

# Voices: Truth and love: Thinking carefully about Sharia and civil law

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I am responding to Jack Goodyear's opinion article "[Sharia law and championing religious liberty](#)" published Feb. 24 in the *Baptist Standard*.

Many people agree we should treat our neighbors with dignity, no matter their background or beliefs. That value is important in a diverse country.

But the article's discussion of Sharia and its connection to American law leaves out key differences that matter when we talk about religious liberty and how our legal system works.

## Sharia and religious liberty

The title "Sharia law and championing religious liberty" suggests Sharia naturally supports the same kind of religious freedom Americans enjoy. In places where Sharia is used as the basis for civil law, that is not the case.

In those places, there is no separation between religion and government, and laws come directly from religious texts. This is very different from the U.S. Constitution, which protects freedom of conscience and prevents the government from establishing any religion.

## Xenophobia

The article also uses the word "xenophobic" to describe concerns about Sharia. But disagreeing with a legal system based on study, observation, or

personal experience is not the same as fearing or disliking foreigners.

Calling all criticism “xenophobia” shuts down honest discussion.

If preferring your own country’s legal system makes you xenophobic, then every nation would fall under that label. Using the term this way creates more heat than light and makes it harder for people to talk openly about real differences.

## **Sharia as legal tradition**

Another problem is the article describes Sharia only as a personal spiritual path. It is true that many Muslims in the United States practice Sharia privately through prayer, fasting, charity, and other religious duties. But Sharia is also a full legal tradition.

In countries where Sharia is used as civil law, it governs testimony in court, inheritance, marriage, divorce, contracts, and religious conversion. These are not just spiritual ideas. They are legal rules that affect people’s daily lives.

Classical Islamic jurisprudence includes rulings such as a woman’s testimony counting as half of a man’s, sons receiving twice the inheritance of daughters, bans on leaving the faith, and husbands being able to divorce their wives unilaterally.

These rules come from the legal tradition itself, not from extremist groups. They reflect a system built on different assumptions about authority, gender, and the role of religion in public life.

# Parallel legal systems

Because of these differences, it is reasonable, not hateful, to ask whether any religious legal system can fit within a secular constitutional framework like that of the United States. This question is not about denying Muslims the right to practice their faith. They should have the same religious freedom as everyone else.

The real issue is whether any religious code—Islamic, Christian, or otherwise—should be allowed to run alongside or override American civil law.

The U.S. legal system is built on the idea that laws apply equally to all citizens, regardless of their religion. Allowing a parallel legal system based on religious rules would challenge that equality and create conflicts the U.S. Constitution is designed to prevent.

## Misleading analogy

The article also compares concerns about Sharia to accusing Christians of wanting to stone children. This analogy is misleading.

Christians in America may be criticized for their moral beliefs, but those beliefs do not function as a separate legal system. Christians are not trying to enforce biblical punishments through civil law.

Sharia, however, includes detailed legal rulings used as state law in several countries. That difference matters when we talk about law, government, and constitutional principles. Mixing up moral beliefs with legal systems makes it harder to understand the real issues.

# **Love, respect, and honesty**

Treating our neighbors with love and respect does not mean agreeing with everything they believe or practice. It means recognizing their dignity while also being honest about real differences.

Respect does not require pretending all legal or ethical systems are the same. In fact, real respect involves clarity.

When people raise concerns about the legal side of Sharia, they are not necessarily attacking individuals. They are examining a legal tradition and asking whether it fits with the principles of a secular, pluralistic country.

## **Primary sources on Sharia**

Anyone writing about this topic should take time to study primary sources—the Qur'an, the hadith, and the classical schools of Islamic law—as well as the experiences of people who have lived under Sharia-based legal systems.

Many people who express concerns are drawing from firsthand accounts of limits on speech, religion, gender equality, or due process in countries where Sharia influences the law. These voices deserve to be heard, not dismissed.

After studying these sources and listening to these experiences, many conclude Sharia as a legal system does not align with the U.S. Constitution or with Texas law. This is not an insult to Islam or to Muslims. It is simply an acknowledgment that different legal traditions are built on different foundations.

Just as we would not expect American law to be imposed on countries with Islamic legal systems, we should not assume those systems naturally fit

within ours.

The conversation about Sharia and American law should be grounded in honesty, respect, and a commitment to understanding, not in slogans or accusations. Only then can we treat our neighbors with dignity while also protecting the constitutional principles that allow people of all faiths to live freely in this country.

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