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WEST COAST MUSLIM-CATHOLIC DIALOGUE DISCUSSES PROPHETS IN ONGOING COMPARISON OF SACRED TEXTS

WASHINGTON—The 13th annual West Coast Muslim-Catholic Dialogue continued its study of sacred texts with presentations on the prophets Hud and Habbakuk as well as a joint discussion on the qualities of the believer in Islam and Catholicism. The meeting was held at the Center for Spiritual Development in Orange, California on May 22-23. Bishop Carlos Sevilla, S.J., retired bishop of Yakima, Washington, and Imam Muzammil H. Siddiqi, Ph.D., of the Islamic Society of Orange County, presided.

Siddiqi lectured on the life and message of the prophet Hud in the Islamic tradition. Siddiqi identified this prophet from the third millennium before the birth of Christ as living a few generations after Noah and hailing from a wealthy tribe of Ad in southern Arabia. Muslim tradition teaches that he was a model of uprightness and was chosen by God to warn the people of Ad to turn away from their descent into immorality. Having failed to listen to this prophet, their city was destroyed and passed into legend until 1992 when archaeologists discovered a city buried in the sands of southern Arabia that perfectly corresponded to the description of Ad in the Qur'an.

Siddiqi noted that “the refusal of the people to listen to Hud’s warnings led to a catastrophe, which the Qur’an refers to as ‘the inevitable hour’ awaiting civilizations that stray from the ways of truth and justice.” The prophet Hud is esteemed by Muslims today as a prototype “for prophetic messages and guidance for all times to come. Hud gives hope that justice will prevail over oppression.”

Father Alexei Smith lectured on the prophet Habbakuk in the Catholic tradition. In the manner of Hud, Smith contended, Habbakuk emerges in history at a time of considerable stress between God and the people of Israel. The message conveyed to believers across the centuries is that God’s truth takes time to unfold even in the midst of appalling evil. What is required is

patience, which produces endurance and increases faithfulness and utter dependence on God. Father Smith acknowledged that while “it is difficult for one to accept this teaching, and difficult as well for pastors and religious leaders to counsel patience in the midst of immediate suffering,” enduring evil, according to Habbakuk, can be turned into an opportunity for faithful witness to the saving power of God.

The second part of the meeting addressed the qualities of the believer in Islam and Catholicism. Imam Taha Hassane identified the six principles of faith for Muslims. This faith, al-Iman, is translatable as a personal acceptance that is informed by a right understanding of each principle. However, such an acceptance must be accompanied by al-Islaam, which means the practical application of each principle. Hassane emphasized that belief without practice is considered weak in Islam. There is a great emphasis in Islam on personal commitment to faith with righteous actions. From the Catholic side of the question, Msgr. Dennis Mikulanis argued that the qualities of the believer similarly require an absolute submission to the will of God as conveyed through God’s Word, Jesus Christ. However, obeying the law of God requires more than doing good actions. He asserted that “in order to be a disciple of Jesus it is not enough just to obey the commandments but to turn one’s life over to God and the proclamation of the Good News.”

In addition to the co-chairs, those present at the meeting included Muslim participants Imam Mostafa Al-Qazwini of the Islamic Educational Center of Orange County; Hussam Ayloush, executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), Greater Los Angeles area; Kalim Farooki of Corona; Iftekhar A. Hai of United Muslims of America Interfaith Alliance; Imam Taha Hassane of the Islamic Center of San Diego; Sherrel A. Johnson, community relations manager and assistant to the director of CAIR, Greater Los Angeles Area; Imam Jerrel Abdul Salaam of Paramount, California; and Maria Khani. Additional Catholic participants included Father Al Baca, Diocese of Orange; Father Michael F. Kiernan, Diocese of Sacramento; Msgr. Dennis L. Mikulanis, Diocese of San Diego; Father Jose A. Rubio, Diocese of San Jose; Rt. Rev. Alexei Smith, Archdiocese of Los Angeles; Dr. Anthony Cirelli, Ph.D., associate director, Secretariat of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The next meeting is scheduled to take place May 21-22, 2013.

Keywords: West Coast Muslim-Catholic Dialogue, Bishop Carlos Sevilla, S.J., Imam Muzammil H. Siddiqi, Ph.D., Islamic Society of Orange County, Hud, Habbakuk, sacred texts, Bible, Qur'an, faith, Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, USCCB, U.S. bishops

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