EARNING YOUR TRUST, EVERY DAY | MAY 7, 2022

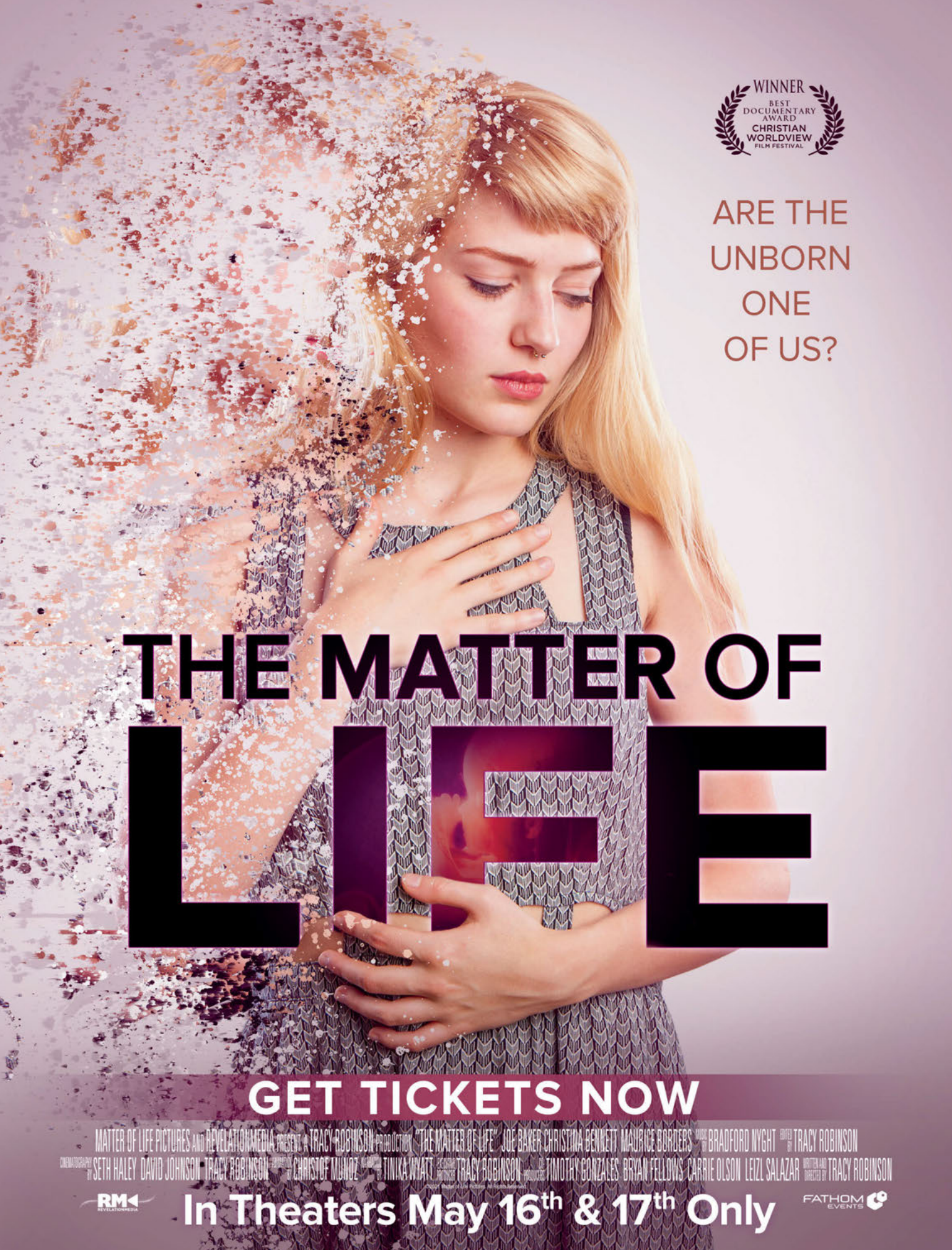
WORLD



GROWING UP IN A CULT

p. 44

"ANY TEENAGER ON SOCIAL MEDIA NOW IS GOING TO BE INUNDATED WITH THIS IDEOLOGY." —HELENA KERSCHNER ON TRANSGENDERISM, P. 38


WINNER
BEST DOCUMENTARY AWARD
CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW FILM FESTIVAL
ARE THE UNBORN ONE OF US?
THE MATTER OF LIFE
GET TICKETS NOW
MATTER OF LIFE PICTURES AND REVELATIONMEDIA PRESENT A TRACY ROBINSON PRODUCTION "THE MATTER OF LIFE"
JOE BAKER CHRISTINA BENNETT MAURICE BORDERS
MUSIC BY BRADFORD NYGHT
EDITED BY TRACY ROBINSON
CINEMATOGRAPHY BY SETH HALEY DAVID JOHNSON TRACY ROBINSON
PRODUCED BY CHRISTOF MUNOZ
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER TINIKA WYATT
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS TRACY ROBINSON
CO-PRODUCERS TIMOTHY GONZALES BRYAN FELLOWS CARRIE OLSON LEIZL SALAZAR
WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY TRACY ROBINSON
RM REVELATIONMEDIA
In Theaters May 16th & 17th Only
FATHOM EVENTS

May 7, 2022 Volume 37 Number 9

50
EUROPEANS AFFIRM LIFE

The pro-life movement is growing in Europe but needs new, positive messages

by Jenny Lind Schmitt



38

WEB OF DECEPTION

The "fake reality" and peer contagion of the internet are leading many teen girls into transgenderism

by Mary Jackson

44

A LONG SHADOW

Growing up on a cult compound shaped three siblings for life

by Kim Henderson

56

HOMESCHOOLING JOURNEYS IN AFRICA

Parents find ways to make teaching their children at home work

by Onize Ohikere

PHOTO BY EMILIE GARCIN/GENESIS

DEPARTMENTS

5 **MAILBAG** 6 **NOTES FROM THE CEO** 72 **POSTSCRIPT**

23



THE BAD GUYS ARE GOOD

A quick-witted kids' caper with a heart of gold

by Collin Garbarino

Dispatches

11 **NEWS ANALYSIS** New regulations could hamstring charter schools

14 **HUMAN RACE**

15 **BY THE NUMBERS**

16 **QUOTABLES**

17 **CARTOONS**

18 **QUICK TAKES**

ON THE COVER

Photo illustration by Krieg Barrie

Culture

23 **MOVIES & TV** *The Bad Guys, Sonic the Hedgehog 2, Writing With Fire, Our Great National Parks, Father Stu*

28 **BOOKS** The Dark Ages were actually pretty bright

30 **CHILDREN'S BOOKS**

32 **MUSIC** Great music from war-torn lands

Notebook

65 **BUSINESS** Wool is at the center of Australia's geopolitical relationships with China and India

67 **LAW**

68 **ENTERTAINMENT**

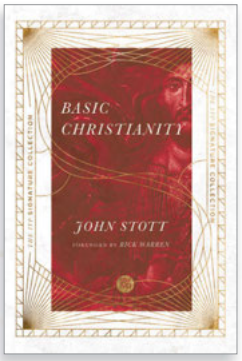
Voices

8 Joel Belz
20 Janie B. Cheaney
34 Q&A
62 Kim Henderson
70 Andrée Seu Peterson

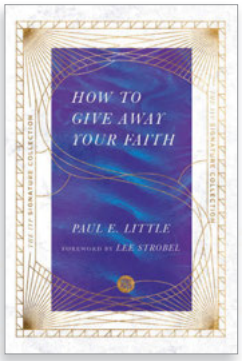
DREAMWORKS ANIMATION LLC

INTRODUCING THE
IVP SIGNATURE COLLECTION

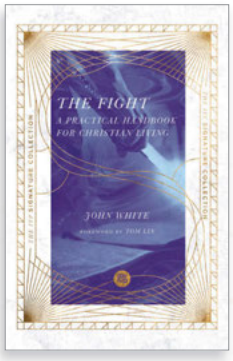
Since 1947 InterVarsity Press has been publishing thoughtful Christian books that serve the university, the church, and the world. In celebration of our 75th anniversary, InterVarsity Press is releasing special editions of select iconic and bestselling books from throughout our history.



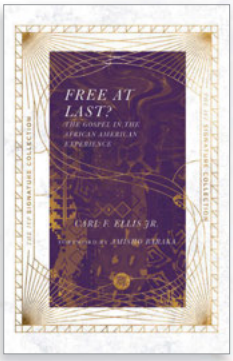
Basic Christianity
John Stott
9780830834136
$8.00



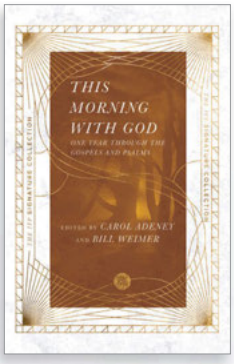
How to Give Away Your Faith
Paul E. Little
9780830848546
$8.00



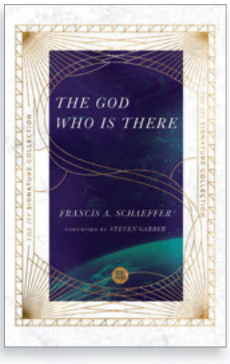
The Fight
John White
9780830848577
$18.00



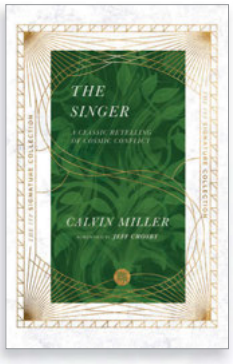
Free at Last
Carl F. Ellis Jr.
9780830848584
$21.00



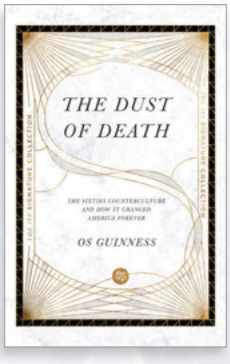
This Morning with God
Carol Adeney and
Bill Weimer
9780830848560
$17.00



The God Who Is There
Francis A. Schaeffer
9780830848553
$18.00



The Singer
Calvin Miller
9780830848607
$17.00



The Dust of Death
Os Guinness
9780830848591
$24.00

ivp

#readivp
shop ivpress.com

WORLD

BIBLICALLY OBJECTIVE JOURNALISM THAT INFORMS, EDUCATES, AND INSPIRES

"THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S AND THE FULLNESS THEREOF; THE WORLD AND THOSE WHO DWELL THEREIN." —PSALM 24:1

WORLD MAGAZINE

INTERIM EDITOR Timothy Lamer
MANAGING EDITOR John Carpenter
REPORTERS Addie Michaelian, Onize Ohikere, Leah Savas
SENIOR WRITERS Janie B. Cheaney, Andrée Seu Peterson, Lynn Vincent
CORRESPONDENTS John Dawson, Maryrose Delahunty, Sharon Dierberger, Juliana Chan Erikson, Kim Henderson, Charles Horton, Charissa Koh, Arsenio Orteza, Jenny Lind Schmitt, Laura G. Singleton, Russell St. John, Joyce Wu
SENIOR FILM AND TV REVIEWER Collin Garbarino
REVIEWERS Sandy Barwick, Bob Brown, Jim Hill, Jeff Koch, Marty VanDriel
EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS Kristin Chapman, Mary Ruth Murdoch, Elizabeth Russell
ART DIRECTOR David Freeland
ASSISTANT ART DIRECTOR Rachel Beatty
ILLUSTRATOR Krieg Barrie
GRAPHIC DESIGNER Arla Eicher
DIGITAL PRODUCTION ASSISTANT Dan Perkins

WORLD DIGITAL

WEBSITE wng.org
EXECUTIVE EDITOR Timothy Lamer
EDITOR Lynde Langdon
MANAGING EDITOR Daniel James Devine
ASSISTANT EDITOR Rachel Lynn Aldrich
REPORTERS Mary Jackson, Carolina Lumetta, Onize Ohikere
CORRESPONDENTS Laura Edghill, Collin Garbarino, Steve West
WORLD OPINIONS EDITOR R. Albert Mohler Jr.
WORLD OPINIONS MANAGING EDITOR Andrew T. Walker

WORLD RADIO

WEBSITE wng.org/radio
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER Paul Butler
MANAGING EDITOR Leigh Jones

The World and Everything in It

HOSTS Nick Eicher, Mary Reichard, Myrna Brown
NEWS EDITOR Kent Covington
REPORTERS Anna Johansen Brown, Lauren Dunn, Bonnie Pritchett, Jenny Rough, Emily Whitten
SENIOR CORRESPONDENTS Katie Gaultney, Kim Henderson, Jenny Lind Schmitt, Les Sillars
CORRESPONDENTS Maria Baer, Caleb Bailey, Sharon Dierberger, Collin Garbarino, George Grant, Lillian Hamman, Amy Lewis, Jill Nelson, Josh Schumacher, Sarah Schweinsberg, Cal Thomas, Steve West, Whitney Willliams
PRODUCERS Johnny Franklin, Carl Peetz Rich Roszel, Kristen Flavin

Listening In
Warren Cole Smith

Effective Compassion
Leigh Jones, Kim Henderson, Bonnie Pritchett, Jenny Rough, Sarah Schweinsberg

Legal Docket
Mary Reichard, Jenny Rough

Lawless
Lynn Vincent, Anna Johansen Brown, Bonnie Pritchett, Lillian Hamman

What surprised you during your day with the Gipson sisters?

"Their joy. In spite of all they've been through, they were laughing, happy, full of optimism. They're so close. They still face life interconnected—even as grandmothers, even distanced. I went away that day with a longing for a sister of my own."

—Kim Henderson, whose story on growing up in a cult begins on p. 44

WORLD NEWS GROUP

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER Kevin Martin
CHIEF CONTENT OFFICER Nick Eicher
FOUNDER Joel Belz
DEVELOPMENT Debra Meissner, Andrew Belz, Max Belz, Sandy Barwick, Whitney Williams, Jacob Roberts, Ambria Collins
FINANCE Bill Gibson
ADMINISTRATION Kerrie Edwards
MARKETING Jonathan Woods
AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT EDITOR Mickey McLean
ADVERTISING John Almaguer, Kyle Crimi, Robin Bridges, Christine Hartman, Elizabeth Kerns
MEMBER SERVICES Amanda Beddingfield

WORLD FOR STUDENTS

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR Rich Bishop
GOD'S WORLD NEWS WEBSITE gwnews.com
MANAGING EDITOR Rebecca Cochrane
WORLD WATCH WEBSITE worldwatch.news
PROGRAM DIRECTOR Brian Basham

WORLD JOURNALISM INSTITUTE

WEBSITE wji.world
ASSOCIATE DEAN Edward Lee Pitts

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

John Weiss (chairman), William Newton (vice chairman), Mariam Bell, John Burke, Kevin Cusack, Peter Lillback, Edna Lopez, Howard Miller, Russell B. Pulliam, David Strassner

Member of the Associated Press

HOW TO CONTACT US

TO BECOME A WORLD MEMBER, GIVE A GIFT MEMBERSHIP, CHANGE ADDRESS, ACCESS OTHER MEMBER ACCOUNT INFORMATION, OR FOR BACK ISSUES AND PERMISSION:

EMAIL memberservices@wng.org
ONLINE wng.org/account (members) or members.wng.org (to become a member)
PHONE 828.435.2981 within the U.S. or 800.951.6397 outside the U.S. Monday–Friday (except holidays), 9 a.m.–5:30 p.m. ET
WRITE WORLD, PO Box 20002, Asheville, NC 28802-9998
BACK ISSUES, REPRINTS, PERMISSIONS 828.435.2981 or editor@wng.org
FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK facebook.com/WNGdotorg
FOLLOW US ON TWITTER @WNGdotorg
FOLLOW US ON INSTAGRAM instagram.com/WNGdotorg

WORLD OCCASIONALLY RENTS SUBSCRIBER NAMES TO CAREFULLY SCREENED, LIKE-MINDED ORGANIZATIONS. IF YOU WOULD PREFER NOT TO RECEIVE THESE PROMOTIONS, PLEASE CALL CUSTOMER SERVICE AND ASK TO BE PLACED ON OUR DO NOT RENT LIST.

WORLD (ISSN 0888-157X) (USPS 763-010) IS PUBLISHED BIWEEKLY (24 ISSUES) FOR $69.95 PER YEAR BY GOD'S WORLD PUBLICATIONS, (NO MAIL) 12 ALL SOULS CRESCENT, ASHEVILLE, NC 28803; 828.253.8063. PERIODICAL POSTAGE PAID AT ASHEVILLE, NC, AND ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES. PRINTED IN THE USA.

REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT WRITTEN PERMISSION IS PROHIBITED. © 2022 WORLD NEWS GROUP. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO WORLD, PO BOX 20002, ASHEVILLE, NC 28802-9998.

COVID-19: TWO YEARS ON

MARCH 26, P. 58: I was extremely disappointed in your article on the pandemic. In your discussion of the status of mandates for various countries, you failed to draw any conclusions concerning their effectiveness or the damage they caused. You completely missed the most important part of the discussion.

Kevin Lantaff/Commerce City, Colo.

NO WRONG ROADS

MARCH 26, P. 20: As an 18-year-old who is still trying to find her place in the world, I have regularly asked myself what's God's will and what isn't? What's the right path and what is wrong? Janie B. Cheaney's column not only reminded me of the truth that God *will* provide, but it also encouraged me to trust in my own choices—even if they could be wrong or imperfect.

Allison Fawley/Allegan, Mich.

I can relate to much of Janie B. Cheaney's story. I too have agonized over my choices, and I have often felt paralyzed. But her column brought me peace. It's going into my journal for future reference.

Elisabeth Bodey/St. Paris, Ohio

A DOUBLE PORTION

MARCH 26, P. 52: Thank you for reporting on the heartwarming story of conjoined twins. In this time of division in our country, I was encouraged by the support Dwight and Stephanie Castle have received from friends and family. It is such a beautiful example of the body of Christ being the hands and feet of Jesus.

Miyleah Young/Delaware, Ohio

HOUSES DIVIDED

MARCH 26, P. 70: Andrée Seu Peterson's column hit the nail right on the head. We are working really hard at destroying ourselves.

Gary Baker/Edgerton, Minn.



A WICKED STORM FROM THE EAST

MARCH 26, P. 38: As a teen who watches *WORLD Watch* and reads WORLD articles about Putin's war in Ukraine, I've been blown away by your lack of bias and fearmongering. You make me aware of the difficult times in which I live but remind me that there is hope because God is still on His throne. Thank you for your commitment to honesty, integrity, and a Biblical worldview.

Taquan M. Young/Delaware, Ohio

LETTERS AND COMMENTS

EMAIL editor@wng.org
MAIL WORLD Mailbag, PO Box 20002, Asheville, NC 28802-9998
WEBSITE wng.org
FACEBOOK facebook.com/WNGdotorg
TWITTER @WNGdotorg
INSTAGRAM instagram.com/WNGdotorg

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

LOOKING FOR TRUTH

MARCH 26, P. 28: In Emily Whitten's review of *True or False: A CIA Analyst's Guide to Spotting Fake News*, she gives the book a qualified endorsement, with the caveat that author Cindy L. Otis "does support the LGBTQ+ cause, and she recommends media outlets like NPR as balanced and neutral." Considering the subject matter, how could anyone with those views possibly be worth reading?

Eddie Tison/Newport News, Va.

A TALE OF TWO ADAMS

MARCH 26, P. 26: Collin Garbarino's understated "numerous instances of coarse language" in *The Adam Project* would have been more helpfully expressed as a continuous stream of profanity (abuse of both God's and Jesus Christ's names), vulgarity, and occasional potty mouth.

William O'Rourke/Ames, Iowa

A DARKER SHADE OF DARK KNIGHT

MARCH 26, P. 23: Collin Garbarino's review of *The Batman* grieved me. Instead of warning Christians to stay away from this movie because it will be toxic to their soul, he concludes by detailing how he thinks Gotham is "a metaphor for the fallen world." If it's only a picture of the fallen world, then why should Christians watch it? I would rather you drop the whole culture section than continue to confuse immature believers and affirm their love for the world.

Michael Miller/Calgary, Alberta, Canada

THE NEW NOMINEE

MARCH 26, P. 11: I felt like I was reading a Democratic National Committee press release indicating that Ketanji Brown Jackson was a solid choice for the Supreme Court, a moderate that both sides could support. If this is the kind of nominee that conservatives support, the right is in big trouble.

Gary Darstein/Baldwinsville, N.Y.



BIG THINGS AHEAD!

WORLD's history has been one of change and improvement

THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVE BEEN SUBSCRIBING to WORLD Magazine since the earliest days know that we have changed the publishing frequency a few times over the years. For roughly the first 10 years of WORLD's existence—after a start and a pause in 1986, then a restart in 1987—we published 40 times a year. We were a weekly news magazine, but we really couldn't afford to publish weekly year-round, so we went to biweekly for a few months during the summer.

Starting in 1998, we felt we could afford to be a true weekly. Even then, I guess, we weren't a true weekly, because we took a one-week break in the summer and again at year-end, producing a 50-times-per-year publishing schedule. We kept that up until 2006.

For that jump from 40 issues per year to 50, the size of each magazine stayed roughly the same—we simply produced about 25 percent more content every year. After a few years with the weekly schedule we did start to beef up the magazines a bit, but it happened gradually.

By 2007 our website was delivering more news and analysis than we could ever print in a weekly magazine. Even with a tiny staff and a tiny budget, we were producing daily updated news stories and a fairly robust opinion section on worldmag.com (that's what we called it back then). So it didn't seem unnatural to start questioning how often we published the magazine. We published 48 issues in 2007 before taking the big leap to biweekly publishing in 2008. That change made sense, and a subscriber survey at the time told us that you felt the same way.

We've been biweekly ever since, although we did make a change in 2017 that provided two one-week publishing "breaks" (as we did when we were a weekly), one in the summer and one at the end of the calendar year.

With every change in frequency, we have figured out how to provide more content in the pages of the magazine. Even in the transition from weekly to biweekly, we were able to increase the pages of each issue enough to provide more content overall as a biweekly. At the time, we promised to provide at least 10 percent more content after the change, and we exceeded that promise.

Don't worry—this discussion isn't leading up to an announcement that we are reducing the frequency of publication, or reducing the content in each issue (actually, the opposite is true—more on that in another column).

This discussion is leading up to something, though: In our next issue, Lord willing, I will share the ways our editorial council is reshaping our editorial "org chart" to accommodate our growing content production. We think the new structure will allow us to keep improving WORLD Magazine, while expanding and improving all our other platforms. Big things ahead! ■



Kevin Martin

FUEL TO THE FIRE



Over 150,000 people will die today without Christ.

Over 90,000 of them live in what is known as the the unreached world — the places that are hostile and less open to the Gospel, the places where it is difficult, if not impossible, to send an outsider.

Traditional methods are not getting us to these places quickly enough.

Today is a new day in world missions. Local leaders training others to disciple people in their communities and plant churches where they already live, work, study, and shop is the most sustainable and impactful way to reach the unreached.

Are you ready to add fuel to the fire and learn a new way to get the Gospel to every people and every place? Scan a QR code to learn more.

THE TIMOTHY INITIATIVE
ttionline.org

multiplication network
multiplicationnetwork.org



My guest's laptop

Some lessons learned from a missing computer search

WE HAD HOUSEGUESTS for the weekend, and I thought we were ready—but there were a couple of snags we hadn't counted on.

For one thing, I'd been hoping to complete our April 15 tax returns before our guests arrived, and thought I was on schedule to that end. But now, just as our guests were checking in, so was a most unwelcome message on my laptop computer: "TAX RETURN REJECTED." I knew a lot of work was being called for.

The other snag was more serious and more costly. One of our guests, on his arrival, discovered that the sound function on his laptop computer had gone silent. He decided to take the quiet machine to a nearby repair shop first thing the next morning. That's when things started to go wrong.

Walking out to his car, he realized he'd left his keys in the house. So he laid his computer on the car's roof top while retracing his steps to the house. Only when he arrived 10 minutes later at the repair shop did he realize he'd forgotten to retrieve his computer from its precarious perch.

But, of course, such mishaps by their very nature leave no tracks. Did someone walking by our house opportunistically grab the computer from the car top? Or did it slide off at the first of two dozen curves?

Believe me, the 2.6 miles of road between our house and the computer repair shop never got a more careful inspection. The ditches, too. Back and forth, over and over again. Here are some of the things we learned—things you can learn at no expense, just by reading about them here.

First, of course, is to remind yourself never, ever, ever to use your car top as a storage shelf. We've all done it. We all know we shouldn't. A loaf of bread, perhaps; but never something as valuable as a computer. No, don't even think of allowing the habit to develop. Don't even think of tempting a thief to do what he shouldn't do.

REMIND YOURSELF NEVER, EVER, EVER TO USE YOUR CAR TOP AS A STORAGE SHELF. WE'VE ALL DONE IT. WE ALL KNOW WE SHOULDN'T.

Second, technological responses have their limit. Our guest had been careful, when he bought his computer, to include the feature that equips it, when it is stolen or mislaid, to say, "Here I am; come and get me!" Just how helpful is that when it guides you to an apartment complex, a dormitory, or an office complex? We got the signals, OK—but they came in almost useless batches. And remember that we got into this fix first of all because the computer had lost its sound system. Now we wanted it to become very noisy indeed!

Third, take seriously the reports you hear about the limitations on police effectiveness. A couple of hours into our escapade, my wife Carol Esther reminded us that a Christian friend in the management of Asheville's police department might give direction to our confused pursuit. A quick call proved her right. Within minutes, he helped us complete a formal "Incident Investigation Report"—and said he'd be praying for our efforts. But he also sobered us with the reminder that, compared to a very few years back, there are right now only half as many policemen on the street investigating such incidents.

Finally, I couldn't help recalling a rule of etiquette that says: When a guest accidentally breaks something during a visit, the proper response is for the host quite deliberately to break another just like it. In doing so, you're making a point of saying: "Don't worry. It doesn't matter."

That response is suggested when the guest breaks something belonging to the host. Has anyone suggested a sensitive response of the same kind when the guest breaks something of his own? ■

EMAIL jbelz@wng.org

ENDURE
A book by Bill Newton

Live Life with Godly Determination

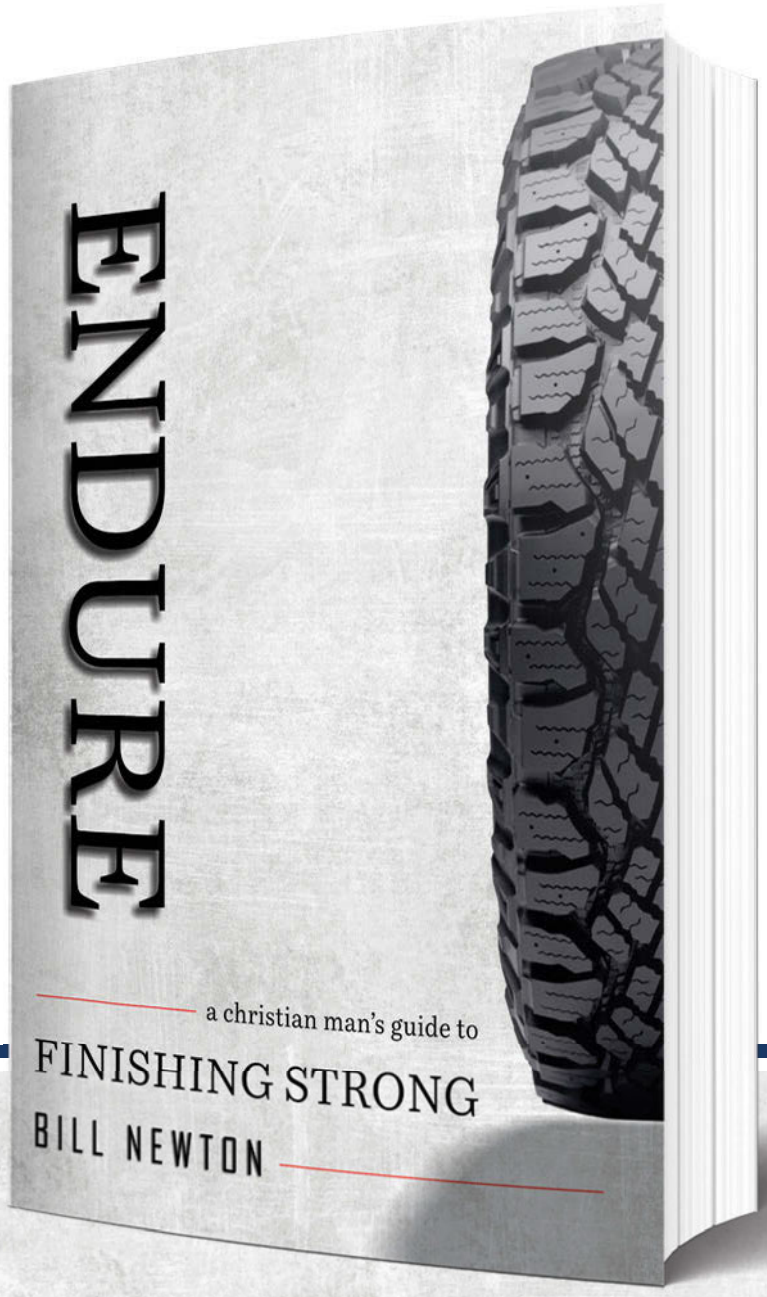
Introducing ***Endure: A Christian man's guide to finishing strong***

What does it mean to be a man? That depends on who you ask. To most people, being a man is defined by their culture – what society expects a man to be. Tough and burly. Sentimental and woke. Confident and poised.

And they'd all be wrong.

You are not defined by culture. You're defined by God's Word. *Endure* is a collection of short, practical, real-world-centered chapters describing Christian principles to help you grow into a mature man of God, confident in God's power to supply what you need for life in this fallen world. "Do you believe that God can do that for you?" *Endure* is a guide that challenges every man to answer that question in a way that pleases God.

Visit **BillNewton.us/Endure** to get your copy of *Endure*. Prepare to be challenged and encouraged.



Visit BillNewton.us/Endure to get your copy

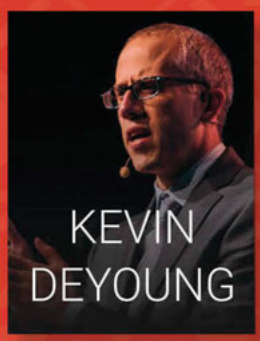
RADIUS INTERNATIONAL

JOIN US IN NORTH CAROLINA JUNE 29-30, 2022

RADIUS MISSIOLOGY CONFERENCE 2022

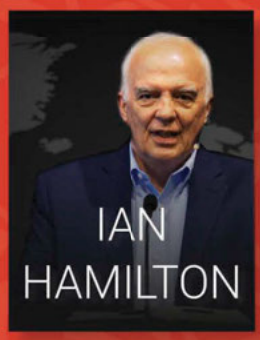














MORE INFO

The Radius Missiology Conference is a unique time of encouragement and learning from world-class Bible teachers and cross-cultural church planters. Join us as we spend two days considering what it will take to see the Great Commission accomplished and how we can do it faithfully.

RADIUSINTERNATIONAL.ORG/WORLD



CHOKING OUT CHARTERS?

Charter school advocates say new rules could kill the movement

by Lauren Dunn

THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION in March proposed new grantmaking rules—which could take effect in May—that some critics say could stop the charter school movement in its tracks.

The rules, which determine how federal startup grants are doled out, would require increased cooperation between proposed charters and existing public schools and set new requirements for charter school proposals. Charter advocates say that could hurt new schools, while others argue the rules are an overdue crackdown on for-profit management models. →

A fifth grade class at the Achievement First Aspire Middle School in Brooklyn, part of a large charter school network

HILARY SWIFT/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

The Charter Schools Program (CSP) was launched during the Clinton administration in 1994 and provides startup or expansion grants for publicly funded, privately run schools. A 2019 Department of Education report found that nearly 60 percent of charter schools that opened between 2006 and 2017 received startup funding through a CSP grant. President Joe Biden's 2023 budget request allocated $440 million for charter schools out of a total $88.3 billion in discretionary education spending.

The Network for Public Education, an advocacy group critical of charters, said the new rules would help end "the spread of charters run for profit." The group set up an online petition for followers to express their support for the proposed regulations, and as of early April it had collected more than 4,000 signatures.

The organization's website keeps a running list of what it terms "charter scandals" under categories such as "student/family dissatisfaction," "academic failure," "financial issues," "closure," "theft or fraud," and "administrative failure." Under the proposed rules, for-profit managers would not be allowed to apply for CSP grants. But charter supporters say the rules' reach goes far beyond for-profit concerns.

Michael Petrilli, president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, said the new regulations "could really grind the charter school movement to a halt." Most concerning to Petrilli is a stipulation that a proposed charter school submit a "community impact analysis," proving, among other things, that it will "not exceed the number of public schools needed to accommodate the demand in the community." In other words, if there are already enough public school openings for local students, then there would be no need for a new charter school, according to the new rules.

"They basically say, you cannot start a new charter school in a place that has flat or declining enrollment, and in the wake of the pandemic, that's almost everybody, everywhere," Petrilli said.

"[IF] YOU'VE GOT A DREAM FOR YOUR DREAM SCHOOL, GIVE IT A SHOT."

Karega Rausch, president of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, said in a statement that the regulations would hinder communities from starting schools that meet local needs.

"Demand for charter schools is not just about the availability of any seat, but the availability of a high-quality [seat] that meets the needs of families and communities," he wrote. Nina Rees of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools called the proposed rules "a back-door attempt to prevent new charter schools from opening."

Six Republican U.S. senators sent a letter to Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona asking the administration to abandon the proposed rule changes. The senators called the proposal "a blatant reversal of three decades' worth of bipartisan support for charter schools."

Cardona told *The Washington Post* that he disagreed with concerns that the new regulations would complicate the process for new charter schools to open.

The Fordham Institute's partner organization, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, authorizes 12 Ohio charter schools. An authorizer measures a school's performance, determines guidelines, and decides if new schools can open. In states that allow charter schools, the state determines who can be an authorizer: Sometimes school districts or state boards of education fill the role, while in some states, such as Ohio, nonprofits may take on the job.

Petrilli predicted that under Biden's proposed regulations, many smaller charter school proponents would be unable to open schools, while wealthy organizations would find ways to make it work. "The beauty of charter schools is that it says, 'Hey, if you're a teacher, or you're a parent, or a community member, you've got a dream for your dream school, give it a shot,'" he said. "But this really would make it so hard for any of those kinds of organizations to get these grants." ■



A rally supporting public charter schools in the Brooklyn borough of New York City

DREW ANGERER/GETTY IMAGES



Dear Pro-Life Friend,

Did you know that a simple Billboard - featuring an 800# Hotline for Help - can save a baby's life?

It's true. So often, someone experiencing an untimely pregnancy may not know about alternatives to abortion, or that confidential counseling and pregnancy services are available. That's why PROLIFE Across AMERICA's Billboards have proven to be **vital and life-saving**.

Each year, thanks to our supporters, over 8,500 Billboards, offering facts and a 800# Hotline, appear in over 45 states.

Will you help us do more to save babies' lives? No gift is too small!

Mary Ann Kuharski, Director

"I'm pregnant and my parents want me to have an abortion, but I don't want to do it. It just doesn't feel right."

"I'm 4-6 weeks along, but afraid to tell my boyfriend. I'm scared and not sure I want to have this baby."

PROLIFE Across AMERICA

P.S. 92¢ of every dollar goes directly to our pro-life outreach. **Won't you help us? prolifeacrossamerica.org/donate.**

CHARITY NAVIGATOR
★★★★
Four Star Charity





Scan the code to visit us online!

PROLIFE Across AMERICA: totally educational, non-profit, non-political & tax deductible. *** We never sell or trade donor names - or phone solicit.**
PROLIFE Across AMERICA, PO Box 18669, Mpls, MN, 55418 or visit prolifeacrossamerica.org.



OVERRULED

The masks come off

Federal judge nixes public transportation mask mandate

U.S. DISTRICT JUDGE Kathryn Kimball Mizelle struck down the Biden administration's public transportation mask mandate on April 18. She said the federal rule requiring face coverings on airplanes, trains, and buses exceeded the authority of U.S. health officials. The rule had been set to expire on that same day, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently extended the mandate to May 3. Officials said they needed more time to study the effect of the new BA.2 Omicron subvariant of the coronavirus. But in her ruling, Mizelle said the CDC failed to justify its decision and did not follow proper rulemaking. The lawsuit dates back to July 2021. Calls had been growing to drop the transportation mask mandate in recent months as states have eased their pandemic restrictions. Airlines lobbied to end the unpopular mask rule, arguing advanced filtration systems make virus spread on an airplane unlikely.

DIED

Adelia "Dede" Robertson, a founding board member of the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) and a board member of Regent University, died on April 19 in Virginia Beach, Va. She was 94. Pat and Dede Robertson founded CBN in 1961, where Pat hosted the flagship show, *The 700 Club*, for more than 50 years. When Pat ran on the Republican ticket for president in 1988, Dede campaigned by his side and was the "glue that held the Robertson family together," her son Gordon said. She was "a woman of great faith [and] a champion of the gospel," her husband said.

CONVICTED

A federal jury on April 14 found El Shafee Elsheikh, 33, guilty on all counts of lethal kidnapping and conspiracy to commit murder for involvement in abducting, torturing, and executing Western hostages in Syria. Elsheikh and two other ISIS fighters are British nationals, nicknamed "the Beatles" by hostages due to their accents. In an agreement with the United Kingdom, Elsheikh will not face the death penalty but will be sentenced to life in prison. Elsheikh's victims included humanitarian aid worker Kayla Mueller from Prescott, Ariz., who was abused and raped before being killed.

PROTECTED

U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas announced on April 15 that the agency will add Cameroon to the list of countries to which it is too dangerous for immigrants to return. Roughly 11,700 Cameroonians legally in the United States will receive Temporary Protected Status. This means they will be protected from deportation for the next 18 months and are allowed to apply for work permits. Mayorkas cited extreme violence in the African nation from an ongoing civil war between government forces and armed separatists, along with increasing attacks from the Boko Haram extremist group. Cameroon will be the 14th country added to Homeland Security's list. Critics say the Temporary Protected Status program has become "amnesty-lite" because the government often extends the 18-month deadline. Roughly 200,000 El Salvadorans have had temporary status since 2001.

JAY LAPRETE/AP

2020-21: ANNUS HORRIBILIS FOR TEENS



44%

THE SHARE OF TEENS who reported feeling "persistently sad and hopeless" according to an alarming survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention during the first half of 2021. Back in 2009, researchers polling high school students on the same question found just 26 percent confessing to despair. Released March 31, the survey of 7,705 high school students from across the country paints a grim picture of how adolescents coped with the unusual 2020-2021 school year and calls into question whether the benefit of pandemic measures outweighed the social cost borne by many students. The CDC's findings echo an October 2021 declaration by the American Academy of Pediatrics of a national emergency in child and adolescent mental health.

3.1%

The share of the 128 schools surveyed by the CDC that offered in-person only instruction with a vast majority operating a hybridized in-person and online model.

26%

The share of girls surveyed who said they had contemplated suicide within the previous year, nearly double the number reported by boys.

47%

The percentage of students surveyed who said they felt close to someone at school.

2 TRILLION

The number of in-person school hours lost to pandemic measures worldwide according to a March 30 estimate by UNICEF.

9 OF 10

The number of teenagers who have smartphones according to *The New York Times*.

ILLUSTRATION BY KRIEG BARRIE

"The word 'Christ' you are trying to publish violates regulations on Internet Information Services, including, but not limited to the following categories: pornography, gambling, drug abuse, incitement."

China's **WECHAT CENSORSHIP TEAM** to Early Rain Covenant Church about its book review group's post that included a reference to *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis.

"Explosives have been found under helmets, attached to doors, in the washing machine, and in cars."

Ukrainian Interior Minister **DENYS MONASTYRSKY**, commenting on the tens of thousands of land mines and other booby-trap devices Russian forces left behind in Ukrainian neighborhoods.

"This was not a road rage incident—this was a grown man who took the life of a child because his feelings got hurt."

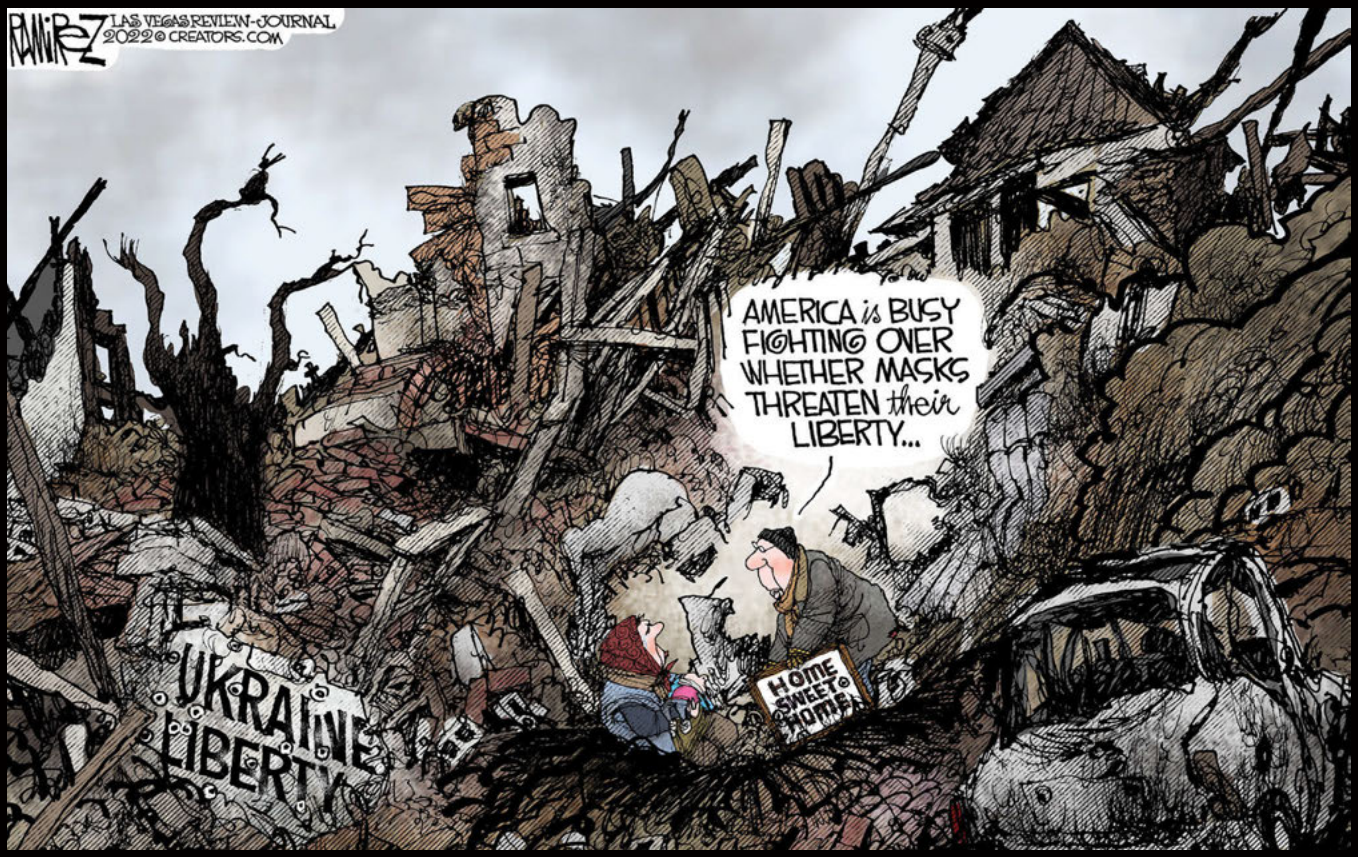
PAUL CASTRO, whose son David, 17, died after shots were fired at their pickup truck in Houston last year following an Astros baseball game.

"I knew my body could still do what it could do, and obviously I have a love for the game. I think I'll always have a love for the game. I do think, physically, I'll be able to do it."

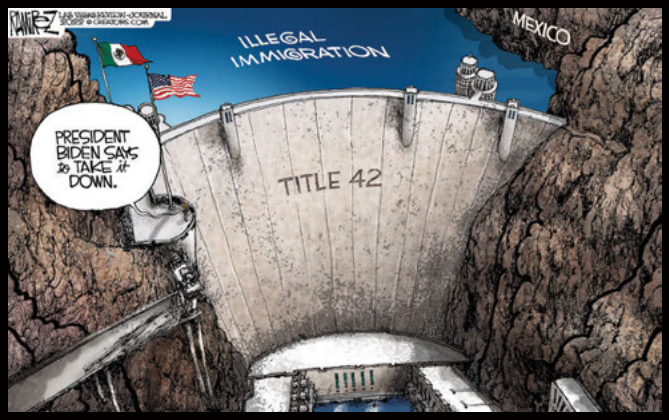
Tampa Bay Buccaneers quarterback **TOM BRADY**, who turns 45 in August, explaining why he ended his 40-day retirement in March.

"How can you accept prayers for the patriarch who is blessing the soldiers trying to kill your son?"

ANDREAS LOUDAROS, an editor for a news website that covers Orthodox church affairs. The head of the Russian Orthodox Church supports the war, placing Ukrainian worshippers in an untenable position.

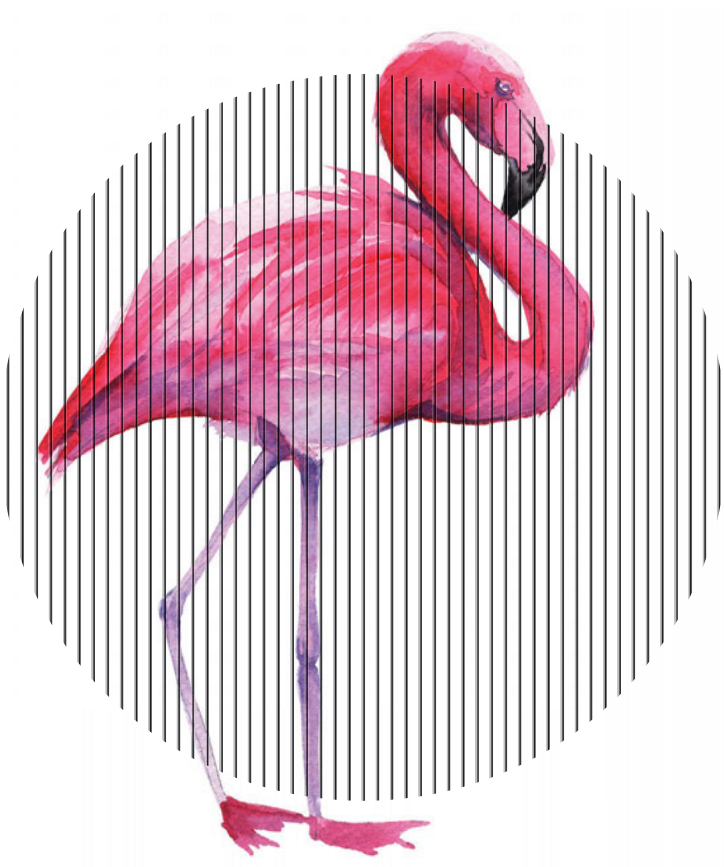

RAMIREZ
LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL
2022 © CREATORS.COM
AMERICA is BUSY FIGHTING OVER WHETHER MASKS THREATEN their LIBERTY...
UKRAINE LIBERTY
HOME SWEET HOME


THE UNITED STATES OF AM
INFLATION
TAX SP3ND 46
ONE DOLLAR


RAMIREZ
ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION
MEXICO
PRESIDENT BIDEN SAYS TO TAKE IT DOWN.
TITLE 42


RAMIREZ
I SEE HUNTER BIDEN CAME BY...


RAMIREZ
EU Can Do It!
BUY RUSSIAN ENERGY
RUSKIE the RAVAGER
FUNDING GENOCIDE

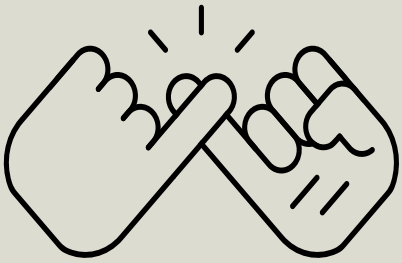


Freedom-seeking flamingo

Kansas zoo escapee is living the high life on the Texas Gulf Coast

by John Dawson

A flamingo that flew the coop nearly two decades ago has been spotted on a Texas beach. Texas wildlife officials say they're certain a greater flamingo spotted March 28 on Texas' Gulf Coast is the same bird that escaped the Sedgwick County Zoo in Kansas in 2005. Two flamingos escaped the zoo 17 years ago. Flamingo 397 was spotted once in Minnesota after the escape. But No. 492—nicknamed Pink Floyd—headed south and has occasionally been spotted in Texas. Officers with Texas Parks & Wildlife have been able to read its leg tag to confirm its identity. Sedgwick Zoo officials have decided to let the bird go. "Every time we hear of it being spotted every couple of years, we're still pleased that he's doing well," a zoo spokesman told CNN.



CHILD-LIKE MUGGER

Police in Warren, Ohio, are looking for a mugger with an unusual getaway strategy. The mugger robbed a young walker on March 27. According to authorities, the knife-wielding man in a ski mask approached the victim and demanded cash. After pilfering $80 from the 22-year-old pedestrian, the perpetrator allegedly forced the victim into a "pinky promise" not to rat on him to police. Secure in the knowledge that a pinky swear under duress is not a legally binding contract, the victim called police anyway, but was unable to provide authorities with a good description.



STILL HAS NEW-CAR SMELL

No sooner had a British motorist picked up his new Ferrari than he crashed it. Derbyshire Roads Policing Unit officials say no one was hurt in an April 1 single-car accident when the driver lost control. But the accident did leave a newly purchased luxury sports car in shambles and its owner's pride in tatters. Authorities described the new red Ferrari as severely damaged as a result of the fiasco.

FLAMINGO: GETTY IMAGES; FERRARI: DERBYSHIRE ROADS POLICING UNIT/TWITTER



AIRPORT LIVING IS THE LIFE

Rather than spend time with his family, a Chinese man has elected to live in Beijing Capital International Airport since 2008, according to a recent report in Chinese media. According to Sina News, **Wei Jianguo** originally left home when he fell out of favor with his in-laws, with whom he lived, and his wife over his propensity to drink and smoke. According to the report, the erstwhile husband occasionally leaves the airport to visit family or do some shopping. Wei bragged that at the airport he can drink as much as he wants.



SUPER-SIZED SNACKS

Teenagers in Aliquippa, Pa., have to comply with the local school's new snack regime. Administrators at the school, which serves students between 7th and 12th grades, posted new rules for what snacks students can bring to school. According to the new rules, pupils will be limited to a 4-ounce bag of chips and a 20-ounce drink. Administrators say the rules are necessary because of the large amounts of food students had been bringing. "I've seen some of the snacks kids are bringing in," parent Janisha Walker told WPXI. "Are they setting up a small store? Why are they carrying a variety box of chips and two liters of soda into the school?"

GOOD DEED—PUNISHED

Arslan Guney thought he was doing a good deed for his Denver community by putting together a pickleball court at a local park. But the city of Denver had other ideas. Authorities in Colorado have issued an arrest warrant for the 71-year-old on the charge of felony criminal mischief after he converted a city basketball court into a pickleball court without permission. According to Guney, he used a Sharpie to add lines to an existing court at Denver's Central Park. When the lines faded, he re-marked them on March 21. By March 24 he had a felony warrant. Guney's lawyer said he and his pickleball friends are willing to clean off the markings and apologize. Officials for Denver Parks and Recreation said it's their job to protect city assets. Guney turned himself in to authorities on March 24.



WHY ARE THEY CARRYING A VARIETY BOX OF CHIPS AND TWO LITERS OF SODA INTO THE SCHOOL?

BASHED WITH A BUNNY

Police in Brandon, Manitoba, say they caught a shoplifter who assaulted a store clerk with a chocolate bunny. Police received a call about the incident on April 1 after a store employee confronted the suspected shoplifter. According to authorities, the suspect then reached for the nearest weapon at hand—a Mr. Solid brand chocolate bunny on display in the store for Easter. After smacking the clerk with the confection, the suspect escaped the store but was arrested by police near the scene. "I know oftentimes the people will use whatever is in their hand to commit assaults," a police spokesman told the CBC. "But quite often it's something more typical than a piece of food."



SHARPIE, MR. SOLID: HANDOUT; JIANGUO: DAILY MAIL VIDEO SCREEN CAPTURE; PINKIE, CHIPS: ISTOCK



The element of surprise

God has a purpose in the events we don't expect

DO YOU LIKE SURPRISES? My husband didn't, so I'm still mystified at my decision to throw a surprise party for his 40th birthday. He's the oldest of seven siblings, and as we would be spending the holidays in his hometown, and as his birthday falls shortly before Christmas, it seemed an opportune time to celebrate a family milestone. All of them could come, all of them kept the secret, and when we walked into his brother's house for a presumed poker night, they were all there to yell, "Surprise!" My husband almost turned around and walked out—or so he told me later. Followed by, "Don't do that again."

But he was a good sport and seemed to have fun once the one-foot-in-the-grave jokes were over. (And that was nothing to what one of the brothers did a few years later for his wife's 40th: hire a hearse and assemble the guests to arrive in a funeral procession.)

As it happened, my husband's surprise party was the last time all seven Cheaney siblings would be together. About five weeks later, the fourth brother died suddenly, in his sleep, at the age of 35. That was also a surprise—a devastating one, especially for his wife and two little girls.

I recall many happy surprises in my life: the positive pregnancy test, the call from my agent about the book deal, the house on the corner that seemed perfect for us. But then that same house deal fell through because of unexpected job uncertainty, another contracted manuscript was rejected, and my daughter miscarried just weeks after a positive pregnancy test. In some lives, unpleasant surprises outnumber the happy ones, by a factor of two or more.

SURPRISES INTERFERE WITH OUR SCHEDULES AND FORCE US TO RETHINK OUR CAREFULLY LAID PLANS.

That's one reason most of us don't like surprises. They interfere with our schedules and force us to rethink our carefully laid plans. They wreak havoc on agendas small and great. Think of every president who began his term with ballyhooed goals, most of them derailed within two years: Clinton's healthcare ambitions stalled by a public that wasn't ready; George W. Bush's hopes for education blown up by 9/11; Trump's quavering approval ratings tanked by COVID-19. And whatever Biden hoped to accomplish in his term, war in Ukraine wasn't in the playbook.

But if God has a purpose for all things, He has a purpose for surprises too. Not just the content, but the "element of surprise" itself, the rug-pull, the banana-peel slip. "Beloved," writes Peter, "do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you" (1 Peter 4:12). He knew about surprises, having experienced a very nasty one when his hopes for Messiah crashed and burned. Even though he was warned. Jesus had told His closest followers at least three times about His death in great detail, but they didn't believe it. Luke goes so far as to say it was hidden from them, and they could not perceive it (9:45; 18:34).

Could it be that the prediction was concealed and unperceivable so that surprise would do its galvanizing work? God had often surprised His people in the past by showing up: for rescue (at the Red Sea), for rebuke (in battle where the Ark of the Covenant was captured), and for reform (through John's preaching after centuries of silence). Christ Himself was not at all what the Jews expected. But the greatest surprise of all occurred on the third day after His ignominious death.

He had told His followers about that too, but it's unlikely they anticipated the resurrection while placing His broken body in a tomb. Otherwise, they wouldn't have been both doubtful and fearful when He appeared among them with wounded hands and side: the happiest surprise in history.

Peter says, "Don't be surprised," but we will be anyway, whether by sunlit uplands or fiery trials. I would just add this: In any surprise, God is showing up. Be looking for Him. ■

EMAIL jcheaney@wng.org TWITTER @jbcheaney



MASTER'S
ATHLETICS

17 INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETIC TEAMS

W WORK

O OVERCOMING

R RESPONSIBILITY

S SELFLESS

H HUMILITY

I INTEGRITY

P PASSION

THE MASTER'S WAY

Athletics at The Master's University exists to train God glorifiers, gospel ambassadors and kingdom influencers for Christ & Scripture.

Therefore, in recognition of this mission, we call each athlete and coach to model The Master's Way: To prepare and perform as an act of WORSHIP (Rom. 12:1).

MEN'S

- Baseball
- Basketball
- Cross Country
- Golf
- Soccer
- Swimming & Diving
- Track & Field
- Volleyball

WOMEN'S

- Basketball
- Beach Volleyball
- Cross Country
- Golf
- Soccer
- Swimming & Diving
- Track & Field (indoor and outdoor)
- Volleyball

TO GET RECRUITED AND TO LEARN MORE, VISIT

GOMUSTANGS.COM

Alliance Defending Freedom is committed to achieving significant and enduring victories that change the law and culture of our nation for generations through sustained, deliberate actions.

We call these Generational Wins.

LIFE IS SAFEGUARDED

Guaranteeing the right to life from conception to natural death.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM PREVAILS

Restoring religious freedom as a fundamental right.

ALL CAN SPEAK FREELY

Securing free speech for all.

MARRIAGE & FAMILY ARE PROTECTED

Ensuring the law respects God's creative order for marriage, the family, and human sexuality.

PARENTAL RIGHTS ARE GUARANTEED

Guaranteeing the fundamental rights of parents to direct the upbringing and education of their children.

To learn more, go to:
www.adflegal.org

ALLIANCE DEFENDING FREEDOM

KEEPING THE DOORS OPEN FOR THE GOSPEL





THE BAD GUYS ARE GOOD

A quick-witted kids' caper with a heart of gold

by Collin Garbarino

WHAT IF NATURE'S MOST FEARSOME CREATURES formed a criminal gang? Director Pierre Perifel shows us that world in DreamWorks Animation's *The Bad Guys*, based on the children's books by Aaron Blabey. This heartfelt action comedy is *Looney Tunes* meets *Oceans 11* meets *Fast and Furious*—and it's clever enough to make it a treat for the whole family.

The Big Bad Wolf (Sam Rockwell) leads a gang of thieves that includes Snake, Tarantula, Shark, and Piranha. Snake (Marc Maron) is a safecracker. Tarantula (Awkwafina) is a computer hacker. Shark (Craig Robinson) is a master of disguise. →



THE BAD GUYS ECHOES THE BIBLE'S TEACHING THAT WE CAN'T JUDGE THE HEART BASED ON APPEARANCE.

And Piranha (Anthony Ramos) is the gang's muscle. The five friends tire of robbing banks and decide to steal the unstealable to solidify their "bad guys" reputation. They plan a heist to nab the "Good Samaritan Award" right before it's handed to Professor Marmalade (Richard Ayoade), a philanthropic guinea pig. But the plan unravels when Wolf impulsively performs an act of kindness, causing him to question whether bad guys can be good.

The Bad Guys is rated PG for action and rude humor. The movie contains some flatulence jokes, and one character repeatedly refers to a heart-shaped object as looking like a "butt." But overall, *The Bad Guys* is a family-friendly movie that entertains both kids and their parents.

We've seen many versions of this bad-boy-with-a-heart-of-gold story, and no one will be surprised when Wolf ends up wearing sheep pajamas. But despite the story's familiarity, *The Bad Guys* feels fresh and fun. Much of that freshness comes from Perifel's sleek animation. He combines computer-generated imagery with a 2D feel, giving the film a gorgeous texture that's a welcome relief from the typical Pixar-lookalike style. *The Bad Guys* is the most beautifully animated film I've seen since 2018's *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*.

Perifel's artistry enriches technically brilliant action sequences: the car chases, the heist montages, the fight scenes—all fantastically entertaining. And it's all very funny. The humor operates on two levels, containing a balance of slapstick farce and wry social commentary. Kids will laugh at absurd violence reminiscent of Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner. Parents will chuckle at the movie's mockery of wealthy self-satisfied do-gooders.

The Bad Guys asks its audience whether we're sometimes too quick to judge others, a common theme in kids' entertainment. This film ponders whether Wolf and his gang are bad guys because they're inherently bad or whether society's antipathy has left them with no other option. Almost everyone besides the main characters is human, which seems odd at first, but these "bad guys" animals are a metaphor. Wolves, snakes, spiders, sharks, and piranhas are rarely dangerous to humans, but we have an outsized fear of them. Are societal prejudices just as unfounded?

We see some familiar themes in the movie—the need for love, friendship, and rescue—but we also find less popular but still important themes—the need for repentance and taking responsibility for past actions. The film even avoids the trap of claiming we're all good at heart. It acknowledges the existence of wickedness, while suggesting goodness can be found in surprising places. Is it coincidence that the entire plot revolves around the Good Samaritan Award, which reminds us of Jesus' parable about help coming from a supposed enemy? *The Bad Guys* echoes the Bible's teaching that we can't judge the heart based on appearance.

Another strength is the movie's willingness to wrestle with the meaning of "goodness." At one point, a character says we should do good because it makes us feel good. This platitude pervades much children's programming, but in *The Bad Guys* this selfish ethic proves to be inadequate for virtuous living. Doesn't sin offer people good feelings for at least a moment? Toward the movie's end, one of the bad guys gives a more helpful definition of right action. He realizes doing good requires sacrificing and putting other people's needs before our own. It's a serendipitous moment parents can use to reinforce teachings about Christ's love for His people. ■

BAD REPUTATIONS Tarantulas have never killed a human being. Wolves and piranhas kill less than one person per year.

DREAMWORKS ANIMATION LLC



Sonic is back to speedily save the day

by Collin Garbarino

Everyone's favorite blue hedgehog is back in theaters, and this time he's got some new friends. Fans will love *Sonic the Hedgehog 2* with its fun characters and frenetic video-game action.

Sonic (Ben Schwartz) is coming to terms with his new life in small-town America. He wants to be a hero, but his guardian Tom (James Marsden) cautions him to be patient. He tells Sonic being a hero means taking care of others, and Sonic will know when it's time to act. While Tom's on vacation, Sonic realizes it's time to act. Dr. Robotnik (Jim Carrey) returns to get his revenge, and he's accompanied by a surly brawling echidna named Knuckles (Idris Elba). Sonic gets an assist from a two-tailed fox appropriately named Tails (Colleen O'Shaughnessey).

What the film lacks in coherence, it makes up for in humor and speedy action sequences. Carrey is even more outrageous than in the original, and Elba puts in some scene-stealing voice work.

The movie is rated PG for action and some rude humor—God's name is uttered outside of prayer a couple of times. But for the most part, *Sonic the Hedgehog 2* is a fast-paced kid-friendly movie with a wholesome message about the importance of family. Sonic learns that love and compassion can transform difficult relationships.



FIGHTING FOR JUSTICE

Low-caste journalists report courageously

by Emily Whitten

"IN OUR REGION, a Dalit woman journalist was unimaginable." So says Meera, chief reporter for the Indian newspaper *Khabar Lahariya*. She's featured in the 2021 documentary, *Writing With Fire*, now available on Amazon and other platforms.

Meera and her team of female Dalit reporters come from India's untouchable caste, often excluded from Indian life. But since 2002, they've defied expectations with compelling, on-the-ground reporting. As Meera explains early in the film, "When citizens demand their rights, it is us journalists who can take their demands to government. This is how one fights for justice in a democracy."

For Meera and her colleagues, fighting for justice means reporting on illegal and deadly mining practices, even in the face of threats from organized crime. It means criticizing political leaders and religious gurus who scam people. And too often, it means pressuring police to enforce laws that should protect women. In one scene, we hear from a girl who was raped. Within a week after *Khabar Lahariya*'s reporting, police arrested the girl's attacker.

These women aren't perfect. They seek worldly power and sometimes lie about their caste. But their virtues stand out boldly in a dark culture: courage, perseverance, and commitment to innovation. Some viewers won't want to deal with subtitles and tough topics like sexual assault (not graphically presented). Those who do will find, as co-director Sushmit Ghosh puts it, "These women are showing you what true journalism and true courage really means."



THE BEST VIDEO GAMES FOR 3+

- Super Mario Maker 2
- Super Mario U Deluxe
- Mario Kart 8 Deluxe
- LEGO Marvel Collection
- Mario Golf: Super Rush
- Rayman Legends
- Untitled Goose Game
- Peggle 2
- Animal Crossing
- Captain Toad

SOURCE: DIGITALTRENDS.COM

SONIC: PARAMOUNT PICTURES; WRITING WITH FIRE: MUSICBOXFILMS

NATIONS PROTECT GOD'S CREATION

President Obama produces and hosts series on the world's great national parks

by Marty VanDriel



CHRISTIAN NATURE LOVERS might wonder if the new Netflix documentary *Our Great National Parks*, hosted by former President Barack Obama, is worthwhile, or if it veers toward extreme environmentalism. With some discernment, viewers should really enjoy this beautifully filmed and well-paced five-part series that explores national parks around the globe.

Protected national parks like Yellowstone, the world's first when it was established in 1872, can have enormous impact on conserving the landscape and wildlife of our natural world. *Our Great National Parks* seeks to document the positive work being done by nature preserves all over the world, and in doing so, gives viewers a glimpse of the incredible diversity and beauty of the Lord's creative work.

President Obama, whose Higher Ground Productions is the producer of the series, introduces each park with an overview of its location and unique characteristics, often highlighting the park's "re-wilding" and conservation efforts. Each episode then moves to a more intimate story of the park's distinctive animals and animal families.

Every episode makes note of humanity's impact on the environment and climate and our responsibility as stewards of the globe but does not take an overly heavy-handed, nagging approach. Instead, our narrator highlights the positive work that people have done through establishing and expanding national parks.

A highlight of the first episode is the surfing hippos of Loango National Park in western Gabon. These enormous creatures enjoy crashing through the waves and surf of the Atlantic Ocean each night as they make their way along the coast to their feeding grounds.

Some of the most enjoyable footage of the whole series shows an endangered lemur species, the Decken's sifaka, that leap from crag to precarious crag, up to 30 feet at a time, as they make their way to and from different groves of trees. A baby sifaka clings to its mama as she confidently bounds high above the ground: One false step, and both would be dashed to pieces, but the mother's pace is hardly slower than her companions'.

The second episode explores the national parks of Chile's Patagonia region. A male Chilean stag beetle, whose huge, heavy jaws weigh down his progress, climbs the equivalent of two Eiffel towers, as he catches the scent of a female stag beetle—anything for love, they say! These large distinctive jaws, the largest of any animal in comparison to its body size, also serve to fight off a rival, as two males duel nearly to the death for the right to secure a female companion.

The documentary explores Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary and Indonesia's Gunung Leuser National Park in its last two installments. If viewers can ignore a few references to "millions of years," and don't mind the former president being the narrator, they will marvel at the incredible scenery and unique stories of this ode to the world's national parks. ■

NETFLIX

LIFE AND FAITH Mark Wahlberg and Mel Gibson are both Catholics, and *Father Stu* was released four days before Easter.

BOX OFFICE TOP 10

WEEKEND OF APRIL 15-17, ACCORDING TO BOX OFFICE MOJO. QUANTITY OF SEXUAL (S), VIOLENT (V), AND FOUL-LANGUAGE (L) CONTENT ON A 0-10 SCALE, WITH 10 HIGH, FROM KIDS-IN-MIND.COM

		S	V	L
1	**Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore*** PG-13	1	5	1
2	**Sonic the Hedgehog 2*** PG	1	3	3
3	**The Lost City*** PG-13	4	5	5
4	**Everything Everywhere All at Once** R	not rated		
5	**Father Stu*** R	5	5	8
6	**Morbius*** PG-13	2	7	5
7	**Ambulance** R	1	8	10
8	**The Batman*** PG-13	2	7	5
9	**K.G.F.: Chapter 2**	not rated		
10	**Uncharted*** PG-13	2	6	5

*REVIEWED BY WORLD



TOP 10 FOCUS

In the comics, Spider-Man is the hero, and Morbius is the villain. Without Spider-Man, this movie tries to make Michael the hero, even though he kills a bunch of people after becoming a vampire. —from Collin Garbarino's April 23 review of *Morbius*



PRIZEFIGHTER TO PRIEST

The gritty story of a changed life

by Sharon Dierberger

FROM SELF-DESTRUCTIVE prizefighter to passionate priest, Father Stuart Long was the real man behind the movie, *Father Stu*, released in theaters on April 13. This true story starring Mark Wahlberg as Stu and Mel Gibson as his father personifies redemption—how Christ changed one man's life and used it to change the lives of others.

Full blessing can't be bestowed on the film because of ear-sizzling foul language and offensive conversations worthy of confession. But, if audiences can listen through it, they'll be rewarded with a powerful gospel message shown through altered lives, as well as explicitly preached near the movie's end.

Stu grew up in Montana with a single sibling, a brother, who one day didn't wake up. His death traumatized the family, leading his parents to divorce, his father to alcoholism, and Stu to continual feelings of worthlessness and the need to prove himself.

After a doctor tells him injuries from amateur boxing have left him with a serious jawbone infection and blood inflammation, he naïvely heads to Hollywood, determined to become the next big star. Instead, he meets a Mexican gal, Carmen (Teresa Ruiz), with whom he's immediately smitten. He tracks her down to the doors of a Catholic church and brashly heads into Mass.

Like a quest for the Holy Grail, he relentlessly pursues her—to the point of taking Christian education classes and sitting in on the children's Sunday school class she teaches, just to be near and impress her. He even says, "I'm getting baptized cuz it means something to my girl." But despite his initial impure motives, the truths of the Bible slowly begin to touch him.

The film elevates Catholic doctrine, especially surrounding Jesus' mother, Mary, and the death-defying incident that inspires his life-changing choices, including his pursuit of the priesthood. But his ultimate transformation appears Christ-centered, according to his final sermon we're privy to. And this transformation affects everyone in Stu's purview, especially after he's diagnosed with an incurable disease. Humor, often crude, is sprinkled throughout the movie, despite serious topics, although it declines significantly following his transformation.

With Wahlberg and Gibson, top-notch acting brings power and nuance to a memorable story. Wahlberg said he gained 30 pounds for the film. Wahlberg said one scene felt particularly real, when in order to portray grief authentically he poured out genuine tears and emotions over the recent death of his own mother. His personal story of troubled adolescence to eventual embrace of Catholicism has much in common with Father Stu.

F-bombs galore, vulgar talk, and bloody fight scenes earn the film its R rating. ■

MORBIUS: JAY MAIDMENT/COLUMBIA PICTURES/SONY PICTURES; FATHER STU: KAREN BALLARD/SONY PICTURES/CTMG, INC.

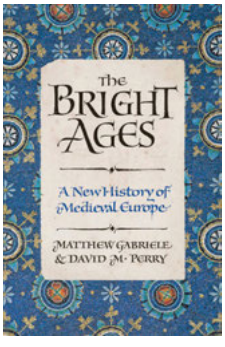
The Dark Ages were actually pretty bright

Middle Ages get a contemporary look

by Collin Garbarino

SPACESHIP EARTH at Disney's Epcot theme park takes riders on an educational trip through the best of human history. After spending a few minutes on the achievements of the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, the ride skips over the next thousand years and begins extolling the virtues of the Renaissance and modernity. Is there nothing in these Middle Ages worth studying? Did humanity take a step backward?

This popular perception of the Middle Ages is all too common, leading people to dismiss these thousand years as a superstitious and brutal speed bump in the path of human progress. It's this image of "the Dark Ages" that Matthew Gabriele and David M. Perry challenge in their recent book, *The Bright Ages: A New History of Medieval Europe*.



In this chronological narrative, the authors begin with the fall of Rome in the fifth century and end in the 14th century with the Italian Renaissance. They manage to pack a lot of information into this slim volume, recounting the rise of Byzantines, Arabs, Franks, Vikings, and Mongols. Readers will find moments of cooperation among Christians, Muslims, and Jews but also learn about violent conflicts among the three Abrahamic religions.

Despite the breadth, Gabriele and Perry tell a story that's accessible and enjoyable for nonspecialists. Their prose is chatty, sometimes to a fault, and they don't assume their readers have much prior knowledge. Thankfully, the book doesn't present the flow of history as the inevitable movement of impersonal social forces. Rather the narrative engages our attention by focusing on the historical actions of real people.

The Bright Ages takes a somewhat meandering journey through the Middle Ages, and many of the people we meet along the way aren't whom you might expect. We meet a few kings and popes, but Gabriele and Perry shine their light on people who they say have been typically ignored in history books. They use the story of Galla Placidia, an empress of the late Roman Empire, as a frame, beginning and ending the book in her mausoleum in Ravenna. Almost every chapter features a different woman whose story might typify her context. The book also attempts to highlight contributions of non-elites and non-Europeans. The characters who populate this history might not be the "greatest hits" of medieval Europe, but their stories illuminate what life could be like during these years.

One of the strengths of the book is the authors' sensitivity to religion. Perry is Jewish, and Gabriele is Catholic. And they consider spiritual motivations as legitimate explanations for people's decisions. Too often past historians treated medieval religious experience as either "a smokescreen for the 'real' economic or political actions" or "as evidence that medieval people were unthinking religious fanatics." Readers won't necessarily affirm medieval theological reasoning, but they'll gain an understanding of the religious concerns that drove these people.

When it comes to religious violence, however, Gabriele and Perry flinch from the horror. Their chapter on the Crusades disappoints because they claim we can't really know why the first Crusaders did what they did. They dismiss the historical evidence as untrustworthy, but if they applied the same standard to the rest of the book's evidence, they would need to dismiss everything.

Their "further reading" section ignores the work of Jonathan Riley-Smith, the leading Crusade historian of the last 50 years. It's as if the Crusades are too hot to handle in light of today's political discourse.

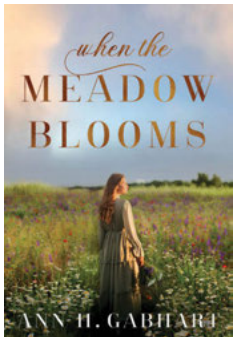
The Bright Ages is very much a product of our age, which doesn't mean it's a bad read—you just need to know what you're getting. Gabriele and Perry complain about historians who looked to the Middle Ages for the foundations of European nationalism or for justifications of European colonialism. But Gabriele and Perry are guilty of looking to history for their own justifications.

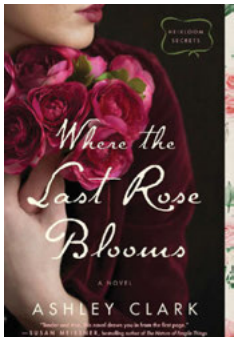
Their narrative highlights themes of female empowerment, multiculturalism, and globalization. These themes are present in the lives of some medieval Europeans, so we see the bounds of what was possible, but these experiences certainly weren't universal to the age. When the authors put their spotlight on these ideas, they show us as much about our world as they do the world of the Middle Ages. ■

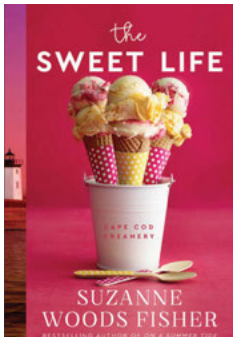
The bond between mothers and daughters

Christian novels with strong female leads

by Sandy Barwick









WHEN THE MEADOW BLOOMS **Ann H. Gabhart**
Weakened by tuberculosis, Rose Meadows checks herself into a sanitorium for care and leaves her two daughters at an orphanage. She promises to return for them, but two years later they are still waiting. Rose's brother-in-law, Dirk, badly scarred in a long-ago fire, leads a reclusive life at his farm called Meadowland. But when he finds out about Rose and her girls, he feels obligated to give his late brother's family a place to live. At first he avoids them, reluctant to get emotionally involved, but these new housemates work their way into his heart. Rose's quiet faith, along with the countless prayers of others over the years, slowly begin to mend the invisible scars Dirk carries inside.

WHERE THE LAST ROSE BLOOMS **Ashley Clark**
Alice runs a flower shop in present-day New Orleans with the aunt who raised her after her mother's disappearance during Hurricane Katrina. She discovers some old embroidery in the attic of her former home and realizes the flower designs contain coded messages. The dual narrative reverts to 1861 Charleston where Clara, a secret abolitionist and Union spy, helps a slave named Rose locate her 9-year-old daughter who was sold to another family. The embroidery plays a pivotal role. This story, highlighting the bond between mothers and daughters, includes scenes depicting the horrors of slavery but also reminds us that through fires and floods, God is always with us. Third book in a series but reads as a standalone.

THE SWEET LIFE **Suzanne Woods Fisher**
When her fiancé cancels the wedding, Dawn Dixon invites her mother, Marnie, on her already-paid-for honeymoon on Cape Cod. Marnie, a recent widow and breast cancer survivor, impulsively buys a dilapidated ice cream shop on Main Street. Dawn reluctantly agrees to stay and help her mother get started, but they encounter opposition from the local historical society, putting the new venture—and Marnie's life savings—in jeopardy. Free-spirited Marnie and tightly wound Dawn learn new things about themselves and each other as they live and work together. They also get much-needed help from new friends and old. Some characters lean toward caricature, but overall, it's a fun, feel-good story.

THE MASTER CRAFTSMAN **Kelli Stuart**
Professional treasure hunter Nick Laine is dying of cancer. He sends his estranged daughter, Ava, in his place on one last hunt for a missing Fabergé egg. She and her mom travel to St. Petersburg, Russia, to retrace the steps of Karl Fabergé, the famous jeweler commissioned by the House of Romanov—the last Imperial family to rule before the Russian revolution. Alternating between 1917 and present day, both narratives include intrigue and fascinating historical details, but the action intensifies near the end of the present-day story as Ava closes in on the mystery egg while being threatened by a Russian mobster. The chase is fun but the real—and poignant—point to the story is this: Nothing is more valuable than family.

Curious characters

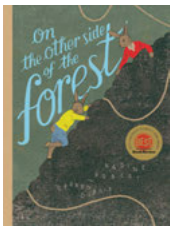
Noteworthy read-aloud books

by Mary Jackson

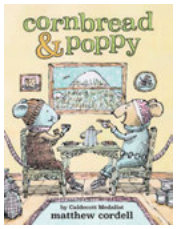


THE STUFF BETWEEN THE STARS **Sandra Nickel**
Nickel introduces young readers to Jewish astronomer Vera Rubin and her breakthrough discovery of dark matter. Vera developed a childhood fascination with the night sky as she gazed out her bedroom window. She later studied astronomy in college and pursued her astronomical questions with persistence while becoming a wife and mother and encountering resistance in the male-dominated scientific field. Even as she made significant discoveries, she "wasn't bothered by not knowing" the mysteries of the sky. *(Ages 6-9)*

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FOREST **Nadine Robert**

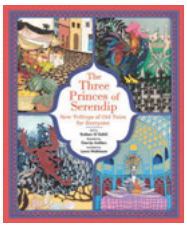


A young bunny lives with his father and dog on a little farm surrounded by a dense, dark forest. Father's curiosity about the other side of the forest prompts him to build a tall tower by trading his fresh-baked bread with neighbors for their large stones. When a storm ruins the tower, neighbors show up to help rebuild. The cooperative effort becomes more magnificent than what father and Arthur discover on the other side of the forest. Robert's storytelling combines beautifully with Gérard DuBois' vintage-inspired inked and colored illustrations. *(Ages 3-8)*



CORNBREAD & POPPY **Matthew Cordell**
Cordell's short chapter book follows two mice who are best friends but could not be more different. One loves to plan ahead (Cornbread), and one is free-spirited and chooses adventure instead (Poppy). Poppy's lack of preparedness and a food shortage prompt the mice to forage an intimidating mountain where they find unexpected provision and friendship. Cordell's endearing characters and comical watercolor and ink illustrations make this a delightful pick as a read-aloud or an early reader. A second installment, *Cornbread & Poppy at the Carnival*, releases in June. *(Ages 6-8)*

THE THREE PRINCES OF SERENDIP **Rodaan Al Galidi**



"Stories are the best travelers," Al Galidi writes in the opening. He wrote the book in Dutch (Laura Watkinson translated it to English). It includes 20 Arabian fables and folktales he learned as a child living in Iraq. Geertje Aalders' cut-paper collages accompany stories that convey simple lessons about virtues and vices. Some will be more meaningful than others for Christian families, but enjoyable nonetheless. In one story, an arrogant rooster comes to realize, "I was so wrapped up in myself that I didn't even hear all the other roosters." *(Ages 6-9)*

Afterword



Two recent noteworthy books share truthful messages about Christ for young children. They also share the same gifted illustrator and printmaker, Stephen Crotts.

The words and pictures in ***The Sower*** by Scott James "tell a true story about the way God is making the world (including us) new," writes author and musician Andrew Peterson in the foreword. James portrays the Biblical story of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration from the vantage point of a loving Creator, depicted as the Sower, who purposefully tends to his people and completes his work. Using light and dark, Crotts captures the contrast of the abundant life that comes through nearness to the Sower and the brokenness for those who drift from his voice.

The Forgotten King, by Kenneth Padgett and Shay Gregorie (available May 10), reads like a poetic parable. A wizard puts a curse on villagers who once delighted in their king. When they forget his goodness and lose their way, the king sends his son to make things right and ensure he will never be forgotten again. *—M.J.*

Talk About

Family Faith Conversations from Awana



Digitally Delivered Weekly

→ Form lasting faith one conversation at a time. Talk About™ delivers child discipleship through simple discussions and family fun.

First Month FREE

with code: **WORLD**

SCAN THIS CODE TO GET STARTED

TalkAboutDiscipleship.com

Great music from war-torn lands

New albums by Solomiya Ivakhiv and the Estonian Philharmonic Choir

by Arsenio Orteza



Ivakhiv

WITH THE WAR BETWEEN Russia and Ukraine likely to rivet international attention for the foreseeable future, there's no time like the present to remind oneself that there's a lot more to both countries than what's dominating the news.

Or as Dame May Whitty says in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes*: "You shouldn't judge any country by its politics. We English, after all, are quite honest by nature."

Russia and Ukraine are quite musical by nature, a fact on prominent display in ***Poems & Rhapsodies*** by the violinist Solomiya Ivakhiv, the cellist Sophie Shao, and the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine (Centaur) and in ***Rachmaninov: Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*** by the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir (BIS).

Poems & Rhapsodies showcases the Ukrainian-born Ivakhiv performing a program that with its soothing properties and multinational provenance seems better poised to foster global goodwill than anything that the world's superpowers currently have up their sleeves.

The only Ukrainians among the album's six composers are Anatoliy Kos-Anatolsky (who, interestingly enough, served as a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union throughout the 1970s) and Myroslav Skoryk. But their compositions, "Poem for Violin & Orchestra in D Minor" (Kos-Anatolsky) and "Carpathian Rhapsody" (Skoryk) balance the French Romanticism of the pieces by Saint-Saëns (*La muse et le poète*) and Ernest Chausson (*Poème for Violin & Orchestra*) while seasoning the proceedings, especially in the case of Skoryk's rhapsody, with a distinctly Eastern European flavor.



The centerpiece and highlight, however, is a splendid rendition of Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending*. On the Russian front, the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir's performance of Rachmaninov's *Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* (BIS)—minus several refrains and responses—serves as a stirring reminder of the interdependent relationship between faith and beauty running throughout the long history of the Russian Orthodox Church.

As captured in the sonorous acoustics of the 13th-century Niguliste (St. Nicholas) Church in Tallinn, the 30 voices of the EPCC levitate, coalesce, and hover, transforming the liturgy's Old Church Slavonic text into a kind of aurally illuminated manuscript.



The liner booklet contains English translations. But even without them, the titles of the 18 movements (e.g., "Bless the Lord, O my Soul," "The Litany of Supplication," "The Creed," "The Eucharistic Prayer: A mercy of peace," "The Lord's Prayer: Our Father," "Let Our Mouths Be Filled") and the composition's structure will keep anyone familiar with traditional Christian liturgies or attuned to reverently matched form and content from feeling adrift. ■

FRENCH ROMANTICISM appeared in the late 19th century as a reaction against the formality of neoclassicism.

PAUL TERRIE

A European tour

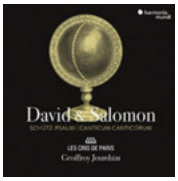
Noteworthy new or recent releases

by Arsenio Orteza

DAVID & SALOMON: SCHÜTZ: PSALMI, CANTICUM CANTICORUM

Les Cris de Paris, Geoffroy Jourdain

Before Bach, the gold standard of German composers was Heinrich Schütz, whom the conductor Geoffrey Jourdain describes in this album's liner notes as someone whose "artistic motto [was] absolute clarity." The selections that Jourdain has chosen and the vocal and instrumental performances that he has coaxed from Les Cris de Paris (the Street Cries of Paris), a small group comprising a choir and instrumental ensemble, not only illustrate that clarity but also invigorate it with the exuberance and the attention to detail that it deserves. The juxtaposition of the majestic (six Davidic psalms sung in German) with the sensual (four Song of Solomon excerpts sung in Latin) in particular accentuates the richness of both.



HERMAN VOGT: LIGHT SHALL SHINE

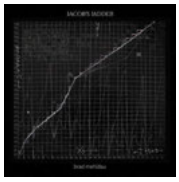
Anders Eidsten Dahl

The title of this fascinatingly expressive solo church organ recording comes from the five-movement, 40-minute suite that leads it off, *Light Shall Shine Out of Darkness* (inspired directly or indirectly by Luke 17:21, John 8:12, Mark 10:15-16, Matthew 5:14, Galatians 5:22, and the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas). The title of the 15½-minute piece that brings the album to a close, "The Marvel of Turin," comes from the famous cloth relic that may or may not be the burial shroud of Jesus Christ. In between, there's the 15½-minute "Ré-sur-Ré...exit," a continuously morphing exploration in sounds both eruptive and reflective of the event without which the Christian faith is just wishful thinking.



JACOB'S LADDER Brad Mehldau

For his second Scripture-inspired album in three years, Mehldau dives headlong into the progressive rock that he loved as a kid, covering—or maybe "mining" would be more accurate—Rush, Gentle Giant, and Yes. He also oversees a polyrhythmic racket of his own. In "Herr und Knecht," Tobias Bader shouts quotations from Hegel's "master-slave dialectic" while Mark Guiliana drums up an ELP-worthy storm. And sometimes Mehldau looks a lot further back than the 1970s. He also looks a lot further back than Hegel: In the title cut's first movement, six speakers recite Genesis 28:10-19 in English and Dutch simultaneously.



SEMPITERNAM BY RHONA CLARKE

State Choir Latvija, Māris Sirmais

Unlike the music of some composers who "rub against the tradition," Rhona Clarke's choral works have about them an inviting singability that augurs well for their entry into and survival in the repertoire. Not that they don't sound daunting. Along with its pressurized dynamics and swooping lines, her setting of Catullus' "Ave Atque Vale" requires well-timed riser stomping, and nearly every piece would seem to demand superior breath control. But the effort yields dividends. *The Three Carols on Medieval Texts* and perhaps even the setting of Clare Harner's "Immortality" will lift your spirits. The four-movement Latin-language *Requiem* will lift them higher—and keep them there.



Encore



In the publicity accompanying the release of his mostly instrumental 2019 album *Finding Gabriel* (Nonesuch), the jazz pianist Brad Mehldau spoke of the project's having grown out of his "close reading" of the Bible. Yet "The Prophet Is a Fool," which featured a narrator paraphrasing Obama's line about "bitter clingers" against the backdrop of a "Build that wall" chant, made the album seem less like a heartfelt exploration of transcendent truth and more like mere Trump-bashing à la the Religious Left.

Now, in light of Mehldau's persistence in making Bible-themed music, it's worth revisiting such nonverbal *Finding Gabriel* tracks as "Born to Trouble," "O Ephraim," and "St. Mark Is Howling in the City of Night" and taking their textured, synthesizer-glazed luminosity at face value—as sonic code, in other words, for sensitivity to otherworldly realities.

It's also worth wondering whether Mehldau's latest album, *Jacob's Ladder*, is an answer to the prayer spoken throughout *Finding Gabriel*'s title track. —*A.O.*



MINISTERING TO LE GOUVERNEMENT FRANÇAIS

French Evangelicals seek to be salt and light in the public sphere

JENNY LIND SCHMITT INTERVIEWS THIERRY LE GALL

THIERRY LE GALL IS THE DIRECTOR of the parliamentary pastoral service of the Conseil National des Évangéliques de France (National Council of French Evangelicals). After a long career in corporate communication, God called Le Gall to the pastorate in Normandy and Brittany, and then to the political class in Paris. Inspired by his time spent in Washington, D.C., Bern, and Brussels, Le Gall has since 2016 ministered to hundreds of French politicians from every political party. His first book, *Un avenir, une espérance* (A future, a hope), was released in February 2022. Le Gall and the NCFE published a voter's guide ahead

ILLUSTRATION BY REBECCA SAMPSON

of April's presidential election titled *Elections 2022—Evangelical Convictions*.

What is your role and how long have you been in this position? I am the Protestant evangelical chaplain to the French Parliament, which includes the National Assembly and the Senate. This year will mark six years since I've taken up that post.

How did God lead you to this ministry? After the tragic death of our 24-year-old son in 2011, my wife and I spent time in a spiritual retreat in order to grieve. Through that process, God revealed a new direction for us in a powerful and clear way: He told me to minister to French parliamentarians. I had had a long career in corporate communications before God called me to be a pastor, but besides voting, I had never had much involvement in the world of politics. It had never crossed my mind!

What's a normal day for you? A normal day is spent meeting senators or deputies of the National Assembly for conversations, either in their offices over a cup of coffee or in a meeting room. I'm not a lobbyist, and they receive me as a pastor. First we talk about things of God, and I seek to encourage them in their faith, in their personal and family life. I also listen a lot because these are men and women under an enormous amount of pressure: political, social, nervous, and intellectual pressure.

Often there are subjects on which they would like the perspective of French evangelical Protestants, for example the law on secularism, the threat of Islam, education, ethics, end of life, the family, children, the environment. All those issues where biblically grounded Christians have convictions to share.

Do representatives seek you out or do you seek them out? Both. Sometimes representatives just want to meet with a pastor, and in those moments, there is nothing political in our meeting, just the desire to accompany them personally and spiritually. Other times I ask to meet with them when there is a subject important to evangelicals. For example, the anti-separatism law last year greatly concerned Christians because it directly affects the liberties of expression and religion and directly affects church planting in France.

From the beginning, the members of Parliament told me that in the name of domestic security we must accept the reduction of religious liberties in order to fight radical Islam. We [the CNEF] didn't agree with that, or course, because radical Islam is not an Islam that is organized in legal institutions. That's the realm of national information and law enforcement services. Relying on a change of law to get to an invisible enemy that doesn't concern itself with legalities doesn't seem like a good indicator for French democracy.

What role does that play in the current election cycle? People of faith—whether Jewish, Christians, Buddhists, or Muslims—were shocked and worried by the passage of this law because believers in France have now become suspect in the eyes of the law simply for their convictions and for practicing their religion. It's not right to discriminate against all religions just because of one religious minority that poses a real problem and needs to be dealt with.

This political decision to impose more financial, legal, and administrative restrictions is deeply upsetting for believers of any religion. So yes, it impacts the elections to the extent that we have the impression to have become suspect in the eyes of the French authorities.

How has this situation changed the view of politics for evangelical French Christians? There is a growing political awareness among French evangelical Protestants. For a long time among Christians there was a radical separation between the secular and spiritual worlds and apathy towards politics. For many years, evangelicals were taught in their churches to stay away from politics. Only in the last 15 years have we seen a younger generation start to take interest in political engagement for the common good.

I've noticed that especially at the city and local levels, more and more Christians from all social ranks are participating in city councils with a single goal: To improve the daily lot of the French and serve the common good. And that idea of working for the common good through politics is a biblically justified notion. →

THIS POLITICAL DECISION TO IMPOSE MORE FINANCIAL, LEGAL, AND ADMINISTRATIVE RESTRICTIONS IS DEEPLY UPSETTING FOR BELIEVERS OF ANY RELIGION.

The Christians entering politics that I meet aren't doing it to impose their evangelical point of view on the country, but to contribute as a living stone, as salt and light in the places where decisions are made that affect all of us.

How can Christians active in politics avoid falling into divisive battles? Among politically interested Christians there can be a strong temptation to "dominionism," that is to say, the desire to take political power with the goal of imposing Christian values on all of society. It seems to me that that is not the model that we find in the Gospels or modeled by Jesus Christ. His example is men and women at the heart of society who, by their behavior, by their actions, by their words, impact society positively, but who never force their will on others.

In Revelation 3:20 Jesus says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock." In France, we have a very strict separation between church and state. It would be absolutely forbidden for any French group to take power in the name of one religion or faith.

How would you answer those who say that France is in danger of losing its culture and heritage of Western liberal values? In Europe it's true that there is a big sociological and cultural shift that can give us the feeling that our Christian heritage is deconstructing or weakening. So I would respond this way to those who worry about Christian societal values and heritage dissolving: This heritage must be transmitted, not through power but through incarnation.

The challenge today for European Christians is to recover the joy of being a Christian and to daily, peacefully declare their hope in Christ in their manner of loving and living with fellow colleagues and citizens. It's in re-becoming Christ's disciples that the 23 million European evangelical Protestants can again positively impact society.

Your book *Un avenir, une espérance* was recently released. What is your hope for this book, and for whom is it intended? The subtitle of the book is "A user's manual against discouragement and disillusion." There has been a problem with religious expression in France since the Revolution, and in the book I aim to address that. It is precisely the capacity to dialogue, confront, and debate ideas that makes the richness of French society.

There is no reason that those who have a spiritual hope cannot share that, right alongside those who have hope in politics, unions, ecology, or philosophy. So fundamentally, I wanted to write a book that would be an encouragement. It tells my personal story, but also the story of how the chaplaincy was created and the interactions with representatives and senators and the important role they play in our democracy. I hope that it will encourage Christians to better know, understand, and pray for their political representatives.

IT'S IN RE-BECOMING CHRIST'S DISCIPLES THAT THE 23 MILLION EUROPEAN EVANGELICAL PROTESTANTS CAN AGAIN POSITIVELY IMPACT SOCIETY.

The most encouraging thing you've seen in your work? The most discouraging thing? The most encouraging thing is seeing the real commitment of many parliamentarians. French public opinion is very critical of the political class, but the majority of elected officials I personally know have a true vocation to work for the common good. They invest time, hard work, and sacrifice in trying to improve our country and better our laws to protect the weakest and increase justice. It is a true calling, and that's why I encourage Christians to respect them and pray for them.

The most discouraging thing is that there are almost 1,000 parliamentarians, and I am alone in this work! I would love to grow our team in order to be more available and do more.

How can Christians in other countries pray for France? We need to pray that peaceful elections will take place and help to create a good political and civil climate. And the other prayer is that the French will use their right to vote. There is a high abstention rate in France, particularly among young people. Our democracy is envied in many countries. But if we want our future government to be representative of the population, people need to put aside their disillusion and vote. ■

WORLD OPINIONS

Sound commentary from trusted voices



Now Christians have a trustworthy source of sound analysis, insights, and perspectives on the events and ideas attempting to redefine our world today.

WORLD Opinions contributors post columns on timely topics each weekday on wng.org. And through reasoned, respectful commentary, they help readers be better informed on how to think about and discuss the consequential issues of our rapidly changing times.

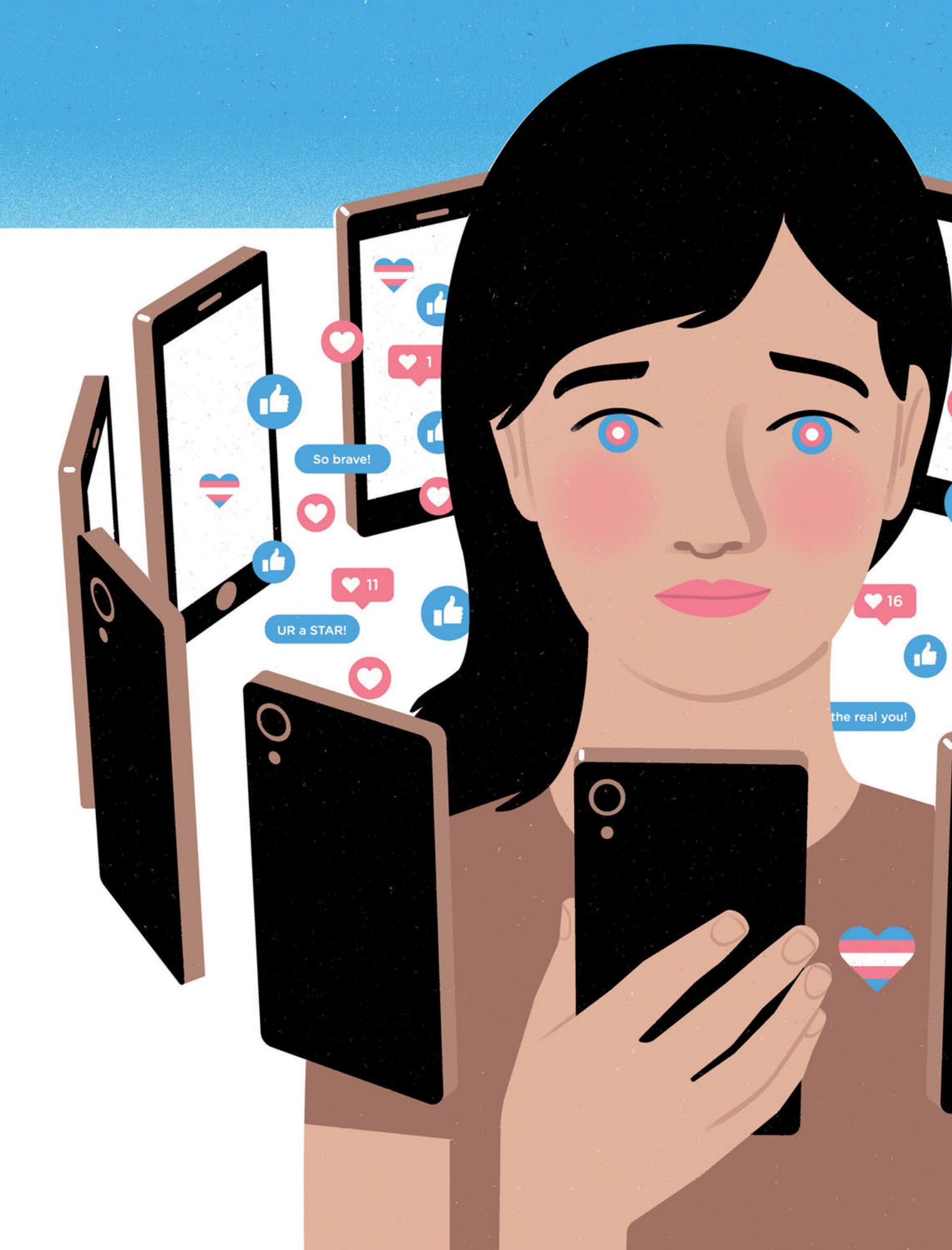
SEE WHAT READERS ARE SAYING:

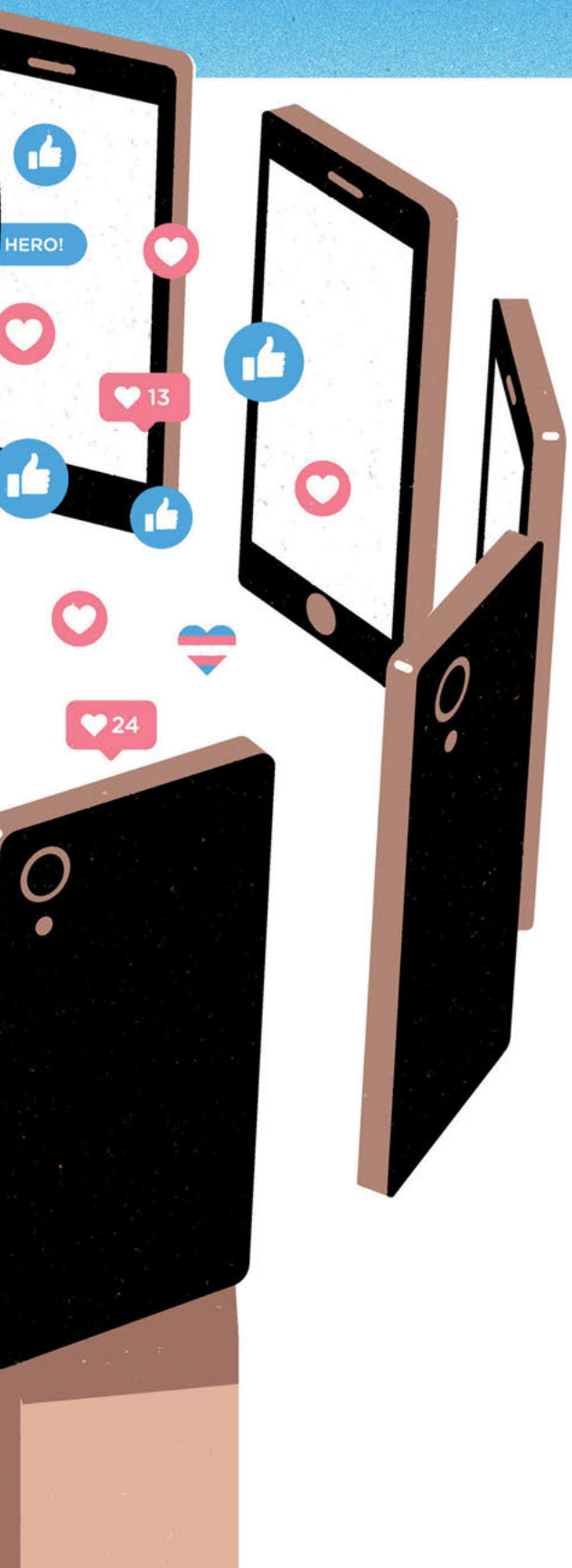
MARY V.
"The new opinion section of WORLD is thoughtful and helpful. People like me need help in thinking about the world/culture. Those who are writing for Opinions are solid, Biblical, and not overtly political. Biblical Christians need to stand together."

STEVEN T.
"I really appreciate the new WORLD Opinions effort. I am grateful for the convictional base that seems to lie behind this new thrust. The articles are timely, rightly sobering, penetrable, and informative."

CAP S.
"I am enjoying WORLD's new opinion page. I think it is providing a platform for some excellent voices and thought-provoking pieces to serve and challenge the body of Christ. Thank you for adding this feature to your publication."

Columns posting each weekday on **wng.org/opinions**


1
So brave!
11
UR a STAR!
16
the real you!



WEB OF DECEPTION

The "fake reality" and peer contagion of the internet are leading many teen girls into transgenderism

BY MARY JACKSON

Illustration by KRIEG BARRIE



Helena Kerschner was a socially awkward 13-year-old who struggled with an eating disorder and self-harming when she stumbled upon an online community of teenage girls who shared a similar interest: Elvis Presley.

Tumblr started out as a space where she fan-girled with other teens over old-time rock. It quickly turned into an obsession. The platform, a blend of microblogging and social media, was introduced on the internet in 2007. It boasted 13 billion global page views by 2013 and peaked the next year when users contributed 100 million blog posts daily.

Kerschner was one of them. She said she spent the majority of her days and evenings during high school scrolling and posting on Tumblr. She said that in between discussing fandom interests, she and other teenage girls on the platform would disclose intimate details about their lives. Many shared her social and body image struggles or experienced similar family dysfunction.

IRYNA KHABLIUK/ALAMY

Kerschner's fandom interests expanded from Elvis Presley to Harry Potter, Justin Bieber, and the boy band One Direction. With each new fandom, she was introduced to more teenagers, most of whom were anonymous, who exchanged elaborate fanfiction and art—photos, drawings, collages, and videos set to music—sometimes depicting romantic or erotic "ships" (short for relationship pairings). One famous "ship" was an imagined homosexual relationship between One Direction bandmates Harry Styles and Louis Tomlinson. The ship was dubbed "Larry." In reality, the two men shared a close friendship and dated girls. But on Tumblr, fans obsessively opined that they were secretly married. (One 2011 tweet in which Louis expressed affection for Harry was retweeted 2.6 billion times. It remains the sixth most popular post on Twitter.)

Kerschner said Tumblr users also created "head canons," deviations from the official canon of a novel, film, television show, or other storyline based on one's personal perception. For example, one might have a head canon that Harry Potter is actually black, nonbinary, and abandoned wizard school to become a professional chef, she explained.

Immersed in this online fantasy world, Kerschner was introduced to the concept of gender identity. In a recent Substack piece, titled "By Any Other Name," she described how she went from a girl who played with Barbies, dress-up, and toy makeup sets—never experiencing any gender distress—to identifying as nonbinary by age 15 and then transgender.

Kerschner's Substack piece went viral. At age 23, she is one of a small number of detransitioners beginning to pull back the curtain on how fandom, Tumblr, and other online influences play a critical part in teens identifying as the opposite sex. The detransitioners see a need for more caution among parents and professionals to take seriously the threats posed by online influences. Their stories add to a growing chorus among researchers and parents addressing the role social media is playing in introducing teens to gender ideology and propelling the transgender phenomenon.

"There are a lot of prevailing narratives about how we got here … but they are not really answering the question, 'Why are all these girls doing this?'" Kerschner said.

Today, children are increasingly introduced to transgenderism in public schools, in picture books and novels at the library, at doctor's and counselor's offices, in television programming and advertisements, and among family and friends.

Online, teens are exposed to hypersexualized women on the one hand and transgender individuals or "influencers" on the other who showcase (and glamorize) their transitioning journeys—from "coming out" parties to taking cross-sex hormones or undergoing double mastectomies. Some have massive followings and feature prominently on TikTok, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram. On TikTok, one of the most popular social media platforms for teenagers, videos filed under #transgender have nearly 11 billion views. "Any teenager on social media now is going to be inundated with this ideology," Kerschner said.

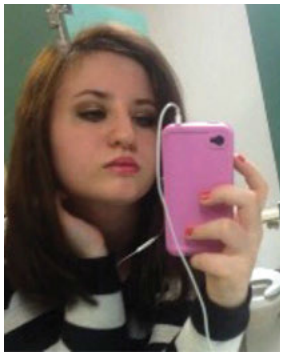
In 2018, physician and scientist Lisa Littman coined the term *rapid-onset gender dysphoria* (ROGD) after studying the spike in the number of teenage girls identifying as transgender who showed no previous signs of gender dysphoria. She presented the first academic study connecting teens' peer circles and social media usage with the transgender phenomenon. Her study addressed the influence of peer contagion—the spread of ideas, attitudes, and behaviors by group imitation and conformity—among adolescent girls identifying as transgender.

Of the 256 parents Littman surveyed, more than 80 percent had transgender-identifying daughters. The daughters averaged 16-years-old. Littman's study found that more than 65 percent of the teens increased their social media usage and time spent online immediately prior to announcing their transgender identity. Most of the parents Littman surveyed suspected their child used language they found online to describe their transgenderism. Nearly 70 percent of the teens belonged to a peer group in which at least one friend had come out as transgender.

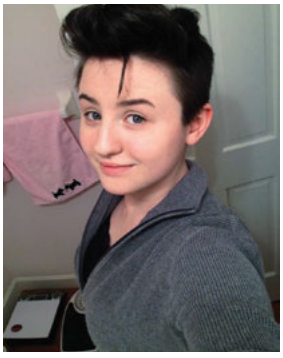
Some parents in Littman's study said they found posts on their child's Tumblr, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram accounts disparaging "cis-gendered people," heterosexuality, marriage, and nuclear families. "On my daughter's Tumblr blog, she has liked or favorited or reposted disparaging comments about those who aren't transgender or seem to misunderstand transgender identity," one participant said. "Online, they are always swapping jokes and comments about cisgender and about transphobia," another parent wrote.

IN THE EARLY 2010S, before transgenderism was mainstream (and before Instagram and TikTok became popular), teenagers on Tumblr and Reddit were already adopting alternative identities—transgender, nonbinary, demisexual, and neopronouns—en masse due to its unchecked blend of fandom, fantasy, pornography, and so-called social justice. Tumblr's monthly traffic plummeted in December 2018 when the platform banned pornographic and adult content. Many users moved to Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. (*The Wall Street Journal* reports 22 million teens log onto Instagram in the U.S. each day.)

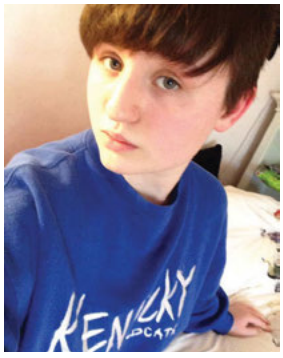
I spoke with one male detransitioner who goes by "Limpidă"—WORLD is using his pseudonym because of concerns over risks to his teaching position in a liberal state—about his experience with Tumblr beginning in 2014. Similar to Kerschner, he first learned about transgenderism on



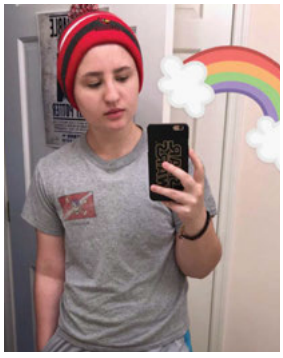
Kerschner in 2013



2014



2015



2016



2017

Tumblr. Limpidă was 14 when his girlfriend encouraged him to join the platform to share memes and fandom on their interest in the British television programs *Doctor Who* and *Sherlock Holmes*.

"A lot of our relationship from that point forward was completely mediated through Tumblr," Limpidă said. The sexual politics and pornographic material began to play a large role in their dating relationship: "We got to where we didn't have a life outside of Tumblr. We stopped taking advice from our families and started to see them as oppressive … part of the cis-hetero-patriarchy."

Limpidă's girlfriend, who experienced autism, anxiety, and an eating disorder, began to identify as a male. He began questioning his own gender identity and eventually believed he was a woman. He changed his name to "Liliana." In August 2019, he started cross-sex hormones. He said no one prepared him for the physical, emotional, and mental effects. A clinician he visited suggested he pursue surgeries to further his transition. That is when Limpidă began to do his own research and discover other detransitioners who helped him question his trajectory.

Limpidă, now 24, chose his pseudonym because it means "clear" in Romanian, the native language of his immigrant parents. He stopped taking estrogen in January and no longer identifies as female: "I don't know how I deluded myself. … I feel like I'm getting back on my feet."

Limpidă says, "More people are beginning to talk about it and to realize what happened to them."

"It was an act of war against myself."

At a virtual March 12 detransitioners conference hosted by a newly formed support group called Genspect, Kerschner, Limpidă, and other panelists discussed how fandom, pornography, and online influences contribute to young people identifying as transgender. They said medical professionals and clinicians pushed them further down the path by "affirming" them into hormonal and surgical interventions. "Everyone online was telling me at that time, 'If you think you're trans, you are,' and really, they repeat it over and over," said one panelist named Michelle. She said that as she struggled with gender dysphoria, she was repeatedly told online, "Cis people don't question their gender."

In a 2021 study of 100 detransitioners, Littman found that about half originally believed they would be treated better if they transitioned.

Kerschner said she earned adoration on the platform with each pronoun change or deviation from being a "cis white female," which users viewed as oppressive and bad. One Tumblr friend gifted Kerschner with a breast binder. A handful of her real-life high school friends, who were also addicted to the platform, simultaneously transitioned to male pronouns and identities, she said.

In August 2016, shortly after Kerschner's 18th birthday, she drove from Ohio to Chicago to a Planned Parenthood facility, where she obtained a prescription for a weekly regimen of 100 milligrams of testosterone. Kerschner describes a subsequent dark period of loneliness, rage, worsened mental illness, and "suffocating numbness" she now attributes to the high dosage of testosterone.

The reality of transitioning was far less attractive than the fantasy version Kerschner first envisioned on Tumblr. "It was an act of war against myself," she wrote.

Kerschner detransitioned 18 months later in 2018. She has wrestled with regret and shame. In her Substack piece, she

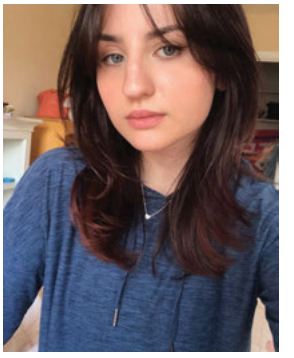
HANDOUT PHOTOS



2018



2019



2021

recounts one moment at a smoothie shop where she realized "not only was I not the only one going through this, but it was a full-fledged phenomenon."

Janine McLean founded Parents of Rapid-Onset Gender Dysphoria Kids with 10 other parents in 2017. The group now has about 2,000 members who are skeptical of the "affirmative approach," which fast-tracks vulnerable children into hormonal and surgical interventions. The group is intended to provide support for parents whose children "suddenly—seemingly out of the blue—decided they identify strongly with the opposite sex and are at various stages of transitioning," the website states. McLean said she hears from about five parents daily.

McLean, of Ontario, uses a pseudonym to protect her identity from her estranged, transgender daughter, who is now 23. Her daughter struggled with social and emotional issues beginning at puberty. She preferred interacting with peers on Facebook Messenger and Tumblr over in-person communication at school. "It somehow felt safer for her, more protected," McLean said.

McLean limited her daughter's internet usage to one hour per day. But her daughter's online activity became harder to monitor once she got a smartphone. At 15, she announced she was a boy. "She told us, 'This is why I'm having so much trouble' … it was a cure-all," McLean said. "Online and at school, she received all this affirmation."

Two years later, McLean's daughter asked to start taking testosterone. At the same time, a friend she had met on Tumblr who lived in New York was starting cross-sex hormones with her parents' approval. McLean and her husband said no. McLean said she later found violent and erotic drawings and photos on her daughter's Tumblr account. But she could not see what her daughter's conversations were on the platform.

Kerschner and Limpidă said Littman's ROGD study helped them understand their own experience with gender dysphoria and the ways fandom and Tumblr contributed to their intense desire to identify as the opposite sex. Still, Kerschner said Littman's findings "barely scratched the surface."

One interviewer recently asked Kerschner what would have made a difference for her as a teenager. She replied having a loving, trusting relationship with an adult who would have steered her toward valuing her female body. She told me parents play a critical role in helping their children cultivate a life outside of the internet.

Kerschner said the emphasis on screens and devices creates "a fake reality" in which young people don't form a connection to their bodies and nature. "It's going to take a while for society to figure out what to do to mitigate this." ■

Social contagion on social media

Adolescent girls are known to experience social contagion effects when it comes to cutting and eating disorders. A growing body of evidence reveals how social media platforms have a similar effect of causing harm among teenagers.

Since the pandemic, teen girls who use TikTok are increasingly claiming to have Tourette syndrome, a nervous system disorder leading to repetitive movements or sounds. An article in the *Archives of Disease in Childhood* noted that some teen girls reported the onset of symptoms after visiting sites such as TikTok #tourettes. Others posted videos of their symptoms. "They report that they gain peer support, recognition and a sense of belonging from this exposure," according to the article.

One recent study, published in *Nature Communications*, showed a negative link between social media usage and life satisfaction among girls ages 11-13 and boys 14-15. Increased social media use predicted lower life satisfaction at age 19.

All of this comes on top of a *Wall Street Journal* investigative report last year that found Facebook concealed from the public its own research showing the ways its photo-sharing app Instagram contributed to worsening body image issues and higher rates of anxiety and depression among teen girls.

The *WSJ* quotes a May 2020 slide presentation shared on Facebook's internal message board, in which company researchers said, "We make body image issues worse for one in three teen girls." *—M.J.*

A long shadow

Growing up on a cult compound shaped three siblings for life

by KIM HENDERSON
in South Mississippi

IN THE LATE 1970S, the Rev. David Earl King purchased 58 acres of land along a ribbon of rural blacktop near Jayess, Miss. His wife and their passel of children accompanied him there, as well as an Apostolic congregation seeking a fresh start a few county lines away from old troubles. The spot became known as "Valley of the Kings."

The group's charismatic worship and plain style of dress stood out in the community, and some locals still call the place a *compound*, even though different owners now occupy the sprawling blond-brick house at the center of the property and stacks of office furniture fill the two-story church building out front. *Compound*, however, is a word with connotations. Maybe that's why in 2001 King's defense attorneys filed a motion



The Gipson children with their mother



to prohibit use of it during his criminal trial. Even today Bill Goodwin, the prosecutor who put King in prison, hesitates to label the group's leanings as those of a cult, preferring to call them "fundamentalist" instead.

But a trio of siblings who grew up on the property have a different take. They're comfortable using both *cult* and *compound* as they talk about Valley of the Kings, and they lace the words into conversations about their past with frequency and firmness. As they do, an obvious, though unspoken, truth emerges. The Gipson sisters may have escaped Valley of the Kings, but decades later they're still trying to leave it behind.

SPRING BRINGS rising water levels and a host of canoeing enthusiasts to the Okatoma, a muddy Mississippi tributary Choctaws once called "Shining River." After she left Valley of the Kings, Joanna Lawrence, the oldest of the Gipson sisters, built a business near its banks cleaning houses for residents who don't have time for mopping. On a fresh March morning, she's seated beside her sisters in her own kitchen. The smell of just-cooked hash browns hangs in the air. A box of doughnuts lies open on the counter.

It doesn't take long to see the sisters' mark of kinship isn't so much resemblance as it is their easy talk around the table and the knowing glances that pass between them as freely as the doughnuts. Part of that comes from shared childhoods going door-to-door, and parking lot-to-parking lot, selling candy. Candy was the compound's bread and butter. Church members made peanut brittle back at Valley of the Kings while the Gipsons and others worked a three-state sales territory stretching from Monroe, La., to Mobile, Ala.

"I remember being left in Jena, La., by myself when I was 9 years old," recalls Lawrence, now 51. "We'd have about $70 worth of candy in our baskets, a heavy load for a child, and if people didn't want to make a purchase, we had to ask them for a donation." Not meeting their $40 sales quota meant no evening meal, maybe even a beating from their mother or King.

The sisters grew up peddling peanut brittle six days a week in the summer, and every Saturday during school terms. In between, they did their lessons, worked the compound's row crops, and attended church gatherings. Lots of church gatherings. The preaching at Valley of the Kings grazed the gospel but was skewed—a false "faith-plus salvation," with the plus being unquestioned obedience to the pastor's rules. Members couldn't wear skirts without pleats or shoes taller than 1½ inches. They couldn't listen to secular music, watch television, or read novels. They couldn't trust outside ministers.

Thus, Valley of the Kings was closed off, a nearly self-sufficient farm with its own school, housing, and social circle. The sisters shared a mobile home with their mother, Adra Gipson, on a back section of the property, and it's Adra the sisters hold responsible for their tumultuous upbringing.

Iowa native Adra Anne Heetland met her husband, Larry Gipson, in the military. She was a D.C.-based secretary for a Navy chaplain, and he was a Marine who served in Vietnam. They married and settled in his Mississippi hometown where they welcomed four children in six years, but according to the couple's daughters, Larry was unfaithful, and that led



Adra to seek something deeper outside her marriage. She believed she'd found that something in King's church.

By 1975 Adra's new beliefs had caused her to isolate herself and her children from all of their extended family, and when King eventually encouraged her to leave her husband, she did. Then, when he suggested her husband should die, Adra took her pastor's words literally. One morning as her children watched, she shot Larry Gipson outside the front door of their home. He lived. Adra went to prison.

But that didn't end her entanglement with King. When she completed her sentence two years later, Adra collected her children and moved to his newly established enclave in Jayess.

Lawrence says as a child she knew something wasn't right with her mother's relationship with King, even though it was platonic: "She wasn't dumb. She was

Valley of the Kings was closed off, a nearly self-sufficient farm with its own school, housing, and social circle.







FROM LEFT: the Gipson children; Adra Gipson with candy; Joanna with her nephew

PHOTOS ABOVE AND PREVIOUS PAGE: HANDOUT

brainwashed. That's the only thing I can lay it to." Lawrence also felt the weight of responsibility for her younger sisters. "I remember holding them close. Mama was the adult, but she couldn't keep us safe. She couldn't make wise decisions."

Customers along their candy route tried to help. Sometimes King punished the girls by withholding food, and middle sister Leah Lofton, 50, remembers a week when she could only have bread and water. "Mom would go into a building to sell, and I'd go into a different one. My friends would have something ready, like a piece of chicken or a Little Debbie. God sent people to nourish me, and it's been that way all through my life."

The women around the table have been talking pretty matter-of-factly until this point, but the mood changes when Lawrence produces a stack of Polaroids, including one from 1979 that shows their oldest sibling, Shawn, with his shirt tucked in tight, an arm draped around Joanna's shoulder. That's when they soberly bring up another layer of the Valley of the Kings story—the leader's sexual abuse of young males.

"Mom literally gave our brother to King when Shawn was 10 years old," Lofton explains, emotion affecting her voice. "I remember King telling her she wasn't qualified to raise a boy."

Shawn went to live in the compound's main house and even got a new last name—King. Authorities used that name some 20 years later when they made arrests at the compound. A jury soon convicted the Gipsons' brother, as well as the elderly King, in a sexual abuse trial involving a boy in their church.

ALL THREE of the Gipson sisters were long gone from Valley of the Kings by that point. Each of their escapes was individual and harrowing.

Lawrence made three attempts to leave before achieving success at age 20. After crawling through a field of briars in the middle of the night, a friend picked her up as planned. In time, a Pentecostal preacher's wife took her in and made her part of her family.

The other sisters faced additional challenges. Both were married. Both were mothers. They managed to leave, but Lofton remembers feeling despair as she and her children settled into a domestic abuse shelter. Then, during a church service, a preacher's words nudged her on. "He reminded me that God had carried me through every difficult time in my life. I couldn't have survived if He hadn't."

But their new life had some steep learning curves, starting with employment. "I had no idea how to apply for a job," Lawrence says. "I could read, of course, so I filled in everything on applications, but I didn't really understand the concept of getting a job."

They encountered communication gaps when people referenced something from movies or TV. They faced custody battles and counseling sessions. Financial hardships. Threats on their lives.

But in time, the Gipson sisters went on to start businesses and earn college degrees. They bought their own homes. If they suffered from their past in any obvious way, though, they say it's been their relationships. They have four divorces among them.

One relationship has remained strong, though, despite the false teaching they were under so long, and that's their relationship with God. The sisters say their story—every part of it—testifies to His faithfulness.

"As early as first grade, I realized what I was being taught was wrong," Lofton says. "I started praying then, asking God to show me what was right. He did."

The Valley of the Kings school required Bible reading—Genesis through Revelation twice before graduation—and Lawrence points to that as a means of bringing her to a true knowledge of Christ. "Having a personal walk with the Lord made all the difference, being able to read the Bible for ourselves and work out our own salvation."

Ironically, the sisters point to their peanut brittle sales as a saving grace, because they learned there was life outside Valley of the Kings. "It gave us a window on the world," says Lofton. "When we were ready to leave, we knew it wasn't that scary."

But even as they took flight, their mother remained firmly entrenched. Adra Gipson only left Valley of the Kings when a burst appendix and failing health forced her to. Assisted by her daughters, she lived her last years outside Valley of the Kings. One Sunday while Lofton was cooking dinner, Adra came to her with questions. "She asked, 'Did I abuse you? Was I really that mean to you?'" remembers Lofton. "My sisters heard it and told her, 'Yes, you were,' and she burst into tears. She asked me to forgive her, and I did, but that parent-child bond, I couldn't re-create it."

That was Adra's singular instance of contrition. The sisters still struggle to explain how their mother got under King's spell and why she stayed under it, but something happened at the end of Adra's life that gave them some insight. She was on her deathbed at the VA Hospital in Jackson, Miss. It was Christmas Eve, and one of her childhood friends called. The sisters watched in surprise as Adra sat up in bed and started to babble, started trying to talk to him.

PHOTO BY KIM HENDERSON



He has turned a lot of our "situations" into strengths.

"We still don't understand it because we're there, we're talking to her, and there's nothing. No verbal communication in days," Lawrence admits. "We realized then that Mom's life had revolved around pleasing men, whoever that man was in her life at the time."

That was 2015. Two years later, David Earl King died in prison at the age of 83. Lawrence says when she heard the news, she cried, not because he was dead, but because her mother didn't live to see it. "Maybe if she'd lived long enough to see him die, she could have been free mentally, because she never truly was. Even when she'd been out 15 years, he still had some hold on her."

At that moment the conversation pauses. Someone opens a phone and pulls up proofs from their recent "sister shoot." They're good photos. In one, the morning sun bears down through a thicket of trees and lands on faces turned toward each other talking, laughing. It also lands on coordinated clothes with on-purpose navy blue, a color that represents strength. Power. Bravery.

Those qualities show up when the Gipsons speak of skills gained during a hard upbringing, like sewing, gardening, and carpentry, and when they describe a survival attitude that's made them into capable problem solvers. But a simple statement made in the midst of it all is hard to shake: "Being raised in that environment cast a long shadow over our lives."

Rising from her chair, Lawrence credits God for preserving their lives and their love for each other. "He has turned a lot of our 'situations' into strengths," she says quietly, and her sisters, nodding, agree. ■

The Gipson sisters today

EMAIL khenderson@wng.org **TWITTER** @kimhenderson319

EUROPEANS

The pro-life movement is growing in Europe but needs new, positive messages

BY JENNY LIND SCHMITT
in Krakow, Poland, and Porrentruy, Switzerland



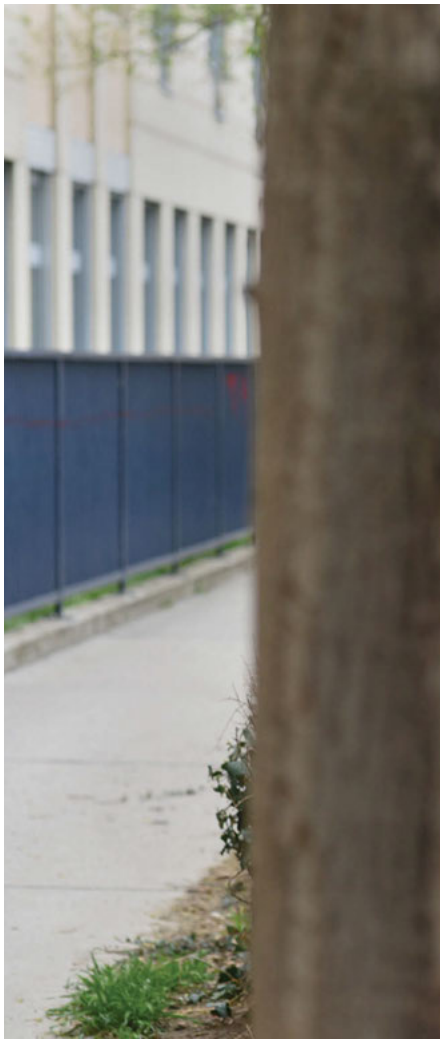
Pro-lifers participate in the 2022 March for Life in Munich, Germany.

SACHELLE BAB/ZUMA PRESS, INC./ALAMY

AFFIRM LIFE



M



MARIA CZERNIN GREW UP IN A FAMILY THAT WAS PRO-LIFE, BUT didn't engage much with the issue. That changed dramatically when as a university student in Vienna, Austria, she attended a conference on Europe's future. As part of the conference, Czernin watched a showing of the 2014 film, *The Giver*, based on Lois Lowry's 1993 Newbery Medal–winning novel of the same name.

"There's a part of the film where babies are put in a shop window and people choose them. The ones who don't get picked up are basically killed. I remember watching and thinking, 'This is abortion! It's the same thing!'" says Czernin.

She spent a sleepless night contemplating how many abortions take place in Europe each day. The next day at the conference she met a leader from a pro-life group in search of a graphic designer, Czernin's field. She offered her help. "The more I got to know about the issue, the more I understood the huge wound society has because of abortion."

But Czernin, who grew up in Portugal, sees that the problem of abortion in Europe needs a Europe-wide solution, which is why she helped found ProLife Europe three years ago. New pan-European organizations like ProLife Europe are challenging the decades-long acceptance of abortion as a right and reinvigorating the discussion with arguments from biology and ethics.

Czernin stresses that the goal of ProLife Europe is first and foremost to have a positive message about protecting life. She says the pro-life movement in Europe has suffered in the past because of messaging that used graphic images or harsh rhetoric. That alienated many people who otherwise considered themselves pro-life. A negative message is also out of step with what younger pro-life people want to project. The organization's website reflects that: Brightly colored graphics show smiling youth proclaiming life-affirming messages, and an upbeat mission statement: "We are a transnational organization that aims to create a culture of life in Europe, beyond political and economic interests."

Still, they don't shy away from the facts: Beyond life-affirming messaging, the group's main aim is education by presenting the basic facts of biology and



Maria Czernin

conception and what an abortion does to stop life in the womb.

"If you go out on the streets, people say, 'Yeah, it's a woman's choice,' they know that line by heart," says Czernin. "But if you ask them what an abortion is, they don't know. They can only say that at 12 weeks, the baby is 'like a clump of cells.'" To counter that, ProLife Europe puts on training seminars for university students in biology, ethics, and philosophy, presenting facts and letting that persuade people, instead of trying to win an argument. A section of the website explains in matter-of-fact language how different kinds of abortions function, and whether the baby is killed by asphyxiation, heart failure, or dismemberment.

Czernin cites public studies that support a pro-life case: "It's a fact that the child is alive. It's a fact that women have an 81 percent higher risk of depression following abortion. We have those studies, so our main goal is to make the information from those studies known."

"IF YOU ROOT PRO-LIFE TOO MUCH IN YOUR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, THEN YOU LOSE A PLATFORM TO CONNECT TO THOSE WHO DON'T HAVE GOD IN THEIR LIVES."

As a university student, Czernin had a friend who became pregnant and sought an abortion. Though she considered herself pro-life, Czernin realized that she lacked the arguments and resources to give her friend an alternate perspective. Now the memory of that conversation motivates her to equip pro-life students.

ProLife Europe has 35 groups across Europe, with most members between the ages of 17 and 25. As a newer organization aimed largely at university students, the COVID pandemic took a toll on gatherings. Still, in the three years of its existence membership grew. Czernin says with the growth has come connection with other Europe-wide pro-life organizations and the desire to combine forces.

ONE OF THOSE GROUPS is the One of Us Foundation, based in Krakow, Poland. Founder and General Secretary Jakub Baltroszewicz met me for coffee in a gleaming shopping mall to the north of the city. Everything about Krakow and the shopping center belies attempts by international abortion activists to paint Poland as a repressive backwater. Upscale shops are spotless and well stocked, and everywhere I look there is evidence of a society that welcomes and cares for children: diaper-changing tables in the men's room, child-sized restroom stalls and toilets, accessibility for strollers in shops and on public transport.

Baltroszewicz was one of five men who founded One of Us. He says the men started the organization because of what he calls a "crisis of manhood." "Whenever there's a child in the belly of a woman, the man should be there," says Baltroszewicz. "Seeking an abortion is always a huge cry of loneliness, when a woman is told: 'your belly, your problem.' If a man would be a real man who would support a woman, there would be no more abortion in the world."

One of Us grew out of a citizens' initiative to the European Parliament challenging the European Union financing of abortions in developing nations as a violation of the EU's principle of nondiscrimination. The initiative failed, despite garnering a record number of signatures from 20 supporting nations. But the effort

PHOTO BY ALBERTO CATANIA/GENESIS

brought together pro-life forces across Europe to found the federation of which One of Us is a part in 2013.

"We had never worked together like that as Europeans before," says Baltroszewicz. "This is something good that came out of the initiative." One of Us now has a permanent office in Brussels where Baltroszewicz has lobbyist status. The 24-member nation group works to keep life issues in the EU spotlight.

Baltroszewicz is also president of the Polish Pro-life Federation, an umbrella group started in 1993 that boasts 70 pro-life NGOs from all over Poland. At 40, he's older than the pro-lifers that Czernin refers to, but he also sees the younger generation as key. In cooperation with the Jerome Lejeune Foundation, one of France's leading pro-life groups, One of Us has developed a school curriculum that approaches bioethical questions from a strictly human rights perspective, which it plans to provide to every secondary school in Poland. Like Czernin, Baltroszewicz stresses the importance of arguments that transcend religious beliefs, so he can also dialogue with atheists and agnostics.

"I think that if you root pro-life too much in your religious beliefs, then you lose a platform to connect to those who don't have God in their lives," says Baltroszewicz. "And we are not here to convince people who are already Christians and believe, because they're usually pro-life. I want to convince the young girls, who last October after the tribunal ruling, ran around the city in a so-called women's strike, shouting that the church is taking away basic freedoms."

One newer project of One of Us Foundation is the Bioethics Academy, intended to provide online tools and facts for those who wouldn't otherwise have access to it. "What do parents do if they're from a small village in eastern Poland, what kind of argument do they use with their teenage daughters? They usually use religious arguments, and teenagers very often don't care about it. So we want to provide people with tools," says Baltroszewicz.


Jakub Baltroszewicz

IN PARIS, Aliette Espieux also wants to provide tools for pro-life arguments. At 23, the philosophy student has served the last two years as spokesperson for La Marche pour la Vie (The March for Life), the pro-life group that organizes an annual January march in the capital. After going virtual in 2021, this year's march attracted 20,000 people, despite requirements for the unpopular vaccination pass to attend. Espieux says that number in a time of lingering COVID-19 restrictions was encouraging.

Even more encouraging was the number of young people attending, as well as the number of young people joining the movement overall. Espieux says there's been a shift: Her grandparents' generation fought hard against the original Loi Veil, which legalized abortion in France in 1975. The following generation was less active, faced with a barrage of laws restricting pro-life actions, notably laws that prohibit demonstrating within 300 meters (just under 1,000 feet) of an abortion clinic. But now, Espieux says, the next generation has a stronger will to fight.

"We have to stop being afraid of these laws because we're fighting for children who are being dismembered. We have to analyze the risks: 24 hours in detention is not much to sacrifice compared to a child who could be saved," says Espieux. She added that the other factor driving young people to the movement is a desire to help



BALTROSZEWICZ: PHOTO BY OMAR MARQUES/GENESIS; ESPIEUX: PHOTO BY EMILIE GARCIN/GENESIS



"EUROPE'S FUTURE IS PRO-LIFE, BUT TO GET THERE, NEW, POSITIVE ATTITUDES MUST CHALLENGE ENTRENCHED ONES."



Aliette Espieux

women in unplanned pregnancies. "In France, everything is in place to push a woman to abort. No other solution is proposed to a woman in distress. Something very encouraging is young people who want to be trained to demonstrate in the streets, but at the same time, they want to be trained to bring tangible help to those women and their children."

Inspired by the Pro-Life Generation movement in the United States, Espieux founded Génération Pro Vie (Pro Life) to encourage young adults who want to speak up for life. When she herself first wore her pro-life sweatshirt to university classes, fellow students were shocked. Some agree with her views in private, but feared she would get threats or sabotage her future career. But one professor recently gave her an unexpected encouragement. "The professor saw that I was pretty much the only one interested. She said, 'I understand why you're interested in a class in strategy. I think you need it for your fight.'

"The other students started protesting that I was conservative, out of touch, against women's rights. The professor said, 'Listen, you can agree or disagree with her. In the meantime, there's only one person in this room who dares to disagree with the crowd, and she has ideas. I'm not sure the rest of you have any or have even considered the question, you just follow everybody else.' I was dumbfounded," says Espieux.

But while a younger generation is expanding the pro-life movement, the older generation is still in charge. France's Parliament last month voted to move limits on abortion from 12 to 14 weeks. Olaf Scholz's new German government has started a push to liberalize policies around abortion. Activists are challenging Poland's life-preserving legal rulings, and even though the conservative government pushed for last year's pro-life ruling that forbids abortion in case of Down syndrome or life-threatening handicap, it has failed to follow through with promises of greater assistance to families raising a disabled child.

Espieux, Baltroszewicz, and Czernin are all certain that Europe's future is pro-life, but to get there, new, positive attitudes must challenge entrenched ones, and the movement that's growing in size and youth must also grow in endurance for the long haul. ■

One of Linda Adeniyi's four sons poses at home.

Home-schooling journeys in Africa

From Nigeria to South Africa, parents find ways to make teaching their children at home work

BY ONIZE OHIKERE in Abuja, Nigeria

PHOTO COURTESY OF LINDA ADENIYI


"2022"
1st day
of
Homeschool
2nd Grade

Linda Adeniyi and her four sons scattered across their small garden in Lagos state, out on a nature study adventure.

She called the children to her after spotting a elephant hawk moth caterpillar. One of the boys gently held the caterpillar on a green leaf. He peppered her with questions about what it was and if it stung. Adeniyi patiently answered each one.

Adeniyi began exploring homeschooling five years ago when her eldest son struggled to understand his schoolwork, sometimes breaking out in tears or flinging his homework across the table. The first grader told his father his teacher didn't think he was smart.

The Adeniyis pulled him out of school for the rest of the year, determined to help him catch up before enrolling him in another school the next academic year. The temporary solution is now the norm for all of her children.

"He became alive in learning," Adeniyi said. "I wanted him to succeed."

Homeschooling in Nigeria includes a small but growing network of parents who received renewed interest after the pandemic triggered restrictions on schools. Nigeria has no legal provisions directly addressing homeschooling, but parents inspired to take that route are finding creative ways to work within the existing educational structure.

The community is young compared to other African nations like South Africa, where decades of homeschooling have sparked advocacy groups and legal provisions. Homeschool parents there are advocating for more legal freedoms to control their children's education.

Like Adeniyi, several Nigerian parents who choose to homeschool are seeking a more positive learning environment or higher quality of education. Olumuyiwa Okunlola, the Nigerian consultant for the curriculum provider Accelerated Christian Education (ACE), said homeschooling parents also include missionaries who are often on the move or posted to remote locations. Okunlola, who was partly homeschooled in 1997, said about 80 homeschooling parents and three homeschool academies across Nigeria now use ACE's curriculum.

When Adeniyi first started to research ways to help her son back in 2016, she couldn't track down other Nigerian homeschooling parents online. So she pored over blog posts and YouTube videos and watched live activities of homeschooling parents from other countries. Adeniyi, who is an artist, found the structured curriculum online expensive and decided to design her own content and study aids.

The effort started to bear fruit. She saw her son start to comprehend and enjoy math and science. "We decided we'd take all of them through homeschooling," she said.

The children now have a routine of four study days each week that includes school work and also prayer, listening to Adeniyi read to them as they eat breakfast, and circle time—their creative version of an assembly.

Adeniyi has also become creative with their playtime, ensuring it serves as a constructive learning process.

"I got creative with investing in building blocks, so at the same time they're learning," she said. "You can put different subjects in there."

The family's dining table serves as their muster point, although Adeniyi also found ways to incorporate other areas in the home into the learning process. She set up a comfy reading nook and carefully selects the children's programs during their screen time. "I made sure every corner has something to learn."

THE VOICES OF CHILDREN reading aloud and talking to each other echoed from a two-story building in Abuja. In separate study rooms upstairs, some wore headphones



Linda Adeniyi teaches her sons.

as they independently studied French and English. None of the children had on uniforms—a rarity here in Nigeria.

Rosemary Udo-Imeh describes her Saros Home Education Center as a Nigerian version of a homeschooling co-op. The parents agree together on changes, like when Udo-Imeh decided to incorporate a different digital learning platform for the older kids. (Saros is one of the academies using the ACE curriculum.)

The essential difference for Udo-Imeh is the children are focused on mastering what they study, not on cramming to pass exams and rushing to the next grade with the best score. "Your progress is based on how much content you understand, not about the other person," she explained.

Udo-Imeh's journey began in 2017 when a financial crisis meant she had to pull her children out of an international school in Abuja. She ruled out the regular schooling system and researched other remote education opportunities, such as the University of Nebraska Online High School.

When she met a church member whose homeschooled children could speak multiple languages and had sailed through the national exams, she jumped on board. Udo-Imeh used ACE for her children at the time, and also built on their interests in arts, animation, and swimming.

She admits she still had her doubts, considering she was taking an unpopular route. So she signed her children up for several competitions.

One was a swimming contest, where Udo-Imeh said her kids looked more like "rag dolls" compared to the synchronized swimsuits of children from other schools.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LINDA ADENIYI

But they won the backstroke. "I was screaming," she recalled.

As her efforts increased, Udo-Imeh had more people asking her to take on their children. She tried to formally register as a homeschool in 2019 but learned from the Ministry of Education that Nigeria has no legal provisions for it.

So she registered the center as an international school instead. The arrangement gives her the freedom to prepare the students for national and international examinations, including the SATs. Homeschooling parents also register their children independently to sit for the national exams.

"If I insisted on a Nigerian school, I knew I had to conform to some learning methods I felt weren't relevant," she explained.

Her center has provided access for other homeschooling parents who want their children to engage in sports and other social activities with other students. Udo-Imeh says Saros particularly provides support for children who don't fit into the norm. A child with dyslexia is one of the center's best computer programmers.

"In a conventional school system there's a square box and everyone has to be square," she said. "He's not under pressure to be like everyone else."



Students at Saros Home Education Center

SOME 4,000 MILES AWAY in South Africa's Cape Town, Graham and Alison Shortridge's homeschooling journey goes back decades. The great-grandparents began homeschooling the youngest four of their six children back in 1993 when it was still illegal.

One couple was jailed in Pretoria for homeschooling that year and had their kids taken away. The Shortridges also got reported to the Education Department and received a warning.

"We wrote them a long letter where we laid out the reasons why we should homeschool," Graham recalled. "We told them they're actually breaking God's law because they're trying to usurp the authority of the parents."

That letter made the rounds, eventually getting to the Home School Legal Defense Association in Virginia.

The growing international lobbying and local backing from the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) further propelled the Shortridges to the front of the battle. They led a subcommittee that drafted a parliamentary proposal on homeschooling.

By 1996, South Africa legalized home education.

"The whole thing was a total, absolute miracle," Graham said.

In 2019, South Africa had about 140,000 homeschool learners. The numbers doubled to about 300,000 in 2020, with the jump fueled by pandemic restrictions. The South African Schools Act requires homeschoolers to register with their provincial education departments, which are allowed to set their regulations.

Uda de Wet, who works with the Pestalozzi Trust, a legal defense group for home and community education, said the majority of homeschooling parents have refused to register since the law requires them to apply for home education approval.

"They either allow you to home educate and register you, or they decline your application," she explained. "There's quite a number of parents who say you don't need to ask permission to do your duty."

Some homeschoolers have raised an alarm over the impact of a bill seeking to amend education laws. It would require homeschool parents to ensure their curriculum is comparable to the national curriculum. De Wet said such a requirement could affect parents who use a more eclectic method of learning.

HANDOUT PHOTOS



"We told them they're actually breaking God's law because they're trying to usurp the authority of the parents."

An education policy for home education promulgated back in 2018 required parents to keep attendance and hand in assessment reports.

"There needs to be proper research on home education in South Africa because the legislation being proposed now is not based on research," she said. "You must be able to use the education modality that's in your child's best interest."

The Shortridges have continued to work on a structured Christian education curriculum with more than 250 users. Alison Shortridge, who has a background in education, creates the scheme of work and prepares the assessments. The Theocentric Christian Education also features Scripture memorization and helps to prepare students for the British certification exams.

"It's very much a one-on-one learning situation, learning your values, and it's important especially today with what's going on with schools."

BACK IN NIGERIA'S LAGOS STATE, homeschooling mom Tomilola Olatunde said Nigeria could glean some lessons from South Africa's provisions and support. Like Udo-Imeh and Adeniyi, Olatunde said she has also experienced people warning her against ruining her children's future over her decision to homeschool.

Yet she says the pandemic proved the growth of homeschooling is inevitable. Olatunde, who runs a blog on her homeschooling resources and experiences, said as many as 45 parents have connected to her network in Lagos alone.

"Before the pandemic we didn't have a community," she said.

In South Africa, the University of Cape Town became the first on the continent to launch an online high school this year. Udo-Imeh also saw a jump in parents needing support to set up homeschools in Abuja. Some of them continued, even after pandemic restrictions eased.

"Education should not be restricted to four walls," Udo-Imeh said. "Learning can be done anywhere."

Adeniyi's son, who is now 10, will sit for the national exams next year before moving to the Nigerian equivalent of seventh grade. Adeniyi said she and her husband are still praying over whether to enroll him in a school or continue homeschooling.

Regardless of the decision, Adeniyi said, the sacrifices are costly but worth it.

"The focus is on them first, and it makes a lot of sense," she said. "If you get teaching your children right, everything else falls into place." ■

EMAIL oohikere@wng.org TWITTER @onize_ohiks



No boundaries

Minus distractions, creative love is easier to see

I WASN'T A FAN OF THE CHORUS that made its way through worship circles, the one that coupled "reckless" with God's love, but I'm perfectly comfortable using that descriptive in regard to us, His fallen creatures. In fact, I married a man who chose that very word to express himself in his senior yearbook. He could pick two adjectives out of the entire Webster's dictionary, and that's where he landed—reckless. Had my high school been into such things, my two words very well might have been "not reckless," so there you go. Opposites do attract.

That's why I was nervous last February when he invited me on a three-hour adventure in a desolate corner of Copiah County, Miss. I got to glimpse a world he enters with one of our sons during the winter months, a sideline gig working for a forester friend from church. Something called boundary line painting.

In our neck of the woods, timber management companies own large tracts of land with property lines that must stay marked, thus every few years they hire someone for the job. This boundary line business is not for the faint of heart, though. It's active work—climbing hills and crossing gullies while splashing orange paint on select tree trunks—and it's best done in the winter when the woods aren't so thick and snaky. My guys were winding up their season, 146 miles of it, when I decided to tag along.

First, we parked their truck in some place off the grid and unloaded equipment. Using a GPS mapping app, they strategized, then suited up in special overalls, a thick kind made to handle thorns and such. About that time, a crow flew solo overhead, cawing, and it sounded just like he was laughing at me. Maybe it's because I didn't have a pair of those overalls.

I WAS LOOKING AT A WELL-ORDERED, FAR-FROM-RECKLESS EXPRESSION OF GOD'S LOVE FOR US.

"Let's go," my husband finally called out. We jumped on the four-wheeler and followed a dirt road past a few hunting stands to where the app marked the spot. He plundered through a Rubbermaid tub filled with paint buckets and, of all things, a layer of Spanish moss.

"Absorbs spilled paint real good," he tried to tell me, but I knew better. He just wanted to plant that stuff on the live oak in our front yard later.

"You know that moss has parasites in it," I pointed out.

"No, ma'am, I don't," he answered over his shoulder. "Everybody in Louisiana would be dead if that's true."

Hmmm.

Moments later, my husband got some music playing on a speaker clipped to his backpack, and he set off on foot. I followed behind. I'm good with following him. Soon he eyed a tree with a faded orange mark and took out his brush, quickly taking care of business on both sides. Then it was off to the next one about 30 yards away. I pushed through vines and soggy leaves, trying to keep any flying paint from finding me.

My husband was always looking for the next tree. I had the enviable role of just looking. Looking at coon tracks and creek banks, at trees with limbs that kissed the dirt. I was looking at a well-ordered, far-from-reckless expression of God's love for us. It's different out in the boonies, with the nearest distraction a mile away. No stolen glances here. Only staring, eyes wide open.

A half hour into our adventure, the boundary line painter showed me what was left of some yellow markings on the tree. "Lead paint from years ago, when timber companies could use it. It lasted a lot longer." Interesting.

I did most of my walking in an old fire lane cut by some long-ago crew. My husband was always a few yards away, paint brush in hand. Once, we came to a ditch, and he reached out an orange hand to pull me across. It was almost romantic. At the top of a hill, I asked him about his glasses.

"Wire mesh," he replied, alluding to their ability to withstand briars. Then he showed me a bell he wears to warn hunters he's not a deer. "Good," I nodded, thinking how very prudent the high school version of my husband has become.

By midafternoon, the work was done, but along the way I found the skeleton of a wild boar and crossed a stream over my boots. I also got orange paint on my favorite flannel shirt. Now I wear it and remember God's creative love in both creation and marriage. ■

EMAIL khenderson@wng.org TWITTER @kimhenderson319

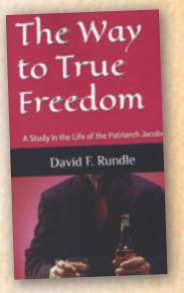
Explore the Possibilities with SchoolhouseTeachers.com



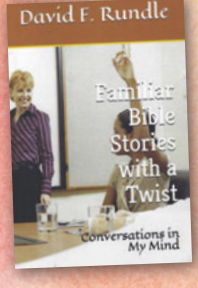
Four books that meet the needs of many churches and Sunday schools



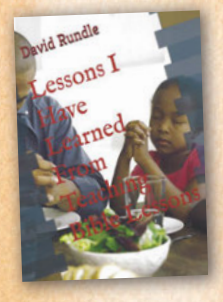
A Reformed Theology Handbook allows each of us to re-evaluate what we believe and why. A handbook to help avoid "sloppy" theology or even heresy.



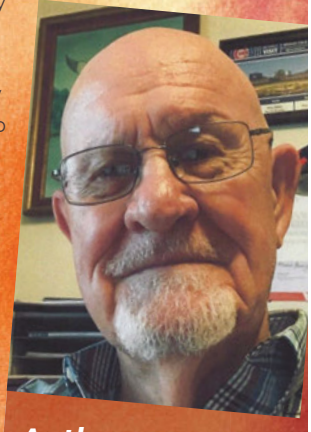
The Way to True Freedom studies the path taken by Jacob to reach a point where he was free from his 'demons.' Many today are caught in Satan's trap of drugs, pornography, alcoholism, and more.



Familiar Bible Stories with a Twist looks at stories with people doing the dialogue. The Stories are taken from the Bible in chapters of 2 Samuel through 2 Kings.



Lessons I have Learned teaching Bible Lessons speaks to issues most teachers need to know when entering the classroom.



Author David F. Rundle

Available at **Amazon** *and* **Barnes & Noble**



WORLD
NEWS GROUP

If the news fits, wear it.

Your editorial and sartorial sensibilities can finally align. WORLD News Group shirts, hats, mugs, and more are waiting for you.

Find your new look at **wng.org/store**.

Sound journalism has never looked so stylish.





WOOL THAT GOES AROUND THE WORLD

Wool is at the center of Australia's geopolitical relationships with China and India

by Amy Lewis in Geelong, Australia

MARK RICHMOND runs electric clippers down the belly of a sheep resting quietly on her back. In less than two minutes, she leaves her whole fleece behind in the corrugated steel woolshed and joins her peers in the Australian sun, emitting some parting bleats.

She is one of 68 million Australian sheep whose wool is exported around →

Shearing at a sheep farm near Gunnedah, New South Wales, Australia

DAVID GRAY/BLOOMBERG VIA GETTY IMAGES

the world. Since 1787 when sheep set foot on Australian soil with the first fleet of convicts, sheep have been an important commodity on the island continent. Australia has long exported wool, first to England and now mostly to China, which imports 80 percent of Australia's wool.

But Australia's complicated relationship with China is changing the landscape of Australia's wool production. In early April, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison signed an interim free trade agreement with India that reduces tariffs on wool from 5 percent to zero in attempts to decrease Australia's dependence on China.

Morrison received criticism for dealing favorably with India, since India has refused to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine and has also increased its Russian oil purchases even while other countries ban them.

When Richmond sheared his sheep in November 2021, tensions over Taiwan were high between Australia and China. Richmond told his brokers, "Sell everything. We'll take the income now," even though the prices weren't the best.

Richmond has also diversified his flock from only Merino to include crossbred sheep for meat production. It's not only about China. It's also about the endurance of Merino garments versus food consumption. "Your woolen jumper [sweater] could sit in the closet for 20-30 years. But you buy a roast lamb, and you think, 'Aw, that was really good.' Next week you go and buy another roast lamb," says Richmond.

All but 3 percent of Australia's wool is shipped straight off the backs of sheep as "greasy wool." The rest is processed at one of three remaining scouring mills in Australia. One of those, Riversdale Mills, is in the former wool capital of Geelong. Jim Robinson and his 40 employees run clients' wool 24 hours every day of the week.



Raw and baled wool in Mark Richmond's wool shed, Inverleigh, Victoria

On this particular day, the washed wool is being sent to Lanificio Colombo in Italy for suits, to a wool spinner in India, and to Pendelton, Ore., for blankets. Another sells to AW Hainsworth in England, the company that makes the uniforms for the Queen's royal guard.

Robinson points out that none of his Riversdale clients sell to China. His company is audited annually by the Responsible Wool Standard, which ensures animal welfare, good environmental practices, sustainability, and traceability standards. Ten years ago, Robinson installed a recovery plant that treats the dirt and waste from the cleaned wool. A local farmer composts the resulting dirt and plant matter and raises millet in the reclaimed soil.

Likewise, sheep grower Richmond has joined SustainaWool, which audits his practices every few years to make sure he's complying with land, sheep, and employee care.

"There's a lot more focus on us from outside with a lot of animal groups and people asking more questions about where the food's coming from, where the fibers are coming from," says Richmond.

Most of the fibers filter through China, the world's largest producer of woolen garments and the world's largest importer of wool. India, however, is seen as an emerging economy. Australian trade minister Dan Tehan said of Morrison's recent trade deal with India, "We get access to the fastest-growing economy in the world."

Andrew Blaszak has been tapping into that economy since he took over Interknit/Branberry 15 years ago. It's the last rural knitting factory in Victoria, 1½ hours west of Melbourne.

Blaszak uses only Australian wool, purchased from a processing plant in India. If Blaszak kept the whole process onshore, his garment prices wouldn't be competitive since the infrastructure no longer exists. Even with reimporting Australian wool yarn, his popular "farmer's jumper" costs triple what one might find at the Australian equivalent of Walmart. But it lasts five times as long.

Richmond, Robinson, and Blaszak work with wool at different stages of the process, but they share an emphasis on quality and ethical practices. That benefits Australia long term. ■

PHOTO BY AMY LEWIS

SECRET SERVICE

One man's undercover work helped chronicle the Klan

by Kim Henderson

WHEN EVIL LIVED IN LAUREL landed on NPR's Best Books List last year, and author Curtis Wilkie has since stayed busy signing copies at a smattering of events, including one held in the shadow of Mississippi's Civil Rights Museum. There, audience members soaked up stories from Wilkie's long career with *The Boston Globe* and his years covering '60s-era civil rights struggles. He also referenced the murder of Mississippi voting rights activist Vernon Dahmer that took place during that time, but Wilkie admitted he never considered writing a book about it until he met the guy sitting front row, right.

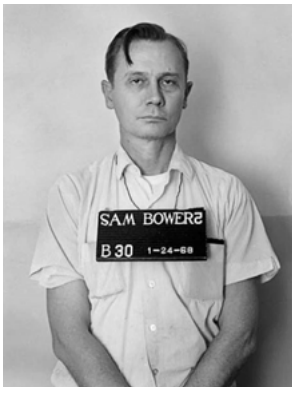
At that mention, Mike Landrum stands briefly and smiles. The insurance executive and former professional football player makes it to as many of these book signings as he can, because he's proud of his dad, one of the heroes in Wilkie's nonfiction novel. But neither Mike nor his four siblings really understood their father's accomplishments until Tom Landrum was near the end of his life. He kept a big secret for decades.

Then, in 2007, someone published a book that worried Landrum. Mike remembers his dad called for a family meeting. "He told us his name was listed as being at a Klan meeting, and he just said, 'It's not what you think. If something ever happens to me or your mom, look in my old briefcase in the back of our closet.'"

Mike says they didn't think much about it because they knew their dad. They also knew closed lips came with his job as a correctional officer, a 30-year career. "So we never asked questions. We just knew it wasn't anything to worry about."







CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Landrum and his family about the time he became an FBI informant; Sam Bowers; Tom Landrum, Curtis Wilkie, and Anne Landrum

HIS JOB WAS TO CREATE DISTRUST WITHIN THE WHITE KNIGHTS, A KIND OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE.

But Mike had another talk with his dad in 2016. The elder Landrum was by then 84, and his health was deteriorating. He handed over seven journals, and Mike says he was blown away by what they contained. "I didn't sleep the whole night."

The pages revealed Tom Landrum, as a 33-year-old youth court counselor, had in 1965 become a member of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, back when they were an evil blight on his hometown. What the Klan didn't know was Landrum joined at the request of the FBI. He was an informant. →

LANDRUM PHOTOS: HANDOUT; BOWERS: MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

"His job was to create distrust within the White Knights, a kind of psychological warfare," Mike explains.

Infiltrating was dangerous business, and Tom Landrum spent a week praying with his wife and his mother-in-law before deciding to risk his life and the safety of his young family. Mike says he did it because he believed it was the right thing to do, even though he couldn't tell his parents or his siblings. His friends. His church.

Landrum's introduction to the secretive group was eye-opening. He was surprised to learn who some of the members were—former students he'd taught and coached, a relative, the circuit court judge, even part-time preacher Cecil Sessum. Sessum told Landrum they were doing the right thing—that God had established racial separation.

Landrum didn't participate in the White Knights' "missions," but he did attend meetings. He took notes, then passed them to the FBI in a creek bed behind Laurel's Charity Hospital or in the library at a nearby university. "They figured none of the Klan would be in a library," laughs Mike.

Sadly, Landrum couldn't prevent the 1966 murder of Vernon Dahmer, the murder highlighted in Wilkie's book, but his meticulous records helped bring some of those responsible to justice even as late as 1998, when the state of Mississippi retried and found guilty of murder Sam Bowers, the White Knight's Imperial Wizard.

Landrum's wife, Anne, helped him in the work, making carbon copies of his notes and sending them to her mother, who put them in a lockbox in her out-of-town bank. Mike had those records digitized, and the family eventually shared them with Wilkie.

Landrum died in 2019, before his informant role was well known. Mike believes the timing was right, because his father never sought acknowledgment. He didn't accept compensation from the FBI, either, even though they often paid informants when civil rights struggles roiled the South. Landrum took on the task for a different reason—to combat evil in his community.

"I knew Dad and Mom were both very special," Mike says, "but man, I didn't know how special they were." ■

"FAITH" FOR THE FIVE-LETTER WIN

Religious variants of WORDLE are cool, but they may not last long

by Julianna Chan Erickson

MATTHEW BARNUM was just looking for an icebreaker to put on the board for his easily distractible Sunday school class of preteens when one Sunday in March he drew five squares on the board.

The kids immediately knew what this was and jumped in.

It didn't take long for Barnum, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) and a software engineer for Amazon, to jump on the Wordle bandwagon himself and create religious variants of the popular five-letter daily word guessing game. His first, a Wordle clone based off of an LDS devotional, now gets 16,000 unique visits a day. So Barnum decided to create a second for the broader religious community.

Launched last week, Christian Wordle joins the already-crowded pool of Wordle variants, with other Christian clones already among them. Besides his Christian Wordle, which uses keywords from inspirational verses, there's also Versle, a Bible chapter-and-verse guessing variant created by app and software developer Tobey Osbourne, and Biblidle, a clunky keyword clone launched just this week by an unnamed creator. There are overseas Christian equivalents like Kungdle, a Hong Kong–based variant created by Jonathan Yip for his local Anglican community.

Creators of these Wordle variants said they created the games on a whim—they bought the website on the cheap, found the open source code, put the site up in days, and told everyone on social media.

But ever since *The New York Times* bought Wordle back in February, there may be limits to how far a variant can go.

Last month, the *Times* ordered a Wordle archive to be shut down. Apple in turn has deleted Wordle copycats from its app store. And since U.S. Patent and Trademark Office records show the *Times* applied for a trademark for Wordle on Feb. 1, tech news site Ars Technica says this means the *Times* could go after any games using the



name *Wordle* or even *-dle* in its title. That would include just about every Wordle variant out there right now, including Christian Wordle and Versle.

Still, while the *Times* may have cornered the Wordle name and trademark style, it will be harder to stop games that have merely imitated Wordle's addictive five-letter guessing concept. As Barnum's five squares on his Sunday school board proved, the game is so simple it's hard to patent. Wordle itself isn't exactly the first of its kind (a 1955 pen and paper game named Jotto predates it), and even the name *Wordle* isn't original—remember word clouds? There was a time in the early 2000s when *wordle* referred to those fun computer-generated displays depicting words in different orientations and sized to their relative significance.

THE GROUP BECAME A PLACE WHERE WE COULD OFFER OUR PRAYERS AND SUPPORT.

Barnum admitted he hadn't considered the potential trademark issues that naming his game Christian Wordle might involve until his aunt mentioned it. "I really was just doing it for fun," he said. "I just like seeing my work grow and turning people toward Christ."

Osbourne said similarly about Versle, which he said has seen a 50-percent increase each week since its launch Feb. 14, "With the momentum around Wordle, it seemed like a great opportunity to create a place to bring a fun twist to learning Scripture."

Hong Kong Anglican pastor Amos Poon, who started playing Kungdle in January, says the game in English helps him "learn more new words of Christianity" and is "a very good way to connect different people in the Christian community."

"It's like a fun, daily, Bible memorization test," says Michael Fredericks, a pastor in Nova Scotia who plays Versle. "I'm very good at guessing the book and the general vicinity of the passage within the book but [Versle] helps me better memorize the chapter and verse."

Fredericks says he recently ran a Wordle tournament on Facebook with 40 friends, where each would play and compare scores from Wordle and four variants.

While running the tournament, he said, the group bonded. "One of our 'Wordlers' had to have emergency surgery during the tournament. Another got engaged, and another one lost her husband unexpectedly," said Fredericks over email. "The group became a place where we could offer our prayers and support and gave those who were dealing with difficult situations a little healthy distraction every day."

That camaraderie may outlive his friends' interest in Wordle, which Fredericks says is already waning. People started dropping out of his Wordle tournament halfway through March, and he admits it can become a time waster, especially if you've committed to playing six Wordle variants a day.

"I think it's already running out of steam," he said. "Like most internet things, it's probably short-lived." ■

ALEXI ROSENFELD/GETTY IMAGES



A question of responsibility

Sin in complex circumstances is still sin

GEORGES CLEMENCEAU, premier of France from 1917 to 1920, mused on the origins of World War I: "We can say all kinds of things about the causes of the war of 1914, but we can never say that Belgium invaded Germany."

Indeed.

The question of causality is the quiet backdrop of the nightmare that is Ukraine. As an American eavesdropping on the current French presidential elections, I heard one candidate try to thread the needle by saying Putin is culpable but that the West is responsible for cornering him by trying to put NATO on his doorstep—for essentially "poking the Bear." This is more than I am qualified to comment on.

Nevertheless, I got to pondering the Word of God on questions of causality and responsibility.

Adam tried blaming Eve, and surely she was at fault. But he was not off the hook, and suffered consequences. Eve fingered the serpent, and God did punish that wily snake, but also the woman. Who can deny that Moses was pushed to the limit by the daily drip-drip of Israelite recalcitrance (Deuteronomy 1:37) when he struck the rock rather than obeying God's explicit command to speak to it? But he was still at fault (Numbers 20:12). See the care with which the Spirit phrases it:

"They angered him at the waters of Meribah, and it went ill with Moses on their account, for they made his spirit bitter, and he spoke rashly with his lips" (Psalm 106:32-33). Human reason wants a less ambiguous verdict, a clear-cut acquittal of one party and condemnation of the other, but we are not given the satisfaction.

STRESSES, INFLUENCES, AND TEMPTATIONS DO NOT EXCULPATE THE ONE WHO SUCCUMBS TO THEM.

Assyrian King Sennacherib wrongly reasoned that since he was God's tool to punish Israel, he was justified in his cruel attack: "So now, was it apart from the LORD that I have come up against this land to destroy it? The LORD Himself said to me, 'Go up against this land to destroy it'" (Isaiah 36:10; 2 Kings 18:25, BSB).

But not so in God's eyes.

I know a man who cheated on his wife. I also know that that wife had deprived him of affection for years. In sorting out the grand implosion that resulted, we have to speak something like Clemenceau if we wish to be Biblical: "We can say all kinds of things about the causes of the ruin of that marriage, but one thing we cannot say is that the man did not go to bed with that other woman." I notice that in the Old Testament the adulterer is stoned to death, no questions asked about how nice or not nice his wife was.

Likewise, though all kinds of stresses, influences, and temptations may be brought to bear on an unsuspecting person—and God will judge them all in due time—they do not exculpate the one who succumbs to them: "Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin" (Luke 17:1-2).

Behold a nuanced position, convicting the one who causes the stumbling, while still calling the stumble "sin." God understands that people abused in childhood are set up to abuse their own children, but for all their own scars they are not excused if they become abusers. We can say the same about people born predisposed to anger, alcohol, homosexuality, or whatever bad hands we are dealt in this fallen world. But here is God's offer: "You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers" (1 Peter 1:18). "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

Back to national events. I know not whether the harshly punitive Treaty of Versailles of 1919 "caused" World War II and made it "inevitable," as some historians insist. But surely Hitler will have to face the God of the universe for his choices, as will Putin. As will we all. ■

EMAIL aseupeterson@wng.org

WORLD Watch

Watch + LEARN

We all need a change of scenery. How about touring the world? Now your family can catch up on the latest global, national, and cultural current events in **ten minutes each day**.

The makers of God's WORLD News and WORLD Magazine are pleased to introduce a new video current events program called WORLD Watch.

Find headlines, news briefs, and feature stories that captivate and educate. Explore topics such as science, history, technology, art, and more—**all with the Biblically sound perspective you expect from WORLD.**

We can't keep your teens from growing up too quickly, but we can help them grow into humans equipped with news literacy.

View a sample episode at worldwatch.news.

News Literacy

Biblical Discernment

Critical Thinking



BRACING FOR BATTLE

Ukrainians face a renewed Russian onslaught

A 7-YEAR-OLD UKRAINIAN BOY (above) held a wooden toy rifle while standing next to destroyed Russian military vehicles on April 17 in Chernihiv, Ukraine. That same day, the Russian army began pouring troops into a new offensive along a front that covered more than 300 miles in eastern Ukraine. The new troops reportedly included mercenaries from Syria and Libya. Both sides said the war had entered a new phase, as Russia attempted to take control of Donbas—Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland. Military experts told the Associated Press that Russia was attacking Ukrainian troops from the north, south, and east, and trying to encircle them. "They have driven almost everyone and everything that is capable of fighting us against Ukraine," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said of the renewed Russian offensive in a video address to the nation. He added that Russian forces were targeting civilians, and he called the Russian army "the most barbaric and inhuman army in the world."

EVGENIY MALOLETKA/AP

LANCASTER BIBLE COLLEGE

CAPITAL SEMINARY & GRADUATE SCHOOL

Since 1933



Get your Master's or PhD Online!

Biblical Studies, Divinity, Education, Strategic Communication, Business, Leadership, Health & Phys Ed, Counseling, Social Work, and more.

Online & Hybrid

LBC.edu/Masters

901 Eden Road, Lancaster, PA 17601 | 717-569-7071 | Admissions@lbc.edu

WORLD
Sound journalism, grounded in facts and Biblical truth

A **Biblical** solution to **health care**

Join today and take control of your health care.

Samaritan™
MINISTRIES



SamaritanMinistries.org/WORLD · 877.578.6787

Gregg and Courtney, members since 2014