

PRAYER ALERT...

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BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

■ ‘Atheism seen as cool’ - Archbishop Rowan Williams

The Archbishop of Canterbury has admitted the Church of England is struggling to counter the image of atheism as ‘the new cool thing’. Dr Rowan Williams argued it has become difficult for the Church to convey its message because of the popularity of non-believers such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens. He said attempts to reverse the decline in worshippers had begun but that there will be ‘no quick fix’. His remarks came despite new research, released by the Roman Catholic Church, suggesting that the Pope’s visit to Britain a year ago has brought a lasting rise in the level of spiritual and religious feeling in the country. The archbishop said that Christian witness is the strongest argument the Church has to rebut the claims of atheists such as Dawkins. He said the evolutionary biologist would struggle to explain the growth of the Church in Zimbabwe, for example, in the face of constant brutality and harassment.

Pray: [that the testimony of believers would lead to an understanding that rebuts atheism. \(Mt.24:14\)](#)

More: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/8770929/Atheism-is-cool-says-Archbishop-Rowan-Williams.html>

■ Parents really want to spend time with their children

Last week’s UNICEF report on parenting led to a flood of news items lamenting the consumer culture and its impact on British children. In fact, UNICEF interviewed a total of 25 - yes, twenty-five - families across Europe. That’s fewer than ten per country. This is hardly a good statistical base for drawing conclusions. Another report commissioned for the Labour party questioned 2000 adults in the UK and found ‘a yearning for traditional family values’, which many feel have disappeared, saying the ‘ideal’ family should have a mother and a father. This is quite a contrast to Government policies over the last decade encouraging mothers to go out to work. Jill Kirby, a family expert and author of *The Price Of Parenthood*, said: ‘This survey shows how out of touch current political parties are with what families really need and what most women want. They want more time with their children.’

Pray: [for governments and policy to be much more orientated to support family life. \(Eph.3:14-15\)](#)

More: <http://www.anglican-mainstream.net/2011/09/20/the-media-wont-tell-you-but-what-british-parents-really-want-is-more-time-to-spend-with-their-children/>

■ Citizens Advice Bureaux: coming to a church near you

Citizens Advice is working with churches and other places of worship across the country to make advice services more accessible, particularly for those living in remote areas. This will provide face-to-face advice in the local community rather than users having to travel significant distances. Faithful Advice: A guide for advice services in places of worship was published at the Citizens Advice service’s annual conference. This provides practical examples and guidelines for churches to set up face-to-face advice sessions on their premises. The guidelines acknowledge that as the public sector cuts bite,

churches can play a vital role in offering premises for advice sessions, particularly where there are no alternative sites available locally. The Rt Revd John Gladwin, former Bishop of Chelmsford, said, 'By working with faith organisations, Citizens Advice Bureaux have already established partnerships which enable them to reach out and provide advice services to some of the most vulnerable.'

Pray: for the success of such ventures and for it to further emphasise to Government the importance of the church in society. (Ac.5:20)

More: <http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod.newsDetail&newsid=533>

■ Toddlers among thousands of children branded racist

Teachers have branded more than 20,000 primary school children racist or homophobic following spats in the playground, figures have disclosed. Even some toddlers in nursery schools have been reported to local authorities for so-called hate speech. Critics have hit out at local authorities saying they are overreacting about playground squabbles. Under the 2000 Race Relations Act schools are obliged to report all 'hate speech' incidents to local authorities. Adrian Hart, of the Manifesto Club, called for the Government to ditch the policy of 'hate speech' reporting in schools. He said: 'Children need space to play and to learn the meaning of words, without being reported to the local education authority. These policies are an inappropriate intervention into playground life, and undermine teachers' ability to set a moral example to children and to teach them right from wrong. There is a world of difference between racist abuse and primary school playground spats.'

Pray: for a more moderate, sensible approach to managing 'playground' behaviour. (Ps.32:8)

More: <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/toddlers-among-thousands-of-children-branded-racist/>

■ Free Church delegation attending party conferences

A delegation of Church leaders and representatives from the Baptist Union, the Methodist Church, the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), The Salvation Army and the United Reformed Church attended the Liberal Democrat conference this week and will attend the Labour and Conservative party conferences in September and October. The Free Church delegation is urging Christians to pray for all politicians during the party conference season as they debate the challenging financial and social problems being experienced. The delegation will be hosting prayer breakfasts with other Christian groups at all three conferences, which local Christians in Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester are encouraged to attend. During their visits to the party conferences, the delegation will have opportunities to meet with politicians and raise topics like poverty and inequality, the Big Society and wellbeing.

Pray: for leaders and delegates as they debate and formulate party policies. (Tit.2:6)

More: <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/15400>

■ Dale Farm Travellers - background story

Dale Farm near Wickford in rural Essex is one of the largest Gypsy and Traveller sites in Europe. Ray McKay, spokesman for Basildon council said travellers would get more sympathy if they were poor, but they aren't. The Bishops of Brentwood, Chelmsford, and other Catholic and Anglican clergy have all visited Dale Farm. There is a small cabin there for meetings plus IT and literacy classes with the blessings of the local Catholic parish priest. A Catholic nun and social worker working with the travellers for eight years said, 'Irish Travellers are the smallest ethnic UK group: more than 20% are homeless. Most are illiterate. Their life expectancy is 20 years lower than the national average. They are often the target of abuse and blamed for everything from fly-tipping to petty crime. Some do misbehave, but the majority are law-abiding. Many families have to move every few days. The children have no chance to stay in school for long.'

Pray: for facilities for Travellers to be established across the UK, and for more churches and authorities to unite in their work for and with these communities. (Mt.25:34-40)

More: <http://www.indcatholicnews.com/news.php?viewStory=18803>

■ BBC star calls RC Church 'evil' for defending marriage

BBC actor John Barrowman has launched a blistering attack on the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland for defending the traditional definition of marriage. Earlier this month the Scottish Government, led by the Scottish National Party, launched a consultation on whether to redefine marriage but the proposal has met fierce opposition from senior figures within the Church. Now Mr Barrowman, who plays the main character in BBC One's Torchwood, said that he was 'horrified' that church groups were 'prepared to ruin lives'. He added: 'That's not being Christian at all. In fact, I think it's evil. Being gay is not, as they claim, against the laws of nature. I was born this way.' The actor, who has been in a civil partnership since 2006, made the comments after the Archbishop of Glasgow and the Bishop of Paisley warned against meddling with the definition of marriage. (See last week's Prayer Alert)

Pray: that the Church would continue to speak up boldly for the sanctity of marriage. (Heb.13:4)

More: <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/bbc-star-calls-rc-church-evil-for-defending-marriage/>

EUROPE

■ Europe growing hostile to Christians

Europe is currently experiencing 'an atmosphere of intolerance in relation to Christians, as well as to representatives of other traditional religions' according to one of the most influential figures in the Russian Orthodox Church. Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external Church relations also said that Europe needs to 'discuss openly the violation of the rights of Christians'. He was speaking in Rome to a meeting organised by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to address the issue of discrimination against Christians. The meeting, entitled 'Preventing and Responding to Hate Incidents and Crimes against Christians', was organised by Lithuania,

which currently chairs the OSCE. Metropolitan Hilarion said that, while European civilization 'is a culture that has developed on a Christian foundation' it had 'acquired a clearly expressed multicultural nature, having become a place of contact between peoples and religions from all over the world'.

Pray: that the people of Europe would remember their Christian foundations and revert to the truth. (Is.48:13-14a)

More: <http://www.ionainstitute.ie/index.php?id=1676>

■ Austria and Hungary seek EU help on human trafficking

Austria and Hungary are asking the EU to help them guard the Schengen border to the Balkans after an alleged increase in human trafficking. The issue will be discussed today (22 September) when interior ministers are likely to bin a proposal to give the EU commission a say in re-imposing border checks and on enlarging the border-less zone to Bulgaria and Romania. In a joint letter seen by EUobserver, the Austrian and Hungarian interior ministers are asking for 'common action' in securing the Hungarian-Serbian border which allows traffickers to bring Arab and Asian migrants into western Europe. 'In Austria and in Hungary we have recently seen a significant increase in the number of interceptions of illegal migrants, most of them smuggled into the country. These people, above all citizens of Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Somalia, Iran and Iraq, are being smuggled into the European Union under inhuman conditions, most often in converted buses, lorries or cars,' the letter reads.

Pray: for all those caught up in this trafficking problem to be set free. (Is.42:7)

More: <http://euobserver.com/22/113679>

WORLDWIDE

■ Israel/Palestine: Palestinian bid for UN recognition

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has launched a diplomatic campaign to gain full United Nations membership, (See Prayer Alert 37-2011) This Friday he intends to officially notify UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon of his intentions. Washington has threatened to veto any such move. Both the United States and Israel said Abbas's move could dash hopes of resuming peace talks. Their warnings came amid reports that Britain and other countries are coming under growing US pressure to oppose a Palestinian bid for statehood. Abbas had meetings on Tuesday with French and Lebanese Presidents seeking support ahead of Friday's speech to the General Assembly. Senior diplomats from the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations - the Quartet of Middle East mediators - have also met throughout the week seeking a way forward. Israel and America are calling the Palestinian Authority to open up direct negotiations to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Pray: that God will not allow President Abbas's actions to prompt violent repercussions in the area. (Is.46:4)

More: <http://www.islamonline.net/en/Page/Home>

■ Israel: Messianic Jews singled out in Israeli town

Messianic Jews in Mevasseret Zion, west Jerusalem, continue to be harassed for their faith by hostile flyers containing their names, addresses and phone numbers (and in some cases their photographs) being placed in public areas singling them out as members of Messianic congregations. The leader of the Ahavat Yeshua Congregation said the flyers are 'an effort to drive us out of the neighbourhood' by inciting others to harass or harm Messianic Jews. 'Why else would you put the addresses on the flyers?' he said. This is the second time recently a group has singled out Messianic Jews in Mevasseret Zion for ridicule. (see PA 27-2011) It is unclear who posts the flyers but they match a well-established pattern in Israel. According to Wikileaks, 'Outing' Messianic Jews and Evangelical Christians through the publication of names, photos and addresses alongside hysterical allegations about 'soul stealing' and 'brainwashing' is a favourite tactic of Yad L'Achim branches throughout the country.'

Pray: for God to strengthen feeble hands, steady weak knees and remove fear from communities of believers in Israel. (Is.35:10)

More: http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/israel/article_120307.html

■ Syria: Over 5,000 deaths since March

Pro-democracy protests begun in March 2011 are continuing despite fierce government opposition. President Bashar al-Assad has responded by killing over 5,000 of his citizens according to new statistics from human rights researchers. Thousands more have been arrested and tortured. 148 children were killed mainly by gunshots to the upper body. A report found 16 of the children had suffered severe torture in detention before their deaths. Amnesty International said, 'It is difficult to second guess the motivation for torturing and killing children in custody. It may be that security forces hope to terrify people off the streets with the threat of what could happen to their children.' International leaders are calling for al-Assad to step down and cease his attempts to put down and crush the serious threat to his family's 40-year rule. He repeatedly rejects these calls claiming demonstrations are 'foreign-inspired plots,' Syrian Christians request prayers for God to intervene and for political and emotional healing for the land.

Pray: for a peaceful transition of power, and for leaders to truly know God and serve with integrity. (Zec.13:9)

More: <http://www.trust.org/alertnet/news/syria-new-report-indicates-over-5000-deaths-since-march>

■ Pakistan: Christians caught up in floods

Christians in Pakistan are in 'grievous distresses' as large swathes of land are again submerged in water forcing thousands of people into emergency camps where facilities are poor and they are at risk from malaria, dysentery and dengue fever. It comes exactly one year after floods covered vast swathes of Pakistan last summer. Barnabas Fund said some areas were worse than 2010 floods, with the equivalent of an entire monsoon season's worth of rain in just a few days. Christians are

particularly vulnerable because they already live in poverty and are often overlooked in aid distribution. One church leader said, 'I am terribly sad to see the destruction and poor condition of the people affected by heavy rains, and notice Christians are being deprived of the help, relief and support that other people are getting.'

Pray: for fair distribution of food, clean water and hygiene products to Pakistani Christians caught up in the floods. (Ps.40:1)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/pakistani.christians.caught.up.in.floods/28641.htm>

■ Mexico: Evangelicals leave village amid crucifixion threats

At least 70 evangelical Christians in Mexico's east-central region were homeless on Saturday, September 17th after being expelled by local authorities from their village where traditional Catholics reportedly threatened to 'crucify or lynch' them. The government of Puebla state 'bowed' to pressure from the traditional Catholics in San Rafael Tlanalapan village, 60 miles from Mexico City. Initially 50 Protestant families were ordered to leave the village by September 12th but some were allowed to stay on condition that they would worship outside the area. Additionally they are not allowed to get involved with traditional Catholics, who practice a mixture of indigenous and Catholic rituals. Regional government officials said, 'there is an agreement that evangelicals not originating from the area have to go as the state government can not guarantee their safety.'

Pray: for an end to decades of small town persecution of Evangelical Christians by local authorities, and for the Holy Spirit's presence to be established across Mexico. (Is.65:1)

More: <http://www.worthynews.com/10963-mexico-evangelicals-leave-village-amid-crucifixion-threats>

■ Pakistan: Christians regularly kidnapped and forcibly married

Abduction, forced conversion to Islam, and then marriage against the will of Christian girls, is a growing trend in Pakistan with over 700 cases every year. A typical recent incident involved 14-year-old Mehek Rashid kidnapped at gunpoint from her home by a gang of five armed Muslim men. One of her abductors yelled that he would purify Mehek by converting her to Islam before marrying her. Local authorities refuse to investigate the case because the assailants were a prominent Muslim family. A senior church leader warned that the 'the cases of forced conversion are rising at an alarming rate'. Another recent case was Mariam Gill abducted on her way home from the market by a Muslim businessman who had asked her to marry him and been refused, so she was forcibly converted and married to her kidnapper. His actions were praised as a 'pious act' by the Muslim leader who conducted the wedding ceremony.

Pray: for God to cause authorities and regulators to bring an end to crimes against Christians' human rights. (Ps.5:10,11)

More: <http://www.barnabasfund.org/Estimated-700-Christian-girls-annually-kidnapped-and-forcibly-married-to-captors-in-Pakistan.html>

PRAISE REPORTS

■ Prayer for nation draws 1,000 Christians to Wembley

Christian leaders from all over the British Isles gathered at Wembley Stadium for a day of prayer and vision setting. The Carry the Torch meeting was organised by Global Day of Prayer (GDOP) London as it pushes ahead with plans to fill the entire stadium with Christians for a day of prayer in 2012. The 1,000 leaders at the stadium on Saturday included GDOP London Convener, Dr Jonathan Oloyede, the Bishop of Barking, the Rt Rev David Hawkins, More than Gold CEO, Dave Willson, Senior Minister of Cornerstone Christian Centre, Hugh Osgood, and the grandson of Billy Graham, Will Graham. Dr Oloyede spoke of his vision to see Christians uniting in prayer across the British Isles, and the nations transformed and taking the Gospel to the world again. He said he was inspired to serve God in Britain because of the example set by the British missionaries who pioneered his native Nigeria.

Praise: God for His vision placed in the hearts of those that gathered. (2Cor.12:1)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/prayer.for.nation.draws.1000.christians.to.wembley/28646.htm>

■ Street Pastors start new patrols in Westminster

Street Pastors has formally launched in Westminster to provide support to young and vulnerable people out and about in London's West End. A team of Street Pastors was commissioned during a service last week attended by the Bishop of London, Dr Richard Chartres, and the organisation's founder, the Rev Les Isaac. During the service, the organisation appealed for more volunteers to come forward to join the 15 Street Pastors in Westminster who have already completed their training. Prior to the formal launch, the team undertook two patrols in the area around the Strand and Victoria where they were able to provide assistance and support to people, including young revellers and a stranded family of tourists unable to speak English. As more volunteers come on board, there are plans to expand the patrols to cover more areas of Westminster. Street Pastors are now working in over 200 towns and cities around the UK.

Praise: God for the continued expansion of this work across the country. (2Tim.4:5)

More: <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/street.pastors.starts.new.patrols.in.westminster/28630.htm>

PRAYER FORUM OF THE BRITISH ISLES & IRELAND

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