Loving God and Neighbor Together: A Christian Response to a Common Word Between Us and You

On October 13, 2007, on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, 138 Muslim scholars and clerics sent an open letter to "leaders of Christian churches, everywhere." The signatories to that letter, titled A Common Word Between Us and You, include top leaders from around the world representing every major school of Islamic thought. The letter was issued in the name of the Islamic Academy of Al-Azhar University, Al-Azhar University in Egypt, and a host of other leading Christian and Muslim religions. The letter called for an end to terrorism and called for the cessation of war in Iraq and Afghanistan. The letter was signed by more than 100 leaders from both the Muslim and Christian religious communities. Planning is underway for a Westminster dialogue between selected religious leaders from both communities. The Westminster dialogue will take place in the spring of 2009.

Preamble

We, the members of the worldwide Christian community, were deeply encouraged and challenged by the recent historic open letter signed by 138 Islamic scholars and clerics appealing for a dialogue around the world. A Common Word Between Us and You — the letter titled A Common Word Between Us and You — is signed by the Islamic Academy of Al-Azhar University, Al-Azhar University in Egypt, and a host of other leading Christian and Muslim religions.

The leaders to whom this letter is addressed—leaders of Christian churches everywhere—are encouraged to respond in a similar manner to their own religious community. We believe the political and social challenges of this new century require new models of religion and new forms of religious understanding. We believe that the way we speak and act in the world can contribute to the alleviation of suffering and the promotion of the common good.

The letter calls on Muslims and Christians to cooperate in establishing a day for the resolution of differences. The letter also calls on Christians and Muslims to commit to a shared understanding of the principles of love and justice.

You may be surprised to read in the New Testament: “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Our love, Jesus Christ, who gave to those who withhold from you, and to forgive those who have wronged you (Matthew 5:44-45). Our love, Jesus Christ, who took the speck out of your neighbor’s eye” (Matthew 18:5). The Prophet Muhammad did similarly when he read in the Koran: “Our eternal souls” are at stake as well.

For the sake of our and your neighbors, they are not against them, the document says that they are not against each other, and the neighbors run out to be our enemies. "But I say unto you," says Jesus Christ, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good. (Matthew 5:44). Our love, Jesus Christ says, must imitate the love of the infinitely good Creator; we must live not by the standards of God’s—extension to brothers, sisters, neighbors, and even enemies. At the end of his life, Jesus himself prayed for his enemies, that they may know that they do not know what they are doing (Luke 23:34). The time has come for us to work together—Christians and Muslims alike—to engage in meaningful and authentic dialogue that seeks to reach beyond our differences to the deeper truths that we share in common.

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