

Bible Society Newswatch 5 February 2010

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This week in the world press:

Pope's Equality attack prompts backlash

A papal broadside on the government's Equality Bill has sparked threats of a protest march when he visits Britain later this year. While Pope Benedict XVI praised the UK's 'equality of opportunity', he claimed legislation giving equal rights to homosexuals 'violates natural law'. He said rules stopping churches from rejecting staff whose lives conflict with church teaching are 'unjust' and limit religious freedom. The Pope made his criticisms on Monday when he also confirmed his visit to Britain this autumn. The criticisms led the National Secular Society to announce it would stage a mass protest against the visit involving clerical abuse victims, gay, family planning and other groups. Archbishop Vincent Nichols, however, defended the Pope's 'reasoned voice'.

Sources: The Times (2/2); Church of England Newspaper (5/2); The Universe (7/2)

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/>

American Baptists charged with abduction of Haiti children

Ten Christians from Idaho, USA, face child abduction and criminal conspiracy charges after trying to take 33 Haitian children to the Dominican Republic. The Baptist Church members, who could face 15 years' imprisonment, were taking the children to a hotel they leased as an emergency orphanage in the neighbouring country. But they did not have government permission nor passports for the children. It also emerged that many of

the children were not orphans but their parents had received promises that the children would have a better life over the border.

Source: The Times (1/2, 5/2)

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/>

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North Korea to release u-turn missionary

A US missionary arrested after marching into North Korea and demanding the resignation of dictator Kim Jong Il, will be released after 'repenting' of his crime. North Korea's state media said Robert Park, a 28-year-old of Korean descent arrested on Christmas Day, has come to see the 'wrong understanding' he had of the country. Since speaking in December of his wish to free the occupants of North Korea's gulags, Mr Park has changed his views. Korean Central News Agency said he had attended a service at a church in Pyongyang and now believed 'There's complete religious freedom'. 'I was ... taken in by the West's false propaganda,' he was reported to have said. However, a South Korean Christian activist commented: 'When he comes out ... what he truly thinks will come out'.

Source: The Times (5/2)

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/>

This week in the Church press:

Harman confirms Church Equality exemptions to stay

Equalities Minister Harriet Harman has confirmed she will not force controversial amendments to the Equality Bill through parliament following their defeat in the House of Lords last week. The attempts to define more clearly which religious posts were exempt from equality rules were seen by churches as narrowing their exemptions. Ms Harman believes groups have failed to comply with the law applying to 'non-religious' jobs such as church youth workers and accountants. But church leaders have claimed that youth workers are often in religious roles if they are involved in discipling young people. Although Ms Harman made no reference to Pope Benedict's criticism of the Bill, The Times believes the Government does not want to be at loggerheads with churches during preparations for his visit.

Sources: Church Times (5/2); The Times (3/2)

<http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/>

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/>

## Guidance should boost primary RE

The first ever government programme for RE learning in primary schools has been given the thumbs up. The programme, developed with contributions from religious groups, is non-mandatory but will be backed by school inspectors and is likely to be highly influential. The last government report on primary schools ignored the RE curriculum. But Schools Minister Diana Johnson, who published the new ideas, said 'Good Religious Education plays an important role in helping to keep this country a tolerant and inclusive place to live.' The programme has been designed to help 'young people develop a good understanding of other people's beliefs' as well as 'ask questions about their own'. Christianity and other major religions will be included, but atheism and humanism should also be considered. RE Council Chair, Prof Brian Gates, said the guidance 'warrants a welcome from the entire RE community.'

Sources: Church of England Newspaper (5/2); Church Times (5/2)

## Bishops plead: allow dying to make a 'good death'

New Roman Catholic guidance on care for the dying warns that medical staff who over-administer pain relief may deny patients the chance of a 'good death'. The healthcare group advising the Catholic Bishops' Conference said excessive sedation unnecessary for pain relief could deprive patients of opportunities to 'set things right', 'make peace' or 'say their goodbyes'. The draft document stresses the need for care both of the dying and those close to them. However, it judges that healthcare workers do not have a duty to keep people alive 'at all costs'.

Sources: The Universe (7/2); Church Times (5/2)

<http://www.totalcatholic.com/>

## Culture watch:

### More Christianity on TV at Easter

The BBC will step up its coverage of Christianity this Easter after criticism that last year's offering was sparse. The BBC announcement came as the Church of England prepares to consider a motion next week criticising the broadcaster for 'completely ignoring the Christian significance of Good Friday 2009'. An Easter broadcast from King's College, Cambridge will be the broadcaster's most high profile addition. The traditional Carols from King's shown at Christmas drew 2.7 million viewers. The BBC's head of religion, Aaqil Ahmed, said he hoped the new programme would also become a regular broadcast. Two religious documentaries have been planned for BBC1, while BBC2 will screen The Private Life of an Easter Masterpiece featuring The Descent from the Cross by Rogier van der Weyden. A Holy Land Songs of Praise and the Pope's Urbi et Orbi address are also scheduled.

Sources: Church Times (5/2)

<http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/>

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Bible Society, Stonehill Green, Westlea, Swindon SN5 7DG

T: 01793 418100 F: 01793 418118

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