

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



OFFICE OF HRH PRINCE  
Ghazi Bin Mohammed Bin Talal

Amman, Jordan,  
December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2007 CE  
pgo : 14 / / / 990

Your Eminence,

Thank you for your kind letter dated November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007, a copy of which was delivered to me by the Papal Nuncio to Jordan on November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2007. I am only one of the 138 initial signatories of the Open Letter *A Common Word between Us and You*, but in order to respond to your letter, I have contacted and consulted a number of the senior Muslim authorities and religious scholars who signed or have since supported the Open Letter, and they have graciously consented to my co-ordinating this affair on their behalf. Thus I can now respond, on their behalf and on my own, as follows:

First, we thank you for your response, letter and amicable suggestions. Please also convey our thanks also to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for his personal encouragement and concern.

Second, we, too, are most willing to meet with His Holiness in Rome. Indeed, we are mindful and heartened by the recent visit of H.M. King Abd Allah bin Abd Al-Aziz of Saudi Arabia, the Custodian of the Two Holy Sites, to the Vatican.

Third, we do accept, in principle, the dialogue that you have proposed and the general concept and arrangements. We will, however, send at your convenience in February or March 2008, God Willing, three representatives to work out with Your Eminence or Your Eminence's representatives the details of the arrangements and the procedures. Should Your Eminence have particular dates that you would prefer within that window of time, please do inform us accordingly.

Fourth, we receive Your Eminence's letter as a response to our own Open Letter *A Common Word*. Moreover, Your Eminence says that: 'His Holiness was particularly impressed by the attention given in the letter to the twofold commandment to love God and one's neighbour' and 'that we can and therefore should look to what unites us, namely, belief in the

One God, the provident Creator and universal Judge who at the end of time will deal with each person according to his or her actions', all the while 'without ignoring or downplaying our differences as Christians and Muslims'. We thus understand that the *intrinsic* dimension of this particular Catholic-Muslim dialogue of ours will be based, God Willing, on our letter *A Common Word*—which, as you know, is essentially an affirmation of the One God, and of the twofold commandment to love Him and one's neighbour—even if it transpires that there are differences between us in the interpretation or comprehension of the text of this letter, each in accordance with their own religious sensibilities and traditions. These differences themselves are presumably also a matter for discussion between us, and should be an occasion for mutual respect and celebration, and not divisive disputation.

We believe also that H.H. Pope Benedict XVI has proposed the Ten Commandments (of Exodus 20:2-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21) as a basis of dialogue between Jews, Christians and Muslims. We have no objection to regarding this excellent idea, additionally, as the basis of the *extrinsic* dimension of our dialogue (since these Commandments are also repeatedly enjoined in the Holy Qur'an in various forms), notwithstanding the Commandment to keep the Sabbath, which the Holy Qur'an mentions as having been Divinely instituted for the Ancient Israelites, but which Muslims are no longer enjoined to keep as such. By 'intrinsic' I mean that which refers to our own souls and their inner make-up, and by 'extrinsic' I mean that which refers to the world and thus to society.

It is on this common intellectual and spiritual basis, then, that we understand that we are to pursue, God Willing, a dialogue in the three general topics of dialogue Your Eminence wisely mentioned in your letter: (1) 'Effective respect for the dignity of every human person'; (2) 'Objective knowledge of the religion of the other' through 'sharing of religious experience', and (3) 'A common commitment to promoting mutual respect and acceptance among the younger generation'. We could also perhaps discuss how to bring the results of our dialogue on these three topics to practical fruition between Christians and Muslims, based also on *A Common Word* and the Ten Commandments (notwithstanding the aforementioned proviso about the Sabbath).

Fifth, our *vision* of dialogue was expressed exactly by the *Communiqué* of some of the Muslim delegates on the occasion of the encounter "*FOR A WORLD WITHOUT VIOLENCE: Religions and Cultures in Dialogue*", (Naples, 21-23 October 2007, at the community of Saint Egidio), which said:

Dialogue is by definition between people of different views, not people of the same view. Dialogue is not about imposing one's views on the other side, nor deciding oneself what the other side is and is not capable of, nor even of what the other side believes. Dialogue starts with an open hand and an open heart. It proposes but does not set an agenda unilaterally. It is about *listening* to the other side as it speaks freely for itself, as well as about expressing one's own self. Its purpose is to see where there is common ground in order to meet there and thereby make the world better, more peaceful, more harmonious and more loving.

Our *motive* for dialogue is essentially one of wanting to seek goodwill and justice in order to practice what we Muslims call *rahmah* (and what you may be pleased to call *caritas*) in order thereby to seek in turn *Rahmah* from God. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: *He who does not show mercy, will not be shown Mercy* (Sahih Bukhari, Kitab Al-Adab, no.6063).

Finally, our *method* of dialogue is in accordance with the Divine Commandment in the Holy Qur'an: *Do not contend with the people of the Scripture except in the fairest way, save those of them that inflict wrong (and injury); but say, 'We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and the revelation which has come down to you and your God and our God is One, and unto Him we surrender'* (Al-Ankabut, 29:46).

We trust, of course, that you have a similar general attitude towards dialogue since we happily read (in 1 Corinthians 13:1-6) the words of St. Paul:

*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. / And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. / And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. / Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, / Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; / Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;*

I mention these last things only in view of some recent pronouncements emerging from the Vatican and from Vatican advisors—which cannot have escaped the notice of Your Eminence—as regards the very principle of theological dialogue with Muslims. Howbeit, although many of us consider these pronouncements as having been superseded by your letter, we nevertheless wish to reiterate to you that we, like you, also consider complete theological agreement between Christians and Muslims inherently not possible by definition, but still wish to seek and promote a common stance and co-operation based upon what we do agree on (as mentioned above)—whether we wish to call this kind of dialogue 'theological' or 'spiritual' or something else—for the sake of the common good and towards the good of the whole world, God Willing.

I take this occasion to extend to your person my best wishes and profound respects and ask that you convey to H.H. Pope Benedict XVI our best wishes in advance for a most joyous and peaceful Christmas.

العبد الفقير إلى ربه العظيم

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Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal

والحمد لله وحده