

The Centre for Religious Literacy in Journalism is a British-based philanthro-media charity working to change understanding of religion's impact on world affairs.

Autumn 2016

# Religious literacy on the agenda in Westminster



L to R: Roger Bolton, broadcaster; Sir Ian Moses, IPSO Chairman; Dr Jenny Taylor; Aaqil Ahmed, BBC Head of Religion and Ethics; Yasmin Qureshi, MP; Gaby Hunt, Goldsmiths College Religion Media Centre; Tom Holland, historian and Lapido Patron; and Rt Revd Lord Baines.

THE CENTRE FOR RELIGIOUS LITERACY was invited to address the launch of a new All Party Parliamentary Group on religion and the media.

The group is the brainchild of Labour MP Yasmin Qureshi and moderated by Bishop of Leeds, Rt Revd Nick Baines. It is part of a range of responses to the *Living with Difference* report published earlier this year by the Woolf Institute's Commission on Religion and Belief in Public Life in Britain.

Dr Jenny Taylor addressed the round-table to launch the Group. Other panellists included Lapido Patron Tom Holland; BBC presenter and Lapido Ambassador Roger Bolton, Trustee of the Sandford St Martin Trust; the BBC's Head of Religion Aaqil Ahmed; Dr Abby Day of the Religion Media Centre at Goldsmiths, University of London and Sir Alan Moses, Chairman of IPSO.

Trustee Prof John Wolffe attended a second APPG to focus on religious literacy in May, the

Religion and Education group, chaired by Fiona Bruce MP. Dr Taylor also submitted evidence which will result in a policy recommendation to government.

CRL chairman Nick Isbister welcomed the breakthrough. He said: 'This is exactly where the Centre for Religious Literacy needs to be – at the centre of where policy is first formed.'

'We have worked long and hard for many years and although we have advised policymakers before this feels significant as two separate groups have been formed at the same time.'

'What we have known for a long time is starting to penetrate the Establishment and it is our good work that is starting to make a difference.'

'I hope that we can continue to engage with both these groups in the coming years so we can help form the ideas and policies that will improve religious literacy across the board.'

## Founder takes on new role

THE FOUNDER of the Centre for Religious Literacy (Lapido Media), Dr Jenny Taylor, is to take on a new role at the charity.

As well as over-seeing the transition towards a new CEO over the next year, Dr Taylor will concentrate on her vital writing and speaking brief.

Officially her new role will be founder and senior executive which will also enable her to work closely with the new CEO once an appointment is made.

She said: 'We have come a very long way and have enjoyed another successful year. But we must never rest on our laurels.'

'We have a lot of exciting plans for the coming year and when a new CEO is in place we will truly be able to strive towards our goals and targets.'

Dr Taylor has also recently signed a contract with publishing house Lion to write *An Inconvenient Story* about why she set up Lapido.

Dr David Landrum, Director of Advocacy at the Evangelical Alliance, said Dr Taylor's contribution to religious literacy in the media was significant.

'Jenny Taylor's contribution to developing religious literacy in politics, media and international affairs is unparalleled,' he said.

'Indeed, the fact that the term "religious literacy" is now common parlance is largely down to Jenny's intellect, vision and tenacity.'

US-based Dr Paul Marshall, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute's Centre for Religious Freedom, added: 'Through her wide and deep knowledge, and her hard work, Dr Jenny Taylor has demonstrated the dire need for religious literacy in the media and has made great headway in meeting that need.'



Dr Taylor addressing students at the Press Association in May

# Book launch sparks ISIS debate in US

THE BBC's Head of Religion told a Centre for Religious Literacy book launch that journalists should admit the 'uncomfortable' truth that Isis has an Islamic doctrine.

The comments – made at the northern launch of *The Caliphate* – were carried in national and international media including *The Times*, *The Independent*, *The Daily Mail* and the *Washington Times*.

Contradicting both former Premier David Cameron and US President Barack Obama, Professor Aaqil Ahmed, the first Muslim to hold the role at the corporation, said it was wrong to suggest the terrorist group 'has nothing to do with Islam' during a speech at Huddersfield University.

He said: 'I hear so many people say Isis has nothing to do with Islam – of course it has. They are not preaching Judaism.'

'It might be wrong but what they are saying is an ideology based on some form of Islamic doctrine.'

The panel discussion – chaired by former Associate Editor of *The Independent* Paul Vallely and including Dr Mercy Ette of Huddersfield University, Dr Afshin Shahi of Bradford University and the book's author Dr Sean Oliver-Dee – focused on all aspects of religion in the media with the audience also fielding questions.



Prof Ahmed addresses the audience

Prof Ahmed described the book as 'a great entry-level read' and Mr Vallely agreed, saying 'we need to open trainees' eyes'.

He added: 'Religion is not on the way out, it is on the way in – in a big way.'

## Lapido chief gives lecture at PA

DR JENNY TAYLOR delivered the Press Association's first ever lecture on reporting religion and terror at its head office in London on 20 May.

The talk in front of twenty US journalism students and Editor Emeritus Jonathan Grun marks a significant breakthrough for Lapido Media with hopes of building a lasting relationship with the UK's national news agency.

The Press Association was founded in 1868 and provides a 24/7, 365-days-a-year news-gathering service. It provides words, pictures and video content to all the national and regional media in print, online and broadcast.

Unlike national newspapers the PA has no political agenda and guards its independence. It has 27 shareholders – mainly media companies – but the PA charter prohibits editorial interference.

Although PA spent much of its existence on Fleet Street, today the head office is in Vauxhall Bridge Road but there are also regional offices in every UK county, a New York bureau, a Brussels office and a large team based in Westminster, Holyrood and the Welsh Assembly.

The PA also runs a world-renowned training scheme that has produced numerous household name journalists.

Head of Training Tony Johnston said: 'We teach trainee journalists many different subjects to give them the underpinning knowledge they need to operate effectively in a modern newsroom. At present, religious literacy is not part of those studies on the majority courses. I think many would agree that it should be.'

Dr Taylor said: 'Working with an organisation as respected as the PA is a joy, and we are hopeful we can do a lot more work with them in the near future.'

## Caliphate books sent to newsdesks

ALMOST 100 newsdesks around the country have received a copy of Sean Oliver-Dee's latest *handy guide for journalists*.

*The Caliphate* – described by broadcaster Roger Bolton as 'the starting point of a very important discussion' – was sent to 94 national and large regional media outlets.

More than 60 have confirmed the book is useful and have urged their journalists to use it.

Dr Jenny Taylor said: 'This was a major undertaking for us and lots of effort went into the organisation and the follow-up phone calls.'

'Allowing journalists access to Sean's book is the perfect way to engage with our prime target audience. There is a long way to go but hopefully this *handy guide* will help journalists tackle this highly sensitive issue with new confidence.'

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