



The truth about A Common Word - a review

Martin Goldsmith

THE TRUTH ABOUT A COMMON WORD

By Sam Solomon and Al-Maqdisi

Pilcrow Press. 108 pages.

ISBN 978-1-905950-13-6

Small book, big subject

This small book gives us a well-researched critique of the Common Word letter sent by 138 Muslim leaders to the Christian church. It then helpfully prints the actual document plus the response signed by 300 Christian leaders. As the two documents have been widely discussed in the newspapers and on the media, many Christians are wondering how to react. When leading seminars on Islam and witness among Muslims, I am often asked about this. The book will therefore be helpful to all who are concerned for relations with Muslims and witness in the context of Islam.

In our globalised world it is obviously vitally important that somehow Islam and Christianity learn to coexist in peace and harmony. All attempts to foster mutual understanding should be encouraged. We have to admit that in Christian circles many of our people either veer towards unloving hostility towards Islam and Muslims or, on the other extreme, towards a naive tolerance which is ignorant of traditional Islamic teaching about Jews and Christians. The example of Mohammed himself is also frequently forgotten – did he exercise violence towards Jews and Christians?

This book clearly shows the traditional understanding of the Qur'anic verse (Sura 3.64) which is the basis for the Muslims' letter as well as

other fatwas and teachings of the Qur'an and the Hadith. The background of violent enmity towards Jews and Christians is clearly laid out and we need to challenge our Muslim friends to face these realities. In the Christian response the authors rightly repent of the Crusades and more recent Western violence, but we do not yet see any parallel repentance from Muslim leaders concerning the persecution of Christians, the religious discrimination in many Muslim countries and the long history of enmity and violence.

But we rejoice that there are today Muslim leaders who are apparently seeking to reinterpret the Qur'an and Hadith in ways more acceptable in the modern world and to us as Jews and Christians. They need all the prayer and support we can give. Nevertheless it is somewhat disingenuous to claim, as the Muslim authors of the Common Word letter do, that the two faiths share equally the teaching that we must love God and neighbour. And as Christians, our understanding of the oneness of God is directly against Islam, because for us the oneness of God also allows plurality within the godhead.

Martin Goldsmith
All Nations Christian College
Ware SG12 8BZ

© 2009 *Evangelicals Now*

This item was originally published in the January 2009 edition of *Evangelicals Now*. It is published here by the kind permission of the editors. For a free sample issue or to subscribe to *Evangelicals Now*, click here.