Religious Ethics and the Quest for Neutrality and Unity: A Comparative Study of Islam and Christianity

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This research conducts a comparative analysis of how Islamic and Christian ethical traditions interact with contemporary ideals of state neutrality and social unity. The goal is to uncover theological resources and challenges within each faith that facilitate coexistence in pluralistic societies without sacrificing religious identity.

Methodology: A comparative religious ethics framework is utilized, examining primary texts (Qur'an, Hadith, Bible, patristic and classical legal writings) in conjunction with modern theological and political literature. The research juxtaposes classical viewpoints (models of Christendom and the Caliphate) against contemporary reformist responses to secular governance and interfaith harmony.

Findings: Christianity has established more substantial internal justifications for state neutrality through concepts such as the two kingdoms, natural law, and religious liberty (as articulated in Vatican II), enabling numerous denominations to embrace procedural secularism. In contrast, Islam does not possess direct counterparts; classical Shari'ah intertwines law and worship, rendering neutrality theoretically foreign. Nevertheless, reformist Muslims advocate for state neutrality based on Qur'anic principles of justice ('adl) and consultation (shura). In terms of unity, both traditions emphasize intra-faith solidarity but diverge in their approach to interfaith relations: Christianity focuses on agapic love and ecumenism, whereas Islam underscores respectful coexistence with certain limitations on theological compromise.

Conclusion: Neither faith fundamentally opposes neutrality and unity; however, Christianity has advanced further in accommodating these concepts due to historical influences and theological differences between spiritual and temporal authority. Islam remains fragmented, with traditionalists opposing and reformists reinterpreting essential doctrines.

Recommendation: Interfaith dialogue should progress beyond mere abstract toleration to confront specific legal and ethical disputes (such as blasphemy and family law). Muslim and Christian ethicists ought to work together to create frameworks for principled pluralism that are rooted in their respective traditions while also being compatible with the notion of equal citizenship.

Keywords: Christianity, Islam, Neutrality, Religious ethics, Unity.

INTRODUCTION

In a world that is increasingly globalized and diverse, societies encounter a significant and profound challenge: how to integrate various, and at times conflicting, comprehensive moral and religious beliefs within a unified political community. Two of the most prominent and influential religious traditions globally, Islam and Christianity, each have intricate and detailed ethical frameworks that aim to guide not only individual adherents but also the structuring of public life, legal systems, and social justice. (Viefhues-Bailey & Ludger 2023) However, both traditions now function within contemporary nation-states that frequently strive for some degree

of political neutrality, where the government does not officially support or impose any specific religious perspective, and aim for social cohesion amidst significant religious differences. This research conducts a comparative analysis of how Islamic and Christian ethics interact with the principles of neutrality and unity, investigating both the theological potentials and the practical challenges present in each tradition. The issue is both theoretical and pressing. (Abdelrahem, 2025) On one side, classical Islamic political philosophy, grounded in Shari'ah and the Caliphate model, envisions a cohesive religio-political system where divine law directs public matters.

Conversely, Christianity, despite its own historical context of Christendom, has experienced centuries of reformation, religious conflicts, and Enlightenment critique, prompting many of its mainstream branches to accept or even welcome secular neutrality as a prerequisite for religious liberty. Nevertheless, within both faiths, influential voices oppose neutrality as relativistic or unfaithful, asserting that genuine unity can only be realized under God's revealed law. Consequently, the outcome is a complex environment where religious ethics both clash with and enhance modern pluralistic governance. (Asadi, Ali. 2025)

The aim of this research is therefore threefold: firstly, to elucidate the ethical frameworks of Islam and Christianity in relation to public morality; secondly, to examine how each tradition has historically and theologically approached the notions of state neutrality and inter-communal unity; and thirdly, to juxtapose their current positions, pinpointing similarities, differences, and possible avenues for constructive dialogue. (Atadika, 2025) The research utilizes a comparative religious ethics methodology, referencing primary scriptural texts (Qur'an, Hadith, Bible), classical legal and theological writings (e.g., from Al-Mawardi, Aquinas, Calvin), and contemporary reformist literature (e.g., from Abdullahi An-Na'im, John Rawls' political liberalism in conversation with religion, Vatican II documents). This introduction unfolds as follows. First, the concepts of "religious ethics," "neutrality," and "unity" are defined in their practical applications.

Second, the historical and political backgrounds of Islam and Christianity are briefly compared to underscore the distinct challenges each tradition encounters. Third, the scope and limitations of the research are specified, concentrating on Sunni Islam, due to its demographic predominance, and mainstream Catholic and Protestant Christianity, acknowledging internal diversity. Lastly, the organization of the remaining sections of the study is presented. (Atadika, 2026)

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this research is to conduct a comparative analysis of how the ethical traditions of Islam and Christianity interact with contemporary political ideals such as state neutrality and social unity. Specifically, the research intends to:

i. Define the essential ethical frameworks of both Islam and Christianity in relation to public morality, law, and social order.

ii. Investigate traditional viewpoints within each faith concerning the connection between religious authority and political power, including historical examples like Christendom and the Caliphate.

iii. Examine modern reformist reactions to secularism, pluralism, and the call for state neutrality, pinpointing theological resources and challenges present in each religion.

iv. Assess the ability of Islam and Christianity to promote social unity amidst religious diversity, both within their own communities, in terms of denominational or sectarian unity, and externally, in terms of interfaith coexistence.

v. Identify both similarities and differences between the two traditions on contentious issues such as blasphemy laws, family law, and religious accommodation in public life.

vi. Offer practical recommendations for interfaith dialogue, public policy, and theological contemplation that honor religious integrity while fostering peaceful pluralism.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This research is grounded in three interrelated concepts: religious ethics, neutrality, and unity. Each concept is defined and operationalized as follows:

Religious Ethics

Definition and Scope

Religious ethics pertains to the normative framework of values, duties, virtues, and moral principles that originate from divine revelation, sacred texts, theological reasoning, and authoritative traditions within a religious community. In contrast to secular ethics, which may base morality on reason, utility, or social contracts, religious ethics asserts that the ultimate source of moral obligation surpasses human conventions and is anchored in the divine will, character, or purposes. (Schmidt, Be. & Lala, 2026) For the aims of this comparative study, religious ethics is interpreted as encompassing three interrelated dimensions:

a) Prescriptive Dimension: This includes rules, commandments, laws, and duties that explicitly dictate right actions and forbid wrong actions. Examples are the Ten Commandments in Christianity and the ḥalāl (permitted) and ḥarām (forbidden) classifications derived from Shari'ah in Islam. (Ibn al-Muqaffa to Ibn Khaldun, 2024)

b) Virtue Dimension: This dimension encompasses character traits, dispositions, and excellences that adherents are encouraged to develop. In Christianity, this comprises faith, hope, and love, which are the theological virtues, along with prudence, justice, temperance, and courage (the cardinal virtues). In Islam, it includes taqwā (God-consciousness), ṣabr (patience), shukr (gratitude), and ikhlāṣ (sincerity). (Omar, 2025)

c) Social-Political Dimension: This dimension involves principles that direct collective life, such as justice, authority, governance, war and peace, economic distribution, and interactions with non-believers. This dimension is the central focus of the current study, as it directly addresses the issues of neutrality and unity. (Audi, 2024)

Operationalization in This Study

For the purpose of comparative analysis, religious ethics in Islam and Christianity will be scrutinized along the following axes:

Axis	Islam	Christianity
Primary sources	Qur'an (divine revelation), Sunnah (Prophetic example, recorded in Hadith), Ijma' (consensus), Qiyas (analogical reasoning)	Bible (Old and New Testaments), creeds (Nicene, Apostles'), ecclesiastical tradition (patristic writings, conciliar canons)
Role of law	Shari'ah is divine law covering worship, transactions, family, criminal justice, and governance. Fiqh is human jurisprudence interpreting Shari'ah.	Law (Old Testament ceremonial and civil law) is fulfilled in Christ. Moral law (Decalogue) remains binding. Canon law governs church order, but temporal law is distinct.
Ultimate moral end	Ridā Allāh (pleasure of God) and falāḥ (success/flourishing) in this life and the next, achieved through submission (islām) to divine will	Beatitudo (beatitude/union with God) and theosis (deification), achieved through grace, faith, and love (agapē)

Relationship between ethics and worship	Ethics is inseparable from worship (ibādah). All actions are potentially acts of worship if done with right intention (niyyah).	Ethics flows from worship but is not identical to it. Good works are response to grace, not means of salvation (sola fide).
Source of moral knowledge	Revelation (Qur'an, Hadith) supplemented by reason (ʿaql) in some schools (e.g., Mu'tazila, Hanafi)	Natural law (accessible to reason) plus revealed law (Scripture). Thomas Aquinas: "Grace perfects nature."

Comparative Distinctions

i. Islamic ethics (Shari'ah) is generally more legally comprehensive, governing areas that Christianity frequently assigns to personal conscience or secular legislation (for instance, dietary regulations, ritual purity, and criminal penalties).

ii. Christianity strongly emphasizes the inadequacy of law for salvation and prioritizes grace and love. In contrast, Islam stresses adherence to divine commands as the means to attain God's favor, without a distinct separation between law and grace.

iii. While both traditions emphasize community, Christianity exhibits a more pronounced focus on individual conscience, as seen in Pauline teachings that state "each will stand before the judgment seat of God," which can validate deviations from communal standards.

Grasping religious ethics is essential, as the manner in which a tradition articulates the source, scope, and purpose of morality will influence its stance on state neutrality. A tradition that regards divine law as the exclusive legitimate foundation for public order is likely to oppose neutrality. Conversely, a tradition that differentiates between moral law applicable to believers and civil law for everyone is more open to accommodation. (Considine, 2024)

Neutrality

Definition and Scope

Neutrality, within the realms of political philosophy and religious studies, denotes the principle that governmental bodies and their institutions ought not to favor, endorse, or give preferential treatment to any specific comprehensive religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine in comparison to others. A neutral government seeks to establish a procedural framework that allows individuals and communities with varying worldviews to coexist harmoniously and engage equally in public affairs. For the purposes of this study, neutrality is interpreted as procedural rather than substantive. (Ossai, 2024) This distinction is essential:

Type	Definition	Example
Strong neutrality	The state must remain entirely agnostic on all moral and religious questions, refusing to justify policies on any religious grounds and refusing to accommodate religious practices that deviate from general law.	French laïcité (strict form); Richard Rorty's secular liberalism
Weak neutrality	The state has no official religion and does not coerce religious adherence, but it may acknowledge, accommodate, and even support religious institutions insofar as they contribute to public goods.	U.S. First Amendment (establishment clause + free exercise clause); German church tax system
Principled pluralism	The state recognizes that multiple religious and non-religious worldviews are legitimate expressions of human dignity and seeks	John Rawls's political liberalism; Vatican II's Dignitatis Humanae

	overlapping consensus on basic political principles.	

The laws and policies of the state are formulated without consideration of the truth or falsehood of any religious belief. The state does not seek to favor religion over non-religion, nor does it prioritize one religion over another. Nevertheless, the state may allow for religious practices through exemptions or modifications.

The state itself embraces a specific moral or metaphysical stance (for instance, liberal autonomy or secular humanism) and utilizes its authority to advance that stance. Numerous religious critics contend that the purported "neutrality" is, in fact, a manifestation of substantive liberalism. This study adopts a procedural definition while recognizing that achieving perfect neutrality is likely unattainable and that assertions of neutrality frequently conceal substantive commitments. (Dupi, & Husaen, 2025)

Types of Neutrality Distinguished

This research primarily addresses weak neutrality and principled pluralism, as strong neutrality is infrequently observed in practice and tends to provoke religious opposition. A religious tradition will be deemed compatible with state neutrality if it fulfills the following criteria adapted from the works of Abdullahi An-Na'im and John Rawls:

i. The tradition does not insist that the state employs coercive power to impose its religious laws on non-believers.

ii. The tradition acknowledges that the same rights and freedoms it asserts for itself (such as the right to worship, to educate children, and to organize communally) must also be afforded to others, including non-believers and followers of different religions.

iii. The tradition is capable of articulating its moral commitments in terms that are publicly accessible (for instance, justice, human dignity, and the common good) without relying solely on sectarian foundations.

iv. The tradition accepts that the state may accommodate religious practices (for example, providing halal food in prisons or allowing exemptions from uniform policies) without thereby establishing a state religion.

v. The tradition differentiates between what God requires of believers and what the state may legitimately require of all citizens.

Neutrality in Historical Context

Christianity: The traditional Christendom framework dismissed the concept of neutrality. The conflicts arising from the Reformation necessitated a reevaluation. Locke's Letter Concerning Toleration (1689) posited that civil authorities should not involve themselves in the salvation of souls.Vatican II's Dignitatis Humanae (1965) asserted that the right to religious freedom is grounded in human dignity, rather than being a mere concession.

Islam: The traditional Caliphate framework also rejected neutrality. Non-Muslims (dhimmī) were afforded protection but held an inferior status. The Ottoman millet system permitted legal autonomy while maintaining Muslim dominance. Contemporary reformists (such as An-Na'im and Abou El Fadl) contend that the Medina Constitution serves as a model for pluralistic and neutral governance. (Erdem, & et.al, (Eds.), 2026)

Unity

Definition and Scope

In this study, the term 'Unity' signifies social cohesion, peaceful coexistence, and collaborative action amidst religious differences. It does not imply theological consensus, doctrinal uniformity, or the obliteration of unique religious identities.

Instead, unity is perceived as the ability of individuals and communities with differing ultimate commitments to coexist peacefully, acknowledge one another as fellow citizens or neighbors, and collaborate on common moral and practical endeavors. The three analytically distinct levels of unity are categorized as follows:

a) Intra-faith Unity

This pertains to unity within Islam (encompassing Sunni, Shi'a, Sufi, and other traditions) and within Christianity (including Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and other denominations). Both faiths encounter internal divisions that can be as profound as those existing between different religions. Intra-faith unity is significant because a community that fails to attain internal cohesion may find it challenging to maintain a consistent stance on neutrality and external unity.

i. Christian ecumenism: This movement aims for visible unity among Christian denominations, exemplified by the World Council of Churches (established in 1948), bilateral dialogues (such as the Catholic-Lutheran Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification from 1999), and documents promoting theological convergence.

ii. Islamic rapprochement (taqrīb): These are initiatives aimed at reconciling Sunni-Shi'a divisions, represented by organizations like the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought (based in Iran) and various inter-sectarian dialogues.

b) Interfaith Unity

This pertains to harmonious and constructive interactions between Muslims and Christians as separate religious communities. Interfaith unity does not necessitate consensus on doctrines (such as the Trinity, the incarnation, or the prophethood of Muhammad) but does require mutual acknowledgment, respect, and a commitment to non-violence. The Catholic Church identifies four categories of interreligious dialogue: the dialogue of life (everyday coexistence), the dialogue of action (collaborative initiatives), the dialogue of theological exchange (academic discussions), and the dialogue of religious experience (joint prayer when suitable). As stated in documents such as Nostra Aetate (Vatican II, 1965), A Common Word Between Us and You (2007, endorsed by 138 Muslim scholars), and the Document on Human Fraternity (Abu Dhabi, 2019).

c) Civic Unity

This denotes the feeling of shared belonging and mutual responsibility among all citizens within a diverse political community, irrespective of their religious or secular beliefs. Civic unity represents the most fundamental form: it requires only that citizens abstain from violence and recognize the legitimacy of common political institutions. Individuals with differing comprehensive doctrines can concur on a political understanding of justice as the foundation for social cohesion. This unity is rooted in a commitment to democratic constitutional principles, rather than shared ethnicity, religion, or culture. (Ghaffar, and Von, (Eds.), (2025)

Operational Criteria for Assessing Unity

For the purposes of this comparative study, unity will be assessed along the following dimensions:

Dimension	Indicators
Absence of violence	No systematic religiously motivated killing, forced conversion, destruction of religious sites, or forced displacement.

Legal equality	Citizens of all religions have equal access to courts, public office, education, employment, and security protection.
Social interaction	Routine, unremarkable interactions between Muslims and Christians in neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, and markets.
Cooperative action	Joint projects on issues of common concern (e.g., poverty relief, environmental protection, peacebuilding, refugees).
Mutual recognition	Each tradition acknowledges the other as legitimate (if mistaken) community of faith, not as idolaters or infidels deserving punishment.
Institutional dialogue	Existence of official or semi-official bodies for interfaith consultation and conflict resolution.

Barriers to Unity

Both traditions encompass theological and practical obstacles to unity:

i. **Christian obstacles:** Historical anti-Judaism and anti-Islam rhetoric (for instance, portraying Muhammad as a false prophet and Islam as a heresy); missionary efforts that may be perceived as disrespectful; exclusive claims to salvation (extra ecclesiam nulla salus, albeit moderated by Vatican II).

ii. **Islamic obstacles:** Qur'anic denunciations of shirk (polytheism), which some scholars apply to Trinitarian Christianity; legal principles regarding apostasy (punishment for abandoning Islam); historical dhimmi status; certain hadiths foretelling the ultimate triumph of Islam over other faiths.

iii. **Practical obstacles:** Historical grievances (Crusades, colonialism, Ottoman conflicts, Balkan wars); current geopolitical tensions (Israel-Palestine, military interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria); Islamophobia and anti-Muslim attitudes; movements advocating Christian nationalism.

The Relationship Between Neutrality and Unity

Neutrality and unity are conceptually different yet practically interconnected. A neutral state, which does not favor any particular religion, establishes the procedural framework that allows various groups to seek unity. In the absence of neutrality, unity may be enforced (for instance, through forced conversions) instead of being a voluntary choice. Nevertheless, neutrality by itself does not ensure unity; it merely eliminates state-imposed barriers. To cultivate genuine unity, active initiatives, dialogue, collaboration, and mutual education are essential. On the other hand, the quest for unity may necessitate restrictions on certain types of religious expression that provoke hatred or violence. (Religions for Peace Europe, 2025) This situation creates a conflict: religious communities might argue that their ethical responsibilities, such as condemning false beliefs, are undermined by the requirements of civic unity. Addressing this conflict is a primary focus of the study. (Vallier, 2023) Unity stands as the ultimate practical objective of the inquiry. The study poses the question: Considering the extensive ethical claims of Islam and Christianity, along with the requirements of state neutrality in diverse societies, what form of unity is realistically attainable? Is unity confined to peaceful coexistence and civic collaboration, or can it evolve into more profound forms of mutual respect and shared moral testimony? Furthermore, what compromises must each tradition undertake to achieve even a minimal level of unity? (Ghobadzadeh, 2023)

Interconnections Among the Three Concepts

The three concepts are dynamically interrelated in the following ways:

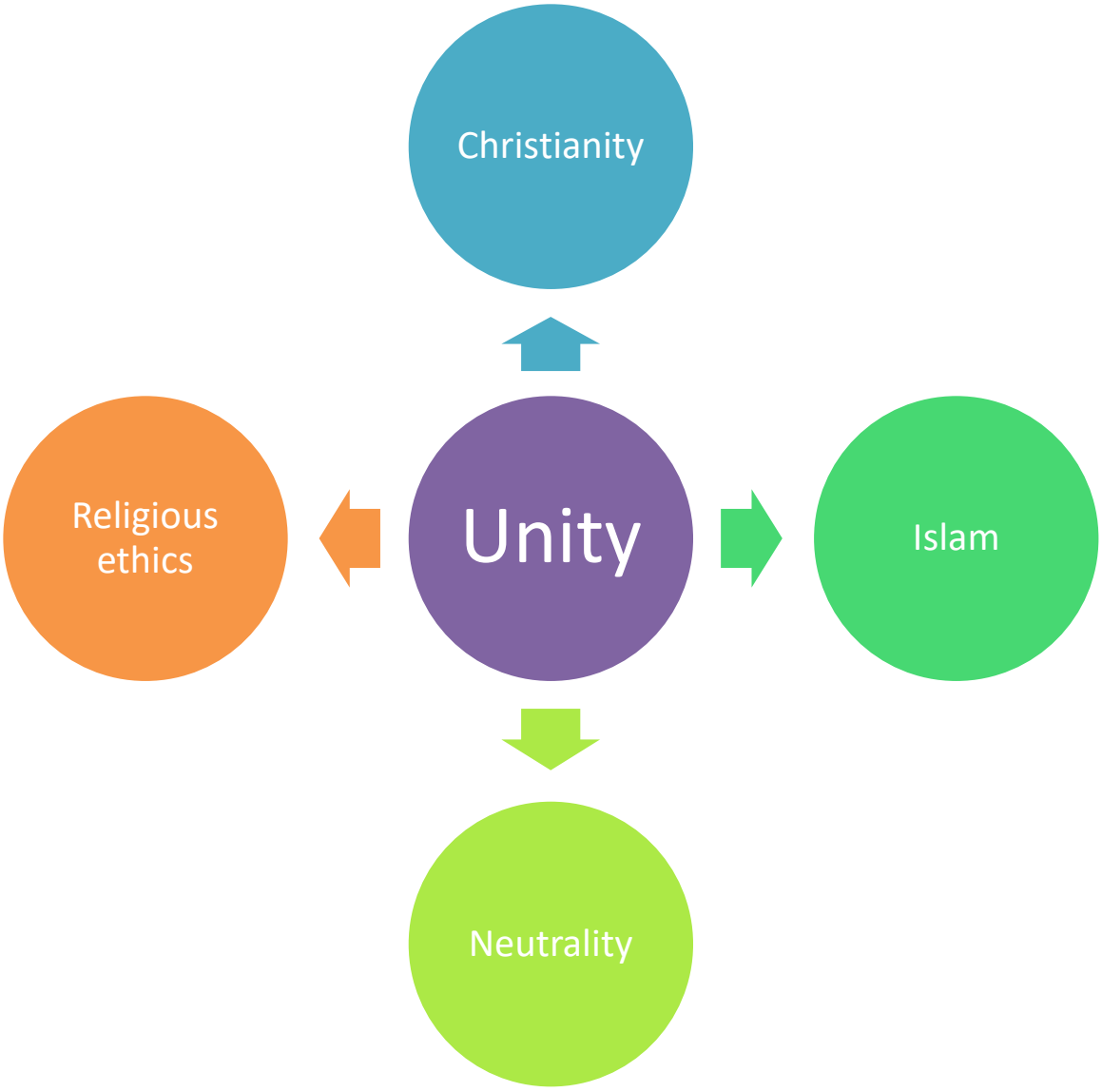
i. A tradition that equates divine will with positive law tends to resist neutrality. Conversely, a tradition that differentiates between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world is generally more accommodating.

ii. When the state refrains from favoring any particular religion, members of minority traditions are often more inclined to engage in civic life and interfaith cooperation. Nevertheless, neutrality can also be perceived as antagonistic (for instance, through the prohibition of religious symbols in public spaces).

iii. In order to foster unity with non-believers, a religious tradition may find it necessary to reinterpret scriptures that seem to advocate for hostility or separation. This reinterpretation should not be viewed as a betrayal of tradition, but rather as an illustration of its living and dynamic nature.

iv. While it is challenging, it is indeed possible to uphold strong religious ethics, embrace procedural neutrality, and achieve interfaith unity. The comparative analysis illustrates how each tradition navigates this complex triangle.

Concept Map of the Study



METHODOLOGY

This research utilizes a qualitative methodology grounded in comparative religious ethics. The approach is characterized as non-empirical and non-confessional, prioritizing analytical objectivity over advocacy. A comparative case study framework is employed, focusing on Islam and Christianity as the two central cases. Each case is analyzed through the same thematic dimensions: (a) sources of ethics, (b) classical political theology, (c) modern reformist responses to neutrality, (d) capacities for unity, and (e) specific contested issues. The research relies solely on secondary and primary textual sources:

i. Primary religious texts: Qur'an (English translation, e.g., Abdel Haleem), Hadith (Sahih Bukhari and Muslim), Bible (NRSV, encompassing both Old and New Testaments).

ii. Classical theological and juridical writings including Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin for Christianity; alongside Al-Mawardi, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Taymiyyah for Islam.

iii. Modern and contemporary literature such as Vatican II documents, encyclicals, and works by John Courtney Murray and Stanley Hauerwas (Christianity); as well as writings by Abdullahi An-Na'im, Khaled Abou El Fadl, and Tariq Ramadan (Islam).

iv. Scholarly commentaries and peer-reviewed articles from journals including the Journal of Religious Ethics, Islamic Law and Society, Modern Theology, and Comparative Islamic Studies.

The research concentrates on Sunni Islam and mainstream Catholic and mainline Protestant Christianity, while acknowledging but not extensively examining Shi'a, Orthodox, evangelical, or Salafi variations. It is text-based and does not incorporate fieldwork or interviews with practitioners.

The study presupposes interpretive potential, suggesting that religious texts permit diverse interpretations, and that contemporary scholars possess the legitimate authority to reinterpret classical viewpoints. (Ghobadzadeh, 2023)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the comparative findings organized thematically.

Foundational Ethics and Political Implications

Dimension	**Islam**	**Christianity**
Ultimate norm	Divine will (expressed in Shari'ah)	Divine love (expressed in agape)
Role of law	Law guides both private and public life comprehensively	Law restrains sin but cannot compel love; grace surpasses law
View of non-believers	People of the Book (Jews, Christians) have protected but unequal status; polytheists have fewer rights	All humans are made in God's image; evangelization is mandated but coercion is rejected by most modern traditions

Tolerance as virtue	Tolerance is permissible (ibaha) but not inherently meritorious; justice is superior	Tolerance is a form of loving the neighbor, but indifference is condemned

The differentiation made by Christianity between law and grace, as well as between spiritual and temporal domains, creates a conceptual framework that allows for state neutrality. In contrast, Islam's amalgamation of law and worship complicates the notion of neutrality, although it is not entirely unfeasible if justice ('adl) is redefined to allow for multiple legal systems within a neutral state. (Hager, 2024).

Classical Positions on Neutrality

i. **Christianity:** There is no room for neutrality. The state is mandated to uphold Christian morality, as seen in the Byzantine and Holy Roman Empires. Augustine permits the coercion of heretics, as noted in Letter 185. Luther's concept of the Two Kingdoms allows secular authorities to govern non-Christians based on natural law rather than the Gospel. In contrast, Anabaptists completely reject any form of state coercion. In 17th century, Locke's Letter Concerning Toleration (1689) advocates for state neutrality as a Christian obligation.

ii. **Islam:** There is no room for neutrality. The Caliph is responsible for enforcing Shari'ah. Non-Muslims, referred to as dhimmi, are required to pay jizya and acknowledge Muslim political dominance, yet they maintain internal autonomy regarding personal issues such as marriage, inheritance, and religious practices. This arrangement represents toleration under a framework of supremacy, rather than true neutrality.

Both Classical Christianity and Islam have historically dismissed the notion of neutrality. Nevertheless, Christianity experienced a significant and traumatic series of conflicts during the 16th to 17th centuries, which necessitated a reevaluation of theological and political perspectives. Conversely, Islam has not undergone a similar period of internal religious conflict that would lead to secular resolutions, thus preserving classical structures as the standard for many. (Hussain, 2024)

Modern Reformist Positions

In Christianity, the predominant denominations have generally embraced a stance of weak neutrality. Vatican II's Dignitatis Humanae asserts that religious freedom is a right grounded in human dignity, rather than merely a concession. Even conservative evangelicals, who frequently oppose neutrality on cultural matters such as same-sex marriage, seldom advocate for a theocratic government. In Islam, reformists like An-Na'im maintain that the Medina Constitution (the Prophet's agreement with Jews and polytheists) serves as a model for pluralistic citizenship. (James, & True, 2023) He argues that while Shari'ah is divine, its application by the state is a human interpretation that can be set aside in favor of equal citizenship. Others, such as Abou El Fadl, promote a vision of "democratic Islam" where the state remains neutral, yet society is influenced by Islamic values through persuasion rather than coercion. (Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (RIIFS), 2025) Traditionalists respond that any state that does not enforce Shari'ah is illegitimate. A notable asymmetry is present. Mainstream Christian institutions have integrated neutrality into their social teachings. In contrast, mainstream Islamic institutions are still divided, with influential traditionalist ulama opposing neutrality. Nevertheless, many ordinary Muslims in Western democracies pragmatically accept neutrality as a necessary condition for peaceful participation. (Kokew, 2025)

Unity (Intra-faith and Interfaith)

i. **Christian intra-faith:** The ecumenical movement, initiated by the World Council of Churches in 1948, aims for visible unity. Nevertheless, conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists frequently reject ecumenism with liberal Protestants. Although there has been progress in Orthodox-Catholic dialogue, it remains unresolved.

ii. **Islamic intra-faith:** The concept of the Ummah is still an ideal; however, divisions between Sunni and Shia, along with nationalism and political rivalries (such as those between Saudi Arabia and Iran), significantly disrupt unity. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) strives for political coordination, yet it does not achieve theological unity.

iii. **Interfaith unity:** Both religious traditions maintain official or semi-official dialogue entities, such as the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Common Word initiative established in 2007 between Muslim and Christian leaders. There is a prevalent trend of practical collaboration on issues like poverty, environmental concerns, and peace. However, substantial theological differences,such as the Trinity and incarnation for Muslims, and the finality of prophethood for Christians, estrict unity to civic and moral dimensions rather than doctrinal ones.

Neither tradition attains complete internal unity. In terms of external relations, interfaith unity tends to be most effective when it concentrates on shared practical issues and maintains procedural neutrality, exemplified by both groups recognizing the state as an impartial mediator. When unity necessitates theological compromise, it tends to fail. (Kokew, 2025)

Nuanced Representation of Islamic Diversity

i. Clearly differentiates among the four Sunni legal schools (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, Hanbali) and their distinct perspectives on relations with non-Muslims and the authority of the state.

ii. Engages in a discussion of Shi'a political ideologies (Twelver, Ismaili, Zaydi), highlighting the concept of wilayat al-faqih (governance by the jurist) in Iran and contrasting it with quietist Shi'a traditions.

iii. Integrates case studies from various Muslim-majority nations to illustrate the diversity in practice: Indonesia (Pancasila state philosophy), Tunisia (the compromise constitution post-2014), Morocco (the King as Commander of the Faithful with a focus on religious pluralism), Senegal (peaceful coexistence dominated by Sufi traditions), and Turkey (the debate over secularism).

iv. Differentiates between scenarios where Muslims constitute majorities versus minorities, indicating that reformist arguments advocating for neutrality tend to be more compelling in minority contexts (e.g., Western Europe, North America).

v. Incorporates contemporary research on Muslim democratic practices (e.g., Hussain 2024; Lussier & Ahnaf 2024) which shows that a significant number of Muslims actively endorse state neutrality.

Contested Case Studies

Issue	**Christian position (mainstream)**	**Islamic position (mainstream)**	**Compatibility with neutrality**

Blasphemy laws	Reject (since Enlightenment)	Many countries retain; reformists reject	Christianity compatible; Islam in tension
Abortion	Oppose but accept legal access in some denominations	Oppose but allow early exceptions	Both in tension with pro-choice neutrality
Religious education in public schools	Accept opt-out provisions	Many demand Islamic education; reformists accept neutral civic education	Possible with accommodations
Family law (marriage, divorce)	Accept state civil marriage; religious marriage optional	Classical Shari'ah demands state enforcement; reformists accept civil law for all	Christian position compatible; Islamic position requires change

Neutrality faces fewer obstacles from Christian ethics today than from classical Islamic ethics. However, on issues like abortion, both traditions challenge the substantive moral neutrality of liberal states. (Kokew, 2025)

Empirical case studies derived from recent research conducted between 2021 and 2026:

i. **Indonesia:** Neutralizing sacred spaces during elections (Lussier & Ahnaf 2024) investigates the ways in which mosques and churches actively foster political neutrality.

ii. **Nigeria:** Christian-Muslim peace advocacy in regions affected by violence (Ossai 2024) highlights the factors that facilitate interfaith unity in the face of conflict.

iii. **Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan:** Interfaith unity amid the 'Innocence of Muslims' controversy (Hager 2024), illustrates how potential violence was redirected towards the enhancement of relations.

iv. **Germany:** Muslim involvement in secular state institutions (Kokew 2025), explores how Muslim communities navigate the challenges of religious education and accommodation.

v. **Ghana:** Disputes regarding religious practices in mission schools (Atadika 2025) uncovers the persistent tensions between the autonomy of Christian institutions and the principle of state neutrality.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The following are the principal conclusions drawn from the comparative analysis:

i. Christianity has established strong theological foundations for state neutrality (including the concepts of two kingdoms, natural law, and religious liberty as a right), whereas Islam does not possess classical counterparts. Reformist Islam is in the process of developing such foundations, but these remain a subject of debate.

ii. The acceptance of neutrality within Christianity arose from particular historical traumas (such as the wars of religion) and intellectual transformations (notably the Enlightenment). In contrast, Islam has not experienced a similar evolution, which accounts for much of the current disparity.

iii. Both Islam and Christianity exhibit factions that support and oppose neutrality. Mainstream Western Christianity is largely in favor of neutrality, while mainstream Islam is split, with conservative traditionalists resisting and reformists advocating for it.

iv. There is a broad consensus on the feasibility and acceptance of interfaith collaboration on practical initiatives (such as charity, environmentalism, and peace). Doctrinal unity is neither achievable nor essential for maintaining social cohesion.

v. Both religious traditions accurately recognize that procedural neutrality often conceals substantive liberal values (including autonomy, equality, and individual rights) that may conflict with religious moral principles. Ongoing tensions exist regarding issues such as abortion, blasphemy, and family law.

vi. Arguments for neutrality from Muslim reformists tend to be more impactful in Western contexts where Muslims are in the minority. Conversely, in countries with a Muslim majority, traditionalist views maintain greater political and social influence.

vii. Both the Qur'an and the Bible include verses that can be interpreted to support either theocratic or neutralist viewpoints. The divergence is driven by interpretation rather than the text itself.

viii. Millions of Muslims and Christians coexist peacefully as neighbors and citizens in neutral states. This illustrates that religious ethics can indeed accommodate neutrality in practice, even when theoretical frameworks lag behind.

CONCLUSION

This comparative analysis of Islamic and Christian ethics concerning the pursuit of state neutrality and social cohesion leads to several significant conclusions.

Firstly, Christianity has progressed further along the path of embracing procedural neutrality. This evolution is attributed to a blend of theological advancements (such as Luther's Two Kingdoms, Catholic natural law, and Vatican II's stance on religious liberty) and historical influences (including the Reformation, the Wars of Religion, and the Enlightenment). Consequently, mainstream Christian ethics predominantly supports the notion that the state should refrain from imposing a specific religious perspective. (Mawardi, & et.al (2026) It is important to note that this does not imply that Christians have forsaken their moral beliefs in the public sphere; rather, they have largely come to terms with the idea that legal coercion is not the foremost method for promoting the Gospel. Secondly, Islam is significantly divided on the issue of neutrality. Traditional Islamic political theology has historically intertwined religion and state to such an extent that the concept of neutrality appears foreign. Reformist scholars are striving to reclaim principles of justice ('adl), consultation (shura), and the Medina Constitution as foundational elements for a pluralistic, neutral state. Nevertheless, traditionalist ulama and Islamist factions persist in their belief that Shari'ah must serve as the sole foundation of public law. Consequently, Muslim-majority nations display a broad spectrum of governance, ranging from secular (such as Turkey under Atatürk, although it is currently experiencing a regression) to theocratic (like Iran) to hybrid systems (as seen in Malaysia and Tunisia). (Lussier, & Ahnaf, 2024)

Third, unity among different religions is most effectively achieved when it is based on common civic commitments and practical collaboration, rather than on abstract theological consensus. Both faiths possess strong interfaith dialogue frameworks, and grassroots coexistence is prevalent in numerous regions worldwide. Nevertheless, significant doctrinal disparities regarding the Trinity, the incarnation, and the finality of Prophethood remain irreconcilable. This should not be viewed as a failure; rather, it is a typical aspect of religious pluralism. Unity does not necessitate unanimity. (Mohd, Siti 2025) Fourth, the pursuit of neutrality is itself subject to debate. Numerous religious adherents correctly observe that procedural neutrality often subtly endorses liberal substantive values (such as autonomy, individual choice, and equality of moral systems) that

may clash with traditional religious ethics. A genuinely neutral state might need to allow for religious exemptions and safeguard minority religious practices, even if they conflict with liberal sensibilities. (Muttaqin, 2025)

Finally, neither Islam nor Christianity is fundamentally at odds with neutrality and unity; however, each religion encounters unique challenges. For Christianity, the challenge lies in resisting the temptation to reduce faith to mere private sentiment and in preserving prophetic witness within a neutral context. For Islam, the challenge is to cultivate a politically credible and theologically authentic acceptance of state neutrality without forsaking the comprehensive vision of Shari'ah. (Oliveros, R. (Ed.). 2024/2025)

Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed for various stakeholders.

i. Engage in dialogue centered on common moral issues such as poverty, environmental stewardship, peacebuilding, and refugee care, rather than insisting on consensus regarding doctrine. Achieving practical unity fosters trust for more challenging discussions.

ii. Develop joint statements that clarify why procedural state neutrality can be acceptable to both traditions, for instance, as a safeguard for religious minorities, including situations where Muslims or Christians are in the minority.

iii. Instead of shying away from contentious topics like blasphemy laws, family law, and religious education, interfaith organizations should create comparative analyses and model legislation that honors both traditions and the principles of a neutral state.

iv. Islamic scholars ought to persist in formulating a fiqh al-ta'ayush (jurisprudence of coexistence) that anchors equal citizenship and state neutrality in Qur'anic principles of justice, covenant (mīthāq), and the inherent dignity of all individuals (karāmah).

v. The agreement made by the Prophet with Jews and polytheists established a unified political community (umma wāḥida) with legal pluralism under a neutral arbiter. This serves as a significant precedent for contemporary citizenship.

vi. Promote the understanding that while Shari'ah mandates individual Muslims, its enforcement by the state is not obligatory and may contravene Islamic justice in diverse societies.

vii. Recognize that Christianity's path to neutrality was fraught with violence and complexity, rather than a straightforward moral victory. Christians should collaborate with Muslim reformists as equals, rather than viewing them as students.

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