

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

Winter 2016

Caliphate handbook 'timely and vital'



Dr Shuruq Naguib at the launch of *The Caliphate*

JOURNALISTS and experts gathered to launch Lapido Media's latest handy guide book, *The Caliphate*, which has been described as 'a vital tool for the media'.

The book, by Dr Sean Oliver-Dee, has captured the imagination of journalists as they report the aftermath of the devastating attacks on Paris.

The launch event, held in December at London's Frontline Club, included a lively debate on the concept of the caliphate between the author and fellow panellists, lecturer in Islamic studies Dr Shuruq Naguib and King's College Islam expert Dr Carol Kersten.

The evening was chaired by broadcaster and journalist Roger Bolton.

The book is available on Amazon and newsrooms across the UK already have a copy to help reporters ensure their reporting is fair and accurate.

Dr Oliver-Dee, a research fellow at the Centre for the Study of Religion in Public Life at the University of Oxford, said: 'The evening went well. The caliphate is a fiction that haunts the Muslim imagination and is a potent unifying symbol. I am pleased that issues like this were discussed and it was excellent that the audience got involved and raised some important points.'

Launching the book, Lapido Media's CEO Dr Jenny Taylor outlined the purpose of the publication.

She said: 'Producing and publishing books like *The Caliphate* is our raison d'être – it is the frontline in the fight to increase religious literacy and ensure our journalists can report freely and without fear or favour on the issues that will echo across generations to come.'

'So I must say a huge thank you to our supporters who have helped us with this book and the array of

'A very important discussion'

BROADCASTER and journalist Roger Bolton, who currently presents Feedback on Radio Four, hosted the launch of Lapido Media's latest handy guide *The Caliphate* and presided over a lively and robust debate.

He was approached to chair the event, held at the Frontline Club, after declaring the media was 'largely ignorant' on issues around religion and particularly the caliphate.

He said: 'Media organizations have editors for everything from sport to the economy – and yet most don't have religion editors'. He added that journalists were often guilty of not really understanding properly the central role of faith in almost every aspect of life.

'Hopefully Sean's book is the starting point of a very important discussion.'



Broadcaster and journalist
Roger Bolton

other projects we are involved in all year around.

'By pursuing this agenda to improve reporting across the board we are laying the foundations of a stronger, more skilful Fourth Estate – and one that will not be afraid to shine lights in some very dark corners.'

The book sold well on the night and – alongside the hard copies – Kindle (from Amazon) and flash-drive with PDF versions (from the office) are available.

National newspaper news editor Nick Hodgson declared the publication 'timely and vital' and added: 'This book tackles a difficult and sensitive topic with clarity and is a vital tool for any journalist tasked with writing about one of the most pertinent issues facing the world today.'

'It provides journalists with a better understanding and therefore makes us more effective.'

Report is a 'missed opportunity'

LAPIDO MEDIA criticised a long-awaited report on religion and belief in modern Britain.

The *Living with Difference: Community, Diversity and the Common Good Report* was finally published, two years after the Woolf Institute assembled the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life to investigate.

But although Lapido Media – who contributed to the report – welcomed some of the recommendations around media responsibility, there was general disappointment with its conclusions.

Dr Jenny Taylor, Lapido Media's CEO, said: 'This report merely continues the half-century-long war of attrition against the Christian character of the country.'



Baroness Elizabeth Butler-Sloss

'By effectively saying that the public space is "pluralist", it further privatises any one expression of faith as true.

'Perhaps the incoherence was unintended, but the outcome effectively makes a religion of having no religion-in-particular, and the effects of that are worrying.'

The brainchild of the Woolf Institute in Cambridge – who sponsored the process and published the report – it is the result of a long process of consultation under the nominal chairmanship of lawyer Baroness Elizabeth Butler-Sloss.

But there was scepticism about much of the report's contents and particularly its overtly pluralist agenda.



Dr Taylor said she believed it undermined the uniquely stabilising and convening institutions of the country.

She said the commission had missed a golden opportunity to reinforce the binding nature of the nation's time-honoured institutions, and instead appeared to want to consign them to history.

Faith and the media explored

JOURNALISTS and experts attended a conference focusing on faith and the media in November.

The Oslo conference was organized by Familie & Medier – an organization that works alongside the media to ensure accountability to their audience. The group is also heavily involved in engaging with the media on religious issues.

Familie & Medier CEO Jarle Haughland said: 'We wanted to focus on faith, worldview and religion in the media.'

'Is media a secular landscape – in the meaning of a place cleansed from religion? If so, how can we understand society if we don't understand peoples' worldview – the driving force in their meanings and actions, the main reason for their view of what's right and wrong, good and bad?'

'We wanted to challenge "the secular lie", that faith belongs to the private area. The public space needs to be open to peoples' worldview.'

'If not, it will be a – potentially dangerous - blind spot in the society. And journalism will profit from more knowledge of how religion affects us – good and bad.'

Dr Jenny Taylor spoke at the event tackling 'Why Journalists don't get Religion'. In her speech she said: 'We are journalists who are Christians, not Christian journalists. Journalism rests on Christian foundations of freedom, love of empirical truth and passion for justice.'



Dr Jenny Taylor addresses the conference



New Lapidomedia Chairman Nick Isbister announcing the launch of the expert sources service

Journalists back plans for expert service

LAPIDO MEDIA is gearing up to launch a fresh push to get expert voices into the media.

The decision to focus on helping connect journalists with religious experts came after a survey of media professionals carried out in the summer.

The survey – which questioned a sample of working journalists from regional and national media – asked numerous questions about what Lapidomedia does and what the organization could do better.

Many of the respondents mentioned how their biggest problem when writing about religion and world affairs was finding a reputable source.

One journalist said: 'Any tools that help journalists understand and/or process information are invaluable – especially involving complex subjects at tight deadlines.'

Another added: 'Can they connect you with spokespeople for different religions perhaps? That would make life easier – a one-stop shop for comments from experts.'

'Anything that explains in-depth theory simply is useful.'

The process requires a journalist contacting the media team who then matches up their requirements with an expert who is happy to help.

Announcing the service during *The Caliphate* book launch Lapidomedia chairman Dr Nick Isbister said: 'We can be the conduit between the newsroom and the voices that know the truth about religion and are experts on how it impacts the world today.'

'In the current climate the insight our experts can offer will prove invaluable.'

Poignant interview scoops prize

THE JERUSALEM Awards, which promote Christian involvement in broadcasting, were held in October at BAFTA in Piccadilly.

Dr Jenny Taylor was one of a panel of expert judges handed the difficult task of picking winners from categories across radio and digital platforms.

The stand-out winner on the night was Kristine Pommert, of the Things Unseen podcast, who produced an 'amazing' Good Friday interview with murdered journalist James Foley's mother.

Dr Taylor said: 'This was the clear winner: an astonishing achievement to have persuaded the mother of the journalist and aid worker James Foley who was beheaded in August 2014 by ISIS to speak about her ordeal.'

'The process including the interview was conducted in such a way as to elicit a faith story of great poignancy, power and even hope, just before Easter.'



(L-R) Kristine Pommert receives her award from the Jerusalem Trust's Executive Officer Bridget Cass

How we quizzed media

WE spoke to journalists from across the British industry in a bid to gather a wide range of views on the charity and its future.

The headline findings were clear: Journalists who know about and engage with Lapidomedia value the work the charity does.

As well as interest in Lapidomedia being a one-stop shop for sources and experts, those quizzed also said they thought the website was useful. However they also added that they thought it needed updating.

The data gathered is now in the process of being analysed and, in some cases, changes are being actioned.

Newswire training day success

INTERNATIONAL news agency Reuters invited Lapido Media to talk to trainee journalists as part of a course investigating religion in the news.

The course, which took place at Reuters headquarters in Canary Wharf, London, was developed after the agency noticed a lack of understanding from journalists especially in the wake of 9/11.

Dr Jenny Taylor said it was an honour to be invited and described the day as 'an excellent opportunity to instill in young journalists the importance of religious literacy.'

Reuters' religion editor Tom Heneghan devised the course and invited Dr Taylor to speak.

He said: 'Reuters saw after 9/11 that there was more religion in the news but few journalists who understood it.'

'I launched the post of religion editor to help correspondents understand religion angles in stories and write specialized stories about religion in the news myself.'

'Most journalists know far too little about the teaching and institutions of the different religions, and that frequently leads to mistakes. Religious terminology can also be a minefield for the uninformed.'

'Even just correcting the common mistakes journalists make can improve the quality of a publication's religion



Dr Jenny Taylor with journalism students

reporting. Once journalists begin to learn how to cover religion, the door opens to many important stories they didn't even know were out there.'

'The Thomson Reuters Foundation offers journalists outside of Reuters many different courses to improve their skills, so we thought it was time to conduct one about reporting on religion.'

Dr Taylor added: 'This is exactly the kind of course all trainee journalists should attend – media companies owe it to their reporting staff to give them the correct and proper training.'

'We hope Reuters run many more courses like this and urge others to consider making religion a larger part of their training schemes.'

The future of the media – in 140 characters

LAPIDO MEDIA's CEO met with Twitter's head of News, Government and Elections Adam Sharp in New York to discuss the future of the media and the impact this might have on the reporting of religion.

Micro-blogging site Twitter was influential in spreading news and opinion during the Arab Spring and has continued to grow as a source for journalism.

Dr Jenny Taylor learnt about some of Twitter's latest initiatives and believes the social media platform has democracy and freedom of speech at its heart.

She said: 'Huge efforts are being made to ensure Twitter is as responsive as possible to ordinary people. Democracy is very much at the forefront of their thinking, and Twitter can prove vital at the grassroots handing a tool to those whose suffering from injustice and persecution otherwise goes unreported.' She added: 'We have a strategic and growing number of followers and increasingly use the medium as a newswire of our own.'



Dr Jenny Taylor at the Twitter offices in New York



Aidan White, Director of the Ethical Journalism Network

THE TRUSTEES are keen to target industry figures to get religious literacy into the media bloodstream.

Such meetings are planned in 2016 to help build capacity in the industry.

'As well as getting the right stories circulating, a lot of what we do is just having conversations with key media people and others, and convincing them that this is sensible and do-able' Lapido's chief, Jenny Taylor, said.

She recently met with Aidan White, the Director of the Ethical Journalism Network to discuss the religious basis of media ethics.

Already Dr Ian Jamison, Head of Education at the Tony Blair Faith Foundation, has approached Lapido for help with a ground-breaking ethical journalism project in Palestine and Angela Graham, a TV Producer in Wales, who recently addressed the Welsh Affairs Select committee inquiry into the BBC in Wales, has initiated discussions about help for the National Union of Journalists in Wales.

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