



LAPIDOMEDIA

Religious Literacy in World Affairs

SPRING 2010

LAPIDO MEDIA'S NICHE

Lapido Media aims to tell a truer story about the nature and role of religion in world affairs. We combine cutting edge experience of religion in the UK and overseas with professional secular journalism.

Our aim is to alert journalists, leaders in public life and religious groups about the dangers of a secular ideology that claims too much for itself, suppressing religious voices rather than guarding their liberty.

Deoband, source of global Islam

Lapido Media gained further insights into the workings of radical Islam in a recent and rare trip to Deoband, India. Various jihadist clerics and movements worldwide have their roots in Deobandi madrasas. India's own Muslims are by contrast famously hospitable. What emerged from the visit is a profound sense of the 'homelessness' of the Muslim mind. Muslim identity is caught between the polarising impulse in radicalism, and the broader social quest for multiculturalism. This dynamic is global and its effects are inevitably felt here in the UK. The Deobandi visit is featured on our website.



DEOBAND DAR-UL-ULOOM: THE NEW MOSQUE BUILT BY DONATIONS
(PHOTO: JENNY TAYLOR)



THE FUTURE OF ISLAM? DEOBAND SCHOLARS TODAY, THE WORLD'S IMAMS TOMORROW
(PHOTO: VISHAL ARORA)



VISHAL ARORA (PHOTO: JENNY TAYLOR)

Lapido Media stringer Vishal Arora is a freelance journalist who writes for the *Times of India* and the *Washington Post*. A former Hindu who lives with his lawyer wife Tehmina and young daughter in

the fashionable Delhi satellite town of Noida, he acted as fixer for our trip to Deoband. As a religion reporter, he was amazed he'd never visited before: 'My first reaction as I entered the Deoband compound

was, "Am I in India?" Perhaps it was my preoccupation with right-wing Hindu groups and my perception of minority Muslims as cousins-in-crisis with Christians in India – both communities are persecuted by

Hindu nationalists – but I'd never seen Indian Muslims as a source of stories for the international media. Thanks to Lapido Media I am now looking at stories with a larger perspective.'

RELIGIOUS LITERACY IN WORLD AFFAIRS

Lapido Media broke this exclusive story on 10 March 2010.

It appears in full on our website:

EXCLUSIVE: Surrey Muslims boycott social cohesion appointment



The embarrassing appointment by Surrey County Council of a member of a 'heretic' branch of Islam to a 'social cohesion' post indicates the need for greater religious literacy in public affairs, Lapido Media said today.

Muslims in Woking are discreetly refusing to

cooperate with the new 'Faith Links Adviser' – appointed at a salary of £24,000 – because she's a member of the reviled Ahmadiyya sect.

The sect's founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, was a civil servant under the British Raj, who believed he was the last prophet of

Islam and Messiah – an outrage to mainstream Muslims for whom Mohammed is considered the 'seal of the Prophets'.

Ahmadis who number between 18-30,000 in UK, are persecuted and even killed for their beliefs in the Indian sub-continent.

One local Muslim who works in local government told Lapido Media others were already boycotting the appointment.

He was loathe to campaign openly against either the appointment or the appointee – 'possibly a wonderful lady' – whom he had

not met, but admitted local Muslims would not cooperate with her: 'We have made discreet representations to the Interfaith Adviser and to the County Council.'

He said it was the same as appointing a Mormon to build trust between Baptists or Anglicans.'



Wholly Political

Wholly Political is our newly tailored course which aims to help professionals – especially journalists – to understand the political dimension of

Islam. There is great confusion over different kinds of Islam and how to approach Muslims. We are taking the initiative to remedy understandings of the

contentious aspects of Islam that have sometimes frightened people into silence. News stories such as the Ahmadiyya social cohesion appointment,

and the Deoband visit highlight the desperate inadequacies of current mainstream understandings of Islam. As peacemakers we are seeking to educate about

the differences within Islam through the Wholly Political course. Topical case studies have been drafted by Professor Julian Rivers, John Ray and Richard Cook, who

combine expertise in Islamic law, education and government policies towards Islam. You can find more details on our website or contact us via our office.



BOOKING NOW!

Tom Holland, historian and *New Statesman* columnist commends the course:

'It is one of the few articles of faith that secular Britain currently possesses that all religions are fundamentally the same. The attempt by Lapido Media to explore the inadequacies of this presumption is therefore bold and timely – and I congratulate them on their chutzpah. The course is warmly recommended to anyone with an interest in making sense of God's return to the geopolitical stage.'

CHANGING THE WAY RELIGION IS COVERED

Networking with journalists



CHRISTOPHER LANDAU, BBC WORLD SERVICE.

We continue to develop a worldwide network of journalists who can better report the religious dimensions of world affairs. The BBC World Service's Christopher Landau, who broke the Archbishop of Canterbury's sharia speech to a stunned world is one journalist who has shown his appreciation and support.

'I think the work Lapido Media is doing is so important in raising crucial questions about the place of faith in today's world – and helping journalists understand how to cover it better. It's great for me to be able to discuss these issues with someone with such a wealth of contacts and understanding!'

We also supplied candidates for the *Guardian* Comment is Free video series on the Qur'an, working with its Editor, Andrew Brown.

Click here to see the videos on the *Guardian* website. After publishing Jenny Taylor's piece on the Tablighi Jama'at, he commented: 'We get masses of opinion here, but what you've given us is the facts.'



THE *GUARDIAN*'S ANDREW BROWN, WINNER OF THE 2009 ORWELL PRIZE FOR POLITICAL JOURNALISM.

Nikah reform

We are helping to publicise the need for reform of the Nikah – the Muslim marriage contract. The vast majority of Nikah marriages remain unregistered with the British authorities, leaving women highly vulnerable to ostracism and loss of freedom. If divorced, these women face overwhelming loss of rights with regard to property, home and family. Lapido Media has already undertaken PR, widely used by the Asian media, and worked strategically with government and opposition members over the reform of the Nikah. Our aim is to generate religious literacy about

the situation of Muslim women in Britain, and to use this positive reform as a source of stories that promote justice for women more widely.

Saving St Mark's



Lapido Media offers subsidised consultancy services, developing media strategies and training, to faith groups such as the Save St Mark's campaign, under the chairmanship of Lady Sainsbury [pictured]. Publicity achieved formed a vital

part of the campaign's submission to the Planning Inspector in November 2009. It was an unusual project coordinating a broad-based group of local residents, celebrities, and professionals working pro bono to save the last community space

in North Mayfair from being developed into a 'health spa'. Timely articles appeared widely across the national and local press including *The Telegraph*, *The Times*, *The Daily Mail*, *Private Eye*, and *The Evening Standard*. We won all-day TV coverage on

the BBC on the day of the Public Inquiry, as well as bulletins on Classic FM. Planning consultant John Parmiter said afterwards: 'Thank you for all you have done to keep the campaign alive. None of it would have happened without you!'



SPEAKING UP: LADY SAINSBURY, PRESIDENT OF SAVE ST MARK'S ACTION GROUP (PHOTO *EVENING STANDARD*)

PUBLICATIONS

Blind Spot

We are currently touring the book *Blind Spot: when Journalists don't get Religion* to media courses in UK. This was published by Oxford University Press in the US. Lapido Media was honoured to host the UK launch of *Blind Spot* at the Frontline Club in February 2009, and strives to see the principles of spiritual awareness borne out in the training of journalists.

'It's not often that I let out a whoop of joy when I read a book, but I did while reading *Blind Spot: When Journalists Don't Get Religion*. I've been preaching this gospel for 15 years and it's great to see it so brilliantly argued and supported in these pages. The editors have assembled a top-flight team of scholars and writers to build the case brick by solid brick. It is now an unassailable truth: without an understanding of religion, a journalist can miss the greatest stories of our time. This is the book I – and my students – have been waiting for.'

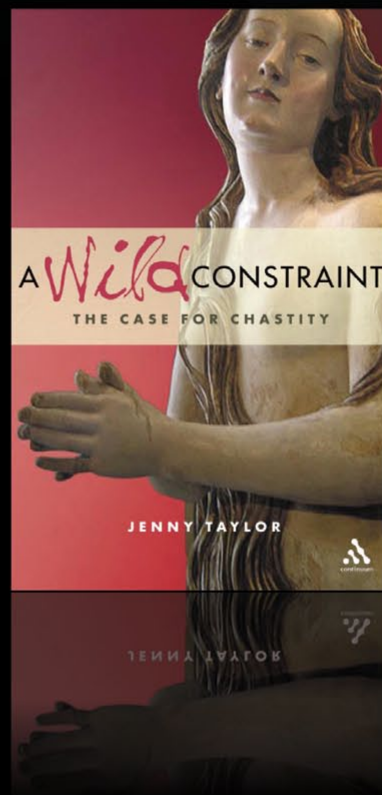
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JENNY TAYLOR

Sexual Ethics: A Wild Constraint

We are consistently raising our academic research profile, and planning to tour *A Wild Constraint: the Case for Chastity*. Authored by Jenny Taylor, this title sold so fast in the US last year that publishers could not keep up with demand. Dr Taylor is addressing seminars this spring in the UK and in the autumn in the US on a new approach to sexuality which retrieves the traditional sexual ethic of the church. Religious literacy in sexual ethics is an ever more pressing dimension of world affairs.



YOUR CONTRIBUTION

To continue this work requires skill and resourcing
– but we believe that this kind of approach to the needs
of our time is catching the public imagination.
We get around 26,000 hits on our website every month.
We need to maximise our efforts and for that we need
your support in whichever way you feel convicted
by getting in touch with us.

Click on the link below to visit our support page

lapidomedia.com/support-us

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