

PRAYER ALERT...

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www.prayer-alert.net editor@prayer-alert.net

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BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

■ BBC is marginalising religion: Simon Mayo

Religion is 'increasingly driven to the margin' on the BBC, a popular radio presenter at the corporation says. Simon Mayo, who is known as a Christian, also says there is an anti-Christian theme apparent in television comedians. He said: 'They are at the forefront of the new atheism.' Mr Mayo said: 'I was listening to a BBC news bulletin during Easter 2008 about services to mark 'the rebirth of Christ''. He said that the line was 'clearly written by someone who had no contact with or understanding of the concept of resurrection'. Mr Mayo added he had listened to actor David Tennant on Desert Island Discs and that the presenter on the show had viewed the fact that his father was a minister as a 'problem'. Last year BBC presenter Jeremy Vine said he believes Christ is who he says he is, but doesn't think he could say so on his show.

Pray: for broadcasters to reflect the Christian foundation and life of this country in an honest and open way. (Pr.12:17)

More: <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/bbc-is-marginalising-religion-simon-mayo/>

■ Carey calls for 'tougher church'

Former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Carey says Christians are too soft and need to toughen up. In an interview on BBC 5 Live's breakfast programme this week, he said Christians needed to speak up about their beliefs. 'I think we need a tougher church,' he said. 'We Christians are very often so soft that we allow other people to walk over us and we are not as tough in what we want, in expressing our beliefs, because we do not want to upset other people. We have got to be more outspoken.' Lord Carey went on to stress the importance of preserving the country's Christian heritage and democratic values. His comments follow those of his successor, Dr Rowan Williams, who said last month that the Government treated religious believers as 'oddballs' and called on politicians to be more outspoken about their religious convictions.

Pray: for God's guidance and courage for all Christians to stand up for their faith. (Mt.10:27)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.co.uk/article/carey.calls.for.tougher.church/25039.htm>

■ Faith schools facing admissions curb

Faith schools are increasingly being robbed of the power to select children on religious grounds following an overhaul of admissions rules, according to Christian groups. The guidelines – introduced to stamp out discrimination against working-class pupils – could actually lead to a rise in 'pew jumpers' who conveniently discover religion to get children into the most popular schools, it was claimed. In the last six months alone, more than 30 faith schools have been subjected to investigations by England's admissions watchdog after being accused of breaching the strict code. An analysis of cases heard by the Office for the Schools Adjudicators shows how some of the most successful state schools in the country have been censured for using 'points-based' systems intended to pick out the most religious pupils. But Mike Judge, spokesman for the Christian Institute, said: 'We've got a bizarre system in which secular organisations are dictating how religious bodies should identify who is and who isn't religious'.

Pray: that authorities would realise that the Christian ethos offered is why these schools are so popular and seek to incorporate their ideas and values in all schools. (Dt.4:10b)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/6960963/Faith-schools-facing-admissions-curb.html>

■ **Nick Clegg: 'Faith schools should be forced to tackle homophobia'**

Faith schools should be forced to introduce anti-homophobic bullying measures, Nick Clegg, the Lib Democrat leader has suggested. Gay couples should also be given the symbolic right to describe themselves as 'married' rather than being civil partners, he said. Mr Clegg made a pitch for the so-called 'pink vote' as the parties continue to manoeuvre ahead of a general election that is expected to take place in May. Mr Clegg said faith schools must ensure they do not become 'asylums of insular religious identity'.

Pray: that Christian faith schools continue to teach the sanctity of marriage as the bedrock of family life. (1Cor.6:9)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/politics/liberaldemocrats/6977759/Nick-Clegg-Faith-schools-should-be-forced-to-tackle-homophobia.html>

■ **Church of England contributes further to dialogue on death and dying**

The Church of England has joined more than 1,000 organisations in the national Dying Matters Coalition. Led by the National Council for Palliative Care (NCPC), working closely with the Department of Health (DH) and other key stakeholders, the coalition aims to promote public awareness around death, dying and bereavement. The Bishop of Southwark, the Rt Revd Tom Butler, vice chair of the Archbishops' Council's Mission and Public Affairs Council, said: 'I welcome the Dying Matters initiative as an important contribution to the debate about dying and death. The advances in palliative and end of life care have been helpful in improving the quality of life of those who are dying and their families, and I hope that this new coalition will bring help and information to many people.'

Pray: for the Coalition and for the contribution the Church of England will be able to make to it. (2Ti.1:10)

More: <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/news/pr0510.html>

■ **Trafalgar Square to host the Passion of Christ**

Thousands of people are expected to attend a vast outdoor performance of the Passion of Christ in Trafalgar Square this Easter, it has been announced. Under the eye of Lord Nelson, a cast of more than 100 actors from the Wintershall Estate near Bramley, Surrey, will act out the drama of Christ's trial, crucifixion and resurrection. Organisers have promised the free event will give spectators a unique chance to experience what it was like to be in Jerusalem on the first Good Friday with the audience hearing the crowds baying for Christ's blood. The event will be staged on the afternoon of Good Friday, April 2. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, the Most Rev Vincent Nichols, who is backing the production, said: 'I am delighted that people from so many Christian denominations will be coming together to remind Londoners why the bank holiday of Good Friday is observed.'

Pray: for those involved in this event and for their planning, preparation and protection. (Ac.5:20)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/religion/6976792/Trafalgar-Square-to-host-the-Passion-of-Christ.html>

■ **Scotland: Kirk leader calls for an end to Sunday working**

A senior Church of Scotland leader is urging people to stop working on Sundays and reclaim it as a family day. The Rev Ian Galloway, convener of the Kirk's Church and Society Council, is questioning whether people's hectic lifestyles are full of meaningful accomplishments or just busy activities to the detriment of personal relationships. He spoke out in support of Christian car dealer Peter Vardy, who has announced he is shutting showrooms on Sundays so staff can spend time with their families. The move, which follows a trial at his Vauxhall dealership in Perth, comes despite the fact that Sunday is usually the biggest day of the week for car sales. Last month, rugby player Euan Murray announced that he was sitting out Scotland's opening Six Nations match against France on February 7 because of his religious views, and would no longer play on Sundays.

Pray: for all those who are standing up for Christian principles against the ways of the world. (Gen.2:3)

More: <http://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/Article.aspx/1556914?UserKey=#ixzz0cYmA5xbd>

EUROPE

■ **Netherlands: Campus ministry reaches out to students without knowledge of Christ**

Around 600,000 students attend universities in the Netherlands. However, only six percent are evangelical Christians. Among college students alone, there is a great need for the Gospel. However, many non-believers have no idea they are missing something. 'There is growing up a new generation who have never heard the Gospel, who don't read the Bible and who don't have Christian friends. And our big question is: 'Who shall bring to them the Gospel?' said Bert den Hertog of IFES-BIS (International Fellowship of Evangelical Students-Board of International Student work). Churches are not stepping up to the task at hand, said den Hertog. 'Although there are nice things happening, we're seeing that most churches are very focused on themselves,' den Hertog said. They lack vision. So IFES-BIS, a Netherland division of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, is using a variety of ministries to reach out to students without Christ around the country.

Pray: that the Church together with IFES-BIS would take up the challenge to bring the Gospel to non Christian students. (Is.52:7)

More: <http://www.mnnonline.org/article/13739>

■ **Spain: 'Guardian Angels' help reduce prison suicides**

Jesus, an inmate in Leon prison in northern Spain, said he lost the will to live after his girlfriend died last month. It was the intervention of four of his fellow prisoners who seemingly prevented his suicide – 'Guardian Angels' who watched over him

day and night. 'Sometimes, their mere presence made me feel better,' said Jesus, who is serving a sentence for armed robbery. 'I don't know if, without them, I would have killed myself, but I had that idea in my head.' The 'angels' are part of a four-year-old nationwide programme whose aim is to prevent prison suicides. Prisoners are trained by psychologists to watch over their fellow inmates. For José Maria, another inmate, the 'angels' are a 'gift from heaven'. 'When I came to prison I needed a Guardian Angel because I had never been in prison before. I had committed a reprehensible crime and the guilt was enormous,' said the inmate, who is serving 25 years for murder.

Pray: that those in prison may be supported by God's love, as was Paul. (Lk.4:18)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/expat/expatnews/6839889/Spains-guardian-angels-help-reduce-prison-suicides.html>

WORLDWIDE

■ Haiti: Earthquake is latest blow for country in misery

Until Tuesday afternoon, a cataclysmic earthquake was about the only disaster that had not befallen Haiti in the 205 years since a slave revolt won independence from Napoleonic France. Bankrupt, barren, misruled and ravaged by nature and human violence, the country serves as a textbook example of a dysfunctional nation. While the rest of the Americas largely escaped poverty in recent decades, Haiti has sunk in a spiral of destitution, dependent on foreign charity and a UN force to keep its 8 million people from starving and fighting. (See also Prayer Alert 0210) When the country has tried to pick itself up, nature has hammered it down again, most recently in 2008 when hurricanes and landslides killed 1,000 and made 800,000 homeless. In 2009, Haiti sank in the UN economic rankings from 146th to 149th place out of 182 nations. In the Americas, only Nicaragua comes close to such poverty.

Pray: for the people of Haiti that as international focus is centred on relief for the earthquake ways would also be found to help it from its poverty. (Ps.4:1)

More: http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us_and_americas/article6985880.ece

■ Malaysia: Police identify suspect in spreading Church attacks

Malaysian police said Tuesday that they have identified their first suspect in attacks on some 10 churches and Christian buildings amid a dispute over the use of the word 'Allah' by non-Muslims. Anti-Christian violence began last Friday, January 8, after a court ruled that Catholic newspaper The Herald could use the word Allah, in reference to God, in its Malay-language editions. The Herald challenged a government ban on the use of 'Allah' by non-Muslims, arguing the word is part of the Malay language that churches have used for hundreds of years. Judge Lau Bee Lan agreed and said on 31 December. The Herald had a 'constitutional right' to use the word 'Allah'. The government has appealed against the ruling, as violence and protests have spread in several areas of the predominantly Muslim nation. Muslims demonstrated at mosques last Friday and later arson and other attacks were reported on Protestant and Catholic Church buildings in and around Kuala Lumpur.

Pray: that these attacks on the Church would cease and ways found to promote acceptance. (1Ti.4:9)

More: <http://www.bosnewslife.com/10896-news-alert-malaysia-police-identify-suspect-in-spreading-church-attacks>

■ Egypt: Coptic Christians gunned down after Christmas service

In spite of threats of violence from Muslims in an area of Egypt wracked by sectarian violence, police declined to increase security for a Coptic Christmas Eve service on 6 January. Six Christians were shot to death after leaving the church. Three men were in a moving car from which automatic gunfire hit Coptic Christians who had attended services at St. John's Church in Nag Hammadi, 455 kilometres south of Cairo. A Muslim security guard was also killed, and nine other Christians were wounded, three of them are in critical condition. Copts, along with many Orthodox communities, celebrate Christmas on 7 January. The primary Muslim suspected of firing the automatic rifle at the Copts, witnesses told police, is local resident Mohammed Ahmed Hussein. Local clergy said Hussein had not been arrested for previous crimes because he receives protection from officials in the ruling National Democratic Party.

Pray: that the violence and persecution would cease and God's authority prevail. (Ps.7:9)

More: <http://www.persecution.com.au/news.asp?id=408>

■ Egypt: Over 100 Coptic Christian teenagers arrested

Egyptian State Security has intensified its intimidation of the Coptic Church and Christians in Nag Hammadi, and neighbouring Bahgoura, by carrying out random arrests of Christian youth. According to Assyrian International News Agency (AINA), the ongoing campaign against Christians started on 7 Jan. 2010. More than 100 Christian youth have been arrested without charge. AINA said the arrests of Copts after every crime is the usual scenario to force the church and Copts to accept 'reconciliation' in which Coptic victims give up all criminal and civil charges against the perpetrators. Because of the reaction in Egypt and worldwide to the January shootings (in which six Christians and a security guard were killed - see above). Bishop Kyrollos was asked to issue statements downplaying the negligence of State Security. It is believed the arrests of the Coptic youth is a pressure tactic to force him to recant his accusations.

Pray: that these tactics of intimidation against Christians would fail. (Ps.11:5)

More: <http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/2010/s10010082.htm>

■ Algeria: Islamists burn and loot Church

Islamists burned and looted a Protestant church in northern Algeria in an attack that was fuelled by violence against Christians elsewhere in the Muslim and Arab world, church officials said Monday. The Pentecostal oriented Tafat Church, which is located in the city of Tizi Ouzou was reportedly ransacked and set ablaze last Saturday night. 'They even attacked the cross of Jesus, which was torn and burned,' church pastor Mustapha Krireche told Algerian media. The independent El Watan daily published a photo of a smouldering pile of pulpits and desks that had been brought outside for destruction.

Looters also set fire to a pile of Bibles and religious textbooks. The head of the Algerian Protestant Church association, Mustapha Krim, suggested that the attackers were encouraged by recent anti-Christian violence in Egypt and Malaysia. 'It was fuelled by what just happened in Egypt' Krim said. (See above)

Pray: that God would protect His Church as it faces up to violence. (Ps.55:9)

More: <http://www.bosnewslife.com/10905-islamists-burn-loots-algerian>

■ **Somalia: A million people face starvation**

Almost a million people may face starvation in as little as three months, according to humanitarian agency World Vision. This follows the announcement last week by World Food Programme (WFP) to temporarily suspend food distributions in six Somali towns. 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 the Somalia conflict to allow peace to return and the resumption of the distribution of urgent humanitarian aid,' said World Vision Somalia's Kevin Mackey. 'Continued isolation of Somalia by the international community will result in a catastrophe.' World Vision is currently assisting 6,000 children with supplementary feeding as well as a school feeding programme. 'If nothing is done to restore the supply in food aid, these children and many, many others will be starving by March,' concluded Mackey.

Pray: that aid organisations will be enabled to provide sufficient supplies to feed those in need. (Mk.8:1-10)

More: <http://www.worldvision.org.uk/server.php?show=nav.3446>

■ **Sudan: Attack leaves 140 dead as agencies issue 'wake-up call'**

Violence in Southern Sudan continues to escalate, with the latest incident claiming 140 lives, even as 10 aid agencies called for urgent international intervention to prevent a return to war between the North and South. A senior UN official said last week that at least 140 people had been killed and 90 wounded during an attack on the Wunchai region of Warrap state some time at the beginning of the year. Reports emerged only after a UN security team visited the remote area by airplane two days ago. Details of the attack coincided with the launch of a report by 10 aid agencies who cautioned that the successful holding of elections, a referendum, civilian protection, as well as increased development funding for Southern Sudan, were all crucial in preventing a return to war five years after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. (See also Prayer Alert 5109)

Pray: that the Lord would use our prayers to enable a breakthrough that would bring peace. (2Ch.6:19)

More: <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/IRIN/7b8272f91018af535c83f2526dba7d9b.htm>

PRAISE REPORTS

■ **Wootton Bassett march called off**

A controversial Islamic group Islam4UK has abandoned plans for an anti-war march through Wootton Bassett where processions to honour the repatriation of dead British soldiers have been held. The march caused outrage and bitterness when it was announced last week, with Prime Minister Gordon Brown branding it 'disgusting'. On Sunday Islam4UK cancelled the march, saying it had 'successfully highlighted the plight of Muslims in Afghanistan'. Home Secretary Alan Johnson said: 'I have today laid an order banning al-Muhajiroun, Islam4UK, and a number of the other names the organisation goes by'. The banning order came into effect yesterday and will make it a criminal offence to be a member, punishable by up to 10 years in prison. Ordinary Muslim organisations have long regarded al-Muhajiroun as harming community relations - but they are split on whether or not a ban would be beneficial. (See also Prayer Alert 0210)

Praise: God for this answer to prayer and pray that these radical Islamists would not find ways to re-organise. (Nu.10:9)

More: <http://www.politics.co.uk/news/foreign-policy/wootton-bassett-march-called-off-1352503.htm>

■ **South London church wins battle with Council over noise**

A church in South London has won its legal battle against Lambeth Council after being handed a noise abatement notice. The 600-member All Nations Centre was handed the notice in September after receiving complaints from several local residents. The notice meant the church would have faced prosecution if it amplified its music or sermons. Church leaders were angry that the notice had been issued without any warning or possibility to discuss the complaints and in spite of a public meeting that had been scheduled with local residents for October on the issue. The church leaders had complained that the notice was more an attack on the church's faith, than a genuine concern about the level of noise. They took the Council to court to appeal the notice against them. The appeal was withdrawn at the last minute earlier in the week, according to their legal advisers at the Christian Legal Centre. (See also Prayer Alert 4209)

Praise: God that common sense ruled and the Church will now again sing His praises. (Ps.18:49)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/south.london.church.wins.battle.with.council.over.noise/25065.htm>

PRAYER FORUM OF THE BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

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Prayer Alert is a partnership project of the Prayer Forum of the British Isles and Ireland
C/O World Prayer Centre, Cornerstone House, 5 Ethel Street, Birmingham, B2 4BG, England