

WORLD

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Western climate policies block the road to prosperity
in developing nations *p.66*

by JENNY LIND SCHMITT





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Ferrybridge power station
in Yorkshire, U.K.



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by Annick Poirier

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WORLD

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WORLD NOTES



It has been about 45 years since our board of directors approved Joel Belz's unlikely idea to begin publishing weekly news magazines for students, what we now know collectively as God's World News. At the time, that decision marked a sharp turn away from the ecclesiastical journal *WORLD* had published for decades. It also set in motion work that has shaped generations of young readers.

For most of those 45 years, Rich Bishop has been at the center of that work.

Rich first began contributing illustrations to *WORLD* and God's World News in the early 1980s, working remotely by mail and fax. In 1990, he moved to Asheville to join the staff full time. From there, he says, he "never really looked back—or even to the side."

"The kind of work and mission I found at GWN was exactly what I hoped to do with my career," Rich told me. "Mostly, knowing that your work is in some small way bringing joy to young people, and helping to shape them—that's a powerful motivator."

Rich's early contributions were primarily visual—design and illustration—but over time his role expanded. He became a writer, a storyteller, and eventually a shaper of tone and direction. What marked his work from the beginning was a rare combination: mature judgment, theological seriousness, and a formidable work ethic to create products that unlocked a child's sense of wonder and playfulness.

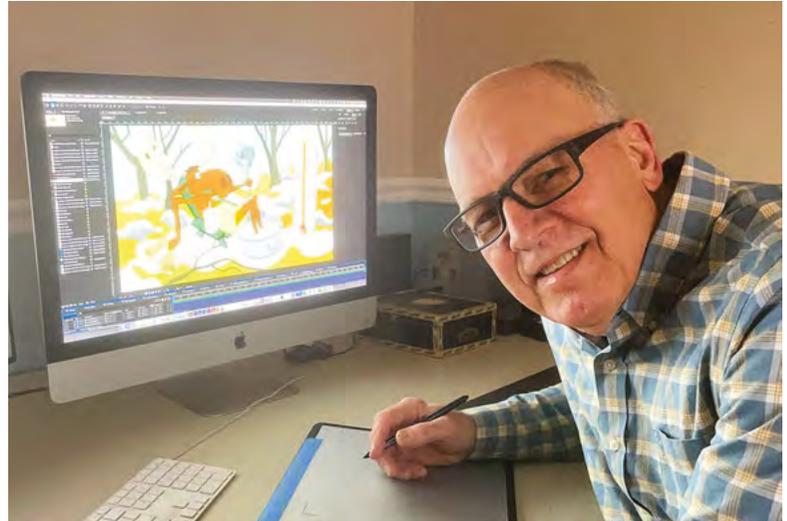
Asked how he balances fun and seriousness when working for younger audiences, Rich pushes back on the premise.

"It's not so much about being light or serious," he says, "as it is about staying interesting and engaging. You can't accomplish much if you don't hold their interest. But once you have their interest, you have to do something with that opportunity."

That philosophy has shaped God's World News for decades—and later, *WORLD Watch* as well. Over time, that approach helped establish a distinctive trust with readers and viewers alike. Young audiences sensed they were being taken seriously—not talked down to or entertained past the truth. Teachers and parents noticed it too. The work respected children not merely as consumers of information, but as developing thinkers formed by what they see and hear.

When *WORLD Watch* emerged as a concept in 2020, Rich was the natural choice to help lead it, though the move was not without risk. He was stepping away from a 40-year-old print institution to help build an untested video program.

His hesitation, he says, was practical rather than philosophical.



Rich Bishop at work on a project

"The only thing that gave me pause was pulling together the talent to make it professional—and whether I could help manage all the moving day-to-day parts," he says. "But creatively, the idea that I could bring my illustrations to life—make them move and give them a voice—felt like a second opportunity of a lifetime."

That blend of curiosity and courage has marked Rich's work from the start. It is also evident in the way he has mentored younger journalists, editors, and producers—often informally, and usually without drawing attention to himself.

What does he hope they carry with them?

"I hope they remember how much they are appreciated by our viewers, who are amazingly intelligent, joyful, and supportive," Rich says. "And I hope they feel both the weight and the pleasure of having a hand in helping young people learn to be good Christian thinkers."

There are only a handful of people without whom God's World News would not exist. Rich Bishop is one of them. And in God's providence, his influence now extends well beyond print—into classrooms, homes, and screens where a new generation is learning to see the world clearly, faithfully, and with joy.

KEVIN MARTIN
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RICH BISHOP



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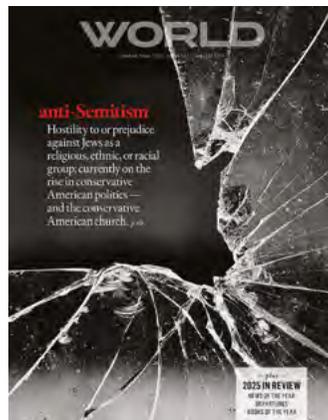
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“I pray that the readers of WORLD will not forget that so much of the “anti-” this and “anti-” that comes from the same place—forgetting that we have the Imago Dei on all of us.”

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Page 60: The two pieces by Mary Jackson and Carolina Lumetta on the rise of anti-Semitism have left me shaken. I find myself again repeating “God has not given us a spirit of fear,” as I have so often in the past few years after I read something in the news that shakes my confidence that this country is going to be the same place for my children and grandchildren that it has been for me.

My family came to this country from the Soviet Union in December 1979 on the Jewish Migration Visa. President Carter strong-armed Leonid Brezhnev to allow Jewish dissidents to leave the Soviet Union in exchange for shipments of American wheat. Our “Jewishness” was enough to get us out of the Soviet Union, but not enough to get us to Israel as only my dad’s mother was entirely Jewish. The IRC took up our case in Italy and helped us get to America. While in Italy, missionaries in Rome—who were there specifically to share the gospel with Soviet Jews living temporarily in the city while their paperwork was getting processed—shepherded my parents and grandparents to a saving knowledge of Christ. Twenty-one days after my family arrived in New York City, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, which surely would have resulted in my father being called up and forced to fight because he had been drafted into the Soviet Army. He was drafted because as a half-Jew, there were no university spots open for him.



JANUARY 2026

This is just a part of the amazing story of God’s working in one family of very unimportant immigrants to the United States. We came to the United States from an enemy land, an “evil empire,” and were welcomed with open arms to eventually become church members, taxpayers, citizens, voters, fully contributing members of this country. I pray that the readers of WORLD will not forget that so much of the “anti-” this and “anti-” that comes from the same place—forgetting that we have the *Imago Dei* on all of us.

VERA VOLODIN
Charlottesville, Va.

I appreciated the fairness of the recent article about the rise of anti-Semitism, however the lead photo for the article was disappointing. It was a full-page image of a burning swastika, with a

caption about a neo-Nazi group in Georgia. Yet the article did not mention neo-Nazi groups, or how vanishingly rare and unpopular they are. The image seemed intended to lead the reader to believe that lack of support for Israel is akin to neo-Nazism (i.e., anti-Semitism), as though it’s a quick slide from one to the other (which is not supported by the facts or the text of the article). The photo undermines the fairness of the article by cashing in on a sensational image while discussing a reasonable topic.

RACHEL GAGE
Hart, Mich.

Good article on anti-Semitism! Anti-Semitism, however, is different from all other kinds of racism; it has a demonic empowerment. God chose the sons of Israel as His initial and dominant missionary group to evangelize the nations, which they have never done. Someday they will, when they awaken to their Messiah. Meanwhile, Satan has been trying to kill off every last Jew possible to prevent that since Haman’s attempt in about 450 B.C.

FM WARD
Seaside, Calif.

Thanks for the insightful and timely cover story on anti-Semitism currently on the rise in some conservative circles. I hope that, as a magazine that takes pride in fairness, you will continue this topic with a cover story on leftist anti-Semitism where it is much more violent and →

prevalent, most notably at Ivy League schools like Harvard and Columbia.

DR. LOWELL HAGEWOOD
Nashville, Tenn.

I am so grateful for your cover story on anti-Semitism! I think this is the most important issue for the church and the world right now. I am tuned in to Israel and the Jewish world, but most of your article was news to me!

PAULA OAS
Laurel, Md.

I was sad and upset reading the two articles on anti-Semitism—especially about some “pastors,” who are supposed to know the Word of God. According to the Bible, every human being is the same in God’s eyes. Maybe it is time for them to read the book of Esther!

ED CHAN
Hoover, Ala.

DISTILLING GODLY WISDOM

Page 38: I found it interesting that there was no mention in Timothy Lamer’s article on Matt Smethurst’s 2025 Book of the Year about Tim Keller that WORLD had actually knighted Timothy Keller’s book *The Reason for God* as the 2008 Book of the Year! That would have been appropriate, if not ironic. One may not agree completely with Keller, but some of his works, such as *The Reason for God*, are superb tools for exploring faith with seekers.

LAURA GONG
Livermore, Calif.

In recognizing *Tim Keller on the Christian Life* as its 2025 Book of the Year, WORLD is honoring a man who was an effective spokesman in a bygone era that was less hostile to biblical faith. But Keller overemphasized winsome engagement, exemplifying Naaman’s example (2 Kings 5:17–19) of accommodation at the expense of stand-taking and resisting pressure. He was not always consistent in his public comments on the biblical understanding of homosexuality. And he often punched right but coddled left.

His approach will not carry the day, given unprecedented challenges in front

of the American church. At the least, it would have been better to share the Book of the Year award with a more convictional writer who is willing to support younger believers who very well may have to live out costly, faithful, and courageous convictions.

STEVE THOMAS
Graham, Wash.

HONORING THE BODY

Page 36: I so agree with Janie B. Cheaney and appreciate her mentioning Victor Sweeney and his views on caring for the body of a loved one. My mom always told me to just bury her in a wooden casket, not knowing that when she died the wood ones were the most expensive. But I did honor her request to be buried under a tree. I like visiting that spot where she and my dad are now waiting for their new glorified bodies. Last summer when I visited my grandparents’ grave, I knelt and thanked God for giving me a godly heritage. Now my family has had disagreements about burial versus cremation. I am sad that I don’t have a place to take flowers for those who were cremated.

SHELLEY SPANOGLA
Clearfield, Pa.

We have been praying for Janie B. Cheaney’s husband and her and her family. We find her updates during her trying journey encouraging. Wonder, love, and hope in Christ are at the heart of one devoted to Christ in this fallen world. Every time we read her columns, we find her locked into the promises of

God’s Word, with that wonder, love, and hope oozing from the page.

CHARLIE & SUE HORNICK
LaGrange, Wyo.

ON THE EDGE OF FAITH

Page 34: I understand Charles Murray when he says, “I have beliefs rather than faith.” This reminds me of theologian Herman Sasse’s warning of “a philosophy to live with, not a philosophy to die with.” I respectfully recommend a good dose of Bible reading and C.S. Lewis’ books *Miracles* and *Mere Christianity*. I pray Mr. Murray will someday realize he was saved by believing.

JORGE A. VELEZ
Long Beach Calif.

THE FOOLISH ROAD

Page 96: This column touched on many of the issues that have bothered me about the political right today. Since becoming a Christian, I have come to embrace moral principles, government policies, and attitudes toward my fellow man that I have seen many conservatives also embrace. However, this is countered by the MAGA movement and an ideology of tribalism that espouses grievance, cruelty, and visceral hatred. My faith remains strong that the American political system can be healed to bring us back to the God-ordained core principles that our forefathers established for us to live civilly and in peace.

PAUL SCHEIHING
Otis, Maine

UNCONVENTIONAL PRESS

Page 20: While the White House has changed which news outlets are welcome to the press briefings, most people do not get their news from these outlets anymore. Trust in the mainstream media is at an all-time low, and I am grateful for the countless podcasts, X, and a largely free alternative media that exist. If we are honest, we have to admit the newsrooms of conventional media are filled almost entirely with registered Democrats. Most of us moved on long ago from that as our news source.

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Medina, Wash.

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VOICES LYNN VINCENT

Put your behind in your past

How a philosopher warthog got it right

It's a strange day when Pumbaa, the Disney warthog, and Viktor Frankl, the Holocaust survivor and psychiatrist, arrive on the same page to make the same point. And yet, here we are.

Let me explain: I've been rereading Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* in connection with a book project.

Many people read this short volume as a death-camp memoir that emphasizes virtue and the power of meaning-making. But Frankl saw *Man's Search* as something closer to field notes—a clinical, and moral, analysis of human behavior under unimaginable, perhaps unprecedented, psychological and physical load.

I've read the book before. This time, though, what struck me between the eyes was not the horror of the camps, but Frankl's trenchant discussion of the surpassing utility of the past. And that's where Frankl and Pumbaa converge—if not in history or even species, then in philosophy—in a way that only seems accidental.

In Disney's 1994 animated hit *The Lion King*, Pumbaa and Timon, a kind-hearted warthog and a wise-cracking meerkat (who somehow imported a Borscht Belt-era comic cadence to the African savanna), provide comic relief. They also stage a quiet contest between rival ways of coping with pain.

Not long after the film's opening tragedy—the death of Mufasa, lion king of the Pride Lands—Timon and Pumbaa find Mufasa's son, Simba, still a cub, collapsed on a parched mud flat in despair and exhaustion. After deciding Simba poses no threat, they quickly discover he is running from something heavy and unnamed: shame.

Eager to help, Pumbaa jumps in: "You gotta put your behind in your past!"

"No, no, no!" Timon says dismissively. "*Amateur*. Lie down before you hurt yourself."

Yet Timon never corrects Pumbaa's comic mouth-mangle, never says aloud the familiar bromide: *You gotta put your past behind you*. Instead, the outcast pair break into the catchy little time-compressing montage song—and disastrous life philosophy—"Hakuna Matata."

But Timon's failure to repair Pumbaa's apparent error leaves open a narrative possibility: Is Pumbaa just a lovable oaf given to the occasional gaffe—or is he quietly wise?

Viktor Frankl would say the latter. He saw the past as a vault, a storehouse of life's treasures. "The only really transitory aspects of life are the potentialities," Frankl wrote, "but as soon as they are actualized, they are rendered realities at that very moment; they are saved and delivered into the past, where they are rescued and preserved."

Usually, Frankl observed, man overlooks "the full granaries of the past." Popular American psychology often does the same. *Don't live in the past. Let it go. Live in the moment*. By and large, we are trained to treat sustained engagement with what came before as either irrelevant or evidence of pathology.

But a people unconnected to a conserved, coherent past—a usable past consonant with the way humans actually behave, for good or for ill—must constantly manufacture meaning in real time. When the past is treated as disposable or suspect, the present bears an impossible load. Identity becomes improvisational. Norms become negotiable. Reality itself begins to feel optional.

The modern impulse to sever ourselves from the past is also profoundly unscriptural. Both Old and New Testament writers were deeply concerned with preserving and rehearsing lineage and tradition. They spent a surprising amount of time remembering not only good times and good people, but bad times and bad actors as well.

Connecting with our pasts, individually and collectively, conserves shared culture, codifies wisdom, and remembers family heroes as well as those whose lives serve as cautionary tales. The past is where we secure our deeds, our joys, our loves, and yes—our sufferings, seasons that often confer wisdom and new strength. And here's the irony: Even as pop psychology urges us to let go of it, the past is the one place meaning can't be taken from us.

In transforming potentialities into realities—doing the work God has given us to do and securing it in the past—we who live in Christ defy life's apparent ephemerality. I say *apparent* because life is decidedly not ephemeral. As we shed our earthly tents, life does not end; it changes form. In this life, we stack stones of remembrance as monuments to God. In the next, we come face to face with Life itself and, stone by stone, give an accounting. In this view, the past isn't something to be avoided but employed and embraced.

I don't often take advice from cartoon warthogs, but in this case I think Pumbaa was right: We should all put our behinds in our pasts. ■



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DISPATCHES





IN THE NEWS

Thinning ICE in Minnesota

The Trump administration shifts immigration enforcement tactics amid public backlash

by EMMA FREIRE

Tom Homan, President Donald Trump's border czar, put on his reading glasses and launched straight into his remarks. He was ready to deliver some good news. It was Feb. 4, just nine days after Trump announced he was sending Homan to Minnesota to oversee immigration operations in the state.

"We have made significant progress under the direction of President Trump working with state and local officials here in Minnesota, and I expect that to increase in the coming weeks," Homan said, adding that 700 federal agents would leave Minnesota "effective immediately."

Homan's announcement marked a shift in the administration's tactics following significant public backlash and concerns over what that might mean for Republicans in November's midterm elections.

In December, the Trump administration launched Operation Metro Surge, initially targeting the Twin Cities but later expanding to all of Minnesota. The operation included the deployment of more than 2,000 federal agents. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) called it "the largest immigration enforcement operation

ever carried out." However, the operation's aggressive tactics drew criticism, even from those who broadly support immigration enforcement, especially after two U.S. citizens were shot and killed by federal agents during protests. Americans were shocked by images of groups of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents wearing masks to hide their identities as they arrested people and clashed violently with protesters.

Public opinion polls show a majority of Americans now disapprove of ICE's tactics, though there are strong divisions along partisan lines. But a small majority of Americans overall still support the idea that people living in the country illegally should be deported.

Minnesota came under the national spotlight in late 2025 due to revelations of large-scale fraud. Prosecutors allege that fraudsters stole billions in public funds by setting up companies that billed state agencies for social services they never provided. Most of the defendants charged are of Somali descent. In December, a video by YouTuber Nick Shirley exposing the alleged fraud went viral on social media. As the scandal grew, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz announced on Jan. 5 he would not seek reelection.

Mark Osler is a law professor at the University of St. Thomas in Minneapolis and a former federal and state prosecutor. He believes the entire Operation Metro Surge mission was wrong. →

A woman in Minneapolis reacts after federal immigration officers used a battering ram to break down her front door before arresting her husband.

“Anytime that you’re addressing a problem, proportion is always important,” he said. Osler agreed that the fraud scandal is “atrocious.” But, he added, “if that was the true concern, we would have been flooded with forensic accountants.” Instead, what we’re seeing is “oppressive law enforcement that is way overstepping the bounds of what’s necessary to address a problem.”

But Max Rymer, a Minnesota state representative and a Republican, said that while Trump and some members of the administration may have rhetorically linked the fraud scandal and immigration enforcement, they are separate problems. “We really have not vetted our illegal immigration problem here in Minnesota, which is vast. At least our two biggest population centers are not sharing any data,” he said. “I think that was more of the reason for Operation Metro Surge than the actual fraud problem.”

During his press conference, Homan said agents detained 14 people with homicide convictions, 139 with assault convictions, 87 who have committed sex offenses, and 28 gang members.

But Homan acknowledged officers made mistakes. “Was it a perfect operation? No,” he said. Homan announced he was unifying operations under a single chain of command, which had not been the case before.

Trump also admitted Operation Metro Surge could have been handled differently. “I learned that maybe we can use a little bit of a softer touch,” he told NBC News. “But you still have to be tough. These are criminals. We’re dealing with really hard criminals.”

Mark Krikorian of the Center for Immigration Studies said DHS had put too much emphasis on “body armor enforcement,” meaning agents going out and arresting people. Instead, he said they should put more emphasis on what he calls “briefcase enforcement,” meaning enforcing the laws against hiring illegal immigrants and encouraging

Federal agents confront protesters in Minneapolis on Jan. 24.

“I learned that maybe we can use a little bit of a softer touch.”

self-deportation. He believes both types of enforcement are necessary, but in Operation Metro Surge, “I think they were out of balance.”

Trump likely picked Homan to deal with the situation because of his extensive experience. He served under six presidential administrations during his three decades in law enforcement. During his press conference, Homan called out protesters who set up roadblocks to keep out ICE agents. He noted their actions were illegal and said local law enforcement would deal with them.

Before Homan arrived, the protests turned deadly. Agents shot and killed Renée Goode on Jan. 7 and Alex Pretti on Jan. 24. Both shootings are currently under investigation. On Feb. 2, DHS Secretary Kristi Noem said officers in Minnesota would start wearing body cameras, a demand from Democratic lawmakers, who said that would help prevent future incidents.

Homan said the ICE agent draw-down is possible only because of “unprecedented cooperation” from local law enforcement. Local jails will cooperate with ICE to arrest illegal immigrants

DAVID GUTTENFELDER/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX



in custody. “Arresting a public safety threat in the safety and security of a jail is the safest thing we could do,” he said. It also requires far fewer agents. Homan calls this “smart law enforcement, not less law enforcement.”

Cooperation between local jails and ICE has been a significant bone of contention not only in Minnesota but also in other Democratic-controlled states. Opponents argue such cooperation undermines trust between immigrant communities and law enforcement.

Last year, state Rep. Max Rymer introduced a bill to force local governments in Minnesota to cooperate with immigration authorities when it comes to violent criminals and people suspected of committing violent crimes. The bill did not pass.

Rymer is disappointed that Operation Metro Surge has overshadowed the fraud scandal. Toward the end of last year, he was encouraged that “Minnesota was propelled into the national spotlight for the incompetence that we’ve had to live under for a long, long time.” He hoped Minnesotans would vote for a radical change of leadership. “But right now, fraud has taken a back burner in this state.”

At the national level, attention is turning to the midterm elections in November. Polls show Republicans are likely to lose their majority in the House of Representatives, which is unsurprising. “In the midterms, the party in power pretty much always loses the majority in one or both houses of Congress in the first midterm of the president’s term,” said Krikorian. But he thinks the economy will weigh much more heavily on the minds of voters than immigration, unless the aggressive enforcement tactics continue into the fall. Krikorian thinks that’s why Trump sent Homan to Minnesota to defuse the situation. “He sent the adults to oversee what’s going on over there.” ■

—with additional reporting by
Josh Schumacher

ILLUSTRATION BY KRIEG BARRIE



BY THE NUMBERS

Going viral

Measles resurges as a rash of cases spreads

BY JOHN DAWSON

2,242

The number of confirmed measles cases in the United States last year according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, making 2025 the biggest year for measles since 1991. Health organizations declared measles eliminated in the United States in 2000, but the Pan American Health Organization could revoke that status when it meets in April to review 2025 and 2026 outbreaks.

920

The number of measles cases recorded in an ongoing outbreak centered around Spartanburg County, S.C., as of Feb. 6. Health officials in Washington state report the virus has spread to the West Coast.

91.26%

The U.S. vaccination rate for measles according to research published by Johns Hopkins University last year, down from 93.92% prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and below the 95% rate that health experts say is necessary to stop the spread of measles.

9 out of 10

The number of people without immunity who are likely to catch measles if in proximity of an infected person, according to the CDC, making measles one of the most contagious of all viruses.



WASHINGTON MEMO

Churches and state

Some Washington pastors find themselves contending with outsider assumptions

by CAROLINA LUMETTA

→ To get to King's Church in Washington, D.C., congregants typically walk, ride the Metro, or find a nearby parking garage. There's not a parking lot or steeple in sight. For a few hours every Sunday morning, this Southern Baptist church takes unlikely shape inside a downtown event venue owned by a bar.

One Sunday in January, Pastor Ben Palka addressed the elephant in the room.

"Well, I learned this week that I am a D.C. insider," he opened his sermon. He was referring to a *Vanity Fair* article about King's Church published days

earlier. It called King's a gathering place for conservatives aligned with the Make America Great Again ideology. As portrayed by the pop culture magazine, the gathering was a secretive assemblage of political power players, where fellowship time after the service was networking for jobs and midweek small group meetings were political war rooms. The proof? The attendance of conservative White House and Capitol Hill staffers.

FROM LEFT: Pastors Daniel Davis, Ben Palka, and Wesley Welch co-lead services at King's Church DC.

That Sunday, Palka came clean: "From time to time on Monday nights, a group of us meet at my house, and we spend time sitting around my kitchen table plotting, plotting how to get economic, cultural, scientific, and political leverage. ... I'm talking about one of the world's most famous turn-based strategy games—*Civilization VII*."

Despite the tongue in cheek, it's perhaps understandable why King's might look unusual to outsiders. A church in a bar sounds scandalous to some, yet Washington pastors commonly turn to innovative meeting locations. But what

Vanity Fair missed is that King's Church members simply exemplify the industry of the city: politics. However, they come to church for something entirely different.

With 857 houses of worship in 2015, Washington ranked fourth for the most religious venues per resident. Since then, real estate developers have turned some houses of worship into luxury condos. Many churches share space with other congregations, swapping the early and late morning services.

"You are either theologically liberal and dying, or gospel preaching and have a shot at survival," said King's staff pastor Daniel Davis. "If you look around, it's like a cemetery of once-faithful churches that are now emptied and flying rainbow flags."

A 2024 Pew survey found that 56% of D.C. residents describe themselves as Christians, but 47% seldom or never attend religious services. Sunday morning brunch, by contrast, is the fashionable activity.

After pastors Ben Palka and Wesley Welch founded it in 2018, King's Church ping-ponged between hotels, a charter school, a church funeral chapel, and the Spy Museum. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, its congregation grew from 50 members to now around 600. Penn Social, a recently renovated bar, accommodates the congregation's Sunday morning gatherings, while during the week Welch, Palka, and Davis work out of an office converted from a row house on 10th Street Northeast. They're in the middle of a capital campaign to purchase their own building.

"Sometimes the proximity can be confused as intent," Palka said. "If you're swimming in a political context, and you have people who work in politics, people can read into that and think we must be recruiting political people. No, it's just the nature of the industry here."

It is true that most churchgoers in Washington have some connection to politics: Some are federal employees, others work at lobbying organizations, some are journalists covering the bosses of their fellow church members. Davis is a former Senate speechwriter, and Palka has experience in defense and national security.

But in our interviews, the pastors pushed back against the idea that King's is a MAGA hub. Although they said many of the congregants are likely conservative in their day jobs, the church is not partisan. It avoids endorsing political candidates, and it has declined partnerships with Turning Point USA and other politically oriented organizations.

"If I meet with a staffer whose boss is involved in some high-stakes political showdown, and they come and meet with me after a long day at work, we're not talking about the showdown. We're talking about their life," Davis said. "Church is a space for them to actually get away from the craziness of their job. It's way less political than most people think it is."

Less than 3 miles away, the District Church, planted in 2010, meets in a high school auditorium. The congregation is awaiting renovations on its future home, a historic Baptist church strategically located along 16th Street Northwest. Colloquially known as the "Highway to Heaven," the street hosts a high number of churches, mosques, and synagogues, culminating in the historic St. John's Episcopal Church across the park from

the White House. Like King's, the typical attendee at the District Church is young, highly motivated, and only in town for a few years.

"Everybody else's national news is our local news," Lead Pastor Aaron Graham said. "The question is not *if* we're engaged but *how* we're engaged in politics as Christians. I think we want people to vote. We want people to pay attention to what's happening in the news. ... But I try to stay away from electoral politics or partisan politics."

In practice, that means Graham pushes the church toward unity, despite the potentially conflicting political views of his congregants. The fact that some Washington churchgoers also have the chance to write policy presents D.C. pastors with unique challenges.

"Whenever I do speak up about something that's more political, you can almost hear the room hold their breath," Graham said. "My theory is that they're nervous that I'm going to say something that's explicitly partisan that may jeopardize friendships in the church because the conversation later is going to be, 'Are you for or against what Pastor Aaron said?'"

Davis, the King's pastor, agreed about that potential pitfall.

"As a pastor, especially in D.C., you have to not allow [your politics] to affect your shepherding of people who might differ on some things and recognize that politics is not the greatest thing," he said. "If there's anything I learned in 10 years working in politics, it's that it makes a terrible god."

The Sunday after the *Vanity Fair* article, Palka joked lightly about running an insider conservative recruiting network. Then he launched into his ongoing sermon series. The topic was about how to live as a Christian in a secular environment that misunderstands you. The title: "Life in Babylon." ■



DEPARTURES

Sanford and Son star dead at 79

by JOHN DAWSON



**Demond
Wilson**

A groundbreaking television actor who starred in one of the most popular shows of its time, Wilson died Jan. 30. He was 79. After a stint as an infantry soldier in the Vietnam War, Wilson made his way into acting and eventually landed a role opposite revered comedian Redd Foxx on *Sanford and Son* in 1972. Wilson played it straight, giving the veteran comedian space to execute punch lines. The Norman Lear show proved a ratings hit, peaking at No. 2 just behind *All in the Family*. Later, Wilson would become a Pentecostal minister and pastor a church in Los Angeles. In 1995, Wilson founded Restoration House of America, a vocational ministry to support former inmates.



**Catherine
O'Hara**

An actress who rose from the ranks of Canadian sketch comedy to become one of Hollywood's most reliable laughs, O'Hara died Jan. 30. She was 71. O'Hara broke through as a cast member with the Canadian sketch comedy show *SCTV* alongside John Candy, Rick Moranis, and Eugene Levy. For much of her career, O'Hara's best comedic work was performed alongside her fellow *SCTV* alumni. While starring as the mother in *Home Alone*, she shared a memorable dialogue with Candy. She appeared alongside Levy in three mockumentaries—*Waiting for Guffman*, *Best in Show*, and *A Mighty Wind*. She also earned an Emmy for her part in the CBC Television comedy *Schitt's Creek*, also with Levy.



**William
Foege**

An epidemiologist and medical missionary whose innovations helped lead to the eradication of one of the world's deadliest diseases, Foege died Jan. 24. He was 89. After medical and public health school, Foege became a Lutheran medical missionary in Nigeria. In 1966, he was tasked with containing the spread of smallpox in a remote Nigerian village. Without enough supplies for mass vaccination, Foege developed a new approach. By contact tracing those who contracted smallpox, Foege vaccinated those in proximity to the disease who faced greater risk. Foege's "ring vaccination" strategy proved successful and became the primary method to control the spread of smallpox, which was declared eradicated in 1980.



**John L.
Allen Jr.**

A veteran reporter serving at the Vatican who provided an inside look into one of the most complex and opaque organizations in the world, Allen died Jan. 22. He was 61. A Kansas native, Allen began writing for the *National Catholic Reporter* in 1997 and opened the publication's Vatican bureau in Rome in 2000. There, Allen built relationships in the notoriously secretive organization and became the journalist other journalists would read when they wanted to understand the inner workings of the Catholic Church. He took his insider knowledge to CNN in 2005 following the death of Pope John Paul II and joined the staff of *The Boston Globe* in 2014 while simultaneously launching the Catholic news website *Crux*.



**Gladys
West**

A mathematician and computer programmer whose calculations sharpened our understanding of the shape of the Earth, West died Jan. 17. She was 95. Born in a sharecropping community in rural Virginia, West pursued education as a means of escaping poverty. After graduating with degrees in mathematics from Virginia State College, she took a civilian job with what would later become known as the Navy Surface Warfare Center. Eventually she led a team of computer programmers in precisely defining the shape of the Earth. Armed with West's data, government scientists developed the Global Positioning System. She was inducted into the Air Force Space and Missile Pioneers Hall of Fame in 2018.

WILSON: NBCU PHOTO BANK/NBCUNIVERSAL VIA GETTY IMAGES; O'HARA: JAMIE MCCARTHY/WIREIMAGE; FOEGE: HANDOUT; ALLEN: YOUTUBE; WEST: MIKE MORONES/THE FREE LANCE STAR VIA AP



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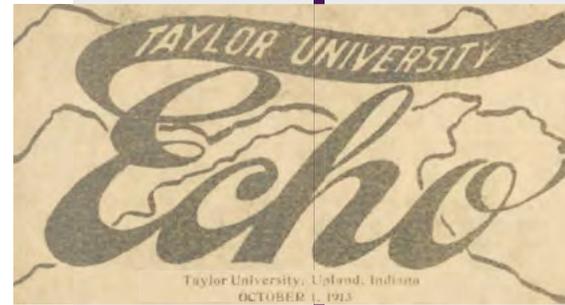
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HUMAN RACE

Scriptural defense

by GRACE SNELL

➔ Republican House Speaker **Mike Johnson** sparked backlash for citing Scripture in a detailed defense of U.S. immigration enforcement in response to concern from Pope Leo XIV. Leo, the first American pope, had called U.S. citizens to “deep reflection” about how they are treating immigrants in light of Jesus’ words in Matthew 25:35: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” After Migrant Insider editor Pablo Manríquez posed this critique, Johnson made the case “borders and walls are biblical,” and later posted a lengthy rationale to his X feed. Johnson argued scriptural admonitions to welcome sojourners were given to individuals, while it is the responsibility of the civil government to maintain order and protect its citizens. This exchange comes as the relationship between the new pontiff and President Donald Trump remains as yet ill-defined. The two Americans have not yet met, and Leo’s office recently announced the pope will not visit his home country this year. Many top officials in the Trump administration are Catholic, including Vice President JD Vance, and Trump won a majority of the Catholic vote in 2024. However, the White House and the Vatican have diverged on other key policy issues, including the United Nations, the war in Ukraine, and in vitro fertilization.

LIFE IN PRISON

The 59-year-old man convicted of planning to assassinate President Donald Trump will spend the rest of his life in prison. Secret Service agents found Ryan Routh waiting with a loaded semi-automatic rifle near the sixth hole of the then-candidate’s West Palm Beach golf course in September 2024, according to prosecutors. A jury convicted Routh, after a two-week trial in September 2025, during which the would-be assassin represented himself. The court handed down his life sentence on Feb. 4. Routh will serve his sentence without the chance of parole. The court tacked on an additional seven years for a felony gun charge.

—Christina Grube

JUST IN TIME

Sanitation worker **Doug Haiko** stopped long enough on his route to save an 18-month-old boy from choking. The Vernon, Conn., garbage-truck driver pulled over after



seeing a woman in distress beside a parked car. He found the child’s face was

turning blue, and forcefully patted him on his back long enough for a small toy to pop out. Haiko then wrapped the boy in his own coat until the ambulance he called for on his radio arrived. “We should all know CPR and the Heimlich,” Haiko said after the town of Vernon’s elected leaders honored him during their Feb. 3 council meeting.

—Todd Vician

HARM DONE

Respected Houston transplant surgeon **John Stevenson Bynon Jr.** faces charges of falsifying his patients' medical records to prevent them from getting vital liver transplants. According to a Feb. 5 indictment, families spent months waiting and hoping for organ donations without realizing Bynon had tam-

pered with their paperwork.

Three patients died, while two others switched

hospitals and eventually received transplants. The U.S. Attorney's Office in Houston charged Bynon with five counts of making false statements in healthcare matters, allegations that could come with a five-year federal prison sentence and over \$1 million in fines. Prosecutors have not yet provided a possible motive for Bynon's alleged actions. —*Grace Snell*

BUDGET TARGET

A Maryland man is facing attempted murder charges after he showed up at Office of Management and Budget Director Russell Vought's Northern Virginia home wearing a surgical mask and gloves. Colin Demarco, 26, is due to appear in court on Feb. 23. Federal law enforcement agents uncovered Demarco's previous claims that he was writing a manifesto and notes detailing weapons and a "body disposal guide." A Ring doorbell camera captured Demarco at the front door of Vought's home on Aug. 10,

according to the criminal complaint. Demarco was arrested on Jan. 22 by the Arlington County Police. He was also charged with carrying a firearm without a permit and unlawfully wearing a mask. —*Mary Jackson*

FAMILY HERO

Media outlets in Australia hailed 13-year old Austin Appelbee as a real-life hero on Feb. 4 when he detailed his dramatic 2.5 mile swim to save his stranded family, a feat described as "superhuman." The Australian boy, his mother, and two siblings were using an inflatable kayak and paddleboards at a beach near Quindalup when wind swept them out to sea. With his kayak taking on water, Appelbee set out alone for shore, eventually abandoning both the kayak and a life jacket he said slowed his swimming. He reached land around 6 p.m., some four hours after he began. A search helicopter located his mother and siblings more than two hours later. None of the family members required hospitalization. —*Kim Henderson*

Austin Appelbee



OFF THE COURT

Charles Bediako's return to college basketball was sidelined Feb. 9 after five games when an Alabama judge denied his request to play while his suit against the NCAA continues. The 23-year-old University of Alabama center left the Crimson Tide in 2023 after two seasons and played in the NBA's developmental league. The NCAA denied Bediako's January request to return, saying his two years playing professionally exhausted his athletic eligibility. Bediako countered he didn't appear in an NBA game and the NCAA selec-

tively enforces eligibility since dozens of college hoopsters have played professionally, mostly in international leagues. The NCAA feared more pros would return if Bediako won. —*Todd Vician*

JUDGE CHARGED

A Detroit judge and three other defendants were charged on Jan. 30 for conspiring to steal from people who require court-appointed guardians. Nancy Williams owned Guardian and Associates, a fiduciary appointed by the Wayne County Probate Court for incapacitated people in over 1,000 cases. Judge Andrea Bradley-Baskin and her father Avery Bradley operated a law firm in the probate court that often represented Guardian and Associates. And Dwight Rashad ran multiple care homes for the elderly, some of whom had court-appointed guardians. According to the IRS, the defendants "conspired to systematically embezzle funds from wards" to a tune of more than \$270,000. Bradley-Baskin has been taken off her docket, and the case awaits a full IRS investigation. —*Bekah Bernhardt* ■

Venezuela advances political amnesty bill



Venezuela The National Assembly voted unanimously Feb. 5 for a General Amnesty Bill to free political prisoners. The vote came one month after the capture of dictator Nicolás Maduro by U.S. forces and the reopening of Venezuela’s oil industry to foreign investors. Top official Jorge Rodríguez, brother of acting president Delcy Rodríguez, apologized during the legislative session “for the crimes committed all these years,” urging fellow deputies to “act swiftly” for a final approval of the bill. Venezuelan human rights group Foro Penal welcomed the news “with optimism but caution,” citing the need for transparency and public involvement in the drafting of the law. According to Foro Penal, 350 political dissidents have left prison since Jan. 8, but close to 700 remain behind bars. —Carlos Pérez

Libya Saif al-Islam Gadhafi, 53, the influential son of late Libyan dictator Muammar Gadhafi, was shot dead Feb. 3 by four masked gunmen who broke into his home in Zintan, northwestern Libya. Educated at the London School of Economics and a fluent English speaker, he was once seen as Libya’s face of moderation and reform. In June 2011, the ICC issued arrest warrants against him for murders committed during the NATO-backed uprising that overthrew his father. Saif’s declaration as a presidential candidate in Nov. 2021 generated so much outcry that elections were postponed indefinitely. Libya remains divided between a UN-backed government based in Tripoli and an eastern administration led by Military Commander Khalifa Haftar. Experts say Gadhafi’s death removes a major obstacle to holding elections in Libya.

—Olalekan Raji



POPULATION
7.3 million

LANGUAGE
Arabic

RELIGION
96.6% Islam,
2.7% Christian

GOVERNANCE
Republic under
provisional
government

GDP
\$48.4 billion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Crude oil,
refined oil,
natural gas

Greece At least 15 migrants died in a collision between a speed boat and a coast guard vessel off the coast of Chios Island on Feb. 3. Trying to evade pursuit, the speed boat reversed into the other vessel and capsized. Search crews rescued 24 people, most of them from Afghanistan. “The criminals are the traffickers,” said Greek Migration Minister Thanos Plevris, while urging parliament to increase penalties against traffickers. In 2025 Greece introduced stricter policies against asylum-seekers, consistent with an EU trend of tightening immigration enforcement. According to the European Council of Refugees and Exiles, 137,000 illegal Mediterranean border crossings were made in 2025, an 11% decrease from 2024. In 2025, 1,871 migrants were recorded killed or missing during irregular crossings, compared to 2,573 the previous year.

—*Evangeline Schmitt*



POPULATION
10.4 million

LANGUAGE
Greek

RELIGION
90% Greek Orthodox, 3% other Christian, 2% Muslim

GOVERNANCE
Republic

GDP
\$256 billion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Refined petroleum, pharmaceuticals

Saudi Arabia The Ministry of Agriculture announced Feb. 3 it will issue passports to the country’s 2.2 million camels. The identification document will include the camel’s microchip number, name, birth information, and vaccination records, plus photos of the camel’s left and right sides. The new database will regulate trade and transport and help prove ownership in the kingdom’s \$13 billion dollar camel industry. The system will also help ensure the traditional beauty of camels entering pageants for prizes totaling \$80 million. In 2023, officials discovered 49% of entrants had had illegal cosmetic treatments including Botox or surgery to enhance lips, noses, and humps. —*Amy Lewis*



Philippines A massive fire broke out in a village of stilt houses Feb. 3 in the southernmost province of Tawi Tawi, destroying more than 1,000 homes and displacing 5,000 residents. Strong winds fanned the blaze that quickly spread through the wooden structures. Firefighters extinguished the fire about four hours after it started, and there were no reported casualties. Officials have temporarily housed the displaced in a university gym and in tents in open fields and announced a \$425 cash grant for each affected family. The cause of the fire was not immediately clear, but locals reported that residents routinely stock gasoline and other fuels in their homes, which likely contributed to the disaster. —*Joyce Wu*

Panama The Panama Ports Company (PPC) and its Hong Kong-based parent company CK Hutchinson Holdings began arbitration proceedings Feb. 4 against Panama after the country’s supreme court annulled contracts for PPC to run two ports at both ends of the Panama Canal, calling the company’s terms of operations unconstitutional. Beijing denounced the ruling and directed state-owned companies to freeze investment projects in Panama in retaliation. In 2021 PPC received a 25-year extension for its port contracts. Many view the ruling as a win for the Trump administration, which has been applying pressure on Panama to reduce influence from China. The canal generates over 7% of Panama’s annual GDP and sees 5% of global trade flow through its waters. —*Elisa Palumbo*



POPULATION
4.5 million

LANGUAGE
Spanish

RELIGION
63% Roman Catholic, 25% Protestant

GOVERNANCE
Republic

GDP
\$86 billion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Copper, bananas

U.S. BRIEFS

New Mexico officials eye raw milk in baby's death



→ A newborn's death from a listeria infection was likely tied to the mother's raw milk consumption during pregnancy, state health officials said Feb. 3. While investigators could not identify the exact cause, the New Mexico Department of Health stated the death "underscores the serious risks raw dairy poses" to at-risk populations, including pregnant women and children. Raw milk is not pasteurized, the process of heating milk to destroy harmful germs. Proponents believe pasteurization eliminates the dairy product's health benefits. Weekly sales of raw cow's milk increased 21% between 2023 and 2024, according to a PBS report, driven in part by high-profile supporters such as Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. But consuming food or beverages made from raw milk can expose people to various disease-causing germs, including listeria, one of the leading causes of death from foodborne illnesses in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Federal law bans interstate sale and distribution of raw milk but permits states to set their own regulations. In New Mexico, retail sales of unpasteurized dairy products are legal but require a permit. —Mary Jackson



POPULATION

2.1 million

GOVERNOR

Michelle Lujan Grisham ▢

U.S. SENATORS

Martin Heinrich ▢, Ben Ray Lujan ▢

INDUSTRY

Aerospace and defense, film, outdoor recreation, energy, biosciences, agriculture

West Virginia The Mountain State spends about \$62 million a year on out-of-state treatment for foster care children. Gov. Patrick Morrisey hopes to allocate \$6 million to bring some of the children back to West Virginia. The state currently sends almost 400 children to foster facilities across the nation because there aren't enough treatment beds in-state for children who need high levels of care. In Morrisey's January State of the State address, he proposed a "Bring Them Home Fund" to provide more in-state beds for foster children with acute mental and behavioral needs. But during a late January budget meeting, Democratic Del. John Williams asked whether \$6 million was enough. "That's less than 10% of what we're paying now out of state," Williams said. "Is \$6 million going to bring 10% of our kids home?" —Bekah Bernhardt

Arizona Flagstaff police arrested three 20-year-old executive board members of the fraternity Delta Tau Delta at Northern Arizona University for hazing in connection with the death of an 18-year-old following a rush party. Police said the party took place at an off-campus house affiliated with the fraternity the man was pledging, but they have not released the cause of death or the victim's identity. The death is likely one of more than 100 hazing deaths since 2000, and the tragedy is fueling calls for more aggressive prosecution of those who engage in the practice. Jack's Law, which Arizona passed in 2022, made hazing a misdemeanor or a felony. But David Bianchi, a top fraternity hazing lawyer, said nothing will change if prosecutors don't seek criminal charges.

—Addie Offermans

CRAIG KOHLRUSS/FRESNO BEE/TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE VIA GETTY IMAGES



Tennessee Tennessee’s highest appeals court ruled unanimously on Feb. 4 that records related to the 2023 Covenant School shooting must be released, overturning a lower-court order that had blocked access for nearly two years. The court said attorneys for the Metro Nashville Police Department acknowledged the investigation is complete, weakening claims that the records should remain sealed because the case was still active. The ruling allows a public records lawsuit, filed by several organizations under the Tennessee Public Records Act, to move forward in Davidson County court. The decision does not require the immediate release of the records, including the shooter’s journals. Instead, the case returns to the trial court to determine which documents can be disclosed and what information, if any, should be redacted. The appeals court emphasized that records cannot be withheld in their entirety simply because they contain some exempt material. Former student Audrey Hale killed three 9-year-old children and three adults in the Nashville school rampage. Police later revealed Hale spent years researching and planning the attack. —*Kim Henderson*

Florida In two days, Floridians rounded up roughly 2,000 cold-stunned green iguanas, one of the state’s most destructive invasive species. Freezing temperatures can cause the reptiles to go into a coma-like state known as torpor. Because of the recent cold snap, they littered lawns and fell out of trees, in some cases injuring unsuspecting humans, since male green iguanas can weigh up to 17 pounds. On Jan. 30, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission issued an executive order temporarily allowing residents to round up the reptiles without a permit and deliver them to designated locations. Authorities planned to humanely kill the reptiles or transfer them to permitted wildlife sellers. The office warned the public not to bring the iguanas into their homes or cars since the creatures can warm up “more quickly than you might expect” and become aggressive. During the weekend roundup, volunteer trappers carried hundreds of the lifeless-looking iguanas to the drop-off sites. —*Bekah Bernhardt*



POPULATION
23.3 million

GOVERNOR
Ron DeSantis^R

U.S. SENATORS
Ashley Moody^R,
Rick Scott^R

INDUSTRY
Aviation,
life sciences,
defense,
tourism

New York New York Attorney General Letitia James announced the state plans to deploy legal observers, who will act as “neutral witnesses,” to areas of reported immigration enforcement activity around the state. James said the monitors, garbed in purple safety vests, will collect information that “may inform future legal action” but will not interfere with law enforcement action. She also said recent Immigration and Customs Enforcement activity in Minnesota demonstrated how “quickly and tragically federal operations can escalate in the absence of transparency and accountability.” Protests engulfed Minneapolis after bystanders captured on video the shootings of two U.S. citizens by ICE agents. James urged New Yorkers to film and submit videos of ICE actions for her office to review. Gov. Kathy Hochul is pushing for legislation that would bar local law enforcement from conducting immigration enforcement actions at the behest of ICE. Her proposals would allow individuals to bring state-level civil actions against federal officers who violate New Yorkers’ constitutional rights. —*Addie Offereins*



COVENANT SCHOOL: GEORGE WALKER IV/AP; IGUANAS: JOE RAEDLE/GETTY IMAGES



BACKGROUND

What is net zero?

by HEATHER FRANK

➔ First introduced by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Paris in 2015, the goal of “net zero” has since influenced public policy worldwide. More than 194 countries are party to the resultant Paris Agreement. As of January, the United States has officially left the treaty, but it still affects American climate policy and public opinion.

Technically, what does net zero mean?

Burning fuel puts molecules with carbon, especially carbon dioxide, back in the atmosphere. Climatologists call these molecules carbon emissions and say they're responsible for the atmosphere's warming temperatures.

Net zero means a country has reduced carbon emissions to a low enough point that they can be naturally absorbed from the atmosphere into “carbon sinks” like forests or oceans. It's hard to change how much carbon dioxide a country can reabsorb, so achieving net zero means significantly reducing human-generated carbon emissions to limit climate change. One way is to replace burning fuel with energy sources like wind and solar.

Who is pushing for net zero? The UN has said carbon neutrality is essential to keep global warming to less than 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels. If temperatures rise more than

that, the UN claims, Earth will no longer be livable. In 2020, the World Economic Forum warned of dangerous sea level rise and extreme weather if temperatures continue to rise. More recently, in light of better evidence, some climate activists, including billionaire Bill Gates, have walked back such dire predictions.

Have any countries hit their net zero targets? Only eight countries—mostly small, forested, and nonindustrial—have reportedly reached net zero, while only a few European countries claim to be on track for the 2050 target.

What exactly did countries agree to in the 2015 Paris Agreement? As part of the Paris Agreement, each country agreed to submit individual national goals in an effort to reduce carbon emissions. Those goals are called Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) and are meant to be renewed and increased every five years. Because each nation sets its own goals, NDCs vary widely from country to country regarding targets for emission reduction and timelines to achieve them.

How legally binding is the agreement? Member countries have a legal requirement to submit NDCs, but not to keep them. A few countries have passed their NDC into domestic law.

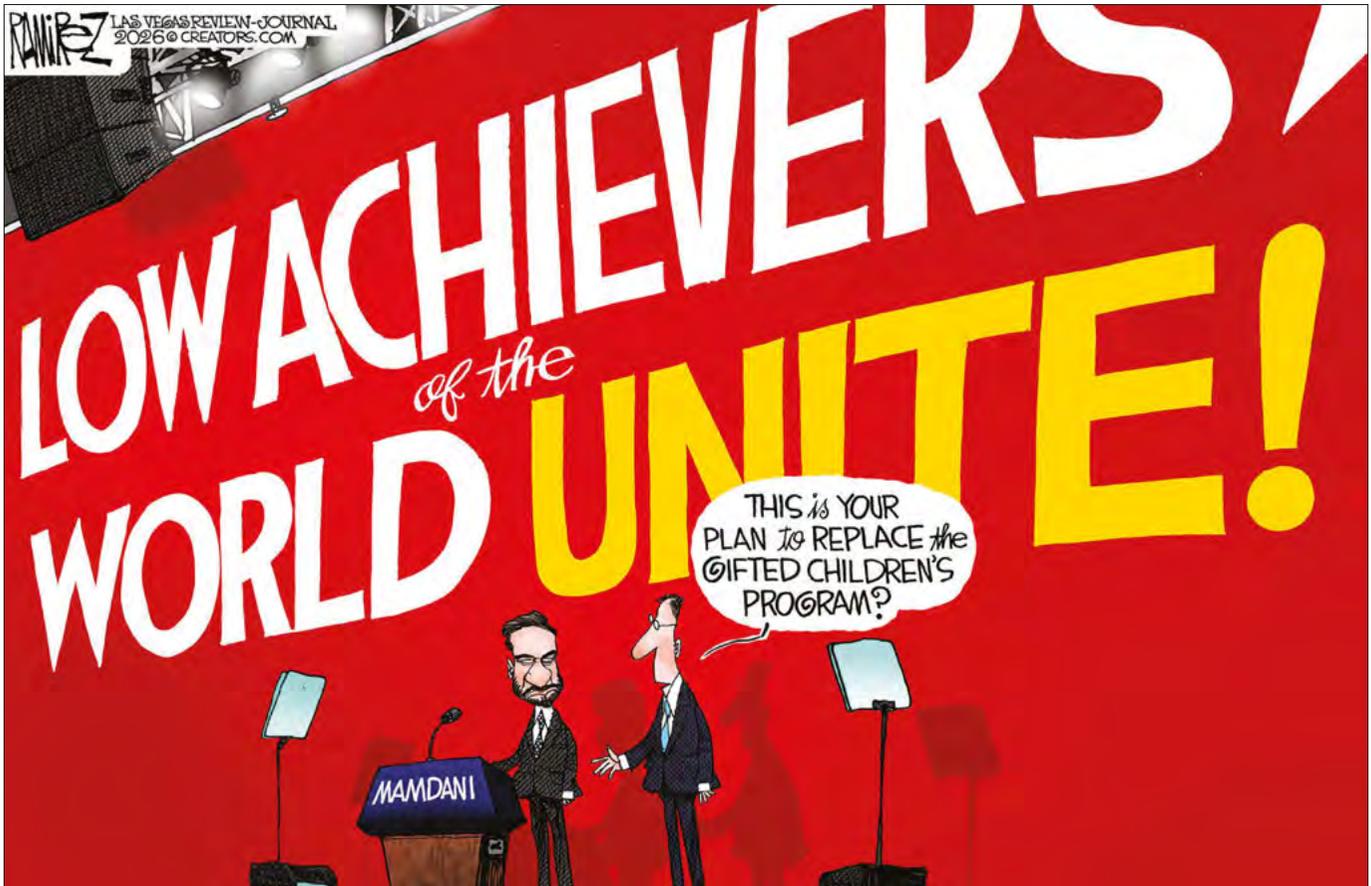
How on earth are emissions measured? Emissions measurements follow internationally agreed guidelines and are actually estimates made by combining data on types and amounts of activity in a country with emissions typically produced by those activities.

What do critics say? Critics say it's unfair for developing economies to take on net zero targets before they are fully industrialized. They also say that in developed countries, the cost of meeting these goals risks crippling economies. The Institute for Energy Research estimated the U.S. economy at the halfway point to net zero would have 1.2 million job losses, a \$7.7 trillion drop in GDP, and an \$840 uptick in household electric bills. ■

QUOTABLES

“She’ll do anything for food.”

Dog owner GREG CHAN about his Doberman pinscher named Penny who won best in show at the 150th Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show Feb. 3.



RICHARD DREW/AP

“I wish you would just hold me in contempt so that I can have a full 24 hours of sleep.”

Department of Justice attorney JULIE LE to a federal judge in Minnesota Feb. 3 describing the around-the-clock legal work generated by the immigration enforcement surge in Minnesota.

“Dude, we’re going to be calling your parents.”

An Australian police officer to a 17-year-old driver who was stopped after officers clocked him driving 117 mph Jan. 30. The teen, who only had the license for two months, now faces fines and a driving suspension.

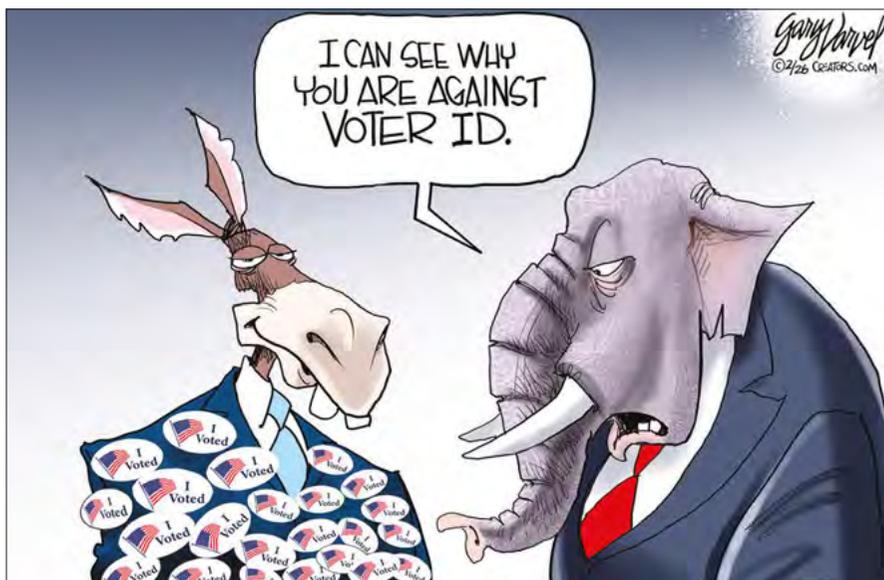
“We should take over the voting, in at least, many, 15 places. The Republicans ought to nationalize the voting.”

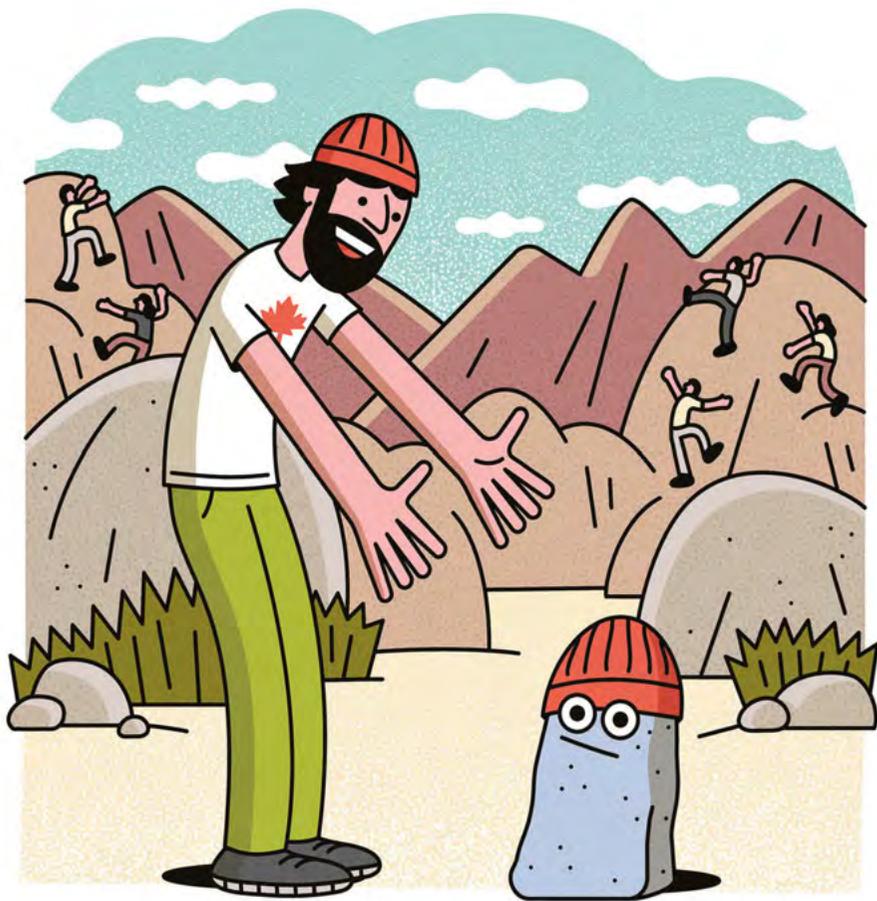
President DONALD TRUMP to podcaster Dan Bongino during an interview that aired Feb. 2 vaguely suggesting a federal takeover of elections ahead of the November midterms.

“It’s like somebody taking a hammer to my heart.”

Former *Washington Post* columnist and sportswriting legend SALLY JENKINS after the newspaper announced layoffs that would effectively end the paper’s sports section.*

*The Ringer





QUICK TAKES

Rock relocation

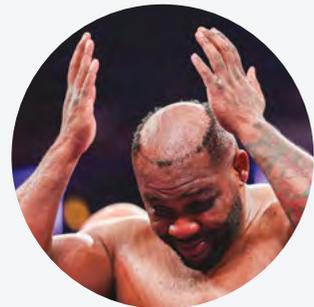
Climbers' rock disappears, turns up in another country

by JOHN DAWSON

➔ It's a little rock with a big reputation. But months ago, the granite chunk known as Portable disappeared from its familiar spot at the base of a rock-climbing haven in Squamish, British Columbia. Climbers often used the small boulder to practice grips and holds before attempting to scale a popular rock face nearby. But perhaps owing to nominative determinism, someone moved Portable—not just away from the Squamish rock face but entirely out of Canada. On Jan. 19, a social media user posted a photo of Portable at the base of a popular rock face near Bishop, Calif., more than 1,700 miles away from its original location. A Canadian climber visiting California confirmed that Portable had been relocated. Ethan Salvo, a 23-year-old Squamish climber, told the CBC that someone had not only moved Portable but also adorned the rock with googly eyes and “a really sick hat.” But the disguise didn't fool Salvo, who knows the small boulder well: “The minute I saw the shape, I knew it was it. It just looked like home. It felt like home. It weighed like home.” Salvo added that climbers may never know the real story of how the rock traveled so far, but he plans to return Portable to its rightful home soon.

Moderation on tap

Bucking centuries of tradition, the United Kingdom's Royal Navy is drying out. In January, officials announced that sailors on ship will have to limit their alcohol intake to about six pints per week and abstain from all alcohol at least two days a week. In 1970, the Royal Navy ceased allotting a daily rum ration to sailors, thus ending a 300-year-old tradition. The steady march toward dry ships has some naval traditionalists worried the new policies could harm morale. “If we start down this route, the next thing is that you should only have salads at lunchtime and the whole raft of other things like that,” retired First Sea Lord Alan West told *The Telegraph*.



A hair-raising fight

Maybe the hair was holding him back. During the second round of a professional boxing match at Madison Square Garden Jan. 31, heavyweight **Jarrell Miller** came under a ferocious attack from opponent Kingsley Ibeh. The flurry of lefts and rights detached the front of Miller's hairpiece causing the toupee to flop up and down with every blow to the face. Frustrated, Miller ripped the hairpiece off, flung it into the crowd, and eventually won a split decision. After the fight, Miller said he recently lost his hair after accidentally washing with ammonia bleach instead of shampoo.

Pass the potatoes

A bumper crop of potatoes in Germany has left some farmers with stuffed storage barns and a serious lack of buyers. In the aftermath of the biggest yield in a quarter century, farmers across Germany scrambled for buyers late last year. When one Leipzig-area grower had a big sale fall through in December, he decided simply to give the spuds away. Throughout January, the unnamed farmer's spare 440,000 pounds of potatoes went to Berlin for distribution to food banks, churches, and the general public. But the farmer's generous offer wasn't universally acclaimed. The Brandenburg Farmers' Association called the move a "disgusting PR stunt" that would "destroy regional markets."



The buck stops here

Suffolk County, N.Y., police were prepared for the worst when they responded to a bank's burglar alarm Jan. 18. But rather than find an armed and dangerous human inside, police discovered an antlered and confused buck deer. According to police, the large buck broke into the bank and caused quite a mess trying to discover an escape path. Officers were eventually able to lasso the animal and lead it safely outside. "We think the buck was looking for bucks," a police spokesman said on social media.



"We think the buck was looking for bucks."



Look what the surf washed in

Add a little salt and some oil and the residents of an English seaside town might be on course for a good snack. In mid-January, beachcombers in the town of Eastbourne discovered their shoreline covered in french fries and bags of whole onions. The loot likely came from a cargo vessel that lost containers in the rough seas of the English Channel the month prior. Sadly for residents, officials cautioned against eating the water-logged fries and onions. Some in the town hurried down to the beach to begin cleaning up the mess due to concern that local birds and seals might be less constrained in the face of a free meal and inadvertently get caught in the plastic bags.



Powering through it

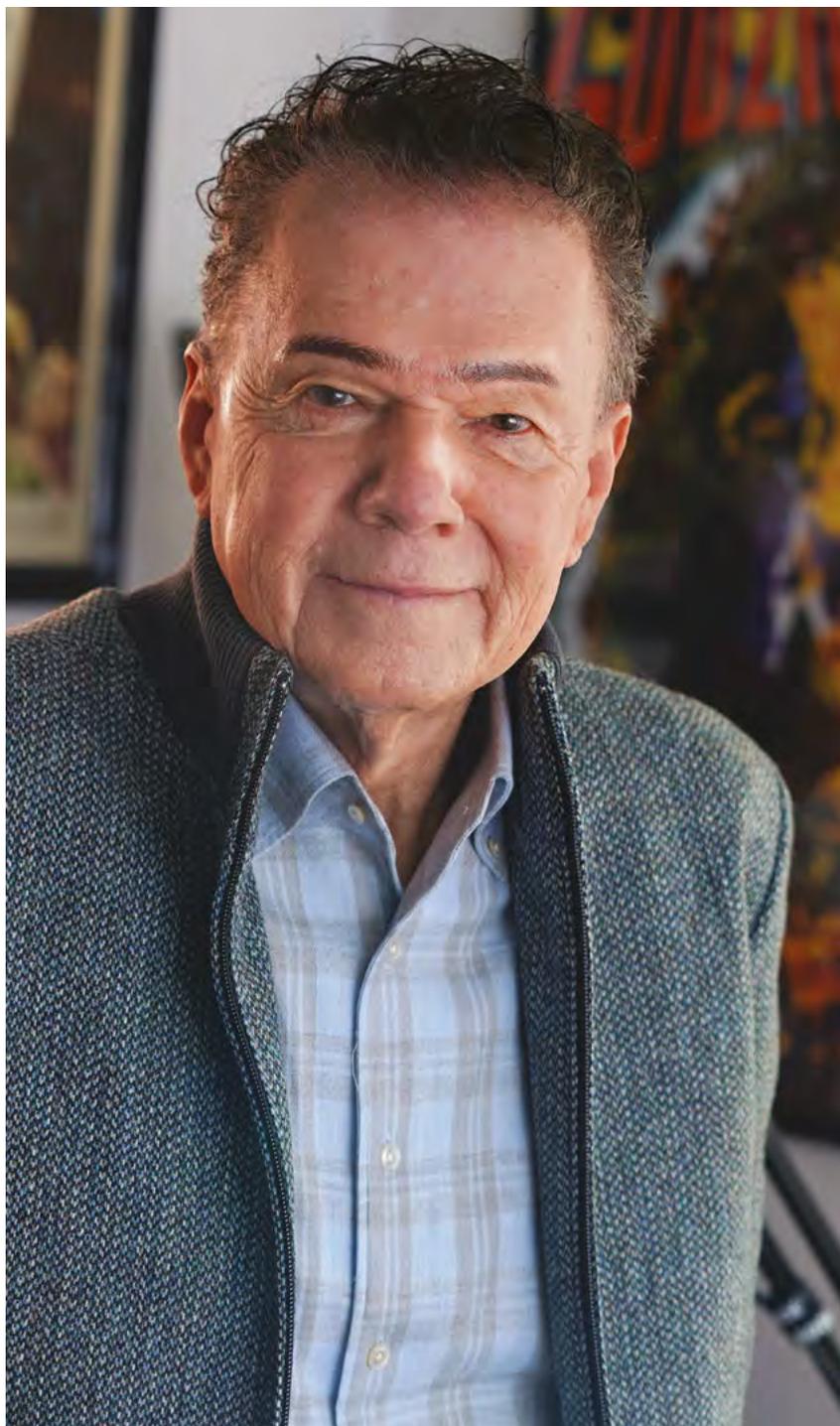
Talia Caravello may have thought she was improving her home when she shelled out \$1,500 for a portable generator as snow and ice blanketed her Nashville neighborhood Jan. 25. But try telling that to her homeowners' association. With the power out, Caravello fired up her newly acquired generator and invited friends and family over to get out of the cold. Hours later, she got an email from an HOA official instructing her to kill the generator or face fines.

According to the HOA letter, the portable generator detracted from the community's aesthetic guidelines and posed a fire hazard. Faced with scrutiny from local media, however, the HOA board reversed its decision and allowed Caravello a one-time exception to use the generator until power was restored.

Supernatural mysteries

Scientist Michael Guillen on how modern physics declares the glory of God

by GRACE SNELL



→ Michael Guillen fell in love with science as a kid growing up in East Los Angeles. His grandfathers and father were all Pentecostal ministers, but he didn't embrace faith until after he started reading the Bible with his now-wife, Laurel, while in grad school at Cornell University. Since then, he's dedicated his life to showing people how science and Christianity are in harmony.

Guillen holds a threefold Ph.D. in physics, mathematics, and astronomy and is a former Harvard physics instructor. He's an Emmy-winning science journalist and spent 14 years as science editor for ABC News, appearing regularly on *Good Morning America*, *20/20*, *Nightline*, and *World News Tonight*.

He's also host of the *Science + God* podcast and bestselling author of books like *Believing Is Seeing*, *Five Equations That Changed the World*, and *Let Creation Speak!*

YOU ARGUE MODERN SCIENCE IS FACING A CRISIS IN COSMOLOGY, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT COMES TO THE DEBATE OVER THE UNIVERSE'S ORIGINS. WHY?

If you go back to Aristotle, his answer to that question was, "Well, the universe that we see today is the universe that has always existed and that will always exist." And that belief persisted through science all the way up until Edwin Hubble looked through a telescope and found evidence that the universe is actually expanding. So, as soon as we discovered that, it introduced the idea, "Well, if something is expanding, if you run the film backwards, there must have been a time when the universe really didn't exist. It sprang into being, and now that springing into being is evidencing itself as a continuous expansion."

That was traumatic for science, and it still is, frankly. Because after all these years, science really doesn't have an answer to that.

WHERE ELSE ARE RECENT DISCOVERIES CONFRONTING SCIENTISTS WITH THE LIMITS OF THEIR OWN LOGIC?

We have in physics right now a very odd situation. It's almost like Jekyll and

Hyde. On the one hand, we have quantum mechanics, which has been around now for 100 years, and seems to explain things at the sub-microscopic level beautifully. On the other hand, the other personality is the general theory of relativity, and it helps to explain the behavior of the universe at large scales.

The problem is general relativity is completely incompatible with quantum mechanics. They just don't match. Obviously physicists are very busy working on what's called a grand unified theory, trying to unify the two personalities. No one has even come close to succeeding, not even Einstein.

WHAT DOES THIS CRISIS REVEAL ABOUT THE NATURE OF REALITY?

What we're discovering in physics is that we are faced with a supernatural universe. And for a long time, physics said, "Well, we're going to demystify this supernatural universe." But guess what? Actually, science has been brought to its knees.

When you look at modern quantum mechanics, they are having to resort to ideas and explanations of this supernatural universe with supernatural explanations. The quantum vacuum is defined as something that is nothing and everything at the same time. Well, here we go again, this very kind of paradoxical language. How can something be nothing and everything at the same time?

WHEN YOU FIRST STARTED READING THE NEW TESTAMENT IN GRAD SCHOOL, THE WORDS OF JESUS RESONATED WITH YOU BECAUSE OF YOUR PHYSICS BACKGROUND. CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHY?

He was talking in paradoxical terms: The first shall be last, you have to die in order to live, and you should love your enemies. No other figure in world religions speaks this way. And that caught my attention, because it resembled very much the language of the quantum mechanics that I was studying as a grad student at the time.

Then, of course, you read in one of the Christian creeds that Jesus was fully man and fully God. Well, quantum mechanics just takes that kind of

“They're stumped as to how to explain somebody who is brain dead having the most vivid experiences of their lives.”

paradox in stride. It is the way the universe is wired.

WHAT DOES MODERN SCIENCE SUGGEST ABOUT HUMAN NATURE?

Our physical being is supernatural. Our physical being is made up of particles that behave in ways that boggle the mind. Quantum entanglement. Quantum duality. Quantum tunneling. This stuff is, like, from another world, but yet that's what we're made of, our physical body. Now go from our physical being into the cranium. And that distinction between the brain and the mind is fascinating to me. And cognitive psychologists will admit to you that we don't understand the mind. What's a thought? It's something we can't hold in our hand, we can't inspect under a microscope, and yet we are thoughtful beings. What is a thought? We have no clue.

YOU ARGUE MODERN SCIENCE TESTIFIES THERE IS LIFE AFTER DEATH. HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE?

It has to do with the difference between the brain and the mind. So, when the brain dies, when a patient flatlines, they oftentimes have the most vivid experiences of their lives after, and they have no brain with which to experience these things. And this has been documented by Dr. Bruce Greyson and many, many other scientists. These are not flakes. These are very serious-minded people. They don't necessarily have a biblical worldview, but they're stumped as to how to explain somebody who is brain dead having the most vivid experiences of their lives.

Christianity, the Bible, offers us an explanation for what happens after we die. Its position has been timeless. Its timeless truth is, "Yes, there is life after death." And it goes on to spell out what kind of life there is.

WHAT RECENT SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERIES DO YOU FIND MOST AWE-INSPIRING?

We've discovered in just the last 50 years that 95% of the universe is invisible to us. Let that sink in. Ninety to 95% of what we call the visible, the observable universe, is actually not observable at all. It's invisible. Think about all the mysteries that are locked into that 95% of the universe that's hidden from us, that's curtained off from us. What mysteries lie behind that curtain?

DO YOU THINK SCIENTISTS WILL DISCOVER WHAT LIES BEYOND IT?

I don't know if I'll live long enough to see that, but I will when I go to the next life. That curtain will be parted, and I'll understand why our physical beings are made of supernatural atoms, and why the mind lives after the brain dies, and what is behind that. What is that 95% dark matter and dark energy, the names we give to things we have no idea about? What are they, those great mysteries? As the Bible says, now we look through a glass darkly, but then one day, when we cross that line, when our essence is conserved after our physical being dies, then our spiritual being will be able to perceive all these mysteries that are kept from us in our physical bodies. ■



VOICES JANIE B. CHEANEY

Just passing through

We're all transitional figures in God's story

What do you remember about Isaac? In the Genesis account, there's not much about him. He casts a pale shadow next to his father: No military conquests, terrifying covenant ceremonies, entertaining angels, or bargaining with the LORD. Our most striking image of Isaac is of a teenager tied up and lying on

an altar—a mountaintop experience more traumatic than exhilarating.

Isaac prefigured Jesus as a promised son and a sacrifice. He echoed Abraham as a covenant bearer and Promised Land wanderer. His chief virtue seems to be keeping out of trouble: When challenged, he moved. When enemies stuffed his well with clay, he dug another, and another. And when his own wife and son joined forces to deceive him, he took it, because what else could he do? He had his suspicions that Jacob wasn't Esau, but didn't press in, so his blessing stayed on Jacob the supplanter. Which was God's plan all along, even though we may despise poor Isaac, just a little, for letting the world walk all over him.

But Abraham's covenant son lived his life just as we do. He made his choices, as we do. He acted in accord with his upbringing, personality, conscience, and circumstances. Like everyone who ever lived on this earth, he told his own story. And not just his own, for (also like everyone who ever lived) Isaac was a transitional figure.

He happens to be one of the most significant transitional figures in redemption history: the link from great Father Abraham to Jacob-renamed-Israel. If the connection between those two colorful characters looks unimpressive

in comparison, he served his purpose, and more importantly God's purpose.

Thinking over Isaac's place in history reminded me of this: We are all Isaac, in that we tell our own stories complete with development, character arc, climactic events, and denouement. But we are also transitional figures in God's story, passing something of ourselves on to the future.

Previous generations understood this sense of obligation to posterity, if not in theological terms. My parents' generation, after slogging through a great depression and a world war, wanted their children to go further in life than they had. We baby boomers, arrogant and reckless though we were, shared some of that desire for our own kids. Our children and grandchildren, though, may be losing that sense of duty to future generations, or to the future itself.

Since peaking in the early 1960s, the world's total fertility rate has dropped to 2.2 births per woman, the lowest in recorded history. Social critics whose main concern was overpopulation are now fretting over not enough people to sustain our civilization. The big question is, why?

Young people are anxious and depressed, we're told. They're facing a world of rising costs and shrinking opportunity. They have no confidence in traditional institutions. All that may be true, at least of a significant number. But, I would add, individuals are losing the sense of themselves as transitional figures. What astute observers like Carl Trueman call "expressive individualism" has closed doors to the past and to the future, leaving the young and not-so-young stranded with only themselves as their primary obligation.

I recall stumbling across an essay about "self-actualization" in high school and thinking, "Wow! I need to start actualizing myself!" The idea was new to me then, and there's nothing wrong with making the best of the abilities God gives. But when children are told that they are perfect as they are, and only need to realize their awesomeness to be happy, they are set up for a feedback loop of obsessive self-focus. Self-actualization is one thing; self-creation is another altogether.

We might have seen young lives closing in on themselves when the truth became my truth. When respecting became affirming. When disagreement meant erasure and correction meant violence. An individual intent on self-creation will admit to childbearing only if it conforms to a certain image. Subsequent generations have no claim, especially if subsequent generations cease to exist.

I don't believe it will come to that. Gen Xers still have some growing to do and may not be as lost as we imagine. More importantly, God cares about the human race and will close it out when He's ready. Until then, we are our own story, but also transitional figures like Isaac. Where do you see yourself in that scheme? ■



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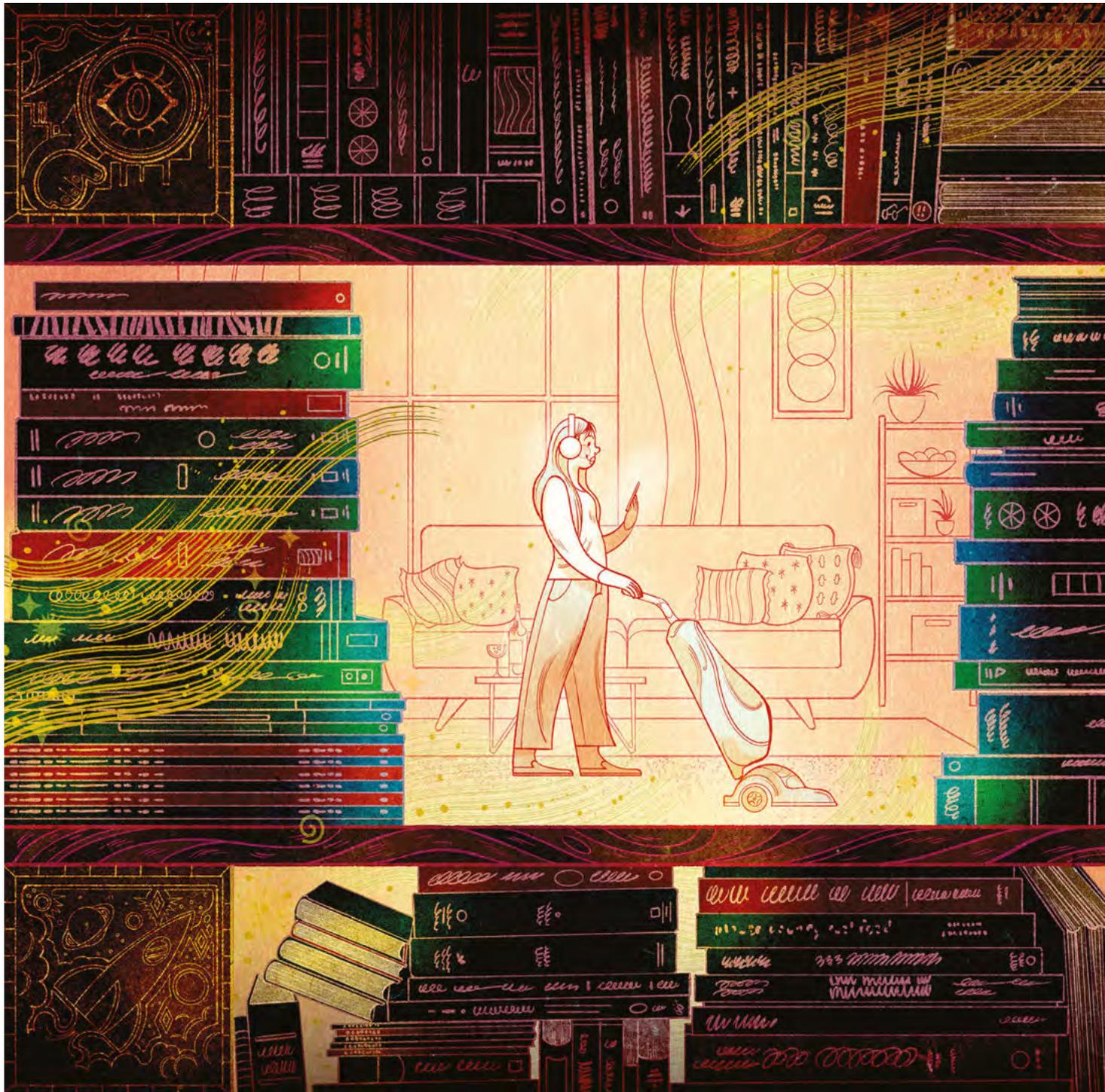
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CULTURE



TRENDING

Eager to hear

Audiobooks are gaining popularity, even as print sales decline

by BEKAH BERNHARDT

Beth Foreman pops just one earbud into her ear while mopping the kitchen floor. That way, she can still hear her husband talking. “He’ll say something to me, and I’ll hold my finger up, like, wait, gotta pause my book,” Foreman said.

A former English teacher and now an author, Foreman can rarely squeeze sit-down reading time into her busy days. So she uses apps like Audible and Libby to listen to fiction and memoirs while taking walks, driving, folding laundry, or cleaning the house. Usually, Foreman finishes at least three audiobooks a month.

Foreman, 69, is one of the roughly 134 million American adults who have listened to audiobooks at some point, according to the Audio Publishers Association, with general fiction the most popular genre. Audiobook engagement is helping to counterbalance the decline of print book reading. As a result, some experts celebrate the added literacy boost, but book lovers disagree about whether listening to an audiobook should count as reading.

Audiobooks have become a lot more accessible since the days of books on tape, thanks to apps like Audible, Everand, and the library app Libby. In a press release last May, Audible called audiobooks “the fastest-growing format in publishing” and claimed AI-generated narration

will drive down production time and costs, allowing supply to better meet growing demand. In January, publisher Simon & Schuster released Simon Maverick, an audio-first imprint that will focus on titles from self-published authors.

Spotify has even gotten into audiobooks. In 2023, the music streaming service began offering more than 150,000 audiobooks to premium subscribers. As of October, its library had grown to about half a million books.

Audiobook sales revenue hit \$2.2 billion in 2024, up 13% from the previous year. Meanwhile, daily reading for pleasure has declined by 40% within the last 20 years, according to a study published in 2025 by the University of Florida and University College London.

Often, books sell better as audiobooks on initial release. According to Macmillan Audio, *King of Ashes* by S.A. Cosby, Jeremy Renner’s *My Next Breath*, Alyson Stoner’s *Semi-Well-Adjusted Despite Literally Everything*, and *Brooke Shields Is Not Allowed to Get Old* by Brooke Shields all outsold their hardcover versions in 2025. That’s significant because, as of early January, none of those titles had paperback versions, which are generally less expensive to produce.

For some listeners, audiobooks supplement rather than replace print reading. While working in an oil field more than a decade ago, Josh →



Matthews listened to classics like *Treasure Island*. Audiobooks helped to “get some things going to my brain while doing this handyman sort of work,” Matthews said.

The primary reason he kept listening? Great narrators. “Good voice actors make a book come alive,” Matthews said. “And they almost interpret it a little bit differently than you might otherwise if you read it.”

Now an English professor at Dordt University, Matthews rarely listens to audiobooks, since the format makes it difficult to revisit passages.

But when his students admit to having listened to an assigned book, Matthews doesn’t push back. Some texts, he admits, are easier to comprehend when read aloud. Plus, “whatever gets them to read these days, is probably a bonus, because most people aren’t reading very much anymore,” Matthews said.

But Victoria Weber, a children’s director at the Williamson County Library in Tennessee, worries that relying on audiobooks means children aren’t developing a love for reading. Weber, who is also a 19-year-old student at New College Franklin, enjoys listening to audiobooks since she doesn’t have much margin for unassigned books during the school year.

But she does worry that parents are using audiobooks to substitute nurturing a love for reading in print. “I think you definitely want to make sure kids still [see] the value of print books, and that parents model that as well,” Weber said.

According to research from the U.K.-based National Literacy Trust, 42% of young people prefer to listen to a book during their free time compared to 34% who choose to read a print book.

Daniel Willingham, a professor of psychology at the University of Virginia, says audiobooks can help children develop a love of reading. “Once you’ve got your foot in the door, you keep trying to expand the child’s



Audiobooks have become a lot more accessible since the days of books on tape thanks to apps like Audible.

“If you’re not counting audiobooks as literacy, I think that’s a mistake.”

understanding of what reading can offer them,” he said.

Willingham says comprehending audio and written books uses many of the same cognitive processes.

But there are some key differences. Reading print, he says, involves more cognitive work than listening since the reader must interact with challenging sentence structures. With an audiobook, the narrator does a lot of interpretive work for the reader.

Despite the different experiences, listening to a book and reading it are both reading, Willingham argues. “[Audiobooks] allow literacy at a time that I otherwise would not be able to engage in literacy ... when I’m driving, when I’m working out,” he said. “If you’re not counting audiobooks as literacy, I think that’s a mistake.” ■



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BOOKS

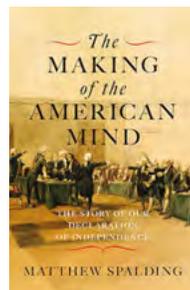
Founding philosophers

A look at the Declaration of Independence

by JANIE B. CHEANEY

→ According to Thomas Jefferson, the Declaration of Independence was not a radical document. It was an announcement based on common sense, in “terms so plain and firm as to command [the world’s] assent” to actions the American colonies were soon to take. “Neither aiming at originality of principle or sentiment, nor yet copied from any particular of previous writing, it was intended to be an expression of the American mind.”

The Making of the American Mind: The Story of Our Declaration of Independence (Encounter Books, 344



The Making of the American Mind
MATTHEW SPALDING

pp.) recaptures the moment in history that created our founding document. Hillsdale professor Matthew Spalding shows how political ferment merged with traditional thought in a room of forward-thinking men called together in Philadelphia. The time was exactly right: The Declaration probably could not have been written a half-century earlier, or a decade later. It came to light between the stable rule of kings and the revolutionary upheaval that overthrew kings.

The American mind was already well-formed long before the shooting started. Thirteen colonies had been governing themselves almost since their founding, with the English monarchy practicing, in Edmund Burke’s words, a “benign and salutary neglect.” The conflict known on this side of the Atlantic as the French and Indian War changed all that as, strapped for cash, Parliament began leaning on the colonies for more revenue to help pay for their own defense. High-handed tax laws led to colonial fury, which in turn led to monarchical overreaction in the form of “Intolerable Acts.” Open conflict flared with scattered shots on an April morning in Lexington, Massachusetts.

By June 1776, when delegates came together as a “Continental Congress,” George III had hired Hessian mercenaries and a fleet of British ships were sailing toward New York. Level heads like John Adams had hoped for a measured amount of force leading to diplomacy and independence, but events were moving too fast. Richard Henry Lee of Virginia proposed a resolution that “these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States.” What the moment demanded now was a formal statement of separation declared to the world.

Like a tour guide, Spalding walks readers through the document, pointing out key phrases and explaining their philosophical roots. As Jefferson said, the purpose of the Declaration was “not to find out new principles”—the principles already existed in the writings of both ancient (chiefly Aristotle and Cicero) and modern thinkers (like John Locke and Algernon Sydney). The Founders held a traditional view of history as “human

Spalding walks readers through the document, pointing out key phrases and explaining their philosophical roots.

events,” rather than the then-emerging conception of capital-H history as an irresistible tide. They appealed to “Nature’s God” not as “a diminution of God *into* nature (that would be pantheism) but a recognition of God’s laws *over* nature made evident by way of man’s reason.” Thus, “the human mind is capable of knowing the truth of things.”

Spalding delves into the Declaration’s ringing endorsement of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” as the foundation of God-given individual rights, based on an understanding of human nature. An examination of the list of grievances against King George demonstrates how each would later be addressed in the U.S. Constitution. For example, the complaint against arbitrary acts by the king led to the Constitution’s complicated amendment process. The practice of quartering British troops in private homes, a nonissue today, was banned by the Third Amendment.

The narrative can be dry at times and breaking up page-long paragraphs could have made for easier reading. But the author packs a store of information into a relatively short book that includes notes and a reference copy of the Declaration. A lot of water has flowed under the bridge since 1776, carrying Americans further away from their founding principles. The 250th anniversary of the Declaration is an ideal time to review our founding principles and be grateful for the men who articulated and fought for them. ■

BOOKS

Life unvarnished

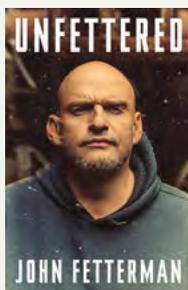
The Democrats’ contrarian gets honest

by CAROLINA LUMETTA

→ Most political memoirs amount to humble brags about achieving status or passing some landmark legislation. Most are also soft launches for presidential campaigns. But in *Unfettered* (Crown, 240 pp.), Sen. John Fetterman, D-Pa., chronicles not only his rise from small-town Pennsylvania mayor to the U.S. Senate but also his wrestling with depression.

The book starts out admitting the 6-foot-8 lawmaker sticks out like a sore thumb. Press gaggles with him in the Senate hallways look something like Gulliver and the Lilliputians. His penchant for sneakers, shorts, and a black hoodie have affected the U.S. Congressional Record when both parties passed a formal dress code for the chamber floor. Fetterman doesn’t hide his disdain for this bill, which he calls one of the only instances of bipartisan cooperation he has seen in his three years in Washington.

The memoir moves through his childhood, college, early career, and what pushed him into local politics in an economically depressed and violent town. When his own memory fails or he realizes he wasn’t seeing himself clearly, Fetterman includes accounts from his wife, brother, and close friends.



Unfettered
JOHN FETTERMAN

It’s a story of cognitive dissonance. While he was a rising star in the Democratic Party, Fetterman battled suicidal thoughts. When he arrived in Washington after a hard-fought Senate race, he could not pull himself out of a depressive fog. For years, he had described himself as someone stubborn and proud. He believed mental illness was something he could fix just by “pulling up your socks and getting on with it.”

Fetterman conquered in one of the most expensive Senate races to date even after suffering a massive stroke that left him struggling to relearn how to speak. Some of the effects continue today. But his mental health was the deeper problem. The story climaxes when in February 2023, shortly after his Senate term began, Fetterman admitted himself to a psychiatric ward at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

Fetterman has become something of the Rand Paul of the Democratic Party, often voting against his caucus on matters like immigration and Israel. Despite that, whenever reporters ask about his contrarianism, Fetterman stomps through the Senate basement repeating, “I am not a Republican.”

What is he? I think the senator is still defining that. But *Unfettered* gives a glimpse into what he doesn’t say aloud.

BOOKS

What the old stories teach

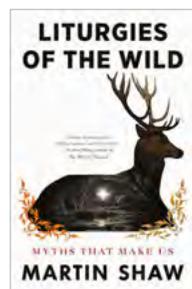
Mythology as an antidote for the modern world

by JEN CURTIS



→ Although “my truth” is a present-day mantra for many, ancient tales and stories historically created a framework for decisions, morals, and universally accepted truths. In *Liturgies of the Wild* (Sentinel, 256 pp.), Martin Shaw argues that learning these myths can help lead us to wisdom and connection. Shaw claims we live in a “myth-impooverished culture.” As a result, we are prone to only engage in storytelling that celebrates what we already believe.

Shaw thinks storytelling should help readers see bigger truths. His narrative



Liturgies of the Wild

MARTIN SHAW

can be rambling at times, but as a wilderness guide and professor, he is challenging the reader to think deeply. Where am I in the story? How can I use these lessons to work through my own life travails? Taking his cue from J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, who presented tales of journeys mingled with life lessons, Shaw presents at least a dozen myths that examine concepts like death, dreams, and evil. He shares his own testimony about finding Christ through myth made fact.

Readers might struggle with the stories' presentation: Often there is not a clear connection between the tale and the theme. But Shaw wants us to realize that, unlike what Walt Disney made us believe, fairy tales are not neatly tied with a bow. Instead, deeply understanding myths and legends provides a defense against the world's trials and evils. Simply put, accepting “duress can sometimes lead us to the palace of wisdom” and in turn will help us become better humans. But Shaw doesn't put anything simply, and the stories, metaphors, and references he uses throughout the book provide deep intriguing storytelling.

Shaw also challenges readers to value their own story. He asks readers to pay attention to creation, to stop being distracted, and to put limits on their life. These lessons are discovered throughout the pages of familiar and lesser-known characters, such as peddlers, swans, dragons, and kings.

Some readers may find a few words in the book offensive. In addition, though Shaw clearly defines himself as an Orthodox Christian, non-Christian beliefs and religions often make it into his storytelling. The chapter on passion speaks about sex and pornography but explains how the ideas of modernism have left people unfulfilled and lonely. He frequently alludes to his own wild oats of being a punk rock musician in his early adult life, but testifies that this life was empty and only upon coming to faith in Christ was he truly at peace.

Liturgies of the Wild is a great book for anyone interested in storytelling and ancient myths. Shaw offers hope with a modern-day message linked to an ancient past. ■

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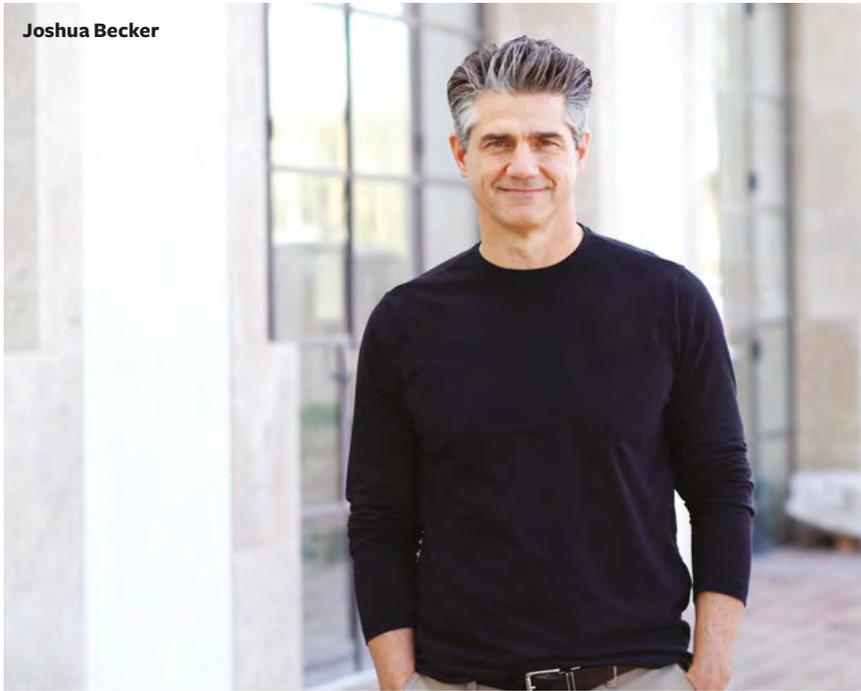
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Joshua Becker



BOOKS

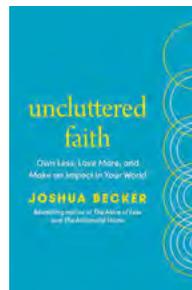
Live with less

A theological foundation for resisting consumerism

by COLLIN GARBARINO

➔ It's been more than a decade since Marie Kondo's *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* became a global phenomenon and inspired folks to start asking whether this or that particular object "sparked joy," but the minimalist movement continues to struggle against modern society's bent toward consumerism. In *Uncluttered Faith* (WaterBrook, 256 pp.), Joshua Becker advocates minimalism, swapping in Christian theology to replace Kondo's Eastern spiritualism as a justification for the practice.

Becker's story begins well before Kondo taught us to tidy up. In 2008, he was working as a pastor to students, and as he cleaned out his garage, he realized that caring for all his stuff was keeping him from meaningful time with the people he loved. He began his journey of minimalism and eventually turned his



Uncluttered Faith
JOSHUA BECKER

blog, *Becoming Minimalist*, into a full-time career.

In *Uncluttered Faith*, Becker compares our cluttered, consumer-driven American lives to the third soil in Jesus' Parable of the Sower: "As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful." Owning too much stuff takes a mental, emotional, and spiritual toll, keeping the Christian from flourishing.

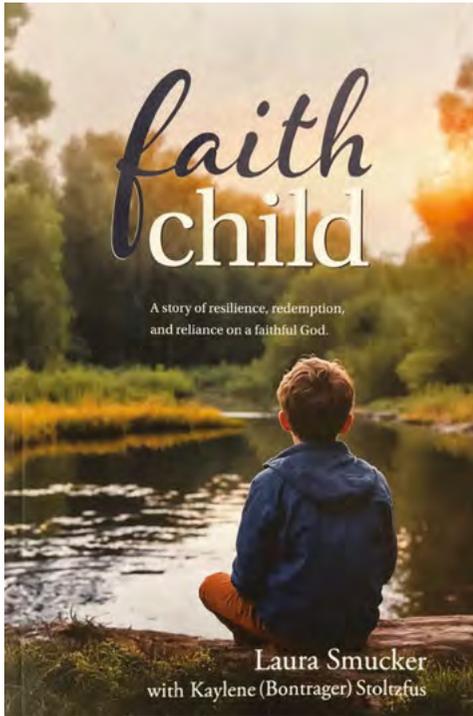
At its best, *Uncluttered Faith* gives biblical encouragement for divesting ourselves of materialist concerns. How can we pursue the kingdom of God if we're continually distracted by the vanities of the city of man? Becker says, "As you minimize the possessions that represent the world's false offer of abundance, you will maximize your experience of the true abundance Christ freely gives."

But in stretching these principles to a book-length treatise, Becker sometimes reads too much of his own agenda into the text. For example, his interpretation of Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler misses the point. Becker warns his reader that from a global perspective even poor Americans are relatively rich. But this warning seems at odds with the disciples' response to Jesus' statement that it's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of the needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom. They ask, "Who then can be saved?" thinking the rich must have a better shot at redemption than the poor. Jesus doesn't respond by saying poor people have an easier time of it. He doubles down: "With man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible." God's grace is a miracle whether it's applied to the rich or the poor.

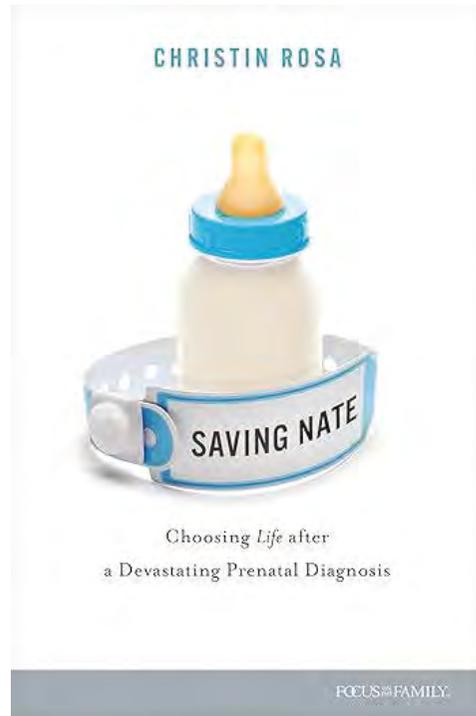
Practical books on Christian living often flirt with a form of prosperity gospel, and *Uncluttered Faith* occasionally falls into this trap by promising that if you shed your possessions you'll live your best life. But Becker's encouragement and seven-step method for decluttering are welcome motivations for those of us feeling overwhelmed by all the stuff our consumer-driven culture has foisted on us. ■

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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BOOKS

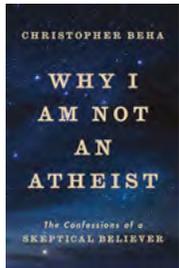
Books taking stock of our broken world

RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

Why I Am Not an Atheist

CHRISTOPHER BEHA
PENGUIN PRESS, 432 PAGES

This book follows a life shaped by confusion, courage, and a nonstop search for meaning. Beha's early life has a sense of mystery that lingers as he grows older and enters a period marked by suffering. His twin brother is nearly killed in an accident. He himself faces cancer. In search of solid ground, Beha turns to philosophy and to the New Atheists. Their arguments are self-assured, yet they never quite touch the deeper anxieties he wrestles with. A purely scientific



view feels too narrow to carry the weight of lived experience. A purely emotional view feels too unstable to guide through fear or loss. He tries to build a way of living that allows both

clear thinking and awe, both thought and longing, without forcing one to replace the other. His writing moves gently through this tension. His return to faith arises from reflection rather than revelation, coming from the recognition that theories alone cannot sustain a meaningful life and that the human heart keeps reaching for something larger than itself. —John Mac Gbillion*

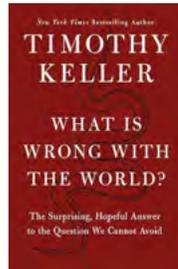
THEOLOGY

What Is Wrong With the World

TIMOTHY KELLER
ZONDERVAN, 240 PAGES

It might seem strange that Tim Keller is coming out with a new book a couple of years after his death, but where there's a widow there's a way. Kathy Keller got the ball rolling on adapting a sermon

series her husband preached in the 1990s called "The Faces of Sin." At times, it's disconcerting to hear Tim's voice from



the grave, but *What Is Wrong With the World* is nonetheless a wise and accessible book.

Keller explains that our problems aren't external to us: The problem is inside.

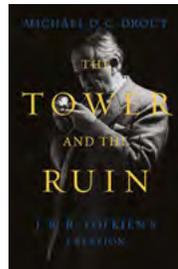
He shows both the destructive nature of sin and its subtleness. He points out that if people are trusting in God to get something else from God, their real trust is in that something else. The book reminds us that we're all sinners who need to grapple with the reality of grace, and it encourages its reader to trust fully in the gospel to remedy the sickness of sin. —Collin Garbarino

LITERARY CRITICISM

The Tower and the Ruin

MICHAEL D.C. DROUT
W.W. NORTON & CO., 384 PAGES

Ecclesiastes says there is no end to the making of books, an observation that seems particularly apt for books about C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. Readers of the Inklings can't get enough of their favorite authors, and this book is yet another volume in the ever-expanding line of Tolkieniana.



A professor of English at Wheaton College, Drout writes that he's read *The Lord of the Rings* more than 40 times. His book offers fellow Tolkien devotees

unique insights from Viking mythology and Tolkien's wider literary output that

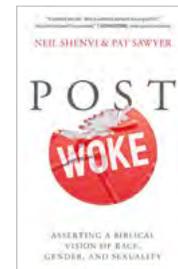
enhance our understanding of the core novels. He explains how reading Tolkien is often like reading the Bible: It's beautiful on the surface, but there's another layer beneath that exposes a more intricate design when you know the historical, literary, and linguistic context. But Drout's reader must extract those worthwhile insights from dense academic prose. The information is interesting, and Drout professes to make the book accessible, but it takes some commitment all the same. Joseph Loconte's *The War for Middle-earth* (Thomas Nelson 2025) or Humphrey Carpenter's *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography* (reissued Wm. Morrow 2000) are an easier introduction for fans looking to start exploring Tolkien beyond the novels. —Daniel R. Subr

APOLOGETICS

Post Woke

NEIL SHENVI & PAT SAWYER
HARVEST APOLOGETICS, 288 PAGES

Clarity and courage are on full display in this work of cultural apologetics. *Post*



Woke is concrete, focusing on the everyday manifestations of critical social theories. The authors draw on examples many folks will instantly recognize. Readers repeatedly find

themselves thinking, "Yes—that's exactly what I've encountered, and I didn't know how to respond." The result is something like a field manual for navigating contemporary workplaces, institutions, and strained relationships. The authors show that debates over wokeness are not merely academic but exert real pressure on ordinary people trying to live with integrity. Much of the book's practical value lies in its careful unpacking of stock phrases, rhetorical moves, and logical fallacies that routinely disarm ordinary Christians. For the average person encountering such claims in workplaces, schools, or social settings, this material functions as a concise and immediately applicable

crash course in critical reasoning. Shenvi and Sawyer offer guidance for charitably engaging those advancing woke ideology. Less expected, and equally important, is their concern for those who react against wokeness by drifting toward the dissident right. Shenvi and Sawyer identify a real generational dynamic here, noting that younger cohorts are particularly susceptible to this overcorrection. —James R. Wood*

COMPUTER HACKING

Ctrl + Alt + Chaos: How Teenage Hackers Hijack the Internet

JOE TIDY

HANOVER SQUARE PRESS, 256 PAGES

This fast-paced unsettling book looks at the teenage hackers who manage to upend the modern world armed only with laptops and a taste for disruption. The book begins with the 2014 Christmas Day attack that brought Xbox Live and PlayStation to a standstill, introducing readers to the “Lizard Squad,” a group of boys who treated global disruption with casual swagger. Tidy charts the shift from teenage mischief to criminal damage. These boys aren’t necessarily brilliant operators. They’re lonely, restless souls swept into something far beyond them. Tidy’s reporting brings the story to life: news



teams racing to track down cheeky minors, police pushing through long nights, and a hacker who, in a moment of pure folly, uploads his own secrets for everyone to see. The book veers between

the ridiculous and the disturbing. Nowhere is this clearer than in the Vastaamo breach in which thousands of private therapy notes were dumped online. Tidy keeps his focus on the people at the center of the controversy—the boys craving attention, the victims left shaken, and the officers trying to hold the line. Danger comes in many forms, not all of them grand or sophisticated. Sometimes it’s just a bored teenager with too much time on his hands. —J.M.G.* ■

BOOKS

Darker Dark Knight

A new take on an old character

by MATT YOCUM



Batman’s origin—in which a young Bruce Wayne witnesses his parents’ murder—has stayed consistent for 86 years. But what if only Batman’s father died in the shooting? And what if Bruce’s mother later ran for deputy mayor alongside mayoral candidate Jim Gordon? And what if Batman’s normal villains—Two-Face, Killer Croc, the Penguin, the Riddler—were Bruce’s childhood friends before the events that transformed them?



**Absolute
Batman
Vol. 2**

This reimagining is the premise of the comic book series *Absolute Batman*, the anchor title in DC Comics’ new parallel Absolute Universe. With this line that retools many heroes and villains, DC Comics challenged premiere writers and artists to stretch their imaginations with each monthly issue. DC republished *Absolute Batman*’s first six-issue story arc in a trade paperback last summer, and now it’s releasing issues #7–14 in *Absolute Batman Vol. 2: Abomination* (DC Comics, 240 pp.).

In this arc, Batman investigates a series of off-the-books buildings referred to as “Ark M,” where a mysterious financier experiments on human subjects to enhance their abilities. The only surviving subject, a villain known as Bane uses a serum that grossly enlarges his physique. He captures Batman, and Ark M scientists attempt to break and enhance Bruce Wayne. Secret agent Alfred Pennyworth and Bruce’s love interest Selina Kyle (aka Catwoman) must rescue Bruce and turn the tide against Bane and his shadowy master.

This Batman is bigger than anything we’ve seen before, from the symbol on his chest, to his physical stature, to his tanklike Batmobile. The proportions are absurd, deliberately so, but rather than off-putting, the effect comes across as new and refreshing.

But new and refreshing doesn’t mean it’s not dark and disturbing. This comic isn’t for kids (DC rates it as 13+). Reading this comic, we see Gotham as surrogate for a world surrounded by darkness. Then a light with the image of a bat pierces the night, dispelling the darkness, and we feel hope. As Alfred Pennyworth explains in *Absolute Batman*, “Maybe that’s what he is. All he is ... one long advance forward.”

The Absolute line has revitalized a stagnant DC Comics, and *Absolute Batman* is the best of the bunch. It shows what happens when a company tells creators to let loose and scare us a little. This is the craziest version we’ve seen, and its mixed-up storylines and characters give us something not seen in 86 years—a new take on a very old character.



CHILDREN'S BOOKS

More than meets the eye

YA thriller offers complex web of secrets

by *MARIAN JACOBS*

→ In Jennifer Dyer's *The Donor* (Quill & Flame Publishing, 404 pp.), 17-year-old hacker Tasha Jenkins is determined to avenge her father's death by exposing an illegal organ-smuggling operation run by wealthy scientist Nigel Foster. She decides to attend a dinner at the company where her late father worked in order to meet Nigel in person. But when she's introduced to his only son Cameron at the event—a teen boy who desperately needs a heart transplant due to a fatal heart condition—Tasha starts to doubt everything she thought she knew about the Fosters. Cameron seems certain of Nigel's integrity and goodness. Could it be possible that someone else at Foster



The Donor
JENNIFER DYER

Medical is responsible for her father's death?

Cameron Foster has led the sheltered life of a medically fragile child. Even with his father's wealth and advanced medical technology, his life feels as though it's hanging on by a thread. When he meets the girl of his dreams, he's more than ready to break his father's overly strict rules to spend time with her. With his upcoming heart surgery hanging over his head like a potential death sentence, Cameron does everything in his power to win Tasha over.

What he doesn't expect to find in Tasha is a girl capable of seeing straight through the shroud of lies that has engulfed his entire life. It seems that the nature of his heart, in both flesh and love, is not what it appears to be. Instead of the normal teen dating experience that Cameron was hoping for, a tangled web of lies, kidnappings, and murder greets him around every corner. As more of the truth is gradually uncovered, Cameron must come to grips with who he is and what his and Tasha's future may or may not hold.

The Donor is a fast-paced young adult thriller that will keep teens and adults alike turning pages well past bedtime. Readers will also find light sci-fi elements the further they delve into the story. Dyer's writing is both clever and skilled as she crafts a complex web of secrets and science. Christian imagery and prayer are mentioned as the characters question who is worthy of their faith and trust. This book is best suited for older teens since it deals with themes of psychological abuse and mental health conditions. It contains some romantic sensuality, including mildly descriptive kissing and admiring one another's bodies using some suggestive language.

Dyer's own challenges with mental health issues and panic attacks inspired some of Cameron's story in *The Donor*. In her author's note, she encourages her readers to seek help if they are also struggling with anxiety. "You're not alone," she writes. "It's hard, but there is help. I regularly see a counselor. There's no shame in experiencing anxiety and panic attacks, but I urge you not to suffer alone." ■

Courageous choices

by KRISTIN CHAPMAN



The Hunt for the Kraken

KATHRYN BUTLER
CROSSWAY, 224 PAGES

Parents who were tweens in the 1980s and '90s may remember the Choose Your Own Adventure series that offered dozens of possible endings based on choices made throughout the plot. Author Kathryn Butler's new Lamplight Series follows a similar model, but integrates Scripture and godly wisdom to help tweens ponder the effects of their decisions while reassuring them that God is always with them. Butler immerses the reader in her story as the protagonist who has inadvertently time-traveled and landed aboard an 18th-century whaleship. The ship's crazed sea captain puts the crew and the reader in grave danger as he hunts for the elusive kraken, a squid-like sea monster. Children will likely want to reread the book so they can make different choices that lead to new outcomes. **Ages 8–12**



Small Wonder

ROSS MONTGOMERY
CANDLEWICK, 224 PAGES

When the Kingdom of Ellia falls under attack from enemy invaders, Tick knows he has no choice but to embark on a dangerous journey with his younger brother Leaf to reach safety at the King's Keep. Atop his trusty horse Pebble, Tick takes to heart his late-grandfather's instructions, reminding himself that, "If you only have one chance, Small Wonder, you have to make it count." Along the way, the orphaned boys encounter bandits, knights, and avalanches, and they must outsmart an assassin hot on their heels. Formulated like a classic fairy tale adventure, *Small Wonder* offers themes of self-sacrifice, courage, and love. The conclusion includes a small plot twist, giving the story a satisfying ending. Note: Some of the villains partake in drinking, and a soldier uses the Lord's name in vain. **Ages 9–12**



Herman Bavinck

SIMONETTA CARR
REFORMED FELLOWSHIP, 64 PAGES

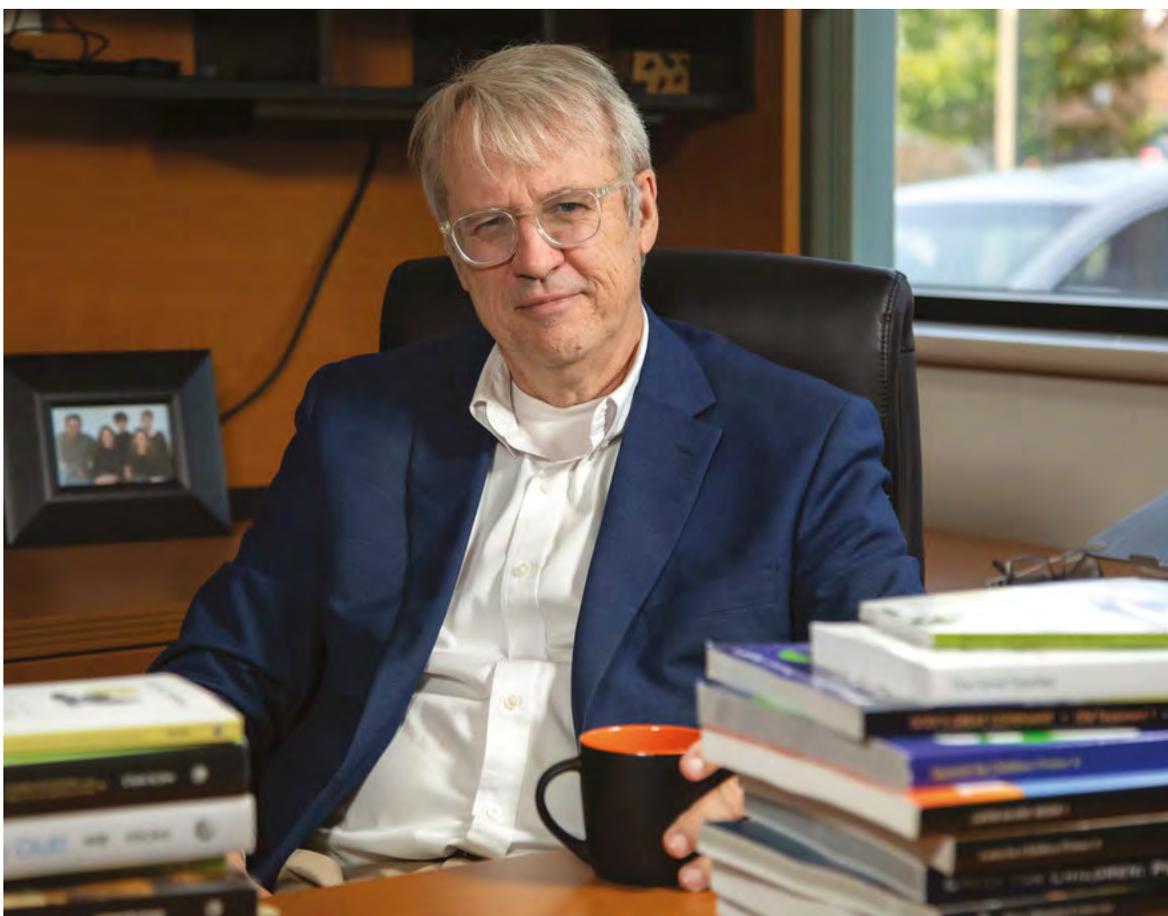
This 25th book in the Christian Biographies for Young Readers series introduces children to Herman Bavinck, an influential theologian from the Netherlands who served as a pastor, professor, writer, and Dutch Parliament member. A contemporary of Abraham Kuyper as well as Nietzsche, Bavinck sought to accurately apply the Bible to all of life while thoughtfully engaging with those who held different opinions. Bavinck's story, Carr writes, is especially timely for children growing up in a "highly polarized society, where cultivating wisdom and treating others with respect and humility are becoming rare virtues." Bavinck's life can serve as an apt example to help families respond biblically and to remember, "A lot can be done with patience and love." **Ages 7–12**



Time for Courage

ROB CURRIE
TYNDALE KIDS, 336 PAGES

In this sequel to *Hunger Winter*, it is the end of 1944, and 13-year-old Dirk Ingelse and his family are working with the Dutch Resistance to hide Jewish children from the Nazis. The family's decision to take in a young Jewish boy soon draws the Nazis' attention, but the Ingelses' commitment to the cause gives them courage during the ensuing trials. Compared to similar historical fiction, the story suffers at times from unnatural scenarios and dialogue. In one example, a Gestapo officer is bent on revenge after a Jewish woman refuses to marry him. Since the Nuremberg Laws made such liaisons illegal, this plot point would have been extremely unlikely, making it feel inauthentic. Nevertheless, the story offers a solid message about how God is always working even amid hard things. **Ages 10–14**



QUEST

BOOKS THAT SHAPED MY THINKING

An American family's classical education

by CHRISTOPHER PERRIN

→ Education is as old as parenting, for *education* originally meant to raise, rear, or bring up (from the Latin *educare*). Schools should come alongside mothers and fathers to assist in this responsibility to raise a child in virtue, wisdom, and holiness.

Such a general definition of education we might call *classical*. This word, like the word *education*, has a wide semantic range, so that when one says, “good education,” we hardly know what is meant. Classical education, in the simplest sense, is the kind of education that has been around a long time—

arguably since the Greeks and Romans, then adapted and transformed by the Christian church. With few exceptions, nearly every form of Christian education prior to about 1890 was classical.

Before that time, we did not speak of “classical education.” We simply spoke of *education*, or sometimes *liberal education*—an education that liberates men and women to flourish as human beings who can know the truth, do the good, and love the beautiful. The curriculum was the liberal arts, the great books, and the natural sciences. The pedagogy was marked by mentorship, academic

friendship, and even discipleship. The animating spirit, especially in Christian contexts, was love for Christ and His church. Christ was understood to be the teacher in our midst and the author of all truth, goodness, and beauty.

Recently, I set out to study American education through the lens of one storied American family: the Adamses. John Adams, signer of the Declaration and second president of the United States; his son John Quincy Adams, our sixth president; and his grandson Henry Adams, diplomat, professor, historian, and journalist. The educational lives of

these men span from the mid-18th century to the turn of the 20th, offering a microcosm of American education itself.

I began with reading David McCullough's biography of John Adams (Simon & Schuster 2002), followed by Paul Nagel's biography of John Quincy Adams (Knopf 1997). These books reveal not only American political history but a fascinating educational thread that runs from generation to generation.

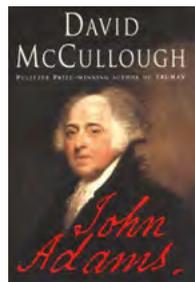
John Adams was educated first at home by thoughtful parents and relatives, then at a local grammar school, then a Latin school, and finally at Harvard College, which then enrolled only about 100 students. His education was grounded in the traditional liberal arts: Latin and Greek, history and literature, logic and rhetoric, mathematics and natural science. Books were scarce, treasured, and read deeply. Both John Adams and his son John Quincy kept regular journals that testify to sustained, serious reading. In John and Abigail Adams' letters, we see they were united in the conviction that the end of education was moral and intellectual formation—not mere vocational utility.

In a letter to John Quincy in 1781, John Adams wrote, "You will ever remember that all the end of study is to make you a good man and a useful citizen."

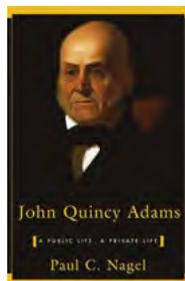
As a father, John Adams was also a tutor and model. John Quincy accompanied his father on diplomatic missions to France, the Netherlands, and England. In the midst of political life, Adams continued his son's education in Latin, Greek, mathematics, history, and literature, even recommending the regular contemplation of poetry.

What John and Abigail had done for their son, John Quincy and his wife Louisa sought to do for theirs. John Quincy followed his father to Harvard, later teaching there himself, even while serving as a U.S. senator. Like his father, he served as a diplomat abroad—in France, Russia, and Germany—and once again a son, Charles Francis Adams, accompanied him.

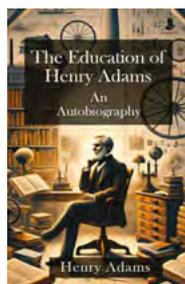
Charles Francis, in turn, was educated much like his father and grandfather. He



John Adams
DAVID McCULLOUGH



John Quincy Adams
PAUL NAGEL



The Education of Henry Adams
HENRY ADAMS

attended Harvard, served as an American diplomat, and became ambassador to Great Britain during the Civil War. And once again, like his father, he brought along his son: Henry Adams.

It is Henry Adams, however, who reflects most self-consciously on education in his autobiography *The Education of Henry Adams* (1918). Born in 1838, he came to believe that he had been educated for the 18th century but forced to live in the 19th and 20th. The revolutions of the modern world left him feeling intellectually unprepared. He lived into the Progressive Era, which increasingly rejected the old liberal education as narrow, formal, and ill-suited to mass immigration and a rapidly industrializing, scientific, and bureaucratic age.

Henry Adams points out the ways in which the traditional classical education had become crusty, defensive, nostalgic, and resistant to needed adaptation and innovation. Many in Adams' time rejected the "old education" and determined to reform education as science rather than a practiced art.

The history of American education from the founding forward reveals a confluence of competing theories and practices, both classical and progressive. This is revealed in the study of the Adams family, where we see the American stream of classical and Christian education flowing through John Adams and into his son John Quincy and then his grandson Charles Francis. In Henry we witness confusion as that stream meets and blends with a new one, flowing fast. Darwin, the steam engine, the Civil War, the dynamo—all of these trouble the waters and muddy them.

In many ways, this is where we remain. Most of us are, in ways we are not always conscious, a blend of the classical and progressive. We must recover the insights and blessings of the classical tradition, but scrape off the barnacles, prudently adapt to changing circumstances, and sail on the clearest rivers we can find. ■

—Christopher Perrin is a classical educator and curriculum author who writes on pedagogy, formation, and the history of education. He serves as CEO of Classical Academic Press.



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MOVIE

A vicious pursuit of freedom

by STEVE LIMKEMAN

Rated R • HBO Max/Prime Video

→ With a record 16 Oscar nominations and almost \$280 million at the box office in 2025,

Sinners is the rare modern film to have both popular appeal and adulation from the members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Should *Sinners* win the award for best picture, it would rank as the fifth-highest-grossing film at the domestic box office among best picture winners in the last 50 years.

If I told you that a singing Irish vampire takes center stage as the primary antagonist in this particular film, you might reasonably inquire what exactly is the attraction. A closer look reveals a complex, disturbing, yet insightful

exploration of people's deep desire for freedom.

The film opens in a small town in Mississippi. It's the era of Prohibition, the Great Depression, and the Jim Crow South. The pastor of a modest black congregation invites his son Sammie (aka "Preacherboy") to help him deliver the next day's sermon on 1 Corinthians 10:13. Sammie knows by heart the verse about temptation and the promise of God's deliverance, but its spiritual significance doesn't seem to have made its way much deeper than the boy's short-term memory. Restless and exhausted from a week of picking cotton as a sharecropper, he takes his guitar to play the blues at the new juke joint that his cousins, charismatic twins Smoke and Stack

(played masterfully by Michael B. Jordan), are establishing just outside town.

The "Smokestack twins" have recently returned to the South after working with organized crime syndicates in Chicago, and they have been "running around everywhere, looking for freedom." Disillusioned because the same racism they knew in Mississippi had haunted them in Chicago, they have come back home. "Might as well deal with the devil we know," Smoke explains to Sammie, but they are about to be confronted with a very different kind of devil. The twins plan to bring the black community together through music and dancing while profiting from the community's vices of drinking and gambling. Their music has the power to "pierce the veil between life and death, conjuring spirits from the past and the future"—and this power attracts vampires.

Remmick (Jack O'Connell), the singing Irish vampire, preaches a very different gospel than the one Sammie

has turned his back on. His cohort of vampires lurks in the shadows just beyond the perimeter of the juke joint, tormenting those trapped inside and playing on their fears. It's probably not a coincidence that filmmaker Ryan Coogler has white vampires preying on the black community.

Remmick promises, "I am your way out" of death and destruction. If these black revelers will only surrender their lives—let themselves be assimilated—they may gain immortality, and freedom from pain and suffering. Other people-turned-vampires affirm the good news that union with their new community is like entering into "heaven right here on earth." However, all their promises of fellowship and love belie the grisly reality that these undead monsters perpetrate upon the living.

Sinners portrays all manner of flawed and fallen people looking for freedom, with most characters succumbing to common temptations just like Sammie: traveling their own path rather than the straight and narrow provided by the Scriptures. These pursuits promise freedom but leave the characters in chains, caging their spirits much like the souls of the men and women trapped in the bodies of the vampires, enslaved to carnal desires. If viewers wade through *Sinners'* crude dialogue and sexual content, they must brace themselves for a flood of vampire blood and gore in the film's final act.

Sinners' 16 nominations are not without merit: The setting is immersive, the acting is captivating, the suspense is paralyzing, and the editing creates a consistently compelling narrative. But Coogler offers a false hope.

His movie accuses Christianity of being a religion of oppression, and it turns music into a kind of liberation, even from the mortal plane. We sometimes refer to particularly powerful music as ethereal or transcendent, and the film depicts that idea in the characters' reverence for the blues. But music can't save us. Only the Creator of everything, including music can do that. Music is a delightful thing, but it makes for a disappointing god. ■



MOVIE

GOAT

by COLLIN GARBARINO

Rated PG • Theaters

→ Basketball legend Stephen Curry serves as a producer and one of the voice actors in Sony's new animated feature *GOAT*, a movie loosely inspired by Curry's role in revolutionizing the NBA. But don't underestimate this film as a little vanity project for a sports star. *GOAT* delivers.

In a land where anthropomorphized animals rule, Will Harris (Caleb McLaughlin) is a small teenage goat, who dreams of playing the animal world's most popular sport, roarball, which is essentially basketball played on a volatile court. The problem is the sport is dominated by massive animals like rhinos, bears, and horses. No one but Will believes he's big enough. As they say, "Small can't ball."

Jett Fillmore (Gabrielle Union) is a black panther who plays for the Vineland Thorns. Most consider her the *GOAT*

(greatest of all time), but she's never won a championship. She's on the hunt for the last accolade that's eluded her, when a publicity stunt by the owner puts Will on Jett's team. Jett is not amused.

Little Will, like little Steph who's only 6-foot-2, changes the game with his uncanny ability to hit insanely deep shots, but don't expect *GOAT* to upend the sports genre. This movie hits all the familiar beats: The little guy gets his big shot, the team he ends up on is full of misfits, the leader begins as an antagonist but comes around after seeing how the new kid can bring everyone together.

It's a story we've seen over and over, yet *GOAT* pulls it off with such style and emotion that everything feels fresh. Moreover, the impressionistic animation Sony used in this film is absolutely beautiful.

Sorry, *Space Jam* fans, *GOAT* might be the greatest animated basketball movie of all time.

TELEVISION

It's Not Like That

by BOB BROWN



Rated TV-14 • Prime Video

➔ *It's Not Like That* is a new faith-based TV series that goes where Angel Studios fears to tread. From the producers of *House of David* at Wonder Project, the drama pushes the boundaries of Christian-themed programming, diving into divorce, midlife dating, parent-teen conflict, teen social anxiety, and behavioral disorders—you name it—all packed into each 50-minute episode. Yikes!

Then again, there's value in a raw take on Christians by Christians, particularly as the directors limit sensuality and only include a few mildish expletives (in the four episodes I had available for review). But raw doesn't mean

unpolished: The cast brings solid résumés, including Scott Foley who (millennials might recall) played Noel, the main love interest of the titular character in *Felicity*. Foley is back for more main-love-interest duty as Pastor Malcolm, a widower who finds a listening ear—and maybe a pair of puckered lips—in recent divorcée Lori, played by Emmy-nominee Erinn Hayes. Lori also attends Malcolm's church, lives on the same street he does, and was his deceased wife's best friend. Did I already say, "Yikes!"?

From nice homes with no money worries, Malcolm and Lori are single-parenting their kids, who themselves are dealing with loss, crushes, and bullying. Malcolm's kids are also feeling the

pressures of being PKs. Complicating matters further is the regular presence of Lori's ex *and* Malcolm's buddy, David (J.R. Ramirez, best known for his role as Det. Vasquez in the NBC hit *Manifest*). There are no claims of abuse or infidelity, but David bears most of the blame for his marriage's failure. Still, he's trying to be a good dad. One of the show's strengths is avoiding caricatures: No one's a saint, and no one's a creep. The show's writers don't pretend families who pray together at the dinner table don't get caught up in petty squabbles sometimes.

"I get no sympathy from [other women]," Lori complains to Malcolm. "They just want to gossip about me and rescue you." Lori is not the only name on Malcolm's social calendar, by the way. But just as viewers feel transported into an episode of *The Bachelor*, the faith expressions will throw them for a loop.

"In our church, we welcome all those who hold Jesus in their hearts," Malcolm preaches. "My voice is deeply rooted in the enduring Word of God."

While Malcolm's sermons extol God's grace, his behavior isn't always worth imitating. He often meets Lori in his church office, his car, and elsewhere with no one else around. Once, Lori informs him over the phone, "I'm naked in my ex-husband's bed. ... Can you come over?" She's dressed when he arrives, but the show treats these rendezvous as natural instead of reckless. And so I grew ambivalent about this potential pastor-parishioner *Brady Bunch*. The show is intended as a serious drama, but the tangled *affaires de cœur* seem as much 1970s sitcom as Shakespearean tragedy—although I might be won back if Malcolm stabs a hiding David through an arras in Lori's chamber.

Are we like that or not like that? That is the question. An American church more consumed with dating apps than discipleship *would* be a tragedy. It's even hard to find the upside in unbelieving viewers commending, "Maybe those Christians *are* just like us." And what would our brethren in the church worldwide watching this show think of us? Yikes! ■

COMING SOON ...

Young Sherlock

3/4 • Not yet rated • Prime Video

In this adaptation of Andrew Lane's book series, a young Sherlock Holmes unravels a globe-trotting conspiracy as he investigates his first case in the 1870s.

Hoppers

3/6 • PG • Theaters

In Disney and Pixar's new film, scientists have discovered how to "hop" human consciousness into lifelike robotic animals, allowing people to communicate with animals as animals.

The Pout-Pout Fish

3/20 • PG • Theaters

In this animated adventure starring Nick Offerman, Mr. Fish, a pouty introvert, and Pip, an energetic sea dragon, embark on a daunting quest to find a legendary fish to grant their wish.

Project Hail Mary

3/20 • Not yet rated • Theaters

Ryan Gosling plays a science teacher who wakes up on a spaceship with no recollection of how he got there. As his memory returns, he discovers he must solve the riddle of the mysterious substance causing the sun to die out.

The Count of Monte Cristo

3/22 • Not yet rated • PBS

This PBS Masterpiece miniseries adapts Alexandre Dumas' classic novel in which Edmond Dantès (Sam Claflin) swears revenge after being falsely accused of treason.

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MOVIE

Midwinter Break

by COLLIN GARBARINO

Rated PG-13 • Theaters



Midwinter Break adapts Bernard MacLaverly's 2017 novel of the same name, with

Lesley Manville and Ciarán Hinds playing Stella and Gerry, an Irish married couple who have been living in England for most of their lives and now find themselves muddling through their retirement years. The story starts when Stella surprises her husband with a post-Christmas trip to Amsterdam.

The film's title has a double meaning. The trip itself is a midwinter break from the monotony of their day-to-day existence, but on the trip this couple in the midwinter of their lives find they can't ignore the rift that's grown in their marriage.

Stella is a devout Catholic who is searching for something more in life, and as she ages, she feels like she hasn't done enough for God. Gerry is dismissive of his wife's religion, and his excessive alcohol consumption is alienating Stella. A change of scenery and a little spontaneity can't paper

over the gulf that's grown between them. Both spouses are still coping with the trauma they experienced as they fled Northern Ireland during the Troubles decades earlier. In Amsterdam, they'll be forced to confront those haunting memories.

Manville and Hinds give formidable performances which elicit sympathy for both characters. The quiet script wrestles with the demands of faith, the realities of aging, and the destructive capacity of pain. It also depicts the effort that's required for sustaining long-term marital love. We're inundated with movies about the beginnings of love, but what about love at the end of life? What does love look like after the "happily ever after"?

Midwinter Break won't appeal to everyone. The movie is rated PG-13 for some strong language and suggestive material. It's also one of those slow movies that gives you time to settle into the characters' pain. And its predictable resolution of the faith dilemma left this viewer a little unsatisfied.



MUSIC

Petra making new music after more than 50 years

A classic Christian rock band's latest album

by ARSENIO ORTEZA

→ Petra wasn't the first Christian rock band. It is, however, the first to make it to 50 years. And its new album *Hope* marks year 52.

Or maybe it's 53 or 54. Petra's golden anniversary took place in 2022, 2023, or 2024, depending on whether you mark the group's beginning as the year it first formed (1972), the year it signed with Myrrh Records (1973), or the year it recorded its first album (1974). Releasing the three-disc anniversary collection *Fifty* in 2023, the band itself seemed to split the difference.

Or maybe not. The year before that, it had embarked on a 50th-anniversary



Hope
PETRA

tour in its latest iteration: Cristian Borneo (drums), Greg Bailey (bass), John Lawry (keyboards), the Head East alumnus John Schlitt (lead vocals), and Bob Hartman (guitar). Hartman had long been the group's sole remaining founding member, while Lawry and Schlitt had been aboard since 1986, Bailey and Borneo since 2013—when Petra celebrated its 40th anniversary.

Ten years before that, Hartman, Schlitt, and Bailey had released what, until *Hope*, everyone thought would be their final studio album of original material, the Peter Furler-produced and unabashedly metallic 30th-anniversary *Jekyll & Hyde*. If the band's longevity is uncommon in contemporary Christian music, so is its revolving-door lineup (Wikipedia lists over 20 former members) and the degree to which its sound inevitably changed as a result. The heartland rock of albums one and two, the transitional *Washes Whiter Than*, the Journey-meets-Kansas facsimiles of the Greg Volz years, the ever-shifting producer-determined (and no doubt market-driven) sounds of Schlitt's lengthy tenure—"Petra" had in some ways become more brand than band.

Hope, however, is surprisingly good, probably because it doesn't sound beholden to any previous Petra stratum or as if Hartman, Schlitt, et al. are out to "prove" anything. Even the uncharacteristic steel drums and reggae rhythms of "Oxygen" and the old-school synthesizers in "We Rejoice in Hope" feel more like someone's idea of fun than the calculated ticking of demographic boxes.

Other factors in *Hope*'s favor: Schlitt, who's in his mid-70s, doesn't sound a day over the age that he was when he debuted on *Back to the Street*, and Hartman's lyrics, while as predictably biblical as ever (the passages that directly or indirectly inspired each song are listed in the CD booklet), avoid clichés and concessions to the lowest common denominator. The result is that everything—the heavier numbers, the poppier numbers—sounds natural, sincere even. And, in the end, isn't that what really matters? ■

MUSIC

New and noteworthy

by ARSENIO ORTEZA



Big Sir CRASH RICKSHAW

These guys come pounding out of the box so hard, fast, and clean that you could easily forget how long it's been since they last even tried—blasts away the cobwebs, you might say. So why only four songs after approximately two decades? Say they're testing the waters. Also, say that each song is a banger that you'll want to add to your next up-and-at-'em playlist and that the two urging you to kick to the curb whatever

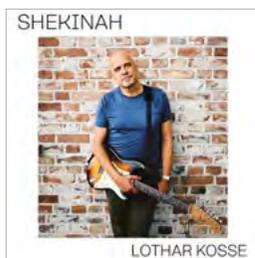
“big sir” has you by the algorithm are well worth a ponder.



Far Country ELLIE HOLCOMB

In response to a challenge by her executive producer (and father) Brown Bannister, Drew Holcomb's better half puts aside her Americana inclinations and accedes to the kind of Big Pop Sound often used to camouflage shallow songcraft. This time, however, if only by failing to overwhelm the melodies and lyrics, the sound reveals how substantial the songcraft is. Make that the songcraft and the singing. Holcomb's playing

for high emotional (and spiritual) stakes throughout, but she almost always emotes with a smile.



Shekinah LOTHAR KOSSE

Although he's an acclaimed worship-and-praise composer in his native Germany, it's as a fusion-jazz guitarist who can really make his instrument sing that Lothar Kosse is gradually becoming known abroad. One might even say too gradually. What other guitarist do you know who can honor influences such as Jeff Beck, Steve Lukather, Larry Carlton, and Lee Ritenour, repeatedly enlist the enthusiastic services

of Abe Laboriel Sr. and Vinnie Colaiuta, and still remain relatively niche 38 years after his debut?



Bob Stanley Presents Liverpool Sunset: The City After Merseybeat 1964–1969

VARIOUS ARTISTS

I don't know what's harder to believe, that “It's a Crime,” the Kirkbys song that opens this collection, isn't a long-lost Beatles cut or that none of these groovier-than-thou songs was a hit in the U.S. Only six of the 24 acts (the Dennisons, Billy Fury, the Swinging Blue Jeans, Billy J. Kramer & the Dakotas, the Merseys [aka the

Crackers], the Koobas) have a Wikipedia discography detailed enough to be useful, but apparently none of these songs charted in England either, maybe because a lot weren't singles in the first place. Astonishing. “It's a Crime” indeed.



ENCORE

The dates in the title of *Bob Stanley Presents Chip Shop Pop: The Sound of Denmark Street 1970–1975* (Ace) might make you think it's a sequel to *Liverpool Sunset: The City After Merseybeat 1964–1969*, but it isn't and in fact couldn't have been—the British Invasion was over by decade's end. Instead, *Chip Shop Pop* celebrates that innocently and exuberantly cheerful brand of pop exemplified by the only one of these 24 songs to chart in the U.S., **the Fortunes'** “Here Comes That Rainy Day Feeling Again.”

The Fortunes' aren't the only voices that U.S. boomers might find familiar. Both Tony Burrows (“Melanie Makes Me Smile”) and Peter Doyle (“Rusty Hands of Time”) sang on hits too. But hits aren't what Bob Stanley was put on this earth to compile. And because he wasn't, we get collections such as this, in which one song after another that sounds too catchy to have missed but somehow did parades past like an AM-radio playlist from the parallel universe of your dreams. —A.O.

MASTERWORKS

The expressive lines of Albrecht Dürer

A depiction of a steadfast faith

by WILLIAM COLLEN





Perhaps there has never been a draftsman as gifted as Albrecht Dürer. Although his paintings are widely praised on their own merit, it is Dürer's drawings, woodcuts, and engravings that showcase his skill most readily. Three of Dürer's prints are known as the *Meisterstiche* ("The master prints") because the level of skill they display goes beyond all other examples of the medium. These three are not only consummate examples of the engraver's craft; they are deeply symbolic and have stimulated scholarly discussion for generations. The first of the series is *Knight, Death, and the Devil* from 1513.

Dürer had ties to prominent Reformation-era thinkers and writers, including Zwingli, Melancthon, and Erasmus, and he would eventually show sympathy for Protestantism. *Knight, Death, and the Devil*, which was created four years before Luther penned his 95 Theses, can be seen as an illustration of Erasmus' *The Handbook of the Christian Knight*, in which Erasmus argues that the faithfully committed Christian is able to vanquish his spiritual enemies by ignoring them in a steadfast pursuit of virtue: "All those spooks and phantasms which come upon you as in the very gorges of Hades must be deemed for nought." This is certainly the attitude that the knight in Dürer's print exemplifies.

He moves resolutely forward, completely uninterested in the gruesome figure of Death, a half-rotted corpse who tries to frighten the knight with an hourglass and a skull placed across the knight's path. The knight has already moved past the devil, who is shown not as an alluring tempter but as the hideous monster he really is: In the light of faith, his true nature is seen. The knight moves with single-minded deliberateness, advancing toward his goal—the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem—seen at the very top of the engraving.

Dürer, an accomplished observer, fills the picture with precise detail, deftly replicating the textures of the knight's steel armor, the fox tail on his spear, the devil's crumpled horn, the trees and bushes and rocks in the background. All these details give the engraving a sense of realism befitting its realistic attitude toward both the evils of this world and the Christian knight's obligation to rise above them. This is not some dreamy mystic vision of Christian faithfulness. Dürer has portrayed a real knight, facing (and overcoming) real horrors, advancing toward a certain and sure hope.

The knight travels through brooding cliffs which echo Psalm 23: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." Fear, indeed, is a great enemy of the Christian: fear of the devil and his power, fear of the inevitability of death. But, as John says in 1 John 4:18, perfect love casts off fear. A perfect love, one focused on the Savior, is the Christian's sure defense against the worldly enemies

that would seek to turn him from the path of righteousness.

Dürer himself made no comments about the meaning of this engraving; the other two *Meisterstiche* are full of obscure symbolism, and this one is ambiguous since nowhere does it include any explicitly Christian imagery such as a cross or a saintly attribute. Art historians are divided on whether the image has a Christian meaning at all. Some scholars consider it an allegory of the evils of war, with Death and the Devil as merely the natural companions of a vicious soldier who makes his career out of bloodshed and destruction. But the knight in the print seems much too calm and resolute to be a ruthless killer. I believe Dürer, influenced by the writings of Erasmus, meant for the image to portray the Christian arrayed in the armor of God, occupying himself only with the call of his Lord, marching steadfastly onward and unafraid of the terrors of Satan or of the grave.

Is Dürer's knight advancing on his own strength and power? Why is there no evidence that the saving work of Christ is necessary for the knight's progress to be successful? It is here that analogies break down; no allegorical picture should be expected to include every possible nuance of the message it is meant to convey. As it is, Dürer's print is a fine reminder that the terrors and temptations that beset the Christian are not to be the focus of our attention as we walk the path of faith. ■



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: *Knight, Death and the Devil*; detail of the heavenly city; Dürer's skills are on display in three master prints known as the *Meisterstiche*.



VOICES NICK EICHER

Weaponized compassion

Peter Schweizer on China's exploitation of birthright citizenship—and how Christian language is used against us

Peter Schweizer believes the United States is more vulnerable than we admit—but not by the usual measures. A conservative investigative author whose books have appeared eight times on *The New York Times* bestseller list, Schweizer argues that America's "greatest vulnerability is not economic or military, but moral." Americans, he told me in an email interview, have lost the ability to defend borders without believing themselves unjust. That hesitation, he says, has become an exploitable weakness—and hostile actors have.

In *The Invisible Coup*, Schweizer makes the case that mass immigration is no longer best explained as humanitarian overflow or policy failure. It is, increasingly, something "organized and leveraged as a political strategy." Asked what convinces him this is intentional, Schweizer pointed not to one smoking gun but to accumulation: "the volume of evidence in the book that outside forces (and their inside partners) are intentionally fomenting chaos."

China looms largest.

Schweizer is scheduled to testify before a Senate committee on March 10 about China's manipulation of American birthright citizenship, with a related Supreme Court case to be argued April 1. The issue is simple. The United States grants citizenship to anyone born on its soil, even if the parents are temporary visitors with no lasting ties to the country. That rule, Schweizer argues, has created a profound national-security vulnerability.

In the book, he documents how Chinese nationals exploit visa-free or loosely regulated entry points—such as Saipan in

the Northern Mariana Islands—to give birth in U.S. territory. "More than 70 percent of the newborns in Saipan are PRC birth tourist parents who utilize the territory's 45-day visa-free visitation rules and the Covenant of the Northern Mariana Islands to guarantee that their children will have American citizenship," Schweizer writes.

The federal government does not systematically track birth tourism. "It is a guessing game in Washington," Schweizer notes in the book. The long-term consequence, he argues, is a coming wave: U.S. citizens raised, educated, and politically formed in Communist China, legally entitled to vote in American elections and relocate here at any time.

"If senators take away just one key point from my testimony, it's this: China is not our friend." Schweizer continued, "We would love to get along with all nations, but many of them don't live by the same ethic. And since they are unable to oppose us directly, they do so in secret, smiling to our face while insidiously introducing poisons heretofore unknown to us. Weaponized migration is one of them."

Birth tourism is not the only channel he describes. Schweizer also reports on the use of American surrogacy arrangements by senior Chinese Communist Party figures. In one case, authorities discovered more than a dozen children living in a California mansion tied to a CCP-linked businessman, with surrogacy contracts spanning multiple states. Schweizer calls this "another even more Byzantine and suspicious form of birthright citizenship"—one even less regulated and less understood.

Progressives, Schweizer argues, have "hijacked biblical terms like love, compassion, and mercy to guilt Americans into believing that their treatment of immigration is the most humane." He is explicit that this does not diminish the dignity of migrants, who are "made in the image of God and are due dignity, respect, and fair treatment." What he rejects is the claim that dignity requires open borders or resisting immigration officials.

"Instead," Schweizer told me, "it would be better to take into account the victims of criminal aliens, the victims of the chaos created by resisting law enforcement, and the far-reaching consequences of admitting people whose worldviews are opposed to what our founders imagined."

That last point can be the hardest for Christians. Schweizer told me that media and activist rhetoric collapse disagreement into accusations of hate. In *The Invisible Coup*, he documents how foreign governments, NGOs, and political organizers work to discourage assimilation, shaping migrant populations into pawns of political power.

Many Christians feel trapped between a law enforcement branded as heartless and a leniency that invites collapse. Our inability to live with policy trade-offs, he argues, produces greater harm. If we cannot sustain borders and citizenship without moral self-loathing, then our most dangerous enemies need only wait us out, as Americans destroy the foundations of our own generosity. ■



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Western nations that grew rich on cheap fossil fuels insist developing nations can't have them—due to climate change

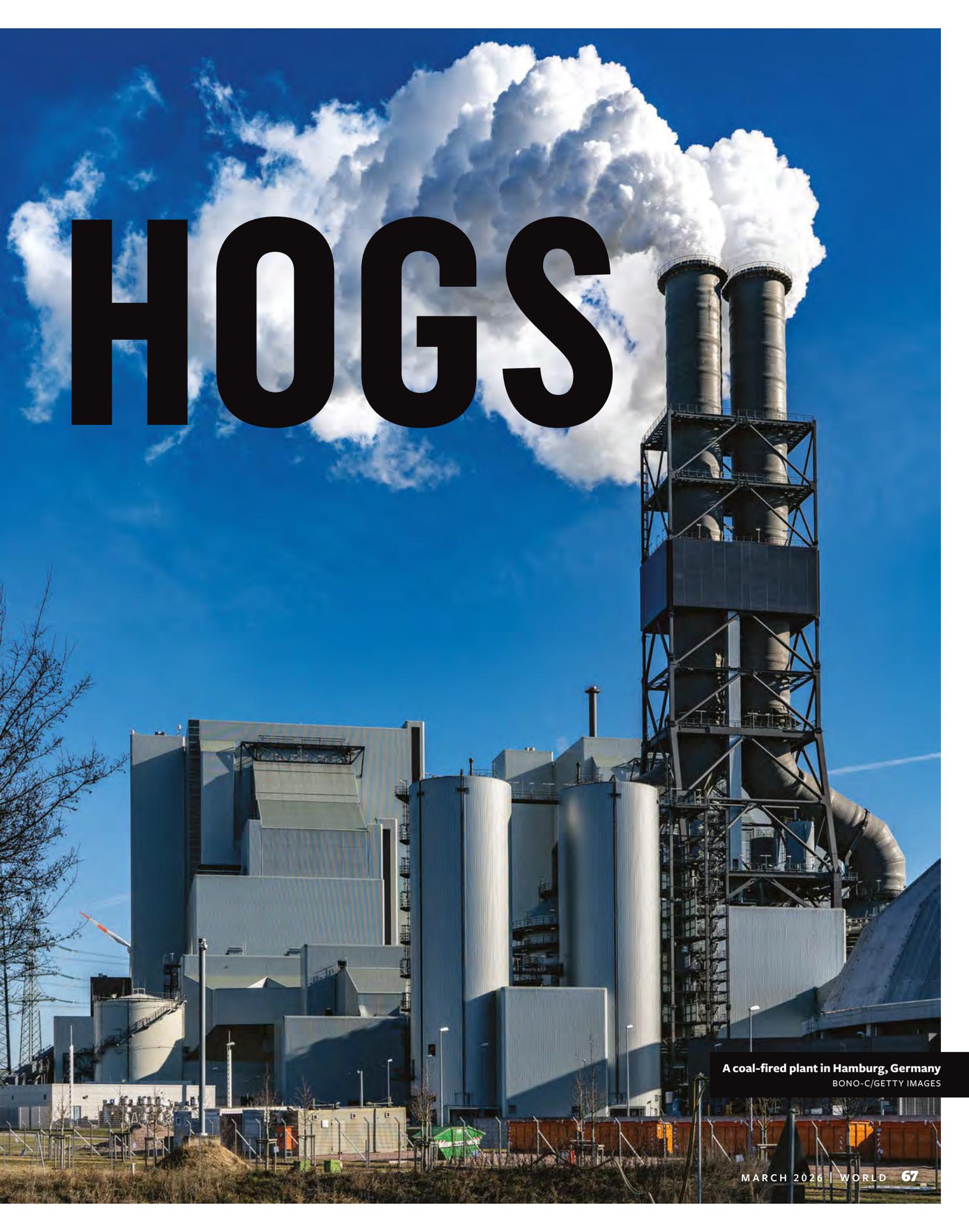
BY JENNY LIND SCHMITT *with additional reporting from Olalekan Raji*

ENERGY



Rush-hour traffic in Madrid, Spain
ELOI OMELLA/GETTY IMAGES

HOGS



A coal-fired plant in Hamburg, Germany
BONO-C/GETTY IMAGES



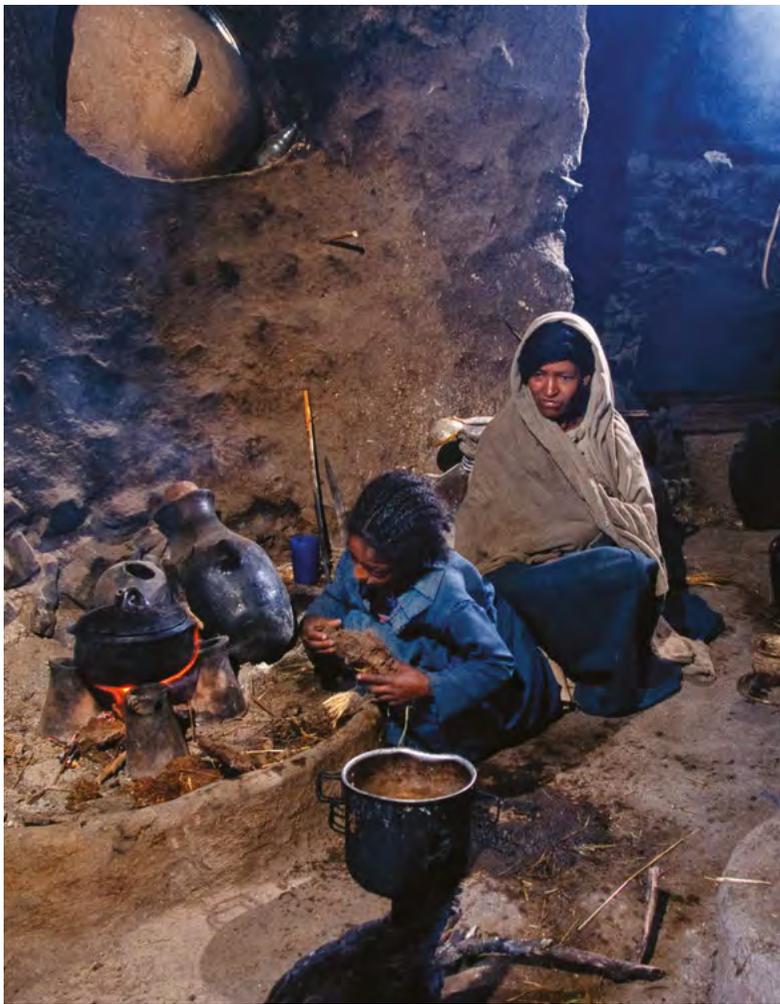
ABOVE: One of Mamadou Jallo's employees bakes bread in a wood fire oven.

RIGHT: A family in Ethiopia prepares a meal using dung for cooking fuel.

Buakar Bah watches as his uncle shovels sticks of wood into a large red brick oven, where a fire is already burning. The dry wood sparks to life, and the young man's eyes water from the smoke as it catches fire. While a brick chimney funnels some of the smoke out of the small concrete building, plenty stays inside, where Bah and his uncle Mamadou Jallo will spend half the day working and breathing the ash-filled air.

The traditional leavened loaves Bah and Jallo make sell for 21 cents apiece. Bah, 20, is glad for the job, but he hopes it's temporary. He dreams of finishing his abandoned high school education and going on to university. Outside, the acrid smoke rising from the bakery mixes with gray plumes from hundreds of charcoal fires in the suburban neighborhood area called Greater Banjul, Gambia.

PHOTO BY SANTOS KEBBEH



At noon, Bah loads fresh bread into the large wooden carrier attached to the back of a motorbike. Each day he delivers close to a thousand loaves to shopkeepers and customers within a 6-mile radius.

Bah bought the motorbike through a leasing arrangement. “I have almost completed the payments,” he says proudly.

When he’s not mixing dough or making deliveries, Bah goes down the street to buy firewood from local merchants. Much of the wood comes from illegally logged sources, and recent government crackdowns on deforestation are sending prices skyward. That cuts into the bakery’s slim profits. Most neighborhood trees have already been cut down as a fuel source for residential cooking. Running the bakery with gas ovens would be healthier, more efficient, and better for Gambia’s forests, but like Bah’s studies, that seems like a far-off dream.

Much of Gambia’s population—along with much of the population of sub-Saharan Africa—uses wood, charcoal, or dung for cooking fuel. In fact, 1 in 4 people in the world eats food cooked over an open fire. And of those, 3.2 million to 4 million people will die each year from heart disease, strokes, and lung disease caused by air pollution. The paradox is that the more prosperous a society grows, the more likely it is to use cleaner fuel sources. But in order to become prosperous, emerging economies like Gambia’s need access to cheap, abundant energy—of any kind.

Developed economies like those in Europe and North America grew rich precisely because they had access to cheap energy. But now that they are rich, their climate policies—ostensibly designed to prevent the adverse consequences of global temperature changes—are restricting poorer nations’ access to the cheapest fuel sources, insisting they transition directly to renewable sources of energy. In doing so, they delay the prosperity that could truly protect those in poverty from climate changes.

As part of the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, Gambia pledged not to emit any additional greenhouse gases—a target known as net zero—by 2050. The country said it would reach this ambitious goal by cutting greenhouse gas emissions in half by 2030. That earned it high marks from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the foundation for the Paris Agreement. Gambia also earned an “Almost Sufficient” rating from Climate Action Tracker, an organization that measures governments’ climate action against the Paris Agreement. A good rating opens the doors to international approval and financial support: In 2023 the World Bank approved financing for Gambia—\$20 million of which was to be dedicated to strengthening “climate resilience.”

Some of that money was likely used for more government workshops like the one held by the Ministry of Petroleum and Energy in 2022 to discuss curbing inefficiency in daily life by not leaving on air conditioners or lights in empty rooms and replacing incandescent bulbs with LEDs. The country’s energy minister concluded her remarks with the phrase, “Energy saved is energy produced.”

Except that it isn’t. Energy not produced is exactly that. And energy not produced means no growth. Access to abundant energy is directly connected to gross domestic product (GDP) growth. If Gambia wants to grow its economy from the current \$3,000 GDP per capita, it needs to produce—and consume—more energy, not less. Currently, Gambians consume 800 kWh per capita—compared to Americans’ nearly 77,000 kWh per capita. While some of the difference comes from questions of capacity and access, price plays a big role. A kilowatt hour in Gambia costs 19 cents, roughly the same amount as the U.S. average. But the median Gambian income is only \$1,383 per year, compared to America’s \$19,306.



A tailor works measuring pieces of fabric to make dresses at his shop in Banjul, Gambia.

“To get rich, you need lots of energy, and to stay rich you need lots of energy,” says Bjorn Lomborg, a researcher based in Sweden. “There are no low-energy high-income countries.”

Lomborg is founding director of Copenhagen Consensus, a Stockholm think tank questioning

the status quo on climate policies. Lomborg’s focus is cost-benefit analysis of particular policies and a clear-eyed, unemotional assessment of global challenges and their potential solutions. Global climate change is a genuine problem, he says, but not the existential crisis currently driving the narrative of many activists and lawmakers. But Lomborg warns that misguided efforts to reduce global temperature are already slowing the global economy, and that will have devastating effects on vulnerable populations.

According to researchers at Copenhagen Consensus, global economic growth in countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development—North American and European countries and Japan—has fallen from 4% in the 1960s to 2% in the 1990s to barely 1% currently. That’s not all due to climate policies, but their effect is clear over the last few decades. By driving up energy costs, climate policies drive down consumption. Money funneled to defining and implementing climate policies can’t be used elsewhere. The Copenhagen Consensus estimates that arriving at

“If we find green energy that’s cheaper than fossil fuels, everyone will switch.”

net zero—the ultimate goal of the Paris Agreement—will cost \$27 trillion a year for the next several decades. For the European Union, that translates to 10.5% of estimated 2050 GDP—more than the cost of all core government services combined. And the benefit to projected climate change? Negligible.

Lomborg says that money would be better spent drastically expanding research into low-carbon energy production. “Innovation is the way we fix all global problems,” he says. “We could increase R&D fivefold and that would still be just \$100 billion a year.” Lomborg notes exciting innovative energy possibilities are on the horizon—fourth-generation nuclear is one—but research requires funding.

“If we find green energy that’s cheaper than fossil fuels, everyone will switch,” Lomborg says. “Not just rich, well-meaning Brits and Americans. But also the Chinese, the Indians, and the Africans. This solves climate change, and it’s a boon for the planet.”

Just 200 yards up the road from Buakar Bah and his uncle’s brick oven, the scent of freshly baked bread wafts enticingly out of another shop: Nabil Bakery, where Sainey Sanyang, 33, pulls hot baguette loaves out of three gleaming commercial ovens. Nabil has been a neighborhood mainstay for 15 years, and it’s popular with the expats and tourists who stay in this neighborhood. The 12 workers employed here sell loaves over the counter, and others are loaded onto bikes for delivery to local residences.

Nabil has big electric ovens that produce thousands of loaves a week. That translates to high energy costs: The weekly electricity bill is about \$400. When the power goes out—which happens frequently—bakers use diesel generators to power the ovens. That raises production costs significantly. Filling a 1,000-gallon tank costs \$2,129, an expense that’s hard to recoup when the cost of a single loaf is regulated by the government at 21 cents. But at least customers will keep coming back.

Nabil Bakery is the kind of small business Magatte Wade says African countries need to grow their economies. Wade is a Senegalese entrepreneur and business advocate. She says that for African countries to become prosperous, they need pro-business environments. And part of that includes access to energy.

“You in the West can go on whatever suicidal path you’re putting yourself on,” Wade says of



THE COST OF BAKING BREAD

To bake bread in a standard electric oven for one hour uses 2.3 kilowatt-hours (kWh). Baking bread every day for a year would add up to 839 kWh.

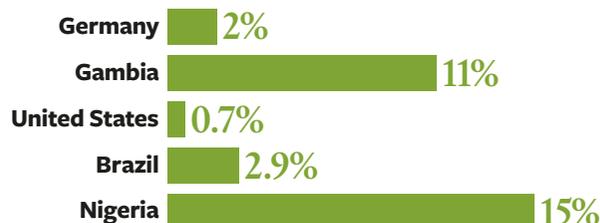
HOW MUCH WOULD IT COST IN THESE COUNTRIES?

REAL COST (kWh times average national price of electricity)



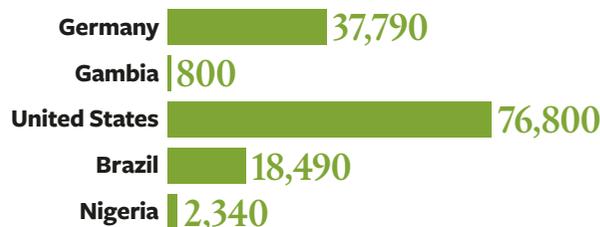
*Nigeria has a tiered system of payment for electricity: You pay a higher rate for a guaranteed minimum of hours. This amount is calculated at the highest rate for a minimum of 20 hours of electricity per day.

WHAT PERCENT OF MEDIAN INCOME WOULD THAT BE?



AVERAGE ELECTRICITY CONSUMPTION

kWh use per person, per year



current climate policies. “But don’t come and tell me what to do with my energy, my resources.”

As a child, Wade was raised by her grandmother after her parents went to work in Germany. When she joined them as a teenager, she was shocked that hot water flowed instantaneously out of the tap. In Senegal, it took 45 minutes to gather fuel, start the stove, and heat the water. She set out to understand why Europe and North America were rich while Africa stayed poor. After starting businesses in both the United States and Senegal, she concluded the problem is overregulation in African countries. Wade often recounts the experience of starting her first business as a student in the United States versus starting ones later in Senegal: In the U.S., submitting the appropriate paperwork took half a day while the process in Senegal took more than two years.

Those kinds of bureaucratic roadblocks and ensuant corruption endemic to many African countries also affect the energy sector, deterring investment by increasing the time and cost involved in starting and maintaining operations in oil and gas production. That creates yet another roadblock to providing cheap, abundant energy to a country’s population.

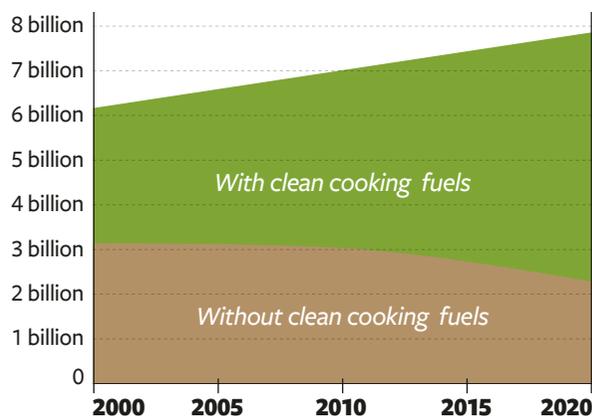
Wade says she has no problem using emotion-filled arguments to counter those from soup-can-throwing climate activists: “What about the 1 to 2 million African people—mostly women and girls—who die every year from indoor air pollution from dirty cooking sources? Are you OK with that? That’s where these policies are taking us.”

She takes particular issue with international organizations that view all African issues through the lens of climate change. “The World Economic Forum is more focused on climate change than on African growth, seemingly unaware that growth is Africa’s best hope against the vicissitudes of climate,” Wade wrote in a white paper for the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship. “Prosperous people can buy air conditioners, have larger budgets for food, and ultimately are more likely to work in air-conditioned environments. Deaths from all types of natural disasters decline dramatically as nations become more prosperous.”

Similarly, while the World Bank acknowledges the need for electricity and cleaner indoor cooking methods, it still focuses heavily on keeping Africans from prospering from fossil fuels and on preparing them for a coming “energy transition” to renewable sources. It

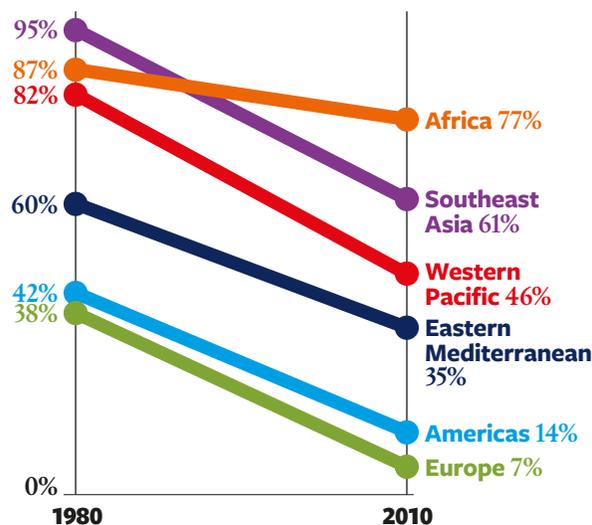
WHO HAS ACCESS TO CLEAN COOKING FUELS?

Clean cooking fuels and technologies represent nonsolid fuels such as natural gas, ethanol, or electric technologies.



WHO USES SOLID FUEL AS THE MAIN COOKING FUEL?

Share of households who rely on wood, crop residues, dung, charcoal, or coal as the main cooking fuel.



TOP: OUR WORLD IN DATA (WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION VIA WORLD BANK); BOTTOM: OUR WORLD IN DATA (SOLID FUEL USE FOR COOKING BY REGION — BONJOUR ET AL., 2013)

neglects the fact that with the affordable and reliable energy of fossil fuels, Africa could attain prosperity—and resiliency—more quickly.

Wade bristles at Western hypocrisy in denying African citizens the opportunity to become wealthy by using their own resources and then attempting to buy them off through promises of assistance. “I don’t care about your \$100 billion of so-called ‘climate aid’ when you’re asking me to sit on the \$12 trillion of oil and gas sitting under my soil,” Wade says.

In February 2025, Senegal’s African Refinery Company (SAR) started refining domestically produced oil for the first time. Before that, crude oil was extracted in the country, then exported for refining. Senegal then imported the finished fuel product. That’s a pattern also seen in other oil-rich African countries that did not have domestic refinery capacity.

Slowly that is starting to change. In 2023, Nigeria’s Dangote Refinery started refining crude oil with the hope of supplying more of the country’s demand. Late last year, Senegal announced plans to build a second refinery to process its oil riches domestically. That would open up the possibility for the country to one day export energy resources. In the meantime, plans for the \$5 billion project rely on foreign investment from China, Turkey, and South Korea.

Ayondele Oni is a Nigerian lawyer specializing in the energy industry. Over the last few years, he’s seen the start of a shift to an “Afro-centric energy” policy in many nations. That means not following the West’s framework for environmental policy wholesale but taking a

more nuanced approach. “Some African countries are starting to say, ‘Let’s keep an eye on transition [to renewables] but make the most of what we have: gas and oil.’”

Nigeria’s government has declared 2021 to 2030 the “Decade of Gas,” with the aim of transitioning the country to a gas-powered economy internally and making the most of its potential to export fossil fuels. “The goal is to make as much income as we can now before the world no longer finds it useful,” Oni says.

Oni says the other African countries he works with are not averse to having a conversation about energy transition, but they want to make the goals more realistic. The climate agreement pact has the globe phasing out sales of combustion engines by 2035, for example, to reach the goal of net zero. But Oni says that’s

impossible in Lagos, where only 2% of the vehicles on the road are electric. Even though that’s a vast increase from just a few years ago, agreeing to

A man charges his electric car in Ghana.



the original goal without a reality check is ludicrous. Oni says 2060 is more realistic.

According to Oni, any talk of net zero goals should go further than just reducing the use of fossil fuels: “We also need to talk about developing technology that can help us reduce the impact of emissions: carbon capture and carbon scrubbing. Renewable energy technology that uses batteries is heavily reliant on carbons. Lithium drilling, for example, is very gas-heavy to produce,” he says.

And for all the talk of equity in the climate debate, Oni cites one argument that keeps getting ignored: “If [the West] developed using coal, then why can’t we develop using gas, which is much cleaner?”

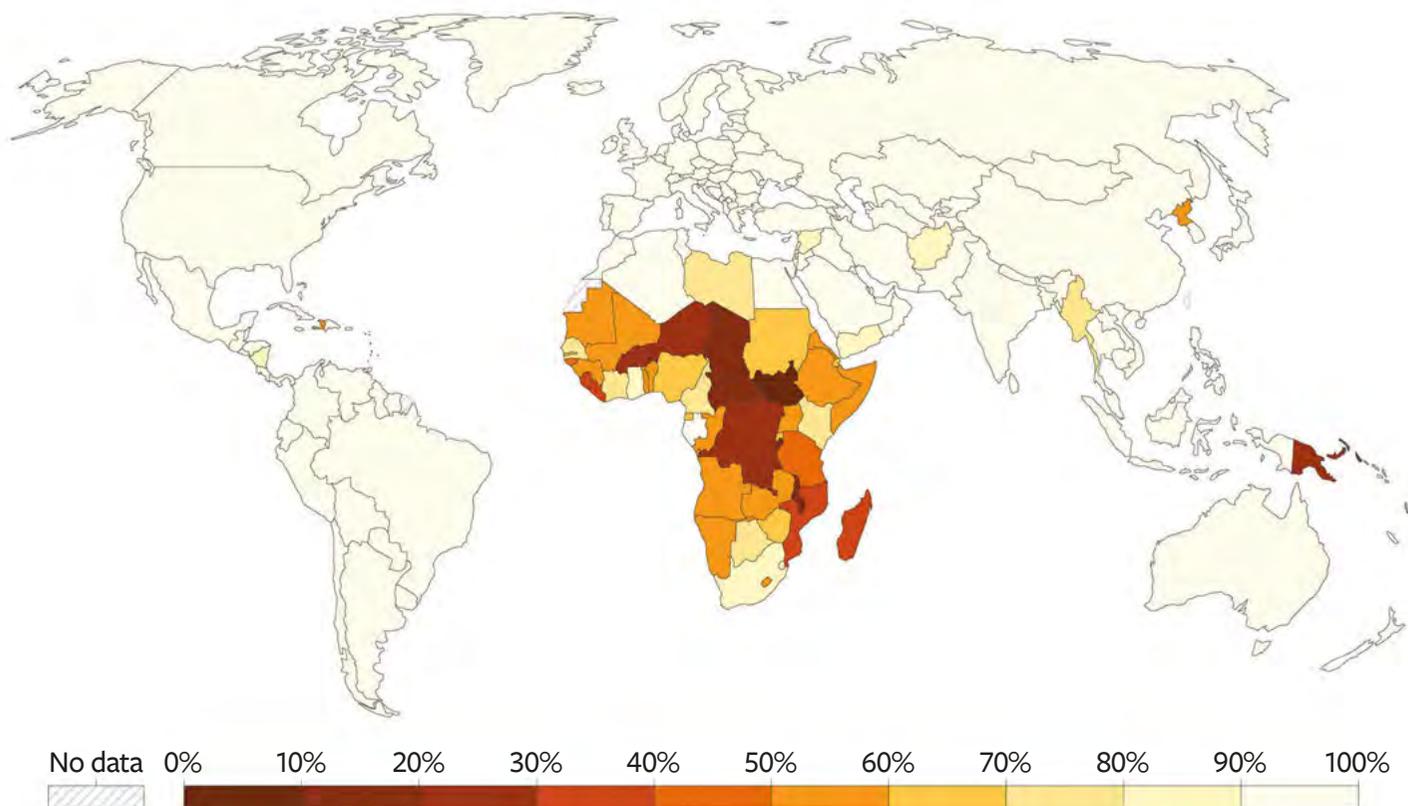
Gambia provides electricity to its 2.7 million people through an electrical grid that runs 99% on imported oil. Most of the country’s electricity is produced at Kotu power station in Greater Banjul where the

majority of the population lives, while several smaller generators serve towns to the east. Only 65% of the population has access to electricity, but the government says plans to bring electrification to the remaining 35% by the end of the year are on track. But electricity generation is already often less than demand, and outages happen regularly. Aging infrastructure adds to the problem. In 2019 the government announced plans for a 150,000 kWh solar farm to help supply generation, but construction has yet to begin. Most businesses and many homes have backup generators.

Preliminary exploration shows Gambia has offshore oil deposits like its neighbors in

WHO HAS ACCESS TO ELECTRICITY?

Access to electricity means having an electricity source that can provide very basic lighting—and charge a phone or power a radio for four hours per day.



OUR WORLD IN DATA (DATA COMPILED FROM MULTIPLE SOURCES BY WORLD BANK)



The entrance of the historic Royal Albert Market in Banjul, Gambia, filled with vendors, shoppers, and colorful stalls

West Africa, with potential for significant production. That could be a boon for the country's very young population: The median age of its 2.7 million citizens is 19.

But instead of encouraging development and self-sufficiency, organizations like Climate Action Tracker seem to want to push the country into further dependence on international aid: "At a time when countries should be moving away from fossil fuels, Gambia continues to promote efforts to extract oil and gas in an attempt to offset its dependency on imported fuel oil," the organization notes, adding that the most sustainable way for Gambia to escape market volatility brought on by the war in Ukraine is to switch to renewable energy and electrify transport. It concludes, inevitably, "To achieve this, Gambia will need international support."

But between 2008 and 2023, foreign aid already provided 80% of funding for public investment. Further dependence in the name of climate financing erodes the independence Magatte Wade wants for her continent.

Wade has another emotion-driven argument to those who insist on climate-driven energy-restrictive policies: the thousands of economic migrants who have drowned trying to get to Europe. "If you take the energy away, you're not going to prosper. And that means people are going to leave the continent in search of jobs. And too many perish on the ocean floor."

Spanish migrants' rights group Caminando Fronteras says that more than 10,000 people died in 2024 while trying to get from Africa to Europe. Of those, it's estimated that over 2,000 came from Senegal. This year began with a deadly boat accident off the coast of Gambia that claimed the lives of 30 migrants trying to get to Spain via the Canary Islands. Gambian authorities say they intercepted 780 more migrants in the days just following the accident. Wade says that without economic growth in their countries of origin, migrants will continue to risk their lives, and the number of illegal migrants arriving in Europe will grow even greater.

For Wade the most important trade-off in keeping cheap abundant energy from people like Buakar Bah, Sainey Sanyang, and the rest of Africa is denying them the dignity that the opportunity for financial independence affords.

"People want to stand on their own two feet," Wade says. "Poverty doesn't equal dignity." ■



Political scientist Bjorn Lomborg on why current climate policies don't make economic sense

BY JENNY LIND SCHMITT

BAD INVESTMENT

Bjorn Lomborg is a political scientist and professor at the Copenhagen Business School. He also directs the Copenhagen Consensus Center, where he researches “the smartest ways to help the world” using cost-benefit analysis. He’s the author of *Best Things First* and *False Alarm: How Climate Change Panic Costs Us Trillions, Hurts the Poor, and Fails To Fix the Planet*. He is on the advisory board of the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship and was a presenter at ARC’s 2025 conference, where I sat down with him for an interview.

Q How did you enter the climate policy critical space? About 25 years ago I came across the work of American economist Julian Simon who said that the climate was not as bad as we think, and for the most part, things are getting increasingly better. As a member of Greenpeace, I was sure that was a load of hogwash. But Simon encouraged people to check data for themselves, which is what I was always telling my grad students. So I decided that would be a fun semester project with the students, to analyze the data and prove him wrong. It turned out that on most everything, the data proved him right! That was an eye-opening experience to realize that while the individual problems were probably true, the overall statement “the environment is getting worse” is fantastically misleading. And I thought to myself, “We should be saying this more out loud.” That’s how it began.

Q How bad is climate change? Global warming is a real problem, but we don’t have a good handle on how big a problem. There’s no doubt the current Western narrative is that climate change is an existential problem bringing the end of the world and is what we all should be focusing on. Activists say, “Renewables are incredibly cheap. Let’s just get going and be green. We’ll all be great!” But that’s not going very well because it’s actually incredibly expensive. It deindustrializes, makes your energy much more expensive, and makes more people poor.

The reality is climate change will be a small problem by the end of the century. It’s not a problem now, and it will be a small problem by the end of the century. And if you do the math, it turns out that the cost of a reasonably likely outcome of climate change by the end of the century is that we’re going to be 2-3% less well off than we otherwise would be. And that’s taking into account that by the end of the century, globally we will all be much, much richer than we are now.

Q But climate change is still a problem that needs fixing, right? If you could fix a problem for very little money, you should do it. But if you could fix a small problem for an enormous amount of money, that’s a bad deal. To put it in numbers: If you can fix a 3% problem for 1% that’s a good deal. If you can only fix part of a 3% problem for 10% that’s stupid. And unfortunately, with our current climate policies we’re mostly engaging in the latter.

Q What do you propose as an alternative to climate hysteria?

Two main points: The environment, if you look at the data, mostly gets better simply because if you get out of poverty, you stop being so dirty. This is not true for everything, and it’s not true in all circumstances. But fundamentally, that’s the case.

The second thing is this: Instead of being very emotional about all this, we should be calm and rational and recognize that we can’t fix all the problems. So we should ask, “What are the problems where I can spend extra resources and do the most good first?” So that’s what I’m doing now at the Copenhagen Consensus Center, where I work with three of the world’s top economists and seven Nobel laureates in economics.

Q You’ve said that current climate policies are immoral. Can you explain? What has made us rich, fundamentally, is the fact that we have found others to do the work. If you were Louis XIV of France, you’d have lots of servants, and that’s great. But of course, it only works for Louis XIV. It doesn’t work for all the guys who are the servants.

The thing we’ve managed to do now is because we have lots and lots of energy—mostly from fossil fuels—it means that you and I and everybody else have literally the working equivalent of, say, a couple 100 servants working for us 24/7. That’s the energy that we get.





That's the washing machine, the dishwasher, the Zoomba, your car, and all these other amazing things that make your life much, much nicer.

The great deceit of many people in the First World is we have all these great conveniences and our lives are incredible by any historical standard, and then we look at poor countries and say, "You know what, you can't actually get rich, because that'll emit a lot of CO₂, so you will have to do without. You just have to start getting used to being poor." Not only is that immoral, but also they're not going to listen to you! They're not going to keep staying poor if there's a way to get rich. And the way, very clearly—what we've done in the past, and what they will be doing, too—is to get much, much more energy.

Q **What better ways could we be spending the resources directed at climate change?** What we need to do is to find much cheaper green energy in the future. That's what innovation does.

We should be spending much more money on innovation so that we can more quickly find the thing that will actually power the rest of the 21st century.

What we should be doing is to make sure that the transition to lower zero carbon energy will happen sooner. Right now, we claim we're doing a transition, but of course, we're not. We're just subsidizing immensely, a very expensive partial transition that's not sustainable.

We need to ensure that future generations of technology are so cheap that everyone, not just rich, well-meaning Americans or Danes, but also the Chinese, the Indians, and Africans, will actually want to buy this stuff. And that's how you fix this.

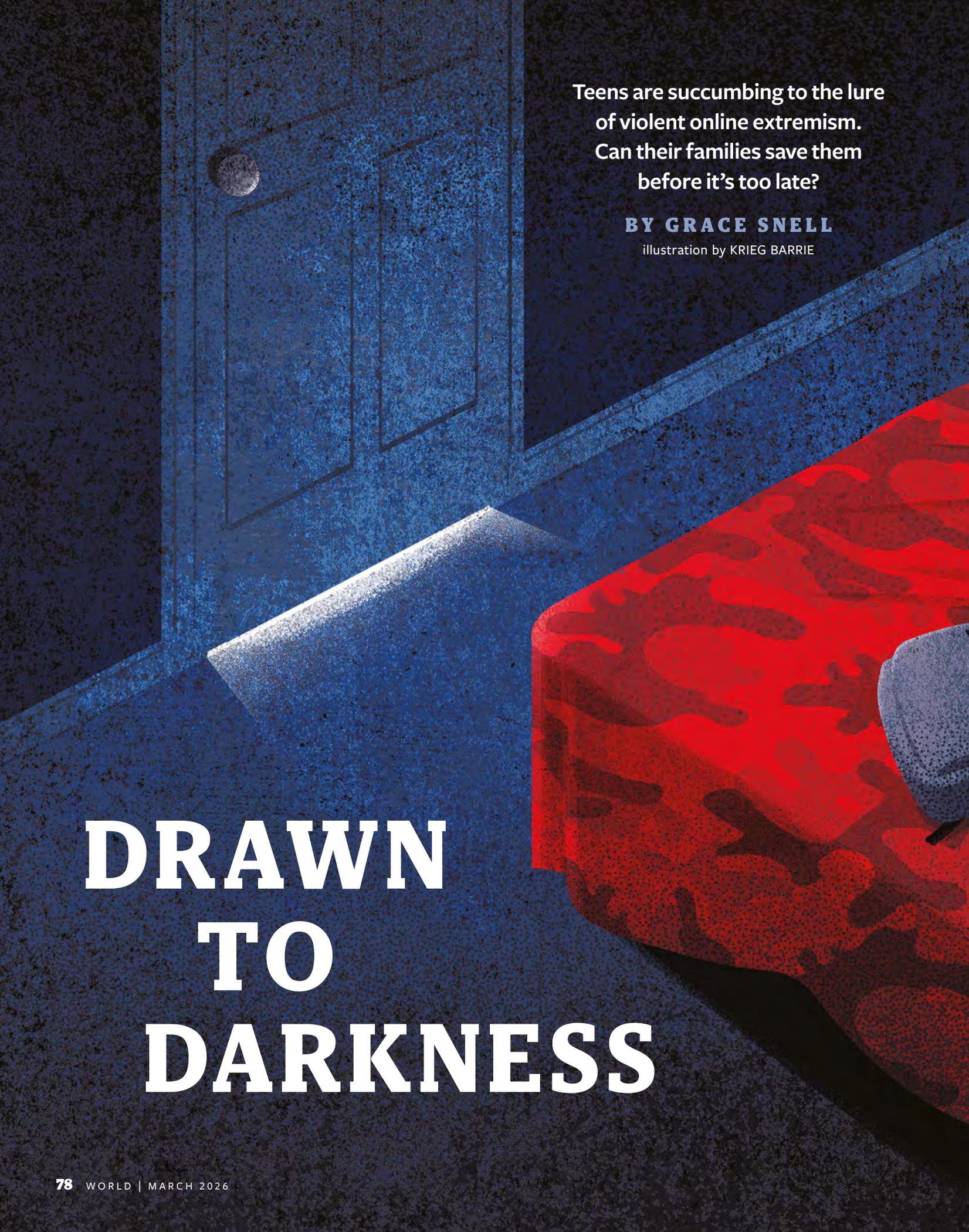
Q **Given that much of the hyperbole around climate change involves reducing global temperatures to save lives, why is it more effective to put that money in other initiatives?** If we have limited resources, we should do the

smart things first. Take tuberculosis as an example: For about \$6 billion a year, you could save about a million people's lives. Malaria and heart disease are similar: We can make a big impact with relative little money. Immunization to small kids: By making sure that we treat moms and newborns very cheaply, we could save about 1.4 million moms and kids for about \$3 billion.

Then there are economic things. Help people get better education, so they will learn more and become more productive in their adult lives. Get better high-yielding agriculture through research and development. Make sure you have better land tenure so you own your land, you'll be more productive. Those are the things we should do first.

Q **So why aren't we already doing them?** The fundamental point of cost benefit is there's always trade-offs. If you do one thing, you can't do another. Setting priorities is hard. It means that you have to say yes to something, but also say no to other things. And most people want to just say yes to everything, because it's easy and it feels like you're a good person. But of course, you're not. If you say yes to everything, it means implicitly, you've said no to everything, but you said yes to a little bit of everything, which is just silly. You should take the courage to actually say yes to this and no to that, because this is more important. This is a better return on investment.

When the UN and all the world's nations decided back in 2015 that they were going to set sustainability goals for the world for 2030, we were the only group to actually do cost-benefit analysis. I met with a third of all the UN ambassadors individually in New York, and they all loved the idea of saying, some things are much better than others. And then I told them, so whatever you do, please, please, please, don't promise everything to everyone. And of course, that was exactly what they did. And that was why we ended up with 169 promises, which is just silly. And so again, my point is to say, if you can't do everything, do the smart stuff first. ■

The background is a dark, textured illustration of a room. On the left, a blue door with a silver doorknob is set into a wall. To the right, a bed with a red and black patterned coverlet is visible. The lighting is dramatic, with a strong light source from the left casting a long shadow of the door onto the floor and wall.

Teens are succumbing to the lure
of violent online extremism.
Can their families save them
before it's too late?

BY GRACE SNELL

illustration by KRIEG BARRIE

DRAWN TO DARKNESS



Dana was on the phone scheduling an appointment for her 14-year-old son Elliott when her daughter walked in from school, unzipped her backpack, and pulled out a hunting knife.

It had the word *Death* engraved on its blade and a gut hook for cleaning out entrails. She had found it in her brother's room.

Suddenly, Dana couldn't breathe.

Elliott's mental health had been declining for months. Just a few days before, he had screamed at her when she took his phone away. Dana recognized some of his ranting as neo-Nazi talking points—and their family is Jewish.

Later, she checked his screen time and found he'd been spending all day on his phone, despite her parental controls. But she couldn't tell where he'd been. His search data was somehow wiped out.

One website that still appeared in his history: a site showing violent gore videos.

Now this.

Dana's mind reeled. Elliott was still at school, and she needed to leave in five minutes to pick him up. But now she didn't know whether she should take him to the hospital or call the police. "Does he have a weapon on him right now?" she wondered frantically. Did he have a plan to harm himself—or any of his classmates?

School violence and mass shootings have become an agonizingly routine American headline over the past decades. So much so that in 2021, the FBI named the risk from lone offenders, often radicalized online, as the greatest terrorist threat confronting the United States.

No one knows who will mobilize to violence or where the next attacker will strike. It's a growing danger leaving law enforcement scrambling to bring perpetrators to justice and protect children from harm.

Children like Elliott's classmates. And children like Elliott.

Dana knew she would do whatever it took to save her son before he hurt himself or someone else. But she didn't realize then how much she would have to do alone—battling uphill as therapists, police, social workers, and nurses dismissed her concerns and failed to grasp the gravity of the situation.

Her fight parallels the crisis facing our nation: a vast chasm between the fast-expanding threat of dark and dangerous internet subcultures and the resources available to help teenagers break free.

During the previous six months, Dana had watched Elliott with growing concern. (WORLD agreed not to use Elliott's real name or the family's last name to protect their safety.) He was in ninth grade and having a rough time. His first girlfriend broke up with him. His tight-knit friend group fell apart. And Dana and her husband were going through a divorce.

Elliott started to spiral.

One night, he showed Dana a small scratch. He was self-harming. Dana immediately got on the phone with Elliott's therapist and pediatrician, but they didn't seem very concerned. They directed her to keep her son on antidepressants and continue therapy.

Soon after, Dana noticed some concerning internet searches, including pornography. She also caught Elliott getting his phone off the family charging station and taking it into his bedroom—something she didn't allow.

But whenever Dana reached out for help, people seemed to be normalizing the behavior: "This is what kids do now. They're all online ... They're all depressed. They're all self-harming."

Dana didn't buy that. But she didn't know what else to do, except stay vigilant and lock up all the knives and razors in the house.

Still, the situation kept worsening. By November 2023, Dana felt like she was watching her son commit suicide in slow motion. Elliott had always loved music. But now he stopped practicing his drums altogether. He started listening to black metal music and wearing "corpse paint"—heavy white makeup with dark circles around his eyes.

His grades started slipping, and he spent every lunch period alone.

Elliott also started repeating a bizarre mashup of extreme left- and right-wing rhetoric. "He would come up to me, look like he was hypnotized, and just start spouting off talking points," Dana recalled.

One day, in desperation, Dana googled: "What do I do if my kid's being radicalized

online?” An organization called Parents for Peace popped up. Staff there work with families affected by ideological extremism.

Dana called the helpline.

Radicalization is fundamentally a cognitive process, something that happens in the mind as a person adopts violent extremist beliefs, according to Bettina Rottweiler, a research associate with the National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center. She said radicalization is distinct from mobilization—the moment someone moves beyond thinking and decides to carry out an attack or hurt themselves.

Radicalization often happens behind closed doors, making it impossible to know the true scope of the problem. But existing metrics suggest this is a significant and growing threat.

In 2024, law enforcement from the Five Eyes intelligence allies—Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States—released a joint statement reporting an uptick in youth getting mixed up in terrorism cases.

One big reason: the rise of the internet and social media.

Youth radicalization wouldn't happen if teens weren't already vulnerable, Rottweiler said. But screens are an enabling factor, exposing children to more dangerous content and bad actors than ever before.

“Before, they went to the playground,” Rottweiler said. Now, parents often have no clue what their kids are watching or who they are talking to online. And that opens the door wide to exploitation.

Even experts don't know how to predict who will make the jump from radicalization to mobilization. Rottweiler calls that the million-dollar question in counterterrorism. But, once someone mobilizes, the warning signs are easier to spot.

A person totally withdraws from the outside world. He or she stops participating in activities they used to enjoy. And they grow increasingly secretive about screen time.

After that, things can escalate quickly.

Dana called the Parents for Peace helpline after weekday business hours. Early Monday morning, she got a call back. Dana explained the situation, and the staffer on the line urged her to take immediate action. As soon as she got off the phone, Dana sent a final SOS to Elliott's therapist. “My kid needs help right now,” she wrote. “Something needs to happen today.”

“We'll talk about it in our session this week,” Dana recalled the therapist's response.

After that, Dana spent the day emailing every in-network therapist she could find. She was on the phone trying to schedule an appointment when her daughter walked in with the hunting knife she'd found in Elliott's room.

The director of the behavioral health department told her to take Elliott straight to the hospital. As Dana sped toward the school, the director got her on a three-way call with 911. She told Dana to stall until the police arrived and then ask for an escort.

But when the police pulled up, Dana said, they refused to even search Elliott. They told her it was a liability issue. “He's saying he's not a harm to himself or others,” Dana recalled them saying. “So there's nothing we can do.”

Emergency room staff told her the same thing, but Dana refused to back down.

After hours of negotiation, they finally agreed to transport Elliott to another hospital. He arrived there just after 1 a.m. By that time, Dana had racked up over 30 phone calls to police, administrators, therapists, and doctors. But except for Parents for Peace staff, almost no one seemed to know what to do with Elliott.

About 6:30 the next morning, Dana's phone rang. It was a detective with the police school violence unit, and she had lots of questions about Elliott: How did he dress? Was he a gamer? What did he watch online? What music did he like?

The detective told Dana her son had likely been targeted by a predatory online group called 764. “They target kids,” she said. “They get them to commit school violence, self-harm, and suicide.”

Last year, the FBI started using the label “nihilistic violent extremist,” or NVE, to describe the emerging threat of online groups like 764. Jon Lewis, a research fellow with George Washington University's Program on Extremism, explained these aren't structured terrorist organizations like ISIS or al-Qaeda. They're loosely affiliated online ecosystems sowing chaos and hatred.

“It's barely rooted in any coherent ideology,” he added. “It's violence for the sake of violence.” According to the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, the number of radicalized young people without ties to established terrorist groups has increased over 300% the past decade. Some of these are school shooters with ties to NVE subcultures, Lewis said. Examples include the shootings at Abundant Life Christian School in Wisconsin,

RADICALIZATION

OFTEN HAPPENS

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Antioch High School in Tennessee, and Annunciation Catholic Church in Minnesota.

Law enforcement say it's a threat unlike anything they've dealt with before. Since there isn't a domestic terrorism statute, police have to rely on lower-level charges to put NVEs behind bars. And that means they typically get out of prison in just a few years. "It really is a ticking time bomb," Lewis said.

Often, NVE perpetrators are other teenagers—and many started as victims themselves. They lurk on gaming platforms like Minecraft and Roblox and prey on younger kids struggling with mental health issues. Because of that, Lewis said, terrorism isn't the most fitting descriptor of what's really going on. "It's grooming," he said. "It's abuse. It's violence against children."

A few days before Elliott's hospitalization, Dana noticed a new text on his phone from a number she didn't recognize. Someone calling himself "Charlie" asked why Elliott had missed his "audition."

When Dana asked Elliott about the text, he pretended he didn't know anything. But the police detective told her it might have been a missed contact from someone nefarious. She promised to contact the FBI and said they would need to get into Elliott's phone.

On her next hospital visit, Dana sat down across from her son and tried to convince him to share his password. Elliott had already refused to tell her over the phone, and now he sat there reciting a jumbled mixture of conspiracy theories. As Dana looked into her son's eyes, she hardly recognized him.

"Am I sitting across from the Unabomber?" she wondered. "Who is this kid?"

Eventually, Elliott agreed to give his mom his password. About a week later, an FBI agent sat down with Dana and her son's phone. Elliott had learned how to hide his search history and circumvent her parental controls. Now the agent showed Dana what he had really been looking at.

"I had nightmares for a year from a handful of thumbnails," Dana said. Her son had been spending 12 to 14 hours daily watching beheadings, security footage of murders, and AI-generated rape videos.

Elliott had also taken hundreds of self-harm child pornography images. His camera roll started with pictures of him displaying a small scratch. But, by the end, he was taking pictures of himself fully naked with every inch of his torso, thighs, and shoulders covered in gashes and etched with satanic symbols—some deep enough to cause permanent scars.

And the day Dana took Elliott to the hospital, he had spent the entire school day on his Chromebook researching how to kill himself.

Allizandra Herberhold is an exit interventionist with Parents for Peace. She handles many of the NVE cases like Elliott's.

Herberhold said Parents for Peace gets lots of calls from people afraid loved ones are radicalized—especially around election season. But she said radicalization is a lot more than supporting a different political party. She describes it as an "unwavering, deeply held belief that is a call to action for violence."

Herberhold said most people also assume radicalization is a symptom of mental illness. "It's not at all," she said. The people she works with may battle some depression or anxiety. "But they're not schizophrenic. They're not bipolar. They're not having delusions," she said.

Instead, Herberhold traces the problem to something far more common: loneliness.

Herberhold describes the teens she meets with as naïve and vulnerable. They don't have a stable sense of self and are desperate to belong somewhere—even if somewhere is a toxic online group. Many also have autism, which she said makes them especially susceptible to grooming.

Minors Herberhold works with also have a long history of watching violent porn and gore online. Often, they get exposed to explicit content when they are in elementary school. Then they start seeking out increasingly horrific media, chasing an adrenaline rush. "It gets burned into your brain," Herberhold said. "You become desensitized."

Joni Johnston is a forensic psychologist and private investigator who's worked with violent offenders for over three decades. She said it's important for people to move beyond blaming the internet for youth radicalization and understand why teenagers are seeking out extreme content.

"Happy kids aren't stumbling on these sites and then being radicalized," Johnston said. They are already struggling with difficult experiences and broken relationships and want to know: "Does anybody else feel like I do?"

By the time families find Parents for Peace, they are usually in crisis. They don't have time to sit around and ponder how their child became radicalized, Herberhold said. Instead, she focuses on giving them action steps for moving forward. Usually, the first step is cutting off internet access.

Herberhold said trying to argue ideology out of someone just doesn't work. You have to help

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teenagers reconnect with their communities and build a better life so they don't want the ideology anymore.

But there's a caveat, Herberhold said. People have to want to change. Otherwise, they won't. In those cases, she tries to mitigate the threat an individual poses to others. "You can believe what you want," Herberhold said. "But you can't hurt other people."

Every day Elliott stayed at the mental hospital, Dana got a call from staff trying to send him home. Meanwhile, a rumor spread among the other patients that Elliott had belonged to a "death cult." People were whispering about him, and even some nurses started asking him pointed questions, Dana said.

Elliott was scared. He told his mom he wanted to come home.

He told her something else, too. Dana doesn't recall his exact words. But their meaning is burned in her memory: "I don't really have a full handle on what happened to me. But I know now that something really wrong was happening, and I never want to go back there."

After weighing her options, Dana decided to bring Elliott home. But first, she boxed up everything in his room. She went through the vents looking for weapons and stripped everything down to the stark essentials of a hospital ward.

No corded blinds. No loose sheets. Nothing Elliott could use to harm himself.

When Elliott got home, Dana outlined her new house rules. Elliott wouldn't be allowed home alone. He wouldn't be allowed online. And he would only have a flip phone.

At first, Elliott was angry about the new rules. But a few days later, he told Dana getting rid of his phone was the best thing that ever happened to him.

Elliott attended a partial hospitalization program for the next six weeks. Dana put him on a program of her own, too. Every day, he had to wake up early and go walk or run around the block. "You're gonna go get sunshine in your eyes," she told him.

Dana bought Elliott a secondhand iPod. Together, they started visiting libraries and checking out CDs. But all Elliott's music picks had to be mom-approved. And Dana watched carefully over his shoulder whenever he uploaded songs to his device.

For the first time in six months, Dana glimpsed a light in her son's eyes.

Gradually, Elliott started making progress forward. By the time another school year rolled around, Dana decided to transfer him to a smaller school for a fresh start.

Elliott's new school didn't have a band program. But teachers allowed him free rein of the old music room stocked with instruments and '90s analog recording equipment. He started making friends and inviting them to play music with him.

Elliott's new school closed at the end of that year. Today, he's back at his old school. Dana told him he'll be homeschooled if he slips up again.

But Elliott is in a much different headspace now, Dana said. He still doesn't have a smart-phone, and it bothers him now how much time his classmates waste online. Dana said he tells anyone who will listen, "Get rid of your smart-phone and just get a flip phone and an iPod."

Dana said he's found a renewed sense of purpose in caring for his family. And he hopes to use his story to help others struggling like he did. At his school, Elliott hears a lot of kids parroting the same extreme ideas he used to believe, and that's really upsetting—especially the anti-Semitism. He told his mom lots of his classmates deny the Holocaust.

Dana said most parents have no idea their kids believe these things.

When she shares Elliott's story, people usually blame what happened on her parenting. Or they assume only "Goth kids" are vulnerable to radicalization. But Dana said that isn't true: "It also happens to the captain of the football team."

Dana said parents, teachers, psychologists, police—anyone working with children—need to understand the warning signs of online radicalization. And parents need to exercise their authority to protect their children, even if that means taking away their phones entirely.

"My son was going to die," she said. "I should have taken it away four, five, six months before I did," she added.

Most importantly, Dana said, parents need to address the crisis of isolation and meaninglessness teenagers face. She encourages parents to find like-minded families and start making memories in the real world. "Just make your house the party house for kids," Dana said. "They need to be running out in the street or on their bikes."

Several times a week, Elliott's friends come over for garage band sessions. Sometimes, they play for eight hours on a Sunday. But Dana doesn't mind the racket. "It means he's connecting," she said. "He's happy." ■



A vendor works in a market
in Comrat, Gagauzia.

RAINER UNKEL/REA/REDUX



LEFT

BEHIND

THE VESTIGES OF COMMUNISM STILL PLAGUE MOLDOVA 35 YEARS AFTER THE SOVIET UNION'S COLLAPSE

by William Fleeson

Nearly two dozen children fill the multicolored classroom at School Without Walls, an evangelical Christian mission in the village of Svetlii, Moldova. Their smiles convey curiosity, and relief that a group of visitors has temporarily interrupted their schoolwork. Some wear little crosses with a diagonal slat, signaling their Eastern Orthodox religion. Their dark hair and features typify the people of Gagauzia, a poor region of southern Moldova with its own Turkic language, a holdover from the Ottoman Empire that ruled this part of southeast Europe for three centuries.

The classroom space, warm and brightly lit, offers the children what they so often lack at home: support, safe conditions, and hope for better days ahead.

For her own future, 11-year-old Kseniya Russu has big ambitions. “I want to become an accountant,” she tells me, smiling. “Or a detective.” Her deskmate, 10-year-old Evalina Zebely, says she wants to become an accountant, too. Russu boasts about her studies in four languages besides her native Gagauzian: English, German, Romanian, and Russian.

Becoming proficient in foreign languages isn’t just for academic accolades. It could one day become vital for Russu and her classmates’ livelihood—and their survival.

More than 1 in 4 Moldovan adults leave to work abroad, given the country's weak economy and the promise of better pay almost anywhere else. Russu's parents live and work in Chisinau, Moldova's capital, in the center of this crescent-shaped country of 2.4 million wedged between Romania and Ukraine. But even those fortunate to find a job in-country can face long stretches of time away from their homes. One in five Moldovan children spends at least three months each year without at least one parent, according to the Moldova Project, a family-focused charity. Extended separations from spouses and children can create a strain that destroys families altogether.

When I asked Russu where she would like to work one day, she didn't hesitate. "I want to go to America," she said.

The facts of Moldova's economy leave little doubt that labor emigration is necessary—or that its effects can hit poor families the hardest. The country is landlocked, which complicates its foreign trade. It lies outside the European Union (EU) but is seeking to join. The country has few high-value industries and instead engages mostly in light industry, mid-level services like tourism, and agriculture. According to a 2021 report from the EU's European Training Foundation, Moldova has one of the highest overall rates of migration outflows in the world. Most leavers go to Russia or Romania, and sometimes to Italy or Ukraine. As more adults leave, fewer children are born and raised in Moldova, making the grim cycle of depopulation a threat to the country's present and future, too.

"It's a catastrophe for Moldovan families," says Sergey Rakhuba, president of Mission Eurasia, a Tennessee-based Christian aid group that runs School Without Walls locations in 14 countries.

Moldova belonged to the Soviet Union until the bloc's collapse in 1991, leading to economic chaos and an urgent need to find stable work. Moldova has lost a third of its population since then. Many parts of Eastern Europe and Central Asia—the former Soviet empire—remained economically depressed for decades. That fostered a set of practices that persist today: legal and illegal labor, with the kinds of exploitation that are typical in illicit work. A June report from the EU's Council of Europe found widespread abuses against Moldovan men working abroad. Women are prone to trafficking for willing—and unwilling—sex work, usually in European cities.

The attractiveness of jobs abroad has only increased as countries in Moldova's neighborhood have prospered. At the low point of its post-Soviet economic depression in 1999, Russia had a gross domestic product (GDP) of less than \$200 billion. In 2024, it logged a GDP of \$2.17 trillion—despite a bevy of

Western sanctions in response to its war on Ukraine. That same year, Poland achieved a GDP of \$915 billion, while Romania's topped \$383 billion. Poland, Romania, and Russia, like Moldova, share a Communist past, which made the transition to capitalism painful. But Moldova's GDP last year came in at just \$18.2 billion—many times below its neighbors, according to World Bank data.

With plentiful jobs elsewhere, even Moldovans who would prefer to stay must grapple with the push and pull of work opportunities abroad—and economic bleakness at home.

"In other conditions, parents could stay," says Denis Griciuc, who runs the school in Svetlii alongside his wife, Lyuba. "They don't want to leave, [but] they have to." Sixty percent of the students' parents work outside Svetlii, Griciuc tells me. The Griciuc family includes six children, three of whom Denis and Lyuba adopted from troubled homes.

For many Moldovans, challenges in work pair with equally serious social problems. More than 30% of the population lives below the national poverty line, per data from the World Bank published in April 2025. Alcoholism and rural poverty are especially acute. The same report held that two relatively recent shocks—COVID-19 and the war in neighboring Ukraine—have warped job markets, stalled homebound cash transfers, and sent inflation soaring to almost 35% per year. War-related disruptions to Ukraine and regional energy systems have sparked a heating shortage. Three in 10 Moldovans now say

they cannot heat their homes adequately.

Apart from Moldovans' private lives and homes, the country's other problems play out at very public levels. Corruption is a significant concern: The country ranks 76 out of 180 on the main index of Transparency International, a governance watchdog. While scores have improved in recent years under the pro-Western presidency of Maia Sandu, Moldovan corruption often goes unpunished. The country's most famous case of public graft involves a former politician, Ilan Shor, who

was convicted in absentia for a 2014 embezzlement totaling almost \$1 billion. Media reports dubbed Shor's maneuver the "theft of the century"—the stolen sum totaled about 12% of Moldova's GDP at the time.

Shor, a dual citizen of Moldova and Israel, remains beyond Moldova's borders and the reach of justice—for now. And despite improvements, Moldova's post-Soviet vestiges, like





corruption, have discouraged the kind of job-creating foreign investment that has benefited its neighbors.

Against such formidable challenges, the School Without Walls is doing what it can. Beyond basic schooling, its ministries include vocational training. Some students, mostly girls, study floristry. Boys can hone skills in construction. Others learn to make bread and manage the local school-run bakery across the street from the school grounds.

After visiting the classroom and eating a meal with school staff, we make a stop at the training bakery. A Moldovan welcoming committee greets us, wearing traditional embroidered tunics and long skirts. Young women hold out bread and salt, Eastern Europe's customary greeting for guests. They encourage us to take a hunk of bread, dip it in the salt dish, taste it—and feel fully welcomed, in the Moldovan way.

As the crowd mills in and outside the bakery's interior, a cluster of senior women—all in the brightly colored headscarves common in Moldovan villages like this one—sits outside, waiting for the free bread the bakery provides as part

11-year-old Kseniya Russu wants to become an accountant.

of its mission. Speaking in Russian, Gagauzia's most common language, they share stories of poverty, trials, and separation.

When I ask the group if they have family members working abroad, nearly all of them raise their hands. They rattle off the countries of their loved ones' employment: Germany, Italy, Romania, Russia, the United States.

How does their absence make you feel? I ask one woman, whose few remaining teeth, all gold, glint in the sun.

"It hurts my heart," she says, and looks away.

As evening sets in, the air in Svetlii changes from cool to chilly. The pale light dims over the surrounding farms and hills—striking a contrast between the beauty of the countryside and the ugly realities of life here. The scarved grandmothers, bread under their arms, shuffle home to feed their grandchildren and themselves.

I ask Griciuc what gives him hope for his six children and the many others in his care.

"We want them to see how we study God's Word," he said. "Our work is to sow. The rest is up to God." ■



Christians are embedding themselves
into U.S. entertainment strongholds

Redeeming the silver screen

by KIM HENDERSON

ILLUSTRATION BY
Krieg Barrie



It was a pose as much as a practicality, the shovels scraping the ground at Biola University that September day in 2024. California dirt flew this way and that, dusting the shoes of school leaders wearing hard hats and neckties and the kind of satisfied smiles befitting such an occasion—the ceremonial start of construction on the 45,000-square-foot Snyder School of Cinema & Media Arts.

The school's founding dean, Tom Halleen, was among those holding shovels. He's a graying former Hollywood executive whose credits include *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad*, and *The Walking Dead*, the highest-rated basic cable series in television history. When he addressed the crowd gathered for the groundbreaking, Halleen spoke not only about new classrooms and equipment but also about influence, insisting that Christians should be smack-dab in the middle of the entertainment business. How else, he argued, can we provide hope in the most powerful form of communication on the planet?

When completed this summer, Biola's new studio will offer film students a host of state-of-the-art resources: color-grading suites, a game design lab, a recording stage, movie prop displays, makeup rooms. The project represents a serious investment with a price tag topping \$75 million, and it bears a direct tie to what was, at the time it was given, the largest donation in Biola's history, courtesy of the Snyder family, owners of In-N-Out Burger.

According to Halleen, a proper return on that investment will look like this—superior graduates with both great technical skill and great character, equipped to compete at the highest levels in Hollywood. And they won't

be alone. Christians are increasingly embedding themselves within American entertainment strongholds, just as what some industry insiders describe as a new "golden age of filmmaking" dawns.

USED TO BE, HOLLYWOOD was the destination for aspiring moviemakers. Things have changed. Writers, directors, and especially bankrollers now dare to create content outside California, often reaping

out-of-state financial incentives in the process. Filmmaking hubs have popped up in cities like Austin, Atlanta, and Nashville, and they're thriving. Austin alone has played host to more than 30 major projects since 2023.

For Los Angeles Pastor Joel Pelsue, the exodus hurts. He's the co-founder and president of Arts and Entertainment Ministries, an organization that's been helping Christians navigate Hollywood since 2004. In recent years, he's watched half of his good friends pull up stakes and move. He blames mounting costs. He blames the writers' strike, unions, government permits, the cost of living, the pandemic. "COVID gave California an opportunity to add more and more regulation. Not just vaccinations, but people testing and making sure you're doing all this on the production set, and it raises the cost of everything."

Pelsue estimates the studios around him are now, at the most, 40% occupied. Even when they are in use, profitability is far from guaranteed, partly due to the advent of streaming. Releasing films to a streaming service like Netflix rather than theaters generates only a fraction of the revenue movies once earned,

making it far harder to recoup production costs. And some networks are even deleting entire series of television shows to avoid paying residuals and royalties. Why shouldn't they, when the costs could exceed a series' streaming value? Add AI to the mix, and YouTube-first releases, and



Tom Halleen speaks at the construction site for Biola's Snyder School of Cinema & Media Arts.

COURTESY OF BIOLA UNIVERSITY



HOUSE OF DAVID



SOUND OF FREEDOM

you've got what begins to resemble an entertainment Wild West.

"I think the good news is that Hollywood is going to be brought to its knees," Pelsue says. "This is a course correction. I think God humbles the proud, and humility is a good thing."

Pelsue hopes declining revenue will get decision-makers to rethink their content, explore something new. And AI is only accelerating the change. "It's a great time for Christians to come in and say, 'We can learn the tools, make movies faster at a lower cost, and distribute straight to the consumer. I don't need to go to LA and get the approval of an executive at a top studio.'"

Conservative investors and creators have responded to the changing landscape by quietly backing new studios and projects aimed at long-term cultural influence. Leonard Leo, a wealthy activist and co-chairman of the Federalist Society, funded the Wonder Project, a new subscription-based entertainment brand designed to hold its own against other big-budget entertainment. More than 22 million people streamed Wonder Project's biblical epic series

House of David in 17 days following its debut on Amazon's Prime Video. Kelly Merryman Hoogstraten, the brand's CEO, says the data confirms what she knew all along—millions of people have been waiting for that kind of entertainment. "Faith is an audience, not a genre. Our viewing patterns prove it."

House of David may have brought subscribers through the door, but they're staying for the hundred-plus titles Wonder Project has curated. Comedy, drama, documentaries. Movie favorites are available as-is or as TV-edited versions, the kind that would typically be shown on broadcast or basic cable.

Crowdfunded, audience-driven models like Angel Studios also demonstrate that alternatives to Hollywood's traditional system can succeed. Angel supporters, known as guild members, get to vote on projects. They decide what will be produced. They hit the jackpot with the \$250 million global success *Sound of Freedom* in 2023. Onlookers

say Angel's success is a response to Hollywood's gatekeepers being out of touch. They just don't seem to understand the strong demand for values-driven storytelling.

The success of another conservative-leaning film in 2023, *Jesus Revolution*, further signaled a shifting moment in entertainment, one more open to engaging, rather than alienating, faith-based audiences. The next year *Reagan*, a biopic starring actor Dennis Quaid as the former president, and the documentary *Am I Racist?* accomplished the same feat. Despite landing in the box-office Top 10, though, the films endured negative critical reception, underscoring a widening worldview gap between professional reviewers and audiences. Critics called *Reagan* "shallow," but fans said it was inspiring. The movie made Rotten Tomatoes history by achieving the largest audience-to-critic score gaps ever on the site.

Still, the movies made money, a good bit of it. Perhaps that helps explain why

Hollywood seems to be growing more hospitable to performers who are candid about their faith. Tony Hale is one of them. Hale is an Emmy Award-winning actor whose work ranges from the Fox series *Arrested Development* to Disney's *The Mysterious Benedict Society*. When a *Rolling Stone* reporter asked him what it's like to be a Christian in Hollywood today, Hale didn't try to change the subject. Instead, he said his faith keeps him grounded: "Knowing there's a higher power as I've gone through difficulties has been an incredible source of comfort for me."

Pelsue maintains such openness is still risky in Hollywood. "If you're a Christian, but you say gay marriage is fine, you're one of the cool Christians," he explains. "But if you actually are orthodox in your beliefs, and they find that out, you get blacklisted easily."

DUANE BARNHART LEARNED that lesson early in his career. Barnhart describes himself as a "redemptive storyteller" with a presence in both Burbank and Palm Beach, Fla. In Christian circles, Barnhart is known for his work with Kirk Cameron's *Monumental*. But his résumé also includes collaborations with mainstream heavyweights Laurence Fishburne, Meg Ryan, Gary Sinise, and others.

Barnhart's big break came in 2000 when he produced commercials for just-launched online advertising platform Google Ads. He remembers when a potential client abruptly cut ties after learning Barnhart had done work for a prominent Christian figure. Barnhart laughs about it now, but at the time the loss stung. "It wasn't about something I personally said or did, which would be more understandable," he said. "They canceled because of how they viewed his Christianity, even though he had nothing to do with the project I was bidding on. It was guilt by association."

Although Barnhart says he wasn't hiding his beliefs, he wasn't advertising them. Instead, he intentionally hired nonbelievers for jobs on his set,

exposing them to faith-based content he was producing. It made for lively lunch discussions.

Barnhart thinks Christian art has for years lagged behind mainstream production in quality, but that gap is closing, thanks largely to developments in technology. When he started out, an editing suite could cost as much as \$300,000, and a good camera another \$100,000. Today, iPhones have cinematic modes capable of making feature films. Even amateurs can make a movie, edit it, and distribute it, right from home. "The new golden age of filmmaking is now," Barnhart says. "That makes Christian filmmaking all the more viable."

Overtly Christian media companies stand to benefit from technological advances, too. Pennsylvania-based nonprofit Christian History Institute introduced its animated *Torchlighters* DVD series in 2005. The inaugural episode brought to life the story of missionary martyr Jim Elliot, attracting a niche audience that eagerly awaited each new release, even in an era dominated by Disney and Pixar blockbusters.

Producing the series, however, was labor-intensive and costly. It could take

nearly two years to complete a single feature-length episode about heroes of the faith like Augustine, John Bunyan, and Amy Carmichael, with some 30,000 hand-drawn images required for each installment. Last May, Bill Curtis, president of Vision Video, a division of Christian History Institute, announced that after 23 episodes, the series would end.

Now, AI has them preparing for a relaunch.

"When you can't sell DVDs and you're getting 2 cents a stream, the economics don't work," Curtis told me. "But getting creative creating them has provided a whole new financial dynamic."

Curtis is a pedigreed member of the Christian filmmaking community whose father, Ken Curtis, produced the well-known 1970 film *The Cross and the Switchblade*. In recent years their ministry has focused on projects like *Vindication*, a faith-based crime drama series that Curtis says has broad appeal. "It's not an apologetic series," he





explained, “but hopefully it gets people thinking about really difficult subjects in a redeeming way.”

Even with the success of *Vindication*, now in its fourth season, Curtis says the biggest challenge facing Vision Video is the same one he has encountered throughout his 40-year career: Most Christians don’t consume Christian media. “They consume mainstream media. It’s a very specialized subgroup that’s motivated to seek out Christian media.”

Still, Curtis is encouraged that new technology has put filmmaking within reach for Christians who once lacked the resources to develop their craft. That was the case with *Vindication*’s director and producer, Jarod O’Flaherty. When his modest first episode won awards on the film-festival circuit, Vision Video noticed. “We said, ‘Wow, there’s some real skill here. We want to work with this writer and director,’” Curtis remembers.

But accessibility hasn’t solved everything. Funding remains the biggest

obstacle for Christian creatives, who often have vision but lack what Duane Barnhart calls “a war chest.” The key, Barnhart believes, is helping Christians see filmmaking as a form of outreach.

“They think, ‘I could feed this child, or I can give you money to make a movie,’” says Barnhart. “I understand that mindset. But the way to multiply your output by 10 is by changing minds, so that hearts are changed, and multiple people are feeding children.”

Barnhart is currently at work on *Monumental 2*, slated for release after America’s 250th birthday

celebration. He says the biggest difference this time around is distribution. “I have two original investors from *Monumental 1* who are investing in *Monumental 2*. And the first question they asked was how we’re going to distribute it differently 15 years later.” These days filmmakers don’t have to follow the old paths. They can drop a film straight onto video-on-demand stores or subscription services, mix a small theater run with a digital launch, or even release it in theaters and online at the same time—what some call a simultaneous release. Others skip the middlemen entirely, selling or streaming on their own sites or social channels, or using fan-driven platforms to trigger local screenings.

Barnhart says this time they’ll start with a national theatrical event, then layer in licensed church screenings, ad-supported streaming, and more. They’ll also go directly to Christian schools and homeschoolers with curriculum-based licensing. “The idea is not just to release a film but to build a movement through strategic windows that align with our

mission. It’s distribution with discipleship in mind.”

CHANGES IN THE INDUSTRY may be opening new doors for independent filmmakers, but keeping pace remains a challenge. At Biola, Dean Tom Halleen says staying current is a priority—one he addresses by hiring faculty and adjunct professors who are actively working in the field. Last year alone, 24 adjuncts brought their industry expertise into Biola’s film school classrooms.

“So if a sound design course is being taught, I bring in someone who works for Skywalker Sound to teach that class. In this case, she was a Biola grad. She shares our common faith, and she’s able to come into the class and tell students what she did yesterday. That’s the job market our students are going to move into.”

The school also brings alumni back to campus to inspire current students. Last year, alumnus Nate Norell and his team won the “Doritos Crash the Super Bowl” ad contest. He grabbed a share of the million-dollar grand prize and saw the Doritos commercial he co-directed air during the big game. Just three weeks later, he was back at Biola, sharing his experience with students. Digital creator and filmmaker Zach King—an alum with a combined social reach of more than 130 million followers—delivered Biola’s 2024 commencement address.

Biola grads are making their marks in other spaces as well. John Mabry is known for his work with the police drama *Blue Bloods*. Natalie Pohorski is a lead producer of the Call of Duty video game franchise. Rob Bredow is an Academy Award–nominated visual effects supervisor.

That’s exciting, Halleen admits, but now the film school is poised to produce even more graduates who can take their talents and their character into the industry.

“Imagine having hundreds—thousands—of executives across the industry who share a passion for family-friendly content. What if we prepared them to move into those decision-making roles? That’s the long game.” ■



VOICES DANIEL R. SUHR

Back to basics in journalism

Is this the end of the “fake news” era?

When Margaret Thatcher started in British politics, her maiden speech in the House of Commons advocated for the Admission of the Press to Meetings Act. She said her “first purpose in admitting the Press is that we may know how [taxpayer] moneys are being spent.”

Oh for the day when the media saw their primary duty as watching the public fisc on behalf of the hardworking taxpayer. Today many in the news media see “the most basic tenet of journalism [as] giving voice to the voiceless,” in the words of CBS News’ Sharyn Alfonsi. She’s the *60 Minutes* correspondent behind the controversial segment on CECOT, the El Salvadoran prison to which the Trump administration deported illegal immigrants. Her story was paused by CBS News Editor-in-Chief Bari Weiss for giving voice to critics of the administration while not including any of its defenders.

Weiss is the vanguard of the new regime at CBS News, brought on in the wake of David Ellison’s acquisition of its parent company Paramount this past summer. One of her first major decisions was to announce five values that would guide the enterprise, replacing the prior 38-page handbook. The values reflect a return to an older, simpler time in American journalism, when journalists saw themselves more as neutral reporters than passionate advocates for “the voiceless.”

For instance, the new CBS News pledges: “We believe that our fellow Americans are smart and discerning. It’s our job to present you with the fullest picture—and the strongest voices on all sides of an issue. We trust you to make up your

own minds, and to make the decisions that are best for you, your families and your communities.”

It will be nice to start getting different viewpoints while watching the news—that fair, unbiased attitude has been missing for far too long. For the past several decades, the broadcast TV networks have functioned as an arm of the Democratic Party. The Media Research Center reports that during 2025, the late night shows hosted 197 liberal guests to exactly two conservatives. Among partisan public officials, the count was 61 to zero. Let that sink in: Not a single Republican elected official appeared on a late-night show in 2025. That’s not television in the public interest—that’s shutting out one party and one viewpoint from participation in the public debate. It reminds me of the old joke about Fox News: Rupert Murdoch started the channel looking to serve a niche market and found out his niche was half the country!

Sadly if unsurprisingly, Weiss has been targeted by dissidents within her own ranks who preferred the prior liberal advocacy model of news, the “deep state” within CBS. They are leaking internal documents that they think will undermine Weiss—my particular favorite was a recent leak of a directive updating CBS’ internal style guidelines regarding transgender individuals to use the terminology “biological sex at birth,” as though that disclosure would harm rather than help Weiss’ standing with many Americans.

Congress’ vote to defund NPR and PBS and the subsequent dissolution of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting point to the same underlying truth as the revamp at CBS: The American people know they have not been well served by the broadcast TV networks. Gallup notes trust in national news media is at an all-time historic low of 28%. As Federal Communications Commission Chairman Brendan Carr has joked, “More Americans trust gas station sushi than the legacy national media.”

After COVID-19, the Hunter Biden laptop, and a score of other screwups, skipped stories, and broadcasts dripping in bias, the American people are fed up. When PBS tried to reboot its public image after congressional defunding, it started with a six-part documentary series on the American Revolution with famous filmmaker Ken Burns, timed to capitalize on public interest in the nation’s 250th birthday. The show ended up a woke presentation of America’s founding, and PBS just reinforced its reputation for left-wing bias.

I am hopeful the new CBS will be different. Another of Weiss’ five values is “We love America.” That’s a good thing—two or three years ago, I would not have been surprised if CBS had announced it was starting every broadcast with a land acknowledgment. Most Americans love America as well—they deserve news and entertainment that is faith-inspired, family-friendly, and patriotic just as much as blue-state viewers want to enjoy the current claptrap on late night. ■

—Daniel R. Suhr is president of the Center for American Rights, a nonprofit law firm with a focus on media issues



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NOTEBOOK



EDUCATION

Trouble in class

Everyday violence has become a common feature in most public schools

by TODD VICIAN

Julie James taught third graders how to read, write, multiply, and subtract for 30 years. She loved her job until about the last three years, when she became increasingly concerned for her safety—and that of her fellow teachers.

She recalled one incident when a student in another class had a sudden, emotional outburst.

“The teacher ended up with a bad concussion after the girl threw chairs and tackled her,” James said. “She was out for three months, but the student was back in the classroom the next day. Nothing was done.”

While school shootings garner much attention in discussions over school safety, the number of those incidents has declined. But everyday violence remains stubbornly difficult to address on K-12 campuses nationwide, and early, positive-based intervention programs haven’t proved as effective as originally touted.

Everyday violence includes fights, sexual assaults, and bringing weapons to school, but also smaller infractions like bullying, shoving, kicking, and punching in the hallway, and even shouting at teachers during class, according to Daniel Buck, a research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute who focuses on school safety, discipline, and curriculum.

Nearly 70% of public schools reported at least one violent incident on their campus during the

2021-22 school year, the latest data available from the School Survey on Crime and Safety. Reported incidents of crime, violence, and bullying in elementary and secondary schools declined slightly compared to a decade ago, but COVID-related closures likely influenced the decline. According to the Educator’s School Safety Network, the rate of violent incidents rose by more than 400% between the 2016-17 and 2022-2023 school years before declining slightly in 2024-25.

In Oregon’s Salem-Keizer School District, where James taught, teachers and staff reported 681 injuries involving students—about seven a day—in just the first three months of the 2023-2024 school year, according to the teacher’s union. Occupational safety and health consultants determined student-involved staff injuries in the district topped the national average, according to media reports.

“I had problems every day, several times a day,” said James, who left the district in 2020.

James and her husband Jeff, also an elementary school teacher, noticed a rise in everyday violence when administrators removed school resource officers from campuses a decade ago.

“I had very difficult kids the last couple years, and there were never any consequences for their behavior,” said Julie James, who retired in part because of health problems related to deteriorating safety. “They would trash rooms. They →





Seventh grade students in uniforms lean against lockers between classes.

would trash the library. Threats were made. One threat was against my life, and I said something to our principal and he kind of laughed it off.”

School administrators are graded on test scores and school atmosphere, a benchmark that can contribute to the problem, Buck said. In an effort to make their schools look better, administrators can be tempted to just stop doling out punishments that go on school records.

Lower-level violence that is allowed to become ubiquitous eventually affects the quality of education. Most students can adapt to even the most difficult environment when they want to learn, but James said near-constant distractions and disturbances are an unnecessary obstacle.

The federal government required school districts to consider the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

“If you hold the line on dress code or uniform infractions, then you’re less likely to get fights in the hallway because students expect excellence in the small things.”

framework in the late 1990s. Education experts touted rewarding positive behavior instead of punishing bad behavior as a way to improve school climate and make learning more equitable. In the Salem-Keizer district, which has over 37,000 students, administrators instructed teachers to give tickets or points to reward good behavior, following the theory that misbehaving children would change their attitude to earn praise.

Buck acknowledged the long-running tension between discipline hawks and discipline reformers has provided healthy countervailing forces in education policy. Public school scales, however, tipped in favor of reformers after the summer of 2020. Scrapped or unenforced behavior codes have failed to prevent misbehavior from spiraling upward.

“If you hold the line on dress code or uniform infractions, then you’re less likely to get fights in the hallway because students expect excellence in the small things,” Buck said. “Misbehavior will manifest in a loosened tie instead of clocking a kid in the jaw in the hallway.”

Analysts at RAND, a federally funded, nonpartisan research center that advises government policymakers, recommend schools invest in more mental health support for staff and students, communicate about incidents more transparently, provide training in trauma-informed practices, and encourage children to report concerns about friends more often. Three-fourths of schools identified by RAND are using programs like tip lines, and two-thirds are scanning social media and websites to try and prevent incidents.

“As long as you bring a bunch of kids together, they’re going to misbehave,” said Buck, who has taught in public and parochial schools. “It’s much more about how we manage that misbehavior—or sin and the imperfection of man—and not how we solve it. We cannot solve kids misbehaving, which is what a lot of the progressive education reformers want.” ■



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BUSINESS

Better than expected

Global outlook surprises economists

by TODD VICIAN



Economists expect the global economy to expand by about 3% this year and in 2027. Their projections are based on unexpected strength shown by the private sector and governments last year despite economic shocks from U.S.-led trade disruptions and marketplace uncertainties. Experts at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank Group revised their expectations upward after observing responses to tariff increases that began in April, continued investor optimism, and surging tech investments, particularly for AI-related projects. Worldwide economic growth has averaged about 3% each year since the pandemic rebound in 2021.

Emerging markets and developing economies in Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean will lead the future growth, analysts predict. China's and India's economies are expected to have the largest growth this year, but then decline at a greater rate than their Asian neighbors and global competitors in 2027. Economists project advanced economies, notably Germany, France, and Italy, will underperform their developing peers, and expand by only 1.8% this year. U.S. growth is projected to be 2.4%, slightly more than last year, and 2% in 2027.

Trade and market analysts at the IMF and World Bank were surprised that global economies, led by the United States and China, recovered so well in the five years following the 2020 recession. In those years, domestic production dropped at a greater rate than in previous recessions since 1960. World Bank economists noted nearly 90% of advanced economies are performing better than prior to COVID, although per-capita income in more than a quarter of developing economies remains below 2019 levels. The risks to the rosy projections, however, remain numerous: rising government debt levels, higher-than-projected inflation, reduced AI investments, and economic or military disruptions to supply chains. ■

AMERICAN BUSINESSES FOOTING TARIFF BILLS

American businesses paid nearly all the higher tariff bills last year, according to a recent study. Economists at the Kiel Institute for the World Economy analyzed more than 25 million shipping transactions at U.S. seaports between January and November 2025 and determined that importers paid 96% of all tariffs. Foreign companies chose to not lower their costs and instead exported fewer items.

American firms, meanwhile, increased purchases before tariffs hit or accepted higher costs because of heavy reliance on foreign suppliers, competition from international buyers, and expectations that the tariffs would be temporary. Tariff rates averaged about 10% in the last nine months of 2025, triple the average monthly inflation for the same year, helping financial analysts conclude that importers absorbed most of their higher input costs. Continued tariffs may contribute to reduced profits and capital investment, slower hiring, and higher prices for consumers.





Jonathan Isaac remains standing during the playing of the national anthem prior to a 2020 game in Orlando.

SPORTS

The NBA's nonconformist

Magic forward Jonathan Isaac knows what it means to stand alone

by RAY HACKE



Jonathan Isaac knows some things about not conforming to this world.

The reserve forward for the National Basketball Association's Orlando Magic drew headlines for doing just that during the COVID-truncated 2019–20 season: To protest the death of African American George Floyd, which happened while Minneapolis police were arresting him and sparked a summer of racial tensions, nearly all players at the NBA's season-ending "bubble" in Orlando wore "Black Lives Matter" T-shirts and knelt during the playing of the national anthem.

Despite strong pressure to do the same, Isaac remained standing. He also refused to don a BLM shirt because he felt the movement didn't align with his Christian values.

"I learned that it's a lonely road, man," Isaac told me earlier this season

after scoring 9 points in a road win over the Portland Trail Blazers. "It's difficult, but the bigger point is to have it settled in your own heart as to what you're doing, why you're doing it, and how you're going about it."

While Isaac drew flak for his stance at the time, it earned him greater respect in conservative circles.

Isaac learned to stand alone early in his NBA career: The 28-year-old remembers being asked to pick up condoms for teammates while on road trips as part of the hazing every NBA rookie endures. Initially, he had no problem doing so.

After recommitting his life to Christ, however, Isaac felt convicted about helping teammates pursue sex outside marriage.

At first, his decision to boldly stand for Christ didn't sit well with his teammates: "Guys were weirded out a

little about this new Jonathan," Isaac recalls in his testimony on the conservative website PragerU.com. "I picked up the nickname 'Baby Jesus' pretty early on."

But over time, Isaac's integrity won over his teammates.

"I definitely think it has grown into something where they respect the decisions that I've made and respect the man that I've become," Isaac said.

Isaac has also found other ways to publicly express his faith. In 2022 the Bronx, N.Y., native published the book *Why I Stand*, and in 2023 he launched Unitus, a Christian-themed athletic apparel line. A personally autographed pair of his Unitus shoes is on display at the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C., as part of an exhibit showcasing biblical influences on various facets of life, including fashion.

The signed sneakers feature a reference to Proverbs 28:1, which declares that "the righteous are bold as a lion," as well as a lion's head and mane. Isaac sees the reference on his shoes every time he looks down while dribbling at the foul line before shooting a free throw.

"My middle name is Judah," Isaac told me. "It's my life verse, and Jesus is the Lion of Judah. ... It reminds me to be courageous."

Isaac has also faced physical adversity during his NBA career: A first-round pick out of Florida State University in the 2017 draft, the 6-foot-10 Isaac missed all of two seasons and most of a third due to various knee and leg injuries and a torn anterior cruciate ligament. Those injuries wiped out the seasons immediately following Isaac's stance during the anthem.

Isaac says God used the period when he was sidelined to refine him.

"Once basketball was taken away from me, it helped me ground my identity in Christ," Isaac said. "He was shaping my purpose, which is to encourage others." ■



LIFE

Life support

Pro-life groups refocus on providing practical help for mothers

by LAUREN CANTERBERRY

➔ Madeline Martinez had a college degree, her own apartment in the Dallas area, and a good job. But the 24-year-old also had a big problem—she was unexpectedly pregnant and no longer in a relationship with the father of her unborn child.

“When I found out I was pregnant, I immediately did not want to be pregnant,” she said. “I didn’t go to a pregnancy resource center. I didn’t go to my family. I went straight to find an abortion.” By the time she got an appointment, her only option was a surgical procedure. She scheduled it for two days later.

Martinez asked her younger sister to drive her to the appointment. Her sister had had an unplanned pregnancy at age 16 and gave birth to a healthy baby boy. She tried desperately to talk Martinez out of aborting her own child, but Martinez had made up her mind. Her sister reluctantly agreed to take her to the appointment.

Like Martinez, many women and girls who face unplanned pregnancies are hesitant to discuss their decision with those closest to them, the ones most likely to offer help. After the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, pro-life organizations understood

expanded protections for unborn babies also meant that more abortion-minded women would need support through pregnancy and early motherhood. Simply saving babies from abortion did not mean their mothers were prepared to care for them, and ministries are stepping in to fill their tangible and relational needs.

Emilie Oxley is the executive director of Refuge Host Homes, an organization in Ohio that serves young mothers

An Embrace Grace support group throws a baby shower for a young mother after she finished the 12-week curriculum.

COURTESY OF EMBRACE GRACE

struggling to find affordable housing. Before they started the organization, Oxley and her husband served as foster parents for six years. During that time she regularly saw women lose custody of their babies. “Year after year, baby after baby, we kind of saw the same pattern,” Oxley said. “We said, ‘How can there be a better way to support mothers during pregnancy, to get support systems in place ahead of time, before baby arrives, so they can actually have a chance to be a mom before their infants are just removed from their care?’”

While more maternity homes have opened in the last few years, Oxley took a different approach. She launched Refuge Host Homes in June 2022 with the goal of matching pregnant women with host families partnered through churches. The model gives women a safe place to live, the opportunity to be part of a family, and exposure to the gospel during pregnancy and the first six months of her baby’s life. “Six months in a host home is not going to fix everything, but it gives hope and it shows another way is possible,” Oxley said.

So far the organization has had 14 women aged 18 to 36 come through the program. After the mothers leave the host home, Oxley’s team helps them find housing, often through a Restorative Landlord program in which a partner church provides rental assistance.

“Things feel really urgent to these mothers,” Oxley said. “We meet the big things when they’re in a spot where they really need to be reminded that they’re not alone.” As the nonprofit continues fine-tuning its model, Oxley said she hopes to see more churches and families with spare bedrooms offer to provide the stability single mothers need.

As nonprofit organizations across the country step in to help young women access housing, child care, and other vital services, the ministry Embrace Grace is meeting their need for relationship and community. Co-founder Amy Ford says long-lasting connections with local churches and believers are vital for women who may have once considered abortion.

**“Six months
in a host home
is not going to
fix everything,
but it gives hope
and it shows
another way
is possible.”**

More than 30 years ago, she and her now husband unexpectedly got pregnant when she was 19 years old. She nearly had an abortion but changed her mind on the abortionist’s table. In 2008, she launched a group at her church in Fort Worth, Texas, for women experiencing unplanned pregnancies. The group expanded to more churches, and in 2012 Ford and her husband turned it into a nonprofit.

The organization now has 1,200 groups across all 50 states that welcome mothers into a 12-week support group where they learn about their worth as daughters of Christ. At the end of the curriculum, the host church throws them a baby shower. “We are just working on making the church a safe place for these girls to run to,” Ford said.

Many young girls who get pregnant unexpectedly feel shame and fear step-

ping into a church, she said. But through the groups, she has seen Christian communities come alongside young mothers to meet their needs and make them feel welcome. “We all have stories of where God’s turned our messes into miracles,” she said. “And when they hear that, they have the courage to even try it.”

In December, Embrace Grace celebrated distributing more than 150,000 Love Boxes, packages that contain encouraging letters, testimonies from other mothers, and resources about local support. Madeline Martinez’s sister attended one of Ford’s groups when she was pregnant, and even gave Martinez a prototype of the Love Box in 2016.

The night before Martinez was scheduled to have her abortion, her sister brought over a bag of baby items, a handwritten note, and a book called *A Bump in Life*. It contained stories of other mothers with unplanned pregnancies. “It was really sweet, but when she was done reading [the note] to me, I looked at her and said, ‘You don’t know what I’ve done. You don’t know how I got here. I really think that having an abortion is just going to be best for everybody involved,’” Martinez recalled.

But after struggling to fall asleep, Martinez stayed up all night reading the book. She had started to wonder if she really could choose life for her baby when her alarm went off. By the time her sister picked her up for the abortion appointment, Martinez was running behind and scrambling to find the facility’s address. All of a sudden, she started to cry. “I was like, ‘I can’t do it,’” she said.

Instead of taking her to the abortion facility that day, Martinez’s sister took her to see their parents, who readily stepped in to help. Martinez chose life for her son and also went through Embrace Grace. Through the group, Martinez accepted Jesus, as did her parents. She now works for the nonprofit.

“My son is fatherless in the physical, but knowing the truth that I got from Embrace Grace, knowing what I know, I’m able to pour that into Mateo,” Martinez said. “I am able to say, ‘You were always wanted. Mommy was a little scared, but you were always wanted.’” ■

IMMIGRATION

Security scare

Experts claim refugees were inadequately vetted

by ADDIE OFFEREINS



Almost five years after the Biden administration's chaotic pullout from Afghanistan,

experts and advocates disagree over whether the federal government properly vetted the Afghans who fled their homeland for the United States. At the end of January, the Heritage Foundation released a report claiming the federal government did not adequately screen potential immigrants for terrorism connections or past crimes due to the tumultuous political climate and rampant document fraud during the

Evacuees who fled Afghanistan are bused from Dulles International Airport to a processing center in 2021.

evacuation and the months following.

Senior research fellow Simon Hankinson, the report's author, noted that thousands of applicants listed their birthday as Jan. 1 or used multiple names. Hankinson, who is also a former consular officer, questioned the use of the term "Afghan allies" to describe the more than 200,000 Afghans who resettled in the United States. Not all of these

individuals worked directly alongside the U.S. military, he pointed out. Many of them did odd jobs for subcontractors and worked with nongovernmental organizations or foreign media groups. "They have stretched the definition so much, it doesn't make sense anymore," Nayla Rush, a senior researcher for the Center for Immigration Studies who is quoted in the report, told WORLD.

The Biden administration also loosened requirements for special immigrant visas and refugees—statuses that put recipients on a pathway to U.S. citizenship—the Heritage analysis argued, and unlawfully admitted others under a temporary status called humanitarian parole. Hankinson urged the U.S. government to reexamine Afghans who entered after 2021 and focus on protecting individuals in surrounding safe third countries instead of admitting more Afghans into the country.

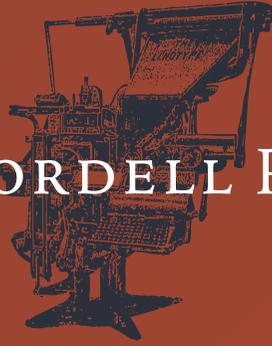
But resettlement advocates like Shawn VanDiver, founder and president of AfghanEvac, say the report mischaracterized the evacuation operation and conflated distinct immigration programs. His group issued a rebuttal statement, arguing Hankinson's critiques compare the vetting process with an unrealistic standard that doesn't account for the reality of a collapsed state with few available records. "It wasn't perfect," VanDiver told WORLD. However, the Biden administration "identified all these issues and placed national security at the forefront," he argued.

A HISTORIC DECLINE

For the first time in half a century, more immigrants left the United States in 2025 than entered, Brookings Institute estimates show. Researchers examined Immigration and Customs Enforcement data, which show deportations within the interior of the United States—away from the border—jumped by a factor of 4.6 during President Donald Trump's first nine months in office. ICE arrests quadrupled as a whole, including a sevenfold surge in arrests of immigrants with no criminal convictions. ICE conducted more than 675,000 deportations last year, according to Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem. That included almost 300,000 from within the interior of the country—a record for this century. As the Trump administration continues its immigration crackdown, net migration will likely continue to decline.



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TECHNOLOGY

Salty exchange

Sodium-ion batteries vying to replace lithium ones

by LIZ LYKINS

➔ Sodium-ion batteries are making their way into small personal vehicles. Chinese electric vehicle producer CATL plans to replace lithium-ion batteries in its Oshan SUVs with sodium-ion ones starting later this year.

Lithium has been the mainstream storage tech for phones, laptops, and electric vehicles for decades. But sodium-ion batteries are gaining popularity as they offer a potentially more resilient and cheaper alternative to lithium-ion. Sodium is over 1,000 times more common in the Earth's crust than lithium and is more easily accessible for mining. It charges faster and is also less likely to explode than its counterpart. But

because lithium batteries generally have longer-lasting charges and longer lifespans, they have been the status quo.

New research and Chinese companies like CATL and BYD have invested heavily in developing sodium-ion batteries that can compete with lithium-ion ones.

In America, the San Diego-based startup, Unigrind, produces sodium batteries for everything from snowmobiles to pickups.

Another American company, Peak Energy, based in California and Colorado, has created the first large sodium-ion battery system that connects to the power grid and stays cool without fans or air conditioning.

EXOSKELETONS FOR PERSONAL USE

Personal exoskeletons were the hot trend at CES 2026, the world's largest consumer electronics event. The exoskeletons showcased at the Las Vegas convention featured lightweight designs, AI-powered tech, and within-reach prices.

Exoskeletons are wearable devices that enhance human movement, strength, posture, or physical activity. Manufacturers, who originally sold the wearable tech to rehab patients and warehouse workers, are now targeting everyone from hikers to active seniors.

Hypershell sells a product enabling hikers to "go farther, climb easier, and take on tougher trails" from a starting price of \$1,100. It weighs less than 5 pounds and uses artificial intelligence to adapt its assistance to terrain and walking pace. Ascentiz's exoskeletons go around either the hips or knees to support and train muscles. Dnsys claims its products can get users up to a maximum speed of nearly 17 miles per hour for less than \$1,000.

UNREACHED APP UPDATE

Joshua Project's **Unreached of the Day app** revitalized its statistics focus this year. The app has shifted from looking at a people group in one country to looking at that group across all the countries it is in. The app highlights a different unreached people group each day to mobilize people globally to pray for the group. Previously, users saw a group like the Bambara listed as 12 different groups, as the people live across 12 West African countries. It now displays the same Bambara population as one people group, regardless of borders. The new statistics strategy aligns more closely with how frontier missions typically work, according to Joshua Project.





U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent speaks outside the USA House near the House of God at WEF.

RELIGION

God at Davos

Making space for faith at the World Economic Forum

by JENNY LIND SCHMITT

→ Limousines inched down crowded Promenade Street where storefronts had all been transformed into temporary corporate “houses”—hosted by companies like META, Google, and *The Wall Street Journal*—for the week of the World Economic Forum (WEF), when leaders of government, industry, and philanthropy descend on Davos, Switzerland.

For 55 years, WEF has brought together the world’s wealthiest and most powerful people in a bid to influence each other as well as the direction of societal trends and the global economy.

But this year, in the middle of this glitzy see-and-be-seen arena, Christians came to wield a different kind of influence. Local groups have long organized prayer meetings on the sidelines of WEF, but this year the House of God had its debut in a joint effort between founder Nicoleta Acatrinei and the local

Swiss congregation of the Evangelical Free Church.

“Religion is more than belief,” Acatrinei says. “It’s a foundational operating system for societies, shaping values, decisions, and behaviors for millennia.” In a rapidly transforming world, Acatrinei says ignoring world-view is detrimental.

The wide range of speakers from across the European Christian landscape in political, business, technology, charity, and health sectors showed the organizers’ desire for faith to impact the public square. Speakers from the Institute for Family Europe, the Foundation for the Family, the International Society for Human Rights, and the European Centre for Law and Justice participated in panel discussions with titles like “Faith, Finance, and Economy,” “The Role of Family and of Civil Society,” and “Faith, AI, and Sustainability.”

Next to the House of God, the privately funded USA House set up headquarters in Davos’ old English-speaking church. Programming there combined themes of American greatness at its 250th anniversary with the desire to bring a Christian faith back to the public sphere. Richard Stromback, the long-time Davos organizer tasked with putting together the USA House, recommitted to his faith with a public baptism service two years ago. That reawakened faith came into play when planning the USA House’s speaker lineup, which included National Association of Evangelicals President Walter Kim.

Stromback spokesman Joshua Brockner said prayer was part of the planning: “We asked ourselves, ‘How can we layer that faith aspect into panels on finance and cybersecurity and AI?’”

This year Brockner was shocked at a shift in conversations. “The energy was different,” he said. “There was humility and vulnerability. In the middle of conversations about business goals and projections, suddenly people said, ‘This is my faith, this is what I believe.’”

By the train station, away from the main WEF hustle, Youth With a Mission (YWAM) hosted daily prayer and worship sessions called Salt & Light. YWAM has previously hosted candle-light prayer vigils during the Davos meeting week, but this year it expanded efforts, including a public café and panel discussions on topics related to WEF.

During the Thursday prayer time, international ministry leader Benjamin Moses reminded attendees that power is given not to abuse, but to serve, and that’s why being present at WEF is important: “We’re serving people who make world impact that can be for good or bad. That’s why God’s people need to be everywhere, to influence those making decisions.”

All three groups are already making plans to expand their efforts at next year’s WEF. ■

C R O S S W O R D

Nonsense words

by PETER SILZER

Across

- 1 *Paradise Lost* villain
- 6 PFCs' superiors
- 10 Weeps
- 14 Church divider?
- 15 Jai ____ (sport)
- 16 Tough and lean
- 17 Snares
- 18 Unintelligible speech
- 20 Safe URL starter
- 22 Twin Cities sch.
- 23 Court records
- 26 Part of HMS and HRH these days
- 27 Obstruct
- 28 Unintelligible speech
- 31 Singer Orbison
- 32 Challenging H.S. science class
- 33 Bosc or anjou
- 36 A bad way to go
- 39 "Whatever you want!"
- 42 Grain tower
- 43 Something really boring
- 45 Alley scavenger
- 48 Unintelligible speech
- 52 Book blunders
- 55 Big galoot
- 56 Apollo's creator
- 57 Engine buildup
- 58 "Como esta ____?"
- 60 Unintelligible speech
- 63 Country singer Crystal
- 67 Adam's second son
- 68 "Got it!"
- 69 Result of a leadoff single
- 70 Comfort
- 71 Long-nosed fish
- 72 Play area

Down

- 1 Took a load off
- 2 Tire inflator
- 3 LAX inspectors
- 4 Literary breakfast?
- 5 Bluejay's home
- 6 Log-cutting area
- 7 Tongue root?
- 8 La Brea goo
- 9 *Toy Story* brat
- 10 Overwhelm with work

- 11 Fried potatoes, vis-a-vis baked ones
- 12 Marlon of movies
- 13 Most populous Australian city
- 19 Math calculation
- 21 Pooh's middle name
- 23 Toothpaste endorsement letters
- 24 Club in a Manilow hit
- 25 Big popcorn containers
- 27 DIY furniture chain
- 29 "Full House" actress Loughlin

- 30 Many a home health care worker
- 34 Key with three sharps: abbr.
- 35 Needlessly wordy
- 37 ____ mater
- 38 Who Uncle Sam wants
- 40 Cookbook writer Rombauer
- 41 Bar bills
- 44 Smallest state in India
- 45 Jamaican music
- 46 "Let's go, amigo!"
- 47 Judah, Levi, and Dan
- 49 Rodent hunter
- 50 British blowouts

- 51 O'er and o'er again
- 53 Saunter
- 54 Capital of Tibet?
- 59 Diva problems
- 61 18-wheeler
- 62 OT book before Jer.
- 64 Pro vote
- 65 Captain's journal
- 66 Opposite from WSW

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67						68				69				
70						71				72				

Bonus clues and puzzle solution on page 110



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Browse sample articles at gwnews.com/family26.

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

Across

- 6 They drill the new recruits: abbr.
- 39 What Adam did to each animal in the garden
- 56 Mars rover org.

Down

- 10 Okeffenokee
- 24 South American soccer tournament, _____ América
- 50 Bad-mouths

E	G	A	T	S		S	A	R	G		E	A	S	E
N	E	O	N	O		E	E	I	S	E	L	E	A	B
E	L	E	G	A	Y	G	H	S	R	I	B	B	E	G
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D	A	L	A	S	D	O	R	W	S	P	A	R	A	T
Y			W	I	R	A	I	A	L	A	L	E	S	I
S			S	O	B	S	G	T	S	A	N	A	T	S



VOICES ANDRÉE SEU PETERSON

Who really owns your house?

Thanks to rising property taxes, it may be the government

God is interested in the subject of property—His own and other people’s. As to His own, He says things like this: “The earth is the LORD’s, and the fullness thereof” (Psalms 24:1; 50:10).

As to other people’s, no sooner did Adam blink in the light than he was entrusted with real estate (Genesis 2:15). God knew that ownership is good for a man, and that ownership responsibility fosters flourishing. Who hasn’t noticed that people take better care of a house they own than one they rent? (Once when I considered buying a car from a local car rental agency, my son quipped: “Would you marry a prostitute?”)

Even animals, we are told by wildlife biologists, thrive when they have territory, resources, and inherited wealth, producing more offspring when they have “property,” and fewer when they don’t.

There is a sense in which the whole Old Testament is property law. (See Joshua 13–19; Deuteronomy 2:9; Leviticus 25:23–25 for a sampler.) When King David is rebuked by Nathan for stealing another man’s wife, the prophet employs the most reprehensible comparison he can think of: A rich man with many sheep steals the single lamb of a poor man.

All of which is to say that it is no trifling matter to defraud a man of his property.

You may have noticed that these days young people can’t seem to buy houses, and old retired people are having difficulty holding on to them.

In the case of seniors like me, these are houses whose mortgages we paid off decades ago. We reasonably assumed

we now own them free and clear. Turns out (this is a huge paradigm shift for us boomers) that we never really own our houses after all. Turns out we can still lose them. An estimated 42 million homeowners are presently in danger of going bankrupt and losing the roof over their heads.

The reasons that people who thought they were homeowners are learning they are effectively home renters are complex: Stagnant wages, rising homeowners insurance, and runaway inflation are among them. But in an 800-word column, let me confine myself to a single contributing factor—property taxes.

In all 50 states, K-12 schools rely on revenue from property taxes. In a cozy relationship between local governing bodies, the local central appraising district sets the value of your house—often inflated—for taxing purposes. The legitimate worth of your house (what people not under duress are willing to sell or buy it for) is thus fraudulently overvalued, which gives the taxing entities an extra few thousand dollars’ worth of value to play with. (They may even boast that they have lowered the tax rate, neglecting to mention that the important number is tax rate times assessment value.)

That extra value flows to the school district and is then levered into school bonds—basically IOUs that they promise to pay back to homeowners with interest, but that are in fact never paid back. Instead, when the bonds come due, they are simply rolled out or restructured, and new bonds are issued.

What makes your house worth \$100,000 or \$200,000 more than it was five years ago? Intrinsically, it may be nothing. It happened because school districts are borrowing money and using your house as collateral, thus strip-mining your hard-earned equity.

You have trustingly believed the bonds are for school building upgrades, teacher salaries, road improvements, and fire and police departments. Little have you guessed that the money also goes to hundreds of NGOs with names like Hmong American Partnership, Interfaith Action of Greater St. Paul, and American Indian Family Center.

Worse yet, when bonds are involved, this is no longer a state issue. You have now entered the big boy world of federal markets, of \$23 trillion in property overvaluation affecting every home in the country, and of compound cumulative interest that can never be paid off. A Ponzi scheme, in other words.

The vet who bought his house in 1960 is bewildered to discover his modest Cape Cod appraised at such a high value in 2026 that his property taxes are quadrupled. It amounts to another mortgage he never knew existed. On a fixed income, this is unaffordable. The government stands by to slap a lien on it and sells it at auction.

One of President Donald Trump’s proposed affordability measures is to repeal property taxes. Good for him. How about we get the local schools out of the bond business and have them operate on a cash-only basis. My grandmother, with her second grade education, could have told you as much. ■



Raji and his wife enjoy a walk on the beach.

Life in Gambia

Power outages, church planting, and long walks on the beach

by LEIGH JONES

→ Olalekan Raji attended WJI Europe in 2024. Since then, he's worked with WORLD's Global Desk to cover news out of Africa. He partnered with Jenny Lind Schmitt on this month's cover package (p. 66) about how Western climate policies hinder countries like the Republic of the Gambia from accessing the energy they need to develop and prosper.

Gambia is in the process of modernizing. Describe what your daily living conditions are like. The country has a fine sandy coastline along the Atlantic Ocean running about 50 miles. It's a

lovely little country for a writer—one of the few in Africa where you can enjoy peaceful long walks, and because of that, lots of European tourists visit every summer. Extremely low industrialization makes the cost of living very high, and I am lucky to live in Kotu, which is a suburb close to the capital, Banjul, and the beach.

Are electricity shortages a constant problem? How do you deal with them? For a couple of hours every two weeks, the power goes off. The bulk of electricity supply in Gambia is centered around the Greater Banjul Area where you have the

hotels and malls that cater to the tourists. My wife doesn't like the noise that generators make, so we just sit out the darkness outdoors under the trees.

How do these problems affect people's daily lives and their plans for the future? Plenty of women and older folks commute from the rural areas daily to work in the city. But the majority of youths like Buakar Bah, who's featured in the story, work so they can save up enough money to travel the deadly "Backway," a local term for illegal immigration that involves trekking on foot through the desert and boarding overcrowded wooden boats to Europe across the Mediterranean Sea. In 2024, nearly 900 of them drowned.

You're not originally from Gambia. What took you there? I came over from Nigeria in 2022 to start a church. Christians have had a presence here for more than a century. There's an old Methodist church that's been around since 1835. But sharing the gospel is a struggle. According to U.S. State Department estimates, 96.4% of Gambia's population is Muslim. It gives a feeling of prerevolution Iran or Turkey before the Ottoman Empire. I am Pentecostal, and to be honest, we're not exactly welcomed with open arms here.

In addition to energy access, what are some of the continent's other significant challenges? Education and democracy. A long history of military coups, despots, and sit-tight rulers have greatly weakened institutions of government in many African countries. This fuels corruption. Some of these rulers spend more money on upholding their regimes than the budgets for educating their citizenry. Education helps people and societies to develop a better quality of life. ■

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“PROCLAIMING THE IMPLANTED WORD”
JAMES 1:21

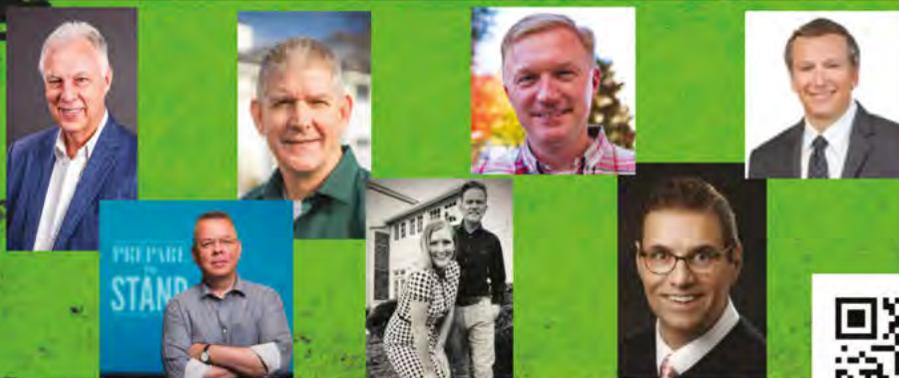


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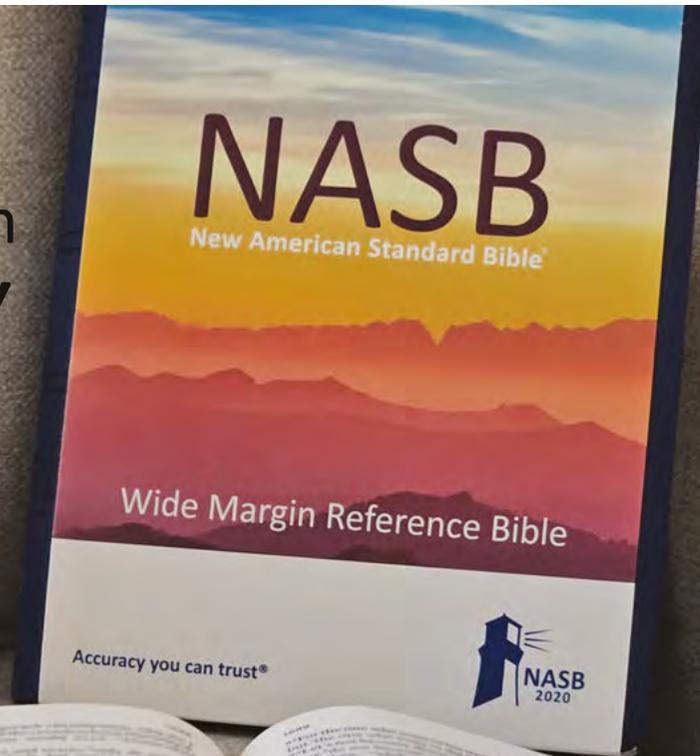
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