Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

WE HAVE JUSTICE IN COMMON

CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM VOICES FROM ASIA AND AFRICA

EDITED BY CHRISTIAN W. TROLL SJ,
HELMUT REIFELD AND C.T.R. HEWER

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PREFACE

Justice is a core value not only in the fields of theology, law and political philosophy, but also in politics, social life and economics. It is a value that generates other values. For Judaism, Christianity and Islam, it has always been a guiding principle in the realm of theological thinking as well as in daily life; therefore it suggests itself to be the focus of Christian-Muslim dialogue, as it did in the course of the symposium held in Cadenabbia in October 2009 at the invitation of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS). The title of this book: "We have Justice in Common" emerged clearly at the end of three days of discussion prompted by the *A Common Word* Open Letter as Christian Troll explains in his introduction.

Being a political foundation, the international dialogue-programmes of the KAS primarily focus on foreign, economic and security problems. At the same time, we are fully aware that these cannot be separated from their religious contexts. In a globalised world, there is an obvious need for inter-religious dialogue based around values. Our aim is to understand these ideals and values and explore their plurality, which is as great amongst Muslims as amongst Christians or members of other religions.

In recent years, the debate about questions concerning Islam has widened considerably in German development cooperation as well as in most Muslim countries. At the same time, the range of bridge-building functions which the KAS can and must assume has broadened accordingly. Outstanding issues in this context include those relating to the development of democratic societies and the rule of law.

There is an increasing tendency amongst Muslims as well as Christians to accept that more and more problems need to be solved jointly and democratically. Addressing these grave problems, including terrorism or territorial conflicts, is difficult because of the effects of globalisation and the profound changes triggered by it in the political, economic, and social structures of all societies. In addition there are powerful reactionary forces confronting movements towards developing structures to tackle these issues together. Islam and Muslims cannot be left out of this discussion; the importance of religion – and particularly that of Islam – has been growing swiftly world-

wide, changing the character of constitutional developments, the opportunities of conflict settlement, and even the perception of a so-called global 'clash of civilisations'.

Europeans have had centuries of experimentation in developing different forms of democracy, while the vast majority of Muslim-majority countries in the world are only decades away from European colonial rule. We see an authoritarian character to various countries, limitations on political liberty and a general "democratic deficit". The problems facing developing countries are well-known: disparities in income levels, institutionalised corruption, unemployment, poor education and the disadvantaged status of women. All these socio-political-economic issues were discussed in a "pastoral spirit" by the scholars and leaders at Cadenabbia. There was an awareness that, with growing concerns over resources (not least of which is water), global climate change, ethic tensions within and economic, political and religious pressures exerted from without, these issues will become even more pressing in the immediate future. The spirit of this meeting was not to see "two opposing sides" but rather a common humanity seeking to establish and enhance common human values. The KAS wants to focus on and strengthen those elements that hold us together. Everywhere, it is our intention to promote democracy, human rights, freedom, and the rule of law with the aid of partners who are committed to the same. We are aware that partners in this endeavour are to be found in various groupings within Muslim societies and wish to avoid the simplistic labelling of groups as though monolithic and able to be categorised as "good, bad, fundamentalist, moderate, liberal" and so on.

Disputes about substantive political issues are most likely to lead to the identification of common interests from which opportunities for long-term cooperation may arise. In Muslim countries as well as elsewhere, the international work of the KAS revolves around factual issues of current and political relevance. Most of these relate to the legal sphere, ranging from fundamental and human rights, democracy, and constitutionality to matters of private law and subjects relating to the social order, the global economy, and the international community of states. The general theme of our work embodies our core concerns – liberal democracy, freedom under the rule of law, freedom for the media, human rights and dialogue on values. In our view, discussing such factual issues is itself a means to promote democracy.

Within this range of issues, there are two subjects on which the KAS concentrates with particular emphasis. To us, human rights and their constitutional codification come first everywhere. The starting point in this context should be a shared concept of human dignity from which a variety of common political and other value concepts may be derived. The Islamic ideal of humanity emphasises the importance of the community alongside that of the individual. In the absence of securely and comprehensively codified civil and human rights, the available freedom of political design does not allow the development of innovative solutions for social, political, and economic problems. While human rights and the independence of the judiciary do exist in theory in many Muslim-majority states, they are frequently restricted in practice in a variety of ways, substantiated by invoking a particular interpretation of the Shari'a, regional traditions and national interests.

The second field that plays a key role comprises religious freedom and secularism. KAS would want to see Muslim-majority countries grant the adherents of other faiths the right to practise their religion freely. This can only happen if everyone accepts the coexistence of cultures as a fact to which there is no alternative in our globalised world. Humane coexistence comes only to those who recognise that every individual should have the right to practise his or her religion freely, and contribute towards peace.

We are aware that there is a range of views on these questions being debated amongst Muslims all around the world. There is no shortage of opinion and various dialogue partners. KAS seeks to work with those who work towards the same ideals that we espouse: ideals of democracy, plurality and human rights in a modern secular state. We are well used to the situation in European democracies that people of the same faith take different views on political matters and exist in a healthy debate about the way that their religion impacts on shared political life; the same is true amongst Muslims also and we would want to encourage that spirit of open debate, whether Muslims are in the majority or minority. For such a climate of debate, there has to be a prior acceptance that we share our commitment to good governance, human rights and the rule of law. For these reasons, the KAS was pleased to sponsor the meeting of Muslim and Christian scholars from Africa and Asia, and thus to contribute to the spirit of healthy and productive debate.

The present book reflects a worldwide process of dialogue and the contributions were written with the idea to promote and carry forward the spirit of dialogue. All opinions and judgements expressed herein are those of the individual authors. We therefore have to express our great thanks to all contributors who, months ahead of the workshop, sent us their papers, discussed it with an open mind and revised it in the light of these discussions. For the conceptualisation of the workshop, for their numerous recommendations and their tremendous efforts to finalise this publication the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has to express her sincere gratitude in particular to Prof. Dr. Christian Troll SJ and Dr. Chris Hewer. Without their help, this book would never have come out so quickly.

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PARTICIPANTS AT CADENABBIA

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Victor Edwin SJ, earned an MA in Islamic Studies from Aligarh Muslim University and an MA in theology at Vidyajyoti, Delhi. He is a member of the Islamic Studies Association (India). Currently, he is a research student at the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations at the University of Birmingham.

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Helmut Reifeld has been with the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung since 1993. From 1997 to 2004, he was representative of KAS to India in New Delhi and from there he was also in charge of new initiatives in Afghanistan in early 2002. Since May 2004 he is Head of Division

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Markus Solo SVD, born in Indonesia. Joined the Society of the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) 1988. Studied in Indonesia, Austria, Egypt and Rome. After serving as Rector of the Afro-Asian Institute of Vienna, started in 2007 to work at the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in the Vatican, being responsible for the Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Asia Desk.

Christian W. Troll, a Jesuit priest, has engaged in studies of Islam since 1961. A graduate of the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, he is author of several books and numerous contributions in collective volumes and in scholarly periodicals. He has taught in India, the United Kingdom, Turkey, Italy and Germany.

Maryam Uwais is a legal practitioner based in Abuja, Nigeria. She works actively in the sphere of the human and socio-economic rights of the more vulnerable in the society, and especially in the promotion and protection of women and children in Nigeria.

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A MESSAGE FROM CADENABBIA

1. As a group of Muslim and Christian scholars and activists, mainly from Sub-Saharan Africa, South and South-East Asia, after a process of some months of reflection, writing and sharing papers, we met together in Villa la Collina, in Cadenabbia (Italy), at the invitation of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (Germany), October 1-4, 2009. We join ourselves with those Muslims and Christians who have welcomed, studied and reflected upon the *A Common Word* document (ACW) and wish to affirm it as an important fresh impetus towards what we hope will be a new experience of Christian-Muslim relations. We wish to add to this discussion of love of God and neighbour a correlative emphasis on universal justice, on respect for the dignity of every human being, on freedom of conscience and respect for difference.
2. Our specificity as a group is that we are coming from both religious traditions, deeply rooted in Sub-Saharan Africa, and South and South-East Asia, where the vast majority of the world's Muslims live; where there is a deep and wide richness of Christian presence; where the expansion in both faiths is likely to occur in coming decades; where we have a centuries-long experience of living together in plural societies. From this we have something to contribute to the worldwide discussion.
3. In our areas plurality of religion existed before the rise of Christianity or Islam and has continued since; into this situation Muslims and Christians in their own ways have entered. Whilst we acknowledge that we have specific dynamics in Christian-Muslim relations, we also note that we are susceptible to international events, forces, pressures and intrusions.
4. In our societies, not only Christians and Muslims but also followers of other world- and traditional religions live side by side, even in the same family or community, overwhelmingly in harmony. We therefore have something to contribute to new contexts in our regions and in other parts of the world. In various configurations in our regions we have experience respectively of living as minorities, as majorities and in plurality. Therefore we have a wealth of experience of and are comfortable with multiple identities and belongings.

5. As Christians responding to ACW we hear their assertion that Muslims are not against Christians, and we in return affirm as Christians that we are not against Muslims.
6. As Muslims we affirm that in this relationship we should be "vying with one another in good deeds" as the Qur'an exhorts us (*Surat al-Ma'ida,* Q 5:48).
7. Together we affirm that we will respect each other, that we will not speak contemptuously and we renounce the use of, or incitement to, violence in the name of God or religion.

8. We recognise and do not pretend to resolve the theological and ideological differences, in all their diversities, within and between our two faith communities, and yet we affirm with full accord the oneness of God whom we serve with our whole being.
9. We accept the challenge of ACW to "love your neighbour as yourself," which we understand as applying to the obligation to build secure "neighbourhoods" in the widest sense of that term. This requires us to confront together the challenges which include poverty and illiteracy, environmental degradation and disease, human-rights violations, gender discrimination and ethnic conflict.
10. We want to speak and act with utmost responsibility because we know from firsthand experience in our regions the consequences that can flow from "easy words."
11. We deplore the actions of extreme groups who abuse the noble teachings of our religions, and manipulate religious sentiments; and the mass hysteria that can lead to violations of individuals and communities. We recognise that there is a responsibility upon majority communities to uphold the human rights and dignities of minorities within their societies.
12. We choose not to be prisoners of the negative aspects of our history and the bitter memories we may have inherited. Rather, inspired by the hope our religions generate, we commit ourselves to constructing a more positive future. Those who have the burden of leadership in our communities bear a particular responsibility not to succumb to stereotype and prejudice, but to maintain a constructive vision.

13. We cannot talk of loving our neighbour without seeking to know, to understand and to empathise with members of other faiths and cultural communities. Therefore:

- We call upon those responsible for educational institutions to review and improve wherever necessary educational resources, syllabi and the training of teachers.
- In turning to the education and training of religious leaders from both our traditions, we call for an open and inclusive approach both to content and interpersonal relationships, within the context of the culture within which they are working.
- Similarly, we acknowledge the powerful role played in society by all forms of media and information technology, and call on those who use and control them to play a responsible, informed and constructive role.

14. We commit ourselves to adding our voices and our resources to the process to which ACW has now given new energy, to promote local, regional and global societies which can truly be experienced as neighbourhoods, in which all men and women are respected equally and accorded their full dignity as the noble creatures of God. Love of God demands of us love of neighbour; without love of neighbour there is no love of God.

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Reflections in the Light of *A Common Word* – An Introduction

Christian W. Troll SJ

The Regensburg Lecture of Benedict XVI (12 September 2006) has in spite – or even because – of its provocative content contributed decisively to the conviction: two religious communities with a universal truth claim, who confess the One God and together make up more than half of the world's population – at a time marked by globalisation – are challenged as never before to talk and act with one another in reasonable ways, on the basis of the central doctrines and values of their respective faiths. The 'Open Letter and Call from Muslim Religious Leaders' to Christian leaders, the so-called 'Letter of the 138' (ACW), published in Amman by the 'Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute of Islamic Thought' on 13 October 2007, a little more than one year after the Regensburg Lecture, surely constitutes a most significant Muslim initiative in the field of Christian-Muslim relations. The Letter designates the dual love commandment as the central commandment not only of the Bible but of the Qur'an as well, and it calls for a renewal and intensification of Muslim-Christian dialogue and collaboration. It has evoked written responses from a great number of individual Christian leaders, churches and groups of theologians. It has also generated a number of international conferences at eminent academic institutions in Europe and the United States, as well as countless local and regional initiatives. Worthy of special mention among the various dialogue meetings initiated by the core group of ACW are the dialogue with the Theological Faculty of Yale University (24-31 July 2008), the conversations with the Archbishop of Canterbury organised together with the Inter-Faith Programme at the University of Cambridge (12-15 October 2008) and the First Seminar of the Catholic-Muslim Forum at the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in Rome (4-6 November 2008). This Forum had been established on 6 March 2008.

All these initiatives and meetings – a full list of which can be found on www.acw.com – have been dominated on the Muslim as well as on the Christian side by European and North American voices.

However, as the Report of the 'Pew Research Center: Forum on Religion and Public Life', contemporary with our Conference in Cadenabbia, tells us, proportionately more than three-quarters of the world-wide Muslim population now lives in the Asia-Pacific (62%) and the Sub-Saharan Africa (15.3%) regions. On the Christian side Asian Christians in our days account for roughly 18 % and African Christians for roughly 16 % of the Christian World population. Thus, during the past century the weight within the Muslim as well as the Christian communities – numerically and otherwise – has been gradually shifting towards South and South-East Asia as well as to Sub-Saharan Africa. Asian and African Muslims and Christians significantly influence and even modify the outlook of each of the communities as a whole.

Dr Johnston Mbillah in his keynote paper eloquently makes the same point:

Arguably, the largest meeting of Christians and Muslims takes place in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia and not the West and the Arab world. It is well known that it is in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia that one can notice Christians and Muslims living as members of the same family sharing in the joys of birth and the sadness of death and celebrating religious festivals together as if there were no stark differences between Christianity and Islam.

Having said that, it is also in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia that the competitive characters of Christianity and Islam as rival missionary religions is felt more than anywhere else. It is in this light [...] one must look beyond the Euro-Arab axis of the Mediterranean to the largest meeting of Christians and Muslims that take place in Africa and Asia to make more sense of Christian and Muslim relations.

It therefore seemed relevant and urgent to learn how personalities with a long record of dialogue practice and reflection – hailing from Asia east of Iran and from Sub-Saharan African countries – view and evaluate the initiative taken by the authors of ACW and the process of dialogue set in motion by this letter. What importance do Christian and Muslim leaders hailing from these regions attribute to this document, and how do they evaluate the ideas and resolutions of the international conferences at Yale, Cambridge and Rome dedicated to it? What do Asian and African Muslims and Christians, who in their respective countries have been engaged for years in promoting better

Christian-Muslim relations, think about ACW and the resolutions of the subsequent conferences? How in their view should and could the noble principles and ideas put forward on paper be translated into reality in their respective countries and regions?

In cooperation with the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Berlin, Muslim and Christian personalities from Pakistan, India, Malaysia and Indonesia, as well as from Nigeria, Sudan and Kenya, were invited. All of them had been engaged effectively for years in their respective countries in promoting Christian-Muslim dialogical encounter, with great courage and perseverance, often in the context of communal disinterest, fear of the other and distrust. In addition a handful of similarly qualified persons from Britain, the United States, Italy and Germany were invited. The small number of participants, about twenty altogether, was meant to favour personal encounter and in-depth exploration of issues after a prolonged period of preparation ahead of the actual meeting between 1st and 4th October 2009 in seclusion in the quiet Villa la Collina at Cadenabbia on the bank of Lake Como in Northern Italy.

The objective of this exchange and reflection was not another evaluation and exploration of the theological and ideological bases and claims of ACW and of the ensuing process of discussion but rather, *first*, to reflect critically from their specific vantage point about the results so far of the 'Open Letter Process' and to discuss the practical significance of the ideas, proposals and resolutions that had been coming up during that process with regard to the challenges that Muslims and Christians together face in their respective regions and countries and, *second*, to make out areas and problems of cultural, social and political life in the respective countries and regions which would seem to demand deepened Muslim-Christian dialogue and *last but not least*, to propose strategies for translating the resolutions of the conferences into practice, including the possible setting up of Christian-Muslim groups/bodies that would make a sustained effort towards shared critical reflection, mutual criticism and common action. In particular, we wanted to ask: What are the political meanings, implications and consequences for human rights and human dignity; for freedom of belief and of religion; for the Common Good (*bonum commune*); and for living together in a pluralistic, secular and democratic society?

We envisaged that all the participants in the Cadenabbia workshop during the months previous to our meeting would have made themselves familiar with the texts, themes, discussions and results of the above-mentioned chain of international conversations that had taken place in the wake of the publication of ACW. The website www.acommonword.com and an electronic dossier containing the relevant materials which was sent to each participant in March 2009 turned out to be helpful in complementing the participants' knowledge in this matter.

Eight participants (two from Asia and two from Africa for each section) were asked to prepare position papers on the following two topics:

- The 'Open Letter and Call' of 13 October 2007 and the subsequent international dialogue meetings so far: A critical evaluation of the significance of the ideas, proposals and resolutions that have come up during that process, with regard to the challenges that Muslims and Christians together face in their respective country and region.
- Which problems of cultural, social and political life and thought of each country and region demand a renewed effort of Muslim-Christian dialogue and cooperation? Ideas and initiatives needed on the normative, practical, political and structural level.

The texts of these papers were completed by July 2009. They were sent to all participants, each of whom was asked to write a comment of approx. 800 words on the two main groups of papers. Especially with regard to the second group of papers the participants were asked to give special regard to the quest for political meanings, implications and consequences. Most of these comments reached us in time so that it was possible to send them to every participant before the beginning of the workshop on 1st October. Thus we all arrived at Cadenabbia having had the opportunity to read the above-mentioned written contributions beforehand.

We trust that the engaged Christian and Muslim voices from Asia and Africa assembled in this volume will help in understanding and supporting their common struggle for genuine justice and democratic values in their regions and beyond.

Part I

POSITIONS FROM ASIA AND AFRICA

A Common Word and What It Could Mean

Franz Magnis-Suseno SJ

When I asked my friend Prof. Dr Nasaruddin Umar what had moved him to sign the letter of Muslim religious leaders to the heads of the Christian Churches, he answered that he was one of those that had prepared the letter. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal, head of the Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought in Amman, who had organized the letter, had challenged him: What does Indonesia, the world's biggest Muslim country, do in order to change the world of Islam?

Thus for Prof. Nasaruddin this letter is also addressed to the Muslim world. It wants to challenge them to get out of their fixation on their own world. It wants to open to Muslims a horizon of world-wide responsibility for peace. For Prof. Nasaruddin this world-wide horizon of responsibility will grow out of the dialogue with other religions. He told me that when he visits *pesantrens* (the typical Indonesian Muslim boarding schools), he likes to bring along Fr Benny Susetyo, a young Javanese Catholic priest who is the liaison officer of the Indonesian Bishops' Conference to other religions. In this way the *kiai* (the *ulama* heading the *pesantrens*) get to know Christians.

An Amazing Letter

But this letter is indeed, an important, even a unique document. Even the fact that it was possible to get 138 respected Muslim scholars from the whole Islamic world to sign it and to offer, through it, friendship to Christianity is something new. And of course, the letter is first and foremost directed to Christians. That these 138 Muslim scholars address the leaders of the Christian world as their brothers, without fear of getting too close to them, expresses their conviction that there is a real chance of working together in the future. As the "largest … religions in the world and in history… the relationship between these two religious communities (is) the most important factor in contributing to meaningful peace around the

world." Like we Christians, they see this task as *the* challenge of our time: that Muslims and Christians together give peace a chance in a world that is torn by conflicts.

What is so remarkable in this letter is that its argumentation is strictly theological. Working together because we are united by common values is already something very important. But this letter, by arguing in a theological way, goes a step further. It offers collaboration for peace in the world *before God*! In this letter Muslims accept Christians as believers before God, something that, I should think, didn't come easily. As it was not easy for the Catholic Church to express her appreciation for Muslims as believers in the one God in the Second Vatican Council (in *Nostra Aetate*). Thus the letter is a sign of theological empathy, something still unusual on both sides. The writers wanted to proceed from the perspective of their addressees, the Christians. They wanted to show that the most important signposts for Christians are the same for Muslims too. In order to make sure that we understood each other they didn't use their own theological and ethical systematic thought. In the same line, the Muslim writers extensively quote from the New and Old Testaments. We know that for many Muslims both texts, the foundational texts of Christian belief, are falsifications. By quoting extensively from these texts, the authors distance themselves silently from this theory of falsification, which for Jews and Christians is extremely insulting. In other words, the writers take our holy scripture seriously.

For me the most important sentence of the letter is the following: "As Muslims, we say to Christians that we are not against them and that Islam is not against them." This sentence challenges also us Christians to say honestly that we are not against Islam! Almost at the end of the letter the authors express what they offer us Christians: "Let us respect each other, be fair, just and kind to one another and live in sincere peace, harmony and mutual goodwill." It is a lovely sentence, and what it says can be realised.

Only a Beginning

Of course, the letter is only a beginning. Most people of the Muslim and Christian world have not been touched by it. In Indonesia, not once have I heard an allusion made to this letter. It has not received any attention. But this should not discourage the writers. The letter

is a first. It opens a gap in the ideological fortifications that we have built around each other. It will have its effect. Those of us in Indonesia that have read the letter feel much encouraged by the fact that there is a respectable number of Muslim scholars who express in a beautiful way what we have felt animates our ongoing dialogue. It reassures us that we are on the right track. On the following pages, I want to explain how dialogue between Muslims and Christians is done in Indonesia. I shall first trace the actual situation of inter-religious relations at the present moment and then trace the development of a dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Indonesia, in order to draw some conclusions on how best to proceed in such dialogues.

63 Years of Christian-Muslim Relations:
A Fundamental Pluralist Consensus

On 17 August 1945 Sukarno and Hatta proclaimed Indonesia's independence under the nose of the Japanese occupiers that had just surrendered to the allied forces. A day later its provisional constitutional assembly (PPKI) adopted a constitution, the "Constitution of 1945", where Indonesia declared herself to be based on five fundamental principles (known as *Pancasila* since Sukarno first formulated them on 1 June 1945) of which the first was "Belief in One God" *(Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa[1])* and where § 29 proclaimed liberty of religion and worship. Besides firmly confirming religious freedom, these fundamental decisions meant that in Indonesia there was to be no discrimination on religious grounds.

How remarkable and extraordinary this philosophical and constitutional base was and is for Indonesia will be obvious if we look at the religious map of the country. More than 85% of all Indonesians are (Sunni) Muslims. Almost 10% are Christians, two-thirds of them belonging to Protestant Churches, one-third being Catholics. 1.5% are Hindu, most of them being the original inhabitants of Bali. The others belong to indigenous religions, Confucianism, the Buddhist community and some smaller communities. This means nothing else than that Indonesia was then, and still is, the nation with the biggest number of Muslims on earth. But at the beginning of the existence of the free Republic of Indonesia, her representatives unanimously decided to build a nation without religious discrimination and without giving Islam, the religion of the vast majority, any special constitutional or legal status. This decision was made with full awareness

of its implications since it was preceded by intensive deliberations and bargaining about whether, first, Indonesia should become an "Islamic state" or not (the decision was "not"), and second, whether at least the Islamic Shari'a should be declared binding on Muslims (this stipulation was unanimously dropped on 18 August 1945). I am of the opinion that only the willingness of the Muslim representatives not to insist on any special status for Islam made possible the continuance of Indonesia as a single state up to this day.

Since then, religious freedom and non-discrimination, in spite of many frictions, petty discrimination and serious conflicts during the last 13 years, to which I shall come presently, have been a reality.[2] Christianity developed exceptionally well after Indonesian independence. The fact is that the religious life of most of the Christian communities on Java, Sumatra, South Sulawesi and in other Muslim regions of Indonesia goes on as usual without any hindrance. There is freedom of worship, freedom of religious instruction, freedom to baptise and to become a Christian (or a Muslim). Church bells ring out at liturgical hours every day in churches on Java. Although being a Christian has long since not been an advantage if one wants to make a career in government or as a state employee, Christians are not systematically discriminated against and can be found in all professions and at all levels of Indonesian society. Even radical Muslim groups have not challenged the principle that non-Muslims in Indonesia have the same legal and civil status as the Muslims and are citizens in the full sense of the word.

Worrying Developments

Thus, although there have always been inter-religious tensions and petty discriminations, the religious communities of Indonesia lived together peacefully. This situation took a decisive turn for the worse from about 1990. This was the time when Suharto took his famous turn to Islam. Many Muslim leaders regarded the change of attitude as long overdue. For them the 20-year long shunning of political Islam by Suharto's "New Order" was an extraordinary discrimination against the majority religion. They also suspected Christian influences behind Suharto's negative attitude. Thus they regarded Suharto's late "conversion" as a question of finally giving justice to the Muslim community.

Christians on the other hand, saw themselves increasingly excluded from public positions and now felt discriminated against and a threatened minority. But what really frightened Christians was a growing number of violent attacks on churches. More than 600 churches have been destroyed or violently closed during the last fourteen years, not counting churches destroyed in connection with the civil wars in Eastern Indonesia. Really traumatic for Indonesian Christians were a number of attacks in 1996 and 1997 in which churches in cities on Java were destroyed, mostly burned to the ground, by the masses without provocation by the Christians.[3] Especially worrying for Christians was the fact that not a single perpetrator, to my knowledge, has ever been brought to court. Christians were increasingly asking themselves whether their constitutionally guaranteed right of worship, even their right openly to exist as Christians in majority Muslim regions, could be violated with impunity.

Although there have been no more large scale devastation of churches since 2000, attacks on single churches on Java are continuing at the rate of at least one a week. Thus, as Christians complain, it is still extremely difficult to build churches on Java and in other Muslim regions even when there clearly exists a Christian community needing a church. Then when the community holds its services in a school or a similar building, this will often be banned by the local administration with the argument that the place has no permit as a building for worship. Often the argument is that a church should not be built in the midst of a Muslim community, which of course would mean the end of religious tolerance since a minority by definition lives amongst a majority of another religion. It is, as I have heard, also difficult for Balinese Hindus to get building permits for their *pura* or for Chinese to build a *klenteng* among the Muslims. I have no data on whether similar complaints are voiced by Muslim communities in Christian regions.[4]

Civil Wars in Eastern Indonesia

The climax of inter-religious conflict came with two civil wars that for almost four years devastated parts of the Moluccas and Central Sulawesi. These wars raged from 1999 to 2002 (in Poso intermittently until 2007) and resulted in about 8,000 deaths and hundreds of thousands of refugees, many of whom have not yet been able to

return to their homes due to the uncertain security situation. But it is clear that in both regions the reasons behind the violence were highly complex, some of them reaching back into history or even into local culture. People in the Moluccas have traditionally been warriors and fights between villages were quite common[5], others being connected with ethnographic and economic change and, as many Indonesians believe, with politics, both local and in Jakarta. But to say, as some do, that these conflicts were in fact not religious in character, is wishful thinking. The fact is that, for more than three years, for many people the answer to the question "are you a Muslim or a Christian?" decided between life and death. Although these conflicts were of another nature than that of the anti-minority violence in Java mentioned above, the reasons for those outbreaks being more political, economic and communal, the disturbing fact is that the conflicts tend to boil down, in these cases, to confrontations simply between Christians and Muslims. Thereby religious hatred can grow and develop its own momentum. The whole atmosphere between the communities involved gets poisoned. Add to this, longstanding suspicions and prejudices and new outbreaks of conflict can be provoked easily by politically or otherwise interested parties.

Nevertheless, although these conflicts *are* conflicts between communities defined by their respective religions, they have not much to do with the teachings or other specific traits of Islam or Christianity. They should be characterized as communal conflicts. By this I mean that emotions, hatred and prejudices relate to the collective identity of a primordial group, united by language, local culture, locality, religion, tribalism and so on. If a member of such a community infringes against a member of another one, his or her community will react collectively against the community of the perpetrator.

In fact, the Ambon and Poso conflicts are only a part of a general climate of violence and brutality that obtains in Indonesian society today. Small frictions, misunderstandings or confrontations easily provoke violent reactions and physical fighting using weapons. Often they quickly involve whole communities, which then fight against each other. If for instance, there is a fight between an extortionist and a taxi driver, and one is a Muslim and the other a Christian (as happened in Ambon), there is always the chance that it may become a war between their respective villages or *kampungs*. Indeed it may widen, especially

if *kampungs* are tribally or religiously homogenous, to become a war between ethnic groups (as happened on Kalimantan) or between religious communities.[6] Thus these conflicts are first of all expressions of general social disintegrative tendencies in Indonesian society.

Positive Developments

These developments have left their scars in religious communities. Many Christians have asked themselves about their future in Indonesia. The existence of hard-line groups that sometimes resort to violence, especially against "sinful places" like gambling dens or even coffee shops, but in some instances also against Christian institutions that they say are engaging in "Christianisation", added to this atmosphere of apprehension. Hard-line Islamic publications openly voiced, and still voice, extremely sectarian views, often directly alluding to Christians. There has been, in my view, an unfortunate tendency towards religious segregation. A *fatwa* promulgated initially 30 years ago by MUI *(Majlis Ulama Indonesia*) but only promulgated with effect after the fall of Suharto, commands that Muslims should refrain from expressing Christmas greetings. Since then a whole tradition of grass roots level inter-religious contacts has dried up. I heard Muslim friends express their dismay at the fact that at school the teacher of religion told their children not to have contacts with non-Muslim and Chinese children. Christians are also worried about a tendency of local authorities enforcing Shari'a regulations in their regions. Hand in hand with local "Shari'aisation" goes, in certain districts, often in the name of the newly-won "autonomy of the regions", a policy of making religious life for Christian communities more and more difficult.

These developments could give the impression that things are very bad between religious communities, especially between Christians and Muslims. The astonishing fact is that relations between Christians and Muslims, while still far from being without problems, are developing well. Undetected by most of the public, the last twelve years have seen some encouraging developments. The fundamental fact is certainly that the *Pancasila* national consensus, that Indonesia belongs to all Indonesians, still stands essentially unchallenged. Political parties favouring making Shari'a Law state law for Muslims represented only about 17% of the 2004

electorate, while this year no party dared to come out in support of making Shari'a the state law. In 2001 the two biggest political parties, Golkar (22%) and PDIP (18%), but also Abdurrachman Wahid's PKB (14%) and Amien Rais' PAN (6%), did not support the introduction of Shari'a.[7] Even more significant is the fact that the leadership of the two big Muslim organizations, Nadlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, had clearly stated that making Shari'a into state law does not fit with the social-cultural conditions of Indonesia.

A second, highly significant and often overlooked fact is that the quasi-war between Christians and Muslims in Eastern Indonesia between 1999 and 2002 – where, in fact, both sides regarded themselves as the victims of violence from the other side – has not spilled over to other regions. There have been no revenge attacks on Christians by Muslims on Java and no attacks on Muslims in Christian parts of Indonesia (the one exception was the anti-Christian riots on Lombok in January 2000). More amazing still, the much vilified political elite in Jakarta, including the political parties, did not use the conflict in the Moluccas and Poso for political gains during their election campaigns. It is also remarkable that during the campaign preceding the last two parliamentary elections (2004 and 2009) questions of religion were almost completely absent; even explicitly Islamic Parties like PKS did not campaign in the name of Islam, but against corruption and for social justice. No party campaigned for the introduction of Shari'a (although some of them have it on their official agenda). All pairs of presidential and vice-presidential candidates for the presidential elections were "mixed" between "Islamists"[8] and "nationalists" (all of the "nationalists" of course were also Muslims).

A third and most amazing development during the last fourteen years has been a significant warming of relations between Christians and the big Muslim organizations Nadlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. Only 20 years ago there were almost no relations between Christians and *Santri-Muslims*,[9] except of formal meetings, usually government sponsored, between the leaders of the religious communities.[10] But which Catholic priest would have known a *kiai* or ever seen a *pesantren* (traditional Islamic boarding school) from the inside? Change began slowly, especially through the influence of the towering figure of Abdurrachman Wahid (NU leader and later President of Indonesia) who

embodied a completely modern openness and commitment to religious freedom, drawing on the Islamic tradition exemplified by the Mogul rulers of India of protecting all minorities and feeling responsible for their well-being. Strangely enough, relations between Christians and Nadlatul Ulama became cordial after the attacks on the churches of Situbondo.[11] But also the relations with, especially the leadership of, Muhammadiyah are now much better than they ever were. Here should be mentioned the fact that the Islamic State Universities (IAIN, UIN) have, in general, since the 70s, taught an open and dialogue-minded Islam.

These tendencies received a big boost from the growing terrorist threat now hanging over Indonesia. The real watershed was the Bali bombings on 12 October 2002. They shocked Indonesians out of their somewhat complacent attitude towards the reality of religiously motivated terror.[12] On the one hand, extremist groups that had used the new democratic openness after the fall of the Suharto government to come out into the open now retreated into more low profile positions. On the other hand, liberal Muslim groups but also the popular leaders of the big Muslim organisations began to present Islam more forcefully as an inclusive religion that, as the majority religion, felt responsible for the peace and prosperity of the whole of Indonesian society. Muslim groups initiated prayer meetings among different religions for the victims of the Kuta killings. Leaders of the big Islamic organisations Nadlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah founded a National Moral Council consisting of the leaders of all Indonesian religions.

Tracing Muslim-Christian Dialogue: A Bleak Starting Point

After telling the story of Muslim-Christian relations in Indonesia, I now want to trace more precisely how during these exciting, sometimes tragic, sometimes worrying, but ultimately hope-inspiring times, a dialogue developed between Christians and Muslims.

The starting point of Christian-Muslim relations in Indonesia could not have been bleaker. Christians came, as missionaries, together with the Portuguese and Dutch. Islam was of course, regarded as the old enemy and these feelings were reciprocated on the Muslim side. There existed always deep suspicions and prejudices between the Christian and Muslim communities. We have a very difficult common

history which became part of our collective identities, a history of crusades and colonialism, of Arab invasions (remember the Song of Roland) and 300 years of the "Turkish threat" to Christian Europe. Muslims in Indonesia are suspicious about Christian intentions and these suspicions still linger to this day. They have been reinforced by reckless proselytising by certain Christian sects. Christians, on the other hand, are suspicious that "strict" Muslims, should they come to power, would restrict their religious freedoms; this fear is now reinforced by prolific Muslim hard-line publications filling Indonesian book shops. This also means that when conflicts involving Christians and Muslims break out, regardless of the cause, or if they are provoked by outside parties with certain political intentions, they may feed on these suspicions and prejudices.

Dialogical relations between Christians and Muslims did not offer themselves in the 19th century since missionary activity took place in the non-Muslim regions of Indonesia (among the Bataks in North Sumatra, in Central and North Sulawesi, in the Moluccas, in the Smaller Sunda Islands of East Indonesia and, much later, in Papua). But for Indonesia, Java where about 62% (130 million) of all Indonesians live was always decisive politically and culturally. Here, of course, the Javanese (the Javanese-speaking inhabitants of Central and Eastern Java, 40% of all Indonesians) with their specific culture and their complex and multiform Islam had a decisive impact on Indonesian Christianity and specifically on relations between Christians and Muslims, into which I cannot here enter. Suffice it to mention that the Javanese K. H. Ahmad Dahlan (who in 1912 founded Indonesia's second biggest Islamic organization, the modernist and moderately Wahhabi-leaning Muhammadiyah[13]) was a personal friend of the Dutch Jesuit priest Fr van Lith who is, amongst Catholics, regarded as the founder of the Javanese Catholic Church.

Getting Closer Because of Basic Political Positions

Well-founded communications, even if limited in scope, between Muslims and Christians developed in the Indonesian independence movement and in the four years of freedom struggle against the Dutch (1945-1949) where Christians, from the very beginning, played an active role.[14] From this time on there existed very close relations between Muslim and non-Muslim politicians in Indonesia,

while the Indonesian military from the beginning did not allow religion to influence their decisions.[15] During the 1950s cordial relations develops particularly between leaders of the big reformist Muslim Masyumi party and the Catholic party, united by their conviction that Indonesia has to be democratic[16] and their common suspicion about the true intentions of the ever-growing communist party. During the 60s, before and after the decisive events of 1965 and 1966 (the leftist *coup d'état*, the subsequent annihilation of the Indonesian communist party, the rise to power of Suharto and the fall of Sukarno), this friendship continued in the close collaboration (initially anti-communist, later critical of Suharto) between the Muslim Student Association (HMI) and the Catholic Student Association (PMKRI).

Outside the political domain, communications between pious Muslims (the *santris*) and Christians were almost non-existent. Christians found their political and cultural allies among the so called "nationalists" (who politically were represented by non-Muslim parties), particularly the Javanese *abangan* (the majority of the Javanese who had only superficially embraced Islam and culturally were far away from orthodox Islam, both of the "traditionalist" and the "modernist" forms[17]), who absolutely did not want any imposition of Islamic law on the country. Thus they strongly supported Suharto who favoured the private practice of Islam but suppressed political Islam with a strong hand (thus the intensification of the Islamic identity of the *abangan* happened under Suharto). The motto of the Christians was "Pancasila state" against all tendencies in the direction of an Islamic state, while NU and Muhammadiyah were regarded with suspicion.

Changes Begun Under Suharto

Soon things began to change. From the beginning of the 1970s, a small group of young Jesuit priests[18] began to doubt the general Catholic line of holding on to Suharto with the argument that he represented the forces ensuring that Indonesia would not become an Islamic state. These Catholic dissidents were appalled by the on-going human rights violations under Suharto's military-backed government, and they were convinced that in the long run Christians would only be safe in Indonesia if they developed trusting relations with "real" Muslims. From there developed,

especially through collaboration in NGOs, a growing network of relations between mostly young Christian and Muslim Indonesians with the same political, social and cultural ideals.

Of great influence were a growing number of open-minded, pluralistic Muslim personalities; not from the *abangan*, but from the *santri* faction. Thus the then minister of religion Mukti Ali sent thousands of young Muslim intellectuals to Chicago and Montreal instead of Cairo in order to study Islam. These intellectuals came back with an open-minded understanding of Islam, often much deeper than that of traditional, narrow-minded religious teachers. At the same time, the Suharto Government, for political reasons, used to sponsor formal meetings between the leaders of the religious communities. But at that time, which Catholic priest would have known a *kiai* or have ever seen a *pesantren* from within? Change began slowly, especially through the towering figure of Abdurrachman Wahid, who incorporated a completely modern openness and commitment to religious freedom with a deep rootedness in Javanese Islamic culture. As a grandchild of K. H. Hashim Azhari, the founder of NU, he enjoyed an extremely high standing among the *santri* all over the country (who kissed his hands when coming to him to ask his advice). He was completely open-minded, with an inborn contempt for narrowness. At my Driyarkara School in Jakarta, we already had close relations with him in the 1970s. Later he became chairman of Nadlatul Ulama for 15 years where he promoted a modern, open-minded Islam among NU's youth who now form the leading edge of Indonesian Muslim intellectuals. On the other hand, there was the theologian Nurcholish Madjid.[19] Nurcholish had angered many Muslim leaders with his 1970 pronouncement, when still a student leader, of "Islam yes, Islamic parties no", and his assertion that Islam demanded secularisation. Up to the end, when he had become the most famous Indonesian Muslim theologian,[20] he was hated by hardliners. Nurcholish declared that whoever surrenders to the Absolute according to his or her conviction was a Muslim; Islam meaning "surrender", and therefore could go to heaven. Through his Paramadina peoples' academy, he transmitted intellectual formation, an open tolerant modern Islam, to thousands of Muslim intellectuals. Here also has to be mentioned the fact that the Islamic State Institutions (IAIN), for instance Sunan Kalijaga in Yogyakarta and Hidayat Syarifullah in Jakarta, have since the 1970s taught an open and dialogue-minded Islam.

Although the 1990s saw a growing discrimination against Christians, relations nevertheless slowly intensified, very much supported by Abdurrachman Wahid, whose influence within the Muslim community still grew and who adamantly rejected Suharto's pro-Islam course. During the 1990s, visits by Catholic and Protestant ministers at *pesantrens*, "live-ins" by Christian students at Islamic places, and the other way around became more frequent. Our Catholic bishops now all know "real" Muslim leaders closely, there is, for instance, a personal friendship between Cardinal Julius Darmaatmadja and the NU leader K. H. Hasyim Muzadi and with the former head of Muhammadiyah, Prof. Dr Ahmad Syaffii Ma'arif. Many Catholic parish priests have built up relations with local Muslim leaders; although at the grassroots level much more has still to be done. It was most astonishing that these relations did not suffer during the more than three years of brutal civil war among Christians and Muslims 1999-2002 in Central Sulawesi and the Moluccas.

Now the initiative for these dialogues no longer came primarily from the Christian side. Especially after the first Bali bombings in 2002, Muslim students, for instance, invited non-Muslims to a common prayer for the victims of the bombing. Hasyim Muzadi, the head of NU, founded a "National Morality Forum", headed by himself and Cardinal Darmaatmadja, where the heads of the most important Indonesian religions were included. This forum, for instance, visited Ambon, the place of the worst Christian-Muslim atrocities, where they met with both sides. Only 10 hours after the terrible Christmas bombings in 2000 (later it was found out that they were perpetrated by people connected to the Bali bombers), a group of high profile Muslims invited Christians and Muslims to meet together. We formed an "Indonesian Peace Forum" that went to the highest authorities of the country demanding that the bombings should be thoroughly investigated which they were not.[21] In the East Javanese city of Malang some years ago, a fundamentalist evangelical group had a private ceremony cursing the Holy Qur'an. News got out and there was a real danger of anti-Christian riots all over East Java. But Church authorities immediately contacted the NU leadership. They took things into their own hands, demanding that those who broke the law should be brought to justice and that everybody should remain calm. Everything remained calm. It is a fact that Christians facing a problem with Muslims often do not go to the police but to NU.

Relations have improved so much that Christian groups: youth, students, a parish council, when they organise a "seminar", for instance on political ethics ("what attitude should we take towards the upcoming elections", "pluralism and democracy", "human rights"?), also invite representatives of the other religions. When Catholics in the provincial city of Tanjung Pinang invited me to talk about what challenges the nation, and particularly the Catholics, were facing in Indonesia, not only did the (female) Muslim Lord Mayor open the seminar but Muslim organisations were also invited and attended.

Dialogue also happens on the level of local people. For instance, all big cities in Indonesia are organised (according to the Japanese system) in districts, sub-districts and local blocks (comprising about 60 families). On the block level, on National Day (August 17) and other occasions, all are invited to have a "togetherness", the men squatting in a circle while the women prepare food. Short formal speeches are given, usually about harmony among us transcending religious borders and how we cope with the problems of a big city.[22] In this way all get to know effectively that there are members of minority religions among them and that they are fully "one of us". A very well accepted form of dialogue is called "*silaturahmi*", "making acquaintance" by appealing to Muslim friendliness. For instance, the local Catholic parish priests, together with some lay members of the community, visit an important Muslim personality in the area of the parish. Such a visit is very easy. One visits and says, one wants to *silaturahmi*, for instance, the new parish priest wants to introduce himself as the leader of the local Catholic community. He might enquire about relations with the Muslims and ask always to be contacted if there are problems. Such visits are never refused and in 75% of the cases lead to positive personal relations between those involved.

Intellectual and Theological Discourse

There are a great number of dialogues going on among Indonesian intellectuals about moral-political questions. Indonesia has travelled through a history full of ups and downs, facing great problems and always coming out a little bit better. Thus things to talk about abound: national identity, the crucial partly tragic points in the nation's history, including terrible violations of human rights, the questions of Islam (brought up by Muslims), democracy, liberalism, social justice,

humanism, revolution and legality, state and religions, whether there is an Islamic state, republicanism, amendments to the constitution, neo-liberalism, globalisation, socialism, national sovereignty versus internationalisation, Indonesian versus local culture, the position of the Javanese (who are politically and culturally dominant) in Indonesia, religious freedom, and proselytism (*"kristenisasi"*).

In all these dialogues: at universities, seminars specially organised by academic or political organisations, at events organised by the state or business or by students (under Suharto often clandestinely), intellectuals of all religions meet and participate without any differentiation. One gets involved, often deeply emotionally, in these national and human questions. This framework also has the implication that these questions are not treated from a narrow religious or sectarian dogmatic point of view, although such a perspective might be brought into the discussion by participants, but on the basis of common human and national values.

A special kind of dialogue that has developed over the last 30 years, not least through the influence of Abdurrachman Wahid, is the dialogue of "pluralist" or "liberal" Muslims and Christians on how to face fundamentalism and how to develop Islam and Christianity as religions of the 21st century. There is a kind of intellectual brotherhood between "progressive" Muslims and Christians were they try to defend themselves against attacks by fundamentalists. The fact that the Catholic Church in the Second Vatican Council declared that non-baptised people can go to heaven and that Catholics should respect and even value positively all positive elements in other religions are well known and admired in Muslim intellectual circles, especially since the large majority of Indonesian (Calvinist) Protestants believe that only baptised people (very often: only people of their own sect) can be saved. Catholic and Muslim open-minded intellectuals and theologians often feel that they really share the same values and communicate with each other with ease, much more easily than with their own respective fundamentalists. There is often an easy understanding between Catholic[23] and Muslim theologians and sometime it is self-ironically called the "dialogue between the converted". These dialogues influence respective academic teaching. At the Islamic state universities in Jakarta and Yogyakarta, hermeneutics are taught (and decried by hardliners as Christian subversion), Muslims use words like theology, for instance,

"theology of liberation" (*"teologi pembebasan"* which is much admired among Muslim intellectuals) or "theology of development" (*"teologi pembangunan"*), or "spirituality" ("*spiritualitas*") are used while at the same time, many Christian key terms have been taken over from Islamic Arabic.

The Letter of the 138

What lessons could we learn from these Indonesian experiences? Muslim-Christian dialogue depends, of course, on who is involved and what one wants to achieve. The letter of the 138 is an offer of a dialogue on a deep level, a dialogue that enters into the deep convictions and values that unite us. This dialogue is so extremely desirable precisely on the level of the letter of the 138: religion to religion. It can show that, contrary to what was portrayed through the centuries, both religions do share convictions and truths about God and that we humans should respect and accept each other in a positive way. This is really something new. It is a breakthrough which makes it possible for both religions to see each other in a positive way, not in the shallow way of secular culture where "we should accept each other and not allow religion to separate us". This is a most serious breakthrough because the 138 speak before God.

Of course, it shows also that dialogue about questions of *aqidah* (beliefs) is not suitable matter for a dialogue. If the situation is right, sharing about what one's belief means for oneself can be a liberating experience, but a dialogue about whether Jesus is Lord or the Qur'an really God's revelation just is not possible. These most central beliefs are not at our disposition. It is different from dialogue between Christians of different confessions, for instance about what is essential for the Church or what sacraments would mean. Christians are united in their belief in the triune God and on their holy scripture. Christians and Muslims have, it seems, to accept humbly that we differ irreconcilably on essential beliefs about God and we have to leave it to God. But these differences make the statements in the letter of the 138 all the more relevant, namely that we both know ourselves to be in obedience under the one God and that God demands that we respect and love each other.

Overcoming Distrust

The situation is different when dialogue is meant to overcome distrust and fear of each other. This is the situation in most countries where Christian minorities live among Muslims. There the most important goal of inter-religious dialogue is to get to know each other. In this way, to lose the feeling that the other is something alien, to be mistrusted, a little bit sinister, or potentially dangerous. What one talks about is not really important: small talk, general attestations of good intention, or some commonly owned values could be the beginning. In Indonesia this is the fundamental rule for all communication at grassroots level. You never come directly to the point.[24] Thus after being friendly with each other, one leaves, but one has brought about what one wanted in the first place, for instance to open up regular channels of communication. Next time you come together you meet like old friends and slowly they creep to a relationship where they can bring up more difficult topics.

Culture and Political Ideals

In Indonesia, culture and nationalism are the great uniting factors; both are Javanese, both are Ambonese, thus, as Indonesians say, "religion should not separate people". Commitment to political values can unite people from different religions deeply. In Indonesia the strong determination to end Dutch colonial rule and establish a free, just and prosperous Indonesia united peoples of different ethnicities, ideologies and religions. Thus in Indonesia the political dimension was highly instrumental in having the Christian communities accepted by the huge Muslim majority. Indonesian Christians played a significant part in the independence war from 1945 to 1949. The fact that Christianity came with the colonialists up to this day is almost never played upon, even by Muslim hardliners.

Thus it is helpful when religion is not the only emotional anchor. Later Indonesian intellectuals, without differentiating according to religion, got involved in questions like national unity, the absence of social justice, democracy, political repression, the violation of human rights, perceived moral degradation, poverty, all kinds of discrimination, corruption, narcotics, pornography, and the challenge of the culture of consumerism.[25] Thus what traditionally in Catholic philosophy would be called "the common good" of the Indonesian

people is what, in Indonesia, unites people of different religions, on all social and cultural levels, in common goals and values, and makes them feel themselves as one and thus strive to overcome their religious tensions.

Human Rights, Religious Freedom and Pluralism

For Christian minorities the questions of human rights, specifically of religious freedom and pluralism, are of crucial importance. Indonesia can look on a tradition of 64 years of almost uninterrupted, often passionate, discourse and controversies, and cite significant progress. Today Indonesia is a functioning democracy, where almost all the rights contained in the UN Declaration on Human Rights (1948) have been integrated in the amended constitution now in force in the country. It may be added that all post-Suharto governments have had strong support from Islamic parties.

Such was not always the situation; but the divide was not on religious but along cultural lines. Java-based political parties, the "Sukarnoists", were from the beginning sceptical towards "Western", "liberal" democracy, while the Sumatra- and Western-Java-based strongly Islamic Masyumi and the (small) Socialist Party, together with the small Catholic and Protestant parties were staunch defenders of "real" democracy. Thus the widely held discussion about whether Islam is compatible with democracy seems strangely out of place in Indonesia. Now, after 51 years of authoritarian regimes (Sukarno's "guided democracy" and Suharto's "New Order") there is an almost 100% national consensus that Indonesia has to be a democracy.[26]

The discussion about human rights developed on the same lines. A Constitutional Assembly had already, in 1958, before it was dissolved by Sukarno, ratified, unanimously(!), more than 20 human rights in the process of writing a new constitution; about 20 others were still in the process and 16 others were marked for later treatment. But since 1945, the "Javanese" political wing has disparagingly put human rights as "Western individualism" in opposition to "Eastern collectivism" and the insistence on rights in opposition to social justice. As was exemplified by the ideology of Suharto, when talk of human rights could lead one into prison and only a few people dared clearly to come out in favour of human rights.[27] Thus the opponents of human rights in Indonesia were not Muslim voices (they were

the military and the Javanese adherents of a so-called "integralistic" state).[28] In 1998, only a few months after the fall of Suharto, when Muslim politicians had their greatest political influence, practically the whole 1948 Declaration of the UN was given constitutional status, the only dissenting voices being the aforementioned old time (Sukarnoist and Suhartoist) groups. It is noteworthy that the famous Cairo Declaration of Human Rights is unknown in Indonesia, except by a few experts, and has never played any role in the discussion of human rights.

There was however a problem. The 1945 Constitution contained indeed the right to freedom of religious belief and worship, although in a very short formulation. Twice (1958 and 1968) the full text of § 18 of the Declaration of the UN could not be included because Muslim politicians rejected it. But since 1999, the full § 18 has been put into the "amended" Constitution. In fact, there have been ongoing, sometimes heated discussions with on the one hand, Christians resolutely rejecting pressure from the Suharto government to accept a statement to the effect that missionary activity should not be directed towards people "already having a religion" (meaning belonging to the officially recognised religions), and Muslims on the other hand, accusing Christians of proselytism. These positions still exist but there has been significant progress because of patient dialogue and discourse amongst intellectuals. The big Christian Churches (but not some evangelical groups) accept that proselytism is a misuse of religious freedom, while even more conservative Muslims would accept that if a person seriously, after deep consideration and not under any pressure, came to the conviction that God calls her or him into another religion, this should be accepted, although with pain in the heart (in reality, change of religion was never restricted in Indonesia). Thus the central point of religious freedom is the freedom to convert, and this freedom will be acceptable if no unfair means are involved. In my opinion, which in these words may not be agreed upon precisely by the Indonesian Catholic Church, a person has the right not to be pestered in her religious convictions and habits. Thus approaching people, even politely, and asking them to consider another religion is, in my opinion, ethically unacceptable. Mission should be done (and has to be done, it belongs to the commands Jesus gave the Church) solely by becoming "witnesses to the Gospel", thus by our Christian way of living, communicating, acting in society, and doing our job. If then a person comes and

wants to know "the reason for your hope" (1 Peter 3:15), we can explain our faith and guide the person, should she or he want it, on the way to enter the Church through baptism. These things are spoken about among Christians and Muslims in Indonesia and this dialogue is fruitful. It surely has implications for the understanding and practice of missionary work and is, therefore, especially for more evangelical Protestants, often not yet acceptable.

The sharpest controversy was about pluralism. This discussion goes to the heart of the identity of the monotheistic religions. It was kindled by some Muslim adherents of pluralism whose position was influenced by (the Muslim thinkers) Syed Hossein Nasr and Frithjof Schuon, but also by the positions on pluralism of the likes of Paul Knitter and John Hick (some of whose books have been translated into Indonesian).[29] Their position could be summarized as the assertion that no religion should claim exclusive truth for itself, that all religions are similarly true and not true since they are all valid expressions of the transcendent religiosity of human beings. This "pluralism" is often opposed to "exclusivism" (we have exclusively the whole truth and only those who share our belief can go to heaven) and "inclusivism" (we have the full truth but adherents of other beliefs will also be saved; the less rigid inclusive position, as is held by the Catholic Church, claims the full truth for itself but acknowledges elements of truth in other religions).

In 2005 the semi-official *Majlis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI) issued a number of *fatwas* against modernistic tendencies within Islam, one of them condemning pluralism. After harsh criticism from many Muslim intellectuals, MUI explained themselves. They did not refer to other religions in Indonesia, MUI had nothing against their existence, but against teachings (by Muslims) that all religions were the same and adherents of all religions could go to heaven.[30] Now the word "pluralism" is usually reserved, as it should be, for a social attitude, namely the cheerful acceptance of the fact that among us live people of different faiths, acknowledgment of this fact, respect towards these others, readiness to work together with them for the benefit of society; we even might then be able to learn something for our own faith from others. There is a broad consensus in Indonesia that such pluralism is essential for the existence of Indonesia, the most plural country in the world. Nevertheless, the *fatwa* of MUI gave the word pluralism a bad aftertaste for mainstream Muslims which is quite regrettable.

The real problem now under hard and controvered discussion has arisen over the case of the Ahmadiyya (and other local Islamic sects). The Ahmadiyya lived peacefully in Indonesia from 1928 onwards; only since 2005 have their premises been attacked by mobs incited and lead by vigilante groups of *Fron Pembela Islam* (FPI, "Islamic Defence Front"). Their mosques and sometimes also personal property were destroyed and in some places they had to leave their villages and now live in camps. Police only protected the Ahmadis against direct bodily violence; the state remained silent. While progressive, liberal Muslim groups immediately strongly condemned the attacks, moderate mainstream Muslims (which would have spoken out against attacks on Christians) remained silent.[31] The distinction has not yet really taken root, that a religious authority has the right to proclaim what is within one's religion and what not (thus that MUI have the right to declare that Ahmadiyya are outside Islam), but that such a community still has the right to live and worship according to what they believe to be the way of God.[32] Thus religious freedom, even tolerance, within Islam itself is still a far shot. Here should be mentioned that some 16 years ago the Protestants wanted to have the Jehovah's Witnesses banned in Indonesia.

The controversy around the Ahmadiyya has brought into focus another extremely important object of dialogue: rejection, on principle, of violence on religious grounds. There is a growing consensus among Indonesian intellectuals that violence on religious grounds can under no circumstances be justified. Of course, this is only one instance of the ethical principle that conflicts may not be solved by force or violence. In Indonesia, with her background of immense violence during her more than 60 years of history, this consciousness is growing. But it has to be repeated again and again, because society – this is a cultural trait – tends to resort to violence when a certain span of tolerance of diversity is felt to be exceeded, that dialogue on all social levels and in an appropriate form, will slowly lead to change, thus to greater tolerance. In the Indonesian language, understood by all, we must remind ourselves unceasingly to behave always in a civilised way.

Two Conclusions

First, inter-religious dialogue, and certainly Christian-Muslim dialogue, depends on the participants. Here the "dialogue between the converted" is not at all to be ridiculed. Although different in their

core beliefs, they really understand and appreciate each other, because they unite in deep-rooted values, not on a merely humanist basis, but because of their beliefs. They not only strengthen each other against the animosity of the "not yet converted", but they radiate their values to those spiritually closer to them and thus will have a long-term effect within their communities. Then there is dialogue and discourse between open-minded, mainstream intellectuals of different religious intensity and orientations. These dialogues, informally taking place the whole time within the many NGOs, formally in seminars or when students invite speakers, lead to political, social and cultural openness, to the breaking down of prejudices. Even friendly encounters, silaturahmi, with unbending hardliners might have long-term positive effects.

The second, most important point is: If we look at what really are the deeper values that make inter-religious dialogue succeed – meaning: coming to a better understanding, increasing tolerance – then there are two human core values that always stand in the background: kindness and sympathy, and justice and fairness. People know deep down that hatred is bad and are ready, if approached in the right way, to let their sympathy have its way. And people know that they have to be fair and just. People open up because their hearts are good deep down and because they will not keep up attitudes they realize are not fair or just.

These two virtues make possible what Rawls[33] would call an overlapping consensus. Their explicit values and normative ideas might be far apart but deep down they know they should never close their hearts and they should change what is not just. We all know how central both values are for Islam and Christianity. Thus Muslim-Christian dialogue should always proceed from these virtues. Only real, hopeless extremists close their hearts completely to the heart's call for compassion and we should never give up even on them.[34]

1| The other four are: (2) just and civilised humanism, (3) unity of Indonesia, (4) (leadership by) the people lead by the power of wisdom through common consultation/representation, (5) social justice for all the people.

2| This religious freedom was (and still is) limited since it only includes Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists and Confucians. The latter only since

2004; because of anti-Chinese racist prejudice everything smacking of being „Chinese" was outlawed under Suharto and Confucians were forced to register as Buddhists, making Confucian marriages impossible, for example. This was changed under President Abdurrachman Wahid although its after-effects still linger. A grave ongoing violation of a human right is that, as a consequence of an extremely one-sided marriage law [since 1973], people belonging to traditional tribal religions cannot legally marry. Mixed marriages too, have to be concluded according to the rites of one of the (now) six officially recognised religions.

3| *It began with an attack on ten churches in Surabaya in 1996 (where damage was slight), then in Situbondo, Tasikmalaya and Rengasdengklok where all 48 churches (except one in Tasik) were systematically burnt down by mobs. There followed two further mob attacks, one in November 1998 in Jakarta, followed two weeks later by Christian riots in Kupang that led to the expulsion of the Bugis people, and one in January 2000 on the island of Lombok. Since these, for Indonesian Christians, traumatic events are a crucial point in Christian-Muslim relations in Indonesia, they should not be politely glossed over as so often in "inter-religious dialogue"; on the contrary, they should be faced squarely but unemotionally and realistically, even if a completely satisfying solution may be some time away. A list by the Forum Komunikasi Kristiani names 938 churches (up to 1 June 2004) that where closed by violent attacks, many of them destroyed or burned down, since 1945: two churches during the presidency of Sukarno, 456 under Suharto, most of them after 1990, the rest under the following three presidents; even not counting the approximately 250 churches that were destroyed during the civil wars in Sulawesi and the Molukkas (where also mosques were destroyed), you still get 688 churches that have been attacked during that period.*

4| *Mention has to be made here of an especially terrifying event, namely the bombings during Christmas night in the year 2000, where 50 bombs were placed in or around Christian churches from North Sumatra to the island of Lombok, 30 of them exploding, resulting in 17 deaths and more than 100 wounded. The police made no serious effort to apprehend the perpetrators. Only after the Kuta bombers (the terrorist attacks on Bali on 12 October 2002, where 202 people were killed) were caught did it transpire that they were also involved in the Christmas bombings two years earlier.*

5| *The situation in the Molukkas in the 16th and 17th century is described by A. Heuken, Be my Witness to the Ends of the Earth. The Catholic Church in Indonesia Before the 19th Century, Jakarta: Cipta Loka Caraka, 2002.*

6| *One can only speculate about the deeper reasons for this climate of communal violence. Under President Suharto people were not allowed to voice their grievances, they often felt themselves to be "victims of development", for example because they were driven from their land in favour of a government project with insufficient compensation, which in turn often evaporated before reaching the rightful recipients. Complaining would have exposed them to being accused of being communists which is, since 1965, the same as being threatened with death. Thus they had to accept and keep silent. Communal conflicts too were silenced and thus could not be resolved. Thus feelings of being the victim of injustice steadily accumulated. People got disappointed, felt isolated and abused, and their anger grew. After the democratic opening after the fall of President Suharto their anger burst to the surface. At the same time, all the injustices of more than 30 years were now remembered. Besides, rapid modernisation with its breaking down of traditional social structures makes a plural soci-*

ety unstable. In other words, we have just begun to realise how big a task it is to unite such a number of different social components within the boundaries of a national state, in such a way that they all feel at home, evolve a positive commitment to each other as members of the same nation, and are reconfirmed in their respective social identities.

7| The 2009 general elections confirmed a long-standing trend in Indonesia, namely the relative weakness of Islamist political parties (they got about 27% of the popular vote, almost 10% less than five years before). In the first free elections in Indonesia more than 50 years ago (1955), when an Islamic state was the most hotly debated topic, Islamic parties received less than 43% of the vote. No free elections happened for the next 44 years. At the national elections in 1999, after the fall of the Suharto regime, Islamically-oriented parties only received 37 % of the popular vote. In the elections in 2004 these parties received 38%, while in this year's general elections these parties received 25%. And this in spite of the fact that Indonesian Islam has experienced a deepening process since the 70s of the last century (meaning that many more Muslims do their prayers and other duties). During the campaigns of 2004 and 2009, religion, Islamic topics or requests, were almost completely absent. Political parties (including parties with an Islamic background) and presidential candidates show themselves inclusive, never alluding to religious or ideological divides. It seems that they instinctively feel that taking a "sectarian" attitude would diminish their electoral appeal. This doesn't mean that many Muslims would not be in favour of introducing some Shari'a rules but it means that they do not like religion to enter into politics.

8| The expression is misleading: by this are not meant ideologues or fanatics but, according to the Indonesian use of the word "Islam" in a political context, those who define their political participation according to Islamic ideas and pursue them through parties based on Islam.

9| Santri is the name for pupils of an Islamic boarding-school (pesantren), but the word is also used in a more general way for people living consciously and culturally as Muslims, in distinction to "abangan-Muslims" whose Islamic practices are incomplete; for the distinction between"abangan" and "santri"see Clifford Geertz, The Religion of Java, Glencoe: The Free Press, 1960.

10| Especially between Masyumi and the two Christian parties who were united by their commitment to democracy and their distrust of the communists; the same holds for the Muslims' student organization HMI and the Catholic Student organization PMKRI.

11| But the real breakthrough came, astonishingly enough, after one of the most traumatic incidents for Christians, the destruction and burning down of all 25 Christian churches in and around the East Javanese city of Situbondo in October 1996. Situbondo is "NU country". Gus Dur (Abdurrachman Wahid), then head of NU, immediately condemned the riots and asked for forgiveness. What then came reads like a good story. The young Catholic Javanese parish priest Benny Susetyo, instead of immediately trying to rebuild his burnt down church, and after receiving the blessing of Gus Dur, visited the surrounding pesantrens. There the kiais expressed to him their horror at what had happened and promised help in building up the churches again. Since then relations between Christians and NU became more and more cordial all over Indonesia. Thus, for instance, many Christian churches are now guarded on Christmas night by Banser, the militias of NU.

12| *Religiously motivated terror had been obvious since 1999 but was played down and never seriously investigated by the authorities. The first bomb exploded in April 1999 at Istiqlal Mosque; the people hired to place the bombs were easily caught, but strangely enough, those that gave them the bombs and paid them never came to light – although the media reported that the house in Western Jakarta, where the transactions were made, was quickly identified. The first climax of religiously motivated terrorism was, of course, the Christmas bombings of 2000 which, as I mentioned, were not investigated seriously. Only Bali – and President Bush? – changed all this.*

13| *The biggest Indonesian Islamic organisation, the "traditionalist" Nadlatul Ulama, was founded in 1926 by K. H. Hashim Azhari, the grandfather of the later President of Indonesia, K. H. Abdurrachman Wahid, partly as a reaction to ongoing criticism by Muhammadiyah that the typical Javanese pesantren (Islamic boarding school with a kiai at its head) compromised Islamic purity. Thus while Muhammdiyah was in part a reaction to Christian inroads in Yogyakarta, NU's subconscious enemy was Muhammdiyah.*

14| *This was the reason why Sukarno, Indonesia's first President, was a friend of the Christians. He had an especially close relationship with the first indigenous Indonesian Bishop, the Javanese Jesuit Mgr. A. Soegijapranata. Mgr. Soegijapranata was Archbishop of Semarang, the capital of the province of Central Java. In 1946 when the Dutch returned to try to subjugate Indonesia again, Soegijapranata took up residence in Yogyakarta, then the capital of the free Republic of Indonesia under Sukarno, instead of staying in Dutch controlled Semarang. Soegijapranata was, after his death, declared a national hero by Sukarno. It may be mentioned that the official heroes of the three branches of the Indonesian Armed Forces were Catholics: Adisutjipto (from the small Indonesian air force, shot down in 1947 by the Dutch; the airport of Yogyakarta is named after him), Slamet Riyadi (from the Army; he fell in 1950 in the fight against Dutch supported separatists in the Molukkas) and Jos Soedarso (who commanded a torpedo boat of the Indonesian navy, sunk by the Dutch in 1961 in the scuffle around Papua).*

15| *The second Indonesian Prime Minister, Amir Sjarifuddin (1947-48) was a Protestant, as was Simatupang, the first Chief of the General Staff of the Indonesian Army.*

16| *This itself was a counter-cliché: In democratic Indonesia from1945 to 1959 the strongest support for Western style democracy came from the Masyumi and the Protestant and Catholic parties, while the Java-based Nadlatul Ulama and the Nationalist and Communist parties supported Sukarno's idea of a guided democracy. Masyumi suffered for their stand by being dissolved by Sukarno in 1960 while the Catholic party had to choose a more accommodating leader.*

17| *For "abangan" see Geertz 1960.*

18| *Here also belongs Fr Mangunwijaya, a priest of the Diocese of Semarang, an architect and famous Indonesian novelist.*

19| *Whom I had invited in 1973 to teach Islamic studies at our college, before he did his studies under Fazlur Rahman in Chicago.*

20| *He was the one chosen on the evening of 20 May 1998 to tell Suharto that it was time to step down.*

21| *Among us was Benny Bikki, the brother of the Muslims' leader Amir Bikki, killed in the Tanjung Priok massacre in 1984, as was Hidayat Nur Wahid, leader of the Salafi-leaning Justice and Welfare Party (PKS).*

22| *I myself am regarded as one of the "elders" of our RT which consists mostly of Muslims and have to give a little speech. In this way I became friends with Pak Amien, the keeper of the big mosque close by.*

23| *Of course Protestants also take part. But the difference between Catholics, having been shaped by Vatican II, and Protestants, often hard-line or with evangelical tendencies although trying to open up, is quite obvious and commented on by Muslims. Since quite some time Protestants use "shalom" as greetings among Christians, as an identity pointer like "asalam alaikum …" among Muslims, but this has not really got hold among Catholics.*

24| *Indonesians love it if one does not come to the point at all; of course on the assumption the point is something a bit embarrassing or difficult or slightly unpleasant. At the highest level of Indonesian communications, it is most appreciated if one can come to the point while seemingly only talking generalities.*

25| *I am often invited by Muslims to speak about questions of political ethics: democracy, human rights, religious pluralism, our state philosophy of Pancasila, democratic reformation, corruption, leadership, but also capitalism, neo-liberalism, globalisation and its impact on religions. I had several times to speak about "Islam and democracy", "Islam and human rights", and conflict between religions.*

26| *The only large but non-political Muslim organisation rejecting democracy is Hizb ut-Tahrir. Besides them, only former military and old Sukarnoists (including some of the family of the late president Sukarno) still grumble about democracy.*

27| *Among them: the present Rector of Jakarta's Islamic State University, Prof. Komaruddin Hidayat, of course Abdurrachman Wahid, and Indonesia's current Foreign Minister, Hassan Wirayuda.*

28| *In the discussions in preparation of a constitution for an independent Indonesia in 1945, Supomo gave a famous speech about the "integralistic idea of the Indonesian community" (adapting organistic political ideas of the 20s in Germany and the Netherlands) where he rejected communist "people's democracy" and "Western parliamentary democracy" in favour of a system where the people are "organically" united with their leader. In the 1980s the Suharto regime resurrected Supomo's idea as an ideological underpinning of the "new Order" (Suharto's political system).*

29| *See for instance Paul F. Knitter, No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1985; J. Hick, A Christian Theology of Religion: The Rainbow of Faiths, Westminster: L John, 1995; also: Paul F. Knitter/John Hick, The Myth of Christian Uniqueness. Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1987. For Raimundo Pannikar see Intrareligious Dialogue, New York: Paulist Press, 1978. For an Islamic pluralism see: Syed Hossein Nasr, The Need for a Sacred Science, London: Routledge, 1995; Frithjof Schuon, Transcendent Unity of Religions, London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1984.*

30| *Against my intentions, I became personally involved. During a good long discussion with Dr Adian Husseini, known as a Muslim hardliner, we had touched on pluralism. Correctly he reported (in an Islamic newspaper and the internet) that I rejected pluralism (in the sense of Hick/Knitter) and adhered to "inclusivism". Thus when they were attacked, MUI answered that even Fr Franz Magnis-Suseno condemned pluralism, so I had to make my position clear. Now, following Benedict XVI, I reject the name pluralism for the position of Hick/Knitter (if all religions essentially are the same, where is the plurality?) and call this position, which I reject, "relativism".*

My experience with "normal" (not specifically intellectual) Muslims is that the following wording always gets full assent: Our Christian and Islamic beliefs have many things in common, but there are irreconcilable differences which we must humbly accept and we leave the final question of truth up to God.

31| A Government decree in 2008 (SKB Tiga Menteri of 11 June 2008) finally allowed them to practise their kind of Islam within their own circle, but they are forbidden to declare themselves in any way. MUI and Muslim hardliners demanded that Ahmadiyya stop calling themselves "Muslims". If they would declare themselves to be another religion (e.g. "Ahmadiyya"), they would be left in peace, the same as the Baha'is who can freely practise their beliefs.

32| I personally always bring up this distinction with a Muslim public, knowing quite well that not only I have to face deep antipathy, if not real hatred, for the Ahmadiyya, but the immediate reaction– the moment I touch on this subject; they have to listen, only later they can say something – of 'this is an internal Muslim controversy, what does this Catholic think he's doing meddling in internal Islamic affairs'. But almost always I can get the decisive point over and at least make the audience think about it.

33| See John Rawls, Political Liberalism, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993; and also his last book: Justice as Fairness. A Restatement, Cambridge, Mass./London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001.

34| What makes potential terrorists so difficult to bring back is that they, because of security reasons, have broken all contact, even with ideologically close allies. They cannot be approached; nobody can involve them in a discourse. Thus in Germany in the 1970s the Baader Meinhof Gang had, because the police were on their heels, broken all contact even with their former leftist co-ideologues and finally lived in a completely unreal world, had completely unrealistic ideas about German society (for instance, that they only needed some prodding to revolt). In Indonesia, the police applied with some effect the same mechanism. They treated convicted terrorists relatively mildly and brought relative hard-line Muslim teachers to speak with them. Some of them realized that terrorism was wrong. One of them wrote a very effective book on how he got rid of his terrorist ideals (Nasir Abbas, Membongkar Jamaah Islamiyah. Pengakuan Mantan Anggota Jamaah Islamiyyah, Jakarta: Grafindo, 2005).

Interfaith Dialogue: An Indian Perspective

Akhtarul Wasey

Human beings share life and its varied manifestations with other animals but stand unique from them with their intellect and power of expression. The speaking animals that human beings are known to be, are also marked by their gregariousness as they live together with fellow human beings forming social bonds. According to the Islamic view of human evolution, man started leading a civilised life from the very beginning. Islamic tradition tells us that the first human couple, Prophet Adam and Hawwa (Eve), not only had intellect but both of them were highly revered creatures of God sent to this world. Islamic tradition can also be interpreted to the effect that this first human couple was sent to this world as a result of a dialogue between them and Satan.[1] The Holy Qur'an traces this dialogue to the very idea of divine human creation. The Holy Book has it that when Allah informed the angels about his will to create man, the angels expressed apprehensions over this divine project asking if their Lord intended to create someone who would disobey him and shed blood. Then Allah revealed to them his grand strategy.[2] The first ever interaction between man and his creator was also in the form of a dialogue where Allah asked the human beings 'Am I not your Creator' with the reply 'why not'.[3] Moreover, when God asked the angels to prostrate before Adam, they obeyed the divine command except Satan who refused to bow before Adam after having a dialogue with God.[4]

Islamic Tradition of Religious Dialogue

The Islamic tradition has a glorious history of religious dialogue. The Prophet of Islam (pbuh) has set many examples of dialogue, both verbal and written. The Prophet (pbuh) entered into a dialogue both with the followers of revealed religions and idol worshippers.

The prophetic dialogue was also accompanied with the establishment of a tradition of co-operation on common human grounds with followers

of other religions. To institutionalise this co-operation, the Prophet (pbuh) concluded written agreements with followers of different religions which can serve as models of co-operation and coexistence for the pluralist societies of today. We witness the first ever instance of the Prophet's activism for cooperation with others in acts of goodness and to undo excesses and injustice, in Mecca, when he was yet to be bestowed with prophethood. He (pbuh) became part of this agreement, called *Hilful fudul*, and accorded so much importance to it that even after he was granted prophethood, he time and again expressed his willingness to be part of any such agreement, if invited to do so.

After migrating to Madina, the Prophet (pbuh) in order to establish peace, stability and a civil society based on human rights, concluded a deal with the Christians, Jews and *mushriqin* (idol worshippers) which is recorded in history as *mithaq-e-Madina* (The Pact of Madina). The most striking feature of the Pact that has a very meaningful relevance to our own socio-political situation in India as well as other pluralist and democratic societies is the fact that it accepted all the religious entities represented in the Pact as forming one single *umma* (people).

The Pact of Madina accepts religious freedom as a core value and right, and guarantees the equal rights and obligations of all the participants in the Pact in matters of state. This also establishes the principle that the religious differences of a society or people do not put any obstacles in the affairs of the state and its defence against any external enemy.

The Pact of Hudaibiyyah also forms a great landmark in the Islamic tradition of dialogue. This Pact, which was concluded with the Muslims seemingly in a position of weakness, paved the way on the one side for the suspension of hostilities against Muslims and for opening interaction and negotiations with different religious groups on the other. These negotiations facilitated the process of mutual understanding and coexistence becoming a reality as well as creating conditions for an unobstructed propagation of the Islamic message.

The fourth most important initiative taken by the Prophet (pbuh) having utmost relevance in the context of the present religious dialogue, is his Farewell Address, which was addressed not only to the Muslims but to all humankind, containing the universal human

message of Islam in the most lucid language. The Farewell Address, the *khutba hujjat al-wida'*, not only constitutes the first Charter of Human Rights but also provides a firm ground for peaceful coexistence and the promotion of human values.

All four models of the Prophet's (pbuh) acts of peace-making through dialogue – *Hilf ul-fudul*, the Pact of Madina, the Pact of Hudaibiyyah, and the Farewell Address – contain a message and guidance that can help us in the process of initiating a multi-layered dialogue in present day pluralist societies, a dialogue that will have a set destination, clear principles and strategies, gentle and persuasive language, thus leading to the establishment of a universal human fraternity where mankind will be free from all discrimination based on creed, colour and race and the last divine message will reach all human beings in its natural form.

Religious Dialogue During the Time of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs

The age of the Rightly-guided Caliphs also is very important in the context of religious dialogue. Muslims in this period of time achieved many victories and huge tracts of land came under their suzerainty, which also enlarged their area of interaction with other religions. The Muslim urge for dialogue also found expression in wars. The Islamic principles of war made it mandatory for the Muslims first to offer the message of Islam to the adversary. It implied the importance that Muslims accorded to dialogue even during a war. This Muslim insistence on dialogue and negotiation underscored their primary attitude of avoiding confrontation to the utmost possible extent and instead trying to resolve tensions through peaceful means. It is during this time that the Muslims came into contact with the Zoroastrian and Coptic traditions, who were also engaged in a meaningful dialogue.

During the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates, Muslims became a super power in the world but still they continued with the tradition of religious dialogue and promoted it to the extent that it developed into a mass culture of mutual coming together: socially, culturally and intellectually. It was this surge in inter-religious dialogue that even amongst Muslims saw the emergence of different sects, based on differences of opinion on, and mutually contradicting interpretation of, Islamic teachings. The Muslim practice of according religious

freedom to non-Muslims was so strong that during the first century after the Hijra (the Prophet's migration), the non-Muslims of Syria, Egypt, Palestine, Persia and Turkistan, which came under Islamic rule, were allowed to maintain their traditional faiths. It took three to four centuries for these areas to turn into Muslim-majority areas. This change was the result of the tradition of religious dialogue, not the use of force or coercion.

In Spain and the Balkans

A new tradition of religious interaction took shape after the advent of Islam in Spain. As the majority of the people were of other faiths, Muslim rulers in Spain not only ensured their religious freedom but also made them equal participants in the governance and administration. Non-Muslims were never subjected to any religious discrimination or repression and had all the avenues of progress open to them. These policies turned Spain into probably the first pluralist society of its kind in the entire human history, where the process of religious interaction and dialogue extended from homes and market places to the royal court. It was however, reversed when the Christians regained power and eliminated all that was Islamic in Spain.

Another experiment in pluralism was undertaken in the Balkans during the Ottoman Caliphate. Here also Muslims lived for a very long time, particularly from the 15th to the 19th centuries, together with Catholic Christians and Jews with all peace. No major incident of religious conflict has been reported during this entire period, while instances of mutual tolerance and coexistence abound.

Religious Dialogue in India

Muslims came to India with their faith in broad human unity and brotherhood. Muslim rulers generally treated their non-Muslim subjects with tolerance and respected their human rights, inspired by the principles of Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence). Muslims knew about India even during the life-time of the Prophet (pbuh), as Arab traders frequented the coastal areas of South India. The same traders later became the propagators of Islam. But in Northern India, the advent of Islam was heralded by the military campaign led by Mohammed Bin Qasim in 711 CE in Sindh, which created the conditions for the

Muslims to come to India, where their numbers grew day by day. At that time Brahmanism was trying to regain power from the Buddhists who were in power until then. Soon Buddhism was ousted from the land of its birth and forced to take refuge in the Fast East. There were some pockets of Jainism, particularly around Gujarat. As such the Muslims came into contact mainly with Brahmanic Hinduism, which Mohammed Bin Qasim treated in the light of the Pact that the Prophet (pbuh) had made with the Christians of Najran. The classical Muslim historian, Al-Baladhuri, records in connection with Qasim's campaign in Sindh:

Mohd. Bin Qasim reached the city of Raorhi situated on a hill top. He laid a siege and won the city without a battle with the assurance that neither there will be bloodshed nor Hindu places of worship will be touched. He considered Hindu places of worship as equal to the places of worship of Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians. Then he clamped tax on them.[5]

Mohammed Bin Qasim established a system of governance in Sindh based on the Islamic principles governing non-Muslims, which were characterised by religious tolerance and ensuring the human rights of the non-Muslims. Hamid-al-Kufi writes in Chach Nama:

The victor of Sindh gave very high regard to religious tolerance. He got a fatwa from Damascus to the effect that Hindu temples enjoy the same status as the Christian or Jewish places of worship found in other provinces of the Caliphate. Brahmans were accorded all the rights that they enjoyed earlier. They were also appointed as revenue collection officers.[6]

Mohammed Bin Qasim did not interfere in the religious affairs of Hindus. Traditional local courts (*panchayats*) were allowed to continue to decide civil cases as usual.[8] There is also written evidence that the Arab victors never forced the people of Sindh to convert to Islam. Instead they were provided with all the privileges enjoyed by the *dhimmis* living in other Muslim lands.[9]

Moreover, the neighbourhoods that Muslims established were open, allowing no segregation on the basis of caste and untouchability, which was in stark contrast to what one found in Hindu neighbourhoods. This openness and equality had such a compelling attraction

that the local people could not resist it. Initial xenophobia gradually gave way to sympathy and misgivings started crumbling. Soon religious discussions started among Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, which had already begun in the court of the Abbasid Caliphs.[10]

These discussions found a more systematic intellectual articulation in Al-Biruni's (d.1050 CE) *Book of India*, which was the first serious attempt by an Arab to know and understand from close quarters the faith systems, religious traditions, philosophical postulates and socio-cultural expressions of India. Al-Biruni's researches and writings on India made sterling contributions in laying the foundations of the Hindu-Muslim dialogue that was to begin after the consolidation of Muslim rule in India.

Muslim rulers in India from the very beginning generally adopted an attitude of religious tolerance and coexistence towards their Hindu subjects. At the same time, the *ulama* (religious scholars) and *fuqaha* (experts of Islamic Law) too favoured that the Hindus should be accorded all the rights and freedoms that they were entitled to under the Islamic system. *Fatawa-i Jahandari*, an important work of Islamic jurisprudence, tells us about the status Hindus enjoyed during Muslim rule:

They have war drums, banners, things made of precious metals, golden robes and all the trappings of royalty. They have lands, employments and power in plenty and (Muslim Kings) allow it that Kafirs (non-believers), Mushriks (those who worship many gods) and idol-worshippers build their houses like palaces, don golden robes, use Arabian horses laden with golden and silver trappings and live in grandeur, enjoy all the comforts of life, have Muslims as servants and make them run ahead of their horses, with poor Muslims begging at their doors and calling them rai, rana, thakur, shah, mehta and pandit.[11]

All the *fatawa* (Islamic legal decrees) of the period have clear statements about the religious grounds of Muslim-Hindu relations and status of the places of worship of non-Muslim *dhimmis* (protected subjects), guaranteeing their protection. Fatawa-i Qara Khani clearly replies in the negative to the query: should the places of worship of non-Muslims and *dhimmis* not be allowed to be built and protected under Islamic rule? Likewise to the related question: have Muslims a

right or not to pull down the places of worship of non-Muslims found in the lands which have come under Muslim rule?[12]

The Contribution of Sufis

Sufis promoted religious tolerance and interfaith understanding with utmost zeal, as they valued these things as articles of faith. With their love of the entire humankind, irrespective of creed, colour and race, the sufis spread the Islamic message of human unity and universal brotherhood in a way that touched people's hearts.

Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti laid the foundations of the Chishti Order of sufism in India. He evolved such a vocabulary and idiom of spreading the Islamic message that transformed an individual's life. He understood the Hindu mind as no-one else did and opened a dialogue with them accordingly.

Khwaja Nizamuddin Chishti of Delhi further extended the Chishti Order and became a great centre of human love and kindness. His *khanqah* attracted people of all religions who were treated with equality and without any discrimination. Amir Khusro, the closest disciple of Khwaja Nizamuddin and a great Persian poet, was a great lover of India and had a profound knowledge and understanding of the Hindu religion and culture. In his Persian *masnavi* (long poem) *Nuh Sipahr,* he writes about Hindus with great philosophical insight:

They believe in the unity of existence, absoluteness of the Reality and the life after death.

They believe God to be the Creator and Provider of all the intelligent and non-conscious and living beings. They believe God to be the creator of the good and evil and believe in His authority and His knowledge of things from the Beginning to the End.

Indians are much better than those who do not know God from His divine attributes. Dualists have split the oneness of Godhead into two but no Indian denies the oneness of God and His power of Creation.

Christians crafted the ideas of Jesus as son of God and that of the Holy Spirit.

Star-worshippers believe in seven gods but Hindus who know the essence of unity deny it.

Elementalists have faith in four gods but Hindus say that God is one.

Anthropomorphists believe in the manifestation of God but Indians are untainted by it.

Another group believes in the Light and Darkness as gods but Hindus do not subscribe to this faith.

Indians believe God to be True and without any parallel.

Although they worship stones, horses, sun, grass and plants but they do it only out of love and to fulfil a necessity.

They say that the Creator is God and these gods and goddesses are just His manifestations and images.

They worship gods and goddesses only for showing their loyalty to them.

We can see this ceaseless search for a firm ground of human oneness and such a common denominator among followers of different religions, which may serve as a basis for social, economic and cultural cooperation among them, running through the entire Islamic history as a current of light. This is the same search for religious understanding that we know as modern dialogue. If one looks at human history with objectivity and uncoloured eyes, one would come to the fact that it was Muslims who were the initiators of this dialogue and interface among various faiths and civilisations. It was because the global society that came into existence under the Abbasids dominated a substantial part of the world was unprecedented in human history. Muslims knew the importance of this globalism and tried to consolidate it by providing academic, philosophical and practical grounds for religious and civil understanding.

Shah Waliullah of Delhi (1703-1762), who was the most outstanding religious scholar of the Indian sub-continent in the 18th century, has discussed the idea of religious dialogue in his book *Al-Fauz al-Kabir*.

He tells us that *Ilm al-mujadila* (the science of disputation) is one of the five categories of knowledge covered in the Qur'an which presents the truth of Islamic faith through arguments.[13] This *Ilm al-mujadila* has a close parallel in our modern religious dialogue. The Qur'an has continuously adopted the style of dialogue wherever there is an invitation to ponder on the truthfulness of the faith. The Qur'an enjoins upon the believers to employ the same style of dialogue while interacting with non-Muslims. The Holy Book commands the believers to: "Call men to the path of your Lord with wisdom and mild exhortation. Reason with them in the most courteous manner."[14] This Qur'anic verse lays down the essential features of the Qur'anic way of invitation and dialogue where a mild and gentle language is used, which is based on reason and argument and where there is no effort to injure or damage the invitee's ego.

The Mughal Emperor Akbar (r. 1564-1605 CE) was another great seeker of interfaith togetherness with whom the tradition of religious dialogue touched a new high in medieval India. He not only promoted the idea of religious understanding but also institutionalised it by organising discussions among representatives of various faiths to arrive at a common ground of unity. The most important feature of Akbar's efforts was that he turned the process of religious dialogue into a public campaign.

The Mughal Prince Dara Shikoh took his grandfather's legacy to the utmost heights by making the idea of religious harmony into a personal experience which he expressed in his many original works and translations of Hindu scriptures.

In the 19th century, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the founder of the famous M.A.O. College at Aligarh and a father figure of Muslim renaissance, made outstanding contributions to interfaith understanding. He wrote an introduction to the Bible, translated parts of it (Gen. 1-12 and Matt. 1-5) into Urdu, commented upon these texts and thus became a pioneer of Muslim-Christian dialogue in India.

Today Muslims are sharing life with the followers of different religions in many countries. Almost all pluralist societies today have Muslims as an inalienable part. Figures show that the Muslim population in

the world is about 1.5 billion which means that every fifth human being in the world is a Muslim. It also makes them the second largest religious group in the world. There are many Muslim states where non-Muslims live together with the Muslims. This situation calls upon the Muslims to become exemplars of the Islamic teachings about religious tolerance and coexistence.

The Contemporary Scenario of Religious Dialogue

We know that religious dialogue as a movement had its beginning in the 20th century but this movement caught public attention only during the sixth and seventh decades. In 1965, the Roman Catholic Church, through the documents of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), introduced a change in its policy towards non-Christian faith traditions.

It is very heart-warming and promises that in a world where conflicts of various kinds are the order of the day, the religious quarters are advocating dialogue and coexistence amongst religions. The Muslim world has furthered the cause of religious dialogue by the active involvement of its political leadership in this process. In the last decade of the 20th century, when the theory of the clash of civilisations was widely published, Iranian President Mohammed Khatami took the lead in emphasising the importance of religious dialogue. The movement of dialogue among religions got another boost when in 2007 about 138 Islamic scholars and intellectuals, under the leadership of Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad of Jordan, issued an open letter and invitation for reconciliation to the Christian Church through the Common Word initiative (see: www.acommonword.com).

Common Word: A New Beginning

Pope Benedict, the head of the Catholic Church, during a lecture on 12 September 2006 at the University of Regensburg, Germany, quoted a Byzantine King's comment that Islam was a religion of violence. This comment provoked the entire Muslim world, which responded in large scale demonstrations the world over. But at the same time these words prompted the intellectual and academic circles in the Islamic world to think about taking a new initiative to remove misgivings about Islam and Muslims that afflict the Christian world. A lead in this direction was undoubtedly taken

by the Aal al-Bayt Trust under the guidance of Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad. On 13 October 2007, the Common Word invitation for a Muslim-Christian dialogue was issued.

After the Common Word

The Christian world, particularly the religious circles, unfortunately could not accept this common word initiative from Muslims with the warmness that was expected. The Christian response was mixed as certain hardcore fanatical Christian circles termed this sincere effort as a bundle of lies, while liberal Christian scholars like Christian W. Troll and John L. Esposito wholeheartedly welcomed it.

The Common Word initiative found the warmest response at Yale University in the U.S.A. where the Divinity School organised a conference to discuss the proposals of accord and reconciliation raised in the Common Word initiative. The conference also saw a document issued by a group of Christian religious scholars which called for strengthening the two proposals of the Common Word initiative – love of God and love of neighbour. The importance of this document lies in the fact that it was signed by about 300 eminent people belonging to different Christian traditions and it was published as a full page advertisement in the *New York Times*. As a follow up, Cambridge University (October 2008) and the University of Georgetown (March 2009) also organised conferences where positive views were presented with reference to the Common Word initiative.

This initiative received a shot in the arm when Saudi Arabia, under the leadership of Shah Abdullah, came forward to involve itself in this campaign of promoting religious dialogue and promised to turn it into a movement.

Saudi involvement and patronage of the Common Word initiative is indeed one of its biggest achievements. Shah Abdullah kept his promise and invited eminent scholars and intellectuals belonging to various groups within Islam to a conference held under the aegis of the *Rabita 'Alam-e-Islami* at Mecca, the city of peace, in June 2008, to deliberate upon the possibilities of a thorough dialogue between Islam and other faiths. An important feature of the Mecca conference was that it also had representatives of the countries where Muslims

have practical experience of living with other religions as minorities. The role of Muslims in pluralist societies, with particular reference to India and Indonesia, was an important part of the agenda. Shah Abdullah organised another grand World Conference on Dialogue in Madrid, Spain in July 2008 to discuss various issues related to religious dialogue. Shah Abdullah said among other things in his inaugural address that:

Let our dialogue be a triumph of belief over disbelief, of virtue over vice, of justice over iniquity, of peace over conflicts and wars, and of human brotherhood over racism.

The Madrid conference had representatives of Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism, apart from Islam. Thus the involvement of Saudi Arabia in the process of religious dialogue has warmed up the expectation that the Muslim world will respond to it enthusiastically and the Muslim religious leadership will come forward to pursue this dialogue much more vigorously.

Muslim-Christian Dialogue: Problems and Obstacles

Muslim-Christian dialogue does not face such problems in India as it faces in the Muslim- and Christian-majority countries, primarily because both the Muslims and Christians are minorities and victims of Hindu religious chauvinism in India. But still there are certain problems and obstacles that need to be discussed and removed. One of the biggest obstacles in the religious dialogue between Muslims and Christians lies in the perceptions about the Lord Jesus Christ and the Prophet of Islam (pbuh). Muslims consider Jesus Christ a Prophet and revere him accordingly but most of the Christians still suffer from certain historical misgivings about the prophethood of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

Another problem consists in both Islam and Christianity being proselytising religions. Both want to enlarge their presence through religious propagation which creates tensions and impedes the process of dialogue.

Perceptions about the relationship between religion on the one hand and politics and political power on the other, is the third important point of conflict. Christianity has accepted the separation of Church

and State as a fact, while Muslims are not ready to accept this dualism and consider the Rightly-guided Caliphate as their model, although religion and politics have been independent of each other for the largest part of Islamic history.

The Christian world has achieved many freedoms, including that of expression, after a long and painful struggle against religious repression because of which they are not ready to give them up at any cost, whilst the Muslim world, because of an entirely different historical experience, finds itself against giving unlimited freedoms to the people. This also constitutes a great obstacle in the dialogue.

Conservative circles in both the religions are also creating problems in Muslim-Christian dialogue as they highlight contentious issues instead of concentrating on the points of accord and unity.

Towards a Future of Hope

Efforts so far made towards strengthening and intensifying the process of religious dialogue show that in spite of many forces working against it, the future of Muslim-Christian dialogue seems to be quite bright, as there are many more points of agreement than otherwise between the two great religious traditions. The Common Word initiative and the Mecca and Madrid Conferences point towards the fact that the process of dialogue has now got a firm ground upon which to grow. The way the religious and political leaderships in the Muslim world have joined hands to further the cause of dialogue is a potent indication that in countering the forces of clash and conflict among religions and civilisations, the religious leadership of different faiths would come forward with much more vigour and unity to intensify the process of dialogue at every level and force the political leadership to serve the cause of religious tolerance, coexistence and universal human brotherhood.

In India, though the tradition of religious interaction and dialogue is quite old and established, the process of religious dialogue, more particularly the Hindu-Muslim dialogue, is yet to find a coherent expression and a firm ground upon which to stand. The Hindu majority has not yet responded to the necessity of dialogue in the way and on the scale it demands. Small groups of different religious traditions are indeed engaged in this process at different levels but

these efforts are limited to conferences and seminars alone with practically no impact on the routine affairs of society. The process of dialogue has still not found a systematic academic articulation mainly because there is almost no institutional support for it. Academics who are engaged in this process largely remain confined to their private efforts and generally do not join the activists of dialogue. But there is still a great hope in India for religious dialogue to grow, as this country has been a pluralist society for centuries and the Indian people share a living experience of religious tolerance and coexistence.

1| *Q. 7:19, 20:120.*
All translations taken from: An English Translation of the meaning of the Qur'an, Lebanon: Dar Al-Choura Beirut, 1980.
2| *Q. 2:30, 33.*
3| *Q. 7:172.*
4| *Q. 7:11, 17.*
5| *Futuhal Buldaan, Al Badhuri, Cairo: Almatba al misriyya, 1937, p.424.*
6| *Kufi, Mohd. Ali bin Hamid Abu Bakr: Chach Nama, Delhi, 1939, p.208.*
7| *The Administration of the Sultanate of Delhi, Edited Volume, Karachi, 1959.*
8| *Ishwari Prasad: The History of Medieval India, Indian Press.*
9| *Futuhal Buldan, Al Baladhuri, op.cit.*
10| *Quraishi, Ishtiyaq Husain: Barr-e-Azam Pak-o-Hind Ki Millat-e-Islamia, (Urdu) translated by Hilal Ahmad Zubairi, Karachi University, Karachi, Third edition, 1987, p.43.*
11| *Fataawa Jahandari, p.120-121, quoted in Nizami, Khaliq Ahmad: Salatin-e-Delhi Ke Mazhabi Rujhanaat (Urdu), Delhi: Nadvatal Musannifin, pp.77, 70.*
12| *Bhatti, Mohd. Ishaq: Barr-e-Saghir Pak-o-Hind Mein Ilm-e-Fiqh (Urdu), Lahore: Idara Saqafat-e-Islamiyya, 1972, pp.95, 97.*
13| *Waliullah, Shah: Al Fauzul Kabir fi Usulal Tafsir, Lucknow: Darul Uloom Nadvatul Ulema, 1987, p.27.*
14| *Q. 16:125.*

Problems of Cultural, Social and Political Life and Thought, for Renewed Effort of Muslim-Christian Dialogue

Maryam Uwais

The dialogue that has ensued in pursuance of the *A Common Word* initiative resounds in a verse of the Qur'an, thus,

Say, O People of the Scripture! Come to a common terms/an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but Allah, 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).[1]

The first part of the verse has been discussed extensively in the body of the Dossier so that requires no repetition, while the second part is worth emphasising because it conveys a significant principle applicable for human co-existence on this earth; that no-one should seek to dominate another on grounds of faith or absence of accord on the subject, because God alone is the ultimate judge. Submission to God is the only acceptable ethic, and finally, disagreements of faith should not be personal and freedom of choice in faith is guaranteed without reservation. It suffices merely to affirm loyalty and submission to God, where there is no assent to common terms.

Challenges in the Nigerian Context

The Qur'an states clearly, "Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from error."[2] Furthermore, "To you be your own way, and to me mine."[3]

Ironically, intolerance and disrespect for other religions is common among some Nigerians, both Muslims and Non-Muslims, notwithstanding that God has made it clear in the Qur'an that he created us as nations and tribes so that we may come to know one another.

Although Islamic personal law (covering such aspects as marriage, family relationships, guardianship, succession, etc) is entrenched in the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as being applicable to Muslims, the contents have not been codified, thereby ensuring uniformity, certainty and publicity, accordingly. Indeed, it is only more recently that some States in northern Nigeria (after 1999) enacted the specific criminal aspects of the Shari'a (the *hudud*) to be enforced in their jurisdictions. Since then religion has assumed increasingly 'front burner dimensions' in our national discourse. Communal conflicts, arising too frequently from intolerance, ignorance and misinformation, have become quite common in our communities in Nigeria. Most regrettably, these incidents are all too familiar, especially in the northern part of Nigeria, although such incidents have sparked off retaliatory measures in communities that are not predominantly Muslim as a consequence.

The majority of our people are poor, ignorant and unemployed. Their emotions are easily whipped up by any allusion to matters relating to religion and they are quick to rouse to anger and rioting at the slightest rumour of 'provocation' or misunderstanding. Churches, mosques, lives and property are often the first targets of destruction upon the occurrence of a seemingly innocuous matter relating to some hearsay 'sacrilegious occurrence'. The challenge, in our own context, has always been how to curtail these incidents before they spiral into the tragic crises and how to manage the aftermath of resultant destruction and the displaced persons who have been rendered homeless.

Of necessity, the propagation of faith is through human agency, bearing in mind the endemic risk of subjectivity, rigidity and inflexibility that is part of human comprehension and human will. Human argument must be informed by human ability, capacity and sentiment. Thus a view expressed by an individual preaching at a community gathering, in a church/mosque or at religious lectures may indeed derive from the divine scriptures. This simple fact is presented as if it is the categorical position and solution on that particular question of faith. In truth however, this view should only be the beginning of the inquiry, because one must first comprehend the presenter and his method of presentation to appreciate fully the message that he seeks to convey. It should always be borne in mind that it is the speaker who makes and manages the argument and

who selects his own illustration and example from the text. Being human, this speaker may be ill-informed, simplistic, dogmatic or ill-intentioned, so it stands to reason that he may simply exclude from his analysis the vast spectrum of material or information that contradicts his own opinion. He will assume and strive to convince the audience that the validity he seeks to ascribe to his argument conveys a clear, precise and singular meaning, thereby excluding all evidence to the contrary.[4] The presentation of one view as simple and compelling truth is necessarily accompanied by the exclusion of contending analysis, which is always a source of unending controversy in our own context.

Most unfortunately, it is clear that some of our imams, priests, pastors or even scholars, lack comprehensive knowledge, humility, wisdom or the temperament for preaching; more so in a pluralist society. They speak with certainty on issues that are not so simple, and are therefore unable or incapable of conveying the wide spectrum of possibilities that are just as legitimate, having been derived from the direct sources of the faith they subscribe to. Claims of expertise and scholarship are hardly ever questioned or verified and there are no established mechanisms or qualifications for monitoring and evaluating the performance of those who claim expertise in the field. Basic minimum criteria for such vocations should at least include a comprehensive knowledge of their particular faith, intellect, humility, wisdom, compassion and a sense of justice before such a person ventures into the public sphere for the purposes of religious propagation.

Consequently there is an abundance of self-declared experts (across all the faiths) in our domain, who may be ignorant, selective or at best non-critical when dealing with religious precepts and traditions. This has only given license to bigotry and intolerance in many situations. Having hijacked the terrain of ‘knowledge’, these ‘experts’ dominate the discourse with claims of exclusive and superior understanding and jealously guard their assertions, their temporal positions and the status quo with tenacity. To question them would be to reduce their relevance in society and their self-esteem, as well as the means of their sustenance in the community. You become the enemy, as your innocent enquiry strikes at the core of their status, regard and relevance in the community.

Universal Concepts

It is a widely-held belief, by Muslims and non-Muslims alike, that democracy and human rights are not in consonance with the Islamic faith, in spite of the predominant and prevailing consensus of Islamic jurists that life, dignity and substantive justice, even in respect of dealings with non-Muslims, are non-negotiable precepts within the faith.

There are, of course, many models for successful democratic governance, but the basic question remains whether or not, Muslims can commit to a system that acknowledges the sovereignty of human beings over their own affairs, or if, in the unquestionable belief in the sovereignty of God, Muslims are duty-bound to consider this sovereignty as precluding human beings from the freedom to conduct their own affairs. Does Islamic theology preclude Muslims from subscribing to and living within the confines of a democratic government? Other questions that arise include whether or not, people have the collective right to elect their government or determine the laws that govern them, and how/if God's law can be translated and transmuted into man-made law.

The basic principle that emerges from the categorical statement in the Qur'an that Muslims (and non-Muslims) are to worship God alone and should not take one another as lords (Q. 3:64), is that human beings should not dominate one another in matters of faith. Submission is to God and not to man, as that could amount to oppression. Accordingly a deep reflection of the meaning of this concept should encourage all, irrespective of faith, to subscribe to arrangements that ensure that none dominates the other. In striving to establish justice between human beings living together, the construction of a political system that enables and ensures the accountability of its leaders, the redressing of injustices and protection from oppression, especially of the more vulnerable, is crucial and eminently Islamic!

Experience has shown that constitutionally democratic systems provide the most conducive atmosphere for nurturing these critical elements, as in a non-democratic system it is virtually impossible to hold leaders accountable for injustices or even to address abuses or social disparities. Where such a system is founded upon individual

rights and duties, its capacity is enhanced towards the achievement of the desired goals of entrenching respect for the dignity and liberty of the human being. Indeed, the Qur'an describes oppressors as corrupters of the earth and oppression as an offence against God, so dignity and liberty are believed to be the basic rudiments of all human beings, endowed by God.

One must also consider the question of whether or not the concept of individual rights is alien to Islam. Is it feasible to reconcile articulated rights from the Western perspective with Islamic traditions? Such a possibility would require a conscious effort to resolve seeming inconsistencies between the standards of human rights as articulated internationally and interpretations of the texts and the Hadith in the area of family or personal law, that relate especially to problematic areas such as women's rights, testimony, inheritance, the rules of marriage and divorce, etc. Much of what we witness in the area of women's rights and personal law in northern Nigeria is based on cultural dogma. Genuine attempts to regulate the enforcement of rights, as derived from the direct sources of Islamic law, encounter a multitude of barriers in trying to access justice. Since there is no enacted civil family code establishing rights and offences (with penalties attached), many of the violations go unpunished and are even accepted by women who do not know any better, who have been socialised into accepting their circumstances, irrespective of the justice element, or whose attempts at enforcing their rights are met with stiff cultural and religious barriers. So they get married, may co-exist in polygamy, be divorced, get deprived of their entitlements to maintenance, inheritance and custodial rights, without the endemic observance of justice that must (by God's prescription) accompany every facet of their personal life. "God commands (the doing of) justice and fairness…and prohibits indecencies and injustices."[5] Furthermore, the Qur'an directs,

O you who believe, be maintainers of justice, bearers of witness for God, even if it be against your own selves or (your) parents or near relatives whether he be rich or poor, God has a better right over them both. So follow not (your) low desires, lest you deviate. And if you distort or turn away from (truth), surely God is aware of what you do.[6]

Since the doing of good and ensuring substantive justice to all manner of human beings is a basic and significant aspect of the faith, many subscribe in the affirmative that this wholesome reconciliation is not only possible but also mandatory, in the true spirit and character of the Qur'an. Undoubtedly, there may be particular rights that would not derive directly from a deliberate study of ethical or moral precepts with a view to encouraging good, ensuring justice and enhancing happiness and peaceful coexistence within societies. Ultimately however, an irreconcilable difference, if identified, cannot be so significant as to render the exercise useless or unnecessary. The Qur'an specifically states, "Allah desires ease for you and desires not hardship for you."[7] Furthermore, "See what God has sent down to you as a blessing. Yet you make some things forbidden and others lawful. God has permitted you (to do so) or do you invent things and attribute them to God?"[8] Consequently the harshness, strictness and rigidity that accompany the application of religious law have been said to be alien to God's command by a renowned Islamic jurist of the past.[9]

Consequently, it is generally opined in many quarters that the development of religious law should ideally be about setting boundaries, rather than precise directions. While piety may create and pursue certain rules, the rules in themselves, do not create piety. They may promote piety and justice where they are carried out with sincere intent and moral vision, but where these criteria are lacking, the rules can easily become meaningless and even punitive.[10] Unfortunately, the process of the development of religious law in our own context, and indeed in many jurisdictions, is mostly apologetic, dogmatic or legalistic; hardly appropriate for ensuring substantive justice for the weak.

Additionally, according to the theory of *haqq* (which notion may be said to relate, in a sense, to both truth and right/entitlement), both God and human beings have their sets of rights, which cannot be taken away, even by the state, unless waived by the individual. God's rights will be vindicated on the Last Day, while an individual's rights remain sacrosanct and inviolable, and must be guarded jealously by human beings on earth. The discourse on human rights in Islam can be predicated easily on this theory, as the implication of the conversation around it is that God will take care of his own rights in the hereafter, while human beings should take care of their rights

here on earth. Thus slander should be followed by remorse, an apology from the offender and forgiveness from the injured party; otherwise even God cannot intercede for the offender on the Last Day.

Justice remains a core value within Islam, to the extent that some scholars have argued that true submission to God is impossible where injustice is prevalent in a society. Injustice would lead to other negative traits that are inconsistent with Islam and render submission to God impossible, which characteristics would include oppression, fear, disharmony, conflict, insecurity, etc. The basis for justice would involve achieving a balance, moderation between duties and obligations, as against due rights. Muslims are obliged to encourage and nurture a system that balances rights with responsibilities, such that everyone has access to protection against abuse and to redress injustices against them. Human history and our common experience indicate that a democratic, constitutional system of governance would best provide the requisite atmosphere for accessing and sustaining justice and accountability, and affording the rights to dignity and liberty, irrespective of faith.

Human Rights in the Islamic Context

Classical scholars have identified five objectives as protected rights, which political and legal interests (or rights) are duty-bound to protect and promote. According to this theory, the ideal political system must respect the right to life, the intellect of its people (ability to reflect), their lineage (right to marry, procreate and raise their children), their reputation and the right to own property (including not to be deprived of it without just compensation). As a corollary to the rights to lineage and reputation, some argue that the right to privacy is also implied. These were considered not to be exhaustive but constitute the basic entitlements of human beings. In an effort to develop this theory, a further three-part division into necessities, needs and luxuries was created. Necessities are deemed to be what are basic and essential for the sustenance of the rights (like a prohibition against the taking of life), needs are less critical although important for the protection of the rights (providing employment and education, for instance), while luxuries are neither necessary nor a need, but where supplied, perfect the enjoyment of the right (such as transportation or paid vacations, etc).[11]

In arriving at these broad but unspecified divisions, these scholars contended that these differentiations are required to identify what must, should and could be guaranteed by a legal system that values the dignity of the human being residing within its confines. They further stated that it was the responsibility of each generation of Muslims to define 'in accordance with the shifting demands of the circumstances and changing times' what ought to be defined as necessities, needs or luxuries. A leadership that considers necessities as sacrosanct, with needs being high on its list of priorities as well as the provision of luxuries, would be on the right path to ensuring an equitable, fair and just society.

Most regrettably, the Nigerian States that have enacted the criminal aspects of Islamic law as applicable in their jurisdictions seem to have neglected many of the necessities and needs for their citizens, and the more vulnerable continue to suffer injustices that remain completely antithetical to the precepts of the Islamic heritage. The focus appears to be on the punishments, rather than the welfare of the people within their jurisdictions. Although the Nigerian Constitution (which provides for the fundamental human and socio-economic rights of Nigerian citizens) applies in all the States of Nigeria, the false argument persists that these rights are 'alien to Islam', having been articulated in the form in which they appear 'from the West'. In fact, the values that emerge from this discourse on 'protected rights' from an Islamic perspective can legitimately form the framework for a coherent set of human, social and economic rights within these States, if the scholars in these jurisdictions would exert their intellect and apply the broad principles, derived from the Islamic faith, to changing times and contexts.

Constitutional Democracy and Sovereignty

Another significant issue, to which reference needs to be made in this discussion, is the divine commandment in the Qur'an for Muslims to conduct their affairs through consultation (*shura*). In other words, decision-making in governance should not be conducted by one individual or a select few but in the type of consultation that is the outcome of democratic interaction with a broad spectrum or group in the society.

Furthermore it is on record that when the Prophet first migrated to the city of Madina (having left Mecca, the city of his birth, due to persecution), he drafted a memorandum (constitution) that established the obligations, duties and responsibilities of each tribal group that existed within the confines of its borders, including those of non-Muslims that were resident within Madina. After his selection as ruler of the city, he carefully negotiated with the various groups within that jurisdiction and prepared a document that was acceptable to all that participated in the exercise. Surely this historical precedent of what is now known as the 'Madina Pact' supports the idea for a legitimate democratic political system under a constitutional government.

Finally the concept of *ijma* (consensus) of a select group of people on an issue is well established and also lays a firm democratic foundation within Islam, although in the course of the exercise of arriving at a consensus in the past, jurisprudential issues varied and were debated quite vigorously. Apart from resolving the subject matter under dispute (including if the issue can ever be a matter for *ijma*), matters were discussed that related to whether or not, such a matter has to be theological or legal, and its effect on the community, if it should be final for all time, or for an interim period, etc. Today many hold the view that the consensus that is acceptable in our own context is one of simple majority, not necessarily that of unanimity; again, the will of the people, as in Western-like democracies.

It seems that much of the controversy in respect of the basis for the individual rights of human beings within Islam is predicated on the conversation around God's sovereignty. The basic understanding is that God is sovereign because final authority is his. Some opine, however, that he has delegated this authority to human beings possessed of the free will to conduct their affairs, so perhaps, people have been delegated this sovereignty (*khalifa*) as far as man-made law is concerned, while God remains sovereign as it relates to eternal law. For them, human beings can thus legislate on matters that relate to human existence so long as this law strives for the good, but where it fails to achieve this, it should be declared unconstitutional. Others argue that people are sovereign on earth and should be in a position to determine how best to conduct their affairs, because only matters relating to the worship of God are best left

to God, especially since human beings are not in a position to intercede or determine with certainty whether or not God has forgiven a violation of what is considered to be God's law.

Following this discourse, it can be assumed safely that Islam is supportive of most elements of constitutional democracy and respect for the basic rights that ensure the dignity of the human being. The challenge that arises is in the application and implementation of religious law, as has been adopted in Nigeria. Most particular are the *hudud* (punishments for theft and fornication provided in the Qur'an and the Hadith), whose existence is mitigated by strict evidentiary requirements for enforcement. For instance, apart from the necessity for four eyewitnesses in an allegation of fornication, there is a penalty of lashes for those who testify, if they fail to amount to the four who are mandated as the minimum number. This would act as a deterrent for making unsubstantiated accusations of sexual misconduct. We are however, witness to several unfortunate verdicts of stoning for the offence of fornication, which judgments have all been overturned on appeal, not having met the strict evidentiary standards required by Islamic law.

Some Muslims argue that the citizenry of a country should be the sole source of criminal legislation and so religious law, being a human attempt to render divine law inert, should ideally remain a moral and ethical guide in Islamic States. The Qur'an proclaims, "This is the Book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear Allah".[12] In their view, laws belong to the people, so legislatures should be free to enact laws that manage the conduct of people's affairs, although these laws should meet minimum moral/ethical standards and not impede the rights of the various peoples to practise their religions. Otherwise the apprehension is that once institutions purport to represent God, they stand the risk of offending him by dominating human beings, thereby ascribing to God a partnership that is completely abhorrent to Islam. Indeed, in Islamic history, after the early days of the Caliphates, Islamic jurists gradually grew conscious of the need to shy away from appearing political, never assuming power directly. Their power base was their popular appeal to hearts and minds, arising from their intellect, humility, wisdom and knowledge. To safeguard that perception, they remained non-partisan and aloof from politics, preferring the neutrality and sanctity of the spiritual realm for their activities.

In Nigeria, we are witnessing the troubling situation whereby 'scholars' (or their 'disciples') are assuming political status and authority in many northern States, in order to gain and wield power. They are gradually attaining authoritarian positions, dictating to the authorities of State what is for and against Islam, claiming exclusive knowledge of God's purpose for us in life with absolute certainty and finality, but without the humility to acknowledge and respect the possibility of other legitimate positions on the same subject matter. Some of them have taken centre-stage in the arena of religious authority, imposing on the public an exceptionally narrow and rigid interpretation of the Islamic faith.

Clearly strident efforts must be made to 'win over' these authoritarian people by engaging them intellectually with the diversity that exists within Islam on every subject matter, the encouraging and accommodating attitude of renowned Islamic jurists and scholars in history and the practical examples of Prophet Muhammad's humility, kindness and compassionate conduct on matters relating to human affairs and life. In this process, the point must always be made that questioning the dogma, which is a consequence of history, culture and subjectivity, is distinguishable and absolutely not the same as challenging Islam as a religion and a heritage. Rather, questioning set notions and beliefs held by human beings is in consonance with God's expectations of us that we should reflect continuously on his Word and its implications for us in our lives and our contexts as human beings.

Interestingly the Qur'an states, "And none can know the soldiers of God except God".[13] Although according to commentaries on the Qur'an, the verse refers to the fact that only God knows why precisely nineteen angels guard hell, the phrase is couched in a manner that is a manifest negation of the authoritarian people in our midst, for it implies that no-one can know who are truly God's soldiers, except the Almighty himself. And while we can all aspire and strive to be the soldiers of God, only God knows his soldiers. Ultimately, even though everyone has access to God's authority, no-one is assured of receiving it. God knows best.[14]

Extremists argue for a re-creation of the days of the Caliphate, which era has long been overtaken by progress in reflection, development, creativity and technology. Yet history tells us that the Caliphate did

not adopt a single form of government, but rather implemented different policies and adapted various strategies for good governance. It was a historical institution that managed to unite most Muslims without necessarily embodying a distinct form of government. A study of the ideal *shura* system would reveal an ardent belief in the selection of a just ruler, who meets the requirements of piety, religious knowledge and wisdom effectively to implement the religious dictates of consultation in governance. Little however, can be found in respect of the procedural checks to be enacted to ensure that such a ruler, where found and selected, being human, can remain consistent, just and accountable to his subjects, practically knowing how power can corrupt so absolutely.

The next issue relates to the constitutional democratic system of governance that necessity demands, arising from the imperative of the element of justice, righteousness and the fair and balanced treatment even for non-Muslims that reside within those jurisdictions. This is even more so because extremists, across most religions, continue to insist that salvation can only be found through worship as dictated by their chosen faith. Indeed the logical conclusion, at which one would arrive in respect of this issue, would be that perhaps in a pluralist society where many claim superiority over the others for salvation and intercession with God on account of the faith they profess (despite the widely acknowledged notion that mercy is at God's sole discretion), we should be wary of allowing religion to play an active role in the public sphere, especially where it is oppressive and dismissive towards other faiths. Permitting such claims of superiority could only breed intolerance and conflict. Rather, emphasis should be placed on the opportunity of choice in the unimpeded ability to practise one's faith without infringing on the rights of others, than on claims of exclusivity of God's favour (which access is beyond us, as every honest, God-fearing human being would readily accept). Choice and righteousness, imperatives that cuts across all faiths, should be the overriding concern in a pluralistic society. Of righteousness, it is stated in the Qur'an that,

It is not righteousness That ye turn your faces Towards East or West; But it is righteousness To believe in God And the Last Day, And the Angels, And the Book, And the Messengers; To spend of your substance, Out of Love of Him, For your orphans, For the wayfarer, For those who ask, And for the ransom of slaves; To be

steadfast in prayer, And practice charity; To fulfil the contracts Which ye have made; And to be firm and patient, In pain (or suffering) And adversity, And through All periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, God-fearing.[15]

Peoples of the Scriptures and Religious Pluralism

Since a jurist's interpretation, no matter how well meaning, can only remain subjective, based on the personal experience, background, knowledge and understanding of the fallible human being striving to access the meaning of God's Word, it is entirely possible to find various categories of Muslims arguing from diametrically opposite ends, about the perceived relationship that should exist between the Muslim and non-Muslim, on the meaning, implications and consequences of God's Word and human rights and dignity, freedoms of belief and religion, secularity and democracy, all of them legitimately deriving their authority from verses of the Qur'an.

My own views can only remain the efforts of a humble Muslim student actively engaged in advocacy for the respect, promotion and protection of the rights of all citizens, absolutely unversed in the complexity of the Arabic language, nowhere near an expert or scholar, but nevertheless searching for the truth amidst a cacophony of voices. There are many that would disagree, even vehemently, with my personal views on this issue, but every individual is accountable for his or her own views and I am consoled by the saying of Prophet Muhammad that the pursuit of knowledge, by itself, is an act of worship and that persons that exert themselves in such efforts receive divine reward, even for trying!

With the support of one of the verses in the Qur'an, Muslims accept and even expect there to be diversity within human society. This verse states,

O humankind, God has created you from male and female and made you into diverse nations and tribes so that you may come to know each other. Verily, the most honoured of you in the sight of God is he who is the most righteous.[16]

Not only is the principle of diversity affirmed in this verse, but the divine will and purpose of creation is said to be also for us "to know

each other," which seems to place an obligation upon Muslims to cooperate with non-Muslims and Muslims alike. Furthermore in the Qur'an, God says to the Prophet,

But why should they make you a judge (between them) when the Torah is in their midst and it contains the Law of God?

We sent down the Torah containing guidance and light, and in accordance with (the Torah) the prophets who were obedient (to God) gave instructions to the Jews, as did the rabbis and priests, for they were the custodians of God's writ. So, therefore, do not fear men, fear Me, and barter not My messages away for a paltry gain. Those who do not judge by God's revelations are indeed unbelievers.

After that We sent Jesus, son of Mary, confirming the Torah, which had been sent down before him, and We gave him the Gospel containing guidance and light, as an affirmation of what we revealed in the Torah, and as a guidance and warning for those who are pious. Let the people of the Gospel judge by what God has revealed in it. And those who do not judge in accordance with what God has revealed are transgressors.

And unto thee have We revealed the Scripture with the truth, confirming the earlier revelations, and preserving them. So judge between them (Muslims) by that which Allah hath revealed to you, and do not ignore the Truth that has been revealed to you by following people's whims. For each We have appointed a Divine law and a traced-out 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 (virtues). Unto Allah ye will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein you differ.[17]

Consequently even where Islam is not accepted by the non-Muslim, the Qur'an admonishes us all to unite in striving for virtue, which certainly does not imply assimilation, domination or dilution of belief. It simply means cooperation in the objective of promoting good, despite the variations in laws, rules and beliefs. Moreover the Qur'an clearly embraces a multiplicity and pluralism of laws and nothing of its contents precludes cooperation with others in order to excel in virtues and goodness. From this paradigm therefore, it could be

argued that a universalism that seeks to impose a single unitary law could be seen to be in conflict with the text of the Qur'an. People may have varying views concerning their creed, but there should be collectivity in aspiring to improve the conditions of human beings. And while it is true that verses exist in the Qur'an that instruct Muslims not to ally with non-Muslims, some would disagree with the notion, that is indeed widely held in some quarters, that certain parts of God's Word may have been abrogated by latter verses.[18] Since it is also understood that behind every verse is a particular context and historical background, they would rather consider those verses in their contextual perspective, which should be comprehended together with the sense that they seek to convey. It would be found that those verses were generally revealed in times of hostilities, at a period when Muslims were at war with non-Muslims, and non-Muslims were considered the enemy. The Qur'an says,

And argue not with the People of the Scriptures unless it be in (a way) that is better, save with such of them as do wrong (inflict injury); and say: We believe in that which has been revealed unto us and revealed unto you; our God and your God is One, and Unto Him we surrender.[19]

Thus while Muslims are urged to call others to Islam, they should do so in kindness, in the knowledge that not all will believe in one faith. An additional fact worth noting is that the Qur'an appears to acknowledge plural religious convictions and laws. In this context, I refer to,

Rest assured that Believers (in the Qur'an), Jews, Christians, Sabians – whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does righteous deeds – shall have their reward with their Sustainer; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve.[20]

Again,

Among the People of the Book, there are those who believe in God. They believe in what has been revealed to you, and also in what has been revealed to them. They bow in humility before God, and they do not trade for paltry gain God's messages. Verily, those have their reward with God for God is swift in reckoning.[21]

Undoubtedly Muslims who believe and do good deeds will receive the reward of heaven, but the Qur'an is also clear that it is impermissible for human beings to speculate about who may be the recipient of God's mercy. We are mere mortals. In dealing with non-Muslims therefore, Muslims cannot preclude the possibility of the latter becoming recipients of his mercy through doing good and abiding by their own rules. Since Muslims are not privy to God's ultimate decision and mercy is God's exclusive domain, it behoves us to strive to know one another, to treat all human beings with regard and to unite with everyone in striving for virtue, God's mercy and doing his will on earth.

Conclusion

Amongst the basic requirements in Nigeria today are strident efforts at understanding and therefore respecting the beliefs of one faith community by the other. It is only in this manner that many of the crises that bedevil our communities could be curtailed. There appears to be a phobia of Islam and Muslims, accompanied with the general belief that our faith is full of violent people, quick to anger and riot. This perception can only be fuelled by what would appear, in several instances, to be acts of deliberate provocation, especially by non-Muslims living in some areas in the north, despite their knowledge of the terrain and the pervading poverty and ignorance that informs the minds of the people in those communities. Surely freedom of speech should also be accompanied with the responsibility of respecting the ardent and firm commitment to religion, irrespective of whether one subscribes to it personally. An effort at respecting the beliefs of others and not maligning or desecrating what they hold dear would be a good beginning.

A study of historical antecedents also (into which we cannot go in this paper), would demonstrate that the Middle-Belt region of Nigeria especially is like a tinderbox, ready to explode at the slightest hint of religious misinformation, and the side of the divide to which you belong or how you survive, would literally depend on the language spoken or the ethnic group to which you belong. Religion often appears as the 'cause' of resentment conveyed as a dispute or conflict, whereas in fact it may be a majority/minority, indigene/settler dispute in that instance. Community and religious leaders of both faiths should urge their faithful to be wary of inciting or

instigating them to take up arms, for God or in God's name. They should refrain from jumping to hasty conclusions or making provocative comments, especially in such sensitive situations. Ultimately we have all been created by him for a purpose, which purpose would include to live with one another peacefully, act justly towards one another, to be our neighbour's keepers and to strive to enhance the conditions in our society.

Advocacy is required in many areas but most of all perhaps in the field of the diversity that obtains all over the world, in various Muslim majority and minority jurisdictions of our country. We must learn to read, understand and listen, even as we attempt to convey our own appreciation of the issues. Advocacy must be accompanied with an appeal to the conscience and the sense of justice that pervades Islam, which is critical to enable the opening of minds to the variations in interpretation of texts (and thus the fallibility of human agency), the contextual nature of many verses and authentic examples of the Prophet Muhammad's life, which practically demonstrate his wisdom, fairness, compassion and justice in dealings with all manner of human beings.

The authorities in those States in Nigeria that have passed the criminal aspects of Shari'a into law need to reflect deeply on the implications of applying such penalties in an environment that remains riddled with disparities between social classes and the injustices that have resulted as a consequence. The *haqq* that is the entitlement of those who are at the receiving end of the misapplication of the criminal aspects of the Shari'a in our own environment would not be overlooked or waived by God. We will all remain accountable for our deeds on the Last Day. Moreover the inconsistencies and disparities that exist, arising from the poverty and ignorance that pervades (which realities make it impossible for justice and accountability to thrive), should be resolved in favour of a more wholesome approach that guarantees basic necessities and needs, good governance, security and the observance of the rights of the more vulnerable in the society, in consonance with Islam.

In addition, for Muslims, civil laws (family codes) could also be enacted in our environment that afford appropriate mechanisms for women and children to access their rights and entitlements, uniformly and easily, which (where derived from the direct sources) remain formidable within the faith but are not available due to the

fact that they have not been reduced into enforceable provisions within these jurisdictions. Consequently where rights are violated currently, the decisions as to whether or not to grant a remedy, and the extent of the right and feasibility of the penalty in the particular circumstance, are left to the discretion of whichever *qadi* is seized with adjudicating on the matter. Indeed even the *qadis* that adjudicate on matters pertaining to the rights of the more vulnerable need to be exposed to the rich, intellectual diversity that obtains within Islamic jurisprudence, if only to ensure a well-reasoned and balanced judgment in protection of the weak.

In addition, a system needs to be established that ensures basic qualifications for those who claim to speak in God's name because the conflicts that have arisen in many of our communities can be traced to spontaneous outbursts of mob action arising from misinformation, rumours, misunderstandings and the ignorance and arrogance of many self-declared experts in the field of religious law, across both faiths. Continuous education, training, exposure to decisions and other valid interpretations as well as monitoring in respect of such matters are critical to maintaining peace and harmony in our society.

Several initiatives have been devised for the purposes of containing the various conflicts that have arisen as a consequence of religious intolerance. These include the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC), which came into being as a platform for high level dialogue between the leadership of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria towards promoting public good, peaceful co-existence and religious harmony especially in the light of ethnic and religious crises which have been recurring in Nigeria, especially since the early 1980s. The Council organises conferences and seminars on a regular basis, to promote understanding, the appreciation of one another's beliefs and the generation of mutual respect between adherents of the Muslim and Christian faiths. It has also promoted the establishment of NIREC clubs in secondary and tertiary institutions in the country, mainly to enable the youth to imbibe the values and spirit of religious understanding and harmony from an early stage.

It is made up of 50 members consisting of Muslims and Christians in equal numbers. It is co-chaired by the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Sa'ad Abubakar and Dr John Onaiyekan, the Archbishop of Abuja and

the Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria. The National Secretariat of the Council is situated in Abuja and meetings are held quarterly in various jurisdictions, with most States having replicated the Council at their level. Although the Council was inaugurated in 1999, it became more active in the latter part of 2007 and 2008, due to the recurrence of ethnic and religious crises in places like Jos, Aba, Kano, Kaduna and Bauchi. The Council has to its success the bridging of the gap between the adherents and leadership of the two major religions in Nigeria and is increasingly becoming known for promoting peace and understanding within and between the faiths. Other organisations such as the Federation of Muslim Women (FOMWAN), Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN), National Council of Muslim Youth Organisation (NACOMYO), Movement for Islamic Culture & Awareness (MICA), Muslim Public Affairs Centre (MPAC), Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI), The Nigeria Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) and the Nasrullahi-Fathi Society of Nigeria (NASFAT) have continued to initiate and promote dialogue in the sphere of religious tolerance and understanding. Worthy of mention specifically is the work in which the Da'wah Institute of Nigeria of the Islamic Education Trust (a non-governmental organisation based in Niger State of Nigeria) is actively engaged, training hundreds of youth in interfaith dialogue every year. Its "Train the Trainers Course", which has been conducted for a total of over 4,500 people in over 20 States of Nigeria, so far, utilises a manual of five modules with an encouraging and rich bibliography of highly recommended reading material for sharing with participants.

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), as well as the various components of that umbrella organisation, including the Catholic, Methodist and Anglican Churches and the Pentecostal Associations of Nigeria, have also actively engaged in the process of interfaith dialogue, especially in recent times, following the spate of interreligious crises that have continued to spiral out of control, leading to huge losses of life and property across our country.

Ultimately, the focus of the authorities in our various jurisdictions, the faith-based organisations and indeed of all of us individually, should be on imbibing the humility to respect the sacred texts in conveying our understanding of religion, in respecting the rights of others, on inculcating the values therein and in exerting ourselves continuously in the effort to understand God, thereby appreciating

what he expects and desires from us. To do his will on earth. Not simply to obey what we are told is God's will, but actively to engage ourselves in acquiring knowledge, to ensure substantive justice in our communities, to strive continuously for virtue, to learn to listen, appreciate and empathise with contrary views and beliefs, to demand accountability from our leaders, and to engage continuously in sincere, respectful, unabated and open dialogue on all of these issues. All things considered, the guarantee of the freedoms of life, dignity and liberty can only entrench security, harmony and peace in our homes, our communities and the world generally.

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An African Reflection on *A Common Word*

Johnson A. Mbillah

In the history of Christian-Muslim encounters, relations and dialogue, it is always understood that Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, in his young life encountered the Christian monk Bahira who other sources refer to as Nesto or George, and that during the early days of his prophethood he also encountered the Christian, Waraqa ibn Naufal, who was a cousin to his wife Khadija.

Apart from the above brief encounters, the most important dialogue session between Muhammad and Christians took place when a delegation of Christians from Najran visited him in Madina in the 9th year of the Hijra (631 CE). The Christian delegation, which is said to have been made up of a bishop, his 45 scholars and 15 men, embarked on what is often referred to as an investigatory dialogue aimed at knowing more about the Islamic faith which Muhammad invited people to accept and to listen to issues that he wished to raise on the Christian faith. In this encounter there was cordiality and understanding; there was also disagreement on theological issues touching on the person of Jesus the Christ, as well as misunderstandings on the question of truth. This led to the invitation of Muhammad to the delegation that they invoke the curse of God on one another (*Mubahala*) to determine which religion is true.[1] In spite of these contrasting fortunes in the first dialogue between Muhammad and Christians, the discussions to all intent and purposes ended harmoniously. To put it in another way, they agreed to disagree in a good manner and the Christians were even permitted to carry out Christian prayers in the Prophet's Mosque (*Masjid al-Nabawi*).[2]

This foundational dialogue that Muhammad had with the Christians from Najran did not continue in like manner through the history of Christian-Muslim encounters. Encounters marked by confrontations, rivalry and even violent conflicts in the name of *jihads* and crusades,

political domination and counter-domination accompanied by irate polemics, poisoned any form of meaningful dialogue that could have been re-initiated.

Modern dialogue between Christians and Muslims, which in essence began in the 20th century, is generally speaking a Christian initiative. This is true when one looks at the Protestant Churches, as represented by the World Council of Churches initiatives, and the Roman Catholic Church's initiatives since Vatican II.[3] These dialogue initiatives with Muslims have over the years involved Christian and Muslim leaders, scholars, educators, and even activists. In the different dialogue sessions, critical issues based on religion, law and society, human rights, religious freedom, community rights, Christian mission and Muslim *da'wa*, peace and communal tensions (among others) form the subject matter for the interchanges.[4] In Sub-Saharan Africa, the initiative of the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA), formerly known as the Islam in Africa Project (IAP), is worth mentioning. Since 1959, when the programme was initiated, one of its main objectives has been Christian constructive engagement with Muslims for peace and peaceful co-existence with a stated vision of "A continent where faith communities live with their differences in peace".[5]

With the above background information it can be said with some amount of certainty that the initiators of "*A Common Word* (ACW)", apart from appealing to the Qur'anic call for dialogue with Christians, are simply following the tradition and example (*Sunna*) of Muhammad, and by so doing, also responding to modern dialogue which, as we indicated, has generally been a Christian initiative. In whatever way one looks at ACW, the truth of the matter is that it is most opportune. For it sets the tone for mutual discussions from both the Christian and Muslim sides of the religious divide. From now on, dialogue for whatever purpose will be seen as Christians and Muslims moving towards each other and not just an invitation from one group to the other.

In this paper, we will look at ACW in the light of the above and for the value it adds to Christian-Muslim relations and dialogue. We will do so by commenting on salient issues that have been raised in the document, provide a reflection on the Sub-Saharan African context of Christian and Muslim encounters, and raise issues on the relevance of ACW in that context. All this we will do taking into consideration previous reflections on ACW, not least the Cambridge and Yale consultations.

We cannot leave this introductory part of our presentation without saying how grateful we are to the organisers of the Cadenabbia conference for providing the platform for this engagement to take place. To those who dreamed about this and those who implemented it, we say in *Kusaal,* my native language and spoken by a section of the peoples of northern Ghana, *Te pusiya pamm* (we thank you all very much).

Salient Issues Raised by *A Common Word*

ACW, which was made public on 13 October 2007, signed by 138 Muslim leaders and scholars, and addressed to 27 Christian leaders and churches everywhere, sets out the oneness of God as the foundation of the relationship between Islam and Christianity and the love of God and love of neighbour as the guiding principle by which Christians and Muslims can talk peace and live in peace. In short, ACW unequivocally makes it clear that the unity of God and the necessity of love for God and neighbour are the common ground.

The Oneness of God

The doctrine of the oneness of God in Islam, as in Christianity and Judaism, is that which provides a common ground for the three religions to be referred to as 'the three monotheistic religions'; that the oneness of God is a core belief and prime doctrine in Islam, as it is in Christianity, cannot be contested. What is and can be contested is the question of what oneness means in the two religions. For as Islam talks about God being one and only, alone and lonely *(tawhid),* Christianity believes that God is one and only, alone but not lonely, he is triune (Trinity). We are all aware that the Muslim confession of faith (*shahada*), for example, takes *tawhid* as the essence of faith when new converts to the faith have to recite: "there is no god but Allah". It is even understood that the *shahada* can be and is recited in the ears of babies. In a similar vein, Christianity takes the Trinity seriously when ushering in new converts to the Christian faith through baptism by asking the following question or its variant: "Do you believe in the one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit?" and the new convert has to answer: "Yes I do". The new convert is then baptised "In the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit."[6] The same formula of the Trinity is used for infant baptism.

These variant understandings of the oneness of God in Christianity and Islam are humanly speaking irresolvable since they constitute

the essence of the two faiths. The situation as explained means that for ACW to take root within the Muslim communities and for Christians to buy into it, there must be mutual respect of our different understanding of the One God. In doing so, we will be acknowledging the diversity of our understanding of what each religious tradition means when it talks about the oneness of God. To acknowledge this will enable us to maintain the integrity of our respective faiths and ensure that Christians and Muslims do not compromise the essence, or should we rather say the fundamentals, of their beliefs.

It is worth emphasising that to take this into account will not be a contradiction, for as ACW states, "God understands better our misunderstandings" or to use a Qur'anic quotation, "Unto God ye will return and he will then inform you of that wherein ye differ" (Q. 5:48). In fact it is understood that the Christian delegation from Najran (referred to earlier) in their dialogue with Muhammad recognised the irreconcilable theological differences between Christianity and Islam and therefore said to the Prophet of Islam "O, Abu al-Qasim, we decided to leave you as you are and you leave us as we are. But send with us a man who can adjudicate things on our properties, because we accept you."[7] The request was honoured and Muhammad thereby dispatched a delegation to go with the Christians to assist them. Noteworthy in this discourse is that the inability to agree on theological differences did not jeopardise the willingness of the Christians of Najran to request Muhammad for assistance, as it also did not jeopardise the willingness of Muhammad to offer such assistance.

Love God and Love Your Neighbour

The love of God and the love of neighbour, which the signatories of ACW see as the common ground for Christians and Muslims working together for peace in the world and peace in their communities, is a welcome statement. What needs to be carefully looked at though is the Christian understanding of the love of God and the love of neighbour. These need to be carefully looked at from the Christian perspective, not because ACW did not take cognisance of what Christian theology and the Bible says about love of God and love of neighbour but precisely because what it says about it is so minimal that the essence of love of God and love of neighbour in Christian thinking is not captured. Perhaps a few elaborations here will deepen the conversation.

Love of God

The Christian understanding of the love of God is that the initiator of that love is God himself. He loves human beings as a result of his very nature which is love. The evidence that one has accepted God's initiative of love is for the person to exhibit love. Thus, the Bible says of human beings: "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." (1 Jn 4:8). To know God therefore is to respond to his love by loving him and recognising always that: "We love because He first loved us." (1 Jn 4:19). This love of God, which depicts the vertical relationship between human beings and God, is, in Christian thinking, incomplete without its horizontal aspect which is love of neighbour. It is this love of neighbour to which we now turn our attention.

Love of Neighbour

On the question of love of neighbour, it is clear that the signatories of ACW have come to an understanding that Christians are neighbours with Muslims and that if these neighbours (Christians and Muslims) are not at peace then the world cannot be at peace. It argues strongly that since Christians and Muslims together form 55% of the world's population, there can be no peace in the world if the two communities are not at peace with one another. In the light of the above, it contends that Christians and Muslims can together achieve peace in the world. For ACW therefore, peace between Christians and Muslims is a prerequisite for peace in the world. It is worth emphasising that what ACW says is also true of Sub-Saharan Africa where Christians and Muslims currently form the majority in the African religious landscape.

Giving ACW the benefit of the doubt that it was addressed to Christians worldwide and therefore constitutes an exclusive document meant for the purpose to which it was written, we nevertheless find it important and worth asking a question about the non-Christians that ACW does not address. Will they also be regarded as neighbours with whom we can together work towards peace in the world? The truth of the matter is that if the 55% of Christians and Muslims in the world, which ACW recognise as neighbours without whose cooperation there would be no peace, are unable or unwilling to extend the same or similar understanding of neighbourliness to the 45% who are neither Christian nor Muslim there will also be no peace in

the world. With this, shall we therefore understand that the signatories of ACW see Christian and Muslim neighbourliness as a stepping stone for working towards good neighbourliness with all others, or is their understanding of neighbourliness exclusive to that of Christians and Muslims? This brings us to a comment we would wish to put forward on the Christian understanding of neighbourliness.

The Christian understanding of love for neighbour goes beyond love of those with whom you share a religion, a friend or one with whom you agree. A lawyer in a brief dialogue with Jesus the Christ sought to know how one can obtain eternal life. He was asked to narrate what the Law says and he brilliantly narrated what ACW stands for when he said: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself." (Lk 10:27). The lawyer appeared to understand who God is and how and why he has to love God, but wished to know who the neighbour is by asking Jesus: "Who is my neighbour?"

The attitude of the lawyer is typical of religious people (and let me dare say Christians and Muslims included) when it comes to the issue of who is the neighbour. Jesus in response to the lawyer's question set up an imaginary scene which nevertheless was true to life. The Jews in Jesus' day acknowledged none as their neighbour except their own. In the scene, a Samaritan who was an outsider and therefore not regarded as a neighbour assisted a Jew, who was beaten by robbers and was in serious difficulty. Jesus said to the lawyer "go and do the same" i.e. go and take for neighbours those who are not Jews. In other words, those who do not share the same faith or ethnicity with you (Lk 10:25ff).

The above scene, which is popularly known as the Story of the Good Samaritan, illustrates the Christian understanding of who the neighbour can be and what love of neighbour means – love those who may not love you in return. In fact Jesus emphasises this when he says "…love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (Lk 6:27-28). This radical departure from what is usually thought to be the norm is re-emphasised by Jesus in a rhetorical question in which he says: "If you love those who love you what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them" (Lk 6:32).

With these biblical views of love of neighbour, it is important to re-emphasise that ACW, in collaborating with Christians in the love of God and love of neighbour needs to accompany Christians in their understanding of what it means to love God and to love your neighbour. Having said that, it is worth clarifying that what we have elaborated is not intended to create a dichotomy between what Muslims and Christians mean when they talk about the love of God and love of neighbour but rather to call for an understanding of the very essence of love in Christianity so that together we enter into dialogue for peace knowing what each faith tradition says on the subject.

Sub-Saharan Africa and *A Common Word*

The history of the Christian faith and Islam cannot be written with Africa left in the margins. Africa is known to have served as a safe haven for Christianity[8] and Islam in their formative periods. In Christianity, the biblical writers make it clear that a threat to kill the baby Jesus was averted by the directive of an angel that Jesus should be taken to Egypt (Matt 2:13-15) to prevent him from being killed in infancy. In Islam, on the other hand, when Muhammad the Prophet of Islam and his followers faced severe persecution in Mecca during the early days of his preaching he asked his followers to migrate to Abyssinia (Ethiopia) where they would be treated well.[9] They did so and were well treated.[10] Jesus and the followers of Muhammad were forced by political-religious violence to seek refuge, in modern terms 'to become refugees', in Africa.

In the context of ACW therefore, a discussion of what it stands for in relation to Christian-Muslim relations in Africa, as the Cadenabbia conference suggests in part, is not only relevant but a re-visitation of centuries of interaction between Christianity and Islam amongst African peoples, and what that has done and continues to do with African converts to Christianity and Islam in terms of relating to one another across the religious divide. In this paper we will concentrate on Sub-Saharan Africa, which along with Asia, is the focus of the conference.

Arguably the largest meeting place of Christians and Muslims is in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia and not the West and the Arab world. It is well known that it is in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia that one can notice Christians and Muslims living as members of the same

family, sharing in the joys of birth and the sadness of death and celebrating religious festivals together; as if there were no stark differences between Christianity and Islam.

Having said that, it is also in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia that the competitive characters of Christianity and Islam as rival missionary religions are felt more than anywhere else. It is in this light that we hope that ACW is not merely thinking of Islam and the West, which generally come to mind when people begin to talk about Christian-Muslim relations, but that it recognises that in practical everyday life, one must look beyond the Euro-Arab axis of the Mediterranean, to the largest meeting place of Christians and Muslims in Africa and Asia, to make more sense of Christian-Muslim relations. We say so as a result of a careful look at the geographical representation of the signatories of ACW and those to whom it is addressed.

As regards the countries represented by the signatories to ACW, it is worth mentioning that the signatories come from 43 countries, out of which nine countries are from the entire continent of Africa. Of these nine countries, five are geographically from Sub-Saharan Africa. As regards the individual signatories themselves, it has to be noted that out of the 138, 30 are from the entire continent of Africa, with 12 of these 30 from Sub-Saharan Africa. Nigeria records the highest number of six signatories, with Sudan and Mauritania registering two signatories each, while Chad and The Gambia have one signatory each. A careful look at the signatories from Sub-Saharan Africa show that Mauritania and the Sudan are members of the Arab League thus leaving Nigeria, The Gambia and Chad as the only signatories from Sub-Saharan Africa, which do not have dual affiliation in the context of the signatories of ACW.

The limited number of original signatories of ACW in Sub-Saharan Africa, coupled with the lack of a mechanism by which its contents are to be disseminated among the Muslim communities (at least in Africa), means that very few if any, outside the original signatories and the countries from which they come, know about the initiative.

Of those to whom ACW is addressed, it is worth noting that even though it is addressed to 'the leaders of all Christian Churches everywhere', those singled out for mention are the world bodies of Christianity such as the Vatican, the World Council of Churches, and the

Anglican Communion, amongst others. The Regional Christian bodies of Africa, such as the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), the Symposium of Episcopal Conference of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA) and the Organisation of African Instituted Churches (OAIC), were not addressed and therefore hardly know anything about ACW. The situation as described is similar for Asian Christian religious bodies. As a result of this, most responses to ACW come from churches and academies in the West where most of the world bodies of Christianity are based.

The Value of *A Common Word* for Sub-Saharan Africa

Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal of Jordan, one of the architects of the ACW initiative, in his speech at the Yale University conference, is reported to have said: "The intention in sending out the *A Common Word* missive was simply to try to make peace between Muslims and Christians globally….It was and is an extended global handshake of religious goodwill friendship and fellowship and consequently of inter-religious peace."[11]

This statement, which explains what was in the minds of the originators of ACW and what their dreams are, is helpful since it clarifies the reasoning behind the document. In the Sub-Saharan African context, inter-religious peace or more correctly multi-religious peace, finds its roots in the African environment, in which Christianity and Islam found a home. In this region, the presence and success of Christianity and Islam and their continuous growth can largely be attributed to the African view of religious plurality, which is 'live and let live' with our religious differences in peace. This philosophy, to which we have on many occasions made reference as one that thrives in African spirituality, serves as the bedrock for Christian-Muslim peaceful coexistence in many parts of Africa. In other words, the two religions (Christianity and Islam), which for ages sought to displace each other, eventually found themselves in an environment where religious plurality and tolerance formed the core of the religious life of the people. Arguably therefore, it can be said without any hesitation that before the advent of Christianity and Islam in Africa, for example, Africans went to war against each other for all sorts of reasons – except for the sake of religious differences.

When a research student asked the landlord of a Kusasi[12] household, made up of Christians, Muslims, and adherents of African Traditional Religions, how it was possible for members of the three faith communities to live together in peace when Christians and Muslims are known to be less tolerant of each other, he responded proverbially: "Before the white man brought us sugar, we already had honey, and before the Arabs informed us of Allah, we already knew Wina'am".[13] This analogy seeks to indicate that the Kusasi, and in the wider sense the African, had religion before the advent of Christianity and knew of God before the advent of Islam. This view, far from portraying any lack of commitment of the family members to their various religious affiliations, rather reiterates the innate belief of the African traditional religious environment that people need not quarrel over religious differences or fight over God, who has different names among the different ethnic groups in the continent.[14]

The above philosophy, which talks about human relations with God as the foundation for human relations with fellow human beings, finds grounds in many African primal philosophies, of which *Ubuntu*[15] comes to my mind. *Ubuntu*, a word that depicts African philosophy that provides an understanding of human beings relations with fellow human beings, makes it clear that we only discover our own humanity by relating with others. We are told that the Zulus in South Africa, for example, will say "*Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu*", which means that a person is a person through other persons. Among other things, the word carries with it harmony, common humanity, and reciprocity, with the view of building and maintaining community.

In essence, *Ubuntu* in many ways does not subtract any value from what Christians and Muslims mean when they talk about the love of neighbour. In this sense, Christians and Muslims in the African environment need not throw away values of what it means to be African when such values are not at variance with their adopted faith traditions but on the contrary strengthens them. To do so under the inherited Christian thinking that all that is African is pagan, and the Muslim thinking that all that is 'pre-Islamic' falls within the period of ignorance (*jahiliyya*), would be tantamount to throwing away a philosophy which provided a tolerant religious environment that facilitated the growth of Christianity and Islam in the continent. For *Ubuntu,* as in other African philosophies "address our interconnectedness, our common humanity, and the responsibility to each other that flows from that connection."[16]

The Challenge for Christians and Muslims as Neighbours for Peace

Earlier in this paper we have indicated that ACW's contention, that if Christians and Muslims are not at peace with one another the world cannot have peace, is as true for Africa as it is for the world. We have also alluded to the fact that Christians and Muslims working together for peace amongst and between themselves as neighbours should lead to a broader understanding of neighbourliness that includes all others, so that peace in God's world may become the norm for all peoples and not just between and among Christians and Muslims. For as Christians believe that they are God's stewards, commissioned to take care of his creation and all that is in it, so we also understand that Islam regards human beings (Adam) as God's *khalifa* (viceroy) with functions of caring for God's world.[17]

If being stewards and viceroys of God also means ensuring that there is peace in God's world, ACW can make an impact in Sub-Saharan Africa and wherever Christians and Muslims live side by side, if adherents of the two religions practise the ideals for which they stand in terms of the love of God and love of neighbour for peace. This can only be done if all who affirm what ACW stands for, and I believe there will be many, work hard to transform this foundational statement, not seen before in Muslim history, into practical living, since peace is only meaningful when it is practised and seen to be practised by those who preach it.

A clear example of what we mean comes in two conference proceedings which the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) organised and which were attended by over one hundred Christian and Muslim leaders from Sub-Saharan Africa. The conferences, which took place in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and Accra, Ghana, looked at issues of Conflict Prevention, Peace-building and Reconciliation in the region.[18] In the said conferences, participants declined to make any extensive analysis of what Christianity and Islam say about peace and peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims and wider society. They argued that the scriptural and theological foundations for peace in Christianity and Islam are well known and there was no need to recycle them but rather to act upon them. I shall give a brief résumé on peace in Christianity and Islam later.

In the deliberations, Christian and Muslim leaders were asked to get out of their comfort zone of always referring to their respective religions as religions of peace and show it by example i.e. living in peace and ensuring that the continent has peace. Attempts to explain away violent conflicts between Christians and Muslims in the northern part of Nigeria as being social, economic, political, ethnic etc. were not readily accepted. Participants raised questions of how conflicts outside the parameters of religion could lead to Christians and Muslims targeting one another and burning down churches and mosques. It was also mooted that the best possible way for Christians and Muslims to talk peace and live peace was to ensure that issues that militate against peace between members of the two communities are confronted and dealt with. It was argued that situations where Christian and Muslim leaders played the proverbial ostrich of the African continent, which buries its head in the sand to avoid seeing the dangers that pursue it, or the proverbial African monitor lizard, which always closes one eye in the midst of danger with the understanding that 'the eye that sees trouble should have it', were unacceptable.

It is the issues that militate against Christians and Muslims living in peace, which I have the mandate to outline before the conference participants, to which I now turn, to put forward for comment by the participants at Cadenabbia.

Unethical Christian and Muslim Expansionist Policies as Threats to Peace Between Christians and Muslims

We have said earlier in this paper that Sub-Saharan Africa is the area where Islam and Christianity are growing faster than anywhere else in the world. Arguably it is the place where religious freedom in the true sense of the word has always been practised. This tolerant religious environment has for some time now been invaded by itinerant preachers from both Christianity and Islam. The methods employed by these itinerant preachers to make converts have no guiding ethic and therefore give room for some preachers from both sides of the religious divide to use inconsiderate and in some cases offensive language to propagate their religion. Negative perceptions by Christians and Muslims of each other's religions, drawn from medieval polemics between Christians and Muslims, for example, are deployed by these provocative preachers. These methods are known to breed conflict, which in many cases degenerate into violent confrontations. In East-

ern Africa, for example, Christian and Muslim polemics against one another in the form of debates, known in Kiswahili as *Mihadhara,* have created such animosity in some parts of the region that they sometimes have led to violent conflicts.

Importation and Exportation of Religious Conflicts into Sub-Saharan Africa

The universality of Christianity can ordinarily be seen by the fact that Christians are spread throughout the globe. Christian solidarity in a spiritual sense, the universality of Christianity, is seen by the Christian understanding that all Christians belong to the Body of Christ – the Church. This concept means that all Christians everywhere belong together in a mystical union that transcends political borders, colour or race. In Christ there is no east, no west, no north, no south, no white, no black etc. The universality of Islam is also seen in the fact that Muslims are spread throughout the globe. The unity of Muslims is seen in terms of the Islamic concept of the universal *umma* (community) to which Muslims everywhere belong. This form of unity is understood to be both temporal and spiritual and thus transcends established borders of nation-states or countries. In the *umma* there is no east, no west, no north, no south, no white, no black etc. The model of the *umma* provides a form of Muslim citizenship which is difficult to define but which shows itself more and more in times of crises. It is well known, for example, that Muslims not directly involved more often than not go to demonstrate solidarity with fellow Muslims who are facing any form of persecution and injustice from other people.

An upsurge of religious particularism, influenced by the concept of Christians belonging to the Body of Christ and Muslims belonging to the universal *umma*, has militated against the unity of nations and the quest for common citizenship, that would enable Christians and Muslims as neighbours to live together in peace. The perception that the European and North American West is Christian, and the Arab East is Muslim has created a situation where conflict between the West and the Arab East is perceived to be conflict between members of the Body of Christ (Christians) and members of the *umma* (Muslims). This was more pronounced and almost became the norm in some parts of Africa, during the Gulf War of 1991, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the Danish cartoon saga in 2006. In Nigeria (the

northern part), for example, Christians and Muslims literally slaughtered each other and burnt down places of worship.[19] In a situation as described above, Christians and Muslims exercise negative solidarity. They import conflicts from outside Africa into the continent. If this negative solidarity was to become the norm, conflicts anywhere could be exported or otherwise imported to countries that in terms of physical proximity are far away from the conflict zone. The fallacy of this emerging negative solidarity is that members of the Body of Christ have even fought other members of the Body of Christ in the two great European wars; also known as World Wars I and II. In the same vein, members of the *umma* are known to have fought against other members of the *umma* in the Iraq-Iran war. For members of universal Christianity and Islam to succeed in setting Africans against their own kind is very unfortunate indeed. For in such a situation it blatantly violates the African understanding of religion, which as we have said earlier is 'live and let live with our religious differences in peace and not in pieces'.

If the ideals of ACW are to become the norm, then Christian and Muslim leaders need to discuss openly the universal nature of their religions and what that means for local and regional contexts, so as to ensure that things alien to Africa are not imported into the continent, to the extent even of importing conflicts in the name of religion (Christianity and Islam) and thereby fighting proxy wars.

The Problem of Translating Good Precepts into Good Practice

We have in our appreciation of ACW's contention that if Christians and Muslims are not at peace with one another, the world cannot have peace, indicated that this is as true for Africa as it is for the world, since Christianity and Islam possess the largest numbers of religious adherents in Africa. In Sub-Saharan Africa, Christians and Muslims are always at pains to convince all others that their religions have peace as an essential value. Christians, for example, argue that the advent of Christ was announced with the angels' song 'Peace and goodwill among humankind' (Lk 2:14), thus indicating that the Christ who was born brought peace to human beings. In fact Jesus is referred to as the 'Prince of Peace' (Isa 9:6).

Muslims, on the other hand, have always passionately explained that the word Islam, which translates as submission, also has in it *salam*,

which means peace. In fact they always explain that the normal routine greeting of Muslims, *salam alaykum* (peace be with you), with the respondent saying *wa alaykum salam* (and peace be with you), shows the essence of peace in Islam.

The comment is often made; if the two religions which have the largest following in Africa are religions of peace, then one would expect the continent to be experiencing peace. This is by no means wholly the case, as conflicts shoot up in some parts of Africa, including those that have a religious bearing. What this means is that the ideal precepts of peace embedded in Islam and Christianity have failed to influence people's lives. In other words, the leadership of Church and Mosque, and by extension Christians and Muslims, are not doing enough to ensure that the ideals of their respective religions are not mere theoretical concepts. This is a challenge that cannot be brushed aside, for the essence of peace, which ACW advocates, is far from being theoretical: it is very much an existential issue. It is an issue that in every circumstance should go beyond talking about it, to living it.

Gatherers and Scatterers and the Need for Intra-Christian and Intra-Muslim Discussions on A Common Word

In the Christian-Muslim encounters in Sub-Saharan Africa, like elsewhere, there are those who gather and those who scatter. By this we mean: there are those who work hard to ensure that Christians and Muslims live side by side in peace and those who consciously or unconsciously work to poison relations. The signatories of ACW, which aims at building relations, are therefore among those who gather and have to engage the Muslim community consciously to spread the ideals of ACW, just as Christians need to engage consciously their own to spread the message of the intentions of ACW. It is only in doing so together that Christians and Muslims will come to appreciate the importance of ACW.

As far we are aware, the World Council of Churches and the Anglican Communion under the leadership of the Archbishop of Canterbury, among others, have been able to bring together Christians of all traditions carefully to reflect on the message of ACW and to encourage them to respond positively and spread the message, so as to inform the Christian communities. It can only be hoped that conscious

efforts are being put in place to encourage intra-Muslim discussion on ACW in Sub-Saharan Africa, as in other places, so as to ensure that it does not fall with other laudable initiatives, which sometimes remain in the annals of history but with no impact.

Conclusion

As a contribution to what ACW stands for and to demonstrate what Christians and Muslims in Sub-Saharan Africa, under the auspices of the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA), are doing to promote peace between Christians and Muslims, and by extension the wider society, we hereby reproduce two communiqués issued during the Christian and Muslim peace conferences, to which reference was made earlier.

The Dar es Salaam Communiqué

We, Muslim and Christian religious leaders from Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Uganda, meeting in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania from September 1 – 5, 2008 under the auspices of the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA), on the theme: Religion, Conflict Prevention/Management, Peace Building and Reconciliation in Eastern Africa:

- having deliberated on the causes of misunderstandings that lead to violent conflicts in the region;
- aware of the fact that religion and religious differences have been misused and manipulated to poison relations and lead to the loss of human lives and properties;
- concerned about the sufferings that have resulted from violent confrontations perpetrated by some of our followers;
- recognising that there are some positive steps that have been and are still being undertaken to bring about peace and reconciliation where violent conflicts have occurred;
- having recognised our common mission to build, uphold and sustain peace in the society at all times;

Do hereby rededicate ourselves to remain in solidarity with each other in pursuit of peace, justice and reconciliation in the region in particular, and Africa in general, and reaffirm that:

- Religious leaders have the utmost responsibility to ensure that justice and peace prevail in the region;
- Religious communities in the region should be mobilised to promote understanding and trust for peace and peaceful coexistence;
- Religious leaders and communities must ensure that there is mutual respect, understanding and appreciation of each other's religious values, beliefs and practices;

Interfaith engagement is a strong tool that can be used to identify and harness potentials for the realisation of peace and peaceful coexistence. On account of the above, we call upon:

- Religious leaders to recognise anew the value of remaining politically impartial and desist from partisan politics in order to play effective roles as peace-builders and reconcilers;
- Governments and political leaders to observe and practice principles of good and responsible governance;
- Governments and policy-makers to develop and implement policies that respect and uphold religious and cultural pluralism;
- Religious leaders to constructively engage with policy-makers to re-examine education curriculum and policy with the view of inculcating the spirit of mutual understanding and trust among communities;
- Governments and those in positions of authority to desist from the tendency to manipulate state resources to favour specific communities or one's own community as this is not only immoral but also a recipe for conflict;
- All stakeholders in interfaith work to collaborate and complement each other's efforts rather than be in competition in addressing human needs in society;
- Governments, political leaders, and economic planners to regularly and deliberately involve religious leaders in matters of policy development, and conflict management;

We adopt the above as our resolve to remain in unity and work with each other as partners in addressing our regional religious, social, economic and political challenges.
Signed by all participants at the conference on September 4, 2008 in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania

The Accra Communiqué

We, 60 Christian and Muslim religious leaders from ten (10) West African States that include Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte D'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, The Gambia and Togo met in Accra, Ghana under the auspices of the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) on the theme: "*Religion and Prevention of Conflict, Peace Building and Reconciliation*" at the M-Plaza Hotel, from July 20-24, 2009.

HAVING deliberated on such issues as: Religious Leaders as Agents of Peace, peace between the religions as a prerequisite for religious leaders to promote peace within the wider society, negative religious expansionist policies, the politicisation of religion, globalisation/internationalisation of conflicts, negative solidarity, the challenge of translating good precepts in religion into good practice in everyday life, causes of conflicts, and advocacy for peace by example;

HAVING received Case Studies on Christians and Muslims Collaboration for Peace from Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte D'Ivoire, and Nigeria;

AWARE that religion and religious differences have always been exploited for political, economic, communal and personal interest which have caused the deaths of thousands of our brothers and sisters and the destruction of properties;

VERY CONCERNED at the violent confrontations in our individual countries carried out by some of our followers;

RECOGNISING that there are some positive improvements in Christian and Muslim Collaboration for Justice, Peace and Reconciliation;

UNDERSTANDING and ACCEPTING that as Religious Leaders we must at all times be Agents of Justice, Peace and Reconciliation and must live by example;

DO HEREBY RESOLVE and reaffirm our willingness and determination to continue to remain in solidarity with each other in the furtherance and sustainability of Peace, Justice, Healing and Reconciliation in the West African region in Particular and Africa in general;

ACCORDINGLY, as Religious Leaders coming from the two major Religions in the West African region, and representing millions of persons of faith,

RESOLVE as follows:

- That we would lead by example and take responsibility to Promote Peace, Justice and Reconciliation in our region;
- That we would embark on a campaign to create awareness and sensitisation within the religious communities to promote positive religious tolerance for peace and peaceful co-existence;
- That we would respect and appreciate each other's religious values, beliefs and practices;
- That we would collectively engage national governments, the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) and along with our counterparts in the various regions of Africa, the African Union (AU) to urge for responsible governance and democracy

Call on Religious Leaders

- We call on all Religious Leaders to continue to be Prophetic and proactive at all times without fear or favour;
- We call on religious leaders to be politically impartial and refrain from partisan politics so as to ensure that we play effective roles as Agents of Peace Justice and Reconciliation;
- We call on the followers of our respective religions to complement each others efforts for peace in society and peaceful co-existence among themselves and avoid negative tendencies which has the propensity for conflicts;
- As both Holy Books (the Bible and Qur'an) place emphasis on Peace, that as religious leaders we practice Peace in fulfilment of the tenets of our respective religions.

Call on Government

- We call on Governments and Political leaders in the Sub-Region to practice good and responsible governance and guarantee peaceful transitions from one duly elected government to the other;
- We appreciate and thank those governments that have created an enabling environment for dialogue with religious leaders, and call on others to create the same;

- We call on Governments to ensure that Child and Drug trafficking be eradicated within the Sub-Region;
- We as Religious Leaders have adopted the above and have resolved to continue to work together to promote positive religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence, addressing Peace, Justice, Healing and Reconciliation.

Done in ACCRA, Ghana this 24th Day of July 2009.

Signed by all Participants from:

BURKINA FASO, COTE D'IVOIRE, GHANA, LIBERIA, NIGERIA, SENEGAL, SIERRA LEONE, THE GAMBIA, The Republic of BENIN, AND TOGO

Attested by:

Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA), All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), Fellowship of Councils and Churches in West Africa (FECCIWA), World Council of Churches (WCC)

The above communiqués, as may be seen, broaden the call for peace to include governments whose actions sometimes do not augur well for peace. In many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa people still listen to their religious leaders and take them seriously. It is in this light that ACW's call on Christians to inculcate a spirit of good neighbourliness with Muslims based on their respective scriptural injunctions holds value.

As we analysed extensively, there are stark theological differences between Christianity and Islam, to the extent that words and phrases may look the same but not mean the same. But as we have said all along, we do not need to come to an agreement on theological and doctrinal issues to work together to promote peace and mutual respect. Our common humanity, as the World Council of Churches has always upheld, and our recognition that there are good values in Christianity as in Islam, as Vatican II holds, should bind us together to seek peace, even as we exercise mutual respect for our differences. As love appears to be the central focus of ACW's invitation to Christians, let us remind ourselves that "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not rejoice at wrong-doing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor 13:4-7).

1| We understand that the mutual cursing did not take place after the Christians objected to it by citing the biblical injunction which reads: "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test" Deut 6:16 cf Matt 4:7).

2| For details on Muhammad's encounters with Christians see Ibn Hisham, Abd al-Malik, al-Sirat al Nabaviyya,, Egypt 1955, 1, p. 180-577.

3| Vatican II (1962-65) is well known for its declaration on the "Relationship of the Church with Non-Christian Religions" in the document Nostra Aetate.

4| See the World Council of Churches document "Striving Together in Dialogue: A Muslim-Christian Call to Reflection and Action". This document is a result of the Christian-Muslim meeting held in Amersfoort, Netherlands in November 2000.

5| The Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) focuses on relations and uses the word 'dialogue' only in situations of conflict and misunderstanding, through which Christians and Muslims need to work together with the aim of resolving the conflict or at least understanding its dynamics so that they may live with it in peace.

6| It has to be noted that the formula is not God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit but rather God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

7| http://www.dehai.org/archives/dehai_news_archive/oct02/0640.html (12/11/2004).

8| We use 'Christianity' here loosely being aware that in essence there was no Christianity before the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ which formed the foundation of the Christian faith.

9| A. Guillaume, The Life of Muhammad, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987 (Eighth impression), p. 146.

10| ibid; pp. 270-277.

11| World Council of Churches News Release, 11-08-2008.

12| The Kusasi are a group of people who inhabit the north-eastern corner of Ghana sharing borders with northern Togo and Southern Burkina Faso.

13| Wina'am is the name of God among the Kusasi.

14| In Kusaal, God is Wina'am, in Swahili, Mungu, in Akan onyame etc.

15| For a detailed analysis of Ubuntu see David Suze Mande, Ubuntu philosophy as an African philosophy for peace. www.africafiles.org Subject no. 20359.

16| ibid. Also see Nussbaum, Barbara (2003) "Ubuntu: Reflections of a South African on Our Common Humanity", in Reflections, the Society for Organisational Learning and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Vol. 4, no.4 pp 21-26.

17| I recognise that I have trodden in unfamiliar territory and will be pleased to know what the Muslims, who will be commenting on my script, say about the whole issue of khalifa in terms of whether it applies to Adam alone or to all human beings in the creative order of God.

18| The Dar es Salaam Conference took place in September 2008, while the Accra Conference took place in July 2009. For details of the proceedings of the two conferences see the PROCMURA website: www.procmura-prica.org.

19| We recognise that the situation in the northern part of Nigeria is more complicated than meets the eye.

A Common Word: Thoughts from Nigeria

Matthew Hassan Kukah

There is a little story that is largely anecdotal about the difference between heaven and hell. As the story goes, a man wanted to know the scope of the difference between them. Rather than embarking on a long theological discourse, Peter invited the man to witness a meal in both heaven and hell. On the surface, there was no distinction in the setting, cutlery and décor in both places. The man, looking confused could not fathom out why both places should look so similar. *You wait,* Peter told him, *until it is meal time and you will see the difference*.

Lo and behold, the guests began trooping in and taking their seats. The man noticed that the spoons that had been laid on both tables were extraordinarily long. It was impossible to eat with them because each was about six feet long. As they walked around, they noticed that in the first hall, the guests were eating joyfully, chatting and laughing. They were obviously enjoying themselves. They had a strange habit of eating though. They were rather feeding one another instead of feeding themselves. This was because, when they sensed that the spoons before them were too long and they could not feed themselves directly, each guest decided to take the spoon, fetch the food and used it to feed guests who were about six feet away from them and vice versa. They got to the other hall and found the people seated, looking very depressed and gloomily staring at the food before them. The food was getting cold but no one touched any of the cutlery. They discovered that there was no way they could feed themselves with the long spoons. The gentleman turned to Peter and said, *Why are these gentlemen looking sad and not eating*? Peter said: *You see, when those in Heaven found that they could not feed themselves with the spoons, they saw the opportunity of feeding someone else. They thought of others and offered service. Those in hell simply believed that what they could not have, no-one else could have. Heaven is service, putting the other person first, hell is Me and I, and no-one else.*

I think this little anecdote should offer us a good starting point in reviewing and reflecting on the beautiful and prophetic work in the document, *A Common Word* (ACW), the subject of our reflections. Let

me join millions of men and women of goodwill, to congratulate and thank all those who answered the divine directive to reflect, write and append their signatures to what must be seen definitely as the most inspirational window leading to the arena of dialogue among believers across the world in this new century. The key issues are already in the public domain and most of those gathered here are already experts at least as far as the lofty ideals contained in the document are concerned. As the documents show, many initiatives have already been undertaken to explore these issues further. I commend the many voices of reason that continue to clarify the issues by their arguments and hope that this initiative will build on these efforts to further deepen our commitment to the world of dialogue between our faiths.

My interest and concern is to place these ideals within the context of the Nigerian situation. It is easy for nations in the west with settled democracies and institutions to take so much for granted in discussing some of the issues captured in this initiative. I make this point because the African situation has often been framed in the most condescending and patronising manner with crises and conflicts presented as inevitable outcomes. Some of the old characterisations have not changed even with time. Between our faiths, these tensions are manifested in our perceptions of one another and our faiths. It is important to restate that most of Africa's problems are the result of the cumulative impact of what the African scholar, Professor Basil Davidson referred to as "the curse of the nation state in Africa".[1] Similarly these are the contradictions that have been captured by Professor Ali Mazrui in his epic narrative, which he referred to as a Triple Heritage.[2] In these conversations, we need to proceed with caution. Globalisation has proved to be both an asset and a liability as we can see from its impact in the last twenty or so years since the collapse of communism. In the course of these comments, I will divide my paper into four sections. First I will mention briefly where our nation is coming from historically. Secondly, I will highlight some of the global difficulties that will pose a challenge to us in the course of this initiative. Thirdly and as a corollary, I will look at the internal constraints to the achievement of these ideals in the Nigerian situation. Finally, I will conclude by making a few recommendations.

Nigeria: A Brief Background

What is today modern Nigeria is part of the arbitrary history of British *civilising missions* into the heart of Africa. On the continent, this

encounter left in its wake tales of violence, broken cultures and shattered empires. It is important to note that in the cause of establishing the colonial state, the already existing disparate groups and empires did not have a say in the project. Today the cumulative impact of this contrived unity has been shown in severe pressures imposed on the new states. In the case of Nigeria, the post-colonial elite have continued to tinker with the ethnic behemoth that the British left behind when they brought the Northern and the Southern Protectorates together in 1914. Post-colonial Nigeria has been broken up from its initial three regions, to 12, 19, 21 and now 36 States and a Federal Capital Territory (with additional splinters into 774 Local Government Areas). In Nigeria as elsewhere, the quest for opening up the political space by the creation of new political spaces/states persists as more and more identities continue to emerge. Sadly national integration has been delayed largely because along with cultural and ethnic differences, the fissures further created by both Islam and Christianity have not helped matters. A writer has noted that: "colonialism was built on huge imbalances and staggering chutzpah by an uninvited elite".[3]

Today Nigeria has a population of about 140 million. The computations of the census figures in 2008 avoided the religious or even ethnic affiliations because of the tensions that both categories of identity have continued to elicit from the populace. The issue of the percentage populations between Christians and Muslims remains a source of controversy with both sides making contentious claims. The internationally accepted figures indicate balanced percentages between Christians and Muslims with each hovering above 40%, with a 10% population associated with traditional religions.[4] The history of both Islam and Christianity in Nigeria is very much wrapped up in controversy and indeed, these accounts capture the tensions that still persist until the present. The colonial state was prosecuted by the British, while the missionary project in many parts of Nigeria was undertaken by predominantly Irish missionaries for the Catholic Church and many Protestant groups from Europe. Today it is impossible to discuss the state of Christian-Muslim relations without a proper appreciation of these historical realities. Among the minority ethnic groups in the Middle Belt, Christianity came to be seen as a source of liberation. The British colonial state operated a policy of what it called non-interference, ensuring that the Muslim population was protected from the incursions of missionaries and their adher-

ents. Taken together with the bitter experiences of slavery, conversions, conquests and the imposition of Islamic culture, the scene was seemingly set for the growth of a climate of fear and suspicion. Sadly poor statesmanship, deep corruption and the incursions of the military into the political space, all went a long way towards deepening these prejudices which still persist until the present. Appreciating these difficulties, working at these perceived injustices is important to our pursuit of the ideals of ACW. But let us now turn our attention to the difficulties arising from globalisation and how these have impacted on our efforts towards dialogue.

Sowing in a Time of Bad Weather

Although it is tempting to suggest that these are difficult times to propose dialogue, they are also actually auspicious times to hold a dialogue. The reasons for doubts and fears are many. The conceptual confusion in framing the future of the world after the collapse of Communism further demonstrated how little we knew of one another. The events which came to be known in the words of Francis Fukuyama as "the end of history"[5] may have accelerated the speed of globalisation, but there were other fears that a Pandora's Box may actually have been opened. The world was called upon by Professor Samuel Huntington to gird up its loins and prepare for "a clash of civilizations".[6] Some saw this gloomy picture differently and rather called for "a dialogue of civilizations".[7] While these issues were being debated, the world woke up to the gory event of 11 September 2001 in New York. The rest, as they say, is history and it is not of immediate relevance to our conversation here. However our concern here is the extent to which these developments have created further difficulties for dialogue in our communities.

Even before September 11, our environment has had a long history of conflict and violence over issues relating to the role and place of religion, the status of Islamic law in the Nigerian Constitution etc. September 11 occurred at a time when the Nigerian state itself was rather fragile. It had only just returned to democratic rule in 1999, the 12 Northern States had adopted Shari'a Law, a series of crises had taken place leading to the burning of churches, mass killings, destruction of properties worth hundreds of millions of dollars and so on. While other parts of the country sympathised and saw the attacks as an assault on our common humanity, a substantial

number of members of the Muslim community in Nigeria had sympathies with the goals of Osama Bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda Movement. The question of who was Osama Bin Laden and what he represented became a severe source of tension and friction. An Osama Bin Laden poster was enough to spark off an ugly conflict. Some non-Muslims who had hitherto been engaged in dialogue had their faith challenged by those who argued (*inter alia*): "You see, we told you so. We told you that dialogue with Muslims was impossible. The nature of their global agenda should tell the world what we have been saying. This is a declaration of outright war. Dialogue is a waste of time." On the side of the Muslims, there were a few shrill fanatical voices saying: "Osama's victory is a victory for Islam. We are witnessing the end of a decadent, corrupt, secular civilisation and the beginning of Islamic domination. All Muslims of the world unite."

Although these voices were not coherent in any way, they placed a severe strain on the relationship between Christians and Muslims. They also drew attention to potential threats to the political order. In the middle of this ugly situation was the fate of about 90% of ordinary men and women who simply wanted to be left alone to practise their religion as Christians and Muslims or even just to be left alone. Voices of reason believed that indeed, rather than being an obstacle to dialogue, the new challenges called on men and women of good will to call this devil by its name and to work hard to rid the world of it. Given that Muslims were not spared in the excesses of these criminals, the real challenge then was for the world to seek a platform of solidarity to support our common humanity. Today it is clear that there is a sense of urgency for believers to rescue their faiths from those who threaten them through the misappropriation of their noble teachings; men and women who use legitimate grievances to advance inhuman causes. It is evident that today most of the issues underlining the so-called *war on terror* relate to perceived historical injustices and how to right them. Sadly under the Bush administration, the issues were wrongly framed and thus dialogue became even harder to sustain. Today from the point of our own experiences, a summary of the key issues is as follows:

- A belief that there are historical injustices that are traced to colonialism.
- There is the belief that despite the independence of most nations today, the international system is still not fair to everyone.

- Muslims believe that the persistence of the Palestinian problem is clear evidence that the west is not prepared to act justly towards the weak.
- There is a lingering feeling among a percentage of western non-Muslims that Islam is a force for evil and must be contained.
- There is the fear among Muslims that the non-Muslim world does not understand Islam and is unwilling to accept it fully.
- With the death of ideology, radical Islam believes that it is just a question of time before Islam establishes itself as the dominant world power.

I have made these few observations just to explain why I refer to the challenges before us as akin to *sowing in a time of bad weather*. But, as any good farmer knows, even sowing in bad weather can lead to a good harvest if we tend and water the crops with care and devotion. This is why dialogue remains the only option at least for now. Let us now turn our attention to some of the internal constraints within both faiths in Nigeria and their implications for the objectives in ACW. I will highlight some of these constraints not to provide an excuse but, in my view, to help us appreciate the difficulties that we face locally. After all, to paraphrase the aphorism, as it is said of politics, in the end, *all dialogue is local*.

Key Constraints in Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria

First, as I have already mentioned, the processes leading to the emergence of modern Nigeria have been fraught with difficulties. It is my belief, as I have argued elsewhere, that military authoritarian rule exacerbated the tensions between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. Given that the colonial map has come to be associated simplistically with the geography of North-South, discussions about religion in Nigeria have tended to be framed in similar dichotomies, with the North associated with Islam while the South is associated with Christianity. Although this is nothing more than a mere fig leaf hiding some very serious contradictions in the nature of the identity formations in Nigeria, these simplistic categorisations still persist today. Despite the fragmentation of the Nigerian state, these dichotomies still provide a key constraint to Christian-Muslim relations.

A second constraint is the issue of a weak article of association of the various units that make up the Nigerian state, namely a Constitution. The problem of the lack of an acceptable constitutional framework for the regulation of national life has been a major constraint to all Nigerians. This issue has dogged all debates surrounding the status of Shari'a Law in the Nigerian Constitution. And as any casual observer knows, debates around the role and place of Shari'a Law have been the Achilles heel of every constitutional conference, even before independence. For example, ten years after the country's return to civil rule, then as now, the National Assembly has still not been able to review or amend the relevant sections of the Nigerian Constitution. As such, even in a democracy, critics still call it a product of the undemocratic military rulers.

A third issue has been the problem of the corruption of the judicial system in Nigeria. The Constitution has often been the first casualty in military interventions since its suspension is often to be found in the second paragraph of the average coup-plotter's speech.[8] The introduction of Special Military Tribunals has also been a great source of temptation to the judiciary because it has seduced many of its members. Its members were occasionally hand-picked to serve as chairmen under the military and often many of them ended up doing dirty jobs. Very often, they were used by the military to commit judicial murder.[9] The environment of democracy now offers us better prospects and the judiciary has, in many respects, begun to regain its glory by some of its landmark decisions. Tribunals now deal with electoral matters and the judiciary is no longer being used in the way that the military manipulated it.

A fourth constraint concerns uneven access to western education and the attainment of functional literacy between the broad sections of the population. In most states in Northern Nigeria, the level of literacy is below 20%. A combination of factors account for this unfortunate development; for example, there are the lingering suspicions which date back to colonial times to the effect that the acquisition of western education made young Muslims susceptible to conversion to Christianity and the fear of modernisation and its perceived negative impact on the religion. The result is that far too many young people are on the streets as beggars in the name of religion in most Northern cities. They are the reservoir from which the elites draw their thugs and criminals in times of crises. Their poor training or even

outright lack of it has predisposed them to seeing non-Muslims as the *other* and in negative terms.

A fifth constraint is the problem of the lack of an acceptable mechanism for reducing inequalities and ensuring an equitable power-sharing formula across ethnic, religious or regional lines. So far, the present situation lends itself to too much suspicion, creates anxieties and reinforces a climate of fear of domination and allegations of regional, ethnic or religious considerations. Merit suffers and mediocrity is elevated in its place. For example, given its historical experience, Islam has come to be seen as a religion of privilege in Northern Nigeria and it is at the heart of the tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Northern states.[10]

A sixth constraint is the lack of mutual trust among the various religious groups especially at the level of the religious, bureaucratic and political elites. Although this is largely a product of history and lack of adequate conditions and experience in dialogue, the poor political environment and the lack of a culture of the rule of law have exacerbated the problems and led to distrust. Thus rather than serving as platforms for healthy exchange of elite consensus, politics and the bureaucracy often become theatres of war. The political elite often mobilise on the basis of religious sentiments and they also tend to appeal to these sentiments when they perceive that they have been denied access to power or they suffer perceived discrimination.

The next serious question is how do we create a fair society where God's children realise their potential and attain the objectives which Jesus Christ captured well when he said, "I have come that you may have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10). Obviously, as long as there is inequality in any society, especially when it is based on a perceived classification or identity, we cannot talk of being children of one God, created in his image and likeness and meant to be the objects of his love. So how should we work towards ending injustice and creating a much fairer society that does not discriminate against some sections or members of the population? We may have dwelt on religion or ethnicity, but other equally potent categories of discrimination include gender, social standing, disability, etc. Let us now turn our attention to the prospects for the creation of a fair society befitting God's children and in keeping with the ideals and goals of ACW.

Ingredients for the Common Good

It is important to note that although there may not be one antidote to the unfortunate spiral of intolerance and the persistence of violence that is often motivated by religious claims, it is important to turn our attention to how we might actually reverse the ugly spread of this virus of intolerance based on prejudices in our society. It is safe to say that whether it is called good governance, justice, fairness, equity or whatever, we can use one expression to capture these sentiments: the Common Good.

As a policy and a strategy, the Common Good seeks to do what it says, namely ensure the welfare and wellbeing of the majority of the population. A nation that ensures the pursuit of the Common Good will exhibit the following characteristics:

- Guarantee of a safe haven for the weakest in the society.
- Create a platform that ensures access to justice by all.
- Create a system that favours and promotes security of the family.
- Create a culture of tolerance.
- Ensure programmes that promote public welfare.
- Promote peaceful co-existence and harmony.
- Encourage and promote freedom of expression.

In theory, most of these ideals have been well-captured in the relevant sections of our National Constitution. Chapter Two of the said Constitution, under a section known as "Fundamental Objective and Directive Principles of State Policy", captures most of these objectives. A random selection of the relevant sub-sections reveals the following claims:

- The Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be a State based on the principles of democracy and social justice.
- The composition of the Government of a State, a local government council, or any of the agencies of such Government or council, and the conduct of the affairs of the Government or council or such agencies shall be carried out in such manner as to recognise the diversity of the people within its area of authority and the need to promote a sense of belonging and loyalty among all the people of the Federation.

- Accordingly, national integration shall be actively encouraged, whilst discrimination on the grounds of place of origin, sex, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association or ties shall be prohibited.
- For the purpose of promoting national integration, it shall be the duty of the State to:
  - Provide adequate facilities for and encourage free mobility of people, goods and services throughout the Federation.
  - Secure full residence rights for every citizen in all parts of the Federation.
  - Encourage inter-marriage among persons from different places of origin, or of different religious, ethnic or linguistic association or ties; and
  - Promote or encourage the formation of associations that cut across ethnic, linguistic, religious and/or other sectional barriers.
- The State shall foster a feeling of belonging and of involvement among the various people of the Federation, to the end that loyalty to the nation shall override sectional loyalties.
- The State shall, within the context of the ideals and objectives for which provisions are made in this Constitution:
  - Harness the resources of the nation and promote national prosperity and an efficient, a dynamic and self-reliant economy;
  - Control the national economy in such manner as to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen on the basis of social justice and equality of status and opportunity.[11]

In real life however, these provisions of the Constitution are lived more in theory than in practice. As a whole, this has reduced the quality of life of citizens to various conditions of poverty and misery. In their daily lives, the people have no shelter, they have no education, they have no adequate food, they remain vulnerable to diseases, they live in squalor, and so on. It is in this ocean of neglect that the viruses of violence reside. Nigerians live daily with these frustrations and it is their cumulative impact that leads commentators to speak about *religious* or *communal* crises in Nigeria. As a review of any of the reports of the government committees set up often to review these incidents will show, the root causes of these crises are often social discontentment by various segments of the society. Religion provides an appropriate tool to which to appeal to mobilise and channel this discontentment, largely because it is easy to identify it as the basis of privilege or disadvantage. Among the non-Muslim population in the Northern States, religious identity is often considered a major

category of privilege or disadvantage, with Islam trumping others as a major identity of privilege. Although more often than not, the allegations are not what they seem, the presence of some of the constraints I have mentioned above does not help matters. Therefore, to address and reverse the issues as to why so-called religious or communal violence persists in Nigeria, it is important to appreciate the aphorism, *a hungry man is an angry man*. What are the options for future dialogue? It is to this that we shall now turn by way of conclusion.

Options: Life Should Be Beautiful

The award-winning film, *Life is Beautiful,* tells the story of the survival of an Italian family that was caught up in the throes of the Second World War. Captured with his family and having been separated from his wife in the concentration camp, the man has to try to build a protective shield around his little five-year-old child from the trauma of life in the camp. It is indeed a beautiful story that tries to make the best out of a terribly bad situation. The question is: Do we all have a common view of what constitutes happiness? What would a world of perfect love look like? A major constraint for us is to appreciate the fact that all of us see happiness differently and will have to subscribe to an inverted form of the Tolstonian aphorism that: *All happy families are happy differently*. However we as believers have a common understanding and a set of principles which have been highlighted in ACW. We are all created by God, a God who is love. His love has been mediated to us through Prophets whom we all acknowledge, no matter how we may differ in ranking them. We also believe that this God has created each and every one of us differently and that he has plans for all his children. All of us admit of the centrality of the human person as the highest expression of this love. We also agree that after this life, there is another one, a life that is eternal. We also agree that there will be judgment and that good will be rewarded while evil will be punished. We also agree that each and every one of us will account for what they have done and merit a place with God or a place outside of God. There is a broad understanding around all these issues. The problem is posed by three questions. First of all, what obligations do we have to one another while we are here on earth? Secondly, what obligations do we have to the powers that control the space around which we function, powers into whose hands God has entrusted our lives and our earthly future? In other

words, what obligation do we have to the state and those who govern it? Thirdly, how should we regulate our lives in relation to these two authorities: one that is earthly and finite and the other that is infinite and eternal? Who should mediate and what powers should he or she have? In other words, should the domain of Caesar and that of God be separated or is there a meeting point (Matt. 22:21)?

These are deep philosophical and theological questions. It would be helpful if we enjoyed cultural, religious or ethnic homogeneity. But the reality is that we are living in an environment where there are believers and those who do not believe, all making similar or sometimes contending and conflicting claims. This is where the issues raised here become important and significant. This is why this initiative is so important. I will make a few propositions.

First, I think it is important that we restate the issues regarding the sacredness and sanctity of life, our individual rights and human freedom as have been set out in the secular doctrines surrounding religious liberty and human rights. The Catholic Church for example has dealt with this issue in the document known as *Dignitatis Humanae.*[12] In paragraph two, the document speaks about *religious freedom* as a *human right* which should finally become a *civil right*. The central theme here is to ensure that no human agency, state or religious authority coerces an individual to act contrary to his or her conscience in matters relating to faith, whether in public or in private. Now in the Nigerian Constitution, there are adequate provisions for the realisation of these lofty objectives. The relevant provisions are to be found under Chapter Four, entitled: Fundamental Rights. Here the Constitution devotes eleven sections to dealing with various aspects of human rights and human dignity such as: the sanctity of life, freedom from discrimination, rights to private and family life, rights to own property, rights to personal liberty, right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and right to freedom of religion, among others.[13] The realities in our daily lives however are different in our situation.

Everyone has a right to religious freedom because the pursuit of a good life is at the heart of why we are here on earth. However, whereas there are those who see this life as an end in itself, those who are believers have the faith that, as Jim Reeves said, "This world is not my home, I am just passing through". Those who have faith

and practise a religion believe that religion is their guide to their lives here and the life hereafter. Religion offers them a road map which they must try to follow faithfully if they are to reach their destination. How this map is read, how it is understood, constitutes a problem in a society where there are other maps and map readers. With old and modern prophets, the clerical classes claim the right to be map readers and then offer guidance to their adherents. How this map reading is conducted has often been the subject of serious controversy, intolerance and violence over the years. The boundaries of individual freedom have often not been respected as some clerics believe that they have a duty to enforce the will of God even here on earth. On the other hand, there are those who do not have a faith in God or anything at all, those for whom this world is an end and who treat religion and the thought of another life with suspicion and doubt. If they had their way, there would be no mention of religion and as we know, these people have been with us from the beginning of time. How should they co-exist in one environment, under the same laws, facing the same challenges, struggling for and defending their rights to be what they want to be without any molestation or discrimination? An attempt at answering these questions will be the final part of this paper.

First for us as Christians, the love that God has freely given to us is unconditional. This love does not depend on our performance or even response or acknowledgement. Even in the midst of the worst form of sin, God does not withdraw his love from us. The story of the criminal who has come to be known as the good thief demonstrates that until we breathe our last, God still follows us offering us this unconditional love (Lk. 23:43). It is because of the exceptional nature of this love that Jesus calls it a new commandment (Jn. 13:34). It was a love that had no precedent. In leaving his apostles, he commanded them to love one another. It is instructive that Jesus makes his love a command: it is not an exhortation, a plea, a request, or a sympathetic appeal. Jesus knew that on their own, his followers would not be able to live up to these ideals. This love will be eternal because he is the vine and we his followers are the branches (Jn. 15:3). He gave them a guarantee by sending them the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth as their guide and their succour (Jn. 15:26).

There are many lessons arising from this, namely that Jesus distinguishes the love of God, which is self-giving ("a man can have no

greater love"), non- discriminatory, does not falter, etc. For us as human beings, our love is more or less the opposite: we withhold it when we are hurt, we withdraw it when it is not reciprocated, we weigh the benefits as they affect us, etc.

Second, we must note the supremacy of God the creator over us humans. God's patience with us, his respect for our freedom and so on, are lessons for us to learn, namely that we must not impose the will of God on our neighbours. A situation where clerics and other followers turn themselves into God's policemen, advocates and judges is contrary to the will of God himself. This does not mean that we should not take seriously our duty to correct, reprimand and guide. Indeed, we need to take those duties seriously and ensure that we are seeking to make others better members of our religious families, not to turn them away.

Further the most pressing issue facing many developing nations is the issue of how best to redress inequalities and reverse the discrimination against citizens on the basis of religion, region, ethnicity or class. It is clear that despite the lofty pronouncements in our constitutions, the real problem is how best to ensure access to justice through the provision of mechanisms to ensure that aggrieved citizens can pursue their cases and causes without threats. To this end, I propose the setting up of a Citizens Equality Commission, which will be given the duty of ensuring that citizens who allege breaches of their rights on the basis of identifiable claims of discrimination can table their grievances to that body. This is akin to the Commission for Racial Equality in the United Kingdom. This platform is important because whereas rulers make declarations of good intentions, these will be of no use if they cannot be enforced. The existence of this platform will help actualise the famous dictum: "he who alleges must prove"! But beyond litigation, voices of authority such as religious, traditional or youth groups need to form alliances and forums and be ready to stand together for one another. The fact that we are *majorities* somewhere, whether as Muslims, Christians, men, women or youth, does not foreclose the fact that we are *minorities* somewhere else.

Third, there is the need to rethink the role and place of religious laws in a plural society such as ours. While respecting the rights of citizens to practise and live under the dictates of their religions, it is important that Nigerians be shielded from the excesses of zealots and fanatics

who use religion to perpetrate criminal acts or settle personal scores. To this end, where the Constitution guarantees citizens the freedom to marry across religions or ethnic lines, convert or change their faith without let or hindrance, it is necessary for the laws to provide enough protection so as to enable citizens to claim these rights. So-called "blasphemy laws" have no place in our plural and democratic society because they fly in the face of the same constitutional provisions and a constitution cannot contradict itself. Those who perceive that their faiths have been slandered should pursue their claims through the competent civil courts. Any citizen who takes the law into his or her hands and commits arson or murder in the name of religion should be tried and sentenced according to the relevant laws. Such criminality has nothing to do with religion and it is important to make the distinction.

Fourth, whereas religious liberty exists in our laws, the Federal Government must think more clearly over how to ensure that religious bodies and groups live under the same laws. Thus the relationship between religious bodies and the State in areas of the provision of education for example, needs to be more clearly thought through. Whereas some Muslims believe that Islam does not admit of separation between church and state, the reality is that a nation cannot live in both a democracy and theocracy at the same time. Democracies survive on the threshold of clear secular claims and objectives. The *secularity* of the state is not the same as the pursuit or promotion of *secularism* as some people wrongly think. Secularity protects religion from the pressures and manipulation of the State while secularism as a philosophy rejects religion and the sacred. The secularity of the state enables the state to perform its functions free from religious pressures while religion enjoys the opportunity to speak truth to power and play its prophetic role of being the voice of the voiceless.

Finally, our nation must move quickly but steadily towards pursuing the ideals of living under and enforcing the rule of law. Democracy offers us the best platform for achieving this through the formation of alliances based on political party membership, civil society and community associations, which will in the long run, make the ideals enshrined in ACW easier to attain. The new challenges posed by the war on terror have moral dimensions but they also touch on our collective sins of omission. We have expended energy fighting to defend our territories and in the process, we left the moral high ground open.

It has now been occupied by opportunists who have no agenda beyond the perpetration of evil against imaginary enemies that they create as they go along. The call for human solidarity is urgent now more than ever before. We may have reached the point now that the late Revd Martin Luther King meant when, in his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail,* he said: "There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into an abyss of injustice where they experience the blackness of corroding despair".[14] The time is now and before us lies an open grave. We know the way, what is needed now is the will. For, as the old saying goes, "If not us, who? and if not now, when?"

1| *Basil Davidson: The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation State, London: Times Books, 1992.*
2| *Ali Mazrui: The Africans: A Triple Heritage, New York. Little Brown & Co., 1986.*
3| *Alan Cowell: Colonialism Left Scars Still Unhealed, International Herald Tribune, 23-24 May 2009, p2.*
4| *John Paden: Faith and Politics in Nigeria, New York. Institute of Peace Press. 2008.*
5| *Francis Fukuyama: The End of History and the Last Man, New York: Free Press, 1992.*
6| *Samuel Huntington: The Clash of Civilisations, Foreign Affairs, Summer, 1993. Later the same year, he published the book version of the essay under the title, The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of the World Order, London: Simon & Schuster, 1997.*
7| *This initiative was conceptualised by Mohammed Khatami, the former President of Iran, to counter the clash of civilisation thesis of Professor Huntington. The United Nations was enthused by the idea and declared 2001 as the year of Dialogue Among Civilisations.*
8| *Dan Agbese: Fellow Nigerians: Turning Points in the Political History of Nigeria, Ibadan: Umbrella Books, 2000.*
9| *The trial of Ken Saro Wiwa and his nine Ogoni kinsmen through one of these kangaroo tribunals in 1995 was referred to as judicial murder by the then Prime Minister of the UK, Mr John Major.*
10| *Matthew Kukah: Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria, Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1992.*
11| *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Lagos: Federal Government Printer, 1999, Ch 2.*
12| *Dignitatis Humanae, Vatican City, 1965.*
13| *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Ch 4, Fundamental Rights.*
14| *Dated 16 April 1963.*

A Response to *A Common Word* from an African Perspective

Al-Tayib Zain Al-Abdin

The letter of "*A Common Word* Between Us and You" sent by 138 Muslim scholars, religious leaders and intellectuals to top Christian leaders in the Vatican, Canterbury, Moscow, Jerusalem and other religious centres in the world (25 senior Christian leaders of different denominations) represents a breakthrough in the stalemated dialogue between Muslims and Christians. It is the only initiative in our times, taken by distinguished Muslim scholars from different parts of the Muslim world, to start a serious dialogue with Christian leaders. It originated from the Royal Institute of Religious Studies in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The theme of the letter around the 'love of God and love of neighbour', as a shared value between Muslims and Christians, is innovative and appropriate for our difficult times of conflict and extremism. The authors proved their point by quoting copiously not only from the Qur'an but also from the Bible, which is not a common practice among Muslims. Dialogue with the 'People of the Scripture' is an Islamic duty, the Qur'an says: "And argue not with the People of the Scripture unless it be in the best way, except with those who do wrong. And say to them: we believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you; our God and your God is one, and to Him we have submitted" (Q. 29:46). However Muslims, especially government bodies, were not sufficiently earnest to respond positively to the calls for dialogue initiated by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Interfaith Dialogue Unit of the World Council of Churches since the late sixties and early seventies. They were suspicious of the motives and purposes of dialogue; the early dialogues were called, financed and organised by western churches. As organisers, the churches fixed the time, venue, agenda and the participants who, in most cases, did not represent the main trend among Muslims. Later on, the Muslim participants became more representative. In fact, even Christians in Asia and Africa were not enthusiastic about these dialogues; they were afraid that the sensitive issues discussed might harm their relationship with their Muslim co-citizens, especially in Muslim-majority countries.

Gradually Muslim leaders accepted the challenges of dialogue but they rarely took the initiative of sponsoring them. This is partly due to religious conservatism, lack of vision for the purpose of dialogue, weakness of voluntary Islamic institutions and shortage of finance. Some Muslim governments, like Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Jordan and Sudan, managed to organise some religious dialogues, but it was mostly as a political show rather than a long-standing policy. This background gives more significance to *A Common Word*, as a new approach from independent Muslim leaders towards religious dialogue. It is a step to be welcomed and encouraged.

The theme of the letter focused on the love of the One God and love of the neighbour, as foundational principles in both Islam and Christianity. It is true that both words (God and neighbour) occur many times in the Qur'an and Bible, but the concepts are different. The use of the word 'love' in an abstract form subscribed to God occurs rarely in the Qur'an; the emphasis is on the merciful and beneficent nature of God who forgives human sins and showers them with all kinds of blessings and graces. On the other hand, the Qur'an mentions the many types of people whom God loves: the God-fearing, those who do good, the benevolent, the just, the patient, etc.. It also mentions those who are not loved by God: the infidels, the aggressors, the wrong-doers, the arrogant, the treacherous, the extravagant, etc.. However, there are other shared values between Islam and Christianity which should be given prominence in the dialogue because they are more relevant to peaceful coexistence in the turbulent and violent world of today. They are the values of peace, justice, equality, human dignity and freedom. These are clear values with concrete implications and responsibilities for any modern community or society. The letter mentions the values of justice and freedom of religion as a by-product of the love of neighbour; I believe they are intrinsic human values in their own right. They are higher and more basic than the concept of love of neighbour, because they are closely related to human dignity, which distinguishes man from the other creatures of God. In Islam the establishment of justice is the whole purpose of sending Messengers by God to human societies. The Qur'an says: "Indeed We have sent Our Messengers with clear proofs, and revealed with them the Scripture and the Balance that mankind may keep up justice." (Q. 57:25). On the other hand freedom of religion is granted by God Himself, nobody has the right to deny it. The Qur'an says: "And say: the truth is from your Lord. Then

whosoever wills, let him believe; and whosoever wills, let him disbelieve." (Q. 18:29). The main purpose of dialogue should be peaceful coexistence and fruitful cooperation among communities, societies and nations irrespective of their ethnicity, religion, colour or nationality. However, the religious people who believe in the oneness of God and the Day of Judgement should lead the way to show the troubled world of today the right path. It would be a grave failure and betrayal on behalf of their faiths, if the secularists and non-believers are to take that responsibility while the people of faith, who claim the truth, are left behind arguing their complex theological differences! It happened several times in the history of the world, we should not allow it to happen again. The letter went on to say that good relationships between Muslims and Christians, being more than half of the world population, will contribute significantly to meaningful peace around the world. It is the ethical values of the two religions and the example of good behaviour set by their leaders, which will lead the world towards peace rather than the sheer size of the two communities. The main weakness of the letter is that it did not set practical objectives for the dialogue between Muslims and Christians, and did not suggest any road map to promote dialogue in order to achieve the desired goals.

The Christian responses to *A Common Word*, which came from distinguished centres like: Lambeth Palace, Yale University, Cambridge University, the Vatican, Munich and India, were positive and serious. It is worthy to discuss here in some detail, the response of Fr Christian Troll (*The Asia Pacific Times*, Hamburg, December 2007) because he is the initiator of the present dialogue, an active religious leader who is associated with the largest Christian church in the world and an specialist in Islamic studies. I believe he also represents the major conservative trend in the Catholic Church, which makes his response more significant. Moreover, he is a straight forward person who does not couch his convictions behind trivial niceties. I am encouraged to be equally frank. Fr Troll commented on the letter that it represents a remarkable attempt to reach a broad consensus among leading Muslim figures; it aims partly to take Islam seriously as a distinct articulated voice at a global level. He did not mention the subject of the 'broad consensus', which I presume to be dialogue with Christians and Jews in order to achieve world peace. I do not think Islam needs this letter or dialogue with other religions to be taken seriously at the global level. It has earned that position by its

noble teachings, long historical traditions and civilisation, the diverse cultures and nations which adhere to it, its huge presence and impact as a living faith in the different continents of the world and the commitment of the majority of Muslims to their faith. It is the religion which is most studied, discussed and written about all over the world by non-adherents. Fr Troll asks if the Biblical quotations used in the letter indicate a break with the classical Islamic doctrine which considers those scriptures as 'corruptions' of those originally revealed by God. My answer is that it does not. The Muslim view is taken from the Qur'an, which we consider the literal Word of God: "Do you covet that they will believe in your religion in spite of the fact that a party of them used to hear the word of God, then they changed it knowingly after they understood it?" (Q. 2:75). Nevertheless, the Qur'an calls these scriptures 'holy books' which should be implemented, "Say (Muhammad) O People of the Scripture, you have nothing till you act according to the Torah, the Gospel (*Injil*) and what has been sent down to you from your Lord" (Q. 5:68). This means that these books are still substantially authentic. But is it only the Muslims who question the complete authenticity of the Torah and the Gospel? There is a long tradition of controversy among biblical scholars about the authenticity and history of various parts of these scriptures. One of the latest critical studies by the distinguished British classical scholar, Enoch Powell, is *The Evolution of the Gospel*, published by Yale University Press (1994), in which he translated from a late Greek manuscript the Gospel of Matthew. He said: "Matthew discloses that an underlying text was severely re-edited, with theological and polemical intent, and that the resulting edition was afterwards recombined with the underlying text to produce the gospel as it exists. That underlying text was itself the product of earlier processes which involved more than one series of major additions." However, if the Muslims deny the complete authenticity of the Biblical scriptures, the Jews and the Christians deny the whole Qur'an as the Word of God and deny Muhammad as a genuine Prophet of God. Thus, we have nothing for which to apologise!

Fr Troll indulged himself in mentioning other differences between Muslims and Christians like the nature of Jesus Christ, which according to him "has profound implications for how God is understood and worshipped", the concepts of the Holy Spirit and the Father as central to Christian belief that cannot be negotiated away. He also pointed to some practical differences with Muslims like the implementation of

Shari'a, human rights and the relation between state and religion. The latter points are not theological differences from the Christian point of view, but political principles adopted by the west due to social and political developments across centuries, which were not always supported at the time by the church. Fr Troll also pointed to the increasing tensions of Muhammad's approach to Jews and Christians during his later years as reflected in *sura* 9 of the Qur'an. The verses referred to in the said *sura* (Q. 9:30-35) do not speak about violent tensions but about theological differences and characteristics of religious leaders. However, the Qur'an is a book which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad over 23 years, it constituted the whole period of his mission. That period witnessed ups and downs in the Prophet's relationship with other groups and communities; the Qur'an, being a book of guidance in different circumstances, reflected that changeable relationship. It is in the human nature not to establish a permanent relationship among individuals, groups or communities even among people of the same faith. The Qur'an speaks about the situation of enmity among Muslims themselves and shows how to solve it. The proper answer for how to deal with our religious differences in the modern world is appropriately summarised by Cardinal Bertone, in his letter to Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal, the master mind behind *A Common Word*, on behalf of Pope Benedict XVI, who wrote: "Without ignoring or downplaying our differences as Christians and Muslims, we can and therefore should look to what unites us, namely, belief in the one God, the provident Creator and universal Judge who at the end of time will deal with each person according to his or her actions. We are all called to commit ourselves totally to him and to obey his sacred will". Dr Troll touched upon the important practical issue of religious freedom; he rightly noted the limited religious freedom of Christians in some Muslim-majority countries. The degree of freedom in any society reflects the cultural, social and political development of that society irrespective of its majority religion. At one time the Catholic Church was one of the most repressive institutions in Europe. The degree of freedom in the Muslim world, which emerged from European colonialism only 60 years ago, cannot match the level reached in Europe and America which have had more than 200 years of constitutional democratic governments. The limitation on religious freedom has no basis in Islamic teachings because it is granted in the Qur'an itself, "There is no compulsion in religion" (Q. 2:256). This is why the history of Islam did not experience religious genocide as it happened to the

Muslims of Palestine during the Christian Crusades, the Muslims of Spain at the time of Ferdinand and Isabella at the end of the 15th century and recently the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina after the break down of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1990s. The Muslim world did not suffer from religious wars as took place during the Reformation in Europe in the 16th century. Nevertheless, the degree of independence and freedom enjoyed by Christian institutions in many Muslim-majority countries, though it is limited, is far more than what Islamic institutions and organisations could get in their own countries. Muslim governments, which are mostly secular or semi-secular, firmly control Islamic institutions like mosques, *madrasas* (schools) and *awqaf* (endowments). It is not a question of religion but a question of political environment. What is not justifiable is the sudden Islamophobia which spread in Europe after the unfortunate events of September 11th 2001 in New York; it led to many anti-terrorist acts directed mainly against Muslims. It reached the extent of preventing the wearing of headscarves for Muslim girl students and the paying of *zakat* to charitable societies; the step was racially and politically motivated against migrant Muslims in order to win the support of the extreme right. These incidents show that religious freedom is still fragile even in long-established democracies, which require strong commitment and more co-operation among people of faith to protect and ensure freedom of religion under all circumstances.

The Situation in Africa

Muslims suffered a great deal of prejudice and discrimination at the hands of European colonial powers and European missionaries. Christianity spread in most African countries since the Catholic Portuguese sailed with their gunships around the coasts of Africa in the late 15th century, to be followed by the Germans, British and French during the 19th century. The colonial powers considered the spread of Christianity in the colonised countries as a civilising mission to the polytheist Africans; it was also meant as a moral facilitator to subdue them to European domination. Some churches went all the way to support unchristian systems, such as the apartheid regimes in South Africa or the slave trade, which forcefully seized African youth to work in Europe and America. The colonial administrations put the services of general education and medical care completely in the hands of Christian missions, which they used to evan-

gelise the local inhabitants of the country. The newly established schools became the major conduit for new mission converts. The Muslims who were conscious of their religion refused to join the missionary schools; the result of which was that they found themselves outside the whole modern system of education, civil service, economy and armed forces. As a result of this situation, Muslims were degraded to the bottom level of society even when they were the biggest group in the country. The consequences of that disadvantageous legacy still continue several decades after those countries gained their independence.

On the other hand, Africa is one of the most tolerant regions in the world in religious matters; it has experienced religious pluralism since antiquity. Almost every ethnic group has its own religion, god and rituals cited in its local language. The individual person hardly practises his rituals outside his locality. When Islam and Christianity were introduced into the continent, people coexisted with them without much problem. Those scriptural religions were quite often adapted to accommodate traditional beliefs and practices, to the dismay of their original preachers. For example, the circumcision of girls in the case of Muslims and polygamy in the case of Christians; both habits were not authorised by religious teachings. It was not uncommon to find members of one family adhering to different religions. The traditional animists are usually more tolerant than Muslims or Christians. However religion was sometimes used to mobilise certain sections of the population against others for political purposes, especially at times of conflict. It happened in the cases of Sudan, Nigeria, Uganda, Liberia, Tanzania and others.

Religious dialogue between Muslims and Christians was not much practised in Africa. Of the many major dialogues organised by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Interfaith Dialogue Unit (WCC) during the last three decades of the last century, almost none of them were held in Sub-Saharan Africa. However at the beginning of the 21st century African countries became not only involved in dialogue but active in establishing interfaith organisations, which include Muslims, Christians, Jews, Baha'is and followers of traditional religions. During the last five or six years, more than 40 interfaith societies have been established which are affiliated to the continental association 'Inter-Faith Action for Peace in Africa' (IFAPA) founded by the Lutheran World Federation in 2002, and the interna-

tional 'World Conference of Religions for Peace' (WCRP) established in Japan in 1970. Those societies have been active in peace-making, humanitarian aid, human rights and combating HIV disease. This shows that African religious communities are more concerned in working together to solve practical problems of their societies rather than indulging themselves in discussing theological differences. A recent publication (*Striving in Faith*, Life & Peace Institute, Uppsala, 2008) discussed Muslim-Christian relations in Sudan, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Nigeria; it found out that community relationships are usually at peace but political and ethnic tensions can easily be given religious overtones. The editor summarised the situation in John Voll's words: "There is a strong sense of competition and potential open conflict among both activist Muslims and activist Christians in Africa. Conflicts that may have different causal elements sometimes become defined and articulated in religious terms."

The Sudan, like many African countries, experienced religious diversity and coexistence since ancient times. The Pharaonic Kushite civilisation spread in Nubia since the 8th century B.C., the coming of Orthodox Christianity in the middle of the 6th century A.D. led to the establishment of three Christian kingdoms in Nubia with different theological traditions, while Islam entered Sudan in the middle of the 7th century from three different places (Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa) and had different characteristics according to its place of origin. After seven centuries, the gradual spread of Islam, led to the establishment of some Islamic kingdoms in Darfur, Kordofan and Sennar. Despite their different denominational traditions, two of the Christian kingdoms merged with each other without any tension or conflict. The various Islamic traditions in the northern part of the country coexisted for centuries without any serious discord. The *sufi* trend was the most dominant in Sudan; it influenced the Sudanese people with its spirituality and tolerance. The conversion from paganism to the Pharaonic deity and from Christianity to Islam took more than twenty-four centuries without instigating a religious conflict. The outcome of that long process was a peaceful coexistence among the adherents of the different religions and traditions; the strong blood kinship and tribal solidarity mitigated any extreme religious feelings. Trimingham, explaining the wide spread of Islam at the expense of Christianity, said that the far more important factor "was the attraction of the seductive power which Islam exercises upon any African people rendered spiritually homeless, especially through its power of

assimilation of indigenous practices." (*Islam in the Sudan*, London, 1949). Fundamentalism is a recent phenomenon which has not taken root in society.

The Anglo-Egyptian rule (1898-1955), which marked the era before independence, was dominated by British administrators who were accountable to their own government. The new administration was biased to curtail Islam and spread Christianity. It gave the churches full freedom to engage in missionary activities among the animist believers in southern Sudan and in the Nuba mountains but not in the Muslim north, for security reasons. After some years, the government allowed the missions to start modern education in the big northern cities, giving them big plots of land in central places. They are the best schools in the country to date; the majority of their students have always been Muslims, which reflects tolerance on both sides. To disrupt the spread of Islam and the Arabic language in the south, the colonial administration introduced in the 1920s the Closed District Act, which prevented northerners and southerners from visiting each other's region. At one time it wanted to annex the south to East African countries. That policy of separation between the two parts of the country, coupled with the churches' activities to foment hate against Muslims of the north, created a gulf of suspicion and mistrust amongst the southerners against the north. The British policy was changed only a few years before independence, it was too late to change attitudes and preconceived ideas. No wonder the first mutiny of southern soldiers against the central government in Khartoum took place in August 1955, even before the British Governor General left his office. Since that time, several southern rebel movements took arms against the central government demanding cession from the north. A protracted civil war continued now and then until a comprehensive agreement was signed in January 2005 between the SPLMandA and the government of Sudan. The military regimes of Aboud (1958-64), Numairi (1969-85) and al-Bashir (1989-2005) tried to solve the southern problem by pushing a policy of Arabisation and Islamisation in the south, which was counterproductive. Ironically the two first regimes were overthrown by northern trade unions, civil society groups and angry crowds; the immediate cause was the civil war in the south. Although religious propaganda was used by both parties to the conflict, the conflict has nothing to do with religion. In the last two decades, about two million southerners fled the operation zones in the south to live among Muslims in the

north, which confirms the fact that the confrontation was not between two peoples or two religions. The real cause of the war is around the distribution of power and wealth. The religious map of Sudan may be estimated as: Muslims 75% (5% of them in the south), animists 13% and Christians 12%. The latter two are mostly in the south and the Nuba Mountains.

During the peace negotiations, the two parties (Government of Sudan and SPLM) differed sharply on the sensitive issue of the role of religion in public life. The SPLM called for a secular state because of the religious diversity in the country, while the government defended the right of the Muslims in the north to implement Shari'a laws in their part of the country. After more than two years of tough negotiations, they reached a comprehensive peace agreement (CPA) which was signed in Nairobi on 9 January 2005, in the presence of the regional and major powers of the world and the United Nations. The agreement included a detailed plan to share power and wealth between the north and the south, security arrangements to ensure the implementation of the plan and the role of religion in public life. The main points in the last subject contain the following: that Shari'a may be implemented in the north but the south will be exempted from any religious laws, the recognition of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature of Sudan, the freedom of belief, worship and conscience, that nobody shall be discriminated against on such grounds, and that eligibility for any public office, including the presidency, shall be based on citizenship and not on religion, beliefs or customs. All personal and family matters including marriage, divorce, inheritance, succession and affiliation may be governed by the personal laws of those concerned. The national capital had a special arrangement: to exempt non-Muslims from Shari'a laws, that they should have their own courts and prosecution offices, and that they will be represented in the law enforcement agencies of the capital. A special commission was established by the presidency to ensure that the rights of non-Muslims are protected in accordance with the terms of the agreement. All the points mentioned above were included in the Sudan Transitional Constitution, which was approved by both parties in July 2005. The CPA opened a new era in the history of Sudan; it attempted successfully to find solutions to all the problems which marred the relationship between the Muslim north and the Christian and animist south since independence. The agreement on religion was welcomed by most religious leaders, both Muslims and

Christians. The CPA needs to be implemented seriously and honestly, and to be followed by similar agreements to share power and wealth with other marginalised regions like Darfur and eastern Sudan. As a consequence of the positive environment created after the CPA, a successful Muslim-Christian dialogue took place in the first week of July 2007 organised by the ministry for guidance and endowments. The major churches took an active role in organising and drafting the recommendations of the conference. The two communities pledged: to deepen the understanding of the coexistence between Muslims and Christians, to enhance the role of mosques and churches to encourage the spirit of coexistence and communication, to reject violence and religious extremism, to strengthen ethical values and combat moral corruption, and to achieve mutual understanding for national unity based on equal rights and responsibilities. The conference called for common institutions to promote dialogue among the followers of Godly religions, for cooperation among the believers to strengthen peace and unity, and to combat all kinds of terrorism. Muslim and Christian leaders succeeded since 2003 (before the CPA) to establish a shared independent organisation called the Sudan Inter-Religious Council (SIRC), which included equal numbers of leaders from the two communities in its general assembly and executive bureau. The Council aimed to strengthen the values of tolerance and coexistence in society, undertake dialogue and extend ties between religious leaders, protect religious freedom and places of worship, consolidate the values of peace and national unity and solve conflicts between religious sects. SIRC managed, in a short period, to solve a number of problems for the Christian community in Khartoum, such as: compensating the Catholic Church for its sports club which was seized by the government because its lease had expired, preventing the building of shops around the Christian cemetery, compensating the Episcopal Church for its school which was destroyed by building a major highway in the area, cancelling a government order to suspend the Armenian Church after an internal controversy over the election of its executive committee, obtaining three plots of land, free of charge, to build new churches for the Catholic, Episcopal and Sudan Church of Christ churches. The Council organised a number of workshops on conflict resolution, religious freedom, the Darfur problem and dialogues on peace-building. All the activities of SIRC were shared by members from both religious communities. The organisation gained mutual confidence and built international relations with similar organisations, especially in Africa.

What Lessons May Be Gained for Africa from the Call of Religious Dialogue?

My answer is that religious communities in Africa, especially Muslims and Christians, should work together to make life in their respective societies more peaceful, free and just. They should do their best to make life easy and tolerable for the weak members in society by providing humanitarian aid, medical care, education and combating poverty. They should stand firm in protecting the noble values of religious freedom, justice and human rights. They should combat dictatorship, injustice, corruption and moral decadence. In other words, what is required is to have dialogue on practical matters which will improve the standard of life in society for everybody. It is not useful for poor, weak and backward societies to squander their energies in debating theological differences, which have remained with us for many centuries and are not likely to disappear for a long time to come; however knowing these differences and the logic behind them for each religion, may lead to a better understanding and appreciation of the other's point of view. That matter may be left to the elite of both communities.

Promoting Interfaith Dialogue Through Promoting a Culture of Peace

Siti Musdah Mulia

Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world and demographically is the fourth most populous country after China, India and the United States, with 224 million people inhabiting an archipelago of 13,112 islands. Currently more than 200 million Muslims live in Indonesia. They constitute 84% of the country's total population and 13% of all Muslims worldwide. However despite the predominance of one single religion, Indonesia is essentially a multicultural society. Spread throughout the archipelago are more than 214 ethnic groups speaking distinct local languages. Among the 35 million Indonesians who are not Muslim, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, as well as various local indigenous religions, are commonly practised.

Indonesia protects all religious believers as stated in its 1945 Constitution. Such a situation came about because the founding fathers of Indonesia, they were prominent Muslims and Christians, did not choose religion as the foundation for the state. Rather they chose *Pancasila* as the state's philosophical foundation and at the same time as the guideline in establishing the state's political power. Certainly such a choice was not made without reason nor was it an easy thing to do.

The historical record has expressly displayed and borne clear witness to the fact that the debate of the Indonesian founding fathers, which tore the group into two severely opposing poles, the nationalists and the Islamists, was aggravated, bitter and tough. The former advocated *Pancasila*, and the latter wanted Indonesia to be based on an Islamic ideology. Such heated debates occurred in meetings prior to or in the wake of the independence proclamation, especially in the sessions held in parliament in 1945.

Historical Background of Islam and Christianity

Islam and Christianity are not the native religions of Indonesian people. In fact, both religions came from outside Indonesia. Islam is always understood as the Arabic or Eastern religion, meanwhile Christianity is considered as the European or Western religion; this misunderstanding leads to prejudice.

Islam came to Indonesia in the 13th century and was spread by traders and preachers who disseminated Islamic teachings throughout the Indonesian archipelago. The key to the success of Islamic propagation was not conquest. That is a fact. Rather it was the ability of Islamic preachers to adopt a cultural approach to the local traditions, beliefs and wisdom dominated by Hinduism and Buddhism prior to the coming of Islam.

Instead of forcing Shari'a (Islamic law) on the community, the preachers of Islam, who are known as the nine saints, especially in Java, developed a cultural Islamic approach by accommodating certain aspects of local traditions, beliefs and wisdom. As a result, there was a process of indigenisation of Islam in Indonesia. Throughout the history of Indonesia, Muslims were able to develop mutual respect, understanding and tolerance of others. It is obvious that the development of Islam in Indonesia is different when compared to that of Islam in the Middle East.

Meanwhile Christianity came to Indonesia in the 16th century with colonialism; especially Dutch and Portuguese colonialism. The population of Christianity in Indonesia now is approximately 24 million people. The close association of Christianity with Western imperialism and colonialism has made many Muslims consider Christians as colonialists.

In fact, despite the association of Christianity with colonialism, Indonesian Christians tend to be nationalistic. Most Indonesian Christians enthusiastically joined in the struggle for independence. It is important to note that in every general election, the Catholic Council of Bishops and the Indonesian National Association of Churches have jointly issued a political statement.

The statement or declaration praises God for the Indonesian nation-state and thanks God for accompanying the Indonesian people in their struggle to realise the ideals of the 1945 Constitution of Indonesia; namely national sovereignty, justice, prosperity and peace. The declaration states that all Indonesian Christians are called by God to participate in the national elections to choose leaders who are committed to *Pancasila*, the Constitution and national ideals.

Our task as peace-lovers is to campaign and to make people realise that Islam and Christianity are two religions which carry the universal message of peace, freedom and salvation. Both are present in the midst of the peoples of the world conveying a new morality for social transformation.

Islam and Christianity are a moral force because of their metaphysical and humanist character. Islam and Christianity not only carry teachings in vertical aspect (between human beings and God) but also carry teachings which contain horizontal aspects (among human beings). So both religions respect humanity.

How to Understand Islam in Indonesia?

While many people commonly speak of Islam and Muslims in all-encompassing terms, there are many interpretations of Islam and many different Muslims. Muslims come from diverse nationalities, ethnic and tribal groups, and cultures; they speak many languages and practise distinct customs. The majority of the world's Muslims live in Asia, particularly in Indonesia, not the Arab world. Only about one in five of the world's Muslims are Arabs. The largest Muslim communities are in Asia, particularly in Indonesia. And millions of Muslims live in the US and Europe, including in Italy; they represent the second or third largest religion in all these countries.

Because of globalisation and emigration, today the major cities where Muslims live are not only exotic-sounding places such as Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, and Mecca but also London, Paris, New York and Milan. Religiously, culturally, economically, and politically, there are multiple images and realities of Islam and of Muslims.[1]

Muslim women's dress, educational and professional opportunities, and participation in society also vary significantly. Women in some Muslim

societies cannot drive cars and are sexually segregated, but women in many other parts of the Muslim world, like in Indonesia, can drive cars, ride motorcycles, and even fly planes. Some Muslim women are required by law to cover fully in public, while others are not. A growing number of women are choosing to cover their heads, while others do not. In Indonesia, Muslim women make up the majority of university students. Indonesian Muslims are convinced that gender equality and women's empowerment are consistent with Islamic values.

In other parts of the world, Muslim women lag behind men in even basic literacy. In Indonesia, Muslim women serve in government and parliaments, and even have headed governments as the president, while in other Muslim countries, women are still struggling for the right to vote and run for office.

The Religious Commitment of the Founding Fathers

Indonesia is a unique case. Despite the fact that the majority of Indonesians are Muslims, Indonesia is not an Islamic state. Indonesia's state ideology is not Islam, but is based on *Pancasila* (Five principles, namely belief in God, a just and civilised humanism, the unity of Indonesia, people's power, and social justice). These five principles are compatible with the universal values of human rights; they are also conducive to building peace within the community.

The choice of *Pancasila* as the foundation on which the state and national life is based, witnesses the victory of nationalistic Muslims and Christians; the victory of moderate Muslims and Christians in Indonesia. This fact also proves that since independence, Muslim and Christian key figures have put into practice the importance of maintaining pluralist and democratic value in the shared life of the nation of Indonesia.

This fact of pluralism should always be manifested and may not be negated in the life of the state and nation. Also the active roles played by both Christian and Muslim leading figures, especially those of the founding fathers, in embodying peace, tranquillity, inclusivism and a respect for pluralism in Indonesia, should always be borne in mind and disseminated. These two ideas are of considerable utility and can serve to generate and inspire efforts to foster peace, justice and humanity in Indonesia.

Pancasila as the Common Ground in Overcoming Prejudice

The founding fathers prepared the Indonesian constitution based on *Pancasila*. This constitution has been amended four times, yet the regulation concerning religion as stipulated in Article 29 of the 1945 Constitution has remained the same. The article reads: (1) The state is based on the Belief in One Supreme God (2) The State guarantees the freedom of each of its citizen to embrace their respective religion and to perform religious duties in accordance with their respective religion and belief. The provision of the article expressly indicates that the Indonesian state comprehensively guarantees the religious freedom of its citizens.

The thing worth underlining here is that Indonesian Christian and Muslim eminent leaders hold inclusive, moderate and tolerant dispositions. They believe in the importance of maintaining harmonious togetherness as a nation, as well as the significance of upholding human dignity and esteem regardless of differences of religion; and the importance of enforcing basic human rights, especially the right of religious freedom for all people including minority and vulnerable groups.

The endeavours made by both the Christian and Muslim communities to establish strong and solid civil society by upholding democracy, reinforcing human rights and promoting justice, including in it gender justice, have become ever more apparent. The strong inclination towards this tendency was made clear by the advent of a number of acts of legislation and public policies, such as Act Number 39 of 1999 on Human Rights. As far as religious life is concerned, this Act lays down (in Article 22): (1) Every individual is given a free choice for embracing his or her own religion and belief and for performing his or her duties in compliance with the religion or belief adhered to. (2) The state guarantees followers of any religion or belief with freedom to observe and perform religious duties in accordance with his or her religion or belief.

In addition, the commitment upheld by Indonesia has become stronger by the birth of Act Number 12 of 2005 on the Ratification of International Covenants concerning civil-political rights stipulating therein the assertion of freedom to advocate any belief.

The Problem of Law Enforcement

At the level of policy and legislation, the guarantee granted by the state for the freedom of advocating any belief in Indonesia is sufficiently adequate. The problem lies in the practical level of law enforcement. Law enforcement on all policies is to a considerable extent influenced by the socio-political situation and condition of the government within a certain period of time. Should the central government adopt strong and firm measures in the application of laws, then the implementation on all public policies will go as desired. On the other hand, if the central government adopts a weak and infirm disposition, the implementation of various laws will meet with barriers and handicaps.

In addition, other matters which have often hampered the enforcement of democracy, fulfilment of human rights, and promotion of peace and justice in Indonesia, have been related to the current economic and political gaps. The failure of the government in realising social welfare and in improving the intellectual life of the nation is the reason for certain Islamist groups resorting to committing destructive acts of vandalism. The community's desperate poverty and ignorance have often been exploited by certain groups in such a way for the pursuit of their own political and economic interests. That is indeed terrible.

It is this unfortunate condition that is alleged to have given birth to radical Muslim groups. The advent of radical Muslims is much influenced by a wide variety of factors, among others, by the failure of the government to advance the welfare of the society, especially in the development of public services, such as education and health. In the mind of this radical group, the best and most appropriate solution to step away from the prevailing problem is to bring an Islamic state into reality. Establishing an Islamic state is considered to be the only and most appropriate solution, which can bring the nation towards a better situation.

A number of conflicts related to religion and acts of violence prevailing in Indonesia are in essence not theological in nature rather they are economic and political in character. To state things firmly, those conflicts are the reflection of widespread discontent and negative reactions demonstrated by the members of a lower strata of society

towards social division and economic-political marginalisation looming large ahead of them. From a religious perspective, this condition is right. Why? Are not the biggest enemies of religion injustice exemplified in the form of poverty, backwardness, ignorance and narrow mindedness?

All religions are descended to the earth with the primary aim of providing solutions to various humanitarian problems. Those religious foes and enemies shall be terminated so as not to bring about disasters of greater magnitude and multitude in the life of society. Poverty and ignorance have made it easier to bring the less fortunate and underprivileged members of society to keep away from religion. The community's poverty and ignorance incline people to be easy prey for certain groups, from which they will take great advantage. Religious communities are always exploited in such a way that they may fight with one another and inter-religious conflicts will arise accordingly.

The Role of Islamic and Christian Organisations in Overcoming Prejudice

Every religion, no matter which it is, has four dimensions: spiritual, ritual, social, and humanist dimensions. Concerning the first dimension, spirituality is the relationship between an individual and God. Spirituality is also very private and can not be interfered with by others.

The ritual dimension usually has two aspects. First, the relationship between the individual and God, and at the same time, secondly, it is to develop a refined personality through noble acts. So there are worldly and spiritual elements. Regarding the social dimension, every religion consists of the same subject matter, but differs in the strategy and form used in promoting this subject matter.

All religions desire a peaceful, safe, prosperous, and equitable society. It is only the strategy to achieve this prosperity which is different. So between spirituality and rituals, a healthy and synergetic social element must be forged. This is like a pyramid structure. If healthy and synergetic social relations are not established, what we have is a pyramid turned on its head. All religions are almost the same with regards to human issues such as peace, justice, honesty, compassion, etc.

An interesting phenomenon from both Christian and Muslim religious communities in Indonesia is the presence of progressive or reformist groups. The groups come from the Islamic and Christian organisations, such as PGI (the Indonesian National Association of Churches), KWI (the Catholic Council of Bishops), NU and Muhammadiyah (the two big Islamic organisations in Indonesia). Besides that, there are many religious Muslim and Christian NGOs which voice the importance of peace, democracy, and human rights on behalf of religion, such as ICRP, ICIP, Wahid Institute, LSIK, LSAF, LKIS, and LP3S.

The most prestigious thing that progressive Muslims and Christians have done is the effort of reinterpreting religious teachings, despite the fact that the attempts of these groups have often received much opposition and resistance from radical groups or the groups who maintain the conservative religious values that very often make no accommodation to the reality of plurality and modernity in Indonesia.

In many cases, ICRP, an association of religious leaders of all religions and beliefs in Indonesia, which is actively involved in promoting religion for peace, demands that the government eliminate all regulations and public policies which are discriminatory against minority groups and cause ignorance of the civil rights of the citizen. Christian and Muslim prominent figures in ICRP always promote observance of civil rights for all citizens and observance of human rights, without taking account of religion, ethnicity, nationality or gender differences.

The endeavour to promote peace in the perspective of gender equality is put as the priority to be carried out by Indonesian Muslim and Christian women. They are, amongst others, associated in Islamic Women's organisations and NGOs, such as Fatayat NU, Muslimat NU, Mitra Perempuan, Perempuan PGI, Rahima, Puan Amal Hayati and Nasyiatul Aisyiyah. These organisations actively carry out training and advocacy for people, especially women. These institutions also train their cadres to develop women activists and thinkers who are progressive, inclusive and enlightened. There are also numerous Christian and Muslim women activists and intellectuals who are actively voicing democracy and gender equality in the bureaucratic state institutions and parliaments.

Promoting Interfaith Dialogue: Developing a Culture of Peace

In my experience, promoting interfaith dialogue must begin from the principle of acceptance of others. For me, this principle of acceptance of others is very important in promoting interfaith dialogue and must be instilled in society regardless of religion, ethnicity and race. Because of that, several steps need to be taken, among others:

- First, to reinterpret the religious teachings which are incompatible with the principles of humanity. Worship is no longer understood as praising God, but rather as having a profound concern for humanity's problems. Here, as much as possible, religion is pushed as a locomotive to free human beings from tyranny and all forms of discrimination, exploitation and oppression.
- Second, to increase a moderate religious understanding. The moderate groups in every religion must disseminate a "humanist outlook." It is done in order to give a different perspective on religion which facilitates tolerance and dialogue.

The forms of dialogue show not only the variety of content and the scope of the dialogues but also the quality. Besides this, the participants involved in the dialogues often exhibit different views to the goals of the dialogues. Those involved in dialogues about social issues, for example, have certainly not yet been ready to enter into a spiritual dialogue.

Therefore, interfaith dialogues are an attempt to overcome all forms of prejudice in religious society. Dialogue participants believe that up to a certain point, faith can be discussed by human beings, among human beings and communicated by language. In short, faith is dialogical. Faith is dialogical first, between God and human beings; and second among human beings.[2]

In this context, I do believe that interfaith dialogue is not only possible, but also necessary to engender an appropriate understanding of other religions. Through dialogue, each side understands the problems faced by other religions and so there emerges a feeling of sympathy and empathy which motivates a desire to work together and to overcome their problems.

In the context of the international society, the term 'culture of peace' has been echoed since 1997. In that year, the United Nations declared the Year 2000 as the "International Year of Peace," and declared that the years 2001-2010 should be "The International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World". So what do they mean by the culture of peace? The UN Resolution 1998 stated that the culture of peace is based on the principles established in the Charter of the United Nations and on respect for human rights, democracy and tolerance, the promotion of development, education for peace, the free flow of information and the wider participation of women as an integral approach to preventing violence and conflicts, and efforts aimed at the creation of conditions for peace and its consolidation.[3]

So the culture of peace is the integrated approach to prevent violent conflicts which in time will bring and maintain peace. Through the culture of peace, acts of violence can be reduced in order to establish peace between human beings and their surroundings.

In the context of developing the culture of peace, one of the basic points which should be considered is how religious communities can take active roles in building platforms for peace and tolerance. The values of universal peace and tolerance, taught in all religions, have the potential to enlighten leaders and lead followers of religions in establishing an everlasting peace, each in their own surroundings.

The problem which has to be considered is the fact that the relationship between people with different religious backgrounds is not always peaceful. Conflicts and violence related to religions can occur anywhere, including in Indonesia. However, we understand that conflicts between religions are not supported by any religion, but rather as an impact of religious identity mobilisation in the struggle between groups of people, including those who are speaking on behalf of a certain religion, in fighting for justice or in a struggle to win resources and power.

There are many forms of interfaith dialogue that can be carried out by multifaith communities. I propose a form of dialogue in action where the actions of supporters of interfaith ideologies are used to transform the community to become a more just and humanitarian society.[4] In other words, enlightenment and transformation at a per-

sonal level is not enough. Dialogue participants have to make social transformations and this transformation must be carried out across all religions.

Therefore, we can still rely on religions, as a vehicle to govern someone's individual spiritual relationship with God and social relationship with other people, to use them as a force for transformation for individuals and communities in order to gain common progress in all aspects of life, including peace, justice and welfare.

The development of the culture of peace would only be effective if it is carried out basically in the framework of achieving peace and welfare in the future. Therefore, one of the strategic factors to which we must pay close attention is how the future generation, especially the children, can understand and apply the culture of peace in their lives.

The development of the culture of peace in children is closely related to the educational activities in which they engage in their home, school, and society. So far, education in many countries still indicates some difficulties in assisting students to become whole human beings. There are many factors involved; amongst others are weak educational infrastructure (funds, human resources, curricula, etc.), and overemphasis on cognitive ability while overlooking the impact of the culture of violence which is still strong in our everyday life.

To develop the culture of peace, I recommend several critical factors to which attention needs to be paid:

- An understanding of the necessity of resolving matters regarding peace and humanity at local, national and global levels in the future, and also the role of the culture of peace in the effort to establish peace. Included within this: how far could the culture of violence in society be reduced and converted into the culture of peace.
- An understanding of how crucial is the role of education in formatting the culture of peace that children receive in home, school and society.
- The preparation of infrastructure for peace education, including the quantity and quality of human resources, supporting institutions, funds and technology.

- More commitment from countries and societies participating in forming the culture of peace. In this matter, the range of varying potential possessed in religious communities, both at national and international level, must be delivered in full towards the establishment of the culture of peace.

Developing the Culture of Peace Through Religious Education

One of the ways to develop the culture of peace is to engineer an educational system that will underpin dialogue between religions. So far, education in religion taught in school tends to be more dogmatic and focussed on rituals. Such education in religion develops a sense of absolute truth, which will not only result in denial of other religions but also a different understanding of the religion itself.

This approach to educating about religion in school underlines a literal and formalist comprehension. Such an approach will only cause the followers to be unable to act critically and with appreciation towards her or his religion and other people's religion. Therefore it is not surprising that in many religions in different countries, religious differences have caused an inability to work together in creating a social world which is comfortable for everyone.

So far an appreciation of the plurality of religions has developed well among religious elites in many countries, including in Indonesia, because they have developed a dialogue tradition and used a phenomenological approach in viewing other religions. The dialogue tradition should enable each follower of religion to act openly and develop communication with other groups. Whereas the phenomenological approach should enable followers of certain religions to understand other religions from the viewpoint of the religion concerned. Such an approach will annihilate the sense of certain religious egoism which judges other religions by their own viewpoint.

Right now, the problem is how to spread such religious attitudes to the public so that an open attitude that respects other religions can be developed not only between elites but also for everyone. Our need is how to develop a pluralist attitude as a common attitude in society so that we can create a harmonious relationship, which will bring peace to different groups of people. In a broader sense, plural-

ity also means respecting other groups with their various differences in terms of religion, ethnicity, citizenship, gender, social status and so on.

Strategically, such education in the plurality of religion must cover the following activities:

- Pedagogical activity, where a curriculum for plurality education will be researched, engineered and implemented.
- Dissemination activity, where a programme of education in religious pluralism will be communicated to stakeholders of education and wider society.
- Research and development activity, where the dynamic response by society toward violence, including relationship between religions, can be identified systematically and used for programme development;
- Policy advisory activity, where we shall make an effort to bring about a change in policies at different levels of society towards the reinforcement of plurality in religion, which in the end will bring peace, justice and welfare for all of God's creation.

As a conclusion, let me say that peace education is one of the ways to develop the culture of peace in promoting interfaith dialogue. Such educational programmes for pluralism in religion must be developed in the light of the fact that current educational systems for religion taught in schools are ideological, absolutistic and formalist.

Finally, the tradition to develop a dialogue between religions and to take a phenomenological approach in viewing other religions must be intensified. Why? Because it will enable each religious person to act openly and to develop communication with other groups and help them to understand constructively about other religions. Educational programmes for pluralism in religion will also intensify our appreciation of differences of religion, ethnicity, citizenship, gender, social status and other differences that we find in our everyday lives.

Recommendations and Solutions

It can be concluded that Indonesia is unique. Indonesian Christian and Muslim communities are intensely influenced by local culture which is tolerant, open and inclusive, as well as respecting humanity.

The Indonesian Muslim community is different to those of other areas, especially the Middle East. The Indonesian Muslim community has a long experience of living together – side by side – with people with different religions. The founding fathers of this country respected humanity and were active in efforts to overcome prejudice and campaign for justice and peace.

Now, what should be done by all Muslims and Christians as their important contribution to the civilisation of peace? I propose three concrete actions as follows:

First, Muslims and Christians work together to continue the efforts of cultural reconstruction through education in its widest sense, particularly education in family life. These efforts need to be implemented because a culture of peace, respect, tolerance and inclusivity cannot emerge naturally and spontaneously in society, instead it must be arranged in such a way through the education system. Why is it important? To reduce prejudice in society, children must be taught to embrace multiculturalism. A few researches found that prejudice and bias are often learned in childhood. So education is a means to a harmonious multicultural society. Multicultural education can shield people from the negative effects of globalisation. Multicultural education promotes the universal values of religion which teach peace and justice, and promote human dignity. I believe that the implementation of multicultural education will be very useful for a diverse country like Indonesia.

Second, Muslims and Christians work together to continue the efforts of law reform. We have to reform some laws and public policies which are not conducive to the establishment of peace and justice as well as the upholding of human rights.

Third, Muslims and Christians work together to continue efforts for the renewal of religious interpretation. Current interpretation, as widely practised in the Muslim community, is not at all compatible with the principles of human rights, particularly women's rights and gender equality. So we have to propose a new interpretation of religion which is more conducive to promoting peace and justice, and upholding human rights. It is this type of interpretation which will lead us to eliminate all forms of prejudice, hatred and violence.

1| *John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, Who Speaks for Islam? New York: Gallup Press, 2007, p.2.*

2| *Komarudin Hidayat, Dialog Antar Iman (Inter-faith Dialog), in Tragedi Raja Miras: Moralitas Agama dan Krisis Modernisme, Jakarta: Paramadina, 1998, p.189.*

3| *The United Nations A/Res/52/13, 15 January 1998, paragraph 2.*

4| *B.J. Banawiratma, SJ, Bersama Saudara-Saudari Beriman Lain (Together With Brother and Sister in Faith), Dialog: Kritik dan Identitas Agama (Dialog: Criticism and Religious Identity), Yogyakarta: Dian/Interfidei, 1993, p. 26-7.*

A Common Word in Pakistani Context

James Channan OP

First, I express my gratitude to the organisers for putting emphasis on Sub-Saharan Africa and South and South-East Asia; the areas where the number and influence of Christian and Muslim communities has increased significantly. Their evaluation of the "Open Letter and Call of Muslim Religious Leaders" the so-called Letter of 138, published by the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute of Islamic Thought in Amman, Jordon, written on 13 October 2007, is very important. The Muslims and Christians of these areas have an important role to play in bringing peace and harmony in the world. It will help to improve mutual relations between Christians and Muslims in these areas and also it will have a positive impact on the entire world. Christians and Muslims have a lot in common and to offer one another for the betterment of humanity. There are also our differences, as Prof. Syed Hossein Nasr said in Rome, which have providentially kept Christianity and Islam distinct and separate. However when the common elements are recognised, appreciated and collaborate with one another, they can play a significant role in promoting peace and interfaith harmony in the world. I am sure that by coming together in Cadenabbia from Asia and Africa our meeting will bear many positive results for building good will and good relations among the followers of these religions.

When we look at the numerical and political situation of Muslims and Christians in South and South-East Asian countries, we find that there is a great diversity. In some countries, Muslims are in the majority and Christians are a small minority, such as in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei etc. In other countries, Christians are in the majority and Muslims are a minority, such as in the Philippines and East Timor. While in several other countries, both Muslims and Christians are in the minority, such as in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Vietnam, Singapore, Thailand, China, Japan and Taiwan etc. Christians and Muslims are present throughout the Asian continent. On the whole Christianity remains a minority in Asia with around 3% of the total population, and Muslims are many more than Christians. However encounter, positive

understanding, interfaith dialogue and respect between them and respect for the differences among them are very important for peace in Asia and in fact in the world.

Evaluation and Remarks About the Open Letter

A letter entitled "*A Common Word* Between Us and You" (ACW) signed by 138 prominent Muslim scholars and religious leaders was sent to Pope Benedict XVI and several other Christian religious leaders around the world. This letter was sent at a crucial time when some misunderstandings between Christians and Muslims developed after the lecture of Pope Benedict in Regensburg, Germany, delivered on 12 September 2006. The quotation used by the Pope in his lecture in Regensburg caused unrest among some Muslims in the world. Some Muslims felt offended, while a few other Muslims perceived it to be a step backward in Christian-Muslim dialogue which had developed for the past number of decades, especially since the Second Vatican Council.

ACW was timely and brought a message of healing and reconciliation. It was written so as to build a strong bridge of understanding between Christians and Muslims. It offers a big step forward that we must get out of the age of polemics and enter into the age of mutual understanding and dialogue. It sets a tone of tolerance and respect for the religious beliefs and practices of the other. The differences should also be respected. It carries an initiative and positive approach based on the love of God and love of neighbour; such an emphasis was never placed so strongly in the past 1400 years. These concepts are based on the sacred scriptures and traditions of Christianity and Islam. It provides a guideline on the common word between Christianity and Islam.

ACW is a concrete response from the Muslims to the initiative taken by the Catholic Church, particularly by the Second Vatican Council and by the Secretariat for Non-Christians in Rome, which later on became the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue. Also a step forward from what Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II had been and Pope Benedict XVI is doing to bring harmony, respect and dialogue among brothers and sister of various religions. We are also aware that there has been a dialogue between Christians and Muslims from the 7th century. There have been clashes as well.

It is a fact that in our time Muslims and Christians cannot afford to ignore one another. Christians are 2.3 billion and form 35% of the world population, and Muslims are 1.5 billion and comprise 20% thereof. Together they are over half of the world population, at 55%. The urgent need for dialogue at all levels of life has been rightly emphasised by both Christians and Muslims, especially by religious leaders, scholars, human rights' activists and promoters of peace and interfaith dialogue. The United Nations is also playing an important role and making a lot of effort in bringing harmony and positive understanding, collaboration and mutual respect among religions for the betterment of humanity. The UN has declared 2009 the Year of Reconciliation. This positive understanding of one another's religion plays an integral role in solving the issues and challenges which are faced by humanity, especially during this 21st century. There are the issues of hunger, poverty, illiteracy, refugees and internally displaced people. There is the issue of the violation of human rights and the dignity of the human person. There is religiously-motivated violence in some South Asian countries. There is the issue of discrimination on the basis of caste, colour, sex and religion. In some countries there is a strong wave of fanaticism, extremism and militancy. In Pakistan, the rise of terrorism, the Taliban and militancy have put the stability of the country at stake and these things have brought a lot of misery, uncertainty and fear among the people. Suicide bombings and terrorist attacks are common, which have resulted in the killing of thousands of innocent people and have caused grave pain and concern, not only for Pakistan but for the entire world as well. In such a situation, our liberal/secular-minded and moderate citizens, and particularly religious minorities, feel very insecure and look to the government to provide protection for their lives, property, religious freedom and dignity. The Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Baha'i and Zoroastrian religious minorities in Pakistan are going through this kind of fear and uncertainty. Some of them have opted to leave their homeland to save their lives and have sought asylum in Europe, Australia, Canada and USA.

There is a danger of the spread of such types of extremism in some other countries as well. There is a lack of religious freedom in some countries of Asia. I believe that if Christians and Muslims will join together, they can fight against these issues. They will be able to create a more human world. There will be peace in the world and the love of God and love of neighbour will be put into practice.

This Open Letter and Call from the Muslim religious leaders and scholars to Christian religious leaders on the topic of "*A Common Word* between Us and You" appeared at an appropriate time to create more positive understanding among Christians and Muslims. The theme of the love of God and love of neighbour in Islam and Christianity is well chosen. Love of God and love of neighbour are fundamental teachings and beliefs both for Christians and Muslims. It is the first time in history that such a theme has been brought up so strongly to provide a firm foundation for Christian-Muslim dialogue.

This Open Letter starts with a positive note and the basic teachings of Islam and Christianity, focussing on the love of God and love of neighbour. For example on the love of God, the letter gives the following quotations from the Holy Qur'an.

He hath no associate, reminds Muslims that they must love God uniquely, without rivals within their souls, since God says in the Holy Qur'an: Yet there are men who take rivals unto God: they love them as they should love God. But those of faith are more intense in their love for God …. (Al-Baqarah, 2:165). Indeed, [T]heir flesh and their hearts soften unto the remembrance of God … (Al-Zumar, 39:23).

And that Muslims should be truly grateful to him in loving God is the forgiveness of sins: Say, (O Muhammad, to mankind): If ye love God, follow me; God will love you and forgive you your sins. God is Forgiving, Merciful. (Aal 'Imran, 3:31)

This Open Letter also give quotations from the Holy Bible that the love of God is the first and greatest commandment.

The Shema in the Book of Deuteronomy (6:4-5), a centrepiece of the Old Testament and of Jewish liturgy, says: Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! / You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.

Likewise, in the New Testament, when Jesus Christ, the Messiah, is asked about the greatest commandment, he answers:

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. / Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, / "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" / Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' / This is the first and greatest commandment. / And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' / On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:34-40)

On the love of the neighbour the Open Letter gives several references from Islam such as,

There are numerous injunctions in Islam about the necessity and paramount importance of love for – and mercy towards – the neighbour. Love of the neighbour is an essential and integral part of faith in God and love of God because in Islam without love of the neighbour there is no true faith in God and no righteousness. The Prophet Muhammad [May God bless him and grant him peace] said: "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."

While writing on the love of neighbour in the Bible, the Open Letter says,

We have already cited the words of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, about the paramount importance, second only to the love of God, of the love of the neighbour:

This is the first and greatest commandment. / And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' / On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 22:38-40)

And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:31)

So *A Common Word* between us is that there is one God and we should love God with all our heart, soul and mind. To love God is

the first and greatest of commandments. There is also freedom of religion mentioned in the Qur'an, "Let there be no compulsion in religion". (Q. 2:256)

In this letter there is a recognition that Muslims are not against Christians. The letter says,

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, (in accordance with the verse of the Holy Qur'an). (Al-Mumtahinah, 60:8)

This letter also proposes that Christians can interpret in the light of the Holy Gospels that Muslims are not against them. The letter gives the following quotations from the holy gospels.

In the Gospel Jesus Christ [Peace be with him] says:
He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters abroad. (Matthew 12:30)
For he who is not against us is on our side. (Mark 9:40)
… for he who is not against us is on our side. (Luke 9:50)

The Open Letter invites Christians, in the light of the above verses to consider Muslims not against them. There is an invitation to come together on common essentials of the two great religions: Christianity and Islam. The common ground is very strong: making the relationship between these two religious communities the most important factor in contributing to meaningful peace around the world. The letter rightly concludes that, "If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace." It is very true that Muslims and Christians have an important role to play for world peace. If they are not at peace with one another, there cannot be peace in the world. There are 57 Muslim countries and, as mentioned earlier, Muslims and Christians together make up 55% of the world's population.

This Open Letter, as the Final Statement from Yale University, puts it,

addressed by Muslim leaders to Christian leaders – began with a desire by Muslim leaders to follow the Qur'anic commandment to speak to Christians and Jews, says:

"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." (3:64). The intention behind A Common Word is not to foist the theology of one religion upon another or to attempt conversion. Neither does it seek to reduce both our religions to an artificial union based upon the Two Commandments."

This is a very important point; to discern that it is not for the conversion of the other nor does it reduce our religions to an artificial union. Christianity and Islam are missionary religions; in favour of evangelisation and *daw'a*. These are an integral part of their mission to invite other people to join their religion. This should also carry on. However, such conversions are not the aim of this type of dialogue. Conversion of the heart is needed to reach out to the other for mutual respect and understanding. In the approach of ACW, the differences are respected and a positive understanding and appreciation is sought from each other. Both Christians and Muslims share a common ground which is the love of God and love of neighbour, described in the two greatest commandments of the Gospel, rooted in the Torah, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind', and, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' The Yale Statement, being a response of 500 Christian leaders, says that this common ground is real and is a basis for dialogue between our two religions. It is a part of our common Abrahamic heritage.

Such an understanding, when studied in the South and South-East Asian context, can bear a lot of positive results. For that there is a grave need to bring Muslim and Christian scholars of this area to a joint conference and study these concepts. There is a need of an open-mindedness and honesty to discuss a range of theological issues. The theological issues discussed, as the Yale Statement puts it, included different understandings of the Unity of God, of Jesus Christ and his passion, and of the love of God. It is also important to discuss the practical issues with which we are confronted, such as poverty, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the situation in Palestine and Israel, the dangers of further wars and freedom of religion.

In the existing situation of South Asia it will be important to include in these issues the war in Afghanistan, war against terrorism, and radical Islamists and the Taliban in Pakistan. The issue, of 60 years'

duration, of Kashmir, in which over 85,000 people have been killed, cannot be ignored. We can also address the issues of poverty, hunger, illiteracy, internally displaced people and refugees. The sufferings of religious minorities and violence carried out against the Christian minority in Pakistan and both Muslim and Christian minorities in India for instance, can be discussed in the search for possible remedies. The violation of human rights and human dignity can also be discussed. The Yale Statement has agreed that,

We recognise that all human beings have the right to the preservation of life, religion, property, intellect, and dignity. No Muslim or Christian should deny the other these rights, nor should they tolerate the denigration or desecration of one another's sacred symbols, founding figures, or places of worship.

Although Christianity and Islam are different religions, the two commandments are an area of common ground and a link between the Qur'an, Torah and the New Testament. In the Qur'an, God Most High tells Muslims to issue a call of *A Common Word* to Christians (and Jews – the People of the Scripture). Both believe in the unity of God and worship him. There is no intention to make one religion out of the two. There is an element of respect for the identity of the other's religion and that they worship the same God. As the Yale Statement puts it, "The intention behind *A Common Word* is not to foist the theology of one religion upon another or to attempt conversion. Neither does it seek to reduce both our religions to an artificial union based upon the Two Commandments." This letter also brings this out strongly when it states,

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, in accordance with the verse of the Holy Qur'an (Al-Mumtahinah, 60:8).

This letter brings out the point of religious freedom, "Let there be no compulsion in religion…" (Q. 2:256). The love of God and love of neighbour are made common ground of all future interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims – this is common ground on which hangs *all the Law and the Prophets (*Matthew 22:40). This dialogue between Muslims and Christians is not, as the letter states,

a matter for polite ecumenical dialogue between selected religious leaders. Christianity and Islam are the largest and second largest religions in the world and in history. Christians and Muslims reportedly make up over a third and over a fifth of humanity respectively… If Christians and Muslims are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace.

There is a respect for the differences and not to look down upon the other because of the difference.

So let our differences not cause hatred and strife between us. Let us vie with each other only in righteousness and good works. Let us respect each other, be fair, just and kind to another and live in sincere peace, harmony and mutual goodwill.

This Open Letter is taken positively and seriously both by the Christians and Muslims. It calls for and invites a renewal and intensification of Christian-Muslim dialogue. The fact that this letter has been discussed by various universities and groups manifests how important and significant it is to study this Open Letter and move forward with positive thinking for promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue. The theological faculty of Yale University organised a workshop and conference on *A Common Word* 24-31 July 2008, followed by "*A Common Word* Conference" at the University of Cambridge from 12-15 October 2008, with the Opening Address by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the colloquium organised by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in Rome from 4-6 November 2008, in which Pope Benedict XVI addressed the participants, and now this International Conference on Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Cadenabbia, Italy 1-4 October 2009. I anticipate that many more conferences will be organised on the theme of *A Common Word*.

This understanding and concept of the love God and love of neighbour in Christianity and Islam are well summarised and presented in the final declaration of the first seminar of the Catholic-Muslim Forum, in Rome 4-6 November 2008. In this declaration we read,

For Christians the source and example of love of God and neighbour is the love of Christ for his Father, for humanity and for each person. 'God is Love' (1 Jn 4, 16) and "God so loved the world that He gave

his only Son so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3,16). God's love is placed in the human heart through the Holy Spirit. It is God who first loves us thereby enabling us to love Him in return. Love does not harm one's neighbour but rather seeks to do to the other what one would want done to oneself (Cf. 1 Cor 13, 4-7). Love is the foundation and sum of all the commandments (Cf. Gal 5, 14). Love of neighbour cannot be separated from love of God, because it is an expression of our love for God. This is the new commandment, 'Love one another as I have loved you.' (Jn 15, 12) Grounded in Christ's sacrificial love, Christian love is forgiving and excludes no one; it therefore also includes one's enemies. It should be not just words but deeds (Cf. 1 Jn, 4, 18). This is the sign of its genuineness.

For Muslims, as set out in A Common Word, love is a timeless transcendent power which guides and transforms human mutual regard. This love, as indicated by the Holy and Beloved Prophet Muhammad, is prior to the human love for the One True God. A Hadith indicates that God's loving compassion for humanity is even greater than that of a mother for her child (Muslim, Bab al-Tawba: 21); it therefore exists before and independently of the human response to the One who is 'The Loving'. So immense is this love and compassion that God has intervened to guide and save humanity in a perfect way many times and in many places, by sending prophets and scriptures. The last of these books, the Qur'an, portrays a world of signs, a marvellous cosmos of Divine artistry, which calls forth our utter love and devotion, so that 'those who have faith, have most love of God' (2:165), and 'those that believe, and do good works, the Merciful shall engender love among them.' (19:96) In a Hadith we read that 'Not one of you has faith until he loves for his neighbour what he loves for himself'. (Bukhari, Bab al-Iman: 13). (§ 1)

In these paragraphs we note how the love of God and love of neighbour are understood by Christians and Muslims. Their understanding is different on the love of God and how he manifests it. The difference of understanding and interpretation must be respected. This is important to manifest and declare in our Christian-Muslim relations in Asia. This is also so in the light of what Pope Benedict XVI emphasised when he addressed the participants of the Catholic-Muslim Forum in Rome on 6 November 2008. His Holiness said,

I am well aware that Muslims and Christians have different approaches in matters regarding God. Yet we can and must be worshippers of the one God who created us and is concerned about each person in every corner of the world. Together we must show, by our mutual respect and solidarity, that we consider ourselves members of one family: the family that God has loved and gathered together from the creation of the world to the end of human history.

The same declaration also brings several other points which are relevant to the situation of Muslims and Christians in Asia, for example when it says, "Human life is a most precious gift of God to each person. It should be preserved and honoured." Yes it is important to preserve and honour human life. It challenges us to work with much more zeal to bring this concept into our situation, for example in Pakistan. If it enters into the minds of the people there will be no more killing of innocent people. There will be no more suicide attacks and bomb explosions. There will no more public lashing of women by the Taliban. Men will not be forced to grow beards and women will be respected and will be free to play their full role for the betterment of society. Such teaching of the Holy Qur'an and Holy Bible needs to get into the minds of the fanatics and militants: to love God and love your neighbour. If these teachings get across to all Muslims and Christians, then there will be a great respect for one's own life and the life of the other as well. So it is important to get these ideas across to those people who have a narrow understanding and interpretation of their religion.

This type of approach is connected with the next point of this Rome Declaration that, "Human dignity is derived from the fact that every human person is created by God and has been endowed with the gifts of reason and free will, and therefore, enabled to love God and others. Respect for the human dignity of all, both male and female." This is another important factor; that all human persons are respected and equal opportunities are provided to them, to make use of their talents which are given by God. Pope Benedict XVI in his address said,

I was pleased to learn that you were able at this meeting to adopt a common position on the need to worship God totally and to love our fellow men and women disinterestedly, especially those in distress and need. God calls us to work together on behalf of the victims of disease, hunger, injustice and violence.

Yet another point in the declaration is relevant when we speak of the love of God and love of our neighbour; this is to respect every person who is around us and that there should not be any discrimination in the name of religion. It is a fact that in some countries there is discrimination in the name of religion. The Rome Declaration says,

Religious minorities are entitled to be respected in their own religious convictions and practices. They are also entitled to their own places of worship, and their founding figures and symbols they consider sacred. Both Catholics and Muslims are called to be the instruments of love and harmony among religions, and for humanity as a whole.

This will help to overcome violence and terrorism, with which we are faced in some countries. It is a fact that in some countries of Asia, such as Pakistan and India, the places of worship of minorities have been desecrated, houses burnt, believers killed and schools belonging to minorities have been destroyed by the militants. There is a need to work together against such aggression and religiously motivated violence.

In the Rome Declaration we read,

We profess that Catholics and Muslims are called to be instruments of love and harmony among believers, and for humanity as a whole, renouncing any oppression, aggressive violence and terrorism, especially that committed in the name of religion, and upholding the principle of justice for all. (§ 11)

There is another important point to improve the situation and join hands to overcome poverty, promote the just distribution of food and thus overcome hunger. The Declaration continues,

We call upon believers to work for an ethical financial system in which the regulatory mechanisms consider the situation of the poor and disadvantaged, both as individuals, and as indebted nations. We call upon the privileged of the world to consider the plight of those afflicted most severely by the current crisis in food production and distribution, and ask religious believers of all denominations and all people of good will to work together to alleviate the suffering of the hungry, and to eliminate its causes. (§ 12)

Some Suggestions, Recommendations and Future Plans

There is an invitation to prepare young people and give them formation in such a way that they know about their own religion and other religions as well; we emphasise this a lot in Pakistan. The future of the world rests in the hands of young people. They must be formed in such a way that there is respect for all and room for the religious freedom of each human person. We have been stressing a lot in this regard that in Pakistan our curricula should be such as to promote interfaith harmony, peace and respect for all. In the Rome Declaration we read,

Young people are the future of religious communities and of societies as a whole. Increasingly, they will be living in multicultural and multi-religious societies. It is essential that they be well formed in their own religious traditions and well informed about other cultures and religions. (§ 13)

In the Open Letter, there is a strong mention of justice for all,

God says in the Holy Qur'an: Lo! God enjoineth justice and kindness, and giving to kinsfolk, and forbiddeth lewdness and abomination and wickedness. He exhorteth you in order that ye may take heed (Al Nahl, 16:90). Jesus Christ [Peace be with him] said: Blessed are the peacemakers ….(Matthew 5:9), and also: For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? (Matthew 16:26).

In Pakistan it is imperative to work for the safeguarding of human rights and the human dignity of all. There are Muslim and Christian groups which are already working for human rights, peace and justice. There are some groups which work jointly, such as the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. There are groups working for the rights of women, such as Women Action Forum. There are organisations which are active for the rights of workers and labourers, and to eliminate child labour. There are other organisations that are vocal against discriminatory laws in the country, e.g. the Joint Action Committee (JAC).

In this conference we have two well-known Muslim scholars, human rights' activists, promoters of peace, inter-faith and Christian-Muslim

dialogue from Pakistan: Mr Abid Hasan Minto and Mr Kazy Javed Hussain. They are and will be contributing immensely to promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue in Pakistan and in the rest of the world. They can also play a great role in bringing ACW to reach out to others, especially Muslim scholars and intellectuals.

There is a need to make the ACW Open Letter and the various responses to it better known to the general public; so far they are not. They should be known by university faculties focused on the world religions and interfaith dialogue. The Vatican documents, such as *Nostra Aetate* and speeches of the recent and current Popes and the documents published by the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue and the World Council of Churches on inter-religious dialogue should also be made available and translated into different languages so that they can reach the general public. There could also be talk-shows on television channels and the public forums of various newspapers on this topic. The youth can also be involved to study these documents and write articles on them.

The government of Pakistan has established the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. There is a Ministry of Minorities Affairs, established by the government of Pakistan. Last year a Christian, Mr Shahbaz Bhatti, was appointed as Federal Minister for Minorities' Affairs. He is working to bring equality among all citizens. Recently a 5% quota was reserved for the minorities in all spheres of life. Addressing a convention for solidarity with the minorities on 28 May 2009 in Islamabad, Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gillani said, "A Minorities Commission had been set up to protect rights of minorities and asked them to ensure implementation of five percent quota for minorities in the government services." Mr Gillani also said that interreligious harmony needs to be promoted as, with greater understanding, the country would be strengthened and be able to face the challenges that present themselves. In the same convention, Mr Gillani announced that an interfaith complex would soon be set up in Islamabad to serve as a centre to work for interfaith harmony.

There are several organisations that are working to promote interfaith harmony and peace. The National Commission for Interfaith Dialogue and Ecumenism of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Pakistan (NCIDE) has been active for the last 25 years to promote interfaith

and Christian-Muslim Dialogue. The Minhaj ul-Qur'an of Dr Tahir ul-Qadri has established the Muslim-Christian Dialogue Forum. The Pakistan Association of Inter-religious Dialogue (PAIRD) is active for the past 25 years. The United Religions Initiative (URI) is another organisation that has been working since 1998 to promote dialogue, reconciliation and peace among religions and cultures at all levels of life; particularly at grassroots levels. The URI has established over 37 groups in the country for youth, children, men and women, to educate them for Christian-Muslim and interreligious dialogue. It has arranged programmes on the International Day of Peace for people of various religions and from various walks of lives. The electronic and print media are also playing an active role.

It is also true that at this moment my country, Pakistan, is going through a crucial time with over three million people being internally displaced. They were forced to leave their homes due to the military operation against the Taliban and militants in the Swat Valley. The Taliban have a radical and narrow interpretation of the Islamic Shari'a. They want to impose the strictest form of Islam. They are not in favour of the education of women. They are against any social, political or media role for women in public life. Towards that end, they have destroyed over 150 girls' schools with bombs and over 100 boys' schools as well. They are against the shrines of saints and mystics and thus have destroyed shrines of famous sufi mystics and poets, such as that of Rehman Baba. One reason that they gave was that women go to these shrines and seek the intercession of saints, therefore these shrines should be destroyed. They levied the *jizya* tax on minorities. They do not accept parliament and are totally against democracy. These militants disregard the high courts and the Supreme Court and want to bring in their own *qadis* (judges). The Pakistan nation as a whole, and in particular civil society and liberal minded people, have strongly reacted against this form of Islamisation and the Taliban. They staged rallies and addressed press conferences to condemn their form of interpretation of the Qur'an and Islamic Shari'a. The minorities have joined them. In such a situation, it is important that Muslim religious leaders play a role to bring about positive change in the society based on the love of God and love of neighbour to save this nation from the grip of the Taliban and extremists. In my opinion these extremists need to be educated in schools and colleges and be opened up towards modern sciences and the world.

The government of Pakistan has started a military operation, *Rahe Rast*, against these militants and has succeeded to a great extent. A large number of internally displaced people have started returning to their homes in Swat and other places. The girls' and boys' schools are being re-opened and the Taliban chased away (about 2,000 of them killed and many arrested). The bold step of the government and army action against these militants has brought relief to the public in general. There is no need and there is no room for such kind of radicalism in our country.

There is a strong wave of promoting interfaith dialogue in the country. Several students from Islamabad University, Quaid-e-Azam University, Karachi University and Forman College University, Lahore are doing research on interfaith and Christian-Muslim dialogue. The faculties of religion have taken interfaith dialogue as an integral part of their studies. The professors of these universities have invited Christian scholars and advocates of interfaith and Christian-Muslim dialogue into the universities to give lectures to the staff and students. They have realised that dialogue is a dire necessity at the stage of history through which we are going. It is a good step towards bringing harmony and understanding among Christians and Muslims, and to know exactly the beliefs of the other; thus to respect the differences and work jointly for the issues with which our countries are faced. Dialogue at all levels, such as the dialogue of life, the dialogue of development works, the dialogue of religious experience and the dialogue of words between scholars, is of prime importance.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference Pakistan and Major Superiors' Leadership Conference Pakistan issued a Joint Statement on 12 November 2008. It was issued in response to the strong wave of terrorism and extremism with which our country is confronted. The statement says:

Realizing that this has created complex difficulties in all walks of life, it was also realized that we are called to be signs of hope for all. In order to be so, we have decided to take the following concrete steps:

- Promote faith formation of our communities through catechesis, Bible studies, prayer by means of media and train our lay-leaders.

- Organise awareness programs in Parishes, Institutions, families etc in order to bring about peace, harmony and better understanding among diverse faith communities.
- Work for inter-religious dialogue of life and ecumenism.

In the light of this statement we see the Catholic Church in Pakistan is committed to promoting peace, harmony and inter-religious dialogue.

The Church of Pakistan Bishops (Protestant) are also on the front-line in promoting peace and harmony among religions. The Rt Revd Dr Alexander John Malik, Bishop of Lahore, and the Rt Revd Samuel Robert Azriah, Bishop of Raiwind and Moderator of the Church of Pakistan, have established inter-religious dialogue committees. They are ardent promoters of Christian-Muslim, inter-religious and ecumenical dialogue.

In September 2009, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Pakistan, and Bishops of the Church of Pakistan along with the Major Superiors' Leadership Conference of Pakistan and several other small churches established the Pakistan Christian Action Forum to address the present wave of violence against Christians in various cities such as Gojra, Korian Wala, Bamni Wala and Sambarial. In several, there was religiously motivated violence against Christians from June to September 2009, seven Christians were burnt alive, including women and children, and over 300 houses of Christians and churches have been destroyed in mob hysteria following the false accusation of blasphemy and desecration of the Holy Qur'an. The Pakistan Action Forum is determined to bring healing between Christians and Muslims and make our society a more humane one, where every person is respected.

The Pakistan nation on the whole is in favour of democracy and being a democratic state. Significant numbers of the citizens of Pakistan have always voted in favour of liberal or secular parties and rejected religious political parties. These religious political parties have managed to get only a few seats in the parliament. The public of Pakistan in general is scared of the hardliners and militants. The general public want to breathe in a free, liberal and secular Pakistan. The so-called religious parties have been creating hurdles in the progress and prosperity of the country. This is what

has happened to Pakistan since the 9/11 incident. The radicals have carried out many terrorist attacks on public places, institutes, police and military academies and head quarters.

It would be great if this Open Letter could be translated into various languages in Pakistan, such as Urdu, Sindhi, Balochi, Pushto and Punjabi. There is an attempt to translate it into Urdu but it is necessary to do it properly. There is a need to make this letter available to the general public. It would be great if it could also be published in our newspapers and made known on the electronic media. As there are several interfaith groups working in the country, this letter can guide us to get to know each other better and promote interfaith harmony between Christians and Muslims.

This Open Letter is not known to the public in general. Therefore I would strongly recommend that this Open Letter should be made known to a wide range of readers. It would be good if we take the initiative and organise seminars and workshops on this theme. It would also be a great help to Muslims and Christians to collaborate with one another, to bring these themes to conferences. The content of this letter could also become part of the curriculum of schools, *madrasas,* colleges and universities. It would also be good to form groups of religious leaders, scholars, students, intellectuals and promoters of peace and interfaith harmony to study this document and make it known to the general public. Such a document could also be discussed during television shows and in newspaper forums.

Muslims and Christians together can fight against the issues they are faced with in our region, such as poverty, illiteracy, religious freedom and human dignity. Pope Benedict XVI said in his speech to the delegates of the Common Word Conference in Rome on 6 November 2008.

My hope, once again, is that these fundamental human rights will be protected for all people everywhere. Political and religious leaders have the duty of ensuring the free exercise of these rights in full respect for each individual's freedom of conscience and freedom of religion.

The Holy Father, Pope Benedict further said that,

The discrimination and violence which even today religious people experience throughout the world, and the often violent persecutions to which they are subject, represent unacceptable and unjustified acts, all the more grave and deplorable when they are carried out in the name of God. God's name can only be a name of peace and fraternity, justice and love.

The Holy Father has challenged us to spread the message of harmony and mutual understanding by saying,

We are challenged to demonstrate, by our words and above all by our deeds, that the message of our religions is unfailingly a message of harmony and mutual understanding.

It would be great to make a network of scholars from the South and South-East Asia region and have conferences, seminars and workshops on this topic. It would be good to identify funds for this purpose so that harmony, Christian-Muslim dialogue and peace are promoted.

Let the outcome and statements of the conferences in Yale, Cambridge, Rome and Cadenabbia be made available to the general public. It will certainly remove a lot of misconceptions and trust will be built.

It would be helpful to establish Christian-Muslim dialogue groups at continental, national and provincial levels in Asia, to work jointly on social, economic, religious and political problems.

There is a grave need to establish Christian-Muslim dialogue and peace centres in our countries. These will offer research facilities and organise programmes to promote dialogue among Muslims and Christians at all levels of life.

The Dominican friars in Pakistan have started the construction of a Peace Centre in Lahore. It will be completed by mid-2010. It will be the first Peace Centre in the Archdiocese of Lahore and most probably in Pakistan as well. This centre is being built to hold seminars, conferences and workshops on inter-religious dialogue and peace. It will also be a place to publish articles and brochures on creating good will, tolerance and positive understanding among

people of various religions, especially Christians and Muslims. The International Day of Peace celebrations will be held in it as well. There will be programmes and seminars for youth, women and children, as well as with media personnel, religious scholars and human rights activities. This Peace Centre will be interlinked with other organisations and groups at national and international levels which are working for similar aims and objectives. I am planning to organise and host an international conference on ACW next year in this Peace Centre.

In conclusion, I would like to state that I am sure that in the light of the Open Letter and positive responses from various parts of the world, from religious leaders and scholars alike, there will be a change in society. There will be a positive change in the attitude of Muslims and Christians, and if they had negative attitudes towards one another, this letter and its responses will help to concentrate more on what unites us rather than what divides us.

Part II

COMMENTS AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVE

General Introduction

C. T. R. Hewer

The eight keynote papers were circulated in advance to all participants, who were in turn requested to write comments, which were sent out to all those attending so that our discussions could begin in the most informed manner. These comments varied in length, with some being focused on the details of the keynote papers and others being more discursive. Five of these comments are here reproduced in full with named authors. The main points of the remainder are summarised in the following paragraphs, with attention being given to generality rather than a minute discussion of the issues raised in the keynote papers.

There was a general welcome for ACW as the initiative of a group of Muslim scholars, although the fact that many from the original group of 138 had not been conspicuous in their efforts to make its message known in their own communities or reach out to local Christian leaders or communities was noted. There was a widespread ignorance of the existence and contents of ACW reported from around the major areas of Muslim and Christian habitation represented by participants. It was particularly noteworthy that the document seemed to be unknown in seminaries and *madrasas*, as well as amongst local and regional religious leaders. If the message is to reach a wider audience, then a strategy needs to be developed to see it translated into regional languages and advocated in a structured way.

The lack of structured follow-up and practical outcomes towards which people could work in ACW was noted by some commentators as a "weakness" and by others as a "limitation". If it is to have any lasting impact, then it would need to be taken up by academics and religious leaders, on the one hand, and at the grass-roots level, on the other. No practical methodologies for doing this were forthcoming. There is a serious need for discussions to be opened up around the ethical themes of ACW between religious communities and secular societies, and also to broaden the scope of the religions involved, to include Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and followers of Traditional Religions. The natural social plurality in matters of religion, dominant

over centuries in the areas from which participants were drawn, was seen as a strength to be shared more widely. Within this context, in addition to the examples given in the keynote papers, particular attention could be drawn to the *pancasila* philosophy in Indonesia and the ability of African extended families to embrace the multiple religious affiliations of their members.

Two key elements in a way forward emerged: media and personal relationships. The impact of the media on matters relating to Christians and Muslims around the world was seen as a decisive factor, both in areas directly reached by the mass media and in those where their impact was discernable in a more remote way. Getting to know people personally and working with them in a relational way was highlighted as being all-important if progress is to be made. The very title of this publication gives vent to the dominant comment on ACW itself; there is a fundamental lack of emphasis given to justice, as a characteristic of God, an overarching ethical theme, a practical tool to set and assess targets, and as the grounding to transform ACW into a vehicle of change within Muslim and Christian communities worldwide.

The political situation of the areas from which the conference participants were drawn is well documented in the papers themselves. Two themes from the comments are worthy of particular notice: political structures and the relationship of religion and state. A common feature in the countries represented from Africa and Asia is that in recent decades they have emerged from periods of European colonial rule. One of the consequences of this process has been the maelstrom of forms of government with varying degrees of corruption. Many countries are still working through the effects of rule by the post-colonial elites, who were left in place at independence, in others, governments can be seen in terms of their military, tribal or feudal characteristics. The concomitant socio-economic situation of people can often be dressed in religious garb and is subject to malevolent manipulation.

The relationship of religion and state is a perennially controverted one, as the history of Europe alone can testify. The separation of both can take different forms and thus the terms "secular, secularity and secularism" are multivalent in their meanings. Voices were raised on this subject in the comments from a variety of contexts

and the Indian "secular neutrality of the state in matters of religion" was particularly emphasised. Thus the division of territory on religious grounds was seen to heighten Christian-Muslim tensions and the lack of a clearly articulated constitution for a nation was identified as a cause of the kind of vacuum that leads to undifferentiated calls for "the introduction of Shari'a". The only groups that tend to benefit in such situations are the political-social-economic elites. Whilst religious and theological debates and disputes can be ways to absorb the time, effort and funds of the poor; therefore a secular state could be seen as freed to work for justice and the human rights all citizens.

The first of our five discrete named comments comes from Dan Madigan and should better be viewed as a Christian theological reflection on ACW rather than as a comment on the keynote papers. Ataullah Siddiqui lays emphasis on the theme of justice, which became the dominant at Cadenabbia, as well as expressing reservations about the mistaken idea that the Shari'a is "ready and waiting for implementation" in Muslim societies and finally focusing on the ignorance of the other faith community amongst religious leaders. Hermen Shastri explores the dynamics of majority-minority living and draws attention to the need to distinguish global and local aspects and solutions in dialogue. Amir Farid speaks on behalf of a deeply-rooted tradition within Islam, which has not been to the fore in ACW discussions: that Q. 3:64 is intended to call Christians back to the doctrine of *tawhid* and purify their distorted notions of the one true God. Finally, Chris Hewer comments on some major themes of ACW and the keynote papers.

Christian Reflects on *A Common Word*

Daniel A. Madigan SJ

Perhaps the best place to begin trying to understand the motivation of *A Common Word* is at the end. The authors note that, since together we make up more than half the world's population, there will be no peace in the world unless Muslims and Christians find a way to live at peace with one another. They surely echo the feelings of many when they say that "our common future is at stake. The very survival of the world itself is perhaps at stake." In a world increasingly ready to see our current situation as a winner-takes-all struggle between two incompatible civilisations, this is a welcome reminder that there is an alternative: we can still try to envision a common future.

The signatories rightly believe that the resolution of our conflicts lies not merely in political negotiation but in finding a common theological basis that can ground our mutual commitments and give them an authority beyond the calculations of temporary expediency. So they undertake to demonstrate the common ground we share in our belief in the unity of God, in the necessity of complete devotion to God and of love towards the neighbour. They quite rightly refuse to accept the idea, all too often expressed even by members of the Roman Curia, that Muslims are incapable of entering into theological dialogue.

A Longer Timeline

However dramatic may be the current world context that prompted it, this open letter to Christian leaders by 138 Muslim scholars and authorities should probably be read against a longer timeline. Forty-some years ago over two thousand Catholic bishops at the Second Vatican Council approved an epoch-making statement that, as Pope Benedict has several times reaffirmed, remains the official position of the Church with regard to Muslims. Though it did not deal with some of the more substantial differences between our faiths, *Nostra Aetate*, as it was entitled, focussed on the things we have in common, which are the basis for the esteem for Muslims that the Council professed. The bishops concluded: "Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and

Muslims, this sacred synod urges all to forget [‘transcend’ or ‘overcome’ might have been better words to choose] the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all humanity social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.”

Authority and Consensus

The Catholic Church has a well-defined authority structure that makes possible the enunciation of such a clear change in policy, and its implementation through control over the training of priests and the appointment of bishops. Even so, the Council’s positions, especially with regard to Muslims, are still not broadly enough known or accepted. They are sometimes dismissed as just outdated pastoral advice appropriate for the optimistic 60s, but hopelessly out of touch with twenty-first century realities.

No other religious community, Christian or not, has such an authority structure. Everywhere else authority is more diffuse; we might even say democratic. It has to be negotiated painstakingly and binding consensus is often elusive. We should be particularly grateful to this group of Muslim scholars therefore that they have succeeded in arriving at a statement like this, subscribed to by such a broad representation. One might read their letter as a first collective Muslim response to *Nostra Aetate*, a response that agrees to adopt the same approach as the Council: the bracketing of differences in order to affirm common beliefs and an appeal to work together for justice and peace in the world.

A Common Word forms part of a larger project, focused in Jordan, to develop an authoritative consensus on what it means to be Muslim in our time. In so doing, the Amman project seeks to fill a vacuum in the leadership of the worldwide Muslim community; a vacuum that has in recent years been filled by the extremist voices only too well known to us through the world’s media. In media terms, such reasoned and scholarly voices may be no match for the sabre-rattling diatribes that make for good television, but they deserve to be taken seriously and given the widest possible diffusion. We can only hope that this letter, though it may well have to struggle as *Nostra Aetate* does to be accepted as authoritative, will favour just as momentous a change of mentality.

"Moderate" Muslims?

The authors are not the mythical "moderate Muslims" with whom everyone professes to be ready to dialogue. What a patronising term that is! We seem to be looking for Muslims who "don't take it all too seriously" and who are ready to tell us what we want to hear. It is against "moderates" of this kind in the Catholic Church that bishops fulminate at election time. "Cafeteria Catholics" – take the bits you like and leave the rest – are roundly condemned, but similarly picky Muslims are celebrated. The presumption seems to be that a commitment that takes seriously the whole Islamic tradition is incapable of dealing with the modern world. In fact the opposite would seem to be the case: the reactionary and intransigent ideologies that drive terrorism and puritanical repression are not drawing on the whole of the Islamic tradition, but rather a truncated and impoverished reading of it. The group of scholars behind *A Common Word* are ignorant neither of the breadth and depth of the Islamic tradition, nor of Christianity. Among them are people like Mustafa Cerić, Grand Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina, who knows both the Western academic world and traditional Islamic learning, as well has having firsthand experience of the genocidal rage driving some Christians. We would be mistaken to think that they are pushovers who will settle for a ceremonial acknowledgement of fellowship without a serious intellectual and spiritual engagement, and frank political talk. In their patient but insistent correspondence since Regensburg they have shown a determination to pursue this discussion with seriousness and respect.

For several decades, of course, it was the Church that made much of the running in interreligious dialogue, but our interlocutors feel that in recent years our pace has faltered somewhat and that, at least in Rome, there is no great energy for dialogue even if we still profess a commitment to it. It may be discomfiting for us, but the initiative seems now to be in the hands of others.

Another Audience

Though addressed to a long list of popes, patriarchs and other church leaders, *A Common Word* surely has another audience as well. In keeping with the aim of the Amman project, it is implicitly addressed to Muslims, modelling for them a methodology and a mode of discourse appropriate to a dialogical approach to relations

with other believers, and also providing the authoritative textual underpinnings for it. The letter spends much of its energy on outlining the obligation on Muslims to be devoted completely to God, to love God and to be grateful for all God has given. In this context, one might have hoped for a more explicit recognition of the political implications of such devotion: the relativising of all power, ideologies and political projects. However good and divinely-sanctioned they may seem to us, they are not God, and therefore are not ultimate. This will be an essential element in further dialogue; it is the theological key that takes us beyond mere disagreement about power relations and political alternatives.

I tend to bristle when I hear the words "all religions." They usually accompany a hasty generalisation that owes more to wishful thinking or projection than to attentive observation of what the various religions do actually claim or profess. It is surprising and disappointing to note how often even academic writing falls back on such pieties and each religion is reduced to a particular variation on the generic theme of religion. *A Common Word* does not quite fall into that trap, since it confines itself to speaking only of the Abrahamic traditions of Christianity and Islam (with Judaism unfortunately only making the occasional, parenthetical appearance). Yet the letter does open itself to a reductionist reading – one that Christians might want to examine more closely – when it says in Part III, "Thus the Unity of God, love of Him and love of the neighbour form a common ground upon which Islam and Christianity (and Judaism) are founded." There has been a slide from the unexceptionable affirmation earlier in the paragraph that the obligation to love God and one's neighbour is a common element in the sacred texts of our traditions, to the more questionable claim that the dual commandment of love is the *foundation* of all three.

In fairness to our Muslim colleagues, it should be admitted that many Christians too will propose a shorthand rendition of Jesus' saying about the greatest commandments as the kernel of his teaching and the foundation of Christianity. But are they right? Is that all there is to the Gospel? Does the Word become incarnate simply to remind us of a few important verses from Deuteronomy and Leviticus, verses that some of Jesus' contemporaries among the rabbis would also have recognised as summing up "the Law and the Prophets"? Is Jesus' mission primarily to remind us of an obligation already revealed centuries before? Is all the rest of his living, dying and rising somehow only ancillary to this?

A Trick Question

We should note that when Jesus gives his answer to the question of the greatest commandment, it is always in the context of controversy. Matthew (Matt 22:35) and Luke (Lk 10:25) both note that it was a question intended to trap him. The cautious answer to a trick question can hardly be considered the foundation of a religion. If the subject under discussion is commandments, then surely those two are the greatest. But is there nothing to the Good News other than commandment and obligation? When the lawyer who poses the commandment question in Mark's gospel warmly reaffirms Jesus' reply, Jesus says to him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God" (Mk 12:34). Not far from it, but not quite there. Commandments are fine as far as they go but the Kingdom goes further than that. The Gospel is not a simple cut-and-paste job on the Torah with a more pithy selection of commandments. Before all else it is about what God has done for love of us. What we are to do flows from that and is made possible by it.

God's Love for Us

When *A Common Word* speaks of "the love of God," it means our love *for* God, and that almost always in terms of obligation; as witness the repeated use of 'must' and 'should' in Part I. Yet personal experience is enough to make us realise that true love cannot be commanded or conditioned; it is freely given and received.

No New Testament writer has devoted more attention to the question of divine love than the one known there as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" and whom we call John. In his first letter he says, "This is what love is: not that we have loved God, but that God has loved us …" (1 Jn 4:10). "We love," John tells us, "because God first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19). Throughout John's work there is a constant outward movement of love: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you" (Jn 15:9). "Just as I have loved you, so you also should love one another" (Jn 13:34). That is Jesus' "new commandment," given to his disciples just before his death. A command not to love him or the Father, but rather to dwell in the love he bears us. Dwelling in that love means allowing it to transform us so that we in our turn love others. In this context Jesus uses the telling image of a vine and its branches. The nutrient sap of the vine enables the branches to produce fruit, yet the fruit is for the benefit neither of the vine nor of the branches; it is for others.

All love originates in God and flows ever outward from there, transforming all who will allow themselves to be suffused by it. It does not turn back on itself, demanding reciprocation, but pours itself out for the beloved; even for the ungrateful.

Both John and Paul recognise the central importance of the fact that it was not on the basis of our perfection or even repentance that God's love for us was manifested but while we were still sinners (1 Jn 4:10; Rom 5:6). If there is a foundation to Christian faith this is surely a major pillar of it.

A similar understanding of divine love is not entirely lacking in the Islamic tradition but it does not find a place in *A Common Word,* possibly because it confines itself to quoting Qur'an and Hadith in order to address the broadest possible Muslim audience. Still, it might have appealed to the verse Q. 5:54 in which it is said that "God will bring a new people: He will love them, and they will love Him." Commenting on this verse some sufi writers have observed that God's love for human beings precedes their love for God, and if it were not for the fact that God had favoured us by his primordial love, mercy and compassion, humanity could never have loved God and his creatures. In this lies an important point for our continuing theological dialogue.

Who Is My Neighbour?

Just as there are reservations about how foundational for Christianity is the commandment to love God, so also one must question whether the commandment to love one's neighbour is fundamental. There are two elements in the gospels that relativise it. The first comes from Luke's gospel where Jesus' questioner, having failed to trap him with the commandment question, has another try and asks, "And who is my neighbour?" (Lk 10:29). The parable Jesus tells in response – the Good Samaritan – actually turns the man's question on its head. After having described the extraordinarily generous and compassionate response of this religious outsider to a Jew in need, after two of the victim's own religious leaders had already failed him, Jesus asks, "Which of these three *proved himself a neighbour* to the man attacked by robbers?" The question is no longer who is to be included in the category of neighbour and so what are the limits of my obligation to love. It is rather: how can I show myself a neighbour to others by responding to them in love?

The second and more striking element in the gospels occurs in both Matthew and Luke in slightly different forms. Here is Matthew's version:

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For He makes his sun to rise on the evil as well as the good, and his rain to fall on the righteous and unrighteous alike. (Matt 5:43-45)

Luke reports that it was in this context that Jesus said,

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

For Luke this exaggerated and disinterested generosity is the imitation of God's mercy; for Matthew it is even more. It is the very definition of God's perfection: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:48). Our perfection lies in loving our enemies just as God's perfection is shown in his loving us with a self-emptying love. God revealed that love in Jesus even while we were still sinners, preferring alienation from God to the peace with God that was our original human state.

"God Bless Our Enemies"

This infinitely expanded definition of the neighbour and brother to include even enemies and attackers has not been easy for Christians to assimilate. We quickly fall back into a generic religious mindset where God loves only the righteous and we, who of course *are* the righteous, are entitled to hate those who are not. Just how radical is the demand placed upon us by Jesus' teaching can be seen if we could imagine the ubiquitous "God Bless Our Troops" bumper-stickers in the US replaced by ones that read "God Bless Osama." Or could

we imagine banners in Occupied Palestine that wished life and blessing on Israel and the United States rather than annihilation? Transformations like these do not happen easily, yet one witnesses them again and again on a small scale. These are the seeds of the Kingdom taking root and sprouting here and there, but too often they are trampled underfoot by "realism" or the desire for retribution. Perhaps our dialogue could focus on the words of Q. 60:7, "Perhaps God will create friendship between you and those you consider your enemies. God is powerful, infinitely forgiving, most merciful." Where love replaces enmity, it is surely God at work, not just us.

Some Difficult Points

A Common Word does not hide some rather problematic points, though perhaps their implications could be missed. The major example of this is where Christians are assured in Part III that Muslims "are not against them and that Islam is not against them." Then come the conditions (stipulated in Q. 60:8): "so long as they do not wage war against Muslims on account of their religion, oppress them and drive them out of their homes." Though the original context is Mecca which oppressed its first Muslim citizens, the verse is given broad contemporary application. Many extremists will use precisely this verse to justify enmity towards Israel and anyone who supports it. George Bush's catastrophic military adventure in Iraq and his so-called "War on Terrorism" are easily interpreted as attacks on Islam. Given the religious rhetoric he employs for political advantage and the outspokenness of many of his evangelical supporters, his wars can easily be portrayed as Christian wars and thus put in jeopardy all Christians. Even Western cultural hegemony is sometimes read as aggression and so taken as legitimising a violent response against any members of that culture. The letter's reassurance that Islam and Muslims are not against Christians entails a fairly major conditional clause. This is surely an important focus for our continuing dialogue with the group of 138 and other Muslims.

Personal Encounter

Although I suggested at the beginning that we might read this letter against the background of *Nostra Aetate* with its appeal to common elements of faith and practice, that should not be taken to imply that our dialogue will best proceed by a series of letters, however authori-

tative. These documents are important touchstones but we know from the history of Vatican II that they only grow out of reflection on experience. Many of the signatories of *A Common Word* have long experience of an interfaith dialogue that goes beyond mere ceremony and requires commitment and openness. Documents like these not only grow out of personal encounter, ideally they also open the way to further interaction.

Dialogue of Repentance

Both *Nostra Aetate* and *A Common Word* focus on positive common elements, and this is certainly a useful beginning. We do need to understand and appreciate each other at the level of ideals and norms, especially those we have in common. However, we also have in common our personal and communal failure to live up to those ideals. Speaking of our obligation to love God and neighbour is relatively easy. Even to speak about loving one's enemies is not that difficult. Talk, as they say, is cheap. It takes much more courage to acknowledge to each other our failures in loving, but that is where the real breakthrough will come: when the proud façades crumble and reveal a contrite heart.

Of course we are both quite sure that the other has plenty of which to repent compared to our high ideals and minor failings. Perhaps we both need to listen again to Jesus' advice about taking the plank out of our own eye before offering to remove the speck from another's eye (Matt 7:3-5). The dialogue of mutual repentance is the most difficult, yet most necessary of all, if we wish to move ahead.

A Clash of Civilisations?

Though the discourse of *A Common Word* is framed in terms of conflict between Muslims and Christians, an honest examination of conscience will not permit us to forget that our future is not threatened only by conflict between us. Over the centuries of undeniable conflict and contestation between members of our two traditions, each group has had its own internal conflicts that have claimed and continue to claim many more lives than inter-confessional strife. More Muslims are killed daily by other Muslims than by Christians or anyone else. The huge numbers who went to their deaths in the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s were virtually all Muslims, as were those who killed them.

Scarcely any of the tens of millions of Christians who have died in European wars over the centuries were killed by Muslims. The greatest shame of the last century was the killing of millions of Jews by Christians conditioned by their own long tradition of anti-Semitism and seduced by a virulently nationalist and racist new ideology. The last 15 years in Africa have seen millions of Christians slaughtered in horrendous civil wars by their fellow believers. It seems from the statistics maintained about Catholic missionaries that one is much more likely to be killed in largely Catholic Latin America than anywhere in the Muslim world.

The Cry of the Poor

So let us not be misled into thinking either that Muslim-Christian conflict is the world's greatest conflict or even that war is the most serious threat to the human future. What of the millions of African children who die every year for want of some clean water or a few cents worth of vaccines? What of the world's poor who live under crushing burdens of foreign debt and corrupt domestic tyranny? What of the devastating effects on the earth of our poor stewardship of its resources? The new stage in Muslim-Christian dialogue represented by *A Common Word* should not become the occasion for a further narrowing of our attention and a greater obsession with ourselves. If we wish to talk of love, we will not be able to ignore the cry of the poor.

The Third Command: To Do Justice

Ataullah Siddiqui

Let me begin by associating myself with all others who have pointed out the fact that this is a unique initiative, to invite Christians to a common cause of love of God and love of neighbour. Although such an invitation has existed in the Qur'an for many centuries, what is significant is that the manner in which it has been introduced is certainly unprecedented. Furthermore it is an intra-Muslim denominational document presented to the Christian leadership at a time when relations between the two communities are at a very low ebb.

But this letter is also unique in the sense that, perhaps for the first time, Churches of all denominations have responded to the Muslims directly on the issue of common concern. After World War II, the efforts of all Churches were diverted to Jewish-Christian relations, where Muslims and Islam featured as an incidental issue; in other words, Muslims were an afterthought.

The letter is unique from another point of view, that it is an 'Islamo-centric' document which has used Biblical quotations as part of its religious traditions. There is a clear departure from many other Muslim publications where the Biblical quotations were used for polemical or apologetic purposes.

Understanding the 'Common Word' – a Common Witness?

The document highlights in its third part that the 'unity of God, love of Him and love of the neighbour form a common ground upon which Islam and Christianity (and Judaism) are founded.' I believe this is an important claim as far as it goes, but to claim that this dual commandment is the foundation of the two faiths seems to be moving too far. The document has, in my view, overlooked one significant aspect of the two faiths: that is the issue of justice. It may not be convenient to raise it as an additional part within the document but this central issue should not have been ignored. 'What does the Lord require of you', the prophet Micah asks, 'but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?'

(Micah 6:8). And I see a similar request in Islamic traditions, demanding the same love and humility from its followers. The Qur'an states that '...let not the hatred of others turn you away from justice, be just, that is nearer to piety.' (Q. 5:8). The demand that our faiths put upon us, in a simple and straightforward manner, are the demands of not only the love of God and love of neighbour, but these two inter-related vertical and horizontal relationships indicate that God and human beings have a higher purpose: to do justice.

I am sure, like me, many others have signed the document to support a significant Muslim process of dialogue with Christians. By signing the document one is not expected to say that these are agendas set in stone for discussion in future. There are layers of issues within these two, and if one adds the third – justice – all create distinctly different yet inter-related issues. The question of 'Love of God' raises a number of points. Love of God is shared in Islam through continuous obedience and worship. For many Muslims that expression is shown through the Shari'a, largely seen as that imposing un-yielding law. Shari'a for Muslims is also about their prayers and spirituality. A close connection with God and living a life in accordance with the teaching of the Prophet, for many Muslims, sums up the meaning of the Shari'a. It is the way to God, and it is the way to beauty and the sign of God leading to the promise of God. It promotes moral values; laws are there at the service of those values and not the other way round. Today the Shari'a is at the mercy of dictators and failed generals, and in the hands of the protestors.

The issue of Shari'a has been raised by the several contributors to this gathering. Professor Troll himself highlighted a perceived conflict between 'the implementation of Shari'a, human rights and the relation between state and religion.' Fundamental to all these is the basic principle that one cannot impose a law on an unwilling people. Such laws, by nature, become coercive and have no legitimacy with God either. The aspects of accountability, consultation and dissent, freedom of expression and human rights, as well as the inclusion of women and those who are citizens but not Muslims; all these areas are in my view open for debate. The use of Shari'a and its implementation is largely motivated by the sense of injustice and oppression that people feel. The way the issue of Shari'a and its 'implementation' (as if rules and methods were discussed, set in articles and clauses, bound

in several volumes and lying on shelves waiting to be implemented) has been raised in some Muslim countries and regions terrifies me as a Muslim, let alone others.

When I look at the concept of love of God, I find divergence in our beliefs which encourages a good number of members of our faith to reach out to others. Al-Jazeerah TV in May this year reported that the military chaplains stationed in the US air base at Bagram were filmed discussing how to distribute copies of the Bible printed in the country's main languages: Pashto and Dari. In one recorded sermon, Lieutenant-Colonel Gary Hensley, the chief of the US military chaplains in Afghanistan, tells soldiers that, as followers of Jesus Christ, they all have a responsibility 'to be witnesses for him'. 'The special forces guys – they hunt men basically. We do the same things as Christians, we hunt people for Jesus. We do, we hunt them down,' he says. 'Get the hound of heaven after them, so we get them into the kingdom. That's what we do, that's our business.' This deep urge, even in a militarily and culturally sensitive zone, in which a soldier is deeply motivated to share the message of Jesus, so that he can bring those who are not Christians to the kingdom, is an expression of his love of God and, from the point of view of those on the receiving end of the message, is equally offensive to God. The perception of God, his love, his care for humanity through Jesus (as the saviour of the whole of humanity vis-à-vis Prophet Muhammad as the messenger and the central figure of blessing for all worlds), how these conflicting positions stand in front of God and his love, needs deeper theological reflection. But until then, we have to accept that the differences of religion will remain forever and that it is the plan of God. Human beings need 'hospitable theologies'.

In all this I have my own concern: what responsibility do the two faiths have in relation to humanity? In our relationship, what place, if any, have those who do not belong to the 'People of the Book' or those who do not have faith in God or religion as we understand it? Is there room for a 'common witness'?

Living in a 'Neighbourhood' – A Common Destiny?

As this conference wishes to focus on Asia and Africa, I believe that there are a few common factors in history at the receiving end of which stand both Christians and Muslims. First, that both communi-

ties are facing a common legacy of colonialism. Both Islam and Christianity have entered into Africa at different stages, but during colonisation in some regions both religions were in a rush to convert the locals. The official policies in some countries, such as Nigeria, meant that the Christians and Muslims did not have direct meaningful engagements. The mediators in some respects were the African traditional religions that had the capacity to absorb both Christianity and Islam into their fold, but also to change their own attitude to faith and living; within a span of time they became distinctly Muslim and Christian but their religious accent was notably African. This is also true, to some extent, with Muslims and Christians in Asia, particularly in India and Indonesia. Secondly, these regions suffered from corruption, maladministration and the exploitation of their resources, both from within the countries and by powerful 'friends' from outside these continents. These by nature set communities in confrontation along ethnic and religious divides and generated their deep suspicion of each other. Thirdly, I believe there is a huge deficit of trust under the respectful veneer of the relationship between the two communities. Inter-faith inter-cultural living is certainly a blessing, providing necessary care within families and the neighbourhood; but what is so bewildering is that overall, communities trust enough *of* each other in their existential relationship but do not trust *about* each other's beliefs and practices. This in my view may lead to some serious consequences. I will illustrate this point a little later.

Against this backdrop one needs to examine the existential realities of *neighbourhood*. One factor that I believe has been a stumbling block between the two communities is the perception of Christians in shared neighbourhoods: although ethnically, linguistically and culturally they belong to the same people, somehow when it comes to religion the perception seems to change. Faith-wise their roots lie somewhere else. Christianity is still been perceived as the white man's religion. This strong subconscious association with their neighbours is detrimental to any meaningful relationship. Such perceptions are also rooted, as Professor al-Tayib has pointed out, in the assigning of medical and educational care by the colonial administrations to Christian missionaries. But it is also fair to say that in some Asian countries, and perhaps also in Africa, Muslims intentionally opted out of such services. They feared a contamination of their faith from such activities and as a result they lag behind in all the areas highlighted by the Professor.

The other crucial issue which has been raised in several dialogue meetings between the two faiths is the issue of education. The problem as I see it is not one of intention but of implementation. There were calls for fair representation of each other's faiths in text books. Ajaltoun in Lebanon (March 1970), the Colombo Dialogue (April 1974), Lagon, Ghana (July 1974), as well as in Hong Kong (January 1975), Porto Novo, Benin (March 1986) and several other subsequent Christian-Muslim dialogues organised by the Pontifical Council for Interreligous Dialogue, the Aal al-Bait Foundation and the World Islamic Call Society, all raised the issue of education and teaching involving textbooks. None of these resolutions, as far as we are aware, have ever produced a single textbook that has been introduced in a Christian or Muslim school. Issues such as these suggest that there is a big gap between our pious hopes and our practical realities, something which we do not perhaps wish to face. But I would like to raise an even more serious issue: what kind of teaching are we offering to our future *ulama* and priests? Let me take the training of *ulama* in *Dar al-Uloom*, *Jamia* or *Pondok Pesantren* (the educational establishments where they are trained). After their training some of them acquire a position and a reputation for being a good *khatib*; they create a place for themselves in Muslim society and wield a great deal of influence in the community. This powerful group are practically unaware of Christian faith and practices and perhaps a large number of them have never visited a church. They have probably never been taught Christianity as Christians understand it and may even have been exposed to some polemical writings on Christianity. I recall a recent conversation with one of these dynamic young scholars, who holds a responsible position in one of the famous *Dar al-Uloom* in India; he proudly asserted that his institution has now introduced the study of other faiths as part of their curriculum. I became curious and asked if that included Christianity. He said 'Yes', and I said 'That means in your syllabus you have also included *Izhar al-Haq* of Rahmatullah Kairanawi?' He replied 'Yes', and I felt sad.

Another issue that will have a considerable impact is the influence of Pentecostal and Fundamentalist Christians with Christian Zionist tendencies in those two continents. Mbillah alluded to this problem in his paper. The retrieving of a true and faithful neighbourly relationship requires a vigilant eye on affairs introduced from abroad. The theology of 'Dispensationalism', and Christian Zionism in particular,

cannot be considered, by any standard, hospitable to other faiths and to Islam in particular. Today's Christian Zionism needs not a muted response, but a bold and forthright rejection of such ideas from the established Churches.

I agree with Professor Wasey about the Saudi initiative of inter-religious dialogue. I believe that a change of heart for a good reason is always welcome at any stage. However, the problem is not one of *intention* but of human resources. Such a commitment to dialogue at an international level needs meticulous planning and competent people to manage the whole dialogue process with understanding and knowledge. The people who led some of these initiatives in the past through Rabitah were more attuned to the people who were polemicist. I hope this may change.

Living in a 'neighbourhood' demands that we explore our shared past with an eye on the ground-realities of our co-existence and common destiny.

Conflict Between People of Different Religions Is Not Religious Conflict

Hermen Shastri

Noting the fact that religious conflicts, most especially between the West (perceived as Christian) and Muslims, have in the last decade of so, assumed greater significance for a variety of reasons, it needs to be unequivocally emphasised that religious conflict does not equal conflict between religions.

Religious doctrines and practices represented by the world's living faiths, however different they may be, seldom give rise to actual conflict. If this was not so, there would exist endless religious wars around the world and one would not find the peaceful intermingling of people of various faiths and no faiths on a daily basis in the public square.

For every fundamentalist and fanatical outburst of religious expression promoting violent conflict, there is always an equally sizeable force within that religious tradition that appeals to the non-violent nature of its cardinal tenets of faith.

The fact that religious conflicts have occurred more frequently in recent decades, is largely due to the resurgence that is taking place within various religions as they come to terms with the process of globalisation, with all its implications for politics and cultural identities. At the same time, societies that were once largely mono-religious are now becoming multi-religious. The traditional cultural identity and affinities of nation-states have to grapple with new challenges and problems associated with pluralism.

It is suggested increasingly that in the post-Cold War world, symbols and flags of religions and cultural identities count tremendously. In an era of cultural struggle, wars and violent confrontations, politics are determined increasingly by cultural affinities instead of ideological options. When people want to safeguard cultural identity, they

invent enmity and enemies become essential in their cause of aggression. The most potentially dangerous enmity occurs across the fault line between world religions.

As far as Christian and Muslim relations are concerned, the events of 11 September 2001 marked a major turning point. The events crystallised the build-up of suspicion, hostility and fear that was already in the making with the end of the Cold War era. Religion became one of the driving determinants of war and violence. The western media played up perceptions of an Islamic threat and at the same time the Muslim world saw itself as being threatened by Western powers.

Seen in this context, *A Common Word* (ACW), signed by 138 Muslim scholars and political leaders (13 October 2007), can be understood as a timely and significant faith declaration that the resolution of hostilities between Muslims and Christians cannot be left to politics. Theologians from both sides, drawing inspiration from the cardinal aspects of their faith, may be able to find a common theological basis to work together for justice and peace.

The signatories make a passionate appeal for drawing closer together on the basis of the twin pillars of faith common to both religious traditions; the belief in God's oneness and the equally important love of the neighbour. ACW states: "Let this common ground be the basis of all future dialogue between us."

On the theological basis of the vertical and horizontal aspect of submission, devotion and piety, and a mutually reinforced self-giving love ethic, it is hoped that a path may be found to approach the difficult but pressing questions of Muslim-Christian dialogue in our day. What obligations do we have as we relate with each other, the state and society as a whole; as we bring the dual commandment to bear on the intrinsic human values we share when related to freedom, justice, peace, equality and human dignity?

The response from the major streams of world Christianity has been encouraging. The Vatican, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Orthodox and the World Council of Churches have officially responded positively and have taken concrete steps to promote and foster dialogue between theologians from both sides.

The Experience of Religious Coexistence

The various case studies emanating from the African, South and South-East Asian contexts that have been circulated have highlighted various insightful concerns that characterise the current discourses of religious peaceful coexistence and the challenges it poses for both religious communities.

Instead of going into details on every point made in the papers, I wish to highlight a few, which I feel resonate in the context from which I come.

- Embedded in the whole discourse of religious diversity is the politics of identity. With the advent of nation-states and the introduction of competitive party politics, party leaders have used every conceivable means to manipulate mass sentiments and mobilise support to maximise their popularity.
  By playing to the fears of the majority, the nation-state clothes itself in the cultural or religious garb of the majority community. The culture or religion of the majority therefore becomes the accepted identity of the nation and promotes this through policies that alienate the minority religious communities.
  In almost every case study, the end result is that religious leaders get co-opted by the political powers to condone a "divide and rule" policy; a political culture with antecedents during the colonial era. Almost all countries in Asia, a region noted in history for its essentially plural and tolerant societies, have succumbed to the powerful pull of ethnicity and religious affinities by leaders that develop authoritarian tendencies in order to remain in power.

- The interplay of economic forces, which easily disadvantage the minority over the majority, results in religious tensions that often overflow into riots and in extreme cases into wars of insurgency.

- Religious minorities, who are subject to discrimination and second class status as citizens, invariably develop certain cultural and religious attitudes, which are antithetical to the majority. They resent the religion of the majority and begin to articulate religious sentiments of the "demonization" of their perceived oppressors.

- The tendency is for some segments of a religious community to develop an exclusive view of their particular religion. Truth, justice, freedom and morality are perceived as values, which they hold to a greater degree than others. The unity that they seek is invariably the unity of their own kind. The rituals and symbols that distinguish their particular religious tradition become rallying points of opposing the existence of the other.

Democracy and Constitutional Safeguards

All the papers explore the implications of the separation of religion and politics for religious diversity and how the separation of the public and private domains may enhance the functioning of a viable democracy. In this regard, the call is for the protection of human rights within the framework of a constitution that treats all citizens equally.

Although many of the countries cited in the studies do have constitutional provisions to safeguard the rights of minorities, the state must be seen to support these safeguards by values and principles that uphold the equality of all religions, a free media, an impartial police force and a judicial system that provides recourse to fairness and justice. These essential safeguards of a democratic system become meaningless if the majority community uses its power and hegemony to impose its political and religious will on minorities.

Striving Together in Dialogue

The World Council of Churches has had a long history of pursuing Muslim-Christian dialogue and has discussed many thorny issues of religion, law and society, human rights, religious freedom, community rights, mission and *da'wa* and local communal tensions. At a Muslim-Christian Conference in Amersfoort, the Netherlands (2000), a document was produced carrying the title: *Striving together in dialogue*.

Interestingly it came to the same conclusions as those advocated by ACW. It emphasised that in a world where Christians and Muslims live as neighbours and co-citizens, dialogue should be understood

…as a way of living out our faith commitment in relation to each other, sharing as partners common concerns and aspirations and striving together in response to the problems and challenges of our time.

In dialogue, the deepest meaning of what our scriptures say to us is opened up and speaks anew. Christians are motivated by the teaching that God wills love of neighbour inseparably from the love of God, which is shown in human action through love of other… Christians also recall that they are not to bear false witness against their neighbour (Ex 20:16). In dialogue, they come to know their neighbours of other religions in ways that enable them to keep this commandment, "What does the Lord require of you," the prophet Micah asks, "but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)

As Muslims enter dialogue, they recognize the Qur'anic texts concerning diversity and God's purpose which say: "O people, we created you from a single (pair) of male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other" (Q. 49:13), and, "We sent you solely as a mercy for all creatures" (Q. 21:07). Plurality is inscribed in God's design: "To each among you have we prescribed a law and open way. If God has so willed, He would have made you a single people but (His plan) is to test you in what He has given you; so excel each other in good deeds; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which you dispute (Q. 5:48). Muslims are called to seek justice through their dialogue activities.

Therefore dialogue needs to be a process of mutual empowerment in public concerns and their common pursuit of justice, peace and constructive action on behalf of the common good of all people. In this process, Muslims and Christians will draw on their spiritual resources. Pope John Paul II in 2002, in his calling for a meeting of religious leaders for a day of prayer for peace in Assisi, came up with the "Assisi Decalogue" which reinforced many of the points made above.

Conclusion

ACW is to be welcomed as an indispensable affirmation on the part of Muslims to dialogue with Christians with recognition of and respect for differences. It seeks to discover and appreciate approaches stemming from a common theological basis.

The dialogue can only be viable if we take the following into consideration to guide our dialogue:

- It is crucial to de-globalise Christian-Muslim tensions. We will have to counteract cases where conflicts in one place with local goals and character are perceived as having a wider relevance and are instrumental in a conflict in another place that has different goals and character.

- Solutions to outstanding problems are to be found, first and foremost, in addressing the local causes of conflicts. Leaders from both faith communities must refuse to be drawn into each other's conflicts on the basis of an uncritical response to the call for solidarity from adherents of one's own faith.

- Christians and Muslims should recognise that Christianity and Islam are not two monolithic blocks confronting each other. In dialogue, they understand that justice is a common value founded in their faith and they are called by their religious persuasion to side with those who are oppressed, irrespective of religious identity, not with co-religionists because of common religious identity.

- Appreciation of both diversity and commonalities can be achieved in dialogue as an educational process that enables each community to come to know each other better.

- Both religions, in upholding the dual commandment, have an indispensable contribution to make in affirming human dignity and that the principles of human rights and religious freedom are indivisible.

It is my ardent wish that ACW will stimulate creative encounters all over the world and bring the two largest faith communities in the world closer to each other.

One God? Same God?

Amir Farid

A Common Word (ACW) has certainly started a chain of dialogues, forums and seminars that can help foster our understanding of one another (Christians and Muslims), which could be a model to be followed in regional and national dialogues and forums. It could also be a model for dialogues between our respective religions and others (Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, etc.). Bearing in mind that some religions do not believe in
a personal god, the emphasis in this case will be just to love our fellow human beings, whatever religion or whatever is our belief about the divine.

But we, Christians and Muslims, can certainly take the lead since our bond has been there for over 1400 years, sharing a common history (albeit with some fundamental disagreements on the historical facts) and much common teaching. Since this ACW dialogue process has been on-going for two years, we should not let the momentum abate but instead ensure that it continues vigorously to inspire friendly discourses and dialogues in all communities where peoples of our faiths live together.

On this note, I am happy to report that on 16 September 2009, which was our National Day, I co-moderated the dialogue session during a "Common Word Roundtable" gathering between about 20 Muslim and 20 Christian religious leaders (including Dr Hermen Shastri), activists and scholars in Kuala Lumpur. We also had observers from the Hindu and Buddhist faiths. The theme was "Unity under the Malaysian Constitution", reflecting some concerns that we have regarding religious issues enshrined in the Constitution which may be impeding our unity. In the spirit of Ramadan, we had *iftar* (breaking of fast) together. I will address specific issues from this in the second part below.

A Common God

I have waited until now to give my comments because I was undecided whether to proceed in writing about my understanding that the main Qur'anic verse (Q. 3:64), quoted by the 138 Muslim leaders and scholars in their "Open Letter and Call" (13 October 2007) to the Christian world (which then became the starting point of the ACW series of forums, dialogues and discussions), has in fact a stronger message to our Christian brethren than has been inferred thus far. Although ACW did comment on the meaning of the oneness of God according to Islam, the real significance of this in their message may have been underestimated, as evidenced from the responses in the conferences and workshops that ensued and in the keynote papers from this group. I believe that it is very important for me to highlight this point, since the phrase *A Common Word* comes from this particular verse.

My hesitation arose from the fact that we have been invited to come together to deliberate on "the results so far" and "to discuss the practical significance of the ideas, proposals and resolutions" that came out of previous deliberations by other people. We are to provide the African and Asian perspectives. From what I have read, everyone has thus far affirmed the two commandments common to us Christians and Muslims (and for that matter, to all believers): to love God, and to love humanity (our neighbours). Therefore I am not sure whether I should "re-open" the discussion and dialogue on the oneness of God, which is theological, and "should be left to the elites" according to some people.

After much contemplation, writing and re-writing, I have decided that if we are not the elites referred to here, then who else? If we avoid discussing it, then who else will do it? So with all humility and without wanting to sound too presumptuous, I believe we have been brought together also to reconsider this issue: what do we mean when we say "The Lord, our God, the Lord is one"?

It is not difficult to convince anyone to love his/her god(s), however that term is perceived. It is more difficult to convince all the people to love their neighbours, as there are people who claim to love their god(s), but revile and despise some of their fellow men, especially those of different sects within their own religion and those outside their religion. Some of them even kill in the name of their god(s) with only the slightest excuse.

I believe the real message of Q. 3:64 is that the object of our love (in this case, God), must not be misplaced. It is a reminder to Muslims and Christians (and Jews), since we claim to be the inheritors of the same religion of Abraham, Moses and all the great Prophets mentioned in the Bible and Qur'an, that our Lord, our God, is not only one in number but also we share the same, one, common God.

There may be other religions which also worship only one god who is totally different from the one we worship (i.e. a non-existent or false god in our context). Thus the main thrust of Q. 3:64 is not just that our God is One; it is also that our God is the *same* one and that we should not ascribe partners to him. *That* is the God we should love with all our hearts and all our souls and all our minds and all our strength.

However, we have irreconcilable differences in trying to agree that we share the same one God, because among others, the God of the Qur'an, who claims also to be the God of the Jews and Christians (People of the Book), describes himself as being one without partners or associates, whereas the Christians describe him as a triune (three-in-one) God made of three co-equal "persons".

I believe there must be a reason why Prof. Christian Troll was moved to invite me although he could have chosen any of the well-known Muslim scholars from Malaysia. I believe God wants me to remind us all of what he meant in Q. 3:64.

An Advance Apology

Before I proceed, please let me re-affirm my commitment to respectful dialogue and discussions, guided by Q. 16:125 to "Invite all to the way of your Lord, with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue/reason with them in the best and most gracious ways; for surely your Lord knows best who have strayed from his path, and who have received guidance."

However, I would still like to extend my apologies in advance if my views here and if my quoting some of the Qur'anic verses below are deemed inappropriate for this dialogue.

If our gathering is only to discuss loving God to the utmost (however we understand him) and loving our fellow human beings (of whatever religion, especially between Christians and Muslims in the immediate context), but never to discuss the meaning of the oneness of God, then please ignore what I have written below, as far as this gathering is concerned, and only consider the section from Our Common Ground onwards for our dialogue. Even then we have much to discuss because many from both religions have obviously failed to love their neighbours, and by implication, also failed to love God completely even though they may believe otherwise.

An Invitation

Nevertheless, I would still like to invite discussion on it outside of this gathering if anyone shares my opinion that it is a crucial question that continues to divide us and addressing it could bring us together instead of keeping us apart. Many debates and dialogues over this issue have been held in the past, and are being held all over the world where we co-exist. Although there is a warning that it will require one party to "abandon" his or her religion to accept the opposing version (since the two are irreconcilable), I believe that the Theosophists are right when they say that "Truth is higher than Religion". So be it.

You may question the necessity of such dialogues, if so many have tried and no agreement has been achieved. I believe new dialogue partners may yet give new angles and new perspectives to solving the conundrum. A deeper understanding of each other's basis for sticking firmly to Unity or Trinity can even strengthen our mutual respect – assuming we already start with much of that.[1]

One God? Same God?

My point is this: the *Shema* attributed to Moses (peace be upon him) in Deuteronomy (6:4-5), and confirmed by Jesus (peace be upon him) in Mark 12:28-31, begins with "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one…" and only then continues with "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength".

From Adam through Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, until John the Baptist (Yahya to us Muslims), the Prophets of God (peace be upon them) only spoke of one God. They never mentioned anything about a triune God, a concept which is never mentioned in the Old Testament but only appeared later. Although attributed to Jesus (peace be upon him), the Apostles and the scholars that followed them, it was only confirmed and endorsed at the Council of Nicea in 325CE. I am not trying to teach my Christian friends who certainly know much more of the history and the theological arguments than I do, but I do have an important question: why didn't any of the Prophets tell us the true nature of God if he is indeed eternally triune in nature? I have asked this question many times to my Christian friends but have so far not received a satisfactory answer. I hope Christians in this gathering can provide me with one I can comprehend (even though I may not agree).

To us Muslims, it is partly for this reason (to correct the misconceptions about his nature) that God sent down the Qur'an and his Last Messenger (peace be upon him) to preach that message.

The God of the Qur'an meticulously defines who he is and who he is not and only then commands us to love him to the utmost. Otherwise that intense love may be misplaced.

The God of the Qur'an defines himself as "one" in many instances, and that he has no associates or partners (in Q. 3:64 and many other verses), does not beget nor was begotten (Q. 112:3 and at least 12 other verses). He directly rebuts the Christian concept of a triune (three-in-one) God in many verses and rejects the notion that Jesus is his divine son:

O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: nor say of God anything but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a Messenger of God, and his Word, which he bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from him: so believe in God and his Messengers. Say not 'Trinity', desist, it will be better for you, for God is one God. Glory be to him: (far exalted is he) above having a son. To him belong all things in heaven and on earth. And enough is God as a disposer of affairs (Q. 4:171)

They do blaspheme who say: God is one of three in a Trinity:
for there is no god except One God". (Q. 5:73)

And elsewhere in the Qur'an, God says: "So invoke the Name of your Lord and devote yourself to him completely" (Q. 73:8), in line with the Shema.

In a different way, there is a lesson to be learned from the religious extremists and terrorists whose love for God is proven by their willingness to die for him. We cannot match their zeal. Unfortunately their misunderstanding and misconception about what it means to love and serve God to the utmost have caused them to harm and kill their fellow human beings, in direct defiance of God's command for us to love one another. Right action can only ensue from right understanding. Likewise, we need the correct understanding of what God means when he says he is one. Since this is the most important commandment, it deserves much scrutiny.

The Common Word

So let me reiterate the salient points of the "Common Word" verse:

Say: O People of the Book! Come to A Common Word between us and you:
that we shall worship none but God,
and that we shall ascribe no partners unto him,
and that none of us shall take others for lords besides God.
And if they turn away, then say:
Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto him)."
(Q. 3:64)

In the Muslim context, the one, indivisible God of the Qur'an, who has determined that Jesus is neither his partner nor his son, is telling Jews and Christians not to take Jesus (or any of the Prophets (peace be upon them) or anyone else) to be their Lord, God, or his divine partner or son. And if they do, then they have not surrendered to God.

I don't know how else to say this, without wanting to sound insulting, arrogant or disrespectful. Once again, please forgive me. The message of Q. 3:64 must be clearly explained. It was revealed to convey this message and needs to be fully understood.

I have deliberately referred to the author of the Qur'an as the "God of the Qur'an", bearing in mind that anyone is free to reject the Qur'an's validity, authority and authenticity. For us Muslims, there is no other god but him.

Our Common Ground

Even if we respectfully agree to disagree on our understanding of the oneness of God, we can certainly agree on these two commandments: to love him completely (no matter how differently we perceive him to be) and to love one another (regardless of our faiths).

In the desire to love God my sufi training and the guidance of my *shaykhs* have been invaluable. I do however seek counsel and guidance from my learned and respected friends and elders of both religions, gathered for this dialogue, to help me further in this quest, and that I may also impart this knowledge and experience to others.

And the more I love God, the more I find myself loving my fellow human beings, of whatever colour, race or religion. Again, I hope our sharing will enable all of us to truly love one another more intensely and more meaningfully. And hopefully, we can then instil this loving attitude in many others.

For Muslims, although some have alluded to the fact that there is no direct mention of "loving thy neighbour" in the Qur'an, and that the only references are in the Hadith, the second commandment has special meaning when applied to Christians because God reminds us in the Qur'an:

…and nearest among them in love to the believers will you find those who say, 'We are Christians': because amongst these are men devoted to learning, and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant. (Q. 5:82)

Indeed, Christians are the dearest and closest to us. It is a shame that it is against the Christians that we have had to fight most throughout our history. Hopefully a better appreciation of this verse by both sides will help prevent more of such unnecessary and ungodly conflicts and wars.

I end this section with these acronyms by which I live:
ISLAM = I Sincerely Love Allah and Muhammad (peace be upon him), and
ISLAM = I Sincerely Love All Mankind (which is a necessary condition to validate the above).

The Malaysian Context

One advantage of writing this comment late is that I am able to report on the issues discussed in the latest dialogue between Muslims and Christians at our first Common Word Roundtable held just two days before writing.

No religious doctrine or theological issues were discussed. No discussion on the oneness of God or our divergent theology. It was decided that loving God was not an issue. We mostly talked about the problems that have caused divisions between the faith communities and proposed solutions and actions to be taken. It was about solving the practical problems that we face currently.

Malaysia is small nation of about 27million people. According to the Population and Housing Census figures (2000), approximately 60.4% of the population practised Islam, 19.2% Buddhism, 9.1% Christianity, 6.3% Hinduism and 2.6% traditional Chinese religions. The remainder was accounted for by other faiths, including Animism, folk religion and Sikhism; while 1.1% either reported having no religion or did not provide any information.

Inter-religious dialogues in Malaysia have always evolved around the perennial issue of the differences in how the Muslim majority and the others interpret the Constitution. Due to the historical dynamics (into which I will not delve in detail here), our nation was born after "independence" from British colonial masters (in 1957) with a Constitution which was at best a consensus, and at worse a compromise, between the majority Malay/Muslims and the minority races and religions.

We ended up with a Constitution which states that Islam shall be the religion of the Federation, but other religions shall be allowed to be practised in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation (Article 3).

It also states that all persons are equal before the law and proscribes discrimination against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, descent or place of birth. Yet it affirms the "special position of Malays and natives". Furthermore, the Malays are by definition, Muslims. The conflicts arise from differing interpretations of what is meant by Islam being the official religion and what does "special position" mean, especially when the rights of the others should not be compromised.

The Malay/Muslims (who constituted 87% of the citizens before independence, reduced to just above 50% at independence when citizenship was granted to many non-Malays, and is now slowly increasing to 60% due to their higher birth rate and lower emigration rate, and expected to increase further) have always headed the ruling coalition and determined much of the administrative policies, many of which have been perceived as unfair and unjust by most non-Malays/non-Muslims, depriving them of equal opportunities in many areas.

Much of this unfairness resulted from the affirmative or "positive discrimination" policies implemented to try to bridge the gap between the economic and educational advantage the others had over the Malays. Unfortunately the situation continues despite the policies being in force for several decades, which obviously means the policies failed although they benefited some Malays and caused injustice to many non-Malays/non-Muslims. Fortunately there was a political *tsunami* in the last general elections when the ruling coalition barely won and which forced a re-consideration and dismantling or revision of some of these policies.

The religious disputes however, appear to get worse. There is gradual Islamisation of the nation (in fact, in 2001, the then Prime Minister declared Malaysia as an Islamic state, whatever that means). With the establishment of the Islamic Shari'a for Muslims (applicable to only some of their affairs) running parallel with the secular civil judicial system, there are many instances of conflict of jurisdiction, especially when there are disputes over conversions and marriages where only one spouse converts. Often the children become innocent victims in these fiascos. The right of a Malay or Muslim (including converts) to renounce Islam is much restricted.

Non-Muslims complain of unfair regulations, like having certain restrictions on the building of their churches and temples. Seeking to convert Muslims is also prohibited.

The privileges of the official religion and the rights of the other religions continue to be contentious issues. The latest and most glaring on-going case is the dispute about whether Christians should be allowed to use the word Allah to refer to God in their publications. The government and many Islamic establishments are against it, although there are Muslims who support the Christians' right to do so. Everyone awaits the court decision, which will then go through the appeals process and take many years to resolve.

There is a debate on how much should religion and morality be regulated or should these be regulated at all?

While the non-Muslims seem to be at a disadvantage because the majority (i.e. the Muslims) controls the government and the policies, they are actually better off than the Muslims in having the freedom to practise whatever form or denomination of their religion they wish. Since the government controls Islamic practice, Muslims are only allowed to practise the approved interpretations of Islam. For example, Shi'ism and many sufi *tariqas* are considered deviant and illegal. The "official" *madhhab* is the Sunni Shafi'i school of jurisprudence, though other Sunni *madhhabs* are tolerated.

These are some of the main issues that keep us at loggerheads. Together we agree that secular and religious education should be improved, common values and ethics should be imbued in the children so that they will become good citizens and that more needs to be done to prevent the communities from drifting further apart as each tries to practise more of their respective religion.

Most of all we need to rebuild the trust and mutual respect that our fathers and elders had for one another that enabled them to forge an alliance against the colonialists and bring our nation to birth.

We also cannot forget the fact that people and communities evolve in their thinking and priorities and how much they are willing *to continue* to compromise may change with time. The racial and religious communities trusted one another and compromised sufficiently; the

resulting formula worked well in the beginning. But compromises are unstable situations that need to be adjusted as often as necessary to maintain the equilibrium or stability.

Barely twelve years after Independence, we had our first major hiccup that resulted in racial riots and many deaths. Although we have had only minor skirmishes since then, history tells us that we cannot take things for granted. Furthermore, any dispute from mundane matters can unexpectedly evolve into racial or religious disputes.

We have to continue to enter into dialogue, understand clearly each other's grouses and complaints, listen to proposed solutions, and adjust, accommodate and compromise wherever possible. In theology, we can respectfully agree to disagree, but in fighting for our rights it is not that simple, especially if what is gained is at the price of the other's loss.

There is still much room for improvement and there is much hope that the relationship between the various faith groups, especially between Muslims and Christians, will get better.

As a Muslim, being in the majority, I am sad that my Muslim community has not been the best of leaders, protectors and administrators and has caused some unhappiness among the non-Muslims. I read with pride the just administration of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs and later, the illustrious governments of Islamic Spain (Andalusia), where there was peace and harmony, where non-Muslims sought refuge and prosperity, where God showered the state and people with wealth and happiness, all because the rulers ruled with justice for all, Muslims and non-Muslims.

I hope our Muslim leaders will practise more of their religious values and virtues that will result in a government and policies that will be just and acceptable to all, irrespective of race and religion. May God guide us all, and may he bless us with enduring peace and harmony.

1| Here, I take guidance from Christian W. Troll, Dialogue and Difference. Clarity in Christian-Muslim Relations, Maryknoll/New York (Orbis) 2009, pp. 47-56, and some rules provided in: Toward a Universal Theology of Religion, ed. by Leonard Swidler, New York (Orbis) 1987, in the Faith Meets Faith Series.

Comment on *A Common Word* and the Keynote Papers

C. T. R. Hewer

Many positive comments have been made about ACW and nothing should detract from that sentiment, it may be taken as read here. Some of the comments since the publication have taken rather a lot for granted. Al-Tayib draws attention to the letter as being part of the Hashemite project and Wasey notes the way in which it provoked a response from the Saudis; partly we have here a play for public leadership amongst different Muslim groups. The timing of the letter and the fact that it was sent in the full glare of public attention meant that Christian leadership organisations could hardly avoid a response. Any letter sent out for wide subscription needs necessarily to be somewhat ambiguous so that people can consider how they wish to read it before appending their signature. It need not have been done in this manner; a decision could have been made to write an edited book with a small number of acknowledged authors contributing detailed articles to which they could be held to account, or a series of single-author monographs. Such a methodology would have given readers a clear understanding of just what lies in the minds of the authors. Instead of a book, a small delegation could have been formed to engage in high-level but discreet private discussions before something tangible reached the public sphere. As Mbillah points out, the letter was not addressed to the Christian leadership of African Churches, where many of the issues between Muslims and Christians are real and pressing, but rather it sought to provoke a reaction from Rome, Geneva, Canterbury, Constantinople and so on. The mere existence of this conference is part of that provoked response, which shows that it was successful in one of its aims.

Many fulsome comments have been made about the fact that ACW quotes from the Bible and the question is raised; does this betoken a change in the traditional doctrine of *tahrif*? As Al-Tayib points out, such a conclusion is by no means justified. One can quote from a document with seriousness and respect without thereby subscribing to its authenticity; Christians do this with the Qur'an on a regular

basis. It would be wholly in keeping with the classical position that the Christians might have preserved some of the original *Injil* sent down (*tanzil*) to Prophet Jesus and the way to test this would be by *al-furqan*, the Qur'an as the ultimate, definitive and divinely protected text; anything that agrees with it therefore has a high likelihood of being authentic even though it is contained amidst some/many fabrications and corruptions. Modern Christian biblical scholarship would not be at all fazed by the citation from Enoch Powell, may God be merciful to him and forgive him his sins, indeed he would be regarded as rather a tame exegete by modern standards. Is it not central to our on-going discussion that we recognise the fundamentally different positions occupied in our respective paradigms by the Qur'an in Islam and the Gospels in Christianity; the former being the direct literal revelation of God to Prophet Muhammad and the latter being the divinely inspired writings of human authors within a particular theological schema as an expression of the faith of the believing community and a witness to the revelation of the Word Incarnate in Jesus?

ACW stresses the worship of the one God alone and has good Qur'anic grounds for this emphasis where Christians and Jews are concerned. However there is a difference between saying that "Christians worship God" and that "Christians worship God in a way that is acceptable to God after the coming of the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad". We await the detailed justification for the latter position, if that is what we are to understand, as a departure from the classical *tafsir* of Q. 3:85 by the substantial majority of scholars. Are we in danger of reading a "do" for a "should" in the meaning of the text? The latter reading is underlined by the repeated use in ACW of the Hadith of the infallible, sinless Muhammad: "The best that I have said – myself and the Prophets that came before me – is: There is no god but God, He Alone, He hath no associate…" Might this not have been read by some at least of the signatories to reinforce that Jesus taught exactly the same doctrine of *tawhid* that was taught by Muhammad, if only the Christians recognised the authentic teaching of their Prophet, and thus, as classical Islam would hold, that Christians should recognise the correction given in the final revelation and the last and universal Prophet? As Mbillah points out, we have significantly different theologies of the one God in whom both communities believe. Suseno draws attention to the theological nature of ACW, but is it written with cognisance and acceptance of a Christian theo-

logical paradigm or a reading of Christianity through a Muslim paradigm, which would be consonant with classical Islam?

Great use is made of the citation of Q. 3:64, which is indeed an invitation for Christians and Muslims to come to a just agreement and enter into dialogue in the best manner possible, as being Qur'anically mandated and endorsed by the *sunna* of the Prophet but without reference to the context of the *mubahala*, and the way that the verse has been interpreted classically. The Prophet, in his various letters, e.g. that to Heraclius, at least in the text before me, used the verse within the context of announcing his divinely appointed Prophethood and the invitation to embrace Islam or else the responsibility will be yours alone (the Prophet having performed his task of giving the invitation and warning).

The centrality of the Dual Commandment in the Christian tradition has been stressed in many reactions over the last two years and indeed it is right to see it as the core of the Christian ethical system. However, with reference to Madigan, surely Christianity believes that the action of God in Christ was something more than just the repetition of two verses from the Hebrew Bible that could have been, and were, recited by an elderly contemporary rabbi whilst standing on one leg. As Kukah and Mbillah point out, the first part is devoid of its core meaning without reference to the prior action of God within the loving reality of the Trinity, which Christians, in the power of the Spirit, are called to emulate by loving their neighbour. As Mbillah rightly asks within an African context, are followers of African traditional religions, or even idol-worshippers (let alone enemies – Madigan), who happen to live next-door, neighbours within Muslim and Christian understandings?

The Dual Commandment of love may be the heart of the Christian ethical system but al-Tayib rightly draws attention to the intrinsic human values which are shared: of peace, justice, equality, freedom and human dignity. Might not justice be seen within the Muslim paradigm to be the core ethical value towards which human beings are to strive, and then peace, human dignity, equality and so on flow from this? And yet, are we not taught to pray: Ya Allah, judge me according to your mercy and not according to your justice? There are dedications of *rahman* and *rahim* at the opening of all but one chapter of the Qur'an, not *'adl*.

Wherein then lies the importance of ACW for our contemporary world? It is precisely in its call to the two major religious communities of the world to enter into discussions to promote justice and peace on earth; as in the well known adage of Hans Küng: "No peace between peoples without peace between religions". The call to action is the paramount out-working of the document by which it is to be judged (Madigan – talk is cheap, and Mbillah – the need for action and not talk on the parts of both signatories and recipients). This, as al-Tayib rightly points out, is one of the failings of the process so far; ACW contains no practical objectives or a road map towards the future. It has taken an important initial step of opening a conversation but no more. That conversation of course, as Suseno notes, is opening up dialogue between Muslims (and between Christians) as well as between the faiths.

The reality of the impact of ACW outside the tiny group of "leaders" is clear from many sources, including Channon, Mbillah and others, viz. that the document is hardly known at all and hardly any tangible interest, let alone consequences, can be seen two years later. Channon draws attention to the dire need for study of the document and the areas that it opens up in the training of clergy and imams. Uwais calls for something deeper as a preliminary, which is an assessment of the qualities needed in a religious leader or teacher in the present age, drawing attention to knowledge and humility above all else. Humility being of particular importance in bringing out the rich diversity inherent within the Islamic (and Christian) traditions rather than the prevailing narrowness, especially of imported forms of religion (Mbillah).

The potentially huge role that can be played in Africa and South and South-East Asia is highlighted: the natural African respect for others irrespective of their religious affiliation (Mbillah), the importance of the Indonesian culture with its historic openness and tolerance as exemplified by *Pancasila* (Mulia), and the natural diversity and tolerance of the Indian Subcontinent (Wasey). Indeed this gives us something to live up to in an idealised way (Wasey), whilst not escaping the gulf between ideals and realities (Madigan). Kukah draws attention to the colonial history and legacy as key to understanding developments in Africa; must we not go on to add that the riches of the northern hemisphere are founded on the poverty of the southern and that no amount of talk between religions can make progress without

international social and economic justice? Al-Tayib raises the question of the influence of world politics on the way forward; to this we surely need to add the question of the exploitation and sharing of resources such as energy, food and water, plus the growing awareness of the impending ecological catastrophe. Channan rightly draws attention to the need to honour and respect all human life; with humility must Western Christians not accept that immoralities of global economic exploitation and the conduct of warfare without regard to civilian casualties gives the lie to any talk of seeking peace and respect for all human life? Finally Kukah raises the important question of secularity as a structure for allowing human flourishing as opposed to secularism as an anti-religious force; this all the more important coming from an African context as opposed to the habitual discourse within Europe and other post-Christian lands.

Looking Together to the Future

C.T.R. Hewer and Christian W. Troll SJ

In addition to all the documentation reproduced or alluded to in the earlier sections of this publication, a synopsis was produced by Christian Troll for participants to read and thus refresh their memories of the most salient points *en route* to Cadenabbia itself. Were ever conference attendees better prepared? During the plenary sessions themselves, participants could take all these preliminaries for granted and focus on discussions about the realities thus exposed and the practicalities of pointers towards the future. This final section of the Report draws from those discussions and aims to point towards issues for further discussion, clarification, study or practical strategies towards building a more just society.

Justice

The overall title of this publication points at once to the major reaction of the assembled participants: the ACW themes of love of God and love of neighbour are incomplete without the inclusion of the theme of justice, which all would hold to be central and several would see as a more fundamental human value than love. If a just society could be built, then love, neighbourliness, peace and compassion would flow from it. A society that is structurally unjust makes it, at least, a hard place for love of neighbour to flourish. The key aim of Christians and Muslims, thus it was held, is to build a society where all human beings can live together with dignity. Human dignity is something that cannot be compromised, and in a hierarchy of values, basic human values were seen to be paramount, to be followed by values based on religion, with nationality and ethnicity coming further down the scale.

And yet from where are these human values to be drawn? As members of two faith communities, participants argued that basic human values come from God, creator of all, and thus were ultimately universal. Such human values ought to be accessible by reason also; therefore we spoke of basic human values, which are common to all humanity. Such values would include justice, fairness, kindness and human sympathy for those who suffer. From within both Muslim and

Christian systems, it was argued that if we want something for ourselves: freedom, dignity, human rights, then these things should be given to others; this is the fundamental meaning of "love of neighbour".

Several practical messages were heard. We have to accept that a deep distrust, even bordering on hatred, exists between different groups of people in the world, in regions and in local communities without a basis in personal experience or personal history. This requires us to own and work with our shared histories in an informed way, through education. Some causes of injustice in African and Asian societies have their roots in factors that lie outside the regions geographically and beyond the control of local religious or civic leaders, such could range from proxy wars, through struggles for spheres of influence, to the importation of religious traditions and approaches that are quite alien to the indigenous people of these continents. Whilst many causes of injustice can be traced to socio-economic-political sources, some of which take on a religious garb in reality, it cannot be escaped that religion has some responsibility also in communal violence and suchlike unjust situations; there was a call to re-examine underlying theologies and focus on the kind of catechesis that was given within religious communities and to be vigilant about material transmitted in the name of religion on television channels and the Internet.

The existing Universal Declaration of Human Rights was seen to have grown up in a First World context; the question was thus posed: What shape would such a declaration of human rights take if it were written from a Muslim or Christian or religiously plural developing world context? High flying talk of justice as a fundamental universal human value cannot be allowed to obscure the reality that in many countries in Asia and Africa, not hereby excluding other parts of the world, the agencies set in place to enforce justice are endemically corrupt. It was held to be a universal religious duty to make the world a more just place for human beings to flourish, however a specificity of the Cadenabbia gathering was that we were drawn from parts of the world where people had lived in pluralist societies for generations, therefore a particular challenge that we must face in the future is how to apply this experience to create a just common law by consensus in a country with a plurality of religions: could this be a "religious" law or must it by definition be "neutral to religion" or, in this sense, secular?

Shari'a

It is a common experience for all those experienced in Christian-Muslim meetings, conferences and dialogues, that sooner or later the question of the Shari'a is bound to be raised; our gathering was no exception. With the geographical compass represented, there were countries that talked actively of "introducing the Shari'a" and others that were founded on quite other principles, such as the *pancasila* principle in Indonesia and the secular tradition of independent India.

Some important first steps should be recorded. Given that the aim of the Shari'a is to establish a situation in which human beings can flourish in the way that God intended, in justice and peace, then, following on from the foregoing, a discussion of the Shari'a is a necessary part of any Muslim discourse on justice. It also follows, justice being a human value open to all by virtue of their reason, that wherever justice is to be found, there by definition is the Shari'a. Emphasis was laid on the importance of beginning with the *maqasid al-shari'a* (the underlying objectives) instead of approaching the Shari'a piecemeal as though it could be implemented as replacement elements in a system that is not founded on the underlying principles.

A strong note of caution was sounded that people often speak of "implementing the Shari'a" as though it were a clearly defined body of laws worked out in bound volumes and sitting on a shelf ready for implementation; this is not the case. As one member put it, to "implement the Shari'a" in the present situation is to sign a blank cheque as no-one knows its precise contents. Another member noted that if one were to draw up a handbook of women's rights in a range of Muslim countries, the results would show how arbitrary and ambiguous talk of the Shari'a is at the present juncture.

Some participants were opposed to the current talk of "implementing the Shari'a", seeing it as the consequence of poor constitutional law and inadequate civil law enforcement, thus creating a vacuum, often supplemented by corruption, into which calls for the Shari'a were seen as the solution. Others noted that if people wanted to be ruled by the Shari'a then they had a right to it. This led to some discussion about the methodology of implementation; if it were not by consultation and the will of the people, would its imposition not amount to

religious dictatorship? At the same time, no law is accepted by all the people but in a democracy, if the majority vote in a law, this must be done in such a way as to protect the rights of the minorities. African Christians, we were told, are not interested in having Christian religious states or being governed by Christian religious law, rather they look for a common state law that rules everyone. If Muslim personal law were to be introduced into a state, it was asked, would that mean that all Muslims have to be ruled by it and thus lose their rights under the common civil law, as upheld by the Christians? Would that not mean that Muslims were thus deprived of their right to choose according to their consciences? It was noted, on the basis of the Qur'an itself, that all human beings are directly and individually accountable to God; this point is particularly sharpened when one thinks of the situation of Muslim women under a legal system that had no or unequal feminine input in its creation and thus can be best described as "male majority law". What then would be the legal and moral position of these women in conscience?

Some of the realities of the Shari'a debate around Asia and Africa were noted. It often leads to polemical attacks by one group of scholars on another. Shari'a becomes a tool to make mischief in the hands of the oppressed who want to claim it as a means of getting back at their oppressors. In the eyes of many, "implementing the Shari'a" connotes imposing the *hudud* punishments; but our attention was drawn to report from the Prophet to the effect that the *hudud* should be kept away by any suspicion of lack of certainty. This principle of deterrent ameliorated by compassion seems far removed from the reality too often witnessed and reported. If the emphasis was on the *maqasid* rather than the *hudud*, then we might indeed see corruption rooted out from societies, the hungry fed, an emphasis on education and so on. It was noted with concern that opposition to elements of law that people labelled as "being part of the Shari'a" but that lacked fundamental justice was seen as "promoting ungodliness", being anti-Islam or indeed downright blasphemous. Indeed with so much misapplication of "Shari'a" around, there are those who associate the term with "causing injustice".

Two specific questions relating to Shari'a stemming from ACW were discussed. It was asked if "loving your neighbour" does not equate to "equal rights for all" and thus suggests a secular common law for all and not the Shari'a for Muslims and another law for Christians. There

was a call for the advocates of ACW to show how it would operate within a Shari'a-based system and demonstrate that such a philosophy does not demand a secular system.

Living with pluralities

One of the characteristics already noted of the Asian and African situation is an experience of living with pluralities, whether in terms of ethnicities or of religions. Stemming from this background, it was noted that "love of neighbour" affects all humanity; even though some of our neighbours are not always friendly and full of goodwill towards us. Hospitality was seen to be key in neighbourliness and a call was made for a more hospitable theology from both communities. A particular concern was raised about plurality that stretched beyond the Abrahamic religions; maybe if ACW had been generated in Africa and South (-East) Asia instead of the more insular Arab-European world, this issue could not have been avoided: is my family member who follows a Traditional Religion or Hinduism also my neighbour?

The language of exclusivity can often be detected in theological discourse but frequently it extends into identity politics where faith labels become symbols attached to majorities and minorities as a way of claiming group solidarity. The reality is, of course, that such identity politics is also played out within a faith community, which is divided by internal division and tension. Could the spread of a more democratic spirit, both within groups and between them, prompt an ideology of greater power-sharing?

The traditional plurality of our loci of interest cannot be immune from influences from outside in our globalised world society. Tensions, actions, theologies, economic strategies and political hegemonies from the West all have their impact in a way that cannot be controlled locally. At the far end of this spectrum was noted external funding for extremist groups and the exporting of armed conflict. Such external forces were not alien to taking on a religious colouring, be it Christian or Muslim.

Theology

The starting point for the discussion here was that Christians and Muslims are two faith communities under God and therefore our faith prompts reflection, which is theology, which in turn inspires us to

such documents as ACW. From a Christian perspective, an incarnated theology means taking local contexts seriously and being open to the Spirit of God working through people of other faiths. And yet experience prompted participants to formulate the question: Can a religious community bear with outsiders being openly critical of their perceived "divine truths"? Which elicits the further question: Is this "criticism" the same thing as "asking questions in order to understand better"? Indeed throughout the theatre of our concern, and perhaps on a wider canvas also, both faith communities are beset by self-declared "experts" in religious matters who are eager to proclaim with assurance what "God says", which prompted one member to raise the massive hindrance to progress caused by those who teach that "my opinion" is the "only right opinion".

Internal theological tensions within each faith are not unknown and need to be acknowledged and worked through. Attention was drawn to some Pentecostals and some Salafis who actually foment tension, first within their own religious community and then between the faiths. Indeed some of the worrying promoters of extreme positions within both communities are middle class "born again" Muslims or Christians, who draw their inspiration and guidance from the Internet or television, and prove to be much more dangerous than traditionally trained and grounded religious leaders. Such groups tend to be prone to "selective reading" of both scripture and history to bolster their extreme positions.

At the same time participants were keen to remember that there are insurmountable differences in theology and belief between Christians and Muslims; not least about how we understand God, Jesus/Muhammad and Qur'an/Bible. These must not be glossed over but we must feel ourselves inspired to "explore the otherness of the other". Indeed one fundamental weakness in religious educational institutions noted is that they need to be more open to understand the other faith within its own terms and paradigms and not according to their own construction of "the other". One important burden placed on theology is to drive and inspire the practice of the faith in human living.

A COMMON WORD

Much has already been written about ACW: how welcome it is, its potential importance in giving new impetus to the relationship between Muslims and Christians, and its strengths and weakness in terms of content. Several of the papers in this volume comment on this point; particular attention could be drawn to those of Channan and Madigan. A dominant reaction from both Asian and African participants was that the document is hardly known at all amongst religious leaders, local religious communities, theological educators or the media. Occasionally a signatory provoked a little interest, just by being a signatory, but overwhelmingly the reports were that the signatories themselves have not been active in promoting the document in their links, if they have any, with local Christians or in inspiring co-religionists to engage in a new way on the basis of the letter.

It was noted by some informed participants that ACW was drafted and then sent out for signature; it was not the product of a collaborative effort on the part of the signatories. ACW has a whole variety of readers, and thus is open to a variety of meanings being drawn from the text, both amongst Muslims but also amongst Christians and others who receive the text. Similarly others noted that many Christian responses to ACW had been collaborative efforts by theologians and Church leaders. This prompted the reflection and question: there needs to be some intra-Muslim agreement on the authoritative status of ACW; how representative is it? This representative quality is one obvious difference between ACW and *Nostra Aetate* but it was noted that the two documents shared the methodology of affirming those things that can so be and remaining silent on the remainder of issues.

The question was raised, based perhaps on a Muslim understanding of *din al-fitra*, that if ACW was truly *A Common Word* then it ought to be common to all humanity and not just restricted to Christians and Muslims. As such it should lead to common action to promote the common good both locally and internationally. What strategy might it prompt to break the deadlock over Palestine? was one comment. The lack of strategies and an action plan has already been noted as a weakness in ACW; perhaps related to its geographically limited authorship and non-representative status. Could it have brought forward an action plan on which the signatories could deliver?

There were calls for ACW to be translated into regional languages to disseminate the message wider. This prompted some discussion as to whether, if it were to be translated "for the masses", it ought to be accompanied by a commentary and some reflections. Perhaps such accompanying literature could be a joint Christian-Muslim production?

Practical ways forward

It was generally agreed that this group meeting in Cadenabbia, drawn as it was from such a vast geographical area and with people acting only in their own personal recognisance lacked the capacity or mandate to set in train a range of practical measures. We could only make some practical observations. It was hoped that the signatories of ACW might feel the onus to become loci of future co-operative action; as indeed might the Aal al-Bayt Foundation in Jordan.

The most pressing practical outworking was the recognition of the need to work on all levels of education. To halt the production of ill-informed polemical literature, which all too easily leads to conflict. To revise existing text-books from children's classes upwards and to introduce material that reflects the other faith within its own paradigms and models of understanding. Only in this way, could the message begin to work down to people in local communities. Coupled with this was the urgent need to address the educational institutions in which future religious leaders in both communities are educated. There needs to be a great interchange of materials and personnel to promote authoritative learning.

The speed and range of worldwide communication mean that local issues have global consequences, as may be evidenced by the episode in the Sudan in which a teacher allowed the children in her class to select the name Muhammad for a Teddy Bear. We need to prepare people to work with such media in productive ways. Similarly, the access to extreme voices on the Internet was noted and the disruptive activities of international speakers on lecture tours; to spare people from some of whom might require that entry visas are not issued, according to some participants.

One of the realities of life is that we do not start from a blank page of history; injustice is rife in the affairs of humankind. Can this be corrected on the basis of justice alone, or, as ACW indicates, do

human beings need to emulate the divine example of tempering justice with mercy and applying creatively the principles of compassion, as understood similarly and differently within Christian and Muslim traditions, to heal the injustices of society.

The overriding practical outcome called for by the conference was to empower both Muslims and Christians locally to work for justice and promote the Common Good, in health provision, education and the eradication of poverty, so that both communities could be known globally for their love of their fellow human beings.

Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

"We are coming from both religious traditions, deeply rooted in Sub-Saharan Africa, and South and South-East Asia, where the vast majority of the world's Muslims live; where there is a deep and wide richness of Christian presence; where the expansion in both faiths is likely to occur in coming decades; where we have a centuries-long experience of living together in plural societies. In various configurations in our regions we have experience respectively of living as minorities, as majorities and in plurality. Therefore we have a wealth of experience of and are comfortable with multiple identities and belongings."

(Extract from: "A Message from Cadenabbia")

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