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Christian-Muslim Dialogue in *A Common Word Between Us and You*: Document Based on Quran's Teachings

Krščansko-muslimanski dialog v dokumentu Skupna beseda med vami in nami*: dokument, utemeljen na naukih Korana*

Abstract: The paper explores Christian-Muslim dialogue based on *A Common Word between Us and You* document as an example of interfaith dialogue. The paper seeks to reveal this dialogue's role in establishing peaceful coexistence and cooperation between Christians and Muslims. The descriptive analytical method was used in investigating the Quranic texts about dialogue with the People of the Book. The paper concludes that such dialogue plays a key role in promoting peaceful coexistence, social cohesion and preventing religious extremism. It particularly highlights the importance of transferring this dialogue from theoretical level to everyday life and the need to strengthen it in educational and social institutions.

Keywords: interfaith dialogue, religious pluralism, religious differences, coexistence

Izvleček: *Prispevek analizira krščansko-muslimanski dialog na podlagi dokumenta* Skupna beseda med vami in nami *kot pomembnega sodobnega primera medverskega dialoga. Raziskava izhaja iz koranskih besedil o dialogu z »ljudstvom Knjige« ter s pomočjo deskriptivno-analitične metode pokaže, da je dialog temeljno koransko načelo, utemeljeno na modrosti, pravičnosti in spoštovanju drugega. Dokument poudarja skupne verske in etične vrednote, zlasti ljubezen do Boga in bližnjega, ter predstavlja okvir za razvijanje konstruktivnega dialoga med kristjani in muslimani. Prispevek ugotavlja, da ima tak dialog ključno vlogo pri spodbujanju miroljubnega sobivanja, družbene kohezije in preprečevanju verskega ekstremizma. Posebej izpostavlja pomen prenosa dialoga s teoretične ravni v vsakdanje življenje ter potrebo po njegovi krepitvi v izobraževalnih in družbenih institucijah.*

Ključne besede: *medverski dialog, verski pluralizem, verske razlike, sobivanje*

Introduction

Contemporary changes make dialogue between religions important for peace and stability. This dialogue becomes necessary in multi-religious societies (Weldu and Kiingati 2024). Everyday interaction between the believers of religions is not marginal but a human reality forces us to look for mechanisms to communicate based on mutual respect, recognition of the difference, and admiration of humanity and peculiarities of others (Hazaymeh 2024; Orbih 2024).

This difference is a main trait of Allah's power who created people with different colors and languages »and one of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your languages and colors. Surely in this are signs for those of sound knowledge.« (Q 30:22)

Christian-Muslim dialogue has gained particular importance because of the long relations and interaction between their followers. The Quran presents dialogue as a means of rapprochement, not as a tool of conflict (Rahim 2023). Allah says, »Let there be no compulsion in religion, for the truth stands out clearly from falsehood. So, whoever renounces false Gods and believes in Allah has certainly grasped the firmest, unfailing handhold. And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.« (Q 2:256)

The Quranic call for dialogue with the people of the Book is in verse »say, O People of the Book! Let us come to common terms: that we will worship none but Allah, associate none with Him, nor take one another as lords instead of Allah, but if they turn away, then say, Bear witness that we have submitted to Allah alone« (Q 3:64). The call assures a common ground of worshipping Allah and not having another God with him and not to take one another as lords instead of Allah. This common ground aims to gather people on universal human moral and faith values.

The document is a representation of Quranic vision of dialogue with the People of the Book. It was a message from Muslim scholars to Christian leaders to rebuild the relation between the two religions based on common values including love God and human beings (Goma'a 2010; Madigan 2008). The document reflects deep awareness of the importance of moving from words, i.e., theoretical discourse to deeds, i.e., the actual

practice of dialogue because through the rejection of violence, religious discrimination and promoting peace and cooperation, the followers of the two religions can encounter the challenges they face.

1 Review of related literature

Dialogue is a communicative process between different parties to express and exchange opinions and thoughts based on mutual respect and acceptance of others' views (Abd-Al Rahman 2000). In present religious' context, dialogue is a tool for managing differences based on recognition of others and their rights including their rights in belief (Abu-Nimer 2002).

Dialogue is not abandoning convictions or doctrinal belief, but rather an ethical practice that allows people to express their thoughts and interact to strengthen peace and coexistence (Edwin 2011; Piwko 2025; Seran 2025).

In this context, Christian-Muslim dialogue is important because of the many intersections that gather their followers like history and traditions, especially in the countries where the two religions live. Their relation cannot only be stored in theological dimension (Kusuma, 2025) because religious, historical, political, social, and cultural factors intersect to make dialogue important (Saleem et al. 2025; Klaina 2025).

The Quran confirms the ground of dialogue with the People of the Book in the Quranic expression »a common word«. This Islamic perspective assures that dialogue shall not be a coercion or exclusion but rather knowing each other (Baig 2025). Christian view of dialogue is based on love, peace, and the serve of human beings (Sahhaf Kashani 2025; Jonathan 2025). The Christian-Muslim dialogue shall not only be between the heads of the pyramid, i.e., the religious leaders of the two religions, but also with the base of the pyramid, i.e., the societies.

2 The Quranic foundations of dialogue

The Quran establishes a framework for dialogue with the People of the Book based on justice, wisdom, and respect of others (Suhail 2024; Moutan 2022). Allah says, »Say, O People of the Book! Let us come to common terms: that we will worship none but Allah, associate none with Him, nor take one another as lords instead of Allah, but if they turn away, then say, bear witness that we have submitted to Allah alone.« (Q 3:64)

The phrase »let us come« means participation and openness, while the phrase »a common word« reflects the principle of looking for a common ground that gathers the different ones around major faith issues which at the top are the belief in one God, the rejection of polytheism, and refusing religious oppression or exclusion. Therefore, the document got its main goal to assure that the real and fruitful dialogue stems from shared morals, not from points of difference.

The Quran confirms that dialogue cannot be isolated from morals in discourse as it assures wisdom and good call when addressing people (Yusuf et al. 2020; Al Saleeh 2019) as in verse »Invite all to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and kind advice, and only debate with them in the best manner. Surely your Lord alone knows best who has strayed from His Way and who is rightly guided.« (Q 16:125)

The Quran builds the goodness of argumentative dialogue with the People of the Book on rational calm speech as seen in verse »do not argue with the People of the Book unless gracefully, except with those of them who act wrongfully. And say, we believe in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to you. Our God and your God is only One. And to Him we fully submit.« (Q 29:46) The verse emphasizes shared faith by acknowledging the unity of divine revelation which enhances trust and strengthens communication bridges. It declares the unity of the Lord whom both sides believe in – »Our God and your God is one«.

»O believers! Do not insult what they invoke besides Allah or they will insult Allah spitefully out of ignorance. This is how We have made each people's deeds appealing to them. Then to their Lord is their return, and He will inform them of what they used to do.« Q 6:108 puts important

Quranic principle for dialogue controlling religious discourse and managing relations with those who differ in religion.

The Quran focuses on common values with the People of the Book like the love of God, justice, and mercy as in »O believers! Stand firm for Allah and bear true testimony. Do not let the hatred of a people lead you to injustice. Be just! That is closer to righteousness. And be mindful of Allah. Surely Allah is All-Aware of what you do.« (Q 5:8)

3 The document *A Common Word Between Us and You*

The document is a contemporary initiative for Christian-Muslim dialogue to exceed theoretical thought to a practical application. It was an open letter from Muslim religious leaders to Pope Benedict and other Christian leaders, and sent on the occasion of the Eid al-Fitr 1428 A.H. / October 13th, 2007 C.E., and on the first anniversary of the open letter of 38 Muslim scholars to Pope Benedict (*A Common Word Between Us and You* 2007, 1). It was signed by 138 Muslim scholars from different Arabic and Muslim countries (22–29) and sent to different Christian leaders.

It was written after religious and media tensions, and a year after Regensburg lecture which Pope Benedict delivered at University of Regensburg in Germany on September 12th, 2006 where he quoted from the Byzantine emperor Manuel II Palaiologos. The quotation which was published in English translation by the Vatican was: »Show me just what Muhammad 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.« Because of it and the lecture, many Muslim politicians and religious leaders protested as they felt it was an insult of Islam.

The document whose name stemmed from verse 64 of surat Al-Imran pointed out that the absence of peace, or the existence of threats can be very dangerous trigger for conflict which fires may burn the whole world (Ali 2009; Haddad and Smith 2009).

It focused on two issues for dialogue between Christianity and Islam. The pure monotheism of God as the essence of faith in Islam and the belief

in one God which occupies a central position in Christianity (*A Common Word Between Us and You* 2007, 2). It confirmed this issue with verses from the Quran and the Old and New Testaments to say that the love of God is not just a spiritual emotion, but also a commitment that guides life and relations. The second issue was the love of the neighbor which is a major recommendation in Christianity and Islam (2).

4 Christian-Muslim dialogue and social coexistence

The Quranic dialogue's impact is not limited to intellectual or formal institutional levels, but includes everyday life in Christian and Muslim societies. For example, in Arab societies where Christians and Muslims are native citizens, the Christian-Muslim coexistence is an authentic segment of social fabric (Albtush 2013; Abdullah 2023).

Christians and Muslims' coexistence confirms social solidarity, unity, and common living (Ata 2013). Participating in happy and sad occasions is a manifestation of this relation. Social coexistence between Christians and Muslims is also seen in lighting Christmas trees in public squares or malls with official and public participation (Murrah 2010).

Christians participate in Islamic occasions like congratulating Muslims on the arrival of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, or participating, or inviting Muslims to Iftar feasts made by Christian people or organizations. These social practices show that dialogue with the People of the Book can be a daily act of belonging, unity, and cohesion (Ziyada 2016).

5 Quranic dialogue to encounter religious extremism and hatred speech

The Quranic dialogue is an important tool to encounter religious extremism and hate. The Quran does not present religion as a system of exclusion or a means of conflict, but rather as human discourse based on knowing each other. »O humanity! Indeed, we created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may get to know

one another. Surely the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you. Allah is truly All-Knowing, All-Aware.« (Q 49:13)

Quranic discourse urges using wisdom and advice to call people to Allah's way: »Invite all to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and kind advice, and only debate with them in the best manner. Surely your Lord alone knows best who has strayed from His Way and who is rightly guided.« (Q 16:125) This discourse establishes a dialogue that weakens the exclusion tendency which fuels hatred speech.

The religious extremist discourse contradicts with Quranic teachings which confirms that no one is forced to be Muslim: »Let there be no compulsion in religion, for the truth stands out clearly from falsehood. So, whoever renounces false Gods and believes in Allah has certainly grasped the firmest, unfailing handhold and Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.« (Q 2:256)

6 The multiciplity of interpretations and its impact on Christian-Muslim dialogue

Although the document is a framework for dialogue, understanding this dialogue cannot be separated from the jurisprudential and interpretive pluralism in Islamic tradition. The view against the People of the Book is not the same all the time. It is shaped through different schools and affected by political and historical contexts.

The divergence about dialogue is not a contradictory to quranic text, but a diversity in the ways of understanding and interpreting it. While some interpretive schools highlight the verses of understanding, cooperation, and justice, others highlight the verses that came in the contexts of certain conflicts.

This divergence stems from different reasons like the difference in schools of interpretation and the difference between scholars in understanding the reasons for revelation and the historical contexts. Political and social conditions played a role in directing these readings as some of these interpretations were affected by conflicts that some Muslim societies had.

Despite the interpretations of dialogue, those which adopt stricter relations cannot be canceled which explains the divergence in the views in the contemporary Muslim societies. Christian-Muslim dialogue needs awareness of these interpretations, addressing the causes of tension, and renewing religious speech to face contemporary challenges.

Christian-Muslim dialogue points out that the problem does not lie in the absence of religious foundations of dialogue, but how to activate these foundations. The transition from words to deeds is hard and requires much effort. The real challenge is not just in having new dialogues, but in making them part of life.

Conclusion

Dialogue with the People of the Book is not a circumstantial choice that political or social changes impose, but rather an authentic principle that is rooted in Quranic text. The Quran presents principles of wisdom, justice, mercy, and respect for dialogue with the People of the Book.

The paper shows that the principle of a common word is a core of dialogue between Christians and Muslims because it calls for meeting on faith and moral common principles without ignoring or declining of the peculiarities.

When such document is used in discourse, cultural policies, educational programs, and everyday interactions, religions become a tool for building, not destroying, bridge for communication, not division. The need to activate dialogue is a necessity that contemporary challenges impose.

Christian-Muslim dialogue in the document is a sustainable civilizational project. Having this approach opens broader horizons for just and tolerant societies to transform religious diversity from difference to cohesion and cooperation.

Data Availability Statement

As this study is based on a theoretical approach, no new research data were generated or analyzed.

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