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## Muslims Call for Interfaith Peace

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Letter to Christian Church Leaders Seeks Common Ground

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Dozens of Muslim leaders from around the world released a letter yesterday to "leaders of Christian churches everywhere" emphasizing the shared theological roots of the two faiths and saying the survival of the world depends on them finding common ground.

The document, "A Common Word Between Us and You," was signed by 138 clerics, scholars and others and released at news conferences in Jordan, [London](#), [Abu Dhabi](#) and Washington.

The effort was organized by the Royal Academy, the same Jordan-based group behind a letter sent last October to [Pope Benedict XVI](#) after he delivered a lecture about Islam that set off protests.

Noting that the two faith groups together make up more than half of the world's population, the letter said: "If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace. . . . thus our common future is at stake. The very survival of the world is perhaps at stake."

The letter was addressed to more than 30 Christian leaders, including Pope Benedict and the leaders of the world's Orthodox Christians and Anglicans. Its signatories include present and former grand muftis of [Syria](#), [Slovenia](#), [Palestine](#) and [Egypt](#) as well as professors, political leaders and advocates such as the co-founder of the Council on American-Islamic Relations.

At the Washington news conference, John Esposito, director of the [Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding](#) at [Georgetown](#), said that the letter was a feat partially because it was able to bring together Muslim leaders from a wide range of theological schools across Sunni, Shia, Salafi and Sufi traditions.

"This is a challenge to Christianity," he said. "It will be wonderful to see their responses."

The key point of the 29-page letter is that Christianity and Islam share two foundations: love of one God, and love of one's neighbor.

"Christians don't see how central these are to Islam, too," said Seyyed Hossein Nasr, an Iranian-born Islamic studies professor at [George Washington University](#) who signed the letter.

Reactions were mixed.

Sister Mary Ann Walsh, spokeswoman for the [U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops](#), said the letter "gives compelling reasons why Muslims and Christians should work together. As Catholics, we look forward to a broad dialogue of civilizations and cultures that will take up the challenges and hopes of the distinguished Muslim authors of this important 'Common Word.' "

[Rowan Williams](#), archbishop of Canterbury and spiritual leader to the world's 17 million Anglicans, said in a statement that the letter "provides an opportunity for Muslims and Christians to explore together their distinctive understandings. . . . The call to respect, peace and goodwill should now be taken up . . . at all levels and in all countries."

Anglican bishop Michael Nazir-Ali said, however, that the letter seems to undercut the role of Jesus by emphasizing a part of the Koran that urges non-Muslims not to "ascribe any partners unto" God. The two faiths' understanding of the oneness of God is not the same, he told the [Times of London](#). "One partner cannot dictate the terms on which dialogue must be conducted," he said. "This document seems to be on the verge of doing that."

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