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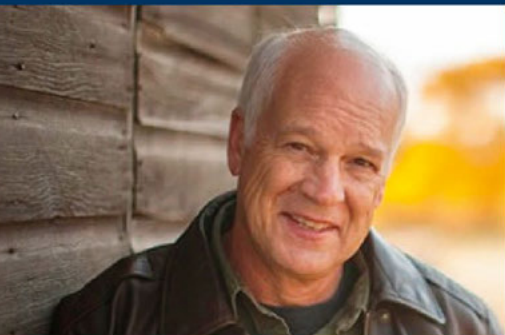
EARNING YOUR TRUST, EVERY DAY / MAY 18, 2024

THE MORAL REVOLUTION

How gay activists won the battle for marriage *p. 44*

by ROSARIA BUTTERFIELD





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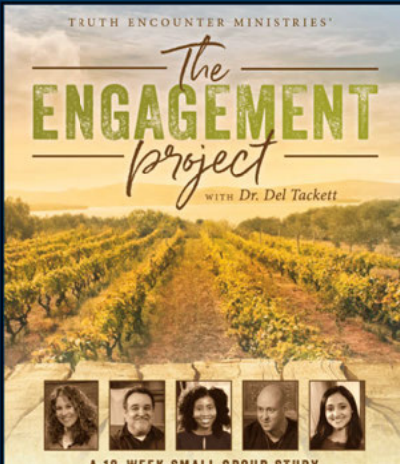
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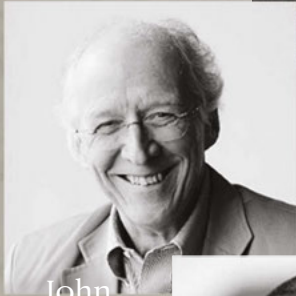
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Dr. Del Tackett is the creator of The Truth Project, The Engagement Project, Who Is Jesus, host of the film series "Is Genesis History" and a popular teacher and author on numerous Biblical worldview topics.

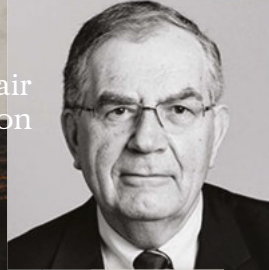
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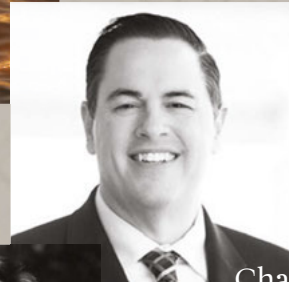
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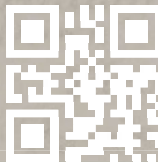
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Amid a big-box exodus from high crime areas, some store owners see staying as ministry

ON THE COVER: Gay activists protest outside the U.S. Supreme Court in 2015; photo by Paul J. Richards/AFP via Getty Images

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WORLD LAUNCHED its daily news podcast, *The WORLD and Everything in It*, in 2013, when only about 10 percent of American adults said they could remember listening to a podcast in the last month or so. Back then, only about 1 in 4 had even listened to a podcast. Ever.

By 2023, podcast audiences exploded—half of all adults were regular listeners—and the number keeps increasing. So here’s the basic math on that growth: In about 10 years, the podcast audience in the United States has increased about fivefold.

But the rate of podcast audience growth is minuscule compared with the growth of available podcasts. Back in 2013, there were around 30,000 active podcasts produced—seemingly sufficient to satisfy the market.

Apparently, it wasn’t enough. The number of podcasts that exist in 2023 is almost impossible to nail down, but Apple Podcasts, one of the two heavyweight podcast platforms, hosts about 2.7 million. And Apple is downright picky compared

with Spotify, Apple’s primary rival in the podcast space—Spotify says it’s hosting more than 6 million podcasts. Seriously?

So while the audience for podcasts has grown fivefold, the number of podcasts has grown ninetyfold, using Apple’s comparatively conservative offerings.

Both Apple and Spotify, and most other podcast platforms, helpfully break those millions of podcasts down into categories, like Comedy, News, Arts & Culture, and True Crime. Based on audience size, those are the top four categories on both platforms, not necessarily in that order. Based on the sheer number of podcasts, the Religion & Spirituality category is the biggest.

The World and Everything in It is in the News category, where it competes with about 150,000 other podcasts (on the Apple Podcasts platform). Even within the News category, many of them are strictly commentary or personality-driven, but most of the real news podcasts are from major players—from BBC to NBC, *The New York Times* to *The Wall Street Journal*.

We don’t pay much attention to the “ranking” of *The World and Everything in It*. For one thing, the algorithms used in the platforms’ ranking methodology are notoriously arcane and complex, so we don’t know what helps or hurts our ranking. Also, advertising revenue is not a major part of our business model, so a mass audience isn’t necessary to accomplish our objectives.

Most importantly, we produce the podcast for our audience, and while we hope more people join our audience, we’re not looking to be No. 1. That would undoubtedly require sacrifices we’re not willing to make.

KEVIN MARTIN
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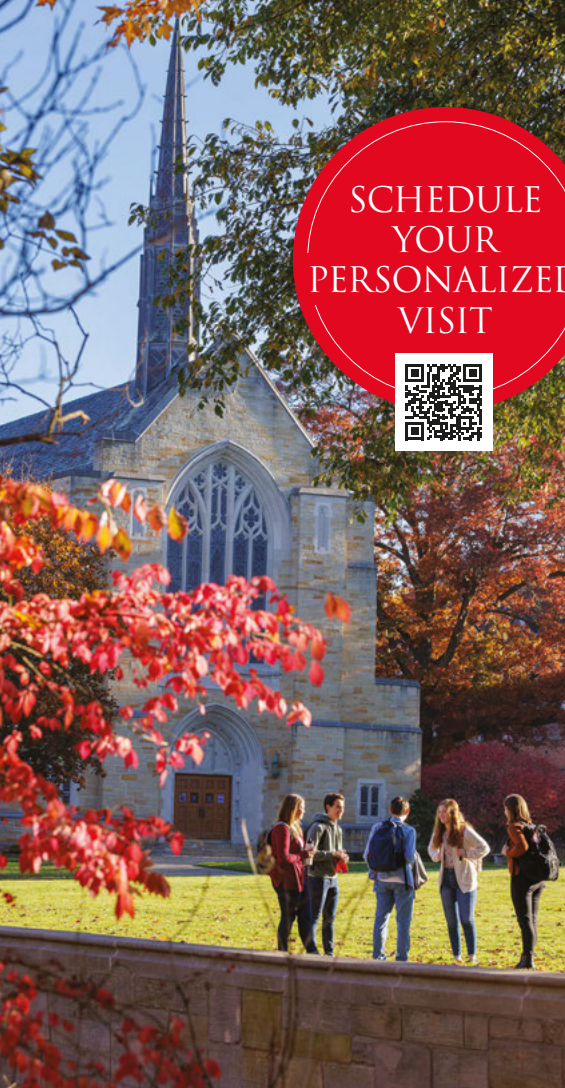
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More crime, less punishment *p42*

This was an excellent report by Kim Henderson. Linda Frickey's story weighs heavily on my heart. It could've happened to any of us. I am so grateful for the district attorneys who were willing to see the consequences of their ideas and change their policies.

BOBBIE KEITH
Garland, Texas

U.S. Briefs: Cru employees fired *p16*

Thank you for the follow-up report on Cru's firing of Uriah and Marissa Mundell. As a former Cru staff member, I've followed this story with interest and sadness. I feel burdened but not surprised that Cru leadership largely dismissed the Mundells' concerns over the ministry's soft stand on LGBTQ issues. Please continue to bring things out into the light even when others within evangelicalism won't (1 John 1:6).

PAUL GEBEL
Edmond, Okla.

Chatbot news network *p64*

I was sad to see that Grace Snell's article endorsed NewsGuard as a digital arbiter of truth. The Twitter Files and the House Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government revealed it was a key element in the "censorship-industrial complex," the state-sponsored system targeting free speech.

GORDON MIDDLETON
Centreville, Va.



APRIL 6, 2024

Moral reframing *p22*

I read Lynn Vincent's piece twice, not that I didn't understand it, but I was looking for mentions of the two biggest perpetrators of moral reframing: pro-abortion advocates and the alphabet of sexuality groups.

DENNIS R. SHEAFFER
Hartville, Ohio

One could argue that the pinnacle—or the depths—of moral reframing is the euphemism for killing babies: "reproductive health." What is more compassionate—except for the baby, of course—than health? Who can be opposed to health?

BRUCE MCKECHNIE
Honey Brook, Pa.

A bloody holiness *p40*

I so appreciated Janie B. Cheaney's dealing with blood sacrifices in the Old

Testament and connecting it to Christ's sacrifice. In reading her column, I thought how important it could be when talking to someone about becoming a follower of Christ.

STEVE WILLIAMS
Madera, Calif.

One of the clearest, most beautiful explanations of the bloody Old Testament sacrifices I have ever seen. I've got to pass this on!

SUSAN DICKENS
Greenbrier, Ark.

Janie nailed the details in Leviticus. In the Old Testament and the New Testament, God is still the same, holiness is still the same, and faith is still the same. We just don't have to obey all the same rules as Old Testament Jews to be holy. Jesus is our holiness,

but we still need to obey God's law.

KEITH WOLSTENHOLME
Collegeville, Pa.

Golden touch *p69*

Regarding equal player salaries between the NBA and the WNBA: When a WNBA team can fill a stadium every night and television advertising revenue equals the NBA, only then will WNBA salaries increase.

BOB FRANCIS
Wakefield, Mass.

Testament: The Story of Moses *p34*

I found myself nodding in agreement as I read Collin Garbarino's review. What disappointed me the most about the miniseries was the missed opportunity to point out God's holiness and His judgment against wickedness.

ARIETTA WATSON
Atlanta, Ga.

In appreciation

I want you to know how much I appreciate how WORLD shares God's truth and can report the news without adding drama and fear.

ROBIN LAYNE
Phoenix, Ariz.

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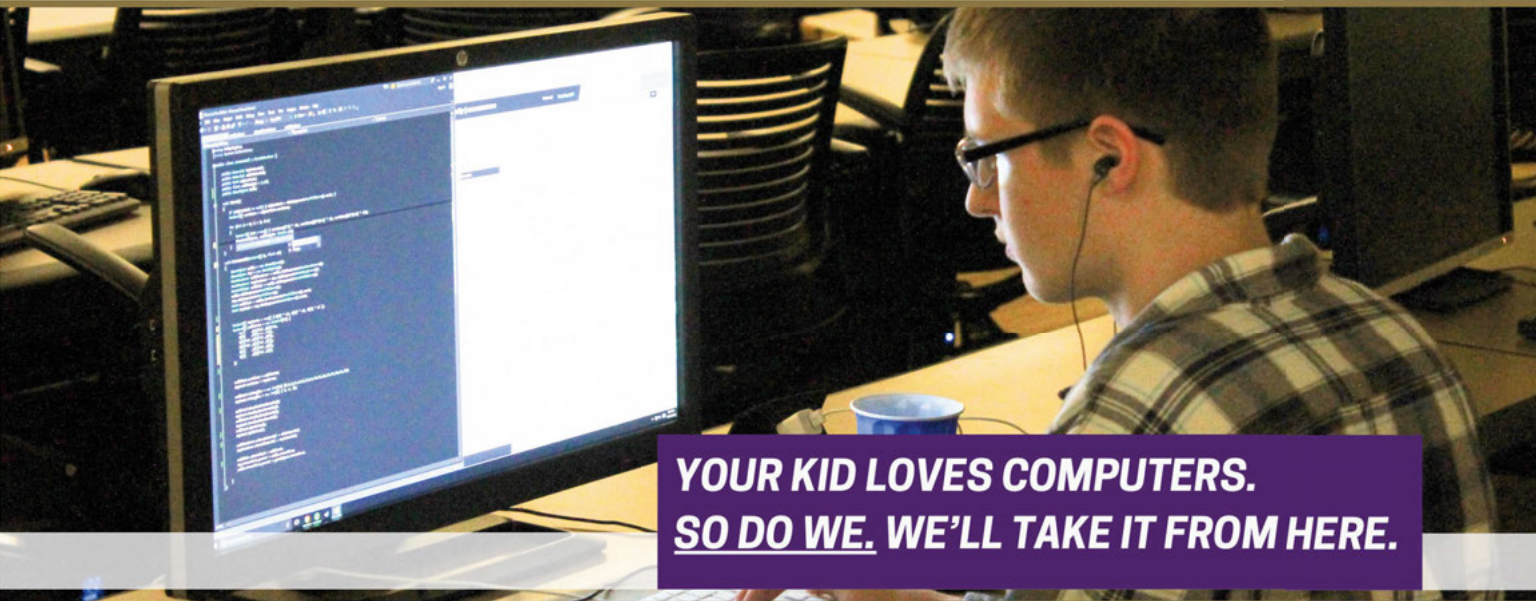
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DISPATCHES



IN THE NEWS

Chaos on campus

Pro-Palestinian protests favor popular political narrative over spiritual and historical realities

by EMMA FREIRE & ELIZABETH RUSSELL



IN THE EARLY HOURS of April 30, shadows moved in the darkness of Columbia University's New York City campus. Students, many wearing Columbia hoodies and covering their faces, stormed the school's historic Hamilton Hall. They quickly grabbed furniture and used it to barricade themselves inside. As protesters outside cheered, they unfurled a banner from a balcony that read "Hind's Hall," named after Hind Rajab, a 6-year-old girl who died in a January attack in the Gaza Strip.

The Hamilton Hall takeover illustrates the tensions that have escalated since mid-April, when pro-Palestinian protesters set up tents on Columbia University's campus for a "Gaza Solidarity Encampment."

But while activists and journalists focus on a narrative that decries Israel as an occupation force, some observers say the resurgence of anti-Jewish harassment at Columbia and elsewhere is part of a long history of persecution that dates back to the ancient Amalekites.

Anglican priest and theologian Gerald McDermott said that's in part due to a chang-

ing university pedagogy that emphasizes social justice and victimhood over reason and nature. Such teaching "has opened the door to a host of mythologies, among which is a completely false history of Israel and Palestine," McDermott said in an email to WORLD.

"The irrationality of all this, even in the universities, is shocking," he added. "But it helps to remember that even the most enthusiastic Nazis in the early 1930s were the German university students who had been taught a false history and false anthropology by their university professors."

Students at dozens of colleges and universities across America set up encampments or other demonstrations and called for an end to Israel's war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. They hope also to pressure school administrators to cut ties with Israel.

But while schools grapple with anti-Semitic and free speech issues, some see a larger spiritual battle playing out.

Luke Moon, executive director of the Philos Project, said students' lack of spiritual literacy is part of what's driving the protests. Many seem comfortable combining liberal ideals and rainbow flags with "this very strong affirmation of ... the violent side of Islam," Moon said.

Two pro-Palestinian groups, Students for Justice in Palestine and Within Our →

Protesters link arms outside Hamilton Hall at Columbia University.

Lifetime, frame Hamas' actions as a fight against an oppressive power—using social justice language that has won over college students. Both have called for resistance against Israel “by any means necessary.”

Some protesters seem ready to oblige. Jewish students report being harassed as they tried to leave Columbia. Protesters pelted them with objects and shouted at them to “go back to Poland.” After Shai Davidai, a Jewish professor at Columbia Business School, tried to lead a counterprotest on campus, administrators barred him from entering the grounds, saying they could not guarantee his safety.

Outside Columbia's gates, protesters chanted to the beat of drums: “We say justice, you say how? Burn Tel Aviv to the ground. Ya Hamas, we love you. We support your rockets, too.”

Such chants persist though Columbia President Nemat “Minouche”

“Protesters chanted to the beat of drums: ‘We say justice, you say how? Burn Tel Aviv to the ground.’”

A man draped in an Israeli flag confronts protesters gathered outside of Columbia University.



Shafik told lawmakers in April that her school was taking a hard line against anti-Semitism and doling out discipline. Shafik “seemed to throw free speech under the bus in an effort to appease lawmakers,” said Zach Greenberg, a First Amendment attorney at the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression.

Greenberg suggested schools instead “crack down on violence and disruptive conduct that prevents others exercising their free speech rights, and uphold the right to peaceful political protests.”

Like students elsewhere, Columbia's have called for the school to withdraw investment of its \$13.6 billion endowment from companies linked to Israel or profiting from the Israel-Hamas war. Columbia has previously divested from fossil fuels and private prisons following student pressure. But the upside of divestment is debatable at best, according to Alison Taylor, an associate business professor at New York University. “Some people think it does work because it raises awareness, and it raises reputational risk, and litigation risk,” Taylor said. “Other people point out that if you sell your assets, someone else will buy them, and ... that company or firm or investor may have less integrity than the original investors.”

As it stands, Columbia isn't likely to trade current profits for better optics: As of April 29, Shafik insisted the school would not divest from Israel-linked companies.

Meanwhile, as the student body rages, many Christians on campus feel they are walking on eggshells, said Eric Lipscomb, a Columbia campus minister with Reformed University Fellowship. “They have friends who are Jewish, and they have friends who are maybe leaning pro-Palestinian.”

Lipscomb tries to encourage them: “We have the opportunity to seek to be agents of peace and a light for the gospel, maybe even especially when things around us are chaotic.” ■



BY THE NUMBERS

Boeing's backlog

In-flight incident slows plane production even as demand continues

by JOHN DAWSON

83

The number of commercial jets Boeing delivered in the first quarter of 2024, compared with 157 such planes delivered in the final quarter of 2023. Safety concerns have slowed Boeing's production following the Jan. 5 incident with Alaska Airlines Flight 1282 in which a door plug fell off a Boeing 737 Max 9 shortly after takeoff, likely due to missing bolts.

90

The number of days the Federal Aviation Administration gave Boeing on Feb. 28 to create a comprehensive plan to address safety issues.

171

The number of Boeing 737 Max 9 airplanes grounded by the FAA following the January incident.

226

The number of months it would take Boeing to clear its current backlog of ordered jets—6,259 according to Forecast International's Flight Plan—at the present rate of construction.

Mandisa

A Christian music star who got her start as an *American Idol* contestant, Mandisa Hundley died April 18 aged 47. Known professionally by her first name, Mandisa studied vocal performance at Fisk University in Nashville, Tenn., prior to working as a background singer for country legends Shania Twain and Trisha Yearwood. Appearing on *American Idol* in 2006, she confronted *Idol* host Simon Cowell on TV for unkind remarks about her weight. Eliminated after making the show's Top 10, Mandisa embarked on a solo career with a 2007 album that debuted at No. 1 on *Billboard's* Top Christian Albums chart. Her 2013 album *Overcomer* earned a Grammy Award.



Daniel Dennett

A philosopher and admirer of Charles Darwin who provoked fierce debates about evolution and religion, Dennett died April 19. He was



82. As a professor of philosophy at Tufts University and an avowed atheist, he advocated for a materialistic explanation for free will,

likening the human mind to a biological computer. In 1995, Dennett published *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, describing evolution as a "universal acid" that fundamentally alters our understanding of reality and human nature. While defending evolution, he argued religion was nothing more than a social construct. Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Dennett became known as the Four Horsemen of New Atheism.

Hijab police hunt women in Iran



Iran On April 21, regime officials announced a new police agency to enforce rules against improper wearing of the hijab—an escalation of a yearlong crackdown against women in the Islamist nation. The rules, called “Noor” or “Light” in Persian, say all women must cover their heads in public or be flogged, fined, or jailed up to 10 years. Human rights groups recently verified videos of women and girls being dragged into vans by chador-clad women. Police arrested men who tried to interfere. Women have reported being beaten, tasered, and sexually assaulted, and authorities have forcibly closed businesses that failed to enforce the hijab rules. Women who travel without a hijab have had their cars confiscated. —Amy Lewis



POPULATION

87.6 million

LANGUAGE

Farsi, Azeri, Kurdish

RELIGION

99% Muslim

GOVERNANCE

Theocratic republic

GDP

\$1.37 trillion

MAJOR EXPORTS

Ethylene polymers, pistachios, iron, copper, industrial alcohols, aluminum

Japan To counter a widespread problem of overtourism, the resort town of Fujikawaguchiko will install a black mesh net to block the view of Mount Fuji at a popular photo spot. Work on the 66-foot-long barrier near a Lawson convenience store was set to begin in early May and is meant to deter overseas tourists who have ignored repeated warnings against overcrowding. The visitors regularly disturb a nearby dental clinic while taking photos of the convenience store with Mount Fuji in the background, according to an official from the town. In March, more than 3 million tourists entered the country, a record high. Japan has implemented other measures to tackle overtourism, including charging hikers a \$13 fee to climb Mount Fuji and banning tourists from parts of Kyoto’s geisha district. Other countries have taken similar measures, including Austria and Italy, where day-trippers must now pay 5 euros (about \$5.35) to enter Venice. —Joyce Wu



Hungary Prime Minister **Viktor Orbán** told attendees at a conservative conference in Budapest that upcoming European and U.S. elections offered a chance to defeat the “progressive world spirit” and end attacks on conservatives. Orbán urged his listeners at the Conservative Political Action Conference Hungary, held in late April, to usher in “an era of sovereignty” modeled on his success in Hungary. Orbán accused liberals worldwide of weaponizing government institutions to hold on to power. Police in Brussels recently closed a conservative conference there due to the “possibility of public disorder.” —*Elizabeth Russell*

Egypt Suspected Islamist extremists set fire to the homes and stores of Coptic Orthodox Christians in the village of Al-Fawakher in the southern Minya Governorate on April 23. About 3,000 Christian families live in the village. The attack came after they received an official permit to build a church. Members started facing threats of violence shortly after the permit was issued, according to International Christian Concern. In a post on the social media website X, Coptic Orthodox Bishop Anba Macarius said security forces brought the situation under control and detained the attackers. Macarius said state authorities will compensate victims. Christians make up the largest minority group in Egypt, an Islamic-majority country. —*Onize Obikere*



POPULATION
109.5 million

LANGUAGE
Arabic, English, French

RELIGION
90% Muslim, 10% Christian

GOVERNANCE
Presidential republic

GDP
\$1.42 trillion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Refined petroleum, crude petroleum

Dominica The island’s High Court of Justice has officially removed penalties against homosexual activity for the first time in almost three decades. The ruling, issued April 22, comes five years after an anonymous gay person sued the government and both Anglican and Methodist churches on the grounds of discrimination. The Sexual Offenses Act, adopted in 1998, sought to offer “greater protection to children and people with mental disorders” while allowing for the psychiatric treatment of convicted offenders. The United Nations Programme for HIV/AIDS and other LGBTQ activist groups applauded the island’s decision as “a win for public health as well as for human rights.” Only five other Caribbean countries still outlaw homosexual relations. —*Carlos Páez*



POPULATION
74,656

LANGUAGE
English, French patois

RELIGION
53% Roman Catholic, 30% Protestant, 9% none

GOVERNANCE
Parliamentary republic

GDP
\$833.83 million

MAJOR EXPORTS
Medical instruments

Armenia Tens of thousands marched by torchlight through Yerevan to mark Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day April 24. During the event, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan urged his countrymen to “overcome the trauma” of the massacre of Armenians under Ottoman Turk rule in 1915. That statement came as Pashinyan seeks rapprochement with Turkey and a peace deal with Azerbaijan. But Pashinyan angered Armenians with a recent proposal to give Azerbaijan four villages abandoned in the wake of last year’s military offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh. According to Caucasus Heritage Watch, historic churches and other Christian sites have been destroyed since Azerbaijan took over the territory. —*Jenny Lind Schmitt*





U.S. BRIEFS

Methodists vote to radically restructure

North Carolina Delegates at the United Methodist Church General Conference voted April 25 to restructure the denomination. The conference, held in Charlotte, N.C., from April 23 to May 3, was the denomination's first meeting since 2019. The new amendment, called "regionalization," would allow different geographical regions to set their own policies for clergy ordination, marriage rites, and other matters—allowing churches to remain in the denomination while disagreeing on key points of theology. The plan still needed to be ratified by a larger group of UMC members. But regionalization didn't satisfy 66 churches in Russia and Eastern Asia that opted to leave the UMC on the same day. The remaining delegates were also set to vote on a proposal to change the UMC's definition of marriage to include same-sex couples. The mass exit of Biblically faithful American UMC churches and the inability of about 100 African delegates to attend the conference meant the liberal votes appeared to have the upper hand. —*Elizabeth Russell*



POPULATION

10.4 million

GOVERNOR

Roy Cooper*

U.S. SENATORS

Thom Tillis*,
Ted Budd*

INDUSTRY

Agriculture,
tourism,
tobacco and
automotive
manufacturing

New Mexico According to an April 25 report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, three women tested HIV-positive after getting "vampire facial" procedures at an unlicensed Albuquerque spa. The findings mark the first documented cases of HIV transmission through cosmetic services using needles. An investigation showed the spa reused equipment intended for one-time use. It closed in 2018 after the investigation was launched, and authorities prosecuted its owner for practicing medicine without a license. The "vampire facial" involves drawing a client's blood, separating out the plasma, and injecting it back into the skin to promote rejuvenation and reduce the appearance of scars. On average, the treatment costs about \$850. —*Kim Henderson*

West Virginia Drivers in the Mountain State will now face penalties if they're caught using lit tobacco products while transporting passengers under the age of 16. State lawmakers finalized the statute on April 23, making it a misdemeanor punishable with a \$25 fine. One of the bill's sponsors, pulmonologist and state Sen. Tom Takubo, said his young patients motivated him to propose the rule. Many of them, he said, struggle with asthma and lost lung function as a result of secondhand smoke. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, concentrations of secondhand smoke can reach "very high levels" inside a vehicle. West Virginia joins 28 U.S. states that have enacted similar bans.

—*Juliana Chan Erikson*



Wyoming Six animal welfare groups notified the U.S. Department of the Interior they intend to sue the federal government to return the Western U.S. gray wolf to the list of endangered or threatened species. In an April 22 letter to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the groups cited a viral video of a Wyoming man showing off an injured wolf. He allegedly ran over the wolf with a snowmobile on Feb. 29. After taping its mouth shut, he took the animal to a bar and later killed it. Animal welfare advocates said the government acted arbitrarily and failed to assess the effect of hunting, politicization of wolves, and inadequate regulations before deciding in February not to reinstate wolves' endangered status. The Wyoming gray wolf was removed from the endangered species list in 2017 after congressional pressure and is managed at the state level. In the recent Wyoming incident, law enforcement officials charged the man with illegal possession of a wild animal and issued a \$250 fine. —*Todd Vician*

Minnesota Nearly 40 immigrant laborers holding temporary work visas filed suit against a vegetable farm for human trafficking. The April 22 lawsuit claims John Svihel and Svihel Vegetable Farm shorted paychecks and subjected workers—mainly from Honduras, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic—to “deplorable conditions.” The laborers say they often toiled 17 hours a day, without promised overtime and Sundays off. They allege they could not drink water or use the restroom while working, and pesticides were sprayed on or near them. Their free communal housing had unclean mattresses, bedbugs, and insufficient restrooms, according to the suit. They said the farm let them get groceries only once every 15 days. Svihel disputes the workers' claims. In 2016, he pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit fraud in foreign labor contracting and paid workers restitution of nearly \$200,000. —*Sharon Dierberger*



POPULATION
5.6 million

GOVERNOR
Tim Walz*

U.S. SENATORS
Amy Klobuchar*,
Tina Smith*

INDUSTRY
Agriculture and forestry

Mississippi State lawmakers on April 24 unanimously approved a bill that would require age verification for social media platforms and parental consent for underage account holders. A separate state bill cleared the Mississippi legislature on April 19, creating new criminal penalties for perpetrators of sexual extortion regardless of where they live. Both bills await Republican Gov. Tate Reeves' signature. The measures are named after a teen, Walker Montgomery, who took his own life after succumbing to a sextortion scheme. Brian Montgomery, Walker's father, began speaking out about the danger online sextortion schemes pose to teen boys after his son's death (see “Speaking for his son,” May 6, 2023). In a Facebook video posted the day the second bill passed, Brian called it “a big win ... a stake in the ground letting tech know we're going to be there to protect our kids.” He said parents still bear responsibility for keeping their kids safe online, “but the help we need is going to be provided here.”

—*Mary Jackson*



BACKGROUNDER

Are “furries” harmless?

by MARY JACKSON



ON APRIL 17, some 75 parents and students from a Payson, Utah, middle school staged a walkout over classmates they said were literally dressing and acting like animals. The students at Mt. Nebo Middle School said so-called “furries” were biting, scratching, and barking at other kids. The incident was the latest report of animal-identifying students at school, but the trend may be linked to a strange adult subculture.

So what are furries? They’re individuals who try to personify anthropomorphic animals. Most develop a distinct “fursona” by wearing costumes called “fursuits” or other animal garb such as tails or ears.

What happened at Mt. Nebo Middle School? After students complained about their classmates’ animal antics, a petition was launched calling on the school to enforce the district’s dress code. The Nebo School District, though, called reports about furries at one of its middle schools “unfounded.” It claimed that while some children had worn headbands with ears, there had been “no students attending school wearing masks, animal costumes, or acting like animals.” But Blaze News posted videos and photos showing kids it claimed were Nebo students in animal masks and crawling on all fours, barking or meowing.

Have similar incidents occurred elsewhere? In 2021, Camp Ernst Middle School in Burlington, Ky., alerted parents to an uptick in “TikTok trends” involving students barking and wearing collars. School districts in Michigan, California, and Colorado have debunked rumors that they installed litter boxes in restrooms for students who identify as cats.

Where did the concept of furries originate? It arose in the late 1970s in science fiction and underground comix communities, according to the late fandom historian Fred Patten. (*Comix* refers to alternative comic strips that are often luridly sexual or political.)

How widespread is it? In 2023, the two largest U.S. furry conventions, Anthrocon and the Midwest FurFest, attracted 13,644 and 15,547 attendees, respectively. Ferzu, a social networking and dating app for furries, claims over 45,000 members.

Who’s into it? The website Furscience describes furries as a “diverse community of fans, artists, writers, gamers, and role players.” They are predominantly male, but as many as 1 in 3 say they are something other than male or female, according to Furscience surveys.

Are there dangers in the furry subculture? Roughly 96 percent of men and 80 percent of women involved in the fandom reported viewing “furry pornography,” according to a 2013 survey. In a 2019 survey of 334 male furries, 99 percent said their motivation was at least partly sexual. The U.K.-based Safer Schools Ecosystem warns that child predators could mask their identity as a furry to prey on kids. Middle schoolers who act like cats may just be goofing off, but parents should beware the deeper hazards. ■

QUOTABLES

“President Trump is leading Joe Biden 3 to 1 on my presidential poll out of my 9,000 members.”

New York steamfitters union leader BOBBY BARTELS, telling *Fox & Friends* on April 25 how recent immigration, crime, and inflation have pushed his traditionally Democratic union members to the right.

“There were 37,000 attempts in four days to log into our firewall.”

MIKE CYPERT, city manager of Hale Center, Texas, where city officials barely thwarted a cyberattack on the town water system. In nearby Muleshoe earlier this year, suspected Russian hackers succeeded in attacking the water system and made it overflow.

“We won’t say he’s been laicized, because he never was a real priest!”

CHRISTOPHER CHECK, president of Catholic Answers, on the group’s swift decision to change an AI chatbot originally released as “Father Justin” into a lay apologist called “Justin” after a backlash.

“I will not ride our transit system by myself. I am afraid and ... I will not ride it”

Los Angeles Metro Board member KATHRYN BARGER, speaking at an April 25 meeting of the transit agency. The board declared a public safety emergency after a series of stabbings on city buses and trains.





QUICK TAKES

Heist in reverse

Aspiring artist adds his unsolicited work to museum display but gets the boot after only one day

by JOHN DAWSON

➔ **MOST MUSEUM CAPERS** involve a burglar sneaking off with a famous work of art. But what if someone instead smuggled *in* a painting and hung it in a gallery? On April 9, officials with a Munich, Germany, museum announced it had cut ties with a technician after discovering earlier this year the 51-year-old employee placed one of his own works on a floor featuring modern art. The Pinakothek der Moderne museum houses more than 20,000 pieces that include works by Pablo Picasso and other modern masters, but the ambitious employee won't be one of them. The museum fired the man, removed his artwork, banned him from the facility, and reported the incident to police. A spokesperson told *The New York Times*, "You can't really have a person like that guarding the high-security wing."

Drunk without drink

A Belgian man insisted he hadn't been drinking when police in Bruges pulled him over in April 2022, citing him for driving with a blood alcohol content level four times the legal limit. Yet on April 22, a Belgian court acquitted the unnamed driver. That's because the man's lawyer proved he suffered from a rare condition known as auto-brewery syndrome, in which contents of the gut ferment into alcohol that gets absorbed by the body. Prior to the 2022 incident, the man did not know he suffered from ABS despite another run-in for drunk driving when he also insisted he hadn't been drinking.



Goose raided

A wild goose chase has ended with the return of waterfowl to their rightful public park. A citizen of Allen, Texas, witnessed a woman pilfer two geese from Bethany Lakes Park in broad daylight April 12 and reported the incident to authorities. The witness snapped a picture of the culprit and recorded the woman's license plate details. Allen Police and Allen Animal Services took the lead and soon located the ill-gotten geese. Despite the ruffled feathers, police officials said they won't press charges.

Timeout, tow truck

Minding their own business at a stoplight in San Francisco April 9, a California couple looked up and saw a yellow tow truck trying to latch on to their vehicle. The tow truck and the 2017 Toyota Corolla then engaged in a cat-and-mouse game as the sedan's driver attempted to back away. Harry and Joanne—who did not reveal their last name out of fear of reprisal—said they eventually

evaded the aggressive tow truck when the car behind them moved and provided room for them to escape. According to Joanne, there shouldn't be a reason for their car to be towed, even if it was parked. "I definitely paid off my car," she told KGO-TV. "I paid my registration."

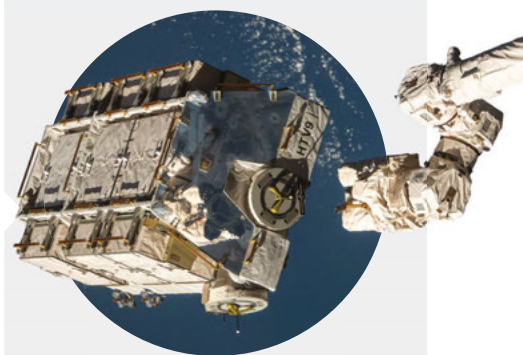


Concessions inflation

Irked that his beverage fell short and left him thirsty, a Texas man filed a federal lawsuit against Cinemark claiming the theater chain repeatedly gave him less than he paid for. According to the April 16 filing, Shane Waldrop grew suspicious of Cinemark's practices when his putative 24-ounce drink—a draft beer—seemed too small. So he took the cup home and found only 22 ounces of liquid fit in it. The lawsuit claims Cinemark engaged in deceptive business practices by mislabeling the drinks.



"It should have burned up during its descent through the atmosphere—but one piece didn't."



A disposal gone south

What could slam through a house's roof with such velocity that it also damages the floor? According to a NASA statement released April 15, the answer is space junk. The American space agency confirmed that the object that flew through Alejandro Otero's Naples, Fla., house in March was part of a **cargo pallet** that had been cast off the International Space Station in 2021. It should have burned up during its descent through the atmosphere—but one piece didn't. Otero, who was not home when the 1.6-pound hunk of metal struck his house, told WINK-TV he was "super grateful that nobody got hurt."

In the passing lane

Usually, runners don't slow down and wave at their competition to pass. But that's what happened at the recent Beijing Half Marathon in China when a trio of African professional distance runners appeared to let Chinese runner **He Jie** win the race and the \$5,500 grand prize. Video of the April 14 race spurred an investigation, and by April 19 race officials had revoked medals and prizes for all four athletes, saying the trio—which included a former world record holder—purposefully slowed down to let China's most prominent distance runner take the win. A sports equipment company that sponsored He admitted to hiring the three Africans as pace setters.





VOICES **LYNN VINCENT**

The Gospels ... in stone

A Spanish architect's opus to Christ

WITH HIS FAIRY-TALE FAÇADES and *modernista* odes to the rhythms and forms of Creation, Antoni Gaudí's work made him Barcelona's most famous artistic son. And yet, during his lifetime, the architect completed just six major projects. A seventh, the Sagrada Familia, a cathedral in Barcelona, is still under construction—almost a hundred years after Gaudí's death.

In April, I visited the Sagrada Familia with my friend Suzy, and on first sight, the place was, well ... odd. Recently consecrated as a basilica, the building's beige bulk hulks on a street corner, weirdly situated across the street from a Five Guys. Its colossal spires and belfries reminded us of wet sand decorated with flotsam from an Afghan jingle truck.

With such a first impression, Suzy and I did not expect to be further impressed. But we were wrong. So wrong that shortly after our tour began, Suzy turned to me and said, "If you were going to build something that would cause people to hear the gospel whether they wanted to or not, this is what you would build."

Gaudí's design includes three monumental façades, each a scene from a pivotal moment in the life of Christ: His birth, His death and resurrection, and His present and future glory. Sculpted in high relief, these are so steeped in realism the stone seems to come alive.

Each façade supports four bell towers, which together represent the 12 apostles. Four new towers

will be dedicated to the four Gospel authors. A final tower, the tallest of all, will be dedicated to Jesus.

This being a Catholic basilica, I expected the interior to be filled with icons and statuary. But no. The entire cavernous space—which envelops a forest of 36 soaring columns—contains only four sculptures, each marking one arm of the basilica's floor plan, which forms a Latin cross. The most striking sculpture hangs above an altar of smooth stone, suspended almost invisibly beneath a lighted baldachin so that it seems to float. It is Christ crucified, head thrown back, arms stretched toward heaven: *Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani*.

In his youth, Gaudí did not focus on this Savior. Instead, he played the dandy: gourmet tastes, concerts, the theater, salons. But by his early 40s, he had withdrawn into a life of austerity, even living at the Sagrada Familia in order to devote himself to the work.

"He reduced all things to what was indispensable for his individual survival," wrote Gaudí's friend, Mosén Gil Parés, who served as custodian chaplain at the Sagrada Familia from 1907 to 1930. "He did not live to eat and rest, but rather he ate and rested as necessary not to die."

I sometimes wonder what that would be like: to be so convinced that a single work was one's ultimate opus to God, to devote oneself so completely, to the exclusion of all else. Most of us aren't called in that way. Observing a man like Gaudí, one might even use terms like *eccentric* or *obsessed*. Then again, many likely used similar terms to describe John the Baptist.

Gaudí devoted the last third of his life to building the Sagrada Familia. According to Parés, he attended Mass and took Communion daily. The rest of his time, he spent between prayer and work. He created a cache of plans and blueprints, knowing the cathedral would not be completed in his lifetime. When asked whether this bothered him, Gaudí replied that it did not. "Don't worry," he said. "My Client has all the time in the world."

And yet Gaudí seemed to know that he himself did not. He died in 1926, just shy of age 74, after being run over in the street by an ordinary tram. At the hospital, he lay for a time unrecognized, unkempt and anonymous, until a priest recognized him as the great Gaudí.

Today, Gaudí lies buried in the Sagrada Familia Crypt, which, along with the Nativity Facade, were the only two parts of the church he was able to complete.

Ah, but the way he worked. The way Gaudí spent himself completely on a project so massive it continues a century after his death. I wonder if he lived by David's prayer: "Lord ... let me know how fleeting I am." ■

Issue 15 is out.

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CULTURE



TRENDING

All bets are on

The growth of sports gambling has led to obsessed fans, threatened players, and suspicions of cheating

by TIMOTHY LAMER



THE YEAR 2023 was a winning year for the sports gambling industry. Five more states—Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Nebraska, and Ohio—legalized sports gambling, which helped produce a record \$10.92 billion in overall revenue for the industry, a 44.5 percent increase over 2022.

But the rapid growth of sports betting hasn't gone so well for J.B. Bickerstaff. The head coach of the NBA's Cleveland Cavaliers tells of sports gamblers obtaining his telephone number and sending "crazy messages" about knowing where he lives and about his children. "I think that we really have to be careful with how close we let it get to the game," Bickerstaff said of gambling, adding that concern about staff and player security "does carry a weight."

Bickerstaff isn't alone. The emergence of legal sports gambling is changing the culture of sports in America, with prominent athletes and coaches fielding abuse and even threats from fans who now have more than a rooting interest in the outcome of games. Meanwhile, suspicions have grown that gambling is undermining the basic integrity of sports.

The U.S. Supreme Court ushered in this new era in 2018, when it struck down the

Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act—a federal law that banned most sports betting in America. The floodgates opened, as state after state legalized sports gambling, aiming to cash in on tax revenue from bets. By 2024, 38 states had approved sports betting, with more almost certainly to follow.

With money on the line, fans' emotions run higher than the mere school or team spirit of the old days, and athletes become targets for extreme vitriol. NCAA President Charlie Baker warned about the problem in a March letter to campus leaders. "Recent data," he wrote, "indicates that approximately one in three high-profile athletes receive abusive messages from someone with a betting interest." (An NCAA survey last year found 67 percent of college students bet on sports and 35 percent have placed bets with student bookies.)

Players can become targets of abuse whether they play well or poorly. For example, the mother of former Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud told *Sports Illustrated* her son received death threats after a close loss to Michigan last year. But winning doesn't shield players, either. Purdue Boilermakers guard Carson Barrett says his phone blew up after he made a three-point shot late in a 2023 NCAA basketball tournament victory. One message said, "Kill yourself." (Social →

media abuse in general is a problem for athletes, including sexualized messages to females. In April, Louisiana State women's basketball star Angel Reese tearfully told reporters that, because of such abuse, she hasn't been happy since her team's 2023 NCAA title victory.)

For gamblers, wins and losses aren't the only concern. They also care deeply about the "spread"—the predicted margin of victory for the favored team. The result is that athletes who simply play to the best of their ability can arouse fan anger if they encroach on the spread. In March 2023, Texas Christian University basketball star Damion Baugh made a 3-point shot at the buzzer against Gonzaga that changed the final score from 84-78 to 84-81. The shot didn't change the outcome of the game, a Gonzaga victory. But since Gonzaga had been favored by 4 points, Baugh's shot meant his opponent's victory didn't cover the spread. Angry bettors sent Baugh harassing messages.

It's the same in the NBA. "There's no doubt about it, that it's crossed the line," Cavaliers coach Bickerstaff said. "The amount of times where I'm standing up there, and we may have a 10-point lead, and the spread is 11, and people are yelling at me to leave the guys in so that we can cover the spread—it's ridiculous."

That kind of pressure, as well as all the money at stake, leads to speculation that some athletes and referees may be cheating. On March 8, when Minnesota Timberwolves center Rudy Gobert fouled out of a game, he gestured toward the referee who called the final foul, rubbing his thumbs on his forefingers to signify "money." Gobert later said his gesture, while immature, "was the truth." The NBA—which has lucrative deals with betting companies—quickly responded to the suggestion that the ref was on the take by slapping Gobert with a \$100,000 fine, the largest allowed under the league's collective bargaining agreement with players.

An even more serious situation erupted in April, when the NBA



LSU's Angel Reese speaks to reporters at a postgame press conference in March.

"Athletes who simply play to the best of their ability can arouse fan anger if they encroach on the spread."

banned Toronto Raptors player Jontay Porter for life. The league says Porter told a bettor about his health status—and then took himself out of a March 20 game after playing only three minutes (claiming sickness). The league also says Porter himself bet on 13 NBA games in which he didn't participate.

In the NFL, such problems have mushroomed. Between 1963 and 2018, the NFL suspended only three players for gambling violations. Since 2019, the league has already suspended 12.

About the only group for which the new sports culture is an unalloyed plus is the sports betting companies. FanDuel is the industry leader, with revenue of \$1.4 billion in the last quarter of 2023, up 26 percent from 2022. The company projects it will notch \$16 billion in annual revenue by 2030.

Such stratospheric growth seems to ratify the branding strategy used by Flutter Entertainment, the Irish company that owns FanDuel. Its tagline? "Changing the game." ■



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An engraving showing the conquest of Carthage by the Roman army in 146 B.C.

BOOKS

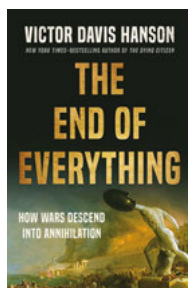
The wages of war

Case studies in pride before a military fall

by COLLIN GARBARINO

→ **THE NATURE OF WAR** is to destroy. But how often do participants in a military conflict consider that violence might begin a chain reaction that ends in the obliteration of their society? Victor Davis Hanson's *The End of Everything: How Wars Descend Into Annihilation* (Basic Books 2024) asks us to contemplate that possibility.

Hanson is a prolific conservative commentator who previously spent almost 20 years at California State University, Fresno, as a classics professor



The End of Everything
VICTOR DAVIS HANSON

specializing in the study of warfare in the ancient Greek world. *The End of Everything* warns us about the wages of war by looking at four case studies.

In the first chapter, Hanson examines Alexander the Great's destruction of classical Thebes in 335 B.C. Alexander's father Philip had conquered the Greek world, forcing the various city-states to recognize his lordship, but after Philip's assassination, Thebes rebelled, believing the 20-year-old Alexander wouldn't be able to hold his father's empire together. Thebes underestimated its enemy and overestimated its own defenses: After a long siege in which would-be allies ignored Thebes' calls for aid, Alexander tore down the city's structures, killed the men, and sold the women and children into slavery.

Chapter 2 recounts Rome's destruction of Carthage in 146 B.C. Rome and Carthage had already fought two devastating wars, both of which Rome won. But Carthage didn't anticipate that decades later Rome would still hold a grudge against its humbled North African rival. Even so, one doesn't feel much sympathy for the defeated Carthaginians, who practiced child sacrifice.

The latter two case studies take place more than 1,500 years later. When examining Constantinople's fall to the Turks in 1453, Hanson explains the former Roman capital's slow thousand-year decline—to the point that it had a population of just 50,000 by the 15th century. Its famed walls protected it from onslaught, but it possessed no strength of arms to guard those walls. Even so, Hanson offers a thrilling tale of how the beleaguered defenders almost outlasted the attack.

Hanson then turns to the New World in Chapter 4, looking at the Spanish destruction of the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán in 1521. The Aztecs' overwhelming numerical superiority lulled them into false confidence. Hanson downplays the idea that the

“Hanson tries
to draw lessons for
modern warfare.”

Aztecs thought Hernán Cortés and his men gods. Cortés’ weapons, armor, and horses gave him a tactical advantage, but his biggest advantage was that the Aztecs had asymmetrical goals in the war. The masses of Aztecs fought as individuals, hoping to capture the Spaniards for later ritualistic sacrifice, but the Spanish soldiers worked together and killed their enemies as a unit in the most efficient way possible.

Hanson tries to draw lessons for modern warfare concerning naïve expectations, the dangers of factionalism, and shifting political calculations. But while each story he tells is interesting, the connections he makes to the modern world feel tenuous. The case studies involve cities under siege, but it’s been a long time since the world’s geopolitical structure favored the city-state. Hanson warns against annihilation, but he’s inconsistent in whether he’s talking about biological kinship, ethnic culture, or governmental structures. Sure, Thebes was destroyed in 335 B.C., but Greek culture endured.

In his conclusion, Hanson comments on Russia’s war in Ukraine and the belligerence of Iran. He offers sensible warnings to the West concerning the possibility of nuclear warfare, claiming we ought not fall into the trap of thinking it could never happen. His analysis is worth consideration, but it doesn’t have much to do with the 250 pages that came before it. ■

BOOKS

Elegant wit and prose

Writer Amor Towles sees human nature as it is

by BEKAH MCCALLUM



AUTHOR WILLIAM FAULKNER said most novelists become novelists because they can’t crank out a convincing short story. Mercifully, Amor Towles, author of the much-loved *A Gentleman in Moscow*, proves he’s more than a one-trick-pony writer. His *Table for Two* (Viking 2024) has six short stories and a novella as an addendum, each a thing of beauty, full of Towles’ signature classy wit and elegant prose.

For the short stories, there’s “The Ballad of Timothy Touchett,” featuring an aspiring writer who agrees to forge signatures in first edition books. In “The Bootlegger,” an Ivy League investment banker eats humble pie when he accidentally gets an old man

banned from Carnegie Hall. Every story takes place in a different time with different narrators that showcase Towles’ range.

Unlike many short-story writers, Towles doesn’t rely on shocking, gruesome twists in the denouement. His stories are poignant because they bear witness to reality, a reality where actions—and inactions—have consequences.

Finally, his novella *Eve in Hollywood* explores one of Towles’ characters from *Rules of Civility*. Heading by train to Chicago, Eve decides to ride to the end of the line: Los Angeles. With a haunting scar

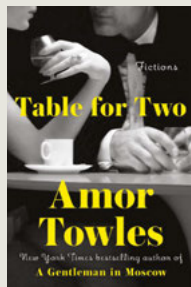


Table for Two
AMOR TOWLES

on her cheekbone and fear of absolutely nothing, Eve becomes the gossip of Hollywood. She makes friends with a stuntman, a retired detective, a washed-up actor, and Olivia de Havilland. When someone blackmails De Havilland with nude photos she never posed for, Eve assembles a crack team of has-beens to avenge her new friend.

The novella is the raciest section in the book. When the perpetrators describe the photos, though, it’s clearly meant to be seen as vulgar and cruel rather than alluring. Some bad language occurs throughout the book, but Towles doesn’t seem to go in for vulgarity. He includes swearing only if a character’s mood calls for it. All the same, *Table for Two* is more profane than *A Gentleman in Moscow*.

Towles’ conclusions aren’t always sound, but he’s perceptive about human nature. He explains exactly what he thinks his audience should understand while leaving them room to make up their own minds. He’s also funny and acutely aware of his proclivity to tangents: “Bear with me,” he writes. “I promise to be brief.”



BOOKS

Appalachian tales

Two novels hinge on a damaging lie and an absurd proposal

by SANDY BARWICK

IN 1905 the Vanderbilt family, owners of the famed Biltmore Estate in Asheville, N.C., founded a school to teach custom woodworking and homespun weaving to underprivileged youth. This historical backdrop is the setting for Sarah Loudin Thomas' well-researched novel, *These Tangled Threads* (Bethany House 2024). Edith and Cornelia Vanderbilt play bit roles in the plot, as well as Fred Seely, architect of the renowned Grove Park Inn, and the Rev. Rodney Swope of All Souls Church (across the street from WORLD's present-day offices).

Set between 1915 and 1924, the story follows three fictional friends employed by Biltmore Industries. Lorna is a master weaver but lacks the creativity to design anything but the most basic patterns. Gentry is her reluctant student, but she possesses intricate designs that once belonged

to her mother. After Lorna passes off the patterns as her own, she's burdened with guilt and shame. Gentry vanishes without a goodbye and years pass.

Meanwhile, Arthur, an expert woodworker who pines for Lorna, has his hands full caring for his wayward younger brother. Then, a woman commissions Lorna to design a special fabric as a gift for Cornelia's upcoming wedding. Lorna, knowing she doesn't have the skills, asks Arthur to help her track down an elusive artisan to produce a design fit for a Vanderbilt. Their search leads to an opportunity for confession and forgiveness.

Ann H. Gabhart's latest novel, *The Song of Sourwood Mountain* (Revell 2024), is set in 1910 Kentucky. On page 1, the Rev. Gordon Covington shocks Miss Mira Dean with a marriage proposal. They barely know each other, but due to a series of events, Mira eventually accepts Gordon's absurd proposal and travels with him from Louisville to rural Sourwood to be not only his wife but also the mission schoolteacher. Mira fears her status as an outsider—or "brought-in"—means she'll never fit into the tight-knit community of hardscrabble folks who jar their own sorghum syrup, churn their own butter, and, to her surprise, brew their own liquor in the backwoods.

Ostensibly, the story is about Gordon and Mira, but the real star is a semi-wild orphan named Ada June, whose only friend is her dog, Bo. Ada June has a case of selective mutism but yearns to go to school. Mira adores the little girl instantly, but feelings for her husband develop more slowly. Although she's content in her role as Gordon's wife, she's hesitant to claim true love. Gordon patiently waits and believes God's plan for them will work out. Let's hope Gabhart is working on a sequel featuring feisty Ada June and her trusty canine sidekick. ■



These Tangled Threads

SARAH LOUDIN THOMAS

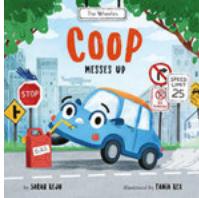


The Song of Sourwood Mountain

ANN H. GABHART

Embracing faith

by KRISTIN CHAPMAN



Coop Messes Up

SARAH REJU
(NEW GROWTH PRESS 2024)

Coop the car struggles to do what he is supposed to do, so his sister Lucy offers to teach him how to obey all the rules. As Lucy gives him a crash course in a long list of driving do's and don'ts, Coop's confidence in his abilities grows—until he and Lucy overlook their gas tanks and find themselves stranded. When their mother comes to the rescue, they're ashamed—until she tells them she loves them unconditionally just like God loves her, even when she messes up. In the conclusion, author Sarah Reju connects the story to the good news of the gospel, reminding children that no one can obey perfectly—but God loves them and sent His perfect Son to make a way for them to be with Him in heaven. **Ages 4-7**



God's Little Astronomer

TINA CHO
(WATERBROOK 2024)

Cho takes children on a journey into outer space in this first book from the God's Little Explorers series that focuses on science through the lens of faith. Children will learn about the basics of astronomy as Cho shares brief details about galaxies, stars, planets, and the moon. Every spread includes a Scripture verse about the heavens and the earth, and the text emphasizes God's power and majesty displayed in His created order. The conclusion rightly notes that while the wonders of space are amazing and exhibit "God's wondrous love," God sees us as "His most special creation in all the universe."

Ages 4-8

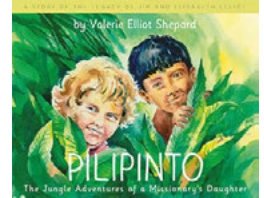


The King of All Things

SHAY & CATHERINE GREGORIE
(WOLFbane BOOKS 2024)

This poetic board book opens by declaring, "Father in heaven, you're the King of All Things—Creation springs from the songs you sing!" The subsequent pages continue with proclamations of God's power and creativity manifested from the wind and mountains to the birds and the whales. The final page offers a scripted prayer about God's wondrous works that parents can pray with their children. Breezy Brookshire's soft illustrations reflect the book's message, and one spread featuring Jesus has His face turned away so only His back and a bit of His profile can be seen. The book would make a lovely bedtime read-aloud for little ones.

Ages 2-5



Pilipinto

VALERIE ELLIOT SHEPARD
(P&R 2023)

In this revamped and reissued edition, Shepard shares her story of growing up in the jungles of Ecuador where her famous parents served as missionaries. After her father's death, Valerie—called Pilipinto by the Quechua Indians—and her mother Elisabeth stay to serve. From trekking through the Amazon to eating termites and keeping a pet monkey, Valerie delights in her unusual childhood. The book's chapters focus on themes and phases from her childhood, showcasing God's provision and care for mother and daughter amid a foreign and often dangerous world. Interspersed among the pages are photos from the author's early years as well as memories of a young Valerie that her mother recorded in her journal. **Ages 6-10**



MOVIE

Unsung Hero

by COLLIN GARBARINO

► Rated PG

► Theaters

THE SONG “UNSUNG HERO” by brothers Joel and Luke Smallbone, who make up the Christian band For King & Country, was inspired by the sacrifices their parents made for their large family. The new movie with the same name fleshes out their story and also tells how their older sister became the Christian music star Rebecca St. James.

The story begins in 1990 in Australia where David Smallbone (played in the movie by his son Joel) works as a concert promoter for Christian musicians. Life is good for

David and his wife Helen (Daisy Betts) who have six kids and a seventh on the way. Helen keeps the family grounded, but David is an optimist with big dreams that require big risks. Those dreams come crashing down when his ambition outstrips his readiness.

The 40-year-old David decides to uproot Helen and the kids and move to Nashville, hoping to salvage his career in Christian music. Helen isn't sure about the idea, but she's willing to follow her husband as he pursues his latest dream.

America might be the land of opportunity, but the opportunities don't come quickly for the

Smallbones. They don't have any money, and the kids sleep on the floor of their rented house because David and Helen can't afford to buy furniture.

Unsung Hero certainly doesn't glamorize the Christian music industry. Business is business, and things get a little cutthroat. David thought his connections in Christian music would help him find work, but too many people let him down or break their promises.

The production values, script, and cinematography of this faith-based movie are workmanlike, but some parts get a little melodramatic. The scene in which Helen announces it's time to go to the hospital because the baby's coming follows a laughable cliché. But on the whole, *Unsung Hero* proves to be a solid Christian film that avoids many of the traps of the faith-based genre.

Too many Christian films follow the same worn-out story arc. Someone has a crisis of faith. He or she gets into trouble. There's an answer to prayer. And faith gets restored.

Unsung Hero tells a more realistic story. The Smallbones experience struggles, but they never question their faith because they don't need a miracle to believe. Instead, we see a beautiful story of a family pulling together and trusting God to meet their needs. When the local church steps in to help, we think their problems are over, but this blessing leads to the movie's real crisis when David struggles to accept generosity from his fellow Christians.

He used to be a successful businessman, and being on the receiving end of charity hurts his pride. He feels like he's letting his family down because he's not able to provide for them as a husband and father should. This heart-level conflict has the ring of authenticity to it, and the movie doesn't take cheap shortcuts on David's journey to humility.

“We see a beautiful story of a family pulling together and trusting God to meet their needs.”

Of course, the family doesn't remain in humble dependence on the goodwill of others. David and Helen's economic challenges provide the movie's conflict, but much of the plot revolves around their oldest daughter Rebecca's attempts to land a recording contract.

The movie plays a little fast and loose with Rebecca St. James' story. It suggests that after the impoverished family moves to America, Rebecca's parents are surprised to find out she can sing. In reality, David and Helen knew their oldest daughter had musical potential before they made the move to Nashville. At the age of 12, while still in Australia, the real Rebecca had already opened for Christian music superstar Carman and recorded an independent album.

Fans of Rebecca St. James or For King & Country will enjoy seeing the family dynamic that helped shape them, but this movie is rooted in Helen's stalwart faith in her God and her family.

The filmmakers have definitely fulfilled their goal of paying honor to an unsung hero. ■



MOVIE

We Grown Now

by BEKAH MCCALLUM

► *Rated PG*

► *Theaters*

IN 1992, Chicago's Cabrini-Green apartment complex housed 15,000 black residents whose families had lived in generations of poverty. *We Grown Now* looks at the housing project through the eyes of two best friends.

Inspired by the legendary Michael Jordan, 10-year-old Malik (Blake Cameron James) and his best friend Eric (Gian Knight Ramirez) go “jumping”: Whoever gets the most air time before landing on an old mattress wins. But youthful games must give way to harsh reality in Cabrini-Green.

Things change for the boys after a sniper guns down 7-year-old Dantrell Davis. Policemen perform drug busts without warning, and it's not safe to go jumping anymore.

Malik's father isn't around, and his mom (Jurnee Smollett) works long hours to make ends meet. The increasing dangers and a new work opportunity cause Mom to decide it's time to move.

Compelling sound design and cinematography bring tenement life into sharp relief, allowing the plot to focus on the boys' friendship. Malik hopes for a better future. Erik struggles to grasp that there's a better future to hope for, and the tension between them grows as their understanding of the world changes.

This intimate film about childhood, trials, and friendship doesn't have much objectionable material. The filmmakers keep a lot of action off-screen. We don't see the murder of Dantrell Davis, and it's not clear what happened to Malik's dad. The movie implies that the absence has deeply affected Malik.

When the boys recite the Pledge of Allegiance at school, the words, “with liberty and justice for all,” echo for ironic effect. But *We Grown Now* doesn't bask in bitterness even as it acknowledges a community that was swept under the national rug. Instead, the film focuses on growing up and holding on to hope.

TELEVISION

Space: The Longest Goodbye

by BOB BROWN



► [PBS](#)

PACKING ENOUGH toothpaste won't be your biggest challenge if NASA selects you as an astronaut for the first human voyage to Mars. According to the new PBS documentary *Space: The Longest Goodbye*, the three years of isolation travelers to the red planet will experience could lead to serious mental breakdowns and mission failure. In the film, International Space Station (ISS) veterans explain the emotional toll separation from their families had on them, and

psychologists and operational experts offer remedies, some of which promote artificial surrogates of questionable efficacy.

Cady Coleman spent six months on the ISS in 2011. Since the space station orbits a mere 250 miles above the Earth, she was able to have real-time communication with her husband and son Jamey, then in fourth grade. Still, Jamey says, "You never know how much you miss a hug from your mom until you don't have it." The documentary plays their recorded personal video conversations, and other interviewees

question whether their separations were worth it.

Astronaut John Glenn, who died in 2016, recounts how he helped NASA advise the Chilean government in 2010 when 33 miners were trapped underground for more than two months. Once a video communication cable was established through a pipe, "stabilizing the families' emotions helped stabilize" the trapped miners, Glenn says. All of them got out alive.

Glenn insists Mars astronauts will need to maintain contact with family to survive. But the vast distance involved in a Mars voyage won't permit real-time communication. Jacquelyn Ford Morie, a "virtual reality pioneer," recommends that astronauts use a VR headset to engage with avatars of their spouses delivering recorded messages. (Morie didn't say if spouses and kids should do the same back home.) The film also shows ISS astronauts interacting with CIMON, a floating AI robot head that engages in (rather shallow) small talk. A European Space Agency scientist recommends astronauts undergo medically induced hibernation to save resources, such as—although he didn't mention it specifically—toothpaste.

Some viewers will be disappointed that the documentary almost entirely neglects to address the technical challenges of a voyage to Mars—the difficulties of getting there and back, as well as routine concerns like doing laundry, providing three years' worth of water, and handling crew illnesses.

On that last point: University of Texas professor Sukjin Han discusses a 2018 Mars simulation in Hawaii that he commanded. The five-person crew quit the planned eight-month operation less than a week in when one member suffered electric shock and they had to call 911. You can't do that (or order extra toiletries) 140 million miles from Earth. ■

BOX OFFICE TOP 10

For the weekend of April 26-28,
according to Box Office Mojo

- 1 **Challengers**
R • S7 / V4 / L10†
- 2 **Unsung Hero***
PG • S1 / V3 / L1
- 3 **Godzilla x Kong:
The New Empire***
PG-13 • S0 / V6 / L4
- 4 **Civil War***
R • S1 / V7 / L10
- 5 **Abigail**
R • S1 / V9 / L10
- 6 **The Ministry of
Ungentlemanly Warfare**
R • S5 / V7 / L5
- 7 **Kung Fu Panda 4***
PG • S0 / V3 / L2
- 8 **Ghostbusters:
Frozen Empire**
PG-13 • S2 / V5 / L4
- 9 **Dune: Part Two***
PG-13 • S2 / V6 / L5
- 10 **Boy Kills World**
R • S1 / V10 / L10

*Reviewed by WORLD

†Ratings from kids-in-mind.com, with quantity
of sexual (S), violent (V), and foul-language (L)
content on a 0-10 scale, with 10 high

THRILLER HITS

- **Poltergeist** / 1982
- **Twilight Zone: The Movie** / 1983
- **Gremlins** / 1984
- **Little Shop of Horrors** / 1986
- **Arachnophobia** / 1990
- **Ernest Scared Stupid** / 1991
- **Coraline** / 2009
- **Split** / 2016
- **A Quiet Place** / 2018
- **M3GAN** / 2023



MOVIE

The Manifestation

by CHELSEA BOES

► [Video on demand](#)

IS THE MANIFESTATION a psychological thriller—or a spiritual lesson? Calvin University professor Geert Heetebrij writes and directs this independent faith-based film that’s clearly designed to scratch both itches.

Day trader Stephen (Jack Kesy) gambles his family’s savings away on risky bets as he tries to “manifest” success. Persistent, suspenseful music alerts the viewer to high stakes, but sometimes the film’s tension feels manufactured. The villain, guru Michael (Usman Ally), got Stephen and his wife (Inbar Lavi) into this trouble by feeding them messages such as “Aspire! You are your own creator! Reject negative visualization! Say what you want!”

In a dumpy office that he imagines is a well-furnished suite, Stephen says, “I want to be successful.” Soon his manifestation takes on a persona—a red-headed alter ego of his brown-haired wife. This evil counterpart represents

the true wishes of Stephen’s heart, and she shows him just how to play the game. Meanwhile, the real wife distances herself from her unstable husband. He tries to woo her back with expensive gifts, but he’s losing sight of what’s true and good.

The Manifestation draws on staples of horror and surreal films such as doppelgangers, jump scares, and an ambiguous ending. Instead of tying up the tale with a neat redemptive bow, as we’re used to seeing in faith-based films, it paints a downward spiral. Its themes are explicit as well as helpful: “Manifestation” ideology is idolatry that will destroy your life. The film narrowly escapes feeling preachy.

Still, parts of the story suffer from the message. The film features some violence, but it’s not realistic or scary enough. In the best horror movies, darkness feels truly dark. In this film, you can’t help feeling that someone left the night light on.

MUSIC

A common man's frustration

Oliver Anthony continues to defy conventional wisdom

by ARSENIO ORTEZA



while the title doesn't roll trippingly off the tongue, it's in keeping with Anthony's conventional-wisdom-defying approach to his career so far.

He did not, for instance, release *Hymnal* on a label, major or otherwise, or even put his name on the cover. Neither did he release it on a Friday (the official day for springing new albums on the world), preferring Easter Sunday instead ("because," he wrote on Facebook, "of the grace that has been afforded to us by Jesus as he took on the entire sin of the world"). Most unusual of all, he hasn't included his hit. "While Richmond was the song that got my name out in the public," he wrote (Facebook again), "these songs represent the true foundation of the music that got me through life up until now."

Listeners will recognize in that foundation plenty of the sound and sensibility of "Richmond." The sound: raw, anguished, resonator-guitar-accompanied vocals thick with the kind of accent that you'd expect from someone who makes his home in Farmville, Va., (population 7,473) and whose go-to modifier is "damn." (Cobb has added some fiddles and an occasional rhythm section too). The sensibility: a common man's frustration at finding himself in a world indifferent to a common man's frustrations.

"If it wasn't for my old dogs and the good Lord," Anthony sings in "I Want To Go Home," "they'd have me strung up in the psych ward." And written on a guitar on the cover: "A nation of sheep will beget a government of wolves."

Such sentiments are pure "Richmond." What's new are the eight spoken Bible segues—five from Ecclesiastes, one from Proverbs, two from Matthew, and all from the "inclusive" NIV (you can't win 'em all)—that recast Anthony's songs as a sort of pilgrim's progress. "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul," he recites. "Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."

It's a warning that both sheep and wolves would do well to heed. ■



FOR A WHILE, it seemed livestock farmer turned country singer Christopher Anthony Lunsford—better known as Oliver Anthony—would prove no more than a flash in the pan. No sooner had his awkward but earnest populist protest song "Rich Men North of Richmond" gone viral last summer and made him a cultural lightning rod than he vanished, his 15 minutes of fame having apparently ticked away.

It turns out Anthony was just resetting his clock, rerecording with the help of the Grammy-winning producer Dave Cobb songs he'd written and posted to social media in demo form before most people knew who he was.

Hymnal of a Troubled Man's Mind, his debut album, is the result. And



Hymnal of a Troubled Man's Mind

OLIVER ANTHONY

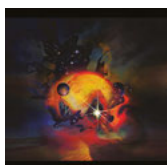
New and noteworthy

by ARSENIO ORTEZA



Pit Sounds DE-PHAZZ

The cover art notwithstanding, this spacey, more-intricate-than-meets-the-ear lounge music is no Beach Boys tribute. Or is it? *Pet Sounds*, after all, drew heavily on the easy-listening modes of its day too. But the similarities break down with the voices—a combination of samples and airy effects that owe nothing to Brian Wilson. Also undreamt of in Wilson’s philosophy: the hyper-catchy “Guru Bamboolo” and the fetchingly weird “Eldorado Flashback.”



Asterisms SEAN ONO LENNON

Over the course of five compositions totaling 37 minutes, melodic patterns that wouldn’t be out of place on a film-noir soundtrack take gradual shape, delineated as often by Michael Leonhart’s trumpet and Devon Hoff’s bass as by Sean Ono Lennon’s electric guitar.

João Nogueira’s Wurlizer piano and Yuka C. Honda’s “electronics” provide an astronomical feel appropriate to titles such as “Heliopause” and “Starwater.” The latter encounters enough prog-metal turbulence to activate the fasten-seatbelt sign. The drummer doesn’t always comply.



Swingin’ Live at the Church in Tulsa

THE TAJ MAHAL SEXTET

“We are the Taj Mahal Quartet,” says Taj Mahal after shouting out his five band members at the conclusion of this wonderful set. So the walking encyclopedia of blues and folk can’t count. Big deal. Guitar, banjo,

ukulele, piano, singing—he can still apparently do everything else. So can his five band members. Rob Ickes’ dobro and Bobby Ingano’s lap steel guitar in particular shine in what, even for our technologically advanced age, is an uncommonly bright and detailed stereo mix. Trey Hensley shines on “Lovin’ in My Baby’s Eyes,” which Mahal, generous mensch that he is, lets him sing.



Swing Fever ROD STEWART WITH JOOLS HOLLAND

The concluding track, a “Tennessee Waltz” in 4/4 time, encapsulates both what works and what doesn’t on this big-band collaboration between rock’s most ageless singer and England’s answer to Paul Shaffer.

What works? The energy. If you have dancing shoes, prepare to don them now. What doesn’t? The energy. A 4/4 “Tennessee Waltz” makes no sense—that is, unless you want to replace its sadness with high spirits, which also makes no sense. In short, the album is sometimes too energetic for its own good. A suggestion for the inevitable Volume 2: Since “Oh Marie” is the jivingest thing here, how about a whole album of Louis Prima?



ENCORE

No musician is currently making better use of Bandcamp than **Phil Keaggy**. His “Acoustic—Live!” subsection alone contains 135 albums, documenting the years 1976 to 2023. The latest is *Asheville, NC: The Cove, 10/22/2023*. About the venue: Also known as the Billy Graham Training Center at the Cove, it hosts a monthly event called “An Evening Event at the Cove,” at which, for just \$64, you can “enjoy friendly conversation over a fine buffet dinner, followed by an uplifting concert program.”

Attendees got their money’s worth last October. For an hour and 38 minutes, one of the world’s greatest guitarists delivered a 16-song set, playing and singing as if he were half his age at the time (72). Among the highlights: rediscovering the “MacArthur Park” riffs in “Rejoice,” the “Dear Prudence” melody in “Where the Morning Dawns,” and “Sweet Home Alabama” in “So Long Ago.” His next Cove appearance is this November. As of this writing, it’s not sold out. —A.O.



MUSIC

Imprecatory pop

Taylor Swift rebukes her enemies and pines for what-ifs

by TREVOR SIDES



THE FIRST TIME I cried while listening to *The Tortured Poets Department: The Anthology* was when I heard Taylor Swift sing, “My beloved ghost and me” in the bridge for “How Did It End?” It was the combination of “beloved” and “ghost”—Song of Solomon collides with therapy speak—that struck me. This is the spiritual collision Swift captures in *TTPD*, her 11th studio album.

This is quite the space to occupy for the most dominant cultural force since the Beatles. *TTPD* is Swift’s fifth album since 2019, and it became the first album to hit 1 billion streams on Spotify in a single week. Swift has more No. 1 albums than any other woman, and she’s the first living artist since Herb Alpert (!) in 1966 to have four titles in the *Billboard* Top 10.

More than anything, her newest album acts like an imprecatory psalm, with Swift naming and rebuking her enemies. It is a 31-track meditation of wrongs done by her former loves (by



**The Tortured Poets
Department: The Anthology**

TAYLOR SWIFT

all accounts, Joe Alwyn and Matty Healy), by her fans, and, yes, by herself. Swift does not seem interested in forgiveness (“The Smallest Man Who Ever Lived”) or letting go of grudges (“thanK you aMee”). These factors may explain the regrettably high volume of explicit language throughout *TTPD* (including several F-bombs).

Much of Swift’s heartbreak stems from dashed hopes of marriage and family. As she sings in “loml” (“loss of my life”), “Talkin’ rings and talkin’ cradles / I wish I could un-recall / How we almost had it all.”

Swift employs Christian imagery and language as she recounts the death of her dreams. This is most apparent on “Guilty as Sin?,” where Easter symbolism abounds. On “But Daddy I Love Him,” she asks us *not* to pray for her as she names the sins committed by “vipers dressed in empath’s clothing.” Later, on “Cassandra,” she scorns the “Christian chorus line” who “never spared a prayer for [her] soul.”

Unfortunately, the midtempo synth-pop that comprises most of the first half of *TTPD* works against these themes. There are two exceptions. “Who’s Afraid of Little Old Me?” is *big*, catchy, cathartic. “I Can Do It With a Broken Heart” is a frenetic, electric jam that belies lyrics like, “I cry a lot but I am so productive, it’s an art.”

Songs like “loml” and most of the second half move in a more acoustic direction. They’re sad and lush and create an emotional ecosystem that’s easy to get lost in. In “The Prophecy,” intricate guitar work lays the foundation for what’s really a prayer. Swift sings, “I’ve been on my knees / Change the prophecy / Don’t want money / Just someone who wants my company.”

Still, all the what-if-ing can feel overdone. The Catholic poet Dana Gioia, in his poem “Summer Storm,” warns against playing games with “What ifs that won’t stay buried ... / Strangers we might have married.” He knows that “memory insists on pining / For places it never went,” and that life would not “be happier / Just by being different.” ■



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VOICES **JANIE B. CHEANEY**

Systemic instability

Children miss a lot more than a hot meal when they don't have a mom and dad

WHEN ROBERT HENDERSON was an undergrad at Yale, many of his fellow students didn't hesitate to share their family backgrounds. "My mom was super strict growing up," explained one young woman he met at a party. "Classic Asian mom, I'm sure you know what I mean."

"Well, my mom is Korean," he replied. "But my family life wasn't really like that."

"Ah! So, you didn't have a traumatic childhood."

Readers of *Troubled: A Memoir of Foster Care, Family, and Social Class* may indulge in ironic laughter at this point. Henderson's Korean mom was a drug addict who tied him to a chair with a bathrobe belt while she got high. Even so, when neighbors reported his crying to the LAPD, he clung to her so hard they had to pry him off. A series of foster homes followed—in the last, he was treated as unpaid labor—before a couple from Northern California adopted him at age 8. His new father, a truck driver, shot hoops with Robert in the park and took him along on a haul to Montana. But this idyllic interlude ended with an ugly divorce, after which the man he called Dad wanted nothing more to do with him.

His adoptive mom began a relationship with another woman, which provided a degree of stability. But financial difficulties led the pair to make a new start in Oakland, and eventually they split up as well. Robert, in his teens by then, stayed behind in his small town, where

he lived with similarly rootless friends, indulged in heavy drinking and petty crime, and blew his straight-A middle school record by barely attending high school.

Three factors snatched him from the dead-end street where most of his friends ended up: a few encouraging teachers (especially the one who taught him to read), books about other hard-luck kids who made good, and the U.S. Air Force. The military provided order and discipline, as well as a stepping-stone for applying to college. That's how he got into Yale, listening to classmates complain about microaggressions and white privilege.

Readers can draw their own conclusions: Only in America. The military turns boys into men. Same-sex parents are better than no parents. But Henderson makes his own conclusion perfectly clear: Though he's achieved the heights of American success (Ivy League education, widely published in *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*), he would, without hesitation, trade it all for a happy childhood with a mom and dad. Better a laborer at peace with his past than a haunted bestselling author.

Critics of the cultural marriage decline often focus on material deprivation. *The Two-Parent Privilege*, a book I reviewed recently, draws on data to prove how single parents can't provide the resources a child needs to become a successful adult. True that, but I recall Jeannette Walls' *The Glass Castle*, a memoir of her neglectful parents. Walls certainly experienced deprivation while dragged from one abandoned house to another, often lacking food or adequate clothes. But she and her siblings also had memories of Dad reading aloud on winter nights and Mom making popcorn on a hot plate, and perhaps that was just enough attention and stability for their children to turn adversity to their advantage. All three went on to create successful careers for themselves.

Henderson ends his memoir noting how "luxury beliefs" about "outdated" marriage and the nuclear family have sifted down from elites to the lower classes. The outré college kids, he observes, went full bourgeois after graduation, getting married and laying out their own children's path to privilege just like their parents did. Meanwhile, his childhood friends are in jail, hopelessly addicted, or dead.

In a way, children don't need much—mostly, to be taken seriously as children, not little adults or units in the system. To have a mom and dad who stay together and care about them, however imperfectly. That's God's plan, and if that's all you can do, it will most likely be enough. ■



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E S S A Y

THE LONG GAME

TWENTY YEARS OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE
AND THE MORAL REVOLUTION
THAT MADE IT POSSIBLE

by Rosaria Butterfield

ILLUSTRATION BY KRIEG BARRIE

NORMALITY LAND

A neat little scheme for a moral revolution



My Christian neighbor knocked on my door and asked if we could talk. I smiled, but he looked uncharacteristically burdened. My just-waking toddler snuggled on my hip. Her hair smelled of apple juice and yogurt.

“I have been praying for a woman who is—or was—a lesbian professor from Syracuse University,” my neighbor said. “Her name was on a prayer list for the graduate students in the philosophy group. I have been praying for her since 1997. I think she is you.”

I felt gut-punched.

“Are you—were you—Rosaria Champagne?” my neighbor asked gently.

With those words, my compartmentalized life imploded.

It was 2008. Prop 8—a California ballot proposition and state constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage—was dominating the news while I tried vigilantly not to notice. After all, I’d been busy: When the U.S. Supreme Court in 2003 declared anti-sodomy laws unconstitutional in *Lawrence v. Texas*, and then—San Francisco mayor Gavin Newsom ushered in gay marriage in February 2004, I was a newly married church planter’s wife caring for a baby—and a traumatized teen adopted out of foster care. That May, as two Massachusetts women became the first legally married same-sex couple in America, I trying to live 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.”

As a new Christian and a new wife, I was experiencing exuberant Christian liberty and freedom from my past sins. But my memories persisted. Not as homosexual longings but as residue, like dirt lodged in grout. If my old sexual sin had passed away, why was it still a source of shame? Why couldn’t I simply erase it from my biography?

Maybe it was, in part, because the day I opened the door to my neighbor, I also opened the door to my past. And I was appalled to see a straight line between my biography and the

lawlessness that was then only beginning to corrupt the precious sacrament of marriage.

April 25, 1993, March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation. I sang along on a day crisp with sapphire sky and Indigo Girls rocking “Closer to Fine.” Gay Pride boded good tidings. We marched 300,000 strong in the center of U.S. power under sturdy and mature cherry blossom trees. I boasted a new butch haircut, piercings in my right ear (because in those days, left was right and right was wrong), and a wife-beater tank, perfect for the uncharacteristic April warmth. My girlfriend’s formidable hand on my back and her raspy alto voice singing in harmony meant one thing: I had arrived.

I was a newly minted Ph.D. holding a tenure-track post at a prestigious research university. Loud and proud. Out of the closet and bold at the lectern. Teaching packed courses in queer theory and women’s studies and coordinating student activism, I would later become a “tenured radical.” On that historic day in 1993, my girlfriend rode her Harley with Dykes on Bikes while I traipsed in my Birkenstocks with lesbian moms bearing sippy cups and strollers. My corner of the march rivaled any Moms Club for durable sensibility.

My partner and I were wholly egalitarian. If you had told us that in just over two decades, independent women like us would be calling each other “wives,” we would have thought you nuts. Why, we would’ve asked, would anyone burden good people with such a heteronormative institution?

The 1993 march displayed the gay rights movement’s internal contradictions: Sippy cups and sadomasochism marched in the same direction under the same banner.



Participants parade through Washington during the 1993 gay rights march.

We postmoderns had made peace with contradictions and dismissed all moral criticism as patriarchal and hegemonic.

ACT UP was there, chanting “Act Up! Fight Back! Fight AIDS” along with “End the Ban Now!” ACT UP activists laughed in the face of both condoms and common sense. Looking back, I believe their over-bright insouciance masked the soul-agony of death. It was at funerals—so many funerals—that the internal contradiction of gay rights hung heavy with unresolvable grief.

Just before the 1993 march, I had attended a symbolic gay marriage. It would not be the last gay marriage I attended, but it was certainly the largest.

About 1,500 same-sex couples assembled at the National Museum of Natural History with dozens of ministers, organ music, photographers, along with rice confetti (which is now frowned upon because it’s hard to clean up—is there a metaphor there?). The wedding ceremony was titled “An Interfaith Ceremony of Commitment.” We

observed, but my lesbian partner and I were not among the premarital assembled.

The march displayed the tension between queer activism and mainstream gay rights. As a radical academic, I was smitten with queer theory, with its fringe embrace of transsexuals and denial of stable categories of sex and gender. But I also saw the political expediency of leveling the legal playing field, of breaking the two-tier system that kept gays and lesbians classified as “other.” It wasn’t as easy as it sounds: To gain this respectability would require convincing garden-variety Americans to go soft on sodomy.

What would it take to get everyday Americans to extend to gays and lesbians the right hand of fellowship?

The answer was clear: gay marriage.

By 1989, the gay rights movement understood the moral advantage of full marriage over domestic partnerships, but this would require a radical change in how the movement presented itself. Neuropsychologist Marshall Kirk and advertising executive Hunter Madsen became the unlikely image consultants to make gay look normal even as the AIDS epidemic—in the early ’80s called GRID (Gay-Related Infectious Deficiency)—solidified the idea that “gay” equaled “deadly plague.” The duo published a handbook of gay

etiquette, *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the '90s* (New York: Doubleday 1989).

Kirk and Madsen's rules are straightforward:

Keep the message focused on the normalization of homosexuality. The authors declared it in plain English: no public sex and no gay disturbances until gay marriage is the law, and Christians see us as victims.

Find easy-to-manipulate churches, especially mainline Presbyterians, to get on board and help promote the idea that gays are victims.

Give potential protectors a just cause by reassuring Americans that the issue is anti-discrimination, not gay rights.

Make gays look good by reclaiming or inventing a noble history. Anyone single, over 40, and dead could be marshaled to the cause as a gay forebear.

Make victimizers look bad. Create a media link, for example, between Nazis and "hysterical backwoods preachers" and distinguish this from open-minded pluralists and liberal, loving pastors.

By the time of the 1993 march, Kirk and Madsen's book was considered seminal reading for gay activists. It was the road map. The game plan. With the march and mass marriage both stunning successes, we returned home with a team and a cause: We could practically taste our respectable freedom and moral inclusion.

It didn't take long to plunge back to earth. When Bill Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act into law in September 1996, we felt betrayed. The act limited marriage to the union of one man and one woman and further declared that no state could recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states.

While gay marriage was seemingly stuck in the twilight zone, my life was bustling with students, political petitions, speeches before lawmakers, op-eds in local newspapers, and disciplining a generation of young lesbian graduate students. Sometime after the 1993 march, we dropped the by-then bourgeois stability of "gay and lesbian" and embraced the rebellion of "queer." Queer, as defined by David Halperin, is "whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant ... is an identity without an essence." The problem with "gay" and "lesbian" is that it looked back to pathologies, abuse, and sin. Where "gay" and "lesbian" sought to normalize aberrance, "queer" embodied no pathology that required a cure, no sin that required forgiveness.

Thus, my ACT UP and transsexual friends saw me as a sellout when I co-wrote the domestic partnership policy at



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1993

March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation.

1996

President Bill Clinton signs into law the Defense of Marriage Act, limiting marriage to the union of one man and one woman and declaring that no state can recognize same-sex marriages performed in another state.

2003

The U.S. Supreme Court declares laws against sodomy unconstitutional in *Lawrence v. Texas*.

2004

Gavin Newsom, mayor of San Francisco, directs the city-county clerk to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. On May 17, two Massachusetts women become the first legally married same-sex couple in the United States.

2008

California voters approve Proposition 8, amending the state's constitution to ban same-sex marriage. The ban is soon overturned through the courts.

2015

In its 5-4 decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the U.S. Supreme Court legalizes gay marriage in all 50 states.

2020

In *Bostock v. Clayton*, the Supreme Court adds LGBTQ rights to the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

“What would it take to get everyday Americans to extend to gays and lesbians the right hand of fellowship? The answer was clear: gay marriage.”

my university, which allowed gay and lesbian couples to legally cover their partners on the university's medical insurance plans. We all knew this was a forerunner for gay marriage laws. ACT UP and company wanted to focus on unfettered sexual equality, not grafting gay couples into the heteronormative tree. I was running in the opposite direction of the radical queer activism I claimed to value.

My tenure book was published in 1996, which meant I could turn my attention to those I believed were stirring up American homophobia: Bible-believing Christians.

I started to obsess about them. Although few, they were vocal. Also, they didn't play fair. Blind to the fact that I and my friends were on an aggressive quest to warp the sexual design that had stood since Genesis, I became convinced it was actually the Christians who were on offense. Why, I wondered, would they not simply leave consenting adults alone?

When the Christian men's movement, Promise Keepers, set up shop in the Syracuse University football stadium, I wrote an editorial for a local paper: "Promise Keepers Message Is a Danger to Democracy." A week later, I received a response, a letter from a local pastor. His name was Ken Smith, and God used him to change my life forever.

Ken's letter invited me to dinner at his house, so I called him on the phone to ensure he wasn't a nut job. He graciously invited me to his home the following week, letting me know I could bring a friend. That was gracious, I thought, but I knew I wanted to go alone. When he gave me his address, I realized I knew the house. It was a few blocks away from mine, on one of my favorite running routes.

When I arrived at the Smith house, Floy, Ken's wife, hugged me warmly. At the dinner table, Ken pulled out my chair for me. Chivalry? I almost laughed out loud.

We made small talk, and I learned that Ken had been an English major and loved books, which became his segue to the Bible. Ken insisted that if I wanted to understand why Christians wouldn't leave consenting adults alone, I would need to actually read the Bible, not just talk about it. Then, in a straight-shooter way that would appall DEI coordinators

everywhere, Ken set the terms of our relationship: "Rosaria," he said, "I can accept you as a lesbian, but I do not approve." That tension between acceptance and approval would later become crucial to my salvation.

From my perspective, Christians were the only people who stood in the way of our full moral inclusion. I suddenly found myself eager to read this book that had seduced so many. Ken's Bible teaching was parsed over hundreds of nourishing meals, law and grace served with rice and beans. I devoured the Bible's imposing heft seven times in two years, grappling with its unapologetic patriarchy even as I found curious comfort in a good Father, a Creator God who makes patterns of nature concur with His purpose.

Of course, I flinched against the Creation mandate. I rejected the idea that my lesbian feelings were in rebellion, marring and distorting the image of God in me (Genesis 1:27-28). My feelings were genuine, were they not? Innate. How could they be anything but pure? Yet, the Bible presumed Adam's sin made me a morally culpable sinner, not an innocent victim (Genesis 3:15). I learned that Jesus came to set the captives free (Isaiah 61:1-3). I heard He was bigger than my lesbianism (Matthew 11:28-29). I later came to believe that Jesus, the God-man, suffered, died, was buried, and was resurrected to justify people like me.

The Smiths unashamedly embraced the Bible, every word of it, as true. What's more, they believed the Bible knew me better than I knew myself. I rejected this out of hand, of course. Still, I kept reading and meeting with the Smiths. Secretly, I considered them unpaid research assistants for my book on the Religious Right. But God had other plans.

God's Word took root in my heart and grew, shaping my thoughts about everything, even my 19th Century Literature class. I started rethinking Satan's hubris in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) and the soulless creature's pathos in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). What was Milton getting at when he had Adam lament, "Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay to mould me, man? Did I solicit thee from Darkness to promote me?" Mary Shelley inscribed these lines from *Paradise Lost* in her opening to *Frankenstein*

to make a point: God was like a mad scientist poking around in our lives without permission. But Psalm 100 assured me that “without our aid He did us make.” If God made man and woman in a pattern for a creational purpose (Genesis 1:28), that made lesbianism no bueno from the get-go.

Ken taught that John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life,” meant that God wanted to be in relationship with His image-bearers.

I was secretly astonished. The God of the universe wanted a relationship with me? And He secured that through the blood sacrifice of His Son, the Savior? And He communicated all this in a Book more magisterial than I could bear?

What the Smiths taught me permeated everything. The Apostles’ Creed, which I had memorized in Roman Catholic churches and schools, resurfaced in my conscious memory, and I found myself audibly exhaling it over 10-mile Sunday morning runs. Conversations with the Smiths were candid and edgy. Pastor Ken once observed, “Rosaria, your problem is you think what is ethical by your standards creates what is true and beautiful. But the Bible says the opposite: Objective truth determines what is beautiful and ethical.”

This is what real love looks like.

My lesbian partner brought me coffee one morning while I was reading my Bible in a corner of my home office.

“Why do you waste your time like this?” she scolded.

I felt exposed. The Word of God had gotten bigger inside me. My lesbianism and atheism no longer appeared to me like choices. Rather, they were attacks against my Lord, Prophet, Priest, and King. I wondered if I was on the road to becoming a closet Christian.

Tenure and faith came simultaneously, and repentance brought both terror and freedom. Terror because I saw all I had once loved slipping away. Freedom because God’s grace makes all loss good: “As there is no sin so small, but it deserves damnation, so there is no sin so great, that it can

bring damnation upon those who truly repent” (Westminster Confession of Faith 15:4). Freedom brought responsibility. I broke up with my lesbian partner and joined the church as a covenant member a few months after conversion. Taking vows before God established the course of my new life.

I was not converted out of homosexuality, but converted I was, and therefore, went to war against my homosexuality. Why? Because God hates it, that’s why. Grace isn’t cheap or easy: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality” (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

The Puritan John Owen helped me understand that we mortify what God hates and “vivify” what God loves. During



“I was not converted out of homosexuality, but converted I was, and therefore, went to war against my homosexuality.”



Plaintiff Jim Obergefell speaks to members of the media after the U.S. Supreme Court handed down a ruling legalizing same-sex marriage on June 26, 2015.

clause,” expanding the legal definition of harm to now include failure to “affirm” one’s LGBTQ identity. Five years later, in *Bostock v. Clayton*, the Supreme Court added LGBTQ to the 1964 Civil Rights Act. And just like that, homosexual “orientation” went from a fringe 19th-century Freudian mistake to our nation’s reigning idol. Today, 30 percent of Gen Zers (18- to 25-year-olds) believe they “are” LGBTQ—a steep jump from 3.4 percent in 2004.

The gay rights movement has won its prize: legal marriage in all 50 states. So why isn’t the gay revolution over? Why didn’t activists declare victory, pack up, and go home? Because the gay marriage movement was never merely about legal inclusion. Civil unions and domestic partnerships were largely secured in the U.S. by 2015, so legal protections were already locked. No, the campaign for gay marriage was always a moral revolution, not a legal one. Activists thought the freedom to marry meant freedom from that quiet internal soul-whisper that something isn’t right. They were fooled into believing that contrary voices came from the outside, from Christians and rednecks, when in fact it was baked in at the Creation.

Man didn’t make marriage, so man can’t modify it. And Christians who believe that moral good emerges from the legal maneuver that created “gay marriage” deny the truth of Scripture, the victory of the Savior, and the power of the gospel. Homosexuality is found in the flesh, forbidden in the law, and overcome in the gospel.

What ought we to do? How now shall we live in this post-Christian, post-*Obergefell* world? We must not be distracted by the vitriol and danger of our day. We must bring the gospel to those people who have become casualties of the LGBTQ movement, including Christian parents whose adult children have cut them off. And we must labor as Christian statesmen, speaking truth to school boards and legislatures, actively speaking boldly in the public sphere, and trusting Christ with the consequences. Should the Lord bless our work, we will see reformation in our churches, revival in our land, and freedom through repentance and faith of those currently captive and enslaved to homosexuality. Even as the whole world rages, our labor is not in vain. ■

—Rosaria Butterfield is an author, pastor’s wife, and former professor of English and women’s studies at Syracuse University. Read more about her in *Backstory* on p. 72.

one long prayer session, I asked God to help me love what He loves. I saw from my church what God loves: Biblical marriage, families, children, building something that matters. Catching a glimpse in the mirror of my ugly, sprouting butch haircut, I laughed out loud at the ridiculousness of that prayer. But God didn’t laugh.

I used my tenure wisely, changing my research field from queer theory to Christian literature, opening my home for Bible studies led by the elders in my church, and being available for students and colleagues who wanted to know what on earth had happened. While on research leave to study Christian education, I met Kent Butterfield, a godly man and seminary student who believed in gospel transformation. On May 19, 2001, the Lord allowed me the greatest earthly privilege: to be Kent’s wife. I have been Biblically married for almost as long as I have been a Christian.

June 2015: In *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the Supreme Court of the United States, in a 5-4 decision, legalized gay marriage in all 50 states and added the “dignitary harm

One man's quest
to destroy false narratives
and restore the black community
to foundational truths

BY SHARON DIERBERGER

photo by Judy Griesedieck/Genesis

Countercultural COURAGE



F

FIVE-YEAR-OLD KENDALL QUALLS

stepped off a city bus onto the streets of Harlem with his weary mom and four siblings. It was still daylight, but he was worn out, too. Kendall clung to the suitcase he had lugged from Fort Campbell, Ky., on the Greyhound bus that rolled into the city just a few hours earlier. He thought about his dad back at the Army base. He didn't know why, but his parents had divorced. Now, his mom was leading Kendall and his siblings along the last stretch: the garbage-strewn sidewalks of a towering tenement project, to his grandparents' apartment.

Suddenly, a tall man blocked their path and demanded Kendall's mom give him money. As she pleaded with him, another man moved out of the shadows and warned she'd better hand it over. Unsure what to do, Kendall could only watch his mother cry. Even today, he remembers thinking in that moment: "I'm never going to be like those men."

It was the first time Kendall Qualls understood the life he didn't want. It would take a few more years to figure out what kind of life he did want: one in which he would never again be—or even consider himself—a victim.

Today, Qualls has achieved that vision and is working to make it a reality for others. As the founder of the Minnesota nonprofit TakeCharge, he's

building a national network of like-minded people—he calls them ambassadors—to dispel what he considers the false narratives of systemic racism and white privilege. His goal: to create coalitions that help restore the black community to its pre-War on Poverty self-reliance and productivity.

TakeCharge focuses on three foundational areas Qualls believes must be revived: faith, family, and education. Qualls, 60, and his wife Sheila want minorities in particular to understand that American free enterprise rewards industriousness and merit, while generational entitlement programs—along with blaming others—destroy a people and a country.

Living in the housing-project squalor of New York City in the late 1960s and early '70s, Qualls usually hiked up 10 floors to get to the family's apartment since the elevator rarely worked. In the stairwell, the stench of urine assaulted him. He then stepped around addicts shooting heroin or passed out in shadowy hallways where they'd knocked out the lights. But there's another scent lodged in his memory, a better one: When he opened his apartment door, the fresh scent of Pine-Sol wafted out.

His mom never got a high school education or a driver's license, but she kept their two-bedroom apartment spotless. She spread a plastic checkerboard tablecloth under every meal. She told Qualls daily, "I love you, and God loves you." From his mother, he learned compassion, love, and a moral code rooted in the Ten Commandments. But from the housing projects, he learned men don't care for their families.

In the 1960s, nearly 80 percent of black families had two parents. But by 2015, nearly 80 percent were fatherless. Today, urban areas are the worst. In Minneapolis, for example, nearly 90 percent of black families don't have a father in the home.

"We do not have a systemic race problem in America," Qualls says emphatically. "We have a fatherless home problem."

He adds that black culture was once rooted in the Christian faith. Men worked hard to provide for families, which in turn sought better education for their children. He cites statistics illustrating how black men's median income grew nearly 600 percent between 1939 and 1960, and the percentage of black Americans living below the poverty level decreased from 87 percent to 47 percent.

Contrast that with the Qualls' time in New York. It didn't take long for his older siblings to get sucked into Harlem's drug culture. His mom's emotional health plummeted. The only bright spot came while visiting his dad's brother on Long Island. Uncle Jimmy was the first black man Qualls knew, other than his grandpa, who didn't abandon his family: "I watched this middle-class man with his kids and thought, Wow, it can be done."

Not long after that, Qualls' absentee father arrived to take him and his

"We do not have a



younger brother to live in Oklahoma near the Army post where he was stationed. Although they lived in a trailer park, Qualls felt safe and was thrilled to see twinkling stars at night. He



LEFT: Kendall Qualls's father.
ABOVE: Qualls with his mother
in New York City in the 1980s.

began dreaming of a better life. But his dad, an Army drill sergeant, treated his sons like recruits—inspecting rooms, interrogating, disciplining harshly. Qualls began to feel lonely and resentful—unloved. Still, he learned from his father self-sufficiency and a strong work ethic.

When the Army transferred his father to Fort Shafer, near Honolulu, Qualls went to school with military kids of every ethnicity. He played football with them, ran track, went cliff diving, and hunted wild boar. He learned skin color didn't matter. He took pride in earning money by tossing

the *Honolulu Star* onto front porches each morning. When they moved back to Oklahoma, Qualls focused on academics and signed up for ROTC. At 17, he joined the Army Reserve and was selected squad leader at basic training. By 19 he was a platoon leader.

And he was dating Sheila.

NEARLY A QUARTER of U.S. children live in single-parent homes—the highest percentage of any country. The world average is just 7 percent. In America, nearly 24 million children live without their biological fathers in the home, mostly within black and other minority communities. But the numbers are increasing for white families, too.

Fatherless kids generate staggering statistics: They comprise 75 percent of children in substance abuse centers, 71 percent of high school dropouts, 90 percent of homeless and runaway children, 75 percent of rapists, and 70 percent of youth in juvenile detention centers.

Qualls saw the destructive results of fatherlessness firsthand. All of his siblings abused drugs. Three went to prison. One died of an overdose. And his mom, unable to manage alone and battling discouragement and mental health problems, jumped off the roof of their 15-floor tenement building. Qualls was serving with the Army in South Korea at the time. He says it took him 20 years to fully grieve.

"My heart broke," he said. "I'd wanted to be her champion."

IN ADDITION to managing a household and children alone, a single mom in America earns only a median \$31,500 compared with a two-parent family's median income of nearly \$101,500, according to 2021 U.S. Census Bureau reports. More than a third of single moms in the United States live in poverty.

Alfrieda Baldwin had a front-row seat to the fallout. After retiring from a 30-year law career, she began volunteering at a suburban school in the Twin Cities' suburbs in 2013. She repeatedly watched teachers and administrators refuse to discipline black children.

One day she saw a black child lying in the hallway, kicking and screaming. No adult stopped him. "As a black woman, I was disturbed," she recalled. "How would these children ever be able to learn without discipline and consequences?" Baldwin knew the heart of the problem started in homes, mostly fatherless ones, but the Obama administration had been saying disparities in black education stemmed from racial bias. DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) was just beginning to filter into schools, though it wasn't called that yet, Baldwin said.

She says she heard constant lies from Democratic politicians, and they made her angry: "Stop telling me how oppressed I am. That's not my experience or my parents'. This country gave me many opportunities." Baldwin's frustration led her to scrutinize the Democratic Party's history and platforms. Eventually, she decided to switch parties and became a Republican. In 2015, she launched her own group of five like-minded women. They call themselves the Dangerous Negro Ladies.

Baldwin and her friends learned about Qualls and his work and invited him to meet them for coffee one day in 2021. After they grilled him, researched his background, and decided he was for real, three became ambassadors for TakeCharge. Baldwin now chairs the board and speaks to groups, urging others to join.

"I find it insulting when people talk about systemic racism and white privilege," she says. "And I'm tired of having voices like mine stifled in the mainstream."

Baldwin appears in TakeCharge volunteer videos, a collection of more than 60 testimonies of black people denouncing progressive ideology and advocating for God, marriage, and strong education. She also founded a Christian microschool in St. Paul.

Baldwin's school dovetails with a larger vision. TakeCharge plans to launch hundreds of its own microschools in minority neighborhoods around the country, with the first scheduled to open in Minneapolis this fall. The Christ-centered schools, each with 20-25 students, will teach academics and life skills. They'll be called Washington Academies, named after both George Washington and educator Booker T. Washington. Qualls draws inspiration from *Up From Slavery*, the latter Washington's autobiography. He's read it five times.

Qualls believes public schools have failed children in black communities. He cites as evidence not only lack of discipline, but dismal reading and math scores: "Schools are pushing social-emotional learning. And they're teaching only the sins of our country—none of its virtues."

QUALLS DECIDED in high school he didn't want to become a casualty of a broken home. But it wasn't until he started dating Sheila that he saw up-close the true blessings of an intact family. Qualls watched Sheila's father—a former sergeant major in the Army—sit quietly in his chair reading the Bible, then work demanding rotating shifts at a Goodyear plant. Qualls began attending church with the family.

In 1986, Qualls and Sheila married, after he became a first-generation college graduate and entered active military service. Eventually, they had five children, one of whom is adopted.



Qualls says, tongue-in-cheek, that he can't remember which one.

After the Army, the Qualls moved to Dallas and began attending Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship. Qualls says he'd viewed most black churches as Sunday social clubs. But sitting in a pew week after week, listening to Pastor Tony Evans' Scriptural teaching, Qualls was transformed. At age 27, he says, he became born again and was baptized. He went to counseling and learned how to forgive his father. He began to understand, he says, how Satan tries to destroy marriages and families. Whenever the family moved to a new city after that, they looked for a Biblically sound church, even if they were the only black family in the congregation.

Today, interest in Qualls' work—and his message—is growing. Kevin Lewis met Qualls over social media in



LEFT: Kendall and Sheila Qualls (center back) with their family. BELOW: Kendall's son Joshua and grandson.

2021. Lewis, 33, is a father of five who works as a chemical engineer at 3M. He also teaches Sunday school in Waterford, Mich., and coaches youth teams. He was happy to meet someone who shared similar goals and soon became a TakeCharge ambassador.

"I didn't have my dad growing up, and meeting someone older and hearing the positive vision he had for blacks from an African American viewpoint encouraged me," Lewis says.

Growing up, Lewis attended mostly white schools but says he never felt he had to overcome his skin color. The only racist attitudes he heard came from other minorities who claimed his success came not from hard work but from "acting white."

Later, in the corporate world, Lewis heard a DEI speaker insist blacks could never be racist because they don't have power. Also, though his own mother



was white, that he couldn't be racist because he looked black. That spurred him to become a leader in his company's DEI group. He hopes to bring balance and ask penetrating questions. He also plans to start a TakeCharge chapter in the Detroit metro area.

TakeCharge will soon launch two more chapters in Memphis, Tenn., and

Omaha, Neb. But Qualls's vision isn't welcome everywhere. Black pastors espousing critical race theory don't return his calls, he says. And he's no longer invited to college campuses.

In February, antipathy toward his message turned violent: Someone tried to burn down Qualls' office and those of two other conservative organizations in the same building. The FBI and the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives found accelerants outside just those three doors—offices located on different floors in a three-story building filled with many tenants. Investigators quickly cordoned off entrances with yellow fire-scene tape and soon confirmed arson. But they have yet to make any arrests.

Few national media outlets reported the crime, an oversight that still irritates Qualls. He says if arsonists had targeted liberal organizations, reporters would be swarming. Despite hateful emails—some, predictably, calling him an Uncle Tom—many more have offered support, he says. Meanwhile, the arson has only heightened Qualls' resolve.

In 2002, Gallup polls reported the state of race relations had reached an all-time high: Between 60 and 70 percent of Americans believed race relations were positive. Those numbers began to dive during President Barack Obama's second term. By 2023, progressives claimed systemic racism was rampant, and only 33 percent of blacks and 43 percent of whites said race relations were favorable.

Qualls longs for blacks to be "victors not victims," a TakeCharge motto. "I don't consider myself exceptional. I have an average IQ on my best days," he says. "But we live in an exceptional country, and I serve an exceptional God." ■



A woman with long blonde hair, wearing a black long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans, is smiling and pushing a shopping cart with red handles. She is in a grocery store aisle. In the background, there are shelves with various products, including bags of snacks and potted plants hanging from the ceiling. The title 'VALUE PROPOSITION' is overlaid in large white letters on the right side of the image.

VALUE PROPOSITION

Amid a big-box exodus from high crime areas, some store owners see staying as ministry

BY THERESA ABELL HAYNES

photography by Chona Kasinger

Grocery store owners
Spencer and Jerusha
Sundem with their son

ERUSHA SUNDEM WATCHED A LARGE

security monitor in the back office of her mid-sized grocery store in Everett, Wash. A bearded, middle-aged man in plaid pajama pants, a black hoodie, and a denim jacket lingered in the frozen food section.

The man glanced up the aisle, opened the freezer door, and grabbed a Double Gold ice cream bar. Then he sneaked around the corner to a quieter aisle with fewer security cameras and stuffed the bar into his jacket.

Jerusha had seen enough. The 31-year-old grocery store owner strode out of her office to confront the man. As she approached, he pulled a can of whipped cream off the top shelf and

sprayed it into his mouth. Then, he laughed—not at Jerusha, but definitely in defiance.

“You know that’s not funny,” Jerusha told him, keeping her voice calm and controlled. She asked for the ice cream bar and whipped cream and told the man he was no longer welcome to shop at the store.

But then, as she walked him toward the front exit, she surprised him: “You’re worth more than that \$1.99 ice cream you tried to take,” she said. “You’re worth more than any item in the store.”

Not every business owner would agree. Shoplifting was once considered a marginal issue, but it now costs American companies billions of dollars, and many can no longer afford it. Several national chains have shuttered locations in high-crime areas and given up doing business there. But not everyone is leaving. Some small-business owners, like Jerusha and Spencer Sundem, are staying put, confronting

Jerusha Sundem views her store surveillance camera feeds.



crime, and, they believe, serving their communities in the process.

When Jerusha told the would-be ice cream thief his worth, she shocked him into an argument. Was he worth more than everything he could fit into his pockets, he demanded to know? Yes, and so much more, Jerusha said.

“In my mind, it’s a given that someone is worth more than whatever they’re trying to steal,” she tells me later. “But when you are down in life, it doesn’t feel that way.”

When the Sundems took over the 13,000-square-foot grocery store in Everett, a small city on Seattle’s northern outskirts, a year and a half ago, they quickly discovered it had a big problem with theft.

“It was really bad,” says Spencer, 29. In the first few weeks, he and Jerusha caught multiple shoplifters every day. But after consistently confronting the problem, shoplifting incidents tapered off to one or two a week.

The Sundems, who met at Princeton Theological Seminary, address shoplifters personally and specifically. Often that includes Jerusha’s best “Mom” talk: “Hey, you know, you can make the world a better place or a worse place, right?”

But she also tells shoplifters they are made in God’s image. “I would tell them, too, that it’s not just bad for us, because you are stealing from us, but you are hurting yourself. This is not good for you. It’s not good for your soul to steal.”

When Jerusha told one woman she was more valuable than the items she pocketed, the woman looked her in the eyes and asked, “Are you sure about that? How do you know?”

“I said, ‘Yes! I’m sure about that. Yes!’” Jerusha remembers. She also remembers that the woman’s questions made her very sad.

AMERICAN STORES LOST \$112 BILLION IN

retail “shrinkage” in 2022, according to the National Retail Federation’s latest survey, released last September. And while that number includes various kinds of financial losses, more than two-thirds of it—about \$74.67 billion—is directly related to theft. That’s equivalent to shoplifting the entire gross domestic product of a midsized country like Sri Lanka or Serbia.

“Never before have we seen the number of CEOs, executives, and even community leaders reach out and highlight the dangers that are taking place in the retail industry,” said David Johnston, vice president of asset protection and retail operations for the National Retail Federation.

Critics claim the survey findings are inflated to deflect poor business management. But Johnston

argues that if the numbers are wrong, it’s only because they’re too low. The \$112 billion loss only partially reflects the actual cost of retail theft. It does not include the costs of hiring security, investing in anti-theft technology, repairing property damage, and paying worker compensation claims for employees injured in smash-and-grab events. It also does not account for the loss of customers who no longer feel safe shopping in person.

“What is happening today is an outright crime, targeting and taking advantage of a specific industry where committing a crime has few consequences,” Johnston said. “We are living in a nation where stealing is no longer considered a crime, and where those stealing are not criminals. We have created an environment that allows others to instill fear and steal in a ‘free-for-anyone’ environment.”

Of the 177 retail brands included in the National Retail Federation’s survey, 28 percent reported closing a store due to theft, and 45 percent said they reduced hours for the same reason.

The pharmacy giant Rite Aid, which also faces lawsuits over its handling of opioids, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in October and announced it will close nearly 200 of its stores nationwide. The low-cost California-based chain, The 99 Cents Only Store, announced in April that after four decades of business it would file for bankruptcy and shutter all of its 371 locations. Its reasons included inflation and retail “shrink,” a now-too-common euphemism for theft.

When the local Walmart in Everett, Wash., closed last year, the Sundems noticed an uptick in shoplifting at their store. People stole gel pens, flashlights, phone chargers, health and beauty items, essential oils, tin foil for drug use, junk food, and ice cream—always ice cream, even in the winter.

They addressed these new shoplifters with the same vigilance they had when they opened the store, and once again, word spread: Their store was not shoplifter friendly.

But big-box stores are reluctant to adopt such a direct approach due to the risk. “There are potential legal dangers if there is a misunderstanding or if somebody thinks they see something they don’t see,” Spencer says. For that reason, the Sundems handle shoplifters themselves, encouraging their 24 employees to report suspicious behavior to them or to their managers. A few shoplifters have reacted violently, punching and biting. Each time, the Sundems called the police and pressed charges. So far, neither has been injured.

The National Retail Federation survey revealed that more than two-thirds of respondents worried about heightened levels of theft-related violence. As a

result, 41 percent of retailers now enforce a “hands-off” approach in which no employees are authorized to stop shoplifters.

April Ullman worked as a sales associate at a Seattle-area REI store for 15 years. She witnessed criminal behavior gradually increase as store managers shied away from engagement.

When Ullman started working for REI in 2007, any employee who noticed a suspicious person lingering in the store could use a code over the intercom to alert all sales associates of a potential threat. Employees would move to the department where the suspected shoplifter lingered. They could follow a suspected shoplifter

“We are living in a nation where stealing is no longer considered a crime.”

around a department or offer to hold an item at the front of the store. If someone walked out the door with stolen goods, store employees could follow them to the parking lot and jot down their license plate number.

But over time, as the public became more concerned about racial profiling and discrimination, the store changed its policies. Eventually, it forbade employees from engaging with potential shoplifters at all.

“Even though we would have eyes all over the place, you weren’t even allowed to say anything,” Ullman said. Eventually, she would watch as shoplifters grabbed armloads of \$300 ski jackets and walked out the front door past the greeter as if to say, “You can’t touch me.”

“You couldn’t stand in their way,” she explained. “You could not take it from their possession. If you walked out of the store, you could get fired.”

This year, REI closed two of its iconic urban stores, a 20-year-old Portland location and one in an upscale shopping area of Santa Monica, Calif. During a 2020 riot following a Black Lives Matter protest, local news coverage showed looters in Santa Monica walking away with thousands of dollars of stolen merchandise. In a 2023 statement, REI blamed

Portland’s crime for its departure. But since then, the company has been reluctant to give reasons for its urban flight. In both the Portland and Santa Monica instances, the company announced it would relocate to nearby suburban neighborhoods.

WHILE NATIONAL COMPANIES ARE

increasingly cautious about employees confronting shoplifters, they have invested heavily in physical and technological deterrents.

Many owners deploy an extensive ecosystem of cameras, sensors, computer chips, and facial recognition software. Radio frequency identification (RFID) tags, first used to track marathon runners’ start and finish times, are now heavily used in consumer products—everything from luxury handbags and smartphones to underwear. Stores use special sensors to detect these tags, which are often embedded in products. RFID product tracking helps with inventory management and supply chain issues, but it’s also a useful tool in analyzing and deterring shoplifting.

Walmart led the way in RFID expansion. In 2022, the retail giant required all of its toy, electronic, home goods, sporting goods, and automotive battery suppliers to include RFID tags on their products or in their packaging. Since then, the RFID tags have become an industry standard, especially in clothing, a key shoplifting category.

Many retailers have resorted to locking away high-theft items, which include common, relatively low-priced goods like mascara, razors, and toothpaste. Small items are particularly lucrative to organized theft rings, which deploy multiple shoplifters across a wide area to pocket them. These are then resold through platforms like Facebook Marketplace and eBay. Gangs involved in such organized theft often “pay” shoplifters with illegal drugs like fentanyl.

When the Sundems bought their grocery store, it already had locking cabinets to display more valuable items. But locking away goods has a downside.

“People are less likely to buy it if they have to ask [or] if they have to wait,” Spencer said. So they removed the cabinets and put valuable items in visible areas near cash registers, which are always operated by watchful, friendly employees.

For nearly 50 years, retailers have used the familiar—and visible—electronic article sensors that trigger an alarm when a thief walks out of a store, but





Spencer Sundem checks inventory at the store.

experienced shoplifters know how to evade that system. Now, though, AI technology, along with facial recognition capabilities, can match a person's features against a database of suspected shoplifters and prevent theft before it happens, *Minority Report*-style. With an instant match, security officers can escort would-be thieves out of the store before they actually steal.

Opponents of facial recognition surveillance cite privacy concerns and fears that machine-driven profilers might reinforce negative stereotypes. The national pharmacy chain Rite Aid discovered this potential flaw after being accused of falsely identifying too many blacks, Hispanics, and Asian Americans as potential shoplifters. In December 2023, the Federal Trade Commission barred Rite Aid from using surveillance facial recognition for five years.

THE SUNDEMS APPROACH THEIR STORE AS marketplace ministry. It's forced them away from intellectual conversations about theology and into on-the-ground realities.

For example, Spencer notes that people often think a person stealing food must be hungry. As a Christian, if people are hungry, shouldn't you feed

them? But looking the other way when a person steals is not the same as feeding the hungry, he says.

"We need to feed the hungry, clothe the naked," he says. "But we also need to give people direction, because justice and mercy are not a dichotomy ... Doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with your God ... that's all one thing. It's not three different things that you do at different times."

The Sundems give people food when they feel it is appropriate. They routinely donate food to local food banks and help direct needy people to church and community resources. And ultimately, they believe that by ethically running their business and graciously addressing crime, they are serving their community.

Jerusha hopes other business owners will adopt a similar strategy. Otherwise, she says, the thieves who once targeted their store will simply move elsewhere. But if enough people consistently confront thieves with both strength and love, it will eventually have an aggregate effect.

"Sometimes," Spencer says, "grace is stopping somebody and saying, 'This is not the right way to do things.'" ■

—Theresa Abell Haynes is a freelance writer and World Journalism Institute Mid-Career graduate

NOTEBOOK



RELIGION

A match made in Washington

How a deal between two congregations preserved a historic church building in the U.S. capital

by JOSH SCHUMACHER



THIRD BAPTIST CHURCH, one of the oldest African American churches in Washington, D.C., sits at the corner of Fifth and Q Streets. Constructed in 1893 by the city's first black architect, Calvin T.S. Brent, the church boasts a red-brick façade, a high tower, and a series of stained-glass windows. One large front window ushers light into a red-carpeted sanctuary outfitted with wooden pews and a now silent organ that once pumped sacred music up through the balcony and vaulted ceiling.

Although Third Baptist appears on the National Register of Historic Places, its brick edifice recently came near being torn down. That is, until another congregation and a D.C. nonprofit helped save it.

Curtis Smith, Third Baptist's administrator and deacon ministry chairman, grew up across the street. His family and neighbors attended worship services, community meetings, and other activities at the church.

Smith, who turns 75 this year, landed his first-ever job cleaning the church, earning 25 cents for five hours of sweeping floors, dusting seats, and vacuuming. In the church's heyday, he said, if you didn't arrive a half-hour ahead of time on Sundays, you'd have to listen to the service while sitting downstairs in the fellowship hall.

But over the years, attendance dwindled. By 2015, the neighborhood had gentrified, and Third Baptist's building was showing its age. After looking through the "ins-and-outs of the finances," Smith said, he and other church leaders made the difficult decision to look for a new building that was less expensive to maintain.

Since 2008, the District of Columbia has lost a third of its churches and other houses of worship. Many have fallen victim to real estate developers who demolished them and built other structures, such as condos, in their place.

Evan Sparks is a board member with the D.C.-based nonprofit Sacred Spaces Conservancy, which has tracked church closures in the nation's capital. Sparks says a church looking to sell its property can easily find developers seeking to put a profitable →

The historic Third Baptist Church building



Church of the Advent hosts an open house in the Third Baptist building.

housing project in its place. His organization was launched to help match churches with other congregations willing to buy their buildings, so that churches continue to populate the capital.

Third Baptist's congregation found that many of its prospective buyers were real estate developers who wanted to tear the place down and put up apartments or condos. The church didn't want to see the building destroyed, although it did entertain some developers' offers in hopes of a deal. None came to fruition.

But Sacred Spaces knew of a congregation in search of a building like Third Baptist's. Church of the Advent, an Anglican congregation native to D.C., began working with Sacred Spaces in 2018 as it searched for a building. Rector Thomas Hinson said Advent began meeting in a living room in 2007 and later rented from a variety of sites.

“Third Baptist’s congregation found that many of its prospective buyers were real estate developers who wanted to tear the place down and put up apartments or condos.”

Hinson described the Third Baptist Church building as a perfect fit because of its central location for many of Advent's members, and because its majestic architecture helped evoke “a sense of connection with the divine.”

Smith, too, was excited at the prospect. He called Advent a “godsend.”

“We said, ‘OK. All the lawyers are gone. All the real estate guys? Gone. Let us just talk,’” Smith recalled.

They did talk, and became friends in the process. Hinson took several others from Advent to visit the historic church, and he recalls the warm reception they felt from Third Baptist: When the Advent attendees arrived for their visit, they found Smith had put up a special sign for them.

“Welcome home,” it said.

Advent ultimately agreed to buy the building for \$3.9 million, a sale that would allow Third Baptist's congregation to move elsewhere, while providing Advent with a location suited to its needs. Leaders of the two churches finalized the deal this past January, meeting in an attorney's office where they also prayed together.

The sale means one more D.C. church building will live to see another Easter. Advent hopes to move into its new place at Fifth and Q sometime next year, after completing a few necessary renovations. The congregation of Third Baptist, meanwhile, has found a new location in nearby Forest Heights, Md., where it will be closer to many of its members and have 7.2 acres of property to benefit the local community.

Hinson recognizes Third Baptist's historic significance in the nation's capital and said he wants to erect a memorial in the first-floor fellowship hall to honor the church's legacy.

Selling and leaving the church he'd grown up in was a “very tough decision,” Smith admitted. But knowing who the buyer was made it easier.

“We were actually blessed to have them come in to buy our place,” Smith said, “because then we knew it was gonna be used for the purpose in which it was built.” ■

SPORTS

Forfeiting their shot

Five girl athletes in West Virginia sacrificed a chance at a title to protest a male competitor

by RAY HACHE



FEMALE middle school athletes in West Virginia refused last month to put up with a court decision letting a boy compete against them in track and field.

Two days after the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit issued a ruling letting a 13-year-old boy compete as a girl in interscholastic athlet-

ics in the Mountain State, five female shot putters at the Harrison County middle school track and field championships protested that boy's presence among them. Video of the April 18 event, posted on the conservative-leaning sports website Outkick, showed the girls taking turns entering the throwers' ring, lifting their

heavy metal balls to their shoulders as they walk to the 4-inch-high toe board, then turning and exiting without making a throw.

The male competitor—who goes by the name Becky Pepper-Jackson, takes puberty blockers and estrogen hormone therapy, and has competed exclusively on girls' sports teams since elementary school—didn't get West Virginia's law protecting girls' sports overturned entirely. However, the eighth grader's lawyers convinced the 4th Circuit to give him an exception to compete in his chosen gender category.

At an April 24 news conference attended by all five protesting middle schoolers, 14-year-old Emmy Salerno of Lincoln Middle School in Shinnston said the decision to forgo a shot at a county title was tough for herself and her fellow athletes.

"Believe me, all of my friends would have loved to help me out, but they are such strong competitors, and I don't blame them," said Salerno.

"Luckily, I found four lovely young girls willing to take a stand with me."

West Virginia Attorney General Patrick Morrisey, who stood alongside Salerno, vowed to appeal the 4th Circuit's ruling.

Pepper-Jackson won the shot put at the championship meet with a throw of 32 feet, 9 inches.

SWIMMING ABOVE BOARD?

The Chinese government cleared 23 swimmers to compete at the 2021 Summer Olympics in Tokyo despite the swimmers testing positive for a banned drug, according to a *New York Times* investigation. The World Anti-Doping Agency admitted in an April 20 response to the *Times* reporting that it had secretly accepted the China Anti-Doping Agency's June 2021 explanation that the swimmers tested positive for the banned drug TMZ "after inadvertently being exposed to the substance through contamination."

Olivier Rabin, WADA's senior director of science and medicine, said WADA found China's report believable due to the "consistently low concentrations as well as no doping pattern." WADA has appointed a special prosecutor to review its handling of the case.

Among the swimmers who tested positive is gold medalist **Zhang Yufei**, who set an Olympic record in the women's 200-meter butterfly in Tokyo. Zhang is expected to contend for medals again at this summer's Paris Olympics. —R.H.





TECHNOLOGY

Deal in the desert

\$1.5 billion investment in the UAE aims to marginalize China

by ELIZABETH RUSSELL



MICROSOFT HAS AGREED to invest \$1.5 billion into G42, an artificial intelligence giant headquartered in the United Arab Emirates, in a deal that could help curb China's global influence. The deal, announced April 16 and heavily negotiated by the U.S. government, will give G42 permission to use Microsoft's processing chips to train and fine-tune AI models. G42 will begin using Microsoft's cloud services, give Microsoft's president a seat on its board, and stop using telecom technology from Chinese company Huawei.

In January, U.S. House lawmakers urged the Commerce Department to

consider sanctioning G42, claiming its group chief executive, Peng Xiao, is connected to companies that "materially support" the technological advancement of China's military.

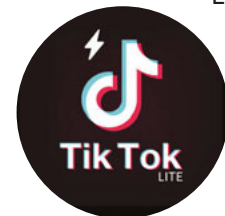
The U.S. government hopes the new Microsoft deal will forestall China's influence in the Emirates. U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, who flew to the Emirates twice to help hammer out the agreement, told *The New York Times* it contains safeguards to prevent sensitive technology from being sold to any China-linked companies. "When it comes to emerging technology, you cannot be both in China's camp and our camp," she said.

TIKTOK TROUBLES

TikTok suspended a key feature of its TikTok Lite app in the European Union April 24 under pressure from the European Commission. Commissioner Thierry Breton said a feature of the app that pays users ages 18 and up for watching videos is "toxic and addictive" and could pose a danger to children. The app also drew the commission's ire for failure to submit a risk assessment required by the Digital Services Act, which took effect last year.

TikTok Lite, a slimmed-down version of the standard TikTok app meant for countries with slower data speeds, first launched in 2018 but expanded to EU members

France and Spain for the first time in mid-April.



TikTok had until May 3 to provide further documents and argue its case or risk fines of up to 1 percent of its annual income. —E.R.

TOO BIG NOT TO TAX?

Canada appears poised to tax tech giants like Alphabet and Meta 3 percent of their digital services revenue. If passed by Parliament, the measure will require large companies to pay the tax on Canada-based annual revenues in excess of \$14.5 million per year. Since the rule would affect mainly American companies, U.S. lawmakers have urged the Biden administration to institute retaliatory trade measures against Canada if the tax is adopted. —E.R.





LAW

Question of discretion

Religious groups continue to fight a New York rule requiring abortion coverage for employees

by STEVE WEST



A COALITION of religious groups—including Anglican nuns, Roman Catholic dioceses, Christian churches, and religious social ministries—went to the New York Court of Appeals in April to defend their right not to cover abortions in employee health insurance plans.

The April 16 hearing before the state’s highest court in *Diocese of Albany v. Harris* was the latest round in a seven-year battle against a 2017 state abortion mandate. New York’s law offers a religious exemption, but only for entities that inculcate religious values and serve and hire those who share their religious beliefs. That leaves other religious groups with an untenable choice: either provide abortion coverage or curtail their

ministry to the community in order to gain an exemption.

Nuns have battled government mandates before: In 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court sided with the Little Sisters of the Poor to uphold a Trump administration rule exempting employers with religious and moral objections from providing contraception in group healthcare plans.

State courts previously dismissed a challenge to New York’s abortion coverage law. But on appeal, the U.S. Supreme Court sent the case back to the state appeals court to reconsider in light of its 2021 decision in *Fulton v. Philadelphia*. (In that case, the high court ruled Philadelphia had wrongly shut a Catholic foster agency out of its foster system because the group wouldn’t work with gay couples.)

Former U.S. Solicitor General Noel Francisco, arguing for the plaintiffs in the New York case, told the appeals court’s seven justices the state law violated the *Fulton* test because it gave the state free discretion to determine who is religious. The state could pick “winners and losers,” he said, by deciding which religious organizations are exempt.

That legal discretion troubled Justice Jenny Rivera. “[The law] says the entity serves primarily persons who share the religious tenets of the entity. What if they don’t ask, what if they feel that’s not appropriate?” she asked.

Assistant Solicitor General Laura Etlinger, who represented New York, replied that this was not, like *Fulton*, an “exercise of discretion [where] you either fit in or you don’t fit in because somebody says so.” She argued the abortion law’s criteria for an exemption were objective and standardized.

Francisco disagreed. “When you have factors that require you to assess the religious tenets of an organization, its employees, and the people it serves and requires you to assess whether the purpose is the inculcation of religious values or providing services to the poor ... I don’t think that’s a neutral law,” he said.

Becket Fund for Religious Liberty attorney Lori Windham agreed the standards were vague, permitting too much discretion by state officials. “How do you decide who is a member of a certain faith?” she said. “And how do you even know who is being served if you’re going out and providing a warm meal to anyone who asks?”

Windham noted that not even a church could truly certify it was serving only people of its faith. “If they want an exemption, they have to meet a test that Jesus’ ministry wouldn’t pass,” she said.

The court didn’t indicate when it would rule, but its decision will affect religious nonprofits all over New York. ■



VOICES **ANDRÉE SEU PETERSON**

Poisonous thoughts

Escaping the “kingdom of noise,” Part 1

MY NORMALLY PRIVATE next-door neighbor once told me she felt like running down the street to get away from her thoughts. Can anybody relate to that? (“For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate”—Romans 7:15.)

Eckhart Tolle could. In 1997 the German-born spiritualist published *The Power of Now*, unpacking my neighbor’s problem. He said most people are under control of “compulsive” and “involuntary thought processes” and “continuous monologues or dialogues” that they can’t get rid of. There is a voice in our heads that “comments, speculates, judges, compares, complains, likes, dislikes” and “imagines things going wrong, and negative outcomes; this is called worry. ... You no longer feel that you have the choice to stop.”

It gets worse:

“I would say about 80 to 90 percent of most people’s thinking is not only repetitive and useless but, because of its dysfunctional and often negative nature, much of it is also harmful. Observe your mind and you will find this to be true. It causes a serious leakage of vital energy. ... It is always concerned with keeping the past alive. ... It constantly projects itself into the future. ... It says, ‘One day, when this, that, or the other happens, I am going to be okay, happy, at peace.’”

C.S. Lewis calls it “the kingdom of noise” (*The Screwtape Letters*). Anne Lamott in *Bird by Bird* likens it to a radio station (whose acronym I can’t repeat)

playing “in your head twenty-four hours a day, nonstop, in stereo. Out of the right speaker in your inner ear will come the endless stream of self-aggrandizement, the recitation of one’s specialness. ... Out of the left speaker will be the rap songs of self-loathing, the lists of all the things one doesn’t do well.”

If you want to get highbrow about it, 20th-century European psychology also talks about internal voices in the psyche. Both Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung thought Nietzsche wrong in assuming that after the “death of God” man could create his own values. Their reason, in psychologist Jordan Peterson’s paraphrasing of Freud: “We are not the masters of our own houses ... we’re more like a haunted house filled with autonomous spirits.”

Jung went further down the rabbit hole than Freud and found that those voices are not mere “complexes” or “systems,” or just metaphors. Peterson again: “He made the case that we are haunted by demons and gods.”

It is with some amusement that a Christian who’s read the Bible a time or two sees how painfully close, yet far away, the great secular seers veer toward Truth—like seeing shadows on the wall of Plato’s cave, or like those blind men of the Orient who grope about the elephant and find some piecemeal truths but miss the pachyderm entirely.

Meanwhile God’s Word, without ostentation, simply speaks of a twofold etiology of this mental nuisance of obsessive nonproductive thinking—namely, the old-man nature, and the prowling lion who tempts. Like other conundrums of our day (how men can fancy themselves women; how fully formed babies in the womb can be thought not human; how the whole world has Jew hatred derangement syndrome), the answers lie in the spiritual, not material, domain.

God puts it bluntly in Ephesians 6, lest we think we are just up against a psychological condition: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places.” One is challenged to imagine how He could have put it more plainly.

We are apprised of this from the earliest pages of Scripture: The serpent introduces poisonous thoughts (Genesis 3). The devil crouches at the door, and we must resist him (Genesis 4). Even as blood-bought believers with a brand-new nature, we are to be diligent in putting to death the old nature because it ever seeks resurgence: “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey its lusts” (Romans 6:12).

(To be continued in my next column.) ■

TRENDING COLUMNS

No more keeping parents in the dark

A diverse coalition asks the Supreme Court to protect parental rights at school

FAMILY & SOCIETY

by Kayla Toney

Is it anti-woman to be anti-abortion?

Abortion advocates try to rewrite the history of feminism

FAMILY & SOCIETY

by Caleb Morell

Growing old as a calling

The personal and cultural significance of recovering a Christian perspective on aging

FAMILY & SOCIETY

by Jennifer Patterson

When medicine is really politics

To help human beings, we must know who humans are

FAMILY & SOCIETY

by Carl R. Trueman

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A chat with Rosaria Butterfield

On repentance, speaking truth boldly, and a three-legged dog named Sully

by LYNN VINCENT

UNLESS YOU'VE BEEN hibernating in Antarctica, you've likely heard the name Rosaria Butterfield. She's been speaking Biblical truth about God's design for sexuality to some pretty tough crowds. I asked Butterfield what it's like to be hip-deep in a ministry that, had God not insisted, she'd have been only too happy to skip:

It seems a great irony that being "outed" as gay used to be scandalous, but now being outed as ex-gay is even more scandalous. You've been both. Which has been the greater challenge and why? To be sure,

it was not popular to be gay in mainstream America in the 1980s and 1990s, but I was in the academy, and feminism, which is the gateway to lesbianism, was popular and growing, and I was all-in. In some ways, being "outed" gave me a team and a cause. After my conversion to Jesus Christ in 1999, I understood my homosexuality through a Christian lens, and I learned—and am still learning—how to repent of an indwelling sin at the root. Looking at my homosexuality through a Christian lens means looking at it through the crosshairs, which is a good skill to hone. When my memoir, *Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*, was published in 2012, I rejected the title that I was ex-gay, and I did so for several reasons. First, I wasn't converted out of homosexuality; I was converted out of unbelief. Second, I was never associated with Exodus International or other ex-gay organizations. But after *Obergefell* and the rise of the heretical "gay Christian" movement, I have come to embrace the idea that I am ex-gay.

Do you ever regret having been so bold with your testimony? And, regarding your ongoing speaking and writing ministry, do you ever ask God, "Um, did we really have to go this route?" Yes, absolutely. I often wish I had published



Secret Thoughts under a pseudonym or would have stopped writing after that first book's publication.

What is the one thing written most often about you that isn't true? I am regularly told that I either was never really a lesbian (or not lesbian enough) or that my current life as a heterosexually married woman is a sham, and I am just suffering under the delusion of internalized homophobia.

You mentioned that you and Kent keep a "menagerie" at home. Who's on your pet

roster these days? We have an enormous orange tabby cat, a flock of backyard chickens, a lovely corn snake, and a three-legged black mutt of mysterious origin—but with enough Gordon setter in him to make him plucky and fun at all times. Our children are the primary zookeepers.

How does your family feel about the mission to which God has called you? I would not have a calling outside of my domestic responsibilities if my husband, Kent, didn't support and encourage my writing. And if my books or speaking engagements caused stress or difficulty for my family, I would quit in a heartbeat and have no regrets. My husband is a pastor, and his job and calling is at the center of our mission as a family. My primary job is respecting and honoring my husband, nurturing my children and grandson, and helping to build the Church. Whatever work I do outside of this is secondary. Being a fairly traditional housewife and homeschool mom has been my secret weapon in the heat of the cultural battles I face. Because I work for Kent Butterfield, I don't have a job to lose. Because I am not a hireling, I can say the hard things without fear. And, if you think *I'm* bold, you should hear the preaching that feeds my soul. ■

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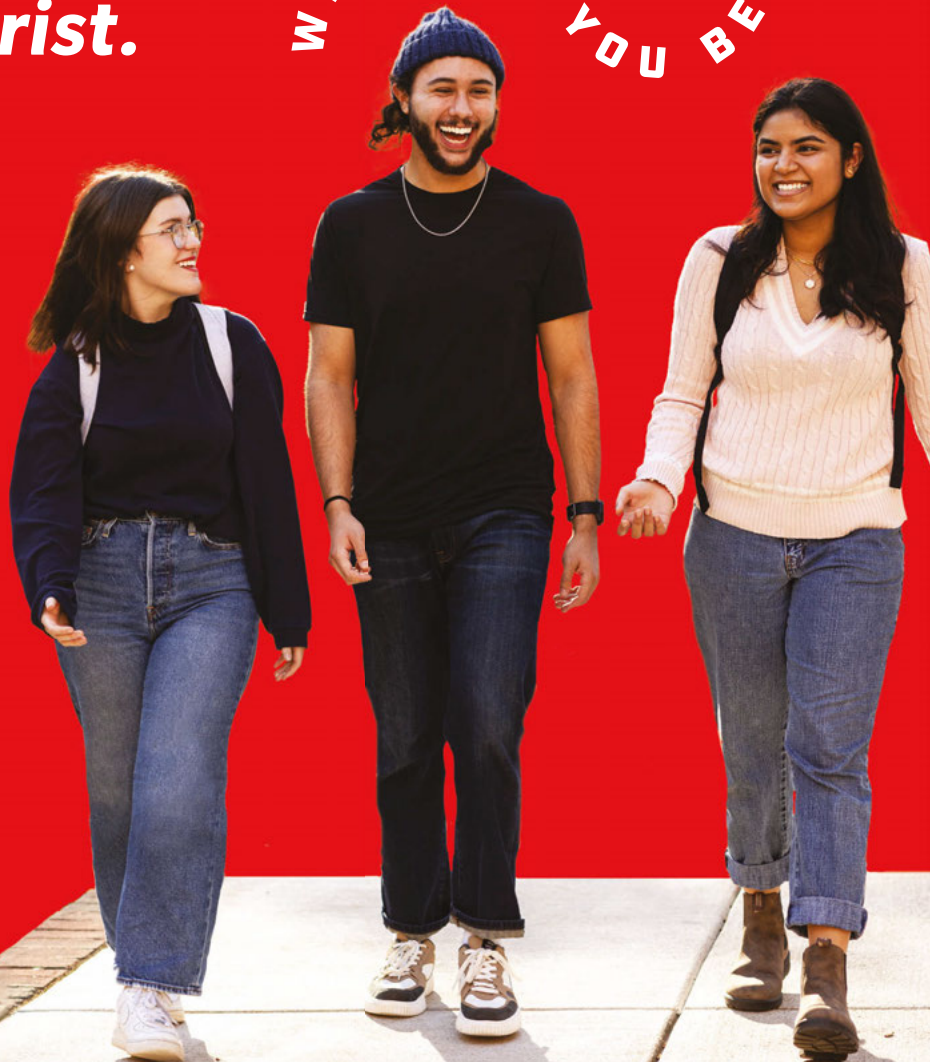
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