



Multifaith Matters

Thomas Johnson and C. Holland Taylor Discuss

God Needs No Defense: Reimagining Muslim–Christian Relations in the 21st Century

Reverend Morehead: This is the Multi-Faith Matters podcast, and I am the host, John Morehead. I am privileged today to have two guests. One is a returning guest, Thomas K. Johnson, and Tom has introduced me to someone who I hope will become a new friend and colleague, C. Holland Taylor. These gentlemen work together in the Humanitarian Islam and World Evangelical Alliance Joint Working Group, and they're going to be discussing their new book, *God Needs No Defense: Reimagining Muslim–Christian Relations in the 21st Century*. It is a fantastic volume. I would like to begin with you gentlemen sharing a little bit about what you're doing right now and how you came together on this project. Tom, why don't we start with you?

Dr. Johnson: My background is as a university philosophy professor, but also as an evangelical pastor. Since 2012, I've been the senior theological advisor for the World Evangelical Alliance, which represents 600 million Christians in 140 countries. So my job is to help facilitate the global theological discussion, trying to participate in and contribute to important discussions, and especially in interfaith relations. So I've been tasked with Vatican relations and also with relating to the Humanitarian Islam movement, which we see as very significant. Holland has a similar role for the Humanitarian Islam movement, playing an international role on behalf of what they're trying to do.

Reverend Morehead: Thank you. If folks are interested, they can go back and look in our library and listen to the previous conversation that Tom and I had. But this time, we're not here alone to have another conversation just between us. We also have another colleague in the mix, and that's Holland Taylor. Holland, can you share a little bit more about your background and how you and Tom came to work together?

Mr. Taylor: Sure. My family background is from North Carolina. My father was an officer in the U.S. military. I grew up mostly in Europe and Asia. In the 1990s, I was in the international telecom industry. Then I retired from the industry and relocated to Indonesia, where I became close friends with a man named Abdurrahman Wahid. The title of this book, *God Needs No Defense*, is the title of a very famous article that president wrote. The article was also published in English, in a book produced by Oxford University Press defending religious freedom from a Muslim theological perspective. The name of that book was *Silenced*. Its co-authors were Nina Shea and Paul Marshall, from the center for religious freedom at the Hudson Institute.

From 1984 to 1999 President Wahid was Chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama, the world's largest Muslim organization with approximately 90 million followers and about 21,000 religious boarding schools. He played a key role in Indonesia's successful transition from a military dictatorship and authoritarian rule to become what's arguably the most successful democracy in the Muslim world, and was chosen as Indonesia's first democratically elected president in 1999. He and I became personal friends after the 9/11 attacks. After the first Bali bombing, we decided to establish an organization called LibForAll, the Liberty for All Foundation, incorporated in North Carolina but operational worldwide, to use the strategies that were employed by his ancestors hundreds of years ago to marginalize and discredit Islamist extremism in Indonesia. That organization has been very successful in many ways.

By the time President Wahid died in 2009, he was a world historic figure, and I had developed relationships with the top leadership of Nahdlatul Ulama. I have continued to the present day to work with the top spiritual

leaders of this organization. We have adopted the term “Humanitarian Islam” to promote the dominant understanding and practice of Islam from the perspective of Nahdlatul Ulama, which is Islam as *rahmah*, or universal love and compassion, as opposed to the kind of Islam you see on the ground with ISIS or al-Qaeda or both.

Reverend Morehead: How long have you two been working together on this working group?

Dr. Johnson: Well, we began our extensive contact a little over two years ago. Perhaps you recall the bombing of some churches in Sri Lanka on Easter 2019. Shortly after that, Holland, representing the leadership of Nahdlatul Ulama, wrote to me, and I’m sure to other people as well, saying this is not what our type of Muslims do. And he indicated they wanted a much higher level of interaction with Christians. I immediately contacted the leadership of the WEA, and they said this was important enough for me to spend some of my time working on this. So in spring 2019, I started working on this. That meant a lot of research initially, and then Holland and I started writing back and forth extensively.

And then later, in November 2019, we had a large meeting at their offices in Jakarta. We spent a whole day talking and decided we should put together a joint working group to work on this further, and that there was a lot to do. This book is our first major joint publication, although we’ve had some publications prior to this. I’m leading the Christian side of the working group and Holland is leading the Muslim side of the joint working group.

Reverend Morehead: Anything to add to that, Holland?

Mr. Taylor: That’s an accurate description of what happened. We were happy when the WEA held its general assembly in Bogor, Indonesia, outside of Jakarta. And then we were very pleased when Tom Johnson came to visit with Thomas Schirrmacher, who was head of the WEA Theological Commission and Associate Secretary General. Last February, Thomas was appointed as WEA Secretary General and CEO. And so this was very good timing as far as we were concerned. Thomas Schirrmacher is bringing this agenda right into the WEA executive offices. From our point of view, this is a very welcome development because we feel that the world is facing multiple crises, and it’s very important that we find ways to work together to address these crises. We feel that the WEA and his leadership are very sincere and effective partners in this endeavor.

Reverend Morehead: This book is a *festschrift* in honor of Schirrmacher. For those who aren’t familiar with him, can you gentlemen talk about his background, his work, and why this book is intended to honor him?

Dr. Johnson: I’ve worked closely with him for 18 years, and we’ve known each other for more than 20 years. Thomas Schirrmacher is German, but he’s been international from his childhood. When he was a kid, his parents were involved in various evangelical mission activities. He says that one of the shaping events in his young life was that they were in Scotland and he was along on the trip, and somehow when their ferry was leaving, he got left behind. A very poor family in Scotland took him in until his parents got all the way back to find him. He’s had this kind of incredibly international life. And he’s the only person I know with four earned doctorates.

Thomas has been known as the one of the most prominent thinkers on religious freedom for a couple of decades. And he’s an extensive writer. This isn’t so well known because he writes mostly in German, but he’s one of the most widely published writers on the topic of ethics in the German language. His introduction to Christian ethics is about a foot thick, six volumes. That’s just one of his many books. And he has been involved in the World Evangelical Alliance for a long time. It’s been part of his career trajectory while he was also a founder of a seminary, the Martin Bucer Seminary, and the founder of a major humanitarian aid organization in Germany called Giving Hands, or in German *Gebende Hände*. It’s been my privilege to work with him since about 2003. But he’s much better known in Europe than in North America.

Reverend Morehead: Hopefully through conversations like this, North Americans can become more familiar with him. Holland, what was it about Schirmmacher's work that led you, as a co-editor, to want to make this book a *festschrift* for him?

Mr. Taylor: Well, I would echo everything Thomas said. Tom has known Thomas Schirmmacher much longer than we have. But we noticed very early on that he was a decisive individual and not afraid of taking responsibility. He also struck us as an individual who acts on principle. People don't generally think of Muslims and evangelicals working very closely together, acknowledging their theological differences but also acknowledging certain ethical commonalities and problems that exist. So our joint working group operates based on the principles of honesty and transparency. And this comes from the top down from Thomas Schirmmacher and Tom Johnson on the WEA side, as well as from [leaders of] the Humanitarian Islam movement.

And so when we were creating the first volume that we would produce together, we thought it would be appropriate to bring forward some of the best thinking that's been produced in the 100-year history of Nahdlatul Ulama, which was founded in 1926, in direct response to the Wahhabi — that is, the Saudi extremist — conquest of Mecca and Medina in 1925. Islamic leaders realized the consequences of this. America would realize the consequences much later. The attack on the World Trade Center was one of the consequences of the Saudis conquering Mecca in 1925. The 19 hijackers were virtually all Wahhabis. They were all Muslim extremists.

ISIS as an organization is a Wahhabi organization. ISIS (Islamic State), al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, all these terrorist movements within Islam are employing what we call obsolete and problematic tenets of Islamic orthodoxy within the context of a world that has changed greatly. They're all operating within a certain framework, and Nahdlatul Ulama was formed 100 years ago to create a barrier to prevent the entry of those ideas into what was then the Dutch East Indies. Nahdlatul Ulama played a key role in Indonesia's establishment as a multi-religious and pluralistic nation-state, not an Islamic state, in 1945. Nahdlatul Ulama helped to defeat the Dutch when they tried to come back after World War II to rule Indonesia. They also helped defeat an Islamic guerrilla movement from 1949 to 1962 together with the Indonesian government. That movement sought to turn Indonesia into an Islamic state.

So we have a long history of opposing religious extremism within Islam itself. And so when we looked at publishing a work together with the World Evangelical Alliance, where the thoughts of some of the top figures within Nahdlatul Ulama over the past 100 years would be placed alongside texts from figures in the WEA, we thought, "What could be more appropriate than to dedicate this volume to Thomas Schirmmacher as a *festschrift* in honor of his vision for the future of cooperation between Muslims and Christians, to hopefully bring about a world in the 21st century where there's freedom of conscience for all?"

Reverend Morehead: Talk about the structure and contents of the book. It's got an introduction and three main sections with a number of contributors. What can readers look forward to in this volume?

Dr. Johnson: You have some of the seminal texts from the development of Nahdlatul Ulama, which they now present publicly as Humanitarian Islam, going back all the way to the 1920s and up through the beginning of the 21st century. You also have a summary statement of one of the recent primary documents. So in this volume, you have the major ideas that constitute Humanitarian Islam as opposed to Islamic extremism. You can read those sources and get, directly from them, what they have to say that is so different from ISIS or al-Qaeda or Boko Haram, or any of the other extremist groups.

And that is what makes it possible for me as a Christian to say, okay, these are people who have a religious and ethical basis for being very good neighbors. And that's extremely important in our time. What are the principles that they are following? Can I trust them? That's why I like these Muslim documents, because they explain their foundations for life. It doesn't tell me, as a Christian, so much about how they pray or how they celebrate Ramadan. That doesn't worry me so much. I'm interested of course, but my interest is in whether they have a spiritual and ethical foundation for being good neighbors in society, and the answer is yes.

Mr. Taylor: As I mentioned earlier, this volume contains the essay by Abdurrahman Wahid, former long-term chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama and the first democratically elected president of Indonesia, titled “God Needs No Defense.” This is a theological defense, from a Muslim point of view, of freedom of worship. This is world-historic. That is paired side by side with an article by Tom Johnson on the ethical case for cooperation between Protestants and humanitarian Muslims. A third essay in part 1 is called “Rahmah: Universal Love and Compassion,” by President Wahid, which is actually published for the first time in this volume. He wrote it before he died in 2009, but we’ve never published it before. It’s a very significant essay, and it explains what Nahdlatul Ulama regards as the primary message of Islam. People act based on their beliefs and their belief systems. Al-Qaeda has a certain understanding of Islam that leads to their behavior. Nahdlatul Ulama believes that the primary message of Islam is universal love and compassion, which should not just be confined to one’s fellow Muslims but to all human beings, all creatures, and all creation, because their concept of God is that God is by nature infinite love and compassion. So if one is in fact a servant of God and devoted to God, then how could one do anything else than be a conduit for God’s love and compassion to others?

Some people have referred to Indonesian Islam or Nahdlatul Ulama as the smiling face of Islam. Obviously, ISIS is a terrifying face, but they are different aspects of Islam. Just as I say when talking about the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages: if you were Jewish your concept of Christianity would not be based on theology. It would be based on the Catholics whom you met. And if you met Saint Francis who came and hugged you and wanted to wash your feet, this would be a beautiful experience of Christianity. But if you met the grand inquisitor, that would be a totally different experience. The same reality is true of Islam today: depending on what Muslim you meet and under what circumstances, you might have a horrific experience or a beautiful experience.

President Wahid was descended from Javanese nobility, or “blue bloods.” Bret Stephens, who was formerly a foreign columnist with the *Wall Street Journal* and is now with *The New York Times*, did a profile of President Wahid while he was still alive and titled that weekend interview “The Last King of Java,” because his ancestors were the last Hindu and Buddhist kings of Java. He was also descended from the first Muslim Sultan of Java.

The first part of the book allows readers to see the similarities between the views of WEA theologians as expressed by Tom Johnson and Humanitarian Islam.

Dr. Johnson: I felt it was quite an honor that two of my essays would be in the same part of the book as essays by President Wahid. So I should publicly say thank you to Holland and his team.

Mr. Taylor: What I would say in that regard is that the Joint Working Group would not exist if it weren’t for Tom Johnson. As he mentioned, he responded to some communication from me and then took the lead within the WEA as it studied our work very extensively. As you would expect of an evangelical theologian, a minister, a professor, an intellectual who is committed to his religious beliefs, he carefully vetted who we were, but this is a good thing, right? And so we have the highest respect for Tom.

Part two consists of a series of essays. The first essay has never been published before in English, even though it’s almost a hundred years old and the core of an address delivered by Kyai Haji Hasyim Asy’ari, President Wahid’s paternal grandfather, at the inaugural meeting of Nahdlatul Ulama in 1926. He lays out the foundational principles of the organization. Today, just as much as in 1926, what’s laid out in that document expresses Nahdlatul Ulama’s view of reality and of social and religious responsibility. And I think your listeners would be particularly interested in the fact that he discusses what happens to a society when it lacks unity. In 1926 in what’s now Indonesia, then the Dutch East Indies, the Muslim community was faced with the spread of Wahhabism, of radical Islam.

You can see what the civil war in Yemen has destroyed. It’s just an absolute disaster. Afghanistan destroyed, Pakistan destroyed by religious extremists, Islamist extremism. The founders of Nahdlatul Ulama understood in 1926 how Islamic extremism could destroy a society. So in his foundational speech, he explained the consequences of lack of unity and lack of humility, lack of a profoundly humble and spiritual approach to religion, and how when people are using weaponizing religion for political purposes, it can

break society into pieces. And then, as he put it, any society which has turned against itself — as Lincoln said, any house divided against itself cannot long stand. So if you and your listeners think about what’s happening in America today, the polarization — if they were to read this article, they would see the founder of Nahdlatul Ulama in 1926 analyzing precisely what is happening in America and in much of Europe today, together with a prescription.

But from our point of view, if we talk about a prescription, we’re not saying that the prescription has to be Islam. That’s why we’re so interested in working with the WEA. What’s in the prescription is fundamental moral values. The prescription is humility. The prescription is building society together and coming together, not allowing self-interest and ego or ideology to tear people apart, but rather a sense of humility and service to others and to God. And so I think your listeners would be very interested in this text.

Reverend Morehead: If you’re enjoying this podcast, please consider becoming a part by sharing on social media, clicking “Like,” and visiting our patrons page and website donation page. You can find the links on the program notes and YouTube comments. Thank you for your partnership. Now back to the program.

Dr. Johnson: As a Christian, I’m very interested in the role of Christianity in a society and whether Christianity is primarily a combatant community in a society or the source of ideas and principles and people who stand for something more than being one fighting group within a society. We make universal claims within Christianity that humans are made in the image of God, but that they are fallible and sinful. We also make universal claims that certain things are right and wrong, regardless of who we are or what religion we belong to. And so there’s this universal component within Christianity that does not turn Christianity into a warring party. That’s what I was looking for when I carefully investigated the documents of the Humanitarian Islam movement.

It’s not the ideology of one warring party, the way ISIS has made Islam. They focus on the universal themes. I see that in President Wahid, but you see that all the way back to their founding documents. In the last five or six years, they have produced a tremendous amount of literature in response to ISIS and Boko Haram. And you see them focusing on the universal values that cause civilizations to flourish rather than self-destruct, it’s an emphasis on universal human dignity — not just the dignity of members of their own religion, but the dignity of all — and the fallibility of everyone, not just the fallibility of people of other religions but also their own. So they’re going to be quite self-critical. Those are some of the themes that are very important to me here.

Reverend Morehead: One of the things that struck me emotionally as I read the introduction was the section that described Humanitarian Muslims watching videos of acts of violence and murder and terror by ISIS. Last night I watched a documentary on a leader in Syria who had formerly been with al-Qaeda. He was seen as a competitor for finances and the right to commit violence. And so he left al-Qaeda and now he’s got his own group and he’s still fighting in Syria against Assad. And it seems as if all the players in that region are tapping into their vision of Islam. They say they want to avoid becoming a dictator and a tyrant, but once they gain power, they end up using their religion as a tool for oppression. What was it, when you saw those kinds of things, that made you want to tap into the roots and the heart of your faith, Holland, and to do the kinds of things you do as an expression of Humanitarian Islam? And tell us a little bit about Humanitarian Islam as well.

Mr. Taylor: I was with the top leaders of Nahdlatul Ulama when we were all watching these videos, together with a colleague of ours who’s not Muslim, but a professor at the University of Vienna in Austria, with whom we had a partnership for research on extremism and terrorism. We spent many hours studying the videos of the executions together with their theological justifications. [For example,] we watched a two-hour series of people being executed, one after another after another, each with a theological justification explaining it. Several things stood out to us.

One figure who was watching, a very senior figure in Nahdlatul Ulama, said, “Holland, you and I aren’t going to be negatively influenced by watching this, but a lot of Muslims could be, because everything they’re arguing is rooted within certain elements of Islamic orthodoxy.” The General Secretary of the Nahdlatul Ulama Supreme Council was with us. And he said, three times in a steadily louder voice: “Every

single thing that ISIS is doing here is consistent with elements of Islamic orthodoxy.” He was exercising his religious authority to say to the other people in the room, “We’ve got a problem.”

We have to be honest about this problem, because for us, the primary message of Islam is *rahmah*, universal love and compassion. But that’s not doing any good for the Yazidis, or the Christians living in Syria and Iraq. It’s not doing any good for people being attacked by Boko Haram or al-Shabaab in Nigeria or Kenya. Islam, just as I was mentioning earlier about Catholicism, historically has had different dimensions to it. It has one dimension that is spiritual and loving, and another dimension that is rooted in the historic conflict between religions. And this gets back to the title of our book, *God Needs No Defense: Reimagining Muslim–Christian Relations in the 21st Century*. One thing about evangelicals is that they’re generally not in denial about the historic conflict between Islam and Christianity. If you look at the West there are certain people who have forgotten this historic conflict, but it lasted from the birth of Islam until the 20th century and is still going on today.

If you ask anybody from Islamist extremist groups, they’re still at war with the crusaders to this day. This is the framework in their mind. In military understanding, you can’t unilaterally declare a war to be over. If your enemy is still fighting you, there’s no escape from this. But you cannot be fighting 1.6 billion Muslims in the world. This is our message to Americans and to Western Europe. You do not need to fight 1.6 billion people in the world, but it’s absolutely essential to be honest about the problems that exist within what we term obsolete and problematic tenets of Islamic orthodoxy.

If we look at Catholic theology and what the Catholic church did with Vatican II, we see that it dealt with issues related to state and religion and with the persecution of Jewish people. They revised their theology in 1965 to address those elements of Catholic theology that could give rise to the persecution of Jews or to state-imposed religion.

One of the things we find attractive about the WEA is that it was established in 1846 out of a movement within Western society that was profoundly committed to religious freedom from the beginning, and also to the abolition of slavery. This is a noble pedigree.

I live in an Indonesian village of 250 people. My wife is from here, and my children were born here. I’ve been here married for 17 years. I’ve never once heard anyone here use the word *infidel*. Nahdlatul Ulama, in response to the horrors that we witnessed being perpetrated by ISIS, actually issued new rulings in Islamic law, abolishing the legal category of infidel and saying that the legal category of infidel is not relevant in a modern nation state. It can lead only to conflict and injustice. This historic development occurred in 2019 in response to what we encountered with ISIS and al-Qaeda. It also reflects the way Indonesian Islam and Nahdlatul Ulama represent a very old strain within Islam.

I’m from North Carolina and we have a saying that sometimes we see somebody who’s a “real Christian” or a “true Christian.” And you and your listeners know exactly what it means when people say this. Someone’s not just wearing it on their skin or on the surface, but really in their heart and life. I work with people for whom Islam must be a manifestation of God’s love and compassion. And if it’s not, something is wrong. So that’s what motivated them and what readers can track in this book.

Part 3 of the book starts with an article by Dr. Rudiger Lohlker from the University of Vienna, the expert on al-Qaeda and ISIS execution videos. He wrote an article that was initially published in *Strategic Review* called “Theology Matters: The Case of Jihadi Islam.”

And he makes an absolutely irrefutable academic case that what ISIS is doing is consistent with Islamic teachings. It’s just that Islam is a big religion. It contains multitudes, to quote Walt Whitman, just as Christianity is large. You had Christopher Columbus coming to America with the cross, and [Europeans] committing genocide in the Americas, as part of history. But we don’t have to say this is Christianity. We credit the evangelical movements in the West for having addressed a number of these problems long ago, namely the merging of state and religion to impose a religious belief on society, slavery, and so forth. Evangelicals were ahead of the curve, relative to the Catholic Church and the Christian world at large.

Indonesia has always had a spiritual understanding of Islam, which has predominated because the indigenous people here, when they became Muslim, refused to adopt a militant, aggressive understanding of Islam. Five hundred years ago, they felt that that was inimical to their civilization and their culture. And they defeated it militarily 500 years ago. So they see all this coming back again and again and again because it's rooted within classical Islamic law, which reflects the circumstances of the Muslim world in the Middle East at the time of the Crusades, at the time of Byzantium, at the time of the siege of Vienna. That was just the reality of conflict.

But from our point of view, if that's where we want to go in a world full of nuclear weapons and a globalized economy, the first thing that's going to happen is that the Muslim world will be challenging America, China, and Russia, which have nuclear arms. Where's that going to lead the Muslim world? Where is that going to leave humanity? Where is the world going to be? If you have an ongoing conflict between 1.6 billion Muslims and the rest of the world, it's not going to be possible for us as human beings to enjoy what we would call the appropriate benefits of a globalized economy, which has brought greater wealth and material welfare to the world than any former system prior to the 20th century.

There's obviously a changed world today. And we don't see it as in the interest of Muslims to be in conflict with the rest of the world. We think it's important that Muslim theologians and the Muslim population in general consider how can we recontextualize Islamic teachings, so as to enable Muslims to coexist with people of other faiths and respect the equal rights and dignity of all human beings, whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim and whether they live in the Muslim-majority world or elsewhere. And this book traces these thought processes over a prolonged period of time within Nahdlatul Ulama, and now in cooperation with the WEA. Civilizations are built on the division of labor and complimentary skill sets. The WEA and the evangelical community can go places and exert influence where we cannot; likewise, we can do the same where they cannot go.

If we have a common agenda and a common set of values, and a common understanding of what type of structure is necessary for harmonious coexistence in the 21st century, then we can support one another and strive together to achieve that objective. And this book is an expression of that joint striving.

Dr. Johnson: One of the things that struck me, as soon as I started reading the documents of the Humanitarian Islam movement, was the awareness that theology matters a lot. There are huge differences between types of Muslim theology, and those differences have massive effects on the way civilizations develop in the Muslim world. We could use a little more of that kind of theological self-consciousness within Christianity. There are dysfunctional types of Christian theology; there are also much better types of Christian theology. Those differences have results in terms of the way entire societies function.

I'll give an example that I used in my recent book on the Humanitarian Islam movement. A century or so ago in the United States, we had some rather extreme rhetoric during World War II, specifically when the U.S. government was trying to develop support for American participation in the war effort. Also, with the war bonds that were sold during World War I, there was a huge effort to develop widespread support for the war. And a lot of that was directly theological. We had Christian spokespeople in the United States describing World War I as a holy war, using Crusade-type language, in 1916, 1917, and 1918, only a hundred years ago.

And among American evangelicals, our grandparents and great grandparents were using Crusade-type language only a little bit more than a hundred years ago. We still have some of that in our background among American Christians, this Crusade idea of connecting church and state, faith and politics in a dysfunctional manner. That's why I say theology matters — our theology of the state, our theology of public life.

That's one of the things I've appreciated about the Humanitarian Islam movement. They're addressing that issue within the terms of Muslim theology. We Christians have some unfinished work in terms of the proper role of faith in society, church and state, and personal and public ethics. So one of my reasons for writing about the Humanitarian Islam movement is to try to prompt more of that kind of discussion among Christians in our time.

Reverend Morehead: Can you talk a little bit about how the book is going to be released?

Mr. Taylor: The details of the book launch are still being sorted out. The most important thing in my assessment is that we will have the official leader of the world's largest Protestant organization with the leader of the world's largest Muslim organization. That's of tremendous symbolic importance. The event itself embodies part of the message that such cooperation in public life is possible for Christians and Muslims. We also think it's significant that the book will be launched in Washington, D.C., the capital of what remains the most powerful country in the world.

We hope that the book, in addition to attracting the attention of evangelicals and Muslims, will also attract a broader audience because, from our perspective, what's happening in America poses an existential threat to world civilization. Since World War II, there's been a rules-based international order, which has to a large extent produced stability, but it's also dependent upon stability in America. And if we look at the current instability in America, the breakdown of civility, the extreme polarization, and what we refer to as identity politics — within an Islamic context, identity politics means Islamic supremacism. It means subjecting everybody else to Islam. We have very close working relationships in sub-Saharan Africa, and there, identity politics means one tribe killing members of another tribe or enslaving them. This is what identity politics means in most of the world.

America has lived with the blessing of the U.S. Constitution. America has lived with the blessing of civil liberty, the rule of law, and mutual respect for such a prolonged period that I think, unfortunately, certain people don't realize that the American structures of government and self-government are an anomaly in world history. Historically, we Americans have felt secure under this structure and free to speak our minds. But in reality, the American structure and system of government are in many ways like a wooden building. From our perspective, people are lighting open fires in the middle of a wooden structure, and this is absolutely insane from our point of view. And so the optics we're aiming for with the launch of this book include pointing out what is at stake, to show a model of how Muslims and Christians can work together for the well-being of humanity.

And we want to bring forward into people's awareness that we need to return to certain core values, lest society lose its moral compass and instead degenerate into a conflict where religion simply becomes a tool for worldly acquisition of power. It doesn't matter whether it's religion or a secular ideology; people in the name of an ideology seek political supremacy. This is a prescription for civilizational disaster. That was the message of Hasyim Asy'ari 100 years ago.

We hope this book and its launch will help bring people to reflect, because we all have an opportunity to impact lives with our everyday decisions. And hopefully we will make decisions that will help to build up society instead of tearing it apart. That's our hope for the launch of this book in Washington, D.C. with the WEA.

Reverend Morehead: I find it profoundly interesting that here we have two of the most important religious leaders in the world, an evangelical and a Muslim, neither of whom are Americans, coming together in Washington, D.C. to launch a book. That's because what happens on the borderline between religion and politics in the United States affects the whole world. Thomas Schirrmacher knows that what happens in America affects the 600 million Christians around the world, and the Nahdlatul Ulama leader from Indonesia knows that he represents not only the nation's Muslims, but a lot of other Muslims globally, probably many millions, follow his leadership. He's coming to Washington for this book because he knows that what happens in the relationship between religion and politics in America affects probably hundreds of millions of Muslims around the world. It's not just people in Indonesia, not just people in America. So that's why I think all of us in this conversation, who happen to be Americans, we have a tremendous responsibility for the relationship between religion and public life in America, because that shapes a whole lot of what goes on globally. How can interested readers secure a copy of the book?

Dr. Johnson: There'll be multiple ways. We are planning to make the book available as a free PDF for download on some of our websites. As we've been editing the book, our technical people have been

developing a print version, a PDF download version, and a version for Kindle and an electronic book version. The content is the same, it's just technical details of the computer files.

The easiest way for people to get a copy will be to download it from one of our websites. If you wish, we could send you one of those copies to put on your website as well.

Reverend Morehead: Yeah, that would be fantastic. I'd love to make it available. Holland, did you have anything to add about distribution within your circle?

Mr. Taylor: We will do the same, and we'll also make it available on our websites. A print version will be available through Amazon, but the WEA will be making it available. So when you post this interview online, you could post an image of the book and enable people to download it for free.

Reverend Morehead: As we bring this to a close, is there anything else you'd like our listeners and viewers to know about?

Dr. Johnson: I think Muslim–Christian relations are one of the most important theological issues of our time. We're dealing with the issue of whether we can identify universal standards and values by which societies can live together in a constructive rather than a destructive manner. So Muslim–Christian relations are central for reasons having to do with the foundations for life together in society.

Mr. Taylor: What I would simply say is that we hope and pray that the evangelical community in America will be strong, that it will uphold moral values for the country and that it will contribute to harmony within America. And we hope that the preservation of America's role in the world is a force for good and a force for stability. We know there are so many forces at work in modern society. And we want everyone to know that evangelical Christians represent such a significant force in America, that the future of America and the world depends on the health of its religious communities. And we wish all of you the best in preserving the strength and vitality of your faith.

Reverend Morehead: It has been a privilege to converse with both of you. Tom, thank you for introducing me to Holland and for suggesting this conversation as a means of promoting this book. We'll include a link for a free download for those who would like to secure a copy. And you are both always welcome to come onto the podcast and discuss what's on your heart and mind. I am in sync with your efforts and hope that our two great faiths can work together to work through our challenges not only within our religious communities but as our religious communities try and work through the challenges we face as there are clashes in various civilizations. So I thank you both for being here.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, it's been a real pleasure being here and Tom it's always an honor and a privilege to be with you.

Dr. Johnson: Thank you also. This has been very worthwhile because we have serious questions to consider together, and both of you are serious discussion partners.