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Intolerance and Violence

Manifestions – Reasons – Approaches

2nd Vienna International Christian-Islamic Round Table
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Preface

The ongoing process of globalization, poverty and injustice, intolerance and violence, conflict and dialogue, reconciliation and harmony, meaning of human existence, deterioration of human values, crisis in education, and religious liberty and equality, were the major topics of deliberations at the First Plenary of the “Vienna International Christian-Islamic Round Table”, the VICIRoTa-I, held in October 2000.¹ These various topics had been chosen by the Muslims and Christians, coming from different parts of the world, in answer to the question what seemed to them to be the most important problem facing the humanity on its path to the future.

In June 2001 the VICIRoTa Steering Committee chose, from amongst the afore-stated topics, “Intolerance and Violence” as the theme for the Second Plenary. At issue in the latter were ‘manifestations and reasons’ of the multi-facetted phenomenon addressed by the terms ‘intolerance’ and ‘violence’ and the possible ‘approaches’ to the resulting problems – all considered from the perspectives of the various Muslim and Christian participants, creating a deeper understanding of the same. The contributions and their discussion led to a distinct perception of implications of the terms ‘intolerance’ and ‘violence’ and a comprehensive analysis and assessment of their inter-connection. Freedom of thought and openness of mind characterized the deliberations made on a worldwide horizon of topical issues with a deep concern for the new forms of the old problems.

Can one approach the complex problems of intolerance and violence in the present situation of the world without sufficiently searching for the reasons behind? This was one of the pressing questions permeating the

¹ Published in: A. Bsteh – T. Mahmood (eds.), *Reading the Signs of the Time. Contemporary Challenges for Christians and Muslims* (Vienna International Christian-Islamic Round Table; 1). Mödling, 2003.

deliberations at VICIRoTa-II. Is it religious fundamentalism only that leads to all sorts of violence? Why religion alone is always seen as a source of violence? Do religions not know very well that love of man and love of God are inseparably inter-linked so that cruelty to man always means cruelty to God? Why is religion-related violence on an increase causing unprecedented tensions worldwide? And, are not the cordial Christian-Muslim relations falling into the trap of terrorism? How can, then, violence as a human catastrophe be confronted on the march of humanity to a world increasingly netted and globalized? How can the strength of the liberating love of humans for humans take them out of the narrow prisons that they have created for themselves? To answer these questions and resolve the connected problems an active and informed dialogue, healthy and positive reconciliation, proper education, eradication of poverty, promotion of liberty and equality, social and political justice and international collaboration – as also a new consciousness of religious values and of answerability to the omnipresent God – have to be positively employed.

Such were the thoughts expressed at VICIRoTa-II, both in individual contributions and in mutual discussions. These were thoughts full of serious concern for the pressing problems humanity is facing at the beginning of this third millennium; thoughts of those looking at these problems diligently and searchingly – trusting each other in this search in order to learn from each other, and together, and yet having the courage to ask critical questions where necessary; thoughts of those raising voice also on behalf of the voiceless and the hapless in the human society. Giving priority to search for the reasons behind the present deplorable conditions, the participants made efforts to create greater awareness of the newly arising problems and suggest possibilities for their solution.

The present work is a collection of the deliberations – contributions and discussions – of VICIRoTa-II. Through its simultaneous publication in German, English, Arabic and Urdu, an effort is being made to make our deliberations available to as many readers as possible. We hope they will find this publication useful for initiating or continuing with similar for the promotion of peace and harmony in the global human society.

For having successfully arranged the VICIRoTa-II and its free and frank deliberations we are indebted, once again, to the public authorities in Austria who have been promoting for years our totally apolitical Christian-Islamic dialogue-process – mainly the Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, and the Department of Science and Research Promotion of the City of Vienna.

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