

UNITING for PEACE

'GLOBALISATION - FAITH and PEACE'

*Uniting for Peace jointly with Annandale Street Mosque, Edinburgh, held a Christian-Muslim dialogue peace event, open to all, on the above theme on Saturday November 26 2016 at the mosque. The following is a summary of key issues discussed by **Rev. Brian Cooper**, Churches & Inter-Faith Secretary, Uniting for Peace, and by **Imam Hassan Rabbani**, Imam at the mosque. The summaries of their statements are followed by the full presentation by Prof. Paul Weller.*

Rev. Brian Cooper: INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS GLOBALISATION? By 'globalisation', I understand the worldwide inter-dependence and inter-connectedness - of trade, mass communications, travel, different cultures and many other features of life - which characterises the human community today. In economic terms, globalisation has emerged since the end of the Cold War, with the entrance into the world capitalist system of the ex-Communist states of Russia and Eastern Europe, and Communist China. Almost suddenly, globalisation is very much in the news, in terms of its significance politically. Both Brexit and Donald Trump's election as US President are widely interpreted as, at least in part, a grassroots popular revolt against globalisation, or at least against its negative consequences. UK Prime Minister Theresa May declared politicians had to acknowledge and respond to popular dissatisfaction over globalisation. Historian Antony Beevor blamed it for "destroying the only justification for the capitalist system" - bringing prosperity to all - because instead it was now causing gross inequality. A special issue of *The Economist* magazine, before Trump's victory, upheld the economic case for globalisation: "a less open world would hurt the poor most of all." Steve Barron, Trump's chief strategist, strongly disagreed: "globalisation has impoverished the US working class to create the Chinese middle class." Populist and far-right movements across Europe are gaining support partly because they articulate popular anxiety about globalisation and advocate protectionist and nationalist policies as the answer. In the context of ongoing economic problems in the wake of the 2007-2008 financial crash, fears over globalisation will not easily be dispelled.

GLOBALISATION AND FAITH

The world's religions and the phenomenon of globalisation are significantly related. The 20th-century saw the major faith traditions acquire a global presence, either because of missionary enterprise [Christianity, Islam] or because of migration [Hinduism, Judaism, Sikhism] - or, in the case of Islam and non-white Christianity, for both reasons. Buddhism has spread through migration, the global activities of figures like the Dalai Lama, and indigenous Western interest. Except for regionalised faiths such as indigenous African blends of missionary Christianity and tribal cults, and of such 'national' faiths as Shintoism in Japan, religions today are a key dimension of globalisation. Miroslav Volf, a US Episcopalian theologian, believes profound relationships exist between world religions and globalisation - from its threat to the sense of transcendence from its emphasis on consumer materialism, to possible common action by different faith traditions to help shape its nature and course. Volf says that while the world's religions do not have a common core, they 'overlap', sharing basic principles eg. commitment to justice, truth and compassion. Following this view, it can be argued that the contemporary reality of globalisation should help all faiths to see what they have in common, where their value systems 'overlap', and how they contribute to human awareness of belonging to a common global humanity, "one family under God".

FAITH - and PEACE

The potential for world faiths to inspire and promote human unity in a world inter-dependent in terms of trade and mass communications is in itself a potential for creating global peace. How to realise this potential raises fundamentally important questions. What does it mean for a faith to inspire a global vision of peace and harmony for the whole human family? Does this only mean a specific faith tradition expressing those of its truths that it believes could advance such a global vision - or does it also mean an embracing and promoting of the parallel truths of other faith traditions which likewise advance the vision? How can the religions *together* help a conflict-torn, divided yet fundamentally globalised world come together in peace?

Just as faith can influence globalisation for peace and harmony, so its misuse in one region, eg. Afghanistan, Iraq/Syria, has been shown to have global repercussions, as do US/Western responses to such misuse. The context of globalisation enables the worst as well as the best of religion to spread worldwide. Islamist terrorism, if not yet global

physically, has touched all continents except Latin America, and promotes its distinctive ideology - apocalyptic, violent and in Muslim terms heretical - digitally through the internet. Its emergence is more readily understood in the context of the global resurgence of religion - except for Western Europe. Globalisation enables religion to be both a positive and negative force on the world scale, and its relationship to promoting and building peace remains ambiguous.

INTER-CONNECTEDNESS AND PEACE

Maximum inter-connectedness means that conflicts in one area have ramifications far beyond the specific zone of conflict. Conflict and instability in the Horn of Africa, and other regions of that continent, have been fuelling migration northwards to Europe over recent decades, thus heightening the refugee crisis caused by the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Libya. Even in peaceful regions, economic inequality and destruction of communities under the impact of globalised trade make them socio-economically 'unpeaceful' and prone to political volatility. Communications make poor communities aware of the great riches of other countries - and of their ruling elites. This both fuels the drive for political change and economic justice - as in the Arab Spring - and destabilises countries making violence more likely. The 2007-2008 financial crash, triggered by the US sub-prime mortgage market failure, soon became a global economic crisis yet to be fully resolved, causing ongoing political volatility. Global awareness through the internet creates anxiety and alienation as much as digital social communities. Inward-looking nationalisms express a fearful tribal-instinct reactions to the excesses of globalisation. International institutions eg. UN, EU, become seemingly remote from the mass of the people, and such apparent remoteness from everyday concerns fuels populist disenchantment with such institutions, questioning their legitimacy. Such undermining of the role of international institutions seeking to bring peace, justice and order into a globalised world is very dangerous to peace, and must be resisted by all forces, including faith communities, seeking to build a harmonious world community. Faith communities have a major responsibility to help shape our globalised world in peaceful directions - and they must cooperate to that end.

[The above statement is an extended version of Rev.B.Cooper's remarks at the November 26 event and incorporates material shared in a follow-up seminar on the theme].

Imam Hassan Rabbani of Annandale Street Mosque studied Islamic Studies at Aberdeen University, Philosophy at Glasgow University and Islamic Theology at Al-Azhar University in Cairo. He is Founder of the Zainab Cobbold Institute in Glasgow, for Islamic education.

Discussing GLOBALISATION AND ISLAM, he said most Muslims welcomed globalisation - "the reality of the world as a global village" - and neither the Koran nor Islamic tradition opposed it. However, he also believed globalisation was 'hugely problematic' for Islam, due to its capacity to undermine 'the sense of the sacred'. This reality was very evident in Mecca in Saudi Arabia, spiritual centre of the Muslim world, attracting millions of pilgrims every year [currently 12 million, with 17 million forecast for 2025] to its holy sites, under the protection of the Saudi royal house. Unfortunately, the impact of globalisation, in terms of ultra-modern architecture and consumer culture, much detracted from the atmosphere of Muslim spirituality. "Mecca now is more like Dubai than the old romantic Muslim area....Many holy sites can be seen only with difficulty, almost lost in the shadow of great skyscrapers." There was tension between the puritanism of the Wahhabi form of Islam practised in Saudi Arabia, and the materialism of an international consumerism so evident in Mecca's shopping malls, luxury boutiques, US junk food, Starbucks and Kentucky Fried Chicken! Mecca had a annual souvenir trade of \$1.3 bn. The prophet Mahomet had recognised the proper importance of trade - but globalised Western commercialism was diminishing the sacredness of the holy places in Saudi Arabia. Some practices actually contradicted Muslim teaching, such as international banks charging interest having branches in the holy city, and people taking 'selfies' around the sacred Kaaba. It was very important for Islam, itself a faith transcending all borders, to resist the power of global corporations whose materialistic purpose and ethos were damaging to faith. Such unrestricted consumerism was also harmful to the environment - but Imam Rabbani saw hope in "eco-friendly awareness rising in Muslim communities", as evidenced by the eco-friendly mosque currently under construction in Oxford.