



Impact

NEWS & NOTES

■ On March 23, the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments in the religious liberty case of Little Sisters of the Poor Home for the Aged v. Burwell. The case combines seven challenges to the Health and Human Services' (HHS) contraceptive / abortifacient mandate, which would force groups into providing insurance coverage for contraceptives, sterilization, and abortifacients. As ERLC president Russell Moore noted, "The government instead is arguing that the ministries misunderstand their own faith; that they can participate in its complicated contraceptive delivery scheme without disobeying God." Less than a week after hearing the case, the Court took the unusual step of asking for additional information, telling both sides to discuss alternative ways to avoid forcing religious women to provide services against their faith.

The Weekly, 3/25;
Becket Fund, 3/29

Impact is published for the Christian community with an emphasis on moral, public policy and religious liberty issues.

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Editor: Bruce Warmack

■ Facing threats of a massive economic boycott, including the NFL and Coke, Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal announced Monday he will veto a watered-down religious liberty bill that critics describe as anti-gay and supporters describe as necessary to protect their religious rights. The Republican governor had been under intense pressure to veto the religious liberty bill, which was intended to allow clergy and religious organizations to operate in a manner consistent with their religious beliefs. It also would let such organizations retain the right to fire employees not aligned with those beliefs. Fox News, 3/28; FACT, 4/1

■ Unlike Georgia's governor, North Carolina's governor, Pat McCrory, has withstood threats from Hollywood, large corporations, and even other states in support of a new law that reversed a recent vote by the City of Charlotte that would have allowed people to use public bathroom facilities of their chosen gender identity regardless of their biological sex. Gay rights activists have sued the state, Obama has called the decision "mean-spirited," and North Carolina's attorney general, who is running against McCrory in the state governor's race, has said that he would not defend the new law in court. The bill passed the North Carolina House with a vote of 83-24 and the state Senate with a vote of 32-0. Mean-

while, Tennessee's "Bathroom bill," HB 2414, is up for a key vote in both the House and the Senate this Wednesday. Also up for a vote in the House on Wednesday is HB 1840, which would allow counselors with religious objections to refer clients to other counselors. FACT, 4/1

■ On Wednesday the Mississippi Senate voted 31-17 to pass the Protecting Freedom of Conscience From Government Discrimination Act that would protect businessmen, social workers, and public employees who believe marriage is the union between one man and one woman from legal repercussions if they refuse to marry same-sex couples, fire someone whose religious beliefs are inconsistent with theirs, or block an adoption due to religious beliefs. The bill heads back to the House to accept some minor adjustments in language made by the Senate before going to the governor's desk. FACT, 4/1

■ A Christian Illinois couple has lost a lawsuit to a gay couple whose civil union ceremony they refused to hold at their bed and breakfast. The owners, Jim and Beth Walder, were fined \$80,000 by the Human Rights Commission, as well as \$15,000 to go to each plaintiff plus \$50,000 in attorney fees. Despite the fines, the Walders remain committed to their beliefs, saying, "Neither the state of

Illinois nor the U.S. Supreme Court has the authority to tamper with the definition of marriage. God alone created marriage..."

Christian Headlines, 4/1

■ Last Friday, U.S. District Judge Myron Thompson overturned the law that required hospital admitting privileges for abortionists, which would have effectively shut down four or five abortion clinics in Alabama. The judge deemed the regulation "unconstitutional" because it would "impose a substantial obstacle to a woman's choice to undergo an abortion." FACT, 4/1

■ Gov. Rick Scott of Florida signed a bill that not only strips the majority of taxpayer funding to Planned Parenthood, but also provides stricter regulations of abortion facilities including improved inspections, requiring abortion facilities to operate as ambulatory surgical centers, requiring abortionists to have admitting privileges at local hospitals in emergencies, and stricter protections governing fetal remains. Florida is now the 12th state to put through defunding measures. Meanwhile, Virginia's Democratic Gov. Terry McAuliffe has vetoed a bill that would have redirected funding from Planned Parenthood. FACT, 4/1; Christian Headlines, 4/1

■ Indiana Gov. Mike Pence signed into law a measure that would ban most abortions based upon the

sex, race, or diagnosed disability of the unborn child. Indiana is only the second state in the nation to ban abortions based on disability. The law also requires the remains of aborted babies to be buried or cremated. FACT, 4/1

■ An Oklahoma ballot measure that would have amended the state constitution to liken abortion to homicide garnered the necessary 123,725 signatures to make the measure open for vote on a statewide initiative. However, the Oklahoma Supreme Court ruled the proposed amendment unconstitutional, so no referendum can be held. FACT, 3/25

■ The FDA changed its guidelines on Wednesday for use of the abortion pill, mifepristone (RU-486), potentially increasing access to a method of terminating pregnancies that accounts for a quarter of all abortions. The FDA originally approved the sale of mifepristone in the U.S. in 2000, four months before President Clinton finished his second

term. This new approval includes a change in the dosage and an increase of the gestational age from 7 to 10 weeks. Despite the increased availability of the drug, the FDA is requiring the old label's warnings, which include the possibility of infection or death. The Weekly, 4/1

■ Tennessee's "Bible bill," which was introduced in last year's legislative session, has gained new life this year and is expected to pass the Senate when it goes to a floor vote this coming week. The bill's sponsor, Sen. Steve Southerland, said that the bill was intended to recognize the Bible for the role it has played in Tennessee's history and its economy. Tennessee's Gov. Bill Haslam and Attorney General Herbert Slatery oppose the bill, saying that it violates the separation of church and state.

FACT, 4/1;
Christian Headlines, 4/1

■ A settlement has been reached in a First Amendment lawsuit filed by the Rutherford Institute against

Whenever the pillars of Christianity shall be overthrown, our present republican forms of government, and all the blessings which flow from them, must fall with them."
— JEDEDIAH MORSE

Jedediah Morse was an educator and became known as The Father of American Geography, writing several books on American geography from 1784-1804. He founded the New England Tract Society in 1814 and The American Bible Society in 1816; and was a member of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. His son, Samuel F.B. Morse graduated from Yale in 1810, was made Professor of Sculpture and Painting at New York University and became one of the greatest portrait artists. He patented the telegraph and developed the Morse code, initially communicating a verse from the Bible, Numbers 23:23, "What hath God wrought?" between Baltimore and the U.S. Supreme Court in 1844.

police officers who allegedly intimidated and threatened to arrest Gino Emmerich, who simply held the “John 3:16” sign in the Willie Mays Plaza prior to a Giants-Dodgers game on Sunday, July 27, 2014. Emmerich has been practicing his “sign ministry” for years, according to his website. In 2012 a man flashed one of Emmerich’s John 3:16 signs behind home plate during the deciding game-four of the Giants-Tigers World Series. It was seen by millions on national TV. WND, 3/22

■ A town supervisor is receiving praise and criticism for posting a Bible verse and a prayer on his Facebook account after the terrorist attacks in Brussels. Rick Stathakis posted Psalm 46:1-2 which says: “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear...” Critics said that it is unconstitutional for a government official “to promote the establishment of faith.” Christian Headlines, 3/31

■ Bellevue Baptist Church, a megachurch in Memphis, received a scare when an armed man entered the building on Easter Sunday. The perpetrator was Marcus

Donald, 31 was carrying “several guns,” but Bellevue security personnel stopped the man before he entered the sanctuary. Memphis police arrested him and no one was injured.

Christian Headlines, 3/30

■ Perry Noble’s South Carolina church promises to return tithes if congregants aren’t blessed in 90 days. The tithing challenge has been in place for at least two years. It’s unclear if the church has ever returned tithes to people, but the church did report that in 2014, more than 1,600 people gave some \$59.3 million during the 90-day tithing challenge. RT, 3/30

■ Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley and a female member of his staff have been expelled from the First Baptist Church of Tuscaloosa for an alleged affair. “While church discipline is a church family matter, both Governor Robert Bentley and Mrs. Rebekah Mason are no longer members of First Baptist Church Tuscaloosa. I continue to pray for each of them,” said Senior Pastor Gil McKee. Christian Headlines, 3/29

■ Actor Morgan Freeman is hosting a six-part National Geographic television series

“The Story of God,” exploring such questions as “Who is God?” and “Where do we come from?” “In some places I found answers, and others led to more questions,” Freeman said in a statement. The producer said the series isn’t meant to be a theological treatise, but a reflection of Freeman’s “personal journey.” RNS, 4/1

■ Oxford theology students in their second and third years will no longer be required to study Christianity, reflecting a more diversified student body. While the study of Christianity is still mandatory in the first year of the theology study, second and third year students will now be able to choose to study other subjects such as “feminist approaches to religion and theology” or “Buddhism in space and time.” Christian Headlines, 4/1

■ Pakistani Christians are burying their dead after a bomb exploded during Easter celebrations in Punjab killing at least 74 people and injured more than 300. It was the deadliest in Pakistan since the 2014 massacre of 134 schoolchildren. The Radical Islamic group Jamaat-ul-Ahrar has claimed responsibility for the attack, saying that they targeted Christians. Almost exactly a year ago, suicide bombers struck two churches, killing 14 people in total. And in 2013, a suicide bomber blew himself up outside a church after Sunday Mass, killing 78. RT, 3/31

OUR FREEDOM VS. CORPORATE PRESSURE

The NFL, the NBA, and Big Bucks

by John Stonestreet

The NFL and the NBA are tackling issues having nothing to do with football or basketball, and they’re putting a full court press on our freedom.

Last week, North Carolina lawmakers—led by the Lt. Governor and leader of the house, ran a backdoor play of sorts to overturn a new Charlotte ordinance known as “the bathroom bill.” As you can probably guess, the bill mandated that Charlotte businesses allow individuals access to the restroom of their choice.

In a specially called session, lawmakers not only overturned Charlotte’s ordinance, they mandated that any public multiple occupancy restrooms and changing rooms in the state be designated for those of the same biological sex, while also allowing accommodation for transgender persons in single-occupancy facilities.

In just about any other time or age than ours, bathroom policies would be an unnecessary area for government involvement. And this particular bathroom policy would seem like common sense for the protection of women and children. And yet it was quickly labeled “anti-LGBT legislation.”

Among those using that nomenclature is the National Basketball Association. The league announced they may reconsider hosting 2017 All-Star Weekend activities in Charlotte, because of their commitment to “equality and mutual respect.” They apparently missed the irony in taking this moral stand, given that the NBA and WNBA are separate leagues, but Ryan Anderson of the Heritage Foundation didn’t, observing on Twitter: “Hey @NBA, you’re against bathrooms based on biology, but think basketball should be?”

Georgia lawmakers recently passed a bill that, in the words of the Washington Post, “protects pastors from being forced to perform same-sex marriage ceremonies and individuals from being forced to attend such events.” HB 757 also, “allows faith-based organizations to deny use of their facilities for

any event they find ‘objectionable’ and exempts them from having to hire or retain any employee whose religious beliefs or practices differ.”

The problem for these lawmakers is that Atlanta is in the running to host a future Super Bowl, and a strange alliance of LGBT advocates, NFL officials, and corporate bigwigs have teamed up to sack the religious liberty legislation. “NFL policies emphasize tolerance and inclusiveness,” reads a statement released by league officials, “and . . . [w]hether the laws and regulations of a state and local community are consistent with these policies would be one of many factors . . . to evaluate potential Super Bowl host sites.”

Walking lockstep, Atlanta Falcons owner Arthur Blank, who’s sinking hundreds of millions of dollars into a brand new stadium to attract the big game, says, “House Bill 757 would have long-lasting negative impact.” What kind of impact? Well, Disney threatened to stop making films in Georgia.

On Monday, while assuring us he was not caving to the financial pressure, Republican Governor Nathan Deal caved to the financial pressure and announced that he would veto House Bill 757. In doing so, Deal joins another Republican governor, Jan Brewer of Arizona, who caved to the NFL’s threats a few years back. “To paraphrase Joshua,” my colleague Roberto Rivera wrote recently, “the leaders of state and local governments . . . when asked to ‘choose this day whom you will serve,’ have answered ‘Sports! Money!’ and not in that order.”

So what does this all tell us? That culture matters. And business and sport is part of culture, and clearly in these cases are shaping our political landscapes. Our current comfort level with culture is being challenged, to say the least.

We need courageous, clear-thinking Christians who will make the right call when called upon.

ENTERTAINMENT NOTES

★★NEW MOVIES

	Quality	Moral	Age
<i>God's Not Dead 2</i>	PG	+3	+4 T/A
<i>My Big Fat Greek Wedding 2</i>	PG-13	+3	-1 T/A
<i>Batman v Superman</i>	PG-13	+4	-2 T/A
<i>Eye in the Sky</i>	R	+3	-2 OT/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