



April 2011

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## Faith and the Big Society

Writing in the Catholic Pictorial recently, I mused on remarks heard at the Spring Synod of the Manchester and Stockport Methodist District. I had been invited to speak on the Big Society. Older members of the Methodist Church, one individual contended, rarely speak of 'Jesus' but of 'God'. Younger members see themselves primarily as followers of Jesus. It set me wondering about Catholics.....

Catholics of my generation who have lapsed do so partly out of disillusionment with the institutional church but also because 'they no longer believe in God'. When I look at the current critique of religion by Stephen Hawking or Christopher Hitchens they don't so much tackle belief in Jesus, as belief in God. But the general drift is that belief in the supernatural is not compatible with reason, a view identified by Jane Williams: 'There is a fairly widespread assumption in the prevailing culture of Britain that people of faith rely on dogma and bigotry and that no one with a brain can believe in God.' (Daily Telegraph, 25 February 2011).

An intellectual defence of belief in God can be made but I wonder if that is the starting point for most people of faith. The word Christianity does imply that its followers have allowed the person of Jesus to get under their skin. And how does this fit in with the Big Society?

Many critics of the Big Society within the Churches question whether their recruitment by Government to fill gaps created by cuts in public funding is desirable. That is a legitimate point for discussion. Some might feel that the good we do is compromised by too close an association with government of any persuasion. Others feel that initiatives such as the Big Society allow the churches a role in the public domain that would have been undreamt of in the sixties when it was assumed that the churches were on a trajectory to extinction. Critics in wider society of a secular frame of mind fear that the enrolment of faith groups in service delivery is to be opposed on the grounds of the 'dogma and bigotry' they bring with them. The challenge for the Churches is to prove them wrong. [Back to top](#)

### Diverse implications of world Christianity

"We must avoid stereotypes," said Revd Dr Nikolaus Schneider, chair of the council that coordinates relations and activities within the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). As diverse groups encounter one another in the contemporary dynamics of world Christianity, he added, the key questions are whether the calling of the church is being fulfilled by a given community, and whether Jesus Christ is to be found there. Schneider made his comments during a wide-ranging discussion of Christianity in the 21st century during a three-day visit by EKD leaders to the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, Switzerland. Taking part in the conversation were staff members and other representatives of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

Prof. Odair Pedrosa Mateus, a Brazilian theologian teaching at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland, observed that Western theologians of a century ago tended to experience Christian plurality "in a traumatic way," in terms of dispute, disaffection and disunity. It was in the context of the global South that pluralism came to be seen in a positive light, providing an opportunity for diverse groups of people to confront common challenges. Revd Dr Martin Sinaga, an LWF staff member from Indonesia, noted that in many nations Christianity sees itself as "the little flock" that needs to embrace a wider religious pluralism in order to make an impression prophetically and politically. Even so, a distinctive Christian identity forms the basis for minority churches' witness to the gospel through their life and work.

Kristine Greenaway, the WCRC communication secretary, warned that many promising opportunities for cooperation among Christians "are blocked by our stereotypes about one another," separating the member churches of ecumenical councils from more conservative evangelical and charismatic bodies. "Changes in our situations are being perceived through a lens of mutual misunderstanding," she concluded, arguing that the so-called "ecumenical" churches need to communicate more openly and effectively, and to gain an institutional competence in languages beyond the traditional, European, "official" languages of the councils.

Revd Cornelia Füllkrug-Weitzel of the Protestant aid agency Brot für die Welt, a member of the EKD delegation, noted that "plurality is threatening to people when they feel that they have to give up something important, or adopt beliefs that are not their own." Revd Christoph Anders of the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (EMW) observed that new church movements tend to be less bound to historical traditions and more likely to want to join in common reflections on common problems. Revd Dr Fidon Mwombeki, a Lutheran leader from Tanzania, applauded recent dialogues and conversations that have opened their examination of issues with practical realities in today's churches rather than with the finer points of theological doctrine.

Prof. Kathryn Johnson, a US theologian and assistant general secretary of the LWF, testified to exciting developments in inter-church dialogues among widely differing communities: "Christian world communions are very aware of growing diversity," she said. "We live it all the time." This is true not only on the global scale, but in every nation and

city: "The world is coming to us." Revd Dr John Gibaut, director of Faith and Order for the WCC, agreed that varying confessions, cultures and nationalities are living side by side, interacting, facing common challenges. "The most pressing ecclesiological question before us," he asserted, "is migration. This is not merely a matter of practicalities; it is profoundly ecclesiological. It speaks to faith, unity, mission and local ministries. Today, the migrant communities in our societies, and in our own neighbourhoods, are where ecclesiology and pastoral responsibility meet." [Back to top](#)

### Trees and tweets for World Sunday for Peace

As the sun rose on Sunday 22 May Christians and churches across the world were encouraged by the World Council of Churches (WCC) to celebrate God's peace in their worship services, to hold a Peace Sunday dawn vigil, to plant a tree as an act of peace or to use social media to share prayers for peace with Christians around the world. "Each tree will become the lasting symbol of our united efforts to bring the peace of Christ to our suffering world" said the Revd Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, the WCC general secretary. "We hope that people will feel inspired to use social media like Twitter or Facebook to share pictures, peace prayers and hopes for a just peace in their own language."

The World Sunday for Peace was part of the WCC's International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) which took place 17 -25 May in Kingston, Jamaica and marked the culmination of the "Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace". Over a thousand people from around the world met in Kingston to celebrate the promise of a just peace. Churches in the Caribbean prepared a prayer for peace for churches throughout the world to use on the Sunday for Peace. [Back to top](#)

### Churches in Japan recover as ecumenical spirit shines

As recovery efforts in Japan proceed, the full impact of the earthquake and tsunami continues to be felt by some of the World Council of Churches (WCC) member churches there. At the same time prayers, letters of solidarity and, in some cases, monetary support are coming in from the ecumenical community in Asia as well as around the world.

In a letter sent to the churches in Japan, the Revd Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, expressed the "dismay and sorrow" of the world wide church community. Speaking for the 349 WCC member churches Tveit said, "We pray for God's grace and divine protection for those who are risking their own lives in order to save others."

The tragedy has also brought together WCC member churches in Japan as they respond jointly to the needs in the disaster area, said the Revd Dong Sung Kim, responsible for regional relations with Asia at the WCC. "The show of support from churches in Asia as well as Europe and around the world is also part of what it means to be the ecumenical community," Kim said today. This same support was shown during earlier natural disasters in Pakistan and New Zealand: "But it is an important sign of the vitality of the ecumenical community in the region, showing solidarity with brothers and sisters in need," Kim said. In his letter, Tveit recognized the potential for a nuclear catastrophe and said, "The more recent news of radioactive contamination in food has heightened the apprehension and concern as the fragile web of life in which we live is endangered."

In a report today from Teruki Takada, staff member of the Commission on Ecumenical Ministries for the United Church of Christ in Japan (Kyodan), it was said that some churches in Japan still have members missing, others are hosting refugees and in one case a group of pastors was part of an emotional reunion. Few of the churches in the earthquake and tsunami region have been left untouched by the tragedy. Some remain damaged by the tsunami, while in others cleanup has begun, according to Takada's report.

After the earthquake and tsunami some churches continue to live with uncertainty. In the Sendai Kita 3-Bancho Church, seven members are still missing. Another five church members are missing in the Sendai Itsutsubashi Church. Even with this uncertainty, churches that were spared the double tragedy of an earthquake and tsunami are finding ways to reach out to those in need. The Sendai Higashi Church has already hosted 15 refugees, both members and non-members. The Sendai Minami Church has hosted 13 refugees while the Miyagino Aisen Church hosted another 16. In one situation, four pastors from the UCCJ were able to assist a survivor who spent the night on the roof of a three-story building in the snow. The Kyodan team of pastors was able to give the man a ride to the coastal area of Sendai City where he was reunited with his co-workers. "No wonder his colleagues burst into joy when he arrived at his company," Takada reported, "because his presence had never been confirmed before." [Back to top](#)

### Communication means participation and inclusion

Reconfiguring communication in the ecumenical movement means discovering, seeking and implementing new forms of communication, the General Secretary of the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) has told a gathering in Frankfurt, Germany. "As communicators we have become pilgrims in space - and sometimes in cyberspace - who have embarked on a long journey, by no means complete, from the old concept of uni-dimensional,

one-way communication to the current multi-dimensional, multi-way approach that emphasizes reciprocity and equality," said the WACC General Secretary, Revd Karin Achtelstetter, in her 31 March address.

Achtelstetter was giving the opening presentation - on "reconfiguring communication in the ecumenical movement" - at a seminar organized by the WACC Europe Region as part of its one-every-three-years general assembly. WACC is a Toronto-headquartered global organization that promotes communication for social change. The Frankfurt seminar - from 31 March to 1 April - has as its theme, "Communication and Reconfiguration in Faith, Media, Society and Economy". The aim of the seminar is to take stock of recent changes in the media, church, societal and economic landscape in Europe, and focus on the implications of these changes for WACC's principles of communication as well as the communication tasks for churches and Christian organizations and the coverage of religion in the media.

In her address, Achtelstetter noted that the word configuration is often used in astrophysics and she compared the ecumenical movement to the Milky Way. "Despite its diversity and its vastness the elements are held together by a large-scale magnetic field," she stated. "The galaxy is in constant movement and in rotation - doesn't this description remind you of the ecumenical movement?" With this image in mind, she continued, reconfiguring communication in the ecumenical movement suggests "discovering, seeking and implementing new forms of communication with an openness to new shapes and constellations". She said, "If we want to reflect about how to reconfigure communication in the ecumenical movement, then the first thing to do is to identify our communication barriers and then in a second step to dismantle them." [Back to top](#)

### Church and Peace Calls for Conflict Transformation

Church and Peace is a European Ecumenical peace church network made up of communities, training centres, peace organizations and peace service agencies. Their common conviction is that the peace witness and nonviolence of the Gospel are essential characteristics of the Church and lead to nonviolent service for peace and reconciliation. In a Press Release issued on 27.03.2011 the organisation said 'We are appalled that, once again, the international community uses military violence to contain an escalating conflict. This time it is in Libya, between the dictator Moammar al-Gadhafi and the people who oppose his oppressive regime. The basis for the use of military force is the UN's concept of "Responsibility to Protect (R2P)", authorizing military action to protect endangered peoples.

In this situation, we underscore our conviction:

'Even in situations where no solution seems possible and where violence is so endemic that a call to counter it with further violence rises amongst victims and within us too, we persist in recommending the use of nonviolent means towards every human being, means which we as disciples of Christ have in abundance. We plead for strengthened commitment of OSCE missions (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe) as well as substantial support for nonviolent intervention organised by the state as well as by churches, inspired by the models of Alternative Service for Peace, Christian Peacemaker Teams, Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel and Peace Brigades International. Violence in any form can never serve to bring about lasting peace with justice. Only the path of loving one's neighbour and loving one's enemy holds any promise. We invite all churches to resist together with us the temptation of justifying the use of deadly weapons even as a last resort. (Church and Peace Declaration on R2P, June 2009)

In the many explosive conflict situations worldwide, especially in the Mediterranean, urgently needed steps were not taken. The international community needed to support, to finance, and to strengthen the nonviolent conflict resolution processes of the region's people. We call for a consistent development of civilian instruments for conflict transformation.

Once again we state: 'Even if military force is held only in reserve for use as a measure of last resort, this influences the planning of civil action during the earlier phases of conflict by consuming a disproportionately high share of the resources available for aiding civilians. Also its availability strengthens the traditional attitude that military force is the inevitable answer. We maintain our rejection of using violent means to attempt to create good outcomes, even when under the guise of policing.' (see [declaration](#) of Church and Peace on "Responsibility to Protect (R2P)")

As a European network of churches and communities committed to nonviolence, we are holding an international conference May 20-22, 2011. It will take place at the Communauté de l'Arche in St. Antoine, France. During our conference we aim to communicate with the Peace Convocation of the Decade to Overcome Violence taking place simultaneously in Jamaica. We will pursue dialog with conflict resolution practitioners in the Balkans and Iraq. Additionally, we will work on theological foundations and political and strategic steps for alternatives to military intervention. We [invite](#) you to take part in this conference'.

More about Church and Peace at: [www.church-and-peace.org](http://www.church-and-peace.org)



Church and Peace is an associate member of the Conference of European Churches (CEC), a partner in the Assisi Coalition, a member of Action Committee Service for Peace (AGDF), and a member of the Network of Christian Peace Organizations (UK). [Back to top](#)

## Passion of Jesus in Trafalgar Square

State of the art technology will bring the live performance of The Passion of Jesus to an even greater audience in Trafalgar Square this Good Friday. Two free performances at noon and 3.15 p.m. will be relayed to a 56 sqm LED screen by Nelson's column and high quality sound systems will carry the actors' words around the Square. Script writer and producer, Peter Hutley said "Last year's performances brought in huge crowds, estimated at 15,000, and we're making it an even better experience for them this year. The GLA has given us huge support and in addition to improved technology we are building two stages so that everyone has a good view".

The play centres around the tension and drama of Christ's trial, the agony and torment of his crucifixion and the joy of his resurrection. A cast of over 70, from the renowned Wintershall plays, recreate the events in Jerusalem on that first Good Friday. The blessing at the end of the first performance on Good Friday will be given by the Archbishop of Westminster, the Most Reverend Vincent Nichols, who said " I am delighted that people from so many Christian denominations will be coming together to remind Londoners why the bank holiday of Good Friday is observed. The Wintershall plays have, for many years, brought the scriptures alive to many thousands of people. The production of the Passion of Jesus in Trafalgar Square will build on that and bring the true meaning of Easter to many more in the centre of London."

Peter Hutley, who has written and is producing The Passion, said "The support we are receiving from so many churches demonstrates the unity of the denominations in the birth, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus. I hope the play will bring faith in Christ to those who don't know about him, remind those who do, and develop faith as the greatest gift that mankind can have." [Back to top](#)

## Quakers to boycott products from Israeli settlements

Quakers in Britain have agreed to boycott products from the Israeli settlements in the West Bank. The settlements are illegal under international law. Quakers consider that this boycott is a nonviolent move for peace for Israelis and Palestinians. The decision makes clear that Quakers are not boycotting Israel.

Half a million Israeli settlers live illegally in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem). The settlements and infrastructure on Palestinian land are protected by the Israeli government and military and prevent or restrict Palestinians access to their land, water supplies, education, health services and more. Extensive settlement infrastructure divides up Palestinian land, creating obstacles to peace. Palestinian Quakers are calling for Quakers around the world to consider boycott, divestment and sanctions because of the worsening situation caused by Israel's occupation. The decision was made on 2 April by the representative decision-making body for Quakers in Britain, Meeting for Sufferings. The Meeting has not yet considered a Quaker view on divestment and sanctions.

The Meeting heard that most Jewish Israeli peace groups support boycotts of settlement products. "People matter more than territory" says the minute from the Meeting. And, "We pray fervently for both Israelis and Palestinians, keeping them together in our hearts. We hope they will find an end to their fears and the beginning of their mutual co-existence based on a just peace. And so we look forward to the end of the occupation and the end of the international boycott. In the face of the armed oppression of poor people and the increasing encroachment of the illegal settlements in the West Bank, we cannot do nothing," the minute continued. We are clear then that it would be wrong to support the illegal settlements by purchasing their goods. We therefore ask Friends (Quakers) throughout Britain Yearly Meeting to boycott settlement goods, until such time as the occupation is ended." Quakers consider that this boycott builds on their other nonviolent moves for peace in the region. Since 2002 Quakers in Britain have trained human rights observers for the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). The observers, called ecumenical accompaniers, work with Palestinians and Israelis to promote nonviolence by their protective presence, to monitor human rights abuses and to advocate for an end to the Israeli occupation. [Back to top](#)

## Faith questions the Big Society

Have you Lost or Found Faith in the Big Society? was the question posed to around 80 faith representatives at a conference in Preston on Friday 25th March. Members of all Faiths in Lancashire, representatives of voluntary groups and local authority members and officers joined together to try to understand the concept better. The conference, sponsored by Third Sector Lancashire, was organised by Blackburn Diocese, attracted people from all over Lancashire and three major keynote speakers; Baroness Warsi (Minister without portfolio), Mgr John Devine (Churches Officer in the Northwest), and Robert Beard.

In opening the conference Baroness Warsi said that in her opinion 'the principles of the Big Society mirror, in many ways, the values that make faith communities such vital assets to national life.' She continued '[The government's] aim is to build a culture where communities of different backgrounds and beliefs come together to take control of their local communities and neighbourhoods. That is why I am pleased to be standing here in front of an inter-faith audience that is actively talking about the Big Society.'

In his address Mgr John Devine, drew attention to the contribution that faith communities had made and were making to the northwest today. 'They work', he said; 'in areas with the greatest deprivation and most need, providing services to those who require them.' As they do this they manage to add over £95 million to the economy of the northwest. He explained that faith communities not only bring integrity to their contribution but also bring many other things with them: Volunteers and Buildings, Sustainability – motivation & stickability, 'ready made' infrastructure for delivery to hard to reach, Value for money.

Robert Beard, in his address highlighted the difference between what the government says and what they do. They espouse faith as a contributor, but faith based organisations are left out of the major processes. He pointed out that the doors in society were 'wide open for big global corporations ... to take over state. How much room will the big corporates leave for all those small voluntary organisations with local knowledge and personal connections that are crucial for enabling citizens to engage and take action?' Workshops and moving presentations from smaller groups completed the day.

Revd Ed Saville, Lead officer for Social responsibility at Blackburn Diocese, and conference organiser, said 'Faith organisations can't be marginalised. We need to be prepared when the needs are there. 'There is a tension in all this. If people are falling through a net, the natural faith response is to catch them. But there comes a point where they will point to the hole in the net and say 'you cut that'.' [Back to top](#)

### Westminster Council to continue to criminalise homelessness and free food

Westminster Council have decided to continue with the process of preparing a by-law to criminalise rough sleeping and the distribution of food to homeless people in the Victoria area, Housing Justice, a charity that convenes the London Soup Run Forum learnt. Alison Gelder, director of Housing Justice said "We are deeply disappointed to learn that Westminster Council will continue with this draconian law which will criminalise compassion and conflict with the good work being done by the Greater London Authority and voluntary groups to end rough sleeping".

Westminster Council closed a month long consultation on the by-law on Friday 25th March, after receiving over 500 responses and petitions. This contentious by-law has been opposed by a diverse range of voices including the Methodist Church, Liberty, The Passage Day Centre in Victoria, the British Medical Association, Churches Together in Westminster and Church Action on Poverty. Campaigners have staged two mass 'lie down' protests in Victoria, and hundreds gathered on 20th March for a street party against the by-law.

The campaign against the by-law will escalate now the news that Westminster Council is pressing ahead with the ban has broken. Jad Adams, from Croydon homeless charity Nightwatch says that if the by-law comes into force "I would consider it a civic duty to defy an unjust law and encourage others to do the same". Meanwhile, members of the London Soup Run Forum are preparing a new code of conduct with which they plan to self-regulate their activities in the face of criticism from Westminster Council.

The proposed by-law will fine people in the Victoria area if they "lie down or sleep in any public place", "deposit bedding" and distribute free food and drink. This bylaw will affect the 1,600 people it is estimated sleep rough in Westminster each year, many of whom bed down in the Victoria area. Many voluntary groups, 'soup runs', hand out food in the Victoria area, especially at Howick Place behind the House of Fraser. These groups will be facing the possibility of moving or being fined for their charity if the ban goes ahead. [Back to top](#)

### One World Week handbook launch

One World Week launched their new handbook on April 7<sup>th</sup> at the Christian Aid Headquarters on 35 Lower Marsh, South London. Their Patron, Lord Griffiths of Burry Port (Revd Dr Leslie Griffiths, Superintendent Minister of Wesley's Chapel) was in attendance and there was a performance from Baluji Shrivastav, the internationally acclaimed North Indian classical musician, composer and educationalist. One World Week 2011 will be from 23-30 October. [Back to top](#)

### Uncovered, Reading Between the Lines

Major Paul Main, Territorial Evangelism Secretary for The Salvation Army UK, writes:

'I would like to offer a warm invitation for you to join The Salvation Army at our ROOTS Event. If you haven't decided how best to use the extended Royal Wedding bank holiday weekend; if you enjoy challenging teaching, inspiring

worship, and the chance for the whole family to benefit from an exciting programme, then ROOTS Conference is for you!

ROOTS is an all-age family festival with age specific programmes for children, young people and adults. Our vision is to create space to inspire spiritual renewal, effective mission, a prophetic voice and pioneering spirit. We're really pleased to be linking into Biblefresh and marking the 400th anniversary since the publication of the King James Version of the Bible. Our theme is 'Uncovered – Reading between the lines'. We want to take a fresh look at the best seller of all times; uncovering the truth of the Bible, reading between the lines to understand the context and history, being inspired by the arts that have shaped scripture, and hearing how God's word remains as relevant today as it did 400 years ago. We're going to do this through celebrations that will inspire us to connect again with Scripture, focusing on how the arts have shaped the text; exploring the poetry, music, drama and story that weave across the pages. We'll be hearing from some fantastic speakers, including guest speakers Liz Babbs (poet and author), Stuart Watson (musician and musical director) Krish Kandiah (chairman of Biblefresh) and Bishop Graham Cray (leader of Fresh Expressions). They will be joined by speakers from The Salvation Army including Commissioner John Matear (leader of The Salvation Army in the UK), and Major Judith Payne (Director for In Service Training and Development). Abby Guinness (Former Lacey Theatre Company and Head of Creative Arts at Spring Harvest) will be helping the Bible come alive through drama, including performing her new play 'Word of the Wives'. Adrian Plass will join us to bring his own unique comic input. Noel Richards and his band will be leading worship in our adult celebrations.

Through our Bible Studies we're going to dig deeper into the imagery of scripture, asking what does it mean for the Bible to be called, among other things, a sword and a lamp. We're going to engage with scripture from all sorts of angles in our seminar programme; taking an overview of both the Old and New Testaments with a mini Walk Thru the Bible experience; making the stories come alive through drama workshops; spending time together with our families engaging in Godly Play activities; seeing what the Bible Societies' new 'Lyfe' Resource has to offer small group Bible study; and hearing more from our guest speakers Krish Kandiah and Bishop Graham Cray.

In our KIDS ROOTS programme our children will be embarking on an incredible journey, joined by Sherlock Holmes and his side kick Watson, exploring the Bible through teaching, games, song and loads of fun. Our programme is led by experienced children's workers and will be a dynamic time of fun, games, teaching and worship.

Our YOUTH ROOTS programme will include Bible studies and teaching asking how the Bible is relevant to today's world. A new youth Bible resource 'Shelf Life' will be launched providing practical take away teaching and guidance. The team, led by ALOVE UK (The Salvation Army for a New Generation) will be joined by Tim Alford (worship leader), DJ Steve Leach, and speaker Cris Rogers (Author and Pastor). Entertainment will be provided by band dweeb, comedian Steve Price, and dance group Release.

Through all of this busy programme we will be asking what is God saying through his word, as relevant today as 400 years ago, 2000 years ago, right back to creation. ROOTS is held in the Southport Convention Centre. The venue will include an Exhibition with a fully stocked bookshop and over 25 organisations have booked stands creating an amazing space to pick up resources and make new contacts. A prayer venue is located in the heart of the venue open throughout the day for individual prayer and prayer ministry. The café will be open throughout the weekend with lots of spaces to relax and meet new people. Children under 11 go free, making ROOTS an affordable family option. We offer a range youth and adults ticket options including concession tickets and sponsored places. ROOTS runs its own campsite offering cheap camping pitches and a range of affordable accommodation options can be found through the local tourism board accommodation booking service, accessed via the ROOTS web site.

To find out more about the programme, including watching our video advert with footage from previous events to give you a feel for the weekend, and to book on line please visit our web site [www.roots-conference.co.uk](http://www.roots-conference.co.uk) or call 01825 748883. It is going to be a busy exciting weekend and I very much hope you can join us and encourage members of your denomination to attend and access this rich resource.' [Back to top](#)

### **More Than Gold training events**

Thirteen training opportunities to help churches run Community Festivals as part of their engagement with the 2012 Games have been announced.

During the 2000 Sydney Olympics, Community Festivals drew 250,000 people to 120 events, making them the largest community event of the Games. They included a large screen showing of key events; music, face painting, clowns and competitions for children; and a barbeque. The Festivals were the work of the Australian organisation Fusion Youth and Community whose Festivals Director, Marty Woods, has moved to the UK to help churches prepare for the 2012 Games. Marty says, "Community Festivals can position a church at the heart of community life in a highly strategic way. At these festivals the children are the stars, on-lookers are drawn in to the centre, and together we taste God's Kingdom – the way life was meant to be."

The training options range from an intensive day to a weekend that includes involvement with an actual Community Festival. Venues include London, Newcastle, Oxford, Reading, Preston, Croydon, Liverpool and Aylesbury. They are

under the umbrella of More Than Gold, the agency established by the main denominations to help churches make the most of the 2012 Games, and being run by Fusion and Share Jesus International who offer two alternative models of festival.

It is hoped churches will work together to run a festival for their community either in the run up to the Games or during them. This includes the opportunity offered by the London 2012 seventy day Torch Relay that will run through much of the UK, the route for which is due to be announced in May. Full information on the Festivals Training programme is available at [www.morethangold.org.uk/festivals](http://www.morethangold.org.uk/festivals) [Back to top](#)

## Unbelievable? Honest answers to tough questions

Premier Christian Radio is proud to present the first-ever Unbelievable? Apologetics Day Conference at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, 235 Shaftesbury Avenue, London, WC2H 8EP, on Saturday, 14 May 2011 from 9:30am until 5pm. The Conference is aimed at those wanting help in answering tough questions on faith from atheists, Muslims and those of other worldviews and will be hosted by "Unbelievable?" host Justin Brierley.

### Guest Speakers

John Lennox is Professor of Mathematics and Philosophy of Science at Oxford University. He is a lecturer for the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics. He has debated Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens and other well known atheists around the world. John is in much demand as a speaker and author.

Jay Smith is a Biblical Scholar specialising in Islam. He has spent much of his adult life in evangelistic ministry to Muslims in the UK. Jay regularly engages in Islam debates, from the chambers of the Oxford Union to his regular debates at Speakers Corner in Hyde Park.

David Robertson is Minister of St. Peter's Free Church, Dundee where he recently established the Solas Centre for Public Christianity. He is author of "The Dawkins Letters" and regularly speaks to sceptical audiences of atheists and agnostics.

David Instone-Brewer is Senior Research Fellow in Rabbinics and the New Testament at Tyndale House Cambridge. He regularly speaks on issues of scriptural reliability and interpretation and writes a regular column on Biblical issues for Christianity Magazine.

Mark Roques is the Director of RealityBites which provides training and resources for schools and youth workers. Mark is a story-teller who asks "subversive questions" about common atheist and religious worldviews.

The Conference will see John, Jay, David, David and Mark tackle questions such as: "Has Science buried God?", "How should I respond to Islam?", "Why does God allow suffering?" and many more. For more information about the event, and to book your place for only £20, please visit: [www.premier.org.uk/answers](http://www.premier.org.uk/answers) [Back to top](#)

## Churches Refugee Network Annual Conference

Spring is here, and so is the Churches Refugee Network with its Annual Conference. The theme is **Refugee Protection: Policies by number or a creative welcome?** and it is on Saturday 4 June from 11 am to 5 pm. CRN is a network of churches throughout Britain involved with or concerned about the treatment of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. The Conference offers an opportunity to share work and to acquaint newcomers with the realities of asylum seekers' and refugees' lives in Britain.

We have changed venue, and you will now find us at the West End church of St. James Piccadilly, just off Piccadilly Circus, nicely central for all mainline stations. This year, Human Rights, its historical roots in theology and philosophy, and its current politics and practices will be the focus of our attentions. Our leading speakers have both ample theoretical and practical experience of the practice of Human Rights in refugee work.

There will be workshops on current asylum practices to share your experiences and questions, and meet new faces working in the field. And you can enjoy photo exhibitions by two refugee collectives plus a dance display by the Kosovo Dance Group Sphreza. As ever at CRN conferences, there will be a fine lunch, prepared and served by volunteers from Migrant Voice, the refugee newspaper. With a lively programme of speakers and events, we hope we'll see you there.

Cost: £15; concessions £10; free to refugees and asylum-seekers. To book your place, please contact Wendy Cooper, Church and Society, United Reformed Church, 86 Tavistock Place, London, W1CH 9RT; ☎ 020 7916 8632; Fax: 020 7916 2021 [wendy.cooper@urc.org.uk](mailto:wendy.cooper@urc.org.uk) [Back to top](#)

## Ecumenical Theology of Rowan Williams



A lecture will be given by Dame Mary Tanner DBE with a response by Revd Dr Oliver Rafferty S.J. of Heythrop College at Westminster Abbey by kind invitation of the Dean and Chapter on Thursday June 9<sup>th</sup> from 5 p.m. - 8.00 p.m.

The Programme is 5 p.m. Evensong in the Abbey, 6 p.m. Reception in the Jerusalem Chamber, 6.30 – 8.00 p.m. Papers and discussion. Admission is by a free ticket; please apply to [paul.avis@churchofengland.org](mailto:paul.avis@churchofengland.org)

Donations on the night will be invited for the work of the Society for Ecumenical Studies.

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## Marriage and Ecumenism

The 13th Annual Nottingham Ecumenical Commission Conference, in conjunction with the Marriage and Family Life Commission, will be on **Marriage and Ecumenism: Seeking fidelity in a messy world**

It will be on June 10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> 2011 at The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire, led by Karen Kilby, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, Nottingham University, and Tom O'Loughlin, Professor of Historical Theology, Nottingham University

The cost is £140 and booking should be made to Monica Purdue 114 Cross Street, Arnold, Nottingham NG5 7BY ☎ 0115 9939235 [monica.purdue@ntlworld.com](mailto:monica.purdue@ntlworld.com)

Karen Kilby is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Head of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Nottingham. She has written two books on Karl Rahner, and just completed a critique of Hans Urs von Balthasar. She has also worked on a variety of themes in theology, including the doctrine of the Trinity, the problem of evil and the limits of our knowledge of God. She currently serves as the President of the Catholic Theological Association of Great Britain. Karen is married and has three children.

Thomas O'Loughlin is Professor of Historical Theology in the University of Nottingham and an expert on the early church. His latest book is on the Didache and sub-titled: "A window on the earliest Christians". He has taught around the world and has given much thought and energy to finding ways to teach Catholic communities - and those who minister in them - to appreciate the liturgy. He has written a series of five books to provide resources to those who preside, and books for those who read the Scriptures, and other short booklets, with CTS, for those who hear the Scriptures at the Eucharist. He is currently developing new resources, with the University of Nottingham, on YouTube.

Other speakers at the conference will be Melanie and Richard Finch of The Association of Interchurch Families and Fr David Gill who will speak about marriage from an Orthodox perspective.

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## Minding the Gap

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference of the Acorn Healing Trust will ask 'Where is the support for those in the Caring Professions?' It will be at Burrswood Christian Hospital, Groombridge, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN3 9PY, on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2011 from 10am-4pm. Tickets, including lunch, are £25. Guest speakers will be Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali, Revd Dr Russ Parker, Revd Canon Edward Pogmore and Dr Jane Bywater. For further details or to book, contact Sophie Minoprio ☎ 01892 865984 Email: [sophie.minoprio@burrswood.org.uk](mailto:sophie.minoprio@burrswood.org.uk) [www.burrswood.org.uk](http://www.burrswood.org.uk) [Back to top](#)

## Wembley 2011 – Global Day of Prayer

GDOP London can confirm Saturday September 17, 2011 as Wembley Day, when 1,000 leaders from across the British Isles are expected to gather at the stadium for a Strategic Prayer Summit. GDOP London believes this will be part of the momentum for the whole church in the nation to start praying towards the London 2012 Olympics. GDOP London is in dialogue with More Than Gold and other Christian organisations to see how this Wembley event will help generate prayers and unity towards the London 2012 Olympics and national transformation.

"This is really an encouraging and exciting development," said GDOP London Convener Jonathan Oloyede. "It's very inspiring to note that the Wembley Directors and staff are looking forward to the church in the nation coming to Wembley. They have actually said to us "don't just take the Grand Hall for the leaders' summit. We can also offer you the whole stadium!" GDOP London and national network of churches are therefore asking market place and church leaders to place Saturday September 17 into their organisation's diaries and church calendars."

In the build up towards the Wembley prayer summit September 17 Christians are being encouraged to join the 500 Days of Prayer campaign, by coordinating regular 24 hour prayer days monthly or start regular nights of prayer. Oloyede said: "Many church leaders are getting plugged in and excited about the 500 Days of Prayer, which was launched last year at the Emmanuel Christian Centre. A number of regular events have been planned which are acting as a runway track of Nights of Prayer in March, May, July and September leading up to the Wembley event on

Saturday September 17 2011. To spread the fire of prayer into every town, city and village, we are calling on churches everywhere to join in and host community prayer events on Pentecost Sunday June 12."

Many key Christian leaders are already getting exciting about the rising tide of unity across the nation and the significance of the Wembley Leaders Strategic Prayer Summit on September 17: "I think it's a very exciting development because once you've got hold of leaders you can affect the whole body of Christ," said Greg Haslam, Senior Pastor of Westminster Chapel. The Evangelical Alliance Chair and Ichthus Fellowship Founder, Roger Forster said: "I think it's essential that the leaders stand together in unity otherwise the churches never will. Unity is essential as a prayer base." Ian Christiansen Senior Pastor of New Life Christian Centre in Wembley said: "It's wonderful to see the potential for 1000 leaders coming together to pray and to look at strategies to influence the nation." Ade Omoba said: "Prayer is the key. It's the most potent weapon we have and it's a tremendous gathering point for the church of God especially for the UK. I'm really trusting God that the kingdom of God will unite the United Kingdom as we gather in Wembley this year."

Oloyede concluded: "With this kind of build up and excitement coming from various streams, the nation is poised for a spiritual tipping point. We need to seize the moment through unity, prayer and prompt action. GDOP London is encouraging every church to come down for the Marsham Street meetings, as well as book Saturday September 17 into their diaries." [Back to top](#)