

U.S. House Passes 'Hate Crimes' Bill

The bill broadens the definition of hate crimes to include violence provoked by bias against sexual orientation, gender identity or disability.



In a 237-180 vote, the U.S. House of Representatives on Thursday passed a bill that broadens the definition of hate crimes to include violence provoked by bias against sexual orientation, gender identity or disability. The bill, called the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2007 [H.R. 1592], will allow federal law enforcement officials to help prosecute sex- and gender-biased crimes at the local level. Similar legislation is now working its way through the U.S. Senate. Conservative critics strongly oppose the legislation, saying such laws threaten the free speech of religious leaders who publicly denounce homosexuality. In a report to Congress, Glen Lavy, senior counsel at the Alliance Defense Fund, stated, "H.R. 1592 would criminalize thoughts, feelings and beliefs." Conservatives use as an example the pastor in Sweden who, under the country's "hate crimes" law, received a one-month jail sentence in 2005 for denouncing homosexuality from his pulpit. President Bush has indicated he would veto the bill. Meanwhile, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), which traditionally champions free speech rights, has come out in strong support of H.R. 1592, claiming a problem in a portion of the bill that it thought would "chill constitutionally protected speech" had been sufficiently revised.

Hispanic Populations Growing the Charismatic Church

Hispanics are changing American religion with their unique combination of Catholicism and Pentecostal beliefs.



A recent study by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life found that Hispanics are changing American religion with their unique combination of Catholicism and Pentecostal beliefs. A third of all Catholics in the U.S. are Hispanic and more than half identify themselves as charismatic. Only one-eighth of non-Hispanics identify themselves as charismatic. Many Catholic Hispanics still believe in traditional Catholic teachings, but some also say they have experienced divine healings and direct revelation from God. "This is introducing a new way to worship, a new way of being the church," Luis Lugo, director of the Pew Forum, told ABC News. "You could call it bringing the fiesta spirit into the Catholic Church." The survey found that some Hispanics are leaving Catholic churches completely and joining evangelical churches. The report from the survey said that the No. 1 reason for these conversions was to experience a direct and personal relationship with God that could not be obtained in traditional Mass services. Researchers suspect that as the Hispanic population, which is the fastest-growing minority, continues to grow in this country the charismatic and Pentecostal movements will grow as well.

Christians Debate Atheist on ABC

Ray Comfort and Kirk Cameron will debate two atheists May 9 at 1 p.m. EST on ABC's Web site and it will be taped for

Nightline.



Ray Comfort and Kirk Cameron, co-hosts of the Christian television show *Way of the Master*, will debate two atheists May 9 at 1 p.m. EST on ABC's Web site and it will be taped for *Nightline*. The co-hosts said they plan to prove God's existence scientifically without mentioning the Bible or faith. "I am amazed at how many people think that God's existence is a matter of faith," Comfort said. "It's not, and I will prove it at the debate once and for all." Comfort and Cameron approached ABC for this debate after the news organization aired a piece in January about "The Blasphemy Challenge," which resulted in hundreds of people posting videos of themselves renouncing the existence of the Holy Spirit on the video site YouTube. Held in New York City and hosted by Martin Bashir, Comfort and Cameron will debate the two originators of the Blasphemy Challenge. Cameron, a child star from the sitcom *Growing Pains* and once a self-proclaimed atheist, said he plans to debunk the idea of evolution, which is the main argument atheists use to deny the existence of God. "Evolution is unscientific," Cameron said. "In reality, it is blind faith that's preached with religious zeal as the gospel truth. I'm embarrassed to admit that I was once a naive believer in the theory."

President Gives Prayer Requests for the National Day of Prayer

On May 3 many gathered through out the nation to pray for America.



President George W. Bush has declared May 3 the National Day

of Prayer, calling on America to pray especially for the families affected by the shootings at Virginia Tech and also for military personnel overseas and their families back home. "A prayerful spirit has always been an important part of our national character, and it is a force that has guided the American people, given us strength and sustained us in moments of joy and in times of challenge," the president said. "On this National Day of Prayer, we acknowledge God's grace and ask for His continued guidance in the life of our nation." The president also encouraged Americans to participate in local prayer events. The National Prayer Day's Web site .org indicates participation in numerous prayer events across the nation, from 12-hour prayer vigils in Texas to prayer breakfasts in Maine. The site encourages people to join an online prayer rally dedicated to repentance and cleansing. "If we are to seek the Lord's forgiveness and blessing upon our nation, we must begin with personal repentance," the site stated. The first national day of prayer began in 1775 when the first Continental Congress asked the colonies to pray for wisdom as America was formed. The National Day of Prayer was not official however until 1952 when the U.S. Congress approved an annual prayer day to occur the first Thursday of May. It is customary for the president and state governors to sign a proclamation to show their support for the Day of Prayer. This year every state has signed a prayer proclamation.

—**Felicia Mann**

Feedback

Vibes

Assemblies of God in Australia Relaxes Divorce Policy

The AG in Australia recently met to relax its divorce policy and to overturn its strict alcohol consumption guidelines.



At its 36th Bi-Annual National Conference held April 23-24, the Assemblies of God (AG) in Australia amended its Divorce, Marriage and Remarriage Policy to allow divorce on the grounds of proven domestic violence. An estimated 850 pastors and leaders representing some of the 1,130 AG churches across Australia voted on the new policy. Previously the AG in Australia allowed for divorce only on the grounds of adultery.

“This is an important and serious issue which affects many Australians,” said pastor Alun Davies, national vice president of the AG. “As a movement we need to bring biblical perspectives on contemporary issues, and ensure we are continually providing help and support in difficult situations. We value and are committed to upholding the marriage covenant, and we consider divorce a last resort.”

At the conference, the AG in Australia also introduced a Minister's Code of Conduct, which provides guidelines to churches and leaders on a range of moral and ethical issues. The new code allows AG pastors to consume alcohol. However it also urges extreme caution when drinking, and states that drunkenness and the use of illegal drugs is prohibited.

The amended Divorce, Marriage and Remarriage Policy and the new Minister's Code of Conduct were the culmination of a comprehensive two-year consultation process, which received input from AG pastors around Australia. The conference marked the 70th year of the AG in Australia, the largest Pentecostal group in the nation.

Christian Bible Publishers Murdered in Turkey

Five Muslim men entered a Bible publishing office in Turkey and killed three Christian men, two of whom were former Muslims.



On April 18, five Muslim men entered a Bible publishing office in Turkey and killed three Christian men, two of whom were former Muslims. The 19- to 20-year-old attackers said they were motivated by “nationalist and religious feelings.” The men entered the Zirve publishing house, located in the southeastern province of Malatya, and tied Necati Aydin, 36; Ugur Yuksel, 32; and German citizen Tilmann Geske, 46, before stabbing them repeatedly and slitting their throats, Compass Direct news service reported. “They are attacking our religion,” read a note found in the pockets of all five men. “We did this for our country. We didn’t do this for ourselves. We did it for our religion. May this be a lesson to the enemies of religion.” In the last three years reports have surfaced that Turkish government officials have contributed to the hostility toward Christians in the region because they have openly criticized Christian missionaries’ activities. Many Christians, who number just 100,000 in a nation of 74 million, claim many in Turkey distrust Christianity. The

publishing house's general manager said the staff had been receiving death threats in recent months, Compass reported. Four of the Muslim men were charged with founding a terrorist organization and murder, and one man was charged with aiding a terrorist group, Reuters news service reported.

Women Claim China Government Forced Them to Abort

At least 40 women say they were forcibly taken to a hospital and given injections that induced labor.



A Christian human-rights advocacy group claims women in China's Guangxi Province are being forced to abort their pregnancies in a crackdown of the nation's family planning laws that allow couples to have only one child. China Aid Association reported that at least 40 women say they were forcibly taken to a hospital and given injections that induced labor. Wei Linrong, whose husband leads a house church in the province, said she was seven months pregnant with the couple's second child when officials told her she must abort. She told China Aid that when she and her husband refused, officials forcibly took her to Youjiang District People's Hospital of Baise City and performed an abortion. "The nurses dealt with the body like it was rubbish," Wei told National Public Radio (NPR). "They wrapped it up in a black plastic bag and threw it in the trash." He Caigan was nine months pregnant with her first child when she was given an abortion-inducing injection the following day, NPR reported. The 19-year-old said she was forced to abort because she was unmarried and not old enough to get married. Chinese officials said they were not aware of the forced abortions. But a family planning official in Baise who is surnamed Nong said this type of treatment would be illegal. And although many of the forced abortions occurred recently, he said an investigation had already taken

place and no problems had been found. "We were very surprised to hear of these accusations, but our investigation concluded some individuals who were dissatisfied with our family planning policies were fabricating stories," Nong told NPR. "These facts simply don't exist. We really love and care for women here." China Aid reported that a woman in Shandong province who unintentionally became pregnant with her second child six months ago is also being pressured to abort.

Christian Choir to Raise Money on American Idol

The African Children's Choir will be featured on American Idol's two-day special "Idol Gives Back."



The African Children's Choir will be featured on *American Idol's* two-day special "Idol Gives Back" scheduled to air April 24 and 25 at 8 p.m. The children's choir comprised of orphan African children is sponsored by a Christian relief and developmental humanitarian organization. Founded in 1984 , the choir travels around the world to raise money to help impoverished nations in Africa. "While we were in Uganda we gave a ride to another town to a very small boy and he sang all the way in the vehicle," said founder Ray Barnett. "When I got back to Canada and people were not very interested in Uganda, I remembered this small boy. I thought, 'If we could take a group of these beautiful children to the West, it would surely raise money to help their country'." Since its inception the choir has raised money from their ticketed concerts to educate children in Africa including themselves. Choir members travel with the choir for one year and then they are sent home where they are given education and scholarships for education beyond high school. Some of the members have gone on to receive education as doctors, lawyers and engineers. The choir also gives funds for emergency

relief efforts to help feed, clothe and shelter Africa's neediest families. The *American Idol* "Idol Gives Back" show featuring a myriad of well-known musicians will raise money for both African and American charities.