



A Common Word for the Common Good

To
the Muslim Religious Leaders and Scholars
who have signed
A Common Word Between Us and You
and to Muslim brothers and sisters everywhere

Grace, Mercy and Peace be with you

Preface

Dear Friends:

We are deeply appreciative of the initiative you have taken and welcome *A Common Word Between Us and You* as a significant development in relations between Christians and Muslims. In your letter you have addressed 27 Christian leaders and “leaders of Christian Churches everywhere” and many of those addressed have already responded or set in motion processes through which responses will in due course be made. Having listened carefully to Christian colleagues from the widest possible range of backgrounds, most significantly at a Consultation of Church representatives and Christian scholars in June 2008, I am pleased to offer this response to your letter, with their support and encouragement.

We recognise that your letter brings together Muslim leaders from many traditions of Islam to address Christian leaders representative of the diverse traditions within Christianity. We find in it a hospitable and friendly spirit, expressed in its focus on love of God and love of neighbour - a focus which draws together the languages of Christianity and Islam, and of Judaism also. Your letter could hardly be more timely, given the growing awareness that peace throughout the world is deeply entwined with the ability of all people of faith everywhere to live in peace, justice, mutual respect and love. Our belief is that only through a commitment to that transcendent perspective to which your letter points, and to which we also look, shall we find the resources for radical, transforming, non-violent engagement with the deepest needs of our world and our common humanity.

In your invitation to “come to a common word” we find a helpful generosity of intention. Some have read the invitation as an insistence that we should be able immediately to affirm an agreed and shared understanding of God. But such an affirmation would not be honest to either of our traditions. It would fail to acknowledge the reality of the differences that exist and that have been the cause of deep and – at times in the past - even violent division. We read your letter as expressing a more modest but ultimately a more realistically hopeful recognition that the ways in which we as Christians and Muslims speak about God and humanity are not simply mutually unintelligible

systems. We interpret your invitation as saying ‘let us find a way of recognising that on some matters we are speaking enough of a common language for us to be able to pursue both exploratory dialogue and peaceful co-operation with integrity and without compromising fundamental beliefs.’

We find this recognition in what is, for us, one of the key paragraphs of your letter:

“In the light of what we have seen to be necessarily implied and evoked by the Prophet Muhammad’s (pbuh) blessed saying: *‘The best that I have said—myself, and the prophets that came before me—is: “there is no god but God, He Alone, He hath no associate, His is the sovereignty and His is the praise and He hath power over all things”’*, we can now perhaps understand the words *‘The best that I have said—myself, and the prophets that came before me’* as equating the blessed formula *‘there is no god but God, He Alone, He hath no associate, His is the sovereignty and His is the praise and He hath power over all things’* precisely with the ‘First and Greatest Commandment’ to love God, with all one’s heart and soul, as found in various places in the Bible. That is to say, in other words, that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was perhaps, through inspiration, restating and alluding to the Bible’s First Commandment. God knows best, but certainly we have seen their effective similarity in meaning. Moreover, we also do know (as can be seen in the endnotes), that both formulas have another remarkable parallel: the way they arise in a number of slightly differing versions and forms in different contexts, all of which, nevertheless, emphasize the primacy of total love and devotion to God.”

The double use of ‘perhaps’ in that passage allows for openness, exploration and debate - made possible because certain aspects of the ways in which we structure our talk about God in our respective traditions are intelligible one to the other. We read it as an invitation to further discussion within the Christian family and within the Muslim family as well as between Muslims and Christians, since it invites all of us to think afresh about the foundations of our convictions. There are many things between us that offer the promise of deeper insight through future discussion. Thus for us your letter makes a highly significant contribution to the divinely initiated journey into which we are called, the journey in which Christians and Muslims alike are taken further into mutual understanding and appreciation. The confession that “God knows best” reminds us of the limits of our understanding and knowledge.

In the light of this letter, what are the next steps for us? We draw from *A Common Word Between Us and You* five areas which might be fruitfully followed through.

First, its focus on the love and praise of God, stressing how we must trust absolutely in God and give him the devotion of our whole being – heart, mind and will - underlines a shared commitment: the fixed intention to relate all reality and all behaviour intelligently, faithfully and practically to the God who deals with us in love, compassion, justice and peace. One of the areas we can usefully discuss together is the diverse ways in which we understand the love of God as an absolutely free gift to his creation. There are bound to be differences as well as similarities in the ways we understand and express God’s love for us and how we seek to practise love for God and neighbour in return, and in what follows we consider how these might be explored in a spirit of honest and co-operative attention.

Second, its commitment to a love of neighbour that is rooted in the love of God (and which, for Christians, is part of our response to the love of God for us) suggests that we share a clear passion for the common good of all humanity and all creation. In what follows we shall seek to identify some practical implications for our future relations both with each other and with the rest of the world.

Third, the concern to ground what we say in the Scriptures of our traditions shows a desire to meet each other not ‘at the margins’ of our historic identities but speaking from what is central and authoritative for us. Here, however, it is especially important to acknowledge that the Qur’an’s role in Islam is not the same as that of the Bible in Christianity; Christians understand the primary location of God’s revealing Word to be the history of God’s people and above all the history of Jesus Christ, whom we acknowledge as the Word made flesh, to which the Bible is the authoritative and irreplaceable witness. For the Muslim, as we understand it, the Word is supremely communicated in what Mohammed is commanded to recite. But for both faiths, scripture provides the basic tools for speaking of God and it is in attending to how we use our holy texts that we often discover most truly the nature of each other’s faith.¹ In what follows we shall suggest how studying our scriptures together might continue to provide a fruitful element of our engagements with each other in the process of “building a home together”, to pick up an image popularised by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in a recent book².

Fourth, and growing out of this last point, the letter encourages us to relate to each other from the heart of our lives of faith before God. However much or little ‘common ground’ we initially sense between us, it is possible to engage with each other without anxiety if we truly begin from the heart of what we believe we have received from God; possible to speak together, respecting and discussing differences rather than imprisoning ourselves in mutual fear and suspicion.

Finally, we acknowledge gratefully your recognition that the differences between Christians and Muslims are real and serious and that you do not claim to address all the issues. Yet in offering this focus on love of God and neighbour, you identify what could be the centre of a sense of shared calling and shared responsibility – an awareness of what God calls for from all his human creatures to whom he has given special responsibility in creation. In our response, it is this search for a common awareness of responsibility before God that we shall seek to hold before us as a vision worthy of our best efforts.

This response therefore looks in several directions. It seeks to encourage more reflection within the Christian community, as well as to promote honest encounter between Christian and Muslim believers; and it asks about the possible foundations for shared work in the world and a shared challenge to all those things which obscure God’s purpose for humanity.

¹ As the staff of the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies wrote in their appreciation of your letter: “We are pleased to see that the biblical and Gospel quotations used in this document come from the sources and that explanations given are on occasion based on the original languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. This is evidence of deep respect and genuine attentiveness to others, while at the same time of a true scientific spirit.”(issued by Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d’Islamistica [PISAI], Rome, 25th October 2007)

² Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together: Recreating Society* (London: Continuum, 2007)

THE ONE GOD WHO IS LOVE

At the origins of the history of God's people, as Jewish and Christian Scripture record it, is the command given to Moses to communicate to the people - the *Shema*, as it has long been known, from its opening word in Hebrew:

**Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!
You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and
with all your strength.**³ (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)⁴

Such an imperative, as your letter makes clear, is of central authority for Muslims too.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!: The *tawhid* principle⁵ is held out in your letter as one of the bases for agreement. In addition to the passages you quote to demonstrate *tawhid*, we read in the Qur'an:

*God: there is no god but Him, the Ever Living, the Ever Watchful.*⁶ (al-Baqara 2:255)⁷

*He is God the One, God the eternal. He fathered no one nor was he fathered.
No one is comparable to Him.* (al-'Ikhlas 112:1-4)

This last text reminds the Christian that this great affirmation of the uniqueness of God is what has often caused Muslims to look with suspicion at the Christian doctrines of God. Christian belief about the Trinity - God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit - appears at once to compromise the belief that God has no other being associated with him. How can we call God *al-Qayyum*, the Self-sufficient, if he is not alone? So we read in the Qur'an

*The East and the West belong to God: wherever you turn, there is His Face.
God is all pervading and all knowing. They have asserted, "God has a child."
May He be exalted! No! Everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Him,
everything devoutly obeys His will. He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth,
and when He decrees something, He says only "Be," and it is.* (al-Baqara 2:115-117)

Muslims see the belief that God could have a son as suggesting that God is somehow limited as we are limited, bound to physical processes and needing the co-operation of others. How can such a God be truly free and sovereign – qualities both Christianity and Islam claim to affirm, for we know that God is able to bring the world into being by his word alone?

Here it is important to state unequivocally that the association of any other being with God is expressly rejected by the Christian theological tradition. Since the earliest Councils of the Church, Christian thinkers sought to clarify how, when we speak of the Father 'begetting' the Son, we must put out of our minds any suggestion that this is a physical thing, a process or event like the processes and events that happen in the world. They insisted that the name 'God' is not the name of a person

³ Taken from the *English Standard Version* of the Bible

⁴ Unless otherwise stated, quotations from the Bible are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version* (copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA)

⁵ *tawhid*: that God is one, monotheism. *shirk*: the association of God with other beings who are not divine, whether other 'gods', saints, mediators of various kinds

⁶ *al Qayyum* can also be translated as "Self-subsistent" and "Self-sufficient".

⁷ Unless otherwise stated all quotations from the Qur'an are taken from *A new translation* by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford: OUP, 2005)

like a human person, a limited being with a father and mother and a place that they inhabit within the world. 'God' is the name of a kind of life, a 'nature' or essence – eternal and self-sufficient life, always active, needing nothing. But that life is lived, so Christians have always held, eternally and simultaneously as three interrelated agencies are made known to us in the history of God's revelation to the Hebrew people and in the life of Jesus and what flows from it. God is at once the source of divine life, the expression of that life and the active power that communicates that life. This takes us at once into consideration of the Trinitarian language used by Christians to speak of God. We recognise that this is difficult, sometimes offensive, to Muslims; but it is all the more important for the sake of open and careful dialogue that we try to clarify what we do and do not mean by it, and so trust that what follows will be read in this spirit.

In human language, in the light of what our Scripture says, we speak of "Father, Son and Holy Spirit", but we do not mean one God with two beings alongside him, or three gods of limited power. So there is indeed one God, the Living and Self-subsistent, associated with no other; but what God is and does is not different from the life which is eternally and simultaneously the threefold pattern of life: source and expression and sharing. Since God's life is always an intelligent, purposeful and loving life, it is possible to think of each of these dimensions of divine life as, in important ways, like a centre of mind and love, a person; but this does not mean that God 'contains' three different individuals, separate from each other as human individuals are.

Christians believe that in a mysterious manner we have a limited share in the characteristics of divine life⁸. Through the death and rising to life of Jesus, God takes away our evildoing and our guilt, he forgives us and sets us free. And our Scriptures go on to say⁹ that he breathes new life into us, as he breathed life into Adam at the first, so that God's spirit is alive in us. The presence and action of the Holy Spirit is thus God in his action of sharing life with us¹⁰. As we become mature in our new life, our lives become closer and closer (so we pray and hope) to the central and perfect expression of divine life, the Word whom we encounter in Jesus – though we never become simply equal to him. And because Jesus prayed to the source of his life as 'Father'¹¹, we call the eternal and perfect expression of God's life not only the Word but also the 'Son'. We pray to the source of divine life in the way that Jesus taught us, and we say 'Father' to this divine reality. And in calling the eternal word the 'Son' of God, we remind ourselves that he is in no way different in nature from the Father: there is only one divine nature and reality.

Because God exists in this threefold pattern of interdependent action, the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit is one in which there is always a 'giving place' to each other, each standing back so that the other may act. The only human language we have for this is love: the three dimensions of divine life relate to each other in self-sacrifice or self-giving. The doctrine of the Trinity is a way of explaining why we say that God is love, not only that he shows love.

When God acts towards us in compassion to liberate us from evil, to deal with the consequences of our rebellion against him and to make us able to call upon him with confidence, it is a natural (but not automatic) flowing outwards of his own everlasting action. The mutual self-giving love that is the

⁸ **God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him (1John 4:16); see also 2Peter 1.4: Thus [God] has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants in the divine nature.**

⁹ as in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, 15.45-49 and the Letter to the Galatians, 4.6, for example.

¹⁰ **God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us (Romans 5:5)**

¹¹ In Matthew 6:9-15 Jesus says: "Pray then in this way: **Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.**"

very life of God is made real for our sake in the self-giving love of Jesus. And it is because of God's prior love for us that we are enabled and enjoined to love God.¹² Through our loving response, we can begin to comprehend something of God's nature and God's will for humankind:

“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1John 4:8).

So Christians go further than simply saying that God is a loving God or that love is one of his attributes among others. We say that God does not love simply because he decides to love. God is always, eternally, loving - the very nature and definition of God is love, and the full understanding of his unity is for Christians bound up with this. .

Understanding the **“breadth and length and height and depth”** of the love of God¹³ is a lifetime's journey; so it is not remotely possible to consider it with satisfactory thoroughness within the confines of this letter. However, it is necessary at this point to stress two qualities of God's love that are crucially important for the Christian: it is unconditional¹⁴, given gratuitously and without cause; and it is self-sacrificial¹⁵.

In the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, the loving nature of God is revealed. We see how Jesus, both in his ministry and in his acceptance of a sacrificial death at the hands of his enemies, offers a love that is given in advance of any human response; it is not a reward for goodness – rather it is what makes human goodness possible, as we change our lives in gratitude to God for his free gift. In the words of a well-known English hymn, it is “Love to the loveless shown, that they might lovely be”¹⁶. And because of this, it is also a love that is vulnerable. God does not convert us and transform us by exercising his divine power alone. So infinite is that power, and so inseparable from love, that no defeat or suffering, even the terrible suffering of Jesus on the cross, can overcome God's purpose.

So, when we seek to live our lives in love of God and neighbour, we as Christians pray that we may be given strength to love God even when God does not seem to give us what we think we want or seems far off (a major theme in the writings of many Christian mystics, who often speak of those moments of our experience when God does not seem to love us as we should want to be loved); and we pray too for the strength to love those who do not seem to deserve our love, to love those who reject our love, to love those who have not yet made any move in love towards us.

We seek to show in our lives some of the characteristics of God's own love. We know that this may mean putting ourselves at risk; to love where we can see no possibility of love being returned is to be vulnerable, and we can only dare to do this in the power of God's Holy Spirit, creating in us some echo, some share, of Christ's own love. And in the light of all this, one area where dialogue between Christians and Muslims will surely be fruitful is in clarifying how far Muslims can in good conscience go in seeing the love of God powerfully at work in circumstances where the world sees only failure or suffering – but also, to anticipate the challenge that some Muslims might make in

¹² Something similar seems to be implied by the ordering of the loves in the Qur'anic verse 5:54 in which it is said that “*God will bring a new people: He will love them, and they will love Him.*”

¹³ **I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.** (Ephesians 3:18-19)

¹⁴ One of the most influential and beloved New Testament texts illuminating the love of God is the parable of the Prodigal Son - sometimes called the parable of the Loving Father (Luke 15:11-32)

¹⁵ **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”** (John 3:16)

¹⁶ in “My song is love unknown” by Samuel Crossman (1664)

answer, how far the Christian tradition of accepting suffering on this basis may sometimes lead to a passive attitude to suffering and a failure to try and transform situations in the name of God's justice.

Thus, as Christians, we would say that our worship of God as threefold has never compromised the unity of God, which we affirm as wholeheartedly as Jews and Muslims. Indeed, by understanding God as a unity of love we see ourselves intensifying and enriching our belief in the unity of God. This indivisible unity is again expressed in the ancient theological formula, which we can trace back to the North African theologian Saint Augustine, *opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt* – all the actions of the Trinity outside itself are indivisible. So, although the Trinity has been a point of dispute with Jews and Muslims, and will no doubt continue to be so, we are encouraged that *A Common Word Between Us and You* does not simply assume that Christians believe in more than one god.¹⁷ We are, therefore, encouraged in the belief that what both our faiths say concerning the nature of God is not totally diverse - there are points of communication and overlap in the way we think about the divine nature that make our continued exploration of these issues worthwhile, despite the important issues around whether we can say that God is love in his very nature.

It was, therefore, appropriate that Cardinal Bertone, in his letter to Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal welcoming *A Common Word Between Us and You* on behalf of Pope Benedict XVI, wrote:

Without ignoring or downplaying our differences as Christians and Muslims, 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. We are all called to commit ourselves totally to him and to obey his sacred will.¹⁸

To what extent do the Christian conviction of God as Love and the all-important Islamic conviction that God is “the Compassionate, the Merciful” (*ar-rahman ar-rahim*) represent common ground, and to what extent do differences need to be spelled out further? This is a very significant area for further work. But your letter – and many of the Christian responses to it – do make it clear that we have a basis on which we can explore such matters together in a spirit of genuine – and truly neighbourly! - love.

¹⁷ We understand that this is the reading given to the Qur'anic verse al-Zumar 29:46 (“*our God and your God are one [and the same]*”) and al-‘Imran, 3:113-115, quoted in your letter. It is also our interpretation of the passage in your letter that reads: ‘Clearly, the blessed words: *we shall ascribe no partner unto Him* relate to the Unity of God. Clearly also, worshipping *none but God*, relates to being totally devoted to God and hence to the *First and Greatest Commandment*. According to one of the oldest and most authoritative commentaries (*tafsir*) on the Holy Qur’an—the *Jami’ Al-Bayan fi Ta’wil Al-Qur’an* of Abu Ja’far Muhammad bin Jarir Al-Tabari (d. 310 A.H. / 923 C.E.)—*that none of us shall take others for lords beside God*, means “that none of us should obey in disobedience to what God has commanded, nor glorify them by prostrating to them in the same way as they prostrate to God”. In other words, that Muslims, Christians and Jews should be free to each follow what God commanded them, and not have “to prostrate before kings and the like”; for God says elsewhere in the Holy Qur’an: *Let there be no compulsion in religion.... (Al-Baqarah, 2:256)*. This clearly relates to the Second Commandment and to love of the neighbour of which justice and freedom of religion are a crucial part.’

¹⁸ Letter dated 19 November 2007.

Responding to the Gift of Love

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. (1John 4:7-12)

God will bring a new people: He will love them, and they will love Him.
(al-Ma'ida 5:54).

What has been said so far is intended to highlight the way in which we as Christians see love as first and foremost a gift from God to us which makes possible for us a new level of relation with God and one another. By God's outpouring of love, we come to share in the kind of life that is characteristic of God's own eternal life. Our love of God appears as a response to God's prior love for us in its absolute gratuity and causelessness.

Thus to speak of our love for God is before all else to speak in words of praise and gratitude. And for both Jews and Christians, that language of praise has been shaped by and centred upon the Psalms of David:

¹ I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever.
² Every day I will bless you, and praise your name forever and ever.
³ Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable.
...
¹⁵ The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.
¹⁶ You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.
...
²¹ My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD,
and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever. (Psalm 145)

In words like these, we hear many resonances with the language of your letter, suggesting a similar kind of devotion expressed in words of love, praise and thanks. The language of the Psalms, like the language you have used, looks to a God of ultimate creative power who is loving and compassionate, generous, faithful and merciful, and upholds justice. In the Psalms, generation after generation has found inspiration and encouragement in the heights, depths and ordinariness of human life. Countless Christians and Jews use them daily. They show, in the words of your letter, how worshippers "must be grateful to God and trust Him with all their sentiments and emotions", and that "the call to be totally devoted and attached to God heart and soul, far from being a call for a mere emotion or for a mood, is in fact an injunction requiring all-embracing, constant and active love of God. It demands a love in which the innermost spiritual heart and the whole of the soul – with its intelligence, will and feeling – participate through devotion."¹⁹

The Psalms are the songs of a worshipping community, not only of individuals, a community taken up into love and adoration of God, yet acknowledging all the unwelcome and unpalatable aspects of the world we live in – individual suffering and corporate disaster, betrayal, injustice and sin. They are cries of pain as well as of joy, of bewilderment as well as trust, laments for God's apparent absence

as well as celebrations of his presence. They are a challenge to find words to praise God in all circumstances. Your letter, in opening up for us some of the riches of the devotion of the Qur'an helps us appreciate afresh the riches of the Psalms. Perhaps in future the statement in the Qur'an, "to David We gave the Psalms" (4:163), might encourage us to explore further together our traditions and practices of praise and how in our diverse ways we seek to bring to God the whole of our human imagination and sensitivity in a unified act of praise.

The Psalms teach us that the name of God, God's full, personal, mysterious and unsearchable reality, is to be continually celebrated and the life of faith is to be filled with praise of God²⁰. We love God first not for what he has done for us but 'for his name's sake' – because of who God *is*. Even in the midst of terrible suffering or doubt it is possible, with Job, to say: "**Blessed be the name of the Lord**" (Job 1:21). In the prayer which Jesus taught to his disciples the leading petition is: "**Hallowed be your name**" (Matthew 6:9). This means not only that honouring and blessing God is the first and most comprehensive activity of those who follow Jesus; it also encourages Christians to give thanks for all the ways in which God's name is proclaimed as holy and to be held in honour – by Christians, by people of other faiths and indeed by the whole order of creation which proclaims the glory of God²¹.

⁹ **Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!**

¹⁰ **Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds!**

¹¹ **Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth!**

¹² **Young men and women alike, old and young together!**

¹³ **Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven. (Psalm 148)**

So, with all creation, we join together in this chorus of universal praise – echoed so vividly in some of the phrases quoted in your letter^{22,23}.

Jesus said "I came that they [we] may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10) and offering such praise and honour to God is in many ways the heart of the new life. The conviction that the love of God lives in us through his Holy Spirit, that to God we owe the very breath of life within us, is the motivation for our response to God's love – both in loving God and loving neighbour. We know from personal experience that true love can not be commanded or conditioned; it is freely given and received. Our love of God, as already indicated, is first and foremost a response of gratitude enabling us to grow in holiness - to become closer and closer in our actions and thoughts to the complete self-giving that always exists perfectly in God's life and is shown in the life and death of Jesus.

²⁰ Psalm 145:1 quoted above and, e.g., Psalm 113:1-6:

¹ **Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD; praise the name of the LORD.**

² **Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time on and for evermore.**

³ **From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the LORD is to be praised.**

⁴ **The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens.**

⁵ **Who is like the LORD our God, who is seated on high,**

⁶ **who looks far down on the heavens and the earth?**

²¹ Amongst many examples see Psalm 148:9-13 quoted above and

¹ **The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.**

² **Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. (Psalm 19.1-2)**

²² "The words: *His is the sovereignty and His is the praise and He hath power over all things*, when taken all together, remind Muslims that just as everything in creation glorifies God, everything that is in their souls must be devoted to God: *All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth glorifieth God...* (al-Taghabun, 64:1)"

²³ "God says in one of the very first revelations in the Holy Qur'an: *So invoke the Name of thy Lord and devote thyself to Him with a complete devotion (al-Muzzammil, 73:8)*"

Towards this fullness we are all called to travel and grow and we shall want to learn from you more about the understandings of love of God in Islam as we continue this journey, exploring the implications of this love in our lives and our relationships with each other. Jesus, on the night before he died, said, **“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”** (John 13:34). Responding to this new commandment to dwell in the love he bears us means allowing it to transform us and, so transformed, to love others – irrespective of their response.

Love of Our Neighbour

[Jesus said:] **‘You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, 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, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.’** (Matthew 5:43-48)

We support the clear affirmation in your letter, through texts from the Qur’an and the Bible, of the importance of love for the neighbour. Indeed, your letter can be considered an encouraging example of this love. We endorse the emphasis on generosity and self-sacrifice, and trust that these might be mutual marks of our continuing relationship with each other. The section in your letter on love for the neighbour is relatively brief, so we look forward to developing further the ways in which the theme is worked out within our traditions. We believe we have much to learn from each other in this matter, drawing on resources of wisdom, law, prophecy, poetry and narrative, both within and beyond our canonical scriptures²⁴ to help each other come to a richer vision of being loving neighbours today.

For Christians, our love for God is always a response to God’s prior free love of humankind (and all creation). Enabled by this gift of love, our love becomes by grace something that mirrors the character of God’s love and so can be offered to the stranger and the other. A full exploration of the significance of this will only be possible as we grow in our encounters together but, within the confines of this letter, we would want to draw attention to two aspects of the love of neighbour that are important for Christians.

The first is illustrated in St Luke’s gospel when Jesus, having given the Dual Commandment of love as the response to the question “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”, goes on to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan when asked to explain “who is my neighbour?”²⁵. Commentary on this parable

²⁴ The stories of saints and other exemplary people can often be of special value in conveying the quality of love.

²⁵ **Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. ‘Teacher,’ he said, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him, ‘What is written in the law? What do you read there?’ He answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.’ And he said to him, ‘You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.’**

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbour?’ Jesus replied, ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, “Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.” Which of these three, do you think, was a

frequently points to the way in which Jesus challenges the assumptions of the question; instead of defining a necessarily limited group of people who might fit the category of ‘neighbours’ to whom love should be shown, he speaks of the need to prove ourselves neighbours by compassion to whoever is before us in need or pain, whether or not they are akin to us, approved by us, safe for us to be with or whatever else. Such neighbourliness will mean crossing religious and ethnic divisions and transcending ancient enmities. So the ‘neighbour’ of the original Torah is defined by Jesus as whoever the ‘other’ is who specifically and concretely requires self-forgetful attention and care in any moment. Thus to be a neighbour is a challenge that continually comes at us in new ways. We cannot define its demands securely in advance; it demands that we be ready to go beyond the boundaries of our familiar structures of kinship and obligation, whether these are local, racial or religious. For that reason – developing a helpful symbolic reading of this parable – Christian thinkers have often said that Jesus himself is our first ‘neighbour’, the one who comes alongside every human being in need.²⁶ We look forward to the opportunity to explore with you how this teaching about being a neighbour relates to the Qur’anic imperative to care for neighbour and stranger (an imperative that seems to be derived here from the worship of God)²⁷.

The second aspect, already mentioned above, is Jesus’ teaching about the love of those who do not necessarily love you. We have quoted above the version attributed to St Matthew, but the Gospel according to Luke contains a similar passage:

If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you... But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:29-31,35-36)

This radical teaching, which Jesus presents precisely as a higher interpretation of what it means to love the neighbour, is grounded, as we have seen, in the way in which God loves.²⁸ It teaches us to recognise as neighbour even those who set themselves against us. This is partly required by humility before the design of God in history and the limited nature of our perspective, for we do not know, as Christians have often said, who among those who confront us in hostility today will turn out to be our friends on the last day, when we stand before our Judge. It is partly, too, ‘that we may be children of our Father in heaven’²⁹, learning to share the perspective of God, who reaches out and seeks to win all his creatures to his love, even those who turn away from it. This resonates with what is said in the Qur’an: “*God may still bring about affection between you and your present enemies – God is all powerful, God is most forgiving and merciful*” (Al-Mumtahana 60:7). Where love replaces enmity we can recognise the work and way of God.

neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’ (Luke 10:25-37)

²⁶ Cf. Karl Barth’s similarly reversing reading of this parable: ‘The primary and true form of the neighbour is that he faces us as the bearer and representative of the divine compassion,’ *Church Dogmatics*, volume I/2, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956) p.416.

²⁷ “*Worship God; join nothing with Him. Be good to your parents, to relatives, to orphans, to the needy, to neighbours near and far, to travellers in need, and to your slaves.*” (4:36)

²⁹ Cf. Matthew 5:45

SEEKING THE COMMON GOOD IN THE WAY OF GOD

The Common Good

“**Love works no ill to his neighbour**” (Romans 13:10)

“**Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers**” (Hebrews 13:1-2)

There are many practical implications that flow from our understandings of love of God and love of neighbour, including those mentioned in your letter regarding peacemaking, religious freedom and the avoidance of violence.³⁰ In response we should like to offer a vision, grounded in absolute faithfulness to our respective religious convictions, that we believe we can share in offering to our fellow believers and our neighbours (in the widest sense).

To believe in an absolute religious truth is to believe that the object of our belief is not vulnerable to the contingencies of human history: God's mind and character cannot be changed by what happens here in the world. Thus an apparent defeat in the world for our belief cannot be definitive; God does not fail just because we fail to persuade others or because our communities fail to win some kind of power. If we were to believe that our failure is a failure or defeat for God, then the temptation will be to seek for any means possible to avoid such an outcome. But that way lies terrorism and religious war and persecution. The idea that any action, however extreme or disruptive or even murderous, is justified if it averts failure or defeat for a particular belief or a particular religious group is not really consistent with the conviction that our failure does not mean God's failure. Indeed, it reveals a fundamental lack of conviction in the eternity and sufficiency of the object of faith.

Religious violence suggests an underlying religious insecurity. When different communities have the same sort of conviction of the absolute truth of their perspective, there is certainly an intellectual and spiritual challenge to be met; but the logic of this belief ought to make it plain that there can be no justification for the sort of violent contest in which any means, however inhuman, can be justified by appeal to the need to ‘protect God’s interests’. Even to express it in those terms is to show how

³⁰ Among the many items for this agenda one respondent, Colin Chapman, suggests:

- **Our histories:** we need to recognise the legacy of 1400 years of sometimes difficult relationships between Christians and Muslims. Both faiths have at different times and in different places been associated with conquest and empire. And while there have been times of peaceful co-existence, conflicts between Muslims and Christians in the past (and present) have left their mark on the collective memory of both communities.

- **The wide variety of reasons for tensions in different situations today:** while there are some common factors in all situations where Muslims and Christians live side by side, in each situation there is also likely to be a unique set of factors – political, economic, cultural or social – which contribute to these tensions.

- **Christians and Muslims as minorities:** we recognise that 25% of Muslims worldwide are living in minority situations, and Christians also in many parts of the world find themselves as minorities. In contexts like these both Christians and Muslims face similar dilemmas and may have more in common with each other than with their secular neighbours.

- **The Israeli-Palestinian conflict** is at or near the top of the list of issues that concern both Christians and Muslims all over the world. This conflict is quite unique in the way that religion and politics are so thoroughly intertwined. Christian and Muslim leaders therefore have a special responsibility both to educate their own communities about ‘the things that make for peace’ and to appeal to their political leaders to work for a just resolution of the conflict.

Love of the neighbour, as *A Common Word Suggests*, provides a firm basis on which to address many of these immediate issues that affect Christian – Muslim relations all over the world. When Muslims point to the saying of Muhammad “None of you has faith until you love for your brother (or neighbour) what you love for yourself”, Christians point to the Golden Rule as taught by Jesus: **‘In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets’** (Matthew 7:12). This must mean in practice, for example, that when western Christians try to put themselves in the shoes of the Christians in Egypt and reflect on how they would like to be treated in that minority situation, this should affect the way that they think about Muslim minorities in the West. The principle of reciprocity seems to many to be a natural expression of love of the neighbour, since it means wanting for our neighbours what we want for ourselves. Its acceptance by both Christians and Muslims would help to resolve many of the tensions experienced by both Christian and Muslim minorities.

absurd it is. The eternal God cannot need ‘protection’ by the tactics of human violence. This point is captured in the words of Jesus before the Roman governor: **“My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight”** (John 19.36).

So we can conclude that the more we as people of genuine faith are serious about the truth of our convictions, the more likely we will be to turn away from violence in the name of faith; to trust that God, the truly real, will remain true, divine and unchanging, whatever the failures and successes of human society and history. And we will be aware that to try and compel religious allegiance through violence is really a way of seeking to replace divine power with human; hence the Qur’anic insistence that there can be no compulsion in matters of religious faith (al-Baqarah, 2:256³¹) and the endorsement in your letter of “freedom of religion”. It is crucial to faith in a really existing and absolute transcendent agency that we should understand it as being what it is quite independently of any lesser power: the most disturbing form of secularisation is when this is forgotten or misunderstood.

This has, indeed, been forgotten or misunderstood in so many contexts over the millennia. Religious identity has often been confused with cultural or national integrity, with structures of social control, with class and regional identities, with empire; and it has been imposed in the interest of all these and other forms of power. Despite Jesus’ words in John’s gospel, Christianity has been promoted at the point of the sword and legally supported by extreme sanctions³²; despite the Qur’anic axiom, Islam has been supported in the same way, with extreme penalties for abandoning it, and civil disabilities for those outside the faith. There is no religious tradition whose history is exempt from such temptation and such failure.

What we need as a vision for our dialogue is to break the current cycles of violence, to show the world that faith and faith alone can truly ground a commitment to peace which definitively abandons the tempting but lethal cycle of retaliation in which we simply imitate each other’s violence.³³ Building on our understanding of God’s love for us and, in response, our love for God and neighbour we can speak of a particular quality to the Christian approach to peace and peace-making: the moment of unconditioned positive response, the risk of offering something to one whom you have no absolutely secure reason to trust.

Many Christians have said that your letter represents such an offering – a gift with no certainty of what might be the response. We want to acknowledge the courage of such a move, and respond in kind. Let us explore together how this dimension of Christian language, born of the unconditional and self-sacrificial love of neighbour, can be correlated with the language of the Qur’an.

³¹ *There is no compulsion in religion*

³² There has been, and continues to be, a tradition within Christianity that has argued the moral rightness of using force in certain carefully defined circumstances, most notably through the application of the “just war” criteria formulated by St Augustine of Hippo and developed by St Thomas Aquinas.

³³ And here we must recognise, in the words of the initial reflections on *A Common Word* offered by Daniel Madigan SJ “... an honest examination of conscience will not permit us to forget that our future is not threatened only by conflict between us. Over the centuries of undeniable conflict and contestation between members of our two traditions, each group has had its own internal conflicts that have claimed and continue to claim many more lives than interconfessional strife. More Muslims are killed daily by other Muslims than by Christians or anyone else. The huge numbers who went to their deaths in the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980’s were virtually all Muslims. Scarcely any of the tens of millions of Christians who have died in European wars over the centuries were killed by Muslims. The greatest shame of the last century was the killing of millions of Jews by Christians conditioned by their own long tradition of anti-Semitism and seduced by a virulently nationalist and racist new ideology. The last 15 years in Africa have seen millions of Christians slaughtered in horrendous civil wars by their fellow believers... So let us not be misled into thinking either that Muslim-Christian conflict is the world’s greatest conflict, or even that war is the most serious threat to the human future.”

Such an approach can take us beyond a bland affirmation that we are at peace with those who are at peace with us to a place where our religious convictions can be a vehicle for creating peace where it is absent.

Such a commitment to seek together the common good can, we are convinced, sit alongside a fundamental recognition that, even with our commitments to love God and neighbour, we cannot expect to find some 'neutral' positions beyond the traditions of our faith that would allow us to broker some sort of union between our diverse convictions. Far from being a cause for concern, holding fast to our truth claims whilst rejecting violence does two very positive things at once. First it affirms the transcendent source of faith: it says that our views are not just human constructions which we can abandon when they are inconvenient. Second, by insisting that no other values, no secular values, are absolute, it denies to all other systems of values any justification for uncontrolled violence. Transcendent values can be defended through violence only by those who do not fully understand their transcendent character; and if no other value is absolute, no other value can claim the right to unconditional defence by any means and at all costs.

So, even if we accept that our systems of religious belief cannot be reconciled by 'rational' argument because they depend on the gift of revelation, we rule out, by that very notion, any assumption that coercive human power is the ultimate authority and arbiter in our world. Given, as we have acknowledged, that Christian history contains too many examples of Christians betraying that initial turning away from the cycle of retaliation, we can only put forward such a vision in the form of a challenge to Christians as much as Muslims: how did we ever come to think that the truly transcendent can ever be imagined or proclaimed in a pattern of endless and sterile repetition of force?

And here we can together suggest a way in which religious plurality can be seen as serving the cause of social unity and acting as a force for the common good. As people of faith, we can never claim that social harmony can be established by uncontrolled coercive power. This means that we are not obliged to defend and argue for the legitimacy and righteousness of any social order. As the world now is, diverse religious traditions very frequently inhabit one territory, one nation, one social unit (and that may be a relatively small unit like a school, or a housing co-operative or even a business). In such a setting, we cannot avoid the pragmatic and secular question of 'common security': what is needed for our convictions to flourish is bound up with what is needed for the convictions of other groups to flourish. We learn that we can best defend ourselves by defending others. In a plural society, Christians secure their religious liberty by advocacy for the liberty of people of other faiths to have the same right to be heard in the continuing conversation about the direction and ethos of society.

And we can extend this still further. If we are in the habit of defending each other, we ought to be able to learn to defend other groups and communities as well. We can together speak for those who have no voice or leverage in society – for the poorest, the most despised, the least powerful, for women and children, for migrants and minorities; and even to speak together for that great encompassing reality which has no 'voice' or power of its own – our injured and abused material environment, which both our traditions of faith tell us we should honour and care for.

Our voice in the conversation of society will be the stronger for being a joint one. If we are to be true to the dual commandment of love, we need to find ways of being far more effective in influencing our societies to follow the way of God in promoting that which leads to human flourishing – honesty and faithfulness in public and private relationships, in business as in marriage and family life; the recognition that a person's value is not an economic matter; the clear recognition that neither material wealth nor entertainment can secure a true and deep-rooted human fulfilment.

Seeking together in the way of God

A Common Word Between Us and You issues a powerful call to dialogue and collaboration between Christians and Muslims. A great deal is already happening in this sphere on many levels, but the very wide geographical (43 countries) and theological diversity represented among the signatories of your letter provides a unique impetus to deepen and extend the encounters. As part of the common shape and structure of our language about God we can acknowledge a shared commitment to truth and a desire to discern how our lives may come to be lived in accordance with eternal truth. As we have noted above, the Christian understanding of love, coupled with our common acknowledgement of the absolute transcendence of the divine, encourages us towards a vision of radical and transformative non-violence. We are committed to reflecting and working together, with you and all our human neighbours, with a view both to practical action and service and to a long term dedication to all that will lead to a true common good for human beings before God.

This is a good moment to attempt to coordinate a way forward for our dialogue. We suggest an approach drawing on *Dialogue and Proclamation*, a 1991 Vatican document whose four categories of inter-religious dialogue have been found widely helpful. They are:

- a) *the dialogue of life*, “where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit”;
- b) *the dialogue of action*, “in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people”;
- c) *the dialogue of theological exchange*, “where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages”; and
- d) *the dialogue of religious experience*, “where persons rooted in their own religious traditions share their spiritual riches”.

This typology can be applied more generally to the whole pattern of encounter between Christians and Muslims, even where this is not directly described as ‘dialogue’.

Three imperatives are suggested by this:

- a) to strengthen grass-roots partnerships and programmes between our communities that will work for justice, peace and the common good of human society the world over;
- b) to intensify the shared theological discussions and researches of religious leaders and scholars who are seeking clearer insight into divine truth, and to realise this through building and sustaining of groups marked by a sense of collegiality, mutual esteem, and trust;³⁴
- c) to deepen the appreciation of Christian and Muslim believers for each other’s religious practice and experience, as they come to recognise one another as people whose lives are oriented towards God in love.³⁵

These different kinds of encounter need to be held together to ensure a balanced and effective pattern of encounter. The approach of your letter shows the importance of shared and attentive study of Biblical and Qur’anic texts as a way of ensuring both that all dimensions of encounter are present and

³⁴ While such colloquia should be characterised by a high degree of academic rigour, they should also draw on and express the personal commitment of religious leaders and scholars to their respective faiths.

³⁵ This will require spending time in each other’s presence, exploring the depth of each other’s spirituality, and acknowledging both the variety and the depth of prayer, remembrance and celebration in both faiths.

also that Christians and Muslims are held accountable to, and draw on the riches of, their respective traditions of faith whilst recognising the limitations – at least initially - in our ability to comment authoritatively on the others’ scriptures.³⁶

As we noted earlier, the role of the Qu’ran in Islam is not really parallel to the role of the Bible in Christianity. For Christians, God’s Word was made flesh in Jesus Christ. Our understanding of the Scriptures is that they witness to and draw their authority from Christ, describing the witness of prophets and apostles to his saving work. They are the voice of his living Spirit who, Christians believe, dwells among us and within us. Nevertheless, for us as for you, reading the Scriptures is a constant source of inspiration, nurture and correction, and this makes it very appropriate for Christians and Muslims to listen to one another, and question one another, in the course of reading and interpreting the texts from which we have learned of God’s will and purposes. And for Christians and Muslims together addressing our scriptures in this way, it is essential also to take account of the place of the Jewish people and of the Hebrew scriptures in our encounter, since we both look to our origins in that history of divine revelation and action.

The use of scriptures in inter-religious dialogue has considerable potential, but there are also risks in this approach when we think we know or understand another’s sacred texts but in fact are reading them exclusively through our own spectacles. We hope that one early outcome of studying and discussing together will be to work out wise guidelines, practices and educational resources for this element of our engagement.

Given the variety of forms of encounter which are to be held together as we deepen our engagement with each other, we can identify three main outcomes which we might seek together. They will depend on the establishment and maintenance of credible and durable structures of collegiality, trust and respect between key individuals and communities in our two faiths. The three outcomes are:

- a) Maintaining and strengthening the momentum of what is already happening in Christian-Muslim encounter. An important stream flowing into this will be the continuing conversations around your letter and the Christian responses to it. Reaching back before that also, there has been a growing corpus of action and reflection in this area at least from *Nostra Aetate* (1965) onwards. The recent gathering of Muslim religious leaders and scholars in Mecca and the subsequent convening of a conference in Madrid, for example, is another promising development. It is important that any new initiatives acknowledge this wider picture of Christian-Muslim encounter, and position themselves in relation to it, learning from both its achievements and set-backs.
- b) Finding safe spaces within which the differences – as well as the convergences - between Christians and Muslims can be honestly and creatively articulated and explored. Our two faiths have differed deeply on points of central importance to both of us, points of belief as well as points of practice. It is essential for the health of our encounter that we should find

³⁶ The Christian Bible, Old and New Testaments together, forms a large narrative (with, admittedly, many subordinate parts some of which do not well fit the ‘narrative’ model) from creation to new creation, from the Garden of Eden to the New Jerusalem which comes down from heaven to earth. Within this narrative, Jesus Christ is presented as the climax of the story of the world’s creation on the one hand and of the call of Abraham on the other: the stories of Jesus are not just ‘stories of Jesus’ but ‘stories of Jesus seen as the fulfilment of covenant and creation’. The multiple teachings which are found variously throughout the Bible – doctrine about God, rules for behaviour, religious practices etc. – are set, and best understood, within that overall story. It would be worth exploring in some detail how Muslims see these aspects of Christian scripture and whether there are ways in which such a perception would create new kinds of possibilities for dialogue.

ways of talking freely yet courteously about those differences; indeed, honesty of this kind has been described as the most certain sign of maturity in dialogue.

- c) Ensuring that our encounters are not for the sake of participants alone, but are capable of having an influence which affects people more widely – Christians and Muslims at the level of all our local communities, and also those engaged in the wider realities of our societies and our world. Seeking the common good is a purpose around which Christians and Muslims can unite, and in leads us into all kinds of complex territory as we seek to find ways of acting effectively in the world of modern global and democratic politics.

Within the wide diversity of patterns of encounter and participation, it will be desirable to establish some broad priorities in order to keep Christian-Muslim relations focused and effective around a number of core themes. Again, three steps seem worth establishing here:

- a) First, there is an urgent need in both our traditions for education about one another. We are all influenced by prejudices and misunderstandings inherited from the past – and often renewed in the present through the power of media stereotyping. Teaching and learning about the reality and diversity of Islam as Muslims practise their faith should be a priority as important to Christians as understanding of actual Christianity should be to Muslims. In concrete terms, such educational programmes might be initially be focused on those preparing clergy and imams respectively for public inter-faith roles and on those providing religious education to young people.
- b) Second, opportunities for lived encounter with people of different faiths, both within and across national boundaries, need to be multiplied and developed in an atmosphere of trust and respect. These should take place on many different levels and in many different settings. Such opportunities might usefully be focused on educational projects, efforts towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals and shared work for reconciliation in situations of conflict and historic enmities.
- c) Finally, for encounters to be sustainable over a long period of time, there needs to be commitment to the process and to one another on the part of all participants. Such a commitment, growing into affection, respect, collegiality and friendship, will be an expression of love of neighbour; it will also be done in love for God and in response to God's will.

We believe that *A Common Word Between Us and You* opens the way for these steps to be approached in a new spirit. The limitations of making further statements or sending further letters in advance of meeting together are obvious, however good and friendly the intentions. We greatly look forward therefore to discussing face to face some of the questions arising from these exchanges of letters, exploring – as was said earlier – both the concepts that have been sketched and the new possibilities for creative work together for the good of our world.

So to your invitation to enter more deeply into dialogue and collaboration as a part of our faithful response to the revelation of God's purpose for humankind, we say: Yes! Amen.

In the love of God,

+ Rowan Cantuar:

14 July 2008