

NETTING CITIZENS

PUBLIC CONCERNS

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NETTING CITIZENS

Exploring citizenship in the internet age

Edited by
JOHNSTON R. MCKAY

THE BAIRD TRUST

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Introduction

This book is the result of a conference on 'Netting Citizens' held by the Centre for Theology and Public Issues at the Riccarton campus of Heriot Watt University in November 2001. The idea of the conference arose when the Baird Trust, conscious that the format of the lecture no longer occupied the place it once did, began looking for alternatives to the Baird Lectures which were founded in 1872-3 by James Baird of Auchmedden and Cambusdoon. The lectures were to be given annually by a minister of the Church of Scotland or any other Scottish Presbyterian church on a theme drawn from a broad range of theological and ecclesiastical subjects.

In the course of the Baird Trustees' discussions the point was made that the new Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) were the modern equivalent of the lecture of James Baird's day. In conversation with Professor William Storrar and Dr Alison Elliot of the Centre for Theology and Public Issues at New College in Edinburgh, the conference began to emerge as a way not only of pursuing the Centre's chosen theme of Citizenship but also of enabling the Baird Trust to discover more about the world of ICTs and how, in contemporary

fulfilment of James Baird's intention, the Trust might become involved with them. Professor Storrar agreed to chair the conference and, as the statutory Church of Scotland minister on the Baird Trust, I agreed to edit a volume of essays or papers, some of which were delivered at the conference and others that were sought following discussions at it. One of the participants in the conference, and a contributor to this volume, Professor Keith Culver wrote that nowhere had he

encountered so diverse a group of conference participants as I found at 'Netting Citizens' ... I must admit that I was pleasantly surprised to find under sponsorship of a theological centre the freest discussion I have encountered in examination of e-democracy and the place of cultural difference and other grounds of disagreement in democratic societies.

The Baird Trust's funding for the Conference allowed Neal Ascherson to spend time at New College researching the issues which he dealt with in his keynote address to the Conference. His contribution, along with the paper by Barry Wellman (who spoke at the conference on a different theme) and Bernie Hogan, form the first section of this book.

The second section of the book consists of contributions from Anna Malina and Keith Culver, sought as a result of further issues which the Conference indicated should be addressed

The final section of the book takes the issues raised and places them in a theological, religious or ecclesiastical context. Elaine Graham did this very clearly in the paper which she read at Conference and which is reproduced here. The papers by Heidi Campbell, Alison Elliot, John Flint and Ade Kearns, Brian McGlynn, Marjory MacLean, Andrew Morton and myself all stem from the Conference,

though Heidi Campbell and Ade Kearns gave shorter presentations during one of the sessions.

This volume would not have reached publication had I not received the constant help, encouragement and advice of two people. One is Dr Alison Elliot, who organised and participated in the conference and whose election as Moderator of the Church of Scotland's General Assembly in the year of publication not only marks a historic moment for the Kirk but also gives a sense of unalloyed delight to her admiring friends; the other is my wife Evelyn whose computing skills gave the rather disparate form of the various contributions a common shape for the publisher, and whose understanding affection means more to me than it would be appropriate to record.

JOHNSTON R. MCKAY

Contributors

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ANDREW MORTON was Associate Director of the Centre for Theology and Public Issues, 1994–2001.

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