

Minutes of the Cross-Party Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief
Scottish Parliament, Committee Room 5
4th December 2019

Present

John Mason - MSP for Shettleston
Murdo Fraser – MSP for Mid Scotland and Fife
Daryl Watson – Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
Robert Torok – Family Federation for World Peace and Unification Scotland
Oliver Lane – Universal Peace Federation and Dundee Faith and Belief
Adam Mackie – John Mason’s office
Trishna Singh - Sikh Sanjog and Interfaith Scotland
Alan Kay – Interfaith Scotland
Anne Edwards – Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
Alan Meldrum - Open Doors
Maureen Sier – Interfaith Scotland
Elizabeth Marshall - Family Federation for World Peace and Unification
Irene Mckinnon – Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office
Maudrey Mckay - Unitarian Church
Robin Downey – Interfaith Scotland
Venus Stark – Interfaith Scotland
Mirella Yandoli – Church of Scotland
Jamie Spurway - Interfaith Scotland

Apologies

Brian Cooper – United For Peace
Martin Mills - University of Aberdeen
Evelyn Liston - Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
Ruth Donaldson - Christian Solidarity Worldwide
Charles Warren - St Andrews University
Kieran Turner - Evangelical Alliance Scotland
Malcom Turner - Steadfast Global
James Fraser - Release International
Brian Miller - Baptist Union of Scotland
Colin Sinclair - Church of Scotland
Bob Akroyd - Free Church of Scotland
James Orrell - Scouts Scotland
Lorraine McMahon - Church in Need
Nigel Kenny – The Christian Institute
David Meredith – Bahai Community
Ravinder Kaur Nijjar – Sikh Women’s Association
Anthony Horan - Catholic Parliamentary Office
Philip Mendelsohn – Interfaith Glasgow

Quorate

John Mason MSP and Murdo Fraser MSP were both present, making the meeting quorate.

Welcome

John Mason MSP welcomed everyone to the meeting and addressed the minutes of previous meetings. The Minutes of 2nd October were approved and adopted.

John then outlined the structure of the evening and welcomed the first two speakers.

General Meeting – Presentation from Family Federation for World Peace and Unification

Oliver Lane began the meeting with an outline of the early years of the movement and various names that it has taken. The Reverend Moon is the founder of the movement. He had an experience when he was six years old in which Jesus spoke to him and asked that he carry out a sacred mission. He died in 2012 after a troubled life but having passionately followed God's calling. Rev Moon studied in Japan and also fought for the unification of Korea which got him into trouble with authorities. He was jailed on two occasions for his faith and beliefs. He spent over two years in a North Korean concentration camp and survived despite the intense hardships. He described a sense of God protecting him during this period.

The church was found in Seoul in 1954. Reverend Moon wanted to work with other Christian bodies but was not well received by them, so had to start up his own church.

Robert Torok picked up the discussion. He described his own introduction to the movement: 'I was born in Transylvania and under communist regime there was an attempt to eradicate religious belief. People were desperate for freedom – of belief and of travel. People resented any political or religious oppression. So, I grew up with a negative view of institutional religion. Meeting the unification movement – because 'church' is still too oppressive for me – I was very impressed by the experiences I had. I discovered through personal experience of the teachings a relationship with God, and through a year-long volunteering programme I decided to change my purpose to the betterment of humanity. After ten years in which I did a lot of volunteering I was able to dedicate my time to all kinds of projects related to the Unification Movement. I found out more about the history and routes of the movement. I realised that people involved in the movement faced a lot of persecution and stigmatisation. They had to hide their beliefs. For many people it is difficult to even mention the name of Reverend Moon. It tends to create a lot of antipathy.

In preparing for this meeting I found a book covering the experience of an author who went undercover in the movement expecting to uncover the wrongdoing of Rev Moon. The author had covered many previous examples of fake preachers and leaders who had done terrible things but never faced jail. He came to the view that the Rev Moon had done nothing wrong. There is one distinction that no other religious figure in modern time has - nobody else has been the subject of so much investigation. He experienced six unjust imprisonments - in Korea, Japan and the United States. He wrote that time in prison was no obstacle for him, but rather an opportunity for growth. Many members of the movement came to visit him in prison – they

would line up to visit him outside the prison and shed tears for him. Nobody could ever find a real fault with the group. Even the UK investigated it thoroughly but have not found any flaw with the community or movement.

A British researcher who was a member of Freud's community studied how sexual behaviour affects the rise and fall of groups. He found that if a group limited sex to monogamy then the culture flourished. If a culture had no limit on sex to monogamy, then it always lost social energy. So, the message we want to bring about is that we must maintain the standard of man and woman keeping fidelity in marriage. The scientific approach to solving human's problems is key to our approach. There hasn't been any other religious group that has achieved so much since its recent founding. We should put down our differences and focus on the similarities – just as we do so in a marriage.

John Mason thanked the two speakers and then invited questions from the floor.

Question: are there members of your movement in prison currently?

The last imprisonment happened in the Republic of Moldova – at least that I'm aware of. Before that we had several instances of kidnapping where members were captured by deprogrammers. In one case a man was held for 12 years by deprogrammers hired by his family. Now we mostly enjoy freedom of religion and belief, but people still feel wary of mentioning their membership of the movement to their colleagues etc.

Question: Rev Moon had a Christian experience, so do you see yourself as a Christian movement? Do you use the bible? Is it a new religious movement or an offshoot?

Oliver - There are aspects of our faith that are common to other Christians – one god who is parent to humanity. Jesus as messiah. The Jewish were prepared and were awaiting to receive the messiah. But the chosen people decided not to follow the messiah when he came to earth. Instead of being welcomed as messiah he was executed by the state. Jesus was not able to fulfil all that he could have done if he was fully accepted and welcomed.

Robert – we are super-denominational. Just recently we had a festival in which many Muslim couples came and received the recognition of marriage. I have been teaching the principles of the unification movement. If I show the ideas to Christians, they say it is too scientific. If I show the ideas to atheists, then they say it is too religious. So, I conclude we are neither – it is a combination of religious and scientific.

John then welcomed Daryl Watson from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

Presentation from Daryl Watson of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints

Daryl began by noting some commonalties between Rev Moon's experience and their own founder, Joseph Smith's experience. The faith was was organised on 6 April 1830 in Fayette, New York and is founded on the teachings of Jesus Christ. Peace, love and forgiveness are founding principles. Despite these ideals the early community did not experience peace. They were often the victims of violence. Many started settling in west in Ohio, Missouri and Illinois. Repeatedly they experienced violent removal. Revelations by Joseph Smith counselled them to

live in peace with their neighbours. But neighbouring communities were resentful of their growing numbers and differing beliefs and practices. Church leaders including Joseph Smith were tarred and feathered, beaten and unjustly imprisoned. Seventeen men and boys were slaughtered in the Hawn's Mill Massacre. Mobs drove the community from Missouri after the governor of the state issued an expulsion. It happened in the winter months and cold heightened the suffering of the group – who numbered around 8000. They found peace in Nauvoo in Illinois for a while, but non-Mormons renewed their attacks. Our founder, Joseph Smith was martyred in prison along with his brother. The main body of saints left Nauvoo under great pressure. They settled in refugee camps on the plains of Iowa and Nebraska. An estimated 1 in 12 Saints died in these camps during the first year. A mob forcibly expelled them from Nauvoo in September 1846 and their temple was desecrated. The scope of violence against them was unprecedented. Thousands of members walked the more than one thousand miles to Salt Lake valley with many hundreds dying along the way.

Even in the UK, the community has not always been accepted. Some members used to meet in Picardy Place in Edinburgh. On 18th June 1922 about 100 Edinburgh University students burst in and confronted the church leaders. Two missionaries had paint, cats blood and other substances thrown over them before being covered in feathers. The event sparked outrage. Four students were later arrested, and a letter of apology received from the principle of the university. Interestingly we have recently received enquiries from Edinburgh University students for help with their projects.

Daryl went on to describe his own experiences.

'In my own life I've faced challenges – I've been isolated, bullied, ridiculed and spat on because of my faith. All to do with misunderstanding, stereotypes and ignorance. You see I was different. Religious freedom is a fundamental Human Right. It ensures people can exercise their agency in matters of faith. Healthy societies run on trust, confidence and a sense of safety. The great enemy of religious freedom is estrangement and alienation. The test of a pluralistic society is to achieve unity without diminishing the diversity within.

The public life of our country is becoming more and more secular. Mention of religion must be veiled. And yet we live side by side with even more religions than ever before. We can no longer assume that Christian values will be shared by everyone. Increasingly people of faith feel banished from public discussions. Accountability to god is not in fashion today. My plea is that all religions join together to defend faith and religious freedom in a manner that protects people of diverse faiths as well as those of no faith. We must not only protect our ability to profess our own religion but also protect the right of each religion to administer its own doctrines and laws.

Daryl then showed a video of Clayton Christensen of Harvard university speaking of the importance of religion to democracy.

Difficult social issues are on the horizon. Will religious organisations continue to define marriage as between male and female? Will laws barring discrimination against LGBT people

have sufficient religious exemption? Will teachers be told they cannot talk about God in class? Will religion come to be seen as something dangerous that the law must protect people from?

Let me suggest seven simple guidelines as suggested by one of our Church leaders Sister Joy D. Jones: Be informed, be civil, be sincere, be clear, be natural, be meek, be patient. My hope and prayer is that we will use our time, talents and resources to promote and defend religious freedom or belief for all.

John thanked Daryl for his input and invited questions from the floor.

Question: around the world are your members persecuted?

Around the world Christians as we know are persecuted for their beliefs. Some young missionaries were recently arrested in Russia which is quite common. Young missionaries are very visible, so they are often targets.

What is your community's policy on arms sale?

UFP – Rev Moon said that the vast sums of money spent on arms could be better used. I don't believe anyone is advocating for nuclear weapons.

LDS – We do believe in defence, but we are not an aggressive group and nuclear weapons are repulsive.

Is there any difference in the persecution experienced in this country that is different from the general issues affecting all religions?

LDS – the biggest issue we have is the musical 'The Book of Mormon' which seeks to make a mockery of our faith. And we are regularly persecuted about beliefs that are historical and no longer practised.

UFP – Members of the unification movement sometimes bring negative attention onto themselves. People are not necessarily so violently opposed to us here.

Comment - Both groups have commented on family values. There are many religious communities who are comfortable with same sex marriage. It is also very important that there is that same attitude of understanding towards those religions who view it as acceptable. We also must offer those values to those who believe differently. How we negotiate that space in a really dialogic way is going to be really crucial to how people perceive religion.

Action Points

The letter from the BBC about Thought for the Day restrictions was unsatisfactory so we have now written to Ofcom to raise the issue with them.

Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting will likely to be in March next year and will be the group's AGM. The next meeting may focus on India and the experiences of Christian, Sikh and Muslim people there.