

An Open Letter

*A response to the letter and call entitled
"A Common word between Us and You" from
138 Muslim Religious Leaders addressed
to Christian Leaders worldwide*

The Maranatha Community

April 2008

This statement is addressed by the Maranatha Community to:

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This is in response to the open letter
“*A Common Word between Us and You*”, published by 138 Muslim
Scholars and available at www.acommonword.com

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The Maranatha Community comprises thousands of Christians drawn from all the major Christian traditions, praying, working and serving as one. We are Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Methodists, Baptists, Pentecostals, and members of the Salvation Army, United Reformed, Orthodox and New Churches. We speak for ourselves, but also represent the views and feelings of many Christians worldwide.

Maranatha's membership includes a substantial number of people involved in work for the wider community in both professional and voluntary capacities. Since its formation 27 years ago, it has been deeply involved in a broad range of relief work in many countries and in the care of people from other countries resident in the United Kingdom who are in need.

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Introduction

IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR

As Christians in all the major different denominations we extend a warm greeting to our Muslim friends in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We welcome your “*Common Word*” as an important and timely statement of faith. As Christians we express our respect and admiration for the great sincerity and dedication of many Muslims throughout the world. Like Christians, they are seeking to find the truth, and seeking to find life and eternal salvation. Our paramount desire is for good relations between Muslims and Christians and for collaboration in those areas where there is common ground. You will appreciate that at the outset we must affirm the proclamation of Jesus that He is *The way, the truth and the life* (John 14.6).

We have given much thought and prayer to your Open Letter. The relationship between Muslims and Christians has not been free from tensions: indeed, there are many areas in the world today where there is violence between Muslims and Christians. We cannot answer for Muslims, but we recognise that some Christians, at some times, have not always followed the *Prince of Peace* (Isaiah 9.6) in word or deed in their dealings with Muslims. In those cases they should ask their Muslim friends for forgiveness.

The “*Common Word*” rightly asserts the commands of Jesus to love. Christian teaching has always held that love and truth must be upheld and promoted in balance together, since God himself is love (1 John 4.8) and truth (John 1.14). Yet a fruitful dialogue between Muslims and Christians cannot ignore the difficult issues that separate our two faiths.

We find much in the Qur’an about love and kindness with which we wholeheartedly agree. There are, however, teachings with which we remain uneasy. We do not believe there is any value in ignoring real concerns. Problems are not resolved if it is pretended that they do not exist. We believe it to be very important for genuine conversations between Muslims and Christians to be carried out with mutual respect and a shared desire for truth.

As Christians, we are painfully aware that the British society we live in is becoming increasingly anti-Christian. Our nation has forsaken its rich Christian inheritance. Like our Muslim friends we deeply deplore developments such as the sexualisation of society, sexual promiscuity, the widespread availability of pornography, increasing family breakdown, the easy availability of abortion, widespread drug and alcohol misuse even among children, lawlessness and violence. There are many other issues of grave concern over which Christians and Muslims share very similar concerns and there is a need for us to work together on these issues. However, none of these signs of decline constitute the hallmark of a Christian nation. All this is what happens when a nation such as ours *forsakes* its Christian roots.¹ We are not surprised therefore that many Muslims see “the Christian West” as decadent, and want to withdraw from Western society. We are saddened by the understandable but totally incorrect assumption that the term “Western” equates to the term “Christian”.

¹ Over 12 years ago and again two years ago, we felt compelled to issue two warnings, presented in the UK Parliament, to this nation called “*The State of Our Nation*”, which included factual evidence on the deteriorating situation in this country.

I. Our Starting Point

As Christians we declare our great love for those who follow other religions, including Muslims. We pray that the Creator God, who is the author of peace and the lover of concord, will enable Christians and Muslims to live together in peace throughout the world. We commit ourselves to working for good relationships. As a Christian community we have been directly involved in many initiatives for peace and emergency relief and we were deeply involved in aid to Muslims during the Kosovo crisis.

We believe that the Creator is a God of justice and we therefore pray for an end to all injustices suffered by any person, anywhere, for any reason. We believe that the Creator is Lord and His desire is that we should all acknowledge Him to be Father and the source of all love.

The call of the Creator God made so clearly in the Scriptures of the Holy Bible is that we should all be children under His Fatherhood. We believe He has revealed His love to us fully in His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. The way of Jesus is the way of peace and love and it is in His name that we address this letter to you.

We have to say that we are saddened and concerned that in so many countries Christian believers are suffering persecution under Islam. This suffering is very well documented, and we respectfully ask you to share with us in this concern. We would express similar concern for any Muslim anywhere who suffers for his faith. To ignore this crucial issue will only inflict more harm on relationships between Christians and Muslims. The issue of the persecution of individuals for their religious convictions should be freely and openly considered by Christians and Muslims together.

We recognise that Islam, like Christianity, is a missionary movement. There will, therefore, inevitably be limitations on the extent of our agreement. However, we believe that if Christians and Muslims agree to openly declare a respect and love for one another and for all human life, there is a way forward together. We believe all humankind is made in the image of the Creator God and as such every man, woman and child must be respected and treated with dignity regardless of their personal faith. We accept the 'golden rule' found in many cultures and affirmed by Jesus, namely 'do to others what you would have them do to you'.

A true and meaningful dialogue must address difficult issues such as the fate of those who leave Islam and adopt other beliefs ('apostasy'), who are frequently persecuted or killed by Muslims. We would need to address the issue of how a number of Muslims who live in Western societies seem to have their main loyalty to shari'a rather than the law of their host nation, and often appear to despise the societies and democracies they live in. We need to address the issue of terrorism and violence perpetrated in the name of Islam, and the persecution of Christians in the name of Islam.

When the disciples of Jesus chose to defend Him with the sword, Jesus replied "*Put your sword back in its place...for all who draw the sword will die by the sword*" (Mt. 26.52). His kingdom is *not of this world* (John 18.36), but a Kingdom of peace and love that starts in our hearts, a Kingdom that will have *no end* (Isaiah 9.7). The answer to the collapse of our society is not violent change, but transformation that comes out of God's love. Let us, therefore, pray and work for His Kingdom to come.

2. Areas that Christians and Muslims need to consider together

Various Muslim-Christian dialogues are currently in progress and we warmly welcome these. However, in our experience, some dialogue, perhaps out of an over-cautious wish not to offend, fails to address some of the fundamental issues which cause friction between our faiths.

We respectfully propose that the following areas, which we examine further below, need to be considered jointly by Christians and Muslims:

1. Injustice from Christian and Muslim perspectives
2. Shari'a law and human rights, in both Muslim countries and Western societies.
3. Religious freedom, including the issue of apostasy.
4. Religious persecution
5. The integration of Muslims into Western society.
6. Terrorism.

Shari'a law & human rights, in both Muslim countries & Western societies

Some shari'a law is incompatible with Western democracy and the modern concept of human rights. This has been recognised in a recent decision by the European Court of Human Rights. We note here an area of severe disagreement between "the West" and Islam. This issue is therefore one that needs to be addressed in any genuine dialogue between Muslims and Christians.

There are a number of areas where shari'a law contrasts with accepted Western law:

- Many Western countries consider rape within marriage (sexual intercourse between a married couple without mutual consent) illegal. However, according to the Hanafi School of Law, Islamic law would allow a husband to "enjoy her [his wife] by force".
- The age of marriage is 16 years in Britain, but Islam allows sex within marriage at the age of 9 when girls are not physically mature. (Sahih Bukhari 7.88).
- Islam allows polygamy, which is prohibited in Western countries.
- If either of a couple converts from Islam, Islamic law imposes divorce. Divorce on the grounds of religious conversion is not known in Western law.
- Under Islamic law, men and women are treated unequally. For example, the testimony of a woman counts much less than that of a man; a man can divorce his wife easily but a wife can only get a divorce with difficulty.

We are deeply concerned that there still appears to be unanimous agreement among the key Islamic schools of law that the punishment for apostasy is death. The influential Islamic theologian Abdul Ala Mawdudi states in his book "The Punishment of the Apostate according to Islamic Law" that:

"To everyone acquainted with Islamic law it is no secret that according to Islam the punishment for a Muslim who turns to kufr (infidelity, blasphemy) is execution. Doubt about this matter first arose among Muslims during the final portion of the nineteenth century as a result of speculation. Otherwise, for the full twelve centuries

*prior to that time the total Muslim community remained unanimous about it. The whole of our religious literature clearly testifies that ambiguity about the matter of the apostate's execution never existed among Muslims. The expositions of the Prophet, the Rightly-Guided Caliphs (Khulafa'-i Rashidun), the great Companions (Sahaba) of the Prophet, their Followers (Tabi'un), the leaders among the mujtahids and, following them, the doctors of the shari'a of every century are available on record. All these collectively will assure you that from the time of the Prophet to the present day one injunction only has been continuously and uninterruptedly operative and that no room whatever remains to suggest that perhaps the punishment of the apostate is not execution."*²

We must also record our continuing and profound dismay at other punishments used as part of shari'a law: including amputation of hands or feet for theft, flogging for alcoholism.

We are also deeply concerned about the increasing numbers of shari'a courts being established in the UK. We assume this is also occurring in other Western countries with a significant Muslim presence. We can only interpret this as meaning that a substantial number of individuals, within the Muslim communities concerned, decide not to fully integrate into the society of the host country in which they have chosen to live and are refusing to accept in entirety the legal system of the country that has afforded them a home. This is a matter of grave concern.

We further note with concern the serious human rights abuses documented by many authorities, including Amnesty International, in Muslim and part-Muslim countries as a result of shari'a. We cite regions such as Northern Nigeria, where horrific human rights abuses have occurred through the enforcement of shari'a in communities where people belong to a number of different religions.

Religious freedom, including the issues of apostasy

We note the lack of religious freedom in many Muslim countries relative to the West. It is usually possible for Muslims to build mosques in Western countries, but it is often difficult or even impossible for Christians to build churches in Muslim countries.

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed by most Muslim countries worldwide, states: *"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."*

We note with sadness that the application of shari'a law on apostasy in many Islamic countries has led to numerous non-Muslims and converts from Islam being deprived of basic human rights and put to death. This includes many of our own brothers and sisters in Christ. Moreover, human rights violations through the application of shari'a apostasy law are not limited to a small number of "extreme" Islamic countries, but occur in supposedly "moderate" countries such as Turkey and Indonesia.

² Abdul Ala Mawdudi. The punishment of the apostate according to Islamic law. (Originally published in Urdu as *Murtadd ki Saza Islami Qanun men*) Syed Silas Husain and Ernest Hahn, translators. 1994.

In practice, fifteen Islamic countries still make conversion from Islam a crime, with perhaps as many as eight or nine making it punishable by death: these include Afghanistan, the Comoros, Iran, Mauritania, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Yemen. In Pakistan, blasphemy is punishable by death. While it is reassuring that very few such state executions are actually carried out, other punishments for apostasy include the annulment of marriage with a Muslim spouse, the removal of children and the loss of all property and inheritance rights. Furthermore, converts frequently face extreme hostility from their own family or community.

The persecution of Christians by Muslims

It is a matter of profound concern to us that widespread and systematic persecution of Christians and followers of other non-Muslim religions is occurring in virtually all Muslim countries worldwide. Many organisations, including our own, have collected a large number of recent examples of hostility perpetrated against Christians or other non-Muslims by Muslims³. These range from discrimination to physical assault, torture, imprisonment and actual murder. In the interests of brevity, we have not included case studies with this document, but we are ready to provide you with them on request.

The issue of blasphemy is a particular problem and Surahs 5.17 and 5.72 of the Qur'an state that Christians commit blasphemy by believing that Jesus is the Son of God. The Qur'an appears to discourage Muslims from taking Christians or Jews as their friends (Surah 5.71).

We recognise and welcome the numerous calls for love and goodwill in the Qur'an. We do, however, continue to be concerned about those Qur'anic verses which appear to command Muslims to kill unbelievers (Surah 9.5). There is abundant historical evidence to show that Surah 9.5 is not "just defensive", as some people have claimed. Do Surahs 9.29 and 8.38-39 not encourage persecution and subjugation of Christians? Surah 60.4 seems to indicate that there can be no peace between Muslims and non-Muslims until all non-Muslims believe in Allah. Indeed, Surah 2.193 appears to command Muslims to fight everyone who does not believe in Allah until Islam is established in the land. It is very disconcerting to see that Saudi material currently used in schoolbooks in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and currently being distributed in US mosques, endorses these views (see Appendices C & D).

We recognise that there are different schools of thought and interpretation of authority dealing with these matters within Islam. We are not Islamic scholars, and it would be much appreciated if clarification of these words could be given in the context of your "*Common Word*" and your expressed wish to establish good relationships between Muslims and Christians. We would be grateful if you would explain how Muslims and Christians can live together in peace if these are the instructions given to Muslims.

Some of you are recognised Muslim scholars living in countries where Christians are persecuted. Is it not possible for your mufti to issue a fatwa clarifying the modern position of Islam regarding other religions, re-emphasising the need for tolerance, accepting the golden rule of 'treat others as you would like them to treat you', and

³ Two years ago, the Maranatha Community submitted a statement 'Persecution of Christians Today – The Price of Faith' to the United Nations, containing factual information about the worldwide persecution of Christians.

interpreting the statement that there should be “*no compulsion in religion*” (Surah 2.256) to mean that all conversions are non-coerced?

Such a fatwa clearly prohibiting any violence against “apostates” or other non-Muslims could then lead to significant change in what children are taught in school in Muslim countries. We are convinced that such a statement would significantly improve relationships between our Muslim and Christian communities.

The integration of Muslims into Western society

True integration of Muslims into Western societies, such as the United Kingdom, has not been evident in many areas, and there is often a social separation which is equally damaging to Muslims and the host society.

The basis of democracy is the common acceptance of basic standards of freedom, so that, in particular, the losers of an election abide by the result. However, an examination of Islam in Western societies calls into question the acceptance by Muslims of the fundamental concept of democracy. Many Muslims – according to a recent opinion poll 40% of UK Muslims⁴ – wish to see the introduction of shari’a law in Western countries. The establishment of a so-called “Muslim parliament” some years ago was seen by many non-Muslims as an affront to our democracy.

It is deeply disconcerting to hear some of the views that are being propagated by some Muslims in Western societies. According to *Freedom House’s Centre for Religious Freedom*, literature seeking to dissuade Muslims from taking Christians or Jews as their friends, and even encouraging them to hate Christians and Jews, is being distributed in mosques. Since much of the literature originates from Saudi Arabia and is in Arabic, its content is not easily accessible to most Westerners. This literature appears to suggest an isolationist or even subversive intent. Muslims who live in the West live are told that they live among infidels who need to be converted to Islam. People who leave Islam can be killed, and those who engage in homosexual or adulterous sexual relationships can be killed.(Appendix A).

We gladly acknowledge that there are many Muslims who participate fully in British civic life and have contributed greatly to the wellbeing of this country. Yet our concern remains that a significant proportion of the Muslim population feels little or no loyalty to Britain or to democracy, only loyalty to Islam. This creates considerable problems in a Western democracy: Muslim enclaves arise in which there is little civic participation.

A fatwa of the kind we have described above could clarify the proper position of Muslims in Western countries, and prohibit any violence against the host country and any attempt to establish an alternative regime within it. We are convinced that such a statement would significantly and immediately improve relationships between the Muslim and Christian communities in the United Kingdom.

Terrorism

Undoubtedly most Muslims are peaceful and law abiding. Unfortunately, surveys have found that a significant minority among Muslim populations in the West currently

⁴ “Poll reveals 40% of Muslims want Shari’a law in UK”; Sunday Telegraph 20.02.2006

condone violence and terrorism, even against their host country. Acts of violence and terrorism by Islamists against their own country have led to the killing of innocent people. This critical issue leads to fear and suspicion, and hinders good relations between different communities.

Many extreme Muslims are referred to as 'fundamentalists'. This is a very misleading title to use, particularly as it has been applied to some Christians. With great sadness Christians can only conclude that whereas Jesus Christ never advocated force in the New Testament, Muhammad does advocate force in the Qur'an. We deeply regret that, whilst few Muslims are terrorists, most terrorist atrocities in the world today are carried out by Muslims. We would respectfully suggest that this fact needs to be urgently appraised by Islamic leaders worldwide and by local imams if enormous bloodshed is to be avoided.

To our deep regret, there is clear evidence that children in some countries such as Iran are being trained for war against the West. They are being prepared to be suicide bombers, under the teaching of the ordinary imam. We are sad that children and young people are being taught that the God who created them would want them to become suicide bombers. We find this message impossible to reconcile with the message of peace and forgiveness lived and taught by Jesus Christ and with the teaching of the Qur'an that Allah is merciful and compassionate.

Once again, you as leading Muslim scholars are in an excellent position to promote a fatwa clarifying the position of Islam on the use of violence and terrorism in general. We believe that a condemnation would significantly improve relationships between Muslims and Christians both in Britain and around the world.

3. A way forward

In spite of the complexity of the problems we face we are, as Christians, filled with hope. We believe that “*nothing will be impossible with God*” (Luke 1.37). We believe that there is a way forward for Christians and Muslims.

We are convinced that there needs to be a frank, full and open dialogue between Christians and Muslims, in which the most contentious issues, including those mentioned in this document, are addressed.

Since these issues arise between Muslims and Christians, they can only be resolved between Muslims and Christians. We should not expect others to resolve them on our behalf.

We are convinced that a fruitful dialogue is possible when it is based on mutual respect and the commitment to love and truth.

We are convinced that the time has come to establish a number of working groups, possibly each chaired jointly by a Muslim and a Christian. Each group would deal with specific issues such as Theology; Human Rights; (including matters of apostasy, shari’a law and the classification of non-Muslims as dhimmi), the role of Muslims in Western democracy; attitudes to terrorism; social concerns where Muslims and Christians have similar stances such as alcohol & drug abuse, abortion, euthanasia and homosexual practices.

Finally, we extend to you a warm greeting in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom we believe to be the *Prince of Peace* (Isaiah 9.6).

As Christians representing all denominations, we commit ourselves to pray and to work for mutual understanding and peace.

Appendix A

Some Theological Considerations

The divergence of belief between Christians and Muslims inevitably becomes evident in any discourse between adherents of the two religions. Contentious issues will invariably arise, but the opportunity of learning more about each other's religion must be welcomed.

"A Common Word" states that

In the Holy Qur'an, God Most High enjoins Muslims to issue the following call to Christians (and Jews – the *People of the Scripture*):

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.(...) (Aal 'Imran 3.64)

The issue of "ascribing partners unto Him" is a key point of disagreement between Muslims and Christians. Muslims believe that by worshipping the Trinity, Christians condone polytheism, something considered in Islam to be an extremely serious form of blasphemy. In "A Common Word" it is suggested that the God of the Qur'an and the God of the Bible are the same God, and that therefore Muslims and Christians worship the same God, perhaps because both claim to have created the world of man. However, the examination of some key scriptures of the Qur'an and the Bible reveal very significant differences:

The nature of Allah and the nature of YHWH

The nature of Allah is different from the nature of the God of the Old and New Testament, YHWH (Yahweh or Jehovah).

It is very clear that YHWH is unchangeable (James 1.17). Is it the case that the concept of abrogation (eg Surah 2.106) allows that the meaning of earlier verses can be "revised", for example in light of new developments? Does this mean that Allah changes his revelations? If he was mistaken before the change, how can you know he has not made later mistakes in the Qur'an? Surah 8.30 also states that he is a deceiver, so how can you know that the Qur'an is final truth?

The Trinity

One of the key areas of disagreement is the nature of the Trinity. For Muslims, the concept of God being a Trinity is blasphemy (Surah 5.73. Many Muslims seem to believe that the Trinity is God the Father, God the mother (ie Mary) and God the Son (Surah 5.116). However, the teaching of the Christian Community through all the centuries has constantly been that the Trinity consists of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28.19). This was one of the first statements of the early church made through the Nicene Creed of 325 AD. This Creed has been accepted by virtually all Christian denominations, (although not of course by new religions such as Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons).

Christians believe just as strongly as Jews and Muslims, that there is one God. The word that is used is the Hebrew word **echad** which does not mean a stark singularity, but **oneness in unity** – so it is used to describe one bunch of grapes, or how a husband and wife become one flesh, and the whole of the people of Israel are described as One people.

The nature of Jesus

A further area of disagreement is the nature of Jesus. If Jesus is seen merely as a good man, a teacher, even a very important prophet, but not as Son of God (John 10.36) and God (Colossians 1.19) then this is no longer the Jesus of the Bible. There are therefore major differences in the Biblical view of Jesus and in the description of Him in the Qur'an.

The word of C.S. Lewis sums up the Christian position – *"Jesus claimed to be God. Logic states that when confronting the claim of Christ to be God, there are only three choices open to us in response to His claim. Either it is true that he is God, or he is mentally confused or bad to the point of blasphemy. All the testimony of his friends and even of his enemies asserts that Jesus was not bad, but was good. He is acclaimed as a great teacher and astounded people by his wisdom. He was clearly not mentally confused. An examination of the evidence shows that Jesus is who he claimed to be"*.

The Biblical view is that:

- Jesus is not created (Colossians 1.17).
- He is the Son of God, He is Lord (John 14.6, Philippians 2.10f).
- He was crucified (as described in all four Gospels and the New Testament letters) and was raised from the dead (again described in all four Gospels, and references are found in most New Testament letters).

The Qur'anic view appears to be that:

- Jesus (Isa) was created (Surah 3.59).
- He was merely an apostle, and neither Lord nor Son of God (Surah 4.171).
- He was not crucified (Surah 4.157), and in our understanding there is no reference in the Qur'an about a resurrection.

But belief in the resurrection of Jesus is absolutely central to the Christian faith. Indeed, the Apostle Paul writes that if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then *our faith is in vain* (1 Corinthians 15.17 & Romans 10.9).

The life and teaching of Jesus and the life and teaching of Muhammad

The life and the teaching of Jesus contrast substantially with the teaching of Muhammad:

- Jesus lived and taught forgiveness, perhaps most famously in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6.12).
- He taught us to love our enemies (Matthew 6.44ff).
- He discourages the use of violence, and especially the use of the sword (Mt 26.52).
- Jesus was sinless (1 Pet 2.22).
- Jesus knew he would ultimately be with God.

In contrast is it the case:

- that Muhammad taught revenge (Surah 2.194).
- that he encouraged the use of violence on many occasions (Surah 8.65; 9.5; etc).
- that Muhammad sinned and was described as merely human (Surah 40.55; 48.12; 18.110).
- that Muhammad had a number of wives, of whom the youngest, Aisha, was only 6 (Hadith Bukhari 5.234).
- that Islam sees women as inferior to men (Surah 4.34).
- that Muhammad did not know what his fate would be after he died (Surah 5.266)?

Salvation in Islam and in Christianity

One of the key questions that has been asked through all the centuries is "how can I be saved?" Again, this question is answered quite differently in the Bible from the Qur'an. The Bible is very clear:

- Salvation is offered to all: *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved* (Romans 10.13).
- God does *not want a single person to perish* (2 Peter 3.9).
- Salvation is fundamentally a gift from God rather than earned through human endeavour or human works (Ephesians 2. 8ff).

In contrast is it the case:

- that Allah only forgives those he chooses to forgive (Surah 2.284).
- that he casts into hell those he chooses to (Surah 32.13).
- that good works can cancel evil deeds (Surah 11.114).
- that while a Christian can have confidence in his or her salvation, *for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*" (John 3.16), even Muhammad himself was not certain that he would enter heaven (Hadith Bukhari 5.266): "*By Allah, though I am the Apostle of Allah, yet I do not know what Allah will do to me...?*"

To our knowledge, the only certain way to enter heaven in Islam is through death as a martyr fighting for Allah (Surah 3.157). This obviously has very significant implications for the current political situation, and probably explains why most suicide bombers worldwide are followers of Islam.

The nature of love and the fatherhood of God

In Christian teaching, human love needs to reflect the love of God. The Apostle Paul writes: "*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" (Romans 5.8). This makes it very clear that God's love *precedes* any human activity. Indeed, the Bible teaches that it is first and foremost God's love (or goodness) that brings us to repentance (Romans 2.4). Repentance results from experiencing God's love.

This is in contrast with the love of Allah, which appears to be conditional on good behaviour (eg Surah 3.31; 3.134; 2.222). The corollary of this is that Allah does not love those who do not do what he demands (Surah 28.77).

One of the key messages of the Christian faith is to receive God's love as the love of a father. This is well documented in both the Old Testament (eg Deuteronomy 32.5; Psalm 2.7) and the New Testament. On numerous occasions the Apostle Paul points out that it is through the sacrifice of Jesus that we have become adopted in God's family, where God has become our Father and we can call him "Abba", the intimate Aramaic word for father, sometimes interpreted as "daddy" (Rom 8.15; Gal 4.6). Most famous perhaps in this context is the prayer that Jesus taught us, which begins with "*Our Father who art in Heaven*": Jesus Himself taught His followers to address God as their "father". In our view, this is a central message of the Christian faith.

To our knowledge, Islam does not teach that Allah is a loving father. The 99 (or more) titles given to Allah never describe Allah as father. Indeed, Surah 5.18 rejects the Christian (and Jewish) teaching of God being a father. In this context we invite our Muslim friends to explain to us why, if the nature of Islam is love, Islam teaches that the world is divided into a "house of peace" (the part under Muslim influence) and a "house of war" (the part not under Muslim influence).

These theological considerations are not exhaustive. They serve to identify areas that could be jointly explored to establish a basis of an honest exchange between Muslims and Christians. We recognise that there are different schools of thought, interpretation and authority within Islam, and where our comments do not represent all (or a majority) we would appreciate your clarification.

Appendix B

Christian-Muslim Dialogue

Professor C.M. Naim, Professor of Urdu at Chicago and himself a Muslim, made these comments on Muslim-Christian dialogue at a meeting in Spring 1996:

"The Christians usually began by denouncing the Crusades, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century colonial expansions into Islamic lands, and the more recent Cold War policies of the United States against various nationalist movements in the 'Third World.' They readily identified themselves with 'the West' and its history, only to castigate all Western protagonists and proponents, past and present. Their Muslim counterparts began in the same vein. They denounced the Crusades and argued that the same crusading spirit worked equally behind the colonial expansion and American support of Israel against the Palestinians. These were the crucial moments, they argued, when the 'West' (Christianity) encountered the 'East' (Islam) and behaved shamefully. The listeners nodded in agreement. One Muslim speaker mentioned the expulsion of the Moors from Spain as another such moment, and all heads were further lowered in sorrow and shame.

Amazingly, no one asked how the Moors arrived in Spain in the first place, or what had brought Muslims to the land of the Testaments. It was as if there had been no imperial expansion of Islam, no Arab conquests of Syria, North Africa, and Spain. I'm not denying the horrors of the Reconquista and the Crusades. I merely wish to point out the absurdity of denying any agency to the Muslims themselves. Islamic history unfolded as a series of conquests. This is not to say that Islam spread only by the sword or that Christians and Muslims should argue over who shed less blood. It is simply to acknowledge that the sword was very much present in the story of Islam's expansion, too.

When this acknowledgment is not made, interfaith dialogue soon turns into an incoherent comparison of Islam, a faith without history, and Christianity, a history without faith."⁵

This statement by Professor Naim, obviously made with a hint of irony, makes completely clear the fact that the basis of a fruitful dialogue must be the acknowledgement of difficult issues based on truth.

⁵ C M Naim, Getting Real about Christian-Muslim Dialogue, Spring 1996

Appendix C

Jihad and Martyrdom in Saudi and Egyptian School books

In a 2005 conference "Victims of Jihad", held at the UN Commission on Human Rights in April 2005, a paper was given by David G. Littman on Jihad and Martyrdom as taught in Saudi Arabian and Egyptian schools. He described what is taught in Saudi and Egyptian schoolbooks on this subject. He came to some very startling conclusions which clearly contrast to the statements made in the "Common Word".

Saudi Arabia: analysis of 93 school textbooks: mostly from 1999-2000 & 2001

In regard to school textbooks in Saudi Arabia, the survey includes an outlook on Christianity and the West. There, Islam is presented as the only true religion, while all others are presented as false. Islam leads its followers to paradise, whereas all others lead their believers to destruction in hell. Saudi children are taught that they are superior, as Muslims, in both this world and the next. Christians and Jews are explicitly denounced as infidels, and are also called the enemies of Islam and Muslims. They should not be befriended, nor emulated in any way, as this is strictly forbidden. The West is the source of evil that has afflicted the Muslim world. Western democracy is totally rejected.

As for "the Jews," the report cites religious references to them as a wicked nation, in their relations with Arabs and Muslims, and in the context of world history. Their disappearance is, therefore, desirable. Israel is not recognised as a state, and a Middle East peaceful solution is not advocated: rather, war, Jihad and martyrdom is exhorted as a religious duty. Even the 100-year-old fraudulent Protocols of the Elders of Zion are referred to with emphasis as an authentic work.

Egypt: analysis of 103 school textbooks - mostly from 2002, some 1999-2001

A description of Jihad in Grade 11 from an al-Azhar schoolbook makes compelling reading:

[One] of the rules derived by the [religious] scholars from these [Qur'anic] verses is the following: 1. Obligation to fight the infidels with utmost vigor and power until they become weak, their state disappears and they submit to the rule of the law of Islam.

And it is again the al-Azhar teaching curriculum that goes to the root of these bloody lessons, with pious justifications offered to Grade 11 students concerning the reasons for beheading infidels:

When you meet them in order to fight [them], do not be seized by compassion [toward them], but strike the[ir] necks powerfully...Striking the neck means fighting, because killing a person is often done by striking off his head...This expression contains a harshness and emphasis that are not found in the word "kill", because it describes killing in the ugliest manner, "i.e. cutting the neck and making the organ - the head of the body - fly off [the body]."

Another school text provides young "Jihadist martyrs" a justification for these barbarities:

Encouraging the faithful to perform jihad in the path of Allah, to behead the infidels, take them prisoner, break their power, and make their souls humble (...) You see that in His [Muhammad] words: When you meet the unbelievers in the battlefield strike off their heads and, when you have laid them low, bind your captives firmly. Then grant them their freedom or take a ransom from them, until war shall lay down its burdens.

(Source: *Jihad and Martyrdom as taught in Saudi Arabian and Egyptian schools*; Victims of Jihad Conference at UN Commission on Human Rights, April 2005)

Appendix D

Material published in the USA by Saudi Arabia which appears to incite hatred

Freedom House's Center for Religious Freedom recently released a new report on the dissemination of publications by the government of Saudi Arabia which seemingly intend to incite hatred towards non-Muslims. The report, "*Saudi Publications on Hate Ideology Fill American Mosques*", is based on a year-long study of over two hundred original documents, all disseminated, published or otherwise generated by the government of Saudi Arabia, and collected from more than a dozen mosques in the United States. (Freedom House's Center for Religious Freedom. "*Saudi Publications on Hate Ideology Fill American Mosques*," 28 January. 2005; <http://freedomhouse.org/religion/news/bn2005/bn-2005-01-28.htm> accessed 19.7.06.)

The report concludes that the Saudi government publications examined reflect a "*totalitarian ideology of hatred that can incite to violence*", and expressed grave concern that the Saudi government seemed to spread hate ideology within U.S. borders. Among the key findings of the report were these:

- Various Saudi government publications gathered for this study, most of which are in Arabic, assert that it is a religious obligation for Muslims to hate Christians and Jews and warn against imitating, befriending, or helping them in any way, or taking part in their festivities and celebrations.
- The documents promote contempt for the United States because it is ruled by legislated civil law rather than by totalitarian Wahhabi-style Islamic law. They condemn democracy as un-Islamic.
- The documents stress that when Muslims are in the lands of the unbelievers, they must behave as if on a mission behind enemy lines. Either they are there to acquire new knowledge and make money to be later employed in the jihad against the infidels, or they are there to proselytize the infidels until at least some convert to Islam. Any other reason for lingering among the unbelievers in their lands is illegitimate, and unless a Muslim leaves as quickly as possible, he or she is not a true Muslim and so too must be condemned.
- For example, a document in the collection for the "Immigrant Muslim" bears the words "Greetings from the Cultural Attache in Washington, D.C." of the Embassy of Saudi Arabia, and is published by the government of Saudi Arabia. In an authoritative religious voice, it gives detailed instructions on how to "hate" the Christian and Jew: "*Never greet them first. Never congratulate the infidel on his holiday. Never imitate the infidel. Do not become a naturalized citizen of the United States. Do not wear a graduation gown because this imitates the infidel.*"
- The opening fatwa in one Saudi Embassy-distributed book, published by the Saudi Air Force, responds to a question about a Muslim preacher in a European mosque who taught that it is not right to condemn Jews and Christians as infidels. The Saudi state cleric's reply rebukes the Muslim cleric: "*He who casts doubts about their infidelity leaves no doubt about his.*" Since, under Saudi law, "apostates" from Islam can be sentenced to death, this is an implied death threat against the tolerant Muslim imam, as well as an incitement to vigilante violence.
- Sufi and Shiite Muslims are viciously condemned.
- For a Muslim who fails to uphold the Saudi Wahhabi sect's sexual morals (ie through homosexual activity or heterosexual activity outside marriage), the edicts published by the Saudi government's Ministry of Islamic Affairs and found in American mosques advise, "*It would be lawful for Muslims to spill his blood and to take his money.*"
- Regarding those who convert out of Islam, the Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs explicitly asserts, they "*should be killed.*"
- Saudi textbooks and other publications in the collection, propagate a Nazi-like hatred for Jews, treat the forged Protocols of the Elders of Zion as historical fact, and avow that the Muslim's duty is to eliminate the state of Israel.
- Regarding women, the Saudi publications instruct that they should be veiled, segregated from men and barred from certain employment and roles.

The research, translation and principal analysis of the materials for the report were carried out by both Muslims and non-Muslims. The large majority of the publications are in Arabic; two independent translators reviewed each Arabic document.

