

A photograph of a group of people, primarily of East Asian descent, gathered around a small, open book. The central figure is an elderly woman wearing a green headscarf and a dark jacket, looking down at the book with a focused expression. To her left, another person in a green headscarf is partially visible. To her right, a younger woman in a green jacket is also looking at the book. In the background, other people are visible, some holding similar books. The overall scene suggests a religious or educational gathering.

idea

Clinging to every Word

How to change
the world

Christianity
and the media

Robbing from the rich

See
insert for
details

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Editor's Note

As Hannibal in the 1980s TV series *The A-Team* (and the forthcoming summer blockbuster) memorably said, "I love it when a plan comes together."

This issue of *idea* was originally conceived as a collection of unrelated stories, mainly due to the fact that we are writing this before the General Election has been announced, but it will most likely take place just days after this magazine lands on your doormat.

But flipping through the pages you'll quickly see that there's one thing that ties everything together: the Bible. Honestly, this wasn't our intention, but clearly it was meant to be.

The Biblefresh initiative (p18) doesn't kick off until January, but we wanted to give you advance warning so you can plan ahead, get involved and see firsthand that God's Word can transform your church in 2011. Add to this stories about the Bible's impact in the Caribbean (p10) and China (p16), plus reports scattered through the news pages that demonstrate how creative approaches to biblical stories are making a difference in society.

Yes, there's real power in the Word to transform lives and make the world a better place (p22). And this is a theme you'll be seeing on these pages over the next months and then of course through next year's flurry of Biblefresh activities up and down the country.

With more than 100 Christian organisations already signed up, this initiative has the potential to not only strengthen the Church but also to cause people to see Christianity through new eyes. And if past experience is any guide, we have no idea what God has planned for Biblefresh. But we can't wait to see it come together.

Rich



12 The resurrection in Leeds

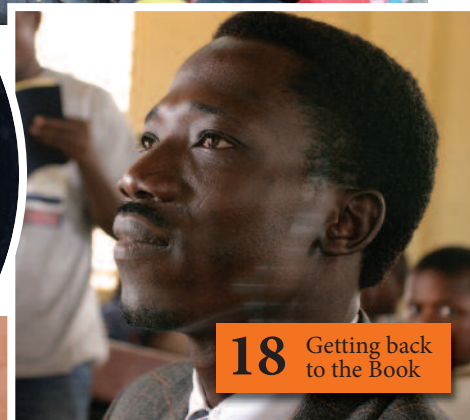


22 You can change the world

There's one thing that ties everything together



16 Clinging to every Word



18 Getting back to the Book



24 Robbing from the rich

Features

- 11 Operation Trumpet Call**
Fighting poverty in Zimbabwe
- 14 Media matters**
How do the media view religion?
- 16 Cover story: China**
The value of the Bible
- 18 Biblefresh**
Transforming the UK Church
- 22 How to change the world**
We can make a difference

Regulars

- 4 Your voice**
idea readers talk back
- 7 A voice in Parliament**
Big issues that need Christian attention
- 24 Talking points**
Pop culture that sparks discussion
- 27 The basics**
Contending for biblical truth
- 30 Last word**
General Director Steve Clifford writes...



evangelical alliance
uniting to change society



Head Office
186 Kennington Park Road,
London SE11 4BT
tel 020 7207 2100 fax 020 7207 2150
info@eauk.org • www.eauk.org



General Director Steve Clifford

Finance & Operations Executive Director
Helen Calder

Churches in Mission Executive Director
Krish Kandiah

Conference room bookings
conference@eauk.org

Email address changes to members@eauk.org

Northern Ireland Director Rev Stephen Cave
440 Shore Road, Newtownabbey BT37 9RU
tel: 028 9029 2266 • nireland@eauk.org

Scotland Director Rev Fred Drummond
29 Canal Street, Glasgow G4 0AD
tel 0141 332 8700 • scotland@eauk.org

Wales Director Rev Elfed Godding
20 High Street, Cardiff CF10 1PT
tel: 029 2022 9822 • wales@eauk.org

your voice

Bridge the gap

I agree with the article *Engage with the General Election* (Mar/Apr). We should indeed decide which issues are most important, and healing our divided society should be the priority of any party. There remains too great a gap between rich and poor, and Christians should be worried about this.

The recent book *The Spirit Level* by Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson examines international evidence showing that very unequal nations generally had worse physical and mental health. Inequality is so stressful it makes people ill. Divided societies also had lower levels of trust, higher murder rates, more obesity and teenage pregnancy, and declining educational performances. The poor suffered most, but everyone was affected.

Yet equal societies do better in all these areas. Even social mobility improves in more equal nations. For example, Denmark has better social mobility than the more divided UK or USA.

I believe such social issues should indeed influence how we vote and what the next government does. We need to make our voice heard.

Graeme Kemp, Wellington, Shropshire

Voting for change

In your article about the General Election, there is one party you did not mention, the Christian Party, which has three parts to it: Scotland, England and Wales.

I am a candidate for Wales, where we are fielding six people to stand for God. We operate on one main principle: prayer. We pray that we can get people into Parliament so that we can make a change for the better. To do that we need Christian people of whatever denomination to get out to vote. To quote from one of our leaflets: "If you don't vote, you can't complain. If you vote the same people in, you can't expect change."

John Harrold, Newport

Rising to new challenges

I read with interest your article regarding digital media (Mar/Apr). Thanks for a great summary of some of the new media challenges and opportunities that face the Church.

I thought readers might also be interested that Church of Christ the King in Brighton has launched a free iPhone app. As far as we are aware, we are the first church in the UK to have an app and we are excited by the new possibilities this allows us. These include access to audio



and video of recent sermons, the church calendar and our blogs.

Like others in your article, our goal is to investigate and utilise new technologies to communicate the message of Jesus Christ.

Matt Simmonds, Hove

Something to say

I can't quite work out what it is about climate change. Most people wouldn't dream of supposing they could work out whether or not a hole is developing in the earth's ozone layer, let alone unravel the intricacies of the photochemical basis of the action of CFCs. Yet when it comes to climate science, every Tom, Dick and Sally has something to say (*Your Voice*, Jan/Feb and Mar/Apr).

I question the space allocated by Christian publications to people who clearly have little understanding of the subject. Would they extend the same opportunities to those who question the

influence of smoking on health or the causation of Aids by HIV, for example?

Rather than give currency to the confusion displayed by many of *idea*'s recent correspondents, I suggest directing such people to a competent account such as Sir John Houghton's *Global Warming, Climate Change and Sustainability*.

I'm not saying that common sense doesn't come into it – it's highly relevant to our response to this crisis. Common sense says it's better to be safe than sorry. Would you take your children on a plane if you knew most aviation experts were warning it would crash? But think of what we'd be putting at risk if we ignore scientific advice. We'd be gambling on the welfare of the whole of humanity, risking bequeathing to our children and grandchildren a veritable hell on earth.

David W Golding, Newcastle

The nosedive

Thanks for the latest issue of *idea*. On the letters page (Mar/Apr), Ray Pedlingham raises the question of what happened to the young people who were in church in 1985. That question has been addressed in the book *Pulling out of the Nosedive*: in 1985, there were 520,000 people aged 20-29 attending church on an average Sunday, but 10 years later this had dropped to 450,000, and by 2005 the number was 350,000.

That is an exodus of no mean proportion and something that churches have to counter-balance to remain viable in the long-term. Furthermore, much of the decline is among people in their 40s, not so much their giving up on church altogether, but attending less frequently. Other priorities in a busy both-parents-working family life take over on Sundays (and other days also, to be fair).

It is not just frequency of church attendance that is changing rapidly, but also our family life and how it is structured. Solutions therefore are perhaps less a call to greater commitment, but rather teaching on coping with the pressures in our ultimate calling to follow Christ.

Peter Brierley, Tonbridge, Kent

idea

Editor Rich Cline • idea@eauk.org

Contributing Editor Hazel Southam

Contributing Writers Phil Green, Nicole Holmes, Rob James, Sophie Lister, Johanna Marris, Tony Watkins, Daniel Webster

Head of Communications Miles Giljam

Advertising Manager Jack Merrifield • j.merrifield@eauk.org

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idea is published in accordance with the Alliance's Basis of Faith, although it is impossible in every article to articulate each detail and nuance of belief held by Alliance members. Articles in *idea* may therefore express views on which there is a divergence of opinion or understanding among evangelicals.

Letters and story ideas from members are welcome, and will be considered by the editorial board, which reserves the right to edit letters and stories for length and style. We regret that we are unable to engage in personal correspondence. Unsolicited material will only be returned if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

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Conference refreshes, restores and revitalises

Following February's Kingdom Come conference in Belfast, the Alliance's Northern Ireland Director Stephen Cave said, "It's time we recognised and appreciated the gifts God has given to the Church in Ireland." The conference brought together 400 church leaders, clergy and laity from different parts of Ireland with a goal to help Christian leaders find spiritual refreshment while facing up to and sharing each others' burdens.

In planning the event, the steering committee felt that God was challenging them to hear His voice through Irish people. So three Irish leaders – Bishop Ken Clarke, Heather Morris and Trevor Morrow – brought the main messages alongside keynote speaker Gordon MacDonald.

The challenge now is to continue to build the leadership of the Irish Church, identifying the gifts God has given to



Andy Bowers

local leaders and making sure that they are recognised and valued across denominational boundaries. "Too often we look beyond our own shores," said Cave, "and assume that we need to bring in big names from elsewhere to teach us, when the reality is that we are blessed with so many gifted leaders and teachers already, and perhaps it's time we gave them their place and acknowledged what God has given us."

Participants at the conference have responded to the experience, saying that

for the first time they are facing some deep realities in their own lives and in the Church. Bishop Clarke commented, "For many leaders I have listened to, this Kingdom Come has proved to be one of the most personally refreshing and ministry-enriching conferences they have ever attended. They are asking for more."

"Among so many highlights," adds Cave, "perhaps most significant is that just maybe Irish prophets can be held with honour even in their own country."

kingdomcomeireland.com

Engaging culture

Confidence and competence were the dominant notes of Joel Edward's keynote address at the recent launch of the Cymru Institute of Contemporary Christianity in Swansea. Speaking to a larger than expected audience, Edwards argued that the Church needs be more competent in four areas: in the battle for ideas, in demonstrating its faith in a God of public benefit, in surfing the waves of liberal democracy, and in spiritual warfare.

"My hope," he said, "is that we will go with our heads held high, recognising that we serve a God of well-being, and that we have a legitimate



place in the public square."

CICC's three-launch programme began in Swansea's Waterfront Church followed by *Question Time*-style events in Cardiff and Colwyn Bay, with questions ranging from the growth of virtual relationships to

Terry Pratchett's wish to die in a way, and at a time, of his own choosing.

Both CICC Director Andrew Cooper and the Alliance's Wales Director Rev Elfed Godding (pictured, left, with Alliance General Director Steve Clifford and Joel Edwards) expressed their delight at an initiative that they believe will build on the momentum established by its much-appreciated predecessor, the Cardiff Institute of Contemporary Christianity.

Godding said, "Providing an opportunity for Christians from all walks of life to acquire greater skill in understanding the Bible and applying it to contemporary issues will prove invaluable."

RJ

In brief...



FIGHTING MALARIA. The international charity Mercy Ships has received a donation of mosquito nets from outdoor adventure specialists Lifemarque Limited. These will be deployed by the *Africa Mercy* hospital ship as the volunteer crew provides free medical care to thousands of people during a seven-month visit to Togo, where malaria is rife. "Minimising the risk of being bitten is extremely important when travelling in high-risk malaria regions," said Lifemarque's Pete Gostling. "The mosquito nets that we have donated are very sophisticated. Each one has been treated with long-lasting Lifesystems EX8 AntiMosquito, which both repels insects and kills them on contact." mercyships.org.uk

HELP SET THE CHURCH'S AGENDA. The Alliance is calling on its members to register churches and colleges as "remote congress sites" for the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation, to be held in Cape Town 16-25 October. The event will be the widest-ever gathering of evangelical leaders and thinkers, coming from some 200 nations with a goal to set effective strategy for the next decade. Churches and groups around the world can join the online Lausanne Global Conversation and make an impact on the discussions at the congress. capetown2010.com

FAIRTRADE TEA PARTY. More than 100 dancing tea ladies made their way to Parliament and Downing Street recently to encourage tea-loving Brits to swap their favourite cuppa to Fairtrade and thereby help tackle poverty that affects more than 14 million people in the developing world who produce tea for a living but are suffering from unfair working conditions. According to the Fairtrade Foundation, only one cup in 10 in the UK is fairly traded. In announcing No 10's Fairtrade status, Sarah Brown said, "The beauty of Fairtrade is that if we all do a little, then together we do a lot." thebigswap.org.uk





a voice in Parliament

EQUALITY BILL. As this Bill completed its passage through Parliament, a surprise amendment was passed allowing churches and other religious buildings to hold civil partnership ceremonies. The amendment included a clause stating that churches

would not be forced to conduct such ceremonies, but following the vote confusion remained about the impact of the decision.

The Alliance has called on the Government to guarantee that churches

Election and the family

Will the General Election make any difference to the family? That was the question the Christian Socialist Movement asked Secretary of State for Children, Schools and the Family Ed Balls (pictured) at its Tawney Dialogue in mid-March.

His comments were made to the backdrop of a Bible Society poll showing that 79 per cent of the public think it is better for a child's quality of life to live with two parents rather than one. Nearly half of people polled (45%) agreed that generally it is better for those parents to be married rather than cohabiting.

"Our policy is based on morality and justice," said Balls, who was speaking alongside author and theologian Elaine Storkey and Bible Society's Ann Holt. Seeking to defend the Government's record on the family, he went on to say that "at its centre are family and strong relationships".

However, in her opening comments Ann Holt said that the "state must undertake actions that motivate and encourage upholding stable families". In addition, she said that marriage is a public institution and a way of strengthening families; consequently there is an "obligation to back what is good for the optimal society".

Elaine Storkey said that while the Government cannot redeem the family they can and must create the framework for this redemption. This, she said was a challenge in "an era of contempt for anything that doesn't value autonomy".

Andy Flannagan, director of the Christian Socialist Movement, said, "It is too easy for what should be the building block of our society to become a political football. Christians need to make their voices heard in this important debate, but we need to have an inclusive approach that does not stigmatise people." thecsm.org.uk



will be free to choose whether or not to hold civil partnership ceremonies without fear of legal action. The Alliance's Head of Public Affairs, Dr Don Horrocks, said, "This amendment hugely confuses the distinction between civil secular ceremonies and religious ceremonies, as well as the nature of marriage, and has major implications for the UK's matrimonial laws, which haven't begun to be thought through." cauk.org/pq

SEX AND RELATIONSHIP

EDUCATION. Schools Secretary Ed Balls introduced an amendment to the Children Schools and Families Bill to ensure that faith schools are able to teach sex and relationship education (SRE) in a manner that is in keeping with their religious ethos. This follows the announcement last year that all pupils will in the future have to take sex education classes, and parents will no longer be allowed to withdraw their children when they are 15 or older.

Although critics accused Balls of watering down the overall purpose of the Bill, the amendment reinforced the promise he had offered last autumn that schools would be able to maintain the tenets of their faith. Schools will still be required to teach the full curriculum, including other views on sexual relationships that might be contrary to the school's ethos. However, they will be able to do so in the context of their own faith perspective.

Dan Boucher, director of parliamentary affairs for Alliance member charity Care, said, "The amendment does placate faith schools, but the ability for them to teach things that are consistent with their faith was never in doubt. In contrast to the media focus on faith schools, the real issue is the fact that the SRE curriculum for everyone is going to be determined centrally rather than giving parents the option of informing school governors on the SRE curriculum in any school that their children attend, faith or otherwise."

care.org.uk

DW

NO FAITH, NO WORKS. Delegates at the Faithworks Conference in London in late-February launched a declaration calling on the Government to recognise that churches, Christian charities and community projects are a key source of real, lasting community change. "Regardless of who resides at No 10, communities in Britain face huge new challenges as well as new opportunities over the next five years," said Steve Chalke MBE, Faithworks' founder and Special Advisor to the UN. "Christians can demonstrate their faith works by rolling up their sleeves and helping our communities make the best of the opportunities." faithworks.info

NO BAIL OUT FOR BOMBS. More than 150 young Christians gathered outside the UK's Defence and Security Organisation in March calling for an end to Government support of the arms trade. They presented hundreds of flowers and origami peace doves as a petition, as well as a life-size cardboard model of a military tank transformed into a symbol of peace. The goal of the event, organised by Alliance member Speak, was to present a future based on Christian values, where the Government transfers its bail-outs from bombs to more constructive industries, such as green technology. speak.org.uk



THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE. The social networking site Shine Your Light was launched by Message Trust in April to help young Christians get more involved in their communities and inspire each other with outreach ideas and experiences. In conjunction with this project, youth agencies are being encouraged to get their young people to shine their light like never before during the Government's Shine Week, which is being held in schools and colleges 12-16 July. The idea is to "make goodness fashionable" throughout the summer holidays, with the weekend of 23-24 September as the climax. shineyourlight.com



Refreshing preaching

In response to comments from churchgoers, the Alliance and London School of Theology held a colloquium on preaching on 23 April, gathering preachers from across the country to discuss significant questions regarding the future of preaching. Part of the Biblefresh initiative, the event examined issues surrounding biblical literacy, as well as how to communicate with people in their 20s and 30s.

"The digital age isn't killing off preaching," said Paul Johns, director of the College of Preachers, "but too much preaching is doing too little to motivate people to look at the world differently and therefore to live in it differently. If that's so, we have to question what we preachers are actually saying about the Bible and about contemporary issues, and how well we're engaging with our congregations."

The event's main question was: "How do we give people a renewed appetite for preaching?" And organisers plan to continue the discussion online, as well as through an electronic book containing advice from a number of experienced preachers. This can be downloaded free of charge from: biblefresh.com PG

Considering the 'Big If'

Church leaders in Scotland have called on Christians to find greater intimacy with God through prayer this year. *Transforming Scotland* is a 24/7 prayer initiative run by the Alliance, Care, Alpha and Pray for Scotland, based around the "Big If" from 2 Chronicles 2.17: "If my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray... then I will hear from heaven."

Key events in the calendar this year are the Global Day of Prayer on 23 May and St Andrew's Day on 30 November. In addition, the Alliance in Scotland has been running *Pray2Transform* events, bringing people together to pray for their towns. So far five cities have taken part with

politicians, business chiefs, police and social workers all getting involved.

As a result, this year in Scotland someone is praying for the nation every minute of every day, from students at St Andrews University to churches up and down the country. The idea is that churches sign up for one day, several days or a week of prayer – 24 hours each day in one-hour slots.

Rev Fred Drummond, the Alliance's Scotland director, said these events have had a significant impact on local churches. "God is calling people to draw near to Him," he said, "to trust in His gracious resources and for the first time in several generations to begin to dream again." NH

Church should address sex

Summer Madness, Love for Life and the Alliance in Northern Ireland have joined forces to show that the Church can and should be addressing issues of sex and relationships in a relevant and practical way. In February, nearly 500 Belfast young people, aged 16-30, attended an evening of teaching with *Romance Academy's* Rachel Gardner as the keynote speaker. Seminars tackled issues including communication between the sexes, porn and dating. One attendee said the evening was "superb – honest testimony, realistic advice and refreshing Bible teaching".

A separate debate on family and relationships education also took place between politicians, practitioners and church leaders, noting that churches are ideally placed both spiritually and practically to be leading the way in promoting and supporting healthy relationships from a young age. notjustaonenightstand.info NH



CHURCHES IN TRANSITION. Christian Ecology Link has launched a project to network and represent the growing number of churches involved in Transition Towns projects, which aim to help communities become more aware of environmental issues. Churches in Transition will be able to communicate through an online forum while utilising the "ecocell" study programme, which helps individuals, households and churches collectively address managing their energy and resource use. Christian Ecology Link is working with other faith-based organisations to produce resources, training and events on the transition to a low-carbon economy. christian-ecology.org.uk

ABSOLUTE, NOT OBSOLETE. Evangelist J John is marking a decade of his just10 missions by releasing a tool kit to help churches teach the message of the Ten Commandments. The kit includes 10 DVDs, study guides, a six-week evangelism training course and a special set of resources for children. Over the last 10 years, J John's messages have been heard throughout the UK, with thousands of people coming to Christ, renewing their faith and making restitution for their past wrongdoings. The goal is to get 2,010 churches in the UK involved in just10 mission this autumn. just10.org



STRENGTHENING MARRIAGE. In Britain this February, Christian organisations – including the Alliance, YWAM and Alpha – helped co-ordinate Marriage Week projects as part of a global initiative to promote marriage as a lifelong commitment between man and woman, as established in Scripture. Geoff Tunncliffe, head of the World Evangelical Alliance, spoke at the Marriage Week Conference in Lausanne about the importance of upholding marriage as part of family-life ministries. He hopes that this will help shift the image of evangelicals away from the stereotype of far-right fundamentalists to having an important voice on issues of religious freedom, global poverty, Aids, human rights and upholding Christian values. marriage-weekinternational.com

Working to end violence against women

A new Christian coalition is working to end violence against women in the UK and worldwide. The United Nations estimates that one in three women will experience violence during her lifetime. Two women a week are murdered by a partner or former partner in the UK, while in Ukraine the figure is one every 35 minutes.

Restored brings together Christian organisations working to transform relationships and to prevent this violence. The goal is to equip churches to address the issue in their own communities. "The Church has been silent for too long on violence against women. It's time for us all to stand together to end this outrage," said Mandy Marshall, Restored's co-director.

The project is being run by Alliance member Tearfund and will be launched at the Faith and Freedom's *Bringing Hope* conference in Colchester on 26 June. restoredrelationships.org



Joana Croft

Join the global Church

Throughout May, Jonathan Oloyede, convenor of the Global Day of Prayer, is calling on Christians of all denominations and backgrounds to set their mobile phone alarms to midday each day to pray the Lord's Prayer. "The prayer should only take 40 seconds out of the day," he said, "but if people cultivate this habit, it could catalyse a worldwide movement towards the healing and deliverance of our land."

Oloyede is also calling on churches to unite at a local level on Pentecost Sunday, 23 May, and then for churches across London to gather together for a huge event on 13 June, joining with Christians in more than 200 nations. gdoplondon.com

New members

The Alliance welcomes the following organisations and churches as members. If your church or organisation wishes to apply, visit: eauk.org/getinvolved

ORGANISATIONS

Cae Canol Centre, Carrs Green, Preston
Calvary Ministries Worldwide, Reading
Heavenly Rain Ministries, Belvedere, Kent

CHURCHES

Abundant Grace and Mercy Ministries, Cardiff
Bryn Sion Baptist Fellowship, Trecynon, Rhondda Cynon Taff
Calderwood Baptist Church, East Kilbride, Glasgow

Christ Church Summerfield, Birmingham
Glory Assemblies of God, Barking
Kesed Church, Colchester
London Church International, Richmond

Miracle Centre Assemblies of God, Eltham, London

Pillar of Truth, Mitcham, London

Resurrection Power & Living Bread Ministries, Deptford Green, Kent

Sword of the Spirit Evangelical Outreach, Forest Gate, London



Simon Richardson

FEAST FOR THE EYES. Alliance member Springs Dance Company is currently on tour with its acclaimed *Bread of Life*, a contemporary dance performance designed specifically for UK churches and cathedrals. The goal was to create an uplifting and thoughtful portrayal of the sharing of bread and wine in the Christian Eucharist. Performed by five skilled dancers, the tour kicked off in March at Westminster Methodist Central Hall in London and continues through the summer and autumn. springsdancecompany.org.uk

“Our Christian legacy should be people living life the Jesus way – as the Bible describes it.”

James Catford

Group Chief Executive
Bible Society



James Catford has a passion. He wants to see God's Kingdom come - and he wants to be able to leave this world a better place.

Isn't that what we all want? A world lavished with God's love, comforting and restoring people to abundant life.

The truth is, it's more than a dream, it's a mission to build a better tomorrow. If that's the kind of legacy you could be passionate about, join the debate online at

www.christianlegacy.org.uk

Christian Legacy

A group of Christian charities working to encourage today's Christians to remember Christian charities in their wills

Christian Legacy members are:

Bible Society, Care for the Family, CMS, The Leprosy Mission, Livability, The Mission to Seafarers.



Photo: Clare Kendall, Bible Society

Patois-speakers receive Gospel

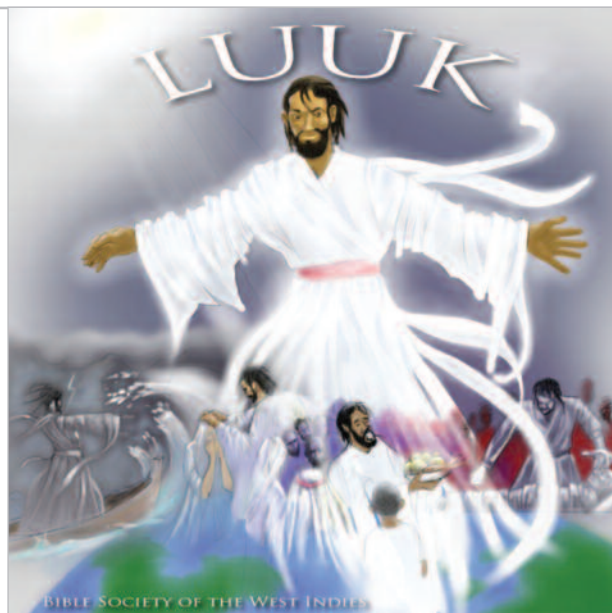
Luke's Gospel in Patois is being launched in May, the first time that any of the Bible has been produced in the language spoken by 5 million people in Jamaica and across the world. The £35m project will see the Gospel become available both on CD and in print. The official launch takes place at events in London and Birmingham, including Biblefresh's Pentecost Festival. The Jamaica launch in August will tie in with national celebrations of independence and emancipation from slavery.

"Patois has always been regarded as the language to communicate music and folklore," said Rev Courtney Stewart, general secretary of the Bible Society of the West Indies, "but it's never been used to translate anything serious, so this is of great significance. It means that we will

be able to communicate the Word of God at a deeper level in churches. And we will be able to have God's Word reach people in a way that has not always been the case."

Stewart added that having a portion of the Bible in Patois would give Jamaicans a greater sense of self-worth. "It is a quantum leap for our language. Patois has always been considered bad, broken English that's relegated to those from a poorer economic background. But this translation means that because God speaks my language I do not have to consider my language to be any less than anyone else's."

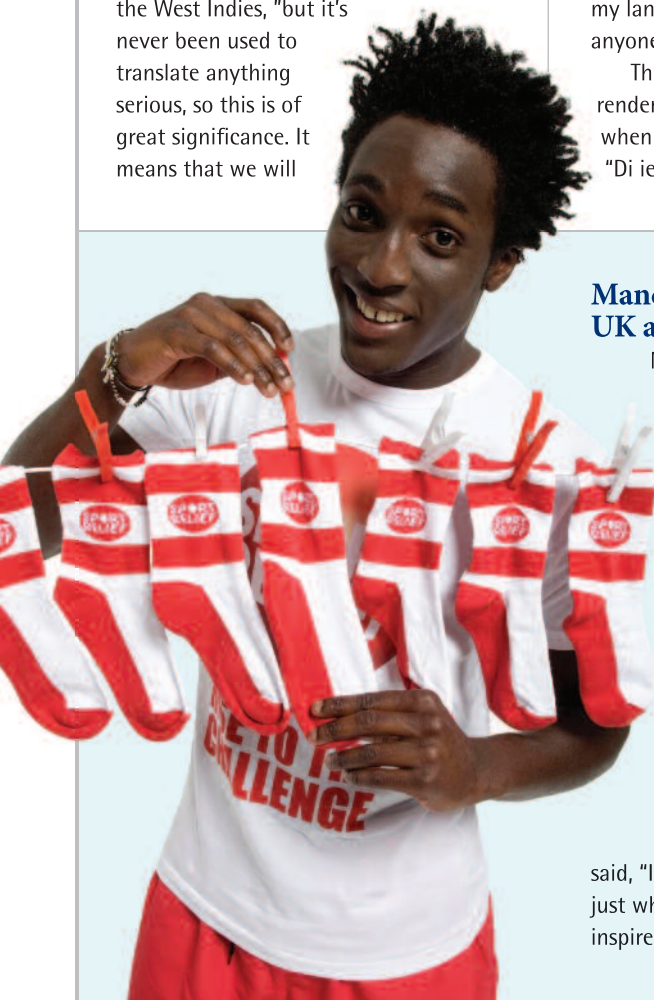
The Patois St Luke gives a colourful rendering of well-known texts, such as when the Angel Gabriel appears to Mary: "Di ienjel go tu Mieri an se tu ar se,



Bible Society

'Mieri, mi av nyuuz we a go mek yu wel api. Gad riili riili bles yu an im a waak wid yu aal di taim.'

Plans are underway to publish a full translation of the New Testament in Patois in August 2012 as part of Jamaica's 50th year of independence. *HS*



Manchester youth represent UK at World Cup

M13 Youth Project, a ministry of Youth for Christ in Manchester, was chosen to represent the UK as the official UK Deloitte Street Child World Cup football team. A team of nine young people aged 14-16 recently travelled to Durban, South Africa, where they worked with street children from eight countries.

Blue Peter presenter Andy Akinwolere (pictured) covered and took part in the project as part of Sport Relief. And former England captain David Beckham said, "I know from personal experience just what power football can have to inspire and change young people's lives

whatever their background or nationality. This is what the Deloitte Street Child World Cup is all about."

Chris Rose of the Amos Trust, which organised the event, said, "We are thrilled to have M13 Youth Project's participation in the first ever Deloitte Street Child World Cup. This was an opportunity for them to represent the UK in supporting the rights of all children across the world."

The M13 Youth Project works with young people often labelled "hard-to-reach" through detached youth work in the urban areas of Ardwick and Longsight in Manchester. The trip to South Africa was an exciting opportunity for the seven boys and two girls to learn about and promote the rights of children through activities that transcend language and cultural barriers. m13youthproject.org.uk

PROTECTION FOR CHRISTIANS. Alliance member Release International is calling on the international community to help protect vulnerable Christians in Nigeria after a further attack against Christians near Jos, which was scene of a massacre in March. Reports say armed men in military uniform led an attack against Christian villagers, killing 12 men, women and children. Release CEO Andy Dipper said, "This is the second appalling attack on Christians in this area in a fortnight. Release calls on Nigeria to act decisively to restore order and to protect its citizens. And we call on the international community to make sure that security is restored." releaseinternational.org

MISSION TO VIETNAM. A group of 500 Vietnamese church leaders has invited international evangelist Luis Palau to lead the first foreign mission to the country since the fall of Saigon in 1975. The mission is expected take place this December and will take the form of a festival featuring live music and action sports demonstrations as well as a Gospel message from Palau. The mission would come at an important strategic moment for Christianity in Vietnam, as the government has just started allowing Christian events to take place. palau.org



CALLING CHRIST'S SENIOR SERVANTS. In response to growing enquiries from pensioners, Operation Mobilisation has developed a range of short-term mission programmes drawing on the skills and wisdom of over-50s. Among the range of options is one taking place in Chile in late-October with events aimed at encouraging local believers, helping handicapped adults and proclaiming Christ to prison inmates. Conducted at a not-too-strenuous pace, opportunities for sightseeing have also been built in among the activities. Operation Mobilisation sends hundreds of British Christians on short and long-term mission trips each year; spaces on over-50s outreaches are filling up fast. uk.om.org



Radical action against poverty

Backers of a new initiative in Zimbabwe believe that within five years, through radical faith, living and mission, the people of their nation can be lifted out of poverty. During the current agricultural season, 100 church leaders are being trained in Bulawayo and Harare in the principles of Foundations for Farming. They will then return to their churches and train 100 others in their communities, translating into 10,000 families being taught to grow food to feed themselves on a sustainable basis. By multiplying this over the next four years, 1 million people could be farming God's way, and 5 million people will be fed.

Adrian Willard of Foundations for Farming said, "We're not just talking about a method of farming, but an entire management system founded on godly principles. It's an eternal promise that those who are faithful with what little they have gain more."

Because of the volatile political climate in Zimbabwe, world aid is severely limited. But if this farming system is applied faithfully in Zimbabwe and beyond, Willard believes that Africa can feed itself. With materials such as wordless books and non-literacy flipcharts, illiterate farmers can be trained in basic principles such as the importance of planting on time and maintaining a mulch cover. Some farmers who have adopted Foundations for Farming methods report that their yield increased tenfold as a result.

But it's not just the Zimbabwean Church that needs to blow the trumpet. Challenged by global events such as Live Aid and Make Poverty History, Willard is rallying the world to pray and fast on behalf of Zimbabwe. Operation Trumpet Call started with an invitation to Christian Zimbabweans living abroad and is spreading from there.

The campaign culminates in a worldwide event at the end of September, with prayer and fasting beginning at sun-up in New Zealand and finishing at sundown in Hawaii. Based on the kind of fasting God laid out "to loose the chains of injustice" (Isaiah 58), the event challenges participants to give the money they would normally spend on a day's worth of food to Zimbabwe.

"This could impact the world," said Willard. "Those in poverty could stand up and say, 'We don't need to rely on man or money; it's God who will save us.'" lovezim.org

NH



HIT THE ROAD. Cycling enthusiast Pete Hodge of Cardiff has raised more than £4,000 for Cancer and Leukaemia in Childhood through a sponsored ride in Rajasthan, India, cycling more than 500 km in a week. "Most of the ride was on rough roads filled with potholes and unmade surfaces," said Hodge, who is an evangelist with OAC Ministries. Back home, he travels around Wales leading school assemblies and youth clubs, where children readily relate to the practical side of Christian compassion. He has also written a booklet, *Turn to God*, a step-by-step illustrated presentation of the Gospel that has sold more than 1 million copies. oacgb.org.uk

OAC

“ Our Christian legacy should be millions of disciples committed to eating, breathing and living mission. ”

Rev Canon Tim Dakin
Executive Director
CMS



Tim Dakin has a passion. He wants to see God's Kingdom come - and he wants to be able to leave this world a better place.

Isn't that what we all want? A world lavished with God's love, comforting and restoring people to abundant life.

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Christian Legacy

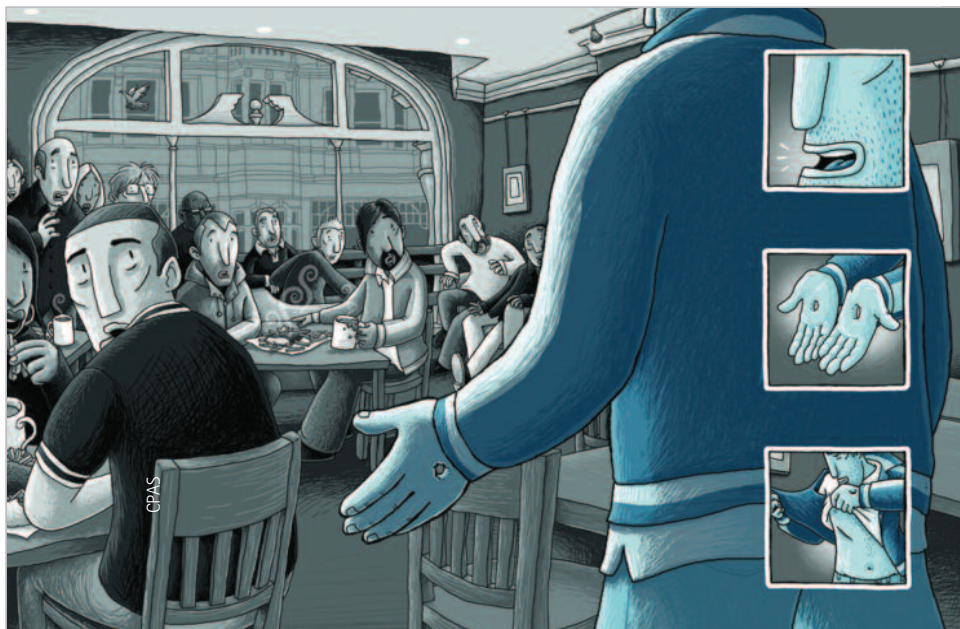
A group of Christian charities working to encourage today's Christians to remember Christian charities in their wills

Christian Legacy members are:

Bible Society, Care for the Family, CMS, The Leprosy Mission, Livability, The Mission to Seafarers.



Photo:
Andreas Weise
© CMS



RESURRECTION COMES TO LEEDS. A series of contemporary images by a Yorkshire illustrator portrays the story of Jesus' resurrection set in modern-day Leeds. Various locations around the city feature in the drawings, published in the Easter edition of Alliance member CPAS' *Church Leadership*. Illustrator Simon Smith represented the empty tomb with the door of a funeral home, with venues such as Caffè Nero in Albion Row and the lakeside in Roundhay Park as settings for key scenes. The series of 12 illustrations has been created as a way of depicting the story of the resurrection as if it was happening in this country in 2010. "I like the idea that the resurrection story includes real people with real decisions to make," said Smith. "I think that setting the story in the here-and-now, in the place where I live, immediately makes the narrative and the characters less remote and more accessible. It earths the story somewhere very solid and tangible." *Church Leadership* is published three times a year for church leaders. church-leadership.org

Hope returns to Britain

Following the success of Hope08, key Christian leaders have signed up to be part of a continuing Hope mission, uniting major Christian denominations and organisations in a commitment to reach out to villages, towns and cities across the UK. Since the initiative in 2008, churches are still running projects and initiatives under the Hope banner, working together for the sake of their communities. Roy Crowne, former national director of Youth for Christ, has taken over as executive director of Hope, while the Alliance's General Director Steve Clifford will continue as chair of the Hope Board.

"The appetite for mission in this country has never been so great," said

Crowne, "and the desire to work together for the sake of those outside the church community has found its expression through Hope."

Hope has reformed in response to wide consultation with church leaders. The Rev Canon Paul Bayes, the Church of England's national mission and evangelism adviser, said, "In 2008, Hope encouraged thousands of local churches to work together.

Christians of all denominations and streams seized the Hope moment, saw what God did with it and asked for more. Now there's a chance to build the moment into a powerful momentum for mission, unity and service where you are. People need it. Let's not miss it." hopeinfo.co.uk



SET THE HALL ALIGHT. A special *Prom Praise* will take place 8 May at the Royal Albert Hall marking the midpoint between Easter and Pentecost with a service that celebrates the diversity of worship. Performers include *X-Factor* finalist Beverley Trotman (pictured), as well as opera star Joanne Lunn and acclaimed Korean pianist Grace Yeo, accompanied by the All Souls Orchestra and Massed Prom Praise Choir. The speaker will be All Souls Rector Rev Hugh Palmer. allsouls.org

ONLINE MISSION. Oscar, the UK information service for world mission that recently marked its 10th anniversary, has launched a social networking site for Christians involved or interested in cross-cultural mission. *Oscaractive* includes a number of interactive features to help people give peer-to-peer support, advice and encouragement. "So many mission workers and supporters are already using Facebook, Twitter and other social networking tools," said Oscar Director Mike Frith. "*Oscaractive* interfaces with many of these and creates a place online for people to interact with each other on mission-related issues, from the practical to the spiritual." oscaractive.net

INTERNET EVANGELISM.

A free internet course launched in January has passed its 500-member mark. Run by Church Army, *Now a Christian* was developed by evangelists Neil Thomson and Peter Graystone. The course provides a series of very short emails, one per day for five weeks, which deal with everyday concerns about living out the Christian faith. *Now a Christian* is designed "to help new Christians explore the implications and understand the delights and complexities of what it is to follow Christ," said Thomson. "The website backs this up with activities that allow the user to interact with fellow travellers on this journey." nowachristian.org



Christian Resources Exhibition

11-14 May, Esher

This year's event is shaping up to be the biggest exhibition yet and will include specialist zones such as Biblefresh, youth, mind and soul, sports and technology. creonline.co.uk

The Big Church Day Out

29 May, Loughborough; 30-31 May, West Sussex

A day out for the whole family, this event brings together people of all ages and church backgrounds to celebrate their faith. Features a line-up of top Christian musicians. bigchurchdayout.co.uk

Church and Media Conference

7-9 June, Swanwick

Explores the human dimensions of life in the digital age and the forecast for people who work in traditional media, including issues of faith and integrity. churchesmediacouncil.org.uk

MediaLit Training

21-25 June, Durham

This course will train those concerned with how to connect their Christian faith with communication in a digital age, exploring ways we can engage with the media. churchesmediacouncil.org.uk

Jewels in His Crown

25-27 June, Swanwick

This is an all-age conference for Christians engaged in ministry among British Asians and Asian Churches. The weekend will include worship, prayer, training and fellowship. jewelsinhiscrown.co.uk

Summer Madness

2-6 July, Belfast

With the theme *Dare to Share*, this year's largest Christian festival in Ireland will include talks from Reggie Dabs and Rachel Gardner as well as cinema, live bands, late night cafes, seminars, debates and much more. summermadness.co.uk

Keswick Convention

17 Jul-6 Aug, Keswick

Christ-centred renewal is the theme for this year's Convention, affirming the sufficiency of Christ for all of life, and His power to renew all of creation. keswickministries.org

Transform 2010

19-24 Jul, Rome

Hundreds of Christians from around the world will participate in Operation Mobilisation's initiative to bring the Gospel to the Mediterranean region. transform.om.org



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“ Our Christian legacy should be a world without leprosy, seeing transformed lives of healing and wholeness ”

Rupert Haydock
National Director
The Leprosy Mission



Rupert Haydock has a passion. He wants to see God's Kingdom come - and he wants to be able to leave this world a better place.

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Photo: Georgina Cranston



media matters

by Paul Woolley, director of Theos



BBC

The BBC spends less on programmes dealing with ethical issues than on entertainment

The media's coverage of religion, and Christianity in particular, has been in the headlines over the past few months. It all started on 6 February with a report in *The Sunday Telegraph* that the BBC's head of religion and ethics had accused the Church of England of "living in the past". Aaqil Ahmed was responding to news that the Synod of the Church of England was going to debate a motion criticising the BBC for its treatment of Christianity. Ahmed added, "I think all the faiths should be treated in the same way. I don't believe in treating any faith differently."

Days later, Synod voted to express "deep concern" about a drop in religious programmes on British television but drew back from targeting the BBC directly for criticism.

In the first place, it's clear that religious output on the BBC has fallen. To be exact, it has fallen from 177 hours of religious programming on BBC television in 1987/88 to 155 hours in 2007/08, a period during which the overall volume of programming has doubled.

It's difficult to establish precisely the changes in religious belief over this time period. It's clear that there has been a decline in church attendance, but the 2001 census shows that people, voluntarily and in the privacy of their own homes, still chose to designate themselves in religious terms. In the census, Christianity is the major religion (71.6% of the population), followed by Islam (2.7%), Hinduism (1%), Sikhism (0.6%), Judaism (0.5%) and Buddhism (0.3%). Certainly the BBC's religious coverage is more diverse today than in 1987/88, reflecting in part the growing presence of other religious faiths in society.

But the BBC spends far less on programmes dealing with religious and ethical issues than on entertainment shows that attract the same size of audience. *Friday Night with Jonathan Ross* regularly attracts a similar audience to *Songs of Praise* (4 million viewers). The difference is that Ross' contribution was valued at £18 million; *Songs of Praise* presenters don't get anything close.

"Good" programming

How then should we respond to these facts? Well, there is no position of neutrality when it comes to programming. The BBC's output reflects certain notions of what "good" programming should look like. Of course, its understanding of "good" might simply be based on securing as high an audience share as possible. But as a publicly funded broadcaster, the BBC has a wider role that goes beyond the

commercial. The Beeb, like charities, is required to demonstrate its public benefit.

It is also important that the BBC produces programmes that reflect the diverse interests and belief commitments of its audience. The BBC's coverage of religion should broadly reflect the religious composition of society, but it's important that the same approach is taken across all subjects, including sport and DIY. If the Beeb did, there would be less time given in the schedules to these latter categories. Strikingly, more people watch *Songs of Praise* than *Match of the Day*.

In addition, it's not the role of the BBC to promote Christianity any more than it's the role of the BBC to promote politics or the arts or anything else. However, it is the role of the BBC to ensure that its religious programmes promote religious literacy and are well-informed and balanced. The level of religious illiteracy across the media is appalling. Despite the fact that the theory of secularisation (the idea that as society advances, religion retreats) is being widely discredited, it remains influential in media circles.

In the future Christianity, and religion more generally, are set to play a more, not less, significant role in the world. The challenge for the media, government and all sectors of society is to understand religious faith better and ensure their activity reflects the reality of the world we live in, not the one that some would like to live in.

► Theos is a public theology think-tank. For details, visit: theosthinktank.co.uk

EASTER GOES LIVE. More than a thousand people signed up to follow *Easter(Live)* on Facebook and Twitter throughout the Lent season, based on the question, "What does Easter mean to you?" Responses ranged from the clever ("Easter is when grace is free but not cheap and when chocolate is cheap but not free") to the personal ("A time when Jesus kept his promise to me and every other human being on the planet"). Even the Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu, posted his view: "Remember God's Son was raised 2new life so that we might live. We are an Easter people Et Alleluia is our song." twitter.com/easterlive

A WORLDWIDE CHALLENGE. The Global Poverty Project was launched at St Paul's Cathedral in late-February with more than 900 people in attendance, including Dr John Sentamu and International Development Secretary Douglas Alexander. According to the organisers, there are *1.4 Billion Reasons* to eradicate poverty, as that is the number of people who struggle to live on less than 85p per day. The project's CEO, Hugh Evans, claimed that tackling extreme poverty is "this generation's greatest challenge". The Alliance's Micah Challenge team (pictured) took part in the event, urging people to hold their MPs accountable to promises made to reduce poverty. micahchallenge.org.uk



HOLIDAY OPTIONS. A new Scripture Union holiday will test if teenagers can survive in the great outdoors. One of seven new holidays launching this summer, *SURVIVAL* is aimed at children aged 11-14 and features orienteering, camping and teamwork. Last year nearly 4,000 young people aged 8-18 benefited from a variety of holidays in a Christian environment. scriptureunion.org.uk/holidays Meanwhile, low-income families are being offered a half-priced holiday in France by Spring Harvest Holidays. Located in the Vendée region, the *Le Pas Option* Christian holiday park is open to people of any faith and includes a programme of optional daily Bible study and worship sessions. springharvestholidays.com/grants

► For updated news from Alliance members, click on [Your Stories at cauk.org/idea](http://YourStories.atcauk.org/idea)

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New Bibles are received by Christians in Yiyang.



The value of the Bible

For people in the world's most populous nation, the Bible is a precious and sometimes rare book. But Alliance member agency Bible Society is helping to get the Word out. Hazel Southam travels to China to investigate...



Jin, 70, walked for three hours to get her Bible.

At age 70, Jin has walked for three hours in sub-zero temperatures to get to church, but she can't stop smiling. The reason? Today free Bibles are being given out to the congregation. And she's got one.

Yiyang lies in China's rural heartland. Despite the astonishing economic growth of cities like Beijing and Nanjing, 70 per cent of China's 1.3 billion population lives in the countryside, where half of them live on less than 65p per day.

In this context, buying a Bible can be a virtual impossibility, so Bible Society is helping to subsidise Bibles. These can cost under £2, but in the countryside, some Bibles are distributed for free.

An estimated 4 million Bibles were printed in China last year alone, bringing the cumulative total to 70 million. Yet as thousands of people are thought to be coming to faith each day, millions of Bibles are still needed.

An eager crowd

The small brick church in Yiyang, where a local pastor is distributing the Bibles, is packed. More than 250 people crowd its hard wooden pews. Jin is one of them, sitting near the open door swathed in scarves to protect her from the biting cold wind. Outside at least 300 more people sit on low wooden benches under bare trees as a small dog roots around

for food and, in the winter sunshine, a tabby cat has a wash.

This is Jin's second Bible. She shows me the first: 20 years old, battered by daily reading and missing a substantial section of Genesis that simply fell out. "Reading the Bible is like having God talk to you," she says, clutching the new black volume.

Jin became a Christian 20 years ago. She earns her living as a watermelon grower, but always suffered from travel sickness on the bus journey to the nearest town to sell her wares. "One day I prayed, 'Lord, if

'Reading the Bible is like having God talk to you'

you let me not feel sick on this journey, I will take whatever I earn today and buy a Bible," she recalls. "I didn't feel sick, so I bought a Bible. After a year I was baptised and changed my name. It mean's 'God's love.'"

Thirteen men carry the boxes of 500 Bibles down a dirt track into the village past courtyards and ditches thick with rubbish. Small children and dogs mill around. The whole congregation applauds as the Bibles are brought in and placed on a wooden table at the front. Very soon a chain gang of 10 women, including some choir members robed in white over their coats, are passing handfuls of Bibles out to every adult.

Outside, 28-year-old Zhang finally gets her copy. She's recently been diagnosed with diabetes and is worried about how to manage her condition with no medication. "I hope through reading the Bible I will be able to find hope," she says. "I will read my Bible every day, starting with Genesis. And I hope that as I read, Jesus will heal me."

China's top seller

Since the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, during which time the Bible was banned, confiscated and burned, it has become China's bestseller. What's more, it is now printed in China, rather than being smuggled into the country.

Nanjing's Amity Printing Press has so far produced some 70 million Bibles, 50 million of which have gone to Chinese Christians. "When we started, we couldn't have imagined that we would have expanded so much," says Qiu Zhong Hui, chairman of Amity's board. "It's amazing growth."

Bible Society helps to fund the paper on which Bibles are printed. This in turn means that Bibles can be sold at a knocked-down rate in China's cities and given away free to Christians like Jin in the villages where low incomes prevent people from buying a copy.

Bible Society's subsidy of the cost means that millions more people are able to afford a copy of the Bible each year. The cost is reduced from around 60 yuan (£6) to 15 yuan (£1.50). But in the rural areas like Yiyang, a day's living expenses could be just 5 yuan (50p), so distributing Bibles for free is vital.

In the cities, subsidised Bibles make it possible for Christians to snap up a copy. At St Paul's Church in Nanjing, 67-year-old Zhang Fang Rong raises her arms in thanksgiving. She has just bought five Bibles at the church's tiny bookshop. "I want to preach the Gospel to my neighbours and friends," she says. "I've been saving money every month to do this. Hallelujah! I'm so excited to be buying these Bibles."

Official estimates report that there are 25 million Christians in China, but it is believed that as many as 90 million could be attending China's churches. Local experts say that every day thousands more are becoming Christians, so the demand for Bibles continues to grow.

"As more and more people are joining the Church, they are asking for a Bible," says Kua Wee Seng, coordinator of the United Bible Societies' China Partnership. "This is a time of opportunity in China," he adds. "Many of us feel that we mustn't miss this opportunity or people will turn to something else other than Christianity."

Jin and Zhang walk home past chickens scratching in the hard soil. They haven't been missed.

The Church in China

- Officially there are 28.6 million Christians in China. Unofficial figures place that number up to 90 million.
- China now prints its own Bibles, producing 70 million (including 20 million for export) since 1987.
- In 2009, some 4 million Bibles were printed and distributed in China.
- Local experts believe that thousands of people are becoming Christians each day, possibly as many as 500,000 a year.
- For further details, visit: biblesociety.org.uk

This is the first Bible for Zhang, 28, and her son Wang, 4.



Get into the Book

What does the Bible mean to you? Is it a book that sits by your bedside that you largely ignore? Does it represent the past? Is it too difficult to read? Or has it become the very stuff of life, the most rip-roaring story you know?

It may be the inspired Word of God, but today in the UK, Bible Society claims Christians often lack the confidence to apply what they know of the Bible to everyday life. And we're among the lucky ones who have the Bible in our own language. According to Bible Society's statistics, more than 4,400 languages still don't have one single book of the Bible.

For many people in Britain, the Bible can seem dull and impenetrable, but it's actually a lively read with the power to change lives. The Biblefresh initiative has brought together more than 100 agencies, festivals, colleges and denominations to boost confidence in the Scriptures in 2011, the 400th anniversary of the King James Version. Work is already underway to produce ideas and resources for individuals, churches and communities, and Christians are being encouraged now to start planning how to join in this year of transformation.

Here four people tell *Hazel Southam* how the Word is becoming vibrant for them as they respond to the four Biblefresh pledges...

Case study 1: Understand the Bible

Six years ago, Andrew Page was asked to give a talk about Mark's Gospel. He was a bit disappointed, being a fan of the Gospel of Luke.



But applying himself to the task, he had "a series of light bulb moments".

"I thought it would be great if Christians knew the order of the events [in Mark] so that they could do a Bible study in the shower without getting their Bible wet," he says, "or when they're out walking the dog."

The resulting book, *The Mark Experiment*, is now available in five languages and is currently being translated into Swahili. It gives a six-pack structure to the Gospel, helping readers to learn the basic events of any section in 10 minutes.

'I really believe that God uses the Bible to change people's lives'

A team minister at Above Bar Church in Southampton, Andrew says the aim is to help people "to meditate on Scripture while going about their daily lives".

"I don't think Christians read the Bible very much," he says. "Mark is so fast-moving, you don't get a moment to get bored. I really believe that God uses the Bible to change people's lives."

And Andrew has now created *The Mark Drama* (pictured with the book cover), which has so far been staged 40 times in seven countries by churches and Christian unions. It can be done anywhere: 15 people take the roles and use *The Mark Experiment* to understand the basic plot, then they improvise (with the exception of Jesus, who has lines to learn). Performed in the round in colleges and churches, it's had a profound affect on audiences and actors alike.

Andrew recalls a performance in Southampton. "When Jesus was being tried it got so quiet you could hear a pin drop," he says. "When Pilate asks what he should do with Jesus and everyone shouts, 'Crucify him,' it is really quite awful.

"One student said that when Jesus was being pushed around, she nearly got up and said, 'Stop doing this. He's a good man, you can't do this.' And when the nails were being hammered in, she had to put her hands over her ears and think about something else."

Andrew says that the aim is to "bring the whole thing alive and for people to experience the whole book in one evening. Most people wouldn't read it in one go. But the impact of the whole thing is astonishing." themarkdrama.com

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Providing Bibles for Burkina Faso is one of the main elements of the Biblefresh initiative.

Case study 2: Translate the Bible

"It's my vision to see the British Church excited about what God is doing through the Church in Africa," says Eddie Arthur, executive director of Wycliffe Bible Translators. And he wants to start that this year in Burkina Faso.

This land-locked West African state, which has a population of 16 million in a space that's larger than the UK, has been described by the United Nations as the third poorest country in the world. Over the past 30 years, it has suffered repeated droughts and military coups, leaving the country fragmented and economically shattered.

Yet its churches are growing. This year, Church-based organisations are running their own version of Biblefresh, while Wycliffe Bible Translators, in conjunction with Bible Society, is hoping to raise funds to pay for new translations of the Bible. There are 352,000 Bissa people in the country who speak two languages, Lebir and Barka. The Barka language doesn't even have one book of the Bible, while the Lebir language only has a New Testament. The aim is to change all that, seeing both languages with their own complete Bible.

"It will make a huge difference to the Church," says Eddie Arthur. "It can be a way of people coming to faith. But it's about being a disciple. How can you do that, if you can't read God's word?"

Here in the UK, any church can hold a Bible Census Sunday during which everyone in the congregation counts the number of Bibles they have at home and gives £1 for each one. "Biblefresh gives us an opportunity to see God at work," says Eddie, "and that will be great for the Church in the UK. We will get just as much out of it as people in Burkina Faso." biblefresh.org.uk



Wycliffe Bible Translators



Saltmine

Case study 3: Experience the Bible

The Bible in one hour: that's the essence of Saltmine Trust's *From Eden to Eternity*, which is touring Britain in May and June.

"It's quite a powerful thing," says Saltmine Chief Executive Phil Collins. "You can get bogged down in the micro-elements of the Bible. But there's a macro narrative of life and God's interaction with the world. These are the mountain-top moments of the Bible."

First performed last year with Matt Jones (pictured) in the lead role, *From Eden to Eternity* is making the Bible accessible for people who've either never read it or never got to the end. "Our role is to creatively

The Alliance Notice Board (online)

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communicate Christ," says Phil, "and part of that is bringing the biblical narrative alive – to take it from being two-dimensional when looking at black and white on paper and giving it the *Avatar* experience, making it 3D."

For a generation that doesn't read, theatre is an easy way to understand the Bible, Phil says. Reading ability or lack of enthusiasm are no longer barriers to getting to know God's Word. "We understand theatre," he says, "but books can be quite daunting, particularly for young people who find it hard to relate to the Bible."

Phil remembers hearing about an 8-year-old boy who had seen another Saltmine production. "Later, the little boy was trapped in a car for hours and hours," he says. "After he was rescued his mother asked him how he had coped, and he said, 'I remembered the play and I sang the song!' That child in that moment related to the biblical story. That's a wonderful thing." saltminetrust.org.uk

Case study 4: Read the Bible

"I am so excited about the Bible now," says 33-year-old church worker Kate Litzell. She and her husband Anders (pictured) are reading the Bible in a year under a scheme run by their church, Holy Trinity Brompton in West London. More than 1,600 people at the church already receive the *One Year Bible* daily by email, with accompanying thoughts from church leaders Nicky and Pippa Gumbel. The scheme first ran in 2009 with a goal to unite the church through learning and prayer.



Kate and Anders started to read the *One Year Bible* this January. "I used to find it difficult to read my Bible and to know where to start. This just sets it out for you; it's so easy," says Kate. "I thought this would be a good discipline to do it daily. And I'm quite surprised at how much I love doing it. It's also blessing our marriage. It's a lovely time for us to spend time with God."

Already the couple says they've been aware of times when they felt that God was

'There's a macro narrative of life and God's interaction with the world'

speaking to them directly through the Scriptures. "Also, we are doing this as a community, as a church-wide thing," says Anders, "and that brings a significant benefit I think. Any time you get many people with a common purpose, aim and experience I do believe it blesses us as a community."

Already, Kate and Anders are looking forward to 2011 and doing the *One Year Bible* again. "I can't talk highly enough about it," says Kate. "I would never have thought to read the Bible this way. But it means that I'm reading the Bible far more than I did, even though I'm a committed Christian." htb.org.uk/one-year-bible

Take it further

► WHY BIBLEFRESH?

The initiative aims to get Christians more engaged with the Bible.

► WHOSE IDEA WAS IT?

Biblefresh is backed by 100 Christian organisations including the Baptist Union, Wycliffe Bible Translators, Bible Society and the Alliance.

► WHEN IS IT HAPPENING?

Throughout 2011 to coincide with the 400th anniversary of the publication of the King James Bible.

► WHERE IS IT HAPPENING?

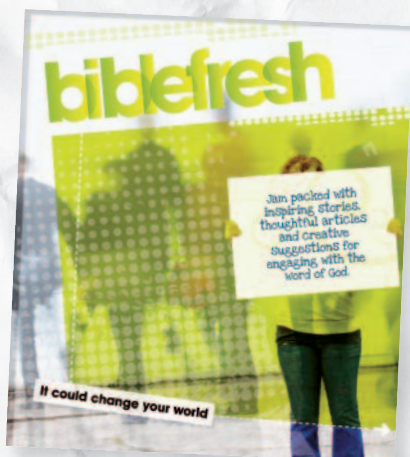
Thousands of churches around the country are expected to get involved next year.

► HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

Sign your church up to the Biblefresh pledge to: (1) read the Bible, (2) train leaders in understanding the Bible, (3) give to translate the Bible for Burkina Faso and (4) provide the opportunity for people to experience the Bible in new and creative ways (biblefresh.org.uk).

► WHAT CAN I DO RIGHT NOW?

Sign your church up now. Find out more at the Christian Resources Exhibition 11-14 May in Esher, Surrey (creonline.co.uk). Get a copy of the Biblefresh book, just £5 from Authentic (authenticmedia.co.uk).



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Make the world

War, famine, pestilence and death make the headlines in our newspapers every day. Isn't there something we can do about this? Hazel Southam investigates...

Not wanting to sound flippant, but the four horsemen of the apocalypse seem closer than ever. In the book of Revelation, war, famine, pestilence and death are recorded bringing in the end of the world.

Just look at the news. Today there are at least eight wars and 21 conflicts going on right now. Pestilence and disease are all around us as 33 million people worldwide are living with HIV, up to 500 million people suffer from malaria annually and, here in the UK, there's been a sharp rise in the number of people with rickets, a condition that had been eradicated, because we don't get enough sunshine and therefore Vitamin D.

Meanwhile, famine continues to stalk Africa, with Ethiopia particularly under threat. And as for death, well, on the day I am writing this, the mother of a 7-year-old child admitted manslaughter when her daughter died of starvation, an orca killed its trainer at Sea World, Algeria's police chief has been shot dead, and a baby died after being hit by a falling lamppost.

Don't you sometimes wish you could change the world? Well, you can. The abolition of slavery, the right to vote, civil rights, the end of apartheid, the fall of the Berlin Wall: all these events were brought about by ordinary people deciding that they wanted to do something to make the world a better place.

It has been nearly 40 years since Dr Martin Luther King Jr famously proclaimed, "I have a dream!" And reaching out for dreams is just as important today. Here is idea's guide to 10 ways that I can help to change the world...

1. Buy fairly traded and locally produced food

Let's face it, we all like a good tuck in. But buying Fairtrade (fairtrade.org.uk) food means that farmers in the developing world get a better wage. And with 3,000 products to choose from you don't have to stop at tea and coffee. Meanwhile, buying locally produced food from a farmers' market or farm shop supports British farmers, can help maintain the landscape and reduces your carbon footprint, all in one go (farmersmarkets.net). I can also use my buying power on other products, such as clothes. Ask shops where clothes are made, what steps they're taking to ensure that workers are paid a living wage and if they're a member of the Ethical Trading Initiative (ethicaltrade.org).

2. Find out what impact I have on the world

I have to know exactly what I'm doing in order to make a change. So I need to find out what my carbon footprint is. There are many websites that offer this service, including Alliance member Tearfund, which has a simple questionnaire that will calculate my global impact (tearfund.org/climatenew).



3. Reduce my impact by 5 per cent

Now that I've found out the size of my carbon footprint, I'd like to know how to reduce it. There's a current movement I can join to pledge to reduce my impact on the world by 5 per cent. It doesn't have to be difficult. Even if it's a little more expensive, it will be worth it to swap to

a better place



an energy provider that only uses renewable sources (energysavingtrust.org.uk). And I can make simple lifestyle changes: recycle more, turn appliances off when I'm not using them and insulate my house.

4. Change my travel plans

Every 6,000 miles, my car pumps out its own weight in carbon emissions. So I can try car-sharing on some journeys, walking to the shops and school, and using public transport where possible. Most travel agencies also have carbon-offset programmes.

5. Find out about the world

To change the world, I have to know about it; I need to keep up to date with the news. The best way to do this is to choose something that interests me – a part of the world, a country, a cause – and learn more. The Alliance's website (eauk.org) lists Christian member organisations working in all spheres from education to international development to mission. And it includes news from many members, including links to their websites.

6. Pray

Prayer focuses the mind and creates a caring attitude. And it changes things. And if I need help with prayer, Viva (viva.org), World Prayer Centre (worldprayer.org.uk) and others offer regular guides to help to focus my prayers around the world.

7. Give

Once I've chosen a charity to support, I can back up my prayers and reading with money, which really does help the world go around. And I can make it fun, for instance by cycling the route of Hadrian's Wall for Toybox this August, which will raise money to help children living on the streets in South America (toybox.org).

8. Go

It also helps to see the impact of poverty for myself and get involved by seeing charity work firsthand in places like Africa, Asia or South America. Most charities can arrange trips ranging from one week to four months. For example, both Tearfund (tearfund.org) and SoapBox (soapbox.org) offer schemes to take me anywhere from Brazil to Romania.

9. Lobby my MP

Micah Challenge (micahchallenge.org.uk) is calling on 100 million Christians around the world to pray for those living in poverty on 10 October (10/10/10). And they'd like us to visit our MPs too, to ask him or her what they're doing to see the Millennium Development Goals reached in the next five years (findyourmp.parliament.uk).

10. Get my church involved

A congregation acting together could really make an impact. Tearfund's Discovery course helps churches find out about community action locally. And its Just People course helps churches and small groups grapple with issues of justice and poverty (tearfund.org/resources).

Robbing from the rich

Looking for conversation starters, *Tony Watkins* finds relevant themes in popular culture...

The legend of Robin Hood has an enduring fascination, and not just for small boys with bows and arrows. For over seven centuries, he has been an icon of struggle against unjust authority and of defending the interests of the poor. Now Ridley Scott is bringing yet another version of the story to the big screen, starring Russell Crowe in the title role. Since the first cinematic outing for Robin and his merry men in 1908, there have been dozens of films and television series about the heroes of Sherwood Forest, and they have been the inspiration for dozens more.

Scott says the last good one was in 1938, with Errol Flynn in his most memorable role. It's impossible to be certain about the truth behind the Robin Hood folklore, and Scott's version expands the story to a grander level than merely robbing the rich who pass through Sherwood Forest. In this film, Robin has been an archer in Richard the Lionheart's army in France. After Richard's death, Robin returns to Nottingham where things are in a bad way. Richard's crusades have virtually bankrupted the country, and King John (Oscar Isaac) has imposed heavy taxes to replenish the nation's coffers. The task of collecting these taxes around Nottingham falls to the Sheriff of Nottingham (Matthew Macfadyen), who oppresses the common people in the name of King John. Robin is soon not only fighting the

Films

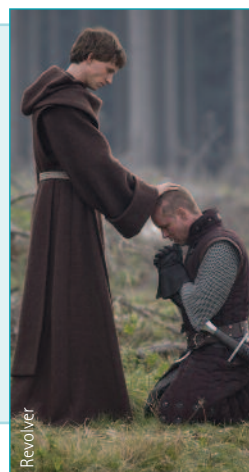


THE GHOST (opened 16 Apr)

This may feel like a sleek potboiler, but director Roman Polanski and his fine cast are quietly doing something much more interesting. It's the story of a ghost writer (Ewan McGregor) trying to help a former British Prime Minister (Pierce Brosnan) sort out his memoirs. But everything gets entangled in scandal and accusations connected with the War on Terror. While the twisty political thriller plot feels rather simplistic, the intricate moral dilemma is what gives the film a real kick, most notably in a fine performance from Olivia Williams as the PM's wife. *RC*

LEBANON (opens 21 May)

As war movies go, this one is distinctly original, confining the perspective to an Israeli tank on the first day of the 1982 Lebanon War. From this cramped position (we can practically smell the sweat), we watch a young soldier have his idealism crushed by horrific reality. Most chilling is how he and his colleagues respond with both true heroism and a refusal to become "heroes" because they can't stomach what their leaders want them to do. In other words, the film takes a vitally honest approach that forces us to examine our idea of patriotism. *RC*



BLACK DEATH (opens 28 May)

Essentially a medieval thriller, this film indulges in quite a bit of over-the-top grisliness, but it also has strong religious overtones in its story of a young monk (Eddie Redmayne) in 1384 England who joins the bishop's over-zealous envoy (Sean Bean) to visit an isolated town that may be using witchcraft to protect itself from the plague. Sure, the movie is basically a series of cheap thrills and deliberately outrageous set pieces, but the script is careful to portray the difference between true faith and viciously self-righteous fanaticism. *RC*



Universal

We want a folk hero like Robin to waylay passing bankers and steal their bonuses

sheriff on behalf of the poor, but fighting for liberty itself. He laments that "the laws of this land enslave the people to its king, a king who offers nothing in return".

A timely tale

Every age finds some resonance in the Robin Hood story, but it seems particularly timely to be revisiting it now. We too live at a time when the national coffers are looking woefully empty and taxes are the principal way of refilling them. But it isn't so much the crippling taxation that echoes our own day. Rather, it's the way the wealthy and powerful do very well for themselves while ordinary people bear the brunt of the financial crisis. The Sheriff of Nottingham is the archetype of those who corruptly feather their own nests at the expense of honest, hard-working people who just want to be able to get on with their own lives. In the public imagination today, this is exactly what MPs and bankers have been doing while allowing the economy to go into meltdown, resulting in job losses, financial hardship and higher taxes. We'd like to have a folk hero like Robin hiding in the forest, or maybe Hyde Park, where he could waylay passing bankers and steal their bonuses to distribute among the unemployed. Somewhat less exciting, but rather more practical, is the recent call for a "Robin Hood tax" on bankers' bonuses. The idea of robbing from the indulgent rich to feed the poor is not found in the early Robin Hood ballads; it comes much later when he is reinvented

as a nobleman. But from the beginning he has been seen as an anti-authoritarian figure. Or rather, he is hostile to corrupt authority. He despises exploitation, oppression and injustice. In his medieval setting, that is what tragically brings him into conflict with the Church as well as the sheriff. Friar Tuck (Mark Addy) becomes one of the Merry Men because he, too, has no respect for Church authorities.

The trouble with Robin Hood is the way he achieves his goals: he is a very violent hero, especially through Ridley Scott's eyes. In this version, even Maid Marian (Cate Blanchett) takes up arms, clearly in an attempt to offset the machismo in traditional Robin Hood stories. In the earliest tales, Robin is anarchic, operating on his own terms and entirely in his own interests. In this new film, he realises the need to move beyond his own concerns and to channel his combat skills to fight tyranny. Robin Hood has immense appeal in a society marked by distrust of authority, cynicism about politicians' integrity, fear of tougher security measures impeding our freedom, and growing antipathy towards organised religion. It's no wonder that we keep returning to this champion of the downtrodden and enemy of injustice.

In many ways he stands for values that are in line with those of the Bible (see Proverbs 14.31), and he's an inspiring example of the lowly shaming the proud and mighty and of the need to stand firm against injustice, whatever the cost.

► *Robin Hood* opens in UK cinemas on 14 May. Further discussions of Christian themes in pop culture can be found at: damaris.org

Tony Watkins is managing editor of *Culturewatch.org*



Books

PERCY JACKSON AND THE OLYMPIANS by Rick Riordan (Disney)

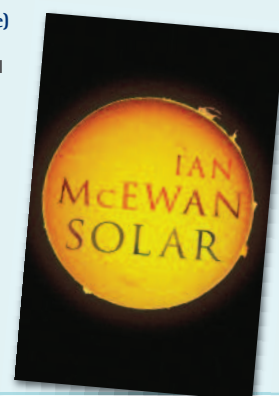
Percy isn't normal: he's a half-blood, son of a Greek god. The gods are alive and kicking, and based in America, and so are all the old monsters, including the very fabric of Western civilisation. Percy and his friends need immense courage and wisdom to stand up to Kronos' forces, and the conflict tests their loyalties and values to the limit. Don't be put off by the recent blockbuster film: Riordan's fantasy book series for teenagers is fast-paced, funny and very exciting. *TW*

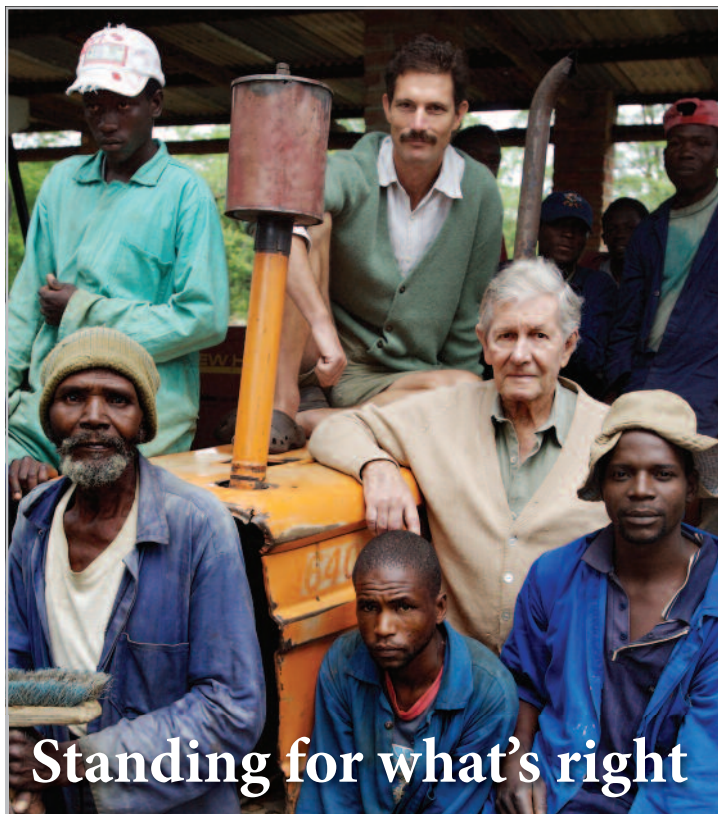
THE BOY WITH THE TOPKNOT by Sathnam Sanghera (Penguin)

Subtitled *A Memoir of Love, Secrets and Lies in Wolverhampton*, this funny, poignant memoir follows journalist Sanghera as he tackles a subject painfully close to his heart: his family. In his late 20s, Sanghera's life is turned upside-down by the belated discovery that his father and sister suffer from schizophrenia, and suddenly every memory and assumption is challenged. His account of untangling truth from lies in the lives of his parents, while also wrestling with his own dilemmas as a man caught between two cultures, is both moving and eye-opening. *SL*

SOLAR by Ian McEwan (Jonathan Cape)

Acclaimed novelist McEwan is known for the seriousness of his books, so this novel about climate change could have been depressingly bleak. In fact, it is full of humour. The protagonist is a brilliant physicist who becomes head of a new centre for renewable energy. And he's a shocking metaphor for humanity with his life of self-indulgence and womanising. McEwan skillfully combines the narrative of this man with weightier issues of global warming without the latter becoming trite or tedious. Once again he has shown what an intelligent and perceptive writer he is. *TW*





Dogwoof

Standing for what's right

For their first feature film, UK filmmakers Lucy Bailey and Andrew Thompson (pictured below) took on a seriously difficult project: documenting a Zimbabwean family taking on Mugabe in a regional African court. Filming had to be done covertly as they followed farmer Mike Campbell and his son-in-law Ben Freeth (pictured above with fellow farm workers), who drew on their strong Christian beliefs to stand up against injustice.

As a result, the award-winning *Mugabe and the White African* plays more like a thriller than a documentary, gripping the viewer through a series of death threats, courtroom battles and rampant corruption. It's an astonishing movie, and at the heart of it is a portrayal of faith in action.

idea: Why did you decide to tell this story?

Andrew: We hope that this film means that internationally the world wakes up to what is happening inside Zimbabwe. It's not so much a campaign film but a debate film. It makes you think hard about what's important in life; it challenges you on identity, race, faith, the

essence of belonging and what human rights are all about. I hope it makes you question how far you would go to stand up for what you believe is right.

How did you get the Campbells to take part?

Lucy: They had to trust us and allow us into their lives at very difficult times, including very real life and death situations. And I think that trust shows in the film. Their bravery is astounding, they never gave up hope and they carried on, and so we carried on too, even though at times we thought none of us would survive the filming process.

Were you ever in physical danger?

Andrew: Yes. I've done a lot of filming in hostile environments, doing TV jobs when I seem to get shot at or people try to blow me up, and I've never worked anywhere that's been more terrifying than Zimbabwe. Ben in the film talks about a climate of fear in Zimbabwe and he's absolutely right.

The situation there is pretty desperate.

Andrew: If you look at the facts and figures, what was once the breadbasket of Africa is now entirely dependent on food aid. The majority of white landowners don't oppose reform, but there's a huge difference between genuine land reform and land-grab. Filmmakers are always trying to find a way of telling the wider story and you tell it through one very intimate story that engages the audience. It just happened to be a white farmer.

Did you get personally involved in their struggle?

Lucy: You are totally involved, you can't fail to be. I think any good filmmaker is involved on that emotional level, because you put everything of yourself into it. There are times when it's really tough, particularly the night when the family were abducted. We sat up that night not knowing what was going to happen. It's that weird thing: you're detached to an extent but you're also very involved.



'Their faith was the power behind them and still is'

How strongly did their faith drive their decision to stay and fight?

Lucy: Their faith was the power behind them and still is. It is everything to them. There's a point in the film where everything else has been taken away from them. There is no law and order in Zimbabwe, there is nothing else to believe in. So faith has become really important. It underpinned their courage and everything they were able to do.

RC

► *Mugabe and the White African* is released on 3 May on Dogwoof DVD.

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the basics

In our series relating the Alliance's Practical Resolutions to the task of mission, *Marijke Hoek* looks at the sixth resolution...

We call on each other, when speaking or writing of those issues of faith or practice that divide us, to acknowledge our own failings and the possibility that we ourselves may be mistaken, avoiding personal hostility and abuse, and speaking the truth in love and gentleness.

One of my favourite books is *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* by Richard Hays. His reflections on a Christian ethic and understanding of true humanness are brilliant. His framework is clear and his agenda is bold. But what

equally attracts me is the humility with which it is offered and the invitation to an ongoing and deeply reflective conversation.

The book is full of such words as "propose", "offer", "seek", "suggest" and "discuss". And his study acknowledges the tension of trying to reconcile the apparent

contradictions among the various New Testament writers as well as the role of the "dissonants". This is not an academic exercise for the few, but rather this concerns us all since it is quite an art to handle the word of truth correctly and adopt a practice of ongoing learning and dialogue.

It is also quite an art to handle different points of view in the Christian community. While one day we will know fully, at present we know in part and we see only a poor reflection (1 Corinthians 13.12). No wonder we differ at times in understanding the Word or in applying what we understand.

Also, as the New Testament writers did not write in a vacuum, so also is our reading of the Word influenced by our different cultures, traditions and generations. It is exactly in this myriad of differences that we can offer a Christian witness through how we disagree with one another. For the Lordship of Christ in our lives determines not only the reasoning behind our hope, but also the gentleness and respect with which this is offered (1 Peter 3.15).

Handling difference

Our commitment to Christ should influence how we handle differences. Observing some disagreements in the evangelical community, "gentleness" and "respect" are concepts that hardly come to mind.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul addresses factions within the Christian community with different religious conceptions. His main concern is to give both groups a better understanding of how the principles of the cross need to be applied in order for Christian truth and love to be expressed. His call to acceptance within the community is directly linked to our imitation of Christ and is crucial in the formation of unity in



Our commitment to Christ should influence how we handle differences

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It is not about being right or wrong; it is about the community we are becoming

the Church (Romans 15.5-7).

Similarly, in his letter to the Philippians, Paul appeals to the sacrifice and humility expressed on the cross (Philippians 2.1ff). This appeal to our identity is also found in his letter to the Corinthians: not only are we reconciled through Christ but, as His ambassadors, God is making His appeal through us (2 Corinthians 5). So how we handle our differences is a kingdom matter.

Paul appeals to the Church to make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification (Romans 14.19). It is vital that we create space where we can ask new questions, come to new conclusions and understand afresh the application of the Word – a space where different practices emerge, curious people can ponder and our faith is sharpened. Here, opinions are discussed with humility and we will consider questions necessary to advance the status quo rather than as a threat to it.

The Church ought to be a community of learners where we can state our case, review it and learn to disagree with one another without losing the relationship. It is a communal life where "sorry" isn't the hardest word.

Space for reflection

While it is vital that we create space for ongoing biblical reflection, more thought

needs to be given to the process, because real dialogue involves content as well as methodology. How we start a discussion determines to a great deal the climate in which that conversation takes place. Do we set the scene for conflict or do we prepare the ground for mutual learning and edification? Wisdom from heaven is peace-loving and considerate (James 3.17). Such wisdom marks Christian maturity, values good relationships and is mindful of the process.

When we were children, we not only reasoned like children but also quarrelled like children. While some Christian disagreements hardly seem to supersede the quarrel in the sandpit, others are more serious. When differences run deep and it becomes hard for parties to listen to one another and communicate effectively, we need to call in those who are gifted to mediate. The timely and skilful intervention of mediators would undoubtedly have prevented some of the evangelical disagreements from becoming so public, personal and disrespectful.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God (Matthew 5.9). Establishing shalom is one of the ways the sons of God are recognised. It is primarily not about being right or wrong; it is about the kind of community we are becoming. Or as Richard Hays writes, the value of our exegesis and hermeneutics will be tested by our capacity to produce persons and communities whose character reflects Jesus Christ and who are pleasing to God. Without the embodiment of the Word in our lives, none of our deliberations matter. We will, after all, be known by our fruit (Matthew 7.18-20).

► **The Practical Resolutions of the Evangelical Alliance can be found at:**
eauk.org/resolutions

Marijke Hoek is the Alliance's Forum for Change co-ordinator



hot topics

The Alliance's Public Theology Research Assistant Phil Green helps us examine theological questions in our daily lives...



Martyn Harrison

Why do we sing songs that say that God is beautiful?

Despite God's beauty being a biblical idea (Psalm 27.4), I've often struggled to get my head around songs that speak of God being beautiful. The main problem with the word "beautiful" is that on most occasions when people talk of beauty they are referring to physical beauty. But the dictionary defines beauty as "the combination of qualities in a person or object that cause delight or pleasure".

So if we say, "Steven Gerrard scored a beautiful goal," we aren't referring to Gerrard's good looks or the particularly good-looking goal post and net, but that all the factors that led to that goal being scored were impressive: Gerrard's dribbling from the halfway line, the skilful tapping of the ball through the legs of a defender, the flawlessness of the final strike, and the way the ball sailed through the air and passed the keeper into the top right-hand corner of the net. It was the combination of all these things that made the goal beautiful.

So when we sing about God's beauty, it's an opportunity to reflect on His amazing qualities: He is complete, perfect and does not lack anything. The combination of God's love, justice, anger, compassion, power, holiness, wisdom, knowledge – everything about Him – makes Him beautiful.

If to be beautiful is to have "a complete set of desirable qualities", then God is the benchmark for defining beauty. Nothing else comes remotely close.

► **If you have a practical question about theology, send it to:** idea@eauk.org

TV/DVDs

GLEE: Season 1 Vol 1 (Fox DVD), Vol 2 (C4)

This lively show has won fans with its entertaining combination of upbeat songs and heart-warming stories of friendship and growing up. It centres on a school's singing club, the members of which are largely misfits. Inspired by making music together, they learn to accept each other and themselves. Turbulent adolescent hormones complicate their lives, of course, with a mixture of real love and fleeting infatuation. There are the rivalries, deceptions and moral dilemmas we expect in such series. Ultimately, those who behave badly receive their comeuppance, while good behaviour brings rewards. *TW*

THE BOX (Icon DVD)

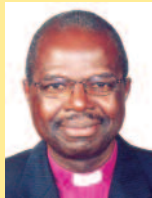
Filmmaker Richard Kelly (*Donnie Darko*) fudges the morality play at the centre of this slow-burning thriller (based on a story by Richard Matheson), but the premise still makes us think. It's about a suburban couple (Cameron Diaz and James Marsden) visited by a strange man (Frank Langella) who gives them a box and a choice: push the button on the box and get \$1 million, but someone they don't know will die. The plot spirals into fantasy silliness, but the central dilemma is truly haunting, urging us to ask what we would do in the same situation. *RC*

AVATAR (Fox DVD)

While watching this film on video will never equal the astonishing 3D experience in cinemas, the film is worth revisiting simply to take a closer look at its themes and characters. The plot isn't terribly complex, but it grapples with serious issues such as corporate and nationalistic greed and features engaging explorations of loyalty and justice. The idea that humans (or in this case, the blue Na'vi people) are one with nature may sound rather airy-fairy, but it definitely has resonance in our world, which is also struggling to cope with war, economic chaos and environmental collapse. *RC*



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Most Revd Henry Luke Orombi, 7th Archbishop, The Church of the Province of Uganda. Chairman, Cape Town 2010 Africa Host Committee

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Revd Dr John Stott, Honorary Chairman, The Lausanne Movement. Chief Architect, The Lausanne Covenant

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- Evangelism** – faithful and relevant communication of the gospel.

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- Four week DVD-based course for small groups – featuring Shane Claiborne, Mark Greene, J John, Tim Keller, Elaine Storkey, Jim Wallis and Tom Wright, as well as grassroots projects around the UK.
- Daily journal with readings, reflections and activities
- Website to equip you for four-dimensional mission: www.eauk.org/squaremile

We are called as followers of Christ to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly; by getting involved with Square Mile, we can begin to live out that call effectively.
– Tim Hughes, HTB

An excellent resource for the local church and the local community.
– Tom Wright, Bishop of Durham

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FRIDAY NIGHT THEOLOGY

the weekend evangelistic tool from the evangelical alliance

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Making our votes count

This year's election brings special challenges to the Church. General Director *Steve Clifford* writes...

It all happened in Committee Room 10 in the Houses of Parliament. It was the afternoon of our most recent Alliance Council meeting, after a great morning with more than 140 people – council members and special guests – crammed into the Chapel of St Mary Undercroft beneath the Palace of Westminster. This was the official launch of the Biblefresh initiative (see p18) with worship, prayer and a great lecture from Professor Alister McGrath.

The afternoon was taken up with Council business, including an opportunity to engage with representatives of the three main political parties in the run-up to the approaching General Election. The question was raised as to how we can encourage the Christian community to go out and vote.

Disillusionment with politicians following the expenses scandal, alongside voter turnout dropping dramatically in recent years, is leaving us with a potentially dangerous vacuum at the heart of our democratic structure. So the message was clear: get informed, hold hustings, consider joining a political party and make sure you vote.

And then it happened: as the three representatives of our major parties stood before us, one of them came out with the statement, "Of course our first allegiance isn't to our party: we are brothers and sisters in Christ." And so another story began to emerge.

A higher calling

This isn't a story that we hear on our televisions or in the newspapers, but one of Christians right cross the political divide working away in Westminster. MPs, researchers, special advisors and civil servants are meeting together regularly to pray, provide support and give encouragement. These people are committed to their parties but have a higher calling: they are part of the family of God and want to see God's kingdom expressed on earth as it is in heaven.

These are Christians committed in their faith but called to work in Westminster, looking to do politics in a different way. At a time when – and in a place where – things often look so dark, God has made sure that there is light. One commented, "If you don't believe we are in a battle, you should spend a few days in Westminster."

It felt like all those years of praying, training and supporting Christians as they explored their calling into politics was bearing fruit. The Care intern programme has made and continues to make an impact, as does the support for MPs offered by Bible Society, the Alliance and others.

As you read this, the General Election is upon us, and my plea to politicians of all persuasions is that the election be fought on issues of policy, confidence in leadership and a vision for the future, rather than dirty tricks, false accusations, smear campaigns and a mantra of election success at any cost.



Ann Clifford

Disillusionment with politicians is leaving us with a potentially dangerous vacuum

Let's recognise the challenge that, despite who wins the next General Election (or who forms a minority government), we are faced with a period of wholesale cutbacks both at a national and local level as the Government attempts to deal with enormous levels of public and private debt.

Services and provisions we have taken for granted will no longer be available. And as usually happens, it will be the most vulnerable that feel the greatest impact: the elderly, the young, the poor and unemployed, those living with disability.

Rise to the challenge

This is an unprecedented opportunity for the Christian community, both individually and as churches, to rise to the challenge. If the state is no longer able to help, will we make ourselves available? Wouldn't it be wonderful if in every village, town and city across the UK, Christian leaders of all backgrounds and walks of life – church leaders alongside those in business, the

police, health care and education – started strategically planning ways to reach out to those in need?

As Christians, we need to be talking to our local councils, asking how we can help in these hard times. Perhaps God is opening up opportunities for us to pastor our communities – not just our church communities, but the neighbourhoods that surround us. Maybe this will encourage us to actively work for the wellbeing of our local community physically, emotionally and of course spiritually.

The final instructions of Jesus must ring in our ears: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me... And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28.18–20). In our calling to make disciples we are not on our own, Jesus promises to be with us.

This is already happening in some places where leaders are praying, planning and acting together, so why not all over the UK? We must remember that "the earth is the Lord's and everything in it" (Psalm 24). There will come a day when everyone will recognise this, but until then we must live, work, and pray, "Let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."



Please Pray For Us

The Police Service needs your prayers
as we celebrate the

**National Day of Prayer for the
Police Service on 13 May 2010**

Jesus told us to pray that his Kingdom would come on earth as it is in heaven. There is no place in God's Kingdom for injustice, fear, hatred, dishonesty, addiction and violence. These are the very things your Police Service is seeking to tackle.

So pray:

- That **senior officers** may have wisdom to direct their forces well and have concern for all their staff
- That **local forces** would be effective in administering justice, supporting victims, preventing and detecting crime, reducing the fear associated with it and building public confidence
- That **officers** will be kept safe and will enforce the law with integrity and wisdom especially in volatile situations
- That officers and their **families** would be protected from the effects of stress and know God's peace in their lives
- That **Christian Police Officers and Support Staff** will be strong and effective in their witness within the Police Service
- That God would crush the forces of evil that are at work in the lives of individuals and communities which lead to **addiction, despair, crime and disorder**
- That the church would respond to **local issues** and help bring communities together with the police to tackle local problems effectively

Please consider linking with local Officers and Staff to develop prayer networks and support community projects.



For Further details contact: Christian Police Association, Bedford Heights, Manton Lane, Bedford, MK41 7PH

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