



Impact

NEWS & NOTES

■ Tennessee House Bill 2414 would prohibit public schools and institutes of higher education from forcing students to use bathrooms and locker rooms with members of the opposite biological sex. In a FOX 17 news article, FACT President David Fowler explained the importance of having a state policy “so you don’t have 20 different school systems all being sued, all trying to figure out how to defend those lawsuits.”

Meanwhile, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio has signed an executive order to allow transgender individuals to use the restroom corresponding to their gender identity in all city-owned buildings and properties. New York City is reportedly home to about 25,000 transgender individuals and gender non-conforming individuals. FACT, 3/11; Christian Headlines, 3/10

■ A bill to protect the religious liberty and free speech

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rights of licensed professional counselors has already passed the Senate and is now scheduled for a hearing before the full House Health Committee on Wednesday. House Bill 1840 allows counselors to refer clients to another counselor if the goals and objectives of the client are in conflict with the counselor’s sincerely held religious beliefs. FACT, 3/11

■ A federal judge has ruled that the *Obergefell* marriage ruling does not apply to Puerto Rico because the island is technically an “unincorporated territory” and not a “state” according to the Fourteenth Amendment. The U.S. Constitution, therefore, only applies in part. FACT, 3/11

■ Georgia’s Republican Gov. Nathan Deal strongly opposes a religious freedom bill that has unanimously passed the Georgia House that would protect clergy from being forced to participate in or condone same-sex “weddings.” The Georgia Senate approved the bill after combining it with the First Amendment Defense Act of Georgia that would protect those who believe that marriage should be defined as between one man and one woman from discriminatory action. Deal retreated in light of opposition from 400 corporations that do business in Georgia. FACT, 3/11

■ A Missouri court has ruled in favor of a Catholic

diocese’s decision to fire employees that violate the diocese’s religious beliefs. One parish fired a director for social ministries after they found out that she was married to another woman. The woman, however, has filed a lawsuit and said the diocese knew she was a lesbian before she was hired in 2013. RT, 3/10

■ Student athletes at Texas public high schools must show their birth certificates as proof of gender identity under a policy change adopted overwhelmingly by school superintendents. Birth certificates can be amended to change gender, but transgender advocates say the difficulty and expense of the process are prohibitive. The Texas amendment is in stark contrast to new transgender rules for Olympic athletes. In late January, the International Olympic Committee announced it would allow an athlete to compete as a member of the sex with which he or she identified, even without first undergoing gender reassignment surgery. World News Service, 3/8

■ The first hearing of the House Select Investigative Panel on Infant Lives on Mar. 2 revealed a deep partisan divide between pro-abortion lawmakers claiming Congress has better things to do and pro-life House members concerned about the morality of an industry harvesting baby body parts from abortions. Committee chair-

woman Rep. Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., made her intentions clear from the start: “This is ... about bioethics.” Last month Blackburn delivered subpoenas to several researchers in the biomedical field. Democrats moved to quash the subpoenas, but the motion failed along party lines. Rep. Diane Black, R-Tenn., brought to light a particular series of emails equated the selling of dead babies to a retail business: “There effectively is an Amazon.com for human parts, including entire babies.” World News Service, 3/8

■ Oklahoma Baptist University has joined with four other Christian universities in two separate lawsuits against the HHS mandate that forces the school to provide abortion-inducing drugs as part of the school’s healthcare plan. The Supreme Court will hear the lawsuits March 23. FACT, 3/11

■ On Thursday, the Florida legislature passed a bill that redirects state funds that would have gone to Planned Parenthood and other abortion providers to state women’s health clinics with comprehensive care. The bill awaits Gov. Rick Scott’s decision. FACT, 3/11

■ An Oklahoma bill has been introduced that makes it clear that life begins at conception and would make abortion a crime. About 30,000 Oklahoma residents have signed a petition asking state lawmakers to ban abor-

tion. Christian Headlines, 3/8

■ Pastor Jack Hibbs of California’s Calvary Chapel church network and the school board for Chino Valley Unified Schools fought back against a federal ruling that made prayer at the beginning of their school board meetings illegal. The board voted 3-2 to appeal the ruling, prayed before the meeting, and decided to hire an outside firm to defend their First Amendment rights. FACT, 3/11

■ A Barna poll has revealed that Christian Republicans generally view presidential candidate Donald Trump favorably. About 32 percent said they would vote for Trump in the primary, which is 13 percentage points above the second most popular candidate, Ted Cruz. However the poll also revealed that of those polled that had actually attended church in the past week, Cruz was ahead of Trump, 30 percentage points to 24

percentage points. Christian Headlines, 3/8

■ Thousands of pastors are expected to gather at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. on April 9 as part of UnitedCry DC16, a massive prayer rally. Charisma News reports that the leaders of the event hope it will draw 30,000 pastors from all across the country to join in prayer. UnitedCry DC16 will coincide with Lou Engle’s TheCall Azusa in Los Angeles where thousands more believers will gather. Christian Headlines, 3/11

■ Christian author Gary Smalley died last Sunday at the age of 75. Smalley worked closely with Focus on the Family and had written over 60 bestselling books on marriage and relationships. Christian Headlines, 3/9

■ Four years ago, an evangelical Christian family entered Colorado’s booming medical marijuana marketplace and developed an extract called Charlotte’s Web,

Government is man-made and therefore imperfect. It can always be improved. But religion is not a man-made affair...I am satisfied with the God we have, with the Bible and with Christ.” — WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN
 Bryan responded to a question of how he could be a progressive in politics and a fundamentalist in religion. He was three times the Democrat nominee for US President, and he wrote widely-used Sunday school lessons.
 On this day, March 13, 1925, Tennessee’s governor, Austin Peay signed a bill into law that made it illegal to “teach any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible.” This started a train of events that led to the so-called “Trial of the Century” in Dayton, Tennessee. The ACLU ran an ad, offering to pay the expenses of any teacher who would test the law. Scopes, a mathematics teacher, volunteered. Two of the best-known lawyers of the day took the case, Clarence Darrow on the pro-evolution side and Bryan the creation case. Darrow lost and the law stood for 40 years.

a dark oil extracted from cannabis that is said to offer relief for epileptics. The drug, produced by the Stanley brothers, does not induce the psychoactive “high” typically associated with recreational marijuana strains that are high in THC. Tennessee is one of 23 states that have approved the use of low-THC compounds for severe epilepsy but has not solved the problems with obtaining the oil and transporting it across state lines. The American Epilepsy Society states that “robust scientific evidence for the use of marijuana is lacking... at present, the epilepsy community does not know if marijuana is a safe and effective treatment.” Federal laws have made medical research on the use of cannabis very difficult. RNS, 3/10

■ Last week, the House Foreign Affairs Committee passed a bipartisan resolution declaring that the atrocities perpetrated by ISIS terrorists “against Christians, Yezidis, and other religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq and Syria constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.” The U.S. State Department is in the process of debating whether the atrocities ISIS is committing against religious

minorities in the Middle East should be designated as genocide. The State Department now has till March 17 to decide if the atrocities committed by ISIS in the Middle East should be designated as genocide. The Obama administration has been reluctant to classify ISIS’ atrocities as genocide. Christian Headlines, 3/9

■ A Muslim man who converted to Christianity has now been sharing his faith with others, baptizing them and planting churches. He grew up in Libya as a devout Muslim and had even memorized the entire Koran. After hearing broadcasts from Leading the Way, a Christian television and radio ministry, he studied the Bible for several months and gave his life to Christ. Now, two years after converting to Christianity, Shahid has planted 11 churches in North Africa and Europe and is baptizing Muslims who are converting to Christianity. “He is a free man,” said Dr. Michael Youssef, founder and president of LTW. “Most importantly, he is free in Christ!” Christian Headlines, 3/10

■ A group of 60 Indian Christians were attacked and beaten by Hindu extremists while they worshipped at a Pentecostal church on Sunday. A mob of 25 Hindu

radicals attacked the Pentecostal church, beating the Christians who were there worshipping, stripping the women naked, and destroying property such as Bibles. The attack comes only a week after the Indian government denied visas to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). Although India claims to be a democracy, persecution against religious minorities such as Christians and Muslims is common. USCIRF has been able to travel to countries that include the worst offenders of religious freedom, such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Burma. Christian Headlines, 3/9

■ This week marks the end of five years of conflict in Syria, and key Christian agencies are calling on American Christians to unite in prayer on behalf of Syrian refugees. “We are to find Christ himself in those who are hurting the most,” said Rich Stearns, president of World Vision. “Our mission field encompasses the most vulnerable among us including those fleeing from persecution and warfare. We should pray for gospel compassion for our neighbors who are in peril,” said Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. The Syrian refugee crisis is the worst refugee crisis of since World War II. More than 13.5 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance, and more than 4 million have fled the country. Christian Headlines, 3/11

Extraordinary Earth

by John Stonestreet

Astronomers have long searched the sky for evidence that we’re not alone. But new research is suggesting we may be one of a kind.

There’s an old joke about Sherlock Holmes and his assistant, Watson, who decide to go camping. The two pack up their gear, head into the woods, set up their tent and by nightfall, are sound asleep. Hours later, Watson is awakened by a nudge from Holmes.

“Watson!” says the detective, “look up! What do you see?” “I see the sky, full of stars,” says Watson, a little annoyed. “And what do you deduce from that?” asks Holmes. Watson thinks for a moment, and replies, “Well, given the thousands of stars, it’s improbable that ours is the only planet capable of sustaining life. Therefore, other beings like ourselves are likely out there somewhere, looking back at us. Is that what it means?”

“No, you nincompoop,” replies Holmes. “It means someone has stolen our tent!”

Well, Watson may have missed an obvious clue, but scientists have long shared his conclusion about the stars. According to the famous Drake equation, a probabilistic argument designed by SETI pioneer, Frank Drake, there could be as many as 100 million thriving, communicative extraterrestrial civilizations in our galaxy—many of them more advanced than our own.

Astronomer Carl Sagan helped popularize this idea in his 1980 miniseries, *Cosmos*. “With 400 billion stars in the Milky Way Galaxy alone,” Sagan reasoned, “could ours be the only one with an inhabited planet? How much more likely it is that the galaxy is throbbing and humming with advanced societies!”

But decades later, scientists no longer share Sagan’s confidence. As one astrophysicist argues in a forthcoming paper, the old estimates vastly inflated the number of potential alien civilizations. Eric Zackrisson at Sweden’s Uppsala University suggests that

THERE’S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

modern research points not to a galaxy “throbbing and humming” with life, but to one in which Earth-like planets are exceedingly rare. It turns out that Drake’s equation failed to take into account factors that we now know to be essential to life. For example, scientists once believed that planets orbiting a certain distance from their host stars in the so-called “Goldilocks zone” were prime real estate for creatures like us.

But not anymore. It turns out that the size and chemical composition of the host stars matters just as much as planetary orbits. And according to Zackrisson, most planets in the universe likely orbit stars that bear little resemblance to our sun. These stars are either much bigger, much smaller, or just made of the wrong stuff.

And in light of the fruitless fifty-year search for extraterrestrial radio signals, predictions of a sky buzzing with activity are sounding less like science and more like science fiction. Increasingly, it looks as if we are alone in the universe.

And just how alone? Zackrisson estimates that given all the factors that make Earth what it is, our planet may be one in 700 quintillion to host intelligent life. That’s one out of seven followed by twenty zeros, or the estimated number of planets in the entire universe.

Nathaniel Scharping at Discover Magazine concludes, “from a purely statistical standpoint, Earth perhaps shouldn’t exist.” And yet, here we are.

Intelligent Design theorists have long pointed out how improbably unique our little blue planet is. And findings like this only deepen the problem for materialists. Because if thinking creatures emerged here and nowhere else, it makes us look less like accidents and more like—dare I say it—miracles.

Of course, for those who believe in the God Who, as Isaiah wrote, “spreads [the heavens] like a tent,” it’s no surprise. In fact you might say it’s “Elementary, my dear Watson.”

ENTERTAINMENT NOTES

★★ NEW MOVIES

The Young Messiah
10 Cloverfield Lane

Quality	Moral	Age
PG13	+4	+4 10+
PG13	+4	-2 T/A

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