

WEST COAST MUSLIM-CATHOLIC DIALOGUE CONTINUES COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SACRED TEXTS WITH DISCUSSION OF AFTER-LIFE IN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

WASHINGTON—The 14th annual West Coast Muslim-Catholic Dialogue convened for a close study of the after-life in Christianity and Islam. Presentations focused on a comparative study of Christ's return and the judgment of nations in Matthew 25:31-46 and the corresponding Muslim version of the judgment in Sahih Muslim Hadith 1172. The meeting was held at the Mary and Joseph Retreat Center in Rancho Palos Verdes, California on May 29-30, 2013. Bishop Carlos Sevilla, S.J., of the Diocese of Yakima, Washington, and Imam Muzammil H. Siddiqi, Ph.D., of the Islamic Society of Orange County, presided.

In the first part of the meeting, a general overview on the question of the after-life in Islam and Christianity was provided by Imam Moustafa al-Qazwini of the Islamic Educational Center of Orange County and Bishop Sevilla. Imam Qazwini's presentation, entitled "Aspects of the Day of Reckoning," provided an account of the Muslim perspective on the after-life gleaned from salient passages in the Qur'an. With respect to the after-life, he contended, two aspects stand-out. First, we will experience the materialization of our deeds, which will take "specific forms" that manifest the status of one's soul. "The Qu'ran stresses that all deeds are going to be transformed into a form or substance. Thus, good deeds, such as acts of kindness, generosity, and charity would turn into serene entities which surround and protect us." Second, the reality of the after-life entails for Muslims a strong "belief in the unseen." Qazwini asserted that "...the universe man has so far discovered is very small compared to the one that has not been seen yet. God created this vast cosmos and made our knowledge and vision of it limited for a reason: so that we understand that this life is not the eternal life... This life is only a test," calling us to exercise belief.

In his presentation, largely culled from passages in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Bishop Sevilla provided a summary description of the rudiments of Catholic understanding on the after-life. Beginning his presentation with reference to the Creed, which identifies the God Christians believe in and follow, he proceeded to focus his attention on Christ as Redeemer, that is, as the one alone who saves humanity from sin whose effect is death. Christians begin their journey with Christ through Baptism, which is the door to eternal redeemed life, Sevilla noted. He then completed his presentation with reference to the meaning of "judgment" and the status of beings after death, i.e., heaven, hell, and purgatory. He completed his talk with a brief description of the Last Judgment in Christian tradition.

In the second part of the meeting, Fr. Al Baca of the Diocese of Orange, CA presented on the particular dimensions of the after-life in Matthew 25:31-46, while Imam Siddiqi presented on Hadith 1172. Fr. Baca provided a line-by-line exegesis of the passage. He first situated it in the context of the earlier gospel parable of the ten wise and ten foolish virgins, as well as the parable of the talents. In his explanation of the meaning of each verse, he was able to treat the important

topics of the eschatological roots of Jesus as the Son of Man, the close connection of corporal works of mercy in the determination of one's eternal status, the importance of cultivating virtues, the nature of heaven and hell, and the meaning of everlasting punishment. In order to provide a modern interpretation of how Christians are to live in the world with one eye oriented to the eternal destiny of the soul, Fr. Baca referenced germane passages from the Second Vatican Council's *Gaudium et Spes* and *Lumen Gentium*. Imam Siddiqi closed the series of presentations with an address on the Hadith 1172 entitled "Ethical Implications of Belief in Life after Death." His understanding of the passage is two-fold: on the one hand, there is an ethical dimension to our eternal status in the Hadith as those "who do not care for the poor and needy, regardless of their so-called faith," will be judged negatively by Allah; on the other hand, Siddiqi argued, there is a theological dimension in that "Allah is encountered and understood precisely with the needy." To know God, to see his face, is to encounter it in those who suffer. He closed his presentation with the recognition of the close parallels between the Gospel passage and the Hadith.

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; Mr. Kalim Farooki of Corona; Mr. Iftekhhar A. Hai of United Muslims of America Interfaith Alliance; Imam Taha Hassane of the Islamic Center of San Diego; 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. Fatma Saleh of the Islamic Educational Center of Orange County; and Dr. Ejaz Naqvi of San Francisco, CA. Additional Catholic participants included incoming co-chair (2014) Bishop Robert McElroy of the Archdiocese of San Francisco; 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; and, Dr. Anthony Cirelli, Associate Director, USCCB SEIA.

The next meeting is scheduled to take place 20-21 May 2014.