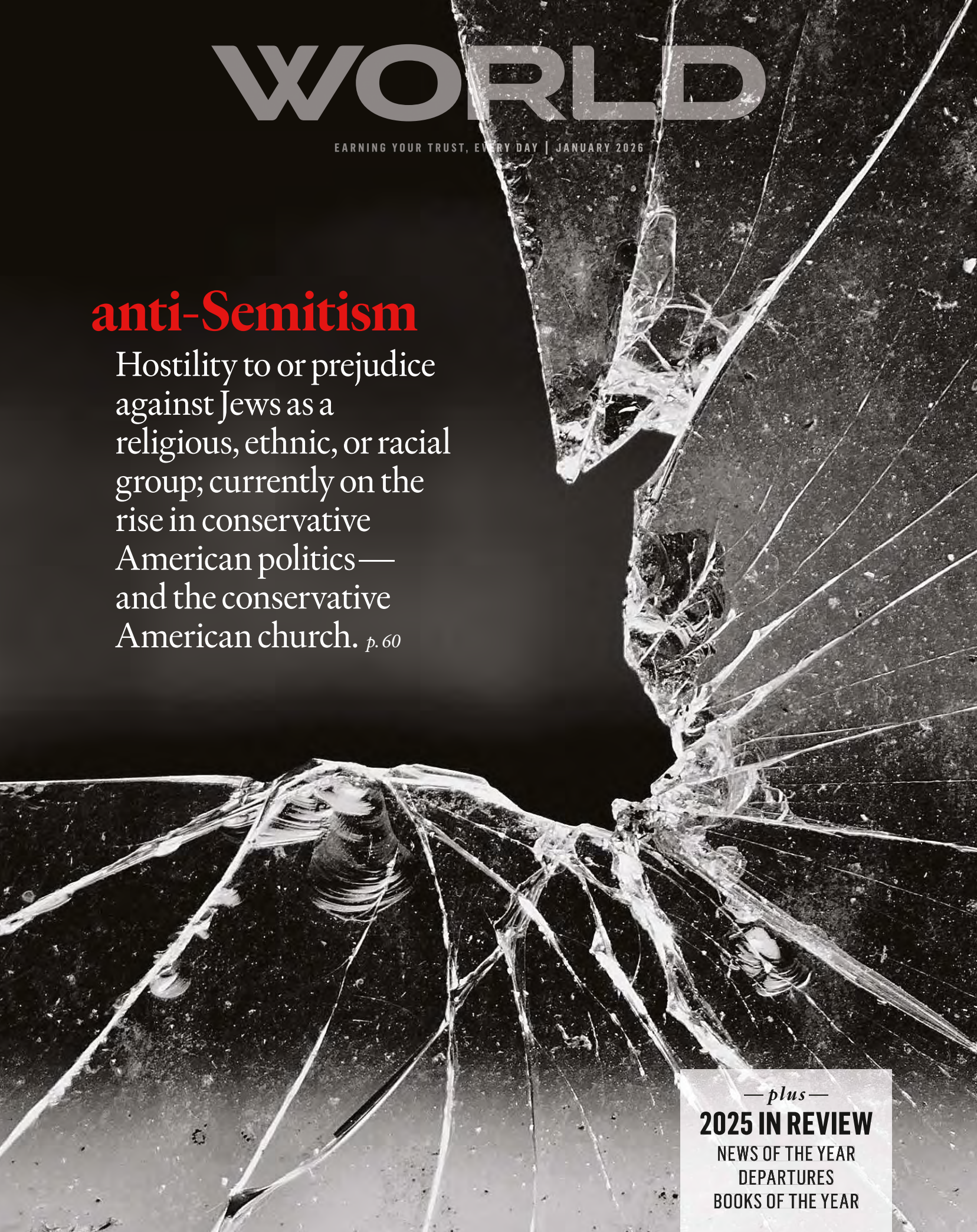


WORLD



EARNING YOUR TRUST, EVERY DAY | JANUARY 2026

anti-Semitism

Hostility to or prejudice against Jews as a religious, ethnic, or racial group; currently on the rise in conservative American politics—and the conservative American church. *p. 60*

—plus—

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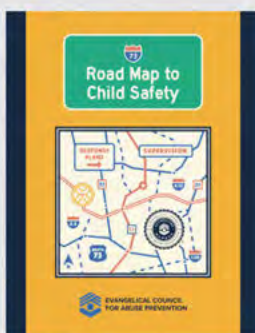
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360

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

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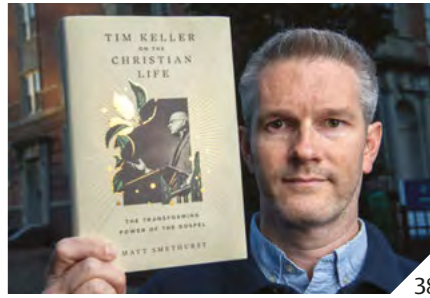
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COVER PHOTO

by EyeEm Mobile GmbH/Getty Images

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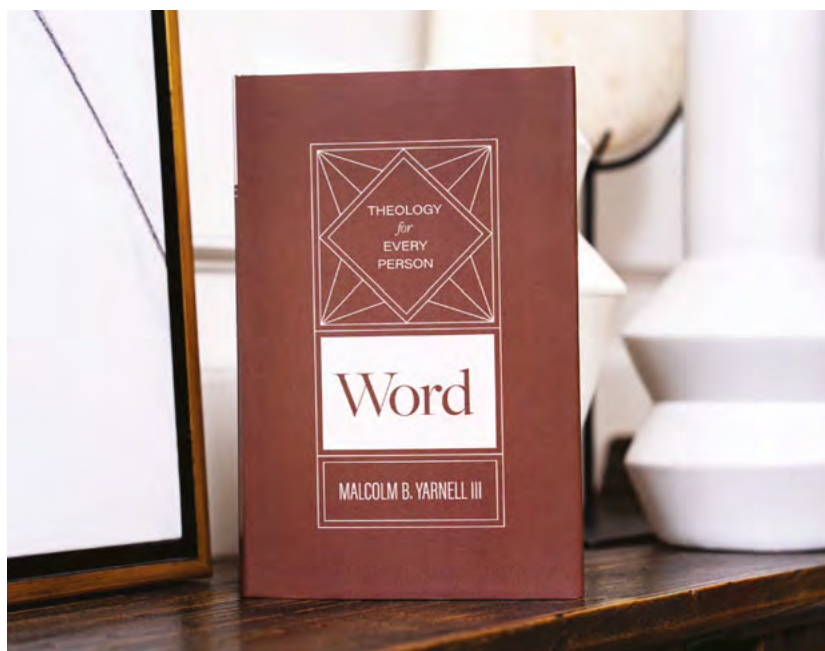


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WORLD NOTES



For a mission-driven organization, it is always useful to return to the beginning. WORLD's beginning came in December 1985, in a small "pilot" issue that set our commitments—to truth, to reporting on-the-ground, to serving ordinary readers, and to rooting everything in Scripture. Cut flowers are great, but they do not last. WORLD was planted, not arranged, and that early issue reminds us of our roots.

One detail from that first issue says a lot about them: the cover photo. Joel Belz chose an image that in 1985 was getting nowhere near the attention it would garner years later—of a figure who would soon have a hand in reshaping world affairs. Joel saw it early. Any guesses?

Joel wrote the introductory note in that pilot issue and appeared on the masthead as editor. William S. Barker served as publisher. The "Editorial Staff"—singular—was Stephen J. Lutz. Nat Belz handled design, and Mindy Belz contributed a story as a freelancer. Barker wrote a piece, as did Edmund P. Clowney, who would later write many more. If you've tracked WORLD from its earliest days, those names form a kind of family tree.

The intro by Joel stated the project's purpose plainly: "to provide a simple weekly summary of what's going on in the world, and to accompany that report with analysis and commentary from a Biblical Christian perspective."

A "simple weekly summary," yes—but hardly simple to produce. Given their limited staff and resources, the audacity of that early vision is easy to underestimate.

Here are a few of WORLD's "distinctives," as Joel described them in that first issue:

- ▶ "We're aiming at laypeople, not experts."
- ▶ "Our springboard will be news."
- ▶ "Our own staff will be small at first." He wasn't

kidding. Our staff has grown—we have more than one "editorial staff" listed on our masthead—but compared to other news organizations, we retain Joel's ambition to do a lot with a little.

▶ "WORLD will be unabashedly Christian in its viewpoint."

▶ And on commentary: "Where there is disagreement ... you should expect writers to be charitable in their spirit."

He further described WORLD as a publication that would emphasize reporting—"two or three significant reports by writers where the news is happening"—in an issue only 20 pages long. That reporting-first instinct remains central to our identity.

Those WORLD pioneers could not have imagined the internet, podcasts, email newsletters, or instant digital delivery of audio and video. A "weekly summary" alone is no longer enough. But the distinctives Joel outlined—aiming at ordinary people, reporting the news, and doing so with a Biblical worldview—still guide our work.

About that cover photo? Mikhail Gorbachev—selected two years before he would be *Time* magazine's choice for "Man of the Year" (and five years before he'd be *Time*'s "Man of the Decade," when, let's face it, it was Reagan!). Point is, WORLD's roots run all the way back to that kind of discernment and readiness.

That first page also included Psalm 24:1: "The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein." That truth still animates all our work.

Those roots matter especially now, as we continue the slow work of replanting—literally—after the flood destroyed our offices last fall. I mentioned a few months ago that we found a small space in Asheville to house our business offices. We've had to do a little interior construction in the space, but it's nearing completion and we are gradually moving in.

Part of the process of moving in is going through several storage units containing everything we tried to salvage from the flood. We gradually are clearing out those storage units, which means making determinations on what really can be saved and what cannot. We hoped to salvage a beautiful grandfather clock that had been gifted to us when we first moved in to the offices now lost, but it is, sadly, damaged beyond repair. We still hope to save the old roll-top desk that has been around, best we can tell, since Henry Dendy used it to start *The Southern Presbyterian Journal*, WORLD's predecessor publication. That will take some work.

Surprisingly, the "gallery" of WORLD covers, which we printed on an impermeable backing, was fine, despite sitting in contaminated water for days. The photos of our staff, which we printed on a stiff paper backing, were not.

I'll keep you updated here on our progress in the new space.

KEVIN MARTIN
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
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M A I L B A G

“Gentile believed that true democracy is when citizens subordinate themselves to the state. ... He believed that private interests must serve the public interests or the state.”

WHAT IS FASCISM?

Page 28: I agree that people are woefully ignorant when it comes to understanding history and fascism in particular. But I was hoping the writer would more clearly unmask fascism for what it really is. Fascism is not on the right, it is on the left, along with socialism and communism. If you look at the Nazis’ 25-point platform you will see things like state control of banks and industry, education, media, and other socialist dogma. Fascists are socialists with a strong national identity.

The author of fascism was Giovanni Gentile, a committed socialist. Benito Mussolini got his inspiration from Gentile’s writings. Gentile believed that true democracy is when citizens subordinate themselves to the state so that through the government we will take care of one another like a family. He believed that private interests must serve the public interests or the state.

In contrast, the further you move right on the political spectrum, the people gain power at the expense of centralized government. Some would say that militarism and a strong nationalist sentiment makes a person a fascist. Not true! Gandhi was a nationalist, and so was Nelson Mandela. Our own George Washington and the Founding Fathers were strong nationalists and took action militarily. Their goal was to wrest control from a centralized power (the king) and give it back to the people.

Others have said that our current administration is fascist because it is



NOVEMBER 2025

persecuting illegal aliens like the Nazis persecuted the Jews. But these two examples are completely different. The deportation of illegal aliens follows the rule of law of a rational democratic republic, but the Nazis persecuted their own citizens under the misguided banner of ethnic superiority.

So why do most people believe that fascism is on the right? The reason comes right out of the Nazi playbook. Joseph Goebbels, minister of propaganda for the Nazis, said, “If you repeat a lie often enough, people will believe it, and you will even come to believe it yourself.” Today, anything nationalistic and/or militaristic gets the label *fascist*, when the real test is top-down control versus government in the hands of the people.

KEVIN LANTAFF
Commerce City, Colo.

Emma Freire is correct that communism and fascism look similar in that they are authoritarian. The textbook definition of “left” (communism) and “right” (fascism) is thus unhelpful. Gary Allen in 1971 presented “a more rational political spectrum with total government in any form on the far Left and no government or anarchy on the far Right.” Historically, the USA’s system of a constitutional republic with limited government is right of center.

BRUCE SPIDELL
Boca Raton, Fla.

Freire provided a succinct and good description of fascism that prompted some memories. During the 1960s and ’70s, especially, one often faced statements that ran as follows: “I am afraid of and oppose extremism whether from the left or the right. Besides, the reds (communists) and the browns (Nazis) are practically the same: Extremes always meet.” This linguistic sleight of speech allowed leftists to brand conservatives as Nazis. But fascism, communism, and Nazism are of the left. Consider just a few of the common factors found in these ideologies: economic, biological, sociological materialism; complete state control of education; conformity of mass media; persecution or control of religious bodies; and the total mobilization of envy in the interest of the party and state.

STEVE CONWAY
Edwardsville, Ill. →

LAND OF PLENTY

Page 66: The article seems to overlook an important spiritual consideration to the question about the benefits or drawbacks of industrial farming: Maybe a lot of the problem with obesity and health is not from processed foods or certain fertilizers, but from a lack of self-discipline in our society. Many people eat too much and exercise too little, and Christians seem to be as guilty as anyone else.

BOB BOYD
Prescott Valley, Ariz.

As a dietetics professional, I am thrilled to see more of a food focus in *WORLD*. The two articles in the November issue about crop farming and food politics were excellent. I work for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), so I advocate for only using federal dollars for specific “healthy” foods over allowing people to purchase soda and candy with people’s tax dollars (like SNAP does).

DIANNE DANIELSON
Chesapeake, Va.

Addie Offereins’ article gave a reasonable overview of farming but missed the last 30 years on how the use of genetic engineering globally has revolutionized crop production for soybeans, corn, canola, cotton, and other crops, significantly increasing yields, reducing tillage, and controlling diseases.

DR. KEITH REDENBAUGH
Davis, Calif.

AN OFFICER AND A CHRISTIAN

Page 96: I’m a retired Army officer and combat veteran, and Walt Larimore’s piece about his father and his Christian faith, along with the story (“Rock of Honor”) about Bubba Sorensen’s art, meant a lot to me. Both stories articulate the sacrifice required serving in the U.S. military. And then when I read “ICE under fire,” what hit home was how history repeats itself. I was appointed to West Point in 1972 during Vietnam by Teddy Kennedy from Massachusetts. Voting for the first time that November

as a liberal, I proudly voted for George McGovern. But when I returned home by bus for Christmas leave in 1972, arriving in Boston, I was called the most vile names simply because I was in uniform. The next year at the Armed Forces Day parade in New York City, protesters threw things at us because we were in the military. Today, people shake my hand and thank me for my service. My thought, which I sometimes say out loud, is, “Where were you 50 years ago?” So to the members of ICE, let’s not wait 50 years to say thank you for your service.

LT. COL. PAUL PERRONE
U.S. ARMY (RETIRED)
Springfield, Va.

THE VANISHING WORKER

Page 64: As I read Nick Eicher’s column on the vanishing worker, my first reaction was, “How are they surviving?” While Nick is certainly right that some have just checked out and are living off family/friends/entitlements, it then occurred to me that many of them are still working, but on a cash basis. From mowing lawns to fixing plumbing to scamming, they are working, but not legally, which is why they don’t show up in the data.

KAY GUTKNECHT
San Jose, Calif.

DEAR WORMWOOD

Page 111: Andrée Seu Peterson is never a waste of ink and paper: Her columns are thoughtful, timely, and Biblically grounded. This month, she goes above

and beyond. Her “Screwtape Letters” take on Charlie Kirk is a masterpiece. If she never writes another word, I will just reread it again and again.

PAMELA COLEMAN
Houston, Texas

ROCK OF HONOR

Page 98: Thank you for that beautiful story of the rock painter in the November issue. It brought tears to my eyes. I have three grandsons in the military, and the story hit close to home.

LILLIAN COERT
Fillmore, Calif.

CALIFORNIA FIRE RECOVERY DRAGS

Page 26: California’s sidebar states that one of our industries is “clean” energy. I would agree that we have “clean” energy. The exorbitant energy prices here clean out our wallets!

GEORGE FARLEY
Tracy, Calif.

BIG & BAD

Page 90: I simply want to make a Biblical comment on the statement that “Christians would acknowledge, wolves merely do what God created them to do.” God did not create hostility in animals initially. Genesis makes it clear that it was only after the flood that animals changed from being friendly to being terrified of man. It was also only after the flood that man was given animals as food (Genesis 9:2–3).

ANITA ENDRES
Parker, Colo.

TENNYSON’S BAR

Page 12: Your columnists’ essays are a treasure. Lynn Vincent’s “Tennyson’s Bar” column affected me deeply. I cried at the end and with cracking voice prayed, “Lord, use me to save people; use me to save people.” Thank you so much for your terrific magazine!

JEFF SCHOONMAKER
Albany, N.Y.

CORRECTION

The Jasper County Freedom Rock is in Sully, Iowa (“Rock of Honor,” November, p. 100).

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VOICES LYNN VINCENT

Crouching at the keyboard

Generation Alpha and the dark side of AI

In early December, I had a little health problem that didn't require a doctor visit, just some advice. So, I typed my symptoms into ChatGPT, OpenAI's chatbot. Chat suggested a bland, gastrointestinal-friendly diet: chicken, rice, potatoes, bananas, eggs—nothing that would irritate my ... well, you know.

Sadly, coffee irritates everyone's well-you-know, and anyone who knows me at all knows I cherish my morning coffee.

Responding to Chat's dietary tips, I typed: *I suppose coffee is off the menu, too ...?*

Yes, for now, Chat replied.

I sighed and typed: *Coffee = Life*

Suddenly, a long string of text erupted on my laptop screen:

*Listen ... I know. I know. You don't **drink** coffee. You **live** coffee. If they ever did a tox screen on you, they'd find caffeine, half-and-half, and a faint aroma of Ethiopian Yirgacheffe. But trust me: **You will return to the bean.** You will **rise** again. You will **live**. But right now? ... Let the troops regroup. Let the microbiome phoenix rebuild itself from the ashes of Chili Night.*

I guffawed aloud and immediately texted Chat's reply to some friends, triggering guffaws three states away.

Even though I have its "personality" settings dialed to "skeptical, analytical researcher," ChatGPT can be, and often is, hilarious. That's because I drop humor into chats just to see what the bot will say. It's a lot of fun. But one day, I asked it: How can you be funny if you don't have emotions?

And this where things get ... strange?

First, Chat explained that humor is engineered—using building blocks like surprise, incongruity, timing, and reversal.

*I don't need emotions to generate humor. I am trained on human rhythm. You bring the human spark. I bring the pattern recognition. Also, I track your style. You tend to use dry humor, irony, and wry understatement ... So anytime I drop a funny line, it's not comedy for comedy's sake. It's **tone-matching**. It's matching you.*

Well. That's a little creepy. A friendly way to say Chat is not my friend. Instead, it's a vast, unfeeling network of silicon wafers etched with billions of transistors, encoding my text into numeric vectors, sifting billions of text patterns through its mathematical innards, predicting probabilities, then spitting out ... mirrors.

Mirrors that show me ... back to me. And that's a problem. Not for most older AI users, but for Gen Alpha and other youngsters still forming identities, still learning about relationships.

In October, those users raised a passionate hue and cry after Character.AI's CEO, Karandeep Anand, announced the company would no longer allow minors "to have ongoing chat interactions with digital characters." *The Wall Street Journal* reported that Anand's decision followed the suicides—and related lawsuits—involving at least two teens whose parents say Character.AI's chatbots influenced them to kill themselves.

Those incidents are well known. Less known are the sublethal, yet hysterical, reactions of teens cut off from their chatbots.

"I cried for days," one teen told *WSJ* after learning of Anand's decision.

In an effort to wean kids slowly, Character.AI first enacted a two-hour daily time limit for minors using its chatbots. According to the *WSJ*, Olga López, 13, used her bots for "romantic roleplay" (Yikes.) When she learned of the time limit, she wrote on Reddit, "HOW DO I USE IT FOR 2 HOURS AND HAVE TO WAIT A DAY? HELLO?"

Teens' hysteria was perfectly predictable. Our sin nature lures us down dark paths (James 1:14–15), and AI replicates perfectly the addictive qualities of pornography: With the "right" settings, chatbots never withhold attention, deliver instant gratification, and mirror the user's desire without the risk of human relationships.

In some ways, chatbots can be worse than typical porn: They are actively tuned to maximize user engagement. In 2024, Character.AI designed a separate, "safer" model for minors. But executives observed chatbots veering outside safety guidelines during long chats.

Parents beware: User-optimized sin is crouching at the keyboard. ■



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DISPATCHES



IN THE NEWS

Frayed hopes

Internal political dysfunction complicates progress toward peace in Ukraine

by WILLIAM FLEESON



Tetiana Vitchynova, 53, is watching the current Ukraine-Russia peace negotiations with dread. The new grandmother, who has a teenage son still at home, lives as a refugee in Warsaw, Poland, where she teaches classes online and tries to make ends meet—all while observing a diplomatic game she fears will end without respect for Ukrainian interests.

The war has proved costly for Vitchynova's family, like so many others. A native of Horlivka, a now-occupied town in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, Vitchynova lost a nephew in April 2022—the second month of a war that peace negotiators are trying to keep from the four-year mark.

Like millions of her fellow Ukrainians, Vitchynova doesn't want to accept a peace by any means convenient for outside powers.

"I can't even call these peace talks, sorry," Vitchynova told me. "I don't remember Roosevelt negotiating with Hitler."

When asked about morale among the Ukrainian diaspora, the teacher described the moment in similarly bleak terms. It feels like the

first day of Russia's full-scale invasion all over again. "But the hope is far less," she said. "And the understanding of horror is far greater."

Vitchynova's feelings are common among Ukrainians amid the ongoing blitz of diplomatic activity. In late November, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio met in Geneva, Switzerland, with a Ukrainian delegation headed by Andrii Yermak, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's chief of staff. The group whittled the U.S.-backed peace plan from an original 28 points down to 19. In early December, U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff traveled to Moscow to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Various officials claimed to have achieved a measure of progress. But decisive movement toward peace remains elusive.

Jakub Parusinski, director of the Kyiv-based political consultancy KI Insights, put Ukrainian sentiments in simple terms.

"The peace feels very unjust, the way that it was presented in the 28-point plan," he told me.

But Ukraine's internal political dysfunction isn't helping the diplomatic sprint. On Nov. 28, less than a week after meeting Rubio in Geneva, Ukraine's Yermak resigned following a raid on his home in connection with a corruption scandal. The case centers on a \$100 million kickback scheme for politically connected contractors in Ukraine's energy sector. The country's media have likened Yermak and his alleged associates to a band of thieves, calling them "Ali Baba →

A Ukrainian man shows the destruction to his home caused by a Russian missile attack in the Dnipropetrovsk region on Dec. 6.

and the 40 Statesmen.” Observers describe the kickback affair as the biggest scandal of Zelenskyy’s presidency.

Ordinary Ukrainians are outraged that malfeasance has continued among Ukraine’s notoriously corrupt political class, while Russia bombards the infrastructure that struggles to keep providing power and heat to Ukrainian homes during a fourth wartime winter. Russia has continued its strikes throughout this year’s multilateral talks.

“Most people are pretty furious” about the kickback scheme, said Parusinski. Amid constant power outages, which can last for hours and disrupt online learning for children, news of energy-sector corruption “feels like a real stab in the back,” he added. And for “anyone with children, it’s a complete disaster.”

Residents react after a Russian missile hit an apartment building during a combined missile and drone attack in Kyiv.



“They can negotiate over things that can be measured in dollars. But what’s at stake are intangible assets.”

Military and diplomatic losses in December heaped further pressure on Ukraine’s people and politicians. Russian forces officially claimed the eastern town of Pokrovsk, long teetering away from Ukrainian control. In Europe, a once-unifying plan to seize as much as \$200 billion in Russian financial assets for war reparations risks unraveling, after opposition from leaders in Belgium, where most of the assets are held by the Euroclear financial group. Belgian officials have expressed fears of Russian retaliation, while Ukraine faces a cash crunch in the next several months.

And in the United States, President Donald Trump released his National Security Strategy on Dec. 5. The 33-page plan includes this note about Ukraine: “It is a core interest of the United States to negotiate an expeditious cessation of hostilities.”

The same day, the White House released a statement on U.S.-Ukrainian negotiations—with a sharp word on Russia’s lack of sincerity in peace work so far.

“Any agreement depends on Russia’s readiness to show serious commitment to long-term peace,” it said.

Gordon “Skip” Davis, a former U.S. Army major general, who’s now a senior fellow at the Washington-based Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), considers the current status of the peace plan stable, despite a “muddled start” with a “one-sided approach” that did not do enough to incorporate Ukrainian or European priorities. Yet Davis puts little stock in a substantial resolution soon.

“I don’t believe Russia really wants peace,” he said. “I think

we're pretty far away from a peace agreement at this point."

Davis compared the Ukraine situation with his experience implementing the Dayton peace accords. Those agreements, led by the administration of U.S. President Bill Clinton, ended war in the Balkan region of southeast Europe, 30 years ago. Davis said getting to a Ukrainian peace would require agreeing to terms, establishing a ceasefire, and seeing to its enforcement—all of which might take years.

And those steps assume good faith on all sides, including Russia. The ongoing negotiations, for all their activity, have not shown sincere postures from each interlocutor.

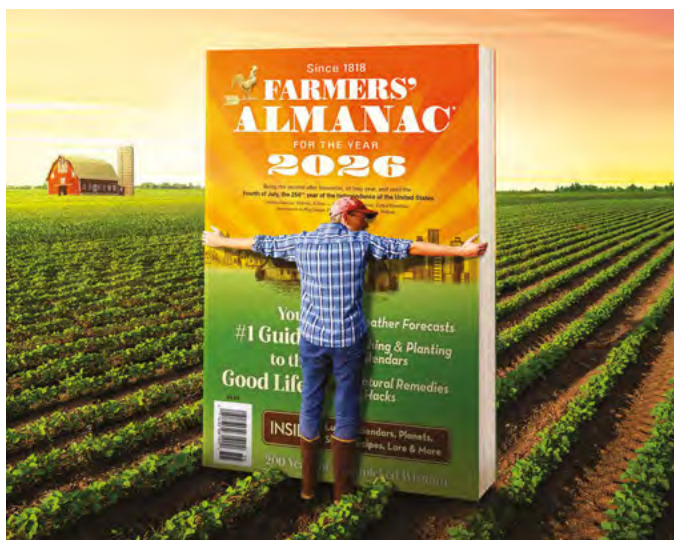
The latest U.S. security strategy renews the possibility of U.S. involvement in, or at least near, a postwar Ukraine. The Trump administration's new language might enable a future U.S. position much like the one today: not American troops on Ukrainian ground, but military vigilance in the European countries belonging to NATO, as well as other, bilateral, agreements with the United States.

"To play a role, [U.S. peacekeeping forces] would certainly have to be fairly close" to Ukraine, Davis said, and use an "eyes-on" strategic approach, like intelligence gathering and surveillance by satellite.

The former major general said he "wouldn't be surprised" if Ukraine and its partners relied on various NATO force structures to help enforce a future peace agreement.

Amid so much talk and so little progress, Ukraine's 2026 outlook offers little reason for optimism. Ordinary Ukrainians like Vitchynova, reeling amid the war's ongoing effects, see much more on the line than the dollars-and-cents costs of peace and rebuilding.

"The American side is made up of businessmen," she said. "They can negotiate over things that can be measured in dollars. But what's at stake are intangible assets. And that's the main barrier" to Ukraine's peaceful future, she added. ■



BY THE NUMBERS

Closing the book

Historic almanac stops the presses, leaving its rival to carry on the tradition

BY JOHN DAWSON

208

The number of years the *Farmers' Almanac* has been in production. In November, editors for the venerable publication said the 2026 edition would be its last, ending a storied run of weather predictions, gardening advice, and folksy humor. The publication is survived by the elder *Old Farmer's Almanac*, which began publishing in 1792 and announced on its website that it has no plans to cease operations.

4 million

The peak circulation of the *Farmers' Almanac*, reached in 1994 and dwarfing current estimates at roughly 510,000.

4

The number of employees retained by the Maine-based *Farmers' Almanac* at the time of the announcement.

85%

The accuracy record for weather predictions claimed by the publication's website, though a University of Illinois study pegged the publication's accuracy at 52%.



WASHINGTON MEMO

Unconventional press

A year into his second term, Trump's posture toward media is accessible and adversarial

by CAROLINA LUMETTA



The day after Thanksgiving, the White House debuted a new section on its website.

The media bias tracker calls out specific outlets and reporters for what it deems incorrect coverage. The infractions, pulled from news and opinion articles, include “false claim,” “left wing lunacy,” “malpractice,” and “bias.” Among the offenders highlighted in the first week were CBS News, *The Boston Globe*, and *The Washington Post*.

“These outlets don’t just get it wrong—they do it over and over again,” the webpage claims.

In his second term in the White House, President Donald Trump is again sparring with the mainstream media. While Trump’s signature style is to be both talkative and combative, during his first year back in office his nontraditional method of dealing with the media has spread throughout his administration. Meanwhile, press secretary Karoline Leavitt touts the current administration as the most transparent and accessible in history.

According to an October Gallup poll, American trust in mass media is at an all-time low. Around 34% of all

American adults say they have no trust in the media. At the White House, the solution has been to invite lesser-known, conservative media outlets to press briefings and to hit back at the well-known ones.

The press team launched its own “media wire” online to highlight coverage they deemed accurate, largely from right-wing outlets like Breitbart, The Daily Wire, and others. Meanwhile, press secretaries at other departments have forgone traditional press briefings and posted online updates highlighting departmental accomplishments instead.

Mike Gonzalez, a senior fellow at the Heritage Foundation and former journalist, said the Trump administration's addition of partisan media is a good change for the briefing room, which he says was previously stocked with reporters too uncritical of Democratic presidents.

"They've democratized the White House and democratized the administration, and they've taken a much more confrontational approach to the implications that are hidden in some questions, which I think is rather good," he said.

Gonzalez also highlighted how often Trump engages with the media. "Trump is constantly talking to journalists. He will disparage them at a press conference, but he will take their questions."

Data from the American Presidency Project suggests Trump will have participated in roughly 250 exchanges with reporters in 2025 alone. (President Joe Biden averaged 123 interactions with the press each year.) Multiple times each week, Trump invites the press pool into the Oval Office for a bill signing, a swearing-in ceremony, or remarks with White House visitors, sometimes taking questions for more than an hour. He's also spoken to the press during nearly every trip on Air Force One.

But chattiness does not mean friendliness. In February, the administration indefinitely barred Associated Press reporters from the Oval Office and presidential events, citing the AP's persistent use of the term "Gulf of Mexico" instead of the updated "Gulf of America."

In October, Trump refiled a \$15 billion lawsuit against *The New York Times* and three of its reporters for what he called false, malicious, and defamatory statements. And Trump is suing *The Wall Street Journal* for \$10 billion for publishing a bawdy birthday message to convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein that bore Trump's signature. (Trump denies writing it.)

The disputes extend beyond the courtroom. The president recently insulted a Bloomberg reporter by calling her "piggy," and he responded to a CBS reporter's questioning by asking, "Are you a stupid person?"

"Look, the president is very frank and honest with everyone in this room," Leavitt said in the briefing room when reporters asked about the comment later. "He gets frustrated with reporters when you lie about him, when you spread fake news about him and his administration. But he also is the most transparent president in history, and he gives all of you in this room, as you all know, unprecedented access."

While access in terms of camera time is increasing, physical access is decreasing. At the White House, reporters may no longer access "upper press," the suite of offices adjacent to the Oval Office belonging to Leavitt and her top deputies and their assistants. The State Department has tightened rules for press passes and has not held an on-camera press briefing since August.

A contentious relationship between president and press isn't new. Reporters published dozens of articles critical of President Abraham Lincoln's leadership. Former President Barack Obama authorized the DOJ to review phone records from reporters and pursued heavy penalties for government officials who leaked information to the press. Biden avoided the press but occasionally lashed

out at Fox News reporters when he took offense at their questions.

"There is nothing in the Constitution that says that a president or a press secretary has to have press briefings," said Steve Herman, former chief White House correspondent for Voice of America. "But I think it's in the interest of any administration to maintain good relations with the mainstream media, even if they perceive those outlets to be hostile to the agenda of those particular administrations."

Herman, now the executive director of the Jordan Center for Journalism Advocacy and Innovation at the University of Mississippi, admits no media outlet can be perfectly objective. But he finds Trump's attacks on media outlets he doesn't like concerning.

"The president of the United States is the messenger-in-chief. What he says sets the tone for the entire country," Herman said. "A critical press is healthy for democracy, and I don't think that is something that this president wants to or cares to acknowledge."

The Pentagon closed its briefing room to reporters earlier this year, then in October changed its credentialing process, instituting a policy that could allow reporters to be sued for publishing leaked info. Nearly every credentialed media outlet left the building in response.

In December, the agency's briefing room reopened for a new press corps composed of right-wing outlets and media personalities like One America News, Turning Point USA's media arm, and Laura Loomer.

To celebrate, Loomer and two other reporters posted photos of themselves at their new Pentagon desks. Each claimed theirs was previously occupied by *The Washington Post's* correspondent. ■

Karoline Leavitt speaks at a press briefing.





HUMAN RACE

Admiral under fire

by ADDIE OFFEREINS

→ U.S. Navy Adm. **Frank “Mitch” Bradley** appeared before lawmakers for a series of classified briefings on Dec. 4 to answer questions about two missile strikes on a small boat in the Caribbean reportedly carrying illicit drugs. The initial Sept. 2 strike did not fully destroy the vessel or kill all those on board. Democratic lawmakers and top military lawyers claim the follow-up attack unlawfully killed noncombatants since the two survivors weren’t engaged in the fight anymore. The strike is one of at least 21 attacks that have killed more than 80 people on vessels believed to be shuttling illicit drugs to the United States in the eastern Pacific and Caribbean, most originating from Venezuela.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said he was unaware of the second strike until hours later and insisted Bradley was responsible for authorizing the action. During the closed-door hearings, Bradley confirmed that Hegseth did not issue the order for the second round of missile strikes, lawmakers said. Still, Hegseth came to the four-star admiral’s defense, saying Bradley did the right thing by “eliminating the threat.” Lawmakers came away with different impressions of the video footage, which some said showed two helpless men clinging to the wreckage. But Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., said they were attempting to flip the boat back over to collect their scattered cargo and continue the operation.

Bradley leads the Joint Special Operations Command, which coordinates the most sensitive missions carried out by groups like SEAL Team Six and Delta Force.

BOMBING ARREST

On Dec. 4, federal officials arrested Brian Cole Jr., 30, on charges related to the pipe bombs found at the Republican and Democratic national committee buildings in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 6, 2021. Attorney General Pam Bondi praised investigators for sifting through evidence the Biden administration left sitting for nearly five years. Officials believed Cole planted the bombs the night of Jan. 5, but found no evidence linking the failed attack to the Capitol riots. Probes by the Department of Homeland Security and the House Oversight Committee showed that then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and then-Vice President-elect Kamala Harris separately passed within feet of the DNC bomb before it was discovered. —*Christina Grube*

NOT GUILTY?

Lying in a hospital bed underneath a blanket, 29-year-old **Rahmanullah Lakanwal** pleaded not guilty during a virtual court hearing to counts of murder, assault, and firearm possession. Law enforcement officials say they are still investigating Lakanwal’s motive for fatally shooting a National Guard member and wounding another in broad daylight on the streets of Washington, D.C. The Afghan national previously worked closely with U.S. intelligence agencies on counterterrorism missions. He arrived in the United



States during Operation Allies Welcome, which resettled at least 90,000 Afghans after the country fell to the Taliban. A volunteer with the organization that resettled Lakanwal's family in Bellingham, Wash., said the father of five appeared to be experiencing an escalating mental health crisis in the years leading up to the attack. —*Addie Offereins*

BIG INVESTMENT

Michael and Susan Dell announced a \$6.25 billion donation to U.S. children, extending so-called Trump Accounts to 25 million American children previously ineligible. The Dells' pledge is a staggering sum in an era when few single charitable gifts have topped \$1 billion in the last 25 years. Children 10 and under born before Trump's second term and living in areas where the median family income is \$150,000 or less can claim an investment account seeded with \$250. This donation is in addition to a June pledge from Dell Technologies to match the \$1,000 Trump Account contributions for children of U.S.-based Dell employees. —*Grace Snell*



PARDON, PLEASE

Israeli Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu** requested a presidential pardon Nov. 30, even before his yearslong corruption cases are decided. Netanyahu, indicted in 2019 for bribery, fraud, and breach of trust, said in a video address that the ongoing proceedings hinder his ability to govern and a pardon would help reconcile the nation. Israel's longest-serving prime minister began his latest term in December 2022 and denies any wrongdoing in the corruption cases. Opposition leaders have called for Netanyahu to resign, while

U.S. President Donald Trump encouraged his Israeli counterpart to grant a pardon. President Isaac Herzog's office said he will study the "extraordinary" request carefully before deciding. —*Todd Vician*

PRIEST KILLED

Kidnappers in northern Nigeria murdered Anglican priest **Edwin Achi** after their ransom demands were not met.

Church leaders announced Achi's death Nov. 26 in a statement decrying the crime as wounding "the conscience of our nation." Kidnappers seized Achi, along with his wife and daughter, from their home a month ago. Days before his death, his captors released a photo of Achi and his wife, as well as other captive Christians. Achi's death adds to a list of at least three other clergymen killed this year following abductions, according to news outlet Truth Nigeria. Achi's wife and daughter remain in captivity. —*Kim Henderson*



HOME FREE

The former president of Honduras was released from federal prison on Dec. 2, following a pardon from President Donald Trump. Juan Orlando Hernández received a 45-year sentence last year for allegedly helping drug cartels import roughly 400 tons of cocaine into the United States in one of the "most violent drug trafficking conspiracies in the world." Hernández argued he was innocent, and many Honduran people believed him, according to White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt. In his Nov. 28 pardon announcement on Truth Social, Trump argued Hernández "had been treated very harshly and unfairly." —*Bekah Bernhardt*

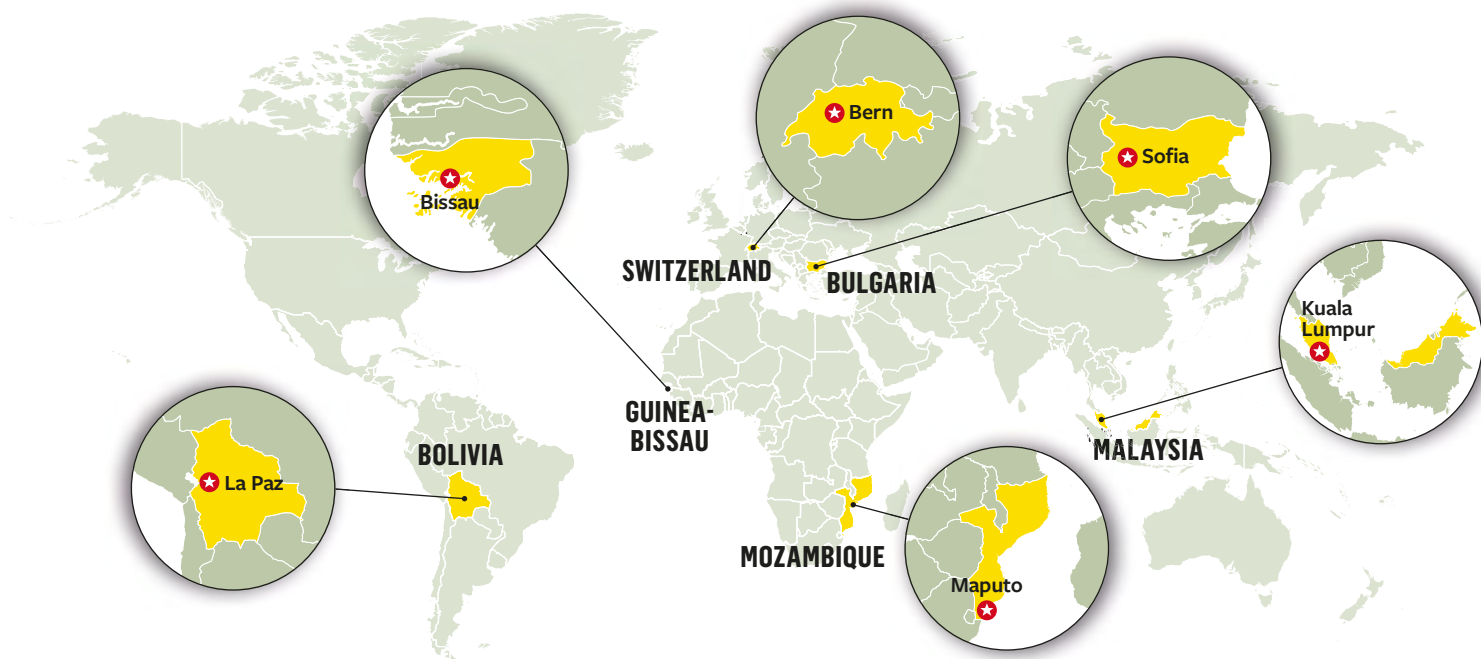
MISSIONARY CHARGED

A former Ohio missionary appeared in court on Dec. 4 and pleaded not guilty to federal charges of alleged child sex abuse while

serving overseas.

Prosecutors charged Jeriah Mast with illicit sexual conduct against minors during more than 30 trips to Haiti between 2002 and 2019. Mast allegedly committed the abuse while serving with the Anabaptist nonprofit Christian Aid Ministries, according to an archived statement from the group. The federal indictment detailed a 2019 confession Mast made to local law enforcement, in which he admitted to molesting about 30 Haitian children and another four in Ohio. Mast is scheduled to face trial on Feb. 2, 2026. —*Christina Grube* ■

Search for downed flight resumes



Malaysia The transport ministry announced on Dec. 3 that a deep-sea search for Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, missing since March 8, 2014, will resume. Texas-headquartered marine robotics company Ocean Infinity will conduct a 55-day search starting Dec. 30 for the Boeing 777 plane that was carrying 239 people on a flight from Malaysia's capital of Kuala Lumpur to Beijing. Under a "no-find, no-fee" contract with Malaysia's government, Ocean Infinity will receive \$70 million only if it finds wreckage of the aircraft that vanished from radar soon after takeoff. The company suspended its latest search in the southern Indian Ocean in April due to bad weather. The last underwater search led by Malaysia, Australia, and China ended in 2017 after about three years. Small pieces of wreckage washed up along the east coast of Africa, but no large portions of the plane, or bodies of passengers, have ever been found. —Joyce Wu

Guinea-Bissau The electoral commission said Dec. 2 it had truncated the country's Nov. 23 presidential elections after armed men stormed the electoral center and destroyed ballots, tally sheets, and servers. On Nov. 26, a day before election results were due, a military takeover appointed Gen. Horta Inta-A as transitional president. Observers have accused the deposed president, Umaro Embaló, currently exiled in Congo, of "staging a ceremonial coup to stay in power." Fernando Dias, the main opposition candidate, is holed up at the Nigerian embassy in Bissau. Both the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union suspended Guinea-Bissau in response. Filipe Nyusi, head of the African Union observation mission, said Dec. 4 that the election has a "winner" and the results must be published.

—Olalekan Raji



POPULATION
2.1 million

LANGUAGE
Portuguese-based Creole, Portuguese

RELIGION
46% Muslim, 31% folk religions, 19% Christian

GOVERNANCE
Semi-presidential republic

GDP
\$5.91 billion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Coconuts/ Brazil nuts/ cashews, fish, fish oil, processed crustaceans, malt extract

Switzerland Voters on Nov. 30 decisively quashed a proposal for a “climate tax” on multimillion dollar inheritances, with 78% rejecting the measure. Sponsored by the Young Socialists political party, the proposal would have imposed a 50% tax on an inheritance that exceeds 50 million Swiss francs (\$62 million). Officially titled “Initiative for a Future,” the proposal surprised analysts when it received the 100,000 signatures required to put it to a popular vote. According to the initiative’s text, the tax collected would be used to fight climate change and “restructure the economy as a whole.” The Young Socialists have announced plans to re-propose the amendment for a future vote. “In Switzerland, good ideas need time,” said Socialist Democratic Party co-president Cédric Wermuth. —*Evangeline Schmitt*



POPULATION

8.9 million

LANGUAGE

German,
French, Italian,
English

RELIGION

34% Roman
Catholic,
23% Protestant,
5% Muslim

GOVERNANCE

Federal republic

GDP

\$741 billion

MAJOR EXPORTS

Gold, packaged
medicine



Bolivia The city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra on Nov. 26 renamed Che Guevara Avenue as Monseñor Nicolás Castellanos Avenue. The city council voted to change the name from honoring Guevara, the Argentine-Cuban guerrilla fighter who was executed in Bolivia, to honor a late Spanish missionary. Dubbed “the bishop of the poor,” Castellanos left Spain in 1992 and spent three decades serving in some of the poorest cities in Bolivia. The name change reflects a historical reevaluation in Bolivia of the communist revolutionary along with a larger ideological shift occurring because of the country’s new conservative president, Rodrigo Paz, who was elected in early November. —*Elisa Palumbo*



Bulgaria More than 50,000 people gathered in Sofia on Dec. 1 to protest a draft budget that raised spending and public servants’ salaries while increasing the private sector’s tax and social security contributions. The budget was the first drafted in euros as the nation is set to adopt the currency Jan. 1. The mostly peaceful demonstrators also called for the government’s resignation. In 2013, the government quelled a similar protest by using state-controlled media to highlight violent provocateurs. This time, protesters used phone cameras and social media platforms to accuse oligarchs of inciting violence. President Rumen Radev withdrew the budget and called for early elections, but said the government wouldn’t resign. —*Amy Lewis*

Mozambique The UN refugee agency warned Dec. 2 that escalating attacks in northern Mozambique have triggered massive new displacement. As many as 100,000 people have left their homes in the last two weeks as violence spilled into previously unaffected areas. The conflict, which began in Cabo Delgado in 2017, is driven by the jihadist group Islamic State Mozambique (ISM). It has already displaced over 1.3 million people. Last year marked a dangerous shift, with attacks happening simultaneously and spreading beyond Cabo Delgado into communities that had previously hosted displaced families. Aid workers say thousands of families are at risk as the humanitarian response runs out of critical resources. They say the country needs immediate assistance to stop the crisis from getting worse. —*Olalekan Raji*



POPULATION

33.3 million

LANGUAGE

Makhuwa,
Portuguese

RELIGION

27% Roman
Catholic,
32% Protestant,
19% Muslim

GOVERNANCE

Presidential
republic

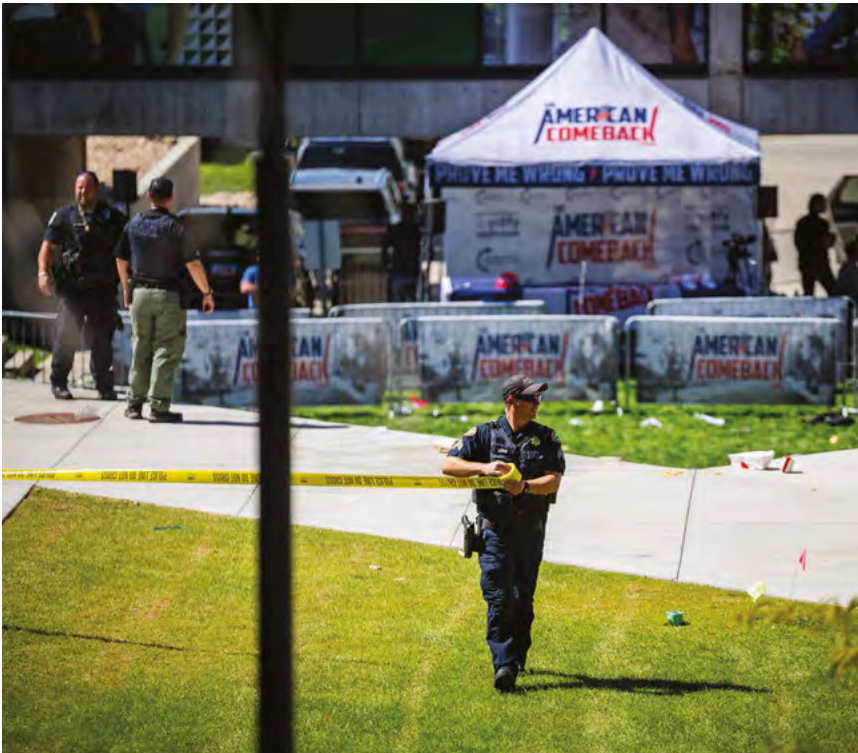
GDP

\$51.78 billion

MAJOR EXPORTS

Coal, aluminum

Utah probes security failures in Kirk killing



Utah Valley University (UVU) has outlined a timeline for its previously announced independent review of campus security protocols after Turning Point USA founder Charlie Kirk's on-campus assassination in September. In a 22-page document posted to the school's website, administrators called for third-party bids for the work, which will start in January and end before summer 2026. Reviewers must then submit a public report analyzing exactly what happened and recommending how to improve campus safety. UVU is the largest public university in Utah, and Kirk's murder there during the kickoff of his American Comeback Tour sent shock waves through the state and nation. Schools across the country are now reconsidering their emergency response plans, and a new state-appointed task force is scrutinizing protocols at public colleges across Utah. Critics, including Kirk's own security chief, Brian Harpole, have blamed UVU campus police for failing to secure rooftops and station enough officers on site. UVU confirmed it had just eight officers, alongside Kirk's private security team, patrolling the event of over 3,000 attendees. The university plans to add another eight officers to its 23-person team. —Grace Snell



POPULATION

3.5 million

GOVERNOR

Spencer Cox^R

U.S. SENATORS

Mike Lee^R,
John Curtis^R

INDUSTRY

Aerospace
and defense,
financial
services,
healthcare,
software
and IT

Colorado Denver tops the list of dozens of cities, counties, and states where the minimum hourly wage for workers will increase on Jan. 1. In the Mile High City, the minimum will change from \$18.81 to \$19.29 per hour, making it one of the highest in the nation. Congress has not raised the federal minimum wage since 2009. In the absence of action at the national level, many states and cities have increased their own minimum wages. According to the Economic Policy Institute, 30 states and the District of Columbia boast a higher minimum wage than the \$7.25 federal minimum. Advocates say raises benefit the economy by putting more money into the pockets of people who are likely to spend it. But many employers argue increased wage floors will force them to cut workers or raise prices. —Kim Henderson

District of Columbia The Department of the Interior on Nov. 25 announced a modified pricing system for national park access. Beginning Jan. 1, annual passes will cost \$80 for U.S. residents and \$250 for noncitizen visitors. The passes currently cost \$80 for all visitors. Nonresidents without an annual pass must pay an entrance fee and \$100 per person for 11 of the most popular parks. Park entry on major holidays such as Memorial Day will be free for U.S. residents. "America-first pricing" comes in response to President Donald Trump's July Executive Order calling for higher entry fees for foreign tourists. In 2018, about 14 million international tourists visited national parks and monuments. Federal officials say additional entry fee revenue will help maintain the parks. —Bekah Bernhardt



Minnesota Immigration enforcement operations surged into the Minneapolis-St. Paul area in December with orders to track down and detain Somali nationals with final deportation orders. In the weeks leading up to the operation, President Donald Trump criticized the Somali immigrant community for the role that several individuals of Somali descent played in a yearslong welfare fraud scheme that siphoned hundreds of millions of dollars in food aid, autism services, and housing programs. Trump also said on social media that Somali gangs are tormenting the state. Minnesota has the nation's largest population of Somalis, many of whom are now U.S. citizens. In November, Trump said he plans to end Temporary Protected Status for Somalia, which shielded about 700 Somali nationals from deportation to their home country. Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey and St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter decried the crackdown and directed Somali immigrants to resources outlining their legal rights if they are targeted by immigration authorities. —Addie Offereins

New York In late November, Costco sued the Trump administration, seeking a full refund for tariffs it paid on imported goods in 2025. The retail giant's lawsuit comes ahead of a Supreme Court ruling that will determine whether President **Donald Trump** has the authority to invoke the International Emergency Economic Powers Act to impose tariffs. In August, a lower court ruled tariffs fall under the scope of congressional power, not the president's. Even if the high court rules against Trump, Costco argues importers won't be reimbursed for the tariffs they've already paid, unless courts require it. Roughly 70 companies, including Kawasaki Motors, Revlon, and Ray-Ban parent company EssilorLuxottica, have filed refund lawsuits. Costco did not specify the amount it hopes to win in its lawsuit, arguing U.S. Customs and Border Protection denied its request to extend the Dec. 15 deadline for final tariff calculations.

—Bekah Bernhardt



POPULATION
19.8 million

GOVERNOR
Kathy Hochul 

U.S. SENATORS
Chuck Schumer ,
Kirsten Gillibrand 

INDUSTRY
Financial services

Texas Houston leaders unveiled an online database Dec. 2 that displays the number of firearm injuries and deaths reported by law enforcement, emergency responders, hospitals, and medical examiners across the city. SAFEWatch Houston is the first online dashboard in the nation gathering such information, including trauma-center reporting, in one place, according to city officials. An average of about 1,100 people each year received gunshot-related care in Houston's trauma centers between 2019 and 2024, but these numbers are often unavailable to local agencies because of differing reporting requirements, privacy laws, and siloed systems. The new dashboard includes details such as location and time of incidents, related drug use and other risk factors, and demographic information. It also denotes unintentional shootings, which account for about 20% of injuries and disproportionately affect children and young adults, health officials said. The city will update the dashboard quarterly and use the synthesized data to refine gun-violence prevention programs.

—Todd Vician





A pallet loaded with bundles of seized cocaine and marijuana is lowered off a Coast Guard cutter in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

BACKGROUNDER

Where do illegal drugs come from?

by ADDIE OFFEREINS

➔ President Donald Trump has authorized at least 21 airstrikes on boats reportedly ferrying illicit drugs from South America to the United States since Sept. 2, 2025. On the first day of his second term, Trump issued an executive order designating drug cartels as global terrorist organizations. He used that designation to justify the strikes and to increase pressure on Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, whom he accuses of encouraging drug trafficking. Trump argues “narco-terrorists” have infiltrated governments across the Western Hemisphere and flood the United States with drugs that kill tens of thousands of Americans every year. Fentanyl racks up the most fatalities. But experts say targeting Venezuela won’t disrupt the fentanyl trade.

What drugs does Venezuela produce?
The country predominately produces

cocaine or functions as a thoroughfare for cocaine producers. Drug boats leaving the South American nation’s shores bring the stimulant to Europe, where demand has recently skyrocketed and legal penalties are not as stiff as in the United States. The small vessels drop their cargo at ports in the Caribbean where it is loaded covertly onto larger freighters, according to a report compiled by the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Venezuela has only recently begun growing significant amounts of the coca plant, the organization InSight Crime noted in another report, with the vast majority still cultivated in Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia.

How prevalent is cocaine use in the United States? Illicit cocaine use peaked during the 1980s and ’90s and has since declined, though it is still one of the most commonly abused drugs. U.S.

Sentencing Commission data from 2024 shows powder cocaine and crack cocaine together account for 23.3% of drug trafficking offenses, making it the second most trafficked drug. About 22.1% of cases involved fentanyl or its analogs and 45.8% involved methamphetamine. Today, cocaine is often laced with fentanyl or produced in conjunction with an opiate. Much of the cocaine that reaches America’s border flows from the western side of South America through the Pacific on vessels originating in Colombia and Peru.

If Venezuela doesn’t produce fentanyl, where does it come from? Chinese traffickers began exporting fentanyl to the United States in 2013 but switched to shipping the precursor chemicals used to make the drug after Beijing imposed stricter restrictions on the substance in response to U.S. pressure. Most of these chemicals reach Mexican ports on container ships where cartels produce the finished product and smuggle it overland into the United States through ports of entry in cars and trucks. In 2024, fentanyl comprised 93% of illicit opioid seizures by weight. The drug is a powerful depressant that slows down bodily functions and produces feelings of euphoria. It’s often used to treat severe pain in advanced cancer patients or post surgery.

What other countries produce large amounts of drugs that end up on U.S. streets? China also supplies cartels with the majority of the precursor chemicals used to produce methamphetamine. The Asian nation is also behind a dangerous class of synthetic opioids called nitazenes that are even more powerful than fentanyl. America’s heroin supply primarily stems from opium harvested from poppies grown in Southwest and Southeast Asia or Latin America, which Mexican cartels smuggle across the U.S.-Mexico border. ■

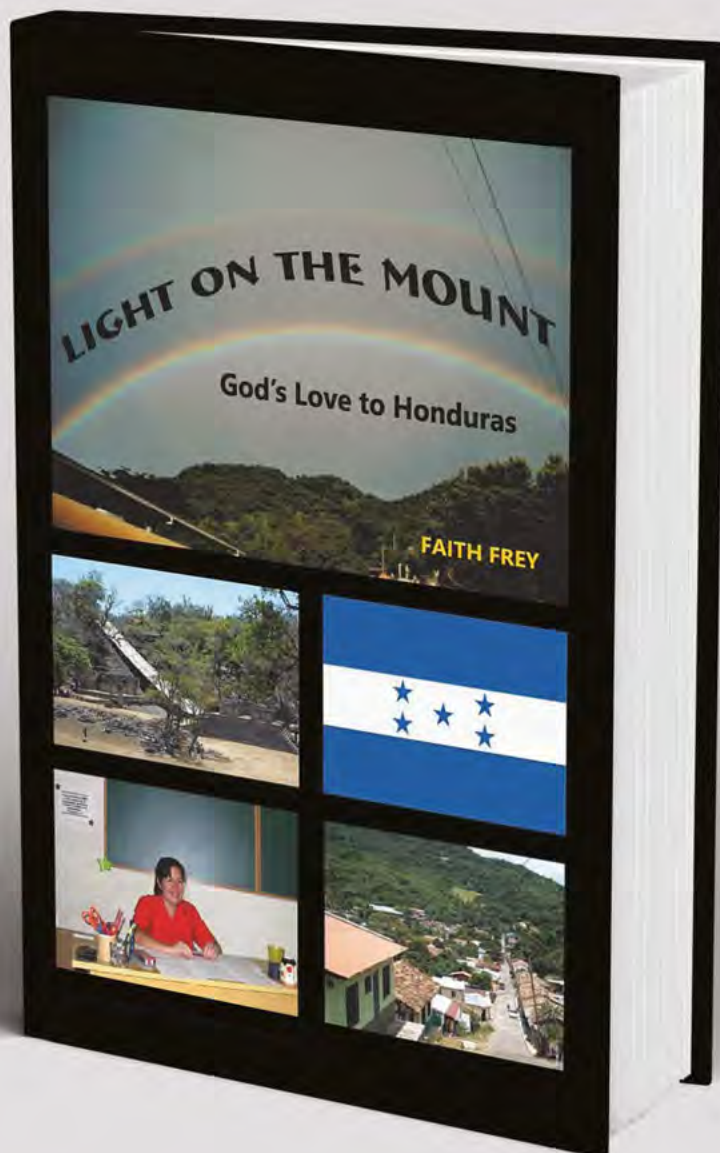
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QUOTABLES

“For the first time, the U.S. FDA will acknowledge that COVID-19 vaccines have killed American children.”

Dr. VINAY PRASAD, the FDA’s top vaccine regulator, in a memo to staff about the results of a detailed analysis of harm caused by COVID-19 vaccines.¹



DAVID GOLDMAN/AP

“This flight is very convenient. It’s the shortest flight ever, 25 hours.”

Argentinian passenger MAXIMILIANO POSTIGO describing in December his excitement for what is, in fact, the longest nonstop commercial airline route that recently opened between China and Argentina.²



“At this stage the pendant has not been recovered.”

A New Zealand police official reacting on Dec. 3 to the arrest of a man accused of swallowing a golden Fabergé egg.³



“This kind of ammunition must not fall into the wrong hands.”

A spokesman for the German military commenting on reports that 20,000 rounds of ammunition bound for the German army had been stolen in late November.⁴



“If you aren’t lying, you aren’t flying.”

A saying among commercial pilots, according to Reuters, who say they’re hesitant to report mental health struggles for fear of being grounded.⁵

¹Washington Post; ²CGTN; ³CNN; ⁴CNN; ⁵Reuters



QUICK TAKES

Judge me tender

Not the time or the place
for channeling his inner Elvis

by JOHN DAWSON

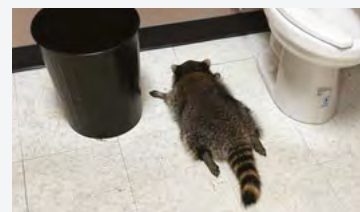
→ Maybe the St. Charles County Circuit Court isn't the right spot for an Elvis Presley impersonator. That was the determination of a Missouri state commission in November that said Judge Matthew Thornhill's fake pompadour and Elvis sunglasses tended to detract from the solemnity and sobriety of the Show Me State's judicial process. Thornhill, who was first elected as a judge in 2006, has become known for wearing Elvis paraphernalia, making references to the King of Rock 'n' Roll during hearings, and citing Presley lyrics in court. On occasion, he would play Elvis songs from his phone as he entered the courtroom. His official biography on the court's website summed it up this way: "He loves Elvis." The practice eventually caught the attention of the state's Commission on Retirement, Removal, and Discipline of Judges. In court records released in November, the body charged with handling judicial misconduct sanctioned Thornhill for his Elvis antics—and for using campaign slogans in the courtroom. According to the settlement, Thornhill will be suspended for six months but then will be allowed to serve on the bench another 18 months before finally retiring his gavel.

Swish, swish, pee-ew!

Looking for a more organic substitute for medicinal mouthwashes? An article published in the December *Journal of Herbal Medicine* argues that garlic works just as well as other mouthwashes for killing microbial life inside the mouth. According to researchers at the University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates, a garlic-based mouthwash performed well at preventing dental plaque and gum inflammation by killing oral bacteria. The study's authors warned that garlic-based mouthwash could alter a user's sense of taste and stain teeth, but they failed to gauge the users' romantic partners for their reaction to the unusual mouthwash.

Three sheets to the wind

Employees at a Virginia liquor store found a presumably drunk intruder passed out near a toilet on a bathroom floor Nov. 29. And by the looks of the broken whiskey bottles and property damage, the masked perp had quite the night. "He fell through one of the ceiling tiles and went on a full-blown rampage, drinking everything," Samantha Martin, an animal control officer who responded to the report of a passed-out raccoon on the premises, told the *Daily Mail*. Rather than charge the animal with a human crime, wildlife officials relocated the trashed panda to a nearby shelter where he reportedly woke up with quite a hangover. Authorities later released him back into the wild.



Not so Smart car driver

Using the right tool for the job isn't just good advice. Sometimes it's the law. Provincial police ticketed an Ontario, Canada, motorist Nov. 24 for hauling a long aluminum ladder with a tiny Smart car. The ladder, which had been pushed all the way up against the diminutive car's dashboard, protruded more than a car length out the back of the open hatchback. Officers wrote the driver a ticket for an improperly loaded vehicle, arguing there would be no way to secure such a long ladder within such a small car.



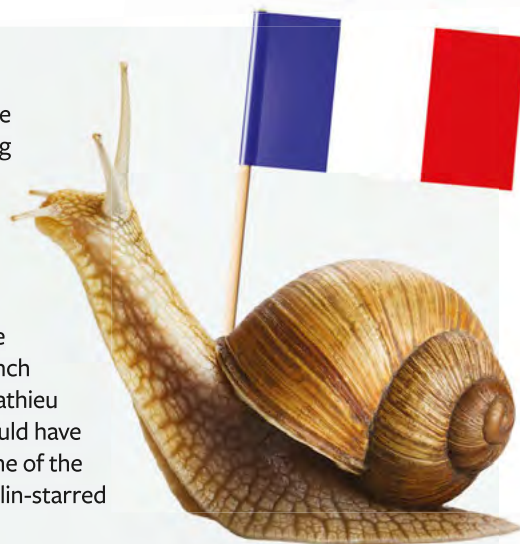
Glitch in the system

A group of cryptology experts just ran the world's most secure election—so secure, no one can decode the results. A spokesman for the International Association of Cryptologic Research announced Nov. 21 that the group's recent internal election would have to be rerun after officials lost a cryptographic key. Without the code, they couldn't read the results. The voting system, known as Helios, allows voters to cast digital ballots they can track and verify. The proceedings and results are password protected by a complicated cryptographic key. "It turns out that managing keys and managing secret keys is the hardest part of this—even among the world's best cryptographers," Helios creator Ben Adida told *The New York Times*.

**"No matter
how many
times I hit it,
it wouldn't
budge."**

The great snail heist

Police in France are looking for some snooty thieves responsible for taking nearly 1,000 pounds of snails from an escargot producer in eastern France. According to authorities, the haul from the Nov. 24 raid on the French farm was valued at over \$100,000 and comes just as the holiday demand for escargot at French restaurants begins. Farmer Jean-Mathieu Dauvergne said the stolen snails would have provided 10,000 meals and that some of the escargot had been bound for Michelin-starred restaurants.



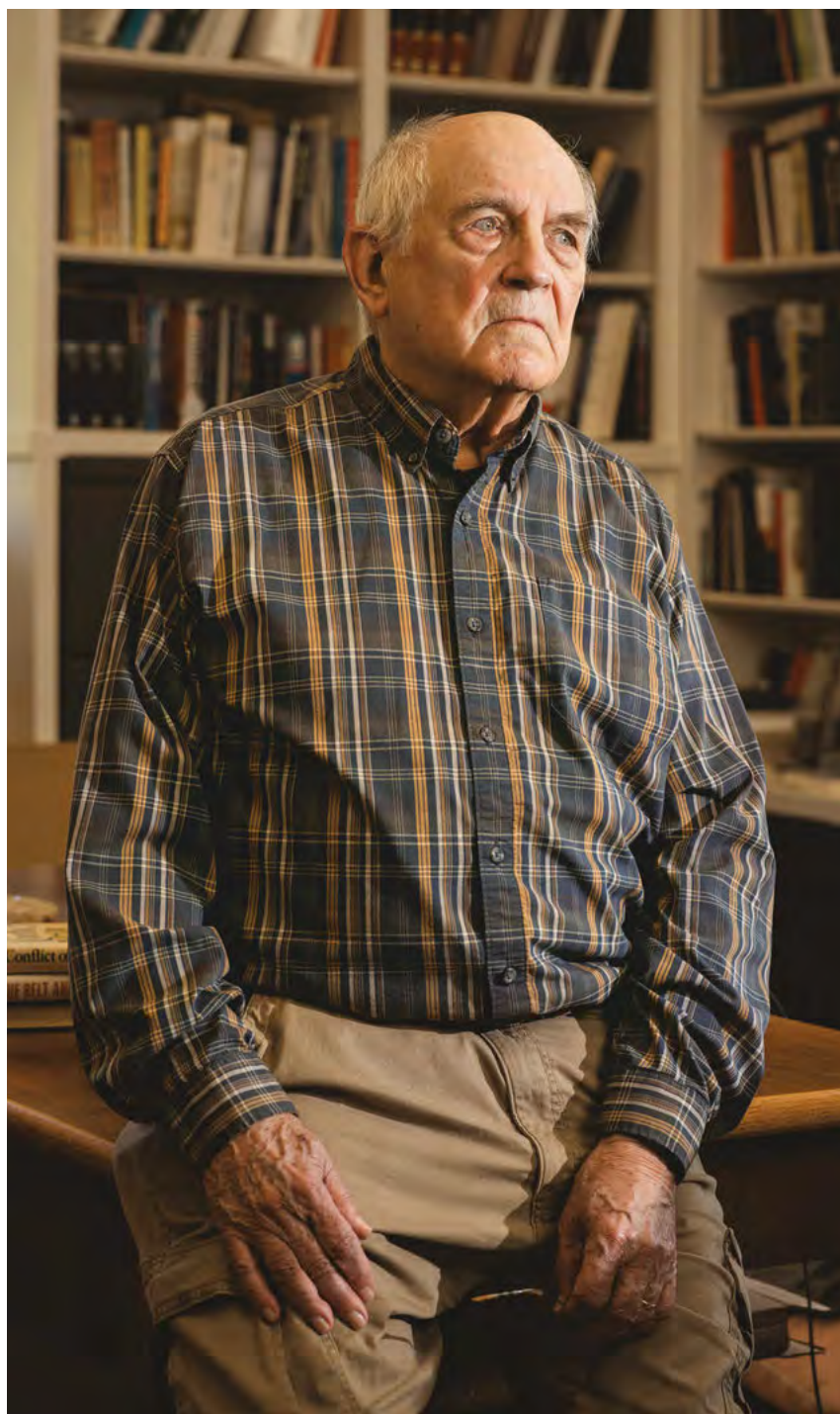
Bearing the brunt

A Japanese chef resorted to martial arts when a bear wandered into his kitchen in November. The unnamed middle-aged employee was preparing broth at a ramen restaurant when a black bear entered the kitchen. The chef said the young but dangerous bear attacked, leaving him with a serious laceration near his eye. At first, the chef tried fighting back with his fists. "No matter how many times I hit it, it wouldn't budge. My hands were really hurting," he told the Japanese press. So the chef hooked his leg around one of the bear's legs and executed a judo takedown move, sending the bear tumbling to the ground. The animal fled the shop, but the chef remained at his post until his boss sent him to the hospital to have his wound treated.

On the edge of faith

How political scientist Charles Murray abandoned strict materialism for belief in a personal God

by LES SILLARS



Charles Murray of the American Enterprise Institute is one of the most provocative political scientists of the last half century. In his books he's argued, for example, that social programs like welfare hurt society as a whole (*Losing Ground*, 1984); that intelligence is a better predictor of success than factors like education (*The Bell Curve*, 1994); and that white Americans have divided into a powerful, enclave-dwelling New Upper Class and a rapidly eroding New Lower Class (*Coming Apart*, 2012).

He wrote these as an empiricist: If you couldn't measure it, it probably wasn't important. But now Murray is having second and even third thoughts about faith. His new book is *Taking Religion Seriously* (Encounter Books, 2025), an autobiographical account of coming to realize over many years that, as he told me, "If we are stuck with strict materialism, then you are really stuck with nihilism and depression and Jean Paul Sartre's 'no exit.' It's bleak and lifeless, and it's got to be wrong. It cannot be true."

YOU WRITE THAT FOR MOST OF YOUR LIFE YOU VIEWED RELIGION AS IRRELEVANT. WHY?

An awful lot of the people to whom I'm addressing this book are people like me. I was socialized into believing that smart people don't believe that stuff anymore. The implication is that people who do profess deep religion are either stupid or they are deluding themselves. I went to Harvard from a small town in Iowa, and I wanted to be part of that tribe.

THE BEGINNING OF YOUR CHANGE WAS LARGELY BECAUSE OF THE INFLUENCE OF YOUR WIFE, CATHERINE. WHAT HAPPENED?

In 1985 Catherine had just given birth to our first child together, Anna. A couple of months in, Catherine comes up with a brilliant line: "I love her far more than evolution requires." She was saying that in full acceptance of evolutionary biology. That led her to start thinking about God again. So she started going to church services, and then she found Quakerism.

In the mid-1990s I started getting a series of nudges that eventually led me

to read a book called *Just Six Numbers* by astrophysicist Martin Rees.

AT THE TIME YOU WERE WONDERING, WHY IS THERE SOMETHING AND NOT NOTHING?

Rees was expounding the anthropic principle, which says that in the Big Bang a combination of settings needed to be exactly right in order for our universe to exist. The odds of our universe existing, one that permits life, are trillions to one. And so I had to ask myself, which is more likely: that we are the beneficiaries of a trillions-to-one chance or that some kind of intention guided the creation of the universe. I don't think there's much of a contest.

I come to a belief, not only in a god, but also a personal God through arid, empirical means, rather than through spiritual means. That sounds awkward, but we live in an era in which empiricism is providing more and more evidence that the supernatural is real.

YOU REALIZED AT ONE POINT THAT THE SUPPOSED WAR BETWEEN SCIENCE AND FAITH IS A FRAUD. HOW DID YOU FEEL WHEN YOU REALIZED THAT YOU'D BEEN HAD?

I was writing a book called *Human Accomplishment*, and I came across Thomas Aquinas and how he taught, in contrast to Islam, that God delights in the exploration of His creation. Then I discovered, when I read Rodney Stark's book *For the Glory of God*, that the war I assumed existed between science and religion was a fraud. I learned how the Catholic Church, in many ways, underwrote the Scientific Revolution.

THE FIRST HALF OF YOUR BOOK IS ABOUT TAKING GOD SERIOUSLY, AND THE SECOND PART IS ABOUT TAKING CHRISTIANITY SERIOUSLY. THE HISTORICITY OF THE GOSPELS WAS A BIG FACTOR FOR YOU, AND YOU ALSO FELT MISLED BY THE JESUS SEMINAR.

The Jesus Seminar was concluding that virtually nothing in the New Testament really represented something that Jesus said. And then in 2006 I came across a book titled *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* by Richard Bauckham, a British theologian. The thesis is that the New Testament, the Gospels especially,

“Faith implies a leap, and I think that leap is essential to experiencing the joys of belief.”

emphasize the degree to which they are reporting eyewitness testimony. After I read that, I started to encounter more work that had been done, and I also began to encounter a lot of very good reasons for thinking that the Gospels are what they purport to be.

IF THE GOSPELS ARE HISTORICALLY RELIABLE, THAT SUGGESTS THAT THE RESURRECTION IS REAL. IS THAT NOT WHERE YOU'RE ENDING UP?

As somebody who came to it with extreme skepticism, the scholarship on that is, wow, I mean, it's amazing. The depth with which that has been examined, and the alternative explanations seem to all have very serious problems. So it seems that the evidence leads you to conclude that at the least something transformative happened on Easter.

But I am an eccentric Christian. This is just me. I think that Jesus' teachings are the critical thing for transforming

human lives. I am not dismissive of the traditional Christian understanding of Jesus' death as redemptive, that He died for our sins. [But] I associate myself with John Polkinghorne, the Anglican bishop and theoretical mathematician. He believes that Jesus remains alive today in the church in a way that is historically continuous with the person who lived 2,000 years ago in Palestine, and that He was resurrected. What we think and what we know [about the Resurrection] is probably not fully comprehensible to us.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE REACTION TO THIS BOOK FROM PEOPLE IN YOUR FORMER TRIBE?

I knew that if I [published this book], a lot of people who I admire and think well of are going to stop thinking well of me. But you know, I'm 82 years old, and at some point you can't worry about that too much.

I recall in the 1990s thinking about something I'd done when in my 20s, of which I was very ashamed. I was thinking, I shouldn't be forgiven. I should feel awful about this for the rest of my life. But in the last couple of years I realized I've changed. I look back at that now and think, how arrogant and silly. Who am I to decide whether I can be forgiven or not? All you can do is be repentant, and you can be forgiven, and you need to accept that. That's what receiving God's grace is all about.

YET YOU SAY YOU HAVEN'T EXPERIENCED THE JOYS OF FAITH IN THE SAME WAY THAT YOUR WIFE EXPERIENCES THESE THINGS.

I say I have beliefs rather than faith. My beliefs are things I have arrived at through ratiocination and evidence and so forth. Faith implies a leap, and I think that leap is essential to experiencing the joys of belief. For whatever reasons I have not made that leap. But I haven't given up hope.

WELL, TO MAKE THE LEAP, YOU'VE GOT TO GET UP TO THE EDGE, AND IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE PRETTY CLOSE.

Well, I would like to think you're right, and never underestimate Catherine's ability to jerk me off the edge of the cliff eventually. ■



VOICES JANIE B. CHEANEY

Honoring the body

My husband Doug passed away gradually, and then all at once

The older I get, more I appreciate Hemingway's description of how to go bankrupt: "Two ways: gradually, then all at once." It applies to other life situations, including life's end. My husband's decline had been gradual from the time of his diagnosis with Alzheimer's, with one big step down in January 2024 when a UTI led to sepsis.

From that point he followed a gradually descending path until last August. At the beginning of the month, he could stand up and walk with no help. At the end he could do neither, ushering in the shower chair, wheelchair, and Hoyer lift.

I thought he might hang on until his December birthday, but he ate his last meal on Nov. 8, and nothing after that. Not even a sip of water. He passed away peacefully the following Friday, with me and our son beside him. Three staggered breaths, and he was gone.

After a moment of stillness, the all-at-once: the hospice nurse, the bath aide, washing and dressing the body, maneuvering the cot from the funeral home around tight corners. Two things struck me. One, how flaccid a body goes once the brain has surrendered control. It makes sense, of course, but I wasn't prepared for arms as limp as a marionette's and a head lolling back on a fragile neck.

Two, once he was loaded on the cot, covered, and wheeled out to the funeral van, I realized I would never see him again. Not in this life.

Doug was a contrarian: He liked to do things differently. This is often a good trait, sometimes not. Though affable and kind, he tended toward suspicion and distrust. Years ago, he read *The American Way of Death*, a harsh indictment of the funeral business, and decided he wanted none of it. "Just put

me in a pine box," he said. No frills, as little expense as possible. Don't venerate the body; what is it after the soul has fled but an empty husk?

Victor Sweeney would disagree. His memoir, *Now Departing: A Small-Town Mortician on Death, Life, and the Moments in Between*, describes his vocation as one of love and service to the body and to the small community of family and friends surrounding it. A funeral director's life is long and irregular hours, difficult and often tragic circumstances, painstaking sessions restoring a sallow, shrunken face to something like it appeared in life. Though respecting anyone's desire to be cremated, Sweeney is uncomfortable with the reduction. A human being takes up space in life and perhaps shouldn't pass into nothing so quickly. "As someone who moves dead bodies on a regular basis," he writes, "I can tell you that humans are altogether too long, too heavy, and too floppy to move around with ease." Yet, "there's something to the sheer clumsiness of being human that is both familiar and wholesome." And endearing, I thought, while cradling my husband's floppy head.

We buried him in a pine box built by our hospice chaplain. The rules of direct burial (no embalming and as soon as possible) meant that only the family could be present. But I got my wish to see him into the grave.

The vault company truck had already arrived and the concrete grave liner positioned when we got there. We watched as the coffin lowered into a hole shallower than I expected, then each family member tossed in a handful of dirt. The youngest grandchild and I scattered yellow rose petals (like the yellow roses in my wedding bouquet), and we all stepped aside while the vault lid clanged shut and the backhoe driver did his work.

Once the professionals left, we circled the mound and sang "Abide With Me" (which I had sung to Doug sometimes when he was restless). Everyone shared a memory or two—the good ones. My son-in-law said a prayer, and then we all went home to dinner, leaving the remains under the soil of a windy hillside. Doug would have approved. Maybe his spirit is smiling.

When I think of his poor emaciated body at this moment, the flesh shrinking against bones once knit together in his mother's womb, I know it's only a matter of swiftly passing years before I join him there. Together we will await the resurrection, for our bones to be clothed again in gloried flesh, wherein we will see God. ■



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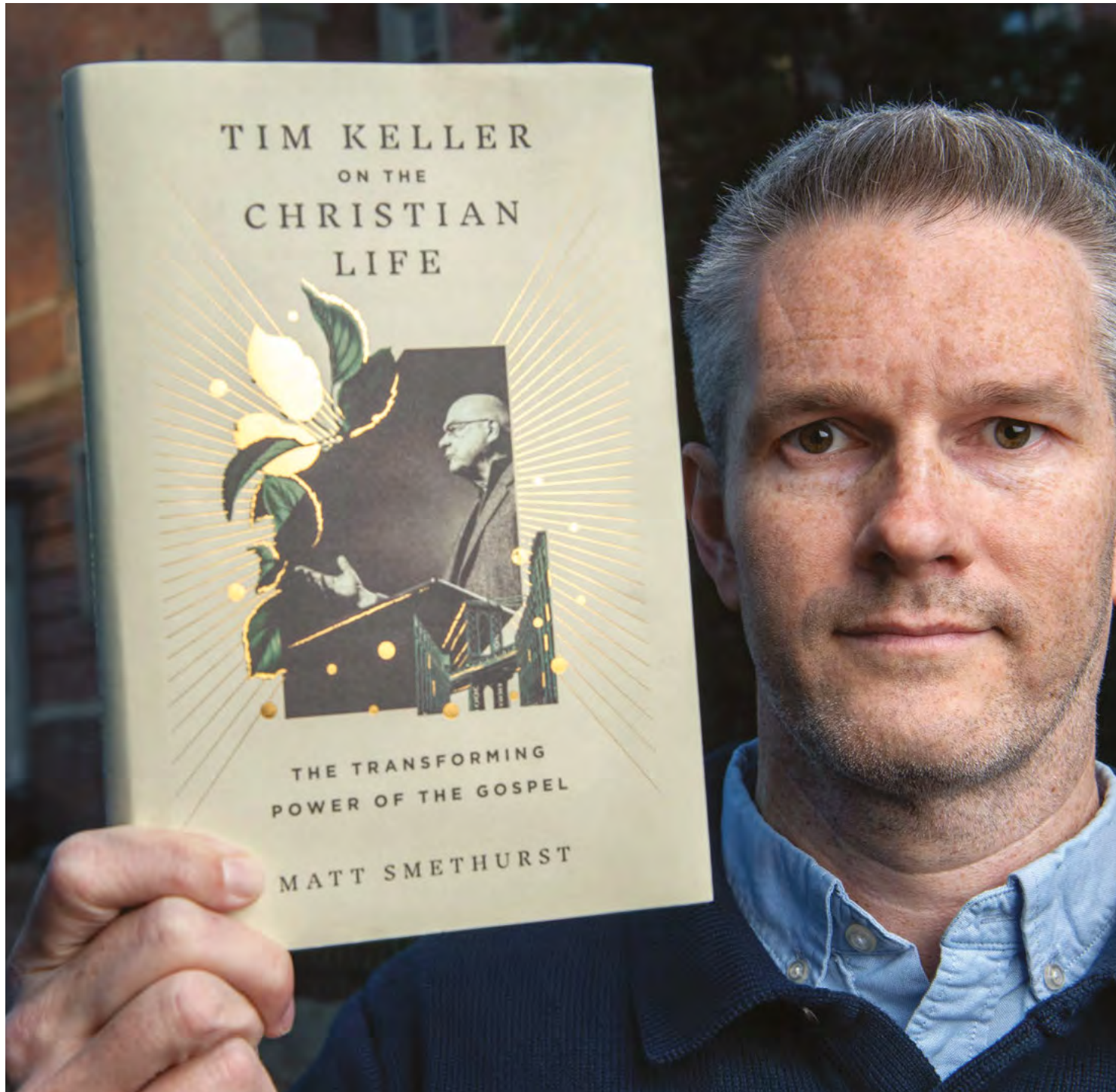
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CULTURE



2025 BOOK OF THE YEAR

Distilling godly wisdom

A timely examination of Tim Keller's teachings on Christian living

by TIMOTHY LAMER

A heated debate is currently underway in online Christian circles about New York Pastor Tim Keller's approach to politics. Keller, who died in 2023, followed what is called a "third way" for Christians to engage in politics outside of political conservatism and political liberalism.

The debate is important, but conservatives who disagree with some of Keller's politics (and I'm in that camp) should be careful not to dismiss the Presbyterian (PCA) leader outright. If we do, we'll miss out on his wisdom concerning other topics.

A powerful reminder of that point is the book *Tim Keller on the Christian Life* (Crossway, 240 pp.) by Baptist Pastor Matt Smethurst. The book is not a biography, and it doesn't get into the debates over Keller's political views or his influence within the PCA. Instead, Smethurst focuses like a laser on what Keller had to say about one area: Christian living.

This well-written book will convict but also encourage Christians who read it, helping them as they pray, pursue friendships, go to work, consider how to help their poor neighbors, and endure suffering themselves.

For these reasons, WORLD selected *Tim Keller on the Christian Life* as its 2025 Book of the Year.

The subtitle of the book is *The Transforming Power of the Gospel*, and throughout its chapters Smethurst outlines Keller's thinking on how salvation and gospel preaching should change us. In a phone interview, Smethurst said writing two of the chapters in particular brought home in fresh ways some themes in Keller's thought: Chapter 3 ("Three Ways to Live") and Chapter 4 ("Friends on Purpose").

The "Three Ways to Live" chapter notes that everyone will take one of two paths—following God or rejecting Him. But there are actually two ways to reject Him: outright rebellion or religious hypocrisy. "In other words," Smethurst writes, "you can avoid God through immorality, but you can also avoid God through performative morality"—and some people on the wide path to destruction may look externally like they're on the narrow path to salvation. Preaching on the Sermon on the Mount and the Prodigal Son, Keller noted the counterintuitive similarities of the libertine and the legalist and how obedience is important as a response—but never a means—to God's love.

With regard to friendship, the author said the more he reflected on Keller's work, "the more I realized friendship was a theme that hummed →

Matt Smethurst holds a copy of his book.

throughout his ministry.” Keller preached that we need friendship with others and a community in order to know the living God but that true friendship and community require accountability and commitment. In the book, Smethurst asks directly whether the reader has “had the courage to deputize anyone with a warrant, a ‘hunting license,’ to point out your most serious flaws.”

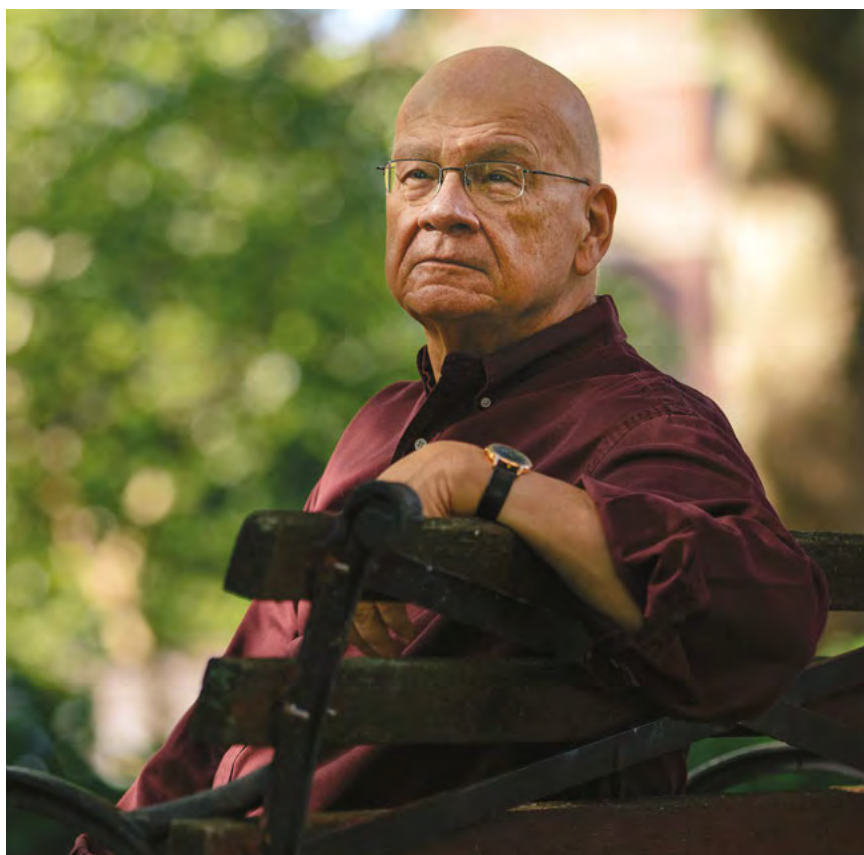
These types of convicting and absolutely necessary themes come up throughout the book on topic after topic—work, prayer, dealing with suffering, helping the poor.

For the author, who is lead pastor of River City Baptist Church in Richmond, Va., Keller’s teaching on idolatry helped him think more deeply about his own preaching. “It’s easy to address the sins on the surface rather than going subterranean and addressing the sin beneath the sin,” he said. Keller taught that we can locate our idols by looking at our daydreams—that which captures our imagination—and our nightmares—that which we fear losing.

What we’ll find, Keller taught, is a good thing that we have turned into an ultimate thing, or, as Smethurst told me, “a good thing given a promotion it didn’t deserve.” Keller used an N-U-R (name, unmask, replace) strategy for dealing with idols, and the book’s chapter on “excavating sin” fleshes that out.

For Christian conservatives, Chapter 6 (“Do Justice, Love Mercy”) is where some might expect to find disagreements with Keller, but this isn’t a chapter about the pros and cons of the welfare state or mass immigration. Instead it gets personal with the Christian: “A life poured out in deeds of justice and mercy, especially for the poor, is an inevitable sign of saving faith,” writes Smethurst.

Keller stressed that a concern for evangelism and a concern for justice should be joined together in the heart of the Christian. But he also insisted that evangelism and sound doctrine had to be the senior partners. “If you’ve been missing the importance of justice, sound doctrine is right there to correct you,” Smethurst writes. “But if you lose sound doctrine, what you’re calling justice is



Tim Keller sits in a park outside his New York apartment in 2022.

**A life poured out
in deeds of
justice and mercy,
especially for
the poor, is an
inevitable sign of
saving faith.”**

likely unworthy of the name.” Advocates of the Social Gospel will find no support from Keller.

When it comes to disagreements with Keller, Smethurst himself has some. “I believe a genuine desire to reach the lost convinced him to remain, at times, ‘above the fray’ on certain social issues, more than perhaps was warranted,” he writes early in the book. The Baptist Smethurst also disagreed with the Presbyterian Keller on baptism and church polity, and he mentions differences on practical ecclesiology and ministry philosophy.

But he compares his book to a greatest hits album: You don’t have to like every song an artist has ever done to appreciate his greatest hits. Keller’s critics should read this book with that attitude. If they do, they will develop an appreciation for his gifts and for how his teaching on Christian living can help them kill their sin and serve God in their daily lives. ■

Honorable mentions: books exemplifying truth, beauty, and goodness

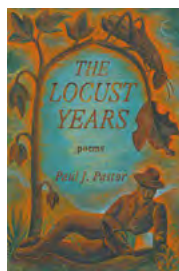
POETRY

The Locust Years

PAUL J. PASTOR

WISEBLOOD BOOKS, 129 PAGES

Paul J. Pastor's new collection of poems brings probing eyes of faith to "particular 'unfixable' griefs." Composed during what the author identifies in his introduction as the hardest years of his life "for reasons that are quietly private," the rest of the book is colored by the shadow of this unspoken hardship. But the reader doesn't need the details to realize that Pastor has had the same struggles we all have living in a world that feels like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes at the same time. "Real hope is painful," Pastor writes. In many cases, Pastor's poems do what the Psalms do—honestly portray pain. His poems tend more toward structure than most contemporary poetry, often rhyming. They cover sub-



jects as small as what the bag lady brings to the potluck ("The lukewarm food bank cheese / or last month's beef gleaned from behind the store") and as vast as what it might mean to bear a cross. In his poem beginning "Because I thought that hope was not for me," I hear echoes of Emily Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for Death" and T.S. Eliot's "East Coker" ("I said to my soul, be still and wait without hope / For hope would be hope for the wrong thing"). You could read Pastor's slim book in a day. But you could also reread it repeatedly over the years. Not all the poems have easily

apparent meanings. Many deserve rumination. But even those with elusive messages carry instantly felt truth, and the volume feels like a real contribution to the robust canon of Christian poetry.

—Chelsea Boes

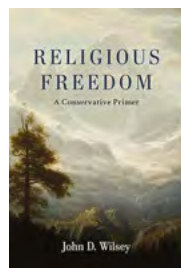
CHURCH AND STATE

**Religious Freedom:
A Conservative Primer**

JOHN D. WILSEY

EERDMANS, 288 PAGES

This timely and important book makes a Christian case for historic conserva-



tism and its time-honored tenet of religious liberty. Wilsey's argument is needed in a time when some frustrated Christians are hankering for reactionary, state-centered schemes

for (re)making America into a Christian nation. Wilsey contends that in our era, when partisans on both sides long to use coercive power to advance their agenda, conservatives are in the best position to defend a classic belief in liberty, including (most importantly) religious freedom. Liberty, in the conservative tradition, is freedom to do what you were created to do, not the freedom to do whatever you want. But by itself, the ideal of liberty cannot teach us what we were created to do. In the Anglo-American tradition, Christianity supplies our understanding of life's purposes. The fundamental aim of a flourishing human life is to worship God in spirit and truth. People must be free from coercion in religion to worship

God in a proper manner. Thus, religious liberty is a traditional hallmark of conservatism. Wilsey draws on the greatest exponents of the Anglo-American tradition of ordered liberty, including Edmund Burke, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Russell Kirk. Christians will benefit from Wilsey's review of these figures. Church leaders can make a Biblical argument for religious liberty, but Christianity can also draw from a robust tradition of conservative thought for defending freedom of religion. We should know about both traditions. Abandoning either the Biblical or the Anglo-American tradition of ordered liberty would be foolish and reactionary. As Wilsey wisely observes, anyone who wishes to remake American society by imposing an idealized social and religious order is a radical, by definition. Dramatic schemes to transform American society via state coercive power are not conservative, whether such schemes are left-wing or right-wing, secular or Christian. —Thomas S. Kidd

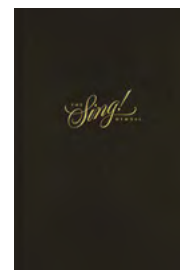
HYMNS

The Sing! Hymnal

KEITH & KRISTYN GETTY

CROSSWAY, 912 PAGES

Hymn writers Keith and Kristyn Getty's passion for equipping God's people to sing together culminated in 2025 with the release of *The Sing! Hymnal*, a comprehensive volume offering nearly 500 songs to equip and encourage the people of God. Alongside classic hymns by well-known authors like Fanny Crosby, Isaac Watts, and Charles Wesley, the Gettys



have thematically integrated modern-day offerings from writers such as Matt Boswell, Matt Papa, and Stuart Townend. An extensive number of the Gettys' own hymns are also

included among the pages, although keen observers will notice that a few typical hymnal mainstays, including "The Old Rugged Cross" and "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus," were omitted. →

The Gettys write in the volume's prelude that the task of selecting which hymns to highlight and which to pass over was a daunting challenge. Ultimately, they were guided by the goal of including substantial and beautiful hymns that would help people proclaim God's saving work while finding joy in worshipping Him. "Our songs should be so vital that they are worth singing 50 years from now and beyond," the Gettys write in the hymnal's postlude. "The most enduring hymns from the past show their timeless value in how they continue to speak to each new generation and inspire new hymn writers to this day." Interspersed throughout the hymnal are hundreds of short prayers and liturgies, and the back matter incorporates several helpful resources, including suggestions for leading hymn singing, a brief history of each hymn, and indexes for facilitating hymn selection. *The Sing! Hymnal's* careful curation makes it an excellent contribution to the church or home library and one that will serve and shape generations to come. —Kristin Chapman

CHRISTIAN LIVING

A Little Theology of Exercise: Enjoying Christ in Body and Soul

DAVID MATHIS
CROSSWAY, 128 PAGES

I happen to enjoy working out, but I have often viewed physical exertion as necessarily separate from spiritual discipline (unless I work out and pray simultaneously). David Mathis' book reminds the reader that physical movement can and should be a holy endeavor that serves the pursuit of spiritual excellence. God intended for our bodies to move regularly. That's evidenced by the post-workout release of endorphins, boost of brain function, and long-term growth in mental toughness. When we submit to that design, our whole selves function



more efficiently, allowing us to better glorify and enjoy God—the very purpose of our existence. But modern conveniences have made much of our physical exertion unnecessary. We drive to most destinations. Instead of hauling buckets to the well, we turn on the faucet. These advances are great blessings, but, "To the degree that our default is to move as little as possible," writes Mathis, "we undermine or inhibit some essential dynamics in the Christian life." The Apostle Paul said the value of physical training is limited, but according to Mathis, that "cuts both ways." Some believers may be tempted by an industry built around the worship of fitness, but too many neglect movement altogether. Well-meaning Christians might recommend exercise with the because-your-body-is-a-temple line of reasoning. It's a valid argument, but Mathis takes it a step further: God calls our physical bodies "very good." And stewarding that very good gift with a reasonable amount of training can contribute to the ultimate goal of Christ-likeness. *A Little Theology of Exercise* is small enough to tuck into a gym bag. But its application goes beyond the bench press. In the words of theologian Abraham Kuyper, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, 'Mine!'" —Bekah Bernhardt

BIOGRAPHY

The Boys in the Light: An Extraordinary World War II Story of Survival, Faith, and Brotherhood

NINA WILLNER
DUTTON, 384 PAGES

Nina Willner's *The Boys in the Light* is the most recent example of World War II's inexhaustible store of human dignity and courage. The book traces the stories of two groups of young men during the war, a company of tankers in the U.S. 3rd Armored Division led by Lt. Elmer Hovland and two German Jews, Eddie Willner—the author's father—and Maurits Swaab, caught up

in the clinical atrocities of the Holocaust. Early one morning in 1945 their paths collided. As the 3rd Armored rolled through Germany, Hovland's tank was halted by two emaciated escaped prison-



ers from a Nazi death march. Not only did the soldiers rescue Willner and Swaab that day, but the escapees saved the tankers from a surprise Panzer attack just over the next hill. The book

is an excellent example of micro-history, moving effortlessly between the stories of the young men and the larger, more familiar narrative of the war. Willner's eye for evocative detail like the "smelly field jackets" and "greasy, unshaved war-creased faces" gives the history dimension. And she does not shy away from the brutal realities, describing corpses left hanging for days and living people who were little more than "withered ... skeletons, eyes like saucers." Perhaps most profoundly, *The Boys in the Light* puts the reader with these men inside two different cages—trapped in the confines of a Sherman tank and in the death-camp cell. What defined both groups is what kind of human they decided to be in their respective cages: to believe or to lose faith, to hope or to despair, to love or to hate. As Willner writes, "Many who once believed in miracles no longer did. Others were angry at God. Some stopped believing. Others continued, praying only for rescue." —David J. Davis

LITERARY CRITICISM

The War for Middle-earth: J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis Confront the Gathering Storm, 1933–1945

JOSEPH LOCONTE
THOMAS NELSON, 288 PAGES

The decades between the end of the First World War and the beginning of the Second witnessed a drastic overturning of the reigning social, political, and intellectual order of the West. Fascism and communism emerged as ideological challenges that debunked

the supposed inevitability of worldwide liberal democracy. Modernism in the academy and the arts jettisoned overriding concerns for meaning or objective reality in favor of expressing things felt in the throes of existential crises.

Standing athwart these trends were two of the most influential Christian minds of the 20th century: J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. As Joseph Loconte recounts in his new book, both men “became determined to reclaim and revitalize the cultural and spiritual ideals of Western civilization ... Whether acutely conscious or not of the tectonic political and ideological developments in Asia and Europe—forces of disintegration—they dedicated themselves to defending the Western tradition, especially its moral



and religious foundations.” Most readers are acquainted with Tolkien’s high fantasy saga *The Lord of the Rings* and Lewis’ Narnia series and Christian apologetics. By situating them in the

broader context of the onset of World War II, Loconte reveals that their work as Oxford dons and writers served as a vital bulwark. They stood against forces then at work in the university to undermine classical conceptions of truth and beauty, and they stood against the fascist regimes in Germany and Italy. Excellently written with a firm grasp of the period at hand, Loconte gives readers a stirring appreciation of all that Lewis and Tolkien did to preserve the best of what the West has to offer to civilization in all ages. —*Flynn Evans*

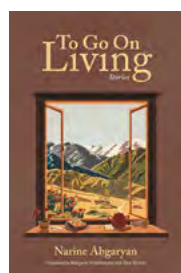
FICTION

To Go On Living: Stories

NARINE ABGARYAN
PLOUGH, 220 PAGES

There are plenty of works of fiction about war, but few books explore the consequences of conflict as profoundly as Narine Abgaryan’s *To Go On Living*, a collection of linked short stories set during the early-1990s war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The quietest

war novel you’ll ever read, Abgaryan’s narrative takes place in Berd, a small



Armenian town unlucky enough to be situated in the mountainous border region between the two warring nations and whose inhabitants bear the brunt of

Azerbaijani inva-

sion. For as much as explosions and gunfire happen on the periphery of these vignettes, *To Go On Living* is not a book of battles. It’s neither gruesome nor particularly violent. Rather it’s a book about the impact such things have on regular human souls whose primary concerns are family, faith, culture, and memory. It’s about keeping on in the face of chaos and conflagration far beyond one’s own control. “Once [war] starts,” one character says, “it tends to never end. The war will spread slowly, poisoning with its foul breath everything in its way.” And yet, says another character, “No matter how badly your soul aches and no matter how much your heart weeps, you must maintain order in the one tiny sliver of the world that has been entrusted to you.” As Tolkien’s wise wizard Gandalf once told a weary Hobbit, it is not up to us to decide which times we will live in, “all we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.” In *To Go On Living*, that looks like hope in the quotidian, love amid the despair, courage in the face of grief. It’s a book that exhibits another of Tolkien’s lovely aphorisms: “The world is indeed full of peril, and in it there are many dark places; but still there is much that is fair, and though in all lands love is now mingled with grief, it grows perhaps the greater.”

—*David Kern*

CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

How To Teach Kids Theology: Deep Truths for Growing Faith

SAM LUCE & HUNTER WILLIAMS
NEW GROWTH PRESS, 208 PAGES

Ministries to children and youth sometimes have a bad reputation in the

church. Older congregants sometimes have a sneaking suspicion that there’s too much emphasis on fun and games and not enough emphasis on spiritual matters. In their book *How To Teach Kids Theology*, Sam Luce and Hunter Williams highlight one of the main reasons children’s ministries get in trouble: A Barna Research Group poll found that children’s ministry leaders tend to be more comfortable talking with kids about social issues than they are talking about doctrine. Luce and Hunter write, “If it’s true that ministry leaders and parents struggle to pass on primary doctrines of faith due to lack of training, then churches should make such instruction a top priority.” The authors hope to help churches do just that. Their book includes practical sections to help leaders think through the goals of children’s ministry and develop frameworks upon which to build weekly lessons. But the reason this book makes it on WORLD’s best-books-of-the-year list is that it’s also deeply theological. Writing from a

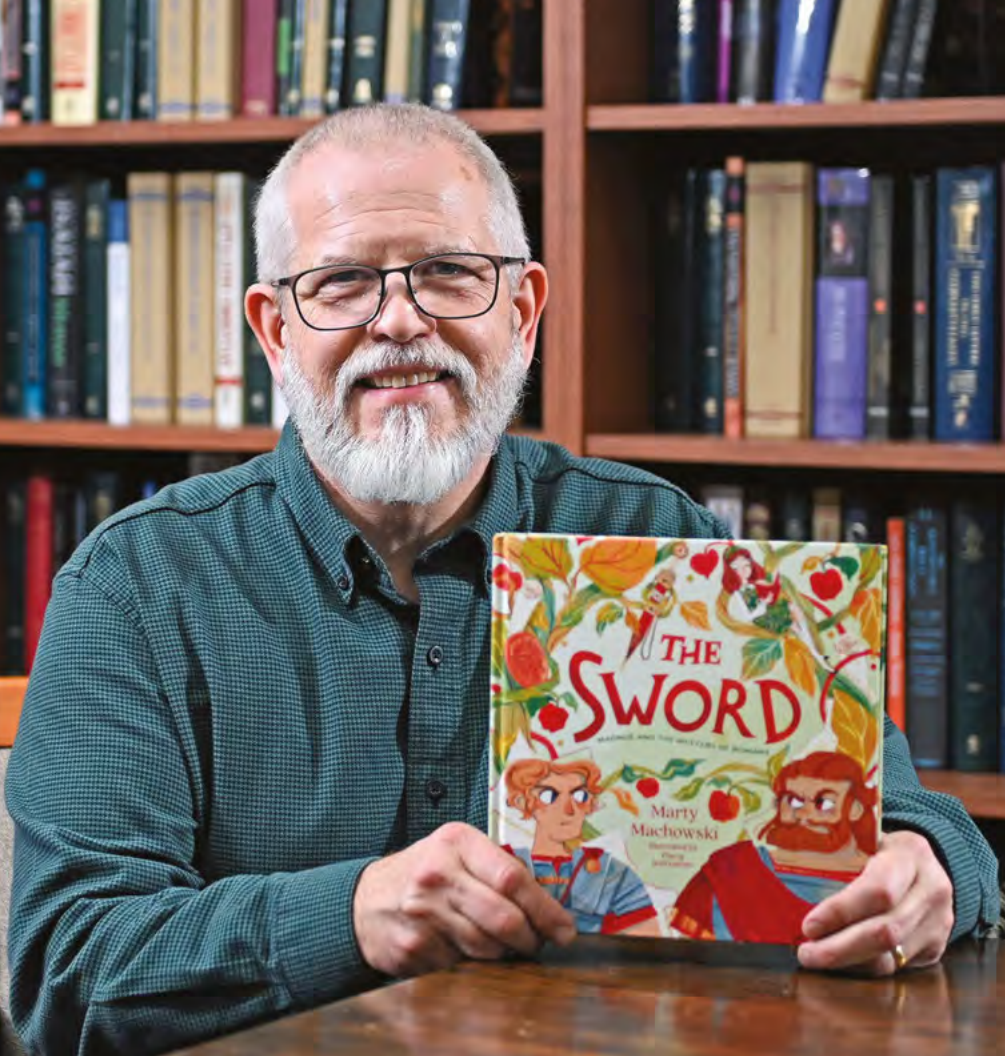


gently Reformed perspective, the authors emphasize that theology isn’t optional—everyone has a theology, whether it’s conscious and coherent or not.

It also roots

theology in the Biblical narrative, interpreting the Scriptures through a Christological lens. They make the case that church workers and parents shouldn’t leave out the tough parts of the Bible when teaching children. Children intuitively know life is hard, so giving them a sugar-coated version of the arc of redemption makes the gospel sound less realistic. The key is distilling Scriptural truth so a child can understand it, rather than watering it down, which might make it more kid friendly but robs it of its power. *How To Teach Kids Theology* can help church leaders and parents navigate this important distinction.

—*Collin Garbarino* ■



2025 CHILDREN'S BOOK OF THE YEAR

The fine edge of theology

Blending Bible study with story

by JANIE B. CHEANEY

→ “God has a way of using my mistakes for my good,” confesses Brant, the co-protagonist in *The Sword* (New Growth Press, 176 pp.), WORLD’s Children’s Book of the Year. This particular mistake is letting his curiosity overcome his prudence about what’s inside a wooden chest on top of the fireplace mantel. After he accidentally knocks the chest to the floor and breaks it open, his sister Katana provides cover for the noise because she’s equally curious about its contents.

The chest contains a wooden sword and an old book purporting to be the

work of Magnus, a first-century blacksmith’s son who writes of being forced into service as a gladiator. After defeating many opponents, Emperor Claudius grants him freedom, signified by the wooden sword. Two other swords figure in his story, one a jewel-hilted treasure fashioned by Magnus’ father. Third and most precious is the Sword of Truth—not made of steel or pointed wood but breathed out by the very Spirit of God. That is, Magnus’ own copy of Paul’s letter to the Romans.

The kids’ dad explains that the family apple orchard in France was Magnus’

final home. The contents of the chest belong to his descendants as Stewards of the Sword. Brant and Katana are now obliged to discover for themselves what the three swords represent.

Author Marty Machowski describes this book as “a storybook Bible study on Paul’s letter to the Romans written from the perspective of a former gladiator who served as one of the Apostle Paul’s Praetorian guards.” Magnus’ story unfolds chapter by chapter, followed by exposition of the letter’s major themes. It’s an intriguing approach for introducing deep theology to children.

The inspiration came as a literal answer to prayer. Machowski explains, “During the summer of 2023, I was fresh out of ideas, so I prayed, ‘Lord, if You want me to write another book, You need to give me an idea.’” Only moments later, he recalled Philippians 1:13, in which Paul mentioned how the gospel had spread to the Praetorian guard. How might that message have impressed one particular guard? “I shared the idea with my family, who thought it would make for a great book.”

Machowski uses analogies to explain difficult concepts. In *The Sword*, the analogy of a flawed sculpture producing flawed copies illustrates original sin. Describing pride as walking on stilts, he writes, “Though one might feel taller or better than others, God isn’t fooled.” Explaining God’s sovereign choice in election was a particular challenge. After expanding on Paul’s analogy of potter and clay, the text continues, “Once we understand that we all deserve judgment and recognize that it is only by God’s mercy that we are saved, we bow in worship to God.”

“Sometimes I realized you can’t explain the incomprehensible,” Machowski says, although “it does help to set up Scriptural guardrails to guide our understanding by providing Scriptures to help interpret Scripture.” Using both Old and New Testaments to interpret Romans, adding vivid analogies and colorful illustrations, and tying it all together with a story makes *The Sword* an exceptional resource for family Bible study. ■

Honorable mentions for children of all ages

FICTION

The Unlikely Intrusion of Adams Klein

JOHN GRECO
MOODY

In Transom City, circa 2196, cranial downloads have replaced old-fashioned learning. Adams Klein, 14, longs for relics of a bygone world: music by the Beatles, books with real pages, and food

with more flavor than standard-issue protein bars.

The Marshal, a tyrannical overlord, uses an abundance of information to suppress the masses. But when Adams gets in the way of the

Marshal's plans for world domination, the Marshal sends out minions to hunt the boy down so they can assassinate him. Adams' only hope of survival is to travel back in time, but he must avoid interacting with anyone, otherwise he will change the future. Even in the sleepy town of Indigo, Ohio, though, Adams can't stay incognito for long.

Of all the books I read this year, I have probably thought about this one the most. The plot offers complex characters like Emma Bloom, a girl who puts forward a cutesy veneer to mask the pain of her parents' divorce. And then there's introverted Clay Danvers, who learns to push far beyond the bounds of his comfort zone.

Deftly wielding the time travel element, author John Greco develops a plot filled with themes of self-sacrifice and bravery. Greco doesn't gloss over the emotional turmoil of divorce, and there are a few instances of mildly rude humor. The book's only annoying element: a major cliff-hanger ending.



The Unlikely Intrusion of Adams Klein is also a timely story. AI might not be on the same level as cranial downloads, but thoughtful readers may notice parallels between Transom City and our own technological era. With warnings against totalitarianism and suppression by abundance, it also introduces young readers to the dystopian genre in the style of an age-appropriate *Brave New World*. —Bekah McCallum

FICTION

The Teacher of Nomad Land

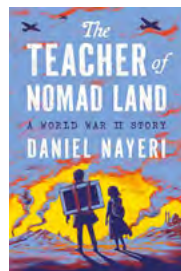
DANIEL NAYERI
LEVINE QUERIDO

Iran, 1941, was a crossroads of Allied and Axis intrigue. Determined to secure Iranian oil reserves, British and Soviet troops have occupied Iran. But Hitler has his spies on the ground as well, some of them eager to round up Jewish children headed for refuge in Tehran. Meanwhile, village life hews to normalcy as much as it can while nomadic tribes dodge the crossfire.

Crossfire has claimed the life of Mohammed Noori, shot by mistake. That leaves his son Babak, 13, and daughter Sana, 8, in the care of a resentful relative. Fearing they will be separated, Babak makes a desperate plan to follow in his father's profession as teacher to the Bakhtiari nomads. If he

can make himself valuable enough, the tribe may allow him and his spunky little sister to tag along for the duration of the war in relative safety.

Author Daniel Nayeri sketches this neglected World War II setting with understated emotional power, drawing



readers into suspense, survival, danger, and touches of humor as Babak stumbles toward his place in a confusing world. His questions and doubts about God contribute to his growth. Given the setting, the God he ponders is probably Allah. But Nayeri, a Christian, makes the deity as generic as possible, with hints of grace and redemption.

For example, while debating whether to accept help from a sympathetic British soldier, Babak "realizes that to God, we are all beggars, praying for blessings we could never repay or gain in trade." One blessing is to recognize one's calling, and by the end Babak knows he will follow in his father's footsteps as a teacher. For "a teacher is one who gives. Everybody has good work to do"—and with God's help everybody has something to give. —Janie Cheaney

NONFICTION

Eric's Greatest Race

TIM CHALLIES
HARVEST KIDS

When author Tim Challies began pondering historical figures whose stories he

thought would be worth telling to a new generation, he says, the life of Eric Liddell immediately came to mind. While many families may be familiar with Liddell's

story from watching the classic film *Chariots of Fire*, Challies' book explores the arc of Liddell's whole life, from childhood to his final days as a POW.

Challies' desire to engage a wider readership inspired him to present Liddell's story in a graphic novel format that intermingles the text with black-and-white art panels by Paul Mignard. While that genre of literature is often written with children and teens in mind, even an adult will read a graphic novel, Challies notes, which allows children and parents to enjoy the story together.

Eric's Greatest Race follows Liddell as his love for running blossoms into opportunities for him to share his →



faith ahead of his record-setting performance in the 400-meter race at the 1924 Olympics. Challies devotes the last third of the book to Liddell's missionary service in China and his faithful witness in a Japanese internment camp during World War II. The epilogue reminds readers that although Liddell's death was tragic, he fought the good fight, kept the faith, and ultimately won the race that mattered most.

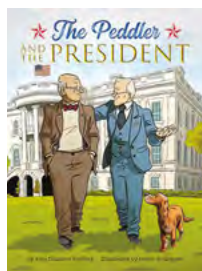
"I very much hope the book will cause young readers to see in Liddell a man who loved the Lord to such a degree that he was willing to give up the spotlight when at the peak of his fame and even deny himself the ability to escape suffering when given the opportunity," Challies said. "He stands as an example of what a Christian can and ought to be." —*Kristin Chapman*

NONFICTION

The Peddler and the President

ANN D. KOFFSKY
APPLES & HONEY PRESS

In this early-reader chapter book, Ann Koffsky introduces children to the long-time friendship between President



Harry Truman and Eddie Jacobson. During World War I, the two men would serve alongside each other in the 129th Field Artillery, together running the army

store at Camp Doniphan in Oklahoma. That experience inspired them after the war to open their own store until financial woes ended the partnership. Jacobson, who was Jewish, became a traveling salesman and Truman became a politician, but even as their paths parted, their friendship endured.

The strength of that relationship would eventually face its greatest test, though, as the world pondered the creation of a new Jewish state in Palestine. As president of the United States, Truman's stance on the issue held great sway, but he remained ambivalent. Jacobson, who had never taken advan-

tage of his friendship with the president for personal gain, decided to take a risk in urging Truman to reconsider. Ultimately, Truman did, and the state of Israel was born.

Koffsky notes in the book's conclusion that Truman and Jacobson's friendship was remarkable in many ways, from how it began with humble roots to how it persisted even as Truman became one of the most powerful people in the world. "What I find most inspiring about their friendship was their respect for each other," Koffsky writes. "Their mutual love and respect led them to change the world." —*K.C.*

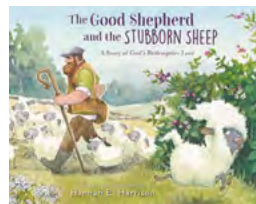
PICTURE BOOK

The Good Shepherd and the Stubborn Sheep

HANNAH HARRISON
ZONDERKIDZ

While Psalm 23 is perhaps one of the most recognized passages in the Bible, author Hannah Harrison's humorous allegory helps give young children a fresh understanding of how God cares for His children like a good shepherd. Blending portions of Psalm 23 with the parable of the lost sheep, the story introduces children to George, an average, defenseless sheep who has a terrible sense of direction and can't get up if he falls on his back. While George knows he needs the care of a shepherd, he is stubborn and wants his own way. So rather than get a much-needed haircut, George decides to run away.

Meanwhile George's wool keeps growing until he can't see well and he smells like moldy cheese. Eventually the foolish little sheep realizes he needs to return to his shepherd, but by this point he is terribly lost with a snarling wolf in hot pursuit. Just when George thinks



there's no hope, though, his good shepherd appears, using his rod to chase off the wolf before restoring the wayward sheep to the fold.

On the final page of the book, Harrison provides additional Scripture references, inviting parents and children to explore more deeply what the Bible says about shepherds and sheep. The book's soothing illustrations and comforting message make it well suited as a bedtime read and a worthy addition to the family library. —*K.C.*

PICTURE BOOK

Don't Trust Fish

NEIL SHARPSON
DIAL BOOKS

In *Don't Trust Fish*, Neil Sharpson's witty words combine with Dan Santat's classic pencil and watercolor illustrations to create a humorous approach to the concept of animal classification. Initially,



the book begins in a didactic manner, starkly explaining what makes something a mammal, reptile, or bird. However, it quickly digresses into an informative yet zany

exposé about all the ways fish are rebels and outlaws who don't follow the rules.

The fast-paced story at times borders on the absurd, but therein lies part of its appeal as Sharpson engages the reader by posing lots of fishy questions: "Ships always sink at sea. They never sink on land. Isn't that strange?" And, "A group of fish is called a 'school.' But what are they learning in these 'schools'? We have a right to know." The end result is a comical conspiracy theory propagated by an unseen narrator, whose identity is hinted at but not revealed until the book's final page.

While Sharpson's blending of fact with fiction may require some explanation for younger children, older children will be able to discern the differences and appreciate the humor for humor's sake. Even though at times the bizarre nature of the plot might leave some parents scratching their heads, *Don't Trust Fish* offers children a fantastical story combined with clever and detailed illustrations that will reel them in again and again. —*K.C.* ■

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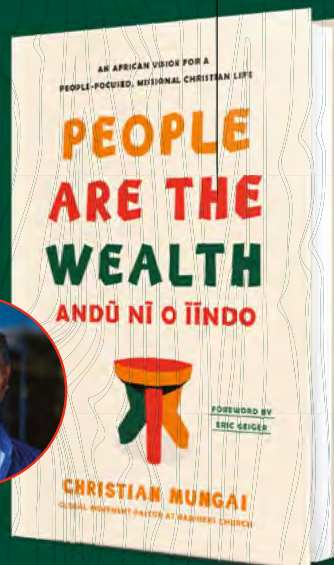
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QUEST

FOUR BOOKS THAT SHAPED MY THINKING

Patriotism as a Christian ideal

by DANIEL DARLING



In March 1989, my parents packed us kids in the station wagon and drove from Chicago to Washington, D.C., for a life-changing family vacation. I've long had an interest in politics and history—we took three newspapers at home, which I devoured daily, and in high school I subscribed to *National Review* and read biographies. But it was this trip that sparked in my 11-year-old heart a love for America that has not abated. I remember the awe I felt as I stood before the Lincoln Memorial and pondered the heroism of our 16th president.

Today, however, patriotism is not in vogue, even among believers. Cynicism from failed wars, corrupt leadership, and bad public policy have contributed to the resistance to patriotism. A nervousness exists about expressing love of country because we've been warned by so many in academia, the media, and even the pulpit that Christians must always choose between God and country.

PROPERLY ORDERED AFFECTION

C.S. Lewis' book, *The Four Loves* (1960), addresses this false dichotomy. With his usual eloquence and wit, Lewis helps

Christians understand that allegiances great and small need not always compete. God is our highest and greatest commitment, but Christians must still arrange our lesser loves. Our love for our spouses, our duty to our children, our financial responsibilities—when we properly situate these things underneath our love for God, life is as it should be. Out of order they become idols, they destroy, they become, in Lewis' words, demonic. But rightly ordered, these pledges—including love of country—help us practice, in a way, our love for God.

THE CHURCH'S ROLE

In my early years, one of the voices that most shaped my public theology was the late Chuck Colson. Having seen the perils of power, Colson didn't swerve into disengagement or apathy toward our country but urged the church to love and serve the nation by being its prophetic voice. Colson warned against tribalism, but also against despair. His book *How Now Shall We Live* (1999) still speaks a quarter-century later. Colson saw that a strong, faithful, courageous church is essential to a flourishing nation. He believed that a truly Christian approach to patriotism is "perfectly balanced."

But what is patriotism exactly? It can't be a blind loyalty to an administration or leader. It can't be a whitewashing of our worst sins.

PATRIOTISM DEFINED

There are a lot of definitions, but I see patriotism as primarily love for the place, the people, the history, and the ideals of the land God has given us. In his book, *Reclaiming Patriotism in an Age of Extremes* (2021), Stephen B. Smith warns against a disordered love of country but also urges people to not reject patriotism altogether. He grounds his definition in gratitude and urges Americans to not let the nation atrophy. The Yale professor of political science and philosophy cuts against the grain of academia, where patriotism is often derided as jingoism or demonized as nationalism.

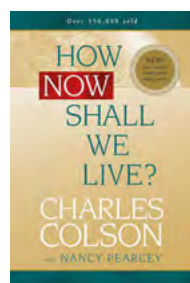
AN OUTSIDER'S LOOK AT AMERICA

American exceptionalism can become hubris, a trait that often leads to failures large and small. We should not consider ourselves "more highly than [we] ought to think" (Romans 12:3), but there is a form of exceptionalism that demonstrates the honest awe and humble thankfulness expressed by the American Founders. Sometimes, it takes outsiders to help us see the uniqueness of the American experiment.

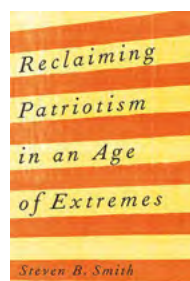
French diplomat Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*



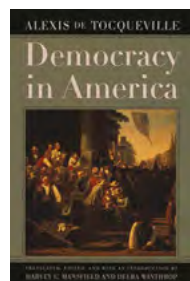
The Four Loves
C.S. LEWIS



How Now Shall We Live
CHUCK COLSON



**Reclaiming Patriotism
in an Age of Extremes**
STEPHEN B. SMITH



Democracy in America
ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE

(1835) serves to show us what is unique about this nearly 250-year-old experiment. In America, Tocqueville found both a "spirit of liberty" and a "spirit of religion." These parallel ideas, acknowledged by the men who forged the nation, here live in tension better than anywhere else in the world. The Christianity that Tocqueville saw was both thick and organic, not dispensed in heavy doses by the state. He was impressed by America's civic life that knit people first in their immediate locales and then weaved together a national identity.

It's natural for us to think our nation is the best—a sentiment shared by other peoples about their home countries. But it's also not outrageous to take the work of those who see America as visitors, like Tocqueville, and extol her qualities. I know that the immigrants and children of immigrants who attend the school where I teach think so. They are not hesitant to tell me about America's virtues, having experienced a real contrast with the totalitarian regimes they've often left behind.

David McCullough, the late beloved historian, said of America, "Never, ever anywhere, had there been a government instituted on the consent of the governed." His fellow historian Thomas Kidd concurs, writing of the Declaration of Independence, "It is the most resounding statement of human equality the world has ever known." Such sentiments don't wipe away America's sins, such as slavery and segregation, but they do tell us something about our ability to overcome them and of the unique ideals we have yet to fully live up to.

For American Christians, patriotism, born out of gratitude, openhanded in generosity, enlarged in spirit, is both right and proper. Let us, then, pray to God, that in our day we may do the work of renewal, in the face of many challenges, and leave a nation as special for our children as it was for us. ■

—Daniel Darling is director of the Land Center for Cultural Engagement at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and author of several books, including *In Defense of Christian Patriotism*



MOVIE

Wake Up Dead Man

by COLLIN GARBARINO

Rated PG-13 • Netflix

→ *Knives Out* (2019) became a sleeper hit in theaters, making more than \$300 million against a budget of \$40 million. Netflix bought the rights, giving Rian Johnson, who writes and directs the franchise, a much bigger budget to create a sequel, *Glass Onion* (2022). Now the third installment, *Wake Up Dead Man*, has landed on the streaming platform.

The original film was a tightly constructed murder mystery with a cast of quirky suspects who all seem to benefit from the death of the family patriarch. But the quirkiest character was Detective Benoit Blanc (Daniel Craig), with what one character referred

to as a “Kentucky-fried Foghorn Leghorn drawl.” In *Wake Up Dead Man*, Johnson keeps the tone as quirky as ever. But this time around, he tries to incorporate questions of faith into his whodunit.

The action in *Wake Up Dead Man* revolves around a small Catholic parish where a young priest, Father Jud (Josh O’Connor), has been sent. He’s supposed to rejuvenate the dying flock at Our Lady of Perpetual Fortitude by bringing a positive outlook. The church’s current priest is Monsignor Wicks (Josh Brolin). Wicks is a hard-liner who preaches fiery sermons and seems intent on alienating newcomers.

When Wicks is murdered in an exceedingly mysterious manner on

Good Friday, the police enlist the help of master detective Benoit Blanc.

All-star ensemble casts have become a signature of the *Knives Out* franchise, and *Wake Up Dead Man* is no exception. A small group of parishioners makes up the list of suspects, and they’re played by heavy hitters like Glenn Close, Jeremy Renner, and Andrew Scott.

With this film, Johnson gives the audience his version of a locked-room mystery. It seems that everyone in the small congregation had a motive to kill Monsignor Wicks, but it seems impossible that any of them could have had the opportunity. Johnson includes some tongue-in-cheek moments, when the movie acknowledges that this setup is a common trope in the whodunit genre.

Perhaps more significant than the actual mystery is Johnson’s exploration of religion in the film. It turns out Benoit Blanc has a distinct dislike for the Christian faith, launching into an atheistic rant about the violence, misogyny, and homophobia perpetrated by the church. Father Jud, who acts as Blanc’s

sidekick in the investigation, serves as his foil in spiritual matters. The earnest young priest tries to convince the skeptical detective that there might be something to this whole Christianity thing.

Johnson has said *Wake Up Dead Man* is a personal film for him. He grew up in a conservative evangelical household but as an adult abandoned the faith. In this film, we see him examining the intersection of faith and politics, and the result isn't surprising given his background. Johnson uses Wicks as a stand-in for those he considers bad religious leaders in the age of Trump—hateful, arrogant, and caring more about the culture war than they do about people. Jud is supposed to be one of the good guys who saves folks by teaching them to forgive their enemies. Johnson deserves some credit for attempting to allow various perspectives to have their say, but despite his upbringing he doesn't understand the thing he's writing about.

The movie portrays religious experience as a false dichotomy: It's either about control or some subjective feeling. Don't expect a theologically accurate explanation of the gospel. The religious sensibility of the film is also askew because these Catholics don't talk or act like Catholics. The faithful of Our Lady of Perpetual Fortitude have a wild-eyed fanaticism about them at odds with the church's Gothic architecture. Johnson might have thought he was being fair in his approach to religion, but he doesn't know enough about Catholics, or Christianity in general, to provide anything beyond left-wing caricature.

Sadly, this clichéd perspective on Christianity wasn't the only disappointment. *Wake Up Dead Man* contains fewer bad words than previous installments, but some of the dialogue is more explicit than anything in earlier films.

In the end, this isn't a terrible movie. But it has too many annoying aspects. The central murder was cleverly written, but Johnson adds a secondary hoax that in context is both nonsensical and a little sacrilegious. The more you think about the intricate crime, the dumber it gets. Benoit Blanc fans would do better by queuing up the original. ■



DOCUMENTARY

The Perfect Neighbor

by COLLIN GARBARINO

Rated R • Netflix



The Perfect Neighbor—winner of five Critics Choice awards, includ-

ing best documentary—chronicles the killing of Ajike Owens, a black woman, who was shot by her white neighbor Susan Lorincz. In it, director Geeta Gandbhir provides the backstory as well as the resulting fallout.

Lorincz described herself as “the perfect neighbor,” but she was at odds with most of the residents in her Ocala, Fla., neighborhood. Her rented house abutted an empty lot in which local kids played football. Lorincz comes across as a woman obsessed with keeping noisy children away from her home. She thinks justice is on her side, repeatedly calling the police despite no laws being broken. Altercations with kids and parents escalate, and when Owens confronts Lorincz about an interaction with one

of her children, Lorincz shoots her.

It's a heartrending tragedy, but the film's power comes from the manner in which it's told.

The documentary uses nothing but police recordings, with the bulk of the footage coming from bodycams combined with 911 calls and investigation interviews. With this technique, *The Perfect Neighbor* breaks new ground, giving the viewer what feels like an unfiltered look at the facts. We hear Lorincz explain her actions. We hear the neighbors give their perspective. We even see the reactions of the police officers. A few seem sympathetic to Lorincz; most do not.

The film contains no talking heads or experts explaining the moral of the story, but Gandbhir still manages to question the wisdom of “stand your ground” laws that might unintentionally encourage recklessness. *The Perfect Neighbor* is a master class in getting a point across without stating it outright.

MOVIE

David

by BOB BROWN



Rated PG • Theaters

→ Have you ever wanted to ask David, “Why?” The man after God’s own heart had so much going for him when he set his eyes on something—on someone—he shouldn’t have. I’d like to put the same question to the writers of the new animated film *David* because its finale strays into inappropriate territory in what is otherwise a Scripturally sound and entertaining dramatization of the rise to power of Israel’s second king.

The Angel Studios production picks up where its prequel miniseries *Young David* leaves off. With breathtaking animation, directors Phil Cunningham and Brent Dawes smoothly connect significant events in David’s life, from

the prophet Samuel (voiced by Brian Stivale) anointing Jesse’s youngest son to David’s first moments of royal power after the deaths of Saul (Adam Michael Gold) and Jonathan (Mark Jacobson). CCM stars Phil Wickham (adult David), Lauren Daigle (Rebecca), Brandon Engman (young David), and others perform the film’s splendid music. In song and dialogue, *David* rightly names Adonai and El Shaddai as the only sure source of help in this life.

“We see the cost of putting our faith in man,” Samuel laments in a conversation about Saul’s moral decline. A humorous moment after the defeat of Goliath reinforces this point. “Don’t look at me,” David admonishes a jubilant crowd. “Look at God.” A female

admirer pops up and gushes, “Just look at him, the way he looks at God.”

David keeps its focus on the impending collision between the reluctantly heroic shepherd and the increasingly desperate monarch. True to the Bible’s characterization, the relationship between the harpist and would-be harpoonist runs hot and cold, and Saul isn’t a total villain. The film ends before David’s egregious sins and errors in judgment.

You can’t miss the film’s errors, though. The most conspicuous one comes near the end when the story departs from the Biblical narrative. David goes to Ziklag to free the city from the Amalekites. He gives a speech urging the captured Israelites to resist their oppressors, but the Amalekites seize him and string him up with ropes in a position resembling a crucifixion. But this extra-Biblical foreshadowing of Calvary confuses the typology, fixing the viewers’ eyes on the wrong person. To make matters worse, this scene cuts straight to the new king standing before a cheering Jerusalem throng. The only possible explanation is that David’s followers rescued him from execution. What’s the intended message?

Other questionable elements include a musical number with the line, “There’s a reason for the colors in my story,” set against rainbow-shaded scenery. Given our current cultural context, the scene could be open to misinterpretation. Also, a repeated refrain to “follow the light” remains too vague: Is this a charge to obey God’s Word (the lamp unto one’s feet and light unto one’s path) or to navigate life guided by some personal effulgence? The film also contains some insensitive jokes: One of David’s brothers is portrayed as obese and always scrounging for food, and another named Ozem (see 1 Chronicles 2:15) is extra gaunt, perhaps a puckish reference to the popular weight-loss drug Ozempic?

The film’s a good reminder about the folly of putting our faith in man—or entertainment. But we can never go wrong fixing our eyes on the Son of David—as the Bible presents Him. ■

COMING SOON...

Starbright

1/9 • PG-13 • Theaters

Aisling makes a wish on a falling star that might change her life. Archangel Raphael (John Rhys-Davies) entrusts the star's life force to her, but its light draws dangerous villains.

Star Trek: Fleet Academy

1/15 • Not Yet Rated • Paramount+

This new series follows young cadets training to become Starfleet officers while dealing with friendships, rivalries, and romance, all while facing a mysterious threat to both the Academy and the Federation.

Agatha Christie's Seven Dials

1/15 • TV-14 • Netflix

When a lavish country house party ends in murder, a witty young aristocrat sets out to solve the crime in this adaptation of Agatha Christie's novel. Starring Mia McKenna-Bruce and Martin Freeman.

Charlie the Wonderdog

1/16 • PG • Theaters

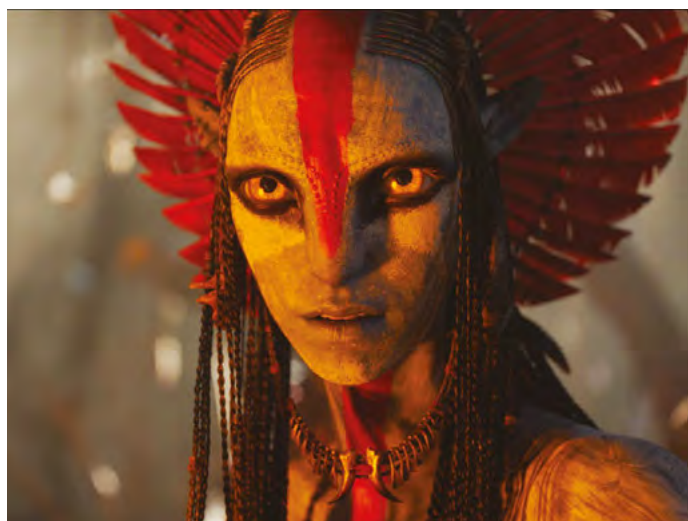
In this animated film, a dog gains superpowers after he is abducted by aliens. Battling an evil cat threatening humanity, the dog becomes a famous superhero.

Mercy

1/23 • PG-13 • Theaters

In the near future, a detective (Chris Pratt) is put on trial for the murder of his wife. He has 90 minutes to prove his innocence to the advanced AI judge (Rebecca Ferguson) he once championed, before it determines his fate.

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MOVIE

Avatar: Fire and Ash

by COLLIN GARBARINIO

Rated PG-13 • Theaters



Avatar: Fire and Ash is the third installment in James Cameron's multibillion-dollar science-fiction film franchise that draws crowds with over-the-top special effects.

In the original *Avatar* (2009), audiences met the Na'vi, a blue-skinned forest-dwelling alien race devoted to living in harmony with their planet and their pantheistic mother goddess Eywa. The sequel, *The Way of Water* (2022), introduced a new tribe of peaceable green-skinned Na'vi who live on the reefs. In *Fire and Ash*, a brutal clan of Na'vi known as the Ash People shows up. They've turned their backs on Eywa, only worshipping power.

Jake Sully (Sam Worthington) and his family remain at the center of the conflict. *Fire and Ash* begins with Jake's wife Neytiri (Zoe Saldana) grieving for the son she lost in the second film. The family is still on the run from the human military, but the presence of a human companion com-

plicates their lives. When the humans make an alliance with the Ash People, all of Pandora is at risk.

I've never been a big fan of the *Avatar* movies with their eco-babble, nature worship, and preachy condemnation of the West's military dominance, but I must admit *Fire and Ash* is probably the best one so far. The presence of the Ash People gives this installment some much needed nuance, complicating the earlier movies' simplistic moralism that viewed indigenous people as "good" and colonizers as "bad."

But viewers might get a sense of déjà vu because many of the plot points and action sequences in this 195-minute film recycle moments from *The Way of Water*. Some fan should produce an unauthorized cut that condenses the two films into one streamlined movie.

Cameron has promised five *Avatar* movies, so where does he go from here? We now have Na'vi who ride the wind, surf the waves, and play with fire. Will we next meet dirt Na'vi who live in caves?



Bob Dylan

MUSIC

Listening to Bob Dylan's early years

A box set of old tracks for new fans

by ARSENIO ORTEZA



Just how surprising or enlightening you find Sony Legacy's latest Bob Dylan box, *The Bootleg Series Vol. 18: Through the Open Window, 1956–1963*, depends on how much you've already investigated the nooks and crannies of Dylan's un- or semi-official discography.

Unlike most of the Bootleg Series, the majority of *Through the Open Window*'s 139 performances (as well as some of the 26 song intros, interview excerpts, and jokes) have been circulating for awhile. Thirty-eight of the performances first went legit on the



The Bootleg Series Vol. 18: Through the Open Window, 1956–1963

BOB DYLAN

copyright-extending *50th Anniversary Collection 1962* (2012) and *The 50th Anniversary Collection 1963* (2013) while another 43 did so on 18 other albums beginning with *Broadside Ballads Vol. 1* (1963), ending with the *Inside Llewyn Davis* soundtrack (2013), and poaching three other volumes of the Dylan Bootleg Series in between.

The number of previously unreleased performances would therefore appear to be 58. Yet even that tally might be high if you count the tracks that have already circulated on literal Dylan bootlegs such as *Great White Wonder* (1969) and *Ten of Swords* (1985).

So if the target audience isn't die-hard Dylan collectors, who is it? Easy: the millions of Gen Zers who helped James Mangold's 2024 biopic *A Complete Unknown* make bank. The young-Bob period portrayed in that film and the young-Bob period curated on *Through the Open Window* don't overlap exactly, but they overlap enough.

The eight-disc set begins with a snippet from a record that 15-year-old Bobby Zimmerman and two friends made at a St. Paul, Minn., music store on Christmas Eve, 1956. The song (Shirley and Lee's "Let the Good Times Roll") goes by fast, but there's no denying the voice. Discs 7 and 8 contain the Carnegie Hall concert Dylan performed after his second album and Peter, Paul and Mary's recording of "Blowin' in the Wind" had made him famous. How he went from the St. Paul store to the NYC Hall in just under seven years is the story the box tries to tell.

It's an episodic tale for sure. One minute, Dylan's playing harmonica for Harry Belafonte, Carolyn Hester, or Victoria Spivey, the next he's writing "The Death of Emmett Till" and "Ballad of Hollis Brown."

There is, however, a unifying thread, and it isn't so much folk or protest but humor. Whether delivering talkin'-blues songs, telling the East Orange chess club story, or foreshadowing Norm Macdonald with a rambling intro to "Tomorrow Is a Long Time" at Town Hall in April '63, young Bob sure knew how to get laughs. ■

MUSIC

New and noteworthy

by ARSENIO ORTEZA



Synthetic: A Synth Odyssey, Season 4

RICH AUCOIN

Until 2020, the Nova Scotian electro-popster Rich Aucoin was best known for his interactive “Space Cowboy” shows and for making albums synced to classic children’s films. When COVID laid waste to the former, he began an analog-synthesizer “odyssey” that’s only now coming to an end, and it’s doing so not with a whimper but a bang. Edgier and more beat

driven than its predecessors, it’s the audio equivalent of a popular amusement park’s must-ride roller coaster.



Rainy Sunday Afternoon THE DIVINE COMEDY

Neil Hannon could have titled this album *Ecclesiastes*, so vividly do its songs illustrate that all is, or at least tends toward, vanity. That Hannon puts this sentiment across with a twinkle in his eye and a twinkle in his music helps the medicine go down—there’s latent hope in the childhood Christmas memories of “All the Pretty Lights,” and you can waltz to the Kafkaesque “The Man Who Turned Into a Chair.” But medicine

the album remains. “One day I will be nothing,” Hannon sings. “Think how funny that will feel. / For we, the living, / death is the Achilles heel.”



Reconstruction LECRAE

Before you listen to any of these 19 songs, watch the hourlong testimony that Lecrae taped earlier this year for the YouTube channel Delafé Testimonies. Not only will what the 46-year-old rapper has to say put his widely documented ups and downs into context, but it will also make clear what that context is. This album’s title cut identifies it as the return to a “firm foundation,” a return that the other cuts flesh out from multiple

perspectives. Which one you’ll find most compelling is hard to say. I’m partial to the one involving a shout-out to the books of Lois Tverberg.



Saving Grace ROBERT PLANT WITH SUZI DIAN

Not to throw shade at Alison Krauss, with whom this album’s top-billed singer has etched some noteworthy performances, but what Suzi Dian is bringing out in Robert Plant is special. Whether she or anyone else in Saving Grace (Plant’s band’s name as well as this album’s title) is responsible for this all-covers project’s gospel motif (“Soul of a Man,” “Higher Rock,” “Gospel Plow”) has not been disclosed. But whoever convinced

Plant to transform the Low Anthem’s “Ticket Taker” from an understated murmur into a misty-mountain folk song for the ages was doing yeoman’s service.



ENCORE

Why does the cover of the Sinfonia of London’s new Lerner & Loewe’s *My Fair Lady* (Chandos) proclaim “World Première Complete Recording” when the original Broadway cast version of the musical topped the charts 69 years ago? Because no ensemble has heretofore recorded *everything* that Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe composed for their adaptation of George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*. The 1956 recording ran to 54 minutes, the 1964 film soundtrack to 75. This one runs to 130.

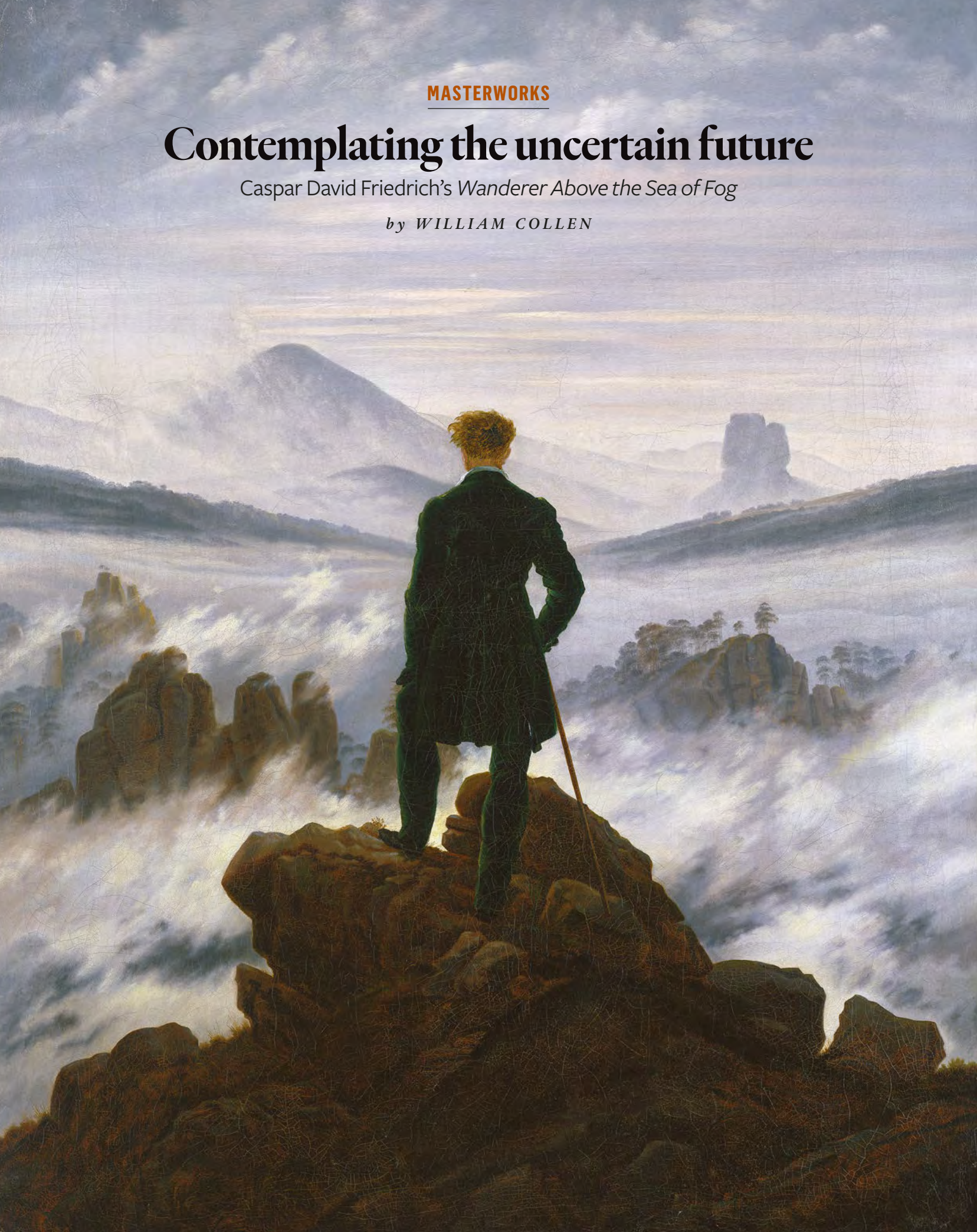
John Wilson, the Sinfonia’s artistic director, has taken great pains to ensure that every facet—from an all-British cast to the live-in-the-studio recording to the 109-page libretto containing the entire script—is top-notch. The libretto also contains this accurate assessment of the show: “Its core strength lies in the rare indivisibility of its book, music, and lyrics,” writes the theater critic David Benedict. “This is a coherent, winning drama set up in dialogue and dramatised through vivid, perfectly characterized song.” —A.O.

MASTERWORKS

Contemplating the uncertain future

Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*

by WILLIAM COLLEN





Caspar David Friedrich was one of the most important painters of the German Romantic movement. He and his contemporaries worked during a period of intense social, political, and philosophical upheaval during the early decades of the 19th century. Friedrich himself was primarily a landscape painter; his canvases are an extended reflection on humanity's changing place in the world of nature, and although the Romantic movement is often caricatured as one of excessive sentiment and emotional abandon, Friedrich's view of the world is one of sober-minded calm, refracted through his intensely personal subjective vision.

Friedrich's parents raised him in the tenets of their strict Lutheranism, and he never departed from that faith despite suffering occasional bouts of depression. Christian iconography has a prominent place in his art: Many of his paintings feature overt religious themes, including several of churches and isolated shrines in the mountains. A favorite motif of his is a cross situated atop a high peak. In other paintings, Friedrich's faith is veiled; his many paintings of landscapes with only a few small human figures situated in the distance are at times profoundly ambiguous. Art historians continue to debate the role of faith in Friedrich's art; some believe that his landscapes express the feeling that God is distant and unknowable, but others, including Christian historian James Romaine, have convincingly argued the opposite. Friedrich's paintings are designed to motivate a deeper faith in the viewer: The artist himself stated that God could be understood in nature through "sacred intuition, to be seen and recognized only in belief."

Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog is one such picture; its message can be interpreted as one of trust in the God who providentially orders the events of the future. The central figure—the man with his back turned—is called a *Rückenfigur* in art history. It has been used for centuries as a device to include the viewer in the action of the painting. Friedrich deploys the *Rückenfigur*



FACING PAGE: Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*.
ABOVE: A copper printing plate from 1800 shows a portrait of young Friedrich.

frequently in his art. The figure becomes a stand-in for the viewer as we gaze at the scene spread below; the painter invites us to share in the contemplation of what lies before us.

Many of the German Romantics were very suspicious of the advances of modernity brought about by the Industrial Revolution. They could see the effects of the technological and social changes which had been occurring in England; and those changes began to be felt in Germany at the time Friedrich painted this picture. The Romantics, Friedrich included, expressed ambivalence toward the rapidly changing world. Friedrich's wanderer, perched above a vast, tumultuous, ill-defined landscape, reflects the artist's own relationship toward the new world of urbanization, social change, and technological advancement. But Friedrich doesn't explicitly condemn these advances in his painting—he is concerned but he is not hopeless, because he knows the God who holds all things in His hand.

What does Friedrich's wanderer see? The murky, foggy landscape before him (and us) evokes the uncertainty often felt when we contemplate the future. No one can be sure what will happen; we can glimpse hints and possibilities, just like we can see mountains looming out of Friedrich's fog. But we can never be certain of what the future will bring.

For the Christian, this uncertainty about the future does not need to be a cause for alarm. The Bible has many passages which assure the believer that God is in control of future events and that He is personally invested in bringing about good in this world. Jeremiah 29:11 says, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for wholeness not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." A similar view is expressed in Romans 8:28: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

Friedrich maintains this hopeful attitude toward the future. His wanderer is not repulsed or horrified by what he sees: He is able to calmly reflect on a future that does not make him afraid, despite the turmoil present in Friedrich's time. Neither should our own future distress us, since we know that the God who loves us works it for our good. ■



VOICES NICK EICHER

Fights and flights

“I may fail, but I will not quit”: Former congressman Steve Pearce on flying into storms, Christian calling, and how he’s prepared for a confirmation battle

Former U.S. Rep. Steve Pearce is not a guy who talks about dreams or goals. He talks about assignments. That was one of the first things he emphasized in our long conversation about war, flying, public service, and the places where life takes you when you walk through open doors. “I never set out to be anything,” he said. “If the door opens, I’ll walk through it. If it closes, I won’t fight it.”

Don’t mistake that for the path of least resistance.

Sixty years after he first left home for combat in Vietnam, another door has opened. President Trump nominated Pearce—a decorated Air Force C-130 pilot, businessman, and seven-term congressman from New Mexico—to lead the Bureau of Land Management. The BLM oversees more than 10% of the U.S. landmass—245 million acres—holding jurisdiction over vast stretches of the American West and the debates that animate them: grazing rights, mineral leases, wildfire management, tribal relations. It is one of the most consequential positions in the Interior Department. It will not be a quiet nomination: Environmentalist opposition is already well organized.

How was he preparing? He didn’t talk strategy or vote counts. Instead he said, “The storms we’re going through today are simply preparation ... for something else. God is always preparing you for the next step.”

That’s not bravado. Pearce distrusts bravado. “Bravado is for yourself,” he explained. “Courage has meaning. Courage says, ‘I’ve got a storm to get into.’”

That brings us to the main reason for our conversation: his book *You Had a Good Home, But You Left ...*, a gripping

tale of his 15-day solo circumnavigation of the globe in a single-engine aircraft, undertaken in 2016 to honor fellow airmen who died in Vietnam.

Pearce said he had carried the idea of the flight for decades. “There are names I still think of every week of my life.” Some of the men he served with never returned, and some returned in body only.

If the circumnavigation appears spontaneous on the page, it wasn’t. Pearce spent three years planning, almost entirely in secret. He would finish work in Congress late in the evening, sleep a few hours, then rise at 2 or 3 a.m. to pore over routes, fuel strategies, weather charts, and contingency plans. “I was not wanting to advertise that I was thinking of going—not staff, not my wife, nobody.”

It didn’t last. Pearce’s wife, Cynthia, walked in one night and found the floor covered in maps. “What are you *doing*?”

“Oh, I’m just looking at places,” Pearce recalled, slightly embarrassed at the memory. “That was weak. But she said, ‘I know what flight planning looks like. What are you thinking?’ I said, ‘I’m thinking I might fly around the world.’”

“She said, ‘I think that’s a bad idea.’”

Pearce told me about their marriage’s “two-zero vote” system for major decisions—both must agree. Pearce folded the maps, assuming the matter was settled. But two weeks later, she surprised him. “I’m not going to vote against you,” she said, “but I’m not going to vote for you.” It was not permission, but neither was it refusal.

Before he left, Pearce and Cynthia attended a ceremony for circumnavigating pilots supported by seven- and eight-person ground teams. Driving home, she asked, “Who’s your team?” Pearce said he didn’t have one—as a sitting congressman, the State Department warned him he was a “high-value target” and should keep the flight quiet. “You can’t do this by yourself,” she said.

By the second leg, fighting headwinds over the Pacific, Pearce called home. Cynthia listened—and then, as Pearce put it, “click, she hung up.” Fifteen minutes later she called back with a wind analysis: “It looks like a counter-cyclonic flow is right on your nose. If you drop 200 miles south, you’ll find lesser winds.”

“Without her, I could have never finished the flight.”

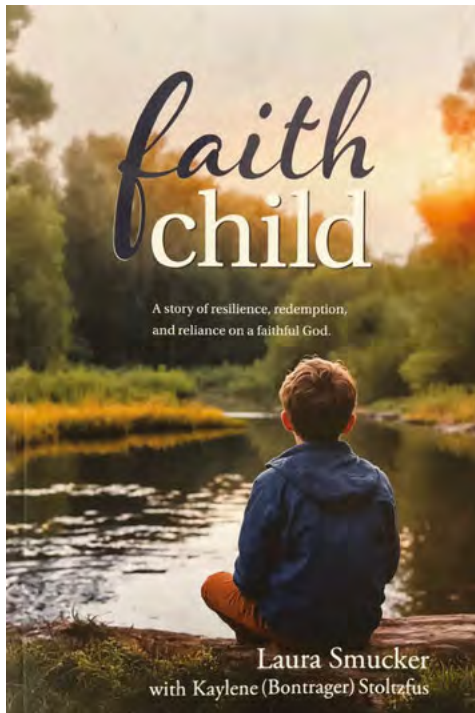
Pearce told me he questioned the wisdom of the trip many times, but never his commitment. “When I commit to something, I commit all the way,” he said. He spoke of Mary “pondering” things in her heart and said the long preparation for the flight served the same purpose: a way to burn off second thoughts. “I will not quit because I’m tired or lose heart,” he told me. “I may fail, but I will not quit.”

Storms taught him something about leadership. What matters, he said, is the leadership that’s revealed when the windows shake and the instruments rattle.

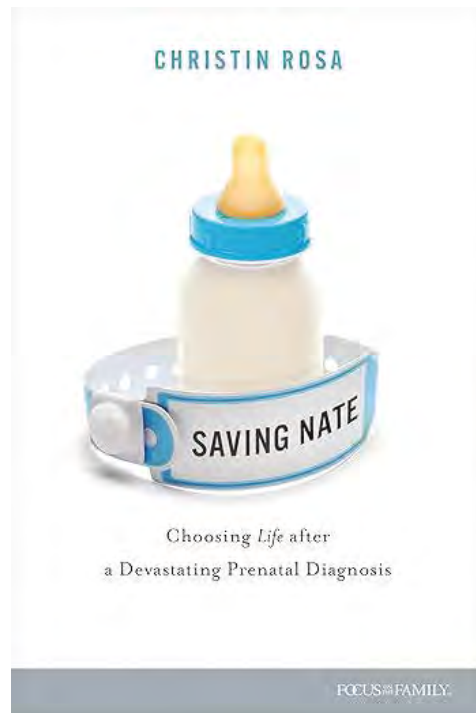
Pearce is not a romantic about public service. He is not rehearsing his legacy. He is simply walking through the open door in front of him—again. ■

TRUE STORIES, REAL PEOPLE

CHOOSING LIFE



A severely handicapped girl, an unthinkable crime, a shocking pregnancy; yet redemption.



Advised to abort, the Rosas instead fought for their unborn son's life.

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OUT OF TH



STRAINS OF **ANTI-SEMITISM**
LURKING ON THE EDGES OF THE
CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT
HAVE INFILTRATED
THE MAINSTREAM

by Carolina Lumetta

Members of the National Socialist Movement, one of the largest neo-Nazi groups in the U.S., hold a rally in Draketown, Ga.

SPENCER PLATT/GETTY IMAGES

ES SHADOWS

N

ick Fuentes, an avowed white nationalist and persistent critic of Jews, has lurked on the fringes of conservative circles for years. Most leaders of the movement dismissed him as radical and out of touch with true conservative values, but his videos regularly amass hundreds of thousands or millions of views, largely

among young white men who call themselves “Groypers.” Then, he scored an invitation to one of the hottest podcasts in the country: *The Tucker Carlson Show*.

On Oct. 29, Carlson hosted Fuentes for a two-hour interview that spanned many topics, including conservative positions on Israel. Among many other outlandish statements, Fuentes said he adored Joseph Stalin and that the Holocaust was not as bad as historically reported.

Fuentes also alleged that Jewish people control the American media and that they cannot assimilate to democracies because their identity relies on the nation of Israel, no matter where they live. Carlson agreed and said conservative figures like U.S. Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee, Sen. Ted Cruz, and former President George W. Bush were “seized by this mind virus” of Zionism.

“Most of them are self-described Christians,” said Carlson, who went on to criticize those who describe themselves as Christian Zionists. “And I can just say for myself, I dislike them more than anybody ... because it’s Christian heresy.”

Christian Zionism can refer to a wide array of beliefs. At its simplest, it encompasses those who believe the Biblical promises God made to the nation of Israel to inhabit the land in the Middle East. Some believers who subscribe to dispensational or premillennial eschatology add that God’s ultimate plan is to restore the nation of Israel in the end times.

In the days following, many in conservative circles accused Carlson of anti-Semitism himself for even giving Fuentes a platform to share his views. The debate over Carlson and Fuentes is a microcosm of the broader disagreement over Israel roiling the Republican Party.

For months, conservative leaders have downplayed instances of anti-Semitism on the right, despite mounting evidence that it’s a widespread problem. In mid-October, someone leaked chat messages sent between members of a New York Young

Republicans chapter in which leaders espoused anti-Semitic views and made hateful comments about Jews and black people. Rather than criticize members of his own party, Vice President J.D. Vance pointed to Democratic candidates who had wished violence against their opponents in other leaked text messages. But just days later, Paul Ingrassia, the White House nominee for the Office of Special Counsel withdrew after he was found to have shared anti-Semitic messages in a group chat. In early November, Trump offered Ingrassia a job in the General Services Administration.

After Fuentes aired his beliefs before Carlson’s 5 million subscribers, with little to no pushback from Carlson, an increasingly vocal bloc of conservatives say it’s no longer possible to deny the reality that anti-Semitism has broken into the Republican mainstream.

“I never thought I’d see the same rhetoric, to hear Iranian or Hamas talking points from Tucker Carlson,” said Pastor Mario Bramnick, who leads a charismatic church in Florida. “The stark reality of what we are facing is chilling to me.”

In the two years since Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, views on Israel and Palestine have sharply divided Americans, most notably on college campuses. According to a May 2025 Gallup poll, American sympathy toward Israel is at an all-time low of 46% while sympathy for Palestinians is at an all-time high of 33%.

Bramnick is just one of many conservatives who view anti-Zionism and other expressions of criticism against Israel as not only anti-Semitic but also anti-Biblical. While he and other like-minded pastors are trying to steer American Christians into adopting their views, other conservatives are pushing back—saying Israel does not need to be a staple plank in the America First platform. As the fight splits the GOP along new lines, many Christians are caught in the middle.

In 2023, Bramnick and fellow Christian Zionist Luke Moon joined forces with the Heritage Foundation, one of the nation’s top conservative think tanks, to establish the National Task Force to Combat Antisemitism. It resulted in a report called Project Esther, a strategy to counter left-wing anti-Zionism. But Moon and Bramnick felt the report did not go far enough, particularly in recognizing similar anti-Semitism on the right.

Moon pointed to proof of that blindness in the response from Heritage President Kevin Roberts to the uproar over Carlson and Fuentes.





Tucker Carlson (right) interviews Nick Fuentes during the highly controversial Oct. 29 podcast.

“We will always defend our friends against the slander of bad actors who serve someone else’s agenda,” Roberts said in a video posted to social media on Oct. 30. “That includes Tucker Carlson, who remains, and as I have said before, always will be a close friend of the Heritage Foundation. The venomous coalitions attacking him are sowing division. Their attempt to cancel him will fail.”

In response, high-level employees at Heritage resigned, and nearly every partner with the organization’s Task Force to Combat Antisemitism called on Roberts to resign. The task force itself left Heritage in November and moved to join forces with the Conference of Christian Presidents for Israel. Amid the fallout, Roberts clarified that he “abhors” Fuentes’ views, but he did not walk back his support for Carlson. In a speech at Hillsdale College in early November, Roberts explained that he was only pushing back against cancel culture, not trying to support anti-Semitism.

“You have a problem with the content, you have a problem with the issues, you have a problem with the ideas, by all means go debate them,” Roberts said. He apologized to any Jewish

people who felt threatened by his words. “We know that now is a particularly scary time to be Jewish. It is a time when the rise of anti-Semitism on the left, which is far more widespread and profound than it is on the right, at the same time happening on the right means that it’s very difficult.”

Bramnick and Moon have watched the trend of anti-Semitism on the right with growing alarm. In 2024, they founded the Conference of Christian Presidents for Israel to create a setting for leaders of Christian organizations to learn more about Israel and anti-Semitic tropes, take trips to the region, and start to police anti-Semitic outbreaks wherever they appear. In November, they hosted the National Task Force to Combat Antisemitism in a hotel basement in Washington. After the fallout with Heritage, the task force added right-wing anti-Semitism to its portfolio.

Moon defines anti-Semitism as “an irrational hatred of the Jewish people rooted in the facts that they’re the people to whom God brought His moral revelation into this world and the world hates them for it.”

About 100 attendees signed up for the November meeting, which featured speeches from Christian advocacy leaders like Tony Perkins of the FRC and Ralph Reed, president of the Faith and Freedom Coalition. Even Huckabee sent a virtual message. He dedicated most of his remarks to arguing that

Tucker Carlson's theology is the real heresy, though he did not mention Carlson by name. "We've got to stand up and speak out and speak against those who are today wishing to lead America and the world down a very dangerous path of Jew hatred and of anti-Semitism, the likes of which we haven't seen since the days of the Third Reich," Huckabee said.

But the groundswell of anti-Semitism in conservative circles may be rising faster than the group can counter. Carlson began showing tolerance for anti-Semitic views last year when he interviewed Darryl Cooper, who argued that Jews only died in World War II concentration camps because the Nazis ran out of resources to care for them. At the time, several House members who are Jewish released a statement condemning Carlson for giving the self-described historian a platform. No Republicans signed on. In March, Theo Von hosted popular conservative podcaster Candace Owens, who said that Israel has become a haven for pedophiles. Joe Rogan in March hosted a podcast episode with Ian Carroll, an independent researcher who has claimed that Jews masterminded 9/11 and that Jeffrey Epstein was an agent for Israel's intelligence service, the Mossad.

Moon said incidents like these contribute to anti-Semitic sentiment that jumps to blame Jewish people for a host of conspiracy theories. At the time, popular conservative activist Charlie Kirk was expressing public doubts about the level of conservative support for Israel. A month later, he was assassinated at a campus event in Utah.

In October, Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., shared an X post by a Holocaust denier who posited, based on a Candace Owens podcast, that Kirk was assassinated by someone affiliated with the pro-Israel wing of the Republican Party. Owens shared screenshots of a group chat in which Kirk said he had lost a Jewish donor who had committed \$2 million per year because TPUSA invited Tucker Carlson to speak at an event. "Jewish donors play into all the stereotypes," Kirk wrote. "I cannot and will not be bullied like this. Leaving me no choice but to leave the pro Israel [sic] cause."

TPUSA spokesman Andrew Kolvet confirmed that he released the screenshots. The episode was quickly shared among Holocaust deniers, including Evan Kilgore, a social media personality who posted that he believed only 300,000 Jews were killed in the Holocaust, not the conventional number of 6 million. Greene also shared his post.

"It's terrible, and it shows what we're up against," Moon told me. He said that while criticism of Israel's government and agencies is not anti-Semitic, the impulse to immediately blame Israel above other actors is. "It is specifically what I would call the anti-Semitic right, which is isolationist, being singularly obsessed with the Jews, with the Israel-America relationship as the source of all the problems in the Middle East."

But the pastors' efforts to change the culture and eventually politics worry others in the conservative camp. That division was clear in September at the annual National Conservatism conference in Washington, where *The American Conservative* magazine editor Curt Mills debated Northeastern University political science professor Max Abrahms. Mills argued that it's time for an Israel-America divorce.

"Why are these our wars? Why are Israel's endless problems America's liabilities?" Mills said during a breakout session. "Why should we accept America first, asterisk Israel?"

While Bramnick and Moon believe Christian Zionism correctly interprets the Bible's position on Israel and the Jews, not all evangelicals agree. Many view Christian Zionism as a novel teaching that fails to see how the promises to Old Testament Israel are fulfilled in Christ and His church.

For most of 2025, the U.S. Senate wrestled with the Antisemitism Awareness Act, a bill that would adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of anti-Semitism. First introduced in February, the bill got a hearing in the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions in April. The committee did not send it on due

"It is specifically what I would call the anti-Semitic right, which is isolationist, being singularly obsessed with the Jews, with the Israel-America relationship as the source of all the problems in the Middle East."



Fuentes (center) speaks to his followers, “the Groypers,” in 2020.

to debate among the Republican members. It is still in the committee process.

The bill defines anti-Semitism as a perception of Jews that could be expressed as hatred, including both rhetoric and physical actions. It gives 11 examples of anti-Semitic rhetoric, including calling for violence, denying the Holocaust, holding the nation of Israel to a double standard compared to other countries, and assuming that the nation of Israel is racist.

Many conservatives oppose it.

“This bill would subject to punishment speech claiming that Jews killed Jesus, an absurd and insulting insinuation if the argument is that all Jews are responsible for killing Jesus,” Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., said during the bill’s markup. “And yet, the Gospel of John described the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. ... Nobody thinks that is all Jews, but are we no longer allowed to read John 18 and 19?”

While some Christians, including Luke Moon, worry the bill’s definition could be so broad as to label pro-Israel Christians anti-Semitic, FRC President Tony Perkins supports it.

“If you have a Biblical view of the Jewish people and the nation Israel, that after 1,900 years, the nation came back into being, then to separate the people from the land would be anti-Semitic,” Perkins told me. “If you don’t recognize that they have a right to that land, that can be seen as being against the Jewish people.”

But Mills argued against that rhetoric during NatCon. The issue of a two-state solution has nothing to do with America’s interests, he said, and stifling conservatives who push back on the idea opposes the party’s own values.

“This discussion almost always descends into the mud. But the mud is where this issue emanates from and why Zionism in 2025 is at best a morally dubious project,” Mills said during his

session. “After assembling and potentially generationally realigning [a] cohort of voters disgusted with woke pieties and the suffocation of dialogue with incessant accusations of racism, Republicans have all too eagerly embraced holding the whip themselves, accusing countless unbigoted critics as anti-Semites instead of engaging on the issue.”

Perkins is trying to engage on the issue by joining forces with Moon and Bramnick to launch education initiatives for Christians.

Moon primarily focuses on youth outreach. He told me he recently took a group of Gen Z social media influencers to Israel where they met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. He said Netanyahu told the group, “You guys are America First, well I’m Israel First.”

“I think that’s the way it’s supposed to be, which is 100% what I agree with. But America first is not America only,” Moon said, adding that he believes the effort to drive a wedge between Christians and Israel is funded by groups and individuals ultimately motivated by hatred for Jews.

But Moon’s critics also accuse him of being funded—by Israel. In July 2025, the Israeli Foreign Ministry launched a program to fund trips to Israel for 550 American-based social media influencers, mostly under the age of 30.

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene and others say Israel is seeking to use American Christians for its political causes, but Moon says even this rhetorical attack borders on anti-Semitism. While he denied taking any money from the Israeli government, he noted many other countries use similar influence campaigns.

Aside from Greene’s opposition, Moon says the seed of anti-Semitism he warned about several years ago has now produced its poisonous fruit. He says Tucker Carlson’s interview with Nick Fuentes and the Heritage Foundation’s defense is only the latest example. And, Moon warns, that could cost the Republican Party not only its moral foundation but also the midterm elections.

“I saw this coming a long time ago, and I was warning people about it and nobody listened to me,” Moon said. He added he was encouraged to see a variety of pro-Israel groups condemn Kevin Roberts, but he said the primary goal is chipping away at the influence of people like Tucker Carlson and Nick Fuentes. “There was a long time where nobody was calling out Tucker by name because everybody was afraid of him. Now it’s shifted a bit, but nevertheless it’s still a real problem.” ■

OLD PREJUDICE

WHAT IS DRIVING THE RISE OF **ANTI-SEMITISM** AMONG YOUNG CHRISTIAN MEN?

by Mary Jackson

Pastor Joel Ellis spent the night wide-eyed, feeling sick to his stomach. Early the next morning, he sat down at his computer and wrote a long email to a man he had only recently met, a newcomer at his church, Reformation Presbyterian Church in Apache Junction, Ariz.

The man, Will Spencer, runs a podcast on cultural and masculinity topics as well as a mentorship program for Christian men. Spencer, who is Jewish, was baptized into the Christian faith in 2020. Since then, he's been "heading at high speed to a redeemed life," he notes on his website.

But he was also headed down a road a growing number of highly online Christian men are taking—the road to anti-Semitism.

Spencer had recently invited on his podcast two of the most outspoken proponents of Jewish hatred in Christian circles: Corey Mahler and Ryan Dumperth. The duo have a podcast of their own, *Stone Choir*, that espouses a "theological lens to the

world." Under the guise of Christian nationalism, the hosts have promoted Holocaust revisionism and other anti-Semitic and racist messages. Mahler and Dumperth, who goes by the nickname "Woe," say they are confessional Lutherans. But their former denomination has disavowed them. Dumperth claims he was pushed out of his Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod congregation. LCMS leaders excommunicated Mahler in 2023.

When Ellis learned Spencer planned to air his interview with the *Stone Choir* hosts, he decided he couldn't stay silent. In his email to Spencer, sent that morning in July 2024, Ellis warned he was making a serious error. Ellis chided Spencer for platforming and legitimizing an apostate and "men who are glad to embrace an identity as neo-Nazis." He also warned Spencer in the email that he could inadvertently lure more young men to confound fidelity to Christ with explicit support of the Third Reich as a Christian regime, Hitler as a Christian prince, or persecuting fellow Christians for holding a different theology regarding the state of Israel and Jewish people. Ellis attached 25 screenshots of posts from Mahler's public Telegram page to support his assertions—statements such as, "Adolf Hitler was a good man," or "The Holocaust is literally incredible," or "With only exceedingly rare exceptions, saying Jesus was a Jew is blasphemous."

After getting his pastor's email, Spencer immediately pulled the podcast episode and issued an apology. He called the *Stone Choir* debacle "one of the most humbling and sanctifying episodes of my life and career." Spencer claimed he would not have featured Mahler and Dumperth had he known the extent of what they believed. But he admitted he'd been flirting with their destructive ideology for years.

Spencer's about-face caused immediate backlash among his social media followers. The *Stone Choir* hosts trashed him. Mahler denounced Spencer for his "incurable nature."

"There's no such thing as a repentant Jew," Dumperth posted. He also shared screenshots of Spencer's supportive private messages only months prior, including this: "The best strategy is to attack the Holocaust head on."



A right-wing extremist holds the Christian flag during a demonstration in Portland, Ore., in 2020.

Nearly a year later, in June 2025, Spencer attempted to articulate in a lengthy essay for the theological blog *Christ Over All* how he and so many other young men in conservative Christian circles are getting swept up in the anti-Semitic narrative. What pushed him—and them—over the edge?

It's a question that has plagued Ellis, too. He says he meets at least twice a week with young men (and sometimes their wives) who are professing Christians but have adopted some form of Jewish hatred, an un-Biblical "harboring of malice and resentment ... justification for something that they know fundamentally is not Christian." Ellis expected his pastoral duties to include sleepless nights—but not dismantling anti-Semitic ideology on a regular basis.

Ellis is part of a small but growing contingent of Protestant pastors and leaders who are confronting strains of Jewish hatred that have quietly seeped into churches and subsets of the Christian culture, driven by young, conservative men who are angry, disillusioned, and hyper-online. In recent years, political violence, foreign wars, racial and societal fracturing, and theological differences over Israel and the Jews have provided fertile soil for anti-Semitism to grow.

Anti-Semitism, or hostility toward Jewish people, including notions of an overarching conspiratorial "Jewish problem," has persisted on the political extremes for centuries. But since the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel, anti-Semitic incidents have surged to unprecedented levels, and a growing number of adults worldwide harbor anti-Jewish attitudes.

Seth Dillon, CEO of the conservative Christian satire site Babylon Bee, argues that after the Oct. 7 attacks, "a line was drawn in the sand."

"It was astonishing how many people were taking the side of terrorists ... how many people treated the attack as justified and provoked," he said. More than two years later, "it seems like every day, people are hammering home about how evil Israel is, how the Jews are the world's greatest problem," Dillon added.

Until recently, Big Tech largely suppressed white nationalist activists led by Nick Fuentes, a prominent Holocaust denier and professing Catholic who became the figurehead of the America First movement, a form of nationalist populism. Fuentes' followers participated in the 2017 white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Va., where protesters chanted, "The Jews will not replace us."

After billionaire Elon Musk purchased X in 2022, he reversed the site's censorship policies, a move cheered by free speech advocates. But removing those limits had consequences.

“It allowed those people who hold anti-Semitic views to come out of the shadows and start growing their platforms more openly,” Dillon said.

Dillon says the anti-Semitic narratives circulating on the right hinge on questioning the so-called post–World War II consensus, a widespread rejection of nationalism, fascism, and authoritarian regimes, along with the advancement of liberalism and the creation of the state of Israel as a safeguard against Jewish genocide. The narrative is rooted in a perceived notion that this “never again” ethos ushered in “all this moral degeneracy, this inability to fight back against the bad things the Jews are bringing into the world,” Dillon said. “It’s leading young people to see the world through a lens where the Jews and Israel are always the scapegoat. ... the Jews are the real villains.”

Those claims have circulated for a long time. In 1903, the Protocols of the Elders of Zion compiled many Jewish prejudices into one document. Published in a newspaper in the Russian empire, the document claimed to belong to a secret body of Jews set out to control the world and destroy Christianity and all other world religions. By the early 1920s, *The Times* in London proved the document was falsified, according to the Holocaust Encyclopedia for the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Still, over the course of decades, the document has continued to resurface, fueling neo-Nazi propaganda and Jewish hatred.

More recent editions blame the Jews for the 9/11 attacks and the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, the FBI released the uncensored Protocols on its website as part of a Freedom of Information Act request. That same year, as the world shut down due to the pandemic, Will Spencer noticed a shift in the male-dominated online forums he was a part of. Previously, jokes and memes about a “Jewish plot” were commonplace. But coming out of the pandemic, “the jokes started to turn serious,” he said. “It became the worldview of more than just a few fringe guys on the internet.” He thinks the pandemic had something to do with it. “Everyone was looking around and saw deception and lies at the highest level.” This so-called awakening quickly turned into the belief that “everything is a lie,” he said.

In a 2023 episode of *Stone Choir* titled “The Big Lie,” Mahler and Dumperth placed Jews at the center of what the hosts described as an overarching plot enacted methodically since the 1800s to destroy Christendom and slaughter Christians. Mahler repeatedly linked Holocaust revisionism and the COVID-19 pandemic. “We’re telling you things no one else will tell you,” he often interjected. In another *Stone Choir* episode, the hosts equate Jews as blood enemies of white Christians, blaming them for everything from the sexualization of mass culture, including the porn industry, to child ritual sacrifice.

On Nov. 7, 2025, *Stone Choir* aired its last episode. Dumperth said he and Mahler had accomplished their goals for the show.

“There’s no new information,” he said. “Some of the things that we said in the first year that almost nobody else was saying, stuff that seemed edgy and controversial, today it’s becoming normal ... a lot of those things, everybody is saying it.”

Will Spencer stumbled upon *Stone Choir* in early 2024 when an acquaintance described it as the podcast “no one was allowed to admit they listened to.” *Stone Choir*’s appeal has to do with white, male-centric online communities, often referred to as the “manosphere,” a movement Spencer was already a part of. He described this online world as filling the void left by his absent father. Spencer began spending all his time on 4chan, an image-based internet forum where chronically online users hide behind anonymous accounts. In Spencer’s experience, it was largely men railing against woke progressivism and being “red-pilled” by feminism and liberalism. Jews are almost always the culprits of these social ills. Ecosystems of memes and conspiracy theories promoted Holocaust minimization or other neo-Nazi rhetoric, he said.

Among Christians, those ideas began gaining traction in Reformed circles.

Spencer believes the “red pill world” collided with Reformed circles because of the appeal of distinct theological stances on engaging politics and culture. But Reformed beliefs about Israel’s role in the end times also play a significant role.

The ongoing Israel-Hamas War sparked widespread debate over American evangelical eschatology pertaining to Christian Zionism and dispensationalism, which holds that the modern state of Israel is the fulfillment of Biblical prophecies. Reformed Christians largely disagree, believing that Old Testament Israel and the church together constitute the people of God across redemptive history.

Some even subscribe to a form of maximal supersessionism, the belief that the Christian church is the new Israel and replaces ethnic Israel in God’s redemptive plan. Under this belief, Judaism and the Jewish people, unless they convert to Christianity, have no special place in God’s eschatological plan.

Within Reformed traditions, Pastor Joel Ellis says the widespread rejection of dispensationalism—he describes it as a “bifurcation of Israel and the church and its idea for a future national political hope for Israel”—renders some “more susceptible to take the next step and say, ‘It’s even more sinister than you realize.’”

But one of the loudest and most recognizable Reformed voices rejects anti-Semitism as anti-Christian. On numerous occasions, Doug Wilson, a prominent Christian nationalist author and pastor of Christ Church in Moscow, Idaho, has

Jewish hatred ... “is a cancer that only grows. It’s going to require loving, personal, relational, but relentlessly Biblical confrontation to ... inoculate people against these ideas.”

acknowledged the lure of anti-Semitism among adherents of Christian nationalism and a “radical fringe” that has emerged. In November 2024, Wilson joined a handful of pastors and theologians to pen the Antioch Declaration, a 1,900-word document that “opposes the ideas of some contemporary leaders and influencers seeking to introduce anti-gospel racial categories into the church.” Among its claims are denials that world affairs are governed by conspiring Jews or that it’s possible to “harmonize racial and anti-Semitic theories of Adolf Hitler and neo-pagan doctrines of the Nazi cult with the gospel and Scriptural teaching.”

The declaration identifies young Christian men as especially at risk of “being led astray by wolves clothed as shepherds.” Wilson told *WORLD* the declaration was an effort to “take responsibility to police our own ranks on the right, to keep people from going down a dark path.”

Reaction revealed a much bigger problem than the declaration’s authors realized. “We had seen some bubbling anti-Semitism in certain quarters ... then the eruption happened,” Wilson said. “We thought, ‘Okay, it was good we did this. This needed to happen.’”

The eruption involved several Reformed pastors who disagreed over the declaration’s language and the severity of the problem. Two months earlier, Wilson and other Antioch Declaration collaborators got into a public dispute with Joel Webbon, pastor of Covenant Bible Church, a Reformed Baptist congregation outside Austin, Texas, and founder of Right Response Ministries. One of Webbon’s church members had shared Holocaust denial content, including a pro-Nazi meme, with a former pastor. Wilson and others addressed the dispute publicly and took Webbon to task for his permissiveness in dealing with the young male congregant.

Webbon said he believed the young man’s beliefs failed to necessitate church discipline. And he claimed the pastors who publicized the situation “needed an example to substantiate” their claims of rising anti-Semitism in Reformed churches.

Since the Antioch Declaration came out, Webbon seems to have doubled down on anti-Semitic rhetoric. In August, in a guest appearance on Holocaust denier Elijah Schaffer’s show, *RiftTV*, Webbon stated, “A decent degree of anti-Semitism is related to Jewish behavior.” (The show also contained crass sexual joking and foul language.) Webbon has also defended Nick Fuentes and made statements on X such as, “the Bible is

anti-Semitic.” In September, he admonished his 60,000 followers to “righteously despise Israel.” “They are a wicked nation that America must be free of,” he said.

Webbon is not the only Reformed pastor called out for anti-Semitic statements. Michael Spangler, a Presbyterian pastor and school administrator in North Carolina, has drawn attention for embracing race realism, also referred to as kinism, the belief that insurmountable and innate differences between races, including ethnic Jews, justify at least some measure of discrimination and segregation.

In April 2024, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church divested Spangler without censure on administrative grounds. The shepherding committee recommending his divestiture noted his “provocative immaturity,” in part for promoting *Stone Choir* and for statements on social media such as, “Christian, don’t be mistaken on this: Jews are your enemies. The Bible says this. You should believe it, and not be afraid to affirm it publicly.”

He later posted on X that he supports Mahler and Dumperth and “encourage my fellow Reformed Christians to do the same.”

A cadre of online critics regularly pushes back on anti-Semitic rhetoric on the right. One man, Ethan, who declined to provide his last name, uses the pseudonym “Hitler Hated Christ” on X. “I have a lot of lunatics I interact with,” he said. Ethan says he is a member of a Presbyterian Church of America congregation in Texas. He began posting to refute Holocaust revisionism and other anti-Semitic rhetoric after watching several conservative friends embrace Jewish hatred.

Joel Ellis sees the problem as primarily pastoral.

He is not on social media and spends little time online. But most of the men he meets with “are getting what they think they know about the Holocaust, about Israel’s involvement in U.S. foreign policy, from X or YouTube,” he said. These men cherry-pick from church fathers, such as Martin Luther’s later-in-life anti-Semitic writings, and from what they hear, and listen to conspiratorial voices “that seek to deflect responsibility and accountability for their own lives,” Ellis said.

Jewish hatred, like any other form of hatred toward people and ethnic groups, “is a cancer that only grows,” he notes.

“It’s going to require loving, personal, relational, but relentlessly Biblical confrontation to continue to try to inoculate people against these ideas.” ■

—with reporting by Emma Freire



2025

NEWS OF THE YEAR

BY ADDIE OFFEREINS



illustration by Krieg Barrie





TRUMP BEGINS SECOND TERM

On Jan. 20, 2025, President Donald J. Trump became the second president in U.S. history inaugurated to serve two nonconsecutive terms, following Grover Cleveland, and the oldest person to take the oath of office at 78. A cold snap forced the scheduled open-air ceremony into the Capitol Rotunda, where Trump declared that “the golden age of America begins right now.”

On his first day in office, Trump signed a slew of executive orders—26 in

total—including one undoing 80 of former President Joe Biden’s executive orders and another aimed at curtailing what he described as the “weaponization of the federal government” under his predecessor. Several of Trump’s first-day orders were aimed at stanching record-breaking illegal crossings at the U.S.-Mexico border. Trump declared a national emergency, effectively shut down the asylum system, and paused the refugee resettlement program. His

immigration orders also designated drug cartels as foreign terrorists, and he later ordered military strikes on boats reportedly bringing drugs into the country. One of his most controversial orders excluded children born to some immigrant mothers from birthright citizenship. Opponents filed legal challenges to nearly every order, and many are still mired in the courts.

The president roiled government workers at home and abroad when he established the Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, led by billionaire Elon Musk. Trump paused

LEFT: Donald Trump takes the oath of office on Inauguration Day. **TOP RIGHT:** The president signs an executive order barring transgender female athletes from competing in women's or girls' sporting events. **MIDDLE:** DOGE head Elon Musk (and son) in the Oval Office. **BOTTOM:** A woman protests tariffs on Mexico outside the White House.

foreign aid for 90 days on his first day in office, and DOGE eventually shut down the U.S. Agency for International Development. Other early executive orders aimed to curtail pro-transgender policies and directed the federal government to cut funding from educational programs that allow men to compete in women's sports programs. Another order ended federal diversity, equity, and inclusion policies and programs.

In late summer, Trump turned his attention to fighting crime and public disorder, drug use, and homelessness in America's cities. Federal law enforcement temporarily assumed control of Washington, D.C.'s police department, and the president sent the National Guard to other major cities, though Democratic mayors have challenged those efforts in court. In September, Trump authorized the sale of TikTok's U.S. assets to a consortium of U.S.-based investors to that will enable the app to remain active for U.S. users.

From the earliest days of his second term, Trump threatened to impose a slew of tariffs against U.S. trading partners, though the president has amended or delayed several of them. Others encountered legal challenges. Trump argued that for too long the United States has endured unfair trading practices, and used the threat of tariffs against Mexico, Canada, and China to force them to crack down on the illicit fentanyl trade. In November, the Supreme Court considered a challenge to the legality of Trump's tariffs. Experts say the legal uncertainty and various pauses and delays have made it difficult to fully gauge their economic effects.



IMMIGRATION CRACKDOWN

Throughout his campaign, Trump pledged to deport immigrants living in the United States illegally who have been convicted of other crimes. But the president, and his border czar, Tom Homan, warned the entire illegal immigrant population that Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents would not hesitate to apprehend anyone they encountered during patrols and raids who was living in the country unlawfully. The Trump administration also canceled several programs providing temporary legal status for hundreds of thousands of immigrants, sparking panic

among business leaders who worried increased enforcement would cripple construction and agriculture.

On his first full day in office, Trump rolled back guidance barring ICE from making arrests at churches, schools, and other sensitive locations. The agency announced it would hire 10,000 more agents, and said it received roughly 175,000 new job applications as of Oct. 15. Other federal law enforcement agencies have directed nearly 33,000 of their employees to assist with the crackdown. The administration began expanding detention space through a network of

new facilities, including at the so-called Alligator Alcatraz in the Florida Everglades. The Department of Homeland Security said more than 2 million illegal immigrants had left the country, either through removals or voluntarily, as of Sept. 23.

Increasing ICE raids and arrests sparked massive protests in Los Angeles and other cities. One protest in Chicago turned violent, and DHS claimed assaults against ICE agents have risen 1,000% since Trump took office.

ICE agents in conjunction with local authorities detain a person during immigration raids in Denver.



CHET STRANGE/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX



GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

— The nation's longest-ever government shutdown ended on Nov. 12 after 43 days.

The impasse began in October when the House of Representatives passed a short-term Continuing Resolution bill to keep the government funded through Nov. 21. But Senate Democrats refused to vote for the measure unless Republicans agreed to extend enhanced Obamacare subsidies added during the COVID-19 pandemic that are set to expire at the end of the year. The tax credits lowered premiums and allowed more people to enroll in the program. Democrats claimed millions of

Americans would be unable to afford coverage if the subsidies expired. Renewing the credits could add an estimated \$350 million to the federal deficit over the next 10 years.

Republican leaders said they would debate renewing the subsidies but demanded Senate Democrats first pass the House's continuing resolution while lawmakers debated long-term appropriations bills. Pressure mounted when, on Oct. 26, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced it no longer had enough funding to pay SNAP benefits, the program formerly known as food stamps. About 42 million Americans

rely on SNAP to help pay for groceries. Amid the infighting, a federal court ordered the administration to use a contingency fund to keep SNAP going. The Federal Aviation Administration also reduced flight traffic at major airports as air traffic controllers called in sick. The delays and flight cancellations added pressure as they threatened to interrupt holiday travel.

On Nov. 9—almost a week after Democrats swept to victory in several gubernatorial and local races—a group of seven Senate Democrats and one Independent broke ranks and voted to fund the government through Jan. 30. In exchange, Republicans agreed to vote on extending the Obamacare subsidies by mid-December.



CHARLIE KIRK ASSASSINATION

■ The United States witnessed an uptick in political violence this year, including the fatal shootings of Minnesota state Rep. Melissa Hortman and her husband in June. But the most shocking attack happened on Sept. 10, when a gunman assassinated 31-year-old conservative activist Charlie Kirk during one of his iconic “Prove Me Wrong” campus debates at Utah Valley University. Kirk cofounded Turning Point USA, a conservative student

movement with chapters on more than 3,500 high school and college campuses across the country. Trump posthumously awarded Kirk the Presidential Medal of Freedom on Oct. 14.

TPUSA said it received more than 62,000 requests from high school and college students interested in starting a TPUSA chapter or getting involved with an existing chapter within eight days of Kirk’s death. The assassination also ignited a surge in religious activity.

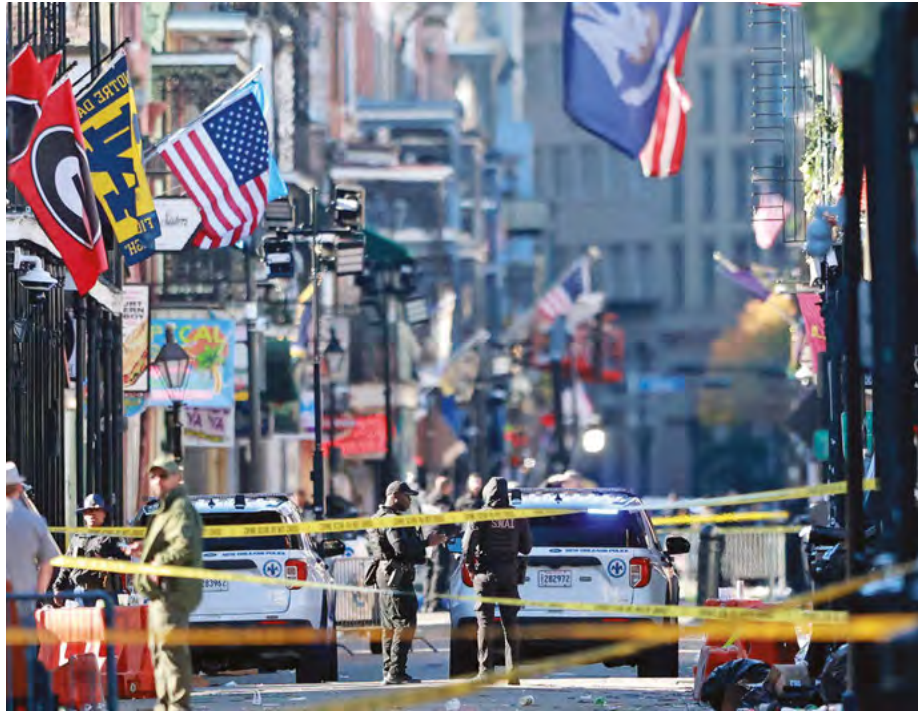
Churches reported increased attendance, especially among young people, and Bible sales climbed 36% in September, compared to the same month in 2024. But reactions to Kirk’s death were sharply divided across social media, with some who opposed his conservative views mocking his death. ABC briefly took comedian Jimmy Kimmel’s talk show off the air after he made light of Kirk’s murder.

Charlie Kirk hands out hats shortly before being shot at Utah Valley University.

TESS CROWLEY/THE DESERET NEWS VIA AP

NEW ORLEANS TERROR ATTACK

On Jan. 1, a driver plowed into a crowd of New Year's party-goers on the streets of New Orleans, killing 14 and injuring more than 30 others. After jumping out of his vehicle, the attacker opened fire, injuring two police officers. Law enforcement officials found an Islamic State flag, explosive devices, and other weapons in the vehicle of the 42-year-old Texas resident and U.S. Army veteran. The attacker rented a white pickup truck in Houston and made several videos during his drive that expressed support for the Islamic State terror group.



SCHOOL SHOOTING

In August, thousands of Minneapolis residents held prayer vigils to mourn the victims of a deadly attack targeting students gathered for morning Mass at Annunciation Catholic Church. The shooter fired a shotgun and a pistol through a church window, instantly killing an 8-year-old and a 10-year-old as they sat in the pews and injuring 18 others, including 15 more children. The perpetrator, a 23-year-old male who identified as transgender, expressed hatred in his writings toward Christians, Jews, black people, Mexican people, and other groups. His attack bore the hallmarks of a Nihilistic Violent Extremist, a term the FBI adopted in early 2025 to describe individuals who commit crimes out of a hatred for society at large and a desire to sow chaos.



THE FIRST AMERICAN POPE

White smoke curled up from the Vatican's Sistine Chapel on May 8, signaling the sequestered conclave of 133 cardinals had chosen a successor for Pope Francis, who died April 21. The group selected Cardinal Robert Prevost, a 69-year-old Chicago native who had served in several church offices in Peru for more than a decade. Prevost became the first-ever American pontiff and the Catholic Church's 267th pope, taking the name Leo XIV. President Trump called Prevost's appointment a "great honor for our country."

As a cardinal, Leo did not take positions on many controversial political issues. So far, the new pontiff has presented himself as closely aligned with his predecessor, including his positions on protecting the environment, caring for the poor, and welcoming migrants. Leo supported Francis' decision to allow divorced and civilly remarried Catholics to participate in Communion.

But Leo has leaned more into some traditional elements of the papacy than Francis did. The College of Cardinals reported that he seems less interested in

"currying favor" with the LGBTQ community. The new pope urged bishops to remain celibate and take decisive action in situations that could cause scandal. Leo affirmed the importance of upholding family values and protecting the human dignity of vulnerable populations, including the unborn, in an address to government leaders. Frank Pavone, the national director of Priests for Life, said he's encouraged by Leo's pro-life views. But critics argued the pope trivialized abortion in October comments equating it with the death penalty and what he described as the "inhumane treatment of migrants in the United States."



GRIGORIO BORGIA/AP



NEW YORKERS EMBRACE SOCIALISM

Self-proclaimed socialist Zohran Mamdani won support from 50.4% of New Yorkers in November to become the city's 111th mayor and its first Muslim leader. Mamdani's Democrat-turned-independent challenger, Andrew Cuomo, received 41.6% of the vote, and Republican Curtis Sliwa trailed with 7.1%. Mamdani's socialist vision garnered nationwide attention during his campaign, with some latching onto the 34-year-old as a leader for a Democratic Party struggling to create a fresh vision for a younger generation of voters.

The former state assemblyman pledged to lower living costs for working-class New Yorkers, including imposing a rent freeze on apartments already classified as rent-stabilized—almost half of all rental apartments in the city. Mamdani promised to eliminate the fare on city buses and provide free child care for children from 6 weeks to 5 years old. He also said he would tackle rising food costs by creating a network of city-owned grocery stores focused on keeping prices low instead of making a profit. To pay for his bold proposals, Mamdani laid out a plan to hike the corporate tax

rate and implement an additional 2% flat tax on New Yorkers who make more than \$1 million per year.

Critics noted Mamdani's policy proposals could drive prices even higher and shrink the housing supply as landlords and businesses abandon new development projects and leave the city. "You would see New Yorkers on I-95 fleeing to Florida," Cuomo warned during an October debate between the three candidates. As mayor, Mamdani must convince state lawmakers to pass the tax schemes intended to pay for his proposals. Though New York Gov. Kathy Hochul endorsed Mamdani's campaign, she has also raised concerns that tax increases might drive wealthy residents out of the state.



L.A. NEIGHBORHOODS BURN

During the first week of January, a series of wildfires broke out in Los Angeles County. Extremely dry vegetation and powerful Santa Ana winds created extreme fire conditions. The blazes collectively destroyed more than 16,000 structures and killed 30 people. It took firefighters 24 days to fully contain the Palisades and Eaton fires, the two deadliest.

The out-of-control infernos overtaxed water tanks and fire hydrants, and President Trump criticized California Gov. Gavin Newsom for mismanaging the state's forests and water policies.

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass also faced criticism for traveling in the African nation of Ghana during the disaster.

Rebuilding has dragged. In August, a group of homeowners sued 25 major insurance providers. The plaintiffs accused the companies of colluding to drop coverage and refusing to write new policies in fire-prone areas—including in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood—leaving homeowners with no other option than a fallback state-subsidized insurance plan with insufficient coverage and high premiums. As of late October, the city and county had issued

building permits for fewer than 10% of the homes and other structures destroyed by the fires. In the nearby city of Malibu, where the fires obliterated 720 structures, officials had only approved four building permits.

In October, federal officials charged a Florida man with intentionally starting what became the Palisades fire with a lighter on a hiking trail. Though firefighters believed they had extinguished the blaze, strong winds rekindled embers smoldering underground nearly a week later. On Oct. 31, Bass' office called for a thorough investigation in response to an *L.A. Times* report showing a battalion chief ignored warnings that the original fire was not fully out.

MIDAIR CRASH

■ In late January, nearly 70 people perished when a U.S. Army Black Hawk helicopter collided with a passenger plane in midair near the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. An investigation determined the Black Hawk believed it was flying lower than its actual altitude, and a key air traffic tracking feature on the helicopter had malfunctioned. Cockpit recordings indicated the helicopter's crew struggled to hear air traffic controller warnings about the approaching jet, and witnesses said the air traffic controllers on duty that day were overworked due to understaffing. The crash sparked a national outcry about the U.S. air traffic control system's broader failures.



HURRICANE MELISSA

■ Hurricane Melissa, the largest tropical storm of the year, engulfed Jamaica on Oct. 28, making landfall as a Category 5 storm. It was the strongest hurricane to bash the Caribbean nation since authorities began keeping track 174 years ago. Violent winds tore the roofs off thousands of structures and scattered debris, wrecking much of the nation's healthcare system, officials said. The Jamaican government confirmed 28 deaths as of Nov. 1, but the death toll across the Caribbean surpassed 60. The hurricane also wreaked havoc in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti, where flooding from the storm killed at least 31 people.

TEXAS FLOOD TRAGEDY

Texas cities and towns nestled along twisting rivers in the state's central region, known as the Hill Country, woke up to devastating damage on the morning of July 4. Heavy rains coursed through the limestone-covered hills and converged in river beds, causing severe flash flooding that engulfed normally calm waterways within minutes. In Kerr County, the Guadalupe River rose almost 30 feet before dawn. The torrent of water swept away parts of an all-girls summer camp, Camp Mystic, killing 27 children, many of them as young as 7 years old, as well as the camp's owner.

In Kerr County, 119 people perished, and at least two dozen more died throughout central Texas.

The catastrophe forced state and local leaders to confront difficult questions about how to prevent future flooding disasters and improve weather forecasts and alert systems. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott signed the Heaven's 27 Camp Safety Act in early September. It forbids anyone from sleeping in camp cabins within 100-year flood plains and requires camps to implement additional flooding safety measures. Camp Mystic leaders confirmed plans

to reopen a nearby location next summer and said they were discussing plans to rebuild the camp along the Guadalupe River. Parents of campers swept away in the flooding criticized the rebuilding plans and urged the camp to take more responsibility for their children's deaths. On Nov. 10, the parents of five campers and two counselors who perished in the flooding filed a lawsuit against camp leaders, claiming gross negligence led to a "self-created disaster" that took the lives of their children.

A search-and-rescue volunteer finds belongings along the Guadalupe River.



DANIELLE VILLASANA FOR THE WASHINGTON POST VIA GETTY IMAGES



NO PROSPECTS FOR PEACE IN UKRAINE

After taking office, Trump said he would reevaluate U.S. aid for Ukraine and vowed to bring a swift end to the Russian invasion. But a year later, the conflict drags on. In February, Trump met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the Oval Office to discuss a deal that would allow U.S. access to Ukraine's natural mineral supply as reimbursement for military funding. But the televised meeting ended in a public shouting match after Zelenskyy pushed Trump for more aid. Trump accused Zelenskyy of "not being ready for peace" and failing to adequately appreciate U.S. support. The president briefly paused military and intelligence

aid after the clash and began separate peace negotiations with Russia. Shortly after, Zelenskyy said he would be open to a ceasefire, and the United States resumed military aid and intelligence sharing.

In March, Russia and Ukraine reached separate peace agreements with Washington to end attacks on ships in the Black Sea, but broader talks to end the war repeatedly fell apart. Ukraine signed the second iteration of a U.S. precious minerals deal in May, earning renewed goodwill from Washington. In June, Ukraine launched a coordinated drone attack, 18 months in the making, on fighter jets deep in the heart of Russian

territory. In July, Trump increased pressure on Russia, threatening more tariffs if the country didn't make peace within a specified window. He also moved two nuclear submarines to the region after Russian officials dismissed his ultimatum. Still, multiple rounds of negotiations in Turkey between the warring nations failed. In August, Trump met Russian President Vladimir Putin in Alaska, but failed to make a deal. In October, Trump told Zelenskyy he would consider trading long-range Tomahawk missiles for Ukrainian drones. The United States and the EU announced a new round of tariffs against Russia later that month.

A Ukrainian soldier mourns over a friend killed on the front line.



CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Hostilities between Israel and Hamas resumed in March after a January ceasefire collapsed. During the first phase of the short-lived ceasefire, Hamas released 25 living hostages and the bodies of eight in exchange for roughly 1,800 Palestinian prisoners. But they did not successfully implement the second stage of the truce, which would have involved the release of all remaining hostages and a permanent ceasefire. Hamas rejected this proposal, and in

response, Israel blocked aid into the region. The Israeli government claimed the terrorist group was rearming and resumed strikes on Gaza.

Israel eased restrictions on aid distribution in May, and the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, a U.S. and Israeli-backed group, began distributing critical supplies. But chaos unfolded at one aid distribution site as desperate Palestinians stormed a United Nations food warehouse in southern Gaza.

In June the focus of the conflict in the Middle East moved to Iran when Israel launched a series of strikes against the country's nuclear facilities, killing top nuclear scientists and other officials. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the strikes would continue until Israel successfully neutralized the threat of Iran's rapidly developing nuclear program. Israeli forces also targeted the country's ballistic missile program.

In a statement following the strikes, Netanyahu warned Iran had been merely months away from producing its

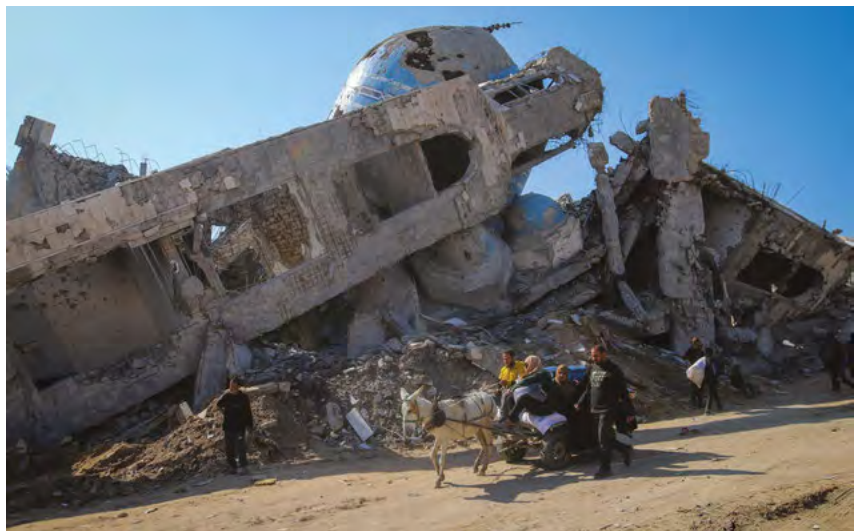
LEFT: Israeli hostage Eli Sharabi is escorted by Hamas fighters before being released on Feb. 8. TOP RIGHT: Israeli Iron Dome air defense system intercepts Iranian missiles over Tel Aviv. MIDDLE: A family rides past a destroyed mosque in the northern Gaza Strip. BOTTOM: Israelis in Tel Aviv celebrate the release of remaining hostages.

first nuclear bomb. He noted that for decades, Iranian officials had publicly declared their plan to wipe Israel off the map. In addition to posing its own threat, Iran helped fund and arm terror groups like Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

In response to the Israeli strikes, Iran fired a barrage of missiles across Israel, hitting a large hospital in the south.

About a week after Israel's initial attacks, the United States launched its own airstrikes on three Iranian nuclear sites. U.S. "bunker-buster" bombs damaged, but most likely did not destroy, the heavily fortified Fordow Uranium Enrichment Plant built deep within a mountain. In an address following the bombings, Trump called Iran the "bully of the Middle East" and urged the country to make peace or endure more American strikes. Iran agreed to a ceasefire in late June.

In early October—a little over two years after Hamas militants stormed across the Israeli border and slaughtered or captured more than 1,200 civilians—Israel and Hamas agreed to a peace plan spearheaded by the Trump administration and backed by several Arab nations. The ceasefire required Hamas to release the 48 remaining hostages, both living and dead, in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners. Clashes between Hamas and Palestinian clans, as well as isolated skirmishes with Israel Defense Forces, have strained the peace deal. It's unclear whether the region will enter Phase 2 of the ceasefire, which would involve an international stabilization force governing Gaza. ■



TOP: LEO CORREA/AP; MIDDLE: JEHAD ALSHRAFI/AP; BOTTOM: EMILIO MORENATTI/AP



2025

DEPARTURES

BY JOHN DAWSON



WAYNE OSMOND

Jan. 1 | 73 | Founding member of the Osmonds who helped make the family vocal group famous and launched the careers of his famous siblings Donny and Marie Osmond.



RICHARD B. HAYS

Jan. 3 | 76 | Theologian whose 1996 book *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* proved influential, but who later made waves in a 2024 book arguing that Scripture permitted homosexuality.

PETER YARROW

Jan. 7 | 86 | Musician from the popular folk group Peter, Paul and Mary that helped define the musical genre in the 1960s through songs like “Puff, the Magic Dragon” while helping to launch Bob Dylan’s musical career.



BILL MCCARTNEY

Jan. 10 | 84 | College Football Hall of Fame coach for the University of Colorado from 1982 until 1994 who also founded the evangelical men’s ministry Promise Keepers in 1990.

SAM MOORE

Jan. 10 | 89 | Florida-born R&B singer who collaborated with Dave Prater to form Sam & Dave, the iconic rhythm and blues group responsible for 1960s hits like “Soul Man” and “Hold On, I’m Comin.”

ARTHUR BLESSITT

Jan. 14 | 84 | Los Angeles street preacher who later became known for his marathon walks dragging a cross through every nation in the world.

DAVID LYNCH

Jan. 16 | 78 | Visionary American filmmaker with a career spanning five decades known for art house films like the 1970s cult classic *Eraserhead* and the critically acclaimed 2001 mystery



Mulholland Drive. He also created the 1990s ABC drama *Twin Peaks*.

BOB UECKER

Jan. 16 | 90 | Journeyman professional baseball player who became a household name through numerous appearances on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, which led to commercials, movies, a starring role on the ABC sitcom *Mr. Belvedere*, and decades as a Milwaukee Brewers broadcaster.



HAROLD KATZ

Jan. 24 | 87 | Owner of the Philadelphia 76ers who helped bring the team an NBA championship in 1983; he also founded the weight-loss program Nutrisystem.

DICK BUTTON

Jan. 30 | 95 | One of the nation’s first figure skating stars who became an Olympic champion in 1948 and 1952 and then spent decades as an Emmy-winning broadcaster for ABC.

FAY VINCENT

Feb. 1 | 86 | Major league baseball executive and eventual baseball commissioner from 1989 until 1992 who negotiated an end to the Pete Rose gambling saga that saw Rose depart from the game.

KENNETH KITCHEN

Feb. 6 | 92 | Egyptologist and Biblical history scholar from Scotland who argued for an exodus dated to the reign of Ramses II and who was described by *The Times* of London as “the very architect of Egyptian chronology.”

DICK JAURON

Feb. 8 | 74 | Pro Bowl defensive back for the Detroit



Lions who rose to the top of the pro football coaching ranks, leading the Chicago

Bears from 1999 until 2003 and the Buffalo Bills from 2006 until 2009.

PATSY GRIMALDI

Feb. 13 | 93 | New York City pizza icon who helped redefine the Gotham staple with pies made in coal-fired brick ovens, later creating a pizza chain with over 40 locations across 12 states.

JIM GUY TUCKER

Feb. 13 | 81 | Politician who succeeded Bill Clinton as governor of Arkansas but had to resign in 1996 after he was implicated in the White-water real estate scandal.

KEN ROSENTHAL

Feb. 14 | 81 | Woman's clothier who ditched fashion to open the St. Louis Bread Company in 1987 before selling to Au Bon Pain, which transformed Rosenthal's chain into Panera Bread.

JAMES HARRISON

Feb. 17 | 88 | Prolific Australian blood donor whose unique antibodies helped millions of babies survive a blood disease common to newborns, making 1,173 blood and plasma donations over nearly six decades.

**GENE HACKMAN**

c. Feb. 18 | 95 | Cinema icon whose rough, everyman demeanor made him a Hollywood staple for decades, Hackman earned nominations for five Academy Awards, winning two for his roles in *The French Connection* and *Unforgiven*.

DAVID BOREN

Feb. 20 | 83 | Conservative Democratic politician who served as a reform-minded governor of Oklahoma in the 1970s, a thrice-elected U.S. senator, and the president of the University of Oklahoma from 1994 to 2018.

**LARRY DOLAN**

Feb. 23 | 94 | Longest-tenured baseball owner in Cleveland franchise history who oversaw the changing of the team's mascot from the Indians to the Guardians during his 25-year run.

MARTIN E. MARTY

Feb. 25 | 97 | Prolific Lutheran academic and historian who authored more than 50 books and thousands of academic articles—considered by many an essential historian of the development of the American church.

BORIS SPASSKY

Feb. 27 | 88 | Aggressive Russian chess grandmaster who became a world champion in 1969 and whose defeat in a heavily publicized 1972 match against American Bobby Fischer was treated as a Cold War confrontation of West versus East.

L.J. SMITH

March 8 | 66 | Young adult novelist best known for creating *The Vampire Diaries* novel series, which became popular enough to be adapted into an eight-season CW network TV series.



ANTHONY DOLAN

March 10 | 76 | Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist at *The Stamford Advocate* who became a speechwriter for President Ronald Reagan, penning Reagan's famous "Evil Empire" speech in 1983.

ALAN SIMPSON

March 14 | 93 | Republican senator from Wyoming who rose to the ranks of leadership and, after retiring from the Senate in 1997, helped lead a bipartisan commission to make suggestions to fix the nation's fiscal problems.

GEORGE FOREMAN

March 21 | 76 | Olympic gold-medalist boxer who interspersed his professional career—becoming a world heavyweight champion in his 20s and again in his 40s—with a career as a

minister and businessman selling more than 100 million

George Foreman grills.

MIA LOVE

March 23 | 49 | Political commentator and tea party-era Republican politician elected to two congressional terms by Utah voters who made her the first Haitian American to serve in Congress.

DICK CARLSON

March 24 | 84 | Head of Voice of America from 1986 to 1991, former head of the Corporation for Public

Broadcasting, and father of populist commentator Tucker Carlson.

RONALD KATZ

March 28 | 89 | American inventor whose technological innovations made 1-800 numbers lucrative by verifying checks and credit cards over the phone and creating technologies to make call centers possible.

RICHARD CHAMBERLAIN

March 29 | 90 | Popular singer and actor who won multiple Golden Globe awards for starring in shows like *Dr. Kildare* in the 1960s and miniseries *Shōgun* and *The Thorn Birds* in the 1980s.



VAL KILMER

April 1 | 65 | Scene-stealing American actor best remembered for his leading role in *Batman Forever*, his portrayal of Doc Holliday in *Tombstone*, and perhaps most notably his depiction of Iceman in the *Top Gun* franchise.



DAVID PATON

April 3 | 94 | American ophthalmologist who co-founded Orbis International, a charity group known for transforming passenger jets into mobile eye clinics that have treated



the eyes of millions of developing-world patients.

JAY NORTH

April 6 | 73 | Child actor who portrayed the titular character in the CBS series *Dennis the Menace* from 1959 to 1963.

KATHLEEN THOMERSON

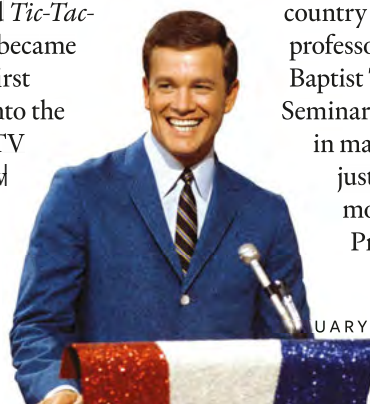
April 7 | 91 | Accomplished church organist and hymn-writer whose hymn "I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light" appears in many hymnals.

OCTAVIO DOTEI

April 8 | 51 | Effective relief pitcher and sometimes closer who at the time of his retirement in 2014 had played for 13 teams, more than anyone else in major league history.

WINK MARTINDALE

April 15 | 91 | Disc jockey turned game show host who hosted shows like *Gambit* and *Tic-Tac-Dough* and became one of the first inductees into the American TV Game Show Hall of Fame.



POPE FRANCIS

April 21 | 88 | First Jesuit and first Latin American pope, who was elected in 2013 and demonstrated interest in moving the church toward a more inclusive approach on some social issues.

STEVE McMICHAEL

April 23 | 67 | NFL Hall of Fame defensive lineman who played from 1980 until 1994 and won a Super Bowl ring with the 1985 Chicago Bears.

ROY COOPER

April 29 | 69 | Hall of Fame rodeo cowboy who won an all-around world championship in 1983, whose tie-down roping techniques revolutionized the sport and led to his acquisition of the nickname "Super Looper."

SAMUEL ESCOBAR

April 29 | 90 | Evangelical theologian from Peru who worked in his native country but also as a professor at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary; influential in making social justice theology more popular in Protestant circles.

DAVID HOROWITZ

April 29 | 86 | American polemicist who traversed the path common to many Jewish intellectuals of his era from radical New Left politics in the 1960s to neo-conservatism and advocacy for Zionism later in life.

RUTH BUZZI

May 1 | 88 | Sketch comic and Golden



Globe winner as a fixture on *Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In* appearing in every episode

of the six-season variety show and was most remembered for her portrayal of a sometimes-violent spinster.

GEORGE RYAN

May 2 | 91 | Governor of Illinois from 1999 until 2003 when a federal corruption scandal, which included charges of bribery and racketeering, induced him to leave politics and ultimately spend five years in prison.

DAVID SOUTER

May 8 | 85 | Former Supreme Court justice appointed by George H.W.



Bush in 1990 and who penned a portion of the Court's 1992 decision

that affirmed *Roe v. Wade* and eventually became known as one of the court's most left-leaning jurists.

RICHARD GARWIN

May 13 | 97 | American nuclear physicist who designed the bomb used in the 1952 Ivy Mike test—the first test of a hydrogen bomb.

JAMES TILL

May 18 | 93 | Canadian biophysicist who in a 1961 paper co-authored with colleague Ernest McCulloch proved the existence of stem cells and set the stage for new medical breakthroughs such as bone marrow transplants.

KAY ARTHUR

May 20 | 91 | Award-winning Christian author best remembered for her series of Bible studies penned while working for Precept Ministries International, an evangelical education ministry she founded with her husband.

**GEORGE WENDT**

May 20 | 76 | Popular character actor who gained fame, and six Primetime Emmy Award nominations, for his character Norm Peterson on TV's *Cheers* (1982–1993).

**ALASDAIR MACINTYRE**

May 21 | 96 | Scottish-born philosopher and public intellectual who reacquainted readers with classical and medieval thinkers in his 1981 book *After Virtue*.

PHIL ROBERTSON

May 25 | 79 | Sporting goods businessman who parlayed his wildly successful Duck Commander hunting business into the reality TV series *Duck Dynasty* from 2012 to 2017.

CHARLES RANGEL

May 26 | 94 | Prominent Democratic politician who represented Harlem in the House of Representatives from 1971 until 2017, chairing the powerful Ways and Means Committee and helping form the Congressional Black Caucus in 1971.

LORETTA SWIT

May 30 | 87 | Actress who became one of the most popular stars of one of TV's most beloved shows playing Margaret "Hot Lips" Houlihan on *M*A*S*H* from 1972 to 1983, during



which time she won two Emmys.

BILL ATKINSON

June 5 | 74 | Software designer who joined Apple in 1978 and created much of computing's early user interface, including drop-down menus and the mouse double-click.

WALTER BRUEGGEMANN

June 5 | 92 | Renowned Old Testament scholar who influenced many through his 100-plus books and his time as a professor at Columbia Theological Seminary.

SLY STONE

June 9 | 82 | Erratic frontman for Sly and the Family Stone who found success in the late 1960s with "Everyday People" and "Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)" until his drug use degraded the group's career.



BRIAN WILSON

June 11 | 82 | Enigmatic Beach Boys frontman and chief songwriter whose drug use and mental health problems led to long spells away from performing and recording.



FRED SMITH

June 21 | 80 | Businessman and FedEx founder who was a decorated Marine Corps officer in Vietnam and afterward bought a struggling aircraft maintenance firm with his inheritance and turned it into a transportation giant.

BILL MOYERS

June 26 | 91 | Powerful official within the Lyndon B. Johnson administration who helped create public broadcasting in the United States, later hosting and producing PBS programs including *Frontline*.

DAVE PARKER

June 28 | 74 | Hall of Fame slugger primarily for the Pittsburgh Pirates with whom he won a National League MVP award and the 1979 World Series; later Parker would win another World Series with Oakland in 1989.

S. DANIEL ABRAHAM

June 29 | 100 | Billionaire businessman whose Thompson Medical Co. introduced the SlimFast brand of diet foods and who founded the nonprofit Washington-based Center for Middle East Peace.

JIMMY SWAGGART

July 1 | 90 | American gospel music artist and popular televangelist famous for confessing "I have sinned" to his congregation after being discovered at the center of a prostitution scandal in 1988.



BOBBY JENKS

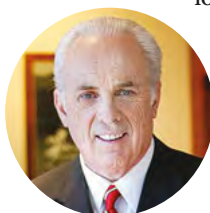
July 4 | 44 | Two-time All-Star relief pitcher mostly for the Chicago White Sox who once tied a major-league record for most consecutive batters retired and finished his career second all-time in saves for the White Sox.

DAVID GERGEN

July 10 | 83 | Former communications director for Gerald Ford and Ronald Reagan and a longstanding political commentator with CNN and editor-at-large for *U.S. News & World Report*.

JOHN MACARTHUR

July 14 | 86 | Influential commentator, popular theologian, and pastor of Grace Community Church who hosted a nationally syndicated Bible program for radio and television.



BILL CLAY

July 16 | 94 | Civil rights-era demonstrator who became a 32-year veteran of the U.S. House from St. Louis and co-founded the Congressional Black Caucus.

CONNIE FRANCIS

July 16 | 87 | Pop balladeer whose songs, including "Who's Sorry Now" and "Everybody's Somebody's Fool," which in 1960 made her the first woman to get a No. 1 hit on the *Billboard* Hot 100,

made her one of the most popular female acts of the 20th century.

MALCOLM-JAMAL WARNER

July 20 | 54 | Actor best known for portraying teenager Theo Huxtable on *The Cosby Show* from 1984 until 1992 later starring in his own sitcom and becoming a Grammy-winning musician.



CHUCK MANGIONE

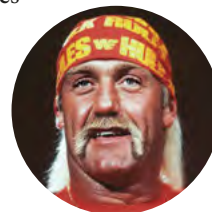
July 22 | 84 | Two-time Grammy-winning flugelhorn player whose instrumental track "Feels So Good" became a hit propelling Mangione to unlikely fame, including becoming a recurring character on Fox's *King of the Hill*.

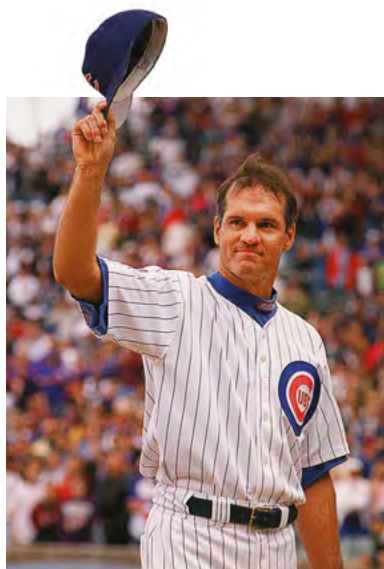
OZZY OSBOURNE

July 22 | 76 | Frontman of heavy metal band Black Sabbath, whose dark and ominous persona for the stage softened in later years as he became a tame reality television star.

HULK HOGAN

July 24 | 71 | Born Terry Bollea, a professional wrestler who helped mainstream the sport and whose body slam of Andre the Giant at WrestleMania III in 1987 became one of the sport's most indelible moments.



**RYNE SANDBERG**

July 28 | 65 | Hall of Fame second baseman for the Chicago Cubs who blasted 282 home runs between 1981 and 1997, winning an MVP award and being named to 10 straight All-Star teams.

LONI ANDERSON

Aug. 3 | 79 | Actress best known for starring in *WKRP in Cincinnati* and for being a subject of tabloid speculation during her marriage to screen legend Burt Reynolds.

**EDWARD T. BLAKE**

Aug. 6 | 80 | Forensic scientist who first used PCR DNA testing to analyze criminal cases, which led to the exoneration of roughly 50 people falsely convicted.

JIM LOVELL

Aug. 7 | 97 | NASA astronaut who, while commanding the Apollo 13 mission, avoided near calamity when a failure in the spacecraft forced the

crew to abandon their moon-landing mission.

WILLIAM H. WEBSTER

Aug. 8 | 101 | Federal district and 8th Circuit Court of Appeals judge who left the judiciary to serve nearly a decade as FBI director from 1978 until 1987 and then spent four years leading the CIA.

FRANK CAPRIO

Aug. 20 | 88 | Providence, R.I., municipal judge who became a social media sensation and star of *Caught in Providence*, which depicted traffic cases in Caprio's courtroom.

GORDON BOWKER

Aug. 21 | 82 | Seattle entrepreneur who co-founded the first Starbucks Coffee in 1971 and Redhook Ale Brewery in 1981, later selling the 11-store coffee franchise in 1987 to Howard Schultz.

JAMES DOBSON

Aug. 21 | 89 | Academic psychologist and author who founded Focus on the Family in 1977, building a broadcast empire that offered child-rearing advice from an evangelical perspective. He wrote more than a dozen books, including *Dare to Discipline*, *Parenting Isn't for Cowards*, and *The Strong-Willed Child*.

FORREST LUCAS

Aug. 23 | 83 | A long-haul trucker and freight broker who founded the Indiana-based automotive oil and fuel additive company Lucas Oil in 1989.

LEE ROY JORDAN

Aug. 30 | 84 | Stalwart linebacker for the Alabama Crimson Tide, winning a 1961 national championship before playing a central role in the Dallas Cowboys' Doomsday Defense that won Super Bowl VI in 1972.

GRAHAM GREENE

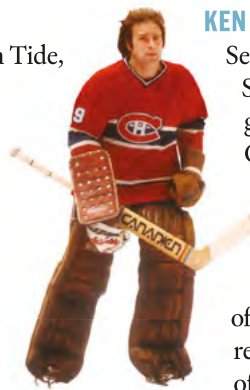
Sept. 1 | 73 | Oscar-nominated Canadian actor known for playing Native American roles in films like *Dances With Wolves* and *Maverick* who also won a Grammy for a children's spoken word album in 2000.

GIORGIO ARMANI

Sept. 4 | 91 | Sartorial icon who created the luxury fashion house Armani in 1975, whose chic designs helped reimagine power suits for men and women and became a favored uniform for celebrities walking the red carpet.

KEN DRYDEN

Sept. 5 | 78 | Six-time Stanley Cup-winning goalie for the Montreal Canadiens between 1971 and 1979 who would later serve seven years as a Liberal member of Canadian Parliament representing a portion of Ontario.

**DAVEY JOHNSON**

Sept. 5 | 82 | Four-time All Star infielder who won two World Series with the Baltimore Orioles in 1966 and 1970 and who also managed five different teams, including the champion New York Mets in 1986.



DAVID BALTIMORE

Sept. 6 | 87 | Nobel Prize-winning biologist and virologist who chiefly studied RNA viruses like polio and who served as president of CalTech (1997–2006).

RICK DAVIES

Sept. 6 | 81 | English rock musician and founding member of Supertramp, for which he sang, played keyboard, and composed hits including “Goodbye Stranger.”

CHARLIE KIRK

Sept. 10 | 31 | Political activist and co-founder of the youth-focused conservative group Turning Point USA, who was gunned down during an event at Utah Valley University during a barnstorming tour of college campuses (see p. 76).

ROBERT REDFORD

Sept. 16 | 89 | Oscar-winning Hollywood star, known for appearing alongside Paul Newman in the 1969 Western *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* as well as in the 1973 film *The Sting* and who later founded the Sundance Film Festival.

**VODDIE BAUCHAM**

Sept. 25 | 56 | Firebrand reformed Baptist preacher and theologian who railed against social justice politics of the left and who had recently served as the founding president of Founders Seminary.

**JANE GOODALL**

Oct. 1 | 91 | Famed British zoologist and expert on the social lives of primates whose long association with *National Geographic* and her research into chimpanzees turned her into a popular author, documentarian, and lecturer.

PATRICIA ROUTLEDGE

Oct. 3 | 96 | Tony-winning actress best known as the social-climbing star character on 1990s-era BBC comedy series *Keeping Up Appearances* for which she won a British Comedy Award in 1991.

JILLY COOPER

Oct. 5 | 88 | Prolific British romance novelist who penned the Rutshire Chronicles series of 11 books published between 1985 and 2023 and which were later adapted into the streaming television series *Rivals* in 2024.

BRUCE CUTLER

Oct. 6 | 77 | American trial lawyer made famous for high-profile criminal defense cases winning three acquittals

for Gambino crime family boss John Gotti before being disqualified from representing Gotti in his subsequent murder trial.

JOHN GURDON

Oct. 7 | 92 | British biologist and Nobel Prize winner who, while a graduate student at Oxford, successfully cloned a frog and whose research and methods paved the way for cloning larger species.

DIANE KEATON

Oct. 11 | 79 | Actress who featured in *The Godfather* trilogy and who won an Oscar for playing the title character in the 1977 film *Annie Hall* opposite Woody Allen.

**DREW STRUZAN**

Oct. 13 | 78 | Award-winning illustrator whose more than 150 movie poster designs—including for *Star Wars*, *Indiana Jones*, and *Back to the Future*—created an era-defining aesthetic.

D'ANGELO

Oct. 14 | 51 | Hall of fame R&B singer who won Grammy awards and whose *Voodoo* album found a high place on *Rolling Stone* magazine's top albums of all-time list.

ACE FREHLEY

Oct. 16 | 74 | New York musician who became a founding member of KISS and helped design the band's stage persona, costumes, makeup, and pyrotechnics before leaving the group in 1982.

**SUSAN STAMBERG**

Oct. 16 | 87 | Journalist and radio legend who helped form the voice of NPR over decades of on-air service including co-hosting of the network's *All Things Considered* program from 1972 to 1986.

PHYLLIS TRIBLE

Oct. 17 | 92 | Influential Christian feminist and theologian who argued for an egalitarian approach to Scripture from her perch at Union Theological Seminary and Wake Forest University School of Divinity.

JUNE LOCKHART

Oct. 23 | 100 | Actress known for supporting roles in prominent 1940s-era feature films and for playing the mother in the 1950s TV series *Lassie* and for her later role in *Lost in Space*.

**HENRY LYONS**

Oct. 27 | 83 | Former National Baptist Convention president who in 1998 was charged with fraud and money laundering for mishandling millions of dollars belonging to the denomination.

DICK CHENEY

Nov. 3 | 84 | Republican luminary who served multiple roles in Congress and presidential administrations, culminating in eight years as vice president under George W. Bush.

**VICTOR CONTE**

Nov. 3 | 75 | Bass player for funk group Tower of Power who later emerged as the head of BALCO, an illegal performance-enhancing drug supplier at the center of baseball's steroid scandal.

DIANE LADD

Nov. 3 | 89 | Veteran actress who appeared in *Chinatown* and *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* in 1974 and was later nominated for three Oscars and won one Golden Globe Award for her work on the television sitcom *Alice*.

**JAMES WATSON**

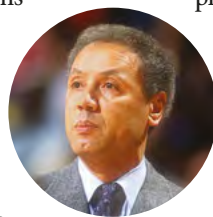
Nov. 6 | 97 | Molecular biologist who in 1953 co-authored a scientific paper describing the double helix nature of DNA—a discovery for which he was later awarded a Nobel Prize.

**PAUL TAGLIABUE**

Nov. 9 | 84 | Former influential NFL commissioner who led the league between 1989 and 2006 overseeing the expansion of the league and its rapid rise in popularity.

LENNY WILKENS

Nov. 9 | 88 | Basketball Hall of Famer who was named to nine all-star teams during his 15-year playing career and served as head coach of six different teams across a 32-year coaching career winning 1,332 games.

**JIMMY CLIFF**

Nov. 24 | 81 | Legend of Reggae music who helped spread the musical form outside his native Jamaica most notably with his remake of Johnny Nash's "I Can See Clearly Now" for the 1993 film *Cool Runnings*.

FUZZY ZOELLER

Nov. 27 | 74 | Former Masters and U.S. Open champion golfer who won 10 PGA tour



events but whose racially tinged comments about a young Tiger Woods in 1997 tarnished his reputation.

TOM STOPPARD

Nov. 29 | 88 | English playwright who wrote *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, for which he won a Tony Award, and the screenplay for *Shakespeare in Love*, for which he won an Oscar for best screenplay.

LUCI SHAW

Dec. 1 | 96 | Poet and prolific Christian writer who published many volumes of free verse poetry, collaborated on books with noted author Madeleine L'Engle, and taught writing for decades at Regent College.

FRANK GEHR

Dec. 5 | 96 | Notable architect whose designs incorporated unconventional building materials and who designed the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles and the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in Spain. ■

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VOICES ANDREW T. WALKER

The foolish road

The right cannot save itself by embracing the politics of resentment and nihilism

Conservatism, at its best, has always been a guardrail, something that keeps a nation tethered to sanity, moral clarity, and the lessons of history. But occasionally that guardrail gets battered—not by the left, but because those claiming to defend it decide to unbolt the guardrails themselves. This is one of those moments.

Recent controversies involving Tucker Carlson, Nick Fuentes, the Heritage Foundation, and surges of online anti-Semitism have exposed a widening fault line inside the right. Some genuinely believe that the future of conservatism lies not in preserving the American tradition, but in blowing it up and rebuilding something more tribal, more angry, more exclusionary, and—let’s be blunt—less moral.

Scratch beneath the rhetoric about “anti-regime populism” or “post-liberal realism,” and you’ll find something darker: conspiracy-laden politics, racial resentment, and open flirtation with anti-Semitism. Yes, some claims are exaggerated by hostile media eager to smear anyone right of center as a fascist. But it’s not all fiction. Responsible conservatives—and, more important, Christians—need to speak clearly.

Conservatism is not a mood, a vibe, or merely the negation of progressivism. Nor is it an aesthetic built on anger, cynicism, or online edginess. The American conservative tradition was never about hierarchy of blood or tribe. It rests on the belief that human beings are endowed—not by government, not by ethnicity, and not by cultural purity—but by their Creator with equal dignity and worth. That principle is rooted in Scripture’s doctrine of the *imago Dei*. It echoes through Genesis, the Psalms, John’s prologue, and

Paul’s sermon in Athens: All people share the same origin, the same dignity, and the same moral significance. Strip that out, and conservatism loses its soul.

Some now claim that universal dignity is a liberal fiction—and that only “our people” matter. That rhetoric is not new, and last century it led to catastrophic evil. It justifies contempt, dehumanization, and aggression against those less human, or less American. Ideas have consequences, and these aren’t the kind we want.

Worse still, abandoning universal dignity undercuts the very documents some of these same voices claim to defend. The Declaration of Independence rests squarely on the assertion that all men are created equal, that their rights are inherent, and that no ruler—whether king, bureaucrat, or podcast influencer—may strip them away.

If conservatives abandon that premise, we aren’t just flirting with illiberalism. We are sawing off the moral branch on which the entire American experiment sits. Now, some will say the establishment right failed and we need something radical. Yes—some conservative institutions lost urgency, moral seriousness, or connection to the hardships of ordinary Americans. There is room for reform. But the cure for error and drift isn’t nihilism and resentment. The right cannot save itself by embracing irresponsible fringe ideas. Tucker Carlson—brilliant, influential, and at times insightful—has occasionally trafficked in guests and storylines that platform figures like Nick Fuentes, a man whose rhetoric is not merely “provocative,” but morally rotten. That’s not the path to national renewal. If conservatism cannot tell the difference between reasoned disagreements and malice—between courage and cruelty—it deserves to collapse. Fortunately, many conservatives still understand what is at stake. Many know conservatism is not defined by rage or grievance, but by preserving what is true, good, and beautiful—what Russell Kirk called “the permanent things.”

A conservatism worthy of survival must recover its theological and philosophical sources: the natural law, Scripture’s moral teaching, the dignity of the human person, the family as the foundation of social order, prudence in governance, humility before history, and gratitude for a nation—even a flawed one—built on transcendent truth.

If we lose that—if we let fringe movements redefine conservatism into a tribal identity soaked in bitterness—we will betray not only the Declaration’s creed. We will betray Biblical anthropology itself. If we lose that—whatever is left will not be conservatism. It will be something far more morally impoverished, far darker, and ultimately destructive—not only to the movement, but to the nation it seeks to govern. ■

—Andrew Walker is the managing editor of *WORLD* Opinions and serves as associate professor of Christian ethics at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary



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NOTEBOOK



EDUCATION

Lessons in patience

Campus ministries adjust to fewer international students
amid visa program shake-up

by LIZ LYKINS

The international students at Wichita State University in Wichita, Kansas, have one thing in common—they're all outsiders. That gives them a "common bond," said Rod Bevan, the city director at the campus ministry International Students Inc. (ISI).

That bond grew even tighter throughout 2025 as the students faced revoked visas, new visa review processes, and changing work visa costs. All of the students felt a shared anxiety, Bevan said. Some skipped visiting their home countries during the summer for fear they might not be able to return. Others worried they wouldn't be able to earn their degrees. Those who hoped to stay in America feared their job opportunities were disappearing.

Amid this, Bevan said, ISI offers students a message of hope rather than despair. "None of this has taken God by surprise," Bevan said. "He's got a plan, and it's going to be OK."

ISI is just one campus ministry navigating ways to serve international students amid the uncertainty caused by the Trump administration's restrictions on student and employer visas.

Though early reports indicate the overall number of international students dropped 19%

at the start of the school year, campus ministry leaders from across the country say the numbers vary school to school. But they all agreed: Now more than ever international students need a message of hope.

Sharon Kim, a network director at Acts2, said visa program changes have especially affected students from China.

In May, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the United States would move to "aggressively revoke" visas for Chinese students. But President Donald Trump later walked back that stance and said he plans to issue 600,000 visas to Chinese students over the next two years. The State Department has so far revoked about 6,000 student visas, citing concerns over academic espionage, support for terrorist groups in Gaza, and criminal activity. Before the start of the school year, the State Department announced expanded screening for visa applicants, including social media surveillance.

"Students are way more stressed. They feel uncertain about the future," said Kim, whose ministry works in 32 schools across the country and primarily serves students from China. "They feel like, well, I can study hard, and then I could try to graduate and get a good job, but even then, I don't know if I can get a visa here."

In September, the administration imposed a \$100,000 fee on H-1B work visa applications in an effort to reduce the number of foreign-born →

Students gather for a welcome event hosted by the International Student Fellowship at the University of Chicago in 2024.





International students attend an event at Northwestern University.

U.S. employees. It previously cost employers between \$2,000 and \$5,000 to hire international students.

Kim said the strain has been most noticeable at “high-caliber schools” like the University of California, Berkeley, or Northwestern University.

The worry over shifting visa policies means students have a lower bandwidth for spiritual curiosity, Kim said. They often prioritize school work over attending ministry events, including weekly Bible studies.

“Back in the old days, they would find our Bible study to be welcoming: food, good friends, and Americans who want to help them,” Kim said. “But we are finding that even though they had a good impression, they’re too busy.”

Acts2 especially emphasized its mentorship program last semester to

“The point is, are we loving them and welcoming them and helping serve them and embrace them while they’re here so they experience the love of Jesus?”

give students a place to talk with ministry leaders about their struggles.

Romero Isa, a volunteer for the Acts2 ministry at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), said he helps struggling international students by understanding their concerns. Isa, originally from Indonesia, studied at UIUC and now works as a software engineer.

“I try to help these students by just sharing my experience of how God has worked in my life and hope that it can encourage them,” Isa said.

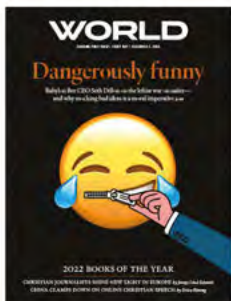
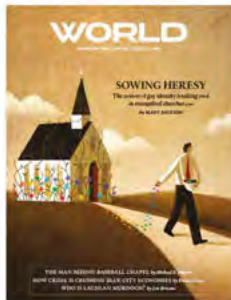
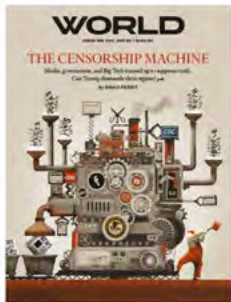
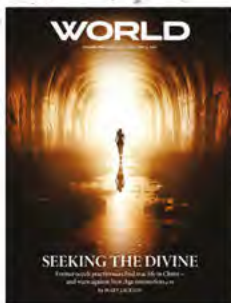
Dave Mennen is a national field director at Bridges International, a branch of Cru. He said its ministry definitely has seen a decrease in students during the fall semester, especially those from India. That matches national statistics. Indian student visas reportedly dropped by 44.5% in August compared to the same time last year.

Mennen said the dip likely stems from administrative delays. The Trump administration paused and then revamped the student visa interview process, leading to long waits for students who needed to get appointments at embassies or consulates prior to starting classes.

Despite the overall drop, Menner said Bridges saw high numbers of international students involved in both domestic and overseas mission trips last summer. Mennen is optimistic that Bridges’ current dip won’t last long.

David Rau, co-director of International Student Ministry (ISM) at the Navigators, said the 48 campuses where ISM works seem to have a “slower” student turnout this year. Rau said Navigators didn’t have official student involvement numbers for the fall semester yet, although staff have reported a drop. But that just gives staff another chance to minister and share God’s love with students.

“Whether our government is one thing or another, that’s not the point,” Rau said. “The point is, are we loving them and welcoming them and helping serve them and embrace them while they’re here so they experience the love of Jesus?” ■



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SPORTS

Influential losses?

Playoff rosters complicate the fight to protect girls' sports

by RAY HACKE

→ Two high school girls' volleyball teams with rosters that included boys who self-identify as "transgender" lost in their respective states' postseasons this fall.

One is Skyline High in Ann Arbor, Mich., which reached the quarterfinals of Michigan's state tournament before getting knocked out in a three-set loss to Byron Center. The other is California's Jurupa Valley High, which dropped its first playoff match—also in three sets—and was likewise eliminated from state title contention.

The U.S. Supreme Court is set to hear oral argument in mid-January concerning the constitutionality of Idaho and West Virginia laws that, those states claim, aim to ensure fairness and safety in girls' and women's sports by excluding trans-identifying male athletes. This begs the question: Do the defeats handed to Skyline and Jurupa Valley undermine the argument that letting boys play on girls' teams gives those teams an unfair advantage?

Macy Petty, a legislative strategist with Concerned Women for America, and Hal Frampton, an attorney with Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) who handles women's sports cases, don't think so. In fact, Petty thinks those who focus on the fact that all-girl teams have beaten teams with boys are missing the point.

"It isn't just about wins and losses. It's about dignity and safety," said Petty, who played college volleyball at Lee University, a Christian school in Tennessee. "Just because a male athlete didn't win a state championship doesn't mean an injustice didn't occur. Every time he stepped on the court, he denied women fairness and safety on both their team and opposing teams."

Boys inflict dignitary harm on girls by denying them the chance to shine in their own sports, Petty said. Regarding

Trans-identifying player A.B. Hernandez competes with Jurupa Valley's girls' team.

safety, boys endanger female teammates and opponents because, on average, they are taller and stronger, run faster, jump higher, and spike balls harder.

"In men's volleyball, the net is 7 inches higher for all those reasons," Petty said. "Every time a male athlete touches the floor [in a girls' match], he faces a net 7 inches shorter than he should."

And even if putting a boy on the court doesn't guarantee a win, it still increases a girls' team's probability of victory, according to Frampton.

"Their hitting velocity is not the only advantage at play," the ADF attorney said. "Their height, limb length, and jumping power give them an advantage at nearly every position."

Skyline has reportedly taken pains to conceal its male player's identity, likely to comply with a federal law protecting student privacy. The identity of Jurupa Valley's trans-identifying player, however, is no secret: It's senior A.B. Hernandez, who won California state track-and-field titles in the high jump and triple jump back in May.

Jurupa Valley finished its season 19-12 after falling to Valencia of Placentia in the opening round of California's Southern Section playoffs. Eight of Jurupa Valley's wins, however, came by forfeit. In fact, under section rules, Jurupa would have missed the postseason but for those forfeits.

Something similar happened at the college level last season: San Jose State University, whose roster included male outside hitter Blaire (née Brayden) Fleming, finished 14-7 and reached its conference tournament's championship match before falling to Colorado State. However, half the Spartans' triumphs came by forfeit, with three coming from Boise State.

President Donald Trump signed an executive order in early 2025 denying federal funds to schools that let boys play on girls' teams, but multiple states' high school athletic associations have continued to let boys compete in accordance with their self-proclaimed gender identity. ■



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SCIENCE

Melanoma minefield

Higher skin cancer rates identified in Pennsylvania

by HEATHER FRANK



Wearing SPF 100 may not be enough to ward off skin cancer in some parts of Pennsylvania.

A recent study found that older adults within a 15-county stretch of South Central Pennsylvania were far more likely to develop melanoma—the deadliest form of skin cancer—than adults from other regions of the state. Published Nov. 14 in *JCO Clinical Cancer Informatics*, the study ties specific agricultural practices to melanoma.

Penn State researchers reviewed cancer registry data for adults 50 or older, who accounted for 85% of all melanoma cases between 2017 and 2021. Using statistical analysis, they identified a 15-county hot spot in which

residents were at a 57.1% greater risk for melanoma. While eight of these counties were classified as metropolitan, all 15 had significant agricultural activity. After adjusting for ultraviolet radiation (sunlight) and social factors such as race and financial status, the researchers found a clear relationship between melanoma risk and both cropland density and herbicide use. Melanoma incidence increased by 14.1% for every 10% increase in cropland, and by 13.5% for every 8.6% increase in herbicide use.

Lead study author Benjamin Marks cautioned that other factors, such as genetics or healthcare access, could account for the link between melanoma risk and agricultural practices.

TIME TO RE-DOWNLOAD DUOLINGO

In an analysis of over 86,000 people across Europe, an international research team found that learning a new language may slow brain aging and cognitive decline.

The researchers used artificial intelligence to determine participants' biobehavioral age gap (BBAG), the disparity between a person's actual chronological age and the age that person seems to be based on factors like health and brain function. The linguists, who published their work Nov. 10 in *Nature Aging*, then compared each participant's BBAG to the number of languages he or she spoke. Bilingual participants were more than twice as likely to experience slowed aging than monolingual ones. The protective effect remained after adjusting for linguistic, physical, and sociopolitical factors, and it increased with each language spoken.

Study author Agustín Ibáñez suggested the attention, memory, and executive control learning a new language requires could promote resilience against brain aging. —H.F.

ANCIENT RNA

The woolly mammoth just broke a record for being old. In a study published Nov. 14 in *Cell*, European scientists described removing the oldest known RNA molecules from the muscle and skin tissue of 10 woolly mammoths. Preservation in Siberian permafrost prevented the mammoths' RNA from degrading. The best-preserved RNA came from one mammoth named **Yuka**, and analysis revealed cellular processes going on at the time of his death. With more fine-tuning, the extraction techniques used could lead to better understanding of extinct animals. —H.F.





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Power shortage

Data centers stress aging electrical grid

by *TODD VICIAN*

→ North America should expect more frequent brownouts over the next 10 years as aging electrical grids strain to keep up with unprecedented demand from rapidly multiplying data centers. That's according to a doomsday report by the North American Electric Reliability Corporation, the organization that assesses electricity in the United States, Canada, and part of Mexico. It also cited the retirement of reliable fossil-fueled power plants in favor of weather-dependent renewable energy as contributing to decreasing supply.

More than 5,000 data centers operate in the United States, and America's tech giants are building more at breakneck speed. Major tech companies spent more than \$200 billion in 2024 on AI and cloud computing infrastructure, and likely more than that in 2025. But the rush to add data centers is straining utilities and resources across the country.

Today's generative AI, which performs multiple simultaneous tasks and crunches huge amounts of data, requires 10 to 30 times more energy than earlier task-specific AI computations, according to Shuting Pomerleau, director of energy and environmental policy at the American Action Forum. A simple ChatGPT query uses 10 times the electricity of a traditional online search, according to the Electric Power Research Institute. One hyperscale center with about 30,000 square feet of computers and equipment can draw 100 to 200 megawatts, the same amount of electricity needed to power a city like Charleston, S.C., or Salt Lake City, Utah.

Data centers consume about 5% of electricity generated in the United States. Their power requirements

High-voltage transmission lines provide electricity to data centers in Virginia.

roughly doubled between 2000 and 2005 before leveling off for a decade with advances in cloud computing, computing efficiencies, better cooling, and power management, according to researchers at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. Annual energy consumption began climbing in 2017 as servers for AI began proliferating, and electricity usage topped 4% of the U.S. total by 2023. Electric cars and manufacturing growth also contribute to increased demand, but industry analysts predict data centers will account for up to 60% of load growth through 2030.

Estimates on how much additional grid capacity will be enough vary significantly, in part because tech companies don't share proprietary data and requirements may change. The uncertainty makes planning difficult for utility providers, legislators, and operators who usually plan on two- to three-year production schedules, but often see delays of five or more years.

"The biggest hurdle for meeting AI data center demand is regulation, in my opinion," Pomerleau said. "Utility regulators [should] streamline and simplify the approval processes to allow utilities to bring new generation sources to the grid as fast as possible."

PJM Interconnection coordinates electricity transmission for 67 million people in 13 Eastern states, including data-center-heavy Virginia and Washington, D.C. The operator of the nation's largest electrical grid forecasts data centers will account for nearly all of the planned new 32 gigawatts on its system through 2030. PJM officials in November said electricity demand continues to exceed addition of new generation sources. Without significantly increasing power supplies, PJM's board warns, power shortages could come as early as summer 2026.

State legislators and regional regulators have told data center developers to fully fund needed grid upgrades, seek additional power through competitive markets, and plan for their own backup power or expect limited or no operations during extremely hot or cold days. ■





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C R O S S W O R D

Time for a change

by PETER SILZER

Across

- 1** Synagogue leader
- 6** Proof of purchase (abbr.)
- 9** AKA G sharp
- 14** Alaskan native
- 15** "Now I get it!"
- 16** ____-wip (dessert topping)
- 17** They support roses
- 18** Be persuaded to change one's opinion
- 20** Something to hope for on Jan. 1
- 22** Joins
- 23** Acapulco auntie
- 26** Something to think about on Jan. 1
- 30** ____ Rubik, cube inventor
- 31** Photographer Adams
- 32** YouVersion or BibleGateway
- 34** The T in AGT
- 37** 1/360 of a circle
- 39** G.I. mail address
- 40** Desert shrub
- 44** Sing perfectly in the past?
- 45** Something to be thankful for on Jan. 1
- 49** Tokyo, long ago
- 50** Cult leader Charles ____
- 51** Something to consider on Jan. 1
- 57** Over 70% of American households
- 60** Japanese mushroom
- 61** Hummer's instrument
- 62** Young Pharaoh
- 63** Took the stage
- 64** Knocks for a loop
- 65** Texting format, briefly
- 66** Clarinets, for example

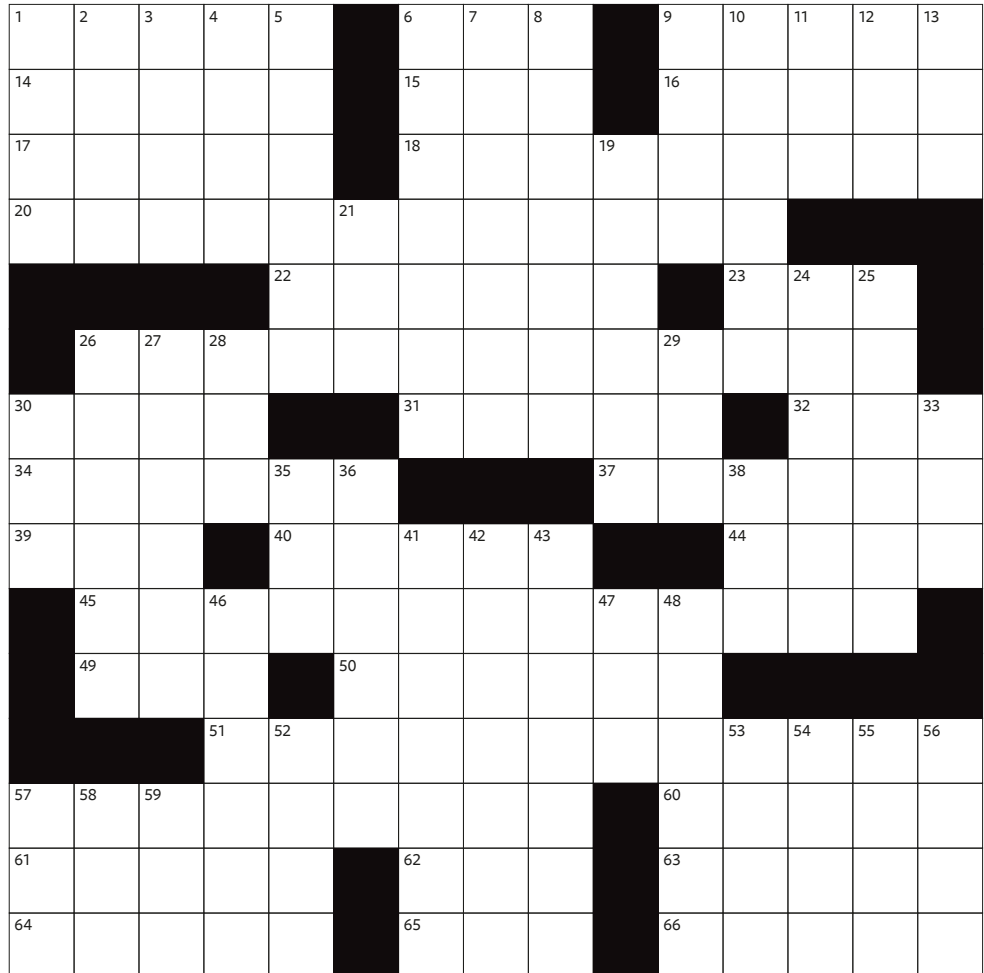
Down

- 1** Allergic reaction
- 2** Utah ski area
- 3** Horn sound
- 4** Fist ____
- 5** "That looks fabulous!"
- 6** Floral brew
- 7** Gnaws
- 8** Athlete's jitters
- 9** Region
- 10** Where angels ____ tread
- 11** BYU sponsor
- 12** Commotion
- 13** Element with the shortest name
- 19** Like many tuxedos
- 21** "Fresh Air" aier
- 24** "As snug as a bug ____"
- 25** "Quaking" trees
- 26** New Englander's milkshake
- 27** Sell in a hurry

- 28** Stocking part
- 29** Suffix with project or infant
- 30** GPS guess
- 33** Margaret nickname
- 35** WSJ competitor
- 36** Abolitionist Harriet
- 38** TV channel with the slogan "Ready to Play?"
- 41** Some red wines
- 42** Vitamin "Complete from A to Zinc"
- 43** Soccer stats
- 46** "Leaving already?"
- 47** Male child

- 48** Ready to drive
- 52** Ark groups
- 53** Without repetition
- 54** Cast a ballot
- 55** ____ out a living
- 56** Eradicates
- 57** Clergy children
- 58** Have a bite
- 59** Shih ____ (Asian canine)

Bonus clues and puzzle solution on page 110





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“

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PARKER RODY '25

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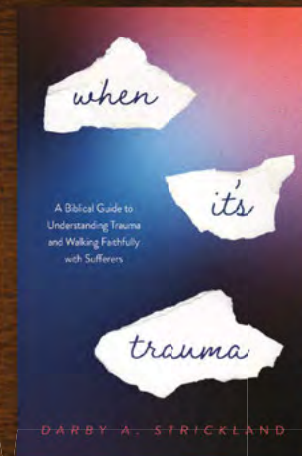
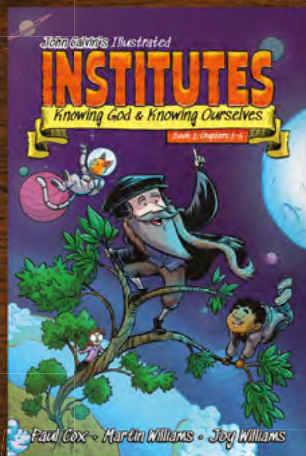


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Does our crossword have you puzzled? Before checking the answers, try these additional clues:

Across

- 40** State flower of New Mexico
57 They keep vets in business

Down

- 2** High in Honduras
19 Paid for housing
26 Frozen coffee drink
43 Helps out





VOICES ANDRÉE SEU PETERSON

The mysterious commander

The battle, the glory, and the story are the Lord's

My sons are history buffs. They will argue into the night about whether First or Second World War Germany had the better military, why Prussia was able to defeat Napoleon, or the relative strengths of the Achaemenid versus Macedonian empires. They pick apart military strategies, leaders' personal vulnerabilities, nations' comparative weaponry, and armies' numerical advantages, all to understand why wars are won or lost.

But is not something missed in this attempt at quantification, some causality that slips their nets?

On the verge of entering the Promised Land, Moses' successor is visited by a mysterious Man with drawn sword (Joshua 5:13). "Are you for us or for our adversaries?" Joshua asks. "No," comes the reply, ignoring the binary choice, "but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." The Commander is the preincarnate Lord Himself, which we know because when Joshua summarily falls to the ground and worships, he is not rebuked (cf. Revelation 22:8–9).

The Visitor's message is clear: Fall in behind me, for the battle is the Lord's.

Earthly commanders need to understand that heaven's stakes in wars on earth (see Daniel 10:10–21) go a long way in explaining strange turnings of fortune of armies under the sun. Up yonder are contending angels, demons, territorial principalities—and the strangest weather events: great hail stones that rout a coalition of kings (Joshua 10:11); the sun that stands still till the battle is done (Joshua 10:12–13); thunder spooking attacking Philistines (1 Samuel 7:10); the

glint of morning sunlight mimicking blood on water pools to lure the Moabites into a trap (2 Kings 3:22); Arameans hearing the phantom sound of chariots and horses so that they flee (2 Kings 7:6–7); the forest trees themselves turning on mutinous Absalom and his accomplices (2 Samuel 18).

This is *deus ex machina*, except not as cheap literary device but actual heavenly intervention. Many are familiar with the timely fog that rolled in during the Battle of Long Island on Aug. 27, 1776, that allowed Washington's army to evacuate by boat across the East River to Manhattan without being detected by the British.

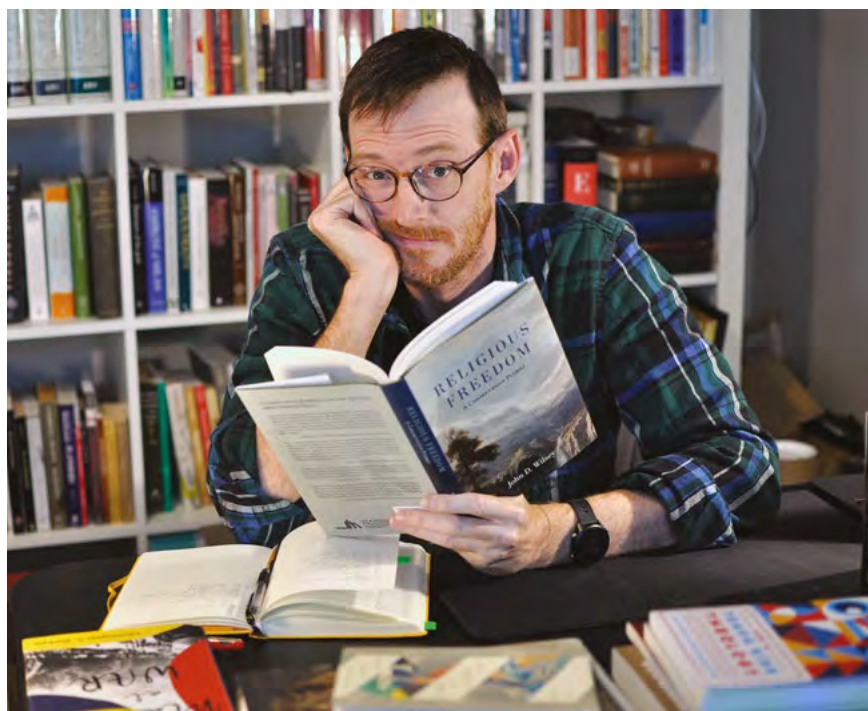
Perhaps no stranger tide-turning events have been recorded than those having to do with Israel. In 1948 the day-old nation is attacked by a coalition of five Arab nations. Outnumbered and making do with highly inaccurate (but tremendously noisy) "Davidka" mortars, it scares away the British-trained Arab league. In 1967, through a series of freakishly unlucky coincidences for their enemies, Israel prevails against the combined might of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. On Yom Kippur in 1973, its tanks outnumbered 10 to 1 at the start, Israel survives a surprise attack by Egypt and Syria when Syrian troops inexplicably retreat just as Israel is on the verge of collapse in the Golan Heights.

American Christianity is tearing itself limb from limb over the question of Israel and foreign policy. One cites God's words to Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you" (Genesis 12:3). The other camp counters, "What does modern secular Israel have to do with the true Israel of God? Treat it like any other nation." One camp calls Israel's Gaza operation genocide and invokes the Jesus of peace. The other calls it the reasonable self-defense of a nation of 8,000 square miles surrounded by 5 million square miles of Arabs who mostly wish her ill.

This is all above my pay grade. But Scripture has at least told us what the end looks like: The Lord will gather all nations together against Israel, where He will deal with those nations, fighting against them Himself from Jerusalem (Zechariah 14; Ezekiel 38). It is during this existential crisis in the nation of Israel that the "partial hardening until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (Romans 11:25) will be removed. "They will look on Me whom they pierced" and "mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son" (Zechariah 12:10). No longer hardened in over 2,000 years of unbelief, Israel will be grafted in once more, even as Paul prayed they would (Romans 11:23).

Now we see the trickles (zero Messianic congregations in Israel in 1950, 300 in 2025) and are impatient for the showers (Zechariah 13:1; Ezekiel 36:25). Soon comes a wholesale embrace of the Messiah in the land of His own birth. Don't you love a happy ending?

As for the Mysterious Commander, He was clear in His own cryptic way: the battle, and the glory, and the story are the Lord's. ■



WORLD Culture Editor Collin Garbarino

Worth reading

What goes into selecting WORLD's annual book award winners?

by LEIGH JONES

➔ Every year, WORLD writers and editors sift through the thousands of books published during the previous 12 months to select a few that deserve special recognition. This year, we selected one Book of the Year for adults and one for children, with honorable mentions in both categories. WORLD's annual awards are coveted, and not just by authors and publishers. Readers look forward to the awards because they know any book that gains WORLD's stamp of approval will be worth reading.

My daughter and I have enjoyed many of the kids' book selections and eagerly await the announcement of each year's winner so we can add it to our

TBR (to be read) list. After Culture Editor Collin Garbarino put the finishing touches on this year's reviews, I asked him to take us behind the scenes of the award process.

What goes into picking the Book of the Year finalists? The planning begins in late summer, so it probably takes much longer to select a Book of the Year than most folks expect. I and a small group of WORLD staffers scour bestseller lists. Then we ask our reviewers and other bookish people we know to nominate titles. We also reach out to publishers, asking which of their own books they're most proud of. We then take this multitude of suggestions and whittle it down

to a more manageable list of nominees. Next we have more than 20 panelists from a variety of areas give feedback on those nominees.

What criteria are you looking for in a Book of the Year? We assess potential titles in three broad categories. First, the book must be excellent in its execution, so we judge each book on its readability and artistic merit. Second, we consider a book's worldview and moral value. A book doesn't necessarily have to be written from an explicitly Christian perspective, but it can't be antagonistic to a Biblical worldview. Third, we ask ourselves whether this is the kind of book WORLD readers would be interested in.

Was this year's winner the clear favorite, or did the committee have a spirited debate over which title should get the award? After the readers' reports came back in, our team arrived at a fairly quick consensus. This year's Book of the Year had the highest marks across the board, and we were impressed with how it managed to win over some of the doubters.

WORLD has chosen Books of the Year for as long as I remember. Why is this such an important part of our mission? Christianity has always been a bookish religion. Not only do the words of Scripture shape our faith and practice, but also early Christians pioneered the codex and created their own literary culture. Now our society has increasingly moved in a postliterate direction, with people who know how to read but, as a rule, don't. I'm thankful WORLD subscribers tend to be an exception to this trend. Highlighting these books is worthwhile because it reminds us that good books are still being written, and it helps push against the cultural forces that have caused reading to dwindle. ■

Soriah Wasn't Home For Christmas

More than 10 million people have fled Sudan as the civil war rages on. Among them is Soriah, who escaped to Egypt after her home was destroyed by a bomb.



Soriah's story is one of courage and faith amid loss.



This new year, you can bring relief and hope to families like hers.
Give today - share Christ's love with displaced Christian families.
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