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FROZEN ASSETS

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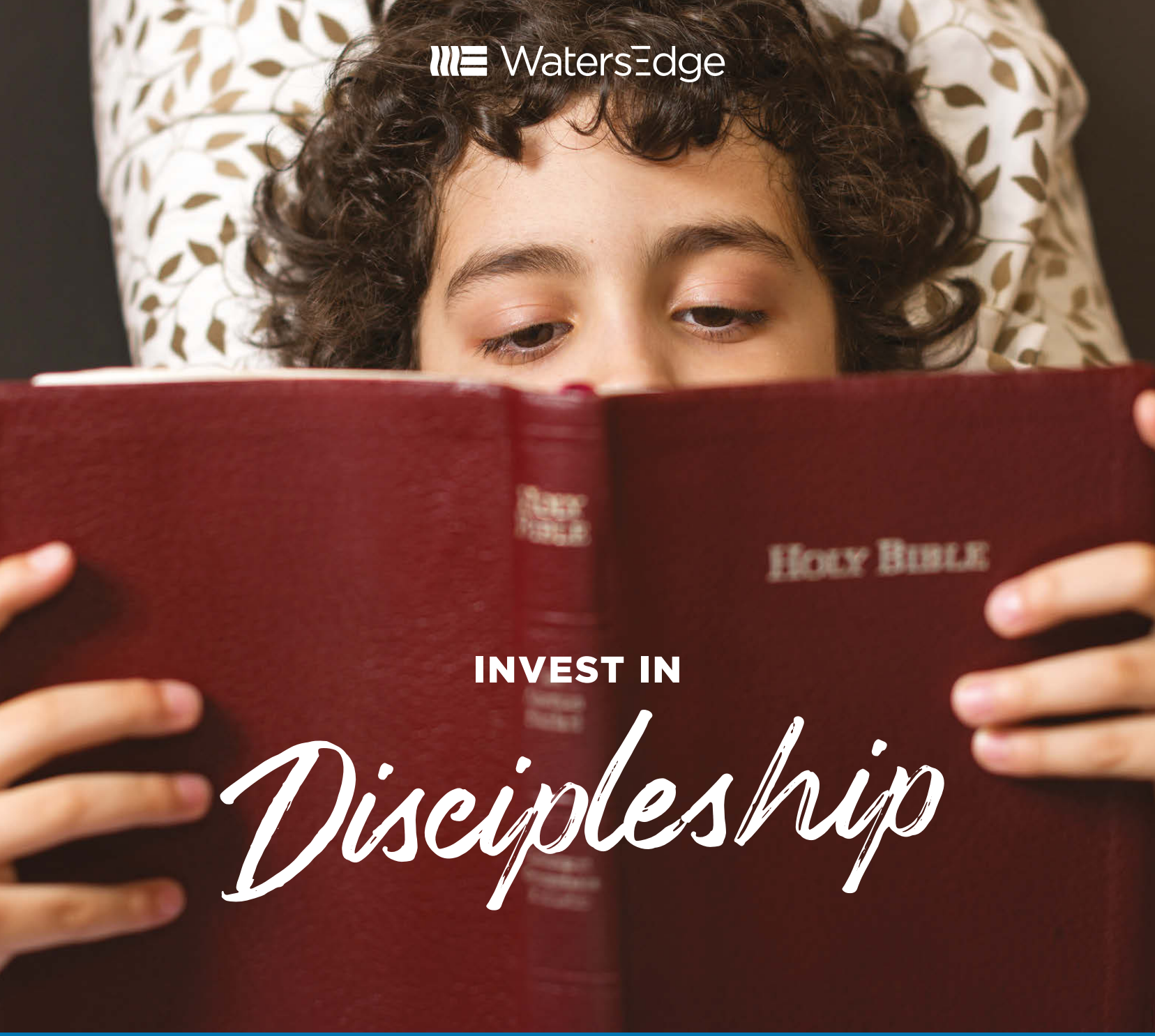
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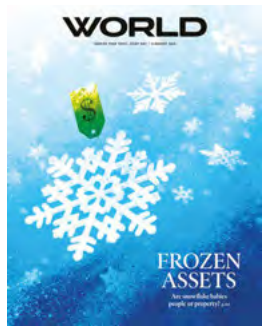
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by Krieg Barrie

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WORLD NOTES

→ For the second year in a row, I am attending a gathering of Christian ministries working in Haiti. A few of these ministries are large and well known. Most are not. Most depend on the labor of one or two founders, and whoever those founders can rally to the work.

News reporting frequently focuses, understandably, on the immense problems facing Haiti. But another story deserves attention: the faithful work of dozens of small, locally led ministries that carry on despite extraordinary obstacles to cultivate small gardens of gospel hope.

It is the Creation Mandate and the Great Commission wrapped together. It is patient work. It rarely makes headlines. But it endures.

WORLD Watch carries the motto, "Whatever the news, the purpose of the Lord will stand." If you want to see that truth lived out, start paying attention to the many ministries serving faithfully in Haiti.

At the other end of the spectrum—demographically and geographically—are tiny island communities scattered across the oceans of the globe. One of them is Kosrae, an island state in the Federated States of Micronesia that I have visited. Only a few thousand people live there, compared to nearly 12 million in Haiti, but the challenges can feel just as difficult.

Only one Christian organization works on the island: a small, founder-led ministry called Grateful Ministries. God is at work there too, allowing steady faithfulness to bear fruit over time.

May we be faithful to report on all of God's work in the world—especially when it is quiet, patient, and easy to overlook.

Ever wonder how artificial intelligence might change the news business? We think about it often, partly because it is advancing quickly, and partly because WORLD has been here before.

WORLD exists today because our founder, Joel Belz, recognized that new tools could extend faithful journalism far beyond what a small staff and modest resources would otherwise allow. He embraced desktop publishing when it was mainly used to print office memos—effectively hacking the early Macintosh to build a national newsmagazine while others relied on expensive legacy systems and networks. We were early adopters of remote work, when dial-up was the norm and before broadband made it easy. That allowed us to add employees without the cost of relocation.

AI presents a similar moment. It is already changing the way people do research. Even basic web searches are no longer the same. AI-generated answers now sit atop search results—most of the time helpfully, occasionally not. Honestly, I prefer the AI to the algorithm. So whether we welcome it or not, AI is now part of the information environment. Anyone who has searched for a Supreme Court case or breaking news recently has already seen this shift.

WORLD has rules for AI use in our newsroom, aimed at protecting human skill, judgment, and accountability. At the same time, we believe responsible stewardship means testing and evaluating new tools.

That experimentation happens under human direction. AI does not replace reporting, sourcing, or editorial judgment at WORLD. Human editors are fully responsible for everything we publish. Where AI plays a visible or material role in what readers see or hear, we will be clear about how we use it.

One early example we are exploring is an optional article-listening feature on our website. This tool uses AI to read staff-written articles aloud for readers who prefer listening to reading. It does not make editorial decisions but simply offers a different way to experience our journalism that has already been reported, edited, and approved by people.

We plan to introduce such tools carefully and incrementally. The goal is not to replace human work, but to support it. Joel Belz understood that technology, wisely used, could extend faithful journalism rather than diminish it. That remains our aim today: to use what helps, refuse what harms, and steward new tools in a way that strengthens trust.



KEVIN MARTIN
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
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"Yes, we need immigrants, but we need them here legally, fully vetted, and based upon their ability to assimilate and be a productive part of the American economy."

OPPORTUNITY COST

Page 82: Having worked my teenage years on the family fresh produce truck farm in the 1960s with illegal immigrants, I can attest to their value, hard work ethic, and good and decent values. Those immigrants crossed only for the harvest seasons, returning to Mexico in November to return every April or May. They sent 90% of the paychecks back home. They taught me how to work. My brothers and I worked alongside them for 10-12 hours a day, went to bed, and then got up the next day to do it all again.

They paid into Social Security without any hope of ever collecting a dime, much as happens today. They sometimes begged to work for cash as they didn't have the funds to buy fake documents. Back then, the INS hunted them down like animals and stole our helpers when we needed them most.

Now? Millions are let in without vetting, and we will pay the awful price for that for years to come. Yes, we need immigrants, but we need them here legally, fully vetted, and based upon their ability to assimilate and be a productive part of the American economy. For my Democrat/Socialist friends who love all things Europe and Canada, we would only have to look north to Canada for a sane, workable, productive, and country-preserving immigration system.

Canada vets immigrants and requires them to speak English or French proficiently and have a skill that can be employed in Canada. These types of requirements were introduced into Congress during Donald Trump's first term but never made it out of committee, and the reasons are legion. With declining birthrates, immigrants will save our economy, but the drug dealers, gang members, sexual predators, and worse must be vetted out, excluded, and returned when found.

That would be a sane economic and social policy. I pray for sound leadership, but before we reform the system and perhaps even provide a path to citizenship, we must cleanse our cities and land from the mess of illegal, unfettered, and dangerous immigrants who are not here to forward our interests. I weep for our future.

CRAIG J BORGARDT
Caledonia, Wis.



DECEMBER 2025

This article is one of the reasons that I love WORLD. Never have I had the immigration debate explained for me so clearly and in such a well-balanced way.

CHERYL IRISH
Bastrop, Texas

I disagree with the argument that illegal immigrants provide greater fiscal benefits than those who reside here legally. Federal, state, and local governments spend billions of dollars a year for their education. How much do we spend on illegal immigrants' healthcare? We don't really know because many states take federal money for Medicaid that is not supposed to be used for illegal immigrants and that frees up state money to provide healthcare for them. Meanwhile, illegal immigrants, as well as legal ones, take jobs from citizens.

JEANETTE BURRAGE
Kent, Wash.

HERALDS FROM THE SOUTH

Page 66: This article brought up a few good points that could serve the church in America well. However, an issue that went unaddressed is that a pastor does not have the right or authority to make unilateral changes and enforce them on the congregation against its will. Jesus, as Head of the church, has granted power to His church. This power resides with the whole body of the church—those who rule and those who are ruled. The power exercised by the people extends to the choice of those officers whom He has appointed in His church. In other words, it's not the pastor's →

church. It's Christ's church, and Christ has granted power to the congregation, which then extends that power to the elders of the church as overseers and shepherds. If an elder board/session wants to make the types of changes set forth in this article, it would do well to involve the congregation in the process rather than pushing changes upon them.

TOM CHAPMAN
Acworth, Ga.

HEAVENLY LIGHT

Page 12: I choose to accept and marvel at God's pre-solar, divine light, as detailed in the first book of the Bible. Created on Day 1, this light was sufficient to grow and sustain vegetation, three days prior to the creation of the sun. I believe it is the identical, God-created, light identified in Revelation 21:23: "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp."

DOUG POWELL
Fayetteville, Ga.

A VISION FULFILLED

Page 73: I've followed stories about Wycliffe and other groups translating the Scriptures in previously unwritten languages. We are so fortunate to have had the Bible in English for many centuries, following the work of John Wycliffe, the Lollards, William Tyndale, Miles Coverdale, and the translators of the "authorized" King James Bible. I myself mostly use the old Revised Standard Bible, the English Standard Version, and the New King James. But more translations in English seem to appear almost every year. Do we really need more English versions when we have so many? I don't know, but I wish more money and effort were spent for those who cannot yet hear God's words in their own "heart" language.

DAN LARUE
Lebanon, Pa.

Thank you for Rob Holmes' update on Bible translation around the world! I wept as I read about God's faithfulness to reveal Himself to every people group through this work. "God's provision through prayer changes everything. … Soon, 'the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea'" (Habakkuk 2:14) is a challenge and encouragement that I hope will keep us on our knees and raise up a generosity that will fuel and fund translation teams around the world. May God be praised!

REBECCA BLAIR
Albany, Ore.

REVIVAL SEED

Page 111: I greatly appreciate Andrée Seu Peterson's focus on revival seed. The history we have been taught in public schools over the past seven decades mentions Jonathan Edwards and the Great Awakening, but it does not come close to describing what happened within the colonies' churches in the lead-up to the Revolutionary War, especially with the central role the churches played.

In my seminary courses about church history, the central figure of the Welsh Revival that extended around the world was Evan Roberts, whose utterance of the phrase "Come, Holy Spirit" was the invitation of the revival's initiation.

DAVID ALBERS
Crystal Lake, Ill.

One of my favorite writers, Andrée Seu Peterson, once again has tapped into the heartbeat of what God wants to bring to America—spiritual renewal and revival. As she noted, each revival or awakening America has experienced has left its own signature. In 1740, youth led the way; in 1857, businessmen and prayer took center stage; and the 1906 Azusa Street revival, while important because it was interracial, also extended to the Pentecostal Movement and Charismatic Movement, which both exploded worldwide in the 20th century. While all revivals and awakenings share many common themes, prayer is the most important common theme.

FRANK STEPHENS
Lynn Haven, Fla.

THINGS THAT LAST

Page 38: Thank you for the article on DVDs making a comeback. I am one of the few who still watch them instead of streaming as I just can't stomach that extra cost, especially when it includes ads! Hoping that this trend back is not lost on the library system. I keep fearing they will get rid of their vast collection.

CONNIE FLEMING
Mentor, Ohio

AMBITIOUS FAITH

Page 88: As a Christian in the Anglican tradition, I was amused by the assertion by Michael A.G. Haykin that he doesn't "know of any other denominational body where paedocommunion is the norm." Professor Haykin either made the choice to ignore orthodox Anglican churches, or he is unaware of the common practice of paedocommunion in many Anglican churches. My church is part of the Reformed Episcopal Church (ACNA), where infants and toddlers are brought to the communion rail every Sunday to receive.

DANIELLE VERSLUYS
Wrightwood, Calif.

QUOTABLES

Page 31: Why is Mamdani shown extinguishing the flame of hope of liberty and a better life, when it was being put out by others in power for years?

TOM KITTOK
Milaca, Minn.

CORRECTION

Corey Mahler's Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod congregation excommunicated him in 2023 ("Old prejudice," January, p. 66).

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VOICES LYNN VINCENT

Sticks and carrots

Employers may be using the wrong tricks to get workers back to the office

When I started freelancing for WORLD Magazine back in 1998, the rest of the journalism and business universe did not consider you a real reporter if you worked from home. Thus, when my elementary-age boys were home during summer vacation, I had to enact sound-dampening protocols during phone interviews. My hope? That interviewees wouldn't hear my little savages Tarzan-yelling and swinging from the curtains in other parts of the house.

This did not always go well.

My "office" was really a tiny bedroom in a tiny bungalow in a Navy housing neighborhood. The main bathroom was directly across a narrow hall. Most of the day, I kept the bedroom door open while I worked, my Mom Ears running low-level threat scans like the radome on an airborne early-warning aircraft.

One day, I had an appointment to interview a California state senator. When the time came, I placed the call, planning to close the bedroom door once the senator was on the line. Just one problem: I had failed to notice my 8-year-old situating his rump on the white ceramic throne across the hall. As you likely know, 8-year-old boys care nothing about closing the bathroom door. And just after I introduced myself to the senator's secretary, the little saboteur yelled at the top of his lungs:

"*Can somebody bring me some toilet paper?*"

No reaction from the secretary—but I wanted to melt into the carpet! Still, I pressed on with the interview. I've always wondered if the secretary noticed my Bond-like cool under scatological duress.

The perils of remote work, to both employer and employee, are in the news again.

According to a recent *Wall Street Journal* report, companies are pushing even harder to get workers back to the office, using a carrots-and-sticks combo managers hope will succeed where other RTO (return to office) mandates have yielded mixed results.

For example, some companies now factor office attendance into promotions. Let's say "Sally" frequently comes into the office ... and then she gets a new title. "Now Sally is the new standard. Be like Sally," human resources consultant Jaye Johnson told the *WSJ*. The "carrot" idea here is to send a message to other employees without actually sending one.

Some companies were already using badge-swipe systems to track attendance. But badging often yields clever workarounds, such as: Badge in, attend a meeting, grab a coffee, go home. Now comes a more disturbing RTO strategy: cellphone tracking.

Employers have found they can use cell towers to track a worker's whereabouts. Is he sitting at a Starbucks, logged into the company server? That means he's probably working. But if cell towers show him bouncing from Walmart to Home Depot to Taco Bell ... well, he's probably not. It's a clear sign remote work isn't working when surveillance enters the picture.

WORLD reporters have worked remotely since the magazine's founding in 1986. This was—and is—the only way to run our nonprofit and still keep the lights on. Today, a distributed workforce is normal in journalism. But truth be told, all of us would be delighted to be able to see each other more often.

Among the broader population, millennials (surprise!) are those most likely to insist on more time out of the office, according to a May 2025 Gallup survey. Interestingly, Gen Z (born in 1997 or after) is the group most likely to wish employees were required to work in the office more often.

Gen Z likely intuits what Scripture says: "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17). Increasingly, employers, too, are noticing that digital blades like Zoom and messaging just aren't sharp enough—a deficit, it turns out, that's based in biology.

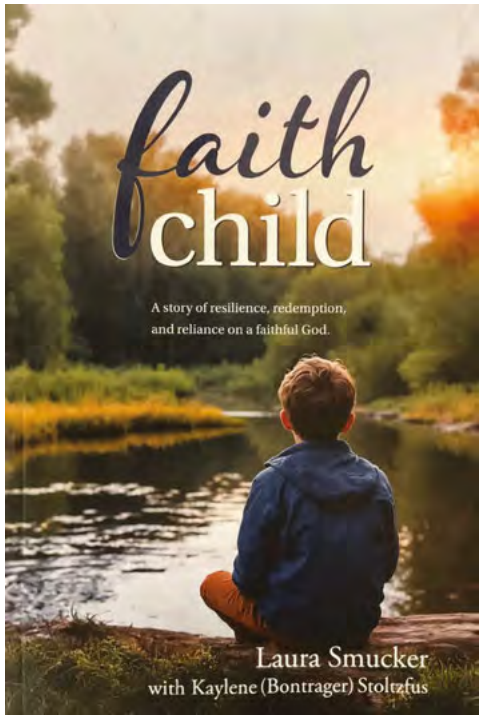
Neuroscience shows that when we are physically present—as Jesus was with His disciples—our brains read posture and movement, while also syncing speech and attention rhythms. This creates "neural coupling"—literal shared patterns of brain activity. And those casual lunches with colleagues matter, too. Relaxed social settings activate the brain's creative networks. This is why "out of nowhere" ideas make their way onto the backs of napkins and sometimes even to the New York Stock Exchange.

Today's employers want presence and for good reasons. But rather than using tricks to get it, maybe they should look to Scripture and to the way God made us instead. ■

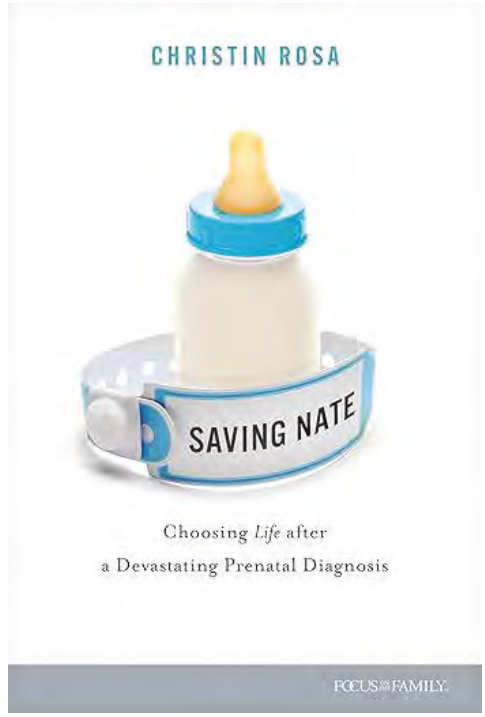
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IN THE NEWS

Donald's doctrine

U.S. intervention in Venezuela is about much more than oil

by GRACE SNELL

When Neil Atkinson worked as an analyst for Venezuela's nationalized oil company in the 1990s, business was booming. By 1998, Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) was widely regarded as the best national oil company in the world, Atkinson said, extracting 3.5 million barrels per day.

Then, socialist Hugo Chávez came to power in the 1998 presidential election. His glowing campaign promises quickly faded into a system of waste, corruption, and greed, Atkinson said.

During a power clash with PDVSA in the early 2000s, Chávez fired over a third of PDVSA employees, and waves of skilled professionals left the country. A few years later, Chávez effectively forced out two of the three major U.S. oil companies drilling in Venezuela. Oil production plummeted, bottoming out at just over half a million barrels per day in 2020.

Over time, a slew of new foreign powers stepped in to prop up the struggling oil industry and fill the power vacuum left by the United States: China, Russia, and Iran. That set the United States and Venezuela, by then run by Chávez protege Nicholás Maduro—on a collision course.

Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, are seen in handcuffs after landing at a Manhattan helipad, escorted by heavily armed federal agents en route to a federal courthouse in Manhattan on Jan. 5.

On Jan. 3, U.S. special forces swooped into Caracas and captured Maduro and his wife, successfully transporting them back to the United States to stand trial on drug-trafficking charges. Venezuelans across the globe took to the streets to celebrate, with opposition leader and 2025 Nobel Peace Prize winner María Corina Machado declaring it "the day justice defeated tyranny."

But in the aftermath of the raid, competing narratives emerged from Washington about the real reason it took such decisive action in Venezuela. Narratives about everything from migrants, to drugs, to oil. Andrew Latham, a professor of political science at Macalester College, believes those are all just selling points used to justify the operation to the American people.

Latham thinks it's really about something different: geopolitics. He believes Operation Absolute Resolve is fundamentally an aggressive play to root out adversarial influences in Venezuela and orient the country toward U.S. interests.

Since December, President Donald Trump has asserted his commitment to an 1823 declaration known as the Monroe Doctrine, warning foreign powers to keep their colonial ambitions away from the Western Hemisphere. Trump's corollary, touted as the "Donroe Doctrine," comes with an added twist: Trump doesn't want outside nations having a substantial economic presence here, either, Latham said. →

"If you look at the Western hemisphere, there is only one country which clearly violated that new standard," Latham said. "And that was Venezuela."

Among other comments, Trump has claimed the United States will "run" Venezuela until the two countries can facilitate a "safe, proper, and judicious transition." It's a prospect he later told *The New York Times* would likely take years to accomplish. In the meantime, Trump said the United States will rebuild Venezuela's oil industry to enrich both countries.

Venezuela currently sits on the world's largest known oil reserves, estimated at about 300 billion barrels of crude.

But getting Venezuela's oil industry up and running efficiently is a tall order, Atkinson said. He last visited Venezuela in 2012, and by then, the country looked very different from its heyday decades earlier. The hotels he stayed in had grown much shabbier, and they weren't the only thing that had deteriorated.

"A lot of their infrastructure within the oil industry is also decrepit and needs to be rebuilt."

"A lot of their infrastructure within the oil industry is also decrepit and needs to be rebuilt," said Gil Guerra, an immigration policy analyst at the Niskanen Center. Rebuilding this machinery would require a huge short-term investment oil companies aren't likely to make without more certainty about Venezuela's future.

Oil companies rely on political stability for their operations, Atkinson noted. And that's exactly what Venezuela doesn't have right now, especially in remote areas where many of the oil production facilities are. Companies can't guarantee the safety of their employees, and many places also lack reliable electricity, food, and fuel.

ExxonMobil CEO Darren Woods underscored that point during a Jan. 9 meeting with the Trump administration. "It's uninvestable," Woods said, referencing the current state of Venezuela's oil industry.

For that reason, Macalester College's Andrew Latham believes the Trump administration sees oil more as a stepping stone to a bigger foreign policy goal than an end in and of itself. He believes Trump really wants to make some kind of "win, win deal" with Venezuela and root out Chinese, Russian, and Iranian influence in what he views as "America's hemisphere."

What the administration doesn't want, Latham said, is to embroil the United States in another forever war. He thinks that's the main reason Trump spurned opposition leader Machado in favor of Maduro's vice president, Delcy Rodríguez.

Latham noted the United States had to put 24,000 troops into Panama to manage the 1989 regime change of strongman



Venezuelans in Santiago, Chile, celebrate the capture of Maduro.

CRISTOBAL OLIVARES/BLOOMBERG VIA GETTY IMAGES

Manuel Noriega, the clearest precedent case for what happened in Venezuela. "But Panama is a small country," Latham said. "Venezuela has 30 million people."

By Latham's estimate, subduing Venezuela and installing Machado would require 12 times as many U.S. soldiers battling popular militias and narcotics gangs through dense jungle.

Going forward, Latham sees four potential scenarios for Venezuela. First, Rodríguez stays in power and gives Trump most of what he wants. "And then it's back to business as usual," Latham said. Second, there might be an internal civil war between Rodríguez and Chavismo-hardliners like Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello. Third, a real democratic transition could bring Machado's party to power.

"And then the final scenario is that the whole thing falls apart in civil war and chaos, and it looks like Iraq in the battle days," Latham said. Of these possibilities, he sees a return to free and unfettered democracy as the least likely outcome.

Atkinson, who now serves as a visiting fellow at the National Center for Energy Analytics, said this realization has dawned on a growing number of his Venezuelan friends and former colleagues who had hoped Maduro's ouster signaled the return of democracy to their beleaguered country. Many of them now live outside their homeland, along with nearly 8 million other Venezuelans who have fled their country since 2014.

As long as Maduro's cronies remain in power, it's unclear what benefits may trickle down to the Venezuelan people. Atkinson said Venezuela's industrial and political recovery is a long-term project that will have only just begun when Trump's term ends three years from now.

As in other foreign policy endeavors, Atkins said, the United States would do well to heed former Secretary of State Colin Powell's caution: "If you break it, you own it." But he hopes the coming decades will bring brighter prospects for those who have suffered most under Chavismo. "Make Venezuela great again," Atkinson said. "That's what we want to see." ■

ILLUSTRATION BY KRIEG BARRIE



BY THE NUMBERS

Efficiency deficiency

The rising cost of going green

BY JOHN DAWSON

$953

The estimated extra cost to purchase and install a new electric water heater when Department of Energy environmental regulations take effect in 2029 according to a Competitive Enterprise Institute study released in December. With a large portion of Americans concerned about affordability, governmental policies provide at least one clue for why prices keep going up.

36%

The share of American households that have put off large purchases like cars or appliances, citing discomfort with their financial situation, according to a December Navigator survey.

7

The number of times regulators have imposed tightened environmental requirements on washing machines beginning in 1988 and most recently in 2024. Regulations have increased costs while reducing cleaning capacity and creating reliability problems.

99%

The share of LED light bulbs currently on the market that will not meet Biden-era regulations when they take effect in 2028, according to a CEI report. The DOE estimates that light bulb prices will increase from $2.98 to $5.68 per bulb.


Bart Hutchins

WASHINGTON MEMO

The politics of fine dining

Inside Butterworth's, the bistro of choice for Capitol Hill conservatives

by CAROLINA LUMETTA

On New Year's Day, Bart Hutchins was driving a rented U-Haul down the National Mall in search of French-style sausage. In the back of the truck, drinking glasses and patio warmers clattered. In the rearview mirror, you could say, were Hutchins' past roles: lay church minister, enrollee at Reformed Theological Seminary (briefly), staffer for the Nevada Senate Democrats, Washington chef, and IT consultant in Minnesota.

Now he's head chef and co-owner of Butterworth's, a French-Australian fusion bistro on Capitol Hill that's become a magnet for the district's conservative movement.

"There are people who were built for politics, but it wasn't me," Hutchins said while driving across town to a specialty butcher shop for the sausage he needed for a catering event. "I like to see my work play out. As a chef, you make a dish, and then somebody tastes it, it's delicious, and then it's over."

According to a recent report from Restaurant Association Metropolitan Washington, a record 92 restaurants closed in the District of Columbia in 2025 by November. Nearly 3 out of 4 mid-priced restaurants surveyed reported a drop in sales. But among those dire stats, Butterworth's has carved a lane for itself as the MAGA fine dining haven for the nation's capital.

On any given day, Hutchins mans the host stand beside the marble bar in the center of the restaurant. An eclectic interior sports an antler chandelier, warm yellow light sconces, and a framed photo of Queen Elizabeth II. Unlike many D.C. establishments, Butterworth's does not try to be political. It does not name its drinks for political figures or feature pun-laden dishes on the menu.

PHOTOS BY CAROLINA LUMETTA

Every china plate and cup was thrifted at estate sales and secondhand stores.

The atmosphere is like a club, and wait staff have learned that customers don't stay still. They greet friends and move in and out of conversations in the booths and at the bar. Hutchins loves it.

"It's the grand history of the French café, a place where ideas happened, right? All kinds of great artistic and political movements started in places like this," Hutchins said.

In 2018, President Donald Trump's White House press secretary, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, was asked to leave a Virginia restaurant after the owners realized who she was. The same year, a bartender followed White House adviser Stephen Miller down the street yelling at him. Many in the administration flocked to the Trump Hotel for their fancy meals instead.

Trump sold the hotel in 2022, and Butterworth's quietly stepped into the vacuum in October 2024. Since then, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, and other right-wing figures like Steve Bannon (who lives nearby) have regularly dined there. In December, the disgraced former New York Republican Rep. George Santos hosted his Christmas party on Butterworth's second floor.

"Politics are now part of pop culture," Hutchins said. In the past year, he's become used to scanning the reservations list to ensure he doesn't seat political opponents near each other, which also requires keeping an eye on social media to see the latest drama. "I talk to the staff to not treat our clientele like policy-makers," he said. "This is not the place for that. We're here to provide really good service."

Staffing was a struggle for Butterworth's during its first few months. Roughly 75% of Washington residents are Democrats. Some couldn't leave the politics in the kitchen.

"I think there's a certain mindset among the mainstream left right now that is that you can't even be in the same room with these people without getting the ick on you," Hutchins chuckled.

The menu at Butterworth's can change weekly. There are no burgers: Instead, bone marrow and lamb tartare are among the most-ordered items. The stars of the show are the $12 beef tallow frites served with a garlic aioli, to the tune of 15,000 pounds of potatoes in the first year.

Hutchins sources his food from local farms. "With literature, with food, I am always trying to find the primary source," he said before waxing eloquent about the history of the militarization of French cuisine ranging from the days of Catherine de' Medici. His hunt also extends to faith—Hutchins is in the process of converting to Catholicism: "I like the deep historical nature of it, the history of the saints, and the continuation of its leadership."





Hutchins now describes himself as a working-class populist. His turning point away from the political left came during the first Trump administration when his liberal friends refused even to read a tax proposal from Bannon, then a White House policy adviser.

"It became clear that the rhetoric of our party politics are regardless of the facts, policy, or actual solutions," Hutchins said. "There's a streak within the left and within the right that I can see myself in. But the mainstream of both parties are aligned with a global economic system that just doesn't work."

And yet the GOP mainstream descends on Butterworth's every night. In the first full year of operation, Butterworth's hosted 200 private events and averaged 1,000 customers weekly.

That attracts protesters. About twice a month, demonstrators with bullhorns shout "fascists" and "Nazis" from the sidewalk. The protests don't disturb the atmosphere inside, partly because Hutchins invested in sound-deadening curtains.

"Butterworth's is one of the stage sets for the reality TV drama that is Washington, D.C., now, and they see it as part of the show," Hutchins said. "I don't love that, but it relieved the concern I had. Who would want to eat in a restaurant that people are screaming out front of? Turns out it doesn't bother them."

Hutchins also rejects the premise that his customer base will disappear once a Democrat wins the White House.

"This idea that there's a monolith is crazy. Is this the MAGA hangout? Yes, totally. But it's a MAGA hangout in the way that it's a red state, which is to say that on any given night, it's probably 60-40 at its peak."

Conservatism now looks different from his host stand, where French 75 cocktails and Guinness pints pour liberally every night.

"For the MAGA crowd, we have to sell more booze and be open later than almost any restaurant in the neighborhood," Hutchins said. "They are the party crowd right now, and they love to have a good time." ■

Dilbert cartoonist dead at 68

by JOHN DAWSON



Scott Adams

A satirist and cartoonist who chronicled life within the four cubicle walls of corporate culture, Adams died Jan. 13. He was 68. Adams began drawing cartoons while an engineer at Pacific Bell in the 1980s. By 1989, he turned his doodlings into the syndicated comic strip *Dilbert*. Adams lampooned cubicle culture and the interactions between managers and engineers. In 1996 he was able to quit his job at Pacific Bell and focus on his cartoons full time. Eventually, Adams' *Dilbert* would run in 2,000 newspapers and get adapted into books and even a short-lived television series. Later, Adams became a popular conservative commentator on social media, racking up more than 1 million followers on the social platform X.



Michael Reagan

A conservative talk radio host and eldest son of the 40th president, Reagan died Jan. 4. He was 80. Born John Charles Flaugher, he was quickly adopted by Ronald Reagan and his first wife, actress Jane Wyman. While his father's political career flourished, Reagan occupied himself with a variety of jobs from business to acting. By the 1990s, Reagan had transitioned to conservative talk radio, establishing himself as a powerhouse in Southern California. By 2000, more than 200 radio stations carried Reagan's show in syndication, reaching about 5 million listeners daily at its high point. After retiring from radio, Reagan led the Reagan Legacy Foundation, which is dedicated to his father, and was a Newsmax commentator.



Richard Smallwood

An influential gospel singer who helped mainstream the sounds of the black church, Smallwood died Dec. 30. He was 77. Smallwood built his musical chops as a student at Howard University singing in the school's gospel choir before forming the Richard Smallwood Singers in 1977. The group released multiple albums beginning in 1982, earning a handful of Grammy nominations and winning a pair of Dove Awards. Before the group broke up, they toured the Soviet Union in 1989, breaching the Iron Curtain with the gospel. Smallwood wrote "Total Praise," a modern choral standard, for his subsequent group, Vision, in 1996. Smallwood was inducted into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame in 2006.



Brigitte Bardot

An actress and model who leveraged her physical beauty to become an international movie star, Bardot died Dec. 28. She was 91. Raised in a glamorous neighborhood in Paris, Bardot originally trained as a ballet dancer before becoming a teenage model and an actress. By the mid-1950s, Bardot would find international success when her French cinema films became popular around the world as her on-screen sensuality challenged midcentury norms. In 1956, she starred in *And God Created Woman*, a film that was then the highest-grossing foreign film of all time in the United States. Typecast, she tired of film and retired to a second career in animal rights advocacy in 1973.

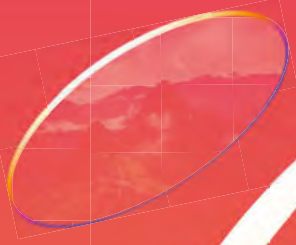


Norman Podhoretz

A thought leader and magazine editor who helped define the politics of a generation of neoconservatives, Podhoretz died Dec. 16. He was 95. Born to a liberal Jewish family in New York City, Podhoretz would become the editor of *Commentary* magazine from 1960 until 1995. Like many intellectual Jewish New Yorkers, Podhoretz's—and his magazine's—politics would drift rightward in the 1960s and '70s as a reaction against the radical New Left and the disorder common in American cities. By the 1990s, he had made interventionist foreign policy synonymous with neoconservatism, arguing for regime change in Iraq before the 2003 U.S. invasion. In 2004, Podhoretz received the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

ADAMS: BOB RIHA JR./GETTY IMAGES; REAGAN: GERO BRELOER/AP; SMALLWOOD: HANDOUT; BARDOT: ALEXIS DUCLOS/GAMMA-RAPHO VIA GETTY IMAGES; PODHORETZ: BERNARD GOTFRYD




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HUMAN RACE

Fraud scandal stumble

by EMMA FREIRE

Minnesota Gov. **Tim Walz** announced Jan. 5 that he will not seek reelection for a third term amid a growing scandal over fraud in social service programs in his state. "I came to the conclusion that I can't give a political campaign my all," he said in a statement. Prosecutors allege that fraudsters stole as much as $9 billion by setting up companies that billed state agencies for social services they never provided. To date, prosecutors have charged 98 defendants, 85 of whom are of Somali descent. Pressure on Walz escalated in December after a video by YouTuber Nick Shirley exposing alleged fraud went viral on social media. The scandal prompted the Department of Homeland Security to send 2,000 federal agents to Minnesota. Local opposition to the federal presence in the city boiled over on Jan. 7, when an Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent shot and killed a woman during a protest. On Jan. 8, the Trump administration also announced it would set up a new division for national fraud enforcement within the Department of Justice. Politically, the revelations became a major liability for Walz's administration, with opponents arguing that regulators ignored warnings and allowed payments to continue. Walz rose to national prominence after then–Vice President Kamala Harris selected him to be her running mate in her unsuccessful 2024 presidential campaign.

FAITH CONVICTION

Nayereh Arjaneh, an Iranian Christian, began serving a five-year prison sentence on Dec. 23. Authorities arrested Arjaneh and her husband Qasem Esmaili in July after the couple attended a Christian training event in Turkey. After being released on bail, Arjaneh was convicted of promoting anti-Islamic teaching and supporting "groups affiliated with Zionist Christianity." According to Iran's government, proselytizing for any religion besides Islam is an offense punishable by up to 10 years in prison. Arjaneh was sentenced to five years for each offense and will serve both simultaneously. Officials allowed her husband, who was also convicted, to postpone his jail time while he undergoes cancer treatment.

—Bekah Bernhardt

UP FOR GRABS

California Republican Rep. **Doug LaMalfa**'s sudden death on Jan. 6 left a void in the state's rural Northern district and diminished the GOP's narrow majority in the U.S. House to 218 seats. Democrats hold 213 seats.



LaMalfa, 65, was a fourth-generation rice farmer and staunch supporter of President Donald Trump who served seven terms in the House. He died during an emergency surgery. LaMalfa had planned to run for reelection after state voters passed Proposition 50, redrawing his district to skew Democratic. Two

WALZ: STEPHEN MATUREN/GETTY IMAGES; LAMALFA: BILL CLARK/CQ-ROLL CALL, INC VIA GETTY IMAGES

Democrats had already announced plans to seek the seat. It's not clear who might join the GOP ticket. Voters will pick someone to fill the rest of LaMalfa's term and then vote again in November to fill the next two-year term. *—Mary Jackson*

DEADLY DIAGNOSIS

Messages of support poured in during the Christmas holiday for former Nebraska Sen. Ben Sasse who announced his terminal cancer diagnosis in a social media post. Sasse, 53, described pancreatic cancer as "nasty stuff" and "a death sentence." But he also vowed not to go down without a fight. Voters sent Sasse to Washington in 2014. He was one of seven Republican senators who voted to convict Trump of "incitement of insurrection" after the Jan. 6, 2021, riot. Sasse retained his Senate seat until 2023, when he resigned two years before the end of his term to lead the University of Florida. He left the college in 2024 after doctors diagnosed his wife with epilepsy. *—Leigh Jones*


Ben Sasse



PUBLIC CONFESSION

Bestselling Christian author **Philip Yancey** has withdrawn from all writing and speaking engagements after confessing to an eight-year affair with a married woman. "My conduct defied everything that I believe about marriage," Yancey, 76, wrote in a letter to *Christianity Today*. "It was also totally inconsistent with my faith and my writings and caused deep pain for her husband and both of our families." Yancey, who was diagnosed with Parkinson's in 2023, has been married to his wife, Janet, for 55 years. His books, including *The Jesus I Never Knew* and *What's So Amazing About Grace?*, sold more than 15 million copies and have been translated into 40 languages. *—Kim Henderson*

PENDING PAY CUT

Sen. **Mark Kelly**, D-Ariz., has vowed to fight a Pentagon decision to censure him for appearing in a video urging military members to refuse orders they believe are illegal. Kelly and several other members of Congress released the video in November. Secretary of War Pete Hegseth called Kelly's comments reckless and seditious with the clear intention of undermining military discipline. Kelly is a retired captain and receives retirement pay from the Navy. In addition to the formal censure, Hegseth said, Kelly might also face a demotion and pension reduction. On Jan. 12, Kelly filed a federal lawsuit, claiming the administration was punishing him for protected political speech. *—L.J.*



PRISON PURCHASE

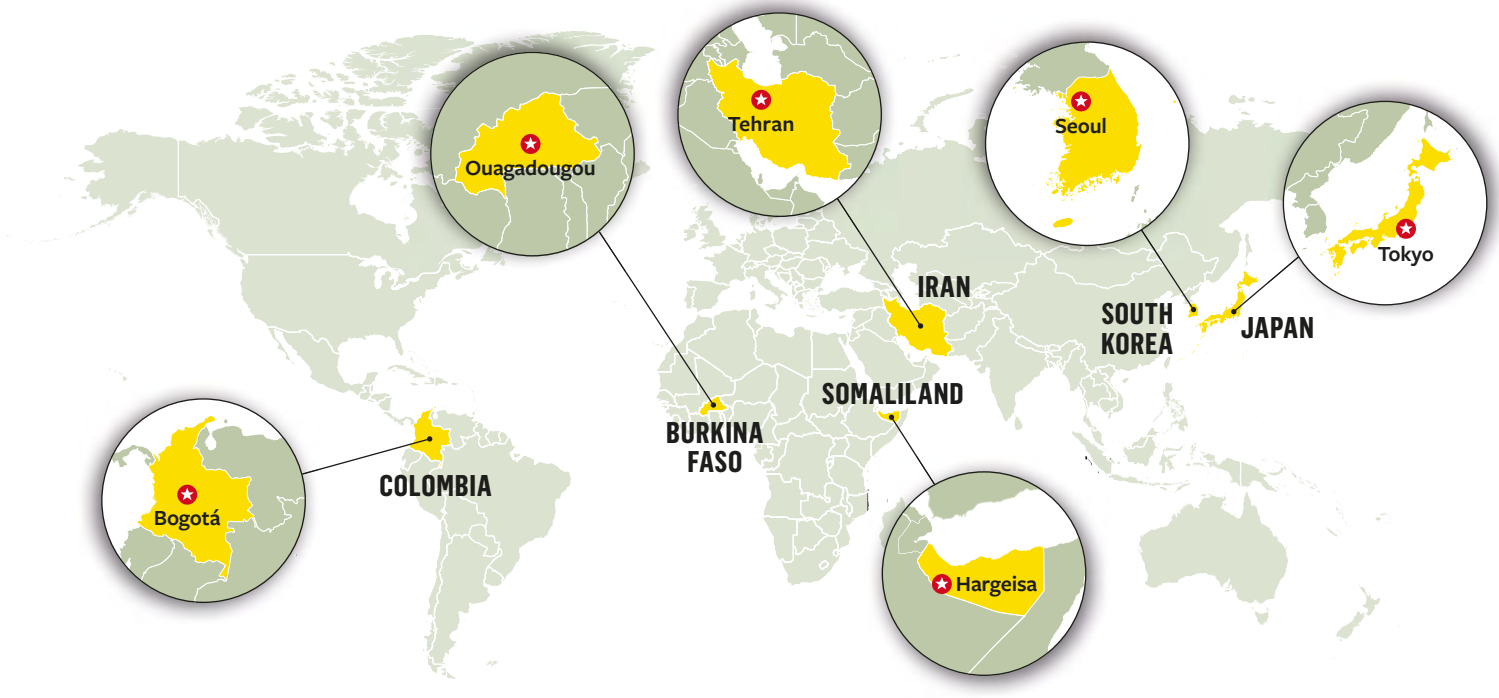
Social activist Kerwin Pittman has purchased an abandoned prison in Goldsboro, N.C., to help others who, like him, have served time. Pittman spent 11 years behind bars for conspiracy to commit murder, then went on to found his own recidivism reduction nonprofit after his release. The prison property will further his plans to create reentry housing and a workforce campus where residents can train to become tradesmen. Pittman said he bought the property for less than a million dollars and will spend twice that much to refurbish it. *—K.H.*

POLITICAL TARGET

Christine Crowder, a Catholic school teacher from Texas, became the face of political targeting in January as lawmakers marked the fifth anniversary of the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riots. Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., released investigative files from the Biden administration showing how it weaponized federal agencies against Crowder after she was falsely accused of participating in the riots. Crowder attended President Donald Trump's rally on the Ellipse hours before the riot, but never set foot inside the Capitol. Yet Biden's FBI labeled Crowder as a domestic terrorist and subjected her to nearly two years of physical federal surveillance. The investigation centered on an unverified tip from a disgruntled neighbor, and continued after digital evidence failed to implicate her. *—Christina Grube* ■

SASSE: UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA; YANCEY: ST PETERSBURG TIMES/ZUMAPRESS.COM/ALAMY; KELLY: TOM WILLIAMS/CQ-ROLL CALL, INC VIA GETTY IMAGES

Iranians call for regime change





Iran Thousands of people died, and many more were arrested during mass protests that spread across the country in early January. The demonstrations started in response to the Islamic Republic's deteriorating economic situation, but quickly morphed into calls to overthrow the government. As the protests grew, U.S. President Donald Trump warned America might intervene if Iran's leaders began killing their own people. In response, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei blamed Trump for the violence, claiming crowds of people in Tehran and other cities destroyed buildings to please the U.S. president. The 86-year-old Khamenei insisted Iranian leaders won't back down. He also claimed Iran's enemies didn't know what they were up against. Despite the regime's attempt to shut down the country's internet access, videos of the protests continue to appear on social media. *—Christina Grube*



POPULATION
88.4 million

LANGUAGE
Persian Farsi, Azeri, Kurdish

RELIGION
98% Muslim, 1% Christian

GOVERNANCE
Theocratic republic

GDP
$1.486 trillion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Plastics, iron ore, alcohols, natural gas, refined copper

Somaliland Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar visited the capital city of Hargeisa Jan. 6. Saar's visit to the Horn of Africa followed Israel's Dec. 26 formal recognition of the de facto state—the first by a UN nation since its 1991 declaration of independence from Somalia. Somalia condemned Israel's interference into its internal affairs. China, Turkey, and 20 Middle Eastern and African nations also criticized Israel's move, but the European Union supports Somaliland's right to sovereignty. After Israel's recognition, Djibouti recalled its representative from Somaliland in protest, and Somaliland reciprocated. Israel and Somaliland will open embassies in the other's country as part of the mutual agreement. *—Amy Lewis*

MAHSA/MIDDLE EAST IMAGES/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; FACT BOX SOURCE: THE WORLD FACTBOOK-CIA



Japan The country's first female prime minister, Sanae Takaichi, has added her name to a petition for more women's restrooms in the house of parliament. A cross-party group of nearly 60 female lawmakers submitted the petition Dec. 31. The parliament building contains only nine toilets for women, with 22 total cubicles, compared to 12 men's toilets with 67 stalls and urinals. In 2024, 73 women were elected into the 465-seat lower house, exceeding the previous high of 54 in 2009. The male-to-female toilet ratio reflects Japan's broader gender gap in politics. The government wants women eventually to hold at least 30% of its legislative seats, but they currently hold just 16%. *—Elisa Palumbo*

Burkina Faso The government on Jan. 6 said it had foiled another attempted coup to oust military leader Ibrahim Traoré. This is the latest reported attempt to remove Traoré, 37, who took power in September 2022 during a rise in militant attacks in the region. The country's security minister, Mahamadou Sana, announced in a broadcast that Lt. Col. Paul Henri Damiba, who was ousted by Traoré in September 2022, orchestrated the plot with co-conspirators from neighboring Ivory Coast. They reportedly planned to launch their attack on Jan. 3. Since seizing power, Traoré has faced at least two coup attempts while grappling with growing jihadist violence. Despite this opposition, experts observe that Traoré continues to gather popular support across the continent, driven by his pan-African ideals and anti-Western rhetoric. *—Olalekan Raji*



POPULATION
23 million

LANGUAGE
French, Mossi

RELIGION
64% Muslim, 20% Roman Catholic, 9% animist, 6% Protestant

GOVERNANCE
Republic

GDP
$60 billion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Gold, cotton, oil seeds, coconuts

South Korea President Lee Jae Myung said Jan. 7 that he had requested Chinese President Xi Jinping to mediate inter-Korean relations and help curb North Korea's nuclear program. Lee spoke at a press conference in Shanghai after meeting with Xi in Beijing on Jan. 5, the first visit by a South Korean president to the Chinese capital in six years. Lee's long-term goal is to denuclearize the peninsula, but he said any effort to prevent further escalation would be a good first step. Lee said Xi told him to be patient with Pyongyang, which has refused to engage in dialogue with Seoul. China is the top trading partner for both Koreas. Lee belongs to the left-leaning Democratic Party of Korea which favors diplomacy with North Korea and stronger ties with China. He came into office in June 2025. *—Joyce Wu*



POPULATION
52 million

LANGUAGE
Korean, English

RELIGION
17% Protestant, 16% Buddhist, 6% Catholic, 60% none

GOVERNANCE
Presidential republic

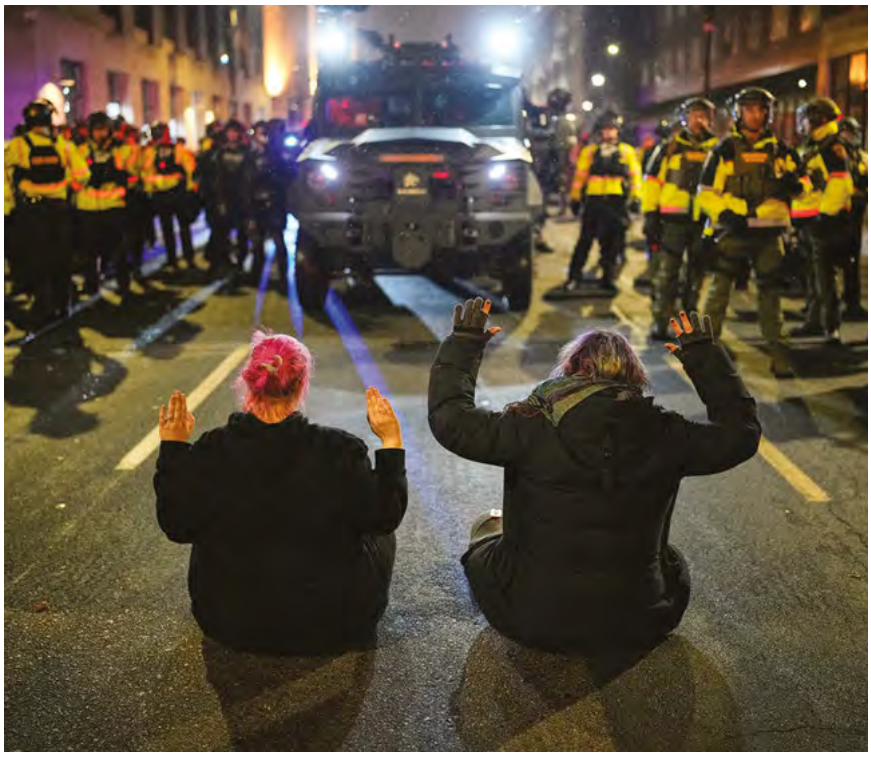
GDP
$2.6 trillion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Microchips

Colombia Unidentified hit men shot and killed Pentecostal Pastor José Ortega on New Year's Eve during a family reunion in the northwestern department of Magdalena. Colombia's Evangelical Council issued a statement Jan. 2 condemning the attack and calling for the crime not to go unpunished. Ortega's death marks one year of increased persecution against religious and community leaders in Colombia after failed peace talks between paramilitary groups and the national government. Since Dec. 31, military offensives by the rebel Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) have also forced a mass displacement of at least 150 Colombian families in the nearby Catatumbo region. Presidential elections are set to take place in May amid one of the most violent periods in Colombia's recent history. *—Carlos Páez*



JAPAN: Y-STUDIO/GETTY IMAGES; COLOMBIA: FERNANDO VERGARA/AP



JOHN LOCHER/AP

U.S. BRIEFS

Anti-ICE protests erupt after Minnesota shooting

Over the weekend of Jan. 9, tens of thousands took to the streets in Minneapolis to protest an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officer's fatal shooting of 37-year-old Twin Cities resident and U.S. citizen Renee Good. These demonstrations were just a handful of the estimated 1,000 events planned across the country from Houston to Seattle. In early January, the Trump administration deployed about 2,000 federal troops to Minneapolis amid sweeping allegations of social services fraud involving Somali immigrants. During a Jan. 10 news conference, Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey reported protests remained largely peaceful, although police arrested 29 people for vandalizing a hotel. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said her agency will send hundreds more officers to Minnesota to continue ICE operations. Noem and White House officials have defended the officer who fired at Good, arguing she tried to run him over with her vehicle. Gov. Tim Walz and others dispute that characterization, saying Good was merely trying to drive away. DHS spokeswoman Tricia McLaughlin said the officer had been previously dragged by a car driven by someone trying to flee an ICE traffic stop. *—Grace Snell*

POPULATION
5.7 million

GOVERNOR
Tim Walz[D]

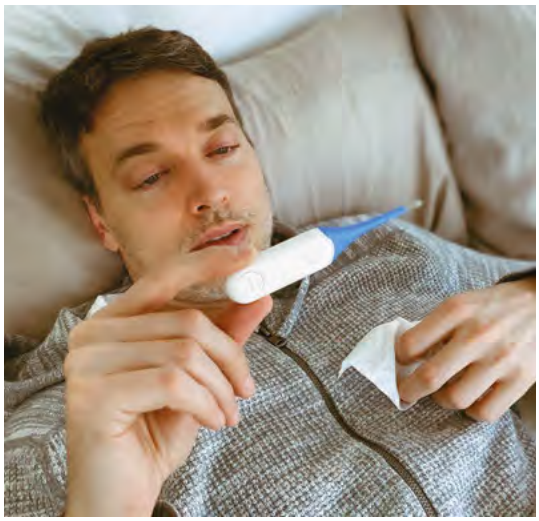
U.S. SENATORS
Amy Klobuchar[D], Tina Smith[D]

INDUSTRY
Technology and innovation, agriculture, retail sales, clean energy, finance and insurance

Utah AI may soon start refilling some prescription drugs for state residents. On Jan. 6, Utah announced a pilot program with tech-startup Doctronic. The company's website allows patients to get AI-generated diagnoses and treatment plans. According to the company, human doctors agree with its AI-generated treatment recommendations over 99% of the time. Now in Utah, Doctronic can refill roughly 200 eligible drugs for patients with chronic health conditions. Doctronic will have human doctors review the first 250 refills in eligible drug classes before AI fully takes the reins. Some medical professionals worry about the implications of autonomous healthcare. But it may cut down on busywork since prescription refills account for about 80% of medication activity, per a press release from Utah's Department of Commerce. *—Bekah Bernhardt*

Indiana State lawmakers could approve the use of firing squads for executions if the drugs used for lethal injections are not available. Indiana spent about $1 million on execution drugs in 2025. But Gov. Mike Braun said at least $600,000 worth of pentobarbital expired before it could be used. State Sen. Mike Young, who proposed the bill authorizing firing squads, said they would provide a "fail safe" option for the state. Young told lawmakers not to debate the issue in light of their own beliefs about the already legal death penalty. "The question here is, 'What do we do if we only have one option in which to carry out a legal order by the courts in the state of Indiana?'" he asked. Five states—Idaho, Utah, Oklahoma, Mississippi, and South Carolina—already use firing squads under certain circumstances. *—Leigh Jones*

[D]Democrat | [R]Republican



Michigan Influenza cases have risen exponentially across the state, one of the hardest hit at the start of the new year, according to flu data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This year, the United States has logged its highest level of respiratory illness since the 1997–98 flu season. That's based on the number of doctor visits for fever plus cough or sore throat, according to CDC data published Jan. 5. The national public health agency estimates that at least 11 million people have had the flu this season, resulting in 120,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths. In Michigan, pediatric hospitals reported an influx in their intensive care units due to children needing ventilator support, said Dr. Natasha Bagdasarian, the state's chief medical executive. Hospital capacity is "getting a little tight," she said. Statewide, adult and pediatric hospitalizations from the flu are up 40% compared with the same time last year, according to Ryan Malosh, director of the division of immunization for the state Department of Health and Human Services. Public health officials say a new mutation of influenza, called subclade K, is driving much of this year's illness. *—Mary Jackson*

Wyoming The state Supreme Court in January struck down two pro-life laws when four of the five justices concluded they violated the state's constitution. In its majority opinion, the court wrote that women have a fundamental right to make their own health-care decisions, including the choice to kill their unborn babies. One of the laws would have protected all babies from abortion except in cases of rape, incest, or to save the life of the mother. The other measure was the first bill in the United States to make it illegal to prescribe, dispense, or use abortion drugs. Lawmakers passed both laws in 2023, and pro-abortion groups quickly filed suit. The state Supreme Court's decision upholds an earlier ruling by a state district judge. Republican Gov. Mark Gordon urged state legislators to introduce a pro-life constitutional amendment for voters to consider later this year. A judge last year temporarily blocked two other pro-life laws that would have required abortion facilities to be licensed as ambulatory surgical centers and required women to have an ultrasound at least 48 hours before obtaining abortion pills. *—Lauren Canterberry*

Rhode Island On Jan. 7, a federal judge granted the state's request to join a lawsuit seeking to block federal efforts to stop work on a nearly complete offshore wind farm. Neighboring Connecticut also joined the legal fight. The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) ordered Revolution Wind's developer, Orsted, to immediately stop construction Aug. 22, even though the agency approved the 65-turbine project in 2023. It is 80% complete and is designed to have enough capacity to power 350,000 homes when finished. The state attorneys general and the developer sued the federal government separately, alleging the order violated federal laws and procedures. The judge ruled in September that construction could continue while the developer lawsuit proceeds, but BOEM issued a second 90-day stop-work order Dec. 22 that also affects four other offshore wind-turbine projects, citing national security concerns. The combined lawsuit will be heard in the Federal District Court of Washington, D.C. *—Todd Vician*

POPULATION
1.1 million

GOVERNOR
Dan McKee[D]

U.S. SENATORS
Jack Reed[D], Sheldon Whitehouse[D]

INDUSTRY
Fishing, food and beverage, life sciences



FLU: GRACE CARY/GETTY IMAGES; TURBINE: SETH WENIG/AP

BACKGROUNDER

Why are Thailand and Cambodia fighting?

by ANTONIO GRACEFFO



Cambodian soldiers watch as a peacekeeping team implements a ceasefire agreement following a skirmish with Thai forces in August.

On Dec. 27, defense ministers from Cambodia and Thailand signed a ceasefire deal to end months of fighting. Two days later, the countries' foreign ministers met in China for talks to end the century-long conflict. The most recent crisis began in May when a Cambodian soldier died following a skirmish. That prompted both countries to impose trade restrictions and reinforce troop deployments. Fighting intensified again in July and escalated in early December. Since then, at least 48 people, including both troops and civilians, have been killed, although official accounts vary. More than 500,000 civilians have been displaced, leading to the expansion of refugee camps and the closure of schools, hospitals, and other critical infrastructure.

What started the dispute? The conflict between Thailand and Cambodia stems from a long-standing territorial dispute rooted in colonial-era border mapping along their roughly 500-mile frontier. The dispute originated in a 1907 colonial map drawn when Cambodia was a French protectorate and Thailand, then Siam, remained independent. In defining the boundary, French cartographers introduced ambiguities that remain flash points for repeated border clashes.

What kind of ambiguities? The most sensitive points involve disputed temple sites, particularly the Preah Vihear area and the Temple of Ta Muen Thom. In 1962, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that the Preah Vihear temple belonged to Cambodia but left the surrounding land undefined.

What happened during Cambodia's civil war? After the 1962 ruling, the formal border dispute faded from view as Cambodia descended into civil war in the late 1960s and 1970s, culminating in the brutal Khmer Rouge regime that killed roughly a quarter of the country's population. From 1975 to 1989, the frontier became a lawless zone of guerrilla activity after Khmer Rouge forces fled toward the Thai border following Vietnam's 1979 invasion of Cambodia.

Throughout the 1980s, Vietnamese troops repeatedly crossed into Thai territory while pursuing Khmer Rouge fighters, triggering frequent clashes with Thai forces that included artillery exchanges, tank battles, and Thai airstrikes. By 1981, more than 250,000 Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees lived in camps along the border. Relative calm returned only after Vietnam's withdrawal in 1989 and the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in 1991.

How did things get so heated again? The dispute resurfaced in 2008 when Cambodia sought UNESCO World Heritage status for the 11th-century Preah Vihear temple without Thai consent. That ignited intense nationalist backlash in Thailand, where opposition politicians and nationalist groups accused the government of betraying national interests. The controversy contributed to the fall of Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej's government and strengthened the influence of Thailand's military and ultraroyalist factions, who framed border defense as central to national sovereignty. Military clashes followed, killing dozens and displacing thousands.

A 2011 ICJ clarification reaffirmed Cambodian ownership of the temple but again failed to resolve adjacent territorial claims, enabling both governments to justify continued military deployments. Since then, nationalist sentiment on both sides has made compromise politically toxic, with sporadic clashes killing soldiers and civilians in recurring cycles of escalation. ■

WISSARUT WEERASOPON/ZUMA PRESS WIRE/ALAMY

A Miraculous Experience

What if you were saved from a fatal accident by an angel and as part of that miracle you were given a sight beyond eyes that allowed you to see whether the souls of others went to heaven or hell?

"a fascinating premise for a novel".

Marvin Olasky, SENIOR EDITOR, *Christianity Today*



"I found the book to be intriguing, easy to read, and hard to put down. It should spark the reader to consider their relationship with Jesus Christ."

Phyllis Russell, CO-FOUNDER of the Amy Foundation

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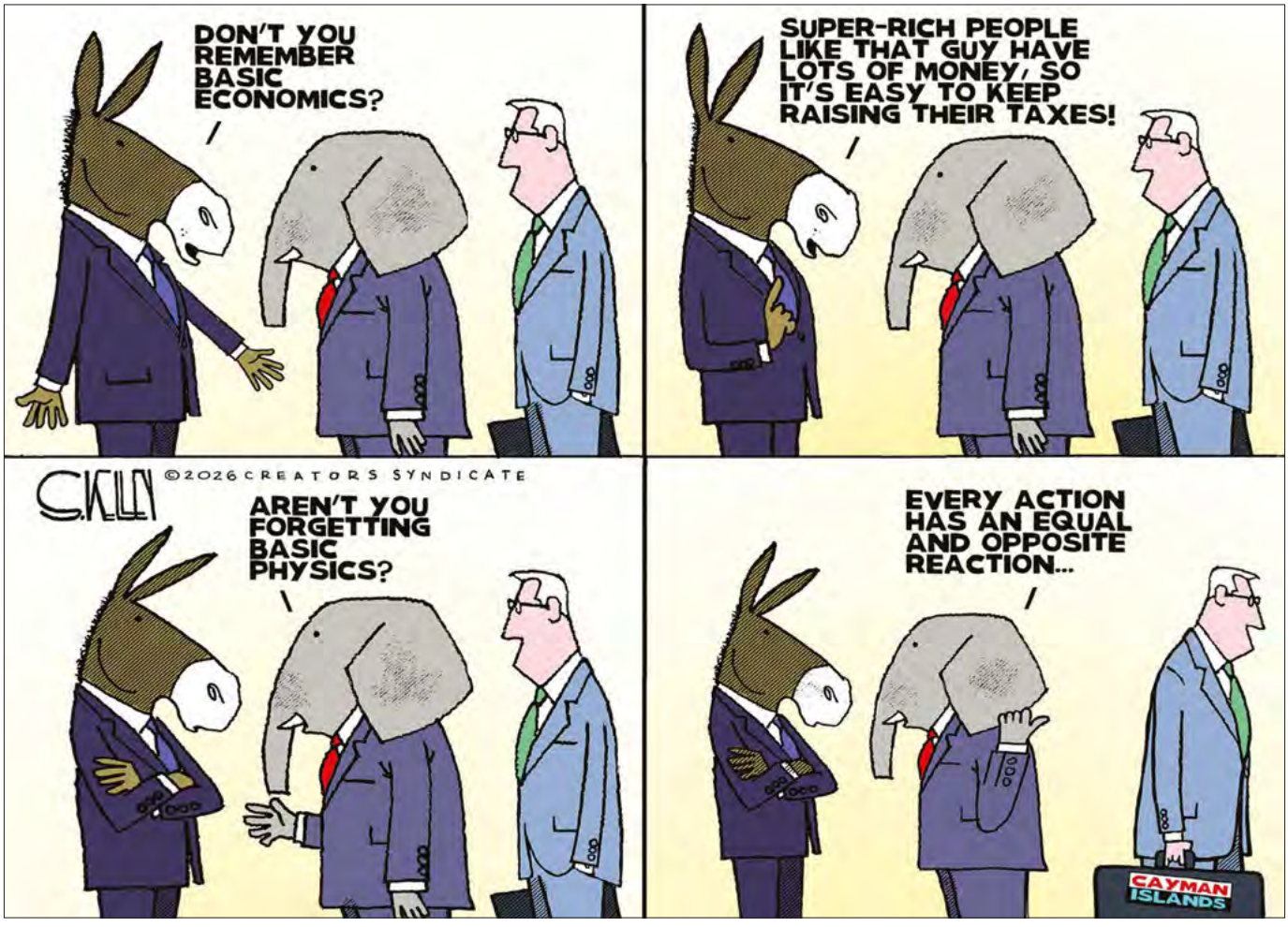
Encourage your local librarian to add
Sight Beyond Eyes to their collection.

"It was the chillest dog I've ever seen in my life."

STEVE HOWARD, deputy chief of Rhode Island's Misquamicut Fire Department, describing a yellow labrador who needed rescuing Jan. 1 after falling through thin ice into a pond.



MISQUAMICUT FIRE DEPARTMENT VIA AP



“You might as well wear your slippers in the office as you’re not getting to wear them at home.”

NICK BLOOM , a Stanford economist who studies work culture, on the new Silicon Valley trend of “no shoes” workplaces. He says the phenomenon is consistent with 996 culture (in which employees work 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. six days a week).*

“When I see a good-looking tuna, I cannot resist.”

Japanese sushi magnate KIYOSHI KIMURA after paying a record $3.2 million for a 535-pound bluefin tuna at the first auction of the year at Tokyo’s Toyosu fish market.

“You have to be a little flexible on Hyde, you know that.”

President DONALD TRUMP to Republican lawmakers during a Jan. 6 meeting to discuss upcoming healthcare policy negotiations. The Hyde Amendment bans using public dollars to pay for abortions, something Democrats support.**

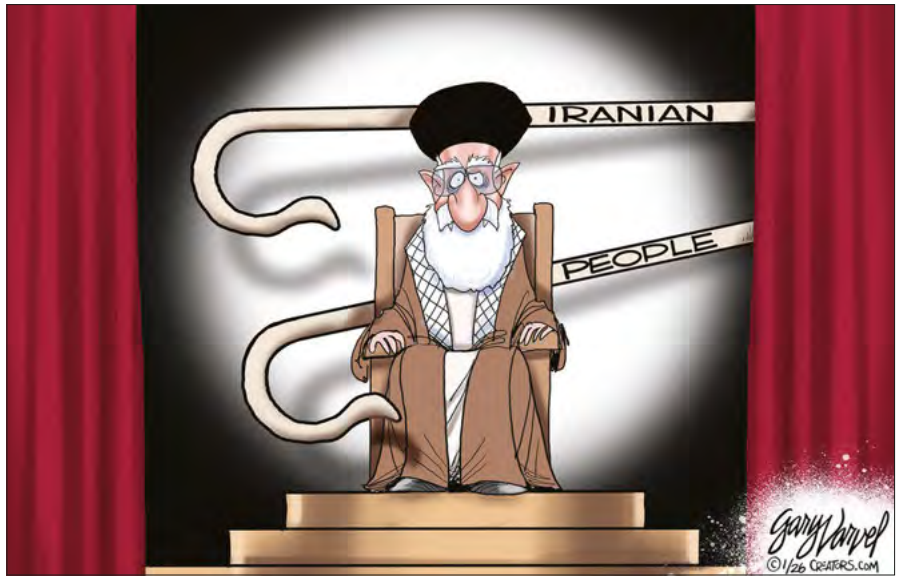
“We’re all still trying to figure out exactly what it means.”

Editors of a popular college survey of overused words and phrases about the phrase “6-7” that took over the tween vernacular in 2025.

*The New York Times; **Politico









QUICK TAKES

Lobster loot

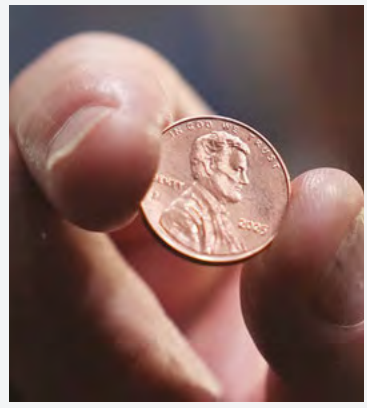
Thieves orchestrate elaborate cargo heist that leaves Costco seafood shelves empty

by JOHN DAWSON

Seafood swindlers struck again at a Massachusetts warehouse in December. An official with freight handler Rexing Companies reported the theft of $400,000 in lobster meat after a sophisticated heist from a warehouse in Taunton. Company president Dylan Rexing acknowledged the theft in a Dec. 28 statement saying the lobster meat had been bound for Costco stores in the Midwest. Rexing said thieves stole a load of crab meat from the same facility earlier in the month. The shipper told *The Boston Globe* that the crime was accomplished through identity theft. "It followed a pattern we're seeing more and more, where criminals impersonate legitimate carriers using spoofed emails and burner phones to hijack high-value freight while it's in transit," Rexing's email said. The rise of organized cargo theft has drawn the attention of the FBI, which is investigating the incident. Shipping firm IMC Logistics in September published a white paper detailing the rise of cargo thefts. "Every week we're seeing people doing this," an IMC executive told the *San Bernardino Sun*. "They steal license plates and put them on trucks, then they talk to customers like they're legitimate."

Sleight of hand

A Thai fortuneteller told a 19-year-old girl she was on the brink of bad luck Jan. 1. But the 38-year-old fortuneteller left out the part about how he would cause it. After predicting the girl would lose something valuable, police say, the fortuneteller stole the girl's iPhone 13 Pro. When the girl realized her phone was missing, she returned to the fortuneteller, who audaciously claimed her misplaced phone proved the accuracy of his sooth-saying. A suspicious crowd later found the phone in the fortune-teller's possession, and police arrested him.



Costing a pretty penny

How much is a penny worth? A lot, judging by what bidders were will-ing to pay at a December auction organized by the U.S. Mint. The last three pennies ever made fetched $800,000, or more than a quarter million dollars per penny. The mint, which ended penny production in November, auctioned the last few hundred pennies in three-cent sets and fetched a total of $16.8 million in proceeds. Each three-penny set included a single 24-karat gold penny and featured a unique Omega symbol to mark the end of an era.

ILLUSTRATION BY KRIEG BARRIE; PENNY: MATT SLOCUM/AP



Changing his tune

After drying out, an admittedly drunken thief chose to return a pair of valuable mandolins to a New Jersey musical instrument shop. Owners of Lark Street Music in Teaneck, N.J., said a man wearing a parka stole two mandolins each worth between $3,500 and $4,250 on Dec. 22. But on Dec. 26, store owner Buzzy Levine reported on social media that the thief had reentered the store and quietly returned the mandolins in a shopping bag with a note attached. In the note, the thief said he had made a mistake. "Sorry, I been drunk," the thief wrote. "Merry Christmas. You are good man." Levine said he attempted but failed to chase the man down after he made the return.



Dropping like iguanas

What happens when the Sunshine State doesn't have so much sunshine? A cold snap on New Year's Eve meant that in parts of Florida, it was raining iguanas. On Dec. 31, WINK News meteorologist Matt Devitt posted on social media photographs of cold-stunned iguanas as temperatures near his home in Fort Myers, Fla., dropped to 39 degrees. When temperatures drop into the 40s, the cold-blooded reptile's metabolism begins to slow. As a defense mechanism, the animals stiffen their muscles, cease movement, and have a tendency to fall from trees where they like to perch. Prolonged exposure to temperatures in the 30s can be fatal for the lizards. Thankfully for the iguanas, the temperature reached a daytime high of 70 on Jan. 1, according to AccuWeather.

A shoedunit to solve

The ocean served up a mystery to Welsh beachcombers who began finding 19th-century footwear washed up on shore in southern Wales in December. In a single week, volunteers discovered more than 200 waterlogged hobnailed leather boots in the rock pools of Ogmore by Sea Beach. The quantity of shoes washing up on shore led locals to believe they came from a former shipwreck. And the vintage style pointed to a shipwreck from the Victorian era. One postulated theory holds that the shoes could be from the wreck of an Italian cargo vessel that broke up off the coast about 150 years ago. The ship's storage containers may have recently ruptured, releasing the shoes into the water.



"Sorry, I been drunk. Merry Christmas. You are good man."



Another McLawsuit

By not including rib meat in the McRib, fast-food giant McDonald's perpetuates a fraud against American diners. That's the allegation of a federal class-action lawsuit filed Dec. 23 in the Northern District of Illinois. In the lawsuit, plaintiffs allege that the McRib contains an amalgam of pork shoulder, heart, and tripe. The plaintiffs allege the popular seasonal sandwich does not include rib meat as the name and rib shape imply, leaving the company in violation of consumer protection statutes. A McDonald's spokesperson said the allegations regarding heart and tripe are false and that the sandwiches are made from boneless pork.

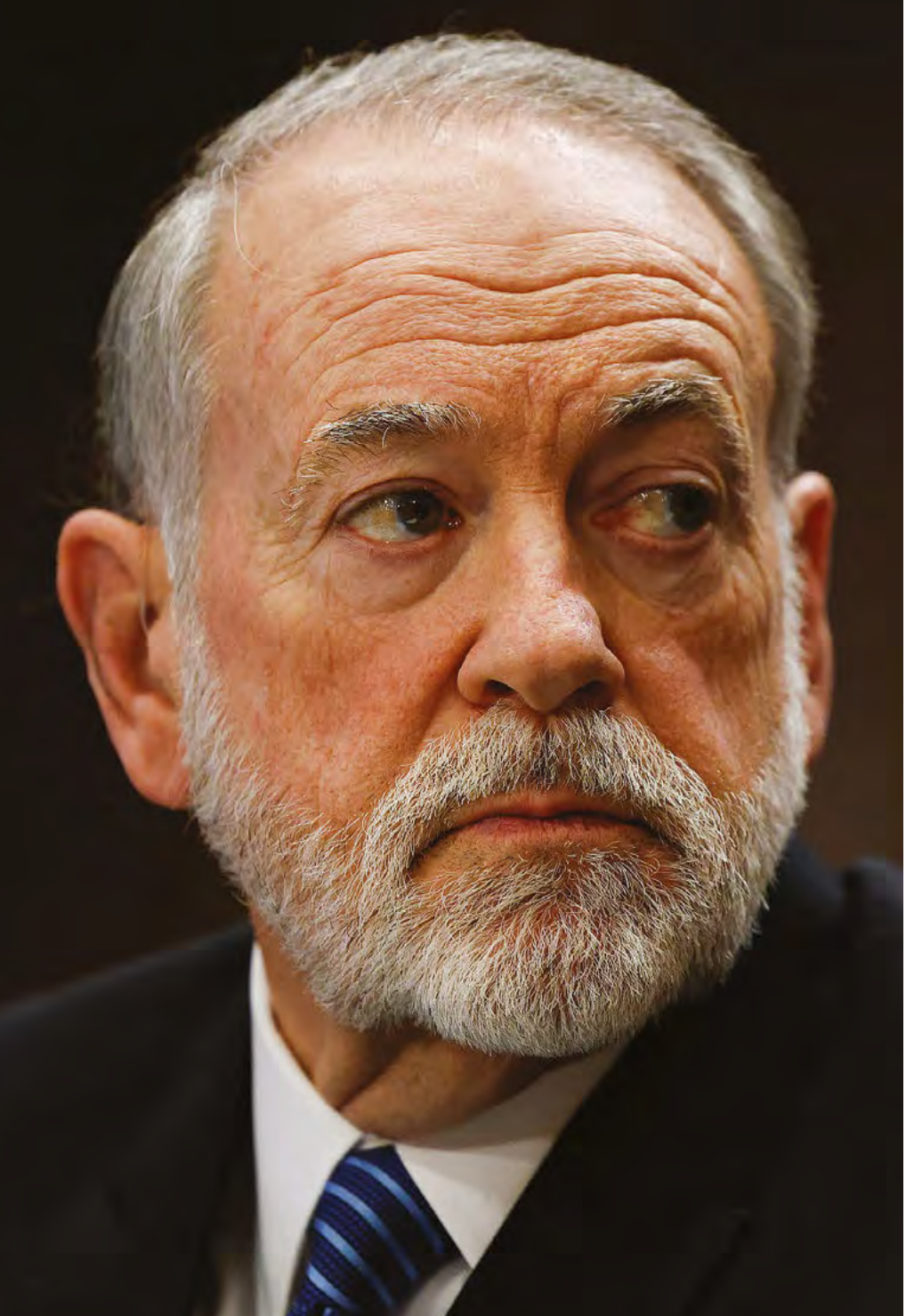
MANDOLINS: BUZZY LEVINE; SHOES: BEACH ACADEMY WALES CIC/FACEBOOK; IGUANA: ILLUSTRATION BY KRIEG BARRIE; MCRIB: MCDONALD'S

THE FORUM

Prospects for peace in the Middle East

Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee says Americans should care about what happens in the Holy Land

by TRAVIS K. KIRCHER



KEVIN DIETSCH/GETTY IMAGES

Mike Huckabee is the former governor of Arkansas and currently serves as the U.S. ambassador to Israel. During the last year, he's had a front-row seat to the war in Gaza, as well as Israel's fight against Iran and terror groups in Lebanon and Syria. President Donald Trump has made peace in the Middle East a top priority, even though many of the president's most vocal supporters question whether America should invest so much time and energy in the region. Huckabee, a former Baptist pastor, says part of his job is to help convince skeptics back home that the U.S.-Israel relationship is vital. With the prospects for peace so close, Huckabee says now is not the time for America to draw back.

THE NEXT PHASE OF THE CEASEFIRE PLAN CALLS FOR A BOARD OF PEACE TO REPLACE HAMAS AS THE RULING AUTHORITY OVER GAZA. WHO SHOULD SERVE ON THIS BOARD?

Anyone on that board is going to be very carefully vetted. President Trump will personally oversee every single person. He will be its first chair. The people who are on the board are going to be those who are committed to creating a different kind of Gaza, one that is not driven by Hamas, or terror, or the mindset that it is OK to slaughter Jewish people. I really believe we're on the brink of something historic in the Middle East. And it wouldn't have happened without President Trump. He's the only person I know who could have gotten every one of the Arab nations to come to Sharm El Sheikh and sign that document saying that they're going to be a part of the future of Gaza, and they're also going to be standing together to ensure that Hamas has no future there, and must disarm.

YOU'VE MENTIONED A HISTORIC FUTURE. WHAT DOES THAT LOOK LIKE?

I think we could see something such as Abraham Accords expansion in 2026. Let me surprise you and tell you I think the next countries to join the accords could even be Syria and Lebanon, something that would have been unthinkable even a year ago. That's just indicative of

the complete realignment that's taking place in the Middle East because of a very different kind of diplomacy that President Trump has employed.

Most everyone who comes into office as president sort of takes whatever has been done and they do the same thing. Even though it doesn't work and never brings peace, every administration, Democrat or Republican, keeps doing it. But President Trump is the ultimate pragmatist. He looks at every decision and wants to know two things: Will it work and will it make things better? And if it won't work, he won't do it. And if it won't make things better, he won't do it. He's less concerned about the horizontal, left and right. Will it be liberal? Will it be conservative? He's interested in the vertical. Will it work? And will it make things better? And if it doesn't, then he throws out the playbook, and he puts something on the table that nobody ever thought of before. And time and time again, what he puts in place of the unworkable becomes the unimaginable that actually works.

PRESIDENT TRUMP AND ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU ARE ALLIES BUT THEY HAVE HAD THEIR DIFFERENCES. DO YOU SEE FRICTION BETWEEN THEM IN THE FUTURE?

If there's any friction between the two of them on a personal level, I just simply don't see it. In fact, I would say that I think their relationship is close enough that it can afford the differences they sometimes have. But these aren't differences of policy. They're not differences that are divisive. My gosh, I've been married 51½ years. My wife and I have some differences too, but we know we can trust each other. We know that we have committed to the relationship. What I see with President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu is the most amazing relationship between two world leaders who like each other personally, who enjoy each other's company, who talk regularly, but they talk honestly. And if there's a disagreement—and surely they have some from time to time—they deal with it respectfully. And they come to a conclusion that they both can live with. That's how good relationships work.

"President Trump is the ultimate pragmatist. He looks at every decision and wants to know two things: Will it work and will it makes things better?"

THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION IN THE PAST HAS EXPRESSED AT LEAST SOME SUPPORT FOR A PALESTINIAN STATE. NETANYAHU HAS ALWAYS INSISTED THAT WOULD BE A DANGER TO ISRAEL'S SECURITY. WHAT'S THE ADMINISTRATION'S CURRENT POSITION?

President Trump has never said that there would be a Palestinian state. And he's never said there wouldn't. In his first term, he made it pretty clear it would have to start with some serious reform in the Palestinian Authority. They're going to have to stop things like paying people who have murdered Jews. That's been an incredibly negative thing that has enriched people who carried out acts of terror, and it made it very difficult to come to a peaceful solution.

Also, Palestinian textbooks teach children from the age of 6 that it is a noble thing to kill a Jewish person, and that carrying out an act of terrorism is not a crime or not something that is evil. It is something that is wonderful and desired, if the person that you murder is a Jew. Well, you can't bring about a peaceful settlement, and you cannot grant a state, as long as that mindset continues to exist. So if there's going to be something like a Palestinian state, it will have to be based on a peaceful view of the future and a respectful view of the right of Israel to live in the homeland that they have had since God said to Abraham: Here's your homeland. This is a place for you. You are the people I've chosen, and I've got a purpose for you.

MANY CHRISTIANS VIEW ISRAEL THROUGH A PROPHETIC LENS. DO YOU BELIEVE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL IN 1948 WAS THE FULFILLMENT OF BIBLICAL PROPHECY? IF SO, DO THE JEWISH PEOPLE IN THE STATE OF ISRAEL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN PROPHECY GOING FORWARD?

You know, I tell people sometimes that when I was 18, I was an absolute expert on prophecy and how the end of the world was all going to happen. And the older I've gotten, the dumber I've become! I do believe that it was a fulfillment of prophecy for Israel to return to the land that God gave them. There's something very incredible about that. Every day, I see the dry bones come to life with the flesh put on them, just like Ezekiel said. I see the desert come to bloom, as the prophet said, literally, seeing the desert bloom with fruits and vegetables, groves and trees that did not exist 52 years ago when I first came. So I believe in Biblical prophecy.

As to when is the end of the world coming? I don't have a clue. Could be tomorrow; could be 2,000 years from now. What I do know is that whenever it comes, I believe I've lined up on the right side. When people ask me, "Are you feeling okay and comfortable over there?" I say, "Yeah, if the worst thing that could ever happen to me should happen, my next move from here would be a local move." So I don't try to predict when the end of the world will be or how it's going to come about, or who's going to instigate it. I simply don't know. But I know that when I say this is the holy land, it is indeed just that. ■

To listen to the full interview, visit wng.org/huckabee



VOICES JANIE B. CHEANEY

Broken bonds

Cutting contact with parents won't heal children's wounds

Grandparenting wasn't supposed to be like this. After years of picnic-packing, zoo-visiting, and birthday-planning, my friend's daughter-in-law decided neither set of grandparents should spend time with the children unless one parent was present. A few months later the young family moved halfway across the country with no plans for holiday get-togethers or summer vacations. Phone calls are no substitute, especially when the little girls are often "too busy" to chat with Grandma.

Our hospice social worker, on the other hand, is resigned to separation from her daughter after the daughter went through a course of counseling that taught her to classify parental discipline as "trauma." No parent is perfect, and there were incidents in which Mom was not entirely sensitive to her daughter's feelings. But growing up in a normal Christian household in the early 2000s is not traumatic.

Another family I know was turned upside down when three of their adult children decided they had been manipulated by their parents and the church they grew up in. These three have cut off all but the most obligatory communication, in spite of Mom and Dad acknowledging some well-meaning errors and apologizing for them. Well-meaning or not, the kids don't feel safe, even though they are married with children of their own.

Have you heard of "going no contact"? The cultural sage known as Oprah delved into this phenomenon in a November podcast featuring three experts in psychology. One of them, Dr. Lindsay Gibson, has done as much as anyone to mainstream "no contact" in her breakout book, *Adult Children of Emotionally Immature Parents: How To Heal From Distant, Rejecting, or Self-Involved Parents* (2015). To strip Gibson's thesis to its starkest terms, the best way for some wounded souls to heal is to become distant, rejecting, or self-involved themselves. At least where their parents are concerned. Her first chapter recounts stories of unhappy Gen Xers and millennials—mostly women, but a few men—who were "not being sufficiently emotionally responded to as a child," which led to their feeling "emotionally lonely," or "emotionally unseen."

Mature parents, Dr. Gibson claims, are always sensitive to their child's feelings, always ready to affirm them, always open to honest conversations, even though "emotional loneliness is a vague and private experience, not easy to see or describe." But that's no excuse: "Some people have called this feeling existential loneliness but there's nothing existential about it. If you feel it, it comes from your family."

Family estrangement is nothing new, and no reasonable counselor denies the need to distance oneself from toxic or abusive parents. But "going no contact" has become symptomatic of modern isolation, with as many as a quarter of young Americans, by some estimates, breaking off from Mom or Dad or both. Dr. Josh Coleman, another member of Oprah's panel, is alarmed at the trend among counselors who serve as "detachment brokers" rather than reconciliation mediators. Normal parenting mistakes are reclassified as abuse; exercising discipline is trauma; insisting on family standards is gaslighting. The solution is to establish "boundaries" or sever bonds altogether. Parents who were never invited into the conversation don't know what hit them.

As with most social trends, Christians are not immune. All three examples cited above happened in conservative homeschooling families. Even some Christian counselors and youth leaders have bought into the toxic-parent trope as justification for separating rather than resolving.

Why? Part of it reflects the atomization of a culture that prizes self-fulfillment and self-care over group loyalty. For organic family, ethnic, or national bonds we've substituted "communities" of like-minded and affirming individuals, which break up when affirmation falls short or minds begin to differ. Millennials raised in Christian homes may also be reacting against the idealization of Christian families as the last best hope of America. They don't want to save America, just themselves.

But idealization of the self will not heal emotional emptiness. Young people determined to forge their own identities forget that we are made and shaped by others as much as by individual personality traits. It's only by seeing ourselves reflected in close, sometimes difficult, unions that we understand who we truly are. God, a relationship in Himself, means to shape us in relationship, beginning with our mother's arms and father's voice. "Honor your father and mother" is a weighty command. To break that bond for self-centered reasons makes us weightless. ■

Email jcheaney@wng.org **X** @jbcheaney

2026 UK TOUR

EXPERIENCE C.S. LEWIS

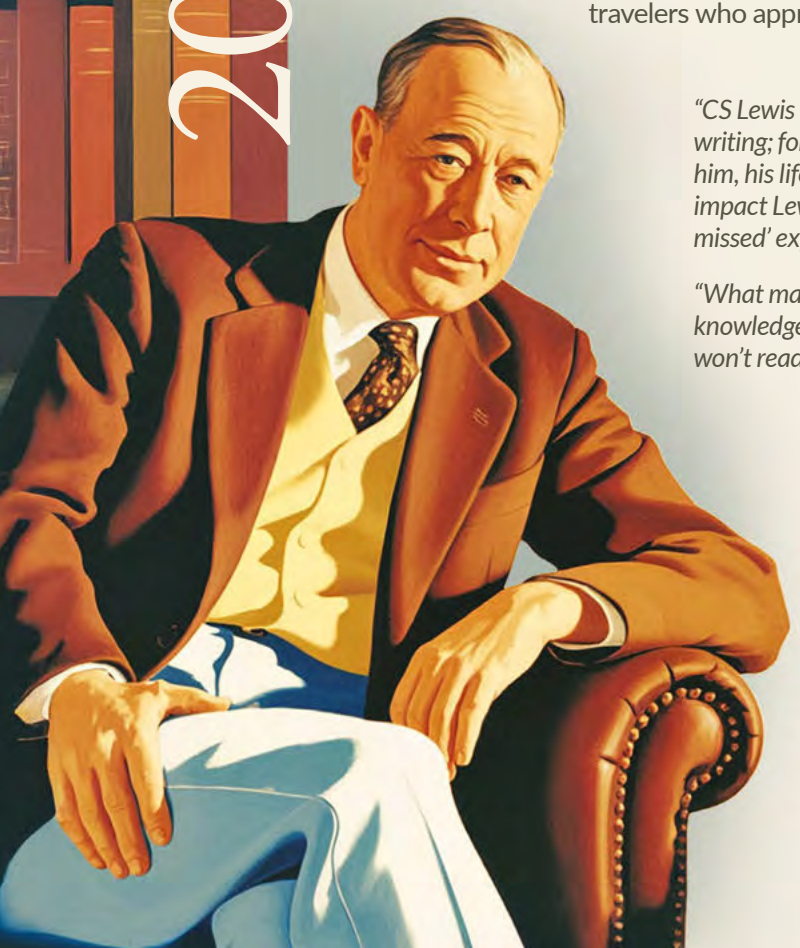
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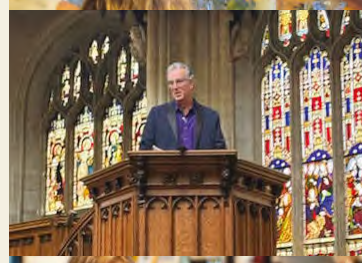


















CULTURE



ILLUSTRATION BY DANIEL DIOSDADO



TRENDING

Searching for something real

Younger travelers prioritize experiences over traditional sightseeing

by WILLIAM FLEESON

When making travel plans, Eric Kim prioritizes "authentic" experiences. For the 35-year-old Washington, D.C.–based public administrator, that boils down to one thing: real local food.

While seeking out singular meals, as he did on a trip to Germany in 2019, Kim asked two overarching questions: "What did people grow up on? What did their grandmother cook when they were sick?"

Kim is part of a trend among Gen-Z and millennial travelers that's shaking up the tourism industry. Younger people are not taking the kind of trips that appealed to their parents—cruises or package tours. Instead, they're looking for something more "authentic."

According to a July report from the travel consultancy Skift, travelers under 45 are after "personal enrichment and meaningful experiences," versus checklist-style, in-and-out sightseeing. That quest for the genuine essence of a place is creating a clash between locals and voyeuristic travelers looking for a window into their daily lives.

While the search for authentic travel is not new, recent developments suggest the trend is barreling forward in 2026. The homeshare mega-platform Airbnb recently announced plans to supersize its offerings of experiences, in addition to the room and home listings that are the California company's bread and butter.

The new project, called Airbnb Services, intends to roll out 22,000 options to see and do more, worldwide. Each one is meant to help a visitor get closer to real local flavor.

Airbnb says its services are one-of-a-kind opportunities, like learning about Notre Dame Cathedral from a Parisian architect, or training with a real *luchador* (wrestler) in Mexico City.

"The most authentic way to explore a city is with the locals who know it best," asserts Brian Chesky, Airbnb's co-founder and CEO. The company's relentless online advertising is anything but subtle: "Don't just see a place. Experience it," Airbnb urges. Two-thirds of the company's customers are 40 or younger, according to iGMS, a travel data consulting agency.

For federal worker Elizabeth Bettis, 35, curiosity about what defines a place can even trump personal taste. On a trip to Japan in 2023, she visited a workshop to see how traditional matcha tea is made—and what it means to many Japanese.

"I don't like matcha at all," Bettis admitted. "But it was important for me to experience something that is theirs, and unique." →

Yet the desire to observe a culture firsthand can lead to excess. The problem of "overtourism," where masses of visitors overwhelm the local ability to accommodate them, has led to public bitterness from Amsterdam and Venice to the Indonesian island of Bali.

Amid these trends, cries of "Tourists, go home!" are growing. The "Airbnb effect," converting homes into short-term rentals, has squeezed housing markets and raised real estate costs. Locals in Spain have used demonstrations, and water guns, to discourage current and future travelers.

Similarly, the "Instagram effect" can bring a crush of social media influencers to already-popular places, drawing crowds that are known for "selfie tourism" and bad behavior. Overtourism has even given rise to another social media trend: an "expectations versus reality" beat, where social media figures—often disappointed travelers with a bone to pick—expose the grit behind the glamour. The risk of disappointment at over-hyped destinations only feeds the interest in supposedly "real" travel experiences.

And the search for truer travel doesn't always deliver. Bali featured in the self-help story from *Eat, Pray, Love*, in which writer Elizabeth Gilbert recounts a year of postdivorce, feminist-tinged inner exploration during a trip to Europe and Asia.

Published in 2006, Gilbert's memoir set the island reeling and sparked a broader cultural debate on the negative effects of popularizing a sleepy tropical paradise—and on misleading women who idolized Gilbert, her cult book turned mediocre movie, and the fantasies she was chasing. Gilbert's ongoing relational dysfunction suggests her trip didn't deliver the true, lasting connections she promised.

But that doesn't mean quests for real experience are generally fruitless. Vacationers seeking serious connection, minus the problems of overtourism, are looking beyond standard choices like London, Paris, or New York City. Travel media are exploring a phenomenon they call "go here, not there," for worthwhile trips to less-visited destinations. (Think Toronto instead of New York, or Theodore Roosevelt National Park instead of Yellowstone.)



The sun sets over the Little Missouri River, seen from the Wind Canyon Overlook at Teddy Roosevelt National Park.

"It was important for me to experience something that is theirs, and unique."

The same trend also goes by the label "destination dupes," when a place resembles a more famous attraction, without the pressures or the high prices. That helps spread travel dollars around—creating awareness and instilling a new appreciation for underrated places in the process.

Travelers like Bettis stress that, on the list of good reasons to venture abroad, coming home ranks near the top. One's family, friends, and local community provide better and more genuine connections than the trip of a lifetime.

Travel "gives me a deeper sense of gratitude and love for my own home," Bettis said. "The world is cool. But I wouldn't trade my home for the world." ■

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Cover art for *Puck* magazine, 1904

BOOKS

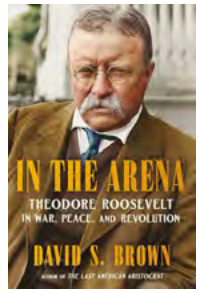
King Teddy

The life and contradictions of an American president

by TYLER HUMMEL

I must admit to feeling some reservation as I began David S. Brown's biography *In the Arena: Theodore Roosevelt in War, Peace, and Revolution* (Scribner, 496 pp.). Perhaps it's the times we live in, but I was waiting for the book to reveal an ulterior motive or agenda. Lately works of history seem to emerge from either passion or polemics, meaning the reader ends up with a paean or political propaganda.

But the shoe never dropped. Brown's new weighty tome on the president we call "Teddy" is curious, then, as a book that avoids extremes. It neither succumbs to adoration for its subject nor attempts to destroy him, offering instead a clear-eyed, comprehensive, fast-paced, and unromantic depiction of one of America's greatest and most important presidents, without necessarily calling him great.



In the Arena
DAVID S. BROWN

Teddy Roosevelt is certainly hard to categorize in modern terms, being both a boisterously masculine figure and a progressive Republican. We find in him the swagger, integrity, ruggedness, and pride that John Wayne would later embody on the screen. Roosevelt was an avatar representing all that is good and bad about our country—the self-sufficient and the fully realized American man.

Brown is clearly fascinated by this great man without being swept up in Roosevelt's hype. He attempts to view the president with an unflinching objectivity, only occasionally jumping out of the narrative to highlight a modern person's perspective, for example, calling out eccentric aristocratic practices and social Darwinists for their implicit racism.

He certainly isn't afraid to take shots at Teddy, calling much of the president's eccentric mannerisms pretend. Brown also dresses down Roosevelt's racist and imperialist statements, airs his dirty laundry, and undermines the narratives he claimed about himself and his nation. To his credit, Brown's criticism isn't partisan, as he levels the same accusations against rival politicians like Woodrow Wilson. He's a fair critic, also highlighting their genuine accomplishments as accomplishments. Even the book's brief digression on Trump merely highlights that Teddy shares a great deal in common with the sitting president.

Despite its hefty length, *In the Arena*'s brisk, digestible chapters make it a propulsive read, efficiently capturing the major events of Roosevelt's life with enough detail. We learn how a sickly aristocratic child, with a love of taxidermy and classic literature, could grow into a successful politician, author, war hero, and cattle rancher.

ARTWORK BY UDO J. KEPPLER/JT VINTAGE/GLASSHOUSE VIA ZUMA WIRE/ALAMY

Brown is clearly fascinated by this great man without being swept up in Roosevelt's hype.

Granted, the image Brown paints of Roosevelt isn't flattering. He was clearly a complex man, intelligent but disdainful of intellectualism, prejudiced but scornful of outright bigots, ambitious to the point of restlessness, opportunistic, jingoistic, egotistical, wealthy, and warmongering. Roosevelt believed in his own self-promotion as much as he believed in America's greatness. He saw himself as a philosopher king and demanded the right to centralize power around his presidency. Once he left office, he spent his dying days railing in op-eds against his enemies, unable to find peace.

Roosevelt's great accomplishment was guiding the fledgling American Republic to become an imperial power that could compete with the great nations of Europe. He legitimized America, fought against domestic corruption, and succeeded at balancing America's ancient Hamiltonian and Jeffersonian tensions in the manner of a good king.

I enjoy a little bit of romance and mythology in my history, so Brown's work comes off a bit dry for my taste. But the book is sober and fair. *In the Arena* is filled with asides, historical tidbits, and pinpricks of harsh criticism that will whet the appetite of readers who love long historical tomes. Brown captures the contradictions of a man like Roosevelt, who, as much as any man can, lived a remarkable life and achieved every ounce of glory that can be achieved in this world alone. ■

BOOKS

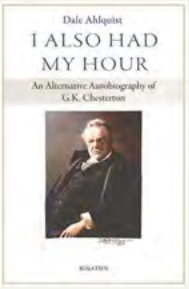
The humility of wisdom

G.K. Chesterton in his own words

by CALEB NELSON

Can you get a sense of a man by stringing together excerpts from disparate writings? That's the goal of Dale Ahlquist's *I Also Had My Hour: An Alternative Autobiography of G.K. Chesterton* (Ignatius Press, 480 pp.). Compiled with painstaking labor, the quotes range in length from a single sentence to three pages. Strung together into a more-or-less continuous narrative, sentences written decades apart live harmoniously in the same paragraph.

The person whose soul emerges from the patchwork shares humble wisdom. He's the kind of man who says, "I should never dream of defending my books," but also says, "I shall always take every opportunity of defending my opinions." Consider the testimony of Dorothy L. Sayers, who heard him speak in 1914: "His books ought to be read as he speaks—rather slowly, and delivering the paradoxical statements tentatively. His speaking has none of that aggressive and dogmatic quality which his writings are apt to assume when read aloud."



I Also Had My Hour
DALE AHLQUIST

He's also the kind of man who fought "for certain civilized certitudes." The family is one of those certitudes: "I believe in monogamy as the one complete adventure of man." "I believe that one of the most vital, one of the most honourable and let me add, one of the most difficult callings on earth is that of playing with children."

Non-journalists may be surprised by Chesterton's diagnosis of the worst sin of journalists: "Not saying one's own opinions is the temptation, and therefore the treason, of my trade." The worst kind of journalist is the kind who won't tell you what he really thinks.

For readers who already know GKC's books, the most fascinating part of Ahlquist's work will be the selection of testimonials from Chesterton's contemporaries. Take this one, from Maurice Reckitt, who served on a magazine board with him: "Chesterton was in everything a little more than you had hoped he could be, and those who had hoped the most were perhaps the least disappointed." David Magee, rare-book dealer: "He resembled nothing so much as a vast unmade bed."

This book is fabulous as only Chesterton can be. Every word from his pen is soaked in the fear of the Lord. He comments, "Big newspapers do not ask for theology from theologians who possess it, but from popular novelists who have none." But here is a newspaper columnist and popular novelist who possesses theology—and preaches it with unhindered boldness.

BOOKS

Just another animal?

A flawed attack on human exceptionalism

by WESLEY J. SMITH



I hate to say this about the work of a fellow author, but *The Arrogant Ape* (Avery, 336 pp.) is one of the most shallow and impractical books I have ever read.

It is not that the author, Christine Webb, can't write. And it's not that she did not put much research into her many stories of striking animal behaviors. But her thoughts about what she calls the "myth of human exceptionalism" are mostly mere assertions, such as that Darwinian theory entails her position and the acceptance of human exceptionalism has caused an ecological crisis.

But human exceptionalism is no myth. The term conveys two symbiotically related concepts: First, that our lives are of unique equal intrinsic moral value, sometimes called the sanctity of life. And second, that humans—as the world's only truly moral beings—have positive duties, the violation against which we can be held to account. After all, an elephant that tramples a farmer's crops has not acted immorally. But humans engaging in the same destruction have. Indeed, if being human—in and of itself—is not what requires us to act properly and humanely toward each other and the natural world, what does?

Absurdly, Webb argues against an "interspecies model of prejudice." More bizarrely, she claims that "reducing the status divide between humans and other animals can help combat discrimination ... against members of the LGBTQ, Black, and immigrant communities."

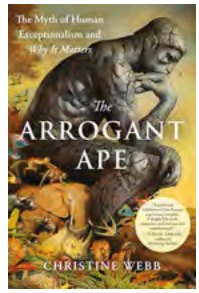
This is backward. Discrimination against fellow humans is wrong because it treats *inherent equals as if they were unequal*. Animals are *not* our equals, and while they should be treated humanely, we are not morally obliged to act toward them as we do each other.

Here's a thought experiment: Is there a difference between accidentally killing a squirrel with your car versus a child? If you think the former is regrettable road kill and the other a terrible tragedy, you are a human exceptionalist.

Ultimately, Webb seeks to undermine what she denigrates as "orthodox Christian arrogance toward nature." She throws in a chapter about how we need to apply "indigenous cosmologies" of a spirit-animated natural world to our public policies that would explicitly replace the Judeo-Christian worldview with "animistic" paganism, a belief system she calls "post humanism."

Anti-humanism is more like it. She doesn't grapple with how the radical policies she advocates, such as "degrowth," would deleteriously impact human thriving. That lapse reduces the book to a mere mystical rant.

That's the core failing of *The Arrogant Ape*. Rejecting human exceptionalism comes at tremendous cost. Because if we ever come to define ourselves as just another animal in the forest, that is precisely how we will act. ■



The Arrogant Ape
CHRISTINE WEBB

VASYL HELEVACHUK/GETTY IMAGES



Julie Klassen

BOOKS

Doctors, dowagers, danger

A cozy mystery with a Christian character

by BEKAH BERNHARDT

At the ripe old age of 27, Anne Loveday faces marriage to a much older man. She would prefer to practice medicine like her father, but society frowns upon such an unladylike profession. This is the setup for Julie Klassen's Christian mystery novel *Whispers at Painswick Court* (Bethany House, 368 pp.).

To avoid the tragic fate of "marriage, babies, and death," Anne accepts an invitation to stay with Miss Lotty, a family friend who lives near Painswick Court, the site of many of Anne's childhood memories.

Upon her arrival, the town's doctor asks her to serve as a nurse to Lady Celia Fitzjohn, a crotchety old widow who allegedly prevented a marriage between her nephew and Anne's sister.



Whispers at Painswick Court
JULIE KLASSEN

Despite her longstanding grudge, Anne agrees to stay at Painswick Court and look after Lady Celia. Anna isn't the only person who has a bone to pick with the old woman. As Anne becomes reacquainted with the family and staff of Painswick, she realizes someone is trying to murder the elderly invalid. Motives abound.

For Anne, the stakes are especially high: It wouldn't be the first time someone died in her care. And on top of everything else, the ghost of King Charles I supposedly haunts the house.

During her stay, Anne catches the eye of the town's new doctor, though she suspects she's not the only woman he aims to woo. Anne eventually learns she had misjudged several people. She even comes to recognize the value of marriage and motherhood.

The book isn't preachy or, despite plenty of romantic interludes, sensual. Although (mild spoiler), one character does have a child out of wedlock, and that same character nearly gets exploited by a man of low morals.

Anne utters a few prayers throughout her adventure, but there isn't much that defines the book as belonging in the category of Christian fiction.

"The hope is," author Julie Klassen told me, "That some people will pick up my books and read them because it's a mystery, and who aren't necessarily looking for that faith element."

The book's mystery element probably won't blow your mind. But Klassen took pains to think through each detail. Anyone who remembers reading Nancy Drew books or American Girl mysteries with fond nostalgia will probably enjoy *Whispers at Painswick Court*.

This book is more "mature" but not in the negative sense of the word. Reading mysteries can be an uncomfortable experience when they're laced with foul language and sexual innuendo. True to its genre, *Whispers at Painswick Court* has no language and no graphic elements to the romance, leaving readers with a cozy mystery that remains pleasant from start to finish. ■

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Christian life and living well

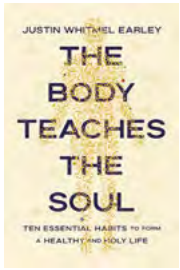
CHRISTIAN LIVING

The Body Teaches the Soul

JUSTIN WHITMEL EARLEY

ZONDERVAN, 272 PAGES

Evangelicalism has long been criticized for its lack of a robust theology of the body. For those looking for a more "embodied" faith, entering into Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy is often seen as the only way to satisfy a longing for an approach to Christianity



that sees the body itself as a central vehicle for religious practice, but in his compelling and helpful new book, Earley explains from a Protestant perspective that our bodies have much to say about our walk with God. Earley contends we must see Christianity as a "habit project" that shapes our routines rather than merely a "head project" focused on having all of our theological ducks in a row. He focuses on breathing, mental health, food, rest, sickness, exercise, sex, technology, worship, and death as central to "practicing your way out" of the malaise of modern life. He desires for Christians to see each of these things as helping them fulfill their responsibilities as image bearers of God, loving Him and our neighbor. In each chapter, he suggests both a physical and spiritual discipline one can implement to give each area its due attention. Earley admirably integrates expert insights about what is good for the body with the timeless wisdom of Scripture. Rather than simply showing how the Bible confirms the insights of secular perspectives, he shows how the Word of God has always testified to our need to regulate bodily rhythms. Because God's plan of salvation included the assumption of human flesh, it follows that Christian discipleship should focus on the interrelation of body and soul. Skeptics might identify Earley's proposals as over-sacralizing the mundane because, with our emphasis upon the supremacy of Scripture, it can be jarring to consider anything that suggests our bodies have lessons of their own to teach us. But since Christ sought to redeem our humanity by taking a body of His own, we should imitate Him by prizing it as much as He did. *—Flynn Evans*

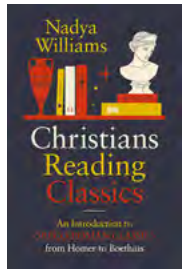
CLASSICAL STUDIES

Christians Reading Classics

NADYA WILLIAMS

ZONDERVAN ACADEMIC, 320 PAGES

This appealing and ambitious book argues that faithful Christians ought to read, study, and enjoy the great literature of classical and early-Christian antiquity. And yet a sea of troubles besets this claim even as it proves the urgency of Williams' message. A first trouble: American society has become increasingly postliterate. Saturated in the spectacles of new media, fewer and fewer submit their minds to the quiet discipline of reading.



A second trouble: Despite the Reformers' encouraging a mastery of the classics as both humanizing and a model for good Latin composition, modern Protestants have all but abandoned this recommendation of their forebears. Williams counters these troubles in a series of short chapters, offering insightful and easy introductions to roughly 30 ancient authors. In each chapter, she shows how classic works can help us, here and now, to receive the gospel, just as the classical world prepared our ancestors to accept the revelation of Christ. She helps us draw nearer to those early Christians by deepening our understanding of the world that shaped them. And she shows how Homer and other great authors provide us with imaginative models for "character formation." Williams brings a Christian's understanding to these texts, appreciating their intrinsic qualities, while also highlighting the ways they anticipate the gospel and the ways the gospel itself fulfills and infinitely transcends them. *—James Matthew Wilson**

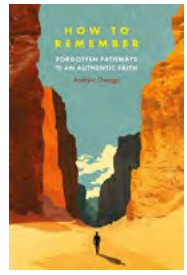
CHRISTIAN LIVING

How To Remember

ANDREW OSENGA

MOODY PUBLISHERS, 224 PAGES

Songwriter and musician Andrew Osenga invites readers to ponder the ways the American church has cut itself off from its historic roots and created a culture of consumerism that "unwittingly filtered out the parts that were too challenging, too boring, or too controversial to pass along as product."



Through a series of short essays, Osenga builds a case for a return to the forgotten songs, prayers, and practices that for centuries guided and equipped the church. He devotes about half of the book to an assessment of the important role of song, noting "that what we sing about God, and what we don't, shapes us like a river carving a landscape." The second half of the book persuasively advocates liturgy, confession, creeds, quiet, and even intergenerational connections. Osenga writes from the humble perspective of a fellow wanderer who, like the rest of Christ's followers, is still working out his own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). The 38 chapters offer much to ponder, making it the kind of book best savored over a span of days rather than absorbed in one sitting. *—Kristin Chapman* →

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

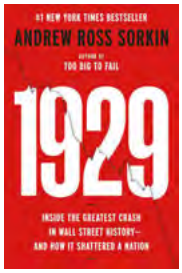
ECONOMIC HISTORY

1929

ANDREW ROSS SORKIN

VIKING, 592 PAGES

This book retells the story of the Great Crash with color and urgency. Drawing on fresh sources, including unpublished Federal Reserve minutes and a Wall Street insider's memoir, Sorkin recreates the drama through vivid portraits of financiers such as Charles Mitchell of National City Bank and Thomas Lamont of J.P. Morgan. The book excels at narrative: Scenes unfold like plays, from Mitchell's desperate pledge to borrow $12 million to prop up his own stock, to Groucho Marx's wry disbelief at prices soaring without dividends. Sorkin frames the crash as a story of hubris, credit, and the intoxicating optimism of the 1920s.



He writes that "optimism becomes a drug, or a religion, or some combination of both" as debt draws "the wealth of tomorrow into the present." These passages capture the frenzy but risk turning economics into mere parable. His portraits of Mellon, Coolidge, and Hoover are brisk, at times shallow, and his habit of comparing 1929 to modern crises introduces a whiff of revisionism. For conservative readers, the book's strength is its attention to individuals and choices rather than broad ideological condemnation. Its weakness is the pull toward allegory. Engaging, vivid, but nowhere near the final word. *—John Mac Ghlionn**

LITERARY CRITICISM

The Way of Dante

RICHARD HUGHES GIBSON

IVP ACADEMIC, 248 PAGES

Dante Alighieri belongs to that rare class of authors whose profundity survives all attempts to rationalize or destroy it. His timelessness is made more potent by the depth and potency of his medieval religious philosophy. This view was very much the case for the Inklings, the famous group of 20th-century intellectual Christians who formed C.S. Lewis' Oxford social group. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Inklings associate Dorothy L. Sayers all had their own respective journeys discovering Dante at different points in their lives and slowly recognizing the heights of his poetic skill. Sayers, in particular, would dedicate the final decade of her life to translating and lecturing on Dante. Lewis, Williams, and Sayers all wrote a great deal on Dante, but much of it is scattered or buried in dense analysis. This book synthesizes three streams of thought by showing the ways that these three friends and colleagues worked together in their analysis. The trio saw that the remarkable heights of Dante came from his ability to paint an image that pointed directly to God, reaching "altitudes no other poem could touch." *—Tyler Hummel**



BRITISH HISTORY

The Rage of Party

GEORGE OWERS

CONSTABLE, 576 PAGES

The so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688 in England has long occupied a pride of place within traditional narratives of liberalism's inevitable rise within the modern West. Its resultant Bill of Rights, Act of Toleration, and establishment of a satisfactorily constitutional monarchy under a greatly empowered Parliament are typically depicted as essential stepping stones toward the flowering of Anglo-American democracy in the late 18th century. What is often left out of such triumphalistic narratives is the rancorous partisan strife that took place. This book restores such factionalism to its rightful place for understanding post-1688 Britain. Owers manages to breathe a great deal of life into the somewhat forgotten years from the start of the reign of William and Mary to the death of Queen Anne in 1714. Whereas Whigs aimed to present themselves as the true, duly Protestant representatives of the revolution, Tories were inclined to maintain a traditional relationship between the crown and the government that managed to avoid the Catholic absolutism modeled by France's Louis XIV. Whigs and Tories tussled with each other to win the affections of the given monarch to advance their own interests. Peppered throughout an otherwise political chronicling of events are vibrant personal portraits and scintillating anecdotes concerning its large cast of historical actors. *—Flynn Evans**



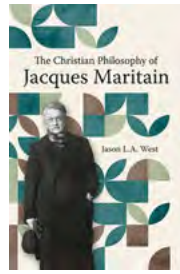
RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY

The Christian Philosophy of Jacques Maritain

JASON L.A. WEST

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA PRESS, 344 PAGES

Jacques Maritain stands among the half-dozen 20th-century philosophers whose name will be recognizable beyond the university classroom. The story of his conversion from the brink of nihilism and suicide to a spirited and intellectually vital Catholicism, as well as the great revival of the faith he helped to stir among artists and thinkers alike, has been told many times. His name was the most widely known of the several generations of "neo-Thomist" philosophers who answered modern problems with ancient wisdom. Since his death in 1973, the most substantial books on Maritain have focused on his life rather than his thought. Jason L.A. West's new study, therefore, answers a long-standing need. He gives us not the life, but the essence of his philosophy. This book will serve as the standard reference for Maritain's work for many years to come. West's book is comprehensive, careful, and compelling. *—J.M.W.** ■



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Sharon G. Flake

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Poignant persistence

One middle-grade read and one picture book

by BEKAH BERNHARDT

In the heart of the Jim Crow era, many black people moved to places like Philadelphia in search of opportunities. *Hattie Mae Begins Again* (Knopf Books for Young Readers, 368 pp.) tells the story of one such girl who receives an invitation to attend Miss Abigail's School for Exceptional Young Ladies.

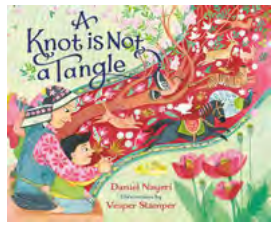
While Hattie Mae looks like the other young women at the school, the spunky Southern farm girl sticks out amid the sea of debutantes-to-be. Eventually, most of the girls develop respect for Hattie Mae's confidence and leadership, but a snooty doctor's daughter continually reminds Hattie Mae she does not belong. "You are all show and pretense," says Lisa. "A charity case. ... It will all come out in the wash. They'll see." But it's Hattie Mae who comes to see that Lisa's facade hides deep hurts. Hattie Mae also observes the other girls' obsession with social status. She, too, becomes enticed by the prospect of appearing in the society pages until she recognizes being part of "the upper crust" isn't as valuable as having opportunities to do good.

This middle-grade book is an easy read since author Sharon G. Flake frames the story in free-flowing, lyrical prose. With an immersive writing style and colorful details, Flake invites readers to see the world through Hattie Mae's eyes.

While the book emphasizes character, working hard, and making your own way in spite of expectations that precede you, it also promotes some slightly wishy-washy morals, such as assuming that a person's greatest asset is his or her commitment to authenticity. Still, the story promotes compassion and forgiveness even in the face of injustice: "Maybe mean people need more love than the rest of us."



Hattie Mae Begins Again
SHARON G. FLAKE



A Knot Is Not a Tangle
DANIEL NAYERI

In *A Knot Is Not a Tangle* (Knopf Books for Young Readers, 48 pp.), a young boy spends weeks making a traditional Persian rug with his grandmother. Hopeful to make the perfect rug, the boy grows frustrated when the process isn't always straightforward. His grandmother reminds him, perfection isn't the goal: "The purpose is to make a precious memory." After all, that's what made their old rug so special.

Author Daniel Nayeri details the process of making the rug, from carding wool that Grandpa sheared to using a hook to knot the spun wool around the warps. Since the story develops along a detailed step-by-step explanation and is paired with Vesper Stamper's rich-toned illustrations, it is reminiscent of Harriet Ziefert's *A New Coat for Anna*.

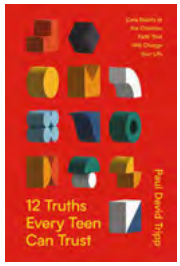
Like many of Nayeri's other books, this picture book includes plenty of bite-sized proverbs. Beautiful things, the grandmother assures the boy, aren't so because they have no flaws. "Nothing in this world is perfect, and nothing should pretend to be," she explains. "Our job is only to make knots out of the tangles." Such wisdom may encourage children who aspire to artistic feats yet struggle with a sense of perfectionism. ■

HANNAH PRICE/SHARONGFLAKE.COM

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Firm foundations

by KRISTIN CHAPMAN

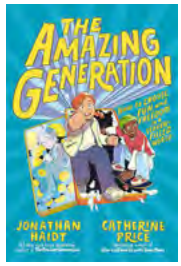


12 Truths Every Teen Can Trust

PAUL DAVID TRIPP

CROSSWAY, 176 PAGES

One of WORLD's honorable mentions for 2025's Books of the Year was *How To Teach Kids Theology*, and Tripp's recent book for teens would pair well with it. This resource, which is rooted in the Westminster Confession of Faith, presents solid theology in accessible terms by focusing on 12 core essentials of the Christian faith. The book is not meant to be read in one sitting, and attempting to do so would limit the reader's ability to adequately ponder and reflect on the subject matter. With seven readings for each doctrine, the book can serve as a 12-week daily devotional that allows for steady digestion of the material. The volume's presentation will resonate with adults, too, making this a valuable tool from which the whole family can benefit. ***Ages 13–18***



The Amazing Generation

JONATHAN HAIDT & CATHERINE PRICE

ROCKY POND, 240 PAGES

This follow-up to *The Anxious Generation*, Haidt's 2024 exposé of the detrimental effects of a phone-based childhood, targets tweens to help them set healthy tech habits and break free from patterns that can hijack their lives. The format is part handbook and part graphic novel with lots of illustrations to keep the intended audience engaged. The overall message of the book is solid and timely, whether the reader has tech devices or not, but at times the book communicates ideas antithetical to a Biblical worldview. One section, for example, encourages readers to consider how they feel after doing something, and "If you feel good, it was probably a good use of your time." But this doesn't account for how sin often feels or seems good when it's not. ***Ages 9–14***

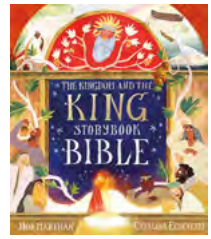


Teach Me To Pray

KRISTEN WETHERELL

CROSSWAY, 112 PAGES

In *Teach Me To Pray*, Wetherell provides a tool parents and grandparents can use to help elementary-age children learn how to pray about all areas of life. Alphabetically arranged, the 52 prayers address many matters of the heart (such as attitude, identity, and vanity) and model how children can structure their prayer time. The prayer for obedience exclaims, "Within my heart I feel a fight, Resistance to the way that's right! Please give me strength to follow you, To love what's lovely like you do." Other prayers point children to look beyond themselves to the needs of their community and world through prayers for orphans, missionaries, and the unborn. Each prayer is accompanied by Scripture, short commentary about the subject matter, and then an action step. ***Ages 7–12***

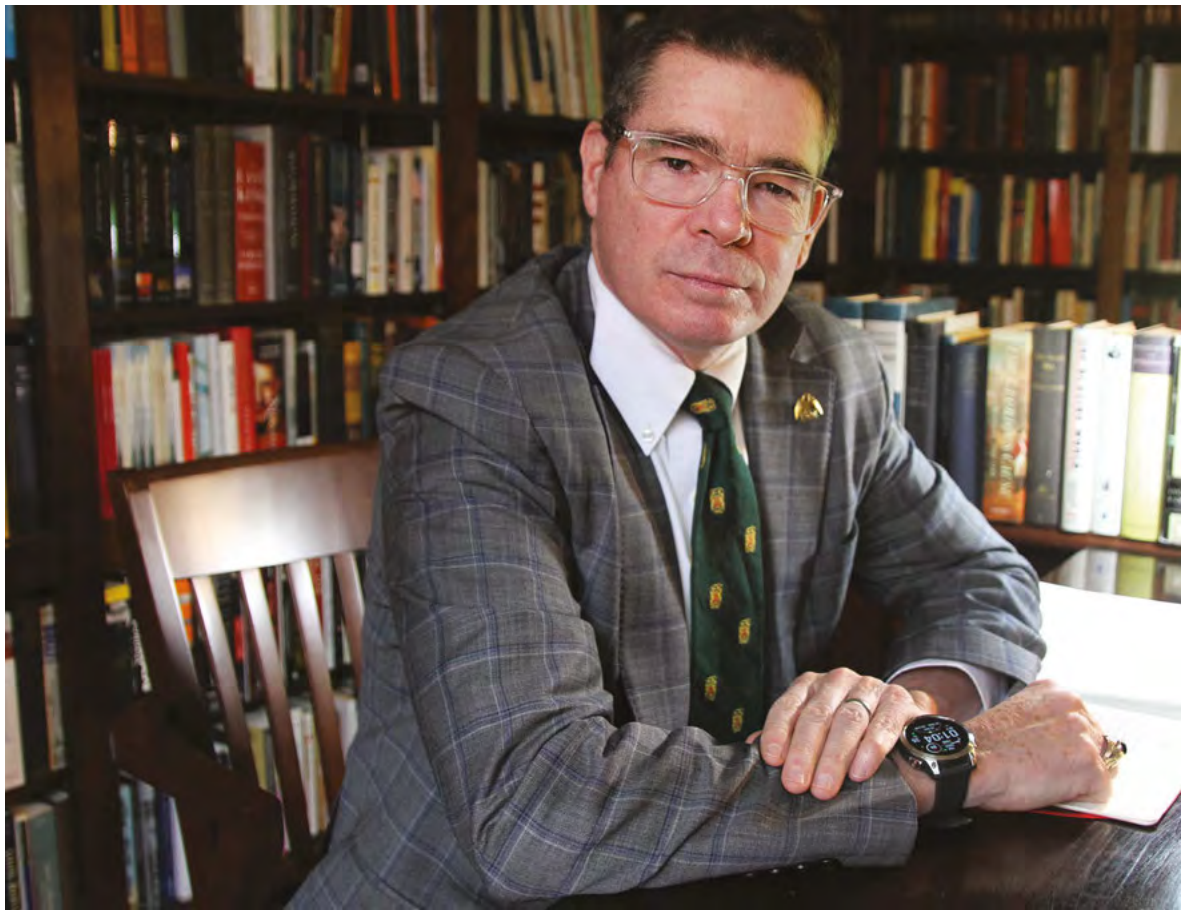


The Kingdom and the King Storybook Bible

BOB HARTMAN

THE GOOD BOOK COMPANY, 176 PAGES

Hartman's volume of 70 stories spanning both Testaments offers a slightly different approach than some other storybook Bibles. His selection of stories revolves around the theme of Christ the King and His kingdom. Old Testament entries illustrate the continual foreshadowing of Jesus the King, while New Testament entries demonstrate how Jesus was the King of all and how His followers were to practice kingdom living. With Catalina Echeverri's trademark illustrations, Hartman recounts the stories with children in mind, simplifying and summarizing key accounts that relate to the overall King and kingdom theme. His conclusion reminds children that lots of things will vie to be king of their lives, but only the True King will ever satisfy. Note: Pictures depict Jesus' face. ***Ages 4–8***



QUEST

FOUR BOOKS THAT SHAPED MY THINKING

History as a virtuous conversation

by JOHN D. WILSEY

Since I was a boy, history has captivated me. I remember reading our 1955 edition of *World Book Encyclopedia* when I was in middle school. Those encyclopedias had belonged to my mother when she was in school, and during my early teenage years, I realized they not only contained historical articles but were themselves historical artifacts. In the '80s, when I was in the eighth grade, I wrote a report on John F. Kennedy and was surprised to find that our *World Book* included no article on JFK. The simple and obvious reason was that JFK was merely the junior senator from Massachusetts when those encyclopedias were published! That blew my mind.

The study, teaching, and writing of history have been my primary vocation. Beyond those early experiences with *World Book*, four books I read in my late teens and twenties have had an enduring impact on how I think about my calling.

THE MEANING OF VIRTUE

The Florentine Dante Alighieri penned his three-part *Divine Comedy* in the early 14th century. Dante takes his reader on an imaginative tour through hell and purgatory, using the Augustan poet Virgil as a guide, and then he begins an ascent through the nine spheres of heaven, culminating with the beatific vision of God. Through these journeys, Dante encounters a host of momentous figures of history, mythology, and the Bible, along with many contemporary political and ecclesiastical leaders. *The Divine Comedy* is one of the most consequential works of Western civilization. It reminds the reader that all persons are mortal, no matter how wise, wealthy, or strong; that the world to which we go is real and waiting for

PHOTO BY DAVID HARRISON/GENESIS

us after death; and that the Lord our Creator will judge us for the content of our faith and conduct. Dante's method shows us that understanding the past enables the acquisition of wisdom in the present.

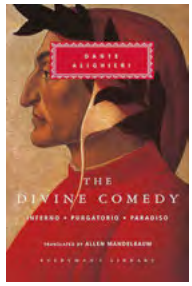
UNDERSTANDING HUMANITY

John Lukacs fled his native Hungary after the Nazi invasion. He studied at Columbia University, authored 35 books, and taught at Chestnut Hill College in Pennsylvania for 47 years. In his magisterial work on historical thinking, *Historical Consciousness* (1968), Lukacs called history "the remembered past," and likened its study to the mission of John the Baptist. The Baptist was not the Light but bore witness to it. In a similar way, history should not be understood as truth itself, but the pursuit of truth. History, for Lukacs, entails the acquisition of knowledge, but more than that, it entails the acquisition of understanding. As human persons, we come to understand other human persons as they once existed, and in doing so, we grasp the common nature we share with those who are dead. Thus, all history is meaningful and relevant, whether we appreciate it or not.

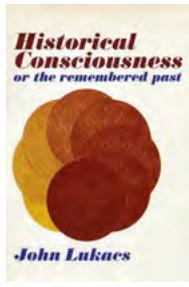
Both Dante and Lukacs taught me that the study of history has a moral dimension. We instinctively associate the reading of history with the acquisition of wisdom, but we must also exercise virtue as we study the past.

ORDER AND FREEDOM

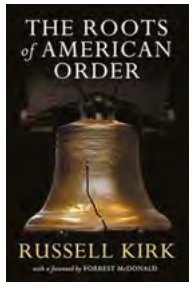
Russell Kirk is best known for writing one of the most vital works of postwar American conservatism, *The Conservative Mind* (1953). But he also penned *The Roots of American Order* (1974). Kirk called this order "a systematic and harmonious arrangement" that has animated and defined the national character. Kirk argued that American order was shaped by four civilizations, expressed in the cities of Jerusalem, Athens, Rome, and London. The sublimity of Biblical ethics, the profundity of Greek thought, the impartiality of Roman law, and the hard-won liberties of the English people all came together to birth the American experiment in ordered liberty. This book showed me the relationship between order and liberty—that true liberty is built upon a just order.



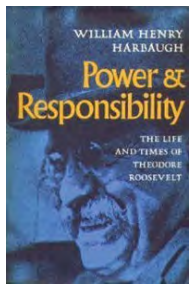
The Divine Comedy
DANTE ALIGHIERI



Historical Consciousness
JOHN LUKACS



The Roots of American Order
RUSSELL KIRK



Power and Responsibility
WILLIAM HENRY HARBAUGH

HISTORICAL DIALOGUE

William Henry Harbaugh's *Power and Responsibility* (1961) was among the first biographies of Theodore Roosevelt to treat him as a serious political and intellectual figure. Hubert Humphrey wrote in his endorsement, "It will no longer be possible to pretend that TR didn't matter or to judge him superficially as historians once did." In 1931, Henry Pringle wrote *Theodore Roosevelt: A Biography*, in which he treated Roosevelt as comparatively insignificant, not much more than a great big boy—which was exactly the way Roosevelt's political enemy Woodrow Wilson described him. A generation of historians after Pringle agreed with this negative assessment, until John Morton Blum's *The Republican Roosevelt* came out in 1954. Blum rehabilitated Roosevelt's reputation, and Harbaugh's book solidified him as a figure of singular prominence in 20th-century American history. Since then, Roosevelt has been considered as one of the top-tier American presidents.

I read William Henry Harbaugh's TR biography as a sophomore in college. It was the first time I recognized a historical conversation taking place over the generations. In Harbaugh's book, I learned that we receive the persons, events, and ideas of the past in our own contemporary contexts, and those contexts are ever changing. The book sparked a lifelong fascination with Theodore Roosevelt, and it caused me to think historically for perhaps the first time in my life.

I made a B on my critical book review of Harbaugh as a college sophomore, but I have never forgotten this lesson: that the finest thinkers, even across generations, are always in conversation with one another. Let our conversations be animated by virtue. ■

—John D. Wilsey is a professor at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the author of Religious Freedom: A Conservative Primer



TELEVISION

Monsters of modern society

by STEVE LIMKEMAN

Rated TV-MA • Netflix

The stakes for the fifth and final season of *Stranger Things* could not have been higher. Not only would we find out if the teenage heroes would prevent darkness from covering the entire world, but we would also find out if Netflix managed to satisfy the myriad fans of this fantasy series that trades on 1980s nostalgia.

Viewers became hooked on the show set in the fictional small town of Hawkins, Ind., when young Will Byers vanished and his gang of nerdy friends had to rescue him from the Upside Down. Filled with monsters and closely guarded by top-secret military personnel, the Upside Down is a terrifying threat hidden in America's heartland. Subsequent seasons introduced new dangers of earth-shattering proportions, and we discovered much about the origins of the Upside Down, the mastermind (Vecna) controlling the hive-mind of hideous vines, demogorgons, demodogs and demobats, and the mind-invading entity, dubbed "The Mind Flayer."

While the show revels in eerie subject matter, it's the cast's chemistry that makes the series so compelling. Their determination to save each other from the evil that menaces their hometown has the power to turn former rivals, bullies, and disinterested family members into self-sacrificial heroes. And Joyce Byers' determination to recover her son is matched only by police chief Jim Hopper's no-nonsense fearlessness. (Winona Ryder and David Harbour both deliver unforgettable performances in their respective roles). Will and his friends are pushed to the limits of their imaginations and resourcefulness, and the harebrained missions they concoct in order to keep the darkness at bay are what have kept viewers waiting impatiently for successive seasons.

One of the most interesting aspects of this final season is the prominent role played by Madeleine L'Engle's sci-fi classic, *A Wrinkle in Time*. In previous seasons, the show referenced *Dungeons & Dragons*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and various elements of '80s pop culture. But I was surprised to see the series feature a novel with overtly Christian themes in which Scripture is quoted frequently.

Like *Stranger Things*' fifth season, the book's narrative follows a group of unlikely heroes who travel to another dimension to liberate their loved ones from a superintelligent hive-mind that is bent on universal conquest. Observant

COURTESY OF NETFLIX

viewers will note a host of other connections between the two stories, but the contrast between the lessons learned by their protagonists shows a cultural shift.

Meg's heroic journey in *A Wrinkle in Time* requires her to discover the power of self-sacrificial love in service to a higher power, but Will's in *Stranger Things* emphasizes self-discovery and self-liberation. Will begins Season 5 weighed down by a secret, hindering his ability to help his friends against the forces of darkness. He fears the relational fallout that might occur if they find out he's gay. The series suggests he has nothing to be ashamed of. The possibility of rejection, of his friends drifting away from him—these are society's problems, problems that would melt away in the warmth of uncritical self-acceptance. One character advises: "I was looking for answers in somebody else, but ... I had all the answers. I just needed to stop being so ... scared of who I really was." The source of Will's power becomes the knowledge his community will embrace him without judgment. Both *A Wrinkle in Time* and *Stranger Things* assert that the truth sets you free, but what truth? What if society's "truth" is a falsehood masquerading as your salvation?

The series has plenty of objectionable content, much like the '80s movies it patterns itself on, but at its best, *Stranger Things* reminds us that we are engaged in a daily spiritual battle. Spiritual evil is relentless, afflicting our minds with fear and lies about ourselves and our futures. The powers of darkness try to deceive us, if they can, appearing as angels of light—a new approach attempted by Vecna in Season 5.

Though the finale ultimately fizzles in a less than satisfying manner, the heart of *Stranger Things* has always been a loyal group of friends using the power of curious minds, scrappy courage, and creative storytelling against incredible odds to defeat evil. And that story, despite its defects, depicts heart-swelling, death-defying, self-sacrificial glory, that can be used as inspiration to have the courage to bring the light of the gospel into the darkness. ■

ANGEL STUDIOS



MOVIE

Solo Mio

by COLLIN GARBARINO

Rated PG • Theaters

These days, it's rare to find a romantic comedy in theaters. It's even more rare to find one that stays funny without transgressing traditional social values. Perhaps this is why *Solo Mio* feels like such a refreshing film.

Kevin James (*The King of Queens*) plays Matt Taylor, a romantic guy who books an all-inclusive package for his upcoming honeymoon in Italy. Matt's dream vacation turns surreal when he decides to go on his honeymoon alone after getting left at the altar.

Solo Mio is an utterly charming film reminiscent of the screwball romantic comedies of the 1930s and '40s. The idea of a single man participating in the "Two Become One" package has an appealing and absurd quality, and much of the comedy comes from the other two couples who booked the same vacation. Jonathan Roumie, Julee Cerda, Kim Coates, and Alyson Hannigan play characters that function sort of like Job's friends. They're well meaning, but the contradictory advice they offer provides little comfort to Matt. As the honeymoon progresses, Matt's heartbreak gives way to confusion when he crosses paths with a kind and beautiful Italian woman who takes an interest in him.

The PG film is low on objectionable content, but there are scenes of drunkenness in which Matt attempts to cope with his situation. Some out-of-the-blue moments will amuse and delight many viewers, and with a length of only 97 minutes, the story zips along. The film also benefits from the beauty and romance of its Italian setting. The plot's romantic aspect might be a little predictable, but that's not necessarily a bad thing because *Solo Mio* offers a comforting return to the love stories of the past.

TELEVISION

The Pendragon Cycle

by BOB BROWN



Unrated • Daily Wire+

→ Conservative media company The Daily Wire is known for political news and commentary, Matt Walsh's deadpan but scathing documentaries, and some entertainment options—if you count Jordan Peterson's parenting series as entertainment. But if you're looking to escape the 24/7 news cycle with an epic fantasy adventure, you have to flip the channel to HBO Max, Disney, or Netflix, right?

Not so fast with the remote. *The Pendragon Cycle: Rise of the Merlin*, based on Stephen R. Lawhead's historical fantasy books, is a spellbinding new live-action TV series on Daily Wire+ that matches the major streaming platforms' best productions in visuals and storytelling—but with less objectionable content than fantasy sagas like the ever-popular *Game of Thrones* and its many spinoffs and knockoffs. Jeremy Boreing, who co-founded The Daily Wire in 2015 with Ben Shapiro and served as co-CEO until last year, directs *The Pendragon Cycle* and is one of its writers. Lawhead is credited as an executive producer.

Like Lawhead's novels, the TV series is a retelling of the Arthurian legend, not during the High Medieval Age of armor-clad knights, but in the wake of Rome's occupation of Britain. The book series' first installment *Taliesin* won the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association's Gold Medallion Award for Fiction in 1988. WORLD received early access to the show's first two episodes, which are based on *Taliesin* and set the stage for the account of Merlin's rise.

The show opens in the fourth century A.D. on the Island of the Mighty, the ancient Welsh name for Britain. A spiritual darkness overshadows the land, but the seeds of Christianity are beginning to take root. The first two episodes focus on the intertwining stories of the fierce Atlantean princess Charis (Rose Reid) and pagan Celtic bard Taliesin (James Arden). Flashbacks detail Charis' tumultuous allegiance to the bull-god Bel and how she saved a remnant of her people when a volcano destroyed Atlantis. Her bravery and wisdom continue to protect Atlanteans in their new home in Britain. Taliesin, the adopted son of King Elphin (Duran Fulton Brown), sings enchanting ballads and wields otherworldly powers. When their peoples come into conflict over territory, Charis' scheming younger sister Morgain (Emree Franklin) initiates her own play for power through the bloody sacrifice of a newborn foal. Charis and Taliesin both encounter two itinerant Christian priests who begin to challenge their worldviews.

"There is a new power at work in the world," Taliesin tells Morgain. "A God who does not ask us to sacrifice what we love but who sacrifices what He loves for us." At times, Taliesin's take on faith has elements of mysticism, but such wouldn't be unusual for that era.

The sets of *The Pendragon Cycle* are richly decorated, and the acting is top-notch. Breathtaking valleys and seascapes stretch across the screen, but the towering, pointed, snowcapped peaks look very out of place for that part of the world—indeed, the show was filmed in Italy and Hungary. Topographical liberties don't constitute material unsuitable for younger children, but some frightening and gory images do. Also, Charis and other female characters are frequently garbed in revealing clothing. Not to justify the sensuality, but it might be worth pointing out that the original Arthurian legends contain problematic sexual content, too. ■

THE DAILY WIRE

COMING SOON...

The Muppet Show

2/4 • TV-PG • Disney+

Kermit, Miss Piggy, and the rest of the gang are back. Music, comedy, and a whole lot of chaos are bound to ensue when the Muppets once again take the stage of the original Muppet Theatre.

Solo Mio

2/6 • PG • Theaters

In this comedy, a man decides to go on his honeymoon alone after being left at the altar in Rome. Starring Kevin James (*The King of Queens*).

GOAT

2/13 • Not yet rated • Theaters

This animated action-comedy set in an all-animal world follows Will, a small goat with big dreams who gets a shot to join the pros and play roarball—a full-contact sport dominated by the fastest, fiercest animals in the world.

I Can Only Imagine 2

2/20 • PG • Theaters

This sequel dramatizes the life of MercyMe's Bart Millard after the breakout success of "I Can Only Imagine." He grapples with devastating challenges, including a life-changing diagnosis for his son.

The Greatest Average American

2/25 • TV-PG • ABC

In this game show hosted by comedian Nate Bargatze, contestants try to guess how everyday Americans think and live for a chance to win an average American salary of $67,920.

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LUDOVIC ROBERT/PRIME VIDEO



TELEVISION

Steal

by COLLIN GARBARINO

Rated TV-MA • Prime Video

The British crime thriller *Steal* tells the story of an office worker caught up in an inscrutable heist that leads to a national scandal.

The series comprises six episodes, with the entire first episode devoted to the actual robbery. Armed gunmen storm a wealth management firm taking the staff hostage. They force two low-level workers, Zara (Sophie Turner) and her friend Luke (Archie Madekwe), to transfer four billion pounds into offshore accounts. The thieves disappear as quickly as they arrived.

The theft sends shock waves across the country because the money was taken from a government pension fund, threatening the livelihood of retirees across Britain. Why was so much money being held in cash accounts? How did the thieves know it would be there? It's clear to Detective Chief Inspector Rhys (Jacob Fortune-Lloyd) the heist was an inside job, but why does MI5 seem to be hampering his investigation?

After the nail-biting first episode, *Steal* becomes a slow-burn mystery that ratchets up the tension as Zara and Rhys attempt to figure out who's behind the theft.

Steal is a good example of modern British crime drama. It offers a gritty realism and a relatively quiet mood that revels in Zara and Rhys' melancholy. They're flawed heroes—she tends toward self-destructive decisions because she hates her dead-end job, and he's got a gambling problem. There's violence, but it's more restrained than what's typical for American shows. The series also contains some objectionable language, though again, not as much as one would expect from a TV-MA show made in America.

Perhaps the most British aspect of the series is the social commentary. *Steal* decries the classism that still pervades British society, but it also exhibits some ennui, questioning the virtue of tearing down social structures in pursuit of a more equitable economic framework.



MUSIC

The rock 'n' roll world's legendary losses

Remembering John Lodge and Ace Frehley

by ARSENIO ORTEZA

The Moody Blues' bassist John Lodge, 82, and Kiss lead guitarist Paul "Ace" Frehley, 74, died within a week of each other in October—Lodge of unreported causes (though he'd had a stroke in 2023), Frehley of complications from a head injury sustained during a fall. Their passings brought to an end any hopes that the legendary bands to which they'd belonged would ever reunite.

How legendary? Counting compilations and live albums, the Moody Blues earned eight gold and six platinum certifications and placed a dozen singles (the enduringly ethereal "Nights in White Satin" chief among them) on the *Billboard* Top 40. Kiss (whose name, incidentally, is not an acronym for "Knights in Satan's Service" or anything else) earned 16 gold, seven platinum, and three double-platinum albums, dinging the singles chart nine times with songs both mellow ("Beth") and loud ("Rock and Roll All Nite"). The group's platinum album total reaches 11 if you include its members' simultaneously released 1978 solo LPs, and their hit singles count reaches 10 if you count Frehley's cover of Hello's "New York Groove."

At the time of their deaths, Lodge and Frehley had recently completed solo tours and were planning to tour again. Frehley's passing felt especially poignant, occurring as it did just seven weeks before he, along with Kiss' other founding members, was to receive Kennedy Center medals for his contribution to America's performing arts.

One needn't endorse the hedonism for which much of Kiss' music was a soundtrack to support such recognition. For over 50 years, the band set continually escalating standards for rock 'n' roll showmanship. Frehley's "smoking" Gibson Les Paul guitar alone became iconic.

Lodge cut a simpler figure. The Moody Blues' early predilection for concept albums and (relatively) philosophical lyrics got them labeled "progressive rock," but by the '80s they'd become a sleek, no-nonsense hit machine, powered in part by such Lodge compositions as "I'm Just a Singer (in a Rock and Roll Band)" and "Sitting at the Wheel."

Frehley left Kiss in 1982, rejoined in 1996, and left again in 2002. At the time of his death, he'd been sober for almost 20 years. But, as detailed in his autobiography *No Regrets*, he'd spent decades fueled by alcohol and cocaine. Lodge, on the other hand, avoided rock excess. When asked how, he credited his lifelong Christian faith.

Frehley died on 10/16 and called his final album *10,000 Volts*. Lodge died on 10/10 and called his touring group the 10,000 Light Years Band. History records more exact coincidences. But, as the October-born Paul Simon (he of "in the naked light I saw 10,000 people, maybe more" fame) once sang, "When numbers get serious, you see their shape everywhere." R.I.P. ■

ILLUSTRATION BY KRIEG BARRIE (ORIGINAL PHOTOS: LODGE & BAND: GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REFERNS/GETTY IMAGES; LODGE: MONICA SCHIPPER/GETTY; FREHLEY & BAND: FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY, FREHLEY: DANIEL ZUCHNIK/GETTY

MUSIC

New and noteworthy

by ARSENIO ORTEZA



Heaven Shines Like Silver STEFAN LOVIN
This solo-piano album opens with a spellbinder ("Providential Men"), closes with a benediction ("Tantum Ergo"), and provides dramatic tension and development in between. The tension comes from a sacred-secular push and pull (two Christmas-themed songs linked by a piece called "Funeral"). The development comes from Lovin's channeling of his Romantic impulses into improvisations worthy of titles such as "Toccata" and "Childhood."



Alfred Hitchcock: A Portrait in Piano MATTEO MONICO
What's the difference between those who can't hear Rossini's *William Tell Overture* without thinking of the Lone Ranger and those who can't hear Gounod's *Funeral March of a Marionette* without thinking of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*? Trick question—the latter are just the former grown up. Those who can't hear Poulenc's "Mouvement perpétual No. 1" without thinking of Hitchcock's *Rope* are a different breed. So are those who think of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* and not *The Doris Day Show* when they hear "Que Será, Será." The Bernard Hermann pieces, which include melodies indelibly associated with *North by Northwest*, *Vertigo*, and *Psycho*, pose no complications at all.



Melancholia RICK WAKEMAN
Performed on a Steinway Model D concert grand, these 12 closely and clearly miked three-to-five-minute pieces are what fans of nonclassical solo piano who've settled for the much heavier-handed George Winston should've been holding out for. Each delicate elegiac melody feels designed to bridge the gap between, say, Debussy and latter-day Benny Andersson. And Wakeman, his membership in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as a member of Yes notwithstanding, proves well suited to the task.



Close to You: The Spencer Zweifel Trio Plays Bacharach SPENCER ZWEIFEL TRIO
You'd think that the "so-and-so plays Bacharach" trope would've run its course by now. But whether immersing "Wishin' and Hopin'" in Latin boogaloo, forcing "Close to You" to wobble along on high heels, depriving "Such Unlikely Lovers" of Elvis Costello, or sending "Always Something There to Remind Me" on a wild-goose chase, this Colorado-based piano-bass-drums trio deposits some of pop's best-known melodies in remote, unfamiliar locations and forces them to find or fight their way home. Spoiler alert: They succeed. As to how, hearing is believing.

GIAMBALVO & NAPOLITANO/REDFERNS



ENCORE

Decca released the six-disc **Radu Lupu** box *The Unreleased Recordings: Decca Masters and Radio Tapes 1970–2002* on Black Friday, and it's easy to see why. It makes an ideal gift not only for a connoisseur of 20th-century pianism but also for anyone who aspires to be one. It's customary these days to talk about "letting the music breathe," and because Lupu, who died in 2022, could summon an almost preternaturally light touch, breathe these recordings do. And in "breathing," of course, they live.

Lupu's fluid luminosity sparkles most on the Mozart piano quartets comprising Disc 1, the Mozart piano sonata on Disc 3, and the Mozart piano concerto on Disc 6. It's easy to imagine listeners content to savor those to the exclusion of the rest. They'd miss, however, the sections where Lupu plays "against type" as it were. In giving Bartók's percussive *Out of Doors* and Copland's oblique second piano sonata their turbulent and expressive due, he generates pleasure from dashed expectations.
—A.O.



MASTERWORKS

Our longing for romance

Celebrating human love in the work of Gustav Klimt

by BRUCE HERMAN

In the month of February we celebrate Valentine's Day, originally a feast day to commemorate a Christian martyr named Valentinus (d. 269) who is said to have served as a priest and to have secretly celebrated the Christian weddings of conscripts to the Roman legion against existing laws. Quite romantic!

In modern America we live in a culture that seems obsessed with romantic love—to the extent that all other loves seem eclipsed—even friendship and family bonds. When we use the word *love*, romance is what we usually mean. In Gustav Klimt's famous painting *The Kiss* (1907–1908), we have a masterpiece of modern painting that "marries" abstract art to realistic figurative painting in service of romantic love. This painting is one of the most reproduced modern works—adorning everything from tee shirts and ball caps to handbags, bedspreads, coffee mugs, leggings, furniture, jewelry, and even oven mitts.

Though Klimt could never have foreseen the immense popularity of *The Kiss* and its extensive merchandising, he did enjoy a measure of celebrity in his lifetime. Despite his fame and the high prices that his work fetched, he leaned toward seclusion and avoided the popular café society of his time—preferring to spend time with his family and countless hours in the studio employing his fastidious painting technique. The idea that abstract decoration and romantic narrative could be fused with realistic rendering was a fresh idea at the turn of the 20th century, and his many other similar works explore this unique territory of realism and abstraction to great effect.

The Kiss isn't Klimt's only exploration of human love. He celebrates it in another large piece titled *The Embrace* (1905–1911), which is even more decorative and overwhelming in its patterning—with the figures seeming to be swallowed in the exuberant swirls and disks and golden tendrils that cover the canvas.

As an artist Klimt clearly touches something deep in our collective romantic psyche. Yet where exactly does romance fit within the Christian life? We know from Scripture and the traditions handed down to us that at least some of the Apostles were married. We know that early leaders of the church were often married women and men who lent their homes and their resources to the propagation of the gospel message—and we have an entire book of the Bible dedicated to romantic love, the Song of Songs. Romance is even an integral part of the creation narrative: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." The consummation of creation also points to love when God and redeemed humanity will be joined at the Wedding Feast of the Lamb.

St. Valentine, for whom our romantic holiday is named, served as a presbyter of the church in Rome in the third century—during the persecutions under Claudius II—healing people and overseeing a growing church. Supposedly, he sent a letter to the daughter of his jailer, healing her blindness, signing it, "Your Valentine." A thousand years later, his feast day became associated with romance and couples began to express their love for each other by sending their own "valentines."

But these days, romance often feels commercialized and commoditized. Just like modern-day valentines, Klimt's works are robbed of some of their power by ubiquitous profiteering. But these images deserve a second look, in which we ponder our own longings for romantic love. In these paintings, Gustav Klimt has given us a powerful visual language in which the best of modern abstraction is wedded to Western art's tradition of careful representation of the human form, providing two of the most breathtakingly beautiful valentines of all time. ■



LEFT: A couple kisses in front of Klimt's *The Kiss* at a museum event on Valentine's Day. RIGHT: Detail of *The Embrace*

THE KISS: THERESA WEY/AP; THE EMBRACE: FINE ART IMAGES/HERITAGE IMAGES VIA GETTY IMAGES



VOICES NICK EICHER

Showing up, every day

As *The World and Everything in It* nears its 15th year, a look at the work and the persistence that made it possible

Fifteen years is a long time in podcasting.

Long enough that the medium itself barely existed when *The World and Everything in It* began. When Joseph Slife and I recorded a pilot episode for commercial radio in the spring of 2011, we were thinking about audience—but not about rankings, platforms, or anything resembling today's podcast ecosystem. We did not even know what to call the program. We were testing an idea: What would WORLD's journalism sound like if it were written for the ear instead of for the eye?

That first experiment led to a weekend broadcast later that summer on hundreds of stations syndicated by the Salem Radio Network. The work was difficult and not immediately popular. But week by week, the program improved. By May of 2013, what started as a weekly broadcast became a daily.

There were early moments when it was not clear the program would survive. Once Joseph and I sat on a bench in a hotel stairwell during a broadcasting conference to pray, asking God to provide the people we needed to do the work well. Over time, He did.

What followed was not the result of careful engineering. It was persistence, plain and often costly. Across an estimated 3,300 episodes, *The World and Everything in It* has never missed a deadline.

Consistency matters in any medium. It matters even more in one as young as podcasting. Many of the most widely known shows have yet to reach 2,500 episodes. We happened to start early. More importantly, from the beginning, we resolved to stay with the work for the long haul.

Even the program's name reflects it. As Joseph later recalled on air, he was reading Psalm 89—"The world and everything in it is yours"—and also thinking about Paul's words in Acts 17. The phrase, Joseph said, gave the program "rails to run on," a way of grounding daily news in the conviction that this is God's world, ordered by Him, even when the headlines suggest otherwise.

This summer, *The World and Everything in It* marks its 15th anniversary. In the life of a daily news program, 15 years suggests maturity—less concerned with proving itself and more with faithfully stewarding what has been built.

Along the way, many people have carried responsibility for the program: reporters, editors, hosts, producers, engineers, freelancers, administrators, donors, and listeners who made room for it each day. Among those stewards has been Paul Butler.

Paul served as executive producer of WORLD Radio for more than five years. During that time, he helped shepherd close to 1,500 daily programs, as well as special weekend editions and radio news efforts. Taken together, that represents nearly half of all the episodes we have produced—and more than 60 million downloads.

Those numbers matter. But they are not the most important thing. What matters more is the care Paul brought to the work: care for the journalism, for the people producing it, and for the listener who trusts us each day. Radio is a collaborative craft that calls for patience, humility, and an ear for voices. Paul brought those qualities to the role, and the program is better for his service.

Paul is not leaving WORLD. He is taking on a role that plays directly to one of his greatest strengths: directing our internal training program. He has shown year after year—especially through the World Journalism Institute—that he is an outstanding teacher. In the years ahead, his focus will be on helping develop our journalists' professional skills across the organization. I suspect, though, that broadcasters will always hold a special place in his heart.

As for *The World and Everything in It*, this anniversary year also includes a transition. I have stepped back into direct leadership of the program as executive producer, working alongside Lindsay Mast, a highly experienced producer whose voice listeners know well. Lindsay manages the day-to-day work, and together we are collaborating with a deeply talented team of writers, editors, reporters, technical producers, and journalists across WORLD.

The purpose is not reinvention. It is a recommitment.

We recommit to the same things that have guided this program from the beginning: careful reporting, thoughtful conversation, and a clear Christian worldview applied to the news of the day. We are grateful for what God has built. And we look ahead with confidence. ■

Email *nick@wng.org*



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COLD WAR

Legal battles involving a prominent pro-life embryo adoption organization underscore the need for better regulation

by **LEAH SAVAS** *and* **MARY JACKSON**



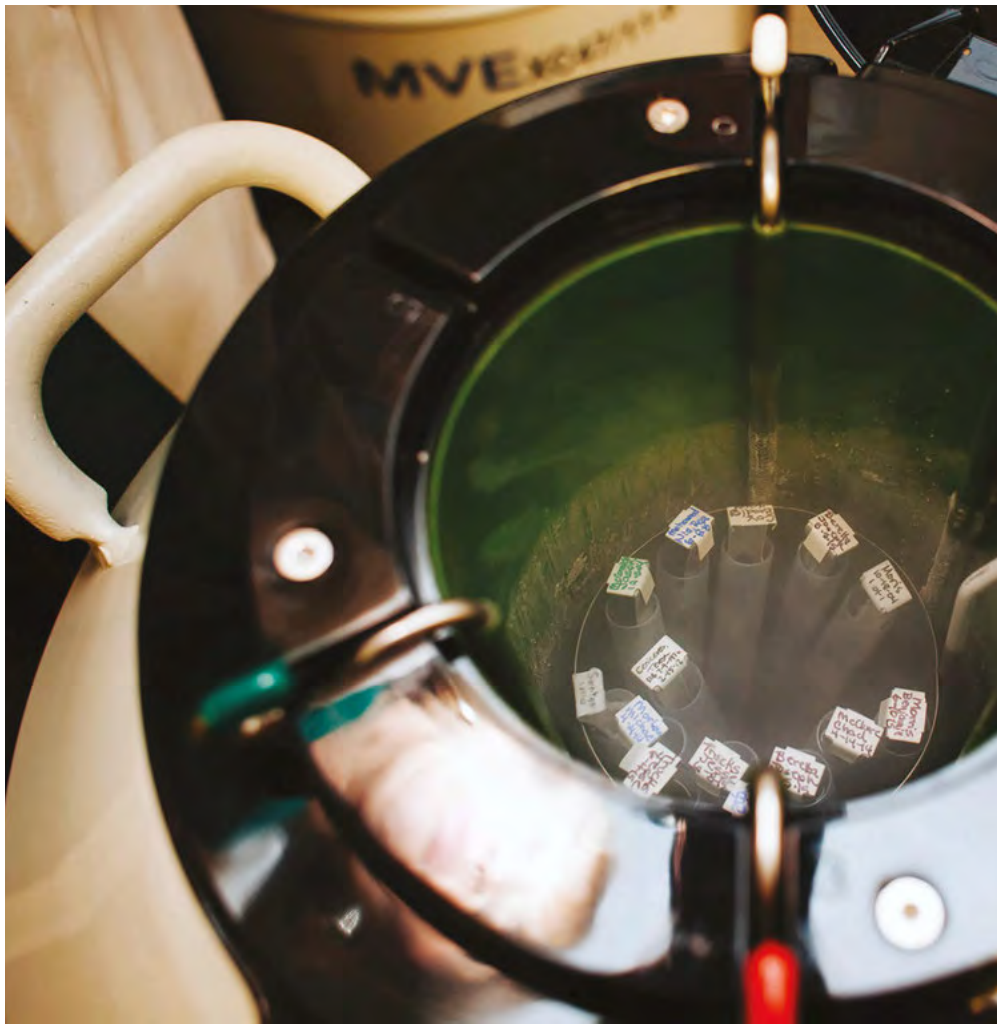
UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Amy Flores froze, her eyes fixed on her phone as her three youngest children tinkered with trains and baby dolls strewn about the floor around her. She had hoped to add more playmates to her already busy crew. But according to the letter that had just arrived in her email inbox, that might not happen.

The letter stated that Flores and her husband had no legal right to their adopted children's three siblings—embryos waiting in a cryo-storage tank in Tennessee for their chance to be born. Neither did the biological parents who had conceived them through in vitro fertilization years prior, according to the emailed document.

"I literally cried," Flores said. "I was shaking."

The Floreses thought of these embryos as children. They said they thought the organization that had them in their care did too. Now, they and other familes connected to the same organization claim it's treating these human lives as property. Property worth a lot of money. WORLD granted the Floreses' request to use a pseudonym due to an ongoing legal dispute involving their children's sibling embryos.



The fate of those embryos and others underscores the uncertainty surrounding legal categories for tiny suspended lives conceived in a lab. Because they lack personhood status, contractual agreements, court decisions, and a patchwork of state laws determine what happens to them. As the number of babies born through in vitro fertilization continues to rise, and President Donald Trump expands its access, more frozen embryos likely will be caught in similar legal limbo.

THE BATTLE OVER the Floreses' embryos and others began in 2024. That May, Dr. John Gordon, the medical director at Rejoice Fertility who performed the Floreses' embryo transfers, stopped accepting new patients from the National Embryo Donation Center. The NEDC is a pro-life Christian organization that matches families with donated frozen embryos. It's the nation's largest embryo adoption center.

Three months after Gordon parted with the NEDC, his fellow clinician at Rejoice Fertility, NEDC president and founder Dr. Jeffrey Keenan, split from the clinic. Keenan started a new practice, Southeastern Fertility Center, the only one now allowed to perform embryo transfers for the NEDC. Keenan said the NEDC only works with affiliated clinics "to protect embryos and their donors." The nonprofit requires affiliated clinics to adhere to its standards, including declining transfers to same-sex couples and prohibiting discarding embryos.

Before the split, Amy Flores had given birth to three sibling embryos from a set they matched with through the NEDC, working with Gordon as her physician. In 2024, she and her husband signed a contract releasing three remaining sibling embryos back to the NEDC. But about a year later, the couple changed their minds and wanted to continue with both Gordon and the remaining embryos for future pregnancies. But the NEDC, under Keenan's leadership, declined to move the remaining embryos back to Gordon's clinic, which was no longer an NEDC affiliate, even though the donors—the embryos' biological parents—approved and requested the move.

Flores sent WORLD a PDF of the letter, addressed to Rejoice's lawyer from the NEDC's lawyer. It stated the donors have "zero legal rights to these embryos any longer," including the right to move the embryos to Rejoice, after they signed over guardianship to the NEDC. The letter repeatedly referred to the embryos as "NEDC embryos" and threatened the donor parents with legal action. It also accused Rejoice of "apparent desperation in needing embryos to create inventory."

"REGARDLESS OF THE INDIVIDUAL FEELINGS OF PARENTS OR THE CLINIC, THERE'S NO LEGAL OPTION TO TREAT THEM AS PERSONS."



SHAWN POYNTER/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

Frozen embryos at the National Embryo Donation Center in 2015

Gordon denied those claims. He said Rejoice currently has about 200 embryos waiting to be adopted and does not need more to add to that inventory.

THE SPLIT BETWEEN Gordon and Keenan resulted in the Floreses and other parents WORLD interviewed having to choose—either immediately or in the future—between holding on to embryos they see as their children or continuing with their preferred doctor.

Their predicament points to a much larger problem, one that eludes even those who set out to find pro-life solutions within the IVF industry. In the largely unregulated world of IVF, safeguards for embryos, and in some cases, the parents who donate and seek to adopt them, are tenuous at best.

When disputes or clinical mishaps call into question frozen embryos' ownership and parentage, the law offers little to no protection. Federal regulations for laboratories holding embryos are voluntary. In 49 of 50 states, frozen embryos are deemed property with no right to life. Louisiana is the only state where embryos created using IVF are regarded as "juridical person[s]" and where destroying them is illegal. In Tennessee, where the NEDC is located, lawmakers recently codified IVF as a right. That shields the fertility industry from any ramifications of the state's pro-life measures, including its classification of an embryo as "an unborn child from fertilization to birth."

In February 2024, the uncertain legal and moral status of frozen embryos burst into view when the Alabama Supreme Court ruled that embryos destroyed in a hospital mishap were "extrauterine children" and the families they belonged to could proceed with wrongful death claims against the fertility clinic responsible for their care. Equating frozen embryos to minor children with human rights who deserve protections "ground the entire fertility industry to a halt" in the state, said Katy Faust of the children's rights advocacy group Them Before Us. Alabama lawmakers quickly passed legislation protecting IVF providers from civil and criminal liability.

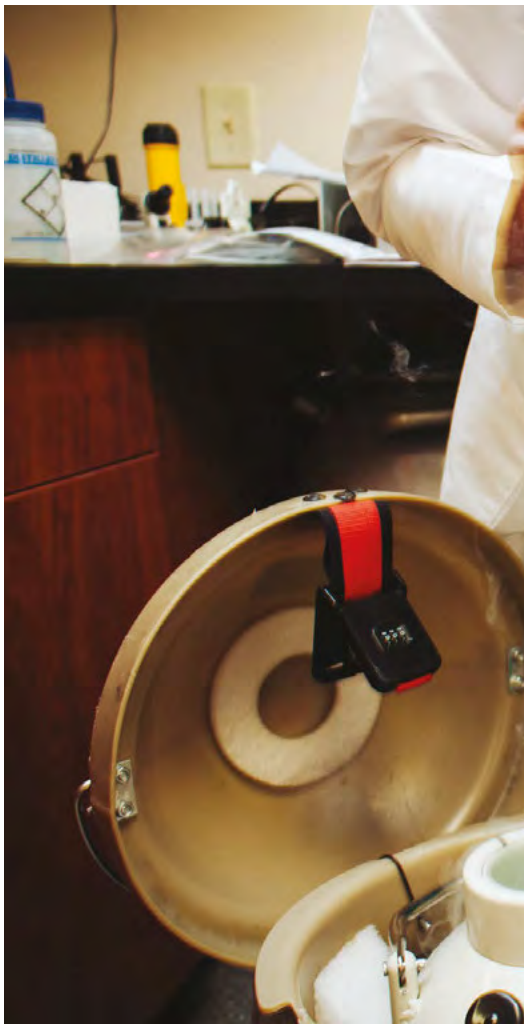
"IVF cannot exist if you recognize children not as property, but as people," Faust said. "Regardless of the individual feelings of parents or the clinic, there's no legal option to treat them as persons."

The fertility industry is built on "children dying in the process," she added. For every baby born via IVF, the process conceives countless excess embryos that the industry tests and oftentimes destroys for not making the grade, donates for scientific research, or discards. Many more remain in cryogenic storage indefinitely. "Big fertility has virtually no requirements to track or share what they do with these little lives," Faust said.

KEENAN FOUNDED THE NEDC with a mission to give frozen embryos from IVF cycles a chance to be born. By 2003, NEDC had a small inventory of donated embryos from across the country and began matching them with recipient families. Within 20 years, the Knoxville-based pro-life organization had facilitated the births of nearly 1,500 babies. It also made international headlines for its part in what were then record-breaking births of babies frozen as embryos for 24, 27, and then 30 years.

NEDC requires donors to sign paperwork transferring ownership of their embryos "as property to the NEDC," according to forms available on the NEDC website. That frees donors from continuing to pay storage fees for their embryos. Once recipient couples match with embryos, they begin picking up the tab. Recipient couples travel to Knoxville from across the country, coming for medical procedures called transfers that involve placing embryos into the woman's uterus, hoping they will implant and grow into full-term babies.

NEDC's practice of taking ownership of embryos differs from other embryo adoption programs espousing a pro-life approach. Nightlight Christian Adoption's embryo adoption program provides a legal contract ensuring ownership of embryos passes directly between their biological parents and the adopting family. Nightlight never takes possession of the embryos, according to Elizabeth Button, vice president of Nightlight's Snowflake Embryo Adoption Program. Similarly, Flourish Adoption Ministries facilitates the legal transfer of embryos between donor and recipient



Carol Sommerfelt transfers frozen, donated embryos at the National Embryo Donation Center in Knoxville in 2015.

couples without taking ownership, said embryo coordinator Anna Haynes.

NEDC has another distinguishing factor: For much of its history, Keenan's fertility clinic was the organization's only affiliate and Keenan the only doctor performing transfers with NEDC embryos. He said that was largely due to the fact that there were "virtually no clinics in the country who meet [NEDC] criteria" pertaining to donor and adopting parents and embryo treatment. Keenan's role changed when Gordon bought his medical practice in August 2019. Gordon renamed it Rejoice Fertility in 2023, and Keenan continued to work there.

The close relationship between the nonprofit and the clinic included shared cryostorage tanks that held both embryos donated to the NEDC and the embryos of the clinic's patients, Keenan told WORLD in a 2024 interview. That became problematic when Keenan and Gordon split in 2024, citing in court documents their disagreements in how to run the clinic.

That triggered the battle over custody of the embryos.

ON AUG. 16, 2024, Keenan filed a report with the Knox County Sheriff's Office in an attempt to retrieve charts from Gordon's clinic documenting the donor information of roughly 200 embryos entrusted to the NEDC. Gordon says he offered to scan the charts and email the PDFs to Keenan, since federal regulations required him to have the originals on location. He says Keenan contacted the sheriff's office anyway. According to the report, Keenan valued the charts at $1,000 each and the transfers that he hoped to do with those 200 embryos at $800,000. According to that report, Keenan believed the embryos and their donor information were worth $1 million.

In December 2024, Keenan sued Gordon over the split, claiming that Gordon pushed him out of the practice by taking all the patients for himself and by refusing to schedule any more NEDC patients. Under an August 2024 mediated agreement between Keenan and Gordon, NEDC recipient families currently matched with embryos through the NEDC can continue under Gordon's care if they wish to do so until October 2029. After that, any remaining embryos must return to the NEDC.

Couples who wish to continue transfers with those embryos must come under Keenan's care.

One of Gordon's patients told WORLD the timeline isn't working out in her family's favor. She gave birth to her second NEDC-adopted baby in August. The patient and her husband still have four embryos on reserve but are unlikely to transfer them all before October 2029. "I don't want to be forced back with Dr. Keenan," said the patient, who asked not to be named because she fears future reprisals from him or the NEDC. While she previously viewed the NEDC as "embryo-focused and Christ-focused," she says her view of the center changed during the split.

Keenan said the nonprofit remains committed to its mission and denies any change to its "philosophy or motivation."

"Sometimes, doing what is in the best interest of the organization may cause some dissatisfaction during times of transition," he said.

Gordon's patient said she believed that once she and her husband were matched with embryos and began paying storage fees for them, those payments and the paperwork they signed granted them some legal claim over the embryos. But in a recorded Zoom Q&A Keenan held with patients around the time of the split, obtained and viewed by WORLD, Keenan referred to even embryos matched with recipient couples as "legally the property of the NEDC." The patient said that language surprised her.

"I was like, 'what?' This is the first time anyone has ever outright said that," she said, adding later that it almost felt like a betrayal. "I was really mad because I was like, 'You are threatening my babies.'"

PROBLEMS AT THE NEDC predated the split between Keenan and Gordon. In an August 2023 letter to Keenan, North Carolina attorney Bo Caudill described a transfer that "supposedly occurred" in 2011 for his clients, who had adopted five NEDC embryos. The 2009 transfer of two of the embryos resulted in the birth of their son. But the second transfer—allegedly involving the three remaining embryos—did not result in



SHAWN POYNTER/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

"I GOT ANGRY. I WAS REALLY MAD BECAUSE I WAS LIKE, 'YOU ARE THREATENING MY BABIES.'"

a pregnancy, because, the family later learned, there were no embryos.

Caudill wrote that the NEDC had informed the female patient in December 2022 that "no embryos were placed in her uterus during the second transfer and that NEDC was still in possession of three of the five adopted embryos." One of Keenan's employees, according to the letter, used "blank catheters that contained no embryos." The letter requested a payment of $100,500 as settlement for the family's claims against the NEDC. Caudill declined comment for this story.

Almost two years later, in June 2025, an Ohio woman named Kendra Jacobs sued the NEDC, alleging another case of missing embryos. According to the allegations in the lawsuit, Jacobs had met NEDC donors who agreed to give her two of their embryos. Over several months in 2019, Jacobs coordinated with NEDC staff to have the embryos sent to her fertility clinic in Ohio and paid for their storage and transportation. Jacobs alleges she underwent surgery in fall 2019 and, in December, began taking fertility drugs and injections to prepare for the scheduled transfer. But when the day of the transfer arrived, according to the lawsuit, the Ohio clinic informed Jacobs that staff could not find any frozen embryos in the storage devices the NEDC had sent to the clinic.

Devastated, Jacobs contacted the NEDC. She said an unnamed lab director insisted she had sent the embryos and claimed she even double-checked the cryostorage tanks to make sure she had not sent Jacobs the wrong embryos. But in spring 2025, according to the lawsuit, Jacobs learned that the NEDC's representations of the situation in 2019 had been false. The lawsuit stated that the organization had "sent empty cryostorage devices containing another substance to the Ohio fertility center" and had "transferred [Jacobs'] embryos, without her knowledge, to another family."

In previous interviews with WORLD, Keenan blamed problems in the lab on a former embryologist who was fired. In July 2023, Keenan, Gordon, the NEDC, and Southeastern (later renamed Rejoice) sued embryologist Carol Sommerfelt for fraudulent recordkeeping related to the reproductive material and human embryos stored in Southeastern's cryostorage tanks. According to the lawsuit, Southeastern began auditing lab records in 2022. The plaintiffs claim Sommerfelt had "apparently ... never performed a physical inventory of the tanks during her time as the Laboratory Director."

According to the legal filing, Sommerfelt had worked for Keenan's

fertility clinic since the NEDC launched in 2003 and assumed the role of embryology lab director six years later. The lawsuit listed her as an employee of Southeastern. Sommerfelt said she was also an employee of the NEDC, but her salary came from Southeastern.

The audit, the lawsuit says, uncovered more than 300 discrepancies between the available records and what was actually in the tanks—some from as early as 2003. In some cases, the storage devices within the tanks had either unreadable labels or no labels at all. The lawsuit summarizes Sommerfelt's work as "an extraordinary failure ... to operate the lab in accordance with generally accepted professional standards." According to the complaint, Gordon terminated her employment in September 2022.

According to the last filing available, Keenan and Gordon moved to dismiss their complaint in April 2024. Gordon told WORLD all parties reached a mediated agreement that included a non-disclosure agreement (NDA).

Sommerfelt's response to the complaint is not publicly available in the court record due to the NDA, she told WORLD, nor are the details of how the case was resolved. "It is a lot of 'he said, she said,'" Sommerfelt said in a phone interview. "I was not the only person handling the tanks. ... My heart was in the NEDC, and I felt called to do this job." The fallout "has broken my heart," she added.

That same spring, tension in Keenan's and Gordon's business relationship came to a head, and the ensuing play-by-play became the subject of lawsuits Keenan and the NEDC filed against Gordon at the end of the year. In a countersuit, Gordon implicated Keenan's role in the clinic's past mishandling of the embryos in the NEDC's care.

"THERE'S A LEARNING CURVE EVEN FOR THOSE WHO ... BELIEVE CHILDREN HAVE THE RIGHT TO LIFE FROM THE MOMENT OF CONCEPTION."

In interviews with WORLD, Keenan has admitted to errors in his practice but insists that he was unaware of them until after Gordon purchased the practice. When asked in December 2024 if the lab had ever conducted a full inventory of its embryos in storage under his ownership, he said, "I do not know the answer to that," adding that "you do not micromanage the embryology lab" as the clinic's physician. If it were true that the staff hadn't conducted an inventory of the tanks in years, "it never would have been OK with me," he said.

In his countersuit, Gordon also claims Keenan tried to keep the errors a secret from patients and donors. Specifically, the suit claims Keenan dictated a patient note in October 2023 describing an inventory error that resulted in donor embryos still being present in the tanks even though the clinic had told the patient there were no embryos left. In the note, the suit claims, Keenan concluded that there was no point in telling the patient about the remaining embryos because the patient had already given birth using other embryos. When a staff member confronted Keenan about it, he insisted that "omission is not a cover-up," the counterclaim says.

Keenan denied these allegations in his response to Gordon's counterclaim and in a recent email to WORLD. He also denied the complaint's allegations that the audit uncovered about 300 inventory errors. He put the "significant error rate" at "approximately 0.5%."

Still, news of the inventory errors at the NEDC shook adopting families. One patient, Emily Ballou, questioned the nonprofit's trustworthiness. Her children's sibling embryos are among those that might have to return to Keenan in 2029.

"I loved the NEDC because they talk about how these [embryos] are God's little image bearers and they're lives that He's set aside and He values and cherishes when the rest of the world views them as property," Ballou said. She claims the organization's behavior has been different than its words.

But Katy Faust of Them Before Us believes the problem is much bigger than one organization. When human lives are mass-produced in a laboratory without regulations holding the fertility industry accountable, she said, it's not hard for clinics, even those espousing pro-life values, to get ensnared in pitfalls. Her nonprofit is working on a state-by-state guide that will help lawmakers come up with regulations to ensure embryos get the treatment their human dignity deserves.

"There's a lot of work to be done on the policy level and on the cultural level," she said. "There's a learning curve even for those who are with us convictionally and believe children have the right to life from the moment of conception." ■

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THE 360

OPEN COMMUNICATION

People with nonspeaking autism are learning to spell out their thoughts. Critics say the words they produce aren't really theirs

BY MARY JACKSON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
CHARLIE LEIGHT/GENESIS





Glori Nuessle quizzes her son Cody on history, spelling, and Phoenix Suns trivia using his letter board.



CODY NUESSLE'S INDEX FINGER BOUNCED AROUND THE LAMINATE LETTER BOARD SO FAST THAT HIS MOTHER, WHO HELD IT OUT IN FRONT OF HIM, LIFTED IT UP, PAUSED, AND SAID, "DO YOUR FINGERS A BIT SLOWER SO I CAN CATCH WHEN YOU SAY SOMETHING."

Cody, 24, is autistic and has apraxia, a motor disorder that makes it difficult to speak. He's considered nonspeaking but uses minimal words, often repeating what others say. But about three years ago, he began "spelling," pointing at letters to form words on an alphabet board with help from a family friend who is trained in the method. Until that point, Cody's parents knew little about his interests and thoughts. They had no idea his mind could have developed remotely similar to other kids his age. His father Matt regrets playing Elmo videos over and over, thinking his son liked them because when the videos played, Cody repeatedly called out, "Elmo!"

Once Cody started spelling, Matt learned he's actually fascinated by World War II history.

On a Friday night in October, I visited the Nuessles' home outside Scottsdale, Ariz. After dinner, Cody, who is 6 feet, 5 inches and 225 pounds, paced the room while his mom, Glori, short and petite, briskly cleared away plates and positioned two dining room chairs next to each other. As she pulled out the letter board and a scripted lesson about the role of the Soviet Union in World War II, Cody immediately tapped, "I-A-M-E-X-C-I-T-E-D."

As Glori moved through the lesson, reading sentences and asking Cody simple questions, he grew restless at times, scratching his trimmed beard or spelling unrelated words

instead of answering the questions. Then, he tapped the red "X" to delete and start again. Glori never touched him, but gently prodded with, "Eyes on the board," or if he got stuck: "After 'h' is, find it, find it … You're doing good, Cody."

He went on to spell words related to other topics, including his 2019 baptism, angels and demons, and a new book by his pastor, Joe Infranco, titled *Decoding Cody*. In the book, Infranco, pastor of adult education at Highlands Church in Scottsdale, describes his discovery that there's far more to Cody—and other nonspeaking people with autism or other disabilities—than he previously realized.

But critics of Cody's communication method argue that none of the words he spelled on the letter board that night, or at any other point, are reliably his. The fight over spelling is part of the larger debate over autism—what causes it and how to help those diagnosed with it. Those questions are especially vital for parents who have never had a meaningful way to communicate with their children.

Spelling to Communicate is also known as S2C, Spellers Method, or the Rapid Prompting Method. These forms involve an aide, ideally someone who has been trained in one of these methods, holding the letter board and coaching the nonspeaker. Spellers start by using a pencil to poke large letters from the alphabet, broken into three stencil boards. The aide uses verbal prompts, but is taught to avoid leading questions. The speller progresses to a 26-letter laminate or plastic board, using his or her index finger, and eventually, perhaps, to typing independently using an iPad.

The premise, according to the International Association for Spelling as Communication (I-ASC), the leading spelling organization, is that nonspeakers already have language understanding but lack the motor planning skills to communicate. Practitioners are taught to presume nonspeakers' competence in language. In a recent podcast, I-ASC Executive Director Elizabeth Vosseller, founder of S2C, likened the process to teaching someone to play the piano.

Spelling has emerged as an alternative to a method called facilitated communication (FC). Dating back to the 1970s, FC involves the aide physically supporting the nonspeaker, typically on the hand, elbow, or shoulder. By the mid-1990s, it had been widely discredited as studies revealed the spellers were not actually or entirely the authors of the words they were typing, and aides, whether intentionally or not, controlled the messaging. In some cases, facilitator dependence led to generating false allegations of physical or sexual abuse. Major medical professional groups such as the American Psychological Association debunked FC as pseudoscience—but it never fully went away.

In 2015, FC was the focal point of a highly publicized case involving a female Rutgers University professor using the method to take advantage of a nonspeaking man with severe physical and cognitive disabilities. The story was the subject of a 2024 Netflix documentary, *Tell Them You Love Me*.

According to some estimates, roughly 30% of people with autism spectrum disorder are nonverbal or minimally verbal. In recent months, public officials, including President Donald Trump and Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., have called attention to rising rates of autism and challenged scientific consensus behind it.

Meanwhile, a series of popular podcasts, documentary films, books, and press reports have thrust spelling into the spotlight as a breakthrough for nonspeaking autistic people. In 2024, the viral podcast *The Telepathy Tapes* claimed spellers are not only highly intelligent but also have a special ability to read minds. The podcast dominated Apple audio charts for months and was nominated for iHeart Media's Podcast of the Year award. A spin-off documentary film is scheduled to release this spring, according to *The Telepathy Tapes* website.

Infranco, Cody's pastor and a former litigator with Alliance Defending Freedom, was featured in an episode of the podcast. Infranco mentions Cody and some unexplainable spiritual phenomenon he's witnessed among spellers, including their perceived ability to see angels and demons. But Infranco says the podcast's creator and host, Ky Dickens, did not include his attempts to explain what he was seeing through Biblical Christianity.

For the Nuessles, the publicity surrounding the podcast has had its pros and cons. They see themselves as part of a homegrown movement spreading the word about spelling and, they hope, quietly reshaping the conversation around autism. As Christians, they view Cody and other nonspeakers as individuals with special God-given gifts and purpose. Those beliefs prompted them to start Hidden Gifts Ministry to support people with special needs. Since Cody began spelling, Matt and Glori admit they can't always explain his knowledge base, insights into the spiritual world, and instances where he knew something happened before they're aware of anyone telling him.

But they reject *The Telepathy Tapes*' framing of autistic nonspeakers as having extrasensory perception.

In the spelling world, telepathy claims have mired the method's credibility. "It's created this sensationalism around it that's not good for the forward momentum," said Dawnmarie Gaivin, co-founder of the Spellers Method and board president of the Spellers Freedom Foundation, a nonprofit advocacy group for nonspeakers. She says *The Telepathy Tapes* "almost made [spellers] like the freak show at the circus."

Efforts to legitimize spelling, including increasing its accessibility and integrating it into mainstream autism care, have made little progress.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), the leading professional organization for speech pathologists and audiologists, maintains facilitated communication "is a discredited technique that should not be used." It's less definitive in its position statement on newer variants, including S2C and the Spellers Method, but "advises against"

these methods due to the lack of supporting scientific evidence, potential harms, and the uncertainty regarding the facilitator's influence over the speller.

In September, the Maine Department of Education awarded I-ASC a $50,000 grant. But two months later, the department terminated the grant without explanation. New Hampshire lawmakers in 2024 attempted to establish a S2C pilot program under the state Department of Education for nonspeaking children with autism. The bill died shortly after it was introduced.

Still, about 80 clinics and schools primarily in the U.S. offer some form of spelling, according to facilitatedcommunication.org, a website run in part by researchers opposed to the method. Since its beginning in 2019, I-ASC claims it's trained nearly 800 spelling practitioners. The group declined to talk to me for this story. Gaivin, who co-founded the Spellers Method in 2023, estimates there are about 1,000 trained spelling practitioners and 10,000 spellers. In 2015, she knew of only six practitioners, including herself.

In Scottsdale, a few spelling practitioners work with nearly a dozen nonspeakers, including Cody, who attend Highlands Church's special needs ministry program.

The day after I visited the Nuessle home, I met Marissa, one of the trained spelling practitioners, at the church. Marissa is a longtime family friend of the Nuessles who has decades of experience working with special needs children. She requested to use a pseudonym to protect her work with spellers. Marissa typically spells with Cody once a week. She's also coaching Glori to spell with Cody, something spelling groups encourage. Matt and Joe Infranco, his pastor, have also dabbled in spelling with Cody.

"Ultimately the goal is open communication ... at home with their families, not just with me in a session," Marissa said.

It was late morning when Cody and his parents arrived at the church. Marissa sat beside Cody and clutched a plastic stencil board vertically in front of him. Marissa has known Cody since he was 4. Their emotional bond was evident. Her eyes welled up with tears when Cody inquired about her health and a recent trip. He brought up feeling nervous about Infranco's new book, the one that tells his story.

"Why are you nervous?" Marissa asked.

"People won't believe," he spelled. "And forget how all of us are treasured by God. God wants us to share it, the enemy does not."

Sitting behind him, I watched as he poked one letter at a time. I never saw Marissa touch Cody or cue him by moving the board or her head, eyes, or other hand.

Cody also typed out comments about the spiritual realm, including angels and demons and a place he says he goes while sleeping called "the hill." Here, he claims he meets other nonspeakers—and Jesus. Marissa told me later she struggles to grasp some topics Cody brings up, including his repeated references to her guardian angel.

Twenty minutes into their spelling session, Cody stood up for a break. He burst into jumping jacks and pushups. As he sat back down in the chair next to Marissa, Matt told him he loved him. "You're doing really well, Cody. Thank you for sharing with us."

"I love you too, Dad," Cody spelled.

In November, when ASHA held its annual convention, a group of researchers presented the results of a systematic review of S2C and other variants. The review is currently submitted to a journal and awaiting a blind peer review, according to one of the researchers, Bronwyn Hemsley, head of speech pathology at the University of Technology Sydney in Australia. The results could deliver another setback for advocates of spelling.

In an email to WORLD, Hemsley summarized the results: "No studies met the inclusion criteria as the designs of studies to date do not control for facilitator influence over the message prior to analysing the message generated using [Spelling to Communicate or its variants]."

Hemsley also co-authored an October 2025 commentary paper with guidance for clinicians pertaining to minimally speaking or nonspeaking people who are "at risk of having their communication rights violated." Anyone working with nonspeaking people "must be mindful that Facilitated Communication and variants result in facilitators' control of messages through mechanisms that are simultaneously too subtle for most observers to notice, yet powerful enough to violate the communication rights of those least able to speak up for those rights," it states.

Researchers attribute this to the likelihood of the ideomotor effect, a psychological phenomenon in which the facilitated communicator may unknowingly guide letter selections with subconscious muscle movements or inadvertent cueing or expectations. Those cues "can be impossible for facilitators to avoid and for observers to detect," according to the paper, published in the academic journal, *Research and Practice in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*.

In dozens of controlled studies involving message-passing tests, the nonspeaker was shown a pictured image and the facilitator was blinded. "The facilitated person spells the correct answer only when the facilitator knows what it is," the paper states.

For these reasons, ASHA "does not encourage" spelling among its 240,000 members, said Diane Paul, an ASHA fellow and senior director of Clinical Services in Speech-Language Pathology. The organization excludes S2C and other variants from approved forms of augmentative and alternative communication, such as picture symbols, visual supports, or keyboards accessed independently. Paul worries that the growing popularity of spelling will detract nonspeakers from conventional speech therapies.

"I can understand that [spelling] might give parents hope that their child had previously unrecognized skills ... people want an answer," she said. "Autism seems to be a magnet for unproven treatments ... because parents, they want hope."



Matt Nuessle races Cody on the HO scale track they built.

The most reliable way to determine whether a nonspeaker is communicating independently, is "very simply, put the board down," Paul said. "As long as the person holding the board doesn't know what the word is that's being asked or isn't looking, or [the letter board] is on a stationary platform ... that's totally different."

The 2023 documentary *Spellers* features Jamison Handley, an autistic nonspeaker who went from using stencil boards to typing independently with a keyboard with built-in dictation, mounted in front of him. In the film, his dad, J.B. Handley, or his spelling practitioner are next to him. J.B. co-wrote with Jamison the 2021 book *Underestimated: An Autism Miracle*, chronicling their experience with the method.

For Cody, who has unique and complex motor issues, independent communication is still an aspiration. Like the Nuessles, many parents who are desperate to know their children are willing to take the risk. In Arizona, they will pay up to $170 for a 45-minute session with a trained spelling facilitator, Matt told me. One of his ministry goals is to raise scholarship funds to help parents afford it.

Since Cody began spelling, the Nuessles have witnessed a marked shift in his behavior. Outbursts, including aggressive ones, are fewer and farther between. "For 21 years, he has had all these feelings, all these emotions in his head, but he hasn't been able to communicate it with us," Matt said.

Hours before I observed Cody spell with Glori, I met the two of them at One Step Beyond, Cody's educational program, designed for adults with intellectual disabilities. He attends every weekday, six hours a day. His supervisor gave me a run-down of his classes. In English, he's learning long and short vowel sounds. His math class is studying how to budget. The science lesson included instruction on dry ice. The program also includes fitness, gardening, service work, and fun outings, such as bowling and a pumpkin patch. But no spelling.

It was a stark contrast from Cody's life at home and church, where his family, pastors, and network of friends repeatedly speak of "presuming competence," a motto in the spelling world.

Matt says he's learned from spelling sessions about Cody's political views, his favorite constitutional amendment, and most importantly, his spiritual walk with Christ. At the Nuessle's home, Cody appeared engrossed in a World War II



book in the living room as Matt leaned against the kitchen counter munching on chips. "He's listening to everything we're saying," he told me.

One 2024 study published in the journal *Autism* appears to support the idea that nonspeaking autistic people are literate and could learn to express themselves through writing. University of Virginia researchers found that five times more nonspeaking autistic teenagers and adults exhibited knowledge of written language conventions than what would be expected from previous estimates of their abilities. More than half of a sample group of 31 nonspeakers responded the same as literate participants in a method similar to whac-a-mole, where participants predict next letters in sequences that spelled words and sentences.

A separate 2020 University of Virginia study published in *Scientific Reports* used head-mounted eye-tracking to investigate communicative agency in nine nonspeaking autistic spellers responding to novel questions. "The speed, accuracy, timing, and visual fixation patterns suggest that participants pointed to letters they selected themselves, not letters they were directed to by the assistant," the study said.

But critics of these studies always return to the influence the aide has on controlling the messages.

The autism establishment has a lot riding on opposing spelling. Dawnmarie Gaivin of the Spellers Method believes it's not entirely rooted in protecting nonspeakers' welfare. "Somebody wants to make money, and finding out these kids are not intellectually disabled is going to shut down an entire industry or it's going to cause school districts to have to provide communication partners," she said.

"There has to be some other thing going on behind the scenes."

Back at Highlands Church, Marissa told me she's hoping spelling will eventually become accessible to all nonspeakers. She admits that would take a complete paradigm shift. "We've been taught for hundreds of years that people with disabilities are cognitively not intact and to change that … that's hard for a lot of people."

Cody seems to understand it's a leap for outsiders to embrace spelling. But he says the opposition is not coming from clinicians and researchers. During both spelling sessions I observed, he brought up a spiritual battle.

"I see the spiritual world," he typed. "I see angels and demons. … They are both here now." Cody described an angel outside guarding the doorway and demons, one by me and another behind a family friend who joined us. Cody typed that Marissa's angel was "watching her closely and waiting for a fight when God says to."

I asked Cody if he sees them all the time. He spelled, "Y-E-S." He added that he couldn't imagine what it would be like to not see them.

Then, with his eyes fixed on the board, Cody tapped: "Do you believe me?" ■

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THE 360

THE SEARCH FOR AUTISM ANSWERS

Can RFK Jr. solve one of America's most vexing health problems?

BY EMMA FREIRE

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS), has made autism one of his top priorities. He refers to high rates of autism as an "epidemic" and speaks with feeling about the suffering of the children and families affected. Some parents see Kennedy as the champion they've been waiting for. They hope his unorthodox approach can finally yield answers and treatments. But other parents fear he is doing more harm than good. Scientists also worry he's misdirecting resources, which could set back autism research.

On April 16, Kennedy gave his first major press conference as HHS secretary in Washington, D.C., to announce the results of the latest Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network survey published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that day. The survey found that autism prevalence in America has risen to 1 in 31 children. For boys, that figure is much higher—1 in 20. The CDC defines autism spectrum disorder (ASD) as a developmental disability caused by differences in the brain.

The CDC has published the ADDM survey every two years since 2007. The first year, it estimated that only 1 in 150 children in America had autism. "Year by year, there is a steady, relentless increase," Kennedy said during the press conference.

He grew emotional as he discussed children with severe cases of autism, known as profound autism. "They'll never pay taxes. They'll never hold a job. They'll never play baseball. They'll never write a poem. They'll never go out on a date. Many of them will never use a toilet unassisted," he said.

Mary Holland had hoped for this press conference for years. Holland is president of Children's Health Defense, a nonprofit advocacy group founded by Kennedy, and the mother of an adult child with autism. After the press conference, she and other parents of autistic children got up on the stage and snapped photos. "We as a community have been completely dismissed by the CDC and the FDA and HHS for decades," she said. To literally take center stage at HHS was "a very poignant moment."

But not everyone is happy. Dr. Alycia Halladay is the chief science officer at the Autism Science Foundation. She said it's important to remember that autism is a spectrum. Some individuals are severely disabled in the way Kennedy described. But for others, an autism diagnosis "means that they feel like that is their identity, that gives them special skills or gifts." They live independently and graduate college. She said there are also many people who fall somewhere in between those extremes. She thinks Kennedy lumped everyone together as profoundly autistic. "That causes a lot of confusion," Halladay said.

Holland said Kennedy's focus on more severe cases of autism is appropriate, noting "at least 30% of the people who are diagnosed on the autism spectrum have severe medical co-occurring conditions, together with the behavioral symptoms of autism."

During his press conference, Kennedy didn't only express compassion. He vowed that health officials would study the causes of autism and provide some preliminary conclusions soon.



ALEX WONG/GETTY IMAGES

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. discusses the CDC's Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network survey.

In September, he held a press conference with President Donald Trump at the White House to announce a change in medication advice related to autism. He told reporters the FDA was sending a letter to doctors notifying them that Tylenol use during pregnancy may be associated with a higher risk of autism for the baby. Trump repeatedly said, "Tylenol is not good." He urged pregnant women to "tough it out" if they are in pain.

The actual letter, written by FDA Commissioner Dr. Marty Makary, was more conservative in its wording. It stressed that the science is far from settled, and Tylenol is still safer for pregnant women than other over-the-counter medicines like ibuprofen.

Kennedy is often labeled an "anti-vaxxer," and he has frequently questioned vaccine safety in the past, especially as it relates to autism. During the September press conference, Trump expressed similar concerns. He talked about a woman who used to work for him whose son has autism. She believes—and Trump agrees—it was caused by a vaccine.

In late November, the CDC updated its website with statements backing that belief. "The claim 'vaccines do not cause autism' is not an evidence-based claim because studies have not ruled out the possibility that infant vaccines cause autism." The website previously said "studies have shown there is no link between receiving vaccines and developing autism spectrum disorder."

The change attracted enormous attention and condemnation in some quarters. Dr. Jeffrey Singer, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, calls the new language "embarrassing." He said the science around vaccines and autism is settled. "The anti-vaccine people just cling to this when study after study fails to show a link," he said.

Halladay is also concerned. The CDC is the largest public health organization in America, and its statements carry a lot of weight. "It can influence things like whether or not doctors recommend certain vaccines, whether insurance companies cover certain vaccines," she said. It can also influence research-funding decisions, and Halladay particularly worries it will impact public opinion about vaccines.

The disagreement is about more than vaccines. It touches on a fundamental question about the causes of autism. Is it genetic or is it caused by external factors? In his April press conference, Kennedy did not use the word vaccine, but he blamed autism on environmental toxins. "Somebody made a profit by putting that environmental toxin into our air, our water, our medicines, our food," he said.

Holland believes autism is a type of toxin-induced brain injury. But she notes it is difficult to say more than that. "Unfortunately, at the moment, it's an extremely subjective kind of behavioral diagnosis." She said autism ought to be detected by things like blood work, scans, and functional neurological testing. "I'm very hopeful that this administration will take us there," she added.

But Halladay said the scientific consensus is that autism is genetic. "About 20% of people with autism have a gene that causes their autism. Most other people have a combination of genetic and environmental factors." Singer added that autism is also linked to older maternal age. "We do know that the older you are when you get pregnant, the more prone you are to have children with genetic disorders," he said.

Kennedy disagrees. In his September press conference at the White House, he denounced scientific research that "has focused almost solely on politically safe and entirely fruitless research about the genetic drivers of autism," he said. "That would be like studying the genetic drivers of lung cancer without looking at cigarettes."

Under Kennedy, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) launched the Autism Data Science Initiative that devotes an additional $50 million to the cause of studying autism. Many of the research projects being funded will take three years to complete, but Kennedy has promised to give updates as soon as he has them.

Halladay has mixed feelings about the way Kennedy has put autism in the spotlight. "While we're kind of happy to see that autism is being brought back into the national conversation, it's not being done in an accurate way," she said. "And so it's actually creating more misunderstanding, more stigma, and it has pushed back some of the discussions about blaming people for autism or what causes autism by a decade." ■

THE 360

THE AUTISM LEAP

How an unwelcome diagnosis became one mom's gift of grace

BY CHELSEA BOES

Each morning when my husband leaves for work, he first says goodbye to the baby. "She doesn't look back at me yet," he tells me one morning. "But I'll keep saying goodbye, because someday she will."

It's true: The baby doesn't turn his way. She doesn't follow him with her eyes. Our peaceable girl is not like other babies, and something feels wrong.

But is it wrong? Or just different?

The word *autism* automatically conjures *wrong*.

That question—wrong or different?—will attend me for the rest of my life.

Six years later President Donald Trump suggests Tylenol taken during pregnancy causes an increased risk of autism. The administration's approach does not treat autism as a diversity. It treats it as a disaster.

An immediate outcry erupts. Among the many voices, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists calls it "highly unsettling that our federal health agencies are willing to make an announcement that will affect the health and well-being of millions of people without the backing of reliable data." A meme floods my social media feeds: "I don't know who needs to hear this, but you did not cause your child's autism."

These things were helpful to hear, since *I* took Tylenol during the first few months of my pregnancy—until my chronic migraine got so bad the obstetrician prescribed propranolol instead. (Propranolol, like most medications, is typically avoided in pregnancy unless absolutely necessary.) So the presidential address brings a brief pang of alarm—a pang mostly alleviated by the outcry.

But only *mostly*. I don't feel the pang because I'm afraid I caused my child's autism. I'm afraid of the possible motives behind the address.

Can autism be cured? *Should* it be cured? Short of that, should autistic people conform to neurotypical standards of behavior? Will a widespread *yes* to any of these questions lead to heightened discrimination for my daughter in the future? Do people really think the world would be better with fewer people like her?

I remember reading this line in Virgil as a teenager: "Hysteria finds a missile." For me, this phrase maps onto the presidential address. The hysteria comes in response to climbing autism numbers. (These numbers demonstrably owe to expanded criteria for what the disorder includes, not an unexplained "epidemic.") And the missile, it seems, is Tylenol-as-bogeyman. At whom does the missile aim? The makers of Tylenol, of course, but also mothers of autistic children and autistic people themselves.

The autism diagnosis I so resisted put me in league with the broken—other disability moms experiencing diverse kinds and levels of suffering. Now I meet them everywhere—at church, at Aldi, when I go to the mechanic. I don't mean to call their children broken. But these parents usually are. From their broken expectations, they've built beautiful lives.

Another phrase flicking across my brain in the wake of the autism address comes from *Crime and Punishment*. Yes, I took Tylenol during pregnancy, but "from a hundred rabbits you can't make a horse, a hundred suspicions don't make a proof." As medical professionals rushed to declare after the address, Tylenol as cause for autism is a leap into the absurd.

My daughter got the autism diagnosis at 3. I had to fight for the diagnostic appointment. Many phone calls. Endless waiting lists.

To be clear, I didn't *want* the diagnosis. I wanted it to be anything but autism. Could my daughter's social irregularities spring from her COVID-era babyhood, necessarily starved of many typical social interactions? Not-autism to autism requires a huge leap in a parent's brain. I badly wanted to stay on the safe side of the gorge.

But I needed help—which a widened criteria for autism makes possible, even for a mother who can't tell at first if a disorder really exists in her child. I built a quiet list in my brain: On one hand, she didn't talk much and made infrequent eye contact. On the other hand, she didn't need physical therapy and could pour a glass of water without spilling a drop. (She walked at 9 months!) On the other, other hand, she was funny and loved to make us laugh. I believed (among other stereotypes) that autistic people wouldn't connect socially in this way.

And besides, she might just be a late bloomer. I tried to interest her in drawing for many months with no success. Then, one day in the park, she took a beefy stick of chalk in hand and decked the entire sidewalk with giant, perfectly formed lollipops. There was no denying she learned in leaps. Now, at 6, her art astounds us.

I later learned that this pattern—learning in leaps—also frequently occurs in autism.

The day the diagnosis fell on us like a hammer, I called my mother to tell her the news. She gave me a seasonable word. "We don't know what causes it," she said. "So stop worrying about that."

A mix of factors (including, prominently, genetics) lies behind the moment of diagnosis, which feels like both grief and relief. This painfully tender crisis is certainly not the moment to tell a woman she caused her child's autism. Particularly without robust evidence.

I no longer feel my daughter's diagnosis as a point of pain. Like many disability moms, I'm accustomed to being misunderstood based on my child's outbursts in church, unresponsiveness to questions, atypical patterns of speech, or sudden aggression. By now I've moved well beyond that tender first stage ("What caused this?") into new questions.

First—What does disability teach us about Jesus? My daughter teaches me weekly that church is not about "good behavior," and also that a person's value does not spring from his or her social facility.

Next—What gifts does the autistic brain have to give us? (My favorite meme circulating the day after the announcement pointed out that many scientists are autistic; therefore, autism causes Tylenol.)

And instead of finger-pointing, which I did subconsciously before I knew my daughter, I ask: What suffering do autistic people undergo, and how can I help?

My daughter, for example, has just started expressing that she wants to say much more than she is able to. She can't find the right words—her speech, though growing, seems limited to certain constructions for much of the time.

I'm expecting many more leaps from her. I try to remember to expect as much as I can.

I met a guy in a coffee shop a few months ago, and autism came up. He said, "I think it's the next leap in evolution."

Make of that what you will. In general, neurotypical people don't have the same gifts autistic people have. Someday, all God's people will take a leap into glorified bodies, unlimited resources, and endless understanding. Until then, what matters most is that we welcome autistic people like Jesus does.

I know this because people have done it for my daughter. For example: She loves to spin to the music in church. I've spent many weeks trying to keep this spinning contained so she doesn't get too close to the front and distract other worshippers. One Sunday this fall, she spun out of my control—all the way to the front. I started to run to restrain her (then probably carry her out screaming, as I have done many times). Our pastor held out his hand—not to her, but to me—meaning, *stop*.

I stopped. I felt with a jolt that I had seen the heart of Christ. ■

THE LURE OF ROME

WHY ARE SO MANY YOUNG PROTESTANTS IN AMERICA'S POWER CENTERS CONVERTING TO CATHOLICISM?

by Emma Freire

illustration by
BRADLEY CLARK



When Anika Smith moved to Washington, D.C., more than a decade ago, her first order of business was to find a church. She didn't have a car, so she used the metro. Even with transportation challenges, she managed to visit about three services each weekend. Her fourth Sunday, on a recommendation from a co-worker, she went to Church of the Advent, an Anglican congregation. Smith grew up Presbyterian in the Pacific Northwest, and Anglicanism was new to her. ¶ "There were a lot of words, a lot of standing up and sitting down, and so many prayers," she recalled with a laugh. But she knew almost instantly she had found her new church home. "Some of the first songs I heard were hymns I had sung back home," she said. And the preaching was "gospel centered and Holy Spirit centered."



Smith moved to Washington for a job in the conservative movement. That same month she was invited to a big party at the home of a Catholic friend. "It was really fun and sweet," she said. But Smith noticed that, as a Protestant, she was in the minority. That was her first taste of the city's vibrant Catholic social scene. Several years later, she enrolled in law school at the Catholic University of America. She continued attending Church of the Advent but also went to Mass. "I would just duck into daily Mass because I loved it," she said.

When young Protestants move to Washington, it's usually not long before they start meeting smart, influential conservatives who believe Rome is the one true church. Like many of her peers, Smith began to ask herself: Should I swim the Tiber?

Roman Catholics exiting their church are disproportionately driving declining rates of Christianity in America. And far more Catholics convert to Protestant denominations than vice versa. But you wouldn't know it if you looked only at places like Washington and some influential university campuses. A small but vocal group of Protestants is converting to Catholicism—and in even smaller numbers to Eastern Orthodoxy. They tend to be ambitious, highly educated, and well connected. Catholics now provide much of the conservative movement's intellectual horsepower—and they are picking up Protestant converts along the way.



Anika Smith at her home in Maryland

According to Pew, only 2% of Americans who were raised Protestant are now Catholic, but 14% of Americans raised Catholic are now Protestant. Former Catholics often say they attended Mass for years and never once heard the gospel. Roman Catholicism loses 8.4 members for each new person who joins, and those numbers might be worse were it not for immigration from Catholic countries in Central and South America. By contrast, Protestantism only loses 1.8 members for each new addition.

While centers of conversion to Catholicism are tiny, they punch above their weight due to their political and cultural prominence.

Brad Littlejohn is the director of programs and education at American Compass, a conservative think tank, and co-author of the book *Why Do Protestants Convert?* He says Washington is the most prominent center of conversion to Catholicism, but that evangelical colleges with a Great Books curriculum also produce converts. That's because students from "nonliturgical, nonhistorical, theologically shallow Protestant upbringings" get exposed to the great Catholic authors for the first time. Littlejohn thinks that leads to an unfair comparison: "My megachurch youth pastor versus Aquinas is Protestantism versus Catholicism." Also, Catholic graduate schools like Catholic University, Georgetown, and Notre Dame attract students from Protestant schools, and some of them convert.

Conversion is eased by the fact that it is a less dramatic shift in America than it would be in other countries. American Catholics downplay elements of their theology that might put off Protestant converts. "They make the distinction between, 'Well, we don't really pray to the saints. We ask the saints to pray for us,'" Littlejohn said. "That's an intellec-

PHOTO BY MIKE KEPKA/GENESIS

tual distinction catering to Protestant concerns that your average Catholic in Mexico or wherever is not doing at all." Littlejohn notes that Protestant converts also are making their mark on the Catholic Church. They bring a Protestant style of theological reasoning with them, focusing on issues such as justification by faith.

Littlejohn says Catholic leaders he talks to have reservations about Protestant conversions. They tell him they welcome anyone who comes to Catholicism convinced at an epistemic level that it is the truer expression of the Christian faith. But if someone converts out of dissatisfaction with things like their church or family background, they are setting themselves up for disappointment and may eventually convert again to another church. Catholic leaders also worry about converts who bring with them a Protestant tendency to fractiousness because they're not accustomed to functioning within an institution, Littlejohn said.

Anika Smith didn't feel much pressure to convert from Catholics her own age, but it was a whole other matter when some of her mentors embraced Rome. Both her parents died at relatively young ages, and some of her mentors stepped into parent-like roles. "They taught me and encouraged me and prayed for me the way my mom would pray for me, or my dad," she said, as tears filled her eyes. While they never overtly encouraged her to join them in Rome, she wondered if they were disappointed at her hesitation.

Smith is not alone in looking up to senior conservative figures who are Catholic. "It is undeniably a fact that Catholics are overrepresented in leadership of political and cultural conservative institutions," Littlejohn said. He cites Ryan Anderson of the Ethics and Public Policy Center and Kevin Roberts of the Heritage Foundation. They are both cradle Catholics. But other famous converts on the right include Vice President JD Vance, controversial podcaster Candace Owens, and former speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Newt Gingrich. Less recent converts include Richard John Neuhaus, founder of the magazine *First Things*, and Russell Kirk, author of *The Conservative Mind*.

Littlejohn argues that once the pattern of Catholic leadership in the conservative movement got established, it became "self-perpetuating." Today, "anybody who wants to move into that leadership class tends to—subconsciously, at least—internalize that they should be Catholic, too."

America is a historically Protestant country. Today, according to Pew, only about 20% of the U.S. adult population identifies as Catholic, whereas 40% identifies as Protestant. So, how did Catholics come to dominate the conservative movement? Littlejohn thinks a big part of the problem is that conservative Protestants don't have many of their own prestigious institutions in which to train up leaders. By contrast, conservative Catholics do.

"It is undeniably a fact that Catholics are overrepresented in leadership of political and cultural conservative institutions."

Protestants once dominated positions of cultural leadership in America, but things began to change in the second half of the 20th century. Many Protestant institutions became theologically liberal, and conservatives either left or were ejected. They tried to start new, conservative institutions, but without much success.

"If you have these inherited institutions from generations of being in the majority, you don't really know what it looks like to create a countercultural institution," Littlejohn said.

He thinks Protestant institutions also failed to flourish because of an anti-intellectual streak that assumes people become liberal from "too much book learning." Moreover, the dispensational eschatology held by many Protestants compounds the problem, according to Littlejohn. They think, "We're not going to be around much longer. So what's the point of creating another Princeton?"

Catholics, as a minority group in America, could draw on a long tradition of countercultural political leadership. Conservative Catholics were well positioned to weather the progressivism that began in the 1960s. "They are planning for the long term, and they're thinking: How do we build up an intellectually robust institution in a culture that is relatively hostile?" Littlejohn said.

Vice President Vance became interested in Catholicism while attending law school at Yale, which was founded as a Protestant institution. He was raised in a Protestant, but not especially churchgoing, family. He told *The Washington Post* in 2016, when he was considering converting, that he noticed Mormons and Catholics at Yale Law School "were really smart and successful, were engaged with their faith." They made him realize, "Maybe it is possible to have Christian faith in an upwardly mobile world."

Smith began to notice friends making comments that suggested they expected her to convert to Catholicism, particularly because she was Anglican. A former co-worker on the West Coast joked, "Oh, you're an Anglican? I give

you another two to three years and you'll be either Catholic or Orthodox."

Jacob Rodriguez is an assistant professor of New Testament at Trinity Anglican Seminary in Ambridge, Pa. He said it's "absolutely the case," that some Protestants move gradually toward more liturgical denominations, and the Anglican church often is their penultimate stop before Rome. Last summer, he addressed the issue head-on.

On a Sunday afternoon in July, Rodriguez waited patiently as churchgoers at the Church of the Resurrection, an Anglican congregation on Capitol Hill, finished their coffee and wrapped up their conversations in the fellowship hall. Volunteers set up folding chairs and a large projection screen.

"Before we get started, let me go ahead and pray because this is a very important topic," Rodriguez said as people took their seats. "It can be a sensitive topic. I also think it's an urgent topic." His lecture was titled, "Should I convert to Rome? Protestantism for the global church." The day had started warm and sunny, but during Rodriguez's talk, dark clouds gathered and unleashed a rain storm that was audible in the hall.

Rodriguez previously worked at Church of the Resurrection and returned to help out for the summer. He had several motives for giving his lecture. "Part of it was me personally answering the question why I'm not Roman Catholic, but I wanted to make sure that it wasn't an invective against Roman Catholicism." He also wanted to make a case that the Protestant church has what he calls a "charism," a unique spiritual gift, to offer the global church. Part of that charism, according to Rodriguez, is gospel clarity. He said the call to repentance "is beautifully embodied and protected by the Protestant tradition." If someone converts, he hopes they will still hold on to some of the spiritual goods of Protestantism.

Adam Nicholson, a member of Church of the Resurrection, listened attentively. He had answered the question "Should I convert to Rome?" in the negative several years before. Nicholson was raised Baptist and began attending an Anglican church in college. When he moved to Washington in the mid-2000s, he found himself immersed in a Catholic community.

"I dated several Catholic girls, was always going to Catholic parties, lived in a house with a bunch of Roman Catholic guys," he said.

Nicholson eventually enrolled in the Catholic Church's membership classes, called the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, but later dropped out. He realized the classes were for people who had definitely decided to convert, and he still had fundamental questions.

Nicholson met several times with a priest recommended by a friend who said he was good at providing answers. Before the meetings, Nicholson researched Catholic doctrine about Mary, the mother of Jesus, and came prepared with some challenging questions. He was unimpressed with the priest's lack of answers. "He didn't blow up in anger, but he basically acted like it was crazy that I could be raising any of those things," Nicholson said.

Nicholson noticed an attitude among Catholics that conversion was simply a question of "putting your faith in the church and everything else falls into place." He wasn't ready to give up his objections to certain doctrines, particularly because the Catholic Church has changed some of its teachings over the centuries. Nicholson noted the sale of indulgences, a major issue in the Reformation. "The Catholic Church has good post hoc rationalizations for how they deal with that now, but at one point that was part of the faith," he said.

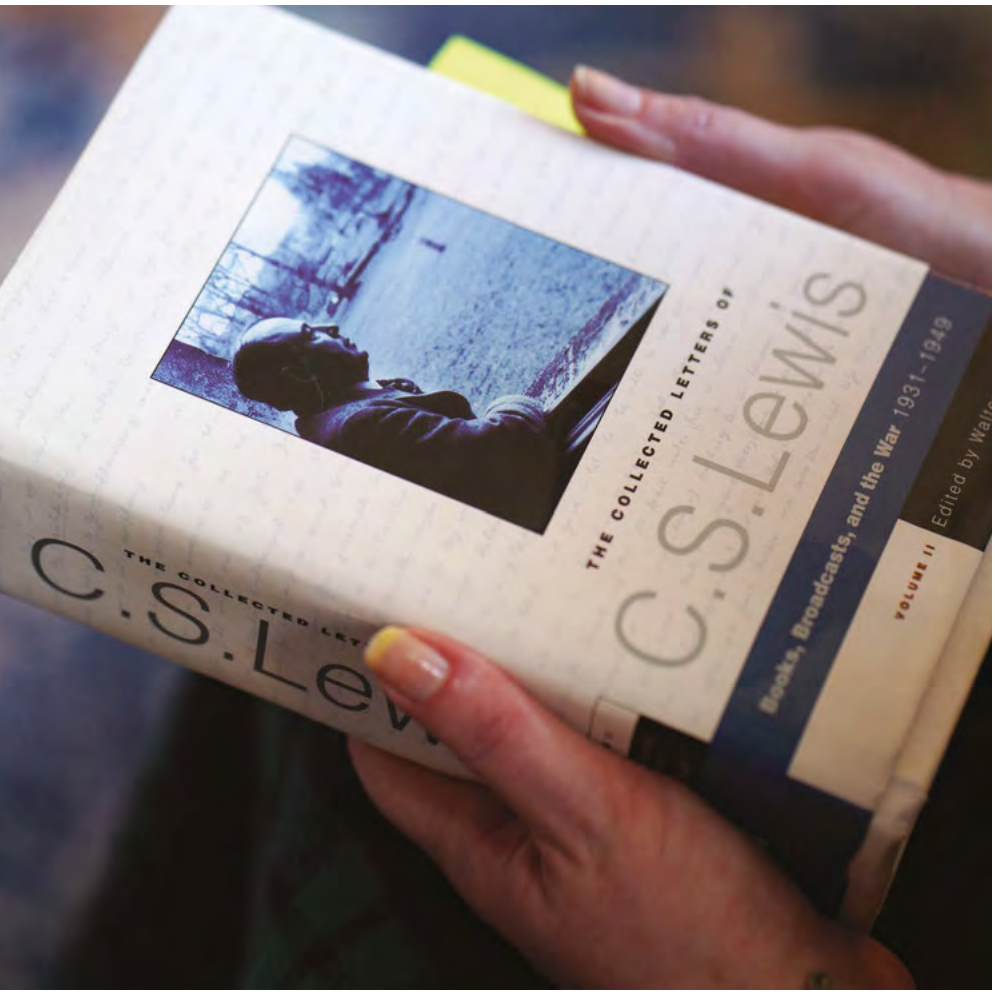
"So many of these hymns I grew up with also made it impossible for me to cross the Tiber."

Nicholson stresses that he deeply respects his Catholic friends, but he will stay Anglican. "I am very confident that being in an Anglican church, I'm being taught to think in a Christ-like way, to mold my life to Christ, to repent of sin, to be accountable to other believers and to my pastor and my bishop, and to love people as Christ did, in a way that is informed by tradition and church history."

Rodriguez has noticed three recurring concerns in people who convert to Rome—both in Washington and at Wheaton College, where he earned his bachelor's degree. The first he calls "belonging," which denotes "a longing for home in the true Apostolic Church." The second he calls "beholding," or hunger for the real presence of Jesus found in the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation which holds that the bread and the wine used in the Eucharist actually become Jesus' body and blood while retaining their original appearance and taste.

The last one is "Bible." Some converts are frustrated with the way Protestant churches handle the Bible, which can lead to "a hermeneutical free-for-all." Converts want a "more clear authority that we can submit to," Rodriguez said. For Catholics that is the pope, who they believe is "infallible"—protected by God from error when he defines a doctrine for the entire church.

Littlejohn agrees with Rodriguez on some converts' desire for clear authority. He thinks a wave of conversions got underway under Pope Benedict, whose papacy lasted from 2005 to 2013. "He was very staunchly conservative at a time when American culture was moving



Smith holds the book of C.S. Lewis letters that influenced her decision not to become Catholic.

PHOTO BY MIKE KEPKA/GENESIS

toward an embrace of gay marriage, and a lot of evangelical leaders seemed to be kind of squishy on the topic." That wave had enough momentum to continue during the liberal papacy of Francis from 2013 to 2025. Littlejohn said the current pope, Leo, who was elected in May 2025, has made AI and transhumanism his main area of focus. While Leo may not be particularly conservative, "If he can show that the Catholic Church is on top of answering the most pressing questions of the day, that's going to make it very attractive for intellectual Protestants," Littlejohn said.

The question of converting remains profound at the individual level. But Littlejohn points out that today Christians have to answer questions like, "What is a human being in an age of transhumanism?" When placed within that context, he argues, "The differences between Protestants and Catholics are not actually relevant to most of the cultural battles that we're facing."

Anika Smith tucks her feet under her as she gets comfortable on her sofa. She's wearing purple socks with cats that match her purple nail polish. Then she carefully places her mug of steaming mint tea on the arm rest.

She often pauses and looks out her living room window as we talk. The question of whether she should convert to Catholicism came to a head during the pandemic. She had just moved to New Jersey and, like many people during that difficult time, she felt "very depressed" and craved human connection. A nearby Catholic basilica was one of the few places she could attend in-person worship because it was large enough for social distancing.

Agonizing over the decision, she called up a married couple she knew from Church of the Advent and bluntly asked them, "Should I be Catholic?" They encouraged her to read a letter by C.S. Lewis from 1945 explaining his reasons for not converting to Rome.

At that point in our interview, Smith got off the sofa and walked over to a wooden side table with a stack of books. She picked up a heavy volume of Lewis' correspondence. She had marked the 1945 letter with a sticky note. Like Smith, Lewis had many Catholic friends and always approached their faith with respect. But he singled out three points where he rejected Catholic doctrine: Mary, the papacy, and transubstantiation. On those three vital matters, Lewis believed Catholic teaching is "utterly foreign to the New Testament."

"The whole set-up of modern Romanism seems to me to be as much a provincial or local variation from the central, ancient tradition as any particular Protestant sect is," Lewis wrote.

She recalls sitting on the floor of her apartment in New Jersey reading the letter. As she read, she felt an immense sense of relief. Lewis articulated her own subconscious objections to Catholic doctrine. She knew then that she would not convert.

Smith eventually moved back to Washington and now teaches Sunday school at Church of the Advent. Church leaders are discussing launching a children's Sunday school series that explains why they are Anglican and not Catholic. Smith thinks that would be "very useful."

Also useful? Leaning into the elements of worship that help define the Protestant faith.

"What we sing, we believe. And I can't not believe hymns like 'Jesus Paid It All,'" Smith said. "So many of these hymns I grew up with also made it impossible for me to cross the Tiber." ■

State lawmakers and hospital administrators rethink prenatal and newborn drug testing policies

False positives

BY ADDIE OFFEREINS

illustration by Stephanie Dalton Cowan

Laura Kuzdale didn't think twice about stopping at Tim Horton's or her regular bag of bagel bites and a blended, iced coffee drink. She was on her way to her last prenatal appointment before her scheduled cesarean section two days later. Kuzdale also picked up egg pizza and orange juice for the staff. "I was feeling good," she recalled.

But when she arrived, staff tested her daughter's vital signs and told her they wanted to move Kuzdale over to Oishei Children's Hospital in Buffalo, N.Y., to perform her C-section right away. Kuzdale called her husband and a couple of other people to let them know. She remembers telling the staff about her breakfast of bagels and iced coffee, since doctors can't perform a C-section on a full stomach. They scheduled the operation for later that afternoon and took samples of her blood and urine. Kuzdale wasn't worried about the tests. It all seemed normal and routine.



A spate of stories last year spotlighted other instances of faulty tests, including more harrowing separations triggered by poppy seed bagels or salad dressing.

The C-section went well, and Kuzdale and her newborn daughter settled into the postpartum wing of the hospital. But a social worker walked into her room at 9 a.m. the next morning. "She said, 'You tested positive for opiates, and we are going to have to turn you into child protective services,'" Kuzdale recalled. "I'm pretty sure I scoffed in bewilderment."

Kuzdale told them she didn't do drugs. In fact, at the time, she directed the social work department at a skilled nursing facility owned by Kaleida Health, the company that also presided over Oishei Children's Hospital. She called her doctors and demanded to speak with someone higher up. But the hospital social worker reiterated that because she'd tested positive, it was out of their hands. CPS had to get involved.

Kuzdale eventually filed a lawsuit against Kaleida Health for testing her for drugs without her knowledge or consent. Her case is one of a growing number seeking to challenge mandatory maternity drug testing and reporting policies. A spate of stories last year spotlighted other instances of faulty tests, including more harrowing separations triggered by poppy seed bagels or salad dressing. The outrage—and subsequent lawsuits—compelled several large hospital chains to change their policies, and a growing number of states to introduce legislation clarifying when reports are necessary.

Some proponents of the harm reduction model of addressing illicit drug addiction take it further, arguing that drug use, by itself, shouldn't reflect on parenting ability at all. But amid the escalating criticism of substance use policies, Christian child welfare advocates are quietly urging local churches to step in to assist women in crisis and prevent long-term family separations when possible.

Under federal law, hospitals aren't required to drug test maternity patients, but most do anyway. Federal law requires hospitals to notify child welfare authorities anytime a child is born substance-affected, though it's up to the states to determine whether a positive test result constitutes abuse or neglect. State testing and reporting requirements vary. Most policies direct hospitals to create a safe care plan to be shared with child welfare agencies, but not all say positive test results should trigger a child abuse or neglect report.

"Wiser states have specified that it does not, and that a separate report of abuse or neglect would have to be made to trigger an investigation," Michael Ramey, the president of the Parental Rights Foundation, told me.

But nuanced situations often escalate to full-blown investigations quickly, Ramey pointed out. Even though hospitals may just be reporting a positive test for statistical purposes, they're still reporting it to a child welfare service, which is "not known for using a lot of discretion," he noted.

For instance, Philadelphia community activist April Lee told me her nonprofit, Philly's Voice for Change, often interacts with women recovering from drug or alcohol addictions who were prescribed medications that stimulate the brain's opioid receptors to a far lesser extent than illicit opioids, but still show up as opioids on a toxicology test. Their babies can experience withdrawal symptoms, triggering hospital policies about alerting the resident social worker, who is legally obligated to report suspected abuse or neglect.

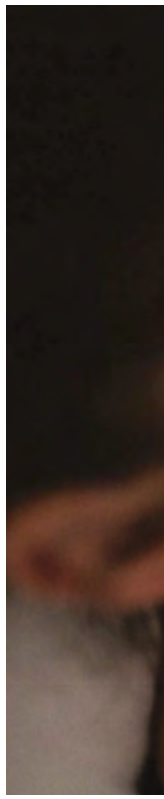
"They didn't touch anything throughout the entire pregnancy," Lee noted. But child protective services still opened an investigation and removed their babies after they were born. Lee told me she knows women who were beating their addiction, but after authorities removed their children, they relapsed. After that, chances of a quick reunification narrow, she noted.

Kuzdale, the New York mother of three, filed her lawsuit in April 2024. Staff ignored her when she told them she had consumed bagel bites that contained poppy seeds for breakfast before her labor. The baby did not test positive for opiates, the suit said, quoting from Kuzdale's medical notes. When she demanded another urine test or a blood screening, the hospital denied her request, her suit claims.

Kuzdale had been home from the hospital a mere 20 minutes when a woman from Child Protective Services showed up to scour her home. The woman checked whether Kuzdale had a crib for the baby and other safety measures in place. Later, the agency told her she would need to talk to a substance abuse counselor as a part of the investigation.

Roughly three months later, the family received a letter acknowledging the investigation was unfounded.

State data from 2019 showed roughly 83% of CPS reports and subsequent investigations proved to be unfounded, and at least two-thirds or more of reports fall into the catch-all category of neglect, not abuse. Parental illicit substance use falls into this



category. More than 46 million Americans had a substance use disorder in 2023, according to National Institutes of Health data. That means roughly 19 million American children—1 in 4—live with at least one parent or primary caregiver who has a substance use disorder.

Herbie Newell, president and executive director of Lifeline Children's Services, told me that in his experience, the harmful effects of substance abuse are the No. 1 reason his agency sees children enter foster care. And while one positive drug test doesn't mean that's what a child will experience, he says there's always the chance it could indicate a larger issue. That's why he believes maternity drug tests are important.

"Whenever there's drug abuse, there's just always the opportunity for neglect, physical abuse, physical harm, as well as mental anguish to a child," he said.

But harm reduction proponents argue drug use is a poor indicator of an individual's ability to parent. Glyceria Tsinas, co-founder and director of development for the Academy of Perinatal Harm Reduction, said that while medical professionals have a responsibility to encourage healthy behaviors during pregnancy, current testing and reporting practices discourage women from seeking prenatal care—"the best defense we have" against the long-term impacts and harms of drug use, she noted.

Sudheer Jayaprabhu, an OB-GYN in Texarkana, Texas, told me he works hard to build relationships with his expectant patients who are using substances that could harm their babies. Jayaprabhu said the policy of the hospital where he practices is to ask patients for consent before they test them for drugs. But if they refuse a test for themselves, hospital staff still test the baby after birth. Once a mom or baby tests positive, a state social worker gets involved to further evaluate the situation. But it's "usually not just based on one test," he said.

New York lawmakers are considering a bill that would bar hospitals from testing patients without informed consent and would direct healthcare professionals to only test newborns and their mothers for drugs if it appears medically necessary based on other indications. Lawmakers proposed similar bills in Arizona and Tennessee, but they got stuck in the legislative session. In April 2024, Mass General Brigham, a large hospital system in Massachusetts, announced positive toxicology tests would no longer automatically trigger child welfare reports.

Herbie Newell doesn't believe these changes are the best way forward for children. "I don't think we need to take the signs and overreact, but we don't need to eliminate those signs," he argued, adding a positive drug test should at least trigger an investigation.

But he agrees that supportive services are key—and that's where the church can step in. Lifeline oversees a program called Harbor Families in South Dakota that connects mothers at risk of losing their children with volunteer couples from local churches willing to temporarily house their children to prevent formal separations while the mom receives the treatment or services she needs.

But Nancy Osborne, the senior director for foster care and family preservation at Lifeline, said, so far, Harbor Families doesn't often get that call. "I think hospitals do feel obligated to call child protective services," she said. "But if they were aware of us and our hospital social workers, I know that that could be an option, especially if they want to work with that mom toward reunification."

Osborne hopes more hospitals—and struggling parents—encounter their program as more volunteer families get involved.

"We certainly have seen parents for whom giving birth to a child is the thing that is a turnaround in their story, and then their ability to successfully complete treatment and to get to a place of recovery," she said, "We ... would want to offer that opportunity if there is a safe way to do so." ■



RICK LOWE/GETTY IMAGES

For more coverage of America's drug crisis, visit wng.org/compassion



VOICES WHITNEY WILLIAMS

Bedside faith

God's all-sufficient grace at the end of life

It made no sense to me. Why would the local ambulance service bring a patient to my home in the middle of the night instead of speeding them to the hospital for care?

I mean, yes, I'm a nurse—but for less than three years. And yes, the hospital was full. But there had to be a better, safer, more legal option. Right? I mean, I had no emergency meds, no equipment, no doctor here. And the last time they brought a patient to my home, I totally forgot the poor man existed until my children found him days later lying alone in our backyard, soiled, dehydrated, and barely conscious.

Regardless, here they came. My heart raced and my stomach churned as I jumped out of bed to put on my uniform. "No, no, no. God help me, help me, help me," I begged.

Such were my dreams for the year and a half that I worked nights as a nurse in my local hospital's emergency room. Twice my husband found me, confused, in our closet in the middle of the night putting on my scrubs, and once (in my dream—or rather, nightmare) a patient ended up beside me in bed. Skin flakes and all!

I went to Google (like a good nurse does) and gave myself three diagnoses: impostor syndrome, exhaustion disorder, and anxiety.

But I felt like less of a "snowflake" when I remembered Biblical "heroes" who struggled similarly:

Paul dealt with "weakness, fear, and much trembling" when it came to his calling (1 Corinthians 2). Solomon, when anointed as king, felt quite the impostor: "I am but a little child. I know not how to go out or come in" (1 Kings 3). Gideon: "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house" (Judges 6). And Moses, too: "Who am I ...? I am not eloquent ... I am slow of speech and of tongue. ... Please send someone else" (Exodus 3–4).

Even Jesus—fully man, though nowhere near an impostor—exhibited signs of stress and exhaustion in the Garden. The Bible says He fell on the ground in sweaty agony the night before His crucifixion and prayed, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me" (Mark 14).

Thankfully, the Lord did remove the emergency department night shift nurse "cup" from me before it (and I) completely shattered. In August I transitioned into day shift hospice nursing.

"So you're going to give the death shot?" a loved one asked in all seriousness when I announced my job change.

Hard no. Hospice care helps people at the end of life. It doesn't help them to end their lives. But hard? Yes, at times.

Like when a 65-year-old patient, and now friend, shares through panicked tears that she's scared to go to sleep because she fears she won't wake up: "I don't want to die, Whitney. I want to live!" Or when, alternatively, a patient has lost all will to live and yet continues to linger in a broken body that renders him completely dependent on others. Or when caregivers sacrifice themselves day and night to care for a confused loved one who is just plain mean in return.

I listen, holding a hand—or at one patient's house, a playful pit bull!—and think: "Who am I to help this person, Lord, being a fairly new nurse? Who am I to encourage this person when I'm not eloquent and instead my speech often stutters out like Porky Pig's? Who am I, when I've never been in their position or felt their particular pain? Please send someone else."

And yet, because God did not remove Jesus' cup of suffering and allowed Him to bear the full weight of our sin, He says to me, and to my patients, to their family members and caregivers, and to all who acknowledge their neediness during difficult times:

"I will be with you" (Exodus 3:12); "I will help you speak and will teach you what to say" (Exodus 4:12); "I will make a way in the wilderness" (Isaiah 43:19); "I will strengthen you, ... I will uphold you" (Isaiah 41:10); "I will supply all your needs" (Philippians 4:19); "I will fight for you" (Exodus 14:14); "I will rescue you" (Jeremiah 1:8); "I will restore you to health and heal your wounds" (Jeremiah 30:17); "I am a shield to you" (Genesis 15:1); "I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten" (Joel 2:25); "I will not leave you as orphans" (John 14:18); "I will not fail you" (Joshua 1:5); "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

Nor will He leave you, His child, lying alone in some figurative backyard, soiled, dehydrated, and barely conscious. Only in my wildest dreams. ■

—Whitney Williams is a hospice nurse in Dallas

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SPORTS

Betting the house

Recent scandals have thrown sports betting into an unfavorable light, but fans might be the biggest losers

by BEKAH BERNHARDT

On more than one occasion, Janice Pierce has gotten a call from someone whose spouse put their home up for sale to pay for a gambling debt.

Pierce is the financial counseling practice lead at GamFin, a company specializing in gambling-related debt management. She works with people who have "high amounts of debt," sometimes thanks to mobile sportsbooks. "It's all so accessible now that you don't have to get in your car and drive to a casino," Pierce said.

Sports betting has recently come under scrutiny following a high-profile FBI investigation. In one of the indictments, the FBI charged six people including Miami Heat Guard Terry Rozier for allegedly sharing insider information about NBA games and player performances to influence betting odds.

This and similar scandals have prompted the NBA and some state leaders to advocate for tighter regulations on sports betting, arguing the practice is too tempting for players and undermines the very competition being wagered on. But fans are the ones who suffer most. Thanks to the rapid rise of mobile sportsbooks, many Americans have found they just can't quit placing bets. For some, a few dollars quickly leads to three-figure losses, and many gamblers don't even realize they're addicted.

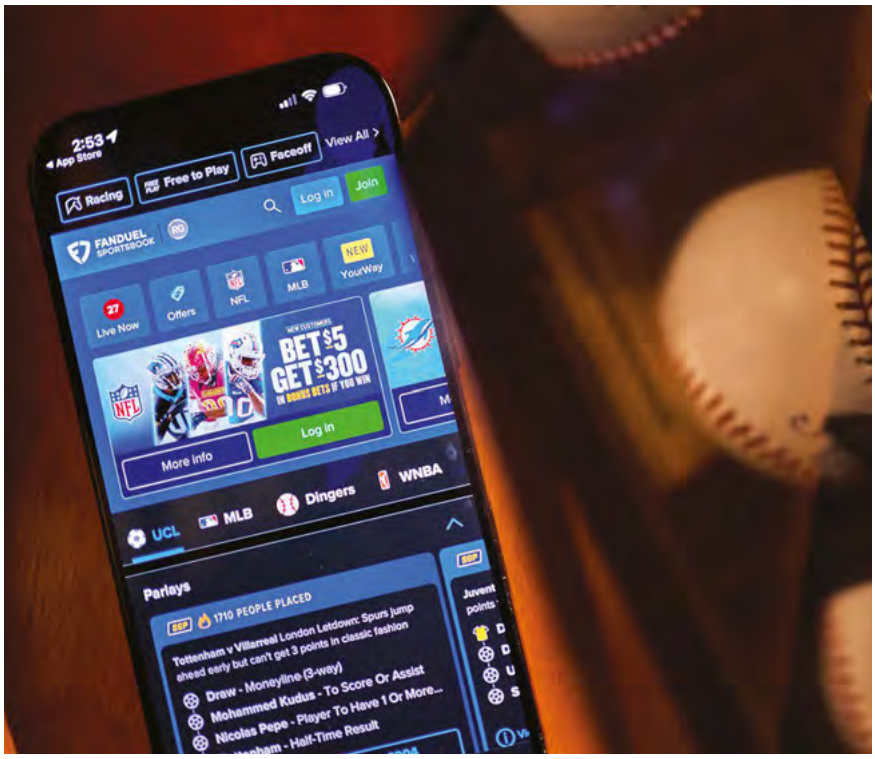
A FanDuel ad is displayed at an NBA game between the Miami Heat and the Memphis Grizzlies.

Nationwide sports betting is a relatively new phenomenon. A 2018 Supreme Court decision allowed states to regulate the practice. Today, 39 states and the District of Columbia permit it.

Mobile sportsbooks like FanDuel and DraftKings are legal in 32 states. Using so-called prediction markets like Kalshi, even gamblers living in states that don't allow sports betting can wager on sporting events since prediction markets aren't legally considered gambling platforms. Gamblers wagered more than $148 billion on sports last year, about 45% online. Nearly half of men under 50 have an account with at least one mobile sportsbook.

Pairing sports and mobile wagering can easily become "enslaving," said Jared Pincin, an associate professor of economics at Cedarville University in Ohio. Young men are particularly susceptible to addiction. "You add in the dopamine of placing these wagers, now you're upping the excitement on an event they already like."

Less than 5% of bettors make a consistent profit, meaning the sportsbooks make the majority of their revenue on losers. According to a recent US News survey, about a quarter of sports bettors said they couldn't pay a bill because of a bet. Roughly 15% took out loans to fund wagers. →



Gamblers can place bets using mobile sportsbooks like FanDuel.

"We're seeing so much money move out of things that it should be going into, like college, retirement, buying a house, buying a car," said GamFin's Janice Pierce. "All of those things people should be saving their money for is being spent gambling or gaming."

According to the latest research from the National Council on Problem Gambling, roughly 20 million Americans report experiencing "problematic gambling behavior." As many as a quarter of gamblers think their habit is out of control.

The majority of gambling addicts likely don't report their symptoms. "With the element of guilt and shame, not everybody is as forthcoming about [their] problem," said Andreas Bienert, assistant professor of counseling at Colorado Christian University. That means actual numbers are likely higher.

Two bills introduced last year could force the federal government to get more involved in gambling regulation and addiction treatment. The Gambling Addiction Recovery, Investment, and Treatment (GRIT) Act aims to set aside 50% of federal gambling tax revenue to fund addiction treatment and research grants. The federal government took in about $150 million in taxes for money wagered on gambling in 2024.

The SAFE Bet Act would ban sportsbook marketing during live sporting events, prohibit bettors from making more than five deposits within a 24-hour period, and prevent sportsbook operators from using AI to track gambling habits.

Preserving the reputation of leagues has motivated some people to push back on sports betting. In late July, Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine announced his intention to crack down on prop betting or wagering based on particular actions rather than the end result of the game. This came after Cleveland Guardians pitcher Luis Ortiz threw first pitches well outside the strike zone in two different games, allegedly so bettors could wager on the pitches being balls.

Prop betting also played a role in the recent FBI investigation. While playing for the Charlotte Hornets, Terry Rozier allegedly tipped off a friend that he would leave a game early, allowing accomplices to wager more than $200,000 on Rozier's under stats.

NBA Commissioner Adam Silver told sports analyst Pat McAfee that the NBA wants its sportsbook partners to "pull back some of the prop bets." The NBA, like most leagues, has partnerships with multiple sportsbooks.

But Cedarville's Jared Pincin believes it will be difficult to put the entire sports betting genie back in the bottle. Even Christians have mixed views about it. A little over half of pastors believe sports betting is wrong, but only about 7% discouraged the practice from the pulpit last year, according to Lifeway Research.

"You'll have churches that are running March Madness pools," he said, acknowledging that while many congregants don't play for money, it still legitimizes the practice.

"And that's just, I think, setting people up for failure." ■

"It's all so accessible now that you don't have to get in your car and drive to a casino."

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MONEY

Higher costs to stay warm

Rising prices leave homeowners out in the cold

by TODD VICIAN

The typical American household will spend nearly $1,000 this winter to keep the heat on. That's about $85 more than a year ago, according to the National Energy Assistance Directors Association (NEADA). Electricity consumers will pay about one-third more than those who heat with natural gas.

The prognosis follows several years of increasing electricity prices that generally rose nationwide at the same rate as inflation. Residential electricity prices have risen about 25% since 2019, almost 10% higher than those for businesses, according to Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory analysis. While the cost of electricity has increased nationwide, particularly in the Northeast and along the West Coast, electric bills in some states are less than they were in the 2010s, after adjusting for inflation.

Paychecks for hourly wage earners have risen about 3% to 4% a year since 2019, keeping up with inflation, except when inflation and utility costs exceeded wage growth in recent years. More than one-third of households said they reduced or went without necessities to pay an energy bill at least one month last year, according to NEADA's analysis of Census Bureau data. About one-quarter of households kept their home at an unsafe or unhealthy temperature or were unable to fully pay their energy bill at least once.

GRADUATION BLUES

College graduates may struggle to land a job this spring as businesses cut expenses, according to a recent survey of national employers. Just one-quarter of the 183 employers polled by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) anticipate hiring more graduates than they did last year. About half of those surveyed rated this year's job market "fair or poor," the most pessimistic view since the first year of the pandemic.

Declining sales and business leads, an uncertain economy, and budget cuts were the primary reasons for the concerning outlook. Economists surveyed by Bloomberg News expect the unemployment rate to remain elevated for most of 2026, but NACE researchers say employers who didn't hire college grads amid last fall's economic uncertainty may be looking for more hires this spring. Graduates who find work should plan to go into the office or worksite: Just 10% of expected job offers will be fully remote.

COUNTING ON DISCOUNTS

More wealthy Americans are shopping at discount stores, a sign that inflation is hitting more income levels. About 30% of people earning more than $170,000 a year said they now shop at stores like Walmart, ALDI, and Dollar General, especially for food and essential household items. That's up from 20% four years ago, according to researchers at GlobalData Retail. They attribute the shift, measured by surveys and credit card sales, to elevated prices and discount chains' efforts to attract affluent customers with diversified lines and more attractive aisles.



LAW

Foster freedom

Renewed hope for couples wanting to foster or adopt

by STEVE WEST



A Massachusetts state policy excluded religious parents Audrey and Nick Jones from fostering children.

In an about-face, Massachusetts state officials adopted a policy change late last year that removes a gender ideology mandate from foster care licensing.

Two religious families, aided by Alliance Defending Freedom, filed a federal lawsuit in September 2025 that challenged a state policy excluding them from fostering children because of their beliefs about sexuality—specifically, that "boys are boys and girls are girls."

Nick and Audrey Jones and Greg and Marianelly Schrock had long been licensed to foster by the state, and together provided homes to over 35 foster children. Yet the state threatened their licenses because they would not affirm a gender identity policy that required them to "promote," "support," and "affirm" a hypothetical child's gender identity or gender expression—a violation of their religious convictions.

ADF attorney Johannes Widmalm-Delphonse hopes the state will abide by its assurances that the two couples can continue to foster while staying true to their religious convictions. But he says they won't dismiss their lawsuit until the couples' foster care licenses are approved.

That's because under the amended policy, foster parents still must agree to support a child's "individual identity and needs." Widmalm-Delphonse explained in an interview with WORLD, it's unclear how state officials will interpret that language.

"Do you have to do things that go against your conscience if you're a Christian, or is it just love and respect children equally?" he asked. He also questioned whether individual needs of a child should be considered at the matching stage, rather than excluding a category of parents like his clients upfront. "Our hope is that Massachusetts pursues a big tent strategy, invites all loving families into the system, and respects religious diversity."

Massachusetts' turnaround comes after a federal appeals court panel in July 2025 ruled that a similar Oregon policy burdened single mom Jessica Bates' speech and forced her to express views against her religious beliefs as a condition of fostering or adopting a child. Bates is currently pursuing licensure while the full appeals court considers whether to revisit the panel's ruling.

States have other ways of excluding parents with Biblical beliefs about sex and gender from the fostering process without wholesale exclusion. After Jennifer and Shane DeGross filed a lawsuit against a similar Washington state policy in March 2024, the state also backtracked, granting the couple a religious waiver. But as Widmalm-Delphonse explained, the state imposed restrictions that unfairly targeted religious people, precluding them from caring for children older than 5, from adopting, and from receiving emergency placements.

A Nov. 13 executive order issued by President Donald Trump directs the secretary of Health and Human Services to take action against policies that "prohibit participation in federally-funded child-welfare programs by qualified individuals or organizations based upon their sincerely-held religious beliefs or moral convictions." It backs up letters an Administration for Children and Families spokesperson told WORLD the agency sent to 13 states late last year warning them about qualifying foster family licensure on affirming a hypothetical child's gender identity.

Widmalm-Delphonse hopes the tide has turned for religious parents. "You don't have to agree with our client's beliefs to see that there are other ways to go about addressing this issue in a way that maximizes the opportunities for children to find loving homes by making sure that every loving family is invited into the system." ■

ALLIANCE DEFENDING FREEDOM



RELIGION

Lessons that last

Off-campus club introduces public school students to the Bible

by THERESA ABELL HAYNES

First graders huddle around a table in an Everett, Wash., church basement. They form balls of multicolored clay into human figures while Marjolynn Brasseur, a LifeWise Academy teacher, watches. "Now breathe on them!" she says as the kids giggle and blow on their clay figures.

Volunteers hand out Bibles, open to a picture of Adam and Eve, and without missing a beat, the teacher begins telling the story of God breathing life into the first man. Before she finishes, volunteers are already passing out lunches—strawberries, carrots, and chicken hot dogs wrapped in freshly baked biscuits.

While they eat, the kids watch a Claymation-style video depicting God creating the first man and his wife. When the narrator says, "and God breathed life," a 6-year-old boy yells out, "Just like we did!"

The 40-minute program moves quickly, beginning with the half-mile bus ride from school. As the LifeWise bus pulls away from Emerson Elementary, the kids sing, "My God is so big, so strong and so mighty. There's nothing my God cannot do!"

From there, the class runs through a Bible story, Scripture memorization, discussions of Jesus, the concept of being created in God's image, and the value of human life. When the teacher asks, "Why did God create us?" the same boy blurts out, "For His glory!"

Less than an hour later, the kids file back onto the shuttle and return to public school—an afternoon of Sunday school squeezed into a lunch break.

Supporters hail LifeWise as a long-overlooked opportunity to make Biblical education accessible to public school students. Critics call it a dangerous encroachment on the separation of church and state.

LifeWise insists its program, based on "release time" policies, is legal.

In 1952, the Supreme Court ruled that parents must be allowed to take their children off campus for religious instruction, a decision that led to "release time religious instruction" policies across the nation. Parents have long used these policies to take kids out of school for special religious services, like Yom Kippur. And some Catholic churches have used it to offer midday classes for high school students. But it was not until recently that evangelical

JON RINGGER/LIFEWISE ACADEMY

Christians leveraged the idea to offer Bible-based education during school hours.

LifeWise founder Joel Penton set out to develop a replicable, scalable program that could be integrated into the public school day. In 2019, LifeWise Academy launched its first off-campus, Bible-education program at a school in Ohio. Since then, the movement has expanded to more than 800 schools in 30 states.

"There are 90,000 schools in the nation, and we think every one of them, every one of the 50 million students, should have access to Bible education," Penton said.

But the program's rapid success has also brought opposition.

When the Everett LifeWise Academy, the first chapter in Washington state, began in early 2025, it immediately drew the ire of local skeptics worried about the encroachment of evangelical Christianity in public schools.

At a school board meeting in July, Charles Adkins, an elected school board member, read a statement lambasting the district for allowing LifeWise to operate. "We cannot allow this religious brainwashing and bullying of non-Christian and LGBT kids to take place when we can do something to stop it," he said. "We must do everything we possibly can to protect our kids."

Parents and a Lutheran pastor also urged the board to shut down the program, arguing that it would take away from recreational time and create unfair privilege for participating students. Several community members expressed a concern that LifeWise's Bible lessons, with their teachings about created gender distinctions, would harm children and disrupt the public school's inclusive culture.

LifeWise uses a curriculum developed by The Gospel Project, published by LifeWay Christian Resources—an organization affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention.

Keith Comer, an Ohio computer programmer, created a website to help organize the Washington opposition. He objects to LifeWise's "hateful" message and worries about its effect on young children. "It's completely wrong to say nobody is capable of being a good person unless you have accepted Jesus," he said.

"Nine out of 10 kids are in public schools, so if we want to reach our youth and be a light for them, we have such an opportunity to do that."

Penton says LifeWise's critics are loud but few. For the most part, parents have been supportive, with some elementary schools enrolling up to 90% of their students.

Cindy Lien-Kessner, a grandmother who volunteers with the Everett program, is not surprised by the pushback. "The Scripture very clearly says that those who want to live a godly life will suffer persecution. When you are doing God's work, the devil gets mad."

The Everett School District maintains its statement that it neither partners with, endorses, nor opposes religious organizations like LifeWise. It provides strict parameters for the organization to follow: Lessons must take place off campus, not interfere with instructional time, and, most importantly, be offered only to students who have their parent or guardian's consent.

The school also forbids LifeWise from giving students take-home materials unless they are sealed in an envelope kept in their backpacks. Consequently, this LifeWise provides two sets of Bibles: one for home and one for class.

The average LifeWise program costs $50,000 per year, including expenses for food and some paid staff, all of which is covered by churches and local donors.

Everett's LifeWise program co-director, Darcie Hammer, said local churches and supporters have been generous with their time and resources. The Assembly of God church where the program meets, donates the use of its building every week. Another church donated two shuttles to transport kids.

Hammer said one day an older man drove to her house, gave her $4,000 worth of gold coins, and told her to "go buy tires" for the two shuttles.

A team of volunteers, mostly retired teachers and grandparents, shows up every week to set up the classroom, make lunches, and help the teachers enthusiastically greet students when they get off the bus.

"We are intentional Christian grandparents," said Earl Radford, a retired children's church pastor who spends his Wednesday mornings making lunch for the kids. "I didn't want to sit around and watch TV in retirement. I want to be purposeful."

Hammer and her co-director, Sarah Sweeny, met in their kids' elementary school parking lot. Sweeny overheard Hammer asking a teacher if she knew of any other Christian parents in the school who would be interested in praying. Sweeny introduced herself, and the two moms spent the next year walking around the schoolyard, praying. When they learned about the LifeWise program, they knew it was an answer to those prayers. Now they have 53 students enrolled.

Sweeny recognizes that many Christians are choosing to homeschool or send their children to Christian schools, but as a former public school teacher, she is passionate about staying involved.

"Nine out of 10 kids are in public schools, so if we want to reach our youth and be a light for them, we have such an opportunity to do that," she said. ■



Pennsylvania State Capitol

LIFE

Abortion on demand

Pennsylvania seeks to expand abortion access

by LAUREN CANTERBERRY

Pennsylvania's House of Representatives approved just before Christmas a proposed constitutional amendment that would strip protections for unborn babies. The bill would allow abortions through any stage of pregnancy for essentially any reason. While the measure leaves open the possibility for the state to regulate abortion after an unborn baby reaches viability, it emphasizes such protections could not override an abortionist's opinion that an abortion is necessary to protect the physical or mental life of a pregnant woman.

The measure passed nearly along party lines, though two Democrats voted against the bill and two Republicans voted in favor. During the more than two-hour floor debate ahead of the vote, Republican Rep. Barb Gleim urged lawmakers to recognize that abortion is an issue of morality according to God's design. Other lawmakers said the language of the proposal was excessively vague.

Current state law only protects babies after 24 weeks of pregnancy, except in cases where the life of the mother may be at risk. Girls under the age of 18 must obtain parental consent or a judicial bypass to obtain an abortion, and women are required to have an in-person appointment to determine how far along the pregnancy is. Women must also participate in options counseling and wait 24 hours before getting an abortion.

Days before the vote, state Superior Court Judge Cheryl Lynn Allen sent a letter to the Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus calling on representatives to vote against the bill. While black women make up about 14% of the women of childbearing age in the state, they account for more than 40% of abortions, she said. Dozens of pastors, physicians, and community leaders signed her letter.

The bill will now move to the Republican-controlled Pennsylvania Senate for consideration and will need to be passed by both chambers in two consecutive sessions before going before voters.

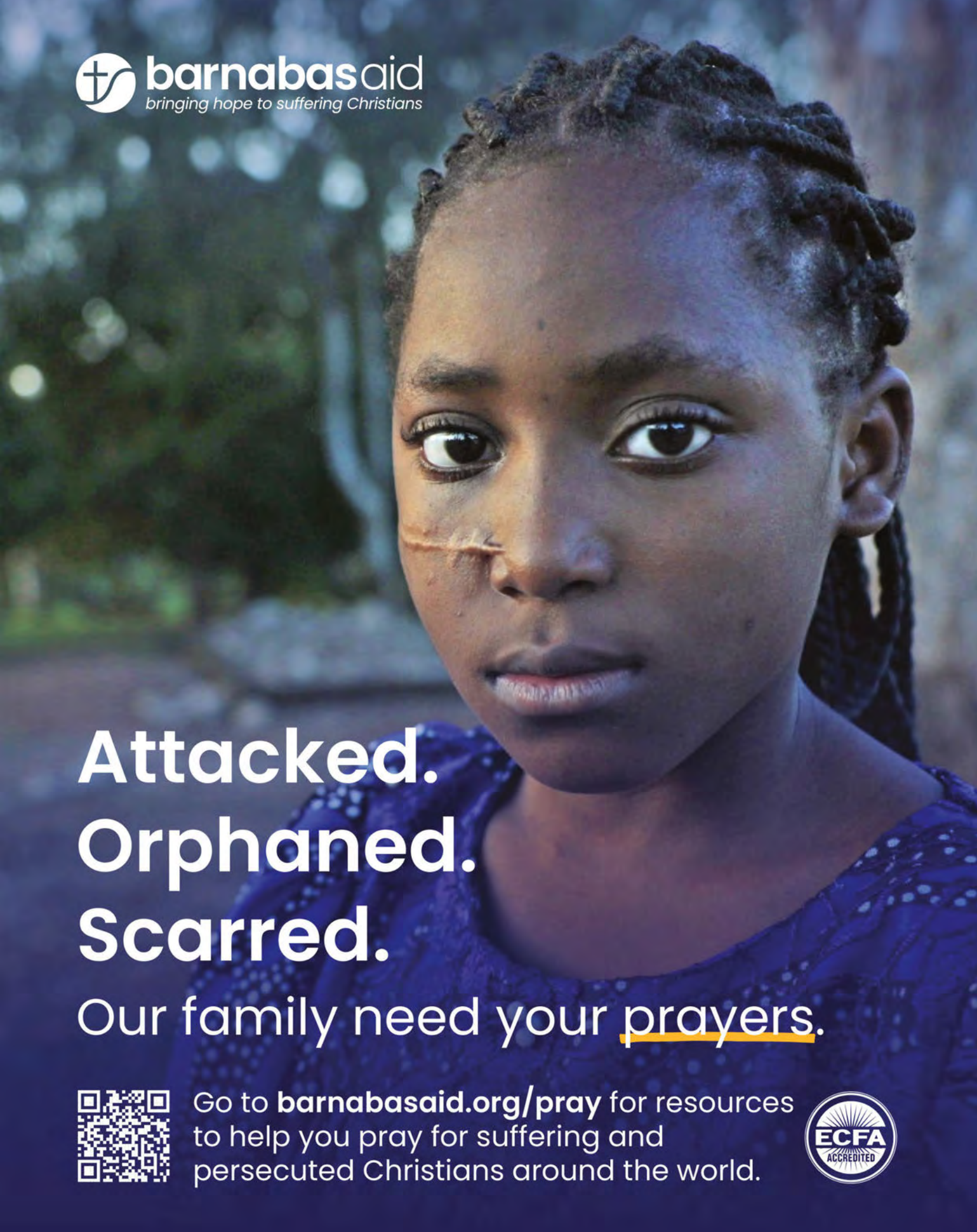
REPEAT OFFENSE

Police in the county of West Midlands, England, last month once again criminally charged Christian pro-life advocate **Isabel Vaughan-Spruce** for silently praying outside an abortion facility in Birmingham. She is the first person to be charged under the country's law that prohibits anyone within 150 meters—roughly 500 feet—of an abortion facility from acting in a way that could be interpreted as influencing a person's decision to obtain an abortion. While local municipalities have similar buffer zone laws, the national law implemented in 2024 applies across the country.

Authorities in Birmingham have arrested Vaughan-Spruce multiple times for violating the local ordinance by praying silently. In 2024, a court ordered the police to apologize and pay her $17,500 in damages after she was arrested twice in 2023. The new buffer zone law does not explicitly mention silent prayer, according to Alliance Defending Freedom International. In a statement to *The Telegraph*, a U.S. State Department spokesperson said the prosecution represents a departure from the countries' shared values of freedom of expression.



CAPITOL: NATHAN MORRIS/NURPHOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES; VAUGHAN-SPRUCE: JACOB KING/PA IMAGES VIA GETTY IMAGES


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HEALTH

The straight dope on weed

New review questions the benefits of medical marijuana

by HEATHER FRANK

President Donald Trump's recent move to loosen restrictions on marijuana use is potentially at odds with scientific data about the drug's benefits. According to a surprising meta-review released Nov. 26, medical marijuana may do more harm than good.

A University of California, Los Angeles–led group of experts evaluated over 2,500 scientific articles detailing the effectiveness of cannabis against conditions ranging from Parkinson's disease to pediatric seizure disorders. Publishing their work in *JAMA*, the researchers found that FDA-approved cannabis-derived products only remedy a limited number of ailments. These included chemotherapy-induced nausea and HIV/AIDS-related appetite loss.

For the majority of illnesses examined, the researchers reported inconclusive or insufficient evidence of the drug's effectiveness as a treatment. They found no clear benefit for chronic pain, insomnia, anxiety, or PTSD—conditions commonly treated with cannabis. In some cases, marijuana use was associated with serious health risks: 29% of medical marijuana users exhibited symptoms of cannabis overuse disorder.

Lead study author Dr. Michael Hsu called for additional, rigorous research to better understand the risks and benefits of medical marijuana.

THE KIDS ARE NOT ALRIGHT

U.S. parents are spending more on their children's behavioral health than ever before. A study published Dec. 15 in *JAMA Pediatrics* found that behavioral health expenses for children 6 to 17 years old have nearly doubled nationwide since 2011.

Behavioral health includes mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and substance use disorders. Analyzing national healthcare data, a medical team reported that behavioral healthcare costs went from 22% of all pediatric health expenditures in 2011 to 40% in 2022. Out-of-pocket spending increased from $2.1 billion to $2.9 billion within the same time period, and made up over a quarter of all pediatric healthcare out-of-pocket spending in 2022.

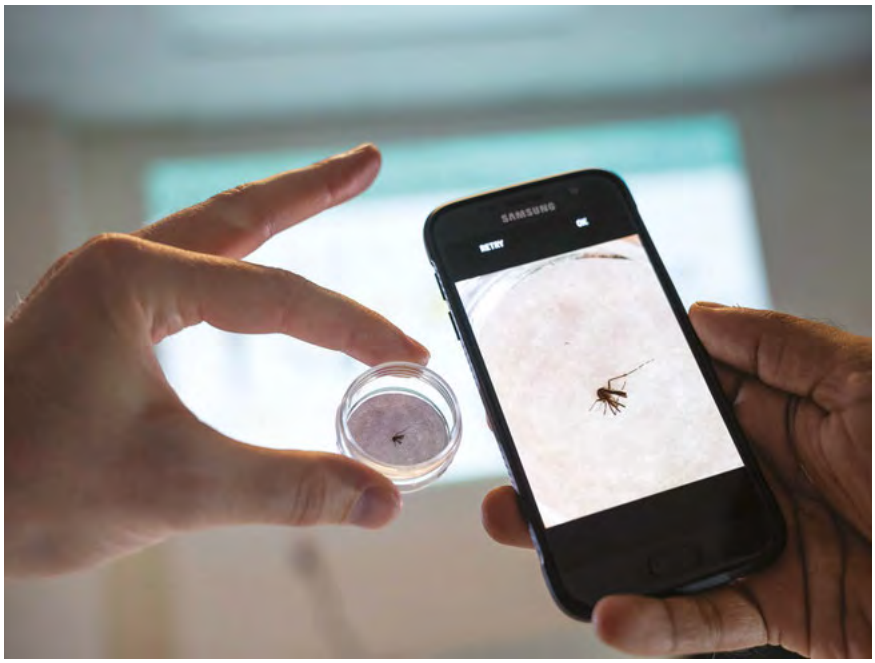
The study authors attributed rising costs to an uptick in children's behavioral issues, likely worsened by COVID-19 school closures and social isolation. They also pointed to increased access to care spurring more families to seek treatment.

BABY FORMULA CRACKDOWN

The FDA recently sent warning letters to major U.S. retailers for failing to remove recalled baby formula. ByHeart voluntarily recalled its Whole Nutrition infant formula on Nov. 11, after it was linked to an infant botulism outbreak that has hospitalized at least 51 children. The Dec. 12 letters gave Walmart, Target, Kroger, and Albertsons 15 days to provide evidence of full compliance with the recall. The FDA reported checking retail stores nationwide more than 4,000 times after the voluntary recall and finding recalled formula in over 175 locations.



MARIJUANA: BILL OXFORD/GETTY IMAGES; BYHEART: CHEYANNE MUMPHREY/AP



COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

An AI tool that can identify malaria-carrying mosquitoes in photos could help prevent disease in Madagascar.

TECHNOLOGY

Citizen science meets AI

Researchers use tech to crowdsource data collection

by EVANGELINE SCHMITT

Your next social media post could become a data point in an animal study. Recent scientific naturalist studies are using artificial intelligence to sift through thousands of photos and extract data about animal sightings.

One research group is looking for photos of *Anopheles stephensi*, a malaria-carrying species of mosquito adapted to urban settings. It has spread to more than six African countries in the last 10 years. A group of researchers from the University of South Florida and the University of Antananarivo in Madagascar created an AI tool that can detect *Anopheles stephensi* in photos. They took thousands of smartphone photos of mosquitoes and trained an AI model to identify the species using a photo recognition algorithm.

Now the tool can automatically analyze photos of mosquitoes submitted to citizen science apps like iNaturalist or NASA's GLOBE Observer. Recently, it identified *Anopheles stephensi* in a photo from Madagascar taken five years ago, before the species was believed to be present in the island country.

"Traditional mosquito surveillance such as trapping is expensive, requires expertise, and time," said Ryan Carney, the project's lead researcher. By contrast, the AI tool facilitates a citizen science approach to disease prevention, which should be a "priority for both local communities and international health bodies like the World Health Organization."

Carney said getting the word out can be a problem: "For these tools, one of the limitations is that people are simply unaware that the citizen science apps exist, or that photos of mosquitoes are needed by scientists." To encourage participation, Carney's team hosts workshops in elementary schools and universities in Madagascar.

A group of scientists studying sharks has found a different solution to a similar problem. People may not know that scientists need shark photos, but they're usually excited to post their shark sightings on social media. Marine biologists from Virginia Tech and Stanford University have created an AI tool that doesn't rely on photos submitted to science-related applications. Instead, it uses Instagram posts, Facebook posts, and other photos posted online.

The AI platform, called "sharkPulse," relies on web data mining, the process of computers automatically collecting and organizing information from thousands of sources across the internet. In the case of sharkPulse, the AI tool collects photos of sharks in addition to time stamps, location data, and species information. A group of marine biologists validates each photo before adding it to a searchable database.

"With cameras in nearly everyone's hands, our encounters with the ocean are being recorded more than ever," said Jeremy Jenrette, a Ph.D. candidate working on the project. "SharkPulse turns scattered signals into knowledge."

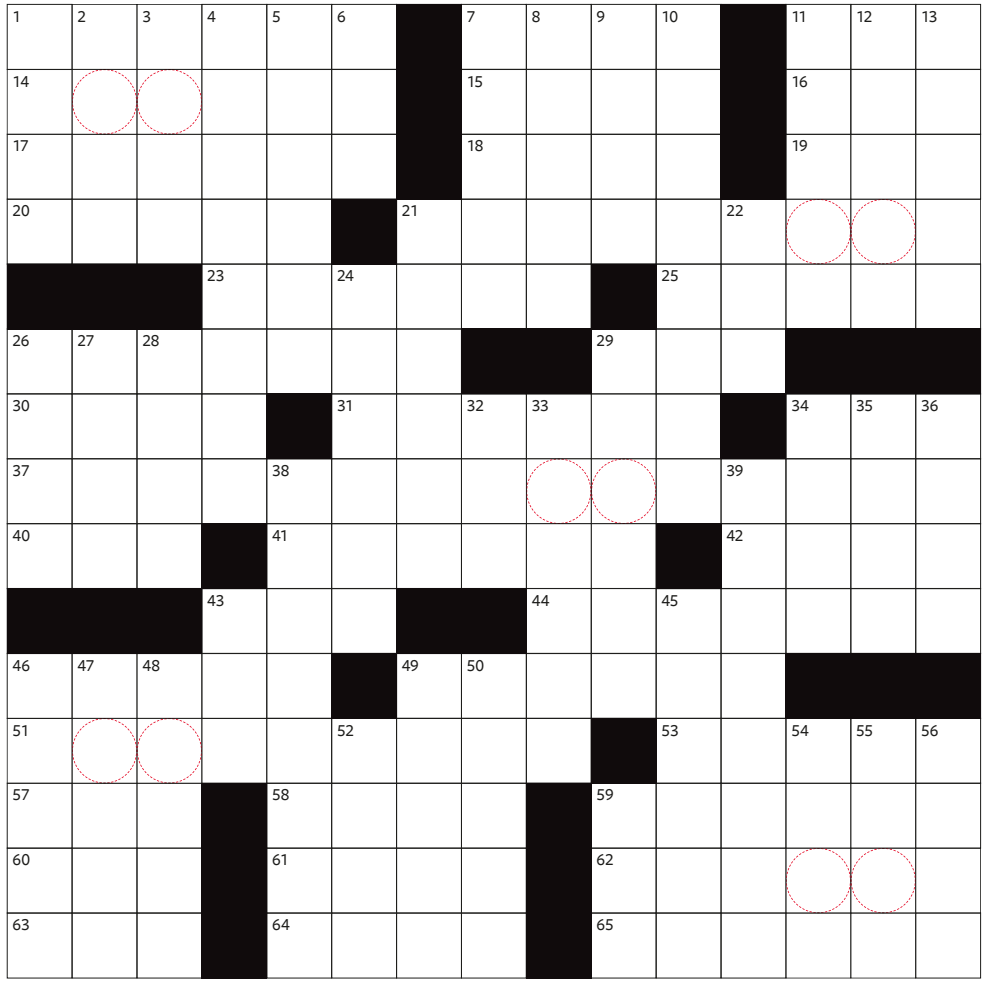
SharkPulse currently has over 100,000 records featuring over 285 shark species. The tool also can analyze historic photos, which provide data points as far back as the 1890s. Using the records, marine biologists have identified new hot spots of shark activity, notably white shark hot spots in the Mediterranean. The team is currently improving sharkPulse's multilingual data mining capacities and working to integrate other data sources like fishery records.

SharkPulse could be adapted to create similar platforms for other species. "This is about creating an always-on pulse monitor for the ocean," lead researcher Francesco Ferretti explained. "The more we see, the more we can do to protect." ■

CROSSWORD

Double vowel

by DON McCRORY



Across

1 Percentage on a bank sign
7 Exclude
11 Obamacare, for short
14 ____-Dazs
15 Flaky mineral
16 Bear's lair
17 Did some fishing
18 Actor Baldwin
19 Bug killer
20 Pine product
21 Sect condemned by Jesus
23 Capital of Iran
25 Some like it hot
26 Acorn producer
29 Merriment
30 Case for a dermatologist
31 Big prize on *The Price Is Right*
34 Split ____ soup
37 Words that may convince you to pass?
40 Observe
41 Fake people
42 Too
43 ATM code
44 Wall-to-wall floor coverings
46 Rip to pieces
49 Summoned
51 Work together
53 Ziti, e.g.
57 Fishing pole
58 Internet sensation
59 Guide
60 Sushi tuna
61 Notion
62 Source of a terrier's terror, perhaps
63 Wok, e.g.
64 Young horse
65 More than sufficient

Down

1 Blacken
2 Great ____
3 From ____ to riches
4 Twinkling
5 High school student, informally
6 Conclusion
7 D-Day beach
8 Italian fashion city
9 Cake decorator
10 Reserved
11 Tacked on
12 Surrendered
13 Unable to sit still
21 Gussies up
22 Prodigal ____
24 Kermit creator Jim
26 Quaker ____
27 Tylenol target
28 Joint with a cap
29 Former Saudi king
32 "____ is me!"
33 Group of friends
34 Brazilian soccer legend
35 Right on the map
36 Follower of Joel
38 Uncontrolled outbreak
39 Emulate Gregory Hines
43 Get-up-and-go
45 Undo, as a law
46 Discard
47 Kerfuffle
48 *The Thinker* sculptor
49 Humped beast
50 Troubled
52 Try again
54 Leave speechless
55 Promote
56 Private employer?
59 Super Bowl VIP

Bonus clues and puzzle solution on page 110



One message could be the difference between life and death

Dear Pro-Life Friend,

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

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

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DISCERN
Ages 11-14

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Browse sample articles at gwnews.com/family26.

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

Across

17 Not straight
41 Those in front of the camera
65 Horn of ____

Down

7 Nebraska's largest city
39 Click-clacking performing art





VOICES ANDRÉE SEU PETERSON

When your faith requires faith

Working out salvation is a daily challenge

Do you know that I am almost never sure that I should write the essay I am about to write? And then, after I sit down and write it, I am almost never sure I should have?

It just happened again. I got on my knees by the computer, as is my habit, to ask God for help, guidance and skill from the Spirit, and freedom from great error.

And then I sat down on this swivel chair with fear and trembling.

I like that the Bible has the phrase "fear and trembling" when it describes our Christian life, as in "Therefore, my beloved, ... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). It's well said. We take a step, with something less than 100% certainty, and then another step. Repeat. But what else can we do? Not walk at all?

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) was a Danish philosopher who wrote a book called *Fear and Trembling*, about Abraham's near-sacrifice of his son Isaac. But I'm guessing it had some heretical bits. (See 1 Corinthians 1 on philosophers.)

I will throw you a few typical daily dilemmas, so as not to be as opaque as Kierkegaard. On a regular fasting day (Mondays for me), if I haven't slept the night before, do I say to myself, "It would be wise, and fair to my employer, to eat something before I go off to work"? Or do I say, "I will trust in the Lord to sustain me without food and sleep"? Don't answer too fast, because if you give it a minute, it gets complicated.

Here's another example from real life. (Am I telling you too much? I'm not sure!)

I'm the church cleaning lady, and I have to work on Sundays (that's not the dilemma part yet) because we have a community school ministry downstairs with lots of classrooms that need to be shipshape for Monday morning after we use it for our own Sunday school.

On weekdays at work, I like to listen to interesting podcasts. It makes the time fly. But it has occurred to me that when God said in His Ten Commandments that we are to keep the Sabbath "holy," He was indicating that we should make a distinction between this one day and the other six. Holy means "set apart," after all. It would be appropriate, therefore, if I refrained from my podcast addiction to just be quiet and pray for one day. Or maybe I should at least just listen to sermons.

So what do you think? To be honest, I usually start out with a sermon, or "the Bible read slowly," or some preacher in France. (That way I brush up my French.) But after a while it creeps up to all kinds of podcasts that will "enrich me spiritually." Of course the Lord alone knows the secrets of the heart (Psalm 44:21; 1 Corinthians 14:25).

Which brings me to a comment of Paul's that has long made me ponder. He writes to the Corinthians, in partial self-defense against their unwarranted accusations:

"But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God" (1 Corinthians 4:3–5).

It has often pained me to hear this passage preached as some proof of a doctrine of depravity or Christian life as a tissue of sin. What the apostle is saying is clear to me: "I do the best I can by God's grace, by prayer, and by study of His Word, putting one foot in front of the other, and not allowing my energies to be consumed in constant second-guessing, but rather, pressing forward. As far as I know, I am obeying God. I am aware of no secret sin. If I am wrong, He will let me know when He returns."

So the subtitle of this column could be: "Working through daily challenges according to God's Word in sometimes nearly 50–50 or 49–51 situations, and finally picking one way, and not looking back." It's a longish subtitle, but they did that kind of thing in Jonathan Edwards' day. ■

Email editor@wng.org



Cody spells using a laminate letter board.

Learning to speak

On one family's mission to give their autistic son a voice

by LEIGH JONES

Autism is one of the most devastating and yet least understood conditions. The lack of answers about causes and treatments is especially difficult for parents whose children cannot speak. For her story on p. 72, Mary Jackson met a family that uses a controversial communication method to talk to their son, Cody. It's called spelling, and it enables Cody to spell out the words he's unable to speak. They say it has allowed them to hear him for the first time. And many of the things he's said came as quite a surprise.

How do Cody's parents explain the knowledge he seems to have on subjects he's never been taught? World War II history, for example. They believe he is an auditory learner, and he's been absorbing information his whole life, unbeknownst to them. Matt believes Cody's interest in World War II stems from his father, Cody's grandfather, who was a war veteran and won medals. But Cody's parents admit they are routinely shocked by his knowledge base and cannot really explain it.

What else have they learned about Cody's inner thought life? They learned he had a lot more Biblical knowledge than they realized. They say he often talks about his personal relationship with Christ or refers to Scripture. He expresses feeling left out of family functions. He apologized to his mom for his aggressive behavior in the past. He told his parents he harbors no resentment toward them for the years they assumed he had little intellectual capability. He has opinions about a wide range of things. He loves spelling and wants other nonspeakers to start working at it sooner than he did.

Cody frequently talks about seeing angels and demons. How do his parents explain that? Cody's father Matt says before Cody started spelling he was a cessationist, meaning he believed spiritual gifts ceased and are no longer given to believers today. Matt and Glori now believe Cody has special gifts and actually sees the spiritual world. It's changed their everyday lives. If Cody spells about a demon, or in his limited speech, mentions one, they stop everything and pray. They believe demons are opposed to spelling and want to keep nonspeakers trapped in silence.

What else did Cody say about the spiritual realm? I was struck by his description of a place he called "the hill." He says he goes there while he is sleeping and has no control over when it happens. He described it as a meeting place he and other nonspeakers go to be together and with Jesus. He says he is free of his autism there.

Your story ends with a question Cody asked you: "Do you believe me?" What did you say? I told him that I did. I believe there is a spiritual realm I cannot see or understand at work all around me. I don't know why Cody is the only one in the room who can see it. I asked him about that. He wondered if the enemy blinds us with worldly distractions. But he also admitted these are his thoughts—not certainties. ■

PHOTO BY MARY JACKSON

Are you profiting from or supporting abortion through your investments?

The bad news: most investors are unknowingly involved in abortion by owning companies in mutual funds and other investment vehicles. The good news: you don't have to anymore.

At **Sovereign Private Wealth,** we are dedicated to a pro-life, pro-family approach to investing. Our investment portfolios screen out companies that profit from or support abortion and other harmful activities, giving you the **freedom and confidence to invest according to your values.**

As a steward, you deserve the assurance that your investments align with your deeply held beliefs. To find out what activities your investments are currently profiting from, contact us at **sovereignpw.com** for your **free portfolio audit.**



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