



NEWS & NOTES

■ Last week the U.S. Civil Rights Commission issued a report that implies religious believers—especially Christians—who support religious freedom legislation are often motivated not only by hate but by “intolerance, racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia, [and] Christian supremacy,” according to the report. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights was created by Congress in 1957 to inform the government of discrimination because of “race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, or national origin, or in the administration of justice” – no mention of “sexual orientation.” Their report recommends that “overly-broad” religious exemptions be narrowed, that First Amendment free exercise rights not be used to “limit others’ freedoms,” and that nondiscrimination policies “protect religious beliefs rather than conduct.” The chairman stated, “We now see ‘religious liberty’ arguments sneaking their way

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back into our political and constitutional discourse (just like the concept of “state rights”) in an effort to undermine the rights of some Americans. ... Regardless of the pace at which American religious institutions do or do not embrace the reality of civil rights and liberties of LGBT families and of women, religious exemptions to them are, and must remain, few and narrow.”

The Weekly, 9/16

■ A 14-year employee of the Social Security Administration is in danger of losing his job for refusing to watch a video on LGBTQ “diversity and inclusivity.” Recently, all employees were told they had to watch a diversity training video. David Hall refused, citing his Christian beliefs. Hall was reprimanded and was suspended without pay. “LGBT ‘diversity’ sessions and films are NOT truly ‘diverse’ because they disrespect or ignore faith-based and moral opposition to homosexuality and transsexualism,” said Americans for Truth president Peter LaBarbera. Christian Headlines, 9/16

■ The NCAA said on Monday it will move seven championship sporting events out of North Carolina to protest a state law it deems discriminatory to transgender individuals. Two months ago the NBA moved its 2017 pro All-Star Game from North Carolina to New Orleans for the same reason.

It is illegal for anyone in the state to use a public restroom that does not match the gender they were assigned at birth. The NCAA also bans championships in states that display the Confederate flag, authorize sports wagering, and at schools that use “hostile or abusive” Native American imagery.

Reuters, 9/13

■ “Chelsea” Manning could become the first prisoner to receive gender transition surgery. In 2013, Private Bradley E. Manning was convicted of stealing and disseminating 750,000 pages of documents and videos and providing them to WikiLeaks. Manning is serving a 35-year sentence at Fort Leavenworth, an all-male Army prison in Kansas. As a transgender, “she” has demanded treatment for gender dysphoria, beginning with surgery recommended by her psychologist. Last year, the Army agreed to provide Manning with hormone therapy but would not allow her to groom as a woman. Manning’s lawyer said she still faces charges related to her suicide attempt. A new Department of Defense policy, which takes effect in October, lays out processes under which service members may transition. CNN, 9/14

■ Successful new research on mice has scientists wondering if in the future, two men could potentially have a child together entirely without the genetic assistance of

a woman. While up until this point scientists had assumed it necessary to fertilize an egg with sperm to conceive a baby, the new experiment has shown that it is in fact possible to conceive mice (and potentially human children) using other kinds of cells, such as possibly skin cells. The research could result in the ability for gay biological men to have children with each other, or a man to fertilize his own cells. The research could also help infertile women to have children and aid in the preservation of endangered species whose eggs are often difficult to collect. The Week, 9/13

■ Republican leaders looking to avoid a government shutdown one month before Election Day are faced with Democrats refusal to approve legislation to combat the Zika virus because the measure included limits on Planned Parenthood. Both sides have shown they are willing to wage war over it. NY Times, 9/12

■ The Vatican issued a strong ruling about the sanctity of life this week when it said a man’s involvement in performing or helping someone procure an abortion is an obstacle to becoming a Catholic priest. The Church considers the sanctity of life “so absolute” that the new ruling even includes men who were not Catholic at the time of the abortion. The Canon Law also includes a person who has “committed

voluntary homicide ... mutilated himself or another gravely and maliciously or who has attempted suicide.” Forgiveness and special intervention of the bishop is needed before the person could be ordained. Initially, some feared Pope Francis would water down Catholic Church teachings on abortion and other issues, but he has been a strong advocate for life. LifeNews, 9/16

■ A Pew study finds that the share of Americans who do not identify with a religious group is growing: While nationwide surveys in the 1970s and ’80s found that fewer than one-in-ten U.S. adults said they had no religious affiliation, fully 23% now describe themselves as atheists, agnostics or “nothing in particular.” The share of the population that exhibits low levels of religiosity is growing. Young

people who are not particularly religious seem to be much more comfortable identifying as “nones” than are older people who display a similar level of religious observance. In 2007, 14% of U.S. adults had a low level of religious commitment on our scale, which is based on self-reported rates of attendance at worship services, daily prayer, certainty of belief in God and self-described importance of religion in people’s lives. Just seven years later, in 2014, the share of U.S. adults with low religiosity had grown to 19%. Pew Research, 9/14

■ A new Barna study finds that Almost three-quarters of Americans (73%) say they are a Christian, one-fifth (20%) claim no faith at all, and only 6% identify with faiths like Islam, Buddhism, Judaism or Hinduism. How-

But above all, for the inestimable blessings of the Gospel of Peace and Salvation, the means of grace and hopes of future glory, through the merits of a crucified Savior... That he would bless the means used for the promulgation of his word, and make pure religion and morality more and more abound.”

— JOHN LANGDON

In 1774, when King George III issued a royal order banning the export of gunpowder and arms to America, Langdon led 400 men to capture British Fort William and Mary, seizing arms and 100 barrels of gunpowder. In 1776, John Langdon oversaw the building of American warships, including the “Ranger,” which he recommended be captained by fellow church member John Paul Jones. As Governor of New Hampshire, he convened a convention to ratify the U.S. Constitution, but postponed it, seeing opposition to it. Rather he called for a Day of Fasting, after which the New Hampshire delegates ratified the U.S. Constitution and fulfilled the necessary requirement of 2/3rds of the states. The above quote is from his proclamation as Governor acknowledging the nation’s victory over the Muslim Barbary Pirates of North Africa in 1805. John Langdon died September 18, 1819.

ever, almost almost half of all American adults (48%) disbelieve in God or do not participate in practices such as Bible reading, prayer and church attendance. Barna, 9/15

■ A new study claims that religious institutions contribute more to the U.S. economy than corporations like Google, Apple, and Facebook combined. According to the report, religious institutions and their associated ministries contribute \$1.2 trillion each year to the economy and society. Religious tax-exemptions cost the US \$71 billion. Despite declining religious affiliation in the American population, religious organizations have tripled the amount of money spent on social programs in the last fifteen years—to \$9 billion. Denison Forum on Truth and Culture, 9/16

■ Archaeologists in Israel have discovered what they believe to be the site of a biblical city mentioned in the story of David and Goliath. They believe the city was Sha'arayim, which is Hebrew for "two gates," and was mentioned in 1 Samuel 17: 52. Scientists used carbon-14 dating to determine that the city flourished at the

end of the eleventh century BC through the early tenth century, which included the days of King Saul and David. Christian Headlines, 9/16

■ Over 100 parliamentarians from 60 countries met this week in Berlin for a series of workshops and seminars under the title, "An Embattled Right: Protecting and Promoting Freedom of Religion of Belief." German Chancellor Angela Merkel said that better education is the key to ensuring a productive dialogue between cultures and religions. A Greek MP said, "We are all guilty of putting our economic interests first, and our moral and ethical beliefs second. We have our hierarchy all wrong..."

World Watch Monitor, 9/16

■ The United States has now accepted 10,801 Syrian refugees, of whom 56 are Christian or about 0.5 percent, even though ten percent of all Syrians are Christian – an especially persecuted group. "This is de facto discrimination and a gross injustice," Nina Shea, who is director of the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom. Currently, the only path to resettlement for ref-

uges is to apply to the UN from a UN refugee camp in Jordan; however, very few Christians reside there due to intense persecution. A bill introduced in March in Congress is still pending that would set aside 10,000 slots for allow religious minorities fleeing persecution and to allow them to apply directly to the U.S.

Council on Foreign Relations, 9/9

■ The Philos Project and In Defense of Christians are partnering together in working to establish homeland to provide safe haven for Christians who have been persecuted and displaced in the Middle East, due to the Syrian civil war and terrorist groups such as ISIS. Some critics say establishing a homeland in the Middle East for persecuted Christians is not feasible, but Robert Nicholson, president of the Philos Project gave examples of Israel, Armenia, and Iraqi Kurdistan.

Christian Headlines, 9/12

■ From January 2016 to July 2016 there were Christians in Cuba are experiencing escalated threats due to their faith with 1,606 recorded violations of religious freedom in the country from January to July this year. These violations included destruction of churches, church property, and arbitrary arrests of Christians.

Christian Headlines, 9/16

Early Voting begins in one month — October 19
Are you registered?

LOUISIANA, TOCQUEVILLE, AND VOLUNTEER ASSOCIATIONS

Americans Doing Good

by Eric Metaxas

People banding together to do good. It's what Americans have always done, and are still doing.

I recently had the pleasure of speaking with Lord Jonathan Sacks, a British rabbi who won the 2016 Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion—a prize Chuck Colson also won. Lord Sacks told me that every American ought to read Alexis de Tocqueville's classic book, "Democracy in America," at least once a year. Why? To remind ourselves that citizens acting together can do far more good than a far-off government.

Just ask the citizens of Baton Rouge. Following a catastrophic flood recently which killed 13 people and rendered thousands homeless, residents learned yet again—as they did after Hurricane Katrina—how unreliable "the government" can be. U.S. Congressman John Mica called the federal government's response "pitiful."

But that didn't mean Baton Rougers were without help—far from it. Hundreds of volunteers—members of churches, civic groups, and rank and file volunteers—showed up to pitch in. Volunteers in boats rescued some 30,000 people.

Wesley Pruden, a columnist at the Washington Times, marveled at the private citizens who worked to ease the suffering. For example, a Notre Dame student organized food contributions. Citizens in Appalachia loaded up a truck "with diapers, baby food, basic groceries, odd pieces of furniture and tape guns." And University of South Carolina athletes "organized a truck to Baton Rouge for the benefit of their rivals at Louisiana State University."

Alexis de Tocqueville would not have been surprised. During his long visit to America nearly 200 years ago, the Frenchman applauded the American habit of forming civic associations for the purpose of doing good. As Tocqueville put it, in the U.S., "Americans of all ages, all conditions, all minds constantly unite," forming associations

"religious [and] moral . . . immense and very small; Americans use associations to give fetes, to found seminaries . . . to raise churches, to distribute books, to send missionaries to the antipodes; in this manner they create hospitals, prisons, schools.

"Finally," Tocqueville writes, "if it is a question of bringing to light a truth or developing a sentiment with the support of a great example, they associate."

And when they form associations, Tocqueville adds, Americans "are no longer isolated but have become a power seen from afar whose activities serve as an example and whose words are heeded."

Civic groups not only meet immediate needs, such as feeding flood victims; they can also work to protect us from a too-powerful government that seeks to take over jobs it is ill-equipped to do—or worse, take away our freedoms. In fact, as I write in my new book "If You Can Keep It," if we're going to keep our freedoms and our Republic, we need to do the things Tocqueville is talking about. This is why, for instance, I admire the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, whose members banded together to protect the religious rights of all Americans—freedoms which are occasionally stomped on by bureaucratic bullies.

So I encourage all of you to look around, search out local needs, and join, or even found, a civic society to meet that need. I've done this myself: About a dozen years ago, I saw a need for busy professionals to have a forum where they could think about the bigger questions in life, and hear notable thinkers talk about "life, God, and other small topics," as we put it. *Socrates in the City: Conversations on the Examined Life*, was born.

Finally, I hope you'll take Lord Sacks' advice: Find a copy of "Democracy in America," climb into a comfortable chair, and read it from cover to cover. You will learn that our enthusiasm for forming groups to do good is a big part of what makes America great.

ENTERTAINMENT NOTES

★★ NEW MOVIES

	Quality	Moral	Age
<i>Hillsong: Let Hope Rise</i>	PG +3	+4	10+
<i>Snowden</i>	R +3	-2	A
<i>Bridget Jones's Baby</i>	R +3	-3	A
<i>When the Bough Breaks</i>	PG-13 +2	-3	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