WORLD

EARNING YOUR TRUST, EVERY DAY | NOVEMBER 2025

The feeding of the 8 billion

For the first time in human history, the majority of the earth's population has enough food to eat—but at what cost? *p.66*

by ADDIE OFFEREINS

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CONTENTS

NOVEMBER 2025 | VOLUME 40, NUMBER 11

THOMAS BARWICK/GETTY IMAGES

THE 360


14


38


98

DISPATCHES

CULTURE

NOTEBOOK

VOICES

COVER PHOTO
Tetra Images/Getty Images

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WORLD NOTES

Five years ago, I might not have believed it: WORLD producing a daily video news program watched in more than 30,000 public school classrooms. Yet here we are. We haven't spent much time in this column on one of WORLD's major initiatives of recent years, *The World From A to Z*—but it's time to tell you more about it.

We launched *The World From A to Z* in August 2023 to help public school students in middle and high schools think critically, discuss differences respectfully, and approach the news with compassion.

In God's providence, the timing could not have been better. Except for our *WORLD Watch* for Christian families in homeschool and private school settings, few media programs today even attempt to promote those values among students. Fewer still reach them in the public school classroom. In the past decade, only a handful of organizations have tried to bring video news into public schools, and of those, only *CNN10* remains. Until now.

We have talked here before about some of the disturbing, pervasive bias in programs aimed at our neighbors in public schools. Even CNN, which prides itself on being "mainstream," regularly leaves moral or contextual truth on the cutting-room floor. *The World From A to Z* is meant to do the opposite: to report clearly and help students discuss what they hear with respect and reason. And let's be honest—it's a skill we adults ought to practice more ourselves.

So far this school year, *The World From A to Z* is shown daily in roughly 35,000 public school classrooms, with many days topping 40,000. On Sept. 11, for instance, the program reached more than 60,000 classrooms. That's still fewer than *CNN10*, but it represents significant adoption within America's roughly 100,000 public schools.

Is there a secret to the program's success in this, its third year?

No secrets, but several factors:

► First, our host. Carl Azuz had hosted *CNN10* for 15 years before joining us and launching *The World From A to Z*. He's a master at delivering news to public school students. His energy, experience, and humor combine to draw in audiences of all ages—but especially students.

► Second, a commitment to serious reporting. Carl's Christian commitment is to the truth, and his professional commitment is to reporting that's as objective as possible. The program earns high marks for its deep, balanced coverage—even on difficult topics.

► Third, top-notch, high-energy production. The small team behind *The World From A to Z* turns out a dynamic program every weekday—paced for today's classrooms, where attention spans are short and schedules tight.

Carl Azuz on the set of *The World From A to Z*

► Fourth, clever storytelling and reporting. The team keeps the content lively and sneaks in plenty of learning. Both students and teachers notice—and appreciate it.

► Finally, the puns! It's hard to tell whether viewers are laughing or groaning—probably both—but Carl fires off wordplay faster than a copy editor on espresso. He's turned the dad joke into an Olympic event and somehow sticks the landing every time.

We generate only a small amount of advertising revenue from *The World From A to Z*, mostly through email placements, and we're careful about what appears in the program itself. Otherwise, this initiative exists because of donor support. Your gifts made it possible to launch the program and keep it going—and they're reaching hundreds of thousands of teenagers every school day.

We'd like to reach even more. Additional funding would allow us to expand reporting by sending more journalists into the field, to produce special features and live events, and to create supplemental materials for students and teachers alike. If you'd like to invest specifically in this work, visit wng.org/givetoatoz.

Kevin

KEVIN MARTIN
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
kevin@wng.org

ALISSA MINNICK

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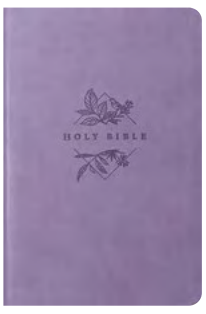

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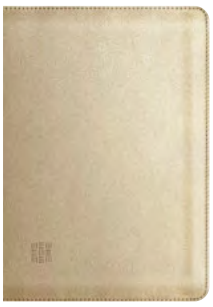
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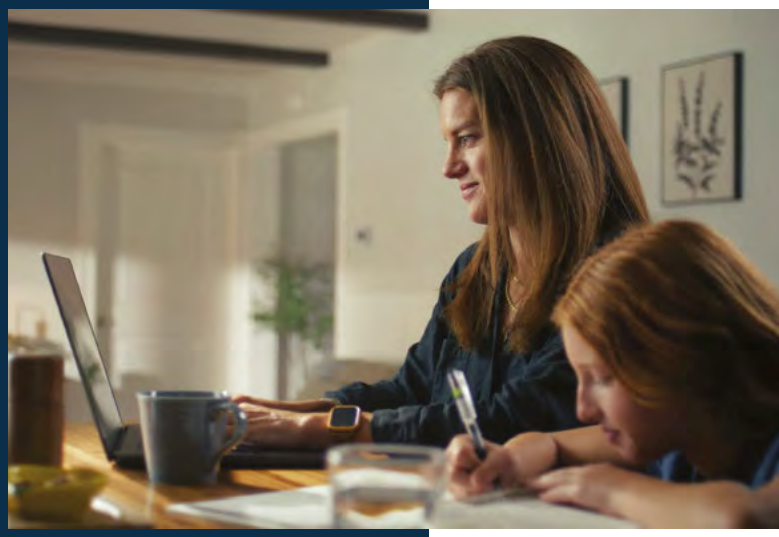

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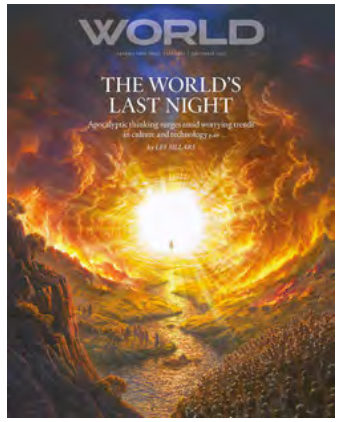
"Because the concept of mental illness has replaced that of sin, neither the elimination of the IMD exclusion nor the launching of CARE courts will solve our problem in this area."

RIGHT TO BE RESCUED?

Page 76: Articles such as this play on the heartstrings but need Biblical perspective. It is not unusual for a student to finish high school with achievements and popularity and then to find himself struggling in college. It is natural for a mother to blame the system and/or disease after four years of trouble ending in her son's suicide, but the Christian is called to the supernatural. It is customary in 2025 for churches to follow the world in assuming bipolar disorder and substance abuse disorder to be diseases, but that custom is indicative of the ease with which we are willing to contradict Scripture.

A Harvard psychiatrist in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in June of 2025 lamented that "psychiatric disorders remain poorly understood despite extensive research." This should not be surprising as what he termed "methodologic shortcomings of studies in the field" are inevitable because the data is entirely subjective. Objective measures are possible with antibiotics but are not so with psychotropic medications because the very concept of a psychiatric disorder rests upon a list of adjectives describing troublesome thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

For this reason, statements like "25% to 35% of the homeless population has a severe mental illness" and "About 44% of people in jail have a history of mental illness" are essentially meaningless. Was David mentally ill when he ran to Gath



SEPTEMBER 2025

and "let his spittle run down his beard"? Was Saul bipolar when he would intermittently attempt to kill David while at other times would cry, "I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm" (1 Samuel 26:21)?

Because the concept of mental illness has replaced that of sin, neither the elimination of the IMD exclusion nor the launching of CARE courts will solve our problem in this area. Scripture denies our "right to be rescued." Christ came because of the Father's love (John 3:16) and will come again because of the Father's justice (Revelation 19:11).

CAROL THARP
Winnetka, Ill.

VISIONS OF THE APOCALYPSE

Page 66: I've been a Christian for over 50 years and a WORLD Magazine reader for probably 35 or more years. Thank you for this excellent article. I found the article extremely helpful. I also want to thank you for your Millennium Primer. Every time I've tried to figure out premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism, I've become very confused. So, following Jesus' statement that "no one knows the time and the date" of Jesus' return, I decided to just ignore these discussions. However, these issues seem to be critically important to some Christians, and I could never understand why. Your Millennium Primer has helped me understand each of the positions, and I consider it a very valuable resource.

BILL CURTIS
Lansdale, Pa.

Many thanks for Les Sillars' deft handling of the Apocalypse and current world events. He did a great job of summarizing Christian millennial thinking historically and today. It was a solid, orienting perspective with a reminder that we are on God's time and in His plan, after all.

CHRISTINE HAMILTON
Fort Collins, Colo.

Quoting Pastor Jonathan Cahn, Les Sillars seemingly supports the premise that a demonic entity referred to in the Book of Daniel as the prince of Persia could be, in fact, the modern-day equivalent of Iran-backed groups like Hamas who have perpetrated violence and destruction against the nation of →

Israel. The argument would seemingly have merit and a plausible apocalyptic scenario borne out.

Troubling, however, is the fawning praise for President Donald J. Trump, a person of questionable moral, spiritual, and ethical values. His allegiance to Israel would, on the face of it, seem to be more of a geopolitical stance than any carefully thought-out apocalyptic understanding of the gospel.

ROBERT L. LONG III
Nesbit, Miss.

PROPHETIC FOREIGN POLICY

Page 73: Christian eschatological aspirations that seek to politically or militarily empower the nation of Israel may be misplaced, for we know that near the end, the son of perdition will "seat himself in the temple of God, claiming that he is a god" (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4).

PATRICK HERRICK
Olathe, Kan.

An influential D.C. faith leader is quoted as saying we need to "put ourselves in control and give God the control." That is a scary statement. I don't know the foundation of her faith, but the Bible has led me to believe God doesn't need us to put ourselves in control so we can then put Him in control. Him being in control all on His own is the foundation of my faith. I'm not interested in a god who needs people to put him in control.

KURT MACH
Gig Harbor, Wash.

RETURN OF THE RED HEIFER

Page 18: Attempts to immanentize the eschaton are impious efforts to implement what frail humans believe ought to be the will of God. My M.Div. was granted by a seminary that was officially dispensationalist, but I graduated without embracing that system, and am now an amillennialist. Rather than cobbling together unrelated verses to support Father Darby's interpretive scheme, serious Christians ought to perceive that the Bible is fairly clear: Jesus could come back at any moment to judge the quick and the dead and to establish the new heavens and the new earth. Neither a red heifer nor a rebuilt Temple is necessary.

ROBERT HELLAM
Seaside, Calif.

Never in my life have I read an article that confirmed my convictions against dispensational theology more firmly. I humbly ask those in agreement with Mr. Stinson to reread the Epistle to the Hebrews and then consider the image of that cow. Why would Mr. Stinson participate in false worship that does not point to the cross? Is this any different than supplying silver idols for the Temple of Diana (Acts 19)? At the root of this Third Temple ideology is an implication that God approves "another way" other than THE Way.

M. DIGRANDI
Richmond, Ky.

THREE YEARS AND A CAREER

Page 106: I was quite surprised to see that this is being floated as a new idea. Grace College in Winona Lake, Ind., has been doing this very thing for over 14 years. In fact, at Grace, students can earn a bachelor's degree in three years and a master's in four! I certainly hope that they can be given some credit for doing it before it was "cool."

MICHELLE THOMPSON
Lizton, Ind.

WARS AND RUMORS OF WARS: EIGHT BOOKS

Page 47: It is disappointing that the first book review is of a book by author and journalist Douglas Murray. He is an articulate, intelligent gay man who unapologetically disdains Christianity in his book *The Madness of Crowds*. In fact, in the book, the first chapter is titled "Gay." He rejects the Lord and His Word, which condemn homosexuality as sin. He endorses many of the conservative views that Christians hold, but his presuppositions differ drastically. The reviewer writes, "Murray supports Biblical calls to choose life," and "the book underscores the theological roots of the conflict." These are antithetical to Douglas Murray's worldview.

KÄREN DOUGLASS
Lakeland, Fla.

BEAUTIFULLY DISGUISED

Page 111: The column on near-death experiences was excellent! I have often struggled wondering how can I discount someone's experience? Andreé Seu Peterson's basic response was that you don't have to. You just respond to it and evaluate it in light of God's Word. A person may have envisioned or imagined something, but to give a definitive appraisal requires (as all ideas and experiences do) measuring it against the plumb line of Scripture.

CAROLYN STONE
St. Louis, Mo.

ELDER CARE

Page 12: I truly enjoyed Lynn Vincent's column on elder care. Especially the verse she quoted from Leviticus 19:32. I am 86 years old and have my own Bible verse, Psalm 92:14-15: "They will still bear fruit in old age, proclaiming 'The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him.'"

HELGA ARNDT
Fredericksburg, Va.

CORRECTIONS

The site of a fire near Doolittle, Mo., was on Interstate 44 ("Overcooking the cargo," October, p. 32).

The hosts of the *Haunted Cosmos* podcast are Presbyterian pastors ("Things unseen," October, p. 77).

Hal Lindsey died November 2024 ("Visions of the Apocalypse," September, p. 70).

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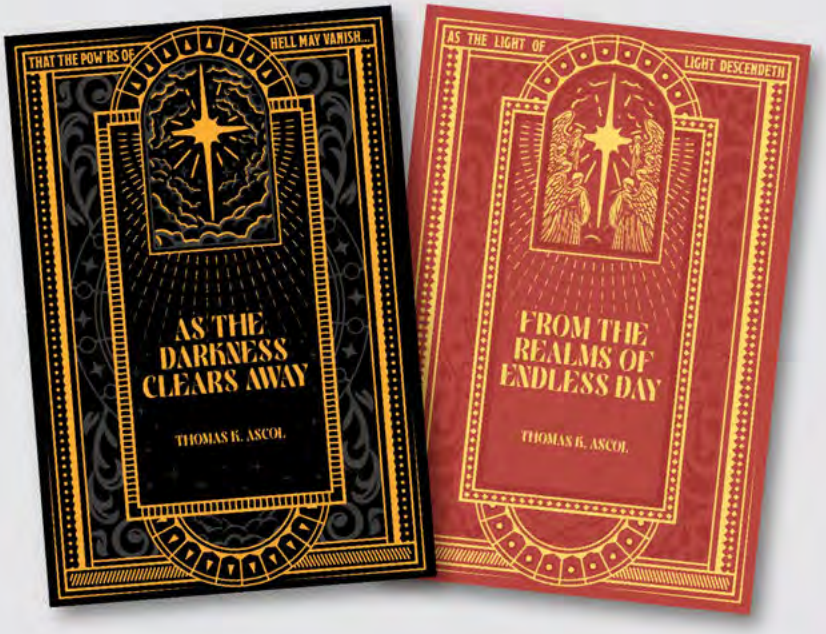

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VOICES LYNN VINCENT

Tennyson's bar

It's not enough to promise unbelievers they "go to heaven"

Aunt Esther was dying. Breast cancer had taken her down to a shadow, and for nearly two weeks, she'd lain in her San Diego home in a hospice bed, neither eating nor drinking. I sat at Esther's bedside with my mother-in-law, Hazel.

Esther was Hazel's aunt, and Hazel prayed and talked with her, remembering old times. But Esther had lapsed into silence a few days before, and she lay completely unresponsive.

Then, suddenly, her breathing changed. "Cheyne-Stokes respiration," doctors call it—faster, deeper breaths, then shallow ones, or none at all. Cheyne-Stokes is an indication of active dying. It was almost time, in Tennyson's maritime metaphor, for Esther to "cross the bar."

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea ...

I had brought my Bible, and something—Someone?—prompted me to begin reading from Revelation 21: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more."

We weren't worried about Esther's soul: At 71, she'd long been a strong believer. Now, the Bible's most detailed description of heaven streamed forth into a supernatural quiet, a heralding hush at the holy threshold just this side of the Veil. I believe that's where Aunt Esther was in those moments, her spirit hovering between dimensions.

That day in 1997 was one of the many times I've felt I could simply stretch out my hand and touch the Veil. That if I did, faint capillary waves might ripple out, as if I'd tossed a small stone into a still pond. On this side, shadows and copies. On the other, a far green country I desperately want to see, but can't.

Have you ever felt that way? C.S. Lewis called this our great longing. Trapped in earthly tents, our souls pine "to meet with some response, to bridge some chasm that yawns between us and reality."

The only time I ever told anyone I feel so close to the Veil, it was by phone, and when I finished, I heard two too many beats of silence on the other end of the line. I filled the gap with embarrassed laughter and reassurances about the state of my mental health.

I'm not embarrassed anymore. Like an ice bath thrown in my face, Charlie Kirk's death reminded me there is no such thing as "this life" and "the next." It is, in fact, all *one life* with just that threshold—Tennyson's bar—where we shed our battered tents and acquire sudden, brilliant, vivid sight.

Of course, such sight will for many produce instant horror, and the realization that those annoying Christians were right all along. But for those on the narrow path, that sight will bring fireworks of unimaginable joy. We will see Christ, dazzling, like "the sun shining in full strength" (Revelation 1); people we recognize, with resurrection bodies, imperishable and glorious (Matthew 17; 1 Corinthians 15); and flowing from the throne of the Father and Son, "the river of the water of life, bright as crystal ... also, on either side of the river, the tree of life ... [its] leaves for the healing of the nations" (Revelation 22).

We evangelize meagerly, I think, when we promise an unbeliever they'll "go to heaven" in exchange for a profession of faith. It's like Michael Behe's conception of the living cell as "Darwin's black box." Darwin was wrong about the origins of life because he lacked the technology to see *inside the cell*. Similarly, *heaven* is a plain cardboard box of a word if the unbeliever can't see the glories inside. We must do better. We must tell them.

Aunt Esther already knew. I continued reading: "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more ... for the former things have passed away."

I looked up from the page and saw Esther's tears. She, who'd gone silent days before, was hearing God's Word! Though she'd had no water for nearly two weeks, droplets on her cheeks sparkled with joy!

A few minutes later, Aunt Esther crossed over to meet her Savior:

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar. ■

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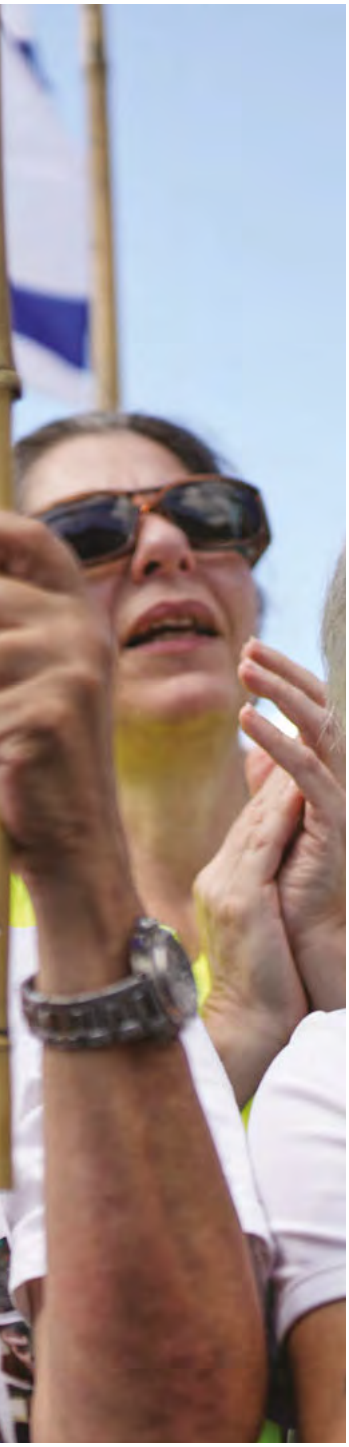

IN THE NEWS

Hope rising

With the hostages finally home, Israel looks forward to peace

by TRAVIS KIRCHER

Thousands of people packed Tel Aviv's Hostages Square—the plaza in front of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art—on a sun-filled Monday morning to witness one of the most significant days in their nation's history. As all Israel held its breath and the world watched, Hamas released the last of the hostages abducted on Oct. 7, 2023. Supporters gathered in Hostages Square watched the news of their release live on a giant screen. They cheered, chanted, sang, and wept as the first new images of the hostages appeared on the screen. Names like Rom Braslavski, Evyatar David, and Eitan Horn, hostages whose images had been plastered in shop windows, on the sides of taxis, and in bus stations all over Israel for the past two years.

For many in the square on Oct. 13, the release of the hostages meant that an emotional weight was finally lifted, a weight that had kept Israelis from moving forward and going about their daily lives.

"It's pure excitement, like finally a bit of hope after all the very harsh years," said Yonatan Had. "These two years were so full of grief. Everything was very dark all the time, and finally a bit of light and finally a bit of hope for the future. Just a big bright future right now."

People react as they watch a live broadcast of Israeli hostages being released from Gaza at Hostages Square in Tel Aviv.

Brad Myers, a young Australian immigrant to Israel, put the day's events in perspective.

"This is huge," he said. "I'm 26. I haven't been alive for all of Israel's history, but this is the biggest, biggest day in my lifetime for Israel, 100 percent."

The release of the hostages was just one step called for in the first phase of a 20-point road map for peace between Israel and Hamas championed by the Trump administration and backed by several Arab and Muslim nations. In exchange for the hostages, Israel agreed to free nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners and detainees, some of whom were also released on the same day. As part of that ceasefire plan, approved by Israel on Oct. 10, Gaza must demilitarize and Hamas must turn in its weapons. In response, Israel agreed to withdraw its military in Gaza to prespecified lines.

Shortly after the hostages were released, roughly 70 miles away in Jerusalem, U.S. President Donald Trump addressed the Knesset, Israel's parliament. In an upbeat, hourlong speech laced with humor and touting his own foreign policy, Trump promised a new era for the region.

"Generations from now, this will be remembered as the moment that everything began to change and change very much for the better," Trump said. "It will be the golden age of Israel and the golden age of the Middle East—it's going to work together." →

The president went on to assure Israelis that they had won over Hamas militarily and said they now needed to pursue peace and prosperity. The plan calls for an international body to govern Gaza, with Palestinian bureaucrats running day-to-day affairs. It also calls for an Arab-led international security force paired with Palestinian police. About 200 U.S. troops traveled to Israel to monitor the ceasefire.

But Israelis aren't the only ones who have suffered for the past two years. Palestinian Christians in the West Bank have also longed for the conflict in Gaza to end. Yousef AlKhouri is the academic dean of Bethlehem Bible College. He said he was born in Gaza and hails from a family that served in the priesthood of Gaza's Orthodox Church for 900 years. Some of his family still lives there, and he said they've suffered during the conflict, which he blames on Israel.

"Healing includes the other side too. I think that's the only way everyone's gonna get the closure that they need."

"What's happening is disastrous in many ways, not only for the Christian community in Gaza, which is about to vanish," he told me a couple weeks before the ceasefire was announced. "And it's not because of Islamic persecution, it's because of Israeli brutality."

He said many of the Christian community in Gaza were suffering from lack of food and water. He said he speaks to his parents as often as he can get a phone connection.

"This is the reality: no sleep almost all night—this is the situation of my mom today, never slept last night," he said in September. "The Israeli [military is] constantly bombarding their neighboring area, which is the Orthodox Church neighborhood."

He went on to claim that "there's no militants there, so [you] can see that it's only bombardment for the sake of destruction and brutalizing the local community."

Israel flatly denies intentionally targeting civilians and points to ongoing measures to avoid civilian casualties,

Palestinians return home to completely destroyed infrastructure in Gaza City.

ANAS ZEYAD FTEHA/ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES

including dropping leaflets and issuing evacuation orders before engaging in military action. But AlKhouri's voice breaks at the thought of his parents having to leave their home, which he said was built in the early fifth century.

"So leaving this behind is torture," he said. "My mom was telling me she prefers to die in their home rather than being displaced."

After two years of war, much of Gaza's infrastructure lies in ruins. Trump vowed to help rebuild and urged Palestinians to "turn forever from the path of terror and violence." During a summit in Egypt on the day of the hostage release, Middle Eastern and European leaders pledged to work together to help secure Gaza's future. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Qatari Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani signed a document with Trump that lays the groundwork for rebuilding, although they did not make details public.

Many in Hostages Square agreed that the release of the hostages signified a turning point for the Middle East and a chance to pursue a brighter future for Israel. But some Israelis appeared divided on how that future could be achieved—and whose responsibility it was to take action.

Some, like Tamarah Arounian, suggested that change should stem from building bridges and that Israelis have a responsibility to try to understand the position of Palestinian people like AlKhouri.

"I think healing includes the other side too," she said. "I think that's the only way everyone's gonna get the closure that they need."

But Jacob Basiri disagreed.

"We can't build too many bridges," he said. "That change has to come mostly from the other side. We're always happy to change. We're always reinventing ourselves. We take care of our children, our cousins, our neighborhoods, our state. The counter party ... needs to care for their kids more than they care about killing us." ■

ILLUSTRATION BY KRIEG BARRIE

BY THE NUMBERS

Dialed down

It's the end of an era for internet users

BY JOHN DAWSON

33.2 million

The number of subscriptions AOL—formerly America Online—boasted for its dial-up internet service at the company's height in 2001. From the hit movie *You've Got Mail* to the free trial discs cluttering many American homes, AOL's dial-up service was an emblem of the early internet age. But after 34 years, the company announced it would disconnect the service Sept. 30.

163,401

The number of American households with only dial-up internet access—accounting for just 0.13% of internet-connected households—according to a 2023 Census Bureau report.

56

The average download speed in kilobits per second that AOL's dial-up users achieved through telephone modems, a speed greatly surpassed by today's typical broadband connection, which moves data at a rate more than 3,800 times faster.

50%

The share of all CDs produced worldwide at one point in the '90s that were AOL free trial discs, according to former AOL marketing chief Jan Brandt.

WASHINGTON MEMO

Paul Dans makes a Senate bid

Can a MAGA stalwart make campaign headway without Trump's blessing?

by CAROLINA LUMETTA

Roughly 60 people attended an October silent auction hosted by the York County Reaganites in Tega Cay, S.C. They came to bid on a range of Trump-themed items, like whiskey kits and patriotic paintings. While few knew the Republican speaker headlining the event, all were familiar with his work: Project 2025. His next goal is "Project 2026": ousting 22-year incumbent Sen. Lindsey Graham.

From his home in Charleston, Paul Dans says he is running the only viable campaign against the longtime GOP senator. An October Quantus Insights poll found Graham has a strong lead, with some 58% of Republican primary voters supporting him or leaning his direction. In second place, Greenville businessman Mark Lynch had roughly 15% support, while Dans trails at a mere 7%. Still, around 20% of Republican voters are undecided about the 2026 midterms, according to Quantus. That leaves potential room for a strong rival in next June's Republican primary.

Dans hopes to claim that mantle. Designing Project 2025—a Heritage Foundation initiative offering policy recommendations for the second Trump administration—gave him name recognition. He is styling himself as the pro-Trump candidate, the man who can provide the president a consistent yes vote in Washington to drain the swamp.

The problem is that Trump already has a yes vote from South Carolina: Sen. Lindsey Graham.

"He is always there when I need him, and I hope everyone in the Great State of South Carolina will help Lindsey have a BIG WIN in his re-election bid next year," Trump posted on Truth Social in March. Dans is undeterred.

RICHARD ELLIS/ALAMY

"I think Donald Trump implicitly endorses me every day," Dans told the crowd in Tega Cay, reading from a list of Project 2025 recommendations that the Trump administration has implemented.

Born and raised in Baltimore, Md., Paul Dans has a bachelor's degree in economics and a master's in urban planning from MIT. He was president of the Federalist Society at the University of Virginia Law School, practiced law in New York City, and then moved to the nation's capital in 2019. He worked eight months as a senior adviser in the Department of Housing and Urban Development and then moved over to the Office of Personnel Management until Trump left office.

In 2021, Dans joined the Heritage Foundation, headquartered on Capitol Hill, while commuting from South Carolina, where he's lived since 2018, he says, and bought two homes by 2022.

The Dans campaign slogan is "God, family, country." An unmentioned fourth could be Trump. Dans supported Trump's political ambitions early on, stumped for him in swing states before Trump's first election, and has never left the bandwagon.

During the 2024 campaign, when Democrats denounced Project 2025 as a radical conservative plan for America, Trump publicly repudiated the policy blueprint, saying he had never read it. Shortly after, Dans stepped down from the Heritage project. Since then, the Trump White House has implemented around half of Project 2025's recommendations.

Dans told me he doesn't know if the president truly understands how much he's done to advance administration policy priorities. "He does love my work, though." Dans said. "Every day, a Project 2025 angel gets his wings."

Dans criticized current Republican senators as being less than fully committed to Trump's agenda. He lambasted the group for not working a full five-day week and failing to pass a majority of executive nominees despite Democratic blockades.

He specifically accused Graham of being swayed by self-interest. He pointed to Graham's 2015 opposition to Trump, his broken promise to serve no more than 12 years, and his super PAC campaign funding.

Asked whether he would commit to a term limit himself, Dans demurred but said he would not serve four terms: "Let's get one under the belt and make sure the good people of South Carolina want to send me back."

He also said he might accept super PAC funding but would not be obligated to special interests. Dans said his humility and faith would protect him from doing the bidding of his major donors or becoming another swamp creature. Dans grew up Catholic but now attends an Anglican church. He does not identify exclusively with either tradition but said he reads the Bible daily. He draws from the Ephesians 6 imagery of putting on the armor of God to guide his actions.

"I pray, and I have humility to have respect for the common man," Dans said. "I've been given certain gifts, and I'm always going to stand up and speak for people and speak my own mind."

Dans certainly speaks his mind about Graham. He calls him "bloodthirsty," "deranged," and "fixated on violence" when it comes to foreign policy. And Dans, a husband and father of four children, derides his opponent's lifelong bachelorhood, claiming he's "committing other people's children to endless war. ... He has no passion for actually addressing today's issues because he has no stake in tomorrow's future."

Finally, Dans frames the president's support of Graham as a political play, pointing out that the endorsement came only after Graham and other Senate Republicans passed the president's One Big Beautiful Bill Act, which is projected to add $3.4 trillion to the federal deficit in the next decade.

"They loaded it all up with their Democrat friends' pork," Dans said. "Sen. Graham extorted in the middle of it an endorsement from President Trump. That sort of quid pro quo, we can't take it anymore."

For his part, Graham has not responded to the rhetorical attacks from Dans. And he has little incentive to do so, given his solid lead in the polls and endorsements from Trump, the National Republican Senatorial Committee, and former HUD Secretary Ben Carson, Dans' former boss. Graham is a well-known defense hawk in the Senate, advocating for interventionist policies in war zones like Ukraine and Israel, and he chairs the budget committee.

However, when I reached out to Graham's office to get a reaction to Dans' claims, campaign press secretary Abby Zilch did respond to one of them.

"It's shocking that someone would suggest that President Trump's endorsement of Senator Graham is phony and corrupt," Zilch wrote. "Desperation surrounded by lies never plays well in South Carolina."

Back in Tega Cay, attendees listened to Dans' stump speech and occasionally chuckled at his phrases. But the biggest cheers of the night were for President Trump, whose name and actions Dans frequently invoked.

Trump was there, too, attracting selfie-takers. But the 47th president attended only in cardboard cutout form. ■

—with reporting in South Carolina from Tatton Strassheim

A mug with an image of Trump and Dans sits on Dans' desk

FRANCIS CHUNG/POLITICO VIA AP

Oscar-winning actress dies at 79

by JOHN DAWSON

Diane Keaton

A generational acting talent who landed scores of film and TV roles from 1970 onward, Keaton died Oct. 11. She was 79. Keaton broke through after landing the part of Kay Adams, wife of Michael Corleone, in The Godfather trilogy. Throughout the 1970s, Keaton forged a working relationship with comic filmmaker Woody Allen. She appeared in eight Allen movies, including the critically acclaimed *Annie Hall* for which she won an Academy Award. A powerful enough screen presence to not get lost behind strong leading men, she'd find success in softer comedies, starring alongside Steve Martin in *Father of the Bride* in 1991 and next to Jack Nicholson in the 2003 romantic comedy *Something's Gotta Give*.

Patricia Routledge

An English star of stage and screen who, for a portion of the 1990s, could have arguably laid claim to the title of funniest woman on television, Routledge died Oct. 3. She was 96. As a theater actress, she played with the Royal Shakespeare Company and on Broadway, winning a Tony Award for her performance in the 1968 musical *Darling of the Day*. But it was Routledge's portrayal of fussy social climber Hyacinth Bucket on British television's *Keeping Up Appearances* from 1990 until 1995 that won her widest popularity. Her bellowing voice and natural talent for physical hijinks won her a British Comedy Award in 1991. She would later star in the BBC crime drama *Hetty Wainthropp Investigates*.

Jane Goodall

A primatologist whose research unveiled the lives of great apes, Goodall died Oct. 1. She was 91. Goodall began living in close proximity to chimpanzees in 1960 after moving to Tanzania. Her 1963 report published by *National Geographic* detailed the heretofore unknown lives of great apes that included tribal conflict, cannibalistic behavior, and the use of tools. Through articles, books—including the 1971 title *In the Shadow of Man*—and documentary series, Goodall demystified chimpanzees and warned against the loss of the animals' natural habitats. She promoted conservation efforts through the Jane Goodall Institute and inspired young women to enter the previously male-dominated field.

Voddie Baucham

A pastor and seminarian who was at one time nominated to lead the Southern Baptist Convention, Baucham died Sept. 25. He was 56. Raised in a Buddhist home, Baucham converted to Christianity while a college football player at New Mexico State University. He earned numerous degrees including a doctorate from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and served as a conference speaker in the 1990s. He served as dean of theology at African Christian University in Zambia between 2015 and 2024 during which time he fielded an offer in 2022 to lead the Southern Baptist Convention—an offer he ultimately rejected. Baucham had recently moved back to the U.S. and was serving as the president of Founders Seminary in Florida.

Robert Redford

One of Hollywood's most recognizable leading men in the latter half of the 20th century, Redford died Sept. 16. He was 89. After years of smaller television and film roles, Redford broke out as a bona fide movie star opposite Paul Newman in the 1969 Western *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. Redford would again star with Newman in the 1973 caper film *The Sting*, which earned him his only Academy Award nomination as an actor. After playing journalist Bob Woodward in *All the President's Men*, Redford began directing films, including his 1980 Oscar-winning *Ordinary People*. He created the Sundance Film Festival and grew it into the nation's largest independent film festival.

KEATON: JB LACROIX/WIREIMAGE; ROUTLEDGE: ELEANOR BENTALL/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES; GOODALL: TOMMY MARTINO/AP; BAUCHAM: BAPTIST PRESS; REDFORD: ZZ/NDZ/STAR MAX/IPX/AP

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HUMAN RACE

Erika Kirk presses on

by ADDIE OFFEREINS

Erika Kirk is pressing ahead with her husband's mission more than a month after his assassination. Charlie Kirk, the 31-year-old co-founder of Turning Point USA, the conservative political action group present on more than 3,500 high school and college campuses, died Sept. 10 after being shot during one of his classic "Prove Me Wrong" debates at Utah Valley University. On Oct. 14, President Donald Trump awarded Kirk the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Erika Kirk thanked Trump for honoring her husband on what would have been his 32nd birthday: "Your support of our family and the work that Charlie devoted his life to will be something I cherish forever." Shortly after Kirk's death, TPUSA's board announced it had selected his widow to lead the rapidly growing organization. Within eight days after the shooting, the organization said it received more than 62,000 requests from high school and college students interested in starting a TPUSA chapter or getting involved with an existing chapter. Erika Kirk, 36, pledged to expand her husband's mission to change the hearts and minds of students across the country during a tearful speech two days after his death. She said she will continue Turning Point's campus tour, its annual AmericaFest conference, as well as Charlie's radio show and podcast.

MAKING HEADLINES

Independent journalist Bari Weiss is the new editor-in-chief of CBS News. CBS parent company Paramount also announced Oct. 6 the purchase of her online news site, The Free Press, saying the move is a response to the nation's longing for balanced, fact-based news. Weiss in 2021 co-founded what would become The Free Press after quitting *The New York Times*, where she accused colleagues of being intolerant of her centrist views. With 1.5 million subscribers, the wildly successful Free Press is now one of the nation's largest and fastest-growing media outlets. Weiss, a lesbian, grew up in a Jewish family in Pittsburgh. ***—Kim Henderson***

LEADERSHIP DISPUTE

On Oct. 2, London Bishop **Sarah Mullally**, 63, was tapped to become the 106th Archbishop of Canterbury—the first woman to fill the role.

Mullally's appointment prompted the Anglican Church of Nigeria to reject the Church of England's spiritual leadership. Due to disagreements about same-sex marriage, the conservative Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) renounced England's leadership in 2023. Nigerian Archbishop Henry Ndukuba said in a statement that Mullally's support for same-sex unions just reaffirmed GAFCON's position: "This election is a further confirmation that the global Anglican world could no

KIRK: ALEX BRANDON/AP; MULLALLY: BEN STANSALL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

longer accept the leadership of the Church of England and that of the Archbishop of Canterbury." Mullally's official installation is scheduled for March.
—Bekah McCallum

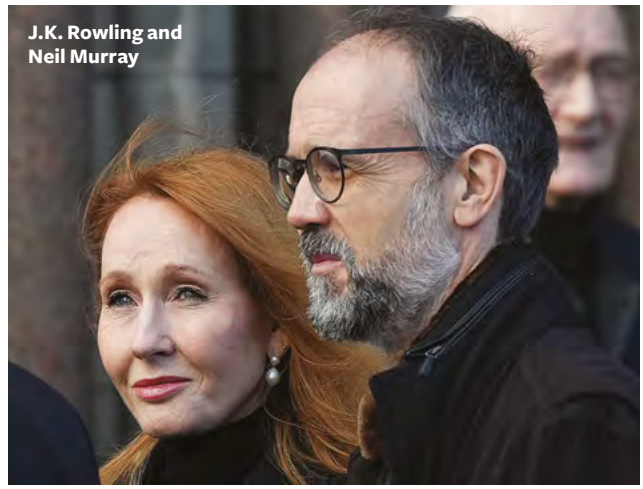
PASTOR CONVICTED

Former Texas megachurch Pastor Robert Morris was handcuffed and taken into custody after pleading guilty on Oct. 2 in Osage County, Okla., District Court to charges that he sexually abused a girl in the 1980s. Morris, 64, admitted to five felony counts of lewd or indecent acts with a child. Under a negotiated plea agreement, he accepted a 10-year suspended sentence, spending the first six months in the county jail. Morris must also register as a sex offender and pay $250,000 in restitution. In June 2024, Cindy Clemishire, 55, publicly accused Morris of sexually abusing her when she was 12. Days later, Morris resigned as senior pastor from Gateway Church in Southlake, Texas, after acknowledging a "moral failure" with a "young lady." In March, after the Oklahoma attorney general's office investigation, a multicounty grand jury indicted Morris for abusing Clemishire between 1982 and 1985. Prosecutors pursued the case by relying on a provision within state law that pauses the clock on the statute of limitations when a defendant moves out of state. *—Mary Jackson*


Robert Morris

LIFE SUPPORT

Acclaimed British author J.K. Rowling no longer supports assisted suicide and is speaking out against her country's effort to legalize it. She credited her physician husband, Dr. Neil Murray, with opening her eyes to the possibilities of coercion against vulnerable people. Rowling's announcement came as the U.K.'s House of Lords debated a landmark assisted suicide bill that passed the House of Commons in June. Rowling first expressed concerns about assisted suicide last year, but started actively highlighting the issue on social media this fall. Since 2020, Rowling has also faced severe backlash from her fan base after publicly challenging transgender ideology.
—Grace Snell


J.K. Rowling and Neil Murray

ROAD TO RECOVERY

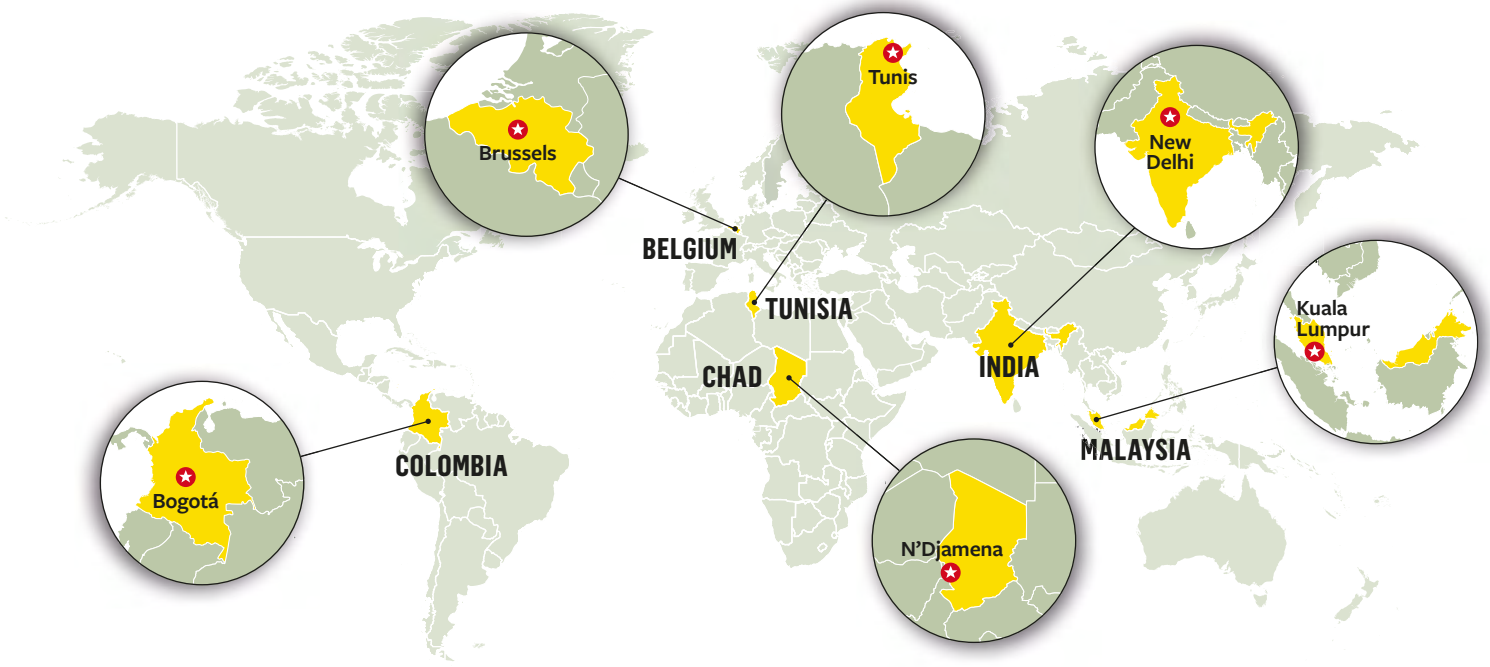
Canadian psychologist, author, and speaker **Jordan Peterson** is out of intensive care after spending nearly a month battling pneumonia and sepsis. His daughter, Mikhaila Peterson, shared the news in an Oct. 4 YouTube video. In her message, she praised God for her father's improving condition. Peterson also suffered from "a host of neurological issues" believed to have been caused by mold-induced chronic inflammatory response syndrome that apparently worsened after Jordan cleaned out his father's basement, his daughter said. "We don't have a better explanation for his neurological symptoms at the moment, other than spiritual attacks," Mikhaila Peterson added. Although her father's condition may no longer be critical, Mikhaila Peterson said it's difficult to predict a timeline for his recovery and asked for prayers.
—Bekah McCallum

UNDERSTUDY

Hollywood is up in arms after Dutch comedian Eline Van der Velden revealed her company is seeking a talent agent for its groundbreaking AI-generated "actress," Tilly Norwood. At September's Zurich Film Festival, Van der Velden said her creation has already captured the interest of multiple agents and is the first of many AI projects in the works. Film and TV stars such as Emily Blunt, Natasha Lyonne, and Whoopi Goldberg have blasted the project, and the powerful American actors guild SAG-AFTRA condemned the Tilly Norwood avatar as a character "trained on the work of countless professional performers—without permission or compensation." *—Grace Snell* ■

MORRIS: JUAN FIGUEROA/THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS VIA AP; ROWLING: ANDY BUCHANAN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; PETERSON: JORDAN PETTITT/ PRESS ASSOCIATION VIA AP

EU takes a stab at fake meat



Belgium The European Union parliament voted Oct. 8 to ban the word *meat* and similar terms like *burger* and *steak* from labels for plant-based meat substitutes. Céline Imart, a French member of parliament who represents agricultural interests, filed the proposal. She argues words like *meat* are misleading for consumers. Although it passed, the proposal faced criticism for being anti-environmental and a waste of time. "While the world is burning, the EPP [center-right political party] has nothing better to do this week than to involve us all in a debate about sausages and schnitzel," said German parliament member Anna Cavazzini. But German Chancellor Friedrich Merz supported the proposal: "A sausage is a sausage. Sausage is not vegan." The proposal won't become law unless other branches of the EU government give their approval. *—Evangeline Schmitt*

Colombia Joint operations between Colombia, the U.S., and the U.K. captured José Antonio Márquez Morales, the alleged leader of the Venezuelan armed wing of the transnational gang Tren de Aragua (TdA) in Valledupar, Colombia, on Oct. 2. Authorities say Caracas, as he's known, managed the finances and logistics for the group's drug trafficking, smuggling, and extortion operations. In February, President Donald Trump declared TdA a terrorist organization and deported more than 250 alleged gang members to a jail in El Salvador. Tension between the U.S. and Venezuela increased after Trump deployed warships to the Caribbean and offered a reward for President Nicolás Maduro's capture for colluding with cartels. The U.S. military has carried out multiple strikes on boats allegedly transporting drugs from Venezuela. *—Amy Lewis*

POPULATION
49.6 million

LANGUAGE
Spanish

RELIGION
64% Roman Catholic, 17% Protestant

GOVERNANCE
Presidential republic

GDP
$978.59 billion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Crude petroleum, coal, gold, coffee, refined petroleum

IMPOSSIBLE BURGERS: ANGELA WEISS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; FACT BOX SOURCE: THE WORLD FACTBOOK-CIA

Malaysia Seven members of the country's national soccer team are not actually Malaysian, the worldwide soccer governing body FIFA said Oct. 6. According to the Malaysian Constitution, people with Malaysian grandparents can become naturalized citizens and are eligible to play on national teams. Documents submitted by players born in Argentina, Spain, Holland, and Brazil stated Malaysian cities of birth, but were not original. Some were even dated January 2025. The players in question were essential to Malaysia's 4-0 win over Vietnam in a third-round Asian Cup Qualifier game Jun. 10. The Football Association of Malaysia said it will appeal FIFA's decision to suspend the players for one year and fine them and the team. Malaysia will play two upcoming Asian Cup matches with a much-reduced squad of players. *—Amy Lewis*

POPULATION
34.6 million

LANGUAGE
Bahasa Malaysia

RELIGION
64% Muslim, 19% Buddhist, 9% Christian, 6% Hindu

GOVERNANCE
Federal parliamentary constitutional monarchy

GDP
$1.21 trillion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Circuits, petroleum

Tunisia Just days after being sentenced to death for online posts that criticized the president, 51-year-old Saber Chouchane received a full pardon and was released Oct. 7. First imprisoned in January 2024, Chouchane received global support after his death sentence sparked outrage against Tunisian President **Kais Saied**. First elected in 2019 and reelected last year, Saied has quashed all opposition. In 2022, Saied enacted Decree Law 54 that criminalizes "false news." Chouchane's death sentence raised fears the country was sliding toward full authoritarian rule. While the president's critics celebrated Chouchane's pardon, many still fear Saied's crackdown on dissent highlights the ongoing threat to free speech in Tunisia. *—Elisa Palumbo*

Chad On Oct. 3, the parliament overwhelmingly approved a constitutional amendment abolishing presidential term limits, a move critics decry as a maneuver to entrench the rule of President **Mahamat Idriss Deby**. The 41-year-old president took over in 2021 after his father's death and won a disputed election in May 2024. Some opposition members in the Chadian Assembly boycotted the term limit vote. Leading opposition figure Albert Pahimi Padacké, a former prime minister and presidential candidate, said Chad was "choosing to abandon the democratic path." Remadji Hoinathy, a senior researcher at the Africa-focused Institute for Security Studies, said Chad's dissenting voices are disappearing. *—Olalekan Raji*

India Authorities arrested Sresan Pharmaceuticals owner Ranganathan Govindan on Oct. 9 after cough syrup made by his company allegedly caused the deaths of about 20 children. On Oct. 2, India's Health Ministry found that samples of the cough syrup contained diethylene glycol, an extremely toxic industrial solvent, in quantities 500 times the permitted amount. Indian officials told the World Health Organization none of the affected cough syrup was exported but warned that some might have left the country unofficially. In 2023, Indian cough syrup also killed 70 children in The Gambia and 18 in Uzbekistan. The country manufactures roughly 20% of all generic drugs worldwide. Critics renewed calls for an overhaul of India's drug oversight system, which they say has weak regulations. *—Jenny Lind Schmitt*

POPULATION
1.4 billion

LANGUAGE
Hindi, Bengali

RELIGION
80% Hindu, 14% Muslim, 2% Christian

GOVERNANCE
Federal parliamentary republic

GDP
$14.24 trillion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Petroleum, medicine

TUNISIA: TUNISIAN PRESIDENCY VIA AP; CHAD: MOUTA ALI/AP

U.S. BRIEFS

California fire recovery drags despite arrest

Federal officials charged a 29-year-old man with igniting California's deadly Palisades fire, one of the most destructive wildfires in the state's history. On Oct. 8, Jonathan Rinderknecht appeared in an Orlando, Fla., court near his home on charges including malicious destruction by fire. The Palisades fire, one of two blazes that broke out Jan. 7 in Los Angeles County, killed 12 people and destroyed thousands of homes. Authorities said Rinderknecht used a lighter to start a small blaze early Jan. 1 on a Pacific Palisades hiking trail. Firefighters believed the fire was out. But nearly a week later, severe winds reignited invisible smoldering embers. Among the evidence investigators collected were images Rinderknecht generated on ChatGPT of a burning city, according to Bill Essayli, acting U.S. Attorney for the Central District of California. California Gov. Gavin Newsom called the arrest "an important step" in determining the fire's cause. State and local officials have faced criticism for their fire responses, including the slow rebuilding pace. In Malibu, where 720 structures burned, only 69 have received approvals to rebuild. Just two have obtained building permits, according to the *L.A. Times*. *—Mary Jackson*

POPULATION
39.4 million

GOVERNOR
Gavin Newsom[D]

U.S. SENATORS
Alex Padilla[D], Adam Schiff[D]

INDUSTRY
Agriculture, film and TV, clean energy, manufacturing, aerospace and defense

Iowa A bridge connecting Lansing to Crawford County, Wis.—the only Mississippi River crossing for 60 miles—will close Oct. 20. Its replacement is set to open in 2027 and is under construction alongside the existing bridge. Project engineers determined the 94-year-old structure must be demolished for work to continue. Meanwhile, Iowa and Wisconsin will partner to offer a free car ferry until the new bridge is complete. The Lansing bridge, also known as the Black Hawk Bridge, was featured in a scene from the 1999 film *The Straight Story*, when Alvin Straight is depicted crossing the Mississippi River near the end of his 240-mile journey. According to the American Society of Civil Engineers, a third of the nation's bridge inventory, some 221,791 spans, needs repair work or replacement. *—Kim Henderson*

Kansas State officials are cracking down on smoke and vape shops selling marijuana and other products containing the plant's psychoactive ingredient, THC. Though many surrounding states have legalized recreational and medicinal marijuana, the drug is still illegal in Kansas. But state Attorney General Kris Kobach said local police have only intermittently enforced the state's ban and in some jurisdictions have not enforced state law at all. As of Oct. 1, the Kansas Bureau of Investigation had conducted raids against 10 shops in six cities. KBI Director Tony Mattivi noted it is too easy for minors to access marijuana and other THC-laced products. He hopes the crackdown will prevent young people from suffering the negative effects of consuming high concentrations of THC. *—Addie Offereins*

ALLEN J. SCHABEN/LOS ANGELES TIMES VIA GETTY IMAGES

[D]Democrat | [R]Republican

Washington Spokane Mayor Lisa Brown sent a new proposal to ban unauthorized public camping to the city council Oct. 8. Residents and businesses pushed for a citywide ban on homeless encampments early this year. But the majority liberal city council passed a watered-down version of the hoped-for measure with a controversial, late-night vote on June 16. The current ordinance directs police to offer voluntary services instead of issuing citations and requires officers to provide a three-day warning before arresting those violating the ban. It also prevents officers from collecting data to keep track of whom they have contacted. Police Chief Kevin Hall said the stipulations made the ban practically unenforceable and provided no incentive to chronically homeless drug users to leave the streets. The revised version of the law would give officers greater discretion to arrest those who repeatedly refuse services. Hall said his department has reserved 10 beds in the downtown jail for those with criminal charges who need time to become stabilized before working with a case manager and making decisions about their own care. The city council still needs to approve the suggested revisions. *—Addie Offereins*

Georgia Thanks to a state Supreme Court ruling handed down Sept. 30, residents of a historic district of Sapelo Island may now have a say in allowing large developments in the area. In 2023, county commissioners passed an ordinance increasing the maximum size of homes in Hog Hammock. The community is home to roughly 50 descendants of former slaves, a people group known as the Gullah Geechee. Concerned that larger homes could drive up property taxes, Hog Hammock locals launched a petition to put the zoning change to a vote. They garnered around 2,300 signatures from other Sapelo Island residents. A special election was scheduled so voters could decide on holding a referendum, but McIntosh County commissioners sued to prevent the vote. A lower court ruled in their favor. But state Supreme Court Justice John Ellington declared that, according to Georgia's Constitution, the zoning ordinance could be put to a vote. The referendum has not yet been rescheduled. *—Bekah McCallum*

POPULATION
11.1 million

GOVERNOR
Brian Kemp[R]

U.S. SENATORS
Jon Ossoff[D], Raphael Warnock[D]

INDUSTRY
Automotive, agriculture, energy, film

St. Luke Baptist Church in Hog Hammock

North Dakota The state-owned Bank of North Dakota announced Oct. 8 it is developing a stable digital token dubbed the Roughrider coin. The state hopes its announcement will spur financial institutions to adopt stablecoin technology that promises citizens, businesses, and institutions more accessible, instant, and secure transactions with reduced fees. Stablecoins can be used to purchase goods and services or transfer money between financial institutions. They are less volatile than cryptocurrencies, such as bitcoin, that are speculative in nature with their values determined by investors. Stablecoins are backed by U.S. dollars, government-issued Treasuries, or other assets like gold and transferred via digital ledgers through traditional financial institutions. Congress passed the GENIUS Act in July that created federal digital payment regulations for entities, including states. Wyoming was the first U.S. public entity to offer a stablecoin Aug. 19 after initially passing legislation in 2023 authorizing what it calls the Frontier Stable Token.
—Todd Vician

SPOKANE: JEFF T. GREEN/AP; HOG HAMMOCK: DAVID GOLDMAN/AP

Mussolini (left) and Hitler in 1937

BACKGROUNDER

What is fascism?

by EMMA FREIRE

The assassin who killed Charlie Kirk allegedly inscribed messages including "Hey fascist! Catch!" on his bullet casings. To call someone a fascist is one of the most powerful pejoratives in our political lexicon. It conjures up images of the unspeakable evil of Adolf Hitler and the Holocaust. Today, the term is applied frequently but often inaccurately.

The battle against perceived fascism in America has itself led to great evil. On Sept. 22, President Donald Trump designated the left-wing violent group Antifa—short for anti-fascists—as a domestic terrorist organization.

What does the term *fascism* mean? That depends on who you ask, according to Glenn Duerr, chair of the department of history and government at Cedarville University. "The textbook definition would be that it's a far right, authoritarian movement or political system that pervades a country," Duerr says. "It's dictatorial. It's based around militarism in general. It's hyper-national in that there's often an attempt to take over other countries."

What were some famous fascist regimes? Benito Mussolini of Italy first popularized the term *fascist* around 1919. He named his political movement after the Latin word *fasces*, a symbol of authority in ancient Rome. The most famous fascist in history is Hitler, though the name of his Nazi Party means "national socialist." Other regimes considered fascist include Greece under Ioannis Metaxas in the late 1930s and Spain under Francisco Franco between 1936 and 1975.

What's the difference between communism and fascism? Communism and fascism can look similar in that they are both authoritarian and suppress key freedoms such as speech and the press. Duerr says the key difference comes down to the central question of the regime: "For communism, every question comes down to class and economics. For fascism, every question comes down to race and ethnicity." Under communism, the means of production are controlled solely by the state. Under fascism, the means of production can be co-opted by the state, but a free market still exists theoretically.

Why is *fascist* used so widely as a pejorative in America today? Poor education is to blame, according to David Azerrad, of Hillsdale College's Van Andel Graduate School of Government. "The average college grad knows very little history, but one thing everyone knows is that Hitler was bad," Azerrad says. "Evil is defined as anyone who's like Hitler." This association with evil is a powerful weapon against political opponents. A poll in October 2024 found that 87% of Democrats believe Trump is a fascist. But Azerrad warns the label will lose its impact if used too often: "If everybody is a fascist, then nobody is a fascist."

How far back do accusations of fascism go in America? In 1944, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt warned America would yield "to the spirit of fascism" if it returned to the economic policies of the 1920s before the New Deal. Since then, most right-wing political leaders, both elected and unelected, have faced accusations of fascism. Critics called President George W. Bush a fascist, though that had no basis in fact, according to Azerrad. Bush "was obsessed with curing AIDS in Africa and ensuring that every kid in America would succeed in school," he noted. ■

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“I’m not dying!”

DOLLY PARTON responding in a video message Oct. 8 to rumors about her health after her sister asked for prayers for the country music icon.

AMY HARRIS/INVISION/AP

“It is normal for a few air traffic controllers to call in sick on any given day.”

A statement issued Oct. 6 by the air traffic controllers’ union explaining the uptick in sick days as members are required to work without pay during the government shutdown.*

“You’re not making art.”

ZELDA WILLIAMS, daughter of late comic Robin Williams, pleading on Instagram for people to stop making AI renderings of her father who died in 2014.

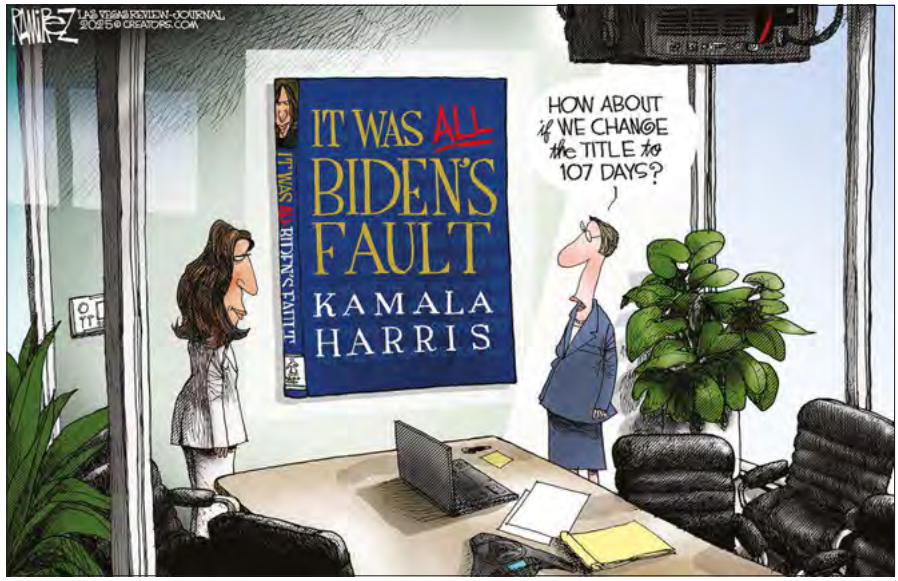
“[He] was living his best life and was off the grid on a preplanned hiking trip.”

A statement from Sonoma Biotherapeutics about the whereabouts of its researcher Fred Ramsdell after the Nobel Prize committee could not reach him to tell him he won the prestigious award.*

“I’m sorry for stealing Claire. Please do not press charges!”

An anonymous apology note attached to a 50-pound fiberglass dinosaur returned to a Los Angeles gas station Oct. 6 after being stolen.**

**The New York Times*; ***NBCLA*



QUICK TAKES

Target acquired

Scientists weigh *Armageddon*-like options to avoid potential asteroid collision

by JOHN DAWSON

Hit it with a rocket or blow it up with a nuke. Those are the options presented by a group of concerned scientists in a September report about a looming asteroid threat. The authors say asteroid 2024 YR4 could be as large as 220 feet across—roughly equivalent to the wingspan of a 747. Scientists project the object will come closest to Earth in 2032. Skywatchers first started paying attention to the object in 2024, initially calculating its chance of hitting Earth at about 3%. Subsequent calculations have led scientists to believe the space rock won't hit our planet. However, they gave it about a 4% chance of striking the moon, creating a debris field that could endanger spacecraft and Earth-orbiting satellites. The authors, including NASA and university scientists, say there may be only two ways to deal with an asteroid that size. One option would be to launch a projectile big enough to break it into smaller chunks. The scientists' other option conjures up the plot of the 1998 blockbuster *Armageddon*, with authors suggesting that a 1-megaton nuclear warhead detonated near the asteroid should be enough to take care of the problem.

No one to pin it on

Police conducting a traffic stop in Northern California during the early morning hours of Sept. 27 found something missing when they approached the white sedan: a driver. San Bruno police officers stopped the Waymo self-driving taxi when the vehicle made an illegal U-turn. "Since there was no human driver, a ticket couldn't be issued," a San Bruno police official wrote on social media. "Our citation books don't have a box for 'robot.'" Police said they contacted the company to fix the glitch.

Costly cover-up

Socks draped over the license plate may have fooled the toll cameras, but a Jersey City, N.J., scofflaw found himself behind bars in September after Port Authority police officers caught him driving with deliberately obscured plates. Police arrested the 51-year-old driver of the white Mercedes-Benz when they spotted socks stretched across his license plate as he drove through the Holland Tunnel that connects Manhattan to New Jersey. Eventually Port Authority officials determined the man owed more than $18,000 in unpaid tolls. He was charged with theft of service and improperly displaying his license plate.

ILLUSTRATION BY KRIEG BARRIE; SOCKS: PAPD

Balloon brigade stunt

Civil authorities in Lithuania shut down a major airport Oct. 4 when radar networks began picking up strange objects in its airspace. Officials quickly discovered it was not a repeat of a July incident when a Russian attack drone entered Lithuania from nearby Belarus. Instead, the objects were balloons rigged by smugglers to transport contraband cigarettes across the border. Authorities said they recovered 11 balloons and about 18,000 packs of cigarettes before allowing the airport to reopen the next day. So far this year, Lithuanian officials have identified 544 smuggling balloons crossing the border.

Due for a good scrub

At long last, residents of a remote Canadian town can wash their cars again. Responding to alarmingly low water levels in a local reservoir, city councilors in Iqaluit, Nunavut, voted to enact strict water rationing rules in 2018 that included a ban on washing cars. Seven years later, with water levels replenished, city officials voted to remove the ban Sept. 23. "Honestly it is just the talk of the town this morning," Iqaluit resident Anne Crawford told the CBC. "Everyone is talking about 'I can wash my car!' It's wonderful." But the 7,740 residents of the Nunavut provincial capital may want to hurry: October typically marks the beginning of eight straight months of freezing temperatures for the town located south of the Arctic Circle.

Deceptively stinky

Complaints about a strong gas smell spurred a utility worker to go looking for a gas leak Sept. 16 in Lytham St Annes, a town north of Liverpool, U.K. When the utility worker's nose directed him toward a fruit shop, the owner suspected the odor might be emanating from a durian fruit. The foot-long spiky tree fruit has a reputation in its native Southeast Asia for a smell so pungent it's been banned on some public transportation. "He didn't believe me at first," the shop owner told *The Straits Times*. "It was only when I took him outside and gave one to him that he realized." The shop's owner told the paper he knew the smell was bad, but "didn't think it would bring the gas board out."

"Our citation books don't have a box for 'robot.'"

Next time, call a taxi

The mobility carts at grocery stores are there for the convenience of disabled customers—not for getting around town. That was the opinion of Publix grocery store employees in Punta Gorda, Fla., who phoned police after a customer slowly pulled away from the grocery store in a $2,500 powered cart Sept. 29. Police apprehended the 42-year-old female suspect a mile away at a gas station. According to police, the suspect said she was merely borrowing the cart to go to a doctor's appointment down the street and planned to return the expensive machinery later. Charlotte County Sheriff's deputies charged the woman with grand theft.

LITHUANIA: STATE BORDER GUARD SERVICE VIA AP; DURIAN: MIROSLAW CIOLEK/GETTY IMAGES; CAR WASH: TOMASZ MAJCHROWICZ/GETTY IMAGES; ILLUSTRATION BY KRIEG BARRIE

THE FORUM

Laughter, tears, and consolation

Novelist Jan Karon on small-town living, praying over commas, and the power of literary medicine

by BEKAH McCALLUM

Jan Karon, 88, is author of the bestselling Mitford novels, a series highlighting the life of Father Tim Kavanagh, a fictional Episcopal rector in a small North Carolina town. Her 15th Mitford book, *My Beloved*, came out in October. We met at the Hub Station in Hudson, N.C., a building that formerly housed Karon's childhood school. It now has a wing dedicated to the Mitford Museum and recently broke ground for the Mitford Discovery Center, a learning space with educational programming for children and seniors. Here are excerpts of our interview, edited for brevity and clarity.

YOU DIDN'T PUBLISH YOUR FIRST BOOK UNTIL YOU WERE IN YOUR 50S, BUT NOW HAVE WRITTEN 27 AND FOUNDED A MUSEUM. HOW DID YOU GET HERE?

Just by hook or crook, by stumbling around trying to figure it out for many years, before I asked God to show me how to stumble around better. I was in advertising for a number of years. Advertising really was a wonderful training ground for fiction in that it taught me to use white space, not to put too much of a jumble before the reader. But I knew that I could not remain in advertising forever, because I had more to say. I came to know Jesus as my Lord and Savior at the age of 42. Several years later, I moved to Blowing Rock, N.C., where, after a series of poor starts, I began writing the Mitford series.

WHERE DID YOU GET INSPIRATION FOR MITFORD?

From my life. I've been in places where people really cared about each other, and where people actually knew each other. Mitford is not Blowing Rock. It is most certainly not Hudson. Mitford is a mashup of all my experiences in small-town living.

YOU DIDN'T HAVE IMMEDIATE SUCCESS AS A NOVELIST, THOUGH?

When I submitted my first manuscript, I didn't have an agent. I received 11 rejections, but I did not feel rejected. I went around to bookstores, and I left them a copy. I was on the third novel

JEN FARIELLO

before I actually had an agent. I eventually sold the books to Penguin. The market was completely devoid of anything like Mitford, which are Christian-themed novels, because my lead character is a priest. If you have a priest, you're talking about the church business, the God business.

DID YOU ALWAYS PLAN TO WRITE A SERIES?

I never dreamed I would write such a lengthy series. I didn't intend to write the 15th installment. I was trying to write a different book, and the Holy Spirit wouldn't let me do it. So I came across a short story that I'd written in 2008 or thereabouts. I just started actually doing something with it. And it took me by surprise, and I experienced some real joy in re-finding Mitford.

YOU PREFER TO CALL YOURSELF NOT A CHRISTIAN FICTION WRITER BUT A FICTION WRITER WHO IS A CHRISTIAN. WHY THAT DISTINCTION?

My work is essentially for a secular audience. Of course, it's supported strongly by a Christian reading audience, but I'm out there for the person in the pew who's still looking and who, like myself, was lost. In the Gospel of Mark, there are three verses devoted to this. Jesus was seen sitting down with "sinners and publicans." I don't even, by the way, know what a publican is. I'm just looking for the people who need that consolation. That's the medication that a lot of people need today. It's the medication that helped bring me into my faith.

DO READERS WRITE TO YOU ASKING WHERE THEY CAN FIND MITFORD?

All the time. But of course, it's not a real place. People say, "Oh, I wish I could live in Mitford." Well, I'm telling you, people, you do live in Mitford. If you'll just wake up and see it, it's everywhere. It's in your next-door neighbor who would appreciate a pie when she's sick. It's in the grocery store. The real Mitford is in the human heart.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL DAY OF WRITING LOOK LIKE FOR YOU?

Well, I don't have any schedule at all. I write when I can and sometimes when I can't. If you put your fanny in the chair, something will happen. Sit there until it happens. And then, of course, there's prayer. Without prayer, no schedule or lack of it means anything. I pray about a paragraph, sometimes, or a comma—honestly, yes, I've prayed about a comma. God is my navigator, my true editor, and so I keep in touch.

"I'm writing for everybody. I'm not trying to draw a line between Christians and non-Christians, or finders and seekers."

DO YOU GET WRITER'S BLOCK?

No, never, ever. I've always got something to say. But I've had writer's exhaustion. I took a break this year by taking a monthlong trip to Italy.

WHEN YOU START WRITING, DO YOU HAVE THE PLOT WORKED OUT BEFOREHAND?

Very seldom. I like to be surprised because, as someone said, "No surprise in the author, no surprise in the reader." And you can carry that further: No laughter in the author, no tears in the author, none in the reader.

DO YOUR NOVELS REQUIRE MUCH RESEARCH?

Yes, and I love research. In one of my books, Father Tim goes deep-sea fishing and becomes violently seasick. I had to research that, because it's not just that you get on a boat and you get seasick. When you've done your research, you can control your writing. You can control the movement of the characters. I get a letter or two with most every book. One time I put a constellation in the wrong part of the sky, and I got a letter from a scientist who knows this stuff.

YOU ALSO HEAR FROM READERS SAYING YOUR BOOKS SAVED THEIR MARRIAGE, OR HELPED THEM ENDURE A LOSS. WERE YOU EXPECTING THAT?

I don't know how to do the things that people give the books credit for. So one must assume these are God's books. Lots of cancer survivors have been fed and consoled by these books. I think consolation is one of the things I want to give my reader. Actually, if I had to fly a banner over all of my work, the banner would say, "God *really* does love us."

WHICH WRITERS HAVE INFLUENCED YOU THE MOST?

Steinbeck has had a great influence on me. I love Billy Collins, the poet. Flannery O'Connor scares my pants off. She's always burning down the woods, shooting somebody in a ditch. But at the same time, she's also a great writer, and she handles Southern dialect better than any of the so-called masters. Much better than Faulkner, way better than Twain. And my most recent favorite is Ernest Gaines. I have such a crush on his work.

YOU SAY YOU'D LIKE TO SEE MORE CHRISTIAN FICTION AUTHORS WRITING LIKE C.S. LEWIS?

Yes—Lewis was not writing for Christians; he was writing for everybody. I'm writing for everybody. I'm not trying to draw a line between Christians and non-Christians, or finders and seekers. I value my readers, any color, any faith. I value their humanity. We're all in this huge stew pot together. I'm just trying to do my job, which is small by comparison, just to be in the boat with everybody else. ■

VOICES JANIE B. CHEANEY

What do women really want?

The one thing that makes every other good thing possible

If you remember anything of high school English, you may recall the Wife of Bath from *Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer pictures her as a hearty soul who's outlasted five husbands and knows a thing or two. The story with which she regales her fellow pilgrims concerns a knight of the Round Table who rapes a young maiden and is sentenced to death. But Queen Guinevere intervenes with an alternate sentence. If, within a year, he can discover an answer to man's most urgent question, he wins a pardon. The question: What do women want?

The knight's search yields only contradictions until he encounters an ugly old hag who promises the true answer on the condition that he marry her. It beats the alternative, so he reluctantly agrees. The answer: "Wommen desiren to have sovereynetee" (sovereignty, especially over men).

In this desire, women were no different from men, but more biologically constrained. That's why "the pill" in 1960 and legalized abortion in 1973 were seen as liberation from the shackles of motherhood. You want babies? Fine; you know how to get them. But if a baby doesn't fit into your current plans, here's a prescription. And if that fails, here's an address. Children are an option for whenever you're ready.

But is anyone truly "ready"? Children are always a surprise, even when expected. They're unruly and obstreperous. They don't act according to plan. To an aunt or cousin viewing them from the outside, they're a lot of trouble. What's more, the means to acquire them—namely, a man, or even worse, a husband—may be even less amenable to the plans of an upwardly mobile young female.

So it's no surprise that on an NBC News survey of almost 3,000 participants from Generation Z (ages 18-29), women place marriage and motherhood low on the scale of what constitutes success. No surprise, that is, for Democrat-leaning voters, who ranked "Being married" and "Having children" as No. 11 and No. 12 on a list of 13 priorities. Of more concern to conservatives, women who voted for Donald Trump weren't far behind. Marriage was No. 9 for them and children came sixth, after material concerns like financial independence (No. 1), a fulfilling career (No. 2), home ownership (No. 3), and "Having enough money to do the things you want to do" (No. 5, after "Being spiritually grounded").

While men and women on the left tracked roughly the same in their ambitions, the gap between male and female Trump voters was startling. On the right, men ranked "Having children" first, and "Being married" fourth. Priorities need a little adjustment there, but their hearts seem to be in the right place, possibly due to influencers like Jordan Peterson and Charlie Kirk. Female models may be more on the order of Karoline Leavitt, who appears to balance marriage and motherhood with a high-profile administration job, all while looking fabulous.

Does the long shadow of 1970s Women's Lib, which touted almost any job as superior to housewifery, stretch this far? More to the point, where does love fit into the current view of life satisfaction? Is it a by-product to be picked up on the way to success, or a prize awarded once personal goals are achieved? Or is love the meaning of life in a world created by Love Himself?

Women's liberation never admitted that raising children in a loving relationship, who then go on to form loving relationships of their own, may actually *be* a fulfilling career. We used to call it "homemaking"; societies throughout history call it "stability." Survey after survey indicates that marriage and motherhood are the greatest markers of satisfaction for women, but the siren call of financial independence—"sovereignty," in medieval terms—speaks louder.

In "The Wife of Bath's Tale," the knight drags himself to the altar, and on their wedding night his ugly bride exercises sovereignty by offering him a choice. He can value her as a woman of worth and nobility bestowed by God, or she can transform herself into a lovely maiden of questionable virtue. Sighing, he sees the wisdom in the first option, and thereby receives his reward. With his kiss, she becomes beautiful.

Also chaste, amiable, and obedient, for according to the worldly wise Wife, a compliant woman gets her way more often than the other kind. But beyond that, she gets love, which is all any of us really want. ■

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

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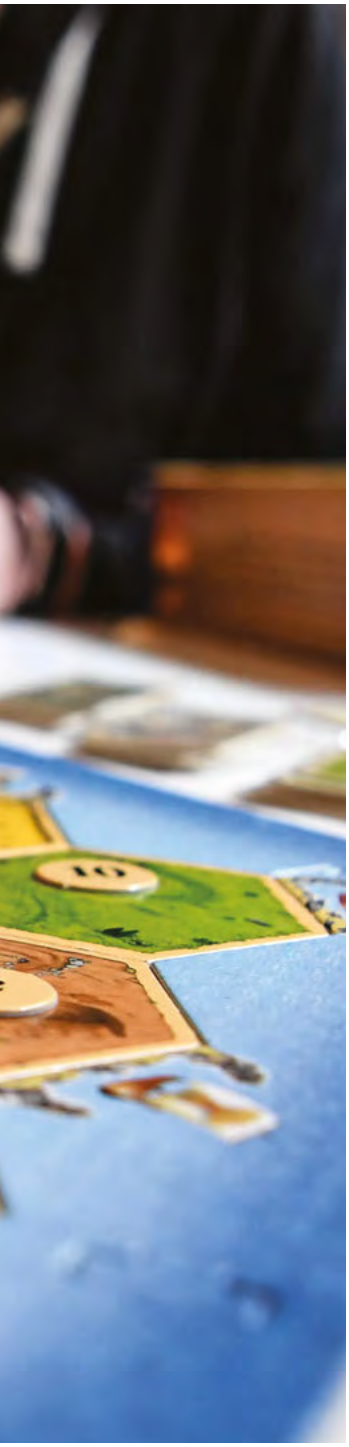


TRENDING

Your turn

Board games surge as families and friends look for screen-free ways to connect

by CALEB BAILEY

Will Meadows brandishes an unopened, newly released card game called FlipToons and begins explaining the rules. His wife, Sara, sits next to him on their living room couch and next to her, their friend Ryan. But Meadows, 43, isn't talking to either of them. Instead, he's addressing a camera live-streaming the gameplay to a handful of viewers online.

Those viewers come to Meadows' platform, Tantrum House, for trustworthy reviews of new hobby games, a market that has exploded in the past 10 years. The pandemic lockdowns gave the industry its first big boost. Now phone-weary consumers are searching for face-to-face interaction, and hobby games are meeting that need in cost-effective ways.

Hobby, or tabletop, games include board games like Monopoly as well as trading card games like Pokemon and role-playing games like Dungeons & Dragons. According to market research firm IMARC Group, the global board game market is worth $18.53 billion and is expected to jump another $5.17 billion over the next four years.

Unlike many other forms of entertainment, the tabletop game industry thrived during the pandemic as people were confined to their homes with family and close friends.

"A lot of people went to the internet to find out what games they should buy and have sent to their family so that they could entertain everybody," Meadows said.

Meadows, his wife, and three other couples loved playing games long before that. Together they launched Tantrum House in 2014 with the initial goal of publishing their own games.

"It turned out to be a ton of work trying to fulfill international orders with custom boxes and child safety testing and all the things that go with international fulfillment," Meadows said.

Instead, the Tantrum House team began to review games. With a newfound audience in 2020, Tantrum House became a trusted source.

"We had publishers sending us games," Meadows said. "It was like Christmas. Every other day, two or three games would show up in the mail."

Long before the cameras rolled, this group of four couples gathered regularly to play. Date nights out had become unaffordable, with the cost of dinner, a movie, and babysitting fees. A new board game cost a fraction of that. So once the kids were in bed and the "tantrums were settled down," the games could begin. Hence the name Tantrum House. →

Settlers of Catan

The team quickly learned there is much more to the tabletop game world than Monopoly, which Meadows calls mostly a game of luck.

New games require skill and come with unexpected benefits. For example, Meadows has noticed his memory has improved, something he attributes to regularly learning new rules. Studies show playing board games can slow down cognitive decline and maybe even prevent dementia. Meadows' teenage sons also developed new skills—good and bad.

"My kids love social deduction games, which typically involve having secret information and having to keep it a secret," he said. "And so they're really, really good liars. "

The idea of exercising skill isn't new to the tabletop game world. Chess, for example, is known for its challenging strategy. But Meadows notes new games are immersive and beautiful.

Jamey Stegmaier, co-founder of Stonemaier Games, made his mark on the industry with Wingspan, published in 2019. It features lavish, realistic bird illustrations by career artists.

"I think it's nice to have an excuse to turn off the screens for a while, whether you're playing games with other people or solo," Stegmaier wrote in 2019.

Although Tantrum House didn't find success publishing new games, other amateur creators have, thanks in part to the crowdfunding platform Kickstarter. In 2024, supporters pledged $220 million to successful tabletop game campaigns on the site.

That's one place John Emery goes to stock his store's shelves. Emery is the founder and co-owner of Boardwalk in Greenville, S.C. When he opened the store 41 years ago, board games were considered a children's activity.

"Now it is social and thinky," he said.

Emery attributes the robust tabletop game industry to the success of a few pioneers. The first edition of Trivial Pursuit in 1981 was one. Melody Loder, who co-owns Boardwalk and is a few decades younger than Emery, points to the German-made Settlers of Catan as a big boost for the industry.

A stack of new games sent to Tantrum House

10 MOST POPULAR MODERN BOARD GAMES

1. Settlers of Catan
2. Pandemic
3. Carcassonne
4. 7 Wonders Duel
5. Codenames
6. 7 Wonders
7. Azul
8. Wingspan
9. Terraforming Mars
10. Ticket to Ride

Source: BoardGameGeek.com

And many of those older games are rebranding with new editions to appeal to modern audiences with an appetite for visuals and a shorter attention span.

Emery and Loder also stock their shelves with new games they discover at North America's annual board game convention, Gen Con, held in Indianapolis over the summer. The Tantrum House team also attended the event, along with a sold-out crowd of 72,000 and more than 575 exhibitors.

Will Meadows says he's noticed the demographics change at these conventions over the past 15 years to include men and women of all ages. It just goes to show that today there's a board game for everyone.

"Once you get into the hobby, part of the fun is finding the perfect game for a friend of yours," he said. ■

PHOTO BY CALEB BAILEY

JEFFREY PHELPS/AP

BOOKS

An attack on Charlie Kirk

Proof that to some, the gospel is hate speech

by JOHN MAC GHLIONN

Matthew Boedy's *The Seven Mountains Mandate* (Westminster John Knox Press, 226 pp.) is less a critique than a declaration of war—against Christian influence, the nuclear family, and the very idea that God belongs in the public square. Behind its alarmist prose is a simple premise: that American Christians, especially evangelicals, are conspiring to seize control of seven facets of cultural life: education, government, media, family, business, religion, and entertainment. Boedy considers Christians a danger to the republic and a threat to democracy. He wants readers to brace for a coup every time someone says grace in public.

The Seven Mountains Mandate
MATTHEW BOEDY

The target of Boedy's ire is the abovementioned mandate, a theological and cultural framework embraced by some evangelicals. Its core idea is not new: If Christians want to shape culture, they can't retreat from it. It calls for cultural reengagement with purpose, preparation, and presence.

Boedy, a professor at the University of North Georgia, sees tyranny in this. To him, belief in objective truth, Biblical morality, and spiritual authority is a threat. And his chosen villain is the recently assassinated Charlie Kirk, founder of Turning Point USA. Boedy has long painted Kirk as a menace, a fixation only sharpened when his own name appeared on Turning Point's professor watch list. The fact that the book is coming out right after the death of Boedy's central foil adds a darker, unintended weight. What was once a polemic now reads as a kind of grave-dancing, an attack on a man who cannot defend himself and, by extension, on the millions who followed him.

Boedy's obsession with Kirk borders on pathological—Kirk isn't just a character in the story, he's the shadow behind every curtain, the man Boedy blames for everything from school board elections to the erosion of secular order. Boedy accuses Kirk of exploiting fear, manipulating youth, and presenting dominionism as patriotism. But what's more revealing than what Boedy says is what he omits: For millions of Americans—especially parents, pastors, and teachers—this vision is not about domination; it's about protection. They're not seeking power for its own sake. They're trying to protect children, families, and churches from a culture that has lost its moral anchor.

That is Boedy's blind spot. He treats Biblical conviction as extremism. When Christians assert the value of life, the sanctity of marriage, or the need for clarity in schools, Boedy hears fascism. He lumps together prayer groups and political rallies, religious hope and militant nationalism, and blurs every

Boedy's entire thesis rests on the dangerous assumption that faith in the public sphere is inherently oppressive.

line between thoughtful civic engagement and theocracy. He never allows for the possibility that ordinary believers might act not out of hunger for dominance, but from fear that silence means surrender. Dismissing this isn't analysis; it's contempt dressed up as scholarship. His entire thesis rests on the dangerous assumption that faith in the public sphere is inherently oppressive.

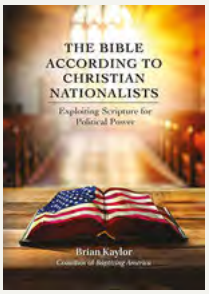
Boedy is not stupid. He's articulate, and he's done his research. He even insists on his own Christian identity, which makes the venom in this book more jarring. Published by a Christian press, it reads like an insider's denunciation, a work designed to give secular critics the credibility of a "Christian witness." But the witness here is hostile. It is less confession than prosecution, less honest wrestling with the faith than a betrayal of it. There is no nuance, no charity, no admission that Christians might be responding to cultural collapse, not causing it. There's no recognition that public schools are failing, that the family unit is disintegrating, that a godless elite now occupies most cultural mountains.

Boedy's smug and sanctimonious tone presents his enemies as not just wrong but evil. That makes for poor analysis and even poorer understanding. He never asks what, beyond lust for power, might motivate the Christians he critiques. In doing so, he exposes the emptiness of his own argument. If Christians are truly so dangerous, why reduce them to caricatures instead of confronting their ideas with seriousness? Boedy claims to offer objective analysis. In reality, what he delivers is projection layered with contempt. He despises everything Christianity represents, and that disdain drips from every word. The cross, to him, is a red flag.

The strength of the book—if we can call it that—is in its archival work. Boedy tracks the movement's development from the 1970s to today. He explains how figures like Francis Schaeffer, Bill Bright, and Lance Wallnau contributed to a theology of cultural engagement. Schaeffer challenged Christians to confront secularism head-on. Bright believed evangelism shouldn't stop at the church door. Wallnau repackaged the idea of cultural engagement for a media age. But Boedy weaponizes this history to warn of an alleged Christian uprising. He sees coordination where there's conviction, conspiracy where there's concern.

This robs Boedy's argument of any real weight. He misunderstands the mandate itself. The Seven Mountains framework isn't about enforcing faith. It's about not being ashamed of it. It's about building a culture where kids aren't confused about gender, where marriage means something, where media don't mock prayer, and where the church isn't bullied into silence.

In the end, Boedy gives us a book that's not about mountains at all; it's about his own fears. Those fears—sharpened by his enmity with Charlie Kirk and projected onto a grieving movement—reveal less about Christianity than about the insecurity of academia itself. Let the reader decide which vision for the nation preserves freedom: the one that silences faith or the one that speaks it boldly. ■



AFTERWORD

Brian Kaylor's *The Bible According to Christian Nationalists* (Chalice, 128 pp.) pretends to expose extremists who twist Scripture into tyranny. In truth, it's an attack on everyday believers who take the Bible seriously.

He never defines the term "Christian nationalist," so violent radicals and churchgoing parents get tossed in the same basket. Confederate apologists mix with moms who support school prayer. The vague label becomes a weapon. The result is caricature, not conversation.

Pro-life convictions become "white supremacy." Religious liberty becomes "dominionism." Patriotism with faith becomes "theocracy." *The Bible According to Christian Nationalists* is less scholarship than slander, designed to dismiss millions of Christians as enemies of democracy.

America needs dialogue about faith and politics. What it gets instead is distortion packaged as doctrine. *—J.M.G.*

→ ***Find a full review of this book on our website: wng.org***

BOOKS

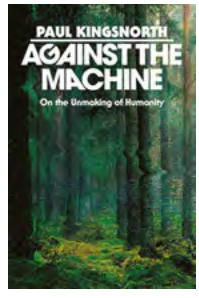
The unmaking of humanity

Paul Kingsnorth warns against our technological age

by JANIE B. CHEANEY

Paul Kingsnorth is a British journalist and novelist with a colorful record of environmental activism and spiritual pilgrimage, converting to Orthodoxy in 2020. From his rural outpost in western Ireland he surveys the cultural landscape with an apprehension laid out in *Against the Machine* (Thesis, 368 pp.).

Kingsnorth's argument begins with a definition of "culture" as "the story a people tells itself." Once, the civilization we know as "the West" drew life and meaning from a story of God becoming man. Our roots sank deep in the Old Order alliterized as Past, People, Place, and Prayer. After the Protestant Reformation swept away the authority of the Church and made religion a matter of individual preference, the West became increasingly unmoored.



Against the Machine
PAUL KINGSNORTH

Subsequent revolutions re-created the earth as an object to be used rather than a living organism to be wondered at. Age-old allegiances to home, king, country, and God shattered, clearing the way for a New Order of Science, Self, Sex/Sexuality, and Screens. The raging current of so-called Progress will one day absorb humanity. The Machine dissolves transcendence, obliterates the person, and values only money and power. "When you have made a machine of the world you are going to have a question on your hands: *What fuel does this thing run on?* The fuel is nature. The fuel is life. The fuel is you."

As he lays waste to every innovation in sight, Kingsnorth sounds like a cranky Old Testament prophet. But his wholesale condemnation of modernity overlooks progress in literacy, medicine, and labor savers like lawn mowers (which he regretted having to purchase when scythes weren't up to the job). In one chapter, he even appears to give a nod to income redistribution, disregarding capitalism's ability to take much of the world out of grinding poverty.

But he's correct that surrendering our foundational story has led to rootlessness. The deification of Self ultimately destroys individual selves, as indicated by our growing unease over AI. In one chilling passage Kingsnorth quotes AI researcher Eliezer Yudkowsky on the possibility of an immaterial superintelligence shaping itself from strands of DNA into an organic superbeing. If that happens, wrote Yudkowsky, "we are all going to die."

But wait. That happened already, when an Immaterial Superintelligence became an organic being. God is present but passive in Kingsnorth's doom scenario. Yet we know God is at work, now as much as ever. We can resist the Machine in any way practical, whether putting down our phones or moving off the grid. But we do not fight alone. ■

HANDOUT

Wendell Berry and six other recent books

FICTION

Marce Catlett: The Force of a Story

WENDELL BERRY

COUNTERPOINT, 176 PAGES

Now 91, Wendell Berry has been writing about the fictional community of Port William, Ky., since his mid 20s, when he first published *Nathan Coulter*. Berry's fiction, alongside his many poems and essays, has attempted to honor the culture of rural communities for whom the good life is defined by fidelity, frugality, and reverence, arguing that postmodernity has been hostile if not downright antipodal to such virtues.

Americans have abandoned such communities, he argues, even as nostalgia for prewar Americana emerged as a billion-dollar industry. Berry's newest novel, *Marce Catlett*, is among his most aggressive fictional shots across modernity's bow, a melancholy book that is angry but never vindictive, sorrowful but never bitter. It's the story of a memory that defines an entire community across multiple generations, shaping the way its membership conceives of itself and proceeds with its work. That memory is passed to readers through Andy Catlett, Berry's most familiar creation who has long been presented as a keeper of the flame. He recalls the story of the brutal harvest of 1906, when Andy's grandfather, Marce, discovers that, thanks to the efforts of a single magnate, the crop's yield won't cover even the cost of getting it to auction. A year's work may as well have been burned. The novel describes the way that catastrophic season shaped those who came of age. What happens, Andy asks, when you have a healthy culture that provides life, employment, camaraderie, stability, family, and vision "and you lose it all at once and have nothing to replace it?" In answering that question, Marce Catlett is Berry at his elegiac best, even as it hews more closely to his essays and Mad Farmer poems than to his most beloved novels. The novel has an argument, there's no doubt, but in the voice of old Andy Catlett the story of that empty harvest weaves with the many stories found across Port Williams. And for as much as it simmers with an underlying fury, it's a book that glistens with gratitude for what was and hope yet for the world to come.

—David Kern

SOCIAL THEORY

When Everyone Knows That Everyone Knows ...

STEVEN PINKER

SCRIBNER, 384 PAGES

In this book, Pinker, a cognitive scientist with a talent for clear prose, tackles the concept of "common knowledge"—the transition from private awareness to shared certainty—and how this shift influences everything from politics to personal life. He begins with the emperor's new clothes, showing how a child's blunt truth turned suspicion into collective recognition.

From there, he argues that common knowledge explains why money works, why social norms stick, why dictators fear protests, and why reputations can collapse overnight online. A Super Bowl ad, a viral math puzzle, or a single tweet can each create the spark that changes behavior once people realize everyone else is paying attention. Pinker brings abstract theory to life with sharp examples: Apple's 1984 ad, the fall of an ordinary woman who became notorious overnight, the rituals of language and innuendo. His prose is fast, witty, and easy to follow, but he sometimes tries to fit chaotic events into neat frames, leaning toward optimism that can feel naive. Still, this is Pinker at his most readable, a lively exploration of how shared awareness shapes power, order, and everyday life. *—John Mac Ghlionn**

SCIENCE FICTION SATIRE

Maxine Justice: Public Offender

DANIEL SCHWABAUER

ENCLAVE, 256 PAGES

After a galactic-level fall from grace, lawyer Maxine Justice hopes to save her struggling practice by picking up clients as a public defender in a televised corporate-run night court. Instead, she finds a new robot judge dead in her office, and Father Barthes, an android priest with a penchant for conspiracy theories, standing over the body. The "podre" is promptly accused of the judge's demise but refuses to defend himself, citing the confidentiality of confession. When Ms. Justice is assigned to represent Barthes in his murder trial, she is pulled into a dangerous world of shady robots, evil corporations, and aliens of questionable intent. Oh, and her cat is missing, too. Instead of Douglas Adams' sardonic bite or Terry Pratchett's freewheeling absurdity, author Daniel Schwabauer writes with a sarcastic zaniness. He also infuses Maxine with sincerity and determination, expertly balancing emotional themes of forgiveness and trust with stellar deadpan humor. While the first book in the series, *Maxine Justice: Galactic Attorney*, gives context and its own hilarious action-packed story, *Public Offender* provides the reader

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

everything needed to enjoy this sequel on its own. *—L.G. McCary*

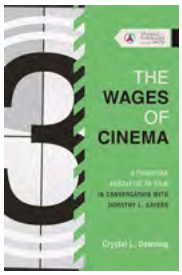
THEOLOGY AND THE ARTS

The Wages of Cinema

CRYSTAL L. DOWNING

IVP ACADEMIC, 256 PAGES

Even during the time of Plato, our pagan intellectual ancestors lambasted the arts as purveyors of sin, disorder, and excess, and Christians have long held their own resentments toward the arts. From the outset of the cinema in 1897, Protestants and Catholics alike have believed the medium is escapist pablum that exposes impressionable minds to sex and violence. *The Wages of Cinema*, a recent book on film theory, challenges this assertion. In this book Downing, a devotee and leading scholar of English writer Dorothy L. Sayers, condemns low-effort consumption and low-effort craftsmanship, equally calling viewers to task for demanding shallow, propagandistic entertainment as well as filmmakers and financiers who produce it. She argues it amounts to a serious spiritual heresy wherein the creation of art is severed from the divine source of all creation. Drawing on Sayers' rich theology of art, Downing argues that true artistry fulfills the *imago dei*, and calls upon Christians to avoid treating cinema as "a content delivery system." Her work offers a scholarly and challenging exploration of the nature of medium and craftsmanship. *—Tyler Hummel**



DYSTOPIAN FICTION

Scavenger

BRADLEY CAFFEE

MOUNTAIN BROOK INK, 294 PAGES

After a global pandemic, 90% of the world's population is gone. Now Jimmy Hunter and his two best friends use a drone to help them safely scavenge for tradable goods because without something to sell to the criminal overlords of their city, the three friends will go hungry. The most valuable good, however, is information. When Jimmy learns of top secret underground bunkers with prized resources and uninfected inhabitants, he has a dangerous choice to make. He can either share his intel and join the criminal Brotherhood or try to escape with only one of his friends to find the Keepers' bunker. The cost of such a choice might be more than he's willing to pay. Caffee masterfully weaves clear Scriptural themes into his character-driven novel without being too preachy. Readers may recognize certain elements of his dystopian world-building, yet the spiritual journey of the characters breathes new life into the apocalypse. *Scavenger* is just the first book of Caffee's The Keeper Series. *—Marian Jacobs*

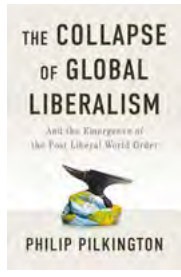
POLITICAL SCIENCE

The Collapse of Global Liberalism

PHILIP PILKINGTON

POLITY, 224 PAGES

This provocative new book proclaims the death of the liberal order, claiming we are now living through the final cadaveric spasms of the world system created after the Second World War. Liberalism, according to Pilkington, is a leveling, flattening force, defined by its opposition to hierarchy. Economically, it reduces all human relations to contractual exchanges that replace natural, heterogeneous hierarchies. After the Cold War, the West assumed that the rest of the world would willingly embrace liberal ideology and economic liberalism. But many nations haven't. And Western nations themselves continue to crumble under liberalism's logic. The reality is that the liberal moment is over and that it was destined to collapse. Liberalism, he contends, is a "dark and uncivilized philosophy of life," inherently "unstable" because it is "unnatural" and irrational. By eroding the preliberal sources on which it depends, it ensures the destruction of any civilization it touches. Pilkington hopes to help postliberal societies retrieve classical sources capable of recivilizing the West. At root, liberalism's error is this denial of the human need for hierarchy; hence its antagonism toward religion, which testifies to the hierarchies in creation and creation's relation to the Creator. *—James R. Wood**



CRIME FICTION

After That, the Dark

ANDREW KLAVAN

MYSTERIOUS PRESS, 336 PAGES

Award-winning crime writer and conservative commentator Andrew Klavan is back with his fifth novel about super-spy-turned-English-professor Cameron Winter. In this installment, a locked-room murder catches Cameron's attention, and when Cameron starts tugging at the threads of the mystery, he unravels a conspiracy involving a powerful biotech company. The plot contains the pointed social critique found in some of Klavan's other novels. In this one, a billionaire attempts to use his vast resources to cure humanity of sin, but this secular offer of redemption only causes greater suffering. The story, with its twists and turns, showcases Klavan's skill at constructing plots and action scenes, but this novel contains a fatal flaw. Cameron has fallen in love, and Klavan's romantic dialogue has the charm of a jackhammer at midnight. To make matters worse, Cameron's love interest is a self-proclaimed Bible thumper who willingly falls into bed with the agnostic Cameron but betrays no hint of self-consciousness or remorse. *After That, the Dark* is a disappointing installment to an otherwise engaging series. *—Collin Garbarino* ■

BOOKS

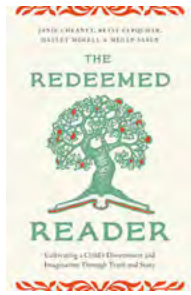
Raising readers

Helping parents find the right books for their children

by CANDICE WATTERS

"We're reading ahead for you." So promises Redeemed Reader, a website where Betsy Farquhar, Hayley Morell, Megan Saben, and WORLD's own senior writer Janie B. Cheaney review children's books from a Christian perspective. Now they've written *The Redeemed Reader* (Moody Publishers, 320 pp.), a guide to "cultivating a child's discernment and imagination through Truth and Story."

It's a timely guide for families, weary of so much screen time and concerned about offerings in the children's section of the public library. Their book aims to equip parents, teachers, and librarians to curate books that fit individual children.



The Redeemed Reader

JANIE B. CHEANEY, BETSY FARQUHAR, HAYLEY MORELL, & MEGAN SABEN

The authors skillfully compress their combined wisdom into a relatable handbook about "what to read when," as well as navigating hard stories, reading across genres, and organizing a home library. Each chapter concludes with suggested titles by reading level, but this is more than a book of books.

These authors *love* books, but they say the books they point to are not meant to take time away from the only source of Truth. They urge readers to "remember, the only required book is the Bible." They also point to books that, though not explicitly Christian, conform to reality. This book is not merely a guide to books that will entertain children but to books that will "spur [them] on to love and good deeds." "We pray regularly for wisdom," they write, "and encourage you to do likewise."

Some readers might feel the authors seem too open to new titles, embracing "messy books" that "tend to make readers (and/or their parents) uncomfortable." They say the goal of these books that honestly portray the human condition is "discernment, not comfort." Yet, they urge caution about giving children such books too soon. Some books "may be more suitable for high school audiences even if the words can be decoded easily by a middle school student." Children who aren't developmentally ready for messy but redemptive books "may get caught up in the mess and sinful actions, missing the greater story."

The Redeemed Reader offers tools for choosing books that foster conversations about weighty matters like perseverance in suffering, the consequences of sin, and the possibility of redemption. The authors trust parents to know their children best, to discern the right time to introduce individual books, and to steer clear of books that glorify sin or promise rewards for it.

Equal parts reference, inspiration, and worldview, this book is a robust guide for parents who want to "shepherd their children's imagination." ■

PETE ARK/GETTY IMAGES

Give the greatest gift this Christmas.

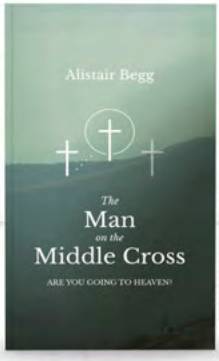
Introduce others to Jesus!

Brand-New from Bible Teacher Alistair Begg

ONLY $1

Inspired by the video viewed more than *one million times*

Watch and share it with others!



The Man on the Middle Cross invites people you know to ponder the question

"Where would you go if you were to die tonight?"

This little book explores the stories of three lives forever changed by meeting Jesus:

• the woman at the well • the healed paralytic • the thief on the cross

Purchase for $1 each at truthforlife.org/world

Give this little book to everyone who has yet to meet Jesus.


S.D. Grimm

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Plot twists and fairy tales

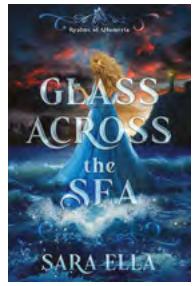
Speculative fiction books for teens

by MARIAN JACOBS

Author S.D. Grimm weaves a tight web of government secrets and plot twists in her fast-paced young adult sci-fi novel *Beneath False Stars* (Enclave Escape, 368 pp.). In a world where everything is a lie, teen hacker Ryleigh Stevens is bent on discovering the truth about the government's control over genetically engineered humans with powers. The problem is, she has no idea whom she can trust. Nor do her teammates know if *they* can fully trust *her*.

When her father's plan to integrate the Powered back into normal society finally takes effect, old wounds and new problems collide. All she wants is a world with unity, equality, and the neutralization of powers for the safety of all. Ryleigh must work with her sworn enemy—and the person responsible for her brother's death—if their society is ever going to avoid a second Universal Tech War.

Beneath False Stars
S.D. GRIMM



Glass Across the Sea
SARA ELLA

Beneath False Stars tackles themes of overcoming prejudice and hard-won reconciliation. Grimm also beautifully incorporates the Biblical motif of finding virtuous heroes in unlikely places. Teens who enjoy superheroes, stories of defying dystopian governments, and a touch of clean romance will enjoy this first installment in the Project Integration series.

"Even shattered glass, lost across the sea ... finds its way back to shore. But not before it is changed—made more beautiful and more refined than the day it was broken." Masterfully capturing the cadence and tone of a classic fairy tale, author Sara Ella weaves her own unique myth in *Glass Across the Sea* (Enclave Escape, 432 pp.). In this Cinderella retelling, Noelle thinks the stories of the Firefly artisans and their Vestiges are mere myths. Yet when her mother falls gravely ill, her father has no choice but to search across the sea for the ancient relics before he loses his wife to her mysterious illness. Noelle's best friend Prince Dante accompanies her father on the voyage, leaving Noelle behind to handle her unwanted and cruel guests.

Meanwhile, Dante is fighting for both his birthright as the next king and the life of his younger sister. Without the power of the Firefly's Vestiges, his sister may not survive the same strange illness that took the life of his mother and now plagues Noelle's mother. Unless Dante and Noelle can uncover the truth behind the myth of the Firefly and their Vestiges, the darkness threatening the kingdom will snuff out their light.

With nods to movies *Ever After* (1998) and Disney's live-action *Cinderella* (2015), the land of Lumiverre boasts an entirely new magic system and origin story that will have readers drawn in by each plot twist and the depth of world-building. Christian fantasy lovers will also appreciate how Ella weaves faith elements into the story, including a God-like being called the Lamplighter who "created the Firefly to carry his light to the corners of the earth." ■

FACEBOOK

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Classic storylines and timeless tales

by CHELSEA BOES & KRISTIN CHAPMAN

Hansel and Gretel
STEPHEN KING
HARPERCOLLINS, 48 PAGES

According to prolific horror author Stephen King, his recent collaboration with the late illustrator Maurice Sendak has at its heart "a sunny exterior, a dark and terrible center, brave and resourceful children." Their storybook begins: "Once upon a time, long before your grandmother's grandmother was born, a poor broom maker and his wife lived on the edge of a great dark forest with his two children, Hansel and Gretel." As the children's troubles advance, Hansel has nightmares of a witch. Gretel dreams of angels circling the moon. While Hansel's dream comes true, Gretel's never does. It feels significant that the story rests on human ingenuity at the expense of spiritual rescue. As a whole, though, Sendak's images and King's musical but contemporary text make the book feel like a classic. ***Ages 6–9***

Flora and the Jazzers
ASTRID SHECKELS
WAXWING BOOKS, 40 PAGES

Flora the ferret works as a scullery maid at a grand hotel in the center of an old city. During her long days scouring pots and scrubbing floors, she sings to herself because her heart is full of music. She vows to one day fulfill her dream of attending a concert. When she learns that the famed Jazzers will be performing at the hotel, Flora dares to hope that this is her chance to finally get to see a concert. Her dream is cut short, though, until her hopeful singing draws an unexpected audience. While the book's conclusion is predictable and rather anticlimactic, young girls in particular may be drawn to this Cinderella-esque story with Sheckels' charming watercolor illustrations featuring an extensive cast of anthropomorphic woodland animals. ***Ages 4–8***

Arco's Little House
JESS FOGEL
PENGUIN WORKSHOP, 32 PAGES

Arco the fox loves his little house. He takes care of it, and it takes care of him in return. But when a neighbor builds a big house, Arco starts to compare—and starts a construction project of his own. As Arco's envy grows, so does his little house—until his house is so big and so mobile and so popular that Arco doesn't feel at home anymore. On one level, this tiny easy-reader teaches a profound lesson about contentment. But with subsequent readings, other messages emerge. First, that what others view as "success" may actually rob you of joy. Second, it's unwise to have more stuff than you can care for well. The cozy, muted illustrations give this small story a peaceful feel perfect for bedtime. ***Ages 4–8***

The Best Bath Ever!
PAUL TAUTGES
P&R PUBLISHING, 32 PAGES

This second book in the Pictures of Gospel Grace series tells the story of Naaman, the Old Testament pagan army commander who needed God to give him a good washing to make him clean on the outside as well as the inside. Author Paul Tautges retells Naaman's story from 2 Kings 5, illustrating how Naaman's pride nearly prevented him from receiving God's healing grace until servants urged him to obey. Ingrid Sawubona's illustrations use bright colors, bold fonts, and word balloons to create a visually engaging format. The final pages connect Naaman's story to our own need for God's grace to wash us clean from our sins while pointing to the hope we have of a future time when Jesus will make all things new. ***Ages 5–9***

QUEST

FOUR BOOKS THAT SHAPED MY THINKING

Faithfully stepping into God's adventure

by STEVEN L. JONES

On July 1, 2025, a few weeks shy of my 50th birthday, I stepped into a new adventure as a missionary professor, training pastors in hard-to-reach places in East Africa. This new role answered a question I had been asking for a while about where I belonged. Over the years, I have had the opportunity to serve as a pastor and a professor. Sometimes I felt that I was too much of a pastor to be a good professor or too much of a professor to be a good pastor. I have a passion for both the church and the university, but I couldn't find my place in either until I was invited to train pastors in Africa. But stepping into this new role was hard. These four books helped me choose faith over fear.

UNDERSTANDING PROVIDENCE

Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is more than a *Swiss Family Robinson*–style adventure involving a man shipwrecked on an island, learning to survive alone. It is a meditation on how divine providence plays out amid our good and bad choices.

Crusoe first thinks what is happening to him is God's punishment. His perspective slowly evolves until he views his island life as God's kindness to him. Crusoe recognizes that God was always at work to lead him to that exact spot. The shipwreck was his salvation and deliverance. This novel reminded me that even the worst circumstances can be turned by divine providence into the conduit of God's blessing and provision. Like Crusoe, I realize I have stumbled backward into exactly the spot God had for me. God intended for me to be a pastor and professor, but the place for me to live it out was not where I expected.

JAMES PHARAON

UNDERSTANDING THE NEED

My interest in Africa began one afternoon in my church office. I was praying, asking God what He had for me next. Before I said "amen," the missions pastor walked in and asked if I could take his place on a teaching trip to Uganda. It was my first trip to Africa.

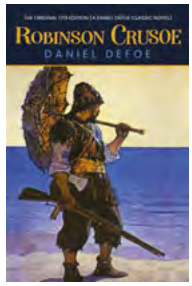
That trip awakened a hunger to learn all I could about the continent. In my studies, I encountered the autobiography of Rwandan pastor Cedric Kanana, *I Once Was Dead* (Oasis International 2022). Kanana's father was the imam of the local mosque. His mother was the local witch doctor. After the Rwandan Genocide, he lived as a homeless street kid, becoming addicted to drugs which led to his death and miraculous resurrection more than 12 hours later. He tells how Jesus appeared to him while he was dead and called him to new life.

Kanana's book reads like a chapter in the Book of Acts. It is a compelling description of the forces at work in Africa: tribalism and colonialism, Islam and animism, ancient ways and modern technology, as well as the familiar addictions to drugs, alcohol, and sex. Above it all, Jesus still works miracles, still delivers from sin and death, still grows His kingdom. I wanted to be a part of it.

UNDERSTANDING THE STAKES

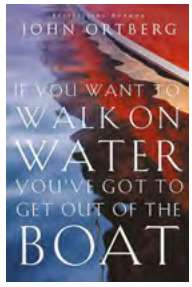
As I began teaching regularly in Africa, I saw the need for accessible theological education. I made more frequent trips, specifically to Kenya, to work with Hamoreh Ministries, whose mission is to equip pastors who live in hard-to-reach places.

After three years, Hamoreh asked me to join them full time as a missionary professor. It seemed like the logical next step in God's leading. It also felt like a step into the complete unknown. Then I rediscovered John Ortberg's *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got To Get Out of the Boat* (Zondervan 2001). Ortberg uses the account of Jesus walking on water and Peter accepting the invitation to join Him as a paradigm for how God calls us to embrace faith over fear.

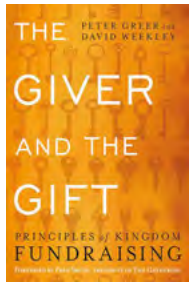


Robinson Crusoe
DANIEL DEFOE

I Once Was Dead
CEDRIC KANANA



If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got To Get Out of the Boat
JOHN ORTBERG



The Giver and the Gift
PETER GREER &
DAVID WEEKLEY

The book walks you through discerning God's call, facing your fear, and deciding to trust God. You can step out in faith and follow the call of God, or shrink back in fear and miss the life that God has for you. I didn't doubt that God was leading me. However, I, like Peter, saw the waves and was worried.

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S PROVISION

One of my biggest worries was that the position with Hamoreh was donor-supported. Raised in SBC churches, I believe the Cooperative Program might be one of the greatest missions funding initiatives ever conceived. The concept of "raising support" was foreign to me. I was worried about sounding like a huckster. I didn't want friends to feel I was monetizing relationships. I remembered every uncomfortable conversation with an acquaintance involved in a pyramid scheme. I worried that my future would be a series of uncomfortable calls, bothering people for money.

Peter Greer and David Weekley's *The Giver and the Gift* (Bethany House 2015) changed my perspective. It has two parts: "The Gift," written by Greer from the perspective of a ministry leader fundraising for nonprofit organizations, and "The Giver," written by Weekley from his experience funding Christian philanthropy from the proceeds of his construction business. This book encouraged me to see fundraising less as asking for money and more as providing a chance to partner in what God is doing. It helped me see the fundraising process from a kingdom perspective.

I am grateful God used these books to allay my fears, guide my decision, and lead me to where I am. Defoe reminded me that God was at work even when I felt lost. Kanana opened my eyes to an area of ministry that excited me. Ortberg encouraged me to realize what was at stake. Greer and Weekley helped change my perspective. Looking back on the last few months in my new role, I am so glad I chose faith over fear. ■

—Dr. Steve Jones currently serves as Director of Global Theological Education for Hamoreh Ministries

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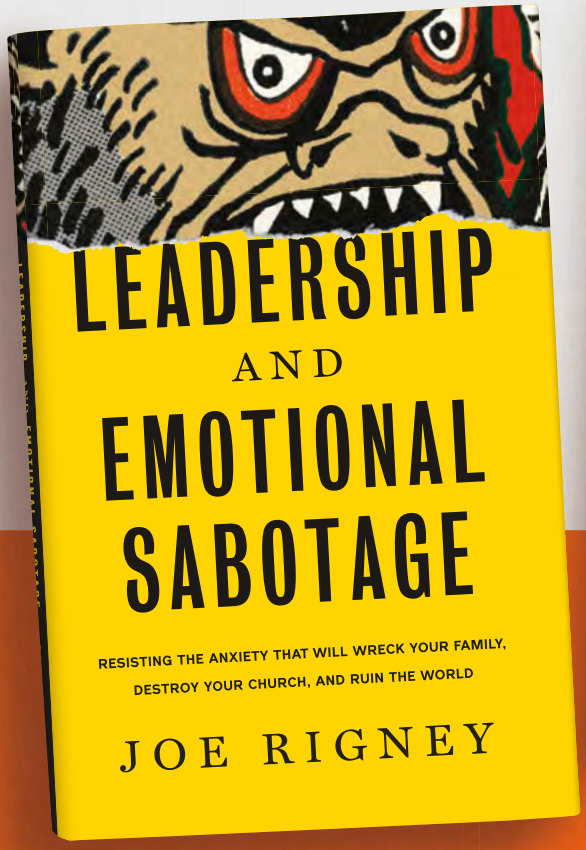

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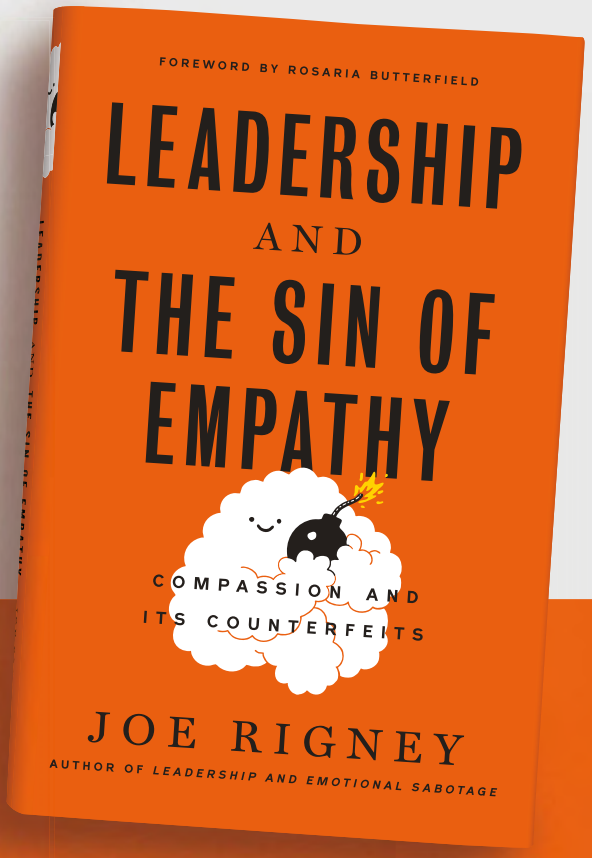

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MOVIE

Nuremberg

by COLLIN GARBARINIO

Rated PG-13 • Theaters

Back when I was a history professor, I often found myself teaching the second half of Western Civilization. As the semester wound down, I usually asked my students which person from the course they would most want to meet and why. A surprising number said Adolf Hitler. These bright young things weren't crypto-Nazis; rather, they expressed a desire to find out what had made Hitler so evil. They felt he must have had some trauma that turned him bad, and they wished they could talk with him to figure out what it was. These 18-year-olds had an amusing self-confidence in their own powers of psychoanalysis.

Even so, the question of how the Nazi regime could perpetrate such monstrous deeds still haunts us. Many people at the time couldn't believe the rumors of atrocities. The reports seemed too horrible. And as the war fades from living memory, some people have forgotten how cruel humans can be to one another. The historical drama *Nuremberg* reminds us of humanity's potential for brutality and gives an honest answer to my students' question: Why were the Nazis so bad?

The film begins on the last day of the war in Europe, with the capture of Hermann Göring. Göring, played by Academy Award winner Russell Crowe, is the highest ranking Nazi official still alive. The Allies discuss what to do with him. Most of the military brass prefer the idea of simply shooting him, but U.S. Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson, played by the wonderful Michael Shannon, wants to put Göring and the other captured Nazis on trial to expose their crimes. Army psychiatrist Doug Kelley, played by Rami Malek, another Academy Award winner, is tasked with ensuring the prisoners stay mentally fit and don't commit suicide.

Nuremberg possesses two storylines that start to converge toward the film's climax. One storyline follows the difficulties Justice Jackson faces in prosecuting the Nazi leadership. No one had ever attempted anything like this before. It wasn't feasible to try these men in a German court, but what legal authority would an international tribunal have? And if they did get to trial what would they be accused of? There was no case law to bolster the claims of war crimes.

Putting the Nazis on trial was a bit of a gamble. Would it be possible for them to successfully plead their

KATA VERMES/SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

innocence? In televising the proceedings, were the Allies running the risk of portraying these men as sympathetic victims? Or worse yet, were the Allies giving the Nazis yet another opportunity to infect the world with their anti-Semitic hatred?

The other storyline involves Kelley's interactions with the Nazi prisoners, especially his relationship with Göring—the relationship at the heart of the film. The psychiatrist takes his job as prison doctor seriously, looking after both the physical and mental health of the Nazis, but his interest in Göring and the others isn't entirely altruistic.

Kelley hopes to write a book about his experience. He wants to psychologically define evil, and he's essentially asking the same question my students did: What makes these Nazis different from us? Kelley views evil as a pathology that must be explained away.

Göring makes for a fascinating figure, and Crowe hypnotizes us with his performance—his Göring is simultaneously gregarious and malevolent. As the movie progresses, the psychiatrist becomes ensnared in the Nazi's web. Seeing the proud figure humbled in prison elicits sympathy from both Kelley and the audience. But clarity comes when Justice Jackson's Nuremberg trial cuts through the manipulation and sentimentality.

Part of the brilliance of *Nuremberg* is that it doesn't merely depict Nazi atrocities. We've been confronted with those images in countless films. In fact, the sheer number of WWII movies tends to numb us to the terrible reality. This film is different because we see the characters discover for the first time the extent of the horror, and their reactions to these sickening images arouse a greater reaction in the audience than the images might have created on their own.

But what about that nagging question: Why were the Nazis so bad? Kelley eventually arrives at the Biblical answer. The Nazis aren't any different from you or me. They were evil because they were human, and we fool ourselves if we think that 80 years later sin no longer crouches at our own doors. ■

LUKAS SALNA/ANGEL STUDIOS

MOVIE

Truth & Treason

by JOSEPH HOLMES

Rated PG-13 • Theaters

WWII Holocaust movies are having a comeback, with last year's *White Bird* and *Bonhoeffer* and this year's *Triumph of the Heart* and *Nuremberg*. Angel Studios' newest film, *Truth & Treason*, follows the trend, asking the ever-relevant question of how one stands up to evil.

The film follows the real-life story of Helmuth Hübener, a 16-year-old boy who secretly distributes anti-Nazi pamphlets in Nazi Germany and who becomes the youngest resistance figure executed under Hitler.

Truth & Treason does everything expected of it. It depicts the rise of the Nazis, and we see a hero who watches that rise and decides he must act. We also see the cost he pays. But what sets it apart is how well it puts the viewer in Helmuth's shoes and intimately shares his experience with the audience. We see Helmuth as an ordinary boy with his friends—then we see the moment their Jewish friend is taken, and they become motivated to fight.

The film explores the religious convictions of its good and bad characters. Helmuth's bishop argues Christians must obey their rulers, while Helmuth argues they must obey Jesus' command to "love thy neighbor as thyself." The movie portrays Helmuth's Christianity as the right version of the faith.

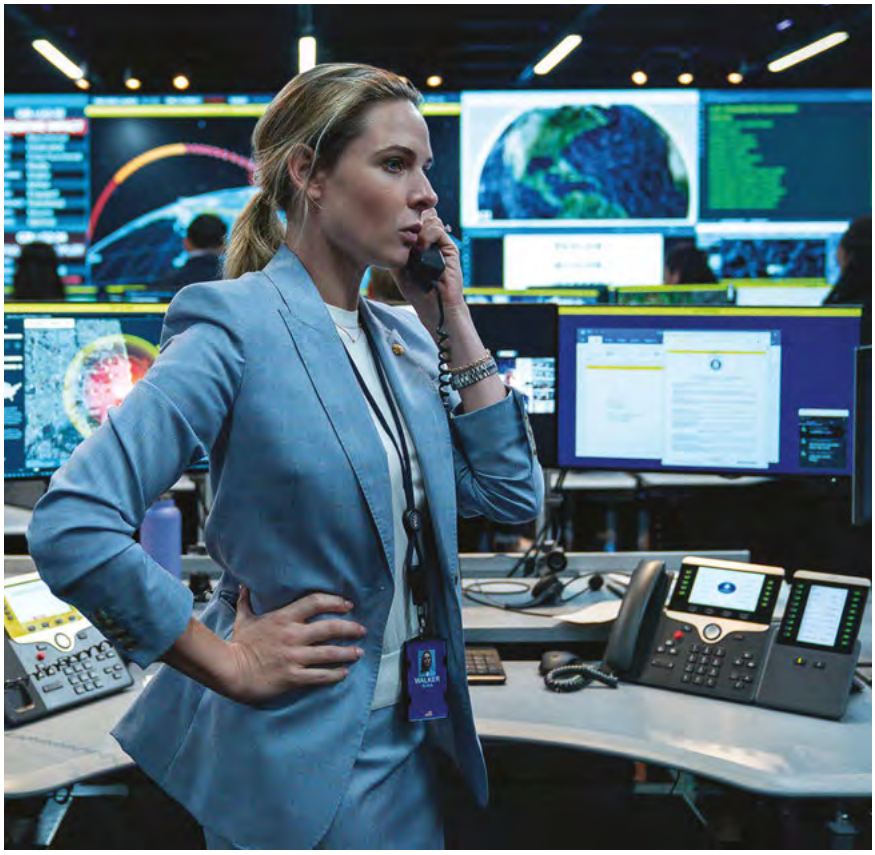
But as the film continues, it becomes formulaic. The climax is guilty of contrived sentimentality, as Helmuth gets the chance in court to give an inspiring speech that his enemies could have, and probably would have, stopped.

It's sad that tales about those who stand up against injustice at great cost remain timely. *Truth & Treason* doesn't reinvent the genre, but it effectively reminds audiences why truth is worth dying for.

MOVIE

A House of Dynamite

by COLLIN GARBARINO



Rated R • Netflix

An intercontinental ballistic missile is heading toward the United States, presumably bringing with it a nuclear warhead that will vaporize a major urban center. That's the situation in director Kathryn Bigelow's political thriller *A House of Dynamite*.

The action in this 112-minute film takes place over a harrowing 20-or-so minutes—the time that elapses between the missile's detection and its arrival at its destination. Bigelow, who won an Academy Award for the war movie *The Hurt Locker* (2008), lets the action unfold in three acts that repeat these tense minutes from three different perspectives. Each time the events repeat the audience becomes more intimately acquainted with the emotional toll the crisis exacts.

The film begins in the White House Situation Room, where Olivia Walker (Rebecca Ferguson) monitors world events. She starts her shift distracted because her young son's fever has spiked. Within minutes she's concerned her son's country won't exist by the end of the day. From the situation room, Walker rounds up the secretary of defense, Strategic Command, the NSA, and eventually the president, who's out making goodwill appearances when the threat is detected.

Two urgent questions must be answered as the minutes to impact count down. First, is the U.S. military capable of stopping the missile? Second, what should be the government's response to the attack?

This second question is especially vexing because surveillance systems didn't register who launched the missile. All that's known is it came from somewhere in the Pacific. Is it the North Koreans? The Russians? The Chinese? How can the president order a counter-strike if he's not positive who's responsible? But would a lack of response signal weakness to our enemies and invite more attacks? Maybe the best course of action would be to launch our own nukes to neutralize all three countries' nuclear capabilities. But an attack like that would escalate the crisis and invite the targets to immediately launch their entire arsenals. As one character says, the options are "surrender or suicide."

Over the last 40 years, we've lulled ourselves into viewing nuclear war as unthinkable. *A House of Dynamite* is an unsettling movie because it shows just how thinkable the unthinkable really is. We might have plans and contingencies, but if someone really did launch a nuke, world leaders would have less than half an hour to respond.

The film's characters show a range of reactions. Some advocate immediately launching a global war. Some caution that the stakes are too high and that the U.S. shouldn't respond at all. Some focus on making sure their loved ones are far from any urban centers.

The president is one of the last people to find out about the crisis, but he's the only one who can determine the response. The audience feels the agony of his responsibility.

A House of Dynamite—rated R for language—isn't a feel-good movie. It's a reminder that no one wins in a nuclear war. We've used that fact to comfort ourselves, believing that since a nuclear war can have no winner, no one would want to start one. But the film offers a relevant caveat: Someone who's already losing the game might decide that he would prefer a world without any winners. It's a sobering and scary thought. ■

EROS HOAGLAND/NETFLIX

COMING SOON...

Dr. Seuss's the Sneetches

11/3 • TV-Y7 • Netflix

An unexpected friendship forms between two young Sneetches on an island surrounded by beaches in this animated musical special set in the world of Seuss.

Grand Prix of Europe

11/7 • PG • Theaters

In this animated movie, a young mouse named Edda dreams of racing glory. When Edda's world takes an unexpected turn, she disguises herself as her racing idol and seizes the once-in-a-lifetime chance to drive in the Grand Prix.

The Running Man

11/14 • Not Yet Rated • Theaters

Glen Powell stars in this remake of the 1987 Arnold Schwarzenegger film in which contestants attempt to elude professional assassins in a deadly game show.

Wicked: For Good

11/21 • PG • Theaters

Part 2 of the screen adaptation of the popular stage musical set in the Land of Oz, which continues the story of Elphaba and Glinda as a girl from Kansas crashes into their lives.

Zootopia 2

11/26 • PG • Theaters

In this Disney animated film, detectives Judy Hopps and Nick Wilde find themselves on the twisting trail of a mysterious reptile. To crack the case, they go undercover to new parts of town, where their growing partnership is tested like never before.

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YOUTUBE

TELEVISION

The Promised Land

by BOB BROWN

Not rated • YouTube

Have you ever wondered what you would get if you mashed up the mockumentary style of *The Office* with the Biblical story of the prophet Moses? Enter *The Promised Land*, a new series on YouTube set during Israel's exodus from Egypt amid the tents, tunics, and livestock herds. (Could this be TV's first flockumentary?)

Nowadays it feels hard to find shows without sexual innuendo and misuses of God's name, especially funny ones. Despite its humorous premise, *The Promised Land* stays surprisingly respectful.

Written and directed by *The Chosen* assistant director Mitch Hudson, *The Promised Land* mirrors *The Office*'s production methods (but without the inappropriate content): jerky camerawork, characters who give mini-interviews to the film crew, and quirky humor. It might sound like a strange way to tell a Bible story, but it works.

We see Moses' proud apprentice Joshua (Artoun Nazareth) standing guard at the base of Mt. Sinai as the people consecrate themselves for the Lord's appearance: "Nobody, and I mean nobody, is going to touch the mountain on my watch." Then a soccer ball goes rolling past him. Miriam (Sheeran Khan), a self-described tambourine "prodigy," rolls her eyes at the musically unrefined golden-calf revelers: "If you're going to sin, at least do it on the beat." That's about as irreverent as the show gets.

The Promised Land isn't all spoofery, though. When Moses (Wasim No'mani) envies the joke-telling prowess of his brother Aaron (Majed Sayess), his wife Zipporah (Tryphena Wade) commends his leadership: "You care for what God wants for His people, even when it's not what they want for themselves."

Episode 3 ends dramatically with Moses furiously smashing the two stone tablets in front of his idol-worshipping countrymen. "God gave us everything we need, and you spit in His face." It's a good reminder, even when deciding on TV shows to watch.

MUSIC

The face behind catchy digital psalms

The music of Siham I AM

by ARSENIO ORTEZA

For the last two years, the quirkiest Christian songs this side of Half-handed Cloud have been appearing on Bandcamp (and sometimes YouTube), attributed to an act called Siham I AM.

Make that an extremely *coy* act called Siham I AM. Its website says that *siham* means "arrows" in Arabic and that "I AM" is the name of God. But the site does not say who or what is creating the band's bubbly, lo-fi techno tunes.

It turns out it's both a who and a what. The "who" is a Floridian named Sally Bishai who sometimes calls herself DJ Sallysal and who lists earning a Ph.D. in philosophy among her diverse accomplishments. The "what" is the technology she uses (more about that in a minute) to turn her song ideas into audio artifacts with titles such as "I Will Worship You" and lyrics such as "God, curtail me. / I was kinda fuming mad. / It was a while back, / but now I am on track. / OK, I can't lie. / It was an hour ago / as my blood-pressure readings show. / Can you help me let it go?"

"I think it's safe to say that up until, like, three years ago I wasn't really serious about my faith, or I thought I was a better Christian than I was," says Bishai. "The fact that I thought I was a good Christian tells you how bad of a Christian I was."

She punctuates that confession with a laugh. She laughs a lot. She also likes to point out that while she doesn't consider herself charismatic or Pentecostal, she's not above receiving the occasional "word of knowledge" or tuning in to the Trinity Broadcasting Network to catch the evangelist John Bevere.

"He had this video, and it was called *This Is Why You Feel Stuck in Your Wilderness*," she says. "And I said, 'Wilderness? What's that?' And I kind of felt an unspoken question from the Holy Spirit, which was 'Did you ever think that I actually had a plan for you, that you don't have to try to find out what you're supposed to do and just get a rubber stamp from me?' And I was like "What? How?'"

The "what" was to write and record contemporary psalms expressing her renewed experience of Christ. This she has done on EPs titled *And Then* ... and *The Calling*. The "how" was by using 21st-century tech such as the MIDI-controller ROLI keyboard, the music-composition software Odesi, and the effects available at the digital audio workstation FL Studio. The thoroughly digital, synth-poppy results are unlike anything coming out of the above-ground Christian-music scene and super catchy to boot. "Harmony: always," reads the "about" section of the Siham I AM website. "Whimsy: usually. Drama: indubitably." An apt description. ■

And Then ...
SIHAM I AM

HANDOUT

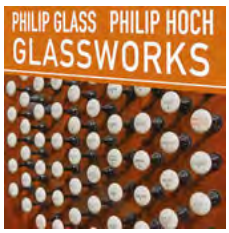
MUSIC

New and noteworthy

by ARSENIO ORTEZA

Swag* and *Swag II JUSTIN BIEBER
Had these 44 tracks totaling 155 minutes been overseen by someone like Quincy Jones or Teddy Riley instead of by Bieber's indulgent production team, they might've amounted to more than what they sound like: a mountain of sketches and demos for a potentially not-bad Michael Jackson album. Not that Jackson would've let the half a dozen or so songs with explicit lyrics even reach the demo stage. (Maybe the pastors of the megachurch that Bieber is said to attend could have a word?) Then again, Jackson also probably wouldn't have risked "Safe Space," "Glory Voice Memo," "Forgiveness," "Everything Hallelujah," or the colloquial but accurate spoken retelling of Genesis 2 and 3 called "Story of God."

Chilling, Thrilling Hooks and Haunted Harmonies: The Big Stir Records Halloween Grimoire VARIOUS ARTISTS
Imagine the median point between "Monster Mash" and "(Don't Fear) the Reaper" (and maybe Count Floyd's *Monster Chiller Horror Theatre* and definitely Disneyland Records' *Chilling, Thrilling Sounds of the Haunted House*) and you'll have an accurate idea of the sounds on this clever, Halloween-themed ad for Big Stir Records' talented (and, in Graham Parker's and the Strawberry Alarm Clock's cases, pedigreed) power-pop roster. Good. And clean. And fun.



Philip Glass: Glassworks PHILIP HOCH
Even if you agree with Harold C. Schonberg that minimalism is a "kind of baby music" or with me that Philip Glass has long overplayed his hand, you can still admit that *Glassworks* is an ineffably haunting and at-times powerful piece. For one thing, the average length of each movement is 6½ minutes, just about right where Glassy minimalism is concerned. For another, the whole suite flows. It sparkles more when performed by an ensemble, but Philip Hoch's organ transcription has its recollected-in-tranquility charms.

Between Piety and Desire NATHAN OGLESBY
The fruit of a painful romantic breakup and a joyful pivot toward faith, these folk-meets-country songs by a former classics professor with a social media presence built on philosophical hip-hop feel raw and real because they are. Oglesby wrote and recorded them in a month, singing and playing (or sampling) everything himself except Anya Sapozhnikova's guest vocals on the not ironically titled "Thank You for Breaking Our Hearts." Also not ironically titled: "Reading the Bible in a Bar" and "The Name of Jesus."

ENCORE

Last fall, MovieScore Media released the orchestral soundtrack to Sean McNamara's biopic *Reagan*. Now, Curb Records has released the 13-track *Reagan: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack* (rock-pop-country songs heard in whole or in part in the film) and the 11-track *Reagan: Songs Inspired by the Film* (what it says). The latter is uneven but has its moments (Sweet Comfort Band's "Do I Say Goodbye," Kathie Lee Gifford & Claude Kelly's "I Knew it Would Be You," the Commodores' "Always"). The former, however, is nothing but moments, from faithful reproductions (Clint Black covering John Denver, the Imaginaries covering Frankie Valli) and dazzling reproductions (Robert Davi and Creed's Scott Stapp covering Sinatra, MŌRIAH covering the Andrews Sisters) to reproductions both one of a kind (Bob Dylan singing "Don't Fence Me In") and two (a "Stormy Weather" by KISS' Gene Simmons that makes a fitting flip side to the "When You Wish Upon a Star" he recorded 47 years ago). —*A.O.*

CREDIT

MASTERWORKS

A revolutionary image of war

Francisco Goya's *The Third of May 1808*

by WILLIAM COLLEN

Francisco Goya was the first truly modern painter.

Though born in the high Enlightenment—the so-called "Age of Reason"—he lived well into the Romantic Era, with its emphasis on subjectivity and the irrational. His own works did much to hasten the break with established artistic tradition which occurred in the early 19th century. Before him, artists were mainly concerned with depicting the reality of the world outside themselves—and even when they painted mythological subjects or scenes from works of fiction, they employed a Neoclassical style inherited from the Renaissance that aimed for objectivity in proportion and perspective.

Goya, on the other hand, seriously examined his own responses to the world around him. His many paintings of life at the Spanish court consistently betray his own feelings toward their subjects, and his famed series of etchings known as *The Caprices* sharply satirizes the beliefs and attitudes of contemporary Spanish society in a way that had rarely been seen before.

Some of Goya's most personal works were made in response to the

FRANCISCO GOYA/PRISMA/UIG VIA GETTY IMAGES

LEFT: Goya's *The Third of May 1808*; RIGHT: Visitors admire the painting at the Museo del Prado in Madrid.

DANIEL KALKER/PICTURE-ALLIANCE/DPA/AP

Napoleonic invasion of the Iberian Peninsula. In his painting *The Third of May 1808*, Goya achieves a tour de force of symbolic narrative, recording both his own feelings about his subject and those of his nation.

The painting depicts a particularly egregious atrocity perpetrated by Napoleon's soldiers in Madrid. The French armies had occupied Spain with the intention of installing a puppet government, and the people of Madrid heard that the last of the Spanish royal family would be deported to France. On May 2, the city erupted into rioting. The rebellion was brutally crushed. Hundreds of Spaniards were imprisoned, and anyone with a weapon—even craftsmen with sewing scissors or kitchen knives—were shot on the night of May 3. Spanish patriots continued to resist the French for the next few years, and this first wave of rebels came to be seen as heroes.

Goya's painting movingly captures the pathos of the citizens of Madrid as they are led to their slaughter in front of a firing squad, and Goya subtly manipulates the viewer into sharing his own sensibilities. His ability to evoke this emotional response makes this painting a masterpiece. Goya does not soften the gruesome scene with displays of painterly skill or technical virtuosity. His colors are stark and muted, except for the lurid glow from the lamp and the rivulets of the martyrs' blood. Abandoning his classical training, he leaves his brushwork coarse, as if he were quickly sketching so as not to lose the immediacy of painful feeling.

Napoleon's soldiers are identical and anonymous, lined in a ruthlessly precise row. Their act of killing is machinelike and inhuman. None of their faces can be seen; instead, Goya emphasizes the cold steel of their gun barrels and the repetitive shapes of their uniforms. The citizens of Madrid, on the other hand, carry expressions—frightened, heroic, sorrowful—which clearly signal to the viewer that these are real people who share a common humanity with us. They are shown as individuals, distinct in dress and comportment. The central figure, dressed in white with arms outstretched and wounds on his palms, alludes to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross—turning these rebellious Spaniards into an echo of the most famous example of unjust killing.

Goya shifts the focus from the victor to the vanquished and cuts through the proud sentimentalism and the focus on power and might.

Before Goya, war paintings were often made by the victors to celebrate their own exploits of bravery on the battlefield. Goya shifts the focus from the victor to the vanquished and cuts through the proud sentimentalism and the focus on power and might, which marked his era's conventional portrayals of war.

This expressiveness opened a way for other artists to experiment with technique so as to elicit immediate emotional effects, not only in paintings of war, but in other genres as well. ■

VOICES NICK EICHER

The vanishing worker

Millions of prime-age men are out of the workforce. David Bahnsen says it's a spiritual crisis, not just an economic one

When the federal government shut down and furloughed so-called "non-essential employees" on Oct. 1, its Bureau of Labor Statistics couldn't issue the usual monthly jobs report. Yet sometimes the absence of data reveals as much as the data itself, pointing to another absence: working-age men not working.

The American workforce has long faced a quiet crisis: About 7 million men of prime working age—25 to 54—are neither working nor seeking, up from about 5 million in the 1990s. This persistent trend signals a broader societal issue—disconnection from the purpose of work.

We may have stopped noticing. Wealth manager David Bahnsen thinks that's exactly the problem. "The problem isn't a shortage of jobs," he told me. "It's a collapse of will."

At a recent *WORLD Stage* event in Houston, Bahnsen made the case that every human being is created to be a worker—a producer, a co-creator with God. "The number of non-essential workers," he told our audience, "is always and forever zero." In his view, God made every person to build, to serve, to make something of the world.

That conviction anchors his book *Full-Time: Work and the Meaning of Life*. Work, he writes, was not invented after the Fall to punish. It began in Eden. Before there was sweat or scarcity, there was a command: "Rule and subdue." God left the world unfinished, Bahnsen says, for humans to finish it—turn raw material into beauty and order. As he says, we were made to "draw out the potential of creation."

Bahnsen's strength lies in uniting economic realism with creational theology. He refuses to treat "ministry" as holier than managing a balance sheet. Drawing on Genesis 1–2 and echoing Dorothy Sayers, he argues that with productive work—the making of things, the meeting of needs—we participate in God's creative purpose.

Bahnsen's point isn't that productivity defines a person, but that creative labor expresses what it means to be human. Work is not a curse to be managed; it's a gift to be ordered. When men lose the habit of work, they lose something that no amount of leisure can replace.

The evidence of that loss is clear in the data. According to the Federal Reserve, the labor-force participation rate for prime-age men has declined almost steadily since 1990—a drop spanning roughly 35 years. During that span, the percentage of these men neither working nor looking for work has increased from about 8% to more than 11%. In a country this big, the change means millions of souls.

Bahnsen sees idleness as a moral malady: "Almost any marriable young man is employable, and almost any employable young man is marriable." The breakdown of work and family feeds on itself—unemployed men become unmarriable; fatherless boys grow up without models of diligence. It's a spiritual feedback loop.

That's why Bahnsen pushes back on the pulpit cliché "You are not what you do." Of course work shapes identity: "Nobody pictures Michael Jordan and doesn't picture a basketball player." Churches, he adds, often warn against overwork while ignoring under-work—a more common sin. Work is not everything, but it is one of the ways we image God. To strip it of dignity is to strip humanity of design.

He extends that logic to economics. Markets are moral goods precisely because they channel our creative impulses into mutual blessing: "In a free market, we can't make our life better without making someone else's life better."

Properly ordered, exchange itself becomes a form of love—service rendered through skill.

Bahnsen can sound almost defiant in a culture that prizes victimhood over vocation. He rejects the phrase *work-life balance* as a false dichotomy: "No one goes home saying, 'Honey, I can't talk right now—I'm doing marriage-life balance.'" His humor disarms, but his point is serious. Work is not the enemy of life; done rightly, it's one of its expressions.

Trade-offs, he says, are built into creation itself. The goal isn't to escape them but to order them rightly—productivity without pride, ambition without idolatry, rest without retreat. Forget that, and a nation loses more than output. It loses a piece of its soul, because when people stop working, they lose sight of the One whose image they bear.

Economic statistics alone can't measure what's really missing. Bahnsen isn't offering a policy solution anyway. His point is simpler, and older: The dignity of work is a divine calling. He argues that the curse of the Fall lies in futility, not in the work God ordained before it. ■

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LAND OF

INDUSTRIAL FARMING FILLED THE WORLD'S PLATE BUT CAME WITH A SIDE SERVING OF EROSION, POLLUTION, AND ULTRA-PROCESSED FOOD

***by* Addie Offereins**

PLENTY

Workers harvest corn in a field on a farm near McIntire, Iowa.

SCOTT OLSON/GETTY IMAGES

Kathy Carlson remembers her gardening days fondly. Back in the 1970s, she canned a lot. Green beans. Tomatoes. These days, she tends a few plants recreationally, but the Iowa native relies on her local grocery store for the majority of her fresh produce. "I don't can anything anymore," she said.

Carlson isn't the only Iowa farmer who reverted to the local supermarket, and the state's agricultural landscape reflects it. Stick-straight corn marches like soldiers in identical rows across massive swaths of farmland, interspersed with sprawling soybean fields, only the occasional grain elevator interrupting the monotonous horizon. Very few picket fences guard lush gardens. It's an almost unbroken golden sea.

The Hawkeye state used to be a major apple producer, believe it or not, said Jeremy Hummel, a professor of agriculture at Dordt University. A typical Iowa farm in the mid-1900s would have also cultivated cattle, horses, chickens, hogs, oats, hay, cherries, and potatoes, in addition to corn. "We have a lot less crop diversity on our landscape," he notes.

But Carlson says she eats many more fruits and vegetables today than when older generations managed thriving gardens. Aside from the couple of short months when they harvested their produce, Carlson said, her family used to rely on canned versions of the vegetables throughout the year. You couldn't get much fresh food at the store either. Grocers only sold fresh carrots, celery, apples, and oranges.

"We kind of grew up on things that were canned," she said. "We didn't have access to avocados and blueberries and raspberries and broccoli and cauliflower."

Such a sparse produce aisle is a reality most Americans today can't imagine. That's because the majority of us grew up after a wholesale agricultural transformation of global food systems known as the Green Revolution. Technological innovations kick-started by the end of World War II and the rise of new global supply chains gave residents of most developed countries access to a greater variety of food—and more of it—than ever before. For the first time in human history, the majority of the earth's population had enough food to eat.

But critics of the movement toward industrialized agriculture note this new approach to farming left a trail of erosion, pollution, and overconsumption of ultra-processed foods in its wake. Proponents of alternative agriculture, who champion a set of practices known as organic farming or agroecology, are gaining cultural traction, joining forces with the Make America Healthy Again coalition to argue that the chemicals we spray on our food are undermining our health. Others tie the push for more natural methods to Christian ideas about stewardship.

But does Biblical stewardship require Christians to eschew industrial farming altogether? It's easy to blame Big Agriculture for our health and environmental problems, but not too long ago, most people in the world didn't have enough

Mixed fields of soybeans, grain corn, maturing oats, and alfalfa in Clayton County, Iowa

TIMOTHY HEARSUM/DESIGN PICS EDITORIAL/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES

to eat, some agricultural experts caution. Without Big Agriculture, that could still be the case. And scaling up chemical-free methods could come with its own set of hefty environmental consequences.

Carlson's eyes grow warm behind a pair of stylish glasses outfitted in leopard-print rims when she thinks back to the start of her farming operation. She and her husband, Roger, began with a combined $8,000 in their bank accounts and a modest 300 acres. The couple joined their savings to purchase their first tractor. Fifty-one years later, Carlson and her two adult children manage one of the largest farms in Montgomery County, Iowa.

The Carlsons measure their farm's productivity in terms of bushels per acre. In the 1970s, the Carlsons considered 120 bushels of corn and about 30 bushels of soybeans per acre a good yield. Last year, the family harvested a staggering 300 bushels of corn and 80 bushels of soybeans per acre.

Their fantastic yields are the direct result of Green Revolution research between the 1950s and 1990s, when agronomists, often funded by governments and large foundations, discovered how to create high-yielding, pesticide-tolerant versions of major grains, focusing especially on corn, wheat, and rice.

These developments—fueled by equally significant advances in irrigation and fertilizer technology—arrived not a moment too soon.

Well into the 20th century, hunger was still a major problem. People struggled to consume enough calories, even in parts of Europe. In 1946, the United Nations released a report spanning 70 countries whose residents accounted for about 90% of the earth's population. It found that the pre–World War II food supply couldn't provide enough calories for more than half the globe's inhabitants, with those living in Asia and Central America experiencing the most deficiencies.

The report issued a recommendation equal parts ambitious and chilling: To keep up with population growth, the world would have to double its food supply. "Nothing less is involved than a transformation of life in all its aspects which challenges the best efforts of science and industry, governments and peoples," it warned.

But that's exactly what happened during the next few decades.

As World War II drew to a close, the American government enlisted the Rockefeller Foundation and Norman Borlaug, an American agronomist known as one of the fathers of the Green Revolution, to improve Mexico's corn crop in hopes of staving off worrying political unrest. Borlaug eventually switched his efforts to wheat and employed an accelerated breeding technique, known as shuttle breeding, to produce a variety that could withstand common fungi and diseases. He went on to breed the plant to have shorter, thicker stalks that could hold far more wheat berries.

Combined with heavy use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, the new wheat tripled yields. The United States and other countries like Pakistan and India quickly switched to using Borlaug's seeds, and researchers employed his methods to create new corn and rice varieties. Studies estimate that these new high-yielding crop varieties increased yields by 44% between 1965 and 2010. Green Revolution research enabled India, the world's most populous nation, to shift from importing grain to self-sufficiency. By the 1990s, these new grains accounted for 70% of the wheat and rice planted in low-income countries.

When Carlson cups one of these remarkable seeds in her hand, it typically appears an odd pink or green color. That's because both the corn and soybean seeds are treated with insecticides and fungicides even before they go into the ground.

These grain varieties are also especially nitrogen-hungry, so the Carlsons apply a highly concentrated nitrogen fertilizer called anhydrous ammonia to the soil several months before planting season in mid-April. Gone are the days of using a bean hook for weeding. "We put the crop in the ground, and we run a sprayer through this field," she said. Carlson told me she isn't thrilled about the amount of chemicals they layer on the soil and spray on their crops as they grow, but at her scale, it wouldn't make sense to revert to old methods, she said.

Underpinning what's now the conventional approach to farming are ideas about soil fertility with roots stretching back to the late 1800s, said Hummel, the agriculture professor at Dordt University. German chemists discovered that agricultural productivity hinged on three chemical elements: nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium. Farmers could improve their yields if they gave a plant just the right amount of all three, or in other words, got the chemistry right.

The technological infrastructure required to implement these scientific developments, which had been simmering for decades, took off after the World Wars, Hummel noted. Companies repurposed wartime chemical factories to produce fertilizers and pesticides. Fossil fuels cranked new pumps pulling trillions of gallons of water from the Ogallala Aquifer in the American Midwest to satiate the extra-thirsty, high-yielding grains.

The system's productivity is stunning—but so are the environmental ramifications. Monoculture crops that require excessive fertilizer application can cause soil erosion over time and chemical runoff that upsets the natural habitat in bodies of water as far away as the Gulf of America. And researchers at Texas State University predicted that current irrigation practices will drain the Ogallala Aquifer 52% before 2060.

"The consequences have been a gradual pollution of soil, air, and water, and a negative impact on human health," said Emile Frison, a Belgian agricultural researcher and a member of the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems, or IPES.

While a fixation on chemistry drove much of the practices undergirding industrial farming, proponents of alternative methods emphasize the importance of soil biology.

Plugging fertilizers into a chemical formula grows plants, but it can still produce food lacking in essential nutrients. That's because only healthy soil, fostering a full-bodied ecosystem of microbes, can fuel healthy food, Frison said.

Frison advocates for a set of practices collectively known as agroecology, a movement he said is often mischaracterized as "looking backwards," when, in fact, agroecology is on the cutting edge of microbiome research. Frison told me about research in Andhra Pradesh, India, for instance, where 6 million farmers are involved in the world's largest agroecology experiment, scientists from the United States and Australia are studying how soil microorganisms change production. Their research includes cultivating the microorganisms from a cow's microbiome and inserting them into the soil.

Increasing microbial activity in the soil would naturally provide plants with more nitrogen, Frison noted, since microbes use the chemical as an energy source. He believes this could allow farmers to cut out synthetic fertilizers without

BELOW: Ernest Borlaug inspects wheat fields in Atizapan, Mexico. RIGHT: A farmer sprays natural pesticide on his farm in Pedavuppudu village in India's Andhra Pradesh state.

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experiencing drastically lower yields. Applying man-made fertilizers and pesticides on the soil year after year kills these microorganisms, he said.

Still, scaling up organic farming methods like agroecology would come with its own set of environmental challenges, said Dan Blaustein-Rejto, who heads up the food and agriculture program at the Breakthrough Institute. He told me his organization, which promotes technological solutions to environmental issues, often clashes with other environmental groups advocating for alternative agriculture.

Chemical pesticides and fertilizers boost yields and reduce the portion of crop lost to pests, enabling farmers to produce more food on a smaller amount of land. "One of our top goals is to minimize the land footprint of agriculture," Blaustein-Rejto said. "We often see the trade-offs of many modern inputs as being very worthwhile."

A meta-analysis of data from 105 studies comparing organic and conventional farming found that organic farms produce about 18% less on average. Other studies estimate the yield gap to be somewhere between 29% and 44% depending on the specific crop. Basic economic theory dictates that a reduction in the food supply and a rise in prices would spur farmers to expand, Blaustein-Rejto noted. Some studies indicate that scaling up organic farming to match industrial farming's current output would require farmers to cultivate two to three times the amount of land currently in use around the world.

Alternative agriculture proponents, along with supporters of the Make America Healthy Again movement, point out that while industrial farming has lowered the cost of food, the Green Revolution's laser focus on commodity crops has also lowered the quality of what people are eating.

Modern diets center around a small number of grains and legumes, often at the expense of traditional crops with higher nutrient counts like millet, sorghum, rye, barley, and cassava. The iron content of the world's most-consumed grains declined 19% between 1961 and 2011. While these custom-designed grains are "rich in calories, they often lack essential micronutrients found in fruits and vegetables that aren't a part of the industrialized diet," Frison with IPES noted. To make matters worse, agribusiness companies funnel a large portion of these commodity crops into factories that transform them into ultra-processed food.

Travis Lybbert, a professor of agriculture and resource economics at the University of California, Davis, told me that while some places still struggle with outright hunger due to supply chain disruptions, corruption, and poverty, most countries are reckoning with "diseases of overconsumption" and the results of eating unhealthy food. One IPES report noted that about 2 billion people worldwide suffer from "hidden hunger," or a lack of essential micronutrients. Roughly 3 billion people are also obese or overweight, according to the World Obesity Foundation.

ALTAF QADRI/AP

"You know you're raising something that's going to affect somebody a long way from where you live."

As food prices plummeted, healthcare expenditures for the average American simultaneously climbed. In 1950, Americans shelled out roughly 20% of their disposable income on food. Only about 7% went to healthcare. In 2024, Americans spent about 10% of their income on food and used between 16% and 34% to cover healthcare costs.

But a more local and diverse cropping system wouldn't necessarily improve human diets or health, Blaustein-Rejto with the Breakthrough Institute observed. "In many ways, people's diets are more diverse than they historically have been," he said. "That's not to say that diets today and human health are by any means optimal, but I think there's a danger of romanticizing past diets and agricultural practices."

Cathy Carlson's garden proves that point. Today's global market supplies Carlson with fresh produce through every season, not just one or two months out of the year. Not only did very few people have year-round access to fresh food just a few decades ago, but it wasn't too long ago that acute hunger plagued every continent, Lybbert, at the University of California, Davis, points out.

"Organic food production will always be a tiny sliver of total global food production, and we should hope it doesn't get big," Lybbert said. "It's easy to forget ... in the middle of the 20th century, outright famine was a major concern."

Teaching agriculture at a Christian university, Hummel understands the spiritual appeal of methods seen as more natural. But he's wary of automatically rejecting technologies or practices outright. Still, he argued that doesn't mean we shouldn't be "thoughtful critics" of waste and environmental harm.

He notes that there are ways to improve pesticide and fertilizer use without throwing them out altogether, such as technologies to help farmers calculate a more exact nitrogen fertilizer rate to minimize runoff. Today, farmers often apply more fertilizer than they expect to need in case of a bumper crop.

In his classroom at the College of the Ozarks, a tiny college situated on its own farm in the Ozark Mountains of Missouri, professor of agriculture Micah Humphreys delves even deeper into how a Christian should approach farming. Among other classic farming treatises, his students read *The Marvelous Pigness of Pigs* by renowned organic farmer Joel Salatin. Humphreys uses these texts to raise the question: What is the standard by which we do agriculture?

Most alternative agricultural movements argue that nature should be that standard.

"Whatever's happening in the ecosystem becomes what you measure your agricultural system against," he told me during our interview. That's a key thrust in Salatin's book—honoring the pigness of pigs and the way God created them. The problem is, the Scriptures don't direct us to use nature as our measuring stick, Humphreys said. Instead, they seem to suggest that nature wasn't intended to be wild, and humans are called to develop and civilize the earth.

So what should that look like in our fields? Humphreys says he still has more questions than answers about whether we should use chemicals to grow our food. But Christians do have some clear Biblical principles to guide their farming practices, he argued.

For instance, he points out, industrial farming has resulted in a shrinking agricultural population as farms expand to specialize in one or two monoculture crops. Increased mechanization and chemical use mean less manual labor, larger fields, and smaller towns. The Bible is clear about the importance of strengthening human communities, so rebuilding these rural communities should be at the center of any farming initiative.

In other words, there's a Biblical mandate to care for the people who farm the land, not just the land, Humphreys said.

Carlson loves drinking in the smell of spring soil when she takes her cultivator or planter out into fields that lay untouched all winter long. But nothing compares to autumn when the plants are standing tall in "beautiful, straight rows," she said. "You know you're raising something that's going to affect somebody a long way from where you live."

Stewardship of her crops and land includes giving God what you can't control, she said, as well as making small, beneficial changes to the things you can. Carlson said she's learned not to worry about weather, yields, or grain prices, and instead to trust the Lord with those outcomes. The couple planted many trees on their acreage and did their best to minimize soil erosion and chemical runoff to keep it out of nearby rivers. She said that's something most farmers try to do.

But Carlson doesn't believe stewardship means reverting to her grandparents' farming practices.

"I don't think I can see the world going back to the 1930s and '40s and farming the way they did before. It's so labor-intensive, it would cost so much," she said. "I just don't know that that can happen in today's world and make it cost-effective to be able to grow a crop that the world can benefit from." ■

ERIN SCHAFF/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

THE 360

A MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE

BIG FOOD AND ANTI-HUNGER GROUPS FIGHT TOOTH AND NAIL AGAINST SNAP REFORM

***by* Addie Offereins**

Flanked by two of her children, Katie Lewis guided her large shopping cart down the aisle in Bedford, Va.'s, Walmart Supercenter. A conglomeration of chips and snacks lined one side of the walkway, rack upon rack of sodas towered on the other. Customers brushed by the group as Lewis reminded her two shoppers-in-training to stick close to her cart. Her daughter scampered away for a moment and returned holding a dead cricket. Lewis gave me a look that said: Grocery shopping is always an adventure.

There were two large packs of canned tuna in Lewis' cart. A box of diced onions. A Styrofoam carton of 18 eggs. On the sweeter side, she'd selected a box of mini Dr. Pepper cans, sour fruit candy, and some cream-filled packaged cakes. Together, it's what she calls the "basics." Lewis planned to purchase the foodstuffs with her Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) dollars, formerly known as food stamps. Every month, she receives about $740 through the program for her family of four. But things still get tight at the end of the month, she told me.

"As a single parent, with a single job, it's rough," Lewis said. "Everything's sky high."

Lewis is one of roughly 42 million Americans who receive SNAP benefits. While the program is entirely federally funded, individual states manage its day-to-day workings. In most states, including Virginia, SNAP participants are free to purchase almost any grocery store food item with their benefits. But that's starting to change.

Since President Donald Trump took office in January, 13 states have requested, and, for the first time, 12 of them have received federal approval to remove soda, candy, or other sugary foods from the list of eligible items. Proponents of the restrictions point out that American taxpayers shouldn't subsidize items they contend are at cross-purposes with SNAP's stated purpose: to "increase food security and ensure low-income households have access to nutritious food." *Nutritious* being the key word, they argue.

Their reform efforts are meeting fierce opposition. Major food and beverage companies, along with anti-hunger advocacy groups, are fighting tooth and nail against efforts to take junk food off the program, using similar talking points to argue that restrictions will hurt program recipients and could end up shrinking SNAP. But reform proponents point to an obvious conflict of interest: Will reform efforts actually hurt the hungry—or opponents' bottom line?

Hair-raising images of wailing babies, little more than skin and bones, admitted to the hospital due to severe malnutrition, filled American TV screens on May 21, 1968. That evening, CBS News aired "Hunger in America," an hourlong special report that depicted in graphic detail regions of the country where ordinary men and women struggled to feed themselves and their children.

The documentary succeeded in drawing the public's—and the future president's—attention to the lingering problem of hunger and malnutrition in the United States. President Richard Nixon urged Congress to address the "embarrassing and intolerable" problem of malnutrition and convened the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health in December 1969. The gathering produced dozens of recommendations and, most significantly, fueled the expansion of the national food stamp program, first approved as part of the New Deal in 1939.

Participation skyrocketed, going from 2 million in October 1967 to 15 million by October 1974.

Congress stopped requiring recipients to purchase booklets of the orange and blue stamps in 1977 and, in 1996, directed states to switch to electronic benefit transfer cards to reduce the stigma of using them. Congress dubbed the system the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program 12 years later, with the aim of refocusing on nutrition.

By that time, acute hunger had all but disappeared. Advances in industrial agriculture spurred a precipitous drop in food prices, and programs such as SNAP, additional benefits for mothers and children, and free school lunches ensured every American had access to essentials. The U.S. Department of Agriculture swapped "hunger" for the term "food insecurity," a much more subjective measure that's gauged by Americans' responses to a range of questions, including whether they often worry about food running out before they can buy more.

No longer do Americans suffer due to a calorie shortage, but Harvard University nutrition expert and former USDA official Jerold Mande says "food is still a problem."

In a study published in January, researchers at the Network Science Institute at Northeastern University found that roughly 70% of the abundance ladening America's supermarket shelves falls into the category of ultra-processed. "If you went into those factories, there's very little you'd see in there that you would recognize as food," said Mande, who used to perform inspections on the processing plants producing what he calls "industrial formulations." Powders and sludges are combined into something that "looks really unappetizing," he added. "Then they lean heavily into cosmetics, colors, and flavors to make the food not only edible but actually craveable."

As a result, Americans are suffering from chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and obesity at record rates, Mande noted. A 2016 USDA study analyzing grocery store purchase data from 2011 revealed SNAP recipients spent more money on soft drinks than any other item. Purchases of sweetened beverages, desserts, salty snacks, and candy exceeded combined fruit and vegetable sales by $9.4 billion.

The data showed that individuals receiving SNAP benefits tend to have even worse diets compared to people with similar incomes who aren't on the program. Program participants also reported a higher prevalence of obesity and abnormal blood pressure.

A woman who depends on SNAP benefits shops for groceries at a supermarket in Bellflower, Calif.

ALLISON DINNER/AP

Ultra-processed foods are often some of the cheapest in the grocery store, Mande observed, but not quite as affordable as in-season produce and dry goods like beans and rice. But ultra-processed foods are much more convenient to prepare. SNAP's extra boost of cash allows beneficiaries to purchase these foods to save time in the kitchen, he argued. Mande believes individuals with similar incomes who don't receive SNAP dollars have organized their lives in a way that allows them to prepare healthier food from scratch.

Paige Terryberry, a senior research fellow at the Foundation for Government Accountability, argued SNAP is failing in its mission to provide enrollees with a more nutritious diet, and American taxpayers shouldn't be contributing to the nation's growing health crisis. "The government should not be a major funder of junk foods that are driving diet-related chronic diseases among the most vulnerable," she added.

The federal government spent $113 billion on SNAP in 2023. Terryberry pointed out that American taxpayers often end up paying for ultra-processed food twice. Once at the grocery store and once in the doctor's office. Roughly 78% of SNAP recipients are also on Medicaid.

When Texas state Sen. Lois Kolkhorst and her husband operated 14 convenience stores in and around Brenham, Texas, the couple refused to accept SNAP. "We did not sell fresh vegetables and fresh fruits and meats and things that were what I believe should be purchased with taxpayer dollars," Kolkhorst explained.

As chair of the Texas Senate's Health and Human Services Committee, Kolkhorst advocated fiercely for Senate Bill 379, which prohibits the purchase of sweetened drinks and candy with SNAP dollars. Versions of the bill had been floating around for a while, Kolkhorst told me, but the legislation received renewed interest with the rise of the Make America Healthy Again movement.

The law defines a sweetened drink as any nonalcoholic beverage that contains 5 grams or more of added sugar or any amount of artificial sweetener. Drinks that contain milk, milk substitutes, or 50% fruit juice are still eligible for SNAP. Candy includes "any confection made with natural or artificial sweeteners," but does not include products used for cooking, such as chocolate bits or cake sprinkles, the waiver clarifies.

Kolkhorst said she wasn't surprised when the bill attracted opposition from food manufacturers and grocery chains. Walmart, which netted more than a quarter of total SNAP dollars in the 12 months ending April 30, 2025, registered against the bill. The grocer spent $7.2 million lobbying the

federal government in 2024. Groups like the American Beverage Association and Coca-Cola also spent millions.

"What did surprise me is that groups that should be very interested in the health of the general population, children and adults, were against the bill," Kolkhorst said. These included Feeding Texas, the Texas branch of Feeding America—one of the nation's largest nonprofits responsible for providing food to a network of food banks and pantries across the country. Aside from the federal government, Feeding America is the largest provider of SNAP application assistance.

Feeding America's CEO, Claire Babineaux-Fontenot, told me that while her organization supports making nutritious foods more available to SNAP participants, so-called junk-food bans aren't the way forward. She argued that the restrictions focus on removing unhealthy items from the program without making it easier for participants to purchase healthy alternatives. "The reality is that not every calorie is created equally," Babineaux-Fontenot said. "But when you're experiencing hunger, every calorie counts."

Babineaux-Fontenot argued that item restrictions strip participants of the dignity of choice instead of enabling them to make more nutritious selections. Opponents of the restrictions also raise concerns about the administrative burden they could place on grocery stores.

But Kolkhorst pointed out that businesses already have the systems in place to exclude certain federally prohibited items such as alcohol, supplements, and hot food. She predicted that market forces will quickly motivate stores to adapt to the junk-food bans and find new ways to cater to SNAP recipients, especially in areas where they compose a large percentage of their customer base.

Gov. Greg Abbott signed Texas' new restrictions into law this summer, and they will take effect on April 1, 2026, now that the state has received federal approval. So far, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Colorado, Florida, West Virginia, Arkansas, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Nebraska, and Utah also have received federal approval to eliminate sugary items from the program.

Meanwhile, Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly vetoed a bill that would have required her state to request federal approval to restrict the purchase of candy and soft drinks. Her veto remarks echoed the concerns of many anti-hunger advocacy groups and large food and beverage companies.

"This bill is simply wrong," Kelly wrote in her terse explanation. "Not only would it make it more difficult for Kansans to access the food they need to feed their families, it would also harm Kansas businesses."

Anti-hunger groups' alignment with Big Food to oppose SNAP reform is nothing new, Harvard's Jerold Mande told me. Nonprofit advocacy groups like the Food Research and Action Center and Feeding America realized they didn't hold enough political sway on their own to combat efforts to cut SNAP dollars, he said. So, they sought a powerful partner in Big Food.

For decades, Mande said, the partnership functioned like a "marriage made in heaven." Anti-hunger groups succeeded in boosting low-income Americans' grocery budgets, and Big Food happily advocated to put more dollars in their customers' pockets. But as more public health research emerged in the 1990s about the dangers of ultra-processed food, especially for low-income Americans, the relationship should have soured, Mande said. Instead, anti-hunger groups just looked away.

Soft drinks, candy, and salty snacks are more frequently purchased by SNAP users than healthier options like fruit and vegetables.

COKES: JEFFREY GREENBERG/UCG/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES; CANDY: JC MILHET/HANS LUCAS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

That's because by then, anti-hunger groups had come to rely on Big Food donations, Mande said. He pointed to the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) as just one example.

FRAC hosted its annual benefit breakfast in October, centered around the theme, "Feeding Communities. SNAP Matters." The organization listed Coca-Cola as one of the event's top three sponsors. Hersey Company, which owns more than 70 chocolate, sweets, and snack brands, was also listed as a major donor for the event. So were Walmart and the National Association of Convenience Stores.

I asked FRAC via email about whether the donations their organization receives from food and beverage companies have affected their position on cutting sugary drinks and candy from the program. Jordan Baker, senior communications manager, directed me to the donations policy on their website, in which the organization states it will not accept money if it's conditioned on FRAC adopting or declining to adopt a "substantive policy position."

In his emailed statement, Baker also pointed to the harms of food restrictions: "increased paperwork, administrative costs, lost benefits due to confusion over eligible foods, and bureaucratic wrangling over what's 'in' or 'out.'"

Two of Feeding America's largest donors are Walmart and Sam's Club. Their investments in the nonprofit total more than $271 million since 2005, according to the company's website. The duo has also donated more than 9 billion pounds of food. Since 2014, Feeding America has partnered with the chains through the "Fight Hunger. Spark Change." campaign, which has garnered more than $206 million for the organization since 2014. General Mills, Dollar General, Kraft Heinz, and Albertsons are some of the large grocers and food manufacturers Feeding America lists as visionary partners, recognized for gifts of $4 million or more.

JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES

In our interview, Feeding America CEO Babineaux-Fontenot was quick to acknowledge, even celebrate, the fact that SNAP dollars benefit American businesses, farmers, and ranchers, not just program recipients. "Snap has to be about people," she said. "And it has to be about an ecosystem."

But Babineaux-Fontenot rebuffed criticisms that her organization opposes restrictions on the use of SNAP dollars to purchase soda and candy because it might hurt the profit margins of its Big Food and Beverage donors. "Whomever it is that says that just doesn't know who we are and they're not paying attention," she argued.

"We advocate for increasing access to nutrition for people experiencing hunger all the time. We advocate for the voice of people experiencing hunger being the most important voice," Babineaux-Fontenot added. "We don't have people experiencing hunger clamoring to say, please give us less choice at the grocery store."

Racial advocacy groups like the NAACP have also pilloried attempted soda bans as racist and condescending, said Marion Nestle, a public health nutritionist and the author of *Soda Politics* and *Food Politics*. In 2012, former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg attempted to prohibit restaurants from serving sodas larger than 16 ounces. The NAACP and Hispanic Federation filed an amicus brief in support of a lawsuit filed by the American Beverage Association and other business groups challenging the ban.

"But that wasn't particularly surprising, because the soda industry had been funding them for decades," Nestle noted. "When you have these funding relationships, it's very difficult to sort out the politics."

American Enterprise Institute senior fellow Angela Rachidi witnessed the power of Big Food's partnership with advocacy groups firsthand. In 2010, two years before his ill-fated restaurant soda ban, Bloomberg requested a waiver from USDA to ban the use of SNAP dollars to purchase soda. Rachidi, who worked in the city's social services department at the time, drafted the waiver proposal, which USDA denied. Fast-forward to May 2024, and not much had changed. Rachidi testified before the House Appropriations Committee about improving nutrition in SNAP and encountered pushback from both Democrats and Republicans alike.

And while the federal government's attitude has shifted in favor of the bans for the first time under Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s Make America Healthy Again push, the opposition is just as determined.

At the heart of the disagreement is a persistent, fundamental divide over the purpose of SNAP, she said.

Anti-hunger groups and their Big Food supporters cling to the food stamp program's original intent to relieve acute hunger, Rachidi noted, despite the newer focus on improving nutrition.

"The problem today is not that people don't have enough to eat," she said. "They just have too much of the wrong things to eat." ■

For more coverage of government aid programs, visit wng.org/compassion

ASIAN ALLIANCE

Disdain for Western democracy solidifies a new autocratic coalition

by WILLIAM FLEESON

A bright September sun shone over Beijing's Tiananmen Square, illuminating the full strength of China's military. Men and machinery marched past a who's who of global autocrats: Chinese President Xi Jinping, Russian President Vladimir Putin, and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

The parade—held ostensibly to mark the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II—was China's largest-ever show of military might. Xi used the event to showcase new types of nuclear weapons for the first time. Perhaps more alarmingly, the parade's attendees offered an updated vision of dictatorial unity.

Two days earlier, Xi and Putin met with Indian President Narendra Modi at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) conference in the Chinese port city of Tianjin. (SCO was founded in 2001 to advance Eurasian economic goals.) During the event, the leaders affirmed a rising global paradigm—what Xi called "true multilateralism"—to counter U.S. and European control of world affairs. Russia and Asian countries broadly share a view that Western rules, including the economic policies of U.S. President Donald Trump, stand against the interests of their own ascendant power.

Analysts now caution that a new era of Russian-Asian cooperation is in the works. And that has potentially dangerous implications for America's interests and allies around the world, and for flash points like Taiwan and Ukraine.

Putin (left), Xi (center), and Kim arrive at the Sept. 3 military parade in Beijing.

ALEXANDER KAZAKOV/POOL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Jack Burnham, a China military analyst at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, says the ongoing trend of non-Western cohesion isn't new. But he warned further development of an autocratic axis warrants serious concern.

"Russia and China in particular, as well as North Korea to a lesser extent, are in for far more than just a dalliance," Burnham said, and are in fact "setting the foundations for a long-term strategic relationship" with economic, military, and political dimensions.

The West, Burnham suggested, should do more to dissuade would-be aggressors from challenging the current world order. This strategic posture is known, in professional defense circles, under the broad term of *deterrence*.

After September, that approach feels more necessary than ever. For the first time, China publicly showcased its ability to launch airborne nuclear weapons, confirming long-known capabilities. It also demonstrated its atomic launch technology from land, sea, and air, sometimes called a "nuclear triad." China, India, North Korea, and Russia all possess nuclear weapons, as does the United States and a few mostly European countries. But the atomic arsenals vary widely in quality and quantity of weapons.

Should deterrence fail, the West must be ready to win a war in the Indo-Pacific region, Burnham said. He believes the United States should prepare itself, and help prepare its allies and partners, for such a possibility.

"Not everyone needs to do the same thing, but everyone needs to do something," he said.

Michael Sobolik, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, shares Burnham's sense of the seriousness of an autocratic threat, for Taiwan and other U.S. interests in the region.

Sobolik urged Americans to watch the events in Asia carefully—and to demand accountability from officials handling challenges coming from the region.

U.S. officials working with Beijing on a new, comprehensive trade deal should not barter promises of peace for new economic advantages, Sobolik said. Doing so could jeopardize the security of U.S. allies and partners, including Taiwan.

Sobolik put China's assurances not to attack Taiwan into the same category as Putin's repeated rhetoric about ending the war in Ukraine.

"What the American public should expect of their leaders is to not be taken for fools, to not be deceived," Sobolik said. He faulted federal

China's liquid-fueled intercontinental strategic nuclear missiles pass through Tiananmen Square during the military parade in Beijing.

SHENG JIAPENG/CHINA NEWS SERVICE/VCG VIA GETTY IMAGES

RUSSIA-ASIA ALLIANCE

Expanding relations among non-Western countries

policymakers for not enforcing certain laws, like the U.S. ban on TikTok, the Chinese social media platform whose parent company maintains ties to the Chinese Communist Party. Spotty enforcement sends the wrong signals to ambitious autocrats, he said.

More generally, Sobolik cautioned against American complacency toward U.S. interests abroad. In his view, the best deterrence against new challengers is a stronger status quo.

"Americans need to understand that the world is just getting really dangerous, and very unstable," Sobolik continued. "Strength matters more than anything else right now."

With a far smaller economy than either China or India, Russia has much to gain from tighter relations with its Eastern partners. During the SCO meeting, Russia and China inked a deal to finish a long-stalled pipeline delivering Russian natural gas to Chinese buyers.

Those benefits also mean military advantages. As the war in Ukraine grinds toward the four-year mark, Russia needs weapons, manpower, and money to keep its economy and military machine running. Even without foreign support, Russia's economy is more than 10 times larger than that of Ukraine, according to data from the World Bank. European countries fret that the war could eventually lead to a direct confrontation between Russia and NATO, the Western-led alliance Putin has long described as a threat to Russia.

Speaking in Beijing, Putin said Russia's ties with China are at "unprecedentedly high levels."

Russia has relied on Chinese help, from weapons technologies to Chinese troops on the

ground, since the start of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Russia has marshaled further assistance from other autocrats, mustering North Korean troops and Iran-provided Shahed drones that have killed Ukrainian soldiers and civilians. Several news reports have noted a yearslong pattern of Chinese inputs, from chemicals to component parts, found in Russian weapons used in Ukraine.

Xi meets with Putin in Moscow on May 8.

Together, that array of battle assets has formed a deadly threat for Ukraine—and for the United States, NATO, and other democratic partners.

"Ukraine is not only up against Russia, but is up against the combined weight of Russia, Iran, North Korea, and China in a very substantial way," Burnham said.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio acknowledged that imbalance when he called the fight in Ukraine a "proxy war between nuclear powers," meaning Russia and the United States. But other competitions are unfolding at the margins of global security, especially when it comes to cross-border arms sales.

Lyle Morris, a defense expert at the Washington-based Asia Society, said September's events in China have increased the stakes in the global weapons trade. Often a country's arms manufacturing takes place with active government partnership, such as the U.S. government's purchases and collaboration with the national defense-industrial base. Now as ever, countries with the ability to produce arms can sell them to smaller countries, deepening military and political ties in the process.

The Beijing parade served as a "coming-out party for China," while mimicking Russian, North Korean, and other autocracies' habits of giant military processions. The spectacle offered the "biggest advertisement for Chinese arms in the world," Morris said. And the show of force sent a chilling message to Taiwan: Resistance is futile.

"It was a signal to Taiwan that they should just give up, essentially," Morris added. "But the most important audience was the U.S., because the U.S. is the key factor in whether China would win or lose in a conflict over Taiwan."

Both Morris and Sobolik compared China's arms escalation with patterns from the Cold War, when the planet's two major power blocs, led by the United States and the Soviet Union, worked for military primacy—while trying to avoid a world-destroying atomic conflict.

The 21st century has its own race toward bigger, stronger weapons and a broader, East-West alignment of military strategies, Morris said.

"The reality is that we're living in the midst of a second Cold War," Sobolik said.

But Thomas Duesterberg, another senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, believes the growing alliance in the East is a matter of gradual change, not a structural shift—more evolution than revolution. Duesterberg, an expert in global trade and manufacturing, notes that a host of economic problems crowd Asia's path to global dominance, including China's trade imbalance and rising debt.

In global security, Duesterberg noted a connection between today's war in Ukraine—and a conflict over Taiwan tomorrow. The West's solidarity with Ukraine will guide Xi's thinking on the costliness of occupying Taiwan, which the Chinese government has long sought through what it calls "reunification" under a broad policy known as the "One China" principle. Taiwan has been politically separate from China since 1949, when Mao Zedong and his Communist forces seized the Chinese mainland and Nationalist forces under Chang Kai-shek fled to the island of Taiwan.

Any Western disunity on Ukraine may embolden Xi and his partners toward greater aggression against Taiwan. But the recent events in China were "more theater than substance," according to Duesterberg, who described announcements of a new, Asia-first world order as "wildly overstated."

"We're not even at the third inning of a transition to a new world order," he said. ■

PAVEL BEDNYAKOV/AP

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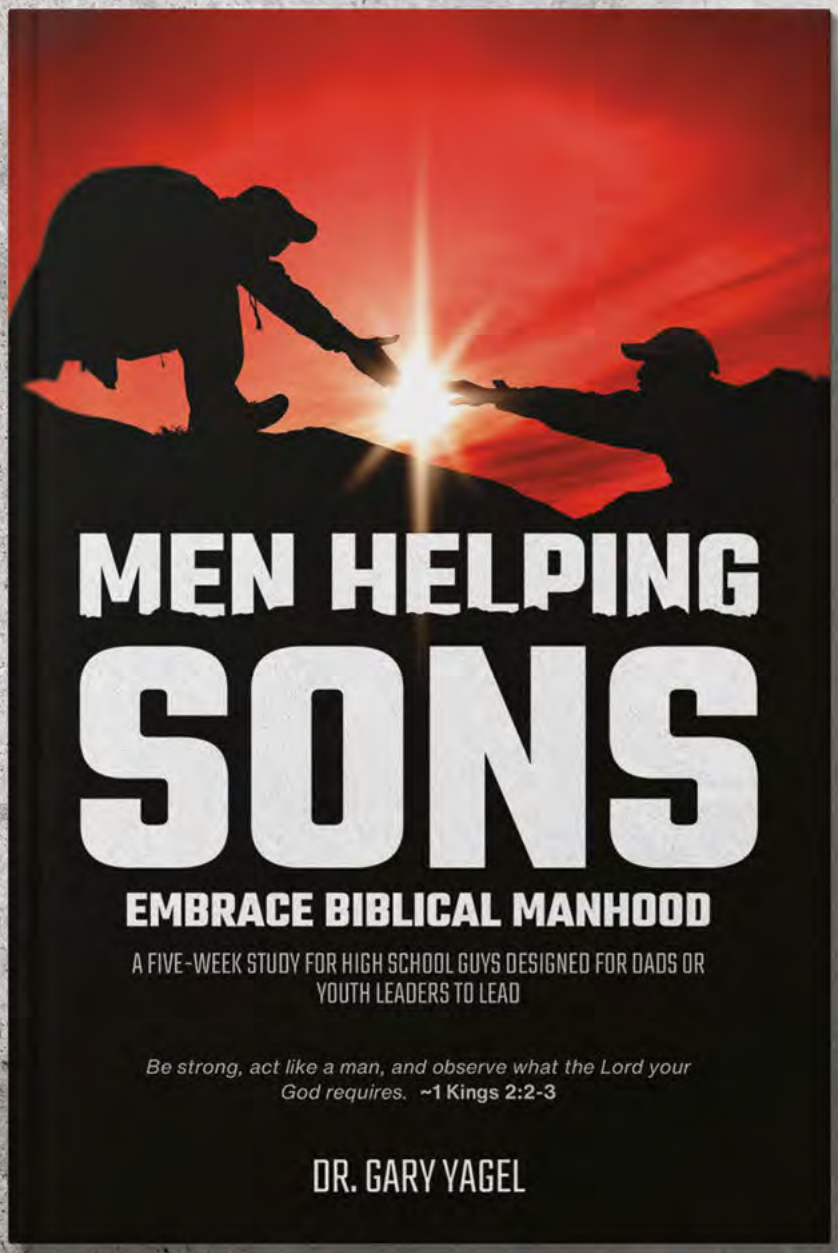

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Saving the lan

Syriac Orthodox Christians struggle to preserve Aramaic from the forces of assimilation

BY GRACE SNELL

photography by Danielle Richards/Genesis

GROWING UP IN NEW JERSEY, Nehrin Akyon got used to strangers stopping her in the grocery store. She already knew what they were going to ask: What language was she speaking with her siblings?

Akyon didn't hesitate to answer. "I speak Aramaic, the language of Jesus Christ," she would say.

Akyon, 35, moved to the United States from Turkey when she was less than a year old. But she isn't ethnically Turkish. She's Suryoyo—a term for Aramean and Assyrian people historically belonging to the Syriac Orthodox Church.

Akyon's ancestors preserved classical Syriac—a dialect of Aramaic descended from one of the languages Jesus spoke—in their liturgies for nearly two millennia. They trace their roots back to Antioch, the city the Book of Acts identifies as the place followers of Jesus were first called Christians. Over the centuries, Syriac Orthodox Christians survived persecution and the rise and fall of empires in the Middle East.

But since the turn of the 20th century, Christians of all traditions have been leaving the Middle East in waves. Since 1910, the share of Christians in the region has dropped from over 13% to about 3%.

Although there is no definitive count of Syriac Orthodox Christians globally, one 2016 report puts the number at over 5 million worldwide. An estimated 3 million of these live in India—where tradition says the Apostle Thomas carried the gospel in the first century. Less than 700,000 remain in the Middle East.

The Palm Sunday account from a 13th-century Aramaic Bible

guage of Jesus

Approximately 1.5 million live scattered across Europe, North and South America, and Oceania. There, Syriac Orthodox Christians have found peace and prosperity. But now they face a subtler existential threat—the slow erasure of their identity, language, and religion as younger generations assimilate into their new communities and countries.

LEFT: Nehrin Akyon at the entrance to the Mor Aphrem Center. RIGHT: Archbishop Kawak reads from the Gospel.

AKYON'S FAMILY SETTLED in Paramus, N.J., in 1990. This suburb of New York City is a hub for the Syriac Orthodox Church in the United States, with about 1,500 Syriac families living within a 10-mile radius of each other. Akyon grew up attending church regularly and especially loved celebrating Christmas and Easter there. The congregation felt like family.

School was a different matter. Akyon was outspoken about her faith, and some of her classmates made fun of her for it. Akyon didn't let that stop her from sharing about God, but it did leave her feeling isolated sometimes.

At school, Akyon learned to speak English. But at home, she and her family used a colloquial dialect of Aramaic with each other. And at church, services were in an older, more liturgical version of the language. Even after three decades living in the United States, Akyon said, Aramaic still comes a lot more naturally than English.

But that's increasingly rare among young people in Akyon's church.

Archbishop John Kawak is Akyon's bishop and oversees the Syriac Orthodox Church's Eastern U.S. diocese. Kawak estimates only between 30% and 40% of the young people in his community speak Aramaic fluently anymore. In fact, researchers say almost all Aramaic dialects spoken by Syriac Orthodox Christians from regions of Turkey, Iraq, and Iran are now on the brink of extinction.

Once the lingua franca of the Middle East, Aramaic first emerged somewhere between 1000 and 600 B.C. and is the language most scholars agree Jesus primarily spoke with His disciples. Over the centuries, the language evolved and splintered into more than 100 dialects spoken by Jewish and Christian minorities.

But today, only an estimated half million people still speak any of these Neo-Aramaic dialects.

One reason for this—a brutal genocide of Syriac Orthodox Christians. In 1915, the Ottoman Empire carried out a sweeping massacre of its Christian minorities. Before World War I, there were an estimated 500,000 Suryoye living under the Ottoman sultan's rule. Many of these lived in a region of Turkey called Tur Abdin—"Mountains of the Servants [of God]."

Four years later, about half of those Christians were dead.

Scholars call this the Assyrian Genocide, and it coincides with the more widely known Armenian Genocide. Aramean Christians remember it simply as the Sayfo—literally, "the sword."

Archbishop Kawak's father was born in 1929 in Mardin, Turkey. But he didn't talk about his early childhood much. Life was difficult for Syriac Orthodox Christians in the decades after the genocide, and Kawak said his father didn't have a lot of good memories from that time.

Eventually, Kawak's father left for a Syrian border town with his parents and three siblings. Later, they made their way to Damascus, where Kawak grew up.

Since becoming a priest, Kawak has been back to visit Tur Abdin many times. Some of the original fourth- and fifth-century Christian monasteries still stand there, but the Syriac communities are sparse. Only about 30,000 Syriac Orthodox Christians still remain in the regions of Turkey they once called home.

"It's a beautiful place," Kawak said. "But it is not our land anymore."

Leaving kept them alive, but not safe from the threats to their identity: "The diaspora—it's more dangerous than Sayfo."

IN THE MIDDLE EAST, Syriac Orthodox Christians had to stand together in the face of persecution and the near-universality of Islam. "But America is a melting pot," Kawak said. In the United States, Syriacs are more at risk of disappearing into the surrounding culture and dying out spiritually.

Iskandar Bcheiry serves as priest of a small Syriac Orthodox church near Chicago. Like Kawak, Bcheiry's grandparents survived the Assyrian Genocide and moved to northern Syria. Bcheiry himself grew up in Lebanon and studied theology in Damascus and Rome before coming to the United States in 2005.

Bcheiry said secularization is a major challenge for Suryoye living in the United States. In America's pluralistic culture, people often absorb secular notions of church and religion without even realizing it.

And the language barrier is accelerating that trend.

At Bcheiry's church, about 70% of the liturgy is in classical Syriac, also called Kthobonoyo. The rest of the service is split between English and Arabic since most of his parishioners come from Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. Only a few youth at his church speak Aramaic fluently.

Those who do speak Aramaic at home use a more colloquial dialect called Turoyo, which differs significantly from classical Syriac. Because of that, it can be difficult even for people who know Aramaic to deeply engage with what's happening at church.

As a result, some leave the church or silently distance themselves. Others stay for the sake of family and tradition but view their faith more as an ethnic heritage than a spiritual reality.

Bcheiry tries to teach the young people of his church Aramaic so they can participate more fully in services. His own children have a basic grasp of the language, and his three sons serve as altar boys and help him chant the liturgy.

"They sing, at least," he said.

But it's difficult to help teenagers retain a language they aren't using much in their day-to-day lives. And Bcheiry has to compete with the many distractions of American life: TV, social media, video games, friends, school, and extracurriculars.

And the stakes are high—the struggle to win the hearts and minds of young people will determine the church's long-term survival.

Around the globe, Orthodoxy is declining as a share of the overall Christian population, and today, only 4% of the world's people belong to any kind of Orthodox tradition. Still, some Orthodox congregations in the United States have recently reported a burst of new conversions.

But Archbishop Kawak said the Syriac Orthodox Church hasn't seen a similar uptick. He believes the language barrier is one of the biggest reasons why. People just don't want to come to a church service they can't understand.

By now, many of the Greek Orthodox churches in the United States are using English as their primary language. But Kawak said Syriac Orthodox believers would never accept a switch. "The people—they want to hear Jesus' language," he said.

But that creates a unique dilemma when an increasing number of Suryoye no longer understand the ancient language of their ancestral church. And Kawak admits some of them leave the Syriac Orthodox Church just because they want to hear the Word of God in a language they understand. "I'm their bishop," he said. "My English is broken."

ELKE SPELIOPOULOS IS ONE of the rare converts to Syriac Orthodoxy. She decided to join the church after writing her dissertation on the history of the Aramean diaspora.

Speliopoulos' husband grew up Greek Orthodox and recently rediscovered that heritage. As a result, she has a front-row seat to compare and contrast the two churches.

At her husband's Greek Orthodox church, the entire service is in English. And Speliopoulos estimates about 75% to 80% of the congregation are converts, including the priest.

At her own church in Phoenix, Ariz., most of the churchgoers are immigrants from Iraq. Even though Speliopoulos covers her head in keeping with Syriac Orthodox tradition, her blond hair and blue eyes make it obvious she isn't Middle Eastern.

Speliopoulos is working hard to learn classical Syriac. But it's difficult because she doesn't have anywhere to speak the language outside of church. Unlike the Greek Orthodox who have Greece and the Russian Orthodox who have Russia, there is no country belonging to Syriac Orthodox Christians, she pointed out.

Speliopoulos isn't the only one struggling to learn the language. Her language class started with 18 students, but dwindled down to about four.

Priests conduct services at Speliopoulos' church in a combination of Aramaic and Arabic. And that makes it difficult for her to invite anyone to church with her. Once, she brought her husband to a Syriac Orthodox service in San Diego, Calif. "Honey, I'm sorry," she apologized to him. "You're going to be bored for an hour and a half."

But the church had screens with English translations. Her husband was thrilled because it meant he could worship with them, too. Speliopoulos said displaying translations is one easy step congregations can take to make their services more accessible to non-Aramaic speakers.

In the long run, Speliopoulos believes Syriac Orthodox churches in the United States are on the same trajectory as the Greek Orthodox churches. Once, she was talking with one of her church leaders about the language problem. He told her the churches would probably be English-speaking in the next 25 years or so anyway.

"In 25 years, you'll have lost a generation of young people," she told him.

Back in New Jersey, Archbishop Kawak recognizes passing on faith in Christ is the most important thing his church can do. "We are aware that we are preaching Jesus Christ, not the language," Kawak said. "But we also want to preserve our language."

Although these aims sometimes seem at odds with each other, Kawak is doing his best to hold both in tension. When it comes to language skills, he encourages young people to start small—just swapping out a few English words for Aramaic ones as they are able. "To say, 'Good morning,' say, 'Brikh ṣafro,'" Kawak tells them. "To say, 'Hi, guys,' say, 'Shlomo.'"

Kawak also encourages weekly Bible studies to help young people grow in their faith even if they can't understand Sunday services. About 80 or 90 attend every week. Although this is still a small percentage of the overall student population, Kawak said it's an improvement from the previous decade.

This year, Kawak also sent young people from his region to the Suryoyo Youth Gathering in Los Angeles. There, Kawak said, youth from all across America gather

"We are aware that we are preaching Jesus Christ, not the language. But we also want to preserve our language."

"in one place: talking, laughing, praising, dancing, attending Bible studies."

"So, we are trying to do everything," he said.

JENNA HANNAWI IS A 21-YEAR-OLD who credits one of these Syriac Bible studies with helping bring her to faith in Christ.

Hannawi's family has roots in Turkey and Syria, but she grew up in New Jersey, speaking mostly English at home. She said her family attended Suryoyo summer camps and Syriac Orthodox services on holidays, but she wasn't very involved otherwise. "We went to Sunday school," she said. "But it was a fight."

In middle school, Hannawi started to regularly attend Bible study hosted by a nearby Syriac Orthodox church. She loved her friends there, and she started to dive into Scripture more and more. "Am I fully understanding everything? No, probably not," she laughed. "But am I sitting there with my highlighters and highlighting the whole Bible? Yeah."

Hannawi said her friends from school were surprised when Friday night rolled around and she told them she couldn't make plans because she was going to Bible study. Over time, Hannawi also started listening to more Christian podcasts, like the program *Girls Gone Bible*.

From left: Jenna Hannawi, Megan Akdemir, Nehrin Akyon, Maryrose Chamoun, and Stepheny Kallah, discuss an upcoming podcast.

But she couldn't find many online resources from a Syriac Orthodox perspective. As a joke, she suggested to Nehrin Akyon and two of their other friends, Stepheny Kallah and Maryrose Chamoun, that they should start their own podcast.

Her friends loved the idea. And in April 2024, they launched the *Voices of Syriac Faith* podcast. Together, they started interviewing Syriac clergy and scholars about different theological topics and posting the conversations online. They hoped to reach other young people and help them better understand the reasons behind their faith.

Instead, they found all kinds of people—including older adults—started tuning in from around the world. Today, they've heard from listeners as far away as Brazil, Australia, and Germany.

About the same time they launched their podcast, Hannawi said, she experienced an awakening in her faith and fully surrendered her life to God. She also got engaged to another member of the Syriac Orthodox church and is currently trying to learn Aramaic for her fiancé and his family. She hopes to be able to teach the language to her own kids someday.

In the meantime, Nehrin Akyon keeps herself busy tracking down Syriac clergy for the girls to interview on their podcast. Often, people are reluctant at first—many of them are busy or don't speak English as their first language. Sometimes, she has to follow up with them several times to schedule a single interview.

But Akyon is persistent. She knows it's an important way to bridge the gap between church leaders and everyday Syriac Orthodox believers.

When she's not chasing down interviewees, Akyon works as Archbishop Kawak's office manager at the Mor Aphrem Center, the archdiocese headquarters. She said the center is always fully booked for Bible studies and community events. And they host a local Syriac preschool and annual Suryoyo summer camps.

This year, 370 people came to the church's annual Suryoyo Family Gathering weekend event, an increase from the previous year.

Akyon said the pace of life at the Mor Aphrem Center can be exhausting. But it's also beautiful. And she's happy to do whatever she can to help plant faith in the hearts of young people. "Our heritage, our faith—it's not just like in the past," she said. "But it's still alive for us." ■

BIG & BAD

CATTLE RANCHERS IN ARIZONA AND NEW MEXICO HOWL OVER GROWING NUMBERS OF MEXICAN WOLVES

by KIM HENDERSON

Mexican wolves attack adult cows, but they usually prefer calves. One will work to separate a calf from its mother, chase it down, then bite at its flanks and hindquarters—literally eating it alive—until the wounded animal falls to its death.

Catron County Commissioner Audrey McQueen has learned that's what happened yesterday to yet another calf on the Harriet Ranch near Datil, N.M. It's the seventh head of cattle killed by wolves on the property in four months. McQueen is riding hard toward the ranch in a brand-new Suburban, her hand rifling through a bag of honey-flavored cough drops. She's sniffling, too, but cold or no cold, she's going. The discovery of the calf's remains prompted a meeting between frustrated ranchers and officials from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It's set to start at half past noon and promises to be heated.

As she drives, McQueen gazes out the window at endless high plains, the sort that have informed her perspective since she was born. They are brown with drought. Such conditions would normally occupy the thoughts of McQueen, a grass-dependent cattle rancher, big game hunting guide, and nine-time world champion elk caller, but it's the wolves, not the drought, that now keep her up at night. "They are a plague," she says simply, her eyes never leaving the road.

The Mexican wolf is also a highly protected endangered species.

SUSAN VIERA/ALAMY

"THE PROBLEM IS, WE HAVE A SOCIETY THAT'S BEEN RAISED ON DISNEY SHOWS, WHERE THESE ANIMALS TALK AND HAVE FEELINGS, AND THAT ISN'T THE CASE."

Moments later McQueen's Suburban rolls onto Harriet Ranch, a fourth-generation cattle operation which, at 53,000 acres, covers more territory than the city of Miami. She greets a group of fellow ranchers by name and handshake. They stand beneath a towering windmill on hard-packed ground, their flatbed pickups and duallies forming a ring around them. Near the front, Brady McGee, coordinator of the government's Mexican wolf recovery project, explains what they already know. He has an obligation to reach the 320 mark—320 Mexican wolves in the wild—before the animal is no longer considered endangered. The Catron County ranchers listen patiently, but the Catron County ranchers are not sympathetic.

They are, after all, at the epicenter of this clash between beast and man. In April, the county issued an emergency declaration calling the growing number of wolves a threat to public health and safety.

Laws rightly seek to preserve endangered species, but in this case, it's an apex predator, not a spotted owl or silvery minnow, that's getting government protection. Whose rights should prevail? Man and his interests, or an animal hunted nearly to extinction?

→ Two hours north of Datil, visitors at the Albuquerque BioPark Zoo can see Mexican wolves up close. Children press their faces against plexiglass openings in a tall wooden fence and scan a large, shaded enclosure. They shriek when they spot one wolf lying near a smattering of logs, then another two at the right corner darting through some brush.

Visitors can also read a sign nearby that explains the *Canis lupus baileyi*, with its grizzled coat and rounded ears, can weigh up to 80 pounds. That's smaller than the gray wolf roaming Yellowstone, and larger than a common coyote. Mexican wolves were once a fixture of the Southwestern landscape, but their presence caused problems for the cattle industry that took root in the 1800s. By 1976, only seven Mexican wolves were believed alive, which led to their listing under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Because the wolf's natural territory crosses borders, the United States initiated an out-of-the-norm binational captive breeding program with Mexico to save them from extinction.

Two decades passed before the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released the first captive Mexican wolves into Arizona and New Mexico. The original recovery goal was 100 wolves in the wild. In 2017, that figure was upped to 320, a number to be sustained over eight years. A 2024 population survey revealed a minimum of 286 Mexican wolves distributed across Arizona and New Mexico.

Advocates say the massive effort to repopulate Mexican wolves, costing taxpayers more than $74 million since the program's inception, is imperative because they are a keystone species. Keystone species are animals that have a significant effect on the ecosystem, even though their numbers are low. Mexican wolves keep elk and deer on the move, preventing them from standing near water and eating or trampling all the aquatic plants. Those plants, along with bushes and trees, keep the water cool. Trout need cold water to reproduce. It's a whole-system effect.

Bryan Bird is a conservationist with the organization Defenders of Wildlife. Standing near the wolf exhibit in Albuquerque, he bends to watch the animals through the fence. Bird is a slender man with a warm smile, and he admits he's never seen a Mexican wolf in the wild, even though he's been trying to for 25 years. That hasn't hampered his activism, though. "I speak for the wolves," Bird says.

Part of that, Bird maintains, is being candid about conflict with ranchers in places like Catron County. He's quick to explain that while most ranches have a small deeded property as their base, they

LEFT: A member of the Mexican wolf recovery team measures the teeth of a wolf captured during an annual population survey. RIGHT: Audrey McQueen (fifth from left) and other ranchers meet with Brady McGee (second from left) at Harriet Ranch.

are usually tied to tens of thousands of acres of land leased from the government. The ranches need huge tracts to feed their cattle because vegetation in Western states is so sparse.

"Ranchers are business people, and they're raising livestock on federal public lands," Bird emphasizes. "The federal government manages that land and has to consider all the values. Not only the value of the grass for these private cattle ranchers but the animals that live there, the water that comes off that land, the clean air that land produces, whatever it might be. It's a multiple-use system."

Audrey McQueen agrees with Bird's assessment but adds a caveat. It's a multiple-use system that benefits from stewarding ranchers. "We keep up the waters and manage herds. If we don't have cattle grazing our forests, our forests will burn."

McQueen doesn't want to rid the landscape of wolves, she just wants better wolf management. She thinks putting radio collars on every wolf, rather than just a portion, would enable an accurate count. Many ranchers believe government estimates are low and the recovered number may actually already have hit the benchmark.

Wolf recovery staff use collars to gather information on pack size, territories, den locations, and reproduction. Collars can also track wolf movement—or lack of movement. A conventional radio collar is programmed to emit a mortality signal if the wolf does not move after a certain amount of time. Recovery staff are quick to investigate.

When Buster Green, a rancher who lives in Catron County near Quemado, shot and killed a collared wolf, he reported it immediately. Authorities confiscated his gun the next day.

It's been a week since that incident, and inside the main house at the Greens' family ranch, Buster's 83-year-old mother, Karolie Green, is working on dinner. There's a pot roast in the oven and green beans in a pressure cooker that's starting to hiss. The pressure cooker was a wedding gift in 1959. "It's lost the top handle, but it still works," Karolie says, laughing. She's standing beneath a log ceiling made of hand-hewn Ponderosa pine, part of the original dwelling on land her husband's family homesteaded more than 100 years ago.

Karolie remembers when authorities reintroduced Mexican wolves in 1998. "We protested, and they bused people in from the city. We said if you want the wolves, put them in your backyard. But they said oh, no. We can't. People live there." Karolie shakes her head at the memory. "What are we?"

She's lived long enough to see the results. Wolves have killed their cows. They terrorized and injured their horses, which had to be euthanized. A wolf even stalked her grandchild's horse for more than a mile as the 12-year-old girl rode in a remote part of the ranch. Now Buster must face the consequences of shooting a federally protected animal he thought was a coyote threatening his pets. Killing a Mexican wolf can result in criminal penalties of up to $50,000 and a year in jail.

"The problem is, we have a society that's been raised on Disney shows, where these animals talk and have feelings, and that isn't the case," says

WOLF: ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT VIA AP; RANCHERS: PHOTO BY KIM HENDERSON

Buster, a man whose day starts at 4 a.m. "We're dealing with wild animals, pack animals. They don't just kill to eat. They kill for the fun of it."

Buster points to a neighbor down the road who woke up one morning and found seven of his calves dead. At first the neighbor thought they had gotten into some kind of poisonous weed, their bodies were so unmarred. "It wasn't until they shaved the calves that they found bite marks and knew wolves killed them," Buster explains. Killed them, but didn't eat them.

That "savage side of life," as author Nate Blakeslee detailed in his best-selling book *American Wolf*, is only one part of a wolf's existence. Blakeslee wrote about an alpha female known as O-Six as though she were a character in a novel, taking readers into her world in Yellowstone National Park as she defends territory, seeks a mate, nurses pups, and dens. Still, O-Six must hunt, and she hunts well.

As Christians would acknowledge, wolves merely do what God created them to do. How then should man exercise dominion over them?

When talk turns to Mexican wolves in cattle country, the word *depredation* comes up a lot. The work of confirming wolf depredations, or kills, falls on employees like Shawn Menges, depredation investigator for Catron County. Menges is a stout, serious man. Yesterday his job involved a newborn calf that barely lived six hours. Today, it's an older cow. Each time, Menges collaborates with an investigator from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to study the carcass, using livestock clippers to remove hair and calipers to measure the distance between canines in the bites. "For a Mexican wolf, it's going to be in the high 30s. For a younger wolf, 45, 46 millimeters."

The death of a cow can be as much as a $4,000 loss for ranchers, with financial reverberations felt for years. The operation not only loses that cow but its future offspring as well. Capital then goes toward buying replacements, rather than herd development.

A confirmed wolf depredation, however, means money for ranchers. That's part of the wolf recovery program—reimbursing ranchers for their losses. Standards of evidence for wolf depredations changed in 2023, making it harder to get compensated. But wolf advocates like Bryan Bird believe a stringent, scientific approach is necessary because cattle die for a variety of reasons—other predators, health conditions, drought. "It's important that we have evidence-based standards to ensure our taxpayer money is being spent correctly," he argues.

Bird also questions ranchers with losses sitting on reimbursement boards. Last year, Audrey McQueen and two others faced scrutiny from the New Mexico State Ethics Commission for their roles as members of the County Livestock Loss Authority, an entity that in 2024 paid out $190,000 in depredations and conflict avoidance—things like buying guard dogs, changing calving time to when there are elk calves the wolves can eat instead, and providing fladry, flags that flap in the wind. While the commission found that McQueen had not benefited inappropriately from any of her official acts, it did order that she abstain from any future compensation votes related to her ranch.

And that's not the only trouble McQueen has faced. The mother of four

PHOTOS BY KIM HENDERSON

LEFT: The Green family tells about their encounters with wolves. RIGHT: Melynda Walraven wonders about the safety of her cows.

received death threats after she and other county commissioners in April voted for the emergency declaration because of the wolves. The suspect, an Oregon resident who mentioned two wolf advocacy groups in his texts and calls, is now in jail. McQueen says she wasn't worried about herself so much. "But my children drive an hour and a half to school one way, and they drive back roads. I wondered, do I drive the kids to school with a gun every day?"

The arrest shocked many Catron County residents, including Melynda Walraven, a petite 64-year-old with highlighted, edgy hair. Walraven fears that if wolf advocates have their way, ranchers like her may lose their way of life. Wolf tracks around her house mean her grandchildren can't do what her kids grew up doing, things like making tents on the trampoline and spending the night outside. She misses a church friend who went out of business as wolves slowly picked off his cattle. "He moved to the city and died not long after that, because ranching was all he'd ever done," she says.

Walraven admits that for years she wasn't really concerned about wolves. They were a problem in other parts of the county. Then she found one of her own cows dead, its udder and rectum eaten away. Coyotes, Walraven points out, don't do that. Wolves have a penchant for soft tissue.

Walraven was later astonished to discover wolf advocates feeding a pack on her leased land. "It looked like a roll of bologna. They told us it was horse meat and beef."

That's a big problem, according to Catron County Extension Agent Tracy Drummond. The feeding. The handling. The wolves no longer fear people. Drummond experienced this himself when a wolf drifted, rather than ran, away from him. He blames the recovery program. "The wolves see a white pickup like the ones from the Fish and Wildlife Service, and they start salivating. They associate people with food."

The wolves' habituation to people is the reason Drummond's wife no longer goes walking. It's also the reason area bus stops have small wooden shelters for school children. If the Mexican wolf program is so important to the citizens of the United States, Drummond asks, why do the people in Catron County have to carry it on their backs?

Arizona Congressman Paul Gosar hopes they won't have to carry it much longer. In June he introduced a bill that would remove the Mexican wolf from both the threatened and endangered species lists. The legislation cites recovery goals met and surpassed in the United States. At the same time, it contends that goals linked to Mexico through the binational agreement can never be reached because of failing conservation efforts in that country.

That's what the latest evaluation released by the Fish and Wildlife Service indicated. It reported Mexico had zero collared wolves alive in the wild in 2023, mostly due to illegal poisoning.

The crowd at the May 22 meeting at Harriet Ranch brought up that binational agreement. Even Brady McGee agreed it's a problem. "You are correct. Mexico is a challenge," the Fish and Wildlife Service coordinator acknowledged. And that wasn't his only concession. Unexpectedly, McGee also promised a wolf removal order to the dead calf's owner, Louis Sanders.

Later, McGee would say he felt ambushed that day.

Louis Sanders saw it differently.

"I was able to tell Brady and his team that I wouldn't allow them to haze the wolf onto my neighbor's property, and I wouldn't allow them to use a food cache to try to draw it onto my neighbor's property. As a cowboy, you don't give your problems to your neighbor. You tend to it yourself."

But even a removal order can't solve the problem. The wolves that wreaked havoc at Harriet Ranch appear to have moved on. For weeks, Sanders used night vision equipment to look for them, but he never saw them again. ■

"THE WOLVES SEE A WHITE PICKUP LIKE THE ONES FROM THE FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, AND THEY START SALIVATING. THEY ASSOCIATE PEOPLE WITH FOOD."

VOICES WALT LARIMORE

An officer and a Christian

A German sniper took my father's leg, but his quiet faith reminds us to steward the liberties purchased so dearly by so many

On April 8, 1945, one month before VE Day in Europe, a German sniper took the leg and almost the life of Philip Larimore. Just three years earlier, at 17, Phil was the youngest-known graduate of the Army's Officer Training School. At 18, he was its youngest commissioned officer. At 19, he spent over a year in combat; at times the average life expectancy of front-line officers was 21 days. At age 20 he was promoted to company commander, the Army's youngest and one of the most highly decorated, and led his unit into Germany.

After his amputation, Phil rehabilitated in an Army hospital, one of more than 15,000 soldiers with major limb loss. After recovery all amputee officers were, by policy, to be discharged from service. Phil decided to appeal this injustice, hoping to be the first to continue to serve. At the hearing on April 15, 1947, he was shocked to learn how amputee officers were viewed. One colonel exclaimed, "You're a handicap to the Army. You're a highly decorated cripple, but still a cripple!" He lost his request by one vote and was honorably discharged as a major at 22.

Then Phil began his second and most difficult post-war battle: severe depression. After 415 days of combat in Europe, a year of additional surgeries and rehabilitation, and a crushing legal defeat, his self-image was shattered. A promising Army career had been stolen, not just by a German sniper but by the Army and country he loved. He contemplated ending it all.

But Phil had the wisdom to seek help. Over several conversations with an Army chaplain, he heard this life-altering advice: "Your physical, emotional, and spiritual wounds will either make you a bitter person or a better person. The worst handicap in life isn't being disabled; it's being disabled with a bad attitude. Don't let what happened shatter your heart, your talents, your gifts, your will, or your faith in God and His plan for you."

Phil's outlook changed as he began seeking God's wisdom and guidance as well as the support of family and friends. The next six decades were personally and professionally successful by every measure.

I was his first son, and when I entered college, Dad didn't express Christianity like my friends and I did during the "Jesus Revolution" of the '70s. When I challenged him one evening, he sighed and gently responded, "I endured the hell of war with the Lord walking with me. This was and is my belief." He pulled out a piece of paper from his wallet and handed it to me:

No shell or bomb can on me burst, except my God permit it first;

Then let my heart be kept in peace, His watchful care will never cease;

No bomb above, nor mine below, need cause my heart one pang of woe;

The Lord of Hosts encircles me, He is the Lord of earth and sea.

Red-faced, I handed it back. The Lord used this moment to teach me to judge correctly by looking beneath the surface to evaluate the heart. Once I asked him what it felt like to be a hero. He replied, "Two million men fought in Europe. I was one of over 500,000 American casualties, but there are over 100,000 buried there. Those are the real heroes. Not me!"

Dad's quiet but consistent faith, humility, and countless acts of serving others became a model for me and those he discipled. Several named their first son Philip. After retirement, he was at peace with his past and his Creator. The horrible nightmares and the stench of war tattooed in his nostrils were gone.

At age 78, Dad died in his sleep. Although a plot was reserved for him at Arlington National Cemetery, he wanted to be buried closer to home. After my biography about him was published in 2023, I visited his grave. I sat there thinking: Dad, I always loved being your son. Now more than ever, I'm honored by it.

I think my father would ask us this coming Veteran's Day to take a few moments during our get-togethers to find a story of other heroes who served to be reminded about all who have served—particularly those who left their all on the altar of war, willingly sacrificing their tomorrows for our todays—to remember that the freedoms and liberty they preserved for us should be deeply appreciated and honorably stewarded. ■

—Walt Larimore is a retired family physician and the author of At First Light: A True World War II Story of a Hero, His Bravery, and an Amazing Horse

Email editor@wng.org

NOTEBOOK

DESTINATION SCENICS/ALAMY

LIFESTYLE

Rock of honor

One man's mission to paint murals honoring veterans in unusual places

by CLAIRE PERKINS & ISRAEL GOLE

Ray "Bubba" Sorensen was busy dabbing paint on a giant rock in Greenfield, Iowa, when a young solider pulled off the highway to watch him work. From his perch on the nearby guardrail, the Iraq war veteran told Sorensen the painting had saved his life. The artwork's patriotic message had given him hope when he was tempted by suicide.

Sorensen never saw the soldier again. But he says that experience is the reason he keeps painting: to serve and honor veterans.

Sorensen first painted a mural on the side of what's now known as Freedom Rock in 1999. It first depicted soldiers raising the flag at Iwo Jima with the words "Thank you veterans for our freedom." Every year on Memorial Day, he repaints it with a new message. It has depicted Pearl Harbor, the grave of the unknown soldier, D-Day, and symbols of American pride.

Sorensen has a soft spot for veterans because his uncle served multiple tours in Vietnam. Like many others, he faced rejection and vilification when he returned home. Painting Freedom Rock became one way Sorensen could show his appreciation for his uncle and others.

Sorensen commemorated the United States Army's 250th birthday on one side of the 2025 Freedom Rock in Greenfield, Iowa.

Sorensen began creating art when he was a kid. He would grab any materials he could find and draw whatever was in front of him. Outside, he drew semi trucks driving by. In church, he drew the cross and the pastor. In class, he got in trouble for doodling.

In addition to art, Sorensen has always had an interest in American history. That passion carried over into adulthood. It sparked his painting career after he watched *Saving Private Ryan* in 1998 and later his political career as an Iowa state legislator in 2018.

Beyond his artistic talent and historical interest, Sorensen credits God as the inspiration and motivation behind his work.

"The stories I read—especially those of veterans who've shown incredible courage—often feel like they have God's hand in them," Sorensen said. "My work is my way of honoring that."

But in 2003, Sorensen decided to stop painting the rock.

After five years, he figured people had gotten the gist of his message. He "heard grumblings" that people would rather the rock return to what it was before: a convenient spot for graffiti. So Sorensen decided to move on.

Then he got a phone call from a legion commander in the U.S. Army.

"Are you that guy that paints that rock out there in Iowa?" the commander asked.

"Yes, sir, I am." →

Sorensen and his son Michael put the finishing touches on the 2025 mural in time for Memorial Day.

The commander asked why he was going to stop painting, and Sorensen gave his reasons. The commander responded firmly: "Let me tell you why you're not gonna do that."

The entire legion then proceeded, one at a time, to make the case for Sorensen to keep painting:

"I bring my family."

"I count on pictures from my friends in Iowa."

"You don't know what this does for veterans."

"Please continue doing it."

So he did. In 2013, Sorensen and his wife, Maria, founded Sorensen Studios and the Freedom Rock Tour. He has since painted boulders in all 99 Iowa counties and nine other states. His goal is to paint one in all 50.

Sorensen said the rocks bring something unique to the "veteran memorial world." While most memorials are somber and reflective, the Freedom Rocks are colorful, with vibrant illustrations.

For example, the 2008 Freedom Rock featured brilliant paintings of U.S. soldiers from the Revolutionary War to modern day. Beside the soldiers, Sorensen wrote: "A soldier in defense of such a cause needs no title; his post is a post of honor, and blessed will be his memory."

The 2025 mural features *V-J Day in Times Square*, a re-creation of the famous photograph of a sailor kissing a girl at the end of World War II.

But not everyone likes Sorensen's work. Some accuse him of making money from dead veterans. Others call his paintings "seventh grade artwork." One man pulled up in his truck while Sorensen was painting, rolled down the window, and said, "I don't like what you do here." Then he drove off.

Sorensen takes the criticism in stride. "If everybody quit the first time somebody said something nasty about them, we wouldn't do anything in this world."

And the appreciation from veterans more than makes up for the criticism. Before Vietnam veteran Dennis Beckler died in 2021, he signed his name to the bottom of the Jasper County Freedom Rock in Newton, Iowa. His daughter, Amanda Prevo, said being a part of the memorial gave Beckler the honor and appreciation he didn't feel when he returned from the war.

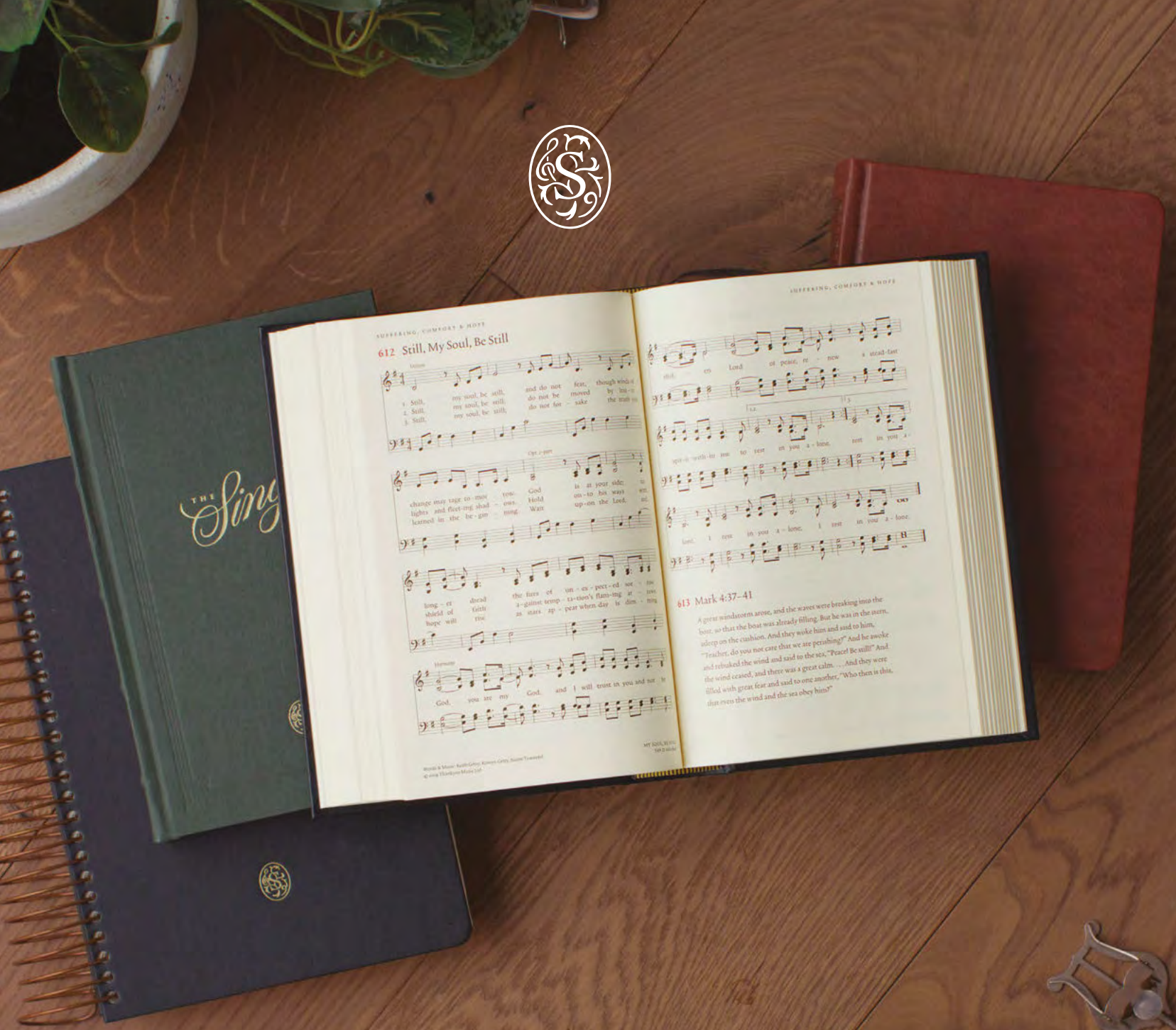
"He was touched to see them honoring fellow veterans," she said.

Sorensen plans to continue his work with a new series he's calling the Medal of Honor Mural Tour. It will feature concrete panels along Highway 20, illustrating the stories of Medal of Honor recipients.

With all the attention his artwork receives, Sorensen prays that God would not let his core message get lost. "It's kind of just a big thank-you card. It's just showing my appreciation for getting to live in a free country. And so I often pray that message is getting through." ■

—Claire Perkins and Israel Gole are graduates of the World Journalism Institute

"The stories I read—especially those of veterans who've shown incredible courage—often feel like they have God's hand in them."



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CROSSWAY

EDUCATION

New name, same grant

Popular college fund could get presidential moniker

by LAUREN DUNN

House Republicans want to rename a new subset of Pell Grants after President Donald Trump, who signed a budget measure this summer that contained a provision creating them.

Republicans included the name change as part of the fiscal year 2026 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Act. In a Sept. 23 letter, Rhode Island's two U.S. representatives, both Democrats, objected to calling the funds "Trump Grants." They argued the funds should retain the name of the senator from their state who first proposed them.

Sen. Claiborne Pell, D-R.I., "saw the barriers that too many Americans faced in accessing higher education, and he believed the federal government had a responsibility to help break down those barriers," the letter noted.

Pell spearheaded legislation calling for direct federal aid for students. In 1972, Congress enacted the program, at first called Basic Educational Opportunity Grants but later renamed to honor Pell. Grant recipients do not have to repay the funds as they would loans.

Students who do not already have bachelor's degrees and are enrolled in qualifying programs are eligible for Pell Grants if their family demonstrates financial need. While Congress has not set specific financial thresholds for eligibility, 92% of students receiving a Pell Grant during the 2021-22 school year listed a family income of $60,000 or lower. In the 2023 fiscal year alone, 6.5 million students received about $31 billion in Pell Grants.

In July, Trump signed into law a measure that adds a Pell Grant designation for workforce programs. The new designation allows students pursuing career training to receive federal aid if they are enrolled in eligible programs for "in-demand industry sectors or occupations."

Pell, Rhode Island's longest-serving U.S. senator, died in 2009 at the age of 90.

AID FORM GETS AN EARLY ROLLOUT

Secretary of Education Linda McMahon announced "the earliest launch of the FAFSA form in history," even as the Trump administration moves forward with plans to close her agency.

Education officials released the Free Application for Federal Student Aid form for the 2026-27 school year on Sept. 24, one week ahead of its scheduled launch. The FAFSA determines how much federal financial aid—including Pell Grants—students receive. The department traditionally releases the form by Oct. 1 every year, a deadline lawmakers made official last November. But a 2023 update delayed the decades-old form's availability for two years in a row. During the first school year after the update, many colleges and universities had to push back their decision deadlines as students scrambled to find out how much federal aid they would receive.

In July, the U.S. Supreme Court green-lighted the Trump administration's plan for mass layoffs at the Education Department, though the plan is still making its way through the appeals courts. *—L.D.*

PELL: RON EDMONDS/AP; FAFSA: THOMAS FULLER/SOPA IMAGES/LIGHTROCKET VIA GETTY IMAGES

ANNA BARCLAY/GETTY IMAGES

MONEY

Unbalanced

Debt and delinquencies on the rise

by TODD VICIAN

Americans are racking up debt and struggling to pay it off.

The average credit card balance for consumers grew to $6,500 in August, up nearly $100 from a year ago and $70 higher than in July, according to data released Sept. 24 by credit-modeling company VantageScore.

"People have more credit card debt now than we would have expected they would have had on the pre-pandemic trend line," said Ted Rossman, a senior analyst at Bankrate. "A lot of that has to do with just everything costs more so more people are financing groceries and other essentials. It's also harder to pay that debt off when it's a 20% interest rate versus the 16% or so that we were seeing four or five years ago."

Total household debt topped $18 trillion in the second quarter of this year, $185 billion more than three months ago, according to the Federal Reserve Bank. Home mortgages account for the majority of Americans' debt, but home equity, credit card, auto, and student loans grew by over $55 billion. Credit cards and auto loans account for more than half the new debt.

"It's high, but not compared to how over-leveraged people were, say in 2007," said Allison Schrager, senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute.

But more Americans are buckling under their debt load. Auto loan delinquencies have surpassed pre-pandemic levels, according to August's numbers. The percentage of people with lower credit scores defaulting on their auto loans is higher than during the financial crisis of 2008, according to Rossman. It's not, however, only lower-income consumers who are feeling the squeeze. Americans with better credit ratings are defaulting on auto loans more often than those with poorer credit scores, according to VantageScore's analysis. Consumers with the highest credit scores (between 781 and 850) defaulted on their loans 300% more this summer than a year ago, the sharpest rise among all credit categories.

The average new car costs nearly $50,000. Car loan balances grew 57% between 2010 and 2025, as new and used car prices and interest rates rose.

"If you're buying a more expensive vehicle and financing it at a higher cost and you're getting a 7% or 8% auto loan rate instead of 4% or 5%, there's a cumulative effect to all of that, and that's the big issue right now," Rossman said.

Despite average credit scores for consumers remaining at about 700, well within the range considered good, more Americans are using unsecured credit, such as personal loans and credit cards, to refinance existing debt. Credit card balances that had declined by nearly 20% in 2020 have ballooned by more than 50% since then, climbing steeper than the pre-COVID trend, according to Rossman.

And debt likely will grow during the next few months. Americans plan to spend more than $1,500, on average, on gifts and celebrations for Christmas and holidays this year, according to retail consultants at PwC. Only about 1 in 4 holiday shoppers surveyed by Bankrate said they plan to budget for these expenses, and nearly 30% plan to use a credit card or buy-now, pay-later loan to buy gifts.

Household debt-to-income ratio remains lower than historical norms, but the rising debt against the backdrop of inflation and a softening job market has analysts worried.

"It does show that there's some vulnerability sort of brewing in the economy," Schrager said. "More debt is more vulnerability, and it also is a signal that people's wages maybe aren't really keeping up with inflation for a lot of the things they buy." ■

HEALTH

A new addiction

Kava, the latest alcohol alternative, comes with its own set of problems

by AMY LEWIS

When Cameron McLeod drank his first half coconut shell of muddy brown earthy-smelling kava in 2002, he knew it would taste bad. "But it tasted way worse than I thought it was going to taste," he said, with a laugh. However, "the effect was almost immediate. And really pleasant." He's since given up alcohol and instead drinks a few shells' worth of kava "to take the edge off after a long day." Since 2023, his business, Australia Kava Shop, has imported powdered Vanuatu kava and an aqueous extract of the *Piper methysticum* root to sell Down Under.

Men in Oceania have been drinking kava for centuries during ceremonial meetings and for social connection. It is a nonaddictive depressant, anxiolytic (anxiety reducer), and mild narcotic that leaves the user with a numb tongue and a cheerful attitude or, as one leading kava researcher described, "like being stoned in your body" but not inebriated.

Half of kava's chemicals are psychoactive or mind-altering, and its use comes with serious warnings: Do not use when pregnant or lactating; do not operate a motor vehicle or heavy machinery after use; may cause drowsiness; avoid prolonged use; do not combine with caffeine, alcohol, drugs, or medications.

Despite those cautions, kava has become the West's hot new alcohol alternative. More than 400 kava bars now dot the United States. For the sober-curious seeking natural, botanical, relaxation-inducing drinks, kava ticks all the boxes. Exports outside the Pacific islands have grown into a $2 billion industry. Demand for exports from Fiji have risen 300% since January.

Men socialize and drink kava at Mauri Kava Bar in Suva, Fiji.

LEON LORD/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

In 2021, Australia reversed its 14-year ban to woo kava-exporting Pacific islands away from China's influence. Last year, Australia imported 147 metric tons. Kava's global growth rate is around 16%. That helps McLeod's bottom line.

But not everyone is excited about increased kava consumption. Politicians and the church have had a conflicted relationship with its use, from banning it to promoting it as an alcohol substitute to renewed attempts to curtail or ban it again.

Missionaries to the New Hebrides forbade new believers from using kava because of its association with pagan spirituality. But since Vanuatu's independence from Britain and France in 1980, kava use has become more accepted as part of the island nation's cultural identity. McLeod said that even though it's not physically addictive, it creates a social addiction and can be used to excess.

In Fiji, early Methodist missionaries accepted the use of kava as a cultural bridge. "Kava is the protocol before the church service, to welcome the preacher that comes," said Vika Lewavou, who grew up as a Methodist in Fiji. After the service, they "luva la necktie," or untie the necktie, and drink kava together. Churches purchase a kava barrel and sell cupfuls as a fundraiser. Custom demands they drink the barrel's entire contents.

Lewavou is now a member of the Assemblies of God denomination, which forbids kava use. But she still sees kava as a beautiful cultural gift from God, "just like any other good fruit that God has blessed us with. The sad part is it's being overly used. It's causing more chaos," she said. People spend more time drinking kava and sleeping off its effects than planting cassava and catching fish to feed their families.

In January, the Rev. Semisi Turagavou, president of the Methodist Church in Fiji, warned pastors and lay leaders that excessive kava use could result in their suspension from church duties.

The use of kava has also spread to island nations where it doesn't grow.

"Anything to excess that's not good for you is obviously going to have detrimental repercussions."

Ruth Cross Kwansing is the Minister for Women, Youth, Sport, and Social Affairs in Kiribati, a tiny island nation halfway between Hawaii and Australia. She describes Kiribati as a very socially connected, community-minded culture. Even though it's not grown in the island nation, kava has become a part of the culture because it allows men in particular to hang out for hours in the evening chatting about everything and nothing, Kwansing said. Men's health has plummeted as a result. Strokes are on the rise, as are liver issues, poor hydration, and sleep deprivation. "You cannot turn around and say, 'This is specifically a result of kava,' the way you can with tobacco use," she said, but lifestyle choices that surround kava's use seem to trigger more health issues—and have negative social effects.

Kwansing is a Mormon and says that group's emphasis on health gives her a stronger stance on the issue, even though it's not expressly forbidden. As social affairs minister, Kwansing oversaw an increase in social protection funds, a government welfare payment for disabled, elderly, and unemployed people. But her office noticed a corresponding increase in kava consumption and child neglect. "So you've got more money now, and that money isn't being spent on your families. It's actually being spent on kava," Kwansing told me. This nation, with a population 202 times smaller than Australia's, imported twice as much kava—280 metric tons—last year from Vanuatu alone. To add to the problem, kava's soporific effects mean the men don't get up early to provide for their families by cutting toddy (the sap from green coconut pods) and fishing.

The Minister of Health wants to propose a sin tax on kava, which would raise its price, Kwansing said, but an even bigger problem is that politicians use kava as a campaign tool. "When the government does a ministerial tour, we have to take kava with us, because you're expecting people to come along and listen to you and see how the government's been doing. But they're also interested in the kava session that's going to happen afterwards."

Kwansing says she is only one of two politicians who has never given kava, though she has taken part in kava ceremonies on very special occasions. "I don't see kava as a bad thing. It has traditional, ritual, and ceremonial aspects to it." She likens it to a good wine. "Anything to excess that's not good for you is obviously going to have detrimental repercussions," she added.

Australia imports kava as a drug but allows it to be sold in the country as a food. U.S. regulators consider kava a dietary supplement. Figuring out when it crosses the line between a food and a drug could be the key to combating its abuse in countries now embracing it. Kwansing hopes her government will at least stop promoting its use. She plans to propose a bill to parliament in December that would prohibit politicians from buying kava for constituents. ■

SCIENCE

A case for teetotalism

Drinking any alcohol may increase dementia risk

by HEATHER FRANK

Just one glass of wine per week could contribute to long-term brain damage, according to a new study. A team of researchers from the United States and England found that any level of alcohol use is associated with increased dementia risk. Their study contradicts previous ones suggesting that moderate alcohol use does not increase dementia risk, and may even protect against it.

Published Sept. 23 in *BMJ Evidence-Based Medicine*, the study included an observational analysis of nearly 560,000 adults between the ages of 56 and 72. Assessment of their drinking habits over a minimum of four years revealed a higher risk of dementia for both nondrinkers and heavy drinkers. But genetic analysis told a different story. The scientists used Mendelian randomization, a statistical method that can estimate causal effects, and genetic data from 2.4 million people to assess drinking in relation to dementia. This analysis, which considered lifetime genetically predicted risk, found that dementia risk increased linearly with greater alcohol consumption.

"Our findings challenge the common belief that low levels of alcohol are beneficial for brain health," lead study author Dr. Anya Topiwala said in a press release. "Genetic evidence offers no support for a protective effect—in fact, it suggests the opposite."

NOT JUST FOR BUILDING PLAY HOUSES

Cardboard boxes could be recycled to build an actual house, not just one for kids to play in. Australian engineers at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology recently developed a building material they've termed "cardboard-confined rammed earth" (CCRE). CCRE cylinders are made by compacting a mixture of raw soil and water into spiral wound cardboard tubes. The new material offers a greener alternative to cement and cuts down on cardboard waste.

A paper appearing in the October issue of *Structures* details CCRE's structural performance, sustainability, and cost. While not as strong as cement, CCRE can hold up in standard load-bearing applications, such as low-rise buildings. The material boasts a 77.7% smaller carbon footprint and a 63.9% reduction in cost compared to concrete columns. CCRE could also eliminate some construction headaches because soil can be sourced on-site, and cardboard is lighter than cement and steel. *—H.F.*

TAYLOR SWIFT'S CHAMELEON VOICE

Pop star **Taylor Swift** doesn't just have musical eras—she has speech ones, too. In a study published Sept. 23 in *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, experts found Swift's dialect changed as she moved from country to pop. While living in Nashville and making hits like "Tim McGraw," Swift exhibited hallmarks of a Southern twang, shortening "i" vowels to make words like "ride" sound like "rod," and modifying "oo" sounds to make "two" sound like "tee-you." She began lengthening her vowels with her first pop album, *Red*, in 2012. *—H.F.*

WINE: SKYNESHER/GETTY IMAGES; SWIFT: KEVIN MAZUR/TAS24/GETTY IMAGES

IMMIGRATION

ICE under fire

Protests against immigration raids turn violent in Chicago

by ADDIE OFFEREINS

Tensions over federal raids targeting illegal immigrants have escalated in the last month in Chicago. Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker accused President Donald Trump of sending "masked agents" to grab people off the street, separating children from parents and nabbing innocent residents.

Federal law enforcement in the Windy City has surged since early September, when Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) launched Operation Midway Blitz, an initiative targeting "criminal illegal aliens" who sought refuge in the city due to its sanctuary policies. Law enforcement officers have arrested dozens of protesters outside an ICE facility in Broadview, a Chicago suburb. An Oct. 4 protest there turned violent when 10 vehicles driven by protesters "boxed in" federal immigration agents, according to the Department of Homeland Security. DHS officials said the protesters rammed into the patrolling agents, forcing them to exit their cars. One officer opened fire on a female driver carrying a semi-automatic weapon after she rammed her vehicle into his, the agency said.

The president decried the incident on Truth Social, asserting that Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson should be in jail for failing to protect ICE officers.

Trump sent 200 Texas National Guard troops to the city on Oct. 7 to help protect the ICE facility. But two days later, a federal judge blocked the deployment, saying it violated the 10th and 14th amendments. The Trump administration appealed the decision, but an appeals court kept the block in place. The court clarified that the troops can remain federalized in the state, but cannot be deployed in the streets.

Trump first deployed troops to Washington, D.C., in mid-August. Since then, he has attempted to expand the effort, with mixed success.

Oct. 4 ICE raid

VENEZUELANS LOSE PROTECTED STATUS

In the latest installment of an ongoing legal battle, the U.S. Supreme Court granted an emergency appeal from the Trump administration, allowing it to end Temporary Protected Status for hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans. About 350,000 will immediately lose their protected status, and an additional 250,000 could be at risk of deportation in November. Temporary Protected Status (TPS) is granted on a case-by-case basis to immigrants of certain nationalities who are unable to return home safely due to a humanitarian catastrophe or ongoing violence in their countries of origin. TPS recipients may work legally in the United States.

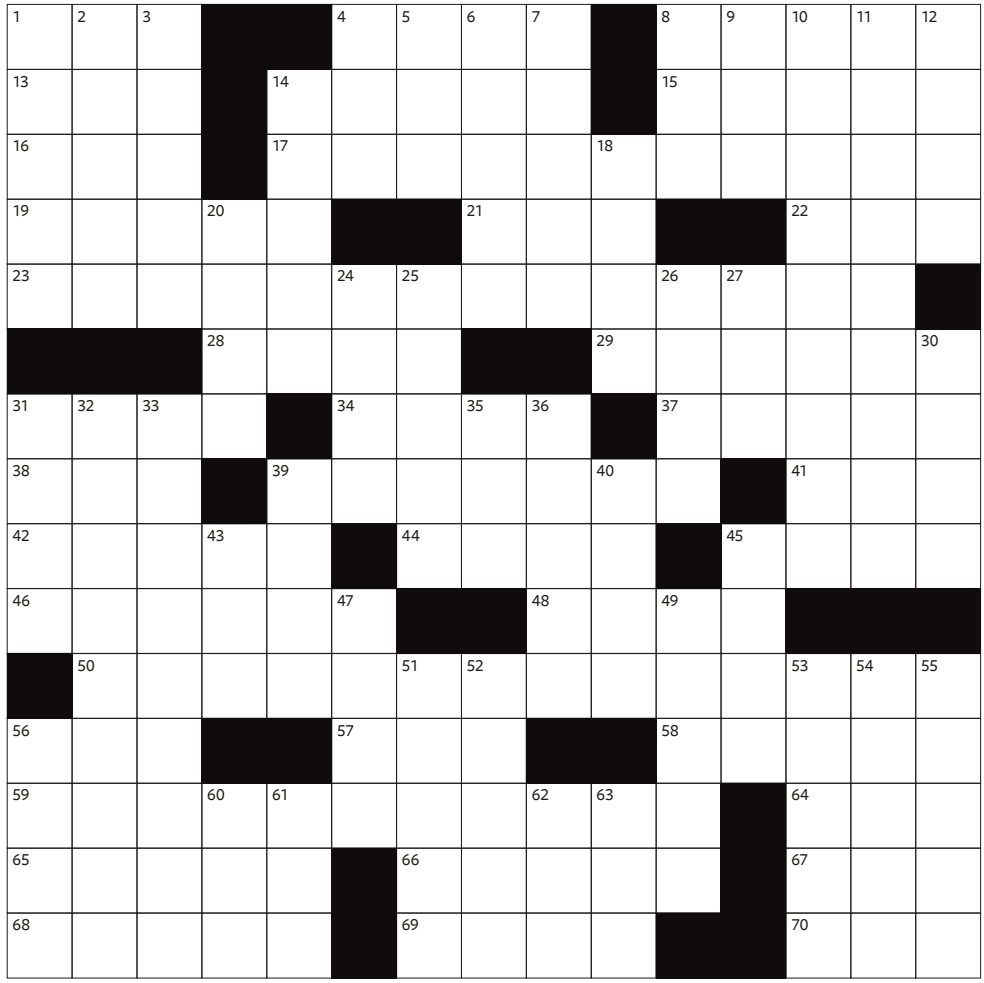
The Trump administration has argued that, in many cases, extensions of the program have undermined its temporary nature. So far, his administration has tried to end protections for more than 1 million migrants from Afghanistan, Cameroon, Haiti, Honduras, Nepal, Nicaragua, Syria, and Venezuela. Advocacy groups have filed six lawsuits to prevent the expirations. —*A.O.*

CHICAGO: ARMANDO L. SANCHEZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE/TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE VIA GETTY IMAGES; VENEZUELANS: PEDRO PORTAL/MIAMI HERALD/TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE VIA GETTY IMAGES

CROSSWORD

Which is it?

by PETER SILZER



Across

1 Sorrowful sound
4 Scandinavian native
8 Skillful
13 Have a go
14 Christmas song
15 Prefix with scope or film
16 Sit-up muscles
17 Confusing compliment?
19 Cross-promotion
21 Airport near JFK
22 Samaritan's Purse or Save the Children, briefly
23 Confusing car offer?
28 ____ contendere (court plea)
29 Pulpit presentation
31 Financing figs.
34 Totals
37 Salary hike
38 Casual top
39 Rah-rah encouragement
41 Clearasil target
42 Woke up
44 "And others," abbr.
45 ____ *of the D'Ubervilles*
46 Throughout
48 ____ of Capri
50 Confusing computer world?
56 "Fee, ____, foe, fum"
57 Stir
58 Prefix with sonic or violet
59 Confusing sorting choice?
64 DNC counterpart
65 Chip giant
66 Water purifier brand
67 Sch. founded by Jefferson
68 Australian golfer Pickworth
69 Hurricane centers
70 "Are we there ____?"

Down

1 Sports figures
2 Planet's path
3 What "two" meant to Paul Revere
4 Toothed tool
5 Pound sound
6 Fungus, in Falmouth
7 Volunteer's vow
8 Asian-American author Tan
9 Excavate
10 Cut back on expenses
11 Medical opinion
12 Chore-list heading
14 "No problem, boss"
18 Swimmer's count
20 Wayside stops
24 In addition
25 Baton ____, La.
26 Six years in the Senate
27 Lyricist Gershwin
30 Clears after taxes
31 Somewhat
32 Some llama herders
33 Adjusts to a new position
35 N.Y. mascot Mr. ____
36 Flight segment
39 Decent chap
40 "So what ____ is new?"
43 Knight's title
45 Relate
47 "Where America's day begins"
49 Michelle's predecessor
51 Acrobat maker
52 Vehicle with 18 tyres, maybe
53 PC troubleshooter
54 Treasure cache
55 Pester, puppy-style
56 Cold, in Caracas
60 Agnus ____
61 World Cup cheer
62 Game cube
63 Alf and Mork, briefly

Bonus clues and puzzle solution on page 110

Don't walk through sexual betrayal alone.

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

Across

4 ____-am (Dr. Seuss character)
15 Teeny tiny
41 Point of acne
68 Alternate spelling of Australian nickname

Down

6 British spelling of a common fungus
32 Bolivians' neighbors
35 Got together
49 ____ Ingalls Wilder, author of *Little House on the Prairie*
61 Grand ____ Opry

VOICES ANDRÉE SEU PETERSON

Dear Wormwood

That little stunt in Utah unloosed 10,000 formerly timid tongues

Dear Wormwood,

Congratulations. I hope you see what you have done through that little stunt in Utah. Thought you would put an end to an annoying voice, did you? Ten thousand tongues have been unloosed in its place, formerly timid men now newly emboldened. Their own Book predicted it, as you'd know had you bothered to read Paul's prison letter: "Most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear" (Philippians 1:14).

People who had never heard of that saccharine little sock puppet immediately rushed to their phones and typed "Charlie Kirk" to scroll through his speeches. And what did they find? Everything we labored to hide. They looked for hate and found agreeableness and reasonableness, without even a cuss word or two. He was too clever for that, even while other prominent media influencers of his ilk had given in to the worldly fashion of dropping the F-bomb (such childishness).

Consider the damages: Legions of so-called Christ followers who lived in compromise, lackluster faith, and fear of naming Christ are suddenly ashamed and repenting. Instead of the pleasingly generic "God," which offended no one, they say "Jesus."

Remember the hilarious deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, which had the immediate result that "great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things" (Acts 5:11). People cleaned up their acts momentarily. To be sure, there is always a slouching back into mediocrity; revival has no grandchildren, only children, but at least we enjoyed a pleasant respite.

What did you learn in demon school, where I presume you studied their books to avoid repeating our former mistakes? When we incited the stoning of Stephen, did it go well? The second-order effect was more rampant spread of the gospel. Does no one consider second- and third-order effects anymore? Assassination, imprisonment, vilification—it all plays into the Enemy's hands. Kirk's own wife, whom you managed to only strengthen, said as much in her pathetic eulogy: that what we intend for evil will only fortify the good.

It's always the same. Do away with Joseph, and there he is elevated to viceroy of Egypt, leading to the long-term disaster of an exodus from slavery and a homeland for the Semitic Habiru tribe. The Enemy plays the long game, Screwtape. He does inscrutable things, so that even His children wonder what in the world He's up to.

There are verses in those magic books of theirs that come alive only when a little shaking is applied, such as your fecklessness enabled at the campus rally. These verses are like geodes that do not impress from the outside, but must be cracked open to reveal amethyst or agate crystal.

For example, one housewife read in her Bible the next day: "And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it" (John 1:5), a statement which for years was wonderfully opaque to her. She suddenly understood that Light is more powerful than Darkness and will not be overcome, or comprehended, or controlled by it. (The Greek is *katalambano*, but I don't imagine they even teach you languages anymore in demon seminary.)

Another Pennsylvania woman texted her grandson in college, with whom she hitherto had scant contact, and asked if he had heard of Charlie Kirk. It opened up, for the first time, doorways to conversation about ethics and the meaning of life. Conversation is never on our side, Wormwood. It is dangerous, always carrying the possibility of veering close to truth.

Turn on any news channel and everyone is talking about God these days, politicians and journalists alike. It is the handwriting on the wall for us. Even the Europeans, whose minds we have more successfully shrouded in Materialism, are surely bemused. I fear that you will get them thinking too.

Two thousand years ago we pierced the Enemy's own Son (more delightfully gory and prolonged an anguish than the quick-and-done Utah event), and no one has stopped adulating Him since. You will pay the price of your obtuseness, you dim-witted demon. But until I have my way with you, you must pursue your duty with undimmed alacrity, and henceforth with more cunning.

Your profoundly disappointed uncle,

Screwtape. ■

Email *aseupeterson@wng.org*

Ranchers meet with officials from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at Harriet Ranch near Datil, N.M.

On the range

Beautiful scenery, daily road trips, and deadly neighbors

by LEIGH JONES

For her latest assignment, Kim Henderson traveled to southern New Mexico, a wild part of the country filled with beauty and danger. You can read her story about the clash between cattle ranchers and Mexican wolves on p. 86. When she got back, I asked Kim to describe what life there is like.

How remote is this place? It's a four-hour drive from the Albuquerque airport, so that tells you a little something. Several people told me I was going to the most frontier-ish part of the United States. My final destination was Luna—population 67. But the beauty there is unbelievable. You've got the desert scenes, and then you have forested mountain scenes, and then you've got the little Western town that looked like something straight out of a John Wayne movie. So it's really magical, but it takes rugged people to live there.

What makes life so hard? Mostly it's the isolation. It's two hours to any sizable grocery store. And there's one local spot where all the Amazon packages get delivered. People have to come pick them up. Some of the kids have to drive an hour and a half to school, each way. It's just a totally different way of life.

How long have these ranchers lived and worked in this area? Some as long as five generations.

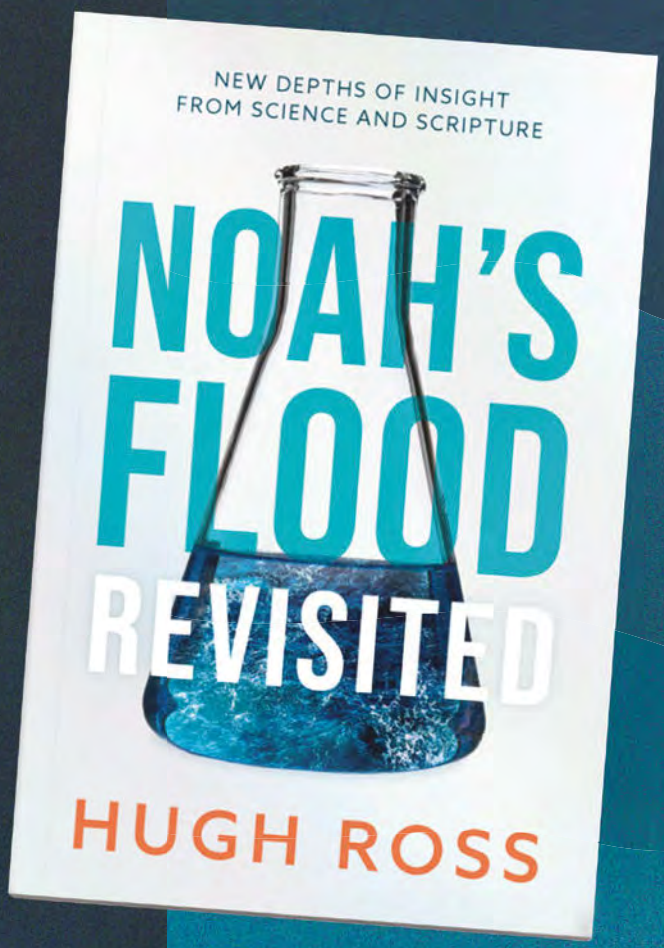
But it's a financially precarious existence, right? One woman I talked to told me about a man in her church who had spent his whole life ranching. He lost $150,000 worth of calves over three seasons, and that was enough to put him out of business. And the ranchers would say this is not a problem their grandparents dealt with. That's something I heard a lot, too. This is a totally new issue for them.

In your story you talk about how the reintroduction of Mexican wolves has changed daily life. Can you share an example you didn't include in your story? Rancher Audrey McQueen has a teenage daughter who had raised a prize mare. Rodeo competitions are a pretty big deal for young people in this part of the world. After they've been trained for a few years, the horses can be worth as much as $30,000. But they're also prey to the wolves. One day, Audrey had to break the news to her daughter that wolves had killed her horse. It's not like that animal can be easily replaced.

When you got home, you had an experience that connected with the story. What happened? I went on a walk, and a young coyote popped out in front of me. I've never seen that before, but I was so scared of him. It made me sympathize with people who are afraid of coming across these wolves. As they increase, they're entering towns, coming into people's yards, snatching pets. People are afraid to put their children out in the yard to play, like they've been doing all these years. It's just a question of whose right to freedom is going to prevail here—man or beast? ■

PHOTO BY KIM HENDERSON

ANCIENT FLOOD. MODERN SCIENCE. REAL ANSWERS.



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