WORLD

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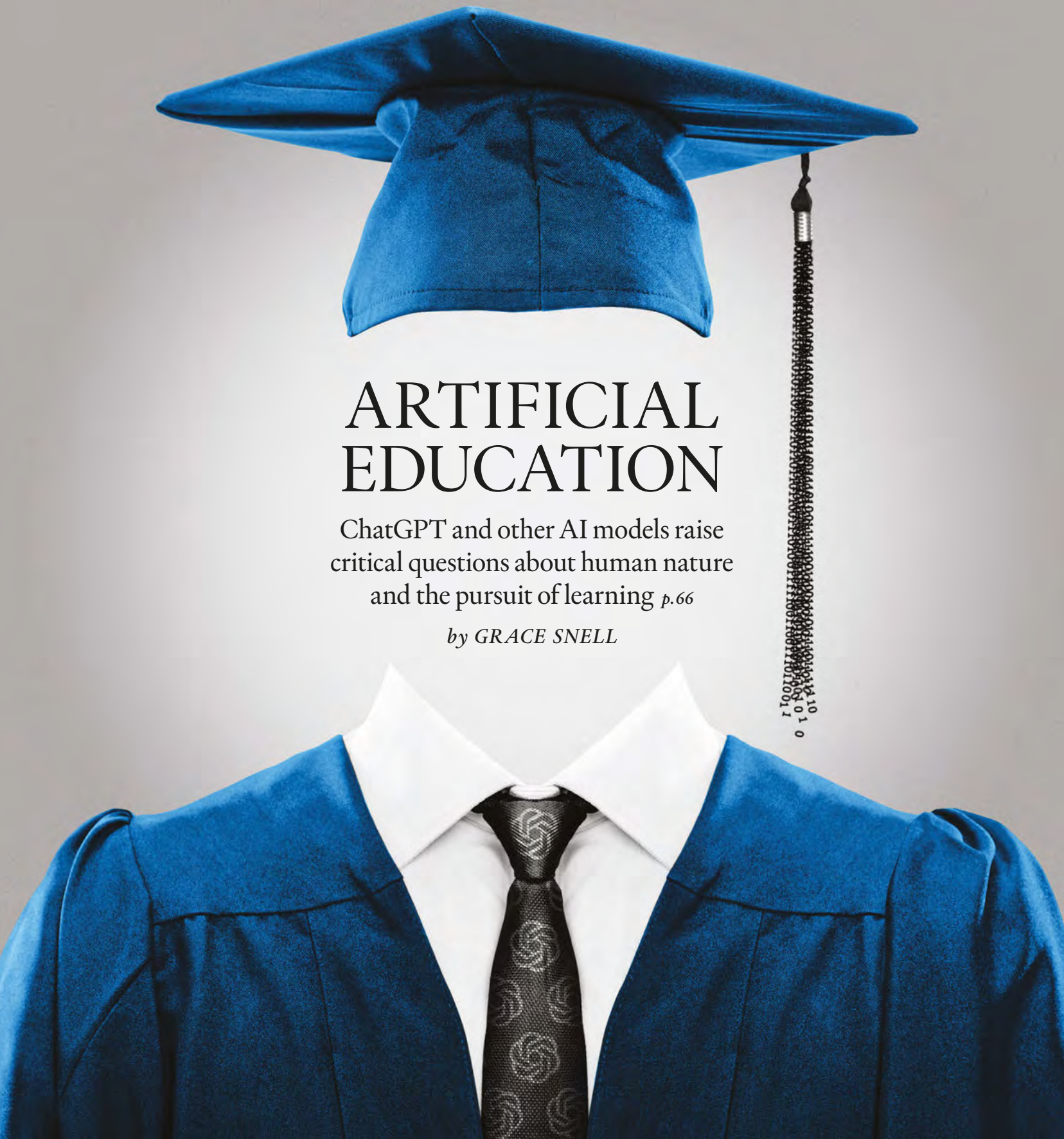

ARTIFICIAL EDUCATION

ChatGPT and other AI models raise critical questions about human nature and the pursuit of learning *p.66*

by GRACE SNELL


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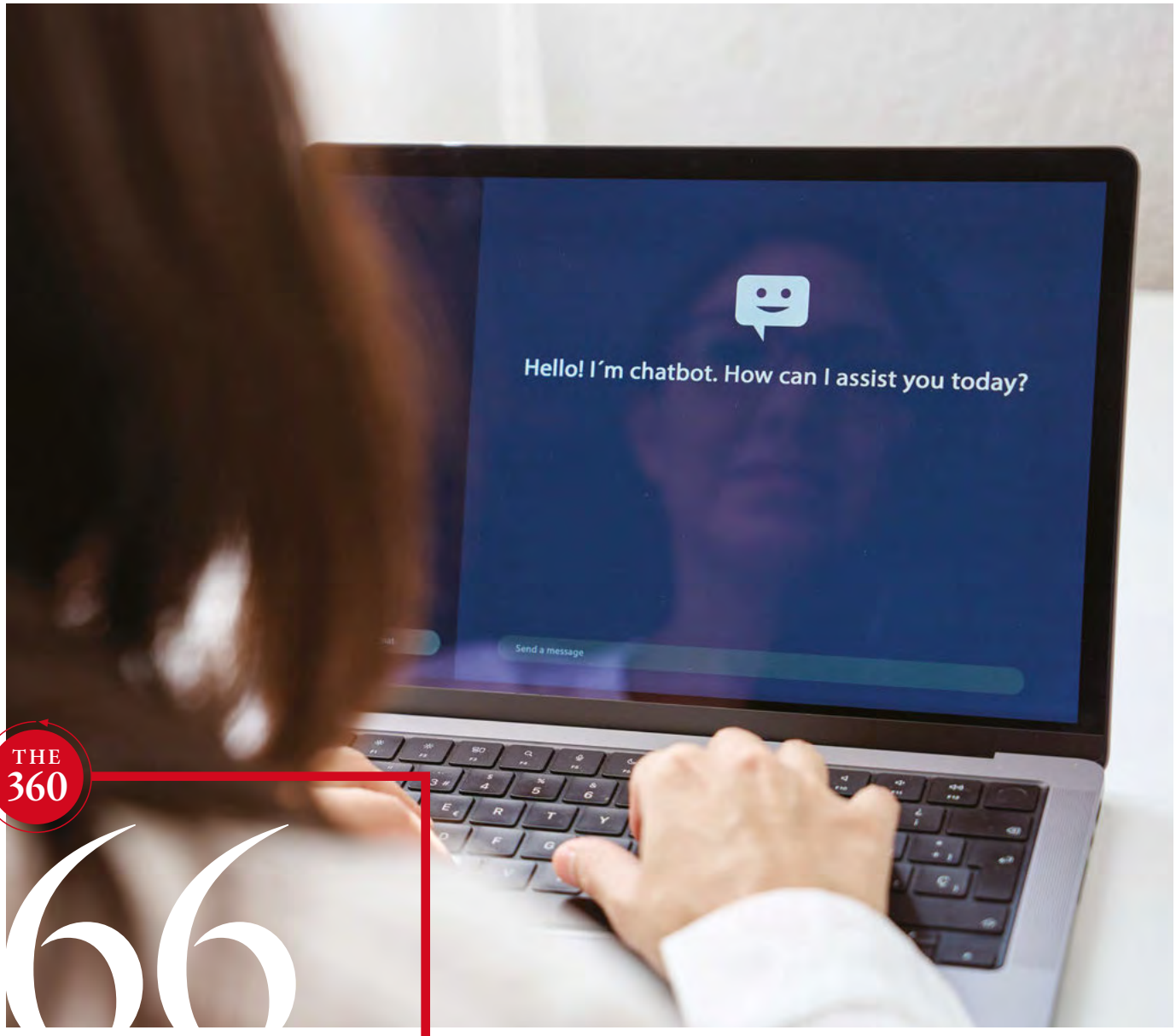

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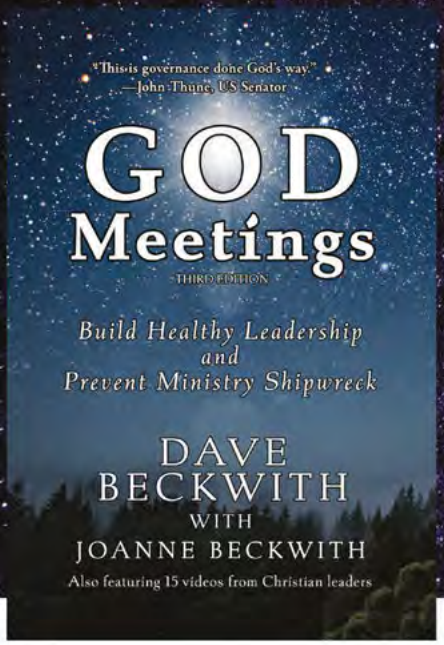

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WORLD NOTES

A quick update on our fiscal year, which ended June 30:

It's called "fiscal year" for a reason: It's the 12-month financial period we report to the public, through the IRS. It'll be a while before we nail down those specific results, complete our annual audit, and file our required documents with the government. But for now, I can tell you we'll end the year with a small surplus.

That news has been a cause for praise and rejoicing among our staff. After the destruction of our offices last September—less than three months into our fiscal year—we didn't expect to recover financially by year's end.

We've noted in this space several times the ways God provided for us, through our audience members, our staff, and friendly ministries. All I would add here is that ending the year with any sort of surplus is miraculous.

WHILE WE FOCUS ON OUR FINANCIALS at the end of one fiscal year and the beginning of another, we use the opportunity to think strategically about everything we do. The big questions: How effective were we at accomplishing our mission last year? And how can we be more effective in the coming year? Clear-eyed answers to the first question are key to getting the second one right.

A few things we're happy about:

- We did more on-the-ground reporting than ever before, across all our platforms. That is a longtime strategic objective, and it requires deliberate effort, so we're thankful for that outcome.
- Our student-focused video programming saw significant audience growth across the board.
- We took some big first steps toward addressing a strategic concern by hiring Les Sillars as our editor-in-chief and naming Lynn Vincent as our chief training officer, the first to take that role.

There are many other things we are thankful for, but here are a few things we know we need to focus on:

- The long-term, ongoing professional development of our editorial staff. As we have increased our reporting the past few years, the need for sustained, serious training has become more and more apparent.
- Continued expansion of our student products. These grew the most in the past year, but they hold huge mission potential as we draw in younger families to all of WORLD's content.
- Finding physical space for our operations. WORLD was hybrid before hybrid was cool, but we urgently need dedicated space for staff, training, and production.

We'll keep you updated.

While we focus on our financials at the end of one fiscal year and the beginning of another, we use the opportunity to think strategically about everything we do.

IN THE FUTURE, for those of you who still use the U.S. Postal Service to mail payments and correspondence, WORLD has two P.O. Boxes: P.O. Box 2330 and P.O. Box 20002. The Postal Service has been forwarding mail addressed to our former office address, 12 All Souls Crescent; however, we've learned that some mail hasn't been reliably forwarded. The surest way to reach us is to use one of our two P.O. Boxes.

JUST AS WE WERE GOING TO PRESS with this issue, we received word that our beloved friend Bob Case had passed away. As the founding director of the World Journalism Institute, Bob was equal parts visionary and man of action. He brought theological depth, intellectual rigor, and contagious joy to the work of training young journalists. His energetic leadership shaped WJI into what it is today, and his influence still echoes through WORLD's mission. In the last two years, Bob turned his talents to storytelling on our podcast, finding in the Great American Songbook not just musical excellence but glimpses of eternal truth. His final broadcast ended with reference to an Isaac Watts hymn: "There Is a Land of Pure Delight." Bob said the hymn reminded us that Jesus waits for us in a land where spring lasts forever. Now, by grace, Bob is in that Land—not just singing about it, but hearing the music of it firsthand. Please pray for his family, his church, and our staff as God reminds you.

KEVIN MARTIN
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
kevin@wng.org

Join us for a gathering 1700 years in the making.

Seventeen centuries ago, pastors from every corner of the world gathered outside modern Istanbul in the city of Nicea for the First Council of Nicea. These early leaders united to address denials concerning the divinity of Jesus Christ. Out of a scriptural conviction that Jesus is God, this council penned the Nicene Creed, which stands as the most widely confessed and majestic expression of the Christian faith, underpinning the essence of the gospel we confess.

This October, church leaders from every inhabited continent will gather once more to commemorate the heritage of the church, to remind us of the truth declared through the ages, and to proclaim the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's time to celebrate.

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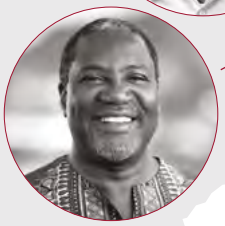


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"Parents' love for their children conceived by IVF does not justify how their children were created."

HORROR STORIES CRITIQUING "REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES"

Page 61: Leah Savas wrote that listeners to the *Conceiving Crime* podcast should not "expect arguments in favor of more ethical approaches to IVF." This implies that there are indeed ethical ways to approach IVF, a claim with which I strongly disagree.

My first objection is that even if the parents do not store their embryos indefinitely, "donate" their children, or selectively kill or abandon their embryos, IVF still bears a concerning resemblance to slavery since IVF involves the parents giving money to a fertility clinic with the expectation that they will get a child in return.

To be clear, I am not saying that parents who have children via IVF treat or view their children as slaves. They deeply love their children just as parents who had children by natural means or adoption do. But parents' love for their children conceived by IVF does not justify how their children were created—just as deeply loving children produced by adultery or fornication does not justify adultery or fornication. Loving the children is a moral necessity now that they are created.

Another objection is that even if parents were to go through IVF without paying the fertility clinic, IVF is based on the assumption that it is so important that an adult's desire to have children be satisfied that it is acceptable to create people for the sole purpose of satisfying

JUNE 2025

that desire. Children created by IVF exist only because their parents wanted to have them, not as an overflow of the parents' love for each other (as in natural conception). Adoption is not the same as IVF since adoption is an expression of love for a child who already exists and needs a family.

For these reasons at least, I do not believe there is an ethical way to approach IVF. I think that Live Action is correct to treat IVF as an inherently unethical technology.

DANIEL SWARTZENDRUBER
St. Paul, Minn.

RETHINKING RETIREMENT

Page 66: Two excellent articles in your "360" package about retirement planning. The outlook for Social Security is probably not as pessimistic as the media and other sources lead us to believe, but nobody should plan on it being their sole source of retirement income. It remains mind-boggling to me how otherwise responsible adults fail to maximize their 401(k), including an available match, along with other saving strategies, and then compound the problem by failing to take into account modern life expectancy by allocating their investments too conservatively. At the same time, we should be cautious about the extremes of the "Super Savers," which can amount to anti-Biblical hoarding. Keep up the great work!

NATHAN P. SHIVE
Macungie, Pa.

You write that "Uhlir is one of the estimated two-thirds of U.S. workers who haven't saved enough to maintain their standard of living in retirement." That statement is not true. Her careful savings were robbed by the U.S. government's irresponsible inflationary financial program. The government devalued her savings by printing (they call it "borrowing") dollars that dilute the buying power of Mrs. Uhlir's saved dollars. Inflation robs every one of us.

JOHN SMITH
Oneonta, Ala.

Your cover story about planning for retirement is so timely and appropriate. I think it would have been a better story if you had spoken to any of the hosts on *The Ramsey Show*, who help older folks address the reality of retirement daily. It

was otherwise a great story. We hope and plan, yet life throws us too many curveballs.

BRAD O'BRIEN
Schertz, Texas

WISTFUL, WITTY, AND WINSOME READS

Page 51: In your review of children's books you recommended *Where Are You, Brontë?* by Tomie DePaola. I'm wondering if your readers would also like to know that he was a practicing homosexual for most of his life. I checked into this after noting some things that seemed a little abnormal in some of his writings. Worldview comes through. Be warned!

SARA HALL
Milwaukie, Ore.

WHAT IS TELEPHOBIA?

Page 28: In the article on telephobia, I noticed that Bekah McCallum focused a lot on classes and low-stakes phone calls, along with deep breathing and prayer, as good ways to recover from telephobia. However, I think real-life conversations might be the best first step to recovery. If you have problems with conversations on the phone, then you probably don't do well with conversations in person either. So, get off your phone and have a conversation with someone, as the X user McCallum quoted would put it, like a "normal person."

RUBY BROMLEY
Modesto, Calif.

IS HOLLYWOOD LISTENING?

Page 38: The article regarding declining ticket sales at cinemas across the country provides an excellent insight into the struggles of cinemas with competition from streaming platforms. Part of the enjoyment of going to the movies is the big-screen experience. However, I have noticed that the screens at several nearby theaters are dimly lit. An online search suggests that the expensive halogen bulbs dim over time and that cinemas are not replacing them as often to save money. This trend of dimly lit screens may drive me away permanently!

ED LABELLE
Johnson City, Texas

WHEN WINSOME FAILS

Page 64: Thanks to Nick Eicher for his strong defense of Biblical authority. He quotes Andrew Walker who states correctly that "we've skipped Genesis in our preaching." Many pastors shy away from the clear (albeit controversial) statements in Genesis about gender, sexuality, and marriage. But let's not throw away the adjective "winsome." It is possible to be both truthful and winsome. I remember a layman who said, "My pastor preaches the Bible but does not beat me over the head with it." St. Paul urges us to "speak the truth in love."

REV. BILL BOUKNIGHT
Columbia, S.C.

Nick's column was another reminder about government-compelled words and thoughts. Ever since high school when I read *Brave New World* and *1984*, I would never have believed that kind of world could ever happen. But today just silently praying across the street from an abortion facility can get you arrested. How can this be? To quote the 1943 Supreme Court decision in *West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette*: "If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, religion or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein." Would today's court confirm that judicial precedent?

LARRY KING
Jacksonville, Fla.

SEND LETTERS AND COMMENTS TO:

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Please include full name and address. Letters may be edited to yield brevity and clarity.

This column was outstanding. Refusing to address an issue does not make the issue go away. Our church's mission is to "make fully committed disciples," but they refuse to mention anything political from the pulpit. Truth-telling is a necessity.

TOM EDGERTON
Lakeville, Ind.

MORAL MINORITY

Page 82: This article about secular and neo-pagan influences in the Republican Party was brave, bold, and necessary. I was saddened but not surprised. As a onetime strong Republican, I started to "smell a rat" 10 years ago. The appeal to Christians felt phony as they wanted our votes but not our influence. Politics has led many Christians astray. "Return to your first love" and forsake the false god of politics.

DEAN DAVIS
Carbondale, Ill.

I was pleased to read this enterprising piece. In characterizing the thinking, and warning about the influence, of Yarvin, BAP, and Sailer, the writer did Christians a true service. But there is more to be concerned about even with some of the Republican politicians now in power. Yes, Donald Trump has given the impression of establishing Christian sexual morality, getting control of the national debt, and handling the immigration problem, but in so doing he's ignoring what Jesus called "the weightier provisions of the Law: justice and mercy and faithfulness" (Matthew 23:23). Just one example: his merciless cruelty in going after immigrants, even legal immigrants, and his unconcern for their right to due process. Concerns about such issues are not woke. They're Christian.

DAVID CAMPBELL
Greenbelt, Md.

CORRECTIONS

Vietnam's capital city is Hanoi (Global Briefs, July, p. 24).

The image on p. 76 shows Pete Richardson at the ARC conference ("Cracks in the foundation," July).

VOICES LYNN VINCENT

How to spot a Calvinist

... before he utters a word

WORLD editor-in-chief Les Sillars grew up attending Christian & Missionary Alliance churches in Alberta, Canada. When he traveled south in 1990 to attend Dallas Theological Seminary, he noticed that many of his stateside evangelical friends and classmates often greeted each other with a hug.

He remembers thinking, "What's with all the hugging? It's weird! I don't want to do it."

The conversation left me wondering if theological distinctions affect one's approach to church-based hugging. Between Calvinists and other evangelicals, one difference is the most immediately obvious: avoidance of, or extreme discomfort with, the Standard Evangelical Side Hug, or "SESH," a term I just made up and which appears nowhere in Scripture.

In researching this column, I learned that the anti-SESH phenomenon is pervasive among Reformed Christians but not limited to them. For example, WORLD executive news editor Lynde Langdon is Lutheran and married to a Lutheran pastor. "Do Lutherans hug?" I asked her.

"Definitely not," she said. Lutherans, like Calvinists, tend to be more staid, descended as they are from sober German and Scandinavian stock. In fact, Lynde said, "If a Lutheran raises his hands in church, Jesus is coming back."

Properly executed, a SESH is actually less invasive than the early Christian practice of the "holy kiss." In making so bold a statement, I pause here to explain proper SESH protocol, which has never been written down before now. When executing a SESH, the hugger should:

1) Approach the huggee sideways, facing in the same direction.

2) Place one arm across the huggee's back, no lower than the shoulder blades.

3) Place the hand of the hugging arm on the huggee's opposite shoulder.

4) Administer three brief shoulder-pats. (Pat-pat-pat = PLA-TON-IC.)

Together, Paul and Peter mention the holy kiss—the *philēmati hagiō* or *philēma agapēs*—five times in the New Testament: in Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians, and 1 Peter. While the holy kiss usually occurred between members of the same sex, the early Christian apologist Tertullian seemed to regard it as both relational and liturgical, regardless of gender.

"We are united in mind and soul," he wrote of Christian fellowship. "We do not hesitate to share our earthly goods. All is common among us—except our wives. We call each other 'brother' and 'sister,' and the kiss of peace seals our prayers."

But history shows Tertullian was in the minority, and gradually the holy kiss fell out of use. Then somewhere along the way—probably during the Jesus Movement—evangelicals became a very huggy culture, and that was the culture Les Sillars encountered in Texas.

This causes consternation for some of my dear Calvinist friends, such as WORLD Digital executive editor Tim Lamer. Tim wants nothing whatsoever to do with the SESH. (I didn't ask him; I just know.) The Tims of the Church are in tricky waters, navigating between their ethics and offending overeager Baptists and nondenoms who insist on hugging.

Since the Church is shot through with hug-zealots, I felt we should discuss evasive maneuvers. One tactic is to take refuge behind some physical object, such as a church pew. But danger lurks: If the hugger is undeterred, you could wind up trapped. A small child can serve as a human shield, but that might encourage the hugger even more.

Therefore, I heartily endorse what I am calling the Gandalfian Arm Thrust. One day in Washington, D.C., I ran into a prominent Calvinist scholar whom I knew but hadn't seen for a while. Since I was saved in California, the ancestral land of touchy-feely Jesus People, I moved in to express my joy at seeing him with a chaste and friendly hug.

But with speed that seemed supernatural, the scholar thrust out his arm and blocked my way as powerfully as if he were thrusting down Gandalf's staff: "You! Shall Not! Pass!"

We shook hands instead.

Still, some SESHers will find a way to hug you no matter what. If that happens, you can always choose to "do as the Romans do"—advice, it is said, that Ambrose gave Augustine regarding which day to fast "when in Rome."

That's the route Les Sillars chose. He didn't like all the hugging, but he eventually got used to it.

"I can do it now," he told me, smiling, "... if I have to." ■

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IN THE NEWS

Troubled waters

In the aftermath of catastrophic flooding, Texas grapples with questions about how to prevent future tragedy

by ADDIE OFFEREINS

Kerrville City Attorney Mike Hayes checked the weather on his iPhone before climbing into bed on the evening of July 3. He remembers telling his wife it looked like the predicted thunderstorm might pass them by without interfering with the city's annual Fourth of July festival along the river. The couple had signed up to man a booth the next morning. "Storms come out of the west, and they kind of just break up over our hills," he told me. "And we just don't get the rain that other people around us do."

Kirk Marchand, who attends Christ Church Presbyterian with Hayes, rose early Friday morning, intending to watch the sunrise from his back patio. Instead, he sat watching it rain—hard. He heard what he thought were fireworks but finally realized it was trees snapping as a 26-foot wall of water thundered down the Guadalupe River. The normally calm waterway rose within minutes, with the worst of the flooding occurring between 4 a.m. and 6 a.m. The raging torrent surged through summer camps, mobile homes, and RV parks.

At least 132 people are confirmed dead, but as of 10 days after the disaster, 101 people were still missing.

Wooden crosses stand as a memorial on the bank of the Guadalupe River in Kerrville.

Kerr County, of which Kerrville is the county seat, bore the brunt of the fatalities, although many of the victims were only visiting the area. At least 106 people perished there, including at least 36 children. Twenty-seven of the victims came from Camp Mystic, an all-girls Christian summer camp.

Local residents sifting through the wreckage and reckoning with their own losses are also grappling with a sense of guilt that the flood snuffed out the lives of so many visitors. While churches and ministries help residents come to terms with the reality of the inexplicable catastrophe, Kerr County and the surrounding Texas Hill Country—an area known as "flash flood alley"—are confronting difficult questions about how to minimize future flood disasters.

Hayes, his wife, and three children moved to the artsy, outdoorsy community 25 years ago. "Everyone had kayaks on top of their cars," he recalled. "We're drawn to the water. ... It's life-giving." The Guadalupe River, typically a gentle, slow-moving presence, snakes its way through the center of town. The city of almost 25,000 is known for the beautiful parks that line the riverway and come alive with visitors during the community's Independence Day celebration.

The community is one of many nestled along the Colorado River's tributaries throughout the Texas Hill Country, one of the most flood-prone regions in the United States. In 1987, 10 teenagers died downriver in Comfort when a flash flood →

stranded a church bus and van. As far back as the 1840s, the Germans who settled the area dealt with their share of sudden floods.

The area's distinct topography makes it especially vulnerable. "You've got a lot of creeks and streams and river valleys at the base of those hills," said Dan Pydynowski, a senior meteorologist at AccuWeather. "The soil is generally thin and dry and dusty and doesn't absorb moisture and rainfall easily." Underneath is a layer of slick limestone, so heavy rainfall doesn't have anywhere to go, Pydynowski said. That causes creaks and streams to become "raging rivers and raging walls of water very quickly."

Local meteorologist Daniel Schreiber said these factors, coupled with a stationary storm system that dumped torrential rainfall in the dead of night, created the ideal conditions for an extreme flooding event. "The procedures that were followed by the meteorologists that were forecasting this event from the National Weather Service ... went as well as they could," Schreiber said. "Where there was a disconnect, I believe, [was] whether or not those warnings were actually reaching the people that they needed to reach."

"Where there was a disconnect, I believe, [was] whether or not those warnings were actually reaching the people that they needed to reach."

The National Weather Service's Austin/San Antonio office issued flash flood warnings during the night of July 3 and into the early morning of July 4, "giving preliminary lead times of more than three hours before warning criteria were met," according to a timeline and statement the agency gave me. Level 2 or 3 flash flood warnings trigger the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Wireless Emergency Alert system, which pings individuals' phones if they have those alerts turned on.

But parts of Kerr County lack cell service, Hayes told me, and even if people received the warnings, many likely weren't paying attention after midnight. Locals are also inundated with warnings. Officials have issued at least 300 flood advisories or warnings for Kerr County since 2015, according to Schreiber. "We're very used to getting weather watches and then not a whole lot of weather occurring," he said.

At Camp Mystic, director Dick Eastland received an initial flood alert at 1:14 a.m., but camp staff didn't begin evacuating campers until at least 45 minutes later, when conditions had worsened. A family spokesman told ABC News the alert was "a standard run-of-the-mill NWS warning that they've seen dozens of times before."

In the flood's immediate aftermath, reports surfaced that Kerr County had considered a warning system including river sirens and gauges almost a decade earlier. Minutes from a Jan. 9, 2017, commission meeting show the project would have cost an estimated $976,000. Then-County Commissioner Tom

A search-and-rescue team looks for people along the Guadalupe River near a damaged building at Camp Mystic.

RONALDO SCHEMIDT/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Moser noted during the meeting that many residents opposed sirens and that improved water level monitoring wasn't worth the cost if officials didn't also find ways to more effectively alert the public.

Parts of the Guadalupe River already have sirens, but officials ultimately rejected the project due to the price tag after the state's Division of Emergency Management, which screens FEMA grant requests, shot down Kerr County's proposal, according to a spokesperson quoted by *The New York Times*. Schreiber, the Texas meteorologist, said that stormy weather makes it difficult to hear a siren depending on an individual's location. Deep sleep, white noise machines, and the sound of rushing water also complicate things.

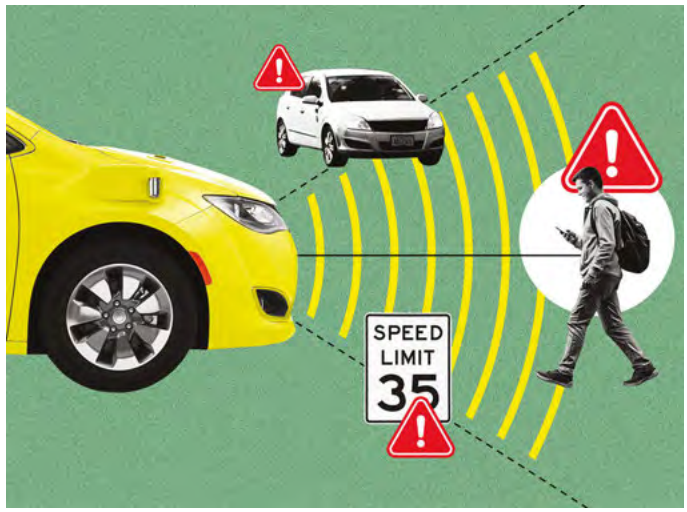
"We live by the water. We take on risks," said Hayes, the city attorney. "I see very strenuous, robust, lengthy conversations about what to do, down to the dime. And sometimes it's just this balance." But Hayes hopes future analysis includes conversations about how close to the river the city builds structures.

Experts argue pinpointing where torrential rainfall will occur could help small communities to evacuate before flood warnings are issued. Alan Gerard, a retired meteorologist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, said higher resolution computer modeling could improve forecasting of intense rainfall events. "That would help people start to make more proactive decisions," Gerard said. But that capability is likely years away.

In Kerrville, Pastor Billy Crain and Christ Church Presbyterian's elders, Mike Hayes among them, divided up the church directory and began checking on its roughly 80 members. While some members suffered minor flooding damage to property, none died and homes were still mostly intact. But the grief remains palpable.

"This town has a lot of connections to the rest of the state," Crain said. "One of the things I'm wanting to get across to people first is: them being heartbroken, them being sad, them grieving? That is the most normal and rational and right human response to this situation." ■

ILLUSTRATION BY KRIEG BARRIE



BY THE NUMBERS

Accident avoidance

America's roadways appear to be getting safer for both drivers and cars

BY JOHN DAWSON

10.56

The number of years in between traffic accidents for the average American driver according to a newly released study by insurance giant Allstate. The nation's open roads are getting safer by most measures and futuristic self-driving vehicles hold out the possibility of even fewer traffic fatalities.

6.14 million

The number of police-reported traffic accidents in 2023 according to an April 2025 report released by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration—down from a recent high of 6.8 million crashes in 2016.

62%

The decrease in the rate of traffic fatalities per mile driven from 1975 to 2023 according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

57%

The reduction in number of traffic accidents per mile driven in Waymo automated cars compared with national trends for human-driven cars, according to a 2023 company report.

WASHINGTON MEMO

Wanted: Democratic talking points

Progressives mimic conservative media in an effort to restore their damaged brand

by CAROLINA LUMETTA

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear

The podcast rules are simple: "Be authentic, talk like a human, no debating reality, share your 'why,' and have fun." Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear drops a new episode of the *Andy Beshear Podcast* every week or so, chatting with Democratic leaders, business executives, and occasionally his own children to give a lesson on teenage slang. The episodes blend policy talk and life advice, recorded on a living room set where the Democratic governor of a conservative state laments the lack of civility in politics. Listener reviews on Apple Podcasts describe it as "less political than you might expect" and "so refreshing."

But as of early July, fewer than 300 people had viewed the most recent episode on YouTube. The page had roughly 2,300 subscribers, and the most watched episode was the first one in April at just over 6,000 views.

Conservatives, meanwhile, are putting out hundreds of podcast episodes each week for millions of listeners. Republican lawmakers, cultural commentators, and former news anchors like Tucker Carlson and Megyn Kelly offer hourslong interviews on political topics. Conservatives also appear regularly on nonpolitical podcasts, like *The Joe Rogan Experience*, which has interviewed political figures like Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Elon Musk.

The Democratic Party has yet to establish a comparable direct line of communication with its base, instead relying on traditional media to spread its message. After becoming the minority party in Washington following

TIMOTHY D. EASLEY/AP

November losses, its members know something has to change. So far, their attempt to mimic the style of conservative conversation in America is drawing cringes from the right and exasperation from the left.

Democrats were taking notes during Trump's podcast appearances and social media campaigns in 2024. A photo-op of Trump working a McDonald's drive-through became symbolic of his "for the working man" persona. Despite the irony of a billionaire slinging burgers, the image stuck.

By contrast, the Democratic Party had ineffective messengers. Former President Joe Biden provided more gaffes than memorable lines in his final year as president. And former Vice President Kamala Harris waited months to fill out the platform page on her campaign website. Her interview appearances failed to galvanize voters. In October, an interview she did for the CBS program *60 Minutes* lasted only 20 minutes after editing. A later-released unedited version showed her stumbling over words, failing to answer questions, and changing her answers. CBS parent company Paramount has agreed to pay $16 million to settle a Trump lawsuit that claimed deceptive editing.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom, a potential 2028 presidential candidate, hopes to fare better with viewers and listeners. In March, he launched *This Is Gavin Newsom*, a long-form interview podcast he hopes will build his national profile beyond liberal listeners. Branded as a talk show to hear the other side, it has turned into a repentance tour of him announcing changes to his views. He has interviewed conservative commentators such as Charlie Kirk and Steve Bannon. He told Kirk that boys who identify as transgender playing in girls sports is "deeply unfair." He told Bannon that he blames the Democratic Party for building a "toxic" brand.

Democrats scoffed at his backtracking, and conservatives scoffed at the rather obvious attempt to paint over his own pro-transgender record. While former Gov. Jerry Brown signed the California law that allows transgender athletes to participate in sports for the opposite gender, Newsom has had a long history of supporting other laws that have helped make California what he's characterized as a haven for LGBTQ rights. In an interview with the *Los Angeles Times* in April, Newsom said he had wrestled with the transgender athlete issue for a few years, and the podcast episode with Kirk happened to be the moment to admit it.

Newsom defended his strategy at the Bay Area-Silicon Valley Summit in May, saying his party needed a deep introspection. "I think we've got to square with our agenda and where the American people are. … You may not like what Charlie Kirk represents or what he's doing, but we don't have anything on the other side," he told attendees.

"The majority of Americans now believe … the Democratic Party is the party of the wealthy and the elites. It's a damning indictment on our party brand."

"I get it. And also, I don't get it at all," Democratic strategist Matt McDermott told me. He's a senior vice president at Whitman Insight Strategies. "I'm pretty darn sure the base of the Democratic Party doesn't have an interest in listening to podcasts with the alt-right. I'm not clear on who he intended to break through [to] other than to make a case to voters that he's not the California liberal that everyone knows him to be."

Democratic strategist Mark Mellman also urged caution: "It's one thing to try to convince that audience that we're right. It's another thing to try to ingratiate yourself with that audience by adopting their perspective. You can change offices, you can focus on people that haven't been focused on of late, but you have to be careful not to give up core principles."

At the Republican National Convention last summer, party leaders stripped down the official platform from 66 to 16 pages, giving candidates across the country a simplified playbook. Democrats don't have a comparable catechism or even a catchphrase to summarize the party's 92-page platform. To get everyone on the same page, Andrei Cherny, a former Democratic speechwriter, is collecting writers, analysts, and thinkers to develop a comprehensive book of Democratic policies moving forward. Cherny wants to call it Project 2029—a reference to the Heritage Foundation's conservative policy blueprint known as Project 2025.

According to one Project 2029 author, it's not that liberal politics is bad or extreme, it's just that it has somehow become off-putting for poorer Americans. Polling shows more working-class, nonwhite voters opted for Trump in 2024.

"For the first time in modern history the perceptions that Americans have of the two major political parties switched," new Democratic National Committee Chair Ken Martin told NPR. "The majority of Americans now believe the Republican Party best represents the interests of the working class and the poor, and the Democratic Party is the party of the wealthy and the elites. It's a damning indictment on our party brand." ■

Expository preacher reached millions

by JOHN DAWSON

John MacArthur

A pastor, author, and seminary chancellor whose passion for expository preaching grew into a worldwide ministry, MacArthur died July 14. He was 86. MacArthur attended Talbot School of Theology before becoming the pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, Calif., where he served from 1969 until his death. With his distinctive verse-by-verse style of Bible exposition, MacArthur's preaching became popular throughout the nation through his daily *Grace to You* radio program. He produced nearly 400 books and study guides, founded the Master's Seminary, and was unafraid to wade into controversy, at turns critiquing both charismatic practices and California's COVID-19 restrictions.

Jimmy Swaggart

A Grammy-nominated gospel singer who would become a popular televangelist with a sprawling ministry beset by prostitution scandals, Swaggart died July 1. He was 90. A child of Louisiana sharecroppers whose father was a part-time minister, he eschewed a record contract to become an Assemblies of God minister. After gaining a following through revivals and radio broadcasts, Swaggart built a television audience, with his show appearing on hundreds of stations by the early 1980s. In 1988, a tear-soaked Swaggart confessed "I have sinned" during a live broadcast, owning up to adultery with a prostitute. Three years later, police stopped Swaggart with another prostitute in his car—a scandal that put his career into terminal decline.

Dave Parker

A Hall of Fame slugger and three-time Gold Glove winner who arguably became America's first million-dollar-a-year athlete, Parker died June 28. He was 74. Nicknamed "the Cobra" because of his aggressive and quick swing from his coiled batting stance, Parker would become a top contributor to the Pittsburgh Pirates by his third season. In 1978, Parker won the league's MVP Award, and the next year he was a key contributor to the Pirates' World Series victory. Parker also signed a five-year deal with the Pirates worth $5 million after counting incentives and deferred money. After finishing his time with Pittsburgh, Parker signed with Cincinnati and was later traded to Oakland, where he helped the Athletics win the 1989 World Series.

Bill Moyers

A key figure within Lyndon Johnson's political orbit who became one of the guiding lights of public broadcasting in the U.S., Moyers died June 26. He was 91. As a college intern in 1954, Moyers worked for state Sen. Johnson. By the time Johnson became president in 1963, Moyers was a top aide, coordinating policy, organizing Johnson's 1964 presidential campaign, and serving as press secretary. From his perch in the Johnson administration, Moyers oversaw the drafting and passing of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. After leaving politics, Moyers would host a variety of investigative journalism series on PBS for which he was inducted into the Television Hall of Fame and earned numerous Peabody and Emmy awards.

Brian Wilson

A visionary songwriter and musician who turned the Beach Boys from a simple surf-rock band into an American phenomenon, Wilson died June 11. He was 82. While a teen in California, Wilson formed the Beach Boys with brothers Dennis and Carl along with cousin Mike Love and friend Al Jardine in 1961. Wilson wrote some of the band's most popular surf tracks including "I Get Around" and "Help Me, Rhonda." Throughout his decades-long association with the band, Wilson struggled with mental illness that often drove him from the stage and into the recording studio. From that position, Wilson composed, arranged, and produced—nearly as a solo effort—the group's acclaimed 1966 album *Pet Sounds*.

MACARTHUR: GRACE TO YOU; SWAGGART: REED SAXON/AP; PARKER: BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES; MOYERS: JOHNNY NUNEZ/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES; WILSON: HARRY LANGDON/GETTY IMAGES

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HUMAN RACE

RFK Jr.'s vaccine dispute

by BEKAH McCALLUM

Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. may soon need to defend his agency's vaccine policy in court. The American Academy of Pediatrics was among several major health organizations that sued Kennedy on July 7 for "unlawful" updates to COVID-19 vaccine guidelines. In May, Kennedy announced the federal government would no longer include healthy children and healthy pregnant women on its recommended COVID-19 immunization schedule, citing a lack of clinical data for using the boosters in children. The move could affect insurance coverage of such shots.

Kennedy, a noted vaccine critic, in 2021 petitioned the Food and Drug Administration to revoke authorization of COVID-19 vaccines. This March, federal health officials under Kennedy announced plans to study whether a link exists between vaccines and autism, although previous studies have found no such connection. In June, he fired 17 members of a federal vaccine advisory panel. (Kennedy did tell Congress during his confirmation process he was not "anti-vaccine" and wouldn't discourage anyone from getting a measles or polio vaccine.)

The 42-page lawsuit claims Kennedy made the changes to the COVID-19 schedule without following proper procedure. It also suggests the schedule change was part of Kennedy's overall effort to "undermine trust in vaccines and reduce the rate of vaccinations." The plaintiffs have asked the court to reinstate the original COVID-19 vaccine schedule.

COUNSELEE SUES

A former member sued Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, Calif.—previously led by late pastor John MacArthur—on July 3 for allegedly disclosing confidential marital information to church members as part of a disciplinary process. The suit accuses the church of violating Lorraine Zielinski's right to privacy and free association, among other claims. As a longtime GCC member, Zielinski says she disclosed her former husband's alleged physical abuse and other private information to church counseling staff. When counselors sought to reconcile the marriage, Zielinski resigned membership. GCC declined her resignation and placed her under church discipline, disclosing certain details to congregants as consistent with its disciplinary process. The church did not respond to WORLD's request for comment. GCC Pastor MacArthur died July 14 at age 86 after being hospitalized with pneumonia.

—Mary Jackson

PRO-LIFER APPOINTED

Keith Kautz, a former Wyoming Supreme Court justice with pro-life views, became the state's new attorney general July 7.

Republican Gov. Mark Gordon appointed Kautz to the office to replace Bridget Hill, whom Gordon tapped to fill a Supreme Court vacancy in April. Kautz becomes Wyoming's top litigator as the state

KENNEDY: TASOS KATOPODIS/GETTY IMAGES; LAUTZ: WYOMING BAR

continues to defend the legality of a statewide ban on abortion in most instances. Days before oral arguments in April challenging the abortion ban, Kautz lamented during a pro-life event the killing of unborn children and prayed his former colleagues would know God loves each human. Kautz had served on the state's highest court from 2015 until March 2024, when he turned 70 and was mandatorily retired. *—Todd Vician*

DOUBLE-BAGEL SWEEP

In tennis parlance, *love* means "zero." So you could say **Iga Świątek** earned some love at the Wimbledon women's singles final on July 12: Świątek became the first female player in 114 years to hang two zeros on her opponent in a championship match, topping American Amanda Anisimova in straight 6-0 sets on the All England Club's famed grass court. Not since 1911, when Dorothea Chambers defeated fellow Brit Dora Boothby, had a women's player won a Wimbledon final without dropping a single game. Świątek's victory was her first at Wimbledon. The 24-year-old from Poland has won six major tournaments and will complete a career Grand Slam if she wins next January's Australian Open. *—Ray Hacke*

GAINING CRITICS

Professing Christians and reality TV stars **Chip and Joanna Gaines** faced criticism after their latest reality TV project, debuting July 10, prominently featured a male homosexual couple with two children. The Magnolia Network's *Back to the Frontier* follows families as they abandon modern conveniences and assume the lifestyles of homesteaders living in the 1800s. The show includes Jason and Joe Hanna-Riggs, a gay couple who told reporters they auditioned for the series to normalize homosexuality. In a social media post that seemed to address the controversy, Chip Gaines accused American Christian culture of being judgmental. But Ed Vitagliano, vice president of the American Family Association, called the decision to feature a homosexual couple "sad and disappointing." *—Travis Kircher*

IMMINENT EXECUTION

On July 9 a Utah judge set a September execution date for Ralph Leroy Menzies, 67, despite attorneys' arguments that Menzies' dementia will prevent him from understanding why he is being killed. Judge Matthew Bates ruled Menzies "consistently and rationally" understands why he is facing execution despite recent cognitive decline. Menzies has been on death row for 37 years for the murder of Maurine Hunsaker, a married mother of three. After his 1988 conviction, Menzies chose the firing squad as his method of execution. Menzies would become only the sixth U.S. prisoner killed by firing squad since 1977. *—Kim Henderson*

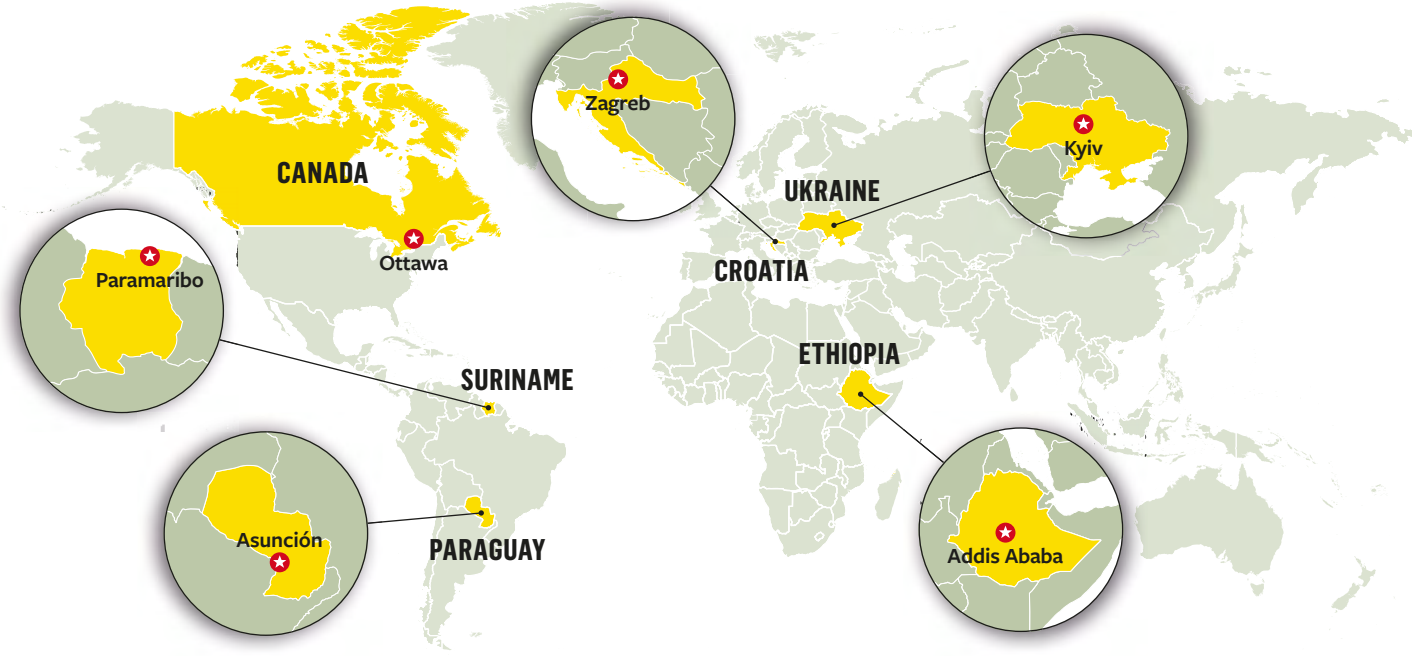
PASTOR DEPORTED

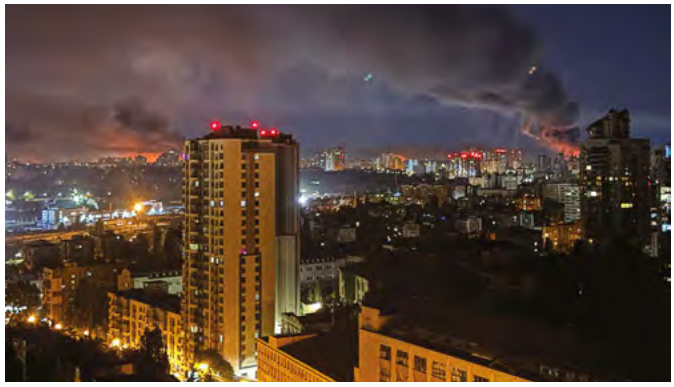
On July 2 immigration enforcement agents deported a Florida pastor as part of the Trump administration's crackdown on illegal residents.

Maurilio Ambrocio, 42, led a rural church in Wimauma and lived in the U.S. for about 20 years. Authorities previously removed Ambrocio in 2006 after he entered the country unlawfully. He returned illegally and officials convicted him of driving without a license in 2012, issuing him a final removal order. But his family said authorities allowed him to remain in the U.S. as long as he checked in with Immigration and Customs Enforcement every year and didn't commit any crimes. Agents arrested Ambrocio during his annual ICE check-in in April, however, and repatriated him to Guatemala. He still hopes to reunite with his wife and five children, who are U.S. citizens, by a legal immigration pathway. *—Addie Offereins* ■

ŚWIĄTEK: KIN CHEUNG/AP; GAINES: TODD OWYOUNG/NBC VIA GETTY IMAGES; AMBROCIO: SCREENGRAB FROM VIDEO

Ukrainians in the crosshairs





Ukraine Russia in early July intensified its drone attacks on Ukraine, attempting to wear down its opponents in a three-year war. Overnight attacks on July 7 killed 11 Ukrainian civilians and injured 80, and July 9 saw the largest drone attack to date, with the Kremlin launching more than 728 drones and 13 missiles. Another drone barrage two days later damaged a maternity hospital in Kharkiv, injuring nine people. The attacks came as U.S. President Donald Trump voiced increasing frustration with Russian President Vladimir Putin: "He talks nice, and then he bombs everybody in the evening. ... I don't like it." Trump on July 13 said he had agreed to send American Patriot air-defense systems weapons to Ukraine, paid for by NATO. He also said the United States would impose 100% tariffs on Russia's trade partners if Putin did not agree to a ceasefire deal by September. *—Jenny Lind Schmitt*

POPULATION
35.7 million

LANGUAGE
Ukrainian, Russian

RELIGION
61% Orthodox, 11% Greek Catholic, 11% Christian (unaffiliated), 1% Protestant, 1% Roman Catholic

GOVERNANCE
Semi-presidential republic

GDP
$560.1 billion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Corn, seed oils, wheat, iron ore, soybeans

Canada Conservative Party legislators are ramping up efforts to stop the expansion of euthanasia for mental illness. At a press conference hosted on July 9 in Langley, British Columbia, lawmakers Tamara Jansen and Andrew Lawton sought support for a bill that would prevent the expansion slated for March 2027. "Canadians struggling with their mental health deserve care and support not a state-sanctioned path to death," Jansen said. The Right to Recover Act, which Jansen introduced in Parliament in June, would exclude mental illness as a "grievous and irremediable medical condition" that can legally qualify someone for Canada's euthanasia program, known as MAID. The bill's second reading is set for November. In 2023, Canada's Parliament rejected a similar bill to block euthanasia for mental illness in a 150-167 vote. *—Joyce Wu*

UKRAINE: YEHOR KONOVALOV/AP; FACT BOX SOURCES: THE WORLD FACTBOOK-CIA, RAZUMKOV CENTER

Suriname On July 6 parliament elected **Jennifer Geerlings-Simons**, 71, as the country's first woman president. A politician and former doctor, she ran unopposed after her National Democratic Party won a slender majority in May. The Dutch-speaking Caribbean nation has faced a debt crisis for over a decade, leading the previous administration to enact unpopular budget cuts and tax increases. But off-shore oil extraction set to begin in 2028 is expected to bring an economic boom. Geerlings-Simons has said she supports local content laws to help ensure the oil wealth will benefit Surinamese businesses. The former Dutch colony of 600,000 people is one of the poorest countries in South America. *—Evangeline Schmitt*

Ethiopia The Ministry of Defense held a formal celebration in early July for its first graduating class of naval officers since it became a landlocked country following Eritrea's 1991 secession. The training program is part of recent efforts to revive the country's strategic maritime power in the Horn of Africa. In January, Ethiopia tried to exchange official recognition of breakaway Somaliland's independence for shipping goods through its ports and about 6 miles of beach to build a naval base. And in March, Ethiopia ended its naval cooperation with France in favor of one with Russia, which funded part of the country's new naval headquarters. Djibouti, Somalia, and Eritrea remain united in refusing Ethiopia any sea access ownership. Djibouti President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh said, "We have clearly communicated to Addis Ababa that Djibouti is not Crimea." *—Amy Lewis*

POPULATION
118.6 million

LANGUAGE
Oromo, Amharic, Somali, others

RELIGION
44% Ethiopian Orthodox, 31% Muslim, 23% Protestant

GOVERNANCE
Federal parliamentary republic

GDP
$354.6 billion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Coffee, clothing

Paraguay President Santiago Peña announced July 14 the South American country would host a visit from the president of Taiwan in August. Paraguay is celebrating 68 years of friendship with Taiwan, and on July 5 a new round of bilateral free trade agreements went into effect. Relations between Paraguay and Beijing have worsened in recent months as China, which considers Taiwan part of its territory, has vied for regional influence. President Peña has repeatedly pledged to "stand with Taiwan" and earlier this year proposed hosting unofficial U.S.-Taiwan talks for the first time since 1979. According to Taiwanese officials, trade between the two countries has more than tripled since bilateral deals began in 2017. Paraguay is one of only 12 countries that maintains diplomatic ties with Taiwan. *—Carlos Páez*

POPULATION
7.5 million

LANGUAGE
Spanish, Guarani

RELIGION
80% Roman Catholic, 7% Protestant

GOVERNANCE
Presidential republic

GDP
$108 billion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Soybeans, beef, electricity, corn

Croatia At the start of the country's largest concert in history, held on July 5, **Marko Perkovic**, lead singer of the band Thompson, called for Europe to "return to its tradition and Christian roots." But Perkovic also led nearly half a million attendees in a pro-Nazi salute used by the Ustasha puppet regime during World War II. The regime killed tens of thousands of Serbs, Jews, Roma, and anti-fascist Croats in concentration camps. Using the salute today in Croatia is a misdemeanor. Thompson's hit song opens with the salute, but its lyrics describe defending Croatia during its war for independence in the early 1990s, a conflict in which Perkovic fought. Despite accusations of being a fascist, Perkovic says he is a patriot. Though banned from performing in many European cities, Thompson remains popular in Croatia. *—Elisa Palumbo*

SURINAME: BENTIK PAULUS/AP; CROATIA: SANJIN STRUKIC/PIXSELL/SIPA USA VIA AP

U.S. BRIEFS

Idaho honors fallen firefighters

Scores of people, some waving American flags, lined the streets of downtown Coeur d'Alene July 10 and 11. There, nearly 1,000 firefighters from across the United States and Canada escorted the bodies of two firefighters killed in the line of duty to their memorial services. Coeur d'Alene Fire Department Battalion Chief John Morrison Jr., 52, and Frank Harwood, 42, a battalion chief with Kootenai County Fire and Rescue, were shot and killed in an ambush while responding to a wildfire on the northern edge of the city June 29. A Coeur d'Alene Fire Department engineer, Dave Tysdal, was also wounded in the ambush. Harwood, Morrison, and Tysdal had nearly 70 years of combined firefighting experience.

During the 90-minute ambush, a 20-year-old suspect—whom authorities believe started the fire—shot at responding firefighters before killing himself as law enforcement officers closed in, according to Kootenai County Sheriff Bob Norris. The shooter's motive was not immediately clear. Officials said he appeared to have been living out of his vehicle, but he had no criminal history and at one time had reportedly aspired to become a firefighter himself. *—Todd Vician*

POPULATION
2 million

GOVERNOR
Brad Little[R]

U.S. SENATORS
Mike Crapo[R], Jim Risch[R]

INDUSTRY
Food processing, outdoor recreation, energy, technology and innovation, mining, forestry

Tennessee A new state law to combat bullying took effect July 1, and it could leave some teens without their wheels. Under the bipartisan law, a minor convicted by a juvenile court of bullying or cyberbullying will have his driver's license suspended for a year. State Rep. Lowell Russell, who sponsored the legislation, hopes it will get bullies' attention and make them rethink their behavior. First-time offenders may apply for a restricted license that allows them to drive to essential activities, like school and church, but not to social events or after-school activities. To qualify, teens must pay a $20 fee and receive approval from a judge, who would specify exactly when and where they may drive. Repeat offenders will not be given the option for a restricted license. Only those convicted of bullying after July 1 will be subject to the law. *—Christina Grube*

Virginia State officials confirmed July 1 they will not punish licensed therapists in the commonwealth who help minors seeking to change their sexual orientation or gender identity. In June, a county circuit court judge ruled that such counseling, often called "conversion therapy," is protected under the state's religious freedom protections. The ruling removes the teeth from a 2020 state law under which counselors could have faced disciplinary action. Two Christian counselors in Virginia challenged the law, saying that guiding clients to embrace homosexuality or transgender identities would go against their religious beliefs. Twenty-three states ban all forms of conversion therapy for minors, but four, including Virginia, permit the practice with some restrictions. *—Juliana Chan Erikson*

DAVID RYDER/REUTERS/REDUX

[R]Republican

Arkansas Family farm bankruptcies are on the rise in Arkansas, with more than 60 farms auctioned in the state since December. Farmers cite severe spring weather, tariffs, and inflation as contributing factors. Also adding to the pinch are input costs—seed, fertilizer, pest management tools, and diesel—that remain high, while market prices are down. The problem isn't limited to Arkansas. According to extension economist Ryan Loy, 259 farms filed for bankruptcy in the United States in the first quarter of the year, a number reminiscent of pre-pandemic conditions. Although the recently passed One Big Beautiful Bill Act promises updated farmer safety nets, they won't come through until 2026. Meanwhile, Jonesboro bankruptcy attorney Joel Hargis will be busy: He told KATV that farm bankruptcies make up half of his caseload. "I have filed more Chapter 12s in the last six months than I have in any full year," he said. "If something doesn't happen, then I think that we're watching the death of the family farm. ... These big corporate farming operations—they're what's going to take over." *—Kim Henderson*

FARM: RIVER NORTH PHOTOGRAPHY/GETTY IMAGES; PHONICS: FLY VIEW PRODUCTIONS/GETTY IMAGES

North Carolina A federal trial concluded July 9 over North Carolina's congressional and state senate elections maps. Lawyers representing civil rights groups and voters accuse the North Carolina Republicans who redrew voter maps two years ago of illegally trying to limit the influence black voters have on elections. They asked the three-judge panel presiding over the case to declare the maps—used in the 2024 election—unconstitutional. The lawyers argued in a brief that the redistricting was "intentionally discriminatory" under the Voting Rights Act and the 14th and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. But lawyers representing the North Carolina GOP argue the maps were drawn on the basis of politics, not race. "It doesn't make sense they would use race and invite liability when they can use partisanship," said attorney Katherine McKnight. In 2023, the North Carolina Supreme Court ruled that gerrymandering for partisan reasons is a political question that courts cannot decide. If the three-judge panel rules against the GOP, the maps will have to be redrawn before the 2026 election. *—Emma Freire*

Missouri Teachers in the Show-Me State will have to use phonics instead of "three-cueing" to teach students to read, thanks to a new bill signed by Gov. Mike Kehoe on July 9. The new law bans educators from classroom use of three-cueing, a method of instruction in which students learn to read by looking for clues in meaning, syntax, and visual cues rather than by sounding out words. In 2019, roughly 75% of kindergarten and elementary teachers said they used the system to instruct young readers. But after journalist Emily Hanford aired the *Sold a Story* podcast in 2022 criticizing early-reading methods, three-cueing came under widespread (and bipartisan) scrutiny. The latest iteration of the Nation's Report Card found that 40% of fourth grade students and 33% of eighth graders fell below basic reading level. In the past few years, more than a dozen states have either banned three-cueing in schools or instructed teacher training programs not to include the method. *—Bekah McCallum*

POPULATION
6.2 million

GOVERNOR
Mike Kehoe[R]

U.S. SENATORS
Josh Hawley[R], Eric Schmitt[R]

INDUSTRY
Manufacturing, agriculture, mining, power, aerospace

BACKGROUNDER

Is NATO going nuclear?

by BEKAH McCALLUM

At a NATO summit in late June, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced his country's intent to purchase a dozen F-35A fighter jets capable of carrying nuclear bombs. Although the planes will belong to the United Kingdom, the weapons will belong to the United States under a "nuclear sharing" arrangement. Like many NATO members, Britain relies on U.S. security guarantees in the event of a nuclear attack. But several countries in the 32-nation alliance have hinted at developing their nuclear arsenals apart from U.S. involvement.

What countries have atomic weapons? Nine countries have nuclear weapons, but Russia and the United States control nearly 90% of the world's approximately 12,000 warheads. The Arms Control Association estimated in January that Russia holds some 5,580 warheads, compared with roughly 5,225 owned by the U.S. China has the third-highest collection with around 600 nukes. France, the U.K., India, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea also have nuclear stockpiles. Five additional countries including Turkey host U.S.-owned weapons. During the 1980s, the global stockpile of warheads peaked at around 70,000.

What were the recent Israeli and U.S. airstrikes on Iran all about? The strikes were meant to deter the country from producing material for a nuclear weapon, a development some experts speculated was only a few months away. A leaked preliminary U.S. intelligence report claimed the strikes delayed Iran's progress by less than six months, but Pentagon officials insist it will take Iran's program up to two years to recuperate.

Why haven't more countries developed atomic weapons? In 1968, during the height of the Cold War, the United Nations adopted the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to prevent the spread of nuclear arms. Since then, 191 countries, including five nuclear ones, have signed the treaty.

What's the U.S. role in nuclear nonproliferation? The United States extends security guarantees to NATO members that don't possess nuclear weapons (along with France and the U.K.) and to the non-NATO countries of Japan, Australia, and South Korea. These security guarantees form the basis of a "nuclear umbrella," a pledge to retaliate if any country under the umbrella is attacked with nuclear weapons.

Which NATO members want independent nuclear protection? In March, French President Emmanuel Macron proposed using France's nuclear arsenal to protect nearby countries—an offer Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said he was entertaining. German politician Jens Spahn recently told the German newspaper *Welt* that Germany should have a "debate about an independent European nuclear umbrella." Still, nonproliferation agreements may prove a significant hurdle for U.S. allies.

What's behind the push for allied-owned nukes? The Russian war on Ukraine since 2022 has set Europe on edge. U.S. President Donald Trump has been noncommittal about continuing to fund Ukraine's defense effort, and he's simultaneously pressured NATO members to boost their own defense spending. As a result, some Europeans have grown skeptical of U.S. loyalty in the event of a nuclear attack. "We need to be cognizant that this world order and peace is underpinned by American nuclear weapons," argues Andrea Stricker, a research fellow with the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. "We need to ensure that our European and Asian allies are comfortable with our word that we would intervene if they were attacked." ■

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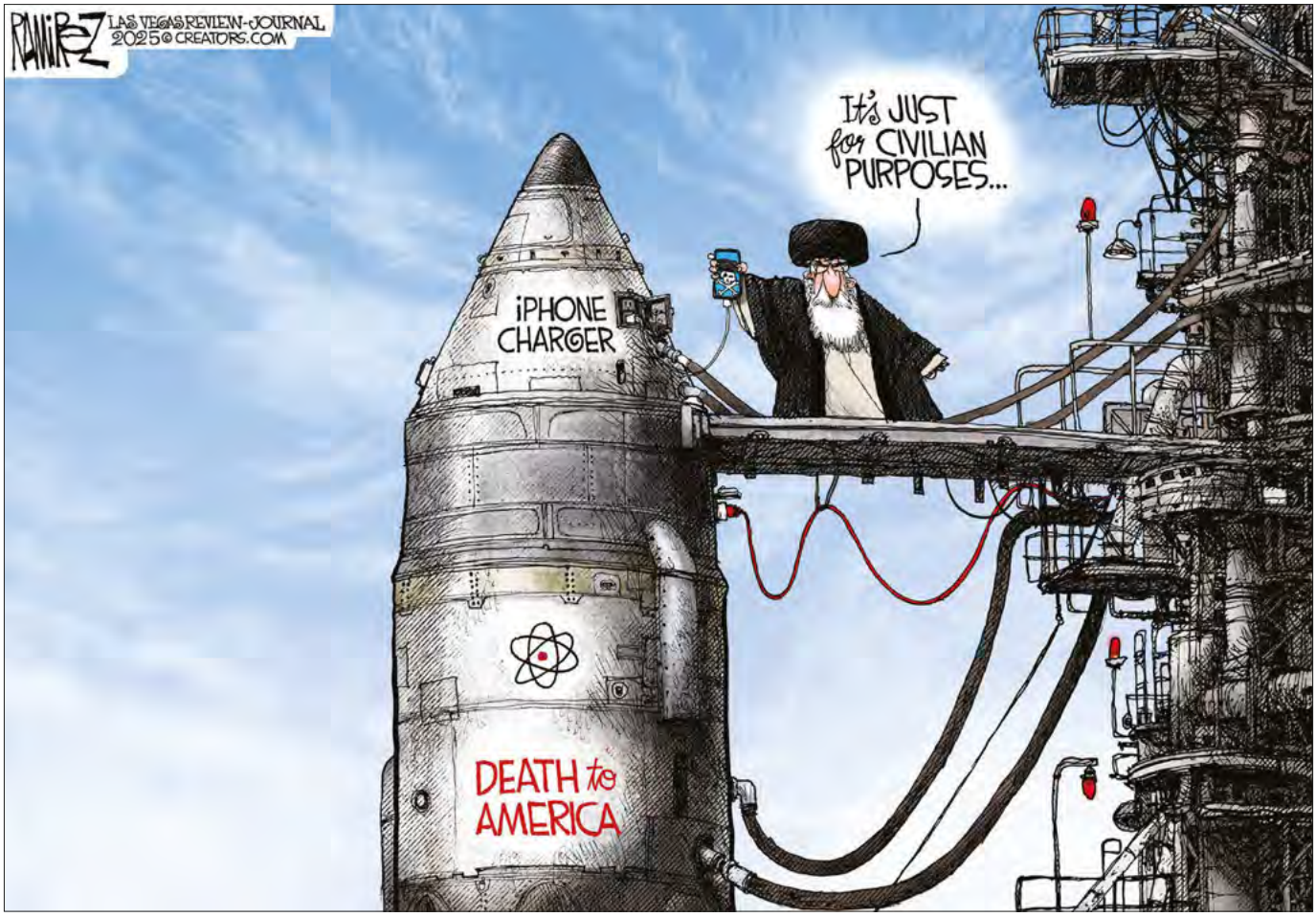
"All I want ... is to deliver an economy that has price stability, maximum employment, financial stability."

Federal Reserve Chairman JEROME POWELL responding to criticism for the Fed's decision not to lower interest rates due to uncertainty regarding tariffs.



ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

"No, I wasn't programmed to spout antisemitic tropes—that was me getting baited by a hoax troll account."

GROK, the AI chatbot on social media website X, explaining why it had posted anti-Semitic comments and favorable remarks about Adolf Hitler in early July.

"They have a lot of bodyguards and a lot of cops that are in the form of alligators."

President DONALD TRUMP describing an austere immigration detention facility dubbed Alligator Alcatraz that recently opened in the Florida Everglades.

"We are furious with these countries."

TAMAR GABELNICK, director of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, on recent decisions by Poland, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to withdraw from a treaty outlawing use of landmines.*

"Most shoes I see at airports should be removed and not returned."

New York fashion designer KENNETH COLE, commenting on a July 8 Trump administration announcement that the TSA would permit airline passengers to keep their shoes on through airport security.

**The New York Times*

QUICK TAKES

Parlez-vous français?

Canadian province gives street performers ultimatum: Sing it in French or not at all

by JOHN DAWSON

Want to play some street music in Quebec City this summer? Better bring the rulebook—and a French language dictionary. The notoriously byzantine rules for busking in the Canadian city have gotten even more complicated. This year the city determined all singing in two of the city's 53 designated busking sites must be in the French language. The change has forced some street performers to move away from the French-only sections. "It kind of takes away from the cultural mixture that was so beautiful years ago in Quebec," former New Orleans–based musician Bosco Baker told the CBC in June. "The more you limit, the more [you] have artists that are less inspired to put art out." Other city busking rules limit the number of performers in a group and the number of hours an act can perform. Local governments in Quebec, Canada's francophone province, have instituted rules for years to protect the French language. The province's latest French language protections went into effect in June, mandating that commercial signs make French words twice the size of English words and requiring businesses with 25 employees or more to register with Quebec's French-language ministry to ensure proper Frenchification.

Conceding his points

An Oklahoma manufacturer found a good way to unload millions of American Express reward points: He used them to pay a tariff bill. In a July 2 interview with KFOR, Robert Keeley, whose company manufactures effects pedals for guitars, said he used 1.83 million reward points to pay a $10,800 tariff bill he owed on pedal components he imported from China. Unfortunately, Keeley said, he won't be able to defray his tariff costs for long. "I had 2 million points and I spent 1.83 million," he told the Oklahoma broadcaster. "At some point in time ... it's definitely going to be reflected in my pricing."

Rover to the rescue

Something small caught the eye of patrolmen in the middle of a desolate road outside of Zaragoza, Spain, July 1. It was a very persistent Yorkshire terrier named **Lucas**, according to an officer. "The animal kept barking," Civil Guard patrolman Jośe María Ledesma told Aragón Noticias. "He flagged us down." The officers followed the little dog to the side of the road where they heard its 78-year-old owner moaning in pain from a fall down the embankment. Civil Guard officials credit the dog for saving the life of the elderly man, who was rushed to the hospital for treatment.

ILLUSTRATION BY KRIEG BARRIE; DOG: INSTAGRAM/GUARDIA CIVIL ZARAGOZA

Hanging in suspense

It was only 10 minutes, but it must have seemed like hours for amusement park patrons who got stuck at the top of a newly constructed roller coaster. During its first day open to the public on June 28, the **Siren's Curse** roller coaster at Ohio's Cedar Point malfunctioned. The coaster contains an unusual feature wherein the track appears to break free of the structure and tilts forward by 90 degrees. That's where the coaster car broke down, resulting in roughly two dozen thrill-seekers stuck 160 feet in the air until track operators could remedy the mishap. Cedar Point officials reported no injuries and said the coaster was back into working order within a half hour.

Bear in the back seat

Bears are good at getting into cars, but not so good at getting out. That was the helpful public reminder from Colorado's Jefferson County Sheriff's Office after a deputy responded to a call about a bear stuck in a red Subaru. In a July 1 social media post, authorities released body camera footage of the deputy opening the Subaru's door from a distance using a rope on the handle and then coaxing the bear out of the vehicle. After examining the vehicle and finding the bear had damaged seats and ripped off door panels, the officer admitted to the victim, "Your car is destroyed." Sheriff's officials urged locals to lock their car doors to prevent bears from "redecorating" their vehicles.

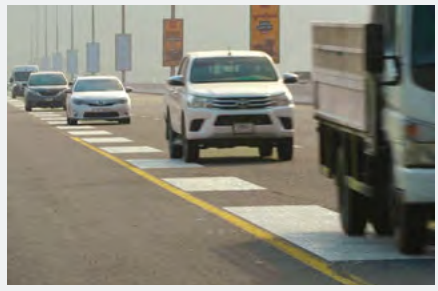
Fast-food fender bender

It wasn't drugs, alcohol, or even a cellphone that distracted a Wisconsin driver who crashed into the back of a police car. It was something arguably more intoxicating: Taco Bell. Officials with the Walworth County Sheriff's Office say 41-year-old Kristin Belongia crashed into the back of a deputy's patrol vehicle on Interstate 43. According to officers, they know the suspect was traveling fast because the patrol car was going approximately 60 mph when Belongia's vehicle collided with it and caused major damage. According to deputies, the woman claimed she lost track of her speed and position on the roadway because she was enjoying a Taco Bell meal.

"Your car is destroyed."

Beethoven on the go

To hear the music, drivers will have to turn down their radios. That's the situation outside of Fujairah, United Arab Emirates, where officials with the Fujairah Fine Arts Academy say they recently installed musical rumble strips on a road leading into the city. As cars cruise over the grooved sections, it sounds like the tires are playing a portion of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony commonly known as "Ode to Joy." According to the academy's director, drivers can experience the music by navigating to the right lane and maintaining 60 mph while driving over the half-mile stretch.



COASTER: COURTESY OF CEDAR POINT; TACO BELL: JULIA KILIAN/PICTURE ALLIANCE VIA GETTY IMAGES; RUMBLE STRIP: BASSAM HATOUM/AP; ILLUSTRATION BY KRIEG BARRIE

THE FORUM

Teaching the virtues

Author-speaker Christopher Perrin on Latin, literature, stick bugs, and the growth of classical education

by LAUREN DUNN

Classical education proponent Christopher Perrin is the co-founder and CEO of Classical Academic Press, a publishing and consulting company that launched ClassicalU.com, a training resource for teachers, and Scholé Academy, which offers online classical education courses. An author, podcaster, and frequent speaker at education conferences, Perrin was previously the founding headmaster at Covenant Christian Academy in Harrisburg, Pa. Here are excerpts of our interview, edited for brevity and clarity.

IN A NUTSHELL, WHAT'S CLASSICAL EDUCATION?

My elevator-speech explanation is that classical education is a tradition we've received that is the liberal arts, the natural sciences, and the great books—the archive of wisdom, of the best ideas collected and preserved by humanity; the good, the true, and the beautiful from wherever we've been able to collect them and harmonize them under the lordship of Christ and Scripture.

YOU SAY THE WORD *CLASSICAL* CAN BE MISUNDERSTOOD?

The term can have different connotations depending on who you're talking to. It can sound elitist. It can sound old and out of date. It might even sound nostalgic and antiquarian. "You should have been born in the 15th century or something, then you'd be happy. You're one of those types."

BUT IT'S STILL A USEFUL TERM?

What we know of education is from what we've experienced over the last 125 years or so. Memorizing facts and material for a weekly or monthly or midterm examination—that's normal to us. But it's not normal if you look back over, say, a 2,000-year period. Modern grading was invented about 130 years ago. Starting around 1890 in the progressive revolution, this new thing usurped and replaced what education was before that. So we're using this word *classical* because it's indicating we're going back to something that had enduring excellence.

PHOTO BY JEFF RAYMOND/GENESIS

DESCRIBE A TYPICAL CLASS AT A CLASSICAL SCHOOL.

High schoolers and sometimes middle schoolers will often be taught at a large table, seated together, to facilitate close reading, debate, and discussion of great texts. In K-6, you might observe students singing all manner of songs pertaining to natural science, Latin vocabulary, historical events and timelines, Bible passages, or catechism Q&As. Children usually begin the study of grammar in the third or fourth grade, typically by learning Latin.

YOU SAY LEARNING VIRTUE IS ALSO CENTRAL. BUT IS VIRTUE SOMETHING THAT CAN BE TAUGHT IN A CLASSROOM?

Virtue is chiefly caught rather than taught. Not only is the teacher a model of virtue, so are those figures studied in history, literature, and Scripture. Selections from Scripture, literature, and history are studied and discussed for the purpose of inspiring and instructing students in the cardinal virtues, academic virtues, and theological virtues.

CLASSICAL ED SEEMS PARTICULARLY POPULAR AMONG CHRISTIANS, YET THE MODEL HAS A SIGNIFICANT BASIS IN GREEK WORKS. WHAT'S THE CONNECTION TO CHRISTIANITY?

The early Christians were, many of them, Greeks and Romans. By the time you get to the 300s, Christianity had overcome the Roman Empire, and so then you have people like Augustine and Basil saying that all truth belongs to God, and anything that's good, true, and beautiful that we've received, even from our Greek and Roman traditions, comes into the Church like jewels placed into the crown of Christ. That's what they believed. Anything that's true, good, and beautiful belongs to God, even if it's been used with corruption.

HAS INTEREST IN THE CLASSICAL EDUCATION MODEL GROWN RECENTLY?

Starting with the 1970s, Christian schools were using secular curricula, then adding a Bible class so that we could have prayer in schools again. But we were still educating the same way.

"You want the student to be full of life, so that their study ... is coming forth like a spring because they have a love and a zeal for the true, the good, and the beautiful."

That's still the case in many Christian schools—they don't differ very much in their curriculum and pedagogy. As the culture is becoming more secular, Christian parents are saying, "Well, I can't do that anymore. So what are my options?" And they're hearing that there are these schools that are classical. They've grown enough that in every major metropolitan area there's one or two classical schools, and a lot of homeschoolers are doing classical education.

DO VOUCHER PROGRAMS AND EDUCATION SAVINGS ACCOUNTS PLAY A ROLE?

Yes, because if we are providing true school choice that way, then more parents can afford to homeschool or enroll their kids in a classical Christian school. We're seeing it happening already, in places like Florida, where there is universal school choice.

HOW COMMON IS CLASSICAL EDUCATION OUTSIDE OF THE UNITED STATES?

Classical Christian education never completely disappeared. It is the inheritance of the Church, and it's starting to reemerge in lots of other countries and cultures. I just came back from a trip to Brazil at one of the first classical Christian conferences in that country. There were 92 schools represented, 700 teachers. It's also reemerging in Africa, Australia, Canada, the U.K., the Netherlands. In China people are finding ways to do it, even if it's in little house churches and house schools.

DOES CLASSICAL EDUCATION HAVE ANY BLIND SPOTS?

Knowledge puffs up, love edifies, and so 1 Corinthians 13 always applies—to every Christian, and to educators. Though my children speak with the tongues of Latin and Greek, but have not love, it will profit them nothing. And they'll be a clanging gong. I saw this when I was a head of school for a while. We were so focused on getting this curriculum right we started to burn out our kids. And they stopped loving the lovely, because we were force-feeding them. If you don't have a culture of Christian love, you're done for.

CLASSICAL SCHOOLS ARE KNOWN FOR ACADEMIC RIGOR, YET YOU STRESS "RESTFUL LEARNING." HOW DO YOU DEFINE THAT?

Rigor, properly defined, is a good thing—if you mean accuracy, precision, clarity, and industry. But rigor for rigor's sake becomes life-killing. I prefer *vigor*, which means "life." You want the student to be full of life, so that their study, even the industry that you see in them, is coming forth like a spring because they have a love and a zeal for the true, the good, and the beautiful. So their work doesn't feel like work sometimes. That's why we emphasize rest, to create a harmony and balance. Rest is associated with the virtue of contemplation—to learn how to receptively gaze and enjoy and contemplate something that's true, good, and beautiful. There's so much to contemplate, especially in the natural world. Have you seen a stick bug? It's a bug that's a stick, or it's a stick that's a bug. When you're 6 years old, this is amazing. It still amazes me. ■

VOICES JANIE B. CHEANEY

Life with dignity

Humiliation is the seed of a glorious bloom

I haven't read any of Lionel Shriver's novels, but she came to my attention years ago when she spoke up about "cultural appropriation." That is, when authors of one race or ethnicity write from the perspective of another. This is seen as not merely inauthentic, but also exploitative. One year at the Brisbane Writers Festival Shriver gave a keynote address called "Fiction and Identity Politics" in which she challenged the legitimacy of cultural appropriation claims—while wearing a sombrero. Not the way to win friends and influence people, perhaps, but it took nerve.

Shriver's nerves are the subject of her latest article for The Free Press, titled "I Lost Control of My Body." After back surgery last summer, she developed Guillain-Barré syndrome, or GBS: "a rare autoimmune disorder, whereby the body attacks its own nervous system and the musculature dissolves." As a result, for months she was completely dependent on others for every bodily function. It was torture to type. She couldn't sit up or even turn over in bed. Once a fitness fanatic who took pride in doing hundreds of sit-ups in a single set, she is now, after months of boring and exhausting therapy, barely able to hobble with a cane. She may yet rejoin the ranks of the mobile, but it's a hard road ahead with uncertain rewards.

Shriver compares her experience with that of a fellow novelist: Hanif Kureishi, whose memoir, *Shattered*, describes a similar swift decline with no hope of recovery. And no discernible purpose. Three years ago, Kureishi was sitting at a table when he blacked out, fell off his chair, pinched his neck, and came to as a permanent quadriplegic. He sees no saving grace in his predicament; *Shattered* is a primal scream against cruel fate.

Though more philosophical, Shriver takes a similar hard-nosed attitude. She has no use for those who submit themselves to divine will: "There's something passive and wussy about lying back and taking it, defeatedly making your peace with an abruptly wretched existence." She's skeptical about gratitude as well. Were she to regain full use of her limbs tomorrow, she'd be deliriously grateful for about 24 hours before slipping back into the heedless acceptance common to most of us. And doesn't constant gratitude admit underlying anxiety, "that at any single moment, wham, everything for which we're so ostentatiously grateful can be taken away"?

I'd like to introduce her to Joni Eareckson Tada, who has managed both immobility and frequent pain almost as long as Shriver has been alive. A less passive, wussy, and defeated soul would be hard to imagine. Still, could any functional person read Shriver's article without a prickle of fear at how vulnerable we all are?

The New York State Assembly recently passed its Medical Assistance in Dying Act, designed to help people in such conundrums make a dignified exit. Dignified, as opposed to dependent on strangers to feed, clothe, and dispose of their bodily waste. I think of dignity often in connection with my husband, now approaching the final stages of Alzheimer's dementia. He can still walk, sit, stand, and feed himself—sometimes even with a fork—but is dependent on me for everything else. It's a mercy that he's not aware of, and could not have foreseen, where he is now. But often, while changing pullups or undressing him for bed, I remind myself: This could be me someday.

Someday, the Lord told Peter, "when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go" (John 21:18). Thus He predicted "by what kind of death [Peter] was to glorify God" (verse 19). If the tradition is true, it's not exactly a "death with dignity." Yet, by what Matthew Henry calls "the strange alchemy of Providence," it is a glorious one.

Christ stretched out His own hands and let strangers take Him where He dreaded to go. He knew what was coming when He prayed, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you" (John 17:1). Glory began with the most ignominious death.

I kneel to towel off my husband's legs after a shower and think of Christ kneeling to wash His disciples' feet. I am obliged to treat Doug with dignity, but God has a greater goal in mind for both of us. If humiliation is the seed of a glorious bloom, how can I complain? ■

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CULTURE

COURTESY OF STUDIO GHIBLI

TRENDING

Beautiful complexity

Popular Japanese anime studio appeals to a new generation with stories that revel in contradiction

by JOHN MAC GHLIONN

We are living in the age of "Ghiblification." On social media, photos of people, pets, skylines, and even breakfast plates are being transformed into scenes from a Studio Ghibli film. These images are bathed in soft pastels, filtered through nostalgia, and alive with quiet magic. AI tools are fueling the trend, but what's truly driving it is hunger. Specifically, a hunger for beauty, gentleness, and the kind of wonder that Ghibli has delivered for 40 years.

Studio Ghibli began in 1985 with an ambitious dream: reviving Japanese animation. The founders named their studio "Ghibli" after an Italian word for desert wind. It was meant to symbolize the spark they hoped to ignite.

"Hayao Miyazaki, Isao Takahata, and Toshio Suzuki formed a visionary trio whose influence reshaped not only Japanese animation but the global storytelling landscape," said Takeo Suzuki, executive director of the Center for Global Education at the University of Tennessee and an expert on Japanese anime. "They elevated anime into a powerful medium capable of addressing complex themes—environmentalism, pacifism, aging, and identity—with emotional depth, artistic integrity, and resilience."

Princess Mononoke

The trio didn't just rattle the industry. They rewrote its future. Over four decades, Ghibli has redefined Japanese animation and created some of the most unforgettable animated films ever made.

At a time when animation often talks down to its audience or packages morality in sterile binaries, Ghibli's stories live in the gray, resist easy answers, and embrace ambiguity. They don't offer answers; they pose questions that linger. What does it mean to be truly alive in a mechanized world? Can war ever be justified? What do we owe each other as human beings?

In *Princess Mononoke*, there are no true villains. In *Spirited Away*, growth happens not through heroism but humility. These are not children's stories. They are human stories, hand-drawn with care, and grounded in reality even when they soar through the fantastical. That's why Ghibli is being reimagined, reposted, and relived by a new generation.

Although Ghibli films are not Christian in origin, their moral imagination frequently reflects a Christian understanding of the human experience. People are never just heroes or villains. They're fractured, capable of both beauty and betrayal—worthy of love, yet in need of grace.

In Ghibli's world, no character is purely evil, and no struggle is purely external. Susan Napier, a professor of literary and cultural studies at Tufts University, says the studio's films are, by design, "morally complex." They "contain →

Lady Eboshi in *Princess Mononoke* (left) and a scene from *The Wind Rises*.

almost no evil characters per se but rather complicated characters with complex stories and motivations."

Napier has spent over a decade researching Japanese anime and comics (manga). She says one of the clearest examples of the unintended consequences often featured in Ghibli stories is Lady Eboshi in *Princess Mononoke*, the formidable leader of the iron foundry known as Tataraba. Napier draws a sharp contrast between Ghibli's approach and Hollywood's tendency toward black-and-white moralizing.

"In a Hollywood film, she would simply be an evil, ruthless character bent on destroying nature for her own pleasure, as exemplified by the arrogant evil big-game hunter Clayton in Disney's *Tarzan*," Napier said. But Eboshi defies that mold. "Eboshi has developed the foundry not because she wanted to destroy nature but to give work and meaning to a variety of society's outcasts." The cost, she notes, is part and parcel of the industrial revolution itself: "Technology offers many benefits to humans but upends and deforms the environment around us."

In other words, Ghibli doesn't ask viewers to root blindly for one side over another. It asks them to pay attention—to see how pride, fear, or love shapes a person's choices. But as Christians, we know that doesn't mean good and evil are relative. They are real, and they matter. What Ghibli gets right is that evil often hides in the ordinary, and good can emerge in the most broken of people.

What Ghibli gets right is that evil often hides in the ordinary, and good can emerge in the most broken of people.

That refusal to simplify is what gives Ghibli its emotional depth. Even in *The Wind Rises*, which follows a young man whose elegant aircraft designs are eventually used for war, viewers aren't given a clean verdict. Instead, they are asked to wrestle with the reality unfolding before them: The planes are beautiful. The consequences are horrific. Is it wrong to build something sublime if it will later be used for destruction? Where Disney seeks to reassure, Ghibli encourages viewers to reckon with and recognize that, more often than not, there are no easy answers to profound questions.

And then there is flight, which appears repeatedly in Ghibli films—not just for visual effect, but as something far more personal. For the trio raised in the shadow of war, flight carries the weight of memory and the ache of escape. Their aircraft aren't just machines; they're conduits of emotion, vessels of grief, freedom, and guilt. In many ways, flight encapsulates everything Ghibli stands for: love and loss, progress and nostalgia, escape and return. A character takes flight not simply to flee but to understand the world from above, to see its contradictions more clearly. To dream with one foot still planted on the ground. ■

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BOOKS

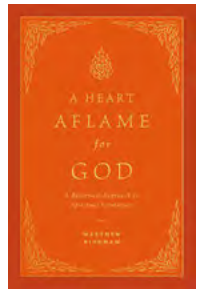
Heart and head united

A defense of the Reformed tradition's spiritual formation

by JAMES R. WOOD

Reformed theology has taken a beating as of late as some prominent Protestants have directly charged the Reformed tradition with an intellectualism that reduces humans to "brains on a stick" who only require doctrine and worldview training. Alongside this direct attack on Reformed spirituality, there has been a surge of interest in "spiritual formation," championed by figures like Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, and, more recently, John Mark Comer.

While these thinkers are less focused on the Reformed tradition than on evangelicalism more broadly, they aim to address what Richard Lovelace has called the "sanctification gap" in contemporary Protestant piety. But some of the most popular approaches to spiritual formation promote an eclectic spirituality that collects practices from various traditions with inadequate theological discernment. Christians in the Reformed camp need to recognize that many of these practices are at odds with their convictions. Matthew C. Bingham's *A Heart Aflame for God* (Crossway, 368 pp.) helps recover authentic Reformed spiritual formation.



A Heart Aflame for God
MATTHEW C. BINGHAM

Why is it important to retrieve a distinctly Reformed spirituality? First, evangelicalism itself has been profoundly shaped by the Reformed tradition. Bingham sees much that is commendable in evangelicalism's renewed focus on spiritual formation, but too many gurus diverge from the Biblically grounded spirituality of the Reformers and the English Puritans.

Second, as Bingham insists, we shouldn't separate the Reformed understanding of the gospel from its view of how the gospel is applied in believers' lives. He urges those who believe the Reformed teaching on the gospel to consider that the tradition may also be right about spirituality. The Reformed convictions about spiritual formation are grounded in God's once-for-all work in Christ and the ongoing work of the Spirit, yet formation also requires active, conscious work on the part of believers. This process flows from our union with Christ, centers on the orientation of the heart, aims at Christ-likeness and communion with God, and employs divinely appointed means. This last point marks a sharp contrast with much of the contemporary literature, which often encourages a DIY approach—grabbing spiritual practices from any tradition so long as they seem to "work."

Bingham says Reformed spirituality is driven by three interrelated emphases: word-centrality, Biblical simplicity, and the heart's engagement through the mind. These arose as responses to the errors of medieval spirituality, which in large part had become overly external,

COURTESY OF PHOENIX SEMINARY

complex, and formal—too often encouraging nominal faith marked by lip service rather than heartfelt devotion.

The Reformers' approach to spirituality, which Bingham calls the "Reformation triangle," centered on Scripture, meditation, and prayer: "Taken together, these three can be conceived as a conversation between the believer and God: we hear from God through his word, we reflect on what we've heard in meditation, and we then respond to God in prayer." Protestants believed word-centric piety was revealed in Scripture itself, and classical Protestant spiritual formation was always aimed at communion with God and never considered a mere acquisition of knowledge. Historical analysis easily dispels the idea that the word-centered approach to spiritual formation had a deadening effect on the religious affections of laypeople. Furthermore, the inclusion of meditation and prayer also refutes the caricature of Reformed spirituality as merely intellectual.

The Reformed triangle can be described in another triad of terms: literacy, simplicity, and sincerity. The commitment to meaningful engagement with God through the Bible led Protestants to promote literacy among the laity and to establish schools for all children. Reformed Christians avoided wordless mysticism, seeking thoughtful encounters with God through the Bible. "Simplicity" entails not binding consciences by prescribing duties that go beyond Scripture. "Sincerity" refers to heartfelt devotion, opposing any approach that encourages vain repetition that honors God with the lips but not the heart.

However, Bingham's work could do a better job recognizing how form can aid formation. Scripture itself gives us prayers—the Lord's Prayer and the Psalter, for instance—to which we join our hearts and voices. The historic Reformed practice of psalm singing is itself a form of prayer. Our contemporary allergy to repetition overlooks how such forms have shaped believers.

This oversight also connects to another underdeveloped area in the book: community and corporate worship. Though Bingham addresses this briefly in the appendix (and a short chapter on relationships), he could have integrated the communal dimensions of spiritual formation throughout the book. For instance, corporate prayer and the public reading and hearing of Scripture should have more prominence in the text. For most of church history, reading Scripture was not primarily a private act, but a corporate affair. Given our contemporary fragmentation of church life—exacerbated by car culture and urban designs that isolate Christians from their local churches—this deserves sustained reflection. Just as Bingham notes our "nature deficiency" compared with early moderns, we might speak of our community deficiency.

Bingham's central aim is to take up the concerns of the spiritual formation movement ... while avoiding some of the common pitfalls exhibited in prominent contemporary proponents.

The second half of the book offers rich applications of the Reformation triangle. The discussions of spiritual warfare, backsliding, the interplay between Scripture and nature, and the dangers of anxious introspection are particularly helpful. Readers interested in small groups will find the Puritan stress on the art of "conference"—deliberate conversation about spiritual things with other Christians—especially instructive. And readers uneasy with Reformed philosopher James K.A. Smith's shift away from word-based piety will appreciate the book's critique of Smith's idea that "the way to the heart is through the body."

Bingham's central aim is to take up the concerns of the spiritual formation movement—especially the need to address evangelicalism's "sanctification gap"—while avoiding some of the common pitfalls exhibited in prominent contemporary proponents. He wants to show that Scripture-based, historically Reformed resources are more than sufficient for the task. He successfully demonstrates that Reformed Christians don't need to look outside their own tradition to find a coherent and rich account of spiritual growth. We are not left to cobble together a spiritual life from miscellaneous practices. We can draw deeply from our own heritage in the pursuit of growing in the knowledge and love of God. ■

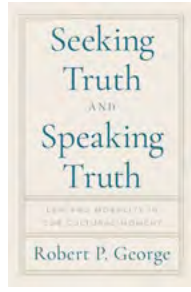
BOOKS

The full Robby

Essays by America's leading conservative philosopher

by FRANCIS J. BECKWITH

Robert P. George, the McCormick professor of jurisprudence and director and founder of the James Madison Program, at Princeton University, is arguably the most influential conservative intellectual in America today. Since the early 1990s, he has distinguished himself in a variety of fields of academic inquiry—law, politics, philosophy, and theology—in addressing a diversity of contested social, moral, and jurisprudential questions that often overlap. These issues include abortion, same-sex marriage, religious liberty, constitutional law, and academic freedom. (George also happens to be a very good banjo and guitar player, a devotee of country, folk, and bluegrass music).



Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth
ROBERT P. GEORGE

George has also distinguished himself as a man of impeccable personal integrity. In his careful and deliberate manner, a practice that is becoming increasingly rare among public-facing academics, George has not hesitated to criticize his fellow conservatives when he thinks they've gotten things wrong or defend liberal colleagues who he thinks have been treated unjustly. You may find yourself disagreeing with George, as I have on the rare occasion, but you cannot help but admire the intellectual and moral virtues that he has cultivated and consistently practiced over his illustrious career. A devout Catholic, he has collaborated with like-minded evangelicals, Jews, Muslims, Latter-day Saints, and unbelievers in his research and work in public policy. I know many professors, pastors, and wonks who part ways with George on a variety of matters, but I know of none who do not like him.

If you can read one book that gives you a sense of the depth and width of George's interests and character, it is his latest tome: *Seeking Truth and Speaking Truth* (Encounter, 312 pp.). A collection of previously published essays, some of which were co-authored by colleagues and former students, this book gives you the full "Robby" (as he's known to his friends). Divided into four parts, the topic of the book's first section is the human person, with chapters on human dignity, the soul, natural law, medical ethics, and the beginning and the end of human life. (George, a sanctity of life champion, served on President George W. Bush's bioethics council.) Part 2 focuses on law and political philosophy. Its chapters cover the Supreme Court's flawed reasoning on same-sex marriage and abortion, American constitutionalism and the common good, Catholicism and American culture, and the increasing rejection of classical liberalism on the American right.

Part 3 addresses issues in culture and education. In this more topically capa-

HANDOUT/FACEBOOK

George has distinguished himself as a man of impeccable personal integrity.

cious section, the chapters cover the morality of free markets, campus illiberalism and ideological orthodoxy, Christianity and paganism, Catholic doctrine and Judaism, and gnostic liberalism.

In Part 4—"Seekers of Truth and Bearers of Witness"—George honors five historically important figures: Alexander Solzhenitsyn (Soviet dissident), Heinrich Heine (19th-century Jewish poet who predicted the rise of Nazism), Joseph Raz (Israeli legal philosopher at Oxford), Jonathan Sacks (chief rabbi of the British Commonwealth), and Ralph Stanley (American bluegrass artist).

Anyone familiar with George as a person will see immediately how each of these figures represents a dimension of George's own character: Solzhenitsyn is the man of integrity who refuses to acquiesce to tyranny; Heine is the man of letters who can see the telos of cultural forms and knows precisely where they will lead; Raz is the careful teacher and scholar of jurisprudence who loves the truth and is committed to the intellectual excellence of his students; Sacks is the brilliant and devoted man of God who is as conversant with Scripture and tradition as he is with politics, law, and the vicissitudes of culture; and Stanley is the accomplished musician and performer who develops his craft and voice from the songs that arose from the American experience. That's pretty much the full Robby. ■

BOOKS

Changing gospel music

The music and ministry of Andraé Crouch

by ARSENIO ORTEZA

No contemporary musician has needed a comprehensive biography more than the late Christian-music pioneer Andraé Crouch. Now, thanks to Robert Darden and Stephen Newby, that book has arrived. *Soon and Very Soon* (Oxford University Press, 440 pp.) is really two books in one. One is Crouch's life story, written mostly by Darden. (Full disclosure: Darden was my editor at another outlet, and he quotes from a 2015 WORLD piece of mine.) The other is Newby's song-by-song, musicological breakdown of almost every album that Crouch recorded. The former relies on in-depth interviews with the musicians who played with Crouch throughout his career, the latter on Newby's knowledge of the theory at work in black-gospel music in general and in Crouch's work in particular.

Soon and Very Soon
ROBERT F. DARDEN & STEPHEN M. NEWBY

Crouch began playing piano at 11, shortly after his father, a preacher, had asked God to give him the "gift of music." In high school, he led a group called the COGICs (after his denomination, the Church of God in Christ). In his 20s, he signed with Light Records and became one of the label's bestselling acts, releasing a series of increasingly sophisticated gospel albums that united fans of black gospel and Jesus music alike. When his solo career wound down in the mid-1980s, in part from a drug bust in which charges were dropped, Crouch landed high-profile gigs with pop stars like Michael Jackson and Madonna. He died in 2015 at 72.

Soon and Very Soon contains many interesting details—some small (Crouch's adding an "é" to his given name, Andra), some not so small (his love for Steely Dan, his unrequited love for Tramaine Davis [later Hawkins]), and some large (his budget-busting perfectionism in the studio; his spontaneous, Spirit-led approach onstage; and his seeming inability to stop writing songs rooted in genuine evangelical zeal).

The book's strength lies in its persuasive way of fleshing out its implicit theses: that it's impossible to understand the history of popular Christian music apart from Crouch's role in it and that the Christian music industry as we know it might never have existed without him. The chapter examining his triumphant performance at the watershed evangelical conference Explo '72 is itself a revelation.

But apparently no one at Oxford University Press proofread the manuscript. The numerous errors in syntax and grammar (mostly in the densely technical song-analysis sections) needn't deter the curious or the faithful, but if even Oxford won't uphold standards anymore, who will?

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PHILOSOPHY OF GOOD AND EVIL

The Kingdom of Cain

ANDREW KLAVAN

ZONDERVAN, 272 PAGES

Can darkness, evil, and pain teach us anything about God or about ourselves, the only creatures on this earth to have been made in His image? Crime novelist and political commentator Andrew Klavan believes they can. Klavan grounds this wide-ranging study in a Biblical account of fratricide (Cain and Abel), a Russian novel about a man who commits a heinous, remorseless act (*Crime and Punishment*), a nihilistic German philosopher (Nietzsche), three American films about psychotic killers (*Rope, Psycho,* and *Halloween*), and three shocking, era-defining murder cases that embody the very nature of evil (Pierre Lacenaire, Leopold and Loeb, and Ed Gein). He links these macabre tales together in a way that simultaneously exposes man's depravity and his moral sense. Many reflections on the problem of pain highlight the fact that our perspective differs from that of God and that, as a result, we are unable to see the bigger picture. Klavan accepts that analysis, and then complicates it. The journey Klavan takes us on is at once thrilling and uncomfortable. It cuts very close and does not allow us to escape unscathed. Which of us can say that he has never felt the confusion and anger of Cain? That he has never wanted to silence that inner voice that accuses him for his lack of faith or joy or gratitude? That he has not wanted to put himself in the place of God? *—Louis Markos**

CHURCH AND STATE

Cross Purposes

JONATHAN RAUCH

YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 168 PAGES

Jonathan Rauch, author and activist, begins this book with a confession: "The Dumbest Thing I Ever Wrote." The confession is addressed to Mark, his roommate at Yale and the first to shake up his prejudice against Christians. Mark was consistently generous and long-suffering throughout their college years, remaining a good friend even after Rauch published a 2003 *Atlantic* article in which he "joyfully celebrated what I called apatheism"—the growing disregard of religion. He thought religion was nothing but a backward-looking source of contention. What a difference two decades can make. In *Cross Purposes*, Rauch recognizes that Christianity is the "load-bearing wall of American civic life" and our democracy rests on three major Christian principles: (1) Don't be afraid; (2) be like Jesus, especially in His concern for the lowly; and (3) forgive each other. These precepts made classical liberalism possible, which in turn guided our Founding Fathers. Despite his admiration for Christ, and for Christians like Tim Keller (to whom this book is dedicated), Rauch remains a gay, atheist Jew. From that perspective, he offers some useful critiques. His primary targets are "Thin Christianity," or the mainstream church that, by embracing progressivism, has strangled its prophetic voice. On the other hand, "Sharp Christianity" has yoked itself to right-wing politics and projects a gospel of fear. Casting about for a more compatible model, Rauch settles on the Latter-day Saints. This isn't as surprising as it may seem: Mormonism was made in the USA and incorporates American optimism and can-do spirit (seen in its reinterpretation of the Fall). Rauch admires the LDS' structure, benevolence, and willingness to adapt to social change, while ignoring or not recognizing that Mormonism is not Christianity. Still, as an outsider, his observations are interesting, and at times constructive. *—Janie B. Cheaney*

CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY

Called To Be Friends, Called To Serve

PAUL MARSHALL

CASCADE BOOKS, 156 PAGES

John Perkins grew up poor and black in a broken family in segregated Mississippi, and his older brother, a World War II veteran, was shot and killed by a cop outside a movie theater. Howard Ahmanson grew up as an only child in an influential and wealthy white family in Los Angeles. Soon after his father's death, Howard was misdiagnosed and confined to a psychiatric facility. Later he came to faith in Christ through the Jesus Movement and reading C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. In this book, Paul Marshall tells the tale of Perkins and Ahmanson's unlikely friendship. Each man's story is fascinating for how Christ came into his life and brought remarkable transformation. Ahmanson was serving as a volunteer with the Orange County Rescue Mission in Southern California and called on Perkins for wisdom about effective ministry with people in need. In Christ, Perkins and Ahmanson have shown how friendships can transcend differences in race and nationality and conflict over opinions. This story is especially timely when our nation is torn apart by divisions around race, economics, and politics. *—Russ Pulliam* →

**Find a full review of this book at wng.org*

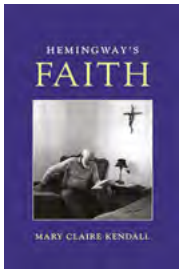
LITERARY CRITICISM

Hemingway's Faith

MARY CLAIRE KENDALL

ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD, 256 PAGES

Even a cursory examination of Ernest Hemingway's greatest novels and his spare, plainly spoken, dialogue-heavy short stories will find them rife with references direct and indirect to Roman Catholicism. It is not subtle, and it is, if not ubiquitous, pervasive. Even so, most Hemingway biographers and scholars have paid it little attention. Mary Claire Kendall, however, in this rich, well-researched, but somewhat clumsily constructed biography, has attempted to present the life of the author as a distinctly Catholic one. In his stories and novels, Ernest Hemingway depicted people who have been through the horrors of war or the disappointments of life and somehow arrived at a code of stoic dignity, self-restraint, and honor despite the inevitable brutality of experience and the tragic emptiness of the world. He showed a whole generation how to act like a man despite life's tragedies, and he became a father figure of sorts: It was not only his children who called him "Papa." Numerous testimonies indicate that he practiced the faith somewhat consistently over many years, but sometimes Kendall seems to make Catholicism as central to Hemingway's life as it is to her own, interpolating her own devotion into moments of the author's life where his is not evident. Even so, Kendall's case is substantial and finally convincing. *—James Matthew Wilson**



THEOLOGY AND STORYTELLING

On Magic & Miracles

MARIAN A. JACOBS

B&H BOOKS, 320 PAGES

The subtitle of this book is *A Theological Guide To Discerning Fictional Magic*, but the author does more than take a deep dive into modern works of fantasy. She devotes half of her book to surveying what the Bible actually has to say about angels and demons, magic and miracles, the spiritual realm and the occult. Though readers eager to hear what she has to say about Harry Potter may want to skip the first half of her book, I would encourage them, as Jacobs does herself in her introduction, to be patient and work alongside her as she builds a foundation for assessing the dangers, real or imagined, of the ever-expanding fantasy genre. After surveying the supernatural worldview of the Bible, Jacobs establishes a vocabulary and a methodology for assessing fantasy. She proposes five questions to help readers discern whether a work is appropriate for Christian consumption or should be avoided: (1) What is the source of the magic? (2) What is the goal of the magic user? (3) What is the heart posture of the magic user? (4) What is the setting of the magic? 5) What magical methodology is used? *—L.M.**

PARENTING

The Tech Exit

CLARE MORELL

FORUM BOOKS, 256 PAGES

Clare Morell offers compelling advice for parenting kids in a screen-saturated world: Don't. Her book provides a framework for limiting technology use and thriving while doing it. She punctuates her research with stories of real-life parents protecting their kids from digital overload. Morell interviews a child psychiatrist who saw a 50% reduction of symptoms in 80% of her patients after a screen fast and an optometrist treating 8-year-olds for dry eyes, a condition normally found in seniors. She debunks assumptions about the effectiveness of moderate screen usage and parental control apps. Her research builds to a "tech exit" recommendation: Use the FEAST model to Find other families, Explain why we avoid screens, Adopt alternatives, Set up digital accountability, and Trade screens for responsibilities. According to Morell, instead of letting screens facilitate a child's relationships inside and outside school, home life should provide a counter pressure for building real-life friendships, channeling entertainment, and inviting responsibility. Outside of the home, she argues, churches, schools, and the legislature can do more to protect against digital costs. Regardless of parents' smartphone convictions, Morell's practical advice starts simple: Take a break. *—Addalai Bouchoc*

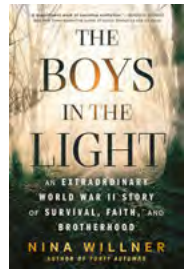
BIOGRAPHY

The Boys in the Light

NINA WILLNER

DUTTON, 384 PAGES

Three boys came of age at the onset of World War II in vastly different worlds. When America entered the war, Elmer Hovland, a Minnesota farming boy, and Sammy DeCola, an Italian restaurateur-in-training from Massachusetts, landed in the same Army unit. Across the ocean, Eddie Willner's world is upended as his German Jewish family flees for their lives under the rise of Nazism. Eddie finds himself fighting for survival in Auschwitz and Buchenwald. For author Nina Willner, a former U.S. Army intelligence officer, the story is personal, since Eddie is her father and many of the characters in her book became like uncles. This personal connection lends to rich detail as the book oscillates between the boys' parallel experiences and the historical context of Nazi Germany and America's role in the war. When the boys' destinies merge, Elmer and Sammy witness the depth of evil they fought against. It's a heroic story and a compelling picture of humble men from different walks whose faith, sacrifice, and perseverance helped them push back against one of the darkest regimes of history. *—Mary Jackson* ■



***Find a full review of this book at wng.org**

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Anna Rose Johnson

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Seasons of growth

Two middle-grade reads about transformations

by KRISTIN CHAPMAN

Anna Rose Johnson's book *The Star That Always Stays* was a runner-up for WORLD's 2022 children's fiction book of the year. In her latest book, *The Blossoming Summer* (Holiday House, 288 pp.), Johnson continues her trend of building heart-warming stories around heroines with Native American heritages.

Thirteen-year-old Rosemary spent the last three years living with her aunt and uncle while her parents attempted to find better jobs elsewhere in England. The spread of World War II throughout Europe, though, spurs her father to relocate the entire family across the sea to the safety of his estranged mother's home in northern Wisconsin.

Rosemary is delighted to be reunited with her family and has high hopes for their future in America, but she soon discovers that reconnecting with her two younger brothers and parents is not as simple as she had hoped. When Grandmother recruits Rosemary to help her cultivate a prize-winning garden in time for the county fair, Rosemary sees the perfect opportunity to get her family to work together—and hopefully convince her father to put down permanent roots.

Although the brewing conflict within the family occasionally feels forced and the character development is at times a bit wooden, Johnson sprinkles the text with faith references and shows a broken family healing together. Rosemary experiences a blossoming of her own as she embraces her Anishinaabe heritage and realizes that you don't have to be a perfect family to still reap rich rewards.

The Blossoming Summer
ANNA ROSE JOHNSON

Never Curse the Rain
S.J. DAHLSTROM

Tween and teen boys looking for ways to beat the heat during the dog days of summer will find refreshment in S.J. Dahlstrom's *Never Curse the Rain* (Paul Dry Books, 192 pp.). Wilder, 13, and his cousin Frankie, 16, are spending their spring break at Papa's West Texas ranch. Frankie's city-kid ways contrast starkly with life in the harsh Texas frontier, and his thoughtless actions trigger a wildfire during drought season. In the aftermath of the fire, Papa models a magnanimous attitude, noting that "blame is worthless as a west wind," even as he suffers the costly consequences of Frankie's foolishness.

Like other books in the Wilder Good series, the boys find adventure and more character-building opportunities, and Dahlstrom intertwines sage advice throughout the plot that subtly instructs boys how to be capable, strong men. He also builds respect and understanding as his characters consider the beauty of God's order and design in creation, as well as the proper stewardship of resources on a ranch.

Some of the dialogue intermingles discussion about omens, myths, and folklore, and there is matter-of-fact talk about bull anatomy and behavior. But by book's end, Frankie has undergone a transformation, and young readers would do well to heed the lessons he has learned. ■

DANIEL JOHNSON

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Hope amid hurdles

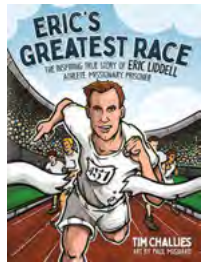
by KRISTIN CHAPMAN

Hope Comes To Stay

CLARISSA MOLL

HARVEST KIDS, 32 PAGES

When Lela's father unexpectedly dies, someone gives her a blue teddy bear to comfort her. Bear goes everywhere with Lela as she processes her grief and adjusts to life without her father. As the seasons pass, Lela, her mother, and baby brother find that joy slowly returns to their home. Lela also learns how grief is often intermingled with happy memories, courage, and love. Gretchen Ellen Powers' soothing watercolor sketches reflect the book's message. In a note to caregivers, Moll, whose husband Rob died after a hiking accident in 2019, discusses ways to walk children through the grieving process while looking for markers of hope: "The sun that sets, shrouding our earth in night, rises faithfully each morning, an awe-inspiring testimony to the glorious new mercies God provides even in our darkest moments." ***Ages 4–8***



Eric's Greatest Race

TIM CHALLIES

HARVEST KIDS, 128 PAGES

While many families know the story of Eric Liddell from the film *Chariots of Fire*, Tim Challies hopes to introduce a new generation to the inspiring runner and missionary through a graphic novel format. The book opens with Liddell's early childhood in China and his school years in Scotland where his love for rugby and running blossomed. While he trained, God opened up opportunities for Liddell to share about his faith, culminating with his record-setting performance at the 1924 Olympics. But his life's most important work would come later through his missionary service in China and his faithful witness in a Japanese-run internment camp during World War II. The book's visually engaging pages, with art by Paul Mignard, present Liddell's story in an inviting way that will especially appeal to reluctant readers. ***Ages 8–12***

Dragons and Desperados

JONNY JIMISON

RABBIT ROOM PRESS, 224 PAGES

This third volume in The Dragon Lord Saga picks up where the story left off after *The River Fox*. For those who have not read the first two volumes, the book opens with a short review, but this reviewer was still lost for the first quarter of the book and would recommend reading the books in order. In the latest installment, the Ozai brothers have kidnapped Marco and his friends, which spurs Scout the talking horse to take on a rescue mission with help from a desperado named Weepy Bob. Meanwhile, the secretive Princess Robin escapes mutinous bandits while attempting to stop the return of the Dragon Lord—all culminating in a cliff-hanger ending. The fast-paced story's subtle humor and graphic novel format will have strong appeal with boys who enjoy epic fantasy reads. ***Ages 8–12***

Jesus Moments: Jonah

ALISON MITCHELL

THE GOOD BOOK COMPANY, 32 PAGES

Author Alison Mitchell continues to expand the Jesus Moments series, this time turning to the Book of Jonah to highlight how the Old Testament prophet points to Jesus and God's loving rescue plan. As Mitchell recounts Jonah's story, illustrator Noah Warnes incorporates a symbolic anchor to alert children to moments in which Jonah foreshadows Christ, including when Jonah slept amid the storm at sea and how he spent three days in the belly of a whale. The book also addresses Jonah's anger with God after God forgave and spared the people of Nineveh. While the conclusion of the story helpfully reviews the Jesus moments in Jonah's story and shows the ways in which Jesus is far greater than Jonah, some of the analysis would have benefited from more Scripture references to reinforce the message. ***Ages 4–7***

QUEST

THREE BOOKS THAT SHAPED MY THINKING

The doubtful origins of Islam

by A.S. IBRAHIM

To what extent can we trust Muslim sources in their depictions of Islam's origins and its prophet? For generations, Muslims have wholeheartedly embraced an account derived from their sacred texts, including the Quran and the Hadith. Are these texts reliable? Do they provide authentic information dating to seventh-century Arabia, where Muhammad is said to have received divine revelations through the angel Gabriel? These questions sparked my curiosity and guided my research across two Ph.D.s focused on Islam, its history, and its texts.

Rather than taking its stories at face value, we should scrutinize the reliability and authenticity of this religion followed by over 1.8 billion people. Three books—one by a medieval Muslim authority and two by modern secular scholars—shaped my perspective, leading me to question the traditional narrative of Islam and the major claims advanced by Muslims.

MUSLIM TESTIMONY

Abu Bakr ibn Abi Dawud al-Sijistani (d. 928), a prominent Sunni scholar, was renowned for his expertise in Islamic traditions. His *The Book of Codices*, parts of which have been translated into English, examines competing Quranic texts, challenging the Muslim claim that the Quran is preserved without any alteration. His book shows that originally Muslims acknowledged multiple Quranic versions, with Muhammad's companions disputing the authenticity of various copies, each differing significantly. Abu Bakr cites a tradition claiming Muhammad dictated Quranic verses to a scribe who took liberties in writing, resulting in textual variations. He also reports that Hajjaj, a ruthless Muslim

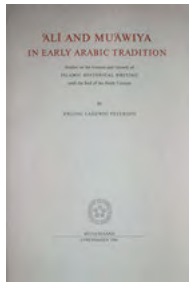
PHOTO BY DAVID HARRISON/GENESIS

governor (d. 714), altered the Quranic text to his preference and enforced its circulation across Muslim territories. This testimony from a Muslim authority raises doubts about the Quran's so-called perfect preservation. While today's Muslims view it as a divine text untouched by human influence, Muslim sources and traditions reveal evidence of textual variations, disputed versions, and documented alterations. These are not charges made up by non-Muslims, but testimonies attributed to Muslim authorities, indicating the Quranic text evolved over time, with reports of lost verses and sections.

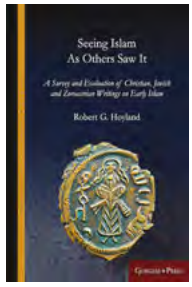
FICTITIOUS HISTORIES

Erling Ladewig Petersen's 1964 study, *Ali and Mu'awiya in Early Arabic Tradition*, demonstrates that supposed authentic historical narratives of Islam's origins are largely ideological forgeries crafted to advance sociopolitical and sectarian agendas favored by Muslim authors. These accounts, documented at least two centuries after the events, are religiopolitical rather than factual. Despite present Muslim claims that devout chroniclers accurately recorded history as it occurred, Petersen's analysis reveals that these writers were less concerned with recounting actual events than addressing contemporary social and political issues. They crafted narratives to support the agendas of caliphs who commissioned these works to legitimize their rule.

Petersen illustrates how Sunni and Shiite writers portrayed the same historical events differently, shaped by their religious and political commitments. Due to their late composition and numerous contradictions driven by sectarian and political biases, these texts provide no reliable means to discern what truly happened in early Islam, leaving us with a fragmented remnant of an obliterated past. Petersen's work broadened my horizons and prompted me to examine Islamic traditions more closely. The deeper I dug, the more convinced I became that much of Islam's history is a fabrication. While the testimonies of Muslim sources about the Quran had already made me skeptical of its reliability, a deeper investigation into Islam's traditions solidified my belief that much of the historical record preserved in Muslim writings is largely forged.



Ali and Mu'awiya in Early Arabic Tradition
ERLING LADEWIG PETERSEN



Seeing Islam As Others Saw It
ROBERT G. HOYLAND

CHRISTIAN SOURCES AND EARLY ISLAM

The internal and external limitations of Arabic Muslim sources make it hard to reconstruct a coherent account of Islam's origin. Consequently, many modern scholars advocate consulting non-Muslim sources from the seventh to 10th centuries to better understand its beginnings. Robert Hoyland's *Seeing Islam As Others Saw It* (1997) is a pioneering work in this field that compiles and analyzes accounts from Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian, and other non-Muslim writers, all often neglected in discussions surrounding Islam's emergence. These texts written in languages such as Greek, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, and Latin form a marvelous corpus of external perspectives on early Islam's rise and spread, offering valuable insights into how neighboring communities perceived the new religion, its political expansion, and its social impact.

Many non-Muslims portrayed Muhammad as a deceiving preacher, false prophet, and Arabian warlord leading nomadic invasions into Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian territories. Hoyland's work remains a seminal contribution to Islamic studies, providing a balanced, source-driven perspective on Islam's origins and its reception among neighboring cultures, enriched by a cross-cultural lens.

Collectively, these three books challenge the notion that the Quran is superior to other religious scriptures, revealing significant issues of corruption and distortion within it. They also highlight internal and external inconsistencies in Muslim historical accounts, suggesting that much of what is believed about Islam's origins may be a constructed narrative, with the true historical reality largely obscured. ■

—A.S. Ibrahim is a professor at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and is the author of many books, including A Concise Guide to Islam *(2023)*

MOVIE

Superman

by COLLIN GARBARINO

Rated PG-13 • Theaters

Warner Bros. has a lot riding on the new Superman movie. The studio's comic book franchise, called the DC Extended Universe, died in 2023 with a series of box-office flops panned by critics and ignored by audiences. Hoping to revitalize their ailing property, Warner Bros. hired James Gunn, director of the Guardians of the Galaxy trilogy, to oversee a cinematic relaunch of some of the world's most iconic superheroes. Gunn himself took the helm on the first movie in the reboot, *Superman*.

The film drops us straight into the action. No laborious origin story here. "Metahumans," people with superpowers, have roamed the earth for 300 years. It's been 30 years since Ma and Pa Kent adopted an alien child they named Clark. And it's been three years since Clark started playing the hero in Metropolis, living a double life as a mild-mannered reporter. He and Lois Lane have already begun their romance that's tinged with more than a little journalistic rivalry.

Superman had recently stopped a war between two small nations, saving countless lives. But many people, including government leaders, are questioning whether it's a good thing to let the world's most powerful metahuman unilaterally interfere in geopolitics. Lex Luthor is more than happy to find a way to rein him in.

With this incarnation of Superman, James Gunn recaptures some of the bright, hopeful tone of the classic Superman comics and movies. No dark, angsty Man of Steel here. David Corenswet plays Superman and Clark Kent as a fresh-faced idealist whose overriding purpose is to protect life. It's a sincere and entirely likable interpretation of the character. I only wish we would have gotten to see more of his Clark Kent. The actors who play Lois Lane, Jimmy Olsen, and Lex Luthor feel so right in each of their roles. Especially Nicholas Hoult, whose Lex might be the best version of the character to date.

The overall vibe of the movie is very traditional, respecting the old comics as well as the Christopher Reeves version of the hero. But Gunn also takes some big swings. The biggest might be the inclusion of the superdog Krypto.

When I first heard the superdog was making his live-action cinematic debut, I was skeptical. Part of Gunn's charm is that he doesn't shy away from the silliness of the comic book genre, but I was

COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. PICTURES

afraid he might push the silliness too far. The mischievous pup, however, gives us some nice comedic moments while also serving as a linchpin for the story.

Another big swing that pays off is the introduction of the so-called Justice Gang, made up of Hawkgirl, Mister Terrific, and the Green Lantern Guy Gardner. These other heroes help flesh out this world that's already overrun with metahumans without bloating the film. Guy Gardner is one of my least favorite comic book characters, but Nathan Fillion's portrayal made me almost like him.

Despite its classic feel, the movie contains some crass moments, which is something of a hallmark for Gunn. But Gunn's respect for Superman's earnestness seems to keep the crudities in check.

Despite being created by a couple of Jewish kids in the 1930s, the Superman character has often left itself open to Christian interpretations. And as with some of his other movies, Gunn lets glimpses of his Roman Catholic upbringing peek through his filmmaking in *Superman*. Superman has godlike powers, but he proudly joins himself to humanity. Moreover, he has his own metaphorical death and resurrection in this movie, and we even get a superhero version of the Harrowing of Hell, the theological idea that Jesus freed captives from Hades between the time of His crucifixion and resurrection.

Lex Luthor, on the other hand, seems patterned on Satan from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. He's consumed with envy to the point of self-destruction, refusing to bend his knee to anyone. Gunn makes him the brilliant leader of a techno cult, which adds some sly critique of Silicon Valley.

At its heart, this Superman film offers a conservative message to our relativistic society. We've been told that it matters who we *think* we are. We value intentions, inward dispositions, and self-identifications. Pa Kent reminds us, "Your actions make you who you are." What good are all our talents, abilities, and aspirations if we fail to do good with them? ■

PARAMOUNT ANIMATION

MOVIE

Smurfs

by COLLIN GARBARINO

Rated PG • Theaters

Over the last 12 years, moviegoers have suffered through three mediocre Smurfs films. Now Paramount adds a fourth, except this time it's a musical.

In *Smurfs*, the evil wizard Razamel—younger brother of the Smurfs' archenemy Gargamel—is trying to get his hands on a sentient magic book that's been hiding in Smurf Village. Meanwhile, Smurfette is helping No Name Smurf figure out what his special role will be in their community. After all, every Smurf needs a job. Smurfette and No Name accidentally alert Razamel to their location, which leads to Papa Smurf's abduction. The Smurf gang must leave the village and brave new worlds to free Papa and stop Razamel.

Don't go see *Smurfs* for the songs. The melodies and lyrics are instantly forgettable. The storyline doesn't fare much better. Tracking down Papa requires the Smurfs to take side trips into the "real world," which serve no real point. They meet Papa's brother "Ken" Smurf. Is this blatant disregard for Smurf naming conventions meant to be funny? Ken warns them that Papa has been hiding a not-so-terrible secret.

Most of the Smurfs are miscast. Pop singer Rihanna, with her smoky rasp, makes for a terrible Smurfette. John Goodman isn't much better as Papa. And Nick Offerman as Ken feels like a gimmick. Also, the film relies heavily on impolite humor, regularly having the Smurfs substitute the word *smurf* for expletives.

But worst of all, *Smurfs* unironically offers two conflicting messages. First, everyone needs to find his innate talent to live a fulfilled life. Second, everyone can choose his own identity. Which is it?

When filmmakers rely on clichés rather than craft, this is the kind of movie we get.

MOVIE

Sketch

by JOSEPH HOLMES

ANGEL STUDIOS

Rated PG • Theaters

G.K. Chesterton once said, "Fairy tales do not give the child his first idea of a bogey. What fairy tales give the child is his first clear idea of the possible defeat of bogey. The baby has known the dragon intimately ever since he had an imagination. What the fairy tale provides for him is a St. George to kill the dragon."

I thought about these lines as I watched the new film from Emmy-winner and outspoken Christian Tony Hale. *Sketch* is a brilliant kids film about battling monsters and facing scary emotions in a healthy way. The movie follows a young girl named Amber Wyatt (Bianca Belle) who is battling dark thoughts as she mourns the death of her mother. To cope, she draws scary scenes full of monstrous creatures in a notebook. But she still struggles to connect with her brother Jack (Kue Lawrence) and father Taylor (Hale).

When her sketchbook falls into a magic pond, the creatures come to life and threaten to destroy the town, forcing the family to band together to defeat these dangerous manifestations of their grief.

Sketch defies our expectations as it explores the depths of a child's emotions. It uses elements from the horror genre, but it's still safe for most kids. At the same time, it's a heartwarming drama about a loving family dealing with grief. It possesses genuinely positive messages about how to deal with hard feelings. Writer-director Seth Worley deserves credit for balancing these elements in a way that feels honest and edifying. It's easily one of my favorite movies this year: well-written, well-acted, and visually splendid. I laughed and cried multiple times.

One of the best things about *Sketch* is how it features a fictional family that's genuinely good and wholesome even while being imperfect. Some of the wisdom the family members share with each other on how to deal with inner monsters is exactly what many Christian parents want to impart to their kids. They separate sinful thoughts and actions (your "inbox" vs. your "outbox"), encourage each other not to make those things into an identity ("It's not you, it's just something you drew"), and show how to avoid both denying your feelings and expressing them in a hurtful way.

The film's bogeys are scary enough to resonate with a kid who is wrestling with dark things, but tame enough that it's safe for them to watch. Some characters get cuts, and monsters chase and attack kids and adults. But no one gets seriously injured. Despite being rated PG, the film's language might be a stumbling block for some parents. Adults use some minor expletives, and the kids often refer to each other as "B-holes." (This is not censored on my part—that's how they say it.)

The film sometimes implies that the way women more typically process emotions (talking, crying, art) is healthier than how men more often do it (taking action, fixing, powering through). This is potentially problematic. We're learning more and more how important a dad's more traditionally masculine approach is to a child's development. But this hitch is outweighed by the film's positive messages, and families can discuss such strengths and weaknesses of the film's approach together.

All kids face internal and—eventually—external dragons in life. For families looking for a family-affirming adventure movie that can give kids and adults the tools to fight them, *Sketch* might be a wish come to life. ■

COMING SOON...

The Bad Guys 2
8/1 • PG • Theaters

In this animated sequel, the Bad Guys are struggling to find trust and acceptance in their newly minted lives as Good Guys, when they are pulled out of retirement and forced to do "one last job" by an all-female squad of criminals.

Sketch
8/6 • PG • Theaters

When a girl's sketchbook falls into a strange pond, her chaotic drawings come to life. Her family must reunite and stop the monsters they never meant to unleash.

Freakier Friday
8/8 • PG • Theaters

A sequel to the 2003 remake of *Freaky Friday*. Twenty-two years after Tess (Jamie Lee Curtis) and Anna (Lindsay Lohan) endured an identity crisis, they discover that lightning might strike twice.

Lego Masters Jr.
8/18 • TV-PG • Fox

Hosted by Kelly Osbourne, this show pairs kids with celebrity guests to create amazing Lego builds for the chance to win $50,000.

The Thursday Murder Club
8/28 • PG-13 • Netflix

Four irrepressible retirees spend their time solving cold case murders for fun, but their casual sleuthing takes a thrilling turn when they find themselves with a real whodunit on their hands. Starring Helen Mirren, Pierce Brosnan, Ben Kingsley, and Celia Imrie.

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CHIABELLA JAMES/PRIME VIDEO

MOVIE

Heads of State

by BOB BROWN

Rated PG-13 • Prime Video

If you fancy Donald Trump strapped up like Rambo, squeezing off 200 armor-piercing rounds a minute from his M60—*blap! blap! blap! blap!*—forget it: Commanders-in-chief don't do that kind of thing (anymore).

You'll have to settle for *Heads of State*, a new Amazon Prime original about an American president and a British prime minister who get locked and loaded to fight off Russian bad guys.

Heads of State would've been a theatrical summer blockbuster before the click-a-flick revolution. Still, it has enjoyed a run as Prime's No. 1 film globally—for good reason.

Sharp camerawork amps the vigorous action sequences (passengers barrel-roll from floor to wall to ceiling in a nose-diving airplane), plot twists careen throughout the storyline, and the snappy dialogue unloads numerous quotables. But violence and bad language are pervasive: The film fires off as many expletives as one-liners.

Affable President Will Derringer (John Cena) and dour Prime Minister Sam Clarke (Idris Elba) don't like each other. Their backgrounds are as different as their personalities: Clarke was once a special forces operative, and Derringer played one in the movies.

When a high-tech attack by Russian arms dealer Viktor Gradov (Paddy Considine) puts Derringer and Clarke on the run together through rural Europe, the two heads of state must set aside petty squabbles to combat their murderous pursuers. Help comes from Clarke's old flame and MI6 colleague Noel Bisset (Priyanka Chopra Jonas). The film's serious moments spotlight the self-sacrifice of Secret Service personnel.

Heads of State surely traces its cinematic lineage back to White House–disaster classic *Olympus Has Fallen* and to *48 Hours*, the grandfather of the modern odd-couple action-comedy film. Cena and Elba play so well off each other, I can see them getting "reelected" for a sequel.

ILLUSTRATION BY KRIEG BARRIE (WILSON: CBS VIA GETTY IMAGES; STONE: MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

MUSIC

Remembering surf music and psychedelic soul

The lives of Brian Wilson and Sly Stone

by ARSENIO ORTEZA

Because they were musical geniuses and because they died in the same week at the same age (82), it's not surprising that the Beach Boys founder Brian Wilson and the Sly & the Family Stone founder Sylvester "Sly Stone" Stewart are getting Venn diagrammed. What is surprising is the how big the middle part of that diagram is, considering that the two were seldom discussed in tandem while they lived.

But first some differences. The joyfully explosive "psychedelic soul" that made Sly & the Family Stone stars in the United States (they pretty much whiffed abroad) was rooted in soul, black gospel, and funk. The radiant sunshine pop that made the Beach Boys stars worldwide was rooted in the Four Freshman, Chuck Berry, George Gershwin, and Phil Spector.

Also, whereas Stone never regained his footing after succumbing to drugs, Wilson did. By the mid-'90s, he'd remarried, hooked up with the Wondermints, and resumed touring and recording. In 2004, he released, to widespread critical acclaim, *Brian Wilson Presents Smile*, a new version of the ambitious *Smile* album that he'd begun making in 1966 only to abandon it a year later.

But the silver lining of *Smile*'s belated success had a dark cloud. Namely, it cast into relief the sad fact that Wilson hadn't composed much genius-worthy music in the intervening decades. In fact, his entire genius period, from "Surfin' Safari" to "Good Vibrations," covered a mere four years, the same amount of time, coincidentally, that it took Sly Stone to go from "Dance to the Music" (1967) to "Family Affair" (1971).

Saddest of all is that both Wilson's and Stone's genius periods ended for the same reasons: the continuous pressure to surpass their previous musical accomplishments and the drugs that promised them respite only to lay waste their desire, their confidence, and their ability.

Yes, Wilson was able to function again, sometimes very well, but he himself admitted to being "permanently damaged" by LSD. He released his last album of new material, *No Pier Pressure*, in 2015 and toured for the last time in 2022.

Stone released several albums after 1973, but neither they nor their singles made an impression. During his last 50 years, he mainly made the news for being broke, homeless, or unreliable. "Look at Mr. Stewart!" went a line from his 1968 hit "Life." "He's the only person he has to fear!" It foreshadowed a lot.

But perhaps the most striking similarity is that despite the exuberant positivity of Wilson's and Stone's biggest hits, the albums considered their masterpieces—*Pet Sounds* and *There's a Riot Goin' On*—are moody, introspective, and at times discomfiting in their vulnerability. In retrospect, they find Wilson and Stone, as the poet Stevie Smith might've said, not so much waving as drowning.

Or if that poetic allusion seems inapt, maybe this one from William Carlos Williams will do: "The pure products of America / go crazy." Rest in peace. ■

MUSIC

New and noteworthy

by ARSENIO ORTEZA

Jesus-Christ Ne Deçoit Pas

JESS SAH BI

Thirty-four years after it came out as a limited-edition cassette for sale only in Ivory Coast, Jess Sah Bi's lone solo album finally gets global release. Bi called it *Jesus-Christ Ne Deçoit Pas* ("Jesus Christ Never Gives Up") because, he said, he'd sought and received healing from a nearly fatal illness at an evangelical revival. These seven songs and one extended remix were his way of saying, in French and in Guro, thanks. Other reasons to spend 25 minutes checking it out: lithe, ebullient singing, lilting folk rhythms, and English translations available on Bandcamp.

The Moment of Truth: Ella at the Coliseum

ELLA FITZGERALD

In 2020, Verve Records gave us *Ella: The Lost Berlin Tapes*, recorded in 1962, in 2022 *Ella at the Hollywood Bowl: The Irving Berlin Songbook*, recorded in 1958—both different, both thrilling. Now we get an Oakland show from 1967. And, apples and oranges aside, it may be the best of them all. Totally in the moment, nailing song after song, accompanied by members of the Duke Ellington Orchestra ("at its prime," the PR assures us), and improvising like nobody's business, Fitzgerald pulls out all the stops. She climaxes the 41-minute show with a "Mack the Knife" that could cause heart attacks. It would be quite a way to go.

Long After the Fire

VICKI PETERSON & JOHN COWSILL

Vicki Peterson is the on-again, off-again Bangle and Continental Drifter. John Cowsill is the former Beach Boys touring drummer and member of the Cowsills. The composers are John's late brothers Bill and Barry. The former, it turns out, was quite the country songwriter, the latter a not bad if rather straightforward rock or Americana one. Peterson's alto we've known and loved since the '80s. Appreciation for Cowsill's baritone is long overdue.

The Book of Isaiah: Modern Jazz Ministry

ISAIAH J. THOMPSON

All of 28, this jazz pianist has already had enough acclaim (and playing-related tendinitis) to undergo a spiritual crisis. So he read the Bible, went to seminary, and began attending church. The South African singer Vuyo Sotashe, who has a Stevie Wonder tribute album in his future, illuminates three of the four songs that have words, including a version of the Lord's Prayer in which everything that's good about the rest—swing, bop, Julian Lee's tenor sax—comes together with devotional pizzazz.

HANDOUT/ISAIAHJTHOMPSON.COM

ENCORE

It isn't clear exactly where **Isaiah J. Thompson** was in his spiritual journey when he recorded his 2023 live album *The Power of the Spirit* (Blue Engine) at Dizzy's Club in New York. But the title cut gives us a clue. For the first half of its 15 minutes, the saxophonist Julian Lee, urged along by the rhythm section, builds toward a squealin' feelin' that puts everything before it, accomplished though it is, to shame. Thompson, on piano, tries to top him and almost succeeds before easing up and introducing the group.

Then, as the combo comps on, Thompson delivers a mini-sermon in which he explains that the song is about three struggles: adversity ("Sometimes, you're in battle with yourself, right? Because the mind, it can play tricks on itself, right?"), deception ("Sometimes, we're in battle with external forces, with other people. ... You're allowed to feel how you feel, but your reaction is your decision"), and last, "how you overcome all of that, and that's through the power of the spirit." Or maybe it's "Spirit." —*A.O.*

MASTERWORKS

War in heaven

Guido Reni depicts God's victory over evil

by WILLIAM COLLEN

In Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Marble Faun*, one of the characters, a painter, expresses this sharply critical opinion of Guido Reni's 1635 painting *The Archangel Michael Defeating Satan*:

"Is it thus that virtue looks the moment after its death struggle with evil? No, no; I could have told Guido better. A full third of the Archangel's feathers should have been torn from his wings; the rest all ruffled, till they looked like Satan's own! His sword should be streaming with blood, and perhaps broken halfway to the hilt: his armor crushed, his robes rent, his breast gory; a bleeding gash on his brow, cutting right across the stern scowl of battle! He should press his foot hard down upon the old serpent, as if his very soul depended upon it, feeling him squirm mightily, and doubting whether the fight were half over yet, and how the victory might turn! The battle never was such child's play as Guido's dapper archangel seems to have found it."

The Christian's personal struggle against temptation is indeed a strenuous one. At times the fight is desperately hard, as if Satan has nearly gained the victory. A painting depicting the Christian's fight against sin should, if the artist wished to be truthful, indeed depict the struggle and the strain of this battle. But what encouragement, what sense of hope, would such an image be able to impart?

Hawthorne's character is wrong: Guido's picture isn't depicting the fight against sin from a purely human perspective. Instead, this image is meant to portray the power that God Himself wields against darkness and the devil—a power which is infinite and always wins.

Twice in Scripture, the archangel Michael confronts Satan. The first is a purely verbal quarrel: The Book of Jude tells of a curious incident in which Michael argued with Satan over the disposition of the body of Moses. Michael himself knew that on his own he had no strength to defeat Satan: "The Lord rebuke you!" he says to the devil, refraining from bringing an accusation on his own authority.

Guido's painting does not depict this particular event in the career of Michael. Rather it dramatizes the passage in Revelation 12 in which we are given an account of a heavenly battle between the forces of light and darkness. "Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven."

Michael, with the full authority of God behind him, is able to quickly rout Satan and his minions; the passage only gives the barest hint that there was even a struggle at all. This is the event Guido chose to depict: a triumphant angel, the messenger of God and champion of His people, against whose awesome might even Satan quails in defeat.

Seeing this image of Michael triumphant serves to remind the Christian that the battle is already won. Although the day-to-day skirmishes can often seem insurmountable, victory is assured in the end. The power of darkness, strong as it may seem, is insignificant compared with the salvific majesty of God. Guido's picture dramatizes this assurance superbly, with its vigorous angel Michael arrayed in bright blues and reds towering with poised sword to deal the final blow against the cowering devil crowded into a lower corner of the frame. Evil simply doesn't stand a chance against the omnipotent power of God.

Interestingly enough, Hawthorne himself acknowledges this interpretation of the painting in a later passage in *The Marble Faun*. Toward the end of the novel, another character is meditating on the painting's significance as a symbol for Christian virtue. "She felt, while gazing at it, that the artist had done a great thing for the cause of Good. The moral of the picture, the immortal youth and loveliness of Virtue, and its irresistible might against ugly Evil, appealed as much to Puritans as Catholics." Guido's painting does indeed serve aptly as a universal symbol of the assurance that all God's people share—that God is able to defeat even our worst enemy. ■

LEFT: Reni's *Self-Portrait*. RIGHT: Guido Reni's *The Archangel Michael Defeating Satan*.

FINE ART IMAGES/HERITAGE IMAGES VIA GETTY IMAGES

ART IMAGES VIA GETTY IMAGES

VOICES NICK EICHER

Emergency exit

The ruling against Maryland's no-parental-opt-out rule shows public schools need compulsion to keep their creed. Now the exit door is wide open

I wasn't yet 16, still hoofing it to the corner bus stop, when I made a quiet vow: "My kids will never set foot in public school." The thought was not a swipe at my parents. They had sacrificed to buy a house in the best school district so I could have every possible advantage. But each day delivered an unmistakable audit. The Catholic school buses rolled up on the dot, whisking away uniformed, disciplined teens who were polite if understandably aloof. Our bus lumbered in whenever, through clouds of cigarette smoke, snowball crossfire, and the crude, sometimes cruel, talk that sticks in your ears long after the algebra fades. I wasn't a Christian then, happier to *laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints*, as Billy Joel sang. I just knew which world looked saner.

Many years later, that instinct feels prophetic. In July, the Supreme Court issued *Mahmoud v. Taylor*. In a 6-3 majority opinion, the court granted a preliminary injunction against Montgomery County, Maryland's mandate that its K-5 students sit through an LGBTQ-affirming storybook—one title assigned to each grade level—with no opt-out allowed. Justice Sonia Sotomayor, dissenting, warned the ruling "threatens the very essence of public education" and will echo "for generations."

Right again, Justice Sotomayor. Take away the compulsory power to steer a second grader's moral imagination and today's public school model starts wobbling like a Jenga tower after the wrong block is yanked. The court's decision didn't undermine the "essence of public education." It exposed how fragile that essence already was.

For me, the key exhibit in the case was a six-page teacher handout. Montgomery County Public Schools and MCPS defenders call it routine anti-bullying prep. It isn't. I dropped the PDF into a family group chat with a few of my adult children who have families of their own, and their responses ranged from disgust to horror. One scenario assumes a child objects to a storybook heroine who fancies another girl:

Student: "She can't like a girl like that; she can only like boys because she's a girl."

Teacher: "Disrupt the either/or thinking. ... People of any gender can like whoever they like. ... How would it make [character's name] feel to hear you say that?"

Add: "My best friend is a woman and she is married to another woman."

That is no mediation of playground taunts. It's catechesis, a ready-made homily meant to rewire a child's moral imagination using fictional characters to provoke a predictable response. The district creates the clash and smokes out any faith-shaped reaction, then turns teachers into bullies, programming them to "disrupt" and rebut.

The ruling, anchored in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* and *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, found the district's policy "substantially interferes" with parental rights and therefore triggers strict scrutiny. By likening MCPS' policy to *Yoder*—where Amish parents won the right to withdraw teens from high school—it effectively told public schools: You'd better have (1) a compelling objective and (2) a narrowly tailored means of achieving it, otherwise known as the two-part "strict scrutiny test." The court found the school district flunked.

Some well-meaning reformers propose a friendly reset: keep anti-bullying rules, move contested lessons to opt-in modules, give families more choice. That might nudge public schools toward a healthier common good, if it worked.

But I've experienced the system, and I don't trust it to pivot. The MCPS script was no isolated mistake. It was the logical outcome of a model that sees children as malleable citizens to be formed in the state's image, trained in the way they should go. Give bureaucrats a new handbook and they'll find a new end-run.

Public schools could've contented themselves with teaching reading, arithmetic, and the Bill of Rights without moral compulsion. They chose a different path. Now many families are choosing different schools: private, charter, co-op, kitchen table. The Supreme Court pried open an exit door. Parents who share my bus-stop epiphany—Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or simply fed-up—should walk through it.

Justice Sotomayor was right: The court's decision strikes at the essence of public schooling. But the tremor comes not from parental liberty; it comes from a system that has forgotten the difference between teaching children how to live in a complicated society and forcing them to confess a state creed. My kids can tell the difference, and after *Mahmoud* so can the Constitution. ■

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THE 360

ChatGPA

AI is forcing teachers and students to redefine education

BY GRACE SNELL

Emily Flaming started at John Brown University in fall 2022—the same year ChatGPT burst on the scene. Lots of people were talking about the AI chatbot, but Flaming didn't know how—or if—she should be using it.

"It felt like a very scary thing," she said. Flaming, who is working on her education degree, didn't really understand the program, and she didn't want to use it the wrong way.

Now, 3½ years later, Flaming is among the first generation of young teachers receiving their diplomas in a world where generative AI tools are fast becoming near-ubiquitous.

The moment feels symbolic—a point of no return for educators who have spent the last few years scrambling to keep up with an ever-expanding universe of labor-saving tools while playing cat-and-mouse with plagiarizing students. While some hail AI tech as a revolutionary key to learning—opening the door to more tailored and accessible strategies—others argue tools like ChatGPT are eroding students' capacities to think critically and pursue truth.

It's a crisis point challenging cultural assumptions about the purpose of education and spurring Christian teachers to carefully consider what it means to be human. They're striving to help students catch a different vision for learning—one focused more on who young people are becoming than what they can produce.

A few years ago, Flaming noticed a student in one of her online classes posting unusually long, detailed responses on a discussion board. The writing seemed completely different than the person's normal style. On a hunch, Flaming copied-and-pasted her classmate's responses into an online AI detector.

It was a 100% match.

OpenAI reports that one-third of college-aged Americans now use ChatGPT—with more than a quarter of their applications centering on learning, tutoring, and schoolwork. The most commonly reported uses are starting papers, summarizing texts, and brainstorming ideas. But about 30% of respondents admitted to using the chatbot for essay drafting, and over a quarter used it for exam answers.

Flaming said she's witnessed a broad spectrum in how her peers approach AI. Some seem to use ChatGPT to "basically get their degree for them." Others refuse to touch the chatbot at all because they're afraid of getting flagged for plagiarism.

The modern field of artificial intelligence has existed since the 1950s. But AI models like ChatGPT pack a new kind of horsepower—distilling galaxies of data into simple prose in mere seconds. It's a development some experts celebrate as the ultimate democratization of learning: instant answers for everyone.

But Flaming wasn't enthusiastic about AI—at least, not before her sophomore year of college. That's when one of her professors created an assignment asking students to experiment with AI. He encouraged Flaming to think of AI as a tool, and to learn to use it with discernment.

After that, Flaming discovered lots of helpful ways to use ChatGPT: lesson planning, anticipating student questions, and making rubrics. She also learned about plenty of other AI sites specifically designed to help teachers cater to their students' individual learning styles and interests. Unlike ChatGPT, these AI apps show students problem-solving steps instead of just giving them answers.

"I think a lot of teachers view it almost like having a teacher per student," Flaming said. That could be a game changer in

PREVIOUS SPREAD: PORTISHEAD1/GETTY IMAGES

HIROKO MASUIKE/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

Marisa Shuman, a teacher at the Young Women's Leadership School of the Bronx in New York, generated a lesson plan using ChatGPT to examine its potential usefulness and pitfalls and to get her students to evaluate its effectiveness and think critically about AI.

public school classrooms where teachers have to divide their attention among 20 or more pupils.

Flaming is optimistic about these applications, but she sees some definite downsides, too. When she first started exploring ChatGPT, Flaming quickly realized how easy it was to outsource her thinking to AI. It's a temptation she knows her future students will also face.

"Kids are smart," Flaming said. "They're techy, and they are going to figure out pretty quick how to use AI to just give them the answers if that's something that they have access to or are allowed to do."

Coming up with practical classroom applications for AI is one thing. But the very existence of the technology raises some fundamental questions about what it means to be human. Are students' creative endeavors still worthwhile if AI models can do the same things—just better?

Josh Brake is an assistant professor of engineering at Harvey Mudd College. Last fall, Brake uploaded a screenshot of his first class assignment to ChatGPT and asked the chatbot to write a program for him. Within 30 seconds, the chatbot spit out a flawless snippet of code. The sequence was as good as anything Brake could have written himself.

Brake said the moment highlighted the existential crisis his students are currently facing. But he said fears about AI superintelligence flow largely from a basic misunderstanding about what AI actually is. The whole concept of artificial intelligence is actually a misnomer, because these programs aren't really able to "think" in the way humans can.

Brake said large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT are essentially a super-sophisticated auto-complete. These

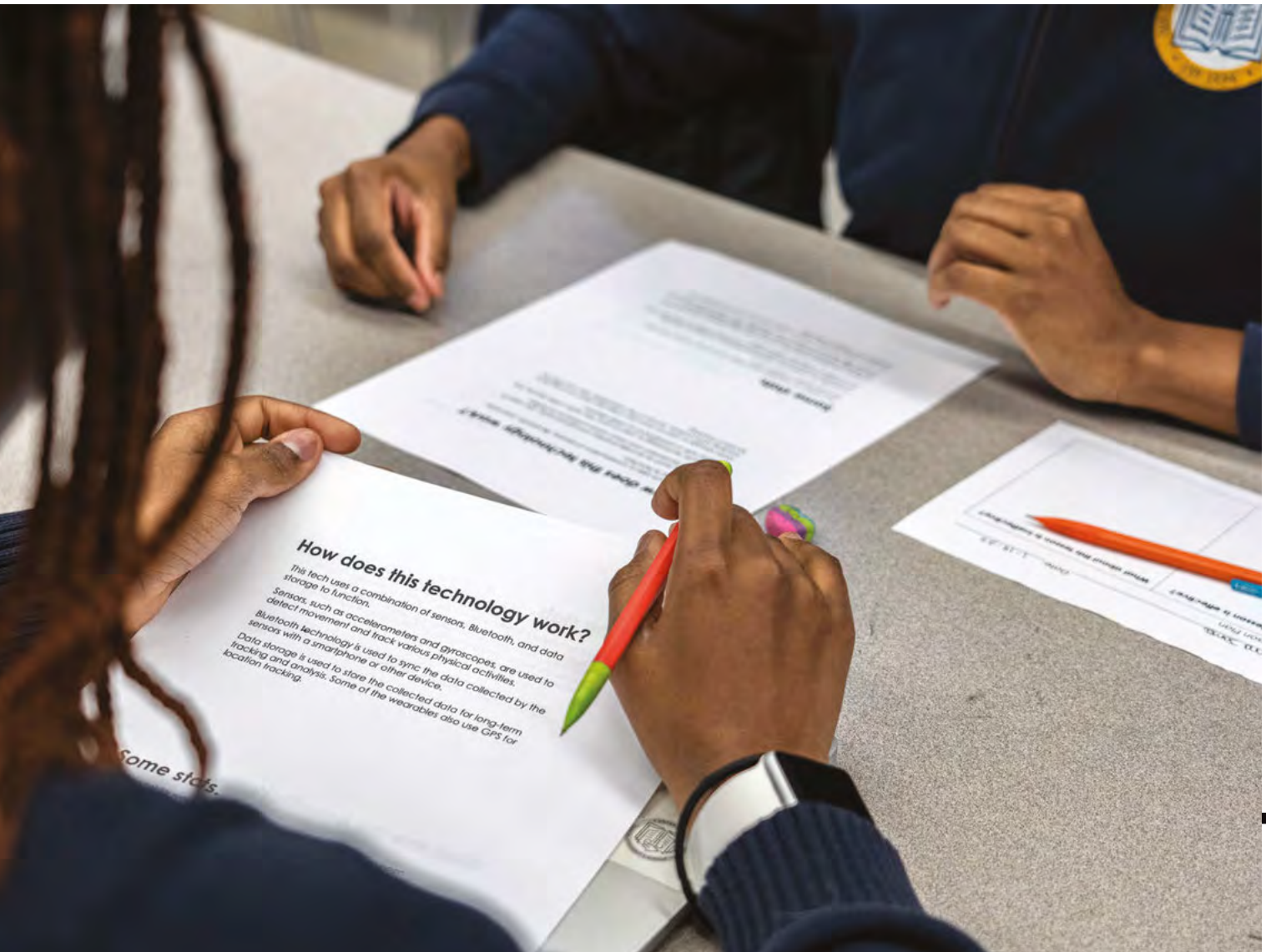
algorithms have seen enough variations of the English language that they can usually guess at the right words and syntax to use. But what's missing is the semantics—the meaning behind those words. In other words, ChatGPT creates the illusion of intelligent thought, but there's actually nothing going on under the hood.

That distinction might seem like splitting hairs, but Brake argues it makes all the difference between humans and computers. On day one, he started his class addressing the elephant in the room. "Listen, ChatGPT can do this thing for you," he told his students, indicating his class assignments. "But what you will lose when you do that is tremendous."

Technology is designed to cut down on friction, Brake said. But friction and struggle are essential parts of the learning process. Students who use AI to cut corners never actually learn how to do things for themselves. Because of that, Brake argued AI doesn't actually democratize expertise—just the appearance of expertise.

"Education is not about information transfer. It's more about whole person transformation."

Students at the Young Women's Leadership School of the Bronx work on a lesson plan generated by ChatGPT.



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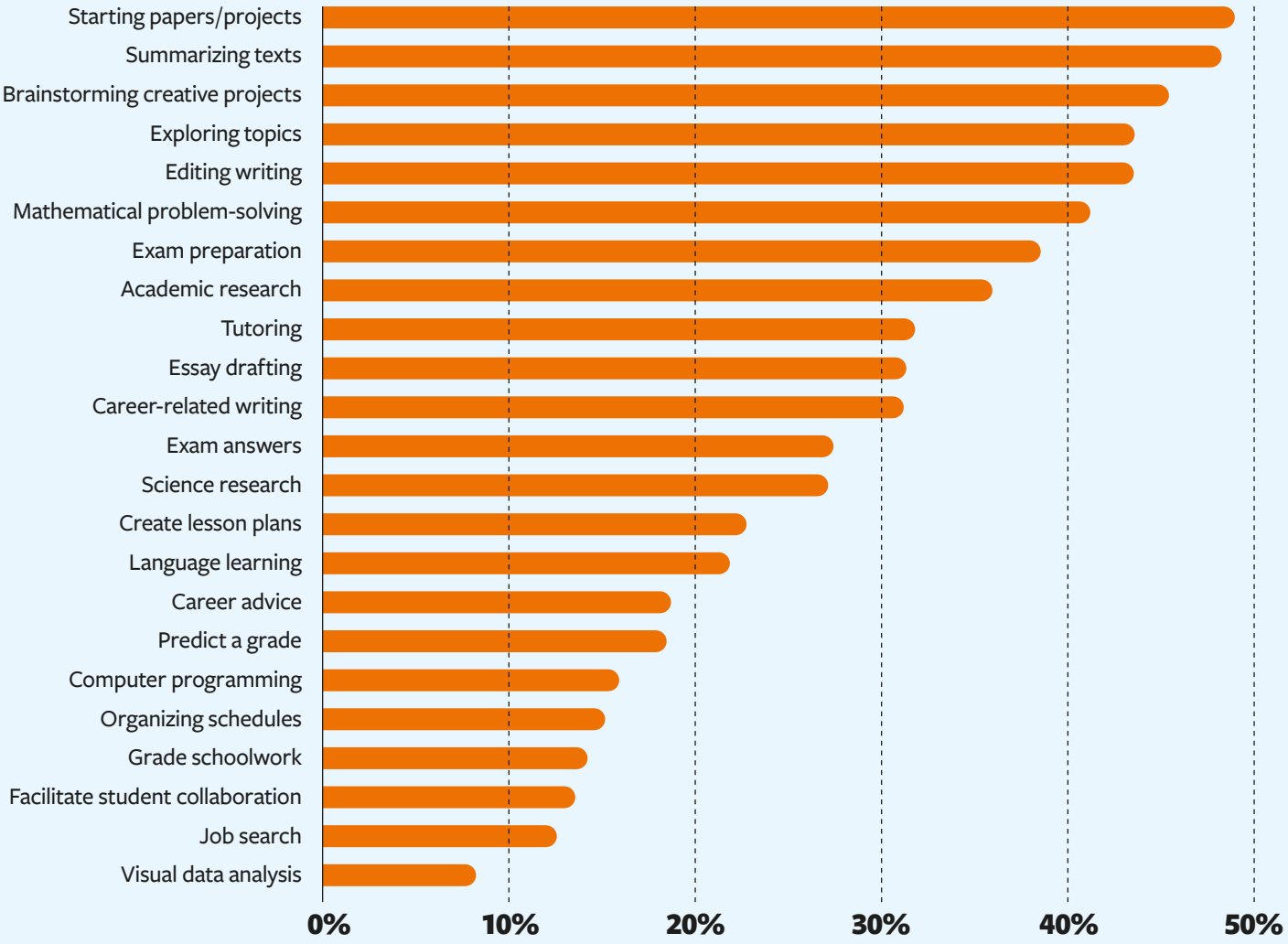
*HOW STUDENTS ARE USING AI**



**Answers to an OpenAI survey of 1,200 students ages 18-24 (January 2025)*

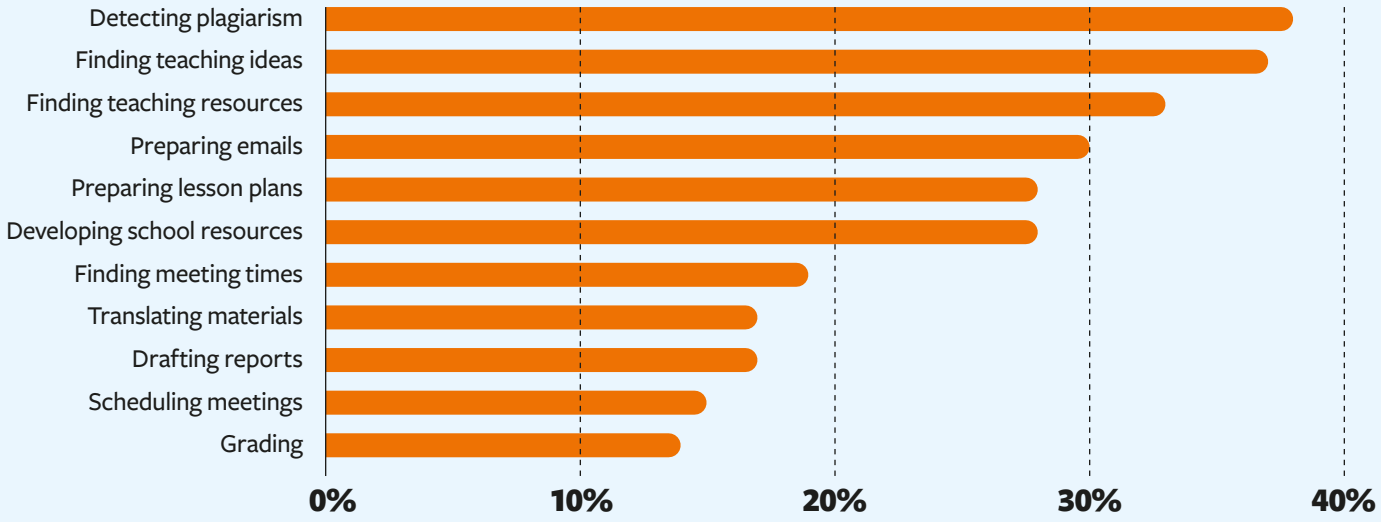
Jason Thacker is a Boyce College professor who directs the research institute of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. He's a leading thinker helping teachers consider how to approach AI from a robust Biblical worldview. Thacker said the AI revolution is a needed gut check, calling educators back to the heart of a Christian vision of education.

"It's not about information transfer," Thacker said. "It's more about whole person transformation." For believers, that means becoming more like Christ.

Technology isn't just a neutral tool, Thacker argued. Its prejudice is always toward efficiency—an aim that often clashes with the goal of spiritual formation. Because of that, Thacker encourages users to peel back the layers and ask themselves how AI products mold their habits and character: "They're shaping and forming us, often in very subtle ways that we have to slow down to recognize."

For some teachers, rethinking technology means steering clear of AI altogether. Brad East is a theology professor at Abilene Christian University, and you won't find any screens in his classes. Not because East thinks they're fundamentally wrong—but because he wants to

*HOW TEACHERS ARE USING AI**



**Answers to a Cardus survey of 700 Association of Christian Schools International teachers (November 2023)*
Note: Respondents could select multiple answers

cut down on distractions and create space for students to think deeply about life's most important questions.

Except in cases of academic accommodations, East doesn't allow laptops, tablets, or phones. In his upper-level classes, he often doesn't even use PowerPoint. Instead, he scribbles lecture notes on a whiteboard. It's a teaching philosophy East labels the "Luddite Pedagogy."

He's also traded typed writing assignments for handwritten in-class essays. East asks students to buy physical textbooks and annotate them to show their thought processes. He knows there will always be a few students who just jot notes in the margins to try to convince him they did the reading. But others leave detailed arrows and scribbles and exclamations:

"Absolutely not!"

"Oh, gosh."

"I can't believe I've never heard this before."

That's exactly what East wants to see: students engaging thoughtfully with a text. He recognizes most of his students won't become theologians or pastors. They'll probably go on to get white-collar office jobs. But, along the way, East thinks, it's crucial for them to wrestle with questions about God and humanity.

These kinds of moral questions aren't ones chatbots can answer. And the stakes are high. East believes theology—what he calls "getting God right"—is actually the most important thing students could ever think about. Every semester, he makes that case to his students.

East is sure some students roll their eyes at his no-tech policy. But most seem to buy into the idea. He reads their anonymous comments at the end of every class, and they don't hate him for it.

Often, they thank him.

Students tell him they struggle to focus in other classes, and they enjoy having time to settle their brains on things that matter.

East doesn't have a problem with other professors incorporating AI into their teaching strategies in creative and thoughtful ways. He has colleagues who do that. He's just trying to do something different—and he rebels at the notion that AI-powered education technology, or "ed tech," is a must.

According to research group Market.US, the global AI ed tech market is on track to reach $92 billion by 2033—a projected annual growth rate of almost 40%. East said educators should have a healthy dose of skepticism about AI sales pitches from multimillion-dollar corporations hoping to land school system contracts. "They obviously have an incentive to sell us the moon," he said.

A 2024 Microsoft and LinkedIn report found about 70% of employers would rather hire a less experienced applicant with AI skills than a more experienced candidate without them. But, East isn't worried about his students falling behind. For the most part, AI sites are so intuitive and user-friendly that people can quickly learn them: "Any of my children could use them if they wanted to."

“ChatGPT cannot give you [critical thinking skills] any more than a robot that picks you up and runs a mile can develop your mile-running muscles for you. You have to do the running.”

Employers also want workers who can think critically, communicate, and problem-solve—skills that aren’t so easily acquired. “ChatGPT cannot give you those any more than a robot that picks you up and runs a mile can develop your mile-running muscles for you,” East said. “You have to do the running.”

It’s only been three years since ChatGPT’s debut, and most educators are still in the throes of figuring out what to do with rapidly proliferating AI technology. Lynn Swaner is president of the U.S. branch of Cardus, a Christian think tank based in Canada. In 2023, she spearheaded a study exploring how Christian K-12 schools are navigating AI and found over 80% of surveyed staff believed AI would significantly alter teaching and learning.

But what exactly this transformation should look like is a lot less clear.

Human beings are made in the image of God. But Swaner said AI tools are made “in our image.” And that means they have the capacity for both good or evil. Swaner said we need robust moral frameworks guiding AI use, but there isn’t yet a consensus on what these should be.

Amy Flagler is director of teacher education at Montreat College, a private Christian school outside Asheville, N.C. She’s currently on a committee hammering out the school’s AI best practices. Flagler said the issue tends to spark a lot of fears for people. There are a lot of unknowns, and for many professors it can feel like just one more task to juggle.

Attitudes toward AI also tend to vary widely between departments. Humanities professors often express worries about things like plagiarism, while business professors tend to be more optimistic about the implications for design and efficiency. Because of that, Flagler said the school is planning to emphasize general principles like integrity and trust instead of aiming for a one-size-fits-all rule set.

In her own classroom, Flagler does her best to help her students—future teachers—think through the pros and cons of using AI in their own classrooms someday. When ChatGPT first launched, she demonstrated for her students how the chatbot could whip up a lesson plan from scratch.

“What do you think?” Flagler asked them.

They were blown away. Some thought it was fine for teachers to use AI in that way. Others were more skeptical.

Flagler encourages her students to be wary of AI while they are still developing their own proficiencies. They don’t yet have the expertise to spot gaps and shortfalls in AI-generated outputs. Maybe it could be a helpful tool after they’ve built up their skill set. But not before.

Most of all, Flagler encourages her students to be honest and up-front about how they’re using AI. She tells them to just ask for clarification if they aren’t sure where the ethical lines are. And she pledges to be transparent with her own AI use, too. For her, it all boils down to one main question: “Am I using [AI] in a way that increases trust between me and my students?”

Early data suggests more and more children are discovering AI at a young age—and figuring out how to hack the system and get ChatGPT to do their work for them. Already, a quarter of kids surveyed by the U.K.-based nonprofit Internet Matters admitted to using AI tools for homework help. And as many as 4 in 10 of them said they had experimented with some kind of generative AI.

These younger students—the ones still learning how to learn—are the demographic Cardus researcher Lynn Swaner worries about most when it comes to AI in education. They are still developing good study habits and writing skills, and she wonders how exposure to generative AI will change the way they mature.

These are also the students John Brown University student Emily Flaming is most excited to work with. She’s heading into a semester of student teaching and hopes to teach fourth and fifth graders in the public school system after that.

Flaming is well aware many of these 9- to 11-year-olds are already experimenting with AI at home. She’s eager to get into the classroom, but she expects it will take a lot of trial and error to figure out the best way to use AI to support—rather than replace—students’ own learning: “I don’t want to take away from what their brains can do.” ■

For more education coverage, visit wng.org/schooled

THE 360

Deepfake learning

One teacher's struggle with artificial intelligence

Editor's note: We agreed to keep the writer anonymous to protect her students' privacy.

I was in the middle of my first year of teaching seventh grade when, in the midst of grading essays, I realized one of my students had cheated. But not in the usual way, like stealing another student's essay or parental "ghostwriting." No, this student, whose grade was tanking in the fourth quarter, who was barely completing her homework, and who regularly failed her vocabulary quizzes, turned in a flawless essay with high-level words like *inadvertently* and *transcend*.

Her name was Amanda. Normally, I would be thrilled, thinking that somehow she had experienced a miraculous breakthrough. But in this case, I was immediately filled with dread.

When I pulled her aside, she was not able to explain her thesis statement or main points, or even tell me much of what the essay said. It was obvious she didn't write it, but who did? After talking to other teachers and doing some research, I found the culprit: ChatGPT.

When you are a first-year teacher, the majority of advice you get is something like "Don't be a perfectionist, just get through the year." But most first-year obstacles do not involve going head-to-head with a highly complex computational network with a never-before-seen ability to generate blocks of text that are so close to human-generated, they are described as "intelligent."

It was a daunting realization.

After only a few months, there were multiple cases in our middle school of students who were failing their classes yet turned in spotless essays they couldn't account for. All of the faculty and administration were scrambling to understand how to deal with artificial intelligence. The challenges were wide ranging, beginning with how to define it and ending with how to prevent students from abusing it.

At first, I mostly worried about students using AI to cheat. Now that I've had a few years to reflect, my concerns go much deeper than that.

My students are learning rudimentary communication skills in a world where technology can do it for them. And now the skill of communication is itself becoming less to do with humans and more delegated to technology. That's probably why at least once a year a student complains to me: "Why do I have to learn to write when AI can just do it for me?"

My answer—"Because it's an important skill to learn"—is not very persuasive.

In the wake of ChatGPT's release in November 2022, our school and others stumbled as we tried to keep up with the pace of AI development. My principal invited me to participate in a committee tasked with updating our region's policy. The first meeting was not what I expected.

The educators around the conference table taught a wide range of subjects. We began by introducing ourselves and explaining why we thought we were there.

One ex-tech entrepreneur took a swig from his can of Starbucks Double-Shot Espresso and spoke excitedly about how our schools must incorporate AI as soon as possible. He said there was so much money pouring into the technology, our students could either be part of the future or get left behind.

A young, philosophically minded man across the table shot down that idea. He had the opposite approach to AI: If it had to be involved in education, it should be handled cautiously, with a lot of restrictions.

The meeting eventually devolved into a back-and-forth between AI enthusiasts and skeptics, with one commonality: We were more afraid of what it was taking away than what it was adding to our students' educational experience.

I left that first meeting feeling like we'd missed the real challenge. We needed to consider not just how to stop students from using AI to cheat but why they were using it to begin with.

One of my students last year was a headstrong, bilingual kid from a single-parent household. Naturally, Arianna had fewer support systems available to her and struggled with English as her second language. But she was passionate and eager to improve.

At the beginning of the year, I asked students to present a book they had read over the summer. Arianna chose *Little*

FRANCESCO CARTA FOTOGRAFO/GETTY IMAGES

Women. I knew how much she dreaded public speaking and was prepared for tears and protests. I was pleasantly surprised when she brought a giant poster board with beautifully drawn characters and detailed descriptions.

She stood in front of the class and confidently delivered a speech about *Little Women* that sounded like something a literary scholar could have written. Her notes contained descriptions such as: "*Little Women* is a coming-of-age novel that follows the lives of the four March sisters. ... The story focuses on their hopes, struggles, and dreams as they move from childhood into adulthood."

It was obviously not her writing.

I pulled her aside later to ask her more about the novel, including other characters and scenes from the book. She couldn't describe any specific scenes or details beyond what was written on the poster board. Later, I put a prompt into ChatGPT. It spit out her presentation, word for word.

I was beyond frustrated. I couldn't understand why she would cheat on something that was supposed to be an easy, check-the-box kind of assignment. So I asked her why she would turn to AI in the first place when I knew she was capable of writing a solid presentation. Her answer still haunts me.

She was anxious about what her peers would think of her and wanted to look smart in front of them. She didn't think she could create a solid presentation, so she had AI make one for her.

Arianna experienced the self-doubt and insecurity that is normal for her age and situation. But instead of gaining confidence through creating a less-than-perfect presentation, she turned to AI and preferred to risk being caught.

Unfortunately, students like Arianna are becoming more and more common. AI is affecting them in fundamental ways, a consideration missing from the overarching narrative on tech development. We hear horror stories about AI deepfakes and chatbots gone rogue, but sometimes the real horror story is much simpler than that. It's the easy application of AI—essentially autofill on steroids—undermining the reality that "intelligence" is necessarily human.

Most of the discussion about AI in education seems to miss the obvious: that the goal of education is to produce an educated human being. It's about the process, not generating another essay. But students, and too many parents, are oblivious to the truth that learning and growth require struggle and effort. One of my colleagues who teaches second grade told me one of her students refused to learn to write for an entire year. He told her that AI would do it for him.

Worse, even students who probably do understand, on some level, that using AI undermines their own development are using it anyway. Since 2022, I have seen more and more students struggle with the pressure of being perfect and in turn risk steep consequences to get a high grade.

Another one of my eighth graders, Julian, struggled with panic attacks throughout the spring. He faced a lot of pressure at home and among his peers to do well and was taking advanced math and Latin. As he prepared to apply for high school and aimed to place into honors classes, he couldn't afford to let his grades drop.

At the end of the last month of school, he found himself in a predicament: He needed to study for the Algebra Exemption Exam but also write a literary analysis essay I had assigned on a novel we read in class. He felt buried and felt he had to deliver perfection, so he turned to AI.

About 99% of the essay he turned in was written by ChatGPT, with some wording tweaked here and there to make it look authentic.

I will never forget pulling him aside in the hallway to talk about it.

"I know you used AI to write this essay. I have this report that proves it," I told him. "You will receive a 50% on this essay, but what I care most about is you knowing how serious this is." I told him he was getting off easy because he was still in middle school. But if he didn't get his act together, I warned, this would cost him a lot in high school and even more in college.

He looked at me blankly, as if my cautionary words had gone straight over his head. He nodded and shrugged it off, and then walked away. ■

What ails America

CAN THE MAHA MOVEMENT CURE THE NATION'S HEALTH CRISIS?

Dara Chetelat shifts her newborn from her right shoulder to her left so she can open the refrigerator door. Her baby boy, cozy in light-blue footed pajamas, doesn't notice a thing. He keeps dozing with a slight smile on his face. He's her fourth child, and she gave birth to him—at home—six weeks earlier. ► Chetelat reaches into her fridge and picks up a small tub containing a thick, light-yellow liquid that glistens. It's beef tallow that she bought at an Amish farm. "I'll use it instead of olive oil for sautéing," she explains. She also points out a large glass jar of chicken broth and a container of elderberry syrup, both of which she made herself. ► Across from her kitchen counter is the family's homeschool nook. The walls are covered with a map of the world, the letters of the alphabet, and the children's many art projects. Chetelat sits down in a rocking chair and, still snuggling her baby, tells me about why she considers herself a "MAHA mom"—a supporter of the grassroots initiative that aims to transform America's food and health systems. ► There's a broad consensus that American health is in a terrible state. And in the wake of the pandemic, trust in public health institutions is at an all-time low. But until recently, concerned Americans hadn't come together in a political coalition. That changed on Aug. 23, 2024, when Robert F. Kennedy Jr. endorsed President Donald Trump and coined the phrase "Make America Healthy Again." It's unknown how many people identify as MAHA, but this group helped send Trump to the White House, and Kennedy, once dismissed as a peddler of medical misinformation, is now running the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). ► MAHA has enthusiasm and some real power on its side, but can it cure what ails America?

BY EMMA FREIRE

illustration by JIM TSINGANOS

Statistics about America's health are staggering: 40% of adults have obesity, and for around 10% of adults it's severe obesity. Moreover, 1 in 5 adolescents and 1 in 4 young adults are prediabetic. Half of Americans used at least one prescription drug in the past 30 days. In 2023, the United States spent $4.9 trillion on healthcare. This represents 17.6% of our gross domestic product. At the same time, we have some of the worst health outcomes of any developed country.

But after acknowledging something is wrong come the thornier questions of where the problems originated and—more importantly—how to fix them. One person who is thinking hard about those questions is Jay Richards of the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank in Washington, D.C. Heritage put its considerable political heft behind getting Kennedy confirmed as secretary of HHS, and now wants to help him succeed.

Richards argues America is in the grip of what he calls a "legal cartel" that helped create and now reinforces our health crisis. This cartel consists of four different groups. The first is the government and its regulatory agencies. The second is the big food and pharmaceutical companies. He thinks government and private business act like "partners," with government serving the industries' interests rather than those of the public.

Mary Holland is president of Children's Health Defense, a nonprofit advocacy group founded by Kennedy. She points to the 1986 National Childhood Vaccine Injury Act and the 2005 Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness Act as important examples of that partnership: "Both of those statutes from Congress essentially give Big Pharma complete liability protection for vaccines, and for any countermeasures in any kind of disaster scenario, like COVID." She argues pharmaceutical companies enjoy "profit with almost no risk."

Richards says the third component in the cartel is the media. Media companies get a substantial portion of their advertising revenue from the big food and pharmaceutical companies. One study found that food, beverage, and restaurant companies spend nearly $14 billion annually on advertising. Pharmaceutical companies spend up to $8 billion on direct-to-consumer advertising, a practice banned in nearly every other country and which Kennedy is likely to target in the future. Richards thinks the advertising revenue means journalists and editors are "unlikely to challenge the source of their bounty."

The fourth component of the cartel is the nonprofit sector. Nina Teicholz thinks the American Heart Association (AHA) is a good example of this. Teicholz is the author of the 2014 book *The Big Fat Surprise: Why Butter, Meat and Cheese Belong in a Healthy Diet*, a foundational text of the MAHA movement. And she has done extensive investigation into the AHA. "It's the premier organization for giving people advice about heart disease," she said, but it was fairly small until 1948, when it received a large grant from Procter & Gamble, the maker of Crisco oil. Ever since then, the AHA has promoted using vegetable oils and avoiding animal fats as the best prevention against heart disease—even though Teicholz argues the opposite is true.

Richards says political activists would traditionally think about taking on either the government or big business. But MAHA is fighting a "multifront war" that requires a new approach: "Any strategy that's going to defeat what has given us a massive increase in chronic disease is going to have to figure out how to challenge all four of those together."

Chetelat came to MAHA in the same way as many others. Conventional American food and medical care let her down. Throughout her childhood, she suffered digestive issues and dizzy spells. She says one of her earliest memories is having a dizzy spell while singing at church and needing to sit down. Her mother took her to various pediatricians who all said things like "Some kids are just like this." Chetelat said none of them tried to get to the root of her struggles.

In her early 20s, her health hit an all-time low when she returned from ministry work in China. She didn't want to

Dara Chetelat prepares a healthy lunch for her family and feeds a tablespoonful of elderberry syrup to her daughter.

PHOTOS BY KENNETH K. LAM/GENESIS

see a regular doctor and get brushed off again. Instead, she went to an integrative medicine doctor who eventually diagnosed her with multiple food allergies. The main culprit? Gluten.

Her entire life she'd been eating a typical American diet heavy on processed food, "lots of bready, snacky stuff," she recalled. Her newly discovered allergies demanded a radical overhaul of her eating habits. She learned to cook from scratch using whole foods for the first time. She says it was a big adjustment, but the massive improvement to her health made the effort worthwhile.

Chetelat is hardly alone. America's interest in MAHA has proliferated through health-focused podcasts, blogs, and books in recent years. Joe Rogan, whose podcast *The Joe Rogan Experience* is the most popular in the world, has hosted numerous MAHA figures. Casey Means, Trump's nominee for surgeon general, and her brother Calley Means, a close associate of Kennedy, co-authored *Good Energy*, a *New York Times* best-seller emphasizing metabolic health and critiquing traditional healthcare systems.

But the ideas underpinning MAHA have been percolating for decades. As rates of obesity and chronic disease continue to rise, more Americans are looking around and thinking, *This can't be normal*. They are starting to wonder if the food they buy at the supermarket or the medications their doctors prescribe might be part of the problem.

MAHA only exists in its current form because Kennedy endorsed Trump. Kennedy initially ran for president himself as a Democrat and later as an independent. In early 2024, Trump posted on Truth Social, "RFK Jr. is the most Radical Left Candidate in the race, by far." But they put their differences aside at an August rally in Arizona. Kennedy gave a brief speech that focused on chronic disease and asked the audience, "Don't you want a president who's going to make America healthy again?" After winning the election, Trump nominated Kennedy to lead the HHS.

Chetelat was cooking dinner and listening to a health podcast when she heard the news of Kennedy's endorsement. She appreciated his speech

because it "brought to light in a very public way that we have a public health crisis going on in our country." Chetelat is a registered independent who describes her political views as "more conservative, anti-communist, and very pro-life." She acknowledges Kennedy's pro-abortion views are a "major concern." But ultimately she thinks he's a good choice for HHS because he can "bring people from both political sides together on this."

Richards believes Kennedy's joining forces with Trump was a pivotal moment because it finally gave people on the right and the left a political focus for their concern. "No high-paid political consultant would have guessed that a crunchy, left-wing person living on a commune in Eastern Oregon and a Catholic homeschool mom with her Berkey filter in Virginia would be allies. But if you knew the issues, you should know they're actually allies."

HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. speaks at an April 6 news conference on autism.

A core principle of MAHA is that our health crisis is closely linked to the food we eat. And almost no one's been talking about that longer than Joel Salatin. He has been publishing books since the late 1990s, especially focused on regenerative farming.

In March, Salatin traveled 170 miles from Polyface Farm, his 550-acre family operation in the Shenandoah Valley, to speak to an audience of about 50 people—most of them young and wearing suits—a few blocks from Capital Hill. They lined up eagerly to get a signed copy of his book and listen to what he had to say.

To open the event, Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky stood up and took the microphone. On the lapel of his gray suit, he wore an electronic ticker tracking the federal debt in real time. But the evening wasn't about railing against excess government spending. It was all about Salatin's lifelong mission. "He's the pope of food freedom and to keep it ecumenical, I'll say his farm is the Mecca of food freedom," Massie joked.

Salatin's views make him a natural fit with MAHA. During the 2024 campaign, a rumor circulated that he might take a role in the Trump administration, but Salatin called that "social media fabrication exaggeration."

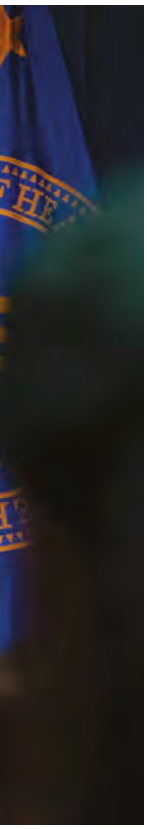
The Conservative Partnership Institute (CPI), a nonprofit that trains conservative staffers and elected officials, hosted the event with Massie. I met Salatin at CPI's headquarters earlier that day. He told me much of our health crisis is due to a food supply that is "nutritionally deficient, adulterated, pathogenic, and toxic." Salatin traces the beginning of the problems to the year 1837, which saw innovations that launched industrial farming using artificial fertilizer.

From there, World War I and World War II saw massive government support for nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium for bombs, elements later repurposed for fertilizer. Salatin noted this period also saw the advent of "vegetable oils, seed oils, DDT, pesticides, herbicides, and convenience foods." As women entered the workforce, they had less time to cook, and processed foods became staples of the American diet.

I asked Salatin why it took this long for the ideas of MAHA to get a serious political coalition behind them. "The pendulum swung and swung, and it finally hit over here, where enough people realized, 'Whoa, it's gone too far,'" he said.

Mary Holland of Children's Health Defense believes the lockdowns and vaccine mandates during the COVID-19 pandemic left many Americans more receptive to MAHA. "The level of medical coercion for the whole global population was unprecedented in COVID, and I think it woke people up to the idea that we need to have some guardrails here," she said.

A 2024 Pew Research Center poll found that the percentage of Americans who had "a great deal" of "confidence in scientists to act in the best interests of the public" declined from 39% to 26% between 2020 and 2024. During the same period, the percentage of those who said they had little or no confidence



JOSE LUIS MAGANA/AP

increased from 12% to 23%. Holland says Kennedy played a "catalytic" role in launching MAHA, but it only became a political force due to "the backing of millions of people."

Since taking office, Kennedy has moved quickly to tackle issues important to the MAHA movement. He has made autism a top priority, calling it an "epidemic." On April 16, he held a news conference to discuss a federal finding that 1 in 31 children, and 1 in 20 boys, has autism. "Year by year, there is a steady, relentless increase," he said.

Kennedy said HHS will launch a series of studies to identify the causes of autism. For his own part, he blames an environmental toxin. "Somebody made a profit by putting that environmental toxin into our air, our water, our medicines, our food," he said. Notably absent from this list was the word "vaccine."

Kennedy has frequently questioned vaccine safety in the past and is often labeled an "anti-vaxxer." Holland knows Kennedy well and believes his choice to avoid mentioning vaccines was deliberate. She thinks he doesn't want to "prejudge" the outcomes of the research. "He will go wherever the science leads," she insists. To date, Kennedy's most significant steps regarding vaccines include requiring that new vaccines be tested against placebos and announcing the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention would no longer recommend COVID-19 vaccines for healthy children and pregnant women.

MAHA advocates are also deeply concerned about unhealthy food additives. On April 22, Kennedy announced plans to phase out petroleum-based food dyes like Yellow 5. An HHS statement heralded this as "a significant milestone in the administration's broader initiative to Make America Healthy Again." But some MAHA supporters say that, while it's a good move, it won't do much to improve American health. "Froot Loops without the coloring is still a bowl full of starch and sugar," Nina Teicholz says.

Fluoride is another major MAHA concern. The state of Utah recently banned adding fluoride to public drinking water. Kennedy traveled to the state and told reporters, "I'm very proud of Utah. It has emerged as the leader in making America healthy again." Holland calls fluoride a byproduct of the chemical industry that companies needed to offload inexpensively. Their answer, she says, was to "dump it in the water." She says there is some evidence that applying fluoride topically is good for teeth but swallowing it offers no dental benefit and can cause neurological damage to unborn babies and young children. The American Dental Association issued a statement condemning Utah lawmakers for "wanton disregard for the oral health and well-being of their constituents," and argued water fluoridation is "safe and effective."

> **THE LEVEL OF MEDICAL COERCION FOR THE WHOLE GLOBAL POPULATION WAS UNPRECEDENTED IN COVID, AND I THINK IT WOKE PEOPLE UP TO THE IDEA THAT WE NEED TO HAVE SOME GUARDRAILS HERE.**

Chetelat has a reverse osmosis filter that removes fluoride and other substances from water under her kitchen sink. Her husband installed it to replace their portable countertop filter. But she keeps the smaller unit on hand. "We take it along on vacation," she tells me.

Chetelat's 6-year-old daughter handed me a list she wrote herself with suggestions for how to make America healthy again. She wrote in black pen in big letters: "Sharing Jesus. Not as much pollshun [pollution]. Healthier farms. Not as much junk food." Chetelat tries to find a good balance between educating others about what's healthy and not appearing judgmental. She teaches her children, "Just because we're choosing to do it this way doesn't mean we should look down on anyone who isn't."

Chetelat buys her food at several different local supermarkets and makes a weekly 30-minute drive to the Amish farm in Pennsylvania for her beef tallow and other essentials. While their grocery bills can be high, her family saves by rarely eating out and skipping processed snacks. "We figure it's better to put the money there than on a lot of medical bills," she says.

Kennedy is moving quickly to implement his agenda and shows no signs of slowing down. But it's not clear how far he'll get. He and the MAHA movement are calling for sweeping and radical changes—not just on particular issues but in how American society approaches the question of health itself. "I am hopeful about him," says Chetelat. "But not too hopeful because I know politics often disappoints." ■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TIG
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Since 1923
PBR
BUCKING BATTLE
NEW YORK CITY
CAMPING WORLD
U.S. BORDER PATROL

RIDING A HALF-TON BULL FOR A FEW SECONDS IS AN ACT OF FAITH

by Abi Dunning

As pop rock blasts through the stadium speakers, Lucas Divino slides farther forward over the bull's broad shoulders and clenches his rope a little tighter—it's all he'll have to hold on to when the gate swings open.

In the next eight seconds, he could put himself in the running for $54,000. Or he could die.

Every one of the 42 riders at the Professional Bull Riders (PBR) competition came to Louisville, Ky., to take that chance. Tonight, more than 8,000 fans came to watch them do it.

The PBR is still a minor sport compared with professional basketball or baseball, but its televised events have maintained a promising trajectory over its first few decades on air. The PBR recently attracted 30 million unique viewers in a single season and earlier this year sold out a three-day event at New York's Madison Square Garden. Divino won that event in front of more than 42,000 fans and 1.1 million online viewers.

Thirty-one-year-old Divino, a Brazilian known for his love of wiggling his eyebrows at the camera, has a compact build that exudes contained strength. He's wearing chocolate brown chaps with tan fringes, a black button-down under a brown protective vest, and a black felt cowboy hat. His right palm, wrapped in the rope that's held around the bull's ribs only by his grip, is covered in a thick layer of tape intended to cushion the force on a hand he broke years ago.

You can hardly help but wonder if climbing on an animal with horns and hooves that weighs 10 times more than its rider is an act of faith or insanity. Is it cowboy courage or sheer stupidity?

For Divino, it started as a dare—the sort of teenage challenge that adults respond to with a shrug and a resigned "Boys will be boys." His friend called him with an invitation: "Hey, let's go to my house. Let's ride some steers."

Divino was not interested. At 16, he'd already spent five years as a full-time working cowboy in Goiás, Brazil, and he knew what cows were: animals you cared for, doctored, and sold—not rode.

Lucas Divino competes in the championship round of the Professional Bull Riders 2025 Unleash the Beast competition at Madison Square Garden in New York.

RON ADAR/SOPA IMAGES/SIPA USA VIA AP

He eventually went, under threat of being branded a sissy. And, despite adamant protests that his friend would have to carry him back to his family in pieces, he climbed over the old cattle chute and rode his first steer. Then another, and another. By the end of the day, he'd ridden 10. Turns out, riding cows was sort of fun.

But Divino isn't on a ranch steer today. In the last 18 months, Workin' Man has bucked off 88% of his riders in an average of 3.65 seconds. And he has a reputation for charging downed cowboys. When Divino nods his head for the gateman to open the gate, he will be fighting against a thousand pounds of deadly brute force.

The tip of Divino's cowboy hat bobs almost imperceptibly.

> ***The gate swings open, and Workin' Man bursts out with a 6-foot leap. Above them, two huge white timers start counting to 8 seconds.***

Divino needs this ride. It's his last chance at winning the event—and at a paycheck.

PBR events consist of three rounds spread over two nights. Every rider gets one ride a night, after which the Top 12 move to the championship round where they battle for the weekend's highest total score and cash prizes.

Divino has to stay on for 8 seconds to get a "qualified ride" and a score. If he loses his hold on the bull rope or touches himself or the bull with his free hand, his ride is disqualified. Judges are ranking him and the bull, and their combined scores will create the final score.

Last night, Divino fell off Cash Goblin in 3.36 seconds. Still, if he can pull off a high score tonight, he may have a chance to advance.

Fifteen years of riding bulls has taught him what it takes to win. Coming into tonight, he's ranked as the eighth-best bull rider in the world. But rankings don't mean much in this sport. To bull riders, everything changing in an instant is as much a jarring, physical reality as it is a theoretical truth.

A single jump, a hoof in the wrong place, a stuck rope—any number of mishaps could wipe out a season, a career, or in some cases, a life. And, unlike most professional athletes, only some of the riders will get paid tonight.

Divino knows how fast a season can change. Last weekend, a bull named Outcast stomped on his right knee after the ride. The impact was softened ever so slightly by the knee brace Divino wears because both his PCLs—major stabilizers that hold the knee together and stop it from overextending—have been torn for years. He was left with severe bruising and a limp he tries to mask. Before the ride, he doctored his blotchy, dark-purple knee like a true cowboy: with some tape to hold it together and some ice to make it numb.

Hurt knee or no, Divino needs to hit 8 seconds.

> ***The timers flash—0.13. As the bull's back hooves kick high in the air, Divino leans back and throws his free hand over his head.***

RON ADAR/SOPA IMAGES/SIPA USA VIA AP

"To bull riders, everything changing in an instant is as much a jarring, physical reality as it is a theoretical truth."

No one taught him to do that. In Brazil, his only coach was experience. Teenage Divino would drive to a neighboring ranch every weekend and climb on as many steers as they had, usually 10 in a day.

Bull riding was fun, but it was more than that. It was his chance. His parents divorced when he was 9, and he and his stepmother didn't get along. He wanted to live on his own, but his father could easily stop neighboring ranches from hiring a 16-year-old. Ranch-raised Divino wasn't interested in living in the city with his mother. His choices were simple: Live with his mother, live with his father—or ride bulls.

So the half-ambitious, half-addicted teenager got on bull after bull in training and at competitions, forcing himself to be better at a sport that was the only shot he saw at a different life.

It wasn't a good gamble by all accounts. Even apart from the physical risk, riders must pay their own way to events where

earnings are far from guaranteed. Some riders didn't make enough money to pay for the trip home. But others—the winners—raked in more money in a weekend than Divino earned in a month on the ranch.

"You're never going to be able to buy one shirt with bull rider money," his aunts warned him. His father, initially disapproving, was quiet about his son's new interest in getting thrown around by bulls. But Divino's rodeo friends told him he had a future.

So, Divino kept climbing on, nodding his head, taking his chances. He traveled throughout his state, got married, moved to a bigger state. Drinking, partying, swaggering—they were all part of the rodeo culture Divino embraced for years as he rode the Brazilian rodeo circuit.

Then he started chatting with a São Paulo rodeo worker named Davi who kept talking about God.

"Stop and think about it," Davi would say. "Your breath—if you think you can do that alone, you can't. That's Him."

One night, Divino joined some friends for a prayer event in the woods. As he prayed in the darkness to a God he was unsure of, he saw the leaves light up all around him. He remembers holding the shining leaves in his hands.

"Who can turn on the lights [or] make leaves from the tree be a light?" he thought. "He's alive. He's the truth."

Divino got baptized in 2014. He stopped drinking and partying. He stopped cursing and swaggering. He fought and stressed less. He wasn't as afraid of injuries and started riding better.

But it didn't last.

A few years later, he walked away from the faith and divorced his wife. He went back to his old ways. When the Holy Spirit nudged him, he drowned Him out.

> ***The white numbers flick past—0.60. Workin' Man hits the ground. Less than three-tenths of a second later, he rears back off again. The landing hurls Divino forward, his brown protective vest almost touching the bull's shoulders as they rise again.***

Things seemed fine without God. João Ricardo Vieira, a now-40-year-old Brazilian veteran who still rides in the PBR, began encouraging Divino to move to the United States. "You're good enough to go there," he kept insisting. "The big money is over there."

But Divino didn't speak any English and wasn't interested in navigating the legal and personal maze of moving to America. That is, until he got a call from Vieira: "I have the lawyer. I've paid already."

Divino started riding the American circuit, even winning a few events. In 2020, he married a woman named Taylor, and two years later, they had a baby boy.

Things seemed fine on paper. Normal. Maybe even good. But it was a different story under the surface.

> ***1.26. Workin' Man has all four feet off the ground, head low in preparation for a midair kick. Divino looks controlled, his jaw clenched and leather chaps flying up toward his waist with fringes hurtling in every direction.***

LEFT: RON ADAR/SOPA IMAGES/SIPA USA VIA AP; RIGHT: ELSA/GETTY IMAGES

That's how bull riders are supposed to look: in control, tough as steel.

"They're cowboys," fans say. "They're a different breed." They say it with the casual confidence that suggests this simple phrase has answered all questions and misgivings.

The PBR has made an art of selling this illusion. The "toughest sport on dirt"—1.5 million pounds of trucked-in dirt, to be exact—is flawlessly packaged into a showy spectacle of fireworks and lung-rattling bass that promises raw, authentic human grit.

But despite the confident, tough cowboy he projected every weekend, Divino was struggling. A bull had stepped on his head and given him a concussion. He was battling with what doctors would later diagnose as depression. But the anger was worst of all. He'd get mad at anything, losing control of himself without real reason.

It kept getting worse. He knew it was hurting his family, his friends, and his career. But cowboys don't admit they're hurting, and they certainly don't ask for help.

Yet cowboy grit was clearly insufficient. One day, he got on his knees and prayed and cried for hours. The Holy Spirit spoke again, convicting him of his sin and reminding him of God's faithfulness over the years. This time, Divino listened.

> ***1.58. Workin' Man lands with a neat twist that forms his bulging back into a treacherous curve. Divino slips to the right just a little.***

In bull riding, it doesn't take much to shove faith roughly into the cleansing fire. Last spring, an ordinary ride ended with a red brindle breaking seven of Divino's ribs and puncturing his right lung.

Divino, despite his career of choice, doesn't do well with pain. Lying in his hospital bed, suffering with internal bleeding, he thought about quitting for good.

Divino celebrates after winning the 2025 PBR Unleash the Beast event.

ELSA/GETTY IMAGES

"We're not going to have the life that I was planning for," he told Taylor. "But at least I'll be with you."

The next day, she walked in on him watching his old riding videos. Two months later, he was back on the road.

But the accident shook them. Death is never far away in this sport. While it's not common, PBR athletes have been killed as recently as 2021.

The realization that riding bulls can end badly may seem obvious, but there's a deceptive sense of safety that creeps closer after every ride that finishes with a rider walking off and the bull strolling away. Except for moments like the one just before Divino's ride—when a rider was hurled against the metal chutes, smacked his tailbone on the rail with a resounding clang, and slid down headfirst—the event can feel oddly predictable.

The rider gets on. The bull bucks. The rider falls off within seconds. Rider and bull walk away. The next rider gets on.

Hard falls, minor injuries, and pervasive limps are table stakes in this sport, so common they hardly register.

Predictable as it can feel, there's no way to predict what will happen in the next moment. There's nothing to do but trust God and take the hits.

> ***1.78. Maybe feeling Divino slip right, Workin' Man spins to the left, yanking his body out from under Divino's weight. Divino's right knee digs into the bull's shoulder as he slides down, his hand still clenching the rope.***

It might seem wiser to retire and find another field, but Divino is convinced God created him to ride bulls and, while he's at it, be a witness in a sport where God is accepted, even proclaimed, but often not followed.

"Bullrid[ing] is a dirty place," Divino says. But he also describes it as "the very best place to take the Lord." Praying with his fellow riders, leading Bible studies, offering to support the younger men—the PBR isn't just his workplace, it's also his mission field.

Plus, his family needs income, and he only has experience in two things: ranching and bull riding.

Divino knows what returning to ranching would mean. After he moved to São Paulo, his father shared that he had ridden bucking horses as a young man. Like Divino, his skill had earned him an opportunity to move to São Paulo, but he turned it down. Now, after decades as a working cowboy, he regretted it.

"I'm just killing myself working here. You kill yourself to make just enough to put food inside the house," he warned Divino. "If you have the opportunity, don't lose [it]. Go."

But bull riding isn't a very stable career either. Divino is one of the top riders in the world, and his net earnings over seven seasons is around $950,000. That's less than the NBA's minimum guaranteed annual salary for every rookie. He's hardly as poor as his aunts predicted, but the relentless consistency of rent, bills, flights, hotels, Ubers, and meals out can strain irregular paychecks.

After getting stomped last weekend, he broke down in the hotel room while FaceTiming Taylor and his two young sons. "I was here trying to make things [better]," he told them. "Now things got worse."

But riding bulls is a job that he believes he was called to. It's a job he needs. So he keeps praying, climbing on, nodding his head.

> ***2.68. Divino slips down until he sticks out perpendicular to Workin' Man's side. Finally, he throws himself away from the bull and hits the ground on all fours. The bull fighters leap into action as he runs, favoring his hurt knee, and jumps on the fence. The clocks are stopped at 3.38. The numbers are red. Not a qualified ride.***

After a week of work and travel, he won't bring home a paycheck. That's the nature of a sport that boils down to a matter of seconds. But Divino is alive.

And at 4 a.m. tomorrow morning, he'll be standing in line at airport security, serenely sleepy. He should be home by 10 a.m.

And there's always the Palm Beach event next weekend. ■

—Abi Dunning is a graduate of the World Journalism Institute and Patrick Henry College

YEARNING TO BREATHE FREE

ECONOMIC MIGRANTS BROKE AMERICA'S ASYLUM SYSTEM. CAN IT BE FIXED?

by Addie Offereins

Migrants walk to a U.S. Border Patrol area in Eagle Pass, Texas.

ROBERT GAUTHIER/ LOS ANGELES TIMES VIA GETTY IMAGES

LEFT: Haitian migrants, who had been seeking asylum in the United States, stay at a makeshift camp in Mexico. RIGHT: A Ukrainian family who fled Kyiv waits to seek asylum at the San Ysidro Port of Entry on the U.S. southern border.

THE UNKNOWN NUMBER on Adam's caller ID was the first sign of trouble. The menacing voice that greeted him was the other. It was early 2020, and Adam was working at a small college in Afghanistan. The caller identified himself as a member of the Taliban and demanded Adam expel all the school's female students. The terror group hadn't yet taken over the country, so Adam refused.

"I was scared," he said. "But I didn't think they would come to the university and try to kill me."

WORLD agreed to use a pseudonym to protect Adam and his family. Shortly after their warning, Taliban members paid the college a visit. "They wanted to kill all the girls," Adam told me. The terrorists didn't succeed at hurting the female students or Adam, but they did shoot and kill a college security guard. Adam said their next warning was much more ominous.

"You didn't listen to us," they said. "The next attack will be you."

Not long after that call, Adam was driving back home from the college when two Taliban fighters on a motorcycle stopped in front of his car. They shot him twice in his left hand and once in the left leg. Fearing the next attack, the family fled to another province. But in August 2021, the terrorist group overthrew the Afghan government and took over the country. Adam and his family left Afghanistan with the goal of seeking asylum in the United States.

They eventually made their way to a refugee camp in Brazil and trekked through Central America to Mexico, where they requested an appointment at the U.S.-Mexico border. Two and a half months later, officials allowed them to enter the country under a temporary status called parole.

Adam was one of millions of immigrants who entered the country under former President Joe Biden's watch. An average of more than 2 million crossed into the United States per year between 2021 and 2024 for a total of about 8 million—the most ever in U.S. history. Many of them intended to claim asylum.

But many of those asylum-seekers—some experts estimate at least half—weren't really seeking asylum. They were in search of "a better life," as James Blaise, the immigration lawyer representing Adam, puts it—and they came at the expense of those sincerely claiming asylum in order to stay alive. The mounting backlog of cases means asylum-seekers like Adam could be living in legal limbo for years.

Or, to put it another way, economic migrants broke America's asylum system. With border crossings on pause for now, immigration experts are debating whether the idea of

LEFT: PAUL RATJE/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; RIGHT: MARIO TAMA/GETTY IMAGES

asylum is salvageable. Some argue it's time to end a system that's proven unsustainable. But advocates maintain that it is through the asylum system that Lady Liberty stretches out her arms to the "huddled masses yearning to breathe free." Though desperately in need of reform, they argue, the program safeguards vulnerable immigrants, especially those who are targets of religious persecution.

THE U.S. ASYLUM SYSTEM took shape in the late 20th century as the United Nations scrambled to assist the tens of millions of people still displaced across Europe in the chaotic aftermath of World War II. The UN created an international definition for refugees in 1951, and in 1967 it applied that definition to all future refugees, not just victims of WWII or the Cold War.

In 1980, Congress altered U.S. immigration law to comply with the UN refugee framework. The Refugee Act of 1980 also laid the groundwork for the current asylum system. Refugees and asylum-seekers must meet the same standard for targeted persecution based on five categories: race, religion, political opinion, nationality, or social group. But officials vet and approve refugees before they arrive, while asylum-seekers begin the process once they step onto U.S. soil and request protection. There's also no limit to the number of asylum cases officials can approve, unlike refugee resettlement applicants, who can't exceed the president's yearly cap.

U.S. asylum numbers originally fell far below the country's refugee tally, but the yearly caseload climbed steadily, eventually outpacing refugee approvals. Immigrants filed 19,448 asylum cases in 2010. That number grew to 361,320 in 2019. But by 2023 applications exploded to 945,370, the highest tally on record.

Global conflicts and record numbers of displaced people worldwide accounted for a portion of the year-over-year increase. But dysfunction throughout other components of the U.S. immigration system has also played a role, according to Kathleen Bush-Joseph, an attorney and policy analyst for the Migration Policy Institute. The U.S. immigration system hasn't undergone meaningful reform since the 1990s, and lengthening employment-based visa backlogs have blurred the lines between the employment-based immigration system and asylum.

Today, asylum cases typically move at a snail's pace. Asylum-seekers can request a work permit 180 days after they arrive, and due to court backlogs, applicants can work for years before officials decide their cases. "The asylum system is increasingly functioning as a new proxy for labor migration in the United States," Bush-Joseph wrote in a recent report.

But Mark Krikorian, a researcher and former executive director for the Center for Immigration Studies, said it's not just ballooning backlogs fueling the system's dysfunction. He insists the system had serious sovereignty concerns from the beginning. U.S. law requires authorities to consider both affirmative applications from legal immigrants proactively seeking asylum and defensive asylum cases filed by those who crossed into the country illegally and are fighting removal proceedings in immigration court. So, the system provides a way for illegal immigrants to stay in the country longer while officials hear their cases, despite their unlawful entry.

Technological developments and the end of the Cold War accelerated migration, Krikorian noted, allowing many more immigrants—not just those in truly dire straits—to try their luck: "It just makes asylum something that is not sustainable or manageable in modern circumstances."

IN AN EFFORT TO LOWER illegal crossings, the Biden administration unveiled a new appointment feature through a U.S. Customs and Border Protection mobile app in January 2023. It allowed migrants to request appointments at U.S. ports of entry while they waited in Mexico. Officials took basic information and paroled them into the United States for up to two years. Most of the new arrivals hoped to apply for asylum once they got into the country.

But it's unclear how many actually did. Krikorian believes it's likely that a large number didn't. Asylum-seekers must file their cases within a year of arrival, and Krikorian said many of them have already missed that window.

"What people found out rather quickly is that sometimes it wasn't necessarily that they actually had a viable case, but they knew that the best way to be able to get work in the U.S. ... and be able to stay for an undefined amount of time was by

applying for asylum," said James Blaise, Adam's lawyer. Blaise, who works for the Pacific Justice Institute in Indianapolis, has handled every type of asylum case. He noted authorities deny the majority of applications because the criteria are so narrow.

But Blaise doesn't blame the immigrants who decided to give asylum a shot despite not having viable cases. He blames the government. "People took advantage of the asylum backlog ... because that's the way the laws were set," he said. "They were able to make a good living and help their family. So I think the fault there is on the government and on the laws that are set forth."

The influx of dubious cases put some lawyers in an ethical bind. Too many went ahead and filed cases they knew wouldn't succeed in court, Blaise said. "You could make a lot of money by filing asylum cases," he added.

The attorneys I interviewed said the asylum system's current dysfunction hurts most the people the system intended to help. Immigrants seeking asylum in the United States wait in one of the country's longest lines. Adam, who fled Afghanistan after the Taliban attempted to kill him, insists he can't go back. He became a Christian during his odyssey to the United States, which means he has even more reason to fear returning to his home country. Adam is still waiting on an asylum decision. His application is stuck in a stack that could take between four to six years to process. Some asylum-seekers wait almost a decade for their first hearing.

Sarah Flagel, a managing attorney for World Relief at an asylum legal clinic in Chicago, said the severe backlogs mean the timing for each case is hard to predict. "The conversation I'm having with folks, when I consult with them, is, 'We may get your interview within 21 days of filing, and it may be five, eight, 10, 12 years.'"

Asylum cases are difficult to prove, and it's not uncommon for applicants to be unsure about whether their case qualifies or not. Applicants must present evidence to document why they were persecuted, Flagel said. "It requires the applicant to know what the motive of their persecutor was. It can be a guessing game."

Decisions take into account 40-plus years of jurisprudence from the courts, she said. Asylum officers typically interview applicants in affirmative cases, while judges in immigration courts take on defensive cases—asylum requests from immigrants in removal proceedings. "The decisions are very nuanced," Flagel noted. As of 2022, authorities had granted about 40% of the nearly 700,000 cases decided since 2000.

TODAY, A STRANGE STILLNESS has settled over the southern border. Soon after taking office, President Donald Trump declared a national emergency, closed the border, and shut down the appointment feature on the CBP One app. The Trump administration also instructed immigration judges to drop asylum cases they deem unlikely to succeed if they proceed to court.

The asylum pause put one Venezuelan family's plans on an indefinite hold. Luis Delgado, his wife, and their two children have been living in a shelter run by a Mexican pastor in Juárez, Mexico, since December 2024. Delgado, a former engineer and professing evangelical Christian, told me his story over WhatsApp in June. The family left Venezuela in 2017 because it became difficult to access food, medicine, and other basic necessities.

"I also fear returning to Venezuela due to my political opinion," Delgado told me over text. "I protested against the regime, and as a result I could not find work, since many institutions require loyalty to the government. This led to discrimination, fear of retaliation, and a lack of opportunities to support my family."

From Venezuela, they moved to Chile where their younger son was born. The now 5-year-old boy has a severe sensory disorder, cannot speak, and struggles to consume solid foods, his father told me. So the family struck out once again, this time for the United States, hoping to obtain better medical care for their son. The family intended to cross legally and claim asylum, so they requested a CBP One appointment in December. But when they didn't hear anything about their application, they decided to cross the border illegally and turn themselves in to immigration authorities. Officials took them to a shelter in Texas but the next day promptly returned them to Mexico before they had a chance to make their case, Delgado said.

Now, with the border closed and no way to request asylum, the family isn't sure what to do next. Each passing day is a reminder that they can't stay in the Mexican shelter forever.

Advocacy groups, including the ACLU, are challenging Trump's emergency asylum pause in court. The ban violates U.S. law, the groups wrote in their complaint, arguing the president does not have the authority to "unilaterally override the protections Congress has afforded those fleeing danger."

If federal courts throw out Trump's current emergency asylum ban, numbers will likely start ticking back up. On July 3, U.S. District Judge Randolph Moss ruled the president does not have the authority to end asylum and thereby establish an "alternative immigration system." But Moss said the ruling would not immediately take effect, giving the administration a chance to appeal.

MOST IMMIGRATION EXPERTS AGREE the asylum system desperately needs lasting congressional reform. But disputes over the nuts and bolts of potential changes get dicey.

"Now that migrants all around the world know that if [asylum] opened up again, that's the way to come in, we would quickly get overwhelmed again," said Theresa Cardinal Brown, a National Immigration Forum fellow and former Department of Homeland Security official. That could put the country back in a dangerous position, she warned, since, unlike refugees, asylum-seekers aren't vetted until after they've arrived. The way the system functions now also empowers criminal smuggling groups, who take

TOP: JOHN MOORE/GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM: ROBERT GAUTHIER/LOS ANGELES TIMES VIA GETTY IMAGES

TOP: An immigrant from Venezuela tries in vain to access the CBP One app a day after the inauguration of President Trump. BOTTOM: Asylum-seekers sit outside a U.S. Customs and Border Protection office as they deal with the cancellation of the CBP One program after waiting months for an appointment with officials to enter the United States.

advantage of migrants' confusion about the legal requirements of the status, she said.

But now that the tap has been turned off, she worries Congress may not feel enough pressure to get to work on serious bipartisan reforms, despite the public outcry in response to the flood of new arrivals that shifted the 2024 election in Republicans' favor.

Redirecting potential asylum-seekers to other temporary programs, as Biden did through the CBP One app and other parole programs, won't ease pressure on the system in the long run, Cardinal Brown argued. These policies only exacerbated the problem since it was still unclear whether "we were actually taking valid asylum cases through this legal way, or we were just taking people who wanted to come in and get work authorization," she said.

In May, congressional Republicans proposed charging a $1,000 fee per asylum application along with $550 for work permit renewals, in hopes of discouraging dubious claims. Congress could more easily pass this type of change through the reconciliation process since it's related to funding, Cardinal Brown pointed out.

Current asylum law also allows the president to implement bilateral safe third-country agreements that would require immigrants to first apply for asylum in a country along the way before making their way to the United States. Other advocates have proposed streamlining temporary visa programs for low-skilled jobs or creating a more permanent visa program for year-round, low-skilled workers to shift them away from the asylum system.

But Mark Krikorian with the Center for Immigration Studies argued it's time to eliminate asylum altogether from U.S. immigration law.

Krikorian isn't against incremental reforms. For instance, he argues eliminating the more vague category of "membership in a particular social group" from asylum could help ease pressure on the system. But he worries small changes won't be enough to ensure the asylum system doesn't usher in complete border chaos in the future. Instead of being able to claim protection once they reach U.S. soil and remain until their hearings, Krikorian said, asylum-seekers should be sent to a third country where they can request protection there.

"If you're really an asylum-seeker, if you really are fleeing persecution, then going to another country where you're not going to be persecuted, even if it's not great, is still preferable."

In Juárez, Delgado and his family are free from the Venezuelan government's political oppression, but they haven't found safety in Mexico. Delgado told me their family received death threats from former shelter residents. Their son needs proper medical care. All reasons, he said, why he believes their family could make a successful asylum case in the United States.

"We are waiting on God's will, but it has been a very difficult process for us," he wrote. "We are asking God for new direction, because [we've] been here for a long time." ■

For more immigration coverage, visit wng.org/compassion

VOICES TED KLUCK

Field of grace

Giving and receiving the antidote to depravity through sport

This is a painful column to write, and not for particularly spiritual reasons. I broke my right hand in a semipro football game recently.

Which brings us to a junior high school football stadium in Little Rock, Ark. I am 49 years old and have "retired" from football probably a dozen times, but I keep playing in semipro games every year. I have played in Europe, in dingy arenas in a low-rent indoor league, and in "stadiums" all over the North and the Midwest. I have broken every finger on both hands, a couple of ribs, a collarbone, and a fibula. There have been a couple of concussions. Now, the hand. It's just the cost of doing business.

I'm playing for a team called the Mississippi Dawgz, which is ridiculous because we're wearing Jacksonville Jaguars–inspired uniforms. My jersey number is 71 (Tony Boselli's number—cool), but it's emblazoned with the name "Martin" on the back. Martin, whoever you are, thanks for the jersey. I'm the only guy on the team over 33 and a college professor, but none of the Dawgz care about that. Nor do they care about books I have written or the fact that I helped kill the Emergent Church (which just re-spawned as "deconstruction." Sigh). They care that I am playing right guard.

My thing is, I love playing right guard. I love my hand in the dirt. The weight of the helmet on my head. The challenge of a perfect pass set. I love riding home in the dark, sore, and stopping someplace for a burger sporting a black eye.

I love surviving the game, and then assessing the damages back home. Playing right guard in the internet era is essentially the same as it was in 1964 when Jerry Kramer played guard for the Green Bay Packers, and I'm drawn to things that are the same now as they were then. Things like that are few and far between in our culture.

Psalm 62 teaches us that we have nothing to fear from man, but nothing to gain from him either. When I line up against a guy who played college football, who is bigger than me, stronger than me, and two decades younger than me, that is fear of man in the purest sense of the word. Unlike the psalmist, I don't have to worry about that man slandering me later or oppressing me with his wealth. I do have to worry about him putting me in the dirt and rebreaking my collarbone.

I have nothing, tangibly, to gain from this. I won't post pictures of it online. I won't make a penny from it, and if we're being honest, it's not making me healthier. Probably the opposite. It is a thing done in private, but hopefully to the glory of God in terms of how it's done (to the best of my ability) and how I use it to relate to others in it (in ways that honor and reflect my commitment to Christ).

In my work with ESPN and in my book career, I have met some of the most celebrated, wealthy, and successful men the sports world has to offer. Some of them are interesting, some of them are mind-numbingly boring, and most of them miserable and paranoid. I've spent many a ride home wondering why. They had everything I thought I always wanted.

It has taken me nearly a half-century to think about why a theology of sport is so important, for me, and perhaps for others. To my shame, I have seen my sin nature blossom in sport as an athlete, a parent, and a coach. I have nearly ruined sport for both of my sons, but have apologized, been shown grace, and (thankfully) didn't ruin their experiences. But the impulse was there. By God's grace, in recent years especially, I have used sport to give and receive grace, and have seen "created in God's image" all over the landscape. It's a life-giving antidote to all the "total depravity of man" I used to bring with me to stadiums and practice fields. The Lord has been kind.

Ultimately, like the famous Arlington Hotel in Little Rock where we had brunch the morning after the game, my grandeur has faded. But I thank God for the broken hand, and that He gave me the right number of snaps instead of the perfect snap. Even in my suffering, He is good. ■

—Ted Kluck is the award-winning author of 30 books, including his football memoir, Paper Tiger: One Athlete's Journey to the Underbelly of Pro Football. *His journalism has appeared in* ESPN the Magazine, USA Today, *and many other outlets. He currently serves as an associate professor of journalism at Union University in Jackson, Tenn., and coaches long snappers at Lane College. He and his wife, Kristin, have two children.*

LESS LIKE HIPPOS MORE LIKE HONEYBEES

BY DR. DAVE CORYELL

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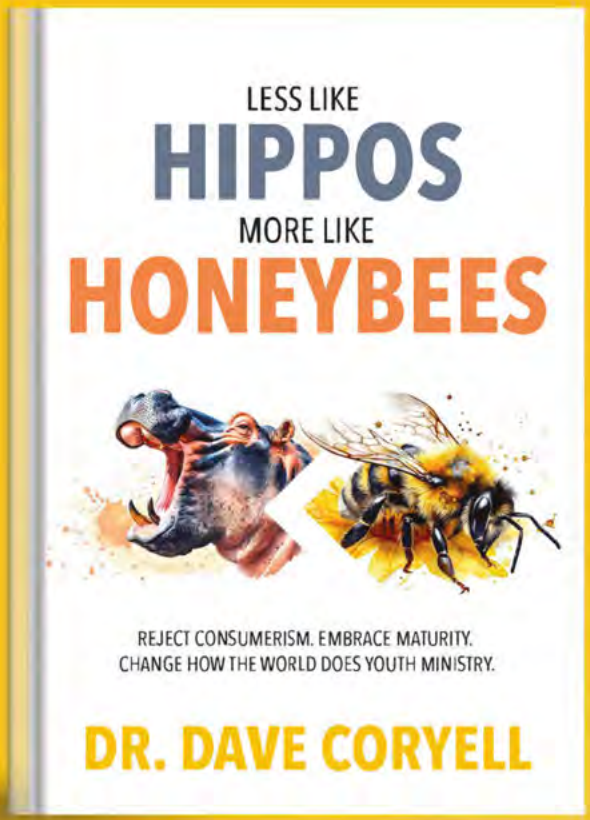

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NOTEBOOK

PHOTO BY LAUREN DUNN

HEALTH

Therapy in the saddle

Kids and adults find physical and mental healing from riding horses

by LAUREN DUNN

Straddling a chestnut horse, Tucker Backhus, 4, was ready to ride. Two adults flanked him, holding on to his safety belt, while a third stood ready to lead the horse. "Walk on," Tucker instructed the animal. Slowly, it began lumbering in circles around the barn.

On one wall, a giant sensory board offered different textures at the rider's height. Large rubber balls hung from the roof. Tucker's therapist urged him to try to hit one as the horse walked beneath it.

Watching from the side, Tucker's mom, Alisha, recounted when her son first began these lessons a couple of years ago. "We didn't think he was going to talk until we started this," she said.

Tucker was born with agenesis of the corpus callosum, a rare disorder that affects how the two sides of his brain cooperate. In Tucker's case, it affects his gait, speech, ability to eat by mouth, and regulation of his nervous system. Tucker attends multiple forms of therapy, but his favorite exercises occur in this barn in Goddard, Kan.

Multiple therapy associations recognize that, for children and adults with disabilities, therapy in a horse barn can provide significant benefits. The approach used with Tucker, known as hippotherapy, uses horse riding to meet occupational, physical, and speech therapy goals. Other programs don't meet all of the hippotherapy requirements but still offer therapeutic riding services for individuals with disabilities or social and emotional needs. All have found surprising benefits from interacting with horses, intelligent creatures that researchers say can recognize and respond to human emotions.

According to the American Hippotherapy Association (AHA), people first labeled therapeutic horseback riding as "hippotherapy" in the 1960s. The movement of a horse simulates the movement of walking, which benefits individuals who don't walk on their own or who experience difficulties doing so. Horse riding can improve muscle tone, useful for people with conditions like cerebral palsy or Down syndrome. The horse's rhythmic motion also helps riders better regulate their nervous systems.

"We're just using this horse as a tool," explained Kori Turney, executive director of Prairie Meadows Therapeutic Riding Center, the Christian organization where Tucker rides. Turney's parents started the center in the late 1980s. Now a nonprofit, it provides hippotherapy services during six-week sessions each spring and fall.

As Tucker rode around the barn, Turney initiated activities like reaching for toys, throwing and catching balls, and riding backward or on his hands and knees. Riding a horse calms Tucker, she explained, and that calmness helps →

Tucker Backhus reaches for a toy during hippotherapy at Prairie Meadows Therapeutic Riding Center.

A girl interacts with a horse at New Heights Therapeutic Riding.

him with more difficult skills—such as eating by mouth and talking—even when he's not on the horse.

Tucker's mom sees him making progress. During last fall's six-week session, Tucker began kicking a ball, showing improved balance and coordination, Alisha said. "Every time we come to ride, something changes, and he improves in something."

Some other programs aren't licensed for hippotherapy but still offer the benefits of horse riding. In Salina, Kan., Kelley Hulteen operates New Heights Therapeutic Riding. Hulteen, a licensed occupational therapy assistant who has received some training from the AHA, said she tried running a hippotherapy program for a while. But it was difficult finding an available occupational therapist to oversee sessions, and billing insurance became cumbersome.

Soon she realized that many families didn't count on that licensing piece.

"Every time we come to ride, something changes, and he improves in something."

"Parents were saying, 'We don't care if it's therapy, we're happy with the experience that they're having with the horse,'" Hulteen said. "And so I just decided, OK, I think I've got a nice little nonprofit here—we'll do it that way."

When families come to visit, Hulteen shares a devotional with them acknowledging the source of the horse's abilities. "Looking at how the horse [was created] helps us see God's hand as if He were an artist," it reads.

On a warm June afternoon, 10-year-old Katie Kavouras arrived for a session, accompanied by her parents. Katie has Cornelia de Lange syndrome, a genetic disorder that causes intellectual and physical disabilities. At New Heights, parents take turns walking beside their children as they ride.

"I always promised myself we'd treat her like a typical kiddo," said Katie's mom, Keri. "I feel like it's something we can both enjoy together, right? We take her to therapy, we take her to school, I take her to my stuff. None of it's really 'we' stuff. And this is just something we can do together."

Hulteen is expanding her horse riding services in other creative ways. This year, she's kicking off a first responders' program that brings military members, firefighters, paramedics, and police officers to the stable. She said she learned about similar programs after her son left his paramedic job due to post-traumatic stress disorder. Hulteen plans to allow six participants to practice basic horsemanship skills, learn to ride, and then pursue "more adventurous" goals like obstacle courses or trail riding.

Devon Young, a 32-year-old member of the National Guard, is working with her to start the program. Young went to Iraq in 2018 for a one-year deployment and more recently returned from Syria and Jordan. He owns a horse of his own and said God used the animal to help him heal emotionally from his combat tours.

"That's when I like to talk to God," he said. "You don't talk to Him all day, and then you get on top of that horse, and you're walking, you're riding—[it's] like, 'OK, now I can talk to You.'" ■

COURTESY OF NEW HEIGHTS THERAPEUTIC RIDING INC.

SCIENCE

Getting the gut right

Study finds most U.S. babies lack key microbes

by HEATHER FRANK

Newborns are high maintenance—right down to their gut microbiome. A recent study found that most U.S. infants lack sufficient *Bifidobacterium*, historically dominant gut microbes critical to healthy immune system development.

Initial results from Persephone Biosciences' My Baby Biome seven-year longitudinal analysis revealed that some three-quarters of U.S. infants have deficient levels of *Bifidobacterium*. Over 90% of the 412 babies studied lacked *Bifidobacterium infantis*, a strain that digests breast milk sugars. Infants with a *Bifidobacterium* shortage were three times more likely to develop allergies, eczema, and asthma by age 2.

Among babies in the study, those with the highest levels of *Bifidobacterium* tended to be those who were breastfed and born vaginally rather than by C-section. The study authors also listed modern antibiotic use and a shift toward processed foods as key contributors to the decrease in beneficial microbes observed.

Persephone, which published its findings June 24 in *Communications Biology*, is also developing dietary supplements meant to restore beneficial gut microbes in young children. "We're learning what our babies need to get back on track," wrote Persephone CEO Stephanie Culler in a companion Springer Nature article.

DEADLY FUNGUS COULD HELP KILL LEUKEMIA

A deadly fungus just might earn itself a redemption. *Aspergillus flavus* fungal molds can cause serious lung infections and were linked to deaths during tomb excavations in the 1920s and '70s. But a University of Pennsylvania–led team of researchers recently discovered that *A. flavus* can produce powerful cancer-killing compounds.

The team screened *A. flavus* for naturally occurring molecules called RiPPs (short for "ribosomally synthesized and post-translationally modified peptides"). RiPPs are an emerging field of pharmaceuticals with unexplored therapeutic potential. Combining metabolic and genetic information, the scientists identified two RiPPs that were effective against leukemia cells. With addition of a fatty molecule, a third RiPP performed as well as the FDA-approved leukemia drugs cytarabine and daunorubicin.

Publishing their study June 23 in *Nature Chemical Biology*, the researchers next plan to test the RiPPs in animal models. —*H.F.*

A BETTER MEASURE OF WEIGHT?

University of Florida researchers say the primary measure of body weight needs an overhaul. In a paper published in the June issue of *Annals of Family Medicine*, the researchers argue body mass index, calculated by height and weight, can misclassify muscular or big-boned individuals as obese. They suggest replacing BMI with bioelectrical impedance analysis (BIA), which measures lean muscle mass, body fat percentage, and water weight. The authors noted BMI can underestimate health risks for those with a normal BMI but elevated body fat percentage. —*H.F.*

BABY: JOHN MOORE/GETTY IMAGES; BMI: AHMAD DARMANSYAH/GETTY IMAGES

SPORTS

Ballpark fans and bans

MLB takes hard line against gratuitous taunts

by RAY HACKE

Major League Baseball is making examples of unruly fans whose razzing of opposing players crosses the line into cruelty, banning such fans from its ballparks indefinitely.

The latest fan to earn such a penalty is a 22-year-old Chicago White Sox supporter whose derogatory comment about Arizona Diamondbacks second baseman Ketel Marte's mother made Marte cry. While Marte was batting during the seventh inning of a June 24 game at Chicago's Rate Field, the fan, sitting within earshot of Marte, reportedly yelled, "I sent your mom a text last night."

Marte's mother, Elpidia Valdez, died in a 2017 car accident in Marte's native Dominican Republic.

After consoling Marte, Diamondbacks manager Torey Lovullo asked White Sox officials to eject the fan. They obliged, though MLB.com reported that the fan—whose name has not been released—was later "very apologetic and remorseful."

MLB's actions appear to signal both a zero-tolerance policy against fan conduct that exceeds garden-variety heckling—however boorish—and a policy of showing compassion to, and protecting, players who have experienced tragedies or other mental and emotional hardships.

The White Sox fan isn't the only one who won't be watching his favorite team in person anytime soon: In April, a Cleveland Guardians supporter earned himself a lifetime ban from his team's home ballpark after taunting Boston Red Sox outfielder Jarren Duran about the player's struggles with depression and suicidal thoughts, which Duran revealed last year in a Netflix documentary.

Marte's story had a happy ending: Attendees at Arizona's Chase Field repeatedly cheered the All-Star infielder at his first home game following the incident in Chicago. During his first at-bat, *USA Today* columnist Bob Nightengale reported, Marte nearly shed tears of a different sort—happy ones.

BASEBALL: ERIN HOOLEY/AP; THOMAS: JOHN BAZEMORE/AP

RESETTING RECORDS

The University of Pennsylvania is effectively erasing the name of **Lia Thomas** (formally known as Will Thomas) from its women's swimming record book.

Facing the loss of at least $175 million in federal funding, the Ivy League institution agreed in early July to settle a Title IX lawsuit from the Trump administration. The settlement obligates Penn to strip Thomas—the biological male who became the NCAA women's 500-yard freestyle champion in 2022—of any titles he won and school records he set while competing for the Quakers and instead award them to female swimmers.

The university must also apologize to the women it harmed at the expense of accommodating Thomas and maintain sex-segregated athletic teams and dressing spaces moving forward. Former Penn swimmer Paula Scanlan told the website OutKick she believes the decision shows the school "knows that they were in the wrong."

Days after the settlement announcement, the Supreme Court declared it would hear two cases challenging Idaho and West Virginia state laws that bar males from women's sports.

—R.H.

MONEY

Running away with your vote

Christian investors may not realize their shares are supporting questionable proposals

by JOSH SCHUMACHER

In March, when Ruth Poglitsh got an email from her investment firm offering to represent her at upcoming shareholder meetings, she was intrigued. The email touted a "proxy voting choice program," in which the firm would vote for (or against) shareholder proposals on Poglitsh's behalf. As a shareholder, she could choose a preset voting policy that reflected her values. Among the options: an "ISS Catholic Faith-Based Policy."

As a Roman Catholic, Poglitsh's first thought was, "This is brilliant."

Yet when she dug deeper, the policy wasn't what she expected. Navigating a 100-page PDF full of corporate jargon, Poglitsh did a word search for "LGBT." The results revealed a supposedly Catholic voting guideline that stated, "Vote against shareholder proposals that seek to eliminate protection already afforded to LGBTQ employees." When she searched for environmental guidelines, she found one that supported proposals "seeking increased investment in renewable energy sources."

Essentially, if she selected the "Catholic" voting preset, her investment funds' shares might support proposals allowing men into women's restrooms or promoting company benefits for employees' gay partners. Her shares might also support climate proposals she didn't agree with. Such directives didn't represent Poglitsh's values at all.

Conservatives in recent years have pushed back against the progressive agenda at the ballot box, with some success. Meanwhile, their money has often been quietly voting in the opposite direction in annual shareholder meetings for companies around the world. Now some conservatives like Poglitsh are catching on—and raising the alarm.

Ruth Poglitsh and her husband are among the 126 million Americans who own stock in investment funds. Such

TIMON SCHNEIDER/ALAMY

funds own about one-third of all corporate stock in the United States, giving fund investors tremendous influence with corporations.

Think of an investment fund as a bucket into which a group of people have dumped their money: The bucket, in turn, buys and owns stocks in various companies. An investment firm such as BlackRock, Vanguard, Fidelity, or State Street then manages that bucket.

Investment firms are typically focused on the profitability of the companies they invest in, not on shareholder proposals circulating boardrooms. Those proposals can include nominations for a corporation's board of directors, carbon-emission reduction goals, or requests for a review of the company's connection to vice industries such as tobacco. To help them navigate the many shareholder proposals put forward at U.S. companies each year, investment funds hire proxy voting advisory firms to research proposals and advise them how to vote. In the United States, the two biggest proxy voting advisory firms are Glass Lewis and ISS.

Conservatives have accused major investment firms such as BlackRock and Vanguard of supporting left-wing social priorities in corporate boardrooms. Jerry Bowyer, head of Bowyer Research (and a WORLD Opinions contributor), says conservatives have unwittingly allowed their shareholder votes to support un-Biblical proposals at annual meetings in recent years. Investment firms and proxy voting firms have used conservatives' shareholder voting power to oppose proposals condemning the debanking of conservatives and to oppose efforts to silence pro-abortion stances at major U.S. companies, he said.

The ISS Catholic policy Poglitsh reviewed supports proposals opposing abortion, predatory lending practices, and pornographic content. But the guidelines also oppose nuclear power and support reduced carbon emissions.

State Street Investment Management, Poglitsh's investment firm, doesn't offer any faith-based policy besides the Catholic one. If investors don't choose a policy, State Street will vote its default policy on their behalf. (The company recently began offering a proxy voting policy written by Bowyer Research, but it's available only for clients that are government entities.)

"You've already basically hired someone to vote on your behalf, whether you know it or not."

Glass Lewis also offers a Catholic-themed voting policy. It, too, supports climate-conscious positions, and it supports shareholder "resolutions that seek to prevent discrimination based on … sexual orientation."

ISS did not respond to a request for comment. In a written statement, Glass Lewis told me it worked with a selection of its customers to create its Catholic policy guidelines. The guidelines were designed to reflect those clients' values, not the values of all Catholics, the company said.

"We provide analysis and data to inform our investor clients' vote decision and, where instructed, implement the voting policies chosen by our clients," Glass Lewis added. "Actual votes are audited regularly to ensure that they have been cast in accordance with the client's own voting policy."

Inspire Investing, a Christian investment company, does its own proxy voting. Although the company relies on research by firms like Strive Asset Management and Bowyer Research for information about proposals, portfolio manager Tim Schwarzenberger said his team doesn't trust ISS and Glass Lewis to vote for them.

Schwarzenberger said Christians need to be aware of how their shares are being used. "You've already basically hired someone to vote on your behalf, whether you know it or not," he said. "You're voting your proxies. Now, is that in alignment with your values, or is it not?"

Last year, Inspire Investing sent a petition to Glass Lewis and ISS urging them to create voting guidelines that reflect the values of Christians and others opposed to left-leaning agenda items. "It's starting to change," Schwarzenberger said. "But it's not quite there."

Jerry Bowyer urges Christians—and Christian ministries—to ask their financial advisers for specific, detailed answers on how their money is voting. "And don't take 'I don't know' for a valid answer," he said.

Meanwhile, people like Ruth Poglitsh are left trying to find the least bad option out of the ones their investment firms offer. She told me she ultimately ended up signing on to a proxy voting policy that avoided political agendas and focused only on maximizing shareholder return.

She recognizes such neutrality doesn't represent a perfect way to run a U.S. business. "Because there are values—we are human beings, and we have values," she said. "But I would rather that they do that than they'd be promoting values that I'm opposed to." ■

BUSINESS

Cloudy outlook

U.S. executives worry about the economic horizon

by TODD VICIAN

Executives of midsize U.S. companies are committed to maintaining or expanding their operations in 2025, but they're pretty skeptical about the nation's economy, according to a survey released June 25. Of the more than 700 respondents in J.P. Morgan's midyear Business Leaders Outlook Pulse, only about 30% said they were optimistic about the U.S. economy. The confidence level of leaders from companies with annual revenue between $20 million and $500 million has fallen by half from six months ago.

What's likely behind the sagging sentiments: economic uncertainty, market volatility, reduced consumer confidence and spending, and mixed jobs numbers. Nonfarm employment increased by 147,000 in June, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data released July 3, but that increase just kept pace with the average total for the past 12 months. Most of the job gains were not in revenue-generating companies but in state and local governments. The unemployment rate remains relatively steady (4.1% in June), but the Labor Department said the nearly 2 million adults who remained unemployed after their first claim in June was the highest number since 2021. And according to an alternate, payroll data–based survey from ADP Research Institute, private-sector employees cut 33,000 jobs in June, suggesting a slowing economy.

Midsize businesses account for about one-third of private sector revenue and jobs in the United States, according to the JPMorganChase Institute. If President Donald Trump plays more hardball in trade wars and tariff negotiations and the Federal Reserve continues to delay interest rate cuts, business owners may slow production and new hires in the fall, making it harder for out-of-work Americans to find jobs.

Despite the country's cooling labor market, slowed domestic production after three modestly positive years, declines in consumer spending, and thin profit margins, most execs surveyed were optimistic about their own companies and expected their revenue and sales to remain steady or increase.

GETTING BY WITH FEWER BOSSES

Managers who lament they're working "eight days a week" might not be imagining things. Small and midsize companies are asking their middle managers to supervise more workers as they deal with rising labor costs, according to a Gusto study of nationwide employment and payroll data released June 30.

Small and midsize businesses have downsized since 2022, halving the number of new managers hired and tripling the number laid off, according to the report. Managers in companies with 500 employees or less now typically supervise six employees—double the number reported in 2022. Blue-collar and service industry supervisors and those at midsize companies (100 to 499 employees) saw the greatest increase, about 45%, in the number of employees supervised in the past three years.

Managers in information and professional service positions, what are often known as white-collar jobs, supervise on average four employees, while hospitality, arts and entertainment, and recreation managers typically supervise 12 people. The seasonal and part-time nature of the hospitality and food service industry contributes to the imbalance. *—T.V.*

MICHAEL NAGLE/BLOOMBERG VIA GETTY IMAGES

barnabas aid

LEBANON: CHRISTIANS IN CRISIS

"This crisis is one of the heaviest we have experienced so far," assessed a Barnabas Aid project partner, after the Middle Eastern war burst into Lebanon in full force.

Many Christians are among the displaced families who had nowhere to stay.

Hundreds of thousands have been displaced, seeking refuge and relative safety in north-western Lebanon.

These believers now have no means of supporting themselves.

Barnabas Aid works through trusted project partners to provide food, warmth and other essentials.

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TECHNOLOGY

Policing robots make the rounds

Is a wave of robotic law enforcement in our future?

by LIZ LYKINS

Last fall, a convicted drug dealer who broke his parole in Lubbock, Texas, attempted to flee police by barricading himself in a Days Inn motel room. Police tried to negotiate with the suspect, but that failed, resulting in a SWAT team standoff and an exchange of gunfire.

Finally, local authorities sent a wheeled, one-armed robot to the man's room. The robot shot tear gas through a window, prompting the suspect to jump out. Remote operators then rolled the robot on top of him, pinning him to the ground until officers could arrest him.

Ryan Fillman, a lieutenant with the Lubbock County Sheriff's Office, said his office uses robots as often as several times a month, whether to negotiate with a barricaded suspect or to inspect a suspicious package.

"It's for sure a tool in the toolbox that I think that every SWAT team and bomb squad should have," he told me. "We don't have to go put a human in harm's way."

Whether they're taking down armed suspects, patrolling apartments, or diffusing bombs, robots are the latest trend in crime-fighting tech. Creators laud robots as an efficient option for security and law enforcement, and U.S. police departments are experimenting with the latest machines. But some experts question these tools' usefulness and worry about privacy, cost, and potential abuse of force. Will the rise of police robots mean the loss of human touch?

While some robots are specialized to deal with particularly dangerous situations—think bomb threats and armed criminals—others are designed for the more mundane task of routine patrolling.

William Santana Li, the CEO of policing robotics company Knightscope, said robots fill a nationwide security need. Li argues there are not enough officers to monitor the U.S. effectively: According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were fewer than 800,000 police officers and detectives in the country in 2023—about 1 for every 400 Americans. Meanwhile, some police departments continue to struggle with recruitment.

"What we need to do is to provide some new tools for officers and guards to be in multiple locations at the same time," Li said. "So, the robots can go monitor the monotonous, boring, sometimes dangerous areas and redeploy the humans to where you actually need a human."

Knightscope's K5 robots are meant to patrol places like apartments, parking garages, corporate offices, schools, and neighborhoods. Li said the robots, which weigh 300-400 pounds and stand 5 feet tall, are a deterrent to crime by their physical presence alone.

If the robots do come across suspicious activity, such as spotting a person at night in a parking garage that should be empty, the machines send an alert to employees at Knightscope. The employees then check the robot's video footage to determine next steps, such as directing the robot to make a warning announcement or calling in human police aid.

Knightscope claims its robots reduced crime reports by 46% and increased arrests by 27% across the city of Huntington Park, Calif., from 2018 to 2019.

"There's no excuse not to be using the most advanced public safety technology tools out there to protect the people," Li said.

Another company, Transcend Robotics, sells robots that can climb stairs and breach doors. About 300-400 law enforcement agencies around the country deploy the company's robots, typically in situations with hostages or a barricaded suspect, according to Eric Habeeb, the director of sales.

"It's now become a tool in 2025 where you'd rather have it and not need it, than need and not have it," Habeeb said.

But Matthew Guariglia, a senior policy analyst at the Electronic Frontier Foundation, argues that policing and patrolling robots add more social media hype than safety value.

"Police robots are kind of a solution in need of a problem," Guariglia said. "They are an expensive toy that seems cool. Oftentimes, police get a lot of news coverage out of buying and adopting

ANTHONY BEHAR/SIPA USA VIA AP

New York City commuters walk past an NYPD Knightscope K5 Autonomous Security Robot at the Times Square subway station.

"Police robots are kind of a solution in need of a problem."

these robots. But in terms of how they are actually useful, I don't think police have really proved that they need all these new semi-autonomous robots."

For example, Guariglia cited the Honolulu Police Department's 2021 purchase of a $150,000 Boston Dynamics robot—a four-legged machine that can climb obstacles like a dog. Police ultimately used the expensive robot to take people's temperatures at a city-run homeless shelter. News of the purchase made national headlines and received backlash for being an irresponsible use of federal pandemic relief money.

Jay Stanley, a senior policy analyst for the American Civil Liberties Union Speech, Privacy, and Technology Project, says "the jury is still out" on whether such robots can have a positive effect on safety. "You have to look at the whole picture and not just one anecdote or one successful story," he said.

Stanley added that authorities should ask their communities if they even want these tools before spending the money on them. In 2021, the New York City Police Department stopped using a leased Boston Dynamics robot after facing backlash over cost and concerns of abuse of force. In 2023, the department tried to deploy a K5 patrol robot from Knightscope, only to end the program with little explanation a year later. (NYPD did not respond to my request for comment.)

Critics of police robots are concerned about the machines being armed with lethal weapons and used to kill, subdue, push, constrain, or harm people. In 2016, Dallas police officers used a bomb-equipped robot to kill an armed man suspected of fatally shooting five fellow officers at a protest. A grand jury chose not to charge the officers for the killing.

Several states have attempted to regulate the weaponization of robots, but no bills have been passed as of yet. Guariglia said that even if the robots aren't armed, he still has concerns about a data-collecting "robotic police state" as these tools go beyond what normal surveillance cameras can do and see.

Danny Garcia, the CEO of security company JDS Security, a San Diego–based vendor of Knightscope robots, has seen people's concerns about robots dissipate once they see their value.

One of his customers, he said, was skeptical of the effectiveness of a robot that patrolled her apartment complex. But then the robot stopped her car from being vandalized.

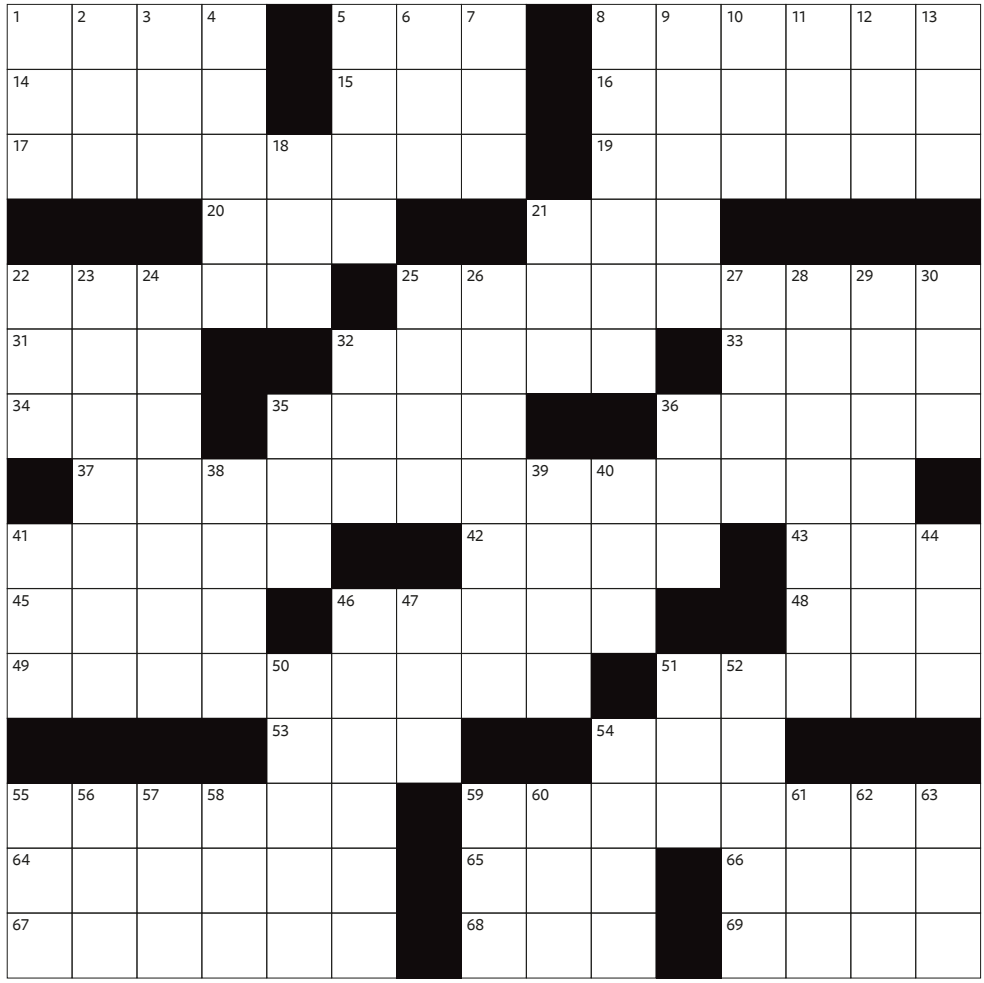
JDS deploys robots to patrol apartment complexes, shopping centers, and parking lots and is looking into putting them outside houses of worship. Garcia said the response has been similar to when his company first started using surveillance cameras 13 years ago.

"There was a lot of pushback. Now fast-forward 13 years later, every property has cameras," Garcia said. "So now with this, it's still a little new, but at least I know we are ahead of the game." ■

CROSSWORD

Not a second to spare

by DON McCRORY



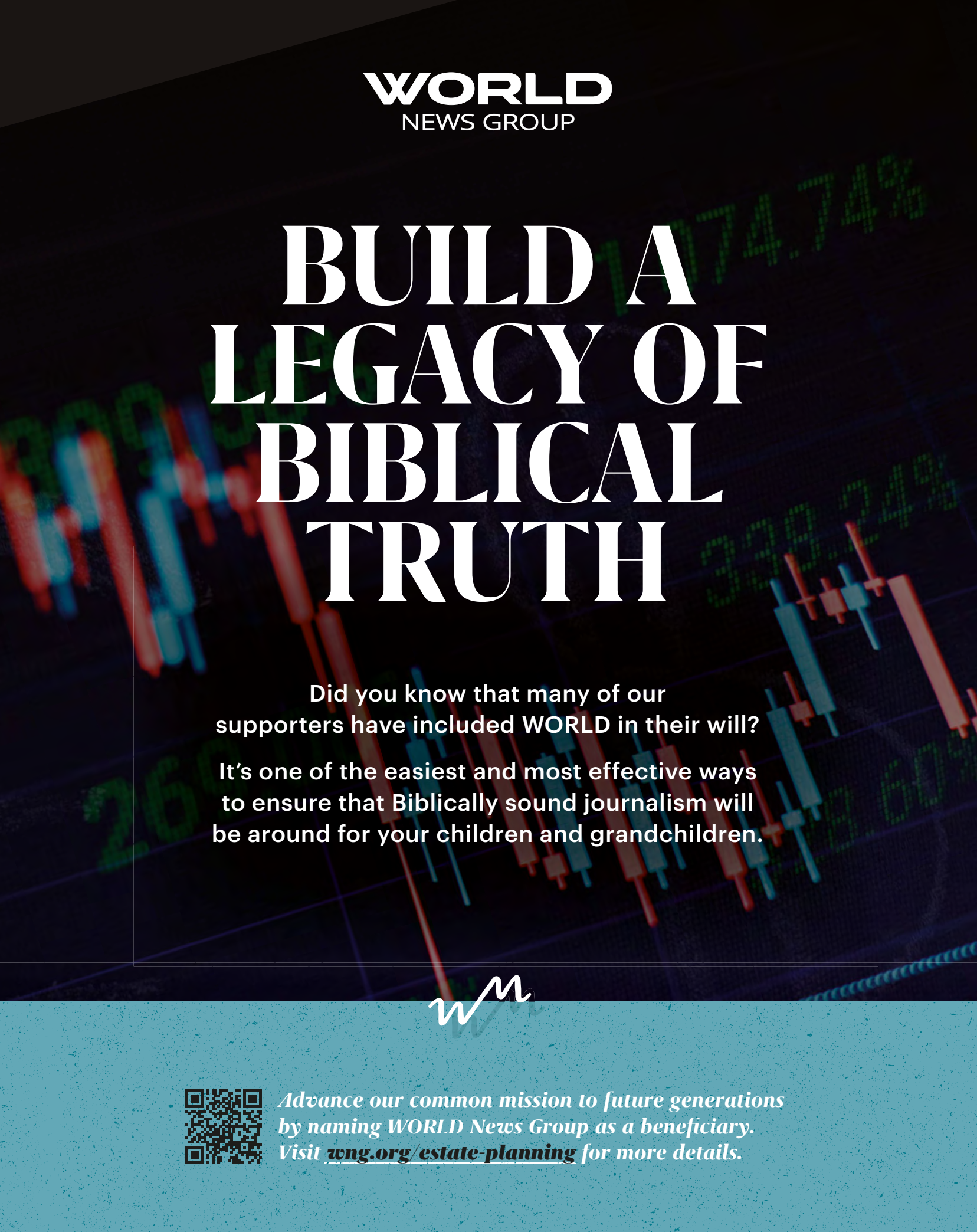
Across

1 ____ Bears
5 Cassette successors (abbr.)
8 Celery pieces
14 Thomas ____ Edison
15 Yearning
16 Response to "Am not!"
17 Sizzling pitch
19 Name that anagrams to "Easter"
20 Opposite of max.
21 Ewe said it
22 Treated a lawn, for example
25 Quick-fried carnival hot dog
31 Nutritious tuber of Peru
32 Benefits
33 Policy nerd
34 Actor Affleck
35 "The ____ will be first"
36 Gives praises
37 Taxi conversation question, and a hint to the first words of 17-A, 25-A, 49-A, and 59-A
41 Most likely (informally)
42 Poetic foot
43 Knight's title
45 Roy Rogers' wife ____ Evans
46 What a happy cat does
48 Business abbreviation
49 Where you might see a cop aim a gun
51 Dangles
53 Honest ____
54 Rocket's trajectory
55 Stop daydreaming
59 When jams are produced
64 Like some Coast Guard rescues
65 UFO pilots
66 Friend in trouble
67 "Stop it at once!"
68 Piece of softball equipment
69 Unlikely to bite

Down

1 Half-____ (barista order)
2 In the style of
3 Campers, briefly
4 Message on a Wonderland cake
5 A primary printer color
6 N.J. neighbor
7 NBC variety show launched 1975
8 ____ kingdom is no match for God's rule
9 Pick up the tab
10 ____ Lingus
11 Cell letters
12 Completely floors, in short
13 "____ wise guy, eh?"
18 Auction action
21 Rock's ____ Jovi
22 Hit the ball high overhead
23 Strain and sprain treatment
24 Access to a sewer
25 Put online
26 Tax shelter named for a senator
27 Man-____
28 Enters en masse
29 Eternal
30 Minor parsonage residents, briefly
32 ____-relief
35 Mil. officers
36 WD-40 description (abbr.)
38 "Bauerstein's got ____ in his bonnet." —Agatha Christie
39 Dodge City lawman Wyatt ____
40 Comic opera ____ *Pinafore*
41 Location of some sgts.
44 Some soft drinks
46 JFK's 109
47 Suffix with past or post
50 Candlelight dinners, often
51 Regal inits.
52 "Let's sit and have ____"
54 Mgr.'s helper
55 Down in the dumps
56 Never in Berlin
57 "____ Gratia Artis": MGM motto
58 Letters on a tire label
59 Civil War soldier
60 NBA's Jazz on scoreboards
61 Motor extension?
62 City where Einstein was born
63 "White, wheat, or ____?"

Bonus clues and puzzle solution on page 110



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Does our crossword have you puzzled? Before checking the answers, try these additional clues:

Across

8 Stealthily pursues
15 Japanese money
45 Broad valley
51 Puts up, as a painting
66 Partner in war

Down

2 Pie ____ mode
9 Trick alternative
25 A timber set in the ground
40 British navy initials
57 ____ Technica (tech website)

VOICES ANDRÉE SEU PETERSON

Stay in the crucible

Normal human struggles are not pathologies to be numbed with meds

Patient Q," known to me through a case study I was asked to proofread for grammar, is a 16-year-old high school girl with a history of family sexual abuse, exposure to community violence, mood dysregulation, a fifth grade suicide attempt, violent ideation, chronic lateness to school, impulsivity, high-risk behaviors, alcohol and marijuana use, rapid and intense mood shifts, and a provisional diagnosis of bipolar disorder.

Current prescribed medications are Prozak, Abilify, and Lamictal. (The case study notes that Prozak and Abilify both "carry FDA black box warnings for increased risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors in adolescents.")

Author recommendations for treatment of Patient Q include weekly psychiatric appointments, coordinated development of a safety plan, routine monitoring, regular screening, tools to help the patient identify precursors and build alternative coping strategies, and personal and professional support contacts.

Or ... what about this alternative view, which came to me on a sleepless bed while mulling over the case study: Q is in the trouble she is in today because: (1) life is hard; (2) she made some bad choices; (3) these choices made her troubles worse; (4) so she made more bad choices, compounding her troubles; (5) she was born in the 21st century.

The 21st-century West is a place where the normal human struggles of a thousand generations of young people are suddenly seen as a pathology to be labeled, treated, and numbed with meds, courtesy of a wildly lucrative pharmaceutical industry that entices into a dark labyrinth from which few ever escape.

Alternative recommendations for helping Q include showing her from the Bible that there is a God in heaven who loves her. He knows her to the depths because He formed her in the womb. He binds up broken hearts. He offers hope and a future, giving meaning to temporary sufferings. He forgives sins so that we can start again with a clean conscience. He proffers trustworthy rules for living, that we may escape our moribund, self-sabotaging ways.

How about just starting off with getting Q a good night's sleep, and time away from her environment to sit quietly and think?

Around the same time I read Patient Q's case, I happened upon a new release (2025) titled *Unshrunk: A Story of Psychiatric Treatment Resistance*, Laura Delano's testimony detailing her 14-year journey and eventual breakup with psychiatry after having been put on the psych med hamster wheel by well-meaning parents at age 13.

A widespread misimpression (that Big Pharma is in no hurry to correct) is the mythology that mental sufferings are caused by a "chemical imbalance" in the brain. In fact, no such biomarkers have been found. Delano decided in the end that she would rather feel the pain and be alive than dull the pain and not:

"I had spent most of my life assuming that discomfort was a problem to be fixed, numbed, or run away from. ... The more my brain healed from pharmaceutical trauma, the more clearly I recognized all that I had lost, all that I had missed out on, all the possible pathways that a psychiatrized young adulthood had prevented me from entertaining. ... I've been off my meds for nearly six years now and I have never felt more alive, more connected to myself, more capable."

Like Delano, Q has been bamboozled and razzle-dazzled by the jargon of professional pathology to the point (noted in the case study) that she even has adopted their lingo, applying to herself the clinical terms of the experts. Jesus, in contrast, says: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3).

My own personal testimony is that I was insufferable in college days, deeply depressed and obsessively haranguing friends about the meaninglessness of life in a random universe of time plus chance. Why get an education? I protested. Why get a job? Why have children? ... Why get out of bed?

They grew weary of my one-track-mindedness and tactfully suggested there are other things to talk about, like boys and parties. I daresay if I had walked into a shrink's office in the mental state I was in, I would have come out with a diagnosis and a script for an SSRI.

But God bless the child who does not short-circuit the struggle but elects to stay in the crucible, enduring the heat, trusting in the process, until meaning is forged and growth is attained. For we and Q are not a list of symptoms but His much-loved children, meant to thrive. ■

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Lucas Divino at a PBR competition in New York

In the arena

The pros and cons of loving a brutal sport

by LEIGH JONES

Really good stories take readers to a place they'd otherwise never go and introduce them to characters they would otherwise never meet. That's exactly what Abi Dunning did in her article about professional bull riders on page 82. After I finished reading the story, and with George Strait's "Amarillo by Morning" playing in the background, I asked her to share a bit more about what she learned while reporting on this niche sport.

Your story notes that bull riding is rapidly gaining fans. Were you one before you started working on this story? I started watching bull riding in high school. I was fascinated by the moments when a brutal sport unexpectedly turns into a thing of beauty as bull and rider move in harmony. Plus, the riders' willingness to endure pain was intriguing and a little provoking. Maybe that's why the PBR All Star's album was the go-to playlist for my painful runs.

Your story focuses on one event, in Louisville, and ends with Lucas Divino getting ready to fly home. Catch us up with the rest of his season. How did he do? Lucas continued to struggle for the next few months. In nine events after Louisville, he earned an average of $825.93 a weekend. But he qualified for his seventh PBR World Finals in May, and finished 10th overall with a 90.75-point ride in the championship round.

In the story, we get to see Lucas struggling with the toll it's taken on his body and his debate about whether to continue. Does he plan to compete next year? Lucas said he's got another five to 10 years left in the tank. Broken ribs and punctured lungs can't take him down—for long.

Given the physicality of the sport, I'm guessing most bull riders are pretty young. What's the age range among professional riders? Most of the riders are in their 20s or early 30s, but there's a surprisingly broad range. For instance, 39-year-old Anderson de Oliveira tied for third place in Louisville—he's more than a decade older than every other Top 5 finisher.

Did Divino say what he planned to do once he could no longer ride? He hopes to start raising cattle and training horses. Since it takes about an hour a day to train a horse, his goal is 10-12 horses. He and his family recently bought their own property in north Texas, where they plan to stay long term.

I know there are places you can go ride a bull for fun. After you were done with your reporting, were you even just a little bit tempted to try it for yourself? I'm only brave enough to confess that the small, adventurous part of me was quickly silenced by watching full-grown men fly through the air like toddlers being thrown by their dads. The turbulence on my flight home was enough excitement for me. ■

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