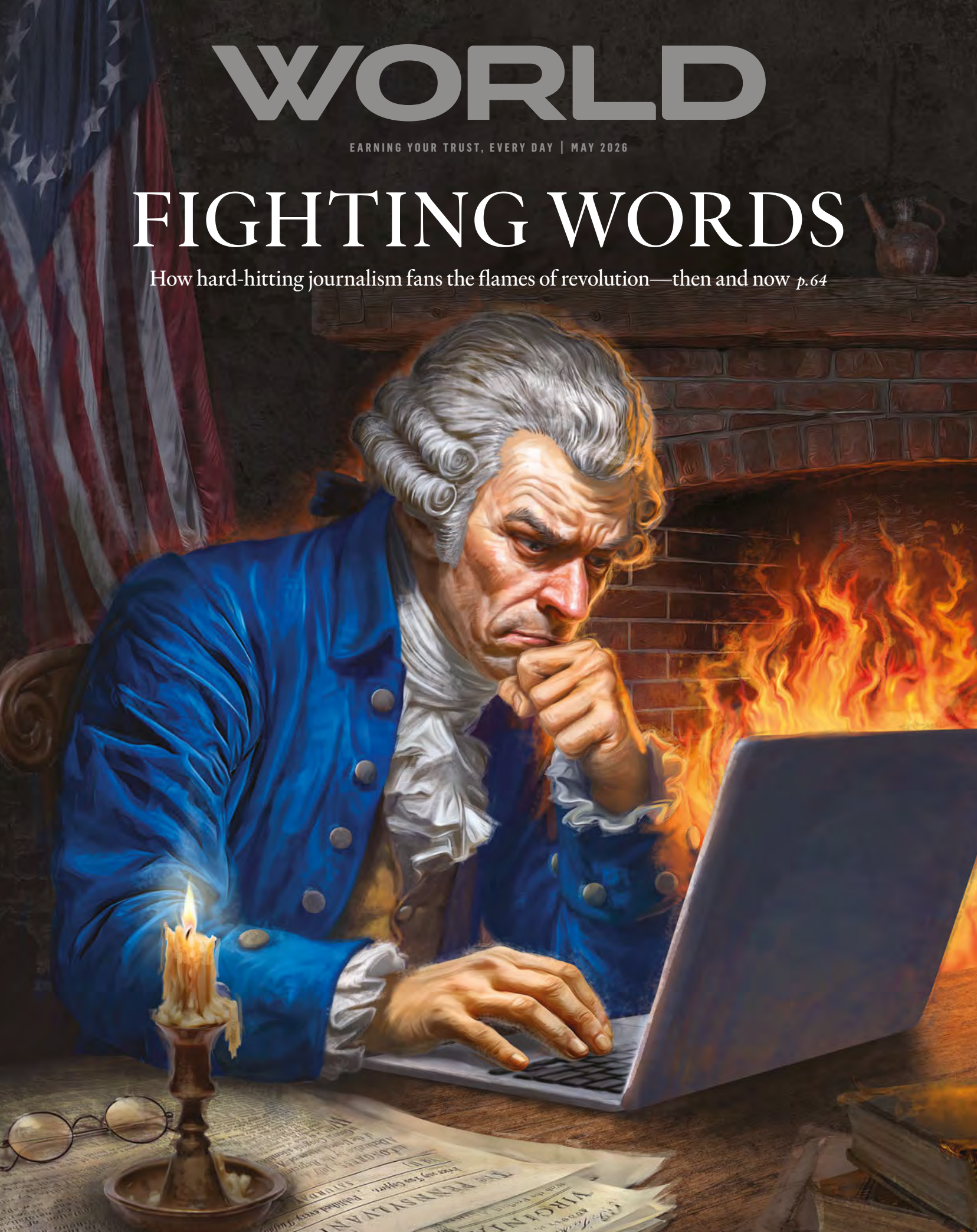


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FIGHTING WORDS

How hard-hitting journalism fans the flames of revolution—then and now *p.64*





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64

REVOLUTIONARY REPORTING

THE RETURN OF THE PATRIOT PRESS

Amid constant change, high stakes, and elusive truth, Revolutionary-style journalism holds renewed appeal

ALABAMA'S CHIEF MUCKRAKER

Bryan Dawson is on a mission to revitalize hard-hitting, local journalism

76

TIME FOR SOME TOUGH LOVE?

The Trump administration adopts a new approach to solving America's homelessness crisis

84

LIFE IN CUBA

Evangelical churches are challenging the communist country's pro-abortion culture, and saving babies

90

A TIME TO DANCE

Young singles are turning to an age-old social activity to overcome an epidemic of loneliness



14



38



96

DISPATCHES

14 In the News

The war in Iran could be the final straw in the already tense U.S.-European relationship

17 By the Numbers

Earlier testing and lifestyle changes probed as ways to combat surging colon cancer

18 Washington Memo

Lindsey Graham leads in polling despite many frustrated constituents

20 Departures

22 Human Race

Artemis II returns to Earth

24 Global Briefs

Fraudulent mountain rescues in Nepal

26 U.S. Briefs

Drought whittles Wyoming's snowpack

28 Backgrounder

What is the Jones Act?

30 Quotables

32 Quick Takes

City debates autonomous robots after spate of botched deliveries

34 The Forum

Grace Jin Drexel on China's fear of Christians and her father's imprisonment

CULTURE

38 Trending

Opera companies look for ways to draw in new audiences

42 Books

Restoring the dignity of man for the glory of God

Pastor Doug Wilson defends strong language

A common-grace guide to recovering purpose

The myth of picky eating—and what to do about it

One biography and one fantasy with faith-filled themes

Children's books on vision, value, and visits

52 Quest

Gregory Willbur: Four books that shaped my thinking

54 Film & TV

Animal Farm

He Calls Me Daughter

The Sheep Detectives

The Story of Everything

58 Music

New albums from the 77s and Lost Dogs

New and noteworthy

60 Masterworks

Grief resolved in Christ

NOTEBOOK

96 Lifestyle

Birding is attracting a new, younger flock of enthusiasts

100 Money

USPS needs help to stay afloat

101 Health

The persistent problem of lead poisoning

102 Religion

AI pastors raise financial and theological concerns

104 Sports

Pro softball and baseball leagues create new opportunities for female athletes

106 Politics

Republicans in California reap redistricting woes

107 Law

Recent damage awards may signal changes ahead for internet platforms

VOICES

12 Lynn Vincent

Curating corners of God's creative ensemble

36 Janie B. Cheaney

God's promised calamity was never the whole plan

62 Nick Eicher

Carl Trueman shows a path forward: not more argument, but recovery of belief, worship, and a shared way of life

94 Erick Erickson

Reports of fractures in the MAGA base are greatly exaggerated

111 Andrée Seu Peterson

Run your race with perseverance, all the way to the end

6 WORLD Notes

9 Mailbag

108 Crossword

112 Backstory

On telling hard stories and watching someone else get the reward



COVER ILLUSTRATION
by Mark Fredrickson

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WORLD NOTES



Healthy institutions—especially Christian ones—do not endure by accident. To remain faithful beyond their founders, they must deliberately reach and form the next generation. That is the work before us now.

At WORLD, we have seen this pattern before. In 1981, we began publishing God's World News for students. Those publications reached hundreds of thousands of young readers and, over time, drew entire families into WORLD Magazine. What began as a student product became a bridge to the next generation.

Today, we are building that bridge again.

You may have seen Nick Eicher's column in the April issue of WORLD introducing *Reality Check*, a new pilot series now part of our *WORLD Watch* program. His focus was on the concept behind the series—helping students recognize the ideas shaping today's cultural debates. Here, I want to place that effort in WORLD's broader generational context.

The background starts with *WORLD Watch* itself. Among our paid subscription products, *WORLD Watch* is the fastest-growing. Its target market is every Christian family in the United States with school-aged children. That's a real opportunity, even when we narrow it to the families we are most likely to serve.

Equally important is who those families are. The *WORLD Watch* audience is younger than the audience for WORLD Magazine. Many of our magazine readers are more likely to think of *WORLD Watch* for their grandchildren (and what a great idea, by the way). *WORLD Watch*, by contrast, is reaching parents who are raising children right now. That shift is more than demographic. It is generational.

If we are going to grow and serve that audience, we have to provide content aimed at the problems facing this generation. Students today are growing up in a culture with no shared framework for truth. Every day, they hear false claims about identity, morality, and purpose—often through media designed for speed and reaction rather than careful thinking.

As *Reality Check* co-host Jonathan Morrow says, a worldview must “explain what needs to be explained.”

At the same time, students are learning to think rigorously in other areas of life. They take advanced courses in history, science, and mathematics. They are capable of serious thought. But their understanding of

the faith does not always develop with the same depth. When that gap persists, faith can begin to feel like something outgrown rather than something built upon.

That is the gap we are working to address.

Reality Check is one way we are doing that. Each episode runs about five minutes and focuses on helping students recognize the ideas behind the arguments they hear every day. The goal is not simply to provide answers, but to train students to see more clearly—to identify assumptions, to ask better questions, and to understand how a biblical worldview speaks to the issues they encounter.

In a culture characterized by quick takes and competing voices, the ability to slow down and think clearly is not automatic. It must be taught.

And *Reality Check* is only a beginning.

Because it airs once a week as part of the *WORLD Watch* feed, it opens the door to additional programming throughout the rest of the week. For example, we are planning a segment that will help students think biblically about work, money, and the economy. Lord willing, that pilot will be ready for next fall. Other ideas are in development as well. Over time, our aim is to build a consistent, week-by-week framework—something families can rely on as they train their children.

That work complements the God's World News magazines, which are as lively and relevant as ever. We believe—and our audience continues to affirm—that students still read, and parents want them to read. By providing compelling news and features in print and online, we are encouraging both a love of reading and a love for God's world.

Taken together, *WORLD Watch* and God's World News are a gift to Christian families. We consider it a privilege to steward that gift for a new generation, and we pray that, as before, God will use it to draw families into a greater understanding of His world—generation after generation.

KEVIN MARTIN
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
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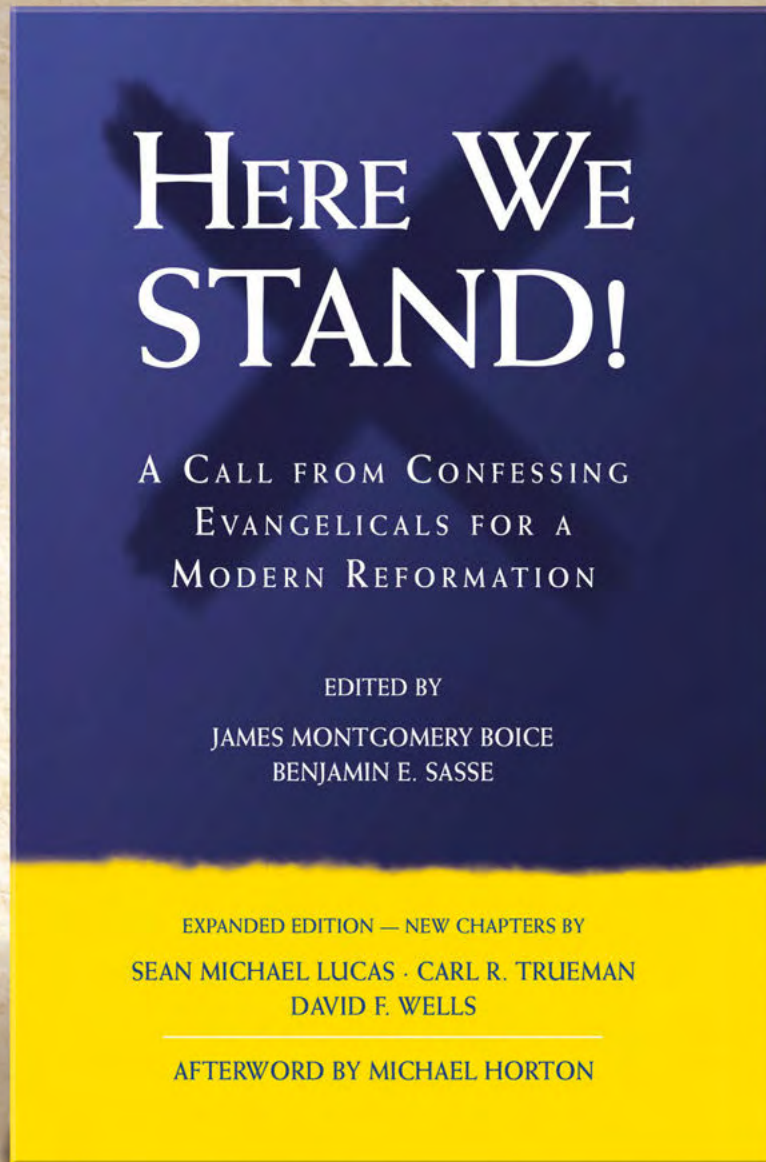


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“What impresses me is that Lomborg started out as a radical environmentalist, was challenged to examine the data, and realized that hardly any of those issues are as bad as they say.”

ENERGY HOGS

Page 66: I was glad to see the two articles on the issue of global warming. For sure, the policies of advocates for global warming hysteria harm the poor and keep them in poverty. I have always liked Bjorn Lomborg, having read three of his books. What impresses me is that he started out as a radical environmentalist, was challenged to examine the data by Julian Simon, and realized that hardly any of those environmental issues are as bad as they say.

Your readers should be encouraged to look at the data, especially when the majority of people in the United States have been led to believe that global warming is very serious, and that governments must act now to save the world. I read numerous hysterical articles in the scientific literature on all the harms of global warming, but they are almost all exaggerated.

Examining the data, your readers would find that the climate models exaggerate the heating with a doubling of carbon dioxide, there has been no increase in severe storms, more than 10 times as many people die of the cold than the heat, and there are natural processes of climate change that statistically are about half the global warming since the late 1800s. Moreover, advocates commonly point out severe weather events as evidence of climate change. Weather and climate are different.

The question comes up of why so many scientists are into climate hysteria.



MARCH 2026

I just read the provocative book, *Unsettled*, by Steven E. Koonin, former undersecretary for science at the U.S. Department of Energy in the Obama administration. A long quote from page 192 says it all: “I know from experience that such institutional pressures are real; whether you’re working for the government, a corporation, or an NGO, there is a message to be adhered to. For academics, there is pressure to generate press and to secure funding through grants. There’s also the matter of promotion and tenure. And there is peer pressure; more than a few climate contrarians have suffered public opprobrium and diminished career prospects for publicizing data that doesn’t support the ‘broken climate’ meme.”

MICHAEL J. OARD
M.S. ATMOSPHERIC SCIENCE
Bozeman, Mont.

How ironic that efforts to mitigate future climate change are resulting in present-day climate and agricultural disaster in Africa through the process of deforestation. I worked at a rural hospital in Eastern Africa in the 1980s and took advantage of green energy projects like solar hot water, freezer, and lighting; biogas for cooking; and a windmill-driven well. (The hospital still required a petro generator for high-wattage equipment.) With the green technology, though, when the time came for replacement parts and repair expertise, the original donors had often moved on to newer glamour projects. Even if they’d been able to do the upkeep, the green technologies still fall well short of the dependable, large-scale energy available with coal and petro.

MIKE CARLSON
Weeki Wachee, Fla.

I was very pleased to see “What is net zero,” “Energy hogs,” and “Bad investment,” which point out the adverse effects of policies by the WEF, the IPCC, and other organizations on the poor and how the effects of “climate change” are exaggerated. I hope many people read them. But why not tell the whole story, i.e., that the “climate change” predictions are a hoax? It would not take much research to prove, for instance, that Mann’s “Hockey Stick” graph is fraudulent.

JOHN T. BIGHAM
Oakland, Tenn. →

WHAT IS NET ZERO?

Page 28: “What is net zero?” starts off with helpful contextual information about “carbon sinks” like forests or oceans. Not many people are aware—my healthy cynicism suspects powerful actors do not *want* us to be aware—that healthy, moist soil is also a significant carbon sink. If “regenerative farming” methods are embraced by Congress and the Ag lobby (or, probably, in spite of the Ag lobby), the additional carbon sinks would bring the USA back to net zero.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER
Madison, Wis.

DRAWN TO DARKNESS

Page 78: Just read “Drawn to darkness,” and then read it again. The cure will never be parental controls (although they are good in their own way), or even government regulations limiting content. It seems there is a missing ingredient here that will always play the most important role in every crisis: Where is the dad?

SHAWN DAVISON
North Manchester, Ind.

I was upset and disappointed in WORLD when my 11-year-old told me he had read an article that troubled and concerned him—“Drawn to darkness.” The article should have had a content warning as it shared very disturbing and graphic words that left vivid and disquieting images in my mind—let alone my young son’s mind!

KATHARINE YODER
Crystal, Minn.

SECURITY SCARE

Page 104: I wonder about the subhead saying that experts claimed refugees were inadequately vetted. As a volunteer in Knoxville, Tenn., a City of Refuge since 1982, I have been told that refugees have been through several layers of vetting before they come here. Are the “experts” disputing this, or is the problem with the use of the term “refugees” as a catch-all for various categories of people who come here (asylee, migrant, Special Immigrant Visa holder)? Also, I’ve been told that many who come here without birth certificates are assigned

the birth date of Jan. 1, so it is not surprising that thousands of applications use that date. Let’s be careful about what we allow to scare us about security.

KATHRYN HENDRIX
Knoxville, Tenn.

REDEEMING THE SILVER SCREEN

Page 88: Great article. My son Michael will be graduating from Biola this spring as a choreographer. His dad talked with Halleen numerous times while visiting and was very impressed with him.

RICHARD PIEHL
Whitewater, Wis.

PUT YOUR BEHIND IN YOUR PAST

Page 12: The columns from Lynn Vincent and Janie B. Cheaney seem to interleave in a conspiracy, timely and prophetic. I have been fasting lately, asking God for revelation for how to trust Him in this season of life where there’s more and more room for my behind to fit into my past (I’m 62). Mostly, I have been viewing my past as a dusty attic of heart-piercing longings that I just don’t want to face. You say God makes my story in some significant place a transition in the larger story I can’t see. That’s such a redemptive thought.

PAT WAHL
Chippewa Falls, Wis.

THE EXPRESSIVE LINES OF ALBRECHT DÜRER

Page 62: I have been thoroughly enjoying the Masterworks articles. I look forward to them every issue. I connected in a deep way with the article featuring Albrecht Dürer’s work titled *Knight*,

Death, and the Devil. The detail is incredible. But what drew me in was the imagery of the knight going home after battling our greatest adversary the devil, and extinguishing any fear of death. Although Christ won the ultimate battle, we are in the fray here on earth, and I look forward to going home too! One characteristic of the sketch that was not mentioned but stood out to me was that he is headed toward the light. So are we if we are in Christ.

KEVIN LANTAFF
Commerce City, Colo.

WHO REALLY OWNS YOUR HOUSE?

Page 111: Andrée Seu Peterson is my favorite WORLD columnist, but this column was sadly a compendium of misstatements, misunderstandings, and misrepresentations that displayed a lack of understanding of property values, property taxation, and local government debt. Her wild allegations included whoppers such as schools are “strip-mining your hard-earned equity,” bonds are IOUs to homeowners, and such bonds “are in fact never paid back.”

Property taxes support far more than just schools. In Ohio and most (if not all) other states, police, fire, roads, and most local government functions are heavily reliant on property taxes. Getting rid of property taxation would create a local government funding crisis for which no one has come up with a viable solution. Mrs. Peterson should redirect her ire to the costs of local government. Collective bargaining and defined benefit pension plans are the two biggest drivers of the higher taxes that she loathes.

PAUL RUTTER
Granville, Ohio

I could easily add another 800 words on looting the elderly of the homes they worked for and invested in for 50 years or more. It bothered me when I saw it happening to my elderly neighbors before I joined their ranks. All property taxes on owner-occupied homes should be frozen when the owner reaches 65 years of age, regardless of their income.

KURT MACH
Gig Harbor, Wash.

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VOICES LYNN VINCENT

Collectors' items

Curating corners of God's creative ensemble

Quick—Google “Cuban Spiky,” then come back here. Are those not the cutest little bugs you’ve ever seen? In case you didn’t Google, the Cuban Spiky is an isopod—a land-based crustacean with seven pairs of evenly matched legs. It’s closely related to the common pill bug, or “roly-poly,” but Cuban Spikys are anything but common.

At a recent pet expo in White Plains, N.Y., collectors were paying \$350 for a plastic cup containing nothing more than dirt, dead leaves, and a few Spikys the size of your pinky fingernail. In January, *The New York Times* reported that “thousands of enthusiasts in online communities around the world” are collecting and breeding different varieties of isopods. This includes the aptly named Rubber Ducky isopod, which is also adorable.

Of this new collecting trend, David Vargas, who runs Holy-Poly Isopods in Wildomar, Calif., told the *Times*, “I always compare it to Pokémon. You’ve got to catch them all.”

That collectors are paying big bucks to curate colonies of cute crustaceans got me thinking about why we collect things in the first place.

For many people, collecting is about externalizing memory: places visited, family heirlooms, baby shoes, clipped locks from a child’s first haircut. Other collectors are engaged in a form of meaning-making.

I have three collections. All three are about meaning and each meaning is different. I collect book bags from independent bookstores—not to commemorate my visits, but because independents support authors, and as an author I want to support independents. I also have a collection of

bracelets, purchased from local artisans during long-distance motorcycle rides to places like Silverton, Colo. (population: 622), and Tortilla Flat, a wide place in the road in Arizona.

Finally, I collect furniture and objects from the American Arts and Crafts period (1900–1930). I love the era because it emphasized simple forms and natural materials—wood, leather, glass, stone—well-made objects for everyday use.

It seems God, too, imbues specific objects with special meaning and cares deeply about the materials He selects. When He gave building instructions for the ark of the covenant and the priestly vestments, He was very picky. Not just any wood; acacia wood. Not just any stone; onyx.

Some people’s collections evoke specific emotions. For example, WORLD CEO Kevin Martin collects art. The walls and shelves in his home are covered in art and sculpture in many media and styles. The reason for his collection: joy—plain and simple. He takes joy in the beauty of each piece, he told me, and in the stories behind them.

In *Enchiridion*, the handbook on Christianity Augustine wrote for his Roman friend Laurentius, he notes that all things are not “supremely and equally and unchangeably good,” but as an ensemble they are very good, because they constitute “the universe in all its wonderful order and beauty.” Perhaps, then, some of us collectors delight in bringing order and beauty to our little corners of God’s created ensemble.

For a long season in life, WORLD reader Jeff Hamann delighted in collecting ... well, sea slugs. Hamann found himself fascinated with nudibranchs, the scientific name for a major group of sea slugs. Enchanted with their endless combinations of neon colors and the feathery breathing structures that swayed from their backs, he collected them for years, mostly via photography, since he didn’t want to pluck too many from their homes. Tide-pooling, diving, and snorkeling all over the world, he identified and officially named several nudibranchs that had never been seen before, including one in La Jolla, Calif., which his mentor at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography named after Hamann himself: *Cuthona hamanni*.

As years passed, Hamann found himself wondering why he loved collecting—and especially naming—these beautiful creatures. Then in his Bible reading, he encountered Genesis 2:19: “Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.”

Adam’s naming of the animals is the first recorded moment when God invites man to participate in the ordering and stewardship of Creation. In effect, God let Adam name every creature in His entire animal collection. How cool is that?

I’d love to hear what you collect—and especially why. ■



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DISPATCHES



IN THE NEWS

Is the West breaking up?

The war in Iran could be the final straw in the already tense U.S.-European relationship

by LAUREN SMYTH

The U.S. relationship with Europe is not “whistling past the graveyard,” according to NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte—even though everyone has “a knot in their stomach” about its future.

That reassurance came after an April 8 closed-door meeting at the White House that Rutte described as “very frank.” Afterward, President Donald Trump posted on Truth Social: “NATO wasn’t there when we needed them, and they won’t be there if we need them again. Remember Greenland, that big, poorly run, piece of ice!!!”

The testy exchange reflects deepening mistrust between Washington and its European allies. Even before the Iran war, a YouGov poll conducted in six major European countries found that public opinion of the United States has plummeted during Trump’s presidency. More than half of respondents said they believed the United States posed a significant threat to Europe, with some assessing the danger higher than that posed by China, Iran, or North Korea.

It’s a stark reversal on a continent that once embraced the United States as its closest ally. But Europe’s stance on the Iran conflict has revealed potentially insurmountable cracks in the once-

solid alliance. Experts warn this conflict could push Europe to draw a harder line in future negotiations over joint U.S. ventures.

“[Trump] is constantly attacking his friends and seems more comfortable with the U.S.’s traditional adversaries,” said Edmund Fitton-Brown, a former British diplomat. “The option of just [giving] him what he wants when he wants it—that doesn’t work for Trump, because he just comes straight back and asks for the rest. So you’ve got to be very clear about what your national interests are.”

On Feb. 28, Trump unleashed a surprise attack on Iran. The conflict quickly spread to other Middle Eastern nations. The president repeatedly asked the Europeans to support U.S. operations, saying they too would benefit from a defanged Iran. But his calls were effectively brushed aside. The United Kingdom did deploy a lone destroyer to protect its own bases, but the ship almost immediately docked for repairs and never reached the Middle East. Even a ceasefire announced in early April met with little fanfare. “The government of Spain will not applaud those who set the world on fire just because they show up with a bucket,” Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said.

From the Europeans’ perspective, Trump’s demands for military assistance seemed to ignore the wartime pressures already at their doorstep. Since 2022, when Russia first →

President Trump speaks at the 2025 NATO Summit.

launched its invasion into Ukraine, Europe has faced a costly influx of immigrants, occasional spats with eastern neighbors, and concerns for the security of its own borders.

“What do you do if Russia defeats Ukraine, turns its attention to the Baltic states, and Trump turns around and says, ‘I don’t care, because what did NATO ever do for me?’” asked Fitton-Brown. “Can NATO function without the United States?”

The energy crisis from Russia’s invasion remains fresh in European public memory. Back then, record-shattering heat waves and high oil and gas prices contributed to an estimated 68,000 civilian deaths. After Iran shut down the Strait of Hormuz at the end of February, average prices for standard gasoline in the European Union rose to 1.82 euros per liter (about \$8.07 per gallon)—11% above the prewar

“Can NATO function without the United States?”

At a training range in Romania, troops from nine nations participate in the largest NATO operation of 2025.



February average, and only slightly below the three-month average following the Russian attacks. Natural gas, used for heating and electricity generation, saw even steeper price increases.

Trump vowed to reopen the strait and implemented a reverse blockade in April, trapping the Iranian fleet and its oil shipments in the Persian Gulf. British and French officials denied his requests for military aid. Still, they worried Trump might not keep his promise, since the United States has less of a financial stake in the waterway. Nearly one-fifth of the world’s oil supply passes through the strait, but virtually none of that cargo reaches North America.

“You’ll have to start learning how to fight for yourself, the U.S.A. won’t be there to help you anymore, just like you weren’t there for us,” Trump wrote in a Truth Social post at the end of March. “The hard part is done. Go get your own oil!”

But oil isn’t Europe’s only problem. Leaders also worry over potential terror attacks. Government officials and media outlets warned of travel risks after the war started, but Sumantra Maitra, founder of CLIO Strategic Consulting and a fellow at the Royal Historical Society, said Europe has little to fear from Iranian terrorists.

“The Europeans are a party to this conflict, but overall, they have kept it hidden, and they haven’t really mentioned it much in public,” Maitra said, referring to limited military support several countries have given the U.S. “So the Iranians don’t really have a *casus belli* to go and have a conflict with the Europeans.”

Maitra also noted Shiite Muslims in Iran don’t have a history of terror attacks in Europe. Most of those have come at the hands of Sunni Muslims.

News outlets in Europe have repeatedly observed that Iran might have the missile capability to reach its shores, while the United States remains out of range. These fears intensified after Iran reportedly launched two missiles at a U.S.-U.K. joint base in the Indian Ocean, demonstrating a possible

range of more than 2,300 miles. Although neither missile reached its target, analysts said that could put European capitals as far away as London within striking distance.

But Maitra said those fears are overblown. “The Iranians can do a lot more damage by retaliating just in normal structural ways, by barring European ships from traveling and getting more money from them, than actually doing a terrorist attack.”

So far, daily life in Europe has seen little change, said William Moore, an American who retired in France 20 years ago and has since operated a bed-and-breakfast there. But with tourist season about to begin, Moore said many French businessmen worry about how safety concerns will affect visitors this summer—and local profits.

“In France, the overall feeling is a mistrust of President Trump,” Moore said. “Obviously, there’s recognition of the fact that there was an enemy [in Iran], and he’s been there for years, and President Trump was interested in getting rid of the enemy for the rest of the world. But I think there’s growing resentment [of] the American president and [of] what’s happening. I think we’ve lost sight of the fact that there was danger.”

Trump’s rift with Europe has fueled international speculation that the U.S. might withdraw from NATO, leaving Europe to address its own security concerns without U.S. aid. Such a decision would require congressional approval thanks to a Biden-era law. Sumantra Maitra called that unlikely. Trump has often complained that the U.S. underwrote international security on its own dime, while Mark Rutte of NATO said Europe has already assumed a greater and fairer share of defense expenses.

There’s little indication that Trump wants to smooth things over. But even if he did, it might be too late to sway European sentiment.

“What you can’t do is just roll over every time Trump tells you to,” Fitton-Brown said. ■



BY THE NUMBERS

Deadly diagnosis

Earlier testing and lifestyle changes probed as ways to combat surging colon cancer

BY JOHN DAWSON

No. 1

Colorectal cancer’s ranking as the leading cause of death for Americans under age 50, according to new research published in March by the American Cancer Society. The steady rise in diagnoses for younger adults has alarmed cancer experts who have pointed to increased obesity rates and lifestyle factors such as poor diet and physical inactivity as possible causes.

45

The age at which the American Cancer Society now advises screenings begin for people of average risk, down from the recommended age of 50 that prevailed prior to 2021.

158,850

The projected number of Americans who will receive a colorectal cancer diagnosis in 2026, according to the American Cancer Society study, while an estimated 55,230 will die from the disease.

37%

The share of Americans aged 45–49 who have had recommended colorectal cancer screenings like colonoscopies or stool tests, according to the American Cancer Society.



WASHINGTON MEMO

Lindsey Graham's repeat performance

The South Carolina senator leads in polling despite many frustrated constituents

by CAROLINA LUMETTA



On a Thursday morning in upstate South Carolina, Lindsey Graham is downing a to-go cup of Chick-fil-A coffee before speaking at a private breakfast with pastors. The 70-year-old senator is wearing a Ralph Lauren–esque uniform of khaki pants, a blue blazer, and a blue-and-red striped tie. Staffers ask how he's doing. "Better now that I have my coffee," he replies. For the rest of the day, he'll juggle a campaign luncheon, an interview with me, a news conference, a flight back to Washington, and at least one phone call with the president.

And he wants six more years of this. Graham is running for a fifth term in the U.S. Senate, and he's already pocketed President Donald Trump's endorsement. Not only that, he's become the administration's advertiser for its military operations in Israel and Iran, a region he's focused on for more than 20 years.

But his Washington qualifications have led many voters in his home state to believe he's out of touch. In only two days, I saw eye rolls and heard comments like, "Oh, I can't stand him," and "He's never met a war he doesn't love," from South Carolinians at gas stations

to audience members at the state gubernatorial debate. It's not new. In 2023, a crowd in Pickens booed him during a campaign event with Trump. And then photos leaked of the senator holding a bubble wand at Disney World during a previously scheduled Senate recess, which happened to land during an extended partial government shutdown, chaos at airports, and a month of a war in Iran.

So how does Graham keep getting reelected? In 1994, Graham promised he would only serve for 12 years. He's now exceeded 30 years in Washington. And since 2002, he's never even had a close

election. But this year, five other GOP candidates are stumping to replace him. Graham is dedicating more time out of Washington to stump in his home state, what he calls his every-six-year job interview. As in years past, he has a trifecta working for him: He's made himself essential to Republicans in Washington no matter who's in the White House, he's charismatic on the campaign trail with voters, and his primary opponents' strategy to turn the campaign nasty is turning off even the voters who don't like Graham.

"I think what I have to offer the country and South Carolina is in great demand right now, which is steady, seasoned, informed leadership," Graham told me in an interview. "I'm hard to bully. I know who I am. I know what I believe. I'm comfortable in my faith, and I will not be deterred."

It doesn't hurt that he's golfing buddies with the leader of the free world. After Trump delivered an April 1 address to the nation about the Iran war, he called Graham, who praised the speech as "a home run."

Graham had a rocky path to Trump's inner circle. He now jokes about his short-lived 2015 presidential campaign and God's mysterious workings, along with the restorative powers of golf.

"In my wildest dreams, I never thought we'd be friends. It's from the Lord, I think. There's no other explanation I can think of," Graham told a group of Republican voters at a luncheon hosted by the Fourth District Republican Club, based in Greenville, on April 2.

Graham's opponents call the progression proof of chameleon tendencies. Project 2025 architect Paul Dans suspended his campaign against Graham in early April, but before then, he frequently reminded voters of the days when Graham called Trump a racist and a dangerous man. Some say they cannot trust him since he voted to confirm liberal Supreme Court justices during the Obama administration. Others say he's not focused enough on South Carolina.

"You see him in Ukraine with the Democrats, and they're doing a press

conference and that stuff in Ukraine, and we don't really want to be involved," Greenville County Republicans chair Jeff Davis told me. "Why does he take the opposite stance of what is really red meat issues here in South Carolina?"

Graham pushed back that this is, in fact, his job and his specialty.

"The federal government's No. 1 job is to provide national security, national defense above all others," he told me.

Graham claims he can never be bullied, but he doesn't talk about how many positions he's flipped on. In 2010, he advocated for creating a pathway to citizenship for illegal immigrants, which conservative talk show host Rush Limbaugh called "Graham-nesty." Now he supports Trump's mass deportation efforts. In 2016, he refused to schedule a quick confirmation hearing for a Supreme Court justice close to the presidential election. Then in 2020, he confirmed Justice Amy Coney Barrett only days before Trump lost reelection. One of his few consistent positions is a yearly push for more Defense Department funding.

"I hesitate to call him an actual Republican," upstate voter Debbie McCauley told me. "It's about low spending and less government, and he always votes for more spending and more

government. If you're looking for the principles of conservatism, he's not it."

The front-runner in the primary field against Graham is far behind him in the polls. Greenville businessman Mark Lynch is known for claiming extreme conspiracy theories about Graham, including but not limited to the baseless rumors that he is homosexual or a biological woman. Graham, a lifelong bachelor, often does not dignify the attacks with a response.

On the campaign trail, Graham sheds enough of his official persona to appear relatable to South Carolina voters, but retains just enough to be impressive. He quips with voters in a classic Southern drawl and remembers individual attendees. That's because as much as Graham is on speed dial with world leaders, his district and Washington offices are known for their constituent service.

"He has a record of being for the people," Upstate Republican Women President Cheryl Cuthrell told me. "I actually just talked to him about a domestic issue, and he told me, 'Get the information to us, we'll take care of it.' He knows us here, he recognizes us, and he does what he can for South Carolina."

Graham has developed what he calls scar tissue, simply by virtue of having been in politics for so long. But he argues he's just now reaching his stride: "I trust the voters to understand that I feel that what I have to offer to South Carolina is at its highest peak." ■

Graham speaks during a bill signing with President Trump.



DEPARTURES

All-Star baseman dead at 80

by JOHN DAWSON



**Davey
Lopes**

A Los Angeles Dodgers mainstay and four-time All-Star whose baserunning helped his club win four National League pennants, Lopes died April 8 at the age of 80. The second baseman broke into major league baseball with the Dodgers in 1972 at age 27 and quickly became part of the sport's most enduring infields. According to Elias Sports Bureau, Lopes as well as Steve Garvey, Ron Cey, and Bill Russell played 833 games as an infield quartet, more than any other group in baseball history. Lopes and the Dodgers won it all in 1981, defeating the Yankees in a six-game World Series. After his playing career, Lopes coached for seven clubs including a stint as manager for the Milwaukee Brewers from 2000 until 2002.



**Dash
Crofts**

A musician whose partnership with Jim Seals helped define the contours of soft rock, Crofts died March 25. He was 87. As a high school student in rural Texas, Crofts, then a drummer, met the saxophonist Seals in a local band. The pair moved to California together in 1958 to join the Champs, an established group that had just recorded a massive hit instrumental titled "Tequila." The pair toured and recorded with the group for years before forming their own duo, Seals & Crofts, in 1969. Their fourth album took off in 1972, and the group charted a Top 10 hit in "Summer Breeze." The song became a soft rock classic, appearing for decades in television and film soundtracks.



**Robert
Mueller**

A decorated Marine Corps officer in Vietnam who held two conspicuous roles at the Department of Justice, Mueller died March 20. He was 81. After earning a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart in Vietnam, Mueller became a lawyer, filling Justice Department roles until becoming a U.S. attorney in 1986. Mueller became FBI director just a week prior to the Sept. 11 attacks in 2001 and helped turn the agency's attention toward counterterrorism. In 2017, Mueller accepted an appointment as special counsel and oversaw the investigation into possible Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election. Mueller's investigation led to numerous indictments but produced no criminal charges for President Donald Trump.



**Chuck
Norris**

An actor and six-time world karate champion who also held black belts in numerous other martial arts, Norris died March 19. He was 86 years old. After playing the role of a villain in Bruce Lee's *Way of the Dragon*, Norris went on to star as a hero in over a dozen action films including *Good Guys Wear Black* and *Lone Wolf McQuade*. He also held the title role in the long-running TV series *Walker, Texas Ranger*. Norris founded Kickstart Kids, a Texas physical education program focused on teaching karate and good character, in 1990 with the help of then-President George H.W. Bush. He became a Christian at an early age and rededicated his life to Christ as a young adult during a Billy Graham crusade.



**Paul
Ehrlich**

A Stanford academic whose famous 1968 book, *The Population Bomb*, sparked needless concern over the Earth's ability to sustain life, Ehrlich died March 13. He was 93. In his famous bestseller, Ehrlich predicted hundreds of millions would die of starvation in the 1970s because the planet couldn't support more than its roughly 3.5 billion inhabitants. By 1970, Ehrlich took his pitch onto *The Tonight Show* and his Malthusian argument entered the mainstream. Ehrlich's work has been cited as influencing China's decision to implement its ruinous one-child policy in 1979. Revolutions in agriculture rendered Ehrlich's work obsolete even in his lifetime, and the estimated world population at the time of his death was over 8 billion.

LOPES: LOUIS REQUENA/MLB VIA GETTY IMAGES; CROFTS: RALPH DOMINGUEZ/MEDIA/PUNCH/ALAMY; MUELLER: BRENDAN HOFFMAN/GETTY IMAGES; NORRIS: ROGER RESSMEYER/CORBIS/VCG VIA GETTY IMAGES; EHRLICH: HANDOUT



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HUMAN RACE

Artemis II returns to Earth

by ELIZABETH BLACK

➔ The four Artemis II mission astronauts returned safely to Earth on April 10, splashing down in the Pacific Ocean. Americans Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover, and Christina Koch, along with Canadian Jeremy Hansen, made history when their Orion spacecraft flew around the dark side of the moon, marking the farthest distance humans have ever traveled from Earth. The 10-day Artemis mission broke the previous distance record set by Apollo 13 in 1970, according to NASA. Just before they passed behind the moon, Glover spoke of Jesus' love in a message broadcast to Earth before the crew entered a 40-minute communication blackout. While the astronauts were working to unlock the mysteries of the cosmos, Glover said, one of the greatest mysteries on Earth was love. "And to all of you down there on Earth ... we love you from the moon," he added. Glover, Wiseman, and Hansen also shared Easter messages from space. During the mission, the crew snapped the first photos of the far side of the moon taken by people in space. They also witnessed a solar eclipse when the moon blocked out the sun as they traveled around it. Before the mission launched, NASA head Jared Isaacman said the goal of the Artemis space missions is to return mankind to the moon by 2028, and lay the groundwork for a future lunar colony.

DARING RESCUE

A U.S. airman who was wounded after his F-15E strike jet crashed in Iran on Good Friday is back home and on the mend following a daring rescue. The Defense Department has not named him, but in a statement, President Donald Trump characterized the airman as a brave and highly respected colonel. The jet went down in a mountainous region, and Iranian officials offered a reward for anyone who could capture him. But the weapons officer avoided discovery for nearly two days by hiding among the rocks. His rescue followed the recovery of the plane's pilot several hours after the crash. In the first message rescuers received from him, the weapons officer said, "God is good." According to the president, the rescue mission involved four bombers, 64 fighters, 48 refueling tankers, and 13 rescue aircraft. Two aircraft that got stuck after landing were destroyed to prevent Iran from getting them. —Travis Kircher

CHEER PIONEER DIES

Jeff Webb, a cheerleading pioneer and early mentor to Charlie Kirk, died on March 19 at age 76 from a head injury sustained while playing pickleball. Webb founded Varsity Spirit, an American cheerleading company, in 1974 and went on to help transform the activity into a global, multibillion-dollar industry. According to his obituary, one of Webb's crowning achievements came in 2021, when the International Olympic Committee formally recognized cheerleading as a



sport. Webb first met Charlie Kirk when the future Turning Point USA founder was 24. After Kirk's assassination, Webb told reporters Kirk "had it all—charisma, faith, respect for everyone," adding that we "may have lost a future president."

—Kim Henderson

WAR CRIMES

Benjamin Roberts-Smith, a former Special Air Service Regiment corporal and Australia's most decorated living veteran, has been charged with five counts of war crime murder. Roberts-Smith, 47, received the Medal of Gallantry and the Victoria Cross for Australia, the country's highest medal, for his service in Afghanistan between 2009 and 2012. But in 2017, several Australian newspapers claimed he murdered five unarmed Afghans. Judges dismissed Roberts-Smith's subsequent civil defamation case when evidence revealed his probable guilt. Judges denied his appeals. Police arrested the former soldier on April 7 as he exited a plane in Sydney. If convicted of criminal charges, he could face life in prison. —Amy Lewis



LANGUAGE BARRIER

Air Canada CEO **Michael Rousseau** will retire this year amid criticism of his inability to speak both English and French. The company announced his resignation plans March 30. A week earlier, an Air Canada flight crash-landed at LaGuardia Airport in New York, killing the plane's two pilots. Rousseau offered his condolences in English in a video with French subtitles. Since Canada is officially a bilingual nation, Air Canada must legally serve customers in both English and French.

Rousseau apologized in a March 26 statement, but Canada's National Assembly voted in favor of a resolution calling for Rousseau to step down. Air Canada's board plans to hire a CEO who has the "ability to communicate in French." —Bekah Bernhardt

KILLER CONFESSES

Rex Heuermann, a 62-year-old New York architect, appeared in court April 8 and admitted to murdering seven women between 1993 and 2011. Heuermann also admitted to another murder not previously connected to the so-called Gilgo Beach serial killer, for which charges have not been brought. The murders remained unsolved for over a decade after police discovered at least 10 sets of human remains on an isolated stretch of highway on Long Island's Gilgo Beach. Police arrested Heuermann in 2023 after DNA evidence from the scene matched a sample of his DNA taken from a half-eaten slice of pizza investigators dug out of a trash can.

—Christina Grube

NO CHARGES

Police in Brentwood, Tenn., do not believe accusations of sexual assault against former DC Talk singer Michael Tait will end in prosecution. A police department spokesperson told WORLD that all seven of the alleged cases either fell outside the Tennessee statute of limitations or were not in the local department's jurisdiction. In June 2025, Tait wrote a social media post admitting to instances of touching men without their consent, along with alcohol and drug abuse. Police in Brentwood, the Nashville suburb where Tait once lived, opened an investigation last year. The local district attorney's office is still reviewing the findings.

—Elizabeth Black

REPORTER FREED

An American journalist kidnapped on the streets of Baghdad is now free, U.S.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio confirmed in a post to X on April 7.



Shelly

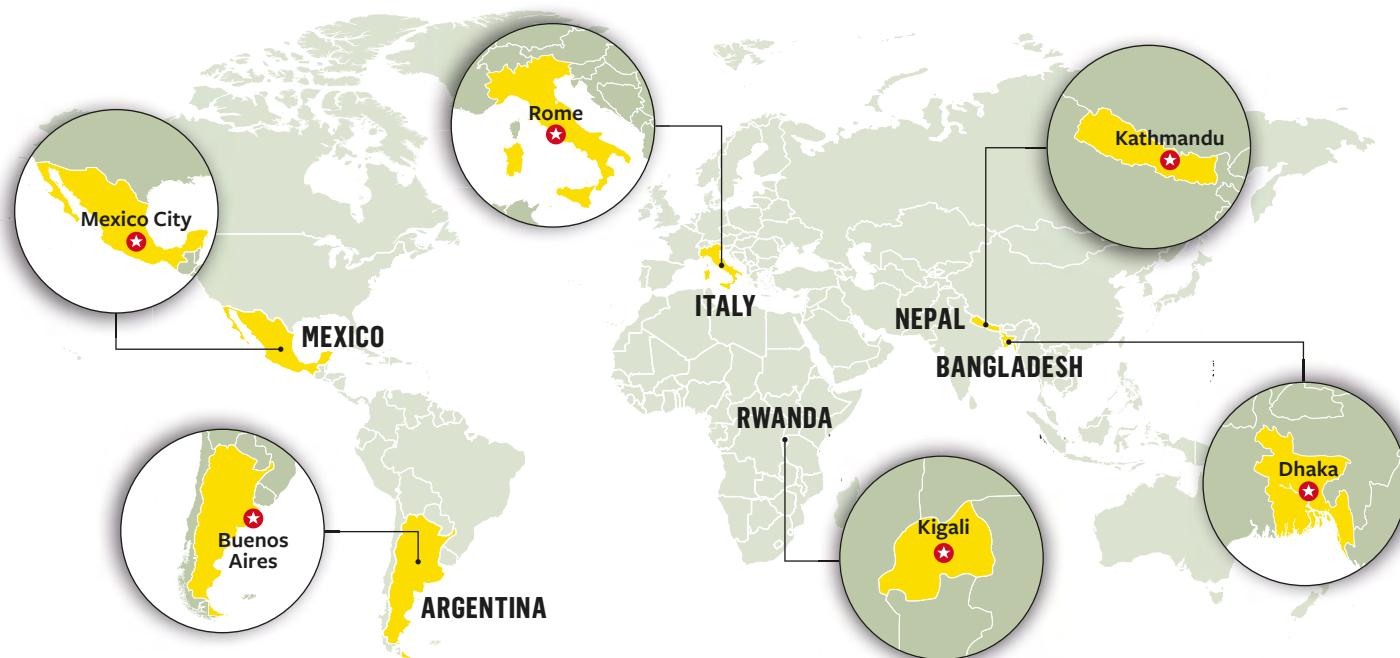
Kittleson, 49,

is from Mount Horeb, Wis., and worked as a freelancer covering conflicts in Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq. On March 31, members of the Iran-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah abducted her during a reporting trip. U.S. officials said they repeatedly warned Kittleson of threats against her. According to the Associated Press, Iraqi authorities agreed to release six Kataib Hezbollah members in exchange for Kittleson.

—Grace Snell ■



Fraudulent mountain rescues in Nepal



Nepal Police have charged 32 suspected hospital workers, trekking company owners, and helicopter operators who benefited financially from more than 300 mountain hikers' fraudulent rescues. On April 7, the police, tourism board, and aviation officials created a joint task force to prevent further fraud. Between 2022 and 2025, guides allegedly exaggerated hikers' medical situations, laced hikers' food with baking powder to mimic gastric distress, or told tired hikers to fake sickness. They then recommended hikers call a helicopter for evacuation. Helicopter operators billed insurance companies multiple full-price bills for the same trip, sometimes totaling \$31,000. Nepal's Central Investigation Bureau says the network has defrauded international insurance companies of \$20 million and damaged the reputation of Nepal's tourism industry. —Amy Lewis



POPULATION

29 million

LANGUAGE

Nepali

RELIGION

81% Hindu,
10% Buddhist,
4% Muslim

GOVERNANCE

Federal
democratic
republic

GDP

\$42 billion

MAJOR EXPORTS

Soybean
oil, palm oil,
woolen goods

Argentina Amid environmental protests, lawmakers approved a controversial bill on April 9 promoted by President Javier Milei that authorizes mining for metals in ecologically sensitive areas of glaciers. Argentina has nearly 17,000 rock glaciers—a mix of rock and ice—according to a 2018 inventory, and the Central Bank of Argentina said mining exports could triple by 2030. But in the northwest, where mining is concentrated, glacial reserves have shrunk by 17% in the last decade. Enrique Viale, president of the Argentine Association of Environmental Lawyers, said the legislation threatens the water supply for 70% of Argentines. Milei countered that environmentalists “would rather see us starve than have anything touched.” Environmentalist groups have vowed to challenge the bill in court.

—Olalekan Raji

Mexico Divers April 9 rescued a miner who survived 14 days trapped underground in a flooded gold mine. In late March a dam burst in the northern Mexican state of Sinaloa, flooding the mine with 25 people inside. Most escaped immediately, but four, including Francisco Zapata Nájera, remained trapped while temperatures inside the mine reached 86 degrees Fahrenheit. Rescuers took 13 days to find Nájera, 42, and initially unable to move him, left him another 21 hours with drinking water, cans of tuna, and energy bars. After lowering the water level with pumps, army divers finally extracted Nájera. Last year saw a worldwide rise in mining fatalities, a trend that has continued into 2026, with over 231 people already perishing in mining accidents so far. —*Evangeline Schmitt*



POPULATION

130.8 million

LANGUAGE

Spanish

RELIGION

78% Roman Catholic,
11% evangelical Protestant

GOVERNANCE

Presidential republic

GDP

\$1.86 trillion

MAJOR EXPORTS

Cars, car parts, computers, crude oil

Italy The Adriatic seaside town of Riccione bought Benito Mussolini's former vacation home in early April for 1.2 million euros to prevent it from becoming a shrine to the dead dictator. Other places significant to Mussolini, like his grave in the town of Predappio, have become gathering places for neofascist groups, and when the villa came up for auction this year, prospective buyers included fans of Mussolini. The dictator, who ruled Italy from 1922 to 1943, used the villa as a summer getaway. Riccione will use the home as an events center, but will keep the name Villa Mussolini. "Yes, the name evokes an ugly story," says Mayor Daniela Angelini. "But you can't erase it, you must tell it in the right way." —*Evangeline Schmitt*



Rwanda The government of Africa's most densely populated country is mapping agricultural land and using satellite imagery to track any development encroaching on farmland and forests. To promote food security, authorities in the capital Kigali have set aside almost a quarter of city land for agriculture and have imposed fines of up to \$3,000 and jail terms up to six months on developers found to be encroaching. In a country roughly the size of Maryland, the current population of 15 million is expected to reach 22 million in a few years and faces an expected housing shortage. Kigali now requires developers seeking building permits to include green space and gardens in their designs. —*Olalekan Raji*

Bangladesh Amid a worldwide fertilizer shortage due to Iran's near-total blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, Bangladesh on April 8 asked neighboring India to supply more fertilizer, a request India said it would consider. The waterway closure has disrupted about one-third of the global fertilizer trade, threatening food security and food prices. Gulf Arab nations are major producers of urea, the most commonly used nitrogen-based fertilizer. They are also significant exporters of liquefied natural gas, a raw material for fertilizer production. The fertilizer crunch has prompted farmers in Australia and the United States to switch to growing crops requiring less urea, such as barley and soybeans, while planting less wheat, canola, and corn. —*Joyce Wu*



POPULATION

175 million

LANGUAGE

Bengali, Chakma

RELIGION

91% Muslim, 7.9% Hindu

GOVERNANCE

Parliamentary democracy

GDP

\$475 billion

MAJOR EXPORTS

Clothing, shoes, home textiles

U.S. BRIEFS

Drought whittles Wyoming's snowpack



Record high winter temperatures and below-average precipitation produced the lowest recorded mountain snowpack levels in 13 of Wyoming's 19 primary river basins as of early April. Cowboy State snowpack generally peaks in the middle of March, but this year's peak occurred a month earlier, on average, due to warmer, dryer conditions, according to Wyoming State Climate Office Director Tony Bergantino. "Except for the north, northeast, and some of the high elevation northwest, temperatures have been running up to more than 10 degrees Fahrenheit above normal, which has chewed up the snowpack," Bergantino said. Some counties recorded normal or above-normal precipitation in late March and early April, but most of the state received less than half the usual spring snow or rains. Precipitation across much of the state in early April didn't help the snowpack climb above the record lows. Moderate-to-exceptional drought conditions persist across more than 40% of the country, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which forecasts below-average precipitation and continued drought conditions through June for most of the West, including the Central Rocky Mountains. —*Todd Vician*



POPULATION

587,618

GOVERNOR

Mark Gordon^R

U.S. SENATORS

John Barrasso^R,
Cynthia Lummis^R

INDUSTRY

Blockchain technology, carbon capture, agriculture tech, data centers, energy

California The White House has requested \$152 million to reopen Alcatraz as a working prison. The Trump administration included the funding in its 2027 proposed budget submitted April 3. Located on a remote island, "The Rock" was one of the most secure prisons in the United States. Since the prison cost almost three times more than any other federal prison, it closed as a correctional facility in 1963. It has since served as a tourist attraction under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service. Last year, President Donald Trump announced on social media he would direct federal agencies to renovate and reopen the prison to "house America's most ruthless and violent offenders." The funding request may not go through. Congress sets the budget, and the request mainly functions as a suggestion. —*Bekah Bernhardt*

Montana Gov. Greg Gianforte joined a slew of other states' leaders in requesting a waiver from the federal government to exclude certain items from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps. If approved, the waiver would cut candy and prepared desserts, such as packaged snack cakes, from the program as well as high-sugar beverages. So far, Department of Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins has granted 22 states permission to ax junk food from SNAP. Gianforte praised the Make America Healthy Again initiative in a press release about the waiver. Montana's requested changes will not affect fresh baked goods, protein bars, milk products, and fruit juices. Similar restrictions went into effect in Texas on April 1. —*Addie Offereins*



Tennessee Convicted felons in Tennessee have fewer financial hurdles between them and the voting booth thanks to a law that amends a previous rule requiring them to finish paying back child support before they could regain the right to vote. Republican Gov. Bill Lee signed the new legislation in April. It requires felons to show that they are complying with a child support payment plan. The law also does away with a previous rule requiring people with felony sentences to finish paying their court costs before being allowed to vote. The Volunteer State joins several others in easing up on felony voting restrictions in recent years. Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz signed a law restoring voting rights to about 55,000 felons in 2023. Felons lose their right to vote in 23 states only while incarcerated. Fifteen states remove voting rights for a period of time after prison such as parole or probation. In 10 other states, felons lose their voting rights indefinitely or require a governor's pardon or additional action to regain suffrage. Felons never lose the right to vote in Washington, D.C., Vermont, and Maine. —Addie Offereins

Washington Opponents of the state's newly adopted income tax are gearing up for a legal fight to overturn it. Gov. **Bob Ferguson** signed the tax into law on March 30. It took effect immediately, but the state will not start collecting until 2029. Backers, who dubbed it the "millionaire's tax," claim it will generate about \$3 billion a year from an estimated 21,000 filers. The 9.9% tax only applies to Washington households that make more than \$1 million a year. State Senate Majority Leader Jamie Pedersen welcomed news of the legal challenge. He and other supporters of the bill filed it in part to test the legality of targeted taxation at the state Supreme Court. Washington voters have previously rejected efforts to impose a state income tax, but the income threshold for those measures was much lower. Opponents of the current bill say progressive taxing is illegal. Because income is considered property, they claim any taxing laws must be universally applied. Only eight states do not levy any form of income tax. —Leigh Jones



POPULATION
7.9 million

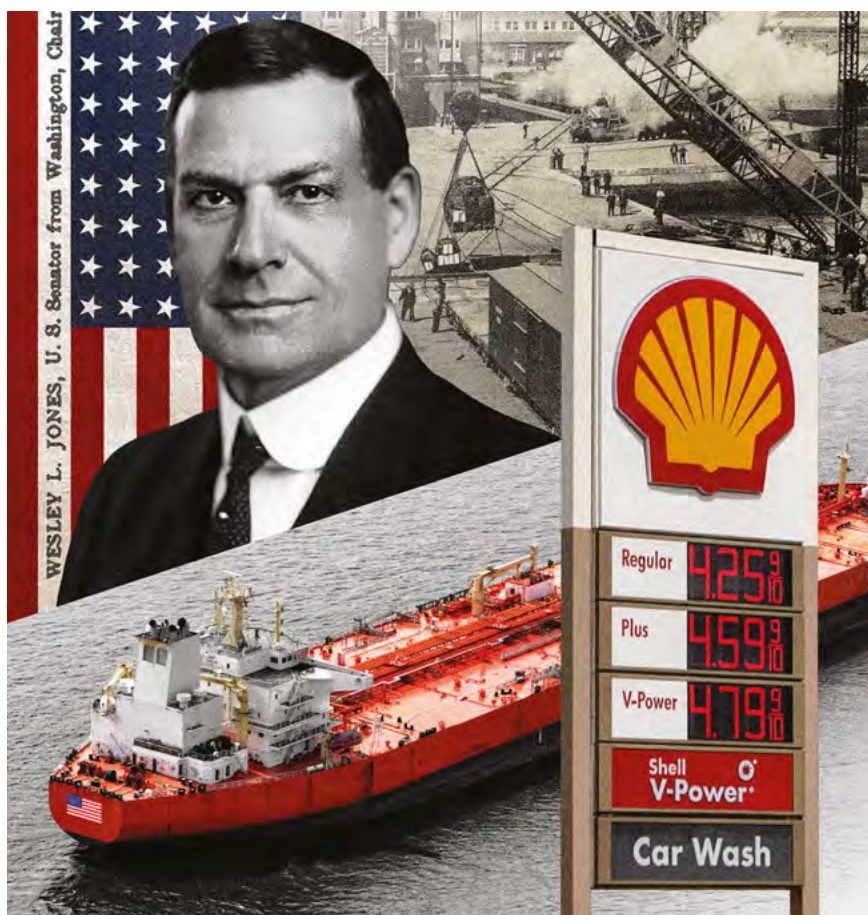
GOVERNOR
Bob Ferguson ^D

U.S. SENATORS
Patty Murray ^D,
Maria Cantwell ^D

INDUSTRY
Aerospace,
agriculture,
clean energy

South Carolina Senate budget writers on April 7 moved to limit the state's K-12 scholarship program to 10,000 students before reversing course a day later, restoring a planned 15,000 cap. The proposal, led by Senate Education Chairman Greg Hembree, stemmed from frustration that the state Department of Education awarded funds to homeschooled students, allegedly against lawmakers' wishes. After a 16-3 committee vote, several senators said they hadn't realized the cap would reduce participation. While they reinstated the higher limit, they upheld a ban on adding more homeschooled students. The scholarships are designed to cover private school tuition, curriculum, technology, transportation, and other education expenses. South Carolina's voucher law bars students in the state's three statutory homeschool programs but is silent on those taught at home outside them. Normally ineligible under attendance rules, those students can qualify through required testing. Under Hembree's proposal, the nearly 1,000 homeschooled students who participated in the program last year would be allowed to remain. —Kim Henderson





BACKGROUND

What is the Jones Act?

by LAUREN SMYTH

➔ One week after the start of the Iran conflict, U.S. gas prices shot up more than 16%. That was the highest weekly price jump since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, according to AAA.

President Donald Trump quickly said he'd found a way to make gas cheaper again. In March, he issued a 60-day waiver on the Jones Act, a law requiring goods traveling between U.S. ports to be carried on domestically built, owned, and operated ships.

Where did the Jones Act come from? Sen. Wesley Jones (R-Wash.) introduced the act in 1920 to stimulate U.S. ship-

building capacity, which was strained during World War I. He told Congress the act would "put trade under the American flag" and support a domestic merchant marine. Other lawmakers countered that Jones was looking out for his constituency, which had maritime interests, at the expense of free trade.

How does the Jones Act affect oil supply? U.S.-built tankers can cost up to six times as much as similar ships built abroad, according to data from shipping analysis firm Marhelm. In 2024, the United States only had 92 Jones Act-compliant ships, and only 54 of those now carry oil.

Some have argued this has created a supply bottleneck, driving up prices for goods that are typically transported by sea and keeping the supply of those goods artificially low.

How could waiving the act lower gas prices? If cheaper foreign tankers enter the U.S. market, shipping costs for oil would fall. That would increase the supply of oil, especially in coastal cities, and put downward pressure on prices at the pump.

A 2023 study from the University of Chicago found that eliminating the Jones Act could bring gas prices down by 63 cents per gallon. Jet fuel could see even greater price reduction. U.S. consumer surplus—when buyers save money they would otherwise have spent—could top \$760 million.

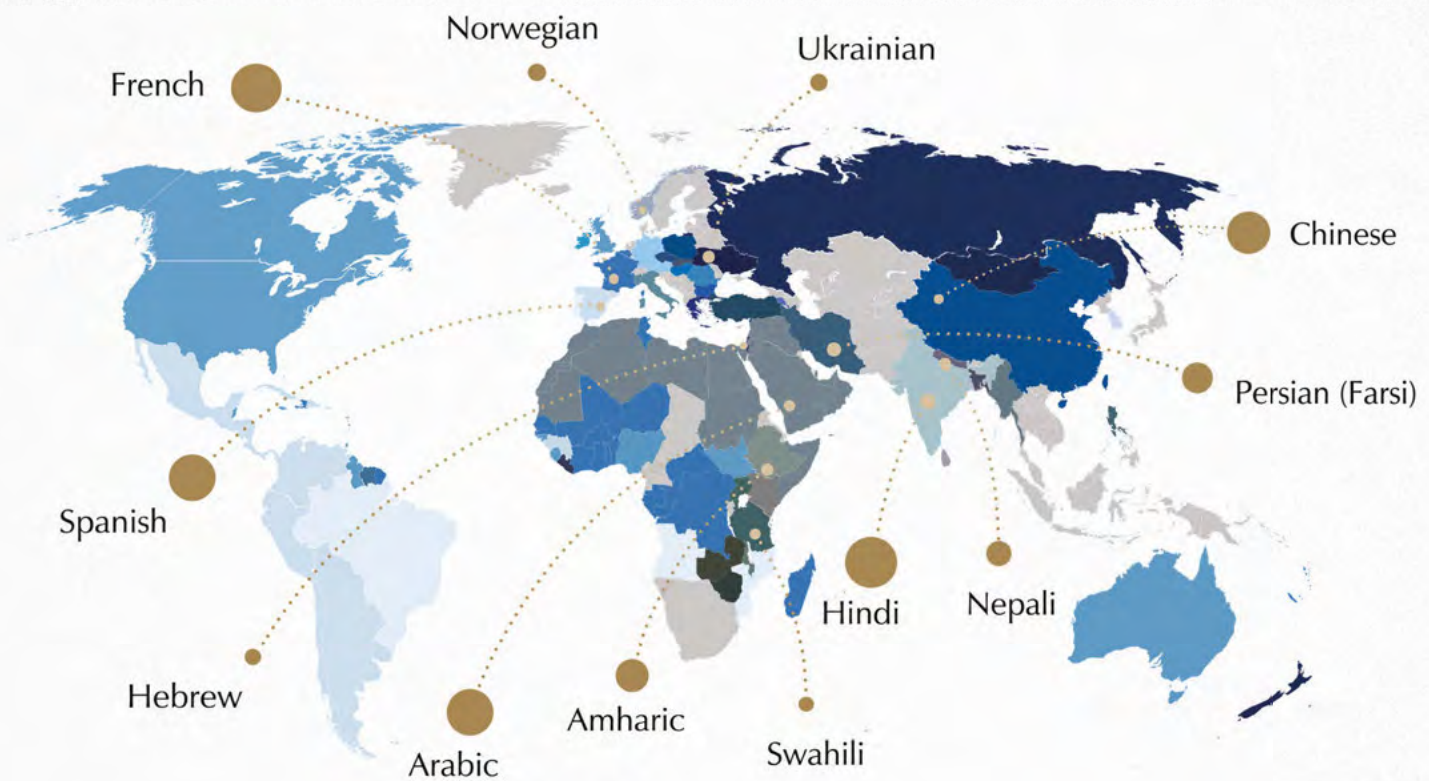
What do opponents say? Only about 2% of U.S. crude oil is moved by tanker. The majority travels through pipelines, so domestic shipping costs may add as little as 1 cent per gallon to overall gasoline prices, according to the Seafarers International Union. Others say the Jones Act waiver may signal low commitment to protecting U.S. interests at sea, risking national security.

The same University of Chicago study found that producer surplus—gains from selling above the minimum acceptable price—would fall by more than \$360 million. That could put U.S. shipbuilders with high operating costs out of business, reducing the industry's resilience to global disruptions and costing American jobs.

What other industries could be affected? White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said the waiver will also bring down prices for fertilizer, natural gas, and coal. Some speculate the temporary waiver is a first step in eliminating the act, although any permanent change would require congressional approval. A repeal could cause ripple effects in other industries where legislation similar to the Jones Act applies, such as dredging, fishing, towing, and cruise shipping. ■

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QUOTABLES

“It’s a new world.
It’s the same
Constitution.”

U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice
JOHN ROBERTS responding to
Solicitor General John Sauer’s
argument that new times required
new interpretations of the 14th
Amendment’s citizenship clause
during an April 1 oral argument.



“Unfortunately, emotionally charged decisions can come back and bite you in the rear end.”

RYAN FARMER, an attorney representing a Georgia man who was ordered to pay nearly \$40,000 in unpaid overtime and damages after he paid one former worker’s final paycheck by dumping 91,500 oily pennies in her driveway.

“NASA is back in the business of sending people to the moon.”

NASA administrator JARED ISAACMAN on April 1 after the successful Artemis II launch.

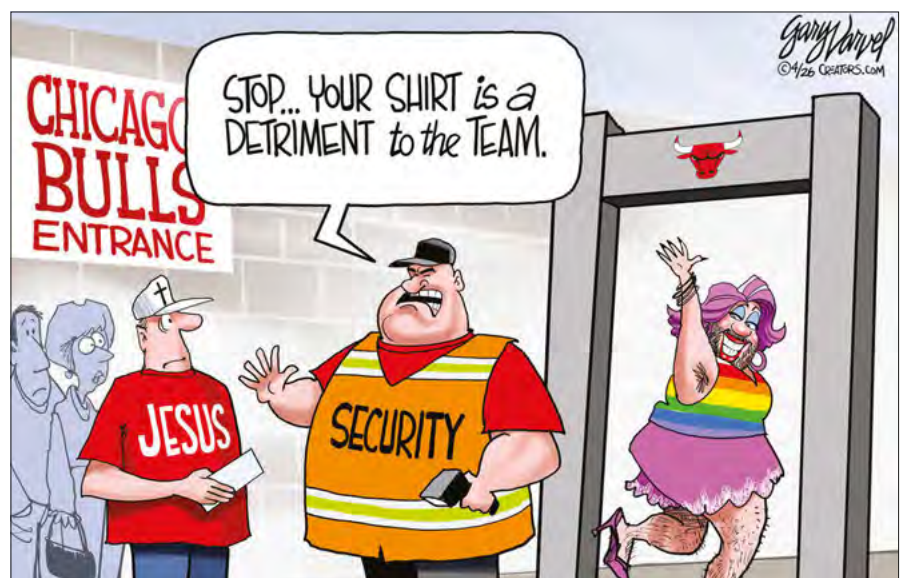
“I was putting on about 37,000 steps per day looking for him. I haven’t done so much exercise in a very long time.”

Wisconsin resident DEBBIE MARLAND after a three-day search for an escaped petting zoo kangaroo.

“None of us should be expected to be in trial while being tried by an election challenge.”

Multnomah County, Ore., Circuit Judge Adrian Brown asking other jurists to take her caseload while she sought reelection in April.*

*The Oregonian





QUICK TAKES

Smashing service

City debates autonomous robots after spate of botched deliveries

by JOHN DAWSON

➔ Call it a roadblock, a bump in the road, or an impasse. Delivery robots in Chicago are garnering bad press after rogue units crashed into the city's bus shelters, shattering glass and causing locals to question the robots' place on city streets. Surveillance footage captured the first crash as it happened March 22: A robot shaped like an ice chest on wheels apparently got confused and smashed through the glass panel of a Chicago Transit Authority bus shelter. On March 24, a different company's robot smashed through another bus shelter's glass wall. The two robot companies involved said they've never had this problem before and promised to pay for repairs. Anthony Spaulding heard the second incident from inside his barber shop and said he wasn't surprised a robot caused the crash. "This is happening all the time," he told CBS News. "Every time you look up, the robot comes through, bumping into people." Robotics companies are working to persuade skeptical city residents to share sidewalk space with the robots, but Chicagoan Josh Robertson launched a petition last year to get the robots off the sidewalks. As of March 27, Robertson said, the petition had more than 4,000 signatories from more than 55 zip codes.

Whole new kettle of fish

For the first time in roughly 50 years, New York anglers can safely drop a line from the Chelsea Piers in Manhattan and then eat what they catch. Due to lower levels of industrial pollutant polychlorinated biphenyl (PCBs) in fish, officials with the State Department of Health released updated recommendations on April 1 and now New Yorkers can consume some fish caught from the lower Hudson River. But don't go overboard, health officials warn: The fish are safe to eat so long as residents stick to striped bass and eat no more than four per month.



Crossing the line?

A proposal by a Republican Texas legislator to study annexing part of New Mexico has launched a war of words between state officials. Texas House Speaker Dustin Burrows directed a committee in March to study the feasibility and legality of annexing a few contiguous counties in southeastern New Mexico that he said weren't being fairly represented by their state government. In response, New Mexico House Speaker Javier Martinez, a Democrat, said March 27 that his Texas counterpart should "get offline, touch some grass, and get his own House in order." The Texas committee will present its findings in January 2027.

Diving in and going deep

Pothole or swimming hole? In Johannesburg, South Africa, the question is up for dispute. Hoping to garner attention for her mayoral campaign by shining a light on the city's crumbling roadworks, politician **Helen Zille** donned a wetsuit March 28 and snorkeled in a sinkhole that had formed three years ago after broken water pipes caused a portion of land to cave in and fill with water. Zille said the pothole signified years of failure within Johannesburg's government. City officials had the sinkhole filled the next day.



A clean sweep

Thanks to the efforts of an Arizona nonprofit, the river rafting season might necessitate fewer tetanus shots. Volunteers with Natural Restorations, a conservation group that removes trash from wilderness areas, organized a cleanup March 31 after receiving a tip that a shallow river section popular with tubers and rafters had become inundated with rusty nails. Magnet-wielding volunteers combed through a portion of the Salt River near Phoenix and removed thousands of nails weighing 27 pounds total. "We wanted to get out there and remove the nails before it went through the bottom of somebody's foot, before it popped a paddle board or injured an animal," organizer Nicole Corey told KTVK.



No one left behind

A week after rescuers plucked Jessica Johnston out of the New Zealand wilderness when she fell 180 feet from a waterfall, one helicopter pilot returned to finish the job properly. When first responders airlifted Johnston to a hospital March 24, urgency required them to leave behind her border collie **Molly**. Matt Newton, owner of Precision Helicopters, heard the story and vowed to return to look for the dog. After a few fruitless attempts—and a fundraising drive to pay for more flight time—Newton finally spotted the dog on thermal cameras not far from where her owner was rescued. According to Newton, Molly didn't require much persuasion to get aboard the chopper: "She knew what we were up to, I think."

"She knew what we were up to, I think."



Can't catch a break

Gimme a break. Rather than just a piece of a KitKat bar, thieves broke off an entire European shipment of the candy in March, making off with around 13.2 tons of the chocolate wafer bars. Nestlé officials say thieves pilfered 413,793 individually wrapped candy bars in a cargo truck transporting the goods from a factory in Italy en route to Poland. In a statement, the company assured customers that supplies would not be affected and noted that each wrapper contained a batch number. Nestlé officials, who said the delivery truck also remains unaccounted for, asked customers and merchants to check wrappers and see if they find any of the bootlegged bars.

Free to worship

Grace Jin Drexel on China's fear of Christians and her father's imprisonment

by JENNY LIND SCHMITT



Grace Jin Drexel grew up in China, where her father, Pastor Mingri “Ezra” Jin, founded Zion Church, one of the largest and most prominent underground churches in the country. Zion Church has 10,000 regular worshippers in nearly 100 branches in 40 cities.

In October 2025, government authorities arrested and imprisoned Pastor Jin and 17 other Zion Church leaders. They are being held incommunicado on charges of anti-government online activities. Pastor Jin suffers from severe diabetes for which he reportedly is receiving medication.

Grace Jin Drexel moved permanently to the United States with her mother and siblings following a previous church crackdown in 2018. She is now an international advocate for her father and other Christians imprisoned in China for their faith.

YOUR FATHER AND THE OTHER LEADERS OF ZION CHURCH ARE ACCUSED OF “ILLEGALLY USING AN INFORMATION NETWORK.” WHAT IS THE REAL REASON THEY’VE BEEN IMPRISONED?

They are being held because they did not want to join the government-sanctioned churches, as they feel that would infringe on their ability to worship God freely and wholeheartedly. There have also been other church leaders from many provinces detained recently, and my father’s case is an example of this new wave of persecution.

CHINESE OFFICIALS PREVIOUSLY SHUT DOWN ZION CHURCH IN 2018 AFTER YOUR FATHER REFUSED TO INSTALL FACIAL RECOGNITION CAMERAS IN THE BUILDING. WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THAT?

The government made it impossible to rent out any other space for worship. So because of that, the church started a hybrid model of meeting online and offline, and it holds services through various online media. That’s what the Chinese government now claims is illegal, saying that there are only specific legal portals and specific people who are allowed to use them, and charging the leaders with “illegal use of information

online.” But our sermons are still on YouTube, and we’re still meeting, and you can look through it and see that it’s not even political. It is just the gospel message.

WHAT CONTACT HAVE YOU HAD WITH YOUR FATHER?

Right now, there are no direct family communications with any of the 18 detained. Several families are there in person, and they’re not allowed to meet them. They’re not allowed phone calls or even letters. We only have information through our lawyers, and the government has now begun harassing them and revoking their licenses.

WHY DO YOU THINK THIS NEW CRACKDOWN IS HAPPENING?

I’m personally baffled by how strongly they are persecuting people who want only to pray and sing and worship freely. We are not being anti-regime or anything. We just want to hold onto our own faith and make sacred decisions like, Who should be the leader of our church? What should we do with our tithing? How many people can be baptized?

Our songs are just hymns, but they’re not Communist Party songs, and our sermons are not about core socialist values. For the Chinese government, they feel like they can’t control it, and anything that they cannot control, they fear. They see church as ultimately a social organization that is able to gather people and mobilize. We also do a lot of civil society service, like helping with the poor and the vulnerable, and helping families. I think the Chinese government wants people to think that the Chinese Communist Party is the only one who can give those things, so people rely only on the Chinese Communist Party versus the church.

ESTIMATES PUT EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS AT 9% OF THE POPULATION, BUT BECAUSE MANY ATTEND UNDERGROUND CHURCHES, DOES ANYONE REALLY KNOW?

Growing up, my friends didn’t know what a pastor was. I had to tell them

“From my father’s letter and from encouragement from the church, we know that God is faithful, and God is using this for good.”

my dad was a teacher and then a teacher of religion if they asked further. But now most people would at least know the basic idea of what Christianity is, and many people are searching for meaning in their lives. Money and fear only take you so far, and you need something else to ground your life upon. So Christianity is growing quickly in China. I believe persecution often makes the faith grow faster and firmer, because people realize that there is a cost to it, and they are willing to pay that cost—willingly and peacefully. That baffles people and attracts those looking for answers in their lives.

WHAT DO YOU WISH PEOPLE BETTER UNDERSTOOD ABOUT YOUR FATHER’S CASE?

It strips away from the China you see on the surface with its skyscrapers and fast railways that make you think that it’s like America or a European country. But in the U.S. or Europe, we don’t detain a pastor for just wanting to preach.

HOW HAS THIS SITUATION AFFECTED YOUR PERSONAL FAITH?

In some ways, it feels like we’ve seen this history of persecution over and over, especially in China. We see the martyrs spill their blood in China, from the early missionaries who came from Western countries to now when so many Christians are in prison or have been in prison, and you ask, “Why is this happening again and again and again?” So there’s some personal wrestling with that, and those feelings are echoed in certain Bible passages: “For how long will you turn your face from us? How long will you forget the people?”

But from my father’s letter and from encouragement from the church, we know that God is faithful, and God is using this for good. The night before my father was detained on Oct. 9, Pastor Wang Lin was arrested, and some suspected it would be a more widespread crackdown. Another pastor asked my father, “How would you feel now, if you knew they were coming for you tomorrow?” To his surprise, my dad just said, “Hallelujah, the gospel will spread even further!”

WITH YOUR ADVOCACY WORK, HAVE YOU GOTTEN ANY TRACTION ON THIS CASE?

It already has made a difference in my father’s case. We heard in December that he received a Bible inside his prison cell, which is unheard of in the history of the Chinese regime! Since then, six other church leaders have also gotten Bibles. Recently several U.S. senators and congressmen sent a bipartisan letter to President Donald Trump, requesting he raise the plight of my father and other Christians at the upcoming summit with Xi Jinping.

HOW CAN CHRISTIANS BE PRAYING FOR PASTOR JIN?

Pray for God to guard and be with the people in prison, to give them hope, and ultimately, for the miracle of their release. Please also pray for the family members, that we take comfort knowing our loved ones are being comforted and sustained by God’s power supernaturally, even inside prison. ■



VOICES JANIE B. CHEANEY

Blessings and curses

God's promised calamity was never the whole plan

Guess the opening line: "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." (Answer below.)

That quote came to mind while reading Deuteronomy 28, Moses' catalog of blessings and curses for the people of Israel. It's a weird context: Here they are, about 2 million strong, on the

verge of achieving a multigenerational goal going back to Abraham. The land will soon be theirs to keep or to lose, and the choice is plain. Obey the LORD your God, and you will be blessed. The blessings encompass weather, fields, crops and livestock, home and family in 14 verses. The list of curses is over four times longer, for when the LORD turns against them He will drag weather, fields, family, friends, and enemies down on their heads.

Happiness has one face; disaster has many. The blessings sound almost Edenic. Even though death still waited at the end of a long and happy life, the passage would be peaceful as the accomplishments of one generation passed down to the next. If the people had heeded the voice of their God, their days would have been long. But their story would be short.

As we know, they failed to obey and all the curses came true, though not all at once. And with one exception: The LORD did not abandon them for good. Calamity fell at various times and places; the sky turned to bronze and the earth to iron; nightmarish predictions of siege and cannibalism came to pass, but He remained through all the ups and downs of a thousand-year history.

That's why the Old Testament is three times longer than the New. It's why Tolstoy, author of that famous opening

line, could stretch his unhappy-family saga (*Anna Karenina*) to over 800 pages. It's why all storytelling builds on conflict, because it's the story of us and our central conflict with God.

The conditions put before the people on the edge of their Promised Land were never the whole plan. As the LORD confided to Moses, "I know what they are inclined to do even today, before I have brought them into the land I swore to give" (Deuteronomy 31:21). Every good would be theirs if they obeyed Him, but the IF was a massive stumbling block.

Almost 3,500 years later, it still is. We carry the seeds of disaster everywhere we go, and if a few lives look more like verses 1–14 than 15–68, we call those people lucky. But the great difference between the LORD's people then and now is that felicity and misery have bled into each other. Consider that list of blessings, and many of them are ours in the United States: abundant food, long life, central heat and air, freedom from hard labor. Viewed from the perspective of most of the world and practically all of history, it looks like a perfect life. And, if surveys and statistics are accurate, it is saturated with despair.

Writing in *The Free Press*, Arthur Brooks ponders "Why Your 'Perfect' Life Feels So Empty." The wealthy, bright, and beautiful young people he knows today appear to have everything, yet their symptoms of major depression have nearly tripled in comparison to the young people he knew 20 years ago. Too many young people are "undeniably, desperately, incorrigibly unhappy." Brooks blames their education: They have been taught to see life as a problem to be solved rather than a mystery to be lived. At the same time, they are trained on momentary diversion rather than challenged by purposeful boredom. It's not a new problem, but always new diversions.

Human ingenuity finds countless ways to turn blessings into curses. Meanwhile, by the alchemy of heaven, blessing penetrates the curse. We all know people who have suffered in ways they never chose and yet remain, if not constantly upbeat, yet incorrigibly joyful. Their bronze sky diffuses light and their iron earth gives way under showers. Why?

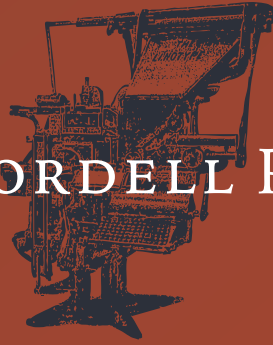
It's because the Lord who pronounced those curses long ago became the curse.

In *Anna Karenina* the wealthy, bright, and beautiful title character takes her own life. Meanwhile Konstantine Levin, the brooding, often-overlooked co-protagonist, discovers joy in divine mysteries he cannot solve.

Deuteronomy says the LORD will establish you as His holy people, *if*—

The cross says, No *if*. Not anymore. The *if*, like death itself, is swallowed up in victory. ■

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CULTURE



TRENDING

Opera struggles to hit a high note

Companies look for ways to attract new audiences

by BEKAH BERNHARDT



Halley Bondy used to spend many afternoons at an iconic New York locale: the Metropolitan Opera. Once every couple of months, she'd catch a classic like *La Bohème* or *Madame Butterfly*. "You're amid the best of the best of everything, down to the triangle player," Bondy said.

Bondy still loves opera, but, after the pandemic, she fell out of the habit of going to the Met. She's a mom now, and splurging on an opera ticket isn't something she can prioritize quite as often.

And she's not the only one. In recent years, the Met has struggled to bring in audiences. For the first half of the opera house's 2025–2026 season, ticket sales only reached 72% capacity. In January, the opera house announced sweeping layoffs and reportedly even considered selling two massive murals by artist Marc Chagall that hang in the Met's atrium. These cuts came in spite of a pending financing deal with Saudi Arabia.

The Met is the largest opera house in the world by capacity, and it's something of a bellwether for the art form in America. Across the nation, opera attendance has steadily declined,

even though performances continue to attract first-time attendees. Turning those first timers into patrons has become a priority for companies trying to keep opera from fading into obscurity.

Opera dates back to the 16th century with Italian composer Jacopo Peri's *Euridice*. Many newer operas are written in English, and most U.S. opera companies provide subtitles to accompany Italian works, which comprise many of the most iconic productions.

Samantha Miller, an opera singer and a vocal studies professor at Liberty University, describes an evening at the opera as a "highly culturalized event." That's because operas involve elaborate stage designs, displays of vocal prowess, and live orchestra performances. "It's really kind of a big collaboration of various forms of art that are being expressed in one night," Miller said.

Despite showcasing several fine art mediums at their best, opera is a particularly hard sell when "people don't want to leave their houses for entertainment," Miller said.

About 3.2% of Americans saw an opera in 2002. By 2017, that number had dropped to 2.2%, and it fell again after pandemic-era lockdowns. Sixty-eight opera companies reported ticket revenue declines of 22% between 2019 and 2023.

Within the past decade, several opera companies have shuttered or filed for bankruptcy →

A performance of Verdi's *Aida* at the Met

including Maryland Lyric Opera, New York's On Site Opera, and Syracuse Opera. Those left have reduced their per-season productions. For its 2026–27 season, the Met will showcase 17 productions, down from 23 in 2022–23.

Nevertheless, new patrons keep trickling in. According to a 2024 survey from Opera America, “Opera companies of all sizes documented record-breaking levels of first-time attendance.” Between 2020 and 2024, roughly 12% of opera ticket buyers were new to the opera. Young adults under 34 made up about one-third of that group.

According to the survey, most of the first-time attendees saw a well-known opera like *La Traviata* by Giuseppe Verdi. Michael Bobbitt, president of Opera America, says it's the same for ballet. “A lot of kids are introduced to dance by seeing *The Nutcracker* or *Swan Lake*,” Bobbitt said. “And so you want to go to see something you've heard of, and then turn you into an opera-goer.”

Samantha Miller says classical operas keep resonating with audiences because they blend comedy and wisdom. Take Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, which tells the story of a philandering nobleman. Despite being fairly lighthearted, the opera includes some poignant lessons. “There's this thread throughout of seeing this man continually choose evil, even though there were people in his life trying to help save him,” Miller said.

Because the art form can display gospel truths in a unique way, “I think it plants seeds,” she added.

But Miller believes modern audiences may need to be convinced that operas can tell relevant stories. Many early operas were based on Greek myths. But in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's day, that changed. “Operas were being written based on plays that were just about normal life,” Miller said. “The characters would have been relatable to the people who were going to see them.” In a similar way, Miller argues, reframing classical operas using contemporary settings could help modern audiences relate.

Opera companies are leveraging social media to raise awareness among younger prospective patrons. Last year,



A nearly sold-out crowd at the Met waits for a performance of Verdi's *La Forza del Destino*.

“Watching the opera felt so surreal because that was something that was on my bucket list for so long.”

the Met offered free tickets to 70 influencers. But typical ticket prices could still be an obstacle.

Although about a third of seats for the Met Opera sell for under \$100, the average ticket costs around \$300. That was the only barrier for 25-year-old content creator Shannon Du.

But for patrons under 40, the New York opera house has an ongoing promotion offering discounted ticket prices and complimentary drinks at certain shows. After Du saw a TikTok video about these events, she and a few friends got dressed up to see *Antony and Cleopatra* last June.

“Watching the opera felt so surreal because that was something that was on my bucket list for so long,” Du said.

Now that she's been introduced to live opera, Du hopes to see about two or three a year. She may even catch a performance at the Palais Garnier opera house in Paris when she visits later this year. ■

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Carl Trueman

BOOKS

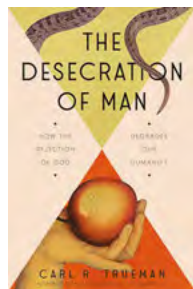
Consecrating humanity

Restoring the dignity of man for the glory of God

by COLLIN GARBARINO

→ Christian thinkers and critics of modernity often talk about rising secularization in terms of the world's "disenchantment," suggesting the need for efforts of "re-enchantment" whether religious or aesthetic to combat the feeling of meaninglessness that has crept into Western society. Carl Trueman, however, thinks this thesis of disenchantment is inadequate to explain our modern situation.

Trueman is a professor of biblical and theological studies at Grove City College and a WORLD Opinions contributor who has written extensively



The Desecration of Man

CARL TRUEMAN

about the crisis of modernity and its relationship to the church. His new book, *The Desecration of Man* (Sentinel, 256 pp.), explains that modernity's problem isn't a loss of wonder but a conscious rejection of biblical truth.

Trueman says the central question of our time is "What is man?" Without an answer to this question, it's impossible to speak about morality. Darwinians believe we're accidentally conscious beings. This purposelessness of humanity's origins undermines any attempt to speak about how we ought to behave. Christianity, on the other hand, teaches mankind is made in the image of God, but has the church consistently explicated a robust theology explaining this doctrine?

In light of this lack of direction, Trueman says our world has answered this central question by saying man is "the one who transgresses what was formerly considered sacred and thereby demonstrates his own godlike status."

Throwing off our natural restrictions might make us feel godlike, but Trueman argues that it actually desecrates our status as image bearers of the one true God. He notes three broad categories of desecration at work in modernity: the denial of human exceptionalism, the objectification of persons, and the move to self-creation. The exploitation of technology to overcome the limits of human nature has consequences for the entirety of human life from beginnings—questions of birth control and IVF—to the ends—questions of assisted suicide and euthanasia.

Much of the book wrestles with the damage wrought by the sexual revolution. The advent of the pill unhinged sex from procreation. Trueman says the sex act's potential to create new life is one of the clearest manifestations of our status as image bearers of God. But birth control takes the purpose of sex and redirects it from procreation to recreation. Sex becomes an outlet for self-fulfillment and self-expression. Making sex about one's self leads to unbiblical attitudes about promiscuity, homosexuality, and abortion, as well as encouraging individuals to see each other as objects for self-gratification rather than fellow image

**Modernity's
problem isn't a loss
of wonder but a
conscious rejection
of biblical truth.**

bearers. Other writers have made similar critiques of the sexual revolution, but Trueman adds another dimension as he examines our current cultural climate. Society wants to see sex as both recreational and exceptional. It's an unstable position. Many people view sex as central to their identities, but they're "doomed to experience life as objects" in this morally untethered world we've created. Making sex into a commodity turns the self into a commodity.

Trueman suggests the modern ideal is founded upon the pursuit of authenticity, and the quickest way to demonstrate one's authenticity is to reject society's traditional restraints. Once humans have felt the godlike exhilaration of throwing off sexual standards, the obvious next step is to reject the reality of our sexed bodies. We move from rejecting natural law to rejecting nature itself. There's a depressing sameness to this supposed authenticity that spurns the biblical understanding of humanity.

Combating this onslaught of nihilism will require something sturdier than a program of "reenchantment." Trueman finds the notion that we can create meaning through openness to the supernatural too anemic. He ends his book arguing that the church must engage in robust worship and promote proper morality. But most importantly, these two things must be rooted in the truth of biblical doctrine. We can only truly answer the question "What is man?" if we know how to answer the question "Who is God?" ■

BOOKS

What's in a word?

Doug Wilson defends strong language

by EMMA FREIRE

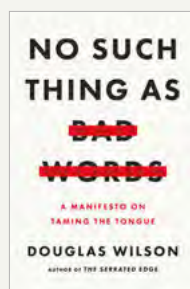


Does heaven contain an official register of "bad words" that are always a sin to say? In *No Such Thing as Bad Words* (Canon Press, 248 pp), Pastor Douglas Wilson says many Christians today act like there is. He argues the matter is more nuanced and we must let Scripture be our guide.

To frame the discussion, Wilson identifies four categories of inappropriate words: vulgarity, obscenity, cursing, and swearing. He notes the Bible prohibits speaking in these categories but it also contains godly examples of these types of speech.

Citing passages like Ephesians 5:3–4, Wilson explains, "Paul doesn't tell us to fight dirty jokes with clean jokes ... he says to fight dirty jokes with contentment and gratitude." And in one of the best chapters, Wilson admonishes Christian parents who are vigilant about blocking internet pornography but allow their children to listen to songs with the vilest of lyrics. He offers helpful insight on the harms of listening to such songs.

But those familiar with Wilson's ministry know he can be a polarizing figure. Over his long career as a pastor and prolific author, he has landed in hot water for his choice of words many



**No Such Thing
as Bad Words**

DOUGLAS
WILSON

times. Sadly, large portions of this book feel like an exercise in self-justification. Wilson repeatedly dredges up instances when someone criticized him over something he said and painstakingly explains why he was actually right. These passages come across as petty and tedious. He even dedicates the book to Kevin DeYoung, who wrote a long article criticizing Wilson on various fronts including his language. The back cover features a quote from DeYoung's article as a satirical endorsement.

Wilson spends so much space relitigating his various feuds, he doesn't leave enough room for fulfilling the book's subtitle, "a manifesto on taming the tongue." Perhaps this is why he claims he's not a role model. "I don't believe that all Christians should write the way I do," he says. "In fact, I think it would be really bad if they did. But I do believe that when it is done rightly and well by someone gifted and called to it, that other Christians should be good with it."

It's important to note the book contains plenty of instances of various "bad words" fully spelled out. Fans of Wilson's pugnacious style may enjoy *No Such Thing as Bad Words*. But Christians seeking guidance as they navigate a world full of vulgarity, obscenity, cursing, and swearing should probably look elsewhere.

BOOKS

Against digital serfdom

A common-grace guide to recovering purpose

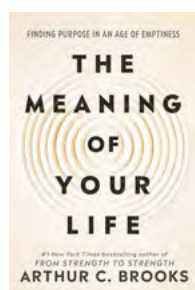
by FLYNN EVANS



Many Americans are experiencing a crisis in which everything seems meaningless.

Arthur Brooks, behavioral scientist at Harvard University and columnist for The Free Press, thinks the path to recovering the reason for why we're here is more straightforward than many are willing to entertain.

As he suggests in *The Meaning of Your Life: Finding Purpose in An Age of Emptiness* (Portfolio, 304 pp.), our co-dependence on smartphones and the endless enslavement to the internet produce "a simulation of life" propelled by "the mismatch between our right-brain need for meaning and the left-brain bias of the world we've made." This dissonance



The Meaning of Your Life
ARTHUR BROOKS

encourages us to seek technological solutions to practically everything. If we are to restore a sense of divine direction, we must return our humanity to its rightful place in every aspect of our routines and actively resist the digitally overoptimized alternative progressively forced upon us.

At the heart of our collective discontent are smartphones, what Brooks labels "anti-boredom machines." Their seemingly infinite provision of content perpetually keeps the deeper aspects of our spiritual selves at bay. Rather than calling us to set fire to our devices, Brooks proposes we should intentionally "embrace the discipline of boredom" by laying them aside whenever we can to free our minds to adequately recall our need for meaning.

Meaning is something that is objectively knowable, but it requires giving ourselves space to contemplate it above the fleeting distractions of social media and streamed entertainment. Loving relationships, service toward others, careers calibrated toward calling, beauty around us and in others, along with the suffering we face, provide chances to grasp the essence of what we're meant to be.

For Brooks, the effect of this is not that someone will "invent" the meaning of life for the rest of us to behold; it is so we can allow ourselves to be in our "brain's right hemisphere long enough" for meaning to reveal itself.

Brooks is Catholic, but he avoids proselytizing by taking an eclectic approach that includes insights from the Dalai Lama, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and evolutionary psychology. Even so, Brooks is writing for people open to theism and supernatural reality, or in Brooks' words "the idea that there just might be a metaphysical dimension" to ourselves and the world around us.

The Meaning of Your Life is the kind of book that uses common grace and general revelation to promote human flourishing. But it also might pique its readers' interest in the supernatural to the point that they seek the ultimate meaning of life in the reality of Christianity. ■



BOOKS

The myth of picky eating

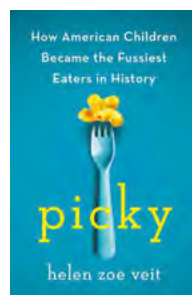
And what to do about it

by CANDICE WATTERS

➔ Before refrigeration, moms cooked meals from scratch with local, in-season ingredients—and children happily ate them. But no longer. Today children routinely demand alternatives to the family dinner, and parents typically comply. It's a frustrating situation, but parents assume this is a normal part of childhood.

In *Picky: How American Children Became the Fussiest Eaters in History* (St. Martin's Press, 304 pp.), historian Helen Zoe Veit shows it's not. Exploring 200 years of eating history, she exposes the myths that created the pickiness that plagues so many modern families.

Until recently, adults expected children to eat the same food they did.



Picky

HELEN ZOE VEIT

That's because nearly all children did, enjoying spicy, briny, saucy, varied, flavorful foods. They took an active part in growing, harvesting, and preparing meals. Snacking on anything other than foraged fruit and nuts was unheard of, and thanks to chores, outdoor play, and walking everywhere, children typically came to the table "appreciatively hungry," eager to eat what was set before them.

But in the 19th century, "experts" began directing parents to feed children special foods based on unscientific fears and theories. In the mid-20th century, psychologists claimed—without evidence—that children would naturally choose the foods their bodies most needed and that forcing (or even encouraging) children to eat what they didn't initially prefer would do long-term damage.

Then, came television. Suddenly food companies were marketing high-calorie, highly palatable "factory foods" directly to children. Snacking between meals became common even as television watching cut into outdoor playtime where children could burn calories.

Not only is picky eating abnormal, it undermines children's nutritional needs and "sets them up for decades of subpar eating habits in the future," even as it "deprives them of joy right now." After 176 pages of lively, readable history, Veit's epilogue, "Happy Meals," offers solid advice for breaking the pattern of picky eating. She says parents should confidently, repeatedly encourage children to try new things, limit snacking between meals, and let an unwilling eater leave the table hungry. It's shockingly countercultural, and refreshingly wise.

Kids used to eat the strangest things, by modern standards. But "the way we feed children now," Veit says, is what's truly "bizarre, harmful, and unnecessary." *Picky* shows that gaining historical perspective can "feel like a superpower," restoring the confidence parents need to help their children learn how to eat broadly and happily, for the good of the whole family. ■



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Ministry, mystery, and memoir

CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

The Augustinian Pastor: Deep Wisdom for Modern Ministry

JOSEPH H. SHERRARD
BAKER ACADEMIC, 240 PAGES

Augustine of Hippo was a theological giant in the church, especially known for his contributions to Trinitarian doctrine, hermeneutics, and political theology. What is often missed, however, is his

central vocation as a minister. He wrote on a wide range of topics and was involved in theological controversies, but he never departed from the pastorate or its ordinary duties. More

than 900 of his sermons have survived, and he certainly preached many more. In this introduction to Augustine's pastoral theology, Joseph H. Sherrard offers not simply an account of his thought, but an attempt to inhabit it, especially his emphasis on humility. For Augustine, humility is not merely one virtue among others; it is the way, because Christ is the way. Pride is the foundational sin, and humility its antithesis. An Augustinian pastor, then, is one who follows this path of humility. The book is both candid and practical. There are a number of helpful discussions, particularly on preaching and catechesis. Augustine's own practice as a preacher is presented as both central to his ministry and instructive for today. Preaching, in this account, is not merely the communication of ideas but an event in which Christ Himself is active. Augustine's life was also marked by a dense network of relationships, and he did not imagine the Christian life as something that could be sustained in isolation. True friendship is grounded

in a shared pursuit of truth and righteousness, and ultimately in Christ. At the same time, it requires more than agreement. It involves practices of forgiveness, patience, and mutual correction. Sherrard describes his own efforts to cultivate such friendships, including regular meetings with fellow ministers. He suggests many pastors do not lack opportunity for friendship so much as the imagination or discipline to pursue it. In an age when many men find themselves isolated, this is a timely and necessary word. Sherrard has not only presented Augustine as a pastor, but has shown what it might mean to take that fact seriously. The result is a work that invites its readers to reconsider the shape of their own ministry under the tutelage of this great teacher whose wisdom remains ever relevant. —James R. Wood

MEMOIR

Homeschooled

STEFAN MERRILL BLOCK
HANOVER SQUARE PRESS, 288 PAGES

Novelist Stefan Merrill Block remembered a blissful childhood in Indiana before his family moved to Plano, Texas. Pulling up roots was hard enough for a 7-year-old, but his New England–bred mother fared worse. Casting about for purpose in a strange land, she latched onto her youngest son. Stefan's complaints about school she interpreted as frustrated genius. The solution was glaringly obvious: bring him home to bloom. During the next five years she

put her own spin on educational theory, such as making Stefan crawl on hands and knees to catch his motor skills up to



his intellect and leaving him alone for empty blocks of time to develop “passions” he didn’t have. Reentering public school as a freshman, he found himself woefully behind. The book has received rave reviews from homeschool skeptics, and Block himself believes the practice should be better regulated. But his years at home were more an experiment in maternal indulgence than real-life education. And Mom was right about one thing: Her son turned out to be a gifted writer. His memoir explores a complex relationship with Oedipal overtones told in a style both torching and tender, though readers should expect a small amount of foul language and innuendo.

—Janie B. Cheaney

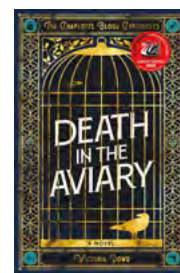
MYSTERY

Death in the Aviary

VICTORIA DOWD
DATURA BOOKS, 400 PAGES

Victoria Dowd crafts murder mysteries that harken back to the Golden Age of detective fiction. *Death in the Aviary* is the first volume in her new series featuring Charlotte Blood. Set in 1928 at Ravenswick Abbey on the English

moors, the novel evokes the haunting atmosphere reminiscent of Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Lord Ravenswick is a London newspaper magnate, and



Charlotte is a journalist for a competitor. Pretending to do an article on the Ravenswick ravens, she gains access to the estate hoping to unravel the mystery of the murder of the Ravenswick heir. Foiled at every turn by the dysfunctional, imperious, aristocratic family and their viciously loyal servants, she struggles to penetrate the conspiracy of family secrets. A parallel plot of her own backstory as a disinherited high-society debutante and grieving WWI widow gives the story depth and further mystery. The novel features complex characters, and Dowd's skill in weaving raven imagery throughout adds a touch of →

humor. This whodunit keeps Charlotte and the reader in suspense right up to the surprising ending. —*Nina Oetting*

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE FICTION

Firebreak

KATHY TYERS
ENCLAVE, 304 PAGES

After years spent away from her home world, Lady Firebird Caldwell returns to Netaia with the goal of introducing her young sons and husband to her remain-



ing friends and family. But when unknown ships in distress call upon Netaia for help, Firebird is chosen to represent her people and make contact.

The crew is surprised to find

something that is more machine than human—a ship that may have once had a soul. Firebird must use every tool and human talent she has if she and every planet in the Whorl are to survive this mysterious enemy. *Firebreak* by bestselling science fiction author Kathy Tyers has the feel of a Star Trek film with the depth of a biblical worldview. Through Firebird's story, Tyers encourages readers to have courage under pressure and to ask in the age of AI: What does it mean to be human? Tyers began the Firebird novels 40 years ago, but *Firebreak* can be enjoyed by all readers whether they're familiar with the original series or not. —*Marian A. Jacobs*

CHRISTIAN MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE

The Bookshop of 99 Doors

JAIME JO WRIGHT
BETHANY HOUSE, 352 PAGES

In this tale, supernatural stressors become the building blocks of faith



when two women, separated by a century, face the same ghost story in a Gettysburg manor house. Present-day Triss enjoys her new job in the bookshop of a Gettysburg

landmark house, until the stories of spectral presences lead her spirits-obsessed brother to its doorstep, forcing her to confront her family as she discovers the true God. Post-Civil War Minnie struggles to care for her father in a lonely Gettysburg manor house with a ghostly reputation. An acerbic housekeeper, an increasingly crazed father, and a stalwart Quaker with a troubling disregard for property boundaries lead her to question her deistic certainties and uncover the violent past of her new home. Both women struggle with what it means to honor their families, when doing so might cause real harm to themselves. As they unravel the story of the manor house, they determine that “sometimes you have to define the darkness before you can step into the light.”

—*Deborah Roby*

HISTORY

A Kingdom and a Village: A One-Thousand-Year History of Moscow

SIMON MORRISON
KNOPF, 528 PAGES

Moscow has always been a city of great brooders. Tolstoy perpetually tortured by the human condition; Putin perpetually tortured by the existence of his neighbors. The city itself broods too,



and for good reason. From riverside settlement to principality. From principality to empire. From empire to ruin. And from ruin, the slow, exhausting job of building it all

back up again, knowing exactly how this ends. Simon Morrison traces this thousand-year cycle with style, moving from medieval princes and Orthodox ambition through Ivan the Terrible's reign of cultured savagery, Napoleon's catastrophic miscalculation, and Stalin's wholesale reinvention of the city as a monument to state power. Each era breaks Moscow. Each time it returns — somehow, stubbornly, against all reasonable expectation. The Soviet collapse brought chaos, crime, and genuine

uncertainty. Oligarchs carved up the ruins. Gangsters wrote the new rules in blood and bad suits. The city absorbed that too. Morrison's Moscow is proud, suspicious, and shaped entirely by its losses. Russia's capital defies easy explanation. It's less a city you understand than one you endure. And Morrison delivers arguably the most honest account of what a thousand years of endurance actually looks like. —*John Mac Gbillion**

MEMOIR

Everything You Want Is on the Other Side of Hard

KEN RIDEOUT
SCRIBNER, 304 PAGES

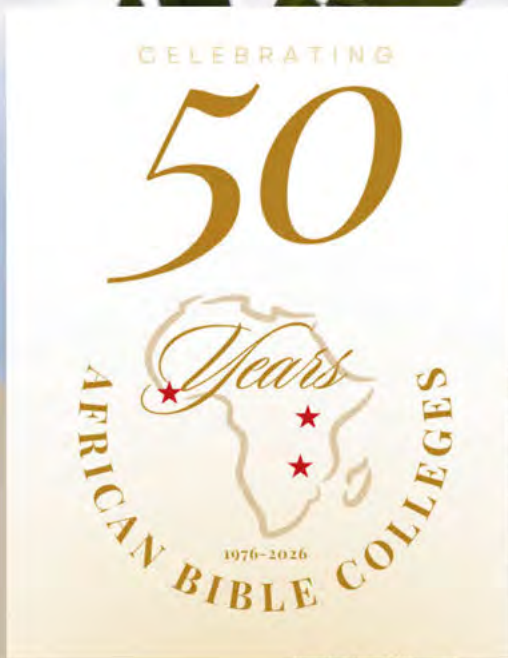
This is the story of a life shaped by hardship and rebuilt through discipline.

Growing up outside Boston, Rideout finds himself surrounded by poverty,



addiction, and instability. Hockey becomes his first refuge, a place where rules make sense and effort is rewarded. As an adult, he carries that competitive edge to Wall Street.

The environment rewards endurance and aggression, and he succeeds. Yet success merges with self-destruction. Drinking grows. Emotions shut down. Work becomes an escape. Eventually, everything erodes, forcing him to confront a difficult truth: Knowing how to survive is not the same as knowing how to live. Running becomes his way forward. What begins as exercise turns into marathons, ultramarathons, and extreme endurance races across harsh terrain. These races test physical limits while forcing him to face fear, pain, and unresolved trauma. In exhaustion and solitude, answers begin to emerge. Moving between childhood neglect and adult reinvention, the memoir presents hardship as a proving ground rather than a curse. Rideout shows that growth lies beyond comfort, and resilience forms through repetition and resolve. Runner or not, there's a lesson here for every reader. —*J.M.G.** ■



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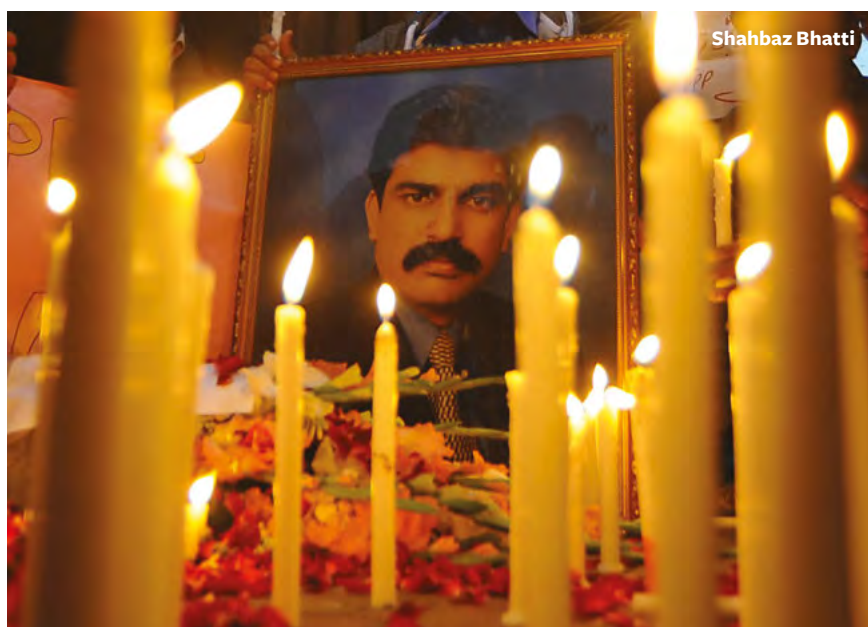
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CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Following the light

One biography and one fantasy with faith-filled themes

by NINA OETTING & CHARISSA GARCIA

➔ In *Blood & Water: The Life and Martyrdom of Shahbaz Bhatti* (Magnificat-Ignatius, 120 pp.), author Matt Yocum and illustrator Jordan Holt use a graphic novel format to introduce readers to the Catholic politician who advocated on behalf of persecuted religious minorities in Pakistan.

From the perspective of Bhatti's niece, Yocum chronicles Bhatti's life, beginning with his days as an altar boy who feels God is calling him to serve those in need, to his adult years of influence as a political activist and the country's minister of minority affairs. The book highlights Bhatti's bold faith and his tireless push for reform, including the elimination of blasphemy laws in Pakistan—a platform that would ultimately cost him his life in 2011 at the hands of the Taliban.

The book at times juxtaposes Bhatti's life and faith with Christ's life and words, and the ending seems to



Blood & Water
MATT YOCUM



Out of Darkness
DANIEL J. ATKINS

point to Bhatti's possible sainthood in the Catholic Church. (In 2016, Pope Francis declared Bhatti a Servant of God, which is the first step to becoming a Catholic saint.) Bhatti's dedication to reform work and his selfless commitment to the cross in the face of coercion and death will be inspiring to readers. Note: Due to some scenes of persecution, the book would be best suited for teens. —N.O.

In Daniel J. Atkins' *Out of Darkness* (Seek the Light Publishing, 286 pp.), stone hunters Fin and Sky live in "the Underground," a place where the only source of light comes from firelight or special glowing stones. The 12-year-old best friends dig for "glowstones" in dark, dangerous tunnels at the behest of the Stone Order, the ruling class of their underground society.

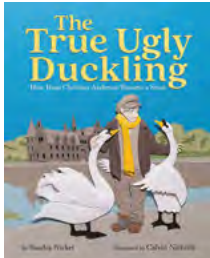
Fin struggles with a fear of the dark that affects his digging and makes him doubt whether he's cut out to be a stone hunter. Sky, meanwhile, is a stone hunter prodigy, but she wishes she knew more about the parents she lost as a young child. When Sky learns her parents were "seekers of the light" and followers of the supposedly dangerous "Old Way," she and a reluctant Fin set off to discover more about her past.

Out of Darkness is a middle-grade adventure with just the right balance of humor and seriousness. In a world where darkness prevails and true light seems lost, Fin and Sky learn about the "All Mighty" and the "Old Way," giving readers clear parallels to God and the Christian faith. Atkins weaves familiar biblical archetypes into the story in ways that children should pick up on without losing the mystery and intrigue found in this fantasy world.

While there are some sudden point-of-view shifts in the story, the levels of action, adventure, and Christian values will appeal to parents and children alike. The cliffhanger ending will also leave readers wanting to find out more about Fin and Sky's journey out of darkness in the next installment of The Lightseeker Series. —C.G. ■

Vision, value, and visits

by KRISTIN CHAPMAN, JODY LANE, & NINA OETTING



The True Ugly Duckling

SANDRA NICKEL
LEVINE QUERIDO, 32 PAGES

Hans Christian Andersen was awkward, isolated, and decidedly different as a child—much like the ugly duckling from his beloved fairy tale. Author Sandra Nickel shares the journey that led Andersen to pen his famed fairy tales, and she captures the heartache of Andersen's social challenges, which may have stemmed from Marfan syndrome and autism. Calvin Nicholls' unique illustrations feature low-relief, cut-paper sculptures that honor Andersen's talent for creating elaborate paper cuttings while he regaled audiences with his stories. Throughout the book, Andersen's face is mostly obscured, but on the final page his face reflects joy that, after years of isolation, he is now a swan who has found his calling and place in the world.

Ages 4–8 —K.C.



The Visit

NÚRIA FIGUERAS
EERDMANS, 56 PAGES

A surprise visitor knocks on the door soon after Mother Fox leaves, and curious Little Fox decides to open up. Silence walks in—tall, huge, and ominous. Then Little Fox discovers Silence likes blackberries and dancing without music. Little Fox twirls across the floor with Silence until, worn out, she snuggles into Silence and says, “You know, I’m really glad you came to visit today.” This wholesome story, whimsically illustrated by Anna Font, offers many teachable moments about embracing silence in a world that never hushes. For instance, Little Fox learns that hearing her thoughts is easier when Silence is present, which serves as a good reminder of how much easier it can be to hear God’s voice when the noisy world fades away. **Ages 3–7 —J.L.**

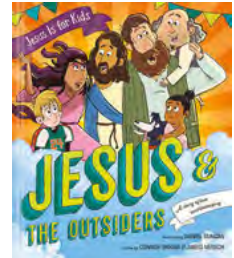


The Amazing Brain Club

LINDSEY GOFF VIDULICH
ZONDERKIDZ, 32 PAGES

The message woven throughout *The Amazing Brain Club* reminds children that every brain is amazing, unique, and purposefully designed by God, no matter how it is wired. Vidulich’s lively text uses apt similes and metaphors to describe brain function, traits, and challenges. Children will see themselves in Cyndi Wojciechowski’s whimsical illustrations as the text reassures them that God made everyone unique and “each of us has a purpose and a role to play in God’s story.” Although it is intended to encourage neurodivergent children, the book can serve to show all children that “every zip, zap, zoom, sparkle, and shimmer of my excitement, energy, and creativity are things we need in the world and in the body of Christ.”

Ages 4–8 —J.L.



Jesus and the Outsiders

CONNOR SHRAM &
JARED NEUSCH
TYNDALE KIDS, 32 PAGES

Whether children are dealing with clique mentalities, experiencing loneliness, or being ignored, *Jesus and the Outsiders* provides wise guidance from the Master Teacher for children of any age. With engaging kid humor, authors Connor Shram and Jared Neusch offer straightforward talk about the feeling of being excluded or not wanting to include people who are different. Drawing on stories about Zacchaeus, the Samaritan woman at the well, and the thief on the cross, the authors demonstrate Jesus’ compassion and His response to those who don’t fit in: He invites them to the party! Illustrator Daniel Duncan interprets the conflicts and the party with imaginative and appealing pictures, supporting the book’s strong message that “there are no outsiders in Jesus’ new world.” **Ages 4–8 —N.O.**

FOUR BOOKS THAT SHAPED MY THINKING

Worship of the living God

by GREGORY WILBUR



→ The son of a church musician, I grew up in the 1970s and '80s in the era of the “worship wars.” The advent of folk styles, Scripture songs, and contemporary Christian music raised questions about the holiness of God versus His immanence—debates that have much in common with the worship wars of the early church and the medieval church, not to mention Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli in the 16th century. At the time, all I knew was that we sang out of a different songbook on Sunday night than the hymnbook we used on Sunday

morning. As I continued to study music and pursue my call to serve the church by planning and leading worship, I continued to wrestle with this fundamental question: What exactly *is* worship?

A SENSE OF PLACE

A good hymnbook can be an invitation into another era, perspective, and set of priorities. I found one such on my mother’s shelf—*The Psalter and Church Hymnary*, authorized by the Church of Scotland in 1880 in which the metrical psalms are presented on split pages. Here was a collection of hymn texts and music

that spanned 1500 years of worship. I felt like an orphan that had been reunited with a hitherto unknown family who entered my life bearing riches and beauty beyond comprehension. Here was a connection to the history of my calling—from David to the temple musicians to the hymns sung after the Last Supper to the fight against early heresies to the hymns of Ambrose and Gregory’s reforms and Reformation chorales crowned by the art of J.S. Bach.

With that foundation, perhaps my most formative hymnbook has been *The*

Plainsong Psalter edited by James Litton in which all 150 psalms have antiphons along with call and response settings on chanted tones. I have led thousands of prayer services from this psalter as part of the daily life of the college where I teach. I chose this songbook to expose students to a part of their spiritual legacy that was foreign to them. I did not realize how formative—in thought and heart—this practice would become. Recently a student told me he had resolved to memorize more Scripture only to be surprised by how much he already knew through the consistent singing of God’s word by means of the chanted psalms.

A SENSE OF PURPOSE

After college in the early ’90s I moved to Nashville searching for a role in worship leadership. I still had a lot to learn, but the voices I kept hearing concerning worship and music seemed to have weak arguments. Then someone in my home church gave me a copy of *O Come, Let Us Worship* by Robert G. Rayburn, which provided helpful guidance. Rayburn’s book was the first of its kind that I had read, and he gave flesh and blood to things I’d been thinking but for which I didn’t have the words. He spoke biblically and historically with boldness and assurance. He defined the nature of worship between God and His people, set forth an order derived from biblical principles, and stated objective reasons why some songs are not suitable for congregational worship. Subsequent reading, research, and practice built on this foundation. With the perspective of 30 years, I might be more critical of some passages, but I am still grateful for Rayburn’s work.

A SENSE OF LONGING

I love reading and teaching fiction, including our monthly literature discussions at church. Sometimes there is more truth in fiction than in the facts of nonfiction. A constant friend has been Walter Wangerin Jr.’s allegory *The Book of the Dun Cow* in which the formative power of liturgy and music shapes and unifies a community. Chauntecleer the rooster crows the daily hours, delineating sleep and dawn, work and rest, and the



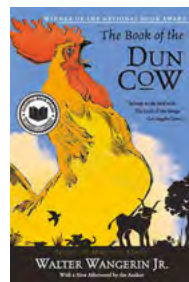
The Plainsong Psalter

JAMES LITTON, ED.



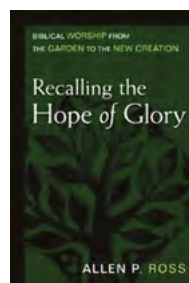
O Come, Let Us Worship

ROBERT G. RAYBURN



The Book of the Dun Cow

WALTER WANGERIN JR.



Recalling the Hope of Glory

ALLEN P. ROSS

completion of the day. His songs are ones of communion, of sorrow, of rest and benediction. They are also the songs of war to inspire courage to fight evil. Moreover, Wangerin portrays the loneliness of leadership, the self-doubt and recognition of sin and inadequacies, and the seemingly unanswered prayers of complaint. The uncomfortable light that he shines in these dark recesses provokes repentance and dependence on the Lord’s calling—to spend less time feeling sorry and more focused on the truth of the gospel. It’s a helpful reminder of the purpose and power of worship and the call of the worship leader.

A SENSE OF DIRECTION

The beauty of the created cosmos, its reflection in the Garden of Eden, the Tabernacle, the Temple, the incarnation of Christ, and the redemption of the church as the Bride of Christ make me respond in gratitude and praise for the plans and purposes of our loving Father. There are many texts I have read over the years that talk about worship this way, but the best has been *Recalling the Hope of Glory* by Allen P. Ross. He beautifully covers theology and typology, but he also points to the holiness of God as one to be worshipped and adored. He stirs the reader beyond intellectual consideration to actual worship. He defines worship as “the celebration of being in covenant fellowship with the sovereign and holy triune God, by means of the reverent adoration and spontaneous praise of God’s nature and works, the expressed commitment of trust and obedience to the covenant responsibilities, and the memorial reenactment of entering into covenant through ritual acts, all with the confident anticipation of the fulfillment of the covenant promises in glory.” His writing makes the heart sing and long for the redemption of the cosmos, for the Lamb upon His throne, and the marriage supper of the Lamb—the focus and end of all our worship. ■

—Gregory Wilbur is the chief musician and liturgist at Cornerstone Presbyterian Church, author of *Soli Deo Gloria: The Life and Legacy of J.S. Bach*, and founder of *New College Franklin in Franklin, Tenn.*



MOVIE

Animal Farm

by COLLIN GARBARINO

Rated PG • Theaters

→ George Orwell's allegory *Animal Farm* is a perennial inclusion on high school reading lists because it warns against the dangers of totalitarianism, corruption, and propaganda. Now students wishing to avoid the assignment have another film adaption they can watch. But how faithful to the original story is this version updated for modern audiences?

The broad outline of the film remains intact. The animals of Manor Farm rebel and expel their farmer, renaming the property Animal Farm. Their new society begins with promise, and the animals create high-minded rules for themselves, the most important

of which is "all animals are equal." But in this barnyard utopia a power struggle between two pigs emerges. Napoleon exiles Snowball and begins to consolidate power for himself, which allows him to exploit the other animals and rewrite the rules. Eventually some animals become "more equal than others."

Orwell's novella doesn't have the kind of action and feel-good ending that moviegoers have come to expect, so this animated film aimed at families adds frenetic sequences as well as a young hero that the audience can relate to.

Lucky is a small but intelligent pig who feels torn between his loyalties to Snowball and Napoleon. Snowball taught him how to read, but Napoleon positions himself as Lucky's protector.

Lucky has some misgivings about Napoleon's justifications for breaking rules and seizing power, but he allows the older pig to rationalize away his fears. But Lucky comes to realize the promise of Animal Farm has gone unfulfilled, and he leads a second revolution to restore the farm to its original vision. Other innovations in this adaptation include Napoleon's alliance with a tech billionaire and jokes about flatulence. Orwell purists will hate the film. It doesn't help that the script is uneven and the animation is clunky.

Despite these flaws, this adaptation captures the often-neglected point of the original story: Socialism is good.

It's always perplexing to me when I run across conservative free-market folks who laud *Animal Farm*. Just because Orwell's allegory criticizes communist Russia doesn't mean it promotes Western-style capitalism. Orwell was a democratic socialist who became disillusioned with Joseph Stalin and was sympathetic to Leon Trotsky. The enemy of my enemy isn't necessarily my friend.

Part of Orwell's intention in saying "all animals are equal" is his desire to see a socialist state inaugurate economic equality. He just didn't want the propaganda and exploitation that went along with Russia's version of communism.

The film updates Orwell's socialist premise by trading on 21st-century concerns. The new Napoleon relies more on populism than propaganda to push his agenda. The allure of consumerism corrupts him. Tech billionaires are the new capitalist enemies who keep us from an egalitarian paradise. We just need bright young folks like Lucky to lead us into that classless society.

The film suffers from the same muddled political messaging as the book. In both the movie and the book—no matter what the rules say—the animals aren't and never could be equal. Many in the barnyard aren't intellectually equipped for having a say. The pigs really are smarter. Does the farm need equality, or does it need pigs with more virtue? And there's a subtle implication that we'd be happier with equitable poverty rather than prosperous inequality.

This is the socio-political worldview of the Hollywood celebrity, which might explain how this modest film managed to attract so many stars. Directed by Andy Serkis, the film features voice work from Seth Rogen, Glenn Close, and Woody Harrelson, among others.

But why would Angel Studios, whose supposed mission is to promote stories that "amplify light," buy the distribution rights to this film that subverts traditional economic values? Also the studio's Christian constituency will have doubts about a film with an atheist director and a cast that includes gay and transgender actors. Orwell had trouble finding a publisher for *Animal Farm* back in the 1940s, and the production companies that made this film had the same problem finding a distributor. Originally, Netflix was linked to the project, but dropped it. I'm not surprised the major Hollywood players also passed on it given its dubious quality. I can only assume Angel bought it for a bargain price, which might, ironically, allow the capitalist company to turn a profit. ■



DOCUMENTARY

He Calls Me Daughter

by BOB BROWN

Not rated • Angel App



Nex month, "Happy Father's Day!" will ring through phone lines and be scrawled in crayon on hand-crafted cards. But that wish won't be voiced in homes where June's third Sunday is an annual reminder of hurt. The new documentary *He Calls Me Daughter* explains why women and girls often carry deep wounds inflicted by an absent or abusive father. The damage is not only physical and psychological, it's spiritual.

"For women, 80% of what they believe about themselves comes from the message their father is giving them," researcher Tracey Robinson claims. Many of the women interviewed share stories of how rejection by their fathers led to destructive lifestyles and to projecting their pain onto God. A former sex worker who grew up without her father recalls how even after warming to the gospel, she struggled to

worship Jesus because He's a man.

The film's lone shortcoming might be in not directly addressing offending fathers. But we do meet one father whose godly example has reverberated far and wide. Rachelle Starr says as a child she "watched my dad live out the gospel" by inviting strangers and AIDS patients to their house. By her late 20s, she had founded Scarlet Hope, a Christian ministry that prepares and delivers home-cooked meals to women in the sex industry—on site! Starr says "virtually all" of the 10,000 women her organization has served "have a broken perspective about their father."

Author and theologian Michael Reeves opens Scripture to find the perfect Father: "We need to see the revelation of God in Jesus," Reeves says. A woman suffering a hemorrhage for 12 years, worthless in the world's eyes, did not escape Jesus' notice. He called her "daughter."

MOVIE

The Sheep Detectives

by JOSEPH HOLMES



Rated PG • Theaters

→ *The Sheep Detectives*, the new family-friendly murder mystery from Amazon and MGM about sheep who solve a murder, is the kind of movie that's both enjoyable and a little disappointing.

George (Hugh Jackman) is a shepherd who loves to read murder mysteries to his sheep, never suspecting they can understand him. When George dies under mysterious circumstances, the sheep decide to solve the crime themselves, even if it means leaving their meadow for the first time and facing the fact that the human world isn't as simple as it appears in books.

The Sheep Detectives is a fun film from start to finish. The jokes come at

a rapid pace, and almost all land. The characters and world-building—both for the sheep and the classic murder-mystery small-town inhabitants—are well developed and engaging. The elements of the murder mystery stay simple and light for children, but the film doesn't lose any of the great twists or stakes.

Characters—including George—die and stay dead, but the deaths are no more difficult to watch than those in *The Lion King* or *The Incredibles*. Most characters are both admirable and sympathetic, but also flawed. Lily (Julia Louis-Dreyfus) is the smartest sheep and the leader, but she can sometimes be cowardly. Sebastian (Bryan Cranston) has a moral spine but is too pessimistic to lead.

The movie uses its sheep-centric narrative for some shockingly mature (in a good way) moral themes. The sheep have the superpower of forgetting things by choice, which they use when things make them sad. This means they must make the heroic decision to remember sad truths—like their owner's death—to bring his killer to justice and save their flock. We're reminded of our own responsibility to choose sad truths over happy lies.

Sadly, the filmmakers also include anti-religious messages. One of the feel-good fantasies the sheep abandon is that sheep become clouds instead of dying. This new "facing reality" about death doesn't involve replacing it with a true understanding of the afterlife; rather, the sheep keep the person they love alive through their memory.

This assertion makes other references to Christianity feel less in good faith and more like mocking dismissal. A flawed priest features prominently who—in admitting his own sins—refers to himself as a "bad shepherd." And in an extended joke the sheep express confusion over biblical metaphors, e.g., God is a shepherd who's also bread but also invisible.

The film also pushes other ideas parents may find questionable. The sheep partly solve the case by deciding to ignore evidence because one of the sheep looked into a suspect's eyes and didn't see guilt. The sheep's instinct, we're told, is more reliable than the evidence—or even other sheep's intuition—because he's been marginalized. The implication? We can—and should—ignore evidence if it contradicts the intuition of someone who's historically marginalized. It's an ironically anti-intellectual message for a movie that implies religion is anti-intellectual.

The Sheep Detectives is one of the most entertaining family movies I've seen in a while. But viewers will have to decide if its attitude toward religion is an opportunity for fruitful conversation or a reason to dismiss the film the way the film seems to dismiss Christian belief. ■

COMING SOON...

The Devil Wears Prada 2

5/1 • PG-13 • Theaters

In this sequel to the 20-year old film, Miranda (Meryl Streep) nears retirement and reunites with Andy (Anne Hathaway) to face off against her former assistant turned rival, Emily (Emily Blunt).

Lord of the Flies

5/4 • TV-MA • Netflix

In this four-episode series based on the classic novel, a group of schoolboys crash-lands on a tropical island, and their attempt to survive is threatened by their own dark instincts.

The Mandalorian and Grogu

5/22 • Not yet rated • Theaters

Once a lone bounty hunter, Mandalorian Din Djarin (Pedro Pascal) and his apprentice Grogu embark on the first Star Wars adventure to hit the big screen in seven years.

Spider-Noir

5/27 • TV-14 • Prime Video

In this live-action series starring Nicolas Cage, an aging and down-on-his-luck private eye in 1930s New York is forced to grapple with his past life as the city's one and only superhero.

The Breadwinner

5/29 • PG • Theaters

A supermom (Mandy Moore) lands a *Shark Tank* deal, switching roles with her breadwinner husband (Nate Bargatze) who struggles to adapt as a stay-at-home dad to their three daughters.

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DOCUMENTARY

The Story of Everything

by BOB BROWN

Not rated • Theaters



I simply wasn't convinced. The computer graphics animating planets spinning and proteins folding, video clips of agnostic astronomers from the 1970s saying the darndest things about their marvelous discoveries, and interviews with modern physicists: *The Story of Everything* could not have been the product of an intelligent mind. No, no, no. I'm sure the documentary filmed itself, and random chance edited its complex arrangement of scenes, dialogue, and music. Watch it for yourself. I think you'll agree.

The Story of Everything is based on the book *Return of the God Hypothesis* by Stephen Meyer, who's one of the film's narrators. In four "chapters," the film presents a staggering amount of scientific evidence pointing to a Creator's handiwork: the universe's finite age and finely tuned laws of physics, the existence of life on Earth, the sophisticated "machinery" inside every living cell, and the "gratuitous beauty" in many living things

that evolutionary biologists evidently fret over. From the very large to the very small to the abstract—the film's orderly presentation sure has the *appearance* of design, like someone had structured a purposeful cinematic composition. But as any reviewer worth his NaCl will tell you, the documentary was that way because it *had* to be that way.

One of those pieces of evidence: The taillike propeller a bacterium uses to go about its daily business has 30 different interworking parts and in some bacterial species rotates at 100,000 rpm.

All this scientific evidence brought a question to mind—I mean, it spiked an interrogative transmission of chemical signals through my cranial neurons. If the Jewish rabbi Jesus of Nazareth, who history tells us died on a Roman cross 2,000 years ago, was the Creator of spinning planets and folding proteins and everything else visible and invisible, He must really have been holding back during His earthly ministry. Why would He do that? It defies scientific explanation.



MUSIC

Michael Roe proves he still has it

New albums from the 77s and Lost Dogs

by ARSENIO ORTEZA

➔ It's a good time to be a Michael Roe fan. Besides leading the Christian rockers the 77s for the last 44 years, Roe has been a member of the supergroup Lost Dogs for the last 35. Both acts have new albums, and both albums are *really good*.

"I've been really grateful that the response has been overwhelmingly positive to this record," says Roe of the 77s' *7* (Fools of the World/Mezzo), "because it's been over 20 years since we made a full original album."

To be clear, the 77s *have* released albums during that span, and exciting ones at that. But they were cover projects such as *Holy Ghost Building* (gospel blues, spirituals) and *Gimme a Kickstart* (pop, rock, indie, and folk, both famous and obscure).



7
THE 77S



Trick of the Light
LOST DOGS

"When a band goes away for that long and you're going to bring them back," says Roe, "you have to bring them back better. If we put out an album that isn't any better than our old albums or is not quite as good, then people say, 'Ah, they don't have it anymore.'"

The 77s—Roe (vocals, guitar), Mark Harmon (bass), Bruce Spencer (drums)—still have it. Available as a seven-song vinyl LP, a 10-song CD, or an 11-song digital download, *7* offers everything that makes the band special: galloping rockers ("Saddle Up"), transcendent pop ("Heart Back," "Hand to God"), free-range boogie ("Weedzlers"), and wisdom ("Be Still"). Not that the album had an easy gestation. The trio worked on it off and on for 13 years.

"We ended up with probably between 15 and 20 basics," says Roe. "This new record was culled from those. And we have another whole record in the can."

Until that album comes out (its title: *7s*, so you can put its cover side by side with the cover of *7* and see "77s"), there's Lost Dogs' *Trick of the Light* (Fools of the World). Mellow on the whole than *7*, it finds Roe, the Choir's Derri Daugherty and Steve Hindalong, and Daniel Amos' Terry Taylor melding melody, melancholy, and meaning with ease. In particular, the title cut memorializing departed friends and family and the godly-woman tributes "Here and Now" and "I've Been Workin'" belong on the Dogs' ultimate best-of.

The songwriting didn't break down democratically. (Of the 11 songs, Taylor wrote eight.) But then, where the Dogs are concerned, it never does.

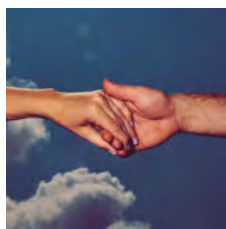
"We got lazy a lot of years and let Terry write all the songs," says Roe. "If you stay in a band long enough, you understand that the guys that are the most driven are going to be the ones that dominate the art, and the ones that are lazy are not."

"So there you have the true reason why a lot of times things happen the way they do: pure laziness." Roe laughs. "I have no excuse. ■"

MUSIC

New and noteworthy

by ARSENIO ORTEZA



77 (Pt. 2) COLONY HOUSE

The second half of Colony House's latest project replaces the rawer energy of the first with sounds more in keeping with the pop gradually achieving classic status during the Chapman brothers' formative years. If "Head Over Heels" borrows its title from the Go-Go's, it borrows its opening and recurrent riffs from Tears for Fears. On the whole, though, it's Crowded House to

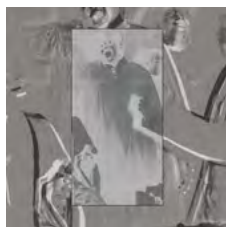
whom this EP is throwing down a gauntlet. And, frankly, the Chapmans write better lyrics.



This World Ain't Mine To Change FEPESTE

Three albums in, Eric Jett keeps making artistic strides—both with his lyrics, which weave biblical texts into conversational and sometimes cheeky self-reproaching self-examination, and the musical challenges that he has set for himself as he pushes 40. These include aiming for a sparkly, laid-back psychedelic surf awash with overdubbed vocals inspired by his love for *Pet Sounds*, a sound that

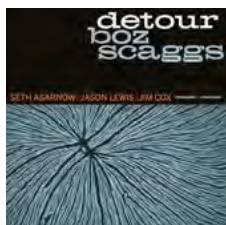
more often than not he achieves. (Check out the wet guitars on "Doomsurfing.") Not bad for a guy who named his act after a Watashi Wa song and whose day job since he has been old enough to hold one is distilling whiskey.



Have You Heard About the World Coming to an End? VARIOUS

This album, much of which will be familiar to fans of Document Records compilations, begins with 1927's "Don't Let Satan Get You" (aka "Doan Let Satan Git You") by the Barbour Singers (aka Barbour's Plantation Singers) and ends with 1942's "I'm on My Way to Heaven Anyhow" by the Royal Harmony Singers (aka the Florida

Boys). The tempos and lead-singer-with-tight-backgrounds format prefigure everything from the Mills Brothers to doo-wop. The lyrics prioritize pursuing faith, hope, and love as the end draweth nigh. The Birmingham Jubilee Singers reveal that "ruckus" used to be pronounced "rue-kiss."



Detour BOZ SCAGGS

"I'll Be Long Gone" is an original that Scaggs first recorded in 1969 in Muscle Shoals, "It's Raining" an Irma Thomas classic from '61, and "The Meaning of the Blues" a Bobby Troup composition first minted by Julie London. The other eight, at least two of which were composed before the 81-year-old Scaggs was even born, belong to the Great American Songbook. All of them get

the intimate, late-night-jazz-trio treatment, a mood that Scaggs eases into and illuminates so naturally and subtly that he probably should've called the results *Silkier Degrees*.



ENCORE

It turns out that **Colony House** has been as influenced by U2 as any other act over the last 40 years. Take "Telephone Pole," for instance, the number that opens 77 (Pt. 1). Were U2 to copy Colony House's performance note for note and inflection for inflection, no one would blink. Some might even consider the results a return to form. It's certainly easy to imagine Bono emoting "One day is a blessing. The next day is a curse. / One day I'm moving forward. The next I'm in reverse."

But that's where the U2 similarities end. Just two songs later, the band is making like punks, bashing out one song whose refrain goes "OK! OK! OK! OK!" and another called "Ready To Go" in which the singer has had it up to here with the ruts that he's stuck in. Two further observations: (1) The band's label (LastDaze) may or may not be a Keith Green homage; (2) the vulgarity in "Atomic" would've gotten Colony House banned from Christian bookstores and radio back in Will and Caleb Chapman's father's day. —A.O.

MASTERWORKS

Grief resolved in Christ

Saint Sebastian Tended by Saint Irene

by WILLIAM COLLEN



PHOTO BY DEAGOSTINI/GETTY IMAGES



Although the story of Sebastian and Irene is semi-legendary and is not found in any historical chronicles, it was a popular one in the Renaissance. Sebastian was a Roman Christian who was tortured in A.D. 286 by Emperor Diocletian. The emperor had him tied to a pole, and his best archers used him as a target. Astoundingly, Sebastian survived the ordeal; his wounded body was taken from the pole by Irene, a fellow Christian who nursed him back to health. After this recovery, Sebastian would have another encounter with Diocletian that led to his martyrdom. Sebastian pierced by arrows was a common subject in Renaissance paintings, but by the early 17th century, painters began favoring depictions of Sebastian being tended by Irene.

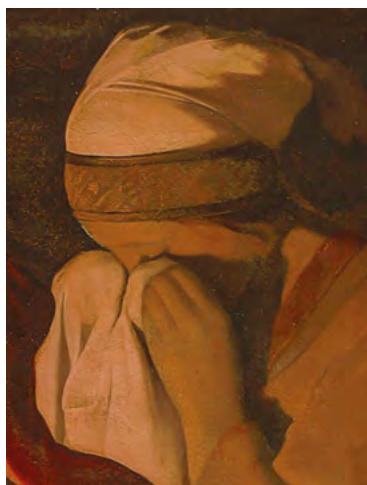
Georges de la Tour was a French painter who specialized in candlelit scenes. Dramatic lighting effects were popular in the paintings of the early Baroque era—a break from the previous century's favoring of scenes strongly lit from the front. This high-contrast style was known as *chiaroscuro* and was well suited to the period's emphasis on drama and decorative effects. De la Tour's painting of Sebastian and Irene deploys



the master's characteristic touch to create a painting with a stunning unity of form and content.

Mention the Baroque and what often comes to mind is the exuberant decorative elements in the arts of the time. Cathedrals were furnished with massive pulpits and altars decorated with carved and painted sculptures of saints and

angels. Palaces featured grandiose staircases, elaborate entryways, and heavily embellished interiors. Baroque painters experimented with complicated arrangements of pictorial space and dramatic depictions of intense emotion.



De la Tour organized his painting of Sebastian and Irene around a strong central diagonal axis. The viewer's gaze travels back and forth from Sebastian's broken body to the grief-stricken faces of Irene and her companions in a whirlwind of powerful feelings. Subtle contrasts—Sebastian's lying on the ground versus Irene and her standing companions; the single figure of the martyr versus the grouped figures of his mourners—emphasize the saint's plight: He is alone in his physical suffering but for the empathy of Irene and her friends. Irene and her associates are experiencing their sadness together, but not in the same way. Irene herself is focused on attending to Sebastian's medical needs; her companion in black extends her hands in a gesture of pity; another companion is silently praying while a fourth figure weeps. There are thus several diagonal axes in the picture, all of them converging on Sebastian himself. There is even a literal arrow piercing Sebastian's torso, further emphasizing the focus of the collective emotional outpouring of the women in the picture.

In the visual language of painting, diagonal lines are often used to signify

movement, unrest, and action. But a triangle sitting on its base communicates the opposite: rest, repose, stability. De la Tour's picture, despite its intense emotional content organized via a prominent diagonal, is made of a series of such triangles. Irene's figure is a triangle; so is that of the companion to her left. Their hands and faces make two more triangles. Sebastian's upraised knee is the apex of yet another triangle.

This tension—between the active, unstable diagonal and the placid, settled triangles—gives de la Tour's painting a powerful symbolic meaning. All grief has a resolution in Christ. In the story, Irene does not succumb to a despairing inaction when presented with Sebastian's wounded body. She seeks to give comfort and aid because she knows the source of lasting comfort.

In contrast to many Baroque painters, with their crowded canvases and frescoes depicting swirling, contorted figures engaged in vigorous action, de la Tour often imbued his pictures with an atmosphere of quiet repose. Little is known about his intellectual life and even less about his faith. As his career advanced, though, he worked ever more exclusively on paintings of religious subjects. A quiet, trusting faith, one that is aware of the brokenness of the world yet which does not react in bitterness or despair, is woven into the structure of *Saint Sebastian Tended by Saint Irene*; woven as it ought to be in the life of every believer, what trials may come. ■

—William Collen is an independent researcher who writes *RUINS*, a Substack blog discussing art and aesthetics from a Christian perspective





VOICES NICK EICHER

Up from desecration

Carl Trueman shows a path forward: not more argument, but recovery of belief, worship, and a shared way of life

Some writers you read for information, others you read for clarity. Carl Trueman belongs firmly in the second category. He has a gift for naming things plainly—especially when the rest of us may be satisfied to speak in generalities.

His latest book, *The Desecration of Man*, is a case in point. It's relatively brief, and pointed. Its central claim is as bracing as anything he has written: Ours is not simply an age that has lost its sense of the sacred—disenchantment. It is an age that increasingly rejects it—desecration.

That is a harder word. It implies intention. And, in Trueman's telling, something more than intention—something like enjoyment. Modern culture, he writes, shows a "sheer delight ... in toppling the moral codes of the past."

This is not mere forgetfulness of what is sacred. It is transgression with a smile.

If the sacred character of human life is no longer assumed—if it is instead something to be challenged or redefined—then moral language itself begins to destabilize. We continue to make claims about dignity, freedom, and justice. But we make them without a shared account of what a human being is—whether our nature is something we receive or something we invent.

So we're met not with confused silence, but with confident, often aggressive, contradiction—frequently unmoored from reality.

Trueman's answer is not to meet that noise with more noise. If the problem is desecration, he says, the answer is

consecration. But he is not talking about a plan or a program. He is talking about something slower—and harder.

"Faithful church attendance," he told me, "and a vibrant, joyful church life that flows over into the everyday life, attitudes, and behavior" of believers. That is what reconsecration looks like. The clearest sign, he adds, is the love Christians show one another.

That answer may feel almost anticlimactic. It does not promise quick results. It does not map neatly onto political strategy. But that is precisely the point. We are not meant to remain at the level of belief and worship, but to see them take shape in the way we live.

Trueman organizes his argument around three categories: creed, cult, and code. What we believe. How we worship. And how we live. The shortcut is to separate the last from the first—to rush to moral conclusions without formation, or to linger in belief and worship without ever arriving at how we live. But Trueman insists that the code cannot stand on its own. It must grow out of creed and cult—out of truth believed and practices embodied over time. Catechesis—teaching, worship, and shared life—is basic to that work, because it is what gives shape to how we live.

When that formation is weak, the moral life becomes unstable—or never really takes shape at all. Convictions harden quickly. Disagreements escalate. And questions that require prudence are treated as if they admit only one obvious answer. As Trueman put it to me, if churches and families are not cultivating Christian virtue, "nothing society does can compensate for that lack."

That is a sobering thought, particularly in an age that looks instinctively to politics for solutions. Trueman does not deny the importance of political life. Not at all. But he places it in its proper context. "Christians need to realize that earthly politics is not an exact science," he notes.

We may differ on some of the details, and that's where "modesty of judgment and respect for others even at points where we differ is important."

That emphasis on prudence is not a retreat from moral seriousness. It is an acknowledgment of complexity—and a recognition that not every question is settled at the same level. In the end, *The Desecration of Man* is not a book about policy or even primarily about culture. It is a book about formation. About how a people come to understand themselves, and about the practices that sustain that understanding over time. Which is why its answer is at once simple and demanding.

If we want a more stable moral world—if we want our claims about justice, dignity, and human worth to hold—then we must recover more than arguments. We must recover the habits, the worship, and the shared life that make those arguments possible—the kind of life that can actually sustain them in practice.

In Trueman's terms, we must recover creed and cult.

Then the code is likely to begin to take shape—and to hold. ■

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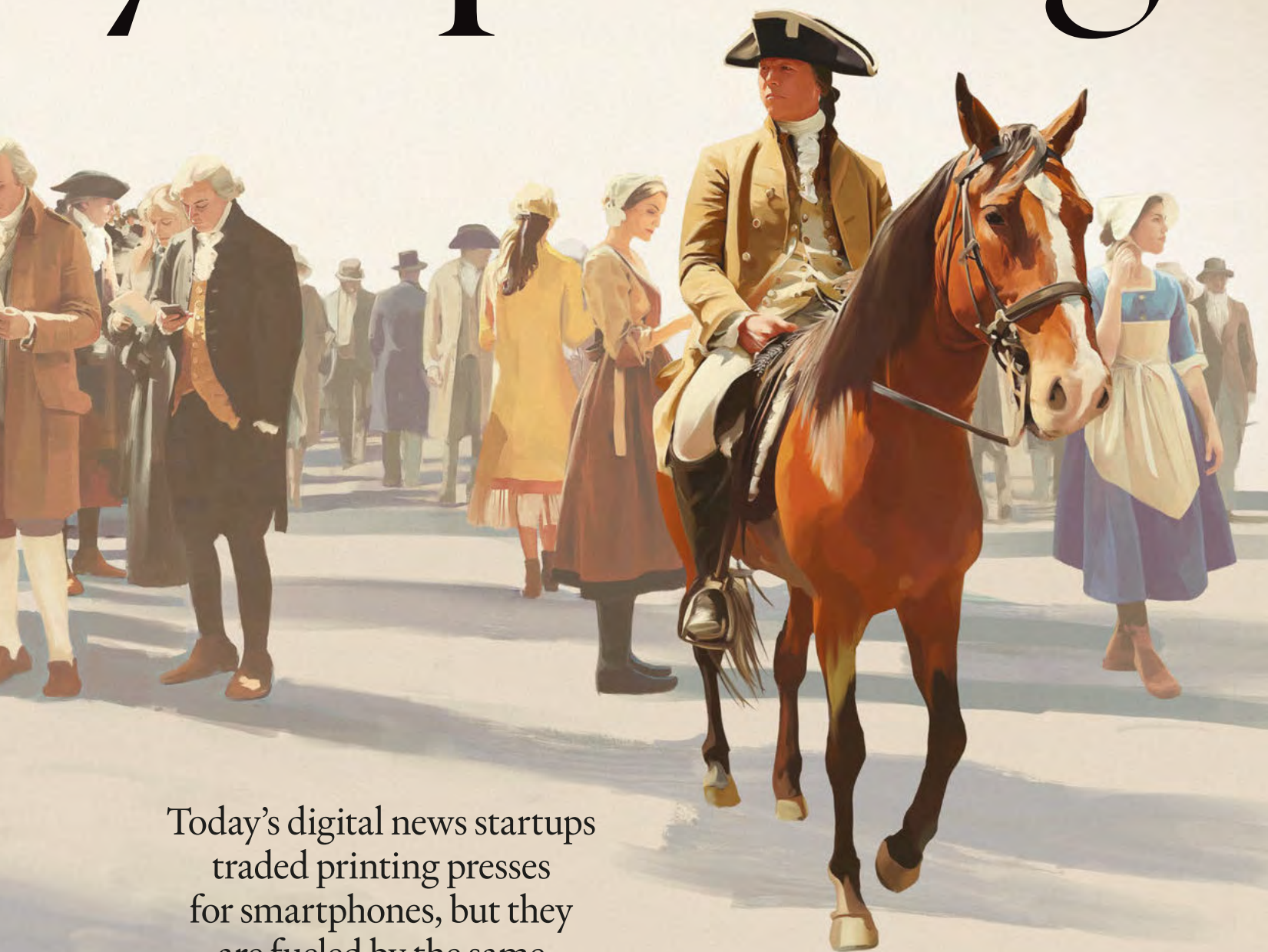
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Revolutiona



ry reporting



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illustration by Annick Poirier



REVOLUTIONARY REPORTING

The return of the Patriot press

Amid constant change, high stakes, and elusive truth, Revolutionary-style journalism holds renewed appeal | by Les Sillars

The first newspaper to publish the text of the Declaration of Independence was *The Pennsylvania Evening Post* on July 6, 1776. In the following months, 29 of the 37 Colonial newspapers then operating at least alluded to it. For example, the *Virginia Gazette* reported on Aug. 10 that when it was read aloud in Richmond to several hundred “respectable freeholders of Henrico county, and upwards of 200 militia it was received with universal shouts of joy, and re-echoed by three volleys of small arms” followed by “many patriotic toasts.”

After that, however, few newspapers took much notice of the nation’s founding manifesto. As a political document, the declaration is a stunning achievement. But American militias had already been at open war with British forces for more than a year. The declaration articulated why they were fighting, yes, but it only mattered if they won.

While coverage of the declaration was subdued, newspapers themselves had a huge effect on the course of the American Revolution. Many historians believe that the real revolution occurred in the decade before 1776, before a single shot was fired, when newspaper coverage of key events and ideas helped transform loyal British subjects into fiery American Patriots.

Now, 250 years later, Revolutionary-style journalism is back.

Newspapers fired some of the first salvos of the American Revolution following the Stamp Act of 1765. The steep tax on paper was designed to replenish British coffers badly depleted by the Seven Years’ War with France and its Indian allies in North America. The act was a disaster for printers, who promptly denounced it as tyrannical. The British repealed it the following year, but it provoked the printers into open opposition against



ABOVE: The July 6, 1776, edition of *The Pennsylvania Evening Post*, the first paper to print the Declaration of Independence. **FACING PAGE:** The *Boston Gazette's* coverage of the 1770 Boston Massacre.

the Crown. And because American Colonials were avid readers in perhaps the most literate society in the world, in attacking the act newspapers prepared the way for even more radical political ideas to spread across the culture.

At the time, Colonial newspapers were generally produced by printers. Britain had some full-time newspaper editors, but in America newspapers were usually a less-than-lucrative sideline to printers’ primary business producing books, pamphlets, and government documents. A few employed freelance correspondents, but the job of “reporter” didn’t emerge in America until the 1800s. Printers typically filled their four-page papers with whatever crossed their desks, from official documents to private letters to reports from other newspapers.

And Colonials, including printers, would have been baffled by modern

ideas about “journalistic objectivity.” That American invention first appeared in the early 1900s. Colonial newspapers hoped to be factually accurate and bragged about offering the “freshest advices.” But balance? Neutrality? How could one not take sides in the war between justice and tyranny?

Colonial newspapers had interpreted the Seven Years’ War in both theological and political terms as between French popery and Christian England. They defined battles

either by the atrocities of the Catholic French (“hen-hearted, cowardly dogs”) or the heroics of the fine Anglican British lads and officers. So when the Stamp Act appeared in 1765, printers didn’t hold back. No journalistic standard required them to present “both sides” when King George was obviously the villain.

Colonial printers took this same approach describing the 1770 Boston Massacre. On March 5, an angry confrontation between a handful of British troops and hundreds of furious Bostonians got out of hand. After some in the crowd began swinging clubs and a cutlass, the soldiers fired, killing three, mortally wounding two more, and injuring six others.

Newspaper accounts portrayed the event as a bloodbath, the inevitable result of a standing army quartered close to a city. Well over half of the narrative in the March 12, 1770, *Boston Gazette* recounted as the cause of the incident a vicious and cowardly lot of armed troops bullying innocent boys and respectable, unarmed citizenry. The page included several black coffins for emphasis.

At the climax, according to the *Gazette*, “the Captain commanded them to fire; and more snow balls coming, he



again said, damn you, fire, be the consequence what it will!" The paper continued: "But what showed a degree of cruelty unknown to British troops, at least since the house of Hanover has directed their operation, was an attempt to fire upon or push with their bayonets the persons who undertook to remove the slain and wounded!"

An account in the *South Carolina Gazette* called it a "horrid massacre." It began, "Tuesday morning presented a most shocking scene, the blood of our fellow citizens running like water through King Street and the merchants Exchange."

The stories were influential, overheated, and factually doubtful. Some witnesses and the commanding officer later denied he had ordered the soldiers to fire. At the trial that fall, six of the soldiers were acquitted, and two were found guilty of manslaughter but merely branded on the thumb and released—an oddly restrained verdict for a supposedly vicious "bloodbath."

Religion and politics were at the time increasingly intertwined. The revolutionary "ideology of dissent" linked religious tyranny with civil tyranny, making the Church of England a political threat just as French Catholicism had been 10 years earlier. As historian Edmund Morgan has noted, Revolutionary-era Colonials read history in a way that "attributed the rise and fall of empires to the acquisition and loss of the same virtues that God had demanded of the founders of New England."

This same concern for virtue appears in coverage of the 1775 Battles of Lexington and Concord, the skirmishes that opened the Revolutionary War. On April 19, the British military governor of Massachusetts sent out 700 troops to destroy the Colonials' military stores at Concord. He had hoped to surprise the Colonials, but a body of militia was waiting at Lexington Green.

As the British attempted to surround and disarm the Americans, who were

The Battle of Lexington

dispersing, a shot rang out. The redcoat lines then opened fire, killing eight militiamen and wounding 10. The British soon retreated, but the Colonials sniped from behind walls and trees at the exposed British lines all the way back to Boston.

Patriot accounts of the battle, however, focused on alleged British duplicity and atrocities. "The late frequent Marchings and Countermarchings into the Country, were calculated to conceal the most cruel and inhuman design, and imagining they had laid Suspicion asleep, they pitched upon Wednesday Night for their Execution," said the May 1 *New York Gazette*.

During the battle, the British committed "Cruelties and Barbarity never equalled by the Savages of America." The story continued: "In one House a Woman and seven children were slaughtered. ...

It is no time now to dally, or be merely neutral, he that is not for us is against us, and ought to be the First of our Resentment.” The son of a Tory who had guided the British troops was captured and shot, “a Death too honorable for such a Villain!”

God was on their side, it continued: “In every Struggle Heaven has as yet given us Strength equal to the Day, its hand is not shortened, nor its Arm weakened. ... God who transplanted us hither, will support us.”

A minority of newspapers remained Loyalist, or tried to, but in most places that wasn’t easy. In Patriot-controlled areas, many Loyalist printers suffered threats and attacks as mobs smashed presses, broke up printing rooms, and occasionally assaulted the printers themselves. “Sir,” began one letter, “if you print or suffer to be printed in your press anything against the rights and liberties of America ... death and destruction, ruin and perdition, shall be your portion. Signed by Order of the Committee of Tarring and Feathering.”

Loyalist printers were often ready to print both sides of an argument, a practice Patriot mobs discouraged and Patriot printers regarded with contempt. To a true Patriot, to print both sides was simply to propagate error and support the enemy.

Both American and British leaders saw newspapers as vital to winning the hearts of the public, as media historians David Sloan and Julie Williams wrote in their 1994 book, *The Early American Press*: “They expected their press to behave accordingly. News reports in the Revolution, therefore, were certainly never meant to contain mere factual coverage or to describe battles and events objectively. Instead, coverage of news was a deliberate, highly valued attempt to paint the two sides in their most persuasive colors.”

For Patriot printers, press freedom meant the freedom to print that which supported the Revolution. Francis Hopkinson, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, once explained that

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when newspapers abuse their freedom and sow dissension, “ought not that government, upon the plain principles of self-preservation to silence, by its own authority, such a daring violator of its peace, and tear from its bosom the serpent that would sting it to death?”

The war itself was hard on the press and on printers. Simply operating was difficult, given the challenge of collecting news, an uncertain postal system, economic and military instability, bad roads, and a shortage of newsprint, among other troubles. At the start of the war there were 37 newspapers in the colonies but only 35 at the end of the Revolution in 1783. Including the 33 new papers founded during the war, 70 published at one time or another but half of them folded.

The news industry has seen major changes in the last 250 years, but the style of Revolutionary papers still echoes across today’s media landscape. Take the once-venerated *Washington Post*, the paper that broke the Watergate scandal. It announced in February that it cut about a third of its reporters and editors, over 300 people, perhaps the most dramatic sign to date of the mainstream news media’s economic woes.

Commentators pointed to *Post* owner Jeff Bezos’ attempts to broaden the paper’s appeal. When Amazon’s founder bought the paper in 2013, most conservative readers had already abandoned it as relentlessly liberal. The paper cemented that reputation with its 2017 slogan aimed at the Trump administration but absent in the Obama years: “Democracy dies in darkness.” When, in an effort to moderate its image, the paper declined to endorse Democrat Kamala Harris in the last election and then tried to balance its op-ed pages, its progressive base revolted. In Revolutionary terms, it tried to act like a Loyalist paper with a Patriot audience.

This happens across the political spectrum, often in language that mirrors Patriot rhetoric. A paid subscriber to the Substack newsletter Unreported Truths



Disgruntled *Washington Post* employees protest layoffs announced in early 2026.

explained that he was canceling because he was tired of the author's attempt to be an "objective" journalist: "We are in a war of good versus evil. Nobody is perfect, including Trump, but Dems and Media are pure evil. Trump is our last Hope. He needs full support of those fighting evil."

It shouldn't be surprising that people today want news that attempts to persuade, to serve a larger purpose. The professional ideal of "journalistic objectivity" that produces "unbiased" news is not inherent to journalism; rather, it's a century-long American experiment that is now winding down. It didn't appear until after World War I, when ideas that had floated around journalism for decades coalesced into a package of professional standards and practices: accuracy, balance, fairness, nonpartisanship, and detachment. By midcentury, this paradigm dominated newsrooms.

At its best, journalistic objectivity helped newspapers deliver credible news across political and cultural lines and so become very profitable. At its worst, it

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pretended that facts could be delivered free of interpretation, "without bias," allowing journalists to hide their true political and ideological commitments under a veneer of neutrality.

But the news industry's commitment to objectivity collapsed with its finances over the last four decades. It happened, in Hemingway's phrase, "gradually, then suddenly." There were several factors, but one major one was how the internet devastated the news industry's ad-supported business model. Some publications chased after fragmented audiences with clickbait, and others abandoned pretensions to fairness and nonpartisanship. Social media fueled political polarization, forcing news publications like the *Post* to take sides.

All this left the door open for an explosion of online sources and the rise of news "influencers" who, self-consciously or not, take on the role of Revolutionary journalists. The stakes in today's political and cultural battles are different but just as real as in 1776. The public square is again infused with religious fervor. People like Tucker Carlson attract huge audiences in part by saying: "You can trust me because you know me, and you know our cause is just." In a chaotic culture where change is constant, the stakes so high, and truth so elusive, that's an appealing pitch.

Where the journalism industry goes from here is far from certain. After the Revolutionary War ended in 1783, hundreds of newspapers sprang up across the country to form what came to be known as the Party Press. Federalist and Republican editors heaped vitriol on political opponents and their ideas, but in general both groups shared the ideals articulated in the Declaration of Independence. Newspapers helped forge a new nation under that broad consensus. American culture currently lacks that sort of shared purpose; without one, the news media industry will probably remain thoroughly revolutionary. ■

—*Les Sillars is associate dean of academic affairs and professor of journalism at Patrick Henry College, and former editor-in-chief of WORLD*



REVOLUTIONARY REPORTING

Alabama's chief muckraker

Bryan Dawson is on a mission to revitalize hard-hitting, local journalism

by Kim Henderson | photography by Lloyd Gallman Jr./Genesis

Bryan Dawson's barrel chest strains the seams of his size 54 tux as he moves through a make-shift banquet hall, shaking hands with Alabama's most conservative conservatives. It's the moment his adoring crowd of supporters has been waiting for, and several men greet him with a hearty clap on the shoulder. Over the din, Dawson leans in close, then, after an appropriate number of words, he presses on, working the room like a politician on the eve of a primary. But Dawson isn't running for office. He's running an upstart news organization that's taken the media landscape by surprise.

It's a role that has him presiding over this annual gala, a to-do that took place last November at Birmingham's Barber Motorsports Museum, four stories of carefully curated motorcycles, cars, and high-speed dreams. Everywhere, the place gleams. Chrome fenders and polished pistons. Spokes and hubcaps. The hood of a Formula One race car parked atop a glass-walled elevator.

The backdrop fits Dawson, a man whose life has accelerated at a remarkable pace. The former Colorado convict today sits at the helm of 1819 News, a state-focused media outlet launched in 2021 under the umbrella of the Alabama Policy Institute. But the goal, according to Dawson, was to create a real-deal, legitimate news organization, not another think tank publication. "There are many tank publications," he said. "Nobody does what we do."

Independent and nonprofit since 2023, 1819 News drew 6.5 million viewers to its website last year alone. Named for the year Alabama became a state, the outlet and its investigative reporting have shaped political debate and, at times, state policy. The gala's guest list is telling—lawmakers, activists, pastors, business leaders—all drawn to a media organization that seeks to arm Alabama with the news it needs to be a "free, virtuous, and flourishing society."

But while 1819 News has been making headlines, its president and CEO has been making his mark—and more than

a few enemies. Even his pick for the gala's celebrity headliner was combustible. Dawson didn't mind, though. Tucker Carlson delivered what would become his most prominent public speech in Alabama to date, boldly telling the sold-out audience that this project—this 1819 News—will "save your state."

The success of 1819 News comes at a time when journalism, overall, is taking a hit. A 2025 report from Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism lays out the numbers: Print newspaper circulation across the United States has dropped by an estimated 80 million since 2005, leading to the loss of three-quarters of the industry's jobs. More than 3,400 local newspapers have folded. Some 50 million Americans live in counties with either no local news source or just one.

Given the important role newspapers played in America's founding and the stability of its democracy, their decline seems especially worrisome as



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Bryan Dawson works in his 1819 office.

eight donors willing to pledge \$250,000 a year for three years. He met with evangelicals accustomed to funding works of mercy and discipleship and evangelism. His task, he says, was to persuade them that investing in his venture would yield a cultural and political return. “I had to cast a vision for a media organization that could radically change the political trajectory of the state.”

Dawson understands radical change.

His life began with what he describes as the unlikely pairing of his parents, “a senator’s daughter from Colorado and a redneck from Louisiana.” They divorced when Dawson was 2, and instability characterized his childhood. He got into drugs and dealing as a teenager, and was in and out of jail. But even at his lowest point—sleeping in stolen cars, his 23-year-old body covered in sores from meth use—Dawson wasn’t willing to make a change. It took the threat of a staggering 384 years in prison for attempted murder, aggravated robbery, and extortion to finally get his attention. When he somehow managed to get his sentence reduced to 16 years, Dawson knew something miraculous had happened. “I made a decision that I was going to look at prison as an opportunity to change, not as a punishment,” he said. “I wanted to reenter society as a person who was fit for what’s to come.”

Over time, Dawson took classes in computer information systems, graphic design, and printing technologies, skills that became quite useful after his release. But his primary acquisition during imprisonment didn’t come with a certificate. It came with a change of heart.

When Dawson arrived at Huerfano County Correctional Center, he met Charles Frederick, a stout, broad-shouldered Christian inmate with a Semper Fi tattoo. Frederick befriended Dawson and began planting gospel seeds. Dawson wasn’t interested.

Then they both ended up at Sterling Correctional Facility, where Dawson says Frederick tricked him into attending some faith-based programs. He remembers being challenged by a video course called *The Truth Project* by Del Tackett.

“The series was thorough, it was scriptural, and he got to the core of my secular worldview and absolutely destroyed it,” Dawson says.

After Dawson’s conversion, Frederick gave his young friend a Bible and a piece of advice: Start reading the story of Joseph, and don’t stop. So he did. “I was all in at that point,” Dawson recalls.

Meanwhile, a few states east, a young woman from Dawson’s past was charting her own path as a new Christian. Years earlier, an eighth grader named Kristina had firmly rejected Dawson. Now the Alabamian wanted to be his friend on social media. When Dawson’s mother let Kristina know she was managing his Facebook page while Dawson was in prison, Kristina wasn’t put off. She left her address, and letters flew back and forth, fast and frequent. The two married not long after Dawson’s early release. In all, he served five years and two months behind bars.

Post-prison, Dawson’s story has a recurring theme: people giving him a chance. Like the tax-resolution law firm where he felt like an impostor in a white-collar world. The sales floor manager recognized his communication talents and gave the young felon a shot. “My job was calling people with IRS liens and offering help with payment plans. It wasn’t glamorous, but it was a door,” Dawson says.

Later, friends helped him land a job at USA Radio Network, where he sold nationally syndicated content to radio stations. He taught himself email marketing. He taught himself MailChimp, an email marketing and automation tool.

Because every station is licensed through the Federal Communications

the country prepares to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

But against that bleak picture, the rise of digital-only outlets like 1819 News suggests the situation is merely the decline of a delivery system, not the death of journalism. People still want to know what’s happening. They just want to get their news a different way. Even the storied *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* opted to shift gears this year and go fully digital.

Alabama is home to multiple news websites, led by AL.com, the state’s largest digital outlet. It’s owned by Advance Local, a New York-based media powerhouse with holdings across the country. Bryan Dawson sees that as a problem. When he came knocking on potential donors’ doors in 2020, he discovered many conservatives were weary of getting their news from out-of-staters with a liberal bent and little love for Alabama. Still, he had a formidable fundraising goal to get 1819 News off the ground:

Commission, decision-makers' contact information was publicly available in a database called PrecisionTrak. Those names became his targets. He developed a process: Upload the contacts, build custom email pitches, and when someone opens an email three or four times, pick up the phone. He cracked the code. Soon USA Radio News was airing on hundreds more stations.

Dawson smiles as he describes that time. "They didn't think it could be done, and I was the new guy that didn't understand the limits."

The industry noticed. By then, Dawson and Kristina had settled in Alabama with their growing passel of kids. One day, with his headphones on and his laptop glowing in a corner of his bedroom he called a "home office," Dawson got a call from Lee Habeeb, the creator of *The Laura Ingraham Show*. He wanted Dawson to promote his new radio project, *Our American Stories*.

Dawson was stunned. Still, he managed to make an audacious request of Habeeb. "Look, Lee," he said. "I don't want to grow people's radio products for the rest of my life. I'll grow your show, but I want you to teach me everything you know about the media industry."

And for four years, that's what Habeeb did. Dawson refers to that experience as his "big break." While he worked to take Habeeb's show from 80 to 330 stations, Dawson sat at his mentor's feet, learning everything he could about the media business, fundraising, politics, public policy. "He showed me the power of cultural architecture through storytelling," Dawson explains. By this point, Dawson's conservative identity was firm, even combative. Studying models like NPR, Dawson realized private donations could sustain mission-driven journalism. "Everybody thinks NPR is just a huge government-funded thing, but only a small percent of their \$350 million budget comes from the government," he says. "The rest is from like-minded philanthropists."



Such insights later helped shape 1819 News into a nonprofit, donor-supported media organization. But in between, Dawson did a stint nationally, raising more than \$6 million for a group working to help Donald Trump's 2020 campaign. That election, however, left him disillusioned. Believing it was rigged, he began to see D.C.'s problems as unfixable, something akin to "trying to squirt out the sun with a water pistol." Back home in Alabama, a sermon from Dawson's pastor spurred new thinking. Maybe it was time to put his hand to the plow closer to home. Maybe the culture war was best waged on a local level.

The offices of 1819 News occupy a historic space on Morris Avenue in downtown Birmingham. Cobblestone streets front what was once a train station, and exposed antique brick forms the walls.

It's Monday, an amber-colored afternoon, and Dawson is still recuperating from the gala weekend. He sits alone in a

In addition to its website, 1819 News offers an email newsletter, a magazine, TikTok videos, a radio show, and a podcast.

tastefully decorated office. His desk is nearly bare, except for a stack of cards waiting for his signature. They're custom, thick paper, and they feature a photo of his smiling family of nine.

The nice office—and nice everything else, from branded merchandise to the black-tie gala—is part of a strategy to make people take 1819 News seriously. "High-quality journalism reflected in high-quality stuff," as Dawson puts it.

Its journalism comes in a variety of packages—a flagship website, an email newsletter, a magazine, podcasts, TikTok videos, a radio show. It has a reporter who covers the Alabama Senate and one who covers the House. Another is dedicated to education. Reporters attend local city council and county



commission meetings. “I think the chief distinction is that we have real reporters, muckrakers at heart that are out there beating the pavement, pressing the flesh, asking real questions of real people about things that really matter to the average Alabamian,” Dawson explains. “And by our rapid growth, you can see there was a hunger for it.”

He isn’t boasting. In fact, Dawson seems factory programmed to keep a check on that type of thing. “God just decided to find a piece of human refuse in prison, going nowhere fast, and show His kindness and bring me out of that,” he says of his improbable success.

Staff members describe their boss as intense, driven. A family man who is famously fond of boiled peanuts. He describes himself as a mixture of Christian notables Doug Wilson and Voddie Baucham. “They best sum up who I am theologically, culturally, politically.”

The kid who scored off the charts on standardized tests at Curtis Middle

School in Wichita, Kan., also references Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn with ease. It’s no wonder Dawson was a big fan of the rolling library cart in prison. “I had to start with Louis L’Amour novels because my reading comprehension had gotten so low,” he remembers. “Then came John Grisham, Tom Clancy, and Walter Isaacson biographies.”

And for a guy with no diploma, Dawson sounds pretty educated. In his gala speech, he used the word *prescient*. On his podcast, *effectual call*.

But some of Dawson’s word choices raise eyebrows. He shrugs off concerns about using “language” in podcasts and posts, arguing that provocation can push past social norms and make people think. Still, he caught flak for Facebook comments about modesty. “Probably more people who read that post got mad about me saying *hell* than they are about their daughters dressing like whores,” he says.

According to Dawson, 1819 News exists to expose problems, to “shine a light” on them. He cites the city of Prattville, where parents objected to sexually explicit material in the children’s section of the public library. An 1819 News article amplified the complaints and drew statewide attention. Conservatives later took control of the library board.

1819 News also broke stories about Bubba Copeland, an Alabama pastor and mayor who maintained a secret online persona posting explicit transgender-oriented content. He also wrote erotic fiction that named and featured unsuspecting individuals in his community. Copeland died by suicide on Nov. 3, 2023, just days after the 1819 News articles published.

The backlash was swift. Critics, from NPR to *The Washington Post*, accused 1819 News of unethical “involuntary outing.” Protesters gathered outside the newsroom. Death threats targeted staff and their families, including Dawson’s. The Alabama Policy Institute, the think tank that previously

owned the outlet, issued a statement distancing itself, saying it had no “legal, editorial, or financial affiliation” with the site.

Dawson concedes the episode shook the team, but says he would publish the story again.

“You had a double public figure doing things publicly, putting himself in a position to be scrutinized,” Dawson says. “We understood the weight of it, but if you lived in that community or had kids in that church, wouldn’t you want to know about it?”

Then, in a surprising turn, *Esquire* magazine won a Pulitzer Prize last year for a piece that downplayed Copeland’s online actions and denigrated the “right-wing” outlet that exposed him. Dawson was incensed. “The fact that their story was given a Pulitzer just shows how far journalism has fallen, which is why we’re creating an alternative world of journalism.”

Because Dawson is not a man of mild opinions, the risks have not subsided. In October, vandals targeted him ahead of a keynote address at an event held after Charlie Kirk’s death. In February, death threats preceded his scheduled appearance at the University of Montevallo, where students staged a walkout, citing his criminal past and the Copeland coverage.

Dawson remains undeterred.

These days, 1819 News is entering a new phase. The startup scramble is over. The focus now is sustained execution, with an overarching goal of becoming Alabama’s paper of record. Then, Dawson says, they’ll export that model to the other red and purple states that have been contacting him, wanting in.

This afternoon, staff members completed a Culture Index, a type of personality analysis, to refine roles. It turns out Dawson is a trailblazer.

“That means I’m the engine that gets the thing going. I’m a builder,” he explains with a hint of excitement. “So I’ve built this. Now I’ll go build the next thing.” ■



TIME FOR SOME TOUGH LOVE?

**The Trump administration
adopts a new approach
to solving America's
homelessness crisis**

BY ADDIE OFFEREINS

PHOTO BY ALLEN J. SCHABEN/
LOS ANGELES TIMES VIA
GETTY IMAGES



Bobby, 70, who has been homeless for four years, smokes in his tent on Skid Row in Los Angeles.

SAM TSEMBERIS TRACES Housing First's beginnings to his daily commute to and from the psychiatric wing at Bellevue, New York City's oldest public hospital. The soft-spoken clinical psychologist began noticing former patients loitering on street corners with nowhere to go, discharged to a life of unsheltered homelessness. "It was incomprehensible," he said. "So I changed my job."

Tsemberis joined a street outreach team in the 1980s as cities across the nation began reckoning with this new kind of visible street homelessness. He winced as he recalled the incident that convinced him something needed to change. A 62-year-old woman froze to death on the street. "She was sleeping in a cardboard box outside an office building in the Wall Street area of New York City," he said. "And overnight, the temperature dropped."

So, in 1992, Tsemberis created the organization Pathways to Housing and acquired a government grant. The group placed individuals living on the streets directly into subsidized apartments for as long as they wanted to stay without sobering them up or requiring them to engage in treatment.

His approach became known as Housing First. Along with its sister policy, permanent supportive housing, Housing First has shaped most federal and state agencies and the community nonprofits they fund for more than a decade.

But critics assert it has failed massively. Homelessness in America has only continued to rise since the Department of Housing and Urban Development started its annual tally in 2005. An estimated 771,480 people—the most since the government started counting—needed a place to live at some point in 2024, and more than a third experienced unsheltered homelessness, living under bridges, in their cars, or in other places not meant for human habitation.

The Trump administration says it's time for a new approach. In November, HUD announced plans to cap spending on permanent supportive housing at 30% of its budget, funneling billions of dollars back into substance abuse treatment programs and transitional housing.

"We will no longer warehouse homelessness through the Housing First model that neglected to treat the root causes of homelessness, including drug addiction and mental illness,"

HUD Secretary Scott Turner told **WORLD** in a statement. "Instead, we will support providers, including faith-based organizations, that take a holistic approach to homelessness."

Housing First adherents hit back hard. Twenty states and the District of Columbia filed a lawsuit against the funding changes, warning they could send up to 170,000 permanent supportive housing recipients back to the streets. A group of 11 local governments and nonprofits filed another legal challenge.

But amid the political tug-of-war, a growing number of experts, advocates, and ministry leaders are building consensus around the idea that there's no silver-bullet approach to solving our country's homelessness problem. Americans end up on the streets due to all kinds of problems the government's blanket approach can't solve.

TODAY, UNSHELTERED street living is a familiar feature in most major American cities. But four decades ago, the sight shocked Tsemberis and his team of social workers. Most historians agree a toxic convergence drove Americans to the street toward the end of the 20th century: economic volatility,





the deinstitutionalization of the mental healthcare system, and urban renewal movements that diminished the country's stock of cheap, low-quality housing.

Tsemberis struck up conversations with New York City's chronic street dwellers. People told him they needed housing, but the available programs—typically community rescue missions and transitional housing programs—operated according to the idea that people should receive treatment for their mental illness or addiction before they could live independently. This approach alienated many individuals who weren't interested in treatment or would quickly lose their housing once they relapsed, Tsemberis said.

Pathways to Housing moved chronically homeless individuals into apartments straight from the streets. Service support teams visited them and provided help whenever someone asked. But the client's housing wasn't tied to accepting that help.

Tsemberis knew it was risky. But a randomized controlled study of his experiment showed 88% remained stably housed

FACING PAGE:
A homeless woman sleeps on a bench along 5th Avenue in New York. ABOVE:
A man sits with his dog on a Manhattan street.

after five years. A systematic review of Housing First studies published in 2020 showed the model increased housing stability by 41% when compared with treatment-first programs, though most of the studies analyzed only tracked the individual's housing status for two years or less.

"People who get housed start to care about themselves more," Tsemberis said. "When they're on the streets all

they can think about is a safe place to stay."

In other words, permanent housing without conditions gives people the stability and bandwidth they need to make other essential life changes.

Tsemberis' novel program went mainstream when Philip Mangano, the executive director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness under President George W. Bush,

More than two-thirds of the unsheltered homeless live with an untreated mental health condition or substance abuse disorder.

threw himself into replicating Tsemberis' success across the country. The self-proclaimed homelessness "abolitionist" urged communities to develop 10-year plans for ending chronic homelessness using the Housing First model, and more than 350 followed suit before Mangano left his role in 2009.

Under President Barack Obama, HUD doubled down on the policy, mandating grant recipients adopt a Housing First approach or lose their government funding. HUD spent about 87% of its budget on services and transitional housing when Mangano arrived in Washington, D.C. When President Joe Biden left office, the funding priorities had flipped: The agency allocated about 90% of its homelessness funding toward permanent supportive housing.

Housing First devotees argue that a rise in chronic homelessness doesn't mean their model is failing to keep individuals stably housed. They say it just can't keep up. "The inflow into homelessness is crushing communities," said Marcy Thompson, the vice president of programs and policy at the National Alliance to End Homelessness, one of the groups suing to block the Trump administration's change.

Thompson also argued permanent supportive housing saves taxpayers money since it prevents individuals from cycling through treatment programs, jail, or transitional housing. Some data shows Housing First programs may reduce emergency room visits and hospitalizations, but there is little published data showing the model improves criminal justice outcomes or reduces healthcare costs as a whole.

Tsemberis called the Trump administration's push for a treatment-first approach "frightening."

"That's exactly what we were doing 30 or 40 years ago," he said. "And it wasn't getting us anywhere."

CRITICS OF HOUSING FIRST argue the model routinely fails the chronically homeless—the very people its creators intended to help. Devon Kurtz is one of Housing First's fiercest opponents. The youthful, bespectacled researcher serves as public safety policy director at the Cicero Institute, a conservative think tank that has the ear of the Trump administration.

The people who struggle the most to find housing due to complicated behavioral health needs or to becoming entangled in the criminal justice system will also struggle the most in a Housing First program, Kurtz said. He pointed to data estimating more than two-thirds of the unsheltered homeless live with an untreated mental health condition or substance abuse disorder, often both. That makes it difficult for them to maintain their housing or find steady employment without intensive interventions.

Individuals deep in the throes of addiction or an untreated mental health condition might not have the capacity to make the choice to accept essential help, Kurtz argued. "There's a really perverse framing around voluntary treatment where we almost frame it as a moral failing of homeless people not to choose it," he added.

Randomized controlled studies of Housing First programs show people tend to hold onto their housing for one to two years even with severe mental illness and a history of addiction. But as Stephen Eide, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, points out in his book *Homelessness in America*, there's little evidence that Housing First increases social integration or



GENARO MOLINA/LOS ANGELES TIMES VIA GETTY IMAGES

helps people overcome their behavioral health challenges and addictions in the long run. Data showing Housing First improves housing stability for individuals in active addiction is also scarce.

Most individuals experiencing chronic homelessness don't meet the standards for involuntary hospitalization, but they need more rigorous engagement than a locked apartment and completely voluntary services, Kurtz said. But the federal government's continuum of care—the bureaucratic structure that awards grants to organizations through local governments—has discouraged communities from creating middle-of-the-road options, like transitional housing facilities with service and sobriety requirements, since they don't adhere to the Housing First model.

Door of Hope, a transitional housing program for homeless families in Los Angeles, received government funding until regulatory changes enshrining Housing First as official policy at the state and federal level would have forced it to scrap its service participation requirements and stop drug testing. That would have put some of its families in danger, said CEO Megan Katerjian: “When you're a mom or dad trying to keep your babies safe and people around you are expressing volatile or unsafe behaviors ... that is just a very toxic, dangerous-feeling environment to live in.”

LEFT: Sage cries as city workers clear the homeless encampment where she lived in Van Nuys, Calif. RIGHT: Jenn, high on fentanyl, watches her friend, Jesse, smoke the drug in LA.

Serna Village, once a sober living apartment community for the homeless in Sacramento County, Calif., can no longer require its residents to maintain sobriety. Now, the permanent supportive housing facility must accept whoever is next in line. Kris Martin is the CEO of Sacramento Cottage Housing, the group providing optional recovery services to Serna Village and another tiny home community. She estimates about 99% of residents use some type of substance.

The fiery 82-year-old questions the government's one-size-fits all commitment to Housing First's foundational premise: that people will voluntarily seek out sobriety and services once they're provided a clean, dry place to live. “It takes a lot of work and a lot of time to get clean and sober,” she said. And the right incentives are key.

“The approach of Housing First, as far as I'm concerned, is simply a new title for warehousing people,” Martin said.

Critics also highlight economic concerns. “We have a limited number of subsidized housing apartments, and people stay in them for an extremely long time,” said Howard Husock, a senior fellow in domestic policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute. HUD data for fiscal year 2022 showed less than 14% of households exit permanent supportive housing units each year. In fiscal year 2024, federal funding for permanent supportive housing and rapid rehousing, the federal government's two Housing First programs, totaled about \$5.4 billion. The National Alliance to End Homelessness estimated it would cost an additional \$9.6 billion per year to provide these programs to every person living in a homeless shelter.





Still, some of Housing First's most staunch critics told me they worry the Trump administration might swing the pendulum back too aggressively. Andy Bales served as CEO of the Union Rescue Mission in downtown Los Angeles for nearly 20 years. The mission sits in the heart of Skid Row, a 50-block neighborhood home to about 3,800 homeless individuals, 2,112 of whom are unsheltered. Bales is hopeful the administration's changes will give faith-based groups more opportunities to provide individuals with essential treatment and accountability.

But he warned that mandating a treatment-first approach without explaining how the administration will transition individuals currently living in permanent supportive housing into more treatment-focused programs will only bolster opposition to the shift. "You can talk about things, and then you can roll it out in a way that doesn't get it accomplished," Bales noted.

In April, a federal appeals court blocked the funding changes, but Trump officials say they remain committed to reforms.

AMID THE POLITICAL GRAPPLING, an unlikely group gathered around a long wooden table in the administrative building of the Denver Rescue Mission in December, about a month after the administration announced its new paradigm shift.

Dennis Van Kampen, the mission's president and CEO, sat next to Sam Tsemberis, the graying clinical psychologist who created the original Housing First program. On the other side of the table, Tom De Vries, CEO and president of Citygate Network, a community of gospel rescue missions across the country, sat next to another rescue mission leader. Philip Mangano, George W. Bush's former homelessness czar who promoted Housing First in communities across the country, joined over Zoom.

LEFT: Thomas, homeless for about a year after battling a kidney disease, sits beside his tent in Venice, Calif. CENTER: Alexandria, homeless for five months, comes out of her new tiny home in L.A. RIGHT: Jose moved from a homeless shelter into an apartment in Denver.

The men met for about five hours. They sipped on soda, coffee, or water while they talked. The mission statement of the 134-year-old organization hung on the wall: Changing lives in the name of Christ by meeting people at their physical and spiritual points of need with the goal of returning them to society as productive, self-sufficient citizens.

"I was really excited for that meeting," Van Kampen said, noting Housing First advocates often have negative views of rescue missions.

"We need to have open and honest,

respectful dialogue and figure out where we align."

The Denver Rescue Mission provides emergency, temporary shelter recovery programs for individuals addicted to drugs or alcohol, and a transitional housing program. But in some cases, the mission has connected clients to Housing First programs. Permanent supportive housing may be the right approach for clients with a physical disability that may prevent them from ever holding a stable job and becoming self-sufficient, Van Kampen said. Many homeless families the mission serves ended up on the streets because of unpaid medical bills or another life-altering tragedy, not as the result of addiction or other behavioral health issues.

But for about half the people the mission works with, those dealing with addictions and mental health issues, often at the same time, Housing First is not the solution, Van Kampen argued: "I know people ... who went through the Housing First



model six times, and they never stayed housed more than three months.”

Mangano, who is now the president of the American Round Table to Abolish Homelessness, acknowledged that Housing First often fails individuals with substance use disorders for whom isolation and a locked door tend to exacerbate the addiction spiral. That’s where a structured rescue mission recovery program might make more headway, Mangano agreed.

But rather than reallocate housing funding toward recovery services, Mangano argued, the Department of Health and Human Services should provide funding for treatment opportunities in addition to HUD’s permanent supportive housing budget. He’s hopeful HHS has already started to play a larger role. In February, the agency announced it is setting aside \$100 million to connect homeless individuals struggling with addiction to stable housing focused on long-term recovery and independence.

Still, Mangano told me he believes the Trump administration is right to reassess the government’s exclusive allegiance to the Housing First model. Though he’s still a firm believer in the strategy as a solution for most people—especially for the chronically homeless suffering from mental illness—

Mangano argued the federal government should not have mandated that every homelessness program adopt the approach.

“They felt this was the policy for every single person,” he said. But HUD’s broad application of what was created to be a very targeted approach was not evidence-based, Mangano added.

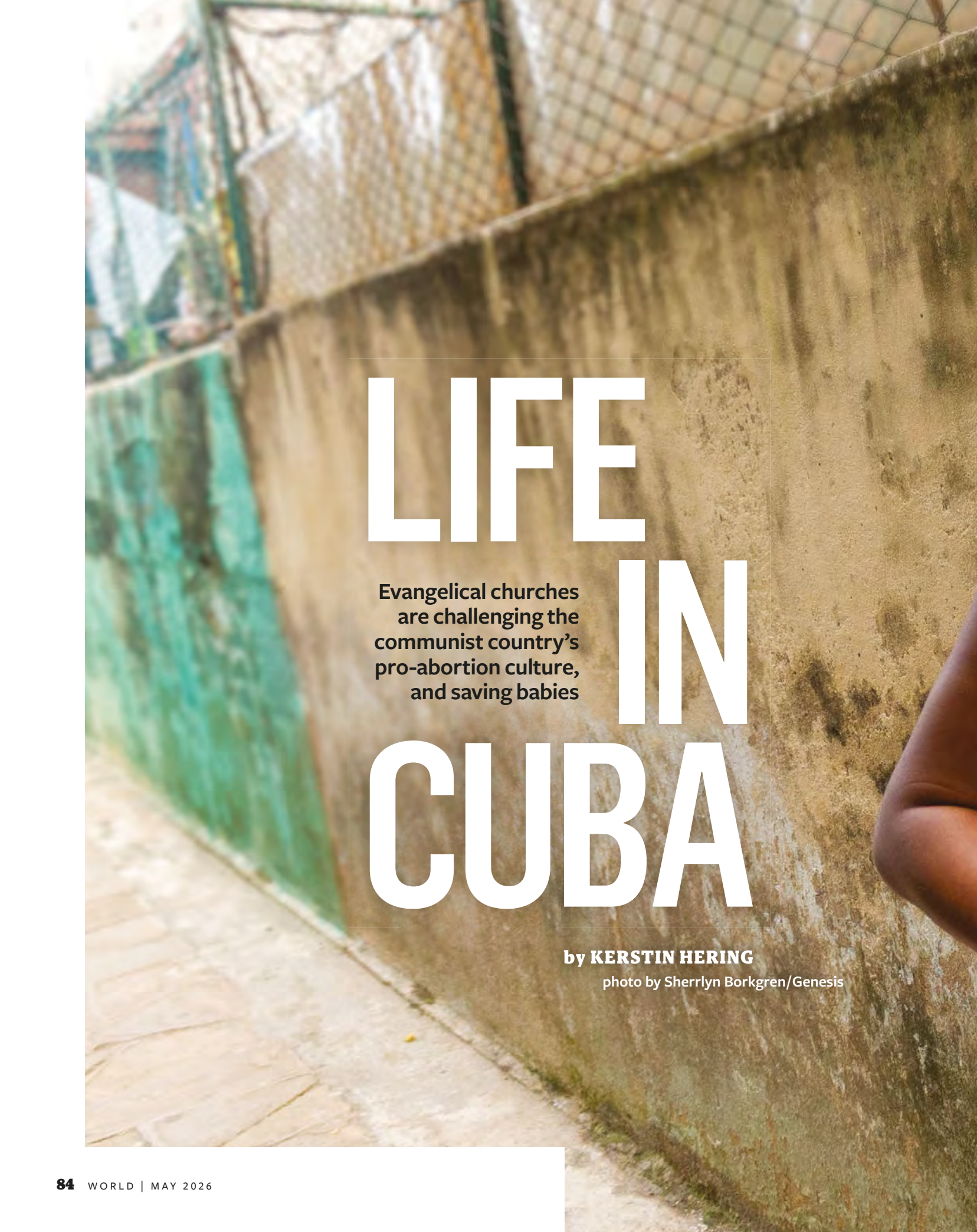
TSEMBERIS TOLD ME the government’s one-size-fits-all approach incentivized programs to adopt the language of Housing First without actually sticking to the original model. Studies demonstrating Housing First’s success followed individuals who were placed in apartments throughout the community and regularly offered intensive services. But that’s not always how it’s applied.

Some permanent supportive housing programs in California tend to put many chronically homeless people struggling with addiction together in one apartment building, Tsemberis pointed out, without providing enough supportive services. California enshrined Housing First into law at the state level in 2016, shortly after HUD mandated the approach for most housing programs receiving federal funding. Unsheltered homelessness climbed 47.1% between 2016 and 2019 even as the Golden State increased permanent housing units by 33% and overall homelessness funding by 101%.

A few months after the December meeting in Denver, Sam Tsemberis and Phillip Mangano presented on Housing First at Citygate Network’s DC Forum in the nation’s capital. They discussed ways to integrate the two approaches and took questions from a room full of mission leaders. Mangano told me while the two camps still have significant disagreements, they agree that the days of doing it one way are over.

For the Denver Rescue Mission’s Van Kampen, that’s a welcome change. “There’s dozens of reasons and pathways that led them to homelessness. And there have to be multiple approaches to get them out of homelessness,” Van Kampen said. “Housing First is an important tool for us to have in our tool belt. But it can’t be the only tool.” ■

“There’s dozens of reasons and pathways that led them to homelessness. And there have to be multiple approaches to get them out of homelessness.”



LIFE IN CUBA

Evangelical churches
are challenging the
communist country's
pro-abortion culture,
and saving babies

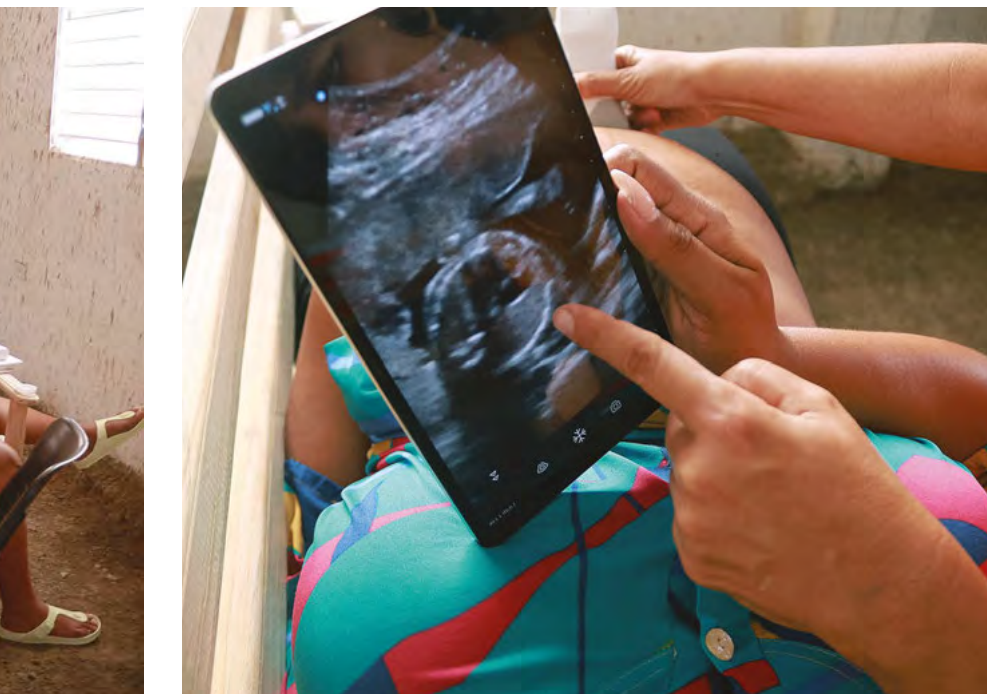
by **KERSTIN HERING**

photo by Sherrlyn Borkgren/Genesis





These days, it's impossible for Dr. Annia González to get anywhere in Siboney in a hurry. She doesn't mind the interruptions. Women rush from their doorways to show her their babies and invite her to hold them. Most of the children almost didn't get a chance at life. ■ Today, González is heading to the home of yet another girl who, only this morning, applied for an abortion at the local health center. The center's janitor recognized the girl and told González which home to visit. He has been her informant for years. Together, they make an unlikely but highly effective team. ■ González's message to the girl is to the point: "I believe that you want your baby. And that you would keep it if you had what you needed. I, and others from the church, will help you."



A pro-life doctor with a hand-held ultrasound checks on a patient in a Havana church.

It's an unorthodox approach to pregnancy in this town on Cuba's southern coast. Ten years ago, Cuba had one of the highest abortion rates in the world according to Johnston's Archive, a website that tracks abortion data. But in 2025, not one baby in Siboney died at the hands of an abortionist, thanks mostly to González and her pro-life team. They are part of a growing movement, led by the island's evangelical churches, to promote the sanctity of human life by providing hope and support to pregnant women, even as the country's quality of life deteriorates.

Cuba's pro-life movement began to gain traction in 2016 when the U.S.-based ministry PassionLife sent missionary teams to the country. González remembers the stunned silence that hung over her church as PassionLife CEO Mark Nicholson explained the value of human life. For the first time, she understood the biblical view of human value—something she'd not considered when she once sent her own

patients to get abortions. She thought she was being kind to the mother, who often had only a cup of coffee for breakfast and a cigar at lunchtime to keep the hunger pangs at bay. And she thought she was doing the baby a favor by not exposing it to a life of empty supper bowls.

Another PassionLife team member, Jeanne Pernia, shared openly about her own abortions and the hundreds she had facilitated at her abortion center in Miami. Then she explained how God had turned her life around, allowing her to open a pregnancy help center in the building where she had once offered abortions. It was then that González realized each abortion prescription she had written was a death sentence, implicating her as a murderer.

"Until that moment, it was as if we still had blinders on that prevented us from seeing the situation our country was going through with the shedding of innocent blood," she said.

González began to weep. Others in the congregation clutched their cheeks, stricken at what they had done. With Cuba's annual abortion rate of 52.36 abortions per 1,000 women of child-bearing age, all 75 members of Iglesia

Bautista Playa Siboney have had some involvement with abortion.

González and four other women confessed their guilt on the spot and resolved to start a rescue movement in their own town. "We asked the Lord for guidance, saying, 'Lord, we have no resources, but what can we do?'" González remembers.

PassionLife could have helped fund a center in Siboney. But the organization's president, John Ensor, believed the local church needed to figure out how to do it on their own. "If a group gets foreign money to start a pregnancy help medical office, then it can't reproduce," he said. "Because the next town over will say, Well, we can't do that because we don't have foreign money."

González and her newly formed team recognized they could not afford a building for a pregnancy care center, but they could make house calls. And so, equipped with a hand-held ultrasound machine, they began visiting pregnant women all over town.

A nurse and the janitor served as their eyes and ears at the local health clinic. When they found out that the clinic's doctor had told 21 women to abort or expect fetal defects, González and her team visited each of them. After their house calls, only one woman chose abortion. Twenty babies were born within the year. Nineteen were healthy, but one, named Moses, had a heart defect.

At first, the doctors did not want to help Moses because they did not expect him to live. But when he turned 1, they agreed to operate. Recently, González helped celebrate his fifth birthday. "As Moses was rescued from the waters, Moses was also rescued from abortion, and today we enjoy him," she said.

Pastor Alfonso Bens and his congregation at Iglesia Bautista Playa Siboney rallied around the new mothers, and child dedications started becoming commonplace. The Siboney pregnancy movement seemed unstoppable. Then, in late 2019, Bens, a central

figure in the budding pregnancy care movement, had the chance to leave Cuba and took it.

Six decades of communism has taken its toll on the island, leaving many Cubans impoverished and angry. Between 2022 and 2023, Cuba lost 18% of its population to mass emigration to countries such as Venezuela, Russia, China, Guyana, Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia. Some, like doctors, escape by

signing up for volunteer programs from which they never return. Others get permission to take trips abroad and end up staying wherever they land.

Bens' departure left the ministry team stunned, then angry. It soon fractured. González tried to hold everything together with the help of the PassionLife team, but when COVID hit, visits from the U.S. ceased, and González was left to pick up the pieces on her own. Cuba closed its borders for two years.

"All we could really do was pray," Mark Nicholson remembers. "We would

hear stories from them every once in a while, but communication wasn't very good." If González wanted to send Nicholson an email, she had to purchase a card and go to the public park where the government had installed Siboney's only router in a tree. Sitting on a park bench, she could access the internet, a few seconds at a time, if she was lucky and the electricity was working.

Nicholson and Pernia didn't know what they would find when they returned to Cuba in 2022. All they knew was that the ministry had split in two. They feared it might have fallen apart. "But when we came back, there were 22 babies that they had saved during COVID in that one church," Nicholson said, the smile audible in his voice.

The split had created two strong pro-life teams in Siboney, both eager to save babies. Soon, other pastors learned about the life-saving work in Siboney and wanted to join in.

One of these pastors was Sandy Cancino, the director of the Evangelical League of Cuba, a group that incorporates all 23 government-sanctioned denominations. Cancino knew that, unlike his recent public challenge to the country's same-sex marriage movement, the government would not censor his pro-life work. Cuba's leaders wanted more babies to counter the country's negative population growth and were happy for him to work toward that goal. That meant he could keep both his Facebook page and his travel license.

Cancino began his national effort by bringing together the two pro-life groups in Siboney. Then he worked to give the Siboney church a vision for ending abortion across the nation, not just their neighborhood. Throughout Cuba, Cancino's biblical teaching laid the groundwork for the pro-life movement. Churches were prepared to act in response to true conviction, rather than just relying on fleeting emotional responses.

González calls Cancino a godsend: "He organized this entire ministry so that throughout Cuba there were volunteer coordinators who began to work."

Pastor Sandy Cancino





People walk through a garbage-strewn street while vendors sell homemade crisps and bread from the trunk of their American classic car in Havana.



Although Cancino works primarily with government-approved churches, even unregistered churches are joining the movement. The Cuban government does not recognize any church established since the Cuban Revolution in 1959. Dr. Daliadne Mercedes attends one of these illegal churches, Iglesia del Espiritu Santo in Bayamo. While members of underground churches may have been persecuted in the past, Mercedes said her unregistered church meets openly and without opposition. She can only pinpoint one disadvantage for her congregation: The government only gives handouts to registered churches.

For 32-year-old Mercedes, independence from the government is a choice. She recently gave up her government position as a dentist with a steady \$20-per-month income to lead a pregnancy counseling team at her church. Mercedes considers this her calling: “When my eyes were opened to the circumstances of my nation, that moved my heart to do a little bit, even if it were a drop in an ocean.”

In the last two years, 20 such pregnancy care teams have mobilized across Cuba, bringing the total to 22.

Still, the challenges of living in Cuba are mounting. “With the shortage of food, basic supplies, medicines, electricity, and basic necessities, we face a real battlefield every day,” Mercedes said. Many families are still homeless after Hurricane Melissa swept over the island in late October 2025. Cuba, reliant on Venezuelan oil, also has suffered from the ongoing U.S. blockade. Without gas to power garbage trucks, trash has piled up on the streets. These mounds of waste have become breeding grounds for mosquitoes that spread diseases like Zika, dengue, and chikungunya. Bread lines snake for blocks, with people standing for hours to buy a loaf. Ration offices are empty. Shopkeepers only accept dollars for their wares, keeping the average Cuban from buying food.

Even farmers are no better off. The communist regime allows cattle farming but prohibits beef consumption. All beef is exported as a cash crop.

But churches are stepping in to meet as many needs as they can to support young mothers. “We look for women who can sew, who can make little clothes for the babies,” Gonzalez said. “We try to get provisions, to support them in whatever way we can, and it is wonderful to see how there are always brothers and sisters, children of God, willing to help.”

Cancino, Gonzalez, and Mercedes know that while circumstances play a

role, every pregnancy crisis has a spiritual component. “The girl comes worried, comes with uncertainty,” Gonzalez said. “She needs support, she needs hope. Sometimes it is difficult for us to look around us and see the situation we are going through, but we look up and put our faith and trust in the Lord.”

One of Gonzalez’s volunteers often tells pregnant moms, “Every child is born with a loaf of bread under their arm.” In other words, if God created a baby, He will also provide for it. As the volunteers encourage the girls to pray and believe that God will see them through, many young moms put their faith in Christ. While abortion is decreasing, churches in Cuba are growing. In the early 1990s, Protestants were estimated to number about 70,000. Today, the U.S. government puts the number of Protestants at about 550,000—5% of Cuba’s overall population.

The nursery at Iglesia Bautista Playa Siboney is now full to the brim with toddlers. Schools also have seen a sudden increase in children. One teacher asked a volunteer, “How come I have so many students in my preschool this year?” She just smiled and said, “Glory to God, hallelujah! This is the work that the Lord is doing in this place.” ■

—Kerstin Hering is a mom of seven, president of NextGen Institute, a commissioned Colson Fellow, and a World Journalism Institute graduate



Peter Keegan
teaches a line dance
at Highpoint Swing.



Young singles are turning to
an age-old social activity to overcome
an epidemic of loneliness

A TIME TO DANCE

by Theresa Abell Haynes

PHOTOGRAPHY BY *Sy Bean/Genesis*

IT'S A RAINY WINTER NIGHT IN EVERETT, WASH., A CITY NORTH OF SEATTLE.

But the dancers crowding the Girls and Boys Club basketball gym are working up a sweat, kicking and clapping, hopping and stepping, as “Footloose” blasts from a portable speaker.

When the song ends, a familiar country hit begins, and the dance lines dissolve into men and women standing around the makeshift dance floor.

A young man approaches a woman in a denim dress and cowboy boots. “Would you like to dance?” he asks, offering her his hand.

“Yes!” she says, beaming. She takes his hand, and they glide into a simple, choreographed Western swing sequence.

Men and women dancing together is nothing new, but for Gen Z—digital natives whose teenage years were marked by social distancing, masking, and pandemic-era regulations—line and swing dance meetups offer a way to bridge communication gaps and make friends in real life—or “IRL,” as they say.

According to Barna research on mental health, more than a third of Gen Z—people born between 1997 and 2012—feel uncertain about the future and anxious over important decisions. They are lonely too, with 29% reporting loneliness and 26% feeling isolated. In contrast, only 8% of boomers experience persistent loneliness or isolation.

But it’s hard to feel lonely when you’re twirling around the dance floor.

PETER KEEGAN, 24, discovered the social benefits of dancing while attending Benedictine College, a Catholic school in the Midwest. When the mechanical engineering major graduated and returned home to Washington state, he missed that rich social life. So did his friend, 24-year-old business management major Brandon Wozeniak.

Together, they decided to do something about it.

“We both really liked country dancing—swinging and line—and we wanted to create a space where we could meet other young adults, make friends, and just have a fun place to both dance and build community,” Keegan explained.

Keegan said the area already had a few dance clubs, but they wanted something different—a wholesome environment, one without the influence of alcohol or sexually provocative dance moves and “profane” lyrics.

In the spring of 2025, Keegan and Wozeniak launched Highpoint Swing, a country dance club with a simple idea—teach people the steps to popular dances and let them try. They bought a couple of speakers, rented a dance studio on Saturday nights, and started inviting their childhood friends.

Young adults began showing up for the biweekly events, coming even when the dance studio was occupied and Highpoint had to temporarily relocate to the Boys and Girls Club basketball gym.

They began posting videos on Facebook, and within a few months, some of the posts went “viral,” prompting Meta to begin paying them as content creators. By January 2026, Highpoint’s Facebook page boasted 15,000 followers.

Savannah Pratt, a 25-year-old kindergarten teacher, first came to Highpoint when a church friend invited her in the summer. Now, she’s a regular and invites other friends. She started a WhatsApp message group for people she met at Highpoint, and it’s already 40 strong.

Like many Highpoint attendees, Pratt discovered swing dance in college, but when COVID sent students home, she stopped dancing. She later tried to go to swing dance clubs in Seattle, but they were too far from where she worked and lacked a sense of community.

Pratt says Highpoint is different because Keegan and Wozeniak stop the music and break down new songs each week.

“One of the songs that I knew about was ‘I See Country Everywhere,’ but I could never catch on to it. I could never learn it. But then they were like, ‘Hey, we’re going to teach that one today,’” she recalls. “I got really excited, because I really wanted to learn that one. And they slowed it down, and I got the steps. And so then every time they play that song, I’m able to dance to it, and it’s really fun.”

The irony of Keegan and Wozeniak working as dance instructors is not lost on them. By day, Keegan oversees construction projects for an engineering firm, and Wozeniak has a landscaping business. Neither of them considered dancing until they were in college.

“I refused to go to dances in high school,” Wozeniak said with a laugh. “I wouldn’t do it.”

“And I went to an all-boys school,” Keegan added.

Keegan learned his first moves through YouTube videos, dancing alone in his college dorm room during the early weeks of COVID when social activities were canceled.

Keegan and Wozeniak were not alone in adopting line dancing during the pandemic. Many people credit lockdowns and viral TikTok dancing trends for renewing interest in line dancing. When in-person social activities resumed, line dancing clubs began reemerging.

That’s when Wozeniak also decided to try swing dancing, but his first attempts didn’t have much success. “The first time I danced, I dropped the girl! I dropped the girl, and she was mad, and then I was like, ‘I’m not going down like this.’ That was the spark.”

RYLEE STROVAS, a 23-year-old who spent the evening dancing with different partners, said if she were not at Highpoint, she would “probably be sitting on my couch at home.” Like many young adults at the meetup, she was grateful for the opportunity to interact with people in real life.

Jonathan Haidt, author of the influential 2024 bestseller *The Anxious Generation*, which exposed the harmful nature of social media on Gen Zers, blames much of young people’s





anxiety and depression on their online experiences. He encourages people to participate in more real-world life, which he describes as embodied and synchronous—requiring an actual body and happening in real time.

These real-life, physical experiences, unlike disembodied online interactions, require people to engage in face-to-face interactions and navigate social situations.

Wozeniak says swing dancing fits that description perfectly. “It’s connecting with someone else. It’s not in any way that is demanding or intimate, but it still has physical touch, and it still has communication, and I think people really want that.”

He encourages newcomers, who sometimes only want to line dance, to give partner dancing a try.

“It’s little two-minute increments,” he said. “It’s not very demanding, but there’s a little bit of communication you have to have, and so it’s perfect.”

Addy Eaton took a ferry and drove for over an hour to get to the dance meetup after she found Highpoint on Instagram.

At 23, Eaton works full time at a Christian camp, but she said she is willing to drive a long distance to meet more Christians her age. And she was not disappointed.

“The first time I came, I met some really lovely people who have now become my main group of friends, and it’s really cool to see how connections formed out of getting to dance in community with fellow Christians,” she said.

Wozeniak sees Highpoint’s success as proof of the need for healthy social events. In the same way that faith-based media content has recently flooded Hollywood, providing high-quality alternatives to immoral entertainment, he believes there is an untapped market for providing “wholesome” events. The business partners plan to expand to four more clubs in the Pacific Northwest and hope the idea will continue beyond.

Even though Highpoint attracts a Christian crowd, Keegan says they regularly have dancers from a variety of church backgrounds—Catholic, Protestant, and even a few with no church experience. Many attend congregations with very small singles groups. Others find that their young-adult church functions are stale, and Keegan says that, in his experience, most church activities are not designed to encourage intermingling between men and women.

Partner dancing requires it.

Lead dancers have to approach a “follow” and ask if they want to dance, and that, Keegan points out, is good practice for men.

Malea Norman, a 22-year-old Highpoint attendee, uses Hinge, an online dating app. But she said she much prefers meeting people organically.

She said she is always surprised when someone she knows in real life asks her out via direct message rather than over the phone or in person, especially since she would be more likely to say yes if he asked her in person.

“I think it is really attractive when a man has courage,” she said.

The need to make real-life friends in a digitally dominated world is not limited to Gen Z.

“In adulthood, in general, it can be so difficult to make friends,” said Samantha Hricziscse, a 31-year-old experienced line dancer. She came to Highpoint to dance, but has already found a group of friends who meet regularly. This year, they spent New Year’s Eve together.

One of those friends, 36-year-old Vinh Do, says he wishes he had found swing dance earlier in life. “It teaches us things that are so important—to relate to one another, like as a man and a woman, to be able to lead, to initiate. It’s like an art form that has been lost over time.”

He looks over at his new friends and adds, “Life is kind of a dance.” ■



VOICES **ERICK ERICKSON**

Foundational problems?

Reports of fractures in the MAGA base are greatly exaggerated

The American press, pundits, and partisans have been predicting cracks in President Donald Trump's base of support since 2016. First, it was the *Access Hollywood* tape. Then it was Supreme Court picks. Then it was killing Iran's Qasem Soleimani. Then it was the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riots. Now it is Venezuela and Iran.

Through all of it, MAGA's crackup remains overstated.

During the past month, Trump has lost support online. Social media has become a swamp of disinformation and misinformation coupled with a podcast class that hitched its wagon to Trump and is now moving on. The war in Iran is the breaking point for the podcast class. That has given the press incentive to, yet again, assure America that the president is losing his base. But the online world is not reality.

"Iran war creates growing cracks within Trump's MAGA movement," blared a PBS headline for a Liz Landers interview with Curt Mills of *The American Conservative*. Mills claimed a mantle of leadership within the MAGA movement and now feels betrayed. But he is no more MAGA than former Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, who is now favorably hosted by media outlets like CNN. Where once those outlets criticized her, they now use her to criticize the president.

The data suggests, contrary to the podcasters and pundits, that the president and his base are united against Iran.

NBC News' March polling showed a majority of Americans are opposed to the military engagement in Iran. But the polling also found, "a full 90% of self-identified MAGA-aligned Republicans back the strikes, with just 5% saying they don't think they should have been launched." Only 54%

of Republicans who don't see themselves as part of MAGA support the strikes.

A CNN poll conducted the same week found similar results. On March 20, Politico's polling found that 81% of the president's self-described MAGA voters trust him and 70% of his 2024 voters support him. Five days later, a Fox News poll found MAGA support for the Iran strike at 90%.

Most telling is the straw poll of activists at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Dallas at the end of March. CPAC has become a clown show of attention seekers, grifters, and other nonsense, but it still attracts a faithful MAGA following. On stage, former Rep. Matt Gaetz and former Trump adviser Steve Bannon voiced their concerns and opposition to the Iran engagement. Even so, the crowd packed in to hear from Reza Palavi, the would-be shah of Iran.

CPAC's annual straw poll offered some seemingly surprising results: 88% of attendees thought "conservative leaders/influencers are creating unnecessary controversy and division in the MAGA movement"; 85% believed "Israel continues to be one of the United States' most important strategic allies"; and 89% approved of "President Donald Trump's decision to use military force in Iran." While CPAC is pretty meaningless in all things conservatism, it is an accurate barometer of the president's base. Its polling also suggests the "MAGA crackup" narrative is overstated.

So what is really going on? Social media influencers and others are jockeying for position in 2028. They are the loudest voices and many used Trump for their own aggrandizement. The president will soon be a lame duck, and these people are looking for a new bandwagon to climb aboard.

However, with a ceasefire in place and Iran in, arguably, a better position than before the war began through more exploitative control of the Strait of Hormuz, we may begin to see the base actually fracture between those who want to finish the job and those who want to ignore the problem.

The bigger problem for the president are the Republican and independent voters who supported him in 2024, but are not his natural constituency. Polling suggests most of them are happy with his foreign policy, but unhappy with his economic policies. From tariffs to running roughshod over allies, these voters prefer him to the alternative, but they may not show up in the midterms. They want some accountability for the president, even if it means Democrats take control in Congress. But that is not a MAGA crack-up. That is the historic nature of midterm elections.

Trump remains a transcendent politician but the rules of politics still apply. Midterms tend to benefit the party out of power, not because the president's base has abandoned him, but because the party out of power is more motivated to vote and the president's voters who are not actually his strongest supporters tend to stay home. ■

—Erick Erickson is a *WORLD* Opinions contributor and hosts the Erick Erickson Show broadcast nationwide



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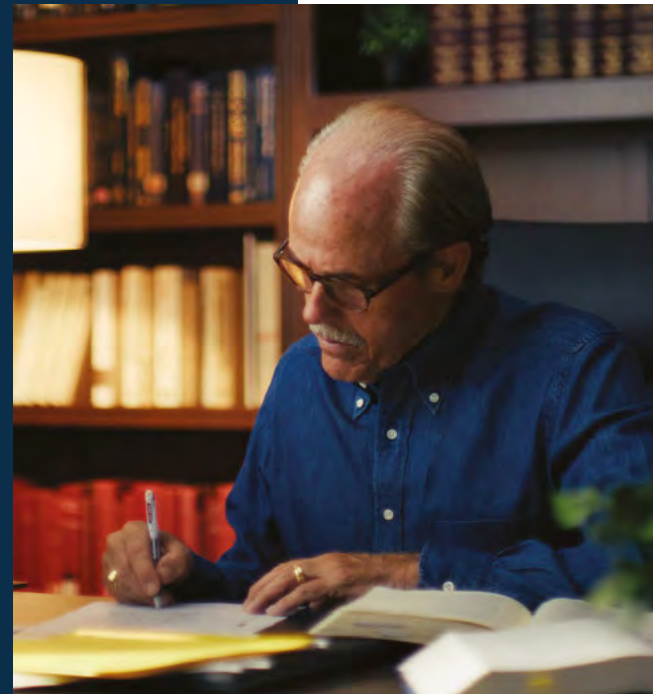
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NOTEBOOK



LIFESTYLE

Spring chickens

Birding is attracting a new, younger flock of enthusiasts

by JEN CURTIS



Michael Plauche sits outside with his 5-year-old son, Gus, watching the bird feeder intently. His ears are attuned to the symphony of nature around his Brevard, N.C., home. Nearby, a hermit thrush sings an ethereal song. Plauche points out to his son the muted colors of the female robin sitting pensively on a branch. Teaching slight differences or distinct details in birds doesn't just help his son develop into a future bird watcher. Plauche also uses it as an avenue for bigger life lessons. He wants Gus to appreciate nature and find the extraordinary among the ordinary.

At 48, Plauche is not what most people think of as the typical birding hobbyist. He developed a passion for birding in 2005 when the ivory-billed woodpecker, a species that had its last documented sighting in 1944, was rumored to have been rediscovered in Arkansas. Plauche was one of the many caught up in the frenzy of finding North America's second-largest woodpecker.

While he didn't find that bird, the search opened his eyes to a world around him that he had occupied but never really observed.

"You know it makes the world a lot more magical to know that stuff is around," he said,

adding that bird watching is a good excuse to get out and appreciate nature. It also doesn't require much: Just sitting in the backyard watching native birds qualifies someone as a birder, Plauche said.

Because it's simple to start, many new birders are taking up the hobby. And they're getting younger.

Cornell Lab of Ornithology saw record numbers of new users in 2025 on the two apps it maintains. Merlin, a bird identification app for beginners, grew by 9.6 million users in 2025, while eBird.org, a citizen scientist database for birds, saw 140,000 new users. And according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the average age of the 91 million American birders now stands at 49, down from 53 in 2011.

Most start the hobby by looking out their kitchen window or sitting on their patio and noticing a feathered friend nearby. An inexpensive field guide can help identify native species and their various traits. But technology also helps new users find what they're looking for—and identify it.

Apps like Merlin can identify birds by song, but it's not without problems. Misidentification is common, and because eBird provides one of the main data sources for conservation decisions in ornithology, Plauche encourages new birders to not make casual observations, but to pay attention and study particulars about habitat and behavior. →

Birders watch thousands of snow geese take flight at sunrise near San Antonio, N.M.



ABOVE: Birding brothers use binoculars and a telescope to watch sandhill cranes leave a marsh in Indiana. **BELOW:** Apps like Merlin can help identify bird species.

“I think it’s a great tool; you just don’t want to let it do your birding for you,” he said.

While local birding is relatively cheap and easy, many birders are extending their searches farther from home. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), birders spent \$107.6 billion on the hobby, \$93 billion of that on equipment such as binoculars and cameras and \$14 billion on travel. Birdwatching tourism brings economic benefits to towns such as Decatur, Ala., where every January the city hosts a festival to promote viewing the more than 20,000 sandhill cranes that winter in Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge.

Danielle Gibson, president of Decatur Morgan County Tourism, called the festival a rare opportunity to witness the cranes in their natural habitat. About 5,000 people flock to the refuge for the festival each year.

Michael Birnbaum of Marietta, Ga., visited Wheeler during this year’s migration. “I can still hear the loud rattling bugle calls of thousands of sandhill cranes,” he said.

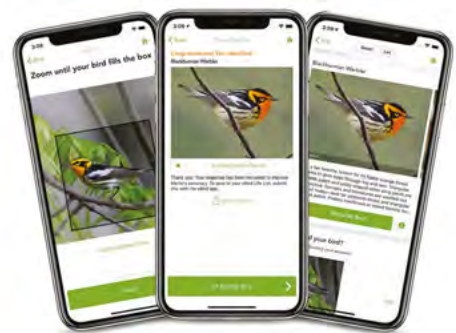
“You know it makes the world a lot more magical to know that stuff is around.”

Birnbaum has been a hobbyist birder since his retirement from the biomedical field in 2006. Teaching people how to spot and photograph birds is Birnbaum’s passion, and he especially loves to see younger people become interested in the hobby. To help beginning birders, he compiled a chart containing the 50 most common bird sightings in his community. He hands them out regularly to both children and adults in his neighborhood.

In addition to being the neighborhood bird guy, he also leads nature walks and teaches classes through a local nature photography association. Years ago, his groups consisted only of senior citizens, but now it’s normal to have middle-aged and young adults participate.

Michael Plauche says sharing the passion for birding with younger generations has another benefit. Ecological problems are causing many species of birds to decline, according to the U.S. North American Bird Conservation Initiative. Loss of habitat including grasslands and forests has put a third of all bird species at a “tipping point,” meaning they have lost half of their population in the last 50 years, according to the group’s 2025 report. Plauche says recognizing bird species and their ecological homes helps people understand the importance of conservation efforts. It also points them to the Creator.

“There’s so many different ways to do it and approaches to it,” Plauche says of birding. “What I always tell people is to do it as much or as little as you like and let it enrich your life that much.” ■





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MONEY

No mail today

USPS needs help to stay afloat

by LAUREN SMYTH



The United States Postal Service could go bankrupt by 2027, postmaster general David Steiner told lawmakers in March. Since the 1980s, USPS has been funded by stamp sales and package fees rather than taxpayer dollars, but nearly two decades have passed since it turned a profit. After losses of \$1.3 billion so far this year, Steiner is calling on Congress for authorization to borrow more money so USPS can operate like an independent business, and he outlined plans to raise postage prices. Steiner attributed last year's \$9 billion loss to a drastic overall reduction in mail, down from a high of 213 billion pieces annually to 109 billion today. He

also said that because USPS legally must deliver to all U.S. addresses, more than 70% of its routes are unprofitable.

"We got thrown overboard and into the water," Steiner said. "But instead of tossing us a life jacket, we were thrown an anchor."

USPS has a partnership with Amazon valued at about \$5 billion a year, more than 6% of its annual revenue. That contract will be up in September, and renewal talks ended abruptly when USPS backed out after a yearlong negotiation, Amazon said. Renewed negotiations led to a deal whereby USPS will keep about 80% of its package delivery volume with Amazon.

STAY HOME, SLOW DOWN, SAVE MONEY

Take it easy on the roads—or just stay home, the International Energy Agency says. Its recent report highlights steps consumers can take to ease demand-side pressure on oil prices, which spiked to near-record levels after the Iran conflict began. Also among the IEA's suggestions: cook with electricity, avoid air travel, use public transport, and carpool.

The supply disruption triggered by Iran's blockage in the Strait of Hormuz is the largest in oil market history, says IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol. IEA members hold more than 1.2 billion barrels of oil in strategic reserves. Just two weeks after the Iran war began, the 32 IEA member nations agreed to a largest-ever release of 400 million barrels. By comparison, in the same timeframe, the United States released 172 million barrels from its reserve.

Gasoline prices typically lag oil market changes by several weeks, so consumers may have to wait to see relief at the pump.

WAR WINNERS

Hours before the United States bombed Iran, crude oil futures spiked as investors prepared to cash in. When markets reopened on Monday, March 2, the defense and energy sectors saw the largest gains. Shares of Northrop Grumman soared over 6%, trailed by Raytheon, Palantir, and Lockheed. Travel stocks sank, with Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings leading with a 10.5% loss. Nonyielding precious metals saw little enthusiasm as safe-haven assets, given a strong dollar and predictions that the Fed would hold interest rates high to counter wartime inflation.





A child's blood is tested for lead poisoning.

HEALTH

Lead free?

The persistent problem of lead poisoning

by KEVIN QUINN

➔ Lead poisoning costs the United States more than \$50 billion per year according to the National Institutes of Health, yet critics say governmental efforts to reduce the impact of lead toxicity have an unacceptable price tag.

Despite a 98% drop in lead exposure among young children since 1980, nearly 500,000 children still have more than 3.5 micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood, according to the Centers for Disease Control. That's toxic enough to cause behavioral issues, lowered IQ, and slowed development. Although only 29% of U.S. homes still have lead-based paint, the odds of lead poisoning increase in poorer neighborhoods and in housing built before 1950.

But despite the strides made to protect the vulnerable, recently the pendulum has swung the other way as lawmakers work to help potential

landlords. In early 2025, four Kentucky legislators sponsored a bill forbidding local governments from requiring landlords to assess rentals for lead safety. Only weeks after that, the Louisville, Ky., Metro Council voted to stop requiring landlords of pre-1978 housing to test for lead hazards.

Chief bill sponsor Kentucky state Rep. Ryan Dotson said lead hazard testing and remediation are too expensive for many landlords and “this could have translated to a huge debacle in the housing market there.”

HomeAdvisor lists the normal range for a lead paint inspection nationally at \$240-\$439 per home and lead remediation costs from \$8 to \$17 per square foot, which translates to as much as \$18,000 for a 1,100-square-foot house. That puts a crunch on an already tight housing market, particularly the low-income housing sector in

Louisville, which has an unmet need of more than 36,000 housing units, according to the city's 2024 Housing Needs Assessment. Statewide, low-income renters need nearly 93,000 more homes based on data from the Kentucky Housing Corp.

The cost for hazard mitigation is indeed high: A 2009 study put the potential cost in the United States for permanent removal of lead paint hazards at \$11 billion. But experts also say that the benefit is even higher: Ridding the country of the toxin could save Americans between \$202 and \$323 billion in health and social costs.

Others are skeptical of the efficiency of government programs. According to Delaware television station WHYY, the state has spent nearly \$4 million since 2023 to completely remove lead hazards in soil and paint in 30 homes, an average of \$95,200 per home. Having spent that, Delaware only has enough remaining funds for a “tiny fraction” of homes still needing lead remediation.

But some states and municipalities have found success running programs where community groups work together to reduce the risk of childhood lead poisoning. Knoxville's Lead Safe and Healthy Homes Program, which maintains a lead-safe housing registry, is one example of success. The program wins competitive Federal Housing and Urban Development grants to assist landlords who otherwise struggle to pay for lead hazard mitigation.

“Landlords love this,” said Todd Kennedy, of East Tennessee Housing Development Corp. “They get assistance on improving their properties and end up with a ‘lead-free’ certification for their rentals.” The program also trains renovation contractors to be safe and efficient lead mitigators, giving them a new marketable skill.

State and local regulations have done their part by keeping administrative costs low. “The economics work,” Kennedy said. ■



RELIGION

Deepfake faith

AI pastors raise financial and theological concerns

by LIZ LYKINS

➔ The video included her face, her voice, and her familiar home setting, but it did not include the real Jennifer LeClaire. Still, the AI-generated version of LeClaire looked authentic enough to convince some online followers to part with their money. LeClaire, who leads the non-denominational Awakening House of Prayer in South Florida, has a following of nearly 600,000 on YouTube.

As the AI version of LeClaire opens the video, she tells the viewer in an eerily static tone, “Please be at peace. This is

Jennifer. I’m a partner and a friend in prayers.” The video later promises viewers they can receive a personal phone call and prophetic counseling—for a donation.

LeClaire isn’t the only Christian leader mimicked by AI. With the tool developing rapidly, technology experts say pastors and congregants alike need to be aware of the dangers posed by deepfake videos.

LeClaire first learned of the scam when a man named Sergio reached out to her on Facebook and insisted she had promised to give him counseling. Sergio,

who didn’t speak English as a first language, didn’t notice the broken English throughout the video.

“Most people would have known by the bad English that it wasn’t me,” LeClaire told me. “But because Sergio was desperate for help, and it was my face, my voice, and my living room as the backdrop, Sergio fell for it.”

Jennifer LeClaire holds a tablet displaying the deepfake video that was used to scam her online followers.

LeClaire went public with the scam and posted a video calling out the deepfake, or AI-generated, video. She warned her followers to be wary and keep an eye out for scams imitating her or other pastors. She said education about these scams is key to keeping people from harm.

She also advised individuals to only seek online counsel from sites with a proven and long track record. "It's dangerous to direct-message ministries and spill your guts about all your problems," said LeClaire, who creates online content across 10 social media channels. "While some people can't find good churches in their areas and have no choice, we need to be careful that the online community is truly a community, not just a website that collects money."

AI-generated content can be made from pastors at high-profile churches or small local ones, said Clayton Chancey, a former missionary and the founder of Foray Consulting, a company that specializes in AI systems and automation.

If churches post a livestream or regular video footage of their pastor online, anyone with a laptop can make deepfake videos, Chancey said. For example, fake videos of Mike Schmitz, a Catholic priest based in Duluth, Minn., tried to swindle his more than 1.2 million followers on YouTube.

Not all videos are designed to make money by asking for it directly. Some earn cash through clicks, Chancey said. Shortly after the death of Pastor John MacArthur, his ministry warned that fraudsters had already started to make videos. The videos didn't ask for money, but rather created new sermons and put words into the preacher's mouth. Chancey called high-volume videos like these "AI slop" with a high potential for monetization.

Chancey said it's nearly impossible for pastors to prevent these videos from being made. And if they are created, it will be an uphill battle to get them taken down because the legal precedent in cases like these is so new.

The only way churches can prevent AI deepfakes is to cut off content at its

"You're going to have to start making some tough decisions about what it looks like to be a church with a media presence, and how public you want to be about that."

source and not to post any video footage that can be scraped and used to generate content or even to train AI models.

"Preaching is a particularly vulnerable medium to that, because the background of a preacher sitting in a pulpit is typically somewhat static," Chancey said. "There's one person, there's a fixed tone of voice, and due to the nature of the medium, the clips which are available online are often pretty long form."

Churches can also limit how public their livestream videos are and limit

the amount of content they post online. Posting to fewer platforms will decrease the chances of a deepfake, Chancey noted. "You're going to have to start making some tough decisions about what it looks like to be a church with a media presence, and how public you want to be about that."

Chancey also recommended churches have a written policy on where they post and the type of content they post, to give congregants clearer guidelines for spotting scam videos.

While AI has imitated pastors, it has also generated new ones, Chancey noted. One account on TikTok with a following of 10,000 people features videos of these fake pastors. Some of its videos have gone viral and racked up millions of likes. Videos like these erode the trust and credibility of real pastors, Chancey said. He urged Christians to lean on their local, in-person communities.

Nicholas Skytland, vice president of the faith-based technology company Gloo, echoed that. AI pastors take away from real pastors' ability to have relational authority with their congregants. Instead, viewers who rely on these fake pastors make the technology into an idol. They essentially outsource their spiritual guidance to AI, Skytland said.

On top of this, the programs making these AI videos don't even come from a Christian worldview, he said. They are based on secular data.

"If you create an individual pastor, then the pastor is supposed to be responding from a Christian worldview. But the AI underneath it is fundamentally built differently than that," Skytland said. "Maybe it's going to promote more relativism versus a Christian biblical understanding of any topic that you ask it."

He said one of the most pivotal things churches can do to stop AI videos is to advocate for how these tools are made and shaped: "The church can say, 'Hey, our values are really, really important here. Our worldview is really, really important here.' You can demand that those things are represented in the technology that is being created." ■

SPORTS

Leagues of their own

Pro softball and baseball leagues create new opportunities for female athletes

by RAY HACKE



After the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League—made famous by the 1992 movie *A League of Their Own*—folded in the mid-1950s, opportunities for women to play baseball or softball professionally became scarce and fleeting. But that could quickly change, depending on the growth and success of two new leagues.

The Athletes Unlimited Softball League (AUSL), whose two-month season begins in June, launched last year with four teams: Carolina Blaze, Chicago Bandits, Texas Volts, and Utah Talons. The AUSL has since added two teams, the Oklahoma City Spark and the Portland Cascade.

Meanwhile, the Women's Professional Baseball League (WPBL) will begin its inaugural season Aug. 1 and play through mid-September. The WPBL has four currently unnamed teams affiliated with four

cities: Boston, New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.

While AUSL teams will play in or near the cities, states, or regions whose names they bear, all four WPBL teams will share one venue: Robin Roberts Stadium in Springfield, Ill. However, the AUSL has partnered with the Women's Sports Bar Alliance, which boasts 16 establishments nationwide—12 in non-AUSL markets—where fans can catch the action on ESPN, the MLB Network, or other sports networks. An undisclosed network will show WPBL games.

The WPBL has more known star power: pitchers **Kelsie Whitmore**, who competed with the Staten Island (N.Y.) Ferryhawks of the independent Atlantic League in 2022, and Mo'ne Davis, a Philadelphian who in 2014 became the first girl to win a game—and throw a shutout—at the Little League World Series. Whitmore and Davis will suit up for San Francisco and Los Angeles, respectively.



SOFTBALL STREAK

No team in college softball has had a longer winning streak this season than **Grand Canyon University**. The Phoenix-based Christian school won 30 consecutive games to start the season before falling on March 17 to Oklahoma State.

GCU's streak wasn't quite half of the longest in NCAA history: Oklahoma won 71 consecutive games from 2023 to 2024 under Christian coach Patty Gasso.

The University of Arizona is the only school besides Oklahoma with more than 40 straight victories, having 47 in a row from 1996 to 1997. Seven universities—Florida, Oregon, South Carolina, UCLA, Cal State Fullerton, Princeton, and Canisius—own streaks of 35 or more.

GCU could become the next Christian university to play the role of giant-slayer in the NCAA Division I postseason, which begins mid-May: Last season, Virginia-based Liberty University—coached by two-time Olympic gold medalist Dot Richardson—stunned top-ranked Texas A&M in the regional round before falling to Oregon in the Super Regionals.

WHITMORE: REBECCA BLACKWELL/AP; GCU: BRAYDEN STENNER/GCU

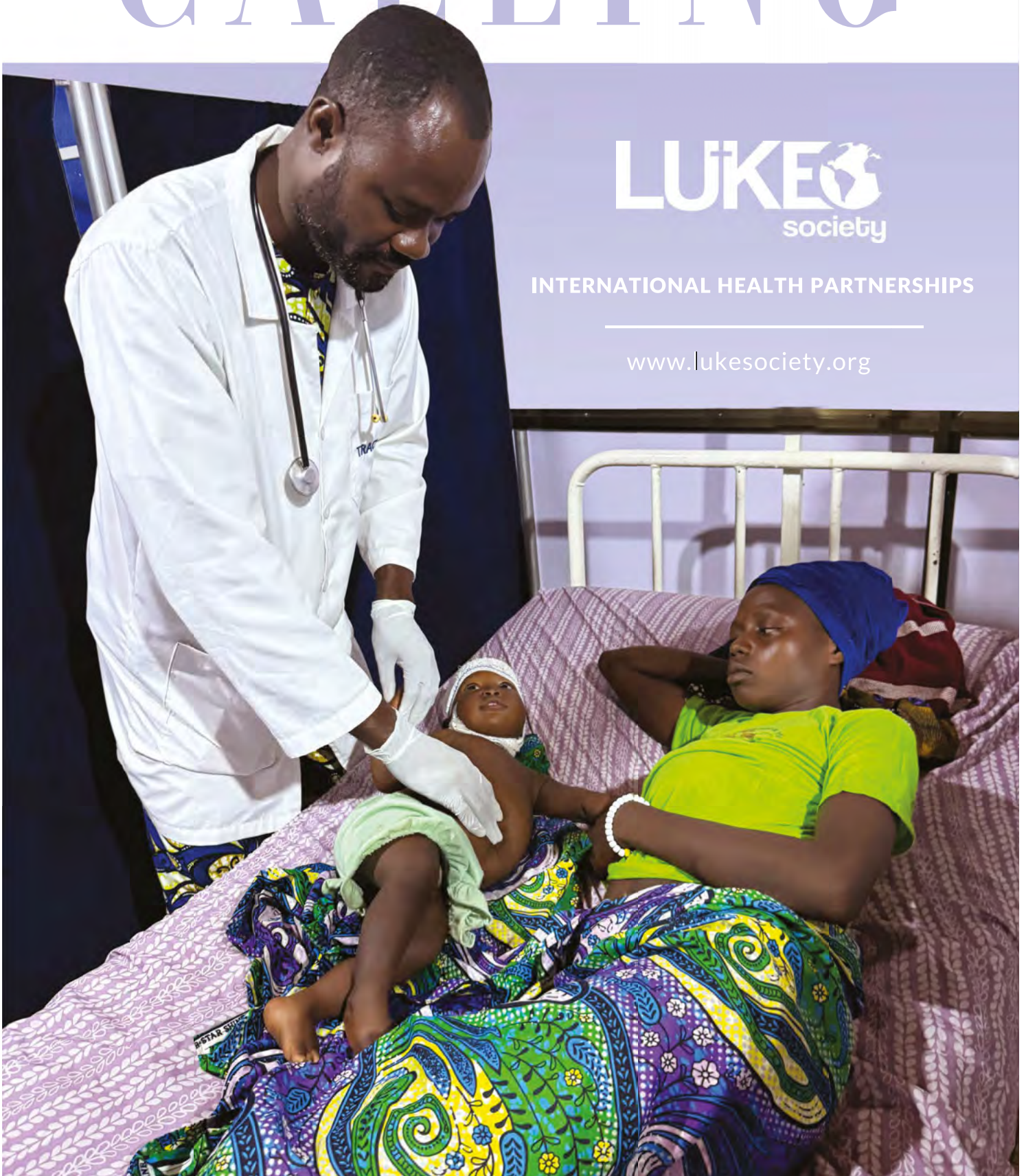
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POLITICS

California primary havoc

Republicans reap redistricting woes

by ELISA PALUMBO

→ Conservative political activist group Reform California lists 26 elections that must flip or stay red to keep the state from swinging further to the left, an even tougher task after last November's Proposition 50 redrew electoral districts. Democrats thereby hope to gain five congressional seats to offset Texas' own redistricting efforts. California holds its primaries on June 2.

Redrawn District 13 in the San Joaquin Valley is a toss-up, lending Republicans hope that former Stockton Mayor and Pastor **Kevin Lincoln** can unseat incumbent Democrat Adam Gray, who himself flipped the seat in 2024. Republicans must defend District

22, in the southern Central Valley, by keeping incumbent David Valadao in his seat. Democrats in this "purple" agricultural region are divided between moderate state legislator Jasmeet Bains and progressive professor Randy Villegas. That battle echoes national debate over the future of the Democratic Party in the era of Zohran Mamdani.

New boundaries forced some candidates like longtime GOP Rep. Darrell Issa, to retire after two decades. For his District 48 replacement, Issa endorsed San Diego County Supervisor Jim Desmond, but redistricting means 11 Democrats now vie for the open seat, which is a must-win for the party to gain control of the House.

NEVADA FREE FOR ALL

The unexpected retirement of Rep. Mark Amodei, the lone Republican of Nevada's four congressmembers, has sparked one of the country's most crowded primary races. The June 9 contest for the northern, red-leaning district will be a showdown between 15 Republicans and 11 Democrats. Former state Sen. James Settelmeyer has endorsements from Amodei and Gov. Joe Lombardo. David Flippo, a retired U.S. Air Force lieutenant colonel originally running for Nevada's 4th Congressional District changed races after Amodei's February retirement announcement. Flippo received numerous MAGA endorsements, but has been chided for changing races by another Republican candidate, former Eureka County Sheriff Jesse Watts. Democratic candidates include Greg Kidd, a venture capitalist who ran for the seat in 2024, and former state Assemblywoman Teresa Benitez-Thompson. With such a crowded race, results could be a toss-up, though the district typically leans Republican.

IOWA: REMATCH IN THE HAWKEYE STATE

Incumbent Republican Rep. **Mariannette Miller-Meeks** faces a two-prong primary challenge from fellow Republican David Pautsch and newcomer 27-year-old Tyler Hegewald for Iowa's 1st Congressional District seat. MAGA candidate Pautsch is running to the right of Miller-Meeks with Hegewald to her left, calling himself an "Abraham Lincoln Republican." The June 2 primary will have Democrats deciding between former state Rep. Christina Bohannon and political newcomer Travis Terrell. Bohannon has run against Miller-Meeks for the southeastern district seat twice before, losing in 2024 by only 799 votes, making the seat extremely vulnerable.



LAW

Jury's in on social media

Recent damage awards may signal changes ahead for internet platforms

by STEVE WEST



California and New Mexico juries issued multimillion-dollar verdicts against social media platforms that negligently harmed users through addictive features. The bellwether cases may portend broad liability for the companies on the scale faced by tobacco companies and opioid manufacturers in recent years.

On March 24, an Albuquerque jury found Meta, parent company to

Facebook and Instagram, liable for \$375 million in a 2023 case brought by New Mexico Attorney General Raúl Torrez. Investigators posing as children documented sexual solicitations they received and Meta's response. Torrez sued the outsized company under a state law barring unfair and deceptive trade practices.

The following day, a Los Angeles jury returned a verdict against Meta and Google, awarding \$6 million in com-

pensatory and punitive damages to a 20-year-old woman known in court documents as Kaley G.M. Lawyers contended that Kaley—who began using YouTube at 6 and Instagram at 9—suffered severe emotional problems as a result of the companies' negligence.

In both cases, the challengers skirted a federal law that immunizes internet platforms from liability for content posted by users by attacking the companies' design of the platforms. Features claimed to be especially addictive and damaging to youth included infinite scrolling, autoplay videos, and algorithms that drive users deeper into destructive content.

Both companies have said they would appeal their respective verdicts.

In a post on X, Jonathan Haidt, a social-psychologist at NYU-Stern and critic of children's access to social media, called the California verdict a "common-sense" result. "A jury affirmed what parents have long known: Meta and YouTube were designed to exploit young people, with devastating consequences," Haidt wrote. "The companies knew they were harming children by the millions—and did it anyway."

But a leading free speech advocacy organization, the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, criticized penalizing companies for what it contends are editorial choices protected by the First Amendment. In a post on X, FIRE's Nico Perrino pointed to Kaley's early and near-continuous use of social media and asked, "Where were the parents?"

DECENCY DEBATE

In March, a U.S. Senate committee used the 30-year anniversary of Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act to return to criticism of its impact. Republican Sen. Ted Cruz sounded the familiar charge of censorship. "If you disagree with a particular view, Big Tech doesn't answer that with more speech," said Cruz. "They simply make the view they disagree with disappear, and they silence you." Ranking Democrat Sen. Brian Schatz sounded a common theme of Democrats, calling out the companies that "used Section 230 as an excuse to avoid taking meaningful action to protect users, but especially kids."

Matthew Bergman, the attorney who successfully obtained the verdict against Meta and Google for social media addiction, argued against repeal of Section 230. "Courts would still have the opportunity to apply time-tested First Amendment jurisprudence to determine the extent to which those claims implicate protected speech and in which cases they don't," he said.



C R O S S W O R D

Best laid plans

by NATHAN KENISON

Across

- 1** Storm relief org.
5 Dog doctor, for short
8 Kibosh
11 “You wait your turn like everyone else!”
13 Early church sect named for the first man
16 Blood lines
17 Congeniality
18 Adopted boy navigates a big world and drives a small car in this 1999 film
20 Ex ____
21 Growlithe’s Pokémon move
25 Joseph’s had many colors
28 Winter bug
29 Turn ____
30 ____ wrestle
31 An unlikely duo cook an eponymous dish in this 2007 film
34 Checked (out)
36 Old-school school tool
37 Pair of special agents go on a mission to save a girl in this 1977 film
41 Suffix for Power
42 “Slander is spoken. In print it’s ____.”
43 ____ tear
44 Individuals
45 Dutch cheese
46 Go ____ (completely lose it)
49 Classic Steinbeck novella, or a loose plot description to 18-, 31-, and 37-across
55 Revealing words
58 Balanced
59 Local leader
60 Destiny
61 Peculiar
62 “____ be a lot cooler if you did!”
63 Actor Sebastian

Down

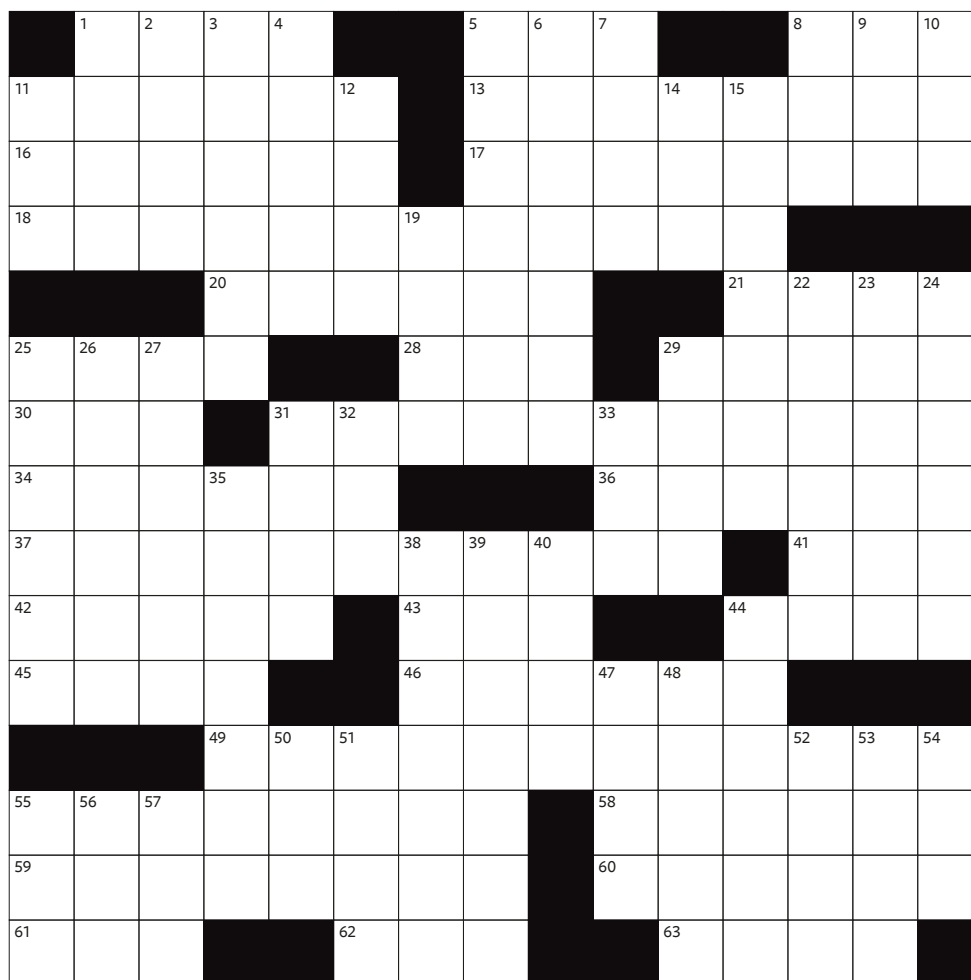
- 1** Fruit by the ____
2 Light beige
3 Result of incorrectly placed nitrogenous base, e.g.
4 Jaguar and Lynx maker

- 5** Boring
6 Remove via move Magic
7 Social skill
8 Broke fast
9 Simple signatures
10 Feminine suffix
11 ____ in “Nathan”
12 Mr. Milchick’s first name in *Severance*
14 Name of two Spice Girls
15 Staying power?
19 Raise up
22 Tin Man’s need
23 Refer (to)

- 24** ____ Pieces
25 Stronghold
26 Corsage flower
27 Amorphous organism
29 Replacements, for short
31 Instagram video
32 Pop-ups, e.g.
33 Something used in a row
35 Online chess option
38 “Jesus is my ____” (bumper sticker slogan)
39 Skip, for example
40 Ill at ____
44 Most advanced, in a way

- 47** Piece of work
48 All those against
50 Word ____ word
51 Short skirt
52 ____ bear
53 Locale for 13-across
54 The Gray Lady, familiarly
55 Word in the *Star Wars* opening crawl
56 Signal
57 Redbox rental

Bonus clues and puzzle solution on page 110





**Attacked.
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Scarred.**
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Go to **barnabasaid.org/pray** for resources to help you pray for suffering and persecuted Christians around the world.



A New Way of Seeing

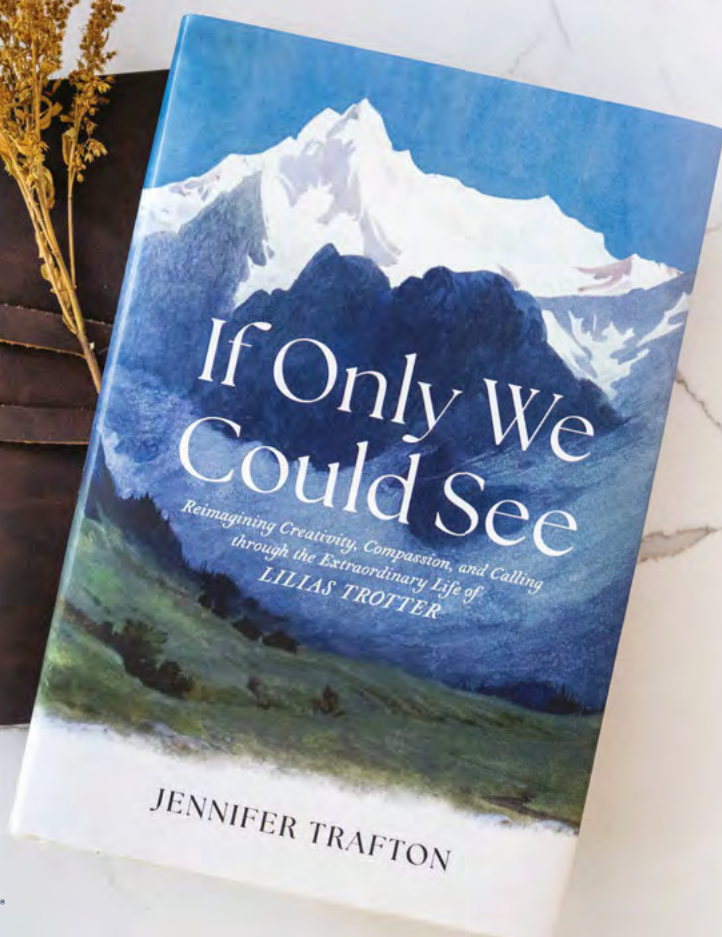
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Does our crossword have you puzzled? Before checking the answers, try these additional clues:

Across

- 16** Vessels leaving hearts (Latin plural)
- 21** Lion's sound

Down

- 3** Teenage ____ Ninja Turtles
- 9** Letters before -mas and -ray
- 12** The world's third son
- 14** Alice worked at his diner





VOICES ANDRÉE SEU PETERSON

Sticking the landing

Run your race with perseverance,
all the way to the end

The 2026 Winter Olympics are already in the slipstream of sports history. But you can be sure that training has begun for the next one. And equally sure that an important part of the practice of every figure skater and gymnast will be to master the sticking of the landing.

“Sticking the landing” spells the difference between a medal and no medal. You can have 2 minutes and 40 seconds of flawless execution, only to blow it all at the end. But this is true in life as well. Many a Christian pilgrimage is disappointing because, though the child of God reads her Bible, confesses her sins, and signs up for every retreat that comes down the pike, it all amounts to little because she doesn’t “stick the landing.”

By sticking the landing I mean the step of perfect completion, of holding firm one’s landing position without losing balance. God intends for us to wrestle with each testing He allows into our lives and to “land” at a conclusion for action. But I find it rare that the concept of resolution is preached, and indeed it is even under suspicion as works righteousness and an enemy of grace. Good luck with that. Allowing anything less makes us the dog ever returning to its vomit—treading water, stuck in cycles, failing to make progress in conformity to Christ.

For example: Let’s say a woman invites her father to move into her house when he is old and a widower. She is sincere when she says at the outset, “Now Dad, I want you to think of this house as your house too. The way I look at the roof over our heads is as God’s provision for both of us, so do not ever feel like you’re imposing. *Mi casa es su casa.*”

Then the first time they have an argument the woman blurts out, “This is MY house, and you should be grateful to live here!” Then they patch things up for a while, and daughter reaffirms to Dad that this house is God’s gift to both of them. Later they will fight again and she will yell again, “This is MY house!”

This is how you know the woman didn’t stick the landing. Wobbling back and forth is indication that the matter was not settled in her heart the way it should have been. The lizard is not dead but merely sleeping.

Shall I submit evidence from the Bible that God wants us to think through hard things, down to the nub, comparing Scripture to Scripture, and then making up our mind? How about the fellow in Corinthians whom Paul commends for the internal private work of coming to decide that he will forgo marriage for the kingdom’s sake:

“If anyone thinks he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed ... let him do as he wishes: let them marry—it is no sin. But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well” (1 Corinthians 7:36–37).

Whatever else this teaching means, it means we’re meant to learn how to “establish” and “determine” things within our hearts, and “to have our desires under control.” The man Paul notes is fixed in purpose. He will not look back. Only God will ever know the secret agony he lived before he made that firm resolve. Think of Mary’s husband Joseph, what he must have suffered in the dark wee hours to arrive, by morning’s light, at the decision not to put his pregnant fiancée to public shame (Matthew 1:19–20).

All acts of courage are a private death before they ever are a public one. And “fighting the good fight” (1 Timothy 6:12) is lonely business, done by men “of whom the world was not worthy” (Hebrews 11:38). What you and I observe in people we mark out to be mature in Christ is but the endpoint of untold numbers of voluntary wrestlings of the soul that we saw not, that came before. “Double-minded” and “unstable” men, James says, are “like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind” (James 1:6, 8). They are men who never learn to stick the landing.

“Pick up your cross and follow me,” said Christ. What is that but to put to death desires, wants, frustrations, and annoyances? The woman with her father getting nowhere would do well to choose, while it is day, to stop forging a chain of wood and hay and stubble, and instead to try by all the grace that God affords to stick the landing and go for the gold. ■



Craig Monger receives 1819 News' Albert Patterson Courage Award for reporting on Bubba Copeland.

Pulitzer material

On telling hard stories and watching someone else get the reward

by LEIGH JONES

→ In 2023, Alabama's 1819 News broke what became a national news story that went on to win a Pulitzer Prize, but not for the journalist who first reported it. Craig Monger, a 28-year-old reporter at the digital news startup, revealed pastor and popular Smiths Station, Ala., Mayor Bubba Copeland led a very different life online, posting explicit transgender content and erotic fiction. A few days after the story came out, Copeland took his own life. As part of her reporting on 1819 News (see p. 73), Kim Henderson talked to Monger and visited Smiths Station. I asked her to share more about what she learned.

You note in your story that the Bubba Copeland coverage prompted a lot of pushback for 1819 News. What kinds of things did Monger endure? The onslaught after Copeland's suicide was immediate. Hundreds of messages on Twitter, hundreds of emails. Craig's detractors posted his address and pictures of his kids on Facebook. They threatened to rape and murder his family and burn his house down. His wife and children stayed with relatives, but Craig decided to remain at home to protect their property. Eventually the whole family left the area for a week. They've since installed alarms on their home doors, and they've gotten a driveway alert. But even now,

more than two years later, Craig is still getting threats. He showed me one he'd gotten the day I interviewed him.

Winning the Pulitzer is every reporter's dream. How did Monger react to the news that a story about his work had won that award for another writer? He says he had a good laugh. It stung, of course, but he wrote a tongue-in-cheek acceptance speech for his group of 1819 reporters to enjoy in their text loop. I later heard him give a real speech about breaking the Copeland story. He joked that it's not often a journalist's work wins a Pulitzer Prize. It's even less often that work results in a Pulitzer Prize for someone else.

Bryan Dawson told you he would publish the story again, despite the criticism. Why? The press wields influence beyond reporting, especially when it comes to accountability. Someone had to hold Copeland accountable for his actions, which had gone beyond the bounds of private to public and possibly even criminal. I've wondered if some of the criticism of 1819 News coming from other media outlets is rooted in embarrassment that they didn't report the Copeland story first.

And yet, when you visited Smiths Station, you learned some residents didn't think it was right for 1819 News to expose Copeland. Why? They still refer to it as an "outing," rather than a journalistic endeavor. They wrongly insist what Copeland was doing didn't hurt anyone. I interviewed a pastor in the area to get his take on why people were willing to overlook such behavior from a public figure, and he blamed our culture's distorted view of sin. If Copeland had been embezzling, he believes, they would be thanking Craig for exposing it. ■



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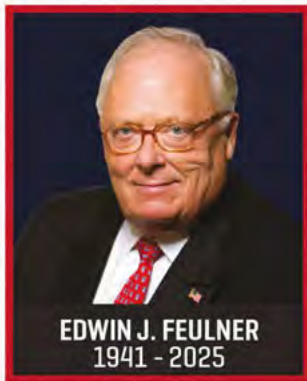
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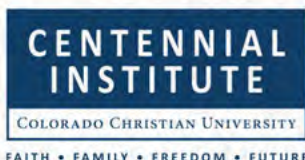
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