



# Impact

## NEWS & NOTES

■ Reports have surfaced that House and Senate members of the conference committee negotiating the final version of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) have caved to the Obama administration's veto threat and stripped the Russell Amendment, which would prevent the government from revoking contracts and grants from faith-based social service providers whose internal staffing policies reflect their faith, from the final version of the bill. The amendment was originally included in the House-passed version of the NDAA and applies decades-old religious exemptions to federal grants and contracts. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act has for decades specifically protected these organizations' ability to hire those who will abide by their religious precepts (a system that has been affirmed by the Supreme Court) and thereby preserve their religious identity.

Daily Signal, 11/18

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■ A Minnesota judge has ruled that a transgender man represented by the ACLU can have his gender reassignment surgery paid for by tax dollars. The judge's ruling in the case is consistent with the Obama administration's changes to the Affordable Care Act which forces states to include gender reassignment surgery in their Medicaid plans.

Christian Headlines, 11/21

■ A Minnesota mom filed a lawsuit after her underage son was given "gender-transition" treatment and female hormones without her consent. While the boy was living apart from his mother, there was never any court order emancipating the boy. So, the county public health department and two medical service providers gave him drugs and services without her permission in order to suppress and alter his male hormones and appearance.

FACT, 11/24

■ The Becket Fund has filed a lawsuit on behalf of the State of North Dakota, several clinics, hospitals, and one university to challenge the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) federal regulation that demands all doctors in America be willing and able to perform gender transition procedures on children. The lawsuit challenges HHS by pointing out the expense to taxpayers, the dangers to children, and the governmental overreach that violates the Hippocratic Oath.

The plaintiffs also cite research that gender dysphoria disappears naturally in 94 percent of children, which would make sex-change treatment unnecessary.

FACT, 11/24

■ A Missouri state appellate court in a 2-1 decision held that frozen pre-embryos created from the husband's sperm and the wife's eggs for the purpose of in vitro fertilization are to be treated as marital property in a divorce proceeding, rather than being treated as children. The wife had argued that the court should have treated the pre-embryos as children and awarded her custody so that she could have them implanted to become pregnant. The majority held, however, that applying this declaration to pre-embryos would infringe the father's right to privacy and his right not to procreate.

Religion Cause, 11/18

■ A new experiment called the TelAbortion Study conducted in Hawaii, New York, Oregon, and Washington will provide women with abortion pills through the mail following an online or phone medical consultation. The purpose is to give an easier and lower-cost alternative to traditional in-clinic abortions in spite of the FDA protocol for the safe use of the drug. Medical abortions make up about a quarter of all abortions in the United States.

FACT, 11/24

■ In 2011 and again just ahead of the election, PRRI

asked Americans whether a political leader who committed an immoral act in his or her private life could nonetheless behave ethically and fulfill their duties in their public life. Back in 2011, consistent with the "values voter" brand's insistence on the importance of personal character, only 30% of white evangelical Protestants agreed with this statement. But this year, 72% of white evangelicals now say they believe a candidate can build a kind of moral wall between his private and public life. In a shocking reversal, white evangelicals have gone from being the least likely to the most likely group to agree that a candidate's personal immorality has no bearing on his performance in public office. Today, in fact, they are more likely than Americans who claim no religious affiliation at all to say such a moral bifurcation is possible.

Time, 11/19

■ The 2016 American Family Survey found that 75 percent of conservatives believe that society is better off when more people are married and 84 percent feel that marriage is needed to create strong families, only 35 percent and 39 percent of liberals agree with those two statements. Married respondents younger than 30 reported cohabiting prior to marriage much more often than other age groups—about 53 percent of married respondents under 30 re-

ported cohabiting at least once. However, Among those under 30, the vast majority (70 percent) became parents for the first time when they were not married. In comparison, 67 percent of those 45-55, 80 of those 55-64, and 91 percent of 65 and over were married when they had their first child.

The Weekly, 11/25

■ Canadian researchers discovered that conservative theological beliefs of church members and clergy are associated with growing churches, in contrast to mainline Protestant Christian churches which have declined since the 1960s in both the U.S. and Canada. The trend has also been noted by Albert Mohler, David Brooks of The New York Times and Joe Carter of The Gospel Coalition. For example, 71 percent of pastors at growing churches said they read their Bibles daily,

compared with 19 percent of pastors at declining churches. The results of the five-year research project will be published in the December issue of the Review of Religious Research.

RNS, 11/22

■ From the U.S. Census Bureau's latest America's Families and Living Arrangements report, the two-parent family is still the most common family form for children in the United States—with the majority of children currently living with married parents. In 2016, 69 percent of the nation's 73.7 million children under 18 live in families headed by two parents (biological, step, or adoptive). That's significantly less than the 88 percent of children who lived with two parents in 1960, but still a substantial majority. By comparison, 3.0 million children live with two unmarried parents (up from 1.2

**E**xistence is a strange bargain. Life owes us little; we owe it everything. The only true happiness comes from squandering ourselves for a purpose."  
— WILLIAM COWPER

For William Cowper, that purpose was eventually found in writing hymns with his friend John Newton. He was born on November 26, 1731. His early life was troubled but he finally obtained a law degree yet made little exertion in the field. He was never married and had a melancholy spirit and said "In a fleshly tomb, I am buried above ground." Hoping to lift his spirits by keeping him busy, Newton suggested that he and Cowper co-author a book of hymns. Of the 280 hymns in the popular "Olney Hymns," Cowper wrote 68 of the hymns, including "Oh for a closer walk with God," "God moves in a mysterious way," and "There is a fountain filled with blood." Cowper kept writing poetry and became famous. "Variety's the very spice of life, That gives it all its flavor," he said. He is considered one of the founders of the English Romantic movement. His "John Gilpin" is a children's favorite. In his best work, "The Task" Cowper continues to praise his Creator. He once said that of all the gifts God gives to us, God, Himself, is the greatest.

million in 1996). By age 12, 40 percent of children will spend some time in a cohabiting household, most often with their biological mother and her live-in boyfriend. Meanwhile, the percentage of children living with their single mother has nearly tripled since 1960, from eight percent to 23 percent.

Family Studies, 11/21

■ A 14-year-old girl in the U.K. who was dying of cancer won the right to be cryogenically frozen, in the hopes that scientists someday would be able to bring her back to life and cure her illness. The girl's mother supported her interest in cryogenics and agreed to her desire to have her body preserved. The girl, who is not being named to protect her privacy, has since died. Her body has been sent to the United States for long-term cryogenic storage. NPR, 11/18

■ Franklin Graham recently spoke at a revival event in Myanmar where thousands of people responded to the message and gave their lives to Christ. Most people of Myanmar (formerly known as Burma) are adherents of Buddhism, but many embraced Christianity during

the festival. The first day of the festival had around 46,000 attendees. About 2,500 of these gave their lives to Christ after hearing the gospel message, and 2,400 more did so on the festival's second day. Graham and his team with Samaritan's Purse ministries handed out hundreds of Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes.

Christian Headlines, 11/21

■ Jesus was named the King of Poland at a ceremony on November 19 attended by Poland's president Andrzej Duda. The ceremony took place at the Church of Divine Mercy in Krakow. Stated at the ceremony, "We entrust the Polish people and Polish leaders to you. Make them exercise their power fairly and in accordance with your laws. ... rule us, Christ! Reign in our homeland and reign in every nation – for the greater glory of the Most Holy Trinity and the salvation of mankind." Said Bishop Andrzej Czaja after Saturday's ceremony: "It is not a declaration of Christ the King, because he is king. It is not a declaration of Christ the King of Poland. His kingdom is not of this earth, and his dominion is

over the whole universe."

RT, 11/23

■ Iconic London landmarks, including the Palace of Westminster, Westminster Abbey and Westminster Cathedral, were floodlit in red on November 23 to raise awareness of people who suffer injustice because of their religion. A parliamentary spokesman said that Parliament "fully endorses" the aims of the Red Wednesday campaign.

World Watch Monitor, 11/23

■ A spate of attacks on Christian communities in Nigeria in November left 45 dead and several more injured. Most of the victims were women, children and the elderly, who could not escape the gunfire of the attackers, believed to be Fulani herdsmen, in which 120 houses, including 8 house-churches, were burnt down. Since March 2013, at least 180 have been killed and 10,000 displaced, while hundreds of properties, including dozens of churches, have been burnt down.

World Watch Monitor, 11/20

■ Mariam Ibraheem, the Sudanese Christian mother sentenced to death in 2014 for marrying a Christian American man, but released in June of that year, said she secretly read the Bible while imprisoned. She now lives in Virginia. When she was imprisoned, her 20-month-old son was also jailed and also had to deliver her baby in jail. Ibraheem is now serving as a religious freedom advocate.

RT, 11/22

## Advent, Sacred Time, and Worldview

by John Stonestreet

This upcoming Sunday marks the beginning of Advent, the time historically "set aside by the Church to help believers prepare to receive the fullness of Jesus' coming."

And the word "coming" refers both to His Incarnation and "His return as the 'Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory,' who will 'send his angels to gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens' (Mark 13:26-27)."

A few years ago, on BreakPoint I said that "walking through this season of Advent in prayer, scripture and devotional readings has been a huge blessing to my family, to my church, and to me personally." That's definitely still the case.

Today I want to explore the relationship between the observance of Advent and our worldview.

When most Christians think about worldview (if they think about it at all), what comes to mind are ideas. Now worldview isn't less than ideas, of course, but it is more.

Bill Brown, Gary Phillips and I define worldview as the framework of basic beliefs we have that give us a view of and for the world. That framework includes ideas, but also our imagination, our habits, and the basic stories—both cultural and personal—that shape our lives.

We live out of these stories—they give us, as N. T. Wright puts it, "a way-of-being-in-the-world." It's this "way-of-being in the world" that I want to talk more about today.

Twelve years ago, the historian Robert Louis Wilken wrote in the journal *First Things* that "The Church is a culture in its own right. Christ does not simply infiltrate a culture; Christ creates culture by forming another city, another sovereignty with its own social and political life."

What distinguishes this culture from the non-Christian world is not some kind of physical separation, or even a spiritual withdrawal, but, to borrow Wright's phrase, a

"way-of-being-in-the-world" that's different.

According to Wilken, three hallmarks of this "way" were the distinctive Christian uses of space, time, and language. Time today does not permit me to discuss the uses of space and language, so I'll settle for urging you to read Wilken's essay. We'll link to it at BreakPoint.org.

But that does leave time to talk about, well, time. As Wilken writes, "We should not underestimate the cultural significance of the calendar and its indispensability for a mature spiritual life. Religious rituals carry a resonance of human feeling accumulated over the centuries."

He continues "The season of Advent . . . is a predictable reminder that the Church lives by another time, marked in the home by a simple ritual, the lighting of a violet Advent candle set in an evergreen wreath on a dark evening in early December."

"Sacred seasons" like Advent, "run at right angles to the conventional calendar [and] they offer a regular and fixed cessation of activity." They become "times of reflection and contemplation that open us to mystery and transcendence."

What's more, they provide the "gift of leisure," a much-needed respite from "the world of work and money and minding our p's and q's."

Only if we truly understand those cultural forces that shape our worldview can we intentionally open ourselves to the possibility that there is a way of being in the world that is both countercultural and transformative.

We have some Advent resources and readings for you at BreakPoint.org. And beginning on Tuesday, you can listen to a special Advent podcast titled, "He Has Come." It's available on our BreakPoint podcast. You can sign up for the podcast at iTunes or by visiting BreakPoint.org/podcast.

Please, find time and find space to prepare for Christmas. Have a blessed Advent.

### ENTERTAINMENT NOTES

#### ★★NEW MOVIES

	Quality	Moral	Age
<i>Moana</i>	PG	+4	-1 10+
<i>Rules Don't Apply</i>	PG-13	+3	-2 OT/A
<i>Allied</i>	R	+3	-3 OT/A
<i>Bad Santa 2</i>	R	+2	-4 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](http://movieguide.org); [pluggedin.com](http://pluggedin.com)