U N I T I N G   for   P E A C E   ---   *Scotland Programme 2014*

Uniting for Peace [Churches & Inter-Faith Work] in co-operation with the Annandale Street Mosque, Edinburgh, held a C H R I S T I A N - M U S L I M   Inter-Faith   P E A C E   E V E N T : on 5th of December 2014

"Global Threats & Global Prospects - Faith Reflections for World Peace"

with Christian and Muslim speakers and Open Forum. Mosque official Mr.M.Aslam welcomed everyone, then Iman Abdul Ghafoor read verses from the Qur'an. Rev.Brian Cooper [UfP Churches & Inter-Faith Secretary] thanked the Imam for hosting the occasion, spoke briefly about UK-wide work of Uniting for Peace, and stated the importance of the occasion: "At this time when religion is associated with violence in many parts of the world, it is vitally important that religions work together on peace issues, and be seen to be doing so." After reading a New Testament passage, he introduced the Muslim contributor as first speaker:

Mr. Aurangzeb Haneef - MTS Harvard Divinity School; former Lecturer in Islamic Studies, Lahore University of Management Sciences; currently Ph.D. researcher at Alwaleed Centre for the Study of Islam [Edinburgh University]. His theme was:

> "*Islam and Peace-Building in the Modern World*"

He said Muslim societies today were mostly facing crises, many because of conflicts: internal conflicts between different sects of Islam, and external conflicts with non-Muslims, popularly termed 'Jihad'. But violence related to Islam today was not exceptional, either historically or today - no religious tradition was guilt-free in respect of its followers committing violence in its name. However, the notion that religion itself was inherently violent was false: faith-related violence always came out of specific social, political and historical contexts. Religion could be as much used to promote peace as to encourage violence. He saw Muslim societies today suffering from many negative factors: the effects of Western colonialism and post-World War 1 fall of the Ottoman Empire/ Caliphate ["it deeply shook the Muslim psyche"], rise of 'reactionary religious discourse' as a response, Cold War interference, failure of Arab Nationalism, authoritarian regimes, and Western invasions post 9/11 and current conflicts. However, Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, mujahidin victory against USSR in Afghanistan, and 9/11, all contributed to the 'clash of civilisations' interpretation of events, extremist interpretations of Islamic scripture, and rising Jihadism. "Further US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq strengthened this understanding of world politics" and "Israeli oppression of people of Gaza after Hamas' win in 2006 elections and Egypt's counter-revolution further strengthened those among Muslims believing Western interventions will continue unless a Caliphate is re-established - one reason despite wide condemnations, that ISIS in Syria & Iraq still enjoys

support from lots of quarters."

Internally, this whole political scenario had had disastrous results for Muslim societies: greatly limited freedom of religion and expression, intolerance of minorities, curtailment of women's rights and decline of Muslim creativity in many spheres. While the main problems were political, theology was neither irrelevant nor a distraction: religious discourse had become so distorted and extreme that it was now an essential part of the problem - therefore "it needs to be part of the solution." A renewed emphasis on 'Islamic Peacebuilding' was vitally necessary, re-asserting religion's role in promoting peace values - eg. mercy, compassion, truth, forgiveness, reconciliation, empathy, justice, equality, charity, sanctity of life. Numerous Qur'anic verses and Prophetic reports dealt with such themes, "but other Scriptural sources appear to be not so peaceful", so it was the reader's task to receive the message aright, in accord with "the moral integrity of the Islamic religious tradition" [Islamic legal scholar Khaled Abou El Fadl]. This 'moral integrity' had been seriously eroded by extreme manifestations of Islam arising from political turmoil in Muslim societies. "This means that while interpreting one must recognise the overall moral thrust of the Qur'an, which is goodness, mercy, balance, peace and justice. No interpretation can violate this overall moral thrust." Mr. Haneef believed promoting this 'overall moral thrust' would be much helped in majority Muslim societies, if Islamic Studies were undertaken in universities within Humanities [as in early Islam] instead of in conservative seminaries. It would take time for that to happen - but if   Muslim societies continued suffering injustice, interventions and exploitation by outside powers, "internal efforts will unfortunately bear negligible fruits in terms of peace."

Rev. Brian Cooper then introduced the Christian contributor as second speaker:

Ms. Arianna Andreangeli - Fulbright Scholar [Michigan University]; Lecturer in EU Law, Edinburgh University; former Executive Member,Pax Christi [Roman Catholic]. Her theme was:

"*Role of the Vatican in Peace-Making in the Middle East"*

She stressed all Vatican peace-making efforts, indeed all Christian peace work, expressed the Christian calling "to be bearers of God's light" in the world. In Catholicism the latter was worked out in **Catholic Social Teaching**, expressing 'deep thinking' on the Church's role in secular society, with "solidarity with the oppressed and needy" at its heart. "We   are all children of God and we all have enormous value in God's sight". The "centrality of the common good" - including non-violence, human rights and multilateralism - the seeking of forgiveness and reconciliation,the upholding of fraternity - especially through combatting poverty and seeking economic justice - and limiting political and economic power, were all moral imperatives very relevant for peace-making, especially so in today's Middle East. For the Vatican, solidarity and fraternity were "the basis of all the process of building Middle East peace." Pope Benedict XVI,

in his 2012 visit to the Holy Land, declared peace "must be an ongoing process" with "religious freedom at the root of peace". [He also condemned the arms trade to the Middle East]. Pope Francis I, in his 2014 Holy Land visit, took the Vatican's peace appeal further, urging "rejection of all violence" as fundamental to any peace process, especially condemning violence in the name of religion as "anathema to the Catholic Church." Peace - 'an indivisible good' - had to embrace economic justice, with the Church's 'option for the poor' very relevant. The Vatican supported a two-state solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict, with special status for the city of Jerteusalem: "as the special city for the three Abrahamic faiths, it should not be under a single political entity, but have a special status, recognising it as the 'City of God'." Ms. Andreangeli stressed "the Catholic Church is very much present in the Holy Land, with its centuries-old Latin Patriarchate both presence and witness". It saw itself as having responsibility for *all Christians* in the Holy Land and *for all communities* - eg developing dialogue with Jews and charity action through Caritas. She much regretted the Israeli government's refusral of dialogue and lamented the migration of Christians from the Middle East due to persecution and many pressures - yet believed the only way forward for the Church was to continue expressing 'the law of Love' in a very difficult context.

For **Rev. Brian Cooper** [UfP Churches & Inter-Faith Secretary] religion-related violence in many parts of the world - from Hindu fanaticism in India to Isis [Iraq/Syria] and Boko Haram [Nigeria] - fuelled rejection of religion and rising strong secularism in UK and other European states. On

"World Peace - Can Faiths Make a Positive Contribution?" he stated while some authorities eg. Oliver McTernan saw violence as integral consequence of some faiths, most recent studies eg Karen Armstrong *Fields of Blood* and William Cavanaugh *The Myth of Religious Violence,* rejected this notion, emphasing the primacy of political forces and noting the huge violence unleashed by Fascist and secular/liberal forces in 20th-century. He said churches and faith-based peace groups had a significant record and continuing role in peace-making, eg.role of grassroots bodies in Northern Ireland bringing together Catholics and Protestants, creating conditions for the Good Friday Agreement [eg.Corrymeela Community], and key role of Anglican prophetic churchmen [Trevor Huddleston, Joost de Blank, Ambrose Reeves and Desmond Tutu] and non-violent Black Churches, in securing peaceful transition from apartheid in South Africa. On development for peace, in UK and Germany especially churches had been powerful lobbies sustaining government policies for development aid.

On the **Ukraine Crisis,** he said *the role of Ukraine's churches* was a neglected factor. There were three different Orthodox Church organisations - one linked to the Moscow Patriarchate, a new one set up after post-Soviet independence, and a small older one. The Uniate Church, Orthodox in style but under the Vatican, and strong Protestant Churches [Baptist, Adventist, Pentecostal], were also important. When violence erupted in Kiev, various Orthodox priests had stood with

crosses between the protesters and police, urging peace and non-violence, but later the new 'Kiev Patriarchate' Orthodox Church adopted a strongly nationalist, anti-Russian line, whereas the Moscow Patriarchate Church called for reconciliation and peaceful solution. In the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, religion was an important factor: as in the rest of Ukraine, many devout Orthodox, especially of Moscow Patriarchate, fear Kiev rule will bring imposition of the "EU secular human rights agenda" with gay marriage being cited as an example of what they reject on traditional Christian grounds. Some religiously-motivated separatists had even called themselves 'the Russian Orthodox Army' [without official Church approval]; for some, their anti-Kiev 'war' was a 'crusade' against Catholic influences. There were also unconfirmed reports of some harassment of non-Orthodox believers in separatist areas. Clearly, religious factors have significance in the Ukraine crisis.

On the political aspects, Rev.Brian Cooper said talk of a 'new Cold War', media demonising of President Putin,and mutually harmful sanctions,were only worsening the situation and making a solution more difficult. He re-stated the view of experts at UfP's Annual Conference [House of Lords.Nov.25 2014 - see website for full report] that Putin's annexation of Crimea had been 'a panic reaction' to the prospect of Russia's strategic naval base being seized by a pro-US and pro-NATO Kiev regime. A diplomatic solution respecting the security interests of all parties was the only answer.

In the lively **Open Forum**, participants stressed UK schools should give importance to peace education and 'development of global awareness' among young people; in Muslim majority countries, young people could be educated for peace from within their own traditions, eg. recalling the great ages of tolerance in Islamic civilisation; traditional religious education in Muslim majority countries was generally too 'top down' and should allow space for more discussion; co-operation between Christians, Muslims and Jews was especially vital for peace in the Middle East, while co-operation of all world faiths was an essential ingredient of peace on the global scale. The major world religions shared many ethical values: this commonality should be stressed and made operative for the benefit of the global community.

....**Report by Rev. Brian Cooper, UfP Churches & Inter-Faith Secretary**