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Dinner with the Islamic Society of North America

Maureen Fiedler | Sep. 4, 2012 NCR Today

On Sunday evening, I was honored to attend, as an invitee, an interfaith banquet sponsored by the Islamic Society of North America. It was part of their larger national convention with the theme, "One Nation Under God, Striving for the Common Good."

You might recall the name of this organization, the largest Muslim organization in North America, because it has been an implicit target of attacks in July by Rep. Michele Bachmann and other right-wing critics who want to link it to the Muslim Brotherhood. Among those named as security risks by Bachmann and others was Imam Mohamed Magid, currently president of the Islamic society.

Imam Magid was present at the dinner, of course, and shared the stage with Rabbi David Saperstein of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, Cardinal Emeritus Theodore McCarrick of Washington, D.C., and noted author and scholar of interfaith relations Karen Armstrong. They discussed issues of religious freedom as they are emerging around the globe. (The question of contraceptive coverage in the health care law was never mentioned. They talked about real threats to religious freedom, like Muslims and Christians killing each other in Nigeria.)

Interestingly, I learned that Muslim clerics from the United States who have been moved by the support they get from Jews and Christians when they are attacked in the U.S. have traveled to places like Egypt in an effort to protect the rights of Coptic Christians.
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I became aware of the Islamic Society of North America several years ago, when I interviewed Dr. Ingrid Mattson, then the president of the society. Who knew that a woman was the elected leader of a prominent Muslim organization? Although her role was not clerical, her respected scholarship earned her a prominent leadership role in the American Muslim community.

It was an enlightening evening, showing that American Islam is developing and moving in a distinctly American way.

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