

360 degrees love

By

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The reaction to my essay **Reconciliation: The choice of peacemakers**¹ encouraged me to shed more light about the reconciliation process. What is the next step? What should people do to get involved in a reconciliation effort? Who is qualified to engage in this kind of activity?

On October 13th 2007 in *A Common Word Between Us and You*², 138 Muslim scholars, clerics and intellectuals came together unanimously for the first time since the days of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ to declare that common ground exists between Christianity and Islam. The signatories to this message came from every denomination and school of thought in Islam. Every major Islamic country or region in the world was represented in this message, which was addressed to the leaders of all the world's churches, and indeed to all Christians everywhere.

"*A Common Word Between Us and You*" was first presented at a conference in September 2007. In the letter the authors and signatories suggest that the most fundamental common ground between Islam and Christianity, and the best basis for future dialogue and understanding, is the love of God and the love of neighbor.

The hope is that this document will provide a common constitution for the many organizations and individuals who are carrying out interfaith dialogue throughout the world. Not only can "*A Common Word*" give us a starting point for cooperation and worldwide coordination, but it does so on the *most solid theological ground possible*: the teachings of the Qu'ran and Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and the commandments offered by Jesus Christ ☩ in the Bible. Despite their differences, Islam and Christianity not only share the same Divine Origin and the same Abrahamic heritage, but the same two *greatest commandments*.

In "Loving God and Neighbor Together: A Christian Response to A Common Word Between Us and You" a response was drafted by scholars at Yale Divinity School's Center for Faith and Culture. It was endorsed by almost 300 Christian theologians and leaders.

"As members of the worldwide Christian community, we were deeply encouraged and challenged by the recent historic open letter signed by 138 leading Muslim scholars, clerics, and intellectuals from around the world.

What is so extraordinary about A Common Word Between Us and You is not that its signatories

¹ <http://safikaskas.blogspot.com/2010/01/reconciliation-choice-of-peacemakers.html>
<%0bhttp://safikaskas.blogspot.com/2010/01/reconciliation-choice-of-peacemakers.html>

² <http://www.acommonword.com/index.php?lang=en&page=option1>

recognize the critical character of the present moment in relations between Muslims and Christians. It is rather a deep insight and courage with which they have identified the common ground between the Muslim and Christian religious communities.

What is common between us lies not in something marginal nor in something merely important to each. It lies, rather, in something absolutely central to both: love of God and love of neighbor.

Given the deep fissures in the relations between Christians and Muslims today, the task before us is daunting. And the stakes are great. The future of the world depends on our ability as Christians and Muslims to live together in peace. If we fail to make every effort to make peace and come together in harmony you correctly remind us that "our eternal souls" are at stake as well.

We are persuaded that our next step should be for our leaders at every level to meet together and begin the earnest work of determining how God would have us fulfill the requirement that we love God and one another. It is with humility and hope that we receive your generous letter, and we commit ourselves to labor together in heart, soul, mind and strength for the objectives you so appropriately propose³”.


Hence, when I proclaimed the two love commandments to be basis for reconciliation, I did so with the theological backing of many Muslim and Christian leaders.

I also proclaimed that reconciliation is relational. An examination of this statement is necessary, so that we can better understand how to start the reconciliation process and how we should proceed.

The two commandments of love are the following:

“ ‘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)

So the first commandment concerns itself with loving God with all one’s heart, soul and with all one’s mind. This commandment is about one’s relationship with his Creator. In that sense, it addresses a private relationship; one that is only known and fully understood and appreciated between the individual and his Creator. While this relationship needs nurturing, it will always remain essentially private. Though both Muslims and Christians worship the same God, it is not within the realm of reconciliation to discuss the nature of God.

Both Muslims and Christians accept the first commandment and all similar teachings. In the New Testament, Jesus  said: *“Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one”⁴. “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”⁵* The Qur’an

³ <http://www.yale.edu/faith/>

⁴ Mark 12:28

⁵ Mt 4:10.

similarly teaches: *“Say, ‘My Lord has guided me to a straight path, an upright religion, the faith of Abraham, a man of pure faith. Nor did he associate anything with God.’* ¹⁶²*Say, ‘My prayers, my devotions, my very being and death are all in the hands of God, Lord of all the Worlds;’* ¹⁶³*He has no partner. This is what I am commanded, and I am the first to submit my will to Him.’* ¹⁶⁴*Say, ‘Should I seek a Lord other than God, when he is the Lord of all things?’ Each soul is responsible for its own actions; no soul will bear the burden of another* ⁶.... (Al-An’am, 6:162-164). Moreover, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: *The best remembrance is: ‘There is no god but God’ ...*

Expanding on *the best remembrance*, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ also said: *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, His is the sovereignty and His is the praise and He hath power over all things’.* The phrases which follow the First Testimony of faith are all from the Holy Qur’an; each describes a mode of loving God and devotion to Him.

Getting involved beyond the point of accepting the oneness of God to a discussion of His nature should not be the task of those seeking reconciliation. One’s relationship with the Creator and the way He is worshiped should be personal. My proposal is that we leave it out of the reconciliation effort and focus upon the second commandment.

The second commandment addresses our relationship with our neighbor. But who is your neighbor? Jesus ﷺ answered this question with the parable of the good Samaritan. This parable is found in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 10, verses 25-37.

“One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: ‘Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?’ Jesus replied, ‘What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?’ The man answered, ‘‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.’ And, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” “Right!” Jesus ﷺ told him. “Do this and you will live!” The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus ﷺ, “And who is my neighbor?”

Jesus ﷺ then replied with a story:

“A Jewish man was traveling on a trip from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road. By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Levite walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side. Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, ‘Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I’ll pay you the next time I’m here.’” “Now which of these

⁶ Translation is mine

three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?" Jesus asked. The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy." Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same."

In this parable Jesus is trying to say that the one you perceive as your enemy can, in fact, be considered your friend. In reality, everyone that you encounter on your journey through life is your neighbor and should be loved.

But how do you love your neighbor? Do we wait until we encounter someone on the side of the road who has been attacked by bandits? More relevant is how does an employee love his boss? How does he love his colleagues at work? How does a woman love her husband or her father-in-law? And how does her husband love her? Can one love others if he/she does not love themselves? How can you give what you don't have? When you look in the mirror, what do you see? Do you like who you are? Are you at least happy with yourself? Have you made peace with yourself and accepted the unique person you are?

At the heart of all the elements that make up your life experiences - family, friends, intimate relationships, and work - is you. This is why the rules of love begin with a rule not about relationships with others, but rather about the one you have with yourself.

There is a distinction between "you" and your "self." Your self is the core of your being, the essential entity that exists irrespective of your personality, your ego, your opinions, and your emotions. It is the small, sacred space within you that houses your spirit and soul. "You" are the observer, coach, editor, and critic who survey your thoughts, words, feelings, and behaviors and determine how much of your essential self is shown to others.

The quality of the relationship between you and your self is paramount, for all your other relationships are based on it. This relationship acts as a template from which all the unions in your life are shaped, setting the quality, tone, and texture for how you relate to others and how they relate to you. It establishes a working model of how to give and receive love⁷...

Each one of us has needs that are different from the hierarchy of physical and survival needs as defined by Maslow (1970). These are emotional needs and they are called Relational needs as they emerge out of our social connectedness, and help sustain and nurture our emotional attachments to others⁸.

Relational needs are the needs that grow out of human interaction, and being aware of these needs in ourselves and in others can help develop and nurture human relationships. Being aware of these needs can also help us gain insight into the feelings, behaviors and motivations in

⁷ Excerpt from *If Love Is a Game, These Are the Rules*, By Cherie Carter-Scott, Ph.D.

⁸ Erskine, Moursund, Trautmann 1999

ourselves and others. So loving your neighbor is about understanding your neighbors' needs and meeting them to the best of your ability.

All people experience these relational needs and they are present in all components of our life, from cradle to grave. Often these needs are out of our awareness, but they push into our awareness if they are not being met.

When relational needs are not met, they become more intense, more pressing, and are experienced as emptiness, a longing, or a nagging loneliness. Some people may become frustrated, angry, or aggressive in the face of unmet needs, or they may become depressed, lose energy and hope. They may also develop beliefs about their life such as "There's nobody there for me" or "There's no use trying" or "Nobody can be trusted" as a way of explaining the inner distress they feel⁹. Hence the importance of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ teaching: "*smiling when you meet your brother is an act of charity*" and further, "*the best among you when you meet is the one that first gives his salutation of peace*".

These needs are shared by all human beings; they are intrinsic characteristic of our God-given identities, an inescapable part of being human.

According to current studies of the subject of relational needs, there are five general characteristics of needs:

- 1- Needs are cross-cultural
- 2- Needs exist in all generations
- 3- Needs are lifelong and continuous
- 4- It is OK to have needs; Neediness is not a defect
- 5- We cannot meet our own needs; they can only be met in the context of meaningful relationships.

Beyond the five characteristics of general needs there are also specific relational needs that are shared by all human kind. As we will see, we each have the opportunity to both "receive" and "give" these relational needs as we live life to the fullest in our relationship with God and our neighbors. These ten relational needs can be demonstrated as follows:

- 1- Acceptance: The need for acceptance revolves around receiving others willingly and unconditionally (even when their behavior has been imperfect) and loving them in spite of any differences that may exist between you.
- 2- Affection: The need for affection revolves around expressing care and closeness through physical touch, actions that represent affection and through words such as "I love you" or "I care about you"
- 3- Appreciation: The need for appreciation revolves around expressing thanks, praise, or commendation, particularly in recognition of someone's accomplishments or efforts; appreciation has a specific focus on what a person "does".

⁹ [Lindsay Stewart](#)

- 4- Approval: The need for approval revolves around building up or affirming another person, particularly for “who” they are (as opposed to what they do). It is also met by affirming both the fact and the importance of your relationship with another person.
- 5- Attention: The need for attention revolves around conveying appropriate interest, concern, and care. Addressing this need requires us to take notice of others and make an effort to enter into their respective worlds.
- 6- Comfort: The need for comfort is about caringly responding to a hurting person through words, actions, emotional responses and physical touch. Meeting this need requires us to truly hurt with and for another person in the midst of their grief or pain.
- 7- Encouragement: The need for encouragement is about urging others to persist and persevere in their efforts to attain their goal and by stimulating them toward love and good deeds.
- 8- Respect: The need for respect is about valuing one another highly, treating one another as important, and honoring one another with our words and actions.
- 9- Security: The need for security revolves around establishing and maintaining harmony in our relationships and providing freedom from fear or threat of harm. This process involves mutual expressions of vulnerability, the deepening of trust and the successful resolution of conflict.
- 10- Support: The need for support is about coming alongside others and providing gentle, appropriate assistance with a problem or struggle.

Though we obviously all have needs—one question still remains—why do we long for comfort, attention and security¹⁰? After all, God could have created us without any needs whatsoever. Should we then conclude that our needs represent flaws in our design? The answer must be a resounding “No!” So why do we have needs?

1- Our neediness encourages humility and valuing of relationships.

So far, we have seen that (1) everyone has needs, and (2) we cannot meet our own needs. Therefore, we can only conclude that, in order to have our needs met, we must look beyond ourselves. We are not to live as an “island” unto ourselves. Our relationships in life can provide meaning and fulfillment.

2- Our neediness encourages interdependence.

Just as our neediness and our inability to meet our own needs compels us to value relationships, so it should also motivate us to support and encourage one another. We cannot live our lives as if we were computerized robots on an assembly line, doing our own thing with no regard for the needs of others.

Fortunately, a number of relationships serve to promote interdependence and mutual fulfillment of needs. At the most axiomatic level, many of us have been granted the blessings of healthy marriages and other close family relationships, which serve as environments within which we both give and receive loving care in order to meet one another’s needs.

¹⁰ For full understanding and training contact <http://www.crladership.com/>

In addition, through friends, colleagues and community, we are challenged to look for ways in which we can give to the needs of others, as well as meet our own.

3- Accepting the reality of our needs helps us to develop a heart filled with compassion for others.

Our ability to respond effectively with care and compassion toward others is closely tied to our willingness to admit that we have needs.

The sad truth is that those who tend to deny their own needs often lack compassion for others who are in need. Having chosen to adopt an attitude of self-reliance, they are likely to respond to neediness in others by thinking, “Why should I care about their needs? If they have problems, they should take care of them themselves!” As we come to accept the reality of our own needs and to humbly receive care and compassion, we are in turn empowered to respond to the needs of others with genuine feelings of compassion and concrete acts of kindness.

4- Admitting our needs frees us to both receive and give care.

It is difficult to give others what we have not received. A woman who was never comforted as a child may find it incredibly challenging to offer words of comfort to her own children. A man whose parents failed to consistently display affection for him may struggle to adequately express his affection for his wife. An employer who has rarely received encouragement from others may find it hard to effectively encourage his employees.

By contrast, those who have had their own needs met are much better equipped to meet the needs of others. But in order to have our needs met, we must first admit that they exist. When we willingly acknowledge our neediness, we allow ourselves to receive care and we are better able to give more freely in return.

5- Meeting the needs of others expresses care and produces community ties.

If we desire to decrease the number of divisions within our families, communities, and cultures, we must begin by increasing care. Countless conflicts and breakdowns can be traced to a lack of trusting, caring relationships between marriage partners, family members, business and country leaders. How do we demonstrate that we truly care for one another? By meeting each other’s needs. As loving care is increasingly demonstrated through mutual fulfillment of needs, divisions are mended and unity is strengthened¹¹.

Knowing one’s self and emotional needs helps us understand how to satisfy these needs relationally. The most powerful acts of kindness are often the simplest — standing up for a complete stranger, leaving space so someone can get in front of you with their car or providing a shoulder to cry on. This, in my opinion, will produce healthy individuals, healthy families and

¹¹ Ibid

healthy social networks and communities. Additionally there is accumulative social capital that will form through these interactive healthy relations.

Social capital is a sociological concept used in business, economics, organizational behavior, political science, public health and the social sciences, in general, to refer to connections within and between social networks. For the past decade, social capital has resonated strongly with communities across America attempting to improve residents' quality of life and overall well-being.

The accumulated social capital forming out of loving God and loving neighbors might be measurable as suggested by a study done in November 2001¹². The study argues that the idea that many sociological and economic outcomes are determined not only by market forces, but also by factors related to the nature and quality of people's social, non-market interactions underlies the very active research program on "social capital".

Sociologists and political scientists have long stressed social capital's importance¹³. And, a number of studies by empirical economists document correlations between social capital and positive economic outcomes across different communities and countries, and over time¹⁴. One of these studies is the Social Capital Community Benchmark Study¹⁵. It has enabled us to better quantify and measure social capital, and we are still exploring the most effective ways, settings and activities to build social capital and increase civic engagement.

Loving our neighbor is a command given to us by Jesus Christ ﷺ and confirmed centuries later by the Qur'an and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Both the Muslim and Christian traditions have taught all along that this command falls into the realm of good ethics. However, Jesus Christ ﷺ went further and proclaimed that to Love God and your neighbor *summarized all the Law and the Prophets.*" (Matthew 22:34-40).

I am proposing that there is more to the two commands than an order for simple good behavior. Perhaps they are the basis God gave us to build a healthy and a prosperous society. Their inherent value is significantly broader than the common conception of right and wrong. They

¹² Love Thy Neighbor? – Carpooling, Relational Costs, and the Production of Social Capital□
Kerwin Kofi Charles, Patrick Kline, University of Michigan. November, 2001


¹³ See Putnam (1993) and Coleman (1990).

¹⁴Theoretical work on social capital in economics probably begins with the seminal work of Loury (1977). See Grief, (1993), Abreu, (1998), Fudenberg and Masken, (1986), and Kreps et al. (1982) for results from the theory on repeated games. Arrow (1972) discusses how cooperation can lower transactions costs of economic activity. Important recent empirical pieces in economics include Knack and Keefer, (1997), La Porta et al., (1997), Putnam, (1993), (1995), (2000).


¹⁵ In an unprecedented partnership with some three-dozen U.S. community foundations, we conducted the 2000 Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey, the largest measurement of social capital ever. 30,000 respondents were polled across 41 communities, covering all parts of the country, and ranging from tiny towns to sprawling metropolises. This survey was developed in consultation with a Scientific Advisory Council comprised of some of the best social scientists in the country. For more information on the survey, survey instrument, and results, see: <http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/saguaro/communitysurvey>


might be the gateway to "the good life", the life worth living, which is held by many philosophers to be more important than traditional moral conduct.

Relationships are at the core of who we are as humans. From Greek dramas to the current top ten music charts, nearly every artistic expression is about relationship: songs of love lost and found, tales of our deepest longings and greatest tragedies. Whether it is an individual broken heart, or whole families and society's devastated by relationships gone bad, relationships reflect our deepest human struggles. They are the source of our most profound joy and pain. Relationships are what we are willing to kill and die for... what we long for most... what keep us up at night. It is in relationships that we find out who we are as humans, and what matters most in life.

Relationships are at the heart of faith, reflecting the fact that we as humans have been created as social creatures. Jesus  identified the central message of the law and prophets relationally.

From love to hate, relationships are at the depth of sin and at the height of moral virtue. Compassion, sacrifice, forgiveness, trust, betrayal, murder, adultery and revenge—each is rooted in relationship. It is at the heart of both ethics and worship.

A relational focus entails that we place love as our highest priority above orthodoxy, placing righteousness over being right. The mark of good doctrine is the fruit it bears. A relational faith cares more about relationships and people than it does about being right. In fact, according to Scripture, a theology that is unloving is not right. Of the necessity of love for the neighbour, Prophet Muhammad  said: *"None of you has faith until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself."*¹⁶

One can go through life trying to be the best he can according to materialistic ends, the wealthiest, the most powerful, or instead, become what God has created one to be; a loving and humble servant to others. This is best expressed in one of the fondest prayers of the Prophet Muhammad  "My Lord, I ask you for Your love, and for the love of everyone who loves You, and for the love of everything that will bring me closer to Your love".

So what is the next step? Take a deep look inside and make sure your heart is reconciled to your Creator. Then you can then take a look around you and love your neighbors. This will include people that you don't like at all. Liking likable people does not require any effort. It is the people that you don't like that you need to pray for and ask God to forgive and to bring to the straight path. This is the true essence of the 360 degree love.

What is the end result that we should look forward to? To turn into a better person that loves his family, a servant to his community and a leader. You may also end up having a tender heart that brings tears to your eyes every time you remember God or see his blessings.

¹⁶ <http://www.acommonword.com/index.php?lang=en&page=option10>

Who is qualified to engage in this kind of activity? You and I; everyone who has a personal relationship with God and everyone we have a relationship with. It is a vertical relationship with God and 360 degrees of horizontal relationship with others.

In short, all of us are qualified to engage in reconciliation. God loves us all, shouldn't we do the same? Isn't time we replace the culture of despair, division and violence with a culture of hope, inclusion and peace.