



# Impact

## NEWS & NOTES

■ Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia's untimely death leaves an empty seat on the Supreme Court and throws into doubt a number of pending cases in the 2015 term, including abortion rights and the Affordable Care Act's mandate that employers pay for contraceptives as part of standard health insurance plans. It is likely that a tie vote will let a lower court's decision to stand and uphold the Texas law imposing tough new restrictions on doctors and facilities. However, a tie in the contraceptive case would mean that the mandate would be forced on religious non-profits such as charities, schools and hospitals.

USA Today, 2/16

■ A federal appeals court has ruled that the Obama administration can force a television network run by a Catholic nun to obey the HHS mandate, which compels religious groups to pay for abortion-causing drugs

*Impact* is published for the Christian community with an emphasis on moral, public policy and religious liberty issues. Newsletter archives are posted at: [fbconcord.org/impact](http://fbconcord.org/impact) Please send your comments and requests for email subscriptions to: [warmackrj@gmail.com](mailto:warmackrj@gmail.com) Editor: Bruce Warmack

for their employees. Although the Supreme Court ruled that the Christian-run business Hobby Lobby doesn't have to obey the HHS mandate that is a part of Obamacare, the organization has lost its battle at the federal appellate court level. This mandate forces religious ministries like EWTN to violate their faith or pay massive IRS penalties. Recognizing the severity of the situation, the court immediately put its ruling on hold until the Supreme Court address this important issue on March 23 in the Little Sisters of the Poor case. *LifeNews*, 2/18

■ The South Dakota Legislature cleared a bill on Tuesday that would prevent transgender students from using bathrooms and other facilities that correspond with their gender identity. Transgender students would have the option of using alternate accommodations. Gov. Dugaard "has said the measure seems like a good idea and plans to research the issue and listen to recorded testimony before making up his mind on whether to make the bill law." If he signs the bill, South Dakota will become the first state in the U.S. that requires transgender students to use bathrooms and other facilities based on their "chromosome and anatomy" at birth. A similar Tennessee bill, SB 2387, is under consideration. *The Week*, 2/17; *FACT*, 2/19

■ In a 27-5 vote on Wed-

nesday, the Tennessee Senate approved SB 1556 that would allow counselors and therapists in Tennessee to refer clients to other counseling services if the client's counseling goals conflict with the therapist's "sincerely held religious beliefs." A 2014 change in American Counseling Association's ethical guidelines, which serve as the state's ethical guidelines for licensure purposes, had prohibited the long-standing practice that allowed such referrals. The bill now heads to the House. *FACT*, 2/19

■ Amid concerns of legal challenges, TN Rep. Rick Womick withdrew his bill that would require abortion clinics to give their clients the opportunity to see an ultrasound of their baby as a means of reducing the number of abortions in Tennessee. *FACT*, 2/19

■ On Thursday, Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker signed two pro-life bills to help further de-fund the Planned Parenthood abortion business in the Badger State after it was caught across the country selling the body parts of aborted babies for profit. The laws redirect federal Title X family planning funds away from organizations that perform abortions, taking \$3.5 million dollars from Planned Parenthood and will further eliminate \$4.5 million taxpayer funds that have previously gone to Planned Parenthood. The

House Select Panel on Infant Lives announced Feb. 12 it will issue subpoenas to several organizations with ties to the fetal tissue industry after they refused to provide requested information. It is still unclear how many companies bought aborted fetal tissue from Planned Parenthood and at what price. *LifeNews*, 2/18; *World News Service*, 2/19

■ The West Virginia Senate voted 24-9 to outlaw dismemberment abortions, making it illegal for abortionists to use the dilation and evacuation (D&E) procedure, typically used in second-trimester pregnancies, to kill babies in the womb. The bill now goes to the House of Delegates. If the bill becomes law, West Virginia would be the third state to outlaw dismemberment abortions. *FACT*, 2/19

■ A pastor was reportedly issued a police citation for speaking out against STDs in Texas, because his speech offended students at the University of Texas at Austin. Brother Jed Smock, head of Campus Ministry USA, reported the citation was dropped after a lawyer called police on behalf of the preacher. Speaking about the intellectual climate on campuses in general, former Harvard president Larry Summers says, "It seems to be that there is a kind of creeping totalitarianism in terms of what kind of ideas are acceptable and are debatable

on college campuses. And I think that's hugely unfortunate. I think the answer to bad speech is different speech. The answer to bad speech is not shutting down speech." *Christian Headlines*, 2/16; *Weekly Standard*, 2/18

■ Eight-time world boxing champion Manny Pacquiao, who will fight his last boxing match this April before he retires, recently lost his partnership with Nike for his comments against same-sex relationships. Said the tennis shoe giant in a statement, "Nike strongly opposes discrimination of any kind and has a long history of supporting and standing up for the rights of the LGBT community." Pacquiao responded, "I still stand on my belief that I'm against same-sex marriage because of what the Bible says." *FACT*, 2/19

■ On the heels of President Obama's criticism of the recently passed bipartisan anti-BDS Trade Facilitation and Trade Enforcement Act last week, Alabama became the

fifth state in the nation to pass a landmark resolution to condemn the anti-Semitic BDS movement. [BDS refers to the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement against the nation of Israel.] Building on momentum created by the Tennessee State Legislature in 2015, legislators in Alabama decided to join their colleagues in Tennessee. An organization spearheading this effort in Alabama stated, "The purpose is to recognize the resurgence of global anti-Semitism currently being at its highest point since World War II." *PJTN*, 2/18

■ A new study has found that the human brain can still recognize God's existence, even if an individual is not directly taught about God. Belief in the existence of God may be hardwired into our brains. "Psychologists and anthropologists deemed that children left to their own devices would have some conception of God," says Shaheen Lakhani, who holds

With fervent supplications for His favor, to His overruling providence I commit with humble but fearless confidence my own fate and the future destinies of my country."

— JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

Presidential Inauguration, 1825

John Quincy Adams served in Congress for 18 years after having been President. Nicknamed "The Hell-Hound of Slavery" for relentlessly speaking out against slavery, lifting the Gag Rule which prohibited House floor debate, and successfully defended 53 Africans to gain their freedom before the Supreme Court. African slaves brought to America were purchased at Muslim slave markets and who enslaved an estimated 180 million Africans over 1400 years. On Feb. 21, 1848, the 'Old Man Eloquent' John Quincy Adams suffered a stroke at his desk in the House chamber, having just given an impassioned speech against the Democrat plan to expand slavery into the Western territories. Abraham Lincoln was one of his pallbearers.

several doctorate degrees and an M.D. Andrew Newberg, a researcher of “neuro-theology,” reports that, in his studies, the brains of people who regularly prayed or meditated showed improved brain function. “They had improvements of about 10 or 15 percent,” Newberg stated. “This is only after eight weeks at 12 minutes a day, so you can imagine what happens in people who are deeply religious and spiritual and are doing these practices for hours a day for years and years,” he told NPR.

Christian Headlines, 2/18

■ Terri Roberts, the mother of the shooter who killed 10 girls and himself at an Amish school in 2006, said God has “healed” her home. The Nickel Mines Amish community responded to the shooting with forgiveness, Roberts said. They attended her son’s funeral and reached out to Terri and her husband to help them. “God’s goodness is in the eye of the beholder. Bitterness and anger are worse than any cancer, eating away at our souls. Even in hardship, praising God for His provision changes our perspective, granting grace for the ‘next step.’” RT, 2/16

■ In recent years, a number of companies have hired

spiritual leaders to serve on their staffs. Though slightly less trendy than nap rooms and yoga classes, workplace chaplaincies are another attempt to make workers more productive by catering to their “whole” selves. Sometimes, these chaplains serve as spiritual social workers, advising staffers about everything from divorce to cancer. They might conduct weddings or funerals; they’ll often refer people to local churches and, at times, professional psychologists. It’s hard to know just how many workplace chaplains are employed around the U.S., partly because many of them work at privately owned, small- or medium-sized businesses. For example, Tyson Foods runs its own in-house chaplaincy program, which was started 16 years ago and has more than 115 chaplains based in different factories around the country. Company-wide, this works out to roughly one chaplain on staff for every 1,000 Tyson employees. Atlantic Daily, 2/17

■ Led by charismatic preachers and self-proclaimed prophets, African churches are swelling with promises of miracle healings, signs and wonders. But in recent months, governments across the continent

are trying to rein in these churches. Africa’s experience with Christianity has for the most part been positive. About 63 percent of Africans identify as Christian, and Christian denominations founded and still run schools and hospitals. They have played critical roles in helping to keep communities together and stitching together a fraying social fabric. In Cameroon, President Paul Biya recently ordered the closure of 100 churches over alleged criminal activities by Pentecostal church pastors linked to miracles. While trying not to trample on religious freedom, governments are increasingly frustrated with tales of clergy fleecing their followers and are proposing a raft of new measures to protect unsuspecting church members from corrupt or immoral schemes. But churches are also fighting back, rejecting the assumption that all church leaders are frauds. NRS, 2/17

■ Archaeologists have uncovered a 7,000-year-old settlement in the north part of Jerusalem, a discovery which the Israel Antiquities Authority called “highly significant.” The settlement includes two houses and various artifacts during what is known as the Copper Age. Civilization in the region where the settlement was found was previously thought to date back to 3,000-2,800 B.C. The new settlement proves that people inhabited the area earlier than formerly believed.

Christian Headlines, 2/17

## AN UNBELIEVER CONFRONTS THE EMPTY TOMB

### Risen

by Eric Metaxas

Christian audiences have felt a little burned lately by bad movies on biblical subjects. But one really good movie can change all that.

“Ben Hur,” “The Robe,” “The Ten Commandments,” “Quo Vadis?”—who can forget the golden age of biblical films? But that was the 1950s, and this is 2016.

Biblically based movies these days often comes across as, well, less than inspired. Writers and directors sometimes play fast and loose with the source material, leaving out crucial details and inventing some bizarre stuff. Worse, portrayals of God often come across as flippant or even blasphemous. And that’s just not something I enjoy watching.

Well, I want to urge you to give the genre another chance. Because a film hitting theaters this weekend proves that sword-and-sandal productions based on the Bible can still hold their own against “Ben Hur.”

“Risen,” directed by Kevin Reynolds and starring Joseph Fiennes, is the story of the manhunt for the corpse of Jesus Christ. Spoiler alert: They don’t find it.

Fiennes plays a Roman tribune named Clavius. He’s tasked by Pontius Pilate with crucifying the latest batch of Jewish rabble and self-proclaimed messiahs. The only catch? One of them really is the Messiah.

Of course Clavius, a good Roman military man, doesn’t think anything of Jesus. When the centurion at Golgotha admits, “Surely this man was the Son of God,” Clavius lets him have it. Clavius is tough, and he’s immune to Jewish superstition—that is, until Sunday morning. For Clavius, that’s when all Heaven breaks loose.

The tomb is empty, the guards aren’t talking, and the Disciples of Jesus are spreading the news that He’s come back to life. The high priest warns Pilate that they’ll have an uprising on their hands if he doesn’t put the resurrection story to rest. So Pilate sends Clavius on a grisly, CSI-style hunt for the body of Christ.

That’s when our tribune has an encounter that shakes his pagan worldview to the core. “I have seen two things which cannot reconcile,” he says. “A man dead without question, and that same man alive again.”

Everyone on our BreakPoint team who’s seen the film loves it, not just because it’s a respectful and riveting portrayal of the gospel accounts, but because it shows an unbeliever’s crisis of faith when confronted by the Risen Lord.

In anticipation of Easter, I cannot think of a better reminder of how Christianity, as Tim Keller puts it, forces us to “doubt our doubts.” The empty tomb is the most startling fact of history—something two millennia of skeptics have tried to explain away. But the evidence is just too strong. And “Risen,” like a good detective novel, follows that evidence where it leads.

For instance, the Roman officials and Jewish leaders had every motive to produce a body. Yet they couldn’t. And Jesus’ Disciples had nothing to gain and everything to lose from lying about the Resurrection. But their transformation from cowards to spiritual conquerors testifies that they, like Fiennes’ fictional character, saw something—or Someone—who rocked their worlds.

Joe Fiennes, whom I had the pleasure of interviewing on the “Eric Metaxas Show,” told BreakPoint that he expects this movie to touch audiences in a unique way precisely because it invites them to examine these events through the eyes of a non-believer.

I think “Risen” has the potential to spark a renaissance of solidly biblical movies. But more importantly, I think it will challenge audiences to confront, with Clavius, the question that defies doubters to this day: If Jesus is dead, then where is the body?

Go see “Risen.” And take some unbelieving friends with you.

#### ENTERTAINMENT NOTES

##### ★★NEW MOVIES

	Quality	Moral	Age
Risen	PG-13	+4	-1 T/A
Race	PG-13	+3	-1 12+

A- Adult, T-Teen, OT- Older Teen

Film “Quality” is an estimate (+1 to +4) of appeal for the intended audience or age group. “Moral” rating ranges from extremely objectionable (-4) to very good (+4). [movieguide.org](http://movieguide.org)