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A Case for Ethical Cooperation between Evangelical Christians and Humanitarian Islam

Thomas K. Johnson

Humanity's ability to live together in peace and harmony—and the very lives of both Christians and peaceful Muslims in many parts of the world—are threatened by radical Islamic elements. The World Evangelical Alliance and a major Muslim organization have agreed to work together to combat threats to their shared values and articulate a positive alternative. This article explains why such an effort is justified and how it hopes to make a global impact.

On 19 April 2007, as I was preparing to teach a theology class for a low-visibility evangelical seminary in Turkey, I read an email and felt as if I had been kicked in the stomach. Terrorists had slit the throats of three men—two Turkish converts from Islam to Christianity, one German missionary. One of them had enrolled in my class.

The motives of their murderers were a sinister mix of nationalist ideology and the desire to enforce an inhumane version of sharia, or Muslim law.

One could, if one wished, place this attack in the broader context of fourteen centuries of conflict between Muslims and Christians.¹ To me, such an assessment would be one-sided. The typical Muslim today, like the typical Christian, is sickened to see religion used to justify violence. But across history, both Islam and Christianity have often included notions of religiously defined empires, kingdoms, lands, and nations within their systems of ethics. This has contributed to involving religions in the conflicts amongst empires, as well as to countless instances of genocide, terrorism and persecution.

We would be much better off if, on issues of social and political relations, Islam and Christianity were on the same side, offering a universal ethical compass. I believe that such a radical step is achievable via a partnership between evangelical Christianity and an impressive intellectual movement known as Humanitarian Islam.

In this paper, I first discuss the inadequacy of some Muslim responses to Islamic extremism, followed by an explanation of why Humanitarian Islam is

1 Raymond Ibrahim, *Sword and Scimitar: Fourteen Centuries of War between Islam and the West* (Hachette Books: Kindle Edition, 2018).

a preferable alternative. I then draw some comparisons to Christian ethics and close by suggesting how we can work together effectively—including one promising new collaboration.

Why some Muslim responses to extremism do not go far enough

In recent years, many Muslim theologians and jurists have been working hard to convince extremists to turn from their violent ways while explaining to the watching world why violence does not represent Islam. Three prominent responses have been the ‘Open Letter to Dr. Ibrahim Awwad Al-Badri, alias “Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi”, and to the fighters and followers of the self-declared “Islamic State”’ published by 126 Sunni leaders in September 2014; the Marrakesh Declaration of 2016; and the 2019 Human Fraternity Document (HFD) signed in Abu Dhabi by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar.

These documents directly confront and condemn violence in the name of Islam; if these principles were followed, our world would be far less violent. This is significant. However, these recent Muslim statements also perpetuate some convictions that undermine their potential to reduce global conflict and local tragedies. For example, the Open Letter of 2014 (in paragraph 22) directly affirms the obligation of Muslims to form a new caliphate, even while rejecting ISIS’s use of morally repugnant means to establish a caliphate. Such a perceived obligation, a central cause of conflict among Muslims as well as between Islam and others, has been perpetuated, not resolved, by the Open Letter.

Likewise, the Marrakesh Declaration of 2016, though rejecting violence in the name of Islam and calling for the development of a Muslim doctrine of citizenship that applies to people of other religions, clearly affirms the notion of ‘Muslim countries’. In a Muslim country, minorities may be tolerated, and citizenship may increase their level of toleration, but non-Muslims will always be regarded and treated as something less than full stakeholders in a country that officially describes itself as Muslim. It seems as if the Marrakesh doctrine of a Muslim country is a smaller version of the same Muslim doctrine of which the Caliphate is the larger version. It does not affirm true freedom of religion.

The 2019 HFD blends important themes in Roman Catholic and Sunni Muslim ethical teaching in a manner that is designed to be understood by followers of either religion or of no religion. It begins to address the problems related to minority religions and citizenship which were identified in the Marrakesh Declaration. The HFD could be a valuable tool for moral instruction in some circumstances; it has the added value of clarifying international and interfaith ethical standards for many areas of public life, though some will suspect that this text implies an ultimate equivalence of religious beliefs.² Despite these significant steps forward,

2 For example, the HFD claims, ‘The pluralism and the diversity of religions, colour, sex, race and language are willed by God in His wisdom, through which He created human beings.’ Many Christians would feel unable to say without qualification that ‘God willed the diversity of religions.’ Recognition of the similarities of ethical teaching across faith traditions should be balanced by a recognition of the ultimate incompatibility of some claims of those traditions.

the HFD does not explicitly address the problem of the religiously defined state, whether one has a Christian country or a Muslim country in view. By ignoring this topic, the text may unintentionally perpetuate second-class citizenship for adherents of minority religions. And the HFD does not address the explosive issue of how to treat people who convert from one religion to another.

Some recent Muslim statements on public life, such as those just discussed, make passing reference to the 1948 United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). However, UDHR article 18, which is painfully explicit about the freedom to convert to a different religion, is seldom quoted. It states, 'Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.' If UDHR 18 were fully understood, affirmed, and practised, it would not only end the persecution of converts; it would also mean the gradual end of religiously defined countries (whether Muslim, Christian, Hindu or Buddhist). No country that consistently protects the freedom to change religions, including freedom to develop the institutions of the newly adopted religions, can expect to consistently affirm its long-term identity as a state belonging to one religion.

Humanitarian Islam

One very large Muslim movement is quite different from those discussed above. It robustly affirms the UDHR (including article 18) and rejects the notion of a Muslim country or caliphate. Its theory of ethics directly and constructively addresses the reality of religiously pluralistic societies. The main voices in this movement are leaders in the world's largest Muslim organization, the Indonesia-based Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Their perspective, called 'Humanitarian Islam', has spawned many publications in English for the international community, especially since ISIS declared its caliphate in 2014.

A careful examination of the ethics of Humanitarian Islam finds that Muslims of this type, when following their own principles, support religious freedom and human rights for Christians and people of other faiths. But their ethic goes much farther. Though presented mostly as a Muslim alternative to extremist violence, Humanitarian Islam contains a serious assessment of universal moral norms, the relation between faith and reason, fundamental human goods, the laws (both civil and religious) needed to protect those human goods, and the role of religions in societies.

Within the spectrum of varieties of Islam, the Indonesian Humanitarians represent the opposite end from the violent extremists. They present themselves as fully orthodox Muslims, not secularized half-Muslims. Precisely as such, they fully endorse classical human rights, religious freedom for other religions, and constitutional democracy, while openly naming and repudiating 'obsolete and problematic tenets' of Muslim orthodoxy which, they claim, have been misused to promote extremism.³

3 For example, in February 2019, NU leaders decreed that members of their organization should no longer use the term 'infidel' to describe people who are not Muslims, suggesting that the term 'citizen' be used as a replacement. For the political context see 'NU Calls for End to Word "In-

The representatives of Humanitarian Islam believe that Islamic extremists—from ISIS to the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia—have been misusing Islam for their own purposes, and that this misuse of religion has been supported by versions of Muslim doctrine which were contextualized many centuries ago in a radically different situation. In their May 2017 *Declaration on Humanitarian Islam*⁴ they write, ‘Various actors—including but not limited to Iran, Saudi Arabia, ISIS, al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, Qatar, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Taliban and Pakistan—cynically manipulate religious sentiment in their struggle to maintain or acquire political, economic and military power, and to destroy their enemies. They do so by drawing upon key elements of classical Islamic law (*fiqh*), to which they ascribe divine authority, in order to mobilize support for their worldly goals’ (para 28).

Therefore, the *Declaration on Humanitarian Islam* says, ‘If Muslims do not address the key tenets of Islamic orthodoxy that authorize and explicitly enjoin such violence, anyone—at any time—may harness the orthodox teachings of Islam to defy what they claim to be the illegitimate laws and authority of an infidel state and butcher their fellow citizens, regardless of whether they live in the Islamic world or the West.’ As an alternative, NU seeks to establish a new Islamic orthodoxy that addresses the problematic tenets of medieval Islamic teaching which extremists claim to be orthodox.

Precisely as Muslims, the Humanitarians claim that the extremists do not reflect the best of Islam. The core of their argument is that Islam has a tradition of developing the application of Muslim ethics and law by means of interaction with changing cultures, but that this process stopped several centuries ago, leaving many Muslims bound to an ossified and conflict-producing version of Sharia that is not tenable in a global, pluralistic society. In contrast, truly orthodox Islam contains within itself its own proper theological and legal method that leads to a humanitarian, pro-democracy position, including promoting religious freedom for all and signalling the end of religiously defined countries. Humanitarian Islam seeks to reactivate this authentically Muslim theological method to develop a truly new and more fully orthodox Islam, thereby displacing the outdated version of Islam that is fuelling many conflicts and possibly a global clash of civilizations.

As Humanitarian Islam explains, ‘Islamic orthodoxy contains internal mechanisms, including the science of *uṣūl al-fiqh*—the methodology of independent legal reasoning employed to create Islamic law, or *fiqh* (often conflated with *sharī‘ah*)—that allow Muslim scholars to adjust the temporal elements of religious orthodoxy in response to the ever-changing circumstances of life. These internal mechanisms entail a process of independent legal reasoning known as *ijtihād*, which fell into disuse among Sunni Muslim scholars approximately five centuries ago’ (*Nusantara Manifesto* para 106).⁵ As they see it, for some five hun-

fidels” to Describe Non-Muslims’, *Jakarta Post*, 1 March 2019, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2019/03/01/nu-calls-for-end-to-word-infidels-to-describe-non-muslims.html>.

4 Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam: Towards the Recontextualization of Islamic Teachings, for the Sake of World Peace and Harmony Between Civilizations (Bayt ar-Rahmah, May 2017), https://baytarrahmah.org/2017_05_22_ansor-declaration-on-humanitarian-islam/.

5 *Nusantara Manifesto* (Bayt ar-Rahmah, October 2018), https://baytarrahmah.org/2018_10_25_nusantara-manifesto/.

dred years the proper Muslim theological method, the ‘internal mechanism’ for the unfolding of Muslim orthodoxy, has not been properly implemented, leading to the debacle of the role of Islam on the global stage, and leaving their thought leaders with a lot of unfinished homework.

The theological method of Humanitarian Islam

Several notable themes characterize the distinctive theological method used by Humanitarian Islam in its systematic effort to define a new Islamic ethics and theory of law. I will highlight four of them here.

1. *Humanitarian Islam sharply distinguishes eternal, unchanging ethical and legal norms from contingent norms that are limited in their relevance to a particular time and situation.*

The *Declaration on Humanitarian Islam* says, ‘Religious norms may be universal and unchanging—e.g. the imperative that one strive to attain moral and spiritual perfection—or they may be “contingent”, if they address a specific issue that arises within the ever-changing circumstances of time and place. As reality changes, contingent—as opposed to universal—religious norms should also change to reflect the constantly shifting circumstances of life on earth’ (paras 3 and 4). Humanitarian Islam claims that the current crisis of Islam arises from taking contingent norms from previous centuries, whether the seventh century or the Middle Ages, and applying them in the twenty-first century as if they were eternal, unchanging norms. This leads to a horrendous misperception of Islamic religious rules, both by Islamist extremists and by the enemies of Islam.

The eternal norms cited by Humanitarian Islam are general principles of morally sensitive behaviour. For example, they emphasize the need ‘to revitalize the understanding and practice of religion as *rahmah* (universal love and compassion)’ in contrast with hatred and violence (*Manifesto* para 7). They continue, ‘Noble behavior entails acting with compassion and treating others with respect’ (para 61). As a dimension of respect for others, they repeatedly mention the UDHR (for example, para 132).

2. *This hermeneutic for properly applying religious norms is related to a transcendental definition of the sharia, not a concrete or specific definition of the sharia.*

Because of the complex origin of sharia in the Koran, in the early Muslim tradition, and in the interpretations of classical Muslim theology, sharia does not have an historically given source or definition found in one particular text. Nevertheless, amongst several strands of Islam, the perception of a single, firmly established form of sharia is great enough that several countries have attempted to fully implement a specific set of laws that they call ‘the sharia’, even if the historical claim, that this is the true sharia, is questionable. For example, in recent years Sudan, Pakistan, Libya, parts of Nigeria, the Aceh province of Indonesia, some regions in the Philippines, and Yemen have implemented sharia law to strictly enforce such matters as women’s dress, punishment for blasphemy or

apostasy, corporal punishment, stoning for adultery, and even cutting off limbs.⁶

Humanitarian Islam decries this practice as the false application of contingent religious norms from a previous era to the current situation. Instead, the term ‘sharia’, which the Humanitarians use sparingly, is applied to eternal principles that exist outside time and space. They see sharia as transcendent moral values leading to God (and protecting creation) that have to be applied anew in every situation, not as specific laws that can be enforced by a police officer.

The *Nusantara Manifesto* (2018) includes an essay by Abdurrahman Wahid (1940–2009), president of Indonesia from 1999 to 2001, called ‘God Needs No Defense’ as an official appendix. Wahid wrote, ‘Shari’a, properly understood, expresses and embodies perennial values. Islamic law, on the other hand, is the product of *ijtihad* (interpretation) which depends on circumstances and needs to be continuously reviewed in accordance with ever-changing circumstances, to prevent Islamic law from becoming out of date, rigid and non-correlative—not only with Muslims’ contemporary lives and conditions, but also with the underlying perennial values of shari’a itself’. In other words, Islam cannot merely copy a law code from a previous era; perennial and eternal values have to be applied in every generation, for which a clear theological and legal method is needed.

Wahid assumed that in some instances, religious law as taught today, based on contingent interpretations from a previous era, would contradict a proper contingent interpretation or application of the perennial values of the eternal, higher sharia to our era. For example, anti-blasphemy or anti-apostasy laws, which may have been proper applications of the eternal sharia in a previous socio-political situation, might themselves become blasphemous in our era because they attempt to defend God in ways that are inappropriate in a multi-religious society.

Such a definition of sharia, if followed by the global Muslim movement, would undermine many reasons for Islamophobia, since it would shift the discussion of the religious ethics of public life away from, for example, the proper way to execute blasphemers and toward a principled discussion of what constitutes human goods and what types of religious and civil laws would serve to protect the primary human goods. People from different religious communities and cultures might have different opinions, but the discussion of human goods and the proper ways to protect human goods would constitute civil public discourse, not an endless war.

3. *In its social doctrine, Humanitarian Islam has appropriated and approved selected principles of Indonesian civilization which it views as predating the arrival of Islam.*

The Humanitarian Islam movement believes that important moral and political principles that have long existed in Nusantara culture (the historical culture of the Malay Archipelago) merit new application today. In fact, for them, Nusantara culture provides the filter (hermeneutic) through which Islam and other religions can be understood, evaluated, and applied. Clearly, anyone who takes such a stance is already committed to accepting religious pluralism, because he or she has con-

6 Christine Schirrmacher, *The Sharia: Law and Order in Islam*, trans. Richard McClary, ed. Thomas K. Johnson (Bonn: World Evangelical Alliance, 2013), 24; <https://iirf.eu/journal-books/global-issues-series/the-sharia-law-and-order-in-islam/>.

sciously utilized cultural norms and values related to multiple religious traditions.

The *Nusantara Manifesto* concludes with a ringing endorsement of the Indonesian constitutional principle of Pancasila (which affirms humanitarian unity despite diversity), including officially recognizing several religions, which is a specific rejection of Muslim theocratic visions.

Humanitarian Muslims are not shy about recommending Nusantara culture to the world. Indeed, in the *Declaration of Humanitarian Islam* they even suggest that their experience can serve as a 'pilot project' for a multi-religious nation-state (para 19).

4. *Humanitarian Islam accepts the moral legitimacy of selected socio-political developments of the last two centuries.*

The *Nusantara Manifesto* identified four key social and political developments which make our world different from that of previous centuries: '(1) A complete transformation of the global political order; (2) fundamental changes in demography; (3) evolving societal norms; and (4) globalization, driven by scientific and technological developments that enable mass communications, travel and the emergence of a tightly integrated world economy' (para 108).

Until two hundred years ago, and to a large extent even one hundred years ago, much of the world's population lived in kingdoms or empires in which there was a supposed unity of a majority religion and the ruling power, though minority religions may have been tolerated. Within Europe, this was described as the 'unity of throne and altar'. Today most empires have passed away, replaced by nation-states that contain millions of immigrants of all religions and cultures, with those populations and states connected by intergovernmental organizations (such as the UN) and international businesses. The age of religiously defined empires, whether in Asia, Europe, Turkey or the Middle East, is long gone.

Therefore, for Humanitarian Islam, any desire to return to a caliphate or a religiously defined country, as displayed by Muslim extremism, is an impossible desire to return to a previous era and can lead only to conflict, destruction and death. Instead, Muslims should fully accept a different relationship between religion and society, including a critical endorsement of some societal transitions such as those mentioned.

Importantly, Humanitarian Islam accepts only *selected* socio-political developments of modern global society. It does not endorse atheism, moral relativism or hyper-individualism. Though religious pluralism is expected, Humanitarian Islam does not call on governments or schools to ignore religious values, practices and communities. Rather, it believes that people's lives should be shaped by the teachings of their religious communities. The movement fully accepts the existence of multiple religious communities within one country, with the hope that those communities and their members can flourish together.

A Christian response to Humanitarian Islam

Our Muslim friends have set a very high goal, that of a new and truly orthodox Islam; I hope they can freely pursue their dreams. It is a philosophically sophisticated response to some of the crucial questions of our era.

Theologically, Christian ethics claims to differ in a crucial way from Islam. As the apostle John said, 'For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' (Jn 1:17). This relationship between law and grace underlies everything we do as Christians. Law is God's command about what to do or not do; grace is his provision of undeserved acceptance and forgiveness in Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the gospel. In contrast, Islam is generally seen as containing a much heavier emphasis on law than on grace, although hints of the need for grace occur occasionally, such as in the well-known saying attributed to Mohammed that God's throne bears the inscription, 'My mercy precedes my wrath.' This is obviously an all-important issue for Christians, who believe that the grace that came through Jesus Christ is our only hope of salvation and that we cannot be saved by any amount of obedience to law.

Despite this central theological difference, a comparison of Humanitarian Islam with Christian social ethics and philosophy of law reveals that, amidst today's great global threats, we are ideological allies and should treat each other as such. Even though the theological differences between Christians and Muslims may never be resolved, our level of agreement in the spheres of ethics and law calls for global cooperation in the public square. Rather than taking opposite sides, evangelical Christians and Humanitarian Muslims should help to protect each other's religious communities and to articulate and embody a global moral compass.

Moreover, reflecting on the themes expressed by Humanitarian Islam can help us understand more clearly key aspects of Christian ethics and how they relate to Muslim thinking. I will mention three points.

1. *A Christian hermeneutic on the law distinguishes among God's moral, ceremonial and judicial laws, all of which are found in the Bible. This distinction has both similarities to and differences from the distinction made by Humanitarian Islam between eternal norms and contingent norms.*

As the Westminster Confession of 1646 stated:

Beside this law, commonly called *moral*, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, as a church under age, *ceremonial laws*, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, his graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; and partly, holding forth divers instructions of moral duties. All which ceremonial laws are now abrogated, under the new testament. To them also, as a body politic, he gave sundry *judicial laws*, which expired together with the State of that people.⁷

A few Christians have questioned this threefold hermeneutic, but it has received widespread support. With slight variations, it was used during the Reformation by John Calvin (1509–1564) and in medieval Christian ethics by Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), both of whom regarded it as a common distinction long known to Christians. Calvin and Aquinas assumed the similar distinctions used by Augustine (354–430) and Justin Martyr (circa 100–165); indeed, one of the earliest Christian books after the New Testament, the Epistle of Barnabas, sharply

7 Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 19, paragraphs 3 and 4; emphasis added.

contrasts the moral and ceremonial laws (compare chapters 2 and 19). Jonathan Bayes argues that this hermeneutic was already used in some Old Testament passages, such as Proverbs 21:3: 'To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.' For Bayes, righteousness refers to the demands of the moral law, whereas justice refers to the demands of the judicial law.⁸

This three-part hermeneutic has guided most Christians to view blasphemy or adultery as against God's moral law but to steer clear or punishing blasphemers or adulterers with death, even though the theocratic nation of Israel sometimes applied capital punishment to these offenders. At times, Christians have indeed enforced anti-blasphemy laws, even to the point of executing those accused. This was wrong and based on an improper hermeneutic. Almost all Christians have repented of this sin, even if not all have consciously adopted a better hermeneutic. There is much to learn from ancient ceremonial and judicial laws, but we do not teach Christians to obey them directly. In contrast, the moral laws remain crucial for Christian living today.

2. *The whole undertaking of Humanitarian Islam entails an appeal to a universal moral norm which they expect both Muslims and non-Muslims to recognize, even if the source and nature of this norm are not yet always fully articulated. This is what Christians call the 'natural moral law'.*

When people argue, they inevitably appeal, perhaps implicitly, to a moral norm by which everyone's actions may be evaluated. When the people involved share the same religion, they may refer to a religious text, such as the Bible or the Koran. If they do not, the norm referenced may be less explicit; nevertheless, it is crucial. Normal people seldom say, 'There are no standards, so do what you want.' Rather, we are implicitly claiming, 'According to the standards which we both know, I am right and you are wrong.'⁹ This unwritten standard is traditionally called 'the natural moral law', or sometimes simply 'natural law'.

Within Christian theology, the natural moral law has been regarded as a part of creation, with the result that humans can hardly avoid distinguishing between right and wrong and almost necessarily make similar assumptions about right and wrong (even though they sometimes deny this knowledge, as Paul stated in Romans 1). Christian theology also regards the natural moral law as a prominent theme in God's ongoing 'general revelation', or God's speech to humanity which comes to all people through his creation. (God's general revelation is usually contrasted with God's 'special revelation' which was given in Christ and Holy Scripture.)

The natural moral law is so strongly assumed in the Bible that the assumption is rarely clarified. Such clarifications typically arise when believers do something

8 Jonathan F. Bayes, 'The Threefold Division of the Law', The Christian Institute, 2017, <https://www.christian.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/the-threefold-division-of-the-law.pdf>.

9 This analysis of moral discourse is heavily dependent on C. S. Lewis, especially *Mere Christianity* (rev. ed. London and Glasgow: Collins, 1952), 15–26. For an assessment of Lewis on this topic, see Thomas K. Johnson, *Natural Law Ethics: An Evangelical Proposal*, Christian Philosophy Today vol. 6 (Bonn: VKW, 2005), 85–105, https://www.academia.edu/36884239/Natural_Law_Ethics_An_Evangelical_Proposal.

which their pagan neighbors properly regard as wrong, showing that unbelievers sometimes respond to the moral law better than do believers. A painful example is when Pharaoh followed principles protecting marriage and truth-telling and confronted Abram for not following such principles (Genesis 12:10–20).

In the twentieth century, some Protestant theologians mistakenly claimed that we cannot know God's natural law; some said we should not even mention the topic. This fatal mistake threatens the soul of civilization, because it removes any explanation of why people of all religions can distinguish right from wrong, thus eliminating any basis for ethical agreement with non-Christians.¹⁰

Prior to New Testament times, many Greek writers claimed that there is no universal standard of right and wrong. In response, Aristotle and the Stoics argued that there is a universal ethical standard, which they began to call the natural moral law. The apostle Paul sided with the natural-law theorists against moral relativism. He wrote, 'When Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them' (Rom 2:14–15). In this way, early Christianity adopted the moral philosophy of the Old Testament (of which the account of the Pharaoh and Abraham in Genesis is one of many examples) and contextualized it in the terminology of the Roman Empire.

The church fathers of the first four centuries usually summarized the demands of the natural law in the Golden Rule: do unto others as you would have them do to you. Both Aristotle and Augustine taught the doctrine of natural law, but for different purposes. Aristotle pointed to the universal moral law as a basis for a civilized society, assuming the existence of many communities and cultures with their particular laws, but did not mention God as its source; Augustine preached that all people are accountable to God, even if they do not yet acknowledge God.¹¹

In the centuries after Augustine, within Europe and the Mediterranean basin, Christianity grew from a persecuted minority to become the majority religion, sometimes even the official religion. This prompted a discussion within Christian ethics of the relation between the universal moral law and the civil or human laws of particular countries. Now the perceived threats to a humane religious and social life came not so much from moral relativism and cultural diversity as from the church and the state (or states) alternately seeking absolute power. Two different types of tyranny threatened human flourishing.

In his 'Treatise on Law', the great medieval thinker Thomas Aquinas distinguished four types of law in a manner intended to overcome both moral relativism, on one hand, and religious and political absolutism on the other hand. The four types are (1) eternal law, which is a universal idea which has always

10 See Thomas K. Johnson, "The Rejection of God's Natural Moral Law: Losing the Soul of Western Civilization," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 43, no. 3 (2019), https://www.academia.edu/39590583/The_Rejection_of_Gods_Natural_Moral_Law_Losing_the_Soul_of_Western_Civilization.

11 Augustine, Letter 157, paragraph 15; found in Augustine, *Works*, Part 2, vol. 3, Letters 156–210, ed. Boniface Ramsey and John E. Rotelle, trans. Roland John Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1990), 25.

existed in the mind of God and is not distinct from God himself; (2) the natural law, which is the participation of the eternal law within human rationality, communicated to humanity by the creation of the human mind in the image of the divine mind, the light of reason which cannot be fully extinguished even by sin; (3) human law, which is framed by human lawgivers and given to a particular community for the common good; and (4) the divine law, which is the special revelation of God in the Bible.¹²

Revolutionary themes were hidden in this medieval text. Though he was writing during the period of 'Christendom' or European church-state unity, Aquinas did not claim that human law should be based on the 'divine law', the Bible; moreover, he said that neither the state nor the church has ultimate authority to evaluate a human law. In a manner that was remarkably untheocratic and anti-autocratic, he argued that human law is to be derived from and evaluated primarily by the natural law.¹³

For Aquinas, laws coming from a king or government are to be evaluated by the principles of equity which God has built into human reason, but without giving ultimate authority to the church, which would evaluate human law by interpreting and applying religious texts. This was a principled break with both theocracy and autocracy. Aquinas was a Christian who honoured God as the source of law and reason, but not in a manner that had to exclude other religions, since it was not a religious institution that could evaluate human laws.

During the Reformation, the new Evangelicals, such as Martin Luther and John Calvin, did not carefully follow the precise terminology of Aquinas. They simply assumed the natural law, as was common in the Bible. But their rediscovery of justification by faith alone (not by obeying the moral law) pushed them to clarify what functions God's moral law carries. Luther taught that God's moral law has two special functions (in addition to guiding the lives of Christians). The first is the civic use of the moral law, which restrains sin enough to make life in society possible; the second is the theological use of the law, which reveals our sin to ourselves.¹⁴

Calvin did not precisely follow the terminology of Luther, but his teaching was remarkably similar. First, Calvin compared the moral law to a mirror that 'warns, informs, convicts, and lastly condemns, every man of his own unrighteousness' so one sees the need for forgiveness.¹⁵ He then added, 'The second function of the law is this: at least by fear of punishment to restrain certain men who are untouched by any care for what is just and right', almost a repeat of Luther.¹⁶ In this manner the Reformation more clearly distinguished the dimensions of the

12 See Johnson, *Natural Law Ethics*, 15–18.

13 Thomas Aquinas, 'Treatise on Law', questions 90–96 of the *Summa Theologica* I-II, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benzinger, 1947), question 91, article 3. Republished online in *Classics of Political Philosophy*, http://www.sophia-project.org/uploads/1/3/9/5/13955288/aquinas_law.pdf.

14 Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. and trans. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 26: *Lectures on Galatians*, 1535 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963) 308, 309.

15 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), II, vii, 6.

16 Calvin, *Institutes*, II, vii, 10.

biblical-classical synthesis which came through Aristotle from those which came through Augustine. The reasoning of Aristotle formed the basis for the civic use of the moral law; the reasoning of Augustine supported the spiritual use of God's moral law. On the question of how to order life in society, Calvin can be taken as speaking for the main Reformers: 'There is nothing more common than for a man to be sufficiently instructed in a right standard of conduct by natural law.'¹⁷

3. *Within Christian ethics, there is a developing discussion of the relation between moral laws and human goods which has significant parallels in the philosophy of Humanitarian Islam.*

In Western civilization, it has been common for three hundred years to distinguish between doing things that are good for people and those things which are seen as duties in an abstract sense—i.e. doing what is 'right' regardless of the consequences. In moral theory, this is the contrast between utilitarian ethics (doing good for people) and deontological ethics (doing what is good in itself). But this sharp contrast does not seem reasonable to many people in the theistic religions. In other words, we who believe in one God, creator of all people, see a close link between moral norms (i.e. our abstract duties) and human goods (the results of doing good actions). For example, Moses connected is quoted as saying, 'The Lord commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the Lord our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive', clearly connecting abstract duty to God with human well-being (Deut 6:24).

In his discussion of this question, Aquinas argued that there are definable human goods that correspond with God-given human inclinations, that the natural moral law commands us to protect these goods, and that good, enforceable human laws give more detail about how to protect these human goods. Commentators on Aquinas normally say these primary human goods are 'life, procreation, social life, knowledge, and rational conduct'.¹⁸ To avoid a secularized misunderstanding of Aquinas, one should note that knowledge, in his definition, includes knowing the truth about God; his definition of social life includes the protection of private property.¹⁹

There is an astonishing similarity between Aquinas' definition of human goods and the definitions provided by the Sunni Muslim jurists Imam al-Ghazali (1058–1111) and Imam al-Shatibi (d. 1388), who are quoted in the 2017 Declaration on Humanitarian Islam. These Sunni jurists described five human goods—faith, life, progeny, reason and property—which should be protected by moral norms. This similarity reflects extensive interaction between Muslim and Christian scholars in the twelfth through fourteenth centuries which occurred largely in France and southern Europe. They interacted with each other to the

17 Calvin, *Institutes*, II, ii, 22.

18 For example, Mark Murphy, 'The Natural Law Tradition in Ethics', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2002, revised 2019), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/natural-law-ethics/>.

19 See Aquinas, 'Treatise on Law', question 94, article 2. The 'new natural law' theory offers a longer list of primary human goods, mostly by means of dividing Aquinas' categories into distinct parts. For example, John Finnis, *Natural Rights and Natural Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 59–99, argues that the basic forms of human good, which he also calls 'values', are life, knowledge, play, aesthetic experience, sociability (friendship), practical reasonableness, and religion.

extent that it is now difficult to know who influenced whom and who is quoting whom in many books or essays.²⁰

One clarification of human goods that has been articulately argued in the twenty-first century points out that freedom of religion should be described as a basic human good to be protected by moral and civil law.²¹ Indeed, we should perhaps place freedom of religion at the top of the list, because it plays such an important role in securing or promoting the other human goods.²²

Primary Human Goods in Medieval Philosophies

<i>Christian</i>	<i>Muslim</i>
Life	Faith
Procreation	Life
Social life (including property)	Progeny
Knowledge (including God)	Reason
Rational conduct	Property

These Christian and Muslim scholars referenced higher laws that are not precisely written in a particular text to evaluate human laws, though all these writers spent large parts of their lives interpreting the religious texts of their respective traditions. One side (Muslim) references a transcendent or higher sharia, whereas the other side (Christian) references a natural moral law, imprinted in the human mind that was made in the image of God, which no one can truly claim not to know. Nevertheless, the Muslim and Christian scholars came to astonishingly similar conclusions regarding the primary human goods which are to be protected by the application of moral and human laws. The representatives of Humanitarian Islam have once again made these claims prominent in their twenty-first-century proclamations.

So what can we do?

Though we understand and relate to God in very different ways, Humanitarian Muslims and evangelical Christians see life, family, rationality, a faith community, and an orderly socio-economic life as fundamental human goods that lead to comprehensive well-being in this world. We know that these deep human goods

20 For more background on al-Shatibi, see Ahmad al-Raysuni, *Imam al-Shatibi's Theory of the Higher Objectives and Intent of Islamic Law*, trans. Nancy Roberts; abridged by Alison Lake (Herdon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2013).

21 Robert P. George, 'Religious Liberty and the Human Good', *International Journal for Religious Freedom* 5, no. 1 (2012): 35–44, https://www.iirf.eu/site/assets/files/92052/ijrf_vol5-1.pdf.

22 Brian Grim and Roger Finke have used social science research to argue convincingly that freedom of religion contributes to many other indicators of societal flourishing including economic growth, political freedom, freedom of the press, longevity of democracy, lower levels of armed conflict, and reduction of poverty. See, for example, *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

are vulnerable, needing protection from various threats. We have similar convictions regarding universal moral standards that should influence religious and legal norms, all of which should protect basic human goods. This must be demonstrated intellectually, politically, in education, and in shared humanitarian efforts.

When the fundamental principles of Humanitarian Islam are brought into interaction with corresponding principles of Christian ethics, one obtains an ethical–jurisprudential method to respond to religious extremism, and to efforts to maintain religiously defined states which require a particular religious identity to be full stakeholders in the society. In other words, Christians and Muslims have a clear way to explain the moral wrongness of both religious extremism and religiously defined states—one that does not depend on a prior commitment to any religious view—on the basis of which we can then engage in principled discourse with those who hold other views and seek to eliminate religious-based terrorism and persecution. Our influence could be much greater if presented by official representatives of two major religious traditions that are widely perceived as in conflict with each other.

How can Christians around the world foster such cooperation?

- We could hold joint events at which scholars or civic leaders from both religious communities discuss how we talk about each other and how we address questions regarding religion's role in society.
- We could produce joint publications.
- We could bring together political leaders from both faith communities to talk about how they can develop civil laws, based on their shared understanding of the universal moral law, that will protect all people's basic human goods.
- We could work together to provide information for the business, government and education sectors on how to promote harmonious interaction among people from multiple cultures and religions.
- We could cooperate in delivering humanitarian aid or in addressing other problems that government alone cannot readily solve, such as homelessness, human trafficking, drug addiction and environmental problems.

The World Evangelical Alliance is currently taking on this challenge at a global level. In November 2019, while in Indonesia for the WEA's General Assembly, several of us spent most of a day with leaders of Nahdlatul Ulama. After further correspondence and discussion, in April 2020 we announced a joint project to respond to threats to religious freedom arising from both religious extremism and secular extremism. At our June meeting, we decided to pursue cooperative efforts in three main areas: opposing 'tyranny' (i.e. governments and movements that threaten basic human rights and freedoms); articulating shared messages in the areas of jurisprudence, ethics and human rights; and public communications.

The expansion of secularism, atheism and moral relativism in the modern West have been partly fuelled by the widespread, though generally false, perception that organized religions are a cause of war and oppression. The level of philosophical agreement between evangelical Christians and Humanitarian Islam demonstrated in this paper justifies a concerted joint effort to build a world in which religious faith can flourish for the benefit of humanity.