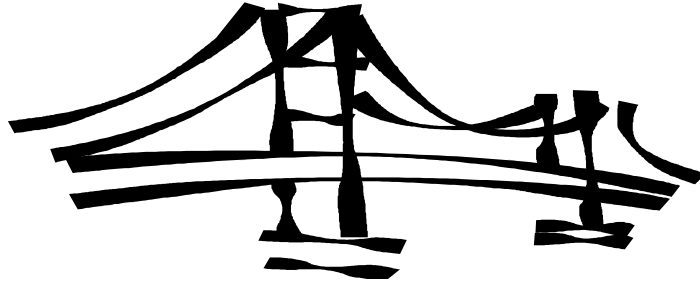


# ***The Bridge***



***Journal of the Churches' Agency for  
Inter Faith Relations in Scotland***

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**Wishing you all Christmas Happiness, and  
peace and joy throughout 2008!**

The next issue of ***The Bridge*** will go out on January 15, 2008. Items for inclusion should reach me by January 14.

Any views or opinions presented are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of CAIRS unless otherwise specifically stated. Most news items are links to other news sources, for which CAIRS accepts no liability for accuracy.

We take reasonable precautions to check for viruses but you are strongly recommended to carry out your own checks as CAIRS will not take responsibility for any damage caused as a result of virus infection.

## **CAIRS Events**

*Thursday, February 7, 2008.*

### **CAIRS Annual Meeting (7pm) and Annual Lecture (7.30pm)**

HG Bishop Angaelos, of the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Moderator of CCIFR, will speak on

### **"Orthodox Spirituality and Inter Faith Relations"**

Augustine United URC,  
George IV Bridge, Edinburgh.

***ALL WELCOME***

*Friday, April 18, 2008 (provisional)*

### **What is the Baha'i Faith?**

A study day in the "Christianity and Scotland's Other Faiths" series to be held in Scottish Churches' House, Dunblane.

Further details will be circulated in due course.

*Thursday, September 25, 2008*

### **Jesus and Other Faiths**

A study day in the "Christianity and Scotland's Other Faiths" series to be held in Scottish Churches' House, Dunblane.

Further details will be circulated in due course.

We are also planning a Saturday visit to the **Synagogue** of the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation and a Sunday visit to a Sikh **Gurdwara** in Glasgow. Further details will be circulated in due course.

## **Correction and Apology**

If you tried to follow the link in last month's issue to find out more about the film "**Hiding and Seeking**" and got nowhere, I'm sorry. The correct link should have been

<http://firstrunfeatures.com/hidingandseeking.html>

## **Christian Bridge building**

### **Making Space for Difference**

Joel Edwards describes the latest Evangelical Alliance's Values campaign...

We want to start a conversation among Christians about what tolerance really means and how we make it an active value in our culture. As evangelicals, let us confound our critics by being the ones who are modelling it in our communities.

Let us be the ones leading the way in social cohesion. Let us be the ones campaigning for those who are victimised or vulnerable, even when their religion is different from our own. And let us do it all with no agenda other than the love of Christ.

Idea, Sept./Oct. 2007,

<http://www.eauk.org/resources/idea/SepOct2007/making-space-for-difference.cfm>

### **People like us**

In an increasingly frightened and fractured society, what's needed is tolerance and understanding, says the Chief Rabbi, Sir Jonathan Sacks.

Britain's long tradition as a tolerant nation stems from its Christian heritage. We need to draw on that history of tolerance to overcome today's current racial and religious tensions.

Joel Edwards adds, "Being tolerant is not about agreeing with something or someone who's different from you. It's about understanding difference, maybe not necessarily liking it, but seeing the person behind the culture, race or religion - a person created in God's image. It means spending time with people who are not like you while still holding onto your own values. It means, ultimately, not wanting the whole world to be exactly like you are, while still having the heart of an evangelist."

"If we were all completely different we couldn't communicate, and if we were all the same we would have nothing to say," says the Chief Rabbi.

Idea, Nov./Dec. 2007,

<http://www.eauk.org/resources/idea/NovDec2007/people-like-us.cfm>

### **Evangelical Tolerance**

There are several other articles about the Evangelical Alliance and Tolerance available online that may interest you.

Bridge over troubled waters  
Talking about... Storytelling  
How **right** is the Religious Right?  
Black and white in a grey world  
The **love, grace and sovereignty** of God in creating,  
sustaining, ruling, redeeming and judging the world.  
Idea, Nov./Dec. 2007,  
<http://www.eauk.org/resources/idea/NovDec2007/>

### **Catholics draw on example of Gandhi**

Young Catholics were urged to follow the example of Mahatma Gandhi at last month's National Youth Sunday.

A new DVD explores the themes of non-violence, peacemaking and justice with young Catholics and aims to equip them to be proactive and bring about change.

Drawing inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi – the man internationally esteemed for his doctrine of non-violent protest – this year's National Youth Sunday (Nov. 25) invited young adults to 'Be the change you want to see in the world'. It focused on experiences of conflict and reconciliation and how to live in solidarity with others.

Ekklesia, Nov 19, <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/6293>

## **Building Bridges with Islam**

### **Website launched to compare Qu'ran and Bible**

In a move believed to be the first of its kind, two Dutch broadcasting companies have launched the integral texts of the Bible and the Qu'ran alongside each other on one website. The objective of the site is to build a bridge between Muslims and Christians. The website, <http://www.bibleandkoran.net>, makes it possible for anyone to access the two books anonymously.

Tariq Ramadam stressed the international importance of the website for the dialogue between Muslims and Christians. "If we want to promote mutual respect we need knowledge of the other text, but in a humble way. Every one of us should be committed to get knowledge from the website."

Ekklesia, Dec.7, <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/6440>

### **Putting faith in different way of life**

Peter Clark, minister of Edinburgh's Nicolson Square Methodist Church recently spent a day dressed in traditional Islamic

clothing so he could experience what it was like to be Muslim in Edinburgh. The idea was timed to coincide with the start of Interfaith week in the city and the Imam of the neighbouring Central mosque, was right behind the idea.

Imam Mohammad Sajjad Asim said: "It's a good thing to do because he will gain a better understanding of what life is like for Muslims in Edinburgh."

Edinburgh Evening News, Nov. 23,

<http://edinburghnews.scotsman.com/features.cfm?id=1841652007>

### **British Sudanese defends "Teddy" teacher**

The imprisonment in Sudan of a British teacher for insulting Islam has led once again to images of angry Muslims splashed across the newspapers. But according to one British Sudanese Muslim scholar, this is not the true face of Islam and their anger is not shared by Muslims in Britain.

Dr Imad Hassan, 45, is a Sudanese doctor and writer with a PhD in comparative religious studies who has lived in Britain since 1991. He feels that someone from the Sudanese community must speak out against the ruling, and is planning to organise a protest from fellow scholars.

"I feel insulted as a Muslim by the government of Sudan, not by Mrs Gibbons," he told the BBC. "Describing the lovely children's toy with the name of Muhammad is a compliment, it is not an insult.

BBC News, Dec.1, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7122562.stm>

*[I could have produced a whole issue with news and comment on this item. Due to its substantial press coverage, I have decided to limit coverage to this article.]*

### **Christians respond to Muslim letter**

A group of prominent Christian theologians have issued a response to a recent open letter sent by 138 Muslim scholars to the Christian community. The response to A Common Word Between Us and You, identified common ground between the two major world faiths, as well as Judaism.

The response extended 'a Christian hand in return, so that together with all other human beings we may live in peace and justice as we seek to love God and our neighbours'. It added: "Muslims and Christians together make up well over half of the world's population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world."

It called for the two religions' common ground of the love of God and neighbour to be the basis of future interfaith dialogue.

The response was signed by more than 100 Christian theologians including Miroslav Volf, authors Jim Wallis and Rick Warren, and John Stott, Rector Emeritus at All Souls Church in London.

Religious Intelligence, Nov.22,

<http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=1194>

### **Pope welcomes Muslim invitation for talks**

The Pope has welcomed the recent letter from 138 Muslim leaders calling for talks between Islam and Christianity.

In his official response to the 'Common Word' appeal, Pope Benedict XVI said he was 'more than eager' to meet with the signatories of the Common Word who formally invited him to a meeting promoting peace between Muslims and Christians.

Religious Intelligence, Nov.30,

<http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=1252>

### **Yorkshire church leaders welcome 'bridgebuilding' Muslim report**

Fourteen leaders of the main Christian Churches in West Yorkshire have welcomed an Islamic report for its peacemaking efforts, and urged Christians to use it to build bridges with their Muslim neighbours.

The West Yorkshire Church Leaders' said in a statement that they welcomed the 'peacemaking tone' of the report, and acknowledged the 'bridge-building gesture' that the scholars had made by quoting Jesus from the Christian scriptures and not, as is usually the case, from the Koran.

The church leaders also said that they found 'encouragement for local Churches' who might engage in dialogue with Muslim neighbours. They suggested that the report could assist dialogue, or in some cases provide a basis for dialogue and improved community relations across West Yorkshire and beyond.

The statement by the church leaders, issued by the West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council, is believed to be the first statement on A Common Word made by regional church leaders anywhere in the UK.

Ekklesia, Dec.10, <http://www.ekkleisia.co.uk/node/6449>

### **Should CAIRS Respond to A Common Word?**

Several groups of Christians have put together responses to the letter from 138 Muslim scholars. Do you think it would be appropriate for CAIRS to produce a reply? Please let me know what you think, in advance of the next CAIRS committee meeting, on January 10.

### **Archbishop hosts Muslim-Christian gathering**

Muslim and Christian scholars gathered in Singapore at the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury. On the agenda will be issues including gender and diversity issues.

The meeting is the latest 'Building Bridges' exercise, the sixth in the annual series, which will bring together over 30 scholars to examine issues of current interest from a religious perspective. It will consider how the respective religions approach such matters as care and responsibility for the environment.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, delivered a lecture on the theme of religious diversity and social unity. The meeting comes just days after the Pope signalled his willingness to meet with the 138 Muslim scholars who last month appealed for more dialogue between the two world faiths.

Religious Intelligence, Dec.1,

<http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=1255>

### **Metropolitan Police sign deal for course in Islam**

The Metropolitan Police have signed a deal with a US company to provide them with an introductory course about Islam.

Jones Knowledge Group announced yesterday that it was to bring its new course 'Understanding Islam: An Introduction' to police officers in the Metropolitan Police (MPS) Territorial Police Command in London.

Ekklesia, Nov. 13, <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/6224>

### **Research claims that the British media is demonising Muslims**

An amalgam of research projects prepared by members of an expert panel examining published newspaper articles and reporting the experiences of Muslim journalists has revealed a "torrent" of negative stories and widespread prejudice.

Ekklesia, Nov. 14, <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/6239>

### **London Mayor calls for press to rethink Islam**

A new survey commissioned by the London Mayor has concluded that the media sees no common ground between Islam and the West, and that conflict between them is 'inevitable'. The survey also suggested that news organizations draw up new codes of conduct to combat negativity about Islam.

The central question examined was whether media coverage hinders or promotes mutual understanding. Other findings in the survey were that Muslims are depicted as a threat to traditional British customs, values and ways of life, alternative worldviews, understandings and opinions are not mentioned or are not given a fair hearing, and facts are frequently distorted, exaggerated or oversimplified.

The study suggests possible recommendations including News organisations should review their coverage of issues and events involving Muslims and Islam. They should recruit more journalists of Muslim heritage, and should also consider how best to give Muslim staff professional support and to prevent them being pigeon-holed as specialists in minority issues.

Religious Intelligence, Nov. 16,

<http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=1163>

### **'Lyrical Terrorist' convicted**

London's 'Lyrical Terrorist' has become the first woman to be convicted under the Terrorism Act.

Samina Malik, who called herself the Lyrical Terrorist "because it sounded cool", has been convicted at the Old Bailey for owning terrorist manuals, writing extremist poems praising Osama bin Laden, supporting martyrdom and discussing beheading.

Religious Intelligence, Nov. 10,

<http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=1138>

### **Strong opposition to Muslim veils among London leaders**

A new poll in the UK has uncovered strong opposition to the wearing of the Muslim veil in schools.

The survey of 'influentials' (business leaders, innovators and politicians) for the London Evening Standard newspaper, found that there was similar opposition to women covering their face in public.

Of those questioned, nearly 90 per cent were opposed to Muslim teachers wearing a veil while teaching while 84 per cent said that Muslim students should not be allowed to wear

it.

About half described Islam as an 'intolerant' religion. However, 70 per cent of those questioned said that Muslims make a positive contribution to society.

Just over half of those questioned said they believed that Muslims are isolated from the rest of society in the capital.

The survey also found that a quarter of those questioned wanted political groups with fundamentalist Islamic agendas to be banned. Religious Intelligence, Nov.13,

<http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=1148>

### **Bishop and clergy visit London mosque**

The Bishop of Kensington joined 75 clergy in a visit to a London mosque as part of an interfaith dialogue event organised by the diocese of London. They took part in a study day at Hounslow Jamia Mosque and Islamic Centre, exploring the question 'Who is my Muslim neighbour?'

The Bishop said it was important for the two faiths to learn more of each others traditions.

He said: "Today is an important day when, thanks to the hospitality of the Muslim community here, we begin to look together at our common ground and goals, our differences - which are often very precious to our communities themselves, and - very importantly - what we can do together for the good of all God's people here in West London."

Meanwhile, the Bishop of Sheffield, the Rt Rev Jack Nicholls, launched Islamic Awareness Week for South Yorkshire.

The campaign, now into its 14th year, aims to raise awareness of Islamic culture and beliefs and dispel misinformed opinions.

The theme this year was 'One World: Our Children, Our Future',

Bishop Nicholls said, "One of the priorities of my time as Bishop of Sheffield has been to maintain dialogue and encourage conversations between people of different faiths and beliefs."

Religious Intelligence, Nov. 15,

<http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=1155>

### **Secularisation project for French Muslim theological students**

In a bid to curb Islamist radicalism fostered by overseas imams preaching on French soil, the Ministry of the Interior

has backed a secularisation programme for French Muslim theological students.

The Catholic Institute of Paris, in conjunction with the Grand Mosque of Paris, will offer a government-sponsored two-semester course beginning in January for 30 student imams that will complement their religious training.

The course will offer instruction in 'general culture,' including a history of republican values, legislative matters, 'openness,' and 'intercultural exchange.'

The former mufti of Marseille, Soheib Bensheikh, backed the plan: "The majority of Muslims, the ordinary people, want an open, moderate Islam. They want to hear innovative, modern discourse." He also said that Muslims today "experience a dangerous discrepancy between their status as citizens and their status as believers

Religious Intelligence, Nov.25,

<http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=1224>

### **Muslim leader concerned about UK climate of fear**

The head of the Muslim Council of Britain has condemned what he describes as "the climate of fear" and prejudice experienced by many Muslims in the UK, and has called on the authorities to stamp out prejudice and promote fair treatment.

Muhammad Abdul Bari said that in certain respect the atmosphere of fear and suspicion surrounding the Muslim community was similar to that effecting the Jews in Germany during the 1930s - a remark which has provoked controversy among those who say that it is an over-dramatic and inappropriate parallel.

Ekklesia, Nov. 14, <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/6233>

## **Building Bridges with Jews**

### **Jewish group protests at Israel's treatment of Christian delegation**

The International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) has asked the Israeli government to investigate why a group of Austrian Catholic clergy were prevented from paying their respects at the Western Wall recently.

The IJCIC expressed concern over international negative impact on Israel and Jewish-Christian interfaith relations as a result of the incident, which occurred when a delegation of Austrian Catholic Bishops wishing to pay their respects at the Western (Wailing) Wall declined to remove their crosses. Ekklesia, Nov. 20, <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/6307>

## **Building Bridges with Hindus**

### **Archbishop and PM praise Diwali**

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, sent a message of greeting to the Hindu community for their celebration of the festival of Diwali. Dr Williams praised the Hindu Community for their contribution to the life of the UK, in business, education, culture and religion, and in bringing the festival of Diwali to the wider community.

And Prime Minister Gordon Brown also sent his greetings: "I'm delighted to send my warmest greetings to everyone in our Hindu and Sikh communities on the auspicious occasion of Diwali. "Diwali is such a wonderful inclusive festival, which reaches beyond your communities to people of many backgrounds all over the world. The symbolic lighting of lamps, representing life, hope and new beginnings sends a powerful message of unity and peace to us all.

Religious Intelligence, Nov. 9,

<http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=1136>

### **"Christians and Hindus : Determined to Walk the Path of Dialogue"**

In his message to Hindus, Cardinal Tauran, the president of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, focuses on peace, freedom and mutual respect.

"The world around us is yearning for peace. Religions promise peace because they trace their origin to God who, according to Christian belief, is our peace. Can we, as believers of different religious traditions, not work together to receive God's gift of peace and to spread it around us so that the world becomes for all people a better place to live?"

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/interelg/documents/rc\\_pc\\_interelg\\_doc\\_20071105\\_diwali\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_20071105_diwali_en.html)

## **Building Bridges with Sikhs**

### **Relations with Other Faiths**

This month's feature from Church of Scotland Inter Faith Support Worker, Iain Stewart, is about the Birthday of Sikh Guru Gobind Singh.

<http://www.churchofscotlandextranet.org.uk/xmissiondisciple/downloads/xmdrwofdec07.doc>

## **Building Bridges Together**

### **World religious leaders gather at Amritsar**

The Dalai Lama is to host a major inter-faith gathering this week in Amritsar to examine how faith groups can 'bring healing to the world'.

The summit, organized by the Elijah Interfaith Institute, will hear from Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Sikh delegates.

Among those attending are American Christians including Miroslav Volf, the British Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sacks and Sheikh Muhammad Nur Abdallah, President of the Islamic Society of North America.

The 50 delegates, all members of the Board of World Religious Leaders will join the Dalai Lama at the Golden Temple where he will deliver the keynote address on Wednesday.

The Dalai Lama says: "Our planet is in desperate need for love, forgiveness and interreligious harmony. This meeting of leaders and scholars from around the world will explore how the wisdom of our traditions can help achieve these things."

A group of 20 Muslim thinkers and historians from all over the world join the meeting as part of a three-year process to explore a Muslim Theology of World Religions.

Religious Intelligence, Nov.26,

<http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=1229>

### **A Reflection on 'Reconciliation'**

These are a few quotes from a reflection given by Gerald Henderson at a Christian, Muslim, Jewish - Three Faiths Forum in Liverpool.

"I believe that 'Reconciliation' is a journey. Depending on the people or the circumstance, the journey can be short or long.

In the context of world events, we are aware how much injustice, conflict and revenge have been, and are being,

inflicted as a result of the unhealed wounds of history. Reconciliation is a journey towards a place where Truth, Mercy, Justice and Peace meet. Initiatives of Change help people move from 'you are the problem' and 'the blame game' to 'we have a problem, what do we do about it'. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting, nor does it mean abandoning the claims of justice. It does mean, however, an acknowledgement that the past is past and must not be allowed to cast its shadow over the future." Initiatives of Change, Nov. 20, <http://www.uk.iofc.org/resources/reflections/5643.html>

### **Faiths will use their billions to back ethical business**

Religious organisations already have a major stake in the global economy and can now shift decisively towards using their resources for ethical purposes and to redistribute wealth to the poor, a major group of faith investors says.

"Faith organisations have the real potential to transform the global money markets, but are currently failing to 'walk the walk' when it comes to ethical investment", says Joost Douma, Secretary General of the International Interfaith Investment Group (3iG).

Representatives of nearly two dozen Christian, Jewish and Buddhist faith organisations, with combined assets in excess of 135 billion dollars, will be advised to work together using shareholder activism to promote ethical, environmental and socially sustainable behaviour by companies in which they have funds invested.

Ekklesia, Nov. 14, <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/6243>

Religious Intelligence, Nov. 16,

<http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=1160>

### **Latin American and Caribbean faiths meet banks to talk anti-poverty action**

Interfaith religious leaders representing Christian, Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, Muslim, Jewish and indigenous faith communities in Latin America and the Caribbean have met with officials from the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the Inter-American Development Bank to discuss ways of working together to advance the struggle against poverty and inequality.

The delegates, went to Washington DC for conversations aimed at influencing policy, not in search of funding.

Participants came from Bolivia, Anguilla, Venezuela, Argentina, Colombia, Peru and Costa Rica.

In an interview following the meetings, Dr Oluwakemi Banks, president-at-large of the Caribbean Council of Churches discussed the significance of faith community involvement in development efforts. "Churches reach people at a grass roots level," she said. "We are more in touch with their needs and meet those needs in a different way than governments and other organizations. We felt there was a need to let these groups know we exist and to discuss ways of working together."

Ekklesia, Dec.3, <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/6413>

### **Religious leaders cite concerns ahead of Annapolis peace conference**

Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders of the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative in the US have met with Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, R. Nicholas Burns, expressing support for 'active, determined and consistent' US leadership for peace, but raising specific concerns related to the Annapolis peace conference and follow-up efforts.

Ekklesia, Nov.22, <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/6328>

### **Places of worship to receive anti-terror guidelines, and PM encourages inter faith dialogue**

Places of worship will be issued with guidelines as part of the government's new anti-terrorism strategy. The guidelines will advise remaining vigilant and training staff to carry out searches and practise evacuation drills.

Meanwhile, interfaith dialogue will be encouraged in a bid to curb Islamic extremism. Announcing the new measures in Parliament, the Prime Minister also unveiled plans to create a Business in the Community Muslim mentoring programme, and a Muslim advisory group which will look into granting women's access to mosques. The Prime Minister said more dialogue between faiths was an important way of trying to cut down on extremism. He said: "It is by seeking to build on shared interests and shared values that we will isolate extremists and foster understanding across faiths.

"Following the recent remarkable letter by 138 Muslim scholars which paid tribute to the common roots of Islam, Christianity and Judaism and called for deeper dialogue, we stand ready to support in Britain new facilities for multi-faith scholarship, research and dialogue."

Religious Intelligence, Nov. 15,  
<http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=1157>

### **Government urged to invest in inter-faith dialogue to combat terror threat**

Inter faith dialogue is a worthwhile investment in the war against Islamist terrorism, the Bishop of St Albans has said. Speaking in response to the Prime Minister's national security speech to the House of Commons, the Bishop told the House of Lords that the government would benefit from the experiences of the church's interfaith dialogue.

"If the amount of money that is likely to be put into soft architecture and barriers at stations could be directed with equal concern and excitement towards interfaith work, we should achieve a great deal more in the long term," he said.

Religious Intelligence, Nov.25,  
<http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=1227>

## **Obstructions to *Bridge Building***

### **Bibles banned at Beijing Olympics**

Bibles have been banned by the Beijing Olympics organizing committee from the 2008 game's Olympic village.

The Italian daily La Gazzetta dello Sport reports that security concerns have prompted the ban, which also includes any kind of religious symbol from the grounds of the Olympic facilities. While the Communist Party's 17th National Congress has given a grudging support for the role of religion in the nation, crackdowns on "House Churches" and Christian activities outside of the government backed national protestant and catholic churches have intensified.

Religious Intelligence, Nov. 7,  
<http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=1124>

### **Hairdresser facing tribunal over headscarf claim**

A London hairdresser is at the centre of the latest case of religious discrimination after a job applicant claimed she was refused work because she wore the Muslim headscarf.

Sarah Desrosiers, a 32-year-old hair stylist, is being sued by Bushra Noah who claims she was told that it was a 'must' for her customers to see their stylist's hair.

Other recent cases involving religious discrimination have included:

Aishah Azmi, who was dismissed from a Church of England primary school in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, after refusing to remove her niqab in class

Shabina Begum, who went to court after she was excluded from Denbigh High School in Luton for flouting its uniform policy.

Sophia Moussaoui, a divorce lawyer, who was sacked by Radcliffes solicitors because of her religious clothing.

Nadia Eweida, a British Airways employee, who was suspended for refusing to remove a cross, which she said was central to her faith.

Lydia Playfoot, who was excluded from her school in Horsham, West Sussex, for refusing to remove her 'purity ring', which she said was a symbol of her Christian commitment to chastity.

Religious Intelligence, Nov. 8,

<http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=1133>

### **New legal battle looming over schoolgirl's bangle ban**

Sarika Singh, 14, was excluded from school for wearing a Sikh religious bangle.

Religious Intelligence, Nov. 7,

<http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=1122>

Ekklesia, Nov. 19, <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/6283>

### **Should religious dress and symbols be banned at work?**

So long as the form of dress is not dangerous, unhealthy, contrary to the needs of the task undertaken, or deliberately designed to menace or threaten someone else, then we should seek to allow it wherever possible.

People dress in all sorts of ways that reflect their lifestyle. And it isn't always straightforward to identify what is, or isn't, inspired by religion. For example, some people wear a cross for religious reasons, while others wear one simply as jewellery.

Mediation and mutual adaptation should be viewed as the appropriate way forward, rather than prescription and litigation.

Simon Barrow, writing in Ekklesia, Nov. 19,

<http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/6279>

### **Hindu evangelist escapes arson attack**

In the latest outbreak of inter-religious conflict, the home of a Christian evangelist has been destroyed in an arson attack by Hindu radicals. The incident took place in the Medak district of Andhra Pradesh when the young pastor, aged 23, together with his wife and family were asleep. The heat and smoke woke them and they managed to escape. Observers believe that the home may have been targeted in the November 27 attack because it was also used as a meeting place.

There is increasing violence and sporadic attacks against Christians from those on the fringes of India's Hindu majority population.

Religious Intelligence, Dec.2,

<http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=1262>

### **Caste and rules create 'dual faith' Dalits in India**

Many are Hindus in government records but Christians in faith," explains the discrepancy between the government statistics and what many people believe is the actual number of Christians.

The majority of the population of the Kolar Gold Fields in Karnataka state are Dalits, low castes treated as untouchables under India's caste system. Many are classed as Hindu Dalits but if they convert to Christianity or Islam they lose their job security and may find themselves even more discriminated against. As a result, many Dalits remain officially Hindu while also worshipping as Christians.

In many places, people celebrate Hindu festivals as well as Christian feasts, and almost every mining hamlet has a Hindu temple and a Christian church, often side by side.

Such "dual faith" is symbolised by finding, for example, a statue of Jesus Christ among a host of Hindu deities.

Ekklesia, Nov. 15 , <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/6250>

### **Christian family attacked for snubbing Diwali**

A Christian family in India was attacked , for not celebrating the Hindu festival of Diwali. A group of yobs, who had reportedly been drinking, accused the family of praying instead of celebrating the Hindu festival of Diwali

Religious Intelligence, Nov. 12,

<http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=1140>

### **New Muslim-Christian violence in Pakistan**

A fresh outbreak of Muslim-Christian violence has been reported in Pakistan. Two villages have faced attacks with Muslims using mosques to broadcast calls for attacks on Christians.

The first incident took place in Govind village, near Lahore, Muslims there objected to prayers being relayed through loudspeakers at the village church and used rival loudspeakers at seven mosques to broadcast a call to war against Christians. In a separate incident, in the village of Kasur, mosque loudspeakers were used to call on Muslims to seize land belonging to Christians.

Religious Intelligence, Nov. 8,

<http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=1129>

### **Christians in Iraq 'worse off than under Saddam'**

Conditions for Christians in Iraq are now worse than under the Saddam Hussein regime, a priest has claimed. Speaking on the CBS 60 Minutes programme, Canon Andrew White, an English Anglican priest based in the Iraqi capital, said that things were worse there now than ever they had been.

"Things are the most difficult they have ever been for Christians, probably ever in history," he added.

He confirmed recent reports that almost all of the country's Christian population have fled, been killed, or been the targets of assassination or kidnap.

Religious Intelligence, Dec.1,

<http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=1258>

## **Other Inter Faith events**

*March 1-11, 2008*

### **Edinburgh International Festival of Middle Eastern Spirituality And Peace 2008**

A celebration of the aspects of spiritual peacemaking, with a wide range of events including spiritual retreats, workshops and conferences. The festival welcomes guests from across the UK and further afield to enrich conversations and the spiritual and cultural exchange.

#### **Key Event:**

Edinburgh will host a visit by the world-renowned Iranian Islamic scholar Prof Seyyed Hossein Nasr to address the opportunities and challenges of Middle East Peace from a spiritual, educational and cultural perspective. Prof Nasr will give the 2008 Middle East Festival Lecture on "**Spiritual Approaches to Peace and Ecology in the Islamic World,**" on Tuesday March 11 at the Queen's Hall in Edinburgh, beginning at 7.30pm.

The previous day he will give a workshop on "Sufism: Doctrines, Practices and Historic Manifestations" at the Quaker Meeting House in Edinburgh, beginning at 10am.

Prof Nasr, born in 1933 in Tehran, is one of the world's leading experts on Islamic science and spirituality. In 1979 he migrated to USA becoming Distinguished Professor of Islamic Studies at University of Utah, then from 1979 to 1984 Professor of Islamic Studies at Temple University. Since 1984 he has been University Professor of Islamic Studies at the George Washington University. He has given several major lectures, including the Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh. He is the author of over thirty books and 300 articles on aspects of Islamic studies, comparative philosophy and religion, philosophy of art and the philosophical and religious dimensions of the environmental crisis.

Further Information from Neill Walker, 0131 331 4469,  
[mesp2008@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:mesp2008@hotmail.co.uk)

Or the Edinburgh International Centre for Spirituality and Peace website, <http://www.eicsp.org>

*May 20-22, 2008*

**“Can religions ever be channels for peace?”**

Christian Interfaith Practitioners’ Association Annual Conference.

Luther King House, Manchester.

Conference programme from <http://www.acts-scotland.org/cairs/downloads/cipa08.pdf>

Further details from, and bookings to, Johny, GRASSROOTS  
47, High Town Road, Luton LU2 0BW, 01582-416946 or  
[jgrassroots@btconnect.com](mailto:jgrassroots@btconnect.com)