

WORLD


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Tidings of great joy

Could Christians from the Global South rejuvenate the church in the West? *p. 66*

by GRACE SNELL





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COVER ILLUSTRATION
by Ale+Ale

WORLD (ISSN 0888-157X) (USPS 763-010) IS PUBLISHED MONTHLY (12 ISSUES) FOR \$69.99 PER YEAR BY GOD'S WORLD PUBLICATIONS, (NO MAIL) 12 ALL SOULS CRESCENT, ASHEVILLE, NC 28803; 828.253.8063. PERIODICAL POSTAGE PAID AT ASHEVILLE, NC, AND ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES. PRINTED IN THE USA. REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT WRITTEN PERMISSION IS PROHIBITED. © 2025 WORLD NEWS GROUP. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO WORLD NEWS GROUP, PO BOX 20002, ASHEVILLE, NC 28802-9998.

WORLD

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WORLD NOTES



If you've been around WORLD for a while, you know that we make our biggest appeal for charitable contributions in December every year.

You also know, even if you're new to WORLD, that we rely on your contributions to do our work. We're up front about this: Our readers, listeners, and viewers also are our most important supporters, and we are grateful for that. To maintain our independence, we can't allow ourselves to depend on big advertisers, big foundations, big government, or a never-ending chase for a bigger audience. All of those bring big temptations—and it's hard enough to do honest reporting even without those.

We're thankful, then, that you have been so generous all these years. You've made it possible to do more work and to do it better—deeper reporting, sharper analysis, and stronger programs. With your help, we are serving more individuals and families by providing more content on more platforms.

Here are just a few things your gifts made possible this year:

At the start of the year, we launched a newsroom-wide professional development program—our most robust ever. It's already helping to stretch our reporting vision through a series of off-the-record briefings and workshops with high-level speakers addressing education, science, culture, ethics, and world affairs. These sessions allow our reporters and editors to engage candidly with leaders and thinkers shaping the news we cover. Like our other initiatives, this effort exists entirely because of your support.

As I noted here in the previous issue, this year we've seen tremendous growth in our newest program, *The World From A to Z*, viewed in more than 30,000 public school classrooms every day. That program is almost entirely donor-supported—we wouldn't be doing it at all without your help.

At the beginning of the school year, we introduced a brand-new look for *WORLD Watch*, our daily video news program for families. This is our fastest-growing subscription service, and we hope it reaches many more young families in the coming year. Your contributions helped get that program off the ground, and they'll help us reach new viewers.

World Journalism Institute—also funded by donors—continues to train young reporters for WORLD and for dozens of other news and media outlets. WJI has become a unique supporter of journalism programs at Christian colleges and has expanded significantly in recent years. This year, that commitment deepened with the introduction of our yearlong journalism fellowships, and our first fellow, a recent college graduate with a degree in economics and an alumna of WJI. She's now gaining experience with the *WORLD Watch* team, representing the next generation of journalists your gifts make possible.



Students at the WJI Young Professionals Course in July

The WORLD and Everything In It, our daily news podcast, continues to grow and improve, even after more than a decade of production. Advertising covers only a small fraction of what it takes to produce the program. You provide nearly all the resources that make it happen.

And if you're wondering, this magazine and our student magazines all benefit from your giving, too. Your subscription matters, and we're grateful when you give gift subscriptions to friends and family. But even with those and limited advertising, your charitable support keeps these magazines vital and helpful.

We consider our audience—you, our readers, listeners, and viewers—a gift from God. He has called us to serve you, and we take that calling seriously. In an age when so many ministries rely on a handful of very large patrons, we're thankful for the tens of thousands of ordinary believers who make WORLD possible. It's not flashy, but it's faithful—and it's the kind of independence that keeps us accountable to you.

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“The fact that some of Heiser’s work hangs on the Book of Enoch, which is not even in the Protestant or Catholic Bibles, makes WORLD sound like marginal reporting.”

THINGS UNSEEN

Page 74: I have read every word in WORLD since 1995. Well, maybe not the advertising, but certainly the articles and blurbs related to news. However, the last two issues, September and October 2025, have me wondering where the magazine is headed.

First, eschatology is such a divisive issue within the church that I wonder if airing it on the front cover was wise. It certainly brings no noble thoughts about WORLD. We cannot know if this is the end times. And, trying to puzzle the pieces together from the bits and bytes of Scripture does not really help. Who knows? God could lead the world into revival and worship of Him, and we could have two more centuries before Christ returns.

We know there is this age and the age to come (Matthew 12:32). We know that Christ will return. We know that we are to spend our time living for Him and not wasting it in idle speculation (Luke 18:29-30). Individually, we will be called to account for how we lived, not on our wonderment of *end times*.

At least Les Sillars pointed out, “Critics of connecting current events to Biblical prophecy charge that continually hunting for signs undermines the Church’s witness in the world and damages people’s faith.” I would agree, but WORLD’s handling of the issues did not help.

Now I opened the October issue and find a tabloid-worthy hunt for Yeti, Sasquatch, Nephilim, and other furries.



OCTOBER 2025

If the subject is worthy of mention, it could have been handled in a one-page article—maybe in the Culture section. I doubt it to be worth even that.

Thankfully, buried in the article is a quote from Bruce Wood, “Heiser excels at fabricating lucid interpretations of Scriptural topics that are not given any substantial data to accurately define.” The fact that some of Heiser’s work hangs on the Book of Enoch, which is not even in the Protestant or Catholic Bibles, makes WORLD sound like marginal reporting. In the final two paragraphs someone is given the voice to refocus back on Christ, Christ’s gift to mankind—true salvation.

I hope we see a refocus at WORLD back to useful “Biblically objective journalism that informs, educates, and inspires.”

RUSS FRISINGER
Woodland Park, Colo.

I am praying that Timothy Alberino is wrong and that this is a passing fad. Thank you for trying to give perspective. A friend tried to get me interested in Michael Heiser, but I was quickly turned off when he said he liked the weird passages in the Bible most and then went on to spend much of his time and books and seminars on them. I agree with Charlie Trimm’s concerns, plus Heiser seemed to quickly dismiss other godly Bible teachers who give different views on these passages. One of my favorite Bible teachers says, “The plain things are the main things and the main things are the plain things.” Is it wrong to ask questions? No, but it saddens me that so many Christians would go down these speculative rabbit trails. There are still people on this earth who have never heard that Christ died for them, and we are worried about Bigfoot?

SHELLEY SPANOGLE
Clearfield, Pa.

POWER STRUGGLE

Cover: There is a rather glaring error in your cover art. While the inside articles address the general history of the judiciary/executive conflict, the cover does not reflect the current reality of the Supreme Court. With his strong embrace of the unitary executive theory, Chief Justice John Roberts is not tugging against the efforts of the president. He is tugging with him.

SAM REID
Issaquah, Wash. →

QUOTABLES

Page 30: I read WORLD cover to cover and almost always feel you are reporting the actual news. However, I was disappointed in the cartoon on p. 30. It seems at least to imply that the Palestinian people are the ones killing and starving the Israelis and/or their own people. That is not true—it is Hamas, and the Palestinian people group is not one and the same with Hamas.

CHERYL HEMPHILL
Laramie, Wyo.

AWAKE?

Page 12: Thank you for your article on Jen Hatmaker's book, *Awake*. I read it, as I was curious about Jen's stance after her divorce. I would not recommend this book for any Christians as it is a conglomeration of a memoir and new age listen-to-your-body philosophy, sprinkled with bad language. Yes, her pastor husband was unfaithful, and it was devastating for her family. I'm glad she has friends who were supportive. It is sad that she could not find real support from the church community. I too hope that Jen comes back to the truth of Jesus instead of her own "truths."

HENNY BULTEN
Lutz, Fla.

Lynn Vincent reminds us that the Word is truth and to disregard it is folly. Often our reaction is not one of sadness but one of judgment and criticism. One thousand percent we have to call out the wrong and point to the truth. There is a place for anger over the damage done to those who hear her false teaching—but our reaction should be sadness, and a deep desire for those who have strayed to come home. I needed to hear this and to be reminded of the proper heart posture toward prodigals in all areas of my life.

AMY MASTERS
Marietta, Ga.

Lynn Vincent's sensitive and poignant column about her friend Jen Hatmaker revealed a Christian heart. Ms. Vincent differs with her friend on important issues, not based on opinions but on the

authority of God's Word. She lists the names of others who "first dabbled in doctrinal detours, then fell over the cliff." The same could be said for deviations from the authority of the Bible. After "editing" or "updating" one or two verses, it becomes easier to do the same with all parts of the Bible that are "inconvenient." Gradually one creates a new Bible. Lynn Vincent is not angry with her friend; instead, she is grieving for her to come home.

WILLIAM R. BOUKNIGHT
Columbia, S.C.

SCREWTAPE STARTS A PODCAST

Page 94: The introspective column by Peter Biles echoes the thoughts of a lot of Gen Z, myself included. It brought to mind Colossians 2:8: "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ."

KYLIE WEAVER
Salem, Ohio

DEPICTING THE INNER PERSON

Page 62: William Collen suggests that Frida Kahlo's surrealist self-portraits, including *The Two Fridas*, proclaim the Biblical truth that we only see the outward appearance while God sees the inner person. God's truth does shine in every nook and cranny of His creation, but Frida Kahlo, a lifelong atheist and communist, would never have intended such a message. Erasing God from her inner landscape profoundly affected her

imagination while communism saturated her life, especially her art. Her last painting, unfinished, was *Marxism Will Give Health to the Sick*. Why Collen completely ignored Kahlo's deep faith as he tried to understand her art is almost as puzzling as her work.

NANCY J. RICE
Culpeper, Va.

FUNNY, RIGHT?

Page 111: I searched out the J.C. Penney commercial. Yeah, the concept was amusing enough. And I get why a woman would be so enthusiastic about the ad. But my empathy was tempered by ... what if my wife gave me a top-of-the-line lawn mower? (Wicked cool!) Or even better, that highest rated by *Popular Mechanics* Ego Power 56 volt 24-inch 2-stage self-propelled battery snow blower 7.5 Ah? That would be like getting married all over again. Sigh. Really good column.

BRUCE P. MCKECHNIE
Honey Brook, Pa.

OIL EXODUS

Page 101: The picture in the rearview grows clearer. California was once king of the mountain in drilling and production. In the past 40 years, one decision after another has been a slippery slope as refineries fall like dominoes. Todd Vician's piece helps us to connect the dots. Gov. Newsom's 2020 executive order regarding gas-powered vehicles was one more blow to energy independence. Now the California Energy Commission is left to try and put Humpty Dumpty back together.

DARLA DYKSTRA
Kansas City, Mo.

CORRECTIONS

Helmuth Hübener was Mormon, not an orthodox Christian ("*Truth & Treason*," November, p. 57).

Paul Dans was born in Boston and lived in South Carolina while working in Washington, D.C. ("Paul Dans makes a Senate bid," November, p. 19).

Ray and Maria Sorensen started their business in 2008 ("Rock of honor," November, p. 100).

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VOICES LYNN VINCENT

Heavenly light

Reflections on the Star of Bethlehem

On Nov. 5 at eventide, my son Jake and I headed south on I-25 from Castle Rock toward my new home in Colorado Springs. On our right: Pike's Peak and the Front Range, its jagged ridgelines sawing into the blue-green vesper light. On our left, floating low over the Black Forest's ponderosa pines: the Beaver Moon.

That's what Native tribes and early American pioneers called November's full moon, although no one is quite sure who called it that first.

This November's full moon was a "supermoon," the modern term for the giant orb that appears when our moon waxes full at perigee, the point in an object's elliptical orbit that brings it closest to earth. The moon isn't really bigger, of course, only closer—and brighter, reflecting up to 30% more sunlight toward Earth, according to NASA.

In Colorado Springs, the colossal moon turned gold for a few minutes and then, as it rose, so bright it seemed someone had switched on a searchlight in heaven.

This month, we celebrate the birth of Christ and the time Someone did switch on a distinctively heavenly light: the Star of Bethlehem. Though traditional nativity scenes often show the star over the manger, scholars vary on how old Jesus was at the time of the Magi's visit.

I've read a lot about the Magi, but not a lot about the star itself, the nature of which is still debated today. A December 2023 article on JSTOR, a digital database of scholarly journals, notes "the believer historian or astronomer wants to prove that there is a connection between what the Bible tells and what happened in the skies ... the nonbeliever wants to disprove any such thing."

In 2014, at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, an astronomer and a theologian helmed an entire international conference on the star, inviting Near East and modern astronomy experts, among others.

Scholars have debated heavenly lights since the ancients. Both "great" lights, the sun and moon, are spoken of in Genesis 1, but not until Day 4 of creation. Yet, Genesis 1:3 proclaims, "And God said, 'Let there be light,'" raising a critical question: Of what nature was that light before God made the sun?

In *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas suggested that God first produced "luminous matter" to dispel darkness, then on Day 4 organized it into the sun and moon, eliminating the apparent contradiction.

Some ancient rabbis said the Day 1 light referred to divine or moral illumination, the revelation of God's presence as He inaugurated time. Others proposed the light was literal, a pre-solar divine radiance, which became the Or HaGanuz, or "hidden light." In this view, after the serpent deceived Eve, God judged His radiance too pure for fallen man and concealed it, preserving it for the righteous in the future.

Throughout Scripture, divine light marks the intersection of heaven and earth (John 1:9, John 8:1, 2 Corinthians 4:6). Nativity tradition notwithstanding, Luke's detailed account of Christ's birth does not record a unique heavenly light, but instead God's Shekinah glory, which is referenced many times in Scripture: The heavenly host *ephistēmi* ("stood near") the shepherds, and God's glory *perielampsen autous* ("shone around them"). Further, the text explicitly says the angels "went away into heaven," implying they'd been with the shepherds, not above them like some angelic chorus singing from a choir loft in the sky.

Thus, when the Star of Bethlehem punched through the night sky, it can be argued it was unique in history: a divine heavenly light announcing a singular event.

But which event? Amateur theologian that I am (and discarding any natural explanation as pointless), I now sidle out on my exegetical limb and humbly hypothesize:

Until Christ, there was "none righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10–12). Perhaps the star was a glimpse of the hidden light—the Or HaGanuz—now fixed and shining over the only Righteous One, the Father gazing on His beloved Son and Heir—and a sign for the world, fulfilling Isaiah 60:3—"Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising"—guiding the Gentile Magi to worship the child Jesus, Everlasting King of all. ■

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DISPATCHES



IN THE NEWS

Deployment disputes

Trump forges ahead with National Guard mobilization despite legal challenges

by EMMA FREIRE

A group of protesters advances slowly toward a row of federal law enforcement officers. Some wear animal costumes. One carries a bull horn and yells obscenities. Many are holding up their phones to film the agents. Scenes like this are a near-constant outside the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility in Portland, Ore.

Once an unremarkable building that blended in with nearby high-rises, it now has windows covered with plywood for protection. The facility has become the epicenter of protests against the Trump administration's immigration enforcement efforts. Portland's extreme left political culture is diametrically opposed to Trump's policies. "This is kind of ground zero for a clashing of world views," said Damian Bunting, who works for Echelon Protective Services, a private security firm in Portland.

Tensions simmer constantly and regularly boil over into outright violence. During the summer, the facility had to close for several weeks due to the protests. On Sept. 27, Trump announced on Truth Social that he would send "all necessary troops" to the city. He aimed to protect the ICE facility which he said was "under

siege from attack by Antifa and other domestic terrorists."

Portland is one of at least 10 American cities where Trump has deployed or discussed deploying the National Guard. His efforts have faced local resistance and frequent legal setbacks, often getting blocked in court. Trump's proposed deployments are pushing legal boundaries, but Mark Caleb Smith, professor of political science at Cedarville University, thinks the president "has a leg to stand on" in court.

The outcomes of the legal challenges will likely vary by city based on the local context. But the tensions over deploying the National Guard reflect deeper political divisions. Trump and his supporters believe the troops are needed to restore law and order to cities that are out of control. Critics see troops on American streets as a warning sign of authoritarianism.

American presidents regularly deploy the National Guard, usually without controversy. Guard troops often respond during natural disasters and occasionally during severe disruptions like the 1992 Rodney King riots in Los Angeles. The National Guard also serves in overseas conflicts and can supplement active duty military on American soil. Smith notes the National Guard could be deployed during a hypothetical invasion or rebellion.

When a president calls up the National Guard domestically, he usually works with the →



The National Guard and police confront protesters after a series of immigration raids in Los Angeles.

governor of the affected state, though not always. Smith cites the example of President Dwight Eisenhower. “During the civil rights crisis in the 1950s, he deployed elements of federal troops into Arkansas against the governor’s wishes in order to uphold some court orders involving desegregation,” Smith said.

It’s not always crystal clear when a president can legally deploy the National Guard. Smith said there are “a bundle of laws” relevant to the issue, which is one reason the orders have faced so many court challenges. “We just haven’t seen this kind of situation before,” Smith said, noting the context in each place matters. “That makes this all a lot more complicated because the courts are going to have to work through each of these cases.”

During his second term, Trump has ordered the National Guard to put boots

**“We generally
have that level
of unrest
all the time
here in Portland
somewhere.”**

Anti-ICE protesters clash with federal agents at the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement building in Portland.

on the ground in various U.S. cities, citing the need to fight crime and protect federal agents as they arrest illegal immigrants. He started in Washington, D.C., where he proclaimed a crime emergency in August. This came shortly after Trump administration staffer Edward Coristine was assaulted in Washington by around 10 juveniles during an attempted carjacking. Trump called up about 2,300 National Guard troops, and their deployment will continue through February, if not longer. This deployment held up in the courts because of Washington’s special legal status. “It functions under the direct supervision of Congress and the federal government in general,” Smith said. “A president can deploy the D.C. National Guard much more easily and uncontroversially than a state’s National Guard.”

Violent crime has dropped in Washington since the deployment, and Trump touted that success in a video message in September. He said the nation’s capital “was one of the worst and now it’s a crime-free city. And we’re going to keep it that way. It can be done. It can happen fast.” Trump offered to help other cities combat crime, adding all local officials have to do is tell him, “Mr. President, we need help.”

Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee, a Republican, accepted that offer this fall. Trump deployed National Guard troops to Memphis in October to help bring down its high crime rates.

But the president has had a much harder time sending troops to states with Democratic governors. He deployed 4,000 guard troops and 700 Marines to Los Angeles in June, arguing they needed to protect ICE agents. California Gov. Gavin Newsom denounced the deployment as “purposefully inflammatory,” and took the administration to court. In September, a federal judge ruled the deployment violated the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878, which prohibits the military from performing law enforcement duties unless authorized by Congress. The case is still winding its way through the



courts, and Smith expects the Supreme Court to weigh in eventually.

Despite that setback, Trump isn't slowing down. In August, he asked the Pentagon to create specialized National Guard units in every state and territory that can respond rapidly to riots and civil unrest.

In Portland, Trump argued ICE agents needed the National Guard to do their jobs. Bunting of Echelon Protective Services said protesters routinely take over sidewalks, block traffic, play loud music, or throw fireworks. Virulent protests like the ones at the ICE facility have become routine in Portland during the last five years. Protesters barely need a pretext to hit the streets. "We generally have that level of unrest all the time here in Portland somewhere, and it would be happening somewhere if it wasn't at the ICE facility." He said the city government gives the protesters free rein.

But after Trump put Portland under the spotlight, the local police have done more to keep order. Terri Wallo Strauss, a Portland police spokesperson told me the city deployed an Incident Management Team in September that includes dialogue liaison officers, a sound truck, and air support. Bunting said the change is noticeable: "I've seen more active enforcement in the last maybe 2½ to three weeks than I have in a long time."

When the protests were at their peak, Trump had a strong legal case for calling up the National Guard. But now that the local police are doing more to keep order, Smith said it will be harder for Trump administration lawyers to argue the troops' presence is needed.

Bunting thinks even if courts rule the National Guard deployment legal, it won't address Portland's bigger issues with homelessness, shoplifting, theft, and vandalism. But he doubts Oregon's left-wing leaders will ever accept the presence of troops sent by Trump. "The local government and the state government, in my opinion, would rather see the entire state fail before they would accept any help." ■



BY THE NUMBERS

Seasonal spending

Holiday countdowns help fuel retail trends, but tariffs may slow spending

BY JOHN DAWSON

69

The number of days in the 2025 Christmas season, according to Hallmark's annual Countdown to Christmas movie marathon that began Oct. 17. When Hallmark debuted the feature in 2009, it allotted just 28 days for Christmas programming. Hallmark's expanded countdown reflects the ongoing push by broadcasters and retailers for a longer Christmas shopping season.

\$890.49

The amount of money Americans plan to spend on holiday shopping this year, according to a survey conducted by the National Retail Federation.

1.3%

The decrease in planned holiday shopping compared to last year's all-time high spending, according to the survey, which also found that 85% of holiday shoppers expect higher prices due to tariffs.

31%

The share of holiday shoppers who used credit to buy Christmas gifts in 2024 and have yet to fully repay those bills, according to a Harris Poll published in October.



WASHINGTON MEMO

A farewell to the East Wing

President Trump's startling but legal White House ballroom construction project

by CAROLINA LUMETTA

→ The *Washington Post* editorial oozed skepticism. “The attempt to ‘modernize’ [the White House],” it read, “has destroyed its historic value and does not seem to have made it much more desirable as a residence.” The *New York Times* lamented “a sacrifice of history for convenience.” Another newspaper wondered if White House renovations were really necessary at a time when Americans suffered under a poor economy.

The latter paper, the *United States’ Telegraph*, was responding to President

Andrew Jackson’s completion of the North Portico of the White House in 1830. The *Times* ran its complaint in 1970, when President Richard Nixon covered over a swimming pool to convert it into a press briefing room. And the *Post* lodged its opposition in 1902, when President Theodore Roosevelt ripped out greenhouses to build the West Wing. At the time, newspapers and citizens across the country wondered if the building really needed the extra office space.

In 2025, newspapers and the public are again unhappy at the sight of excava-

tors and bulldozers removing the East Wing for a planned 90,000-square-foot ballroom. President Donald Trump originally said the privately funded project would cost \$200 million and that the ballroom would sit next to, but not touch, the East Wing.

A few weeks later, the entire wing was gone. New estimated cost: \$300 million.

While Trump continues to adapt and expand his ballroom plans, his actions have run afoul of public sentiment and Washington historians. But the project is not illegal.

During a dinner for private donors in October, Trump claimed he had the authority to start his projects simply by virtue of his office.

“They said, ‘Sir, you can start tonight,’” he said. “You have zero zoning conditions. You’re the president.”

He’s technically correct. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 created what is called the Section 106 review process. It involves input from stakeholders, agencies, and architectural historians. The process includes guidelines for how to identify historic properties and minimize adverse effects that could “diminish the integrity of the property.” An adverse effect could include physical destruction of the property or changing its historical look.

But Section 107 exempts three buildings: the Supreme Court, the Capitol, and the White House.

For construction of the new wing and ballroom, the White House says it will submit plans to the National Capital Planning Commission. In 1952, the National Capital Planning Act granted the group jurisdiction over construction and major renovations to government buildings and parks in the region. Among its responsibilities, it enforces a height restriction on buildings in Washington, which does not have typical city skyscrapers. The board consists of 12 members, including at least three presidential appointees. Earlier this year, Trump appointed Will Scharf, the White House staff secretary, as chair of the board.

The Commission of Fine Arts, a six-member board that oversees Washington architecture, was also expecting a call. But on Oct. 28, Trump fired the entire board.

The laborious review process for D.C. construction projects can take years, so it makes sense that the president wanted to avoid it. He has long complained about brutalist architecture that characterizes some Washington buildings—notably, the soon-to-be-former FBI headquarters. He also wants to finish the ballroom by the end of his term. While most presidents have volun-

tarily abided by Section 106, Trump is correct that he’s not required to.

The East Wing was first added to the White House complex in 1902 as a carriage entrance during the Theodore Roosevelt administration. In 1942, his fifth cousin Franklin Delano Roosevelt expanded it further and added a secure bunker underground due to war concerns. It also held a private movie theater for the first family. The president and first lady typically hosted Christmas parties and tours from the East Wing.

In a building where power is determined by proximity to the Oval Office, the East Wing was a remote outpost. It was a mishmash of offices and public touring space until first lady Rosalynn Carter created a formal Office of the First Lady there in 1977. Previously, first ladies worked from a sitting room in the main residence. After Carter’s office expansion, the role of the first lady grew, with first ladies launching education and social initiatives from that wing.

BELOW: President Trump holds an artist’s rendering of the new ballroom interior. BOTTOM: The construction zone at the White House.



First lady Melania Trump has now moved operations into the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. The White House said it removed historical artifacts and artwork prior to the excavator’s arrival in October.

The press has been thankful for at least one White House project before—the 1970 addition of the James S. Brady Briefing Room, a media gathering place that now sits above the former swimming pool. Still, it’s cramped, and the cubicles in the basement grow mold on occasion. It has shockingly poor air conditioning during the summer. Reporters also face the periodical threat of having the floor opened up beneath them (apparently still possible) if the press corps grows too rowdy.

From that briefing room, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt has defended the ballroom construction. In October, she displayed photographs of past historical projects—most notably, the gutting of the White House interior during the Truman administration. The final straw for President Harry Truman was when a grand piano leg fell through the floor of his daughter’s sitting room. From 1948 to 1952, he oversaw an over-

haul of the interior that ripped out and replaced wooden beams, plumbing, and electrical systems. Only the walls remained.

The ballroom might not be the only project on the president’s horizon. Trump displayed blueprints and 3D models of a grand archway à la Arc de Triomphe. The renderings put the arch on the other side of the Potomac River on the Memorial Bridge into Washington. He said the monument could be “small, medium, or large.”

It’s unclear whether that project could clear the National Capital Planning Commission’s 24-step process for new monuments in time for the nation’s 250th birthday celebrations next year. ■

DEPARTURES

Former vice president dead at 84

by JOHN DAWSON



**Dick
Cheney**

A sharp-elbowed political operator who took on leadership roles in the legislative and executive branches of government, Cheney died Nov. 3. He was 84. Cheney began his political life working in the Nixon White House under the aegis of Donald Rumsfeld. He succeeded Rumsfeld as President Ford's chief of staff and later ran Ford's unsuccessful 1976 reelection campaign. Cheney then spent a decade in the U.S. House representing Wyoming before becoming secretary of defense during the first Bush administration. As George W. Bush's surprising vice presidential pick in 2000, Cheney played an influential role in the nation's response in Afghanistan and Iraq after the Sept. 11 attacks.



**Diane
Ladd**

A screen veteran who played a variety of roles through six decades of work, Ladd died Nov. 3. She was 89. Initially best known for soap opera roles, a pair of films in 1974 helped Ladd break out into more varied work. Director Roman Polanski cast the Mississippi native in *Chinatown*. The same year, Ladd earned an Oscar nomination for her part in Martin Scorsese's *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*. She joined the cast of the movie spin-off and CBS sitcom *Alice* from 1980 to 1981 earning a Golden Globe for best supporting actress. Ladd would earn Academy Award nominations for her supporting roles in *Wild at Heart* in 1990 and *Rambling Rose* in 1991.



**Victor
Conte**

A popular funk musician who, decades after his musical career ended, reemerged as the linchpin of one of American sports' biggest scandals, Conte died Nov. 3. He was 75. In the late 1970s, Conte earned a spot playing bass for the notable Oakland-based funk band Tower of Power. By the mid-1980s, Conte had left music behind to form the Bay Area Laboratory Co-operative, a sports nutrition business that sold supplements and more. On the side, Conte peddled undetectable performance enhancing drugs to sports luminaries like baseball stars Jason Giambi and Barry Bonds as well as gold-medalist sprinter Marion Jones, leading to an investigation and federal charges in 2004.



**June
Lockhart**

A television, film, and stage actress who outlived most of her colleagues from the Golden Age of Hollywood, Lockhart died Oct. 23. She was 100. Lockhart first appeared on screen in a 1938 rendition of *A Christmas Carol*. As a teenager she had supporting roles in *Sergeant York* and *Meet Me in St. Louis* and won a Tony Award for her stage work in 1948. But it was her natural fit as a motherly character where Lockhart found her most enduring success. Her portrayal of Ruth Martin from 1958 until 1964 on the CBS series *Lassie* helped define the stereotype of a TV mom. Later she reprised the motherly role in *Lost in Space* and *Petticoat Junction*.



**Susan
Stamberg**

Called a founding mother of NPR for her early involvement in public radio, Stamberg died Oct. 16. She was 87. When NPR first hit radio dials in 1970, the Manhattan native had a job there cutting and splicing audio tape. Before long, network executives put Stamberg on the air. She hosted *All Things Considered*, NPR's afternoon drive-time news program, for 14 years beginning in 1972, making her the first female host of a national evening news broadcast in the United States. She continued with NPR through 2025 in a variety of roles, including as a guest host and a special correspondent, and made sharing her family's special cranberry sauce recipe a Thanksgiving tradition on the network.



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HUMAN RACE

A socialist at city hall

by ADDIE OFFEREINS



Self-proclaimed socialist **Zohran Mamdani** swept to victory in November, trouncing Democrat-turned-independent candidate Andrew Cuomo.

Mamdani, New York City's youngest mayor in a century and its first Muslim leader, won 50.4% of the vote to Cuomo's 41.6%. Republican candidate Curtis Sliwa trailed with 7.1%.

Mamdani captured national attention with his bold socialist proposals aimed at lowering living costs for working-class New Yorkers. His youthful appearance and growing popularity led some to consider him a potential path forward for a Democratic Party struggling to regain its footing in the wake of President Donald Trump's reelection. The former state assemblyman proposed freezing rents on more than half of the city's housing units and eliminating the fare on city buses. Mamdani also pledged to provide free child care for children ages 6 weeks to 5 years old and establish a network of city-run grocery stores focused on keeping prices on basic foodstuffs low instead of making a profit. The new mayor proposed paying for his plan by slapping a flat 2% tax on New Yorkers who make more than \$1 million and hiking corporate tax rates.

Critics pointed out that Mamdani does not have the power to change tax law and must convince state lawmakers to approve his plan. Though Gov. Kathy Hochul endorsed the young socialist, she has criticized policies that would increase taxes and might drive wealthy New Yorkers out of the state. His opponents also warned his plan to freeze rents could strangle the housing supply and drive up prices in the long run.

TUITION PAYMENT

Billionaire businessman Jeff Yass has given the fledgling University of Austin \$100 million, marking the beginning of a \$300 million campaign aimed at keeping the school permanently tuition-free and free from relying on government funds. Co-founded in 2021 by journalist Bari Weiss, the school hopes to build a "community based on the lively clash of ideas and opinions," according to its website. Yass, who announced his donation on Nov. 5, reportedly appreciates the school's commitment to free speech. Initially, the university said it planned to charge \$32,000 per year, but students have never paid tuition. School leaders say keeping the campus tuition-free will encourage innovation since graduates won't be encumbered by heavy student loans. —*Bekah McCallum*

ROYALLY DISGRACED

King Charles III stripped his brother Andrew of his remaining royal titles on Oct. 30, relegating him to full commoner status over his ties to disgraced financier and sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. The former prince, Queen Elizabeth II's second-oldest son, will now be known simply as

Andrew Mountbatten Windsor.

The king also kicked Andrew out of his home at the

Royal Lodge mansion near Windsor Castle. Andrew surrendered his title, Duke of York, earlier this year amid new accusations of abuse from Virginia Roberts



Giuffre, who claimed Epstein introduced her to Andrew when she was still a minor. Giuffre committed suicide in April, but her posthumous memoir hit bookstores in late October. —*Leigh Jones*

READY TO RETIRE

Nancy Pelosi announced Nov. 6 she will not seek reelection once her current term ends in January 2027. Pelosi, 85, has represented San Francisco for 38 years. She rose through the ranks from House Democratic Whip to leader and eventually two-time speaker of the House, the first and only woman to hold the position. The California Democrat helped craft the Affordable Care Act, better known as Obamacare, during her tenure from 2007–2011, and presided over two impeachments of President Donald Trump during her second speakership from 2019–2023. Pelosi's critics accused her of being an out-of-touch

coastal elite who took advantage of her political power to make millions of dollars trading stocks. —*Addie Offereins*

TOP SPACE MAN

President Donald Trump renominated **Jared Isaacman**, 42, to serve as his NASA director on Nov. 4, months after abruptly rescinding the original nomination over the tech billionaire's political leanings. Trump withdrew Isaacman's nomination in May after "a thorough review of prior associations." He said he was surprised to learn that Isaacman, a private astronaut endorsed by tech entrepreneur Elon Musk, was a "blue-blooded Democrat." In his Nov. 4 announcement, Trump made no mention of the previous nomination and withdrawal, calling Isaacman "ideally suited" for leading NASA. If confirmed, Isaacman would succeed Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy, who



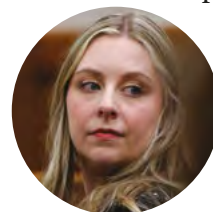
has served as the space agency's interim leader since July. —*Mary Jackson*

FREE AT LAST

Iran released two French professors from the infamous Evin prison after more than three years in captivity, according to French President Emmanuel Macron. Iranian authorities arrested Cécile Kohler, 41, and her partner, Jacques Paris, 72, during a tourist trip in May 2022 and convicted them of spying charges in October. France's foreign minister confirmed Kohler and Paris arrived safely at the French Embassy in Tehran, but negotiations are still ongoing for their return to France. Their release comes two weeks after French authorities conditionally released an Iranian woman, Mahdiah Esfandiari, held on charges of inciting terrorism online. Western countries have long accused Iran of taking tourists and dual nationals hostage as diplomatic bargaining chips, with dozens detained since 2010. —*Grace Snell*

PAIN AND SUFFERING

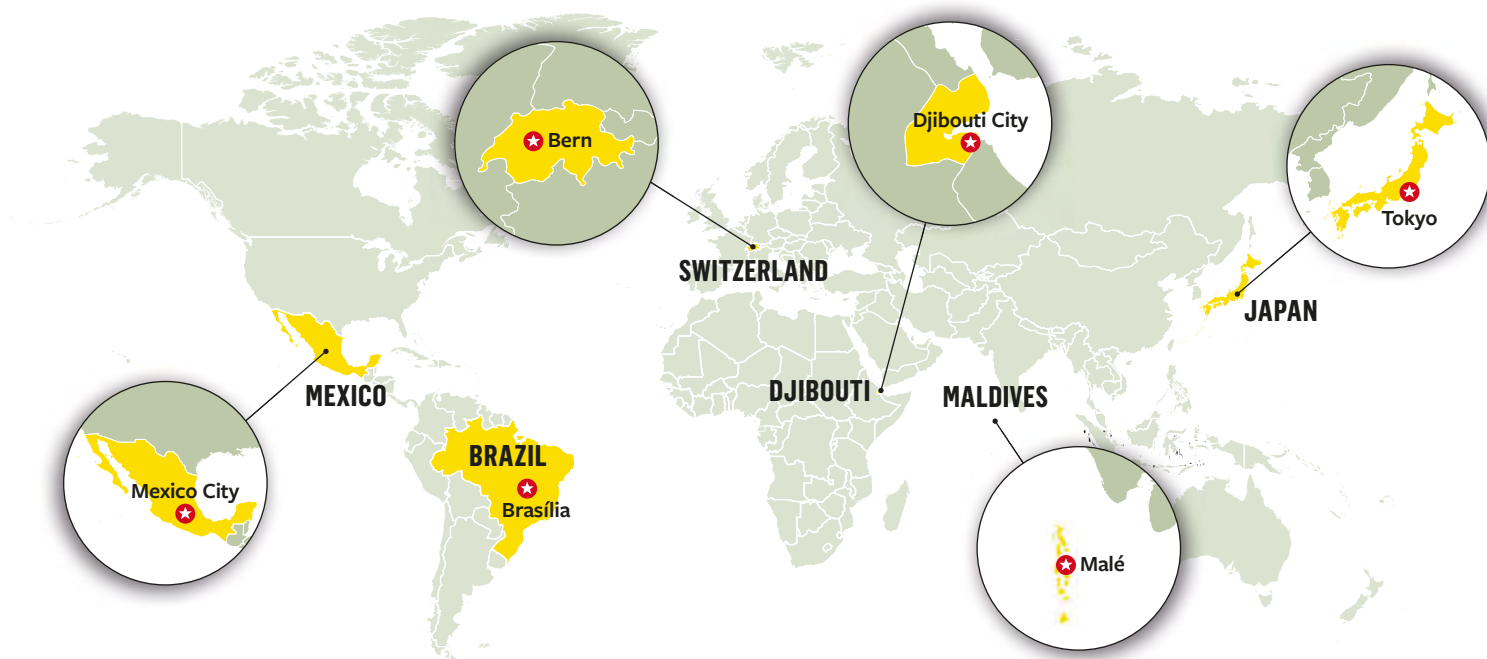
Abby Zwerner, a first grade teacher shot by one of her students in 2023, won a \$10 million civil verdict against her former school's assistant principal on Nov. 6. The Virginia jury agreed with Zwerner's claim that Ebony



Parker ignored repeated warnings that the 6-year-old student had a gun before he pulled it out of his backpack during class. The bullet he fired at Zwerner as she sat at a reading table went through her hand and lodged in her chest, narrowly missing her heart. She spent nearly two weeks in the hospital and endured six surgeries to repair the damage. She still does not have full use of her left hand. Parker also faces a criminal trial on eight counts of felony child neglect. She was the only defendant in the civil lawsuit. A judge previously dismissed claims against the district's superintendent and the school principal. A jury sentenced the child's mother to four years in prison over the incident. —*Leigh Jones* ■



Mexican politician gunned down



Mexico Uruapan Mayor **Carlos Manzo** was gunned down during a Day of the Dead celebration on Nov. 1 in the state of Michoacán, despite his large security detail. Authorities say the killer, 17-year-old Victor Ubaldo Vidales, had ties to the criminal gangs that Manzo had promised to fight. Authorities shot and killed him immediately after the assassination. The 40-year-old cowboy-hat-wearing Manzo became mayor of Uruapan in 2024 with a promise to confront the cartels. That earned him the nickname “the Bukele of Mexico,” referring to El Salvador’s hardline president, Nayib Bukele. Michoacán is one of Mexico’s most violent states and has become a battleground for cartels and other criminal groups. Manzo’s assassination highlights the growing trend of violence against local politicians who stand up to the cartels, even as the Mexican government faces criticism for its inaction. —*Elisa Palumbo*



POPULATION
130.7 million

LANGUAGE
Spanish

RELIGION
78% Roman Catholic,
11% evangelical

GOVERNANCE
Federal presidential republic

GDP
\$2.883 trillion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Cars, vehicle parts and accessories, crude petroleum, trucks, computers

Brazil A violent police raid on Oct. 28 left 121 dead in Rio de Janeiro. The raid, meant to serve 100 arrest warrants in two *favelas*, or shantytowns, turned into a battle between thousands of police officers and the Red Command drug faction—one of Brazil’s largest and oldest crime groups. Left-wing President Lula da Silva called it a “mass killing” and called for a federal investigation, while the conservative governor of Rio de Janeiro, Cláudio Castro, said all those killed in the operation were criminals. Four police officers also died. The violent confrontation sparked indignation from human rights activists, but garnered support from residents weary of their crime-ridden streets. Lula, 80, whom many criticize as too soft on crime, recently announced he will seek an historic fourth presidential term in next year’s election. —*Elisa Palumbo*



Switzerland The Alpine nation wants UNESCO to recognize yodeling as an Intangible Cultural Heritage. Thought to have originated with livestock herders as a way to communicate over long distances, yodeling is now practiced as a folk tradition. The Swiss Yodeling Association has 780 groups, and Lucerne University offers degrees in yodeling to a few students each year. If UNESCO recognizes yodeling, Switzerland could apply for grants to support continuing the tradition. UNESCO created the list for Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003. Since then, it has added more than 700 activities, including pizza-twirling in Naples, Italy, traditional hand-puppetry in Egypt, and tea-pouring ceremonies in China. —*Evangeline Schmitt*

Maldives Residents and visitors born after Jan. 1, 2007, are banned from buying, selling, or using any tobacco products in the tourist-friendly and nominally Muslim archipelago. As of Nov. 1, the country is the first to enforce a generational smoking ban. Last year, the nation of 1,200 islands banned vaping products for all ages, and it already prohibits alcohol, except on privately owned resort islands. In 2022, about 25% of residents smoked daily. Vice chair of the tobacco control board Ahmed Afaal says recent tobacco regulations haven't hurt tourism, which has increased over the past year. Other nations have tried similar anti-smoking measures with mixed success. New Zealand's government repealed a 2023 generational smoking ban before it went into effect. A similar law in the U.K. awaits royal assent. —*Amy Lewis*



POPULATION
388,858

LANGUAGE
Dhivehi, English

RELIGION
Sunni Muslim

GOVERNANCE
Presidential republic

GDP
\$12.33 billion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Fish, aircraft, refined petroleum, scrap iron, natural gas

Djibouti Parliament removed the age limit rule for presidents on Nov. 2 with a unanimous vote, opening the way for President Ismail Omar Guelleh to run for a sixth term. Guelleh, 77, has held power since 1999 in the tiny Horn of Africa nation. The previous age limit of 75 would have prevented him from running again. Djibouti is a major port nation that hosts military bases for the United States, France, China, Japan, and Italy. Parliament Speaker Dileita Mohamed Dileita said the constitutional change was necessary to ensure "the stability of the small country in a troubled region." But opposition leader Daher Ahmed Farah said the country is in a strategic position, and its interests lie with the Djiboutian people, not with a single man. The country will hold elections in April 2026. —*Olalekan Raji*



POPULATION
994,974

LANGUAGE
French, Arabic

RELIGION
94% Sunni Muslim, 6% other

GOVERNANCE
Presidential republic

GDP
\$7.99 billion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Raw sugar, seed oils, cars, palm oil, rice

Japan Amid rising bear attacks in the northern Akita prefecture, local representatives and the country's Defense Ministry signed an agreement on Nov. 5 to deploy soldiers to trap bears, transport local hunters, and remove bear carcasses. Since May, bears have killed at least four people and injured dozens of others in the prefecture that has a population of about 880,000. Across Japan, bears have killed 12 people and injured about 100 others since April. As the animals forage for food ahead of hibernation, they are increasingly encroaching into residential areas where the population is quickly aging and shrinking, and few people are trained to hunt them. Abandoned neighborhoods filled with fruit trees often attract the bears. While troops are not allowed to cull the animals, the government recently permitted riot officers to shoot them. —*Joyce Wu*





U.S. BRIEFS

Alaska's storm victims brace for winter

➔ More than 1,600 people remain displaced amid the aftermath of Typhoon Halong, the remnants of which hit the state's western coast on Oct. 11. Gov. Mike Dunleavy projected it could be up to 18 months before residents can return to the area, but one woman, Louise Paul, told the Associated Press many people have said they won't go back at all. Halong brought record flooding that swept away homes and infrastructure, leaving many villages uninhabitable just as winter set in. The Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, where the storm hit, has been home to the Athabascan and Yup'ik peoples for thousands of years. About 25,000 people live in remote villages across a region the size of Alabama, surviving mostly on subsistence hunting and fishing. However, in recent years, thawing permafrost, coastal erosion, and storm flooding have threatened their way of life. As a result, the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium reported almost 150 communities, many in the delta, will have to fully or partially relocate in future. Meanwhile, hundreds of Alaskans remained in temporary housing in Anchorage, and the state authorized an emergency moose hunt to help victims restock their freezers for the coming winter months. —*Grace Snell*



POPULATION

740,133

GOVERNOR

Mike Dunleavy ^R

U.S. SENATORS

Lisa Murkowski ^R,
Dan Sullivan ^R

INDUSTRY

Fishing, tourism, oil, mining, timber, agriculture

Kentucky The state's Public Service Commission approved two new natural-gas-fired power plants to help provide energy for future data centers. Before the Oct. 28 vote, commissioners cited current demand, expected economic growth, and the state legislature's expansion of tax incentives this spring to lure data centers. Louisville Gas and Electric and Kentucky Utilities generate and provide electricity to more than 1 million customers in several counties. Public comments prior to the decision skewed heavily against the nearly \$3 billion project designed to come online by 2030. A coalition of housing, environmental, renewable energy, and community development advocates argued the utility companies should use profits, not higher rates, to pay for utility grid maintenance, repairs, and upgrades. —*Todd Vician*

Mississippi Democrats broke the Republican Party's supermajority in the state Senate Nov. 4 with a two-seat flip, loosening the GOP's grip on the 52-member chamber for the first time in over a decade. The victories occurred in two Republican-held districts reconfigured after a court ruled they should have greater representation for black voters. Mississippi Democratic Party Vice Chair Jodie Brown celebrated the wins, writing that they restore checks and balances, "ensuring that every Mississippian's voice counts in their state government." State Republican Party Chairman Mike Hurst described the defeated candidates as "underdogs in gerrymandered districts drawn by an unelected court." Republicans can still override Democrats on most votes, in both chambers, if they caucus. —*Kim Henderson*



Oklahoma Archaeologists on Nov. 3 exhumed the remains of two people who may have been killed in the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. The yearslong search for victims gained momentum in 2024, when experts discovered four remains with gunshot wounds, and the city announced the first identification of a race-massacre victim, C.L. Daniel. The city announced in June it had identified a second victim. This fall archaeologists and forensic analysts began the fifth excavation of Oaklawn Cemetery, identifying 83 graves not previously documented or marked by gravestones. By early November, teams of professionals and community volunteers had exhumed eight remains of adults buried in plain wooden caskets. Forensics experts are analyzing trauma wounds in bones, death certificate data where available, and DNA samples from potential descendants to try to identify the remains of hundreds of black Tulsans killed during the mob violence more than 100 years ago. The two-day attack that destroyed homes and businesses is considered one of the worst instances of racial violence in U.S. history. —*Todd Vician*

Vermont Mid Vermont Christian School is challenging a new state law that bars religious schools from receiving public funds. The pre-K–12 school in Quechee, Vt., sued the state’s education department in an amended lawsuit filed in late October. The school claims the law, Act 73, “gerrymanders out and excludes all religious schools” from a program that allows students in rural areas to use taxpayer money to go to a school of their choice. Act 73, passed by legislators this summer, outlines strict criteria for private schools to receive public funds. As a result, only 18 private schools remain eligible for public tuition dollars, according to Mid Vermont. The recent claims add on to Mid Vermont’s ongoing lawsuit against the state’s athletic association. In 2023, the association kicked the school out of the state athletics program after Mid Vermont forfeited a girls’ high school basketball game because the opposing team included a male player. In September, a court of appeals ruled that Mid Vermont can continue to compete in the association while litigation proceeds in a lower court. —*Liz Lykins*

New Mexico The state’s three U.S. House members are sounding the alarm about the Trump administration’s plan to boost beef imports from Argentina by 300%. In a Nov. 3 letter to Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins and U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer, U.S. Reps. Teresa Leger Fernandez, Melanie Stansbury, and Gabe Vasquez maintained the move will hurt the state’s cattle ranchers, who are already struggling to turn a profit after years of drought and soaring input costs. “New Mexico’s ranchers deserve a federal government that looks out for them rather than one that gives a handout to foreign producers,” they wrote. Legislators from other beef-producing states have urged President Donald Trump to reconsider his plans, announced following a \$20 billion currency swap deal with Argentina. The United States has imported more than 30,000 metric tons of beef from Argentina so far this year. —*Kim Henderson*





POPULATION
2.1 million

GOVERNOR
Michelle Lujan Grisham

U.S. SENATORS
Martin Heinrich, Ben Ray Lujan

INDUSTRY
Aerospace & defense, film

BACKGROUND

What are rare earth minerals?

by HEATHER FRANK



China added five rare earth elements to its existing export control list in early October.

During meeting with President Donald Trump on Oct. 30, Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed to delay the new restrictions for at least one year, but the measures have the potential to seriously disrupt the global economy. The United States relies on China to supply about 70% of its rare earth metal imports. Many technologies wouldn't exist without them, including smartphones, electric vehicles, missile guidance systems, and some cancer therapies.

What are rare earth minerals, and are they actually rare? Rare earth minerals contain one or more of the 17 rare earth

metallic elements. These metals, which include the 15 lanthanides as well as scandium and yttrium, possess unique magnetic, luminescent, and electrochemical properties. They are not rare in terms of natural occurrence—for example the Earth's crust has more cerium than copper. But they are rare in terms of availability. Rare earths are seldom discovered in concentrated, economically viable forms, making for a costly extraction and purification process.

Why are rare earth elements so important? These metals are critical to key sectors of the U.S. and global economies because of their unique chemical and physical properties. Neodymium magnets, for example, are essential to

clean energy technologies, while yttrium is critical to LED lighting and cancer therapies. U.S. military equipment, including F-35 fighter jets and the Virginia-class submarine, requires thousands of pounds of rare earth elements.

How did China monopolize the rare earths industry? China took over the rare earths market in the mid-1990s when U.S. companies began offshoring their processing to China, a regulatory wild west, in response to increased environmental restrictions at home. Chinese executives, who had toured MolyCorp rare earths processing company in Mountain Pass, Calif., stole and improved upon U.S. technology. Cheap labor and heavy government subsidization also boosted China's rare earth metals output. The country now controls over 90% of global refining and about 60% of global production.

Can't we replace rare earth elements with something else? Geopolitical pressures have already spurred a search for alternatives, but it's difficult to find economically viable replacements that match rare earth's special properties. Ferrite magnets are a promising substitute due to their corrosion resistance and affordability, but rare earth magnets have up to 10 times the magnetic strength. Some companies developed technologies to reduce or even eliminate their rare earth use. Toyota designed a neodymium-reduced magnet, while BMW's fifth-generation electric motors are rare-earth-free.

Is the U.S. taking steps to rebuild its rare earths industry? Yes. In July the War Department invested \$400 million in MP Materials, which owns and operates the Mountain Pass mine. Nebraska-based NioCorp's Elk Creek project, the first and only U.S. site for mining and processing niobium, received \$10 million in funding from the Pentagon in August. Vulcan Elements, a startup rare earths manufacturer in North Carolina, was awarded over \$10 million across nine Department of War contracts this year. ■



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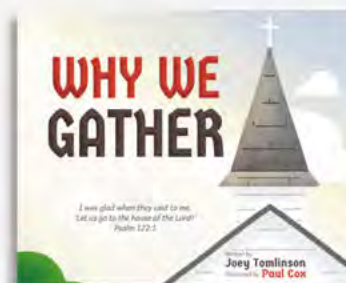
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QUOTABLES

“He did not expect California to fight fire with fire.”

California Gov. GAVIN NEWSOM correctly predicting that voters in his state would approve Democratic redistricting maps in response to President Donald Trump’s push to redraw congressional districts in Republican-controlled states ahead of the 2026 midterm elections.¹



GODOFREDO A. VÁSQUEZ/AP

“It has made me fail tests all the time. And then I’ll get mad and I’ll yell at it, ‘You made me fail! Why did you do this?’”

Celebrity KIM KARDASHIAN on using ChatGPT to study for law school exams.²

“It smelled of onions and mustard ... [and it] exploded all over my chest.”

A Border Patrol officer testifying Nov. 4 in a federal case against a man acquitted of misdemeanor assault for throwing a sandwich.³

“If this is done to the president, what is going to happen to all of the young women in our country?”

Mexican President CLAUDIA SHEINBAUM on her decision to press charges against a man who allegedly groped her a Mexico City street.⁴

“What would prohibit Congress from just abdicating all responsibility to regulate foreign commerce?”

Justice Neil Gorsuch during a Nov. 5 oral argument in a Supreme Court case challenging tariffs.

¹NBC News; ²NBC Philadelphia; ³CNN; ⁴AP





QUICK TAKES

Sleep app-nea

Internet mishap left some luxury mattress owners tossing and turning

by JOHN DAWSON

→ An internet outage in October led to furious social media complaints and a host of inconveniences, but the owners of some technologically advanced beds literally lost sleep over it. Amazon Web Services reported an outage in the early morning hours of Oct. 20 that led to a cascade of internet-related problems. Because many services use AWS servers, the interruption caused social media sites, gaming platforms, and mobile apps to grind to a halt. Also affected: a niche New York City-based mattress maker known as Eight Sleep whose tech-forward bed kits offer a plethora of customizable features. That is, if the internet is working. For some smart bed users, their first indication of the AWS outage was waking up in a pool of sweat as their bed's temperature control got jammed to maximum heat. Others woke to find their bed's adjustable base contorting their bodies as the bed shifted into an extreme incline. In the days after the mishap, company officials said engineers were working on a backup program that can still function during an AWS outage and prevent similar problems in the future.

Not a flight of fancy

Unable to find electricity through normal means, some American data centers are turning to an unusual source to keep the lights on. At an October trade show, an official with natural-gas provider ProEnergy revealed the company had repurposed some 21 aviation jet engines to generate electricity for two data center projects this year. ProEnergy Vice President Landon Tessmer said the jet engines will provide power to the new data centers until the projects can fully connect to the broader power grid or construct their own power plants. The engines come from jumbo jets like the 747 and can generate electricity after a host of modifications.

Whipped into a frenzy

Just in time for pumpkin pie season: A Canadian thief made off with 30 pallets of whipped cream inside an unattended trailer. Early on the morning of Oct. 29, Guelph, Ontario, police say a thief drove a truck to the Gay Lea Foods facility and used it to hook up the refrigerated trailer before absconding with its contents.

Police don't know whether the thief was after the trailer or the \$80,000 worth of whipped cream inside. The sweet cream robbery follows a spate of large-scale butter thefts that took place over the past two years in the region.



Frank conversations

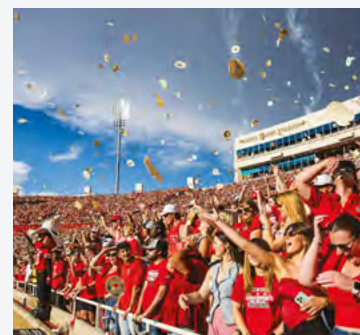
After the government shutdown freed him from his day job as an IRS lawyer, **Isaac Stein** finally found time to pursue his real passion: hot dogs. In September, Stein began planning for potential furlough by securing permits to run a Washington, D.C., food stand selling New York-style franks. The tax lawyer named his cart Shysters Dogs under the motto “the only honest ripoff in D.C.”

Besides jokes, Stein has two main offerings: a “correct hot dog” with mustard and sauerkraut or a “hot dog with the wrong toppings” that Stein allows customers to customize for \$1 extra. “No judgment,” Stein told NPR. “But I do reserve the right to assess an additional dollar as a penalty.”



Keeping them in check

Security guards rifled through bags outside Jones AT&T Stadium in Lubbock, Texas, looking for contraband ahead of the Oct. 25 football game between Texas Tech and Oklahoma State. What prompted the extra security? Tortillas. Texas Tech fans have a decades-long tradition of showering the field with tortillas to celebrate their team. But school officials ended the practice after referees issued unsportsmanlike conduct penalties against Texas Tech during an Oct. 11 home win. In protest, many Red Raider fans attended the Oct. 25 home game with blankets and shirts emblazoned with tortilla prints. Before the season began, Big 12 conference officials voted to ban tossing foreign objects onto the field. Texas Tech cast the lone objection.



Towering reputation

A new tower installed atop a Catholic basilica in Barcelona, Spain, Oct. 30 put the church known as Sagrada Familia one step closer to completion. The tower also pushed the famously ornate building over the top, making it officially the tallest church in the world. The addition brought the basilica's height to 534 feet, just taller than Ulmer Münster in Germany. Construction on the building project began in 1882 and the main structure is expected to be completed next year. Sagrada Familia has in recent decades drawn millions of tourists who want to see architect Antoni Gaudí's unique design and the building's famous sculptured façade.

“I do reserve the right to assess an additional dollar as a penalty.”



Not dressed for success

Zoom court is still court: There are standards. A police officer appearing as a witness during an online hearing Oct. 27 challenged those standards when a Michigan judge called him out for not wearing any pants. The officer appeared dressed in his uniform shirt during a reckless driving and public intoxication case. When the officer's camera shifted to reveal his lower body, Detroit-based Judge Sean Perkins asked him, “You got some pants on, officer?” He did not and admitted as much as he adjusted his camera. Happily for the court, the officer was at least wearing underwear.

Be not conformed

British writer Paul Kingsnorth on the Western myths of progress and technology

by LES SILLARS



British novelist and poet Paul Kingsnorth was a popular figure among radical eco-activists until he began to write about “dark ecology,” which he called “a personal philosophy for a dark time.” The modern world has made ecological collapse inevitable, he wrote in 2014, and activism is worthless. So he moved to rural Ireland with his wife and two kids and took to mowing grass with a scythe. That made him less popular than the proverbial garden party skunk among environmentalists, but he continued to write and founded a popular Substack newsletter called The Abbey of Misrule. Critics on the left and right frequently misunderstand his critiques of modern technology and the West, which are severe but thoughtful.

Then, six years ago, he became an Orthodox Christian. “It’s been profoundly altering,” he told me, “in the way that I see the world, and in the sense I have of the future. Because being a Christian gives you hope.” His latest book is *Against the Machine: On the Unmaking of Humanity* (see WORLD, November 2025).

WHAT IS “THE MACHINE”?

It’s a matrix of technology, politics, and a kind of technological and cultural system that since the Industrial Revolution has risen around us to the point where we have gone beyond being a species that uses tools and become people who are in service to a technological system.

For a very long time we have been trying to replace nature with technology, trying to build a world in which we are in control and can manage every aspect of life. We think that we’re able to do things like create superintelligences, artificial minds, and potentially not just extend our lives but end death. At least, this is the dream. It’s the same story that played out in the first book of Genesis, where we decide that we’re going to eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil and become as gods.

YOU WRITE THAT THE FOUNDATIONS OF A CULTURE ARE THE FOUR P’S: PEOPLE, PLACE, PRAYER, AND PAST. THEY PROVIDE US WITH

**ROOTS, BUT THE MACHINE UPROOTS US,
REPLACING THE FOUR P'S WITH THE FOUR
S'S: SCIENCE, SELF, SEX, AND SCREENS.**

We end up with this very rootless world in which we identify ourselves as individual consumers, fulfilling our needs through technology and through consumerism. We have to be uprooted for the Machine to succeed.

**IS THE MACHINE WHAT THE BIBLE
CALLS "THE WORLD"?**

The Machine is a product of the world, if you like. It's a kind of technological manifestation of exactly that force that St. Paul talks about: powers and principalities. We are supposed to be in it, but not of it. In that sense, it isn't new. Its intensity is new, and the technological power that it has is new.

**YOU ALSO WRITE THAT THE WEST HAS
BECOME AN IDOL IN PART BECAUSE TOO
MANY CHRISTIANS HAVE BOUGHT INTO
THE MYTHS OF THE MACHINE: PROGRESS
AND TECHNOLOGY. DEFENDERS OF THE
WEST ADMIT PARTS OF IT ARE CORRUPT,
BUT SAY IT'S THE BEST WAY TO ENCOURAGE
HUMAN FLOURISHING AND RESTRAIN EVIL.
YOUR RESPONSE?**

The West is the thing that evolved from what used to be Christendom. It's a very particular way of seeing, which is very rationalistic, very scientific, very mechanistic, which has actually given rise to this Machine. I wouldn't say that the West is a Christian culture anymore. It's the culture of the Enlightenment, and it's decided that, because there is no God, we can build God ourselves. A lot of Christians think they need to defend the West. If we're defending anything, we ought to be defending Christian teaching. But a lot of what the West is doing at the moment is valorizing the Seven Deadly Sins. We've abandoned a culture that's based around God and the teachings of Christ, and we've replaced them with this culture of growth and progress and money and capitalism and power. And we say that's the West.

It's a perfectly good thing to want to do, defend your culture and nation, especially when you see them under attack from the progressive left and all

**"I wouldn't say
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the other stuff that's been going on for years. And so your instinct is to say, "I want to defend my culture." But you can't confuse that with the Church.

**TELL US ABOUT YOUR CONVERSION TO
CHRISTIANITY. DOES YOUR ORTHODOX
THEOLOGY SHAPE YOUR APPROACH TO
THESE KINDS OF QUESTIONS?**

I got down on my knees in my garden and I said to God, "If you exist, show me what truth is. Because I want to know. I need to know." Soon I started having dreams about Jesus, and meeting Christians everywhere. I decided to read the Gospels, and I found a story I'd never heard before. I had a number of experiences which basically convinced me Christianity is true.

Orthodoxy has a deep well of mysticism, and there's a sense of God being very present in the world, and a very traditional sense of the devil being very present in the world as well. I think that has really helped me to understand what's going on with the Machine.

There's a spiritual element to the construction of the Machine and our experiments with technologies. I often think that the internet feels like a giant Ouija board, opening up portals that things can come through. If C.S. Lewis were to write *The Screwtape Letters* today, he'd have a lot of letters in there about how Wormwood should be using the internet to corrupt people. We've turned half the human race against the other half. We've got them all addicted to pornography. They're obsessed with their phones. They're losing touch with reality. If you were a demon, you'd be thinking that was a job well done.

**YOU WRITE THAT BOTH SOCIALISM AND
CAPITALISM ARE PRODUCTS OF THE
MACHINE, AND THAT THEY'RE BASED ON
POWER AND EQUALLY DESTRUCTIVE. HAVE
YOU UNDERVALUED LIBERTY AND THE
IMPORTANCE OF FREE MARKETS?**

[Regarding] capitalism, I'm talking about a system in which giant corporations dominate the economy, own and manage most of the capital, and crush all of their enemies. Markets are one thing, you know, people freely trading. That's all good. But capitalism isn't free. With the Machine, the real question is about scale. A moral economy would be based on notions of things that are good and true, a [local] economy that comes from the ground up, and that serves human beings at a human scale.

**IS IT STILL POSSIBLE FOR CHRISTIANS TO
LIVE GODLY LIVES UNDER THE MACHINE?**

Being a Christian is excellent training for living a godly life under an oppressive system. This is the life that Christ and the apostles were living. How many of the early Christians were martyred by the Romans? How many Christians have had to live in hostile systems? The premise of Christianity is not that we create a perfect world and live in it. It's that we try to live a Christ-like life in a world that is basically the kingdom of the devil. In that sense, it's nothing new. The technologies are new. I think the scale is new, but the actual job of being a Christian is the same, I suppose, as it's always been. ■



VOICES JANIE B. CHEANEY

Everybody's a critic

We may as well try to be discerning ones

Does anyone remember the old PBS program *Sneak Previews*, with Siskel and Ebert? Thousands tuned in to their lively weekly debates on the latest movies, ending with thumbs-up or thumbs-down. Both reviewed films in the *Chicago Tribune*, but Roger Ebert had the greater reputation as a tough critic, all the way until his death in 2013. He occupied such a prestigious chair that older readers may be surprised it disappeared after his successor Michael Phillips took a buyout—gracefully stepping away, as he told Spencer Kornhaber for *The Atlantic*, from a “career path that no longer exists.”

Print journalism is laying off or phasing out critical staff, whether book, music, theater, film, or art. Even such venerable relics as *The New York Times* have reassigned many of their erudite reviewers. Criticism has migrated to the masses on Goodreads (for books), Letterboxd (movies), Beli (restaurants), or Rate Your Music. These are amateurs, some of them educated and perceptive, though most probably just know what they like. There's nothing wrong with gushing over one's latest enthusiasm online, as long as readers can tell the difference between useful criticism and other kinds. But can they? Can we?

That's the question lurking in Kornhaber's *Atlantic* piece titled “Traditional Criticism Is in Trouble.” Traditional critics knew their stuff, such as Jay Nordlinger, recently of *National Review*. His passion for classical music took him to the annual Salzburg Festival and the Milan Opera House, not to mention countless hours of comparing recordings from world-class symphony orchestras. I might not agree with him about Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 2, but I could

acknowledge his opinion was a step up from my simple WOW.

Today's critics pontificating on YouTube might not be as discriminating. Kornhaber discovered this through experience: “For every second of insight a video essay provided, there were 10 more seconds of filler: platitudes, plot summary, sponsor shout-outs. TikTok's algorithm started swamping me with humanities grad students of varying cogency.”

Reaction videos are even less cogent, as they show the reviewer responding to the latest Taylor Swift album or Marvel Universe movie trailer with exaggerated facial expressions, like real-life emojis. Once they achieve a level of popularity, YouTubers or TikTokers may be paid for a favorable review, so there's no way of knowing how impartial their opinions are. Meanwhile, a stream of amateur content from self-published authors, garage bands, and hand-held video cameras clogs the pipeline and makes it hard to separate wheat from chaff. Even intelligent, self-educated critics who care about their music or movies are “at the mercy of the algorithm” that determines who sees what.

A glut of content conceals a more subtle problem with video and podcast reviews. As one popular Letterboxd reviewer admitted, “You get better at film criticism by reading it, not watching videos.” One music maven followed by hundreds of thousands on YouTube and TikTok complained about dumbing down his reviews for nonreaders: “It really does seem like people are getting stupider.”

But is this another thing Christians should be concerned about? Don't we have enough already?

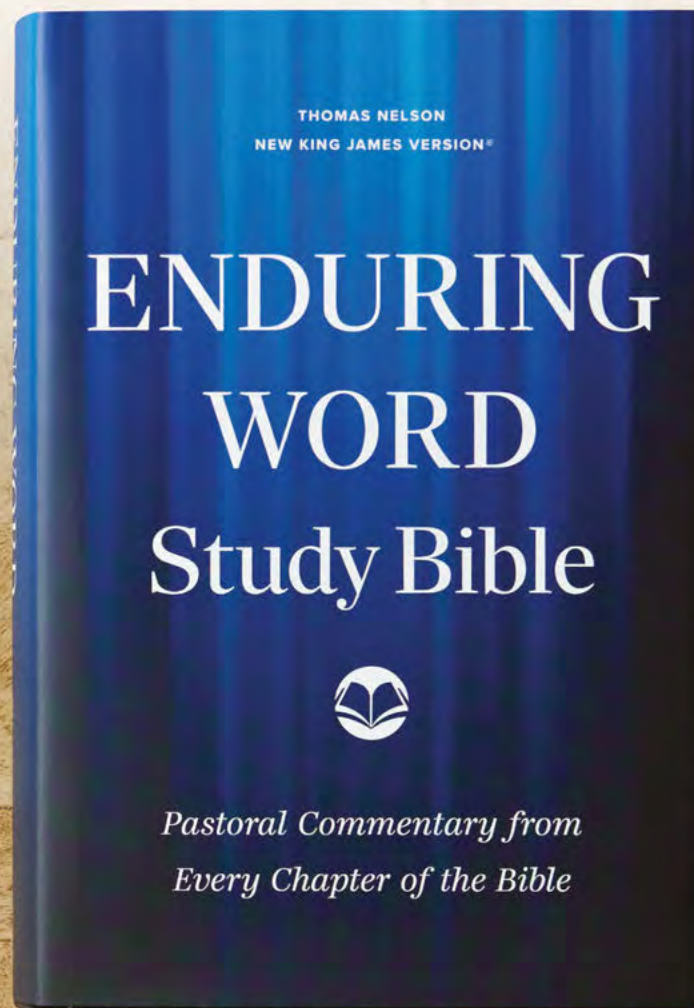
Two considerations: For one, Christians (or artists influenced by Christianity) have produced the bulk of classical Western art, and we should have at least a passing acquaintance with their work. Two, we are all creators, whether it's a square picture frame or a satisfying meal. Creating (or appreciating) work that is true, good, and beautiful means distinguishing it from that which is merely comfortable, safe, and pretty.

One of my colleagues at Redeemed Reader, a review website for children's books, weighted this distinction over Keeper of the Lost Cities, a popular fantasy series among Christian teens. Her subtitle asked, “Is it Safe? Is it Good?” Yes to the first question, at least until recently, when the author introduced LGBT content. To the second question—a lack of nuance, clichéd writing, and a flawless main character make for a quantified No. Such works are “organic mac and cheese: free from offensive ‘ingredients’ that crop up in many teen fantasy series but still boxed mac and cheese.” Fine as comfort food, but not a nourishing literary diet.

Christians rightly recoil from art intended only to shock, but art that challenges and stretches lies somewhere between shocking and safe. Determining what is excellent and praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8) makes critics of us all. We may as well try to be discerning ones. ■

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CULTURE



TRENDING

Things that last

DVDs and Blu-ray are making a comeback amid growing frustration with streaming

by JEN CURTIS



After a long day of work followed by sitting in bumper-to-bumper traffic, Gabriel Thompson just wanted to relax with his wife and watch a few episodes of *The Office*. But the ads on his \$10.99-per-month Peacock Premium subscription had become just as tedious as his commute. The solution? Use an old gaming system to play Blu-ray Discs instead. Not only did Thompson get to view his favorite show ad-free, he also experienced better sound, better image quality, and the thrill of owning something tangible.

Thompson began collecting vintage video games in middle school, but about six months ago the 23-year-old A/V service engineer added Blu-rays to his physical media library. Like most other Americans, Thompson had come to rely on streaming services for most of his small-screen content. But over time, he got fed up when shows and movies changed from one streaming service to another. He found himself oscillating between providers and racking up mounting monthly fees, even as the value of those services declined.

Thompson decided to go old school.

“My thought process was for the stuff that I really enjoy, like movies and TV shows, I wanted to get it on Blu-ray, which is a fantastic quality of media,” Thompson said. “I really wanted to have it and own it and not be worried it would disappear at some point.”

Invented in 2005, the name Blu-ray comes from the blue laser that is used to read the polycarbonate disc. These lasers have shorter wavelengths than the red lasers used to read DVDs. This allows for more density, which translates into a high-definition (HD) viewing experience. Streaming services may offer HD, but things like speed of internet service can impact the actual experience. That, and the rising cost of streaming services, is driving an increasing number of viewers to embrace technology that was state of the art 20 years ago. Technology companies and retailers are taking note.

In June, Sony released a new Blu-ray player, the first new offering on the market in five years. The 4K HDR, which costs about \$300, has little competition since many other companies stopped producing Blu-ray players years ago. Many stores have also stopped selling the discs. In 2024, Best Buy announced it would discontinue sales of Blu-rays and DVDs. But due to increased interest in the format, the company launched an online marketplace in August 2025 to sell physical media again. These trends point to retailers seeing potential growth and income in the physical media market.

2nd & Charles, a subsidiary of Books-A-Million that sells used books, vinyl, and physical copies of movies, has seen sales growth in stores that maintain enough inventory. But finding used copies in good condition is a difficult task. →

Sarah Hope, co-manager of the 2nd & Charles in Kennesaw, Ga., said that 20% of the store's \$3.2 million in sales in 2024 came from movies in the form of Blu-rays, DVDs, and 4K. That's up 2% from 2023, and she expects it to grow even more by the end of 2025.

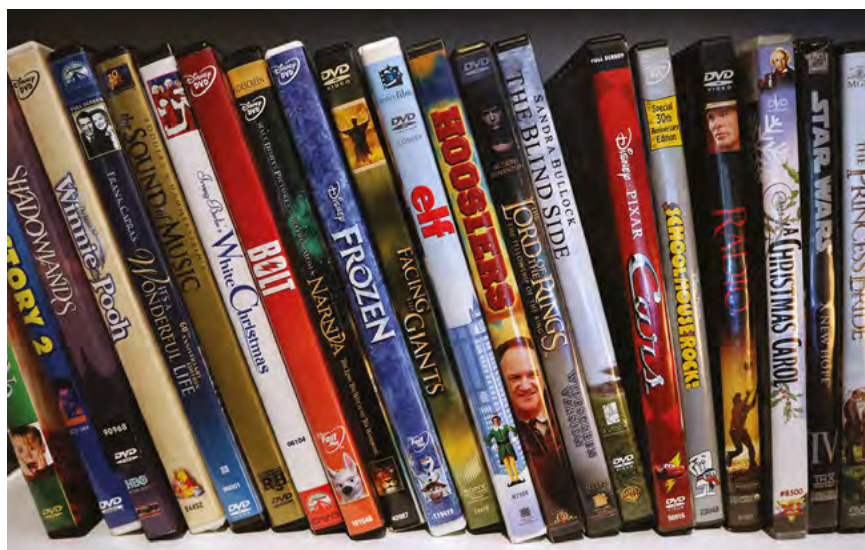
"In summer, everyone's cleaning out Grandma's garage. Whereas fall, I see more collecting because they are getting DVDs for the seasonal time, and they're getting movies that fit their mood and what they're feeling," Hope said. "People who do collect and want to have the physical media, it's almost like a scary thing to them, like if I don't have this I'm never going to have it again."

According to the Digital Entertainment Group, sales of new discs also grew by 9% in the first half of 2025. Collectible titles such as *Wicked* and *Dune: Part Two* have bolstered sales in the premium 4K UHD Blu-ray format.

Deleted scenes, director commentaries, extended editions, blooper reels, and even specialty steel cases are many of the other reasons collectors flock to buy physical copies of their favorite movies. These bonus features, often unavailable on streaming, add to the fandom experience. Thompson owns *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy remastered extended cut that was released in 2021. It features 18 total discs—six for each movie, including four discs of bonus features. The extra features allow him to understand more about the art of moviemaking and supply hours of additional entertainment.

But streaming remains the top way Americans view movies and TV shows. A Pew Research study in April 2025 found that 83% of U.S. adults still subscribe to at least one streaming platform for content, with Netflix and Amazon Prime being the most popular. But a third of respondents said that streaming is not worth the cost. And the growing presence of ads isn't the only source of dissatisfaction.

Movie aficionados note that streaming services can change or edit a film to match new or progressive ideology. For example, when Disney acquired the rights to the 1971 Academy Award-winning film *The French Connection*, the company deleted six seconds to remove a



"I really wanted to have it and own it and not be worried it would disappear at some point."

racial slur. Film critic Keith Phipps noted that removing the slur created ambiguity in the characters' actions and eliminated one of the film's most important features—its awareness of racism.

Questions about the permanence of purchased content have also raised concerns. In August, Amazon Prime subscriber Lisa Reingold filed a lawsuit in Washington state claiming Amazon uses "bait and switch" tactics to get consumers to "buy" media, when in reality they are paying for a licensing agreement that can end at any time. Reingold claims she bought *Bella and the Bulldogs: Season 4* in May 2025. Shortly after, she says, the title disappeared from her library. Amazon has not responded to the lawsuit, and the series remains available to purchase on the platform. But the uncertainty surrounding long-term availability of purchased content only adds to the interest in buying physical copies.

In a world where everything is literally at our fingertips, people don't often think of an item's intrinsic value. But once they have a physical item to hold and protect, Thompson said, it places more emphasis on its worth: "Having a physical collection has definitely taught me how to take care of different stuff. I understand the value of certain things instead of just having instant gratification or instant access through a streaming service. It's really refreshing to have a patience mindset when it comes to collecting." ■



Joel Beeke



James Coates



David de Bruyn



Jeffrey Johnson



Scott Aniol



Mary Beeke



Becky Aniol



Erin Coates



Matt Sikes



Laramie Minga

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BOOKS

Daniel Nayeri, seller of dreams

Christian children's book writer has had a long road to success

by DAVID KERN



Daniel Nayeri is a notebook guy. He doesn't carry a smartphone. He doesn't text. He doesn't even draft his books on a computer, instead filling the pages of his notebooks with handwritten manuscripts, research, outlines, and notes.

When he was working in publishing, which he did for nearly 20 years in a variety of roles for HarperCollins, Houghton Mifflin, Macmillan, and several other major houses, he'd snatch up the "all whites," dummy books sent by printers to help determine a title's paper and trim size, and cram them with ideas. Over the years he's also filled dozens of pocket-sized Moleskines, which he especially

likes for working on picture books. Now, however, he's graduated to a bundle of beautiful Italian notebooks that he carries in a leather cover. They were a gift from his agent when his novel *The Many Assassinations of Samir the Seller of Dreams* received the prestigious 2024 Newbery Honor, awarded for "distinguished contributions to American literature for children."

Does this mean Daniel Nayeri has arrived?

There's no denying he's come a long way. As detailed in his autobiographical novel, *Everything Sad Is Untrue* (which was named WORLD'S children's book of 2021), he arrived in America from

Iran in 1989 following his mother's conversion to Christianity.

Her choice put a fatwa on her head and left the family in grave danger at home. But it also helped shape Nayeri into someone who would use his gifts to serve God.

"People are born with differing predilections," he explains. "I was probably toggled to like ideas and words more than lab science and music. And also in general terms, grit and practice make you better at any endeavor. But I think that we worship whatever it is we love most with the instruments we have at hand, and the greatest danger is to imagine those instruments as the subject

rather than the tool.” He picked up this idea from studying the early church: “Augustine claimed that idolatry is worshipping what should be used and using what should be worshipped. I was a born worshipper, and I tend to use stories to do that, and the challenge is to point those stories in the proper direction.”

Following a period of homelessness in Abu Dhabi and in a refugee camp in Italy, Daniel and his mother and sister eventually settled in Oklahoma, where he learned about American movies (fascinating!), American football (strange, but ... OK!), and American food (mostly quite bland). *Everything Sad Is Untrue* is a funny but sometimes melancholy story of a lonely child in a big new place that, despite its many freedoms and virtues, is simply not home.

His follow-up, *The Many Assassinations of Samir the Seller of Dreams*—the one that received that Newbery Honor and earned him those lovely Italian notebooks—is an ode to the country he left behind. A raucous and funny adventure story, it brings to life the Silk Road during the 11th century through the eyes of a young boy called Monkey and his larger-than-life guardian, Samir. Like bringing a Persian rug to life in narrative form, Samir celebrates the ancient Iranian tradition of storytelling.

His new novel, *The Teacher of Nomad Land: A World War II Story*, which came out this fall (see our review in the October 2025 issue), is a finalist for the National Book Award. In it, a pair of orphan siblings fight to remain together as the war ravages their Iranian homeland, an ostensibly neutral place that is nonetheless a crucial battleground because of its natural resources. This too is a road book, an adventure story about young people looking for a place to belong.

It’s familiar ground for Nayeri who, because of his own Christian faith, can never safely return to his native home.

It’s natural that Nayeri’s heritage richly decorates his work, blending a love for Iranian folklore, mythology, history, art, tapestry, and food with taste shaped by and reveling in the classics of the Western canon. Reading Nayeri is a bit like reading Lewis and Tolkien,

**Reading Nayeri is
a bit like reading
Lewis and Tolkien,
whose abiding
affection for a world
no longer visitable
shaped both the
form and function
of their work.**

whose abiding affection for a world no longer visitable shaped both the form and function of their work.

Because of his prodigious creative gifts, Nayeri is the sort of writer for whom the phrase “born storyteller” is often tossed about, but that phrase belies the degree to which process is meaningful to him. It’s different from sheer will or hard work. Process has to do with

attention, which itself has to do with the way one lives. The storyteller, like any craftsman, is shaped by what he pays attention to. The evolution of an artist occurs beyond the dialectic of “nature” and “nurture,” in the effervescence of the quotidian, the everyday.

Nayeri’s notebooks seem to be the tool by which he attends to the world as he sees it. They help him present a hopeful vision of a confounding world. He roots his vision in the belief that stories can offer transcendence to children.

“If you ask anyone to name a book that changed their lives,” he says, “I’d be willing to guess that they’d name a book they read between the ages of 12 and 22. That is the moment we come of age.” And so his stories often take place just as his characters are about to—and here Nayeri quotes his friend Gary Schmidt—“turn their faces to adulthood.”

When Jesus spoke, Nayeri says, “He specifically chose the mode of storytelling we use for children, the parable, a simple story imparting a moral lesson. To a lesser extent, the great children’s books do the same thing. They deal in the simple truths that train you to know what is good. And what does the Lord require of us? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God. All of these lessons begin in childhood.”

After years in a variety of American cities, Nayeri now lives in South Carolina with his wife Alexandra and their son Gideon. He’s writing full time, which he does in a shed Alexandra renovated for him and which, it probably won’t shock you to learn, is not connected to the internet: “just books, a desk, a rug, and a not-so secret stash of snacks.” Gideon is homeschooled, so when Daniel’s not traveling for a speaking gig, they cook together (yes, lots of Iranian recipes), read a lot, host friends, and play board games (ask him about the pages in his notebook dedicated to that subject and you’ll be in for an enjoyable fortnight).

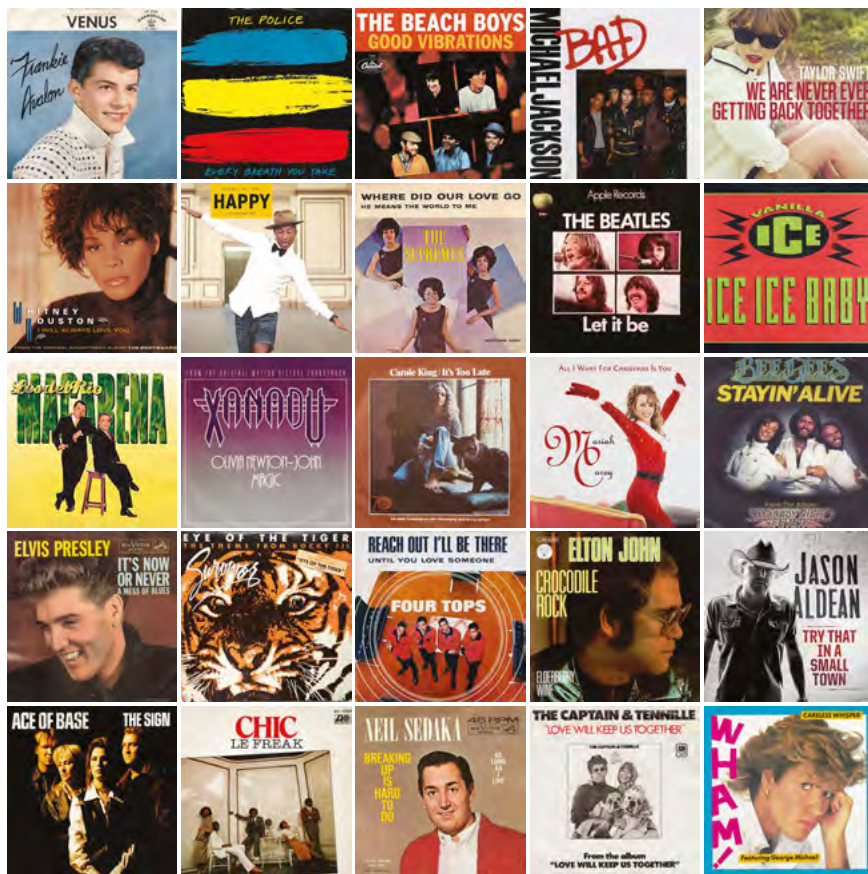
The simplicity of his life seems by design, as if, after years of being on the move, he’s reveling in being home. So yeah, he’s arrived. And the notebooks help make sense of the journey. ■

BOOKS

Numbers behind a No. 1

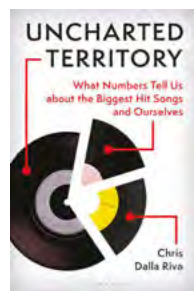
A statistical look at pop music from 1958 through today

by ARSENIO ORTEZA



The subtitle of Chris Dalla Riva's *Uncharted Territory* (Bloomsbury Academic, 352 pp.) is *What Numbers Tell Us About the Biggest Hit Songs and Ourselves*. By “numbers” Dalla Riva means data, by “biggest hit songs” he means *Billboard* No. 1 singles, and by “what the numbers tell us about” them he means a combination of intermittently interesting trivia and narrative-challenging deep takes.

Examples of the former: 55% of the biggest songs from 1961 to 1965 ended by fading out, 85% of the biggest songs from 1958 to 1971 were by artists younger than 30, and 86% of the No. 1s



Uncharted Territory
CHRIS DALLA RIVA

between 2004 and 2012 listed their performers as a co-writer (“up from 38% in the 1960s”). Examples of the latter: A need to feel better after the JFK assassination probably had little to do with why the U.S. went mad for the Beatles in 1964, disco definitely didn’t die in 1979 at Steve Dahl’s Disco Demolition Night, and performers who get co-writing credits haven’t necessarily written anything.

As for what the numbers tell us about ourselves, a lot of it could be summarized thus: We like different styles of music and songs about different topics at different times, depending on the political, cultural, and technological climates. And while Dalla Riva cites Elvis Presley’s “Stuck on You” (predatory!), Ricky Nelson’s “Travelin’ Man” (ethnic stereotypes!), and Johnny Preston’s “Running Bear” (ditto!) as examples of how insensitive we once were, he draws no moral conclusions from the explosion of hit-song profanity and sexual content that he documents as beginning in the 1990s.

What the book does confirm, as if we needed the confirmation, is that we really love money. Practically every significant music-business decision or development—from the lengths of songs to how many tracks albums contain—has been driven less by aesthetics, taste, talent, technology, or even fashion than by the bottom line.

The book confirms something else unflattering about us: We no longer proofread. One can only conclude from the number of minor and not-so-minor errors in Dalla Riva’s text that publishers are trying to boost the bottom line by spending less money on proofreaders.

Still, if you like the music of what Casey Kasem called the “pop-rock era” and related trivia, Dalla Riva’s investigations will both activate the jukebox in your head and fire up your synapses even when his observations, charts, and graphs don’t feel seismic. If, on the other hand, you number such music among the “childish things” that you’ve put away, you’ll likely consider his statistical lens just another glass through which to view human nature darkly. ■



Heath Hardesty

BOOKS

A call to apprenticeship

An invitation into a life with God and others

by KELLY ARABIE



Heath Hardesty's *All Things Together* (Multnomah, 288 pp.) combines personal story with pastoral lessons in a multifaceted approach to following Jesus.

It's no surprise this book on discipleship is centered on the master Jesus Himself, in whom all things hold together (a nod to Colossians 1:17). But Hardesty begins by exploring all those things that vie for our attention and promote disintegration in our current age.

Hardesty argues to combat distractions we need *apprenticeship*. In Part 1, he makes a case for discipleship as



All Things Together

HEATH HARDESTY

apprenticeship, a term often used in the spiritual formation field, and he adopts Dallas Willard's phrase "the with-God life" to describe the journey of following Jesus. In Part 2, the book looks at seven ways in which we can be with Jesus: meditating on Scripture, talking with God, participating in Christian community, being incarnationally present, being generous with joy, being good stewards of power, and faithfully witnessing the gospel to our world.

In this book, Hardesty puts his literature degree to good use: Literary references and conversational footnotes abound. And his experience as a plumber's apprentice brings flesh and grit to concepts we often leave too ethereal.


When Hardesty allows a peek into the messy bits of his own life, his writing brings to mind insightful pastors of earlier generations: "I am a person before I am a pastor, which means I have tear-stained pages and confusing chapters of church hurt in my own story. But forsaking the church because of church hurt is like never eating food again because of food poisoning."

Most of the concepts in *All Things Together* can only be accomplished when people do life together. "We are wired to dwell in a community of being known and being loved." Anything else is "shame running its mouth."

Hardesty offers plenty of food for thought, and contemplative readers will resonate with his invitations. Those familiar with James Bryan Smith and Dallas Willard will recognize Hardesty's language. For others, he may whet the appetite for a new way of considering life with Jesus.

Yet the question remains, "How?" How do we relationally live out the "with-God life" in community with sisters and brothers? What does it look like to follow a "come and see" Shepherd who invites us into relationship?

For apprentices, learning from the master Jesus is a lifelong journey. *All Things Together* presents the "why" and the "what" for such a pathway. The practical "how" of relational living becomes the with-God journey for each person and faith community. ■



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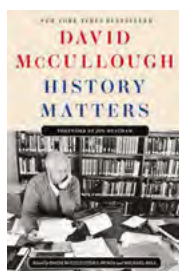
Six books on history and interpretation

HISTORICAL ESSAYS

History Matters

DAVID McCULLOUGH
SIMON & SCHUSTER, 192 PAGES

Before the smash musical *Hamilton* was ever a twinkle in Lin-Manuel Miranda's eye, before the studio that is producing the new movie *Young Washington* even existed, David McCullough had taken Founding Father John Adams and made him the subject of a 750-page biography that was the go-to summer beach read of 2001. The lawyer from Braintree had neither the colorful genius of *Hamilton* nor the commanding charisma and courage of Washington, yet in the hands of McCullough his life was fascinating enough to warrant a bestseller, a Pulitzer Prize, and a subsequent HBO series. McCullough managed the same magic



with topics as diverse as Harry Truman, Theodore Roosevelt, the Wright brothers, the Panama Canal, and the Brooklyn Bridge. After 10 works of history recounting some of

the most interesting feats and figures of our nation's past, his final book is a collection of speeches, essays, and interviews posthumously published by his daughter and his longtime research assistant. In the book's foreword, fellow writer John Meacham describes the collection that follows as an opportunity to "listen once more to a man who loved art, music, drama, adventure, and courage; we can see the world as he saw it, feel it as he felt it, and love it as he loved it." That's true, but McCullough's greatest gift as a writer was to see the world through the eyes of his subjects, writing with sympathy and insight. In a speech

honoring a friend and mentor, writer Paul Horgan, he says, "His work is a calling, and he gives himself to it entirely. In all, one senses it is an act of devotion." Horgan, he continues, "can take us into other times, into the hearts of other men and women, because he can himself enter into their lives so fully, not just as an actor playing a part, but as a fellow human being." How true that was of McCullough's own style. His books were written with the same empathy, the same great heart, invested fully into the lives of Harry Truman, John and Abigail Adams, and Teddy Roosevelt. McCullough loved the world and its various cultural facets, but he loved America specifically and specially, and his genuine patriotism flows through this brief volume. Those who love McCullough's other works, his magisterial biographies and monumental histories, will enjoy these anecdotes and insights from the man behind their favorite books. But any citizen of this great land can enjoy and appreciate better her past, and thus have greater faith in her future, by seeing both through the sparkling eyes of one of her greatest storytellers. —*Daniel Suhr*

RELIGIOUS HISTORY

Christianity and the Qur'an

GABRIEL SAID REYNOLDS
YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 288 PAGES

This book challenges the long-standing assumption—echoed in both Muslim apologetics and early Western scholarship—that Muhammad's world was a religious vacuum. For centuries, Muslims have claimed that the Qur'an was revealed in a purely pagan environment, untouched by the Scriptures of the Jews or Christians. This traditional claim serves a crucial Muslim purpose: to insist that Muhammad could not

have "borrowed" from prior revelations, and thus his message must have been a miraculous, independent disclosure from heaven. Yet, as Reynolds shows with devastating clarity, that premise is historically and textually indefensible. The central premise of the book: The Qur'an was born not in isolation from

Christianity and Judaism, but within their orbit—saturated with their vocabulary, Biblical figures, imagery, and even theological debates. For Reynolds, the Qur'an is shaped in

conversation with Biblical ideas, although it tweaks, reinterprets, and reconfigures Biblical narratives to serve Islam's own rhetorical and theological aims. One of the book's greatest strengths lies in its combination of rigorous historical analysis and careful literary reading. Reynolds masterfully guides readers through the complex history of how both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars have understood the origins of Islam. In our time, when interreligious dialogue often wavers between sentimentality and suspicion, Reynolds offers a model of intellectual integrity rooted in Christian conviction.

—*A.S. Ibrahim**

HISTORICAL STUDIES

Look Out: The Delight and Danger of Taking the Long View

EDWARD MCPHERSON
ASTRA HOUSE, 304 PAGES

This fiercely intelligent and deeply unsettling collection of essays investi-

gates what it means to see across time. Moving through American landscapes—oil fields, uranium dumps, charter schools, data farms—McPherson shows how our obsession with the

future often blinds us to the damage already done. Whether examining →



drone surveillance in Texas or the algorithmic creep into education, he reveals the hidden costs of progress and the lies we tell ourselves about where we're heading. Each essay stands alone, but together they form a powerful indictment of the American tendency to conflate vision with virtue. McPherson's prose is razor-sharp, poetic, and, from start to finish, entirely unapologetic. Split into three parts—Before, Then, and Beyond—the book explores the aerial view as a powerful but perilous lens. McPherson's argument is clear: Seeing far is not the same as seeing well. He recounts how Apollo 14 astronauts, equipped with detailed lunar maps, still got lost, proving that even at great heights, we can fail to understand what's right in front of us. *Look Out* doesn't offer comfort. Instead, it offers a mirror. With lucid urgency, McPherson dismantles the illusion that perspective equals wisdom, reminding us that the unchecked long view can render us blind. —John Mac Gblionn*

LEGAL MEMOIR

Listening to the Law

AMY CONEY BARRETT
SENTINEL, 336 PAGES

Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett's memoir is a welcome volume for understanding the role of the Supreme Court in the United States. In it, she provides a comprehensive overview of the court's purpose, its history, its proscribed limitations,

its preparations for hearing cases, the frameworks by which its justices interpret the Constitution, and the rationales underlying the court's decisions. As Barrett is at pains to say throughout the book, the job of a Supreme Court justice is to put aside one's own policy preferences and to objectively rule on cases whose outcomes may be against personal preferences, yet nonetheless yield the most accurate reading of the law itself. She writes: "We judges don't



dispense justice solely as we see it; instead, we're constrained by law adopted through the democratic process." Justice Barrett writes movingly of the courage needed to withstand the torrents of popular opinion that demand capitulation to social pressures rather than unbiased judicial analysis. For Barrett, proper interpretation requires understanding the original meaning of the words of the Constitution and statutory law at the time of their passage. While that may seem obvious, Barrett demonstrates that this constrained approach to legal interpretation is not universally accepted. I can't recommend the book highly enough, as readers will find it to be as much a crash course in American civics as it is a manifesto on the Supreme Court itself. —Andrew Walker*

HISTORY OF RELIGION AND POLITICS

In Defense of Christian Patriotism

DANIEL DARLING
BROADSIDE BOOKS, 288 PAGES

Is excessive, uncritical self-congratulation the predominant danger facing our nation today? Dan Darling thinks not. America, he argues, suffers not from overconfidence but from a deficit of gratitude and love. For Christians, this is more than a civic failure; it's a spiritual one. It's a failure of Christian piety, for we cannot love God and hate our country. Scripture calls us to seek the welfare of the societies in which we live and to order our loves rightly. Longing for the city to come should not make us loveless toward the cities here below. If patriotism, rightly ordered, is a virtue, how, then, do we perform the duties of patriotism well? First, we must avoid national self-loathing—the temptation



to view our country as utterly depraved, to interpret its history in the worst possible light, and to assume there is nothing good worth preserving. The second error is the opposite extreme: uncritical affirmation. A true patriot does not say, "My country, right or

wrong," or offer blind loyalty to any administration or policy agenda. Love of nation includes the courage to call it to repentance. In an age of cynicism and division, this book offers a timely reminder that love of country, like love of family, begins with gratitude.

—James R. Wood*

LITERARY CRITICISM

Between Interpretation and Imagination: C.S. Lewis and the Bible


LESLIE BAYNES
EERDMANS, 350 PAGES

This book is an essential addition to C.S. Lewis studies due to Baynes' detective



work that shows what books influenced Lewis in the early years of his conversion and continued to the end of his life to color his reading and interpretation of Scripture. But

despite its prodigious research, its skillful marshaling of Lewis' multitudinous letters and personal marginalia, its balanced assessment of the books that influenced Lewis' interpretation of Scripture, and its original, at times brilliant, linking of the Bible to the Chronicles of Narnia, Baynes' book is also vexing because it's filled with the same academic arrogance and scholarly condescension that blocked Lewis from receiving his much-deserved Oxford professorship. She takes numerous potshots at Lewis, claiming that if he read higher critics like Bultmann, Vidler, and others more carefully, he would have seen some of his theological errors. Baynes, however, trusts too much to modern techniques of Biblical criticism based on faulty biases that would never hold muster if applied to other ancient books. As Lewis argued with his signature wit, the "assured results of modern scholarship," as to the way in which an old book was written, are 'assured,' we may conclude, only because the men who knew the facts are dead and can't blow the gaff." —Louis Markos* ■

A detailed line drawing of the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child, rendered in a classic, religious style. The background is a solid dark blue, and the illustration is in a lighter blue/grey tone, creating a subtle, elegant backdrop for the text.

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Karina Yan Glaser

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Ties that bind

Two eras intersect in cultural adventure quest

by JULIANA CHAN ERIKSON

→ With Karina Yan Glaser's latest offering, readers get a bonus—two stories that start out separately and gracefully blend into one. The first pages of *The Nine Moons of Han Yu and Luli* (Allida, 432 pp.) take us to China in A.D. 731. Han Yu, 10, follows in his father's footsteps to sell steamed buns at the market, but he yearns for a talent like his siblings. He has an uncanny talent for summoning animals, particularly tigers. But it's not helpful, especially as a mysterious illness infects their town and eventually his family.

Before we find out what happens to Han Yu, Glaser begins a different story. It's Oct. 8, 1931, and Luli Lee, 7, is drooling as she daydreams about the dim sum at Jade Palace Restaurant, the Chinese eatery in New York City run by her parents. But Luli senses something is



The Nine Moons of Han Yu and Luli

KARINA YAN GLASER

wrong. Fewer customers are coming, leaving her parents more worried.

Then we switch back to ancient China, where Han Yu's family has fallen ill with tuberculosis. His father had promised to make an important delivery of precious goods, but now Han Yu realizes he must do it.

The book zigzags like this for the next 64 chapters. It's like switching TV channels as *Nine Moons* flips between two countries, two time periods, two sets of pets, and two problems. But don't worry: You won't feel storyline whiplash.

We turn the page and Luli is brainstorming new ways to pay her parents' rent. A family member walks her into the back room of the family's failing gift shop and shows her the family heirlooms—small teacups, artwork, and three faded scraps of silk with poems written in Chinese. The effervescent Luli is perhaps too eager to help. Why not convert the back room of the gift shop into a small art museum and charge for admission? she thinks. She knows she's biting off more than she can chew, but when others notice a foreclosure letter in the mail, the family considers some of her desperate ideas.

Han Yu's story hits its stride when he takes off on an epic journey along the silk routes to deliver goods for his sick father. Along the way, he meets Du Fu, a young scholar who puts memories of misty mornings and verdant landscapes to verse in his journal. Readers familiar with Chinese history will recognize Du Fu matches the name of the real-life Chinese poet who penned hundreds of poems during the Tang dynasty. But none of us would know about Du Fu's poetry unless it was passed on. Which brings us back to Luli, who believes firmly that the dirty scraps of silk in the back room of her family's gift shop are worth something.

Glaser, known for her Vanderbeekers series, spent years researching both the real-life history of the silk routes and poor immigrant life in 1930s New York City Chinatown. She's a New Yorker, and Chinese American, so it's no surprise that she chose the settings. But *Nine Moons* isn't just about being Chinese. It's about how a person from the past can still have a profound effect on us today. ■

The gift of story at Christmas

by CHELSEA BOES & KRISTIN CHAPMAN



Brightwing Tales: Mole's Misadventure

BEN PALPANT
BRIGHTWING BOOKS, 212 PAGES

In the land of Brightwing, forest animals await the return of a girl called Little Freckles. This peaceful book opens with a handful of seemingly disconnected tales of moles, rabbits, and mice. But the threads weave together in the last act when tiny mice Parsley, Sage, Rosemary, and Thyme try to snatch a Christmas apple pie from a human's windowsill. Clearly influenced by *The Wind in the Willows*, the stories also feel akin to Narnia—not exactly allegory, but resonant with the Christian experience. Each animal character endures its own creaturely trouble—self-importance, doubt, exhaustion, ambition—that the return of Little Freckles will heal. In the lead-up to Christmas, *Brightwing Tales* is good nighttime reading for kids and their grown-ups. Grown-ups may cry happy tears. **Ages 5–11**



Lost Evangeline

KATE DICAMILLO
CANDLEWICK, 160 PAGES

A shoemaker is blessed with Evangeline, a girl small enough to fit in his palm. As tiny Evangeline ages, “changing shape without ever changing size,” she grows to share her adoptive father’s longing to go to sea. The ensuing story strikes the timeless tone necessary for fairy tales. When the shoemaker’s wife wants to get rid of Evangeline, the shoemaker says, “She is a person, a person who is clever and courageous and kind. She is a gift.” Eventually Evangeline will get lost in the wide world and even go to sea, where cleverness, courage, and kindness will serve her well. Though third in the Norendy trilogy, this book stands well on its own. Sophie Blackall’s stunning illustrations make it more than the sum of its parts. **Ages 7–10**



Tully's Christmas Mess

JILL & PAUL MILLER
NEW GROWTH PRESS, 32 PAGES

Tully the dog is eager to help his family get ready for Christmas, even if they continually have to remind him to stay out of the way so he doesn’t make a mess. They pick out the perfect tree and then adorn its branches with ornaments, lights, and lots of angels. Christmas Day arrives, complete with delightful presents and delicious provisions. But then an evening walk through the snow turns disastrous when Tully’s leash gets tangled around the tree. The Millers based the book on their golden retriever Tully, whose real-life Christmas tree catastrophe served to remind the family about a key reason for the season: Jesus came to clean up our messes. A concluding note to parents offers tips for shepherding children through the messes of life. **Ages 4–8**



The Biggest Story Advent

KEVIN DEYOUNG
CROSSWAY, 60 PAGES

DeYoung writes in his introduction that this family Advent devotional diverges from focusing on the traditional Christmas story to instead concentrate on two dozen Old Testament promises that demonstrate how Jesus “fulfilled the larger story of God’s redemptive purposes for His people.” Each day’s reading includes a lift-the-flap panel, which reveals that day’s Scripture verse along with a stylized illustration by Don Clark. The opposing pages offer brief exegesis of each prophecy ranging from Genesis to Malachi. Day 25 culminates with Matthew 1:21 and is followed by a page of lift-the-flap panels pointing to the Savior’s triumph over sin, but younger children may need help understanding the pictures’ meanings. Note: An illustration includes Jesus’ face. **Ages 6–10**



QUEST

FOUR BOOKS THAT SHAPED MY THINKING

Economics as a truly human thing

by DAVID L. BAHNSEN



The most *unfunny* cliché about economics is the overused reference to its being a “dismal science.” The phrase, coined by 19th-century historian Thomas Carlyle, has become a cultural trope in modern times, reducing economics to something cold, mechanical, and formulaic—a series of laws illustrated in mathematical theorems and administered by central planners. Dismal, indeed!

Economics is *the study of human action around the allocation of scarce resources*, and my passion for economics is directly related to my understanding

of it as anything but dismal. When we see economics as attached to moral philosophy and about the purposeful acts of human beings, it invites an entirely different attitude to its study. Economics should transcend mathematical and physical laws and instead lead to the discovery of timeless truths and the challenging work of applying those truths. This isn’t the kind of work best left to central planners.

CREATED BY HUMAN ACTION

It is hard to understate the impact Ludwig von Mises’ *Human Action*

(1949) had on the 20th century. In a magnum opus for the economic movement, Mises resisted the collectivist impulse that dominated academia at the time. Today we take things like subjective value theory (value is not a by-product of the labor that creates goods and services but rather the subjective value humans place on them from their own preferences and judgments) and marginal utility (value comes from the very *next* need it satisfies, not the total use) for granted, but these were profound contributions of Mises’ Austrian school of thought. *Human Action* shows that humans act

purposefully, and this foundational understanding allows us to deduce other discoveries in economics. The intentional actions of humans creates value, and out of that value we get this thing called “exchange.” Subsequent economic realities—such as prices, currencies, interest rates, etc.—are a by-product of the basic fact of human action. Mises wasn’t a Christian, but his insights can be understood within the Christian worldview. If economics properly starts with human action, economists can’t do their job correctly without proper *anthropology*. No discovery animated me more than this: that economics is fundamentally about the pioneering spirit of human beings, made in the image of God, to cocreate with Him. Mises lacked a full understanding of his own propositions, but his work led me down a path of economics as “rallying the really human things.”

THE NEED FOR HUMAN FREEDOM

The Austrian peer of Mises, Friedrich Hayek, helped me understand these ideas from a different perspective in *The Road to Serfdom* (1944). Hayek’s elaboration of the *knowledge problem* (that central planners cannot obtain the knowledge to properly administer the affairs of an economy) and the *price mechanism* (that prices serve as pockets of information that coordinate activities among a wide array of economic actors) allowed me to understand the miracle of a market economy in a deeper and more intellectually serious way. He explains that if economics starts with the purposeful acts of humans, then individual human freedom is a cornerstone of optimal economics. Supposedly noble attempts to deny human beings their individual liberty should not be considered noble at all. They not only create suboptimal economic outcomes, but they also lead to political tyranny.

THE IMPACT ON HUMAN LIVES

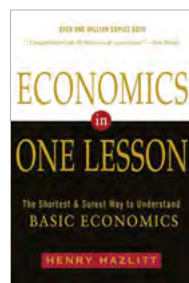
After I was firmly committed to the principles derived from Mises and Hayek and serious about understanding them in the context of my own Christian worldview, Henry Hazlitt’s



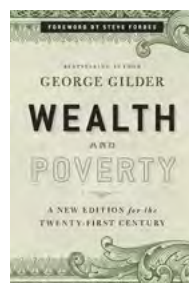
Human Action
LUDWIG VON MISES



The Road to Serfdom
FRIEDRICH HAYEK



Economics in One Lesson
HENRY HAZLITT



Wealth and Poverty
GEORGE GILDER

Economics in One Lesson (1946) aided me in applying these principles to real matters of economic policy. From minimum wage laws to free trade to rent and price controls, as well as other late 20th-century economic debates, Hazlitt took economics from the ivory tower to the street. I probably read his book more than 10 times in high school, and continue to use it to this day in teaching economics to high school students. Hazlitt’s popularizing of the *broken window fallacy*, explaining that almost all economic error comes from looking at visible effects while ignoring invisible ones, remains one of the most valuable economic principles (with universal application) I have ever come across.

THE JOY OF HUMAN INGENUITY

My journey to seeing economics as a social and human field could not have been complete without George Gilder’s *Wealth and Poverty* (1981). Viewing markets as mechanical venues where incentives compete with one another deprives us of the entrepreneurial element of markets. Gilder recognized that humans, created in the image of God, are not merely disincentivized by excessive tax and regulation, but stifled in their pursuit of new ideas and innovations. Gilder added to the depth of my understanding of human nature, centering my view of money around the ultimate finite resource in God’s created order—time. He celebrates entrepreneurship for all the right reasons, and condemns heavy-handed government intervention in the economy for all the right reasons, too.

The entire corpus of books that has informed my view of economics is too vast to cover in a short essay, but these four books were not merely “good reads.” They were transformative in a way that evokes gratitude that will last the rest of my days. ■

—David L. Bahnsen is the founder and managing partner of The Bahnsen Group, an \$8 billion private wealth management firm, the author of several books on work and economics from a Christian worldview, and a regular guest on The World and Everything in It podcast’s Monday Moneybeat

WORLD

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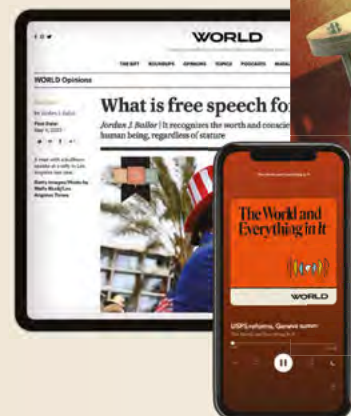
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MOVIE

Train Dreams

by COLLIN GARBARINO

Rated PG-13 • Netflix

→ Netflix might be the undisputed leader among streaming services, but the company hasn't yet managed to conquer the film awards season. Over the last seven years, the streaming giant has had many of its films nominated for best picture at the Academy Awards, but none have won—though it has had a couple of wins in both the best director and best supporting actress categories. This fall, Netflix continues its quest for the Oscars' highest honor with a half-dozen prestige films it's releasing alongside its usual slop. You know the kind: movies with beautiful, melancholic

atmospherics that play well with critics but are usually ignored by general audiences.

One of the most beautiful and melancholic of this year's lot is *Train Dreams*, directed by Clint Bentley from a script he co-wrote with Greg Kwedar. The film adapts Denis Johnson's 2011 novella of the same name.

Joel Edgerton plays Robert Grainier, a logger working in the Pacific Northwest. Robert spends more than 80 years in and around the same small town, joining logging crews long enough to scrape together a living. Born toward the end of the 19th century, he sees his little corner of America undergo extraordinary changes during his lifetime.

Robert is a quiet man, who doesn't seem predisposed to self-reflection, but when he meets a young woman at church, his conception of life's possibilities widens. The two marry, build a home, and have a child. Robert finds his greatest joy in his family, but financial necessity requires him to return to the logging camps for monthslong stints. After a bad experience working for a railroad company, Robert fears he's been cursed, and his life takes a tragic turn.

In *Train Dreams*, Bentley eschews a typical narrative arc, relying on the character of Robert to tie the film together. We get a series of scenes—Robert as a young man, Robert in the logging camps, Robert at home, Robert riding the rails. Moments that seem scattered and disparate are really part of a connected whole because they are part of Robert's experience. He remains somewhat inscrutable, a rock of a man who's steadily eroded by the winds of change. Robert's life acts as a metaphor for the film's central theme: The world is both

COURTESY OF NETFLIX

joyous and sorrowful and above all interconnected and beautiful.

These rather banal and heavy-handed observations concerning the world's interconnectedness and the nature of passing time would be quite unforgivable in a less beautiful film, but as it so happens, with *Train Dreams*, Bentley has created an extraordinarily beautiful film.

The Pacific Northwest is intrinsically picturesque, but Adolpho Veloso's cinematography captures the lush greens of the forest in such a way as to give the impression that the world is simultaneously very old and very new. The visuals are rugged and earthy, evoking a longing for simpler times.

Train Dreams has a runtime of only 102 minutes, but it doesn't hurry Robert's life. Bentley crafts spacious moments, echoing with silence, that allow the audience to drink in scenery. The film relies on a narration provided by Will Patton to give meaning to the events.

The cast provides lovely performances all round, despite the script's sparse dialogue. Robert tends to be taciturn, but Edgerton's patient expression carries its share of the dramatic load. In one scene, he utters the most heart-breakingly affecting lines I've witnessed in a film this year. The supporting actors are just as strong. Felicity Jones' turn as Robert's wife Gladys is sincere and joyful. William Macy plays Robert's older friend and mentor in the logging camp who ponders the ethics of cutting down thousand-year-old trees. Kerry Condon lends her talents as a forester who carries her own hurts to the Pacific Northwest.

Train Dreams is rated PG-13 for violence and sexuality, but the film is relatively low on objectionable content. Logging camps are dangerous places, because of both the nature of the work and the nature of the men who perform it. The film also contains a brief moment of passion between Robert and Gladys, but the scene honors the actors' modesty.

I'm not sure this film will get Netflix that coveted gold statuette for best picture, but it could be a winner with viewers in the mood for that beautiful, melancholic vibe. ■



MOVIE

In Your Dreams

by COLLIN GARBARINO

Rated PG • Netflix



Netflix hopes to spark kids' imaginations with its new feature-length animated movie *In Your Dreams*, a film exploring the space between wishing for a better future and being content with present reality.

The heroine of *In Your Dreams* is Stevie, a teenage girl who longs to return to the perfect childhood of her memories. She's got an annoying little brother named Elliot, and she struggles with the idea that things will never be the same again. Moreover, her parents' relationship seems to be deteriorating. Money's tight, and Mom thinks about taking a job in another city.

Just as these dark clouds are forming, Stevie and Elliot find a magic book that allows them to enter the world of dreams. If they can get past the sinister Nightmara, they'll find the Sandman who has the ability to

make their dreams come true. But, as one might expect, things in the dream world aren't as they seem.

Not every parent is going to feel comfortable letting the kids watch *In Your Dreams*. It's rated PG for thematic content, action, some rude humor, and scary images. Many of the dream sequences trade on cheap gags meant to appeal to young boys. Lasers shoot out of people's posteriors, and the protagonists find themselves in a "naked dream" (with some pixelation). The talk about the parents' potential split-up felt a bit heavy for a kids show. I can't imagine this movie would make children, regardless of their parents' marital status, feel better.

Though much of the plot feels derivative, the movie's not all bad. We see siblings learn to rely on each other, we learn that the dreams of our hearts can lie to us, and we get to hear some fun needle drops along the way.

MOVIE

Eternity

by COLLIN GARBARINO



Rated PG-13 • Theaters

→ In the Gospels, the Sadducees try to stump Jesus with a theological conundrum. They offer a hypothetical situation in which a woman married a man who then died. Afterward she married his brother, who then died. This happened five more times. They ask Jesus which of the seven men is her husband in the resurrection. I kept thinking of this pericope while watching A24's new film *Eternity*.

In *Eternity*, Joan (Elizabeth Olsen) dies. Her husband of 65 years, Larry (Miles Teller), is waiting for her in the afterlife, but he's not alone. Luke (Callum Turner) thinks he has a greater claim on her affection. He's Joan's first

husband who died in war shortly after their marriage, and he's waited 67 years to be reunited with his wife. Due to the afterlife's bureaucratic rules, Joan has one week to decide which man she'll spend eternity with.

When faced with the Sadducees' absurd scenario, Jesus responded, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Matthew 22:29). His answer sums up my thoughts on Joan's dilemma in *Eternity*.

Some Christians will be turned off by the movie's depiction of the afterlife. There's no heaven or hell. The newly deceased find themselves in a mid-century modern train station. God doesn't run things. Instead an extensive bureaucracy moves souls through the

station to their final destinations. Those destinations seem more like retirement communities than eternal paradise. The options are countless but narrow: For example, souls can opt for beach world, mountain world, or even a version of Paris where everyone speaks English with a French accent.

One might shrug off this theologically problematic depiction of the afterlife as a metaphor through which the movie attempts to say something interesting about love, marriage, and the path not taken. But after looking past the irreverence, one finds that the movie lacks a thought-provoking subtext.

Joan's decision regarding the love of her life never feels in doubt, but she dithers and worries about what to do. The movie fails to challenge our society's shallow and misguided notions about the meaning of marriage, affirming the idea that marriage is a means to self-fulfillment. When talking about this scenario, Jesus says we won't be married in the age to come because we won't die (Luke 20:36), implying that since procreation will no longer be necessary to preserve the human race, marriage itself will not be necessary. And when we think of marriage as a picture of Christ and His church, we realize that marriage isn't fundamentally about us and our subjective sense of finding "the one." *Eternity* tells us that marriage is about finding the right feeling—after you've sampled some other feelings on offer.

If *Eternity* were just a fun, light-hearted romantic comedy, one still might be tempted to let its shallow themes and bad theology slide, but this is not a sweet little rom-com. The film pushes the boundaries of its PG-13 rating with crudities, coarse talk, and a scene of sensuality. There are a few truly funny moments, especially those involving actress Da'Vine Joy Randolph who plays Joan's "afterlife consultant." But on the whole, the film substitutes perverse joking for the witty banter and gentle humor found in the best romantic comedies. And the frisson of passion is wholly absent. The emotional stakes are much too low in this movie in which eternity is supposedly on the line. ■

COMING SOON...

Percy Jackson and the Olympians, Season 2

12/10 • TV-PG • Disney+

Continuing the adventures of Percy Jackson and his fellow Half-Bloods, this season adapts the second book in Rick Riordan's popular series.

Wake Up Dead Man

12/12 • PG-13 • Netflix

Benoit Blanc (Daniel Craig) returns for director Rian Johnson's third Knives Out mystery. This time the detective must sift through suspects when a monsignor turns up dead.

The SpongeBob Movie: Search for SquarePants

12/19 • PG • Theaters

Desperate to be a big guy, SpongeBob sets out to prove his bravery to Mr. Krabs by following the Flying Dutchman—a mysterious swashbuckling ghost pirate—on a seafaring comedy-adventure.

Avatar: Fire and Ash

12/19 • PG-13 • Theaters

Director James Cameron returns to Pandora in a new adventure with Marine turned Na'vi leader Jake Sully (Sam Worthington), Na'vi warrior Neytiri (Zoe Saldana), and their family.

Anaconda

12/25 • Not yet rated • Theaters

In this comedic reboot of the 1997 horror movie, starring Jack Black and Paul Rudd, a group of friends decides to remake a favorite movie from their youth but encounters unexpected events when they enter the jungle.

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MOVIE

Hamnet

by COLLIN GARBARINO

Rated PG-13 • Theaters



Academy Award-winning director Chloé Zhao's *Hamnet*, adapted from

Maggie O'Farrell's book of the same name, poignantly dramatizes the life of William Shakespeare.

The film begins with a young Will (Paul Mescal) meeting and falling in love with his future wife, here called Agnes (Jessie Buckley). But life isn't a fairy tale for the young lovers. Despite familial objections, Will and Agnes marry, and daughter Susanna soon follows. Small-town life stifles Will's genius, so Agnes sends him to London. He makes visits back home, and soon twins Judith and Hamnet are born. Having a husband and father who's frequently absent puts a strain on the family, but that strain reaches the breaking point when Hamnet dies of plague while Will is away.

This movie is an emotionally wrought exploration of grief, and Zhao crafts powerful scenes using long takes. Buckley's performance

channels a visceral pain when Agnes loses her child, and we feel the chill wrapping her heart as she redirects feelings of injustice toward her husband. Will takes his anguish and channels it into the script of *Hamlet*, and Mescal imbues his recitation of those lines with pathos.

Despite the names "Hamnet" and "Hamlet" being interchangeable in 16th-century England, the idea that Shakespeare's dead son inspired his play about a Danish prince seems questionable. The film also contains some anachronisms of attitude and deed; for example, we see Will swimming a front crawl hundreds of years before the stroke made its way to England. Even so, *Hamnet* offers a moving interpretation of the Shakespearean mythos that considers both how grief shapes creativity and how creativity can help us heal from loss.

Hamnet is rated PG-13 for the-matic content and some sexuality, containing a scene of intimacy that's awkward to watch despite the actors staying mostly dressed.



MUSIC

An alternate musical history

A flutist's look back at the 20th century

by ARSENIO ORTEZA



"Personally," says the classical flutist Gian-Luca Petrucci, "I felt the time was finally ripe for a reinterpretation of a certain 20th-century musical era."

Petrucci, a professor emeritus of flute at the Santa Cecilia Conservatory of Music in Rome, is referring to his recently released album *The Other 20th Century: 1903-1986* (Brilliant Classics), a 54½-minute program that he recorded with the pianist Paola Pisa 15 years ago. As its title suggests, it's intended as a kind of historical corrective.

And what, exactly, about our understanding of classical music in the 20th



***The Other 20th Century:*
1903-1986**

GIAN-LUCA PETRUCCI

century needs correcting? "The achievements of avant-garde music based on the pursuit of new sounds, diverse instrumental uses, and constructions organized around rhythmic fragmentation or improvisation ... failed to produce a stable structure," Petrucci says. "The pursuit of 'novelty' essentially replaced the pursuit of writing."

This kind of assessment has been stated by others. But seldom if ever have those doing the stating taken the time to argue for an alternate history while bringing the musical receipts as well. Organized more or less chronologically by the birth dates of the 12 composers whose works it contains, *The Other 20th Century* unfolds so delightfully that it's easy to forget it's expounding a thesis: (to quote Petrucci's liner notes) that "critics, musicologists and instrumentalists have finally realized that, working alongside the New Music and the Avant-Garde, composers of great stature had upheld a tradition that was capable of being more than self-referential."

Opening with Rhené Baton's oneiric and elegantly lyrical 1924 "Passacaille" and following with Francis Poulenc's pastoral "Mélodies pour Pipeau" (1934) (reworked from music that Poulenc composed for Jean Anouilh's play *La Reine Margot*), the album sets off on a decidedly non-self-referential path and never looks back.

It sometimes glances sideways. But even the atonality that glints through Ernst Krenek's "Suite für Flöte und Klavier" (1954) is counterbalanced by a succinct, neoclassical melodicism. And by the time the program begins its culmination with Giuseppe Mulè's "Largo" (1903), you'll be convinced not only that Petrucci's "other 20th century" is no castle in Spain but a beautiful if overlooked musical edifice whose well-tended grounds are well worth exploring. "Ultimately," says Petrucci, "no one should ever set aside anything without understanding, experimenting, and evaluating."

And is there an "other 21st century" developing in the world of serious music? "Each era," says Petrucci, "shapes its own physiognomy." ■

MUSIC

New and noteworthy

by ARSENIO ORTEZA



As We Are Now JIMMY GREENE

The first of this album's musical highlights occurs halfway through the opening track, "Praises," when Greene and his tenor sax achieve the kind of squealin' feelin' that bebop fans live for. The highest emotional highlights occur throughout the title track in snippets of interviews that Greene, his wife, and his son have given in the wake of Greene's daughter's death at Sandy

Hook. "It's our intention," goes one, "to humanize the face of gun violence in a moment in history where all too often we focus on everything but our shared humanity."



Songs for Emily: The Album MARCUS HUMMON

Hummon isn't the only composer turning Emily Dickinson poems into music, but he's one of the few not turning them into art song. Pop-Americana is more his style. If you're familiar with the *Songs for Emily* EP that he released last year, you already know six of these 10 cuts. But you'll want to hear the four new ones—"Letter to the World," "I Taste a Liquor Never Brewed," "Slant,"

and "Sabbath"—because they're cut from the same cloth. Dickinson wrote nearly 1,800 poems. Can *Songs for Emily: The Box* be far behind?



Somos Los Straitjackets LOS STRAITJACKETS

Performing as Nick Lowe's backing band may have raised Los Straitjackets' profile, but it hasn't changed their fondness for *lucha libre* masks or their sound: They still create songs that will have music-trivia buffs guessing "Ventures" or "Shadows." To tell the difference, listen to the production (neither Nokie Edwards nor Hank Marvin had the technology available to Eddie Angel and

Greg Townson) and for classic pop melodies once removed. If either the Shadows or the Ventures had wanted to cover "Stay" (cf. Townson's "Bumper Car") or "Moon River" (cf. Angel's "Catalina Farewell"), they'd have done so straight up.



XX: Twenty Years of Silence WATIV

The jazz pianist (well, that's one thing he is) William A. Thompson IV is so experimentally inclined that even this album, arguably his most accessible, might strike many as too "out there." But this time he provides aural ways in even more helpful than his Bandcamp liner notes—the Romantic-period classical echoes of the first 45 seconds of "Computer Riot," for example, and the

romantic mainstream jazz of "122-60." Even the Steve Reichian speech-to-music numbers aren't prohibitive, not with source material as familiar as a radio preacher ("Speaking in Tongues") and Walt Whitman ("Dirge for Two Veterans").



ENCORE

By the time that Sony launched the *Now That's What I Call Music!* series in the U.S. in 1998, it had already been releasing such compilations in the U.K. for 15 years. And, between the two countries, you'd think that the series had just about run its course. But with the four-CD, 72-cut *Now That's What I Call an Era: The Albums 1980>1984, Essential Tracks From Iconic Albums* (40 cuts on vinyl), the U.K. series turns a corner. No more overexposed hits—underexposed deep cuts now get their due.

As you might expect, the song selection has a British bias (R.E.M., Bruce Springsteen, Pretenders, **Donna Summer**, and Paul Simon appear only once). But many of the albums from which the choices were made should've been bigger in the U.S. than they were anyway, so U.S. fans should be grateful to hear what they've been missing. And if the era's (and the U.K.'s) predilection for splashy synths and Bowie-meets-blue-eyed-soul vocals begins to wear, the abundance of hooks that time forgot is compensation. —A.O.



MASTERWORKS

The world's most surprising announcement

Henry Ossawa Tanner's *The Annunciation*

by BRUCE HERMAN



Take a few moments to think afresh about a young Jewish woman barely 14 or 15 years old, living in first-century Galilee. She encounters a messenger of God, the archangel Gabriel. He declares to her that she has been “favored by God”—set apart as chosen—and that she will carry God’s only begotten Son in her

womb. She will deliver the Deliverer, Messiah, and Savior of her people and the whole world.

Could this be the most momentous supernatural encounter in all of history?

The truth is we have no category for such encounters, nor can we readily imagine it without all the angelic stereotypes and preconceptions crowding our

minds. Wing’d, bronzed, majestic armored athletic figures holding swords, hovering in the air with blinding lights and a terrifying sense of *otherness*—such that they must always say, “FEAR NOT!” But African American artist Henry Ossawa Tanner working at the turn of the 20th century offers us a refreshingly humane vision of this event: We find the young virgin sitting up in bed, gazing intently but unafraid into a theophanic manifestation of unearthly light. A luminous nimbus hovers quietly in her room—like a portal to another dimension—and we can almost hear an otherworldly whisper: “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you.”

Unlike the sometimes-bombastic depictions of the Annunciation that echo superhero comics or Hollywood movies, Tanner’s version of this blessed

event is humble, quiet, and inviting. We are allowed to silently and reverently eavesdrop on this cosmically important conversation. Surprisingly, we find that we are truly welcomed into this intimate yet world-changing encounter. We are included. In fact, everyone is invited. This is the Savior of the World coming to us, for us, as one of us—our Emmanuel.

The warm tonalities of the room that Tanner has painted beckon to us. The golden light, the large expanse of rusty red in the center of the painting, the subtle arches lending dignity to the event, the rich blue robe laid aside (Mary's traditional symbol of heavenly calling), the rumpled blankets ... all of these domestic details ask us to rest, to listen, to attend carefully to a message the entire human race has longed for since the loss of our intimacy with God post-Garden of Eden.

Here is blessing and redemption. Here is rest and joy and wonder.

Perhaps this is the central feeling Henry Ossawa Tanner has placed in this painting: quiet wonder. Not the melodrama of emotion usually associated with the supernatural. This is not magic or a display of occult power or some scary vision. This is the Creator-of-all sending an astounding message to an unimportant village in a rural corner of the world to a young woman without status. The God of All Creation is humbling Himself.

Later, in the Gospel of Luke, when pregnant Mary visits her relative Elizabeth (herself pregnant with Jesus' cousin John—later to become the Baptist) she recites a powerful poem she has composed in which the entire world is turned upside down. Plenty of drama is coming! She speaks with power and prophetic authority: A revolution is coming in which the last shall be first and the first shall be last. The last (the marginalized people) will be cared for, and the poor and the widow, the orphan, the stranger—those dear to God's heart will be comforted. The first (the privileged and powerful and affluent) will be sent away empty having already had their reward of worldly goods and status.

Tanner grew up in Pittsburgh and later moved to Philadelphia, where his father became a bishop in the African

Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. His mother, Sarah Elizabeth, was born into slavery in Virginia but having been freed, she later married Henry's father Benjamin Tanner and became a leader and missionary in the AME church alongside her husband. Bishop Benjamin Tucker Tanner was close friends with Frederick Douglass and several other influential leaders of the city—all of them active in the abolition movement and in spreading both social reform and the gospel of Christ.

Henry Ossawa Tanner was educated at Avery College and Western Theological Seminary and later at Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. He was a close apprentice of the famous American painter Thomas Eakins who taught for many years there. Though Henry was well educated and a favorite of Eakins, he nevertheless faced racism and suppression of his art career—which he details in his autobiography. In the 1890s he moved to Paris where he was able to establish a thriving art career and earn enough prestige and affluence to allow him to travel widely, including to

the Holy Land—where he made many sketches and smaller paintings and studied ardently to develop references for his larger Biblical paintings.

The Annunciation has many of the qualities art historians associate with Impressionism—a movement that Tanner encountered while living in Paris. The brushy, spontaneous quality of the paint, the richness of color, and loose handling of forms while retaining an essential realism.

Today Tanner's works are in most major museum collections in the United States, and he is one of the few Christians whose Biblical works are taken seriously in the art world. His art has inspired generations of black artists, and he's is often referred to as "the greatest African American painter in American history." There is perhaps a certain historic justice that an African American, deprived of status and success here in America, should paint the moment in human history in which all forms of human judgment and honor are turned upside down, when the Messiah comes to a lowly woman whose humility and obedience became the occasion of radical change for us all. ■

LEFT: *The Annunciation*. BELOW: Henry Ossawa Tanner photographed circa 1905.





VOICES NICK EICHER

Against the world, still

At Nicea's 1,700th anniversary, a reminder that the church's confession draws the same bright line

After 6,000 miles of flying, I made it to the very end of Europe, where I would cross into Asia and visit the site that brought the church the Nicene Creed. Istanbul is built on the Bosphorus—a strait that has always been about more than geography. Constantine saw the economic value of this passage and made it his capital to anchor an empire.

Not long after, he called church bishops to nearby Nicea, present-day Iznik, to settle the question that would shape the Christian faith: Who is Jesus Christ?

I had the privilege of traveling with a group that came to mark that council's 1,700th anniversary—to remember not the empire, but the creed. As colleagues and I walked Istanbul's modern streets, humming with traffic and trade, where the Islamic call to prayer issues out five times a day, I was reminded that the questions remain the same. What do we confess? And will we hold to it when the world demands we let go?

At the Nicea Conference, the speakers traced how orthodoxy holds when everything around it thins. Albert Mohler warned that the church's greatest danger is not hostility but hollowness—thin Christianity disappears but thick survives. The creeds, he said, are how the church keeps its faith dense with truth, impossible to dilute.

Ligon Duncan reminded us that the bishops of Nicea bore the scars of persecution and defended the gospel not from ivory towers but from prison cells. And Kevin DeYoung drew the line from that gathering to our own divided age: The creed still binds believers in one confession, giving the church a center of gravity no culture can erase. When we

confess *one Lord Jesus Christ, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God*, we stand with Athanasius—the young deacon at Nicea who would later, as bishop, refuse to bend when emperors pressed him to yield. Athanasius *contra mundum*—Athanasius against the world. Yet he prevailed, not by force but by the stubborn strength of truth.

Every age brings temptations for the church to compromise. In the fourth century, the pressure was imperial. In ours, it is cultural—political conflict, moral confusion, and, to borrow from Carl Trueman, the rise and triumph of the modern self. But the creed still draws the same bright line: that Christ is *begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made*.

We don't face torture or exile. But we do face a world that insists reality is what we make of it and truth is negotiable. The challenge for us is not persecution but persuasion. There is a slow erosion of confidence that what the church confesses is really, eternally true. The early church fought heresy that threatened to make Jesus less than God. We face heresies that make truth less than real. Either way, the remedy is the same: a faith thick enough to resist thinning.

It struck me, hearing these messages, that every economic or political system fails when it trades substance for appearance. Erdoğan's Turkey—where the lira has been devalued again and again—has illustrated the point: a lesson in what happens when promises outrun reserves. Inflation is heresy in financial form. When the church prints moral slogans without doctrinal reserves, it devalues its witness. Nicea's answer was to anchor the church's currency in the eternal: Christ of one substance with the Father.

The setting itself underscored that point. Modern Istanbul thrives on the same geography that once enriched Byzantium. The Bosphorus still funnels ships between the Black Sea and the rest of the world. Every Russian and Ukrainian vessel that seeks the open sea must pass beneath its bridges. Yet, empires come and go. Each is convinced it has found the formula for stability. But the creed endures.

The conference didn't pretend that the early church's struggles were greater than ours—just different. In fact, it reminded us that orthodoxy is always a contested word. Nicea had Constantine's protection, but later, many would die under his successors. Doctrinal conviction always comes with conflict. But the alternative is worse. A church that avoids conflict by avoiding clarity eventually loses both truth and peace.

Outside the conference, the *adhan*—the Muslim call to prayer—echoed from the minarets. Inside, we recited what no empire can overturn: "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds."

A millennium and seven centuries later, those words remain the church's true wealth—faith's hardest currency. ■



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HERALDS FROM THE SOUTH

Missionaries from the Global South are taking the gospel back to the Western nations that first evangelized them

by Grace Snell

PHOTO BY
GREG SCHNEIDER /
GENESIS





Nehemiah Chigoji came to the United States from Nigeria and is now pastor of Upland Peace Church in California.

At Samuel Vitalino's church in Orlando, Fla., services are often packed to overflowing. Every week, about 70 new visitors file into the pews, and Vitalino estimates the church adds four or five new families every month.

Vitalino is a Brazilian pastor who planted Esperança Bible Presbyterian Church in 2021 to serve fellow immigrants. Services are in Portuguese, and most of Vitalino's congregants are Brazilian.

But, here and there in the crowd, a handful of people sit wearing earbuds and bending over their phones—listening as the church's team of interpreters translate the sermon into English. Vitalino estimates about a dozen of his 550 church members are English-speaking Americans, and the church adds a new American member every three months or so.

"They're not coming because of the language," Vitalino said. They're coming because they see something different in his church. He calls it the "vibe" of the Global South—a

broad region primarily comprising Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Christians there are often more connected with each other and more openly passionate about their faith.

Vitalino isn't just imagining the difference. Christianity is on the rise in the Global South—a demographic earthquake becoming one of the greatest religious shake-ups since Christianity transformed the Roman Empire in the fourth century.

For the last five centuries, the story of Christianity seemed nearly synonymous with the history of Europe and her colonies. By 1900, over 80% of the world's Christians lived in Europe and North America, according to researcher Philip Jenkins. As a result, scholars viewed Christian missions as a stream flowing "from the West to the rest."

But that dynamic has shifted in little more than the span of a lifetime. Today, over 67% of all Christians live in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, while many of those on other continents have roots in the Global South.

Now, some of those believers, like Vitalino, are reaching back to the West as churches here hemorrhage congregants and many young people reject organized religion as outmoded, colonial, and oppressive. Many of these Christians come first to work or study—but they are making disciples as they go, seeking to breathe life back into Western Christianity, and calling the church back to Biblical faithfulness.

In 2015, Samuel Vitalino arrived in Greenville, S.C., to study at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. He planned to earn his master's degree and then return home better equipped to serve the church in Brazil.

But during his time in seminary, Vitalino had a front-row seat to the sorry state of the Western church. "I saw the decline," he said. "I saw the need."

So, the next year, he said yes when a pastor in Lakeland, Fla., asked for his help to revive his dying church.





Samuel Vitalino prays (facing page) and sings (above) with his congregation in Orlando.

Vitalino met with resistance right away. For one thing, he spoke English with a heavy Brazilian accent. And the church he started serving was very traditional. People there didn't like the idea of change.

Vitalino compares pastoring there to trying to turn a cruise ship from its charted course. Whenever he suggested new ideas, church members shut him down. But Vitalino pleaded with them to stop and look around. "Your sons and daughters—they're not here," he told them. "You have to open your eyes."

Eventually, the church gave him permission to try something new: a weekend event kicking off with a four-hour Friday service, followed by a Saturday barbecue, and a Sunday guest speaker.

The whole idea flew directly in the face of American notions of speed and efficiency. Church leaders told Vitalino it would never work. It was hard enough to get people to come for a one-hour Sunday service, let alone an entire weekend of activities.

But Vitalino forged ahead. And much to the surprise of church leaders, people did come. In fact, the event was such a success Vitalino heard people complaining afterward because they didn't want it to end.

Eventually, the head pastor retired and the church brought in a new pastor, also a Brazilian. His arrival marked a new era for the church. The new head pastor had a wife and five kids, and their presence helped attract more young families and teens.

The church's demographic makeup also started to shift. "It was a white church," Vitalino said. "It's not a white church anymore. You have people from different nations there."

In October 2021, Vitalino left to plant Esperança Bible Presbyterian Church. His church has since planted five other churches across Florida and Georgia. Altogether, membership at these campuses tops 800 people.

Vitalino said the Brazilian church owes a lot to the generosity and tenacity of American missionaries. But the American church also has a lot to learn from believers in the countries they helped reach with the gospel 150 years ago. "We're coming back to say, 'Hey, let's do church different,'" Vitalino said. "Let's hold on to the truth."

The United States remains far and away the top sender of missionaries—launching about 135,000 mission workers in 2023. But it's also the top receiver of missionaries: welcoming about 38,000 the same year. Other top missionary sending countries include Brazil, South Korea, the Philippines, and Nigeria.

Although some scholars have referred to the movement of Global South ministers to the West as "reverse missions,"

World Christian Database editor Gina Zurlo said that isn't the best expression because it makes it seem like missions is something reserved for the West.

"Why is the thing that the majority of Christians do the backwards thing—reverse?" she asked. Instead, many missiologists have embraced the term "polycentric missions" to describe the exchange of Christian workers and ideas from everywhere to everywhere.

A.J. Moreira's ministry is pretty much the definition of polycentric. Moreira is a Brazilian serving international students in the Washington, D.C., area.

Decades ago, his grandmother came to faith through the work of American missionaries. Now, Moreira and his wife live in the United States and host a weekly dinner and Bible study for students from as far away as Saudi Arabia, China, Ghana, and Bangladesh.

Once, Moreira invited a student from Afghanistan over to his house. "We had a cross hanging on our wall," Moreira recalled. "And he asked me, 'Hey, what is that?'"

The student had never seen a cross before.

Moreira was able to share the gospel with the student that evening. He views this work as planting seeds and trusts the Holy Spirit to bring new life in students' hearts, even when he doesn't get to see it come to fruition.

And he hopes students who do come to know the Lord will take what they have learned and put their faith into practice back in their home countries.

In fact, Gina Zurlo said international students and other migrants are primarily responsible for the geographic spread of Christianity today. "There are a tremendous amount of people on the move today," Zurlo said. "And a lot of them are Christians." Among an estimated 280 million people living outside their home countries, nearly half claim Christianity, according to the Pew Research Center.

As a result, Zurlo said, much of the South to West missions trend is actually unfolding on the heels of migration. Many of the people researchers count as missionaries are actually bi-vocational pastors who come to the United States and Europe to study theology and serve their own diaspora communities.

Other Global South Christians come to the West primarily for economic reasons—but they end up forming churches and sharing the gospel along the way. These immigrants aren't included in official missionary tallies, but Pepperdine sociology professor Rebecca Y. Kim argued many of them nevertheless view themselves as "everyday missionaries."

"They're evangelizing to their neighbors," Kim said. "And as they do that, they are also kind of reviving the United States in terms of Christian faith."

Nchemiah Chigoji first came to the United States to continue his soccer career. At that point, the 22-year-old from Nigeria had already played for several football clubs across Europe.

Chigoji grew up in a vibrant church. And he learned from a young age there are "no benchwarmers" in the

In the United States, Chigoji sees a widespread problem he labels "spiritual obesity." People are so financially and socially comfortable they don't feel their need for God.

Christian life. But he had no plans to enter formal ministry in the United States.

Mostly, Chigoji just wanted to build a better life for himself and his family. He had grown up extremely poor and athletics was his ticket out. "I didn't want to live in those rural areas and become a farmer and die early," he said.

But, in the United States, Chigoji started attending a Mennonite church near Los Angeles. The pastor there,



Neville Peterson, took the young man under his wing and brought him on as the youth pastor. Later, when he decided to retire, Peterson asked Chigoji to consider taking his place.

“Out of my trust and respect for him,” Chigoji said, “I took the job.”

Right away, Chigoji met with pushback. The church he started leading was a historic congregation originally founded by Russian and German immigrants in 1903.

“These were hardcore, stubborn Mennonite businessmen and farmers,” Chigoji said. “Nobody told them what to do,” he added.

Even though the surrounding area had seen an influx of Asian and Hispanic immigrants, the congregation was made up entirely of elderly white Americans.

Chigoji said it was a big culture shock for people when “a Nigerian kid from Jos” took over as their pastor.

Chigoji wanted to change things up and start reaching out to the local community. That included switching to a more contemporary worship style. Up to that point, the church had only ever used a pipe organ.

But many of the congregants didn’t like that idea. And some were outright hostile. “I almost got beat up by one of the older ones,” he said. The elderly church member was upset because Chigoji bought some drums for worship.

Nehemiah Chigoji preaches (left) and greets members of his church in Upland, Calif.

At one church meeting, Chigoji said, people stared him down and accused him of trying to kill the church.

But Chigoji said that’s exactly the opposite of what he wants to do. He wants to challenge American Christians so they can grow. In the United States, Chigoji sees a widespread problem he labels “spiritual obesity.” People are so financially and socially comfortable they don’t feel their need for God.

Nigerian Christians don’t have that luxury, Chigoji said. In his home country, jihadist military groups like Boko Haram burn churches and kill Christians. And beyond the threat of violence, millions of people battle the daily struggle of living in grinding poverty.

Still, ministering in the United States has put Chigoji’s faith to the test in plenty of other ways. During the COVID-19 pandemic, his church lost nearly half its already small congregation. Attendance dropped from about 70 to about 30, and the church still hasn’t recovered.

Chigoji said that’s been extremely discouraging. But he’s determined not to give up and is praying for revival.

In the meantime, Chigoji has seen a few signs of hope. When he first arrived, the youngest person at the church was 56 years old. But now, a few younger faces have joined the pews.

“It’s weird that a Nigerian pastor has started attracting Indonesians and Hispanics,” Chigoji said. But in some ways, it makes sense because those are the people left behind as more and more white people move away to wealthier areas.



Chigoji sees them as the future of his church. And even though his congregation is small, he imagines it as a glimpse of what heaven will be like. “There will be no Nigerian section, and there will be no American section,” he said. “There will be no black section or white section. We’re all going to be children of God.”

One of the biggest ironies about the demographic shift of Christianity is that while young people in the West reject it as colonial and oppressive, people in formerly colonized areas of the world are embracing Jesus as the source of freedom, justice, and joy.

In fact, researcher Philip Jenkins said most Global South Christians would be very surprised if Westerners raised the subject of imperialism with them. By now, he said, many of them have fully embraced languages like French and English as their own and view colonialism as something from their grandparents’ time.

But Jenkins said there’s one major exception to that general rule: Western churches trying to introduce their own

“Our Western brothers who brought this message to us are now telling us a different story. We say, ‘No, let’s go back to the text.’”

progressive views of moral and sexual issues to the Global South. When that happens, Jenkins said, many people will point to that and say, “No, no—that’s imperialism.”

Uchenna Anyanwu is an associate director with the missions organization Frontier Fellowship. Anyanwu is originally from Nigeria, and before he came to the United States, he spent a decade serving as a missionary to North Africa.

Anyanwu said many African Christians like him feel indebted to Western missionaries for translating the Bible into their languages. But now they feel their spiritual descendants aren’t living out the teachings of Scripture.

“Our Western brothers who brought this message to us are now telling us a different story,” Anyanwu said. “We say, ‘No, let’s go back to the text.’”

Justin Schell works with church leaders from all over the world through the Lausanne Movement. He said Global South churches offer a powerful witness to the moral decay of Western churches when it comes to issues of abortion, same-sex marriage, and the ordination of LGBTQ clergy.

For example, when the United Methodist Church voted to remove its long-standing condemnation of homosexuality in 2024, Schell said, delegates from Africa and Asia were some of the most outspoken in resistance to the change.

“They stood up in that assembly, walked to the microphone, and begged the Western people there to repent,” he said. “They were the faithful ones.”

Jenkins cautions people against viewing Global South churches primarily through the lens of Western conservative-liberal dichotomies, since Global South Christianity is a vast and diverse phenomenon of its own and doesn’t directly map onto Western political divides. African Christians, for example, might pair conservative views on marriage with more progressive views on economics.

Instead of Western Christianity defining the Global South, churches there are establishing themselves in their own right. Global South Christians now far outnumber their Western brothers and sisters, something World Christian Database’s Gina Zurlo refers to as the “people power.” And while Western churches still command more money and influence, Zurlo said, the balance of power is starting to shift.

Jenkins notes Global South-influenced churches are playing an outsized role in the pockets of revival blossoming across the United Kingdom. Several of Britain’s largest congregations have African pastors and a handful of Church of England churches have evolved into “more or less evangelical megachurches with a very charismatic tone.”

Jenkins said a dive into the history of these congregations usually turns up at least one Brit who spent some time working in Chile or Central Africa and brought home a fresh perspective on Christianity, something Jenkins refers to as “the empire striking back.”

Across France and Belgium, there are also a handful of large churches with African pastors, Jenkins said. But while some of these congregations also try to reach out to Europeans, many of them primarily minister to African and Afro-Caribbean immigrants.

Frontier Fellowship’s Anyanwu hopes more of these immigrant congregations will expand their missionary horizons beyond just their own diaspora communities—in both Europe and America. “These churches need to open their eyes to see that it was not only for that purpose that the God of missions brought them to where they are,” he said.

He urges Global South Christians to seize the moment to carry the gospel across ethnic lines. “Many white Americans who come from formerly Christian backgrounds have abandoned the faith,” Anyanwu said. “They are no longer walking with Jesus.”

And that, he added, makes them a mission field. ■



A VISION FULFILLED

The ambitious plan to start translating the Bible into every language is nearly complete

by Rob Holmes



A Bible translated into Tsotsil, a Mayan language

I was 16 in 1985 and freshly challenged in my faith by Cristy, whose locker was beside mine at Chattanooga Christian High School: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” She quoted Matthew 6:21 as a gentle but needed rebuke, refocusing me on “things above.” The Lord used it to jolt me into soul-searching.

My boyhood imagination had bent toward aviation, fueled by encounters with cool missionaries at church. But in the months following Cristy’s admonition, I decided I would join the ranks of Bible translators, in part because my English teacher modeled a love for language and literature. I had spent an amazing summer in Nigeria, helping my archaeologist uncle, and I prayed the Lord would bring me back one day to Africa.

First came college, a stint in the Federal Aviation Administration, study in France, and a research and writing job in London, where I met my Brazilian wife. She had some training in linguistics and shared my pioneering spirit. After a year of marriage, we joined a British Bible translation organization in 1997 and headed to Nairobi, Kenya, to earn our master’s degrees in linguistics. As Westerners, we would be part of an innovation in Bible translation: getting trained in Africa, learning with Africans as peers.

This new program sprang from a bold strategy shift percolating in the Bible translation movement: Vision 2025—a goalpost year for at least starting work in all languages worldwide still without Scripture.

When we graduated in 1999, that number stood around 5,000.

A fever to begin new projects launched the translation movement into an era of rethinking everything so as to get the task done quicker. Agencies across the globe bought into comprehensive strategies that emphasized partnership, just-in-time training, innovation in funding streams, and—boldest of all—passing the baton of responsibility and leadership to the Global South church.

The story of a Bible translation up to this point usually centered on Western missionaries. They would target a new people group, then arrive with plans and expertise to get the job done. In that less-globalized world, the local expression of the church, if there was one, had meager capacity and connections for translation work.

My wife and I latched on to Vision 2025 while in Nairobi. And with a nudge from our leaders, God birthed in our family a more specific vision: to work alongside nationals to do translation and literacy work in Chad.

Across the Bible translation movement, Scripture Engagement became a paramount part of strategy, as Vision 2025 caused a flood of newly available Scripture. Ditching the previous focus on the product of printed texts, translation teams now envisaged from the outset how a community could be transformed by the Scriptures, by “planning for impact” to engage people with God’s Word before and after it got printed.

Stories and studies prove that community ownership, spearheaded through a local language committee, is key to success. In this vein, leaders also considered new modes of translation. Certain people groups and their language committees preferred an Oral Bible Translation, not print. And the hundreds of sign languages used around the world became visible on the radar screen.

Another tectonic shift came from fleshing out Vision 2025: attitudes about people. Bible agencies began to view locals no longer as “co-translators” but mentored and trained them to lead translation projects. The heart of the translation movement began to beat with the understanding that “God desires not only to reach the nations but also to include the nations in the work,” as Daniel Watters, son of Wycliffe missionaries wrote this year. Its aim became “the transformation that sees indigenous churches transition from recipients to agents of God’s word.”

Real hurdles loomed even so. Developing countries’ nationals had little access to specialized linguistics or theological training and sometimes scant education at all. Hard-won fruit came as Bible agencies tailored academic programs—teaching in languages besides English—in Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

“More than almost any other human activity, it is the translation of the Bible that has fueled Christian mission and resulted in the expansion of the Church,” wrote R.J. Sim, a Scottish Bible translator in Ethiopia and longtime professor in Kenya. In the Vision 2025 vanguard, Sim, who died only this year, founded the Nairobi graduate program to train African Bible translators—where he also trained us.

In 2002, three years after we graduated, my wife and I joined a translation team. Its Chadian and expatriate members had already broken ground, and we worked another 15 years before finishing the draft of the whole Bible under the auspices of the Chadian Bible Society. Milestones came even before then: literacy work and primers, the New Testament, the audio recording, and many short reading books. It felt at times like too many cooks stirring the pot, and we “got up each other’s nose,” as a British colleague would say. But the very words we translated also transformed us.

One Chadian teammate, who initially worked only in literacy, made a profession of faith when God’s Word in the Psalms penetrated his heart. He buzzed with new motivation and became the key to making the translation sound beautiful and natural—with *chette* (“pepper”)—as he would say. He and a Chadian female colleague grew in their translation skills and learned Hebrew, becoming more responsible for the text’s accuracy. Their wording made the translation “acceptable” to readers, without obscuring the truth that inevitably causes offence to those without ears to hear. They also began to treat each other differently, in Christ, in a culture where men and women rarely stayed in the same room together.

Being translators’ kids became a tool of God’s transformation for our five children, too. They grew up with Vision 2025 through the highs and lows of cross-cultural life. And



Rob Holmes (right) with the translation team in Nigeria.

they understood intimately our family’s calling as we marveled constantly that we had a hand in bringing God’s Word into another language.

Unreached people who hear the gospel continue asking the same question posed to missionaries over the centuries: “Why did it take so long for us to hear this good news?”

Translating the news always takes time. But new technology enables teams to work faster, with better accuracy, pushing the movement to new frontiers like Oral Bible Translation and Sign Language Translation. These require specialized audio and video technologies to even make them possible. And print projects depend heavily on Zoom meetings and Paratext software tools as consultants work with a team to “check” their work, leveraging the internet for a faster pace or more regular interaction.

Last century, sorting data on note cards in shoeboxes gave way to computers, causing an explosion in productivity and pacing. This century, artificial intelligence (AI) is the new game changer. About 500 languages are now using AI for drafting translation.

Before you start worrying that robots are churning out Scripture, consider that AI tools, like Scripture Forge, do some tasks flawlessly and more easily than a translation team. It reduces open quotes, missing or misnumbered verses, or unintended additions in a text. Languages with a New Testament can even use that corpus to produce a machine draft of Old Testament books for humans to glean

from and improve their own translation: One Nigerian team I serve as a consultant found that Scripture Forge renderings in Deuteronomy sparked them to express their own wording better. And like a good German, AI gets grammar rules right every time, remembering to use an inclusive pronoun where the team forgot. AI tools still require trained people to ensure exegetical faithfulness.

God’s provision through prayer changes everything—as throughout all 2,000-plus years of the Bible translation movement. Vision 2025 has now been achieved in many countries around the world.

Soon, “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14 NIV).

In August, the official tally from Vision 2025’s (current) alliance of over 100 partner Bible agencies shows only 544 of the world’s 7,396 living languages still need translation work to begin! About 300 of these are sign languages. Many of those that remain will have an Oral Bible Translation. Major Scripture organizations remain committed to making “God’s Word accessible to all people by 2033.”

“Latest statistics suggest there is some form of translation or Scripture Engagement work going on in 4,457 languages,” British linguist Peter Brassington shared recently in a consultant forum.

My own Bible agency’s vision is galvanizing me afresh: ASAP—All Scripture, All People. This year some of us started learning American Sign Language, in hopes of branching out to one day serve deaf translation teams. ■

—Rob Holmes works as a consultant for Seed Company, serving Bible translation teams in Africa. He is a graduate of the World Journalism Institute.



Physician shortages are contributing to
America's healthcare crisis

BY KIM HENDERSON

illustration by Krieg Barrie

THE DOCTOR IS NOT IN

MATT WHEELER'S PATIENT CAUGHT HIM BY SURPRISE

that fall afternoon inside his medical clinic in Hayward, Wis. Instead of wanting to talk about his terminal lung condition, the patient wanted to talk about Wheeler. He sensed something wasn't quite right with the young doctor he'd come to consider a friend. When he asked how Wheeler was balancing work and family, Wheeler grew quiet and shrugged. His patient nodded knowingly, then spoke of the lifetime of memories his wife and son had built together. "I'm not part of those," the man said, emotion affecting his voice. "I spent all my time building my career. I missed time with my family, and I won't ever get it back."

Wheeler says those words hit hard. The pool of physicians in his practice was down two due to retirements, and he was feeling it. Long hours at the clinic with no time for lunch. Nights and weekends on call. Rounds at the hospital and nursing home. Wheeler couldn't remember the last time he'd had breakfast with his family or dropped his sons off at their preschool. "I barely managed to refill my cup of tea and go to the bathroom at some point during the day," he recalls.

That heavy workload had Wheeler wondering whether he'd chosen the right career.

Matt Wheeler isn't an anomaly. In an annual survey conducted by MedCentral, a digital news source for healthcare providers, at least one-third of practicing doctors indicated they considered quitting this year. Most cited burnout as the main factor "pushing them to the edge." But clinical demands, such as increasing administrative burdens, made the list, too.

And the problem isn't just dissatisfaction. A quarter of the country's working physicians are of retirement age, even as their younger counterparts are making plans for early retirement. America better buckle up. The practice of medicine is changing, and a serious doctor shortage is straight ahead.



ACCORDING TO NATIONAL

Center for Health Workforce Analysis predictions, we'll be short nearly 90,000 primary care physicians in less than 15 years.

America's aging population is partly to blame. By 2035, folks 65 or older will outnumber children aged 17 or younger for the first time in history. Primary care physicians will be in high demand, since older people see a doctor at nearly four times the rate of younger people and account for a disproportionate number of medical tests and procedures. A primary care physician acts as the gateway for the referral to medical specialists. Without a physician who understands his medical history, a patient can wander from specialist to specialist and still not receive the correct care. Having a primary care physician also means a patient is more likely to get preventive care that avoids serious illnesses. He won't end up in an emergency room for routine care.

But to medical students loaded down with school debt, high-paying specialties are a draw, leaving residency slots in primary care fields unfilled each year. The higher-paying specialties aren't immune to the shortage, however.

Stephen Mills is a popular OB-GYN in Brookhaven, Miss. He says his job is unique, because delivering a baby makes him, in a way, part of that family. "Everybody remembers who delivered what baby and you have that relationship for decades," he explains, his grin widening at the thought. If that's true, Mills is part of a lot of families. The OB estimates he's delivered some 4,000 babies over the course of his 37-year career. But when it came time for Mills to retire, putting a firm date on the calendar was hard. His practice just couldn't seem to recruit new doctors.

"The first question we get asked is, 'Do I have to work on the weekend or at

LEFT: Dr. Matt Wheeler makes his rounds at Hayward Medical Center. RIGHT: Dr. Stephen Mills chats with Danica, a former patient who was in for her 9-weeks postpartum visit. Dr. Mills delivered not only her child but Danica as well, 28 years ago.

PHOTO BY JUDY GRIESEDECK/GENESIS



night?’ In our generation, we just assumed that came with the territory, but I think that the new generation of docs is really looking at what kind of lifestyle they’re going to have.”

Mills’ practice includes four doctors, but three are nearing retirement and have dropped their obstetrics role. That leaves only one doctor to deliver babies. They’ve had to contract OBs from other places.

“We do our due diligence, and we check them out and make sure they have good credentials, but when our patients show up at the hospital, they have, you know, Dr. Smith, who they’ve never seen before,” Mills says. He predicts big change across the board—more health-care from mid-level providers like nurse practitioners and midwives, with OBs only called in for complicated deliveries. “It’s going to be different, and I guess the public at large will acclimate, but it makes me a little sad. The relationship

between OB-GYN and patient isn’t going to be quite as close as it has been in the last 30 years.”

Nurse practitioners and physician assistants may balk at being labeled a “mid-level provider,” even though the federal government uses the term. But whatever you call them, NPs and PAs are among America’s fastest-growing professions, making up a third of our clinical workforce. Still, they can’t fully remedy the doctor shortage.

Political leaders and training centers are working on creative solutions.

In June, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott signed a law that allows experienced, foreign-trained doctors to practice in Texas without having to repeat a U.S. residency. Two months later, Florida Polytechnic University and the Orlando College of Osteopathic Medicine announced a new six-year degree program designed to fast-track the next generation of doctors. With the new initiative, students will be able to complete both a Bachelor of Science and Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine degree in just six years, compared to a traditional eight-year track, not including residency. Something similar is happening in Massachusetts, where students at UMass Chan Medical School can complete studies in family medicine, internal medicine, or pediatrics in three years instead of four.

In September, a bipartisan group of U.S. lawmakers introduced the Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act, a bill that would allow thousands of unused green cards to be allocated to foreign-born doctors and



nurses. Immigrants already make up more than a quarter of physicians at U.S. hospitals, and they're more likely to practice primary care and live in rural and underserved areas.

CONGRESS IS WRESTLING WITH another factor contributing to the doctor shortage. The Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act of 2025 would gradually add 14,000 Medicare-supported medical residency positions over seven years. The government-Medicare connection to residency opportunities began in 1965, when Congress established funding for graduate medical education to ensure an adequate supply of well-trained physicians. The Balanced Budget Act of 1997 threw that pipeline a curveball, restricting the number of hospital residency slots that can receive the funding. While medical school enrollment has grown by 33% since 2002, the number of residency opportunities required for those graduates to become licensed physicians has not kept pace. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, the cap is a major problem for most states, citing it as a primary cause of the widening gap in rural access to care.

That's led providers like medical behemoth AdventHealth, the largest not-for-profit Protestant healthcare company in the country, to leverage alternate state and federal funding streams to begin new residency programs. The accreditation process is the same for any program, and in Tampa, Fla., their Seventh-day Adventist-owned hospital has started programs in internal medicine, OB-GYN, general surgery, and

Wheeler examines one of his patients at the assisted living facility attached to Hayward Medical Center.

critical care medicine, all in the great hope that some of the graduates will put down roots. But even if they don't, communities benefit from the residents' medical services while they are training. Faculty hires for the programs mean more physicians in a community, too. AdventHealth isn't alone in this approach to battling the doctor shortage. At least 33 hospitals and health systems across the country launched or announced new residency programs in 2025.

Physician Francis Nuthalapathy is double board-certified in obstetrics and gynecology and maternal-fetal medicine. He founded the OB-GYN residency program at AdventHealth Tampa last year with three students and a prime-the-

pump \$2 million investment. But even with a beautiful new clinic, Nuthalapaty admits attracting medical students to the OB-GYN field is increasingly difficult. And we need more OBs now than ever.

“This issue of well-being has become predominant. Doctors have decided 36-hour shifts may not be good for their health, their well-being,” he explains. “Reduced shifts require more doctors to make up the difference.”

But even with shorter shifts, Nuthalapaty believes it’s harder to be an OB now than it was 50 years ago. Patients are just different. “They’re delaying childbearing. They’re coming into pregnancy with more health issues and at higher weights. All of that increases the complexity of care and requires more of a doctor’s time and energy,” he says. The risk of adverse outcomes is greater as well.

Beyond just OBs, a looming shortage of doctors of all types has been on Nuthalapaty’s radar for decades. He believes a move away from the Hippocratic principles of medicine, with the loss of the covenantal relationship between the physician and patient that sets medical practices apart, is one culprit.

“Especially since the COVID era, there’s this loss of calling and mission in terms of the practice of medicine, and a shift toward a more profit-based motive. It’s really a loss of physician identity,” he says.

Nuthalapaty goes further, suggesting that the current “Tower of Babel that we’re building”—the transactional model of medicine—can’t persist. At least not for doctors who endure years of grueling training because they want to help people, to make some sort of difference.

“Now it’s just about bringing people in, doing what they need, and getting them out, one after the other. So that route that brings people into medicine, which is really knowing your patients, having a relationship, caring and, in fact, ministering to them, that part is being devalued. I think we’re coming to a juncture in this field where people are going to have to decide, what is medicine? What is medicine for?”

A completely transactional system of healthcare, Nuthalapaty contends, will draw the wrong kinds of people to the field. “I think a change will have to happen soon, because this highly corporatized model of medicine is not sustainable. And like the Tower of Babel, it will fall apart.”

IT’S ALREADY FALLING APART for rural communities, ground zero for the doctor shortage.

Sawyer County, Wis., where Matt Wheeler practices, is a federally designated HPSA—Health Professional Shortage Area. Wisconsin has 165 such primary care dearth designations, and together they represent the unmet healthcare needs of more than a million residents. If U.S. Department of Health & Human Services estimates are right, it would take an additional 138 primary care physicians to adequately treat patients in those spots.

Wheeler and his colleagues at Essentia Health-Hayward Clinic are doing their part by promoting rural medical education. Today, he’s finishing rounds with a student from the Medical College of Wisconsin. Evidence shows the likelihood of doctors choosing to practice in a rural setting goes up when they experience a rotation in one. “Exposure is huge,” Wheeler maintains.

But retention is an issue, too. Wheeler says a community should have incentives that make doctors want to stay there. “Can they provide a meaningful life for the physician and his family? Will employers make sure they don’t squeeze everything they can out of the physician they have at the moment, because who knows who they’re going to have a year from now?”

Wheeler plays the piano occasionally at his church, and he conducted the Christmas choir this year. Those are the kinds of things that bring him joy, he says, adding that “connection is really important in a small town.”

But the interaction with his dying patient made Wheeler take a serious look at his hectic work life. Although he wasn’t burned out, he could see it coming. He determined to take steps to avoid it. “You invest so much of yourself in a place, and you don’t want to get to that point where you feel like the only thing you can do is just pull back and stop.”

It took 18 months and lots of strategizing to reduce Wheeler’s work schedule to what now is three days a week in clinic and a couple of times a month on call. Capping his number of patients—no new patients—was a big step in that direction. “I want my patients to have access to me. I want to have a relationship with them, and hopefully they feel like they can have that with me.”

Even on his “off” days, though, Wheeler visits his nursing home patients and does rounds at the hospital. But it’s relaxed. He’s not trying to squeeze those responsibilities into a day already filled with clinic appointments.

The days he’s in the clinic still run at a breakneck pace, but since he started his new reduced schedule in July, Wheeler is enjoying the benefits of more sleep. He’s better able to engage with his family, he says. “Something that’s really hard to do when you’re exhausted.”

Wheeler acknowledges reduced hours aren’t possible for all doctors, but he’s convinced it’s right for him. “We’ve got this twofold problem, physician shortage and physician well-being. I can’t be beholden to a national problem that I can’t fix. What can I do? Take care of me so that I can keep taking care of patients.” ■



Are immigrants hurting or sustaining the American economy?
Economists say the truth lies somewhere in the middle

OPPORTUNITY COST

by ADDIE OFFEREINS



Mexican farm workers harvest
lettuce outside Brawley, Calif.

SANDY HUFFAKER/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

AT FIRST, ALEKHYA BHAGAVATHI YANAMANDRA DIDN'T WANT TO STUDY IN THE UNITED STATES. SHE'D HEARD ENOUGH ABOUT THE AMERICAN IMMIGRATION SYSTEM TO DREAD EXPERIENCING IT FIRSTHAND. AUSTRALIA. CANADA. ANYWHERE ELSE SOUNDED EASIER. BUT HER FATHER SHOT DOWN ALL THOSE OTHER IDEAS. SHE DESPERATELY NEEDED NEW OPPORTUNITIES—AND A WAY OUT.

Her family, Hindus with ties to the prestigious Brahmin caste, resented her growing Christian faith. “Why don’t you stay with your family?” they chided most Sundays as she prepared to attend church. “Is your God asking you to get separated from us?”

The Sunday harangues never escalated to physical violence. But their verbal jabs grew ever more painful and persistent. It became more than the 21-year-old could take. So when her U.S.-based aunt called and convinced her father to send her to America, Yanamandra buried her earlier hesitations and prepared to tackle the U.S. immigration system head-on.

Yanamandra started her master’s in business analytics at the University of New Haven in Connecticut on an F-1 student visa in 2022. In September 2025, she moved to North Carolina, where she entered the U.S. labor force as a senior financial analyst for Pyxus International Inc., a global agriculture company headquartered in Raleigh, the state’s capital.

As of June 2025, immigrants accounted for roughly 19% of the U.S. workforce. In 2021, more foreign-born workers held jobs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics occupations than U.S.-born workers. Immigrants held roughly 30% of construction jobs in 2020, though in some states that number is closer to 40%. Immigrants not legally authorized to work in the United States fill about 40% of agricultural positions, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture data from 2020–2021.

Some economists and immigration experts call these statistics troubling. But others say they reveal the essential role

immigrants like Yanamandra play in maintaining and fueling economic growth.

President Donald Trump’s immigration policy changes and a growing number of high-profile workplace raids have reignited this decades-long debate about the role immigrants play in the American economy. His circle of advisers is rife with tension between business leaders who believe immigrant laborers complement American workers and create opportunity and those who argue immigrants compete with Americans for jobs and social services and want the president to cut employment-based immigration.

The generalizations and talking points fly fast and furious. But most economists say the truth is much more complicated than either side wants to admit.

One of Yanamandra’s favorite parts about the United States is the Mexican food. In New Haven, she started attending a bilingual church where she worshiped alongside many Hispanic believers. “I love their flavors. I started learning Spanish, and I fell in love with the language,” she said.

But she’s a fan of more traditionally American foods, too. Cornbread. Soups. Salads. “I believe New Haven has the best pizza,” she added.

Yanamandra’s career in the United States depends in large part on a visa lottery her company will enter on her behalf in February 2026. She can start work on an extension of her student visa, but once that expires, Yanamandra will only be able to remain in the country if she receives an H-1B visa, a temporary employment visa granted to highly skilled immigrants working in specialty occupations such as technology and healthcare.

In September, Trump shook up that process by issuing an executive order that requires companies to pay a \$100,000 fee for new visa applicants. His administration also announced it will now favor H-1B visa applicants receiving a higher wage to ensure only the most highly skilled employees are selected, though the agency will still allow employers to file the application for all wage levels.

Trump argued Congress created the H-1B program for temporary workers performing “additive, high-skilled functions” for which American workers are unavailable. But companies have exploited the visa to “replace, rather than supplement, American workers,” suppress wages, and fill entry-level positions, Trump said in the order. His announcement isn’t the first time members of his administration have criticized the program. Trump’s supporters split over the visa in early January, when he appointed Indian American Sriram Krishnan, who favors bringing skilled immigrants to the United States, as a senior White House policy adviser. That rift revealed a deeper clash over employment-based immigration among the president’s supporters.





LEFT: Immigrants work on new housing in Palm Beach County, Fla. RIGHT: A Haitian worker talks with the owner of an auto parts manufacturer in Springfield, Ohio.

Jason Richwine, a resident scholar with the Center for Immigration Studies, agrees with many of the H-1B program's critics. "So many of the so-called high-skill immigrants we bring in are really just sort of like average college graduates," he said, adding that there are a "handful of H-1B recipients who are very successful, but overall they are just essentially substitutes for Americans in a lot of fields."

But Richwine believes the issue runs deeper than any one visa program. His organization advocates for lower employment-based immigration across the board, and Richwine proposed winnowing employment-based visas down to roughly 10,000 "Einstein visas" for extraordinarily intelligent and accomplished applicants. Immigrants, both legal and illegal, filling low-skilled positions in fields such as construction and agriculture, also push Americans to the sidelines, Richwine argued. In many cases, some combination of U.S.-born workers and automation could easily fill these positions, he said.

"The idea that we could never get any houses built, or we could never get landscaping done, or never get crops picked without immigrants doesn't make sense," he added. "It's not a sound understanding of how an economy actually works."

Jared Pincin, an associate professor of economics, isn't surprised by the latest round of pushback against employment-based immigration. The debate over immigration's economic burdens engulfed the Cedarville University professor's hometown of Springfield, Ohio, last fall. As many as

20,000 Haitians settled in the small city of about 60,000, many of them on programs allowing them to live and work in the country temporarily.

"Under the Biden administration, the reality is they didn't do much immigration enforcement," he noted. Conservative estimates peg the number of new arrivals under former President Joe Biden at around 8 million, and more than two-thirds of them entered illegally. Such a massive immigration wave will have lasting economic implications, Pincin said, and available economic literature analyzing the costs and benefits of past immigration surges "shows a mixed picture."

By and large, data shows that a large number of immigrants, regardless of their legal status, infuse the economy with new ideas, he said. First-generation immigrants tend to be more entrepreneurial than even second- or third-generation immigrants. There's also plenty of evidence that a growing population drives economic growth in a well-functioning, free-market system, said Charles Steele, the director of the Center for Commerce and Freedom at Hillsdale College in Michigan. "A growing population is a net benefit. It is accumulating human capital: useful skills, useful knowledge, and practices," he said.

Most developed economies are struggling to reverse below-replacement-level fertility rates. One reason the United States has so far avoided the worst effects of this demographic crisis is because we have a "fairly robust immigration system," Steele pointed out.

But not all immigration is created equal. It matters who's doing the immigrating, Steele added.

Both Steele and Pincin agree that more data points to the benefits of high-skilled immigrants who assimilate into the culture and become net contributors to economic growth. A

massive number of low-skilled immigrants flooding lower-paying industries doesn't necessarily have the same effect.

Low-skilled immigrants are more likely to suppress wages for low-skilled native workers, Pincin said, pointing to research by Harvard economist George Borjas. Borjas noted that an increase in low-skilled immigration benefits employers who can pay less for the same positions since more workers are available overall. It also frees up high-skilled native workers to focus more of their time on activities that will increase their wages.

"Immigration will tend to have laser-focused effects on comparable native workers," Borjas wrote. And some groups will certainly lose.

Large numbers of low-skilled immigrants, especially those without legal status, are also more likely to become a net drain on the economy, both Steele and Pincin noted. Their economic contributions may not offset their use of public resources like the local school system and, in certain cases, government healthcare and welfare programs.

From a fiscal perspective—one narrowly focused on taxes and government spending instead of the broader economy—immigration benefits the federal government, said Alan Viard, a senior fellow emeritus at the American Enterprise Institute. Viard and a group of AEI scholars recently conducted an analysis of past studies evaluating immigration's fiscal effects.

Data shows "the federal government is making money off immigrants, both legal and illegal," Viard said. That's because immigrants as a whole pay more in taxes than the cost they impose on federal programs. And when the government admits an immigrant, it also grants entrance to their future children and grandchildren, a whole host of potential taxpayers, he noted.

Strangely, illegal immigrants provide greater fiscal benefits than those who reside in the United States legally. Both sets of immigrants tend to pay income, payroll, and sales taxes, Viard said, but illegal immigrants are ineligible for most federal benefits and are often reluctant to step forward to claim those they do qualify for because they don't want to expose themselves to the government.

While some illegal immigrants do work off the books, it isn't as common as people think, Viard said. Most employers comply with existing I-9 laws requiring workers to provide a Social Security number. So claims that illegal immigrants aren't paying into Social Security and Medicare don't hold much water, Viard said. It's just that most of them use fake or stolen numbers. As of September 2024, almost \$2.3 million in wages had been reported to the Social Security Earnings Suspense File, which keeps track of taxes that don't match a



genuine Social Security number—almost entirely money paid into the system by illegal workers.

Viard acknowledged the fiscal picture is more nuanced at the state and local level, where immigrants still pay a large amount in state and local taxes but receive more government benefits.

It also matters where immigrants move once they arrive in the United States, Cedarville University's Jared Pincin noted. Thousands of immigrants moving into a small city like Springfield will put a far greater strain on social services and the local economy than a large, diverse urban center like New York City.

Industry leaders worry the Trump administration's noisy deportation push could severely incapacitate agriculture, construction, and other service-based industries, causing prices to skyrocket. Bryan Little, senior director for policy advocacy at the California Farm Bureau, said that while 40% to 50% of agricultural workers acknowledge in the National Agricultural Workers Survey that they do not have authorization to work, the real number is probably much higher.

Strangely, illegal immigrants provide greater fiscal benefits than those who reside in the United States legally.



National Guard soldiers block protesters during an ICE raid at a cannabis farm near Camarillo, Calif.

So far, the Trump administration has not dramatically increased workforce raids on farms in the Golden State, but ICE raids targeting specific immigrants who already have final orders of removal or law enforcement efforts shutting down illegal marijuana-growing operations have sent shudders through the state's farming communities. In Bakersfield, Calif., citrus fruit remained unpicked as word of ICE raids circulated in early 2025.

"We've had members who have lost production because their employees see this on social media," Little said. "And they've decided not to come to work."

Little refused to connect me with any of the bureau's member farmers. He worries their workers won't show up if their farm's name appears in an article that could come to the attention of ICE. The bureau is urging the Trump administration to tone down its enforcement rhetoric and instead expand existing legal pathways, including making the seasonal H-2A visa program for agricultural workers available year-round.

In October, the U.S. Department of Labor raised its own concerns about potential agricultural labor shortages in a relatively obscure notice posted in the Federal Register about upcoming changes to how H-2A wage rates are calculated. The agency noted that the illegal immigration standstill at the U.S.-Mexico border and Trump's efforts to increase enforcement

within the U.S. interior could significantly disrupt domestic food production and prices.

"Much of this illegal inflow artificially boosted the supply of labor at relatively lower costs compared to the labor costs associated with a legal workforce," the notice warned. The department argued it does not believe there are enough American workers who will make themselves readily available to replace the immigrants no longer entering the country and those choosing to leave or being deported.

Brian Turmail, the vice president of public affairs and workforce for Associated General Contractors of America, has similar concerns. He worries the administration's push to end Temporary Protected Status and humanitarian parole programs for hundreds of thousands of immigrants will further shrink the available labor force. Turmail argued immigration will continue to be essential for the construction industry until the federal government invests more funding into programs that will incentivize more American workers to enter the field. "Eighty percent of our members tell us they are having a hard time finding qualified workers to hire," Turmail said.

But Pincin questioned what has become a common defense of welcoming more low-skilled immigrants: Americans simply don't want to work in industries such as agriculture, construction, or hospitality.

"There might be Americans who won't do that job for that wage," he countered. "If there are fewer laborers, well, the wage is going to go up. And so that is going to encourage more workers to come into that industry. The question is, how fast can that occur?"

Hillsdale's Charles Steele agreed, but he noted that without simultaneous welfare reform, that adjustment might be rocky. One startling statistic indicates nearly 7 million able-bodied American men between the prime working ages of 25 and 54 have left the labor force and aren't looking for new jobs. "We have unskilled workers coming in, sometimes illegally, and people say we need them. We're not getting Americans to do these jobs," Steele said. "But Americans are being subsidized by welfare programs."

Yanamandra told me she'll earn a starting salary of \$90,000 per year as a senior financial analyst for Papyrus International in Raleigh. She hopes to remain in the United States for years to come to grow her career—and strengthen her faith. "I see a great amount of work over here," she said. "It's much more free over here than back home."

But she knows her plans could change in an instant if she doesn't win the H-1B visa lottery in February. "It's not only scary, but also confusing," she said, referring to Trump's new rules. "Because we don't know what's going to happen next." Yanamandra and many of her international student friends bear the additional burden of paying off education loans they took out in India to finance their studies abroad. Still, she told me she expected the uncertainty and is trusting God to guide her one step at a time.

"The Lord provides," she said. "Wherever He takes me." ■

Doug Wilson is bringing his brand of Reformed theology to America's political power centers

BY EMMA FREIRE

illustration by Taylor Callery

Ambitious faith

A security guard in a dark blazer and wraparound sunglasses nodded to smiling churchgoers as they walked past him and through the door of a red brick building a few blocks from Capitol Hill. The rented venue was not prepared to accommodate a congregation that swelled to over 200. Some people got seats, but many others were left standing.

Around 10 a.m., two people who were not smiling arrived. A young man and woman stationed themselves next to the door to protest. The woman held a homemade sign that read “Christ Church is not welcome.” The man blew a whistle and yelled things like “I curse you. You’re going to hell” at those arriving for church. A few churchgoers tried to engage them in conversation—without success.

That bright Sunday morning in July marked the inaugural service for this new church plant in Washington, D.C. Church plants rarely kick up such a commotion. But this one is part of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC), a denomination co-founded by Douglas Wilson in 1998. A few minutes before the service started, black SUVs rolled up, and the CREC’s



most famous member, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, accompanied by his wife and daughter, climbed out.

Once considered a fringe denomination, the CREC is moving into the mainstream. It grew rapidly during the pandemic, due to its staunch opposition to COVID-19 restrictions. The CREC and Wilson, who serves as lead pastor of Christ Church in Moscow, Idaho, are known for a pugilistic style that appeals to some but repels others. Wilson in particular has been dogged by controversies stretching back decades. Despite those seeming impediments, the CREC is planting its flag in the political sphere. Wilson has become a kind of spokesman for Trump-voting Christians, at least in the eyes of the secular world.

Wilson himself stayed far away from the new church that weekend. The honor of leading the inaugural service fell to the Rev. Jared Longshore, an associate pastor at Christ Church in Moscow. He was the first in a rotation of pastors who will fill the pulpit until the church hires a permanent leader.

Wilson's footprint extends beyond the CREC. He's a prolific author and helped found a wide variety of organizations that spread his vision, including New Saint Andrews College, Canon Press, the K-12 Logos School, and the Association of Classical Christian Schools, all headquartered in Idaho. In 2021, Canon Press launched a subscription streaming service called Canon+, offering Christian instruction for adults and entertainment for children.

While Wilson has been known in Christian circles for decades, his profile rose significantly during the pandemic. Christ Church closed only briefly in early 2020 but soon reopened without requiring masks—in violation of local ordinances. In September 2020, Christ Church organized an outdoor psalm singing to protest mask mandates, which led to police arresting three members. Prosecutors eventually dropped all charges, and the city paid a settlement.

Videos of the arrests were widely shared on social media, even by President Donald Trump. Some Christians were so impressed by the church's bold stance, they moved to Moscow. Over the past five years, membership in the CREC's churches in the area has doubled to 3,000.

And the growth wasn't isolated to Moscow. According to Uriesou Brito, the CREC's presiding minister and pastor of a CREC congregation in Florida, the denomination now has nearly 170 churches worldwide, with between 23,000 and 25,000 attendees. Brito estimates that between 2020 and 2023, the CREC's attendance grew about 60%. Between 2023 to 2025, he says it grew another 55%.

Still, the CREC remains a relatively small denomination. The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the largest evangelical Reformed denomination in the United States, has around 400,000 members. But the CREC punches above its weight.

The Washington church plant launched the CREC to new heights of fame—even in secular media. That's largely due to Hegseth's attendance. Major news outlets from CNN to *The Wall Street Journal* have interviewed Wilson in recent months.

Wilson denies starting the Washington church plant for publicity purposes. Rather, he says he and the denomination's leaders identified a demand for a local church with two of the CREC's distinctives. The first is paedocommunion—a theological distinctive that divides the denomination from almost all other evangelical Christians. Once babies are baptized in the CREC, they can start taking communion. Wilson noted that CREC members were moving to the capital to

serve in the Trump administration and needed a local church where their children could take communion. Wilson acknowledged Washington has several faithful churches, but none of them practice paedocommunion.

Michael A. G. Haykin, a professor of church history at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, notes the CREC is unique in this aspect of its theology. "I don't know of any other denominational body where paedocommunion is the norm," he said. In denominations that practice infant baptism, children generally must be old enough to make a profession of faith before they can take communion.

LINDSEY WASSON/AP



Doug Wilson works in his office in Moscow, Idaho.

Wilson also cited paedocommunion as the reason the CREC is planting a church in Hillsdale, Mich., home of Hillsdale College. Wilson said CREC members attend the college and need a church where their children can take communion. But Hillsdale also plays a prominent role in the conservative movement, educating many of its young leaders. I asked Wilson if his goal was to get young conservatives into the CREC in college and then funnel them into the Washington church plant.

"I'm sure that that will happen," he said. "That's not the primary goal."

The second CREC distinctive that Wilson cited for planting the

Washington church is "Moscow mood." This term was coined by author and PCA Pastor Kevin DeYoung to capture Wilson and the CREC's provocative and aggressive posture. DeYoung calls Moscow mood "incompatible with Christian virtue" and "inconsiderate of other Christians." Wilson happily appropriated the term.

"It's not everybody's jam, but there are people in D.C. now who are attracted to that," he told me.

It's definitely not everyone's jam at Hillsdale. The week the church plant there launched, Wilson picked a fight with Hillsdale President Larry Arnn, who disagreed with one of Wilson's core

beliefs: Christian nationalism. "A Christian nation is not possible because Jesus' kingdom is not of this world," Arnn said on his podcast. Wilson attacked that statement on his blog, calling it "cut flower conservatism." He argues America needs "Christian conservatism, conservatism with a root ball."

Moscow mood is crystallized in the slick, humorous videos shared on social media by Wilson and his affiliated organizations, usually Canon Press. After Wilson's interview on CNN, Russell Moore, an editor at *Christianity Today*, referred to CREC men as "losers." Moore and Wilson frequently exchange barbs. Canon Press fired back at Moore with a video set to the song "Here's to the Losers." It featured images of Hegseth as well as Wilson laughing with famous people like Tucker Carlson, Tom Wolfe, and Charlie Kirk. It was published before Kirk's assassination.

The video was tied to a sale at Canon Press. In fact, many "Moscow mood" videos on social media have a commercial component. Canon Press' annual "No Quarter November" videos produced some of the most infamous images of Wilson. In one of them, he puffs on a big cigar and takes a flame thrower to images of Disney princesses.

R. Scott Clark, a professor of church history and historical theology at Westminster Seminary California, notes Wilson knows how to capitalize on financial opportunities: "Doug is an entrepreneur, and he's very good at it."

Wilson's blog features a lengthy page titled "Controversy Library." Here he provides responses to a litany of issues, ranging from accusations that he plagiarized some of his books to the fact that he officiated the wedding of a convicted pedophile to the charge that he defended slavery.

He also addresses criticism of his occasional use of profane or vulgar words. "I deny that I use any language outside the clear parameters of Scripture, and further deny that my



words are unnecessarily provocative,” he writes. In one well-known instance, he used a vulgar word to refer to women. He claims he was putting that word in the mouths of two feminists and not saying it himself. During our interview, I asked whether he anticipated his meaning would be twisted.

“I did it anyway because I think we got far more out of that for good,” he said. “It’s a cost-benefit thing.”

Wilson’s views on women and gender roles are a frequent source of controversy. Numerous media outlets have published interviews with women who say they were abused while attending CREC churches and that the church provided a framework for the abuse.

“The question is, is that framework within which people can be abusive, is that framework Biblical?” Wilson told me. “If you have a framework of: husbands are the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church, wives are to be submissive to their husbands. That’s a framework that’s straight out of the Bible. And sinners abuse it.” Wilson said his church has helped women get out of abusive situations but also said he’d encountered situations in which the husband was the victim of abuse because the wife “was not behaving Scripturally.”

The CREC keeps growing despite the controversies. Clark thinks that’s because Wilson is “the Donald Trump of the conservative evangelical world.” As with the president, “the people who love him don’t care what he does because he fights.” Wilson will do anything and say anything, Clark adds. “He doesn’t care about the blowback and nothing ever seems to stick.”

On a Thursday morning in September, hundreds of bleary-eyed people trickled into a massive basement hall in a Washington hotel. They clutched cups of coffee and cans of energy drinks. It was the third and final



Doug Wilson speaks at NatCon.

day of the National Conservatism Conference—often called NatCon.

Attendees had already endured a relentless schedule of speeches, panel discussions, and networking. But if anyone was up to the task of waking them, it was Wilson. He bounded onto the stage, having switched his trademark jeans for khakis. He even donned a tie.

Each year, the leading lights of the “America First” strain of the conservative movement gather at NatCon to flesh out their positions on a wide range of policy topics. This year’s speakers included Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, Missouri Sen. Josh Hawley, and political strategist Steve Bannon.

Wilson’s talk was titled “The American Founding and the Lessons of the Golden Calf.” He made his case that America was founded as a Christian

nation and accused anyone suggesting otherwise of rewriting history. He drew a humorous parallel with the Book of Exodus when Moses climbed Mount Sinai and “various rascallions got themselves elected to various school boards and started messing around with the history curriculum.” That led the Israelites to forget God and worship the golden calf. Something analogous is going on in America today, Wilson said.

This approach to politics is deeply influenced by Wilson’s postmillennial eschatology. Postmillennialism holds that Christ will win tangible victories on earth before His second coming. “We believe that we’re going to win, that the gospel is going to be victorious, the nations will be disciplined,” Wilson said.

“THAT’S A FRAMEWORK THAT’S STRAIGHT OUT OF THE BIBLE. AND SINNERS ABUSE IT.”

And he’s happy to refer to the political side of Christ winning those tangible victories as “Christian nationalism.” Many Christians eschew that controversial label, but Wilson has become its most prominent proponent.

Haykin of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary says postmillennialism has a long pedigree in church history. Many of the Puritans embraced it, as did the leaders of the early missionary movement like Andrew Fuller and William Carey. But he thinks Wilson’s postmillennialism has a more political focus. By contrast, the Puritans’ eschatology “had to do with the return of Christ, last judgment, death, heaven, hell.”

Many evangelical Christians believe either the rapture or the second coming of Christ could happen at any moment. Wilson’s postmillennialism is different. He told me the second coming is “not

imminent” because the world isn’t nearly Christian enough. In fact, Wilson thinks Christians today are still part of the early church. “Five thousand years from now, school children will be agonizing over their church history test. ‘I can never remember: Did C.S. Lewis or Athanasius live first? I can’t keep those guys straight,” he said. I asked him if that means Christ will not return for at least 5,000 years. He said he believes that’s “likely.”

Clark of Westminster Seminary California says Wilson’s postmillennial vision of a “future earthly glory age” can be very attractive to some. “It offers a kind of parallel to the Marxist utopia.”

The CREC was everywhere at NatCon. Several panels featured speakers who work at New Saint Andrews College (NSA). Each morning, the conference opened with prayer. The first morning featured a Jewish rabbi, the second a Roman Catholic priest. On the final day, the CREC’s Uriesou Brito took the stage. This marked his third time praying at the conference. “I’m sort of referred to as the Protestant chaplain of NatCon,” he told me.

When conference attendees walked the hallways between sessions, they passed a table set up by NSA—near tables for conservative heavyweights Alliance Defending Freedom and the Heritage Foundation. NSA’s table featured booklets trumpeting the fact that 81% of the college’s graduates are married—and only 2.3% divorced.

Conference attendees treated Wilson like a celebrity. His mostly young, male fans approached him between sessions to ask for selfies or for him to sign copies of his books.

For those wanting to hear even more from him, Wilson held his own conference on Sept. 6 in Arlington, Va., just outside Washington. That event, co-led by Christ Church in Moscow Associate Pastor Joe Rigney, had a less pugilistic

tone and focused on principles Christians tend to agree on, such as the importance of attending church every Sunday. But Wilson took plenty of jabs at Russell Moore, and during the Q&A, some of Wilson’s controversies came to the fore. Someone asked Wilson how to field concerns from family and friends who think the CREC is a cult. Wilson responded that cults invariably try to isolate people from their support networks. By contrast, the CREC encourages people “to treat ... whoever it is that’s concerned, better than you ever have in your life.”

While the CREC may not resemble a cult in that regard, the idea that Wilson is building a cult of personality is harder to refute. So much of the marketing by the institutions he helped found centers around his persona. And Clark thinks it goes much deeper than that. “Wilson calls the shots, and everything is organically related to him,” he said. “It’s all part of Doug, Inc.”

On Sunday, Sept. 7, Wilson finally preached at the Washington church plant. He was met by women protesters wearing red *Handmaid’s Tale* costumes. Photos of Wilson greeting them with a friendly smile quickly circulated on social media, to the merriment of his fans.

Still, Wilson downplays his own importance.

“I’m probably the most well-known individual nationally associated with these institutions,” he said of the CREC and its affiliated organizations. “But they’re not dependent on my continued existence for their thriving health. ... If I were to get hit by a bus tomorrow, Logos School would continue on. New Saint Andrews would continue on.”

Even Clark—who often criticizes Wilson—acknowledges the CREC has hit its stride.

“These are the golden years right now,” he said. “I suppose eventually it’ll run out of gas, but it might go for a while.” ■



VOICES BRAD LITTLEJOHN

Just say no to AI toys

Best-case scenario: Your child forms a deep emotional bond with a robot

This Christmas shopping season, you might spot something new on the shelves: AI-powered dolls. Soon, Barbie, Ken, and your daughter's favorite American Girl will be able to hold up their end of the conversation thanks to a new partnership between OpenAI and Mattel. The idea of an artificially intelligent companion doll sounds like the stuff of sci-fi horror, as in the recent *M3GAN* films where a smart doll turns on her human caregivers. The real threats posed by such devices may be more mundane, but they're still well worth losing sleep over.

Earlier smart dolls, such as My Friend Cayla from a decade ago, came with disturbing security risks. The internet-connected doll could easily be hacked, allowing bad actors to listen in on children in their bedrooms or even communicate with them using Cayla's voice. Alarmed, German regulators in 2017 instructed every family who had such a doll to destroy it. Other companies have tried to make their products more secure against third-party hacks, but consumers will have to decide whether they trust the companies themselves not to violate their privacy.

Given that Chinese companies supply about 80% of the global smart toy market right now, such trust is hardly warranted. Last year, Congress voted overwhelmingly to ban TikTok within the U.S. based on well-grounded national security fears that the CCP was using the app to gather data on American users and feed them propaganda. Surely Chinese-built smart toys, processing information in Chinese data centers, could do the same.

To encourage more responsibly designed products, the World Economic Forum established a short-lived Smart Toy Awards competition in 2021 and 2022 to recognize those designed to serve healthy child development. After all, what could be better to teach your daughter French than a patient and fun smart-doll tutor named Marie? It's easy to imagine parents, unable to pay for human tutors, lining up to buy smart toys with supposedly educational potential.

But there is still plenty of reason to be skeptical.

In recent years, American parents have mobilized by the millions against unaccountable public school educators who spend less time teaching the ABCs than CRT. They get that it's critical for parents and religious communities to have more direct input over what their children learn. It would be a rich irony if parents, having at last learned a healthy distrust of local school boards, entrust their second graders to OpenAI's Sam Altman and his buddies. Educational AI toys could be done well, but few of the companies involved have the kind of track record that deserves parents' trust.

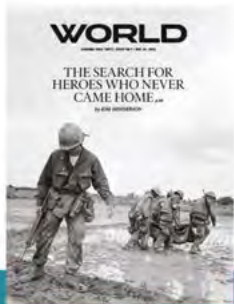
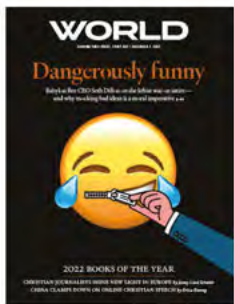
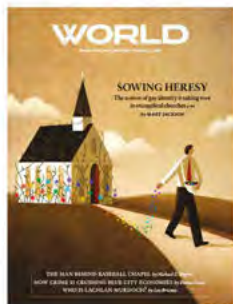
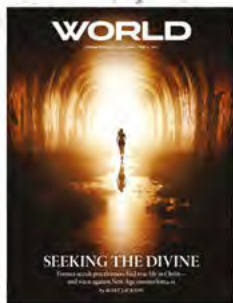
Unlike earlier generations of AI, trained to respond to specific context-dependent inputs (such as speech recognition for French), the new AI models are trained on essentially the entire universe of digitally available data, including the darkest and most perverted corners of the internet. Inputs in AI training data tend to drive outputs—just as the things you read and watch tend to shape what comes out of your mouth.

Many AI companies have tried to create “guardrails,” but users have found it fairly easy to “trick” the models into spitting out vile or pornographic responses. Maybe OpenAI and Mattel can program their smart Barbies to be always prim and proper, but with ChatGPT accused of encouraging teens to commit suicide, the technology seems a long way away from child-safe.

But let's assume these companies avoid all the pitfalls and do exactly what they're advertising: create a lifelike, humanoid toy that will pretend to be your child's best friend. Success in that case means that your child develops a deep emotional bond with a robot, perhaps deeper than her bonds with her human friends or even siblings and parents. We have already seen how many adults and teens have developed pathological dependencies on their AI companions; why should anyone expect that young children, much less able to distinguish between real and artificial relationships, will prove more discerning?

It's a wonder that policymakers are allowing companies to peddle them to unsuspecting parents. Until regulators step up and do their job, parents need to hold the line. This Christmas, just say no to AI toys; your child will be just fine with Hot Wheels and an old-fashioned teddy bear for another year. ■

— Brad Littlejohn is director of programs at American Compass; he lives in Northern Virginia with his wife Rachel and four children



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NOTEBOOK




RELIGION

The battle for Nigeria's soul

Islamic extremists are trying to drive Christians out of the country

by HANNAH BATES



As rain pelted down around 9 p.m. on June 13, the villagers of Yelewata heard death: the roar of motorbikes, shots from AK-47s, and the Arabic cry “Allahu akbar,” meaning “God is great.” Within minutes, a group of extremist Fulani attacked the village from the front while another group flanked fleeing villagers from behind. The Fulani shot fathers, mothers, and children. They burned down buildings for five hours. No help ever came.

Three days later, Truth Nigeria journalist Mike Odeh James woke up at 3 a.m. to pray. Then, he traveled six hours to Benue state, Nigeria, to report on the Father’s Day Massacre in Yelewata. Fulani Islamist terrorists killed over 270 Christians that day with fire, bullets, and the cold steel of their machetes.

For decades, nomadic herders from the Fulani ethnic group have roamed the region with their cattle, seeking pasture. International news reports often say the Fulani are forced into land-grabbing because climate change is causing pastureland to shrink. But witnesses say the radicalized Fulani now trying to steal their land and conquer their villages are doing it for the glory of Allah. The Yelewata massacre “is a representation of what goes on every day [in Nigeria],” James said.

Extremist Fulanis are not Nigeria’s only problem. Islamist insurgents like Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province also plague communities in the northeast. Armed criminals known as bandits operate in parts of the northwest and elsewhere. Meanwhile, kidnappers have also targeted Roman Catholic priests across the country, with at least 145 kidnapped between 2015 and 2025.

When James arrived in Yelewata, he saw charred, smoking huts and smelled “burned dead body [and] burnt rice and yams.” As he walked through the remains of the village, he noticed silent survivors huddled in groups or carrying machetes and cutlasses out of fear of another attack.

The chief agreed to show James through the village, house by house. Charred bodies, bones, and ashes cluttered the inside of more than 40 homes. Blood spattered the walls. On the streets, stray dogs nipped at unburied carcasses. The chief pointed out orphaned children, injured villagers, and husbands and wives who had lost their spouses. “Some of them were breaking down, some of them were looking so hungry, and you could see the scars on their body, you see the white marks,” he said. At one house, James met Lazarus Dendy, a villager who lost 30 family members in the attack—most of them burned alive in their huts or suffocated by smoke. →



Police engagement is directed by Nigeria's federal government.

On the edge of the village, only about 300 steps away from the marketplace, James noticed a military outpost—full of soldiers and police who never responded to the attack. Villagers told him on the night of the attack soldiers fired their guns over the heads of the Fulani to keep them from nearing the base. They did not kill the Fulani or protect the village.

Nigeria's federal government operates a centralized policing system, with forces sent from the capital city of Abuja to other states. Some communities lack any official security presence and rely on vigilantes. Officers have failed to respond to attacks, saying they lacked clearance from superiors in the capital city, and blamed a lack of fuel or weapons for their failure to defend communities.

But Judd Saul, CEO of Truth Nigeria, sees the failure to act as a more

“By persistently killing and grabbing the lands of Christians in Nigeria, the Christians will be forced to flee.”

structured ploy. “The local military commanders are Muslim; the local police commanders are Muslim. And if the Nigerian government doesn’t, from the top, say ‘engage,’ no one’s going to engage.”

To make things worse, government officials reportedly knew about the attack 30 days in advance but never acted to prevent it. “We have a Muslim president, a Muslim vice president, the chief of justice is a Muslim, and everything is just skewed in favor of the Muslim,” James said. “The national security adviser to Nigeria’s president is a Fulani. The minister for defense is a Fulani, and his assistant is a Fulani.”

Right now, Nigeria is about evenly split between Christians and Muslims, but in part due to Fulani terrorism, the numbers are shifting. The Father’s Day Massacre is only one example of the horrors Christian citizens of northern Nigeria go through. Two weeks after the attack on Yelewata, another 50 Christians were murdered by Fulani just feet outside the village.

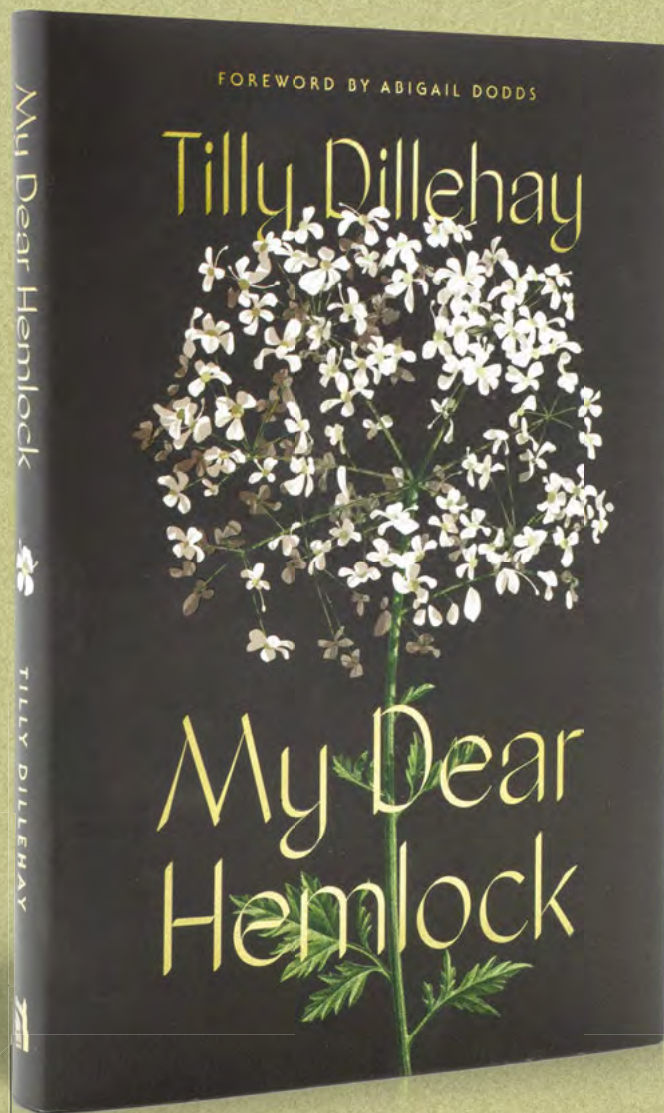
Nigeria’s persecution crisis reignited international concern this year, with lawmakers in the United States and Canada urging stronger government action. Nigerian authorities have so far denied that any persecution is actually happening. But according to the Nigeria-based nonprofit InterSociety, Islamists murdered more than 7,000 Christians—an average of 30 each day—and kidnapped 7,800 others between January and August.

“By persistently killing and grabbing the lands of Christians in Nigeria, the Christians will be forced to flee, to run away to other neighboring countries as refugees,” James said, insisting it’s part of a concerted effort to make Nigeria an Islamic caliphate.

If extremist Islamic ideology continues to spread, he warned, it will fundamentally change the country: “If America doesn’t put pressure [on the Nigerian government], these [terrorist] sentiments will grow, and then over time we will become like Yemen. We will become like Afghanistan.” ■

—with reporting from Onize Oduah

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SPORTS

Extra points

Auburn kicker praises God in victory and defeat

by RAY HACKE



Alex McPherson recognizes God's hand in his ability to accomplish big things with his right foot.

To non-Christians, that might explain why the Auburn University placekicker is quick to point skyward whenever he converts a field goal in a college football game. But McPherson also points toward heaven after every kick he misses—even though the junior hasn't missed often.

That drew criticism this fall from pundits like Barstool Sports' Dave Portnoy after McPherson uncharacteristically missed three field-goal attempts in a 23-17 loss to Missouri. Had he made those kicks, netting nine total points, Auburn might have upset college football's No. 16-ranked team after losing three straight games to teams ranked in the Top 10.

"You shouldn't be allowed to pretend you hit a [field goal] when you missed

your 19th chip shot of the game," Portnoy wrote on X.

But Portnoy doesn't understand that McPherson's gesture isn't just celebratory: It's a show of gratitude from a player who's overcome great physical adversity. McPherson missed most of his sophomore season due to ulcerative colitis, an inflammatory bowel disease that eventually required him to have his colon surgically removed.

"I praise the Lord, make or miss," the 22-year-old from Fort Payne, Ala., said during a late October phone interview. "I praise Him in the highs and in the lows. He's the reason I'm out there on that field. I trust in His plan."

From his true freshman season in 2022 through last year, McPherson set

Alex McPherson prays before a game against the Baylor Bears in August.



an Auburn school record by booting 20 consecutive field goals without a miss. He went a perfect 13-for-13 in 2023.

That streak ended in 2024. After his ulcerative colitis sidelined him for several games to start the season, McPherson went 1-for-2 against Kentucky in a game that, in hindsight, marked an unwise attempt to come back too soon.

McPherson's condition had already wreaked havoc on his body going into that game, making his weight fluctuate wildly. Listed at 150 pounds freshman year, he eventually dropped to 110.

"I lost mostly muscle," McPherson said. "I don't have a lot of body fat, so I had no strength to kick the ball. The amount of stress on my legs was constant. It caused a lot of fatigue."

McPherson credits his high school sweetheart—now wife—Hannah with helping him through the ordeal.

"She did a lot of behind-the-scenes stuff that no one got to see," McPherson said. "She handled everything like a trooper. There were days when I didn't feel good and did not want to talk to anybody. She stayed by my side. She loved me every day. I couldn't imagine a better person to go [through this] with."

Surgeons removed McPherson's colon last December, and he started rehab soon after. Eventually, doctors cleared him to play football again, albeit with an ostomy bag in his abdomen that collects his waste.

By the end of spring, he was booming 65-yard kicks through the uprights at Auburn's indoor practice facility.

Fast-forward to late October: One week after his disastrous outing against Missouri, McPherson tied a school record with a perfect 6-for-6 on field goals, lifting Auburn to a 33-24 triumph over Arkansas.

"It was awesome," McPherson said. "I don't think I've ever kicked six field goals in two games."

McPherson was quick to give credit where it was due.

"I put a lot of faith in the Lord," he said. "I trust Him in everything. He's the one who got me to this point." ■



BUSINESS

Virtual shopper

Walmart embraces new OpenAI shopbot

by BEKAH MCCALLUM

➔ Retail giant Walmart has forged a partnership with OpenAI that will allow users to shop for and purchase products through ChatGPT's Instant Checkout feature. This comes as retailers race to implement "agentic shopping"—purchases assisted by AI agents to enhance customer experience.

ChatGPT launched the Instant Checkout tool just weeks before Walmart's Oct. 14 announcement.

Here's how it works: ChatGPT users can ask for product recommendations such as "fitness watches," and the chatbot will list relevant items. If the item comes from a merchant that has partnered with OpenAI, users can enter payment information and complete their purchase without leaving the chat.

According to a press release from ChatGPT, the chatbot acts "just like a digital personal shopper." Etsy storefronts were the first to sell through

ChatGPT, though Shopify merchants like Vuori will reportedly follow.

For now, the feature only supports single-item purchases, and when buying from Walmart, shoppers won't initially be able to purchase fresh grocery items. The retail giant didn't specify when the shopbot rollout would be complete but said the change would come "soon."

"For many years now, eCommerce shopping experiences have consisted of a search bar and a long list of item responses. That is about to change," said Walmart President and CEO Doug McMillon.

The ChatGPT partnership is not Walmart's first AI agent venture. In June, it launched its in-app AI assistant Sparky, which synthesizes reviews and offers product suggestions based on user queries.

More than 40% of retailers have launched AI agents. Last year, Amazon launched Rufus, "a conversational shopping assistant." In October, the online retailer rolled out a Help Me Decide feature that provides recommendations for shoppers who have looked at similar products but haven't made a purchase.

About 70% of consumers say they would appreciate the guidance of AI agents while shopping. Still, agentic shopping has its limitations, according to research from management consulting firm McKinsey & Co.: "A single faulty prompt can trigger a cascade of unintended consequences," including accidental purchases or a flight booked for the wrong time.



RETAIL REVIVAL?

Toys "R" Us hopes once again to make a comeback, this time ahead of the holidays. On Oct. 16, the retailer said it would open eight permanent flagship stores and 20 pop-up shops in time for Christmas. The brand filed for bankruptcy in 2017 and closed hundreds of stores. Since then, the company has made several attempts at reclaiming its former retail status. In 2022, it opened more than 400 toy shops inside Macy's department stores. The following year, the company opened a flagship store at the Mall of America. Under the leadership of WHP Global, which acquired Toys "R" Us in 2021, the new rollout comes in partnership with toy store operator Go! Retail Group. According to a press release, "this expansion marks a significant milestone in the brand's growth." —B.M.



TECHNOLOGY

Positive energy

The porn industry finds an unlikely enemy: secular, young men

by BEKAH MCCALLUM

Editor's note: This story may not be suitable for younger readers.

→ Slightly sunburned from a few poolside afternoons in Greece and wearing several silver chains under a white Nike jersey, 20-year-old Alex Slater aspires to be the next chart-topping rapper and the future prime minister of England. The London native thinks quitting pornography will help him achieve those goals.

About a year ago, alongside co-founder Connor McLaren, Slater built an accountability app called Quittr

to help others abstain from porn and better themselves too. Like many of Quittr's more than 1 million users, most of them under 18, Slater believes pornography inhibits him from reaching his full potential.

"You can use that energy toward other things, like your goals," explained Slater. "That's like, really positive, like using that energy, harnessing it, and then transmuting it to other things."

Quittr users can track progress and access immediate support with a panic button.

While there has been some opposition to the porn industry from a few celebrities and lawmakers, pornography has long been viewed as fairly normative. But pushback on porn has recently come from an unexpected place: young men inspired by a largely secular movement that promotes self-improvement.

Due mostly to easy internet access and sites like Pornhub, pornography use has become ubiquitous, particularly among men. According to a 2024 survey from the Barna Group, about 78% of men ages 13–65 watch pornography "to some extent," up from 65% 10 years prior. The

actual number of males who watch porn is likely much higher, since many view it well before their teen years. And official statistics on porn use don't begin to account for the proliferation of "soft-core porn" (nude or immodest imagery) on social media and sites like OnlyFans.

Mainstream culture doesn't entirely approve of pornography. Recently, celebrities like actor Terry Crews and singer Billie Eilish have spoken out about its dangers. Twenty-four states have passed age verification laws to prevent minors from accessing porn sites. According to accountability software Covenant Eyes, 46% of the population views porn as harmful.

But broadly, watching pornography is seen as an ordinary or unavoidable part of sexual development. A 2016 study published by the British Sociological Association concluded that pornography may have value as an entertainment form and educational tool. The main problem with viewing, according to researchers? How the parents of the study's participants stigmatized it.

Chandler Rogers is the founder of Relay, an online pornography addiction program. Rogers said many sex therapists view all forms of sexual expression, including pornography, as morally neutral. According to some, "the problem is people's shame around pornography," Rogers said.

But now, many young men are questioning the overall narrative that porn is acceptable, even if they don't believe it's immoral. "I probably talked to a thousand guys personally over the last decade, and I think the theme that I'm hearing is this internal sense of loathing," Rogers said. "They feel dirty, they feel completely just, yeah, powerless."

Many men have discovered that pornography disturbs their in-person romantic relationships or prevents them from pursuing women in the real world. Slater blames it for the reason why so many Gen Z men are single or not interested in dating. "Instead of going out to a bar and talking to a girl, they could just, like, go on a website and skip all that small talk and just, like, get straight to the business pretty much," he said.

"What about becoming men who see people rather than see objects that are there just to fulfill your desire?"

Eddie Capparucci, a licensed counselor who specializes in treating sex and pornography addiction, says porn has become a major obstacle to relationships, partly because much of it has become increasingly violent and humiliating. As a result, many men who regularly watch porn struggle with a lack of normal desire. "I remember one client I had, he was 23, he was taking Viagra every single day," Capparucci said.

Shame and lack of drive for real-life romance are the two main reasons men turn to Quittr, according to Slater. It's not the only digital resource helping people overcome pornography addiction. Sites like Relay, Brainbuddy, and Covenant Eyes also offer resources. A Reddit group that describes itself as "a porn addiction and compulsive sexual behavior recovery peer support forum" boasts almost 370,000 visitors weekly. According to a recent study from the

American Survey Center, more than 60% of young men support making it more difficult to access online pornography.

With its video-game-like app aesthetic and partnerships with social media influencers, Quittr seems tailor-made for that younger crowd. The app features chat capabilities, a content blocker, and a panic button that summons accountability partners while turning on the user's front-facing camera. Its founders claim the app has helped more than 900,000 men stop using porn.

Slater says many young men see cutting out pornography as a means to becoming the best versions of themselves, much like going to the gym or avoiding seed oils.

"The whole movement is, you know, cut out all the bad things in your life and start working on improving your life," said Slater. "You'll become way happier, and you will start moving toward the life you've always wanted."

Slater believes quitting porn will help him continue "being extremely successful in business." He claimed in a post on X that he had his first million-dollar month in August.

Now that he's kicked his porn habit, Slater also isn't tempted to objectify or sexualize women, he says. Long term, Slater hopes that the culture will see pornography as "completely wrong, kind of like prostitution."

Josh Glaser, president of Regeneration Ministries, sees plenty of common grace in how pushback on porn has come from the self-improvement industry. "But it is an insufficient move," he said. For one thing, he wishes there was more widespread recognition of how pornography wounds the user's current or future romantic partner. There's also very little acknowledgment of the humanity of the people being filmed.

"What about becoming men who see people rather than see objects that are there just to fulfill your desire?" Glaser asked. Instead of emphasizing personal potential, "what about looking out for them and becoming men who love?" ■



LIFESTYLE

Biometric checks

EU launches new entry-exit system

by EVANGELINE SCHMITT

→ Travelers to the European Union (EU) must prepare to be photographed and have their fingerprints registered. On Oct. 12, the EU launched a new entry-exit system to be rolled out at all border control points over a period of six months. Under the new system, border agents will no longer stamp passports. Instead, automated entry points will digitally collect biometric and passport information for all non-EU citizens arriving in countries within the Schengen area (all 27 EU countries plus Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein). The biometric information will be stored for up to five years.

The new system aims to more efficiently identify travelers with fraudulent documents or those who stay too long, while reducing wait times. But human rights advocates are concerned digital systems create accessibility barriers for migrants seeking asylum. In late 2026, the EU plans to launch an electronic travel authorization system similar to the ESTA in the United States.

The EU joins a growing number of countries that are tightening and digitizing border control. Australia implemented a biometric system in 2012, followed by New Zealand, Singapore, Israel, Argentina, and recently the U.K. The United States has slowly increased the use of biometric data collection at some airports, announcing Oct. 24 that photographs would be required for all noncitizens entering the country beginning Dec. 26. Photos will be saved in a Department of Homeland Security database for up to 75 years.

Even though the pages in a passport are becoming obsolete, paper copies are still needed to travel—at least for now. In 2023, Finland became the first country in the world to issue digital passports as part of an EU pilot program. In 2024, the Singapore airport became completely passport free for the country's residents. Apple recently announced plans for an iPhone feature that will store passport information and can be used at TSA checkpoints.

HAVE A QUIET FLIGHT

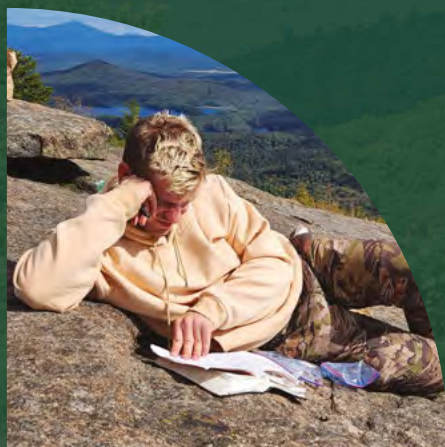
The first “quiet” supersonic plane soared over California Oct. 28 on its inaugural test flight. NASA developed the **X-59** as part of its Quesst mission, which aims to redevelop supersonic planes for commercial flights. Supersonic planes can cover distances in half the time as subsonic planes, but they cause thunder-like booms loud enough to cause property damage and hearing loss. The U.S. government banned civil supersonic flights over U.S. airspace in 1973. British Airways and Air France offered transatlantic commercial supersonic flights on the Concorde from 1976 to 2003, but eventually phased out the planes for economic and safety reasons. In June, President Donald Trump lifted the ban on civil supersonic flight on the condition that flights not create a boom audible on land. After eight years and \$632 million, NASA's X-59 meets that requirement. The plane's shape is designed to reduce the sonic boom to a thump, “similar to the sound of a car door slamming nearby,” according to NASA. Two other companies are developing their own commercial supersonic planes. —E.S.



FINGERPRINTS: JAMI JOY/BLOOMBERG VIA GETTY IMAGES; X-59: NICK UT/GETTY IMAGES

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To catch a thief

Banks and retailers hatch a plan to stop financial scams

by RACHEL COYLE

→ Retailers, banks, and other financial institutions are backing a blueprint for a united front against scams—and calling on the government to act.

Working under the direction of the Aspen Institute, leaders from over 80 private and public organizations, including government agencies, formed a task force that released a report in October. Members hope the 69-page document called *United We Stand: A National Strategy to Prevent Scams* will encourage all sectors to become more unified in their efforts to prevent and stop scams in their tracks.

“The Task Force ... was an attempt to bring together all the different parts of society that are implicated in a scam,” Kate Griffin with the Aspen Institute told me. “We thought intentionally about this idea of a scam ecosystem, and we wanted to make sure that as many

stakeholders from different parts of those ecosystems were represented around the table.”

Scams are a particularly unique crime, involving multiple sectors of technology and financial infrastructure. One scam might involve cellphone communications, retailer gift card purchases, personal bank account withdrawals, and cryptocurrency deposits. Until now, a lack of clarity around which sector ought to take responsibility has made it harder to prevent the crimes. Victims have no clear recourse and rarely get their money back. In 2024, scammers stole at least \$16 billion from Americans. Actual losses may be nearly 10 times that, due to underreporting.

Kate Griffin called for action at a task force event in early October.

The strategy’s basic framework includes two parts. First, minimize harm by intentionally acting against scams in progress, suppressing scam activity at every stage of its life cycle. Second, strengthen efforts to prevent scams in the first place. The task force recommended law enforcement agencies and the government work together to create a single online portal where companies and victims can report scam activity and intelligence. The goal is to make reporting easier and boost public awareness of common scam tactics.

Task force members have also asked Congress to acknowledge that “scams have grown into a national epidemic.” In a recent letter, members urged lawmakers to elevate scams to a national priority and develop a coordinated government strategy to stop them.

“The plan calls for a whole-of-society approach,” Griffin said. She sees it as the only way forward, but said the most daunting part of the plan is that it requires everyone to work together. The various parts of society scammers exploit, as well as law enforcement regulations, must coordinate their action. “All of them need to take action in order for us to make meaningful progress.”

But task force members can also act on their own to help protect consumers. It’s unclear what form those protections might take. And while the task force incorporated a wide range of companies and organizations, it didn’t include all of them. The nation’s biggest brick-and-mortar retailer, Walmart, was not a member of the task force.

Scammer tactics will continue to evolve and likely become more sophisticated, especially with the use of AI. Banks, retailers, and law enforcement agencies might constantly remain one step behind them, but that doesn’t deter Griffin.

“The cost of inaction is just too great,” she said. Even a 10% reduction represents billions of dollars and the well-being of individuals. “Any progress is meaningful progress, if you can prevent this crime from affecting additional people.” ■





MEDICINE

The comeback nut

New guidance prevents dangerous allergies

by HEATHER FRANK



Introducing a baby to potentially allergenic foods can be nerve-wracking. But a recent study suggests it doesn't have to be, at least not when it comes to peanuts. Published Oct. 20 in *Pediatrics* online, the study reported a nearly one-third reduction in peanut allergy incidence for children since 2015.

For decades, doctors told parents that waiting until age 3 to introduce peanuts to their children would lower the risk of allergy development. But a groundbreaking 2015 study bucked this advice, showing that infants exposed to peanuts early were over 80% less likely to develop a peanut allergy. The National Institute of Allergy and

Infectious Diseases (NIAID) responded with updated guidance in 2017, recommending infants be introduced to peanut butter products as early as 4 months old. The *Pediatrics* paper, which analyzed electronic medical records for nearly 125,000 kids under 3, noted a 27.2% drop in peanut allergy risk after the 2015 study was released, and a 43% reduction after the 2017 NIAID guideline update. Incidence of all food allergies fell by 36.3% after 2017. "Early allergen introduction works. For the first time in recent history, it seems like we're starting to put a brake pedal on the epidemic of food allergy in this country," lead study author David Hill told NPR.

MORE SUNSHINE, PLEASE

Pregnant women should prioritize sunbathing, according to a new study. Medical experts at Sweden's Uppsala University found that women with Vitamin D deficiencies are at greater risk of experiencing a difficult delivery. Publishing their work Oct. 8 in *Bone* online, a team of doctors sought to understand the effect of osteomalacia, a bone softening condition caused by a lack of Vitamin D, on birth outcomes. The researchers collected data on 71 Swedish and 52 Somali pregnant women over a two-year period. They took blood samples to assess baseline Vitamin D, calcium, and phosphate levels. Physical examinations assessed the presence of at least one clinical symptom associated with osteomalacia. After two years, the doctors found that women with osteomalacia during pregnancy were twice as likely to require emergency C-section, and five times more likely to require vacuum-assisted delivery. Women with osteomalacia reported far less sun exposure than did those without it. —H.F.

PIGGYBACK?

Tim Andrews of New Hampshire now holds the record for longest time living with a pig kidney transplant. After 271 days, the 67-year-old's genetically modified pig kidney was removed on Oct. 23 due to decreased function. Andrews, who has end-stage kidney disease, returned to six hours of dialysis three times a week. Andrews reported feeling more energized with the transplant, and was able to do things like take long walks. He is the fourth living U.S. patient to receive a pig kidney. —H.F.



C R O S S W O R D

Merry music for the season

by COLLIN GARBARINO

Across

- 1 What one does with the halls
 5 His hands bear their marks
 10 Guardian's charge
 14 ____gelical
 15 10th-century emperor
 16 "Zip-____-Doo-Dah"
 17 Dramatic opening?
 18 Cheery refrain
 19 Pro ____
 20 Stowed in the feed trough?
 23 Kind of port
 25 "Little," in Lille
 26 Simon and Diamond
 27 Seasonal song, and this puzzle's theme
 32 Photographer's request
 33 Bog fuel
 34 Lump for the naughty
 35 Meters and liters
 37 "The ____ of the East"
 41 Kind of rod in Psalm 2
 42 Soul to Seneca
 43 When it came upon?
 48 Farsi speaker
 49 Penny pres.
 50 That woman
 51 Global happiness?
 56 Melville's second novel
 57 Astronomer Hubble
 58 Seemingly forever
 61 Go-____
 62 Revise
 63 Too cute
 64 Canadian gas brand
 65 "We Three ____"
 66 What many will be wishing for this holiday season

Down

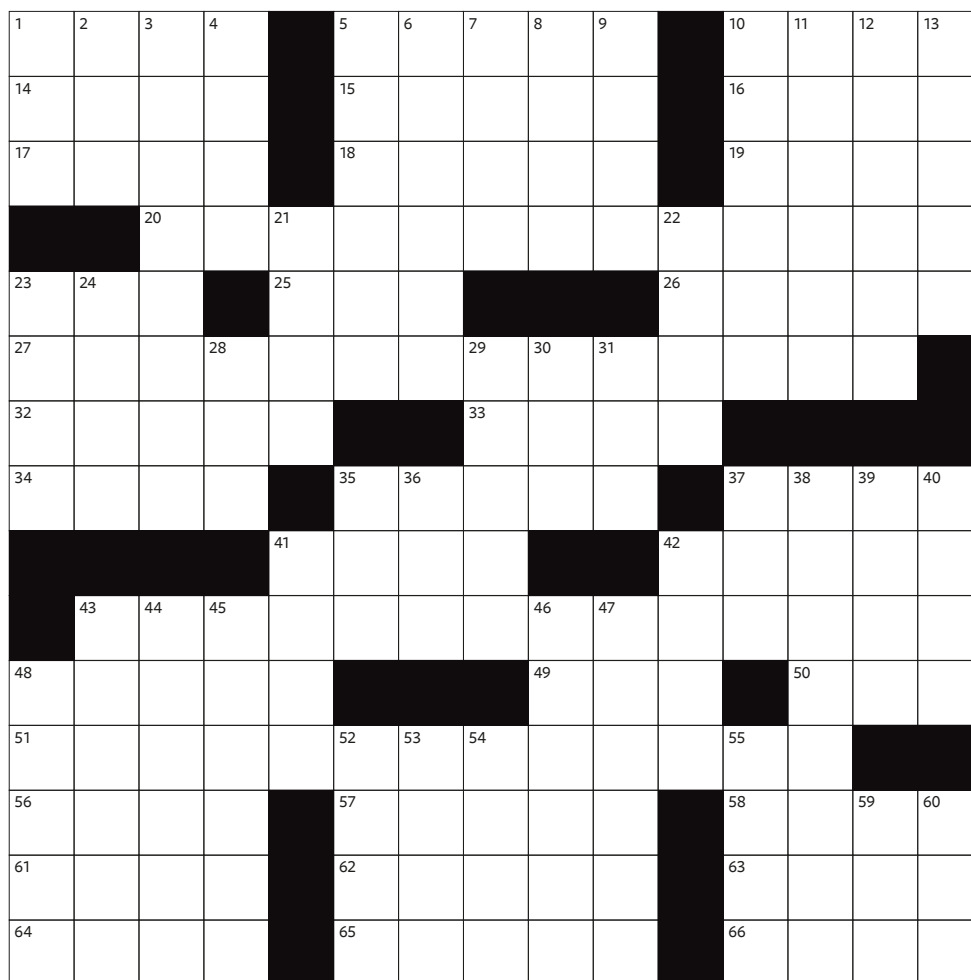
- 1 Rep.'s rival
 2 Night before
 3 Where one might celebrate Natale
 4 Be aware of
 5 "Hold your horses!"
 6 Naturally lit courtyard
 7 "I'd consider ____ honor"
 8 "Copacabana" showgirl
 9 The King and I setting

- 10 ____ Bros.
 11 How "O Holy Night" might be played
 12 Explain anew
 13 Beginnings to letters to Santa
 21 Church recess
 22 Med school subj.
 23 Home of the NCAA's Banana Slugs
 24 Ordinary guy: var.
 28 Under the weather
 29 Mimicking
 30 Complete collection

- 31 ____ in cat
 35 Coffee dispenser
 36 "There's ____ in team"
 37 Sketch show celebrating its 50th year
 38 Secures a tree to the top of a station wagon
 39 Asian nursemaid
 40 Seldom seen
 41 Peculiar: prefix
 42 Laptop brand
 43 Bakery lures
 44 City leaders
 45 As a whole

- 46 Verbal interruption and hesitation
 47 Some gov't issues
 48 "Kidding"
 52 Shipbuilding wood
 53 TV cable letters
 54 Bremner of *Black Hawk Down*
 55 "Why don't we!"
 59 The Matrix hero
 60 Use a Singer

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

- 25** French for "little"
- 42** "____", vegetable, or mineral"
- 56** Utterance from an exasperated cow perhaps

Down

- 23** University an hour south of San Francisco Bay
- 31** "Not 'B' as in 'boy,' but ____ in cat"
- 46** Hemming and ____





VOICES ANDRÉE SEU PETERSON

Revival seed

Let zealous people of God
set about to pray

Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds” (John 12:24). Charlie Kirk fell to the ground and died, and seeds are sprouting up all over.

We have had prior revivals in America. Indeed, Calvin Coolidge noted that “America was born in a revival.”

Jonathan Edwards of Great Awakening fame (1730–1745) cited revival’s tangible benefits: “There has been a great alteration among the youth of the town with respect to reveling, frolicking, profane and unclean conversation, and lewd songs. Instances of fornication have been very rare. There has also been a great alteration among both old and young with respect to tavern haunting” (from a letter to Rev. Thomas Prince of Boston).

This is none other than the pleasing socio-cultural by-product of revival. It is what Jesus meant by the parable of the humble sapling grown to so majestic a tree that “the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches” (Matthew 13:32).

My favorite illustration of this comes from the Great Revival of 1904–1905, which spread to the four corners of the earth. It began at a small youth group meeting in New Quay, Ceredigion, in Wales, when teenager Florrie Evans declared that she loved the Lord Jesus with all her heart. That was all the invitation the Spirit needed. Mrs. Jessie Penn-Lewis, a Welsh evangelical speaker, would later say of the event: “In the life of faith in London, a cloud no bigger than a man’s hand had arisen in the west.” Here is what happened next: “Drunkenness was immediately cut

in half, and many taverns went bankrupt. Crime was so diminished that judges were presented with white gloves attesting that there were no cases of murder, assault, rape, or robbery or the like to consider. Local police became unemployed in many districts. Slowdowns occurred in coal mines, not due to unpleasantness between management and workers, but because so many foul-mouthed miners became converted and stopped using foul language that the horses which hauled the coal trucks in the mines could no longer understand what was being said to them, and transportation slowed until the horses learned the language of Canaan” (J. Edwin Orr, *The Re-Study of Revival and Revivalism*, 1981).

Once we had a glorious Revolution in this country. Then it was over, and national morality sank to a new low. Following the War of Independence, in the late 1700s, Orr writes, “the typical Harvard student was an atheist; a poll at Princeton discovered only two believers in the student body and only five who did not belong to the ‘filthy speech movement’ of the day. Christians on campuses were so few and so unpopular that they met in secret like a communist cell and kept their minutes in code to avoid any mistreatment. Students burned buildings, forced presidents to resign, destroyed Bibles and profaned public worship.”

French philosopher Voltaire (1694–1778) predicted that Christianity would be forgotten within 30 years.

In holy alarm, zealous people of God set about to pray. Scottish theologian John Erskine (1721–1803) republished in 1794 Jonathan Edwards’ *Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God’s People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ’s Kingdom*. The Spirit fell first in the industrial cities of Yorkshire in 1791. It spread throughout Britain, strengthening the hands of British politician William Wilberforce (1759–1833), whose nearly single-handed turning of the great ship of slave trade is history.

At a gathering years ago I put history professor D. Clair Davis on the spot with the challenge, “Summarize Church history in one sentence.” He answered thoughtfully, “There is a tendency to lose Christ.”

Indeed. God warns us not to “drift away” (Hebrews 2:1). No one ever wakes up in the morning and decides to backslide. He does it slowly and unawares, by “neglecting so great a salvation.” Revivalist preacher George Whitefield (1714–1770) was “all life, fire, wing, force,” in contrast to other men “who seem only to be half alive,” wrote Spurgeon in his autobiography. The Christian in slippage mode is “dead even while she lives” (1 Timothy 5:6).

It may be that my favorite evangelists are always just the last ones I have read. So be it. C.T. Studd (1860–1931) puts the choice most pithily in his short poem, a poem that rings poignantly true in the case of Charlie Kirk: “Only one life, ’twill soon be past. Only what’s done for Christ will last.” ■



Worshippers pray during a church service in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

God on the move

On demographics, migration, and gospel renewal

by LEIGH JONES

➔ Missionaries from the West carried Christianity to the Global South a couple hundred years ago. As Grace Snell explains in her story on p. 66, the descendants of those early converts are now returning the favor as the number of professing believers declines in Europe and North America.

Are conversions part of what's driving church growth in the Global South?

Really it comes down to demographics and where in the world people are having babies. In the Western world, our birth rates are plummeting, but in places like sub-Saharan Africa, Christians are still having kids. But researchers disagree about whether conversions are happen-

ing in a statistically significant way, because those are just harder to track.

What do we know about the number of Christians in places where the church faces significant persecution?

World Christian Database editor Gina Zurlo told me they use three main data sources to track Christians: government censuses, surveys, and talking to people on the ground. Government censuses are considered the gold standard, but about half the world's countries don't ask a religion question, and even when they do, they don't ask about switching religions. So there are a lot of rumors about underground church growth in places like Iran, but it's hard to verify that.

We're seeing a renewed hunger for the hope of the gospel in the West. What do Christians from the Global South bring to this moment? They're bringing a faithfulness to Scripture and a reliance on the Holy Spirit. Across Latin America and Africa, there have been a lot of Pentecostal-type movements, and so there's often a vibrance and a freshness that they're bringing with them in their expressions of faith. But then they also seem to have a strong commitment to Biblical accuracy, to holding true to what the text said, instead of embracing more standpoint theology.

What are some of the problems churches in the Global South struggle with?

The prosperity gospel definitely came up in my research. But each area of the world has its own strengths and weaknesses. In the West, we have a lot more wealth and a lot more Biblical resources, but we are struggling with issues of human sexuality and gender. In other parts of the world, they might not be compromising on culture war questions, but they are wrestling with poverty. It only makes sense that there would be different types of heresies and challenges taking root there, which is why every part of the church needs every part of the church.

What was the most encouraging thing you learned during your reporting?

One of the pastors from Nigeria told me, when people are on the move, God is on the move. In Acts 17, Paul talks about God being the one who sets the boundaries for people and places and times. And so I think it's really important for each of us to look around and think, If my heart is to bring the gospel to the nations, what if the nations are already here? ■

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