



NEWS & NOTES

■ Lawmakers in Ohio have passed a “heartbeat” bill that, if signed by the state’s governor, John Kasich, would ban most abortions after six weeks. The new bill not only prohibits most abortions after six weeks, but would make no exceptions for rape or incest, but only if the mother’s life was endangered. Gov. Kasich is pro-life, but has voiced hesitancy in the past regarding whether such a ban on abortion would be considered constitutional. *Christian Headlines, 12/7*

■ Last week, Texas joined at least three other states — Arkansas, Louisiana and Indiana — that have called for the burial or cremation of aborted fetal remains. The Texas regulations regarding the disposal of remains have been in the works for the past year to “protect the dignity of the unborn.” With lawsuits pending, the regulations in Indiana and Louisiana have not yet gone into effect. Abortion rights organizations said they are still

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reviewing the Texas rules and have not decided whether to file a lawsuit. But they said the regulations appear to contradict a June ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court, which found that restrictions on abortions must serve a public health purpose. On November 30, abortion rights advocates challenged laws restricting the procedures in Missouri, Alaska and North Carolina, an aggressive push following a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that struck down a Texas law requiring abortions to be performed in surgical centers or hospitals. *NY Times, 12/1; Reuters, 11/30*

■ Though Macy’s department store have given support and matching gifts to Planned Parenthood in the past, Macy’s will no longer financially fund the abortion provider. Other companies, including AT&T, Coca-Cola, Ford, and Xerox also recently decided to no longer financially support Planned Parenthood. *Christian Headlines, 12/9*

■ A group of atheists and humanists attempted to remove the phrase “In God We Trust” from U.S. currency through a lawsuit against the federal government, arguing that the national motto infringing on their rights to free speech, free exercise, and equal protection. On November 30, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Ohio dismissed the suit. *FACT, 12/9*

■ Filmmakers Carl and Angel Larsen Telescope Media Group filed a lawsuit this week against the Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Human Rights and the Minnesota Attorney General. The Larsens want to use their business to produce films that promote biblical marriage, but under the Minnesota Human Rights Act, which prohibits “discrimination” against same-sex “marriage,” they could be subject to a fine of \$1,000 and up to 90 days in jail. The law provides exceptions for religious entities but not secular businesses, like film companies. ADF is representing the couple in the suit. *FACT, 12/9*

■ Connecticut Comptroller Kevin Lembo, an open homosexual, is targeting the American Family Association (AFA) for “discriminatory” views and is threatening to cut AFA from the state charitable giving program. The AFA is responsible for the boycott against Target for opening its bathrooms for gender choice. *FACT, 12/9*

■ Chip and Joanna Gaines, hosts of the popular HGTV show *Fixer Upper*, were lambasted by BuzzFeed, Cosmopolitan, and US Weekly for attending a church that believes in one-man, one-women marriage. A spokesperson for the Antioch Community Church where the Gaineses attend, says “she

could not speak for Chip and Joanna Gaines on same-sex marriage.” The Gaines have simply asked their fans to respect the author of the article rather than to retaliate. In contrast, nothing negative has been said about Congressman Keith Ellison, candidate for Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, because the imam at the mosque he attends has been outspoken about homosexuality being wrong and unnatural. *FACT, 12/9; Christian Headlines, 12/6*

■ The Illinois Human Rights Commission has ruled against a bed-and-breakfast that refused to host a same-sex civil union ceremony and recommended damages of \$30,000 for emotional distress as well as \$51,218 in attorneys’ fees and costs. The Commission’s decision once again sends a clear message that denying couples the use of a public wedding venue in Illinois because they are gay or lesbian is simply not permitted. Attorneys for the bed-and-breakfast say they will appeal the ruling. *Religion Cause, 12/1*

■ Conservatives won a small victory in National Defense Authorization Act in that America’s young women will not be forced to sign up for the Selective Service. However, the Russell Amendment was included in the House version to ensure that churches, religious organizations, and other non-

profits were not forced to accept President Obama’s executive order protecting sexual orientation and gender identity. A similar provision was not included in the final version under the threat of a Presidential veto. *Daily Signal, 12/1*

■ A new survey by the Public Religion Research Institute and The Atlantic found that 39 percent of self-identified evangelicals who are white feel that the quality of life in their local community is about to get better following the election. Only a fifth of people who are religiously unaffiliated, a quarter of white mainline Protestants, and less than a third of Catholics feel like lives in their communities are about to improve. White evangelicals said that hunger and poverty are major problems where they live: 39 percent identified these issues as sig-

nificant, compared to a third or less of other groups. They were also more likely to express concerns about drugs, and two-thirds were worried about America becoming weak or “too soft and feminine.” *The Atlantic, 12/1*

■ More white Americans are now dying than being born in a third of U.S. states, according to a study released Tuesday, which shows white deaths outpacing births in a record 17 states stretching from California to Maine. That’s a big shift from 2004 when only four states had more white deaths than births. Previous studies have shown that more white Americans, particularly middle-aged men, are dying from opioid abuse, suicide and problems associated with obesity in recent years. “The white population isn’t replacing itself,” says a co-author of the study. “That

Silent night, holy night
 Son of God love's pure light.
 Radiant beams from Thy holy face
 With dawn of redeeming grace,
 Jesus Lord, at Thy birth.”

In 1816 Austrian Joseph Mohr (born Dec. 11, 1792) wrote “Stille Nacht” as a poem. Two years later he gave it to his friend and local schoolteacher Franz Gruber, who composed a melody for guitar in time for the Christmas Eve service at the Church of Saint Nicholas in Oberndorf. The song gained popularity when a singing family called the Strassers performed “Stille Nacht” at a Leipzig concert in 1832. It came to America when the Rainer family first performed the carol outside Trinity Church in New York City in 1839. In 1859, an Episcopal priest at Trinity produced the translation we use today. In 1914, during the Christmas Truce of World War 1, German and English troops joined in singing “Silent Night” on the battlefield because it was the one carol soldiers on both sides knew. Mohr and Gruber had no idea a song written for a small parish church would spread across the world. It has been translated into 300 languages and dialects. Today it is regarded as the most popular Christmas carol in the world.

accelerates the growing diversity of the American population.” He added that several more states, including Tennessee, could soon see natural decreases in white population in the next few years. Time, 11/29

■ Smoking will be prohibited in public housing residences nationwide under a federal rule announced on Nov. 30. Officials with the Department of Housing and Urban Development said that the rule would take effect early next year, but that public housing agencies would have a year and a half to put smoke-free policies in place. The final rule followed a period of public comment during which opponents took exception to the government’s telling people what to do in the privacy of their own homes. NY Times, 11/30

■ The percentage of hotels that offer the Bible and religious books in rooms has fallen over the past 10 years. In 2006, 95 percent of hotels carried such books, and this year, it’s estimated that only 48 percent of hotels carried religious materials. Marriott supplies a Bible and Book of Mormon in its rooms but has decided not to do so for its new millennial-oriented hotel brands. RT, 12/5

■ A professor at the University of Notre Dame says an extremely rare planetary alignment occurring in 6 B.C. could be the Nativity star. Prof. Grant Mathews has spent the past decade analyzing historical, astronomical, and Biblical records. He found that the sun, moon, Jupiter, and Saturn were all located in the constellation of Aries that year. Such an alignment cannot re-occur for over 16,000 years. Other astronomers have proposed alternative theories about the Christmas star, which announced a divine act unique in human history. BBC, 12/6; The Weekly, 12/9; World News Service, 12/9

■ On Tuesday, Egyptian authorities arrested more than two dozen doctors, nurses and professors suspected of being involved in an international organ trafficking ring. It is illegal to purchase organs in Egypt, but poverty drives some to sell their body parts. According to the United Nations, hundreds of poor Egyptians still sell kidneys and livers each year to be able to buy food or pay off debts. In Pakistan, the indigent are especially vulnerable since they are encouraged to sell their kidneys to buy their way out of bonded labor, a form of slavery that has ex-

isted in South Asia for centuries. Last month, Pakistani police raided an apartment block and found 24 people who were being held captive for four months while they waited to be operated on at a nearby clinic. Experts have estimated that globally, five to ten percent of kidney transplants are a result of trafficking. In China, some reports have found that as many as 100,000 organ transplants may be taking place annually in the country, despite the Chinese government’s claims that it administers only 10,000 per year. BBC, 12/6; The Weekly, 12/9; World Watch Monitor, 12/2

■ Compassion International, a Christian nongovernmental organization that aids 145,000 impoverished Indian children, has three weeks left in the country unless officials give it a reprieve. Compassion employs 6,000 workers in India who provide aid to children living in extreme poverty. It has worked in India since 1968 and is the largest humanitarian presence in the second most populated country in the world—providing \$50 million in annual relief funds. But India is cracking down on foreign NGOs based on fears that groups are using humanitarian work to mask evangelization efforts. Those fears have prompted the government to block the inflow of relief dollars. Many other NGOs have lost their licenses in the last several years. World News Service, 12/9

Serving Others Gets Noticed

by John Stonestreet

When Christians live as Jesus told us to do, loving God and serving others, folks notice. Even the New York Times, which ran the recent headline “Finding America’s Mother Theresa.”

Talk about pressure! Whoever the article described had some huge shoes to fill: Mother Theresa was a beloved humanitarian who was both a Nobel Peace Prize winner and a Catholic saint.

While Annette Dove of Pine Bluff, Arkansas, probably won’t win a Nobel Prize, and as a non-Catholic, won’t be canonized, there’s plenty here to admire and emulate.

Dove’s story, as told by Times columnist Nicholas Kristof, is a remarkable one. At age 16, Dove dropped out of high school and married a man not only incapable of loving her but who also physically and mentally abused her.

The end of that marriage left her as a single mom and taught her the importance of being “equally-yoked” with a person who shares your morals and values.

As you’ve no doubt guessed, “America’s Mother Theresa,” like her Calcutta counterpart, is a Christian. As she writes in the preface to her book, “Birthing the Vision,” “My prayer is that this book will help those who find themselves in a new place of seeking God for their purpose in life. It is important that you understand that God should always be acknowledged, first.”

“No journey will be easy,” she continues, “but if you allow Him to take control, by trusting in Him with your whole heart, and leaning not unto your own understanding; victory will be waiting for you.”

In Dove’s case, “victory” has taken the form of TOPPS, which stands for “Targeting Our People’s Priorities with Service.” Dove started TOPPS after spending several decades as a special education teacher.

Today, as Kristof tells his readers, “Dove works seven days a week and struggles month to month to pay the bills with donations, foundation support and a state grant;

THE NEW YORK TIMES FINDS A ‘SAINT’

when the money runs out, she prays.”

And she has no regrets. At TOPPS, she and volunteer mentors are keeping young people in school, preparing them for college, steering them away from drugs and crime. During the summer, TOPPS feeds 600 people a day. Young men are learning things like “how to tie a necktie,” and “how to look a job interviewer in the eye.” At TOPPS meetings, they talk about politics and what’s going on in the world. And they talk about personal responsibility: finances, how to make a budget, how to treat girls with respect.

As Kristof says, “This training doesn’t erase the damage from troubled schools or dangerous neighborhoods, but it helps.” Kristof says that men and women like Dove are the ones who “keep their fingers in the dike and avert catastrophe.”

“By force of will,” Kristof continued, Dove “creates opportunities for kids who have none—and reminds us that whatever happens in Washington, there are miracle workers at the grass roots.”

Actually, Dove would hasten to emphasize that the will that matters most at TOPPS is God’s, not her own.

People like Annette Dove, “get no headlines, no reward, no glory, and they regularly have their hearts broken, only to soldier on to help the next child.” And yet, Kristof says, they “help to restore my faith in America.”

To which Dove would no doubt reply, what needs to be restored most is faith in the God she serves.

A few years ago, Warren Smith and I wrote a book called “Restoring All Things.” As the subtitle says, it’s about “God’s extraordinary plan to change the world through ordinary people.” We had not heard of Annette Dove and TOPPS back then, but like so many stories we tell in the book, this is what restoration looks like: an “ordinary” woman going to extraordinary lengths to teach kids how to change their lives for the better.

And of course, how to always put God first.

ENTERTAINMENT NOTES

★★ NEW MOVIES

	Quality	Moral	Age
<i>La La Land</i>	PG-13	+4	-2 T/A
<i>Office Christmas Party</i>	R	+3	-3 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; pluggedin.com