



idea

# Churches catch football fever

Engaging a  
secular society

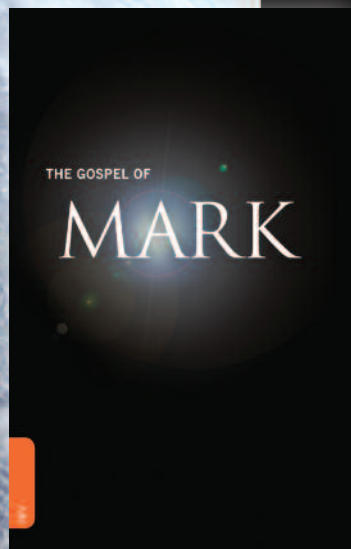
Remember the poor

Nicky Gumbel  
on the Bible



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## Editor's Note

**E**very four years there's a convergence of sporting events at this time of year that almost boggles the mind. And you're not quite sure where to look: there are tennis champions playing in Wimbledon, cyclists racing the Tour de France, Grand Prix drivers zooming around Valencia and Silverstone and of course the biggest sporting event on earth, the FIFA World Cup in South Africa.

And here in the UK we are looking forward to an unprecedented run of world-class events in the coming decade, including the 2012 Olympics, the 2014 Commonwealth Games, the 2015 Rugby World Cup, the 2019 Cricket World Cup and possibly the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

Through all of this, there's a global initiative of Christian individuals and organisations working behind the scenes to use these events as a platform for ministry – and this is something close to my heart as I have worked as a journalist for Christian media at six Olympic Games and a number of other world championships.

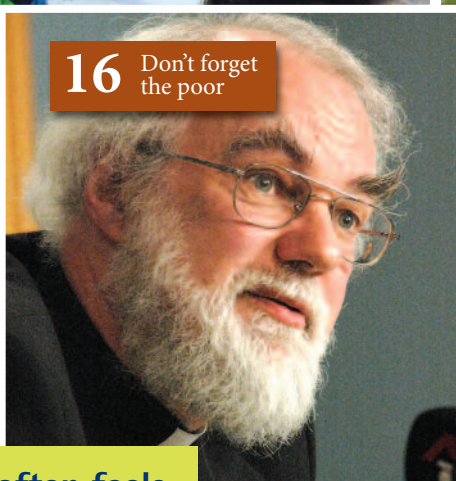
It's not surprising that sport often feels like the world's biggest religion, so we've asked David Oakley, co-ordinator of the Alliance's Forum for Change sports group, to write about what's happening in this area (p21). And these events can also raise our awareness that many of the competing nations are struggling with issues of poverty (p15) and injustice.

Which reminds us of the perceived injustice we feel here at home in a society that feels increasingly antagonistic toward Christians. So in this issue, we also take a look at positive ways we can respond to these issues (p18), which is also the subject of Steve's Last Word (p30). We look forward to hearing what you think about this as well.

*Rich*



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uniting to change society



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# your voice

## True intentions

I've just been reading Paul Woolley's essay (*Media Matters*, May/Jun). If religious programmes are so much cheaper than entertainment and can secure as high an audience as one of the most costly entertainment programmes, why don't the media provide more of them? It would help balance their budgets.

That doesn't help ordinary believers not to think there's a more intentional reason for reducing the volume of religious output.  
*Simon Crittall, Honiton, Devon*

## Avoid platitudes

I have just read a copy of *idea* magazine after a break of about a year, during which I have drifted away from evangelical things while still attending the same church. The reason for my drift struck me sharply while reading items about the Bible by John Stott and Terry Virgo (Mar/Apr).

So much of talk about using the Bible is posturing, sloganeering and platitudes. I'm not being offensive; I need examples of what the writer means. What doctrines can we exercise tolerance over? What theologies need to be put on the back burner? What do the writers think about discernment sites, especially those that say that the majority of Christendom has bought into end-times apostasy precisely because of the current predilection to "learn from each other"?

Presuppositions are crucial. I think that love is more important than being right. So I set up a study group not to do Bible study but to welcome views from Christian visitors that would clash with our own evangelical beliefs. This week we've got a fairly liberal local Anglican priest. The purpose is to see if our love for one another can stand difference of opinion. And that's what I'd like to see of our celebrity preachers. Do they get on with each other?

*Colin Whitehead, by email*

## What God says

Thanks for publishing my letter (*Your Voice*, Mar/Apr), however I was disappointed that the edited version did not include biblical references. I was quoting from the authority on the matter – not my opinion, but what God says about the issue. I am disappointed, considering it is a Christian magazine, and the Bible should surely be the first point of call for all opinions.

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the



man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3.16-17).

*Jon King, Aberystwyth*

**EDITOR'S REPLY:** We must edit letters for style and length, and apologise for anything that might be misleading.

## Dominion not destruction

Jon King's letter (Mar/Apr) was disappointing in its conclusions that the suffering of people around the world and the increased levels of carbon dioxide both result from the introduction of sin into the world. That may have begun with Adam and Eve, but successive generations of humans are guilty of perpetuating it. Today we have the same responsibility that they had of having dominion, not destruction, over God's creation.

We therefore have a duty to do what we can to alleviate the suffering around the

world and stop further increases in the levels of carbon dioxide. A "blame it all on Adam and Eve" approach will not accord with God's instruction to love our neighbours, including future generations, as ourselves.

*Christopher Reeve, Romford*

## Paying to praise

I think it is disgraceful that British, American and Australian Christians think it right to charge believers in poor countries like Zimbabwe and China to sing songs in public worship. Don't blame the Christian Copyright Licence organisation (CCLI); that is just a computerised system that receives money from churches and distributes it to copyright holders. But where does the money go?

The annual total collected from British churches would pay for well over a hundred pastors, missionaries or full-time workers, but there is only a handful of full-time Christian songwriters.

I have no objection to Christian musicians producing CDs and DVDs, and I hope they sell well. But they really shouldn't charge churches for using songs in public worship.

I think we should repent of encouraging our musicians to do something that is dishonouring to God. If a few composers are dependent on receipts from churches' Sunday worship, I would gladly contribute to an organisation for their support, in the same way as we support missionaries and church workers.

*John Delius, by email*

## A hidden meaning?

As a printer I am surprised at the poor quality of the three party leaders photos (*Engage With the General Election*, Mar/Apr). All look like they need a good shave. Was there a hidden meaning behind this? They are hardly complimentary. Surely you had access to better photos.

*Neil MacKinnon, London*

**EDITOR'S REPLY:** As these photos are so overused, we graphically degraded them to look like weathered, silk-screened political poster art. We weren't commenting on their personal hygiene.

# idea

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**Printer** Halcyon Print & Design

*idea* is published bimonthly and sent free of charge to members of the Evangelical Alliance. Formed in 1846, the Alliance's mission is to unite evangelicals to present Christ credibly as good news for spiritual and social transformation. There are around 2 million evangelical Christians in the UK, according to a 2007 Tearfund survey.

*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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Rob Purbrick / LST

## Running the race

Patsy takes Paul's encouragement to run the race set before us quite literally. Having completed 86 marathons and counting, she clearly has a deep passion for running. In her work with Fit Lives, a Christian health-club charity, she uses every opportunity to share God's Word with those she meets in her running group. "It's an organisation not only to help people to get physically fit," she said, "but we believe that people should get spiritually fit too."

Patsy runs in a T-shirt that's captioned, "Don't follow me, follow Jesus", and as a result many people are drawn to run alongside her, opening up to her with stories of the troubles and difficulties in their lives. "I do all that I can to encourage people," she said, "because when we all finish and cross that line, it doesn't matter if people have crossed it after two-and-a-half hours or six-and-a-half hours – we're all winners." [biblefresh.com](http://biblefresh.com)

## Protecting Christian minorities

Alliance member Release International is calling on Pakistan's government to protect its Christian minority community in the wake of research showing brutal violence at the hands of extremists. Investigators from the human rights organisation spoke to Christians whose relatives had been burned alive by militants in their home, and to others who had been unjustly accused of blasphemy.

Josefine Akhlas (pictured) lost her husband and six relatives when militants torched their home in Gojra, near Lahore. "When I looked back I saw there was nothing left of my house," she said. "It was totally destroyed. My husband was burnt alive. We did nothing for which we were punished so cruelly."

Release gathered evidence from individuals whose lives had been devastated by accusations of blasphemy. A family of 16 were driven from their home after militants found a Christian leaflet in a 17-year-old's schoolbook. "We received severe threats," said Shafique

Masih, a pastor. "They said we must embrace Islam. They tried to force us."

Accusations of blasphemy are frequently leveled at Christians and others in Pakistan as a way of getting revenge and to justify land grabs. Release partners there are campaigning to repeal the notorious blasphemy laws.

Meanwhile in Belfast, some 350 Christians gathered on 1 May to make a joint declaration that they would stand with the persecuted Church. A key speaker at *Call for Action* at St Anne's Cathedral was former bishop Michael Nazir-Ali, who



Release

spoke of the reasons Christians are persecuted in many parts of the world, then went on to warn about the impact on the UK of what he called the spread of "aggressive secularism".

Examples were given of persecution in China, Iran, Pakistan, Sudan and Eritrea. The congregation was also invited to pray for Christians in Nigeria, who have suffered recent attacks on their communities. A film was shown of an Iranian woman who tearfully told how she had been forced to leave her family and her country after she had converted from Islam.

The event was hosted by the leaders of three leading organisations serving the persecuted Church: Mervyn Thomas of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Eddie Lyle of Open Doors and Andy Dipper of Release. They called on the congregation to join together in the declaration, which affirms the right of Christians to proclaim the Gospel and to support their persecuted brothers and sisters. [releaseinternational.org](http://releaseinternational.org)

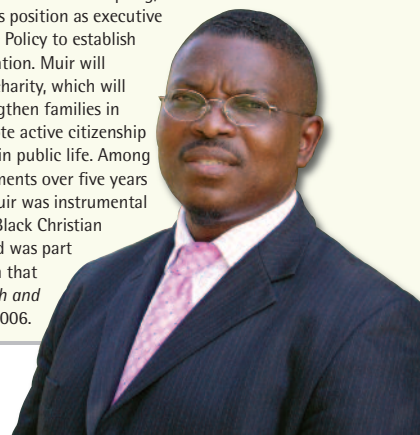
## In brief...



**GOING FOR GOLD.** Students from Thames Christian College won three races at the Independent Interscholar Athletics Competition, winning the overall prize as a result. Thames pupil Leteisha Smith, who won gold in the 100-metres race, said "I am so pleased with our performance today. We did really well, even beating some of the boys' times." Thames Christian College is an independent, co-educational secondary school based in Battersea, South London. [thameschristiancollege.org.uk](http://thameschristiancollege.org.uk)

**A LIFE IN HIDING.** A new stage drama explores the covert lives that many Christians are forced to live in countries where persecution is commonplace. *Secret Believers*, produced by the Saltmine Theatre Company, was inspired by the bestselling book of the same name by Brother Andrew, founder of Open Doors. It tells the true story of two new believers from a Muslim background who are faced with decisions that will shape the rest of their lives. "This is theatre to engage, inform and inspire," said David Robinson, the play's creator. The production visited eight UK venues in May. [opendoorsuk.org](http://opendoorsuk.org)

**NEW PUBLIC LIFE CHARITY ESTABLISHED.** The Alliance said goodbye to Dr R David Muir this spring, as he moved on from his position as executive director for Public Policy to establish the Family Foundation. Muir will develop the new charity, which will support and strengthen families in Britain and promote active citizenship and participation in public life. Among his many achievements over five years at the Alliance, Muir was instrumental in setting up the Black Christian Leaders Forum and was part of the commission that produced the *Faith and Nation* report in 2006.







# a voice in Parliament

**GENERAL ELECTION.** Churches are being encouraged to work with their MPs, building on their impact during the election campaign. At public meetings organised by churches, many new MPs came face-to-face with congregations, which provided an insight into what churches do in their local community and how they can help unite different segments of society.

Ongoing political engagement with the new Parliament is vital. Beyond the intense media scrutiny during the election, which focused on the personality and process of the campaign, many issues were raised that Christians cared deeply about.

**MY MANIFESTO.** During the election campaign, Christians showed that their priorities stretch across the political spectrum, proving that campaigns should be about what the voters want to say, not just what the politicians talk about. *My Manifesto*, a joint project between the Alliance and Care, asked, "What is your priority for the next Government?"

Through Facebook and Twitter, Christians raised the policy priorities that a new Government should focus on, showing a wide variety of passions and concerns, including calls for a cap on interest rates, cutting the national debt and providing aid for less-developed countries.

Three issues, however, stood out. The Government was asked to encourage marriage as the best environment for children to grow up in. There were calls for the electoral system to be reformed, with different models suggested. And Christians offered a range of ideas to reform the House of Lords, including calls for a fully elected chamber, an appointed chamber and complete abolition. Overriding all of these suggestions was a desire for politicians to act with honesty and integrity.

**BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS.** More than a third of the MPs elected in May are new to the House of Commons, and for those returning it is a very different political environment to the one they were used to. Consensus and co-operation have taken the place of the more adversarial aspects of parliamentary democracy, and new opportunities are presented for Christians to become involved.

One perceived cause of voter dissatisfaction has been the apparent detachment of politicians from the communities they represent. Parliamentarians are eager to develop strong working relationships with local communities, and churches are ideally placed to provide a link. The door might already be half open if they visited local churches during the campaign (see box).

A regular complaint is that politicians are only seen when they are hunting for votes, so perhaps Christians can provide MPs with local insight, allowing churches to become a regular feature of an MP's community relations.

At the first meeting, instead of presenting them with a list of what we want or complaints about what the Government has done, perhaps we can instead offer to help them. The Alliance is urging Christians to find ways to offer support to their representatives in Parliament, including asking if they would appreciate prayer. We can also set up regular meetings between MPs and church members so there is a forum where concerns can be raised. [eauk.org/pq](http://eauk.org/pq) DW



## Cross-party praise

The three main political parties were welcomed into Frontline Church, Liverpool, in the run-up to May's General Election, encouraging church members to engage in the political process. More than 400 people turned out to hear Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg (pictured with Colin Eldridge and Frontline pastors Dave Connolly and Nick Harding), who praised the church's work in the community.

Conservative MP Chris Grayling, who is now the Work and Pensions Minister, as well as Cherie Blair and Luciana Berger of the Labour Party, also visited the church to view its many community projects.

Connolly said, "We don't support any one political party, but we do encourage our members to use their votes and to make informed decisions. We held a hustings with six different parties being represented, because we recognise how important it is to help the local community hear what all the different parties stand for." [frontline.org.uk](http://frontline.org.uk)

**HEAL OUR LAND.** More than 1,300 church leaders and members joined together for mass prayer in the wake of the May elections at Liverpool Cathedral. The largest cathedral in Europe hosted the UK premier of the multicultural production *Heal Our Land*, an interactive prayer musical that focuses on fixing a broken Britain. Written by Jimmy and Carol Owens, the programme featured a 110-voice choir from 15 churches across Merseyside. The event was part of a two-week festival that began with a week of prayer run by the local church partnership Together for the Harvest. [tfh.org.uk](http://tfh.org.uk)

**CLEANING UP GOVERNMENT SPENDING.** Alliance member World Vision placed a washing line, hung with babygrows, outside the Houses of Parliament recently, calling on the UK's new government to help stop the preventable deaths of millions of children through a re-balance of its health funding. More than 270 million children in the poorest countries still live beyond the reach of even basic health services. Research shows that investing in low-cost, proven interventions such as immunisation and breastfeeding can save millions of children's lives each year. [worldvision.org.uk](http://worldvision.org.uk)



**CHURCHES CONNECT.** More than 30 churches in Dorset of all denominations will unite at a special event 14-18 July involving worship, ministry and teaching. The goal of *Connect 2010* is to help people link with God, each other, themselves and culture. A variety of churches are co-operating to lead worship, and prayer ministry will be available throughout the five days. The event in Holton Lee is free and open to all, and offers camping and caravanning space with views of Poole Harbour. [connect2010.org.uk](http://connect2010.org.uk)



# Half-empty or half-full?



Tearfund

One of the world's most recognisable buildings was given a shocking makeover by international charity WaterAid and global campaign group End Water Poverty. Gone are the immaculate White House lawns, in their place a squalid otherworldly scene where children collect water from a filthy rubbish-strewn water hole and long queues form at the standpoint.

Except that this isn't another world: having to use a contaminated and potentially fatal water source is a daily reality for some 884 million people.

"This is the White House as you've never seen it before," said Professor Edward Kairu, chair of the African Civil Society Network on Water and Sanitation. "We wanted to bring a snapshot of one aspect of life in many African countries to Washington to coincide with a historic high-level meeting on water and sanitation. Efforts to stamp out poverty are in serious jeopardy unless there is concerted action on the part of ministers attending the meeting to reverse the decades of neglect."

As part of the End Water Poverty campaign, Tearfund warned that unless rich countries did more to honour their promises, they would betray the hopes of 2.6 billion people who currently lack access to safe sanitation.

"We know that God cares about our

practical needs as well as our spiritual needs," said Paul Cook, Tearfund's advocacy director. "And we believe that our biblical mandate as Christians is to speak up for justice with and for those who are poor and oppressed."

[tearfund.org](http://tearfund.org)

## South Asians unite

Through the Alliance's South Asian Forum, leaders are coming together for greater unity in mission and to engage more effectively with the government and media. Committed to reaching out to the two million South Asians in the UK and to working more closely with the mainstream UK church, the forum brings together people of many languages and denominations with a common purpose.

Krish Kandiah, executive director for Churches in Mission, said, "We intend to give the world a taste of the unity of heaven, where people from every different background will be together."

This united sense of identity for

mission has been the key message at the forum's launch events across the country. Membership of the South Asian Forum is open to anyone serving or ministering to South Asian communities in any capacity.

[cauk.org/saf](http://cauk.org/saf)



**A COMMON PURPOSE.** More than 250 people from a variety of faith communities gathered at Holy Trinity Brompton in late-April to mark World Malaria Day, raising awareness of a preventable disease that kills up to 1 million people each year. Night Under Nets was sponsored by Faiths Act Fellows, Malaria No More, Sumitomo Chemical and the Tony Blair Faith Foundation. "Night Under Nets proved just what we can achieve if we come together under a common purpose," said Jayne Buchanan, a Faiths Act volunteer in South London. "This campaign begins in our backyard, but it spans international borders." [facebook.com/faithsact](http://facebook.com/faithsact)



Tackle Africa

**A MINI WORLD CUP.** A coalition of grass-roots agencies including Alive and Kicking, Christian Aid and Tackle Africa took advantage of the attention surrounding the South Africa World Cup to support a five-day youth football tournament in KwaZulu-Natal province to promote positive social education about HIV prevention and treatment amongst young people at high risk. South Africa has the highest rate of HIV on the planet, with nearly one fifth of all cases globally, and this special competition linked young people from Britain, Germany and South Africa. [tackleafrica.org](http://tackleafrica.org)

**BUILDING BRIDGES.** Recent research by South Asian Concern shows that less than 4 per cent of the UK's South Asian population regards the Church and Christianity as relevant. As a result, the charity is developing new ways to engage this immigrant community across cultural boundaries, challenging the perception that Christianity is a Western religion. The importance of prayer was evident in the survey, both in motivating churches to reach out and in creating opportunities. Churches involved in outreach to South Asians were more likely to pray for them. Taking time to build relationships was also key. [southasianconcern.org](http://southasianconcern.org)





## Reaching revellers in Notting Hill

Thousands of people from all over the world flood into the streets of West London every year to attend Europe's biggest carnival in Notting Hill. Many Alliance member organisations will use this as an outreach opportunity, including YWAM Notting Hill, which is equipping Christians with the skills and tools to share the Gospel in innovative ways.

The Carnival runs this year on 29-30 August, but the Christian celebration starts earlier with Bones, a 13-day event that kicks off on 19 August, giving participants the chance to prepare the ground for evangelism outreach. This involves time for teaching, intercession, worship and evangelism and then sharing the good news with joy during the Carnival itself.

This year's emphasis is on art, and the YWAM team is seeking to design creative banners, drawings and paintings that reflect the principles of the kingdom of God. These will comprise angelic representation and heavenly pictures to draw the attention of the revellers to Christ during the lively, loud festivities as people crowd into the streets of Notting Hill for the Carnival.

Christian Vargas, YWAM Notting Hill's art ministry leader, said, "We are using the artistic side to be prophetic; it's not mere entertainment as we seek to be distinct and exalt Jesus under a different spirit." [ywamlondonnottinghill.com](http://ywamlondonnottinghill.com)

AB

## Training chaplains

A postgraduate course focusing on the training and accreditation of sports chaplains is being launched as a joint venture between the University of Gloucestershire and sports chaplaincy agency Score. The MA in Sports Chaplaincy is the first course of its kind to be developed in the UK and is aimed at ordained clergy, church leaders and lay workers. There are also certificate and diploma options.

Score founder and director Rev John Boyers, who also serves as chaplain to Manchester United, said, "We at Score have always sought to professionalise the work of chaplains in sport, and to provide excellence in both training and delivery of chaplaincy services. We are thrilled at this partnership with the University of Gloucestershire and feel this course will provide important accredited training. It will help current and future sports chaplains significantly." [scorechaplaincy.org.uk](http://scorechaplaincy.org.uk)



**STEP UP AND REACH OUT.** More than 140 people attended a special conference on street children in May. Hosted by Bridget and Adrian Plass (pictured) and featuring Rev Joel Edwards of Micah Challenge, the event was designed to draw attention to the 40 million children who live and work on the streets of cities around the world. The conference was organised by Alliance member Toybox, which supports children who are on the streets, often abused and vulnerable. The charity is speaking out on the issue of tackling global poverty, through a campaign called The Big Dream, which is calling for the Millennium Development Goals to be fulfilled (see p15). [toybox.org.uk](http://toybox.org.uk)

Toybox

“Our Christian legacy should be stronger marriages, more confident parents, happier children and restored communities.”

**Rob Parsons**

Founder and Chairman of Care for the Family



Rob Parsons 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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**[www.christianlegacy.org.uk](http://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:

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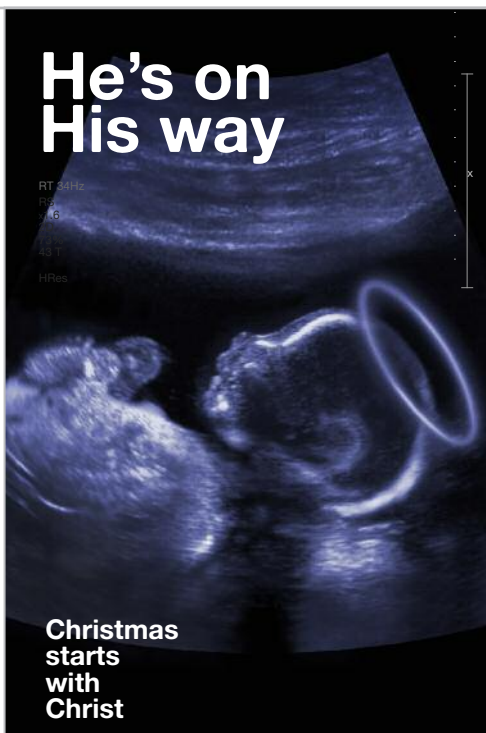
## Already planning for Christmas

Summer may be in full flow but ChurchAds is already gearing up for the second year of its *Christmas Starts With Christ* advertising campaign, through which churches can sponsor posters and radio air-time to bring the positive message of Christ into public spaces during the Christmas period.

Building on past successes, the ChurchAds team hopes to double the numbers of people reached this year through the ecumenical campaign. With successful careers in secular advertising and marketing, Francis Goodwin and Mike Elms (pictured below, with this year's controversial poster at right) commit their skills and time voluntarily to the vision of ChurchAds. This work has been a new experience for both, with a significant shift in goals and objectives compared with those of the corporate world.

"The importance of the work I did before is not a scratch on this," said Elms, who knew for a long time that he should use his advertising skills for God's purposes. "It is exciting and highly rewarding."

Goodwin and Elms are passionate about resourcing the UK Church to embrace advertising and modern communications technology in order to change the public perception of religion and to reach society with the Gospel. They express a desire to see a coordinated strategy among UK church leaders so that



a single powerful and positive message can counterbalance the often negative coverage of the Church in the press. Their vision is to see conversations about the true message of Christianity across the country, resulting in lives being changed.

"We want to work with churches to reach those outside the Church," said Goodwin. "ChurchAds can be a catalyst for conversations amongst those people who are unreachable through conventional church channels."

Like all charity directors, Goodwin and Elms face constant challenges as they connect with a broad range of churches, denominations and networks whose attitudes and approaches vary considerably. Their entire workforce is voluntary, creating a heavy reliance on partnerships with other networks, and it is essential that the advertising is kept edgy and high quality.

And they have high hopes for this year's Christmas campaign: they want UK churches to sponsor 2,010 posters and 200 radio spots to reach 40 million people, doubling the 2009 campaign.

[churchads.net](http://churchads.net)

JM



### The Big Lunch

18 Jul, nationwide

The Eden Project's annual event encourages Christians to sit down to lunch with their neighbours in a simple but profound act of community. This can be anything from getting together in a garden to organising a full-scale street party. [thebiglunch.com](http://thebiglunch.com)

### Keswick Convention

17 Jul-6 Aug, Keswick

Daily renewal was the Apostle Paul's desire, and it's a reality that Christians long for but many find elusive. It's also the theme for Keswick 2010, affirming Christ's power to renew both our lives and His creation. [keswickministries.org](http://keswickministries.org)

### Transform 2010

19-24 Jul, Rome

As Christianity's roots lie in the nations of the Mediterranean, Operation Mobilisation is holding this practical training conference to examine ways to bring the good news to the region. [transform.om.org](http://transform.om.org)

### New Wine

24 Jul- 7 Aug, Somerset and Notts

This year's Unstoppable conferences will explore the promise that "nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1.37). Festivals will be full of inspiring teaching, spirit-filled worship, lively kids' groups, relaxation, fun and friendship. [new-wine.org/summer](http://new-wine.org/summer)

### Soul Survivor

30 Jul-20 Aug, Stafford and Somerset

Thousands of young people gather to journey with God at these five-day events, which are filled with worship, learning more about God through the Bible and waiting on the Holy Spirit to change and equip all to live for Him. [soulsurvivor.com/uk](http://soulsurvivor.com/uk)

### Greenbelt Festival

27-30 Aug, Cheltenham

This year's festival, The Art of Looking Sideways, is a family-friendly celebration with a full programme of music, talks, comedy and visual arts. There's something for all ages and backgrounds. [greenbelt.org.uk](http://greenbelt.org.uk)

### Heart to Heart

21-29 Sep, Lancaster

This nine-day conference is designed for pastors and church leaders seeking an understanding of some of the keys to healing and discipleship. It will be hosted and led by members of the Ellel Ministries leadership team. [ellelministries.org/uk](http://ellelministries.org/uk)

### Micah 2010

10 Oct, nationwide

Special Sunday services will take place as Christians and local MPs promise to remember the poor and seek justice as part of Micah Challenge's campaign to pray for and focus on the promises to halve global poverty by 2015. [micahchallenge.org.uk](http://micahchallenge.org.uk)

**FIRE IN THE FOREST.** Christians from across the New Forest met in May to be challenged and equipped to reach their region in new ways with the Gospel. Now in its fourth year, the *Forest Fire* event was organised by the Local Evangelical Alliance in the Forest (LEAF). The goal is to unite leaders from different church traditions to receive biblical teaching on leadership issues. Krish Kandiah, the Alliance's executive director for Churches in Mission, spoke on the power of the good news to bring real change in communities, the challenges facing church leaders today and the rediscovery of God's passion and grace. [leaforest.org](http://leaforest.org)



### A DECADE OF FAIRTRADE TOWNS.

Ten years after the market town of Garstang, Lancashire, made a pledge to support Fairtrade, there is now a global social movement involving more than 800 towns in 19 countries and tens of millions of people. "When we first launched our campaign our aim was simply to get people to help make trade fairer for farmers from developing countries," said Bruce Crowther, founding member of the Garstang group and now Fairtrade Towns Advisor. "We never envisioned that we would inspire people around the world to do the same." [fairtradetowns.org](http://fairtradetowns.org)

### HELPING CHURCHES GET ONLINE.

Premier Christian Media is working with technology specialist Endis to help UK churches expand their online presence after a survey of 3,000 evangelical church websites found that up to 40 per cent were not making use of new media, one third had no websites at all, and almost 1 in 10 site-links were broken. "We live in a digital age and it's very important that churches don't get left behind. Premier ChurchInsight allows churches to minister to people who either can't or won't come to a physical church," said Peter Kerridge, chief executive at Premier. [churchinsight.co.uk/premier](http://churchinsight.co.uk/premier)





## Our faith, our life

Andy Bowers

This summer, the Alliance together with Christian Research is taking a "snapshot" of the beliefs, opinions and habits of thousands of Christians in the UK.

This is the first component of a much larger piece of research in which the Alliance is hoping to involve all of its members. The results will provide valuable insights that will help churches and organisations as they seek to become more effective.

In addition, knowing more about the UK Church and individual evangelicals will help increase credibility as Christians continue to engage with the media and politicians. The survey can be found online, and only takes 10 minutes to complete: [eauk.org/survey](http://eauk.org/survey)

## CRE focuses on the Bible

The Biblefresh initiative was a major focus at the Christian Resources Exhibition in Sandown, Esher, this May, as 12 Biblefresh partners, including the Alliance, worked together to develop a Biblefresh Zone. Centered around a museum of the Bible, the zone exhibited first editions of the Tyndale and King James Bibles alongside Bibles once owned by the likes of Elvis Presley, Florence Nightingale and Reggie Kray.

Delegates had the opportunity to share their story – in eight words or less – of how the Bible has influenced their lives. A professional photographer was available to take their pictures holding a sign that encapsulated their personal experience (see p6).

Meanwhile, seminars covered a range of topics, including a look at the big picture of the Scriptures and how the Bible continues to inspire music and theatre. The event also included the launch of the *Biblefresh* book, which includes articles by John Stott, Amy Orr-Ewing, Eugene H Peterson, Bob Hartman and Siku.

Plans are underway to repeat the experience at CRE events in Telford (21-23 Oct) and Peterborough (24-26 Feb). [biblefresh.com](http://biblefresh.com)



St Ethelburgas

**RELATING TO OTHER FAITHS.** A consultation will be held on 8 July at St Ethelburga's in London to explore evangelical approaches to other faiths. The central question is how Christians should relate to others in a religiously pluralistic society, and the event is designed as a time for discussing and sharing challenges, opportunities and concerns of engaging in interfaith dialogue. Former Alliance leaders R David Muir, David Hilborn and Bev Thomas are among the participants, and the event is being held in connection with the Edinburgh 2010 Mission Conference, which commemorates the 1910 World Missionary Conference. [stethelburgas.org](http://stethelburgas.org)

“ **Our Christian legacy? A world where people of all abilities are valued as equal - being made in God's image.** ”

**Mary Bishop**  
CEO, Livability



Mary Bishop has a passion. She wants to see God's Kingdom come - and she 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](http://www.christianlegacy.org.uk)**

## Christian Legacy

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

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





## Letter-writing enhances development

Exchanging handwritten letters can have a positive impact on child development, yet as many as one in five children surveyed in the UK have never received one, according to a new survey commissioned for Alliance member World Vision.

Results found that in the last year more than a quarter of children have not written a letter and 43 per cent have not received one. Of the children who had received a handwritten letter, 90 per cent feel excited to discover who sent it and happy that they occupy someone's thoughts.

"If children do not write or receive letters they miss out on key developmental benefits," said child education expert Sue Palmer. "Handwritten letters are much more personal than electronic communication. By going to the trouble of physically committing words to paper, the writer shows their investment of time and effort in a relationship."



World Vision

World Vision commissioned the survey to emphasise the power of letter-writing, a key aspect of their child sponsorship programme, which connects UK families with children and communities in the developing world.

Associate Director Kate Nicholas said, "We know that literacy is one of the main ways to fight poverty in the developing world, but it's also a key concern for

parents and teachers up and down the UK. Many of them see child sponsorship as a win-win situation.

It allows children to improve their literacy and build a personal relationship through letter-writing while understanding more about the world and giving children living in poverty the chance to access education themselves." [worldvision.org.uk](http://worldvision.org.uk)



## media matters

by Charis Gibson, Senior Press Officer

Every time we turn on a TV or open a newspaper, conflict is there, whether it's Jeremy Paxman attempting to annihilate an interviewee with aggressive questions before they've had a chance to draw breath or *Big Brother* contestants screaming at each other. Headlines about Christianity are no different, focussing on conflict between factions in the Anglican Church or between Christians and secularists.

During my years as a newspaper journalist I had interviewees on speed-dial who I knew would stir things up to add some drama to my story. Even so, we can't blame the journalists for this. If we, the consuming public, didn't enjoy reading about this, the media wouldn't bother giving it to us.

One of the main topics the Alliance press team has been asked to comment on recently is that UK Christians believe we are being

"persecuted" (according to *The Daily Mail*) by the state or by secular employers.

There's no smoke without fire: in some cases, Christians do seem to be getting a raw deal, and our faith does not command the respect it has done at some points in our history.

Frankly, we're unlikely to see programmes about the many Christians who do their jobs without feeling victimised by their employers, or the councils that still celebrate Christmas without

## If the public didn't enjoy a good fight, the media wouldn't give it to us

labelling it "Winterval". Stories of Christians selflessly serving the public do exist, but they're not as interesting as those in which we're having a "showdown" (*Daily Telegraph*) with employers, judges or the National Secular Society.

Let's not allow the media's values to dictate what the most important issues are for us as Christians in the UK. We're commanded to be peacemakers. The conflict story should not belong to us.

**LEARNING TO LIVE MORE SIMPLY.** Events across England this summer have been provoking discussions about how people can live more simply, sustainably and generously. Breathe, a Christian network for simpler living, teamed up with A Rocha, Tearfund and Stewardship to launch the *Conspiracy of Freedom*, a festival of events from mid-May to mid-July. Each event includes teaching from Elaine Storkey or Breathe founder Mark Powley, exploring practical ways Christians can become local change-makers. Breathe has also launched a set of video shorts to spark online engagement and enable churches and small groups to join the discussion. [breathenetwork.org](http://breathenetwork.org)



CPAS

**FIND YOUR SHAPE.** An online tool to help young people explore their vocation has been launched by Anglican evangelical agency CPAS. *Your S.H.A.P.E. for Ministry* provides advice and next steps for people interested in pursuing what God may be calling them to, including ordination. The name comes from five areas the site helps to gauge: spiritual gifts, heart, abilities, personality and experience. "Helping more young people to explore their vocation assists them in their discipleship and helps them realise, whatever their vocation, that they have something to offer in the service of Christ," said CPAS adviser Mark Norris (pictured). [cpas.org.uk/shape](http://cpas.org.uk/shape)

**CHURCHES SEEK THE X FACTOR.** A Christian researcher has produced a resource for Christians who are working with a café church or considering starting one. George Lings, director of the Sheffield Centre, Church Army's research unit, examined an innovative multi-faceted event in Norfolk called Xpressions Café, which works concurrently as a café, all-age worship and faith exploration, each held in four parts of a venue. Lings' observations can be found in issue 45 of the Sheffield Centre's quarterly publication *Encounters on the Edge*, which explores emerging forms of church that reach out to the non-churched. [encountersontheedge.org.uk](http://encountersontheedge.org.uk)



## Home-swaps offer alternative

In the midst of a deep recession, families have put ideas of hotels and package holidays on ice this year. And an increasingly popular solution is being found in house-sitting or home-swaps, which links into the Alliance's *Simplify* initiative as part of a conscious decision to spend less and give more.

Ray and Marilyn White launched Christian House Sitters a few years ago. "We have a lot of Christian workers contacting us saying that they just cannot afford to go on holiday," said Ray. "We love to help them organise a rent-free holiday, which is a real blessing to them. Getting references from church leaders provides more security and a stronger feeling of confidence."

Many participants also embrace the experience as a lifestyle choice due to the way they can share with a community and be part of a different church. Harshal Carey of Christian Home Exchange Fellowship said, "Many of our members are in full-time ministry in the Church. Sometimes ministers swap elements of their work too and preach in each other's churches."

Alastair and Françoise Murray from Tower Hamlets have enjoyed several house swaps. "We got to know the neighbours," said Françoise, "and we had more connections with local people than if we had just gone to a B&B." [simplify.org.uk](http://simplify.org.uk) LC

## Global prayer continues

Millions of Christians joined in prayer around the world on 23 May during the 10th annual Global Day of Prayer. This wave of prayer spread across more than 200 nations as Christians spoke to God in unity.

During the Global Day of Prayer in London on 13 June, up to 1 million people said the Lord's Prayer at midday, with more than 25,000 gathered at West Ham stadium. Prayers were raised for transformation of the nation through Christian leaders working in every sphere of society.

In this spirit of global prayer, Operation Trumpet Call, part of the Love Zim coalition, issued a call to all Christians, churches and organisations to join in worldwide prayer, fasting and giving for Zimbabwe on 26 September. The vision is to "lead Zimbabwe out of poverty, teach a starving nation to feed itself and see the Gospel bring true community transformation." Organisers invite UK Christians to pray individually, with friends or to organise a prayer event alongside others taking place globally. [operationtrumpetcall.org](http://operationtrumpetcall.org)



### SOMETHING TO SHOUT ABOUT.

Some 500 volunteers took part in *The Noise*, a free community action event in Bristol that was held over the May bank holiday weekend. Now in its ninth year, the event is described as a massive demonstration of God's love, as local churches worked together on a wide range of local projects that centre on action – from clearing up rubbish (pictured) to holding kids clubs, sports activities, senior citizens' banquets, community barbecues and family fun afternoons. [northbristolnoise.org.uk](http://northbristolnoise.org.uk)

“ Our Christian Legacy should be an enduring provision for the practical and spiritual welfare of seafarers of all nationalities. ”

Revd Tom Heffer  
Secretary General  
The Mission to Seafarers



Tom Heffer 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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# Hearing God's voice

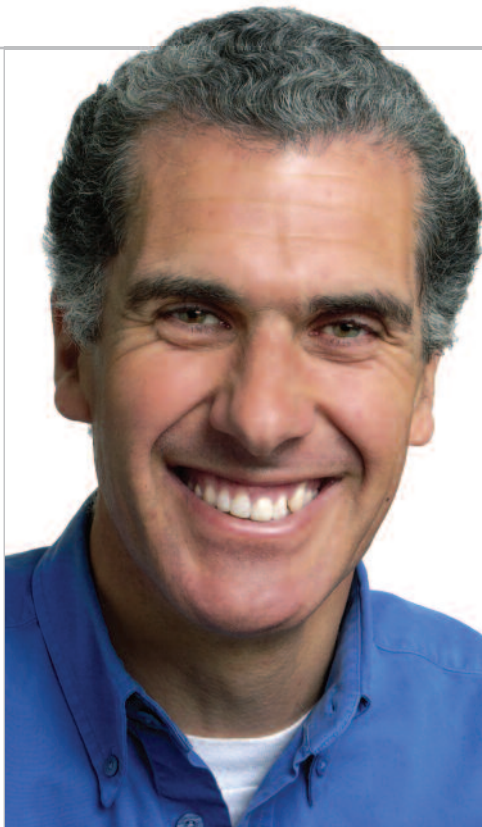
**Nicky Gumbel is the vicar of Holy Trinity Brompton in London and developer of the Alpha Course. Krish Kandiah spoke to him about his passion for God's Word...**

*idea:* Can you tell us about the first Bible you ever received?

**Gumbel:** I wasn't brought up as a Christian. My background is secular; neither of my parents were churchgoers. When I was at university I had a friend, Nicky Lee, who is now my colleague. One day he and his wife told me that they had become Christians, so I thought I'd better investigate. I picked up an old Bible I had from school – it was 11 o'clock at night and I started reading it. I read through Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and I carried on reading the next day and the next day and the next day. That was when I really came to faith in Christ. So I have tried to read through the Bible, roughly speaking, each year over the last 35 years.

**How do you read the Bible?**

I've always read it in the morning. I'm at my most alert in the morning. This year I'm doing a one-year Bible – not a commentary, but "my thoughts each day". I send it to anyone in the congregation who wants it, and we put it up on the web. We're using *The Bible in One Year*, so there's a bit from the Old Testament, a bit from the New Testament and a Psalm or a Proverb. And each day I found a theme – the mercy of God, the love of God, God's name being honoured, wisdom, ways to live under God's blessing – so we look at each of the three passages and see how that links into the theme.



## God can speak through the same passage in a hundred different ways

*You're reading the same passages year by year. What do you do to make sure that it's fresh?*

The primary way in which God speaks to us is in Jesus, but we read about Jesus in the Bible. The primary way in which He communicates with us is through reading it. So that's what I pray each day as I read the Bible: that God will speak to me and that I'll hear His voice. So that's why it's exciting, because He can speak through the same passage in a hundred different ways.

*What would be a good way to start with someone who's never read the Bible?*

I think it's very hard. What we find with people coming on Alpha is unless they're given some help, they tend to start at the beginning, because you start a book on

page one. So the natural thing is to turn to Genesis 1, and of course Genesis is relatively easy in terms of the Old Testament to get into. Then Exodus gets a little bit harder, and then Leviticus, and they get bogged down in the sacrificial system in Leviticus. Alternatively they might say, OK, I understand that's the Old Testament, so I'll start with the New Testament. So they start with Matthew's Gospel, which is the whole genealogy of Jesus – a list of names. So we try to produce a resource first of all to help people: *30 Days* is a kind of an introduction to some of the passages in the Gospels, some of the Psalms and so on, just to give people a flavour. Otherwise, many people find John's Gospel is a very good way in, particularly if they're not yet people who've encountered Jesus personally, because John says at the end, "These things are written so that you may believe, and that by believing you may have life." So I would encourage people to do that.

*Many Christians find reading the Bible difficult, particularly the Old Testament.*

Well, there are lots of passages that are really, really hard. I don't think we have the answers to all of them, and there are things that we all struggle with. But I see it like a crossword puzzle. When you do a crossword puzzle, you come to some clues that are very hard. You could either stop at that point and say, "I'm going to give up", or you go on and you come to the ones that are slightly easier and you answer them. And they give you some clues, and that makes it easier to answer the hard ones. I think it's like that with the Bible: you don't give up just because they're difficult passages. Don't get stuck there, move on to the bits you can understand and fill those ones in. And it may be years, it may be a lifetime before you can answer some of the more difficult ones. But don't give up. **biblefresh.com**

**A RADICAL FIGHT.** Micah Challenge International Director Rev Joel Edwards is calling on Christians to take a radically new approach to fighting poverty by working alongside people of other faiths. "Multi-faith witness is a crucial part of our 21st century outreach," he said, "for it demonstrates respect for the common values people of faith have." Without compromising our views, Edwards believes we can work together on issues central to the Gospel, such as poverty and injustice. For more on this topic see p16, and to read a special essay by Edwards and Michael Tweed of the Tony Blair Faith Foundation, visit: **eauk.org/idea**



**SURPRISE PERFORMANCE.** A group of 120 children surprised the public by staging a song and dance flashmob at Legoland for charity in late-April. The stunt was part of World Vision's *Child Health Now* campaign, which draws attention to the 8.8 million children under 5 who die each year of preventable diseases like diarrhoea, pneumonia and malaria. The participants were children from Stagecoach schools – a national network of performing arts schools for 4 to 18 year olds – who performed two numbers from the musical *Annie*. A video clip of the event is at: **worldvision.org.uk/flashmob**

► For updated news from Alliance members, click on Your Stories at **eauk.org/idea**



# Working together for the Lord we love

**In the run-up to a historic evangelical event, Doug Birdsall challenges the global Church to roll up its sleeves and get to work...**

**T**he Lausanne Covenant is widely regarded as one of the most significant documents in modern Church history. It emerged from the first Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation in 1974, and evangelical Christians are being encouraged to read it again in preparation for the Third Lausanne Congress in Cape Town this October.

We are living at a vital time for the Church and for the world, and we invite Christians to join remotely in the Congress, which will gather leaders representing the demographic, theological and cultural realities of the global evangelical Church. This includes Christian professionals in mission and ministry, as well as in business, government, education, medicine and the media – some of the most creative and courageous men and women the Church has to offer.

At a time when the Church is threatened both from outside and from internal dissension, we need to talk, consider, plan and seek God with humility. We must unite around the great central truths of the Gospel, working together to proclaim Christ in every sphere of influence and to all peoples of the world. We need to be like the people of Issachar who understood the times and knew what needed to be done (1 Chronicles 12.32).

## The relevant past

Why is it important for Christians to give time to a study a document that was composed 36 years ago? To view the past as irrelevant is a recent Western mindset. To understand our times, we must grasp how we arrived in them. Learning our history is a critical part of this. To engage with the forces behind the advance of Islam, or the disintegration of the West, we must first equip ourselves with the knowledge and wisdom of our past.

The Lausanne Covenant has been a great rallying call to the evangelical Church around the world. It is a covenant with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ and with God Himself. The form was chosen deliberately as a solemn and public declaration to the world of the relationship between our faith and our lives. Chris Wright, chair of the Lausanne Theology Working Group, says it brings "a wholesome balance of biblical truth and mission imperatives". He writes:

This is one reason why it is so appropriately called a covenant, since that is precisely true of the biblical covenants. The Lausanne Covenant makes many ringing declarations, strong affirmative statements of what the Bible teaches and what we joyfully raise our voices to confess. Yet it never lets us rest content with signing a mere statement of faith. Again and again it calls for commitments to be undertaken, for choices to be made, for promises to be kept, for sacrifice to be endured, for words to be spoken and actions to be taken. I hope that the study of the Lausanne Covenant will not only strengthen your faith and understanding, but lead to some clear lines of obedience and practical outworking in the responsibilities and opportunities the Lord has entrusted to you personally.

As with many biblical occasions of covenant-making, there is an emphasis on humility, repentance, self-examination and shamed acceptance of so many areas of our individual and collective failure. In signing this covenant we are willing to accept the possibility that



**Let us unite to proclaim Christ  
in every sphere of influence and  
to all peoples of the world**

our lives may be a "stumbling block to evangelism", and that the Church "betrays the Gospel, or lacks a living faith in God, a genuine love for people, or scrupulous honesty in all things".

The Covenant thus pours whatever responsive commitment we may make into the strong mould of God's grace. We participate in God's mission, but we do so as sinners and failures, knowing that we need the forgiving grace of God every bit as much as those to whom we bring the good news of its reality in Christ.

The Covenant has been published with a study guide titled *For the Lord We Serve*. As we work through it with John Stott's brief commentary, we may want to ask ourselves whether we could sign each statement. We must take time to read the Scriptures that shaped each section before moving on to the discussion questions. If studying as a group, we could add further questions from our own local context.

The Covenant's genius is that it came out of a gathering of evangelicals from 150 nations focusing on biblical and primary issues while avoiding controversial secondary issues. This is how it has managed to bring evangelicals together and become so widely used as a foundation for partnerships across the world. The need to work together has never been more critical if we are to see Christ's Gospel made known in this generation and beyond.

► To join the Lausanne Global Conversation or host a Globalink site in October, visit: [lausanne.org](http://lausanne.org)

► *For the Lord We Love* by John Stott (Didasko Files series) is available at £2.50, with reductions for bulk purchase, from: [www.10ofthose.com](http://www.10ofthose.com)



*Doug Birdsall is executive chairman  
of the Lausanne Movement*



# Don't forget the poor

Christians are uniting to urge governments to envision a world that's free of poverty.

*Hazel Southam reports...*

**W**hat one thing could you do that would help the poor? That's the question that we asked people outside Waterloo station. At first there was a lot of "umming" and "erring". But it's a question that prompted deep thought in young and old alike. Helplessness soon changed to tangible ideas.

"Growing my own food at home so that there is more food to go around," said one. "I try to buy fairly traded products," said another. "Campaigning would be a good thing – to try to lobby the government," said a third.

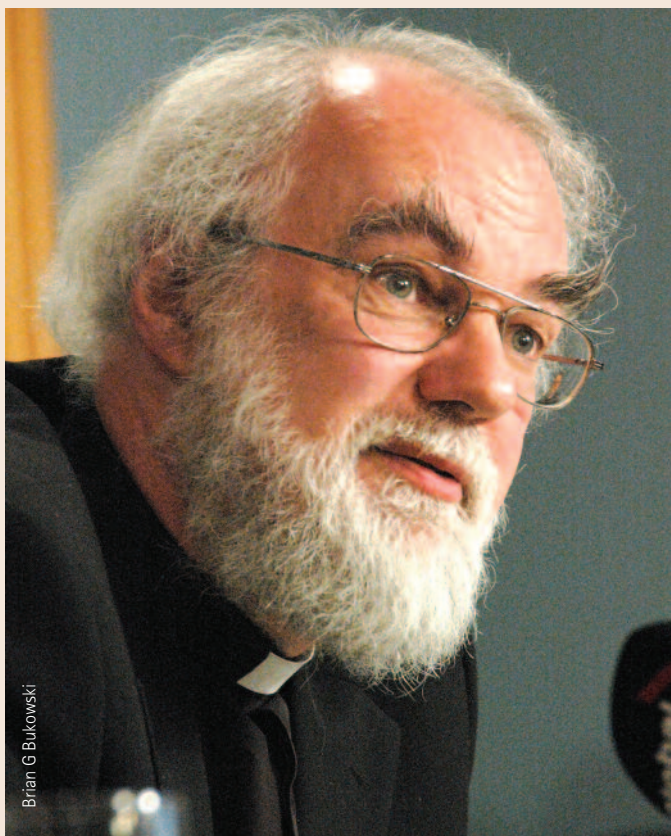
This year, Micah Challenge is calling on Christians around the world to remember the poor and through their remembrance to commit to doing one thing that will make a difference to the 1.7 billion people who live on less than 70p per day. That can be anything from lobbying their MP, buying fairly traded products, giving to charity or praying.

The initiative started in June. But what can it achieve? What difference does doing one small thing really make? According to Micah Challenge UK's Executive Director Andy Clasper, the aim is simple. "We want to see justice, where everyone has enough," he says. "The world is moving on at a pace and all of our efforts seem to be focused on economic progress, but that's not shared equally around the world. More than 1 billion people are being left behind.

"The call that we are issuing is to remember the poor. That was at the heart of the early Church. We can remember the poor after the Haiti







Brian G Bukowski

**ARCHBISHOP BACKS MICAH CHALLENGE.** "Remembering the poor is not simply asking us to give them a thought from time to time," says the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams. "Remembrance is a real and active thing. Our remembrance must be a renewal of relationship. We can ask ourselves what we can do to renew this relationship. It may be looking at ethical trading, at our habits of purchasing and consumption and by prayer at every level. So remember, remember what God has asked, remember what we can do. We can make the difference that God wants us to make."

earthquake but forget them when we do the weekly shop. We want people to see the many ways that they can care for the world."

Christian Aid's Church Relations Officer, Andy Wilson agrees. "People feel that they can't do anything, but everybody can touch the lives of at least one person," he says. "Once you do that you transform yourself. You realise that you can make a difference."

Remembering the poor, he says, "is symbolic of something deeper, of everyday discipleship, of remembering that everyday choices make a big difference."

The scheme comes in the run-up to 10 October (10/10/10), which will be a global day of prayer for people living in poverty. It comes just five years before the Millennium Development Goals – set to halve poverty – are due to be fulfilled.

Experts believe that, at the present rate, the goals will not be met. So Micah Challenge's aim is to remind politicians of the urgency of keeping their promises in relation to goals that will transform lives and lift millions out of abject poverty.

Under the scheme, individuals pledge to remember the poor in a practical way and write that pledge down. Churches or home groups then collect the pledges and give them to their MP. At the same time, they can ask their MP to make his or her own commitment to remembering the poor.

"In the run-up to the General Election, I was really pleased that all the parties said that they would continue to increase aid spending," says



Tearfund's Head of Campaigns, Ben Niblett. "That wouldn't have been the case 20 years ago. It's a no-brainer now. Christians and churches have been banging on about this and have brought this about. That's a massive change and a huge answer to prayer."

► To join Micah's 2010 campaign to lead our government into a deeper commitment to create a world free from poverty, visit: [micahchallenge.org.uk](http://micahchallenge.org.uk)





# Engage with a secular

**Christianity seems to be increasingly at odds with UK society. Is going to court the answer? Hazel Southam explores the options...**

**O**ver the past few years Christians have been making national newspaper headlines, and not in a way that they would have wanted. It's easy to find plenty of examples of this.

In October 2007 a Christian magistrate who felt forced to resign because he opposed adoption by gay couples lost his appeal, but vowed to fight on. Last year, a woman resigned from her job as a blood collector at Gloucestershire Royal Hospital rather than remove her cross necklace, which bosses said "could harbour infection".

This January, a teacher sacked for offering to pray for a sick girl was reinstated after her story made the front page of *The Mail on Sunday*. In March, a Christian registrar who was threatened with the sack for refusing to perform civil partnership services for gay couples lost her latest court battle. In the same month, two Christian hoteliers who were cleared last year of insulting a Muslim guest announced that their business had subsequently collapsed.

By Easter, Radio 5 Live presenter Nicky Campbell was warning that a minority of Christians felt persecuted by human rights laws and local councils. They believe they "are being sidelined and victimised," he said.

So are Christians really being marginalised in Britain? How and why have things changed? And crucially, how do we engage with the changing society around us?

## On a knife-edge

*The Daily Telegraph* reported in April that "a top judge was warned that court rulings against Christian workers risk causing 'civil unrest' as he heard the case of a relationship counsellor who was sacked after refusing to give sex advice to homosexual couples."

Civil unrest? Christians aren't taking to the streets mobbing mounted police and throwing stones. But according to the former Archbishop of

## Are Christians really being marginalised in Britain?

Canterbury, Lord Carey, the country is on a knife-edge. We are, he said, "but a short step from the dismissal of a sincere Christian from employment to a religious bar to any employment for Christians."

The head of the Christian Legal Centre, Andrea Minichello Williams, agrees, calling the recent court cases "a tragedy". She says, "They underline the scale and speed of change in our society's attitude to Christian truth – an attitude which is increasingly characterised by ignorance, suspicion and even hatred."

"It is vitally important that the Church recognises this trend; turning a blind eye is not a solution. What begins as 'marginalisation' develops into 'discrimination' and then 'persecution'. If we don't speak up now then we will see things decay further."

Other observers disagree with this view, saying Christians are not under siege, and that fighting back will only make us more unpopular and misunderstood.

Dr Steve Holmes, chair of the Alliance's Theology and Public Policy Advisory Commission, is one of them. These court cases are "isolated instances", he says. "You would look hard to find a profession where you couldn't work as a Christian because of your faith." He believes that the problem could be that Christians are being insufficiently "sensitive" in the way they express their point of view.

Dr Trevor Cooling, director of the National Institute of Christian Education Research agrees. Speaking about Christians working in education, he says, "There are huge opportunities for Christians involved in education if we can get these things right. But we won't find that we will





# society

be welcomed if we bang on the door and say, 'This is a Christian country, you must listen to me.' We will get a welcome if we are saying we want to contribute to the community and the schools: 'How can we help?'"

## Better understanding

Perhaps the first reason is a lack of residual knowledge of Christianity through RE lessons or Sunday school. A survey from the religious think-tank Theos in 2007 found Britons' understanding of the Christmas story was pretty shaky. According to the survey more than one person in four didn't know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The same number didn't know that an angel told Mary that she would give birth to a son; some thought it was the shepherds who told her.

Theos Director Paul Woolley says, "The fact that younger people are the least knowledgeable about the Christmas story may reflect a decline in the telling of Bible stories in schools and the popularity of nativity plays. No-one seriously thinks that being a Christian or a member of the established Church is the same thing as being British today."

Andrew Graystone, director of the Church and Media Network, believes that this increasing ignorance of Christianity and its tenets is causing the problem. But he says the responsibility for this lack of knowledge in the wider community can only be laid at the door of Christians: we can't blame society for not knowing about Christianity if we haven't told them.

"One of the things that's happened is that Christians have spent the last generations talking to themselves," he says. "We forgot that we had a job to do in speaking to the rest of the world and listening to it. We thought we only had to talk with our own kind. We got out of touch."

Like Andrea Minichello Williams, Graystone sees the recent court cases as "a tragedy", but for different reasons. "This is an age of more opportunity to tell Christians' stories than any other time in history," he says. "The channels of communication are more open than they have been. We are no longer dependent on a few people sitting in offices in London to decide what stories get told. We can tell our own stories."

"I want Christians to shut up about defending their rights and to speak

up about serving others. If we don't, after a while Christians will become famous for nothing but standing up for their own rights. But we should want to be famous for laying down our lives, forgiving the unforgivable, going the extra mile and standing up for other people's rights."

That way, he says, we will be engaging with society and creating the kind of headlines that we want to see.

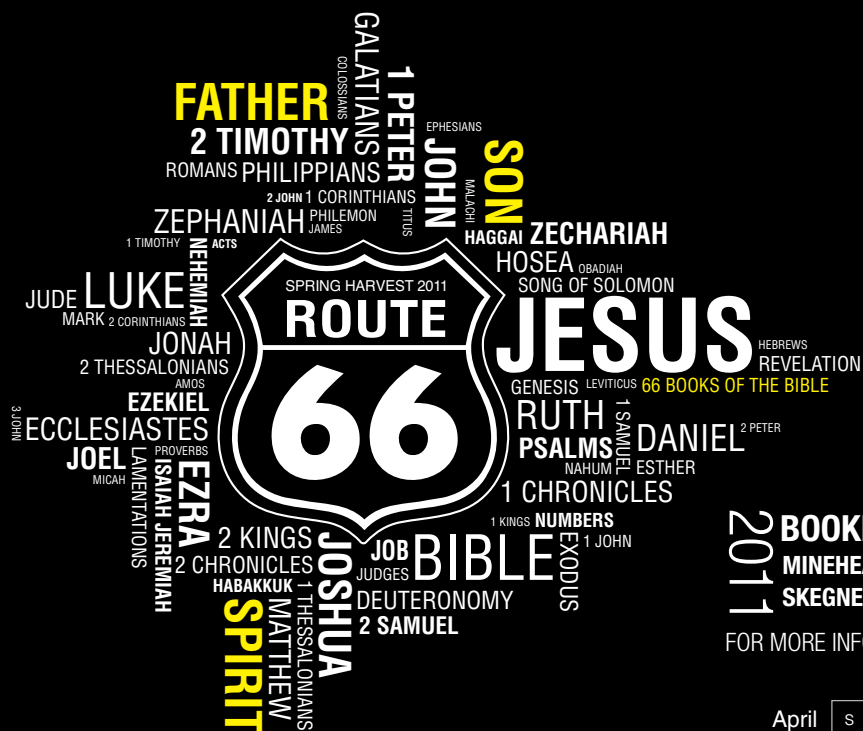
Stephen Cave, the Alliance's director for Northern Ireland, said, "Even with our different approaches to these issues, most Christians agree that going to court is the last resort. As a community we need to support the individuals involved, while at the same time finding the response that will most glorify God. Where possible we should engage our society in conversation rather than confrontation."

► For further information, contact Theos ([theosthinktank.co.uk](http://theosthinktank.co.uk)), Churches Media Council ([churchesmediacouncil.org.uk](http://churchesmediacouncil.org.uk)) and Christian Concern for our Nation ([ccfon.org](http://ccfon.org)).

## 10 tips...

- Don't expect people to know much about Christianity. Be ready to explain.
- Be wise and act appropriately to the situation.
- Ask your church leader to train the congregation in mission work.
- Understand the culture that surrounds you: watch TV, films and read the papers.
- Meet people where they are: offer to help in the local community.
- Spend time volunteering.
- Ensure that you have enough time outside the church walls.
- Defend the rights of others before your own.
- Be positive: Christianity has a lot to offer.
- Use language that people understand, not Christian jargon.





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– Tom Wright, Bishop of Durham

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# A sporting chance



**Britain is heading into an unprecedented period as the centre of world sports, as London hosts the 2012 Olympics, Glasgow stages the 2014 Commonwealth Games and the World Cups for rugby in 2015 and cricket in 2019 both come to England. *David Oakley* looks at the challenges this presents for the Church...**

**M**ajor sporting events can be a source of contention, with political debate about the economic and social benefits on one hand and family arguments over the television remote control on the other. And for churches, there's often a debate about the value of engagement with sporting festivals, especially with the extensive media coverage and sporting obsession in our country. But all of these issues are likely to intensify as the UK enters what's being called a "golden decade of sport", hosting several of the major sporting events over the next 10 years.

Over the past two decades, many churches have been exploring a variety of outreach centred around major sports events. These festivals can help churches address social issues, evangelise fans, educate children, build bridges to the marginalised and reach out to young people in their communities.

## Large-scale outreach

This summer's FIFA World Cup in South Africa is seeing outreach take place on a massive scale. Within the host nation, churches and mission organisations are tapping into a wide range of possibilities. For example, the Alliance member Ambassadors in Sport has been helping to restore vulnerable broken lives through the Gospel and football while building a legacy beyond the event. To do this, they have trained hundreds of Christian coaches to reach out to soccer-mad – and often desperately poor – young people with the Gospel while addressing issues such as HIV/Aids and human trafficking.

As the World Cup builds to the final on 11 July, Christian organisations will work with hundreds of South African churches and

individuals to make the most of opportunities to share Christ both within communities and with visiting fans from around the world. This includes local churches running sporting events and training camps. And Christian players will have the chance to share their faith at concerts, meetings and on radio stations running special sporting programmes produced by the Alliance member 2K Plus International Sports Media. Such top footballers as Lucio (Brazil), Marcos Senna (Spain) and Kaká

**'Sport has the power to change the world, the power to inspire, the power to unite people in a way that little else can. It speaks to people in a language they understand.'**

*– Nelson Mandela*

(Brazil) talk about their football and faith in 2K Plus' series of 12 one-minute radio spots called *2010 Football Shorts*.

And it's not just happening in South Africa. Here in the UK, churches are making the most of World Cup fever by holding football tournaments, family fun days, schools programmes and sports quizzes, as well as distributing literature and showing World Cup matches on big screens to reach out to their communities.

Some churches take the big-screen experience even further by having barbecues or asking local Christians to act as football pundits and share their testimonies. Some have even been turning their





Local children participate in Ambassadors in Sport football tours in South Africa and the UK.

Ambassadors in Sport



buildings into mock-up football stadiums where local children and families are invited to join a match.

## Social concern

Increased Christian engagement at major sporting events also brings greater awareness of social issues. For example, Christians are expressing concerns for local subsistence businesses in South Africa who potentially could lose their trading spots to multinational sponsors during the World Cup. Additionally, the threat of human trafficking to support the sex trade is a real fear in many match-hosting cities, and churches have been vocal on this issue.

In two years time, all these issues will be felt in London and the UK during the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. And the opportunities to share the Gospel will be the same as well.

Good preparation work is already underway to help churches embrace Olympic ministry possibilities under the banner *More Than Gold*. Past experiences of Christian

**‘Soccer has become the new religion... Just like when someone insults Islam or Christianity, they go all out like it is life and death.’**  
– Hosni Mubarak



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engagement at major sporting events have been drawn upon to provide a balance of outreach and social justice engagement around the 2012 Games.

In addition, *More Than Gold* regional envisioning and training events will be held this autumn to help churches to establish sustainable outreach initiatives around major sporting competitions. And lessons learned in 2012 will be transferred to other championship tournaments, including a possible England-hosted FIFA World Cup in 2018.

### On your marks...

And there's plenty of work to do. Many UK-based sports ministries offer training and support for churches that want to reach out to children and young people through holiday activities with sporting themes such as soccer holiday clubs or church-based community games programmes. Christians can also show God's love by hosting overseas athlete families in their homes and offering pastoral support through chaplaincy programmes. Supporting all this activity is a prayer movement that's accompanied by a variety of media tools.

In other words, there is a wide programme of mission opportunities for churches before, during and after each major global sporting event. But it's important to remember two lessons that emerged from Canadian church leaders as they reflected on outreach at this year's Vancouver Winter Olympics. First, church leaders were shocked by the massive national engagement of the Canadian population far beyond the Games city. And because they were not prepared for such widespread interest, church leaders across the country wished they had done more preparation in order to reach out during the Games.

The Bible records how major celebration events like Passover and Purim were very much part of the Judeo-Christian faith. Jesus used the

events to reveal more of who He was to the gathered crowds (see John 7). And the Apostle Paul may well have maximised his tent-making evangelistic opportunities during his extended stay at Corinth during the time of the Isthmian Games (1 Corinthians 9.24-27).

As the World Cup concludes and the Olympics and Commonwealth Games approach, my hope is that guidelines drawn from the use of major events in the Bible and the lessons learned from previous global sporting festivals will help UK church leaders respond positively to the unprecedented opportunity offered by our own "golden decade of sport".

### Take it further...

- **Keep up with the Alliance's Forum for Change sports cluster group:** [eauk.org/forumforchange](http://eauk.org/forumforchange)
- **Find out more about sports-based Christian agencies in the UK:** [uksportsministries.org](http://uksportsministries.org)
- **Listen to 2010 Football Shorts:** [2kplus.org.uk](http://2kplus.org.uk)
- **Host a community-based sports event:** [globalcommunitygames.com](http://globalcommunitygames.com)
- **Look into Ambassadors in Sport training programmes:** [ais-uk.org](http://ais-uk.org)
- **Start planning for London 2012 Olympic outreach:** [www.morethangold.org.uk](http://www.morethangold.org.uk)

*David Oakley is the CEO of Ambassadors in Sport and co-ordinator of the Alliance's Forum for Change sport cluster group.*



## TLG JOB OPPORTUNITIES

### Fast Track Intern Programme 2010

Fast Track - The TLG Intern programme, is a unique opportunity to undertake a gap year of accelerated leadership and career development within a pioneering Christian charity. As an organisation that is under continual expansion, we are looking to recruit exceptional individuals aged 21 and over who have a strong and vibrant Christian Faith combined with a passion for young people, to work and develop alongside senior managers and wider staff team.

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**Location:** TLG National Support Centre (Yorkshire).

**If you would like to apply for any of these positions, require any further information or are interested in any other roles at TLG, then please call 0845 5083242 or check out the vacancies section at [www.tlg.org.uk](http://www.tlg.org.uk).**

TLG is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. The successful applicant will be required to undertake an Enhanced Disclosure via the CRB. TLG are keen to appoint a team which reflects the diversity of the communities we work in



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## True blood and true love

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

**V**ampires are currently one of the biggest phenomena in popular culture. They are central to hit television series like *True Blood*, *Being Human* and *The Vampire Diaries*, but leading the pack is Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* books and their film adaptations. These are just the most obvious examples of a recent surge in interest after the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* a decade ago.

But of course the popularity of vampires in fiction goes back to John Polidori's short story *The Vampyre* (1819) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). Since then the folk-tale origins of vampires have been

overlaid with all kinds of newer traditions, including fangs, sensitivity to sunlight and having no reflection.

Meyer gives them some new twists. Her vampires are not afraid of being in the sunlight, except when humans are present, because the light reveals their "true nature" – not ugly monsters but possessing a beautiful glittering skin. A more important variation is that Edward Cullen (Robert Pattinson), the vampire hero of these stories, comes from a family that has learned to control its lust for human blood. They call themselves "vegetarians", meaning that they feed off animals, not humans.

### Films

#### WHATEVER WORKS (opens 25 Jun)

Woody Allen's latest comedy continues his exploration of morality as cranky genius Boris (Larry David) grapples with modern day angst about health, finance, politics and the environment. Along the way, it also touches on religion (both Boris' Jewish heritage and another character's fundamentalist Christianity), which of course Allen dismisses with a well-placed joke or two, concluding rather nihilistically that, "if it helps you get through life: whatever works". Intriguingly, the film's emotional undercurrents and solid acting subvert this message, concluding that life has meaning when we discover the ability to give and receive love. RC

#### LEAVING (9 Jul)

This fascinating French drama features another astounding performance from Kristin Scott Thomas as a woman who leaves her family for another man (Sergi Lopez). What makes this film notable is the way it tells the story from her perspective, forcing us to understand and even sympathise with the woman who would otherwise be the villain of the story. The result is a raw and emotional film that's sometimes devastating in the ways it challenges us to find compassion for this flawed woman who is making painful decisions that affect everyone round her. RC

#### THE SECRET IN THEIR EYES (13 Aug)

Winner of this year's foreign film Oscar, this lushly shot Argentine drama is the literally breathtaking story of a newly retired judge who decides to write a novel but can't get a violent 25-year-old murder case out of his head. As his memories wash over him, he starts to realise the significance of the choices he has made over the years. This is a startlingly involving film that helps us understand that the only thing that we can't change about ourselves is our passion and that we can't actually live if we're still preoccupied with the past. RC

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**Endless love:** Edward and Bella (Robert Pattinson and Kristen Stewart) in *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse* (main photo), and Sookie and Bill (Anna Paquin and Stephen Moyer) in *True Blood* (right), are looking for an eternal connection.

This takes us to the heart of the tension that pervades *The Twilight Saga*: deep-seated physical urges are at odds with an ethical sense that they should be kept in check. Edward and his family struggle with instincts that could reduce them to the monstrous behaviour of other vampires.

### Inner conflict

Bella (Kristen Stewart), the saga's human heroine, experiences similar inner conflict, although she doesn't have the same strength of will to resist her longings. She is completely infatuated with Edward and will risk anything to be with him, despite how obvious it is that a human-vampire romance will have bad consequences.

Philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer said we are driven to reproduce, so "the lover shuts his eyes to all the qualities repugnant to him, overlooks everything, misjudges everything and blinds himself for ever to the object of his passion". Bella certainly demonstrates exactly this in the first film, insisting that she doesn't care that Edward is a monster who has killed people.

But although the films don't make it very explicit, there must be more to their love than mere animal magnetism. If not, these movies would follow most others about teen love and make the relationship sexual (that's coming, but not until the fourth film).

Vampire stories have long been a metaphor for sexual desire and gratification, so the fact that Edward and Bella abstain from sex, and he from drinking her blood, is counter-cultural. It's one of many ways in which Meyer's Mormon background shapes her narrative.

### Together forever

Bella and Edward are each convinced that the other is their soul mate, that they could never love another person as truly and deeply. They want to be together forever, just like any young couple that has fallen madly in love. As far as Bella is concerned, the solution is easy: all Edward needs to do is bite her and make her like him. But he is reluctant to oblige, and with good cause: to do so would, he believes, destroy her soul and condemn her to hell. At the end of the second book, *New Moon*, he finally agrees to her request, but decides to wait for a few years.

The main attraction of *The Twilight Saga* may well be the brooding, unfulfilled longing for an idealised, apparently unobtainable lover. But why the wider preoccupation with vampires? Perhaps part of the answer is that when our instinctive longing to be connected with spiritual reality is obstructed by the prevailing secularism of our culture, it still comes creeping out of the shadows in some misshapen



**It seems that we can't stop telling – or lapping up – stories about the supernatural or spiritual**

way. It seems that we can't stop telling – or lapping up – stories about the supernatural or spiritual, and about humans becoming immortal, even if through terrible means.

The love that Edward and Bella yearn to share, once she sorts out the place of werewolf Jacob Black (Taylor Lautner) in her affections, is what we all long for: exclusive, intimate and forever. It's how we feel true love should be because it echoes precisely what we were made for: an exclusive, intimate, eternal relationship with God Himself.

► The third *Twilight* film, *Eclipse*, opens in UK cinemas on 9 July. Further discussions of Christian themes in pop culture can be found at: [damaris.org](http://damaris.org)

Tony Watkins is managing editor of *Culturewatch.org*



## Books

### JULIET, NAKED

by Nick Hornby (Penguin)

For 15 years, Duncan and Annie have lived with a third person in their relationship: Tucker Crowe, a reclusive American singer with whom Duncan is fixated. The latest novel from Nick Hornby is a poignant, gently humorous tale about middle-aged regret, as well as a satire on how the internet enables us to feed our obsessions. As Duncan, Annie and Tucker are forced to reassess the ground they've built their lives on, we are called to question where we find meaning and whether it is possible to redeem our wasted years. *SL*

### THE AGE OF ABSURDITY

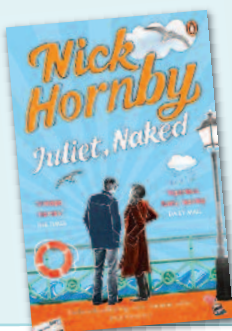
by Michael Foley (Simon & Schuster)

In an age where people increasingly believe that they deserve more, the most valuable commodity of all – happiness – continues to elude us. Holidays and shopping centres use potential-fulfilment as bait, self-help books and advertisements insist that success is easy, and the cool and famous insinuate that they are satisfied. Our innovative world offers immersion, distraction, collaboration and company, but are these conducive to happiness? Foley delves into philosophy, religion and science to uncover the ironies of post-modern society and to discover why modern life makes it hard to be happy. *HP*

### ANGELOLOGY

by Danielle Trussoni (Penguin)

A young nun and an art historian find themselves at the centre of an age-old conflict and must race to discover a hidden ancient artefact before their enemies find it. These are not any old enemies; they're Nephilim, powerful descendants of the union of fallen angels and humans. Trussoni's first novel portrays a world in which they stand behind the great evils of human history, resisted only by a secret society of angelologists. The story combines mystery, adventure, myths, art history and theology in a tale of good and evil with a surprising final twist. *TW*







## Your character is the more tentative of the two.

I was and still am ignorant of the Muslim faith, but so was the character. Part of her feeling of fear is because the atrocity was carried out by a Muslim. When she first meets Ousmane, she refuses his help. In the cinema there's often a gasp from the audience when she first comes into contact with Ousemane because she doesn't shake his hand. But the audience has the advantage on her; they know that he's an innocent man looking for his son. But she doesn't know this. All she knows is that her daughter is missing and here's this man who has a photo of her daughter at a mosque, which she knew absolutely nothing about, and he might know where her daughter is.

## Do you think Elisabeth is facing her own racism there?

Not really. She lives in Guernsey in the Channel Islands, and she's totally alone in this predominantly Muslim part of London. She's frightened, and that kind of reaction is born out of ignorance. If she had been asked before coming to London if she was prejudiced in any way, she'd say "Good gracious, no! I'm a churchgoer. Don't be so ridiculous." And if her daughter had called and said, "I'm going to be marrying a black African," she might have said, "Well hold on a minute dear, let's talk about this." But halfway through the film, she's longing for her daughter to call. It puts things like prejudice in perspective.

## What was the filming process like?

Rachid shot it like a documentary, and had us interacting with real people in the streets. When I lived in that area of London, where we

were filming, it was an Asian area. It's now an African Muslim area, and the people were so friendly toward us. It was actually like being in a different land and finding a welcome there. It was lovely. And you see that the arc of Elisabeth's journey goes full circle when she and Ousmane are totally embracing.

## It's certainly an important message.

We think about Muslim extremists committing the bombing, but all faiths were killed. But the film isn't about the bombings. Rachid Bouchareb made a movie about two people overcoming big barriers to find common ground. And I think he should be applauded for making that film. RC

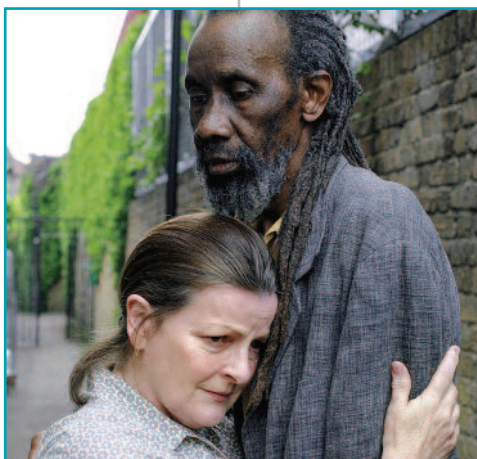
► *London River* opens in cinemas on 9 July.

## Bringing people together

**R**leased to coincide with the fifth anniversary of the 7/7 bombings in London, French filmmaker Rachid Bouchareb's *London River* takes a very personal approach as two very different parents search for their children in the aftermath. Elisabeth (Brenda Blethyn) is from Guernsey while Ousmane (the late Sotigui Kouyate, who won best actor at the Berlinale for this role) comes from West Africa. Blethyn found making the film to be a challenging experience....

### idea: Were you nervous about making a film about 7/7?

**Blethyn:** When I was first asked, it seemed too recent, like it was not the right thing to be making a film about. It was quite recent history, and it was raw. It's still very raw now. But then I met Rachid and I found him to be a very sensitive man. The bombings are just a catalyst that brings people together from different cultures. He was really interested in bringing together two characters from completely different backgrounds - cultures, religions, languages - and just seeing how they get on. He was also interested in the actors meeting in that same way; we didn't know each other, and we came from completely different backgrounds. So it was an interesting process all around.



**'There's a gasp from the audience when she doesn't shake his hand'**

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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 seventh resolution...

### We owe it to each other, in making public comment on the alleged statements of our fellow Christians, first to confer directly with them and to establish what was actually intended.

**T**his resolution continues: "Then to commend what we can, to weigh the proportional significance of what we perceive to be in error, and to put a charitable construction on what is doubtful, expressing all with courtesy,

humility and graciousness."

As a child I enjoyed the game of Chinese whispers. We would whisper a phrase from ear to ear and would all be curious as to the effect the retellings would have on the original statement. Lots of fun.

In the adult world, Chinese whispers is a metaphor for the cumulative error that occurs when a story or statement travels without accurate reference to the original saying. In its journey, inaccuracies are picked up and the content gets distorted. The process and outcome are hardly ever fun.

Recently I read a Christian book review, and the first thing that struck me wasn't the content but the tone. The review bore all the qualities of an irritated rant, quoting ad hoc phrases of the authors and distorting their intent. The reviewer had neither demonstrated a professional nor a Christian approach to what should be an informative, evaluative exercise. Moreover, this was not a whisper shared by a few, but an article read by many.

#### Words travel quickly

These days our means of communication are varied, sophisticated and often speedy. We whisper to one another in emails, blogs, media interviews, articles, conversations, tweets, videos and sermons. The speed by which our whispers travel is potentially fast and the number of recipients frequently beyond count.

This is all the more reason to monitor the principles and values we adopt when we publicly comment on the alleged sayings or writings of our fellow believers.

When we study the Scriptures we seek to discover the author's intended meaning. We take great care to look at the text and the context. We examine the flow of the argument, take historical considerations into account and look at the literary genre. All these facets are vital in seeking to establish what the author is intending to communicate in our aim to interpret the word of God. It takes time, dedication, love and great care.

Similar principles apply when we engage with the words of God's people. When we publicly comment on the



**We need to consider the text and its context**

The Alliance *Notice Board* (online)

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## The cumulative effect of our whispers does not need to develop into a roar

alleged statements of our fellow Christians, we equally need to consider the text and its context. In order to contribute constructively, we need to be clear about what was actually said and where and when the statement was made. We may also need to confer with the source to clarify what was actually intended before we are able to draft a wise and meaningful response.

Yes, this takes time, love and consideration. The author of Ecclesiastes persuades us to take great care in searching to find the right words. Calmness, after all, can lay great error to rest, and wise words that are gracious carry substantial public weight (see 7.19, 10.4 and 12.9). This also means that the cumulative effect of our whispers does not need to develop into a roar.

### Wisdom from heaven

When James describes the qualities of the "wisdom that comes from heaven", he lists a sequence of virtues. Such wisdom is pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere (James 3.17). This reminds us that our public dialogue does not merely concern the actual content. Rather, the manner in which we respond is vital as we seek to be the community that reflects godly character and pursues God's peace.

I have seen some masterly crafted

statements, the choice of words, the courtesy and the timing of which demonstrate a thoroughly considerate exercise that interlocks grace and truth and reveals the *shalom* of God. Such reflections carry weight and convey something of the authority alluded to in Ecclesiastes 7.19: "Wisdom makes one wise man more powerful than 10 rulers in a city."

There are also examples of where the Christian witness has been the very opposite of what Christianity is supposed to offer. As James Davison Hunter writes in his book *To Change the World*, "Clearly, if Christians cannot extend grace and love through faithful presence within the body of believers, they certainly will not be able to extend grace to those outside it."

While we may address issues within the Christian community, the wider society is also listening in. And the wisdom inspired by God's Spirit will help us to commend one another where we can and be considerate, measured and courteous as we reflect on arguments we perceive to be incorrect or doubtful.

We owe it not merely to one another; we also owe it to Him as we seek to fill society with the testimony of Christ and honour Him. In all "smaller matters", we have the opportunity to show that we never lose sight of the wider narrative, which is the redemptive-historical context.

So in tricky situations in which we need to comment on sayings of our fellow Christians, we have an opportunity to communicate in ways that are wisely crafted and stay close to a timeless truth. I am curious what the cumulative effect of such whispers could be. *Shalom*.

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

### How theologically sound is it to make a pact with God?

While considering this question, I began to realise how pact-like many of my prayers sound. The formula is simple: "God, if you help me do well in my exams, I'll start going to church"; "Take away the pain and I'll believe you exist"; "If you help me get that job, I'll give some money to charity".

We find them in the Bible too. Jacob promised to give God a tenth of everything he owned if God kept him safe (Genesis 28.20-22); and Hannah, promised that if God gave her a child, she would dedicate that child to serve God (1 Samuel 1.11). They both lived up to their side of the bargains.

On the other hand, I don't believe that pact-prayers create the relational dynamic God wants to have with us. Recognising that God is powerful and can change things is good, and it is also good to make and keep promises to God, but pacts are somewhat precarious, because we might think we can manipulate God into doing what we want Him to do.

Business relationships are often pact-like, and that's appropriate. Healthy relationships between family and friends tend to be different; love exists, gifts are given and good deeds are done, but out of love, not because of a contractual agreement.

Surely, this is how our relationship with God should be: bring Him our requests, knowing that He is powerful while acknowledging His wisdom and will. I believe that this is the sort of relational dynamic God desires. After all, we must never forget that He has already done so much for us.

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



## DVDs



### THE LAST STATION (Optimum)

A lively look at the final tumultuous months in the life of Russian author Leo Tolstoy, filmmaker Michael Hoffman's modernised biopic kind of obscures its serious themes with sassy comedy and romantic entanglements. But amid the farcical goings on, there's an insightful look at the lifelong commitment of marriage, nicely played with scene-stealing mischief by Oscar-nominees Christopher Plummer and Helen Mirren. And the film also explores youthful idealism through the eyes of a man (by comparison, a slightly bland James McAvoy) whose worldview is severely challenged by one of Tolstoy's fanatical followers (Paul Giamatti). RC

## Music



### LIGHTS by Ellie Goulding (Polydor)

Rising star Goulding won the BBC Sound of 2010 and received a Critics Choice Brit Award. Her debut album is textured and emotive, with a diverse backdrop of keyboards, piano, drums, saxophone and guitars enhancing the ethereal, varied quality of her voice. Studded with insights into love and life, the songs expose the dark emptiness of serial dating and glimmer with the hope of a love that inspires and endures. They also shine a light on the human experience of disenchantment and draw our eye to the source of the problem: our heart. HP

### SIGH NO MORE

by Mumford and Sons (Island)

This debut album from the indie-folk group entered the UK album charts at No 11 last year. Joyful and unrestrained, full of infectious energy, their music is a breath of fresh air. They may be a "secular" band, but themes of grace, hope and renewal resonate in their lyrics, which speak openly of a longing to connect with the creator. The title song culminates in the words, "Love will not dismay, betray or enslave you / it will set you free" – a refreshing lyric for a cynical culture. SL



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## See you in court (or not)

General Director *Steve Clifford* finds a more biblical example for engaging with our society...

**M**y local newspaper recently reported on Peter Aspinall's nasty accident. The handyman fell some four metres from a tree in the grounds of Egerton House Hotel near Bolton, resulting in a broken heel and damaged ligaments. The accident was somewhat bizarre in that Peter had apparently cut down the branch on which he had leaned his ladder. Yet the report indicated that the hotel was to be fined £1,000 for failing to carry out a risk assessment, and Peter was pursuing a civil claim for compensation.

I confess that I have managed to do many embarrassing things over the course of my life, most of which I've tried to keep secret. I certainly wouldn't have reported my employer, expected them to produce a risk assessment or gone to court anticipating compensation for my own lack of forward planning.

It seems to me that society as a whole is falling into the arms of lawyers, with newspapers full of court cases, employment tribunals and medical malpractice suits. Rather than having conversations, perhaps the default position has become to go to court. Lawyers get richer, and society gets poorer in more ways than simply financial; there has to be a better way, especially for us as a Christian community.

I am grateful for the work many Christian lawyers are doing representing Christians in some very difficult situations of employment, religious freedom and conscience. I know that on many occasions there really is no alternative other than going to court. But I would still love for us to try to find another way.

I wonder if we as Christians can sometimes appear to have a furrowed brow, a pointing finger and a somewhat limited outlook on life. And of course we can sometimes appear homophobic as well. Can we also sometimes be guilty of playing the same power games as everyone else – far from the example of Jesus?

### A better model

But Jesus modelled a completely different way of relating to those who opposed Him. He refused to play power games with either the religious or political authorities of the day. He redefined Messianic expectations, preferring the title "servant" to "king". Faced with a court appearance, He laid down His life rather than fighting for it.

The early Church seemed to espouse His example. When dragged into court they used the opportunity to preach the Gospel with the expectation that beating and imprisonment would follow.

My question to myself, the Alliance and to the whole Christian community is this: can we find another way of engaging with the authorities and those in power?

Jesus constantly challenges us. "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you..." (Matthew 5.38ff). In 21st century Britain, what could this better model look like? Jesus'

teaching was never weak. He never passively capitulated to injustice or violence, but modelled another way of dealing with conflict.

Going the extra mile, turning the other cheek, giving away your cloak were not simply acts of submission. This was about assertively going further than required to illustrate the unfairness of the system.

My friend and colleague Stephen Cave, director of the Alliance in Northern Ireland, recently reflected on the contentious issues that still face Northern Ireland's divided communities. He concluded, "The law and the courts can never get us out of our troubles. The law is a blunt instrument and, as Gandhi once said, 'an eye for an eye' will simply leave us with a whole load of blind people."



Ann Clifford

**Jesus modelled another way of dealing with conflict.**

### A battle worth fighting?

So how do we respond when faced with events and issues that challenge our behaviour and undermine our freedom of conscience? We should first ask ourselves if this is a battle we really need to fight. Historically we have chosen the wrong issues to die for and have perhaps failed to fight some crucially important battles.

Let's also recognise that some of those we might regard as enemies could become friends. There are many people of good will in our councils, schools, health authorities, businesses and workplaces, who might not hold our beliefs but share our desires for the wellbeing of our communities. Understanding this and taking time to understand them could bring effective collaboration.

There are unprecedented opportunities for the Church to provide services, education and care, supported and funded by national and local government. Do we miss opportunities to engage with each other because we speak a different language?

Can we look for and actively work towards a more imaginative way of dealing with conflict? Could our appeal be for mediators and peacemakers to help us find ways forward with respect and sometimes compromise before we get to the court?

And can we acknowledge that freedom of conscience – and behaviour in line with that conscience – must be extended to those who disagree with us? Let's battle for the rights of others as well as our own.

Back in the 1850s, the newly formed Alliance sent a delegation to Turkey to meet with the sultan. Their mandate was simple: to appeal for religious freedom, not just for the Christian community but for all faiths. They were successful in their appeal, and numerous deputations of appeals were made throughout the 19th century.

As we look to the uncertainties of the future and the opportunities that present themselves to us, let us do so with a sense of confidence, not fear, recognising that, whatever comes our way, we are not on our own. And through God's grace we can find that elusive, more positive way forward.



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