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THERE IS

MORE

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IF THERE IS NOT, THEN EVEN

THE NOW IS MEANINGLESS.



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WAS IT DIFFICULT TO FIND AN ABDUCTEE'S FAMILY WILLING TO TALK WITH YOU ABOUT ABDUCTIONS IN NIGERIA?

"I contacted Jennifer through a mutual friend. It was a feat to find someone willing to share their experience with kidnappers. But speaking to someone whose family dealt with the pain first-hand drove home the human impact of the insecurity."

—WORLD reporter Onize Ohikere, whose story is on p. 52

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CAMPUS MUTINY

RACHEL LOWERS/WYOMING, MICH.

It looks like the LGBTQ crowd is not reading the Bible. Scripture presents God's holiness, His purity, His sacrifice, His sovereignty, and His dividing of the sheep and the goats. Students at Christian schools have no excuse. I'm praying for them.

ENLIGHTENED ENTERTAINMENT

MAY 22, P. 23—JERRY ZIMPELMANN/ EAGLE RIVER, WIS.

Like Megan Basham, I am very excited about *The Chosen*'s second season and its potential to share the story of Jesus with so many. But she failed to mention the Mormon Church's involvement with the project. We all know that "he that holds the purse strings controls the message."

JONATHAN SHIPP/KNOXVILLE, TENN.

Basham addresses "those able to watch [on-screen depictions of Jesus] with a clear conscience," but I can find nowhere in Scripture where obedience to the moral law rests on the discretion of the human heart or conscience. *The Chosen* breaks the Second Commandment by attempting to portray holiness and perfection in human terms.

ISMAEL C. ALVAREZ/LANCASTER, PA.

I loved Basham's review of *The Chosen*. Her line "Where wouldn't you go to follow the man who not only frees you from sin and guilt but so obviously enjoys your company?" made me weep for joy!

POST-VACCINATION QUESTIONS

MAY 22, P. 68—KAREN DAVIS/EXTON, PA.

Dr. Charles Horton's answers were very helpful. But with so many serious unanswered questions still circulating and people's trust levels in the COVID-19 vaccine faltering, a lot of us are anxious to hear more of his thoughts.



CAMPUS MUTINY

Administrators at Seattle Pacific University and Calvin University should be ashamed for even considering complaints from students, faculty, or employees about Biblically based definitions of men and women and the Old and New Testament stance against the sins of homosexuality. Placating advocates of sin is bad business for any Christian organization.

MAY 22, P. 58—JIM PANYARD/ PALMYRA, PA.

LETTERS AND COMMENTS

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PLEASE INCLUDE FULL NAME AND ADDRESS. LETTERS MAY BE EDITED TO YIELD BREVITY AND CLARITY.

ADAM NIEDERLOH/MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.

I have always appreciated WORLD's approach to handling complicated topics. With so many different opinions and information bombarding us by the minute, with lies masquerading as truth and truths that are labeled as lies, it's incredibly difficult knowing which information sources we can trust and have confidence in.

THINKIN' ABOUT LINCOLN

MAY 22, P. 72—WILLIAM MILLER/ WINSTON-SALEM, N.C.

While Abraham Lincoln and others before him set out to change public opinion on slavery, it took about two generations to accomplish. Yet he took a decisive stand and fought against evil—and evil hit back. People shouldn't think they can confront evil without expecting there to be a fight that gets messy and has casualties.

CULTURAL ICONS

MAY 22, P. 10—MARY MICHOL OEN/ SAINT MARYS, OHIO

I worked at a daily newspaper for almost 29 years, and Joel Belz's column brought back memories of operating a Linotype. It was a beast and had its quirks, but it certainly revolutionized the graphic arts industry.

PUBLISHING POSTURES

MAY 22, P. 20—CARMEN JULIUS/ EDINBURG, PA.

Publications and communications are the latest and most important victims in the year of U.S. mob rule writ large. What is now "fit to print" does not make room for any other points other than the most popular or "the most desired" by those in charge.

READ MORE LETTERS AT WNG.ORG/MAILBAG

Notes from the CEO KEVIN MARTIN



God's world is the real world

Your generosity to us is often the jolt we need to remind us of God's faithfulness

EVERY YEAR ABOUT THIS TIME—out with the old fiscal year, in with the new—the overriding, collective feeling around WORLD's office is a sense of gratitude.

We try always to be thankful, of course, as the Bible says: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

But throughout the year our focus often turns more to the task at hand than to the hand that provides.

Then, with a jolt, God redirects our attention toward Him, the source of all good. Often, He uses the tremendous generosity of our readers, listeners, and viewers to bring us back to reality.

Reality. That's important for a news organization. Here's where we tend to lose track of it: when we begin to think of our work as anything other than service to God through service to His people; when we begin to believe that our success or failure (especially success) is primarily dependent on our own effort; and when we begin to report news stories as if there's no bigger story behind them.

We're tempted on all of those fronts, and others. We need God's jolt to remind us that we need Him.

This year, just like many other years before, you have provided that jolt. Throughout the year, we are encouraged by your deep engagement with our mission. Your questions about, and even criticism of, our work are blessings. The way you introduce WORLD to your neighbors, co-workers, and family members is extraordinary. Many of you have given gift subscriptions to WORLD, God's World News, or *WORLD Watch*.

TOO OFTEN, OUR FOCUS TURNS MORE TO THE TASK AT HAND THAN TO THE HAND THAT PROVIDES.

And the big reason it's impossible to miss the reality of God's provision at this time of year: Your charitable contributions to support the mission of WORLD just keep coming! When we're surprised by how much you give, you give even more. This fiscal year, more than 13,000 of you gave what you could, at God's direction, to WORLD's work. That's *in addition* to the cost of your own subscriptions and the thousands of gift subscriptions you give.

Those are the extraordinary facts that have jolted us back to the reality of God's provision for us at the end of this fiscal year. And so we are grateful, to God and to you, for reminding us of reality. ■



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Menders or splitters?

Knowing when to mend differences or make doctrinal stands is no easy task

HAVE YOU EVER HELPED split a church? I don't mean on purpose. I mean joining with others in making your point so vigorously that your church falls apart.

And I'm not referring primarily here to sometime in the past when you disagreed with others over baptism, or the millennium, or who wrote the book of Hebrews.

I'm thinking more of the vigorous discussions we've had in recent months about masks, vaccines, and the presidency of Donald Trump. I don't remember any time in my adult years when I've seen more local churches so threatened, fractured, and worried about their very future existence.

To be sure, church-splitting isn't always a bad thing. The late Jerry Falwell once told me, "Since coming to Lynchburg, I've been blessed to help in the launch of maybe 27 new churches." Then, after a brief pause, he added, "Not all of them intentional."

These debates—or should we call them squabbles?—are by no means limited to smaller or midsize churches. Even some once-vigorous megachurches are reported at mid-2021 to be stumbling and staggering as they try to recover from the ravages of COVID-19.

Or take it a big step further and note how even entire denominations can find themselves in a mode of debate where many of the participants fear their once-unified body ripping apart. Headlines just a few weeks ago—even in *The Wall Street Journal*—raised the specter of major rifts in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) with painful splintering as a result.

THERE MAY BE VERY GOOD REASONS WHY SPLITS SEEM MORE PREVALENT IN CONSERVATIVE CHURCHES.

It appears now, with the avoidance of any telling split at their June Nashville meeting, that the immediate threat of major division in the SBC has passed.

But in the much smaller Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), many worried the denomination might be headed for fracture or division. Many saw an early July PCA assembly in St. Louis as offering some telling indicators of longer-term directions for the PCA. Meanwhile, the United Methodist Church is in the process of dividing between liberal and conservative factions that some observers say is too orderly to call a "split."

To be sure, there may be very good reasons why splits and divisions seem more prevalent in conservative churches—whether we're talking about smaller congregations or larger megachurches. Conservative churches, almost by definition, tend to be doctrinally fussier than their liberal or progressive counterparts. Liberals, almost by definition, tend to be a good bit more tolerant.

So as I near my 80th birthday later this summer, I find myself reflecting on where I've put my emphasis over a lifetime. Have I been more a church mender or a church splitter? It's been common, every time I've taken vows of membership or leadership, to commit myself "to study the peace and the purity of Christ's church." When I've pursued purity, I've in effect put an emphasis on sound doctrine and teaching. When I've pursued peace, I've put an emphasis on what I have in common with other believers.

For the record, I think that in my lifetime I may have leaned a bit more toward the pure doctrine side and a bit less than I wish toward seeking peace with my fellow believers. But I'm thankful I serve an understanding and forgiving God and that others can make up for my lack and shortcomings.

Every Christian believer has to make those same choices, to a greater or lesser degree. You do that when you decide where to put your membership, where to continue your support, what kind of pastor you will call, what kind of missionaries and educators you will support, and dozens of other decisions along the way.

I hope WORLD readers will be known more and more as folks who are intentional as they do so. ■

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Seeking accommodation

A summer of surprising Supreme Court unanimity includes a narrow ruling that could bode well for Christian foster agencies

by Jamie Dean

WHEN THE U.S. SUPREME COURT began issuing a flurry of decisions ahead of its summer recess, a common thread surprised some court watchers: The nine justices often agreed unanimously.

An ABC News analysis in late June reported some 67 percent of the high court's rulings were unanimous or near-unanimous, undercutting warnings of a bitterly divided court in need of rebalancing or expanding.

In at least one case, a unanimous decision came in particularly contentious territory: On June 17, the justices ruled 9-0 in favor of Catholic Social Services' →

Women celebrate the June 17 Supreme Court ruling in favor of Catholic Social Services.

JONATHAN ERNST/REUTERS/NEWSCOM

right to participate in Philadelphia's foster care program while adhering to religious beliefs that constrain the group from placing children with same-sex couples.

The case—known as *Fulton v. Philadelphia*—grew out of a 2018 conflict between Christian foster care agencies and the city of Philadelphia. When Bethany Christian Services referred a gay couple to another agency, the city suspended its foster care contract with the evangelical organization. City officials also suspended an agreement with Catholic Social Services.

The city issued an ultimatum: If the groups wanted to continue facilitating foster care, they'd have to allow same-sex couples to apply. Bethany complied. The Catholic agency refused. A year later, officials in Michigan made a similar demand. Again, Bethany complied. A Catholic agency refused, and Catholics filed lawsuits in Michigan and Philadelphia.

Bethany didn't join the legal action. In 2019, a Bethany official told WORLD the agency still affirmed marriage as a union between a man and a woman but had considered the probabilities of winning in court and balanced that with a desire to continue placing children in foster care.

What may have seemed improbable turned into a unanimous Supreme Court win for Catholic Social Services, but Bethany's policy changed this spring. In March, the organization announced it would allow same-sex couples to foster and adopt in all its locations, whether local laws require it or not. Bethany officials said the organization no longer takes a position on Scripture's teaching that marriage is an institution between a man and a woman.

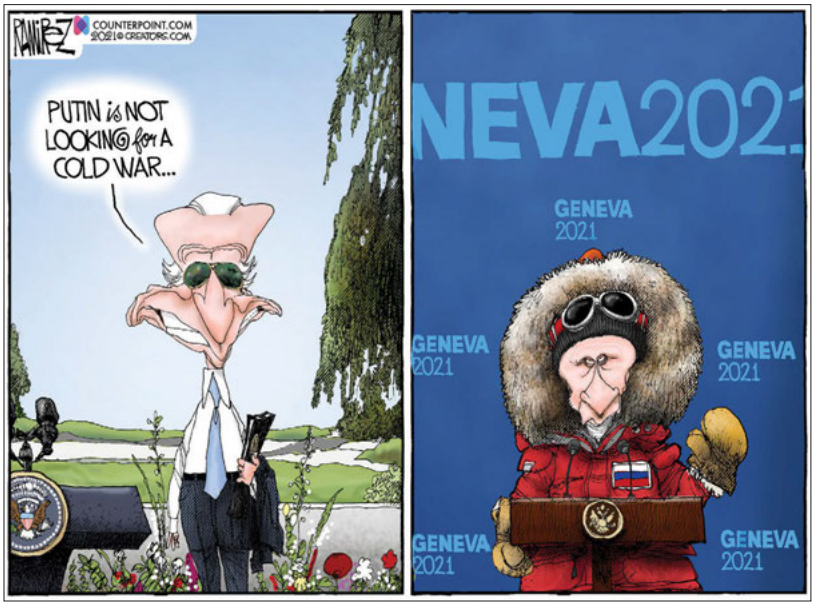
Since then, Bethany voluntarily resigned from the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA). ECFA President Michael Martin said the withdrawal came after his group began discussions with Bethany about how the agency's new policy would affect its standing in the organization. (The ECFA affirms marriage as a union between a man and a woman.) A Bethany official confirmed the withdrawal. When I asked Bethany for its reaction to the Supreme Court ruling in light of its 2019 concerns about winning such cases, a Bethany spokesperson said the decision "reaffirms the importance of diverse coalitions" working together.

WHAT MAY HAVE SEEMED IMPROBABLE TURNED INTO A UNANIMOUS SUPREME COURT WIN FOR CATHOLIC SOCIAL SERVICES.

Meanwhile, religious liberty advocates praised the Supreme Court's ruling for Catholic Social Services. But the victory comes with a caveat: While the justices ruled that the city violated the First Amendment rights of the Catholic agency, they focused narrowly on the details of the *Fulton* case, rather than issuing a ruling that could offer broader protections in the future.

Justice Samuel Alito expressed frustration. "This decision might as well be written on dissolving paper sold in magic shops," he wrote in a concurring opinion. Justices Neil Gorsuch and Clarence Thomas shared Alito's concerns that the city of Philadelphia could get around the court's decision simply by rewriting its contracts.

That means more legal battles likely lie ahead. But religious liberty advocates remained hopeful about language in the decision that could bolster their arguments in the future. Chief Justice John Roberts wrote that Catholic Social Services "seeks only an accommodation that will allow it to continue serving the children of Philadelphia in a manner consistent with its religious beliefs; it does not seek to impose those beliefs on anyone else." ■



DRY DAYS

40M

The U.S. Department of the Interior's estimate of how many people rely upon the Colorado River for water.

4M

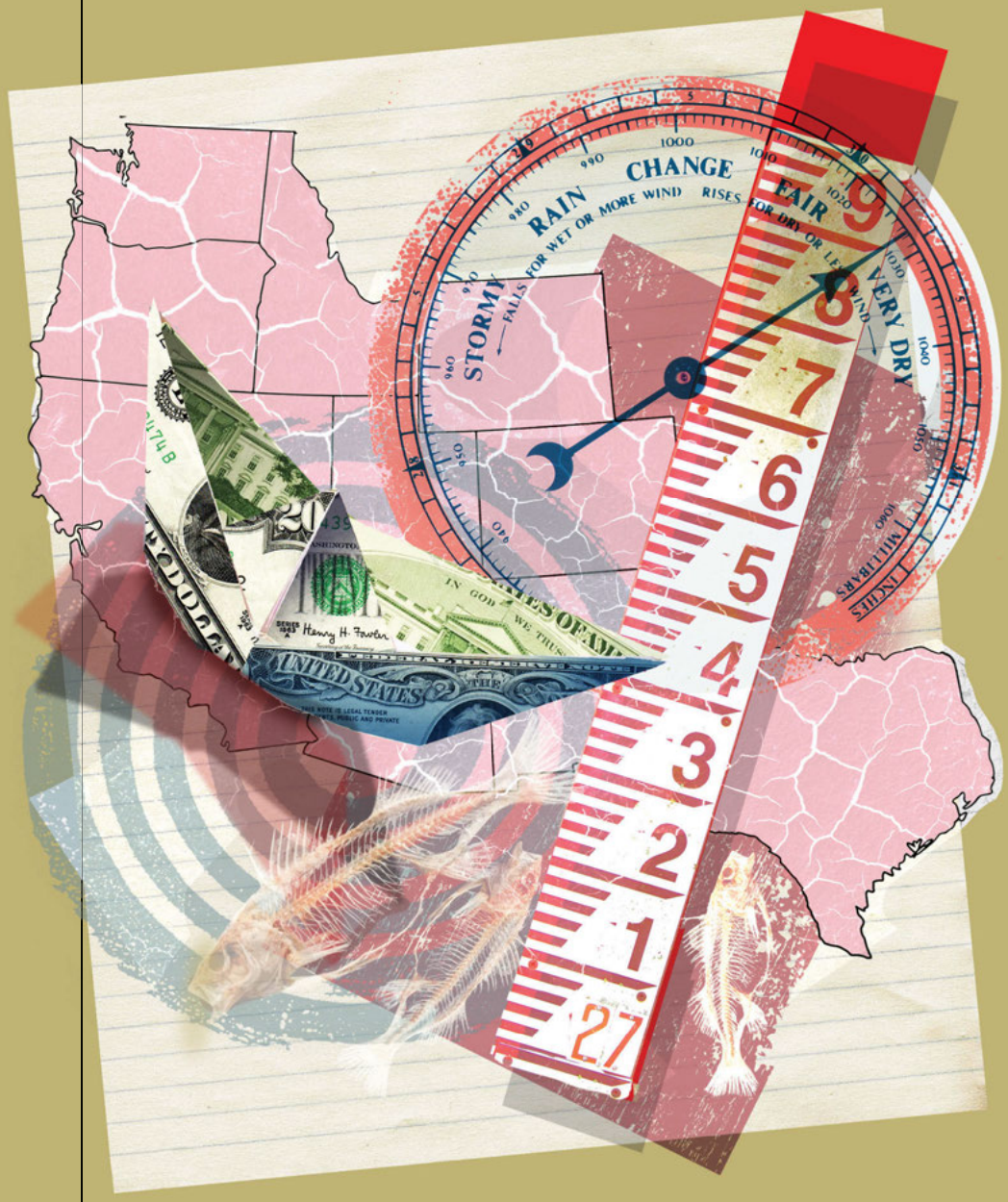
The number of farmland acres the waters of the Colorado River irrigate, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

97.36%

The share of the American West under drought conditions as of June 8, up from 64 percent last year, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor at the University of Nebraska.

0.85

Inches of rainfall in Las Vegas this year as of June 15, according to the National Weather Service. The city averages 2.7 inches of rainfall by this time each year.



36%

THE SHARE OF LAKE MEAD'S WATER CAPACITY actually filled with water. In 2000, the waters of Lake Mead—which spans parts of Nevada and Arizona—reached near the top of the Hoover Dam. Two decades later, the water level at the crucial reservoir has fallen 140 feet and reached its lowest point since the lake's creation in the 1930s. Worsening drought conditions in the American West and Southwest are imperiling residents and agriculture.

ILLUSTRATION BY SARAH JONES



A rescue team looks for survivors in the rubble of the Champlain Towers South condo.

DIED

Florida condo collapses

Authorities pledged investigations as hope for more survivors dwindled

AS JUNE ENDED, rescue and recovery teams continued searching the rubble of a collapsed condominium building in Surfside, Fla., though by then little hope remained for finding more survivors. A wing of the 12-story Champlain Towers South collapsed on June 24. Six days later, authorities had confirmed 16 people died in the collapse, but nearly 150 were still missing. A 2018 inspection found problems with the pool deck that threatened the concrete structure. Earlier this year, the president of the condominium association told neighbors in a letter that the damage would get much worse if they didn't do something soon. The letter from Jean Wodnicki hinted at residents' reluctance to pay for the project, which would cost $80,000-$330,000 per unit. Elected officials pledged to investigate the cause of the collapse.

ACCUSED

Newly elected Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) President Ed Litton apologized after accusations surfaced that he plagiarized from former SBC President J.D. Greear in sermons for Litton's church in Alabama. The church also removed videos of some sermons from its YouTube page. Litton said Greear gave him permission to use points for a series on Romans but that he should have been more explicit in crediting Greear, who confirmed he gave Litton permission to use his sermon content. "I am sorry for not mentioning J.D.'s generosity and ownership of these points," Litton said in a statement on his church's website. A Q&A with Litton—compiled before the accusations—appears on p. 30.

SENTENCED

Former Minneapolis police Officer Derek Chauvin received a 22½-year prison sentence on June 25. That was short of the prosecution's request for 30 years, and he could get parole for good behavior after serving two-thirds of the sentence. A jury in April convicted Chauvin of second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder, and second-degree manslaughter for kneeling on George Floyd's neck for more than 9 minutes before the 46-year-old African American died. Judge Peter Cahill exceeded the state's sentencing guidelines and denied Chauvin's request for a new trial. Chauvin still faces a federal civil rights trial.

ARRESTED

More than 200 police officers searched the offices of the pro-democracy newspaper *Apple Daily* on June 17 for evidence it violated Hong Kong's draconian national security law. Earlier in the day, security forces detained Ryan Law, the newspaper's editor in chief, as well as four of the company's directors on suspicion of colluding with a "foreign country or with external elements to endanger national security." Authorities also froze $2.3 million worth of assets belonging to companies linked to *Apple Daily*, which days later had to shut down operations. The newspaper became a target for its staunch pro-democracy outlook and open criticism of Beijing.

GIORGIO VIERA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

"It was like a mini 9/11."

NICHOLAS BALBOA, a Phoenix resident who was walking a dog outside in Surfside, Fla., while visiting relatives when 12 floors of the Champlain Towers South condo building collapsed suddenly on June 24. One of the first bystanders on the scene, Balboa told *The Washington Post* he helped rescuers find a boy calling out from the rubble.

"I cried, her mother too."

ANASTASIOS KERLIDOU, describing to Reuters his reaction after hearing his daughter Alexandra, who has cerebral palsy, play music on the "EyeHarp." The software program uses an eye-tracking camera to allow the 21-year-old to play notes using only her eyes.

"For athletes the whole thing feels like a bad joke."

Belgian weightlifter ANNA VANBELLINGHEN, 27, criticizing the policy of allowing biological males who identify as women to compete in sports against females, according to the Inside the Games website. On June 21, New Zealand weightlifter Laurel Hubbard, 43, became the first transgender athlete to qualify for the Olympic Games.

"I'm clearly playing in a game that, for me, has moved past the fourth quarter and into overtime."

Billionaire businessman WARREN BUFFETT, announcing on June 23 his retirement from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's board of trustees. Buffett, the CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, is 90.

"I realized I'm in a whale's mouth, and he's trying to swallow me."

Cape Cod lobster diver MICHAEL PACKARD, telling Boston TV station WBZ about a humpback whale that Packard says nearly ate him during a dive on June 11. "I thought to myself, 'Hey, this is it. I'm going to die,'" said Packard, 56. He said the whale spit him out after about half a minute.



1

NOT-SO-HAPPY CAMPERS

LOCAL OFFICIALS HAVE A NEW WAY to deter beach camping in one Southern England vacation destination. Officials with the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council put into action hourly wakeup calls for all campers overnighting on the beach. "Anyone thinking of camping on the beach can expect an uncomfortable night's sleep," a council official told the BBC. As part of the new program, council staff combed the English Channel beaches for tents each hour, waking up inhabitants and suggesting they move along. Illegal camping carries a fine approaching $1,400.

2 HERDING HABIT A lost dog that survived a traumatic crash fell into old instincts as owners searched for her. Tilly, a 2-year-old border collie and red heeler mix, was thrown clear of owner Linda Oswald's GMC Yukon when it collided with a Buick on an Idaho state highway on June 6. Though Oswald avoided injury, she couldn't find Tilly after the collision. Oswald and other volunteers spent 10 hours searching the area of the accident for the lost dog. Eventually, her family took to Facebook, hoping a widely shared message could help them find Tilly. It worked. Sheep farmer Travis Potter, whose farm south of Rathdrum, Idaho, sits 1½ miles from the crash site, saw the post and remembered seeing a similar dog on his property. Potter speculated the dog was drawn to his property because of his sheep. "I think that dog was trying to herd," he said.

3 GOING CRYPTO The government of El Salvador announced June 9 it planned to enter the cryptocurrency market. In a post to his Twitter account, President Nayib Bukele announced the small Central American nation would devote energy produced by the nation's geothermal power plant toward bitcoin mining. Bitcoin miners use the computational power of computers to help keep the cryptocurrency's ledger accurate. In exchange for aiding in the larger project, miners earn their own bitcoins. Bitcoin's increased value—the cryptocurrency swelled above $60,000 per bitcoin earlier this year—has enticed larger and larger bitcoin miners to enter the fray. But all that computer usage costs a lot of electricity. According to the Cambridge Bitcoin Electricity Consumption Index, bitcoin mining around the globe consumes as much power as a small nation such as Finland or the Philippines.

4 QUEEN OF CAKE-CUTTING The queen of England showed her mischievous side during a recent reception for volunteers helping organize next year's Platinum Jubilee. When the time came for Queen Elizabeth to cut the cake, she borrowed a long, curved ceremonial sword for the job. With the sword, a smile, and a little help from Camilla,

ILLUSTRATION BY KRIEG BARRIE

Duchess of Cornwall, Elizabeth, 95, made a clean slice into the cake. When someone reminded the British monarch a cake knife was also at hand, she responded, "I know there is. ... This is something that is more unusual."

5 **HAZARDS OF THE ROAD** Police in Ohio blame a bug for causing a June 7 traffic accident in Cincinnati. According to Cincinnati police, a cicada flew into a Chevrolet sedan through an open window and hit the driver's face. The distracted motorist then lost control of the vehicle and crashed into a utility pole. The cicada was likely part of Brood X, a periodical cicada group that emerges once every 17 years in the East and Midwest. While the driver was unhurt, authorities found the cicada dead on the vehicle's floorboard.

6 **MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING** An Italian artist has made something out of nothing, literally. Salvatore Garau exhibited his artwork, titled *Lo Sono* (in English, *I Am*), in an Italian gallery in May. Before long, Garau had found a buyer willing to pay $18,300 for the piece. The catch: Garau's sculpture doesn't exist. The artist, billing his work as an invisible statue, left instructions for the buyer to place the void in any empty 5-foot-by-5-foot space. According to Garau, the only material aspect of the statue is the certificate of authenticity delivered to the buyer on receipt of payment.

7 **WAFFLES FOR FREEDOM** When Lee Sanderlin entered a 24-hour Brandon, Miss., Waffle House on June 17, it wasn't because he was hungry. Instead, he was there to carry out the penalty of finishing last place in his fantasy football league. According to the terms of the league, Sanderlin's last-place finish meant he had to remain in the restaurant for 24 consecutive hours. But for every waffle Sanderlin consumed, he could remove one hour in diner purgatory. After cramming down four waffles in under an hour, Sanderlin posted on Twitter, "Please, somebody, launch me into the sun." After 15 hours and nine waffles, Sanderlin had paid his debt. "Full of waffles but devoid of life," he posted to Twitter.

> "PLEASE, SOMEBODY, LAUNCH ME INTO THE SUN."

8 **HAM-HANDED JOKE?** Harbormasters in Algeria rejected grain shipments from France after discovering two pig carcasses inside the hold of two separate cargo vessels in June. Algeria's agricultural minister said he's seeking compensation from the now-banned supplier. Besides the sanitary concerns of including a rotting carcass inside a shipment of milled wheat, Abdelhamid Hamdani argued the pigs were a religious affront to Muslims, whose religion considers pigs unclean. The stunt will cost French wheat farmers who depend on exports to Algeria.

9 **DUMPSTER DIVING DISCOVERY** Officials in Germany are investigating how two 17th-century paintings ended up in a dumpster beside a German highway. Police say a 64-year-old man discovered the two oil-on-canvas works in Bavaria in the dumpster of a highway service station. After retrieving the two portraits, the man turned in the artworks to police. Art experts identified one of the paintings as a self-portrait by Italian artist Pietro Bellotti completed in 1665 and the other as a portrait of a boy by Dutch painter Samuel van Hoogstraten, whose works have sold for hundreds of thousands of dollars. Police say they're working to find the artworks' owner.





Homeland

Can you see your country's faults and still love it?

AFTER LIVING IN JAPAN for a year during the early 2000s, my son thought it would be interesting to try "that other island that starts with a J." That is, Jamaica. He expected the culture would be different—and it was. Completely.

I visited him that summer in Negril, on the westernmost tip of the island. He lived in an unfinished hotel—oddly, the builder had finished the second floor, and that's all—at the end of a dirt road, with goats and shanties and uncertain water supply. Aside from minor inconveniences, I enjoyed the trip. My memories glow with blinding sun, turquoise ocean, glittering beaches, tropical fruit free for picking, and smiling people (a few of whom tried to sell me drugs or sex). We didn't need a car—getting around was a simple matter of waving down a taxi (typically a vintage Toyota) and cramming ourselves in the back seat along with the other passengers.

It was fun, but "East or west, home is best." Even so, I wasn't prepared for my emotional return. After touching down in Kansas City and shuttling to my car, I unlocked the door, slid into the front seat, and gripped the steering wheel as the thought gripped me: *I love this country*. I love my car, I love these roads and buildings and people going about their business unmolested. It wasn't just material prosperity; it was the sense of freedom stabilized by order, the ability to go have an adventure yet return to safety and comfort. This was *home*.

Wilfred McClay acknowledges that simple love of home in a *City Journal* article titled "Civic Education, Rightly Understood." Rightly understood, "A patriotic education should be an education in love"—not chauvinism or jingoism, but sincere affection for one's country and a desire for her welfare. It's similar, I think, to love for a spouse. You know the worst while encouraging the best and working toward the better.

YOU KNOW THE WORST WHILE ENCOURAGING THE BEST AND WORKING TOWARD THE BETTER.

It appears that most American children are not getting this kind of civic education. America's sins, common the world over wherever one group gains power over another, are treated as unique. But her virtues are taken for granted or waved away as hypocritical piety. President Donald Trump authorized the 1776 Commission—a panel of academics, historians, and public intellectuals—to challenge this cynical interpretation. They begin with founding documents. "No nation before America ever dared state those truths as the formal basis for its politics, and none has strived harder, or done more, to achieve them."

Not all men (or women) were deemed equal in 1776, but those words promised they would be. Power always corrupts, but the words called power to account. When we took our freedom too far, the words recalled us to justice. Our mistakes, some of them grievous, have tended to self-correct because of the words, deeply embedded in our national consciousness.

Unless it was all a sham. That's what critical theory in general teaches: History is about power, not virtue. Critical race theory in particular has found its moment as the conscience of a nation, and the history it cites is not entirely false. But instead of building our shared house, like the wise woman of Proverbs 14:1, it aims at tearing the house down, to be replaced with—what? The outlines of a social-justice utopia look a lot like Marxist redistribution.

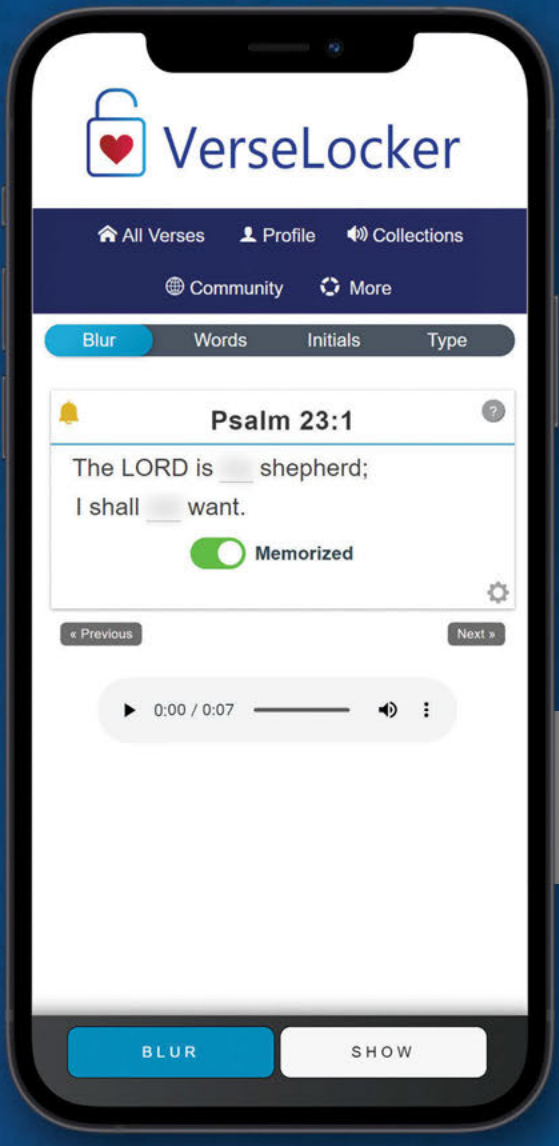
Have the proponents of CRT thought through the practical result of trashing the country we share? Of teaching children that there's nothing remarkable, or even redeemable, about our constitutional government? McClay, author of a history called *Land of Hope*, wonders if the dispirited youth of today have lost hope partly because of the hopelessness they're taught to feel about their own home.

C.S. Lewis saw this coming in *The Abolition of Man*: "Without the aid of trained emotions the intellect is powerless against the animal organism." That is, souls not trained to love will default to apathy—or rage. ■

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"Your word I have hidden in my heart..." Psalm 119:11


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FRIENDS OUT OF WATER

Two sea creatures find adventures on land in Pixar's *Luca*

by Marty VanDriel

DISNEY VIA AP

AMERICAN TRAVELERS HAVE DREAMED OF THE TIME when borders will fully reopen and they can again explore other lands and cultures without a COVID-19 test. If the Cinque Terre region of Italy is on your wish list, and you have little ones in the house, you might enjoy Pixar's new animated release *Luca*, available for streaming exclusively on Disney+. The coming-of-age film about friendship gives a taste of the beauty of the Italian coast.

Residents of the fictional town of Portorosso have long thought that mysterious beings live in the waters off their picturesque village. Fishermen report strange sightings and sometimes mysteriously lose items from their boats to the "sea monsters."

In the bright waters of the Mediterranean, Luca (voiced by Jacob Tremblay) tends his family's school of "sheep fish" and dreams of life above the surface. Luca has a tail and fins but a very human appearance. He lives in a house with his parents. Luca's mom doesn't seem to worry about sharks or predator fish: The real danger to her family is the world of humans on land. She warns Luca, "We do not go anywhere near the surface!"

But with his adventurous friend Alberto (Jack Dylan Grazer) leading him on, Luca discovers that when he leaves the sea, he transforms into a human boy—no tail, no fins, no scales—at least, as long as he stays dry. Alberto and Luca explore the relative safety of a small island, but soon find themselves wanting to discover more about the nearby coastal town. Their ultimate dream is to get a Vespa motorcycle, freeing them to explore anywhere they want in this fascinating new world.

The boys fall in with one of the town's underdogs: Giulia (Emma Burman) has lost the town's annual triathlon to her rival Ercole (Saverio Raimondo), whose cartoonish bullying establishes him as the mild villain of the film. Giulia's father is an enormous, intimidating figure, who despite the lack of one arm, could crush his daughter's friends with ease. He takes a liking to them, especially as they help him find the best fishing spots with their insider knowledge.

Luca and Alberto can buy their precious Vespa if they win the triathlon with Giulia, but the boys face real danger from the townspeople if their "sea monster" identities are discovered—and villainous Ercole is suspicious there's something fishy about this pair.

The beautifully animated film is a joy to watch: The village of Portorosso is perched above the sea, with narrow, winding roads leading into the hillsides. Poking fun at his own culture, director Enrico Casarosa envisions the triathlon as swimming, eating delicious pasta as quickly as possible, and then cycling through the hills.

Some viewers of *Luca* have speculated the boys' friendship is intended to imply a homosexual awakening, and that the town's eventual acceptance of these unfamiliar sea creatures echoes society's affirmation of the LGBT community.



"THERE'S AN INNOCENCE AND A FOCUS ON THE FRIENDSHIP SIDE."

Director Casarosa has denied that claim, though, and there's really not a reason for viewers to read it into the story. In an interview with Screen Rant, Casarosa stated, "We were quite aware that we wanted to talk about that time in life before boyfriends or girlfriends. So there's an innocence and a focus on the friendship side. I feel like the story would be a little different in that it's slightly more complicated when romance comes in."

Luca, rated PG with cartoon violence and mild insults, does have a refreshing innocence that harks back to movies of an earlier era. And the message that we ought not to judge people based on their appearance or skin color is a timeless one. ■

DISNEY VIA AP



Remains of the millennia

by Collin Garbarino

In the new Disney+ series *Loki*, Tom Hiddleston reprises his role as Marvel fans' favorite villain, the Asgardian god of mischief.

But this Loki isn't the lovable rogue who completed his redemption arc in the Avengers movies. This series features an unrepentant version of Loki who escapes from his timeline thanks to the events of *Avengers: Endgame*. The seemingly all-powerful Time Variance Authority immediately picks him and puts him on trial for deviating from the "sacred timeline"—the acceptable version of history. Rather than "pruning" the variant Loki, the TVA enlists his help in tracking down an even more dangerous variant seeking to unravel the timeline. High jinks ensue.

Time-travel stories can get a little knotty, but this series is at its best during the philosophical banter between Hiddleston's Loki and his TVA handler, Agent Mobius (Owen Wilson). Though Hiddleston is the star, when Wilson is absent from the screen too long, the show loses its shine. The action scenes, while exciting, don't always make sense, and we don't spend enough time in the TVA's humorously soul-crushing bureaucracy.

The series is rated TV-14. Besides superhero violence, two of the first three episodes contain occasional bad language. Disney also panders to progressive gender ideology: Loki's TVA dossier lists his gender as "fluid," and the third episode includes a brief, forced line about having romances with both men and women.

STRAY FILMMAKER *Stray* director Elizabeth Lo was born and raised in Hong Kong, then moved to the United States to attend college.



WANDERERS AMONG US

An unconventional documentary spotlights society's most disconnected members

by Juliana Chan Erikson

COMPARING ILLEGAL MIGRANTS to stray dogs might be offensive or enlightening, depending on whom you ask. Director Elizabeth Lo makes a good case for the latter in *Stray*, an hourlong-plus foreign dog-umentary (available on Amazon Prime) that follows three canines in Turkey over three years.

With cameras at dog-level and no narration, Lo allows Zeytin, Nazar, and Kartal to tell their own story. They endlessly wander the streets of Istanbul, some days wolfing down handouts and getting pats on the head, other days diving into dumpsters and tussling with dangerous wild dog packs. With no one to love them, their only comfort each night is finding a place to sleep where they won't be chased away. Glue-sniffing teenage Syrian refugees come in and out of the dogs' lives, but it's not long before the teens are hounded off the streets, treated no better than the pooches.

In a sense, the film isn't just about dogs or migrants but humanity's unwillingness to connect with the disconnected—loners, orphans, foreigners, or singles in a sea of married families. Director Lo helps the viewer see these restless wanderers, both human and canine.

Two problems with this unrated documentary give me pause—a dozen subtitled expletives about dog excrement, and the dog-level cameras that incorporate dog-level attention spans (*squirrel!*) and nauseatingly swift camera turns.



COMIC BOOKS ADAPTED FOR THE SCREEN

- ***Secret Agent X-9* (1937)**
- ***The Green Hornet* (1940)**
- ***Adventures of Captain Marvel* (1941)**
- ***Superman* (1941)**
- ***Spy Smasher* (1942)**
- ***Captain America* (1944)**
- ***The Vigilante: Fighting Hero of the West* (1947)**

LOKI: DISNEY+; STRAY: MAGNOLIA PICTURES; SECRET AGENT X-9: VCI ENTERTAINMENT

CALL OF DUTY

Warm and weighty *Fatherhood* makes a compelling case for being a dad

by Bob Brown



DESTRUCTIVE IDEOLOGIES and men's own poor choices have distorted what it means to be a man and father. Consequently, many men today find themselves sitting on the sidelines of parenthood. It's encouraging, then, to see *Fatherhood*, a new Netflix film, set the record straight: Parenting is a man's duty—good for his children and good for him.

Regrettably, the film's laudable message comes peppered with careless vulgarities and a few profanities. So I don't recommend allowing kids to watch *Fatherhood* (rated PG-13). But I wouldn't hesitate to take a young man I'm mentoring at church to see it.

Comedian Kevin Hart plays Matt Logelin, who wrote the bestseller that "inspired" *Fatherhood*. In the film, Matt's wife dies shortly after she gives birth to their first child, a daughter named Maddy. Matt's heartache compounds his frustrations with fastening diapers, folding strollers, and figuring out baby Maddy's colic issues—making for some of the movie's lighter moments. A successful job requiring travel tempts Matt to hand off permanent care for Maddy to her grandparents. His family and friends don't believe he can raise a child by himself.

FATHERLESS According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 1 in 4 American children lives without a dad at home. In 1960, the proportion was 1 in 9.

Viewers may have similar misgivings about Hart. Is the star of *Ride Along* and Jumanji films ready for a dramatic role? Can he do subtle humor? Carrying each emotion with perfect naturalness, Hart commanded my attention start to finish. *Fatherhood* may be Hart's *Father of the Bride* moment, showing his acting depth, as that 1991 movie did for Steve Martin.

The film's second act picks up when Maddy (Melody Hurd) enters grade school. Hurd more than holds her own. For example, when Matt and Maddy are playing a hand-slapping game, she distracts him with questions about a booger on his shirt. Her facial expressions induce convulsions of laughter in Hart that, I'm convinced, were not theatrical. Nor were my tears, when Matt and Maddy tell each other, "Wherever you go, I want to go there, too."

While faith plays no significant role in *Fatherhood*, the film stands close to Biblical principles. An ultrasound photo and a beautifully ooey-gooey newborn in the opening scenes buck mainstream culture's tendency to hide evidence of a baby's humanity. Later, Matt initially declines a new love interest's invitations to extramarital intimacy. When he eventually yields (in a slightly sensual scene), to his horror Matt has missed phone calls from Maddy's school about an injury she has sustained—seemingly a rebuke of his behavior.

The film also tackles gender-appropriate clothing with common sense. In behavior not atypical of an early grade schooler, Maddy likes boys' superhero underwear, and, defying her school's dress code, prefers long pants to a skirt. Matt just rolls with it. There's no push for gender conversion therapy, only Matt's commitment to surround Maddy with caring women.

In all, Hart's character makes the case: The fatherhood job is a joy. ■

PHILIPPE BOSSE/NETFLIX

CAST CALL Lin-Manuel Miranda apologized to critics who said *In the Heights* featured too few darker-skinned Afro-Latinos.

BOX OFFICE TOP 10

WEEKEND OF JUNE 25-27, ACCORDING TO BOX OFFICE MOJO. QUANTITY OF SEXUAL (S), VIOLENT (V), AND FOUL-LANGUAGE (L) CONTENT ON A 0-10 SCALE, WITH 10 HIGH, FROM KIDS-IN-MIND.COM

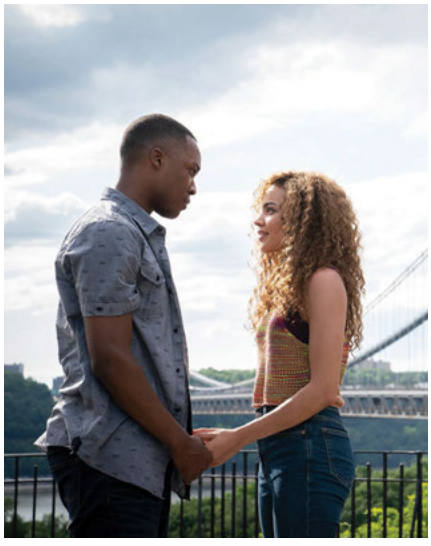
		S	V	L
1	**F9: The Fast Saga** PG-13	2	6	4
2	**A Quiet Place Part II*** PG-13	1	6	2
3	**The Hitman's Wife's Bodyguard** R	5	7	10
4	**Peter Rabbit 2: The Runaway** PG	1	3	1
5	**Cruella*** PG-13	1	5	2
6	**The Conjuring** R	1	7	3
7	**In the Heights*** PG-13	4	2	4
8	**Spirit Untamed*** PG	1	3	1
9	**Nobody** R	4	8	8
10	**12 Mighty Orphans*** PG-13	not rated		

*REVIEWED BY WORLD



TOP 10 FOCUS

A Quiet Place Part II, the sequel to John Krasinski's hit 2018 apocalyptic alien film, is a little scarier than its predecessor, but it mostly frightens with jump-scares. One scene is scarier than anything involving the blind monsters: other humans who have silently turned into monsters themselves. —from WORLD's review



LIVIN' ON A DREAM

In the Heights brings a fresh take to the American Dream

by Collin Garbarino

CELEBRATION IS THE predominant note in the new cinematic adaptation of Lin-Manuel Miranda's Tony-winning Broadway musical *In the Heights*. The movie—in theaters and streaming on HBO Max—is loud, colorful, and joyful, like fireworks on a hot summer night.

Most of the action takes place during the days leading up to a blackout in New York City's Washington Heights, a predominantly Hispanic community on the north side of Manhattan. Usnavi (Anthony Ramos) owns a bodega and knows all his neighbors—even how they like their coffee. His little shop is the cornerstone of the neighborhood, but Usnavi dreams of leaving New York and returning to the Dominican Republic, the land of his childhood, to reopen his father's beachside bar, El Sueñito, or "The Little Dream."

This movie is full of little dreams: Usnavi dreams of impressing Vanessa (Melissa Barrera), the pretty girl who works in a nearby nail salon. Vanessa, though, finds Washington Heights oppressive and dreams of moving downtown to pursue a career in fashion design. Usnavi and Vanessa want to escape, but their friend Nina (Leslie Grace) dreams only of returning—she's home for the summer after her first year at Stanford, and she doesn't want to go back. Nina's father Kevin (Jimmy Smits), meanwhile, dreams of seeing his daughter graduate from a prestigious university. Benny (Corey Hawkins) works for Kevin and dreams of rekindling a past romance with the boss's daughter.

In the Heights focuses on the challenges and triumphs of one ethnic community, but the musical actually celebrates the broader American dream. New York, and by extension America, is a land of possibility where people with nothing can, through hard work and a little luck, create a little something. That's not to say the movie celebrates the American dream uncritically. It explores inequity, prejudice, gentrification, and the rising cost of higher education, but it maintains a belief that America, in spite of its flaws, offers its residents hope.

In the Heights isn't perfect. Miranda's songs in this film aren't as catchy as the ones he wrote for *Hamilton*. The script inexpertly juggles the multiple storylines, and its attempts to grapple with social issues sometimes seem contrived.

Despite framing the story as a tale Usnavi tells his children, this PG-13 movie isn't suitable for youngsters. It contains a few instances of foul language and innuendo, and some parents will be wary of the skimpy costuming and pervasive sensual dancing.

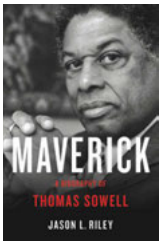
But it's comforting to see a movie claim that the American dream is not merely individualistic but intergenerational. The film's watchwords are "patience and faith," affirming the simple joys of family and community. In spite of the pageantry, *In the Heights* reminds audiences that a kind word and a home-cooked meal can change the world.

Social economics

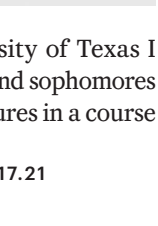
Happy birthday, Thomas Sowell

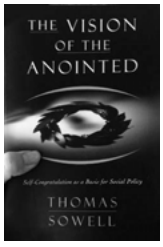
by Marvin Olasky

JASON RILEY'S ***Maverick*** (Basic, 2021) is a concise biography of the brilliant Thomas Sowell, who turned 91 on June 30. Riley shows how and why Sowell was willing to blaze the trails that many black moderates and conservatives are beginning to follow. One reason: He recognizes that intellectuals are a special interest group that competes with other groups and profits when journalists uncritically present supposed brainiacs as owners of special wisdom. Sowell is a conservative not because of abstract theory but because he appreciates street-level evidence.



Sowell's major work has been in economics: I learned a lot 50 years ago by reading Henry Hazlitt's ***Economics in One Lesson*** (Harper and Brothers, 1946; Kindle edition, 2010) and still recommend it, but Sowell's ***Basic Economics*** (Basic, 2000; fifth edition, 2015) and ***Economic Facts and Fallacies*** (Basic, 2008 and 2011) are the 21st-century equivalents. For two years in the 1990s at the University of Texas I subjected 480 freshmen and sophomores each term to my dull lectures in a course titled Critical Thinking for Journalists. My unconventional textbook was Sowell's ***The Vision of the Anointed*** (Basic, 1996), still an excellent read.





Sowell's most controversial work, though, concerns race. His understanding of civil rights history differs from the conventional view that government action benefits blacks. On *Meet the Press* 40 years ago, he flabbergasted his liberal interrogators by saying, "The great achievement of the civil rights organizations has been getting the government off the backs of blacks, notably in the South with the Jim Crow laws. ... Where they tried to get government to play a positive role, so-called, that's where they've not only failed but where they've had counterproductive results."

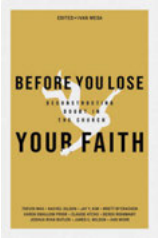
Sowell has shown empirically that racial preferences are counterproductive. Fifty years ago Sowell wrote, "The double standard of grades and degrees is an open secret on many campuses." He argued that preferences devalue the recipients in the minds of others and themselves. The way up is to out-study and out-work competitors, but cultural influences that can go back decades (and sometimes even centuries) are crucial.

The analysis in Chris Bail's ***Breaking the Social Media Prism*** (Princeton, 2021) reminds me of Sowell's work in going beyond easy answers. He shows, as I and many others have, that social media distort our identities and empower extremists. But he disputes the "get out of the echo chamber" advice that I've offered, because his research shows that people who read opposing views on social media often harden their own positions.



Bail's solution: "A digital advertising tax" to fund a give-both-sides platform, ideally controlled by government, that with big stars and big dollars would become popular. In practice, it's highly likely that such a suite-level cure would become one more propaganda weapon.

Bookmarks



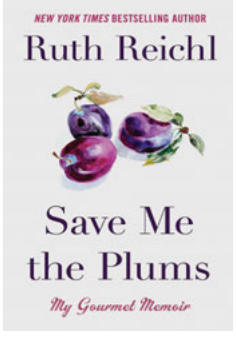
Fifteen thoughtful Christians contributed to ***Before You Lose Your Faith: Deconstructing Doubt in the Church***, edited by Ivan Mesa (Gospel Coalition, 2021). Ian Harber describes how "'Progressive' Christianity was shallower than the evangelical faith I left," with therapy the new path to happiness and cancel culture the new church discipline: "If you didn't tow the party line of progressive orthodoxy, you were an outcast." Brett McCracken notes that leaving Christianity "is in no way countercultural. ... The radical choice is to keep the faith."

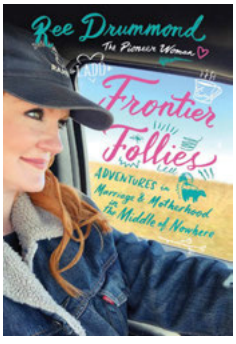
If you read ***Exiles on Mission*** by Paul Williams (Brazos Press, 2020), go directly to Chapters 9 and 10, which compare to Biblical truth five non-Christian ideologies of contemporary Western culture—naturalistic scientism, free-market capitalism, postmodern identity, environmentalism, and secular pluralism. Williams leaves out the one story, thoroughly deconstructed three decades ago, that has now made a campus comeback: socialism. —*M.O.*

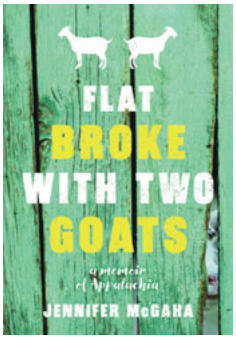
Four-course reading

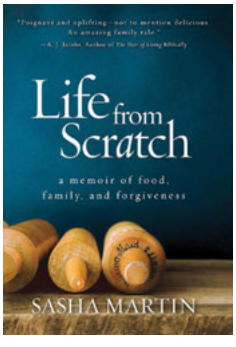
Interesting and evocative food memoirs

by Susan Olasky









Save Me the Plums **by Ruth Reichl:** Reichl was the restaurant critic at *The New York Times* before becoming editor-in-chief of *Gourmet* magazine in the late 1990s. The magazine at that time had become stodgy and boring, but its rich history hinted at possibilities. Reichl had never edited a magazine, but she brought creativity and a love of food to the task. Here she describes the excitement of reimagining the magazine and putting together a team to do it. She puts the story in its historical context: Publisher Condé Nast had a deep pocketed owner, S.I. Newhouse, and Manhattan was flowing in money. That would soon change. Reichl's engaging account of the rebirth and death of *Gourmet* comes with recipes—and a few obscenities.

Frontier Follies **by Ree Drummond:** Drummond, aka the Pioneer Woman, is a Food Network star and cookbook writer. Here she writes about everyday life on the Oklahoma ranch where she lives with her husband. Her stories span 25 years, so her four children, now mostly grown, also figure prominently. Drummond's breezy, informal style and her lists, charts, and recipes make this a fast read. Fans will enjoy the backstage view of her life—mess-ups as well as successes. She writes about marriage, childbirth, parenting, homeschooling, and teaching children at her Presbyterian church. She also writes about subjects peculiar to ranch life: skunks, the odd UPS delivery, and bull calf castration, along with jokes about "calf nuts" and the unwelcome bits that end up in the laundry afterward.

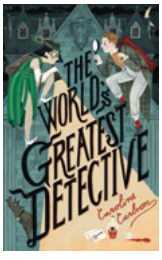
Flat Broke With Two Goats **by Jennifer McGaha:** The Great Recession upended the lives of Jennifer McGaha and her accountant husband. They already had debts, but the recession damaged his part-time real estate and accounting businesses. Then came the big discovery: He had failed to pay income taxes for several years. No longer able to afford the mortgage on their house outside Asheville, they let it go into foreclosure and moved to an old cabin in the mountains of western North Carolina. This book describes how they overcame broken trust while adjusting to a challenging rural life with its snakes, goats, and frequent setbacks. McGaha mixes some New Agey meditations, recipes, and occasional foul language with her vivid descriptions of life in rural Appalachia.

Life From Scratch **by Sasha Martin:** Martin had a hard early life: Her father abandoned the family, her mother lost custody of her two children, and Sasha and her brother ended up in a foster family. Her brother committed suicide. Sasha lived with the foster family in Europe, acted out, and moved back to the United States. She graduated college and attended cooking school. An internship brought her to Tulsa, Okla., where she fell in love and embarked on a project: cooking a meal from every country in the world. The project led to this engaging memoir with recipes. In it Martin depicts the joy and chaos of her early life. She shows the power of food to break down barriers, arouse an appetite for adventure, cultivate community, and fix up a fractured family.

Of dogs and detectives

Books for elementary and middle-school students

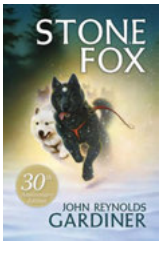
by Whitney Williams



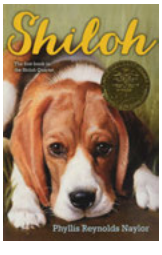
***The World's Greatest Detective* by Caroline Carlson:** After Toby Montrose's parents mysteriously vanish, he bounces from place to unwelcoming place until finally settling into the heart and home of his investigator uncle, whose detective business is struggling to stay afloat. In an effort to help and prove his own sleuthing skills, Toby enters a crime-solving contest that boasts a $10,000 reward. Soon, though, he and his overly confident, take-charge partner, Ivy—who lives in the mansion where the contest takes place—have a real murder mystery on their hands and must work together to crack the case. *(Ages 8-12)*



***Argos* by Ralph Hardy:** Fans of Greek mythology and dog lovers will enjoy this retelling of *The Odyssey* from the perspective of King Odysseus' loyal dog, Argos. Argos expects Odysseus' ship to return soon after the Trojan War, but days of waiting and wondering slowly turn into years. Argos tries to hold out hope as sea-migrating animals bring news of the king's seemingly unending tribulations. The story spotlights a committed marriage, a son's respect for his father, and hopeful endurance, but parents should know it also includes descriptions of violence and discussion of Greek gods. *(Ages 8-12)*

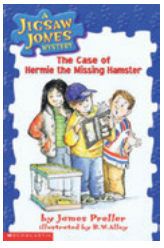


***Stone Fox* by John Reynolds Gardiner:** One day Little Willy's grandfather doesn't get out of bed. He's given up on life due to the financial strain of the farm. Grandfather is the only family 10-year-old Willy has left: He can't lose him. Determined to restore Grandfather's will to live, Willy enters a dog sledding race that boasts a grand prize big enough to pay off the farm's debt. Stone Fox, Willy's main competition, is fierce, but so is Willy's love for his grandfather. Can Willy's dog, Searchlight, pull him to victory? *(Ages 8-12)*



***Shiloh* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor:** When a runaway beagle walks into Marty Preston's life, the young, backwoods boy falls into a mess of love and trouble. The dog belongs to Judd Travers, an alcoholic who abuses his dogs. Marty's dad tells his son they must return the dog, but Marty chooses to hide Shiloh instead and then continually lies to conceal his secret. Marty's sin soon catches up to him, opening his eyes to the realization that Judd isn't the only broken man in the hills of West Virginia. Caution: four curse words. *(Ages 8-12)*

Afterword



For a dollar a day Theodore "Jigsaw" Jones makes problems go away. As the protagonist of James Preller's Jigsaw Jones series, the elementary-aged detective teams up with his friend Mila to solve mysteries—from "stolen" baseball cards to anonymous Valentines—while introducing young readers to basic crime terminology like suspect, motive, and opportunity.

In book one, ***The Case of Hermie the Missing Hamster*** (Scholastic, 1998), a neighbor boy hires Jigsaw and Mila to find out what happened to his missing hamster, Hermie, who may have fallen victim to his brother's pet boa constrictor or his mom's reckless vacuuming.

Throughout the series, Preller works in fun jingles that kids, parents, and teachers may find useful and offers opportunities to crack secret codes. Most books end with a twist, teaching Jigsaw and readers that it's best to look at the facts of each case before drawing conclusions or making potentially hurtful accusations—a helpful lesson no matter one's age. Cute illustrations add to the fun. —*W.W.*



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A NEW LEADER IN A CONTENTIOUS AGE

The Southern Baptist Convention president eschews churches' cultural isolation

SOPHIA LEE INTERVIEWS ED LITTON

MORE THAN 15,000 SOUTHERN BAPTISTS gathered in Nashville in June to elect a new president of the Southern Baptist Convention. Ed Litton, a little-known pastor of Redemption Church in Saraland, Ala., was the surprise winner, beating Georgia pastor Mike Stone, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary President Albert Mohler Jr. (a WORLD board member), and Randy Adams, a state convention leader.

How do you feel? I'm overwhelmed and quite humbled. We're at a

ILLUSTRATION BY THOMAS FLUHARTY

really important moment in our history. And I think this convention has moved in a very clear direction.

Which direction is that? In the beginning of World War II, the United States sent Navy destroyers to protect a massive armada of ships that were taking supplies to Great Britain. And I see those ships as an analogy to Southern Baptists. We're not a denomination, we're a convention of churches. Each "ship" is a different church, and the payload is the gospel. We're getting the gospel to the nations. We are deciding that we're going to stay on target, not be distracted by politics or saving the culture—not turning inward, not being self-protective.

Would the other candidates have gone in the wrong direction? Dr. Al Mohler is an amazing blessing to the Southern Baptists and would have been a good choice. My concern about other candidates is that they had issues that stopped everything and kind of went backwards.

Backwards? Based on what I've read and seen, they want to tighten and narrow certain interpretations of our Baptist Faith and Message (BFM 2000) and hold people accountable for things that the BFM 2000 is very broad on.

For example? We are a complementarian convention. I am complementarian. Yet there's a broadness in our BFM 2000: We believe that a pastor should be a qualified and called-out male. That's in line with Scripture. But women play a critical function in our churches, and some feel like they are being told what they can't do instead of what women are called to do.

You took criticism for having your wife Kathy with you in the pulpit. We did at least two series of messages together: one on family, the other on marriage. It was very apropos, and I think a lot of pastors understand this. Kathy is not only my wife but under my authority as her pastor, and I was inviting her to speak into these issues. There are genuine brothers who have a different view who would never do that—and I respect that. But the BFM 2000 has a broadness in which we can both continue (using the WWII analogy) to get those ships to the nations together.



OUT OF FEAR, PEOPLE WANT TO TIGHTEN THINGS DOWN AND MAKE SURE EVERYBODY'S LINED UP ON TERTIARY ISSUES. BUT OUR FOCUS HAS GOT TO BE THE GOSPEL.



It seems all the presidential candidates agree on the mission of evangelism. But they differ on where they see attacks. For you, who is the enemy? Satan. Scripture says Satan prowls like a lion looking for someone to devour. If he can get believers to fight each other, he's sitting back laughing, because we're just destroying each other.

How is he attacking believers? Satan's fall is our fall: pride. Pride is a serious problem for us. The Bible tells us that our job is to humble ourselves. When we turn on each other, sometimes it's because of envy. Sometimes pride. When we demonize each other, when we attack each other, it builds wounds and distrust.

What do you make of such a close vote? It's humbling. Southern Baptists are always concerned about drifting. I don't think we're drifting into liberalism. We're drifting into fundamentalism. Out of fear, people want to tighten things down and make sure everybody's lined up on all the tertiary issues. But our focus has got to be the gospel. I believe fear has driven us to live in a bubble in our churches, where we protect ourselves, look out the windows, and say, "Look how bad things are out there."

What do you say to the people concerned about leftward drift? I believe in the inerrancy and infallibility and sufficiency of Scripture—always have, always will. I believe our confessional statement is absolutely true, and I live within its boundaries. I'm very conservative in my theology. I'm conservative in my politics.

There was leftward drift in the SBC in the '70s. Southern Baptists should be very thankful for the conservative resurgence that brought us out of that. But now we're facing a whole new battle: a culture that's rapidly secularizing our country. How do we communicate the gospel of God's love to those people? It should make all of us sober up about how we present ourselves and one another to the world. Scripture tells us if you and I have a theological difference, we are to talk it out. But we have people who castigate by name people whom they don't even know. That really needs to stop. We need to repent of that.

Tell me about your views on racial issues. I live in Mobile, Ala., which has a very scarred and painful past. The last slave ship to offload in North America was in our city. The last lynching in our country was in our city (in 1981).

That wasn't so long ago. After Michael Brown's death in Ferguson, Mo., a group of pastors, civic leaders, judges, →

attorneys, and business leaders started meeting. We became known as the Pledge group, and we sponsored something called Shrink the Divide. We thought, *We're gonna try to solve this problem of race.* God humbled us.

How? We learned that what we need to do first is get to know each other and start to learn to love each other. And we did. It was all based on the gospel. Almost none of us, until six months ago, had ever heard of critical race theory. What we were doing was obeying Scripture. We worked through two years of painful conversations every two weeks. Listening to the reality of racism began to break and change my heart. I had to deal with a lot of my own attitudes. I assumed so many things about my African American brothers and sisters—about their theology, lifestyle, politics. A lot of us can't understand why our politics are so divergent, but that's because we don't know the history. There will be no dominant race in this country in just a few years. And the Lord's preparing us for this.

There are different approaches to race. John Perkins once told me, "I don't call a white man a racist. It's the same as calling an African American the N-word." John's purpose is reconciliation, and I would put myself in the same vein. I don't think Southern Baptists are racists. I don't think Southern Baptists want to be known as racists. But I think there's a fear and timidity about crossing that line to your neighbor who doesn't look like you, think like you, or vote like you. I think there is a cultural fear within a lot of people of my color, that they're losing.

Losing what? They feel like they're losing their position, their status, their country, their history. There's nothing being lost. We don't need to fear that.

Some say that more talk about race divides us more. We're divided because we're not talking about it. We're not listening to each other. The whole conversation has been defused. When I started this racial reconciliation group, I was scared. I didn't want to be called a bigot. I was also afraid my peers would call me "woke"—which is exactly what some are doing. People in the church had never once called me a "liberal" until I started working in this area. So I had to die to it: Call me whatever you want, but this is a command in Scripture, and the Spirit of God is leading me to do this.

Sexual abuse was an important topic during this year's meeting. I'm glad. I think with COVID-19, there was a pause. And when we pause, people can forget. And we can't forget. This is something that is with us. It's not going away. And we need to address it the way Jesus would address it.

The SBC passed a motion asking the president to create a task force to oversee a third-party investigation into the executive committee's alleged mishandling of sexual abuse cases. How are you going to do that? I have some ideas, but it's probably not a good time for me to share them. I ask people to pray. I am committed to greater transparency—not less. We are not going to cover things up. We're going to do everything we can to find out the truth, then proceed. We have to make our churches a safe place. ■

I AM COMMITTED TO GREATER TRANSPARENCY—NOT LESS. WE ARE NOT GOING TO COVER THINGS UP.



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B.J. Thomas' cross-genre career

The popular singer who died in May famously crossed into CCM—and tried to cross back out of it

by Arsenio Orteza



WITH THE PASSING OF B.J. THOMAS, one of the strangest celebrity-Christian sagas drew to a close.

Thomas, 78, succumbed to lung cancer in May, two months after announcing his condition on social media. Optimistically, his website still teased the forthcoming announcement of 2021 tour dates.

From his cover of Hank Williams' "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" in 1966 to his cover of the Beach Boys' "Don't Worry Baby" in 1977, Thomas placed 14 singles on the *Billboard* Top 40, with "Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head" and "(Hey Won't You Play) Another Somebody Done Somebody Wrong Song" hitting No 1. The latter also topped the country charts, foreshadowing his '80s string of country chart-toppers.

AWARDED "Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head" won an Oscar for best original song after it was featured in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.*

Between his pop and country periods—in retrospect, musical distinctions without a difference—his tender, melismatic tenor also became a fixture on Christian radio with songs taken from his gospel albums. He made those following a dramatic born-again experience that he detailed in a Jerry B. Jenkins co-authored autobiography named after his inaugural Christian hit, "Home Where I Belong."

In a bizarre turn of events, his gospel run came to a halt. At a 1982 show in Norman, Okla., during which he was co-billed with Andraé Crouch, he stalked off the stage after blowing up at a woman whose loud, 'tween-song testifying for Jesus he took as a rebuke to his continuing to perform secular tunes. News of the incident rapidly spread, Thomas himself fanned the flames, and seemingly overnight his days as a CCM star ended.

Anyone familiar with the history of onstage meltdowns knows that such incidents are usually the culmination of long-simmering conflicts. Thomas' was no exception.

"It put a religious thing on me," he told the *Houston Chronicle* in 2010, speaking of his Christian music, "and that religious thing separates people. I was never able to rebuild my mainstream career after that." Translation: The more he sang about Jesus, the more his pop opportunities dwindled, and the more his pop opportunities dwindled, the more he blamed his Christian audience for demanding only songs about Jesus.

Thomas would go on to send mixed signals about his beliefs. He made live and studio rerecordings of his most popular gospel material and wrote the liner notes to his CCM compilation *Our ReCollections*. But he also pooh-poohed his faith to Howard Stern by telling the shock jock that if he'd been born in India, he'd probably be a Hindu. And in 2019 he snapped at a Twitter follower who'd criticized his support for "gay pride" by Tweeting, "I am not a part of any religion. I believe we are all One."

Yet, in the February 2020 performances that would prove to be his last, he was still singing "Home Where I Belong."

"If I like [a] song," he told an interviewer last year, "and I find a way I can really believe it, that's all I need." ■

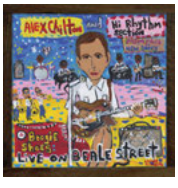
FRAZER HARRISON/GETTY IMAGES

Versatile vinyl

Noteworthy new or recent releases

by Arsenio Orteza

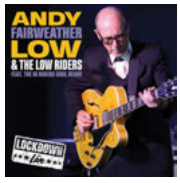
Boogie Shoes: Live on Beale Street **by Alex Chilton & Hi Rhythm Section:** After 12 years of posthumous reissues, Big Star box sets, and barrel scrapings of varying interest, the prospect of hearing late-'90s Chilton putting his hipster spin on a set of rock 'n' roll oldies backed by the Hi guys in the city that gave him his start sounded like a gift horse from whose mouth his fans should most definitely avert their gaze. And at times it almost is. Kept on his toes by this charity event's ad hoc nature, he was clearly having fun. Someone, however, forgot to mic his guitar. And—his notoriety as a curveballer notwithstanding—a lackluster cover of KC & the Sunshine Band's most lackluster hit is a really weird way to kick off a show.



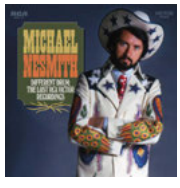
A Selection of Power Pop 1985-2020: 15 Songs **by Bill Lloyd:** If power pop is so great and Lloyd has been any good at making it, why weren't any of these songs hits, if not for Lloyd then for someone with the knack for recognizing a winner when he heard it? Partly because Lloyd didn't craft any of these earworms for a major label, partly because he made them during the years (see the album title) when major labels had already given up on Marshall Crenshaw, the Romantics, Dwight Twilley, and Shoes, and partly because of his subtlety as a lyricist and a sequencer of chords. Conventional wisdom says that power pop should detonate upon impact. Realizing how deeply Lloyd has embedded his shrapnel takes a little longer.



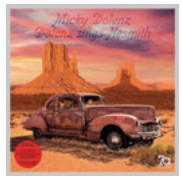
Lockdown Live **by Andy Fairweather Low & the Low Riders, feat. the Hi Riders Soul Review:** Fairweather Low has been giving the term "journeyman" a good name for decades. His secret? Continuing to write and perform as if his solo career as an inspired, soulful pub-rocker hadn't met with unmerited indifference. Ironically, it's by making ends meet as a sideman (Eric Clapton, Roger Waters) that he has retained his sharpness and versatility, qualities that invigorate all 65 minutes of this internationally livestreamed September 2020 COVID-19 show. Highlights include but are by no means limited to his Amen Corner hits (two as a medley), his '70s solo misses, peaks from his last 15 years, and a brass section that's even sharper and more versatile than he is.



Different Drum: The Lost RCA Victor Recordings **by Michael Nesmith:** One adjective seldom associated with the country-rock diaspora is "fun," probably because the genre took flight in the self-consciously hip (as in "hippie") environs of Los Angeles. Michael Nesmith spent his pre-Monkees years in Texas, so the steel guitars in his country-rock swing rather than weep. And his lyrics—well, let's just say that only someone with a Southern accent could sing them with a completely straight face. Even the instrumentals among these 1970-1973 odds and ends have a sense of humor. (The one that rips "Dust My Broom" is called "Tan My Hide.") Funniest of all: Nesmith's use of First National Band ad time to shill for Derek & the Dominos and Morton Subotnick.



Encore



In case you're wondering, the new Micky Dolenz album, ***Dolenz Sings Nesmith***, is no quickie exploitation intended to keep the Monkee business humming until Dolenz and Nesmith can tour again. Rather, it's a reconceptualization that sounds as if Dolenz has taken to heart what he learned as part of the Tribute to the Beatles' White Album tour and passed it on to the album's producer and main instrumentalist, Michael Nesmith's eldest son Christian. "How might Paul have done 'Don't Wait for Me'?" one of them seems to have asked. "And what if George had had his way with 'Circle Sky'?"

The real litmus test, of course, is Nesmith's best-known composition, "Different Drum." Faced with Linda Ronstadt's wistful take and Nesmith's jaunty, aw-shucks version, Dolenz opts for bright sunshine pop, making the breakup classic a full-on celebration of freedom from a bad situation that, if only by analogy, should resonate with particular poignancy this Independence Day. —*A.O.*

Voices MINDY BELZ



Our democracy recession

Only 20 percent of the world's population is "free"

ONE WEEK BEFORE key world leaders gathered in Cornwall, England, for the first G7 meeting of advanced economies in two years, another unnoticed but landmark gathering began not far away in London.

The independent Uyghur Tribunal was a different sort of effort to promote human flourishing through free and open societies. It didn't major on tea with the royal family or fist bumps among vaccinated wealthy-nation leaders, but highlighted the value of a free society by showing what happens where freedom is lost.

The testimony documented the Chinese Communist Party's blatant atrocities against the country's ethnic Uyghurs, who are mostly Muslims. Sir Geoffrey Nice, a British prosecutor who has presided over war crimes trials before, said what he heard from the tribunal's first panel of witnesses was "indescribable."

One nurse at a hospital in Xinjiang province said she saw Chinese doctors perform five forced abortions a day on Uyghurs. "Some babies were born, and they started crying and from this we knew they were alive," she said. "But we knew all babies would be given the injection so we knew they would die before they got home."

A former Uyghur detainee recounted wires pushed into his penis. Another wrapped himself in chains before the watching tribunal to show how Chinese authorities beat him and hung him from a ceiling.

These testimonies are the tip of the iceberg, according to a new dataset from the Oxus Society. It documents 1,151 cases of Uyghurs detained in countries *outside* China. That represents a black network of co-opted states rendering or extraditing Uyghurs back to China—a country that's no rogue nation but among the world's wealthiest, once welcomed to the G7 summits.

Such assaults are part of what Freedom House calls the world's "democratic recession." Its annual report is a flagship barometer that has tracked global trends for more than 40 years. The 2021 findings marked the 15th consecutive year of decline in global freedom—the largest downturn ever recorded—and summarizes: "The long democratic recession is deepening."

China and Russia lead the charge, according to Freedom House, "cheering the breakdown of democracy and exacerbating it." The report highlights declines also in Hong Kong, Belarus, Ethiopia, Algeria, and Turkey. Meanwhile dictators from Venezuela to Cambodia have exploited the pandemic to restrict liberties.

The report shows gains in freedom in diverse countries like Malawi, Taiwan, Montenegro, and Bolivia. Yet its conclusion is staggering: "Less than 20 percent of the world's population now lives in a Free country, the smallest proportion since 1995."

Besides a drastic rise in authoritarian rule, the report attributes declines in freedom to "the fading and inconsistent presence of major democracies on the international stage." Democracy is failing not because it doesn't work, but because its most prominent practitioners aren't doing enough to protect it.

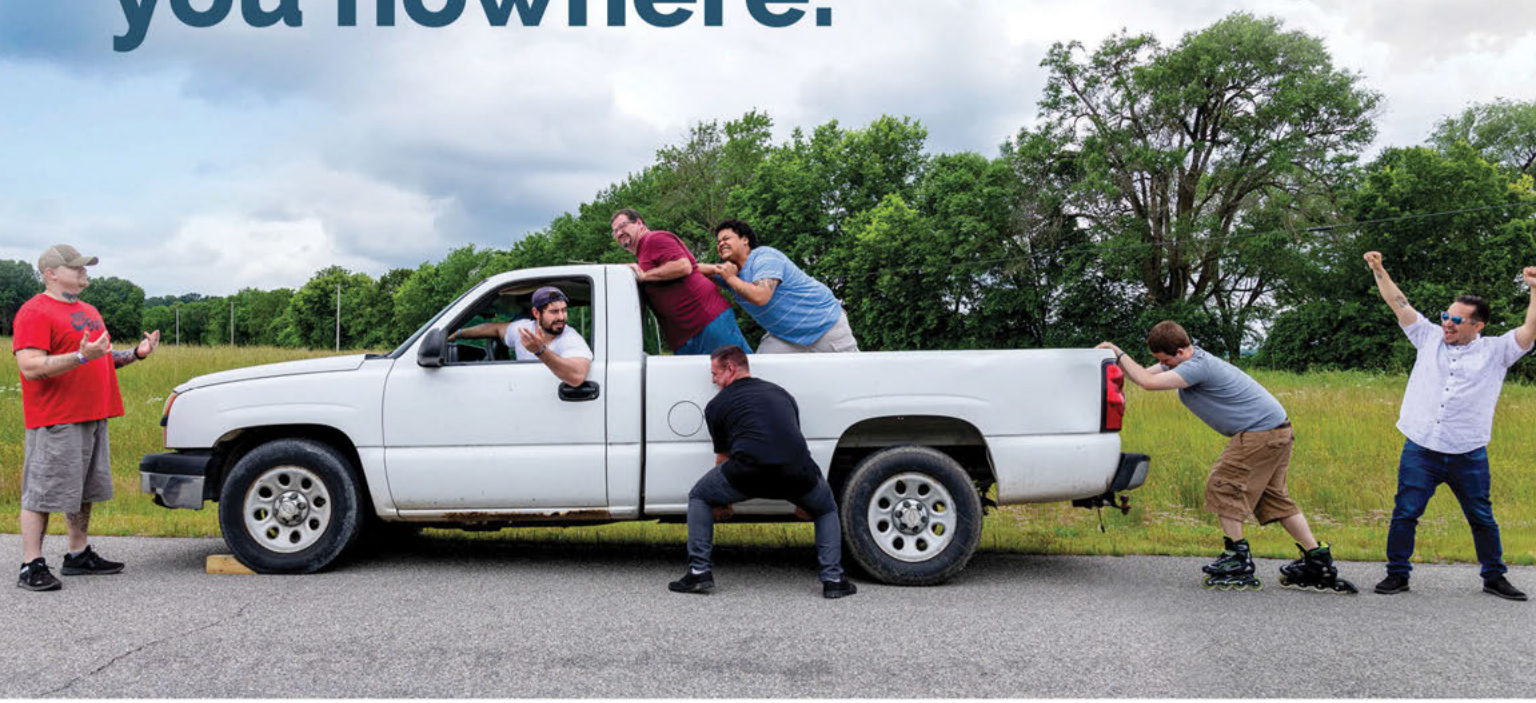
India's ruling Hindu nationalist party targets Muslims and Christians. Europe is awash in statist bureaucracy while witnessing a rise in nationalism, with divides some compare to the rise of Hitler in the 1930s. The United States is gridlocked by partisan divisions, too, with democracy weakening as Democrats move further left into socialism and Republicans to nationalist Trumpism. The United States lost points in the Freedom House index for its lack of transparency, corruption, and the Jan. 6 storming of the U.S. Capitol, which disrupted congressional certification of election results.

Democracy is not our idol, just a demonstrably better system of government than all the others. It's also hard. "Democracy in its essence is kind of improbable," said author Anne Applebaum recently. "It demands things of human beings that are almost inhuman." Election winners sustain institutions that allow their opponents to beat them next time. Compromise on all sides is essential. "All that demands this incredibly high level of consensus as well as a shared reality," Applebaum said.

Recovering shared reality and shared truth in America is perhaps the most pressing hard work. This Independence Day, seeing the dread dangers in all the alternatives can spur that work. It's great work for Christians, who stake their freedom in Christ, whether living in a democracy or an authoritarian state. ■

EMAIL mbelz@wng.org **TWITTER** @mcbelz

Good intentions may get you nowhere.



Most people go into charity work for the right reasons: they genuinely want to help those who are broken down along life's way. Trouble is, many good efforts are misguided and go nowhere, or even worse, they backfire by creating dependency that keeps the poor from ever moving on.

It's essential to hitch our compassion to practices which actually drive results, and that's the purpose of the *True Charity Initiative.*

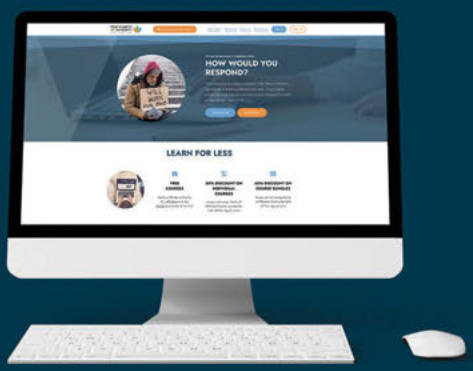
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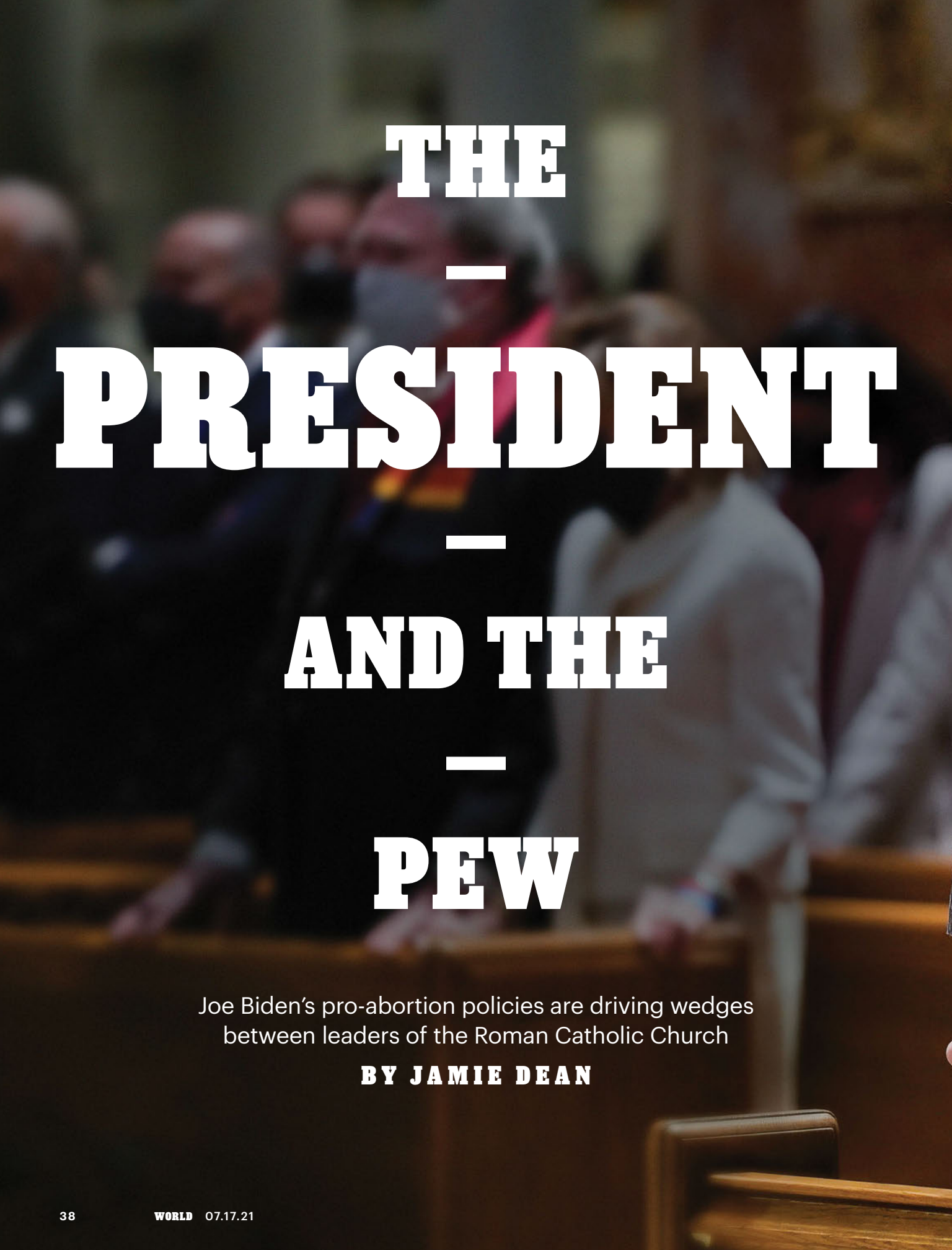
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THE — PRESIDENT — AND THE — PEW

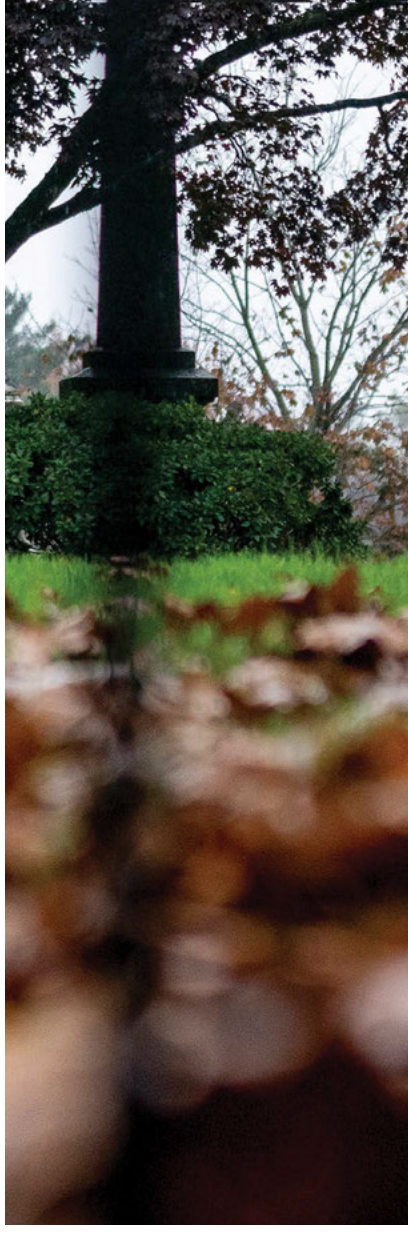
Joe Biden's pro-abortion policies are driving wedges between leaders of the Roman Catholic Church

BY JAMIE DEAN



Joe and Jill Biden attend Mass at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle during Inauguration Day ceremonies in Washington.

PHOTO BY EVAN VUCCI/AP



EARLIER THIS SPRING, WHEN THE ARCHbishop of San Francisco published a pastoral letter on the same day as the Roman Catholic feast of St. Joseph the Worker, he likely had at least one particular Catholic in mind: Joseph Biden, the president of the United States.

U.S. bishops were a few weeks away from debating whether to draft a document about Communion that could include guidelines suggesting whether local bishops should consider withholding Communion from pro-abortion Catholics—particularly those in prominent public positions, such as President Biden.

Some viewed the debate as a hostile attempt to make the Catholic sacrament a political football, with conservative bishops leading the offense against a more moderate team eager to stay out of politics. Others saw it as a pastoral dilemma impossible to separate from a political controversy with spiritual implications.

In his letter to parishioners, Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone called abortion "gravely evil" and said pastors have a responsibility to challenge any prominent Catholic official who promotes it. He said the clergy also has an obligation to assure millions of watching Catholics that the church takes seriously its command to "care for the least of these" by publicly defending the unborn.

In late June, U.S. bishops voted overwhelmingly to draft a document with more teaching on Communion that could include guidelines for pro-abortion politicians.

What that means for the nation's second Catholic president is a question for local bishops to decide. But the ongoing debate spotlights deepening divisions among Catholics and draws attention to the intense pressures pro-abortion groups exert on Democratic politicians to tow an increasingly stark line. The debate also shows Catholic leaders grappling with something new: a Catholic president rapidly promoting chunks of public policy that conflict with Catholic teaching while still remaining devoted to active participation in the Catholic Church.

Even as the bishops debated via videoconference in June, a gay pride flag flew outside the U.S. Embassy to the Vatican in Rome—a public display greenlighted by the Biden administration. "We've never had a situation like this," said Bishop Liam Carey of Baker, Ore. "Where the executive is a Catholic president who is opposed to the teaching of the church."

MOST SUNDAYS, Biden doesn't look opposed to church.

Arriving for Mass in a motorcade is unusual for most Catholics, but a Secret Service detail often whisks the president from the White House to a church aisle, where he waits in line for Communion like an ordinary parishioner.

Growing up in a Catholic family, Biden says he briefly considered entering the priesthood. ("Girls got in the way," he's quipped.) Last fall, during the Democratic National Convention, organizers devoted the last evening to highlighting Biden's religious background.

In October, his campaign spent seven figures on three television and radio ads to target religious voters. One spot showed Biden reading from Psalm 30: "Weeping may endure for the night, but joy cometh in the morning." He credits his Catholic faith with helping him through the loss of his first wife and baby daughter to a car accident in 1972 and his 46-year-old son, Beau, to cancer in 2015.

In 2005, when he was contemplating a second run for the presidency, Biden bristled at claims that the Democratic Party wasn't a party of faith. "The next Republican that tells me that I'm not religious—I'm going to shove my rosary beads down their throat," Biden told *The Cincinnati Enquirer*.

But he's also acknowledged, "I'm as much a cultural Catholic as I am a theological Catholic."

"My idea of self, of family, of community, of the wider world comes straight from my religion," he wrote in a 2008



Biden leaves St. Joseph on the Brandywine Roman Catholic Church in Wilmington, Del., in November 2020.

memoir. "It's not so much the Bible, the Beatitudes, the Ten Commandments, the sacraments, or the prayers I learned. It's the culture."

For some bishops, that's part of the tension: A pro-life culture in the Catholic Church is rooted in the Bible's pro-life teaching. It's difficult to separate the two, even for political considerations.

Still, Biden has said that his Catholic faith has shaped his views about abortion. After the Supreme Court ruled in favor of legalized abortion in 1973, Biden told the *Washingtonian* he thought *Roe v. Wade* went too far: "When it comes to issues like abortion, amnesty, and acid, I'm about as liberal as your grandmother. ... I don't think that a woman has the sole right to say what should happen to her body."

In 1982, from his seat on the Senate Judiciary Committee, Biden voted in favor of a constitutional amendment to allow states to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. "I'm probably a victim, or a product, however you want to phrase it, of my background," he said. (The legislation didn't advance to the full Senate, and Biden voted against the measure the next year.)

In 1987, Biden chaired the Senate Judiciary Committee and opposed President Ronald Reagan's Supreme Court nomination of Robert Bork. A year earlier, Biden said he'd probably vote for him. The change came as activists erupted in opposition to Bork, after Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., declared: "Robert Bork's America is a land in which women would be forced into back alley abortions [and] blacks would sit at segregated lunch counters."

As a Catholic senator, Biden said he personally opposed abortion but supported legal access to it. Pro-abortion groups eventually gave him high marks for his voting record, but he also had

ANDREW HARNIK/AP



limits. For decades, Biden supported the Hyde Amendment—a provision that bans federal funding for most abortions. In 1994, he was emphatic: "Those of us who are opposed to abortions should not be compelled to pay for them."

In 2019, Biden still maintained that position, even after the Democratic Party called for the repeal of Hyde in its 2016 platform. But pressure intensified as he contemplated a presidential bid. In March of that year, Ilyse Hogue, president of NARAL Pro-Choice America, told *The New York Times*: "Joe Biden is trying to carve out a space for himself as the middle, moderate candidate, and he's going to have to really get with the times and understand that standing with abortion rights is the middle, moderate position."

Biden announced his bid for the Democratic nomination in April. On June 5, 2019, his campaign confirmed Biden still supported Hyde. That same day, his Democratic opponents pounced with a barrage of tweets, all denouncing Hyde. Planned Parenthood urged him to reconsider.

Symone Sanders, a Biden adviser, told *The Atlantic* she confronted Biden, arguing that Hyde makes it more difficult for low-income women to get abortions. Patti Solis Doyle, the 2008 campaign manager for Hillary Clinton, told the *Times*: "I'm not sure how sustainable it is for Joe Biden to continue to support the Hyde Amendment. ... Politically, it's a significant problem for him."

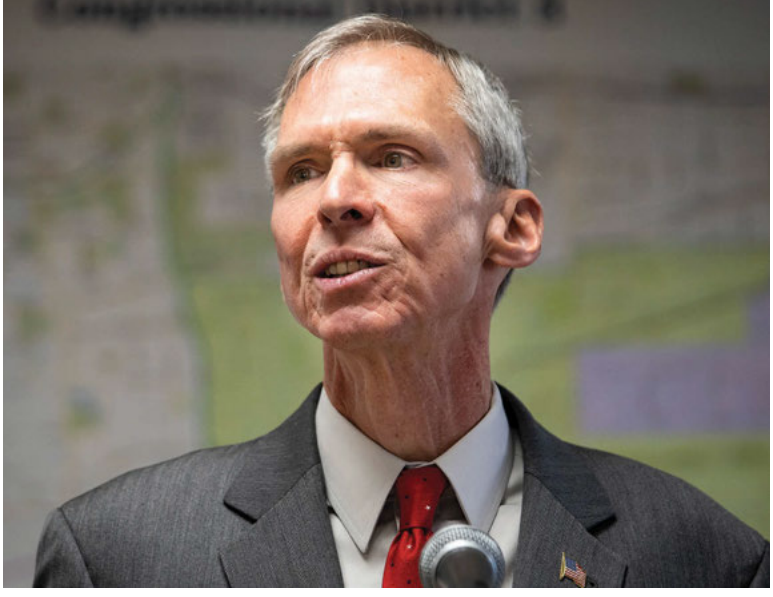
The next day, June 6, 2019, Biden seemed conflicted, even as he shifted. "I make no apologies for my last position, and I make no apologies for what I'm about to say," he told a crowd in Atlanta.

Biden no longer supported Hyde.

IT'S A PRESSURE Dan Lipinski knows well.

The former Democratic congressman from Illinois first won election to the U.S. House in 2005 and joined a handful of other pro-life Democratic lawmakers. The Catholic congressman watched those ranks dwindle to nearly none over the next 15 years.

COMMUNION: MARIO TAMA/GETTY IMAGES





FAR LEFT: The Rev. Arturo Corral distributes Communion during an outdoor Mass at the historic Our Lady Queen of Angels Church in Los Angeles.

LEFT, TOP: Dan Lipinski concedes the Democratic primary to Marie Newman at his election headquarters in Oak Lawn, Ill.

LEFT, BOTTOM: Bishops at a 2017 Mass in Indianapolis

Lipinski rankled fellow Democrats by refusing to vote for the Affordable Care Act in 2010, in part because it didn't include a guarantee that federal funds wouldn't be used to pay for abortions. In 2018, two years after the Democratic Party had abandoned its support for the Hyde Amendment, Lipinski narrowly won his primary race for reelection against pro-abortion opponent Marie Newman.

In 2020, he narrowly lost.

A month before the primary election, pro-abortion groups NARAL and Planned Parenthood announced they would join a handful of other organizations in a final $1.4 million effort to defeat Lipinski. The announcement called him an ally of Republicans who want to "ban abortion and punish women."

"I think it made the difference," Lipinski says.

For Planned Parenthood, the effort was a fraction of the $45 million the group's political advocacy arm announced it would spend to elect pro-abortion candidates in the 2020 elections. NARAL announced it would spend $34.7 million. EMILY's List declared a $20 million campaign to elect pro-abortion, Democratic women.

The Susan B. Anthony List announced a $52 million effort to elect pro-life lawmakers in 2020, but pro-abortion groups' massive funding for Democratic candidates creates a daunting climate for any pro-life Democrat considering federal office—or for Democratic politicians willing to block taxpayer funding of abortion.

"I thought it was important to have a pro-life voice in the Democratic Party," says Lipinski. "And obviously the other side thought it was important to get rid of me." He sees the same dynamic at work in activists' insistence that Democrats drop Hyde—a legislative provision that used to be bipartisan. He said he was "gravely disappointed" to see Biden back down.

On the morning after his defeat, Lipinski stood in his campaign headquarters behind a podium with a sign reading "Re-elect Dan." He congratulated his opponent and told reporters he didn't regret remaining pro-life. "To stand in solidarity with the vulnerable is to become vulnerable," he said. "But there is no higher calling."

IF BIDEN'S PRO-HYDE position made him vulnerable to the demands of abortion advocates before he agreed to relent, his abortion advocacy in the White House makes him vulnerable to the scrutiny of Catholic bishops grappling with a president and a parishioner.

The only other Catholic president, John F. Kennedy, assured skeptical Protestants during his 1960 campaign that he wouldn't take orders from the pope regarding matters of public policy. Biden has said he embraces that approach.

But massive shifts in American law and culture have intertwined politics and religion in ways perhaps unforeseen in 1960. When Biden became the second Catholic president in U.S. history, he took office after the legalization of abortion and gay marriage—practices Catholic teaching denounces.

LIPINSKI: ASHLEE REZIN GARCIA/CHICAGO SUN-TIMES VIA AP; BISHOPS: DARRON CUMMINGS/AP

Still, he's not the first Catholic politician to support both. Democratic Sen. John Kerry's 2004 presidential run sparked debate, but Catholic bishops ultimately agreed local bishops should determine whether to exclude particular parishioners from Communion.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) produced a document saying it would counsel Catholic public officials that "acting consistently to support abortion on demand risks making them cooperators in evil in a public manner."

The bishops warned that such a risk could cause a political figure to create "scandal"—a term the Catholic catechism describes as "an attitude or behavior which leads another to do evil." Francis Beckwith, a Catholic scholar at Baylor University, says the idea of scandal is equivalent to the Biblical warning against "making your brother stumble."

For a Catholic president, that's a lot of brothers.

If the high visibility of Biden's office brings angst to some bishops, so do his policies. Two days after Biden's inauguration, the White House released a statement on the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, calling for Congress to codify the pro-abortion decision into federal law.

The next week he repealed the Mexico City policy that kept federal dollars from funding international organizations that support abortion. The administration proposed changing a Title X rule that prevented family planning dollars from funding abortion businesses.

In April, the administration at least temporarily lifted a restriction requiring women to obtain abortion pills in person instead of by mail. For his secretary of Health and Human Services, Biden tapped Xavier Becerra, the California attorney general who filed charges against pro-life activist David Daleiden and joined a lawsuit opposed to the Catholic group Little Sisters of the Poor during a legal battle for conscience protections.

The president has pushed for passage of the Equality Act, legislation that would gut the Religious Freedom Restoration Act—a bill signed by Democratic President Bill Clinton that provides a legal recourse for religious liberty claims.

And in March, the debate over excluding the 45-year-old Hyde Amendment turned into reality: Biden signed into law the American Rescue Plan Act—without the provision that aims to prevent taxpayer dollars from funding abortions.

THE FLURRY of pro-abortion policy came as bishops in the United States were making plans for their summer meeting and were deciding whether to discuss drafting a document to explain the meaning and importance of the Eucharist in Catholic life.

The bishops had been mulling the idea since at least 2019, when a Pew Research poll indicated nearly 70 percent of self-identified Catholics do not believe the bread and wine used during Mass become the literal body and blood of Jesus—the Catholic doctrine known as transubstantiation.

The poll found most Catholics who don't believe in transubstantiation didn't even know that was the church's teaching.

Bishops began considering how to amplify Catholic teaching, and some proposed including a discussion of Catholic public officials and Communion. In April, Archbishop Joseph Naumann of Kansas City, Kan., told the Associated Press he envisioned a document that would make clear that Biden and other Catholic public figures with similar viewpoints should not present themselves for Communion.

Naumann—chairman of the USCCB's committee on pro-life activities—repeated the concern at the June meeting: "This is a Catholic president that is doing the most aggressive things we have ever seen in terms of this attack on life when it's most innocent."

Other bishops urged caution. Bishop Robert Coerver of Lubbock, Texas, questioned whether electoral politics motivated the discussion: "I can't help but wonder if the years 2022 and 2024 might be part of the rush."

Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego warned that endorsing "public policy–based Eucharistic exclusion" would "invite all the political animosities that so tragically divide our nation into the very heart of the Eucharistic celebration."

Beckwith, the Catholic scholar from Baylor, says there's certainly a political element in the discussions surrounding abortion: "But it's not merely a political issue. … You're talking here about the question of who and who is not a member of the human community."

"ABORTION REMAINS OUR PREEMINENT PRIORITY BECAUSE IT DIRECTLY ATTACKS LIFE ITSELF."

In 2019, the bishops published a letter on "faithful citizenship" that declared: "The threat of abortion remains our preeminent priority because it directly attacks life itself, because it takes place within the sanctuary of the family, and because of the number of lives it destroys."

That may explain why the bishops have focused on the issue of abortion, when Biden and other Catholic politicians have embraced other positions and policies contrary to Catholic teaching:



STEPHEN LAM/THE SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE VIA GETTY IMAGES



Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone (center) enters during an in-church Easter Mass celebration at the Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Assumption in San Francisco.

In 2016, Biden officiated a wedding of two men at his vice presidential residence in Washington, D.C. It's an area where Biden politically and personally supports a position contrary to Catholic teaching.

While Biden is in an unusual position as president, his views aren't necessarily uncommon among other Catholics. A Pew Research poll found 56 percent of self-identified Catholics said abortion should be legal in all or most cases. Some 67 percent of Catholics who attend Mass weekly or more said it should be illegal in some or all cases.

Bishops usually aim to make ecclesiastical decisions based on Catholic doctrine, not Catholic opinion. But the poll numbers reveal gaps in Catholic understanding and practice, and may raise questions about how bishops would consistently apply Eucharistic guidelines to a wide range of Catholics.

For now, the bishops voted 168-55 to proceed with drafting a document about the Eucharist, though two-thirds of the body would have to vote to approve a final version when they meet again in November.

Even if the bishops pass such a document, it won't set a national policy but will instead offer guidelines to local bishops interacting with local Mass-goers, whether public or private figures. Cardinal Wilton Gregory of Washington, D.C., already has said he wouldn't withhold Communion from Biden because he doesn't want to weaponize the Mass.

Meanwhile, the Biden administration continues to set national policy that will likely continue to draw the attention of at least some bishops. The day after the bishops met in June, Secretary of Veteran Affairs Denis McDonough announced at a gay pride event in Orlando that the government plans to offer "confirmation surgery" to transgender veterans.

McDonough is a Catholic. ■

A SUMMER OF WORK?

DOWN, OUT, AND UPWARD IN HOUSTON

BY MARVIN OLASKY, ELAINA BALS, JONATHAN HARBOUR, AND SAM LANDSTRA

Illustrations by Krieg Barrie

PART 2 OF A SERIES



THIS SUMMER, WITH COVID-19 IN THE UNITED STATES APPEARING to be mostly dead, the mostly dead careers of millions of Americans are coming back to life—yet some still feel in a state of suspended animation. Deshuandra Walker, 51, is one of those. She's been unemployed for more than a year following a COVID-19 layoff, but she says a Houston ministry "fully vaccinated" her mindset by helping her "continue on in my faith despite rejections." ¶ Three World Journalism Institute students and I decided to follow five days in the life of that ministry, the WorkFaith Connection. We observed 20 hours of WorkFaith's Job Search Accelerator (JSA), a boot camp in person or by Zoom for those with long-term unemployment or prison records: While employers in parts of the United States are having trouble filling openings, many are still reluctant to hire applicants with big gaps in their resumés.


NO
PARKING
12 NOON TO 2PM
WEDNESDAY
STREET CLEANING



The lead instructor, Rosemary P'Pool, became a WorkFaith staff member in 2018 after a career that included 18 years as a corporate trainer with JPMorgan Chase. She and her colleagues are on track to conduct at least 30 JSAs in 2021. She's seeing a post-COVID change in participants: Fewer have served prison time, and now at least half were imprisoned only in their own homes during the pandemic—"but just as many are in pain."

Although WorkFaith allowed us full on-the-record access to all sessions and participants in the May 24-28 JSA, we are using only initials for current participants who did not consent to a subsequent interview.

DAY 1: On Monday, P'Pool encouraged those with gaps: "We don't have to be ashamed about the time we weren't working, we just have to account for it." She showed them how to relabel years of care for younger siblings as "home crew leader" and years of incarceration as employment by the state of Texas. The goal is to get an interview: "We don't just bring the hope, we bring the how."

P'Pool recommended "progressive disclosure" regarding a troubled background: "Be wise with your honesty" and do not "overshare" past problems. If asked on an application form about felonies or firings, tell the truth but do not write "aggravated assault" or give specifics. Be sure to add, "Please allow me to discuss in the interview." If a gap is due to addiction or alcoholism, write "Conflicting priorities, now resolved."

P'Pool said students should emphasize their changed attitudes concerning work. We asked whether she worries about students gaming the curriculum and not experiencing real change. P'Pool replied, "I let the Lord handle that. They're grown-ups. They're gonna do what they're gonna do.

DAY 2: Instructor Rob Lossman, a former hiring manager and business owner, began Tuesday with a Bible study based on 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." Lossman reflected on God's transformation of the Apostle Paul from persecutor to preacher: We should understand that Christ redeems sinners and removes condemnation. Do not let the past win.

The remaining class time focused on showing awareness of an employer's needs—Profit, Productivity, Safety—while filling out job applications. Participants learned to "state restrictions in a positive manner. Write what you are available to work instead of what you can't work: available M-F 8 a.m.–6 p.m.; available 1st and 2nd shift."

Participant Nubia Cancino, 45, who has a degree in accounting, lost her job on May 5 because of what she called an "alleged procedural infraction." She developed a concise application statement revealing her experience with Microsoft applications and Oracle software.

DAY 3: Lossman selected a practice interview question from the curriculum's list of 22: "Can you think of any reason you would not stay in the job for at least one year?" Participant TB, who worked in construction and has a prison record, said, "Maybe if it didn't have a 401(k)." Lossman cut in, "Think about why the employer is asking the question—to look for commitment. The answer is always 'no.'"

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY KRIEG BARRIE (ORIGINAL PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES)



"WE DON'T JUST BRING THE HOPE, WE BRING THE HOW."

Lossman repeated the question. TB tried again, "No. I would definitely not leave after one year." Lossman: "Right."

Participants received advice on looks and manners. No large belt buckles. Only a tiny dab of perfume. Men should avoid long beards or handlebar mustaches. Jewelry: one or two rings, a watch, nothing else. Cover tattoos, if able. Sit up straight. Women may cross their ankles, but not their legs. Lean up toward interviewers when they lean up, lean back in the chair when they lean back. Open the door for others: It is a kindness that demonstrates humility. People are watching what you are doing or not doing.

Crystal De la Cruz, 46, lost her job in April and admitted that her "willful personality" led to problems. She told us how she left an abusive marriage, became an alcoholic, went through a recovery program, and worked six different jobs in eight years. She stayed late after class to pray with P'Pool: "I still had bitterness from losing my last job." Now she jumped on a practice question, "Tell me about a recent goal and what you did to achieve it." She described staying extra hours to finish tasks and help the company earn its second-highest profit on record.

DAY 4: As the week wore on, honesty increased. Cancino, who on Tuesday spoke of losing a job for an "alleged" infraction, admitted she lacked initiative at her prior employment: "Part of the procedural infraction was not asking for more work." She said she'll "take on more" at a new job to "demonstrate my leadership and skills."

After the lunch break, seven professionals joined the participants to conduct practice interviews. P'Pool stressed the need to acknowledge crime and punishment to employers or interviewers: "If they do not bring it up, it's your obligation to do so."

In her breakout room, BC—a mother of four having trouble finding a job because of a felony conviction for burglary and assault—told how she broke down in tears during a previous job interview while describing her jail time. Now, in her practice interview, she stated, "It's part of my life that's no longer a part of me."

In his breakout room, RF detailed his flexibility and his skills in computer technology and communications. The interviewer asked about his short-term goals: RF said, "Finding a job." Laughing, the volunteer asked, "Once you have a job, what will your long-term goal be?" RF said he wanted to work in a team, grow his skills, and show that "when I do something, I am very passionate about it."

We talked with one of the interviewers, Victoria Fradette, a corporate human resources manager. She recalled interviewing via Zoom one WorkFaith participant, a 45-year-old man who came on-screen in suit and tie. He said his career focus is "the laundry industry" and pointed to 25 years of experience with the state of Texas. Fradette praised his level of experience. He said, "No, ma'am, I was behind bars for 25 years." He had assisted with inmates' laundry.

DAY 5: On Friday, 13 of the original 16 participants still showed up, and five others had joined them. P'Pool emphasized attitudinal change and quoted Philippians 2:13: "Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked

and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world."

P'Pool used Romans 12:1-2 to emphasize the transformation of the mind. Some students showed their own transformations. TA, participating by Zoom, had kept her camera off all week, but today she offered a big smile, pink lip gloss, and a confession: "I had not allowed [God] to be in control of my career journey. ... I had never asked Him, 'What do You want me to do?'"

Participants heard Romans 8:37: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Cancino entered the week expecting, at most, resumé help. She said she left with a strengthened faith—"With Him and in Him I can do anything"—and an understanding of her identity: "It doesn't come from a job title, but God alone."

P'Poole asked participants to write down the lies they had believed about themselves: "We're going to send them back down to that pit of hell where they belong." Participants crumpled their sheets of paper and threw them into wastebaskets.

In the first article of this series ("Down and out in Austin," May 8), WORLD profiled the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). One WorkFaith participant, De la Cruz, is thankful to that governmental organization for giving her gas and bus cards along with use of a computer—but she praised the way WorkFaith emphasizes "what's internal." At TWC she learned technical skills and expected the same from WorkFaith: "I was wrong. ... My work skills are useless without my faith walk. My technical skills are useless without my soft skills."

During a lunch break, De la Cruz stepped up voluntarily and facilitated a participant exchange of contact information as P'Pool sat back, let her get the experience, and afterward praised her leadership. P'Pool said during the week she had seen members of the course change from "wild horses" into "beautiful stallions."

JJ spoke about losing her job at the end of 2019 and then finishing a degree. She had registered with the Texas Workforce Commission and "wasn't expecting much" from WorkFaith that she hadn't already learned at TWC—but WorkFaith helped her to learn how to "communicate my skills to any potential employer."

The Friday afternoon graduation ceremony emphasized that workers are assets, not expendable components. The next step for graduates: WorkFaith offers individual or group job coaching. The goal is to develop both skills and spirituality: We "must replace lies with God's truth." P'Pool's metaphor: God can transform us just as He transforms a caterpillar into a butterfly.

THE PROOF of a program is the flight of its butterflies. In late May, Deshuandra Walker still had not found a job, but continued to receive instruction from WorkFaith while

SUCCESS STORIES



Prison Fellowship

Houston, the fourth-largest city in the United States, has employment development programs and also recovery programs designed to help participants leave behind addiction and alcoholism.

Victory Outreach is one of the best-known recovery programs. It helped Oscar Castellano, 38, who suffered a knee injury and quit his job as grill cook at a Jack in the Box eatery. He sank into alcoholism and spent this past year at a Victory Outreach residential home in San Antonio. Ernest Saldana III, 38, also a current Victory Outreach resident, overcame an addiction to methamphetamines. Both say they will tell potential employers how "the Lord Jesus Christ changed my life."

Prison Fellowship is also well known. It has an Academy program that prepares

PRISON FELLOWSHIP: FACEBOOK



volunteering at church and serving as president of her local homeowners association. She remembers WorkFaith's teaching that her decisions "should be in line with Biblical principles."

Early in 2020, Dora Hoque, 52, took WorkFaith's final in-person course before COVID-19 closures hit America. In a folder alongside her resumé, she still keeps Bible verses she wrote down during the course.

Deborah Somuano, 54, took the class with Hoque. She first took a job manufacturing plastic medical gowns for doctors and nurses caring for COVID-19 patients, then worked her way up to quality control and employee training. She now works in the credit department of Lone Star College and also helps WorkFaith translate its materials into Spanish.

Somuano credits WorkFaith for improving not only her resumé but her emotional stability. On the Monday of her WorkFaith week, Somuano drew a sunflower on one side of a neon orange piece of cardboard and wrote "depressed" and "double-guessing" on its petals. On Friday she showed her new perspective by drawing, on the flip side, a "refreshed" sunflower. ■

—Elaina Bals, Jonathan Harbour, and Sam Landstra are recent World Journalism Institute graduates

prisoners to get jobs quickly after their release. One of its selling points is the correlation between employment and low recidivism rates. One-third to two-thirds of ex-offenders wind up back in prison, but a 2019 study showed only 9.65 percent of Academy graduates re-incarcerated within three years of their release. A 2015 national study by the Manhattan Institute reached a similar conclusion: Reentry programs significantly reduce recidivism among nonviolent offenders. The headline on one issue of *Inside Journal*, Prison Fellowship's newspaper: "Get Out—And Don't Come Back."

Houston's Adult and Teen Challenge (part of the national recovery organization formerly known as just Teen Challenge) also has success stories: Men's Rehab Director Rodney Daniels says it helps residents become "sober and free." WorkFaith participant Crystal De la Cruz remembers graduating from a Challenge program with a new trust and dependence on God. The downside: She had "no car, no house, no job, and no family." She then lived at Sally's House, a transitional home, and heard about WorkFaith there.

Jobs for Life, an employment development nonprofit, partners with churches and nonprofits nationally to train community leaders in a job readiness course curriculum that emphasizes a Christian view of work. A secular Houston group, SER Jobs, offers tailored job coaching and job search support along with occupational and financial training. Latasha Alsbrooks, a nonprofit supervisor, uses SER to find employees from among those with long prison records.

WorkFaith was WORLD's 2012 Hope Award for Effective Compassion winner. In 2021 it operates out of three Houston locations with 20 employees and additional volunteers who have equipped more than 5,300 people with job readiness skills. It tries to meld faith and work fitness: When De la Cruz enrolled in WorkFaith, she expected training in technical skills similar to that offered by the Texas Workforce Commission and SER—but WorkFaith reminded her of God's sovereignty. *—E.B.*



A man whose son was kidnapped by gunmen sits at the Government Science Secondary School in Kankara, Nigeria.

KOLA SULAIMON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



NIGERIA'S KIDNAPPING, INC.

Armed groups have abducted thousands of Nigerians in recent months. The government blames bandits, but international observers highlight religious motivation

by Onize Ohikere in Abuja, Nigeria

STEPHEN SHUANI, 30, LEFT HIS FAMILY ON MARCH 10 AND RETURNED TO THE FEDERAL COLLEGE OF FORESTRY MECHANIZATION IN NORTHWEST NIGERIA'S KADUNA STATE. HE DECIDED TO RETURN TO CAMPUS TO STUDY FOR THE FINAL EXAMS REQUIRED TO OBTAIN A HIGHER NATIONAL DIPLOMA CERTIFICATE.

At 9:30 p.m. the next day, gunmen cut a hole through the perimeter fence of the college and started shooting. The suspected militant herdsmen entered the students' hostels and took 23 females and 16 males, including Stephen, 30.

His older sister Jennifer was still lying in bed the following morning when her mother called to inform her. "Somehow in my head, I was saying, *It's not possible, he's not part of them*," she said.

School abductions in Nigeria first drew international attention with the kidnappings of the Chibok schoolgirls in 2014 and Leah Sharibu's kidnapping in 2018. Nigeria's abduction business has continued to boom. Since December 2020, heavily armed kidnappers have abducted more than 800 students, some as young as 10. Nigerians paid at least $18.34 million in ransom to abductors between June 2011 and the end of March 2020, according to SB Morgen (SBM) Intelligence. The Lagos–based political risk analysis firm said the majority of those payments happened between January 2016 and March 2020.

Islamic insurgent groups—Boko Haram and Islamic State West African Province—immediately claimed responsibility for the Chibok and Sharibu attacks respectively, but Nigerian authorities have blamed much of the recent violence on kidnapping-for-ransom criminal gangs they call "bandits" or "unidentified gunmen." But abductions and killings have continued to plague religious communities and other regions previously void of such violence. While security analysts report growing links between kidnapping groups and established Islamic extremists, international groups are calling for the Nigerian government to act.

JENNIFER struggled to believe her brother was gone. Over and over she called his cell phone, but it was off. When abductors released the first proof-of-life video two days after the abduction, Jennifer spotted Stephen among the students crammed together on the ground while one of their captors struck them with a whip. "That's when reality hit," she said.

The captors held the hostages at a camp near several settlements of Fulani herdsmen, semi-nomadic, largely Muslim cattle farmers sometimes implicated in armed attacks. The men running the operation were all ages, including one as young as 15. They released 10 students in two batches about a month after the attack, but Stephen was not among them.

The abductors initially demanded a 500 million naira (about $1.2 million) ransom from the government. But when state Gov. Nasir El-Rufai ruled out negotiating with the criminals, kidnappers contacted families directly.

Jennifer got her call on a Sunday. The kidnapper demanded 25 million naira ($60,000) for her brother. The kidnapper threatened to kill him if the family failed to raise the money, then passed the phone to Stephen.

"He said we should just try to raise whatever we can, even if we borrow," she recalled. Stephen said he could work to pay it back.

Stephen's family scrambled. Jennifer designed posters with his picture and circulated them on social media sites to raise awareness and funds for his ransom. The family prayed together daily and constantly called each other to check in and share updates. "I can't deny the fact that the hand of God was at play through all of this," Jennifer said.

Abductees' parents also set up a committee to advocate for their rescue. They staged a demonstration outside the National Assembly in the capital city of Abuja and did radio interviews.

"Why should our innocent children pay for the failure of the government to provide security of life and property?" leaders of the parents' committee said in a statement. "Or is it now a crime to seek education in schools?"

SCHOOLS have become one of the abductors' primary targets. On Dec. 11, 2020, gunmen riding motorcycles entered the all-boys Government Science Secondary School in Kankara, in the northwestern state of Katsina, and carted away 344 students. On Feb. 17,

gunmen took 27 students, along with some staff members and their relatives, from Government Science College Kagara, in Niger state. One student died. Nine days later, abductors captured 279 schoolgirls from their boarding school in northwest Zamfara state.

On May 29, some 14 students and staff from the private Greenfield University—located along the Kaduna-Abuja highway, notorious for kidnappings—reunited with their families after more than a month in captivity. Five students had already died, and the gunmen released one of them on May 1 after his family paid a ransom.

One day after the Greenfield release, gunmen seized 136 students from the Salihu Tanko Islamic school in Niger. On June 17, armed men seized more than 60 students and about eight teachers from the Federal Government College, Birnin Yauri, in northwest Kebbi state.

Boko Haram claimed responsibility for the Kankara attack, but security forces have neither identified nor caught the culprits in most other cases. They blame gangs, armed Fulani herdsmen, and other armed militia operating in the region. Most are comprised of Muslims.

NORTHWEST Nigeria is at the center of the complex security crisis. The gangs include armed herders who have clashed with majority farming communities. Weapons traced back to war-torn Libya have proliferated in the region, spurring even more violence. Criminal groups operate in lawless backcountries that forestry authorities once patrolled.

The International Crisis Group reported last May that many criminal groups in the region lack a clear religious orientation but partnered with extremist groups in ambush training or in arms sales. Others have worked with the armed herders to terrorize farming communities.

"This is not to say it can't evolve," said Olajumoke Ayandele, a human security and counterterrorism expert. She listed the region's high unemployment, lack of security, and government response as concerning factors. "They're all interacting with each other," she said of the many groups.

But the security vacuum has emboldened insurgent groups like the Islamic State West Africa Province and al-Qaeda affiliate Ansaru, which want to build a regional presence.

"A poorly secured international boundary, meanwhile, enables the influx of arms and facilitates the movement of jihadists to and



Students from the Government Science Secondary School walk to a government building on Dec. 18, 2020, a day after their release from armed abductors.

KOLA SULAIMON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



Released after nearly a week of captivity, boys from Government Science Secondary School huddle together in Katsina, Nigeria, in December 2020.

from the Sahel, where the Islamic State has been expanding its influence," the International Crisis Group noted.

The attacks have also included religious communities across a widening area. On May 20, armed men stormed a Catholic church in northern Katsina state, where they killed one priest and abducted another. The Jesuit magazine *America* reported in February at least 20 priests have been abducted over the past five years.

Such attacks are also springing up in majority Christian southern states, where some communities are battling secessionist movements and increasing armed herdsmen attacks.

On May 10, suspected armed herdsmen abducted Pastor Otamayomi Ogedengbe while he was preaching at his Deeper Life Christian Church in southwestern Ondo state. On the night of June 5, at least 20 people died when suspected Fulani herders staged a reprisal attack on the Igangan community in southwestern Oyo state.

At least 1,470 Nigerian Christians died in attacks from January to April, according to a report by Nigeria-based rights group Intersociety Rule of Law, which drew international attention. The report blamed Fulani herdsmen for more than 800 of those deaths. Intersociety Rule of Law estimated 3,200 Nigerians were abducted within the same period, including about 2,200 Christians.

Part of the problem is that religious intolerance has grown in recent years, the Rev. Fr. Anthony Bature, a Catholic priest in northeastern Taraba state said during a recent hearing organized by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

He recalled how Christians and Muslims in the past jointly celebrated Christmas and Islamic Eid holidays. "The political leaders have seen religion as a tool to manipulate the vulnerable masses of the society," he said. "There is need to revive national consciousness."

In December, the U.S. State Department declared Nigeria a country of particular concern under the International Religious Freedom Act—making it the first secular democracy to receive the designation. That means it could face economic sanctions or risk losing U.S. aid.

Frustration is also building locally. On May 24, several young people burned tires and blocked cars from moving along the Kaduna-Abuja highway to decry kidnapping along the notorious road and its neighboring communities. Gunmen killed three people and kidnapped 15 others in a recent attack in the area.

But the school cases have drawn wider attention since they are what many analysts have referred to as "soft targets." Dozens of state leaders across the region shut down boarding schools that lacked fences and security measures.

JENNIFER received another early morning call from her mother on May 5. This time it was good news.

A local television station was broadcasting video of three white buses arriving at the police headquarters

SUNDAY ALAMBA/AP

in Kaduna state with the kidnapped students. They came out with dirt-matted hair, still dressed in the nightwear they had on when the kidnappers took them. They had to walk nine hours to meet up with security officials after their abductors released them.

Jennifer turned on the television and saw Stephen. She felt both relief and guilt. "This is my younger brother. I should be able to do something," she told me, breaking down in tears. "I thank God I didn't fail him."

Two days later, Stephen's mother Catherine stood with her niece among other anxious mothers and family members back at the college's student hall. Screams and loud cries replaced nervous chatter as the 29 students held captive for 55 days filed in through a side door.

Catherine spotted her son and yelled his nickname as he walked toward her, a tired smile on his face. She gripped him tightly and wept on his chest while he patted her back, comforting her.

"Bobo is back, praise God," said his cousin, who recorded the reunion.

"3,200 NIGERIANS WERE ABDUCTED ... INCLUDING ABOUT 2,200 CHRISTIANS."

The parents' association at Stephen's school confirmed they paid a ransom to the abductors but refused to provide any additional details. The students suspected herdsmen were involved in their abduction because of the location their captors kept them. But authorities never provided more details besides calling them "armed bandits."

The federal government, not the states, controls police and security agencies. State leaders say security agencies take too long to respond to problems or are absent in many rural areas.

States like Zamfara have offered armed groups amnesty and other incentives in exchange for peace and surrendering their weapons. Other officials in places like Kaduna state, where Stephen's school is located, have insisted they would not enable criminals with payments.

Zailani Bappa, a media adviser for the Zamfara state governor, told Reuters in March that the government did not pay ransom to the abductors of the Jangebe students but offered them amnesty and assistance resettling in a new community.

Niger state Gov. Abubakar Bello in March called the policy a failure since the criminals use the government funds to "purchase more weapons." In February, Auwalun Daudawa—a criminal suspected as the mastermind of the kidnapping in Kankara—and some of his followers surrendered 20 AK-47 rifles and vowed never to engage in criminal activity again. Local media reported he died in May during a gun battle with a rival gang. He developed a relationshiop with Boko Haram, which claimed responsibility for the Kankara attack.

Meanwhile, the Nigerian Senate has been debating a bill that would sentence anyone who pays ransom to terrorists or kidnappers to up to 15 years in prison.

Ayandele, the counterterrorism expert, has called for a strategy that emphasizes a greater role for community leaders, community policing, and stronger cooperation between intelligence and security agencies.

International rights groups have also criticized the Nigerian government's response.

During the USCIRF virtual hearing in June, Mike Jobbins with Search for Common Ground called on the United States to increase partnerships with Nigerian institutions to document attacks. The crisis reporting so far, he explained, is flooded with incidents blamed on "unidentified gunmen."

Former U.S. Rep. Frank Wolf warned the violence is affecting nearby countries and called for a special envoy for Nigeria and the Lake Chad region.

"I believe ... that Nigeria will implode," Wolf said in the USCIRF hearing. "If this were happening in Scandinavia, if this were happening in Eastern Europe, do you think the world would be silent? The world would be engaged, and right now the world is not engaged."

A FEW WEEKS after Stephen's release, he wore a white, traditional outfit to join his family for an early morning thanksgiving Mass at their family church. He danced forward next to his mother, her face glowing with a smile.

He plans to return to school to finish his exams and start his mandatory service in the National Youth Service Corps. Despite the celebration, Jennifer worries about the impact of the nearly two-month experience on her brother. He acts indifferent and only sleeps in short spurts. "At 3 a.m., you hear him moving around looking for what to do."

A request from the parents' committee for the state to provide therapy for the students is still pending, Jennifer said.

Though her brother is now free, Jennifer still thinks of the other students in captivity and the near daily abductions. "I'm scared for where we're going," she said. "A whole lot of people are really disconnected from the reality of what's happening." ■

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A look back at key coverage from WORLD

by Marvin Olasky

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KRIEG BARRIE

WORD BY WORD, YEAR

TO CELEBRATE 40 YEARS of God's World Publications, we're running a three-part series on stories that have been fundamental to what GWP stands for. In this issue we'll look at our coverage of two issues that emerge from Chapter 1 of Genesis. The next issue will show how we've tried to reflect God's concern for the poor and the helpless. Part three of the series will show how we've covered the most helpless of the helpless, babies in the womb and those who try to protect them.

We have firmly stood by the Bible's history of creation and opposed fashionable evolutionary doctrine. Chapter 1 of Genesis disallows all variants of Darwinistic materialism. It also rules out "theistic evolution" in which nature tosses a coin trillions of times, with God making it come up heads. Rachel Aldrich on the following pages describes WORLD's consistent coverage of God's intelligent design of the entire universe.

The closing verses of Genesis 1 are similarly clear about the nature of man and our relationship to the rest of God's creation. Crucially, "God created man in his own image … male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). My wife Susan writes on pages 62-63 about the time 24 years ago that ardent feminists propelled the most-used Bible translation toward removal of pronouns and other usages that recognize the difference between the sexes.

It's good to look back at our coverage of these two crucial areas and see how WORLD has remained consistent throughout the years. Zondervan's charge against us in 1997 was that "WORLD seemed to be unconscious of its duty to protect the good names and reputations of Zondervan" and its publishing allies. To that I responded, "by the public relations standard, WORLD did act unethically. But I do not apologize for that. If telling the truth is unethical, we hope to be unethical next month, and the month after, and the month after that."

Now, 289 months later, we receive similar criticism for not serving the public relations interests of companies, politicians, or even pastors who put dollars, votes, or egos ahead of the Bible. I hope and trust we will continue to be "unethical" by that standard. Thanks be to God for the way He's protected God's World Publications for 40 years.

BY YEAR



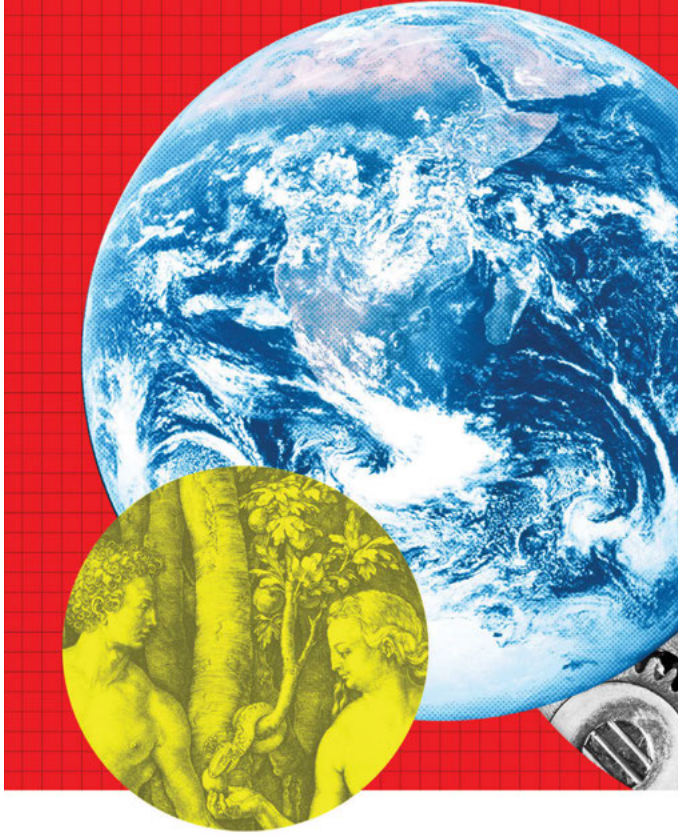
ILLUSTRATION BY KRIEG BARRIE

40 years

STANDING ON GENESIS

God's purposeful design of the Earth is the foundation of WORLD's origins coverage

by Rachel Aldrich



LISTENERS TO WORLD'S daily podcast, *The World and Everything in It*, have probably noticed a semi-subtle musical riff from the opening line of the hymn "This Is My Father's World." WORLD's reporting has always reflected what we believe: This is God's world because He made it.

Scientific debates and questions about the world's origin have always been central to WORLD's coverage. The doctrine of creation provides the factual backbone supporting the idea that, as Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper said, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'"

Debates over origins are contentious and complex because they involve complex scientific data and deal with ultimate questions about religion and metaphysics. Some scientists, both Christians and non-Christians, have tried to define away the conflict by insisting religion and science operate in completely different spheres.

WORLD takes the Bible's claims seriously, so we don't consign them to a narrow part of life and insist Scripture has nothing to say about science. Over the years, our coverage has sought to stand firm when the Bible is clear while leaving room for debate among serious-minded Christians when it is not.

Mainstream biologists say an updated version of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution (generally known as neo-Darwinism) is true. They often denigrate opposing arguments as anti-science. Their pop-science drumbeat: Life resulted from a combination of random genetic mutation and survival-driven natural selection. Any objections, the common story goes, arise from religious motivation and have no basis in the evidence.

The Bible, though, shows that God made the universe and the life that inhabits it with *purpose*. Darwinism insists that everything is purposeless. The Bible starts with a statement of intention: "In the beginning, God *created*" (Genesis 1:1). Darwinism starts with a mechanism of accident: random selection. The Bible posits design: "I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). Darwinism holds out historical contingency: Some conglomerations of cells survived and others did not. The Bible views the world as a testament to the goodness of a loving Creator. Darwinism paints a cruel and godless picture. God says His world was created "very good." Darwinism says nature is red in tooth and claw.

Some Christian scientists have tried to split the difference by advocating what is popularly known as theistic evolution (some refer to it as evolutionary creationism). Theistic evolution grants the entire Darwinian description of how life originated and evolved, then asserts that God was at work through the process.



Though these theorists may be quicker to claim God is responsible for the origin of the first life or perhaps the Big Bang, the basic picture they paint of biological life on Earth differs very little from an atheistic one.

Practically, that means theistic evolutionists must throw out almost the entirety of the Genesis account besides "God created." And they grant evolutionary theory a believability it doesn't deserve. The complexity of cellular life, gaps in the fossil record, unexplained evolutionary anomalies like the Cambrian explosion, and the careful balances in biology, physics, and more that allow life to exist, all illustrate care and intentionality, not random chance. Theistic evolution forfeits the game too readily and loses most of the Christian story along the way.

WORLD stands with the Genesis account that God created the world. He made it and its creatures very good. He fashioned man and woman in His own image. Man's fall brought sin into the world. That framework forms what we regard as a medium-size tent. From there WORLD has reported with balance on the debates Christians have about how God chose to carry out His plan.

The most prominent disagreement among creationists regards the age of Earth. Young-Earth creationists say the planet is somewhere between 6,000 and 10,000 years old and point out that the science of geologic timescales is more unsettled than mainstream science admits. This version of creationism insists on six literal days and sometimes relies on Genesis' genealogies to estimate when creation might have occurred.

Old-Earth creationists agree the Genesis account is true but think that doesn't necessitate throwing out longer timescales. Often, they think the six "days" of creation could be metaphorical and can cover those large spans of time. They usually maintain that the special creation of man happened much more recently than mainstream scientists would think the first *Homo sapiens* arose.

Another major theory, intelligent design, differs from all the others in that its central claim isn't metaphysical at all, though it has metaphysical implications. Intelligent design's main contention is material: Evidence points to the world's design. Besides that, it maintains its own big tent with many ideas about who that designer may be. Many Christians have found an intellectual home at intelligent design's main hub, the Discovery Institute. (Disclosure: I worked there for three years.) But so have practicing Jews and even agnostics, which is what makes it such a powerful opponent of neo-Darwinism.

The intelligent design community's existence contradicts the notion that science equals evolution: You don't have to have a prior commitment to Christianity (or any other religion) to recognize that the world didn't spring from random mutation and blind selection. And that is a distinctly Biblical idea: "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made" (Romans 1:20).

WORLD's reporting has highlighted how standard evolutionary theory contradicts Scripture. We have introduced readers to scientists arguing against Darwinism. Their arguments tackle ideas from Darwinism's theory of common descent of all creatures and its classification of humans as mere matter, to its account of the origin of life. Social Darwinism, or the theory as applied to society, gave birth to horrific abuses, including eugenics.

As WORLD strives to cover events in God's world in a Biblically objective way, we always start with affirming that this is God's world. He made it and sustains it by His power. That's why we have always prioritized scientific coverage and will continue to do so. ■

40 years

TRANSLATION MANIPULATION

In 1997 WORLD uncovered a plan to reshape the most popular English translation of the Bible

by Susan Olasky

IN EARLY 1997 a call came to the Olasky home with a tip: The NIV was quietly going gender-neutral. Would WORLD be interested in the story?

At that time WORLD's staff was small, so editor Marvin asked me to make a few calls. From that small beginning came a story that rocked the evangelical world and the larger world of Bible publishing—and threatened WORLD's existence as well.

The initial story ran on the cover of the March 29, 1997, issue with the attention-grabbing headline "Stealth Bible" over an image of a Bible in the shape of a stealth bomber, the military's state-of-the-art airplane. The inside headline shouted "Femme fatale." Under it in large letters, "The feminist seduction of the evangelical church: The New International Version of the Bible—the best-selling English version in the world—is quietly going 'gender-neutral.'"

In reporting the story, I interviewed Larry Walker and Kenneth Barker of the Committee on Bible Translation (CBT), the obscure group with exclusive control over the text of the NIV. I also interviewed pastors and elders at particular churches and seminary professors about the trend.

We obtained a copy of the already-published British version (NIV Inclusive Language Edition) and found many of the translating choices troubling. Some sounded awkward: "fishers of men" became "fishers of men and women." Others changed meaning. Doing away with "blessed is the man who does not walk ..." and replacing it with "blessed are those ..." turns the focus from the brave individual to a crowd. Replacing "God created man" with "God created human beings ..." cloaks the unity of mankind. And replacing "protects all his bones ..." with "protects all their bones" obscures a reference to Christ.

Our articles drew rapid responses, many of them negative. Two groups mentioned in the article, the International Bible Society (IBS) and Zondervan, issued denials on their websites. Even some readers who oppose unisex trends in society thought maybe WORLD had got it wrong. Why else would IBS and Zondervan, respected organizations that had done wonderful things in the past, complain so vociferously?

The more we dug, the clearer the story became: Groups charged with protecting the Bible had bowed to ideological pressure. As WORLD continued reporting, Zondervan and IBS backtracked and changed attack lines. The rapidly developing story undermined their denials. Evangelical leaders joined the fight. Jerry Falwell sent reprints of the articles to his 50,000-member mailing list. The Baptist Sunday School Board met to decide whether to continue using the NIV in its curriculum. Focus on the Family founder James Dobson came out against gender-neutral Bibles even after discovering that his own *Odyssey Bible* used a gender-neutral translation. He withdrew it and offered refunds.

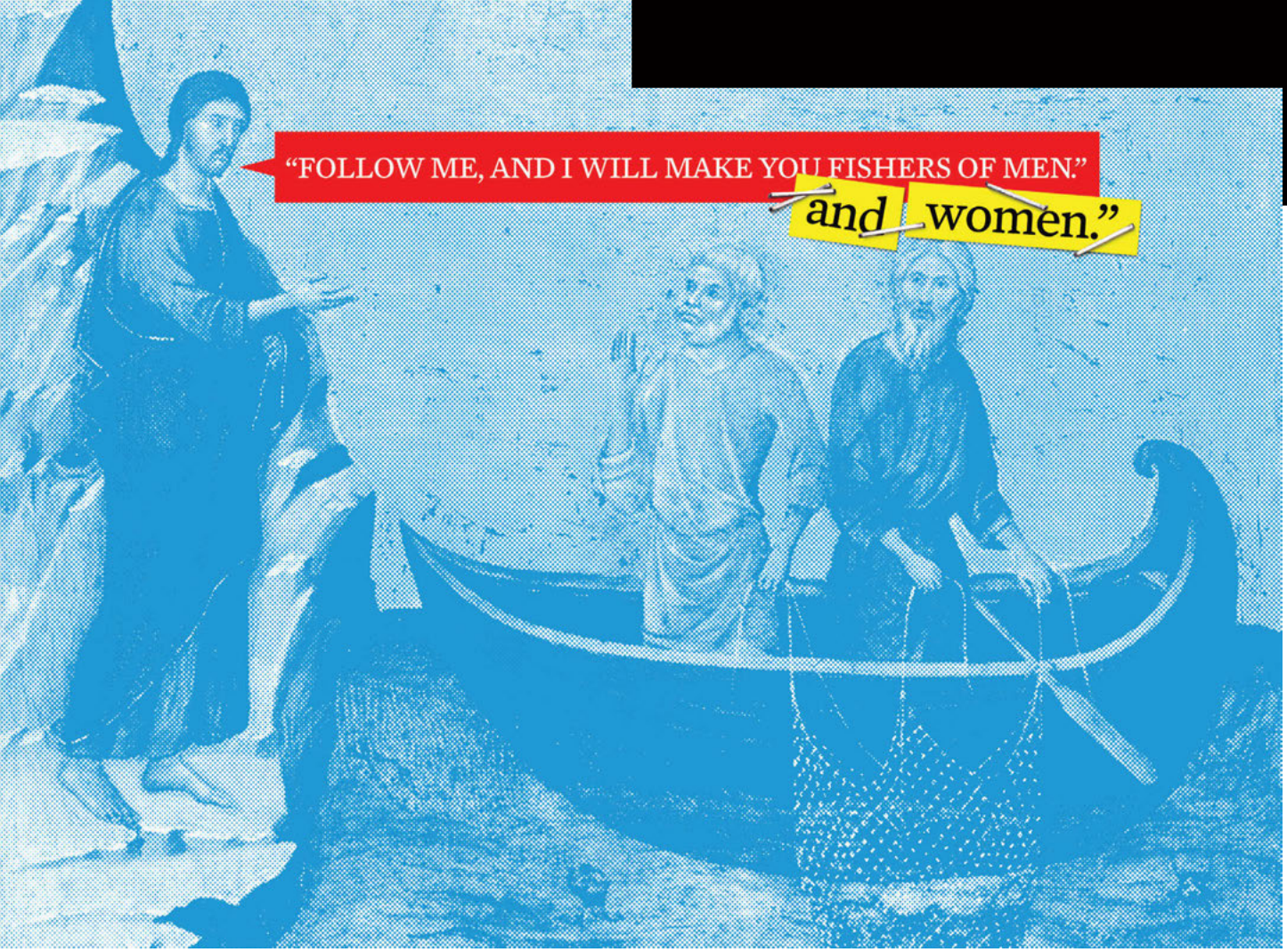
Dobson also sought a way forward: He invited to Colorado Springs representatives from the CBT, IBS, Zondervan, and their critics, including WORLD publisher Joel Belz. Dobson's goal was to hammer out an agreement on principles that should guide Bible translation work.

Early on the morning of the Focus-convened meeting, IBS announced that it would discontinue all plans for a new, gender-neutral version of the NIV and ask the British publisher to yank the NIV inclusive-language edition (NIVI) then being sold in Britain. IBS also promised to revise its inclusive-language children's Bible, the NIrV, to bring it in line with the then-current NIV.

Later that day the meeting participants signed a statement declaring that "many of the translation decisions made by those who produced Hodder and Stoughton's *New International Version Inclusive Language Edition* in the United Kingdom were not wise choices." It called "regrettable and sadly misleading" the phrase in the preface to the NIVI that says "it is often appropriate to mute the patriarchalism of the culture of the biblical writers through gender-inclusive language."

The statement agreed to specific translating principles that conservatives had been advocating: maintain

CREDIT



the generic use of he, him, his, himself; use "man" to designate the human race; don't change singulars to plurals. An IBS press release said its new policy "effectively eliminates incorporation of gender-related language revisions" in all NIV Bibles it licensed.

Yet WORLD ended its report on these developments with these words: "The battle for the Bible is not over." That was true. Zondervan complained to the Evangelical Press Association that WORLD (and I) had violated the organization's code of ethics by damaging the publisher's reputation: WORLD "seems to be unconscious of its duty to protect the good names and reputations of Zondervan Publishing House, International Bible Society, and Committee on Bible Translation." WORLD eventually withdrew from that group, since it emphasized public relations rather than journalism.

And the story continued. By 1999 Zondervan, IBS, and the CBT were back at it. After pledging just two years earlier "to discontinue all plans to develop a new, gender-neutral version of the NIV," they hinted at a new "rendition" that would be gender-neutral. They announced publication of the TNIV New Testament in 2002.

A February 2002 WORLD article used the movie *Groundhog Day* to describe what was going on: "The two organizations were breaking well-publicized agreements that had seemed to deliver them from a public-relations quagmire. They were admitting that work on a gender-neutral Bible had continued despite IBS's pledge that it would not."

Despite a $1 million marketing budget and ads that ran in *Rolling Stone* and *Modern Bride*, the TNIV never caught on. By 2009 IBS, now called Biblica, announced it would go out of print by 2011. CEO Keith Danby said, "We failed to live up to the trust that had been placed in us. ... The feeling is, don't mess with my Bible." ■

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PLANTING PEONIES

At Swenson Gardens in Minnesota, pesticide-free flowers are the family business

by David Aeilts

SWENSON GARDENS in Howard Lake, Minn.—about 45 miles west of Minneapolis—began in 2002 when Keith and Becky Swenson put a few hundred peony roots in the ground. Because they were committed to homeschooling their children, Britta, 6, and Luke, 4, they wanted a family business that could teach their children the value of work.

Peony propagation was Keith's idea—and he wanted to do it without chemicals: "We wanted our fields to be clean— →

BECKY SWENSON

especially as our kids grew up, crawling around on their hands and knees and weeding."

It took Becky about five years—around the time they moved from leased land to their own 140-acre farm—to get on board. In the early years Keith worked a day job to pay the bills, and she schooled the kids. They all pitched in to care for the peonies. That meant slathering the children with sunscreen and explaining why they had to work instead of watch a movie. When Keith got home, the family would drive to the field to pull weeds.

THEY HAND-WEED AND ENCOURAGE HONEYBEES, BUTTERFLIES, AND GOOD APHIDS TO EAT THE BAD ONES.



Becky remembers when sunscreen would find its way into the children's eyes and cause them to cry: "We'd have to bring them back home, clean them up and go back out to the field. ... They were not willing workers." But gradually the children became excited about the business. Becky also embraced it: "I realized this was really something God wanted us to do."

Because they wanted to raise their flowers without the chemical fertilizers and pesticides that other peony growers use, they had to find alternatives. They leave future peony fields fallow and amend soils with animal manure and compost. Their motto: "A scoop of poop will do."

They keep down weeds before they plant with tillage instead of pesticide. They hand-weed and encourage honeybees, butterflies, and good aphids to eat the bad ones. The result: robust peony plants. Labor costs are higher, but Keith says, "We get more vigorous, disease resistant, and absolutely gorgeous flowers to show off God's creation." They name new peony hybrids after God's attributes.

They've also learned to pray for and rely on God's mercy. In 2019 workers dug, divided, tagged, and washed thousands of peony roots for shipping. The Swensons closed the barn doors on the harvest, a year's worth of effort, and sat down for dinner as a violent wind whipped trees and rain pelted the barn. Family room windows overlooking a hay field rattled loudly, and walls seemed to move. The next day they learned that a tornado had headed right toward them but abruptly shifted, flattening the hay in the south field. They had worked hard, but "the Lord is in complete control," Becky said.

Almost two decades after its founding, the business has flourished. The Swensons now plant 15,000 peony roots annually and ship throughout the United States and the world. They teach leadership skills to the teens who weed the gardens, and each June they host thousands of photographers, plein-air artists, and garden club members during Peony Field Days. ■

—David Aeilts is a World Journalism Institute graduate

SWENSON GARDENS



ART THE HARD WAY

Artist, potter, and lithographer Jake Van Wyk finds inspiration in the spiritual world

by Rachel McClamroch

JAKE VAN WYK is in his studio in Sioux Center, Iowa, by 5:30 a.m. It is light, airy, organized. He lets public radio or rock music blast through the speakers in every corner, then gets his hands dirty.

After 30 years as a full-time college professor, Van Wyk enjoys how retirement allows him to pour so much work into his avocations. He may spend the morning at the pottery wheel, working with a clay mix he wrote the recipe for himself, or he may be in the next workroom over, re-creating a 19th-century printing process called stone lithography.

"It's physical and it's difficult," he says of the lithography. "If you want to do something the hard way, I'm there."

Van Wyk grew up as a first-generation American farm kid on the West Coast, and it shows in how he relishes challenging projects and a hands-on approach to life. He turned 70 in June, but he says he would still feel 25 years old if the mirror didn't remind him: "I like to think I still have that energy, that mindfulness."

The front part of Van Wyk's studio, decorated as a gallery, is lined with functional pottery for sale—mugs, vases, platters, baking dishes. His wife Trena, a frequent baker, advises on practical sizes and shapes. He also sometimes draws the occasional landscape.

Van Wyk's passion, though, is the abstract. His prints and sculptural pottery are often dark and moody, with sweeping abstract lines suggesting apocalyptic themes. His favorite inspirations are angels, demons, and spiritual warfare. Not cute cupids—these →

RACHEL MCCLAMROCH

beings are swooping shapes and staring eyes.

In 2019, Van Wyk's kiln—one of his restoration projects—failed and burned down his studio. Van Wyk had uncharacteristically left the kiln to get a quick cup of tea at the house. Once he was aware of the fire, he tried to rush in with a fire extinguisher, but the intense heat threw him back.

Van Wyk believes that if he had been inside the studio when the fire started, he would have tried to stay and save as many pieces as he could, and the smoke and heat would have overcome him. But because he happened to be out of the studio, he was not even able to enter. "I lost hundreds of pieces. ... It was a nightmare."

It took him about five months to find peace with 47 years of work lost. Now, he can find things to be grateful for: Some appreciated works escaped destruction, and a small handful were even enhanced by the smoke patterns. Insurance and a GoFundMe campaign enabled him to build a better studio than before, constructed on the slab of the old.

He can happily spend as much time as he likes crafting art once more. ■

—Rachel McClamroch is a 2021 World Journalism Institute graduate







IN NEED OF SPEED

COVID-year medical research wasn't as sluggish as it seemed, but some changes could have improved its effectiveness

by Charles Horton, M.D.

SINCE THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC began, much of the national media's attention has focused on newly released medical research to help the country understand the new virus: What's the best way to manage patients in the hospital? What are possible treatments for COVID-19? And of course, how can we develop a vaccine to protect people from the virus?

Some aspects of the fight progressed faster than many expected. Operation Warp Speed succeeded in bringing vaccines to market both quickly and safely. Yet other research developments seemed to lag, coming in weeks or even months later than planned. The University of Oxford's STOIC trial, which discovered that the generic steroid budesonide helps against COVID-19, had planned to enroll its last patient

A researcher injects samples into tubes for COVID-19 analysis at El Bosque University virology laboratory in Colombia.

VAN WYK: RACHEL MCCLAMROCH; RESEARCH: IVAN VALENCIA/BLOOMBERG VIA GETTY IMAGES

in mid-November of last year—but the study ultimately needed almost two months more. What was the holdup?

To understand that, let's consider how to design a research study to yield useful information. COVID-19 presents unique challenges to researchers because most patients recover: Its 99 percent survival rate means researchers would expect to need 100 patients to identify one COVID-19 death. Studies focusing on other outcomes—improving severe symptoms, for example—face similar challenges.

Quality research studies vary in their details, but each one builds on this basic framework:

► It asks a specific question (testing a hypothesis).

► It includes a group that doesn't get the proposed treatment (the control group).

► It follows a large enough group of patients, for a long enough period of time, to detect whether the study group or the control group fares better (it has sufficient power).

► It assigns patients to the study group or control group randomly, so that the groups will generally be comparable (it ensures a representative sample).

► It considers whether the proposed intervention helped and whether other factors might interfere with knowing that (it analyzes its results).

► Other researchers, independent from those who did the study, double-check the work (the peer review process).

As with vaccine development, research studies can be sped up—but only so much before quality suffers. Researchers carefully calculate how many patients they'll need to enroll in a study in order to achieve accurate results, but they often struggle to find those patients quickly after diagnosis due to legal barriers protecting personal health data.

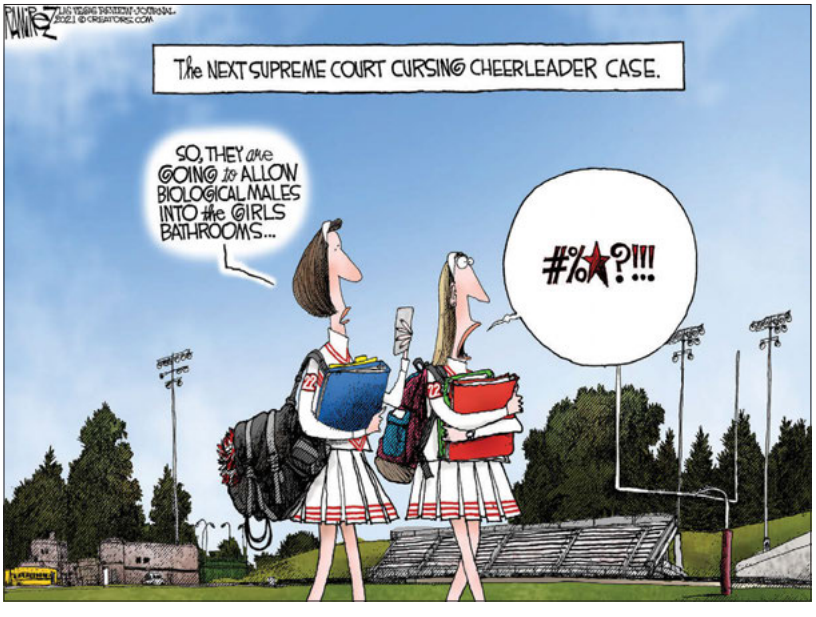
Staff at research journals last year worked hard to minimize delays with peer review and editing: The time between a study's submission and its publication dropped by almost 50 percent during the pandemic. Yet it still averaged about 60 days at some of the top journals amid the unprecedented rush of journal submissions in 2020. A *Lancet* article reported in May that the *Journal of the American Medical Association* received 11,000 submissions in the first five months of 2020, almost three times more than the same period in 2019. This makes the STOIC trial's path to publication all the more impressive: Its results reached the public less than one month after the last patient enrolled.

THE *JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION* RECEIVED 11,000 SUBMISSIONS IN THE FIRST FIVE MONTHS OF 2020.

The *Lancet* article also pointed out that in the research world's well-intentioned haste to do something about the pandemic, it ended up with many small, poorly designed studies, precluding any meaningful attempt at combining their data into larger, stronger studies. Those initial studies did serve as a source of hypotheses for better-quality research, but they also confused the public. For instance, the presence of "research" supporting drugs like hydroxychloroquine that were later shown to be ineffective against COVID-19 stoked online conspiracy theories and social-media debates.

The *Lancet* authors argued that research teams would have served the public more effectively by coordinating their efforts toward fewer, but higher-quality, studies—and that they would have ultimately saved time, and lives, by doing so.

Still, perhaps the greatest surprise about the pace of research during the COVID-19 pandemic was not how slowly it moved, but rather how quickly, given the year's chaos. In reflecting on the good and the bad of our response to the pandemic so far, let's remember the hard work of those who strove to guide it with quality data. ■





Thoughts at a wedding

Keeping our relationships in proper perspective

WE WENT TO A WEDDING in Michigan recently. Watching that young couple exchange vows got me thinking about the marriage relationship.

Issues arise in marriage that I can fix well enough by just hardening my heart: Presto! No more problem!

This is not an option for us.

I know a trick you can play in your mind where nothing bothers you because you reduce your husband's size in your life, displacing him with other interests and hobbies. "There's more to life than marriage," you say to yourself.

Not an option either.

This silent divorce in the heart has the appearance of an improvement over tantrums, but of course it's just slipping off the saddle on the opposite side of the horse.

Slipping off one or the other side of God's commands for holy living is what Scripture warns against: "Do not turn aside from any of the words that I command you today, to the right hand or to the left" (Deuteronomy 28:14).

Ongoing self-examination avoids demonic traps (2 Corinthians 13:5)—put to death words and motives that are more manipulation than ministry. As a pastor once put it: "You should see the devil's desk: It's covered with overflowing ashtrays and half-drunk cups of coffee."

Note, for instance, how the dubious referenced pulling-away technique is the counterfeit of some actual good advice in 1 Corinthians 7:29-31: "Let those who have wives live as though they had none. … For the present form of this world is passing away." This God-given recommendation for reminding oneself that marriage is a temporary arrangement is His comfort to the wife laboring under a difficult yoke (1 Peter 3:1; 1 Samuel 25). Also, it is a caution for the woman who has made her husband everything. Each of us will appear before the judgment seat alone.

MAKING YOUR HUSBAND EVERYTHING AND MAKING HIM NOTHING ARE TWO RELATIONSHIP IEDS.

Making your husband everything and making him nothing are two relationship IEDs hiding on the side of the road. Make him too small and you forfeit the many joyful blessings of one-fleshness. Make him too big and you devour him, and assure your own permanent misery. "No love affair between a man and a woman has ever been great enough to hang everything on. It will crumble away under your feet" (*True Spirituality*, Francis Schaeffer).

The two genders tend to two different imbalances. That was common knowledge as recently as 1992 (*Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*), before it was not culturally permitted to notice the obvious. One comedian riffed on how women are the only people able to turn a compliment into an argument: He: "You look beautiful today." She: "You mean I didn't look beautiful yesterday?"

An old *Prairie Home Companion* sketch depicts a couple driving down the road. She breaks the silence, putting out feelers: "Well, what do you know, today marks the sixth month since our first date." His gaze still over the steering wheel, her male companion thinks to himself, "Six months … six months. When did I get my last oil change?"

Schaeffer continues: "The finally sufficient relationship must be with God himself. As Christians we have this relationship, and so our human relationships can be valid without being the finally sufficient thing. … When two Christians find that their relationship has hit a wall, they can come hand-in-hand and bring their failures under the blood of Christ, and get up and go on."

Keeping God as my No. 1 relationship, "I can take from a human relationship what God meant it to provide, without putting the whole structure under an intolerable burden. … I can enjoy that which is beautiful in a relationship without expecting it to be perfect."

It all comes down to faith, as a friend once reminded me in my own time of need. By which she meant nothing more than believing God. Believing Him now, and five minutes from now, and all the days of your life with the man to whom you made a vow to love for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer. ■

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One year to go

Planning for more sunny days to come

I'VE SEEN FIRE and I've seen rain. I've seen sunny days that I thought would never end." Those lyrics by James Taylor describe my time editing WORLD since 1992. But sunny days do end, and two years ago I became concerned about how my tenure as editor in chief would conclude.

Organizations often see fire and rain when someone who's been a leader for a long time leaves. So in 2019 I decided to stop editing (while continuing to write columns and book reviews) upon hitting my 30-year mark, God willing, on July 1, 2022. Two years ago I started the process of making sure everyone on that day has the right seat on the bus. Now, with a year to go, I can happily report that WORLD is in good shape for the transition.

In large part that's because we have seven graced and gracious leaders who will form our Editorial Council once I'm out of leadership. Michael Reneau, Tim Lamer, Lynde Langdon, and Paul Butler lead our magazine, website, and podcasting platforms. Senior editor Mindy Belz and national editor Jamie Dean will also have seats on the council, chaired by Nick Eicher, our chief content officer. Editors of our three platforms have a lot of autonomy week by week: Council members will discuss questions that emerge in our quest for Biblical objectivity.

I also feel confident because those platforms now have clear roles, as different as their media are but similar in our reporting-first vision. WORLD Magazine at 35 is mature and thoughtful. We respect our readers by introducing them to people they are unlikely to meet, places they probably haven't visited, and sometimes ideas that challenge their own.

WORLD Digital at half that age is our newspaper that changes throughout the day as events happen, all the while avoiding hot takes that often turn out to be mistakes. We have a new website that displays news well. We email out twice each day specialty newsletters that inform readers about developments in specific areas such as abortion, education, poverty-fighting, science, and religious liberty. (If any of those subjects interest you, please sign up at wng.org/newsletters.)

WHEN THE BIBLE IS CLEAR, WE TAKE A STAND, AS WE HAVE ON ABORTION, EVOLUTION, AND LGBT TRENDS.

WORLD Radio's *The World and Everything in It* is now a benevolent daily habit for hundreds of thousands. It features a daily five-minute newscast followed by reliable features like Legal Docket, Money Beat, Washington Wednesday, Culture Friday, and more. By the end of the 30-minute podcast listeners can go away assured that the sky is not falling, because God holds it up. We also have podcast series, such as *Effective Compassion*.

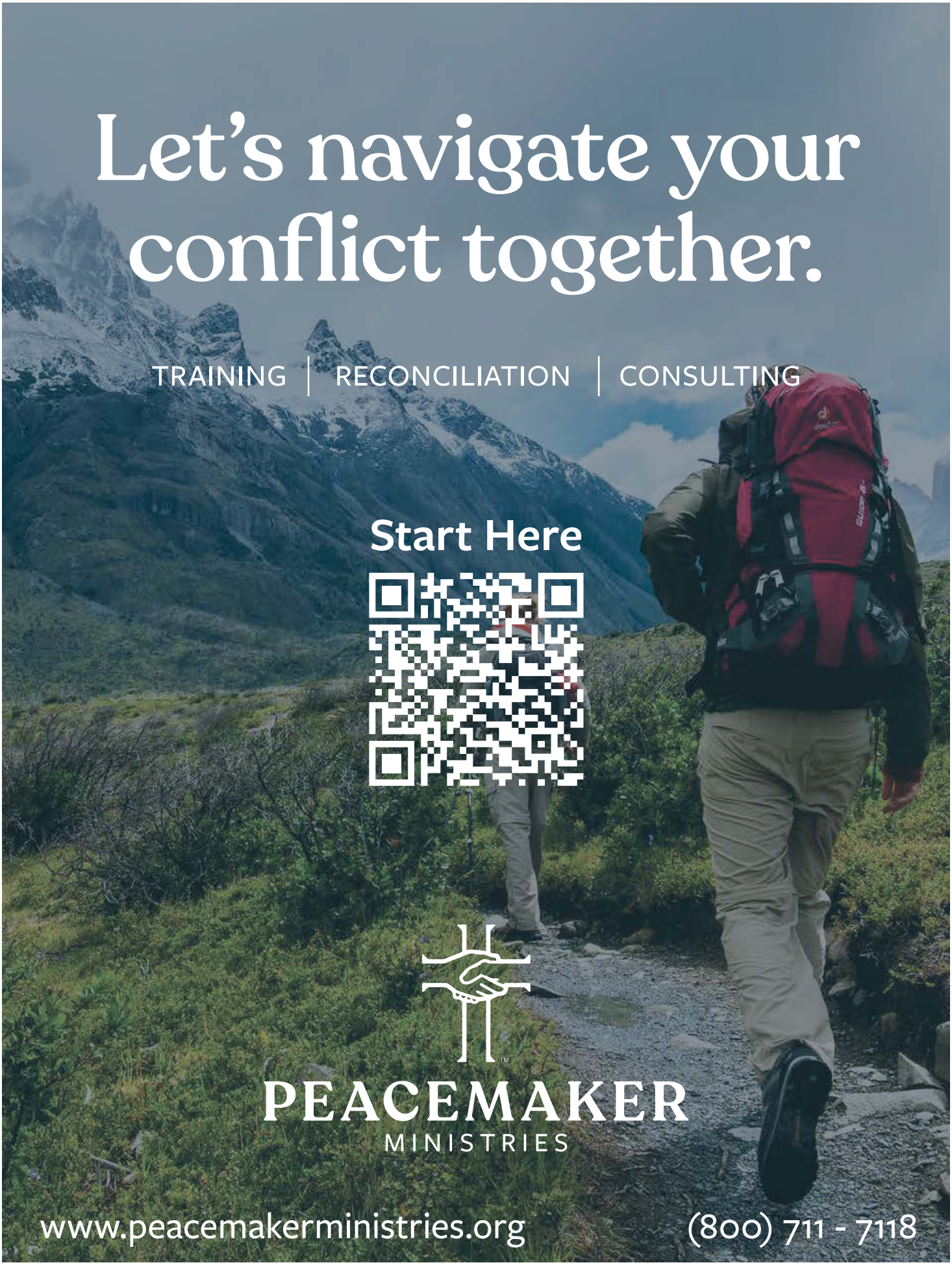
Those seven leaders and three platforms operate with the aid of 45 other writers and correspondents trained at the World Journalism Institute. (I'll continue as dean of it.) Our common educational experience and faith help all three platforms to focus on reporting with Biblical objectivity. That opposes overall journalistic trends in three ways:

First is our emphasis on eyeballing and describing. As the *Columbia Journalism Review* recently reported, "commentary is a cheap and powerful attraction." Reporting on the scene is expensive. Some publications and journalists have relished the COVID-19-era rationale for staying in air-conditioned offices and opinionating. WORLD is different: Our writers yearn to hit the road and learn by observing firsthand.

Second, we take seriously Jesus' teaching, "Blessed are the peacemakers." When the Bible is clear, we take a stand, as we have done on abortion, evolution, LGBT trends, and many other issues—including Bible translation itself. But even on such questions we try to avoid ramping up resentment. That goes against the prevailing school of journalistic marketing and its two-word formula: anger sells.

Third, we also deviate from current media success advice by refusing to become tribalistic, parroting the political slogans of "our side" and turning temporary opponents into permanent enemies. Bucking that trend in today's polarized environment sometimes leaves us lonely. But our faith shines most brightly on those days when we're immersed in controversy and can say, in the words of Taylor's song, "Won't you look down upon me, Jesus? You've got to help me make a stand." ■

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