

WE AND YOU
Let us meet in God's love

by

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We and You — Let us Meet in God's Love

Bismi'llah Rahman al-Rahim

In the Name of God, the All-Good, the Infinitely Merciful,
and blessings and peace be upon the Prophet Muhammad
and upon all the prophets and messengers.

Your Holiness, Eminences, Excellencies, Distinguished Scholars:

IT IS ASSERTED BY THE Word of God, which for us Muslims is the Noble Qur'an, "And God summons to the Abode of Peace," and by Christ (may peace be upon him), who is the Word of God in Christianity and also a prophet of the highest order in Islam, "Blessed are the peacemakers." The goal of attaining peace is thus common between our two religions and we are here precisely with the hope of attaining peace between Christianity and Islam. In fact, what can be more important and foundational in the quest for peace than creating peace between our religions—for only through this peace will it be possible to establish peace between peoples and nations, more specifically the Islamic world and the West. Whether we are Christians or Muslims, we are beckoned by our religions to seek peace. As people of religion meeting here at the center of Catholicism, let us then dedicate ourselves to mutual understanding, not as diplomats, but as sincere religious scholars and authorities standing before God and responsible to Him beyond all worldly authority.

As Muslims, our lives have been punctuated since the advent of the Qur'anic revelation by the repetition of the Islamic testimony of faith, *La ilaha illa'Llah* (There is no divinity but God), the One God proclaimed also in the *Shema* in the Torah, which we both accept as revealed scripture since we and you are both members of the family of Abrahamic monotheism. We are also aware that for nearly two millennia Catholic Christians have recited *credo in unum Deum*. For both us and you, God is at once transcendent and immanent, creator and sustainer of the world, the alpha and omega of

existence—the Almighty whose Will prevails in our lives, the Loving whose love embraces the whole of the created order.

He is also just and therefore we both yearn for justice in our individual lives as well as in society. We both believe in the immortality of the soul, the ethical content of human actions, in our responsibilities before God from which our rights issue. Furthermore, all the faithful, Christian and Muslim alike, believe that one day we shall stand before God and be judged by Him for our actions here below while we also beseech His Mercy. We both believe in the reality of sanctity and our histories bear witness to the lives of saints, whom Muslims call friends of God, men and women who have smelled the perfume of Divine Proximity. We both value faith above all else and pray to God, certain that He hears us.

When we look at the full spectrum of our theological traditions, we observe therein many diverse understandings of the relation between faith and reason, the question of the inscrutability of the Divine Will or Its knowability, of free will and determinism, the meaning of evil, and so many other crucial theological issues.

What is remarkable is how the theological positions in one tradition have their correspondence in the other, *mutatis mutandis*. Our religions have both created major civilizations with their arts and sciences imbued with the presence of the sacred, and also we both claim universality for our message.

And yes, both our histories have been intermingled with periods of violence, and when religion has been strong in our societies various political forces have carried out violence in its name and in certain cases this violence has received legitimacy by religious authorities. Certainly we cannot claim that violence is the monopoly of only one religion.

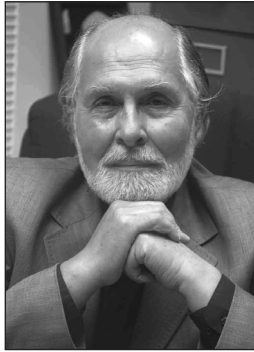
With so many profound similarities, why then have we had such a long history of confrontation and opposition? The answer is that we of course also have our differences which have providentially kept Christianity and Islam distinct and separate. Let us mention just a few of them. We emphasize Divine Unity and reject the idea of a triune God, while you

emphasize the Trinity while believing God to be One. We and you both revere Christ but in a different manner, and we do not accept the Christian account of the end of his earthly life. And yet, we Muslims also accept Christ as the Messiah (*al-Masih*) and expect his second coming at the end of the history of present humanity. We emphasize Divine Law (*al-Shari'ah*) as rooted in the Qur'anic revelation, while Christ asserted his break with the Law in the name of the Spirit. Therefore, Christians do not have the same conception of Divine Law as do Jews and Muslims. Nor do Christians have a sacred language as does Islam, but have used, and some still do use, several liturgical languages.

You and we, we both believe in religious freedom, but we Muslims do not allow an aggressive proselytizing in our midst that would destroy our faith in the name of freedom any more than would Christians if they were in our situation. The encounter of Christianity with modernism including secular humanism and rationalism associated with the Age of Enlightenment has also been very different from the experience of that encounter with Islam. Perhaps we can each learn something from the other in this very significant matter. We should join together in the battle against the desacralizing and anti-religious forces of the modern world, and joining effort should bring us closer together. Secularism should certainly not be a source for the creation of further distance between us.

It is with full awareness of both our shared beliefs and our differences, and also in light of the contemporary situation of the followers of our religions, that we as Muslims from different schools of Islamic thought and countries have come together here to extend to you our hand of friendship, seeking to meet you in God's love, beyond all our theological differences and memories of historical confrontations. Surely we, who respect and love Christ as you do, can meet and come together with you under the banner of what he has stated to be the two supreme commandments: to love God and to love the neighbor. We can also seek to extend, often in harmony with each other, the border of the definition of neighbor to include not only you and us but the whole of humanity, and even beyond

that the rest of God's creation. As the Holy Bible asserts, "With God, all things are possible." We submit to Him, and ask for His help and affirmation in carrying out this momentous task of meeting with you in friendship and peace under the banner of that Common Word that unites us. There can be no more blessed act in our times than the creation of deep accord between God's religions, especially the two religions that have the largest numbers of followers in the world, namely Christianity and Islam. Indeed, God summons us to the Abode of Peace, and blessed are the peacemakers.



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One of the world's leading experts on Islamic thought and spirituality, Seyyed Hossein Nasr is university professor of Islamic Studies at The George Washington University. He has authored more than fifty other books. Born in Tehran, raised in the United States, and graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Harvard, Professor Nasr is a well-known and highly respected intellectual figure in both the West and the Islamic world.

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