

WEST COAST MUSLIM-CATHOLIC DIALOGUE CONTINUES COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SACRED TEXTS WITH DISCUSSION OF EXTREMISM IN ISLAMIC AND CATHOLIC TRADITIONS

WASHINGTON—The 15th annual West Coast Muslim-Catholic Dialogue convened for a close study of various aspects of extremism in Christianity and Islam. Presentations focused specifically on studies of jihad in Islam and just war theory in Catholicism. The meeting was co-hosted by the Islamic Society of Orange County and the Islamic Educational Center of Orange County on May 20-21, 2014. Bishop Robert McElroy of the Archdiocese of San Francisco, California, Imam Muzammil H. Siddiqi, Ph.D., of the Islamic Society of Orange County, and Imam Mostafa Al-Qazwini, of the Islamic Educational Center of Orange County, presided.

In the first part of the meeting, a general overview on the question of jihad in both the Sunni and Shia traditions of Islam was provided by Imam Al-Qazwini and Dr. Siddiqi. In his presentation on the extremism present in certain interpretations of jihad, Imam Al-Qazwini focused his remarks on the economic realities of extreme poverty and poor education that are products of, among other phenomena, the post-colonial era in the Islamic world. While “the vast majority of Muslims despise fanaticism, radicalism, and militant Islam,” nevertheless the extreme minority, especially in these marginal and poor countries, wield a powerful voice that attracts those, especially the youth and unemployed, who are looking for justice. “The world-wide Muslim population,” he remarked, “suffers because of the actions of so few.” Al-Qazwini then discussed the influential teaching of Ibn Taymiyyah and the rise of Wahhabism in the Muslim world, in order to provide some further historical context for Islamic extremism and the violent response of the Muslim minority to the effects of colonialism. Imam Siddiqi’s presentation focused on the Sunni understanding of jihad, which he argued manifests signs of continuity with the Shia interpretation. Specifically, Siddiqi focused his attention on an exegesis of specific texts from the Qur’an, especially 2:190, which reads “Fight only against those who fight,” and fight never out of sheer aggression. “In the sacred text, it is simply and clearly forbidden,” he argued, “to wage war, as well as to force conversions and to conquer other countries.” “Terrorism and violence and forced conversions,” all of these, “are not Islamic – they are against the teachings of Islam,” Siddiqi asserted. Then he shifted his remarks to the similarities between jihad and the Catholic just war theory, which he declared are nearly identical and tend more towards pacifism.

In the second part of the meeting, Bishop Robert McElroy presented the paper, “War and Peace in the Catholic Tradition: An Overview.” In his address, the bishop provided a summary of the Catholic Just War Doctrine as this is presented both in the tradition, with special reference to the teaching of Augustine, as well as in canon law and the catechism. He placed considerable emphasis on the near impossible situations that give rise to a just war and provided substantial references from recent popes who have essentially taken radical pacifist approaches to international conflicts. Following Bishop McElroy, Fr. Jose Rubio presented a paper on the scriptural understanding of war entitled “War and Peace in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.” With specific emphasis on an explication of the textual evidence from both the old

and new testaments, Fr. Rubio provided a scriptural foundation for understanding the rudiments of Catholic just war doctrine.

In addition to the co-chairs, those present at the meeting included Muslim participants Mr. Hussam Ayloush, Executive Director of CAIR, Greater Los Angeles Area; Ms. Sherrel A. Johnson, Community Relations Manager and Assistant to the Director of CAIR, Greater Los Angeles Area; Imam Jerrel Abdul Salaam of Paramount, CA; Mrs. Maria Khani; Ms. Fatima Saleh of the Islamic Educational Center of Orange County; Dr. Maryam Kim Kieu. Additional Catholic participants included Fr. Al Baca, Diocese of Orange; Msgr. Dennis L. Mikulanic, Diocese of San Diego; Fr. Jose A. Rubio, Diocese of San Jose; Rt. Rev. Alexei Smith, Archdiocese of Los Angeles; Fr. Michael Kiernan, Diocese of Sacramento; Fr. Quan V. Tran, Diocese of Orange; and, Dr. Anthony Cirelli, Associate Director, USCCB SEIA.

The next meeting will be the 2nd national plenary and is scheduled to take place in May 2014 in Washington, DC.