

CONCLUSIONS

International Conferences on Culture of Life and Religion and Bioethics, Law and Religion in End of Life Issues

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During these past two days, we have been blessed to gather in the symbolic city of Jerusalem to begin a dialogue fostering the art of convergence and cooperation in global ethical issues concerning us all. We have involved some of the most renowned experts in bioethics from among the three great Monotheistic faiths. More than just *learning* about how our diverse religions and cultures approach emerging bioethical issues, we have come to *understand* the foundations for the beliefs that inform these issues in each religious tradition.

Hosted by the newly-created UNESCO Chair in Bioethics and Human Rights in Rome, Italy, and the Federation of Centers and Institutes of Bioethics of Personalistic Inspiration (FIBIP), the mission of these conferences is to create a permanent academic forum for continuing the dialogue begun this week---the 13th and 14th of December 2009. The first day of the conference addressed Life and Bioethics in the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions, setting forth each religion's core beliefs on the value of human life. The second day of the conference examined how each religion applies its beliefs to life at its end. Our speakers discussed Jewish, Christian and Muslim end of life issues, practices and prohibitions with respect to the dying.

Our conference speakers have moved from general discussions of their respective religious principles to the application of these principles to specific bioethical issues. It is evident that we share much common ground.

There is universal agreement that human life is sacred---created by God as a divine gift. Therefore, each single human being has an inherent dignity and is deserving of profound respect.

- This value inherent in each human life does not allow us to harm or destroy it.
- Since God creates life, he alone has sovereignty in the decision and timing of the birth and death of human beings.
- There is inherent value in procreation, as an important human dimension, in cooperation with God, as Creator.
- Intentionally causing death, even for reasons of ending suffering, is morally unacceptable.
- Prolonging life by employing disproportionate measures is not accepted and can generally be stopped to allow the natural dying process.
- Palliative care has great value and should be encouraged and approved. There is a moral duty to not only provide medical care, but also psychological and spiritual support.

We have also discussed other issues---brain death, for example---where there is basis for agreement. Areas such as these will benefit from further discussion and collaboration.

It is our hope that human rights and duties addressed from the richness of each religion and culture, will enrich bioethical thought in today's actively advancing medical, legal and technological environment. To that end, we look forward to a renewal of this academic experience by taking this multi-cultural and inter-religious dialogue beyond Jerusalem to other cities and cultures around the world.