as it is addressed to Christians from different churches and confederations of churches. The responses from various branches of Christianity indicate that ACW has generated much interest among them.¹⁷⁶

2.2 Structure of ACW

ACW has four sections:

(I) A Common Word between Us and You (Summary and Abridgement)¹⁷⁷

(II) Love of God

a) Love of God in Islam¹⁷⁸

b) Love of God in the Bible

¹⁷⁴ 385,001 visits have been made to the official website of ACW [the data accessed on February 15, 2010]. Over 6000 thousand people have counter-signed ACW.

¹⁷⁵ Sunnis from all four schools of law, Twelver Shia, Ismaili and Ibadi were amongst the signatories.

¹⁷⁶ Chapter 3 is devoted to an analysis of selected Christian responses to ACW.

¹⁷⁷ This is a short summary of ACW.

¹⁷⁸ In the text of ACW there is a contrast between on the one hand the Islamic faith moulded by the Qur’anic texts and the *h adīth*, with on the other hand, the Christian faith substantiated only by biblical verses rather than with the full breath of Christian tradition.

(III) Love of the neighbour

a) Love of neighbour in Islam¹⁷⁹b) Love of neighbour in the Bible¹⁸⁰

(IV) Come to a Common Word between Us and You.

2.2.2.1 Love of God and love of neighbour in Islam and in Christianity

Though love of God and love of neighbour are two different sections in ACW, both are brought together here because they are not only interrelated but are also central to it. ACW is structured around Jesus' summary of the Law (love of God and love of neighbour) and it tells readers that the teachings of Islam confirm the dual commandment of love as taught by Jesus. This is illustrated briefly as follows.

Muslim understanding of the love of God is highlighted through a *h adīth* and some Qur'anic passages. ACW shows that the *h adīth*;

¹⁷⁹ ACW was originally developed in Arabic. [See: Tim Winter Interview, appendix 14, line 14.]The Arabic word *jar*, as used in the Arabic text for neighbour, restricts its meaning to 'next door neighbour'. However, in the English translation of ACW the word 'neighbour' is given a meaning (that 'anyone who is in need is a neighbour') that reflects the teachings of the Gospels rather than that of the Qur'an.

¹⁸⁰ ACW, while dealing with 'Love of Neighbour in Christianity', leaves out the Parable of the Good Samaritan which explains in depth the demands of love for one's neighbours. It might be said that to keep the English translation of ACW close to its Arabic original the writers have left out this Parable as it does not resonate with the Qur'anic meaning of neighbour.

‘the best remembrance’¹⁸¹ and the Qur’an (Q.33:4, 2:165, 39:23, 67:1, 29:61-63, 14:32-34, 1:1-7, 2:194-5, 2:196, 9:36, 9:38-39, 64:1, 64:4) teach that God is absolute and thus demands sincere devotion. The *h adīth*; ‘the best remembrance’ is quoted in ACW thrice.¹⁸² It emphasises that the teaching of all the prophets, including Jesus and Muhammad, about God is the same. If this analysis is correct then the implications are: first, Jesus and Muhammad taught the same doctrine of God. Second, the earliest authentic Christian community was based on the pure teaching of Jesus. These authentic Christians believed the same doctrine of God as Jesus and thus the same as what Muhammad taught later.¹⁸³ The Christian doctrine of God should therefore not differ from the Muslim doctrine of God. Third, any differences between the original Christian teaching and ‘Christians’ today should be counted as the latter’s misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the authentic teachings of Jesus. God has no associate, so one must love God alone. He is sovereign and that calls for a total devotion to God. God has power over

¹⁸¹ “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.’ ACW, line . (*Sunan Al-Tirmidhi, Kitab Al-Da’awat*, 462/5, no. 3383; *Sunan Ibn Majah*, 1249/2.)

¹⁸² ACW, appendix 7, lines 65, 213, 283-292.

¹⁸³ ACW notes: “In the light of what we have seen to be necessarily implied and evoked by the Prophet Muhammad’s 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’*’^{xvi}, 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 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.” ACW, appendix 7, lines 283-295.

everything, so humanity has to fear him and remain totally devoted to him. Thus ACW defines, according to the Qur'an and *h adīth*, love for God in terms of devotion and gratitude, and every human being is called to be totally devoted to God. Muhammad epitomises this devotion and Muslims are called to follow him. This interpretation is in contrast to the Christian understanding of the unconditional love of God.¹⁸⁴ An important element of the Qur'anic understanding of God's love for human beings is that it is conditional upon and in response to good human actions, although of course every living being is dependent upon the love and mercy of God for its very existence. ACW quotes Q. 19:96 to demonstrate this.¹⁸⁵

ACW then presents the love of God as the first and greatest commandment of the Bible quoting the Shema: '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). In Matthew 22:34-40 and Mark 12:28-31, Jesus summarises this teaching for his listeners, saying that the first commandment is to love God with all one's heart, soul and mind.

¹⁸⁴ This point will be dealt with at length in the treatment of D. Madigan's response to ACW in chapter 3.

¹⁸⁵ A list of the Qur'anic verses on the Love of God as given in *Concordance of the Qur'an* by H.E. Kassis {H. E. Kassis, *Concordance of the Qur'an* [California: University of California Press, 1992]} is reproduced in appendix 15.

ACW follows the same pattern for love of neighbour. Quoting the *h adīth*, ‘None of you has faith until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself’ and Q. 2:177 and Q. 3:92. ACW concludes that love of neighbour “must be accompanied by generosity and self-sacrifice.”¹⁸⁶ This is followed by a short section on love of neighbour in the Bible. ACW quotes Matthew 22: 38-40 and Mark 12:31 and deduces that Christian love of neighbour demand the same generosity and self-sacrifice.

ACW keeps Jesus’ summary of the Law as its basic structure and develops a similar paradigm of love that it finds within the Islamic sources. The language of love in the Qur’an as well as the *h adīth* is emphasised in relation to the dual commandment of Jesus. ACW highlights the similarity in the discourse on the love of God and the love of neighbour in both traditions. ACW come to the conclusion that both the Bible and the Qur’an require that their followers love God fully, heart and soul, and be fully devoted to him and that they love their neighbours with generosity and self-sacrifice.

ACW, bringing together the teachings of the Qur’an and Muhammad along with the teachings of the Hebrew Law and prophets and Jesus on the love of God and the love of neighbour, argues that these very themes are at the heart of Islam and Christianity. Thus, ACW points out that

¹⁸⁶ ACW, appendix 7, lines 311-312.

there are some similarities in the teachings of Islam and Christianity on love. Christians hold that the dual commandment of love is at the heart of Christian ethics. However, Christians will point out that these ethical demands cannot be said to be the essence of Christian faith. For them the heart of the Christian faith is the unconditional love of God expressed in Christ, which brings about the new creation so that human beings are, elevated (adopted sonship) into fellowship with God.¹⁸⁷

2.2.2.2 Come to a Common Word between Us and You

The last section in ACW identifies belief in the oneness of God as the common heritage of all the monotheistic religions and says that the dual commandment of love arises from this common heritage. Muslim scholars suggest to the Christian leaders that love of God and love of neighbour are the basis for peace and mutual understanding between Islam and Christianity. They emphasise that peace between Christians and Muslims is necessary for peace in the world.

It may be asked critically whether peace between Muslims and Christians *is necessary* for world peace or whether it can at best *contribute to* world peace. This talk of love and peace is surely hollow without the necessary precursor of justice between Christians and Muslims and in the world. At least 45% of humankind alive today is neither Muslim nor Christian, so does not peace involve them too? And

¹⁸⁷ This idea is discussed in chapter 3.

do they not have something to contribute to peace in the world? As Madigan points out in recent history Muslims worldwide are at greater danger from fellow Muslims than from Christians and vice-versa.¹⁸⁸

ACW is structured around the teaching of Jesus with regard to the love of God and the love of neighbour. This theme, well known as Jesus' summary of the Law, is manifestly the hermeneutical principle that governs the choice of quotations from the Qur'an and the Bible in ACW.

Though the belief in the oneness of God, differently understood, is the basic principle of both Islam and Christianity, ACW affirms that Islam and Christianity are obviously different religions.¹⁸⁹ How is this to be understood? One possibility is that Christianity and Islam, in their pure forms as taught by the Prophets Jesus and Muhammad, should be one and the same, that is *islām*. If they are two different religions now, the implication is either a) that on the one hand the pure teachings of Jesus as taught and practised today have been distorted, while on the other hand Islam, as taught and practised today is the pure religion of God as taught by Muhammad and the earlier prophets or b) that ACW affirms that Islam and Christianity, as they are taught and practised today, remain faithful to the authentic teachings of Muhammad and Jesus respectively. This would mean that ACW is accepting that there is no

¹⁸⁸ Madigan, appendix 10, lines 259-283.

¹⁸⁹ ACW, appendix 7, line 351.

distortion in the teaching and the practice of Jesus in contemporary Christianity, thus it is a second true religion alongside Islam.¹⁹⁰

Upon certain occasions, ACW cites verses from the Qur'an that on the face of it can bear a meaning that accommodates Christians, but without offering any commentary or explanation. Christians who do not know the Islamic tradition or who do not investigate it may interpret this verse in a way contrary to that which is understood by classical Islam. Q.3: 113-115 might be cited as an example.¹⁹¹ The classical commentators identify this 'staunch community' amongst the People of the Book either as Muslims or as former Jews and Christians who have become Muslims.¹⁹² In the absence of scholarly comment from the signatories of ACW giving a new agreed interpretation of this passage, readers could be forgiven for misunderstanding this verse.

¹⁹⁰ Winter Interview, appendix 14, lines 132-145.

¹⁹¹ "They are all not alike. Of the People of the Scripture there is a staunch community who recite the revelation 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)." (Q. 3:113-115).

¹⁹² M.M. Ayoub, *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters*, vol.2, *The House of 'Imrān*, [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992], 298-300. M.M. Ayoub cites the following Muslim exegetes to support this opinion. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Wāḥidi, *Asbāb Nuzūl al-Qur'ān* [Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Jadīd, 1389/1969], 114-115; Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Tabarī, Vol. 7 of *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, ed. Mah mūd Muḥammad and Ahmad Muḥammad Shākir [Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1375/1961-1969], 118-29; Al-Qurayshī al-Dimishqī 'Imād ak-Dīn Abī al-Fidā' Ismā'īl ibn Kathīr, Vol. 2 of *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm* [Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1389/1970], 99-100; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Vol. 8 of *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* [Cairo: Al-Matba'ah al-Bahiyah, n.d.], 199-200; Abū al-Qāsim Jār Allāh Mah mūd ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsarī, Vol. 1 of *Al-Kashāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta'wīl* [Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1385/1966], 102; Abū 'Alī al-Fadl b. al-Ḥasan al-Tbarsī, Vol. 4 of *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* [Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, 1380/1961], 170-72.

On another occasion, ACW holds that Christians and Muslims can assemble together on a common platform built on “the common essentials of our two religions.”¹⁹³ These common essentials are “*that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take other for lords beside God*” (Q. 3:64). The future of interfaith relations between Christians and Muslims, ACW affirms, should be based on these common essentials as directed by Q.3:64. Going a little further, ACW affirms, quoting Q.2:136-137¹⁹⁴ and Q.5:48,¹⁹⁵ that these common essentials should be understood from the Qur’anic perspective. God willed that there should be a succession of Prophets and that they should laid down their own way, these differences are considered only as a test and final surrender is to God as revealed in the Qur’an and the last Prophet. If Christians fail to listen to the admonition of the Qur’an and Muhammad they remain in error and their behaviour is considered to be disobedient to God, who calls all humankind, including Christians, to follow the last Messenger and the

¹⁹³ ACW, appendix 7, lines 444-446.

¹⁹⁴ “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 they are rightly guided. But if they turn away, they are in schism, and God will suffice thee against them. He is the Hearer, the Knower.” Q.2:136-137

¹⁹⁵ And 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 with one another in good works. Unto God ye will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein ye differ.” Q.5:48.

Message he brought.¹⁹⁶ If this is the case then it would seem that it undermines the call for a common platform. Such references that are ambiguous in nature may create some perplexity around ACW.¹⁹⁷

2.3 An analysis of ACW

In this section a thematic approach to the selected topics in ACW is presented, namely: the corruption of the Bible (the status of the Bible) and the nature of God (the belief in one God). As indicated in the introduction to this chapter, by identifying themes and studying them in the way in which the Muslim scholars dealt with such questions in the past and how they are dealt with in ACW will help focus on the research question: “What does ACW do to promote a new understanding between Christians and Muslims?”

¹⁹⁶ Qur’an 5:56. See also Winter Interview, appendix 14, lines 128-130.

¹⁹⁷ For example, M. Taqi Usmani of Pakistan one of the signatories explains this verse as follows: “When all the prophets were preachers of the same religious beliefs, why did they differ in subsidiary laws and modes of worship, and why did a later divine book abrogate several precepts propounded by the earlier ones? The answer given is that Allah could make all humans in all ages uniform even in minute details of the law, but His wisdom required that there should be some difference between people of different ages in such details. This difference was not only based on the circumstances prevailing in different ages, but it was also a test to distinguish the obedient from the disobedient. It should be clearly understood that no particular law or any particular mode of worship has any inherent sanctity. The sanctity is attached to it only because Allah has appointed it as a law or as a mode of worship. But some people after being used to a particular mode of worship or a particular method, take it as inherently sacrosanct, and if a new command comes from Allah, they become averse to it, while the correct attitude is to obey Him in all His commands, whether or not they accord to one’s habits or desires. When a new prophet comes with a new command, the people are tested to see whether they will obey it, or whether their love for the previous ways will prompt them to violate the new command.” M. Taqi Usmani, *The Meanings of the Noble Qur’an* (Translation and Commentary), footnote 32, Chapter 5:48. It confirms that ACW is differently interpreted by the signatories. This particular interpretation does not match with the spirit of the text of ACW as it stands.

2.3.1 The Bible and the Qur'an in ACW

It was shown in chapter 1 that in the early centuries of Islam that Muslims considered the Bible untrustworthy as it was corrupted. Some of them interpreted the Bible in the light of the Qur'an or edited it to suit the Qur'anic teaching. In ACW Muslim scholars juxtapose certain verses of the Bible with some verses of the Qur'an without referring to corruption. This approach is new and unknown in Christian-Muslim relations and it demands careful attention to history and text.

It would be appropriate to recall briefly the discussion of the first chapter with regard to a Muslim approach to the Bible. Both Christian and Muslim scholars have clashed with one another in order to demonstrate the validity of their truth claims.¹⁹⁸ In the process they often examined one another's scriptures in order to deconstruct them in such a way that they could be read to affirm the other faiths' truth claim. They started with the assumption that all scriptures were of divine origin. However, they found differences in them. They held human agents responsible for corruption. They reinterpreted or even edited the others' sacred texts to make them comply with their own scriptures. Paul of Antioch (fl. 1180) was an important example for this approach from the Christian side. In his "Letter to Muslim Friends" he tried to drive home the point that

¹⁹⁸ See C. Bennett, *Understanding Christian-Muslim Relations* [London: Continuum, 2008] chapters one and two for a good summary of such polemics.

Islam teaches that Christianity was the true religion. He used Qur'anic verses to achieve this end.¹⁹⁹

It was also shown that one set of scholars argued that biblical texts were corrupted and others argued that interpretations of them (biblical texts) were mistaken. They wanted to demonstrate that the Bible announced the coming of Muhammad. While scholars like Ali al-Tabarī (d. 923 CE), held that Christian interpretation was mistaken and chose to interpret several biblical texts to show that Muhammad had been foretold in the Bible, other scholars like al-Juwayni (d.1085 CE) held that he could not argue convincingly against Christians using that method.²⁰⁰ Instead, he said that Christians and Jews had altered the text of the Bible. He demonstrated that alterations had taken place to the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) as there are discrepancies between the Hebrew text and that of the Septuagint about the age of the patriarchs. Because of the contradiction between genealogies of Christ in Matthew and Luke, he argued that the gospels too are subjected to substitution, *tabdīl*. It was shown in the first chapter that Ibn Hazm was an extreme example of this position.²⁰¹ He argued that the Bible was hopelessly corrupted and denied any truth value to the Bible. Following al-Tabari, like Paul of

¹⁹⁹ M.H. Siddiqui, "Muslims and Byzantine Christian Relations: Letter of Paul of Antioch and Ibn Taymiyah," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 31 [1986]: 33-45.

²⁰⁰ J.M. Gaudeul, *Encounters & Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History – I A Survey*, 121.

²⁰¹ C. Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism & the Hebrew Bible*, 59-69.

Antioch, al-Ghazali (or the author of the work attributed to him), claimed that Muslims who know the Qur'an and its message will be able to help Christians to understand the Bible better. In short, the Bible needs an Islamic interpretation.

Any effort to bring the Bible and the Qur'an together today, as ACW does needs to take into account the historical past but should not be tied down by it. It should be recognised that polemics have set the rules for interaction between the Bible and the Qur'an for too long. Such polemics continue to be played out in popular literature and on the internet and blogosphere.²⁰² As Islam came after Christianity, Muslim authors could argue that references to Islam in the Bible were hidden, removed, corrupted or misinterpreted; Christian authors could not argue this in reverse. If they accepted the Qur'an as revealed scripture, then they had to explain why they did not accept its authority. Thus Paul of Antioch, though he recognised the fact that the Qur'an is a revelation in Arabic, he limited it to Arabic speakers and denied its universal validity. Consequently he affirms that the Qur'an is irrelevant for Christians.²⁰³

²⁰² K. Zebiri, *Muslims and Christians: Face to Face*, 44-84 gives a good account of Muslim popular literature on Christianity, especially polemics on the Bible and Qur'an. A search on Google.com gives several hundred web sites and blog entries on the same subject. Moreover a visit to the web sites maintained by popular Muslim preachers like Zakir Naik [<http://www.irf.net/>] (accessed on October 20, 2010) and the Late Ahmed Deedat [<http://www.ahmed-deedat.co.za/frameset.asp>] (accessed on October 20, 2010) exemplifies that the internet is an important tool for their polemics.

²⁰³ T. Druart, "Islam and Christianity: One Divine and Human Language or Many Human Languages," *Journal of Religion & Society* 9, [2007], <http://moses.creighton.edu/JRS/2007/2007-27.html> [accessed October 14, 2010].

However, some modern authors like Basetti-Sani accept the Qur'an as an inspired scripture,²⁰⁴ and R. Caspar reflects theologically on the Qur'an as 'a bearer of a Word of God'.²⁰⁵ Their approach was to treat the Qur'an with respect and to seek the voice of God through it to bring about a better understanding between Muslims and Christians. Is there then any other way in which a fruitful theological reflection could take place in the interaction between Muslims and Christians concerning both scriptures?

Troll lays down an important groundrule for profitable interaction between Christians and Muslims while bringing together the Bible and the Qur'an.²⁰⁶ He writes that Christians and Muslims should "grasp the basic point that in the two faiths the Word of God addressed by God to the human race is understood in significantly different ways".²⁰⁷ As discussed in the introduction, while the revelation of the Qur'an as the Word of God is understood by Muslims as "the final, unique and fully authentic manifestation of the Word of God, addressed to humankind through the ministry of Muhammad",²⁰⁸ for Christians the story of

²⁰⁴ G. Basetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ* [Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1977], 223.

²⁰⁵ C.W. Troll, "Changing Catholic views of Islam," in Jacques Waardenburg ed. *Islam and Christianity: Mutual Perceptions since the Mid-20th Century* [Leuven: Peeters, 1998], 67.

²⁰⁶ C. W. Troll, "Bible and Qur'an in Dialogue," *Bulletin Dei Verbum* 79/80, <http://www.sankt-georgen.de/leseraum/troll37.pdf> [accessed December 10, 2010].

²⁰⁷ C.W. Troll, *Dialogue and Difference*, 132.

²⁰⁸ M. Borrmans, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims* [New York: Paulist Press, 1990], 104-105.

revelation comes to its fulfilment in Jesus of Nazareth, who is the Word made flesh (John 1:14), and public revelation ends with the death of the last Apostle.²⁰⁹ So Muslims should recognise that for Christians the Word did not become a book but it became incarnate in the person of Jesus. Muslims might ask: what about the Bible? Is it the Word of God? Muslims have the right to know about Christian thinking on this subject. Christians use the term Word of God in a different way to that in which Muslims use it in reference to the Qur'an. For Christians, the Word speaks in and through the words of men and women, the authors who composed the various books in the Bible.²¹⁰ Limitations of the writers'

²⁰⁹ K. Rahner, "Revelation," in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, ed. K. Rahner, C. Ernest, Kevin Smyth, vol. 5 [London: Burn & Oates], 358.

It is important to note that within Catholic theology there are two different ways in which revelation is understood. Most Catholic theologians before K. Rahner recognised revelation as truths revealed by God. These revealed truths were gathered in a deposit of faith. These revealed truths should be acknowledged as true on the authority of God as mediated by the Church for one's salvation. This could be called static understanding of revelation. In this stream of thought the revelations possessed by non-Christian religions were considered to be preparation for the gospel. In this stream there would be no place for the Qur'anic revelation as it came after Jesus Christ. In contrast to this first school K. Rahner argued that revelation is not static but dynamic. It is God's self communication to which human person respond. Since revelation occurs within historical situations there could be Jewish, Islamic, Indic revelations. See: R.P. McBrien, *Catholicism* [New York: HarperCollins, 1994], 252. See also: Rene Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation* [Staten Island: Alba House, 1987]; G. Moran, *Theology of Revelation* [New York: Herder and Herder, 1966]; A. Shorter, *Revelation and its Interpretation* [London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983]; A. Dulles, *Models of Revelation* [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983].

²¹⁰ It is quite pertinent to quote C. Chapman. He writes: "While Christians see all the books of the Bible as inspired Scripture, they do not believe that the process of inspiration was such that every single word was dictated to the writers. They believe that these writers were thinking about what they wrote, each with their own style of writing, but that the Holy Spirit of God was at work in their minds.

The letter of 2 Timothy, traditionally attributed to the Apostle Paul, describes the Old Testament in these words: '... the holy Scriptures ... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed (*theopneustos*) and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness...' (2 Timothy 3. 15-16). The Second letter of Peter describes the process of inspiration in the books of the prophets in these words: '...prophesy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along (*pheromenoi*) by the Holy Spirit' (2 Peter 1.21; 'men they were, but, impelled by the Holy Spirit, they spoke the words of God' NEB).

cultures, languages and customs are part and parcel of the Bible. This human agency should not be seen as corruption of the Bible as argued by the medieval Muslim scholars, who were discussed in the first chapter.

Christians should recognise the spiritual significance of the Qur'an in the lives of Muslims as the Book shapes the lives and spiritualities of more than a billion Muslims today. To enter the world of Muslims, Christians need to understand the status and agency of the Qur'an and the way in which it is respected by Muslims. Similarly, Muslims should recognise the place of the Bible in the lives of Christians for any meaningful interaction between them on the level of theology. The groundrule Troll provides for this approach should be kept firmly in mind. In the spirit of openness, Troll finds that there are Muslims and Christians who feel that it "is part of their vocation to get to know one another"²¹¹ by studying one another's scriptures. Among Muslims, many are "increasingly aware of the need to learn something from Christians themselves about their own understanding of the Bible" and "take the Bible seriously and get to know it properly" as is the case with Christians who learn about

Christians therefore think of Scripture as *both* the Word of God *and* word and words of human beings at the same time. They believe that the minds of the writers were fully active as they received the message that God communicated to them. God was at work in their minds as they wrote. The Word of God has come to us *in* and *through* the words of the human writer. Although the human element in the process of revelation means that people wrote within their normal limitations, it does not mean that what they wrote is not true and reliable". See: C. Chapman. *The Bible Through Muslim Eyes and a Christian Response*, Grove Biblical Series [Cambridge: Grove Books Limited, 2008], 5.

²¹¹ C.W. Troll, *Dialogue and Difference*, 137.

the Muslim understandings of the Qur'an.²¹² Troll draws attention to the “intense reading of paired passages from the Qur'an and the Bible” as an important initiative.²¹³ The project, called ‘Scriptural Reasoning’ attracts educated Muslims and Christians to study the Bible and the Qur'an together.²¹⁴ M. Ipgrave finds that for any real progress in Christian-Muslim relations, Christian and Muslims should take both the Qur'an and the Bible and study seriously their contents and teachings.²¹⁵

ACW juxtaposes biblical texts with Qur'anic texts and the *h adīth*. It should be recognised that ACW cannot be identified strictly with the ‘Scriptural Reasoning’ project, for this project involves both Muslims and Christians *together* reading and reflecting on the paired passages. In ACW it is only the Muslim scholars who reflect on ways to promote Christian-Muslim understanding by bringing together texts from the Bible and the Qur'an. So the questions that need to be asked are: how far ACW distances itself from the polemics of the past, by what criteria are

²¹² Ibid, 137.

²¹³ Ibid, 139.

²¹⁴ D. Ford and C.C. Pecknold eds. *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning* [Oxford: Blackwell, 2007]. There are five important considerations that are operative in the Scriptural Reasoning Project. First, the scriptures are central to identity, beliefs, ethics, worship and ways of living for both Muslims and Christians; second, both believers should continually study and interpret the scriptures in order to be faithful to God in new circumstances; third, they can learn from each other and engage in dialogue around the scriptures together; fourth, a shared intellectual and spiritual striving in response to the Word will facilitate Christians and Muslims to address difficult issues; and fifth, serious discussion around scriptures would help them to identify common ground. See: M. Ipgrave ed. *Scriptures in Dialogue: Christians and Muslims Studying the Bible and the Qur'an together* [London: Church House Publishing, 2004], 144-145.

²¹⁵ M. Ipgrave ed. *Scriptures in Dialogue: Christians and Muslims Studying the Bible and the Qur'an together* [London: Church House Publishing, 2004], 144-145.

the biblical passages chosen, and what is the status of the Bible for ACW?

ACW juxtaposes scriptural passages with only occasional references to exegetical discourse.²¹⁶ The main effort of ACW is to focus on the similarity between the teachings of these two faiths. They impress upon the reader that Islam and Christianity share common ethical arch-principles. Is the Bible interpreted according to Christian understanding or is it seen in the light of the Qur'an? This issue will be discussed in the following pages.

ACW chooses passages only from the Synoptic Gospels to illustrate the sayings of Jesus. In these passages Jesus emerges as a Jewish teacher. It has not included any passage that might point to the ontological status of Jesus.²¹⁷ Moreover, it omits verses from the Qur'an that challenge the Christian understanding of God. For example, ACW quotes Q.112:1-2

²¹⁶ There are only two references to exegetes in ACW. The first one is to the *tafsīr* of *Aal- 'Imran*, 3:64 by Abu Ja'far Muhammad Bin Jarir Al-Tabari, Vol. 3 of *Jami' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, [*Dar al-Kutub al- 'Ilmiyyah*, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st ed, 1992/1412], 299-302; the second reference is the exegesis of Mathew 12:30, Mark 9:40 and Luke 9:50 by The Blessed Theophylact (1055-1108 CE). He was the Orthodox Archbishop of Ochrid and Bulgaria (1090-1108 CE). The reasons for the choice of the little known Theophylact are not made clear in the footnotes. The footnote merely adds two comments: one, his native language was the Greek of the New Testament; two, his *Commentary* is currently available in English from Chrysostom Press. According to main contemporary Christian New Testament scholars Mt 12: 30 speaks disparagingly of non-Christian people who were in conflict with nascent Christian community and not to demons. Mk 9: 40 and Luke 9:50 reflect more a lenient view amongst the early Christians. See: R.E. Brown, J.A. Fitzmyer, and R.E. Murphy, eds. , *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* [New York: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999], 654. This raises the obvious question as to why the authors of ACW chose this eccentric interpretation which happened to fit nicely with their thesis.

²¹⁷ E.g. John 8:18 and 5:37 refer to the ontological status of Jesus.

(Say: He is God, the One! God, the Self-Sufficient Besought of all!), and leaves out verses three and four (He does not beget, nor he is begotten, And there is none comparable unto Him). Verse three is traditionally interpreted as a challenge to the Christian beliefs with regard to Jesus and the Trinity.²¹⁸ ACW does not clarify why these verses were not included. Does it imply that the authors ACW recognise that the traditional Muslim interpretation of the Christian understanding of God would not open up the kind of discourse that they want to promote with Christians or are they intending a new and revolutionary interpretation of the Christian doctrine? Given that Q.112 in its entirety is one of the most frequently recited Qur'anic passages in canonical prayer (two verses only would not suffice) then the question arises how the Muslim reader especially in Arabic will read this citation of Q.112:1-2; surely they will subconsciously supply verses three and four and thus influence their reading of what ACW is trying to say.

In ACW selected passages are juxtaposed to show common elements between these two faiths. But verses are selected to show apparent similarities in teaching whilst omitting other verses that would challenge this proposed comfortable mutual agreement. Does such an approach provide a strong basis for promoting Christian-Muslim relations? In seeking to promote similarities by this approach ACW does not pass

²¹⁸ M. Asad in his *The Message of The Qur'an* links Q. 112:4 to Q. 89:1 and Q.19:89 to emphasise that nothing could be compared to God and the Christian dogma of Trinity is blasphemous.

over the exclusive truth claims of Islam. This will be exemplified in the next two sections.

2.3.1.1 The choice of the Pentateuch and the Synoptic Gospels

First, ACW chooses biblical verses only from the Pentateuch and the Synoptic Gospels along with the Qur'an and the *hadīth* in its efforts to show that similar teachings are found in both religions. The Pentateuch and the Synoptic Gospels are traditionally considered by Muslims to be at best the corrupted or misinterpreted deposits of the *Tawrāt* and the *Injīl*, which were revelations given by God to Moses and Jesus respectively. ACW does not spell out the status of the Bible as a whole or these two parts in particular, it merely quotes selected verses.

2.3.1.2 Jesus: a Jewish teacher

Secondly, the Synoptic Gospel verses focus on the teachings of Jesus. As is mentioned above, ACW does not choose any passage for its discussion that indicates any reference to Jesus' ontological status. The chosen gospel passages portray Jesus as a Jewish teacher who summarises elements of the teaching of the Hebrew Law and prophets. The Islamic salutation that they add to the name of Jesus emphasises this point by according him the same salutation that is given to all the prophets. Moreover, ACW makes clear:

Muslims recognise Jesus 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 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.... (Q. 4:171).²¹⁹

Not surprisingly ACW nowhere hints at the Christian understanding of Jesus' unique relationship with the Father as revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and in the Bible.

2.3.1.3 Traces of *tah rīf* in ACW

Thirdly, ACW does not refer to *tah rīf* in the Bible explicitly.²²⁰

However, there is an intriguing reference to: "the language differences between the Hebrew Old Testament, the original words of Jesus Christ in Aramaic, and the actual transmitted Greek of the New Testament."²²¹

How does one understand this comment? Do the authors make a point that these differences have resulted from the interference of human elements in the history of the transmission of the Bible? According to Muslim understanding the *Injīl* that was sent down to Jesus was in his mother-tongue, Aramaic. The Gospels are written in Greek and therefore, even if they were an accurate word-for-word translation of the *Injīl*, they would not be the *Injīl*; just as the Qur'an is not the Qur'an in translation. Given the disparity between the four gospels, the gospels must be, in some sense, a distorted version of that which was sent down

²¹⁹ ACW, appendix 7, lines 435-440.

²²⁰ See discussion of this term and its implications in chapter 1.

²²¹ ACW, appendix 7, line 278-281.

by God to Jesus. However, apart from this reference, ACW is silent on the question and so the position ACW adopts on *tah rīf* is not made explicit.

The choice of the gospel passages, the status given to Jesus and a reference to the language differences between the Hebrew Old Testament, the original words of Jesus Christ in Aramaic, and the actual transmitted Greek of the New Testament leaves open the question as to whether the authors of ACW have abandoned the traditionally held Islamic intellectual and theological positions on these points. It is important to consider how the authors and signatories of ACW intend to communicate by using the Bible along with the Qur'an in ACW.

2.3.1.4 ACW: a way forward

There appears to be a way forward when ACW brings together certain passages of both the Bible and the Qur'an. At best it could be said that ACW invites Muslims and Christians to look afresh at their own traditions and beliefs. In this way no tradition needs to be sacrificed to the other and each can scrutinise itself fruitfully for the benefit of itself and the other. This can be illustrated with two examples.²²²

²²² I acknowledge with gratitude that my conversations with the following scholars helped me to develop my ideas for this section: P. Jackson (on January 18, 2008 in Delhi), C. Hower (on January 24, 2009 at St Ethelburga Centre in London), M. Solo (on October 3, 2009 in Milan), and C.W. Troll (on May 10, 2010 in Frankfurt).

First Example

ACW introduces Q. 2:177: “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” with the introductory comment “Empathy and sympathy for the neighbour – and even formal prayers – are not enough. They must be accompanied by generosity and self-sacrifice”.²²³ The Qur’an emphasises the moral value of giving in this verse. The value of giving draws upon compassion, social justice, sharing, and strengthening of the community. The act of giving brings spiritual benefit to the giver and acts as a social corrective measure in general.²²⁴

The emphasis on sympathy for the neighbour,²²⁵ will remind a Christian reader of Jesus’ Parable of the Good Samaritan.²²⁶ This parable has shaped Christian religious thinking and practice about the way in which one’s neighbour is to be understood and served. The large number of Christian service institutions around the world is a witness to this. Similarly within the Islamic tradition this verse from the Qur’an,

²²³ ACW, appendix 7, lines 310-311.

²²⁴ J.D. McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an* vol.1 [Leiden: Brill, 201], 64.

²²⁵ “Empathy and sympathy for the neighbour – and even formal prayers – are not enough. They must be accompanied by generosity and self-sacrifice”. ACW, appendix 7, lines 310-311.

²²⁶ Luke 10: 25-37.

together with certain *h adīth* of the Prophet,²²⁷ have inspired the building up of a whole social welfare system.²²⁸ It would be profitable for both Christians and Muslims to examine jointly how the spiritual teachings of Islam and Christianity help their respective believers to serve the poor and the needy. How do the religious communities organise services to the poor and needy based on the Bible and the Qur'an? These questions would help both communities to understand and appreciate their own limitations in the light of the practice of the other.²²⁹

Second Example

ACW quotes *al-Fātih a*, the first chapter of the Qur'an, and comments on it saying that it is recited at least seventeen times a day by Muslims in

²²⁷ In a personal conversation an imam friend of mine in India narrated to me a *h adīth*. He said: "In one *h adīth* Nabi (ﻭﺳﻠﻢ ﻋﻠﻴﻪ ﺍﻟﻠﻪ ﺼﻠﻰ) said 'He is not a true Mu'min who spends the night on a full stomach while his neighbour remains hungry'."

²²⁸ In Islam the poor and needy are cared for by the funds raised through holding and preserving certain property. These properties are termed as *waqf*. See: M. Kahf, "Waqf" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, ed. J.L. Esposito [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001], 4: 312-316.

²²⁹ Islamic Aid is one such example. The web site of 'Islamic Aid' informs the reader that the organisation strives to help people who "struggle each day to keep hunger and disease at bay and they have nothing to fall back on in times of crisis. Islamic Aid does much more than feed the hungry. We work alongside families and communities to understand their needs and to help them find lasting solutions to their problems. We aim to expand and replicate our successful projects that include both emergency relief and long-term solutions to poverty. We support projects that provide those most basic and immediate needs like clean water and healthcare and we also help people to change lives for good through training, education and business start-ups. During emergencies we help meet immediate needs but are also there to help people rebuild their lives over the longer term." See:

<http://www.islamicaid.org.uk/aboutus.html> and [accessed November 1, 2010]. It is clear from the description that Islamic Aid is at the service of anyone in need.

their canonical prayers.²³⁰ This prayer praises God and asks for God's guidance to walk in the path of God. This first chapter of the Qur'an, the fact that it is always recited in formal prayers, and the comments of ACW will remind a Christian reader of the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:1-4). This prayer praises God and asks for grace and guidance to live in harmony with God and with one another. *Al-Fātih a* and the Lord's Prayer undoubtedly influence the lives of Muslims and Christians. They inspire believers to live more authentically in the way of God.

This still leaves the question open as to how ACW deals with verse 7 of *al-Fātih a* reads: "The way of those upon whom You have bestowed Your favour, not of those who have incurred Your wrath or those who have gone astray." Some of the commentators, like al-Zamakhsharī and al-T abarī have interpreted this verse to refer to Jews and Christians who have incurred the wrath of God since they have gone astray.²³¹ It is important for the signatories to explain the way they understand this verse.

²³⁰ ACW, appendix 7, line 107.

²³¹ Abū Ja 'far Muh ammad b. Jarīr al-T abarī, Vol. 1 of *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, ed. Mah mūd Muh ammad and Ahmad Muh ammad Shākīr [Cairo: Dār al-Ma' ārif, 1375/1961-1969], 185-195; Abū al-Qāsim Jar Allāh Mah mūd ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī, Vol. 1 of *Al-Kashahāf 'an H aqā'iq al-Tanzīl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta'wīl* [Cairo: Mus t afā al-Bābī al-H alabī, 1385/1966], 71. This reference is cited in M.M. Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters*, 49.

The assumption of Muslim scholars is that all authentic scriptures come from one source. Since the Qur'an is the final scripture it is the criterion by which all others can be judged (Q.25:1). Muslims have traditionally believed that all scriptures should agree in all essentials although not necessarily in particulars with the Qur'an. It is clear that the authors of ACW do not depart from the traditional position:²³² to regard the Qur'an as the only extant, authentic, preserved and authoritative scripture, however, by quoting verses from the Bible that agree with the Qur'an they show seriousness and respect.²³³

By bringing together the passages from the Bible and the Qur'an they open up a possibility for both Muslims and Christians to explore their faiths in mutual appreciation of one another. A careful analysis, of the texts of the Qur'an and the Bible, needs to be undertaken in order to promote and sustain relations between Christians and Muslims.

2.3.2 Belief in one God

2.3.2.1 ACW: a title taken from the Qur'an

ACW takes its name from the Qur'anic verse Q.3:64. It is therefore appropriate to explore this verse in its Qur'anic context. Q. 3:64 reads:

Say: O ye People of the Scripture, come to a common word between us: that we will not worship other than God and not

²³² Winter interview, appendix 14, line 128.

²³³ Winter Interview, appendix 14, lines 75-79.

associate anything with Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords besides God.

The general consensus among the Muslim exegetes is that the first eighty-odd verses of this particular *sūrah* of the Qur'an were revealed "concerning the Christian delegation of Najran".²³⁴ The exegetes explain that a delegation of Christians from Najran came to meet Muhammad, in the ninth year of *hijrah*,²³⁵ and they discussed the similarities and differences of Christian and Muslim belief concerning Jesus. The Christian delegation could not defend their faith in Jesus before Muhammad who invited them to accept Islam. On this occasion at least Q.3:1-80 were revealed.²³⁶ As the Najrani delegation "persisted in their rejection of faith and grave error",²³⁷ Muhammad challenged them to a *mubāhalah*, a ceremony of mutual imprecation. It was a ritual to strengthen the assertion or to find truth.²³⁸ The Christians hesitated

²³⁴ M.M. Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters: The House of 'Imrān*, 1.

²³⁵ Al-Qurayshī al-Dimishqī 'Imād ak-Dīn Abī al-Fidā' Ismā'īl ibn Kathīr, Vol. 2 of *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm* [Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1389/1970], 3; Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Ahmad al-Ansārī al-Qurtubi, Vol.4 of *Al-Jāmi' li-Ahkām al-Qur'ān* [Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-'Arabī, 1387/1967], 4. This is cited in M.M. Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters: The House of 'Imrān*, 4.

²³⁶ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb Nuzūl al-Qur'ān* [Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Jadīd, 1389/1969], 90-91. This reference is cited in M.M. Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters: The House of 'Imrān*, 1-2.

²³⁷ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Tabarī, Vol. 6 of *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, ed. Mahmūd Muḥammad and Ahmad Muḥammad Shākir [Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1375/1961-1969], 150-51. This reference is cited in M.M. Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters: The House of 'Imrān*, 3.

²³⁸ A good account of *mubāhalah* in Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. A. Guillaume [Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2004], 270-277.

initially and they were given respite for reflection and deliberation. After some deliberation the Christians refused to participate in it.²³⁹

Since the Najrani delegation refused *mubāhalah* they were invited for something which is easier: “O ye People of the Scripture, come to a common word between us...” (Q.3:64). The exegetes differed in their opinions as to the addressees of ‘O ye People of the Scripture’. In general there are three different opinions: first, exegetes like al-Tabarī,²⁴⁰ ibn Kathīr,²⁴¹ and al-Zamakhsharī²⁴² consider that both Jews and Christians were addressed in this particular place; second, al-Rāzī points out that this verse refers to the Christians of Najran;²⁴³ third, exegetes like al-Shawkānī understand that this reference is to Christians in general not particularly to the Jews of Madina or Christians of

²³⁹ Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Tabarī, Vol. 6 of *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy al-Qur’ān*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad and Ahmad Muḥammad Shākir, 150-151. This reference is cited in M.M. Ayoub, *The House of ‘Imrān*, 202-203.

²⁴⁰ Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Tabarī, Vol. 6 of *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy al-Qur’ān*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad and Ahmad Muḥammad Shākir, 484-485. This reference is cited in M.M. Ayoub, *The Qur’an and its Interpreters: The House of ‘Imrān*, 203.

²⁴¹ Al-Qurayshī al-Dimishqī ‘Imād ak-Dīn Abī al-Fidā’ Ismā‘īl ibn Kathīr, Vol. 2 of *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, 53-54. This reference is cited in M.M. Ayoub, *The Qur’an and its Interpreters: The House of ‘Imrān*, 204.

²⁴² Abū al-Qāsim Jār Allāh Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī, Vol. 1 of *Al-Kashahāf ‘an Ḥaqqā’iq al-Tanzīl wa ‘Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta’wīl* [Cairo: Muḥammad al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1385/1966], 371. This reference is cited in M.M. Ayoub, *The Qur’an and its Interpreters: The House of ‘Imrān*, 205.

²⁴³ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Vol. 8 of *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* [Cairo: Al-Matba‘ah al-Bahiyah, n.d.], 90-92. This reference is cited in M.M. Ayoub, *The Qur’an and its Interpreters: The House of ‘Imrān*, 205-207.

Najran.²⁴⁴ Al-T abarsī reports that *Shī'ī* traditionists hold that this reference was to Jews of Madina.²⁴⁵

These Christian (and Jewish?) addressees are called to 'a common word' with Muslims. Al-T abarī understands this 'common word' to be a 'just word'. This just word is a testimony: 'there is no god but God'. Al-T abarī explains that since the Christians have committed acts of rebellion against God by taking their rabbis (sic) and monks, as well as Christ, son of Mary, as Lords instead of God, they are called to 'a common word', ie to return in justice to the divinely ordained belief in the oneness of God and cease the rebellion.²⁴⁶ The implication is that by associating created beings with God, Christians have made lawful what was made unlawful by God. Christian have usurped the rights of God by making legal that which God has made illegal. The legal implication becomes clear in the explanations of exegetes like al-Qurt ubī²⁴⁷ and

²⁴⁴ Muh ammad b. 'Alī b. Muh ammad al-Shawkānī, Vol. 1 of *Fath al-Qādir al-Jāmi' bayna Fannay al-Riwāyah wa al-Dirāyah fī 'Ilm al-Tafsīr* [Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1393/1973], 348-349. This reference is cited in M.M. Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters: The House of 'Imrān*, 207.

²⁴⁵ Abū 'Alī al-Fadl b. Al-Hasan al-T abarsī, Vol. 3 of *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* [Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-H ayāt, 1380/1961], 104-105. This reference is cited in M.M. Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters: The House of 'Imrān*, 207.

²⁴⁶ Abū Ja 'far Muh ammad b. Jarīr al-T abarī, Vol. 6 of *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, ed. Mah mūd Muh ammad and Ahmad Muh ammad Shākir, 486-489. This reference is cited in M.M. Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters: The House of 'Imrān*, 203.

²⁴⁷ Abū 'Abd Allāh Muh ammad b. Ahmad al-Ans āri al-Qurt ubī, Vol. 4 of *Al-Jāmi' li-Ah kām al-Qur'ān* [Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Arabī, 1387/1967], 105-106. This reference is cited in M.M. Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters: The House of 'Imrān*, 204-205.

al-Zamakhsharī.²⁴⁸ In the Muslim understanding the two dimensions of this fundamental disagreement between Christians and Muslims are that Christians associate created persons with God and make legal what God has made illegal. This is the context in which this particular verse (Q.3:64) is assumed to have been revealed. The Muslims' understanding of this text is shaped by the impact of these exegetical traditions. As ACW signatories are Muslim scholars and leaders their interpretation of the text can be assumed to be in the light of the exegetical tradition of the classical exegetes. The following section explains how ACW deals with this issue.

2.3.2.2 Invitation to a Common Word

King Abdullah II in his AIM pointed out that belief in one God is the meeting ground for Jews, Christians and Muslims. He did not develop his ideas in this regard in AIM. ACW takes up the issue.

It was shown in section 1.3 that the Muslim theologians in the early centuries of Islam concluded that the Christian understanding of God compromises the strict monotheistic idea of God. Lively polemics based on Greek philosophical terms flourished between Christians and

²⁴⁸ Abū al-Qāsim Jār Allāh Mah mūd ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī, Vol. 1 of *Al-Kashahāf 'an H aqā'iq al-Tanzīl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta'wīl* [Cairo: Muṣ ṭ afā al-Bābī al-H alabī, 1385/1966], 371. This reference is cited in M.M. Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters: The House of 'Imrān*, 205.

Muslims.²⁴⁹ Muslims argued that the understanding of God which Christians try to present in opposition to the Qur'anic presentation is riddled with errors. Christians and Muslims cannot really find a common ground in their explanations of God. Christians and Muslims cannot agree upon a common word unless the Christians abandon explicitly the Trinitarian understanding of God as shown in chapter 1 by reference to some Muslim writers.

Muslims of early centuries, as shown in chapter 1, reached a high level of sophistication in theological interaction with Christians. They studied Christian categories and arguments in depth and opposed them on rational grounds. It is said that contemporary Muslim scholars lack such sophistication in their interaction with Christians on matters concerning theology.²⁵⁰ Some scholars understand this lack of sophistication to be the result of self-isolation of Islam from Christianity.²⁵¹

However, among contemporary Muslim scholars, S.H. Nasr argues that Christianity and Islam can together explore some middle ground in matters concerning the 'essentials' of both religions with regard to belief in one God. He provides a methodological approach to such exploration.

²⁴⁹ Kate Zebiri, *Muslims and Christians: Face to Face*, 138.

²⁵⁰ E. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* [London: Duckworth, 1986], 11.

²⁵¹ C. Malik, *God and Man in Contemporary Islamic Thought* [Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1972], 88.

His approach is opposed to an academic approach that developed in Europe in the 19th century (Religionswissenschaft) in which religion is studied in a detached way. He associates himself with traditional schools that consider *tradition* as truth that embraces Supreme Knowledge that was revealed through several transmitting agencies to different religious traditions. This school argues that knowledge which is the fruit of revelation lies at the heart of religion.²⁵² This knowledge links the differences that emerge among various religious traditions. It illumines rites, rituals, symbols, and the faith of every religion including one's own and gives the key to penetrate and understand other religions neither reducing the significance of the other religions nor compromising one's faith. In this method plurality of religions is recognised. However, he resists firmly relativism that seeks to explain that all religions are different paths to one reality. The emphasis is placed on the Source not on the paths to the Source. It is not clear from the text whether such ideas influenced ACW but S.H. Nasr has been identified as a key person in the ACW team and he was one of the members of Muslim delegation to the Vatican.²⁵³ It must be clear that the vision and methodology of *Philosophia Perrennia* which S.H. Nasr follows could not be regarded as part of main stream orthodox Islam.

²⁵² S.H. Nasr, "The *Philosophia Perennia* and the Study of Religion," in F. Whaling, *The World's Religious Traditions, Current Perspective in Religious Studies* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1984], 182-83.

²⁵³ In the First seminar of Catholic-Muslim Forum held in Rome (November 4-6, 2008), S.H. Nasr played a key role and made a presentation on Christian-Muslim relations titled "We and You: Let us meet in God's love". See: S.H. Nasr, http://acommonword.com/en/attachments/107_Nasr-speech-to-Pope.pdf [accessed November 19, 2010].

ACW invites Christians to a common word, the belief in one God referring to “come to a common word between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God” in the Q.3:64. Muslims and Christians, though believing in one God, differ in their understanding of God. It remains to be seen what such an invitation entails theologically.

2.3.2.3 ACW affirms the Unity of God

ACW quotes both from the Bible (Deuteronomy 6:4, Mark 12:29) and the Qur’an (Q. 112:1-2) to affirm the unity of God. While referring to Q. 112 it cites “Say: He is God, the One! God, the Self-Sufficient Besought of all!” (Q. 112:1-2). This chapter entitled *al-Tawhīd* (‘The Unity’) is considered to be the essence of Islam. It stresses that God is one, who neither begets nor is begotten. The oneness of God is understood as being wholly other and the Christian idea of incarnation is unthinkable. The chapter challenges the way Christians understand the incarnation of the Word of God in Jesus. ACW does not explicitly indulge in polemics here. However, although ACW quotes only the first two verses, the implication is that the entire message of the whole chapter applies. This, in the light of traditional Muslim interpretations noted earlier gives the impression that ACW has not dealt with a number of theological issues.

2.3.2.4 ACW offers a minority exegesis

The authors of ACW offer a minority exegesis of Q. 3:64 by quoting one of the oldest and widely respected commentaries (*tafsir*) on the Qur'an—the *Jamī' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān* of Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 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, Muslims, Christians and Jews should be free to follow what God commanded them, and not have 'to prostrate before kings and the like'; for God says elsewhere in the Holy Qur'an: *Let there be no compulsion in religion.... (2:256)*.²⁵⁴

The selection of this interpretation shows potentially an openness and charity towards Christians, since other traditional interpretations are far less generous.²⁵⁵ For example:

... the well-known Qur'an commentary of al-Baydawi (d.1286 or later) interprets "that none of us shall take others for lords beside God" to mean "We do not say that 'Uzayr is the Son of God [an alleged Jewish claim, cf. 9:30], nor that the Messiah is the Son of God. We do not obey the [Jewish and Christian] religious leaders in what they forbid and make lawful without precedent..." Another medieval commentator Fakhr Al-Din al-Razi (d. 1209) explains that this verse mentions three things – worshipping none but God, not ascribing a partner to God and not taking lords beside God – to counter Christians who associate Christ with God and affirm three eternal and equal essences: Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ ACW, appendix 7, lines 398-403.

²⁵⁵ J. Hoover, "A Common Word: 'More positive and open, yet mainstream and orthodox'," *Theological Review* (Near East School of Theology) 30. vol. 1, (April 2009): 65.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

The choice of this interpretation raises many questions. How would other Muslims who know the majority interpretation of this verse react especially when ACW was sent to them for their counter signature? Given that more than 600 Muslims scholars signed the document it is still to be seen when some of them will give an account of their interpretation of Q. 3:64, balancing this minority view with majority. The selection of verses from the Bible without reference to the Christian tradition has already been noted. It would seem that this Muslim interpretation of this key verse does not bear the weight of Muslim opinion with it. It implies that the foundation laid by ACW is somewhat shaky.

2.6.2.5 ACW fails to acknowledge the differences between Christians and Muslims

Hoover addresses this point in his article.²⁵⁷ His argument can be summarised as follows: ACW observes that “the Unity of God, love of Him and love for neighbour” is the common ground on which Judaism, Christianity and Islam are built.²⁵⁸ They are essentials of revealed truth. All the prophets including Moses, Jesus and Muhammad taught these fundamental and essential truths, which underlie all true religions. Hoover argues that, ACW is saying that several religions – each with its

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 50-77.

²⁵⁸ ACW, appendix 7, lines 360-362.

own set of truths – can share these three truths in common. Thus, besides the three essential truths mentioned here, Christianity can hold other truths, like the Trinity and the incarnation and the redemption. The English version of ACW allows this freedom since it says that the same eternal truths underlie all true religions.

Hoover finds the Arabic version of ACW does not give freedom for this interpretation. The original Arabic text uses the phrase *al-dīn al-haqq bi-rummātihi*, which means, according to Hoover, *true religion in its entirety* is based on the three eternal truths. This particular phrase does not allow for additional truths besides the eternal and essential truths. At this juncture Hoover raises an important question: is Christianity, which holds other truths along with the eternal truths, false?

This raises a few more questions in the mind of the reader. First, when ACW in its English translation states that Unity of God is an essential truth shared by Christians and Muslims, how is this to be understood when the Arabic original uses *tawhīd*? Secondly, is a distinction again being drawn between ‘authentic’ Christians and ‘contemporary’ Christians who have moved away from the authentic teachings of Jesus as regards this essential truth? Thirdly, as this use of *tawhīd* constitutes the basic invitation of ACW to Christians to come to a Common Ground based on this essential truth, is it to be assumed that authors accept that the Christian doctrine of Trinity is compatible with

tawhīd or is something else going on here. Fourthly, given the explicit meaning of the Arabic original ‘in its entirety’ (bearing in mind that the document originated and circulated for counter signature by Muslim scholars in Arabic) why does the official English translation of ACW deliberately contain this ambiguity for its readers. This question is particularly acute given that the overwhelming majority of the Christian responses have been based on the English translation with only a few of the authors having a facility in Arabic.

To his own question: Is Christianity, which holds other truths along with the eternal truths, false? Not necessarily, answers Hoover. He bases his argument on a statement of ACW: “there is no minimising some of their *formal* differences.”²⁵⁹ He italicises the word ‘*formal*’. The use of the ‘formal’ instead of ‘essential’ makes clear that for ACW the differences between Islam and Christianity are only *formal*.²⁶⁰ This means that the doctrines of the Trinity, of the incarnation and of redemption in Christ are formal and are not essential. In other words, the formal differences do not challenge the essential truths. This may indicate the influence of the thinking of Nasr discussed earlier in this chapter. ACW appears to argue that Christianity and Islam can find a common ground based on

²⁵⁹ ACW, appendix 7, lines 351-352.

²⁶⁰ The differences between Christianity and Islam are considered to be formal in ACW. However, both ACW and Hoover who comments upon it do not define what they mean by ‘form’. For serious theological discussion there would be a need for clear definitions of terms such as ‘essential’ and ‘formal’ so that both Christian and Muslim readers can come to an assessment whether key, critical doctrines of Christianity, e.g. Trinity, Incarnation and Redemption can be adequately classified by the term formal.

the essentials of the two religions. However, the argument built on 'essentially same beliefs with formal differences' appears to be arbitrary since for Christians the Trinitarian understanding of God is the essence of their faith in the Unity of God. ACW does not acknowledge this difference.

It has been noted already that while quoting Q. 112, ACW refrains from quoting Q. 112:3-4. Moreover the authors of ACW, by choosing a commentary that does not convey the opinion of the majority of commentators and arguing that Christianity and Islam believe in the same essential truths, ACW does not indicate the differences between these two faiths openly. However, as has been shown ACW neither acknowledges the specificities of Christian faith such as the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Redemption as some thing essential to Christian faith nor respects the full breadth of Christian tradition when referring to the verses of the gospels. As a result ACW does not do justice to the faith of Christians with whom it aims to improve relations. It should be said that the religious truths expressed and lived out by different religious communities are often complex. In such cases, an interpretation of a religion by someone from another religion has to be carefully nuanced. ACW's approach towards Christian faith is deficient. This analysis shows that the ACW has walked a tight rope. It affirms that Christians and Muslims believe in the unity of God without acknowledging what it means to Christians and thus it remains very much within the boundaries of traditionally held Islamic theological and

intellectual positions with regard to Christian belief in the Unity of God. The argument of ACW with regard to the dual commandments of love as a link between the Bible and the Qur'an should be seen as an important and novel effort of the authors of ACW to bring out the language of love that is hidden in the Qur'an and *h adīth*.

2.3.2.6 A way forward

The most important point appears to be that ACW emphasises the importance of living the practical aspects of faith in one God. Believing in the oneness of God is also an attachment to the One with our whole being and therefore includes love of the God and, further, love of one's neighbour;²⁶¹ it also demands that believers strive for justice and peace among themselves and in the world.²⁶²

ACW indicates a way forward, by insisting that peace between Christians and Muslims will contribute to meaningful peace in the world. ACW juxtaposes some important verses: "Lo! God enjoineeth justice and kindness, and giving to kinsfolk, and forbiddeth lewdness and

²⁶¹ S.H. Nasr, *A COMMON WORD: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbour*, 110.

²⁶² When Christian and Muslim authors from Africa, South-and South East Asia contributed their response to ACW they chose to call the document 'We have Justice in Common'.

abomination and wickedness. He exhorteth you in order that ye may take heed” (Q. 16:90). And, “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). ACW invites both Christians and Muslims to examine how they live their call to peace on the basis of such verses from the Qur’an and the Bible, but the term justice is notably absent. It should be noted that justice is the foundation of peace and any work for peace is fundamentally the work for justice.²⁶³ ACW warns both groups of believers with these words: “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”²⁶⁴ and invites them: “Let us vie with each other only in righteousness and good works.”²⁶⁵

2.4 A summary

Documents like AM and AIM put forward faith in God as the common ground for Christians and Muslims. ACW that came after these documents took the topic further forward. However it has its limitations. It does not carry along with it the full breadth of Christian and Muslim traditions while commenting on the texts of the Bible and the Qur’an.

²⁶³ It is worth mentioning here that Pope John Paul II titled his message for the World Day of Peace [1 January 2002] with “NO PEACE WITHOUT JUSTICE ...NO JUSTICE WITHOUT FORGIVENESS”. See: Pope John Paul II, MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS *POPE JOHN PAUL II* FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE WORLD DAY OF PEACE, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_20011211_xxxv-world-day-for-peace_en.html [Accessed January 20, 2010].

²⁶⁴ ACW, appendix 7, lines 473-475.

²⁶⁵ ACW, appendix 7, lines 481-482.

However, by making the Biblical and the Qur'anic scriptures engage with one another, it invites both Christians and Muslims to learn from one another and examine their own actions in the light of mutual commitment. Though, ACW is marked with openness it has serious ambiguities especially when it employs Christian vocabulary in its English translations which do not necessarily carry similar theological meaning in its Arabic original. One way of removing these would be for the signatories to explain about their understanding of key Christian beliefs such as the Trinity and Incarnation. Will they acknowledge that the Christian worship of Jesus as the Risen Lord does not do away with their faith in the unity of God? ACW by highlighting the language of love in Qur'an and the Bible has provided Christians and Muslims an opportunity to remain 'side by side' to work out the ethical implication of their faith. In order to build relations 'face to face' adherents of the two traditions should acknowledge and respect the way 'truth' being believed and celebrated in one's own as well as in the other faith community.

Chapter 3

ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONSES TO ACW

Introduction

An analysis of ACW in its immediate historical and textual context was presented in the last chapter. ACW in its quest to improve relations between Christians and Muslims shuns the path of open polemics. It was noted that certain ambiguities blur its intention and that the signatories need to explain their stand on some of the theologically contentious issues that ACW touches upon.

It has been noted in the introduction that it is important to see how a selected sample of Christian responses recognise the newness that ACW tries to bring into Christian-Muslim understanding. ACW's contribution to Christian-Muslim relations and the Christian community's response

and comment on ACW together will help one to assess the positive impact of ACW initiative in Christian-Muslim relations.

This chapter aims to analyse a select sample of Christian responses. It will follow the same thematic approach without neglecting any related themes that are discussed in the responses. The focus of the chapter is to draw out the quality of discussion found in the responses and to gather their reflections.

The Choice of Christian responses

ACW prompted responses from Christians worldwide. The official website of ACW gives 71 Christian responses to ACW.²⁶⁶ Among the respondents there are theologians, religious leaders, academics, popular writers, peace activists and political leaders. Since this dissertation is theological in nature, the theological responses, by C. W. Troll,²⁶⁷ D.

²⁶⁶ See the full list of responses in Appendix 8. It is curious to notice that the first response that comes from D. Ford of Cambridge University is signed on October 10, 2007 that is even before ACW was publically launched. ACW was launched on October 13, 2007. The reason for this seems likely that D. Ford probably had access to a copy of ACW before its launch, since he and T. Winter, one of the main contributors to ACW, are colleagues at Cambridge University. There were 26 responses registered in the month of October 2007. Thereafter there is a slow trickle of responses month up until October 2009. Some respondents have multiple entries e.g. press interviews. It gives an impression that most responses that came soon after the publication of ACW are rather a gesture of appreciation than a studied comment.

²⁶⁷ C.W. Troll is at present Hon. Professor for the study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations at the Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule St Georgen, Theologische Fakultät SJ, Frankfurt AM. He studied Arabic and Islam at the Université St Joseph in Beirut (1961-63) and , between 1966 and 1975, Urdu and Persian Literature (B.A. Hon.) and Islam in South Asia (Ph. D) at SOAS, London University. From 1976 until 1988 he was teaching Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations at Vidyajyoti Institute of Religious Studies in Delhi. From 1988 until 1003 he was Senior lecturer at the Centre for the study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations in

Madigan,²⁶⁸ and S. Khalil²⁶⁹ (theologians specialising in study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations), Archbishop R. Williams²⁷⁰ (a world-class theologian in addition to being the archbishop of Canterbury), and the signatories of the Yale Document, will be considered.²⁷¹

Birmingham. From 1993 until 1999 he was professor of Islamic Studies at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome and regular Guest professor at the Faculty of Theology at Ankara University. From 1990 to 2005 he has been member of the Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (Vatican City) and since 1999 he is member of the Sub-commission for Interreligious Dialogue of the German Bishop's Conference. Presently he serves the General of the Jesuits Order as his adviser on Christian-Muslim Relations.

²⁶⁸ D. Madigan studied and taught Islam in India, Pakistan, Egypt, Turkey, Italy and United States. He was the founding director of the Institute for The Study of Religions and Cultures at the Gregorian University, and currently directs a PhD program in Religious Pluralism at Georgetown University, USA.

²⁶⁹ S. Khalil (born 1938 in Cairo, Egypt) is a scholar of Islam, Semitologist, Orientalist and Catholic theologian based in Lebanon. He studied Philosophy, Theology and Islamic studies and graduated with a thesis on oriental Catholic theology and Islamic studies. He taught for 12 years at the Papal Oriental Institute in Rome. In 1986, he moved to Lebanon and teaches at the Saint Joseph University, specialising in Catholic theology and Islamic studies. He established a research institute CEDRAC in Beirut, which collects literature on the Christian heritage in the Near East.

He is also a visiting professor at the Papal Oriental Institute and at the Centre Sèvres (Jesuit Faculty of Theology and Philosophy) in Paris. He holds the same post at the Maqasid Institute in Beirut, where he teaches the Muslim students about Christianity. He has been a visiting professor at the University of Graz, Tokyo, Al-Azhar University, and Georgetown University, at the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Washington, D.C..

²⁷⁰ Archbishop R. Williams studied theology at Wadham College, Oxford, where he took his D Phil in 1975. In 1983 he was appointed as a lecturer in divinity at the University of Cambridge. In 1984 he became dean and chaplain of Clare College, Cambridge and, in 1986, at the very young age of 36, he was appointed to the Lady Margaret Professorship of Divinity at the University of Oxford. He awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1989.

In 2002 he was announced as the successor to George Carey as Archbishop of Canterbury - the senior bishop in the Church of England - and *primus inter pares* of the bishops of the Anglican Communion. He was enthroned on 27 February 2003 as the 104th Archbishop of Canterbury. He speaks or reads 11 languages: English, Welsh, Spanish, French, German, Russian, Biblical Hebrew, Syriac, Latin and both Ancient (koine) and Modern Greek.

²⁷¹ A short initial appreciation signed by a group of theologian from Yale University who as a group have limited professional training in Islamic Studies.

As the dissertation focuses on ‘the use of the Bible in ACW’ and ‘faith in one God’ the responses that focus on these two themes have been chosen for analysis in order to evaluate ACW.²⁷² Troll discusses both these themes. Madigan discusses the unity of God and love for God and neighbour thoroughly. has some valuable comments on the use of the Bible in ACW. All three of them write from a Catholic point of view. As noted earlier ACW followed the publication of the OL-38 one year later. The Pope did not respond to either OL-38 or ACW.²⁷³ In reference to ACW Jean-Louis Cardinal Tauran, then the head of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, noted that the Pope cannot sign a collective response to Muslims due to Vatican protocol.²⁷⁴ As a result the Catholic responses to ACW come mainly from Catholic scholars who are involved in Christian-Muslim relations.²⁷⁵ Williams’ response is

²⁷² It should be noted that most of the responses to ACW are brief and do not substantially discuss the theological issues raised in ACW.

²⁷³ On November 19, 2007 Tarcisio Cardinal Bertone, the Secretary of State sent a message to Prince Ghazi conveying the Pope’s gratitude and appreciation for ACW. See: <http://www.acommonword.com/lib/downloads/letter-from-the-vatican.pdf> [accessed on November 5, 2010].

²⁷⁴ T. Henegan, “Vatican says Pope cannot sign collective response to Muslims,” FaithWorld: Religion, faith, ethics, entry posted on October 23, 2007, <http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/2007/10/23/vatican-says-pope-cannot-sign-response-to-muslims/> [accessed November 5, 2010].

²⁷⁵ On different occasions Cardinal Tauran made statements about ACW. Most of his comments are brief and do not adequately touch upon the theological issues raised in ACW A long lecture that he gave at Heythrop College, London touched upon Dialogue in general. It cannot be taken as a precise comment on ACW. The responses of Troll, Madigan and Khalil however, focussed on the theological issues that are raised in ACW. Hence these responses were chosen for detailed study. For information, the responses that Cardinal Tauran gave at various occasions are listed here.

chosen because it substantially touches upon both the above mentioned themes and suggests some ways forward.²⁷⁶ The Yale Document comes from a North American liberal Protestant tradition. This document focuses on what is common with regard to faith in one God without emphasising the distinctions between Christian and Muslim faiths. The responses therefore represent the Catholic, Anglican and Protestant traditions.

In section 3.1, a brief summary of these responses will be presented. In section 3.2, discuss the handling of the particular themes. In the final section 3.3, the way in which ACW is evaluated by the chosen respondents is discussed.

- J.L. Tauran, "Interreligious dialogue – a risk or an opportunity?" *A Common Word*, May 27, 2008, under "Vatican cardinal discusses the risks and opportunities presented by interreligious dialogue at London theological college," <http://www.acommonword.com/index.php?page=media&item=496> [accessed November 5, 2010].
- J.L. Tauran and A.B. Murad Muslims, "Press Release" *A Common Word*, March 06, 2008, under "The Vatican agree to a new World Muslim-Catholic Forum based on A Common Word," <http://www.acommonword.com/lib/vatican/The-Vatican-Press-Release.pdf> [accessed November 5, 2010].
- Zenit, "Cardinal praises Muslims for 'Eloquent' Letter," <http://www.zenit.org/article-20787?l=english> [accessed November 5, 2010].
- CNA, "Muslim leaders write to Pope, Cardinal Tauran calls letter a "very encouraging sign," http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/muslim_leaders_write_to_pope_cardinal_tauran_calls_letter_a_very_encouraging_sign/ [accessed November 5, 2010].

²⁷⁶ Williams' response was written subsequent to of an international and ecumenical consultation called by the archbishop of Canterbury. Williams writes: "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." Williams, appendix 12, line 21-24.

3.1 A brief summary of these responses

3.1.1 C.W. Troll:²⁷⁷ “Towards Common Ground between Christian and Muslims.”

Troll has been engaged in Christian-Muslim dialogue for half a century. In his response to ACW, he identifies three significant features. First, he finds that ACW uses Bible verses and comments positively upon them.²⁷⁸ Secondly, he finds ACW highly significant for its remarkable attempt to reach a broad-based consensus amongst various groups of Muslims.²⁷⁹ He recognises also the wide ranges of Christian addressees.²⁸⁰ Thirdly, he remarks that in ACW a potential for a wide ranging dialogue seems to be developing.²⁸¹ He sees ACW against the immediate background of the Regensburg address of Pope Benedict XVI

²⁷⁷ See Appendix no. 9 for the full text of Troll’s article posted on the ACW website on October 22, 2007. This is an immediate response 9 days after the publication of ACW.

²⁷⁸ Troll, appendix 9, lines 63-64.

²⁷⁹ Troll, appendix 9, lines 29-38 and 46-47.

²⁸⁰ Troll, appendix 9, lines 11-14. Troll writes that ACW is “something like an intra-Islamic ecumenical movement.” However, he also brings to the reader’s attention that some important names are missing. He writes: “Some names are notable for their absence, including those of Yusuf al-Qaradawi and especially Tariq Ramadan, both associated in different ways with the Muslim Brotherhood. Also missing is Muhammad Saiyid Tantawi, the Sheikh of al-Azhar, the influential Sunni institution in Cairo.” Troll, appendix 9, lines 39-42. His comments are a reminder that the criterion of selection of the initial 138 signatories is not made public. No information has been given about which, if any, Muslims scholars were asked to sign but refused. Similarly there is no list available to indicate whether certain Muslim scholars were given the opportunity to sign. The initial signatories from India are largely unknown in the area of interreligious dialogue. Persons like Maulana Wahidudin Khan and Asghar Ali Engineer are missing from the list of signatories. Maulana Khan is a well known personality in the area of Inter-faith relations in India. His al-Risala movement attracts a large number of educated people that includes a good number of non-Muslims. Similarly Ashghar Ali Engineer directs an institute for Study of Religion and Culture. He conducts regular workshops on social cohesion, conflict resolution and interfaith relations.

²⁸¹ Troll, appendix 9, lines 10-11.

and OL-38.²⁸² For Troll ACW initiates a new momentum in Christian-Muslim relations.

In his response Troll suggests the following areas for deeper exploration so that the momentum in Christian-Muslim relations initiated by ACW can be carried forward. First, Troll says that the unity of God as a common element between Christians and Muslims needs to be approached carefully for when Christians talk about God, they talk about one who “is known and worshiped as Father, Son and Spirit”.²⁸³ Muslims do not accept the Trinitarian understanding of God. There are fundamental differences in the understanding of God between these two religious traditions. So, he says, “it is important for Muslims approaching dialogue with Christians to understand that this Trinitarian monotheism is central to Christian belief and worship and is not an aspect of Christianity that can be negotiated away”.²⁸⁴ He cautions that future conversations need to take an approach “which takes utterly seriously the points at which Christians and Muslims differ and does not encourage a diplomatic evasion of these points for the sake of a dialogue which would suffer as a result”.²⁸⁵

²⁸² Troll, appendix 9, lines 7-11.

²⁸³ Troll, appendix 9, lines 188-120.

²⁸⁴ Troll, appendix 9, lines 119-121.

²⁸⁵ Troll, appendix 9, lines 127-129.

Secondly, although he appreciates the dual commandment to love as a theological basis for dialogue, he feels that this base is inadequate to meet the realities on the ground.²⁸⁶ He says that even if theologians of the three Abrahamic faiths agree upon the meaning of the dual commandment, it would be difficult to put it into practise in plural communities.²⁸⁷ His views will be discussed in the later in this chapter.

3.1.2 D. Madigan: “A Common Word between Us and You – Some Initial Reflections.”

Madigan published his response on January 13, 2008 in *Thinking Faith*,²⁸⁸ the on-line journal of the British Jesuits.²⁸⁹ He wrote his reflections for general readers who are interested in Christian-Muslim relations. Later he amended his article with the addition of subtitles on October 17, 2008. What Madigan finds significant in ACW and the points he highlights for future Christian-Muslim relations will be considered in this section.

²⁸⁶ Troll, appendix 9, lines 130-131.

²⁸⁷ Troll, appendix 9, lines 130-137.

²⁸⁸ D. Madigan, “A Common Word Between Us and You: Some initial reflections,” *Thinking Faith*, http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20080118_9.htm [accessed on November 4, 2010]. See the final version (October 17, 2008) of his response as given in A Common Word web page in Appendix 10.

²⁸⁹ This online journal publishes articles on faith, culture, art and social justice.

Madigan, reflecting on ACW's approach in emphasising common elements in Christian and Muslim beliefs, observes that "one might read their letter as a first collective Muslim response to *Nostra Aetate* [NA] (the declaration on the relationship of the Catholic Church to non-Christian religions),²⁹⁰ 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".²⁹¹ NA insists that what believers of world religions have in common and what draws them to fellowship should be examined in order to build bridges between them, since "one is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the earth".²⁹² The opening paragraph of NA makes clear the importance of promoting unity through common elements. The paragraph reads:

In our time, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, the Church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions. In her task of promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations, she considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship among them.²⁹³

²⁹⁰ The text of *Nostra Aetate* can be found in *The Documents of Vatican II: With Notes and Comments by Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Authorities*, ed. W.M. Abbot, trans. ed. J. Gallagher [New York: America Press, 1966], 660-668.

²⁹¹ Madigan, appendix 10, lines 47-50. The dimension of justice is absent from ACW. This missing dimension has been highlighted in a conference on run by Konrad Adenauer Stiftung at Lake Como in October 2009. The outcome of the conference is published entitled *We Have Justice in Common: Christian and Muslim voices from Asia and Africa*.

²⁹² NA no.1

²⁹³ Ibid.

Madigan does not say whether he reads ACW as a collective response to NA. He merely says that some might read ACW as a collective response to NA. However in his response he refers to NA six times. In the first reference, he says NA focussed on things Christians and Muslims have in common (ACW does the same).²⁹⁴ The second reference was quoted in the beginning of this section.²⁹⁵ Thirdly, he says that both ACW and NA are important touchstones in the history of Christian-Muslim relations.²⁹⁶ Fourthly, he says that since both ACW and NA focus on positive elements, they are useful initiatives and they have grown out of reflection and experience.²⁹⁷ Fifthly, he notes that as NA had to struggle to be accepted by Catholics; similarly the signatories of ACW will have to make great efforts to for the document to be accepted as authoritative amongst Muslims.²⁹⁸ Finally he declares that NA, “is sometimes dismissed as just outdated pastoral advice appropriate for the optimistic 60’s, but hopelessly out of touch with twenty-first century realities” by some members of the Catholic Church.²⁹⁹

Madigan argues that ACW offers certain common elements; such as unity of God, love of God [as complete devotion to God], and love of

²⁹⁴ Madigan, appendix 10, lines 28 and 236-240.

²⁹⁵ ACW as a collective response to NA

²⁹⁶ Madigan, appendix 10, line 239.

²⁹⁷ Madigan, appendix 10, lines 240-241.

²⁹⁸ Madigan, appendix 10, lines 58-60.

²⁹⁹ Madigan, appendix 10, lines 40-41.

neighbour, that could promote fellowship between Christians and Muslims. He draws attention to what has already been noted in chapter 2, that the Amman project tries to “develop an authoritative consensus on what it means to be Muslims in our time”.³⁰⁰ Although Muslims do not have a structure like that of ecumenical councils, the Amman project can be seen as trying to develop a broad based consensus.

However, it must be noted here: on the one hand, that ACW is signed by Muslim scholars from several Muslim traditions thus making ACW an intra-Muslim initiative which cannot be said about NA which comes from the Catholic Church. ACW draws from the Bible and the Qur’an scriptures to build up a common platform, whereas the theology of NA is strictly based on the Christian scriptures and Catholic tradition. On the other hand, as was noted in chapter 2 one has neither access to the earlier drafts of ACW nor the process of discussion towards the final signing of ACW, which leaves the document open for the signatories to interpret it differently. NA is a solemn and official declaration of the Catholic Church which was signed by the bishops attending the Council. It should be stressed that the processes through which Vatican II and the Amman group presented NA and ACW respectively are entirely different and cannot be compared.³⁰¹ Madigan’s response does not make this sufficiently clear.

³⁰⁰ Madigan, appendix 10, lines 51-52.

A consideration of the nature of NA and ACW indicates that NA proposed that what is common between Christianity and world religions could bring about a better understanding between people, which would promote unity and love among all people. NA says “upon the Muslims, too, the Church looks with esteem.”³⁰² The common elements in Christian and Muslim beliefs such as prayer, almsgiving and fasting are highlighted in NA. NA is pastoral in its approach towards Muslims. Its interest is not make theologically weighty comments about Islam as a religion. Thus NA’s approach towards Muslims is though momentous only tentative as is ACW in its approach to Christians.

It should be noted in the present context that Pope Benedict XVI’s Regensburg lecture appears to have influenced Muslim scholars towards a sustained effort towards engaging primarily with the Pope in OL-38

³⁰¹ For an introduction to and analysis of the history behind the text of NA, see J.M. Oesterreicher, “Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions: Introduction and Commentary,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Vol.3, gen. ed. H. Vorgrimler, [New York: Herder, 1969], 1-154. M. Barnes writes that in the evolution of *Nostra Aetate* five texts need to be distinguished. The very first ‘preliminary study’ of 1961, *Dectetum de Iudaeis*, never reached the Council as it was withdrawn to avoid political embarrassment following what Oesterreicher calls the ‘Wardi affair’. The first draft on the schema of ecumenism titled as *De Catholicorum habitudine ad non-christianos et maxime ad Iudaeos* was debated by the Council on November 18, 1963. The next new draft that contained certain sections of the ecumenism degree entitled as *De Iudaeis et de non-christianis* was debated by the Council on September 28-30, 1964. The next text, *De Ecclesiae habitudine ad religions non-christianas*, was prepared in the third session of the Council and was accepted on November 20, 1964. The final text, *Declaratio de Ecclesiae habitudine ad religions non-christianas*, was presented on October 14, 1964 and promulgated on October 28, 1964. For a brief exposition of the evolution of NA, See: M. Barnes, *Theology and Dialogue of Religions* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, digital printing 2009], 35-37.

³⁰² W.M. Abbot, ed. and J. Gallagher, trans., *The Documents of Vatican II: With Notes and Comments by Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Authorities*, 663.

and with Christian leaders and Christians in general in ACW. In Regensburg address Pope Benedict XVI raised a larger debate with regard to the role of reason in Islamic discourses on faith and mission (*dāwa*). He employed an example from medieval history. The example is polemic in nature and does not really contribute to modern day religious conversation. Moreover some of his comments specific to Qur'anic exegesis did not reflect facts [cf. Footnote 157]. Thus his critique and hard questions did not appear to reflect main stream Islam as it is being seen today by Muslim scholars. The OL-38 pointed such shortcomings in the text of the Regensburg address accurately. Without any further response from the Holy See, after a year of OL-38's publication the 138 scholars signed ACW prepared by a core group of Muslim scholars addressing Christians around the world through their leaders.

Moreover, one cannot miss out the words of ACW:

In the light of what we have seen to be necessarily implied and evoked by the prophet Muhammad's 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 power over all things'*, we can now perhaps understand the words *'the best that I have said myself and the prophets who 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 on the Bible. That is to say, in other words, that the prophet Muhammad was perhaps, through inspiration, restating and alluding to the Bible's First Commandment.³⁰³

³⁰³ ACW, appendix 7, lines 283-294.

These words engage Pope Benedict XVI directly with regard to his understanding of Prophet Muhammad. The Pope, in his Regensburg lecture, based on his quote from the medieval dialogue implied that violence was at the heart of the mission of Muhammad. The signatories pointed out that the Pope is mistaken since at the heart of prophet's mission there is no violence but a proclamation that God is love as was the case of Jesus and other prophets.

However, as it has been shown in the last chapter the signatories of ACW does allow themselves to be limited to the concerns raised by the Regensburg lecture but opted for a broad based approach by choosing to focus on elements that are common to both faiths. In this context some might speculate that ACW with its focus on the love of God displays certain influences from an acquaintance with *Deus Caritas Est*.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ Pope while addressing the participants gathered for the seminar organised by the Catholic-Muslim Forum on November 6, 2008 at Clementine Hall said: "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." Pope Benedict XVI, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20081106_cath-islamic-leaders_en.html [accessed November 10, 2010]

Madigan draws attention to two further significant perspectives of ACW. He says that the current situation is seen by many as a struggle between two incompatible civilizations; namely, the Islamic civilization and Western civilisation. The attitude of many in such a struggle is, “winner takes it all”.³⁰⁵ But he finds that ACW envisions a common future where both civilisations can mutually prosper. Secondly, he is

Also See: Pope Benedict’s speech outside the King Hussein Mosque in Amman on May 2, 2009. In his address Pope Benedict XVI acknowledged the support of the Royal Family to several interfaith initiatives and praised especially the ongoing work of the Royal Institutes for Inter-faith Studies and for Islamic Thought. He said: “... the *Amman Message* of 2004, the *Amman Interfaith Message* of 2005, and the more recent *Common Word* letter which 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).” Pope Benedict XVI, <http://cnsblog.wordpress.com/2009/05/09/pope-benedicts-speech-outside-the-king-hussein-mosque-in-amman/> [accessed November 2, 2010].

T. Cardinal Bertone writes: “Mindful of the context of his (Pope Benedict XVI’s) Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (‘God is Love’), His holiness was particularly impressed by the attention given in the Letter (ACW) to the twofold commandment to love God and one’s neighbour.” Bertone’s communication is dated November 19, 2007 with the following data: Secreteria di Stato: N. 7311/07/RS. This document is available at <http://www.acommonword.com/lib/downloads/letter-from-the-vatican.pdf> [accessed November 5, 2010].

ACW, Khalil writes: “speaking of ‘love of God’ is a novelty. Perhaps it is even an able way of referring to Pope Benedict’s first encyclical (*Deus Caritas Est*). It certainly shows a desire to draw to the Christian way of speaking, even if at the same time there is the risk of taking two meanings from the same work.” Khalil, lines 96-99.

Troll writes: “The date of the publication of ‘*Deus Caritas Est*’, the first encyclical letter of Pope Benedict XVI, as well as its content suggest that Muslims attentive to developments not only in the modern world generally but also specifically in Christianity and in its especially the Catholic Church, would have felt challenged by the brilliant effort of the Pope to express the essence of the Christian message and the summary of all its teaching. Faced with an *umma* that certainly appears to be mainly concerned with political power and this-worldly objectives and which in fact gets into the headlines mainly through the activities of its extremists, not a few Muslims, among whom mainly the more intelligent and far-sighted ones among them, turn away in disgust and feel attracted by groups and interpretations of Islam that are truly spiritual and genuinely ethical. It is to Muslims with such aspirations that the authors of ACW address themselves, I guess. They want to reassure themselves and many other Muslims that the highest ideal of Christian teaching and its summary as expressed in the ‘*Deus Caritas Est*’ are central to the Islamic message also. And they are of course convinced that Islam has received from God better means to implement this teaching on the double commandment of love more effectively in the real world that Christians have been able to do it.” Troll, e-mail message to author, November 7, 2010.

³⁰⁵ Madigan, appendix 10, line 11.

appreciative of the authors of ACW for offering a text to which a broad range of Muslim scholars could subscribe.

Madigan finds that ACW essentially carries forward Christian-Muslim relations by providing a theological basis for it. He writes, "... resolution of our conflicts lies in finding a common theological basis that can ground our mutual commitments and give them an authority beyond the calculations of temporary expediency".³⁰⁶ ACW provides unity of God, love of God, and love of neighbour as a theological basis for Christian-Muslim relations. This offer of a theological base for interfaith relations is not an invitation to a pious talk. The authors invite Christians to consider their mutual commitments in order to work for mutual understanding and to work together for justice and peace in the world.³⁰⁷ He appreciates the seriousness with which Muslims have approached Christians in ACW. He writes:

...the group of scholars behind *A Common Word* are ignorant neither of the breadth and depth of the Islamic tradition, nor of Christianity... 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.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁶ Madigan, appendix 10, lines 14-17.

³⁰⁷ The element of justice is not as prominent in ACW as Madigan's comment would suggest.

³⁰⁸ Madigan, appendix 10, lines 72-80.

3.1.3 S. Khalil: “The Letter of 138 Muslim scholars to the Pope and Christian Leaders.”³⁰⁹

Khalil recognises that “there is a lot of good”³¹⁰ in ACW and points out salient feature such as the use of the Bible, “attention to Christian vocabulary”,³¹¹ and “a great convergence between Muslim currents”.³¹² He also regards ACW as a concerted move towards a consensus among the Muslims with regard to their relations with Christians.

Referring to the title of ACW that has been taken from the Qur’an (Q. 3:64), he comments that “Muhammad says to the Christians in the Koran (sic): when he sees that he cannot reach agreement with them, then he says: Come let us agree on at least one common ground: 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”.³¹³ Khalil refers to the Qur’an as the words of Muhammad. This traditional Christian view does not help improve relations for it is well know that Muslims always while referring to the words of the Qur’an either say: ‘the Quran says’ or ‘God in the Qur’an says’ as they hold that every word of the Qur’an was revealed by God. Khalil’s language may be entirely inconsonant with scholarly study of the Qur’an from the perspective of a Book that is

³⁰⁹ This response was published in Asia News on October 17, 2007 i.e. four days after the launch of ACW. His response see appendix 11. The line numbers are added by the researcher.

³¹⁰ Khalil, appendix 11, line 3.

³¹¹ Khalil, appendix 11, line 4.

³¹² Khalil, appendix 11, line 4.

³¹³ Khalil, appendix 11, lines 53-57.

believed to be the Word of God by Muslims. ACW too maintains a similar approach and Khalil highlights it stating:

Quoting from the Koran they say ‘God said’, as does every good Muslim. When they quote versus from the Bible, they only say ‘as it is found in the New Testament’, ‘as it is read in the Gospel’, etc... Which means that they use, in terms of the Bible, a more scholarly studious approach, while for the Koran they use the terminology of a believer in Islam.³¹⁴

Khalil considers ACW to be a positive step for two reasons. First, ACW “takes for granted that the Bible is the word of God” and comments upon the idea of ‘heart’ found in Pauline literature positively.³¹⁵ Khalil terms the approach of ACW towards the Bible as novel. He finds that the vocabulary used in ACW is a Christian vocabulary.³¹⁶ The use of the words ‘neighbour’ and ‘love’, he says “certainly shows a desire to draw near to the Christian way of speaking” since the word “love” is rarely used in the Koran.³¹⁷

³¹⁴ Khalil, appendix 11, lines 114-118. It is of course the position of the Muslim scholars with regard to the Bible that it is the work of human authors thus at least in part deviating from the pure word of God revealed to Moses, Jesus and others. Thus the authors of ACW are being careful not to commit themselves to any divine authenticity in the New Testament. A reference to an intellectual debate on this subject could be of some interest here. Al-Ash’arī argued on the scriptural authority [For anything which We have willed, We but say the Word, ‘Be’, and it is. Q. 16:40] that the Qur’an is God’s speech, and it is impossible to that God’s speech is spoken to. See: A.J. Arberry, *Revelation and Reason in Islam* [London: Routledge, 2008], 24.

³¹⁵ Khalil, appendix 11, line 124. In the light of the work in the present study it is hard to see the justification for this position.

³¹⁶ Khalil, appendix 11, line 81.

³¹⁷ Khalil, appendix 11, line 81. The word love is used in the Qur’an less centrally than in the Christian tradition and it does not always bear the same connotation of unconditionality that it does in Christianity. See the list of the Qur’anic verses on love in Appendix 15.

Secondly, Khalil contends that though faith in one God and faith in Muhammad as an apostle of God are the two key elements of Muslim (*shahadah*) faith, ACW quoting Q. 3:64 affirms only the first part, the oneness of God without commenting upon the second part that deals with the prophethood of Muhammad. While Troll highlights the place of Muhammad in ACW,³¹⁸ Khalil points out that ACW does not give attention to Muhammad in relations with Christians. It should be noted that ACW indeed gives certain attention to Muhammad who follows Christ and reiterates the teachings of Jesus [see page 126]. However, Muhammad is not the key to ACW. ACW intends to build up conversation around elements that common to both faiths.

He has a suggestion and two critical remarks. Like Troll he suggests that Christian-Muslim relations should have a universal foundation like natural law and they should not be based on the Bible and the Qur'an. He explains his stand saying that in ACW excerpts from sacred texts are paralleled to find a common foundation, but, he asks, what about the texts in the Qur'an which contradict Christian faith! He finds such foundation could be ambiguous. He argues that natural law as a common basis for a common ethic can be accepted by all and on which every one can enter into dialogue with all.³¹⁹

³¹⁸ Troll writes: "A crucial point to bear in mind is that for this document and its authors the absolute criterion for the correct understanding of love of God and neighbour lies in Muhammad..." (Troll, appendix 9, lines 83-86).

³¹⁹ Troll and Khalil argue for natural law as a common foundation. Troll reasons thus: "...even if theologians from the three faiths could agree on the central

He has two critical remarks on ACW. First, he thinks that ACW has used a political approach in dialogue.³²⁰ He finds ACW arguing that reaching an agreement between 55% of the world's population, Muslims and Christians could almost impose peace in the world. It is a tactical and political approach, where as Khalil argues that it should be more rational and thus universal. It is clear that Khalil notices a risk in beginning only from a religious basis: in the case of ACW, an argument for peace from certain selected verses from the Qur'an and Bible. Since he considers religion as only part of human life, beginning from a religious basis would restrict the full light of human experience.³²¹ His experience of living in West Asia as a member of minority Christian community seems to have influenced his assessment of ACW. What he fails to consider is religious experiences can transcend what is known and open up people to wider realities. One can cite the example of Mohan Das Karam Chand

meaning of the double love-commandment, there would still be enormous differences to consider when it comes to putting into effect these commandments in the concrete, here-and-now reality of plural societies.” (Troll, appendix 9, lines 130-134).

Khalil reasons in the following way: “On coming to the content of the letter my impression is that by staying at this level it is quite easy to reach agreement. The method being used is to choose excerpts from sacred texts that can be paralleled. In the Koran there are texts that are a contradiction of Christianity, but they chose those which are closer and more similar. This is an important step but if we remain on this level, we risk casting a dialogue based on ambiguities. In any case as a first step it is useful to highlight our common foundations.

Even in the Christian tradition there is a search for a common basis with other religions, as well as cultures. This basis, from the Christian point of view, is not based on the Bible or Koran, because this would exclude non-believers. The common basis is natural law, the Commandments seen as the natural laws, a common ethics accepted even by atheists.” (Khalil, appendix 11, lines 146-157).

³²⁰ Khalil, appendix 11, lines 180-181.

³²¹ S.K. Khalil, “Is Islam part of God's plan?” *Jivan*, February 2011, 19.

Gandhi (Gandhiji) whose non-violent struggle was inspired by the Bible and the Gita.³²²

Secondly, he feels that ACW fails to distinguish between politics and people as it tends to equate the West with Christianity. He does not consider that Christianity is at war with Islam. He says that the West, though culturally Christian, is secularised and far from Christian ethics. Thus the presence of western armed forces in Muslim countries is not Christian peoples' aggression on Muslim people. The problem between the West and the Middle East is not religious but political in nature.

3.1.4 Archbishop R. Williams: "A Common Word for the Common Good."

On 14 July 2008 Williams issued his response entitled, "A Common Word for the Common Good".³²³ He wrote after listening to a wide range of Christians with whom he discussed ACW. He addressed this detailed response to the signatories of ACW and all Muslims worldwide. He drew several quotations from the Qur'an and the Bible to build up his response. As a major Christian leader by drawing verses from the Qur'an he indicates his respect for it.

³²² M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography: or The Story of my Experiments with Truth*, trans. M. Desai [London: Penguin Books, 1982], 77-78.

³²³ Appendix No 12. The line numbers are added by the researcher.

Williams finds ACW significant from three perspectives: its context, its nature, and its contribution to Christian-Muslim relations. First, he finds ACW timely since it comes in the context of “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”.³²⁴ The context indicates the importance of ACW. ACW takes the initiative to call upon both Muslims and Christians to work together for peace as Muslims and Christians offering them a common theological ground. Secondly, he recognises that ACW brings together Muslim leaders from several traditions and welcomes its hospitable and friendly spirit. Thirdly, he values the focus of ACW (love of God and love of neighbour) which “draws together the languages of Christianity, Islam and Judaism also”.³²⁵ He recognises that one of the important contributions of ACW is that it provides a language and structure for Christians and Muslims to talk about the God they understand in their respective traditions in an intelligible way.³²⁶

In his document, Williams suggests five ways to build and strengthen relations between Christians and Muslims. First, he invites both Christians and Muslims to love and praise the one God who deals with humanity in love and justice. This invitation has two implications. It implies, first of all, that both Christians and Muslims worship one God.

³²⁴ Williams, appendix 12, lines 30-33.

³²⁵ Williams, appendix 12, lines 29-30.

³²⁶ Williams, appendix 12, line 44-45.

The second implication is that there is a possibility of finding a common way to love and praise God (this suggestion is developed in the third point). Both these implications touch upon weighty theological questions. While dealing with the first question, Williams says that, though Christians and Muslims worship one God they cannot arrive at a shared understanding of the nature of God;³²⁷ if they claim to do so such understanding would not be honest to both traditions.³²⁸

Secondly, Williams points to the importance of the commitment to “love of neighbour that is rooted in the love of God”.³²⁹ He discusses two important dimension of this commitment. First, he looks at what is special in the Christian understanding of this commitment. Secondly, he points out that in this commitment Christians and Muslims “share a clear passion for the common good” based on this commitment to love one’s neighbour.³³⁰ He indicates that this passion should be translated into action against all forms of violence in the name of religion.

Thirdly, he recommends that “studying our scriptures together might continue to provide a fruitful element of our engagements with each

³²⁷ Williams, appendix 12, line 39-40.

³²⁸ Williams, appendix 12, line 41.

³²⁹ Williams, appendix 12, line 99.

³³⁰ Williams, appendix 12, line 101.

other...”.³³¹ He believes that in such an exercise “we often discover most truly the nature of each other’s faith”.³³² He invites both Muslims and Christians to explore the possibility of praising and loving God by reading, for instance, the Psalms. However, he notes in his response that Scriptures play different roles in the two traditions,³³³ and this should be kept in mind.

Fourthly, he says that both Muslims and Christians need not remain imprisoned by fear and mutual suspicion and should discuss their differences with respect.³³⁴ He indicates that differences need not necessarily lead to hostile arguments and polemic but that Christians and Muslims could explore together the riches of their faith traditions. He develops this area at length when he discusses the common elements: unity of God, love of God and love of neighbour.

Fifthly, he acknowledges, along with the ACW signatories, that differences between Christianity and Islam are real and serious.³³⁵ He recognises that in ACW the 138 scholars do not claim to cover all issues. He is grateful to them that they have offered something common to both

³³¹ Williams, appendix 12, lines 116-117.

³³² Williams, appendix 12, lines 115-116.

³³³ Williams, appendix 12, lines 108-109.

³³⁴ Williams, appendix 12, line 125-126.

³³⁵ Williams, appendix 12, line 128-129.

faiths: love of God and love of neighbour. These common elements are central to both the Christian and Muslim faiths. He emphasises that this common ground offers both Christians and Muslim a shared calling and a shared responsibility. This shared calling and responsibility leads them to a common awareness of responsibility before God. This common awareness of responsibility before God, Williams appears to indicate, brings both Christians and Muslims to a common ground for mutual understanding and to work for world peace. These five ways merge with four important discussions in which Williams clarifies and carries forward the ACW initiative. These discussions are developed around the themes unity of God, love of God, love of neighbour and common vision for the common good.

3.1.5 The Yale Document: “Loving God and Neighbour Together: A Christian Response to A Common Word between Us and You.”

The Yale Document entitled ‘Loving God and Neighbour Together: A Christian Response to *A Common Word Between Us and You*’ was published on October, 12 2007.³³⁶ The Yale scholars see “ACW as a Muslim hand of conviviality and cooperation extended to Christians world-wide”.³³⁷ The context in which the 138 Muslims signed ACW is probably what makes the Yale scholars call it a Muslim hand of conviviality. Though they do not explicitly mention any context, they

³³⁶ Note: one day before the official publication of the document. See Appendix no 13. The line numbers are added by the researcher.

³³⁷ Yale Document, appendix 13, lines 14-15.

appear to see ACW against the background of two major controversies. On September 30, 2005, a Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published several cartoons offensive to Muslim faith.³³⁸ Then, on September 12, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI in his lecture “Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections” at Regensburg University quoted a disparaging comment on Muhammad by a medieval Byzantine ruler. The cartoons and the Pope’s remarks offended Muslims. A large number of Muslims protested on both occasions. Despite such provocations the 138 scholars signed and sent ACW on October 13, 2007 to Christian leaders inviting them to dialogue based on common elements of faith. That is why the Yale scholars describe the document as a Muslim hand of warmth and friendship.³³⁹

What do the Yale scholars find significant about ACW? They find ACW historic³⁴⁰ and extraordinary.³⁴¹ They call it historic since it is signed by Muslim scholars and clerics from different parts of the world.³⁴² The

³³⁸ See: M. Asser, “What the Muhammad cartoons portray,” BBC, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4693292.stm [accessed on November 4, 2010].

³³⁹ The Yale scholars’ description of ACW as a Muslim hand of friendship is appropriate since ACW invites Christians (implicitly Muslims too) to understand one another better and to work with one another for peace in the world. ACW indeed takes a risk in building bridges between Muslims and Christians. The Muslim scholars knew that they could be rejected by Christians; yet they took this initiative. In this sense, ACW is really a hand of friendship. A similar comment is made by Khalil who contends that using a Christian vocabulary ACW shows a desire to draw near to the Christian way of speaking.

³⁴⁰ Yale Document, appendix 13, line 8.

³⁴¹ Yale Document, appendix 13, line 42.

³⁴² Yale Document, appendix 13, lines 8-9.

signatories belong to different Muslim traditions. They were brought together by Prince Ghazi under the aegis of the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought in Amman, Jordan. The Yale Document finds ACW extraordinary on two counts: ACW “recognises the critical character of the present moment in relations between Muslims and Christians”,³⁴³ and with courage and insight it identifies the common ground between Christians and Muslims.³⁴⁴ The Yale scholars judge that the common elements identified by ACW form an important milestone in Christian-Muslim relations.

As a response to ACW, the Yale scholars first of all indicate that humility is the right attitude Christians need in order to build up relations with Muslims.³⁴⁵ While welcoming ACW as a Muslim hand of friendship, the Yale scholars acknowledge that in history Muslims and Christians have not always shaken hands in friendship.³⁴⁶ They say: “...in the past (e.g. the Crusades) and in the present (e.g. the war in Iraq) Christians have been guilty of sinning against our Muslim neighbours”.³⁴⁷ They ask for pardon and forgiveness of the All-merciful God and of the Muslim community for the past and present hostility of

³⁴³ Yale Document, appendix 13, lines 43-44.

³⁴⁴ Yale Document, appendix 13, lines 44-45.

³⁴⁵ Yale Document, appendix 13, lines 22-26.

³⁴⁶ Yale Document, appendix 13, line 19.

³⁴⁷ Yale Document, appendix 13, line 24.

Christians towards Muslims.³⁴⁸ They are grateful to Muslims, who promise in ACW, to love their Christian neighbours.³⁴⁹ As Christians, the Yale scholars say that they resonate deeply with this sentiment of Muslims.

First, the Yale scholars show that they are honest in acknowledging the wounded Christian-Muslim history and humble in asking for forgiveness from Muslims.³⁵⁰ They are thankful for the openness of Muslim scholars in inviting Christians to dialogue. They appreciate with gratitude that attitude of the Muslim scholars who seek to love Christians as neighbours.³⁵¹

Secondly, they accept that peace between Christians and Muslims would help build peace in the world. They write: “the future of the world depends on peace between Muslim and Christians”.³⁵² They place their hope in the common ground (love of God and love of neighbour) that ACW identifies, and trust that commitment to the common ground by Christians and Muslims will pave the way to peace in the world. They want Christians and Muslims to work diligently together for peace in the

³⁴⁸ Yale Document, appendix 13, line 25.

³⁴⁹ Yale Document, appendix 13, line 94.

³⁵⁰ Yale Document, appendix 13, line 25-26.

³⁵¹ Yale Document, appendix 13, line 94.

³⁵² Yale Document, appendix 13, lines 38-39.

world. They remark that, though the conflicts and wars around the world are not religious wars, the religious dimensions of those conflicts cannot be neglected. They see the close link between religious faith and its impact on conflicts between Christian and Muslim communities. By focussing upon common elements (as proposed by ACW) between religions and working on them the Yale scholars seem to indicate that one can bring about better understanding between Christians and Muslims. This could even pave the way for the healing of memories if the whole gamut of issues was approached in honesty and humility. That is why they write “if we can achieve religious peace between these two religious communities, peace in the world will clearly be easier to achieve”.³⁵³

They emphasise that both Christians and Muslims need to abandon all hatred and strife and must engage in interfaith dialogue. They stress that both these groups should seek each other’s good since the one God unceasingly seeks the good of all. They believe that Christians and Muslims together can 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”.³⁵⁴ This reflects the concept of *a l a al-ammah*, the common good. This

³⁵³ Yale Document, appendix 13, lines 36-37.

³⁵⁴ Yale Document, appendix 13, lines 119-121.

concept highlights the primacy of common good of one and all above every other concern. One can cite the recent example of Egyptian citizens both Christians and Muslims filling the Tahrir Square demanding the resignation of President H. Mubarak so that they could have democracy, rule of law and free and fair elections.

Thirdly, in the document where ever they bring up the name of Muhammad, they always write, “Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)”. They seem to indicate the importance of a respectful attitude towards Muhammad in Christian-Muslim discourse. They seem to have opened up an important discussion on the Christian attitude towards Muhammad. The issue is not something new rather it is as old as the Christian-Muslim relations. It involves more than writing the title ‘prophet’ before the name of Muhammad and adding ‘peace be upon him’ after his name. It is a complex theological area which needs a lot of careful scholarly attention. Here the issue is just mentioned as indicated implicitly by the Yale Document. The next sections discuss their evaluation of ACW.

3.2 Discussion on the themes

3.2.1 Use of the Bible in ACW

All the responses take note of the use of biblical verses in ACW and respond to it in different ways. Williams takes inspiration from ACW

and in his response he too draws from the Bible and the Qur'an. Williams is the convener of the Building Bridges seminar program, during which passages from the Qur'an and the Bible are studied.³⁵⁵ Such initiatives recognise that scriptures are central to the life and faith of Christians and Muslims albeit they have a different role in Christian and Muslim traditions.

The Yale Document does not explicitly mention what the signatories think about the ACW's use of scriptures sacred to Christians and Muslims. However, they consider the common ground offered by the scriptures central to both faiths. In their response, though they do not use any Qur'anic text but they use one *h adīth* while discussing the love of neighbour.³⁵⁶

Troll deals with this issue in an elaborate way. "It is a significant fact",³⁵⁷ he says, since ACW "includes a number of Biblical passages and comments positively upon them".³⁵⁸ He calls this a significant fact

³⁵⁵ See footnote 214. The forthcoming title *Humanity: Texts and Contexts* would be the latest in the series of books recording Building Bridges Christian-Muslim seminars chaired by Archbishop Rowan Williams. In the words of A Afsaruddin, professor of Islamic Studies [Indiana University, Bloomington], this volume brings together leading Muslim and Christian thinkers who "ponder both the commonalities and differences between Islam and Christianity on key issues of human identity, human diversity, and human stewardship." D. Marshall, e-mail message to the author on February 15, 2011.

³⁵⁶ "None of you has faith until you love your neighbour what you love for yourself." Yale Document, appendix 13, lines 80-81.

³⁵⁷ Troll, appendix 9, line 63.

³⁵⁸ Troll, appendix 9, lines 63-64.

for three reasons: first, ACW quotes and comments upon biblical scriptures positively; secondly, ACW does not refer to the Islamic doctrine of *tah rīf*; thirdly, it recognises that biblical texts could be used as a basis for dialogue.

In the past, Muslims argued that biblical texts were corrupt or falsified as shown in chapter 1. Muslim authors said that the Bible was subjected to corruption of the text or distortion of meaning. Consequently, biblical passages were either ignored or used for polemical purposes.

In contrast to that attitude, ACW uses the Bible for raising a common platform for both Christians and Muslims. At this juncture the following question is bound to arise: Is the doctrine of corruption of scriptures still valid in Muslim theology? The popular literature on Christianity continues to hold the idea that the Bible is corrupted.³⁵⁹ Jean-Claude Basset while arguing the case for using the Bible and the Qur'an in religious conversation between Christians and Muslims suggested that the following questions cannot be avoided: "we can not escape serious work on hermeneutics: first within our respective faith community, which passage do we privilege and which interpretation do we favour

³⁵⁹ K. Zebri, *Muslims and Christians: Face to Face* [Oxford: Oneworld, 1997], 67-71.

and for what reason? Secondly, how do we read each other's Scriptures cross-culturally and religiously, and what status we accord to them?"³⁶⁰

As mentioned earlier that in the academic field there are efforts like *Scriptural Reasoning*, where Muslim scholars along with Christian scholars try to discover one another's scriptures with openness and without prejudice. In this exercise the onus is on the believer to explain his/her scripture in the light of one's faith as well as awareness towards the presence of a believer, who believes differently. Thus the rules of exegesis are drawn in the light of one's faith with sensitivity towards the faith of the participant in religious conversation. As mentioned in the chapter 2, the dynamics of ACW is different from *Scriptural Reasoning*, since in ACW Muslims juxtapose passages from the Bible and the Qur'an without reference to the way in which Christians themselves understand and interpret those passages. Thus ACW appears not to take into consideration an important principle that demands that any statement about a religion is invalid unless it can be acknowledged by that religion's believers,³⁶¹ all that ACW does is to cite some verses from the Bible.

³⁶⁰ J. Basset, "Has Christian-Muslim Dialogue already begun?" in *Muslim-Christian Perceptions of Dialogue Today* [Leuven: Peeters, 2000], 287. See also: P.C. Phan, "Can We Read Religious Texts Interreligiously? Possibilities, Challenges, and Experiments," in *A Common Word and the Future of Christian-Muslim Relations*, 15-33. See GRIC, *The Challenge of Scriptures* [Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991]. In this volume the contribution by M.A. Mensia (chapter 6) discusses a way in which could look at each other's scripture in fruitful ways.

³⁶¹ Isma'il R. Al-Faruqi, "Meta-Religion: Towards a Critical World Theology," *American journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 3, no.1 [September 1986]: 26.

In the context of ACW, Troll raises three important questions: does ACW signal a break with *tah rīf*? Does ACW consider biblical passages authentic? Do the Muslim authors of ACW only quote from the Bible such verses as are in agreement with the Qur'an?

He seems to answer the first question. He says that in ACW “more widely based dialogue appears to be developing”.³⁶² Biblical passages have been widely used for polemics in the past (cf. chapter 1). It was noted that this trend is not completely absent even today. One implication of such polemics is to question whether biblical passages can be a shared base for Christian-Muslim relations. ACW uses them to identify common elements between Christian and Muslim faiths upon which they can build.

Moreover, the problem seems to be that ACW neither explicitly refers to nor modifies the classical understandings of *tah rīf*.³⁶³ In this context the phrase “more widely based dialogue appears to be developing” seems to hint that even if ACW does not signal a break with *tah rīf* it does signal a new approach towards biblical texts. This approach could be that ACW is trying to read the biblical texts ‘inter-religiously’ that is “reading the religious scriptures of other religions as *sacred texts* for

³⁶² Troll, appendix 9, lines 10-11.

³⁶³ Troll, appendix 9, lines 79-82.

oneself.”³⁶⁴ As noted earlier, Muslims believe that the original Jewish and Christian scriptures were revealed albeit the contemporary versions have been corrupted. One implication is that the original revealed texts contained within the corrupted Bible are *sacred texts* for them. Since ACW neither makes any reference to *tah rīf* nor to the authenticity of the Bible as a whole: it offers an opportunity to consider whether the biblical passages used in ACW are recognised as *sacred texts* by the Muslim signatories. If so, the important purpose of ACW appears to be to gain and share a deeper understanding of the unity of God, the love of God and the love of neighbour that is available in both the Christian and Muslim traditions. This would indicate a deeper realisation that both traditions together can find in adequate measure pointers towards the deeper mysteries of God. ACW therefore would indicate openness for Christian-Muslim relations at a deeper level.³⁶⁵

This openness is not without a dilemma. The dilemma is that ACW does not make any reference to the overall authenticity of the Bible. Any reference to the overall authenticity of the Bible would raise many complex theological questions for ACW. What is certain is that ACW

³⁶⁴ P.C. Phan, “Can We Read Religious Texts Interreligiously? Possibilities, Challenges, and Experiments,” in *A Common Word and the Future of Christian-Muslim Relations*, 15-33.

³⁶⁵ In this context what Pope Benedict said in his comments on ACW (see foot note 344) that ACW echoes a theme consonant with his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est* emphasising the unbreakable bond between love of God and love of neighbour.

accepts that the quoted passages of the Bible as *sacred texts* and a shared basis for dialogue.

However, Khalil comments that ACW takes for granted that the Bible is the word of God. His comment appears to be imprecise since ACW does not clarify whether the *Injil*, a scripture that Muslims hold was revealed to Jesus and about which Christians have no idea, or the Bible as Christians possess it today is the word of God. Yet, he calls this approach of ACW a novelty. Khalil's remark needs to be explored fully. How does one understand his comment? Khalil's comment refers to a new approach that ACW has undertaken which has never been unknown in the history of Christian-Muslim relations. His comment seems to be appropriate in the context of the tensions between Christians and Muslims. However, the ambiguity around the use of the Bible in ACW continues until the signatories clarify the issues.

3.2.2 The Unity of God in Christian understanding

In their responses Troll and Williams insist that acknowledging that Trinitarian monotheism is the Christian way of speaking about the unity of God. This is crucial issue which needs to be tackled in order to improve relations between Christians and Muslims. Madigan does not make any precise comment upon the unity of God as one of the common elements in dialogue. However, he makes clear that he has a strong difference of opinion with what ACW says regarding love of God and love of neighbour as a common foundation for both religions. The Yale

scholars accept the unity of God as core common ground between Christianity and Islam without going into specific details.

Troll states that “it is important for Muslims approaching dialogue with Christians to understand that this Trinitarian monotheism is central to Christian belief and worship and is not an aspect of Christianity that can be negotiated away”.³⁶⁶ Troll makes this statement since he thinks that ACW does not give proper attention to what is central to Christian faith. He focuses his attention on the exegetical explanation provided for Q. 3:64 in ACW. ACW explains the requirement to come to common word: “none of us shall take others for lords besides God”. Most of the classical and modern commentators have found this phrase to be a criticism of Christian belief in the Trinity.³⁶⁷ However, ACW follows al-Tabari’s comment, who says: “Muslims, Christians and Jews should be free to each follow what God commanded them, and not have to prostrate before kings and the like.” Troll recognises that here ACW quotes a minority exegesis. However, he asks, “...what had al-Tabari imagined God had commanded Christians to do – not, presumably, to worship Jesus?”³⁶⁸ In order to be productive theological dialogue between Christians and Muslims on this central foundation of both faiths Christians need to know the mind of the Muslim authors, signatories and readers on the critical question of Trinitarian monotheism.

³⁶⁶ Troll, appendix 9, lines 119-121.

³⁶⁷ Troll, appendix 9, lines 103-104.

³⁶⁸ Troll, appendix 9, lines 109-112.

For Troll, what is ambiguous is that ACW appears to suggest that there are no fundamental differences between the theologies of these two faiths and even if there are differences, they do not matter any more. He insists that there are fundamental differences between the theologies of both faiths and these differences are central. He agrees that God alone is to be worshiped. He notes however for Christians, “Jesus is both fully human and fully divine”.³⁶⁹ Christians worship the one God as Father, Son and Spirit. This is the mystery of Christian faith. This core mystery of faith can neither be negotiated away nor left out of Christian-Muslim conversations. Troll feels that any diplomatic evasion of this mystery, central to Christian faith, would seriously affect the process of such conversation. Christian commitment to God is rooted in Christ for whom they use the title ‘Son of God’. While speaking of God, Christians cannot evade Christ. That is why Troll emphasises these differences as crucial to interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims. The point Troll insists on is that each other’s religious experience should be acknowledged for any fruitful theological conversation. Williams disagrees with any conclusion that does not give emphasis to specificities of religious traditions that are in conversation. He says that any such shared understanding of God would not be honest to either tradition.³⁷⁰ Such shared understanding, he says, would fail to acknowledge the reality of the differences that exist between both traditions. Both Troll and Williams clearly stress that the specific details

³⁶⁹ Troll, appendix 9, line 116.

³⁷⁰ Williams, appendix 12, line 40-41.

of each faith have to be emphasised in honest dialogue. Any future conversation as can be seen from this discussion cannot negate or evade the Trinity but a new way of dealing with this richness of Christian faith would strengthen dialogue. A new way of dealing with the richness of Christian faith in the Trinity needs to consider the depth of meaning of the expression "God, (who is) 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit'. Believing in God in this way is an expression of the inclusiveness of the Godhead in His relationship to human beings through creation, example and inspiration. A lot more needs to be done in this area.³⁷¹

Williams addresses the question of the oneness of God. He quotes in full Q. 112:1-4. And then emphasises that in Christian tradition at no point in history has any other being been identified with God. He writes:

it is important to state unequivocally that the association of any other being with God is expressly rejected in 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 process and events that happen in the world.³⁷²

God is always considered as one. Then he goes on to explain how Christians understand the oneness of God. His explanation is theologically absorbing. It is worth summarising here. He argues that

³⁷¹ In a telephone conversation with the present researcher on December 8, 2010, Dr Sigvard von Sicard noted that this could be just one thought but it would take more to really tackle the point. The present researcher keeps reading material on this point and discussing it with many others and hopes to expand his reflections on this area.

³⁷² Williams, appendix 12, lines 189-194.

God is not a name but a kind of life. This life, Williams says, is always lived eternally and simultaneously as three interrelated agencies. This truth that the life which is always lived eternally and simultaneously as three interrelated agencies is revealed in Christ. In other words, God is one and God's nature as triune is revealed in Christ. Williams goes on to explain that in human language this mystery is expressed as Father, Son and Spirit. Worshiping God as Father, Son and Spirit does not mean Christians are worshiping either three gods or one supreme god with two associates. When Christians say Father, Son and Spirit, they refer to God's life revealed in a three-fold pattern of love. He explains that this three fold pattern or three dimensions of divine life relate with each other in self-sacrifice and self-giving. Trinity is, for Christians, a way of explaining 'God is love'. It is to say that the nature of God is love. Williams claims that a three-fold pattern of divine life alone can explain how God is love. The love that is lived within the Trinity is at work in creation as unconditional and self-sacrificial love. Thus he makes the point clear that worship of God as Father, Son and Spirit never compromises the unity of God. He feels that though the Trinity will continue to remain as a point of dispute between Christians and Muslims, ACW does not simply assume that Christians believe in more than one God. Williams recognises it is an important step for Muslims to take towards understanding Christian faith.

Williams' approach emphasises the mystery of the immanent Trinity, a discussion that starts with Godhead itself. This approach has risks for

Christian-Muslim relations. It could confirm Muslims in their belief that the Trinity emerged as the result of philosophical speculations on the internal workings of God. This could cause ambiguity. If Christian-Muslim relations should be on the level playing field Christians should stress the economic Trinity. The economic Trinity lays emphasis on Christian experience of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit as believed and celebrated in the community of believers.³⁷³

The second chapter showed that ACW does not raise the specific points of Christian faith. It seems to bear them as non-essential and only differing in forms, without giving any indication of how they understand these terms. Though Williams appears to suggest that ACW is a step forward in dialogue between Christians and Muslims it would be difficult to see how it is a step forward when the specificities of

³⁷³ D. Madigan in an e-mail to the author on November 15, 2010 wrote: "Thanks for raising this issue, your reflection and discussion on this point. In my opinion, the approach to the immanent trinity risks confirming Muslims in the idea that this doctrine emerges simply from philosophical speculation about the internal workings of God -- something which would naturally be disapproved of. However, the economic approach (i.e., trying to understand the origins of Trinitarian doctrine not in speculation but in the community's experience of God at work) gives us more points of contact with Muslims. God addresses God's word to the world, and the community of faith recognizes it not just as (in the Muslim case) poetry, or tales of the ancients, or soothsaying, or something the prophet invented, or that he learned from someone else. Rather they recognize it as God's very word, which is inseparable from God's very self. In the Christian case, when God's word is spoken in the flesh, the community of faith recognizes it not just as a prophet, or as a rabbi, or as a politico-religious reformer, but as God's very word, inseparable from God's very self. In the Christian case, further, there is the experience of Pentecost and of the power of God at work within and among those who believe in Christ. Again this is believed not to be just a power from God or an enthusiasm aroused by God, but God's very self present and at work. These three experiences--of God beyond us, God with us in Christ, and God within and among us as Spirit--we take to be experiences not just of three different methods or periods of God's action, but rather three different modes of God's being. That's why I think it is better to start with the threefold experience of God, rather than trying to start within the Godhead itself."

Christian faith are termed non-essential and only differing in forms vis-à-vis Islam.

Trinitarian Monotheism is central to Christian faith. Any process of dialogue which does not recognise this aspect of Christian faith would fail to make any progress in the realm of theology. ACW remains silent on the issue of the authors' attitude towards the doctrine as a Christian expression of monotheism. There is no evidence that ACW has departed from the classical Muslim position on Christian Trinitarian Monotheism. For Christians ACW's approach seems to leave important issues unanswered. The approach must however, seen as a positive advance on polemics.

The responses seem to indicate that Christians along with Muslims should explore these questions and find ways of strengthening relations between them. One possible way could be to study together passages from the Bible and the Qur'an together to see and understand how best a Christian could appreciate and recognise Muslim understanding of the unity of God. At the same time, Muslims too could find a way to become familiar with the Christian understandings of Trinitarian monotheism.

3.2.2.1 Love of God

In ACW, love of God and love for neighbour are shown to be intimately connected with the belief in one God. It was noted that ACW is built around these themes. This indicates that it is important to pay attention to these themes in ACW in order to evaluate ACW in relation to its responses. In the following sections the evaluation of the responses on these connected themes will be presented with some critical observations.

Madigan finds that there is a vast difference in understanding the love of God in both these traditions. He shows that love of God in Christian tradition differs from Muslim tradition. He focuses his attention on John's Gospel and the Epistles of St John to explain his point. He notes first of all that God has loved us (1 John 4:10) and we love because God loved us first (1 John 4:19). Madigan notes the presence of a constant outward movement of love in the Gospel of John. "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you, so you should love one another" (John 13:34). He notes that this invitation to love is not merely a commandment but rather an invitation "to dwell in the love he [Jesus] bears for us".³⁷⁴ Christians allow themselves to be transformed by dwelling in God's love for humanity so that in turn they can love others. In this context, Madigan presents 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

³⁷⁴ Madigan, appendix 10, line 148.

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.³⁷⁵

Madigan says that God loved us first when humanity was unworthy of that love. He explains, “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” (1 John 4:10 and Romans 5:6).³⁷⁶

Williams’ basic idea is that God’s love is unmerited and a gift to humanity given primarily in Christ. He affirms that “Christians see love [of God] 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”.³⁷⁷ He makes clear that “our love for God appears as a response to God’s prior love for us in its absolute gratuity and causelessness”.³⁷⁸ While ACW explains love of God as a commandment to obey God, Madigan and Williams explain that love of God is an unmerited love which God has shown to humanity in Christ. It is an important difference in understanding the love of God. However Williams finds there are similarities between Christians and Muslims in responding to God’s love in their traditions. One such similarity that Williams mentions is that both Christians and Muslims respond to God’s love in their prayers by

³⁷⁵ Madigan, appendix 10, lines 150-155.

³⁷⁶ Madigan, appendix 10, lines 157-158.

³⁷⁷ Williams, appendix 12, lines 346-348.

³⁷⁸ Williams, appendix 12, lines 350-351.

praising and thanking God. All three Abrahamic faiths consider praising and thanking God as an important part of their worship. The Psalms are full of such language of praise and thanksgiving. The Psalms praise and thank God as creative power “who is loving and compassionate, generous, faithful and merciful, and upholds justice”.³⁷⁹

Williams suggests that Christians and Muslims could explore together how the practice of praising and glorifying God in both traditions seeks to express a complete devotion to God. He finds support for his suggestion from the text of the Qur’an: “to David We gave the Psalms.”³⁸⁰ Williams here accepts a translation of the Qur’an in which the Qur’anic term *zabur*, the book given to David is simply and uncritically rendered as Psalms without any indication of the relationship between the 150 Psalms currently in the Bible and the *zabur* given to David. Christians and Jews use Psalms in prayer whereas Muslims do not use them for their public or private devotion. Williams suggests that studying the biblical Psalms together would help both Muslims and Christians to praise and glorify God together and also to pray together. If Muslims and Christians could pray together with the Psalms, it would be an important step. Williams proposes that praying the Psalms together would in no way compromise Christian and Muslim integrity. At the meeting of religious leaders in Assisi in 1987, the organisers made it

³⁷⁹ Williams, appendix 12, lines 373-374.

³⁸⁰ Williams, appendix 12, line 392.

clear that the religious leaders were *coming together to pray* and *not coming to pray together*. Here, however, Williams affirms a Christian theological position to support the possibility of Christians and Muslims praying together.³⁸¹

It is necessary to distinguish between God's love for human beings and human beings love for God. In Islam God's love for human beings has two aspects: first one, the sustaining, nourishing love of God without which no creature could continue to exist (*al-rahmān*: the limitless mercy of God that sustains creation as the womb sustains the foetus); secondly that love of God which is God's response who obeys God's commands and observes his prohibitions, which is therefore conditional upon human action. In Christianity God's love is in all times and ways unconditional, which is best described in the outpouring of God's love

³⁸¹ See: Catholic Bishop's Conference of England and Wales, *Meeting God in Friend and Stranger* [London: The Catholic Truth Society, 2010]. The numbers 135 and 136 expresses the Christian view of prayer: "... Pope John Paul II explains that his initiative of inviting all religions to Assisi in order to pray for Peace was rooted in his conviction that *every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person*. This perception that every authentic prayer is the Holy Spirit's activity means that all genuine prayer is in fact the work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the one God at work within us. It is the Father, through the risen Christ, who bestows the Spirit when we are moved to pray; and when we pray it is in fact the Spirit prompting us to pray to the Father through the one Mediator, the risen Lord Jesus Christ. It follows then that although other religions are not Christian, and we must not call them such, they are in the Spirit related to the Church in one and the same movement of prayer, prompted by the Spirit, through Christ to the Father. When, as at Assisi, the Catholic Church comes together with other churches, ecclesial communities and other religions to pray for peace it is eloquently carrying out its mission to be the 'sacrament' of uniting all people to God and to each other, in prayer. The initiative of Pope John Paul II was indeed prophetic and instructive."

The texts on the Day of Prayer have been published by the pontifical commission "Justitia et Pax," in *Assie: Journée mondiale de prié pour la paix (27 octobre 1986)* (Cittá del Vaticano, 1987). The text of the pope's address is found on pages 147-155. It can be read also in *Bulletin* (Secretariat for Non-Christians), 64, no.2 [1987]: 54-62.

for humanity in Christ, which is prior to human love for God and does not differentiate between the most perfect and the vilest sinner.³⁸²

Turning to human love for God, in Islam is described as total obedience to the ethical will of God and thus living in complete surrender to the divine will by keeping all God's commands and observing prohibitions. It also would include service to family, community, humanity and creation. In Christianity, the believer becomes a new creation through faith thus participates in the very life of God which is love therefore human love for God is graced response to what God has done in loving human beings and calling them into that love which is a participation in God's love, this includes keeping commandments and observing prohibitions but goes beyond to the self-sacrificial love for the other in whom one sees Christ and therefore this love is Christ (each human being adopted into new life) loving Christ (all other human beings and creation) through, with, in Christ. Therefore the Christian shares in the new life being taken into that divine flow of love and life that Christians call the Triune God. Madigan and Williams do not draw sufficient attention to the two fold dimension of God love for humanity in Islam.

³⁸² In Christian theology this type of grace is known as prevenient grace. The Latin term *preveniens* literally means 'going ahead'. God's grace is active in human lives even before man or woman turns his/her attention towards God. The prevenient grace in fact prepares one to turn towards God. See: A.E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1994], 378.

The Muslim and Christian understanding of human love for God can best be seen as two attempts to understand and articulate the reality of the transcategorical 'love of God' for which human beings lack the categories to speak or understand and so must struggle to describe as best one can knowing that human beings 'see as though through glass dimly'. Both Madigan and Williams point out that mutual exploring of these concepts through dialogue and action would be a mutually enriching process.

As a step for deepening Christian-Muslim relations both Williams and Madigan recognise that an understanding of love similar to that of Christian faith is not entirely absent in the Islamic tradition. They present the following verse, "God will bring a new people: He will love them, and they will love Him" Q. 5:54. Commenting on this verse, Madigan says that some Sufi writers have written that God's love precedes human love for God. However, this verse is referred to in ACW. Both Madigan and Williams, by quoting this text, indicate that dialogue which was not part of ACW could open up such further potentials. They indicate the importance of looking into one another's scripture carefully to find pointers that could bring Christians and Muslims closer together.

3.2.2.2 Love of Neighbour

The Yale scholars find a resonance between Christian and Muslim understanding of love of neighbour. They find that faith in God is intimately connected with love for neighbour. They quote from the *h adīth*, “none of you has faith until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself”,³⁸³ and from the Bible, “whoever does not love [the neighbour] does not know God”.³⁸⁴ They point out that in order to live one’s faith as a Christian or a Muslim one has to love one’s neighbour. Since God is love, the highest calling for a human being is to imitate God whom we worship. Khalil stresses the fact that ACW uses words that are more familiar to Christians. He illustrates this with the use of the word; neighbour. He says: “the word ‘neighbour’ (in the Christian sense of brethren) does not exist in the Koran; it is typical of the New Testament”.³⁸⁵ He says the ‘neighbour’ in the Qur’anic usage is only a next-door-neighbour this is the Arabic term *jār* which is the term used in ACW in its Arabic original. While the Yale scholars reflect on the demands of Christian love Khalil remains close to the text and highlights that ACW draws from Christian understanding of neighbour while making an effort to relate with Christians. He highlights the fact that a close reading of ACW reveals that the document shows certain openness in learning from and sharing with Christians. It must be noted here that though the English text has considers ‘neighbour’ from the biblical

³⁸³ Yale Document, appendix 13, lines 80-81.

³⁸⁴ Yale Document, appendix 13, line 83.

³⁸⁵ Khalil, appendix 11, lines 82-83.

perspective, that is dialogical, there is no way one could be sure that the signatories too would hold this view as they have signed the Arabic document which was circulated to them for their counter signature. If there is a great difference in the signatories understanding of the word ‘neighbour’ in its original Arabic and its rendering in English translation, then one can not say with confidence as Khalil points out that ACW paves a way for mutual sharing and learning.

In the last chapter attention was drawn to the fact that ACW, quoting Mark 12:31 and Matthew 22: 38-40, emphasises that love of neighbour is second only to love of God. It calls attention to generosity and self-sacrifice as two important elements of the love of neighbour in both traditions. The responses of Madigan and Williams affirm this. However, they indicate that love for neighbour in the Christian understanding is much more than generosity and self-sacrifice. It is to be as merciful as the heavenly Father is merciful. Williams writes: “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”.³⁸⁶ It is an invitation and challenge to imitate God’s perfection! The Yale scholars’ response on love of neighbour does not show any indication to support the idea that human love for neighbour reflects God’s character. However, for Williams, love

³⁸⁶ Williams, appendix 12, lines 465-468.

for neighbour reflects the character of God. There is a big difference between the Yale and Williams' position.

Both Madigan and Williams highlight two important elements that make the Christian understanding of the love of neighbour special. The first is that "neighbour" is anyone who is in need. Neighbour is not just someone who belongs to one's own tribe, race, religion, or region, but anyone who is in need. Williams says that this element is illustrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan. He shows that the parable of the Good Samaritan makes clear that neighbour is not "a necessarily limited group of people"³⁸⁷ to whom "love should be shown".³⁸⁸ But, it urges us to "prove ourselves neighbours by compassion to whoever is before us in need or pain".³⁸⁹ Williams says that the concept of neighbourliness transcends borders. Secondly, it shows that one should not just wait for someone to come for help but make oneself ready to go and serve others who are in need or in pain.

Madigan too says that the parable of the Good Samaritan drives home the fact that 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 I can show myself a neighbour to others by

³⁸⁷ Williams, appendix 12, line 478.

³⁸⁸ Williams, appendix 12, line 479.

³⁸⁹ Williams, appendix 12, lines 479-480.

responding to them in love”.³⁹⁰ Both Williams and Madigan stress the importance of transcending borders in loving the neighbour and making oneself a neighbour to anyone in need.

The second element is that the challenge goes further. It is an invitation to love one’s enemies and do good to those who hate and do harm to us. This is an invitation not to follow any human model but to follow the ‘Father in heaven’ as we read in Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount:

You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (Matthew 5:43-45)

and be merciful as the ‘heavenly Father’ is merciful as we read in Luke’s Sermon on the Plain:

If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you... But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:29-31, 35-36).

Madigan remarks that the gospels challenge Christians to imitate God’s mercy in loving one’s neighbour. The gospels insist that disinterested generosity should mark Christian love for the neighbour. There is a similar argument in the response of Williams. Self-forgetful attention

³⁹⁰ Madigan, appendix 10, lines 180-182.

and care for the other at any moment, including one's enemies is evidence that Christian love for neighbour and to be a neighbour is a challenge that continually faces the Christian in new ways.

These Christian responses affirm that God's love is prior to human love. God loved human beings first when humanity was unworthy of that love. It followed that human beings should be able to love others because of this unmerited love that is poured into human hearts. This unmerited love lays the foundation for imitating God's love in the lives of Christians. The gospels challenge Christians to love everyone who is in need by making oneself a neighbour to others even to one's own enemies. Madigan makes it clear that Christians have often failed miserably in responding to the challenge: 'love your enemies'. At this juncture the responses invite deep reflection, humility and sincere togetherness between Muslims and Christians and complete openness to God who alone can sustain and carry forward dialogue.

Moreover, 'love your enemies' has challenging implications on the ground. People need to be transformed to love also one's enemies and to do good to them. Madigan mentions that several such initiatives happen on a small scale around the world. Madigan calls them seeds of God's Kingdom and says that often such sprouts get trampled upon in the quest for revenge. At this juncture Madigan suggests that in future relations between Christians and Muslims one could also consider Q. 60:7;

“Perhaps God will create friendship between you and those you consider your enemies. God is powerful, infinitely forgiving, most merciful”. This suggestion invites one to trust God who can turn hostility into friendship. It also urges one to be open to God’s ways in one’s life. God may invite individuals and communities to reconciliation and forgiveness.

Williams offers a common vision that seeks the common good which is grounded in absolute faithfulness to both Christian and Muslim religious traditions. This common vision calls both sets of believers to abhor violence, uphold freedom of religion and give an unconditional positive response. As Madigan pointed out in his response, the initiative is in the hands of Muslims. ACW is like a seed of God’s kingdom sown by the Muslim scholars in the hearts and minds of Christians, Muslims and all people of good will. It has to be nourished by everyone especially Christians and Muslims. Christians in a special way need to respond, not by a series of letters but by initiating people into contact between believers for better understanding and cooperation. Both indicate an important responsibility for all who are keen on building relations between Christians and Muslims. This responsibility is to make familiar the efforts of ACW among their coreligionists. If that is not done, efforts like ACW and the responses to it will remain confined within certain quarters and cannot become a movement.

3.2.2.3 Dual commandment of love: a common foundation?

Though Madigan finds the dual commandment common to both Islam and Christianity, he hesitates to call this the foundation of both these religions. He also finds that ACW, while working on ‘love of God’, does not reflect the political implication of this particular commandment.³⁹¹

Madigan, although he accepts that the dual commandment of love is important for both Christians and Muslims being drawn from the Bible and Qur’an, finds the claim of ACW that the dual commandment of love is the foundation of all three Abrahamic religions (including Judaism) to be questionable. ACW claims that the dual commandment of love is the foundation because it is the most important teaching of Christ. Madigan affirms that love of God and love of neighbour are indeed important teachings of Christ. However, he maintains it cannot be called the foundation of the Christian faith. He asks:

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?³⁹²

Madigan wants to underline that Christ has some thing more to reveal than what has been already revealed. One could list many specific

³⁹¹ Madigan, appendix 10, lines 93-94.

³⁹² Madigan, appendix 10, lines 116-122.

Christian doctrines which are foundational and unique and more central than the dual commandment to Christian faith world-view and practice.

Secondly, Madigan draws the reader's attention to the context of the biblical passages in which these teachings are highlighted. Both scriptural passages (Matthew 22:35 and Luke 10:25) indicate controversy. Both Matthew and Luke show that the questioner wanted to trap Jesus. Madigan remarks: "the cautious answer to a trick question can hardly be considered the foundation of a religion".³⁹³ For Madigan the dual commandment is definitely a common element between Christianity and Islam, but not the common foundation. For him, the outpouring of the love of God, which is shown to humanity in Christ, is the quintessential foundation of the Christian faith. Christians understand the life of God as the flow of love within the 'fellowship' in the Trinity. In other words, Christian faith is simply rooted in Christ who revealed God and God's love for humanity. Madigan is making an important point here. The commandment of love provides space for diverse ways of explaining those elements. If the space for diverse explanations is either shrunk or dispensed with, he believes that this will not help the cause of dialogue.

³⁹³ Madigan, appendix 10, lines 125-126.

3.2.2.4 Political implication of the love of God: theological key for relations between Christian and Muslims

Madigan is the only one of the respondents under consideration who considers that the discussion of the political implications of the love of God provides the theological key for dialogue between Christians and Muslims. What does Madigan mean when he talks about the political implications of the love of God? As noted above ACW explains the love of God as complete devotion and obedience to God. In other words, God alone is worthy of complete human devotion. Complete obedience is due only to God. The implication of this is that no other being, no institution, whether political or social, can demand a person's complete obedience. All political, social and religious structures are only secondary in reference to God. That is why Madigan says that complete devotion to God relativizes all authorities of power and all political systems in the world.

He refers to Islamic institutions derived from Islamic political thought which are often considered as sacrosanct. Any criticism of such institutions is considered to be a criticism of the will of God. Some of these Islamic institutions often seem to be interpreted by certain sections of Muslims in a partisan way against Christian religious minorities in Muslim majority countries, e.g. the discussion in Pakistan over its identity as an 'Islamic State' and whether Christians should be part of the single electorate or have separate electorates. Such partisan

interpretations affect the human rights of Christian citizens in Muslim-majority countries, especially in the area of religious freedom.

Madigan by calling the political implication of the love of God the theological key between Christians and Muslims, argues that dialogue has to touch upon human rights and the religious freedom of Christian minorities in Muslim-majority countries and similarly such rights and freedom of Muslim minorities in West. In Catholic understanding the religious freedom is an essential part of human rights.³⁹⁴ Religious freedom is rooted in freedom of conscience: the freedom to follow a religious faith without fear or favour (provided it does not follow immoral exploitation of others). He insists that honesty in dealing with the issues related to human rights and religious freedom will determine the progress of Christian-Muslim relations. A similar sentiment is expressed in the Yale Document too.³⁹⁵ ACW does not mention this point. There is no explanation why this issue has not been brought up in ACW.

³⁹⁴ See: Declaration of Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae*) in W.M. Abbott, ed. and J. Gallagher, trans. *The Documents of Vatican II*, 675-700.

³⁹⁵ “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 would end up serving idols and inevitably get mired in deep and deadly conflicts”. Yale Document, appendix 13, lines 60-63.

3.3. Theological evaluation

3.3.1 Theological basis

The theological evaluation of ACW is dealt with in the Yale Document, in Madigan's, Troll's, Williams' and Khalil's responses. The Yale Document is accommodative in its language in reference to ACW. They recognise that ACW has identified the common ground that is love of God and love of neighbour. They congratulate the 138 Muslim scholars for identifying a common ground which is absolutely central to both faiths. They also remark that common ground in fundamentals of faith gives hope, saying that "undeniable differences and even the very external pressures that bear down upon us cannot overshadow the common ground upon which we stand together".³⁹⁶ However when they explain love of God, one of the common elements, they seem to identify it with devotion to one God. They write, "we applaud that ACW stresses so insistently the unique devotion to one God, indeed the love of God as the primary duty of every believer".³⁹⁷ It is seen here that the Yale scholars explain love *of* God as love *for* God and call it the primary duty of humanity. It is a divine commandment to love God. The primary duty of the human person is to obey this commandment. The love for God is expressed in total devotion to God.

³⁹⁶ Yale Document, appendix 13, lines 51-53.

³⁹⁷ Yale Document, appendix 13, lines 58-60.

Moreover, while carrying forward their reflection, they see a parallel in how God is understood in both faiths. They say that in Muslim tradition God is considered as “infinitely good and All-merciful” and in the New Testament “God is love” (1 John 4:8).³⁹⁸ They go on to explain that in the Christian tradition, humanity’s love for God and God’s love for humanity are intimately linked. They quote, “we love because he loved us first” (1 John 4:19).³⁹⁹ Here again, they seem to miss an important element in the discussion of the love of God: they do not highlight that God’s love for humanity is revealed in Christ. They display their lack of understanding of important elements of dialogue between Christians and Muslims.

Also whenever they refer to Jesus, they write: “Jesus Christ (Peace be upon him)”. This is a specifically Muslim way of referring to Jesus Christ. It is certainly not the way Christians refer to Jesus in their writings. Such a reference indicates how the Yale scholars *speak* the language of Muslims. By such a turn of phrase, the Yale scholars appear to indicate that the elements Christians and Muslims have in common are important and that the specific details of each faith need not be given importance in dialogical context. Their approach seems to lead to a quick shared understanding of God. They seem not to give importance to the Christological views of Christianity. The Yale scholars’ approach is different from the others as they emphasise elements held in common

³⁹⁸ Yale Document, appendix 13, lines 67-68.

³⁹⁹ Yale Document, appendix 13, lines 74-75.

without paying much attention to the specific differences between Christianity and Islam in the process of building relations between Christians and Muslims.

Madigan says that the theological basis for dialogue is the most important purpose of ACW. Madigan finds that the driving force behind ACW is to provide a common theological basis for dialogue between Christians and Muslims. He writes that the theological common ground that the Muslim scholars offer is based on “unity of God, in the necessity of complete devotion to God and of love towards the neighbour”.⁴⁰⁰ It is important to note that he does not say that unity of God, love of God, and love of neighbour form the theological common ground. He does not use the term “love of God”, but uses only “the necessary complete devotion to God”,⁴⁰¹ since the authors of ACW defined love of God as complete devotion to God. Here he gives an indication that he differs from Muslims in his understanding of the way that love of God is understood in Muslim tradition and in the Christian tradition to which he belongs. It has been noted already that he too does not do sufficient justice to the Muslim understanding of the love of God.

He agrees with ACW 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

⁴⁰⁰ Madigan, appendix 10, lines 18-19.

⁴⁰¹ Madigan, appendix 10, line 18.

the calculations of temporary expediency”.⁴⁰² He understands that accepting a theological basis for dialogue leads to mutual commitment. Madigan sees ACW as an invitation to mutual commitment for peace and justice rooted in common theological elements. It is not merely arriving at a common platform that is important.

Reflecting on the contents and presentation of ACW, Madigan draws the conclusion that Muslims are capable of entering into a dialogue on the theological level with Christians. He says: “They [the Authors of ACW] quite rightly refuse to accept the idea, all too often expressed by members of the Roman Curia, that Muslims are incapable of entering into theological dialogue”.⁴⁰³ Why do certain Roman officials hold such an idea? Madigan does not discuss this question. However, he hints that some members of the Catholic Church are still not sufficiently open to dialogue with Muslims in the spirit of NA. It could be said that Madigan’s evaluation of ACW is very generous and tentative.

It should be emphasised that for theological interaction between two groups of believers, there must be clarity and precision with regard to the terms used and their understanding. It has been noted already that in ACW clarity is lacking on the use of the Bible and on the invitation to a common word. In this context, it could not be said that ACW is entering into theological dialogue with Christians.

⁴⁰² Madigan, appendix 10, lines 14-17.

⁴⁰³ Madigan, appendix 10, lines 19-21.

Williams says that ACW's motivation is to offer a common language which is mutually intelligible for both Christians and Muslims to carry forward dialogue. However, he insists that the common language ACW offers cannot lead Christians and Muslims to a shared understanding of God. The reasons for his claim will be discussed in this section.

ACW's understanding of the 'common language' focuses on the unity of God, love of God and love of neighbour. Williams interprets the offer of a common language as an invitation to "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 cooperation with integrity and without compromising fundamental beliefs".⁴⁰⁴ Williams sees this effort as the most modest and ultimately most realistically hopeful recognition that the ways in which Christians and Muslims speak about God and humanity are not simply mutually unintelligible. Williams has done a careful analysis and has not jumped to any conclusion about the theological robustness of ACW. He recognises the worth of ACW for its ability to construct a language that Christians and Muslims could mutually recognise albeit that there is a need for much greater clarity and precision about exactly what is being said.

⁴⁰⁴ Williams, appendix 12, lines 47-49.

However, Troll and Khalil approach the issue of common ground in a critical manner. Troll and Khalil, in their respective responses, accept that theological agreement is important for Christian-Muslim relations and in work for peace and justice. However, they do not agree with the idea that theological agreement based on the scriptures alone can guarantee peaceful coexistence within diversity.

Troll asks: “Does the double commandment to love God and neighbour on its own truly provide an adequate basis for peaceful and harmonious co-existence in diverse societies?”⁴⁰⁵ Troll has reason to raise this question. He says, “even if theologians from the three faiths could agree on the central meaning of the double love-commandment, there would still be enormous practical differences to consider when it comes to putting into effect these commandments in the concrete here-and-now reality of plural societies”.⁴⁰⁶ He focuses the question in relation to the imposition of Shari‘a, establishing human rights and the relationship between state and religion. The issues he raises are alive and crucial. One wonders if he has in mind the grim situation of Christians in Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria and Pakistan where human rights violations against them often go unchallenged.

⁴⁰⁵ Troll, appendix 9, lines 136-137.

⁴⁰⁶ Troll, appendix 9, lines 130-133.

Khalil notes that in ACW only such verses from the Bible are chosen that can be paralleled to the Qur'an.⁴⁰⁷ He asks what about the Qur'anic texts that are a contradiction to Christianity faith?⁴⁰⁸ Though Khalil recognises that ACW is "an important step but if we remain on this level, we risk casting a dialogue based on ambiguities. In any case as a first step it is useful to highlight our common foundations."⁴⁰⁹ He goes on to say that a common foundation based on the Bible and the Qur'an would still leave out millions of people who do not belong to either of these traditions or still more those who do not belong to any religious tradition. In this context Khalil prefers Natural Law as the common basis because it is universal and non-believers too can agree to it.⁴¹⁰ Troll too thinks that the dual commandment will not be able to provide an adequate basis for dialogue even if theologians of the three Abrahamic religions agree upon the meaning of the dual commandment of love. In this context in order to carry forward Christian-Muslim relations, he also suggests that Natural Law could form a basis for dialogue. Troll says that rational laws "can be accepted not only by Christians and Muslims but fundamentally by all people".⁴¹¹ He says that friendly and constructive relations could be built on rational laws which are rooted in the 'creator's plan'. Khalil writes: "... the common basis is natural law ...

⁴⁰⁷ Khalil, appendix 11, lines 147-148.

⁴⁰⁸ Khalil, appendix 11, lines 148-149.

⁴⁰⁹ Khalil, appendix 11, lines 151-152.

⁴¹⁰ Khalil, appendix 11, lines 156-157.

⁴¹¹ Troll, appendix 9, lines 156-157.

in itself accessible to every rational creature ... accepted even by atheists".⁴¹²

Troll and Khalil's conviction is based on the interrelation of faith and reason in religious discourse. This could be summarised as follows: faith and reason are not contrary to one another. In the light of faith, reason can ensure the human dignity of all. Faith will show that humanity has its source in God who is the creator of all and as creator wants all humanity to live at peace with one another in a dignified way. Human reason should guide humanity in ways that fit the plan of the creator, since it partakes in divine reason.

Troll argues that Natural Law could provide a common basis for understanding one another better because it argues that a moral and ethical way of living is enshrined and inbuilt in the rational thinking of every human being. Natural Law is understood as an inbuilt

⁴¹² Khalil's position is similar to that expressed by Pope Benedict XVI who spoke of natural moral law as something that justifies and illustrates the foundations of a universal ethic which belongs to the great patrimony of human wisdom and which allows the rational creature to participate in God's law. According to Pope Benedict XVI the doctrine on natural law "achieves two essential aims: it makes it clear that the ethical content of the Christian faith is not an imposition dictated from outside man's conscience, but has its basis in human nature itself; and on the other hand, by starting from the basis of natural law... it lays the foundations for dialogue with all men and women of good will, and with civil society more generally." See: Pope Benedict XVI, "Majorities make mistakes, natural law must be the guide of civil society, asserts Pope Benedict," http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/majorities_make_mistakes_natural_law_must_be_the_guide_of_civil_society_asserts_pope_benedict/ [accessed November 4, 2010].

commitment in human persons that seeks to do good and avoid evil.⁴¹³ It could be said that divine law enlightens human intellect to seek good and avoid evil. This commitment reflects the way God has made humanity. Thus Natural Law participates in divine law (eternal law).⁴¹⁴ The importance of this concept is it universalizes morality providing a common basis for people of all faiths and none. It thus grounds the concept of conscience, establishing a moral link between humanity and God. It also provides a model for the political order that includes the ‘common good’. Natural Law continued to influence secular laws (Universal Declaration of Human Rights – 1948) as well as Christian ethics (esp. Catholic social and ethical teachings).⁴¹⁵

Natural Law also has some limitations in an ecumenical context. All Christian churches do not uniformly accept Natural Law. Some

⁴¹³ A. Hastings, “Natural Law,” eds. A. Hastings, A. Mason and H. Pyper, *Oxford companion to Christian Thought* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], 465.

⁴¹⁴ See a good discussion on Natural Law as ‘participation in of Eternal Law’ in J. Finns, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, Clarendon Law Series [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980], 398-402.

It is important to quote Q. 3:104 here.

وَلْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْعُرْفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ

الْمُنْكَرِ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١٠٤﴾

Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong: they are the ones to attain felicity [Abdullah Yusuf Ali’s translation].

In classical Islam, it is maintained that prophets and messengers are chosen by God and these chosen ones are intermediaries between God and humankind. Revelation is **sent** to them by God. God’s communication originates ‘from on high’. It is also maintained in classical Islam that “it would be mistake to expect the divine revelation typically to be communicated directly to every human being, through his or her reason ...” See: Y. Michot, *Classical Islamic Theology*, 182. This position indicates that there is a problem in recognising ‘Natural Law’ as a common ground for Muslims.

⁴¹⁵ Troll presents his idea systematically in his ‘A Note on Truth’. See: M. Ipgrave, *The Road Ahead: a Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 89-94.

Protestant scholars influenced by thoughts of the degenerate nature of human will without nature and grace would have difficulty in accepting Natural Law in the same way. Moreover, some 20th century theologians would argue that Natural Law can be coherently conceived apart from God. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), who set out Natural Law's character in theological terms, quite clearly refused the possibility of arguing a case for Natural Law apart from God.⁴¹⁶ Troll's suggestion seems to be an important and attractive one in the context of a certain revival in Natural Law thinking among different Christian churches.⁴¹⁷

In summary, these chosen responses argue, in different ways, that providing a theological basis for dialogue is one of the most important aims of ACW. It was shown that the Yale Document though generous in intention does not show a critical understanding of ACW. It fails to do justice to specificities of each faith. Madigan's response though critical of ACW's understanding of the love of God still considers that the document offers a theological basis for dialogue. It was noted that there was a need for greater clarity and precision with regard to some of the terms being used. Williams displays exemplary clarity in his own approach to ACW and cautions that the search for common ground

⁴¹⁶ A. Hastings, "Natural Law," eds. A. Hastings, A. Mason and H. Pyper, *Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, 465.

⁴¹⁷ Catholic moral philosophers such as J. Finnis and G. Grisez have stimulated something of a revival in Natural Law thinking in the recent decades. See: S. Wells & B. Quash, *Introducing Christian Ethics* [Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010], 115-145.

should not lead to claiming a shared understanding of God that would not be faithful to both traditions.

Troll and Khalil though, while agreeing with the importance of theology for dialogue based on common elements derived from scriptures, signal that commitment based on Natural Law which “includes values such as: service of our sisters and brothers and fraternal solidarity with members of other religions and all men of good will” would serve dialogue better.⁴¹⁸

The analysed responses stress the importance of theology in the area of Christian-Muslim relations. Interfaith relations between Christians and Muslims cannot be sustained on mere practicalities, though that is an integral part of such relations. The relations need to be built on faith as articulated in the realm of theology.

3.3.2 Methodology and mode of discourse for Muslims

Some of the Christian responses point out that ACW offers Muslims a methodology for dialogue. Thus Madigan says: “It [ACW] is implicitly addressed to Muslims, modelling 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 underpinning for

⁴¹⁸ Troll, appendix 9, lines 157-159.

it.”⁴¹⁹ The methodology and the mode of discourse that ACW offers is to build relations between adherents of the two religions; for Muslims this is to approach Christians in dialogue based on common elements found in both religions. The common elements are, as noted earlier, the unity of God, love of God (explained as complete devotion to God), and love of neighbour.⁴²⁰ The methodology ACW offers to Muslims invites them not to reject the Bible but to consider biblical verses along with the Qur’an in finding common elements which could be a common platform for deepening relations and remaining committed to peace and justice in the world.

Madigan considers ACW to be a voice of some authority within the Muslim world as part of the Amman Project which seeks “to develop an authoritative consensus on what it means to be Muslims in our time”.⁴²¹ This Amman project “seeks to fill a vacuum in the leadership of the worldwide Muslim community – a vacuum that has in recent years been filled only by the extremist voices only too well known to us through the world’s media”.⁴²²

⁴¹⁹ Madigan, appendix 10, lines 88-91.

⁴²⁰ It should be emphasised without ambiguity that these common elements are rooted in the Qur’an as well as in the Bible, but with their own specific details.

⁴²¹ Madigan, appendix 10, lines 51-52.

⁴²² Madigan, appendix 10, lines 53-55.

It is interesting to note that Madigan describes ACW as an *authoritative voice* but not as a *moderate voice* of Muslims, for he says “the authors are not moderate Muslims ”.⁴²³ He alludes to the terms ‘moderates’ and ‘extremists’ in popular discourse. The media, he suggests, drive home that if anyone takes Islam seriously, then his/her voice would be an extreme voice. It is simply impossible to have dialogue with them. This would indicate that dialogue is possible only with moderates. The media interpret moderates as those who do not take their religion seriously. Many Christians seem to think that dialogue is possible only with Muslims who are moderates. There appears to be a veiled criticism of the officials of the Catholic Church who work in the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue who look for moderate Muslims with whom to conduct dialogue. Madigan, by choosing to describe ACW as an authoritative voice, agrees with ACW that dialogue is possible only with those who take their religion seriously.

Troll and Khalil consider that the document offers Muslims a methodology for dialogue. They note three important new elements in the mode of discourse which ACW offers to Muslims. First, ACW shows Muslims that common elements that sustain dialogue might be found in the Bible and the Qur’an. Troll and Khalil regard this as a first step and look for a more universal basis for Christian-Muslim relations. Secondly, ACW with the help of selected biblical and Qur’anic verses

⁴²³ Madigan, appendix 10, line 61.

points to the unity of God as a meeting place for Christians and Muslims. Thirdly, ACW offers love of God and love of neighbour which are held to be summary of the ethical teachings of Christ as common elements for discussion between Muslims and Christians.

3.3.3 The centrality of Muhammad for Muslims

Both Troll and the Yale Document note the centrality of Muhammad for Muslim and its implications for Christian-Muslim dialogue. Troll points out that for the authors of ACW, as for all Muslims, “the absolute criterion for the correct understanding of love of God and love of neighbour lie in Muhammad, his life and his interpretation of the divine commandments found in the Qur’an”.⁴²⁴ Divine revelation, regarding the unity of God, complete devotion to God and love for neighbour, is understood through the words and deeds of Muhammad. The way in which Muhammad practised love of God and love of neighbour in his life in Mecca and Medina remains absolutely decisive for Muslims. ACW’s repeated citation of *h adīth* highlights their importance in Muslim reflection on dialogue with Christians. Troll sees in the centrality of Muhammad a problem as well as an important opening for deepening relations with Muslims.

⁴²⁴ Troll, appendix 9, lines 83-85.

The problem concerns the increasing tension between Muslims and Christians as well Jews reflected in the ninth chapter of the Qur'an.⁴²⁵

This dimension is not reflected in ACW. If Muhammad's words and deeds are normative, one cannot neglect this aspect of tension in the later years of his life. This is an important area which needs deeper consideration.

By highlighting the centrality of Muhammad's role in Muslim life Troll raises an issue for Christian readers. In the history of Christian-Muslim relations, Muhammad has been insulted in several ways in poetry, history, literature, drama, paintings, and popular songs.⁴²⁶ The legacy of

⁴²⁵ Muhammad Asad in his translation and explanation of the The Qur'an [The Message of The Qur'an] clarifies that *at-Tawbah*, the ninth chapter of the Qur'an was revealed around the time when Muhammad was in conflict with people who violated the treaties and other who denied the truth value of the Qur'an and Muhammad's teachings.

⁴²⁶ Voltaire represents Muhammad as a Machiavellian manipulator of those who were around him, a man motivated by sexual desire and political ambition in his play *Mahomet*. See: D. Hammerbeck, "Voltaire's *Mahomet*, the Persistence of cultural Memory and Pre-Modern Orientalism" <http://www.humanities.ualberta.ca/agora/pdf/154.pdf> [accessed August 10, 2010].

S. Luchitskaja argues that the foundations of the western image of Islam were laid in the early middle ages, when the Prophet was presented as an instrument of apostates, at whose instigation he created a religion which was the very antithesis of Christianity. See: S. Luchitskaja, "The image of Muhammad in Latin chronography of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries" http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=ArticleURL&_udi=B6VC1-4090SV4-1&_user=10&_coverDate=06%2F30%2F2000&_rdoc=1&_fmt=high&_orig=browse&_origin=browse&_sort=d&view=c&_acct=C000050221&_version=1&_urlVersion=0&_userid=10&md5=0b1419235d06457ab9be2bb891c3e56b [accessed July 10, 2010].

Muhammad was accused of being a magician, demonic, an epileptic, and a fallen Cardinal. He was also accused of hypocrisy, imposture and blasphemy. See N. Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*, 30-31, 47, 98, 102, 108, 262, 268, 273, 355 (as a magician); 51, 90, 102, 273, 358, 368, 372 (as demonic); 104, 268 (as a fallen Cardinal); 48-49, 112, 127, 266, 358 (as epileptic); 93, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 185, 298-299, 310-311, 312, 323, 369, 384 (accusation of hypocrisy, imposture or blasphemy).

negativity towards Muhammad is too obvious and could be a real block in Christian-Muslim relations. ACW issues an invitation to Christians to speak about Muhammad in a dignified way. Here one could refer to a comment by the 8th century Nestorian Katholikos Timothy. When asked by the Muslim caliph what he thought of Muhammad, Katholikos Timothy said: “Muhammad walked in the way of the prophets.”⁴²⁷ Muslims and Christians have different definitions of the term ‘prophet’; for Christians they are not sinless, perfect exemplars of a Godly way of life. But it is important that Christians should be able to speak of Muhammad in an informed and respectful manner.⁴²⁸

The important question is: what can Christians say about Muhammad? Within Christian theologies, is there room for positive thinking about Muhammad? Troll indicates that it is important to speak of Muhammad with dignity, drawing upon the Muslim sources as well as Christian faith

See: J. Meyendorf, “Byzantine Views of Islam,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18 [1964], 114-132; N.M. Vaporis, ed. *Orthodox Christians and Muslims* [Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1986].

⁴²⁷ J.M. Gaudeul, *Encounters & Clashes : Islam and Christianity I Texts*, 37

⁴²⁸ M.W. Watt { *Muhammad at Mecca* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979] and *Muhammad at Medina* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981]} and T. Andrae (*Muhammad: The Man and his Faith* [London: Routledge, 2007]) are known for their respectful, academic and scholarly presentation of Muhammad. C. Bennett’s *In Search of Muhammad* [London: Cassell, 1999] though not a biography in the strict sense discusses the general problem of writing biographies of Muhammad. One could add K. Armstrong’s *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet* [London: Phoenix, 2004] which is a popular and readable volume. Moreover M.F. Gülen writes: “The West’s perspective on our Prophet also has softened. Together with Christian clerics and men of religion, many Western thinkers besides Massignon, like Charles J. Ledit, Y. Moubarac, Irene-M. Dalmais, L. Gardet, Norman Daniel, Michel Lelong, H. Maurier, Oliver Lacombe, and Thomas Merton express warmth for both Islam and for our Prophet ...” See: M.F. Gülen, *The Necessity of Interfaith Dialogue: A Muslim Perspective* [Somerset, NJ: The Light, Inc., Wisdom on to the faith series 10, 2004], 8.

tradition. Surely, the Spirit blows where she wills and God uses people who are not Hebrews {e.g. the Queen of Sheba [1 Kings 10: 1-13] and Cyrus the Persian [2 Chronicles 36: 22-23; Ezra 1: 1-11; Daniel 1:21; 6::28; 10:1]} in a prophetic role. Troll's response highlights this important dimension of dialogue between these two groups. An understanding of prophethood also involves an understanding of revelation. Muhammad's life is inseparably linked to revelation for Muslims. Any serious discussion on Muhammad between Christians and Muslims cannot avoid the area of 'revelation'. While the Qur'an is the literal, verbal revelation in Islam, it is Christ himself who is the revelation of God incarnate in Christianity. In dialogue Muslims need to understand their own as well as Christians understanding of the person of Jesus, similarly Christians need to understand how Muslims and Christians understand Muhammad. There is a great deal of work that needs to be done on all dimensions of these questions.

3.3.4 A Common Vision

In his lengthy response, Williams offers a thorough discussion of a common vision for dialogue between Christians and Muslims around ACW. It could be said that Williams' response is the crown of all the responses because it gives a road map for working together in the light of ACW. He says that any vision for mutual understanding and commitment for peace has to be grounded in absolute faithfulness to both religions. He finds the main obstacle to such a vision to be the practice of violence in the name of religion.

Williams accepts that when different communities have the same sort of conviction about the absolute truth of their outlook, 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 any sort of violence. He makes it clear that the more Christians and Muslims, as people of genuine faith, are serious about the truth of their convictions, the more likely they will be to turn away from violence in the name of faith, since religious faith and violence are diametrically opposed to one another. However, he reminds his readers that no religion could absolve itself from violence in the past and present. He says that violence has been propagated in the name of religion. In many contexts over millennia violence has been done to helpless sections of people in the name of religion.

Williams affirms that a vision for dialogue has to break the vicious cycle of violence. ACW has shown that religious convictions can be a vehicle for creating peace, if one works from a common ground. ACW teaches that Muslims and Christians need to hold fast to their truth-claims and reject violence. This does two positive things at once. It affirms the transcendent source of faith and makes clear that there is no justification for violence. It rules out coercive human power as the ultimate authority in our world. Religious pluralism can be seen as serving the cause of social unity and acting as a force for the common good. It would therefore be incumbent on both Christians and Muslims to defend other groups and communities as well.

Williams offers a theoretical framework for a vision of transformative non-violence. To achieve such a vision, Christians and Muslims need to strengthen grassroot partnerships, intensify shared theological discussion and deepen appreciation for each other's religious practices and experiences. He finds study of sacred scriptures would be one such way that could achieve these aims. He sounds a note of caution: one should remind oneself of the different roles of scriptures in different religions.

Williams shows how this vision can be translated into practical action. He says that Christians and Muslims need to maintain and strengthen the momentum of what is already happening in their mutual encounters, find safe spaces within which the differences – as well as convergences – can be articulated honestly and creatively, train people who can impart religious education which respects the faith of others, and provide opportunities for lived encounters. He makes clear that dialogue will make progress only if the participants are committed to the process of dialogue and are partners in dialogue. His vision appears to be suited to a European context and its needs. However, taking their cue from Williams' theoretical framework, Christians and Muslims in different regions can work out practical means to carry forward dialogue.

3.4 A Summary

The responses consider ACW a significant and remarkable step in the history of Christian-Muslim relations. ACW does not simply accuse the Christians of being *kāfirun* and dispute Christian belief in one God. ACW has the potential to contribute towards Christian-Muslim understanding. The responses recognise ACW's effort to draw near to a Christian way of speaking as it has developed around the dual commandments. The themes of ACW, according to some responses, resonate with the first encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI '*Deus Caritas Est*'. They recognise ACW as an important Muslim initiative towards understanding between Christians and Muslims as it comes at a critical moment in history where religious identities are exploited to strengthen prejudices and to promote violence.

The responses are quite frank in their criticism as well. They consider that ACW does not acknowledge doctrinal differences between Islam and Christianity. Troll and Williams point out that a shared understanding of God as ACW implicitly proposes would not be an honest reflection of both traditions. The differences are critical and cannot be negotiated away. On the issue of the use of the Bible in ACW, the responses acknowledge the positive approach provided by the signatories but also highlight several ambiguities. Troll and Khalil in this context propose a universal foundation based on Natural Law

instead of a common platform with scriptural underpinning. As both responses are brief, they do not discuss this proposal at length.

The response of Williams was produced after months of discussion and reflection. But all the others were written either before or shortly after the publication of ACW, therefore the time available for in-depth evaluation of the text and the range of possible meanings was limited. Some of the responses display certain naivety when dealing with certain issues, for example: the Yale Document uncritically accepts the way in which the understanding of God is presented in ACW, and Madigan likens ACW with NA, without reference to the latter's worldwide Conciliar authority.

The responses that are analysed here do not give sufficient attention to the process by which ACW was developed, circulated, and counter-signed. The process is important as it could shed light on the way in which the signatories variously interpret the document they signed.

Conclusion

The dissertation set out to consider the following research question: “What does ACW do to promote a new understanding between Christians and Muslims?” ACW makes a case for a common ground between Christians and Muslims in their belief in one God with a scriptural (Biblical and Qur’anic) underpinning. ACW touches upon two complex issues in Christian-Muslim relations: belief in one God, and the status of the Bible. These two issues had been subject of intense polemical debate between Christians and Muslims for centuries. In contrast to the polemics of the past ACW want to develop mutual relations around these two issues.

In order to search for an answer to the research question, this dissertation chose a methodology by which these two themes: ‘the use of the Bible in ACW’, and ‘the belief in one God’ were considered in the formative period of Islam (chapter 1), in ACW (chapter 2), and in a select sample of responses (Chapter 3) so that one can judge ACW’s contribution for promoting new understanding between Christian and Muslims.

The discussion on ‘the status of the Bible’ in the first chapter showed that in the early centuries of Islam Muslims treated the Bible as corrupted scriptures. When some of the theologians in the early centuries argued that the text is corrupted others insisted that the problem was with its interpretation and thus needed a Muslim interpretation. In short, polemics marked their discussion.

In contrast to the attitude of earlier discussions, it is significant and remarkable that ACW stays away from polemics while using the Bible. It neither condemns the Bible as corrupted scripture nor recommends Muslim interpretation. Refraining from polemics in a discourse between Christians and Muslims is an important new step. ACW shows that polemics has outlived its usefulness and has no place in the future. It regards the Qur'an as the only authentic and authoritative scripture, by quoting verses from the Bible that agree with the Qur'an the signatories demonstrate serious respect for the biblical verses they quote. Thus it signals that it is searching for a new way in which at least certain verses from the Bible could be placed alongside verses from the Qur'an for future conversations between them. It is heartening that ACW indicates a new era of conversation, not debate.

However, ACW's openness is riddled with certain weaknesses. First, ACW is silent about the issue of the overall status of the Bible. It fails to consider or even to acknowledge the way in which the Bible is understood as the word of God within the Christian tradition. Any meaningful relations must have a level playing field and ACW does not provide one. Secondly, it displays ambiguity when it fails to take into consideration the whole range of theological opinions around the biblical texts (and Qur'anic texts too) that it cites. This method of studying scriptures lacks sensitivity towards the exegetical traditions of both traditions. It is surprising that ACW does not pick up from Scriptural Reasoning, a model that takes into consideration the entirety of Biblical and Qur'anic exegesis. As a result the pitfall is that the Muslim signatories and readers as well as Christian readers could read and interpret the text of ACW differently even in ways that are not in

resonance with the spirit of ACW. This ambiguity weakens the potential of the document in promoting understanding between Christians and Muslims. Christian-Muslim relations must be transparent, well-defined, open and unambiguous. Thirdly, ACW displays certain weakness in its overall methodology. It considers a few verses from the Qur'an and Bible and draws conclusions. ACW starts from above (the Qur'an and the Bible) and suggests way to improve relations at the grass root level. In this approach the realities on the ground are not given enough consideration. This is born out by the fact that ACW has been practically ignored by Muslims in South Asia, especially in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. As a result Christians along with Hindu and Sikh minorities are often persecuted under the 'blasphemy law' in Pakistan. The impact of ACW still has to be addressed in those situations. There is a lack of interest in ACW in India among both Christians and Muslims, as it does not consider practical issues that confront Christians and Muslims in a multi-religious situation. It remains an intellectual document lacking roots among Muslims in general. In multi-religious situations, if the invitation to work for peace, as ACW intends, is to be taken seriously it needs to involve the followers of other religions. Moreover, it should not be based on just the scriptures of the two religious traditions since this would exclude many others. In order to come to a common word the basis needs to be widened and should include a concern for human rights, secularism and a consideration of democracy. Such concerns could become common ground for joint initiatives in multi religious contexts.

On the issue of belief in one God, it was shown in the first chapter that Muslim authors in the formative period of Islam argued that the

Trinitarian understanding of God compromises the strict monotheistic unity of God. This Trinitarian understanding of God in the minds of Muslims is riddled with error and cannot be compared to the Islamic *tawhīd*. Thus Christians and Muslims cannot find a common ground between them in the way in which they understand their belief in one God. The way the long drawn out discussion on this issue was handled in the early centuries of Islam demonstrated how intense polemics was at the heart of the debate in that period and instead of improving Christian-Muslim relations it vitiated the relation.

In contrast to this attitude ACW foresees a common ground between Christians and Muslims in their belief in one God and issues an invitation based on Q. 3:64. The Qur'anic underpinning for this invitation indicates that ACW remains orthodox and does not equate the Trinitarian monotheism with *tawhīd*. ACW does not get entangled in the quagmire of polemics. It does not simply assume that Christians believe in more than one God and call them *kāfirun* but rather obfuscates the issue.

Though ACW avoids polemics, it does not recognize the specificity of Christian faith with regard to their belief in one God. It bypasses what is central to the Christian faith and does not even acknowledge that Christians believe in One God as triune. The Trinity and *tawhīd* are irreconcilable. However, it does not mean that the mere acknowledgement of such irreconcilable element would result in complete breakdown of any conversation. The discussion between Muhammad and the delegation from Najran which centred on the nature of God did not result in complete break down of relations. There is a

lesson there for present day Christians and Muslims. Muhammad and the Christians of Najran agreed to disagree.

More critically, though ACW shuns polemics, it suggests that Christian and Muslim belief in one God is *essentially* the same. The differences regarding such concepts as incarnation, redemption, Christ as saviour are categorised as 'formal' without explaining what this term means. ACW neglects them as non-consequential and does not tackle them in order to develop a common platform. As mentioned earlier, acknowledging differences is basic to any religious conversation. The complexity of theology and history on these cardinal truth claims demands a careful and rigorous analysis. ACW has not risen to the demands of such analysis and fails to be sensitive to central aspects of the Christian faith.

ACW does not seem to have succeeded in carrying the majority Muslim opinion along with it by referring to an exegesis of Q. 3:64 which though classical and highly regarded however reflects a minority opinion. It should be said that there is a chosen ambiguity on the part of the writers who prepared ACW and it allows the signatories to interpret it differently. It was noted that there are no monographs on this subject from the signatories. ACW critically needs a solid theological backing from the signatories explaining their stand with more analysis.

The responses are in some cases inadequately brief due to what seems to have been a felt need for a quick response. Consequently they tend to use terms such as common word/common language, natural law/rational law

interchangeably that weakens their evaluation of ACW. It is also intriguing that except for Williams' response, no other lengthy theological investigation on ACW has appeared from Christians who are involved in Christian-Muslim relations. Substantial reflections on ACW with much supportive material will have to come from different Christian quarters in order to answer the question: "what has ACW done to promote a new understanding between Christians and Muslims?"

In conclusion therefore it should be said that ACW is a modest and tentative effort in building Christian-Muslim relations though it is marked with some ambiguities and lack of clarity in certain theologically sensitive areas. It has the potential to contribute to a new development of Christian-Muslim understanding as it avoids polemics. The novelty of ACW lies in its ability to invite both Christians and Muslims to live up to the ethical implications of their respective faiths in one God, and the dual commands that arise from this faith; loving God and loving neighbour. It also invites both of them to learn from one another. Thus ACW signals a beginning of a new understanding in relations between Christians and Muslims. It is the responsibility of both Christians and Muslims to take seriously the demands of the ethical implication of their faith in one God and ACW's invitation to learn from one another. To carry forward this new understanding, Christians and Muslims have to broaden their perspective of one another, acknowledging differences as crucial since these differences have a potential to contribute to the deeper understanding of one another. Moreover, the common ground should be expanded to include every one and take into consideration the realities that exist on the ground in different parts of the world.

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Appendix 1

THE AMMAN MESSAGE

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THE AMMAN MESSAGE

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

Peace and blessings upon His chosen Prophet, and upon his household, his noble blessed companions, and upon all the messengers and prophets.

God Almighty has said:

O humankind! We created you from a male and female, and made you into peoples and tribes that you may know each other. Truly the most honored of you before God is the most pious of you. (49:13)

This is a declaration to our brethren in the lands of Islam and throughout the world that Amman, the capital of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, is proud to issue during the blessed month of Ramadan *in which the Qur'an descended as guidance to humankind and as clarifications for guidance and discernment. (2:185)*

In this declaration we speak frankly to the [Islamic] nation, at this difficult juncture in its history, regarding the perils that beset it. We are aware of the challenges confronting the nation, threatening its identity, assailing its tenets (*kalima*), and working to distort its religion and harm what is sacred to it. Today the magnanimous message of Islam faces a vicious attack from those who through distortion and fabrication try to portray Islam as an enemy to them. It is also under attack from some who claim affiliation with Islam and commit irresponsible acts in its name.

This magnanimous message that the Originator—great is His power—revealed to the unlettered Prophet Muhammad—God's blessings and peace upon him, and that was carried by his successors and the members of his household after him, is an address of brotherhood, humanity and a religion that encompasses all human activity. It states the truth directly, commands what is right, forbids what is wrong, honors the human being, and accepts others.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has embraced the path of promoting the true luminous image of Islam, halting the accusations against it and repelling the attacks upon it. This is in accordance with the inherited spiritual and historical responsibility carried by the Hashemite monarchy, honored as direct descendants of the Prophet, the Messenger of God—peace and blessings upon him—who carried the message. For five decades, his late Majesty King Hussein Bin Talal—God rest his soul—demonstrated this way with the vigorous effort that he exerted. Since the day he took the flag, His Majesty King Abdullah II has continued this effort, with resolution and determination, as a service to Islam, fortifying the solidarity of 1.2 billion Muslims who comprise one fifth of humanity, preventing their marginalization or extrication from the movement of human society, and affirming their role in building human civilization and participating in its progress during our present age.

43 Islam is founded upon basic principles, the fundamentals are attesting to the
44 unity of God (*tawhid Allah*); belief in the message of His Prophet;
45 continuous connection with the Creator through ritual prayer (*salat*);
46 training and rectifying the soul through the fast of Ramadan; safeguarding
47 one another by paying the alms tax (*zakat*); the unity of the people through
48 the annual pilgrimage (*ihajj*) to God's Sanctified House, [performed] by
49 those who are able; and [observing] His rulings that regulate human
50 behavior in all its dimensions. Over history these [basic principles] have
51 formed a strong and cohesive nation and a great civilization. They bear
52 witness to noble principles and values that verify the good of humanity,
53 whose foundation is the oneness of the human species, and that people are
54 equal in rights and obligations, peace and justice, realizing comprehensive
55 security, mutual social responsibility, being good to one's neighbor,
56 protecting belongings and property, honoring pledges, and more.

57 Together, these are principles that provide common ground for the followers
58 of religions and [different] groups of people. That is because the origin of
59 divine religions is one, and Muslims believe in all Messengers of God and
60 do not differentiate between any of them. Denying the message of any one
61 of them is a deviation from Islam. This establishes a wide platform for the
62 believers of [different] religions to meet the other upon common ground, for
63 the service of human society, without encroaching upon creedal distinctions
64 or upon intellectual freedom. For all of this we base ourselves upon His
65 saying:

66 *The messenger believes in what has been revealed unto him from*
67 *his Lord as do the believers. Each one believes in God and His*
68 *angels and His scriptures and His messengers. We make no*
69 *distinction between any of His messengers—and they say: 'We*
70 *hear, and we obey. [Grant us] Your forgiveness, our Lord. Unto*
71 *You is the journeying,' (2:285)*

72 Islam honors every human being, regardless of his color, race or
73 religion: *We have honored the sons of Adam, provided them*
74 *transport on land and sea, sustained them with good things, and*
75 *conferred on them special favors above a great part of our*
76 *creation. (17:70)*

77 Islam also affirms that the way of calling [others] to God is
78 founded upon kindness and gentleness: *Call to the path of your*
79 *Lord with wisdom and a beautiful exhortation, and debate with*
80 *them in that which is most beautiful (ahsan). (16:125)* Furthermore,
81 it shuns cruelty and violence in how one faces and addresses
82 [others]:

83 *It is by some Mercy of God that you were gentle to them. Were you*
84 *severe—cruel-hearted—they would have broken away from you. So*
85 *pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult with them in*
86 *the conduct of affairs. And when you are resolved, put your trust in*
87 *God; truly God loves those who trust [in Him]. (3:i59)*

88 Islam has made clear that the goal of its message is realizing mercy and
89 good for all people. The Transcendent has said, *We did not send you*
90 *[Muhammad] but out of mercy for all creatures.* (21:107) And the Prophet
91 Muhammad—blessings and peace upon Him—said, 'The Merciful has
92 mercy upon those who are merciful, be merciful to those on earth, He who
93 is in heaven will be merciful unto you.'

94 Islam calls for treating others as one desires to be treated. It urges the
95 tolerance and forgiveness that express the nobility of the human being: *The*
96 *recompense for an evil is an evil equal thereto, but who forgives and*
97 *reconciles, his recompense is from God.* (42:40) *Good and evil are not*
98 *equal. Repel with what is most virtuous. Then he between whom and you*
99 *there is enmity will be as if he were an intimate friend.* (41:34)

100 Islam confirms the principle of justice in interacting with others,
101 safeguarding their rights, and confirms that one must not deny people their
102 possessions: *And let not the hatred of others make you swerve to wrong and*
103 *depart from justice. Be just: that is closer to piety;* (5:8) *God commands you*
104 *to return trusts to their owners, and if you judge between people, you shall*
105 *judge with justice;* (4:58) *So give [full] measure and [full] weight and do*
106 *not deny the people their goods, and work no corruption in the land, after it*
107 *has been set right.* (7:85)

108 Islam requires respect for pledges and covenants, and adhering to what has
109 been specified; and it forbids treachery and treason: *Fulfill the covenant of*
110 *God when you have entered into it, and break not oaths after they have been*
111 *confirmed and you have made God your surety; truly God knows what you*
112 *do.* (16:91)

113 Islam recognizes the noble station of [human] life, so there is to be no
114 fighting against non-combatants, and no assault upon civilians and their
115 properties, children at their mothers' bosom, students in their schools, nor
116 upon elderly men and women. Assault upon the life of a human being, be it
117 murder, injury or threat, is an assault upon the right to life among all human
118 beings. It is among the gravest of sins; for human life is the basis for the
119 prosperity of humanity: *Whoever kills a soul for other than slaying a soul or*
120 *corruption upon the earth it is as if he has killed the whole of humanity, and*
121 *whoever saves a life, it is as if he has revived the whole of humanity.* (5:32)

122 The primordial religion of Islam is founded upon equanimity, balance,
123 moderation, and facilitation: *Thus have we made of you a middle nation that*
124 *you might be witnesses over the people, and the Messenger a witness over*
125 *yourselves.* (2:143) The Prophet Muhammad—peace and blessings upon
126 him—said: 'Facilitate and do not make difficult, bear good tidings and do
127 not deter.' Islam has provided the foundation for the knowledge, reflection
128 and contemplation that has enabled the creation of this deep-rooted
129 civilization that was a crucial link by which the West arrived at the gates of
130 modern knowledge, and in whose accomplishments non-Muslims
131 participated, as a consequence of its being a comprehensive human
132 civilization.

133 No day has passed but that this religion has been at war against extremism,
134 radicalism and fanaticism, for they veil the intellect from foreseeing
135 negative consequences [of one's actions]. Such blind impetuosity falls
136 outside the human regulations pertaining to religion, reason and character.
137 They are not from the true character of the tolerant, accepting Muslim.

138 Islam rejects extremism, radicalism and fanaticism—just as all noble,
139 heavenly religions reject them—considering them as recalcitrant ways and
140 forms of injustice. Furthermore, it is not a trait that characterizes a particular
141 nation; it is an aberration that has been experienced by all nations, races, and
142 religions. They are not particular to one people; truly they are a
143 phenomenon that every people, every race and every religion has known.

144 We denounce and condemn extremism, radicalism and fanaticism today,
145 just as our forefathers tirelessly denounced and opposed them throughout
146 Islamic history. They are the ones who affirmed, as do we, the firm and
147 unshakeable understanding that Islam is a religion of [noble] character traits
148 in both its ends and means; a religion that strives for the good of the people,
149 their happiness in this life and the next; and a religion that can only be
150 defended in ways that are ethical; and the ends do not justify the means in
151 this religion.

152 The source of relations between Muslims and others is peace; for there is no
153 fighting [permitted] when there is no aggression. Even then, [it must be
154 done with] benevolence, justice and virtue: *God does not prevent you, as
155 regards those who do not fight you in religion's [cause], nor drive you from
156 your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: truly God loves the
157 just; (60:8) Then if they cease, let there be no aggression, save against the
158 oppressors. (2:193)*

159 On religious and moral grounds, we denounce the contemporary concept of
160 terrorism that is associated with wrongful practices, whatever their source
161 and form may be. Such acts are represented by aggression against human
162 life in an oppressive form that transgresses the rulings of God, frightening
163 those who are secure, violating peaceful civilians, finishing off the
164 wounded, and killing prisoners; and they employ unethical means, such as
165 destroying buildings and ransacking cities: *Do not kill the soul that God has
166 made sacrosanct, save for justice. (6:151)*

167 We condemn these practices and believe that resisting oppression and con-
168 firming justice should be a legitimate undertaking through legitimate means.
169 We call on the people to take the necessary steps to achieve the strength and
170 steadfastness for building identity and preserving rights.

171 We realize that over history extremism has been instrumental in destroying
172 noble achievements in great civilizations, and that the tree of civilization
173 withers when malice takes hold and breasts are shut. In all its shapes,
174 extremism is a stranger to Islam, which is founded upon equanimity and
175 tolerance. No human whose heart has been illumined by God could be a
176 radical extremist.

177 At the same time, we decry the campaign of brazen distortion that portrays
178 Islam as a religion that encourages violence and institutionalizes terrorism.
179 We call upon the international community to work earnestly to implement
180 inter-national laws and honor the international mandates and resolutions
181 issued by the United Nations, ensuring that all parties accept them and that
182 they be enacted without double standards, to guarantee the return of rights to
183 their [rightful] holders and the end of oppression. Achieving this will be a
184 significant contribution to uprooting the causes of violence, fanaticism and
185 extremism.

186 The way of this great religion that we are honored to belong to calls us to
187 affiliate with and participate in modern society, and to contribute to its
188 elevation and progress, helping one another with every faculty [to achieve]
189 good and to comprehend, desiring justice for all peoples, while faithfully
190 proclaiming the truth [of our religion], and sincerely expressing the
191 soundness of our faith and beliefs—all of which are founded upon God's
192 call for coexistence and piety. [We are called] to work toward renewing our
193 civilization, based upon the guidance of religion, and following upon
194 established practical intellectual policies.

195 The primary components of these policies comprise developing methods for
196 preparing preachers, with the goal of ensuring that they realize the spirit of
197 Islam and its methodology for structuring human life, as well as providing
198 them with knowledge of contemporary culture, so that they are able to
199 interact with their communities on the basis of awareness and insight: *Say,*
200 *'This is my way. I, and those who follow me, call for God with insight.'*
201 (12:108); taking advantage of the communication revolution to refute the
202 doubts that the enemies of Islam are arousing, in a sound, intellectual
203 manner, without weakness or agitation, and with a style that attracts the
204 reader, the listener and the viewer; consolidating the educational structure
205 for individual Muslims, who are confident in their knowledge and abilities,
206 working to form the integral identity that protects against corrupting forces;
207 interest in scientific research and working with the modern sciences upon
208 the basis of the Islamic perspective that distinguishes between creation, life
209 and the human being; benefiting from modern achievements in the fields of
210 science and technology; adopting an Islamic approach for realizing the
211 comprehensive development that is founded upon [maintaining] the delicate
212 balance between the spiritual, economic and social dimensions [of life];
213 providing for human rights and basic liberties, ensuring life, dignity and
214 security, and guaranteeing basic needs; administering the affairs of society
215 in accordance with the principles of justice and consultation; and benefiting
216 from the goods and mechanisms for adopting democracy that human society
217 has presented.

218 Hope lies in the scholars of our Nation, that through the reality of Islam and
219 its values they will enlighten the intellects of our youth—the ornament of
220 our present age and the promise of our future. The scholars shield our youth
221 from the danger of sliding down the paths of ignorance, corruption, close-
222 minded-ness and subordination. It is our scholars who illuminate for them
223 the paths of tolerance, moderation, and goodness, and prevent them from

224 [falling] into the abysses of extremism and fanaticism that destroy the spirit
225 and body.

226 We look to our scholars to lead us in partaking of our role and verifying our
227 priorities, that they maybe exemplars in religion, character, conduct, and
228 discerning enlightened speech, presenting to the nation their noble religion
229 that brings ease [in all matters] and its practical laws in which lie the
230 awakening and joy of the nation. Among the individuals of the nation and
231 throughout the regions of the world, they disseminate good, peace and
232 benevolence, through subtle knowledge, insightful wisdom and political
233 guidance in all matters, uniting and not dividing, appeasing hearts and not
234 deterring them, looking to the horizons of fulfillment to meet the
235 requirements and challenges of the 21st century.

236 We ask God to prepare for our Islamic Nation the paths of renaissance,
237 prosperity and advancement; to shield it from the evils of extremism and
238 close- mindedness; to preserve its rights, sustain its glory, and uphold its
239 dignity. What an excellent Lord is he, and what an excellent Supporter.

240 God Almighty says: *This is My straight path, so follow it. And*
241 *follow not the [other] ways, lest you be parted from His way. This*
242 *has He ordained for you, that you may be God-fearing. (6:152-153)*

243 And the last of our supplications *is that praise be to God, Lord of*
244 *the worlds. (10:10)*

Amman
The Hashemite Kingdom of
Jordan

Ramadan 1425
Hijri
November 2004
A.D.

Appendix 2

THE THREE POINTS OF THE AMMAN MESSAGE

1 **THE THREE POINTS OF THE AMMAN MESSAGE**

2 *In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*

3 *May peace and blessings be upon the Prophet Muhammad and his pure and noble*
4 *family*

5 (1) Whosoever is an adherent to one of the four *Sunni* schools (*Mathahib*) of Islamic
6 jurisprudence (*Hanafi*, *Maliki*, *Shafi`i* and *Hanbali*), the two *Shi`i* schools of Islamic
7 jurisprudence (*Ja`fari* and *Zaydi*), the *Ibadi* school of Islamic jurisprudence and the
8 *Thahiri* school of Islamic jurisprudence, is a Muslim. Declaring that person an
9 apostate is impossible and impermissible. Verily his (or her) blood, honour, and
10 property are inviolable. Moreover, in accordance with the Shaykh Al-Azhar's *fatwa*,
11 it is neither possible nor permissible to declare whosoever subscribes to the *Ash`ari*
12 creed or whoever practices real *Tasawwuf* (Sufism) an apostate. Likewise, it is
13 neither possible nor permissible to declare whosoever subscribes to true *Salafi*
14 thought an apostate.

15 Equally, it is neither possible nor permissible to declare as apostates any
16 group of Muslims who believes in God, Glorified and Exalted be He, and His
17 Messenger (may peace and blessings be upon him) and the pillars of faith, and
18 acknowledges the five pillars of Islam, and does not deny any necessarily self-
19 evident tenet of religion.

20 (2) There exists more in common between the various schools of Islamic
21 jurisprudence than there is difference between them. The adherents to the eight
22 schools of Islamic jurisprudence are in agreement as regards the basic principles of
23 Islam. All believe in Allah (God), Glorified and Exalted be He, the One and the
24 Unique; that the Noble Qur'an is the Revealed Word of God; and that our master
25 Muhammad, may blessings and peace be upon him, is a Prophet and Messenger unto
26 all mankind. All are in agreement about the five pillars of Islam: the two testaments
27 of faith (*shahadatayn*); the ritual prayer (*salat*); almsgiving (*zakat*); fasting the month
28 of Ramadan (*sawm*), and the *Hajj* to the sacred house of God (in Mecca). All are also
29 in agreement about the foundations of belief: belief in Allah (God), His angels, His
30 scriptures, His messengers, and in the Day of Judgment, in Divine Providence in
31 good and in evil. Disagreements between the '*ulama* (scholars) of the eight schools
32 of Islamic jurisprudence are only with respect to the ancillary branches of religion
33 (*furu`*) and not as regards the principles and fundamentals (*usul*) [of the religion of
34 Islam]. Disagreement with respect to the ancillary branches of religion (*furu`*) is a
35 mercy. Long ago it was said that variance in opinion among the '*ulama* (scholars) "is
36 a good affair".

37 (3) Acknowledgement of the schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*Mathahib*) within
38 Islam means adhering to a fundamental methodology in the issuance of *fatwas*: no
39 one may issue a *fatwa* without the requisite personal qualifications which each
40 school of Islamic jurisprudence determines [for its own adherents]. No one may issue
41 a *fatwa* without adhering to the methodology of the schools of Islamic jurisprudence.
42 No one may claim to do unlimited *Ijtihad* and create a new school of Islamic
43 jurisprudence or to issue unacceptable *fatwas* that take Muslims out of the principles

44 and certainties of the *Shari`ah* and what has been established in respect of its schools
45 of jurisprudence.

Appendix 3

GRAND LIST OF ENDORSEMENTS OF THE AMMAN MESSAGE AND ITS THREE POINTS

GRAND LIST OF ENDORSEMENTS OF THE AMMAN MESSAGE AND ITS THREE POINTS

(July 2005–July 2006)
*Total number of signatures: 552 *
from 84 countries*

CODE / CONFERENCE	TOTAL
True Islam and Its Role in Modern Society Conference, Amman (July 2005) [THREE POINTS VERSION 1]	signed 201
Forum of Muslim Ulama and Thinkers, Mecca (September 2005)	endorsed 42
Islamic Schools of Jurisprudence Conference, Aal Al-Bayt University, Jordan (November 2005)	endorsed 33
9th Session of the Council of Ministers of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs, Kuwait (November 2005)	endorsed 7
3rd Extraordinary Session, OIC, Mecca (December 2005)	endorsed 54
Moderate Islamic Thought and Culture, Amman (April 2006) [THREE POINTS VERSION 1]	signed 55
International Fiqh Academy Conference, Amman (June 2006) [THREE POINTS VERSION 2]	signed 68
Muslims of Europe Conference, Istanbul (July 2006)	endorsed 157

* Many of those who endorsed or signed did so more than once, on separate occasions. Hence the discrepancy in the total number vis-à-vis the sum of the numbers of the conferences.

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN

1. H.E. Mr. Hamid Karzai
President

2. Amb. Nusair Ahmad Nour
Afghani Ambassador to Qatar
Islamic Envoy of the Government of Afghanistan

REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

3. H.E. Mr. Florent Celiku
Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs
4. Mr. Tahir Zenelhasani

PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA

5. H.E. Mr. Abdel Aziz Belkhadem
Minister of Foreign Affairs
6. H.E. Lakhdar Ibrahimi
Special Envoy of the Secretary General of the United Nations;
Former Foreign Minister of Algeria
7. Prof. Dr. Abd Allah bin al-Hajj Muhammad Al Ghulam Allah
Minister of Religious Affairs
8. Dr. Mustafa Sharif
Minister of Higher Education and Former Algerian Ambassador in
Cairo
9. Shaykh Yusuf bin Mahdi
Professor and Member of the Fatwa Committee in Algeria
10. Dr. Sa'id Shayban
Former Minister of Religious Affairs
11. Prof. Dr. Ammar Al-Talibi
Department of Philosophy, University of Algeria
12. Mr. Abu Jara Al-Sultani
Head of the Algerian Peace Society Movement
13. Dr. Ammar Jaydal
Batina University
14. Dr. Muhammad Zurman
Batina University

AUSTRALIA

15. Shaykh Salim 'Ulwan al-Hassani *fatwa*
Secretary General Darulfatwa, Islamic High Council
16. Ms. Maha Karim Abdo

AUSTRIA

17. Prof. Anas Al-Shaqfa
Head of the Islamic Commission
18. Ayman Aly
Federation of the Islamic Organizations in Europe, Graz
19. Mr. Tarafa Baghajati
Initiative of Austrian Muslims

REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

20. H.E. Mr. Ilham Aliev
President
21. Shaykh Al-Islam Allah-Shakur bin Hemmat Bashazada
Grand Mufti and Head of the Muslim Administration of the
Caucasus

KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN

22. H.M. King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa
23. Shaykh Dr. Muhammad Ali Al-Sutri
Minister of Justice
24. Dr. Farid bin Ya'qub Al-Miftah
Undersecretary of the Ministry for Islamic Affairs
25. Mr. Mansour Al-Jamri
26. Dr. Ibrahim Fadil Al-Dibbo
Professor, Faculty of Humanities, University of Bahrain

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27. H.E. Begum Khaleda Zia
Prime Minister
28. Prof. Dr. Abu Al-Hasan Sadiq
President of the Asian University of Bangladesh
29. Prof. Shamsir Ali President of the Academy of Sciences
and University Vice-President

BELGIUM

30. Mr. Ismail Batakli
Professor of Islamic Studies
31. Mr. Mohamed Boulif
President, Islamic Executive Council
32. Mr. Ahmed Bouziane
33. Dr. Karim Chemlal
Pasteur Institute, Lille
34. Mrs. Malika Hamidi-Hosseinpour
Coordinator, European Muslim Network
35. Mr. Ibrahim Kocaoglu
36. Sheikh Yacob Mahi
Professor of Islamic Studies, Athénée Royal Léonardo da Vinci
37. Dr. Abdelmajid Mhauchi
Professor of Islamic Studies
38. Mr. Khallad Swaid
President, Forum of the European Muslim Youth
and Student Organization (FEMYSO)

REPUBLIC OF BENIN

39. H.E. Mr. Dzulkifli Salami
Senior Minister of Planning, Economy and Development
40. Shaykh Fathi Shitu

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

41. Prof. Dr. Shaykh Mustafa Ceric
Head of the 'Ulama' and Grand Mufti of Bosnia and Herzegovina
42. Prof. Hasan Makic
Mufti of Bihac
43. H.E. Professor Enes Karic
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44. Prof. Anes Ljevakovic
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45. Dr. Ahmet Alibasic
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46. Mr. Amer Bukvic
Islamic Development Bank
47. Imam Senaid Kobilica
Vice President, Islamic Council of Norway
48. Mr. Mirnes Kovac
Journalist, Preporod Islamic Newspaper
49. Dr. Sukrija Ramic
University of Zenica

BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

50. H.M. Sultan Haji Hassanah Bolkihah
51. Prof. Suhaili bin Hajj Muhyi Al-Din
Deputy Mufti of Brunei

BURKINA FASO

52. H.E. Mr. Youssouf Ouedraogo
Minister of State, Minister of Foreign Affairs
53. Dr. Abu Bakr Dakuri ¶
Member of the Executive Council, ISESCO

BRAZIL

54. Shaykh Ali Muhammad Abduni
Representative of the International Islamic Youth Club in Latin America;
Accredited Religious Representative of the Dar Al-Fatwa of the Republic of Lebanon in Sao Paolo

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55. H.E. Mr. Marfa Hamidou Yaya
Minister of State
56. Shaykh Mahmud Malbakri
Imam, Grand Mosque and President of the Council of 'Ulama'

CANADA

57. Shaykh Faraz Rabbani
Hanafi Scholar, Sunnipath.com
58. Mr. Fouzan Khan
Reviving the Islamic Spirit Organization

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59. H.E. Mr. Idris Derby
President
60. Shaykh Dr. Hussein Hasan Abkar
President, Higher Council; for Islamic Affairs
Imam of Muslims, Chad
61. Mr. Tijani Sabun Muhammad

UNION OF COMOROS

62. H.E. Mr. Kub Mohamed Lisharti
Deputy President

REPUBLIC OF COTE D'IVOIRE

63. H.E. Mr. Hamza Salleh
Ambassador in Riyadh

DENMARK

64. Imam Fatih Alev
Danish Association of Cybermuslims

REPUBLIC OF DJIBUTI

65. H.E. Mr. Ismail Omar Gulleh
President
66. Shaykh Abd Al-Rahman Sulayman Bashir
Member of the Higher Judiciary Council

ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT

67. H.E. Mr. Mohamed Hosni Mubarak
President
68. H.E. Grand Imam Prof. Dr. Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi *fatwa*
Shaykh al-Azhar

69. Prof. Dr. Mahmud Hamdi Zaquq
Minister of Religious Affairs
70. Prof. Dr. Ali Jumu'a *fatwa*
Grand Mufti of the Arab Republic of Egypt
71. Prof. Dr. Ahmad Muhammad Al-Tayyib
President of Al-Azhar University
72. Prof. Dr. Kamal Abu Al-Majd
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74. Prof. Dr. Fawzi Al-Zifzaf
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Among the Heavenly Religions; Member of the Academy of
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75. Prof. Dr. Hasan Hanafi
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76. Prof. Dr. Muhammad Muhammad Al-Kahlawi
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77. Prof. Dr. Ayman Fuad Sayyid
Former Secretary General, Dar al-Kutub Al-Misriyya
78. Shaykh Dr. Zaghlul Najjar
Head of the Committee on The Miraculous Nature of the Qur'an in
the Higher
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79. Shaykh Moez Masood
Islamic Missionary
80. Prof. Dr. Muhammad Al-Dasuqi
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81. Mr. Amr Khaled
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82. Mr. Bara Kherigi
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83. Dr. Heba Raouf Ezzat
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84. Dr. Ja'far Abdussalam
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85. Dr. Shawqi Ahmad Dunya
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86. Dr. ‘Umar ‘Abd Al-Kafi
87. Dr. Huda ‘Abd Al-Sami‘
88. Eng. ‘Amr Faruk Farid
89. Mr. Muhammad Al-Samman Lutfi
90. Eng. Abu Al-‘Ala Madi
91. Dr. ‘Abd Al-Wahhab Al-Masiri
92. Dr. ‘Abd Al-Halim Oweis
93. Mr. Ahmad Sha‘ban
94. Mr. Husam Tammam
95. Mr. Muntasir Al-Zayyat
96. Dr. Raged al-Sirjani
97. Dr. Muhammad Hidayah
98. Dr. Muhammad Abd al-Mun‘im Abu Zayd
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99. Shaykh Prof. Dalil Abu Bakr
Chairman of the France Supreme Council of the Islamic Religion
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100. Dr. Husayn Rais
Director of Cultural Affairs, Paris Grand Mosque
101. Prof. Dr. Abd Al-Majid Al-Najjar
President of the Islamic Centre, Paris
102. Dr. Fouad Alaoui
President, Union of Islamic Organizations in France (UOIF)
103. Ms. Fatiha Ajbli
Sociologist
104. Ms. Siham Andalouci
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105. Dr. Ahmed Bakcan
Representative, Milli Görüs
106. Mr. Abdelwaheb Bakli
President, Muslim Youth of France
107. Shaykh Khalid Adlen Bentounes
Alawiyah Sufi Order; Honorary President of the International
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108. Mr. El Hadji Babou Biteye
President, Muslim Students of France (EMF)
109. Mr. Laj Thami Breze
Union of Islamic Organizations in France (UOIF)
110. Mr. Haydar Demiryürek
Secretary General, The Islamic Council of France
111. Dr. Boubaker El Hadj Amor
Treasurer, Union of Islamic Organizations in France (UOIF)
112. Shaykh Ounis Guergah
Head of the Fatwa House, Paris
113. Prof. Dr. Ömer Faruk Harman
DITIP, Germany

114. Mr. Fouad Imarraine
Collective of Muslims of France
115. Dr. Ahmed Jaballah
Member of the European Council for Fatwa and Research, France
116. Mrs. Noura Ben Hamouda Jaballah
President of European women forum (France)
117. Dr. Zuhair Mahmood
Institute for the Human Sciences (IESH), Paris
118. Dr. Mohamed Mestiri
Director, International Institute of Islamic Thought, Paris
119. Mr. Abdelmajid Najjar
120. Ms. Nora Rami
Free Community Organization, Paris
121. Shaykh Zakaria Seddiki
122. Dr. Muhamad Bashari
President, Federal Society for Muslims in France

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123. H.E. Elhadj Ali Bongo Awadamba
Minister of National Defence and Chairman of Supreme Council
for Islamic Affairs and Special Envoy of the President

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124. H.E. Alhaji Dr. Yahya A.J.J. Jammeh
President
125. Mr. Samba Fall
Minister of Foreign Affairs, Youth, Sport, and Religious Affairs
Gambia.
126. Prof. Dr. Omar Jah
Former Deputy Assistant to the President for Special Assistance
Programs
at the Islamic Development Bank, Jeddah

REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

127. Prof. Dr. Murad Hofmann
Former German Ambassador to Morocco; Intellectual and
Researcher
128. Shaykh Salah Al-Din Al-Ja'farawi
Assistant Secretary-General of World Council for Islamic
Propagation
129. Mr. Ridvan Çakir
President, Turkish-Islamic Union of Germany
130. Shaykh Bashir Ahmad Dultz
German Muslim League
131. Mr. Belal El-Mogaddedi

132. Mr. Ibrahim F. El-Zayat
Head of Public Relations, Federation of Islamic Organisations
in Europe (FIOE)
133. Dr. Sabiha El-Zayat
Centre for Islamic Women Studies, Institute for the Human
Sciences (IESH), Paris
134. Mr. Mesud Gülbahar
IGMG President of Youth Organisations, Germany
135. Mr. Ali Kizilkaya
Head, Islamic Council of Germany
136. Dr. Eyüp A. Köhler
137. Mr. Michael Muhammed Abduh Pfaff
German Muslim League
138. Mr. Celal Tüter
IGMG President of University Org., Germany
139. Mr. Recep Yildirim
Europe Association of Turkish Cultural Centers, Germany
140. Mr. Osman Yoba
141. Mr. Nabil Chabib

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Prime Minister
143. Mr. Al-Husayni Diallo
Inspector General, Ministry of Justice
144. Prof. Dr. Qutb Mustafa Sanu
Department of Usul al-Fiqh, International Islamic University of
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146. Prince Ja'far Al-Sadiq Mufaddal Sayf Al-Din
Islamic Intellectual
147. Prince Taha Sayf Al-Din
Islamic Intellectual
148. Prof. Dr. Sayyid Awsaf Ali
President of Hamdard University
149. Prof. Dr. Akhtar Al-Wasi
Head of the Bureau of Islamic Studies, Dean of the College of
Humanities
and Languages; Director of the Dhakir Husayn Centre for Islamic
Studies

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Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare
and Special Envoy of the President
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Kingdom of Jordan
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155. Shaykh Rozy Munir
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156. Mr. Muhamad Iqbal Sullam
International Conference of Islamic Scholars, Indonesia
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158. Prof. Dr. M. Din Syamsuddin
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Al-Sayyid Ali Khamenei *fatwa*
160. H.E. Dr. Mahmood Ahmedinejad
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161. Grand Ayatollah Shaykh Muhammad Ali Al-Taskhiri *fatwa*
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162. Grand Ayatollah Al-Sayyid Fadil Lankarani *fatwa*
163. Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Waez-zadeh Al-Khorasani
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of Jurisprudence
164. Grand Ayatollah Prof. Dr. Al-Sayyid Mustafa Mohaghegh
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Director of the Academy of Sciences; Justice in the Ministry of
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165. Hujjat Al-Islam Dr. Mahmoud Mohammadi Iraqi
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245. Mr. Hatim Al-Manasir
246. Dr. Malik Al-Moumini
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248. Dr. Fayez Al-Rabi'

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KENYA

250. Shaykh Abdullahi Abdi
Chief Executive Officer, Northern Aid

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252. Dr. Abdullah Matuq al-Matuq
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Undersecretary of the Ministry of Religious Affairs
255. Dr. Mohamed Abdul Ghaffar Al-Sharif
Secretary-General, Secretariat General of Religious Affairs
256. Dr. Muhammad Abd Allah Ja'far Al-Sharif
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258. Mr. Mutlaq Rashed Al-Qarawi
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Professor, Faculty of Shari'ah, University of Kuwait
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Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences, Kuwait

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Al-Ijtihad Magazine
269. Prof. Muhammad Al-Sammak
Secretary-General of the National Council for Islamic-Christian
Dialogue;
Secretary-General for the Islamic Spiritual Summit

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Higher Islamic Shi'i Council
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Mufti of Zahleh and Western Beqa'
272. Shaykh Abd Al-Emir Qublan
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273. Prof. Dr. Zakariyya Abd Al-Razzaq Al-Misri
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274. Prof. Dr. Ahmad Al-Sahmarani
Imam Al-Awza'i University
275. Dr. Muhammad 'Assaf
276. Dr. As'ad Al-Sahmarani
277. Shaykh Abd Al-Naser Jabri
278. Shaykh Jamil Muhammad Husseini *fatwa*
279. Mr. Hasan Farhat

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Leadership
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284. Prof. Dr. Hamzah Abu Faris
Al-Fatih University
285. Mr. Abd Al-Salam Muhammad Al-Sharif Al-Alim
Al-Fatih University

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286. Mr. Rufat Sherifi

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303. Mr. Cheikhna Bin Bayyah

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MOLDOVA

305. Mr. Abdulraheem Aljabari

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307. Prof. Dr. Abbas Al-Jarari
Advisor to HM the King

308. Prof. Dr. Abd Al-Hadi Bu Talib
Former Advisor to HM the King
309. Amb. Al-Makki Kawan
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Minister of Religious Affairs, Kingdom of Morocco
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312. Prof. Dr. Ahmad Shawqi Benbin
Director of the Hasaniyya Library
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318. Mr. Muhammad Al-Amin
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Director, New Horizon

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323. H.E. Mr. Hama Amadou
Prime Minister

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328. Dr. Al-Khidr Abd Al-Baqi Muhammad
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Journalist, ITRI
330. Dr. Lena Larsen
Coordinator, The Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, University of Oslo

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Grand Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman
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367. Mr. Yakupov Valiulla
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417. Dr. Muhammad Abd al-Latif Saleh al-Farfur
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Appendix 4

THE AMMAN INTERFAITH MESSAGE

1 **The Amman *Interfaith* Message**

2
3 *In the Name of God,*
4 *the Compassionate, the Merciful*

5
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10
11 **(I) The Amman Message**

12 In November 2004 H.M. King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein of Jordan launched the
13 Amman Message. Its purpose is to clarify to the world what true Islam is and what it
14 is not.

15 Then, in July 2005 H.M. King Abdullah II convened an International Islamic Summit
16 to specifically identify what Islam does and does not allow, who is a Muslim and
17 who can speak for Islam. In it over 180 leading scholars, representing 45 countries,
18 and supported by *fatwas* from 17 of the world’s greatest Islamic authorities, reached,
19 for the first time in history, a signed unanimous consensus on a number of critical
20 issues:

21 First, the declaration recognized the legitimacy and common principles of all eight of
22 the traditional schools of Islamic religious law (*madhhabs*) from the *Sunni*, *Shi’i* and
23 *Ibadi* branches of Islam, and of *Su*, *Ash’ari* and moderate *Sala* Islamic thought.
24 Second, it defined the necessary qualifications and conditions for issuing legitimate
25 *fatwas*. This, in and of itself, defines the limits and borders of Islam and Islamic
26 behavior. Amongst other things, it exposes the illegitimacy of the so-called ‘*fatwas*’
27 extremists use to justify terrorism, as these invariably contravene traditional Islamic
28 sacred law (*Shari’ah*) and betray Islam’s core principles. Third, the declaration
29 condemned the practice known as *takfir* (calling others “apostates”), a practice that is
30 used by extremists to justify violence against those who do not agree with them.

31 H.M. King Abdullah II is building upon these historical developments with political,
32 religious, educational and media initiatives to establish and implement the principles
33 they represent at all levels of culture, education, religion and government in the
34 Islamic world.

35
36 **(II) The Amman *Interfaith* Message**

37 Parallel to the Amman Islamic Message, in 2005 H.M. King Abdullah II also
38 launched the Amman *Interfaith* Message. The purpose of this message is not merely
39 to diffuse tensions between Muslims, Christians and Jews — the followers of the
40 religions of Abraham (peace be upon him), and the believers in the One God — nor
41 simply to promote tolerance between them, but rather to establish full acceptance and
42 goodwill between them. For Muslims, Christians and Jews together comprise around
43 60% of the world’s population, and establishing acceptance and goodwill between
44 them means in effect establishing peace and friendship over most of the world.

45 King Abdullah’s *Interfaith* Message is based on the following Qur’anic injunctions:

46 *Say: O ye people of the Scripture, come to a common word*
47 *between us: that we will not worship other than God and*
48 *not associate anything with Him, and that none of us shall*
49 *take others for lords besides God.... (Aal-‘Imran, 3:64).*

51 *Truly the believers are brothers. Therefore make peace*
52 *between your brothers and observe your duty to God that*
53 *perhaps ye may obtain mercy (Al-Hujurat, 49:10).*
54

55 It has three central ideas that are common to Islam, Christianity and Judaism, the
56 three great Monotheistic religions: (1) belief in the Unity of God, (2) worship and
57 devotion to God, (3) love and justice towards fellow human beings. In a speech at
58 Catholic University in Washington DC on September 13th, 2005 H. M. King
59 Abdullah II said the following:

60 “Jordan is an Islamic country – and home to a historic Christian
61 community. All Jordanians participate in creating our nation and our
62 future. I believe that we have together found, by the Grace of God, a
63 larger community of shared respect. It is based on the deepest
64 teachings of our religions, teachings found in the scriptures of
65 Judaism, Christianity and Islam alike: belief in and devotion to the
66 One God ... and love for our fellow human beings. In the Holy Bible,
67 Jesus taught:

68 *The first of all commandments is, Hear, O Israel; the Lord*
69 *our God is one Lord; / And thou shalt love the Lord thy*
70 *God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all*
71 *thy understanding, and with all thy strength: this is the*
72 *first commandment./ And the second commandment is like,*
73 *namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*
74 *There is none other commandment greater than these.*
75 *(The Gospel according to St. Mark 12: 29-31)*
76

77 Likewise, in the Qur’an, it is written (3:64):

78 *Say: O ye people of the Scripture, come to a common word*
79 *between us, that we will not worship other than God and*
80 *not associate anything with Him....*
81

82 It has never been more important that we understand – and live by –
83 the “common word” of our faiths. It is a bond that can unite us in
84 mutual respect ... and shield us against religious incitement. Such an
85 approach is vital to global peace. Dogmatic conflicts create walls of
86 mistrust. But if we break down those barriers, if we recognize our
87 deepest shared values, we open the way to a better future. There are
88 issues, certainly, but they are political, and political problems can be
89 resolved by pragmatic solutions among people of good-will....”
90

91 A few days later, in a speech at Riverside Church in New York, H.M. King Abdullah
92 II added the following:

93 “Traditional Islam has the same two basic principles as Judaism and
94 Christianity—to *love the Lord your God*, and to *love your neighbor as*
95 *yourself*. The Holy Qur’an says, of the righteous (*Al-Bayinah*, 98:8):

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97 *God is well-pleased with them and they are well-pleased with Him.*
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99 And the Prophet Muhammad—peace and blessings be upon him—
100 said:

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By Him in whose Hand is my life, none of you believes until he [or she] loves for their neighbor, what they love for themselves.

We can all agree upon our common human nature and the need for peace, human rights, social justice and moral values. The Qur'an says (*Al-Baqarah,2:177*):

It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces 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 poordue. 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 God-fearing.

My friends, Muslim, Christian or Jew – extremism divides us from each other and corrodes us from within. It is time to move beyond a world of walls and suspicion. The answer lies not in challenges over the truth of each other's beliefs, but trust in God. God says in the Qur'an (*Al-Ma'idah, 5:48*):

And for each of you We have made a law and a practice; and if God wanted He would have made you a single people. But that He may try you by that which He hath given you. So vie with each other in good works. Unto God ye will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein ye differed. ”

In addition to spreading and promoting this ecumenical message, H.M. King Abdullah II has launched a number of social, political and media interfaith initiatives with the same object of establishing true acceptance and goodwill between all believers, and thus peace and friendship between the nations of the world.

(III) The Jordanian Religious Experience

H.M. King Abdullah II's message did not come out of a void. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has been blessed with one of the most harmonious religious experiences in the world. For although only 2.5% of the population (2005 estimate) are Christian (mostly Orthodox Christians — Jordan is over 97% Sunni Muslim), Christian Arabs were the original inhabitants of Jordan. In fact, when in 629 CE, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) sent a contingent of Muslims (including his own cousin Ja'far bin Abi Talib) to Jordan to spread the message of Islam — and they were met and fought by the (Christian) Byzantine forces — the Ghassanid Arab Christian Tribes of Jordan fought with their fellow Arabs against their co-religionists whom they regarded as oppressors. They thus earned the title '*Al-Azeizat*', 'the reinforcements' (of the Prophet's emissaries), a title by which their descendants are still known and revered to this day in Jordan.

150 Christians in Jordan hold a special place at all levels of Jordanian life and are fiercely
151 patriotic. Historically speaking, there is no country in the world with more religious
152 harmony, camaraderie and goodwill than Jordan at either the government or the
153 popular level. In the Parliament Christians have 9 seats reserved for them out of a
154 total of 110 seats (i.e. over 8%, compared with their real population of 2.5%); out of
155 a cabinet of about 24 ministers, they always hold 1-3 ministries; they hold top posts
156 in the Army, the Intelligence, the Judiciary, the Royal Court, the media, the
157 educational institutes and at every level of government administration. They are
158 amongst the largest landowners and generate close to 10% of the county's private
159 sector economy. The Christians Churches enjoy their own official council and their
160 own laws whereby they determine their own affairs. Moreover, Jordan officially
161 protects and promotes their Holy Sites. In acknowledgment of this, the Orthodox
162 Patriarchate of Jerusalem¹ still chooses to recognize only the sovereignty of the King
163 of Jordan and of Jordanian law over its Holy Sites. On 18th of August 2005, all the
164 representatives of the Orthodox Christian Communities, Churches, NGOs, institutes,
165 popular and political groups *in Jordan, Palestine and Israel* unanimously signed a
166 letter to H.M. King Abdullah II saying the following:

167

168 The Chairman and Members and the various organizations of the
169 Central Orthodox Committee in Jordan and Palestine, meeting in a
170 plenary session in Amman on the evening of 18/8/2005, are honored
171 to send to His Royal Majesty deepest thanks and appreciation and
172 most sincere sentiments of respect and deepest allegiance and loyalty,
173 and are in full concurrence with His Majesty's gracious actions and
174 sincere efforts to preserve and protect the Holy Places (both Muslim
175 and Christian)... Permit us, your Majesty, on this occasion to also
176 acknowledge and approve the righteous role of your government of
177 the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

178

179 In recognition of his tireless efforts to maintain this peace and spread it beyond the
180 borders of Jordan, on November 16, 2005 H.M. King Abdullah II became the first
181 non-Christian to receive the John Paul II Peace Prize.

182

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184 2nd Edition

185

186 **Footnotes**

187 ¹ The Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem is the oldest church in the world and is the
188 original Church of the Holy Land. Its first Patriarch was St. James, Jesus' (peace be
189 upon him) kinsman. It owns, amongst other holy places, the Church of the Holy
190 Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and the Baptist Site
191 in Jordan.

192

193

And praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds

Appendix 5

MEETING WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES OF SCIENCE

LECTURE OF THE HOLY FATHER

[Regensburg Lecture]

1 APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
2 TO MÜNCHEN, ALTÖTTING AND REGENSBURG
3 (SEPTEMBER 9-14, 2006)

4 MEETING WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES OF SCIENCE

5 **LECTURE OF THE HOLY FATHER**

6 *Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg*
7 *Tuesday, 12 September 2006*

8

9 ***Faith, Reason and the University***
10 ***Memories and Reflections***

11

12 *Your Eminences, Your Magnificences, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and*
13 *Gentlemen,*

14 It is a moving experience for me to be back again in the university and to be able
15 once again to give a lecture at this podium. I think back to those years when, after a
16 pleasant period at the Freisinger Hochschule, I began teaching at the University of
17 Bonn. That was in 1959, in the days of the old university made up of ordinary
18 professors. The various chairs had neither assistants nor secretaries, but in
19 recompense there was much direct contact with students and in particular among the
20 professors themselves. We would meet before and after lessons in the rooms of the
21 teaching staff. There was a lively exchange with historians, philosophers, philologists
22 and, naturally, between the two theological faculties. Once a semester there was a
23 *dies academicus*, when professors from every faculty appeared before the students of
24 the entire university, making possible a genuine experience of *universitas* -
25 something that you too, Magnificent Rector, just mentioned - the experience, in other
26 words, of the fact that despite our specializations which at times make it difficult to
27 communicate with each other, we made up a whole, working in everything on the
28 basis of a single rationality with its various aspects and sharing responsibility for the
29 right use of reason - this reality became a lived experience. The university was also
30 very proud of its two theological faculties. It was clear that, by inquiring about the
31 reasonableness of faith, they too carried out a work which is necessarily part of the
32 "whole" of the *universitas scientiarum*, even if not everyone could share the faith
33 which theologians seek to correlate with reason as a whole. This profound sense of
34 coherence within the universe of reason was not troubled, even when it was once
35 reported that a colleague had said there was something odd about our university: it
36 had two faculties devoted to something that did not exist: God. That even in the face
37 of such radical scepticism it is still necessary and reasonable to raise the question of
38 God through the use of reason, and to do so in the context of the tradition of the
39 Christian faith: this, within the university as a whole, was accepted without question.

40 I was reminded of all this recently, when I read the edition by Professor Theodore
41 Khoury (Münster) of part of the dialogue carried on - perhaps in 1391 in the winter
42 barracks near Ankara - by the erudite Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus and
43 an educated Persian on the subject of Christianity and Islam, and the truth of both.[1]
44 It was presumably the emperor himself who set down this dialogue, during the siege
45 of Constantinople between 1394 and 1402; and this would explain why his
46 arguments are given in greater detail than those of his Persian interlocutor.[2] The
47 dialogue ranges widely over the structures of faith contained in the Bible and in the
48 Qur'an, and deals especially with the image of God and of man, while necessarily
49 returning repeatedly to the relationship between - as they were called - three "Laws"
50 or "rules of life": the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Qur'an. It is not my
51 intention to discuss this question in the present lecture; here I would like to discuss
52 only one point - itself rather marginal to the dialogue as a whole - which, in the
53 context of the issue of "faith and reason", I found interesting and which can serve as
54 the starting-point for my reflections on this issue.

55 In the seventh conversation (διάλεξις - controversy) edited by Professor Khoury, the
56 emperor touches on the theme of the holy war. The emperor must have known that
57 surah 2, 256 reads: "There is no compulsion in religion". According to some of the
58 experts, this is probably one of the suras of the early period, when Mohammed was
59 still powerless and under threat. But naturally the emperor also knew the instructions,
60 developed later and recorded in the Qur'an, concerning holy war. Without descending
61 to details, such as the difference in treatment accorded to those who have the "Book"
62 and the "infidels", he addresses his interlocutor with a startling brusqueness, a
63 brusqueness that we find unacceptable, on the central question about the relationship
64 between religion and violence in general, saying: "Show me just what Mohammed
65 brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as
66 his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached." [3] The emperor, after
67 having expressed himself so forcefully, goes on to explain in detail the reasons why
68 spreading the faith through violence is something unreasonable. Violence is
69 incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul. "God", he says, "is
70 not pleased by blood - and not acting reasonably (σὺν λόγῳ) is contrary to God's
71 nature. Faith is born of the soul, not the body. Whoever would lead someone to faith
72 needs the ability to speak well and to reason properly, without violence and threats...
73 To convince a reasonable soul, one does not need a strong arm, or weapons of any
74 kind, or any other means of threatening a person with death..." [4]

75 The decisive statement in this argument against violent conversion is this: not to act
76 in accordance with reason is contrary to God's nature. [5] The editor, Theodore
77 Khoury, observes: For the emperor, as a Byzantine shaped by Greek philosophy, this
78 statement is self-evident. But for Muslim teaching, God is absolutely transcendent.
79 His will is not bound up with any of our categories, even that of rationality. [6] Here
80 Khoury quotes a work of the noted French Islamist R. Arnaldez, who points out that
81 Ibn Hazm went so far as to state that God is not bound even by his own word, and
82 that nothing would oblige him to reveal the truth to us. Were it God's will, we would
83 even have to practise idolatry. [7]

84 At this point, as far as understanding of God and thus the concrete practice of
85 religion is concerned, we are faced with an unavoidable dilemma. Is the conviction
86 that acting unreasonably contradicts God's nature merely a Greek idea, or is it always

87 and intrinsically true? I believe that here we can see the profound harmony between
88 what is Greek in the best sense of the word and the biblical understanding of faith in
89 God. Modifying the first verse of the Book of Genesis, the first verse of the whole
90 Bible, John began the prologue of his Gospel with the words: "In the beginning was
91 the λόγος". This is the very word used by the emperor: God acts, σὺν λόγῳ, with
92 *logos*. *Logos* means both reason and word - a reason which is creative and capable of
93 self-communication, precisely as reason. John thus spoke the final word on the
94 biblical concept of God, and in this word all the often toilsome and tortuous threads
95 of biblical faith find their culmination and synthesis. In the beginning was the *logos*,
96 and the *logos* is God, says the Evangelist. The encounter between the Biblical
97 message and Greek thought did not happen by chance. The vision of Saint Paul, who
98 saw the roads to Asia barred and in a dream saw a Macedonian man plead with him:
99 "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" (cf. *Acts* 16:6-10) - this vision can be
100 interpreted as a "distillation" of the intrinsic necessity of a rapprochement between
101 Biblical faith and Greek inquiry.

102 In point of fact, this rapprochement had been going on for some time. The
103 mysterious name of God, revealed from the burning bush, a name which separates
104 this God from all other divinities with their many names and simply asserts being, "I
105 am", already presents a challenge to the notion of myth, to which Socrates' attempt to
106 vanquish and transcend myth stands in close analogy.[8] Within the Old Testament,
107 the process which started at the burning bush came to new maturity at the time of the
108 Exile, when the God of Israel, an Israel now deprived of its land and worship, was
109 proclaimed as the God of heaven and earth and described in a simple formula which
110 echoes the words uttered at the burning bush: "I am". This new understanding of God
111 is accompanied by a kind of enlightenment, which finds stark expression in the
112 mockery of gods who are merely the work of human hands (cf. *Ps* 115). Thus,
113 despite the bitter conflict with those Hellenistic rulers who sought to accommodate it
114 forcibly to the customs and idolatrous cult of the Greeks, biblical faith, in the
115 Hellenistic period, encountered the best of Greek thought at a deep level, resulting in
116 a mutual enrichment evident especially in the later wisdom literature. Today we
117 know that the Greek translation of the Old Testament produced at Alexandria - the
118 Septuagint - is more than a simple (and in that sense really less than satisfactory)
119 translation of the Hebrew text: it is an independent textual witness and a distinct and
120 important step in the history of revelation, one which brought about this encounter in
121 a way that was decisive for the birth and spread of Christianity.[9] A profound
122 encounter of faith and reason is taking place here, an encounter between genuine
123 enlightenment and religion. From the very heart of Christian faith and, at the same
124 time, the heart of Greek thought now joined to faith, Manuel II was able to say: Not
125 to act "with *logos*" is contrary to God's nature.

126 In all honesty, one must observe that in the late Middle Ages we find trends in
127 theology which would sunder this synthesis between the Greek spirit and the
128 Christian spirit. In contrast with the so-called intellectualism of Augustine and
129 Thomas, there arose with Duns Scotus a voluntarism which, in its later
130 developments, led to the claim that we can only know God's *voluntas ordinata*.
131 Beyond this is the realm of God's freedom, in virtue of which he could have done the
132 opposite of everything he has actually done. This gives rise to positions which
133 clearly approach those of Ibn Hazm and might even lead to the image of a capricious
134 God, who is not even bound to truth and goodness. God's transcendence and

135 otherness are so exalted that our reason, our sense of the true and good, are no longer
136 an authentic mirror of God, whose deepest possibilities remain eternally unattainable
137 and hidden behind his actual decisions. As opposed to this, the faith of the Church
138 has always insisted that between God and us, between his eternal Creator Spirit and
139 our created reason there exists a real analogy, in which - as the Fourth Lateran
140 Council in 1215 stated - unlikeness remains infinitely greater than likeness, yet not to
141 the point of abolishing analogy and its language. God does not become more divine
142 when we push him away from us in a sheer, impenetrable voluntarism; rather, the
143 truly divine God is the God who has revealed himself as *logos* and, as *logos*, has
144 acted and continues to act lovingly on our behalf. Certainly, love, as Saint Paul says,
145 "transcends" knowledge and is thereby capable of perceiving more than thought
146 alone (cf. *Eph 3:19*); nonetheless it continues to be love of the God who is *Logos*.
147 Consequently, Christian worship is, again to quote Paul - "λογικη λατρεία", worship
148 in harmony with the eternal Word and with our reason (cf. *Rom 12:1*).^[10]

149 This inner rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek philosophical inquiry
150 was an event of decisive importance not only from the standpoint of the history of
151 religions, but also from that of world history - it is an event which concerns us even
152 today. Given this convergence, it is not surprising that Christianity, despite its origins
153 and some significant developments in the East, finally took on its historically
154 decisive character in Europe. We can also express this the other way around: this
155 convergence, with the subsequent addition of the Roman heritage, created Europe
156 and remains the foundation of what can rightly be called Europe.

157 The thesis that the critically purified Greek heritage forms an integral part of
158 Christian faith has been countered by the call for a dehellenization of Christianity - a
159 call which has more and more dominated theological discussions since the beginning
160 of the modern age. Viewed more closely, three stages can be observed in the
161 programme of dehellenization: although interconnected, they are clearly distinct
162 from one another in their motivations and objectives.^[11]

163 Dehellenization first emerges in connection with the postulates of the Reformation in
164 the sixteenth century. Looking at the tradition of scholastic theology, the Reformers
165 thought they were confronted with a faith system totally conditioned by philosophy,
166 that is to say an articulation of the faith based on an alien system of thought. As a
167 result, faith no longer appeared as a living historical Word but as one element of an
168 overarching philosophical system. The principle of *sola scriptura*, on the other hand,
169 sought faith in its pure, primordial form, as originally found in the biblical Word.
170 Metaphysics appeared as a premise derived from another source, from which faith
171 had to be liberated in order to become once more fully itself. When Kant stated that
172 he needed to set thinking aside in order to make room for faith, he carried this
173 programme forward with a radicalism that the Reformers could never have foreseen.
174 He thus anchored faith exclusively in practical reason, denying it access to reality as
175 a whole.

176 The liberal theology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries ushered in a second
177 stage in the process of dehellenization, with Adolf von Harnack as its outstanding
178 representative. When I was a student, and in the early years of my teaching, this
179 programme was highly influential in Catholic theology too. It took as its point of
180 departure Pascal's distinction between the God of the philosophers and the God of

181 Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In my inaugural lecture at Bonn in 1959, I tried to address
182 the issue,^[12] and I do not intend to repeat here what I said on that occasion, but I
183 would like to describe at least briefly what was new about this second stage of
184 dehellenization. Harnack's central idea was to return simply to the man Jesus and to
185 his simple message, underneath the accretions of theology and indeed of
186 hellenization: this simple message was seen as the culmination of the religious
187 development of humanity. Jesus was said to have put an end to worship in favour of
188 morality. In the end he was presented as the father of a humanitarian moral message.
189 Fundamentally, Harnack's goal was to bring Christianity back into harmony with
190 modern reason, liberating it, that is to say, from seemingly philosophical and
191 theological elements, such as faith in Christ's divinity and the triune God. In this
192 sense, historical-critical exegesis of the New Testament, as he saw it, restored to
193 theology its place within the university: theology, for Harnack, is something
194 essentially historical and therefore strictly scientific. What it is able to say critically
195 about Jesus is, so to speak, an expression of practical reason and consequently it can
196 take its rightful place within the university. Behind this thinking lies the modern self-
197 limitation of reason, classically expressed in Kant's "Critiques", but in the meantime
198 further radicalized by the impact of the natural sciences. This modern concept of
199 reason is based, to put it briefly, on a synthesis between Platonism (Cartesianism)
200 and empiricism, a synthesis confirmed by the success of technology. On the one hand
201 it presupposes the mathematical structure of matter, its intrinsic rationality, which
202 makes it possible to understand how matter works and use it efficiently: this basic
203 premise is, so to speak, the Platonic element in the modern understanding of nature.
204 On the other hand, there is nature's capacity to be exploited for our purposes, and
205 here only the possibility of verification or falsification through experimentation can
206 yield decisive certainty. The weight between the two poles can, depending on the
207 circumstances, shift from one side to the other. As strongly positivistic a thinker as J.
208 Monod has declared himself a convinced Platonist/Cartesian.

209 This gives rise to two principles which are crucial for the issue we have raised. First,
210 only the kind of certainty resulting from the interplay of mathematical and empirical
211 elements can be considered scientific. Anything that would claim to be science must
212 be measured against this criterion. Hence the human sciences, such as history,
213 psychology, sociology and philosophy, attempt to conform themselves to this canon
214 of scientificity. A second point, which is important for our reflections, is that by its
215 very nature this method excludes the question of God, making it appear an
216 unscientific or pre-scientific question. Consequently, we are faced with a reduction
217 of the radius of science and reason, one which needs to be questioned.

218 I will return to this problem later. In the meantime, it must be observed that from this
219 standpoint any attempt to maintain theology's claim to be "scientific" would end up
220 reducing Christianity to a mere fragment of its former self. But we must say more: if
221 science as a whole is this and this alone, then it is man himself who ends up being
222 reduced, for the specifically human questions about our origin and destiny, the
223 questions raised by religion and ethics, then have no place within the purview of
224 collective reason as defined by "science", so understood, and must thus be relegated
225 to the realm of the subjective. The subject then decides, on the basis of his
226 experiences, what he considers tenable in matters of religion, and the subjective
227 "conscience" becomes the sole arbiter of what is ethical. In this way, though, ethics
228 and religion lose their power to create a community and become a completely

229 personal matter. This is a dangerous state of affairs for humanity, as we see from the
230 disturbing pathologies of religion and reason which necessarily erupt when reason is
231 so reduced that questions of religion and ethics no longer concern it. Attempts to
232 construct an ethic from the rules of evolution or from psychology and sociology, end
233 up being simply inadequate.

234 Before I draw the conclusions to which all this has been leading, I must briefly refer
235 to the third stage of dehellenization, which is now in progress. In the light of our
236 experience with cultural pluralism, it is often said nowadays that the synthesis with
237 Hellenism achieved in the early Church was an initial inculturation which ought not
238 to be binding on other cultures. The latter are said to have the right to return to the
239 simple message of the New Testament prior to that inculturation, in order to
240 inculturate it anew in their own particular milieux. This thesis is not simply false, but
241 it is coarse and lacking in precision. The New Testament was written in Greek and
242 bears the imprint of the Greek spirit, which had already come to maturity as the Old
243 Testament developed. True, there are elements in the evolution of the early Church
244 which do not have to be integrated into all cultures. Nonetheless, the fundamental
245 decisions made about the relationship between faith and the use of human reason are
246 part of the faith itself; they are developments consonant with the nature of faith itself.

247 And so I come to my conclusion. This attempt, painted with broad strokes, at a
248 critique of modern reason from within has nothing to do with putting the clock back
249 to the time before the Enlightenment and rejecting the insights of the modern age.
250 The positive aspects of modernity are to be acknowledged unreservedly: we are all
251 grateful for the marvellous possibilities that it has opened up for mankind and for the
252 progress in humanity that has been granted to us. The scientific ethos, moreover, is -
253 as you yourself mentioned, Magnificent Rector - the will to be obedient to the truth,
254 and, as such, it embodies an attitude which belongs to the essential decisions of the
255 Christian spirit. The intention here is not one of retrenchment or negative criticism,
256 but of broadening our concept of reason and its application. While we rejoice in the
257 new possibilities open to humanity, we also see the dangers arising from these
258 possibilities and we must ask ourselves how we can overcome them. We will
259 succeed in doing so only if reason and faith come together in a new way, if we
260 overcome the self-imposed limitation of reason to the empirically falsifiable, and if
261 we once more disclose its vast horizons. In this sense theology rightly belongs in the
262 university and within the wide-ranging dialogue of sciences, not merely as a
263 historical discipline and one of the human sciences, but precisely as theology, as
264 inquiry into the rationality of faith.

265 Only thus do we become capable of that genuine dialogue of cultures and religions
266 so urgently needed today. In the Western world it is widely held that only positivistic
267 reason and the forms of philosophy based on it are universally valid. Yet the world's
268 profoundly religious cultures see this exclusion of the divine from the universality of
269 reason as an attack on their most profound convictions. A reason which is deaf to the
270 divine and which relegates religion into the realm of subcultures is incapable of
271 entering into the dialogue of cultures. At the same time, as I have attempted to show,
272 modern scientific reason with its intrinsically Platonic element bears within itself a
273 question which points beyond itself and beyond the possibilities of its methodology.
274 Modern scientific reason quite simply has to accept the rational structure of matter
275 and the correspondence between our spirit and the prevailing rational structures of

276 nature as a given, on which its methodology has to be based. Yet the question why
277 this has to be so is a real question, and one which has to be remanded by the natural
278 sciences to other modes and planes of thought - to philosophy and theology. For
279 philosophy and, albeit in a different way, for theology, listening to the great
280 experiences and insights of the religious traditions of humanity, and those of the
281 Christian faith in particular, is a source of knowledge, and to ignore it would be an
282 unacceptable restriction of our listening and responding. Here I am reminded of
283 something Socrates said to Phaedo. In their earlier conversations, many false
284 philosophical opinions had been raised, and so Socrates says: "It would be easily
285 understandable if someone became so annoyed at all these false notions that for the
286 rest of his life he despised and mocked all talk about being - but in this way he would
287 be deprived of the truth of existence and would suffer a great loss".^[13] The West has
288 long been endangered by this aversion to the questions which underlie its rationality,
289 and can only suffer great harm thereby. The courage to engage the whole breadth of
290 reason, and not the denial of its grandeur - this is the programme with which a
291 theology grounded in Biblical faith enters into the debates of our time. "Not to act
292 reasonably, not to act with *logos*, is contrary to the nature of God", said Manuel II,
293 according to his Christian understanding of God, in response to his Persian
294 interlocutor. It is to this great *logos*, to this breadth of reason, that we invite our
295 partners in the dialogue of cultures. To rediscover it constantly is the great task of the
296 university.

[1] Of the total number of 26 conversations (διάλεξις – Khoury translates this as “controversy”) in the dialogue (“Entretien”), T. Khoury published the 7th “controversy” with footnotes and an extensive introduction on the origin of the text, on the manuscript tradition and on the structure of the dialogue, together with brief summaries of the “controversies” not included in the edition; the Greek text is accompanied by a French translation: “Manuel II Paléologue, Entretiens avec un Musulman. 7^e Controverse”, *Sources Chrétiennes* n. 115, Paris 1966. In the meantime, Karl Förstel published in *Corpus Islamico-Christianum (Series Graeca* ed. A. T. Khoury and R. Gleis) an edition of the text in Greek and German with commentary: “Manuel II. Palaiologus, Dialoge mit einem Muslim”, 3 vols., Würzburg-Altenberge 1993-1996. As early as 1966, E. Trapp had published the Greek text with an introduction as vol. II of *Wiener byzantinische Studien*. I shall be quoting from Khoury’s edition.

[2] On the origin and redaction of the dialogue, cf. Khoury, pp. 22-29; extensive comments in this regard can also be found in the editions of Förstel and Trapp.

[3] Controversy VII, 2 c: Khoury, pp. 142-143; Förstel, vol. I, VII. Dialog 1.5, pp. 240-241. In the Muslim world, this quotation has unfortunately been taken as an expression of my personal position, thus arousing understandable indignation. I hope that the reader of my text can see immediately that this sentence does not express my personal view of the Qur’an, for which I have the respect due to the holy book of a great religion. In quoting the text of the Emperor Manuel II, I intended solely to draw out the essential relationship between faith and reason. On this point I am in agreement with Manuel II, but without endorsing his polemic.

[4] Controversy VII, 3 b–c: Khoury, pp. 144-145; Förstel vol. I, VII. Dialog 1.6, pp. 240-243.

[5] It was purely for the sake of this statement that I quoted the dialogue between Manuel and his Persian interlocutor. In this statement the theme of my subsequent reflections emerges.

[6] Cf. Khoury, p. 144, n. 1.

[7] R. Arnaldez, *Grammaire et théologie chez Ibn Hazm de Cordoue*, Paris 1956, p. 13; cf. Khoury, p. 144. The fact that comparable positions exist in the theology of the late Middle Ages will appear later in my discourse.

[8] Regarding the widely discussed interpretation of the episode of the burning bush, I refer to my book *Introduction to Christianity*, London 1969, pp. 77-93 (originally published in German as *Einführung in das Christentum*, Munich 1968; N.B. the pages quoted refer to the entire chapter entitled “The Biblical Belief in God”). I think that my statements in that book, despite later developments in the discussion, remain valid today.

[9] Cf. A. Schenker, “L’Écriture sainte subsiste en plusieurs formes canoniques simultanées”, in *L’Interpretazione della Bibbia nella Chiesa. Atti del Simposio promosso dalla Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede*, Vatican City 2001, pp. 178-186.

[10] On this matter I expressed myself in greater detail in my book *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, San Francisco 2000, pp. 44-50.

[11] Of the vast literature on the theme of dehellenization, I would like to mention above all: A. Grillmeier, “Hellenisierung-Judaisierung des Christentums als Deutepnzipien der Geschichte des kirchlichen Dogmas”, in idem, *Mit ihm und in ihm. Christologische Forschungen und Perspektiven*, Freiburg 1975, pp. 423-488.

[12] Newly published with commentary by Heino Sonnemans (ed.): *Joseph Ratzinger-Benedikt XVI, Der Gott des Glaubens und der Gott der Philosophen. Ein Beitrag zum Problem der theologia naturalis*, Johannes-Verlag Leutesdorf, 2nd revised edition, 2005.

[13] Cf. 90 c-d. For this text, cf. also R. Guardini, *Der Tod des Sokrates*, 5th edition, Mainz-Paderborn 1987, pp. 218-221.

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Appendix 6

OPEN LETTER TO HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI

[OL 38]

1 *In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful,*
2 *And may Peace and Blessings be upon the Prophet Muhammad*

3
4 **OPEN LETTER TO HIS**
5 **HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI**

6
7 *In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful,*
8 *Do not contend with people of the Book except in the fairest way....*
9 *(The Holy Qur'an, al-Ankabut, 29:46).*

10
11 Your Holiness,

12
13 With regard to your lecture at the University of Regensburg in Germany on
14 September 12th 2006, we thought it appropriate, in the spirit of open exchange, to
15 address your use of a debate between the Emperor Manuel II Paleologus and a
16 “learned Persian” as the starting point for a discourse on the relationship between
17 reason and faith. While we applaud your efforts to oppose the dominance of
18 positivism and materialism in human life, we must point out some errors in the way
19 you mentioned Islam as a counterpoint to the proper use of reason, as well as some
20 mistakes in the assertions you put forward in support of your argument.

21
22 *There is no Compulsion in Religion*

23 You mention that “according to the experts” the verse which begins, *There is no*
24 *compulsion in religion (al-Baqarah 2:256)* is from the early period when the Prophet
25 “was still powerless and under threat,” but this is incorrect. In fact this verse is
26 acknowledged to belong to the period of Quranic revelation corresponding to the
27 political and military ascendance of the young Muslim community. *There is no*
28 *compulsion in religion* was not a command to Muslims to remain steadfast in the
29 face of the desire of their oppressors to force them to renounce their faith, but was a
30 reminder to Muslims themselves, once they had attained power, that they could not
31 force another’s heart to believe. *There is*
32 *no compulsion in religion* addresses those in a position of strength, not weakness.
33 The earliest commentaries on the Qur’an (such as that of Al-Tabari) make it clear
34 that some Muslims of Medina wanted to force their children to convert from Judaism
35 or Christianity to Islam, and this verse was precisely an answer to them **not** to try to
36 force their children to convert to Islam. Moreover, Muslims are also guided by such
37 verses as *Say: The truth is from your Lord; so whosoever will, let him believe, and*
38 *whosoever will, let him disbelieve. (al-Kahf 18:29); and Say: O disbelievers! I*
39 *worship not that which ye worship; Nor worship ye that which I worship. And I shall*
40 *not worship that which ye worship. Nor will ye worship that which I worship. Unto*
41 *you your religion and unto me my religion (al-Kafirun: 109:1-6).*

42
43 *God’s Transcendence*

44 You also say that “for Muslim teaching, God is absolutely transcendent,” a
45 simplification which can be misleading. The Quran states, *There is no thing like unto*
46 *Him (al-Shura 42:11)*, but it also states, *He is the Light of the heavens and the earth*
47 *(al-Nur 24:35); and, We are closer to him than his jugular vein (Qaf 50:16); and, He*
48 *is the First, the Last, the Inward, and the Outward (al-Hadid 57:3); and, He is with*
49 *you wherever you are (al-Hadid 57:4); and, Wheresoever you turn, there is the Face*
50 *of God (al-Baqarah 2:115).* Also, let us recall the saying of the Prophet, which states

51 that God says, “When I love him (the worshipper), I am the hearing by which he
52 hears, the sight by which he sees, the hand with which he grasps, and the foot with
53 which he walks.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari* no.6502, *Kitab al-Riqaq*)
54 In the Islamic spiritual, theological, and philosophical tradition, the thinker you
55 mention, Ibn Hazm
56 (d.1069 CE), is a worthy but very marginal figure, who belonged to the *Zahiri* school
57 of jurisprudence which is followed by no one in the Islamic world today. If one is
58 looking for classical formulations of the doctrine of transcendence, much more
59 important to Muslims are figures such as al-Ghazali (d.1111 CE) and many others
60 who are far more influential and more representative of Islamic belief than Ibn Hazm.
61 You quote an argument that because the emperor is “shaped by Greek philosophy”
62 the idea that “God is not pleased by blood” is “self-evident” to him, to which the
63 Muslim teaching on God’s Transcendence is put forward as a counterexample. To
64 say that for Muslims “God’s Will is not bound up in any of our categories” is also a
65 simplification which may lead to a misunderstanding. God has many Names in
66 Islam, including the Merciful, the Just, the Seeing, the Hearing, the Knowing, the
67 Loving, and the Gentle. Their utter conviction in God’s Oneness and that *There is*
68 *none like unto Him (al-Ikhlās 112:4)* has not led Muslims to deny God’s attribution
69 of these qualities to Himself and to (some of) His creatures, (setting aside for now
70 the notion of “categories”, a term which requires much clarification in this context).
71 As this concerns His Will, to conclude that Muslims believe in a capricious God who
72 might or might not command us to evil is to forget that God says in the Quran, *Lo!*
73 *God enjoins justice and kindness, and giving to kinsfolk, and forbids lewdness and*
74 *abomination and wickedness. He exhorts you in order that ye may take heed (al-*
75 *Nahl, 16:90)*. Equally, it is to forget that God says in the Qur’an that *He has*
76 *prescribed for Himself mercy (al-An’am, 6:12; see also 6:54)*, and that God says in
77 the Qur’an, *My Mercy encompasses everything (al-A’raf 7:156)*. The word for
78 mercy, *rahmah*, can also be translated as love, kindness, and compassion. From this
79 word *rahmah* comes the sacred formula Muslims use daily, *In the Name of God, the*
80 *Merciful, the Compassionate*. Is it not self-evident that spilling innocent blood goes
81 against mercy and compassion?

82

83 *The Use of Reason*

84 The Islamic tradition is rich in its explorations of the nature of human intelligence
85 and its relation to God’s Nature and His Will, including questions of what is self-
86 evident and what is not. However, the dichotomy between “reason” on one hand and
87 “faith” on the other does not exist in precisely the same form in Islamic thought.
88 Rather, Muslims have come to terms with the power and limits of human intelligence
89 in their own way, acknowledging a hierarchy of knowledge of which reason is a
90 crucial part. There are two extremes which the Islamic intellectual tradition has
91 generally managed to avoid: one is to make the analytical mind the ultimate arbiter
92 of truth, and the other is to deny the power of human understanding to address
93 ultimate questions. More importantly, in their most mature and mainstream forms the
94 intellectual explorations of Muslims through the ages have maintained a consonance
95 between the truths of the Quranic revelation and the demands of human intelligence,
96 without sacrificing one for the other. God says, *We shall show them Our signs in the*
97 *horizons and in themselves until it is clear to them that it is the truth (Fussilat 41:53)*.
98 Reason itself is one among the many signs within us, which God invites us to
99 contemplate, and to contemplate with, as a way of knowing the truth.

100

101 *What is “Holy War”?*

102 We would like to point out that “holy war” is a term that does not exist in Islamic
103 languages. *Jihad*, it must be emphasized, means struggle, and specifically struggle in
104 the way of God. This struggle may take many forms, including the use of force.
105 Though a *jihad* may be *sacred* in the sense of being directed towards a sacred ideal,
106 it is not necessarily a “war”. Moreover, it is noteworthy that Manuel II Paleologus
107 says that “violence” goes against God’s nature, since Christ himself used violence
108 against the money-changers in the temple, and said “Do not think that I came to
109 bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword...” (Matthew
110 10:34-36). When God drowned Pharaoh, was He going against His own Nature?
111 Perhaps the emperor meant to say that cruelty, brutality, and aggression are against
112 God’s Will, in which case the classical and traditional law of *jihad* in Islam would
113 bear him out completely.

114 You say that “naturally the emperor knew the instructions, developed later and
115 recorded in the Qur’an, concerning holy war.” However, as we pointed out above
116 concerning *There is no compulsion in religion*, the aforementioned instructions were
117 not later at all. Moreover, the emperor’s statements about violent conversion show
118 that he did not know what those instructions are and have always been.

119 The authoritative and traditional Islamic rules of war can be summarized in the
120 following principles:

121

- 122 1. Non-combatants are not permitted or legitimate targets. This
123 was emphasized explicitly time and again by the Prophet, his
124 Companions, and by the learned tradition since then.
- 125 2. Religious belief alone does not make anyone the object of
126 attack. The original Muslim community was fighting against
127 pagans who had also expelled them from their homes,
128 persecuted, tortured, and murdered them. Thereafter, the
129 Islamic conquests were political in nature.
- 130 3. Muslims can and should live peacefully with their neighbors.
131 *And if they incline to peace, do thou incline to it; and put thy*
132 *trust in God (al-Anfal 8:61)*. However, this does not exclude
133 legitimate self-defense and maintenance of sovereignty.

134

135 Muslims are just as bound to obey these rules as they are to refrain from theft and
136 adultery. If a religion regulates war and describes circumstances where it is necessary
137 and just, that does not make that religion war-like, anymore than regulating sexuality
138 makes a religion prurient. If some have disregarded a long and well-established
139 tradition in favor of utopian dreams where the end justifies the means, they have
140 done so of their own accord and without the sanction of God, His Prophet, or the
141 learned tradition. God says in the Holy Qur’an: *Let not hatred of any people seduce*
142 *you into being unjust. Be just, that is nearer to piety (al-Ma’idah 5:8)*. In this context
143 we must state that the murder on September 17th of an innocent Catholic nun in
144 Somalia—and any other similar acts of wanton individual violence—‘in reaction to’
145 your lecture at the University of Regensburg, is completely un-Islamic, and we
146 totally condemn such acts.

147

148 *Forced Conversion*

149 The notion that Muslims are commanded to spread their faith “by the sword” or that
150 Islam in fact was largely spread “by the sword” does not hold up to scrutiny. Indeed,

151 as a *political* entity Islam spread partly as a result of conquest, but the greater part of
152 its expansion came as a result of preaching and missionary activity. Islamic teaching
153 did not prescribe that the conquered populations be forced or coerced into
154 converting. Indeed, many of the first areas conquered by the Muslims remained
155 predominantly non-Muslim for centuries. Had Muslims desired to convert all others
156 by force, there would not be a single church or synagogue left anywhere in the
157 Islamic world. The command *There is no compulsion in religion* means now what it
158 meant then. The mere fact of a person being non-Muslim has never been a legitimate
159 *casus belli* in Islamic law or belief. As with the rules of war, history shows that some
160 Muslims have violated Islamic tenets concerning forced conversion and the treatment
161 of other religious communities, but history also shows that these are by far the
162 exception which proves the rule. We emphatically agree that forcing others to
163 believe—if such a thing be truly possible at all—is not pleasing to God and that God
164 is not pleased by blood. Indeed, we believe, and Muslims have always believed, that
165 *Whoso slays a soul not to retaliate for a soul slain, nor for corruption done in the*
166 *land, it shall be as if he had slain mankind altogether (al-Ma'idah 5:32).*

167

168 *Something New?*

169 You mention the emperor's assertion that "anything new" brought by the Prophet
170 was "evil and inhuman, such as his alleged command to spread by the sword the faith
171 he preached." What the emperor failed to realize—aside from the fact (as mentioned
172 above) that no such command has ever existed in Islam—is that the Prophet never
173 claimed to be bringing anything fundamentally new. God says in the Holy Qur'an,
174 *Naught is said to thee (Muhammad) but what already was said to the Messengers*
175 *before thee (Fussilat 41:43), and, Say (Muhammad): I am no new thing among the*
176 *messengers (of God), nor know I what will be done with me or with you. I do but*
177 *follow that what is Revealed to me, and I am but a plain warner (al-Ahqaf,*
178 *46:9).* Thus faith in the One God is not the property of any one religious community.
179 According to Islamic belief, all the true prophets preached the same truth to different
180 peoples at different times. The laws may be different, but the truth is unchanging.

181

182 *"The Experts"*

183 You refer at one point non-specifically to "the experts" (on Islam) and also actually
184 cite two Catholic scholars by name, Professor (Adel)Theodore Khoury and
185 (Associate Professor) Roger Arnaldez. It suffices here to say that whilst many
186 Muslims consider that there are sympathetic non-Muslims and Catholics who could
187 truly be considered "experts" on Islam, Muslims have not to our knowledge endorsed
188 the "experts" you referred to, or recognized them as representing Muslims or their
189 views. On September 25th 2006 you reiterated your important statement in Cologne
190 on August 20th 2005 that, "Inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue between
191 Christians and Muslims cannot be reduced to an optional extra. It is, in fact, a vital
192 necessity, on which in large measure our future depends." Whilst we fully concur
193 with you, it seems to us that a great part of the object of inter-religious dialogue is to
194 strive to listen to and consider the actual voices of those we are dialoguing with, and
195 not merely those of our own persuasion.

196

197

* * *

198

199 *Christianity and Islam*

200 Christianity and Islam are the largest and second largest religions in the world and in
201 history. Christians and Muslims reportedly make up over a third and over a fifth of
202 humanity respectively. Together they make up more than 55% of the world's
203 population, making the relationship between these two religious communities the
204 most important factor in contributing to meaningful peace around the world. As the
205 leader of over a billion Catholics and moral example for many others around the
206 globe, yours is arguably the single most influential voice in continuing to move this
207 relationship forward in the direction of mutual understanding. We share your desire
208 for frank and sincere dialogue, and recognize its importance in an increasingly
209 interconnected world. Upon this sincere and frank dialogue we hope to continue to
210 build peaceful and friendly relationships based upon mutual respect, justice, and
211 what is common in essence in our shared Abrahamic tradition, particularly 'the two
212 greatest commandments' in Mark 12:29-31 (and, in varying form, in Matthew 22:37-
213 40), that, *the Lord our God is One Lord; / And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with*
214 *all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy understanding, and with all thy*
215 *strength: this is the first commandment. / And the second commandment is like,*
216 *namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other*
217 *commandment greater than these.*

218 Muslims thus appreciate the following words from the Second Vatican Council:

219

220 The church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship
221 God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the
222 Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to humanity. They
223 endeavor to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees
224 of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose
225 faith Muslims eagerly link their own. Although not acknowledging
226 him as God, they venerate

227 Jesus as a prophet; his virgin Mother they also honor, and even at
228 times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the day of judgment and
229 the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this
230 reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially
231 by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting. (*Nostra Aetate*, 28 October
232 1965)

233

234 And equally the words of the late Pope John Paul II, for whom many
235 Muslims had great regard and esteem:

236

237 We Christians joyfully recognize the religious values we have in
238 common with Islam. Today I would like to repeat what I said to young
239 Muslims some years ago in Casablanca: "We believe in the same God,
240 the one God, the living God, the God who created the world and
241 brings his creatures to their perfection" (*Insegnamenti*, VIII/2, [1985],
242 p.497, quoted during a general audience on May 5, 1999).

243

244 Muslims also appreciated your unprecedented personal expression of sorrow, and
245 your clarification and assurance (on the 17th of September) that your quote does not
246 reflect your own personal opinion, as well as the Cardinal Secretary of State Tarcisio
247 Bertone's affirmation (on the 16th of September) of the conciliar document *Nostra*
248 *Aetate*. Finally, Muslims appreciated that (on September 25th) in front of an
249 assembled group of ambassadors from Muslim countries you expressed "total and

250 profound respect for all Muslims”. We hope that we will all avoid the mistakes of the
251 past and live together in the future in peace, mutual acceptance and respect.

252

253 *And all praise belongs to God, and there is neither power nor strength except*
254 *through God.*

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Appendix 7

A COMMON WORD BETWEEN US AND YOU

[ACW]

1

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

2

A Common Word between Us and You

3

(Summary and Abridgement)

4

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.

8

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:

14

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 r said: *"None of you has faith until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself."*

21

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ u 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)

27

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

29

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)

35

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

41 God has commanded'. This relates to the Second Commandment because
42 justice and freedom of religion are a crucial part of love of the neighbour.

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

47

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

50 **A COMMON WORD BETWEEN US AND YOU**

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

56

57 **(I) LOVE OF GOD**

58

59 **LOVE OF GOD IN ISLAM**

60 ***The Testimonies of Faith***

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

66 ***The Best that All the Prophets have Said***

67 Expanding on *the best remembrance*, the Prophet Muhammad r also said: *The best*
68 *that I have said—myself, and the prophets that came before me—is: 'There is no god*
69 *but God, He Alone, He hath no associate, His is the sovereignty and His is the praise*
70 *and He hath power over all things'*ⁱⁱⁱ. The phrases which follow the First Testimony
71 of faith are all from the Holy Qur'an; each describe a mode of love of God, and
72 devotion to Him.

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

77 The words: *He hath no associate*, remind Muslims that they must love God
78 uniquely, without rivals within their souls, since God says in the Holy Qur'an: *Yet*
79 *there are men who take rivals unto God: they love them as they should love God. But*
80 *those of faith are more intense in their love for God (Al-Baqarah, 2:165)*. Indeed,
81 *[T]heir flesh and their hearts soften unto the remembrance of God (Al-Zumar,*
82 *39:23)*.

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

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

91 *And if thou wert to ask them: Who created the heavens and the earth, and*
92 *constrained the sun and the moon (to their appointed work)? they would say: God.*
93 *How then are they turned away ? / God maketh the provision wide for whom He will*
94 *of His servants, and straiteneth it for whom (He will). Lo! God is Aware of all things.*
95 */ And if thou wert to ask them: Who causeth water to come down from the sky, and*
96 *therewith reviveth the earth after its death ? they verily would say: God. Say: Praise*
97 *be to God! But most of them have no sense. (Al-'Ankabut, 29:61-63)^v*

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

99 *God is He Who created the heavens and the earth, and causeth water to descend*
100 *from the sky, thereby producing fruits as food for you, and maketh the ships to be of*
101 *service unto you, that they may run upon the sea at His command, and hath made of*
102 *service unto you the rivers; / And maketh the sun and the moon, constant in their*
103 *courses, to be of service unto you, and hath made of service unto you the night and*
104 *the day./ And He giveth you of all ye ask of Him, and if ye would count the graces of*
105 *God ye cannot reckon them. Lo! man is verily a wrong-doer, an ingrate. (Ibrahim,*
106 *14:32-34)^{vi}*

107 Indeed, the *Fatihah*—which is the *greatest chapter in the Holy Qur'an*^{vii}—starts with
108 praise to God:

109 *In the Name of God, the Infinitely Good, the All-Merciful. /*
110 *Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds. /*
111 *The Infinitely Good, the All-Merciful. /*
112 *Owner of the Day of Judgement. /*
113 *Thee we worship, and Thee we ask for help. /*

114 *Guide us upon the straight path. /*
115 *The path of those on whom is Thy Grace, not those who deserve anger nor those who*
116 *are astray. (Al-Fatihah, 1:1-7)*

117 The *Fatihah*, recited at least seventeen times daily by Muslims in the canonical
118 prayers, reminds us of the praise and gratitude due to God for His Attributes of
119 Infinite Goodness and All-Mercifulness, not merely for His Goodness and Mercy to
120 us in this life but ultimately, on the Day of Judgement^{viii} when it matters the most and
121 when we hope to be forgiven for our sins. It thus ends with prayers for grace and
122 guidance, so that we might attain—through what begins with praise and gratitude—
123 salvation and *love*, for God says in the Holy Qur’an: *Lo! those who believe and do*
124 *good works, the Infinitely Good will appoint for them love. (Maryam, 19:96)*

125 The words: *and He hath power over all things*, remind Muslims that they must
126 be mindful of God’s Omnipotence and thus fear God^{ix}. God says in the Holy Qur’an:

127 ... [A]nd fear God, and know that God is with the God-fearing. / Spend your wealth
128 for the cause of God, and be not cast by your own hands to ruin; and do good. Lo!
129 God loveth the virtuous. / ... (Al-Baqarah, 2:194-5)...
130 [A]nd fear God, and know that God is severe in punishment. (Al-Baqarah, 2:196)

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

133 ...[A]nd know that God is with those who fear Him. (Al-Tawbah, 9:36)
134 O ye who believe! What aileth you that when it is said unto you: Go forth in the way
135 of God, ye are bowed down to the ground with heaviness. Take ye pleasure in the life
136 of the world rather than in the Hereafter? The comfort of the life of the world is but
137 little in the Hereafter. / If ye go not forth He will afflict you with a painful doom, and
138 will choose instead of you a folk other than you. Ye cannot harm Him at all. God is
139 Able to do all things. (Al-Tawbah, 9:38-39)

140

141 C

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

145 *All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth glorifieth God; His is the*
146 *sovereignty and His is the praise and He hath power over all things. (Al-Taghabun,*
147 *64:1)*

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

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

152 As we can see from all the passages quoted above, souls are depicted in the
153 Holy Qur'an as having three main faculties: the mind or the intelligence, which is
154 made for comprehending the truth; the will which is made for freedom of choice, and
155 sentiment which is made for loving the good and the beautiful^x. Put in another way,
156 we could say that man's soul knows through *understanding* the truth, through *willing*
157 the good, and through virtuous emotions and *feeling* love for God. Continuing in the
158 same chapter of the Holy Qur'an (as that quoted above), God orders people to fear
159 Him as much as possible, and to listen (and thus to understand the truth); to obey
160 (and thus to will the good), and to spend (and thus to exercise love and virtue),
161 which, He says, is better for our souls. By engaging *everything* in our souls—the
162 faculties of knowledge, will, and love—we may come to be purified and attain
163 ultimate success:

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

167

168

C

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

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

180 These verses epitomize the Prophet Muhammad's r complete and utter
181 devotion to God. Thus in the Holy Qur'an God enjoins Muslims who truly love God
182 to follow this example^{xi}, in order in turn to be loved^{xii} by God:

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

185

186 Love of God in Islam is thus part of complete and total devotion to God; it is
187 not a mere fleeting, partial emotion. As seen above, God commands in the Holy
188 Qur'an: *Say: Lo! my worship and my sacrifice and my living and my dying are for*
189 *God, Lord of the Worlds. / He hath no partner.* The call to be totally devoted and
190 attached to God heart and soul, far from being a call for a mere emotion or for a
191 mood, is in fact an injunction requiring all-embracing, constant and active love of

192 God. It demands a love in which the innermost spiritual heart and the whole of the
193 soul—with its intelligence, will and feeling—participate through devotion.

194 c

195 ***None Comes with Anything Better***

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

207 *He who says: ‘There is no god but God, He Alone, He hath no associate, His is the*
208 *sovereignty and His is the praise and He hath power over all things’ one hundred*
209 *times in a day, it is for them equal to setting ten slaves free, and one hundred good*
210 *deeds are written for them and one hundred bad deeds are effaced, and it is for them*
211 *a protection from the devil for that day until the evening. And none offers anything*
212 *better than that, save one who does more than that.*^{xiii}

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

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

222

223 **LOVE OF GOD AS THE FIRST AND GREATEST**
224 **COMMANDMENT IN THE BIBLE**

225 The *Shema* in the Book of Deuteronomy (6:4-5), a centrepiece of the Old
226 Testament and of Jewish liturgy, says: *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the*
227 *LORD is one! / You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all*
228 *your soul, and with all your strength.*^{xv}

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

231 *But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered*
232 *together. / Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and*
233 *saying, / “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” / Jesus said to*
234 *him, “ ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul,*
235 *and with all your mind.’ / This is the first and greatest commandment. / And the*
236 *second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ / On these two*
237 *commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:34-40)*
238

239 And also:

240 *Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving*
241 *that he had answered them well, asked him, “Which is the first commandment of*
242 *all?” / Jesus answered him, “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel,*
243 *the LORD our God, the LORD is one. / And you shall love the LORD your God with*
244 *all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This*
245 *is the first commandment. / And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your*
246 *neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark*
247 *12:28-31)*

248 The commandment to love God fully is thus the *First and Greatest Commandment* of
249 the Bible. Indeed, it is to be found in a number of other places throughout the Bible
250 including: Deuteronomy 4:29, 10:12, 11:13 (also part of the *Shema*), 13:3, 26:16,
251 30:2, 30:6, 30:10; Joshua 22:5; Mark 12:32-33 and Luke 10:27-28.

252 However, in various places throughout the Bible, it occurs in slightly different forms
253 and versions. For instance, in Matthew 22:37 (*You shall love the LORD your God*
254 *with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind*), the Greek word for
255 “heart” is *kardia*, the word for “soul” is *psyche*, and the word for “mind” is *dianoia*.
256 In the version from Mark 12:30 (*And you shall love the LORD your God with all*
257 *your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength*) the
258 word “strength” is added to the aforementioned three, translating the Greek word
259 *ischus*.
260

261 The words of the lawyer in Luke 10:27 (which are confirmed by Jesus Christ u in
262 Luke 10:28) contain the same four terms as Mark 12:30. The words of the scribe in
263 Mark 12:32 (which are approved of by Jesus Christ u in Mark 12:34) contain the
264 three terms *kardia* (“heart”), *dianoia* (“mind”), and *ischus* (“strength”).
265

266 In the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD*
267 *is one! / You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your*
268 *soul, and with all your strength*). In Hebrew the word for “heart” is *lev*, the word for
269 “soul” is *nefesh*, and the word for “strength” is *me’od*.
270

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

273

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

278 What all these versions thus have in common—despite the language differences
279 between the Hebrew Old Testament, the original words of Jesus Christ in Aramaic,
280 and the actual transmitted Greek of the New Testament—is the command to love
281 God fully with one’s heart and soul and to be fully devoted to Him. This is the First
282 and Greatest Commandment for human beings. ⁷

283 In the light of what we have seen to be necessarily implied and evoked by the
284 Prophet Muhammad’s r blessed saying: *‘The best that I have said—myself, and the*
285 *prophets that came before me—is: ‘There is no god but God, He Alone, He hath no*
286 *associate, His is the sovereignty and His is the praise and He hath power over all*
287 *things’* ^{xvi}, we can now perhaps understand the words *‘The best that I have said—*
288 *myself, and the prophets that came before me’* as equating the blessed formula
289 *‘There is no god but God, He Alone, He hath no associate, His is the sovereignty and*
290 *His is the praise and He hath power over all things’* precisely with the ‘First and
291 Greatest Commandment’ to love God, with all one’s heart and soul, as found in
292 various places in the Bible. That is to say, in other words, that the Prophet
293 Muhammad r was perhaps, through inspiration, restating and alluding to the Bible’s
294 First Commandment. God knows best, but certainly we have seen their effective
295 similarity in meaning. Moreover, we also do know (as can be seen in the endnotes),
296 that both formulas have another remarkable parallel: the way they arise in a number
297 of slightly differing versions and forms in different contexts, all of which,
298 nevertheless, emphasize the primacy of total love and devotion to God ^{xvii}.

299

300 (II) LOVE OF THE NEIGHBOUR

301 LOVE OF THE NEIGHBOUR IN ISLAM

302 There are numerous injunctions in Islam about the necessity and paramount
303 importance of love for—and mercy towards—the neighbour. Love of the neighbour
304 is an essential and integral part of faith in God and love of God because in Islam
305 without love of the neighbour there is no true faith in God and no righteousness. The
306 Prophet Muhammad r said: *“None of you has faith until you love for your brother*
307 *what you love for yourself.”*^{xviii} And: *“None of you has faith until you love for your*
308 *neighbour what you love for yourself.”*^{xix}
309

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

349

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

350

A Common Word

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

363

364 This could not be otherwise since Jesus u said: (Matthew 22:40) “*On these two*
365 *commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.*” Moreover, God confirms in the
366 Holy Qur'an that the Prophet Muhammad r brought nothing fundamentally or
367 essentially new: *Naught is said to thee (Muhammad) but what already was said to*
368 *the messengers before thee (Fussilat 41:43)*. And: *Say (Muhammad): I am no new*
369 *thing among the messengers (of God), nor know I what will be done with me or with*
370 *you. I do but follow that which is Revealed to me, and I am but a plain warner (Al-*
371 *Ahqaf, 46:9)*. Thus also God in the Holy Qur'an confirms that the same eternal truths
372 of the Unity of God, of the necessity for total love and devotion to God (and thus
373 shunning false gods), and of the necessity for love of fellow human beings (and thus
374 justice), underlie all true religion:

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

379

380 *We verily sent Our messengers with clear proofs, and revealed with them the*
381 *Scripture and the Balance, that mankind may stand forth in justice.... (Al-Hadid,*
382 *57:25)*

383

384 *Come to a Common Word!*

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

387 *Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to a common word between us and you: that*
388 *we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and*

389 *that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. And if they turn away, then*
390 *say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him). (Aal 'Imran*
391 *3:64)*
392

393 Clearly, the blessed words: *we shall ascribe no partner unto Him* relate to the Unity
394 of God. Clearly also, worshipping *none but God*, relates to being totally devoted to
395 God and hence to the *First and Greatest Commandment*. According to one of the
396 oldest and most authoritative commentaries (*tafsir*) on the Holy Qur'an—the *Jami'*
397 *Al-Bayan fi Ta'wil Al-Qur'an* of Abu Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir Al-Tabari (d. 310
398 A.H. / 923 C.E.)—*that none of us shall take others for lords beside God*, means 'that
399 none of us should obey in disobedience to what God has commanded, nor glorify
400 them by prostrating to them in the same way as they prostrate to God'. In other
401 words, that Muslims, Christians and Jews should be free to each follow what God
402 commanded them, and not have 'to prostrate before kings and the like'^{xxi}; for God
403 says elsewhere in the Holy Qur'an: *Let there be no compulsion in religion.... (Al-*
404 *Baqarah, 2:256)*. This clearly relates to the Second Commandment and to love of the
405 neighbour of which justice^{xxii} and freedom of religion are a crucial part. God says in
406 the Holy Qur'an:

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

410 We thus as Muslims invite Christians to remember Jesus's u words in the Gospel
411 (Mark 12:29-31):

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

416 As Muslims, we say to Christians that we are not against them and that Islam is not
417 against them—so long as they do not wage war against Muslims on account of their
418 religion, oppress them and drive them out of their homes, (in accordance with the
419 verse of the Holy Qur'an [Al-Mumtahinah, 60:8] quoted above). Moreover, God says
420 in the Holy Qur'an:

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

427 Is Christianity necessarily against Muslims? In the Gospel Jesus Christ u
428 says:

429 *He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters*
430 *abroad. (Matthew 12:30)*
431 *For he who is not against us is on our side. (Mark 9:40)*
432 *... for he who is not against us is on our side. (Luke 9:50)*

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

443 Finally, as Muslims, and in obedience to the Holy Qur'an, we ask Christians
444 to come together with us on the common essentials of our two religions ... *that we*
445 *shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that*
446 *none of us shall take others for lords beside God ... (Aal 'Imran, 3:64).*
447

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

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

458

459 ***Between Us and You***

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

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NOTES

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

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

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

507 It is important to note that the additional phrases, *He Alone, He hath no associate, His is the*
508 *sovereignty and His is the praise and He hath power over all things*, all come from the Holy Qur'an,
509 in exactly those forms, albeit in different passages. *He Alone*—referring to God Y—is found at least
510 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
511 found in exactly that form at least once (*Al-An'am*, 6:173). *His is the sovereignty and His is the praise*
512 *and He hath power over all things*, is found in exactly this form once in the Holy Qur'an (*Al-*
513 *Taghabun*, 64:1), and parts of it are found a number of other times (for instance, the words, *He hath*
514 *power over all things*, are found at least five times: 5:120; 11:4; 30:50; 42:9 and 57:2).

515 ^{iv} **The Heart** In Islam the (spiritual, not physical) heart is the organ of perception of spiritual
516 and metaphysical knowledge. Of one of the Prophet Muhammad's r greatest visions God says in the
517 Holy Qur'an: *The inner heart lied not (in seeing) what it saw. (al-Najm, 53:11)* Indeed, elsewhere in
518 the Holy Qur'an, God says: *[F]or indeed it is not the eyes that grow blind, but it is the hearts, which*
519 *are within the bosoms, that grow blind. (Al-Hajj, 22:46; see whole verse and also: 2:9-10; 2:74; 8:24;*
520 *26:88-89; 48:4; 83:14 et al..* There are in fact over a hundred mentions of the heart and its synonyms
521 in the Holy Qur'an.)

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

525 *That day will faces be resplendent, / Looking toward their Lord; (Al-Qiyamah, 75:22-23)*
526 Yet God also says in the Holy Qur'an:

527 *Such is God, your Lord. There is no God save Him, the Creator of all things, so worship Him. And He*
528 *taketh care of all things. / Vision comprehendeth Him not, but He comprehendeth (all) vision. He is*
529 *the Subtile, the Aware. / Proofs have come unto you from your Lord, so whoso seeth, it is for his own*
530 *good, and whoso is blind is blind to his own hurt. And I am not a keeper over you. (Al-An'am, 6:102-*
531 *104)*

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

537 ^v See also: *Luqman*, 31:25.

538 ^{vi} See also: *Al-Nahl*, 16:3-18.

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

541 ^{viii} The Prophet Muhammad r said:
542 *God has one hundred mercies. He has sent down one of them between genii and human beings and*
543 *beasts and animals and because of it they feel with each other; and through it they have mercy on*
544 *each other; and through it, the wild animal feels for its offspring. And God has delayed ninety-nine*
545 *mercies through which he will have mercy on his servants on the Day of Judgement. (Sahih Muslm,*
546 *Kitab Al-Tawbah; 2109/4; no. 2752; see also Sahih Bukhari, Kitab Al-Riqaq, no. 6469).*

547 ^{ix} **Fear of God is the Beginning of Wisdom**

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

554 ^x **The Intelligence, the Will and Sentiment in the Holy Qur'an**

555 Thus God in the Holy Qur'an tells human being to believe in Him and call on Him (thereby using the
556 intelligence) with fear (which motivates the will) and with hope (and thus with sentiment):
557 *Only those believe in Our revelations who, when they are reminded of them, fall down prostrate and*
558 *hymn the praise of their Lord, and they are not scornful, / Who forsake their beds to cry unto their*
559 *Lord in fear and hope, and spend of that We have bestowed on them. / No soul knoweth what is kept*
560 *hid for them of joy, as a reward for what they used to do. (Al-Sajdah, 32:15-17)*
561 *(O mankind!) Call upon your Lord humbly and in secret. Lo! He loveth not aggressors. / Work not*
562 *confusion in the earth after the fair ordering (thereof), and call on Him in fear and hope. Lo! the*
563 *mercy of God is near unto the virtuous. (Al-A'raf, 7:55-56)*

564 Likewise, the Prophet Muhammad r himself is described in terms which manifest
565 knowledge (and hence the intelligence), eliciting hope (and hence sentiment) and instilling fear (and
566 hence motivating the will):
567 *O Prophet! Lo! We have sent thee as a witness and a bringer of good tidings and a warner. (Al-*
568 *Ahzab, 33:45)*
569 *Lo! We have sent thee (O Muhammad) as a witness and a bearer of good tidings and a warner, (Al-*
570 *Fath, 48:8)*

571 ^{xi} **A Goodly Example**

572 The love and total devotion of the Prophet Muhammad r to God is for Muslims the model
573 that they seek to imitate. God says in the Holy Qur'an:
574 *Verily in the messenger of God ye have a goodly example for him who hopeth for God and the Last*
575 *Day, and remembereth God much. (Al-Ahzab, 33:21)*

576 The totality of this love excludes worldliness and egotism, and is itself beautiful and
577 loveable to Muslims. Love of God is itself loveable to Muslims. God says in the Holy Qur'an:
578 *And know that the messenger of God is among you. If he were to obey you in many matters, ye would*
579 *surely fall into misfortune; but God hath made the faith loveable to you and hath beautified it in your*
580 *hearts, and hath made disbelief and lewdness and rebellion hateful unto you. Such are they who are*
581 *the rightly guided. (Al-Hujurat, 49:7)*

582 ^{xii} This 'particular love' is in addition to God's universal Mercy which embraceth all things (Al-A'raf,
583 7:156); but God knows best.

584 ^{xiii} *Sahih Al-Bukhari, Kitab Bad' al-Khalq, Bab Sifat Iblis wa Junudihi; Hadith no. 3329.*

585

Other Versions of the Blessed Saying

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This blessed saying of the Prophet Muhammad's r, is found in dozens of *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad r) in differing contexts in slightly varying versions.

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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-Riqaq* (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 yadihi 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 yadihi 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 r, 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 r 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*.)

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^{xiv} Frequent Remembrance of God in the Holy Qur'an

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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).

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

635 (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-

636 38; 26:227; 62:9-10; 87:1-17, et al.)
637 Similarly, the Holy Qur'an is full of verses that emphasize the paramount importance of the
638 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;
639 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
640 al.), and the dire consequences of not practising it (see: 2:114; 4:142; 7:179-180; 18:28; 18:100-101;
641 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
642 God ultimately says in the Holy Qur'an:

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

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

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

647 ^{xv} Herein all Biblical Scripture is taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by
648 Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

649 ^{xvi} Sunan Al-Tirmithi, *Kitab Al-Da'wat, Bab al-Du'a fi Yawm 'Arafah, Hadith no. 3934. Op. cit..*

650 ^{xvii}

651 ***In the Best Stature***

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

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

656 And:

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

659 And the Prophet Muhammad r said: *Verily God created Adam in His own image. (Sahih Al-*
660 *Bukhari, Kitab Al-Isti'than, 1; Sahih Muslim, Kitab Al-Birr 115; Musnad Ibn Hanbal, 2: 244, 251,*
661 *315, 323 etc. et al.)*

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

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

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

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

676 *And when I have fashioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit, then fall down before him*
677 *prostrate, (Sad, 38:72)*
678 *And when thy Lord said unto the angels: Lo! I am about to place a viceroy in the earth, they said: Wilt*
679 *thou place therein one who will do harm therein and will shed blood, while we, we hymn Thy praise*
680 *and sanctify Thee ? He said: Surely I know that which ye know not. / And He taught Adam all the*
681 *names, then showed them to the angels, saying: Inform Me of the names of these, if ye are truthful ./*
682 *They said: Be glorified! We have no knowledge saving that which Thou hast taught us. Lo! Thou, only*
683 *Thou, art the Knower, the Wise. / He said: O Adam! Inform them of their names, and when he had*
684 *informed them of their names, He said: Did I not tell you that I know the secret of the heavens and the*
685 *earth ? And I know that which ye disclose and which ye hide. / And when We said unto the angels:*
686 *Prostrate yourselves before Adam, they fell prostrate, all save Iblis. He demurred through pride, and*
687 *so became a disbeliever... / And We said: O Adam! Dwell thou and thy wife in the Garden, and eat ye*
688 *freely (of the fruits) thereof where ye will; but come not nigh this tree lest ye become wrong-doers.*
689 *(Al-Baqarah, 2:30-35)*

690 ^{xviii} *Sahih Al-Bukhari, Kitab al-Iman, Hadith no.13.*

691 ^{xix} *Sahih Muslim , Kitab al-Iman, 67-1, Hadith no.45.*

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

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

696 ^{xxii} According to grammarians cited by Tabari (op cit.) the word 'common' (*sawa'*) in 'a common
697 word between us' also means 'just', 'fair' (*adl*).

698 ^{xxiii} The Blessed Theophylact (1055-1108 C.E.) was the Orthodox Archbishop of Ochrid and Bulgaria
699 (1090-1108 C.E.). His native language was the Greek of the New Testament. His *Commentary* is
700 currently available in English from Chrysostom Press.

Appendix 8
Christian Responses as given in the official
website of ‘A Common Word’.

1. **David Ford**
Cambridge University
October 10, 2007
2. **Press release from Lambeth Palace**
October 11, 2007
3. **Richard Chartres**
The Bishop of London
October 12, 2007
4. **Yale Divinity School Scholars**
October 12, 2007
5. **The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB)** October 13, 2007
6. **World Alliance of Reformed Churches**
October 15, 2007
7. **Clifton Kirkpatrick**
The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
October 15, 2007
8. **Iain Torrance**
President of Princeton Theological Seminary
October 15, 2007
9. **Rev David Coffey**
President of the Baptist World Alliance
October 16, 2007
10. **Samir Khalil Samir**
October 17, 2007
11. **Tomas F. Michel**
United Catholic Asian News (UCAN)
October 20, 2007
12. **Prof. Kenneth Vaux**
Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary
October 21, 2007
13. **Prof. Dr. Christian W. Troll**
October 22, 2007
14. **Prof. John Esposito**
Georgetown University.
October 22, 2007
15. **Joint Communique of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Chief Rabbis of Israel**
October 31, 2007
16. **Tony Blair**
October 12, 2007
17. **Cardinal Tauran**
October 12, 2007; October 18, 2007; October 19, 2007;
May 28, 2008
18. **The National Council of Churches**
October 15, 2007
19. **Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia**
World Council of Churches (WCC)
October 15, 2007

20. **Abbot Mark Serna, O.S.B.**
Monastic Interreligious Dialogue
October 16, 2007
21. **Hazel Blears**
UK Secretary of State for Communications
October 23, 2007
22. **Dr Paul D. Murray**
Director of the Centre for Catholic Studies
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. **Cardinal Pell**
Archbishop of Sydney
October 30, 2007
27. **Christian Century editors**
November 3, 2007
28. **James Schrag**
Executive Director, Mennonite Church USA
November 5, 2007
29. **British Prime Minister Gordon Brown**
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. **Leith Anderson**
November 20, 2007
33. **Karen P. Hughes**
December 4, 2007
34. **Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**
December 5, 2007
35. **Metropolitan Mykhayil Javchak** Archbishop of New
York
December 9, 2007
36. **West Yorkshire Church Leaders' Statement**
December 10, 2007
37. **Building Bridges, Cambridge**
December 21, 2007
38. **Columbia Theological Seminary**
December 21, 2007

39. **Joint Muslim-Evangelical Christian endorsement of A Common Word in Libya**
January 3-6th, 2008
40. **Daniel Madigan** the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims
January 18, 2008
41. **Arab Orthodox Patriarch**
January 22-23rd, 2008
42. **Mor Eustathius Matta Roham**, Archbishop of Jezira and the Euphrates, Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch
January 31, 2008
43. **GodVoter.org**
January 31, 2008
44. **Aram I Armenian Orthodox Catholicos**
February 06, 2008
45. **Islamic Studies Association (India)**
February 08, 2008
46. **The Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations**
February 13, 2008
47. **Annemarie Schimmel Forum**
March 03, 2008
48. **The World Community for Christian Meditation**
March 11, 2008
49. **Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia**
March 18, 2008
50. **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 02, 2008
51. **The World Evangelical Alliance**
April 02, 2008
52. **The Danish National Council of Churches**
April 09, 2008
53. **Professor James S. Cutsinger**, Professor of Theology and Religious Thought, Department of Religious Studies, University of South Carolina
April 09, 2008
54. **The Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, His Holiness Patriarchy Alexy II**
April 14, 2008
55. **The Religious Society of Friends in Denmark**
April 25, 2008
56. **The Maranatha Community**
April 30, 2008
57. **The Archbishop of Canterbury (Detailed Response)**
July 14, 2008
58. **An Ecumenical Response from the Church of Wales**
July 18, 2008

59. **United Church in Australia**
July 20, 2009
60. **The General Secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches**
August 11, 2008
61. **The Episcopal Commission for Interfaith Dialogue,**
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
August 28, 2008
62. **National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA** October 08, 2008.
63. **ROASIS group,** Italy
November 07, 2008
64. **His Beatitude Chrisostomos,** Archbishop of Cyprus
November 10, 2008
65. **The Methodist Mission and Ecumenical,** New Zealand
November 13, 2008
66. **The Baptist World Alliance**
December 26, 2008
67. **United Methodist Council of Bishops**
January 05, 2009
68. **The Presbyterian Church in Canada**
August 21, 2009
69. **The Presbyterian Church in Canada**
August 21, 2009
70. **Konrad Adenauer Stiftung**
October 1-4, 2009
71. **Prof. Richard Heinzmann** of the Eugen Biser
Foundation
October 6, 2010

Appendix 9

**Towards *common ground* between Christians
and Muslims?**

**138 Muslim religious leaders call for
reconciliation and cooperation with Christians**

Christian W. Troll

1 **Towards *common ground* between Christians and Muslims?**

2 **138 Muslim religious leaders call for reconciliation and cooperation with**
3 **Christians**

4 By Rev. Christian W. Troll

5 Muslim-Christian relations are 1,400 years old but within that long history there has
6 never yet been an initiative like this: on the occasion of this year's Eid, the end of the
7 month of fasting, 138 Muslim religious leaders and scholars signed and published an
8 'Open Letter and Call'. Despite – or even because of – its provocative contents the
9 Pope's Regensburg lecture appears to be bearing fruit. A year ago 38 Muslim
10 scholars wrote to Pope Benedict but now a more enduring, more widely based
11 dialogue appears to be developing. The new letter is addressed not only to Pope
12 Benedict XVI but also to the Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople, the Archbishop
13 of Canterbury and the leaders of the Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist and Reformed
14 Churches. The title – 'A Common Word between Us and You' – is drawn from a
15 famous verse of sura 3:64, addressed to Jews and Christians (referred to here as
16 'People of the Scripture').

17 The letter compares selected Qur'anic and Biblical texts and comes to the conclusion
18 that both scriptures emphasize 'the primacy of total love and devotion to God'
19 together with love of neighbour. Muslims and Christians, it goes on, make up more
20 than half of the world's population. The relationship between them is therefore "the
21 most important factor in contributing to meaningful peace around the world." "As
22 Muslims, we say to Christians that we are not against them and that Islam is not
23 against them – so long as they do not wage war against Muslims on account of their
24 religion, oppress them and drive them out of their homes"(cf. sura 60:8). The letter
25 adds: "To those who nevertheless relish conflict and destruction for their own sake or
26 reckon that ultimately they stand to gain through them, we say our very eternal souls
27 are all also at stake if we fail to sincerely make every effort to make peace and come
28 together in harmony."

29 With this initiative, we see the emergence of something like an intra-Islamic
30 ecumenical movement. Amongst the signatories are the Grand Muftis of Bosnia &
31 Herzegovina, Russia, Croatia, Kosovo and Syria, the Secretary-General of the
32 Organization of the Islamic Conference, the former Grand Mufti of Egypt, and the
33 founder of the Ulema Organization in Iraq. However, there are also two Ayatollahs
34 and further senior Shi'ite, Ibadi and Isma'ili dignitaries and scholars. As with the
35 earlier letter to the Pope, this unique initiative was taken by the Royal Aal al-Bayt
36 Institute for Islamic Thought in Jordan. One of the leading intellectuals behind it, Dr
37 Aref Ali Nayed of the Cambridge University Interfaith Programme, describes the
38 letter as 'a consensus [of Muslims around the world]' and 'a milestone'.

39 Some names are notable for their absence, including those of Yusuf al-Qaradawi and
40 especially Tariq Ramadan, both associated in different ways with the Muslim
41 Brotherhood. Also missing is Muhammad Saiyid Tantawi, the Sheikh of al-Azhar,

42 the influential Sunni institution in Cairo. On the other hand, among the Sunni
43 signatories one is struck by the relatively strong Saudi presence.

44 This letter from Muslim leaders and scholars undoubtedly deserves careful attention,
45 not least on the part of Christians. For someone such as myself, who has been
46 engaged for decades in religious dialogue between Christians and Muslims, it
47 represents a remarkable attempt to reach a broad consensus among leading Muslim
48 figures. This effort certainly has among its aims that Islam should be taken seriously
49 as a distinct and clearly articulated voice at a global level. Reading the impressive list
50 of signatories from all parts of the world and from various socio-religious contexts
51 reminds one that there are no longer separate Islamic and Christian worlds in the
52 sense of geographically distinct areas. Around the world today Christians and
53 Muslims take part in the life of diverse and thoroughly plural societies and states,
54 amongst which must be included societies such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The
55 scholars' letter can be read as a tangible recognition of this fact. The new phase in
56 dialogue of which it is a part can thus be seen as a positive outcome of globalization.

57 The scholars set forth „all-embracing, constant and active love of God“ as the central
58 command of all three monotheistic religions. It is notable that the document draws
59 not only on texts from the Qur'an, but also from the Hebrew and Christian scriptures.
60 It is therefore strange that in this appeal there is no mention of the community of
61 Jewish believers, whose concise confession of faith in Deuteronomy 6:4-6 is cited by
62 the document as „a centrepiece of the Old Testament and of Jewish liturgy“.

63 It is in itself a highly significant fact that this document includes a number of Biblical
64 passages and comments positively on them. Does this indicate something of a break
65 with Islamic doctrine, according to which the holy scriptures of the Jews and
66 Christians (as they exist in their present form) are regarded as „corrupted“ either by
67 falsification of the text or by distortion of the meaning of the text (tahrif al-nass;
68 tahrif al-ma'na)? As a consequence of this view, the great majority of Muslims have
69 hitherto regarded the text of the Bible (in its present form) as unreliable, have
70 generally taken little interest in its contents (except, in some cases, for polemical
71 purposes) and have not recognized it as a shared basis for dialogue. For example, the
72 Book of Psalms is not read by Muslims either in public liturgy or in private devotion,
73 despite the fact that the Qur'an repeatedly speaks of the Psalms which were given by
74 God to David (cf. Qur'an 4:163; 17:55). So one naturally asks whether the authors of
75 this document are seeking to understand the biblical texts which they have cited in
76 their own authentically biblical context, which includes both the immediate context
77 of any particular text and also the wider context of the whole Bible. Or could it be
78 that these biblical texts are only accepted and quoted by the Muslim scholars in so far
79 as they correspond with the message of the Qur'an? Be that as it may, the Islamic
80 doctrine of the intentional alteration of the Biblical text by Jews and Christians,
81 which is extremely significant for Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogue, is neither
82 mentioned nor explicitly modified in this document.

83 A crucial point to bear in mind is that for this document and its authors the absolute
84 criterion for the correct understanding of love for God and neighbour lies in
85 Muhammad, his life and his interpretation of the divine commandments found in the
86 Qur'an. In other words, the specific way in which love of God and neighbour were

87 put into practice by Muhammad, first in Mecca and then in Medina, remains
88 absolutely decisive for Muslims today, in so far as they shape their individual and
89 collective life following his example. In this regard, a fuller consideration of
90 Muhammad's approach to Jews and Christians than was offered in this document
91 would have to discuss the increasing tensions of his later years, as reflected in
92 passages of the Qur'an such as sura 9.

93 We should also mention here the Qur'anic passage which is the source of the
94 document's title – 'A Common Word between Us and You'. This phrase is drawn
95 from a famous verse addressed to Jews and Christians (referred to here as 'People of
96 the Scripture'):

97 'Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to a common word between us and you: that
98 we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and
99 that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. And if they turn away, then
100 say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him)' (sura 3:64).

101 In the context of Muslim-Christian dialogue it is especially important to reflect on
102 the requirement here that 'none of us shall take others for lords beside God'. Much
103 Muslim commentary, classical and modern, has seen in these words criticism of
104 Christian belief in the divinity of Jesus. Moreover, this interpretation appears to be in
105 line with a number of other Qur'anic passages insisting that Jesus was a human
106 messenger of God and in no sense divine (3:59, immediately before the text in
107 question; 4:171; 5:75; 9:31; 19:34-5). It is therefore striking that the Open Letter
108 cites a much less polemical approach taken by al-Tabari, an authoritative early
109 commentator on the Qur'an, to the effect that 'Muslims, Christians and Jews should
110 be free to each follow what God commanded them, and not have „to prostrate before
111 kings and the like“ (p. 14). One might ask, however, what al-Tabari imagined God
112 had commanded Christians to do – not, presumably, to worship Jesus?

113 Of course, Muslims and Christians (together with Jews) agree that only God should
114 be worshipped, but we disagree in our views of Jesus Christ, and this disagreement
115 has profound implications for how God is understood and worshipped. For Christians
116 Jesus is both fully human and fully divine; the most basic confession of Christian
117 faith is 'Jesus Christ is Lord'. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is also known by
118 Christians as 'the Lord, the giver of life'; God is thus known and worshipped as
119 Father, Son and Spirit. So it is important for Muslims approaching dialogue with
120 Christians to understand that this trinitarian monotheism is central to Christian belief
121 and worship and is not an aspect of Christianity that can be negotiated away. In this
122 regard there are some slight ambiguities in the Open Letter, moments at which a
123 Christian might feel that it is suggesting that there are no fundamental differences
124 between the theologies of the two faiths, or at least that these differences do not
125 really matter. While the warm, inviting tone of the Open Letter's appeal to Christians
126 is enormously encouraging, it is to be hoped that this can be held together with an
127 approach which takes utterly seriously the points at which Christians and Muslims
128 differ and does not encourage a diplomatic evasion of these points for the sake of a
129 dialogue which would suffer as a result.

130 Another point to raise here is that even if theologians from the three faiths could
131 agree on the central meaning of the double love-commandment, there would still be
132 enormous practical differences to consider when it comes to putting into effect these
133 commandments in the concrete, here-and-now reality of plural societies. One has
134 only to think of questions such as the imposition of Shari‘a, human rights and the
135 relationship between state and religion. Does the double commandment to love God
136 and neighbour on its own truly provide an adequate basis for peaceful and
137 harmonious co-existence in diverse societies?

138 It so happens that at almost the same time as the Open Letter was published the
139 Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (= PCID) released its annual message
140 to Muslims. This year, its theme was *Christians and Muslims: called to promote a*
141 *culture of peace*. The annual messages of the PCID ‘to our dear Muslim friends’,
142 which, since 1967, have been published annually on the occasion of Eid, of course
143 belong to a quite different literary form from that of the Open Letter. Nevertheless,
144 we can assume that the author of this year’s message, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran,
145 named by the Pope a few months ago as the new President of the Council, expresses
146 not only the outlook of the Second Vatican Council but also the particular emphases
147 of Benedict XVI. The Cardinal speaks in the name of the worldwide Catholic
148 Church, a community which roughly corresponds in size to the Muslim community
149 and which is also like the Muslim community in being established in virtually all the
150 nations of the world.

151 Cardinal Tauran reflects upon the longing for „friendly and constructive
152 relationships“ as such. He does not work from the basis of this or that selection of
153 texts from Jewish, Christian and Muslim scriptures, perhaps because the scriptures
154 occupy a different place within Christianity and Islam and are also so variously
155 interpreted. Tauran emphasizes the significance of the „the Creator’s plan“, that is
156 the rational laws and structures which can be accepted not only by Christians and
157 Muslims but fundamentally by all people. This plan includes values such as: service
158 of our sisters and brothers and fraternal solidarity „with members of other religions
159 and all men of good will“. The message also points to the challenge set before us all
160 to work for peace „by showing respect for the convictions of individuals and
161 communities everywhere“ and by respecting the right to „religious freedom, which
162 must not be reduced to mere freedom of worship“ but rather is „one of the essential
163 aspects of freedom of conscience, which is the right of every individual and a
164 cornerstone of human rights.“ So although it is to be welcomed when Islamic
165 theologians seeking common ground with Christians quote the Bible in a positive
166 spirit, we must also recall the deteriorating situation and increasingly limited
167 religious freedom of Christians in many Muslim majority countries. And of course in
168 other contexts Muslim and indeed other religious minorities also suffer intolerance.
169 We are thus reminded that the world is now also globalized in religious terms and
170 that there are many challenges to overcome if believers of different traditions are to
171 live together in harmony.

172 The Cardinal’s appeal points to the necessity of the distinction and separation
173 between the political order and the religious sphere if cultural and religious diversity
174 is to flourish within a just and peaceful society marked by mutual respect. In this
175 sense the PCID sees Christians and Muslims as called to make their respective

176 contributions (inspired by their respective faiths) to the formation and strengthening
177 of the 'common good' in plural and democratic societies, societies which are secular
178 (in the sense of being religiously neutral) and which are committed to the human
179 rights of all their members. For however valuable it may be to achieve theological
180 agreement over the question of the double love-commandment, on its own this can
181 hardly guarantee just and peaceful co-existence within diversity.

Appendix 10

***A Common Word Between Us and You:* Some initial reflections**

Daniel A Madigan SJ

1 *A Common Word Between Us and You:*
2 **Some initial reflections**

3
4 Daniel A Madigan SJ

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

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

22 However dramatic may be the current world context that prompted it, this open letter
23 to Christian leaders by 138 Muslim scholars and authorities should probably be read
24 against a longer timeline. Forty-some years ago over two thousand Catholic bishops
25 at Vatican II approved an epoch-making statement that, as Pope Benedict has several
26 times reaffirmed, remains the official position of the Church with regard to Muslims.
27 Though it did not deal with some of the more substantial differences between our
28 faiths, *Nostra Aetate*, as it was entitled, focussed on the things we have in common,
29 which are the basis for the esteem for Muslims that the Council professed. The
30 bishops concluded: "Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities
31 have arisen between Christians and Muslims, this sacred synod urges all to forget
32 ['transcend' or 'overcome' might have been a better choice of words] the past and to
33 work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote
34 together for the benefit of all humanity social justice and moral welfare, as well as
35 peace and freedom."

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

42 No other religious community, Christian or non-, has such an authority structure.
43 Everywhere else authority is more diffuse-we might even say democratic. It has to

44 be painstakingly negotiated, and binding consensus is often elusive. We should
45 therefore be particularly grateful to this group of Muslim scholars that they have
46 succeeded in arriving at a statement like this, subscribed to by such a broad
47 representation. One might read their letter as a first collective Muslim response to
48 *Nostra Aetate*, a response that agrees to adopt the same approach as the Council: the
49 bracketing of differences in order to affirm common beliefs, and an appeal to work
50 together for justice and peace in the world.

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

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

72 The group of scholars behind *A Common Word* are ignorant neither of the breadth
73 and depth of the Islamic tradition, nor of Christianity. Among them are people like
74 Mustafa Ceric, grand-mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina, who knows both the Western
75 academic world and traditional Islamic learning, as well as having first-hand
76 experience of the genocidal rage driving some Christians. We would be mistaken to
77 think that they are pushovers who will settle for a ceremonial acknowledgement of
78 fellowship without a serious intellectual and spiritual engagement, and frank political
79 talk. In their patient but insistent correspondence since Regensburg they have shown
80 a determination to pursue this discussion with seriousness and respect.

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

86 Though addressed to a long list of popes, patriarchs and other church leaders, *A*
87 *Common Word* surely has another audience as well. In keeping with the aim of the

88 Amman project, it is implicitly addressed to Muslims, modeling for them a
89 methodology and a mode of discourse appropriate to a dialogical approach to
90 relations with other believers, and also providing the authoritative textual
91 underpinnings for it. The letter spends much of its energy on outlining the obligation
92 on Muslims to be devoted completely to God, to love God and to be grateful for all
93 God has given. In this context, one might have hoped for a more explicit recognition
94 of the political implications of such devotion: the relativizing of all power, ideologies
95 and political projects. However good and divinely-sanctioned they may seem to us,
96 they are not God, and therefore are not ultimate. This will be an essential element in
97 further dialogue; it is the theological key that takes us beyond mere disagreement
98 about power relations and political alternatives.

99 I tend to bristle when I hear the words "all religions." They usually accompany a
100 hasty generalization that owes more to wishful thinking or projection than to
101 attentive observation of what the various religions do actually claim or profess. It is
102 surprising and disappointing to note how often even academic writing falls back on
103 such pieties, and each religion is reduced to a particular variation on the generic
104 theme of religion. *A Common Word* does not quite fall into that trap, since it confines
105 itself to speaking only of the Abrahamic traditions of Christianity and Islam (with
106 Judaism unfortunately only making the occasional, parenthetical appearance. Yet the
107 letter does open itself to a reductionist reading—one that Christians might want to
108 examine more closely—when it says in part III, "Thus the Unity of God, love of Him
109 and love of the neighbour form a common ground upon which Islam and Christianity
110 (and Judaism) are founded." There has been a slide from the unexceptionable
111 affirmation earlier in the paragraph that the obligation to love God and one's
112 neighbour is a common element in the sacred texts of our traditions, to the more
113 questionable claim that the dual commandment of love is the *foundation* of all three.

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

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

134 Before all else it is about what God has done for love of us. What we are to do flows
135 from that and is made possible by it.

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

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

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

160 A similar understanding of divine love is not entirely lacking in the Islamic tradition,
161 but it does not find a place in *A Common Word*, possibly because it confines itself to
162 quoting Qur'ân and hadith in order to address the broadest possible Muslim
163 audience. Still, it might have appealed to the verse Q 5:54 in which it is said that
164 "God will bring a new people: He will love them, and they love will love Him."
165 Commenting on this verse some Sufi writers have observed that God's love for
166 human beings precedes their love for God, and if it were not for the fact that God had
167 favoured us by His primordial love, mercy, and compassion, humanity could never
168 have loved God and His creatures. In this lies an important point for our continuing
169 theological dialogue.

170 Just as there are reservations about how foundational for Christianity is the
171 commandment to love God, so also one must question whether the commandment to
172 love one's neighbour is fundamental. There are two elements in the gospels that
173 relativize it. The first comes from Luke's gospel where Jesus' questioner, having
174 failed to trap him with the commandment question, has another try and asks, "And
175 who is my neighbour?" (Lk 10:29). The parable Jesus tells in response-the Good
176 Samaritan-actually turns the man's question on its head. After having described the
177 extraordinarily generous and compassionate response of this religious outsider to a

178 Jew in need, after two of the victim's own religious leaders had already failed him,
179 Jesus asks, "Which of these three *proved himself a neighbour* to the man attacked by
180 robbers?" The question is no longer who is to be included in the category of
181 neighbour and so what are the limits of my obligation to love. It is, rather, how can I
182 show myself a neighbour to others by responding to them in love?

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

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

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

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

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

204 This infinitely expanded definition of the neighbour and brother to include even
205 enemies and attackers has not been easy for Christians to assimilate. We quickly fall
206 back into a generic religious mindset where God loves only the righteous and we,
207 who of course *are* the righteous, are entitled to hate those who are not. Just how
208 radical is the demand placed upon us by Jesus' teaching can be seen if we could
209 imagine the ubiquitous "God Bless Our Troops" bumper-stickers in the US replaced
210 by ones that read "God Bless Osama." Or could we imagine banners in Occupied
211 Palestine that wished life and blessing on Israel and the United States rather than
212 annihilation? Transformations like these do not happen easily, yet one witnesses
213 them again and again on a small scale. These are the seeds of the Kingdom taking
214 root and sprouting here and there, but too often they are trampled underfoot by
215 "realism" or the desire for retribution. Perhaps our dialogue could focus on the
216 words of Q 60:7, "Perhaps God will create friendship between you and those you
217 consider your enemies. God is powerful, infinitely forgiving, most merciful." Where
218 love replaces enmity, it is surely God at work, not just us.

219 *A Common Word* does not hide some rather problematic points, though perhaps their
220 implications could be missed. The major example of this is where Christians are
221 assured in Part III that Muslims "are not against them and that Islam is not against

222 them." Then come the conditions (stipulated in Q 60:8): "so long as they do not wage
223 war against Muslims on account of their religion, oppress them and drive them out of
224 their homes." Though the original context is Mecca which oppressed its first Muslim
225 citizens, the verse is given broad contemporary application. Many extremists will
226 use precisely this verse to justify enmity towards Israel and anyone who supports it.
227 George Bush's catastrophic military adventure in Iraq, and his so-called "War on
228 Terrorism" are easily interpreted as attacks on Islam. Given the religious rhetoric he
229 employs for political advantage, and the outspokenness of many of his evangelical
230 supporters, his wars can easily be portrayed as Christian wars and thus put in
231 jeopardy all Christians. Even Western cultural hegemony is sometimes read as
232 aggression and so taken as legitimizing a violent response against any members of
233 that culture. The letter's reassurance that Islam and Muslims are not against
234 Christians entails a fairly major conditional clause. This is surely an important focus
235 for our continuing dialogue with the group of 138 and other Muslims.

236 Although I suggested at the beginning that we might read this letter against the
237 background of *Nostra Aetate* with its appeal to common elements of faith and
238 practice, that should not be taken to imply that our dialogue will best proceed by a
239 series of letters, however authoritative. These documents are important touchstones
240 but we know from the history of Vatican II that they only grow out of reflection on
241 experience. Many of the signatories of *A Common Word* have long experience of an
242 interfaith dialogue that goes beyond mere ceremony and requires commitment and
243 openness. Documents like these not only grow out of personal encounter, ideally
244 they also open the way to further interaction.

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

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

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

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

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285 *Religions at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, and member of the Vatican's*
286 *Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims. This year he is International*
287 *Visiting Fellow in the Woodstock Theological Center, Georgetown University,*
288 *Washington DC, where he is working on a book on Christianity for a mostly Muslim*
289 *readership.*

Appendix 11

Response to the Letter of 138 Muslim scholars to the Pope and Christian Leaders

Samir Khalil Samir

1 **The Letter of 138 Muslim scholars to the Pope and Christian Leaders**

2 by Samir Khalil Samir, sj

3 There is a lot of good in the document sent to Benedict XVI and Christian leaders:
4 greater convergence between Muslim currents; attention to Christian vocabulary; the
5 desire for dialogue. There is also some ambiguity and difficulty. But it is a first step:
6 now it is necessary to open up the dialogue to the secular world. The great sura of
7 tolerance. An ample analysis from our expert on Islam.

8 Beirut (AsiaNews) – The Letter by 138 Islamic academics to the pope and Christian
9 leaders is a first positive step towards dialogue, which however needs to become
10 more universal and more concrete.

11 The letter lies in the explicit context of an extension of the first letter, sent exactly
12 one year ago to Benedict XVI, as a reply to his masterful address at Regensburg
13 University: the same date was chosen for its publication (13th October 2007), which
14 this year coincided with the end of Ramadan^[1]

15 ***A highly representative Letter***

16 The fact that its signatories have increased compared to last year is noteworthy: from
17 38 – as it was last year – they have become 138. They represent over 43 nations,
18 both Muslim and otherwise (in particular western nations). Among them are great
19 muftis (that is leaders of the *fatwa* in a country), religious leaders, academics and
20 scholars.

21 Beyond representatives of the two great Sunni and Shiite groups, there are also
22 representatives from smaller groups, sects and even diverging trends, for example the
23 most mystic of those trends (Sufi), who are largely represented in the West. There are
24 also for example Ismailites, derived from the Shiites; jafaarites, also a derivative of
25 Shia Islam; ribadites, which is an ancient group of Islam, rarely spoken of but which
26 has a representation in Yemen.

27 This indicates a broadening of consensus within a certain Islamic quarter, a step
28 towards what Islam calls *ijmaa* (consensus). In the Islamic tradition every point of
29 faith is founded in three sources: the Koran, on the muhammadian tradition (*hadith*
30 or that is the sayings and life of Mohammad), community consensus, in other words
31 *ijmaa*. This third step up until now has never really been evaluated. Actually, there
32 is deep division in the Islamic world: one day one Imam says one thing; the next day
33 he says something different.

34 This letter does not say that there is agreement between all Muslims, but it shows a
35 concerted move towards a certain consensus. This convergence came about under
36 the auspices of the King of Jordan, and the *Aal al-Bayt* (family of the Prophet of
37 Islam) foundation, led by the king's uncle Prince Hassan. This man represents the
38 best of Islam today, from the point of view of reflection, openness and devotion.
39 Being a devote and faithful Muslim, he married a Hindu who – quite unusual in

40 modern Islam – did not have to convert to Islam, as is being demanded of the
41 Christian women today in the West, but which is in no way foreseen in the Koran.

42 The first positive point of the letter is therefore the fact that it is highly
43 representative, coming from a converging group. The letter is also representative
44 because it has been sent throughout the Christian world. If you take a look at those
45 to whom it has been addressed, you can see a carefully drawn up and complete list:
46 besides the pope we have all of the eastern Christian traditions, the patriarchs of the
47 Calcedonian and pre Calcedonian Churches; then the protestant Churches and finally
48 the World Council of Churches. Which amply shows that behind this letter is
49 someone who knows and understands Christianity and the history of the Church.

50 **I – The structure**

51 On coming to the content of the letter what is immediately striking is the fact that the
52 title has been taken from the Koran: “A Common Word between Us and You” (*Sura*
53 *of the family of Imran*, 3:64). This is what Mohammed says to the Christians in the
54 Koran: when he sees that he cannot reach agreement with them, then he says: Come
55 let us agree on at least one common ground: that we shall worship none but God (the
56 oneness of God) “and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us
57 shall take others for lords beside God.”.

58 What must be noted is that this common word in the Koran, does not take into
59 consideration any definition of Mohammed. This sentence does not speak of
60 Mohammad as a prophet, or the last messenger of God. What is underlined is the
61 common word and the oneness of God. Which in itself is a positive step, exactly
62 starting from the Koran.

63 The structure of the letter is composed of three parts: the first is entitled “love of
64 god”, subdivided into two, “love of god in Islam” and “love of god *as the first and*
65 *greatest commandment* in the bible”. In reality, the title in the original Arabic is more
66 precise, it says “in the Gospel”. By using the word “Bible” (which includes the New
67 and Old Testament) Judaism can be included in the discourse (even if the letter is
68 only addressed to Christians). The second part is entitled “love of the neighbour”
69 (*hubb al-jâr*). Also subdivided in two: «love of the neighbour in Islam» and «love of
70 the neighbour in the Bible». Where once again the original Arabic says “in the
71 Gospel”.

72 The third part concludes by taking up the Koran citation: “come to a common word
73 between us and you”, and offers an interesting analysis in three parts: “common
74 word”, “come to a common word” and “between us and you”.

75 **II – Reflections on the content**

76 I desire to make some observations regarding this structure.

77 First and foremost, there is continuity between the first and second letter. The first
78 letter concluded on the necessity to arrive at an agreement based on love for God and

79 for our neighbour. With this the scholars wish to say: we are now developing on
80 what we announced as the basis for all relations between Islam and Christianity.

81 It is most interesting to note that the *vocabulary used* is a Christian vocabulary and
82 not a Muslim one. The word “neighbour” (in the Christian sense of brethren) does
83 not exist in the Koran; it is typical of the New Testament. In fact, the Arabic text
84 does not use the word “neighbour/brethren” but “neighbour” (*jâr*), which only has a
85 geographical meaning (like a neighbour who lives next door), compared to the
86 Christian term *qarîb*, which also means “brethren”.

87 The word “love” is rarely used in the Koran. It is not even part of the names of God.
88 It is never said that God is a lover, even if there are less striking synonyms. Instead
89 the word is widely used in Christianity. Moreover if the first part, love of God in
90 Islam, is analysed, we Christians would refer to it as “obedience to God”, not “love”.
91 But here they have termed it so, to align themselves to the Christian vocabulary.
92 Which is a lovely thought but also a little dangerous as it risks falling into the trap of
93 “settling”. Usually Muslims speak of the adoration of God; but the theme of Love for
94 God is another discourse, which is not excluded from Islam, but found abundantly in
95 the world of Sufism.

96 Either way in this letter, speaking of “love of God” is a novelty. Perhaps it is even
97 an able way of referring to Pope Benedict’s first encyclical (*Deus caritas est*). It
98 certainly shows a desire to draw near to the Christian way of speaking, even if at the
99 same time there is the risk of taking two meanings from the same word.

100 *Other questions of Vocabulary*

101 In this context, the Arab version of the letter uses different terminologies compared
102 to the French, Italian, or English versions. We have already noted that where the
103 Arabic speaks of the Gospel the western languages speak of the Bible. I will give
104 other examples.

105 For example: speaking of Christ, in the western versions “Jesus Christ” is always
106 cited. In the Arab version’s: “Issa- al-Massih”. This expression cannot be found in
107 the Koran, but is the combined result of how the Muslims call Jesus (Issa) – Arab
108 Christians call him “Jasua” – and the Christian definition of “al-Massih”, Christ,
109 which is found in the Koran. The expression in the Koran is “Al-Massih Issa Ibn
110 Mariam” (the Messiah Issa son of Mary), while the usual Christian expression
111 “Jasua’ al-Massih” (Jesus Christ). The text of the letter is littered with expressions
112 from the Koran intermingled with Christian expressions.

113 When they quote from the Koran and the Bible, they use two different measures.
114 Quoting from the Koran they say “God said”, as does every good Muslim. When the
115 quote versus from the bible, they only say “as it is found in the New Testament”, “as
116 it is read in the Gospel”, etc... Which means that they use, in terms of the Bible, a
117 more scholarly studious approach, while for the Koran they use the terminology of a
118 believer in Islam.

119 But in the end the structure is truly beautiful: from here on in we may say that
120 Christianity, Judaism and Islam have love of God and of ones neighbour as the heart
121 of their faith. This is the real novelty which has never before been said by the
122 Islamic world.

123 *Use of the Bible*

124 In quotations from the New and Old Testament, they take for granted that the Bible
125 is the word of God. This too is a relative novelty. In the Koran this idea is
126 theoretically affirmed, but it is rejected in practice. Very often Muslims consider the
127 Bible as a product (*muharrafah* or *mubaddalah*) manipulated by later additions to the
128 original nucleus.

129 The 138 (in note 4) even go as far as to quote St Paul regarding the idea of the
130 “heart”. St Paul is in general totally rejected by the vast majority of Muslims, he is
131 even considered as a traitor of Jesus Christ’s message, which according to them was
132 originally an “Islamic message”. Often Muslims claim that Christ’s message was
133 like that of the Koran, but that Paul introduced the Trinity, Redemption through the
134 Cross, and the rejection of Moses’ law. A famous anti-Christian book, published in
135 2000 and banned in Lebanon, is entitled “Unmasking Paul”!

136 All of these little signs show a real desire for dialogue at the level of language and
137 biblical testimonies. There are even some allusions to Hebraism, in order to integrate
138 it in this vision. Using for example the term “people of the scriptures”, it is clear that
139 this refers to the Jews, even if the discourse is officially addressed to Christians.

140

141 **III. Positive appreciation and a critical reading**

142 Let us now try to see other positive aspects of this document, while at the same time
143 pointing out its gaps and elements which provoke the need for deeper reflections. In
144 short, I would like to make a critical reading of the Letter.

145 *The search for a common basis... but not a universal one*

146 On coming to the content of the letter my impression is that by staying at this level it
147 is quite easy to reach agreement. The method being used is to choose excerpts from
148 sacred texts that can be paralleled. In the Koran there are texts that are a
149 contradiction of Christianity, but they chose those which are closer and more similar.
150 This is an important step but if we remain on this level, we risk casting a dialogue
151 based on ambiguities. In any case as a first step it is useful to highlight our common
152 foundations.

153 Even in the Christian tradition there is a search for a common basis with other
154 religions, as well as cultures. This basis, from the Christian point of view, is not
155 based on the Bible or Koran, because this would exclude non-believers. The
156 common basis is natural law, the Commandments seen as the natural laws, a
157 common ethics accepted even by atheists.

158 In a speech to the International Theological Commission on October 5th last the pope
159 spoke of natural moral law, to “justify and illustrate the foundations of a universal
160 ethic which belongs to the great patrimony of human wisdom and which allows the
161 rational creature to participate in God’s law”. Benedict XVI continues then in
162 reference to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (n. 1955): moral life “has as its
163 pivot aspirations and submission to God, source and judge of all good, and the sense
164 that the other is equal to you”. The Commandments are “natural law” and were not
165 revealed in a strict sense.

166 The pontiff continues by saying that starting from natural law, “in itself accessible to
167 every rational creature, the basis for entering into dialogue with all people of
168 goodwill, and civil society is laid”.

169 Just as the signatories of the Letter, the pope is trying to find a common basis for
170 dialogue with everyone; this basis cannot be Scriptures, it is instead universal ethics
171 founded on natural law.

172 The letter sent by Muslim experts to Christians stops at what is common in the Bible
173 and the Koran. I think that the next step between Christians and Muslims is to find a
174 more universal basis. This can include some elements of the sacred Scriptures as
175 long as acceptable to all; but it should also go beyond this, to find a basis for
176 universal dialogue.

177 This is what is missing from the letter, which only attempts to re-establish relations
178 between Christians and Muslims. This is clearly stated in the introduction, recalling
179 that together “we represent over 55% of the world’s population”. Thus by reaching
180 an agreement we could almost impose peace in the world. It is a tactical, political
181 approach. We need to move towards the rational foundation of peace, found in truth.

182 This is why, as Cardinal Tauran pointed out, the text is interesting, it opens some
183 new roads in both its method and contents, but it needs to be explored more deeply to
184 make it more objective and non selective, to render it more universal and less
185 political.

186 *Distinguishing between politics and people*

187 From this point of view, we must add one more note of criticism. At a certain point
188 the letter asks Christians to “consider Muslims not as being against them, but with
189 them, on the condition that Christians do not declare war”. Here perhaps they are
190 alluding to the problems in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan.....but there it is not
191 Christians as such who are committed to war.

192 The Americans in Iraq (if it is this to which the letter refers) are not in Iraq as
193 Christians who oppress Muslims: neither the Muslim nor the Christian element has
194 any relevance here. It is rather a political issue between the United States and the
195 Middle Eastern States. And even if we know that the president of the United States
196 is a Christian and that he is led by his faith, it can be in no way claimed that this is a
197 war of Christians against Muslims.

198 This is an important point because Muslims tend to see the West as a Christian
199 power, without ever realising the point to which the West has been secularised and
200 far from Christian ethics. This line of thought strengthens the theory of a clash of
201 cultures (or religions), right at a time when steps are being taken to fight such a
202 theory!

203 *A beautiful conclusion: coexistence in diversity*

204 One last point. In the letter the Koran verse on tolerance is quoted: “Had God willed
205 He could have made you one community. But that He may try you by that which He
206 hath given you (He hath made you as ye are). So vie one with another in good works.
207 Unto God ye will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein ye differ”
208 (*Al-Ma'idah*, n. 5:48).

209 This sura is the penultimate in chronological order in the Koran. This means that this
210 can not have been cancelled or overtaken by another, according to the Islamic theory
211 of Koran interpretation, the so-called from the abrogate to the abrogated (*nâsikh wa-*
212 *l-mansûkh*). This verse is fundamental because it states that our religious diversities
213 are destined by God. The result is: “So vie one with another in good works” as a
214 method of dialogue. This is truly a beautiful choice for concluding the Letter,
215 because it means that we can live together despite our difference, moreover that God
216 wants these difference!

217 *Towards the future*

218 This Letter is a first step in dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Often
219 Christians have taken the initiative regarding dialogue, and they have so done well. It
220 is important that this first steps continue in this direction with increased clarity, even
221 showing differences and the need for correction. As the Letter is addressed to various
222 leaders of the Christian world, we can hope that there will be a reply to this letter,
223 which is the result of an immense effort by the Muslim part.

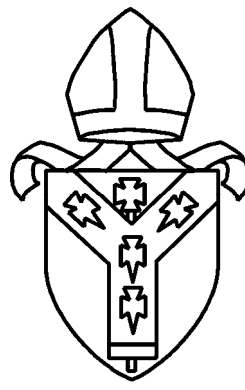
224 But this Letter is certainly also addressed to Muslims, even if not explicitly. What
225 weight will it bring to bear in the Muslim world, considering that priests continue to
226 be kidnapped, apostates persecuted, Christians oppressed? Up until now there has
227 been no comment from the Islamic side. But I think that with time this document
228 could create an opening and a greater convergence.

229 Above all, it is to be hoped that the next step will focus on the more delicate issues of
230 religious freedom, the absolute value of human rights, the relationship between
231 religion and society, the use of violence, etc..., in short current issues that worry both
232 the Muslim world (and I would say above all Muslim people) as well as the West.

Appendix 12

A Common Word for the Common Good

Archbishop R Williams



1

2

3

A Common Word for the Common Good

4

To

5

the Muslim Religious Leaders and Scholars

6

who have signed

7

A Common Word Between Us and You

8

and to Muslim brothers and sisters everywhere

9

10

Grace, Mercy and Peace be with you

11

12

Preface

13

14 Dear Friends:

15

16

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.

25

26

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

29

30 Christianity and Islam, and of Judaism also. Your letter could hardly be more
31 timely, given the growing awareness that peace throughout the world is deeply
32 entwined with the ability of all people of faith everywhere to live in peace, justice,
33 mutual respect and love. Our belief is that only through a commitment to that
34 transcendent perspective to which your letter points, and to which we also look, shall
35 we find the resources for radical, transforming, non-violent engagement with the
36 deepest needs of our world and our common humanity.

37

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

50

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

52

53 “In the light of what we have seen to be necessarily implied and evoked
54 by the Prophet Muhammad’s (pbuh) blessed saying: *‘The best that I have
55 said—myself, and the prophets that came before me—is: “there is no god
56 but God, He Alone, He hath no associate, His is the sovereignty and His
57 is the praise and He hath power over all things”*”, we can now perhaps
58 understand the words *‘The best that I have said—myself, and the
59 prophets that came before me’* as equating the blessed formula *‘there is
60 no god but God, He Alone, He hath no associate, His is the sovereignty
61 and His is the praise and He hath power over all things’* precisely with
62 the ‘First and Greatest Commandment’ to love God, with all one’s heart
63 and soul, as found in various places in the Bible. That is to say, in other
64 words, that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was perhaps, through
65 inspiration, restating and alluding to the Bible’s First Commandment.
66 God knows best, but certainly we have seen their effective similarity in
67 meaning. Moreover, we also do know (as can be seen in the endnotes),
68 that both formulas have another remarkable parallel: the way they arise
69 in a number of slightly differing versions and forms in different contexts,

70 all of which, nevertheless, emphasize the primacy of total love and
71 devotion to God.”

72

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

84

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

87

88 First, its focus on the love and praise of God, stressing how we must trust absolutely
89 in God and give him the devotion of our whole being – heart, mind and will -
90 underlines a shared commitment: the fixed intention to relate all reality and all
91 behaviour intelligently, faithfully and practically to the God who deals with us in
92 love, compassion, justice and peace. One of the areas we can usefully discuss
93 together is the diverse ways in which we understand the love of God as an absolutely
94 free gift to his creation. There are bound to be differences as well as similarities in
95 the ways we understand and express God’s love for us and how we seek to practise
96 love for God and neighbour in return, and in what follows we consider how these
97 might be explored in a spirit of honest and co-operative attention.

98

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

104

105 Third, the concern to ground what we say in the Scriptures of our traditions shows a
106 desire to meet each other not ‘at the margins’ of our historic identities but speaking

107 from what is central and authoritative for us. Here, however, it is especially
108 important to acknowledge that the Qur'an's role in Islam is not the same as that of
109 the Bible in Christianity; Christians understand the primary location of God's
110 revealing Word to be the history of God's people and above all the history of Jesus
111 Christ, whom we acknowledge as the Word made flesh, to which the Bible is the
112 authoritative and irreplaceable witness. For the Muslim, as we understand it, the
113 Word is supremely communicated in what Mohammed is commanded to recite. But
114 for both faiths, scripture provides the basic tools for speaking of God and it is in
115 attending to how we use our holy texts that we often discover most truly the nature of
116 each other's faith.¹ In what follows we shall suggest how studying our scriptures
117 together might continue to provide a fruitful element of our engagements with each
118 other in the process of "building a home together", to pick up an image popularised
119 by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in a recent book².

120

121 Fourth, and growing out of this last point, the letter encourages us to relate to each
122 other from the heart of our lives of faith before God. However much or little
123 'common ground' we initially sense between us, it is possible to engage with each
124 other without anxiety if we truly begin from the heart of what we believe we have
125 received from God; possible to speak together, respecting and discussing differences
126 rather than imprisoning ourselves in mutual fear and suspicion.

127

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

136

137 This response therefore looks in several directions. It seeks to encourage more
138 reflection within the Christian community, as well as to promote honest encounter
139 between Christian and Muslim believers; and it asks about the possible foundations

¹ As the staff of the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies wrote in their appreciation of your letter: "We are pleased to see that the biblical and Gospel quotations used in this document come from the sources and that explanations given are on occasion based on the original languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. This is evidence of deep respect and genuine attentiveness to others, while at the same time of a true scientific spirit." (issued by Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d' Islamistica [PISAI], Rome, 25th October 2007)

² Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together: Recreating Society* (London: Continuum, 2007)

140 for shared work in the world and a shared challenge to all those things which obscure
141 God's purpose for humanity.

142 **THE ONE GOD WHO IS LOVE**

143

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

147

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

149 **You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all**
150 **your soul, and with all your strength.**³ (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)⁴

151

152 Such an imperative, as your letter makes clear, is of central authority for Muslims
153 too.

154

155 **Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!:** The *tawhid* principle⁵ is
156 held out in your letter as one of the bases for agreement. In addition to the passages
157 you quote to demonstrate *tawhid*, we read in the Qur'an:

158

159 *God: there is no god but Him, the Ever Living, the Ever Watchful.*⁶ (al-Baqara
160 2:255)⁷

161

162 *He is God the One, God the eternal. He fathered no one nor was he*
163 *fathered.*

164 *No one is comparable to Him.* (al-'Ikhlas 112:1-4)

165

³ Taken from the *English Standard Version* of the Bible

⁴ Unless otherwise stated, quotations from the Bible are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version* (copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA)

⁵ *tawhid*: that God is one, monotheism. *shirk*: the association of God with other beings who are not divine, whether other 'gods', saints, mediators of various kinds

⁶ *al Qayyum* can also be translated as "Self-subsistent" and "Self-sufficient".

⁷ Unless otherwise stated all quotations from the Qur'an are taken from *A new translation* by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford: OUP, 2005)

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

172

173 *The East and the West belong to God: wherever you turn, there is His*
174 *Face.*

175 *God is all pervading and all knowing. They have asserted, "God has a*
176 *child."*

177 *May He be exalted! No! Everything in the heavens and earth belongs to*
178 *Him,*

179 *everything devoutly obeys His will. He is the Originator of the heavens*
180 *and the earth, and when He decrees something, He says only "Be," and it*
181 *is. (al-Baqara 2:115-117)*

182

183 Muslims see the belief that God could have a son as suggesting that God is somehow
184 limited as we are limited, bound to physical processes and needing the co-operation
185 of others. How can such a God be truly free and sovereign – qualities both
186 Christianity and Islam claim to affirm, for we know that God is able to bring the
187 world into being by his word alone?

188

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

205 that we try to clarify what we do and do not mean by it, and so trust that what
206 follows will be read in this spirit.

207

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

218

219 Christians believe that in a mysterious manner we have a limited share in the
220 characteristics of divine life ⁸. Through the death and rising to life of Jesus, God
221 takes away our evildoing and our guilt, he forgives us and sets us free. And our
222 Scriptures go on to say⁹ that he breathes new life into us, as he breathed life into
223 Adam at the first, so that God’s spirit is alive in us. The presence and action of the
224 Holy Spirit is thus God in his action of sharing life with us¹⁰. As we become mature
225 in our new life, our lives become closer and closer (so we pray and hope) to the
226 central and perfect expression of divine life, the Word whom we encounter in Jesus –
227 though we never become simply equal to him. And because Jesus prayed to the
228 source of his life as ‘Father’¹¹, we call the eternal and perfect expression of God's
229 life not only the Word but also the ‘Son’. We pray to the source of divine life in the
230 way that Jesus taught us, and we say ‘Father’ to this divine reality. And in calling
231 the eternal word the ‘Son’ of God, we remind ourselves that he is in no way different
232 in nature from the Father: there is only one divine nature and reality.

233

⁸ **God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him** (1John 4:16); see also 2Peter 1.4:
**Thus [God] has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that
through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may
become participants in the divine nature.**

⁹ as in Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians, 15.45-49 and the Letter to the Galatians, 4.6, for example.

¹⁰ **God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us**
(Romans 5:5)

¹¹ In Matthew 6:9-15 Jesus says: **“Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your
name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our
daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring
us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. For if you forgive others their trespasses,
your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your
Father forgive your trespasses.”**

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

240

241 When God acts towards us in compassion to liberate us from evil, to deal with the
242 consequences of our rebellion against him and to make us able to call upon him with
243 confidence, it is a natural (but not automatic) flowing outwards of his own
244 everlasting action. The mutual self-giving love that is the very life of God is made
245 real for our sake in the self-giving love of Jesus. And it is because of God's prior love
246 for us that we are enabled and enjoined to love God.¹² Through our loving response,
247 we can begin to comprehend something of God's nature and God's will for
248 humankind:

249

250 **“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love”**
251 (1John 4:8).

252

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

258

259 Understanding the **“breadth and length and height and depth”** of the love of
260 God¹³ is a lifetime’s journey; so it is not remotely possible to consider it with
261 satisfactory thoroughness within the confines of this letter. However, it is necessary
262 at this point to stress two qualities of God’s love that are crucially important for the

¹² Something similar seems to be implied by the ordering of the loves in the Qur'anic verse 5:54 in which it is said that “*God will bring a new people: He will love them, and they will love Him.*”

¹³ **I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.** (Ephesians 3:18-19)

263 Christian: it is unconditional ¹⁴, given gratuitously and without cause; and it is self-
264 sacrificial¹⁵.

265

266 In the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, the loving nature
267 of God is revealed. We see how Jesus, both in his ministry and in his acceptance of a
268 sacrificial death at the hands of his enemies, offers a love that is given in advance of
269 any human response; it is not a reward for goodness – rather it is what makes human
270 goodness possible, as we change our lives in gratitude to God for his free gift. In the
271 words of a well-known English hymn, it is “Love to the loveless shown, that they
272 might lovely be”¹⁶. And because of this, it is also a love that is vulnerable. God
273 does not convert us and transform us by exercising his divine power alone. So
274 infinite is that power, and so inseparable from love, that no defeat or suffering, even
275 the terrible suffering of Jesus on the cross, can overcome God’s purpose.

276

277 So, when we seek to live our lives in love of God and neighbour, we as Christians
278 pray that we may be given strength to love God even when God does not seem to
279 give us what we think we want or seems far off (a major theme in the writings of
280 many Christian mystics, who often speak of those moments of our experience when
281 God does not seem to love us as we should want to be loved); and we pray too for the
282 strength to love those who do not seem to deserve our love, to love those who reject
283 our love, to love those who have not yet made any move in love towards us.

284

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

¹⁴One of the most influential and beloved New Testament texts illuminating the love of God is the parable of the Prodigal Son - sometimes called the parable of the Loving Father (Luke 15:11-32)

¹⁵ **“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)

¹⁶ in “My song is love unknown” by Samuel Crossman (1664)

297 Thus, as Christians, we would say that our worship of God as threefold has never
 298 compromised the unity of God, which we affirm as wholeheartedly as Jews and
 299 Muslims. Indeed, by understanding God as a unity of love we see ourselves
 300 intensifying and enriching our belief in the unity of God. This indivisible unity is
 301 again expressed in the ancient theological formula, which we can trace back to the
 302 North African theologian Saint Augustine, *opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt* –
 303 all the actions of the Trinity outside itself are indivisible. So, although the Trinity
 304 has been a point of dispute with Jews and Muslims, and will no doubt continue to be
 305 so, we are encouraged that *A Common Word Between Us and You* does not simply
 306 assume that Christians believe in more than one god.¹⁷ We are, therefore, encouraged
 307 in the belief that what both our faiths say concerning the nature of God is not totally
 308 diverse - there are points of communication and overlap in the way we think about
 309 the divine nature that make our continued exploration of these issues worthwhile,
 310 despite the important issues around whether we can say that God is love in his very
 311 nature.

312

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

316

317 Without ignoring or downplaying our differences as Christians and
 318 Muslims, we can and therefore should look to what unites us, namely,
 319 belief in the one God, the provident Creator and universal Judge who at
 320 the end of time will deal with each person according to his or her actions.
 321 We are all called to commit ourselves totally to him and to obey his
 322 sacred will.¹⁸

323

¹⁷ We understand that this is the reading given to the Qur’anic verse al-Zumar 29:46 (“*our God and your God are one [and the same]*”) and al-‘Imran, 3:113-115, quoted in your letter. It is also our interpretation of the passage in your letter that reads: ‘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 like”; 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 justice and freedom of religion are a crucial part.’

¹⁸ Letter dated 19 November 2007.

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

331 *Responding to the Gift of Love*

332

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

342

343 *God will bring a new people: He will love them, and they will love Him.*
344 *(al-Ma’ida 5:54).*

345

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

352

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

356

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

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

360 **³ Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is**
361 **unsearchable.**

362 ...

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

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

366 ...

367 ²¹ **My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD,**

368 **and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever.** (Psalm 145)

369

370 In words like these, we hear many resonances with the language of your letter,
371 suggesting a similar kind of devotion expressed in words of love, praise and thanks.
372 The language of the Psalms, like the language you have used, looks to a God of
373 ultimate creative power who is loving and compassionate, generous, faithful and
374 merciful, and upholds justice. In the Psalms, generation after generation has found
375 inspiration and encouragement in the heights, depths and ordinariness of human life.
376 Countless Christians and Jews use them daily. They show, in the words of your
377 letter, how worshippers “must be grateful to God and trust Him with all their
378 sentiments and emotions”, and that “the call to be totally devoted and attached to
379 God heart and soul, far from being a call for a mere emotion or for a mood, is in fact
380 an injunction requiring all-embracing, constant and active love of God. It demands a
381 love in which the innermost spiritual heart and the whole of the soul – with its
382 intelligence, will and feeling – participate through devotion.”¹⁹

383

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

396

397 The Psalms teach us that the name of God, God’s full, personal, mysterious and
398 unsearchable reality, is to be continually celebrated and the life of faith is to be filled

399 with praise of God²⁰. We love God first not for what he has done for us but ‘for his
400 name’s sake’ – because of who God *is*. Even in the midst of terrible suffering or
401 doubt it is possible, with Job, to say: “**Blessed be the name of the Lord**” (Job 1:21).
402 In the prayer which Jesus taught to his disciples the leading petition is: “**Hallowed be**
403 **your name**” (Matthew 6:9). This means not only that honouring and blessing God is
404 the first and most comprehensive activity of those who follow Jesus; it also
405 encourages Christians to give thanks for all the ways in which God’s name is
406 proclaimed as holy and to be held in honour – by Christians, by people of other faiths
407 and indeed by the whole order of creation which proclaims the glory of God²¹.

408

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

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

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

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

414 **¹³ Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is**
415 **exalted;**

416 **his glory is above earth and heaven.** (Psalm 148)

417

418 So, with all creation, we join together in this chorus of universal praise – echoed so
419 vividly in some of the phrases quoted in your letter^{22,23}.

²⁰ Psalm 145:1 quoted above and, e.g., Psalm 113:1-6:

¹**Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD; praise the name of the LORD.**

²**Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time on and for evermore.**

³**From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the LORD is to be praised.**

⁴**The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens.**

⁵**Who is like the LORD our God, who is seated on high,**

⁶**who looks far down on the heavens and the earth?**

²¹ Amongst many examples see Psalm 148:9-13 quoted above and

¹**The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.**

²**Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.** (Psalm 19.1-2)

²² “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...*(al-Taghabun, 64:1)”

420

421 Jesus said **“I came that they [we] may have life, and have it abundantly.”** (John
422 10:10) and offering such praise and honour to God is in many ways the heart of the
423 new life. The conviction that the love of God lives in us through his Holy Spirit, that
424 to God we owe the very breath of life within us, is the motivation for our response to
425 God’s love – both in loving God and loving neighbour. We know from personal
426 experience that true love can not be commanded or conditioned; it is freely given and
427 received. Our love of God, as already indicated, is first and foremost a response of
428 gratitude enabling us to grow in holiness - to become closer and closer in our actions
429 and thoughts to the complete self-giving that always exists perfectly in God's life and
430 is shown in the life and death of Jesus.

431

432 Towards this fullness we are all called to travel and grow and we shall want to learn
433 from you more about the understandings of love of God in Islam as we continue this
434 journey, exploring the implications of this love in our lives and our relationships with
435 each other. Jesus, on the night before he died, said, **“I give you a new
436 commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also
437 should love one another.”** (John 13:34). Responding to this new commandment to
438 dwell in the love he bears us means allowing it to transform us and, so transformed,
439 to love others – irrespective of their response.

440

441 LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOUR

442

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

453

²³ “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)*”

454 We support the clear affirmation in your letter, through texts from the Qur'an and the
455 Bible, of the importance of love for the neighbour. Indeed, your letter can be
456 considered an encouraging example of this love. We endorse the emphasis on
457 generosity and self-sacrifice, and trust that these might be mutual marks of our
458 continuing relationship with each other. The section in your letter on love for the
459 neighbour is relatively brief, so we look forward to developing further the ways in
460 which the theme is worked out within our traditions. We believe we have much to
461 learn from each other in this matter, drawing on resources of wisdom, law, prophecy,
462 poetry and narrative, both within and beyond our canonical scriptures²⁴ to help each
463 other come to a richer vision of being loving neighbours today.

464

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

472

473 The first is illustrated in St Luke's gospel when Jesus, having given the Dual
474 Commandment of love as the response to the question "what must I do to inherit
475 eternal life?", goes on to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan when asked to
476 explain "who is my neighbour?"²⁵. Commentary on this parable frequently points to

²⁴ The stories of saints and other exemplary people can often be of special value in conveying the quality of love.

²⁵ **Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.' And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.'**

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' Jesus replied, '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. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while 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. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." 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.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.' (Luke 10:25-37)

477 the way in which Jesus challenges the assumptions of the question; instead of
478 defining a necessarily limited group of people who might fit the category of
479 ‘neighbours’ to whom love should be shown, he speaks of the need to prove
480 ourselves neighbours by compassion to whoever is before us in need or pain, whether
481 or not they are akin to us, approved by us, safe for us to be with or whatever else.
482 Such neighbourliness will mean crossing religious and ethnic divisions and
483 transcending ancient enmities. So the ‘neighbour’ of the original Torah is defined by
484 Jesus as whoever the ‘other’ is who specifically and concretely requires self-forgetful
485 attention and care in any moment. Thus to be a neighbour is a challenge that
486 continually comes at us in new ways. We cannot define its demands securely in
487 advance; it demands that we be ready to go beyond the boundaries of our familiar
488 structures of kinship and obligation, whether these are local, racial or religious. For
489 that reason – developing a helpful symbolic reading of this parable – Christian
490 thinkers have often said that Jesus himself is our first ‘neighbour’, the one who
491 comes alongside every human being in need.²⁶ We look forward to the opportunity
492 to explore with you how this teaching about being a neighbour relates to the Qur’anic
493 imperative to care for neighbour and stranger (an imperative that seems to be derived
494 here from the worship of God)²⁷.

495

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

499

500 **If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from**
501 **anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.**
502 **Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your**
503 **goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have**
504 **them do to you... But love your enemies, do good, and lend,**
505 **expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will**
506 **be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the**
507 **wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.** (Luke 6:29-
508 31,35-36)

509

510 This radical teaching, which Jesus presents precisely as a higher interpretation of
511 what it means to love the neighbour, is grounded, as we have seen, in the way in

²⁶ Cf. Karl Barth’s similarly reversing reading of this parable: ‘The primary and true form of the neighbour is that he faces us as the bearer and representative of the divine compassion,’ *Church Dogmatics*, volume I/2, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956) p.416.

²⁷ “Worship 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.” (4:36)

512 which God loves.²⁸ It teaches us to recognise as neighbour even those who set
513 themselves against us. This is partly required by humility before the design of God in
514 history and the limited nature of our perspective, for we do not know, as Christians
515 have often said, who among those who confront us in hostility today will turn out to
516 be our friends on the last day, when we stand before our Judge. It is partly, too, ‘that
517 we may be children of our Father in heaven’²⁹, learning to share the perspective of
518 God, who reaches out and seeks to win all his creatures to his love, even those who
519 turn away from it. This resonates with what is said in the Qur’an: “*God may still*
520 *bring about affection between you and your present enemies – God is all powerful,*
521 *God is most forgiving and merciful*” (Al-Mumtahana 60:7). Where love replaces
522 enmity we can recognise the work and way of God.

523 **SEEKING THE COMMON GOOD IN THE WAY OF GOD**
524

525 **The Common Good**

526

527 **“Love works no ill to his neighbour”** (Romans 13:10)

528 **“Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers”** (Hebrews
529 13:1-2)

530

531 There are many practical implications that flow from our understandings of love of
532 God and love of neighbour, including those mentioned in your letter regarding
533 peacemaking, religious freedom and the avoidance of violence.³⁰ In response we

²⁹ Cf. Matthew 5:45

³⁰ Among the many items for this agenda one respondent, Colin Chapman, suggests:

- **Our histories:** we need to recognise the legacy of 1400 years of sometimes difficult relationships between Christians and Muslims. Both faiths have at different times and in different places been associated with conquest and empire. And while there have been times of peaceful co-existence, conflicts between Muslims and Christians in the past (and present) have left their mark on the collective memory of both communities.

- **The wide variety of reasons for tensions in different situations today:** while there are some common factors in all situations where Muslims and Christians live side by side, in each situation there is also likely to be a unique set of factors – political, economic, cultural or social – which contribute to these tensions.

- **Christians and Muslims as minorities:** we recognise that 25% of Muslims worldwide are living in minority situations, and Christians also in many parts of the world find themselves as minorities. In contexts like these both Christians and Muslims face similar dilemmas and may have more in common with each other than with their secular neighbours.

- **The Israeli-Palestinian conflict** is at or near the top of the list of issues that concern both Christians and Muslims all over the world. This conflict is quite unique in the way that religion and politics are so thoroughly intertwined. Christian and Muslim leaders therefore have a special responsibility both to educate their own communities about ‘the things that make for peace’ and to appeal to their political leaders to work for a just resolution of the conflict.

Love of the neighbour, as *A Common Word Suggests*, provides a firm basis on which to address many of these immediate issues that affect Christian – Muslim relations all over the world. When Muslims

534 should like to offer a vision, grounded in absolute faithfulness to our respective
535 religious convictions, that we believe we can share in offering to our fellow believers
536 and our neighbours (in the widest sense).

537

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

550

551 Religious violence suggests an underlying religious insecurity. When different
552 communities have the same sort of conviction of the absolute truth of their
553 perspective, there is certainly an intellectual and spiritual challenge to be met; but the
554 logic of this belief ought to make it plain that there can be no justification for the sort
555 of violent contest in which any means, however inhuman, can be justified by appeal
556 to the need to 'protect God's interests'. Even to express it in those terms is to show
557 how absurd it is. The eternal God cannot need 'protection' by the tactics of human
558 violence. This point is captured in the words of Jesus before the Roman governor:
559 **"My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight"** (John
560 19.36).

561

562 So we can conclude that the more we as people of genuine faith are serious about the
563 truth of our convictions, the more likely we will be to turn away from violence in the
564 name of faith; to trust that God, the truly real, will remain true, divine and
565 unchanging, whatever the failures and successes of human society and history. And

point to the saying of Muhammad "None of you has faith until you love for your brother (or neighbour) what you love for yourself", Christians point to the Golden Rule as taught by Jesus: **'In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets'** (Matthew 7:12). This must mean in practice, for example, that when western Christians try to put themselves in the shoes of the Christians in Egypt and reflect on how they would like to be treated in that minority situation, this should affect the way that they think about Muslim minorities in the West. The principle of reciprocity seems to many to be a natural expression of love of the neighbour, since it means wanting for our neighbours what we want for ourselves. Its acceptance by both Christians and Muslims would help to resolve many of the tensions experienced by both Christian and Muslim minorities.

566 we will be aware that to try and compel religious allegiance through violence is
567 really a way of seeking to replace divine power with human; hence the Qur'anic
568 insistence that there can be no compulsion in matters of religious faith (al-Baqarah,
569 2:256³¹) and the endorsement in your letter of "freedom of religion". It is crucial to
570 faith in a really existing and absolute transcendent agency that we should understand
571 it as being what it is quite independently of any lesser power: the most disturbing
572 form of secularisation is when this is forgotten or misunderstood.

573

574 This has, indeed, been forgotten or misunderstood in so many contexts over the
575 millennia. Religious identity has often been confused with cultural or national
576 integrity, with structures of social control, with class and regional identities, with
577 empire; and it has been imposed in the interest of all these and other forms of power.
578 Despite Jesus' words in John's gospel, Christianity has been promoted at the point of
579 the sword and legally supported by extreme sanctions³²; despite the Qur'anic axiom,
580 Islam has been supported in the same way, with extreme penalties for abandoning it,
581 and civil disabilities for those outside the faith. There is no religious tradition whose
582 history is exempt from such temptation and such failure.

583

584 What we need as a vision for our dialogue is to break the current cycles of violence,
585 to show the world that faith and faith alone can truly ground a commitment to peace
586 which definitively abandons the tempting but lethal cycle of retaliation in which we
587 simply imitate each other's violence.³³ Building on our understanding of God's love
588 for us and, in response, our love for God and neighbour we can speak of a particular
589 quality to the Christian approach to peace and peace-making: the moment of
590 unconditioned positive response, the risk of offering something to one whom you
591 have no absolutely secure reason to trust.

³¹ *There is no compulsion in religion*

³² There has been, and continues to be, a tradition within Christianity that has argued the moral rightness of using force in certain carefully defined circumstances, most notably through the application of the "just war" criteria formulated by St Augustine of Hippo and developed by St Thomas Aquinas.

³³ And here we must recognise, in the words of the initial reflections on *A Common Word* offered by Daniel Madigan SJ "... 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... 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."

592

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

598

599

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

603

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

617

618 So, even if we accept that our systems of religious belief cannot be reconciled by
619 'rational' argument because they depend on the gift of revelation, we rule out, by that
620 very notion, any assumption that coercive human power is the ultimate authority and
621 arbiter in our world. Given, as we have acknowledged, that Christian history
622 contains too many examples of Christians betraying that initial turning away from
623 the cycle of retaliation, we can only put forward such a vision in the form of a
624 challenge to Christians as much as Muslims: how did we ever come to think that the
625 truly transcendent can ever be imagined or proclaimed in a pattern of endless and
626 sterile repetition of force?

627

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

642

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

650

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

658

659

660 *Seeking together in the way of God*

661

662 *A Common Word Between Us and You* issues a powerful call to dialogue and
663 collaboration between Christians and Muslims. A great deal is already happening in
664 this sphere on many levels, but the very wide geographical (43 countries) and
665 theological diversity represented among the signatories of your letter provides a
666 unique impetus to deepen and extend the encounters. As part of the common shape

667 and structure of our language about God we can acknowledge a shared commitment
668 to truth and a desire to discern how our lives may come to be lived in accordance
669 with eternal truth. As we have noted above, the Christian understanding of love,
670 coupled with our common acknowledgement of the absolute transcendence of the
671 divine, encourages us towards a vision of radical and transformative non-violence.
672 We are committed to reflecting and working together, with you and all our human
673 neighbours, with a view both to practical action and service and to a long term
674 dedication to all that will lead to a true common good for human beings before God.

675

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

680

- 681 a) *the dialogue of life*, “where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly
682 spirit”;
- 683 b) *the dialogue of action*, “in which Christians and others collaborate for the
684 integral development and liberation of people”;
- 685 c) *the dialogue of theological exchange*, “where specialists seek to deepen their
686 understanding of their respective religious heritages”; and
- 687 d) *the dialogue of religious experience*, “where persons rooted in their own
688 religious traditions share their spiritual riches”.

689

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

693

694 Three imperatives are suggested by this:

695

- 696 a) to strengthen grass-roots partnerships and programmes between our
697 communities that will work for justice, peace and the common good of
698 human society the world over;
- 700 b) to intensify the shared theological discussions and researches of religious
701 leaders and scholars who are seeking clearer insight into divine truth, and to
702 realise this through building and sustaining of groups marked by a sense of
703 collegiality, mutual esteem, and trust;³⁴
- 704
- 705 c) to deepen the appreciation of Christian and Muslim believers for each other’s
706 religious practice and experience, as they come to recognise one another as
707 people whose lives are oriented towards God in love.³⁵

³⁴ While such colloquia should be characterised by a high degree of academic rigour, they should also draw on and express the personal commitment of religious leaders and scholars to their respective faiths.

³⁵ This will require spending time in each other’s presence, exploring the depth of each other’s spirituality, and acknowledging both the variety and the depth of prayer, remembrance and celebration in both faiths.

708
709 These different kinds of encounter need to be held together to ensure a balanced and
710 effective pattern of encounter. The approach of your letter shows the importance of
711 shared and attentive study of Biblical and Qur’anic texts as a way of ensuring both
712 that all dimensions of encounter are present and also that Christians and Muslims are
713 held accountable to, and draw on the riches of, their respective traditions of faith
714 whilst recognising the limitations – at least initially - in our ability to comment
715 authoritatively on the others’ scriptures.³⁶

716
717 As we noted earlier, the role of the Qu’ran in Islam is not really parallel to the role of
718 the Bible in Christianity. For Christians, God’s Word was made flesh in Jesus Christ.
719 Our understanding of the Scriptures is that they witness to and draw their authority
720 from Christ, describing the witness of prophets and apostles to his saving work.
721 They are the voice of his living Spirit who, Christians believe, dwells among us and
722 within us. Nevertheless, for us as for you, reading the Scriptures is a constant source
723 of inspiration, nurture and correction, and this makes it very appropriate for
724 Christians and Muslims to listen to one another, and question one another, in the
725 course of reading and interpreting the texts from which we have learned of God’s
726 will and purposes. And for Christians and Muslims together addressing our
727 scriptures in this way, it is essential also to take account of the place of the Jewish
728 people and of the Hebrew scriptures in our encounter, since we both look to our
729 origins in that history of divine revelation and action.

730
731 The use of scriptures in inter-religious dialogue has considerable potential, but there
732 are also risks in this approach when we think we know or understand another’s
733 sacred texts but in fact are reading them exclusively through our own spectacles. We
734 hope that one early outcome of studying and discussing together will be to work out
735 wise guidelines, practices and educational resources for this element of our
736 engagement.

737
738 Given the variety of forms of encounter which are to be held together as we deepen
739 our engagement with each other, we can identify three main outcomes which we
740 might seek together. They will depend on the establishment and maintenance of
741 credible and durable structures of collegiality, trust and respect between key
742 individuals and communities in our two faiths. The three outcomes are:

743

744 a) Maintaining and strengthening the momentum of what is already happening
745 in Christian-Muslim encounter. An important stream flowing into this will be

³⁶ The Christian Bible, Old and New Testaments together, forms a large narrative (with, admittedly, many subordinate parts some of which do not well fit the ‘narrative’ model) from creation to new creation, from the Garden of Eden to the New Jerusalem which comes down from heaven to earth. Within this narrative, Jesus Christ is presented as the climax of the story of the world’s creation on the one hand and of the call of Abraham on the other: the stories of Jesus are not just ‘stories of Jesus’ but ‘stories of Jesus seen as the fulfilment of covenant and creation’. The multiple teachings which are found variously throughout the Bible – doctrine about God, rules for behaviour, religious practices etc. – are set, and best understood, within that overall story. It would be worth exploring in some detail how Muslims see these aspects of Christian scripture and whether there are ways in which such a perception would create new kinds of possibilities for dialogue.

746 the continuing conversations around your letter and the Christian responses to
747 it. Reaching back before that also, there has been a growing corpus of action
748 and reflection in this area at least from *Nostra Aetate* (1965) onwards. The
749 recent gathering of Muslim religious leaders and scholars in Mecca and the
750 subsequent convening of a conference in Madrid, for example, is another
751 promising development. It is important that any new initiatives acknowledge
752 this wider picture of Christian-Muslim encounter, and position themselves in
753 relation to it, learning from both its achievements and set-backs.
754

755 b) Finding safe spaces within which the differences – as well as the
756 convergences - between Christians and Muslims can be honestly and
757 creatively articulated and explored. Our two faiths have differed deeply on
758 points of central importance to both of us, points of belief as well as points of
759 practice. It is essential for the health of our encounter that we should find
760 ways of talking freely yet courteously about those differences; indeed,
761 honesty of this kind has been described as the most certain sign of maturity in
762 dialogue.
763

764 c) Ensuring that our encounters are not for the sake of participants alone, but are
765 capable of having an influence which affects people more widely – Christians
766 and Muslims at the level of all our local communities, and also those engaged
767 in the wider realities of our societies and our world. Seeking the common
768 good is a purpose around which Christians and Muslims can unite, and in
769 leads us into all kinds of complex territory as we seek to find ways of acting
770 effectively in the world of modern global and democratic politics.
771

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

776

777 a) First, there is an urgent need in both our traditions for education about one
778 another. We are all influenced by prejudices and misunderstandings inherited
779 from the past – and often renewed in the present through the power of media
780 stereotyping. Teaching and learning about the reality and diversity of Islam as
781 Muslims practise their faith should be a priority as important to Christians as
782 understanding of actual Christianity should be to Muslims. In concrete terms,
783 such educational programmes might be initially be focused on those
784 preparing clergy and imams respectively for public inter-faith roles and on
785 those providing religious education to young people.
786

787 b) Second, opportunities for lived encounter with people of different faiths, both
788 within and across national boundaries, need to be multiplied and developed in
789 an atmosphere of trust and respect. These should take place on many different

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795 c) Finally, for encounters to be sustainable over a long period of time, there
796 needs to be commitment to the process and to one another on the part of all
797 participants. Such a commitment, growing into affection, respect, collegiality
798 and friendship, will be an expression of love of neighbour; it will also be
799 done in love for God and in response to God's will.
800

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

808

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

812

813

In the love of God,

814

815

+ Rowan Cantuar:

816

817

14 July 2008

818

Appendix 13

**LOVING GOD AND NEIGHBOR
TOGETHER:
A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO A *COMMON
WORD BETWEEN US AND YOU***

Yale scholars

1 In the name of the Infinitely Good God whom we should love with all our being

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LOVING GOD AND NEIGHBOR TOGETHER:

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO A *COMMON WORD BETWEEN US AND YOU*

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 (Peace Be Upon Him) 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 *A Common Word* as a Muslim hand of conviviality and cooperation extended to Christians world-wide. 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 (Peace Be Upon Him) says, "First take the log out your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take a speck out of your neighbor's eye" (Matthew 7:5), we want to begin by acknowledging that in the past (e.g. the Crusades) and in the present (e.g. the war in Iraq) 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

49 Christian religious communities. What is common between us lies not in
50 something marginal nor in something merely important to each. It lies, rather, in
51 something absolutely central to both: love of God and love of neighbor.
52 Surprisingly for many Christians, your letter considers the dual command of love
53 to be the foundational principle not just of the Christian faith, but of Islam as
54 well. That *so much* common ground exists—common ground in some of the
55 fundamentals of faith—gives hope that undeniable differences and even the very
56 real external pressures that bear down upon us cannot overshadow the common
57 ground upon which we stand together. That this common ground consists in *love*
58 of God and of neighbor, gives hope that deep cooperation between us can be a
59 hallmark of the relations between our two communities.

60

61 *Love of God*

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

68

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

76

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

82

83 *Love of Neighbor*

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

92

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

96 conscience is curtailed, God is dishonored, the neighbor oppressed, and neither
97 God nor neighbor is loved.

98

99 Since Muslims seek to love their Christian neighbors, they are not against them,
100 the document encouragingly states. Instead, Muslims are *with* them. As Christians
101 we resonate deeply with this sentiment. Our faith teaches that we must be with
102 our neighbors—indeed, that we must act in their favor—even when our neighbors
103 turn out to be our enemies. “But I say unto you,” says Jesus Christ (Peace Be
104 Upon Him), “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that
105 you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the
106 evil and on the good” (Matthew 5:44-45). Our love, Jesus Christ (Peace Be Upon
107 Him) says, must imitate the love of the infinitely good Creator; our love must be
108 as unconditional as is God’s—extending to brothers, sisters, neighbors, and even
109 enemies. At the end of his life, Jesus Christ (Peace Be Upon Him) himself prayed
110 for his enemies: “forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke
111 23:34). The Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) did similarly when he was
112 violently rejected and stoned by the people of Ta’if, saying, “The most virtuous
113 behavior is to engage those who sever relations, to give to those who withhold
114 from you, and to forgive those who wrong you.” (It is perhaps significant that
115 after the Prophet Muhammad was driven out of Ta’if, it was the Christian slave
116 ‘Addas who went out to Muhammad, brought him food, kissed him, and
117 embraced him.)

118

119 *The Task Before Us*

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

130

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

136

137 We are persuaded that our next step should be for our leaders at every level to
138 meet together and begin the earnest work of determining how God would have us
139 fulfill the requirement that we love God and one another. It is with humility and
140 hope that we receive your generous letter, and we commit ourselves to labor
141 together in heart, soul, mind and strength for the objectives you so appropriately
142 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

Signatories to *Loving God and Neighbor Together: A Christian Response to A Common Word between Us and You* (as of 9:30 a.m., Oct. 12, 2007)

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Miroslav Volf, Founder and Director of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture, Henry B.

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Appendix 14
An interview with Tim Winter

1 **1. The Common Word is an important text in the history of Muslim - Christian**
2 **Relations. Where does the inspiration come from?**

3
4 From the Qur'anic text 3:64 which gives the document its name. Muslims are
5 scripturally mandated to address Christians and Jews in this fashion. The timing of
6 the current document reflects the widespread sense among Muslims that many in the
7 Christian world do not know who speaks for Islam, or how the religion's mainline
8 leadership views Christianity and Christians.

9
10 **2. The CW is available to the readers in many languages. I suppose they are**
11 **translations from the original; the language in which the text was originally**
12 **composes. In what language the CW is originally composed?**

13
14 Arabic.

15
16 **3. At this point i would like to ask about two words: Injil and Jar; these words**
17 **in Arabic Text for Bible and neighbour in the English text. It is often pointed**
18 **out that Injil and Jar donot exactly correspond to Bible and neighbor. I have**
19 **noted from the conversations that Injil denotes lost or falsified document where**
20 **as jar means a next door neighbour. Would you kindly clarify?**

21
22 There will never be exact equivalence in terminology. For convenience we are using
23 the word 'Injil' in the sense recognized by modern Christians, that is, the Four
24 Gospels. Muslim scholarship holds that the first Christians did not have these four
25 gospels, and instead possessed memories of the sayings of Jesus, what modern NT
26 scholars would call a 'Sayings Gospel;' which is the ancestor, through various
27 processes of redaction, of the four gospels which came to be accepted as canonical.
28 This roughly coincides with the 'sayings gospel' thesis of some NT scholars. E.g.
29 Burton Mack, in his book 'The Lost Gospel': 'before there were gospels of the kind
30 familiar to readers of the New Testament, the first followers of Jesus wrote another
31 kind of book. Instead of telling a dramatic story about Jesus' life, their book
32 contained only his teachings.' Muslims agree with many NT scholars that this
33 original document, whatever form it took, has been preserved only imperfectly in the
34 Four Gospels. See for instance Ruqaiyyah Maqsood's book 'The Mysteries of Jesus'
35 for a full discussion. It is not necessary to translate 'tahrif' as 'corruption', however,
36 even though Christian scholars like Bart Ehrman have written books with titles like
37 'The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture'. Most Christian scholars do not use the word
38 'corruption' for the processes of redaction. The absence of the Johannine Comma in
39 the early copies of John's Gospel, for instance, is now accepted by everyone, but this
40 is still not termed 'corruption', although it is certainly what Muslim scholars would
41 refer to as 'tahrif'.

42
43 As for 'jar', Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali makes it clear that the scholars of Islam interpret
44 this in different senses. For some it refers to physical neighbours, defined as the
45 nearest forty houses. As a hadith indicates, this includes Muslim and non-Muslim
46 neighbours. For others it means co-religionists, i.e. Muslims. But generally the sense
47 is similar to the Jewish concept of 'neighbour' invoked by Jesus. See
48 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Commandment

49

50 **4. I am interested in a brief history behind the text: who were the core group**
51 **who composed the text? How the group was able to come to a consensus? Is it**
52 **possible to see the various drafts on the Text before it came to a final shape?**
53

54 I don't think that early drafts still exist. Essentially the core group was informal, and
55 consisted of leading traditionalist scholars in Syria, Jordan and the Yemen.
56

57 **5. The Text affirms Unity of God calls for total devotion of human person to**
58 **God. How this uniqueness of God could evoke total surrender? 'What God is'**
59 **evokes a total surrender or 'What God does' to humanity evokes a total**
60 **surrender? Would you kindly explain this?**
61

62 God alone possesses the attributes of perfection; therefore He alone is to be adored
63 and surrendered to.
64

65 **6. The CW has a good number of quotations from Holy Qur'an and Holy Bible.**
66 **Is it the first time an important text like this quotes from the Bible? 'Tahrif' is**
67 **an important theological discussion within Islam which indicates that the Jewish**
68 **as well as Christian Scriptures are falsified or corrupted? How do we**
69 **understand the attitude of the writers of the Text from the point of view of**
70 **'Tahrif'?**
71

72 I have commented on the tahrif above. Most serious NT scholars affirm that the text
73 has a complex history, and is not the same as the earliest materials available to
74 Christians. The debate is heated, and the authors of the CW had no need to intervene
75 in it. Instead we use the text of the Bible as it came to be accepted among Christians
76 (the Council of Carthage in 397 defined the contents of the authorized Bible; for
77 Catholics this was not definitive until 1441), since the point of the CW is to bring the
78 faiths as they currently exist into conversation, not to try to enter internal polemics
79 which are unlikely to be resolved. This does not mean that Muslims think that the
80 Bible which was defined at Carthage is inerrant holy writ.
81

82 There is plenty of precedent for this. Al-Ghazali, in his 'al-Radd al-Jamil', uses a
83 current Arabic version of the Gospels without analysing the stability of the text. He
84 does this to facilitate conversation with Christians; it does not mean that he is
85 committed to the idea that these texts are fully authentic memories of the earliest
86 period of Christianity. After all, they have no 'isnad', which for Muslims is essential
87 in establishing the genuineness of historical documents.
88

89 Another influential example is 'Transcending Jerusalem', available online at
90 www.transcendingjerusalem.com - a Muslim study of the Bible which essentially
91 takes it at face value.
92

93 **7. While the Writers quote from the Holy Qur'an, have they taken into account**
94 **the 'occasions for revelation' (OR) into the Text or have they quoted without**
95 **any reference to OR?**
96

97 The 'occasions' were consulted meticulously through the commentaries of Tabari
98 and Suyuti, and the ulema who ratified the document confirmed that the CW's use of
99 scripture is traditional and authentic

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8. Though the Text has quotations from Jewish Scriptures the Jews are not included in this invitation?

No. That is to be the subject of a separate initiative.

9. Love of God and love of neighbour, the Central theme of the Text is a familiar frame work for Christians and their theologies. Can we say that the Letter is composed on the basic paradigm or frame work of Christian theologies? (It makes the letter very appealing to Christian readers.)

Imam al-Ghazali, the leading thinker of medieval Islam, points out that love is the overriding religious virtue and the axiom of the religion (Ihya, Kitab al-Mahabba). The CW is very classical in reaffirming Islam as the religion of love, and the Holy Prophet as ‘habib Allah’ – his pre-eminent name at the Intercession. Some Christians have not been very good at seeing this doctrine, but it is axiomatic in a faith where God is so loving that he sends a huge number of equally saving revelations, rather than confining full salvation to only one episode in sacred history.

I reflect on this aspect of the Common Word atmosphere in a recent article, ‘Jesus and Muhammad: new convergences’, in ‘The Muslim World’, January 2009. This really sums up my understanding of the respective roles of Love and Rigour in the two religions.

10. The Letter is an invitation for Dialogue. Invitation (dawa) is considered by many muslims as an invitation for others to embrace Islam. Are the Writers of the Text interpret dawa differently?

Of course not: the text is fully classical and orthodox. The love of God summons us to invite Christians, and all nations, to the fullness of faith in Him which is expounded in its clearest form in the Holy Koran.

11. The Text says: "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" while inviting Christians. The Text makes both Muslims and Christians accountable to God. Does this statement vindicate the position of the scholars that Christianity is a valid religion?

I don’t believe that any of the signatories would say that. The point of the initiative is that it allows both faiths to be fully true to themselves. Muslims believe that reconciliation in a modern world torn apart by greed and secular passions is a divine commandment, and that our salvation is intimately connected to how we respond to that. Christians believe the same thing. That is not at all the same as to say that Muslims believe that Christians who do this will be saved. Neither do Christians who have endorsed the document mean that Muslims who act for reconciliation will be saved. It is a statement of the internal ethic of the two religions.

12. Unity of God is the core of the Letter. However, both Muslims and Christian has different understading of the Unity of God (One God and Triune God). Does the Text take different perspectives as different yet valid perspectives?

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Not at all. It was signed by extremely conservative figures. They cannot take a view on the Trinity since they are aware that there is no Christian consensus on Trinitarian doctrine. Many Christians, in the reformed traditions at any rate, now do not accept it at all. The Daily Telegraph (31 July 2002) recorded that a quarter of Anglican priests now state that they do not believe in the Trinity. Amongst lay Christians in the UK, in my experience, the proportion is still higher. The CW's policy is to give Christians the benefit of the doubt (husn al-zann), and engage with them on the basis that many hold theories about the Trinity that can indeed be defined, as Muslims understand it, as monotheistic. This is necessary for the sake of reconciliation. Cappadocian views rather than the rival Augustinian theory may be somewhat more amenable to definition as monotheistic. But the CW certainly cannot offer a view on all Christian understandings of this doctrine.

13. Very few Asian Muslim scholars have signed the document though a large number of Muslims live in Asia. How could this become representative of Asian Muslim aspirations?

I believe that extensive canvassing is taking place and that the results are grounds for optimism. Islam in the subcontinent is often quite detached from Islam elsewhere, and the initiative does not seem to be widely known there.

14. How do you gauge the responses from Christian Churches?

Excellent – as you can see from the website. Rowan Williams has basically endorsed the document, as did the 300 evangelical leaders who took out the New York Times advertisement. The final declaration of the Muslim-Catholic Forum in Rome last year essentially indicated the Vatican's agreement with the basic principles of the document.

15. Did this text carry forward the process of dialogue between Muslims and Christians in the last few months after it is given to Christian leaders?

Yes, not only at the big international fora described on the websites, but in a multitude of local faith initiatives. Extremists on both sides have been predictably hostile, but have not sabotaged the process.

The CW team has an executive which meets every few months, usually in Abu Dhabi, to review progress. At the last meeting, last month, general satisfaction was expressed with the impact of this initiative.

16. How Asian Christians and Muslims could help in the process of dialogue in the context of Common Word?

Firstly, by challenging stereotypes. Christians think of themselves as the religion of love, and are surprised when others (probably all others) see themselves in the same terms. Muslims also, with historic notions assuming that Christianity is a single phenomenon, united in a desire to invade Muslim countries (reinforced during the Bush administration), need to recognise that Islam is not the only religion acknowledging the centrality of love. The pope's encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* was

200 surprising to Muslims who believe that sexual love is not regarded by Christians as
201 an important part of the spiritual life. And there are other Muslim misperceptions to
202 be addressed.

Appendix 15

The verses in the Qur'an that refer to Love

KASSIS: Concordance of Qur'an, California UP 1983

2:165 (160)	who take to themselves compeers apart from God, loving them
2:190 (186)	God loves not the aggressors
2:195 (191)	God loves the good-doers
2:205 (201)	God loves not corruption
2:216 (213)	it may happen that you will love a thing
2:222 (222)	God loves those who repent
2:222 (222)	and He loves those who cleanse themselves
2:276 (277)	god loves not any guilty ingrate
3:31 (29)	if you love God, follow me
3:31 (29)	and God will love you, and forgive you
3:32 (29)	God loves not the unbelievers
3:57 (50)	deeds of righteousness, He will pay them God loves not the evildoers
3:76 (70)	God loves the godfearing
3:92 (86)	until you expend of what you love
3:119 (115)	you love them
3:119 (115)	and they love you not
3:134 (128)	God loves the good-doers
3:140 (134)	God loves not the evildoers
3:146 (140)	God loves the patient
3:148 (141)	God loves the good-doers
3:152 (145)	after He had shown you that you longed for
3:159 (153)	God loves those who put their trust
3:188 (185)	what they have brought, and love to be praised
4:36 (40)	God loves not the proud and boastful
4:107 (107)	God loves not the guilty traitor
4:148 (147)	God likes not the shouting of evil words
5:13 (16)	God loves the good-doers
5:42 (46)	God loves the just
5:54 (59)	God will assuredly bring a people He loves
5:54 (59)	a people He (loves) and who love him
5:64 (69)	God loves not the workers of corruption
5:87 (89)	God loves not the transgressors
5:93 (94)	God loves the good-doers
6:76 (76)	I love not the setters
6:141 (142)	God loves not the prodigal
7:31 (29)	He loves not the prodigal
7:55 (53)	He loves not transgressors
7:79 (77)	you do not love sincere advisers
8:58 (60)	God loves not the treacherous
9:4 (4)	God loves the godfearing
9:7 (7)	God loves the godfearing
9:108 (109)	men who love to cleanse themselves
9:108 (109)	and God loves those who cleanse themselves
16:23 (25)	He loves not those that wax proud
22:38 (39)	God loves not any ungrateful traitor
24:19 (18)	those who love that indecency
24:22 (22)	do you not wish that God should forgive you?

28:76 (76)	God loves not those that exult
28:77 (77)	God loves not the workers of corruption
30:45 (44)	He loves not the unbelievers
31:18 (17)	God loves not any man proud and boastful
42:400 (38)	He loves not the evildoers
49:9 (9)	God loves the just
49:12 (12)	would any of you like to eat the flesh
57:23 (23)	God loves not any man proud and boastful
59:9 (9)	love whosoever has emigrated to them
60:8 (8)	God loves the just
61:4 (4)	God loves those who fight in His way
61:13 (13)	and other things you love
75:20 (20)	but you love the hasty world
76:27 (27)	these men love the hasty world
89:20 (21)	and you love wealth with an ardent love

Appendix 16

HOW CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS SEE EACH OTHER?

HOW CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS SEE EACH OTHER?

“WE WANT TO DECLARE TO YOU OUR ESTEEM FOR MUSLIMS ... AS WAS WELL EXPRESSED BY THE RECENT COUNCIL, WHICH EXHORTED US TO PROMOTE TOGETHER, ON THE BASIS OF COMMON TRUTHS, SOCIAL JUSTICE, MORAL VALUES, PEACE AND LIBERTY. ALL THOSE WHO ADORE THE ONE AND UNIQUE GOD ARE CALLED TO ESTABLISH AN ORDER OF JUSTICE AND PEACE ON EARTH.”

Pope Paul VI, to Mufti of Istanbul, 26 July 1967.

INTRODUCTION

Christian-Muslim relations have a chequered history. Theological differences and social contexts together have a bearing upon the way in which Christians and Muslims understand one another even up to present times. Any theological conversation with Muslims can not avoid theology, social and contemporary contexts. Based on the survey of relevant literature this article presents some of the major issues that present themselves in Christian-Muslim conversations. The article points out those differences need not necessarily put one against the other. A careful study of issues will open up ways for mutual understanding and cooperation.

CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDINGS OF MUSLIMS AND ISLAM

Prophecy

According to Islam, Muhammad (570 – 632 CE), the prophet of Islam, at the age of 40, in 610 began to receive revelations from *al-lāh* (the God) and continued to receive them until his death.³⁷ He taught that God is one and only and that recognition of other deities is an affront to him as the one and only God.³⁸ God’s revelation reached humanity through a chain of prophets that began with Adam and ended with Muhammad, the final

³⁷ F. Rahman, *Islam* [New York: Anchor Books, 1968], 1-5; M.A.S.A. Haleem, “Qur’an and Hadith,” in *Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. T. Winter [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008], 19.

³⁸ F.M. Donner, “The Historical Context,” in *The Cambridge Companion to The Qur’an*, ed. J.D. McAuliffe [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008], 25.

prophet.³⁹ He was the seal of the prophets and the revelation that he received is definitive, universal and corrects any errors that have crept into those that came before.⁴⁰

Christians struggled with Muhammad's claims to prophethood.⁴¹ First, for Christians revelation ended with the apostolic witnesses⁴² and as a result their theology did not allow for Muhammad to be considered a prophet without compromising their own Christian faith.⁴³ Secondly, for Christians, Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of Hebrew prophecy but more than that, he is the Word of God incarnate. Hebrew prophecy prepared people for the central event of the incarnation. This claim by Christians needs a brief explanation.

³⁹ S.A. Mawdudi, *Towards Understanding Islam* [Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1996], 37-42.

⁴⁰ A. O'Mahony, "Christianity, Interreligious Dialogue and Muslim-Christian Relations," in *World Christianity: Politics, Theology, Dialogues*, ed. A. O'Mahony and M. Kirwan [London: Melisende, 2004], 82. Also see: I.R. al-Faruqi, "Islam and Christianity: Diatribe or Dialogue?" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 5, no.1 [1968]: 45-77.

⁴¹ N. Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* [Oxford: Oneworld, 1993], 88-98. See also: T. Andrae, *Muhammad: Man and his Times* [London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956]. T. Andrae argues religious consciousness and moral character of Muhammad should be taken seriously for any theological reflection on Muhammad and his claim to prophethood.

⁴² K. Rahner, "Revelation," in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, ed. K. Rahner, C. Ernest, Kevin Smyth, vol. 5 [London: Burn & Oates], 358.

⁴³ C.W. Troll, *Dialogue and Difference: Clarity in Christian-Muslim Dialogue* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009], 128.

It is important to note that within Catholic theology there are two different ways in which revelation is understood. Most Catholic theologians before K. Rahner recognised revelation as truths revealed by God. These revealed truths were gathered in a deposit of faith. These revealed truths should be acknowledged as true on the authority of God as mediated by the Church for one's salvation. This could be called static understanding of revelation. In this stream of thought the revelations possessed by non-Christian religions were considered to be preparation for the gospel. In this stream there would be no place for the Qur'anic revelation as it came after Jesus Christ. In contrast to this first school K. Rahner argued that revelation is not static but dynamic. It is God's self communication to which human person respond. Since revelation occurs within historical situations there could be Jewish, Islamic, Indic revelations. See: R.P. McBrien, *Catholicism* [New York: HarperCollins, 1994], 252. See also: Rene Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation* [Staten Island: Alba House, 1987]; G. Moran, *Theology of Revelation* [New York: Herder and Herder, 1966]; A. Shorter, *Revelation and its Interpretation* [London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983]; A. Dulles, *Models of Revelation* [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983].

In Jewish and Christian belief, Hebrew prophets called the people to worship the one God who liberated them from captivity and made a covenant with them. The Hebrew people maintained the integrity of their covenant with God by sacrifices offered by priests in the temple. The sacrifices in the temple were at the heart of their covenantal relationship with God. They faced a religious crisis when they were exiled after the destruction of the temple (570 BCE). The exiled Hebrews nourished a hope for a new temple and thus the revival of sacrifices. However, a new religious thought emerged in the Book of Ezekiel (4:4-6). It asserted that a prophet or a priest's bodily suffering would maintain the integrity of the covenant in the place of temple sacrifices. The songs of the suffering servant of God in the Book of Isaiah further clarified this emerging religious thinking. The suffering servant as understood by Isaiah would reconcile humanity with God. Christians understand Jesus to be the suffering servant of God (Isaiah 42:1-7; 49:1-7; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12). They also recognised Jesus not just as the servant of God but as the Word made flesh and sent among humanity to complete the work of salvation which his Father had given him to do.⁴⁴ Muslims would find this Christian understanding of Jesus quite unacceptable. The essential difference is that, for Christians, Jesus is the embodiment of the Word and the fulfilment of prophecy. For Muslims, Muhammad is the recipient of the last and universal Book, the perfect exemplar of the message, the guide to paradise for the whole of humanity, and the seal of prophecy.⁴⁵

In short, Muslims understand prophets as human instruments to reveal God's moral will for the world and call humanity to submit thereto. Christians hold that prophesy prepared the Jewish people to receive the incarnation of God in Jesus. In Jesus they find God entering into humanity to liberate each person from the clutches of sin and raise all to eternal life. While in the Muslim mind, prophecy is a call to submit to God, for Christians it is a preparation to enter into fellowship with God through Jesus. This Christian idea of humanity having fellowship with God comes out clearly in the reflection on revelation in the next section.

Revelation

⁴⁴ P.L. Heck, *Common Ground: Islam, Christianity, and Religious Pluralism* [Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009], 7-42.

⁴⁵ S.H. Nasr, *Islam: Religion, History, and Civilization* [New York: HarperOne, 2003], 3.

In Muslim understanding, God's revelation is an awe-inspiring communication originating from above. All creation totally depends upon God. This transcendent communication takes place in history. Through revelation God reveals His moral will for the world.⁴⁶ The Qur'an is God's direct speech, which instructs humanity that God is transcendent and beyond all human experience.⁴⁷ The purpose of revelation is to call humanity to submit to God.⁴⁸ This will was revealed to Adam and all other prophets who came before Muhammad and the same is revealed finally to Muhammad.⁴⁹

Christians find this teaching unacceptable since they differ considerably with regard to their understanding of revelation. For them, God reveals himself and makes his will known. God wills that, through Christ, men and women have access to God as God's children and have fellowship with him in Christ through the Spirit.⁵⁰ Christ is at the heart of God's revelation for Christians.⁵¹ Christian revelation affirms that God's nature is triune, that is a Trinitarian understanding. More importantly, the transcendent God seeks fellowship with people and, in Christ, God offers a possibility to participate in his life.⁵²

In Christian faith, revelation is progressive and comes to its culmination in Christ. Christians regard their faith as a new dispensation. It is an invitation to a new life in God. Islam believes in the constancy of revelation. For Muslims, Islam is a call back to what was revealed to Adam and every prophet who came after him.⁵³ All prophets received essentially the same

⁴⁶Y. Michot, "Revelation," in *Classical Islamic Theology*, 180-181.

⁴⁷ F. Esack, *The Qur'an: A User's Guide* [Oxford: Oneworld, 2005], 30.

⁴⁸ T. F. Michel, "Islamic Ethical Vision," *Journal of Dharma* 16, no.4 [1991]: 398.

⁴⁹ S.H. Nasr, *Islam: Religion, History, and Civilization*, 62.

⁵⁰ X. Léon-Dufour, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* [London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967], 411-447.

⁵¹ K. Cragg, *Readings in the Qur'an – Selected and Translated with an Introductory Essay* [London: Allen and Unwin, 1988], 17.

⁵² W.M. Abbot, ed., "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation," in *The Documents of Vatican II: With Notes and Comments by Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Authorities* [London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1972], 111.

⁵³ P.L. Heck, *Common Ground: Islam, Christianity and Religious Pluralism*, 43-72.

revelation. Prophecy reminds men and women that they have to worship God and submit to his will.⁵⁴ Muslims consider that through revelation humanity can know God's will and through the Beautiful Names meditate on the divine qualities and thus be transformed.⁵⁵ Christians believe that in and through Christ they obtain a glimpse the nature of God, which is wrapt in mystery. While Muslims maintain that revelation urges human beings to submit to God, Christians stress that revelation invites humanity to participate in God's glory.⁵⁶

Contemporary questions

Common perceptions of Muslim positions on women, human rights, religious violence, fundamentalism and secularism continue to influence Christians' understanding of Islam.⁵⁷ First, many Christians think Muslim men discriminate against women.⁵⁸ It should be said that Islam considers men and women as moral equals on the religious level (Q. 4:1; 49:13). However, on the cultural level women have not been treated as equal to men.⁵⁹ Many Christians do not understand this distinction between religious ideals and cultural realities. A similar perception exists about Islamic Law (the *Sharia*): that it has appropriated many centuries-old customs of Middle Eastern societies that disregarded women. Secondly, many Christians incorrectly think that Muslim communities disregard human

⁵⁴ S.H. Nasr, *Islam: Religion, History, and Civilization*, 4.

⁵⁵ C.T.R. Hewer, *Understanding Islam: The First Ten Steps* [London: SCM, 2006], 77; T. Ramadan, *The Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004], 13.

⁵⁶ *An Encyclopedia of Theology (Sacramentum Mundi)*, [London: Burns & Oates, 1970], s.v. "Revelation."

⁵⁷ J.L. Esposito argues that critical to understanding the presence of Muslims in the West is to recognise their diversity. In his opinion the missing link is the voice of the main stream Muslim majority. See: J.L. Esposito, *The Future of Islam* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010], 10-55.

⁵⁸ One of the most important Islamist thinkers, S.A. Mawdudi, in his idea of the Islamic State refers only to Muslim men who should form the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. He did not make any reference to women. He considered them as 'wives, mothers and housekeepers'. See Roy Jackson, *Fifty Key Figures in Islam*, [London: Routledge, 2006], 190-195. Not all Muslim thinkers agree with Mawdudi. For example, Hasan al-Turabi (b.1932), a Sudanese political thinker and activist argued for equal rights for women in the light of the Qur'anic teachings and the traditions of the Prophet. See R. Jackson, *Fifty Key Figures in Islam*, 219-220.

⁵⁹ S. Altorki, "Women's Religious Observances," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, ed. J.L. Esposito [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995], 4:322-327.

rights.⁶⁰ Thirdly, there is a Christian perception to identify Islam with violence. David Kerr writes: “The military character of the eighth-century Muslim conquests, and of the long drawn wars of Christian *reconquista* that began in the eleventh century, account for the tendency in Spanish writers to identify Islam with violence”.⁶¹ This attitude appears not to be confined to Spanish writers. Some Christians claim that violence has support within Islamic ideology.⁶² They appear to argue that Muslims believe that God is pure will and beyond reason and in this context any violence in the name of religion can be defended if it accords with the divine will.⁶³ Fourthly, Christians seem to assume that Islamic *Sharia* and democracy are incompatible with each other. They call attention to Islamic political thought that insists that God alone is sovereign and denies sovereignty to any human institution including democracy.⁶⁴ As Christians and Muslims are living together all over the world today these contemporary questions continue to affect the way Christians understand Muslims.

MUSLIM UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIANS AND CHRISTIANITY

Corruption of the scriptures and the sin of *shirk*

Muslims believe that these scriptures sent to the Jews (eg. The *Tawrāt*) and the Christians (*Injīl*) were revealed by God.⁶⁵ Muslims believe in all revealed scriptures. However, the followers of Christ have corrupted or distorted their scriptures

⁶⁰ M. Uwais, “Problems of Cultural, Social and Political Life and Thought, for Renewed Effort of Muslim-Christian Dialogue,” in *We Have Justice in Common*, 67.

⁶¹ D. Kerr, “Christian-Muslim Relations: lessons from history,” in *The Road Ahead: a Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, ed. M. Ipgrave [London: Church House Publishing, 2002], 31.

⁶² T.F. Michel, “Islam and Terrorism: Are We Missing the Real Story,” in *East Asian Pastoral Review* 41, no.3 [2004]: 240-47.

⁶³ Pope Benedict XVI, “Three Stages in the Program of De-Hellenization”
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html
[accessed December 10, 2009].

⁶⁴ T.F. Michel, “Social and Religious Factors Affecting Muslim-Christian Relations,” in *A Christian View of Islam: Essays on Dialogue*, ed. I.A. Omar [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010], 59.

⁶⁵ F. Esack, *The Qur'an: A User's Guide*, 30.

either by changing the text or misinterpreting it.⁶⁶ Tarif Khalidi writes:

The view is advanced by some Muslim theologians that it was St Paul who first derailed the original message of Jesus. For these thinkers, St Paul is the person primarily responsible for Christian waywardness. Stripped of its Pauline content, pristine Christianity is indeed a complementary message, one which naturally bears witness to the truth of Islam.⁶⁷

Since it is distorted and the Qur'an remains the only uncorrupted scripture it is the task of the Qur'an to lead Christians to the right path.⁶⁸ Moreover, many scholars consider that there may be, at least in part, in the four New Testament Gospels, the words that were revealed to Jesus preserved in an uncorrupted form. Those parts can be validated by checking them against the Qur'an. If the Qur'an approves some passages from the Bible there can be a strong assumption that those passages are genuine.⁶⁹

It would be helpful to note the two different ways in which Christians and Muslims understand their scriptures. Muslims hold that the Qur'an is literally the Word of God in Arabic without any corruption.⁷⁰ Christians hold that the Bible contains the inspired word of God. It also contains the impact of this revelation on people: their faithfulness and lack of it towards what was revealed.⁷¹

⁶⁶ J.I. Smith, "Islam and Christendom: Historical, Cultural and Religious interaction from the Seventh to the Fifteenth Centuries," in *The Oxford History of Islam*, ed. J.L. Esposito [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999], 306.

⁶⁷ T. Khalidi, "Learning from Muslim history," in *The Road Ahead: a Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, ed. M. Ipgrave [London: Church House Publishing, 2002], 41.

⁶⁸ Christianity is valid until the coming of Islam. With the arrival of Islam, Christianity is abrogated. See: M. Ayoub, "The Roots of Muslim-Christian Conflict," *Muslim World* 79, no.1 [1987]: 25-45.

⁶⁹ C.T.R. Hewer, "Comment on A Common Word and the Keynote Papers," in *We Have Justice in Common*, 211.

⁷⁰ J. Jomier, *The Great Themes of the Qur'an*, [London: SCM Press], 1. See also F. Esack, *The Qur'an: A User's Guide*, 13-29.

⁷¹ R.A.F MacKenzie, "Revelation," in *The Documents of Vatican II: With Notes and Comments by Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Authorities*, ed. W.M. Abbot [London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1972], 108.

Further, Muslims think that Christians have divinised Jesus who was one of the prophets.⁷² If it were so, it would be a major sin, that of associating a creature with the creator (*shirk*). Consequently the Christians developed the doctrine of the Trinity.⁷³ Muslims hold that the Christians have invented several doctrines like original sin, redemption through the death and resurrection of Christ, and Jesus as saviour. All these doctrines have no place in God's revelation. They were not part of Jesus' original teaching.⁷⁴ Finally, they have replaced divine law with human law and denied God's sovereignty. Classical Islam holds that Christians not only brought changes into their scriptures but also continue to associate a human prophet with God. They not only fail to submit to God but also innovate and offend God.

Social reasons

Many Muslims suspect any formal efforts from Christians to improve their relations with them. The question that arises in their minds is: 'Are these efforts a clever mission strategy towards evangelisation?' They have reason to suspect such efforts, since Christian mission in Muslim nations, in the past, was undeniably connected with conversion of Muslims to Christianity. Any effort towards 'reconciliation' and 'bridge-building' thus increases the chance of suspicion.⁷⁵

Many Muslims are not sure, in any of their formal interactions on religious matters with 'Western Christians', with whom they are really meeting? They keep wondering whether they are meeting people of Christian faith or the products of western secularism. In the words of A. Siddiqui:

⁷²O.N. Mohammed, *Muslim-Christian Relations: Past, Present, Future*, 62.

⁷³J.I. Smith, "Islam and Christendom: Historical, Cultural and Religious interaction from the Seventh to the Fifteenth Centuries," in *The Oxford History of Islam*, 307.

⁷⁴M. Jameelah, *Islam Versus Ahl al-Kitab: Past and Present* [Delhi: Taj Company, 1989], 208.

⁷⁵A. Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Twentieth Century* [London: Macmillan, 1977], 51. Also see: J-C. Basset, "Has Christian-Muslim Dialogue already begun?" in *Muslim-Christian Perceptions of Dialogue Today*, ed. J. Waardenburg [Leuven: Peeters, 2000], 289.

It seems there is some truth in this view. The Church has a role in society as far as individuals and social life are concerned, e.g. marriage, birth, burial, and to some extent counselling for those who need it. But increasingly, the Church is becoming secular in its outlook, even in its religious beliefs and practices.⁷⁶

Siddiqui's views highlight the tension between the sacred and the secular. In the Muslim discourse it is reiterated that the Qur'an and *Sunna* guide the lives of Muslims. There is no demarcation between *sacred* and *secular* in a Muslim understanding of life. The Christian West, however, has gone through the fires of the Enlightenment that changed the religious discourse in the West. As a result, most westerners are only culturally Christians and do not bother much with the teachings of the churches.⁷⁷ The point that Siddiqui seems to miss is that many of those western Christians who take initiatives in building relations with Muslims are inspired by the teachings of their particular churches.⁷⁸ Moreover, the efforts to build relations among Christians and Muslims are shifting towards Africa and South and South-East Asia where Muslims and Christians live in large numbers. These two aspects may invite Muslims to rethink their suspicions.

Crusades

In 1095 the Byzantine Emperor Alexius I wanted Pope Urban II to help him to fight the Turks who were close to Constantinople. Pope Urban II wanted to make use of this opportunity to re-establish his authority over temporal rulers and make an effort to reunite the Eastern and Western Churches have been finally separated by the Great Schism in 1054.⁷⁹ He called for people to

⁷⁶ Ibid., 51.

⁷⁷ See: P. Jenkins, *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007].

⁷⁸ C.W. Troll, "Catholic Teachings on Interreligious Dialogue: Analysis of some recent official documents, with special reference to Christian-Muslim Relations," in *Muslim-Christian Perceptions of Dialogue Today: Experiences and Expectations*, ed. J. Waardenburg [Leuven: Peeters, 2000], 233-272.

⁷⁹ The Nicene Creed was intended to bring doctrinal stability with regard to their understanding of the Holy Spirit. The text referred to the Holy Spirit 'proceeding from the Father'. The Western Church, by the 9th century began to refer to Holy Spirit 'proceeding from the Father and the Son'. The idea of double procession created intense debate among the Greek writers. The 'tampering' with the text of the Nicene Creed was considered by many scholars as reason for the split between the Western Churches and the Eastern Churches. See: A.E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1995], 266-269.

take up arms at a council gathered at Clermont in France.⁸⁰ He appealed to them to fight Muslims to deliver the holy places in Palestine from their hands. The lords and barons of Western Europe responded enthusiastically for routing the Muslims meant honour and booty for them. The crusades, which lasted into the 13th century, left a trail of bitterness between western and eastern Christians as well as Muslims.⁸¹ The crusades were an “ill-fated venture” that has left a deep wound on the psyche of Muslims.⁸² They see it as a mark of western (Christian) arrogance against Muslims and the Muslim world.⁸³ The Gulf War (August 28, 1990 – February 28, 1991) and the presence of Western forces in Muslim countries are considered to be extensions of the crusades by some Muslims.⁸⁴ The wounds of history continue to impact Christian-Muslim relations.⁸⁵

Colonialism

In the 18th century, the Western nations in their search for raw materials and markets colonised many parts of Asia and Africa. Almost all Muslim countries came under the dominance of

⁸⁰ J. Riley-Smith, “The Crusading Movement and Historians,” in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades*, ed. J. Riley-Smith [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997], 1-12.

⁸¹ N. Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*, 131-136.

⁸² J. Waardenburg, “Encounters Between European Civilisation and Islam in History,” in *The Christian-Muslim Frontier: Chaos, Clash or Dialogue?* ed. J.S. Nielsen [London: I.B. Tauris, 1998], 6.

⁸³ “In 1076, just 16 years before Urban II called for holy war against Muslims, a Muslim ruler, al-Nasir of Bijaya wrote to Pope Gregory VII requesting him to ordain a bishop in his domain so that Christians living in his kingdom may continue to receive spiritual guidance and nourishment. In responding to his letter Gregory VII wrote to al-Nasir praising him for his belief in One God, though admittedly in a different way, assured his prayers for the Muslim ruler. Pope Gregory VII’s prayer merits our attention here. He prayed: “after the long space of this life that same God will lead you into the bosom of blessedness of the most holy patriarch Abraham.” The Pope’s prayer acknowledges a common source where he as a Christian and al-Nasir as a Muslim could ground their faith and good will for one another. Neal Robinson writes poignantly that Gregory VII’s letter written “some twenty years before the First Crusade, suggests that had it not been for Urban II’s ill-fated decision, Christian-Muslim relations might have developed somewhat differently”. See: N. Robinson, “Massignon, Vatican II, and Islam as an Abrahamic Religion,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 2, no. 2 [1991]:196.

⁸⁴ A. Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Twentieth Century*, 51.

⁸⁵ M. Ayoub, *A Christian View of Islam: Essays on Dialogue*, ed. Irfan A. Omar [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010], 100-102.

western powers and were exploited by their colonial masters. In the 19th century, Muslims realised they were not only exploited economically but their religious and ethical values had been damaged by European thought. First, they found that western liberalism and nationalism undermined Ottoman society and its thought patterns. Secondly, Muslims felt that western modernity acknowledged not only the historical situation but also Christianity's inherent superiority as a religion and culture as the reason for the Enlightenment in Europe. They felt that while modernity was being forced on Muslim lands it undermined Islamic religion and culture.⁸⁶ Moreover they also found the Christian missionaries openly challenging the credentials of Islam as a religion.⁸⁷ M. A. Anees put it succinctly that "crusade, curiosity, commerce, conversion, conquest and colonisation" have left a deep wound in the psyche of Muslims that continues to haunt Christian-Muslim relations.⁸⁸

In summary: Christianity and Islam are two different religions. They affirm one God but understand the unity of God differently. They recognise the role of prophesy but understand it and assert its culmination differently. While Christianity affirms the immanence of God in Jesus, Islam affirms the universal will of God expressed in the Qur'an. As regards the scriptures, the place of the Qur'an in the lives of Muslims is different from the place of the Bible in the lives of Christians. Thus revelation, prophesy and scriptures are important theological concerns for both Christians and Muslims in the context of better understanding between them. This does not mean that theology is the only major issue that obscures understanding between them. There are hosts of other issues that are at play in their understanding of one another, such as, cultural, political and historical conditions.

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⁸⁶ O.N. Mohammed, *Muslim-Christian Relations: Past, Present, Future*, 37-40.

⁸⁷ J.M. Gaudeul, *Encounters & Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History I A Survey* [Roma: Pontificio Instituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica, 2000], 259-264.

⁸⁸ M.A. Anees, "Historical Light on the Present Situation of Christian-Muslim Relations," Part II, *Newsletter of the Office of Christian-Muslim Relations*, Hartford Seminary, no.38 [July 1988], 2. See also: A. Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Twentieth Century*, 157.

