

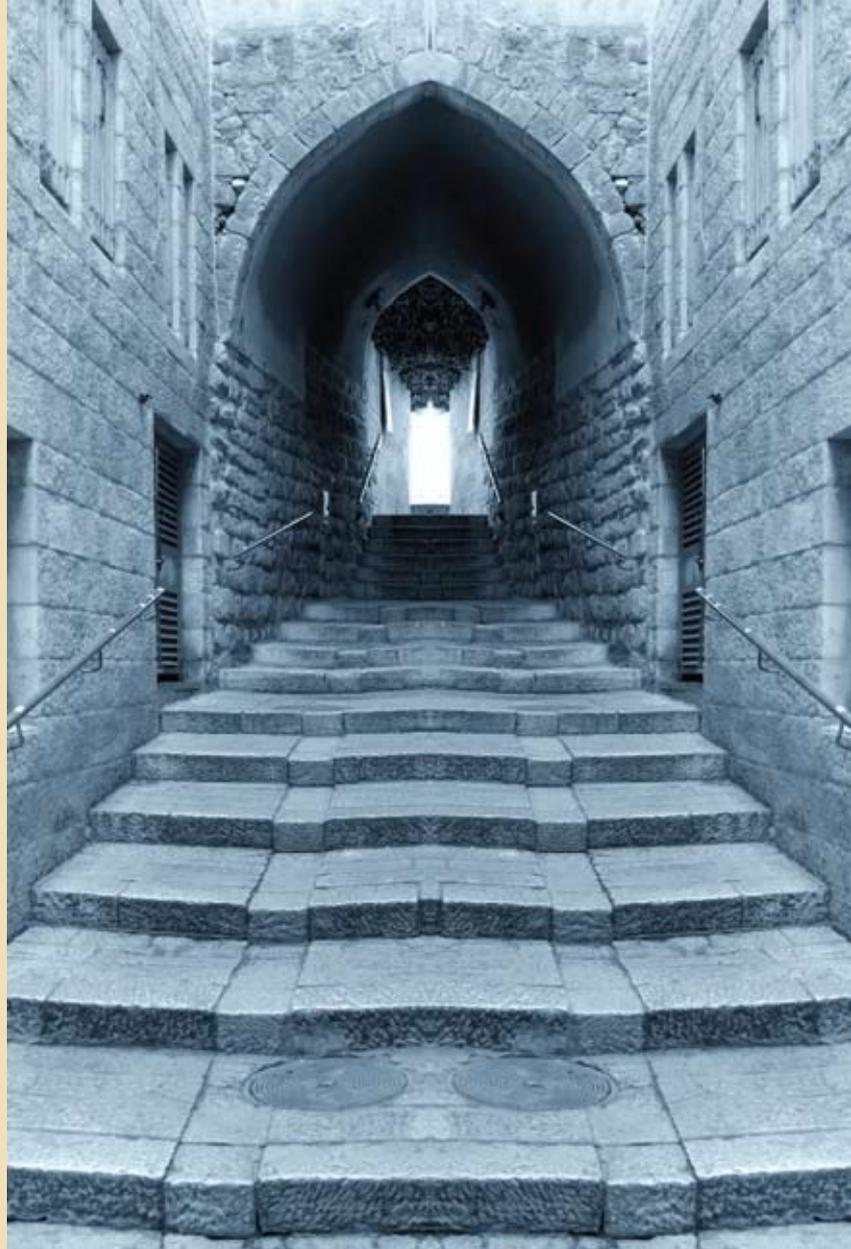
A Comparative Analysis of the Common Word Dialogues



Tabah Memorandum no. 06, October 2008

Subject: A concise review and analysis of *A Common Word*, its history, and the response of Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams.

Summary: *A Common Word between Us and You* is the letter that began an interfaith initiative led by key Muslim institutions and endorsed by prominent Muslim scholars. The focus of the initiative is to identify common ground between Muslims and People of the Book (specifically Christians), and using this common ground to achieve peace and work towards their shared interests and future. The proposal has been welcomed by the Christian community and it has already triggered tangible results. Key among them is the response of the Archbishop of Canterbury in a letter entitled *A Common Word for the Common Good*. The initiative's website address is www.acommonword.com.





I. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE INITIATIVE

The project started with a letter addressed to 27 heads of Christian Churches worldwide that was published in October 2007 – on the one-year anniversary of the joint *Open Letter to the Pope*¹ – bearing the signatures of 138 Muslim scholars (the number of signatories has doubled since then). The letter proposed that the unicity of God and the command to love God and to love one's neighbour are a common ground between Christianity and Islam.

The letter has evoked various responses from Christian leaders, including: Pope Benedict XVI, the Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Former Prime Minister Tony Blair, and a number of Orthodox Christian leaders. There have also been several responses from the Jewish community.

The initiative has also triggered a number of conferences and workshops:

1. **The Yale conference (July 2008):** The workshop, on July 24–28, involved approximately 60 Christian and Muslim scholars, and 3 Jewish observers. The discussions focused on the theological aspects and media dimensions. The larger conference, July 28–31, involving approximately 70 Muslim participants, 70 Christian participants, and 7 Jewish guests, extended the discussions to a larger group of scholars and leaders.

The participants agreed to the following:

- Muslims and Christians affirm the unity and absoluteness of God. God's merciful love is infinite, eternal and embraces all things. This love is central to both our religions and is at the heart of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic monotheistic heritage.
- All human beings have the right to the preservation of life, religion, property, intellect, and dignity. No Muslim or Christian should deny the other these rights, nor should they tolerate the denigration or desecration of one another's sacred symbols, founding figures, or places of worship.
- A commitment to these principles and to furthering them through continuous dialogue.²

The practical outcomes of the conference include:

- A proposal to create an official website for the initiative where Muslims and Christians could recommend books representative of their respective religions and which are appropriate for different ages and address a range of topics.
- Ongoing contact between high-level groups facilitated by Yale University or Aal al-Bayt Institute.

1. *Open Letter to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, 2006*, retrieved 29 October 2008, <http://ammanmessage.com/media/openLetter/english.pdf>.

2. *Final Statement from the Yale Workshop and Conference on A Common Word 24–31 July 2008*, retrieved 30 October 2008, <http://www.acommonword.com/lib/documents/Yale%20draft%20statement.8.pdf>.

- Every year there would be one week where Muslims and Christian religious figures are urged to emphasise the good in the other tradition.
- Publishing a study guide to address frequently asked questions about the Common Word as well as the proceedings of the Yale Conference.
- Carrying the message of a Common Word to their respective communities.³

2. The Cambridge conference (October 2008): The focus of this conference was on the scriptural and hermeneutical aspects of *A Common Word*. Participants celebrated their shared values of love of God and love of neighbour, and reflected on how often we fall short of these standards. Participants stressed that they were deeply troubled by the current threats against the Christian community in Mosul, Iraq, and that partisan violence is not sanctioned by Christianity or Islam. They also said:

We believe that the divine commandment to love our neighbour should prompt all people to act with compassion towards others, to fulfil their duty of helping to alleviate misery and hardship. It is our understanding of shared values that we urge world leaders and our faithful everywhere to act together to ensure that the burden of this financial crisis, and also global environmental crisis, does not fall unevenly on the weak and the poor. We must seize the opportunity for implementing a more equitable global economic system that also respects our role as stewards of the earth's resources.⁴

The participants see *A Common Word* and the Archbishop's response as allowing them to begin exploring areas of potential agreement as well as to identify and diffuse difficult issues. They also discussed their understanding of scripture, shared moral values, respect for foundational figures, religious freedom, and religiously motivated violence. The participants stated that getting together to read their scriptural passages has given them a greater appreciation for the richness of each other's heritage.

The participants made commitments for the following year:

- To identify and promote the use of educational materials, for all age-groups and in the widest possible range of languages, that we accept as providing a fair reflection to our faiths.
- To build a network of academic institutions, linking scholars, students and academic resources, with various committees and teams which can work on shared values.
- To identify funds to facilitate exchanges between those training for roles of leadership within our religious communities.
- To translate significant texts from our two traditions for the use of the other.⁵

The participants expressed the need to ensure that the contents of the two letters and the fruits of the conference be shared with their respective local communities.

3. The future. Future conferences include the Vatican in November 2008, Georgetown in March 2009, Baptism Site in Jordan in December 2009.

3. Ibid.

4. Williams, R and Ali Gomaa Muhammad, *Communiqué from A Common Word Conference*, 2008, retrieved 29 October 2008, <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/2005?q=common+word>.

5. Ibid.



- 4. Progress made between the conferences.** Delegates of the program concurred that the sharing of scriptural readings of the others' tradition at the second conference engendered real feelings of common ground which in the first conference had been talked about as possibilities.⁶

II. THE INVITATION: A COMMON WORD BETWEEN US AND YOU

- 1. A Common Word Between Us and You⁷** is a letter of invitation drafted by H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad (Chairman of the Board of the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute, Jordan) and endorsed by numerous Muslim leaders to Christian leaders that attempts to establish future Muslim and Christian dialogue, collaboration and cooperation towards a better and safer world based on the theological common ground of the unity and love of God, and love of neighbour. Collaboration and cooperation between these two faith traditions are particularly important insofar that they constitute a large portion of the world population.

In laying the theological common ground of love of God and love of neighbour, *A Common Word* quotes the famous *Shema* from the Old Testament: "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), and from the New Testament a reiteration of the *Shema* by Jesus (peace be upon him) when asked about the greatest commandment:

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

Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD

6. Ibid.

7. Bin Muhammed, H.R.H. Prince Ghazi, *A Common Word Between Us and You*, 2007, retrieved 29 October 2008, <http://www.acommonword.com/index.php?lang=en\&page=option1>.

your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:28–31)

According to the letter (*A Common Word*), the Islamic text that most typifies and echoes the message of the above dual commandment is the Prophetic 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’ ” as an expansion on the dual testimonies of faith and the Prophetic tradition that reads: “The best remembrance is: ‘There is no god but God.’ ” The letter proposes how love of God and then love of neighbour can be explained from the above mentioned Islamic texts in combination with other supporting texts. Each discussion is followed by the corresponding Christian perspective on love of God and love of neighbour respectively.

This meant that the stage was now set for calling to a common word between Muslims and Christians based on the texts from the Bible (Old and New Testaments) and the Qur’an that espouse the unicity of God, total love and devotion for God, and love for our fellow human beings. The letter quotes the following Qur’anic injunction as the primary motivation for the call to a common word: *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) (Q 3:64).* He also points out the connection of this verse to both the First and Greatest Commandment and the Second Commandment (albeit somewhat indirect with respect to the Second Commandment). The letter then invites Christians to consider Muslims to be on their side on the basis of the latter’s acceptance of Jesus Christ albeit as a Holy Messenger of God because of the following words of Jesus (peace be upon him): “For he who is not against us is on our side” (Mark 9:40), “...for he who is not against us is on our side” (Luke 9:50).

The letter’s conclusion emphasises that failure to make peace and join together in harmony does not only put our common future or perhaps the very survival of the world at stake, but also our eternal souls.

2. The stated objective: We have a common ground in our belief in the unicity of God and in our love for God and love for neighbour; we need to focus on this common ground – in spite of our differences – in order to bring about peace and secure our common interests and future, both for ourselves and the rest of the world.

3. Critical observations:

- Inferring love of God and love of neighbour from the Prophetic hadith concerning the best remembrance and then connecting this hadith to the *Shema* is somewhat forced. Rather, it seems that the unicity of God is the true common ground.
- The goal of inclusivity might have been better served by employing the hadith which uses the phrase “your brother” (i.e., that one does not truly believe until he loves for his brother that which he loves for himself) as some scholars state that “your brother” applies to all of humanity.
- Although the Common Word project from the outset was geared specifically toward advancing dialogue with the Christian community, there have been questions about the lack of Jewish participation. The initial answer was given that if significant accomplishments could be

achieved between Muslims and Christians, at that point in time a foundation would be provided for discussing the possibility of expanding the scope of the dialogue. This is a very logical question; and international pressure to address it sufficiently should be expected to continue.

- While unicity of God featured prominently in *A Common Word* alongside love of God and love of neighbour, the focus seems now to have shifted to the latter two.
- The terms ‘love of God’ and ‘love of neighbour’ refer to specific concepts within one religion (Christianity), while the concept shared amongst the three (unicity of God) has been for all intents and purposes moved to the background.

III. THE RESPONSE OF ARCHBISHOP ROWAN WILLIAMS

1. **A Common Word for the Common Good** is the response of Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams. The Archbishop, in his response to *A Common Word*, expressed a deep appreciation and welcome for the Common Word initiative, and interpreted it as saying: “let us find a way of recognising that on some matters we are speaking enough of a common language for us to be able to pursue both exploratory dialogue and peaceful co-operation with integrity and without compromising fundamental beliefs.”⁸

The Archbishop then outlined five areas drawn from *A Common Word* that – in his words – can be fruitfully followed through:⁹

- A. With *A Common Word’s* focus on love and praise of God, diverse ways of understanding love of God as an absolute free gift to His creation can be discussed.
- B. Its commitment to love of neighbour suggests a shared passion for the common good of all humanity and creation. The Archbishop later on identifies some practical implications for future relations with each other and with the rest of the world.
- C. With its concern with grounding discussion in scripture, the Archbishop suggests how studying our scriptures together might fruitfully contribute in our engagements with each other in the process of “building a home together” as based on a recent book by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks; this is despite the fact that Christians and Muslims hold very diverse views on the Word of God – Word of God as Jesus vs. Word of God as a supreme communication to Prophet Muhammad.¹⁰
- D. Its encouragement to relate to each other from the heart, if we truly begin from the heart of what we believe we have received from God, will make it possible for us “to speak together, respecting and discussing differences rather than imprisoning ourselves in mutual fear and suspicion”.¹¹
- E. Despite its recognition of real and serious differences between the two faiths, the focus on love of God and neighbour that is offered in it could be “the centre of a sense of shared calling and shared responsibility”.¹²

8. Williams, Rowan, *A Common Word for the Common Good*, 2008, retrieved 29 October 2008, http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/media/word/2/j/A_Common_Word_for_the_Common_Good.doc, 1–2.

9. *Ibid.*, 2–3.

10. *Ibid.*, 3.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

The Archbishop then goes on to explain the dual commandment of love of God and love of neighbour in a section entitled “the One God who is Love” elaborating on:

- how the belief in God as having a son (in his particular Anglican conception) does not place limitations on God’s freedom and sovereignty (as Muslims believe) because God’s begetting a son is not a physical process or event as we know it,¹³
- how the belief of God as a trinity does not contradict His oneness and unity (“God is not the name of a person but of a kind of life that is lived eternally and simultaneously as three inter-related agencies”) and together they equal Love,¹⁴
- exploring the extent to which the Christian God is Love and Muslim God as the Compassionate and Merciful represent a common ground, as a future endeavour,¹⁵
- our love of God is a response to God’s gift of love referred to in (a) above,¹⁶
- how our love of neighbour is an emulation of God’s prior free love for us to which we have responded,¹⁷
- what constitutes the neighbour (i.e., its scope).¹⁸

The Archbishop then explains how certain practical implications (like Common Good) follow from the love of God and neighbour explained previously, and how we should practically go about seeking the Common Good in a section entitled “Seeking the Common Good in the Way of God” stressing the following points:

- The attempt of religious zealots to defend God’s interests and to avert its failure leads to terrorism and religious violence, because such an attempt is a human interference in God’s execution of His own plan. It is also symptomatic of religious insecurity.¹⁹
- Religious plurality is seen as serving the cause of social unity and the common good, and by defending other groups as well as inanimate creatures (i.e., those with and without a voice, e.g., like the environment), you are actually defending yourselves.²⁰
- Our voice in society will be stronger for being a joint voice.²¹

In the subsection “Seeking together in the way of God” the Archbishop suggests some practical steps in terms of the way forward relating to: inter-religious dialogue, imperatives suggested by inter-religious dialogue, scriptural reading (and reasoning) while bearing in mind some of the risks involved in such readings, possible outcomes that we might want to seek from our encounters, and steps for establishing broad priorities for keeping Christian-Muslim relations focused

13. Ibid., 4–5.

14. Ibid. It should be kept in mind that, although this is a gracious effort on the part of Archbishop Rowan Williams to extend bridges of understanding, these interpretations of the trinity are very much his own. Furthermore, the Archbishop is operating within an Anglican context and one should not expect to encounter the same understanding among Evangelicals or Catholics.

15. Ibid., 7.

16. Ibid., 8–10.

17. Ibid., 10–11.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., 12–13.

20. Ibid., 14.

21. Ibid.

on core themes.²²

The Archbishop concludes his response by saying: “So to your invitation to enter more deeply into dialogue and collaboration . . . , we say: Yes!”²³

2. Critical observations:

- The Archbishop shows a great deal of courtesy, respect, and sophistication in his letter. This is evident in his initial salutation, his praise for the inclusion of quotations from other scriptures and explanations based on the original languages,²⁴ his usage of terms like *tawhid* and *shirk*,²⁵ and his quotations from the Qur’an.
- He says that we need to have a more sophisticated understanding of our common ground, and to explore areas where we share a common concept but under a different name. In particular, there is a need to explain, explore, and define what love of neighbour means.
- We need to be aware that some of his points are extracted from Christian concepts of love of God and love of neighbour which carry a sense that is wider than its linguistic combination.
- He expresses his desire to extend the program to include people beyond the People of the Book as well as animals, the environment, and things which lack a voice.
- He proposes grass-roots efforts and building a personal common ground through inter-religious exploration and exchange.
- His call for individuals from the various faiths to interpret scripture together is at odds with traditional scholarly interpretative authority – though he does recognise the need to understand a given scripture as it is understood by its respective religious community.
- The Archbishop proposes extending the scope of Common Word to include more than Muslims, Christians, and Jews. He also proposes a plan for exploring and establishing common ground, but he does not provide a plan for achieving peace and common interests.

IV. ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY: THE ARCHBISHOP’S RESPONSE

The thrust of the letter of invitation (*A Common Word Between Us and You*) is a call to a common word between Muslims and Christians – a call that is motivated by the Qur’anic verse: *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) (Q 3:64)*, and a common word that is based on the unicity of God, love of God and love of Neighbour as stated in the famous *Shema* by Moses in the Old Testament, reiterated by Jesus as the dual commandment in Mark 12:28-31 and Matthew 22:34-40) in the New Testament, and later confirmed by Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) in the following 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.’ ”²⁶ If we as Muslims and Christians come together in

22. *Ibid.*, 15–17.

23. *Ibid.*, 17.

24. *Ibid.*, 3 fn 1.

25. *Ibid.*, 5 fn 5.

26. *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, hadith no. 3934.

mutual cooperation and collaboration it will lead to a better and safer world, and if we fail to do so it will not only put our common future or perhaps the very survival of the world at stake, but also our eternal souls.

The thrust of the letter of response by the Archbishop (*A Common Word for a Common Good*) is to move the invitation forward by drawing from it areas that can be fruitfully followed through – areas that suggest how a Common Word based on (a) a shared exploration and mutual fleshing out of the love of God from our diverse ways of understanding and in accordance with our respective scriptures (notwithstanding how we view the Word of God), and (b) commitment to love of neighbour can seek to identify practical implications for our future relations both with each other and with the rest of the world – the Common Good of all. In doing so, we should relate to each other from the heart of our lives of faith before God respecting and discussing differences rather than imprisoning ourselves in mutual fear and suspicion. While acknowledging that these differences are real and serious it is still possible to find common ground and a shared sense of purpose and responsibility by shifting our focus away from these differences to the love of God and neighbour as per the invitation.

The following are some important points that can be gleaned from the Archbishop's response to the letter's invitation:

- The language used in the invitation allows for openness, exploration and debate, and that such openness, exploration and debate actually exist because of the mutual intelligibility of the languages that we use to describe God in our respective traditions. In other words, there exists sufficient commensurability between the respective Islamic and Christian paradigms so as to make dialogue possible.
- The Archbishop is interested in moving Common Word forward. He feels that five areas that might be fruitfully followed through can be drawn from *A Common Word*, and proceeds to list them. These five areas are subsequently fleshed out in the main body of his response later on as he explains the {the one god who is love}, and how both love for God and love for neighbour follow from God's love for creation. It is also the love for neighbour that makes possible the pursuance of the practical implications for a common good for all. In the end, the Archbishop reduces everything to God's love for creation, from which, he says, follow both love for God and love for neighbour.

NOTE: An analogous concept in Islam to God as Love is reference to Allah's name *al-Wadud* which has a threefold meaning of (a) the one who loves, (b) the one who is loved (i.e., the object of love), and (c) the one who produces love in others.

- The Archbishop suggests exploring in the future our respective understandings and expressions of God's love for us, and how we seek to practise the love of God and neighbour in return.

NOTE: Muslims have a robust theology of *hubb ilahi* (Divine Love) literature which might be useful to develop and incorporate into future discussions with Christians in this regard.

- The Archbishop emphasises that there is a difference in the way the role of God's Word is understood in Islam and in Christianity. For Muslims, he says, it is the Word supremely communicated in what Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is commanded to recite and for Christians the primary location of God's Word is the history of God's people (Old Testament) and the history of Jesus (New Testament), whom they acknowledge as the

word made flesh.

NOTE: For Muslims the Word of God has both a specific meaning and a general meaning. The specific meaning of the Word of God is the locution “Be” through which everything comes into being, and which is also often used in the Quran in relation to Jesus (peace be upon him), since he himself was created through the word “Be”. The general meaning of the Word of God is what we call the “Speech of Allah” of which the Quran is an expression. Then there is the plural form “Words of Allah” that is used often times in the Quran. Another important point is the Jewish understanding of “Word of God” as used in the Old Testament which is closer to that of the Muslims. There remains a need to conduct a philosophical and theological study of the Logos, and its incorporation into Christianity.

- The Archbishop also suggests how studying the respective scriptures together can enrich mutual engagements for “building a home together”.
- He suggests the need to respect and discuss each other’s differences instead of “imprisoning ourselves in mutual fear and suspicion”.
- The directions that the response looks toward are: (a) to encourage more reflection within Christian community, (b) to promote honest encounter between Christians and Muslims, and (c) to ask about possible foundations for shared work and shared challenge to all those things which obscure God’s purpose for humanity.
- In response to the Muslims’ claim that God’s having a son places limitations on God’s freedom and sovereignty, the Archbishop asserts that God’s begetting a son is not something physical or a process or event like the processes and events in the world; God is not the name of a person but of a kind of life that is lived eternally and simultaneously as three interrelated agencies; God is at once the source of divine life, the expression of that life, and the active power that communicates that life.
- According to the Archbishop there is indeed just One God (the Living and Self-subsistent), but what God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) is and does is not different from the three-fold pattern of life, i.e., source and expression and sharing; God’s life is always an intelligent, purposeful and loving life, i.e., centre of mind and love (a person); humanity has a limited share in the characteristics of divine life; three dimensions of divine life relate to each other in self-sacrifice and self-giving expressed as love; God as threefold has never compromised the unity of God, and by understanding God as a unity of love, Christians intensify and enrich their belief in the indivisible unity of God expressed in Augustine’s “all the actions of the Trinity outside itself are indivisible.”

NOTE: It would be useful to develop a rigorous treatment of theological responses to the various Trinitarian doctrines in Christianity illustrated in contemporary language. How does this conception of the trinity mesh with certain other Christian concepts such as Jesus’ Subordination (to the Father), and is this understanding of the trinity universal and shared amongst Trinitarian Christians? Another study worth conducting is the concept of the ‘Holy Ghost’ in Islam, and how it compares with the concept of ‘Holy Ghost’ found in each of the Old and New Testaments.

- The Archbishop proposes the following area for future work: To what extent do the Christian conviction of God as Love and the all-important Islamic conviction that God is “the Compassionate, the Merciful” represent common ground, and to what extent do differences need to

be spelled out further?

NOTE: In Islam the Name “Allah” encompasses all the Most Beautiful Names and Most Perfect Attributes of which Mercy and Love are but two attributes. As Muslims we do not regard Allah as being merely an attribute whether that attribute be “Love” or any other attribute but rather a pre-eternally existing essence characterised by attributes of Perfection and Majesty.

- The Archbishop says that the Psalms – like the language used in the letter – teach that God is to be continually celebrated, and life of faith is to be filled with Praise of God; we love God for who He is, under all circumstances, joining all creatures in the chorus of universal praise (Psalms 113:1–6) and echoed in some of the Qur’anic verses quoted in the letter.
- Praise and honour to God is in many ways the heart of the new life - the conviction that the love of God lives in us through his Holy Spirit, that to God do we owe the very breath of life within us, is the motivation for our response to God’s love – both in loving God and in loving neighbour.
- According to the Archbishop, *A Common Word’s* treatment of the love of the neighbour is relatively brief and is an opportunity for further future exploration.

NOTE: In light of the definition and scope of the neighbour that the Archbishop has provided on behalf of Christianity, Muslims might benefit from providing their own definition and scope of the neighbour as per the Islamic tradition which could then be developed into a fully-fledged ‘Theology of the Other’.

- For Christians, 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.
- The neighbour has a wide and universal application and includes loving those who do not necessarily reciprocate your love; the Archbishop states the following Qur’anic verse as reflecting this idea: *God may still bring about affection between you and your present enemies ...* (Q 60:7) and concludes that where love replaces enmity we can recognise the work and way of God.

NOTE: See also the following Qur’anic verse: *The good deed and the evil deed are not alike. Repel the evil deed with one which is better, then lo! he, between whom and thee there was enmity (will become) as though he was a bosom friend* (Q 41:34).

- In the section dealing with the Common Good the Archbishop discusses the practical implications that follow from love of God and neighbour. Here the main ideas are:
 - Human attempts to force a defence of God’s interests and to avert failure of His plan lead to terrorism and religious violence, as we cannot affect the way God wants to execute His plan (i.e., Divine matters cannot be forced by human agency).
 - Religious plurality serves the cause of social unity and acts as a force for the common good, hence we learn that we can best defend ourselves by defending others, and defense of each other should lead in turn to defense of other groups and communities as well as that which has no ‘voice’; or power of its own – our injured and abused material environment; our voice in society will be stronger for being a joint voice

NOTE: Muslims need to reassert their ‘theology of the environment’. Its content includes: Islam and the proper treatment of animals and plants (‘Izz al-Din ‘Abd al-Salam); Islam and nature (Ibn Tufayl); Islam and natural resources (al-Raghib); Islam and sustainability (al-Shatibi); and so forth.

- The Archbishop remarks that “*A Common Word Between Us and You* issues a powerful call to dialogue between Christians and Muslims” and how much has already been achieved in this regard.
- In terms of the way forward he suggests:
 - Drawing from Vatican doc. 1991 *Dialogue and Proclamation*’s four categories of inter-religious dialogue: (a) the dialogue of life, (b) the dialogue of action, (c) the dialogue of theological exchange, and (d) the dialogue of religious experience; three imperatives are suggested by this: (a) to strengthen grass-roots partnerships and programmes between our communities working towards justice, peace and the common good; (b) to intensify the shared theological discussions and research of religious leaders and scholars ..., and (c) to deepen the appreciation of Christian and Muslim believers for each other’s religious practice and experience, as they come to recognise one another as people whose lives are oriented towards God in love.
 - Despite differences concerning how God’s Word is viewed, the Archbishop suggests that reading the Scriptures is a constant source of inspiration, nurture and correction, and this makes it very appropriate for Christians and Muslims to listen to, and question one another, in the course of reading and interpreting the texts; while the use of scriptures in inter-religious dialogue has considerable potential, the Archbishop warns that there are risks also in this approach when we think we know or understand another’s sacred texts but in fact are reading them exclusively through our own spectacles; working out guidelines, practices and educational resources for this element of engagement.
 - The Archbishop suggests three possible outcomes from these encounters: (a) maintaining and strengthening of the current Christian-Muslim encounter, (b) finding spaces within which the differences – convergences – between Christians and Muslims can be honestly and creatively articulated and explored, and (c) ensuring that our encounters are not for the participants alone, but are capable of having an influence which affects people more widely – Christians and Muslims at the level of our local communities, and also those engaged in wider realities of our societies and our world
 - to keep Christian-Muslim relations focused on core themes, the Archbishop suggests the following three steps for establishing broad priorities (a) urgent need in both traditions for mutual education, (b) multiplying opportunities for lived encounter with people of different faiths, (c) commitment to the process and to one another for encounters to be sustainable over a long period of time.

NOTE: Muslims will need to assess to what extent they are prepared to adopt and move forward on the Archbishop’s suggestions above. Muslims participating in the dialogue may wish to review their existing strategy in light of developments that have accrued throughout the course of the project to date; identifying and delineating directions for the path that lays ahead.

- The Archbishop concludes his response by saying: “So to your invitation to enter more deeply into dialogue and collaboration . . . , we say: Yes!”

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Muslims need to keep in mind that common ground is not itself the goal, but is instead a means for achieving peace and pursuing common interests.
- The English phrases “love of God” and “love of neighbour” are likely to be identified with Christianity, so Muslims need to be aware that the initiative is currently framed in predominantly Christian terminology.
- Muslims need to ensure that nuances in terminology do not undermine commonly held principles, i.e., some of the things Christians see as expressions of love, we see as part of our responsibility as custodians of the earth.
- Muslims need to realise that participants in Common Word will have to take care to treat others with respect and courtesy regardless of past or current events. Just as the historical Crusades and the current occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, for example, do not prevent interaction with Christians; Zionist occupation of Palestine does not prevent interaction with adherents of Judaism.
- Significant Sunni involvement is necessary in order to guarantee that there is a Sunni presence in the initiative.
- A study should be made to see how polytheists, atheists, and other religious communities fit within the scope of Common Word, since this may prove contentious.
- Muslims must understand that the Christian understanding of openness to the other faiths is necessarily an expression of an underlying concession to liberalism that informs their theological development through the modern period.
- It should be understood that within the context of contemporary theological developments that the love expressed in the phrase, “love of God”, when not informed by the knowledge of God leads to love becoming an end in itself rather than God himself.
- Muslims need to identify which theological modalities they will use to engage the other faiths in dialogue; including atheists and other modern philosophies. Otherwise they will risk embarking upon dialogue under the auspices of either a secularism at one end or a syncretist viewpoint at the other.
- There must be a mission statement that understands that the theological aims of the Christians in dialogue can only be truly accessed through our theological tradition of Kalam in its widest sense.

VI. REFERENCES

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