

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

Spring 2015

Getting Religion event ignites debate



L-R: Professor Grace Davie, Caroline Wyatt, Dr Mustafa Baig, Betsy Hiel, Tom Holland, Dr Marat Shterin

LAPIDO MEDIA'S Getting Religion event in January saw some of the biggest names in religious affairs, academia and security unite and call for a braver, more nuanced approach to reporting on religion.

Leading the call was Caroline Wyatt, the BBC's Religious Affairs Correspondent, who believes that journalists are too often 'timid' and 'hesitant' when dealing with difficult religious issues.

She said: 'We're very worried about upsetting or offending and there are so many stories now which involve extreme interpretation of religion – and not just by groups like ISIS. We need to start being a bit braver in how we think through and apply the religious dimension, and I don't just say that only because I'm now covering religious affairs.'

Wyatt pointed out that notions of secularism and the separation between church

and state need to be explored in more depth in the West if religious literacy is to improve.

Speaking at the event Professor Grace Davie of Exeter University said: 'This project is part of something much bigger, a renewal of interest in religion in the late modern world. This is not British, it's much broader than this.'

The event, jointly hosted by Open University at Portcullis House, Westminster, was attended by a number of opinion formers from academia, journalism and security. These included award winning historian and classicist Tom Holland, who appeared on the panel alongside journalists and academics including Betsy Hiel (*Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*) and Dr Mustafa Baig (Exeter University).

The seminar explored the potential for religion both to improve and harm security – and the media's pivotal role. It also saw the launch of a new Open University report entitled: Religion, Security and Global Uncertainties.

Funded by the Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security Research, one of its key

I wanted to engage deeply in this piece of research because I think politicians generally often do not understand the interaction between religion and all the different dimensions to different religions, with the different social context that people find themselves in. I'm always interested that any narrative, when I'm looking at religion and security, is very simplistic and doesn't do justice to all the factors that exist on the ground. Though sometimes we try to detach ourselves from far off areas of conflict where religion and insecurity go together, in this country, it does have a significant impact. The relationships through the internet, through communications generally, through family bonds, means that we have to take these issues seriously, and it's a privilege to be able to support and enable this to happen.



John Glen MP, Chair of the All Parliamentary Group on Global Uncertainties, speaking at the Getting Religion event

recommendations is that the religious literacy of journalists should be promoted and improved through 'training, access to better religion sources, and the establishment of an Institute for Religious Literacy and the Media.'

Dr Jenny Taylor, Director of Lapido Media said that the event marked a step in the right direction from 'anti-religion' towards religious literacy.

However, she warned that the world is in danger from the West's 'conceits and complacency', adding: 'Ignoring religion is anti-journalism. The majority of the world is deeply religious. That small bit of it which still dominates the world's agenda – the secular West – is deeply unaware of what really drives the rest. What people believe matters.'

To this end, Lapido has compiled a twelve point commitment to excellence in reporting (see page 2).



Lapido: at the forefront of religious literacy

JOURNALISTS HAVE a special responsibility to report accurately, especially on sensitive issues. Lapido exists partly to ensure that this happens in the realm of religious and world affairs journalism.

Religious literacy – which includes ideological literacy – is understanding that all people give meanings to their motivations.

Lapido journalists aim to 'dig deeper, go further, be fairer' and to help mainstream journalists become religiously literate.

In the pursuit of excellence in our work, we commit to the following twelve points of religious literacy:

1. We understand there is a 'dominant discourse' in all cultures. The dominant discourse might be said to be 'the elite's conversation with itself'. In Europe, and Britain in particular, this discourse is secularist and it often marginalises religious voices and views without even knowing it.
2. We understand this discourse is such as to result in a 'blind spot' about religious motives and meanings, constituting a worldview in itself, which we commit to make sense of, probing and correcting.
3. We understand that the dominant discourse holds that it doesn't matter what you believe so long as you are sincere: that beliefs and dreams have no consequences. We believe this also to be wrong.
4. We accept that religious devotion is for the majority the source of the deepest dreams, motivations and allegiances. We believe that



Image: <http://socialmediatitalia.it/>

LAPIDO'S WEBSITE HAD OVER ONE MILLION UNIQUE VISITORS LAST YEAR AS ITS POPULARITY CONTINUES TO GROW.

5. We therefore undertake to acquaint ourselves as diligently as possible with the basic phenomena of meaning-making. This may include religious and ideological histories and origins, organization, leadership, core beliefs, and manifestations such as rituals, and holy texts. This inevitably means committing to study and travel.
6. We aim to keep in our minds the fact that religious motivations and allegiances may – or may not – be a part of any story we are

7. We recognize that we as journalists will harbour undisclosed confessional positions when writing news, hence the necessity for double and triple sourcing for our information.
8. Confessional writing is forbidden except in an opinion piece. This does not and cannot obviate a viewpoint, as all discourse has to start somewhere, but we seek a viewpoint that encompasses the fullness of the human predicament.

Read in full at www.lapidomedia.com/12points

Briefings for journalists

'A JOURNALIST who is not confident about the facts is dangerous,' says former Press Association News Editor Richard Porritt. As well as our in-depth news items and analysis features, we now publish regular BRIEFINGS for journalists and others on topical world affairs subjects. These have included The Muslim Brotherhood in England and Egypt; Who are the Copts?; What is Religious Slaughter? and more. Each Briefing is backed up by FREE contacts sheets of named authorities available to comment in the press.

Contact office@lapidomedia.com for more details.



New Handbook for Journalists: Everything you need to know about the caliphate



CALLIGRAPHIC OUTLINE FOR ABU BAKR (ABDULLAH IBN ABI QUHAFA), FIRST CALIPH OF ISLAM ...

THE 'ISLAMIC STATE' is anything but a lightning strike. Understanding the 'caliphate aspiration' in Islamic ideology is absolutely crucial. So says Lapido trustee Dr Sean Oliver-Dee whose new must-have handbook on the caliphate will be published on Kindle in May.

A short, focussed study of the history and the development of the 'caliphate ideology', it takes in history, theology and current affairs in easily digestible chunks. The reader gets a sense of where Islamic State have come from, both socio-politically and ideologically.

But the book does not simply focus on IS. It looks beyond them to the broader arena of those groups who, whilst they might not adhere to the violent elements of IS's worldview, would still support their underlying aim.

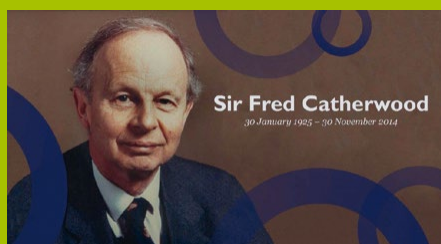
With young people streaming to join IS from the West, it is vital to understand the lure of this ideology.

This book unpacks the ideological roots behind radicalisation for any journalist or layperson. Price £10. Available on Kindle via Amazon or Lapido Media.

Lapido's Dr Jenny Taylor will be giving the annual Catherwood Lecture in Northern Ireland on 'When Words Fail: post-Multiculturalism and interfaith possibilities'

SIR FRED CATHERWOOD was a prominent politician, industrialist and leading evangelical. He was one of the first Conservatives to be elected to the European parliament and his life was shaped by his beliefs.

The Guardian's obituary said of Catherwood that he was the 'sort of pro-European Conservative whose views are almost extinct in the current party'.



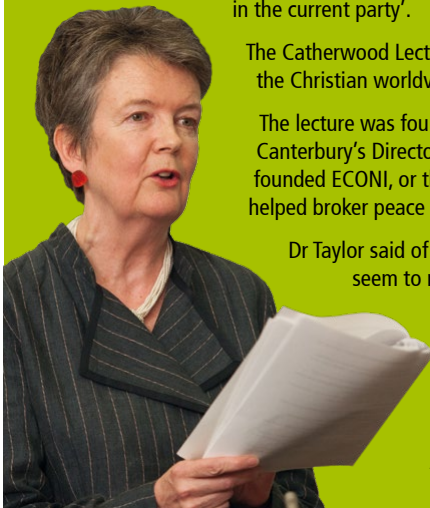
Sir Fred Catherwood
30 January 1925 - 30 November 2014

The Catherwood Lecture is held each year and explores an issue relating to the Christian worldview in the public arena.

The lecture was founded by Dr David Porter, now the Archbishop of Canterbury's Director for Reconciliation at Lambeth Palace. Dr Porter founded ECONI, or the Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland, which helped broker peace in Northern Ireland.

Dr Taylor said of the lecture's themes: 'For several decades truth did not seem to matter. Religion, was just a matter of personal opinion. What changed? What possibilities does this open up for stronger societies?'

Dr Gladys Ganiel, lecturer in conflict resolution at Trinity College Dublin at Belfast, will be responding to the lecture, which will be held on 16 April at the Agape Centre in Belfast.



JOHN WOLFFE

LAPIDO IS DELIGHTED to welcome on board John Wolffe, Professor of Religious History at Open University, as a new trustee.

An eminent scholar, Professor Wolffe's specialises in British religious history since the late eighteenth century with a focus on anti-Catholicism, evangelicalism and the link between religion and nationalism/national identity.

As well as his extensive body of academic work, Professor Wolffe is also President of the Ecclesiastical History Society and a member of the REF sub-panel for Theology and Religious Studies.

He said: 'If better understanding is to be fostered among the adult population, the media has a crucial role to play. While it may sometimes be hard to resist the temptation to go for the eye catching headline that stereotypes a particular religious group, there needs to be a greater readiness to look beneath the surface, and to seek to educate readers, listeners and viewers.'



DR FJELDSTAD

Arne Fjeldstad's worldwide legacy

AS YOU MAY have seen, we recently announced the death of Lapido Chairman Dr Arne Fjeldstad.

Dr Fjeldstad, a former national newspaper editor, died suddenly of a heart attack in Kristiansand, Norway, on 23 November 2014.

As CEO of Washington and Kristiansand-based The Media Project, Dr Fjeldstad built up an international network of 700 journalists committed to religiously literate truth-telling in some of the toughest contexts in the world.

Some of the key contributors to that network, including Lapido, will be attending a conference in October in New York to discuss building on Arne's legacy. Paul Marshall, former Senior Fellow at Hudson Institute, Washington, now based in Indonesia, has been appointed CEO to take over from Dr Fjeldstad.

Reverend Gareth Wardell, Vicar at All Saints Church, Hampton, on why he decided to become one of Lapido's newest trustees

'GO BACK in time some ten years or so and ask key opinion-formers in the media their views on religion, doubtless most would have seen it increasingly as an irrelevance. What a difference a decade or two, makes. Mention any major news story today and chances are it will have a religious dimension to it.

'Lapido Media offers expert commentary on such stories combined with skilled analysis of their context and a much-needed tool-kit for journalists keen to understand the complexities involved.

'Having spent over a decade in international development in south and central Asia, working in majority Hindu and Muslim contexts, I now work as the Vicar of a busy west London parish. I've been a supporter of Lapido Media since it began and I am honoured to be asked to serve as a Trustee bringing an international perspective to programme development.'



Joining the board

'I HAVE KNOWN about Lapido and have been involved with them in various ways for nearly a decade. They have pioneered the call for religious literacy in the public square for fifteen years at a time when nobody thought anything of it. Time and world events have proved the prophetic nature of Lapido's voice and others are now, belatedly, jumping in. The integrity of Lapido's reporting and the cutting edge of their stories make them an invaluable voice in the public arena.'

Dr Sean Oliver-Dee, BA PGCE (London) MTh (Brunel) PhD (Middlesex)



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