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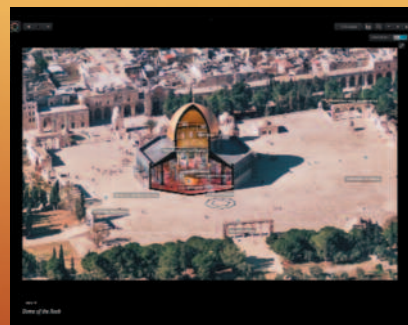
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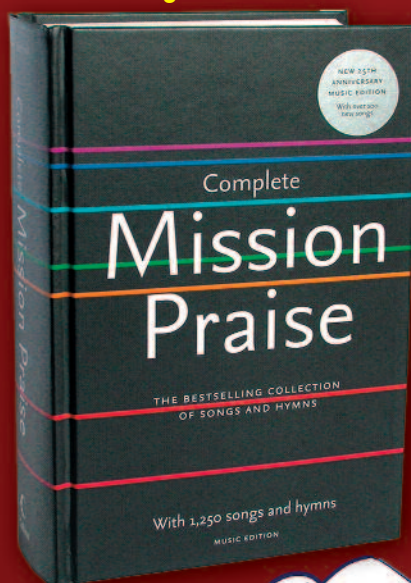


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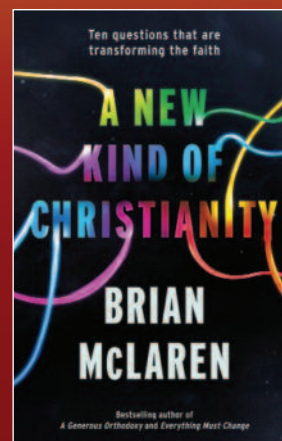
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Editor's Note

For the most part, I try to keep up with new technology. This isn't because I have any love for gadgets (although some of them are rather cool), but rather because I always hope the next innovation will somehow make my life easier. Although this has yet to happen.

For some reason, the almost blindingly fast development of computers, mobile phones and the internet have only added to our daily pressure. Instead of having a few days to reply to a letter from your mum, you now need to immediately send her a text and then write a longer email when you get home. When was the last time you sat down and had a long think about what you would write to someone?

On the other hand, all of these new forms of communication have given us an amazing new array of ministry opportunities. We can share our faith both one-on-one and with wide audiences in an astonishing number of ways. And by the time you finish reading this issue of *idea* you can be sure someone will have come up with something new.

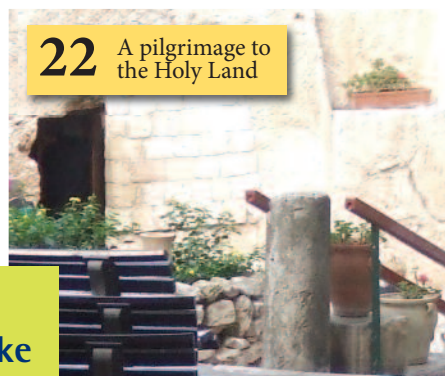
In this issue, we take a look at the challenges new media present to churches and mission agencies (p16), including a rather scary glimpse into the daily life of an Alliance techno-whizz (p20). We also look ahead to Easter (p22) and the upcoming General Election (p14).

And as always, we'd love to hear what you think about the changing face of *idea*. At least some things still come printed on paper. Although you really should check out our new website too.

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evangelical alliance
uniting to change society



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Are more missing?

The article *A Missing Generation?* (Jan/Feb) refers to the falling number of 20-somethings attending church. But isn't the writer missing something else – another generation? Those 520,000 young people who were in church in 1985 are now 45–55 years old. Where are they now?

They are certainly not in many of the churches I know, and the absence of that generation which, in the past, could be relied on to fill most of the leadership, pastoral, practical and administrative roles in their local churches is causing considerable problems. Without them, there will soon be few churches for the 20-somethings to attend. How do we get them back again?

Ray Pedlingham, Welford-on-Avon, Warks

Do Christians care?

John Bristow (*Your Voice*, Jan/Feb) rejects "this global warming bandwagon". Arthur Curtis accepts global warming, as do the majority of scientists. Surely it is the duty of Christians to care what goes on? I once attended a talk on books at my church, and the speaker asked how many of us read the paper. I was amazed that only my hand went up.

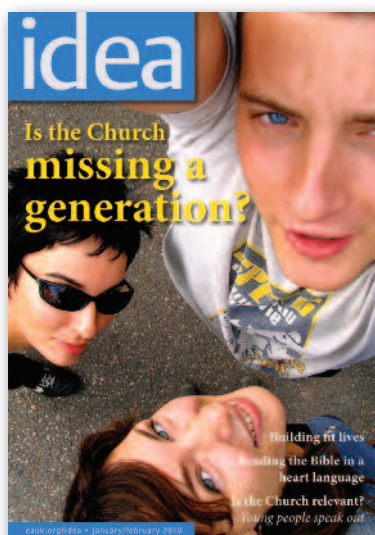
We needn't doubt the effects of pollution, but maybe it's getting too late already; so many millions of trees have disappeared, so much grass has gone, so many fertilisers are still insisted on that I really wonder how many people have grasped the message at all. And even as we are realising the effects of industrialisation, China is wanting more and more of it.

The good news is that the maximum number of minds are focussed on the problem, and communications have never been better. The Lord has promised He will not destroy our race. Will He bail us out when we're rushing towards our own destruction?

Deryn Buckley, Birkenhead

Not so quick

I was very interested to read the comments from John Bristow and Arthur Curtis. As with Mr Bristow, I think the Church should not be too quick to join the "save the world" campaigns as the damage has already been done with Adam and Eve when sin was introduced into the world. The money spent on these earth-saving campaigns and changes would be better



spent on the "fundamental point", as pointed out by Mr Curtis, that people are suffering around the world. I believe that this is because of the curse on the planet following the fall of man, not increased levels of carbon dioxide.

Jon King, Aberystwyth

Finding balance

Even on the letters page of *idea*, climate change seems to be both a bandwagon and a political weapon. I believe the world has gone through many cycles of hot and cold. I also agree that the world needs to conserve its resources to stop plundering for greed, and that our children need to be breathing less pollution.

But everything seems to be being exaggerated for political ends and there

are many who love to join something to protest against to keep from feeling powerless. Balance could be a good guideline.

Barbara Dixon, Huddersfield

Get into the Bible

It's great to hear in *idea* magazine about the Biblefresh initiative for 2011. I'm a committed Christian, but have long struggled to get into the Bible. Somehow it doesn't feel like a book where you start at the beginning and work your way through to the end? Perhaps that is where I'm going wrong.

And my guess is that I'm not alone in finding the Bible tricky. Yet I know that the Bible is central to our faith and that reading it enables us, as Christians, to find direction and hope. So, I'm looking forward to hearing more about Biblefresh. I'm hoping that it will be something that can make a tangible difference to my understanding of the Bible, and won't just be another Church-based scheme.

If that turns out to be true, 2011 could be an exciting year.

Lara J Bates, Lincoln

A question...

I notice that in several places, after a first full-spelled-out woman's name, she is referred to thereafter simply by her surname. Examples from the Jan/Feb issue: Kay Cathcart on p13 and the late Sheena Gillies on p15. Meanwhile, men are treated differently: The Andy Herrick of p23 remains Andy later.

EDITOR'S REPLY: Don't worry, this has nothing to do with gender. It is a journalistic style issue. In news stories, second references always use the last name, just as these stories are written in the past tense (Cathcart said). By contrast, features are written in the present case (Andy says) and people are referred to by their first names.

idea

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

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

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Christians respond to tragedy in Haiti

Alliance members were among the first groups on the scene in the wake of the destructive 12 January earthquake in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti. What is being called one of the biggest disasters in human history struck the poorest nation in the Western hemisphere, crippling its government and police and leaving millions injured and homeless. At press time, the death toll has been estimated at 200,000 with 1.5 million homeless, and relief work is expected to continue for months, even years.

Thousands of UK churches set aside 17 January as a day to pray and raise funds for Disasters Emergency Committee. As DEC members, Alliance member aid agencies World Vision and Tearfund were some of the first on the ground. "With so many buildings destroyed and so many people made homeless, the need for shelter and basic essentials such as food and water is extremely urgent," said Tearfund Chief Executive Matthew Frost. "We are sending disaster specialists to help our partners assess immediate needs, including emergency shelter, clean water and sanitation, nutrition and health care."

Especially devastating

Mark Bulpitt, World Vision UK's head of emergencies, said, "An earthquake of this magnitude anywhere in the world is of major concern, but it is especially devastating in Haiti, where 85 per cent of the population struggles to survive on little more than a pound a day. Haitians are acutely vulnerable because of poor

infrastructure and extreme poverty."

Mission Aviation Fellowship, which has three aircraft and a staff of 21 stationed in Haiti, has been coordinating air transport for relief agencies. Working with organisations like Samaritan's Purse, MAF has delivered emergency supplies, medicines and clean water.

Particularly vulnerable in a situation like this are people who are disabled, and CBM UK has been specifically working in this field. National Director Dr Bill McAllister said, "For every death of a child

'Haitians are acutely vulnerable because of poor infrastructure and extreme poverty'

during a disaster, three are left injured and many of these injuries can, and do, lead to permanent disability without the proper medical care. Our international programmes staff estimate that the number of injured children, men and women demanding hospital services will increase ten-fold."

Meanwhile, Sheila Leech, from Shirley,

West Midlands, led a rapid emergency medical response from HCJB Global's hospital in Ecuador. Director of the charity's international healthcare work, Leech arrived with a team of doctors, an anaesthetist and an engineer. They immediately started work at the Baptist Haiti Mission Hospital, where the first order of business was to get clean water flowing again.

Martin Harrison, a water engineer from Harrogate, said, "Many hundreds of patients are flooding a small hospital with limited facilities. I am mucking in with whatever. I helped fix up a broken leg and am generally running around to make sure all the medical team have what they need to do their job." Amid the casualties, several babies have been delivered by emergency C-section, which the hospital is not normally equipped to undertake.

Mercy Ships volunteers also headed to Port-au-Prince to help with medical emergencies and construction work, with the understanding that it will take months, even years, for Haiti to recover.

"Please support our partners in prayer, as they themselves face the immense scale of disaster, the trauma, the destruction and loss of life that this earthquake has brought," said Matthew Frost. Christians are urged not to forget about the situation in Haiti just because it's no longer in the daily headlines. dec.org.uk

Aid stopped in Somalia

Almost a million people in Somalia may face starvation, according to humanitarian agency World Vision, which is urging Christians to pray for the situation. This follows the announcement in January by World Food Programme (WFP) to temporarily suspend food distributions in six Somali towns due to an increase in threats against staff.

The largest distributor of WFP food aid in Somalia, World Vision says only urgent action by the international community will prevent humanitarian disaster. "The international community must engage quickly with all factions in



Terry Mitchell

the Somalia conflict to allow peace to return and the resumption of the distribution of urgent humanitarian aid by World Vision and other aid organisations," said World Vision Somalia's Kevin Mackey. "Continued isolation of Somalia by the international community will result in catastrophe." worldvision.org.uk

In brief...



CYCLING FOR STREET KIDS. Alliance member Toybox is holding a Cycle Challenge in August, putting together a team of 50 riders who will pedal from the Lake District to Newcastle, following the route of Hadrian's Wall, to raise funds for street children in Latin America. "What an opportunity!" said Sally Ellis, who has already signed up for the 2010 team. "To cycle across England's green pastures and experience some amazing moments with friends, knowing that every penny raised will give street children in Latin America a chance of the future they deserve - how could I miss it?" toybox.org.uk

CHRISTIANS ON THE ROAD. More than 600 Christian leaders have signed up to attend a 10-venue Charity Roadshow designed to convey the latest information on the rights and responsibilities of people who run churches and charities. The tour started in January, but events will be held between 20 March and 15 May in Liverpool, Chessington, Cambridge, Birmingham, Bristol and London. The free full-day events feature a panel of experts who examine recent political and legal issues and offer workshops on more specific topics. Sam Webster (pictured), an in-house solicitor at The Christian Institute, is one of the featured speakers. christian.org.uk/roadshow





a voice in Parliament

GENERAL ELECTION. All eyes are on Parliament as we look toward a General Election in the next few months. The Alliance is urging Christians to make their votes count (see p14).

In the run up to the election, the Bible Society has recently launched an online political engagement project called Susa,

with the goal of "being salt and light in politics and government". This new resource is an urgent call to action, aiming to help the Church in the UK to see political engagement as biblical, mission-oriented and possible.

Susa offers encouragement and equips Christians to take up the challenge,

providing a vital tool to help positive participation. Building on the basis that the Gospel is relevant to every area of our lives, this must include politics.

In order to speak and act effectively it is essential that a positive vision of society is articulated. This involves communicating a clear picture of what is good and beneficial for the communities around us and participating to help make that happen. The aim is that together we can influence the direction of political debate rather than criticise from the sidelines. susa.info

EQUALITY BILL. Following engagement with the Alliance and other Christian organisations, the Lords rejected a Government amendment to the bill that could have prevented churches and Christian organisations from appointing practising Christians to key roles. The Lords voted by a significant margin for a different amendment, which will maintain the status quo.

There is much in the bill that promotes justice, fairness and equality – all hallmarks of a modern society that the Alliance enthusiastically supports. However, it is also important that fundamental liberties such as freedom of religious belief and expression are maintained.

Dr Don Horrocks, the Alliance's head of public affairs, said, "The Government's amendment was unclear and would have left churches and organisations unsure whether they could prefer practising Christians for the majority of their roles. Now, they can continue to appoint people who are committed to the ethos of the organisations they are supposed to represent."

Meanwhile, Alliance member Care recently released the report *A Little Bit Against Discrimination*, which considers the challenge of framing robust equalities legislation in respect to religious belief and other equality strands. eauk.org/pq



Overcoming debt

In collaboration with Stewardship, the Alliance has produced a booklet highlighting some of the ways that churches can respond to the economic crisis. The Bible is outspoken on issues of money, poverty and injustice, and the Church should be equally vocal.

With national networks and local presence, the Church is uniquely placed to help those who are struggling with debt, unemployment or other financial pressures. By bringing the conviction that motivates our action together with organisations and resources already established, the Church can extend its engagement and bring vital aid to those most in need.

These turbulent times will leave an indelible mark on our economic and social landscape. As well as helping to make a practical difference in the communities where we live, now is a critical time to think about the role that money plays in our life and what the Christian faith has to say about the way that the economic system is structured. The booklet contains some of the easiest ways that churches can engage with the subject of money.

Churches across the country are already involved in the activities outlined, as well as many more. It can be a little daunting to think of the challenges that face us and know how best to respond. Many churches already offer debt counselling services or run money-education classes; the booklet offers a taster of how churches can think more about money within their congregations and reach out to the communities outside their door. Maybe there is something that you could start doing, or an idea that would help extend your current work. View online or order copies at: lifebeyonddebt.org

ONLINE WITH THE GOSPEL. This year's Internet Evangelism Day will be held on Sunday, 25 April. The event was set up to help churches understand the opportunities digital media are providing. Free downloads are available for use in services and home groups, including slideshows, video clips, handouts, drama scripts, music and posters. The goal is to build a Church that is "outsider friendly" and to emphasise the fact that you don't need to be technically savvy to share your faith online. internetevangelismday.com

MERCY FOR TOGO. Following a successful 10 months in Benin, the faith-based volunteers who serve aboard the Africa Mercy, the world's largest charity hospital ship, arrived in Togo in January to start a seven-month outreach. In Benin, the 450 volunteers from more than 40 nations provided 5,000 free surgeries, over 33,000 eye treatments and 10,000 dental procedures. Most of Togo's population live in rural areas with limited access to health care. In April, Mercy Ships will run its annual Easter Breakfast, encouraging churches, schools and offices to hold events to raise awareness and funds for the charity. mercyships.org.uk



SUPPORTING YOUTH WORKERS.

A new website has been set up centred around the National Charter for Church Youth Workers, with a goal to improve the standard of youth work in UK churches by encouraging Christians to pray for and support their youth workers in a variety of practical ways. The charter originated from the Youthwork coalitions of organisations that work together to resource and inspire Christian youth workers. The partnership includes Amaze, the first professional body for youth and children's workers in the UK. weloveouryouthworker.org.uk

Churches help tackle domestic abuse

Just before Christmas, the Alliance surveyed 230 member churches, asking how they are responding to domestic abuse – physical, emotional, psychological, sexual and financial – in their communities. Results showed that, when the figures were projected taking into account church size, churches annually donate £6.5 million towards tackling domestic abuse, counsel 71,000 victims and provide up to 370,000 nights of accommodation.

"Domestic abuse is a huge problem in this country, but it is an issue churches often find difficult to tackle," said Steve Clifford, the Alliance's general director. "We are encouraged that so many churches are seeking to respond in practical ways and we hope that more will be motivated to engage further."

As well as churches supporting people in their congregations, the survey also found that non-churchgoers recognise that the Church can be a source of support, with almost a third of churches reporting that non-churchgoers had asked them for help. Concern was also shown for perpetrators, as 22 per cent reported that they had counselled them in the last three years.

Even with these positive results, 58 per cent of churches felt they could



be doing more to respond; only 5 per cent felt they were doing enough already. A lack of volunteers was the most common hindrance to doing more (71%), along with a lack of knowledge about how to help (58%). In addition, 41 per cent felt the issue needed to be talked about more within the Church.

Unsurprisingly, having female leaders also seemed to make it easier for people to come forward asking for help, especially among members of the congregation. In almost half (47%) of female-led congregations, someone in the church had asked for help. The figure was 34 per cent among male-led congregations. SC

Course helps artists build foundations

One-to-one mentoring is at the heart of an innovative course launched by Alliance member NGM. Open to aspiring dancers, singers, musicians, DJs, engineers and producers aged 13 to 25, MYA: Mentoring Young Artists is designed to give young artists the foundations they need in a culture that emphasises instant fame, such as in the case of *X Factor* "celebrities" Jedward (pictured).

Producer-songwriter Roy Goudie sees a need for this kind of course. He said, "Our popular culture seems to be creating lots of pressures for young artists to see success in terms of winning a talent show or becoming a signed artist and having instant public acclaim and all the trappings of what being a star promises."

Held at NGM's performing arts complex near Bristol, the practical course is designed to be holistic, helping Christian artists develop their skills, character and faith and make a difference in culture, arts and entertainment.

ngm.org.uk



Starting a conversation

In March, Christians around the world will be able to add their voice to the Lausanne Global Conversation through a new website. Thought-provoking articles, blogs and videos will be posted in an open forum with an invitation to the global Church to join the conversation.

The project aims to provide an opportunity to wrestle with important issues related to world evangelisation from a global perspective by engaging with Christians around the world.

At the third Lausanne Congress in Cape Town in October, presentations will

be shaped by input from the Global Conversation site, giving Christians a chance to take part in this historic missions congress from the comfort of their own home.

"Your voice in the conversation is needed," said the Lausanne Movement's Andrew Brumme. "As iron sharpens iron, and as there is wisdom in the counsel of many, we trust the Lord will use the global discussion to spur us on, not only to further dialogue, but to strategy and action so that all may hear the good news of Jesus Christ."

lausanne.org/conversation



RADIO FOR GHANA. Two FM radio stations have been inaugurated in Ghana, giving some 700,000 people in two regions access to local Christian broadcasts for the first time. A cooperative effort of HCJB Global and the local ministry Theovision, broadcasts are being made from Asamankese, just outside Accra, and Assin Fosu, a city in central Ghana where Alfred (pictured) works as a DJ. After the first station went on the air, "almost immediately the team heard the broadcasts being listened to in taxis and cafés across the town," said Jeremy Maller, HCJB Global's chief engineer for Sub-Saharan Africa. hcjb.org.uk

GET SORTED. Called "the lads' mag with morals", the Christian men's magazine *Sorted* is now available in 1,500 newsagents around the UK, offering an alternative to the likes of *Nuts* and *Loaded*. Bear Grylls says that it is "down to earth, real, 'unreligious' – that's why *Sorted* has helped my Christian faith so much." Subscriptions to the magazine are available from £1.50/month. sorted-magazine.com



GEEKS WITH A MISSION. The International Conference on Computing and Mission will be held 10-13 March at De Betteld, Netherlands, to help and support those who work with computers and mission. The conference has been running for more than 20 years, allowing Christian technology experts from churches and mission agencies to gather together and share information and encouragement. Together they will examine good and bad uses of digital media, budgeting and how to keep up with the rapid pace of technological development. iccm-europe.org



Rob Purbrick/London School of Theology

Biblefresh tour gets underway

In the run-up to next year's Biblefresh campaign, church leaders from Nottingham, Glasgow, Manchester, Durham, Cardiff, Belfast, Exeter and Bristol have met together locally to hear about the vision and commit to get involved. At most events, Trent Vineyard leads worship, with teaching from Canon Christina Baxter and Bishop Tom Wright.

Biblefresh, a joint initiative involving nearly 100 Christian agencies, is asking churches to make four pledges for 2011, the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible: to read the Bible, to be trained in handling the Bible well, to give towards a translation of the Bible for Burkina Faso, and to provide the opportunity for people to experience the Bible in new and creative ways.

Biblefresh is encouraging Christians to recall how the Bible has spoken into their lives in the past, and London School of Theology has sponsored an initial series of photographs capturing these thoughts by asking people to jot down a short response to the question: how has the Bible changed your world?

These images will be featured over the next two years in print, online and in exhibitions as Christians contribute their own Bible testimony.

"The Bible competes with *A Brief History of Time* for the dubious honour of being the least-read bestseller," said LST Principal Simon Steer. "In my experience, many people struggle with three questions: how on earth do I go about reading this rather daunting book? How can I figure out what it means? And does it have any relevance to my life in the 21st century? By providing a variety of creative and thoughtful ways of working through these questions, Biblefresh has the potential to do something truly significant for individuals, for the Church and even for the wider community."

Further events will be held in Liverpool (16 Mar), Bournemouth (18 Mar) and London (30 Mar), while the Biblefresh book will be launched at the Christian Resources Exhibition in Sandown 11-14 May. For details, and to download the leaders' guide, visit: biblefresh.com

AL

REACHING OUT TO NEPAL. Funds from this year's World Leprosy Day on 31 January will go to a hospital in Nepal. Churches in more than 100 countries participated in the fundraising and awareness day. In Nepal, Sita (pictured) was diagnosed with the disease seven years ago when she was only 11. Earlier treatment would have prevented some of the irreversible nerve damage and physical deformities. She was treated at Anandaban Hospital with both the multi-drug therapy cure and operations to reverse the effects of the disease, which primarily affects poor people. Sita now plans to become a nurse. leprosymission.org.uk



“ I want my Christian legacy to be a man who rehabilitated the idea that Christians really are Good News people. ”

Joel Edwards

Former Director of the Evangelical Alliance UK



Joel Edwards has a vision of Christians being Good News to the world. Amen to that!

We share that vision – and we're also impassioned to leave future generations a Christian legacy where every disciple is a dynamic channel for God's love to a hurting world. And where people everywhere proclaim "Our God reigns."

What's your vision for the future?

Join the debate online at www.christianlegacy.org.uk

Christian Legacy

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

Christian Legacy members are:

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

Micah Challenge marks a decade

Representatives of dozens of development agencies and church-based organisations pledged to be part of *Micah 2010* at the event's launch in London in December. This year marks 10 years since international leaders signed the Millennium Development Goals and committed themselves to halving poverty by 2015.

With just five years to go, Micah Challenge believes that world leaders are off course and unlikely to meet their promises. This year it's hoping to mobilise the Church to lobby governments to fulfil on their commitments.

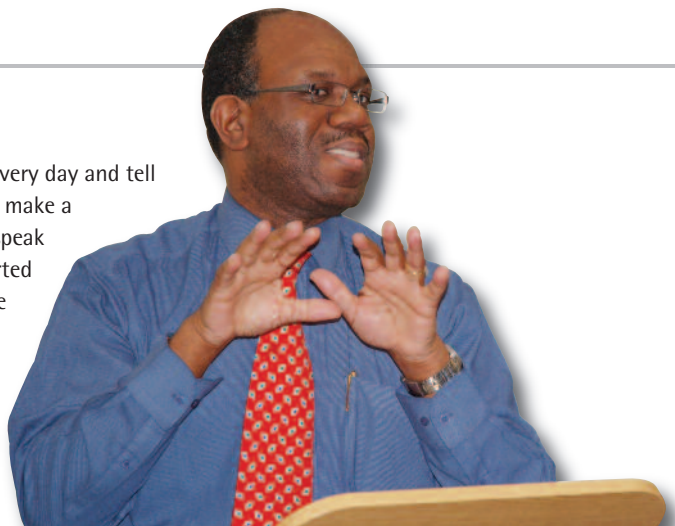
On 10 October (10-10-10), it is expected some 100 million Christians around the world will join together in praying for the poor and for justice. Campaigners also hope that 10 million Christians will pledge to make a difference to poverty themselves.

Launching the initiative, Rev Joel Edwards (pictured), international director of Micah Challenge, said, "In 2010 we want to renew our promises to the 1 billion

people who go hungry every day and tell politicians that they can make a difference. We want to speak out to encourage concerted effort so that in 2015 we can be proud of all that has been achieved."

After the upcoming General Election, Micah Challenge UK will encourage churches to lead the way in their local communities by lobbying MPs during the first six months of the new Parliament to ensure that keeping promises to the poor is a priority. Andy Clasper, director of Micah Challenge UK, said, "Imagine if the first appointment in the diary of MPs up and down the country was an individual or group demonstrating their commitment to a more just world and the prioritisation of the poor. Let's play our part in achieving something great."

The Micah Challenge 2010 initiative



has received the backing of many denominations and development organisations, including the Alliance, World Vision, Tearfund and the Baptist World Assembly. It also received support from the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams. He said, "I am happy to commend the *Micah 2010* initiative. We need to open ourselves in prayer to the source of all righteousness so that we may become more faithful and effective ministers of His peace and justice."

micahchallenge.org

HS



media matters

by Charis Gibson, Senior Press Officer

Before taking my job with the Alliance, I was a local reporter for newspapers outside London. In the capital, there were networks of Christians working in the arts and media who met together regularly to encourage and support each other in what can be a very difficult profession to negotiate as a Christian.

Occasionally, I would travel to London to join them, but more often than not it was just too expensive and time-consuming to make it, especially in a high-pressure job with unpredictable hours. And I'm sure that's been the case for numerous other people working in all types of media who would love to get to know Christians in the same field but struggle to do so because of their geography or time constraints.

That's why I'm really excited about the way Christians are using digital media to start new forms of community. The Church and Media Network has recently set up *theMediaNet*, a new online community for Christians working in the media. Here they can tell stories, give advice, ask questions and talk to other people in the same field.

The Alliance press office is developing a section of *theMediaNet* specifically for people working in PR and communications, helping

I'm sure media workers would love to get to know Christians in the same field

to enable them to share ideas, contacts, tips and more. And as well as meeting up online, we'll organise opportunities to meet up face-to-face for training and getting to know each other.

So if you know someone working in the media or PR who would appreciate some community and support, point them in the right direction: themedianet.org

A DECADE ON TOUR. In February, the UK Christian charity Counties celebrated 10 years of its GSUS Live touring interactive exhibition. Over the years, the mobile classroom has helped more than 300,000 school children understand Jesus' teachings on forgiveness, fear and rejection. GSUS Live consists of two trailers decked out with the latest digital media equipment, which visit schools normally for a week, opening doors for lasting relationships between schools and local churches. More than 1,000 volunteers have been trained, and the exhibition has visited some 570 schools over the past decade. countiesuk.org

KINGDOM COME. The Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu, kicked off the Alliance's Kingdom Come festival in Belfast on 31 January with a call for Christians to focus on and share "the greatest miracle": God's forgiveness and hope for the future. "A Christian is a person who knows their past is forgiven, who knows they're given life in the present and they've got hope for the future," he said to the crowd of around 400. "The purpose of the body of Christ is that together they make Jesus Christ visible." Kingdom Come, with keynote speaker Gordon MacDonald, was based on the theme refresh, restore and revitalise. kingdomcomeireland.com

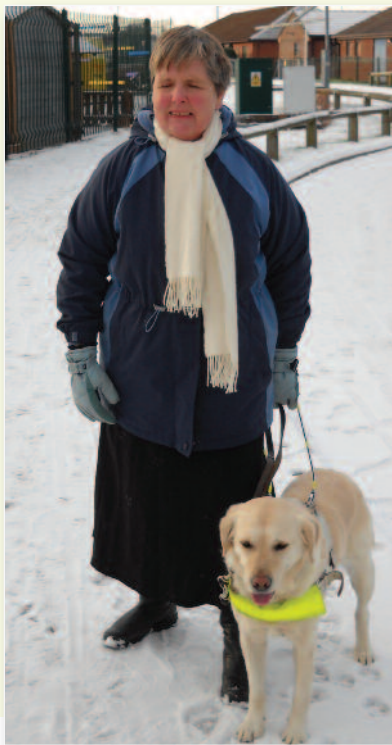


JUSTICE FOR ERITREA. More than 43,000 people signed a petition calling for freedom for Eritrean Christians who have been imprisoned and tortured for their faith. Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali, the patron of Release International, presented the petition to the Eritrean Embassy in London, and also to No 10 Downing Street, on 15 January. Tens of thousands of Eritreans have fled their homes due to the brutal tactics of their own government. To highlight the plight of Eritrea's imprisoned Christians, Release has also produced a music CD and a documentary about the situation. releaseinternational.org

Challenging weather

During the extreme weather earlier this year, churches learned how to provide extra assistance thanks to the Foursight for the Church initiative launched by Torch Trust. "A lot of blind people just won't go out in snowy weather, and I understand why," says Sheila Armstrong (pictured), who is blind and relies on her guide dog Mist. "Just as people are aware that the elderly may not go out in bad weather so need help with shopping, so blind people may need the same extra support in bad weather. I've run out of milk today, for example. And other people with sight loss may appreciate church members checking that their heating system is working properly."

torchtrust.org



New members

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

eauk.org/getinvolved

ORGANISATIONS

Business Men's Fellowship, Yeovil
Garden Tomb Association, Kingham, Oxon
His Grace Evangelical Outreach, Thornton Heath, Surrey

CHURCHES

Agape Church, Luton
Ashford Community Church, Kent
Bethel Community Church, Kenfig Hill, Bridgend
Camden Town Church, London
Christ People's Ministries International, Brixton, London
ChristChurch E.B. Gadlys, Aberdare, Rhondda Cynon Taf
Christian Revival Centre Church, Great Bridge, West Mids
Destiny International, Camberwell, London
Gateway Chapel, Dartford
Grace Church Wanstead, London

Greenisland Baptist Church, Carrickfergus
Mersham Road Christian Fellowship, Thornton Heath, Croydon
New Life Community Centre, Porth, Rhondda Cynon Taf
New Life Community Church, Fordingbridge, Hants
Oasis of Love Church, Emsworth, Hants
Peachcroft Christian Centre, Abingdon, Oxon
Ribble Valley Free Methodist Church, Preston
St Francis Church, Salisbury, Wiltshire
Acts of Love International, Forest Hill, London
The Potters House Christian Centre, Walthamstow, London
Theotherapy Christian Fellowship Trust, Southgate, London
Victory-City Assemblies of God, Wallington, London
Willingham Tabernacle Baptist Church, Willingham, Cambs

EXTREME HOLIDAYS. Venture holidays, part of Anglican evangelical agency CPAS, has added two intriguing holidays to this summer's programme of around 90 holidays for young people aged 8 to 18. The Legacy XS Centre will host the Xtreme Sports Venture, with skateboarding and BMX cycling on indoor and outdoor ramps. And a new Leadership Challenge Venture will run at Pinewood School in Wiltshire, helping teenagers explore how to grow in leadership. Ventures are designed to be fun, safe and life-changing holidays. ventures.org.uk



"I want my Christian legacy to be brave leaders (men and women), passionate about Jesus, theologically sharp, committed to mission, culturally aware."

Rev Ian Coffey MTH

Director of Leadership Training, Moorlands College and widely-published Christian author.



Photo: Rob Partridge

Ian Coffey has a vision of brave, well trained leaders. Amen to that!

We share that vision – and we're also impassioned to leave future generations a Christian legacy where every disciple is a dynamic channel for God's love to a hurting world. And where people everywhere proclaim "Our God reigns."

What's your vision for the future?

Join the debate online at
www.christianlegacy.org.uk

Christian Legacy

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

Christian Legacy members are:

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

Terry Virgo: Deeper into the Bible



Born and raised in Brighton, Terry Virgo started a church movement called New Frontiers, which has grown into an international group of churches in 29 nations. Now a busy speaker and author, he spoke to *Krish Kandiah* about his journey with the Bible...

idea: Can you tell me about the first Bible you owned?

Virgo: My sister became a Christian while she was at drama college in London and she led me to Christ in my home. A few weeks later she sent me a Bible through the mail and encouraged me to get into the Gospels. It was an unusual book, and not one that I immediately felt at home with, but I was keen to read and I found verses that came home to me.

How did God speak to you?

I began to meet God reading biographies, often of missionaries like Jim Eliot and Hudson Taylor. It was as I discovered verses that meant a lot to them that their devotion led me deeper into the Bible.

Where did you get your passion for systematic Bible teaching?

Working consecutively through Scripture helps the listener, as I'm not just picking themes out from the sky but following a story. I found it helpful from a preparation point of view, too, simply to turn the page and see what happened next. By locking into the text I feel I can help people to see how a book holds together and help people to really get to grips with their Bible.

How do you keep your love of Scripture fresh?

For the last two years, I've been using the Murray McCheyne Bible-reading plan, which I've found really refreshing. Murray McCheyne was a Scottish pastor in Dundee in the 19th century and only lived until he was 29. His method was to read the Old Testament once and New Testament twice in one year, breaking the Bible down into four daily readings. This morning I was reading in Zechariah and Revelation, and it was fascinating how the passages overlapped and offered a broad and interesting perspective on Scripture.

You're one of the Biblefresh Champions. How critical is it that we help people to rediscover the Bible in 2011?

I see people drifting from the Bible. Sometimes in a desire to be relevant we forget the message. For me the Scripture is utterly crucial, absolutely important and must have a massive place of authority. And so every endeavour to get people to build their individual lives on the Bible and to build church life on the Bible is absolutely vital.

► For more interviews with Christian leaders, visit: eauk.org/slipstream

'Sometimes in a desire to be relevant we forget the message'



CICC Launch

10 Mar, Swansea;
11 Mar, Cardiff; 12 Mar, Colwyn Bay

The Cymru Institute for Contemporary Christianity launches with an evening on engaging culture featuring Rev Joel Edwards of Micah Challenge. The following events will feature a question time chaired by BBC Radio Wales' Rev Roy Jenkins. cicconline.org

ECG: A Heart for the Nations Conference

6-11 Apr, Wales

For Easter, this innovative conference aims to inspire Christians to transform communities and build God's kingdom. Attendees will be challenged, envisioned and equipped to be relevant and radical disciples of Christ. ecgevent.org.uk

European Evangelical Alliance General Assembly

20-23 Apr, Kusadasi, Turkey

Focusing on "bearing witness to Christ in 21st century Europe", the Assembly will feature seminars covering a wide range of topics suggested by national alliances. Michael Ramsden, European director of the Zacharias Trust, will be the main speaker. europeanea.org

Pentecost Festival

18-23 May, London

This year's festival will explore God's heart for justice and see the Church leave its buildings to speak out through music, film, theatre, art, comedy and much more. Hundreds of organisations, charities, churches and individuals are participating. pentecostfestival.co.uk

Generate Justice

22 May, London

In partnership with Open Doors, Christian Aid and Share Jesus International, more than 1,000 people will march past key locations in Central London to speak out for justice and learn more about what's going on in our world. pentecostfestival.co.uk/generatejustice

Global Day of Prayer

23 May, Cape Town

Imagine an event with representatives from every nation on earth. On Pentecost Sunday, thousands will unite in prayer at Newlands Rugby Stadium, where the Global Day of Prayer started 10 years ago. Millions more will gather in their own nations to pray, including an event on 30 May in London. gdop2010.com

National Family Week

31 May-6 Jun, nationwide

This new national celebration encourages families to spend quality time together. Charities, community groups, statutory bodies, schools, sporting and faith networks are all working together. nationalfamilyweek.co.uk

A WAY WITH WORDS. Six Christian authors will take part in the Words by the Water book festival 5-14 March in Keswick. For 10 days, writers and readers get together to share the pleasure of books, words and ideas, and this year writers from Authentic Media will be part of the line-up, including award-winning children's author GP Taylor with co-author Claire Connor; acclaimed former ITN and now BBC journalist Chris Rogers; Robin Oake, the father of murdered policeman, Stephen Oake; and popular authors Michele Guinness and Nick Page. authenticmedia.co.uk

LOVING THE SNOW. A group of 16 volunteers experienced snow for the first time when they arrived in Britain in January to attend a Careforce training course in Windsor. Arriving from Africa, Asia and South America, the trainees were commended by their local church leaders and will spend 2010 serving churches throughout the UK. careforce.co.uk



A GREAT CELEBRATION. Organisers of this year's Big Church Day Out are hoping to break their own attendance record this year, aiming for 40,000 visitors over three days at the end of May. With one day in Leicestershire and two days in West Sussex, this year's event is being described as even bigger and bolder, with a programme aimed at all ages and featuring a range of musical artists from classical to contemporary. This year's line-up includes Hillsong United, Switchfoot, Toby Mac, Israel Houghton and Tim Hughes. bigchurchdayout.com

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

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- ✓ You can receive advice on how to give strategically, tax efficiently and generously
- ✓ To receive independent advice with a transparent charging structure

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There are more verses in the bible about possessions than there are about prayer and faith.*

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“ I’d like to leave a Christian legacy of laughter, reality and faith; and to have pointed the way to Jesus and away from empty religion.”

Jeff Lucas

Accomplished Christian author, speaker and broadcaster.



Jeff Lucas has a vision of a fresh Christianity - revitalised and Jesus-centred. Amen to that!

We share that vision – and we’re also impassioned to leave future generations a Christian legacy where every disciple is a dynamic channel for God’s love to a hurting world. And where people everywhere proclaim “Our God reigns.”

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

Christian Legacy members are:

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

Engage with the General Election

Parliamentary officer *Daniel Webster* explores the challenges and opportunities of the upcoming election...

A General Election is on its way and, five years after the last national vote, politicians are once again looking for our approval. Over the past year Parliament's reputation sank to a new low as, day after day for many weeks, a steady stream of fresh revelations were released detailing the ways politicians had used the expenses system for their own advantage. To be honest, it is very easy to look on in dismay and want nothing to do with politics.

A few Members of Parliament defiantly claimed that they only got what they were entitled to, and it was authorised by the appropriate offices. Most others, even those tainted by the scandal, acknowledged that their actions cut deeper, affecting not only their personal reputation but also the standing of Parliament and trust in politics.

Elections provide the chance to engage in the democratic system: to have a say about the way the country has been run, to offer an extension if we think the Government has done well, or to throw them out if we prefer an alternative.

For all the criticism that politicians receive it is crucial to remember that they are just people who make mistakes. They will try their best, but sometimes, like all of us, they will get it wrong. Democracy is essential because of our shortcomings, and elections give everyone the opportunity to have their say.

Party leaders will make speeches, announce policies, publish manifestos and plaster our billboards with marketing in an attempt to win votes. But it is up to all of us to decide who runs the country. Engaging with politics may

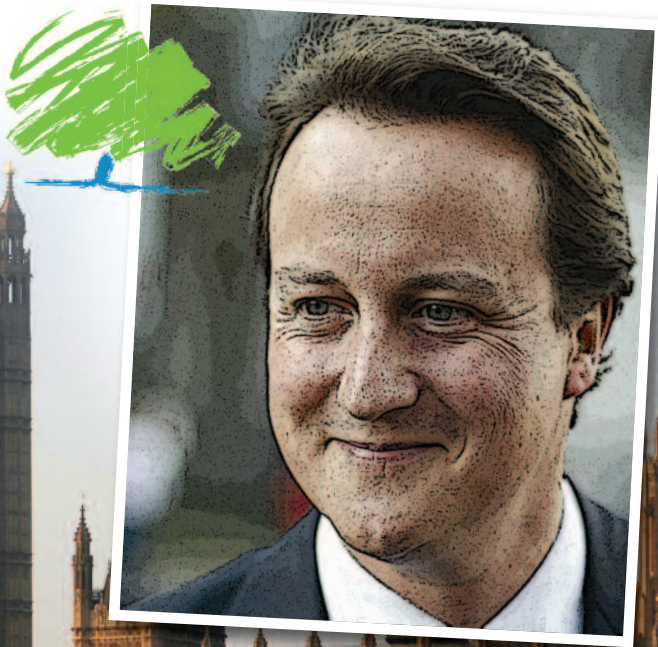
seem difficult, even at times dirty, but we are ignoring our responsibilities as citizens if we step aside and refuse to get involved.

Get informed

It is often suggested that there is no difference between any of the political parties that compete for our vote. That is simply not true.

It is very easy to look on in dismay and want nothing to do with politics

We sometimes feel that it doesn't matter who we vote for, or even if we vote, because one party will win, others will lose, but nothing much will change. The fact is that sometimes it is in a party's interest to emphasise their similarity to other parties, especially when they are trying to win



support. On other occasions clear lines of demarcation are preferred, usually to alert voters to the dangers of supporting the other party.

But we won't know this unless we get informed. The forthcoming campaign will be full of claims and counter-claims, what one party will protect and the others will cut. The dizzying array of announcements can overwhelm us, and it is easy to rely on what we have heard or read in the paper about what Labour, Conservatives or the Liberal Democrats are planning.

Four things we can do:

1. Decide what the most important issues are – the ones that affect how I vote. What values and policy priorities am I looking for?
2. Read what the parties have to say for themselves. Yes, they are trying to sell their package, but at least I can see it firsthand.
3. Change my news habits, read a different paper or watch another news channel. They all come with a filter, so a variety will help build a truer picture.
4. Visit the Alliance's General Election site for a comparison of what each party says about different policy areas.

Get involved

Christians will support various political parties. We all see the world a little differently, so our priorities for Government will vary. Even where the outcome is broadly agreed, the means to get there can differ, and this is reflected in the presence of Christians within all the mainstream parties. Occasionally Christians will be encouraged to support one party over the others because of certain issues that Christians feel strongly about, but this runs the risk of missing the diversity of issues and challenges that make up politics in the UK.

It is also highly unlikely that we will agree with all the policies of any one party and that none of the mainstream parties represent our concerns. Even if it feels a little unsatisfactory, we must find the party or MP that most closely reflects our values and policy priorities and then support them.

It may seem like a big step, but think about becoming a member or helping out delivering leaflets during the campaign. Key decisions, such as who stands as the party's candidate, are often made by the local party members. So by becoming members we can have a far greater influence on who represents us in Parliament.

Steve Webb, MP for Northavon, is encouraging local churches to get together and make sure that hustings are taking place across their constituency. "This is an opportunity for the Church to bring together local people to quiz the candidates about their policies both for national Government and the local area," he says. "It may be the only opportunity that local people will have to listen to the candidates debating their views with each other, and it's an excellent way for churches to reach out to people in their local area at the same time."

Get voting

It might sound simplistic, but in 2005 four out of 10 people didn't vote. Among those aged 18 to 24 only 37 per cent voted and almost as many people did not vote as supported either Labour or the Conservatives. And this was an improvement on the turnout in 2001.

Everyone casts his or her own vote, and it is important not to try and tell each other whom to support. However, this does not mean we should avoid talking about politics. In particular, we should encourage and help our families, friends and church congregations to get to the polling station on election day.



Resources

- ▶ For policy comparisons, a guide to holding a hustings and further information, visit: eauk.org/elections
- ▶ For information about engaging as a Christian with Labour, the Conservatives and the LibDems, visit: christiansinpolitics.org.uk
- ▶ Check out relevant books such as: *Votewise Now!* edited by Rose Lynas (SPCK), *Just Politics* edited by Krish Kandiah (Authentic), and *God & Government* edited by Nick Spencer and Jonathan Chaplin (SPCK).

An old message for a new world

Almost every day, some new digital tool offers us a new way to connect with each other. Anna Moyle, Nicole Holmes and Rich Cline explore the possibilities...

It's not easy keeping up with the breakneck speed of developing technology. Just when you have your head around Facebook, you notice that everyone's moved over to Twitter. And as your fingers finally get the hang of typing a message on a tiny mobile phone keyboard, you realise that everyone has switched to touch-screens.

For those of us who were born before all of these things became everyday realities, the flood of new terms and gadgets can seem overwhelming. But as each new innovation appears, Christians are seizing hold of the potential for ministry, communicating in bold new ways that, despite the technology involved, are more personal than ever before.

A cultural shift

"The biggest change has been the rise of social media, with Facebook and Twitter currently leading the pack, where for millions of people, part of their lives are now lived online," says Simon Jenkins, editor of *Ship of Fools*, which started as a magazine in 1977 and now exists as an online community for Christians who strive to be self-critical and honest about Christianity.

Knowing your Bebo from your Wiki

Digital expert Dr Bex Lewis of the University of Winchester helps us understand what these words mean...



Bebo: an acronym for "blog early, blog often". Launched in 2005, this site offers quizzes, videos, photo uploads, music and pop polls. It is typically used by younger users, built around school networks.



Blogging: short for "web logging". Regular online entries are generally displayed in reverse-chronological order. Each entry should consist of 500-800 words, including an image and a call to action.



DandyID: one of the new-style convergence sites, allowing users to collate their digital fingerprint in one place.



Delicious: a social bookmarking site, allowing users to save, manage and share web pages. Tagging is the key, as users can network with others interested in similar tags.



Facebook: created in 2004, this web-based community has 350 million active users worldwide. The site is typically used to maintain friendships with people already known in the real world.



Flickr: created in 2004, this image and video hosting website is widely used by bloggers to host more than 4 billion images. The site offers photo storage, tagging and group photo pools. Picasa is a similar site.



LinkedIn: has the strongest reputation in the business world, as users can import their CV, and link to Twitter, blogs and Slideshare. Particularly good for headhunters, job-hunters and entrepreneurs.



'Even bishops are blogging and tweeting, and the Church is now fully alive to the possibilities'

Simon has seen a great shift in the attitude of the Church towards new media. "There is now a general appreciation that, while we must always have critical faculties intact when it comes to new technology, we can't afford to reject technological innovation, as some did in the early days of the internet," he says, "But these days, even bishops are blogging and tweeting, and the Church is now fully alive to the possibilities not just of publishing on the net, but of genuinely engaging with people who are internet natives."

Born from a *Ship of Fools* experiment in 3D worship, St Pixels is

now a stand-alone internet church with some 2,000 members, one in three of whom regard St Pixels as their major or only contact with formal Christianity.

"We want the Church to be at the forefront of change, not decades behind," says co-editor Stephen Goddard. "We hope that, through reading *Ship of Fools*, our readers will laugh deeper, study deeper, talk deeper, believe deeper – and then reach out, touch their computer monitor for a blessing and send us the entire content of their wallets."

He's joking, but only just: financing web-based ministries isn't easy, as internet users expect everything to be free of charge.

Make an impact

Tapping into the potential of the global Church was the main goal in setting up World Wide Open, a free online social networking tool that helps connect and empower Christians, churches and organisations to make an impact. "Many in the Church have seen how the internet can



MySpace: Before Facebook, this was the biggest social media site. It offers customisable backgrounds and ability to upload videos and audio. The site is largely used by musicians.



Ning: Chinese for "peace", this site launched in 2005 and offers an online platform for people to create their own social networks around specific interests, whether local or global.



Skype: software that uses the internet to make voice calls, send instant messages, transfer files and set up video conferencing. Calls to other users are free, while calls to phones can be made for a small fee.



SlideShare: a hosting service that allows users to upload, view, comment and share slideshows and other documents. Such sites are particularly helpful for web-conferencing.



Twitter: created in 2006, users post tweets that are limited to 140 characters. These are delivered to the author's "followers". Twitter is great for making and maintaining contacts with others who have similar interests.



Wave: created last year by Google, this online collaboration tool enables groups of people to edit and discuss documents simultaneously on the web, unlike email, where messages are passed back and forth.

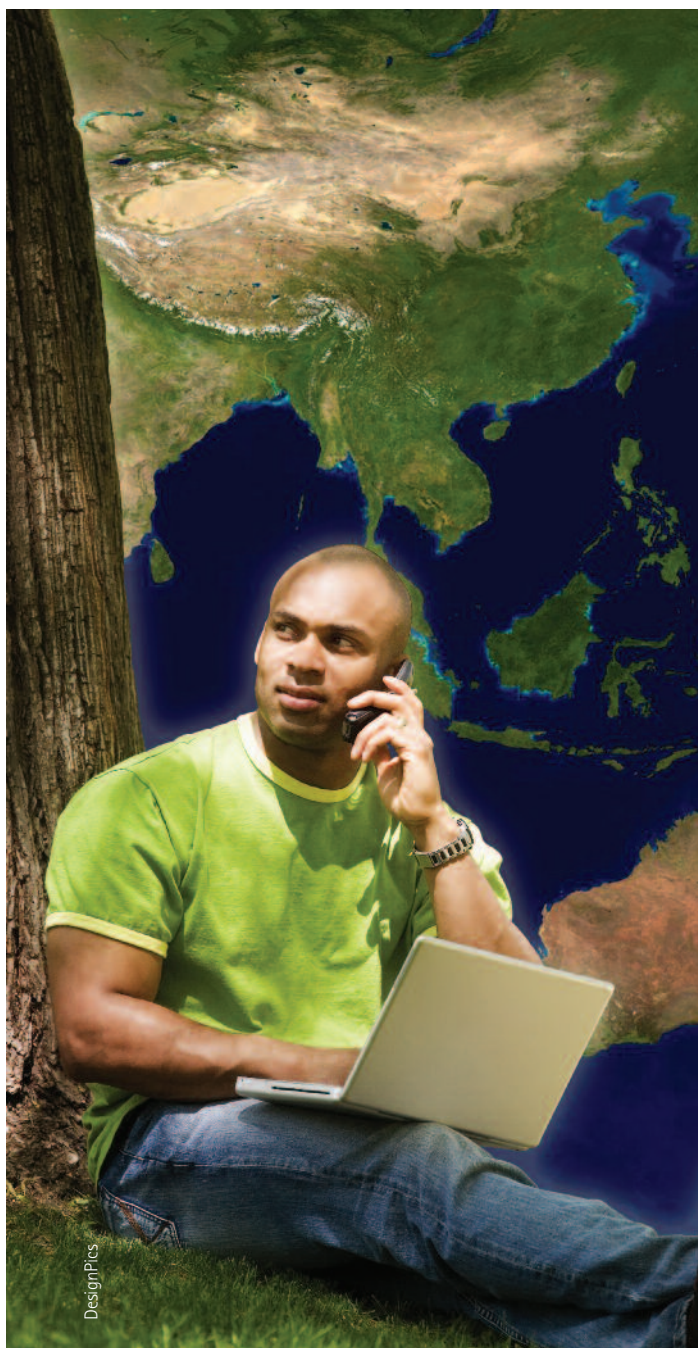


Wiki: a collaborative website, the most famous of which is Wikipedia, created in 2001 and now offering more than 13 million articles. Wikis involve the visitor in an ongoing process of creation and collaboration.



YouTube: a website for uploading and sharing videos. In March 2008 it was estimated that it would take 412.3 years to view all of YouTube's content. There are specialty variations of this site, including Tangle, a Christian version.

► Check out Bex's blog at: digital-fingerprint.co.uk



DesignPics

‘Perhaps Twitter can become a kind of technological breath-prayer’

be used to help us communicate the Gospel,” says Director Sam Melvin. “There are a billion of us walking around the world, and God has given us the resources, knowledge and power to transform the world.”

Through World Wide Open, Sam has come across some inventive new ministries, such as the youth workers in Texas who discovered a series of Bible studies posted online by a Young Life leader in Northern California. By downloading them, they had more time to spend with kids and less time preparing lessons.

And then there’s These Numbers Have Faces, a charity that provides scholarships to youth in a township outside of Cape Town. “They were contacted through World Wide Open by another non-profit that happened to be providing tutors and mentors to the same group of students,” says Sam. “They didn’t know of each other’s existence before meeting on World Wide Open and are now sharing and leveraging each other’s connections and resources.”

In addition to social networking, the internet offers several ways to communicate personally. University of Cambridge Chaplain Maggie Dawn says that web logs, or blogs, are a particularly relational form of writing. “It’s present tense, written today about what I’m thinking about right now, and it connects with readers who also are picking it up as something that they relate to now,” she says. “You end up feeling as if you’re the vicar of your blog parish. People make return visits and they talk to each other in the comment section. That’s why blogs can be capitalised on as a particular form of writing in the new media that works brilliantly within the kingdom of God.”

Getting stories out

Then there’s the micro-blogging site Twitter, which Paul Woolley, director of the theology think tank Theos, says is a great way to get stories out. “Twitter is a good way to get people to engage proactively and creatively with the work that you do,” he says.

Last November, as Theos explored the issues surrounding the 200th anniversary of Darwin’s birth, Paul asked fellow Twitter users to summarise Darwin’s seminal *On the Origin of Species* in 140 characters or less. The winning tweet was submitted by Charles Foster: “He who dies, loses. He who reproduces, plays the game. He who produces game-playing offspring who won’t submerge parental genes, wins.”

Meanwhile, author and speaker Gerard Kelly believes Twitter also has value as a spiritual discipline. Realising the speed at which the site was able to transmit information, Gerard decided to use it as a means of prayer and started *Twitturgies*. “In essence, I simply took Twitter’s central question, ‘What are you doing?’, and translated it as, ‘What are you praying?’”

The result is what he calls “a tweet for the soul: personal liturgies in 140 characters or less”. Twitturgies now has about 1,500 followers.

“Perhaps Twitter can become a kind of technological breath-prayer,”

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he says, "a Pray Without Ceasing application for any of us."

Of course, some Christians have taken a more cautionary approach to online community and networking. Shane Hipps, a pastor from Arizona and author of *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith*, cautions that while digital media is very useful for creating meaningful connections or intellectual transformations, it cannot replace, and must work alongside, close physical community.

"The digital age tends to separate those who are close and bring together those who are at a distance," he says. "But human community is unavoidably physical. The reason you know this is that when somebody close to you dies, one person sends you an email and another person comes over to hand you a glass of water and a tissue and hug you. That's unavoidably physical; it's incredibly intense and very powerful."

► For details about St Pixels, the internet church, visit:

shipoffools.com

► Set up a World Wide Open profile at: worldwideopen.org

► To follow Gerard Kelly's *Twitturgies*, visit: twitter.com/twitturgies

Getting started



Maggi Dawn, fellow of Robinson College, University of Cambridge, shares how to create a successful blog...

The most important thing is to adapt the form of your writing to the people for whom you're writing. Will they be sitting at their computer on a tea break at work? Will they be reading on a Blackberry on the train? If it's a tea break, they only have a few minutes to read, and if they're using a Blackberry, they only have a small space to scroll down. It's frustrating to try to read an essay full of long sentences on a small screen.

The successful blog post is quite short and needs to address one point. This is not the place for systematic theology, where you cover all the bases and make your theory absolutely watertight. It's a place for putting one thing up at a time.

It also has to be regularly updated, because if the post at the top of the page is more than a month old, it says, "I'm outdated and I haven't been here for a while." If it's this week or last week, it's current and relevant.

Readers know you're sitting at home in your pyjamas just bashing up today's blog before you go to work. (Yes, I've said that to the world: I blog in my pyjamas.) And they know that you're writing it in the space of 10 or 15 minutes. It's here and now conversational, and that affects how it's written as well as the way that it's received. maggidawn.com



Sam Melvin, director of World Wide Open, offers tips for Christians who are interested in social networking...

It's easy to set up a profile on any social networking site, but be mindful of what information you share online. The terms of use that you accept when you create an account often release your rights to information, images and videos that you post.

Pray about how God might like you to use social networking to encourage your friends, introduce people to Jesus or post information that can help people become disciples of Christ.

The internet has changed business processes, elections, the way we think about the world and our community, and it is absolutely changing the Church. I was just asked to lead a session on social media at a Luis Palau evangelist conference, and it was wonderful to see how evangelists are adapting to reach people where they are: online.

The goal of World Wide Open is to build connectivity in the Church across denominations and affiliations, both locally and globally, so that we can share God-given knowledge and experience and have a more effective impact on the world.

World Wide Open serves a very different function than Facebook, which connects people who have a pre-existing history. World Wide Open doesn't just connect you with people you know – it connects you with people you need to know and resources to help you grow so that we can change the future. worldwideopen.org



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Am I digi-mad?

Krish Kandiah, the Alliance's executive director for Churches in Mission, puts cyberspace to use...

06.30

The alarm rings on my Blackberry, which is conveniently charging on the bedside table next to my Apple Mac. I power up to check my stats: 600 hits and six comments on my blog, two sales on my Amazon A-store and a tantalising 3,956 members on my fast-growing Facebook group Nick Griffin Does Not Speak for Christians. I tweet, "44 more members to hit 4,000 – who speaks for you?"

06.45

Still in bed, I Skype my friend Brandon in America and pray with him about the eldership meeting he just got back from and for his mum's oncology appointment. I glance over my emails: I am very pleased to receive Gordon Brown's contribution to a book I am compiling, so I forward that immediately to my co-editor – my wife, who actually happens to be lying next to me checking Yahoo.

07.00

On my way to work, I scan the world headlines from *The Guardian* on my Smartphone. Waiting at the platform I catch up on the goals from yesterday's football game. My son's team has now overtaken mine on Fantasy Football, so I make a few informed substitutions to get back in the competition. I tweet, "What was Benitez doing taking off Torres?"

08.00

I am halfway to the office and, thanks to my wireless 3G dongle, have already been able to deal with the work emails. I now have time to see if anyone has replied to my Facebook invitations to our local church's outreach curry event, which I'm speaking at next week. Happily two friends are up for it, so I send them directions to the venue by copying the address from Google Maps, plus a link to the menu.

08.45

I receive a text message from a friend I haven't seen for 10 years but who follows me on Twitter asking me to recommend a local eatery as he is in London for a conference. I text back to see if he has time for a coffee later that day. I tweet, "Lord, I give you this day. Help me to serve your purposes in all I do and be a blessing to all I meet. Amen."

09.00

Thanks to the rail service encouraging e-tickets that I sort out at home, my first face-to-face conversation of the day doesn't happen until I get to work and make my team a cup of coffee in the staff kitchen. I tweet: "Am going dark – no laptops allowed in this morning's meeting. Yawn."

13.00

Over lunch I tune in to a live video feed from the Alliance *Digimission* event, where I hear Shane Hipps broadcasting from his Arizona study to the gathered leaders in London about the challenges and opportunities of the digital age. Using Twitter I ask, "Does Facebook present more challenges than opportunities to real community?"

Shane responds brilliantly: "Local communities will always be necessary as social networking is just a tool, not the totality of community. If your only community is online then you miss out on so much interpersonal communication. It's like listening to a one-stringed guitar – you can hit all the notes but you miss out on the richness of the harmonics."

13.30

I grab a sandwich with my team using the voucher my Mum emailed me from a money-saving website, saving me 90p, which I then spend on a Cadbury Dairy Milk bar that web-TV's Five On Demand has been advertising. The afternoon's meetings are paperless, so laptops are vital to refer to previous minutes, email CVs from job applicants and compare diaries. Using the Apple calendar application I let my wife know where I am going to be when. I tweet, "Anyone know what the weather is like in Oslo in April?"

17.30

I grab coffee with my old friend and swap contact details. As the phones sync I realise that we have been listening to the same podcasts, which gives us more to talk about, making me almost miss my train. I tweet, "Thank God for railway delays!"

18.30

On the way home I update my online DVD rental list so I can look forward to some interesting films to watch in the next few days. Tonight's screening is *Transformers*, which I will watch, check out the online reviews and then blog about. I retweet: "Sarah Palin: 'If God had not wanted us to eat animals how come he made them out of meat?'"

19.00

Walking up my street I am looking forward to the kids' bedtime. We are up to John 3, which we will listen to together on the iPod through the docking station speakers. The passionate voices will make the text come alive and inspire our prayers. But the daily anticlimax hits me as I walk through the front door unnoticed. One of my kids is chatting with a friend on the laptop. Another is building a Sims Kingdom on the Nintendo Wii. Another is composing music on his phone's melody maker. My wife is Googling a recipe for mince pies. I tweet: "Who programmed my kids into screenagers? What I would give for a welcome home hug..."

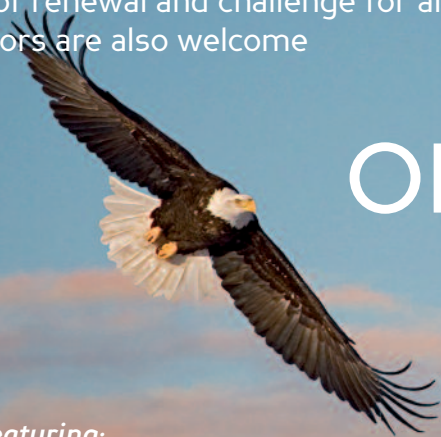
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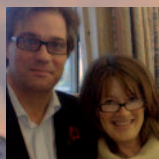
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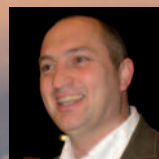
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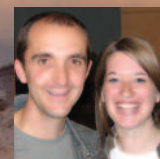
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Palestinian Christian Louisa is a guide at the Garden Tomb.

He is not here, for He is risen

Standing before an empty tomb just outside the wall of Jerusalem's Old City, many visitors are deeply touched by the message of the first Easter morning. *Richard Meryon reports...*

While the world most obviously celebrates the birth of Jesus, it is His death and resurrection that are the foundational blocks of the Christian faith. Nearly a quarter of a million visitors travel each year to remember these events at the Garden Tomb, a little-known British secret that also happens to be an Alliance member.

Located just north of the Damascus Gate into the Old City, this is a place of tranquillity and peace on the edge of a bustling city that is charged politically, militarily and of course spiritually, as it's the geographical focus for three faiths.

In its simplicity, the Garden Tomb offers visitors the opportunity to ponder the claims of Christ. Each individual or group is guided by believing Christians who show them the hillside that has the natural

form of a skull face ("golgotha" in Aramic), first identified in 1883 by General Gordon. Nearby is another quiet spot that reminds us of the garden owned by Joseph of Arimathea, complete with its empty 1st century tomb.

A powerful place

People have different reactions when standing in this place. A group of Germans who were shown around stopped in their tracks as they stood before the empty tomb at sunset, realising that Jesus has risen.

A charismatic Anglican pastor from Australia came with his "hot-blooded Italian" Catholic wife, who stood in the tomb and railed at God: "What have you ever done for me?" He quietly answered her: "I died for

you, didn't I?" She crumbled to her knees. Now, 11 years later, their joint ministry and marriage has never looked the same.

Major General Tim Cross, of the Iraq inquiry, gave his life to Christ during a visit to the tomb. "The guide that day just happened to be retired British Army Artillery Colonel Orde Dobbie," he says. "He showed us around and together we looked at the relevant Gospel stories. We were with him for quite a while, but at the end of the discussions he looked hard at me and said that, while all that we had talked about was interesting, it was all pretty irrelevant unless of course the tomb had been empty on that first Easter Sunday morning. If it had indeed been

'Like an idiot, I went to check that the tomb was indeed empty'

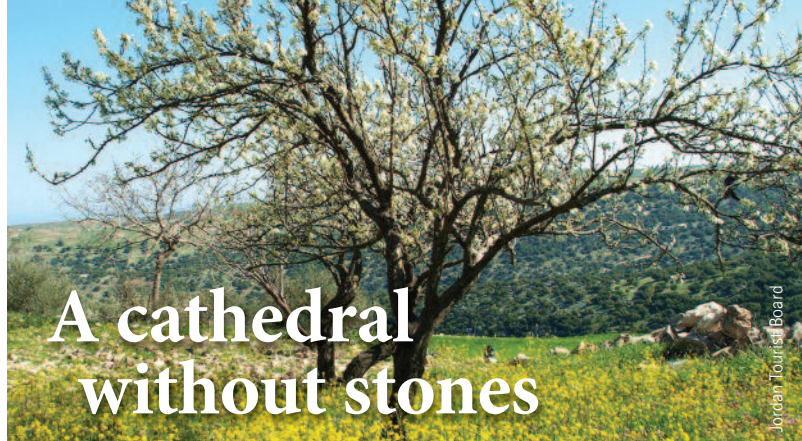
empty then that fact changed everything. 'So go and have a look,' he said. 'See for yourself.' And like an idiot, I went to check that the tomb was indeed empty.

"As I stood at the entrance I suddenly realised that if he was right and this tomb was empty on that first morning, that something quite extraordinary had happened – something so extraordinary that any intelligent person couldn't just ignore it. It wasn't quite a Damascus Road experience, but it was close to it, and in the quiet of the evening in the Garden, I resolved to take this all a lot more seriously. That Sunday was my 30th birthday, and it was effectively the day that I was re-born."

Resurrection day

Many visitors finish by breaking bread together and having their own time of worship, often a unique and pinnacle moment in their time in Israel. Every day is resurrection day in this garden, whether or not this is where the events actually took place. (Many consider that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is correctly located.) But the important fact is that Jesus is risen and that, of all the world faiths, we serve a living God who has overcome death.

► Richard Meyron is CEO of the Garden Tomb, which was founded by British Christians who purchased the site for £4,000 in the 1890s. For more information, visit: gardentomb.org



Hazel Southam takes a pilgrimage through a little-seen part of the Holy Land...

While the vast majority of Holy Land tourists only visit Israel and Palestine, I travelled to Jordan last spring to find out what it has to offer a Christian on pilgrimage. This is the location of Mount Nebo, where the Bible says that Moses viewed the Promised Land, and Bethany-beyond-the-Jordan, thought to be the place where Jesus was baptised.

Abraham's Path is a 12km stretch of the route that Abraham is believed to have taken from his home in Ur to the Promised Land. Only recently open to tourists, the journey winds through Jordan's tranquil Al Ayoun region and will ultimately go through Turkey, Syria, Israel and Palestine. It is opening to the wider public piece by piece and won't be completed for decades.

This first section is a full day of hiking often through steep, rugged countryside. In springtime, you walk up to your knees in flowers through endless meadows that are bright with poppies, tansy, vetch and thistles. Almond trees are in flower, and there is the promise of summer fruit from fig, peach, apricot and olive trees.

We pass several goatherds and their flocks in scenes that would have been little different in Abraham's time. Young boys ride four-up on a donkey through a hilly orchard. I walk very slowly behind them and on reaching a clearing find them playing football instead of minding the goats.

Sacred places

The walk is not signposted but is led by a local guide. "Abraham's Path is a constellation of sacred places," said Daniel Adamson of the Abraham Path Initiative. "We are building a cathedral without stones. The purpose is to provide a place of meeting and connection for people of different faiths and culture based on the story of Abraham's journey through the Middle East."

Hospitality is still as important here as when Abraham received the angels unaware. Overnight accommodation can either be arranged in a local family's home or in the Ajloun Forest Reserve. Poverty is endemic in these villages, and the £6 you pay for lunch at a villager's home makes a considerable contribution to a family's income.

Issa Duwaikat and his family host 23 of us for lunch. Seated on cushions around a shaded room, we are treated to a feast of stuffed vine leaves, local vegetables and freshly baked bread. Issa killed five of his 50 chickens to make this meal.

His brother Mosa, a journalist, says the opening up of the route will give local people some much-needed support. A Muslim, he is keen to welcome Christian pilgrims. "We live alongside each other here," he says. "My neighbours are Christians. We never have a problem between us."

Some 300,000 Jordanians are Christians. In Madaba, an historic city where half the population is Christian, I get up early to attend the Sunday service at 7.30am. Ray Garthwaite was part-way through a pilgrimage visiting both Old and New Testament sites. "It's been terrific," said the 74-year-old Christian from Cheltenham. "The Holy Land isn't just Israel; it's Jordan as well. I'm not sure I really appreciated it before I came, but I do now." abrahampath.org

Falling into Wonderland

Mia Wasikowska plays Alice in Tim Burton's new film.

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

Yet another film foray into Wonderland demonstrates the abiding charm of Lewis Carroll's Alice stories. But Tim Burton's surreal big-budget 3D fantasy isn't just a retread of the much-loved children's story; it picks up Alice's story several years on. Now 19, Alice (played by relatively unknown Australian actress Mia Wasikowska) doesn't know what to do when someone proposes to her. She runs off without answering, then spots a curious rabbit and soon tumbles after it down a hole.

Alice has been this way before, of course, but she has no memory

of it. The bottle and cake again play havoc with her size, but soon she finds herself in a fantastical world inhabited by the bizarre characters we know so well.

It's curious that Carroll's mad tales should have become as embedded in our culture to the extent they have. The Cheshire Cat, the Mad Hatter and the White Queen's statement about believing "six impossible things before breakfast" are all very familiar. References to the stories crop up again and again, even in films like *The Matrix*.

Maybe this is just because it is all such cheerful nonsense. Maybe it's thanks to Disney's much-loved animation. Or maybe there's something more going on under the surface. Readers have often wondered whether there really is any point or moral to Carroll's

Films



CAPITALISM: A LOVE STORY (opens 26 Feb)

Film polemicist Michael Moore (*Fahrenheit 9/11*) is back with a lacerating examination of our money-hungry culture, which reveres a free-market, capitalist economy at the expense of the world's poor, including our own neighbours. Moore assembles this in his entertaining style while pulling no punches. Yes, it's one-sided and pushy, and very America-centred, but we can't deny that biblical values of social justice and human dignity are being trampled every day by an elitist system that undermines true democracy. What does it say to the world when evangelicals defend such an apparently unjust system? *RC*

LION'S DEN (opens 26 Mar)

From Argentina, this harrowing drama is infused with hope as it follows the pregnant young Julia to prison, where she's placed in a maternal cellblock and will be allowed to raise her child for its first four years. After forming a makeshift family with another inmate, her mother decides that the baby would be better off outside. But Julia doesn't want to let her son go. Earthy and raw, the film beautifully catches the spirit of this young woman who desperately yearns to control her own destiny. And along the way, the film grapples with issues of justice and compassion. *RC*

FAREWELL (opens 2 Apr)

This momentous true-life spy thriller is told with a personal touch as it focuses tightly on the two men who brought about the end of the Cold War. Emir Kusturica and Guillaume Canet are excellent as Sergei and Pierre, a Russian spy and a French civil servant who end up working together to transmit secrets from Moscow to Paris and Washington during the Mitterrand-Reagan years. The film centres on the two men and the difficult moral choices they must make, clearly showing that their children's future motivates them to engage in such dangerous activity. *RC*



fanciful tales, just as Alice does when talking to the Duchess. But the Duchess assures her that "everything's got a moral, if only you can find it".

Hidden meanings

Lewis Carroll was the pseudonym of Rev Charles Dodgson, an Oxford mathematician, so it's not surprising that if you study the conversations within the books, you discover that there are many hidden meanings. As well as telling stories, Carroll was clearly having fun with ideas from mathematics, logic, languages, history and politics.

Even more importantly, there are ideas from philosophy and theology about such fundamental matters as existence, meaning, knowledge, morality, justice and, perhaps above all, identity. "Who in the world am I?" asks Alice. "Ah, that's the great puzzle!"

These kinds of question are all very well, but the books themselves are rather disjointed and episodic. So Tim Burton felt he needed to create a film that had a much stronger sense

**'Who in the world am I?'
asks Alice.
'Ah, that's the great puzzle!'**

of being a unified story with a greater emotional drive. "I've never seen a version I've really liked," he says. "It's always been about a passive little girl wandering around a series of adventures with weird characters. There's never any kind of gravity to it."

Having forgotten her childhood experiences, Burton's Alice is as unsure of herself and her place in the real world as she is in Wonderland – or Underland, as it's now known. It's a dark, turbulent place, suffering under the harsh rule of the Red Queen (Helena Bonham Carter). It's inevitable that film versions of the Alice stories ignore many of the hidden meanings from the books. This one is no exception, but it does retain more of the depth than its predecessors. And by telling the story of Alice's return to Wonderland as a young adult, Tim Burton is able to introduce some significant new elements.

A mad world

The most important new dimension is that Alice is no longer passive,



Whose advice do you take: the Mad Hatter (Johnny Depp), the Red Queen (Helena Bonham Carter) or the White Queen (Anne Hathaway)?

merely reacting to everything that happens. Now she has a clearly defined goal: to fight against the Red Queen's oppression. In the process, she grows in self-confidence, discovering who she really is and what she wants in life.

The Mad Hatter (Johnny Depp) tells Alice that Wonderland is "like no place on Earth – a land full of wonder, mystery and danger. Some say to survive it, you need to be as mad as a hatter".

But in some respects, Wonderland is just like the world we live in. It's a place of "wonder, mystery and danger", and there are times when it feels completely mad and out-of-kilter. And we find ourselves longing for a world that makes sense, a world of justice and order. Many people don't recognise the yearning in the human heart for what it is: a hunger for home – a home with God in the new heavens and new earth. People often dismiss the idea as impossible. But, as Alice realises, that doesn't make it any less real.

► *Alice in Wonderland* opens in UK cinemas on 5 March. Further discussions of Christian themes in pop culture can be found at: damaris.org



Tony Watkins is managing editor of Culturewatch.org

Books

SUM: FORTY TALES FROM THE AFTERLIVES
by David Eagleman (Canongate)

This slim, offbeat, ingenious book deals with an enormous topic. It is a collection of 40 stories about the afterlife or lack thereof. There is no coherent argument running through them; rather they are a jumble of mind-stretching possibilities, which Eagleman insists are all equally improbable. The various tales cleverly challenge both atheist and religious ideas, though they primarily target traditional Christian ones, brilliantly expressing some of the common objections to Christian faith. It's a book that makes us think hard about what we believe and why. *TW*



TOOTH AND CLAW
by TC Boyle (Bloomsbury)

In this collection of 14 stories, Boyle pits man against nature, revealing his characters to be always on the verge of animalistic behaviour. But while the author may hold a nihilistic worldview, he writes with revealing empathy. In *Chicxulub* a young couple believes their daughter has died, only to discover it's a case of mistaken identity. The father is left wondering, in the absence of God, what allows us to accept that man is finite. But readers may find themselves asking if these events are actually the work of a creator God. *NH*

CD

BLACK SWAN by Athlete (Polydor)

In the opening songs of its CD, English indie band Athlete reveals the thrills and joys of love as well as the disappointment of broken relationships. Tracks like *The Unknown* inspire hope in the dependability of love, but in *The Awkward Goodbye* we see its fragility. The final track, *Rubik's Cube*, expresses a longing to make sense of these events, and the album's final line is quietly hopeful: "I know I will figure it out." The events of life haven't lived up to expectations, and where else is there to look but in love? *JM*



Right under your nose

When the low-key drama *The Blind Side* opened in America, no-one was prepared for it to become such a blockbuster hit – the biggest of Sandra Bullock's career. Based on the true story of Memphis housewife Leigh Anne Tuohy (played by Bullock), the film centres on her strongly held Christian beliefs, which led her to reach out to homeless black teen Michael Oher (Quinton Aaron). As Leigh Anne, her husband and children adopted the hulking, inarticulate Michael into their home, he began to understand that he had some worth after all. And he went on to become a successful American football player.

Leigh Anne says, "It was God's hand from the beginning," but their life wasn't plain sailing, and the film realistically examines the challenges they faced. We talked to Bullock about her role...

idea: What attracted you to this film?

Bullock: The beauty of the story is that you think it's one thing and it turns out to be something else, and those are usually the best things in life. I thought the script was going to be about football until I read it and realised that it's really about family.

And this family makes a huge difference in this boy's life.

It was not that one-sided. They certainly did a good deed in taking in this young man in such a loving and generous way. But in turn he brought out a side of their family that they didn't even realise was missing. The family seemed to have all the success and joy in the world, but when Michael showed up, it was as if he was the final piece to the puzzle.



Warner Bros

Was it tricky to turn their story into a movie?

The Tuohys opened up their home and their lives, so we felt a great deal of responsibility to do right by their family, and that's a lot to live up to. You want audiences to be entertained, but you also want them to leave the cinema with a genuine understanding of who these people are.

Leigh Anne says her faith is the driving force in her life. How did you try to capture that on screen?

It was terrifying to think of playing her, but it was a challenge I couldn't say no to. She's such an amazing person. How can you explain that kind of energy? By the end of one day with Leigh Anne, I was exhausted. She manages to do what she wants to do in the manner she wants to do it. She doesn't care what it takes; she just gets it done her way. All I can say is: if there were more Leigh Anne Tuohys, the world would be a better-run, more harmonious and more productive place. As long as it was by her rules.

As the real Leigh Anne says, "I am telling you there are Michael Oher's everywhere – wonderful kids who need a home, who want a family. It doesn't take much searching out because they are right under your nose. And they don't need to be brilliant at football. They don't need to be someone who excels at anything other than loving you and wanting love in return."

RC

► *The Blind Side* opens in the UK on 12 March.



Warner Bros

'The family seemed to have all the success and joy in the world, but he was the final puzzle piece'

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We encourage all Christians earnestly to contend for biblical truth, since only as we are open to learn from others and yield fuller obedience to the truth will we be drawn closer to Christ and to each other.

In *Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea for Unity*, John Stott makes the perhaps unusual suggestion that "the supreme quality which the evangelical faith engenders (or should do) is humility". Nowhere is this clearer than in Stott's own attitude towards the Bible. His life and theology have been suffused

with the idea that he was "under" the Bible's authority, which meant that he went wherever the Bible took him, even if at times that involved abandoning previously cherished beliefs.

We see this for instance in his 1975 work, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, where he explains why he changed

his mind in relation to evangelism and social action. Referring to his examination of the great commission in Matthew and the other Gospels, he wrote, "I now see more clearly that not only the consequences of the commission but the actual commission itself must be understood to include social as well as evangelistic responsibility, unless we are to be guilty of distorting the words of Jesus."

Of course, if we think about it, this is precisely the attitude towards the scriptures to which we should all aspire. We must avoid at all costs placing ourselves either over the Scriptures – in the sense of superimposing our beliefs on them – or even alongside the Scriptures – in the sense of seeing our own views as equally valid. Rather, we contend for biblical truth by placing ourselves under the authority of the Bible. But unless we are going to claim that our own interpretations and understanding of the Bible are infallible, then by definition we must be wrong regarding some of the things we currently believe.

I recall once hearing a very prominent evangelical theologian say that he thought about a third of what he taught was wrong – he just did not know which third. Surely, that is the kind of humility that Stott was talking about and that is desperately required today.

Challenge and change

Yet here is the test as to whether we actually go wherever the Bible takes us: do we allow the Bible to challenge and change what we believe? Indeed, when was the last time we shifted our opinion about some previously held biblical or theological point because the Bible itself led us to think differently?

I would suggest that if we ever find ourselves in the position whereby the only thing the Bible ever does is confirm us in



If the Bible only confirms us in what we already believe, we are in a dangerous place



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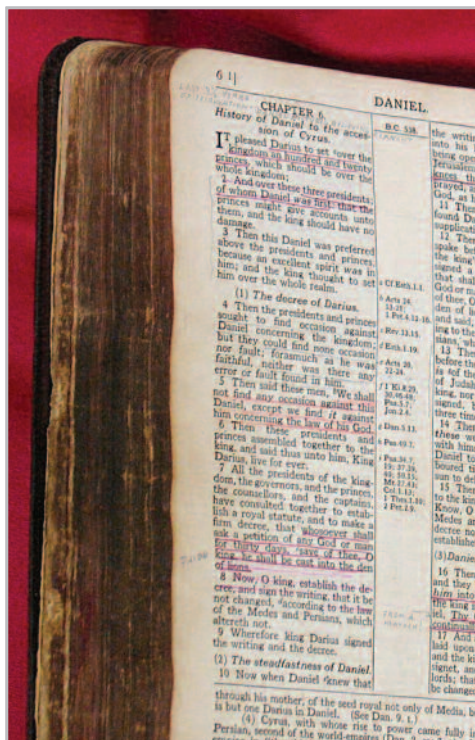


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We must allow the Bible to shift what we already believe

what we already believe, then in fact we are in a dangerous place. "For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4.12).

As Stott put it, "We ask God to break through our defences, until we are ready to hear not the soothing echoes of our own cultural prejudice but the thunderclap of His Word. It is, I fear, this risky humility before the living God which is tragically absent in many biblical critics, and indeed in some evangelical preachers."

"Obedience to the truth" does not just mean that we obey those Biblical precepts that we already understand rightly, such as the requirement to submit ourselves humbly before the Word. It also means that we allow the Bible to shift what we already believe, simply because that is

where the Bible takes us.

As we contend for biblical truth, the emphasis must always rest on the biblical. It is not my understanding or my interpretation that matters: it is what the Bible teaches that is all-important. Once again, Stott makes this point: "It is unwise and unfair to use 'inerrancy' as a shibboleth by which to identify who is evangelical and who is not. The hallmark of authentic evangelicalism is not subscription but submission. That is, it is not whether we subscribe to an impeccable formula about the Bible, but whether we live in practical submission to what the Bible teaches, including an advance resolve to submit to whatever it may later be shown to teach."

Stott makes an extremely important point here. Frequently we misappropriate a call to contend for the truth into an excuse for dogmatism whereby our understanding becomes the only one that is valid. And unless others subscribe to our understanding then they are no longer considered as part of our club: the group of right-thinking evangelicals. But as Stott indicates, the real test of authentic Christianity has less to do with which particular doctrinal formulations manage to get our blessing and far more to do with our humble submission before Christ and His Word.

Of course, this does not mean for a moment that anything goes, that we can believe whatever we want to believe. The reason the Alliance has a Basis of Faith and these Practical Resolutions is precisely because we recognise the need to draw some boundaries. But now that they have been drawn, what matters most is our humble obedience to the Word, exemplified not least in a genuine willingness to learn from one another, and with one another, so that together in unity we may more effectively serve the one who is Lord and master of us all.

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

Hot topics



The Alliance's Public Theology Research Assistant Phil Green helps us grapple with the big issues...

People say that God will guide us. But why does He never seem to guide me?

While it's comforting to know that God has a plan, it can be scary to be unsure what that plan is. There have certainly been times in my life when seeking guidance has left me feeling confused and even lost.

While the Bible might not contain a complete blueprint for my life, it certainly contains guidance. I've found that often when I ask for guidance I'm like a tourist in London asking for directions to the Eiffel Tower. Before you ask for specific directions, you need to be in the right city. I've found that when I am working with the Holy Spirit to follow God's guidance in the Bible, it's amazing how God's individual blueprint for my life becomes apparent.

Secondly, I've learned to do "whatever". By this, I don't mean I throw out all guiding principles, but that I seek to put Colossians 3.17 into practice: "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus."

It's good to have a plan and to be prayerful regarding the future, but we mustn't forget what God wants us to do right now. So whatever situation we find ourselves in, we must be the person God wants us to be. In a few years time, when we look back, we might be surprised to discover just how obviously God has been guiding us.

And if you need more convincing about the "whatever" approach, take a look at the life of Joseph (Genesis 37-50).

► **If you have a practical question about theology that you'd like us to examine, send it to: idea@eauk.org**

TV/DVDs

MAD MEN: Series 1 & 2 (Lionsgate DVD), Series 3 (BBC4)

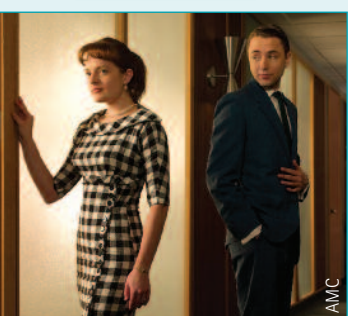
Stylishly immersed in the 1960s advertising world, complete with suburban housewives, cigarettes and Brylcreem, we soon discover each character's desire to find happiness. One person comments that happiness is "a billboard on the side of a road that screams with reassurance that whatever you're doing is OK". Each episode forces us to examine the role of slogans and advertising in our lives. Do we have complete free will when we make choices or are we influenced by the people and media that surround us? *AM*

SKINS: Series 1-3 (4dvd), Series 4 (E4)

Not for the faint-hearted, this explicit series pulls no punches as it charts the lives and loves of a group of friends growing up in Bristol. Sometimes very funny, sometimes deeply poignant, *Skins* evokes both the joys and the pains of adolescence. Alienated from the adult world, its teenage characters may party hard but they can't escape life's hardest questions. Some struggle with difficult families, others with troubled relationships, addiction and academic failure. For those willing to stick with it, the series powerfully dramatises the longings and the hidden heartaches of a prodigal generation. *SL*

FANTASTIC MR FOX (Fox)

Roald Dahl's classic tale is adapted into a sassy comedy with this beautifully animated (in hand-made stop-motion) film about a fox who can't really be happy without a chicken in his teeth. Made in Britain by a trans-Atlantic team (voices are provided by George Clooney, Meryl Streep, Michael Gambon and Jarvis Cocker), writer-director Wes Anderson gives the film a scruffy, feel-good quality that's thoroughly charming. Despite the wacky action and oddball-family theme, the movie quietly touches on some strong issues about how we relate to those closest to us and to our communities at large. *RC*



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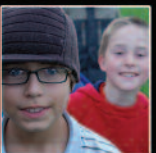

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There's no such thing as a small contribution

General Director *Steve Clifford* is struck by the quiet actions of one pensioner...

It was a great evening. Ann and I had been invited to an awards event at a prestigious central London venue. Dressed in our best, we had been welcomed by our hosts with drinks and canapés. We then took our seats. The evening was hosted by a well-known TV presenter, and we were swiftly taken on a whirlwind tour of some amazing initiatives from all over the country. It felt like the Oscars, but the recognition wasn't for films but for social projects working to reduce crime, develop and train young people, and respond to some of the most challenging needs of our society. The evening was dynamic: videos, music, drama together with the handing out of awards and the expressions of thanks.

As the evening was drawing to a conclusion, former Conservative Party leader Iain Duncan-Smith came to the platform. The Centre for Social Justice, which he had founded, hosted the evening. He thanked those who had sponsored the event and those who had made it happen. Then he announced a final award, which wasn't in the programme. He asked Maxie Richards to come to the stage.

Somewhat reluctantly, Maxie emerged from the audience. A diminutive 70-year-old lady, we could only just see her above the large lectern. Iain's introduction was short: he had met Maxie some 20 years ago and they'd obviously spoken a number of times since. He had been profoundly affected by this woman's life. Eventually, Maxie was left on-stage, alone with the microphone, to tell her story.

A wonderful story

So unfolded this wonderful account, told in Maxie's Scottish accent, of how 23 years ago she had invited a young woman and her child to move in with her. The woman was an addict with a long history of drug abuse. The mother and child lived with Maxie for almost two years, during which time the mother came off drugs and established a stable life. After she moved out, she quickly was replaced by another drug user with a similar history.

In fact, the house began to fill up to the point that social services warned Maxie that she was in danger of breaking planning regulations for multiple-occupancy (which seems a somewhat strange concern in the light of all that was going on in the house).

As she told the story it turned out that over the last 23 years some 1,000 people had been through Maxie's house, all facing up to and working through some major life issues.

As she spoke, I became aware that the room had fallen into total silence. We were all overwhelmed by the power of this silver-haired granny's words. She concluded with words I will never forget: "You know," she said, "all these people who've been part of my life, they've



**We were all
overwhelmed by the
power of this silver-
haired granny's words**

contributed far more to me than I have to them." Then there was a long silence and her final words were, "Anyway it wasn't me, it was God who was working through me".

I wanted to stand on my chair and shout and cheer at the end of such an evening. It was a 70 year old, whom we could only just see, who was giving God the glory and recognition that He deserved. And on this glitzy evening, a simple story reflecting one woman's remarkable life of generosity, sacrifice and faith was being recognised among this esteemed audience.

Amazing people

Over the years I've had the privilege of meeting up with so many amazing people quietly getting on and making a difference in the settings and among the people they sense God has called them to. I think of Ben working as a teacher in the same comprehensive school for the last 20 years, doing assemblies and running a club with the Christian faith at the heart of it. Over the years hundreds, if not

thousands, of young people have been impacted.

I could introduce you to my friend Jo, a social worker; Steven, a politician; Karen, at work in a local authority; Mark, in the health service; Linda, a mum and school governor; and Gary, a businessman. Each of them is convinced that God has called him or her to make a contribution.

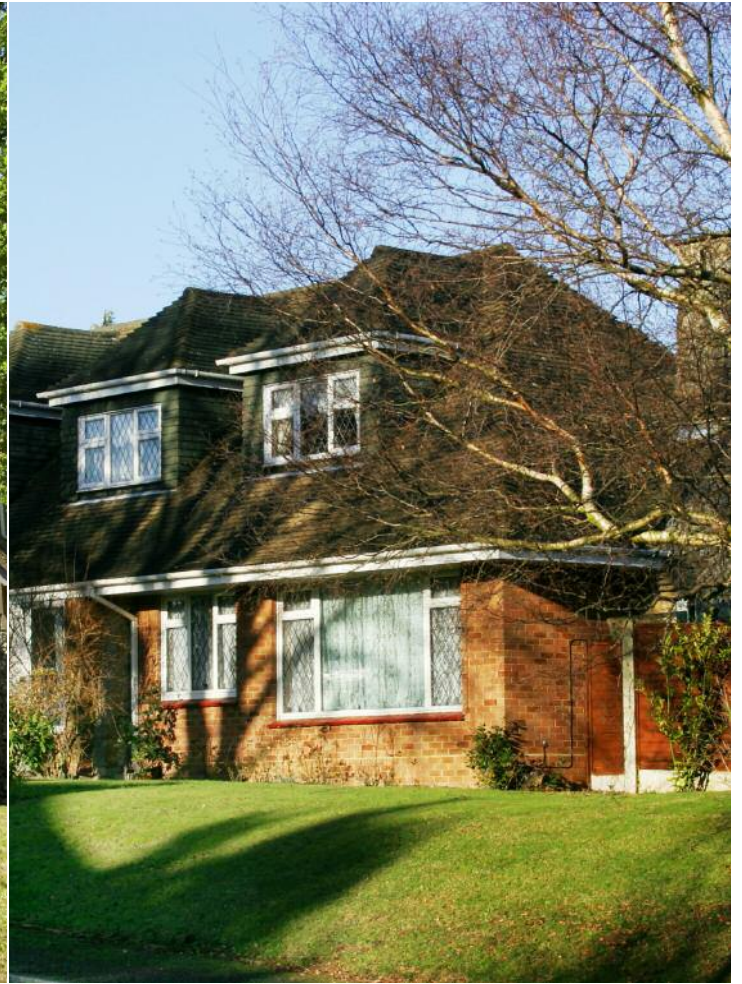
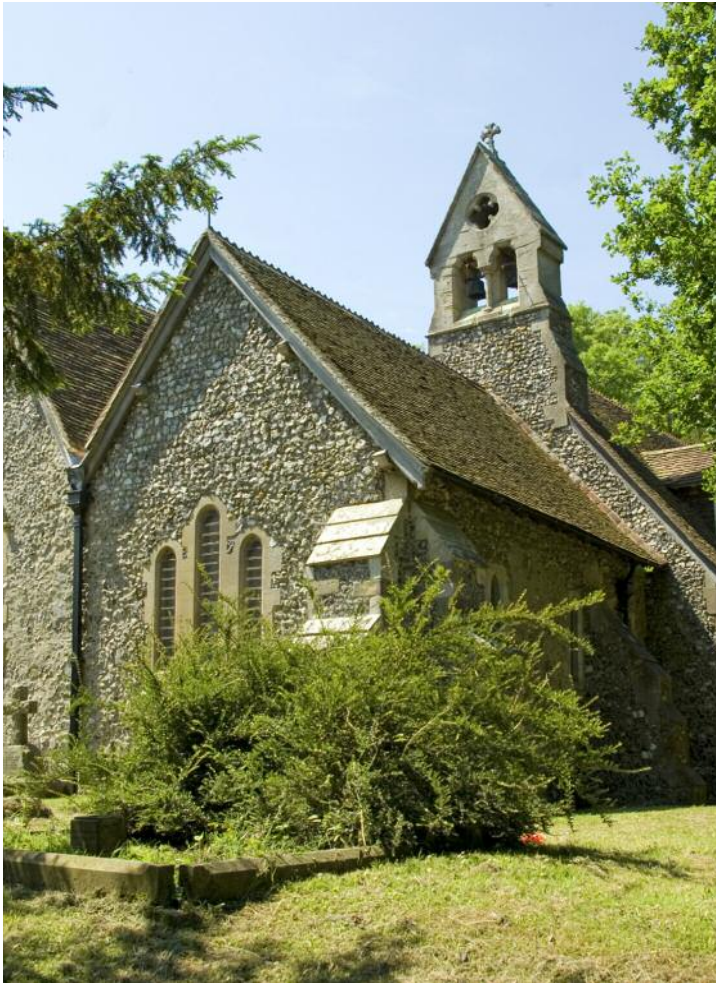
This is the Church at work: being the good news, making a difference through our words and actions, being the salt and the light, bringing transformation into individual lives and communities.

For many the stories will never be told (at least in this age), but I find there is something wonderfully encouraging as I hear these stories. They capture something of peoples' hearts and visions for what they are doing. So whether it's round a kitchen table, in our small group or in a church service, let's keep telling these stories. Let's pray for each other and be encouraged.

Often, as I attend a Sunday morning with my church in West London, my thoughts begin to wander. I find myself tremendously encouraged to reflect on the truth that as we meet to pray, all over the world, in groups small and large, in all kinds of settings and different cultural expressions, the Church of Jesus Christ is meeting, singing songs, reading scripture, praying prayers and responding to preaching.

There are well over a billion of us: we're the family of God from all nations, we're part of God's mission to change our world and we each have a contribution to make. It might seem small and insignificant, but take another look and ask God to help you to see your contribution through His eyes.

► We would love to hear your stories, so that maybe we can share them to encourage others. Write to us at: stories@eauk.org



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