RESPONSE TO OPEN LETTER AND CALL FROM MUSLIM RELIGIOUS LEADERS TO CHRISTIAN LEADERS, 13 OCTOBER 2007:

Introduction

To mark the end of Ramadan this year "An Open Letter and Call from Muslim Religious Leaders" was published, dated 13th October 2007. The letter was addressed to Pope Benedict XVI and 26 other named heads of Christian denominations as well as to "Leaders of Christian Churches, everywhere..." It is ostensibly a presentation of Islamic teaching on love for God and love for one’s neighbour.

The letter was organised by the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, a non-governmental organisation based in Amman, Jordan, supported by the Jordanian Royal House. It has been trying to forge a united scholarly Muslim leadership that could speak for the whole global Muslim community and become the international voice of mainstream Islam.

Following a year after a letter to the Pope signed by 38 Muslim signatories (October 2006), the "Open Letter and Call" seems to signal some urgency. Does it indicate a fear that the West is finally awakening to the reality of Islamic intentions and therefore needs to be lulled, even anesthetised, to the prospects of deliberate Islamic expansion into the West? Or does it indicate a growing Muslim confidence and self-awareness of Islamic power, the letter itself being part of a strategy of Islamisation of the "Christian" world? Furthermore, did the lack of response by Pope Benedict to the letter from 38 Muslims prompt the new letter with 100 more names at the end?

The signatories

A wide spread of Muslim leadership is represented amongst the 138 signatories, drawn from 43 nations and representing various Sunni, Twelver Shi’a, Zaydi, Ibadi and Sufi constituencies. There are traditionalists, Islamists and several liberal Muslims. Some of the signatories are Muslim leaders well known for their moderation and peaceful intentions. Among them are Professor Akbar Ahmed, Dr Alan Godlas, Hamza Yusuf Hanson and Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

However, the list also includes some figures known for their Islamist extremist inclinations who are Wahhabists, members of the Muslim Brotherhood, or Deobandis. There are, for example, the various Saudi Wahhabi dignitaries: Mohammed Salim Al-`Awa (Muslim Brotherhood Egypt); Salim Falahat the Director General of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan; Ikrima Said Sabri Imam of the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem; and Muhammad Taqi Usmani (Deoband). Some of these are on record as making radical and aggressive statements against Christians and Jews and in favour of global jihad.
Intended audience

While addressed to a specific group of Christian leaders, the fact that it is an open letter widely disseminated by the world media means that world public opinion is another intended audience. Furthermore, certain terminology in the letter, as well as the choice of Qur’anic quotations cited, suggest that the letter is also intended for the global Muslim audience. It is not unusual in Islamic discourse for different messages to be delivered to the different audiences. This is permitted by the Islamic doctrine of taqiyya (dissimulation) which allows Muslims to practise deception in certain circumstances. It appears that the Christian vocabulary of the letter is intended to guide Christian readers to the erroneous conclusion that Islam and Christianity are basically identical religions, focusing on love to God and to the neighbour. Indeed it is worth noting that the very terminology "love for God" and "love for neighbour" are Christian rather than Islamic. The hidden messages for Muslims are contained in the many polemical quotations from the Qur’an.

Another example of the apparent use of taqiyya is the fact that some of the words in the Arabic version of the letter differ in meaning from those in the English version. For example, the word used for "neighbour" in the Arabic version of the letter is jar, a term which carries only a geographical meaning. It is not equivalent to the Biblical Hebrew word for neighbour, which is re’a (denoting kinship, even as close as a brother or sister). Yet there is another word for "neighbour" in Arabic which is closer to the meaning of the Hebrew re’a and which could have been used. This is the word qarib, which is used in Arabic Bibles and which more closely translates the Biblical original. It is also worth noting that Jesus Christ is not given the name used by Arabic Christians (Yasu` al-Masih), but the Islamic version (‘Isa al-Masih).

The letter looks at the world as if comprised only of Islam, Christianity and Judaism. There is no mention of other world religions like Hinduism, Buddhism etc., or indeed of secular and agnostic or atheist people in the world. This may reflect the traditional Islamic classification of non-Muslims into Jews and Christians on the one hand, and "infidels" or "pagans" on the other hand. While Jews and Christians are seen in Islam as worthy of a place in an Islamic society, albeit with a second-class status, infidels are not considered to have any place at all (indeed, according to classical Islam, they should be killed if they will not convert to Islam). This is perhaps why "infidels" have been marginalised in this letter.

Of course a basic fallacy of this letter is the view that Western states are basically Christian and that, when pursuing their national interests, religious Christian motivations are foremost in their minds. This is a very common Muslim misconception, and is an indication of how much more important their faith is to an "average" Muslim than to an average Westerner.
Reading between the lines

On the surface the letter looks like a well intentioned and urgent plea for a better understanding between Muslims and Christians, so as to avert an apocalyptic war between the two largest religious blocs in the world.

If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace . . . the very survival of the world itself is at stake . . . So let our differences not cause hatred and strife between us.

However, the letter goes on to lay the blame for all wars in which Muslims and Christians are involved on the actions of Christians.

As Muslims, we say to Christians that we are not against them and that Islam is not against them - so long as they do not wage war against Muslims on account of their religion, oppress them and drive them out of their homes. [emphasis added]

This implies that the war against Islamist terrorism is a global war of Christianity against Islam, and that Christianity is the aggressor against Islam (which is the radical Islamist view). There is no sense of sorrow or remorse for the wrongs inflicted by Muslims on Christians historically, or indeed currently in many Muslim lands. There is no recognition that in many places things may be the opposite, with Muslims oppressing Christians and driving them from their homes (e.g. in Iraq, Sudan, Nigeria, Indonesia and Pakistan).

There is no mention of the Christian communities in Muslim lands suffering other kinds of persecution and discrimination. There is no admission that Muslim actions could have played any part in the alienation between Muslims and Christians. Furthermore Islam, in its capacity as colonial power, seeks to justify its conquest of non-Muslim territory (past and present) as fath (opening). Gibraltar was thus called "The Mountain of Fath", and when Muhammad II conquered Constantinople in 1453 he became known as Muhammad Al-Fatih (the opener). However, if Muslims later lose territory they have conquered, they consider it "occupation" of a Muslim land.

The liberal Muslim leaders who signed the letter seem to have agreed with the Islamist argument which accuses all Christians of a tendency to animosity, hatred and aggressiveness towards Muslims. So an apparently moderate appeal for reconciliation actually contains a subtext of warning and threat: "Do as we say, and you can have peace on our terms." This in fact is the normal meaning of peace in Islam - peace for those who submit to Islamic rule (and war for those who do not).

Classical Islam teaches that the world is divided into two parts: Dar al-Islam (the House of Islam) where political power is in the hands of Muslims, and Dar al-Harb (the House of War) which is the rest of the world. With this in mind, the "Open Letter and Call" is seen to be reminiscent of the traditional Islamic approach to non-Muslims outside the House of Islam. This approach consisted of a "call to Islam" (i.e. a call to convert to Islam) including the threat that if the non-Muslims do not convert they will be subject to a destructive military attack (jihad) aimed at subjugating Jews and Christians, and
annihilating other non-Muslims. Hence the name "House of War" for non-Islamic territory. Only if the non-Muslims embrace Islam or submit to Islamic political power can they avert the attack. In the light of this tradition, the 2007 Muslim warning to non-Muslims about how to avoid war can be read in a very different way. Do some of the Muslim signatories see it as the traditional call and warning before an imminent attack on non-Muslims, an attack intended to win Islamic supremacy? The very word "call" in the title of the document drops a large hint in this direction, at least to Muslim readers.

**Expression of Islamic mission (da`wa)**

Although presented as interfaith dialogue, the letter can equally be viewed as a classical example of Islamic da`wa (mission). It is a call to accept the Muslim concept of the unity of God (tawhid) and therefore to reject the incompatible Christian views of the Trinity and the deity of Christ.

In their stress on monotheism and the unity of God, the Muslim leaders quote a number of verses from the Qur`an which express the Muslim concept of a God with no associates and no partners - verses which have always traditionally been interpreted as a direct attack on the basic Christian doctrines of the Trinity and of Christ`s deity. For instance, Q3:64, quoted numerous times in the letter, calls the People of the Scripture (Jews and Christians) to agree not to ascribe partners to God and not to take other lords beside him.

Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to a common word between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him). (Aal `Imran 3:64)

This Qur`anic verse has always been understood as a call to deny the Trinity and the deity of Christ. In the Saudi-sponsored English Qur`an of Hilali and Khan (Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur`an in the English Language, published in Riyadh by Darussalam) this verse has a footnote which quotes the letter Muhammad sent to the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius, calling upon him and his people to embrace Islam and including the threat that the rejection of this call would lead to severe consequences. It may be that a similar frame of mind lies behind the letter in which this verse is so often quoted.

Other Qur`anic quotations in the letter have a similar message about the unity of God: [emphasis added]

Yet there are men who take rivals unto God: they love them as they should love God. (Q 2:165).

Say: Lo! my worship and my sacrifice and my living and my dying are for God, Lord of the Worlds. / He hath no partner . . . (Q 6:162-164)
Hadith traditions (which record the words and actions of Muhammad and his companions) are quoted to support the same theme:

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 . . . (Sunan Al-Tirmidhi, Kitab Al-Da’awat, Bab al-Du’a fi Yawm ‘Arafah, Hadith no. 3934).

He who says: `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’ one hundred times in a day, it is for them equal to setting ten slaves free, and one hundred good deeds are written for them and one hundred bad deeds are effaced, and it is for them a protection from the devil for that day until the evening. And none offers anything better than that, save one who does more than that. (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Kitab Bad’ al-Khalq, Bab Sifat Iblis wa Junudihi; Hadith no. 3329.)

Say (O Muslims): We believe in God and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered. / And if they believe in the like of that which ye believe, then are they rightly guided. But if they turn away, then are they in schism, and God will suffice thee against them. He is the Hearer, the Knower. (Al-Baqarah, 2:136-137)

According to one of the oldest and most authoritative commentaries (tafsir) on the Holy Qur’an—the Jamī‘ Al-Bayan fi Ta‘wil Al-Qur’an of Abu Ja‘far Muhammad bin Jarir Al-Tabari (d. 310 A.H. / 923 C.E.)—that none of us shall take others for lords beside God, means ‘that none of us should obey in disobedience to what God has commanded, nor glorify them by prostrating to them in the same way as they prostrate to God’.

A hidden message for Muslims?

It is unusual to see Islamic scholars basing their presentation of Islamic doctrines only on the Qur’an. Usually the scholars seek to understand the Qur’an by reference to the hadith (traditions recording the sunna, that is the words and deeds of Muhammad and his Companions) and through tafsir (the Islamic science of interpreting the Qur’an) and other Islamic academic disciplines. There are few quotations from the hadith in the main body of the letter (though there are several more in the footnotes). However, all the Qur’anic verses quoted have interpretations in hadith and tafsir, interpretations which are well known to Muslims and which are usually much more aggressive towards Christians, Jews and other non-Muslims than represented by this letter. Therefore many Muslim readers would detect in the very act of selectively quoting from the Qur’an a hidden message that this is not a letter of appeasement, but a call to Islam in the tradition of Muhammad and his Companions and of the early Caliphs. There the call is always to submit to Islam and to accept Islamic dominance.
For instance, the fatiha (sura 1 of the Qur’an) is quoted and presented as the greatest chapter in the Qur’an, reminding humans of their duty of praise and gratitude to God for his mercy and goodness. Included are verses 6 and 7:

Guide us upon the straight path. The path of those on whom is Thy Grace, not those who deserve anger nor those who are astray. [emphasis added]

In Muslim interpretations and commentaries on these verses, it is explained that those who deserve God’s anger are the Jews, while those who are astray are the Christians. Indeed, the Saudi-sponsored English translation of the Qur’an by Hilali and Khan explicitly incorporates this interpretation in the very text of the Qur’an:

Guide us to the Straight Way. The Way of those on whom You have bestowed Your Grace, not (the Way) of those who earned your anger (such as the Jews), nor of those who went astray (such as the Christians).

Most Westerners, reading the verse as quoted in the letter, simply do not realise what it means. But for Muslims reading the letter, the meaning is clear: a call to Christians and Jews to avoid God’s anger and judgement by accepting Islam.

**Loving God in Islam**

The letter suggests that Islam has much to say about loving God. For example, it quotes a hadith of Muhammad describing God with a string of Qur’anic phrases: "He Alone, He hath no associate, His is the sovereignty and His is the praise". The letter asserts that each phrase describes "a mode of love of God, and devotion to Him".

A similar assertion occurs at the end of the section about loving God, in a passage in which the phrase He hath no associate is repeated twice:

In the light of what we have seen to be necessarily implied and evoked by the Prophet Muhammad’s PBUH blessed saying: ‘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’ [Al-Tirmithi, Kitab Al-Da`wat, Bab al-Du`a fi Yawm `Arafah, Hadith no. 3934], we can now perhaps understand the words ’The best that I have said-myself, and the prophets that came before me’ as equating the blessed formula ’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’ precisely with the ’First and Greatest Commandment’ to love God, with all one’s heart and soul, as found in various places in the Bible. That is to say, in other words, that the Prophet Muhammad PBUH was perhaps, through inspiration, restating and alluding to the Bible’s First Commandment. God knows best, but certainly we have seen their effective similarity in meaning. Moreover, we also do know (as can be seen in the endnotes), that both formulas have another remarkable parallel: the way they arise in a number of slightly differing versions and forms in different contexts, all of which, nevertheless, emphasize the primacy of total love and devotion to God.
In this part of the letter it is argued that Muhammad’s emphasis on the unity of God who has "no associate" is a re-statement of the Bible’s command about loving God with all your heart, soul and mind. The letter states that these two concepts are similar in meaning, although this is hard to derive from a straightforward reading of the two texts.

Perhaps the authors of the letter hoped that, by simply telling Christians that two different statements were really the same, they would be believed. Alternatively they could have had in mind the Muslim belief that Christian and Jewish Scriptures have been distorted, and that Muhammad’s statement is correcting the falsified Biblical teaching to what it was originally meant to have been.

Presenting the theme of love of God and of neighbour as central to Islam is again a misrepresentation of the truth. As stated in Barnabas Fund’s analysis in Part 2 of this Response, love in Islam is but one theme among many, and is not among the central themes of Islam. This is not to say that the Qur’an fails to mention God’s love at all (for it does), but that the weighting is very different from that in the Christian Bible where love is indeed the central theme.

**Loving your neighbour in Islam**

The letter suggests that loving your neighbour is a concept common to both Islam and Christianity. But it ignores the fact that the Muslim concept of love for other people can only operate within the limited scope of shari’a. Therefore in Islam there can be no absolute love for all humans, as in Christianity. Islam treats specific groups of people in specific ways: Christians and Jews are to be humiliated and brought under Islamic dominion as second rate subjects; infidels must accept Islam or be killed; apostates are to be killed if they do not return to Islam; Islamic sects considered heretical are to be fought and annihilated. Thus "neighbour" is a very limited concept in Islam, i.e. limited to fellow Muslims of the same tradition.

As we have already seen, the Arabic word chosen for "neighbour" in the letter, jar, is not one which carries the nuance of kinship as in the Bible, but another which has only a geographical meaning. Even using this limited definition of "neighbour", Islamic history does not show much love in Muslim dealings with those living near them, whether non-Muslims or Muslims of a different tradition.

**Jews are ignored**

Except for the fact that the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4,5) is mentioned as a centrepiece of the Old Testament and of Jewish liturgy, the Jews are ignored. This fits with other Muslim endeavours to shift Christianity away from its Jewish roots. It also displays the traditional use of "divide and conquer" tactics - as the Jews are nowadays portrayed across the Muslim world as the worst enemies of Islam, this would signal an attempt to create an alliance with Christianity against Judaism.
Search for common ground or attempt to islamise Christianity

This letter appears to be part of an ongoing wider effort to islamise Christianity. This project presents the Qur'anic Jesus as the real historical Jesus. It presents Muhammad as similar to Jesus in character (peace and love), and it denigrates the Jewish and Old Testament roots of Christianity (Marcionism).

Thus we see that, in seeking common ground, the "Open Letter and Call" suggests that the central Muslim concept of unitarian monotheism and the central Christian concepts of love to God and love to neighbour are beliefs held by both religions. It stresses that the two commandments to love are the basis of what is common to both religions. But presenting love for God and neighbour as central to Islam is at best a distortion, at worst an act of deception.

The message is that if Christians will accept Islam’s concept of the unity of God (thus denying the basic doctrines of the Trinity and deity of Christ), Muslims will accept the Christian values of love for God and neighbour as central to Islam. Thus a radical revolutionary change in Christianity is demanded in exchange for a superficial change of emphasis in Islamic perceptions.

Part 2: THE CONCEPT OF LOVE IN ISLAM
An analysis by Barnabas Fund

Introduction: the contrast with Christianity

God’s love is the central theme of the New Testament and therefore of the Christian faith. Love is God’s main attribute and very essence. The main message of the New Testament is that God is love in His very being, and that this love was revealed in Jesus Christ and His supreme act of love, His self-giving in his sacrificial death on the cross (John 3:16; 1 John 4:7-12).

In Islam, however, the focus is on submission, so love is never more than one of many minor themes. Modern Muslim apologists in the West sometimes assert that God is a God of love. This is not a concept which traditional orthodox Islam would accept, but appears to be a modern stance of adaptation to the environment they find themselves in.

Love in Qur’an and hadith

Love in the Qur’an mainly means "liking" or "preference". On the rare occasions when love is mentioned in the Qur’an, it is usually in the sense of love between persons and love of material things. The Qur’an never states that God is love.

There are some verses that speak of humans’ love towards God, for example:
Yet there are men who take (for worship) others besides Allah as equal (with Allah); they love them as they should love Allah. But those of faith are overflowing in their love for Allah. If only the unrighteous could see behold they would see the penalty that to Allah belongs all power and Allah will strongly enforce the penalty. (Q 2:165)

A few verses speak of God’s love towards specific categories of humans (good Muslims). This love derives from God’s will, rather than from His very nature. God loves the righteous by rewarding them, as opposed to the evil-doer who is punished. —

… verily Allah loves those who act aright. (Q 3:76)

For Allah loves those who do good; (Q 3:134)

And Allah loves those who are firm and steadfast. (Q 3:146)

For Allah loves those who turn to Him constantly and He loves those who keep themselves pure and clean. (Q 2:222)

For Allah loves those who are fair (and just). (Q 49:9)

Truly Allah loves those who fight in His Cause in battle array as if they were a solid cemented structure. (Q 61:4)

However, God does not love sinful people and he rejects his enemies.

… He loves not those who reject Faith (Q 30:45)

Verily He loveth not the arrogant. (Q 16:23)

The word most often used in the Qur`an for love is hub and its derivatives (mahabba, yuhibbu, etc.). This is linked to the Hebrew Old Testament word ahabah (root ahb) which is the one mostly used to denote love, both God’s love to man and man’s love to God.

Mahabba, the most common Islamic Arabic term for love, denotes an affection inspired in humans by gratitude for God’s blessings. On God’s side mahabba is usually bestowed as a reward for a good believer who follows Muhammad and submits to God.

— — Say: If ye do love God, follow me: God will love you and forgive you your sins: For God is Oft- Forgiving, Most Merciful. (Q 3:31)

God’s love here for the Muslim who follows Muhammad is a reward rather than a relationship. Early classical interpreters of the Qur`an saw this verse in the light of the polemic against Christians. Christians said they loved God, but as they did not follow Muhammad their claim was wrong. Ibn Kathir in his commentary on this verse says: "This verse is a verdict in the case of anyone who claims to love God but does not follow
the way of life laid down by the Prophet Muhammad. His very claim is an absolute lie . . .

"[1]

Love appears also in the other main Islamic source, the hadith collections. In the hadith, there are references to love for things, love for martyrdom, love for God, and God’s love for Muhammad and for deserving Muslims.

**Love in Islamic theology**

According to Islamic teaching, God`s essence and nature cannot be known. Therefore a statement like "God is love" (which appears in the Bible, 1 John 4:8,16) would be theologically wrong, even blasphemous, in classical Islam.

Islam does teach that something of God`s attributes can be known, and these are described in the form of the "99 Beautiful Names". The names emphasise God`s omnipotence and omniscience, his mercy and compassion, his sovereignty and inscrutable will, but do not call him "love". The closest name to "love" is Al-Wadud (see below for discussion of its meaning).

In Islam God reveals himself mainly through his law (shari`a) which calls for submission and obedience. While in Christianity God is personal and establishes personal relationships of love with humans, in classical Islam God is seen as totally self-contained and beyond personal relationships. In Islam, although God loves certain Muslim people of whom he approves, he is not bound to love them even if they deserve his love. Ultimately God is not obliged to do anything, but acts as he wills, sometimes in an entirely capricious manner.

Orthodox classical Islam is more concerned with God`s greatness and transcendence, with shari`a law and its applications, than with God`s love. God is absolutely other, unknowable, far beyond what can be known or imagined (wara`l wara i.e. beyond the beyond). The role of humans is to submit, fear and obey God and his law.

For example, following the call in March 2005 by a well-known Islamist scholar, Tariq Ramadan, for a moratorium on the brutal hudud punishments still implemented in some Muslim states (amputation, stoning, flogging etc.), several Islamic scholars opposed the suggestion. Sheikh Muhammad al-Shinqiti, director of the Islamic Center of South Plains in Lubbock, Texas, claimed that harshness was part of shari`a and any attempt at softening it was giving in to Western Christian concepts which were incompatible with Islam. Shinqiti stated that a personalised faith, like that of Christians, leads to corruption and immorality. He preferred the detachment and severity of Islam, citing the Qur`anic verse

And let not pity for the twain withhold you from obedience to Allah, if ye believe in Allah and the Last Day. And let a party of believers witness their punishment. (Q 24:2, translation not specified)
In this view, harshness rather than love and mercy are at the heart of Islam. The inference is that Christianity is weak and contemptible because it has love and mercy at its very core.

**Love in Sufism**

It was left for Islamic mysticism (Sufism) to try to redress the balance and introduce the theme of love into Islam. Sufism offered an escape from the dry and intellectual legalism of the orthodox Islamic teachers and scholars. It focused instead on the human yearning for an authentic personal experience of God. Sufism taught that this experience could be had by a spiritual interpretation of the Qur’an aimed at finding its secret meaning, and by the disciplines of asceticism, repetition of God’s names, breath control, meditation and trance.

Rabi’a al-Adawiyya (died 801) introduced the theme of Divine Love into Sufism. She longed to love God only for himself, not for hope of any reward in paradise nor out of fear of judgement and hell. After her death the love theme became a dominant feature of Sufism, expressing the Sufi’s endless search for unity with the divine Beloved. The yearning for a love relationship with God was expressed by Sufis in the language of human love, similar to the Bible’s Song of Songs and some psalms. Sufi poetry described symbolically the relationship between God the Divine Lover and the human person searching for his love.

Sufis used the Qur’anic verse 85:14 "And He is the Oft-Forgiving, full of loving-kindness [al-wadud]" to express that God loves. From this verse is derived one of the 99 Beautiful Names of God, Al-Wadud (The One who Loves, The Most Loving, The Most Affectionate, The Beloved). Wadud, from the root wdd, is somewhat akin to the Old Testament Hebrew word dod or dodim (plural) used extensively in the Song of Songs for the pure love between man and woman. From it we get the name David (the beloved). However in classical legalistic Islam, wadud was interpreted as meaning the one who is favourably disposed, who shows kindness and favour, at most affection, rather than true love.

In addition to the Qur’anic terms mahabba and wudud, Sufis coined the term `ishq for love. `Ishq denotes an unquenchable and irresistible desire for union with the Beloved (God) as in romantic love between and a man and a woman.

While Sufism used to be found in every branch of traditional Islam, and is influential today in the West especially amongst some Western converts to Islam, the legalist orthodox scholars have usually condemned it. Strict Islamist reform movements which have developed in recent times, such as Wahhabism, have rejected much of Sufism as pagan additions and innovations which should be purged from Islam. The concept of love is downplayed by such movements and condemned as a pagan, Christian or Western notion incompatible with true Islam.
Note: Most Qur’anic quotations in this Response are taken from The Holy Qur’an: Text, Translation and Commentary by A. Yusuf Ali (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1975 and many other editions) unless otherwise stated. Please note that different translations of the Qur’an have slightly different verse numbers. So in another translation it may be necessary to look at the verses just before or just after the text references given here in order to find the same text. However, where Qur’an verses quoted in the "Open Letter and Call" are re-quoted here, the translation is not known as it was no specified in the "Open Letter and Call".


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