

# LAPIDOMEDIA

Centre for Religious Literacy in World Affairs

LapidoMedia is an internationally networked, British-based philanthro-media charity working to change understanding of religion's impact on world affairs.

Winter 2012/Spring 2013

## Lapido launches handbooks for journalists on religion in world affairs at Frontline Club



HANDY BOOKS LAUNCH PANEL FROM LEFT: DAN DAMON, ZIA SARDAR, ZAC PIERI AND JEREMY HUNTER.  
(Photo: Stephen Sizer)

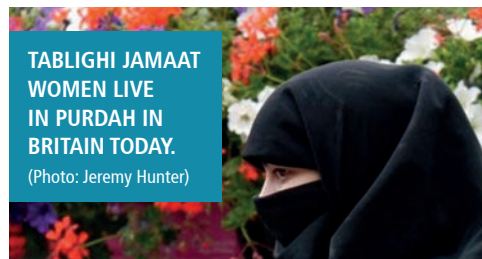
LAPIDOMEDIA CELEBRATED its fifth birthday with a capacity crowd at the Frontline Club in London with the launch of its first Handy Book for Journalists on Religion in World Affairs.

The book, based on doctoral research by Zacharias Pieri examines the secretive Islamic group Tablighi Jamaat (TJ) who are behind the media-dubbed 'megamosque' planned for a prime site on the edge of the Olympic Village in West Ham.

It was standing-room only on Thursday 27 September to hear a celebrity panel headed by the Chair of the Muslim Institute Ziauddin Sardar, with Lapido Chairman and former war correspondent Dan Damon who presents the BBC's World Update. UNESCO-award-winning photographer Jeremy Hunter whose stunning photographs illustrate the book said: 'In Bangladesh my experience with TJ was uplifting. In Upton Park, it was one of the most unpleasant experiences I've ever had.'

The evening came two weeks after formal plans for the controversial 10,000-capacity megamosque in East London were submitted.

In her opening speech, Director of LapidoMedia, Dr Jenny Taylor, warned against ignoring religion. She described it as, 'like being at a concert without being open to the information which the music is giving you.'



TABLIGHI JAMAAT WOMEN LIVE IN PURDAH IN BRITAIN TODAY.  
(Photo: Jeremy Hunter)

She said: 'In the globalized context, many stories don't make sense without a much more informed understanding of religion.'

'We chose the TJ and the megamosque because it is newsworthy. We'll be publishing handy books for journalists that scratch the itch that's already there and feed the existing news agenda with facts.'

Introducing the book on which he spent two years researching as a participant observer at TJ meetings, Dr Pieri said: 'Jenny has worked tirelessly to produce this series and I know she is committed to providing a balanced view of world religions. It is an honour for my book on the TJ to be the first in the Handy Book series.'

**Copies of the book have been sent to Members of Parliament and think tanks.**



Roger Bolton, presenter of BBC Radio 4's *Feedback* show commends LapidoMedia

Religious literacy has never been more essential, because religion is playing an increasing, not decreasing, role in the lives of people across the world, and the consequences of misunderstanding the impact of faith and belief can be fatal.



It has taken the insular, secular, élite in Britain a long time to wake up to this, (some are still in denial) and those who have woken up are frequently baffled.

'They thought that belief in the transcendental would diminish as scientific knowledge increases, not understanding that there are very different forms of knowledge.'

'We remain ignorant of faith at our peril.'

'If we do not try to understand what is most important to people and nations how can we build deep and lasting relationships with them?'

'This is as important within a multi-faith and multicultural society like the United Kingdom as it is between nations as different as the UK and Iran.'

'Understanding does not mean turning a blind eye to what we find unacceptable in different faiths, but trying to place our concerns within a wider knowledge.'

'We should be frank about our differences but be aware of how much we share in common.'

'The work of LapidoMedia is an example we should support and follow.'

For a free sample of *Tablighi Jamaat* by Zacharias Pieri go to <http://www.lapidomedia.com/resources/tablighi-jamaat-britain> It is available to purchase from Amazon at <http://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/0957356501>

## No change without investment

WYCLIFFE BIBLE TRANSLATORS brought in LapidoMedia in early 2012 to develop their communications with secular media. It soon became clear that the change they wanted needed serious investment – something that Phil Prior, Director of Marketing and Communications wasn't expecting.

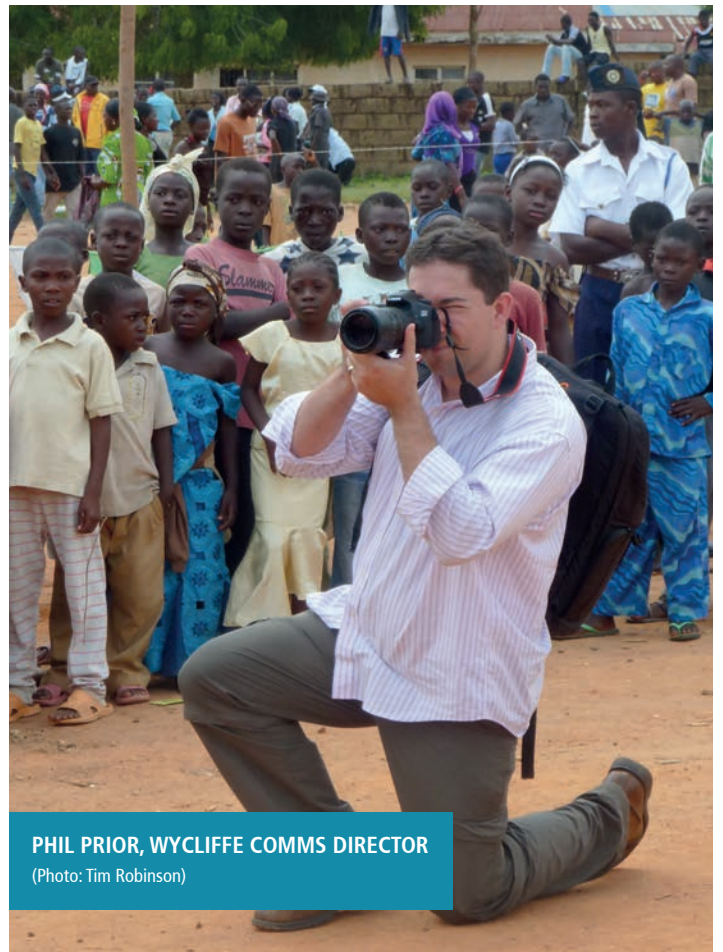
'The wealth of advice and skills that have been shared, and the encouragement when we were going through a tricky time have been invaluable.'



'We ended up talking broadly about organisational structure – how an organisation needs to be structured and what kind of people you need to have in place to be able to liaise well with the media. It was useful to have Jenny's expertise on hand.'

And when a crisis arose, Phil was able to rely on Lapido to support them through.

He said: 'Part way through the process, we did hit Christian media over a translation issue. It was an intense time and having Jenny there to support and give advice was invaluable.'



PHIL PRIOR, WYCLIFFE COMMS DIRECTOR  
(Photo: Tim Robinson)

## Training the next generation of world affairs journalists is a priority



MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD CONTACTS: JAYSON CASPER

Based in Cairo, Egypt, young Arabic-speaking journalist **Jayson Casper** uses his Muslim Brotherhood contacts to go deeper into the truth behind the Arab Spring.

He said: 'Everything in Egypt has religious overtones to it. Lapido gives journalists like myself the opportunity to publish articles that give the religious underpinning to the story that regular journalists miss.'

'It's about trying to get to the motivations producing what happens in the news.'



GETTING THE IDEA: CHINE MBUGAEGBU

Cambridge graduate **Chine Mbugaegbu** has been working with Lapido since early 2011. Chine whose day job is Editor of the Evangelical Alliance's *Idea* magazine said: 'Religion and faith come into stories about war, social issues, care provision and entertainment and media among other things. It is relevant in a way that is not obvious.'

'Lapido encourages journalists to try and understand religion and primarily to see how important it is to understanding.'

# Religious literacy in the international debate

LAPIDOMEDIA is gaining recognition under its new brand as the Centre for Religious Literacy in World Affairs.

It gained recent endorsements by parliamentarian Baroness Berridge, newly elected Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on International Religious Freedom (APPGIRF) – and by the Evangelical Alliance.

The newly formed APPG will be looking at the overall effect of Article 18 on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, how it is enforced or not, and the effectiveness of various strategies, including a Religious Freedom Act.

Lapido has championed this issue with repeated calls for an Act, similar to the one that has existed in the US since 1989.

Calling for a religious freedom test before arming regimes like Libya, Jenny Taylor said in a Frontline Club debate last year: 'Only an Act will leverage awareness across the whole political system.'



BARONESS BERRIDGE

Baroness Berridge commended our efforts to press for more decisive legal measures to promote religious freedom. 'Jenny Taylor and Lapido are right to highlight this strategy and sadly religious freedom will probably be the most contentious human right in the decades to come.'

It was not only the Arab Spring that had brought the issue of religious freedom centre stage but recent cases in China, Iran, and the case of an 11-year-old girl with learning difficulties who was arrested in Pakistan, she said.

'Whilst I am usually wary of copying ideas from across the Atlantic, there is merit in considering whether a Religious Freedom Act would aid the increasing focus and priority given to Religious Freedom in UK foreign policy.

'This Act did mobilise the USA to play its part, along with a prominent contribution by the UK, in ending the Organization of Islamic Conference's Defamation of Religions agenda.

'Admittedly this increased focus is "green shoots" but it is a start.'



ON WHAT CONDITION? BRITAIN HELPED LIBYA TO 'FREEDOM'

(Photo: AFP Patrick Baz)

## Promoting a robust interrogation of Islam's history

LAPIDOMEDIA found ourselves under the media spotlight when Trustee Tom Holland's *Islam: The Untold Story* premiered on Channel 4. The 74-minute programme, an investigation into the origins of Islam and its early texts prompted more than 1,200 complaints by Muslims to media regulator Ofcom.

Journalists who failed to check their sources stoked up a false storm, which died down after interventions by Lapido's Jenny Taylor.

Holland, an award-winning writer and one of Britain's most lauded popular historians, received high praise from fellow writers Robert Fisk, Bryan Appleyard and Charles Moore among many others for his book *In the Shadow of the Sword*.

But Muslim twitterati were less fulsome – and a subsequent screening of the film by Channel 4 was cancelled following death threats.

Jenny Taylor's release to the Press Association defending Holland was quoted in the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Guardian* and the *Daily Mail*, and went viral.

Criticizing the C4 decision to scrap the screening as 'appalling', she said: 'Tom's shown all of us that Islam is interesting enough to be taken seriously.

'He's refused to stick his head in the sand and play blind about the problems or internal tensions that all thinking Muslims know are there,' she said.

'He's not trammelled the sacred heart of an ancient mystery, but found hints of an even greater and more awesome reality that is tantalisingly beyond our grasp at the moment, but could just be the key to a shared past and shared future.'

Holland himself told the press: 'It is important to stress as we do in the film that this is a historical endeavour and is not a critique of one of the major monotheistic religions.'

Holland subsequently accepted an invitation to address 'Islam: Whose Story?', an event being staged by A Bigger Society run by, among others, the son of the former Director General of the BBC, convert Yahya Burt.



PRESENTER AND LAPIDO TRUSTEE TOM HOLLAND ON LOCATION.

(Photo: Channel4)

## On our website

We continue to lead the way in getting to the religious nub of the news. Sign up for email and twitter alerts here: [www.lapidomedia.com/contact-us](http://www.lapidomedia.com/contact-us)

- Behind the protests over the anti-Muhammad film *Innocence of Muslims*.

**MORE HERE:** <http://www.lapidomedia.com/egypt-islamist-theology-protest-reveals-drive-towards-pakistan-style-blasphemy-law>

- The Iranian hunger striker dying to save his Iranian pastor Youcef Nadakhani. The piece was re-published by the *Guardian*.

**MORE HERE:** <http://www.lapidomedia.com/religion-behind-news>

- Eye-witness reports of the desecration of Sufi shrines by Islamist ultra-fundamentalist Salafis in Karachi and Benghazi – and their implications. Re-published by *The Independent* and elsewhere.

**MORE HERE:** <http://www.lapidomedia.com/puritan-zealots-strike-again-libya>

- Muslim girls not allowed to attend their own weddings. Published in the *Daily Star Sunday*.

**MORE HERE:** <http://www.lapidomedia.com/muslim-girls-miss-own-weddings>



**DIFFERENT NORMS**  
(Photo: Jeremy Hunter)

- Iranian hit-squads target Britain's ex-pats protesting torture of Christians. Published in the *Daily Star Sunday*.

**<http://www.lapidomedia.com/irans-hit-squads-could-target-ex-pat-christians>**

## 'Change is coming ...' *The Times*.

LapidoMedia is the subject of the only case study in a new book of essays celebrating the 100th anniversary of the birth of theologian Lesslie Newbigin. *Theology in Missionary Perspective* [https://wipfandstock.com/store/Theology\\_in\\_Missionary\\_Perspective\\_Lesslie\\_Newbigins\\_Legacy](https://wipfandstock.com/store/Theology_in_Missionary_Perspective_Lesslie_Newbigins_Legacy) is due to be published soon by Pickwick. Jenny attributes the birth of Lapido in part to Newbigin's thinking. She does not necessarily want journalists writing more about religion, but to write about world affairs with religious intelligence. 'It is not possible to activate the switches that stop wars and prevent famine without recourse to non-secular language and categories,' she writes. *Times* Religion Correspondent Ruth Gledhill who used extracts from this chapter in her speech to Christian Solidarity Worldwide's London Conference on persecution on 10 November said: 'Even if newspapers cannot cover every case of persecution in the detail that Jenny Taylor and others would wish ... change is coming.'



RUTH GLEDHILL

## Lausanne Movement affirms media presence

'Our first key insight in Cape Town was that so few evangelical churches, mission organizations, and educational institutions seem to take media awareness seriously.'

Those are the words of Professor Lars Dahle of the Gimlekollen School of Journalism and Communication at Kristiansand, Norway, in his lead paper for a religion and media consultation in Norway in November, addressed by Lapido.

As Lapido prepares to pilot its daily 'Religion-in-the-news bulletin' for national newsrooms, the media track of the Lausanne Movement founded by Billy Graham and John Stott in 1974 has affirmed the importance of secular journalism.

The week-long seminar for media practitioners at the church-funded lakeside school, attended by professionals from California, Palestine, Ukraine, Egypt, Britain and Scandinavia resulted in an agreed text calling 'urgently' on the movement to 'engage more intentionally with media in all their diversity'.



### LAUSANNE MEDIA CONSULTATION.

From left: Terje Skjerdal (Associate Professor Mediehogskolen), Julia Bicknell (ex-BBC; Open Doors News Director), Arne Fjeldstad (Lapido Trustee, former Night Editor of Norway's biggest daily *Aften Posten* and now CEO of the Media Project), Jenny Taylor; and host Professor Lars Dahle discuss faith in secular newsrooms at the Lausanne Consultation.

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