

idea

uniting to change society | november/december 2009

**Simplify
Christmas**

p18



**Addressing the
injustice of
climate change**



“I am hugely impressed with Friday Night Theology most encouraging! Excellent material... Keep it coming.”

“Exciting and stimulating - as well as informative. Really helpful.”

“I HAVE FOUND YOUR BRIEF ARTICLES VERY USEFUL - THEY GIVE JUST ENOUGH TO STIMULATE THOUGHT WHILE NOT BEING SO LONG THAT I DO NOT HAVE TIME TO READ THEM.”

FRIDAY NIGHT THEOLOGY

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Editor's note

Over recent years, climate change has become an increasingly urgent issue. As we approach this December's vital Copenhagen Climate Change Conference, our hopes and prayers are centring on governments finally taking positive steps toward turning things around.

In my day job as a film critic, I have been overwhelmed by gloomy documentaries in the past year or so about how the planet is suffering from environmental chaos (*The Age of Stupid*), hunger (*Garapa*), corporate greed (*Capitalism: A Love Story*), government corruption (*The End of America*), fiscal irresponsibility (*I.O.U.S.A.*), declining fish populations (*The End of the Line*), beehive demise (*Vanishing of the Bees*) and rampant injustice in Iraq, Sudan, Burma and other places.

It's easy to get outraged about all of this – or to stick our heads in the sand – without remembering that these things are already affecting communities. And this is where Alliance members are making a huge difference: helping people prepare now for the changes that are coming.

This edition of *idea* looks at how climate change is a justice issue (p4, p14 and p29). Not only are Christians mobilising prayer and action, but they are reaching out right now all over the world.

In addition to being aware of these issues and supporting ministries, the Alliance's *Simplify* initiative has shown us how we can change our own hearts and help others at the same time. See p18 for specific ideas about how to simplify Christmas this year. There are also Christmas-themed articles on Advent (p21) and the nativity story in pop culture (p22).

Frankly, with the current economic situation, we can't afford to waste money on useless presents this year. And there are people who need help a lot more urgently than we need a new television.

**It's easy to
stick our heads
in the sand**

evangelical alliance
uniting to change society

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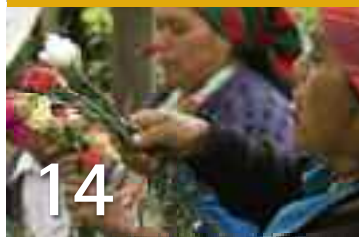
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Leaders tackle climate change

Christians around the world will be praying for 12 days during December as the world's leaders descend on Copenhagen, aiming to agree to a deal on tackling climate change. If an agreement is made, it will replace the Kyoto Treaty, which has struggled to gain global momentum. The US, under George W Bush, didn't sign up, which seemed to give many other nation the excuse to wait and see.

Climate change has been on the agenda of every G8 Summit in the intervening years, as politicians have inched towards progress. The Copenhagen conference, scientists say, is the Last Chance Corral. If world leaders don't sign an agreement in December, the world risks tipping into a climate where temperatures are raised by more than 2 degrees. At that point, weather, food and water supply become uncertain.

This September, Environment Secretary Hilary Benn warned that Britain needs to plan now for a future that will be both hotter and wetter, bringing intemperate extremes of flood and drought. Launching the UK Climate Projections 2009 report, Benn said that by 2080 London will be between 2C and 6C hotter than it is now. Every part of Britain is likely to be wetter in winter and drier in summer, according to the predictions.

"Climate change is going to transform the way we live," said Benn. "These projections show us the future we need to avoid and the future we need to plan for."

In the same month, the World Bank reported that climate change will be a serious barrier to growth in poor nations and must be addressed. It called on governments to reach "an equitable deal" at Copenhagen, pointing out that a failure to do so would hit poor nations hardest.

Aid and development agencies agree. Alliance member Tearfund has been lobbying world leaders on this subject for more than a decade. Its climate change spokesperson, Sara Shaw, said, "Climate change will affect all of us, but it's hitting poor people now. It's in our interests to act now and help poor countries."

Urgent action needed

Many scientists are also calling on politicians to act. In March, more than

2,500 researchers and economists attended a meeting in Copenhagen, where research showed how melting glaciers could lead to sea levels rising by more than a metre, leading to millions of people being made homeless. If the world's temperature rose by 3 degrees, they heard, the Amazon rainforest could lose 75 per cent of its trees.

Lord Stern, whose report on climate change was published in 2006, addressed the meeting. A 5-degree temperature rise would have dramatic results for millions of people, he said, including mass migration sparking conflict. "You'd see hundreds of millions of people, probably billions of people, who would have to move," he said. "So we would see a very extended period of conflict around the world, decades or centuries as hundreds of millions of people move."

But there is some good news. The G8 countries agreed this summer, for the first time, that action must be taken to prevent a 2-degree temperature rise. In September,



David Ponton

Climate change is going to transform the way we live

Japan set a goal to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 25 per cent by 2020. This won praise from the UN, which is recommending that developed countries commit to a 25-40 per cent cut.

And following President Obama's

positive statements about the need to tackle global warming, analysts are more hopeful that America will finally come on board. Meanwhile, major developing nations such as India and China have taken a leading role by promising to significantly reduce emissions.

Even so, the buzz pre-Copenhagen is of stalled negotiations, less achievement and extended talks into 2010. In other words, the spin-doctors are trying to manage expectations for failure. Lobbyists have described their mood "apprehensive" and "daunted", but they're still pushing for a deal.

As Tearfund's Sara Shaw said, "We can't just negotiate endlessly. It's too urgent. It's too pressing. And we need an agreement urgently." Prayer and action from Christians around the world are needed to make sure this happens.

HS



GAMBLING. The prize limits on the most easily available fruit machines were doubled earlier this year. This was despite complaints from the Alliance and other Christian groups that the Government was being cavalier with gambling regulations and increasing the risk to the vulnerable just to

help arcades struggling in the recession.

Following these changes, the Government is now reviewing the availability and prizes for fruit machines that carry large jackpots and can only be played in over-18 venues. The potential to win large amounts of money means that these machines are

highly addictive and contribute to problem gambling. One type of machine allows the user to play casino style games that work on fixed odds; these are only available in betting shops and are particularly accessible to under-age gamblers.

The Alliance is already working with the Government on their plans to review these regulations. In the current economic climate, betting shops insist that they must have high-prize fruit machines in their venues, which is not surprising as research has suggested that these machines add £500 million a year to their revenue.

The Alliance will continue to press the Government to ensure that any changes to the availability of these machines lessen the risk of problem gambling.

Preparing to vote

Ahead of next year's General Election, the Jubilee Centre has published *Votewise Now!* This follows on from Nick Spencer's *Votewise*, which was produced prior to the 2005 election and provided an invaluable guide for Christians looking at the key issues at stake at the ballot box. The book provides a response to the electoral process and also provokes the Church to take seriously its ongoing engagement in the democratic process.

Updated and completely revised *Votewise Now!*, edited by Rose Lynas, includes essays on various policy areas written by experts in each field. As the election approaches, this book provides a

valuable tool to help get informed about a wide variety of policy areas. Each chapter has a biblical grounding for the issue in question and looks in turn at the different parties' responses, giving Christians a starting point through which to examine the issue.

The book concludes with three pieces from an MP of each of the major parties, setting out why it might be appropriate for Christians to cast their vote for them. None of the parties claim to have a monopoly on the Christian vote, and this book provides the opportunity to consider the critical issues and to hear, from a Christian perspective, what the parties have to say. jubilee-centre.org

ASSISTED SUICIDE. The Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) has recently issued draft guidance seeking to clarify the law surrounding assisted suicide in response to high-profile cases involving travelling to foreign clinics with terminally ill patients, including the successful legal campaign of Debbie Purdy. The House of Lords allowed Purdy's appeal and required the DPP to prepare an offence-specific policy identifying the facts and circumstances that he will take into account on deciding, in cases such as Purdy's, whether or not to prosecute.

The draft guidelines emphasise that assisting suicide will remain illegal, reaffirming that regardless of the circumstances anyone who provides such assistance will be liable to prosecution. It is also encouraging that there is recognition of the potential for external coercion and the particular dangers in relation to mentally ill patients as well as the need to discourage any promotion of assisting suicide through the internet.

But significant flaws can also be found in the guidance. It is suggested that, in cases where the deceased was terminally ill or suffering from a severe degenerative condition with no possibility of recovery, a prosecution would be far less likely. This is a broad categorisation that also includes illnesses such as chronic heart disease, so it undermines the value of many people's lives. It would seem to suggest that those who are seriously ill or disabled are less deserving of the law's protection. The Alliance will be responding to the proposals in the coming weeks in conjunction with the Care Not Killing Alliance.

eauk.org/pq

Daniel Webster



India's forgotten Christians



One year after the latest outbreak of religious violence against Christians in Orissa, India, many Christian refugees (such as those pictured) are still living in temporary camps and slums, unable to return to their homes. Meanwhile, Karnataka and several other states report growing communal violence.

Alliance member Release International is calling for prayer that the forgotten Christians of Orissa will be able to return and live in safety a year after Hindu militants attacked and drove out more than 50,000 from their homes.

"The violence had been carefully planned," said Release CEO Andy Dipper. "Hindus in the village put saffron flags on their houses, so that the rioting mob passed them by. Trees were cut down and laid on the road to slow down the police. Then the houses of the Christians were completely destroyed, as was their church building. Hindu militants have now built a temple on the same site."

The Christians had been given temporary shelter in a camp for the displaced, but that was closed after two months. Many have drifted to the slums of Orissa's capital rather than risk returning home where they could be attacked again.

Open Doors and Premier Christian Media have launched FaithWithoutFear.org, calling on UK churches to contact India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, urging him to seek justice for these persecuted Christians.

Although these refugees face an uncertain future, they remain faithful in their Christian witness. Aparajita (not her real name) said, "To know and suffer for Jesus is valuable. Suffering for Christ is worthwhile. We have a burden that one day these people will know the Lord, so we must remain here to share His word with them."

Release has produced a range of resources for International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church on 15 November. releaseinternational.org

International Aids workers visit UK churches

In the run-up to World Aids Day on 1 December, international leaders from ACET (Aids Care Education and Training) are coming to the UK to visit supporters and encourage churches to tackle the pressing problem of HIV/Aids throughout the world.

Marek Slansky leads the work of ACET in Russia and is regional leader of the charity's work in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, while Paul Kabunga's work in Uganda is part of the oldest international ACET programme, established in 1990. Both work extensively with Church leaders and volunteers, encouraging them to take the lead in their communities in offering care, education and training in the battle against HIV/Aids.

ACET Chief Executive Peter Fabian said, "The work that Paul and Marek do, and indeed the work of ACET teams throughout the world, should rightly challenge Christians in the UK as we see what is possible when the Church takes the lead in the fight against HIV and Aids.

"I have been privileged to see these men in action, mobilising local churches to be involved in this work, and I know that their story is a challenging but encouraging one.

"ACET UK is committed to support their work in whatever way we can, and we hope their visit will challenge UK churches to join the fight against HIV and Aids, because too often, congregations are unaware of this global human tragedy."

acet-international.org

Skateboarders make the Switch



Bath Youth for Christ's evangelistic discipleship course *Switch* is making a real impact on young skaters. The course lets young people who skate explore the Christian faith for themselves. The 12-session course has been so successful that it is now being launched in America.

Jo Dolby, skate outreach manager at Bath YFC, describes how each Sunday during the course "young people turn up, skate on the ramps, do 45 minutes of course content, and then we all eat a meal together which local churches provide."

Mixing group work, skateboarding and discussion, the course addresses such questions as "Why does God let bad things

happen?" and "Why is church boring?" Halfway through the course, the young people go on a weekend away that is based around the weeks looking at Jesus' death and resurrection. The team has seen young people become Christians, and some have even gone on to become junior course leaders.

Jack, age 12, said, "*Switch* is amazing, you get to learn more about God and skate. It has really affected my life. I have become a Christian and learnt more tricks."

Sam (14) said, "I've learned loads about Christianity and how to live my life by God. *Switch* has helped me switch my life."

yfc.co.uk

A woman in a black suit is jumping joyfully in the air with her arms raised, as if she has just heard good news. She is in a bus stop, and four other people are waiting. A woman in a colorful patterned hoodie and red pants stands on the left. Three men in business casual attire stand to the right, looking on. The background is a lush green wall.

she's just heard...

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Give this Christmas away

Christian relief and development charity Samaritan's Purse is encouraging UK churchgoers to show compassion to vulnerable children overseas this Christmas. The Alliance member agency, which last year sent over 1.2 million gift-filled Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes to children in the developing world, is also encouraging Christians to "give this Christmas away".

"Circumstances are worrying for many people in this country right now, but it is an awful lot worse for the vulnerable children and families we work with overseas," said Simon Barrington, executive director of Samaritan's Purse UK. "Many have seen their conditions worsen as a result of the global recession. These are the very people that we should be showing compassion to right now."

In addition to encouraging participation in Operation Christmas Child, Samaritan's Purse is urging families to think of other ways to "give this Christmas away", like sponsoring a child overseas or volunteering at a nearby homeless shelter.

"Giving even a fraction of our usual

Christmas spend away for the sake of those less fortunate than ourselves can make a real difference," said Barrington. "Our experience at Samaritan's Purse is that there is real power in giving away what we have, even if we feel we don't have much to give in the first place."

As part of this initiative, a *Give This*

Christmas Away Facebook group will encourage people to post ideas for giving Christmas time or money to those less fortunate. On 18 November, the final day for collection of gift shoeboxes, Samaritan's Purse will publish the top 10 ways to give Christmas away.

samaritans-purse.org.uk

Practical presents

With three quarters of people in the UK admitting to wasting £50 on unwanted Christmas presents every year – a total of £2 billion – international development charity Practical Action is appealing to holiday shoppers to buy a gift that could make a difference in someone's life. The charity's Practical Presents scheme allows people to choose unique, clever gifts including fluffy ducks for families in Bangladesh to provide eggs and a livelihood through breeding or smoke hoods in Nepal to reduce smoke pollution. Stephen Harvey of Practical Action said, "Two thirds of people have said they would rather receive one less Christmas gift and have a charitable donation made instead. Buying a Practical Present will mean your friends and family still receive a gift, while knowing it really is making someone's life better." practicalpresents.org.uk



Church Army

Just 'being' on the plinth

Church Army evangelist Alison Wooding held an hour-long prayer vigil on the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square, in the wee small hours of Sunday 2 August. During her one-hour slot in sculptor Anthony Gormley's *One & Other* installation, Wooding prayed for fellow evangelists, friends and family members while also publicising Church Army's *Life to the Full* campaign and the new interactive website *Make Jesus Famous*.

"I am fascinated by the spirituality of the Desert Fathers and people who did wild and wacky things for God," said Wooding.

"In the desert and at the margins of society, the Desert Fathers and Mothers sought God – a solitary way of life that has puzzled people down the ages."

After her stint, Wooding described the sensation that only minutes had passed, rather than a whole hour. She also stressed that she was promoting the need for us all to sit still and just "be with God", and that it was remarkable how the noise – including occasional heckling – died down halfway into her prayer time. churcharmy.org.uk



Palau

MESSAGE OF HOPE. Andrew Palau spoke about hope and reconciliation with more than 2,000 prisoners at Kigali City Central Prison in Rwanda, during a trip that coincided with the nation's 100-day remembrance of the 1994 genocide. The prisoners, most of whom had been involved in events 15 years ago, during which 1.2 million people were murdered in 100 days of violence, also received Bibles donated by Prison Fellowship. In addition to joining in service projects with local churches, Palau also spoke to some 70,000 people at the Kigali Festival. More than 5,000 people made public decisions for Christ. palau.org

Are evangelicals fundamentalists?

Observing that the terms "evangelicals" and "fundamentalists" are often misunderstood in public discourse, in a variety of scholarly disciplines and by those who consider themselves knowledgeable about Christianity in general, a group of scholars embarked on a project in 2007 to study the relationship between evangelicalism and Christian fundamentalism in Britain.

The project, aided by the Alliance, asks who exactly are evangelicals and Christian fundamentalists? What doctrines have they upheld? What attitudes have they maintained? Have evangelicals displayed the anger often considered characteristic of fundamentalists?

A special one-day event, *Christian Fundamentalism and British Evangelicalism: Exploring the Relationship*, will be held 15 December at King's College Chapel, London, to engage ministers, laypeople and the interested public concerning the question: are evangelicals fundamentalists?

For information, including booking forms, visit: eauk.org/efb or email Andrew Tooley: efbproject@stir.ac.uk

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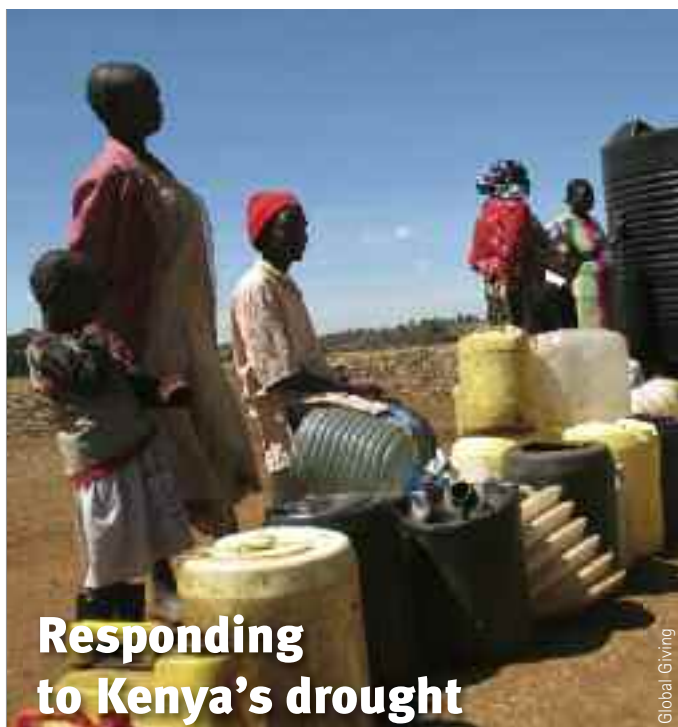
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Responding to Kenya's drought

Global Giving

Prolonged drought in Kenya has led to a serious shortage of water. In Nairobi, the electricity is off for three days each week as power stations rely on water to operate. Reports also suggest that nearly 4 million people are starving in Kenya today. So much so that the UN's World Food Programme is appealing for £145,000 for famine relief as locals wait in long queues for water (pictured).

Alliance member Mission Aviation Fellowship is providing flights that take emergency food supplies to some of the most inaccessible, worst-affected areas. Ruth Moores of MAF in Kenya said, "The situation in northern Kenya is extremely serious. The prediction is that there will be good short rains from now to December. But if the short rains don't come then I fear that Kenya is heading for a disaster."

Lack of rain earlier in the year has caused crops to fail. Affected regions usually harvest crops once a year, planting in April and harvesting in September but this year the rains failed to come. Cattle herders are struggling to keep their herds alive as, according to the World Food Programme, it is the worst drought since 2000. maf-uk.org



media matters

by Charis Gibson,
Senior Press Officer

If you listen to your local BBC station on a Sunday morning, the likelihood is that you will have heard Steve Clifford talking about *Simplify*.

When we told the regional BBC producers that Steve was going to spend a month living on £5 a day and give the money he saved to charity, we were inundated with requests for interviews and ended up organising 35 BBC interviews for him in three weeks.

Steve's story appealed to the producers because it was a good news story. It was topical, because we're in a recession, and it was personal, because he was happy to talk about his own experiences. It was also interesting and unusual – what on earth would make someone do such a thing?

We know there are many of you out there who also have stories to tell that we can promote to the media, or profile on our website. Perhaps you, or someone you know, are also doing something unusual or making an impact in your community.

Maybe you have a first-hand perspective on a topical issue. Personal experience – whether from a mother who decided not to abort her disabled baby, an asylum-seeker helped by the church or a street pastor describing his conversations with clubbers – is gold-dust to a journalist and can be a powerful way of reflecting Jesus in the media.

Or perhaps you can speak with authority, from a Christian viewpoint, on the stories of the day. Teachers, foster carers, health workers and economists are just some of the many people whose expertise could provide journalists with invaluable comment and insight.

So we want to hear from you if you have a story to tell, or if you are interested in training in how to speak to the media. Drop us an email: yourstories@eauk.org



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Careforce

JUST ARRIVED. A group of 33 international Careforce volunteers gather at the London School of Theology for an orientation course before moving to their placements. Since 1994 Careforce has welcomed international volunteers from over 50 countries to join with their British volunteers to spend one or two years engaged in mission alongside Christians in local churches and community projects. Commended by their own leaders and pastors, each international volunteer pays for their own visa and flight costs to the UK and then is supported by their placements during their stay here. They come with a love for God that is both refreshing and infectious. Some 70 Christians from around the world are presently serving with the church in the UK through Careforce. careforce.co.uk

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events

Creation Debate 8 Nov, Chiswick, London

Three scientists – Dr Denis Alexander (theistic evolutionist), Prof Andy McIntosh (young earth creationist) and Prof Lewis Wolpert (atheist) – will go head-to-head to discuss Charles Darwin's legacy. The free event will be open to audience questions. gunnersburybaptistchurch.org

Apprentice Tour 11 Nov-3 Dec, UK

Steve Chalke will visit eight UK cities with special guests, following the launch of his book and DVD *Apprentice: Walking the Way of Christ*, which is designed to explore what it means to be a 21st century follower of Jesus. apprenticethetour.com

Extraordinarily Ordinary 13-15 Nov, Coventry

Run by Activate Your Life, this conference features the Alliance's Krish Kandiah as keynote speaker, providing an opportunity for women to boost their well-being and learn how to impact their communities. activateyourlife.org.uk

Mission and Worship Conference 13-15 Nov, Eastbourne

With the title *In Christ Alone: Worship Foundations for Today's Church*, Kingsway Trust's lively conference offers practical workshops and inspiring seminars on how to bring Christ-centred worship to local congregations. missionworship.com

Mission 21 Conference 17-19 Nov, Bath

A gathering for church planters and planners, this conference will touch on everything from rural church planting and youth culture to fresh expressions of church and working with multi-cultural communities. mission21.info

From Vision to Action 26 Nov, London

This conference at Holy Trinity Brompton aims to pass on organisational and management skills to church leaders. The material will suit leaders of churches of all sizes and denominations as well as their teams who want to move ahead in this area. alphaevent.notlong.com

DigiMission 1 Dec, London

This one-day conference, organised by the Alliance, looks at how technology shapes faith, church and mission. Shane Hipps, author of *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith*, will present about the ideas behind his book via live video. eauk.org/slipstream

Climate Service and March 5 Dec, Westminster

An ecumenical service led by the Archbishop of Canterbury will be followed by *The Wave*, a fun and peaceful march alongside the Thames sponsored by the Stop Climate Chaos Coalition. www.christian-ecology.org.uk

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

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- 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



A changed outlook

Kelvin had always struggled at school in Ghana's capital Accra, until he read a book full of stories about people who persevered when times were equally hard. The book was the Bible, and through reading it Kelvin discovered a living God who was there to help him. Kelvin is one of thousands of schoolchildren who have been given Bibles by Bible Society of Ghana, which wants to see a whole generation of children growing up reading God's word.

Brian Dacre of Bible Society in Swindon said, "After reading his copy Kelvin began asking for God's help every day and found that school was easier. It's an amazing story of how interaction with God, through the Bible, impacted on one child's life."

Bible Society hopes to give a million Bibles to children in Ghana by 2011. The country's First Lady Ernestina Naadu Mills recently handed out the 500,000th donated Bible.
biblesociety.org.uk



A golden decade of sport

A network of 25 Christian sport ministries have joined the Forum for Change, facilitated by the Alliance, which is co-ordinating a long-term strategy to mobilise the Church in influencing the key change-drivers in education, politics, media, arts and business. Sport is a prominent sphere of our culture that captures the imagination of many, elicits intense emotions, generates community and enjoys huge media coverage.

With the 2012 Olympic Games in London, the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow and the possibility of a 2018 World Cup in England, the Church has a unique opportunity to engage effectively with Britain's pervasive sports sub-culture.

"A 'golden decade of sport' will begin in 2011 with the UK hosting many of the world's largest sporting events," said Dave Oakley, chief executive of Ambassadors in Sport. "Not since the late 19th century has the Church had a better opportunity to be a transformational influence for good, both in sport and in the wider society."
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Alistair Begg, Senior Pastor, Parkside Church, Cleveland, Ohio

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The right way to live

On 31 October, Christians will gather in Edinburgh for the Alliance's *Just Generation* conference, examining what Christians of all ages can do to fight against injustice. Rich Cline talked with keynote speaker Ruth Valerio...

idea: Justice is one of our main responsibilities (Micah 6.8), so why do we often act like it's up to someone else to make a difference?

Ruth Valerio: I think part of the problem is that we live in such a globalised world that, by and large, the impact of the way we live here is felt thousands of miles away and hence feels separate to our own lives and society. We need to find ways of continually reminding ourselves of the links between our actions and the lives of others around the world and the land that they live on. For example, as we go around the supermarket and are faced with a choice of buying Fairtrade bananas or non-Fairtrade bananas, we should train ourselves not to see them as a product in a vacuum, but as something that has been produced by a particular person in a particular place who is affected by our decision.

How can we break this cycle?

There is no doubt that big problems require big solutions and we should be encouraging governments and businesses to make those big solutions. But this must be backed up by little actions; we've got to show that we want them to make those big solutions.

Something else I come across quite often, is the "they're worse than me" syndrome, as in, "She's the one driving the 4x4, not me!" But responding to injustice is not about pointing the finger at others, it's about looking at ourselves and asking what we can do, even if it feels small and ineffectual. The ultimate question is, "What's the right way to live?"

How can we identify where injustice is taking place?

It's really important to get informed. I always encourage people to join reputable organisations that will increase their knowledge and understanding and find out as much as they can about what's happening both in our own country and further afield. I think we have to face up to the fact, though, that we can't tackle every issue single-handedly. I would advise people

to find one particular issue that really strikes a chord with them – water shortages, people imprisoned for their faith, industrial farming, whatever – and invest themselves in that. You can still shoot off emails, sign postcards or do Tearfund's Superbadger, but if you try to do everything all at once you'll end up overwhelmed.

Why do you think there's so much injustice out there?

This goes back to the Fall in Genesis 3. However, we do seem to find ourselves in a particularly stark period of horrendous inequality and injustice at a global level. As I am speaking, 27,000 children under the age of 5 will die from poverty-related illnesses. When you have an area of the world like sub-Saharan Africa in which 41 per cent of the population are living on less than \$1 a day, you know something's

“We can't develop God's heart by our own effort and willpower”

wrong. My personal opinion is that we are reaping the consequences of a global economic system that has been built on the foundations of the slave trade and colonialism.

How can we develop God's heart for the poor and oppressed?

Our intellectual understanding of this situation must be accompanied by a heart understanding. I can still remember watching one of the clips during Comic Relief many years back: something broke in me and I sat for the rest of the evening in a puddle of tears. I believe God was starting a process of breaking my heart for people – a process that's still continuing. The bottom line is that we can't develop God's heart by our own effort and willpower, but we can ask



God to move in us, give us compassion and change our hearts so they begin to beat in-line with His.

What are the first small steps we need to take to get involved?

Personally, I think all our actions have to start with confession and repentance: acknowledging the part that we play in the injustices that are in our country and world, and asking God for His forgiveness. From that position there are many things we can do. I would urge everyone to find one organisation to support financially, because that will increase your understanding on particular issues and give you ideas as to what you can do to get involved. Two other things I would recommend everyone to do, which will impact both people and the planet, are to make one day a week meat-free and make one meal a week where everything is locally and/or home-produced.

Where can we look for help in this?

The good news is that it's hard to look into any area of injustice and not find Christians who are involved and working in that area. There are so many organisations: Tearfund, Christian Aid, A Rocha, Cafod, Life Centre, the Fairtrade Foundation, Friends of the Earth, WWF, Climate Rush, the World Development Movement – the list is endless.

Ruth Valerio is author of *L is for Lifestyle* and manages A Rocha's *Living Lightly 24:1* project. For ideas and information, visit: lisforlifestyle.com and arocha.org.uk/livinglightly



It's a justice issue

In the run-up to December's Copenhagen climate summit, Hazel Southam examines what global warming means for people around the world and how Christians can help...

Climate change can no longer be considered the bogeyman in the shadows. Scientists agree that we are already feeling the effects of global warming, with more to come.

At the G8 Summit this summer, the world's leaders agreed to cut emissions of harmful greenhouse gases by 20 per cent by 2020. It was the benchmark for which development agencies like Tearfund and Christian Aid had campaigned for many years. Yet it falls short of the 25–40 per cent cuts that many scientists say is needed.

The aim is to prevent a 2 degree rise in world temperature. This doesn't sound like much on a chilly British winter day (in fact, it could sound like a positive benefit), but scientists say that a 2 degree rise in temperatures could be cataclysmic for the world, most crucially for the world's poorest. It would create unpredictable climate change, and we all depend on weather for food, security and fresh water.

Meanwhile, sea-level rises of 1 metre by 2100 are predicted due to melting glaciers. This could displace 10 per cent of the world's population – that's some 600 million people on the move, looking for a new home.

And the poorer you are, the worse the impact. In a recent report, Christian Aid says, "Most of the world's 2.7 billion poor people depend on natural resources (water, forests, seas, soil) for survival and economic development, but the environment and the world's natural resources are already substantially degraded and increasingly being affected by changes in the climate."

But the report was not a hand-wringing exercise. Titled *Community Answers to Climate Chaos*, the report claims that

On the cover: Pastor Philippe Yampa and his wife Wendenda grow potatoes to supplement their diet and income in Titao, Burkina Faso. Photo by Layton Thompson/Tearfund.



Rising temperatures, frequent floods and cyclones hit Bangladesh's poor population annually

Go po

change already is being brought about in local communities.

"Community action can build the resilience and stability of countries and their economies in response to ongoing changes in the climate," the report says. "Through local sustainable development, working to improve and conserve the natural environment they live in, communities can improve food security and the livelihoods of millions of vulnerable people."

Helping communities

Development agencies are already hard at work helping local communities to adapt to the changes that are affecting them today and to prepare for the effects that will come in the future.

Poor people didn't cause climate change, but they are hit the hardest by it

Some of these initiatives are costly, others are remarkably cheap, but both are more efficient than paying to clean up countries later, experts say.

"Helping people adapt is an issue of justice," says Tearfund's Sara Shaw. "Poor people didn't cause climate change, but they are hit the hardest by it. We have a responsibility to help them adapt."

Arguably, a key place to do this is in Bangladesh, much of



San Curry Christian Aid

Juana Perez Gomes and Florentina Lemuz collect carnations at Las Hortensias nursery in Intibucá, Honduras. Local Christian agencies provide workers with practical, business and personal assistance.

In northwest Burkina Faso, 2 year old Phoebe helps the family by gathering vegetables.



Layton Thompson/Tearfund

which is less than 1 metre above sea level. Rising temperatures, frequent floods and cyclones hit the country's poor population annually. And as the sea level begins to rise, the land where people live is literally being washed away. Salt water can now be found up to 100km inland.

Minu Basar knows all about this. She often travels the whole day to find fresh water. "Because of the salt water, we have to suffer hardship just to survive," she says. "We can't even wash our own vegetables or fish with the water. If you wash anything with it and then leave it, you'll see it go black. When we wash our hair, it becomes sticky and smelly. Once a month, when we go to collect water from freshwater sources far away, we take all our clothes and wash them there."

Some 40 million people like Minu in Bangladesh still lack safe drinking water, but local Christian agencies are helping people to run their own community water organisations.

Working with professionals, they bring people together to identify the best water supply methods for the households and wider community. This encourages rainwater harvesting, doing simple things like collecting water from tin roofs in jars that are kept clean with bleach powder and covered with mesh to stop insects and bacteria getting in.

It's an inexpensive scheme that's transforming lives. Rina Begum, is just one person whose life is better thanks to the scheme. The 20-year-old mother is part of a community water organisation. "Before we learned about the dangers of drinking water, we used to drink water from the pond or the river and even dirty rainwater that we'd collected," she says. "But we didn't know how to do it safely. Now we have very clean water. We preserve it safely and collecting it has become very easy. We even have less health problems now."

Learning to adapt

Elsewhere, protecting yourself from the weather – adapting to it – takes different forms. In Honduras, the problem people face is an increase in storms that bring floods and landslides with them.

Climate change is increasing the size of storms in the Atlantic, where the annual hurricane season finishes at the end of November. Honduras often feels the brunt of this season; the worst was Hurricane Mitch

In Africa, the so-called hungry season is getting worse

in 1998, when some 20,000 people died or were missing. According to Honduras' then president, the country's development was put back 50 years.

So what do you do about ever-bigger hurricanes if you grow flowers for a living? For 58-year-old Florentina, the storms ruined her business. "We made a lovely cover [for our flowers] but the wind tore it down," she recalls. "We have very strong storms here ... terrible winds that destroy everything."

Through a UK-funded project that costs £65,000 over three years, Florentina's situation is changing. The answer to the problem has proved simple: the roof that protects the flowers from sun and heavy rain has now been reinforced using wire mesh. It now holds firm against the storms, and the flowers aren't lost when hurricanes arrive.

In many countries across the vast Sahel region in Africa, the so-called hungry season is a fixed part of the calendar. It's the time when the food runs out and the harvest hasn't yet come. And it's getting worse.

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Subsistence farmers are badly affected by erratic rainfall and rising temperatures. Last year, floods washed away every last seed of Pastor Philippe Yampa's sorghum crop. Today, Philippe and his wife Wendenda are one of hundreds of families being helped by development agency Tearfund to learn how to use their allotments more productively.

This simple strategy has helped some of

the poorest farmers in the Sahel ensure that they have enough food, even though their environment is unpredictable.

"We need to help others," says Christian Aid's Alison Doig. "We have a responsibility as the causers of climate change to help other people adapt. It's our obligation to help those feeling the impact of climate change now."



Women in Mali are affected by erratic rainfall and rising temperatures.

The Millennium Development Goals

- To eradicate poverty: specifically to halve the number of people living on less than \$1 a day
- To provide universal primary education
- To promote gender equality
- To reduce child mortality by two-thirds
- To improve maternal health
- To combat HIV/Aids and malaria
- To ensure environmental sustainability and halve the number of people who don't have access to safe drinking water
- To provide a global partnership for development

Achieving these goals (MDGs) will be a key way of combating the effects of global warming being felt in the developing world. So says Mike Hulme, professor of climate change at the University of East Anglia.

Long-term targets, he says, can "too easily provide a rather convenient way for governments to say, 'We are doing good things,' when what actually would make a difference today is being overlooked.

"Climate change gives us an extra reason why attending to the MDGs is a good thing to do. We don't have to know what the climate danger is to know that we will make real beneficial progress for people if we attend to them."

The Millennium Development Goals – agreed to by the world's leading nations – are due to be met in 2015, just five years' time. Yet, over the last 18 months governments have backed away from meeting these commitments, which aid workers argue would save lives.

Micah Challenge is motivating Christians in the UK and around the world to hold governments to account for these promises. For more information, and ways to get involved, visit: micahchallenge.org.uk

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Simplify and strengthen Christmas



With Christmas celebrations becoming bigger than ever, Lucy Cooper looks at ways to make the season easier both for you and the planet...

The first Christmas was on a rather tight budget. Mary, a young mum, could not pop down to the job centre for child benefit, and the shepherds were surely on the minimum wage. The wise men gave up a life of relative luxury to travel for days on uncomfortable camels. But these participants in the first Christmas certainly were not short of love, family time and meaning.

Like many people, I usually get so stressed about shopping, cooking and whether Sainsbury's has any cranberry sauce left that taking the time out to think about God's gift to the world can be relegated to a couple of hours at the carol service and church on Christmas morning.

Every year, the months before Christmas fill me with concerns and questions: do I have good enough gifts for everyone? How can I make it bigger and better than last year? Have we got sufficient food to cope when the shops shut for two days? And how will I afford it all?

This year, that last question hangs over the Christmas cheer more than usual, especially for families who have lost jobs in the recession. Then there's the guilt or concern that I might be exploiting or ignoring the poor. And add to this depressing statistics that reflect the environmental damage we contribute to annually, such as three million tonnes of Christmas waste – that's enough to fill 350,000 double-decker buses.

But does it have to be this way? Just because something is "what we do at Christmas", is it obligatory or even very meaningful? Surely we can have a joyful, Jesus-centred holiday that's less materialistic, more generous and more ethical.

De-cluttering the holidays

As the Alliance's *Simplify* campaign developed, I and many others have allowed our lifestyle and mindset to be challenged. By living on a benefits-sized budget in October, we learned to identify with those who live on less all the time. And we were inspired to continue increasing our generosity as we gave the remaining money away. Surely Christmas is another perfect time to continue this practice – to live small and think big.

Developed by Morningside Baptist Church in Edinburgh, *Just Christmas* is a project that

encapsulates the essence of *Simplify* by recognising that Christmas is a time of giving. The challenge is to live on half the money that would usually be spent during the festive season and give the rest of the money to the poor.

Senior Pastor Karl Martin says, "If Christmas is about more, eating and spending, then there is something poor about that. We need to buy into the Christmas story and recapture the message of giving. By spending less, we then have a greater opportunity to share with those who have nothing."

Ruth Valerio, contributor to the *Living Lightly* campaign run by A Rocha, is also a firm believer that Christmas does not have to mean excess and that it can be celebrated simply and ethically. "The two big things you can simplify for Christmas are food and presents," she says. "For presents, there are so many different ideas; you might ask people to buy you an alternative gift through an agency like World Vision to benefit the poor, or you might set a gift budget or say that each family member just gets one present."

And then there's the food. "The great thing about Christmas dinner is that almost everything – the turkey and all the vegetables – can be sourced locally, which makes it more ethical," she says.

Start simply

As someone who isn't particularly organised, the planning and budgeting stage was one of the hardest bits of *Simplify* for me. But I discovered it was essential, just like having a shopping list, in order to prevent me from getting swept away by habit or temptation.

A little planning can also get me off the treadmill to enjoy a simpler Christmas. I need to take time to ask what gifts could be made instead of bought? Where can I find

environmentally friendly and ethical presents? How can I spend more time with people instead of in the shops? How can I spend less in order to give more?

Showing appreciation to someone does not have to involve the biggest and best stuff; it's usually more meaningful if we invest creativity and inspiration. Assembling a photo book or family calendar would be a

special memento, as would making jam, giving away allotment produce or creating new gifts from old things in the house.

My mum loves

being offered a couple of hours cleaning, ironing or computer assistance, because that is valuable to her, especially as she can request it at the moment of need. Some friends realised their nephew had already got every toy he could possibly need, so decided to start giving their time to him as an alternative present. He really enjoys their trips to the cinema or bowling alley, and they are delighted to spend more time getting to know him.

These gifts of time or expertise bring joy long after the Christmas rush. And perhaps we can give away the money we save to people whose lack of funds means they find Christmas a particularly painful time of year.

"*Simplify* is about reviewing how we live and tightening our belts in order to benefit others," says Steve Clifford, who piloted *Simplify* with his wife Ann in August. "The Christmas message is God's message of generosity to all humanity, so Christmas is an ideal time to re-think practically how we celebrate Christmas in order to be generous."

simplify.org.uk/christmas



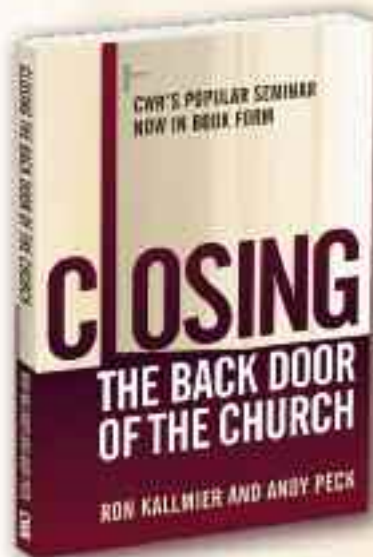
Lucy Cooper is a press officer at the Alliance

We need a Jesus-centred holiday that's less materialistic and more generous

Simple Christmas tips

- Hold a clothes swap for sparkly new outfits for that holiday party.
- Explore options for alternative gifts; check out craft markets or Fairtrade stalls.
- Buy an organic turkey, get seasonal veg from a farmers' market, plan portions and use any leftovers.
- Recycle your Christmas tree and cards and take unwanted gifts to a charity shop.
- Wrap gifts creatively using last year's paper or material; use string or ribbon instead of tape.
- Make your own decorations from old CDs, boxes or bottles, or go natural with holly, ivy and pine cones.
- Turn off the Christmas lights in the day, fully load your dishwasher before switching it on and ask Santa for low-energy light bulbs.
- Look for ethical gift ideas at simplify.org.uk/christmas

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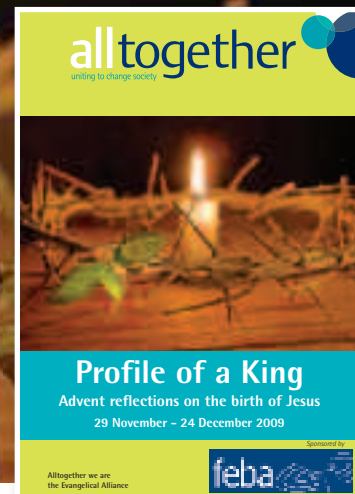
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Profile of a King



During Advent, Andy Freeman offers reflections on the birth of Jesus...

You can imagine the sneer in the comments that came after Jesus spoke in Nazareth: "Isn't this Joseph's son?" Initially impressed by His authority and presence, the penny began to drop with the hometown audience that this was simply a carpenter's boy.

Jesus' incredible manifesto proclamation in Luke 4 ended in Him escaping a violent mob enraged by His challenges to them. Was it Jesus' background that made them reject Him or did that simply provide an excuse for them to avoid being challenged? What seems clear though is that Jesus didn't fit their mould, His wasn't within the profile of a king that they expected, so He was rejected. This is what Isaiah prophesied (Isaiah 53.3) and what Jesus had to live with for much of His life.

We spend too much time making judgments about people - who are their family; what's their background, financial status, influence or nationality? We work so hard to place people into boxes that pre-judging has practically become an industry.

The birth of Jesus breaks down every human divide that we come up with: born in poverty in a land under occupation, the legitimacy of His birth questioned, born in the least of towns, the smallest tribe, from a family line of adulterers, liars and even murderers. There was no glamour or fame around Him. Jesus didn't look like a king.

But Mary managed to work out the truth. With her *Magnificat* (Luke 1.46-56), she acknowledged that this humble, ordinary birth was about to blow the social order right out of the window.

She saw that God has blessed the humble, that fearing and worshiping God was the key, not money or education or power. And then she uttered words of revolution: "He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants for ever, even as He said to our fathers" (Luke 1.53-55).

Jesus was born into a state where leadership had been lost to

the Romans, and faith had been lost to the legalism and power of the Pharisees. The people were waiting for a king, not a humble servant. They wanted a revolutionary, a rock star.

Instead, God went about saving people the way He'd always done it: He made Himself present with His people, but this time it was through birth into poverty and difficulty. Jesus began life as a refugee, with His very existence under threat by Herod.

There is nothing glamorous about Advent, but there is an

This ordinary birth was about to blow the social order right out of the window

incredible miracle that should inspire us to reach out to our world with the Gospel. "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood" (John 1.14, *The Message*).

The Advent of Jesus speaks love and welcome to our world. His poverty, His rejection, His displacement, His persecution - they all embrace the least in the world with His love. He can truly say, "I am with you."

Here in the birth of Jesus the poor in spirit inherit the Kingdom of God, the mourners find their comfort, the meek truly find the earth, the merciful and the peacemaker find their champion. This is where all those who've suffered so much for so long finally find their release.

This Christmas, let's be inspired by the God who came to earth to rescue us and chose to identify Himself not as a celebrity or a prince but as an ordinary man, misunderstood by many, yet Saviour to us all.



Andy Freeman pioneered 24-7 Prayer's first Boiler Room community and writes the blog isthisbiblical.com

Marc Wootton and Martin Freeman, with a classroom of schoolchildren, star in the comedy *Nativity*.

Talking about... the nativity

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As we gear up for another round of seasonal warmth and good cheer, it's time once again to embrace what our culture calls "the true spirit of Christmas". Most people define this as some anodyne wish for peace and goodwill, a result of the pressure to keep any religious content out of the festivities, springing from an ill-founded fear of offending other faiths. Meanwhile, Christians bemoan the growing separation between the real meaning of Christmas and the commercial activity that overwhelms it.

Remarkably, the historical Christmas story is rarely seen in popular culture. It's part of our cultural backdrop, so it gets referred to, but rarely is it looked at in its own right. Even films about Jesus have tended to confine themselves to His ministry or the events leading up to His death.

One of the few that includes the nativity is 1965's *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. Classic seasonal fare like *A Christmas Carol* sometimes alludes to the first Christmas, but little more. In fact, CS Lewis criticised the much-loved Dickens tale for lacking interest in the nativity. So it will be fascinating to see if it's referenced at all in this year's new animated 3D version starring Jim Carrey, which brings the total number of film adaptations to 21.

Yet as far as I can discover, there has only ever been one English-language feature film specifically about Jesus' birth: Catherine Hardwicke's 2006 drama, *The Nativity Story*. Another, *Mary Mother of Christ*, is in production for release next Easter, and a film version of the Gospel musical *Black Nativity* is also in the works.

The nativity story hasn't been told very often on television either, although there have been some notable examples, such as

Where will people hear the narrative at the heart of Christmas?

The Liverpool Nativity two years ago. And the world of pop music has only done slightly better, with a handful of Christmas singles over the years, most famously Boney M's *Mary's Boy Child* from 1978. Even Christmas cards have largely given up celebrating the events surrounding Jesus' birth: less than 2 per cent of Christmas cards now show nativity scenes.

So where might people hear the narrative which is at the heart of Christmas? They're unlikely to read it for themselves in the Bible and, with church attendance in the UK declining, most will never hear it there either, although the numbers of people attending at Christmas is increasing.

In all likelihood, most people will encounter the story in the form of school nativity plays, with all their attendant

calamities. The comedy value of these performances was nicely exploited in *The Flint Street Nativity* a decade ago, while the new British comedy *Nativity* also picks up on the seriousness with which adults approach them. In the film, Martin Freeman plays a headteacher who is in intense Christmas play rivalry with the local independent school. He raises the stakes by idly boasting that his ex-girlfriend, now a film producer, plans to turn his school's production into a Hollywood movie.

A multicultural holiday

Every year we hear about school nativity plays being dropped in favour of secular alternatives, on the basis that they are inappropriate in a multicultural society. Barring celebrations of Jesus' birth is also highly offensive to Muslims, however. And as Trevor Phillips of the Equality and Human Rights Commission pointed out a couple of years ago, the logic of schools celebrating Diwali but not Christmas is "baffling".

It seems we need nativity plays as one of the few remaining ways in which people can encounter the story of Jesus' birth. The trouble is that too often they end up trivialising the historical realities and perpetuating myths. This is partly because schools feel pressure to do something new and improved each year and partly because the staff members responsible for them don't always understand the historical reality.

So it's no surprise that in 2007 the thinktank Theos found that only around three-quarters of adults in Britain know the main elements of the Christmas narrative, such as Jesus being born in Bethlehem, and only 12 per cent know much about the details. A year earlier, a survey for CBBC's *Newsround* found that only 44 per cent of

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Jim Carrey plays Ebenezer Scrooge in this year's animated version of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*.



John Bramley/ImageMovers

British children aged 7–11 knew that Christmas Day celebrates the birth of Jesus.

Amazingly, many Christians have some wrong ideas about the story as well, perhaps thanks to those nativity plays. We trot out the line that Jesus was born in a stable, for instance, but that's not what Luke's Gospel says. Luke simply says that Jesus was laid in a manger because there was no room in the inn. The Greek word translated "inn" simply means "place to stay" and refers to the guestroom. Houses at the time had one

main room, partly open to a stable on one side, and with a guest room on the other. Jesus was put in the manger between the main room and the animals, snug and warm but out of the way. Mary and Joseph would have been in the home along with members of Joseph's family who were there for the census. Bethlehem was his hometown, and it's utterly unthinkable for them to be refused hospitality.

The biblical narrative is obscured by layers of cultural additions, as well as by

commercialism, so we need to work hard to strip them off and allow the astonishing truth of God stepping into our world as a human being to shine clearly once again.

► Find out more about the issues raised in this article at: damaris.org/ideamagazine

Tony Watkins is managing editor of *Culturewatch.org*



contributors include:

Shane Hipps
Adrian Warnock
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how technology shapes faith, church and mission



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Film clips

Cinema appeals across society's boundaries. And films that examine important themes can spark lively conversation with neighbours about something more important than the weather. The following aren't for family viewing, but they can ignite discussions...



TALES FROM THE GOLDEN AGE (15) offers five observant stories from Soviet-era Romania by filmmaker Cristian Mungiu, although these tales are much more amusing than his jaw-dropping abortion drama *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*. Based on urban legends, each extremely well-told story examines the resilience and inventiveness of people who live under an oppressive regime, with vivid characters and situations we can especially understand in today's economy (30 Oct).



COLD SOULS (12) is an offbeat drama reminiscent of *Being John Malkovich*, but with a human trafficking wrinkle as a Russian woman (the excellent Dina Korzun) smuggles souls into America. This playfully absurd film features a superb turn by Paul Giamatti as a version of himself, an actor who puts his soul in storage so he can focus on a role, then has to travel to Russia to retrieve it. What emerges is a surprisingly thoughtful look at relationships and identity (6 Nov).



THE WHITE RIBBON (15), by Austrian filmmaker Michael Haneke, won the top prize at this year's Cannes Film Festival, and it's a remarkable black and white morality tale about a German village just before the Great War, where the stern religious culture masks layers of control and hypocrisy. Rather than a criticism of faith, this is a gripping and utterly chilling drama about the abuse of social and political power that feels eerily relevant today (13 Nov).



BRIGHT STAR (PG) tells the sumptuous story of the brief 1818 romance between 23-year-old poet John Keats (Ben Whishaw) and his neighbour Fanny Brawne (Abbie Cornish). Jane Campion writes and directs with witty dialogue and exquisite visuals, sharply capturing delicate social issues and eliciting performances that delve deep beneath the surface. She also makes us acutely feel Keats' words about "the holiness of the heart's affections". (6 Nov).



WELCOME (15) is an especially involving story about immigration, centring on Simon (Vincent Lindon), a Calais swimming coach whose life becomes entangled with Bilal (Firat Ayverdi), a young Iraqi Kurd who's trying to get to London to see the girl he loves. What's most remarkable about the film is the way Simon risks everything to assist this young man, facing up to against government bureaucracy and unjust rules to both help Bilal and find peace in his own troubled life (6 Nov).



THE MERRY GENTLEMAN (15) features a marvellously understated performance by Michael Keaton (who also directs) as a reclusive hitman who begins to question his efficient, solitary life when he meets a lonely young woman (Kelly Macdonald). As the film follows these two very private people, we discover that both of them have an almost reluctant will to survive. And it's especially refreshing that the underlying thriller never takes over the plot (27 Nov). RC

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In our series relating the Alliance's Practical Resolutions to the task of mission, *Susannah Clark* looks at the third resolution...

We respect the **diversity of culture, experience and doctrinal understanding** that God grants to His people, and acknowledge that some differences over issues not essential to salvation may well remain until the end of time.

Susannah Clark is the Alliance's Public Theology Researcher



In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul uses the analogy of the body, made up of many parts but all cohering to a whole, to describe the Church. Each part is different – in appearance, function and location – yet all are connected and share in pain and joy. The parts are put into place by God for the benefit of the whole; to be effective they have to work together.

Chris Wright says, “There is diversity within the Church but it exists within the fundamental unity.... The Church, then, like the human body, is an organic unity with functional diversity.”

As well as a body, the Church is often likened to a family or household, a place of identity, inclusion, security, nurture and teaching. As believers in Christ we are part of God's family, yet at the same time our experience of earthly families can often be one of disagreement and difficulty. Family members are not always the same. If we recognise such diversity within our earthly families, how much more should we expect diversity within the Church, comprised of millions of people around the world, transcending generations?

We cannot deny that diversity can and often does cause difficulties, but God created a multitude of peoples and culture, all bringing different experiences, and His ideal is that these kind of differences should be celebrated, so we learn and grow from one another.

As Wright says, “The Church is a people, or rather it is the people of the biblical God, through faith in Christ. But it is also a multi-national people, in which membership is open to all, Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free” (Galatians 3.28).

The picture that Revelation paints is that such diversity will still exist in the new heavens and new earth: “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb,” (Revelation 7.9).

Similarly, God built the early Church from a diverse

range of people. When in Acts 2 the Spirit came at Pentecost, the group gathered was very mixed – “Jews from every nation under heaven” – and they all spoke different languages. Initially the message was taken to the Jews, then to the Gentiles, as part of the command to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28.19).

Differences of opinion

Other sources of diversity, however, are not so much ideal, but rather the reality we face in a fallen world where none of us has an infallible theology and none of us discerns the truth perfectly. Such diversity must be respected. Paul, for example, tolerated differences of opinion over food sacrificed to idols (1 Corinthians 8). Of course, in relation to other divisions – for instance, the necessity of circumcision – Paul was clear as to what the right doctrinal position should be (see Galatians).

A distinction, then, is required between primary and secondary issues, and while we may be robust in regard to the former – those that are essential to salvation – respect and humility is needed for the latter. For as this resolution states, some differences will remain until the end of time.

Divisions and disagreements in the Church are nothing new. Yet while this may not be ideal, God is able to work through the Church's weaknesses. It is remarkable that, despite struggles and with the help of the Holy Spirit, the early Church persevered. They learnt to celebrate their diversity, worked together and continued to preach the Gospel. Diversity and division didn't cause the early Church to die. Two thousand years later the same message preached is still being preached around the world.

Of course, doctrinal issues do continue to divide today – women in leadership and the role of spiritual gifts, to name just two. Moreover, we often harbour suspicions towards those that may not fit our

Next issue:
Prayer

particular style of Christianity – left wing, right wing, conservative, charismatic. The Church however has faced numerous crisis points and has often emerged stronger and more united as a result – perhaps this should give us hope for the Church in the differences it faces today.

Unity does of course require effort, action and co-operation. Paul urged the Ephesians, “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace,” (Ephesians 4.3). Perhaps part of this effort is learning to celebrate and appreciate diversity rather than being suspicious of it.

This doesn't mean we don't contend for the truth – the reason the Evangelical Alliance has a Basis of Faith is because we believe there are some things that should not be compromised. However, rather than spending hours debating and disagreeing over the non-essentials, what surely matters for all of us is to get on with the task of loving God, loving our neighbours and making disciples of all nations.

The early Christian communities were tiny in comparison to the prevailing Greco-Roman culture and they often faced persecution. Against this, what united them was far more



Darren Greenwood

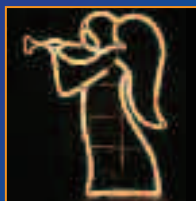
Differences should be celebrated, so we learn and grow from one another

significant than their internal squabbling. So they overcame their differences, united and preached the Gospel, and the Church grew.

Perhaps if the Church today can start to overcome its differences and focus on the essentials, learning to celebrate diversity and aiming for unity, we would send a powerful message to the culture around us. And we might just begin to see again the kind of growth that the early Church witnessed.

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

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Struggling with simplicity

The idea of the Alliance's *Simplify* campaign (*Simplify Your Life*, Sep/Oct) is wonderful. But am I the only person who's really struggled to put it into practice? I hope not.

I want to be the kind of person who can live contentedly on £5 a day, but find that I'm not. Little treats shore up my days and weeks, even if it's something as simple as a new book.

Giving away what you haven't spent seems even harder. What about saving for a rainy day? Or simply just adding in a bit of protection against the current recession?

So while I haven't succeeded in sticking to *Simplify*, it has shone a revealing light on my motivation when it comes to money. I don't like what I've discovered about myself and want to change – even if it's not in such a comprehensive way as you've managed. Thanks to *Simplify* for that.
Sally Briggs, Salisbury

A timely point

David Taylor (*Your Voice*, Sep/Oct) is right to attack greed and materialism in the nation. With bonus payments returning to the world of banking, this is a timely point to make.

However, he is wrong to criticise the public sector in his letter. Those who work for the state may be less likely to be made redundant, but surely there are good reasons for this. Many work in education or health, for instance, performing tasks that have to continue. And I'm all in favour of well-paid doctors and nurses.

With more working people becoming unemployed, we also need people to staff job centres and help with social security payments to those out of work.

Yes, those who have been made redundant need to be compensated for loss of income. Perhaps taxing those bonus payments to bankers would be a good way to start.

Graeme Kemp, Wellington, Shropshire

Ongoing conversation

I agree with David Taylor (*Your Voice*, Sep/Oct) that our economy does not have to rely on debt and materialism. But there were two aspects of his earlier letter (May/Jun) that persuaded me to respond.

Firstly, he appeared to be offering simplistic solutions to complex problems.

That was the issue dealt with in my previous letter (Jul/Aug). Secondly, his letter appeared to be suffused with bitterness and resentment towards those whose circumstances appeared more favourable than his own, in particular those employed in the public sector.

It may well be true that the public sector enjoys better job security in a recession. However, in times of economic boom it is nothing unusual to hear public sector workers complaining that their pay never seems to keep pace with those in the private sector. Workers in both sectors tend to



begrudge the other its advantages whilst taking for granted the advantages of their own sector.

Surely such attitudes of resentment are just as much an expression of materialistic desire as is the reliance on debt of which Taylor complains.

Chris Robins, Kidlington, Oxon

Help me understand

I have been a member and supporter of the Alliance for many years. I find *idea* to be a balanced and scripturally based magazine, but in the latest edition one article has caused me great concern.

The article in question is *At the Heart of the City* (Sep/Oct), which says, "With the help of two professional actors, they acted out the crucifixion with a female Jesus." When I read the article, I could not believe

that a Christian church could do such a thing, or that you could print such an article. Where in Scripture is Jesus referred to as anyone but the Son of God? Jesus was and is a man. This article would appear to give support to those in the world who ridicule Jesus and His Church. They could say, "Even the Church thinks Jesus was a woman."

I am very sad that the Alliance could in any way allow the name of our great Lord and Saviour to be anything other than glorified. Please help me understand why you included this article.

David, by email

EDITOR'S REPLY: We chose to include this article because it was about a local church engaging with its community in a bold way that crossed boundaries and stirred nonbelievers to consider the life of Christ. As described in the story, this was part of an artistic performance, not a literal representation.

A small difference

Some charities are seeing their gift support fall because of the current economic recession. It is therefore good to be able to report that the recent annual gifts made to 38 Christian charities by Gospel Cards etc, on behalf of their customers, took the total given to date to over £250,000.

Each year evangelical Christian charities registered in the UK are invited to enter into partnership with Gospel Cards etc. In return for drawing the attention of their supporters to Christmas cards, calendars and diaries, each charity receives a share of a royalty on the sale of those items.

The reality is that each customer has made a gift through their purchase, and we simply collate those gifts and pass them on to the charities.

John Macey, executive director of Teen Challenge, a Christian organisation that has benefited through this arrangement, says, "We have been linked to Gospel Cards etc in this way for about 10 years. During that time we have received thousands of pounds, which has assisted us in the work we do amongst people with life-controlling problems."

Our prayer is that the gifts generated will be a very real help for the charities, and that our publications will be spiritually helpful to all who receive them. We invite Christians to join with us to support these charities. Details can be found at gospelcardsetc.com
Michael Hard, Bridgend

Letters should be sent to idea@eauk.org or *idea*, 186 Kennington Park Road, London SE11 4BT. Be sure to include your name, address and phone number. The Editor reserves the right to edit letters for length and clarity. We regret that we are not able to engage in personal correspondence. Everyone who has a letter printed on this page will receive a thank you gift.



A challenge for the Church

In the run-up to the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference, noted atmospheric physicist *Sir John Houghton* examines the biblical imperative...

There is compelling evidence that the world is warming and the climate changing, largely because of human activities in burning coal, oil and gas. Through the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the world scientific community has been able to give detailed information about what is likely to happen.

Increased global temperatures make climate extremes more likely. For instance, a heatwave of unprecedented intensity in central Europe in 2003 led to the premature deaths of over 20,000 people. Higher temperatures also lead to more energy entering the atmosphere's circulation that in turn brings more frequent and intense floods, droughts and storms. Further, because ocean water expands as it warms and because of increased melting of polar ice, the sea level is rising by about one metre per century.

The impact of these changes is already evident. Within a few decades they will severely affect billions of people around the world. The damage will be greatest for poor countries in the developing world; it is there that climate extremes will be most severe and where there is little capability to adapt to them. Within 40 years, there could be 150 million or more environmental refugees whose homes are no longer habitable because of rising sea levels, flooding or persistent drought.

Climate Forecast

In early Bible history, Egypt's Pharaoh had a worrying dream. The interpretation of that dream, which God gave to Joseph, was a forecast of a climate crisis: seven years of plenty to be followed by seven years of severe famine. Joseph was put in charge of storing the grain during the years of plenty and of distributing it when the famine came.

Joseph's brothers, who had sold him into slavery, had to travel 300 miles from Canaan to buy grain from Egypt. Joseph told them, "Do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you" (Genesis 45.5). Clearly, God truly cared about the peoples of Egypt and nearby countries threatened by starvation because of the climate crisis.

Today we face a climate crisis of

enormous magnitude and proportions – not local but global, not of seven years duration but lasting indefinitely. Information about it has not come through dreams but through science. To many, science and God are not connected. But if we believe in a creator God, the science we do is God's science. Climate change science is bringing two important messages of the severe impact on billions of the world's poorest people and the threat to millions of the world's species.

Those of us in rich countries need to be reminded that, over 200 years since the industrial revolution, we have grown rich



The Bible puts high priorities on caring for the Earth and the poor

through cheap energy from the burning of fossil fuels. We have not realised its effect on the world's climate nor that the damage falls disproportionately on the world's poorest. There is therefore an inescapable moral imperative for rich countries to avoid further damage by rapidly reducing their carbon emissions and to share their wealth and skills with developing countries to enable them to adapt to climate change and build their economies sustainably.

For Christians this imperative comes over with particular potency. We live in times when we are raping the Earth and exploiting the poor. The flow of wealth in the world is overwhelmingly from the poor to the rich – a statistic that should make us all blush with shame. The Bible, from its first chapters through the prophets, the

ministry of Jesus and to its last book, puts high priorities on caring for the Earth and caring for the poor.

What can we do?

Much detailed advice is available from environmental organisations and aid agencies such as Tearfund. We need to work hard to reduce our personal carbon footprint through such actions as buying green electricity and ensuring that our homes, shopping and transport are as energy efficient as possible. Through our churches and communities, we need to support aid to poorer countries and press our government, through national and international action, to move rapidly towards zero carbon emissions.

In December, the world's nations meet in Copenhagen to set targets and a timetable for action. Christians are calling for worldwide prayer and many are saying it is the most important meeting the world has ever seen.

Four thousand years ago Joseph had seven years to prepare for his climate crisis. Today, action is required just as urgently. Global carbon emissions are still rising rapidly. Within about seven years, well before 2020, global emissions need to peak and begin rapidly to reduce – an extremely challenging goal. The means to achieve it are available and affordable. But is the will there to do it?

A tremendous challenge and unmistakable opportunity are presented to the worldwide Church to shoulder these God-given responsibilities. God is there to help us do it.

Christians in the rich world and the developing world must get together in partnership and take the lead to demonstrate love for God, the world's creator and redeemer, and love for our neighbours, remembering the words of Jesus: "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded" (Luke 12.48).

► Sir John Houghton is the former head of the IPCC and a founding member of the International Society for Science and Religion. His book *Global Warming: The Complete Briefing* is now in its fourth edition (Cambridge, 2009).

Our theory of change

The Alliance's General Director *Steve Clifford* encourages us to start sharing good news stories about the Church...

As we sat having coffee together in a London hotel, John asked me, "So what's your theory of change?" I wasn't sure I had one, but I wasn't going to admit it.

He realised I was struggling, so began to explain by way of a story about a young North American business executive whose life was turned upside down by the death of a close family member in a random shooting. He felt like he had to do something about it, and a conversation some months later with a young mother shaped his strategy. The mother explained her concern at her child visiting other homes: "Who knows?" she said, "They might have a gun in the house."

So a theory of change began to emerge: perhaps mothers asking other mothers if there's a gun in the house could create a climate where people begin to feel embarrassed and put pressure on the owner of the gun, usually the father, to get rid of it. In this case, maybe mothers could help change a culture.

"So," said John again, "what's your theory of change?"

Suddenly it became easy. "It's the Church," I said.

I believe that God's primary agent for change right across our society is the Church. God is committed to change, and He instigated His change theory thousands of years ago in His people, empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring change to the fallen world in which we live.

The Evangelical Alliance is absolutely convinced that the Christian faith and united Christians are good news for the health and wellbeing of our nation – physically, emotionally and spiritually. As such we want to champion Jesus' Church (it's not our church), tell the stories of the Church, speak with and for the Church and provide resources and support where appropriate to enable the Church to be even more effective (Square Mile, Slipstream and *Simplify* are just three examples).

And it's not just church on a Sunday morning – it's church 24/7 in the work place, in educational institutions, leisure centres, our streets, neighbourhoods and homes. It's not just for a few special trained people either – it's for all of us.

Inspirational stories

These stories can both inspire people with ideas that work and show the world that the Church is making a positive difference. For example, I recently met a young woman who is married with a small child and wanted to reach out to other mums and children in her area. Nearly nine years ago she and others started Danceabout, a fun-filled, action-packed pre-school club that's now attended by some 75 children each week. Last term

they started an informal Alpha course with themed conversations about the God behind all that the children and parents were experiencing.

One of the leaders is a young woman whose faith had been completely renewed through contact with the team, and she subsequently joined the church. Through her desire to invest more of her time and energy, a place called ABC grew out of Danceabout. Here parents can come for a chat and a coffee, hear a relevant talk by a health professional, encourage each other and be refreshed.

These two initiatives have over the years connected with more than 500 families. This is the kind of remarkable good news story that can show society how relevant the Church is to a community. And we need to be telling these kinds of stories, as they can help open people's hearts to the message of Jesus Christ.

Of course, the Church doesn't always get it right. For me and my family, Church has at times been a source of pain along with some of our greatest joys. But I can't get away from the fact that God has decided to use the Church as His agent for change. And this is a privilege as well as a challenge.

I agree with Willow Creek's Bill Hybels when he says, "The local church is the hope of the world." So let's stop knocking the Church and let's challenge the media, which just loves to stereotype this God-given, Spirit-empowered family of Jesus' people.

And there are many more stories to be told. Last year as I travelled the country as chair of Hope08, I saw some wonderful

examples of the Church positioning itself at the heart of communities, being good news as well as preaching good news through events from large, citywide missions to clean-up days at community centres. We need to tell these stories of the Church getting outside its buildings and hitting the streets (such as Street Pastors working in some 100 towns every Friday and Saturday night), offering debt counselling and running courses like Alpha, Christianity Explored and Lyfe.

I am making it my job to gather these stories and share them. I'm also looking for the stories of the unsung Church heroes, people who are humbly making sacrifices to transform the lives of others. And I'd like to hear personal stories of hope, redemption and transformation – how God has helped individual Christians through difficult times in ways they could never have even imagined.

► If you have a story of what's happening in your church or churches together in your area, please write to us: yourstories@eauk.org



Ann Clifford

God has decided to use the Church as His agent for change

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