

## **A Common Word: Five Years On A Reading Guide**

In October 2007, an Open Letter ([www.acommonword.com](http://www.acommonword.com)) was sent, signed by 138 Muslim religious leaders, to a range of Christian leaders inviting them to come to work together to build peace between Christians and Muslims on the basis of a verse of the Qur'an (Q. 3:64):

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. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him).

Heythrop College in the University of London ([www.heythrop.ac.uk](http://www.heythrop.ac.uk)) convened a study day in October 2012 to examine the text afresh and consider the developments of the intervening five years. This reading guide was developed for the occasion and delivered then in part. It is offered here in full as an aid to reflection and further theological discussion.

The Muslim initiative to build world peace and open the way for a theological dialogue is warmly to be welcomed. The basis for the initiative is that Christians and Muslims both worship the one and only God (from a Christian perspective, see: Vatican II: *Lumen Gentium* § 16 and *Nostra Aetate* § 3), have a responsibility for giving guidance on earth and are ultimately accountable to God on the Day of Judgement for the way in which this responsibility has been discharged.

### **Background to the Open Letter**

The letter was generated from the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The Hashemites were the clan from which Prophet Muhammad came and historically they have had a particular responsibility for the guardianship of the holy places of Islam (Makka, Madina and Jerusalem) and thus for giving a lead in Muslim affairs. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the 1914-18 war, the Ottoman lands in the Middle East were divided by a British-French initiative (the Sykes-Picot Agreement) to create the countries of the modern Middle East. In this process, the House of Ibn Saud was given the territory surrounding Makka and Madina and a part of Greater Syria was divided off to form the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

It is best to see the Common Word initiative as an attempt, under the leadership of Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal of Jordan, to express the traditional mainstream position of Islam on central questions and develop a new consensus (*ijma*) around it in the face of various extreme positions that became apparent and influential towards the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As part of this process, the **Amman Message 2004** ([www.ammanmessage.com](http://www.ammanmessage.com)) was drawn up under the hand of King Abdullah of Jordan to re-state the middle ground of Muslim thought against the rise of extremism.

Main points:

- Stress on the oneness of God
- Return to the practice of the pillars of Islam
- Stress on ethical living
- The oneness of humanity
- Building a just society
- Need to participate as Muslims in modern society
- Importance of the correct training for religious leaders
- Focus on good guidance for young people
- Against all forms of extremism
- Against terrorism and indiscriminate killing

It was tabled at a number of conferences and signed by 552 Muslim leaders from 84 countries from July 2005 to July 2006 (full list on web). Political leaders: Presidents, Prime Ministers, Kings, Princes, Shaykhs, Ministers etc. Religious leaders: Grand Muftis, Grand Ayatollahs, leaders of Ulama Councils, Professors from universities, etc. The document was hardly noticed in the non-Muslim world.

This was followed by the **Amman Interfaith Message** (see: [www.ammanmessage.com](http://www.ammanmessage.com)), dated 2005, also under the hand of King Abdullah of Jordan.

Main points:

- Reduce tension and promote goodwill between Jews, Christians and Muslims
- Stress on the unity of God
- Worship and devotion to God
- Love and justice towards fellow human beings

The message was reinforced by speeches made by the King in Christian institutions in the USA. On 16 November 2005 King Abdullah was awarded the John Paul II Peace Prize. Again, this document received limited notice.

In September 2006 Pope Benedict delivered the Regensburg Lecture ([http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20060912\\_university-regensburg\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html)). As a small part of this lecture, he drew attention to two questions relating to Islam: What is the place of reason in Islam? and What is the relationship of Islam to violence?

This lecture prompted a group of Muslim scholars in October 2006 to draw up a response pointing out fundamental misconceptions (the text of this response can also be found on the Common Word website: [www.acommonword.com](http://www.acommonword.com)). This open letter was signed by thirty-eight Muslim scholars and offered for wider agreement. Again, this letter received little notice amongst Christians and drew only a minimal response from Vatican authorities.

This letter prompted the issuing of A Common Word (ACW) one year later in October 2007 bearing the names of all the initial thirty-eight original signatories (one office bearer in Indonesia had changed) plus the addition of one hundred further religious scholars to show its additional weight. It seems clear from the timings of certain responses that the text was released in advance to groups of Christian theologians, notably at Cambridge and Yale Universities (for responses, see [www.acommonword.com](http://www.acommonword.com)). ACW prompted an official Vatican response in the form of the establishment of a new bilateral conversation known as the Catholic-Muslim Forum.

### **Status of the Letter**

It has been suggested that ACW should be seen as a “Muslim *Nostra Aetate*” but this is hardly appropriate. There is no conciliar or magisterial tradition in Islam equivalent to an Ecumenical Council in the Catholic tradition. The document was not developed on the floor of a council chamber with open debate and various editions. There was no worldwide signing up to the document by the assembly comparable to the 2,800 Catholic bishops’ agreement to the documents of Vatican II. There has not been a volume of commentary dealing with the genesis of the text comparable to that, for example, of the *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* (edited in five volumes by Herbert Vorgrimler et al., Herder and Herder, 1966 and following). For the specific commentary on *Nostra Aetate* see Vol. III, p. 1-154).

*Nostra Aetate* has been criticised by some Muslim scholars in that it was silent on certain fundamental questions relating to Islam, notably the status of the Qur'an and the prophethood of Muhammad. Similarly, ACW says nothing directly on central Christian doctrines such as the Trinity and Incarnation. In a later commentary (*A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on loving God and neighbor*, (eds.) Miroslav Volf, Ghazi bin Muhammad and Melissa Yarrington, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), key Muslim figures point out that ACW was dealing with recorded sayings of Jesus in the New Testament not later Christian doctrines like the Trinity (see: Ghazi, p. 9) and that Islam denies the possibility of God becoming incarnate in a human being (see: al-Jifri p. 82-83). In the original Arabic, the term *hulul* was used by al-Jifri. This was translated in the English edition as “incarnation” but is better rendered as “indwelling”; the difference between “the incarnation of the Word of God in Christ” and “the indwelling of the Word of God in Christ” provides grounds for

a degree of Christian theological reflection (see the historic controversies on Docetism).

ACW should best be seen as a restatement of mainstream Muslim theology based on the love of God and neighbour drawn up by a group of Muslim scholars and offered for wider agreement as a consensus (*ijma*) amongst Muslims. The choice of the key verse Q. 3:64 should be noted here as Muslim scholarship agrees that it arises in the context of a discussion between Muhammad and a delegation of Christian leaders from the settlement of Najran in modern Yemen. Muslim scholars understand the context of revelation of the first eighty-odd (most say eighty-three) verses of chapter three of the Qur'an to be the occasion of the visit of the delegation from Najran (see: *The Qur'an and its Interpreters*, Mahmoud Ayoub, NY: SUNY, 1992, Vol II, p. 1-6). The verses relate to a debate between the Prophet and the delegation about the person of Jesus in which the Qur'an corrects fundamental misunderstandings amongst these Christians (probably Monophysites) concerning the nature of Jesus. They are asked to return to the true understanding as given in the Qur'an and teaching of Muhammad, namely that Jesus was not the son of God but a human Prophet virginally conceived and born of Mary. There was serious disagreement between them resulting in an invitation to a mutual invocation of the curse of God on whoever taught falsely, at which the Christians pulled back (see: v. 61-63). Then comes the "Common Word" verse of Q. 3:64, in which they are invited to come to a common word that both shall worship none but God alone: the perennial doctrine that was taught by Muhammad and all the earlier Prophets including Jesus. More will be said about this verse later (for the full text of Q. 3:1-83, see appendix one).

The mainstream nature of ACW can be judged by the fact that the text was offered to 141 Muslim scholars from a wide range of Muslim Schools for them to sign. Three declined (two on political grounds, one because "Christian scriptures are forged so should not be put alongside the Qur'an"). No-one objected to the contents of the letter on scholarly grounds (see: Ghazi in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on loving God and neighbor*, p. 177). ACW should be seen as a deeply traditional piece of Islamic theology, not a liberal, radical departure.

### **Generation of the text**

Ghazi bin Muhammad is self-proclaimed as the principal author (see: Ghazi in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on loving God and neighbor*, p. 172). He collaborated with a small working group and the developing text was discussed with others. It was then checked by highly respected Muslim scholars from various centres of learning. Finally it was offered to the 141 scholars for them to validate with their signature, resulting in the initial published list of 138 names.

The text was generated and circulated in Arabic and it is helpful to see two audiences. First, it had to be accepted by the Muslim scholars asked to sign it and by a wider Muslim audience (see: [www.acommonword.com](http://www.acommonword.com) for a complete list of Muslim signatories including those who signed up to it post-publication). Second, it was addressed to Christian leaders and the wider Christian community. To understand the text, it is necessary to consider the first Muslim audience. Such scholars either have Arabic as their mother-tongue or else are totally familiar with the language. They are steeped in the words of the Qur'an and know the contexts of verses cited and the range of interpretations placed on them. The text “resonates with them” within this context. They supply the missing parts of verses and Qur'anic passages from which verses cited are taken almost subconsciously. It is necessary then for Christian readers to read the full context and consult the classical commentaries to come to an understanding of how they “resonate” with Muslims (see the appendices for the passages surrounding principal verses cited).

The fact that individual Muslim scholars have signed the text does not mean that there is unanimity in the way in which they interpreted it. As yet we do not have commentaries by named authors indicting how they understood the text, which interpretations were in their minds when they signed it or how they would justify taking a particular interpretation as opposed to others within the vast body of Qur'anic commentary. We do not know the mind of the signatories and any such text, like the Qur'an itself, is open to a range of interpretations. In the absence of such commentaries and given that this is a deeply traditional statement of mainstream Islamic thought, we need to see how the Qur'anic passages cited are interpreted by the classical authors of Qur'anic commentary and take that as the default position.

### **The aim of ACW**

Three principal aims for ACW can be identified in the text.

- First, an invitation from the Muslim signatories to the Christian leaders to join hands on the basis of the dual command to love God and neighbour for the sake of God and to promote world peace.
- Second, an invitation to Christian leaders to enter into a *theological* dialogue with Muslim religious leaders. The stress on a theological dialogue is important; this is not a United Nations attempt at seeking geo-political world peace as a secular, sociological endeavour but it is from one set of religious leaders to another. The meaning of dialogue is also important here, from the Greek “to talk something through” to seek mutual enlightenment and understanding.
- Third, to find a theological basis for Christians and Muslims to develop a common ethic of peace-building.

From a Christian perspective, “love of God and neighbour” can be seen as the theological foundation for an ethical system. Indeed there have been Christian

attempts to build an ethical system precisely on “doing the most loving thing in any given situation” (see: Situation Ethics). Christian theologians must discuss whether this is a satisfactory basis for a Christian ethic. Similarly, Muslim scholars must develop an argument to defend this dual commandment of love as a basis for Muslim ethics (many would traditionally have argued that justice is the principal ethic of Islam). For Christians, it is important to note that the discussion here is of a basis for an ethical system; the dual commandments are hardly the *heart* of the teaching and mission of Jesus. As one Christian commentator (Dan Madigan SJ) has noted, the Word of God was incarnated in the person of Jesus for something more than to repeat and give emphasis to two statements already found in the Torah (Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:17-18).

The question must be posed for discussion: Is love of God and neighbour a satisfactory ethic for world peace? This needs to be coupled with an examination of the geographical distribution of the original signatories to ACW. There were 138 religious leaders from 43 countries:

Jordan 15, Egypt 9, Morocco 8, Iraq 6, Syria 4, Kuwait 4, UAE 4, Lebanon 4, Saudi Arabia 3, Algeria 3, Iran 3, Yemen 3, Palestine 2, Oman 2, Dubai 1, Tunisia 1.

Nigeria 6, Sudan 3; Chad, The Gambia, Mauritania all 1.

Malaysia 4, India 3, Pakistan 2; Azerbaijan, Indonesia, Brunei, Ukraine, Uzbekistan all 1.

USA 14, Canada 1.

Bosnia 3, UK 3, Turkey 2; France, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Italy, Croatia, Kosovo all 1.

Additionally 4.

This distribution indicates that the continents of Asia and Africa, where the majority of Muslims live and where Muslims and Christians are to be found in close proximity, often within the same family in the case of Africa, were significantly underrepresented. This prompted the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung from Germany to sponsor a colloquium of Christian and Muslim scholars from Africa (East and West) and Asia (South and South-East) to come together in 2009 to discuss ACW and its impact in their areas. The title of the report published from this colloquium *We have Justice in Common* (full text can be downloaded as a pdf file from [www.chrishewer.org](http://www.chrishewer.org)) indicated the need expressed by those present for justice to be placed centre-stage in a practical quest for world peace to augment the love ethic.

### **Seeing the document as a traditional Muslim mainstream statement**

Bearing in mind the foregoing note of two audiences and the stress on this being a statement of the Muslim middle-ground, it is important to consider the text as perceived as such by Muslims. Ghazi notes: ACW “does *not* signal that Muslims are prepared to deviate from, or concede one iota of, any of their

convictions in order to reach out to Christians – and we expect the reverse is also true.” (*A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on loving God and neighbor*, p 11).

ACW opens with a citation of the verse of *da'wa* Q. 16:125:

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful,  
Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and  
contend with them in the fairest way. Lo! thy Lord is Best Aware of him  
who strayeth from His way, and He is Best Aware of those who go aright.

This verse contains a double rationale for the Muslim reader; it gives a methodology for dialogue and states the Muslim duty to invite people to the way of God as exemplified in the Qur'an and the customary practice (Sunna) of Muhammad. The dialogue is to be conducted with the use of beautiful words, the best of arguments and wisdom. To live according to the guidance of God sent down definitively and finally in the Qur'an and teaching of Muhammad is part of the birth-right of every human being. It is the duty of Muslims to invite people to embrace this path. They are not at liberty to deny the invitation to people as this would break the divine command. This invitation is to be extended to Jews and Christians; indeed they are promised a double reward if they recognise the prophethood of Muhammad, purify the errors that have crept into their way of following the Prophet Jesus and become Muslims (Q. 57:28). Such an invitation is a necessary part of any Christian-Muslim dialogue; just as Christians will want to proclaim their faith in the Lord Jesus. There is no suggestion in the ACW initiative that Christians or Muslims should object if their dialogue partner is true to the fundamentals of their faith.

A Hadith of Muhammad is repeated several times in ACW: “The best that I have said; myself and the prophets that came before me, is there is no god but God, he alone. He has no associate. His is the sovereignty and his is the praise and he has power over all things.” We need to read this in a Muslim perspective. Throughout the human ages, God sent an unknown number of Prophets to the earth (there is a Hadith that speaks of 124,000) and they all taught essentially the same message. The last and definitive of these Prophets is Muhammad, therefore we can deduce that the earlier Prophets, including explicitly Jesus, taught essentially the same message as expressed in this Hadith. Absolutely central to Muslim faith is that Muhammad (and the Qur'an) taught the absolute oneness of God expressed in the doctrine of *tawhid*. Can it be then that Jesus taught something so fundamentally different about such an essential element of faith, namely the doctrine of the Trinity? Within this perspective, God, the Qur'an, Muhammad and Islam are the ultimate authorities on what Jesus taught about the essentials of faith. This has led Muslims classically to see that Jesus was an infallible, sinless Prophet of God who taught the oneness of God as expressed in the doctrine of *tawhid*. This is seen as the authentic teaching of Jesus and doctrines such as the Trinity are distortions taught by the Trinitarian Church without a basis in the teaching of Jesus and without explicit mention even in the Christian scriptures.

This is matter for theological dialogue. The Qur'an is certainly opposed to tritheism (belief in three gods), which would be a form of giving God partners/associates (*shirk*). Muslim scholars down through the ages have struggled to understand how the Christian doctrine of trinitarian monotheism amounts to anything other than tritheism. It is of course for Christians to find an appropriate way of expressing their faith in God as “one *ousia* yet three *hypostases*” that might help Muslims to see the monotheistic thrust of Christian belief. ACW is silent on the question. It is open to two possible readings: a. We take seriously and respect the Christian affirmation of the oneness of God, even though we struggle to appreciate the talk of Trinity and would prefer that it was more clearly expressed in what we would regard as absolutely monotheistic language, or b. Jesus taught the absolute oneness of God, who was other than he; we have the utmost respect for this teaching of the Prophet Jesus; our problem comes with the fact that some Christians have deviated from the pure absolute monotheism of Jesus with their talk of Trinity. This group would define themselves as Trinitarian Christians, as opposed to Arians, Unitarians etc. It is important to note in this dialogue that there are some Christian biblical scholars today, some of whom have become Muslims, who argue that the Christian gospels do not support the later Trinitarian and Christological doctrines and so are reconfiguring Christianity on the basis of a non-divine Jesus.

Could a position be sustained in dialogue that Muhammad taught the unity of God as expressed in the doctrine of *tawhid* and Jesus taught the unity of God as expressed in the doctrine of Trinity? This would be a major development as the classical position, as already noted, is that Jesus taught a unitarian doctrine of God, who was other than he. An attempt to resolve a common understanding of *tawhid* and Trinity hardly seems possible. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a signatory both of the Open Letter to the Pope (38 signatories) and ACW, in a lecture delivered before Pope Benedict in November 2008, said, “The doctrine of the Trinity certainly does not negate Divine Unity in mainstream Christian theology.” (see: *Allah: a Christian response*, Miroslav Volf, NY: HarperCollins, 2012, p. 136). This presents an intriguing thesis for dialogue. Can it be that the Christian doctrine of Trinity and the Muslim doctrine of *tawhid* are both theological codes of speech attempting to speak about the same Divine Unity? Here the meeting point would be in the unity of God with Trinity and *tawhid* as linguistic constructs trying to express the same thing.

Does this discourse inevitably lead us to a position that Christians and Muslims are not worshipping the same God? For both traditions, there is only one God, therefore if this were so, then one tradition would be worshipping the one and only God and the other something other than God, i.e. a false god. There have been Muslim scholars who have argued that the Christian understanding of God as Trinity so fundamentally distorts the truth that the Christian “god” is a

human construction, in effect, an idol that is not God at all. This is a similar position to that taken by some Jewish scholars, who have said that the doctrine of the Incarnation means that Christians have lapsed into idolatry. The critical development of Vatican II in stating for the first time in any such conciliar statement explicitly that Christians and Muslims are worshipping the same God (*Lumen Gentium* § 16, *Nostra Aetate* § 3) ought not to be lost from sight. The question posed for dialogue then emerges: “Can we both be worshipping God even though we understand God in fundamentally different ways?” A commendable and comprehensive discussion of this point from a Christian perspective can be found written by the Yale theologian, Miroslav Volf (*Allah: a Christian response*). We await a Muslim scholarly treatment of the same theme. Can it be that we agree thus to differ and still get on with the job of building world peace founded on the love of God and neighbour?

Later in ACW we read, “Whilst Islam and Christianity are obviously different religions...” This statement raises but does not resolve the question for dialogue: Are they two religions both in total obedience to God and their respective Prophets? The classical position would have been that Christians have distorted the original teaching of Jesus and then gone astray to create an “obviously different religion” which is fundamentally flawed. ACW contains the statement that Muhammad “brought nothing fundamentally or essentially new” therefore Qur'an and Muhammad are the best deposit and the criteria for what Jesus taught (see Q. 41:43; 46:9). Muhammad's role as a Warner is to call Christians back to faithful observance and God will ultimately be the judge and mete out forgiveness or punishment.

ACW ends by citing Q. 5:48:

And unto thee have We revealed the Scripture with the truth, confirming whatever Scripture was before it, and a watcher over it. So judge between them by that which God hath revealed, and follow not their desires away from the truth which hath come unto thee. For each We have appointed a law and a way. Had God willed He could have made you one community. But that He may try you by that which He hath given you (He hath made you as ye are). So vie one with another in good works. Unto God ye will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein ye differ.

In the translation of Muhammad Asad (*The Message of the Qur'an*, Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1984), the meaning is brought out more sharply:

And unto thee [O Prophet] have We vouchsafed this divine writ, setting forth the truth, confirming the truth of whatever there still remains of earlier revelations and determining what is true therein. Judge, then, between the followers of earlier revelation in accordance with what God has bestowed from on high, and do not follow their errant views, forsaking the truth that has come unto thee.

Unto every one of you have We appointed a [different] law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one

single community: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works! Unto God you all must return; and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ.

Again this verse needs to be read within the context in which it comes in the Qur'an Q. 5: 41-56 (see appendix two for the full text). v. 41 speaks of those who would race each other into disbelief. v. 43 accuses them of not really being people of faith. v. 44 the people of the earlier Books should judge by them; Muslims should not sell the signs of God for a miserable price. v. 47 let the people of the *Injil* (the Book that was given to Jesus) judge by what God revealed in it. v. 48 Muslims have the final Book; do not be led astray by Christians and Jews. v. 49 beware lest they beguile you away from what God has sent down to you. v. 51 take not Jews and Christians as friends and protectors. v. 55 your real friends are God, Muhammad and the community of Muslims.

Four points flow from this citation. First, the classical Muslim understanding that Jesus received a revelation from God called in the Qur'an, the *Injil*, but that Christians have lost it in whole or in part. Second, that the Qur'an is *al-furqan*, the criterion by which judgement can be made on what remains of the earlier scriptures. Third, Mufti Taqi Usmani, one of the most eminent contemporary Deobandi scholars in Pakistan and a signatory to ACW, gives us a helpful footnote in his translation of the Qur'an (*The Meanings of the Noble Qur'an*, Karachi: Maktaba Ma'ariful Quran, 2006), "When a new prophet comes with a new command, the people are tested to see whether they will obey it, or whether their love for the previous ways will prompt them to violate the new command." He thus emphasises the classical position that Jesus would have acknowledged the prophethood of Muhammad had he been alive in his time and called his followers to embrace the final and definitive revelation that Muhammad brought. Fourth, as Muhammad Asad puts it in his footnote to this verse, "The Qur'an impresses upon all who believe in God – Muslims and non-Muslims alike – that the differences in their religious practices should make them "vie with one another in doing good works" [in this case get on with building world peace].

Favourable attention has been drawn to the fact that ACW quotes from the Bible. Note that when citing from the Qur'an, the authors say: "God says..." and when citing from the Bible, "the Bible says..." or "Jesus says in the NT..." The texts that are cited from the Bible agree with sentiments expressed in the Qur'an and we should note that ACW treats the Bible with seriousness and respect, which is the way that Christians should treat the Qur'an. This does not connote any acceptance of authenticity. Given the disparities between the Qur'anic message and other passages in the Bible it could hardly be that the authors intend it to be understood that they regard the Christian scriptures as they now stand to be authentic and accurate deposits of the revelations sent to

Moses (*Taurat*), David (*Zabur*) and Jesus (*Injil*). In just the same way, a Christian cannot remain a Christian if one regards the authenticity of the Qur'an in the same way that a Muslim does.

To conclude this section on traditional approaches, we can say that both Muslims and Christians need to come to the table of dialogue being faithful to their respective traditions. Islam requires Muslims to say: You understand that we must say that you Christians have fundamentally misunderstood the teaching of Jesus with your doctrines of Trinity, Incarnation, Original Sin, Salvation, Death and Resurrection to Eternal Life of Jesus, and talk of a redeemed humanity. We know better what Jesus taught than you do yourselves. Christianity requires Christians to say: You understand that we cannot accept your understanding of the Qur'an as a literal, verbal revelation from God (*tanzil*) and Muhammad as the last, infallible, sinless, universal Prophet of God. Christians over the last fifty years have attempted to re-assess the questions: What can Christians say of the Qur'an? (we could mention the work of the French-speaking group of Christian and Muslim scholars, Groupe de Recherche Islamo-Chrétien and their *The Challenge of the Scriptures: the Bible and the Qur'an*, NY: Orbis, 1989). And, What can we as Christians say of Muhammad? (a prophet (Watt), like the biblical prophets (Küng) or not (Troll), a religious and political genius (Jomier), a bearer of the prophetic spirit (Hewer) etc.). We see here the need for theological dialogue between Muslims and Christians on these and other fundamental questions.

### **God's love for us – our love for God**

To give some meaning to a phrase like, “You shall love God” we need to begin by exploring the nature of love and God's love for humanity. Ghazi has given us a helpful contribution to this discussion in his book, *Love in the Holy Quran* (Chicago: Kazi, 2010). This is the English translation of his doctoral thesis presented at al-Azhar in the same year. It is a thematic study of the various aspects of love in the Qur'an and exemplifies the exegetical method of one verse being brought to explain another. The entire book can be downloaded as a pdf file from [www.altafsir.com](http://www.altafsir.com) from which website, one can also access a few important commentaries on the Qur'an translated into English.

Ghazi shows that a mere search for the Arabic form of the word love (*hubb*) by no means does justice to the topic in the Qur'an. He draws attention to more than fifty Arabic terms that unpack the concept. All except one chapter of the Qur'an begin with the phrase, “In the name of God, *al-Rahman, al-Rahim.*” These Arabic terms are normally translated as, “the Merciful, the Compassionate.” *Al-Rahman* can be seen as a quality belonging to the essence of God “to be merciful.” We could say, it belongs to the nature of God, or perhaps, it is an attribute of the essence of God “to be merciful.” *Al-Rahim* can be seen as the act of “being mercy-giving” which requires an object. God requires a creation in order “to be mercy-giving.” We could say, it belongs to

the action of God, or perhaps, it is an attribute of act of God “to be mercy-giving.” Both words in Arabic are derived from *rahim* meaning the womb. We can reflect on the ways in which a womb is “merciful and mercy-giving” to the developing child that it bears. We could say that the womb expresses the love of the mother for her developing child and could use a range of terms to deepen the meaning: sustaining, cherishing, nurturing, guiding, protecting... In a similar way, we need to explore these terms in the Qur'an to understand its notion of love.

An episode in the life of Muhammad takes this further. During the years 622-631, there had been enmity between the idol-worshipping people of Makka and the Muslims of Madina. They had fought three battles and there had been many skirmishes. When Makka surrendered peacefully to Muhammad in 631, there were some of its citizens who expected reprisals and that they would be massacred by the Muslims. This did not happen but as the Muslims entered the city, people fled in every direction in a scene of mass panic. A young mother had lost her infant in the confusion and frantically searched for the child. When she found it, she immediately clasped it to her breast to comfort it. Those with Muhammad who saw the scene were moved to tears by the tenderness expressed by the mother. We might describe it as an act of maternal love. Muhammad spoke of it as an act of mercy (or loving-mercy might be better), saying to his companions that if they thought that this was merciful then they should consider the vastness of God's mercy on the Day of Judgement (A version of the Hadith can be found in al-Bukhari 5999).

This example cautions us to explore more deeply the richness of the Qur'anic cognates of love in order to come to an adequate understanding. In this aspect of God's love for humankind it precedes any worthiness or action on the part of the human being; one cannot conceive of a developing child doing anything to merit the love of the mother expressed through her womb. So God's love for us precedes our love for God. Reza Shah-Kazemi in his chapter on “God the Loving” in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on loving God and neighbor*, p. 88-109, draws on the Muslim theological and sufi writings in a way that further enriches our understanding. He indicates that God's essential loving-merciful nature (*al-Rahman*) requires God to be mercy-giving (*al-Rahim*) to God's own self by creating a creation so that God can express that quality and action (*al-Rahman, al-Rahim*) to an object outside God. This is reminiscent of the saying “I was a hidden treasure desiring to be known so I created the creation in order to be known.”

Christians emphasise the statement from the First Letter of John, “God is love”. This would not be a standard Muslim formulation and its use would be contested by different groups of scholars and sufi shaykhs. There is room for a theological discussion on “the love of God”, when one party has an understanding of God expressed in the doctrine of *tawhid* and the other has an understanding of God based on the doctrine of Trinity. Can an absolutely

monotheistic God (*tawhid*) express love in the same way as a trinitarian monotheistic God? In order to use the statement “God is love” (not God possesses the quality of love or God acts in a loving way but God “is love”), does one need a trinitarian understanding of God? Is there not a critical sense in which the three modes of being (*hypostases*) in God “pour out love upon one another within the Godhead for all eternity”, as we could struggle to express it. Such a theological dialogue with Muslims could help Christians to explore if and why a trinitarian understanding of God is essential to Christianity and not coincidental; thus not capable of being argued away without violation of traditional Christian self-understanding.

It would be instructive for Christians to meditate on another group of verses cited in ACW (here given in full but only v 1-2 in ACW): Q. 112:1-4. This chapter of the Qur'an comprises only four verses and it is traditionally one of the very first that Muslim children memorise. It would be one of the most common Qur'anic passages to be recited in the five-times-daily formal prayers (*salat*): “Say: He is God, One, God, the Self-sufficient Besought of all, He neither begot nor was begotten, nor is there anyone equal to Him.” These verses express the oneness of God in a particular way and this is drawn out in eighty-five pages of commentary from a range of scholars through the centuries in the admirable book edited by Feras Hamza and Sajjad Rizvi with Farhana Mayer, *An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries: Vol. I On the Nature of the Divine*, Oxford: OUP, 2008, p.491-576. They highlight the way in which the oneness of God mentioned here (*al-ahad*) is best understood as internal oneness, “indivisibly one within God’s self.” The term *al-samad*, which is rendered by the editors “the Self-sufficient Besought of all”, has the meanings of the one to whom others turn for all needs but also, the solid, impenetrable, the one without cavity. Finally God does not bring forth (beget) or emanate from (begotten) any dense or subtle thing (a “dense thing” might be a child or a being of some kind, and a “subtle thing” would be something non-material like a soul).

Two trains of reflection for Christians arise from this, which would then be worthy of a theological dialogue with Muslims. First, for Christians to read the commentaries on Q. 112 and reflect on the extent to which this understanding of God is close to or adequately represents their trinitarian understanding. Second, the classical Christian theologies of God likewise stress God’s absolute indivisibility and yet speak of the three modes of being (*hypostases*) being unconfused and capable of differentiation within the Godhead (*ad intra*), whilst all three are proleptically present in the action of any one (*ad extra*), therefore, for example, Jesus is wholly God and not part of God in his divine nature. Also the classical formulations speak of the Word being *generated by* or *proceeding from* the Father in eternity (“before all time”).

There is another dimension to the love of God for human beings in the Qur'an which can be described as contractual or conditional. We find many verses that

record that God loves those who do good deeds, the patient, the godfearing, the just, those who fight in God's way and so on. Conversely, we find many verses that record that God does not love those who do wrong, the unbelievers, the proud, the boastful, the aggressors and so on (for a selection of such verses, see appendix three). The Islamic principle of every woman and man being born in a state of natural harmony with God (*din al-fitra*) and the pre-embodied souls having accepted the lordship of God (Q. 7:172) helps us to understand what is happening here. The obedient person who is living according to their natural good state will be loved by God on account of this but the disobedient person is denying their natural state and thus incurring God's displeasure. Ghazi explains this as the evil-doer denying his true nature and thus closing himself off from God's love. In the course of research and dialogue with Muslims it will emerge if this understanding is widely shared or if God actively cuts off (an aspect of) the divine love from the evil-doer. Christians might reflect on how close this understanding of God's love is to a Christian position and how the biblical understanding of God in a covenantal relationship with human beings, rather than a contractual one, is represented here. The biblical picture is of God alone entering into the covenant and thus being bound into a loving relationship with every human being irrespective of whether or not this is reciprocated, although there is also another biblical theme which speaks of the wrath and anger of God being enkindled against the evil-doer.

### **Love of neighbour**

Just as our love for God cannot be discussed except in relationship to God's love for us (God 'loved us into being' and 'made us loveable' etc.), so our love for our fellow human beings hangs on our understanding of God's love for us ('love your neighbour as God has loved you' and 'forgive your neighbour as God has forgiven you' etc.). The Bible speaks of love for neighbours (understood as any human being), for the stranger, for enemies and so on, yet there is also the element of 'charity beginning at home but not ending there' and 'taking care of the widows and orphans amongst the believers'. ACW acknowledges this tension within Islam also (e.g. *sadaqa* is a purely humanitarian principle of "bearing the burdens of another human being", whilst *zakat* is, in the opinion of most scholars, limited to relieving the specified burdens of fellow Muslims) by citing two almost identical but significantly different Hadith: "None of you has faith until you love for your brother what you love for yourself." and "None of you has faith until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself." In a similar vein, there is the saying attributed to Imam Ali that the human being is either your brother in faith or your brother in humanity.

Ghazi in *Love in the Holy Quran* indicates some of the degrees through which love of neighbour must be extended: love of family, fellow believers, and all humankind. The same progression can be seen in the verse cited in ACW (Q. 2:177):

It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces to the East and the West; but righteous is he who believeth in God and the Last Day and the angels and the Scripture and the prophets; and giveth wealth, for love of Him, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and to set slaves free; and observeth proper worship and payeth the poor-due. And those who keep their treaty when they make one, and the patient in tribulation and adversity and time of stress. Such are they who are sincere. Such are the pious.

There is matter here for further Muslim-Christian dialogue on the modalities of love for our neighbour. There has been some discussion amongst Arabists about the Arabic word used for neighbour and whether it connotes certain limitations. Is there any theological justification in Christianity or Islam for limiting the recipients of social welfare payments to those born in this country or who have contributed to the welfare funds in this country or is it a matter of humanitarian need; similarly health care, housing, and so on? Do my children have a right to benefit from or inherit my wealth, or should it “be laid at the feet of the apostles for distribution amongst those in need”?

Christians considering “love for neighbour” will want to reflect on their understanding of the nature of God and God’s love for humankind. The self-giving of God in the act of sending the Son, the self-emptying (*kenosis*) of the Son in the process of Incarnation, give a character to Christian understanding of love of neighbour that is sacrificial and not measured. An incident is recorded in which a man came to Muhammad. He was so eager to hear the words of the Prophet that he dismounted from his camel and ran into the presence. Later he found that his camel was no longer there. When he returned to the Prophet to report this, Muhammad counselled him in such circumstances, “first, tie your camel!” There is a precautionary note here when applied to “love of neighbour:” first take care of the needs of your family. Is there a sense in the Christian understanding of love of neighbour of “first tying one’s camel” or is the nature of Christian love “to give the camel as well”, as it were? In other words, is the Christian concept of “radical insecurity” in sacrificial loving of neighbour in any way subject to limitation? There is a long history of a theological debate within Christian circles on the *impassibility* of God; whether, in a view to be found within the Hebrew scriptures, God is capable of emotion and indeed suffering (see: Jürgen Moltmann) or, more in keeping with Greek thought, God is totally removed from all emotion and suffering (see: von Hügel). A Christian-Muslim dialogue on “love of God and neighbour” would need to revisit this discussion.

One of the characteristics of God is that God is capable of holding in exquisite tension opposing qualities, for example, God is both just and merciful, both forgiving and punishing. The same tensions are to be seen both within the Bible and in the Beautiful Names of God. This poses the question for dialogue: Is an ethic based on love alone a sufficient basis for world peace? Is there a

danger of such an ethic standing, as it were, on one leg instead of two? Can there be an ethical basis for world peace that stands on love alone and not also on justice? Can there be true love of neighbour without the concurrent demand for justice? This issue can be observed lying behind the African and Asian voices already mentioned: *We have Justice in Common*. Is there, as those authors argue, an *essential* element missing in ACW if it wants to achieve its aim of being a basis for Muslims and Christians to join hands to work for world peace?

### **Q. 3:64 The “Common Word” verse**

The context of this verse according to the majority of Muslim commentators has already been noted to have been the Christian delegation from Najran who came to Muhammad in Madina in 631. They were invited by Muhammad to embrace Islam. They claimed that they were true believers long before him but the dispute with the Prophet focuses on the false belief of the Christians as regards the status of Jesus. By claiming that Jesus was the Son of God, “they manifested unbelief in God” as Tabari, one of the foremost early commentators on the Qur'an, put it. The Christians persisted in their rejection of Muhammad's account of “true religion” and the status of Jesus. Eventually this led to a challenge mutually to invoke the curse of God on those who were wrong; in the end, the Christians declined the mutual cursing. Mahmoud Ayoub's book, *The Qur'an and its interpreters*, Vol II, is a synthesis of the way in which Muslim scholars have interpreted this chapter of the Qur'an from the formative period up to the present time. It is the best single place to find the range of Muslim interpretation on the verses in question in English translation.

The full text of Q. 3:1-83 is contained in appendix one. It opens with an affirmation of the Qur'an as the Book of God containing signs for those who want to believe and being the criterion of belief. v.35-41 speak of the birth of Mary. v.42-47 the annunciation and virgin birth of Jesus. v.48-51 describe some of the characteristics of the Prophet Jesus. v. 55-58 speak of true and false belief in Jesus. v. 59 confirms that Jesus is the creature of God like Adam. v. 61 invites those who disagree to a mutual invocation of the wrath of God. v. 63 declares that “if they turn back, God has full knowledge of those who do mischief.” Then we reach v. 64 “Let us come to a common word” within this context.

A key verse in v.55, in which God addresses Jesus: “I shall purify you of those who have rejected faith. I will set those who have followed you above those who have rejected faith until the Day of Resurrection. Then will you all return to me and I shall judge among you concerning all that in which you were in disagreement.” (see: Ayoub, p. 169-183 for a detailed exposition of the commentators on this verse). Two groups of people are identified here: “those who have rejected faith” and “those who have followed you”. Various interpretations are given but the mainstream position can be summarised that

“those who have rejected faith” in Jesus are those who have ascribed divinity to him, referred to him as the Son of God, and thus gone to excess and who later become trinitarian Christians. “Those who have followed you” are identified by the mainstream as those followers of Jesus who remained true to his original teaching that they should worship none but God, who was other than he, namely unitarian Christians, who would have recognised the truth of Muhammad’s teaching and the Qur’an, plus in addition Muslims, who upheld the correct interpretation of the teaching of Jesus.

The Qur’an upholds the virgin birth of Jesus (Q. 19: 19-22, 35-36); Mary being made pregnant by the divine command using the same formula by which Adam was created. The passage in chapter three reaches a climax in v. 59-60: “Surely the example of Jesus with God is like that of Adam. He created him of dust, then said to him: Be! and he was. The truth is of your Lord; be not, therefore, of the doubters.” Ayoub (p. 183-188) gives the commentators’ understanding of the context here, which was the Christians’ claim of divine parenthood for Jesus as he was born without an earthly father. This is refuted on the basis that God created Adam without father or mother and thus is manifestly capable of creating Jesus without an earthly father. The status of Jesus as a creature of God is important, as the Qur’an says in Q. 5:17, had God so willed God could have destroyed Jesus along with his mother and everyone else on earth.

This resulted in v. 61, the verse of the *mubahalah* or mutual cursing in which the Qur’an issues the challenge to invoke the curse of God on whoever was not telling the truth. The Muslim sources record that the Christian delegation recognised that Muhammad might be sent by God and that, if this were the case, no good would come from openly challenging such a man, therefore they withdrew from the mutual cursing and agreed to go home persisting in their Christian faith and instead pay an annual tribute to Muhammad and the Muslims (see: Ayoub p. 188-202 for a detailed account of the commentaries).

After the Christians declined to go through with the mutual cursing, v. 64 was revealed:

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. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him).

There is some discussion amongst the commentators about the identity of the “People of the Scriptures” in this verse. Some scholars held this to refer to the Christians, exemplified by the delegation from Najran, whilst others see it as a more general reference to Jews and Christians, as both are people who received an earlier scripture (see: Ayoub p. 202-208 for a detailed account). All are agreed that it is a clear assertion of the non-divinity of Jesus. Some see it as a consolidation of the earlier discussion. Zamakhshari (see: Ayoub p. 205) held

it to be a reference to Jews and Christians and thus the “common word” was something on which the *Taurat* (the scripture given to Moses), the *Injil* (the scripture given to Jesus) and the Qur'an could agree in the light of Q. 9:30, “The Jews say, ‘Ezra is the son of God’ and the Christians say, ‘Christ is the son of God’. That is a saying from their mouth; (in this) they but imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say. God’s curse be on them: how they are deluded away from the Truth!” Razi (see: Ayoub, p. 205-206) held that the verse was addressed to the Christians of Najran and that in this verse God mentions three things:

First, that we worship no one except God; secondly, that we do not associate anything with Him; and, thirdly, that we do not take one another as lords instead of God. God mentioned these three things because Christians have erred on all three counts. They worship someone other than God, that is Christ. They associate others with Him, and that is because they say that God is three: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They have affirmed three equal and eternal divine personalities. We say this because they say that the hypostasis (*uqnum*) of the Word [logos] was incarnated in the humanity (*nasut*) of Christ. The hypostasis of the Holy Spirit was incarnated in the humanity of Mary. Had these two hypostases not been independent and separate, they could not have separated from the Father and been incarnated in Jesus and Mary. Thus because they affirmed three independent divine hypostases, they have committed the error of association (*shirk*). (Ayoub p. 206)

There is a reference here to Q. 5:116 in which Jesus is questioned by God whether he told his people to “Take me [Jesus] and my mother [Mary] as gods beside/beneath God.” Jesus, of course, replies in the negative that God knows that he only said what God gave him to say. This, however, does not detract from the thrust of Razi’s comment.

The Arabic here translated as a “common word” (*kalimat sawa*) might be better rendered “a just or fair word.” Tabari reports an interpretation that, after the Christians had declined the invitation to a mutual cursing, they were invited to something easier, which is represented in the invitation “to come to a just word common between us and you” (see: Ayoub p. 202). The 20<sup>th</sup> century Shi’a scholar, Tabataba’i, develops this point with reference to the primordial invitation to the whole of humanity to worship no god but God (the *din al-fitra*) in accordance with the first part of the *Shahada*. This ought to be something on which all humanity in general, in accordance with the affirmation of the pre-embodied souls (Q. 7:172), and Jews, Christians and Muslims specifically can agree. It is possible to interpret this “something easier” that was offered to the Christians of Najran, in particular, who had declined to embrace Islam, as an invitation to return to the authentic unitarian teaching of Jesus. A distinctly minority position amongst Muslim scholars, notably Ibn Arabi, saw it as valid that unitarian Christians continued to worship God according to the teaching of Jesus even after the coming of the Qur'an and Muhammad (based on Q. 5:69), whereas the overwhelming majority saw the only worship acceptable to God

after that time as being in accordance with the final revelation, the Qur'an, and last Prophet, Muhammad (based on Q. 3:85).

Finally, the substantial majority of commentators hold that the reference to “not taking one another as lords instead of God” in this verse is exemplified in Q. 9:31 “They have taken their scribes and their monks as lords beside God”, namely “that we should not follow them in making lawful or unlawful except what God has made lawful or unlawful” (Ayoub, p. 204 citing Qurtubi). The authors of ACW take a minority and irenic interpretation of this statement,

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)*.

Ayoub (p. 203) cites another reference to Tabari:

By the phrase “and that we do not take one another as lords” is meant, Tabari argues, “the obedience which they accorded their leaders, and by which they committed acts of rebellion against God”. Tabari cites in support of this interpretation... Q. 9:31.

Qurtubi comments on the interpretation offered by ACW, ascribing it to 'Ikrimah (as does Tabari), that

Bowing down (*sujud*) before persons of high status was common till the coming of Muhammad. But when Mu'adh ibn Jabal wanted to prostrate himself before the Prophet, he forbade him. (Ayoub, p.205)

This verse of the Qur'an has a history of being used in letters to non-Muslims. Muhammad wrote to various political leaders of his time, for example, to the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius:

In the name of God, the All-merciful, the Compassionate. From Muhammad the Messenger of God to Heraclius, Chief of the Byzantines. Peace be on those who follow right guidance. Accept Islam, and you would have safety. Accept Islam, then God would grant you a twofold reward [see: Q. 57:28]. But if you turn your back, then you shall have to bear the sin of the Arisiyyin [Persian peasants who worshipped fire]. “O people of the Book, come to a just word common between us and you.” (Ayoub, p. 203-4)

This has raised the question of whether ACW is really about converting Christians to become Muslims. Ghazi (*A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on loving God and neighbor*, p. 9) denies this but goes on to say that it “does *not* signal that Muslims are prepared to deviate from, or concede one iota of, any of their convictions in order to reach out to Christians – and we

expect the reverse is also true.” (*A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on loving God and neighbor*, p. 11). Perhaps then the question would better be formulated: Is ACW an invitation to Christians to revert to the authentic teaching of Jesus, which, as we have seen, is divine unity expressed in the doctrine of *tawhid*? This was the *din al-fitra* of humankind as taught by all the Prophets of God. This would at least mean to become *unitarian* rather than *trinitarian* in their doctrine of God.

In keeping with the earlier thesis for discussion following Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s point that mainstream Christian trinitarian theology does not breach divine unity, there is another possible interpretation here. Classically Islam has seen the Prophet Jesus as the teacher of pure monotheism, pure *islam*, and thus the distinction between *pure islam* and *corrupted islam*, could be seen in the relation between the true unitarian followers of Jesus and the corrupted “Trinitarian Christians”. Is it possible that ACW, or at least some of those who signed it, wants to draw the distinction another way: namely between accepting that Trinitarian Christians truly profess the monotheistic purity of *islam* as taught by Prophet Jesus, as opposed to corrupted “Tritheistic Christians”, who are in clear error (see Q. 5:116). It is worthy of note that the Qur’an uses the term *Ahl al-Kitab* (People of the Book) of Christians not *Mushrikun* (those who associate created or uncreated beings or things with God, e.g. polytheists, idol-worshippers). Such a recognition that Trinitarian Christianity is indeed true to the pure *islamic* monotheistic teaching of Prophet Jesus would be of truly monumental significance. If this is the intention of some at least of the authors, then we must await a clear declaration to that effect.

### **Q. 3:113-115**

These three verses are cited in ACW without comment or explanation. The context is again important (see appendix four for the full text of Q. 3:110-115). They speak of “the People of the Book amongst whom there is an upright community.” The question arises, who are the people so described? Ayoub again lends assistance from the classical commentaries (see: Ayoub, p. 298-300). The majority position, exemplified by Razi, is that they are former Jews and Christians who have converted to Islam. The minority position holds that it refers to Muslims, as they too received a scripture and thus can be included in the People of the Book.

Tabari interprets the phrase to relate to the two groups amongst the People of the Book referred to in v. 110 as “the people of faith and the rejecters of faith” ... “they are different in righteousness and corruption, and in goodness and wickedness” (Ayoub, p. 299). Most commentators understand the two communities amongst the People of the Book referred to here as ‘the people of faith’ meaning Jews and Christians who accepted Islam, and ‘rejecters of faith’ as the rest of the Jewish and Christian communities (Ayoub, p. 296). The commentators strongly uphold the position that, if the People of the Book had

been true to their original divinely-revealed scriptures, then they would have recognised the prophethood of Muhammad and followed him. Ayoub does not find amongst the commentators that he synthesises any support for a distinction between unitarian Christians as opposed to trinitarian Christians here; the imperative seems to be that the true followers of Jesus would, in obedience to their scriptures, have recognised Muhammad and become Muslims.

### **Miscellany**

Notice the way in which ACW follows standard Muslim convention in putting compliments after every mention of the name of Muhammad: “May God pray over him and grant him peace.” Similarly, compliments are added after the name of the Prophet Jesus and also, as a precaution, after mention of Joshua, who is not listed in the Qur'an as a Prophet but he could have been one of the unknown Prophets sent by God.

Notice the citation of the *Fatihah*, the first chapter of the Qur'an and repeated in every unit of the formal prayers (*salat*), therefore seventeen times per day. It is noteworthy that some Muslim commentators (for example, Tabari and Zamakhshari) have understood “those who have gone astray” as a reference to the Christians (see: Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its interpreters*, NY: SUNY, 1984, Vol I, p. 49).

Notice the citation of Q. 3:31, which is central in understanding the relationship of God, the Prophet and the human being. Muhammad is the best example of how human life should be lived (Q. 3:21), therefore imitating him, following his example in every way, is the most certain guide to living a fully human life (Muhammad is *al-insan al-kamil*, The Perfect Human Being), that will please God and thus God will respond to our love and devotion by loving us in a particular way (see: ACW footnote xii).

Notice the citation of part of Q. 9:36. Chapter nine of the Qur'an uniquely does not begin with the invocation “In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate”. Some scholars have commented that this is due to it dealing in part with fighting. The phrase quoted is the last part of a sentence, the whole of which runs: “And fight against those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God, all together – just as they fight against you [O believers] all together – and know that God is with those who are conscious of him” (trans. Muhammad Asad). The whole first section of this chapter (Q. 9:1-39) is devoted to the theme of fighting against those who worship anything other than God and the scholars indicate that it was revealed in the ninth year after the Hijra (migration to Madina) or 631 CE, when the Prophet was leading his men into battle at Tabuk. Q. 9:29 gives permission under restricted circumstances to fight, subdue and humble Jews and Christians. Q. 9:30-35 deal with Jewish and Christian ascription of sonship to Ezra and Jesus, that they have been led astray by their religious leaders and finally that their religious leaders have hoarded

up treasure for themselves rather than spending it on the people. Then comes the partial citation of Q. 9:36, followed by Q. 9:38-39 (for the full text of Q. 9:1-39 see appendix five).

Notice the citation of Q. 60:8 and the later comment: “As Muslims, we say to Christians that we are not against them and that Islam is not against them—so long as they do not wage war against Muslims on account of their religion, oppress them and drive them out of their homes.” This is the classical position for Christians and Jews as *dhimmi* in the Islamic Empires. They are free to continue in the practice of their religion in private and should be protected by the Muslim army in return for the payment of a military tax (*jizya*), provided that they do not act against the interests of the Empire. Should they become a centre of sedition, “wage war against the Muslims, drive them from their homes etc” then this protected status is withdrawn. We need to recall the geopolitical context of ACW: following the First Gulf War, to drive the Iraqi army out of Kuwait, and the post-2001 American-led military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. Whilst Christians might comment that these were not “Christian wars” against Muslims, as such, it is true that there have been some “Christian voices”, especially in the United States, that have used Christian rhetoric in these conflicts. It may be that there is a reference here to a “Christianisation” of American foreign policy in relation to Muslim peoples and nations.

### **Q. 2:136-137**

The appeal to come to a common word ends:

Finally, as Muslims, and in obedience to the Holy Qur’an, we ask Christians to come together with us on the common essentials of our two religions ... *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).*

Let this common ground be the basis of all future interfaith dialogue between us, for our common ground is that on which hangs *all the Law and the Prophets* (Matthew 22:40). God says in the Holy Qur’an: *Say (O Muslims): We believe in God and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered. / And if they believe in the like of that which ye believe, then are they rightly guided. But if they turn away, then are they in schism, and God will suffice thee against them. He is the Hearer, the Knower. (Al-Baqarah, 2:136-137)*

This is a deeply traditional restatement of the Islamic position, as ACW says, “in obedience to the Holy Qur’an.” This can be summarised thus: We Muslims believe in the common revelation of God, that is consistent in all fundamentals

and essentials, that was revealed to the earlier Prophets, including Jesus. If you Christians return to the authentic teaching of Prophet Jesus, the content of which is consistent with the faith of Muslims based on the Qur'an and Muhammad, then you will be rightly guided. "Let this common ground be the basis of all future interfaith dialogue between us."

### **Some Christian reflections**

The most important thing about the document is that it exists at all, that represents a major initiative taken by Muslim scholars. The breadth and number of signatories is worthy of note. Clearly great efforts have been made to couch the document in Christian vocabulary and care has been taken to seek out some parallel Christian passages from the gospels. The document rightly flags up the centrality of peace between religions as a precursor of world peace; there is, therefore a great deal of good that should flow from Christian-Muslim peace. Muslims and Christians have lived side by side for centuries in many parts of the world: the Middle East, South and South-West Asia, Eastern Europe and Africa. This has been extended to Western Europe and North America, where that was hardly known fifty years ago, and this trend is set to continue. Several Christian commentators have looked towards the time when the second fundamental commandment is applied as "loving the Christian minority neighbour in Muslim-majority lands". This is of course something for which we must aim and campaign; and it must always be remembered that things have become more difficult for Muslims in many Western countries in recent years; therefore there is a need for a Christian voice raised in justice here too. Reciprocity is a political term not part of the Christian theological vocabulary; we do not read there "do good unto others in the proportion that they do good unto you". It is central to our faith that God loved us in Christ when we were unworthy of that love. The Christian route towards reciprocity is to act with abundant love, mercy and compassion in the hope that God will move the hearts of others to do likewise.

What we have in this document is an attempt to establish a new *ijma*, a new consensus within the Muslim communities worldwide. I have not seen yet any critical Muslim scholarly examination of the document by those who might not be inclined to sign it. We await scholarly writing by those who support the document, relating this emerging consensus to the earlier and differing interpretations of the same questions within the Islamic tradition. This document is only a first tentative step and its purpose is not to say all that there is to be said but rather to be an open invitation to begin a dialogue, hopefully in the Greek sense of that term, with Christians and Muslims talking through these issues in search of deeper meaning, the better to understand the revelation of God in both communities. It is not for Christians to tell Muslim scholars what their positions should be; the document will hopefully prompt intra-Muslim critical scholarly writing. It must however be warmly welcomed that the focus has turned to the relationship of the human being before God and

thence within the human family, i.e. starting from faith and theology, and not with politics, sociology, and community cohesion.

Welcome though this Muslim-Christian axis is, it must go wider yet. God is not just interested in those who call themselves Muslims and Christians but in the whole of humankind. This must broaden out to all those who would describe themselves as members of other faith communities; to limit the discussion to those religions that have a special place in their system for Abraham and his heritage is neither true to Islamic nor Christian fundamental principles: from a Muslim perspective, the Qur'an is guidance for all humanity, Muhammad is a blessing for all the worlds, to every people on earth a Prophet has been sent; and from a Christian perspective, God speaks through the *logos* to every human being, Jesus is the Saviour of the whole of humanity and fundamentally changes the human condition and not just that of "Christians", the Spirit is not bounded by any institutional convention but moves where she will etc. The dialogue must broaden out to all human beings, including those who do not profess belief in God, but who are equipped with reason, through which to access justice, which is a central part of "the Way of God", and part of human dignity (see: Vatican II: *Dignitatis Humanae* and suchlike).

The ensuing Christian-Muslim dialogue will lead to a clarification of the diverse meanings of terms. A term such as "the love of God" is central to our understanding because it gives content to terms such as "human love of God" and "human love for neighbour". One set of Qur'anic uses of the term would lean towards a contractual/conditional understanding; namely God loves those who obey, serve, worship and thus love God but not those who rebel and worship other than God, even though no life could exist or continue in existence without the sustaining merciful love of God by which we were created and kept in being. This needs to be discussed alongside a more covenantal/unconditional love of God, who alone passes through the covenantal offerings of Abraham (see: Gen. 15), a God who is constant in love and loves the worst sinner no less than the greatest saint. This has its repercussions in "love of neighbour"; for example, is our neighbourly love forfeit to those "who wage war against us" (see: Q. 60:8) or are we to "love our enemies" (see: Matthew. 5:44-45) because "God is love" (1 Jn. 4:8) and thus God's love for us makes us able to love others (see: 1 Jn. 4:19). Comments have been raised about the centrality of love within the Islamic system as a whole. At the sufi end of the spectrum, within the writings of Rumi, for example, it is the dominant chord but Muslims on other parts of the spectrum would strike a rather different chord majoring more on justice and submission of the human will to the revealed divine will.

There is always a danger in the use of scripture in Muslim-Christian dialogue. This stems from the fact that the Qur'an does not occupy a parallel place in the Islamic system to the gospels in the Christian system. The Qur'an for Muslims is the literal, verbal revelation of the Word of God in which authorship and

articulation lie under the control of God, not Muhammad. By contrast, the gospels for Christians are the work of human authors working on the deposit of the teaching of Jesus under divine inspiration. Christians are not People of the Book, as in the Islamic system, but People of the Incarnate Revelation in Jesus, in the Christian system. What difference does this make? A second danger within this context is to select certain verses of our respective texts that have fitting parallels within the other scriptural tradition without taking the whole of the *corpus* into account. Taking verses out of their contexts can lead to capital errors. Within the Muslim understanding, although the text of the Qur'an is revealed and immutable, human understanding, interpretation and application is constantly expanding as our human knowledge expands. Islam is possessed of a rich and hugely diverse body of Qur'anic commentary, which is not closed but expanding. However the Islamic hermeneutic tools require that each verse be interpreted within the context of its occasion of revelation and then within the context of the Qur'an as a whole. A different system of interpretation is to be found within the Christian scriptural system. There can be no way to dialogue that does not bring the whole of the respective systems into play; we cannot leave out our uncomfortable passages.

By suggesting a verse like Q. 3:64 as setting the terms for future dialogue between Muslims and Christians, especially given the classical interpretation and context of the verse, there is a danger that one side says in effect, "meet us on our terms". It would be as unrealistically impossible to structure a dialogue with Christians on the basis that "let's first agree that there is no divinity in Jesus" as to structure one with Muslims on the basis that "let us first agree that the Qur'an is a document of human origin and composition". A realistically possible dialogue must begin with allowing each side to set their own premises of engagement, however unpalatable, but that is not to say that such premises are not subject to interrogation and discussion.

The document sets out some initial ideas on a Muslim understanding of the love of God and neighbour; it is only a first step and must not be criticised for not covering every possible dimension. However in due course, hopefully Muslim scholars will want to expand these ideas into a broader presentation. The task facing Christians is not to respond to the document as though it set the agenda to be answered but rather to take the topic of the love of God and neighbour and then draw up a response based on a Christian understanding of these terms. What might be some pointers towards things that should be included?

- We would need to speak about the love and worship of God within a trinitarian code of discourse, in which the worship of God is doxological: "to the Father, through, with and in the Son, in the unity and power of the Holy Spirit" and that the love of God begins with a discourse on the eternal love poured out on one another by the three modes of being in the Godhead.

- A Christian understanding of the love of God would need to be incarnational and explore that central concept as it shapes our anthropology, and our understanding of being the People of the Incarnate Revelation.
- How would we adequately express the covenantal, unconditional love of God without exception?
- We would need to speak of a theology of grace, including prevenient grace, as it is the graced love of God for us that makes us capable of a loving response to God and to neighbour.
- A love of God cannot be divorced from some discussion of the *kenosis* of Christ and with that the vulnerability of God's incarnate love.
- We would need to bring in a discussion of our pneumatology and thus explore what it means to be a Spirit-driven community made up of Spirit-filled individuals, who live now "in the Risen Lord".
- No Christian understanding would be complete without a discussion of the sacrificial, atoning, redemptive, unrequited love of God as expressed in the birth, life, suffering, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ and our response in faith.

All this would set the context for a discussion of a universal love of neighbour emulating Christ and the love that we have received.

### **Concluding remarks**

The initial aim of ACW, that Christians and Muslims should come together to work for world peace must be welcomed and enthusiastically endorsed by all people of goodwill. As two communities founded on faith in God, it is necessary that this should involve a theological dialogue and not merely one based on politics or social harmony. Throughout this reading guide, indications have been given of some of the areas to be covered in such a theological dialogue. An ethic based on love of God and neighbour is commendable but needs to be augmented to include working for justice and human dignity in all its forms as an essential part. The basis for such Muslim-Christian dialogue has to be our common faith in the one and only God, whilst living with and discussing our substantially different understandings that flow from that within each tradition, which sees itself manifest in worship and obedience to God combined with service to all humanity and the rest of creation, thus struggling to build a world in accordance with the creator's plan.

## **Appendix one: Q. 3:1-83 in the (augmented) translation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali**

[ 3:1] A. L. M.

[ 3:2] Allah! There is no god but He,-the Living, the Self-Subsisting, Eternal.

[ 3:3] It is He Who sent down to thee (step by step), in truth, the Book, confirming what went before it; and He sent down the Law (of Moses) and the Gospel (of Jesus) before this, as a guide to mankind, and He sent down the criterion (of judgment between right and wrong).

[ 3:4] Then those who reject Faith in the Signs of Allah will suffer the severest penalty, and Allah is Exalted in Might, Lord of Retribution.

[ 3:5] From Allah, verily nothing is hidden on earth or in the heavens.

[ 3:6] He it is Who shapes you in the wombs as He pleases. There is no god but He, the Exalted in Mighty, the Wise.

[ 3:7] He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book: In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning); they are the foundation of the Book: others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings, but no one knows its hidden meanings except Allah. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: "We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord:" and none will grasp the Message except men of understanding.

[ 3:8] "Our Lord!" (they say), "Let not our hearts deviate now after Thou hast guided us, but grant us mercy from Thine own Presence; for Thou art the Grantor of bounties without measure.

[ 3:9] "Our Lord! Thou art He that will gather mankind Together against a day about which there is no doubt; for Allah never fails in His promise."

[ 3:10] Those who reject Faith,- neither their possessions nor their (numerous) progeny will avail them aught against Allah: They are themselves but fuel for the Fire.

[ 3:11] (Their plight will be) no better than that of the people of Pharaoh, and their predecessors: They denied our Signs, and Allah called them to account for their sins. For Allah is strict in punishment.

[ 3:12] Say to those who reject Faith: "Soon will ye be vanquished and gathered together to Hell,-an evil bed indeed (to lie on)!"

[ 3:13] "There has already been for you a Sign in the two armies that met (in combat): One was fighting in the cause of Allah, the other resisting Allah; these saw with their own eyes Twice their number. But Allah doth support with His aid whom He pleaseth. In this is a warning for such as have eyes to see."

[ 3:14] Fair in the eyes of men is the love of things they covet: Women and sons; Heaped-up hoards of gold and silver; horses branded (for blood and excellence); and (wealth of) cattle and well-tilled land. Such are the possessions of this world's life; but in nearness to Allah is the best of the goals (To return to).

[ 3:15] Say: Shall I give you glad tidings of things Far better than those? For the righteous are Gardens in nearness to their Lord, with rivers flowing

beneath; therein is their eternal home; with companions pure (and holy); and the good pleasure of Allah. For in Allah's sight are (all) His servants,-

[ 3:16] (Namely), those who say: "Our Lord! we have indeed believed: forgive us, then, our sins, and save us from the agony of the Fire;"-

[ 3:17] Those who show patience, Firmness and self-control; who are true (in word and deed); who worship devoutly; who spend (in the way of Allah); and who pray for forgiveness in the early hours of the morning.

[ 3:18] There is no god but He: That is the witness of Allah, His angels, and those endued with knowledge, standing firm on justice. There is no god but He, the Exalted in Power, the Wise.

[ 3:19] The Religion before Allah is Islam (submission to His Will): Nor did the People of the Book dissent therefrom except through envy of each other, after knowledge had come to them. But if any deny the Signs of Allah, Allah is swift in calling to account.

[ 3:20] So if they dispute with thee, say: "I have submitted My whole self to Allah and so have those who follow me." And say to the People of the Book and to those who are unlearned: "Do ye (also) submit yourselves?" If they do, they are in right guidance, but if they turn back, Thy duty is to convey the Message; and in Allah's sight are (all) His servants.

[ 3:21] As to those who deny the Signs of Allah and in defiance of right, slay the prophets, and slay those who teach just dealing with mankind, announce to them a grievous penalty.

[ 3:22] They are those whose works will bear no fruit in this world and in the Hereafter nor will they have anyone to help.

[ 3:23] Hast thou not turned Thy vision to those who have been given a portion of the Book? They are invited to the Book of Allah, to settle their dispute, but a party of them Turn back and decline (The arbitration).

[ 3:24] This because they say: "The Fire shall not touch us but for a few numbered days": For their forgeries deceive them as to their own religion.

[ 3:25] But how (will they fare) when we gather them together against a day about which there is no doubt, and each soul will be paid out just what it has earned, without (favour or) injustice?

[ 3:26] Say: "O Allah! Lord of Power (And Rule), Thou givest power to whom Thou pleasest, and Thou strippest off power from whom Thou pleasest: Thou enduest with honour whom Thou pleasest, and Thou bringest low whom Thou pleasest: In Thy hand is all good. Verily, over all things Thou hast power.

[ 3:27] "Thou causest the night to gain on the day, and thou causest the day to gain on the night; Thou bringest the Living out of the dead, and Thou bringest the dead out of the Living; and Thou givest sustenance to whom Thou pleasest, without measure."

[ 3:28] Let not the believers Take for friends or helpers Unbelievers rather than believers: if any do that, in nothing will there be help from Allah: except by way of precaution, that ye may Guard yourselves from them. But Allah cautions you (To remember) Himself; for the final goal is to Allah.

[ 3:29] Say: "Whether ye hide what is in your hearts or reveal it, Allah knows it all: He knows what is in the heavens, and what is on earth. And Allah has

power over all things.

[ 3:30] "On the Day when every soul will be confronted with all the good it has done, and all the evil it has done, it will wish there were a great distance between it and its evil. But Allah cautions you (To remember) Himself. And Allah is full of kindness to those that serve Him."

[ 3:31] Say: "If ye do love Allah, Follow me: Allah will love you and forgive you your sins: For Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."

[ 3:32] Say: "Obey Allah and His Messenger": But if they turn back, Allah loveth not those who reject Faith.

[ 3:33] Allah did choose Adam and Noah, the family of Abraham, and the family of 'Imran above all people,-

[ 3:34] Offspring, one of the other: And Allah heareth and knoweth all things.

[ 3:35] Behold! a woman of 'Imran said: "O my Lord! I do dedicate unto Thee what is in my womb for Thy special service: So accept this of me: For Thou hearest and knowest all things."

[ 3:36] When she was delivered, she said: "O my Lord! Behold! I am delivered of a female child!" - and Allah knew best what she brought forth- "And no wise is the male Like the female. I have named her Mary, and I commend her and her offspring to Thy protection from the Evil One, the Rejected."

[ 3:37] Right graciously did her Lord accept her: He made her grow in purity and beauty: To the care of Zakariya was she assigned. Every time that he entered (Her) chamber to see her, He found her supplied with sustenance. He said: "O Mary! Whence (comes) this to you?" She said: "From Allah: for Allah Provides sustenance to whom He pleases without measure."

[ 3:38] There did Zakariya pray to his Lord, saying: "O my Lord! Grant unto me from Thee a progeny that is pure: for Thou art He that heareth prayer!

[ 3:39] While he was standing in prayer in the chamber, the angels called unto him: "Allah doth give thee glad tidings of Yahya, witnessing the truth of a Word from Allah, and (be besides) noble, chaste, and a prophet,- of the (goodly) company of the righteous."

[ 3:40] He said: "O my Lord! How shall I have son, seeing I am very old, and my wife is barren?" "Thus," was the answer, "Doth Allah accomplish what He willeth."

[ 3:41] He said: "O my Lord! Give me a Sign!" "Thy Sign," was the answer, "Shall be that thou shalt speak to no man for three days but with signals. Then celebrate the praises of thy Lord again and again, and glorify Him in the evening and in the morning."

[ 3:42] Behold! the angels said: "O Mary! Allah hath chosen thee and purified thee- chosen thee above the women of all nations.

[ 3:43] "O Mary! worship Thy Lord devoutly: Prostrate thyself, and bow down (in prayer) with those who bow down."

[ 3:44] This is part of the tidings of the things unseen, which We reveal unto thee (O Messenger!) by inspiration: Thou wast not with them when they cast lots with arrows, as to which of them should be charged with the care of Mary: Nor wast thou with them when they disputed (the point).

[ 3:45] Behold! the angels said: "O Mary! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a

Word from Him: his name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honour in this world and the Hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to Allah; [ 3:46] "He shall speak to the people in childhood and in maturity. And he shall be (of the company) of the righteous."

[ 3:47] She said: "O my Lord! How shall I have a son when no man hath touched me?" He said: "Even so: Allah createth what He willeth: When He hath decreed a plan, He but saith to it, 'Be,' and it is!"

[ 3:48] "And Allah will teach him the Book and Wisdom, the Law and the Gospel,

[ 3:49] "And (appoint him) a messenger to the Children of Israel, (with this message): "I have come to you, with a Sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by Allah's leave: And I heal those born blind, and the lepers, and I quicken the dead, by Allah's leave; and I declare to you what ye eat, and what ye store in your houses. Surely therein is a Sign for you if ye did believe;

[ 3:50] "(I have come to you), to attest the Law which was before me. And to make lawful to you part of what was (Before) forbidden to you; I have come to you with a Sign from your Lord. So fear Allah, and obey me.

[ 3:51] "It is Allah Who is my Lord and your Lord; then worship Him. This is a Way that is straight."

[ 3:52] When Jesus found Unbelief on their part He said: "Who will be My helpers to (the work of) Allah?" Said the disciples: "We are Allah's helpers: We believe in Allah, and do thou bear witness that we are Muslims.

[ 3:53] "Our Lord! we believe in what Thou hast revealed, and we follow the Messenger; then write us down among those who bear witness."

[ 3:54] And (the unbelievers) plotted and planned, and Allah too planned, and the best of planners is Allah.

[ 3:55] Behold! Allah said: "O Jesus! I will take thee and raise thee to Myself and clear thee (of the falsehoods) of those who blaspheme; I will make those who follow thee superior to those who reject faith, to the Day of Resurrection: Then shall ye all return unto me, and I will judge between you of the matters wherein ye dispute.

[ 3:56] "As to those who reject faith, I will punish them with terrible agony in this world and in the Hereafter, nor will they have anyone to help."

[ 3:57] "As to those who believe and work righteousness, Allah will pay them (in full) their reward; but Allah loveth not those who do wrong."

[ 3:58] "This is what we rehearse unto thee of the Signs and the Message of Wisdom."

[ 3:59] The similitude of Jesus before Allah is as that of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him: "Be". And he was.

[ 3:60] The Truth (comes) from Allah alone; so be not of those who doubt.

[ 3:61] If any one disputes in this matter with thee, now after (full) knowledge Hath come to thee, say: "Come! let us gather together,- our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves: Then let us earnestly pray, and invoke the curse of Allah on those who lie!"

[ 3:62] This is the true account: There is no god except Allah; and Allah-He is

indeed the Exalted in Power, the Wise.

[ 3:63] But if they turn back, Allah hath full knowledge of those who do mischief.

[ 3:64] Say: "O People of the Book! come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partners with him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than Allah." If then they turn back, say ye: "Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to Allah's Will).

[ 3:65] Ye People of the Book! Why dispute ye about Abraham, when the Law and the Gospel Were not revealed Till after him? Have ye no understanding?

[ 3:66] Ah! Ye are those who fell to disputing (Even) in matters of which ye had some knowledge! but why dispute ye in matters of which ye have no knowledge? It is Allah Who knows, and ye who know not!

[ 3:67] Abraham was not a Jew nor yet a Christian; but he was true in Faith, and bowed his will to Allah's (Which is Islam), and he joined not gods with Allah.

[ 3:68] Without doubt, among men, the nearest of kin to Abraham, are those who follow him, as are also this Prophet and those who believe: And Allah is the Protector of those who have faith.

[ 3:69] It is the wish of a section of the People of the Book to lead you astray. But they shall lead astray (Not you), but themselves, and they do not perceive!

[ 3:70] Ye People of the Book! Why reject ye the Signs of Allah, of which ye are (Yourselves) witnesses?

[ 3:71] Ye People of the Book! Why do ye clothe Truth with falsehood, and conceal the Truth, while ye have knowledge?

[ 3:72] A section of the People of the Book say: "Believe in the morning what is revealed to the believers, but reject it at the end of the day; perchance they may (themselves) Turn back;

[ 3:73] "And believe no one unless he follows your religion." Say: "True guidance is the Guidance of Allah: (Fear ye) Lest a revelation be sent to someone (else) Like unto that which was sent unto you? or that those (Receiving such revelation) should engage you in argument before your Lord?" Say: "All bounties are in the hand of Allah: He granteth them to whom He pleaseth: And Allah careth for all, and He knoweth all things."

[ 3:74] For His Mercy He specially chooseth whom He pleaseth; for Allah is the Lord of bounties unbounded.

[ 3:75] Among the People of the Book are some who, if entrusted with a hoard of gold, will (readily) pay it back; others, who, if entrusted with a single silver coin, will not repay it unless thou constantly stoodest demanding, because, they say, "there is no call on us (to keep faith) with these ignorant (Pagans)." but they tell a lie against Allah, and (well) they know it.

[ 3:76] Nay.- Those that keep their plighted faith and act aright,-verily Allah loves those who act aright.

[ 3:77] As for those who sell the faith they owe to Allah and their own plighted word for a small price, they shall have no portion in the Hereafter: Nor will Allah (Deign to) speak to them or look at them on the Day of Judgment, nor

will He cleanse them (of sin): They shall have a grievous penalty.

[ 3:78] There is among them a section who distort the Book with their tongues: (As they read) you would think it is a part of the Book, but it is no part of the Book; and they say, "That is from Allah," but it is not from Allah: It is they who tell a lie against Allah, and (well) they know it!

[ 3:79] It is not (possible) that a man, to whom is given the Book, and Wisdom, and the prophetic office, should say to people: "Be ye my worshippers rather than Allah's": on the contrary (He would say) "Be ye worshippers of Him Who is truly the Cherisher of all: For ye have taught the Book and ye have studied it earnestly."

[ 3:80] Nor would he instruct you to take angels and prophets for Lords and patrons. What! would he bid you to unbelief after ye have bowed your will (To Allah in Islam)?

[ 3:81] Behold! Allah took the covenant of the prophets, saying: "I give you a Book and Wisdom; then comes to you a messenger, confirming what is with you; do ye believe in him and render him help." Allah said: "Do ye agree, and take this my Covenant as binding on you?" They said: "We agree." He said: "Then bear witness, and I am with you among the witnesses."

[ 3:82] If any turn back after this, they are perverted transgressors.

[ 3:83] Do they seek for other than the Religion of Allah?-while all creatures in the heavens and on earth have, willing or unwilling, bowed to His Will (Accepted Islam), and to Him shall they all be brought back.

## **Appendix two: Q. 5:41-56 in the (augmented) translation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali**

[5:41] O Messenger! let not those grieve thee, who race each other into unbelief: (whether it be) among those who say "We believe" with their lips but whose hearts have no faith; or it be among the Jews,- men who will listen to any lie,- will listen even to others who have never so much as come to thee. They change the words from their (right) times and places: they say, "If ye are given this, take it, but if not, beware!" If any one's trial is intended by Allah, thou hast no authority in the least for him against Allah. For such - it is not Allah's will to purify their hearts. For them there is disgrace in this world, and in the Hereafter a heavy punishment.

[ 5:42] (They are fond of) listening to falsehood, of devouring anything forbidden. If they do come to thee, either judge between them, or decline to interfere. If thou decline, they cannot hurt thee in the least. If thou judge, judge in equity between them. For Allah loveth those who judge in equity.

[ 5:43] But why do they come to thee for decision, when they have (their own) law before them?- therein is the (plain) command of Allah; yet even after that, they would turn away. For they are not (really) People of Faith.

[ 5:44] It was We who revealed the law (to Moses): therein was guidance and light. By its standard have been judged the Jews, by the prophets who bowed (as in Islam) to Allah's will, by the rabbis and the doctors of law: for to them was entrusted the protection of Allah's book, and they were witnesses thereto: therefore fear not men, but fear me, and sell not my signs for a miserable price. If any do fail to judge by (the light of) what Allah hath revealed, they are (no better than) Unbelievers.

[ 5:45] We ordained therein for them: "Life for life, eye for eye, nose for nose, ear for ear, tooth for tooth, and wounds equal for equal." But if any one remits the retaliation by way of charity, it is an act of atonement for himself. And if any fail to judge by (the light of) what Allah hath revealed, they are (No better than) wrong-doers.

[ 5:46] And in their footsteps We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Law that had come before him: We sent him the Gospel: therein was guidance and light, and confirmation of the Law that had come before him: a guidance and an admonition to those who fear Allah.

[ 5:47] Let the people of the Gospel judge by what Allah hath revealed therein. If any do fail to judge by (the light of) what Allah hath revealed, they are (no better than) those who rebel.

[ 5:48] To thee We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety: so judge between them by what Allah hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the Truth that hath come to thee. To each among you have we prescribed a law and an open way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute;

[ 5:49] And this (He commands): Judge thou between them by what Allah hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, but beware of them lest they beguile thee from any of that (teaching) which Allah hath sent down to thee. And if they turn away, be assured that for some of their crime it is Allah's purpose to punish them. And truly most men are rebellious.

[ 5:50] Do they then seek after a judgment of (the days of) ignorance? But who, for a people whose faith is assured, can give better judgment than Allah?

[ 5:51] O ye who believe! take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors: They are but friends and protectors to each other. And he amongst you that turns to them (for friendship) is of them. Verily Allah guideth not a people unjust.

[ 5:52] Those in whose hearts is a disease - thou seest how eagerly they run about amongst them, saying: "We do fear lest a change of fortune bring us disaster." Ah! perhaps Allah will give (thee) victory, or a decision according to His will. Then will they repent of the thoughts which they secretly harboured in their hearts.

[ 5:53] And those who believe will say: "Are these the men who swore their strongest oaths by Allah, that they were with you?" All that they do will be in vain, and they will fall into (nothing but) ruin.

[ 5:54] O ye who believe! if any from among you turn back from his Faith, soon will Allah produce a people whom He will love as they will love Him, - lowly with the believers, mighty against the rejecters, fighting in the way of Allah, and never afraid of the reproaches of such as find fault. That is the grace of Allah, which He will bestow on whom He pleaseth. And Allah encompasseth all, and He knoweth all things.

[ 5:55] Your (real) friends are (no less than) Allah, His Messenger, and the (fellowship of) believers, - those who establish regular prayers and regular charity, and they bow down humbly (in worship).

[5:56] As to those who turn (for friendship) to Allah, His Messenger, and the (fellowship of) believers, it is the fellowship of Allah that must certainly triumph.

**Appendix three: A selection of verses from Q. 2-5 on aspects of God's love for human beings in the (augmented) translation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali**

[ 2:190] Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for Allah loveth not transgressors.

[ 2:195] And spend of your substance in the cause of Allah, and make not your own hands contribute to (your) destruction; but do good; for Allah loveth those who do good.

[ 2:222] They ask thee concerning women's courses. Say: They are a hurt and a pollution: So keep away from women in their courses, and do not approach them until they are clean. But when they have purified themselves, ye may approach them in any manner, time, or place ordained for you by Allah. For Allah loves those who turn to Him constantly and He loves those who keep themselves pure and clean.

[ 2:276] Allah will deprive usury of all blessing, but will give increase for deeds of charity: For He loveth not creatures ungrateful and wicked.

[ 3:32] Say: "Obey Allah and His Messenger": But if they turn back, Allah loveth not those who reject Faith.

[ 3:57] "As to those who believe and work righteousness, Allah will pay them (in full) their reward; but Allah loveth not those who do wrong."

[ 3:76] Nay.- Those that keep their plighted faith and act aright,-verily Allah loves those who act aright.

[ 3:134] Those who spend (freely), whether in prosperity, or in adversity; who restrain anger, and pardon (all) men;- for Allah loves those who do good

[ 3:140] If a wound hath touched you, be sure a similar wound hath touched the others. Such days (of varying fortunes) We give to men and men by turns: that Allah may know those that believe, and that He may take to Himself from your ranks Martyr-witnesses (to Truth). And Allah loveth not those that do wrong.

[ 3:146] How many of the prophets fought (in Allah's way), and with them (fought) Large bands of godly men? but they never lost heart if they met with disaster in Allah's way, nor did they weaken (in will) nor give in. And Allah Loves those who are firm and steadfast.

[3:148] And Allah gave them a reward in this world, and the excellent reward of the Hereafter. For Allah Loveth those who do good.

[ 4:36] Serve Allah, and join not any partners with Him; and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbours who are near, neighbours who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (ye meet), and what your right hands possess: For Allah loveth not the arrogant, the vainglorious

[ 4:107] Contend not on behalf of such as betray their own souls; for Allah loveth not one given to perfidy and crime:

[ 5:13] But because of their breach of their covenant, We cursed them, and made their hearts grow hard; they change the words from their (right) places and forget a good part of the message that was sent them, nor wilt thou cease to find them- barring a few - ever bent on (new) deceits: but forgive them, and overlook (their misdeeds): for Allah loveth those who are kind.

[ 5:42] (They are fond of) listening to falsehood, of devouring anything forbidden. If they do come to thee, either judge between them, or decline to interfere. If thou decline, they cannot hurt thee in the least. If thou judge, judge in equity between them. For Allah loveth those who judge in equity.

[ 5:64] The Jews say: "Allah's hand is tied up." Be their hands tied up and be they accursed for the (blasphemy) they utter. Nay, both His hands are widely outstretched: He giveth and spendeth (of His bounty) as He pleaseth. But the revelation that cometh to thee from Allah increaseth in most of them their obstinate rebellion and blasphemy. Amongst them we have placed enmity and hatred till the Day of Judgment. Every time they kindle the fire of war, Allah doth extinguish it; but they (ever) strive to do mischief on earth. And Allah loveth not those who do mischief.

[ 5:87] O ye who believe! make not unlawful the good things which Allah hath made lawful for you, but commit no excess: for Allah loveth not those given to excess.

[ 5:93] On those who believe and do deeds of righteousness there is no blame for what they ate (in the past), when they guard themselves from evil, and believe, and do deeds of righteousness,- (or) again, guard themselves from evil and believe,- (or) again, guard themselves from evil and do good. For Allah loveth those who do good.

**Appendix four: Q. 3:110-115 in the (augmented) translation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali**

**[3:110]** Ye are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah. If only the People of the Book had faith, it were best for them: among them are some who have faith, but most of them are perverted transgressors.

**[ 3:111]** They will do you no harm, barring a trifling annoyance; if they come out to fight you, they will show you their backs, and no help shall they get.

**[ 3:112]** Shame is pitched over them (Like a tent) wherever they are found, except when under a covenant (of protection) from Allah and from men; they draw on themselves wrath from Allah, and pitched over them is (the tent of) destitution. This because they rejected the Signs of Allah, and slew the prophets in defiance of right; this because they rebelled and transgressed beyond bounds.

**[ 3:113]** Not all of them are alike: Of the People of the Book are a portion that stand (For the right): They rehearse the Signs of Allah all night long, and they prostrate themselves in adoration.

**[ 3:114]** They believe in Allah and the Last Day; they enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong; and they hasten (in emulation) in (all) good works: They are in the ranks of the righteous.

**[ 3:115]** Of the good that they do, nothing will be rejected of them; for Allah knoweth well those that do right.

## **Appendix five: Q. 9:1-39 in the (augmented) translation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali**

[ 9:1] A (declaration) of immunity from Allah and His Messenger, to those of the Pagans with whom ye have contracted mutual alliances:-

[ 9:2] Go ye, then, for four months, backwards and forwards, (as ye will), throughout the land, but know ye that ye cannot frustrate Allah (by your falsehood) but that Allah will cover with shame those who reject Him.

[ 9:3] And an announcement from Allah and His Messenger, to the people (assembled) on the day of the Great Pilgrimage,- that Allah and His Messenger dissolve (treaty) obligations with the Pagans. If then, ye repent, it were best for you; but if ye turn away, know ye that ye cannot frustrate Allah. And proclaim a grievous penalty to those who reject Faith.

[ 9:4] (But the treaties are) not dissolved with those Pagans with whom ye have entered into alliance and who have not subsequently failed you in aught, nor aided any one against you. So fulfil your engagements with them to the end of their term: for Allah loveth the righteous.

[ 9:5] But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practise regular charity, then open the way for them: for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.

[ 9:6] If one amongst the Pagans ask thee for asylum, grant it to him, so that he may hear the word of Allah; and then escort him to where he can be secure. That is because they are men without knowledge.

[ 9:7] How can there be a league, before Allah and His Messenger, with the Pagans, except those with whom ye made a treaty near the sacred Mosque? As long as these stand true to you, stand ye true to them: for Allah doth love the righteous.

[ 9:8] How (can there be such a league), seeing that if they get an advantage over you, they respect not in you the ties either of kinship or of covenant? With (fair words from) their mouths they entice you, but their hearts are averse from you; and most of them are rebellious and wicked.

[ 9:9] The Signs of Allah have they sold for a miserable price, and (many) have they hindered from His way: evil indeed are the deeds they have done.

[ 9:10] In a Believer they respect not the ties either of kinship or of covenant! It is they who have transgressed all bounds.

[ 9:11] But (even so), if they repent, establish regular prayers, and practise regular charity,- they are your brethren in Faith: (thus) do We explain the Signs in detail, for those who understand.

[ 9:12] But if they violate their oaths after their covenant, and taunt you for your Faith,- fight ye the chiefs of Unfaith: for their oaths are nothing to them: that thus they may be restrained.

[ 9:13] Will ye not fight people who violated their oaths, plotted to expel the Messenger, and took the aggressive by being the first (to assault) you? Do ye fear them? Nay, it is Allah Whom ye should more justly fear, if ye believe!

[ 9:14] Fight them, and Allah will punish them by your hands, cover them with shame, help you (to victory) over them, heal the breasts of Believers,

[ 9:15] And still the indignation of their hearts. For Allah will turn (in mercy) to whom He will; and Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise.

[ 9:16] Or think ye that ye shall be abandoned, as though Allah did not know those among you who strive with might and main, and take none for friends and protectors except Allah, His Messenger, and the (community of) Believers? But Allah is well-acquainted with (all) that ye do.

[ 9:17] It is not for such as join gods with Allah, to visit or maintain the mosques of Allah while they witness against their own souls to infidelity. The works of such bear no fruit: In Fire shall they dwell.

[ 9:18] The mosques of Allah shall be visited and maintained by such as believe in Allah and the Last Day, establish regular prayers, and practise regular charity, and fear none (at all) except Allah. It is they who are expected to be on true guidance.

[ 9:19] Do ye make the giving of drink to pilgrims, or the maintenance of the Sacred Mosque, equal to (the pious service of) those who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and strive with might and main in the cause of Allah? They are not comparable in the sight of Allah: and Allah guides not those who do wrong.

[ 9:20] Those who believe, and suffer exile and strive with might and main, in Allah's cause, with their goods and their persons, have the highest rank in the sight of Allah: they are the people who will achieve (salvation).

[ 9:21] Their Lord doth give them glad tidings of a Mercy from Himself, of His good pleasure, and of gardens for them, wherein are delights that endure:

[ 9:22] They will dwell therein for ever. Verily in Allah's presence is a reward, the greatest (of all).

[ 9:23] O ye who believe! take not for protectors your fathers and your brothers if they love infidelity above Faith: if any of you do so, they do wrong.

[ 9:24] Say: If it be that your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your mates, or your kindred; the wealth that ye have gained; the commerce in which ye fear a decline: or the dwellings in which ye delight - are dearer to you than Allah, or His Messenger, or the striving in His cause;- then wait until Allah brings about His decision: and Allah guides not the rebellious.

[ 9:25] Assuredly Allah did help you in many battle-fields and on the day of Hunain: Behold! your great numbers elated you, but they availed you naught: the land, for all that it is wide, did constrain you, and ye turned back in retreat.

[ 9:26] But Allah did pour His calm on the Messenger and on the Believers, and sent down forces which ye saw not: He punished the Unbelievers; thus doth He reward those without Faith.

[ 9:27] Again will Allah, after this, turn (in mercy) to whom He will: for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.

[ 9:28] O ye who believe! Truly the Pagans are unclean; so let them not, after this year of theirs, approach the Sacred Mosque. And if ye fear poverty, soon will Allah enrich you, if He wills, out of His bounty, for Allah is All-knowing, All-wise.

[ 9:29] Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that

forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.

[ 9:30] The Jews call 'Uzair a son of Allah, and the Christians call Christ the son of Allah. That is a saying from their mouth; (in this) they but imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say. Allah's curse be on them: how they are deluded away from the Truth!

[ 9:31] They take their priests and their anchorites to be their lords in derogation of Allah, and (they take as their Lord) Christ the son of Mary; yet they were commanded to worship but One Allah: there is no god but He. Praise and glory to Him: (Far is He) from having the partners they associate (with Him).

[ 9:32] Fain would they extinguish Allah's light with their mouths, but Allah will not allow but that His light should be perfected, even though the Unbelievers may detest (it).

[ 9:33] It is He Who hath sent His Messenger with guidance and the Religion of Truth, to proclaim it over all religion, even though the Pagans may detest (it).

[ 9:34] O ye who believe! there are indeed many among the priests and anchorites, who in Falsehood devour the substance of men and hinder (them) from the way of Allah. And there are those who bury gold and silver and spend it not in the way of Allah: announce unto them a most grievous penalty-

[ 9:35] On the Day when heat will be produced out of that (wealth) in the fire of Hell, and with it will be branded their foreheads, their flanks, and their backs.- "This is the (treasure) which ye buried for yourselves: taste ye, then, the (treasures) ye buried!"

[ 9:36] The number of months in the sight of Allah is twelve (in a year)- so ordained by Him the day He created the heavens and the earth; of them four are sacred: that is the straight usage. So wrong not yourselves therein, and fight the Pagans all together as they fight you all together. But know that Allah is with those who restrain themselves.

[ 9:37] Verily the transposing (of a prohibited month) is an addition to Unbelief: the Unbelievers are led to wrong thereby: for they make it lawful one year, and forbidden another year, in order to adjust the number of months forbidden by Allah and make such forbidden ones lawful. The evil of their course seems pleasing to them. But Allah guideth not those who reject Faith.

[ 9:38] O ye who believe! what is the matter with you, that, when ye are asked to go forth in the cause of Allah, ye cling heavily to the earth? Do ye prefer the life of this world to the Hereafter? But little is the comfort of this life, as compared with the Hereafter.

[ 9:39] Unless ye go forth, He will punish you with a grievous penalty, and put others in your place; but Him ye would not harm in the least. For Allah hath power over all things.