

## **A PERICHORETIC MODEL FOR CHRISTIAN LOVE: A Theological Response to “A Common Word Between Us and You”**

**Ekaputra Tupamahu**

### **Abstract**

This article is basically a theological response to the Common Word Between Us and You. It gives a special emphasis on the Trinitarian concept of *perichoresis* and uses it as a model for Christian love in a pluralistic society. A close attention is given to Jurgen Moltmann's social trinitarianism, and how it helps formulate a theological framework for a Christian attitude toward others.

### **Introduction**

This article was born out of my personal concern and experience as a Christian who lives in the largest Muslim country in the world, Indonesia. Indonesia is actually known as a very peaceful country. Muslims and Christians have lived harmoniously side-by-side for centuries. Unfortunately, in the last decade this peaceful relationship was terribly destroyed by violent riots in several cities in Indonesia. From January 1999 until 2004, my hometown, Ambon, was tore apart by an extremist religious conflict between Muslims and Christians.<sup>1</sup> Many of my friends, neighbors, relatives lost their homes and stayed for years in refugee camps. Some of my close Muslim friends left Ambon for good.

The legacy was a deeply segregated society, but not one in which either side 'controlled' more territory than could be expected, based on the religious distribution of the population. Ambon's economy lay in ruins. Displaced

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the religious riot in Indonesia, especially in Ambon, see Birgit Bräuchler, "Islamic Radicalism Online: The Moluccan Mission of the Laskar Jihad in Cyberspace.," *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 15, no. 3 (December 2004): 267-285.; H. L. Sapulete, "Some Thoughts on the Riots in the Moluccas.," *Asia Journal of Theology* 16, no. 1 (April 2002): 17.; Patricia Spyer, "Blind Faith: Painting Christianity in Postconflict Ambon.," *Social Text* 26, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 11-37.; John Thayer Sidel, *Riots, Pogroms, Jihad: Religious Violence in Indonesia* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2007).

persons had no visible prospect of returning to their homes if they belonged to a local minority religion.<sup>2</sup>

Religious violence is very close to my life. What can Christians do to end this horrible suffering caused by religious convictions? It is not surprising at all that leading new atheists such as Christopher Hitchens<sup>3</sup> and Richard Dawkins<sup>4</sup> blame religions for violence in the world today and therefore promote the idea of abandoning religion altogether.

Is abandoning religion altogether a solution to violence in the world today? Is it really true that religion is the cause of many sufferings today? In a globalized world full of hate and anger, especially after 9/11 when the United States declared war on terror against the Taliban in Afghanistan and Sadaam Hussein in Iraq, the tension between Muslims and Christians has found its climax.<sup>5</sup> It seems like the thesis of new atheists is justified. Samuel Huntington's prediction of a clash of civilization between Islam and the West is now unavoidable.<sup>6</sup> However, in 2007, a group of Muslim leaders took a profoundly courageous step. They showed the world that the idea of religious violence is not true. "A Common Word between You and Us,"<sup>7</sup> a 29 page open letter, was written by Muslim leaders from all over the world. They sent it to Christian authorities and leaders around the world and asked for a peaceful dialogue. In less than a year, it has become a phenomenal worldwide movement of religious dialogue. This perhaps is one of the most, if not the most, published dialogue between Muslims and Christians in world history. Tony Blair, a former British Prime Minister, makes this statement in regard to the CW:

With the momentum of globalization, countries and cultures are being drawn closer and closer together with astonishing speed, creating a world that is becoming ever more interdependent. As such, not only peaceful

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<sup>2</sup> Gerry van Klinken, "The Maluku Wars: 'Communal Contenders' in a Failing State," in *Violent conflicts in Indonesia*, ed. Charles A. Coppel, Routledge Contemporary Southeast Asia Series (Abingdon, OX: Routledge, 2006), 132. Cf. Sherly Turnip and Edvard Hauuff, "Household Roles, Poverty and Psychological Distress in Internally Displaced Persons Affected by Violent Conflicts in Indonesia," *Social Psychiatry & Psychiatric Epidemiology* 42, no. 12 (December 2007): 997-1004.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, 1st ed. (New York: Twelve, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> In Islamic theology, there is no such thing as separation between state and religion. This means that when American troops came to attack Afghanistan or Iraq, they do not perceive it as an attack to the state only but also to Islam. Ordinary Muslims understand the war on terror in a very different perspective from what many Americans would see it. It is a war against Islam. For further discussion about this, see George F. Nafziger and Mark W. Walton, *Islam at War: A History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003), 200 ff. Angel Rabasa, *The Muslim World after 9/11* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> From now on, I will use the abbreviation CW for "A Common Word".

coexistence but active cooperation between Muslims and Christians – who together comprise about 55% of the earth's population – is a necessary component in making the 21<sup>st</sup> century work more humanely and the earth a better place for all its inhabitants.<sup>8</sup>

As a Christian who lives in a Muslim world, I feel an urgent need to articulate a proper Christian theology that promotes human solidarity, especially between Muslims and Christians. It is a theology to guide Christians in living with others in this globalizing world. The response that I am trying to offer to the CW is thoroughly based on a Christian traditional understanding of the Trinity. I will argue for the concept of perichoresis in the Trinity as a theological model for Christians to see the CW and engage with people from other religions. I am fully aware that many scholars and church leaders have written their responses to this letter, and I will also discuss them in the second part of this article. What I am offering here is not only a response, but also a theological model for Christian love to live in a pluralistic society. This article will be divided primarily into two parts. The first part is a description of the CW and the responses from Christians. The second part is my response and a search for a theological model for Christian love.

## **A Common Word between You and Us**

### **A Brief Background**

Before we go further to the content of the CW, let us discuss the background behind this important religious dialogue. The larger context of the relationship between Muslims and Christians should be taken into account when we try to understand the spirit behind CW. A series of religiously related events in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as the horrible experience of Muslims in Bosnia, Israel-Palestine problem and western foreign policy, the war in Afghanistan and Iraq, is the larger context of Muslim-Christian relationship in the past century.<sup>9</sup>

However, the immediate context of the CW was the Regensburg lecture by Pope Benedict XVI at the University of Regensburg, Germany, in September 2006, in which he spoke about the relationship between faith and reason. In the lecture, the Pope quoted a statement from Byzantine emperor Manuel II Palaeologus (1350–1425) regarding Islam. The lecture has triggered a lot of protest and anger from the Muslim world. Let me quote a longer part of it so that we can see the immediate context in which the statement was made.

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<sup>8</sup> Tony Blair, "Foreword," in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor*, ed. Miroslav Volf, Ghazi bin Muhammad, and Melissa Yarrington (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), x.

<sup>9</sup> Ghazi bin Muhammad, "On 'A Common word Between Us and You'," in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor*, ed. Miroslav Volf, Ghazi bin Muhammad, and Melissa Yarrington (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 4-7.

In the seventh conversation (διάλεξι - controversy) edited by Professor Khoury, the emperor touches on the theme of the holy war. The emperor must have known that surah 2, 256 reads: "There is no compulsion in religion". According to some of the experts, this is probably one of the suras of the early period, when Mohammed was still powerless and under threat. But naturally the emperor also knew the instructions, developed later and recorded in the Qur'an, concerning holy war. Without descending to details, such as the difference in treatment accorded to those who have the "Book" and the "infidels", he addresses his interlocutor with a startling brusqueness, a brusqueness that we find unacceptable, on the central question about the relationship between religion and violence in general, saying: **"Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached."**[3] The emperor, after having expressed himself so forcefully, goes on to explain in detail the reasons why spreading the faith through violence is something unreasonable. Violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul.<sup>10</sup> (emphasis is mine)

There are three things we can see in this short passage from Pope Benedict's lecture. First, this was just a quotation, and not a personal statement of the Pope. Second, the Pope did not say that he agrees or disagrees with the quotation from the emperor. Third, the point he was trying to make is simply that faith should not be forced upon people, especially by violence.

However, after the Pope delivered the lecture, a wave of strong protests and reactions came from the Islamic world. Many statements were loudly made to show how offended the Muslims were because of that statement. In Iraq, for example, the New York Times reported, "In the southern Iraqi city of Basra, protesters burnt an effigy of the pope, and an Iraqi group linked to Al Qaeda posted a warning on a Web site threatening war against 'worshippers of the cross.'"<sup>11</sup> Ayatollah Ali Khameni from Iran said that the Pope is provoking a new holy war or crusade.<sup>12</sup> Strong reactions also came from other nations, like Pakistan, Egypt, Turkey, etc.<sup>13</sup> The Pope eventually had to express an apology to the Muslim world from the balcony of Castel Gandolfo. He openly said, "I am deeply sorry for the reactions

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<sup>10</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections" (presented at the Meeting with the Representative of Science: Lecture of the Holy Father, Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg, September 12, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Ian Fisher, "Many Muslims Say Pope's Apology Is Inadequate," *The New York Times*, September 18, 2006, sec. International, [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/18/world/18cnd-pope.html?\\_r=1&hp&ex=1158638400&en=09867eb4bf0ed8e6&ei=5094&partner=homepage](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/18/world/18cnd-pope.html?_r=1&hp&ex=1158638400&en=09867eb4bf0ed8e6&ei=5094&partner=homepage).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> See "Pakistan's Parliament Condemns Pope Benedict XVI," Text.Article, September 15, 2006, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,213923,00.html>; "Muslim anger grows at Pope speech," *BBC*, September 15, 2006, sec. Europe, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5347876.stm>.

in some countries to a few passages of my address at the University of Regensburg, which were considered offensive to the sensibility of Muslims...”<sup>14</sup>

In spite of the terrible anger in the Muslim world, a group of Muslim leaders began to realize how important it is to build a bridge of mutual and harmonious relationship with Christians. A month after the lecture, about 83 Islamic authorities and scholars wrote the so-called “Open Letter to the Pope.”<sup>15</sup> The main purpose of this letter is to clarify misunderstandings that many have about holy war, etc. The CW was written a year after the Open Letter and is basically a follow up of it. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad of Jordan states,

We did not get a satisfactory answer from the Vatican beyond a perfunctory courtesy visit to me, a month later, from some Vatican officials. So, exactly one year after issuing our first letter (and thus one year and one month after the Regensburg lecture), we increased our number by exactly 100 (to 138, symbolically saying that we are many and we are not going away) and issued, based on the Holy Qur’an, “A Common Word between Us and You.”<sup>16</sup>

The CW, thus, is a follow up response to the Pope’s lecture in Germany in 2006. Instead of giving a negative response that would probably trigger more problems, these Muslim thinkers and leaders asked for peaceful conversations with Christians.

### The Content of the CW

Now, let us briefly discuss the content of the document itself. The central theme of this letter is love and it is basically divided into two main parts: (1) love of God, and (2) love of neighbor. The term “A Common Word” itself is taken from the Holy Quran.

*Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to a common word between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him). (Aal ‘Imran 3:64)*

Therefore, for Muslims coming to a common word among the People of the Book is a command from Allah. It is a sacred duty. This document is written in a highly academic style with long footnotes, but it is very readable even for ordinary people.

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<sup>14</sup> “Pope sorry for offending Muslims,” *BBC*, September 17, 2006, sec. Europe, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5353208.stm>.

<sup>15</sup> A full script of the letter can be access in “Open Letter to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI,” October 12, 2006, <http://ammanmessage.com/media/openLetter/english.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Ghazi bin Muhammad, “On ‘A Common word Between Us and You,’” 8-9.

Each part discusses Muslim perspective and the Christian perspective on the given topic.

(1) The love of God is centered on the Islamic confession of faith, *shahadahs*, “There is no god but God, Muhammad is the messenger of God” (Arabic: *La illaha illa Allah Muhammad rasul Allah*).<sup>17</sup> In this strong monotheistic root, the love of God in Islamic theology is defined. “They must love God uniquely, without rivals within their souls...”<sup>18</sup> The document moves further by explaining that Islamic love to Allah is expressed in three dimensions of the human soul: intellect, will, and feeling. They wrote, “... we could say that man’s soul knows through understanding the truth, through willing the good, and through virtuous emotions and feeling love for God.”<sup>19</sup> However, this love should not be understood as mere feeling, it is actually a “complete and total devotion to God.”<sup>20</sup> Moreover, they also discuss about the Christian concept of the love of God. The document basically says that the idea of the love for God is not only in Islamic tradition, but also central in Christian tradition. The *Shema* in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 is quoted to show Christian understanding of the unity or oneness of God. They also take the text in the Gospels when Jesus gave the commandments of love (Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-31). They write, “The commandment to love God fully is thus the *First and Greatest Commandment* of the Bible” (emphasis is theirs).<sup>21</sup>

(2) The second part of the letter deals with love of fellow human beings.<sup>22</sup> For them it is very clear that “... in Islam without love of the neighbor there is no true faith in God and no righteousness.”<sup>23</sup> This love has to be manifested in generosity and compassion. It is a real love to others, and not just a feeling of sympathy or empathy. “Without giving the neighbor what we ourselves love, we do not truly love God and the neighbor.”<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, love of neighbor is also commanded in the Bible. Biblical texts (Matthew 22:38-40, Mark 12:31; Leviticus 19:17-18) strongly talk about the importance of loving others. All God’s commandments in the Bible are centered in these two kinds of love: love of God and love of neighbor.

In the concluding part of the CW, these Muslim leaders say that they realize there are many differences between them and Christians. They, however, found that love of God and love of neighbor “are an area of common ground and a link between Quran, the Torah, and the New Testament.”<sup>25</sup> This common ground between two largest religions in the world, Christianity and Islam, is expected to be

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<sup>17</sup> A full script of CW can be accessed in “A Common Word between Us and You,” *The Official Website of A Common Word*, October 13, 2007, <http://acommonword.com/index.php?lang=en&page=option1>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

“the basis for all future interfaith dialogue” between them.<sup>26</sup> At the end of the letter they invited all Christians and Muslims to work together for a common good. They write, “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.”<sup>27</sup>

### Christian Responses

The responses are too many to be repeated here. Therefore, since the topic of this article is on the doctrine of Trinity and its relation to inter-religious engagement, I will just focus on the responses related to the Trinity. The main response from Christians comes from Yale University composed by Harold W. Attridge, Miroslav Volf, Joseph Cumming and Emilie M. Townes. It was published by New York Times on November 18, 2007 and signed by over three hundred other Christian leaders. The document is entitled “Loving God and Neighbor Together: A Christian Response to A Common Word Between Us and You.”<sup>28</sup> The content of the letter is very positive. They write, “In this response we extend our own Christian hand in return, so that together with all other human beings we may live in peace and justice as we seek to love God and our neighbors.”<sup>29</sup> The letter emphasizes again the need to find a common ground between Islam and Christianity. It praises the CW for pointing out these two central themes in the Bible (love of God and love of neighbor). It is then closed by an endorsement for further collaboration and dialogue for the sake of the common good. The end part of the document is worth quoting in full.

“Let this common ground” – the dual common ground of love of God and of neighbor – “be the basis of all future interfaith dialogue between us,” your courageous letter urges. Indeed, in the generosity with which the letter is written you embody what you call for. We most heartily agree. Abandoning all “hatred and strife,” we must engage in interfaith dialogue as those who seek each other’s good, for the one God unceasingly seeks our good. Indeed, together with you we believe that we need to move beyond “a polite ecumenical dialogue between selected religious leaders” and work diligently together to reshape relations between our communities and our nations so that they genuinely reflect our common love for God and for one another.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Harold W. Attridge et al., “Loving God and Neighbor Together: A Christian Response to ‘A Common Word Between Us and You’,” *Yale Center for Faith and Culture*, November 18, 2007, <http://www.yale.edu/faith/acw/acw.htm>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

Unfortunately, the Yale document did not mention anything about the Trinity. It seems like they want to be inclusive, but they failed to show the distinctive characteristic of Christian belief. This inclusiveness nature of the document has triggered a lot of strong reactions from conservative leaders. We will discuss this further below.

Besides the Yale document, many other responses have been given from Christians to the CW. After sorting through many of these responses, I would categorize them into three different groups. The first group uses the Trinity apologetically. The second group is offended by both the Yale document and the CW because of their unclearness about the doctrine of Trinity. The third group uses the Trinity as a model for Christian love. Let us discuss them one by one.

The first group uses this opportunity to clarify the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. They point out clearly that Muslims all reject the Trinity due to their misunderstanding of it. Even though they make this distinction clear, they respond to the CW in a positive way. For example, in the response from the Baptist World Alliance signed by the President, the General Secretary, Chair of the Commission on Doctrine and Inter-Church Cooperation, and Chair of the commission on Freedom and Justice, says:

We are well aware that Muslims believe the Christian idea of the Trinity contradicts the affirmation that God has no other being in association with Him. There are many texts in the Qur'an which affirm that 'we shall ascribe no partner unto him', and we may add the declarations that 'He fathered no one nor was he fathered' and the denial that 'God has a child'. We want to make clear that in holding to the doctrine of the Trinity, the Christian church has always denied that there are any other beings alongside the One God.<sup>31</sup>

They, further, write quite a long elaboration on what precisely the Trinity means for Christians when they use it. At the end of this response, they state that they are willing to positively join in a mutual discussion with Muslims on this matter, which is the love of God and love of neighbor. Another example is the response from the World Evangelical Alliance, written by Geoff Tunnicliffe as the International Director, is also in the same tone with the Baptist World Alliance.

By referring several times to Quranic statements that state God has no partner and associate, you rightly draw attention to the deepest difference between Islam and Christianity. Even though we are convinced that you misunderstand our doctrine of God being Three in One, when you speak about a 'partner' of God, we are convinced of the truth of Trinity and, therefore, *we cannot accept your invitation*. We know that this is a fundamental difference in our understanding the nature of God; one that will

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<sup>31</sup> David Coffey et al., "From the Baptist World Alliance to the Muslim Religious Leaders and Scholars Who Have Written or Signed A Common Word Between Us and You," July 21, 2008, 6, <http://www.acommonword.com/ACommonWord-Baptist-World-Alliance-Response.pdf>.



require long and sincere talks, and genuine listening to each other if we are to truly understand each other's position and to move beyond historical caricatures. *We urge you to consider joining us in such discussions.*<sup>32</sup> (emphasis is mine)

There are several things we can say about this response. First, it shows quite frankly the difference between the Islamic understanding of God and the Christian understanding of God. Not only that, they also make it clear that all the accusations that Islam makes against Christianity actually comes from their wrong conception of Trinity. Second, the World Evangelical Alliance is very ambiguous in their response. In the first part of this statement, they obviously reject the CW invitation to discuss about the concept of love because it quotes some strong apologetically monotheistic Quranic verses in the CW. However, it is interesting that they also invite Muslims to discuss or have dialogue concerning the Trinity. It seems to me that they want to say, "We reject your letter, but if you want to talk about the Trinity we are open to do that." Even though this statement is ambiguous, the overall letter from the World Evangelical Alliance is positive. Let us see a stronger response in the second group.

As I have stated above, the second group rejects altogether the CW and the Yale document mainly on the basis of the treatment of the doctrine of Trinity. This group, interestingly, consists of mostly conservative/evangelical leaders and theologians. There are actually many of them, but I will focus on two leading evangelical scholars. First, Robert A. Mohler, Jr., president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, criticized the whole discussion as "naiveté that borders on dishonesty."<sup>33</sup> In other occasion, Mohler says this regarding the Yale document,

"The document is not specific in any way about what makes up a Christian understanding [of God and Jesus Christ]... We don't believe that Jesus Christ is our hero. We don't believe that Jesus Christ is merely our prophet. He is Prophet and Priest and King. He is the incarnate Son of God. He is the second person of the Trinity. He is the Lord over all. Any minimization of that is a huge problem."<sup>34</sup>

The second strong reaction came from John Piper, a respected conservative Reformed theologian and pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In a nine minutes video posted on YouTube, he frankly admitted that he was disappointed with the whole discussion in the CW and the Yale document.

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<sup>32</sup> Tunncliffe Geoff, "We Too Want to Live in Love, Peace, Freedom and Justice: A Response to A Common Word Between Us and You," August 23, 2008, [http://www.acommonword.com/lib/downloads/We\\_Too\\_Want\\_to\\_Live\\_in\\_Love\\_Peace\\_Freedom\\_and\\_Justice.pdf](http://www.acommonword.com/lib/downloads/We_Too_Want_to_Live_in_Love_Peace_Freedom_and_Justice.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> Stephen Adams, "Evangelical Leaders Pledge Common Cause with Islam," *CitizenLink*, January 3, 2008, <http://www.citizenlink.org/CLtopstories/A000006202.cfm>.

<sup>34</sup> "Mohler: Evangelical-Muslim letter Troubling," *Baptist Press*, January 11, 2008, <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=27176>.

Piper's criticism is specifically directed to the Yale document. His response is centered in the soteriological work of Jesus Christ on the cross. He insists that the Yale document writers should have had put it in the document so that the world will clearly understand what Christians believe. He even frankly stated that this document is not "honest" to Christian faith. For Piper, the Muslim God is not the Christian God. They worship two completely different deities.<sup>35</sup> Again, this is rooted in Piper's understanding of the Trinity in the history of salvation.

The third group uses the Trinity as a model for Christian love. A respected Christian theologian from Yale University, Miroslav Volf, based his reflection on 1 John 4:7-12. Volf makes it very clear that the Christian understanding of love is profoundly rooted in the traditional doctrine of the Holy Trinity. He says, "Many Christian theologians through the centuries have seen a close connection between

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<sup>35</sup> See John Piper *Responds to "A Common Word Between Us and You"*, 2008, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTY-9FY13kw&feature=youtube\\_gdata](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTY-9FY13kw&feature=youtube_gdata). Let me quote an important part of Piper's response. He said,

I'm disappointed with a response that came from the one that was published in the New York Times... I just want to register publicly a disappointment, in fact a profound disappointment in the way it is worded... I just want to say that when we speak about the love of God and even quote a verse from 1 John 4 and don't take into account the very next verse where the love of God that sustains us, Christians, is the love of God that sent the Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to be the propitiation for our sins. That's the next verse and not the one that's quoted into the document. We are not, it seems to me, being honest. We are not saying to the world who is reading this document that the love of God that we get strength from is the love of God uniquely expressed through Jesus Christ as the propitiation for our sins because he died on the cross and rose again. All of those things Islam radically rejects so they do not believe in the God we believe in. They do not believe in the love of God that we believe in. They do not believe in the son of God that we believe in.

In the next part of the statement, Piper moves from a soteriological/Christological orientation to theological orientation. He argues that because they reject Jesus, they actually reject God. For him, Islam believes in a completely different God from Christian God. He uses an analogy of two old buddies talking about a friend of theirs. They have a different description of that person, and somebody enters into the discussion saying that probably they are talking about two different persons. Muslims and Christians use the same terminology for 'God' but, according to Piper, they are actually referring to two completely different deities. I strongly disagree with Piper because I do not think that an epistemological difference would be necessarily identical with ontological difference. Muslims have a different understanding of God, but it doesn't have to mean that they believe in an ontologically different God. I may have a different understanding of my father from the way my wife understand him. Again, it doesn't have to mean that I have two different fathers. Nevertheless, since the focus of this article is not on this topic, I will discuss it in other place.

After Piper posted his response on Youtube, Rick Love, a former International Director for Frontiers Besides, wrote a short interesting and open-minded article on why he signed the response of Yale document. See his full article here: Rick Love, "Why I Signed the Yale Response to 'A Common Word': A Respond to Piper's Thoughts," *Desiring God*, January 28, 2008, [http://www.desiringgod.org/Blog/1036\\_rick\\_love\\_responds\\_to\\_pipers\\_thoughts\\_on\\_a\\_common\\_word/](http://www.desiringgod.org/Blog/1036_rick_love_responds_to_pipers_thoughts_on_a_common_word/).