



NEWS & NOTES

■ A quote from the classic holiday TV special “A Charlie Brown Christmas,” has thrust a Texas middle school nurse’s aide, the school district she works for and the state attorney general into a very public — and unseasonably bitter — debate over what “religious liberty” means inside the walls of the state’s public schools. Dedra Shannon decorated the nurse’s office door with a poster of Linus and his famous quote: “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord. That’s what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown.” Following a request by the principal to remove the poster, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton invoked the state’s Merry Christmas Law, which is intended to protect Texans’ “right to acknowledge traditional winter holidays like Christmas on school grounds” and promised to defend the school district

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from “any frivolous litigation.” Wash. Post, 12/14

■ A Florida middle school coach was reprimanded after complaints from the Freedom From Religion Foundation for taking a knee during a student-led prayer on the football field. He explained, “The prayer in question was a student-initiated prayer, and I was kneeling with them. I didn’t know (I couldn’t), I thought it was a gray area. But since then, I’ve been instructed on that particular situation, when the kids start to pray, I have to walk away and turn my back...” The superintendent said that the district has held training seminars about prayer on the football field, saying coaches should “have separation from the players, two to three steps. You are allowed to have reverent respect for their prayer.”

Christian Headlines, 12/16

■ On Tuesday, Ohio Gov. John Kasich vetoed a bill that would have made it illegal to abort babies after six weeks of conception, the earliest one can detect a fetal heartbeat, but he did sign the Pain Capable Unborn Child Protection Act that would ban abortions after 20 weeks. This new abortion regulation will take effect in Ohio in 90 days if the courts approve. Physicians convicted of performing abortions after 20 weeks if the fetus is viable would be guilty of a fourth-degree felony, could serve up to 18 months in prison,

and could lose their medical licenses. FACT, 12/16

■ Even as Texas faces legal action against new regulations mandating the burial or cremation of fetal remains from an abortion or miscarriage, the state’s Catholic cemeteries are developing plans to provide free interment for any deceased fetus. “To bury the dead is a work of mercy,” said the director of the Texas Catholic Conference. The regulations are set to take effect on Dec. 19, but abortion rights groups have filed suit to halt the new policy. The ACLU challenged a fetal burial law in Indiana this year; that law was blocked while the appeal works its way through the courts. A similar law in Louisiana is on hold, NPR reported. RNS 12/15

■ In the wake of the House Select Investigative Panel on Infant Lives referring Planned Parenthood for prosecution based on the abortion giant’s trafficking of fetal body parts, Obama signed an executive order to prevent states from defunding Planned Parenthood that goes into effect days before President-elect Trump takes office and who can rescind the order as soon as he takes office. FACT, 12/16

■ The American Medical Association has described physician-assisted suicide as a serious risk to society and “fundamentally incompatible with a physician’s role as

healer.” Yet, two-thirds of Americans say it is morally acceptable for terminally ill patients to ask their doctors for help in ending their lives, according to a new survey from Nashville-based Life-Way Research. A similar number says doctors should be able to help terminally ill patients die. Physician-assisted suicide first became legal in the U.S. in 1997 under Oregon’s “Death with Dignity” law. Today six states allow physician-assisted suicide.

Facts & Trends, 12/6

■ Opioid deaths continued to surge in 2015, surpassing 30,000 for the first time in recent history, according to CDC data released Thursday. That marks an increase of nearly 5,000 deaths from 2014. Heroin deaths spiked too, rising by more than 2,000 cases and surpassed gun homicides for the first time. Deaths involving powerful synthetic opiates, like fentanyl, rose by nearly 75 percent from 2014 to 2015. These increases come amid a year-over-year increase in mortality across the board, resulting in the first decline in American life expectancy since 1993. Congress recently passed a spending bill containing \$1 billion to combat the opioid epidemic, including money for addiction treatment and prevention.

Wash. Post, 12/8

■ *Highlights*, the nationally recognized magazine for kids, has decided to include same-sex families in their

magazines. Highlights’ Christine Cully said, “When we do show families in the magazines, we make it a point to include diversity. We strive to be diverse in every way...In the future, we will depict same-sex families in our magazines in a manner consistent to the way all diverse families are depicted.” Highlights had stated previously that they believe parents should decide when to bring up the topic of homosexuality. But after backlash from the LGBT community, Highlights committed to including same-sex families in future publications. AFA, 12/8

■ Pro-LGBT group Tennessee Thrives intends to stop any perceived discrimination of the LGBT community in proposed state legis-

lation that they believe could adversely affect the economy. The coalition of more than 180 Tennessee businesses calls itself a “watchdog of the General Assembly” and includes businesses like FedEx, Nashville Predators, Vanderbilt, Jack Daniels and Country Music Television, among others. A new Tennessee law allows mental health counselors to refuse patients treatment based on the therapist’s religious or personal beliefs. Calling it a “hate bill,” the American Counseling Association cancelled a Nashville convention.

FACT, 12/16; AP, 12/14

■ More than 75 prominent religious and thought leaders, including Russell Moore and Al Mohler, have signed the Colson Center’s

Hark, the Herald Angels sing,
Glory to the new-born King,
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.”

— CHARLES WESLEY

Charles Wesley was born Dec. 18, 1707, the 18th child of Rev. Samuel and Susanna Wesley. Susanna home-schooled all her 19 children, giving them a classical education which included learning Latin and Greek. Charles became the secretary to James Oglethorpe, who founded the Colony of Georgia in America for poor debtors and persecuted Christians. His brother, John Wesley, served as the Colony’s Anglican minister. Upon their return to England, the Wesleys met a Moravian missionary resulting in their “Aldersgate experience” in 1738 in which they experienced the infilling of the spirit and free grace. John Wesley founded the Methodist movement and Charles Wesley wrote over 6,000 hymns. The Wesleys influenced George Whitefield, whose preaching spread the Great Awakening Revival throughout the American colonies. The same year Charles Wesley was born, 1707, Isaac Watts wrote the carol “Joy to the World.”

At the low point in his career while recovering from a stroke, in 1741, George Handel composed “Messiah” in only 21 days, as part of a series of concerts in Dublin to benefit charities. The premiere was met with overwhelming success. When it was performed in London, King George II stood to his feet during the singing of the “Hallelujah” Chorus.

"Preserve Freedom, Reject Coercion" statement that affirms every American's freedom to peacefully live their lives according to their beliefs and opposes government coercion or censorship of fellow citizens who have different views. See colson-center.org/freedom

FACT, 12/16

■ With his job still on the line, the newly appointed UN independent expert for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights laid out a provocative agenda for his 3-year term a couple weeks ago. His speech at an international LGBT conference in Thailand effectively dared the UN General Assembly either to suspend him or watch him promote an eclectic and far-reaching gamut of policies to further the homosexual agenda internationally. His declarations come as the General Assembly considers placing his mandate on hold until it has an opportunity to review the very close decision of the Human Rights Council in Geneva to establish his post. C-Fam, 12/12

■ The Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) is filing a lawsuit against the federal government, alleging that a law is unconstitutional that allows pastors to receive tax exempt housing allow-

ances. FFRF leaders allege this part of the tax code is unfair to leaders of non-religious nonprofits.

Christian Headlines, 12/15

■ On Tuesday, the House of Representatives voted unanimously to pass an amendment to a landmark international religious freedom law. According to Rep. Smith this amendment will expand the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to better address escalating religious persecution globally and help the Administration and the State Department to more effectively respond to violent extremism worldwide. The bill will improve U.S. religious freedom diplomacy efforts globally; better train and equip diplomats to counter extremism; address anti-Semitism and religious persecution and mitigate sectarian conflict. The legislation, which was approved by the Senate last Saturday, is being sent to President Obama to be signed into law.

The Weekly, 12/16

■ Compassion International told the House Foreign Affairs Committee that they would have to cease humanitarian operations from India this month. The Indian Ministry of Home Affairs is cracking down on non-government organizations

(NGOs) whose values run contrary to the current government's religious beliefs. Compassion started operating in 1952 after Reverend Everett Swanson saw the plight of children in war-torn North Korea. What started with 35 children on the Korean Peninsula has expanded to 1.9 million children worldwide, including 145,000 in India.

Christian Headlines, 12/14

■ Last Sunday morning, at least 24 worshippers were killed and 49 wounded when an explosion ripped through the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, the scene of Egypt's worst bombing attack against Christians in the nation's history. The bomb exploded inside the chapel on the side traditionally used by young women in their 20s and their children. The government identified a 22-year-old Islamist militant to have carried out the suicide attack. Many Copts at the scene of the bombing voiced their anger with derelict government security officers tasked with guarding the church.

Morning Star News, 12/13

■ Two Chinese Christian pastors who are preparing to evangelize in North Korea say they are ready for whatever trials come, even death. Above all, the pastors are intent on preaching the good news and telling the North Koreans that God loves them. "Because we love them, and God loves them, and God has mercy upon them, so we are willing to dedicate ourselves to them."

Christian Headlines, 12/13

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE IN 'IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE'

Merry Christmas Building and Loan!

by Eric Metaxas

It's one of the most beloved movies of all time. But I wonder how many people miss the gospel message in "It's a Wonderful Life."

I love the film, "It's a Wonderful Life." My family watches it every Christmas. I sometimes think about how much fun it would be to visit Bedford Falls, and meet all those delightful characters—even Old Man Potter.

My friend and long-time BreakPoint colleague, Anne Morse, recently did just that: well, almost. She visited Seneca Falls, New York, which, legend has it, is the town on which Frank Capra based his fictional Bedford Falls. It really does look amazingly like Bedford Falls, and every December the town holds an "It's a Wonderful Life" festival. Festival-goers can't resist running down the street yelling "Merry Christmas, Emporium! Merry Christmas, you wonderful old Building and Loan!"—just like Jimmy Stewart did. They can also chat with "Uncle Billy," "Old Man Potter," and other characters.

My friend Anne Morse is so fond of the film that she wrote a sequel to it, titled "Bedford Falls: The Story Continues," in which she imagines what happened to the Bailey family after the Christmas of 1945. Anne also wrote a wonderful piece about her experiences in the "real" Bedford Falls for The Christian Post—and about the gospel message the film contains that many viewers miss.

As Anne puts it, "It's a Wonderful Life" "is a magnificent cinematic depiction of the words of Jesus: 'For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his own soul?' " (Matthew 16:26)

In the New Testament, the devil tempts Jesus with all the kingdoms of the world, if he will only bow down and worship him. In the movie, Anne writes, "We see a similar scenario: The tempter, in the form of Henry Potter, offers George Bailey everything he has ever wanted: travel to Europe, lots of

money . . . and a far more interesting job than he has at the Building and Loan."

George is tempted. But he ultimately realizes what Potter is really asking him to do: sacrifice the Building and Loan, which means sacrificing his neighbors to Potter's greed. And so he turns him down, calling Potter "nothing but a scurvy little spider."

But just as Satan continues to tempt Christ, Potter continues to tempt George Bailey.

For instance, after his father's death, George must choose between going to college or staying in Bedford Falls to run the Building and Loan. George reluctantly stays because, as he puts it, Bedford Falls needs at least one place where people don't have to go crawling to Potter.

Later, George must choose between his honeymoon and protecting the town from another effort by Potter to shut down the Building and Loan.

When George's brother Harry and his bride come home with big plans for the future, George sacrifices his own dreams so that Harry can have his. And when Uncle Billy loses \$8,000—thanks in part to Old Man Potter—George takes the blame in order to keep Uncle Billy out of trouble.

"George Bailey's soul was not for sale," Anne notes. "Without realizing it, George, through his many sacrifices for others, spent his life imitating Christ. And Potter, by forfeiting his soul for earthly wealth, becomes, as George puts it, a "warped, frustrated old man."

"It's a Wonderful Life" invites us to ask ourselves, every day, what the consequences of our decisions might be. "At a deeper, more subtle level," Anne says, "the film reminds us that living a good life means consistently imitating the Lord we claim to serve."

One of the greatest lessons we can learn: to live for Christ is to die to self.

ENTERTAINMENT NOTES

★★ NEW MOVIES

Quality Moral Age

Rogue One: A Star Wars Story PG-13 +4 -2 T/A

Collateral Beauty PG-13 +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; pluggedin.com