

PREFACE

The Common Word and the Response

On 12 September 2006, Pope Benedict XVI delivered a speech at the University of Regensburg, Germany which contained some comments on Islam that led to widespread protests by Muslims around the world¹. On 12 October 2006, 38 top Muslim scholars and clerics, published an *Open Letter to the Pope* criticising his stance on Islam². One year later, on 11 October 2007, a larger group of 138 Muslim scholars, clerics and intellectuals sent another open letter, entitled *A Common Word Between Us and You*³, to Pope Benedict and the leaders of other Christian denominations. In it the Muslim scholars state,

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

This *Common Word* document has received many responses from individuals and institutions. The most highly-publicised response was written by a group of four academics from the University of Yale, entitled *Loving God and Neighbour Together*⁴ and has been endorsed by over 300 Christian leaders from around the world. This document accepts the basic propositions of the *Common Word* and, in places, goes beyond them. The Yale response attributes the title ‘Prophet’ to Mohammed and explicitly apologises for the Crusades – neither of which was called for in the original wording of the *Common Word*. The Yale scholars referred to the *Common Word* as ‘historic’ and as identifying some “*core common ground between Christianity and Islam*”. They state,

“We receive the open letter as a Muslim hand of conviviality and cooperation extended to Christians worldwide. In this response we extend our own Christian hand in return, so that together with all other human beings we may live in peace and justice as we seek to love God and our neighbours.”

In another area in which the response goes surprisingly beyond the *Common Word*, is the assertion by the authors of the *Response* that:

“What is common between us lies not in something marginal nor in something merely important to each. It lies, rather, in something absolutely central to both: love of God and love of neighbour.”

Neither “common” nor “new”...and certainly no true “invitation”

Is the *Common Word* the new and historic invitation to the Church and Christendom that it is being proclaimed to be? Certainly in the *Response*, some 300 Christian scholars received it as such—before some analysed it and exposed the smoke and mirrors of illusion employed by the writers to give the impression of a common ground that is *not* there. As the following pages show, no such common ground can be supported from the pages of the Qur’an itself. Thankfully, some signatories took note of this warning and removed their names from the response document. Others remained resolute - still under the illusion that the *Common Word* is indeed an open door and a golden opportunity to sit and dialogue with high-level Muslim

¹ See “Muslims Condemn Pope for ‘insulting Prophet’ by Damien McElroy, *The Daily Telegraph*, 16/09/2006.

² See www.ammanmessage.com/media/openletter/english.pdf

³ See Appendix C (see also www.acommonword.com)

⁴ See Appendix D (see also <http://www.yale.edu/faith/about-commonword.htm>)

clerics over the issues dear to Christianity - in the hopes of being able to establish the differences as well as the perceived commonalities. Tragically, their understandable love for the lost and opportunity for dialogue seems to have caused them to downplay the biblical revelation which shows unequivocally that the *Allah* of the Qur'an cannot be our God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob⁵. These scholars seem to have forgotten that 'love' must always be wedded to 'truth'⁶ - the whole truth, not just shards of truth patched together to give an illusion which this present booklet exposes the *Common Word* to be.

The *Response* does not seem to be aware that "*the love of God and love of neighbour*" taught in the Bible and championed by Christ, cannot be supported by even one *surah* in the Qur'an. Thus, though the *Common Word* appears to put forward true common ground between Islam and Christianity, and purports to be an invitation to seek even more common ground through dialogue - it is in fact a patchwork of partial Qur'anic and Biblical references designed to give an *illusion* of a commonality worthy of Shakespeare's frequent treatment of appearance and reality in which he demonstrates that "oft, things are not what they seem...".

The *Common Word* is certainly not new. It is nothing more than a 21st Century version of the call to unity and peace which Mohammad issued to Byzantium before his death in the 7th century - a call which has resounded again and again since that time throughout history, just before the Islamic forces moved in to make good militarily their claims to the right to rule politically by divine decree. However, there is an historic *aspect* of the document - this is the first time in history that so many Islamic scholars from around the globe, both *Sunni* and *Shi'ite*, have participated in reiterating this 'call' or 'invitation' using (or, indeed, abusing) the Christian Scriptures to back it up.

That the *Common Word* is an invitation is indisputable, but not the one which it appears to be. It is but a 21st Century reincarnation of essentially the same wording as every challenge to the Church and Christendom since the days of Mohammad - and it is based on the same Qur'anic mandate, *surah* 3:64⁷. As this booklet shows, the terms which are imbedded within are a far cry from those perceived by the Christian signatories to the *Response*.

Is Islamic love the same as Christian love?

After examining Islamic sources on the issue of comparing love in Islam versus Christianity, one can easily conclude that Muslim scholars are in agreement on one key point: love in the Qur'an is very different from the love in Christianity or the Bible. As a starter, the word 'love' is interpreted by them as an emotional attachment between two persons. Hence, Allah does not 'love' in this sense. When the Qur'an says, "*Allah does not love the unbelievers,*" what is meant here, they say, is that Allah does not 'approve' of the unbelievers, and when Allah says, "*He loves the believers,*" he is simply stating that he approves of their behaviour. Of course this is quite different from the Christian unconditional love, and the full meaning of what is known as 'agape love' in the Bible. In Christianity, God always wants to have a relationship with us, as He created us in His own image. The ultimate expression is of course

⁵ *Surah* 109 *Say (O Muhammad to these Mushrikûn and Kâfirûn): "O Al-Kâfirûn (disbelievers in Allâh, in His Oneness, in His Angels, in His Books, in His Messengers, in the Day of Resurrection, and in Al-Qadar, etc.)! I worship not that which you worship, Nor will you worship that which I worship. And I shall not worship that which you are worshipping. Nor will you worship that which I worship. To you be your religion, and to me my religion (Islâmic Monotheism)."*

⁶ *Ephesians* 4:21 *...if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus...*

⁷ *Sura* 3:64 *Say "O people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians): Come to a word that is just between us and you, that we worship none but Allah, and that we associate no partners with Him, and that none of us shall take others as lords besides Allah. Then, if they turn away, say: "Bear witness that we are Muslims."*

given in John 3:16, “*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*” This overall theme needs a detailed treatment. In our report, we focus more on the issue of “love of neighbour” as it is a key consideration in the *Common Word*. At best, love of neighbour in Islam is restricted to Muslims, whereas the Christian expression is universal, again, as an application of John 3:16.

How then shall we proceed?

In the final analysis what is at stake here? Is it world peace, economic well-being or personal security? We believe that although these are highly desirable outcomes, our Christian heritage tells us that there are much more foundational matters to consider. The 138 Muslim scholars are spiritually lost, not because their arguments are veiled forms of the classical Islamic *Da’wa* (In Arabic, invitation to Islam), but because they are being exposed to the truth of the Bible and yet they don’t see it - they are examples of what the prophet Isaiah wrote to his people, “*And He (God) said, “Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’”* (Isaiah 6:9) On the other hand, the 300 (minus a few dissenters) Christian theologians seem to be more attracted to the prize of a delusional ‘peace’ than by their duty to confront error with truth. The *Response* did not demonstrate at any level what Jesus would have done and said had He received the *Common Word* letter. He would have agonised over the lost Islamic Scholars and challenged them with the truth of His claims. He would surely have asked the 300 Christian leaders: *What did you do to promote my message?*

This discourse is neither complete nor definitive, but it may point us in the right direction. The conclusion section will describe that - not because we want to expand Christianity for the sake of expansion, but because we care about the souls of the 138 scholars, their salvation and the salvation of all the Muslims.

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London, March 2008