

“A COMMON WORD”

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Our response on “A Common Word Between US and You” letter

"A Common Word between Us and You" is an open letter, dated October 13, 2007, from Islamic leaders to Christian leaders at large. It is written in response to a September 2006 lecture by Pope Benedict at a German University. At first reading, *A Common Word* seems to call for peace between Muslims and Christians and attempts to work for common ground and understanding between both religions, in line with the Biblical commandment to love God and one's neighbor, and the Quranic commandment in Quran 3:64: "Say: 'O People of the Scripture! Come to a common word as between us and you: that we worship none but Allah'"

The committee of *A Common Word* phrases this letter in a language they hope would resonate with Christians, primarily with a focus on love. They ask Christians to agree to love God alone and to love our neighbor. By loving God alone, they mean to not associate anything with God but instead to maintain a clear distinction between God and man. We are to love God as God alone, and man as our neighbor alone. On the surface this sounds like a Biblically compatible idea, but when you delve in a bit further it is not because we are not to love God as the man Jesus Christ — which completely negates the basis of Christianity. The letter provides evidence from Old and New Testament passages, the Quran and the Hadith to show that this definition of love is consistent with both religions.

Here's an exact quote from the document itself:

"Whilst Islam and Christianity are obviously different religions—and whilst there is no minimizing some of their formal differences—it is clear that the Two Greatest Commandments are an area of common ground and a link between the Qur'an, the Torah and the New Testament. What prefaces the Two Commandments in the Torah and the New Testament, and what they arise out of, is the Unity of God—that there is only one God. For the Shema in the Torah, starts: (Deuteronomy 6:4) Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! Likewise, Jesus (عليه سلام) said: (Mark 12:29) "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one". Likewise, God says in the Holy Qur'an: Say: He, God, is One. / God, the Self-Sufficient Besought of all. (Al-Ikhlās, 112:1-2). Thus the Unity of God, love of Him, and love of the neighbor form a common ground upon which Islam and Christianity (and Judaism) are founded."

The whole letter can be found here www.acommonword.com. This website has the document available in several different languages. It also contains extensive responses to the letter from Muslim, Christian, and Jewish sources. The responses posted by *A Common Word* vary greatly. All of them praise the committee of *A Common Word* for this initiative saying that this type of dialogue is essential. Some go further and say they agree that we should worship God alone and associate nothing with Him, and love our neighbor.

Call of Love's view of *A Common Word*:

"We agree that we must worship God alone, the true God of the Bible, and we believe that Jesus is God. We are not convinced that the Quran and the Hadith teach to love your non-Muslim neighbor, despite the verses that the "A Common Word" letter chose to use from these Islamic resources. We can site many Quranic verses that incite discrimination and even violence against those who do not follow the commands of Allah. However, the open letter from *A Common Word* provides an opportunity for true Christ followers to publicly dialogue with Muslim theologians. When responded to appropriately, it provides a chance to proclaim and defend the person of Jesus Christ, to question Islam about its love for its non-Muslim neighbor, and to challenge Islam about the way it associates Allah with the true God of the Bible.

John Piper responds to the letter on his own website in 2008 with the following quote:

"The most loving thing we can do for Muslims, or anyone else, is to tell them the whole truth about Jesus Christ, in the context of sacrificial care for them and willingness to suffer for them rather than abandon them, and then plead with them to turn away from 'vain worship' (Mark 7:7) and receive Christ as the crucified and risen Savior for the forgiveness of their sins and the hope of eternal life. This would be our great joy—to have brothers and sisters from all the Muslim peoples of the world."

Our prayer is that *A Common Word* can lead Christians to boldly and lovingly proclaim their faith and the divinity of Christ to their Muslim neighbors. We also pray that Muslims will come to see the love of the true God of the Bible through the Christians they are in contact with.

A Common Word letter responses: http://www.answering-islam.org/Letters/common_word.htm

John Piper's article: <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-shall-we-love-our-muslim-neighbor>