

## Seeking Muslim, Christian and Jewish Wisdom in the Fifteenth, Twenty-first and Fifty-eighth centuries: A Muscat Manifesto

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I am very honoured to speak in one of the finest mosques in the world, and I am inspired by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said's leadership in creating a space where understanding between cultures and religions can be advanced. I am also deeply grateful to HE Shaykh Abdullah bin Mohammed Al Salmi, Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs, for his invitation and hospitality. I would also like to thank all those who have helped in the organisation of my visit and of the two lectures, especially Michael Bos, whose work has done so much for Muslim-Christian relations, and Dr Abdulrahman Al Salmi, editor of the journal *Tolerance*. I bring warm greetings from the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, Professor Alison Richard: we greatly value Cambridge's very close links with Oman and trust that they can become even closer in the years ahead. Three days ago His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, was in Cambridge and was delighted to hear of this visit: he too asked me to convey his warm greetings

### **Seeking the Wisdom of God: A triple dynamic**

My theme in this lecture is seeking the wisdom we need for living in our time, which according to the Muslim, Christian and Jewish calendars is the fifteenth, twenty-first and fifty-eighth centuries. There are many rich traditions of wisdom in our world, among which I will focus on these three, whose members together make up around half of the world's population.

We are siblings who share a great deal, and we are also very different. We need to be able to find shared ground. But 'shared ground' is a static image, and even more important is the spirit that blows over both what we share and what divides us. It is possible for us to face and discuss our differences without resolving them, while at the same time deepening our mutual respect and friendship. I want to suggest that the spirit we most need is one that seeks wisdom above all, the wisdom of the God of wisdom, compassion and blessing.

In the Book of Proverbs in the Bible wisdom makes a passionate appeal to us:

Wisdom cries out in the street;  
in the squares she raises her voice. . .  
Beside the gates, in front of the town,  
at the entrance of the portals she cries out:  
'To you, O people, I call,  
and my cry is to all that live . . .  
Take my instruction instead of silver,  
and knowledge rather than choice gold;  
For wisdom is better than jewels,  
and all that you may desire  
cannot compare with her . . . ' (Proverbs 1:20; 8:3, 4, 10, 11)

That is a manifesto! What might wisdom urge us to do today? I suggest:

first, to search as deeply as possible within our own scriptures, traditions and understanding of our world today; second, to share with each other what we find, as we study, discuss, explore and argue together – deep differences call for wisdom in how to question and dispute; and, third, to collaborate together for the common good of our world in ways that please God – which above all means for the sake of more wisdom, compassion and peace. So the core vision is of this triple dynamic between the Abrahamic faiths: deeper into our own faith, deeper into understanding the two others, and deeper into engagement with the world for its good.

This is a moment of great danger in the history of our three faiths and of our world. There are tensions, crises and conflicts, and widespread misunderstandings and suspicions. But there are signs of hope too, and we must believe that God wants us to create many more such signs.

One sign is the fact that I, a Christian theologian, have received your invitation to speak here this evening in the Grand Mosque and lectured in the Institute of Shariah Studies on its magnificent new campus earlier today. In your invitation you asked me to say what I as a Christian have learned from my own tradition that might be of value to Muslims and their relations with Christians. So in the rest of this lecture, while always assuming that the best relations between any two of the Abrahamic faiths will be formed when the third is also involved, I will largely concentrate on Muslim-Christian relations. That is a central global challenge of this century, one that has only begun to be addressed, and it deserves our urgent attention and dedication.

### **Christian Resources for the Challenge**

I will first explore some of the theological resources Christianity might draw upon to meet this challenge.

For over twenty years part of my academic work has been editing a textbook, *The Modern Theologians*, now over 800 pages in its third edition, about Christian theology since 1918.<sup>1</sup> It has been one of the most valuable parts of my education. I have had to ask questions such as: Who are the leading Christian theologians of the past hundred years? What are the most important movements? How have different theologies responded to modernity? What has been happening in Christian thinking in Asia, in Africa, in North and South America, and among Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox Christians, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, mainstream Protestants and Anglicans? What have been the main developments in the interpretation of scripture? Which philosophies have been most influential? What about

theology that engages with the natural sciences, the social sciences, economics and politics? How has theology thought about the visual arts, music and film? And what about pastoral and practical theology, and theology of prayer and spirituality?

I have come to the conclusion that the past century has in fact been one of the richest and most fruitful in the whole two thousand years of Christian theology. Why is that? There are many factors that help to explain it. In line with the explosion of education at all levels, far more people have been studying and writing theology, and there has been a huge increase around the world in seminaries, institutes, universities and courses for congregations and lay Christians. Whole new groups of people who previously were largely excluded from theology can now study it, and many of them go on to teach and write it – think of women, black Americans and Africans, lower caste Indians, lay Roman Catholics, and many others. These groups have often shown a passion for learning and for working out theologies that connect strongly with their lives and contexts.

There are other reasons too for this flourishing of Christian theology, perhaps above all the stimulus of responding to unprecedented changes and challenges. The historian Philip Jenkins has described how many signs of energetic life and thought there are in European Christianity at present, as it copes with secular forces and the growth of other faiths. He says that the church that can survive Europe can survive anything! He also raises a fascinating question: are the pressures on European Islam having similar beneficial effects, as European Muslims develop a ‘form of faith that can cope with social change without compromising basic beliefs.’<sup>2</sup> Some of my most moving conversations with Muslim friends and colleagues have arisen from sharing how each can learn from the other in responding to modern understanding, to academic disciplines, and to religious, social, political and economic pressures.

Europe is at present like a laboratory for exploring what wise, faithful and creative responses might be possible. In Cambridge my colleague in the University of Cambridge Faculty of Divinity and the Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme,<sup>3</sup> Abdal Hakim Murad (T.J. Winter) has this year begun with others a new Muslim Theological College. This, for the first time in the University’s 800-year history, adds to the rich Cambridge academic environment an independent Muslim institution that is connected to the University.<sup>4</sup> In that environment we hope that the wisdom of different traditions can be studied, tested and worked out in practical ways.

### **Key Elements in Wise Theology**

What about the quality of all this theology? In editing *The Modern Theologians*, I, and those many people with whom I have consulted, have faced again and again the difficult questions: Which theologies should be included? Which are the best? What is it that makes a theology wise and creative? I want to share with you my answer to that last question, about the ingredients in wise and creative theology, and then give an example of one development in Christian theology that has many lessons for Muslim-Christian relations.

So, what are the key elements in a wise Christian theology? I propose four.

First comes wise and creative understanding, interpretation and application of the Bible and Christian traditions. The more I continue as a theologian the more I am convinced that wise interpretation of the scriptures is the most fruitful source of theology, prayer and Christian living. The Bible is in many ways a difficult book, and it can be, and is frequently, dangerously and terribly misused. As the saying goes: ‘The corruption of the best is the worst’. So the sense of gratitude to those who intelligently and faithfully interpret the Bible is

immense. Augustine said that any interpretation of scripture that goes against love is false, and the final criterion of true biblical interpretation is whether it is in line with the love of God. I am at present writing a book on the future of Christian theology, with a parallel book on the future of Muslim theology being written by my friend, the scholar Dr Aref Ali Nayed.<sup>5</sup> Dr Nayed reminds me of Augustine when he says that the main criterion of true Quranic interpretation is whether it is in line with the mercy and compassion of God. His theology springs from those infinitely rich words that the Qur'an repeats so often: Bism Illah Al-Rahman Al-Rahim, 'In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful'. He is working out in Muslim terms something that has deep resonances with what I see in the first element in Christian theology: wise and loving retrieval of our sources, above all our scriptures.

The second element is lively engagement in the present with both God and the world. Wise theology requires constant prayer. The God who is worshipped is the living God, who is in constant interaction with people and the whole world, and invites us to take a responsible part in fulfilling his purposes now.

Modern life is extraordinarily diverse and complex, throwing up one challenge after another. Christianity cannot thrive if it tries simply to repeat the past or reject the present. Contemporary life is not all good and not all bad. It is a complex mixture, which means that we must constantly ask questions, explore possibilities, search the past with sensitivity, and listen to many other people in order to arrive at responsible discernments, judgements and decisions before God. Then we are able to avoid the two extremes of uncritical assimilation to modernity and uncritical rejection of it.

The theologians of all traditions, especially Jewish, Muslim and Christian, from whom I have learned most, have searched long and hard to discern the purposes of God in relation to the great problems and possibilities of our world. They have offered theology that is creative in the sense that it responds to new situations by seeking the wisdom of the Creator God, who desires to draw us into a good future which is very different from the past and present.

The third element is deeply involved in the first two: wise and creative thinking. I have in mind the great ideas that sum up and develop Christian understanding further. God's knowledge and wisdom are superabundant and endless and we can only ever fathom a tiny fraction of it. But we believe God wants to draw us deeper and deeper into this wisdom. It stretches and expands us in every way – in prayer and adoration, in study and discussion, in imagination and in action. Good theologians produce generative ideas that enable us to do fuller justice to scriptures and traditions and at the same time to respond better to the world today – its sciences, its philosophies, its religions, its cultures, its ethical dilemmas, its politics and its economics. The challenge of wise and creative thinking has never been greater.

Then, fourth and finally, there is the way Christian theology is expressed and communicated in all directions to all sorts of people. There is, I believe, in most people a hunger and thirst for deep meaning and wisdom. It is sad that so much of what we are offered concerning religion, not only by the media but also by religious communities and by educational institutions, is either 'junk food' or good food that is indigestible. The situation is not all bad, but it is serious enough to see the immense need for the best theology to be communicated as widely as possible in appropriate ways.

I vividly remember the impact on me as a fifteen-year old schoolboy in Dublin when I happened to come upon some of the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed in

1945 for plotting against Hitler. I had never realised such writing existed – it gripped me, stretched my thinking, gave a sense of the reality of God and the power of the Gospel, and opened up some of our age’s major questions. Years later, as I edited *The Modern Theologians*, I came to realise that Bonhoeffer has all the key elements of theological wisdom and creativity: he is a perceptive interpreter of Christian scripture and tradition; he was utterly engaged with God and with the events and issues of his time in church and in society, both in his own country and internationally; he generated marvellously illuminating ideas; and he communicated powerfully not only in academic writings but also in lecturing, broadcasting, sermons, letters, conversation, poetry, and drama – and he even began a novel.

What might these four elements mean to Muslims? As a Christian, I am not the person to answer that. I simply offer them now as a gift, drawn from the Christian experience of theologians seeking wisdom today. As you unwrap it, I will be watching and listening very eagerly for your response.

### **The Christian Ecumenical Movement as a Model for Inter-Faith Engagement**

Out of the riches of the past century of Christian theology I want now to concentrate on one that has many lessons for the present century’s inter-faith engagements. This is the Christian ecumenical movement of the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> There are, of course, many differences between attempts at bringing Christians together and attempts to bring different religions together, but there are enough parallels and comparable questions to make it very worthwhile. The history of the ecumenical movement is remarkable. I do not think that anyone a hundred years ago could have imagined it happening. Never before in history had major religious communities, with hundreds of millions of members, moved from a history of much hostile and suspicious confrontation, sometimes involving conflict and even killing, to a situation in which there was conversation, collaboration and even in some cases federation or union. Yet that is what happened between many of the main Christian churches in the twentieth century. There is still a long way to go, but the change in atmosphere has been dramatic.

As an Irish Anglican member of a 3% Protestant minority in Dublin I experienced the great changes for the better in relations between Protestants and Catholics in Ireland that came largely as a result of the support given to the ecumenical movement by the Roman Catholic Church’s Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). In all the troubles that happened in Northern Ireland after 1968, better relations between the main churches were a major element making for peace and, I believe, a key factor in avoiding the large-scale bloodshed that has happened in many other places.

How did the ecumenical movement happen? It had courageous pioneers, who often formed friendships that crossed church divisions. It required enormous amounts of theological work, the best of which has all four of the elements just mentioned: reinterpretations of the Bible, traditions and historical events, above all those such as the Reformation which led to splits in the church; patient engagement in prayer, conversations, debates and joint projects; inspired thinking that allowed each side to move beyond blockages and see each other as genuinely Christian, despite their deep differences and often very painful histories; and persuasive communication, especially in educational settings, but also through the whole range of media within and beyond the churches.

The ecumenical movement has been like an ecology with many habitats. It has needed engagements at all levels: international, national, regional and local. There have been

networks and groups, large and small, of ordinary Christians from different churches who have met together, prayed together, studied the Bible together, and worked for common causes together. One of the most encouraging things has been the amount of cooperation in serving the common good of society through charities, and through practical movements, such as Jubilee 2000 that campaigned for international debt relief.

There has also been institutional creativity at all levels, with new organisations and centres, and transformations of older bodies. I have been especially concerned with these in the area of education. In Cambridge those of us involved in helping to bring to birth the new Muslim Theological College have had as a model the Cambridge Theological Federation, which is independent but linked to the University and has members from the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Reformed and Orthodox traditions, as well as centres for Jewish-Christian and Jewish-Muslim relations.

I believe one of the greatest challenges of the twenty-first (or fifteenth or fifty-eighth) century is to bring about a change in consciousness among the world's Muslims, Christians and Jews (and, of course, others too) that can be compared to that achieved by the Christian ecumenical movement. We need to move beyond our often terrible histories and misunderstandings, and shift from suspicion, confrontation and conflict towards trust, conversation and collaboration, even as we acknowledge our real differences. The vision, energy and courage needed for this is even greater than that required by the ecumenical movement, and it will also require a range of dimensions comparable to those just mentioned. There are already some hopeful signs of this beginning to happen.

### **Signs of Hope**

Among the most important and best known<sup>7</sup> in recent years have been two daring Muslim initiatives: the letter *A Common Word between Us and You* sent by 138 Muslim scholars and leaders to all the Christian churches,<sup>8</sup> and the inter-faith gatherings initiated by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. These are very different and very important, and they should be seen as complementary to each other.

In the brief time available I will focus on *A Common Word*. I see it as the most important inter-faith statement in the past forty years.<sup>9</sup> Do visit the website, [www.acommonword.com](http://www.acommonword.com), to read this remarkable letter on love of God and love of neighbour, and the fascinating replies by church bodies, individual Christians, Jews and others. It continues to be fruitful.<sup>10</sup> Just three weeks ago in London I attended the inaugural meeting of a new body, provisionally called the C-1 World Dialogue. It is co-chaired by the the Anglican Bishop of London, Rt. Revd Richard Chartres, and by the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Dr Ali Gomaa, and when I told them of this visit to Oman they both sent their warm greetings. The C-1 has been largely inspired by *A Common Word*, and HRH Prince Ghazi of Jordan has been a leading figure in both. It is dedicated to sponsoring Muslim-Christian engagement and collaboration for the common good at all levels. The atmosphere at the meeting reminded me of the early days of the ecumenical movement, and I was encouraged that it saw the need for something of comparable scope and intensity. Let us pray that it flourishes.

As a theologian I am impressed by the way *A Common Word between Us and You* has all those elements of wisdom and creativity that I have been discussing. It communicates clearly. It has one big wise idea: the centrality of love and compassion to both of our traditions. It shows passionate devotion to God, and it courageously and generously engages with Christians and with the current global situation. Most striking of all, it draws on the Qur'an and the Bible together.

Let me explain why I find this reading together of the Qur'an and the Bible especially important. For the past fifteen years I have taken part in Scriptural Reasoning.<sup>11</sup> This involves Muslims, Christians and Jews studying our scriptures together, and it can also be practised between any pair of those faiths.<sup>12</sup> At the heart of it are reading and conversation around the texts that are central to our faith, worship and living. Scriptural Reasoning is now practised in many countries and different settings: universities; seminaries; schools; local congregations; and regional, national and international gatherings. It allows members of different faiths to practice mutual hospitality around the texts they love most, being hosts in relations to their own scripture and guests in relation to the other two scriptures. For me as a Christian it has been a remarkable experience to be able, year after year, to engage deeply with Jews, Muslims and fellow-Christians, and to see this generate mutual understanding, arguments, friendships, educational initiatives and collaborations. I have not found a better way of actualising the triple dynamic of going deeper into one's own faith, into the faith of others and into the contemporary world.

So it was a special delight in October 2008 when we in the Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme joined with the Archbishop of Canterbury to host a conference on *A Common Word*.<sup>13</sup> He had earlier in the summer of 2008 written the most substantial response so far, *A Common Word for the Common Good*. It was the most distinguished group of Muslim scholars and leaders ever to have gathered in Britain. Central to the conference was discussion of *A Common Word* and the study of the Qur'an and the Bible together. The communiqué issued at the end of it by the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Dr Ali Gomaa and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, said:

'One of the most moving elements of our encounter has been the opportunity to study together passages from our scriptures. We have felt ourselves to have been together before God and this has given us each a greater appreciation for the richness of the other's heritage as well as an awareness of the potential value in being joined by Jewish believers in a journey of mutual discovery and attentiveness to the texts we hold sacred. We wish to repeat the experience of a shared study of scriptural texts as one of the ways in which we can come, concretely, to develop our understanding of how the other understands and lives their own faith. We commend this experience to others.'

If we want to act on this recommendation, as I suggest we should, it must be done in partnership – and this is, indeed, already happening.

One further comment on *A Common Word* needs to be added. It is important not just for relations between Muslims and Christians. It also greatly helps internal relations within each faith community. Many Muslims have seen *A Common Word* as a major achievement in Muslim unity across traditions of Islam and across global regions; likewise, a remarkably varied set of Christians have converged in responding to it.<sup>14</sup> One of the most exciting religious prospects for our century is that inter-faith and intra-faith engagements might mutually reinforce each other. This has already begun to be realised by the most significant initiative within Christian ecumenism in the past decade, that of Receptive Ecumenism, led by the Centre for Catholic Studies in the University of Durham.<sup>15</sup> In its last major conference in Durham in January 2009 Receptive Ecumenism engaged in dialogue with Scriptural Reasoning in order to develop a complementary practice among Christian churches. Wise reading of our scriptures remains the central, demanding task for Muslims, for Christians, and for both together.

### **Future Christian-Muslim Relations: A Manifesto**

I will now sum up this lecture (including some things only hinted at in the lecture but dealt with elsewhere<sup>16</sup>) in a set of basic guidelines for improving inter-faith relations and the contribution of our faiths to the rest of the world.<sup>17</sup> This is the manifesto, in nine points.

Let us aim to:

### **Love of God and Neighbour**

1. Love God and each other, and have compassion for all God's creation

### **A Triple Dynamic**

2. Go deeper into our own faith, into each other's, and into commitment to the common good

### **Sources of Wisdom**

3. Seek wisdom through our own scripture, history and theology, through each other's, and through engagement with the arts, sciences, philosophy, and other sources of wisdom

### **Engaging with the Modern World**

4. Beware of assimilating to modernity and of rejecting it; seek to heal and transform it

### **Partnerships of Difference**

5. Form personal relationships, groups, networks and organisations dedicated to inter-faith conversation, collaboration and education at all levels, from international to local

### **Creative Communication**

6. Encourage the best communicators, artists, writers and teachers to spread the message of love of God and neighbour, drawing on the richest sources

### **An Ecology across Generations**

7. Cultivate a long-term vision of a habitable world, created and sustained by God for the good of all

### **Signs of Hope**

8. Create signs of hope within and between our faiths, inspired by *A Common Word* and the responses to it.

### **God and God's Purposes**

9. Do all this for the sake of God and God's good purposes<sup>18</sup>

There is a Muscat Manifesto. Let us pray that God will bless our efforts and generously surprise us!

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[1] David F. Ford with Rachel Muers (eds.), *The Modern Theologians - An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

[2] Philip Jenkins, *God's Continent. Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) p. 287.

[3] The Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme ([www.cip.divinity.cam.ac.uk](http://www.cip.divinity.cam.ac.uk)) promotes research and teaching which leads to deeper mutual understanding between the three Abrahamic traditions. It has four principal aims: 1) studying actual encounters between the three traditions, in the past and today; 2) bringing together the world's best current and future scholars working on materials in those traditions, in a way that fosters collaboration; 3) translating the core texts of those traditions for the use of their members in study; and 4) promoting engagement, dialogue and collaboration between the three faiths, and public understanding of them. In the area of public understanding and education CIP's major

initiative is the Cambridge Abraham Project, in collaboration with the Coexist Foundation and others, aiming to develop in London a major resource relating the three faiths.

[4] ‘The Cambridge Muslim College supports the development of training and Islamic scholarship to help meet the many challenges facing Britain today. The college is dedicated to maintaining academic excellence and pushing the boundaries of Islamic learning in the West. Drawing on resources and expertise in Cambridge and beyond, the college’s mission is to help translate the many existing strengths of British Muslims into stronger, more dynamic institutions and communities’ ([www.cambridgemuslimcollege.org/about.html](http://www.cambridgemuslimcollege.org/about.html)). For further information, visit [www.cambridgemuslimcollege.org](http://www.cambridgemuslimcollege.org) .

[5] There is also a third parallel book on the future of Jewish theology being written by Professor Steven Kepnes of Colgate University. They are to be published by Blackwell of Oxford in their Manifesto series.

[6] For an introduction to the Christian ecumenical movement and its theology, see Mary Tanner, ‘Ecumenical Theology’ in *The Modern Theologians*, third edition, pp. 556-71.

[7] There have also been many other initiatives, among the most significant of which have been new organizations, such as the Three Faiths Forum ([www.threefaithsforum.org.uk](http://www.threefaithsforum.org.uk)), and new foundations, such as the Coexist Foundation ([www.coexistfoundation.net](http://www.coexistfoundation.net)) and the Tony Blair Faith Foundation ([www.tonyblairfaithfoundation.org](http://www.tonyblairfaithfoundation.org)).

[8] For more information on *A Common Word*, including the text of the document in several languages, visit [www.acommonword.com](http://www.acommonword.com) .

[9] That is, since the Second Vatican Council’s landmark statement on the Roman Catholic Church’s understanding of other faiths in its decree *Nostra Aetate*. The text of the decree can be found in Austin Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1996), pp. 569-74,

[10] HRH Prince Ghazi of Jordan has recently summed up the responses to the letter:

‘Since its launch in October 2007, over 60 leading Christian figures have responded to it in one form or another, including H.H. Pope Benedict XVI, H.B. Orthodox Patriarch Alexi II of Russia, the Archbishop of Canterbury Dr. Rowan Williams, and the Presiding Bishop of the Lutheran World Federation, Bishop Mark Hanson (see: ‘Christian Responses’ at [www.acommonword.com](http://www.acommonword.com)). On November 2007, over 300 leading U.S. Evangelical leaders also responded in an open letter in the *New York Times*. In the meantime, the Muslim Scholars signing the initiative increased to around 300, with over 460 Islamic organizations and associations endorsing it.

*A Common Word* has led to a number of spontaneous local grassroots and community level-initiatives all over the world in places as far apart as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Canada, South Africa, the USA, and Great Britain (see: ‘New Fruits’ at [www.acommonword.com](http://www.acommonword.com)).

Over 600 Articles—carried by thousands of press outlets—have been written about *A Common Word* in English alone.

Over 200,000 people have visited the Official Website of *A Common Word* for more details.

Over 6000 people have ‘fully endorsed’ *A Common Word* online alone.

*A Common Word* has already been the subject of a number of M.A. and M. Phil. Dissertations in Western universities in various countries (including Harvard University, the Theological Seminary at the University of Tübingen, Germany, and the Center for Studies of Islam in the U.K.).

*A Common Word* has been the subject of major international conferences at Yale University, USA, and at Cambridge University (UK) and Lambeth Palace, and studies at World Economic Forum in Spring 2008 and the Mediterranean dialogue of Cultures in November 2008.

*A Common Word* was the central impetus behind the Wamp-Ellison Resolution in the U.S. House of Representatives which passed in 2008, and it was commended in this Resolution.

*A Common Word* received the U.K.’s Association of Muslim Social Scientist 2008 Building Bridges Award, and Germany’s Eugen Biser Award of 2008.

Finally, *A Common Word* was even cited at the traditional Post-Inauguration Service at the National Cathedral for President Obama on January 21st, 2009 during the main sermon by Reverend Dr. Sharon E. Watkins, the General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the US and Canada, as follows:

Recently Muslim scholars from around the world released a document, known as “*A Common Word Between Us*.” It proposes a common basis for building a world at peace. That common basis? Love of God and love of neighbor! What we just read in the Gospel of Matthew!

... There is a barrage of activity planned for 2009, including a major documentary film, three books, a joint Christian-Muslim sensitivity manual, an important political conference planned at Georgetown University, Washington DC; a large religious conference planned in Malaysia and possibly a third in the Philippines. Also planned are two high-level meetings between Muslims and the Orthodox Churches, and between Muslims and the World Council of Churches; a multi-lingual Muslim-Christian “recommended reading list”, a joint website with Yale, Lambeth Palace and possibly also the Vatican (to serve as a voluntary basis for school and university curricula); a Muslim Theological Press Conference in Spain; a major European-based but global and multi-stakeholder Christian-Muslim peace Institute / Foundation with *A Common Word* enshrined in its charter — this is precisely the C-1 world Dialogue —; a University campus-based Common Word student initiative in the USA; a joint-design Common Word Muslim-Christian string of Prayer-beads; a number of “trickledown” projects to try to bring the Common Word to Churches and Mosques all over the world; and finally the continuation of the practical work planned at the meetings in Yale, Cambridge / Lambeth Palace and the Vatican. In short, we think we may fairly say that in its first year *A Common Word* achieved—by the Grace of God, Al-HamduLillah, historically unprecedented “global traction”, and is hoping in its second year—with the Will of God, in sha Allah—to achieve historically unprecedented “global trickledown”. God is Bounteous!’ (from a draft version of H.R.H. Prince Ghazi of Jordan, ‘Concept of Dialogue: On “*A Common Word Between Us and You*”’ in Annual Dialogue Report on Religion and Values of the C-1 World Dialogue 2009, ed. Alistair Macdonald-Radcliff and Roland Schatz (Boston, Beirut, Pretoria, Tianjin, Zurich: Innovation Publishing, 2009), pp. 17-19).

[11] For further information about Scriptural Reasoning, see the website of the Society for Scriptural Reasoning, <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/jsrforum/> . For some of the best print resources on Scriptural Reasoning, see Chapter 8 in David F. Ford, *Christian Wisdom. Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 273-303; David F. Ford and C.C. Pecknold, *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006); Peter Ochs, 'Reading Scripture Together in Sight of Our Open Doors' in *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 26, no. 1, new series (2005), pp. 36-47; and Steven Kepnes and Basit Bilal Koshul (eds.), *Studying the 'Other', Understanding the 'Self': Scripture, Reason and the Contemporary Islam-West Encounter* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007).

[12] A good example of this is the on-going Christian-Muslim 'Building Bridges Seminar', hosted annually by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Some of the proceedings from the second meeting of the seminar, in Doha in 2003, can be found in Michael Ipgrave (ed.), *Scriptures in Dialogue: Christians and Muslims Studying the Bible and the Qur'an Together* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004).

[13] The participants included, on the Muslim side: H.E. Shaykh Prof. Dr. Ali Gomaa Mohamed Abdel Wahab (Grand Mufti, Egypt), Prof. Shaykh Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan Al-Buti (Dean, Department of Religion, University of Damascus, Syria), H.E. Prof. Shaykh Abd Allah bin Mahfuz bin Bayyah (Professor, King Abdul Aziz University, Saudi Arabia; Vice President of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, Mauritania), Shaykh Al-Habib Umar bin Muhammad bin Salim bin Hafith (Dean, Dar Al-Mustafa, Yemen), H.E. Shaykh Dr. Mustafa CeriÄ (Grand Mufti, Bosnia), H.R.H. Prof. Dr. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal (Personal Envoy and Special Advisor of H.M. King Abdullah II, Chairman of the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, Jordan), Prof. Dr. Ingrid Mattson (Professor of Islamic Studies, Hartford Seminary, USA; President, Islamic Society of North America), Shaykh Al-Habib Ali Zain Al-Abidin Al-Jifri (Founder and Director, Taba Institute, United Arab Emirates), Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad Winter (Lecturer in Islamic Studies, University of Cambridge; Director of the Muslim Academic Trust, UK), Prof. Dr. Aref Ali Nayed (Former Professor, Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies; Senior Advisor, Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme; Libya), Dr Ibrahim Kalin (Director, SETA Foundation, Ankara, Turkey; Asst. Professor, Georgetown University), Shaykh Amr Mohamed Helmy Khaled (Islamic Missionary, Preacher and Broadcaster; Founder and Chairman, Right Start Foundation International, Egypt), Ayatollah Prof. Dr. Seyyed Mostafa Mohaghegh Ahmad Abadi Damad (Dean of Department of Islamic Studies, The Academy of Science of Iran; Professor of Law and Islamic Philosophy, Tehran University, Iran), H.E. Dr. Abdulaziz Otham Al-Twajjri (Director-General, Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Saudi Arabia), Prof. Dr. Abderrahmane Taha (President, Wisdom Circle for Thinkers and Researchers, Morocco), Dr. Muhammad Suheyl Umar (Director, Iqbal Academy, Pakistan); Mr. Sohail Nakhlooda (Editor-in-Chief, Islamica Magazine, Jordan), and Mr. Fuad Nahdi (President, Radical Middle Way; Specialist Member, Christian Muslim Forum, UK).

Participants on the Christian side included: The Most Revd and Right Hon. Dr. Rowan Williams (Archbishop of Canterbury, UK), His Beatitude Gregorios III Laham (Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, of Alexandria and of Jerusalem), Metropolitan Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim (Metropolitan, Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese of Aleppo, Syria), The Rt Revd Michael Nazir-Ali (Bishop of Rochester, Church of England;

Co-President of the Anglican Communion's Network for Inter-Faith Concerns), The Rt Revd David Hamid (Bishop in Europe, Church of England), The Rt Revd Dr Josiah Idowu-Fearon (Bishop of Kaduna, Nigeria; Co-President of the Anglican Communion's Network for Inter-Faith Concerns), Professor Iain Torrance (President, Princeton Theological Seminary, USA), Professor Frances Young (Professor Emeritus, Formerly Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of Birmingham, UK), Professor David Ford (Regius Professor of Divinity, University of Cambridge; Director, Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme, UK), Professor Miroslav Volf (Professor of Systematic Theology, Yale Divinity School; Director, Yale Center for Faith and Culture, USA), Prof. Oddbjørn Leirvik (Professor of Interreligious Studies, University of Oslo, Norway), Prof. Fr Emmanuel Clapsis (Professor Ordinarius, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, USA; Ecumenical Patriarch), Abbot Timothy Wright OSB (Advisor on Interreligious Affairs to the Abbot Primate of the Order of St. Benedict), The Revd Prof. Christian Troll SJ (Honorary Professor, Kolleg St. Georgen, Germany), The Revd Dr. Daniel Madigan SJ (Woodstock Theological Center, Georgetown University, USA), Dr. Nicholas Adams (Academic Director, Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme, UK), Revd Dr. Mindawati Perangin-angin (Head of the Ecumenical Bureau of the Karo Batah Protestant Church of Indonesia), Pfrin. Susanna Faust (Representative for Interreligious Dialogue, Ecumenical Center, Evangelical Church of Germany), and Revd Canon Anthony Ball (Archbishop of Canterbury's Secretary for International and Inter-Religious Relations, UK).

[14] The preparation for the Archbishop of Canterbury's response, *A Common Word* for the Common Good, included a great deal of consultation, culminating in a gathering in Lambeth Palace on Sunday June 1st 2008 of scholars from different churches, who next day were joined in Church House, London, by about fifty leaders of churches, including World Council of Churches, Roman Catholic, several Orthodox (including leaders from the Middle East), Methodist, Reformed, Evangelical, and others. They had a draft of Dr Williams' response and agreed that he should send one in line with what they unanimously approved. The Yale-sponsored statement welcoming *A Common Word* and published as a full-page advertisement in the New York Times in November 2007 also had a wider range of Christian signatories, including many leading Evangelicals. The World Council of Churches held a meeting of representatives of member churches in January 2008 to discuss *A Common Word* and later issued a statement, 'Learning to Explore Love Together. Suggestions to the Churches for Responding to 'A Common Word''. In each case there were close links between intra-Christian engagement and later Christian-Muslim meetings. In each case also there was strong collaboration between church leaders and academics. The internal workings of the Roman Catholic Church are not in the public domain, but it is clear that there was considerable debate before the decision to set up the Catholic-Muslim Forum between the Vatican and the signatories of *A Common Word*, which met for the first time in Rome in November 2008.

[15] See the Receptive Ecumenism website, <http://www.centreforcatholicstudies.co.uk/?cat=6> , as well as the recent volume *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, ed. Paul Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[16] See especially Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, and David F. Ford, *Shaping Theology: Engagements in a Religious and Secular World* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007).

[17] These provide a broad framework. A more detailed proposal for Christian-Muslim relations is given in the final section of the Archbishop of Canterbury's response, *A Common*

*Word for the Common Good*. This is the most comprehensive template to have been proposed in recent years by a religious leader and it deserves thorough discussion and implementation.

[18] For a Christian understanding of the significance of ‘for God’s sake’ see Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, Chapters 3, 4, and 7.

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