



Humanitarian Islam, Evangelical Christianity, and the Clash of Civilizations

Global evangelical leader and scholar urges “Christians to develop extensive interfaith cooperation with Humanitarian Islam”

BONN, Germany, March 5, 2021: The world’s largest Protestant organization has endorsed the Humanitarian Islam movement as an essential vehicle for peacefully and definitively resolving “the Muslim-Christian clash of civilizations, which started almost 1,500 years ago.”

On the day that Pope Francis commenced an historic papal visit to Iraq — which included a meeting with the world’s preeminent Shi‘ite spiritual leader and a tour of Mosul, until recently a stronghold of the defeated [ISIS caliphate](#) — the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) Theological Commission published *Humanitarian Islam, Evangelical Christianity, and the Clash of Civilizations: A New Partnership for Peace and Religious Freedom*.

The book’s author, Dr. Thomas K. Johnson, serves the World Evangelical Alliance as senior theological advisor, and is WEA’s Special Envoy to the Vatican and its Special Envoy for Engaging Humanitarian Islam. Reverend Johnson is also Co-chair of the Humanitarian Islam/WEA [Joint Working Group](#), which was established in April of 2020. Through this mechanism, according to religious freedom expert Paul Marshall, “[what] may be the most important movement in the Islamic world... is engaged in active alliance with Christians and others.”

In a chapter titled “Death When Religions Collide,” Dr. Johnson writes that, at times, both Christianity and Islam “included notions of religiously defined nations within their ethics; this contributed to involving religions in the conflicts among nations. Such religious doctrines also weakened religious resistance to atrocities within religiously defined nations. An ideal theological development would place Islam and Christianity on the same side, outside and above the normal conflicts among nations, offering a universal ethical compass for all. Such a radical step is, I believe, possible via a partnership between Evangelical Christianity and Humanitarian Islam.”

In a later chapter, “A Comprehensive Muslim Solution to Religious Violence,” Reverend Johnson observes:

“A careful examination of the ethics of Humanitarian Islam finds that Muslims of this type support religious freedom and human rights for Christians and people of other faiths. But this ethic goes much farther. Though presented 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. A comparison of Humanitarian Muslim philosophy and ethics with Christian ethics and philosophy of law reveals that, amidst the great global threats, Christians and Humanitarian Muslims are ideological allies and should treat each other as such.”

In the chapter “Humanitarian Islam: A New Muslim Orthodoxy,” Reverend Johnson states:

“Within the spectrum of varieties of Islam, the 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....

“Therefore, they are developing a new Islamic orthodoxy, a ‘new religious sensibility,’ that addresses the problematic tenets of medieval Islamic teaching which extremists claim are orthodox.

“Precisely as Muslims, the Humanitarians claim that the extremists do not reflect Islam at its best. 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; this has left 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 for developing its teaching; this method leads to a humanitarian, pro-democracy position, including promoting religious freedom for all, signaling the end of religiously defined countries. Humanitarian Islam seeks to reactivate this authentically Muslim theological method to develop a truly new and yet more fully orthodox Islam, displacing the Wahhabi Islam that is fueling many conflicts and a global clash of civilizations.”

Towards the end of his book, Dr. Johnson underscores the significance of Humanitarian Islam by placing it within the context of nearly 1,500 years of Muslim-Christian relations:

“There was a long era, from the Donatist persecution of 411 CE till the end of the First World War in 1918, during which parts of Western Christianity included problematic themes in its approach to church/state relations. This included notions of a Christian Empire or nation, with various attempts at church-controlled states and state-controlled churches. These assumptions occasionally dominated political propaganda even in countries that had a legal separation of church and state, such as France and the US. Over a period of 30 years, from 1918 to 1948, Western Christianity finally dropped these problematic themes from its social teaching, replacing them with a doctrine of universal human rights, including the definition of freedom of religion in the UN Declaration of 1948 that protected the right of people to convert to other (non-Christian) religions. This is the same era that Indonesian Muslims, led by the Nahdlatul Ulama, began in 1926 to fully articulate their principles of religious toleration and pluralism. These developments in Christian and Muslim political ethics set the stage for Christianity to engage Islam in a manner that is totally different from the era of crusades and jihads.”

[Download a PDF copy of Dr. Johnson's book.](#)