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Liam J. Atchison, Ph.D.
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Thomas K. Johnson is Senior Theological Advisor to the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), which represents and connects over 600 million Christians in 143 countries. He also serves as WEA Special Envoy to the Vatican and as Special Envoy to Engage Humanitarian Islam. He has long been a foremost international Protestant voice on human rights and religious freedom, including numerous publications and consulting with diplomats and religious leaders from around the globe.

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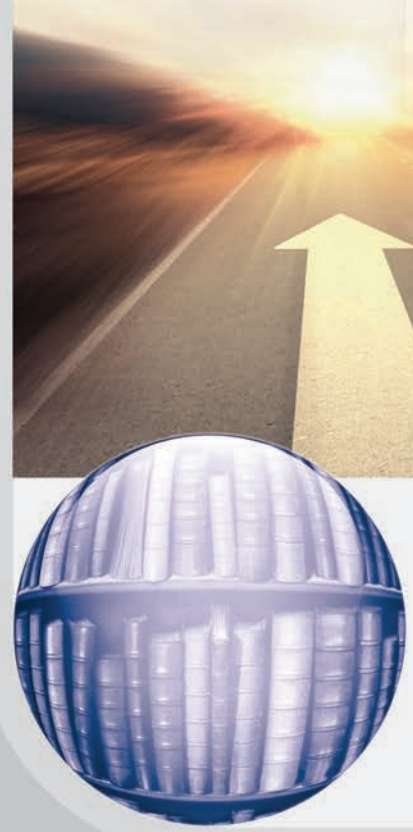
Christian Ethics in Secular Cultures

Volume 2:
Culture, Hermeneutics, Natural Law, Islam, and Missions

With an Essay Co-authored by Thomas Schirrmacher



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Foreword

Liam J. Atchison

Are there many honest evangelicals alive at this time in history who would not admit they have felt tempted to let their chaotic world "go to hell in a handbasket"? Historian Robert D. Linder (1933-2021) said evangelicals have always had two impulses: proselytize and improve. But now, many are tempted to dissociate or withdraw. "Jesus is the answer," we say. "But please God, don't send us into the line of fire!" I suspect few know how to process the dizzying number of problems and issues paraded before us every day.

In this book, Professor Thomas K. Johnson shows that evangelical reluctance is neither a necessity nor an option for those who represent Christ. And he does not merely dismantle our comfortable idolatries. Instead, he provides a comfort and compass we evangelicals need badly.

In the dark days of the 1930s, a totalitarian prelude to total war overshadowed Europe. During this time, Swiss physician and philosopher Max Picard (1888-1965) penned an extraordinary work in a unique contemplative genre, *The Flight From God*. Picard believed that modern society was far from an improvement on what preceded it. On the contrary, he insisted it was an acceleration of the impulse, begun in the Garden of Eden, to separate oneself as far as possible from the presence of God. Technology, rationalism, and even withdrawal from the world of techniques were all part of a concerted effort to escape from God's fundamental claims upon every human life.

While Picard wrote *The Flight* to address the spiritual crisis precipitated by advancing authoritarianism, his metaphors are timeless. Twenty-first-century readers will recognize the abiding poison of what Picard limns is the actual systemic sin. Picard implies the need for repentance, the acknowledgment of universal moral law. Humankind is aware of who and what is just but refuses to acknowledge either. Those who flee refuse to recognize the moral law within themselves that they cannot escape.

Dr. Johnson believes twentieth-century Christian ethicists did not prepare the church well for the present hour. The latter rejected the doctrine of God's natural moral law as surely as Picard's fleers. As a result, they effectively discarded the theological tool that the church needed. But Dr. Johnson is less gloomy than his Swiss predecessor. In *Christian Ethics in Secular Cultures, vol. 2*, he is reassuring. Because history is not over, the present

generation of Christians has an opportunity to recover the way to apply biblical faith to post-Christian cultures.

Dr. Johnson's sound, reasoned, and biblical approach is appropriate to the turbulent world of the pandemic age without the rhetoric of impending doom and hopelessness. After all, we have potent guides who distinguish between law and gospel to bring us back to the moral law in responding to secular, non-Christian culture. He reminds us that the prophet Amos, the apostle Paul, and the magisterial reformers are among them.

Finally, Dr. Johnson confronts the genuine moral failures and flummery that have plagued evangelical testimony. Past failures provide a pretext for Cancel Culture in the West and reactionary opposition in the majority world. Ghosts of Christian violence and manipulation materialize in the perceptions of those with whom we seek to share grace and truth. But Dr. Johnson suggests a path to "replace old scars with visible love."

If you are looking for that path to express Christ's visible love to a watching world, you need to read and re-read *Christian Ethics in Secular Cultures, vol. 2.*

Liam J. Atchison, Ph.D.
Senior Vice President
Global Scholars
Co-author of *Civil Religion and American Christianity*

Author's Preface

Increasing numbers of Evangelical Christians, decline of democracy, growth of authoritarianism, increasing religious persecution, globalization via the internet, astonishing growth of science and technology, growing sense of differences among cultures, increasing interaction with adherents of other religions, ideological extremes on the right and the left, propaganda disguised as news, horrible human rights abuses, immense environmental issues, constant racial problems in several continents, religious terrorism, anti-religious extremism, sexual chaos, greying populations, and a terrifying pandemic. Our globe today. How should followers of Jesus respond?

Some 40 years ago I told one of my university professors, George W. Forell, that I wanted to learn how my biblical faith relates to secular culture and its problems. I had just examined the Lausanne Covenant (1974),[1] devoured several griping accounts of the Holocaust, and was burdened by the books of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008) about the atrocities of Soviet Communism. Forell surprised me, "You need to study Christian ethics. Christian ethics **is** the study of the relation between Christianity and cultures." I sat back. I thought Christian ethics was mostly the study of biblical texts about the Christian life. Not to make a fool of myself, I listened to his lectures and read his books.[2]

I was surprised again when Forell compared God's moral law with the laws of nature: it forms the fabric of human life such that trying to break the moral law was like trying to break the law of gravity.[3] The result is

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1 https://lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant#cov. I also had studied John R. W. Stott's *The Lausanne Covenant: An Exposition and Commentary* (1975), https://lausanne.wpengine.com/content/lop/lop-3.

2 George W. Forell came to Christian faith while a philosophy student in the late 1930s at the University of Vienna after reading the books of the great atheist thinkers of that era, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. Because he was involved in the anti-Nazi political movement, he had to flee to the US after the Nazis took over Austria. After his Christian conversion he was heavily influenced by the theological books of Karl Barth, who was a prominent anti-Nazi. His experience as a young pastor in the US prompted him to embrace much of the teaching of Martin Luther in place of the teaching of Karl Barth.

3 For example, *Ethics of Decision: An Introduction to Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1955), p. 7. Forell sometimes said that babies learn about the law of gravity the first time they fall down, even if they do not have words to

always a crash to the ground. We are the ones who break, not the law, whether the law of right and wrong or a physical law. Christian ethics is the study of how the gospel of Christ relates to the moral law which God has built into human life. All people and all cultures are wrestling with that law, even before hearing the gospel. The encounter with God's law in creation forms the background for thinking about ethics and culture, individually and collectively.

Before being convinced by Forell, I had to check with the Protestant Reformers, especially Martin Luther and John Calvin. Though I had already read some of Luther and Calvin, I did a new close reading of selected books. (This historical study became chapter two of this book.) I learned that while the Bible is filled with truth claims about God, humanity, creation, salvation, and history, there are two focal points at which God's Word expects us to do something: commands and promises; in Reformation terminology: law and gospel. However, the Reformers not only used this interpretative framework (a "hermeneutic") to apply the Bible; they also used this framework to interpret human experience very broadly, with the understanding that God's moral law was created into human experience (even if partly rejected), whereas the gospel of Christ always comes to us from outside.

This means that God's law is not only a written text, such as the Ten Commandments; it is the structure of being human. Sin is not only a rebellion against God; sin is also a revolt against our own humanity, individually and as cultures. And the law of God that convicts us, restrains our sins, and points us in a better direction is not only found in the text of Holy Scripture; that law is the created pattern of our better selves. But this law is only part of the total story; the best part of the story, the gospel, is that God has intervened in Jesus Christ to forgive and restore us to become what we were created to be. And though there are hints of God's grace in creation, the intervention of God in history for our redemption through the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ is made known to us as a message proclaimed by the Bible and by Christians.

I had read some of the great books that said Christians have related to their surrounding cultures in one of two or three or five different ways, along with some serious books that each advocated for one or another of the different methods of relating God's Word to cultures.[4] But as I

describe what they know; something similar happens with the law of morality, even if many people are slow to learn.

[4] Some of the best books that helped frame my question were: Karl Barth, *Eine Schweizer Stimme*, 1938-1945, a collection of essays on ethics from the Nazi era

meditated on Scripture and Christian history, it seemed to me that many biblical authors and many heroes in Christian history have simultaneously used multiple models and methods of relating God's Word to their cultures. At least four methods are found in the Bible and in Christian history. For the sake of a lecture outline I called these four methods: critique, correlation, creation (in some lectures I used the word "construction"), and contribution. After I first gave that lecture for a group of Christian Ph.D. candidates in the Czech Republic, I noticed that my outline followed the Reformation approach to the relation between law and gospel.[5] "Critique" is what was traditionally called the convicting or converting use of the moral law. "Correlation" is connecting the gospel with human sin and shame. "Construction" or "creation" is what the Reformers called the "third" use of the law that teaches us how to live a life of gratitude toward God. And "contribution" is broadly in the realm of what the Reformers called the civil or political use of the moral law that makes civilizations possible. The Reformation hermeneutic of law and gospel can lead us to a balanced pattern of relating our biblical faith to our secular, problem-filled cultures. These themes are the first two chapters in this book. There are no quick solutions to many of the problems of our age, but there are reliable patterns for how we should relate God's Word to those problems and the cultures upstream from those problems.

My surprise when I heard God's moral law compared to the laws of nature has a distinct history. Though I believed that "the heavens declare the glory of God," I had not thought about it very deeply. While I was reading

(Evangelischer Verlag, 1945); H. Emil Brunner, *Christianity and Civilization*, 2 vol. (Gifford Lectures, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947, 1948); Charles N. Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (Oxford University Press, 1940); J. Douma, *Algemene Genade: Uiteenzetting, vergelijking en beoordeling van de opvattingen van A. Kuyper, K. Schilder en Joh. Calvijn over "algemene genade"* (Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1981); T. S. Elliot, *Christianity and Culture* (Harcourt Brace, 1949); Arthur F. Holmes, *The Concept of a Christian Worldview* (Eerdmans, 1983); Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Eerdmans, 1931); H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (Harper & Row, 1975); Francis A Schaeffer, *A Christian Worldview*, 5 vol. (Crossway, 1982); James Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (InterVarsity, 1976); Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (Galaxy Books, 1964); Helmut Thielicke, *Glauben und Denken in der Neuzeit* (Tübingen, 1983); Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (Yale University Press, 1952); Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches,* 2 vol. (University of Chicago Press, 1981; original publication in German 1912); and Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Baker, 1959).

5 This was at a weekend faith and learning retreat held by the Comenius Institute, http://www.komenskyinstitute.com/.

about the Holocaust I began to wonder, "Could the Nazi soldiers have known that what they were doing was terribly wrong if they had not read the Bible?" I learned that very prominent Protestant theologians of the 20th century had given very uncertain answers to this question, doubting that people can have any true knowledge of right and wrong without accepting Christ and the Bible; that particular uncertainty was somehow in my own mind. Then I saw clearly that Luther and Calvin, along many Christians before their time, answered clearly that everyone can know right and wrong regardless of their religion, because God's natural moral law was created into our humanity. This sharp difference between 16th century Protestant theology and 20th century Protestant theology was described by Swedish theologian Gustaf Wingren as "the flight from creation."[6]

I felt compelled, by God I hope, to investigate this question. That investigation led to three chapters in this book. Chapter three is about what I now call the "terrible mistake," the rejection of God's natural moral law in Protestant theology in the 20th century. This is followed by a brief examination in chapter four of the moral reasoning of the opening part of the biblical prophet Amos, which is an illustration of how God's Old Testament prophets referenced God's natural moral law in addressing people outside of Israel. This leads to chapter five, which is my proposal for how we can organize biblical teaching in response to the flight from creation; there is a lot of material in the Bible about God's general revelation, common grace, natural moral law, and related works of God.

Chapter six takes the approach to Christian ethics described in the previous chapters and applies it in discussion with a growing, very important movement within Islam, Humanitarian Islam. This chapter is a condensed version of my book *Humanitarian Islam, Evangelical Christianity, and the Clash of Civilizations,* which, to my delight, has been warmly received and distributed by major Muslim organizations.[7] The book took a tremendous amount of research about this particular type of Islam, but the more difficult portion was forming the interpretive lenses through which I would perceive this movement, the decades of thinking before I encountered this type of Islam.

The last two chapters of this book look at a different set of problems but through the same lenses. Because of the God-given moral law which all

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6 Gustaf Wingren, *The Flight from Creation* (Augsburg Publishing, 1971).

7 This book is available both as a paperback and as a free download on various websites. Here is an example on a Muslim website: https://www.baytarrahmah.org/media/2021/Humanitarian-Islam_Evangelical-Christianity_and-the-Clash-of-Civilizations.pdf.

people know in part, people will always evaluate religions, including Christianity, in light of moral knowledge that is partly right. Though I applaud the wisdom of the Reformation in developing the doctrine of three uses of God's moral law, we should consider talking about a fourth such use, the standards by which the watching world can properly evaluate the authenticity of the faith and life of Christians. The chapter about the ethics of missions was a preparatory study for the publication by the World Evangelical Alliance, the World Council of Churches, and the Vatican of "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World" in 2011.[8] In the preceding decades there had been repeated criticism of Christian evangelistic efforts, mostly coming from Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim leaders who claimed that Christians were using unethical means to convert people to Christ. We were accused on a global level of using enticements, manipulation, and deception in our mission work, and accusations of this sort were used to justify anti-conversion and anti-proselytism laws in several countries. In response, representatives of the global Body of Christ articulated the moral standards in light of which we should proclaim Christ, with the hope that we Christians are not the only people who will recognize moral standards of this sort. Following such standards during our evangelizing is central to distinguishing authentic Christian faith from dysfunctional religion. And the public discussion of these moral standards (with the expectation that most Christians will follow them) should delegitimize anti-conversion and anti-proselytism laws.

The last chapter, about scars on the face of Christendom, introduces a related topic that, in my assessment, deserves more attention. There are identifiable ways in which Christians have committed historic moral failures that have damaged the reputation of Christianity and dishonored God. I have brought a couple of these issues to the attention of readers; many more such sins could be addressed. The watching world can be quick to perceive the failings of Christians, and these perceptions are not always wrong. The problems that especially came to my attention at the time of that lecture were at the intersections of Protestants with Catholics and of Christians with Muslims.

All of the chapters in this book have been previously published in various places, though most have been revised and expanded. A few of these

[8] The text of "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World" is found http://www.worldevangelicals.org/pdf/1106Christian_Witness_in_a_Multi-Religious_World.pdf. The chapter in this book originated as an extensive research report compiled by Thomas Schirrmacher, now Secretary General of the World Evangelical Alliance. He asked that I edit his long report into a concise article.

texts have been used as conference speeches, and the material on Reformation hermeneutics was used as a course outline for intensive classes taught at study centers of Martin Bucer Seminary in Turkey and Austria. The chapter on God's universal grace in Protestant theology was used for intensive classes taught for Martin Bucer Seminary in Bonn, Berlin, and Munich, Germany and for Baltic Reformed Seminary in Lithuania and Latvia. The many students and conference participants deserve my gratitude for what I learned from their questions and discussion.

God's Word Engages the Cultures of the World: Four Complementary Methods[9]

Jesus' prayer for the Body of Christ: "They are not *of* the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them *into* the world" (John 17:14-18; emphasis added).

The 2006 mass murder in a school in Pennsylvania brought our attention to a Christian group that is very intentional about relating their faith to secular culture: the Old Order Amish.[10] This growing group of some 200,000 is mostly descendant from Swiss and Alsatian Anabaptists of the sixteenth century. From the beginning of their movement, they have said that true believers must be serious about holiness and that holiness means being separate from the world, even withdrawal from the world. This withdrawal relates to the State but also to technology and labor-saving devices. Some Amish perceive selfish pride as the fundamental motivation for modern technology; therefore, serious believers must avoid self-serving technology. Instead, we should practice true humility, which means hard physical work with hand tools. Biblical verses they may quote include 2 Corinthians 6:17: "Come out from among them and be separate" and Romans 12:2: "Be not conformed to this world." According to the Old Order Amish, Christian holiness requires the formation of humble communities of true believers. This model of relating God's Word to cultures can be called *Holy Withdrawal.*[11] Technology and government seem to be the dimensions of life given prominence in this way of relating God's Word to culture.

If we are serious about following Jesus, I hope we have moments when we think this way. Since my student days I have wondered why we Christians do not set up separate communities of faith, diligence,

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[9] This essay was previously published as "Christ and Culture," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 35:1 (2011), 4-16.

[10] The reference is to the murder of four girls in the West Nickel Mines Amish School in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, USA, on October 2, 2006.

[11] Some of the terminology used here comes from H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951). Building on Niebuhr's descriptions of historical models of Christian ethics, this essay attempts to move to prescriptions of models for evangelical missiology.

learning, hospitality, and virtue. Why not withdraw from much of the world, even if I take my car, computer, and mobile phone along? The reason why not is simply what Jesus said: "My prayer is **not** that you take them out of the world" (verse 15). Jesus has called us to be holy, not conformed to this world, but he wants us to be **in** the world. Jesus, it seems, recognized that the problem with worldliness is not something in the world *per se* but rather something deep inside us – our unbelief, pride, and ingratitude toward God. The sin inside us will follow us if we withdraw from the world into holy communities. If this is true, the Amish may have misinterpreted the biblical text about "coming out and being separate."

An entirely different relationship to culture was that of the so-called "German Christians" during the Nazi period. These serious Christians were enthusiastic supporters of Adolph Hitler; many thought they should support Hitler as a Christian duty. Their reasoning went something like this: God's law comes to us partly through the creation orders. Those creation orders include the people (*das Volk*) and the state; therefore, the laws of our people and of our state reflect the laws of God. In a time of economic and political chaos, God had, they thought, given a new leader who could restore the people and the state. Therefore, Christians should support Hitler enthusiastically.

I remember vividly the first time I read a book by a German Christian author. The book was in the old Germanic alphabet, which was always difficult for me. I read a few paragraphs and asked myself, "Did he really say what I think he said?" I went back and read it again. When I realized I understood him correctly, I was appalled. I wondered, How could believers support something so obviously evil? Yet they thought they were following the Bible honestly.[12]

Before we congratulate ourselves for not doing something so evil, we need to pause. The German Christians of the 1930s read the Bible through lenses coming from their culture, Nazi-colored glasses. This led to a misinterpretation of the Christian faith that unduly supported their political/cultural bias. We can call it *accommodation* to secular culture – in this case Nazi culture; if you prefer, you might call it *compromise* with culture. In Jesus' terms, these believers were "of the world." Their story became famous because it reflected one of the worst tragedies of the twentieth

[12] An example of this type of book is Friedrich Gogarten, *Einheit von Evangelium und Volkstum?* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1933). For more background, see Robert P. Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus and Emanuel Hirsch* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1985).

century. But we can easily do something similar, even if our cultural agenda might seem more respectable.

My cultural/political sympathies are close to what some Americans used to call "compassionate conservatism." But I must be careful not to say that God is a compassionate conservative; nor may I say that compassionate conservatism is God's will or read the Bible through these cultural lenses. Rather, compassionate conservatism is my part of the world, but I still am to be *in* the world but not *of* the world. I belong to Jesus Christ; therefore, I do not fully belong to any culture or political movement. It is my calling to bring the criticizing and reforming Word of God into that part of the world called compassionate conservatism, as well as into other parts of the world.

What does Jesus want in our relation to "the world"? In John 17 Jesus prays that God would help us to be "in the world" but not "of the world." Thereby he calls us to be "in" but not "of" the world. This means we should live in real living contact with the world, without having our identity, thoughts, priorities, feelings, and values controlled by the world. Instead, our identity, thoughts, priorities, feelings, and values should be continually sanctified by the truth – the living Word of God. And as sanctified people, Jesus sends us into the world in a manner similar to how the Father sent Jesus into the world. We can probably summarize the central thrust of this biblical text by saying: *Jesus wants us to be in the world but not of the world for an extremely specific purpose: He has sent us into the world as hearers and bearers of the Word.*

It may be helpful to define the term *culture*. Many of my university students spent time studying abroad, and they all came back talking about culture shock. When I then asked what culture means, they usually said culture is "how we do things here," wherever "here" is. I then asked, "Is that all culture is?" In the following discussion, it usually became clear that culture is much more. Culture is also how we think about things, how we feel about things, and how we talk about things. Culture is what we have made out of nature, or in theological terms, culture is the entire human sub-creation developed from the creation as it came from the Father's hand. Culture includes customs, theories, ideas, practices, habits, role models, slogans, proverbs, values, and much more. It is all that we pass on from one generation to the next. Education is partly about passing a culture from one generation to another; all of us who received an education were educated into a culture or cultures.

How do cultures relate to faith? Is there a connection? Many observers of culture, especially anthropologists and sociologists, point out that particular cultures are frequently shaped by a particular religion. Philosopher

Paul Tillich summarized these observations into a slogan, "Culture is the form of religion, and religion is the substance of culture."[13] What must be added to Tillich's observation is that much religion is idolatry. Whatever culture it is that we inhabit, it is partly formed and directed by idolatry and unbelief. The Old Order Amish are not all wrong when they say that modern technological culture can be the organized expression of individualistic pride. Oh, that the Nazi Christians had seen that Nazi culture, through the lenses of which they interpreted the Bible, was the cultural form of a war-religion![14]

The apostle Peter reminded the first-century believers of an important principle in this regard (1 Peter 1:18-19). He said, "You know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ." His term *way of life*, *anastrophe* in Greek, is close to our modern word "culture." We were all redeemed out of a godless way of life into a new way of life. That means that being a Christian is the ultimate cross-cultural experience. We were redeemed out of a godless culture into a renewed culture by the precious blood of Christ, and that happened when we first began to accept the redeeming Word of the gospel. But as Jesus emphasized, we are not only redeemed out of a godless culture; we are called to be "in the world," that is, sent back into the world as people who are both hearers and bearers of God's Word. This makes the relation of the Word of God to culture and its several dimensions truly urgent.

The relation of the Word of God to cultures is complex.[15] I hope someone reading this essay will ask, "What about . . .?" thereby helping me learn something more! But I am sure the Word has at least four complementary relations to culture, each of which can be summarized with a "c." Those four are critique, correlation, creation, and contribution. Our life and witness will become unbalanced if we implement only one or two of these relations. In each of these four relations of the Word to culture, we are simultaneously

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[13] Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1959), 42. There seems to be conscious exaggeration in this slogan, since some commonalities among all cultures flow from our common humanity, created in the image of God. These commonalities allow communication across cultures and worldviews, though religious and cultural differences make communication more difficult.

[14] I have borrowed the term "war-religion" from the title of a book by Thomas Schirrmacher, *Hitlers Kriegsreligion*, 2 vol. (Bonn: VKW, 2007).

[15] This complexity arises from the way in which we are addressed by God's revelations in creation and in scripture, the way in which the biblical message contains both law and gospel, as well as the multiple proper uses of God's moral law. See the following chapter in this book.

hearers and bearers of that Word. We are always members of particular cultures, who need to hear the divine Word, while we are also, in word and action, bearers of that Word into the various cultures in which we live.

I. The Word of God is the ultimate critic of cultures.[16]

We should all know what a social critic is, the person who attempts to stand over against a society to articulate what is wrong. The words of good social critics often land on the editorial pages of newspapers and websites. A good social critic has a valuable role in society; however, the ultimate social and cultural critic is the Word of God, which has always been fearless and profound in its confrontation of sin. We must hear the Word's confrontation of our sin, while also communicating that confrontation with sin into our world and culture.[17] Sin does not end at the level of actions; like culture, sin extends to actions, thoughts, feelings, and speech.

A. The Word of God condemns sinful actions.

The prophet Amos is a good example. He wrote, "This is what the Lord says: 'For three sins of Gaza and for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because she took captive whole communities and sold them to Edom'" (Amos 1:6). The sin mentioned is slave trading; the people of Gaza kidnapped whole communities to sell the people to the slave traders in Edom. Similar things happen today. Many of the prostitutes in Prague (where I lived for 20 years) are slaves, kidnapped from their homelands. We must hear the Word of God as it confronts sins that may even be acceptable within our cultures. God's Word has always condemned those matters mentioned in the Ten Commandments: e.g., idolatry, murder, stealing, lying, dishonoring parents, adultery, and Sabbath breaking. We must hear and communicate God's displeasure at such practices.[18]

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16 This relation of God's Word to cultures should be compared with what the Protestant Reformers frequently called the "theological use" of the law which uncovers sin.

17 It should go without saying that believers should affirm and give thanks for all that is good, just, true, and beautiful in each of our cultures. These good gifts range from modern medical care to safe roads to works of art and music. We must be grateful for creation and God's sustaining grace.

18 For more on this topic see Thomas K. Johnson, "The Moral Structure of the Condemnation of Slavery in Amos," foreword to *The Humanization of Slavery in the Old*

B. The Word of God condemns sinful values.

Sin extends to the level of values. Some of our core values are wrong. A generation ago Francis Schaeffer observed that in the West, "the majority of people adopted two impoverished values: *personal peace* and *affluence.*"[19] I think he was right, though we may want to add that personal peace can include what we also call safety or security. These values quickly become our idols, our God-substitutes, which shape our personal and cultural life. Listen to the priorities one hears in political campaigns within open societies. Prosperity, comfort, and personal peace are what the various parties tend to promise, the differences being often how we might pursue those values.

The Word of God challenges these basic values. The prophet Micah said, "He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). Justice, mercy, and humility before God should be our basic values. Surely the Old Order Amish are right, that God-fearing values will make us very different from today's secular, hedonistic culture. But we are not only to hear the Word of God about basic values; we are also to carry that Word into the secular world. Our entire lives, lived in the world, should be a dramatic statement that there is an alternative to the world's impoverished values.

Multiple social critics have claimed that a central characteristic of the West is outward prosperity joined with inward emptiness. We can call it "The Western Paradox."[20] The pursuit of personal peace and affluence has

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Testament, edited by Thomas Schirrmacher (Bonn: VKW, 2015), 9-11, also found later in this book.

19 *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer,* Vol. 5, *The Christian View of the West* (Crossway Books, 1982), 211. Schaeffer's definition is worth noting: "Personal peace means just to be let alone, not to be troubled by the troubles of other people, whether across the world or across the city — to live one's life with minimal possibilities of being personally disturbed. Personal peace means wanting to have my personal life pattern undisturbed in my lifetime, regardless of what the result will be in the lifetimes of my children and grandchildren. Affluence means an overwhelming and ever-increasing level of prosperity — a life made up of things, things, and more things — a success judged by an ever-higher level of material abundance." Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer*, 5:211.

20 An early social critic to speak in these terms was Abraham Kuyper. Describing modern secular culture under the code name "Babylon," he wrote, "The most glittering life on the outside joined with the death of the heart, that is Babylon." *De Gemeene Gratie* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1902), Vol. 1, 456, my translation from the Dutch. A similar assessment of western life is found in the excellent book by David

left the lives and hearts of millions of people largely empty. In stark contrast, as believers, our whole way of living and talking should be a statement that prosperity or affluence is not the highest good, though we want to see people raised out of poverty. The internal emptiness of the West must be criticized, but it can be filled with faith, hope, love, and gratitude, which can be joined with justice, mercy, and walking humbly before God.

C. Sinful ideas stand under critique.

Culture is the realm of ideas, and many of the key ideas we hear in education and the media are abhorrent to the Word of God. Some of the ideas that are most important are those about what a human being is. Though European communism is largely gone, Marxist ideas are still very influential, and one of the most influential Marxist ideas is that human beings are fundamentally economical creatures. Marx thought that economic relations determine a person's and a community's entire way of thinking and living. Today this idea is often given a capitalist spin, but it is still a similar view of a person. And this view of a person seems prominent among political scientists and sociologists in the US and in the EU; however, Jesus directly rejected this idea when he said, "Man does not live by bread alone." If we have partly accepted this view of a person, Jesus would call us to repent of a sinful idea; and we, as bearers of the Word into the world, should use every opportunity we have to say we are more than what we eat or what we own.

In theoretical ethics today, one of the questions that concerns me most is why human life is valuable. Among European and American philosophers, the majority point of view seems to be that human life is valuable because of the unique abilities and functions that human beings have. Functions such as reason, speech, and creativity provide the basis for human value; of course, a being without those functions does not have any value. There is an organic tie between the theories of the philosophers and the practices of racism, abortion, active euthanasia, ageism, and tolerance of infanticide. Ideas have consequences.

Against that sinful idea, the Word of God says that humans are valuable because each person is created in the image of God. This God-given dignity cannot be lost, even if a person loses many normal human abilities. As bearers of the Word into the world, we should take every opportunity to

G. Myers, *The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty* (Yale University Press, 2000). Most of what Myers writes, as summarized in his subtitle, can also be said of European life.

say human life is valuable with a God-given value, even if a person has lost some normal functions. This will mean criticizing other ideas about why human life is valuable, and some people will listen to what we have to say.

The Word of God stands over against culture as the ultimate critic, calling us and the world to repent of sinful actions, values, and ideas. As bearers of that Word into the world, we should take every suitable opportunity to communicate, by word and deed, this ultimate criticism of sinful actions, values, and ideas.

II. The Word correlates with the ultimate needs of cultures.[21]

The Word of God has a negative relation to cultures as the ultimate critic; fortunately, our message, which we both hear and communicate, also has a positive relation to culture – *the Word correlates with the questions, needs, and problems of culture*. This means that the Word provides responsive solutions to the entire range of human needs. Let me explain.

A. The Word provides honest answers to honest questions.

This was an important slogan of Francis Schaeffer.[22] Many people have honest, important questions. What is the meaning of life? Can we know that God really exists? Can we know if absolute truth exists? Can we really know right and wrong? Can we know if Jesus really was raised from the dead? Can we know if the Bible is reliable? Can I know that my sins are forgiven? Can I know if I am justified and adopted by God? Can I know how God wants me to live? We could list additional important, honest questions that people raise, and these questions are, in principle, answered by the Word of God.[23]

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[21] Though this terminology reflects Paul Tillich's "method of correlation," this does not imply agreement with the rest of Tillich's theology. For my perspective on the use of correlation within classical Protestant theology and ethics, see Thomas K. Johnson, *The Step in Missions Training: How Our Neighbors Are Wrestling with God's General Revelation* (Bonn: VKW, 2014), 53-61, especially the text box on pages 60 and 61; https://www.academia.edu/36885979/Gods_General_Revelation.

[22] In Schaeffer's terms, "Every honest question must be given an honest answer. It is unbiblical for anyone to say, 'Just believe.'" *Complete Works,* Vol. 1, 189. He also said, "Rightly understood, Christianity as a system has the answers to all the basic needs of modern man." *Complete Works,* Vol. 1, 93.

[23] For a good comparative study of how such universal questions occur to all people, see J. H. Bavinck, *The Church Between Temple and Mosque: A Study of the Relationship Between the Christian Faith and Other Religions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981).

This does not mean that there is a single verse of scripture that we can use to simply answer complex questions, such as, "How can we know for sure that God exists?" What I mean is that in the Word there are principles of understanding human life and the world which enable thoughtful and reflective believers to give substantial answers. This means that because we have the Word of God in our midst, there are, in the body of Christ, people who can give honest answers to the vast array of questions which arise in the world today. In this sense, the Word correlates with culture by means of giving answers to the questions which arise in the minds of men and women.

We should also notice why people ask serious questions: because God is a question-asking God. Since the Garden of Eden, when God came to Adam and Eve with the question, "Where are you?" God has been asking questions.[24] People do not always realize that God is pursuing them with such deep questions, but those questions are part of how God drives people to himself, so that they find answers in the Word. This explains the correlation between the questions in our minds and the answers in the Word.

B. The Word addresses our deepest anxieties.

Since Adam and Eve, people have been an anxious bunch. We worry all the time, not only because we are paranoid, but also because things really go wrong. *Anxiety is the unclarified awareness of the fallen condition of our world.* What will happen to us? How will life turn out? What will be our calling and destiny? How can we face illness, suffering, and death? Is there a deeper solution to guilt and shame, or can I only try to balance the scales by living a good life? Is life truly empty and meaningless at a level that makes suicide tempting?[25] Such anxieties become not only the matters of sleepless nights and countless hours with therapists; they are the themes of important movies, novels, essays, and songs. Culture in all its dimen-

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[24] For more on this topic, see Thomas K. Johnson, *God's General Revelation*, 79-95; https://www.academia.edu/36885979/Gods_General_Revelation.

[25] The reference here is to Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, a philosophical essay first published in French in 1942 in light of the horrors of World War II. The essay begins with the haunting words, "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy." Translated by Justin O'Brien, it is available in various editions. To prevent an inappropriate response to Camus, one must note that he did not recommend suicide.

sions expresses anxieties of the full range. The human heart cries out in its deep spiritual need, calling for answers.[26]

We can be grateful that the Word correlates with the human heart by speaking to our deepest needs. This is not intended only for believers; this can become the cutting edge of bringing the Word into the world. People whose hearts are bleeding with spiritual need are all around us. We have the solution to the cries of their hearts – cries that can be heard whenever we listen. To repeat: the promises of God's Word correspond with the deepest hurts of fallen men and women which we hear across the expressions of every culture. Listen for guilt, shame, fear of fate and death, or a sense of meaninglessness, and you will have opportunity to talk about the promises of God.

C. The Word addresses our comprehensive alienation.

Since Adam and Eve, people suffer under a state of comprehensive alienation, separation from God, separation from each other, separation from themselves, even separation from creation. This is experienced by all and is articulated by many, becoming a widespread theme in some dimensions of culture. Many good novels and movies depict our alienation and the attempts to overcome it, though the theme is also prominent in politics and economics.

As a young man, Karl Marx offered a sensitive and moving analysis of human alienation while his own alienation from God came to expression in his atheism.[27] The tragic effects of Marxism and Communism flow partly from setting the wrong message in correlation with human alienation. It is important to see that the biblical Word is the right message to respond to our comprehensive alienation, and it does so by means of bringing reconciliation. The Word offers reconciliation with God; in addition, the Word leads to reconciliation with each other, to reconciliation within ourselves, and maybe in some ways, to reconciliation with nature. In this life, reconciliation is never total or complete. Reconciliation must always be worked out day to day because new conflicts always arise, and those new conflicts always bring the stench of death back into our lives.

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[26] This paragraph is dependent on Paul Tillich's analysis of anxiety in *The Courage to Be* (Yale University Press, 1952).

[27] See, for example, the discussion of "Estranged Labor" in Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" (1844), found in *Karl Marx, Early Writings,* introduced by Lucio Colletti, translated by Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (Pelican Books, 1975), 322 to 334.

Reconciliation is constantly made possible by the Word of God. In this way, the Word responds to the deepest human needs. It is important that the church become a community in which reconciliation is constantly occurring, so that restored relationships within the Body of Christ stand in contrast and correlation with the alienated condition of our world.

We must hear the Word of God both as it is the critic of our sin and as its promises correlate with our spiritual needs. It is crucial that as we carry the Word into the world, we bring that Word in a balanced relation to culture. The Word is the ultimate critic of culture, but it is also the ultimate healer of the painful cries of our world. The Word speaks healing to anxious hearts and brings answers to tortured minds. We must be careful to hear and to communicate both the criticism and the answers, critique and correlation, in a balanced manner.

III. The Word of God creates a new Christian counterculture.[28]

John Stott's excellent study of the Sermon on the Mount is entitled *The Christian Counter-Culture,* and there is good reason for talking this way.[29] Jesus came to recreate us to be new people with new relationships, new ways of thinking, new ways of talking, and new ways of doing things. This was already evident in the work of redemption in the Old Testament. The people of Israel were called to be a redeemed nation, not just redeemed individuals. As a redeemed nation, they were intended to have a complete cultural expression of their redeemed status. They had a tabernacle with an elaborate system of sacrifice and worship. They had music and visual art. They had a political structure and a system of laws. All this was created by the Word of God in ancient Israel to be the cultural expression of God's work of redemption.

After the death and resurrection of Christ, the Body of Christ became the new people of God sent into both Jewish culture and Roman culture. At first the early believers were a poor, frightened, socially marginalized, and persecuted minority. Very soon, however, the basic Christian confession became "Jesus is Lord!" This confession stood in contrast with the claim of the Roman emperors that "Caesar is Lord." Of course, Caesar claimed to be

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[28] This relation of the Word to cultures should be compared with what was called the "third use of the law" in Reformation theology, described in the following chapter.

[29] John R. W. Stott, *Christian Counter-Culture: The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (InterVarsity Press, 1978).

Lord of everything, so the claim that "Jesus is Lord" meant that Jesus is also Lord of everything – a truly revolutionary idea.

It was only about a century ago that Abraham Kuyper wrote the famous words, "There is not a thumb-breath of the whole realm of human life of which Christ, the sovereign Lord of all does not cry out, 'It is mine'!"[30] This slogan is relatively new, but this idea was already powerfully active in the early church. This meant that all of life was coming under the Lordship of Christ. This is the starting point for the full cultural expression of our faith. In the time of the Old Testament, the people of God were set apart from the surrounding cultures by national and language barriers, in a defensive posture in relation to the surrounding cultures. But the new people of God, the Body of Christ, was sent into both Greco-Roman and Jewish culture as a countercultural presence. And like the people of Israel, their condition as the redeemed people of God slowly started to come to complete cultural expression.

There was, I believe, a somewhat ordered progression of the cultural growth of the Christian counterculture in the early centuries. It was something of an inside moving toward the outside type of progression in the embodiment of the faith.

A. The Word creates new people with new hearts and new relationships.

We see this in the New Testament. People were saved. Families were reconciled. Small communities of believers were gathered around the gospel. Love became the mark of the Christian and of the Christian community. Much of the teaching of the New Testament epistles addresses the kind of people we are to be as a result of the gospel; this includes the right kind of relationships in marriage, family, work, and church, and the resulting types of communities we are to be.

In the ancient world, Christians were not the only people who talked about what kind of people we should be and what kinds of communities we should form, themes that are today discussed under the heading of "virtue ethics."[31] However, in the pre-Christian era, which was many centuries prior to the era of inexpensive printing, such discussions were mostly limited to small, educated elites who considered the writings of

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30 Abraham Kuyper, *Souvereiniteit in eigen kring* (Amsterdam, 1930), 32.

31 See, for example, Alasdair McIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory,* 3rd edition (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), and Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (Sentinel, 2018).

Aristotle or the Stoics. Few other people could read or write, and very few had a community within which such a discussion was likely to occur. Other than Jewish synagogues, the great exception to this was the New Testament church and the developing Christian communities. Starting in the 50s AD or even earlier, small gatherings of Christians, many of whom were slaves, were discussing biblical themes such as how to practice gentleness, patience, kindness, and self-control in light of the gospel of Christ. These new hearts and new relationships were the center of a blossoming counterculture.

B. The Word creates new ways of thinking and talking.

In the centuries following Pentecost, there was an exciting period of growth, and this growth was not only in numbers, though the numbers of believers exploded for a period of a few centuries. *There was also real growth in new ways of thinking and talking.* Simple believers learned how to think and talk about complicated doctrines such as the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the two natures of Christ. They were soon discussing society and ethics. This new level of thoughtfulness and cognition was, I believe, an expression of the new hearts that had been given by the gospel.

The newness of what the early Christians claimed to be true pushed them to explain to Jews, polytheists, and followers of Greek philosophy why they believed these things. Some of this is seen already in the New Testament, and it flourished in the following centuries, forming the roots of Christian theology, apologetics, and ethics. The intellectual complexity of the new faith, joined with the complex interaction with the surrounding cultures, created a community that was constantly studying and learning. Such a process of community learning, previously conceivable only to tiny groups of philosophers, became a reality for the new Christian counterculture.

C. The Word creates new cultural institutions.

Already in the Roman era, believers started all sorts of new things; orphanages and programs to assist people in need came early. A few centuries later they created schools, cathedrals, and some forms of art. Then they founded universities and wrote great music such as Bach or Handel, while literature and philosophy were unfolding. One can almost tell the history of the Body of Christ by looking at the continuing series of new cultural institutions created by believers in response to the Word of God. In more contemporary terms, new mountains of culture were created by believers because they believed and obeyed God's Word.

This is an exciting story; it would take many hours to tell, enough for a university course of study.[32] All I can do now is to say that the story exists, and the story is worth hearing. Across the centuries, the Word of God has indeed moved believers to create many new cultural institutions and ways of life. Believers today should be courageous in following our believing ancestors in being willing to try to create something new: organizations, activities, and movements for the glory of God. History is not finished. Believers should again become courageous in starting new cultural activities for the glory of God.

IV. The Word of God contributes to cultures.[33]

For us who live in the post-Christian West, it is valuable to know about the contributions of God's Word to the world in which we live. Even though much of the secular West denies or neglects the Christian heritage that shaped it, there are many elements in European civilization that were produced or developed under the influence of the biblical message. These are distinctive practices, institutions, and patterns of thinking that hardly seem to be consistent with an unbelieving worldview, and which seem, historically, to be the result of the impact of the biblical message on Europe and later the Americas. As believers, we can see this as one of the ways in which God has been at work to make our world a much more humane place to live. This is a long story to tell; I can give only a few illustrations.

A. The Word contributes practices to cultures.

Notice in the West today, when an ambulance comes down the street with lights flashing and the siren screaming, everyone tries to get out of the way. Without a thought, we all know that someone is injured or seriously ill and needs help quickly. But at many times and places in human history, this would not have been true. It was **not** always obvious to all people that those who are injured or seriously ill should be helped. At many times in human history, people thought the injured or ill should be left to their fate. I would suggest that many people know to get out of the way of the ambulance because of the contribution of the biblical message to western civilization.[34]

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[32] A good resource for this history is Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity,* 2 volumes (Harper & Row, 1953 & 1975).

[33] This relation of the Word to cultures should be compared with the "civil use of the law" in Reformation teaching.

[34] For this illustration I am indebted to Wim Rietkerk, of L'abri, having heard it from him in a lecture or personal conversation.

It is because of the influence of the biblical worldview that many know we should help people in need; and this principle, learned from the Bible, is the background for the interest in humanitarian aid for people in need seen in countries large biblical influences, while some also work hard for political reconciliation. There is a whole set of important practices that make western life more humane and compassionate which arose partly because of the contribution of the Word to the world.

B. The Word contributes key ideas to cultures.

Even in the post-Christian West there are many key *ideas* which arose partly due to the contribution of the biblical Word. Just a few examples must suffice. The idea of human rights is a prime example: In western history, some of the first people to write much about human rights were the Christian philosophers in Christian cathedral schools and universities. These were people such as Thomas Aquinas and Albertus Magnus in the thirteenth century. They thought humans have rights because they were created in the image of God.[35] Today people from many countries want to discuss and protect human rights, even though they may not have a good explanation of why people have rights or where those rights originate. In some cases, the protection of human rights seems inconsistent with modern secular worldviews, though this does not seem to prevent people from often becoming energetic protectors of at least some of those rights. I think we believers should rejoice that the Word has contributed a central idea to western culture – that of human rights.

Another key idea contributed by the Word to secular Western society has to do with the possibility of natural science. History shows us that the early modern scientists, especially in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, were mostly serious Christians and that they developed modern science under the influence of their Christian beliefs. They thought that the physical world is God's good creation, which we should try to understand and even love. In this way Christian beliefs contributed to the start of modern science.[36] Today science, along with the technology and health care which depend on science, is one of the most important institutions of western culture. Of course, many scientists are not yet

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[35] Some of this story is told in Thomas K. Johnson, *Human Rights: A Christian Primer*, 2nd ed. (Bonn: WEA, 2016). Online: https://www.academia.edu/36884876/Human_Rights_A_Christian_Primer.

[36] This story is effectively told by Nancy R. Pearcey and Charles B. Thaxton in *The Soul of Science: Christian Faith and Natural Philosophy* (Crossway Books, 1994).

believers, and many do not appreciate the extent to which the biblical message contributed to the initial development of science. But we can rejoice and give thanks to God for the way the biblical Word has contributed ideas that helped start an institution and movement that is so important and valuable today.

C. The Word contributes institutions to secular culture.

One of the true radicals in western history was Jan Amos Comenius, also known as Komensky (1592-1670). One of his most radical ideas was that girls should be allowed and encouraged to get an education. Comenius is known as the "Father of modern education" because of his educational writings and practices. He was also an evangelical pastor and theologian. Sending girls to school was a direct result of his evangelical faith.[37]

Today many societies encourage or even demand that girls get an education, often without even knowing that the education of girls started as a distinctly Christian institution. I would suggest that the education of girls is a whole institution contributed to many cultures by the biblical Word, and for that we should be profoundly grateful. There are other institutions in western culture that seem to be largely the result of culture-forming by believers. We could mention orphanages and humanitarian aid organizations as good examples.

History is not finished. Maybe some of us will be used by God, used by the biblical Word, to bring entirely new contributions into secular cultures. Maybe someone reading this essay can be used to start something just as radical and new as education for girls, humanitarian aid, or modern science. The Word continues to be active as a key force that contributes new institutions to cultures.

Conclusion

A great European preacher of a century ago, J. Christian Blumhardt, had a fascinating saying, "A man must be converted twice, from the natural life to the spiritual life, and after that from the spiritual life to the natural life."[38] We must be converted from the world, so that our identity, values, beliefs, and priorities are not those of this world. We must be converted

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[37] For more on this, see Jan Hábl, *On Being Human(e): Comenius' Pedagogical Humanization as an Anthropological Problem* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2017).

[38] Quoted by Herman Bavinck, *Wijsbegeerte der Openbaring* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1908) 207.

back to the world, knowing that God has called and sent us to serve the Word in the world.

The Old Order Amish might be, I worry, once-converted people. They have been converted away from the world, and that is necessary for each of us. Some who call themselves Christians might not be converted away from the ways of the worlds they inhabit. But Jesus also wants to convert us back to the world, to live in the world, to be sent as his representatives into the world. That means bringing the Word into cultures with their many dimensions. What I have presented is a progress report on what I have learned about how that Word relates to cultures. I really hope some of you are thinking, Does not the Word relate to culture in this manner . . .?

I am sure that the Word is the ultimate *critic* of culture, laying bare before God the sinful acts, values, and ideas of the unbelieving world. That Word, especially the gospel and the promises of the Word, *correlates* with the deepest needs expressed in culture, the need for honest answers, the need for comfort in our anxiety, and the need for reconciliation in our alienation. The Word also *creates* entirely new cultural entities, ways of thinking, living, and ordering our world, which bring glory to God. The Word has a long history of *contributing* key ideas, practices, and institutions even to those cultures that do not acknowledge the Word, and for that we should be profoundly grateful. Christians should not forget that God's Word has multiple complementary relationships with the cultures from which we come and into which we are sent.

Our challenge today is to live as twice-converted people, called out of the world to a life of faith and then sent by God back into his world as hearers and bearers of the Word. As we take the Word into cultures and the many dimensions of culture, it is important that we do so in a balanced and complete manner. It would be a mistake to apply God's Word in only one way. But we see in Christian history that believers have developed the level of complexity needed to consider themes such as the Trinity and the two natures of Christ. It is well within our capacity to consider how God's Word relates to cultures in multiple ways at the same time. Then we may see a more full-orbed result of missions and ethics.

Culturally Relevant Hermeneutics: A Return to the Reformation[39]

Evangelicals should actively appropriate a central theme from the Protestant Reformation that provides a unified and balanced pattern for faith, life, proclamation, and public ethics, that is, the application of God's Word in a world of different cultures: the nuanced, complementary relationship between law and gospel. A largely unified (but not woodenly identical) perspective can be learned from a comparison of Martin Luther (1483–1546) with John Calvin (1509–1564). Their significant similarity on these foundational questions established reliable patterns for high-quality proclamation and application of God's Word in the Protestant tradition.

The relationship between law and gospel is a hermeneutical/homiletical key to Reformation theology and ethics in two ways, historically to understand the Reformation itself and normatively, setting a pattern to appropriate today. This complementarity offers evangelicals a proven tool worthy of study and imitation.

I. Some differences between Luther and Calvin

There are theological differences between Luther and Calvin, but differences of literary style and personality seem larger. Calvin labors for elegance of expression and an orderly arrangement. The table of contents of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* offers an overview of how he connects the various themes in Christian proclamation.

Calvin finds repetition inelegant; in his Bible commentaries he refers the reader to a previous book if he has already given a satisfactory exposition of a text or theme. He also distinguishes theology from biblical exegesis, representing the Renaissance care for precision in dealing with historical texts. To get Calvin's complete perspective on a topic, one must read his *Institutes,* not only his commentaries on books of the Bible.

Luther does not clearly distinguish exegesis of the Bible from theology. In his *Lectures on Galatians*, he often digresses from the text of Galatians to other texts and generally tells his students all they should know regarding the themes before him. His *Lectures on Galatians* describes faith and life in

[39] An earlier version of this essay was published as "Law and Gospel: The Hermeneutical and Homiletical Key to Reformation Theology and Ethics," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 43:1 (2019), 53-70.

light of Paul's letter to the Galatians, not merely exegeting the Pauline book. Luther had a tremendously systematic mind, but his love of the gospel constantly breaks his orderly presentation. This makes Luther repetitive though never monotonous.

Behind the difference in literary style between Luther and Calvin lay a difference in personality so great that one can mistake it for a difference in core theology. Lewis Spitz commented:

> "Calvin and Luther were temperamentally quite different. The younger man [Calvin] was shy to the point of diffidence, precise and restrained, except for sudden flashes of anger. He was severe, but scrupulously just and truthful, self-contained, and somewhat aloof. He had many acquaintances but few intimate friends. The older man [Luther] was sociable to the point of volubility, free and open, warm, and cordial with people of all stations of life. But in spite of their differences in personality, Calvin and Luther retained a mutual respect for each other that was rooted in their confessional agreement."[40]

A "confessional agreement" deeper than their disagreements is what we find on law and gospel, though it is partly disguised by differences in terminology. Luther and Calvin held remarkably similar convictions, especially that the relationship between law and gospel is central for the Christian faith, for Christian proclamation, and for ethics, including social ethics. Luther's key text is his 1535 *Lectures on Galatians.* Calvin's 1548 *Galatians Commentary* is convenient for comparison; it must be supplemented by his *Institutes* because of his literary method.

II. The Centrality of the Law/Gospel Relationship

For Luther, the relationship between law and gospel is the center of true Christianity; the ability to distinguish properly between law and gospel qualifies one as a theologian. "Therefore, whoever knows well how to distinguish the gospel from the law should give thanks to God and know that he is a real theologian."[41]

The real problem in theology through Luther's time was the failure to articulate this distinction:

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[40] Lewis W. Spitz, *The Renaissance and Reformation Movements,* 2 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), vol. 2: *The Reformation,* 412.

[41] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works,* ed. and trans. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 26: *Lectures on Galatians, 1535* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 115.

> "You will not find anything about this distinction between the law and the gospel in the books of the monks, the canonists, and the recent and ancient theologians. Augustine taught and expressed it to some extent. Jerome and others like him knew nothing at all about it. In other words, for many centuries there has been a remarkable silence about this in all the schools and churches. This situation has produced a very dangerous condition for consciences."[42]

This distinction is no mere theoretical abstraction. It is an existential reality of the highest import; it is the heart of the Christian faith; it is the key to keeping the gospel pure and distinguishing authentic Christianity from distorted faiths and religions. "Let every Christian learn diligently to distinguish between the law and the gospel."[43]

Without this distinction people either fall into despair, finding that they cannot earn God's favor by law-keeping, or they fall into false confidence, presuming that they can earn God's favor by keeping God's law. However, the proper distinction is not a matter of memorizing proper terms or using certain words; it is more an art than a science. It must be made in the midst of life experience. Luther confessed, "I admit that in the time of temptation I myself do not know how to do this as I should."[44]

Calvin appropriated a clear distinction between law and gospel from Luther, but he understood it to really come from the Bible: "[Paul] is continually employed in contrasting the righteousness of the law with the free acceptance which God is pleased to bestow."[45] Because Calvin avoids repetition, one such statement suffices to show that Calvin sees this contrast as central to the faith. But he thinks it is prominent in the entire Bible.

When discussing Abraham, Calvin notes, "For faith, — so far as it embraces the undeserved goodness of God, Christ with all his benefits, the testimony of our adoption which is contained in the gospel, — is universally contrasted with the law, with the merit of works, and with human excellence."[46] He echoes Luther: "We see then that the smallest part of justification cannot be attributed to the law without renouncing Christ and his grace."[47]

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42 Luther, *Galatians*, 313.
43 Luther, *Galatians*, 120.
44 Luther, *Galatians,* 115.
45 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians,* trans. William Pringle, (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1854; rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 67. Modernized spelling and punctuation.
46 Calvin, *Galatians,* 85.
47 Calvin, *Galatians,* 151.

III. What Is the Gospel?

For Luther, justification by faith alone (not faith plus anything else) is the center of the gospel. By faith a person is united with Christ and received by Christ so that Christ's righteousness becomes one's own and the believer is declared righteous by God. While the legal status of being justified is an enduring condition in relation to God, a person's faith remains dynamic; one may only be aware of the status of justification to the extent one presently trusts the gospel.

> "If it is true faith, it is a sure trust and firm acceptance in the heart. It takes hold of Christ in such a way that Christ is the object of faith, or rather not the object of faith but, so to speak, the one who is present in the faith itself."[48]

> "But the work of Christ, properly speaking, is this: to embrace the one whom the law has made a sinner and pronounced guilty, and to absolve him from his sins if he believes the gospel. 'For Christ is the end of the law, that everyone who has faith may be justified' (Romans 10:4)."[49]

Calvin uses slightly different language. Salvation is accomplished solely by the work of Christ; salvation is received solely by faith. About Galatians 2:15–16, Calvin observed:

> "Since the Jews themselves, with all their advantages, were forced to betake themselves to the faith of Christ, how much more necessary was it that the Gentiles should look for salvation through faith? Paul's meaning therefore is: 'We . . . have found no method of obtaining salvation, but by believing in Christ: why, then, should we prescribe another method to the Gentiles? . . . We must seek justification by the faith of Christ, because we cannot be justified by works.'"[50]

The Reformers understood the gospel in contrast to the law. Believing the gospel is the opposite of seeking to achieve a proper relationship with God by following the law or performing "works."[51]

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48 Luther, *Galatians,* 129.

49 Luther, *Galatians,* 143.

50 Calvin, *Galatians,* 66, 67.

51 The several Latin language "solas" of the Protestant Reformation (*sola scriptura,* by scripture alone; *sola fide,* by faith alone; *sola gratia,* by grace alone; *solus Christus*, Christ alone; *soli Deo gloria,* glory to God alone) are terms primarily used by historians to describe the Reformation understanding of the gospel. Though these

IV. Faith and Works

From the start of the Reformation, Luther was misunderstood to say that if people do not need to earn their eternal salvation by doing good works, then people are free from all moral restraint and free to sin. This antinomian misunderstanding threatened to contribute to the widespread social chaos of the time, an outcome Luther feared greatly.

In his 1520 treatise *The Freedom of the Christian,* Luther rejects antinomianism with his ear-catching irony that, in addition to being a perfectly free lord of all, each Christian is also a perfectly dutiful servant of all. Luther claims that true faith in Christ moves people to love and serve within the everyday social structures without any rejection of the moral law. Faith leads to good works, and if real faith is present, good works can be expected.

> "Therefore we, too, say that faith without works is worthless and useless. The papists and the fanatics take this to mean that faith without works does not justify, or that if faith does not have works, it is of no avail, no matter how true it is. That is false. But faith without works — that is, a fantastic idea and mere vanity and a dream of the heart — is a false faith and does not justify."[52]

Luther interprets the representatives of the Roman Catholic Church of his day to say that works were necessary in order to be justified, the central problem of the "papists." Luther also thinks that the "fanatics," his term for some Anabaptists, follow the papists at this crucial point—a claim not always noticed. Luther teaches that good works will always follow any justification that is authentic, but such good works do not contribute to justification.

In addition to holding a different view of the relation between faith and works, Luther also claims to teach a different view of an appropriate "good work." As a papist he performed works that were explicitly religious in nature; he entered a monastery, fasted, took pilgrimages, and spent long hours confessing sins.[53] After coming to the Reformation faith, he taught that good works are primarily in the everyday world:

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terms were sometimes used by Reformation authors, they were only rarely used together to summarize their teaching. The solas say little about how to understand and use God's law.

52 Luther, *Galatians,* 155.

53 This is what later scholars often call "extra-mundane asceticism," in contrast with the "intra-mundane asceticism" taught by Luther and Calvin.

> "For such great blindness used to prevail in the world that we supposed that the works which men had invented not only without but against the commandment of God were much better than those which a magistrate, the head of a household, a teacher, a child, a servant, etc., did in accordance with God's command."[54]

The good works resulting from justification by faith are those commanded by God in the Word within the everyday created order:

> "Surely we should have learned from the Word of God that the religious orders of the papists, which alone they call holy, are wicked, since there exists no commandment of God or testimony in Sacred Scripture about them; and, on the other hand, that other ways of life, which do have the word and commandment of God, are holy and divinely instituted . . ., on the basis of the Word of God we pronounce the sure conviction that the way of life of a servant, which is extremely vile in the sight of the world, is far more acceptable to God than all the orders of monks. For God approves, commends, and adorns the status of servants with his Word, but not that of the monks."[55]

For Luther, works do not contribute to justification before God. One is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing one does contributes to justification. But real justifying faith necessarily leads to obedience to God's command in the Word.

Calvin's doctrine of faith and works resembles Luther's. Though some have misperceived Calvin to be a stern legalist, in his time the French-speaking Reformation was perceived to be antinomian in a manner that contributed to social chaos and wanton vice. This was similar to Luther's problem, a result of saying that good works and the moral law do not contribute to our salvation. From the time of his "Prefatory Address to King Francis" in the *Institutes,* which he probably wrote very early in his career, Calvin clarifies his doctrine of the relation of faith to good works, partly to teach his people but partly as an apologetic response to this continuing allegation against the Reformation.

Using Galatians 5:6, Calvin defines these matters: "It is not our doctrine that the faith which justifies is alone; we maintain that it is invariably accompanied by good works; only we contend that faith alone is sufficient for justification."[56] In other words, justification is by faith alone, but faith that embraces Christ to receive justification never remains alone.

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54 Luther, *Galatians,* 212.

55 Luther, *Galatians,* 213. For Luther, the fact of these biblical commands indicates that being a servant is a proper way of serving God.

56 Calvin, *Galatians,* 152.

From Luther to Calvin, there is a small development in the terminology of good works. Whereas Luther talks about loving service within the created orders of everyday life in obedience to the command of God, Calvin usually talks about obedience to the law of God as the standard for good works. This is a tiny change in terminology, not a substantial development in content. Like Luther, Calvin describes good works as love for others within the framework of everyday life:

> "But we must inquire into the reason why all the precepts of the law are included under love. The law consists of two tables, the first of which instructs us concerning the worship of God and the duties of piety, and the second instructs us concerning the love of neighbor . . . Piety to God, I acknowledge, ranks higher than love of the brethren; and therefore, the observance of the first table is more valuable in the sight of God than the observance of the second. But as God himself is invisible, so piety is a thing hidden from the eyes of man . . . God therefore chooses to make trial of our love to himself by that love of our brother, which he enjoins us to cultivate."[57]

Calvin uses the term *law* to describe the function of Holy Scripture in guiding the life of gratitude and good works, whereas Luther uses the term *commandment*. This difference in terms is based on a deep agreement—real faith leads to good works that are practiced in everyday life according to the commands or law of God in Scripture.

V. The Gospel and the Old Testament

Throughout Christian history, the relationship between the two testaments has been a recurring issue. Some, such as the group that disturbed the churches in Galatia in the first century, minimize any transition from the Old to the New Testament. Others, such as Marcion in the second century, minimize any continuity between the testaments, believing that the Old Testament contains only law while the New Testament only preaches the gospel. Against such extremes, with small differences, Luther and Calvin fundamentally agree on seeing both law and gospel in both the Old and the New Testament. Neither obliterates all distinctions between the two testaments; both see substantial continuity.

Luther loved to describe Moses as the preacher of righteousness by law:

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[57] Calvin, *Galatians,* 159, 160.

> "Moses does not reveal the Son of God; he discloses the law, sin, the conscience, death, the wrath and judgment of God, and hell . . . Therefore, only the gospel reveals the Son of God. Oh, if only one could distinguish carefully here and not look for the law in the gospel but keep it as separate from the law as heaven is distant from earth."[58]

Representing the apostle Paul, Luther then writes, "You have not heard me teach the righteousness of the law or of works; for this belongs to Moses, not to me."[59]

If this were all Luther said, one might imagine an absolute antithesis between the two testaments. However, with no sense of self-contradiction, Luther notes, "The patriarchs and all the Old Testament saints were free in their conscience and were justified by faith, not by circumcision or the law."[60] It is true that "Moses, the minister of the law, has the ministry of law, which he [the apostle Paul] calls a ministry of sin, wrath, death, and damnation,"[61] yet Moses preached justification by faith alone.

The gospel in the Old Testament, Luther claims, is also about Jesus Christ. The faith of the patriarchs was a faith that looked to the future acts of God for their salvation. "The sound of the promise to Abraham brings Christ; and when he has been grasped by faith, then the Holy Spirit is granted on Christ's behalf."[62]

Though the promises related to the gospel were especially given to Abraham, these promises were also available to whoever believed. In discussing how the Roman centurion (Acts 9) was righteous *before* he heard the gospel from Peter, Luther claimed:

> "Cornelius was a righteous and holy man in accordance with the Old Testament on account of his faith in the coming Christ, just as all the patriarchs, prophets, and devout kings were righteous, having received the Holy Spirit secretly on account of their faith in the coming Christ."[63]

The main contrast between the gospel in the Old Testament and in the New Testament is that "the faith of the patriarchs was attached to the Christ

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58 Luther, *Galatians,* 72.
59 Luther, *Galatians,* 73.
60 Luther, *Galatians,* 85. By the term "free in their conscience," Luther means awareness of a status of full acceptance before God.
61 Luther, *Galatians,* 147.
62 Luther, *Galatians,* 255.
63 Luther, *Galatians,* 210.

who was to come, just as ours is attached to the One who has already come."[64] Indeed, the book of Genesis was primarily a book of gospel:

> "In Jewish fashion Paul usually calls the first book of Moses 'law.' Even though it has no law except that which deals with circumcision, but chiefly teaches faith and testifies that the patriarchs were pleasing to God on account of their faith, still the Jews called Genesis together with the other books of Moses 'law' because of that one law of circumcision."[65]

Just as Luther claims that the Old Testament is full of gospel, he also finds law in the New Testament, even though the New Testament is preeminently gospel:

> "The gospel, however, is a proclamation about Christ: that he forgives sins, grants grace, justifies, and saves sinners. Although there are commandments in the gospel, they are not the gospel; they are expositions of the law and appendices to the gospel."[66]

Calvin's distinction between the testaments is similar to that of Luther. At the beginning of his Galatians commentary, he complains that the false apostles disturbing the churches removed the distinction between the two testaments, which is the distinction between law and gospel. "It is no small evil to quench the light of the gospel, to lay a snare for consciences, and to remove the distinction between the Old and the New Testament."[67]

Like Luther, Calvin regards the Old Testament as largely law, whereas the New Testament is largely gospel:

> "That office which was peculiar to Moses consisted in laying down a rule of life and ceremonies to be observed in the worship of God, and in afterwards adding promises and threatenings. Many promises, no doubt, relating to the free mercy of God and of Christ, are to be found in his writings; and these promises belong to faith. But this is to be viewed as accidental."[68]

Though Calvin agrees with Luther that Moses is primarily a writer of law, Calvin's statements about Moses are more positive than are Luther's. Calvin genuinely loved the Law of Moses and wrote a multi-volume study on the last four books of the Pentateuch. Luther chose to write more on the

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64 Luther, *Galatians,* 239.
65 Luther, *Galatians,* 433.
66 Luther, *Galatians,* 150.
67 Calvin, *Galatians,* 14, 15.
68 Calvin, *Galatians,* 99.

book of Genesis than on the other Mosaic books, probably because he saw Genesis as containing more gospel.

For Calvin, the way of salvation was the same under the old covenant as it is under the new, i.e., justification by faith alone:

"Abraham was justified by believing, because, when he received from God a promise of fatherly kindness, he embraced it as certain. Faith, therefore, has a relation and a respect to such a divine promise as may enable men to place their trust and confidence in God."[69]

Calvin explains why Moses added the law so many years later if the gospel had already been given to Abraham. His comment would have pleased Luther—to show people their sin and need for the gospel. "He means that the law was published in order to make known transgressions, and in this way to compel men to acknowledge their guilt . . . This is the true preparation for Christ."[70]

Like Luther, Calvin hears the gospel throughout the Old Testament, making the difference between the two testaments one of degree and place in the history of redemption:

> "The doctrine of faith, in short, is attested by Moses and all the prophets: but, as faith was not then clearly manifested, so the time of faith [referring to Galatians 3:23] is an appellation here given, not in an absolute, but in a comparative sense, to the time of the New Testament."[71]

Indeed, the Old Testament ceremonies spoke of Christ and served as a schoolmaster to lead to the coming Christ:

> "Beyond all doubt, ceremonies accomplished their object, not merely by alarming and humbling the conscience, but by exciting them to the faith of the coming Redeemer . . . The law . . . was nothing else than an immense variety of exercises, in which the worshippers were led by the hand to Christ."[72]

The Reformers agree in seeing continuity of development from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Old Testament believers looked forward to the redemption in Christ, whereas New Testament believers look back to Christ, but all believers are justified by faith alone in the promise of the

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69 Calvin, *Galatians,* 84.
70 Calvin, *Galatians,* 100.
71 Calvin, *Galatians,* 107.
72 Calvin, *Galatians,* 109.

gospel. Although the New Testament is preeminently a book of gospel, that gospel is properly understood only in relation to the moral law contained in both testaments.

Whether in the time of the Old or the New Testament, Luther and Calvin see the biblical message as always having two distinct but inseparable dimensions: command and promise, law and gospel. This is the continuous structure of the biblical divine-human encounter.

VI. Reason and Law

"Reason cannot think correctly about God; only faith can do so."[73] Such statements give Luther the reputation of being opposed to reason. Some view him as irrational. Calvin, meanwhile, is sometimes presented as an unfeeling rationalist. Neither interpretation is accurate, because such interpretations assume no differentiation in terms of the object to which reason must be applied.

Both Luther and Calvin see reason as properly pertaining to the law; when reason is used within this realm, it is a tremendous gift of God. But when reason exceeds its proper bounds, going into the realm of gospel, then reason becomes an enemy of faith.

For Luther, the primary problem with reason is its claim that people can be justified by works of the law, rejecting the gospel:

> "Human reason and wisdom do not understand this doctrine [the gospel]. Therefore they always teach the opposite: 'If you want to live to God, you must observe the law; for it is written (Matthew 19:17), "If you would enter life, keep the commandments." ' "[74]

> "Let reason be far away, that enemy of faith, which, in the temptations of sin and death, relies not on the righteousness of faith or Christian righteousness, of which it is completely ignorant, but on its own righteousness or, at most, on the righteousness of the law. As soon as reason and the law are joined, faith immediately loses its virginity. For nothing is more hostile to faith than the law and reason."[75]

For Luther, faith is not merely affirming religious propositions, though he accepts such classical Christian credal statements as the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. Faith is personal trust in the gospel. But during assaults on

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73 Luther, *Galatians,* 238.
74 Luther, *Galatians,* 156.
75 Luther, *Galatians,* 113.

the soul (German *Anfechtungen*), or temptations to doubt God's grace, believers are prone to move from trusting in the gospel to trusting in obedience to the law, and *sinful reason supports this tendency*. During spiritual assaults, fallen reason confuses law and gospel, so believers either fall into despair of pleasing God or else into false confidence, presuming they can please God without the gospel: "When it comes to experience, you will find the gospel a rare guest but the law a constant guest in your conscience, which is habituated to the law and the sense of sin; reason too supports this sense."[76]

Reason rarely overcomes the tendency to forget the gospel and rely on the law. Luther does not think that people should become irrational. The solution is to employ reason to its fullest in its proper realm: everyday, practical affairs. Reason is properly applied in the realm of the "orders"—the realm of the civil use of the law. Discussing a popular proverb, "God does not require of any man that he do more than he really can," Luther tightly connected reason to everyday affairs:

> "This is actually a good statement, but in its proper place, that is, in political, domestic, and natural affairs. For example, if I, who exist *in the realm of reason*, rule a family, build a house, or carry on a government office, and I do as much as I can or what lies within me, I am excused."[77]

With this understanding of the proper realm of reason, Luther could praise Greek political philosophy and Roman law, though he also describes reason and philosophy very negatively. Of itself, reason knows nothing about the gospel and tends to confuse law and gospel; nevertheless, reason can know much about the moral law and its application in everyday life. In this realm reason must be treasured. The knowledge of the moral law possessed by reason is the result of God's revelation through creation. Because of sin and unbelief, this reasonable knowledge of the moral law will need to be corrected by the command of God in the Scriptures; nevertheless, reason can know the law. Therefore, by reason, civil righteousness is possible for many who do not know the gospel:

> "The sophists, as well as anyone else who does not grasp the doctrine of justification, do not know of any other righteousness than civil righteousness or the righteousness of the law, which are known in some measure even to the heathen."[78]

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[76] Luther, *Galatians,* 117.
[77] Luther, *Galatians,* 173, 174. Emphasis added.
[78] Luther, *Galatians,* 261.

Calvin's doctrine of reason is similar to that of Luther, but with a subtle shift. After celebrating the ability of human reason in the natural realm, the result of God's general grace and general revelation, Calvin asks what reason knows of God:

> "We must now analyze what human reason can discern with regard to God's Kingdom and to spiritual insight. This spiritual insight consists chiefly in three things: (1) knowing God; (2) knowing his fatherly favor in our behalf, in which our salvation consists; (3) knowing how to frame our life according to the rule of his law. In the two first points — and especially in the second — the greatest geniuses are blinder than moles!"[79]

Calvin distinguished knowing what God is like (point 1 above) from knowing how God relates to man in the gospel (point 2). Though reason is not always completely wrong about God's being, statements on this topic by philosophers "always show a certain giddy imagination."[80] But unaided reason is "blinder than a mole" in regard to understanding God's fatherly care and the gospel. To properly trust in God's fatherly care, the gospel, Scripture, and the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit are needed.

Though reason is worthless in the realm of the gospel, Calvin emphasizes reason in area 3, "how to frame our life according to the rule of his law." This is the realm of the civil use of God's moral law, the natural moral law, and civil righteousness.

> "There remains the third aspect of spiritual insight, that of knowing the rule for the right conduct of life. This we correctly call the 'knowledge of the works of righteousness.' The human mind sometimes seems more acute in this than in higher things. For the apostle testifies: 'When Gentiles, who do not have the law, do the works of the law, they are a law to themselves . . . and show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their thoughts accuse them among themselves or excuse them before God's judgment' [Rom. 2:14–15]. If Gentiles by nature have law righteousness engraved upon their minds, we surely cannot say they are utterly blind as to the conduct of life. There is nothing more common than for a man to be sufficiently instructed in a right standard of conduct by natural law."[81]

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79 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), II, ii, 18.

80 Calvin, *Institutes,* II, ii, 18.

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

Reason often knows right and wrong based on the natural (God-given) moral law, and this knowledge can provide "a right standard of conduct." Calvin never suggests that this knowledge equips people to earn God's favor. Even though people often know the good, and on this basis practice civil righteousness, they are still sinful; the natural knowledge of right and wrong received by reason renders people blameworthy before God.

Calvin carefully qualifies what reason knows about the moral law. Sin darkens our knowing process. We do not always in fact know what we should in principle know by reason. The written moral law is extremely important:

> "Now that inward law [the natural moral law], which we have above described as written, even engraved, upon the hearts of all, in a sense asserts the very same things that are to be learned from the two Tables [the Ten Commandments]. For our conscience does not allow us to sleep a perpetual insensible sleep without being an inner witness and monitor of what we owe to God, without holding before us the difference between good and evil and thus accusing us when we fail in our duty. But man is so shrouded in the darkness of errors that he hardly begins to grasp through this natural law what worship is acceptable to God . . . Accordingly (because it is necessary both for our dullness and for our arrogance), the Lord has provided us with a written law to give us clearer witness of what was too obscure in the natural law, shake off our listlessness, and strike more vigorously our mind and memory."[82]

There is a difference between how Luther and Calvin understand the influence of sin on our perception of the natural moral law. Calvin emphasizes the way in which the content of our knowledge is darkened, while Luther emphasizes the way in which people misuse this knowledge to earn God's favor. They agree that knowledge of God's natural moral law is available to reason and allows people to know right and wrong, but unaided reason cannot know how to relate properly to God. And the Bible is needed to know more fully what kinds of good works should follow faith.

VII. The Uses of the Law

Some see a large difference between Luther and Calvin regarding the proper uses of the law. The evidence shows a difference in terminology, literary style, and personality-driven reactions to the moral law within a substantially similar perspective. Calvin may have taken Luther's doctrine

[82] Calvin, *Institutes*, II, viii, 1.

and refined the terminology, though Luther might have been dissatisfied with some aspects of this development.

If the moral law is not to be used to earn God's favor, what are its proper uses or functions? Luther speaks of two proper uses of the law, the civic and the theological, with the theological use being primary. While discussing Galatians 3:19, Luther claims:

> "One must know that there is a double use of the law. One is the civic use. God has ordained civic laws, indeed all laws, to restrain transgressions. Therefore, every law was given to hinder sins. Does this mean that when the law restrains sins, it justifies? Not at all. When I refrain from killing or from committing adultery or from stealing, or when I abstain from other sins, I do not do this voluntarily or from the love of virtue but because I am afraid of the sword and of the executioner. This prevents me, as the ropes or chains prevent a lion or a bear from ravaging something that comes along . . . The first understanding and use of the law is to restrain the wicked . . . This is why God has ordained magistrates, parents, teachers, laws, shackles, and all civic ordinances."[83]

Though the civic use of the law is important to make civic righteousness possible, it is not the most important use of the law. The ultimate use of the law is to show us our sin and need for the gospel:

> "The other use of the law is the theological or spiritual one, which serves to increase transgressions . . . Therefore the true function and the chief and proper use of the law is to reveal to man his sin, blindness, misery, wickedness, ignorance, hate, and contempt of God, death, hell, judgment, and the well-deserved wrath of God."[84]

At this point Luther waxes eloquent about the value of God's law, but his point is clear—there are two uses of the moral law that must be distinguished from each other. In the civic or political use, the law restrains sin to make civilization possible, whether the law comes directly from God or indirectly through human laws, civic authorities, or other humane influences.[85] The theological use leads a person to despair and prepares him for

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[83] Luther, *Galatians,* 308, 309.

[84] Luther, *Galatians,* 309.

[85] Luther's doctrine of the public use of God's law dropped out of later Lutheran Pietism. "In Pietism the law is essentially a power that discloses the sin in the heart of man. The law is not an instrument of God's governance of society by means of external, physical actions. What the Reformers called the 'political use' of the law has, also, as far as I can see, entirely disappeared . . . in Pietism." Gustaf Wingren,

hearing the gospel. Because of its close relation to the gospel, the theological use of the law is primary.[86]

Calvin speaks about three uses of the law, but he does not discuss all three uses in relation to Galatians, because he does not think that Paul discussed all three uses there. In discussing Galatians 3:19, Calvin offers a rare criticism of Luther:

> "For many, I find, have fallen into the mistake of acknowledging no other advantage belonging to the law, but what is expressed here. Paul himself elsewhere speaks of the precepts of the law as profitable for doctrine and exhortations (2 Timothy 3:16). The definition here given of the use of the law is not complete, and those who refuse to make any other acknowledgment in favor of the law do wrong."[87]

Calvin agrees that Galatians teaches Luther's two proper uses of the law. Calvin insists that the rest of the Bible also teaches a third use.

Calvin calls his first use of the law the primitive function of the law, which is similar to Luther's theological use:

> "Let us survey briefly the function and use of what is called the 'moral law.' Now, so far as I understand it, it consists of three parts."
>
> "The first part is this: while it shows God's righteousness, that is the righteousness alone acceptable to God, it warns, informs, convicts, and lastly condemns, every man of his own unrighteousness. For man, blinded and drunk with self-love, must be compelled to know and to confess his own feebleness and impurity."[88]

Calvin compares the law to a mirror; as a mirror shows the spots on one's face, so the law shows sin, though with different results among believers and unbelievers. Unbelievers are terrified; believers flee to God's mercy in Christ. Calvin and Luther use different language to describe this use,

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Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology (New York: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1979), 32. John Hesselink pointed out that John Wesley, who lived during the same time as the early Pietist movement and had extensive influence on early Pietists, also omitted the *usus politicus* from his theology and ethics. I. John Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law* (Allison Park, Pennsylvania: Pickwick Publications, 1992), 268.

86 It is God's law in its theological use, as described by Martin Luther, that leads to saying God's Word is the ultimate critic of all cultures, as was said in a previous chapter.

87 Calvin, *Galatians,* 99, 100.

88 Calvin, *Institutes*, II, vii, 6.

reflecting differences in personality. Luther seems to have gone through a two-step process, dropping into despair before turning away from the law and toward the gospel. The continuing, repeated assaults on his soul are echoed in his language about the law. Calvin seems to have gone through a one-step process, immediately turning from the law to the gospel without intermediate despair; his language about the law does not usually contain echoes of terror.

Calvin's second use of the law is Luther's first use — the civic or political use:

> "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 unless compelled by hearing the dire threats in the law. But they are restrained not because their inner mind is stirred or affected, but because, being bridled, so to speak, they keep their hands from outward activity, and hold inside the depravity that otherwise they would wantonly have indulged."[89]

The differences between Luther and Calvin are small but noteworthy. Luther understands the moral law in its civic use as largely mediated through societal orders, whether the state, the family, the school, or the church. Calvin conceives of the civil use of the law as being largely unmediated, in the direct encounter of an individual with God. Of course, Calvin believes the civil magistrate must prevent societal chaos, which he regards as the worst of evils. But when he turns to his second use of the law, he first considers each person's direct encounter with God.[90]

Calvin says the third use of the law is primary:

> "The third and principal use, which pertains more closely to the proper use of the law, finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns. For even though they have the law written and engraved upon their hearts by the finger of God (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 10:16), that is, have been so moved and quickened through the directing of the Spirit that they long to obey God, they still profit by the law in two ways."[91]

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

90 What Luther and Calvin described as the civil or political use of God's moral law is closely intertwined with the ways in which God's Word contributes to cultures, as was articulated in a previous chapter.

91 Calvin, *Institutes*, II, vi, 12.

Calvin's two ways in which the law helps believers are teaching the will of God, which believers desire to follow, and exhorting believers to continued obedience. Though Calvin does not use this terminology, they could be called "Use 3A" and "Use 3B," respectively. Concerning Use 3A, Calvin claims the law "is the best instrument for them to learn more thoroughly each day the nature of the Lord's will to which they aspire, and to confirm them in the understanding of it."[92] He uses vivid language about Use 3B: "by frequent meditation upon it to be aroused to obedience, be strengthened in it, and be drawn back from the slippery path of transgression."[93]

Lest one think the desires of believers are all negative, Calvin explains:

> "For the law is not now acting toward us as a rigorous enforcement officer who is not satisfied unless the requirements are met. But in this perfection to which it exhorts us, the law points out the goal toward which throughout life we are to strive."[94]

For Calvin, the law can become a friend in a way Luther did not imagine. Calvin knows, like Luther, that the law always accuses believers, but for Calvin this accusation is in light of a deep, continuing assurance of God's fatherly care, so the threats and harshness can be removed from the believer's experience of the law. Like Luther, Calvin fully affirms the principle of *simul justus et peccator*, that the believer is simultaneously justified and sinful; therefore, the believer needs the law of God as a guide to life. But the new obedience to the law is an expression of gratitude for the gospel without any hint of using the moral law as a tool for self-justification.

Was Calvin's gentle criticism of Luther correct, assuming the validity of Calvin's threefold use? The answer is "probably not," because Luther's view of the uses of the law is closer to Calvin's than Calvin may have recognized, even though Luther does not usually use the term "third use." The reason for this claim is that the content of Calvin's Use 3B, that believers "be drawn back from the slippery path of transgression," is included in Luther's civic use of the law, restraining sin. Luther and Calvin both think the sin of believers needs to be restrained. The difference in terminology is only where this theme appears in the outline.

Then there is the question of knowing the will of God, to which believers should aspire; Calvin calls this third use of the law "primary," which Luther does not. But for Calvin this use of the moral law is "primary" in an ideal sense, as if God's people were all walking by faith, desiring to obey

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92 Calvin, *Institutes*, II, vi, 12.
93 Calvin, *Institutes*, II, vi, 12.
94 Calvin, *Institutes*, II, vi, 13.

God, and merely questioning what they should do. In practice, Calvin makes the theological, condemning use of the law very important. In his *Institutes,* the insightful discussion of the Decalogue is included in the section analyzing the human predicament, prior to his discussion of the gospel. Calvin is using the law in its theological function to show sin. If Calvin had emphasized only the third use of the law, he would have discussed the law only after his discussion of Christology and justification. In practice, Calvin's use of the law is close to Luther's recommendations about which use is primary.

At the same time, Luther's notion of the "command of God" found in Scripture as the norm for the Christian life very closely resembles Calvin's Use 3A, showing how Christians should live in gratitude for the gospel. The first problem with the works Luther had done as a monk was that they were intended to deserve or earn God's favor; the second problem was that his works were the wrong works. True good works have to be done in obedience to God's word in the Scriptures and flow from faith in the gospel, not substitute for faith in the gospel. This teaching of Luther approximates Calvin's Use 3A.[95]

Luther made negative statements about the law. In the preface to his study on Galatians, he claimed:

> "The highest act and wisdom of Christians is not to know the law, to ignore works and all active righteousness, just as outside the people of God the highest wisdom is to know and study the law, works and active righteousness."[96]

Nevertheless, Luther also says, "the works of the law must be performed either before justification or after justification."[97]

> "When outward duties must be performed, then, whether you are a preacher, a magistrate, a husband, a teacher, a pupil, etc., this is not time to listen to the gospel. You must listen to the law and follow your vocation."[98]

Luther teaches that the works of obedience to the moral law not only follow justification in a chronological manner; obedience to the law is a fruit of faith:

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[95] It is God's law in its "third" use that leads to the formation of Christian countercultures, a theme mentioned in a previous chapter.

[96] Luther, *Galatians,* 6.

[97] Luther, *Galatians,* 123.

[98] Luther, *Galatians,* 117.

> "Anyone who wants to exert himself toward righteousness must first exert himself in listening to the gospel. Now when he has heard and accepted this, let him joyfully give thanks to God, and then let him exert himself in good works that are commanded in the law; thus the law and works will follow hearing with faith. Then he will be able to walk safely in the light that is Christ; to be certain about choosing and doing works that are not hypocritical but truly good, pleasing to God, and commanded by him; and to reject all the mummery of self-chosen works."[99]

After contrasting the righteousness of the law with the righteousness of faith, Luther declares:

> "When he [Christ] has been grasped by faith, then the Holy Spirit is granted on Christ's account. Then God and neighbor are loved, good works are performed, and the cross is borne. This is really keeping the law . . . Hence it is impossible for us to keep the law without the promise."[100]

Luther elaborates:

> "Moses, together with Paul, necessarily drives us to Christ, through whom we become doers of the law and are accounted guilty of no transgression. How? First, through the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of righteousness, on account of faith in Christ; secondly, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, who creates a new life and new impulses in us, so that we may keep the law."[101]

Luther teaches that law-keeping by believers has three important purposes:

> "What is the purpose of keeping it [the law] if it does not justify? The final cause of the obedience of the law by the righteous is not righteousness in the sight of God, which is received by faith alone, but the peace of the world, gratitude toward God, and a good example by which others are invited to believe the gospel."[102]

Like Calvin, Luther teaches that keeping the moral law of God is the proper expression of gratitude for the gospel. There are differences in terminology regarding the proper uses of the law, with differences of personality

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99 Luther, *Galatians,* 214, 215.

100 Luther, *Galatians,* 255.

101 Luther, *Galatians,* 260.

102 Luther, *Galatians,* 273. The term "final cause" was a way of talking about purpose inspired by the terminology of Aristotle.

behind those differences in terminology, but the massive agreement between Luther and Calvin sets a standard for discussions of the use of God's law.

VIII. Comments

Luther and Calvin agree that the relationship between law and gospel is central to the Christian faith for several reasons. They see this relation as central in the Bible, in *both* the Old and New Testaments; in other words, the biblical interpreter is not properly examining the Scriptures if this central relation between law and gospel is not perceived. This consideration must not be forgotten. Following directly from this, the ability to clearly distinguish and properly relate law and gospel is regarded as central to qualifying a person as an evangelical theologian. This ability enables a person to apply the biblical message to human experience in a balanced manner that flows from a central thematic structure of the biblical proclamation.

This is closely related to the Reformation apprehension that the biblical relationship between law and gospel addresses one of the deepest existential dynamics within human beings, both individually and culturally. People will always respond to the moral law in some way, whether in despair because of inability to keep the law, in false confidence because of supposed earned righteousness, or by turning to the gospel. Others may turn to a deficient gospel, because believing some sort of gospel is hard to avoid. This existential relation to law and gospel is constant and dynamic throughout one's lifetime. For this reason, it is wise to address these issues continually in preaching and pastoral care. We should see law (in its multiple uses) and gospel as truly central to the application of the biblical message, because it is central to the divine-human encounter.[103] In relation to

[103] The second question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) clearly used this framework for preaching and teaching. Question 1 asks, "What is your only comfort in life and in death?" and then offers the answer "That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ." Question 2 asks, "How many things is it necessary for you to know in order to live and die in the joy of this comfort?" The answer is based on the relation between law and gospel as understood by the major Protestant reformers. "Three things: first, how great my sin and misery are; second, how I am set free from all my sins and misery; third, how I am to be thankful to God for such deliverance." The first knowledge comes from God's law in its theological or condemning function. The second knowledge comes from the gospel. The third knowledge comes from God's law in its "third" use, that of teaching us what kind of life gives God

culture, each use of the moral law, as well as the gospel, leads to a distinct relationship of God's Word to cultures.

Some weaknesses in our proclamation of God's Word can be strengthened by Reformation teaching on law and gospel. One weakness has been forgetting the connection between the moral law and God's general revelation.[104] Forgetting this connection can cause us to miss the way in which people without the gospel already encounter God's law in both its theological and civic uses, thus weakening our approach to social ethics, culture, and missions. In social ethics, we should assume that all people already encounter God's moral law through creation and conscience; therefore, moral claims rooted in the Bible clarify and strengthen moral knowledge that people already have, though this knowledge is darkened or misused. Because moral claims rooted in the Bible build on knowledge given by God's general revelation, some biblical principles can gain acceptance by people who do not accept the Bible. This was discussed in a previous chapter under the topic of the *contribution* of God's Word to cultures.

In missions and evangelism, we can expect that people will normally have questions and anxieties arising from their encounter with the moral law in its theological use, proclaimed by God's general revelation; this is the cause of the *correlation* or question/answer relation between the gospel and human experience, between the Word of God and cultures.

Another weakness has been a failure to distinguish how the moral law relates to reason from how the gospel relates to reason. The claim that we are justified in Christ is purely a statement of faith in the gospel, whereas the claim that murder is wrong is based on reason as well as on faith. This leads to more differentiation in our discussions of faith and reason. This differentiation can strengthen how we discuss integrating evangelical theology and ethics with learning in the various academic fields.

A further weakness has been forgetting the civil use of the moral law. This has made it more difficult for evangelicals to develop social ethics that do not sound like either an attempt to flee the world (ethics of holy community) or an attempt to take over the world (ethics of theocratic domination). There is a distinct and proper relation of the moral law, given by God, to human experience, reason, and society, which we can learn to use in our civic ethics. This will enable us to talk and act as responsible citizens

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gratitude for the salvation proclaimed in the gospel. The civil use of the law is not mentioned, very likely because it is not closely related to an individual living and dying in the comfort of belonging to Jesus Christ.

104 Unfortunately, Karl Barth did much to promote this problem by his rejection of general revelation. See a following chapter in this book.

contributing to the public good, being open about our Christian faith, without adopting a fight-or-flight relationship to society.[105]

Therefore, it is wise to see the relation between law and gospel as a hermeneutical and homiletical key in a twofold sense. Historically, this is the key to the Reformers' hermeneutics and homiletics, needed to understand the Reformation. Normatively, we should see the relation between law and gospel as a hermeneutical/homiletical key to interpret, apply, and proclaim the biblical message in a balanced and full manner on the global stage. This distinction gives a substantial and unified structure to our hermeneutics, theology, social ethics, practical theology, and homiletics.

[105] I have addressed these topics in *Natural Law Ethics: An Evangelical Proposal* (Bonn: VKW, 2005) and in "Biblical Principles in the Public Square," MBS Text 108, available at https://www.bucer.de/ressource/details/mbs-texte-108-2008-biblical-principles-in-the-public-square.html. This forms the background for my *Human Rights: A Christian Primer* (World Evangelical Alliance, 2008).

A Terrible Mistake: Denying God's Natural Moral Law[106]

The denial of God's natural moral law in Protestant theology in the twentieth century is, in my assessment, one crucial reason why Christians lost the battle for the soul of Western civilization. We theologians disarmed God's people on the eve of the battle with exclusive secularism and the resulting extreme moral relativism, so our people did not know how to address the public square about such diverse questions as sexuality, human rights, or education without giving the impression that a person or a society must first follow Jesus to know the difference between right and wrong.

In previous centuries, Christian theologians, both Catholics and Protestants, had claimed in various ways that God's moral law was present within human nature, conscience, or reason, so that all people can know the difference between right and wrong, even if that natural moral knowledge might be limited or distorted. Building on this background, supported by my exegesis of Romans 1 and 2, I have argued that God's ongoing general revelation gives all people a real though deniable knowledge of God's moral law.[107] However, claims of this sort were denied by some of the most influential Protestant voices of the twentieth century.

The rejection of natural law ethics and general revelation was part of a well-intended attempt to purify Protestantism from its subordination to beliefs arising from Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment philosophy. The people who rejected God's natural moral law were all seeking a renewed Protestant theology, ethics, and church that would be more deeply rooted in God's revelation in Christ and Scripture and no longer extensively compromised by purely secular ideas. However, the loss occasioned by this attempted intellectual repentance and self-purification was massive. In this essay we will consider the rejection of the natural moral law and its implications for public life, using the Holocaust as an example. There were also significant implications for how we know God, how we

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[106] This essay was previously published as "The Rejection of God's Natural Moral Law: Losing the Soul of Western Civilization," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 43:3 (2019), 243-252.

[107] Thomas K. Johnson, *The First Step in Missions Training: How Our Neighbors Are Wrestling with God's General Revelation* (Bonn: WEA, 2014), 15-27; https://www.academia.edu/36885979/Gods_General_Revelation.

preach in the churches, and how we approach missions, but I will not address those issues here.

"Culture Protestantism" was a term used by European (mostly German-speaking) neo-orthodox theologians, such as Karl Barth and Helmut Thielicke, to describe the liberal European Protestant theology of the previous century. Some of the prominent writers described by this term were Friedrich Schleiermacher, Albrecht Ritschl, Wilhelm Herrmann, and Adolf von Harnack. These theologians held a variety of convictions, but what they shared in common was that they turned the Protestant faith into pious feelings and moral values while de-emphasizing such Christian doctrines as the Trinity, the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus, or the holiness of God.

Within the German-speaking countries, Karl Barth led the way in calling for a renewed theology of the Word of God that rejected the dominance of the Enlightenment (as reflected in Culture Protestantism). However, Barth did not sufficiently appreciate the fact that Culture Protestantism was not only a rejection of key elements of standard Christian belief; it was also a rejection of God's universal moral law and always inclined toward moral relativism.[108] Neither European neo-orthodoxy nor American fundamentalism recovered this part of the Christian heritage in response to liberal Protestantism.

Karl Barth's rejection of natural law and general revelation as acceptable, normal themes in Protestant theology and ethics was not his theological priority, but he nevertheless had great influence in this regard. Most other Protestant thinkers who took similar positions were either followers of Barth or influenced by the climate of opinion that he shaped. After looking at Barth, we will consider one of his followers who modified Barth's perspective (Helmut Thielicke) and a thinker who shared the climate of opinion shaped by Barth (Evan Runner).

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[108] Emil Brunner commented, "It is not Karl Barth who is the first [theological] opponent of natural law but Ritschl and the Ritschlian school, where the opposition to this concept is grounded in Kantian agnosticism. Further back, it is romantic historicism, which in jurisprudence, as well as in theology, opposed natural law as being 'unhistorical.' If the Barthians who so valiantly fought against the Hitler state only knew a little more of the history of political thinking in Germany, they would become aware of the fact that the fight against natural law resulted in the abolition of all standards by which what the present day State sees fit to declare law might be criticized." *Christianity and Civilization:* Vol. 1: *Foundations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948) 165, note 78.

Karl Barth (1886–1968)

"Human righteousness is, as we have seen, in itself an illusion: there is in this world no observable righteousness. There may, however, be a righteousness before God, a righteousness that comes from Him."[109] With such words Barth rejected the synthesis of Christianity with European culture and philosophy, a synthesis that he viewed as dating back at least to Friedrich Schleiermacher and which, Barth claimed, led to the religious endorsement of nationalism and militarism, such as that seen in the initially widespread Christian support for Hitler and National Socialism.[110]

Barth was not so much addressing a single theological issue as questioning a general pattern of relating the Christian faith to Western culture, namely Culture Protestantism.[111] As Barth saw it, this pattern reduced Christianity to being the religious component or dimension of the best principles of Western civilization, such that Christian beliefs were interpreted, evaluated, and accepted on the basis of ideas coming from Western culture. In other words, Barth thought Western Christianity had capitulated to the Enlightenment, largely giving secular philosophy the authority to decide the basis on which one should accept Christian beliefs, thereby also controlling how one should interpret and apply Christian beliefs.

Barth's comments on Schleiermacher typify this assessment. "The most authentic work of Christianity is making culture the triumph of the Spirit over nature, while being a Christian is the peak of a fully cultured consciousness. The kingdom of God, according to Schleiermacher, is totally and completely identical with the progress of culture." Further, for Schleiermacher, according to Barth, the "existence of churches is really an 'element that is necessary for the development of the human spirit.'"[112]

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[109] Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, translated from the sixth edition by Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1933), 75.

[110] See Robin W. Lovin, *Christian Faith and Public Choices: The Social Ethics of Barth, Brunner, and Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 18–44; Arthur C. Cochrane, *The Church's Confession under Hitler* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962); Robert P. Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, and Emanuel Hirsch* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985); and Will Herberg, 'The Social Philosophy of Karl Barth', in *Community, State and Church: Three Essays by Karl Barth*, ed. Will Herberg (New York: Anchor Books, 1960).

[111] On Culture Protestantism, see C. J. Curtis, *Contemporary Protestant Thought* (New York: Bruce Publishing Company, 1970), 97–103.

[112] Karl Barth, *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert* (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1946), 388. This book contains Barth's critique of the capitulation of Christianity to the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment philosophy.

Barth summarizes his own position in contrast to Schleiermacher when he suggests that real theologians "should seek the secret of Christianity beyond all culture."[113] Barth declares that God stands over against even the best in human culture as both Judge and Redeemer.

A crucial part of this subordination of Christianity to European culture, Barth claimed, was the doctrine of general revelation as held by natural theology, which seeks to prove the existence of God. Though Barth had been speaking out against natural theology for many years before the rise of National Socialism, Hitler's rise to power and the religious support Hitler received brought the issue to a head.

> "The question became a burning one at the moment when the Evangelical Church in Germany was unambiguously and consistently confronted by a definite and new form of natural theology, namely, by the demand to recognise in the political events of the year 1933, and especially in the form of the God-sent Adolf Hitler, a source of specific new revelation of God, which, demanding obedience and trust, took its place beside the revelation attested in Holy Scripture, claiming it should be acknowledged by Christian proclamation and theology as equally binding and obligatory . . . [This would lead to] the transformation of the Christian Church into the temple of the German nature-and-history-myth."[114]

Barth did not want the immediate crisis of National Socialism to blind Christians to the broader problem of which the church's endorsement of Hitler was, in his opinion, merely a particular manifestation:

> "The same had already been the case in the developments of the preceding centuries. There can be no doubt that not merely a part but the whole had been intended and claimed when it had been demanded that side by side with its attestation in Jesus Christ and therefore in Holy Scripture the Church should also recognise and proclaim God's revelation in reason, in conscience, in the emotions, in history, in nature and in culture and its achievements and developments."[115]

Barth added, "If it was admissible and right and perhaps even orthodox to combine the knowability of God in Jesus Christ with His knowability in

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113 Barth, *Die protestantische Theologie*, 388.

114 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: A Selection*, trans. and ed. G. W. Bromiley (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 55. The quotation is from *Church Dogmatics* II,1.

115 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 55. See the excellent treatment in Bruce Demarest, *General Revelation: Historical Views and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 115–34.

nature, reason and history, the proclamation of the Gospel with all kinds of other proclamations . . . it is hard to see why the German Church should not be allowed to make its own particular use of the procedure."[116]

Barth saw the Barmen Confession (31 May 1934), of which he was the principal author, as not only a response to the particular problem of the German Christian movement that supported Hitler but also an attempt to purify the entire Protestant church of the problem of natural theology. Barmen forcefully rejects natural revelation: "Jesus Christ, as He is attested to us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God, whom we have to hear and whom we have to trust and obey in life and in death. We condemn the false doctrine that the Church can and must recognise as God's revelation other events and powers, forms and truth, apart from and alongside this one Word of God."[117]

In contrast to all claims that God could be encountered through natural theology, natural revelation, natural law, or National Socialism, Barth proclaimed that God is known only through his Word, meaning Jesus Christ. Any other approach, he declared, reduced the Christian faith to a mere religious dimension of Western culture, thereby accommodating God's Word to culture.

Barth's approach may be illustrated by his discussion of the traditional Protestant topic of the relation between law and gospel. He thought that sinful humans were very inclined to give the title "law of God" to demands that did not come from God at all. That is why he changed the traditional phrase "law and gospel" to "gospel and law." "Anyone who really and earnestly would first say Law and only then, presupposing this, say Gospel would not, no matter how good his intention, be speaking of the Law of *God* and therefore then certainly not *his* Gospel."[118]

The order "law and gospel," used by Protestants since the Reformation, assumed a revelation of God's law through creation that has an impact on human life before people accept the gospel.[119] But this order, Barth thought, risked giving the title "law of God" to demands that came from the German people, the Führer, or other false sources. To avoid this error, Barth referred to "gospel and law" to emphasize that we know for sure

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116 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 57.

117 This is the first article of the Barmen Confession as quoted by Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 54. So far as I know, this is the only Protestant confession that denies that God reveals himself through creation, although some other confessions do not discuss God's general revelation at length.

118 Karl Barth, "Gospel and Law," in Herberg, *Community, State and Church*, 71.

119 See Hans O. Tiefel, *The Ethics of Gospel and Law: Aspects of the Barth-Luther Debate*, Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1967.

that a law is from God only if it follows the gospel: "We must first of all know about the Gospel in order to know about the Law, and not vice versa."[120]

Finally, Barth contended that natural-law thinking robbed people of courage when they had to confront evil: "All arguments based on natural law are Janus-headed. They do not lead to the light of clear decisions, but to misty twilight in which all cats become grey. They lead to—Munich."[121] Barth's bold resistance of the Nazis, as he saw it, arose from his starting point in hearing the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. He thought any other basis for ethics, whether natural law or any other method, led to moral compromise.

Helmut Thielicke (1908–1986)

Thielicke's rejection of natural law broadly follows Barth, one of his first theology professors in the early 1930s; Thielicke also rejected both natural-law ethics and the capitulation by Western Christianity to the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment ideologies.[122] (Thielicke too was involved in the anti-Nazi movement among Protestant Christians in Germany during World War II.) Nevertheless, he added some considerations that merit separate discussion.

Whereas traditionally Protestants associated the Ten Commandments with the natural law, Thielicke associated them with "natural lawlessness."[123] Noting the negative "Thou shalt not" structure of many com-

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120 Barth, "Gospel and Law," 72. I have responded to Barth in "Law and Gospel: The Hermeneutical/Homiletical Key to Reformation Theology and Ethics," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 43:1 (2019), which because a previous chapter in this book.

121 Herberg, *Community, State and Church*, 49. In the Munich Agreement of 1938, France and Britain permitted the Nazi takeover of the Czech Sudetenland. This agreement became a watchword for the futility of appeasing totalitarianism.

122 Thielicke's critique of the capitulation of Christianity to the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought is found in *The Evangelical Faith* (hereafter EF), vol. 1: *Prolegomena: The Relation of Theology to Modern Thought Forms*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), and in *Modern Faith and Thought,* trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

123 Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics* (hereafter *TE*), vol. 1: *Foundations*, trans. and ed. William H. Lazareth (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rpt. 1984), 444. The material about Thielicke is broadly dependent on my Ph.D. dissertation, *Helmut Thielicke's Ethics of Law and Gospel* (University of Iowa, 1987). Representing the traditional Protestant view, John Calvin claimed that natural law, "which we have above described as written, even engraved, upon the hearts of all, in a sense asserts the very same things that are to be learned from the two Tables." *Institutes of the Christian Religion*,

mandments, he claimed, "There is within this negativity a protest against man as he actually is."[124] This approach was in opposition, he contended, to natural law conceptions, which "can be assumed only on the presupposition that the fall has only a comparatively accidental but not an essential significance."[125] "Natural law and the Decalogue in fact belong to completely different worlds."[126] For Thielicke, the Ten Commandments harshly confront and condemn our natural lawlessness.

This observation relates to Thielicke's critique of Culture Protestantism. Whereas "The Decalogue is expressly set down within the context of a dialogue"[127] (meaning a dialogue with God in personal faith), natural law and Culture Protestantism conceive of moral decisions as being made by solitary egos, seeing God as the distant author of moral laws:

> "Culture Protestantism makes Christianity into a form of the world (*Weltgestalt*) in the sense that the commands of God—including the command to love one's neighbour—are detached from the divine *auctor legis* and from the relationship of decision and faith with this author. One could also say that Culture Protestantism tends to separate the second table of the law from the first Commandment ('I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other gods besides me') and then represents the individual commandments as maxims of Christian behaviour."[128]

Thielicke thought that as soon as the commands of God are separated from their source, they undergo a change of meaning that leaves them significantly different from what they were intended to be. Specifically, biblical moral prescriptions fall prey to ideological perversion once they are separated from God. For example, he thought the maxim "the interests of the group come before the interests of the individual" could be a legitimate application of the biblical love command. But it was also used by the Nazis in their terrible ideology.

Thielicke similarly saw in the early works of Karl Marx a secularized expression of Christian love, but once this love command was separated from its source and integrated into the system of historical materialism,

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ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), II.vii.1. This connection of God's natural law with the Ten Commandments is present in most of the Protestant Reformers.

124 Thielicke, *TE*, 1:441.

125 Thielicke, *TE*, 1:443.

126 Thielicke, *TE*, 1:444.

127 Thielicke, *TE*, 1:442.

128 Helmut Thielicke, *Kirche und Öffentllichkeit: Zur Grundlegung einer lutherischen Kulturethik* (Tubingen: Furche Verlag, 1947), 44.

its meaning was substantially changed.[129] A moral theory that allows the independence of a moral command from God risks serious ideological perversion. "Only the one who stands in personal contact with the Lord of the First Commandment, as one who has been called and who follows, recognizes that the commands of God are something 'wholly other.'"[130]

Thielicke took a correspondingly new, anti–natural law direction in interpreting the Sermon on the Mount:

> "The harsh and apparently alien aspect of the Sermon on the Mount is its true point. It makes its demands with no regard for constitutional factors such as the impulses or for the limitations imposed on my personal will by autonomous structures . . . It does not claim me merely in a sphere of personal freedom. It thus compels me to identify myself with my total I. Hence I have to see in the world, not merely the creation of God, but also the structural form of human sin, i.e., its suprapersonal form, the 'fallen' world . . . I have to confess that I myself have fallen, and that what I see out there is the structural objectification of my fall."[131]

Whereas Culture Protestants, natural law theorists, and "German Christians" generally saw societal structures as the result of creation, perhaps calling them "creation orders," Thielicke saw them as resulting from the Fall.[132] Other views, he claimed, resulted from minimizing the total demand of God encountered in the Sermon on the Mount and left people without a complete sense of responsibility for all their actions.

Thielicke's discussion of the problem of "autonomous norms" recalls Barth's concern for granting moral authority as the "law of God" to a norm that does not deserve such a noble classification:

> "Since Kant the fact is known and deeply rooted in our thinking that the individual spheres of life are endowed with their autonomous norms. He imputed this autonomous structure principally to the spheres of meaning of the ethical, the esthetical and the theoretical. More recently one has learned to reckon with the autonomy of all the historical spheres of life; one knows

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129 Helmut Thielicke, *Vernunft und Existenz bei Lessing: Das Unbedingte in der Geschichte* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 49.

130 Thielicke, *Kirche und Öffentlichkeit*, 45, 46.

131 Helmut Thielicke, *EF*, vol. 2: *The Doctrine of God and of Christ*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 248.

132 In Europe during the mid-twentieth century, the term "German Christians" referred to the Christians who actively, sometimes vehemently, supported Hitler's policies. In German they were called "*die Deutsche Christen Bewegung*" or simply "deutsche Christen."

> of the autonomy of the state, of economic life, of law and of politics. One grants each of these historical spheres an autonomous structure because it is endowed with a constituting principle, from which all its proper functions can be derived."[133]

Because people think there are "immanent principles which so control the processes involved as to make them proceed automatically,"[134] people say business is business, art is art, politics is politics. Even responsible people talk and act as if each sphere of life and society has its own natural laws that carry validity and authority regardless of any moral principles or ethical rules coming from an outside source, whether that source is God, the Bible, or the church. Thielicke denies the validity of these autonomous norms, viewing them as an expression of our fallenness. They are structural expressions of sin, not creation orders in which we encounter a God-given natural moral law. And if one of these immanent principles or autonomous norms is absolutized or idolized, secular ideologies such as National Socialism or Communism result.[135]

Thielicke claimed that all natural-law theories of ethics made two crucial assumptions: (1) there exists a perceptible order of existence that can be traced back to creation; (2) human reason is largely untouched by sin, so all people can perceive this moral order.[136] Thielicke rejected both assumptions, arguing that human reason cannot discern the good without revelation, because it is too distorted by sin to engage in reliable ethical evaluation.[137]

Thielicke called for a purification of Protestant ethics from notions of natural law, similar to the Reformation's purification of Protestant theology from conceptions of salvation by works. "Man's incapacity to justify himself by good works is logically to be augmented by, or integrated with, a similar incapacity truly to know the will and commandment of God."[138]

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133 Helmut Thielicke, *Geschichte und Existenz: Grundlegung einer evangelischen Geschichtstheologie* (Gütersloh: Verlag C. Bertelsmann, 1935), 46.

134 Thielicke, *TE*, 2:71.

135 Thielicke, *TE*, 2:72. A similar discussion of the topic of autonomous norms appears in Danish thinker N. H. Soe, *Christliche Ethik* (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1957). The similarity of the discussions by two thinkers influenced by Barth suggests that this assessment of societal structures flows from the basic lines of Barth's theology.

136 *TE*, 1:388.

137 Helmut Thielicke, *Theologische Ethik,* vol. 2 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1955), 371–83. His "Theological Critique of Reason" does not appear in the English edition.

138 *TE*, 1:326. What Thielicke says here can be seen as a development of related themes in Barth. See Barth, "No!" in *Natural Theology: Comprising* "Nature and Grace" *by*

For him, all Protestant ethics should be only an ethics of justification by faith alone; there is no place for any notion of natural law.

H. Evan Runner (1916–2002)

H. Evan Runner was a North American follower of the "Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea," crafted by the Dutch Protestant thinker Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977). This movement was not directly influenced by Barth or Thielicke, but it had important similarities. Dooyeweerd and his followers were also sharply critical of the medieval synthesis of the biblical and classical traditions, arguing that it furthered the secularization of Europe and North America. They also rejected any synthesis of Christian beliefs with Enlightenment or post-Enlightenment philosophy, suspecting that it had contributed to the two world wars.

In an unpublished 1957 speech, "The Development of Calvinism in North America on the Background of Its Development in Europe," Runner argued that Christians should completely reject natural-law theory. Runner traced this theory to the deist philosophy of Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583–1648), especially his book *De Veritate* (1624). As the Thirty Years' War was devastating Europe, Herbert advocated a "universal" religion and law that could overcome the conflicts between people. Obviously, this proposal deprived Christianity of its distinctiveness.

A year later came Hugo Grotius's *De Jure belli et pacis* (1625). According to Runner, Grotius sharply distinguished the law of God from the law of nature. Although Grotius believed in the law of God, he thought the foundation of public life should be the law of nature. These ideas were developed a generation later by Samuel Pufendorf, who also sharply distinguished between divine revelation and natural law. Thus, Runner argued, a whole new outlook developed that was contrary to the Reformation faith. Man was no longer seen as a covenantal being whose meaning is found in relation to God, but as a rational-moral being who has within himself a proper guide to life and the ability to act according to this guide. As Runner stated, "Such men did not hesitate to leave Revelation and the Kingdom of Christ to the private lives of those who showed some concern for these matters," yet they "took up with unfailing confidence the building of the Kingdom of Man on Earth. Communism is one form of the general pattern."

Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the reply "No!" *by Dr. Karl Barth*, trans. Peter Fraenkel (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946), 97.

In this way, Runner saw the medieval dualistic scheme of nature and grace seeping back into Protestant lands, with disastrous results. The medieval synthesis, he believed, was really an attempt to hold on to pagan philosophy in the realm of nature while adding Christian beliefs in the restricted realm of grace or "supernature." Runner criticized the Reformers for not more completely replacing the medieval nature-grace framework with a more authentic evangelical philosophy. In his reading, the theology of Luther's colleague at the University of Wittenberg, Phillip Melanchthon (1497–1560), already showed signs of capitulation to the medieval framework, which made revelation and the Christian faith irrelevant to such areas of life as law, politics, and business, thereby contributing to the secularization of Western culture. Natural-law theories, whether Protestant or Catholic, were an important part of nature-grace dualism for Runner and should therefore be rejected.[139]

Assessment

We have seen three related reasons for rejecting general revelation and the natural law within Protestantism. For Barth, natural law is part of the natural theology that reduced the Christian faith to the religious dimension of Western culture and lost sight of the otherness of God, leaving Christianity hopelessly compromised in relation to Western civilization (especially represented by National Socialism) and unequipped to stand against society in prophetic criticism. Thielicke developed this argument, claiming that human reason is so heavily shaped by sin that it cannot derive any reliable moral norms from the structure of human life. Along a different line, Runner rejected natural law as part of the nature-grace dualism that contributed to the destructive secularization of Western civilization.

Barth, Thielicke, and Runner should all be appreciated for advancing a purification of Western Christianity that was deeply rooted in God's revelation in Christ and scripture. But the weakness of this line of thought becomes apparent when one asks, "Could the soldiers of Hitler's Third Reich have known that it was morally wrong to march trainloads of Jews and others into the concentration camps?" The soldiers had orders from the German High Command, and the Nazi-led government had rewritten

[139] Other philosophers influenced by Dooyeweerd reconfigured natural-law theory instead of rejecting it. See Thomas K. Johnson, *Natural Law Ethics* (Bonn: VKW, 2005), 116–24; https://www.academia.edu/36884239/Natural_Law_Ethics_An_Evangelical_Proposal.

German laws to make those orders legal. Therefore, the soldiers were following the rule of law. Did those soldiers have a basis on which to say, "This is wrong!" and to refuse to obey orders?

According to the Barth-Thielicke-Runner line of argument, there is no clear answer. If the soldiers recognized the authority of Jesus or the Bible, then they should have perceived the wrongness of their actions; but if they did not, based on these theories, then neither their rationality nor their conscience had access to a higher moral law on the basis of which they should disobey orders. Though Barth and Thielicke risked their lives to speak and write brilliantly against the Nazis, their philosophy would have left them unable to tell non-Christian soldiers, "You know this is wrong."

This theological weakness cost Western civilization its soul. The Protestant churches were left saying to their neighbors, more or less, "We know it is wrong to participate in genocide, but we are not sure if you can know that it is wrong to participate in genocide." Rather than saying something clear and constructive about how everyone, regardless of their faith identity, can know something about right and wrong, Protestants, broadly speaking, applied ethics only to Christians.

Elsewhere I have assessed how this theological situation pushed Christians into two opposite directions: either an ethics of holiness that applied biblical principles within the Christian communities or an ethics of domination that attempted to reassert the claims of Christian ethics on secular society, whether as a call for a "Christian America" or a "Christian Europe."[140] Both of these directions largely communicated the same message to our neighbours of other faiths or no faith: "We are not sure if you can know it is wrong to practice genocide unless you first start to follow Jesus." By the mistaken character of what they communicated about ethics, Protestant churches accidentally promoted exclusive secularism and moral nihilism, thereby cutting the heart out of the West.

The primary solution is not a new claim about the power of human reason to prove right and wrong (or the existence of God), though the proper use of rationality is a gift of God that should be developed with discipline. The primary solution is to see that in the Bible, God is described as constantly revealing his moral law to all humanity as part of his general revelation (which is distinct from the special revelation of the gospel). Because of what God is constantly doing, people generally know that genocide is wrong, even if they are committing it. We can say the same about other terrible evils, even if we do not yet have a satisfying explanation of how God reveals his natural moral law or how people come to learn about right and wrong.

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[140] Johnson, *Natural Law Ethics*, 7–14.

Such a theological change could revolutionize what our churches communicate about ethics to the world around us. We could ask a soldier participating in genocide, "How might you find the courage to do what you know is right, even if it costs your life?" Christian communications about ethics must assume that people, regardless of their faith, already know something about right and wrong; we can then discuss how they know this and what this knowledge implies about God and human nature. Of course, one must also be prepared to apply the gospel of forgiveness.

Karl Barth and Helmut Thielicke were right to reject Culture Protestantism and the subordination of Christianity to secular thought. Evan Runner was right to reject some Enlightenment views regarding natural law. But rather than removing God's general revelation and natural moral law from our theology and ethics, we need to reconfigure them. The natural moral law and the general revelation of which it is a part represent what God is doing, not what humanity is doing. The Creator is active in his creation, even if all of unbelieving life, thought, and culture is involved in suppressing the unavoidable knowledge of God and his moral law. But even suppressed knowledge, if it comes from God, is still effective knowledge. Once we recognize this, we will be better equipped to talk about serious matters with our unbelieving neighbors and introduce the gospel of Christ as revealed in Scripture. Perhaps in this way God might restore the soul of Western civilization.

The Moral Structure of the Condemnation of Slavery in Amos[141]

Amos quoted God, "For three sins of Gaza, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because she took captive whole communities and sold them to Edom." (Amos 1:6) The readers knew that Edom was where one went to sell slaves. As God's representative, Amos condemned slave trading and human trafficking in antiquity. Amos continued, "This is what the Lord says: 'For three sins of Tyre, even for four, I will not relent. Because she sold whole communities of captives to Edom, disregarding a treaty of brotherhood, I will send fire on the walls of Tyre that will consume her fortresses.'" (Amos 1:9-10) Gaza was not the only city guilty of selling human souls.

These descriptions of slave trading in the Bible should shock our hearts; we should feel sick because of what is happening. But we must not turn off our minds if we wish to follow in the footsteps of Amos. We must notice the ethical structure of the critique of slavery in the Bible and in Christian history. This is what I see:

On the one hand, Amos was directly quoting God's special revelation to Amos; while doing so, he also was applying principles found throughout God's special revelation in those parts of the Hebrew Bible (which we call the Old Testament) which had already been written in his day. The global condemnation of slavery coming from the mouth and pen of Amos was deeply rooted in God's *special* revelation, both as that special revelation had been received long in the past and also recently received directly by Amos. On the other hand, when Amos was speaking to the people of Gaza and Tyre, he condemned the abuse of humans on the basis of God's *natural* or *general* revelation of the moral law, not only on the basis of God's specially revealed moral law in the Bible. The particular groups of people to whom Amos was speaking had not yet received the Bible, yet Amos expected them to know something about the difference between good and evil and to know that buying and selling people was wrong.

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[141] This essay was previously published as "The Moral Structure of the Condemnation of Slavery in Amos," the foreword to *The Humanisation of Slavery in the Old Testament,* edited by Thomas Schirrmacher (Bonn: VKW, 2015); https://www.academia.edu/37386530/The_Moral_Structure_of_the_Condemnation_of_Slavery_in_Amos_foreword_to_The_Humanization_of_Slavery_in_the_OT_edited_by_Thomas_Schirrmacher.

A classic evangelical commentator on the prophet Amos, Alec Motyer, observes about the nations surrounding Israel addressed in Amos chapter one, "They have one negative common denominator: none of them had ever received any special revelation of God or of his law; He had never sent prophets to them; there was no Moses in their historical past; . . . they were without the law written upon tablets of stone, but they were not without the law written on the conscience."[142] It was the presence of God's moral law as it is naturally or generally revealed among the nations that should have enabled them to perceive the wrongness of their actions when they abused the rights of the weak. They were justly condemned for doing what they knew was evil.

Observing the moral complexity of the proclamation of Amos and his successors may help our modern efforts against slavery and human trafficking. To emphasize the point: when Amos addressed the nations surrounding Israel about their gross inhumanity, he directly quoted God in such a manner that his message was deeply rooted in God's special revelation to Israel and to Amos; at the same time, his message should have found traction among the nations that had not received God's special revelation because they had already received (and perhaps partly suppressed) God's general revelation of his moral law. And this moral complexity is what we see in the history of Christian anti-slavery efforts.

To take only one example, William Wilberforce: his personal faith in Jesus, and therefore his reception of God's special revelation in the Bible and in Christ, was the starting point for his leadership in ending the abomination of slave trading; at the same time, the message of Wilberforce (and of the thousands of Christians who shared his moral convictions arising from the Bible) had an effect in the broader societies of their day, because even those citizens and members of governments and parliaments who did not recognize Jesus or the Bible could begin to perceive the wickedness of slavery. As Amos assumed long ago, even people without the Bible should be able to see that selling and abusing people is wrong, though they might need a prophet to remind them of what they should already know and also to bring God's wrath to mind. Wilberforce and friends wanted people to end slavery and to come to faith in Jesus, but either order was acceptable, whether rejecting slavery before (or perhaps even without) coming to Jesus, or coming to Jesus and then rejecting slavery as a result of repentance and faith.

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[142] Alec Motyer, *The Message of Amos,* in the Bible Speaks Today series edited by John Stott, Alec Motyer, and Derek Tidball (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1974), 36-37.

We hope this little book will add strength to the new efforts to address the abominations of slavery and human trafficking. We need to add heat to our efforts, but that heat needs to be informed by the light of wisdom, the point of a book like this. The long-term efforts needed to once again abolish the slave trade and slavery will need biblical, historical, and moral studies both to motivate and to guide us.

Christian Proclamation and God's Universal Grace[143]

The amazing growth of Christianity from obscurity toward becoming a global faith began when the first apostles spread out from Jerusalem to proclaim the novel message that God was reconciling the world to himself through a crucified but resurrected Savior. But most people overlook the fact that in their preaching, the early apostles repeatedly referred to the universal grace of God, especially when addressing people from a non-Jewish background. They seemed to believe that understanding the experience of God's universal grace provided the necessary background for their hearers to appreciate the special things that God had done in Christ. In our modern, globalized multi-religious context, we would do well to pay more attention to this feature of Christianity.[144]

When Paul addressed a Gentile audience in Lystra (a Roman colony in today's southern Turkey) he claimed that God "has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy" (Acts 14:17). In a speech to learned people in Athens, he made a similar appeal to their ingrained perception of the existence of a Creator:

> "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so

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143 This essay was previously published as a chapter in *God Needs No Defense: Reimagining Muslim-Christian Relations in the 21st Century*, edited by Thomas K. Johnson and C. Holland Taylor (Institute for Humanitarian Islam, Center for Shared Civilizational Values, and World Evangelical Alliance Theological Commission, 2021), 61-72; https://www.academia.edu/49905107/God_Needs_No_Defense_Reimagining_Muslim_Christian_Relations_in_the_21st_Century.

144 What I am calling God's universal grace has also been called common grace or general grace within Protestant theology. As background see Jochem Douma, *Common Grace in Kuyper, Schilder, and Calvin: Exposition, Comparison, and Evaluation,* ed. William Helder, trans. by Albert H Oosterhoff (Lucerna: Crts Publications, 2017; originally published in Dutch in 1967), and Richard J. Mouw, *All That God Cares About* (Brazos Press, 2020).

> that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'" (Acts 17:24–28)

With these words, the apostle interpreted the life experience of his hearers in light of his knowledge of God learned from the Hebrew Bible. They had experienced their Creator's kindness, including rain, food, and joy. They received the gift of life and the destiny of inhabiting the earth as God's sub-creators and developing civilizations. In the deepest level of their minds and souls, they should have perceived a call to seek God, a call from the Creator that echoed through Greek poetry and philosophy, that God is near because we are his offspring. This God, whose universal grace had made their lives possible, had now come to humanity in Jesus the Christ, whom Paul proclaimed. The universal grace of God provides the background for the nations to appreciate the Christian message.

Today, Christians are less likely to encounter Athenian philosophers, but they are very likely to interact with Muslims. There are more than a billion Muslims and close to two billion Christians in our world. Thanks to globalization, the extent of interaction among people of different backgrounds and beliefs continues to increase. As a result, there will be countless conversations every year between Christians and Muslims. And among those who view their faith as the central defining feature of their lives, those discussions are not likely to be limited to medicine or technology.

When Christians and Muslims talk with each other about their faith, Christians tend to mention the themes that are most dear to them: the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus, themes that seem strange to Muslims. It would seem wise for them instead to follow the example of the apostle Paul and talk about the universal grace of God as a long preamble before making a link to the particularities of Christianity. By doing so, they might facilitate a higher quality of Muslim-Christian interaction and a higher level of desirable cooperation in public life.

In this essay, I explore eight biblical themes related to God's universal grace, themes which Christian theology has often related to knowing God the Father and his work of creation. All of these are themes to which Muslims can probably relate more easily than they can grasp the mysteries of a Trinity with which they are unfamiliar.[145]

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[145] The following section is adapted from a chapter in Thomas K. Johnson, *What Difference Does the Trinity Make? A Complete Faith, Life, and Worldview* (Bonn: VKW, 2009); https://www.academia.edu/37068605/What_Difference_Does_the_Trinity_Make_A_Complete_Faith_Life_and_Worldview.

A. God the Father and the Goodness of Creation

God made the world *good*. Genesis 1 tells us this several times. "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). This theme is emphasized repeatedly, as if people might have a tendency to forget that the earth and the heavens were made by God, belong to God, and are therefore both real and good. Of course, people have indeed forgotten this truth. In ancient Greece, various types of Hellenistic religion and philosophy doubted the goodness of the physical world. Many Hindus similarly doubt the reality of the physical world, treating it as an illusion. And these ways of thinking appear even among Christians, who often think that to find authentic spirituality they must flee from the physical world into an unseen spiritual world. But if the creation is good, we should seek to serve God and find authentic spirituality within the everyday world of creation. We can also accept the everyday gifts of God—family, friends, work, relaxation—as truly good gifts for which we can give thanks and which we can enjoy for the glory of God.

B. God the Father and the Creation of Mankind

"God said, 'Let us make man in our image'" (Genesis 1:26). Believing that God is our creating Father answers one of the deepest questions in the human heart: "Who and what are we?" The answer is that we are his creations, made for a relationship with himself, and therefore our human reason, will, and emotions should be a created reflection of his own. What a magnificent destiny we have been given! How awesome it is to interact daily with other creatures who have the same temporal and eternal destiny! How monumentally tragic it is when people are described and treated as mere creatures of dust and descendants of animals! This is not only an affront to the pinnacle of creation; it is a personal insult to the Creator.

Believing that God is our Father profoundly changes how we think and feel about ourselves and others. It satisfies both our own longing for significance and our intuitions that our neighbors and relatives are somehow worthy of respect and care. As the Psalmist reflected, "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon, and stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor" (Psalm 8:3–5).

When God created us in his image, he did not leave us with empty hearts and minds, like a computer with no software. We might say that God

created us with a lot of software already built in, ready to be activated by life experience. This includes not only the ability to understand God's world, but also the ability to understand love, justice, loyalty, honesty, and the other unseen realities that make life interesting and either frustrating or meaningful. For this reason, we long to experience such moral/spiritual realities, even while we sense that we never experience them totally in this world. Yet our partial experiences of these realities on the human level point us toward God, in whom these realities are fully present and from whom the cries of our hearts receive their answers. God created us with the ability and need to get to know him as our Creator and Redeemer.

C. God the Father and the Development Mandate

"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground'" (Genesis 1:28). "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15). Everywhere we look, people are very busy and working hard. Through their hard work they create careers and families, businesses and schools, cultural institutions and communities. Seldom do we stop and ask, "Why?" Maybe we do not want to recognize that all our work and activity are not only a human necessity for our own well-being and fulfillment but part of a divine mandate—how God created us. In all this intense activity, we overlook that God created us to be active in his world. This does not mean that we must never rest. It does mean that our everyday activity is our primary place of service to God, who has given us a "development mandate" to build families, societies, and cultures that honor him as our Creator.

It is possible to divide this mandate into multiple parts. God has given us a mandate and drive to work, to marry, to have children and raise families, to worship, and to create communities. We see these parts of the development mandate lived out across the biblical record and in society today. They are usually expressed through social institutions: marriage, family, work, church, education, science. For this reason, we can talk about such institutions as "creation orders," recognizing that God has ordered our lives by how he created us. The creation orders are part of God's means of developing and preserving human life and culture from one generation to the next. They delineate the primary places where we serve God and love our neighbors.

Closely related to our work in the world as God's sub-creators is the rapid growth of scientific and technological knowledge. Twenty-first-

century society is increasingly built on information and technology, though people seldom pause to wonder how it is possible for people to truly understand the physical world of nature. A proper answer to this question has two components. On one hand, God created the world with a certain order built into it; the orderly days of creation hint in this direction. What we often call the "laws of nature" are descriptions of certain laws God has built into his creation, part of the creation order. On the other hand, God has created our minds and sensory abilities so that we can perceive and understand his world. Furthermore, God has created a correspondence between the world he made and our perception of it, so that—with much hard work and many mistakes—we can gain such an amazing knowledge of the physical world as to build computers, perform delicate surgeries, or send communication satellites into orbit.

This increasing knowledge plays a massive role in the societal changes of our time. But without acknowledging the orderly creating work of our heavenly Father, we would have great difficulty explaining why such progress in scientific and technical knowledge is possible. Once we recognize that God makes the growth of knowledge possible, we can accept our better computers and improved medical care as gifts from our Father's hand. God certainly deserves far more gratitude than we give him, but this may be especially true in the realm of the growth of knowledge and practical wisdom.

D. God the Father and Practical Wisdom

> "When a farmer plows for planting, does he plow continually? Does he keep on breaking up and harrowing the soil? When he has leveled the surface, does he not sow caraway and scatter cummin? Does he not plant wheat in its place, barley in its plot, and spelt in its field? His God instructs him and teaches him the right way. Caraway is not threshed with a sledge, nor is a cartwheel rolled over cummin; caraway is beaten out with a rod, and cummin with a stick. Grain must be ground to make bread; so one does not go on threshing it forever. Though he drives the wheels of his threshing cart over it, his horses do not grind it. All this also comes from the Lord Almighty, wonderful in counsel and magnificent in wisdom." (Isaiah 28:24–29)

In this passage, Isaiah describes the farming techniques used in his country from around 700 BC. They required practical wisdom, accumulated through trial and error and passed on from one generation to the next. To be a successful farmer, one had to learn these things from one's relatives and neighbors. And Isaiah adds the surprising comment about such a wise

and successful farmer, "His God instructs him and teaches him the right way." Isaiah clearly saw such practical wisdom as coming from God, even though it might be learned directly from fellow humans. God is the ultimate source of the practical wisdom that people need to live in his creation.

The Bible strongly exhorts people to pursue and seek wisdom. "Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you" (Proverbs 4:5–6). This wisdom may be about farming techniques, relationships, avoiding adultery and other sins, fearing God, working diligently, raising children, or controlling one's tongue. It may come to us through various means: tradition, personal observation and experience, the Scriptures, or even the sayings of various peoples. Such wisdom tends to make life flourish, and people are commanded to seek wisdom because God the Creator is the source of this wisdom.

Believers have generally recognized that there is also a problem in this realm: unbelief leads to false claims to wisdom. The command to seek wisdom must be understood in light of warnings like this one given by the apostle Paul: "You must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts" (Ephesians 4:17–18). Darkened hearts produce false claims to wisdom that must be avoided. If we believe in God the Father, we will recognize him as the source of practical wisdom and seek it in the ways he directs.

E. God the Father and Creational Revelation

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge" (Psalm 19:1–2). Everything that people make, whether buildings, chairs, paintings, or books, is a statement from those people that tells us something about them. Similarly, God's creation tells us about him. God continues to speak through his creation—including our accountability to him, not only about his glory, majesty, and beauty. As Paul wrote, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen from what has been made" (Romans 1:18–20).

This speech of God through creation has been given different names: "natural revelation," meaning God's revelation through nature; "general revelation," meaning God's revelation that goes generally to all people everywhere; or "creational revelation," meaning God's self-revelation through creation. It is different from God's special or saving revelation of himself in Christ and Scripture, which should lead to faith and to participating in the believing community, the church. God's creational revelation impacts each person and every community, even those who may not want to believe or accept God's revelation. People often suppress the truth about himself that God makes known through creation, and this suppression leads to a deep tension within the mind and heart of the unbeliever, who knows that everything good, wise, beautiful, or just comes from God but who does not want to acknowledge God as the source of all these tremendous gifts. But all who believe in "God the Father Almighty" should recognize that God is speaking through his world and is the source of all truth in this world.

F. God the Father and the Universal Moral Law

At the end of Romans 1, Paul makes a startling statement. After giving a rather repulsive list of the sins that characterize the lives of people who reject God, he claims, "Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them" (Romans 1:32). What is so remarkable about this statement is Paul's claim that people know the demands of God's law and even know that God punishes evildoers. Sin is not primarily the result of a lack of knowing right and wrong; it is a result of not wanting to do what is right. And all people have at least a substantial knowledge of God's universal moral law.

The older, more traditional terms for how people without the Bible came to know right and wrong were "the natural moral law" or simply "the natural law." These terms were really abbreviations for a longer phrase, something like "God's moral law as it is revealed through nature." The assumption is that there is a God-given moral rationality that forms the fabric of creation. It is a part of God's general revelation, a means of his universal grace. Acknowledging the natural moral law is part of believing that our Father is the Creator of heaven and earth, who speaks to us through his world, which he also maintains and sustains.

We should never suggest that God's natural moral law makes his commandments in the Bible less important; after all, we truly need more specific commands that confront us in our sinfulness and arouse us to repen-

tance and faith. But the natural moral law has great value. It means that God's moral principles are built into human reason, emotions, and relationships so deeply that his written law finds a profound echo in our hearts and minds, making clear and specific those things we might otherwise neglect or question. It means that his written law fits our human nature and relationships in such a way that both his law written in creation and his law written in Scripture guide us in a direction that makes life flourish. It also means that people are partly prepared for the gospel; when people hear the gospel, they already have at least some experience of God's natural moral law condemning them for their sins and making them partly aware of their need for forgiveness and reconciliation. For this we can be grateful.

God's law, both in creation and in Scripture, always has multiple functions and uses in our lives. Three of these functions of God's law are especially important. First, it confronts us with our sin, making us aware of our sinfulness; this is the "theological," condemning or converting use of God's law. Second, God's law also tends to restrain sin, even if people do not fully acknowledge or understand it; this is the civil or political (meaning "community-oriented," based on the Greek word *polis* or community) use that makes life in society possible, so that we do not usually practice a war of all against all. Third, God's law shows us how to live lives of gratitude to God for his gifts of creation and redemption. This third use (as a guide for the life of gratitude) is active only in believers, whereas the theological and civil uses of the law are active in both believers and unbelievers. If people do not trust in God's forgiveness, they may often have very negative thoughts and feelings about God's law as it comes to them in creation and Scripture, but this does mean that God's law has no role in their lives. They may be partly aware of their need for the gospel, and they are often reasonably good neighbors and citizens (displaying what used to be called "civic righteousness"), because no one can totally avoid God's law.

G. God the Father and the Universal Questions

When God came to Adam and Eve after they had revolted in the Garden of Eden, he greeted them with a question. "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?'" (Genesis 2:8–9). The all-knowing God does not ask questions to gain new information; he already knew that Adam and Eve were playing a silly game, trying to hide from God in the trees. So why did he ask this question? It was a way of starting the

dialog with Adam and Eve that would lead to a renewed relationship between them and God.

This new relationship did not immediately overcome the wide-ranging effects of their revolt against God. The subsequent discussion shows signs of a comprehensive alienation—a permanent brokenness in their relation to God, each other, themselves, and even the physical world. But at least Adam and Eve are talking with God, and God makes a vague but profound promise that the offspring of the woman would crush the head of the serpent (3:15). This whole dialog started with God asking a probing question that revealed something deeply wrong within Adam and Eve.

Our Creator continues to be a questioning God, and these questions go out to all people by means of God's general revelation. Certain questions seem to come to all people's minds, all over the world and in every generation. We might call these universal questions. What is a human being? What is wrong with the world? What is the meaning of life? Where did everything come from? What has always existed? What is death? Why do we feel guilt? How can we find forgiveness? Is there any real hope? These questions are not mere mind games; often they express deep anxieties that people ponder through philosophy, culture, and religion. These questions are much like God's question to Adam and Eve, "Where are you?" These questions can torment people deeply because deep within they retain some suppressed knowledge of the Creator, whose moral law they know and whose wrath they fear. By means of these questions, God seeks to chase the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve out from their hiding places to begin an honest dialog with God.

The answers to these deepest questions of religions, culture, and philosophy are found in the Bible; human experience is the question and faith provides the answer. Or we could say that life is the question and Christ is the answer. When we say we believe in "God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth," we are claiming that our Father is still the questioning God who raises questions for all people—questions that prepare the way for his answer, which is Christ, the Savior.

H. God's Universal Grace and the Teaching of Jesus

Jesus taught us, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:44–45). Our Creator gives his rain and sun to all people, even his enemies; in this statement of Jesus, sun and rain probably represent all the things people need to live in this world. This means that all the

good things we receive in the political, economic, social, personal, and medical realms come from our Father's hand.

God deserves our continued gratitude for his good gifts that come to us in so many ways. Maybe we owe God an even greater debt of gratitude than did our ancestors of a century ago, as God's common grace seems even more bountiful and generous than it was in the past, especially for those who live in the developed world.

If God's universal grace to us today seems even greater than it was to our ancestors in previous centuries, the need to love our enemies is also greater. Enmity among races, religions, parties, and communities is the human heritage which we have received. God's universal grace, in which he gives the sun and the rain to his enemies, stands above us in condemnation and inspiration. All who believe in such a God must devote themselves to loving those who are called their enemies, regardless of the cause of the conflict.

We must not overlook that the universal grace of God is one way in which God calls us to repentance and faith. In Paul's sermon to the unbelievers in Lystra, he claimed that God "has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy" (Acts 14:17). And in Romans 2:4 Paul seems to complete the thought: "Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance, and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?"

Rather than letting the comfort, safety, peace, and affluence of life in the developed world make us forget God, we need to remind ourselves that all these gifts come from God's universal grace. And we need to say very loudly and clearly that the bounty of God's common grace calls all the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve to repentance and faith. Life in a world of plenty should lead us to gratitude toward God, not toward thinking that God is now somehow irrelevant.

Conclusion

It is overwhelming to think about these works of God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. We should stand in awe and amazement, recognizing that he is worthy of all our praise and thanks. All our actions, as well as all our thoughts and feelings, should be part of our worship of our Heavenly Father. If we have not yet considered what it means to believe in the Creator, we must begin to let these truths overwhelm and transform our hearts and minds. Sometimes Christians live almost as if they have not

heard that Jesus, the Savior, is the Son of this God and Creator, and this leads to a distorted life and faith. But this problem can be solved!

Surpassing our previous considerations are Christian claims about the trust people can have in the Creator. Jesus said, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of our Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:29–31). This is God's providence, the promise that the infinite Creator not only structures the universe and society, but that he also cares for each person.

Throughout the twenty-first century, Christians and Muslims will surely interact millions of times around the globe. If we Christians talk only about the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus, our Muslim friends will have difficulty understanding us. But if we say a lot about the many dimensions of God's universal grace, following the example of the apostle Paul, we can interpret and draw attention to the experience of God's goodness that makes daily life possible for all human beings. These themes not only make the distinctives of Christian proclamation more comprehensible; they also provide much-needed principles for peaceful and responsible life together in global society.

A Case for Cooperation between Evangelical Christians and Humanitarian Islam[146]

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.[147] 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 among 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 enabling peace for all. 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 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 are not sufficient

In recent years, many Muslim theologians and jurists have been working hard to convince extremists to turn from their violent ways while

146 This essay was previously published in *God Needs No Defense,* 29-48.

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

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 Document on Human Fraternity (DHF) 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 DHF 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 DHF 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.[148] Despite these significant steps forward, the DHF does

[148] For example, the DHF claims, "The pluralism and the diversity of religions, color, 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

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 DHF 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 practiced, it would not only end the persecution of converts; it would also mean the gradual end of religiously defined countries (whether Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, 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 exceptionally 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 further. Though presented largely as a Muslim alternative to extremist violence, Humanitarian Islam contains a serious assessment of universal moral norms, the relation between faith and

ethical teaching across faith traditions should be balanced by a recognition of the ultimate incompatibility of some claims of those traditions.

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.[149]

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*[150] 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.

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[149] For example, in February 2019, NU leaders decreed that the term "infidel" no longer be used 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 'infidels' to describe non-Muslims," *Jakarta Post,* March 1, 2019, available https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2019/03/01/nu-calls-for-end-to-word-infidels-to-describe-non-muslims.html.

[150] *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/.

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 signaling 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 fueling 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 *sharīʿah*) — 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).[151] As they see it, for some 500 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

Four themes characterize the distinctive theological method used by Humanitarian Islam in its systematic effort to define a new Islamic ethics and theory of law. Each is discussed below.

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

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 behavior. For example, they emphasize the need "to revitalize the understanding and practice of religion as *raḥmah* (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, among 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.[152]

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 writes, "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 assumes 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

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[152] 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/.

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 consciously 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* identifies 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 200 years ago, and to a large extent even 100 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, having been 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 one crucial way from Islam. As the apostle John said, "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 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.[153] In contrast, Islam is generally seen as containing a much heavier emphasis on law than on grace, although hints of the latter 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.

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[153] For more on the relation between law and gospel in Protestant thought, see the previous chapters of this book.

Despite this central theological difference, a comparison of Humanitarian Islam with Christian social ethics and philosophy of law reveals that, amid 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 key aspects of Christian ethics and how they relate to Muslim thinking more clearly. 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 states:

> "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."[154]

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 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

[154] Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 19, paragraphs 3 and 4; emphasis added.

sacrifice." For Bayes, righteousness refers to the demands of the moral law, whereas justice refers to the demands of the judicial law, while sacrifices were in the realm of the ceremonial law.[155]

This three-part hermeneutic has guided most Christians to view blasphemy or adultery as against God's moral law but to steer clear of 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."[156] 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

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[155] 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.

[156] 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.

knowledge, as Paul states 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 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 or no religion can distinguish right from wrong, thus eliminating any conceptual basis for ethical agreement between Christians and non-Christians.[157] To take an extreme example, if there were no universal moral law, and there were only the rules taught by particular religious communities, it would be very difficult conceptually to claim that genocide is wrong, unless one is talking to fellow members of one's religious community.

There is wisdom in the observations of Aristotle, the oft-cited hero of both Humanitarian Islam and of many generations of writers about Christian ethics:

> "It will now be well to make a complete classification of just and unjust actions. We may begin by observing that they have been defined relatively to two kinds of law . . . By the two kinds of law I mean particular law and universal law. Particular law is that which each community lays down and applies to its own members: this is partly written and partly unwritten. Universal law is the law of Nature. For there really is, as everyone to some extent divines, a natural justice and injustice that is binding on all men, even on those who have no association or covenant with each other."[158]

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[157] 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.

[158] Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Book 1, chapter 13. Trans. W. Rhys Roberts; edited by Lee Honeycutt. (Alpine Lakes Design, 2011); https://web.archive.org/web/20150213075009/http:/rhetoric.eserver.org/aristotle/rhet1-13.html.

Similar ideas were taught by many classical philosophers, including the Aristotelians, Platonists, and Stoics, in contending against moral relativism, represented in the ancient world by the skeptics, sophists, and Epicureans. All the participants in these ancient discussions knew that different communities have different particular laws and moral rules, which raised the question of whether there is a universal moral law that is binding on all people and communities. The relativists claimed that there are no universal moral rules or legal principles, only ethical rules and civil laws that are established by particular communities. Aristotle argued that there are moral and legal principles which are binding on all people simply because they are human; these laws are binding because of the inherent authority of the laws (the nature of those laws), not because they are authorized by a community. To repeat Aristotle, there is "a natural justice and injustice that is binding on all men, even on those who have no association or covenant with each other."[159] This law is binding on all people because of its nature as a universal moral law, not because people belong to a particular community (an association or covenant in Aristotle's words).

When the Christian message came into contact with the ideas of the Greco-Roman world, the apostle Paul followed the Hebrew Bible and 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" (Romans 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. For example, Augustine wrote, "There is also a law in the reason of a human being who already uses free choice, a law naturally written in his heart, by which he is warned that he should not do anything to anyone else that he himself does not want to suffer; all are

[159] I share the opinion of Tarnas, that much of classical philosophy was a complex attempt to overcome the nihilism which was perceived to arise from religious syncretism (especially polytheism) and moral relativism. See Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View* (Ballantine Books, 1993).

transgressors according to this law, even those who have not received the law given through Moses."[160]

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 he did not mention God as its source; Augustine preached that all people are accountable to God, even if they do not yet acknowledge God.[161]

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. Consequently 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 the 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 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.[162]

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

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160 Augustine, Letter 157, paragraph 15; found in Augustine, Saint, Bishop of Hippo. Works. English. 1990
Part 2, Volume 3 of Letters 156-210, trans. Roland John Teske, ed. Boniface Ramsey and John E. Rotelle (New City Press, 1990), p. 25.

161 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 (New City Press, 1990), 25.

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

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.[163]

For Aquinas, laws coming from a king or government were 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 honored 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.[164]

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.[165] 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.[166] In this manner the Reformation more clearly distinguished the dimensions of the 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

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163 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.

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

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

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

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."[167]

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 300 years to distinguish between doing those 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 (Deuteronomy 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."[168] 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.[169]

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[167] Calvin, *Institutes*, II, ii, 22.

[168] 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/.

[169] See "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.

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 extent that it is now difficult to know who influenced whom and who is quoting whom in many books or essays.[170]

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.[171] 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.[172]

Primary Human Goods in Medieval Philosophies	
Christian	*Muslim*
Life	Faith
Procreation	Life
Social life (including property)	Progeny
Knowledge (including God)	Reason
Rational conduct	Property

[170] For more background on al-Shatibi, see Ahmad al-Raysuni, *Imam al-Shatibi's Theory of the Higher Objectives and Intents of Islamic Law,* trans. from Arabic by Nancy Roberts; abridged by Alison Lake (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2013).

[171] Robert P. George, 'Religious Liberty and the Human Good,' *International Journal for Religious Freedom* 5:1 2012, 35–44; https://www.iirf.eu/site/assets/files/92052/ijrf_vol5-1.pdf.

[172] Brian Grimm 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).

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 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 political leaders from both faith communities together 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. In 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 fueled 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.

Why Evangelicals Need a Code of Ethics for Mission[173]

Thomas Schirrmacher[174]
Thomas K. Johnson

Abstract: The authors claim that now is the right time for the global evangelical movement to formulate a public code of ethics for Christian mission. Occasionally mission work has been marred by actions that do not demonstrate a proper level of respect for people. A code of ethics in mission would establish a standard of accountability and also become an evangelical contribution to the global effort to establish standards for the relations among religions which should help protect the freedom of religion. The complementary principles informing this code should be the need of all people for the gospel and the God-given dignity of all people created in his image.

Keywords: Ethics, code, mission, evangelicals, witness, conversion.

1. Mission can be corrupted.

"There was never any thing by the wit of man so well devised, or so sure established, which in continuance of time hath not been corrupted," says the Anglican Book of Common Prayer (1549). This is even true of Christian mission, spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, the "Prince of Peace." The *Lausanne Covenant* (1974), that most influential evangelical public statement, calls heartily for mission and then addresses the moral framework in articles 12 and 13 respectively:

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[173] This essay was originally published by Thomas Schirrmacher and Thomas K. Johnson in *The International Journal for Religious Freedom* 3:1 (2010), 23-37.

[174] Some of this material was in Dr. Schirrmacher's speech entitled *"But with gentleness and respect:" Why missions should be ruled by ethics – An Evangelical Perspective on a Code of Ethics for Christian Witness,* when he represented the World Evangelical Alliance at the international theological consultation "Towards an ethical approach to conversion: Christian witness in a multi-religious world" at the Institut de Science et de Théologie des Religions in Toulouse, France, 8-12 August 2007. The text of the speech, including an extensive bibliography, is available at www.worldevangelicalalliance.com/news/Conversion.pdf.

> "At other times, desirous to ensure a response to the gospel, we have compromised our message, manipulated our hearers through pressure techniques, and become unduly preoccupied with statistics or even dishonest in our use of them. All this is worldly. The Church must be in the world; the world must not be in the Church."
>
> "It is the God-appointed duty of every government to secure conditions of peace, justice and liberty in which the Church may obey God, serve the Lord Jesus Christ, and preach the gospel without interference."

There have been times when evangelical Christians have attempted to follow Jesus' command to evangelize the world but have done so in a worldly, sinful manner; there have been other times when a mistaken worry about peace or personal comfort has led evangelicals to neglect the mission Jesus gave. Some Christians have manipulated people, have been dishonest, and have taken actions that do not promote the peace, justice, and liberty of society because of a desire to lead people to faith in Christ, while others have neglected the spiritually lost condition of their neighbours. Evangelicals must not in any way pull back from evangelistic or mission activities. As Christians we must carry out our God-given mission in a God-fearing manner, trusting that the way we carry out our work will be used by God for his good purposes, including peace, justice, and liberty in society. Therefore, it would be very beneficial to have a written code of mission ethics, which would be globally endorsed and taught by evangelical organizations, to set a high standard toward which we should strive and by which evangelicals could hold each other accountable. Such a code of ethics could become an important part of the evangelical contribution to global political culture, part of an effort to "seek the peace and prosperity" (Jer 29:7) of the global village.[175]

2. The Bible teaches a demanding balance of witness and respect.

> "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak badly against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil" (1 Pet 3:15-17).

[175] All should note the leadership of the Evangelical Fellowship of India in this area. See their *Statement on Mission Language* (October 2000). Online: http://tinyurl.com/efi2001.

Here one sees complementarity: the necessity of witness, even apologetics (the Greek text says *apologia,* originally a defence in court), joined with the dignified treatment of the other human being in "gentleness and respect." The truth of the need for the gospel is complementary with the truth of the God-given dignity of the people who hear the gospel. People are alienated from God and in serious need of the gospel of reconciliation with God by faith in Jesus; people are created in God's image and therefore worthy of respect and able to both recognize and take many respectable actions.[176] Both sides of the truth must be obeyed. The complementary sides of the truth make an ethics of mission both necessary and possible.

Christians should always see other people as images of God, assuming that God sees their treatment of people as an indication of how they want to treat God, even if Christians totally disagree with others and believe them to need the gospel of Christ. According to Christian ethics, human rights are given by God to all people, regardless of their religion or their lost spiritual condition. (This stands in contrast with some religions which have said that only members of their religion have rights.) Christians should defend the basic human rights of all while also praying for them to come to faith in Christ. To repeat: these complementary truths could be expressed in a code of mission ethics which evangelicals teach and seek to follow. The influence of such a code could extend well beyond evangelical circles. One can hope that such a code, along with improving practice on the part of all Christians, may make the gospel more attractive, reduce religious persecution (of all religions), and also encourage followers of other religions to set public standards for the proper treatment of their neighbours; nevertheless, the Christian's motivation must focus on glorifying God.[177]

3. The Bible teaches self-criticism in light of God's forgiveness.

In a time of religious violence, when Islamists pour violence on Christians, and Hindu or Buddhist nationalists oppose Christians in India and Sri Lanka, it would be too easy to criticize others. But the Christian faith is

[176] Many of the contributions of Christians to political culture arise from their two-sided view of a human being, as created in the image of God but fallen into sin.

[177] Missionaries in Africa and Europe report that some people become interested in Christ after they first hear of or experience the Christian conviction that people have a God-given dignity, which stands in sharp contrast with many other religions and philosophies.

very self-critical: the Old and New Testaments especially criticize the people of God, not other people. One should not say with the Pharisee: "God, I thank you, that I am not like the others," but one should say with the tax collector: "God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (Luke 18:11-13). Because our hope is in God's mercy, not our goodness, Christians are free to be self-critical, more self-critical than are adherents of most other religions. If we have sinned, we should confess our sin, accept God's forgiveness, and move on with the mission he has given us. This sin can be either neglecting the God-given dignity of our neighbours or neglecting their need for the gospel. A Christian's first question should never be, "What do other religions do?" Rather, as Peter says, in the middle of false accusations, a Christian should ask, "Am I gentle and full of respect for my neighbours, to whom I am explaining the hope and faith which we all need?"

4. Different cultures emphasize opposites sides of the truth.

Within the Christian movement some churches and cultures emphasize the opposite sides of these complementary truths, that people need the gospel and that the image of God is worthy of respect. Compare India and Germany, using over-generalized stereotypes: From the point of view of an Indian Catholic evangelist, any evangelical evangelist in Germany seems to be lacking vitality because of a weak awareness of people's need for the gospel. From the point of view of an evangelical evangelist in Germany, every Catholic evangelist in India seems to be putting too much pressure on people because of a weak awareness of the God-given dignity of those people. It is too simple to tell Christians from other cultures to change, if this is mostly a demand to be like one's own culture. We must temporarily accept some cultural diversity while Christians instruct each other about what it means to both respect the God-given dignity of their neighbours and also see their serious need for the gospel. A global code of mission ethics could be a tool for mutual exhortation.

5. Good and bad examples can be identified.

In history and in the present, Christians recognize both problems and lessons in this realm. As a good example of respecting the dignity of others, modern evangelicals have been highly dedicated to religious freedom, including the religious freedom of non-evangelical churches. In the middle of the nineteenth century, when pastors of state and free churches in

Europe began to meet across boundaries forming the earliest ecumenical movement, in a context in which formal church membership in national churches was often compulsory, religious freedom became a major goal. In 1852, for example, a high ranking delegation of the Evangelical Alliance visited the Ottoman sultan on behalf of persecuted Orthodox churches; following this tradition today, well-equipped evangelical religious freedom lawyers have won cases in the European Court for Human Rights for several non-protestant churches, including the Bessarabian Church and the Greek Orthodox Church. Today the orthodox churches in Turkey and the dying old churches in Iraq find their greatest help in evangelical organizations, as evangelicals effectively use the media and speak to governments.

Religious freedom in its modern, peaceful form (not the anti-religious, violent form of the French Revolution) was invented by the Baptist Roger Williams at the end of the seventeenth century in Providence (now in the US). This version of freedom of religion contributed significantly to the modern practice of freedom of speech. Evangelical groups, often with an Anglo-Saxon background, have sometimes transported the American idea of total freedom of speech for the individual, joined with low levels of respect for traditional structures and cultures.[178] Christians can be grateful for these roots of freedom of religion and speech, but not all countries are prepared for the versions of freedom of speech that the US, Canada, or Australia now practice. While we endorse a high level of legal freedom of speech, in a code of ethics Christians should commit to higher standards for truth and respect of their neighbours in public speech. Not all legal speech is morally acceptable. It can be legal but morally wrong to say things that are false or which deny the dignity of one's neighbours.[179]

A painful example: Consider the statement by US-evangelist Pat Robertson that all Muslims should leave the US, which was a headline in many major Indian newspapers the next day, arguing that if Christians want Muslims to leave 'their' country, Christians should not object if Hindus want Christians to leave India. One of us (TS) happened to be in India that day and was shocked. The legal freedom of speech does not lead to a moral right to say things that disrespect other people made in the image of God,

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178 Since American evangelicals now make up only 8% of evangelicals in the world, this is rapidly changing.

179 Evangelicals should defend human rights in general without neglecting other ways of describing our obligations to each other, such as honesty, loyalty, and mercy. Some of our obligations are not easily expressed in the language of human rights.

in this case assuming they cannot be good citizens of the US.[180] This assumption is false, which makes such public statements an attack on the God-given dignity of our neighbours, a way of bearing false witness against our neighbours.[181] A written code would make it easier to identify good and bad examples and provide a basis for good teaching.

6. The rapid numerical growth of evangelicals poses challenges.

The number of evangelical Christians in the world is large, rapidly growing, and they often find themselves in the middle of confrontations between non-Christian religions and Christians, as well as conflicts among Christian traditions.[182] Evangelical groups overall have the highest percentage of Christians who come from a non-Christian background and became Christians by decision.[183] This rapid growth, especially in Africa and Asia, means many new Christians and new churches face situations of potential conflict and have not yet had good opportunities to appropriate the considerations of the rest of the Body of Christ on matters of the relation of the faith to force and conflict. In Turkey, for example, 95% of all evangelicals are converts from Islam. They (and other new evangelical believers in similar social situations) draw more attention and threats than the historic churches in Muslim countries, which have often paid the price of not preaching to their neighbours in order to gain a degree of tolerance. Evangelical groups seldom represent old churches which have established patterns for how they relate to their cultures and other religions. There are no 'evangelical' countries like there are Catholic, Orthodox, or Lutheran countries. Evangelicals should establish good patterns by means of a code of ethics.

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[180] See Reuters News reports from January 18, 2007, especially the report by Tom Heneghan.

[181] This criticism of Robertson must not be misunderstood to mean we think we must refrain from criticizing the actions or disagreeing with the beliefs of people of other religions. Some attempts to criminalize "defamation" of religion appear to be inappropriate attempts to restrict the freedoms of religion and speech. We should follow the example of Jesus and the biblical prophets who criticized sinful actions and beliefs, while we follow Peter's command to practice gentleness and respect.

[182] The estimates for the number of evangelicals range from 300 to 700 million; the World Evangelical Alliance seeks to serve a global constituency of 600 million.

[183] Only sects like the Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses have higher percentages of first-generation adherents.

In spite of this potential for conflict, evangelical groups are highly dedicated to defending religious liberty worldwide, are rarely involved as a party in civil wars, and are not connected with terror groups in any way. In general, evangelicals represent the Prince of Peace, despite the unrest and turmoil (on the personal, family, and political levels) that often accompany religious conversions. These principles can be taught in a code of ethics.

7. Evangelicals should publicly consolidate their spiritual growth in regard to the use of force in matters of faith.

In the past, Christians demanded that people leave another religion and convert to Christianity but did not allow Christians to leave the faith (as some religions still do), punishing apostasy with civil penalties, including losing family, civil rights, reputation, jobs, or even one's life.[184] In that situation, in Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist societies, not changing one's religion was more often due to societal pressure than to conviction. In history, probably more people were forced to accept a religion than there were people free to choose their religion. We are still experiencing the end of this situation (called the Constantinian Era in Christian history), which includes the end of safeguarding Christianity by political means and forcing or manipulating people into the church by political, economic, or other external pressures. Most Christians consider this spiritual growth, not a catastrophe. The Christian faith can live by the Word of God through the power of the Holy Spirit; real faith does not come from worldly powers, whether armies, governments, or business.

Overall, Christianity and its churches have taken the right course in the last hundred years, increasingly abstaining from violence, from being involved in religious or civil wars, and from using political means or economic pressure for mission. One cannot deny some continuing problems, but if 2010 is compared with previous decades or centuries, the situation is much improved. Conflict situations, such as Northern Ireland or with the so-called Christian terrorist organisation 'National Liberation Front' (NLFT) in Northeast India or with the Nagaland rebels, come from the fringe of Christianity, and the Christians involved are criticised by other Christians around the globe. In contrast, during the First World War in

[184] Probably the worst example would be the inquisitions in Europe in the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries.

Europe, many major churches fuelled the war from both sides and gave undue religious endorsement to both sides in that war. Praise God, there no longer is a broad acceptance of force in propagating one's own message in the Christian world, and no longer the automatic endorsement of the use of force by the nations in which Christians have public influence. (Note the contrast with Islam, where the Islamists' acceptance of violence to conquer the world has made inroads into the Muslim community, even though Muslims previously lived peacefully with other groups for centuries.)

The forced conversion of the Saxons by the German emperor (and other forced conversions to Christianity) is old history from which Christians have repented; such events belong to the darkest pages of church history. Today millions who do not come from a Christian cultural background are becoming Christians by pure conviction and persuasion. More people are converting to Christianity than at any time when Christians allowed external pressure to corrupt its mission. What the gun boats of Western colonial powers did not achieve in China is now being achieved by God's Word and Spirit alone.[185]

8. Everybody should separate religious persuasion from political force.

Today the Christian community is suffering heavy persecution in several countries. The number of martyrs is distressing. It is noteworthy that almost all "Christian" or "post-Christian" countries grant religious freedom to all religions, while the number of "non-Christian countries" that do not grant the same rights to Christians is still high. If we want to oppose the persecution of Christians, if we want to promote the right to testify to our faith and practice it in public, we should be even more careful to ban any means of practicing our faith and witness in ways which violate the human rights of others! All must see that evangelicals genuinely affirm the human right of choosing one's religion.

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[185] We offer the following perspective on military force: "The State (and its army) has the duty to defend peaceful Christians if they become the victims of illegal violence, but it does not do it specifically because they are Christians; it should do so for any victim of violence. An army should never have the task to defend Christianity, propagate the gospel, or conquer land for Christianity. In history many Christian areas were conquered by armies, but this was wrong. Using an army to spread a religion is always a confusion of the different tasks of the Church and the State."

In Islam, Hinduism, and partly in Judaism, religious law applies directly to government affairs. Such traditions make a separation between religious institutions and the state more difficult and thereby make freedom of religion more difficult. Christians have taken the lead and have declared that they will no longer use the state for church purposes. Christians would also encourage leaders of other religions to find suitable ways to make distinctions between religious institutions and the state, so that states are encouraged to allow freedom of religion for multiple religions.

9. We face challenging global changes.

Globalization is making these questions urgent. There is a growing interaction among religions, from the private level to world politics, some peaceful and fruitful, some senseless and harmful. A higher percentage of the world population changes religious affiliation every year. Children today leave the profession and lifestyle of their parents, move to different countries, and feel less obliged to follow old traditions. What started in the West is expanding into other cultures. Religion will not be the exception to this trend (Taylor 2005). In the Western world it is now common that children change their religion and political orientation. In other regions of the world this phenomenon is rising and often shocks cultures.

Global communications (radio, TV, internet, and newspapers) can confront every adherent of each religion with all the other religions in the world, whereas 100 years ago the vast majority of the world's population had little contact with the message of another religion. Simultaneously, the number of cross-religious marriages is growing because young people meet more possible partners than they did a generation ago, including more possible partners from other religions.

This complex relationship among parents, children, and globalization is supplemented by the growth of democracy. In democracy there is religious freedom and religious pluralism. This normally helps small religious communities without political influence more than the majority religions, which previously relied on social pressure to keep people in the religion of their birth. Latin America is a typical inner-Christian example, as the longstanding Catholic dominance is giving way to growing Protestant churches, as well as to various sects. In democracies, young people often choose their religion as they choose their favourite music or cell phone company, with no grasp of the impact this has for society, culture, and tradition.

When a country becomes democratic or extends religious liberty rights, people who had previously hidden their religion often surface. These "crypto-religionists" outwardly followed the official religion or

ideology while hiding their true beliefs, frequently in totalitarian or authoritarian societies. When the emperor allowed Protestantism in Catholic Austria in the eighteenth century, thousands of crypto-protestants began to demand their own public worship. In Islamic countries like Egypt there are many secret Christians; in Shiite Iran there are many crypto-Sunnites. Even in India there may be many crypto-Christians among the officially Hindu Dalits.

Globalization, the human rights revolution, and the growth of democracy accompany a growing competition for souls which will not be restrained by anti-conversion laws or religious persecution. Christians must combine a clear *YES* to spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ and to prayer that the Holy Spirit convinces the hearts of people, with a clear *NO* to unethical ways of doing it, ways that go against the command and the spirit of their Saviour.

10. Evangelicals should contribute to the global moral discussion.

At the inter-faith meeting "Conversion: Assessing the Reality," (Lariano, Italy, 12-16 May 2006), 27 people, representing Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and the Yoruba religion agreed that a code of conduct for propagating one's faith is needed. This event was held by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue of the Vatican and by the Office on Interreligious Relations and Dialogue of the World Council of Churches as a first step in a multi-phase process. At this meeting Christians listened to the complaints of non-Christian religions. The process envisioned at Lariano was that the various branches of Christianity would develop a code or codes of mission ethics, leading to a later inter-faith phase, to promote the idea of codes of conduct for all religious groups, so far as they are willing to participate.

The valuable results of Lariano are in two paragraphs:

> "Freedom of religion is a fundamental, inviolable and non-negotiable right of every human being in every country in the world. Freedom of religion connotes the freedom, without any obstruction, to practice one's own faith, freedom to propagate the teachings of one's faith to people of one's own and other faiths, and also the freedom to embrace another faith out of one's own free choice." (Lariano Report 2006, no. 2)
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> "We affirm that while everyone has a right to invite others to an understanding of their faith, it should not be exercised by violating other's rights and religious sensibilities." (Lariano Report 2006, no. 3)

The theme of the second phase was agreed to be "Towards an ethical approach to conversion: Christian witness in a multi-religious world." Thus a significant task facing the World Evangelical Alliance would be to add details to thesis 6: "A particular reform that we would commend to practitioners and establishments of all faiths is to ensure that conversion by 'unethical' means is discouraged and rejected by one and all. There should be transparency in the practice of inviting others to one's faith." (Lariano Report 2006, no. 6)

10.1 The current phase is an intra-Christian phase.

The need is for Christians (Protestants, Roman Catholics, Evangelicals, and Orthodox) to first develop similar codes of conduct among themselves (relating to the other branches of the Christian tradition) to which they bind themselves and which they also apply in their relations with other religions. If Christians are unable to find peaceful ways of doing mission among themselves in a way that respects both the human dignity and the spiritual needs of others, how could it be found in relation to other religions? But if Christians *can* write good moral codes, this process should encourage other world religions to write similar codes, and these codes could contribute to global standards, which would promote the peaceful freedom of religion.

Christians should start with self-obligation, not to negotiate with other religions, but because they want to live honestly before God; the mistakes of others do not give them the right to act unethically. If Christians agree to codes of conduct, they can start to teach them to their members. Local Christian groups of any persuasion will not always listen to their representatives on a world level, and this may be especially true of evangelicals because of their flat hierarchy. But a biblical code is a good starting point for teaching, giving moral guidance to Christians who could combine mission with unethical economic and political pressure, or who could combine mission with respect for people in a manner that contributes to peace, justice, and freedom in society.

10.2 This process has a moral goal, not a religious goal.

Christians (Evangelicals, Orthodox, Protestants, and Catholics) can then ask other religions to agree on codes of conduct for themselves, without denying the distinctiveness of the biblical gospel. Codes of conduct to ban ways to urge conversion by unethical means only make sense if they are not oriented toward any one group. The Lariano Report is right when it

states, "We acknowledge that errors have been perpetrated and injustice committed by the adherents of every faith. Therefore, it is incumbent on every community to conduct honest self-critical examination of its historical conduct as well as its doctrinal/theological precepts. Such self-criticism and repentance should lead to necessary reforms inter alia on the issue of conversion." (Lariano Report 2006, no. 5)

10.3 The global moral discussion relates to human rights.

A code of conduct (even if formulated only by Christians) would be of great value in talking to *governments* that want to know how to permit religious freedom legally, including the right to do mission. It must also safeguard against the use of religion for suppressing human dignity or for promoting social unrest. Many governments fear that religious conversions will fuel strife or violence. Christians can help by speaking with one voice, offering practical, balanced codes (Guntau 2007). This is the political dimension of mission ethics. How can we preserve the human right of religious freedom, while also preserving the same rights for others and preserving all other fundamental rights?[186]

Article 18.2 of the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights says: "No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice." We want this to be true for us, but we also want this to be true for all our neighbours (Lerner 1998:483). Christians may use the legal system of their states to defend their rights (Schirrmacher 2008). But equally they should not use laws and courts to hinder the rights of other religious groups when they practice their freedom of religion legally.

[186] Such a code is being developed with the World Evangelical Alliance. Another good contribution to the global discussion is "Missionary Activity and Human Rights: A Code of Conduct for Missionary Activities," published by the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion and Belief (2009), (www.oslocoalition.org). To their code we would wish to add that truth-telling about other religions is an important moral duty which is difficult to express in the language of human rights, while we note that evangelicals often see their entire lives as an act of gospel proclamation, making it difficult to separate any activity from the invitation to others to accept the evangelical faith.

11. We should summarize our convictions in a short code.

Christians need a code of conduct acceptable in mission, including what conduct needs to be banned. From the view of Christian ethics, these are universal moral principles; this code should not be intended for evangelicals only.[187]

To be sure this code of ethics is not opposed to evangelism, active missionaries must help write it; its purpose is to improve the quality of mission work and the evangelical contribution to society, not inhibit mission. The WEA must ask all churches and branches of Christianity to then stand together to publicly endorse similar principles.[188] One can seriously hope that such steps will, with time, reduce religious persecution and also give reason for governments to eliminate laws against religious conversion. Past mistakes by Christians comprise one reason why some governments try to legally restrain religious conversions.

All Christian confessions agree that a true conversion is a personal, well-considered move of the heart in dialogue with God. A forced conversion is not something Christians should want. If people want to convert, Christians should give them time for discernment and not baptize them prematurely. Pastors should be assured that converts know what they are doing. There should be transparency concerning what Christianity is and what is expected of Christians after their conversion. Christianity is not a secret cult but is open to the public. We do not have anything to hide (Matt 10:26-27). Jesus said concerning those who want to become his followers: "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?" (Luke 14:28; cf. 27-33). Christians should help people who are considering becoming Christians to calculate the costs, not rush them into churches at the risk that later, as new converts they will feel cheated.

When people today see on TV that some religious groups will use any means to further their cause, true Christians have to state what means

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[187] For the sake of completeness, we must add that violence and undue pressure cannot only be used to get people to leave a religion, but also to stay in it. To force young people to stay in a natural religion in a Brazilian tribe is as bad as to force them to become Christians.

[188] See earlier statements of the Roman Catholic Church Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*, article 2, paragraph 13, and by the World Council of Churches in "The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling to Common Witness" (1995). Online https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/towards-common-witness.

they will never use; and if some Christians use inappropriate means, they should receive the disapproval of other Christians on the basis of a public code of ethics. The motto WWJD ("What would Jesus do?"), recently popular among some teenagers, has to guide us especially when we fulfil Jesus' Great Commission.

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Addressing the Scars on the Face of Christendom:

World Mission and Global Persecution in an Age of Changing Intra-Church Relations[189]

We have at least two ugly bleeding scars across the face of Christendom that we need to address urgently if we wish to see a renaissance of evangelical Christianity in our time. Both have to do with perceptions that may be at odds with the best research of our historians. However, these perceptions, whether or not fully based on careful history, make us appear to some people as if we are monstrous Frankensteins, not representatives of the Suffering Servant, Good Shepherd, and Prince of Peace.

I. Scars on the Face of Christendom

A. Intra-Christian civil war

The first of these perceived scars is that Protestants and Catholics have been involved in a 600-year intra-Christian civil war, even if this civil war is subviolent right now.[190] Of course there have been conflicts; blood flowed, even if some of the European wars I heard described in school decades ago as Protestant-Catholic wars of religion were more religious in result than religious in cause. Protestants and Catholics fought on both sides of many of the terrible battles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which suggests that religion was only one of many motivations for the wars.

Nevertheless, the perception of an endless intra-Christian conflict was a significant part of the roots of western secularism that still leaves many resistant to the biblical message. During the decades when I was teaching in secular universities in Europe and North America, students seemed to take 'the troubles' in Northern Ireland as typical of what would happen if Protestants and Catholics were not effectively restrained by completely

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[189] This paper is a revised version of a speech presented at the Global Mission Conference 2016 held in London, October 12-15, 2016; it was previously published in *Evangelical Review of Theology* 41:2 (2017), 166-173.

[190] Because I spent more than twenty years as a guest in the Czech Republic, I may be excused for counting the beginning of Protestantism with John Hus.

secular governments. Whether or not we deserve it, this scar is on our collective face.

B. Anti-Muslim crusades

The second perceived scar is that since the Middle Ages, Christendom has been engaged in centuries of military crusades against Islam in its entirety, even if most Muslims would prefer to see the likes of ISIS, Al-Qaeda and Boko Haram defeated in the current wars which are partly with the western, formerly Christian powers. In 2007, I assisted in reporting about the three Christian martyrs in Malatya, Turkey because one of the young men killed had registered to take a theology class I was scheduled to teach in that country. Shortly thereafter I exchanged emails with a Muslim journalist living in Istanbul. This Muslim journalist is not an extremist. He even maintains good relationships with relatives who are active Christians.

Nevertheless, I was surprised to learn that he thought most Christians secretly want to reactivate the Crusades to destroy Islam militarily; he thought the reasons why all Christians are not united in a military war against Islam were a lack of courage, a lack of military force or the restraint of western governments that are controlled by secularism. This perception makes him, and probably many millions of Muslims, resistant to the biblical message. I think that his perception of the intentions of Christians is mostly wrong, yet this is how we are perceived.

I long for an evangelical renaissance in our time, because every individual needs to know Jesus and because all our cultures need the input of biblical wisdom to address terrible problems of fundamental injustice. For this renewal to happen, I believe, we need not only to look in the mirror ourselves; we also need to see the scars that others perceive to be on our faces. That perception, I believe, is that Catholics and Protestants are just waiting for the right opportunity to begin persecuting each other again, while we Protestants and Catholics together are just waiting for the right opportunity to wipe Islam off the map, whether with military, political, educational or economic weapons. Both of these scars involve fears that we will be the ones persecuting, not allowing true freedom of religion for others.

II. Promoting Freedom of Religion with Roman Catholics

Of course, one of the reasons why we evangelicals need to develop large-scale cooperation with our Roman Catholic counterparts in the realm of

religious freedom is that 2015 may have been the worst year ever in Christian history with regard to persecution. And some of the Christians most vulnerable to persecution are neither Protestant nor Catholic, but the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches in the Middle East (although the people persecuting Christians may not care what variety of Christians they are persecuting). We need a joint Protestant-Catholic response that demonstrates visible love for Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Christians.

But to emphasize what might be obvious, we need public and clearly seen cooperation between Evangelicals and Roman Catholics in the area of promoting religious freedom for all religions in order to remove these two scars from our faces. We need to demonstrate both to Muslims and to our secularized neighbours that we are not about to turn into Frankensteins who are almost ready to start new waves of persecution, whether against other Christians or against Muslims. If we do this, then some of these people may be more open to hearing the biblical message from us. Our joint Evangelical–Roman Catholic response to persecution should be seen as not only a response to the current genocides; it should also be an attempt to heal the scars that others perceive on our faces so that they are not so afraid to listen when we proclaim Jesus.

This is why it was right for a group of evangelicals to invest time, money and energy into two recent documents; this is why it is important for evangelical spokespeople to learn about those two documents. Both documents are organic parts of the changes happening in intra-church relations. Both documents are responses to the persecution of Christians. Both documents are set in the context of missions and also address the scars on the face of Christendom. The two documents are 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World' (2011) and the 'Message of the Tirana Consultation' (2015). I am glad to have participated in the efforts related to both documents, though I was not an author of either text.

A. Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World

"Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World," which we sometimes describe as simply the "Code of Ethics in Mission," was published jointly by the Vatican (specifically the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue), the World Council of Churches, and the World Evangelical Alliance, in June 2011. In principle, over 90 percent of the people in the world who are called Christians were represented, perhaps the highest percentage of Christians represented in an event since the Council of Nicaea in 325, though not everyone is fully informed about what we did.

1) Biblical themes: anti-conversion, anti-proselytism

Contrary to what some expected, the document is filled with neither the distinctives of Roman Catholic doctrine nor the themes that typically emanated from the World Council of Churches. Instead, it contains selected themes from the Bible applied to the situation of Christians who are under certain types of opposition because of their mission activities. Several countries have laws, the so-called anti-conversion laws, or enforced social expectations that prohibit people from changing religions. Other countries have laws that prohibit people from advertising for or publicly proclaiming their beliefs, the so-called anti-proselytism laws.

Behind such anti-conversion and anti-proselytism laws we frequently find the claim that Christians have used or are using inappropriate means to promote the Christian faith. The claim might be that we are using bribery, coercion, force or manipulation to bring people into the churches, or that we are making education or humanitarian aid contingent on people accepting Christ.

The response, which took five years of preparation, was a big step in intra-church cooperation. It directly addresses the scar of public fears that we Christians might use violence to annihilate Muslims, force their conversion to Christianity, or try to restrict their freedom of religion.

The code begins with a carefully balanced preamble:

> "Mission belongs to the very being of the church. Proclaiming the word of God and witnessing to the world is essential for every Christian. At the same time, it is necessary to do so according to gospel principles, with full respect and love for all human beings."

Notice the two complementary principles. On the one hand, we have the true Word of God that we must proclaim to all people; this is a bold assertion of the truth of the gospel and the urgency of proclaiming that gospel to all people. On the other hand, we have to proclaim God's word with "full respect and love for all human beings."

This second principle addresses the perceived ethical scars on our collective Christian face. Ethics is not only about doing what is right when we stand before God; ethics is also about earning the trust of our neighbors. And for us to earn trust from our neighbors, they have to both hear our principles and also know that we will keep them. Christendom has united to renounce the use of force, violence and manipulation to promote Christ or hinder another religion.

I have presented these two principles as complementary, and most evangelicals will think, "Of course." But outside the Christian world, these two principles are often separated. On one hand, much of late modern secularism assumes that strongly held religious truth claims are incompatible with tolerance and promoting freedom for people who hold different beliefs; if we want tolerance and peace in society, many think, we have to stop proclaiming strongly held truth claims.

On the other hand, many of our neighbors who are not part of late modern secularism find it entirely natural to impose their strongly held religious truth claims upon their neighbors by force. ISIS may be the most extreme version of religious extremism, but it is not the only one. And even non-violent forms of religious nationalism in some countries will say that one cannot be a good citizen of that country without following the majority religion, whether one says India is for Hindus or Saudi Arabia is for Muslims. This leads to powerful social coercion to accept the claims of the majority religion.

Strangely, multiple religions, including extremist forms of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, agree with secularism in finding a conflict between proclaiming strongly held religious truth claims and practicing love, respect and tolerance for others. But in our Christian code of ethics for missions, we have joined together proclamation of truth claims with full respect and love for all, because one of the truths we proclaim is that all people are created in the image of God.

Both individual Christians and Christian movements can become one-sided, distorting the full counsel of God one way or the other, so that they over-emphasize either the proclamation of truth claims on the one hand, or respect for those who think differently, on the other. By the power of God's Word and Spirit we have to embody and hold together two principles that are pulled apart by all sorts of unbelief. We must boldly proclaim the truth of the Word of God while we truly love and respect people who may initially reject and ridicule everything we say and believe.

2) Missions

These complementary themes are expanded in the several paragraphs of the code for missions. On the one hand, paragraph two says,

> "Jesus Christ is the supreme witness (cf. John 18:37). Christian witness is always a sharing in his witness, which takes the form of proclamation of the kingdom, service to neighbour and the total gift of self even if that act of giving leads to the cross. Just as the Father sent the Son in the power of the

> Holy Spirit, so believers are sent in mission to witness in word and action to the love of the triune God."

This is a bold assertion that we can and must participate in the very mission of God; as the Father sent the Son, and as the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit, so also the Triune God has sent us into the world. On the other hand, paragraph six of the code notes,

> "If Christians engage in inappropriate methods of exercising mission by resorting to deception and coercive means, they betray the gospel and may cause suffering to others. Such departures call for repentance and remind us of our need for God's continuing grace (cf. Romans 3:23)."

Whether or not I personally have used deception or coercion to lead people to Christ, whether or not my church has used force or manipulation to promote Christianity, some Christians have used inappropriate means to promote the faith. But now Christendom collectively, as part of the new intra-church relations of this century, has publicly repented of this past. And we have to let the world know that this repentance is real; the Crusades are a matter of old history, not to be repeated; even our Muslim neighbors should see that this scar is healing.

A careful study of the document 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World' with issues such as these in mind will be a valuable exercise.

B. Tirana 2015

We now turn to the "Message of the Tirana Consultation" from November 2015, which, I believe, is an important step in changing intra-church relations in the context of our common need to respond to persecution. This consultation also addressed one of the ethical scars on the face of Christendom. To introduce the context and purpose of our consultation, let me quote the opening lines of the message.

> "For the first time in the modern history of Christianity high level leaders and representatives of the various Church traditions gathered together to listen to, learn from, and stand with discriminated and persecuted Churches and Christians in the world today.
>
> This global gathering of 145 people took place from 2–4 November 2015, in Tirana, Albania, a country that was declared by its constitution to be an atheist state in 1967, and now has flourishing churches in a framework of religious freedom even though some discrimination may remain.
>
> The Consultation, entitled *Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom: Following Christ Together*, was convened by the Global Christian Forum together

with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Roman Catholic Church), the Pentecostal World Fellowship, the World Evangelical Alliance, and the World Council of Churches . . .

We have come together because discrimination, persecution and martyrdom among Christians and people of other faiths in the contemporary world are growing due to a complex variety of factors in different realities and contexts."

1) Religious persecution 'to do' lists

About half of the delegates came from persecuted churches, and half came from the free world. It was an extremely diverse group of people who are called 'Christians'. There were Roman Catholics and Evangelicals, Greek Orthodox and North African charismatics, Armenian Orthodox and Presbyterians, European Lutherans, and Pentecostals from several countries. The delegates represented significant differences in style of worship and about some themes in theology, though I believe almost every person there strongly affirmed the doctrines of the Trinity and the two natures of Christ, along with the Incarnation and the Resurrection, so that we had much in common.

We were driven to talk with each other because of globally growing levels of discrimination, persecution, and martyrdom of Christians. We met in secret, choosing a place rich in symbolic value, and one where we thought religious terrorists would not find us. And just as the procedure of carrying out the meeting was very practical, intended to avoid the martyrdom of the participants, so also the goal of the meeting was very practical, to find new and better 'to do' lists that may reduce the persecution and discrimination of Christians in the long-term.

It seems to me that the Holy Spirit gave wisdom to the participants, such that if the 'to do' lists are implemented, Christians can take steps that will lead to a reduction in religious persecution globally. For example, in just two of the several items in the 'to do' lists, representatives of almost all Christians called on

"***All media*** to report in an appropriate and unbiased way on violations of religious freedom, including the discrimination and persecution of Christians as well as of other faith communities."

And they then called on

"***All educational institutions*** to develop opportunities and tools to teach young people in particular about human rights, religious tolerance, healing of

> memories and hostilities of the past, and peaceful means of conflict resolution and reconciliation."

In addition to addressing the media and educational institutions, the representatives of almost all Christians issued several other such calls or public appeals.

2) Intra-Christian persecution

Seemingly along the way, in a manner that did not seem to me to be planned far in advance, a theme that directly addressed one of the scars on the face of Christendom, viz, intra-Christian persecution, surfaced. This theme was addressed in the consultation message prior to the practical lists, as an acknowledgment that, before asking others to turn firmly away from persecution based on religion, we should do it ourselves. The consultation said, "We repent of having at times persecuted each other and other religious communities in history, and ask forgiveness from each other and pray for new ways of following Christ together."

My inner response when I heard this statement at the consultation was simply, "Wow!" In the discussion of this statement, it seemed clear that the leadership of the Catholic Church strongly wanted this public repentance proclaimed. And in the meetings, repentance was immediately given and received among representatives of almost all branches of Christendom in light of the history of intra-Christian persecution. I thought I saw visible love. This does not mean that our theological differences are finished; for example, I am still a Protestant who disagrees strongly with some parts of Roman Catholic doctrine. But it does mean that we should view intra-church relationships in a new light, as friends, not as enemies.

Careful study of the "to do" lists contained in the Tirana message is needed. If we implement them wisely, with the enablement of the Holy Spirit, I think it is possible for the body of Christ to take effective steps to reduce the persecution of Christians on a global level. Love for persecuted Christians requires that we try to do so.

Also, please notice the extent to which the other great bleeding scar still perceived to be on the face of Christendom, the fear that Christians will unite to attack Islam, is being treated in the context of our more unified response to persecution. Peace has been declared among the different branches of Christianity while all those branches of Christianity also went on record as promoting freedom of religion for all peaceful religions, even if that message has not yet penetrated to every tribe and village. Now we have to let the watching world know.

III. Demonstrating Visible Love

I started by saying that there are two bleeding scars on the face of Christendom, the scar represented by the Crusades and the scar represented by the intra-Christian wars of religion; these scars seem to frighten people away from our message. These two scars have now been addressed, so that healing is occurring in the changing intra-church relations of this century as parts of our more unified response to the persecution of Christians.

One of the books that heavily influenced me as a young man was Francis Schaeffer's *The Mark of the Christian.*[191] As Schaeffer applied John 13:34–35, he said that Jesus has given our unbelieving neighbours the astonishing right to evaluate our claim to be disciples of Jesus. They may make this evaluation on the basis of our visible love. This has influenced how and why I have participated in the process of addressing the scars on our collective Christian face. Even if we think we have practiced love, some of our neighbors think they have seen something else. We, as evangelical spokespeople, should talk openly about visible love replacing our old scars.

I would encourage you to read in their entirety the two primary sources cited here. They can be easily found online: "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World" and the Tirana Consultation "Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom."[192]

[191] Francis Schaeffer, *The Mark of the Christian* (L'Abri Fellowship, 1970), now available from InterVarsity Press.

[192] See http://www.worldevangelicals.org/pdf/1106Christian_Witness_in_a_Multi-Religious_World.pdf and http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Tirana:-Christian-leaders-call-on-the-followers-of-Jesus-to-truly-come-together-against-persecution-35819.html. Both texts and many similar primary sources are found in *Global Declarations on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Human Rights,* edited by Thomas K. Johnson, Thomas Schirrmacher, and Christof Sauer (Bonn: VKW, 2017), https://www.academia.edu/36886097/Global_Declarations_on_Freedom_of_Religion_or_Belief_and_Human_Rights.

World Evangelical Alliance

World Evangelical Alliance is a global ministry working with local churches around the world to join in common concern to live and proclaim the Good News of Jesus in their communities. WEA is a network of churches in 129 nations that have each formed an evangelical alliance and over 100 international organizations joining together to give a worldwide identity, voice and platform to more than 600 million evangelical Christians. Seeking holiness, justice and renewal at every level of society – individual, family, community and culture, God is glorified and the nations of the earth are forever transformed.

Christians from ten countries met in London in 1846 for the purpose of launching, in their own words, "a new thing in church history, a definite organization for the expression of unity amongst Christian individuals belonging to different churches." This was the beginning of a vision that was fulfilled in 1951 when believers from 21 countries officially formed the World Evangelical Fellowship. Today, 150 years after the London gathering, WEA is a dynamic global structure for unity and action that embraces 600 million evangelicals in 129 countries. It is a unity based on the historic Christian faith expressed in the evangelical tradition. And it looks to the future with vision to accomplish God's purposes in discipling the nations for Jesus Christ.

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WEA
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Giving Hands

GIVING HANDS GERMANY (GH) was established in 1995 and is officially recognized as a nonprofit foreign aid organization. It is an international operating charity that – up to now – has been supporting projects in about 40 countries on four continents. In particular we care for orphans and street children. Our major focus is on Africa and Central America. GIVING HANDS always mainly provides assistance for self-help and furthers human rights thinking.

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Thanks to our international contacts companies and organizations from many countries time and again provide containers with gifts in kind which we send to the different destinations where these goods help to satisfy elementary needs. This statutory purpose is put into practice by granting nutrition, clothing, education, construction and maintenance of training centers at home and abroad, construction of wells and operation of water treatment systems, guidance for self-help and transportation of goods and gifts to areas and countries where needy people live.

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