



## NO ALTERNATIVE?

Monday, June 21, saw the official launch at Greencoat Place of the booklet *Why TERROR, is there no alternative?* Four of the 19 contributors were present at the event addressed by David Locke of Grosvenor Books and Imam Dr Abduljalil Sajid. Locke described the booklet as an important tool in educating the British public "about the beliefs of our Muslim brothers and sisters".

Dr Sajid told how the idea for the booklet arose at Caux last August in response to "the growing gap between Muslims and the West", under the ever-lengthening shadow of the events of September 11, 2001. The booklet was not about politics but about promoting change and helping individuals to take responsibility.

There were two important factors in starting this process – making a personal commitment to change and moving away from the culture of blame. "If we keep on addressing violence with violence we will create more hate and anger."

Dr Sajid had earlier been interviewed on BBC Radio Asia, broadcast to an audience all over the continent. **Sarah Calkin**

In a leading article on June 14, *Independent* columnist **Yasmin Alibhai-Brown** wrote:

Imam Sajid has edited a reassuring new booklet – *Why Terror?*, published by Grosvenor Books, which contains reflections by 19 thoughtful Muslims worldwide. One of them, Hisham Shihab, used to be an extremist Lebanese militiaman trained to kill Christians. Today, a reformed man, he is a lecturer and journalist who writes: "We need to alleviate the miserable economic conditions most Muslims live in. But that by itself will not answer terrorism. The lack of democracy and human rights in Muslim societies creates a vacuum of leadership that is often filled by extremist groups. We must look to our own wrongs."

Amen to that I say.



**David Young, Dr Abduljalil Sajid and John Munro** who were involved with the production of the booklet

## FAITH AND CONSCIENCE

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The June Greencoat Forum saw **Philip Boobbyer** give a fascinating talk on "Faith and Conscience in Moscow and Canterbury". He drew some interesting parallels between the role of faith in Soviet Russia and contemporary Britain.

Boobbyer lectures in Modern European History at the University of Kent and is working on his third book, *In Search of Conscience: the ethics of dissent and reform in late Soviet Russia*.

Thankfully he did not assume others had his extensive knowledge and began with a brief recap of the development of Soviet Russia, its Marxist policies and beliefs. He noted that, despite the state rejecting religion and the concept of good and evil, the resulting social decline forced them to recognise the need for moral guidance.

"This was a strange combination of beliefs," Boobbyer told us, "You don't believe in God or in any kind of absolute moral standards...But on the other hand you strongly preach the need for moral behaviour."

Russian people, from ordinary civilians to top officials, were developing blocking mechanisms and false consciences to cope with what they were asked to do or forced to witness. This led to people losing a sense of their own identities.

Nevertheless, faith and spirituality survived in dissident communities across Russia. He told inspiring

stories of individuals who had found strength in God to defy the authorities and "to retain their integrity in very difficult situations... The message is that there really is a moral and spiritual world."

Boobbyer confessed to feeling concerned at the current spiritual state of Britain and worried that people are abandoning God, leaving the UK vulnerable to a similar social decline. He pointed to the erosion of family values and the increased isolation of people as "signs that something has gone badly wrong". He said many British churches "didn't know how to engage" with their congregations and that in Russia it would take time to find the faith lost during the Soviet years.

He spoke encouragingly of his visits to Russia that left him "stirred up with hope" and reiterated a comment made earlier in his speech that "not only do people die spiritually, but they can also come alive". A promising thought to end an interesting and thought-provoking evening.

**Sarah Calkin**

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Dr Boobbyer also travelled to **Edinburgh** for a number of engagements. An evening in the home of Drs Roger and Monica Spooner was attended by some 20 people including representatives of church and academia. Jenny Carr, co-ordinator of the Scotland-Russia Forum, said it was one of the best talks they had been to.

## TREASURER'S REPORT

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Remarks by **Chris Evans** at the Annual General Meeting of the Oxford Group, June 17, 2004

2003 was clearly a very good year from the point of view of OG finances, thanks to several generous legacies. What all this has made possible is told in the Annual Report. It has enabled the Oxford Group not only to cover its own costs, but to bear a good share of the international costs of IC as a whole.

For me personally this is also a significant year. I said this time last year that I felt I should resign as Treasurer of the Oxford Group, and I hereby do so, after 12½ very enjoyable years. It means that I can give time to service on the IC International Council, if I am elected next month.

At a deeper level, I have had the thought that I should learn to support others younger than me. This is not retirement. It is the realisation that the world will not be significantly changed by what I do; but it can be significantly changed if more of us can enable others to do the things we might have done – to do them more and better.

IC's recorded assets are far greater than they were. These assets are a sacred trust, to be faithfully and transparently administered to serve God's purposes. They are given us by God, and by the founding generation of IC, not to provide comfort or security. Still less to make us immune from the market

forces of the spirit, which demand that we earn our keep through being of transforming service to individuals and society as a whole.

Stewardship of them is not ultimately in maximising their value, but in using them to the utmost. It means seeking how they can be used to elicit that constant stream of rethinking, starting again and growing which can irrigate a full spiritual crop. That is the real inheritance we can offer subsequent generations of IC...We cannot tell where those crops will be.

### Supporting initiatives

That is why we seek to use whatever the Oxford Group has to support programmes and initiatives which carry IC's spirit out, while also encouraging them to become self-sustaining. That is why so much of this support goes outside the UK.

We must also be mindful of initiatives beyond our own generation, which have not yet been imagined, let alone carried out. So, don't let's hoard the Oxford Group's resources, nor waste them.

Resigning as Treasurer does not mean walking out. I will still serve on the General Management Council and the Council of Management through the important and fascinating reorganisation which lies ahead. Although we can only see its vague outlines at the moment, I believe it will leave us stronger and better fitted for all that is to come.

## REVERSING THE SPIRAL OF INHUMANITY

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*Three from the UK have been part of the **Action for Life** initiative in India and South-East Asia for the last eight months. Its climax will be at Siem Reap in Cambodia for the Asia Pacific Youth Conference in July.*

*Australian **Mike Brown** writes from Indonesia:*

Imagine the director of an organisation of five million Muslim young women turning to a Pentecostal Christian pastor whom she had just met and asking him to pray for peace.

It happened during our visit last month to the largest Muslim nation on earth.

Although some 90 percent of Indonesia's 215 million people are Muslims, those who hosted 12 of us from Initiatives of Change spoke earnestly about their country's plurality and of the need to respect other faiths. "Unity in diversity" is one of the founding *Pancasila* principles enshrined in their nation's Constitution.

### **Building trust**

Hardly surprising, you might say, that such people speak of diversity if they are hosting an Initiatives of Change group from eight countries. Think again. They were almost all students from poor rural backgrounds who, from around 12 years of age, went through the conservative Islamic boarding school system

and then gained entry to the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University. A few of them, aware of national and global conflicts, have formed a group whose aim is "to build the trust between religions, cultures and ethnic groups in Indonesia".

The packed 10-day programme they arranged for us featured interactive dialogues with various religious organisations – a Confucianist youth group, the umbrella body for Indonesia's Buddhists, a Pentecostal Church and a large Islamic boarding school.

### **Extraordinary experience**

This school visit was an extraordinary experience for us from overseas. At one end of a long narrow meeting hall sat all the girl students wearing hijab head scarves and full length dresses, the boys at the other end. We, the speakers, were in the middle. The headmaster, in his introductory remarks, said his Pesantren Al-Hamidiyah school and Initiatives of Change should work "in good partnership" using IC's principles of "absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love...as the main factors with which to reach a high quality of humanity and life". In his study afterwards, he told us that Muslims should not be worried if some of their faith convert to Christianity as Christians elsewhere are converting to Islam – and God leads people in different ways.

Hardly the attitudes I expected

to find in the *madrassa* school system. We Australians have been told that these schools are the breeding grounds of militancy, that the Bali bombers were recruited from them. If they were, then they represent a small radical fringe among the students.

### **Prejudices challenged**

My prejudices were challenged. And sometimes, so were theirs. Like at the elite University of Indonesia where a student in my discussion group asked why “all white people hate Muslims”. One of his fellows corrected him, saying “Americans”. No, he maintained; it was a racial thing – “all whites”.

I assured him that the two of us “blotchy pinks” sitting with him didn’t hate Muslims. And I pleaded that, though many Australians may carry prejudices of fear or anger, to judge ALL of us as hating Muslims was equally racist. With my apology for the arrogance of some elements in the West, he shook my hand and a ripple of applause went through the group.

### **Honest dialogue**

It was just one conversation in a vast Muslim nation in a seriously conflicting world. But such encounters convinced me that, first, a lot of the sweeping prejudices we have towards a nation like Indonesia simply are not valid; and, secondly, that where prejudices do exist, honest dialogue can break through them.

Yet the dialogue – personal and global – needs more than tolerance, more than the warm friendship which greeted us in Indonesia. It may only be in the sharp relief of revealing those things which wound and cause pain that we glimpse the reality of what needs to be cured and transformed. Should not the agenda for the dialogue between “civilisations” be to find the way and will of God on how we live together in this fear-driven world, addressing its injustices and curing its contradictions?

### **Allies**

There may be stronger allies in that war against injustice and inhumanity within the Indonesian colossus than first we thought.

Take, for instance, the statements in the *Jakarta Post* of two leaders of huge Indonesian Muslim organisations, condemning the gruesome beheading of American Nick Berg. “What has been done by the Iraqi men is as inhumane as the abuses committed by the US soldiers (at the Abu Ghraib prison),” said Ahmad Bagja, deputy chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama, which has around 40 million members. And Goodwill Zubir, secretary-general of the almost as large Muhammadiyah movement, said, “No religion nor social norm condones such an act... This is a spiral of inhumanity.”

That spiral could be reversed – but only if we work on it together.

## IC'S OUTREACH TO BRITAIN

Dear Friends,

We of the Outreach Forum, representing IC's various teams and programmes, believe that it is time for IC to raise its voice in Britain. We have been discussing a growing conviction that IC should hold a major conference in central London in Spring 2006 and would like to ask your thought on what would be its main message, its aims and who might be involved.

We have in mind a **one-day high-profile conference** with the best speakers we can muster, followed by **two days of workshops**.

The preparation for the Conference would be an anvil on which to clarify how best to express IC's message to Britain, to see how we can better exemplify our message, and to pull together all those individuals and groups in Britain who are trying to live out this spirit.

An overall theme which has emerged so far is ***Learning to live together*** (an 'umbrella' theme, expressing Britain's – and humanity's – need). Sub-themes suggested are: ***Be the change you want to see*** (the challenge of personal change), and ***Discover the other*** (the challenge to go out to those who are different).

The following draft text has been suggested: ***We believe that in our own country and around the world there are ideas and values being put into practice that if multiplied offer a future that many long for.***

***What we do as individuals and nations is significantly determined by our values. If we sow selfishness, dishonesty, disrespect and indifference, we harvest mistrust, division, insecurity and injustice. A counter-culture of care, selflessness, integrity and respect, rooted in our daily living, is essential for us to be able to live together in justice and fulfilment. Such a change in ourselves and our nation could offer hope in today's connected yet divided world.***

In order to have an invitation ready a year before the Conference, we would need to have clarified the themes by the end of this year. This would mean using this autumn both for consultation among IC teams and with people in public life and other organisations about how it could be shaped to respond to their concerns.

We would like to ask you:

- **Do these themes go to the heart of the spiritual need in Britain? If not, what theme would you suggest?**
- **Does the draft text express what you would most like to say to Britain? If not, how would you express it?**
- **What public figures would you like to consult? What other organisations might we include as partners?**
- **How could this conference advance your work?**
- **How can the IC team better reflect its high ideals? Is there anything we say we want to**

## **see in the world that we do not practise ourselves?**

To get IC's message heard by national leaders and public alike would require a lot of work and human and financial resources. One early need, for example, would be to find two individuals to take on the conference organisation and public relations.

Please send any thoughts you have, and offers of help or support to: Spring2006@uk.iofc.org or Spring 2006 Conference, c/o Peter Riddell, 12a Norham Road, Oxford OX2 6SF

**Alan Channer, Geoffrey Craig,  
Veronica Craig, Blair Cummock,  
Amina Dikedi, Chris Evans,  
Lawrence Fearon, Nick Foster,  
Howard Grace, Gerald Henderson,  
Elizabeth Locke, Ken Noble,  
Edward Peters, Peter Riddell,  
Mike Smith, Paul Williams,  
Eve Wojciechowska**

## **ROMANIA**

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*Medical Support in Romania* was founded some 14 years ago by Patrick Colquhoun, as a way of trying to improve Romanian health-care. Instead of taking the popular route of supporting orphanages, they decided to aim to raise the standards in one district hospital, bringing modern equipment and expertise. What was worked out here would impact the health of the country at large.

I am not a doctor or any kind of health professional, but I had a very small part in this project when

I volunteered to be a driver for one of the six-monthly supply runs. Our 3½-ton van was filled with equipment, reagents for blood analysers, and many things we take for granted in UK – like dressings, which are very hard to get hold of.

While we were there, a team of medical staff from England worked in the radiology and eye departments of the hospital. Not being a doctor, I buried myself in the basement doing IC-related work. But not for long, because every meal was a chance to meet and talk to hospital staff and to get their ideas.

I was struck by how warmly I was greeted by the doctors, nurses and radiographers I met. It was not hard to fall in love with the Romania I found – the mountains and the meadows full of wildflowers. It gave me a glimpse of a beautiful country, which is fighting for modernity. This country no longer wants to be seen as the poor relation of Europe but wants to be taken seriously. It is held back by a serious lack of resources and a culture where bribery is the norm.

Over the years MSR has fought for a moral integrity, whereby patients get the medical treatment they are entitled to. While there, I met some doctors who had chosen not to take bribes from their patients. For me this fight for moral and professional standards is part of what is needed if Romania is to develop the sense of self-worth I think it needs.

**Catherine Hutchinson**

## INTER-FAITH FORUM IN NORTHERN IRELAND

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**Michael Henderson** was the speaker at the quarterly meeting of the Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum in Belfast in June. His talk, attended by some 70 people from different faiths, was given at Stranmillis University College. Its theme: *Forgiveness between the Faith Traditions*. It was followed by a lively question and answer and discussion period.

Norman Richardson, senior lecturer in religious studies at

Stranmillis, thanking the speaker, said it "was one of the richest discussions I can remember our having for a long time. Much said was very potent for those of us who live in Northern Ireland." Maurice Ryan, Chairman of the ten-year-old Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum, said afterwards, "It was one of the best meetings we've ever had."

An interview with Henderson after he had spoken was broadcast on the BBC Ulster radio programme *Sunday Sequence*.

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## OPEN HOMES, LISTENING HEARTS

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Some time ago a group of friends in India had the idea of making one day in the year an occasion to open their home to strangers in the community in order to get to know them better. They communicated that thought to their friends around the world. The first tentative experiments have produced encouraging stories of people from dozens of nationalities who have shared hospitality and an exchange of life experiences, among them Christians, Muslims, Hindus,

Buddhists and people of no particular faith.

In the last couple of years this simple idea has blossomed and hundreds are now taking part on the first weekend of June in the International Day of Open Homes and Listening Hearts.

In Hale, Manchester, **Keith and Ruth Neal** gave a garden lunch party for 20 British and Chinese friends. For one Chinese family it was their first experience of visiting an English home. "That is a day I will never forget," wrote a post-graduate Chinese student.

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This issue was edited by Mary Jones and Janet Paine with layout by Blair Cummock. As usual, there will be no Newsletter in August, but news reports of the international conferences in Caux, Switzerland, will be sent out from time to time.

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