

WORLD

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THE WORLD'S LAST NIGHT

Apocalyptic thinking surges amid worrying trends
in culture and technology *p. 66*

by LES SILLARS



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by Mark Fredrickson

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WORLD

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WORLD NOTES

➔ The sanctuary at Faith Presbyterian Church in Tacoma, Wash., was quiet but full on a cool July Saturday—family and friends gathered to remember Robert Allen Case II. I was honored to be among them.

Then, after four simple notes from the piano, a soloist rang out:

“Soon I will be done with the troubles of the world. Gone home to live with God.”

Moments later, Robert Rayburn stepped into the pulpit and preached on what he called “a providential life.” Rayburn, a longtime friend and Bob’s pastor, preached from Psalm 139, reflecting on the mystery of a life ordered by God—every step written before one was taken.

Bob’s life, he said, was providential and purposeful: shaped by the Lord, but also lived in joyful response to that calling. Nowhere was that purpose more evident than in Bob’s work to build and shape WORLD News Group—first as a board member, then as the founding director of the World Journalism Institute.

Bob didn’t think of himself as a public figure and never called attention to himself. Yet he helped shape the foundation and future of WORLD more than almost anyone. He joined our board in 1990, back when WORLD Magazine was still finding its footing and future. At key moments, Bob was one of the few—and sometimes the only—voices urging us to stay the course.

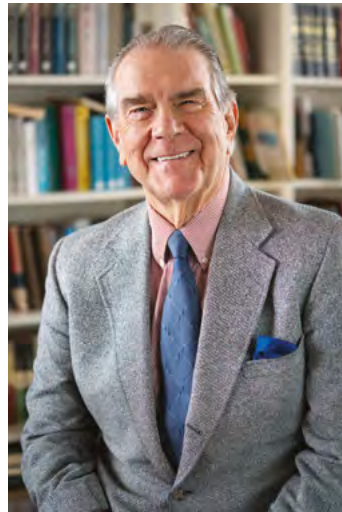
In time, Bob became a passionate advocate for something more: training Christian journalists. That advocacy wasn’t theoretical. In 1999, he stepped off the board to launch the World Journalism Institute. He took the vision he shared with Joel Belz and turned it into reality—serving as program director, dean, fundraiser, recruiter, and instructor all in one. For more than a decade, WJI bore the mark of Bob’s mind and energy. And in many ways, it still does.

While he often said WJI felt like the culmination of his ministry, Bob’s influence reached much further. He helped launch the work of Campus Crusade for Christ (now Cru) in

Europe. He worked with Francis Schaeffer and was among the early evangelical leaders of the pro-life movement. He became the first national director of the Christian Action Council (now Care Net). He pastored churches, served in academic leadership, wrote books, and invested deeply in Christian higher education.

Even in retirement, Bob remained involved at WORLD. Listeners to *The World and Everything in It* will remember the joy and style he brought to his series on the Great American Songbook—the most recent of which aired this past April.

Bob Case lived a remarkable life, and a gospel-shaped one.



Bob Case

The work Bob helped begin continues—in new ways, with new audiences, by journalists trained at WJI. We launched *WORLD Watch*—our daily video news program for students—in August 2020. Since then, we’ve made updates and improvements each school year. But as we prepare to launch Year 6 this September, we’re going beyond upgrades.

When the new season opens on Sept. 8, *WORLD Watch* will debut an all-new look, including a new website and refreshed social media. What won’t change is our commitment to sound journalism grounded in facts and Biblical truth—and our daily sign-off: “Whatever the news, the purpose of the Lord will stand.”

WORLD Watch is ideal for families with students in elementary, middle, or high school. If you know a family like that, a gift subscription for the coming school year is a no-brainer.

But even if you don’t have kids at home, you might consider subscribing. I’ve heard from viewers whose kids have long left home—even a *nonagenarian*—who still rely on *WORLD Watch* as a trustworthy and engaging source of daily news. You can see why at worldwatch.news.

KEVIN MARTIN
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
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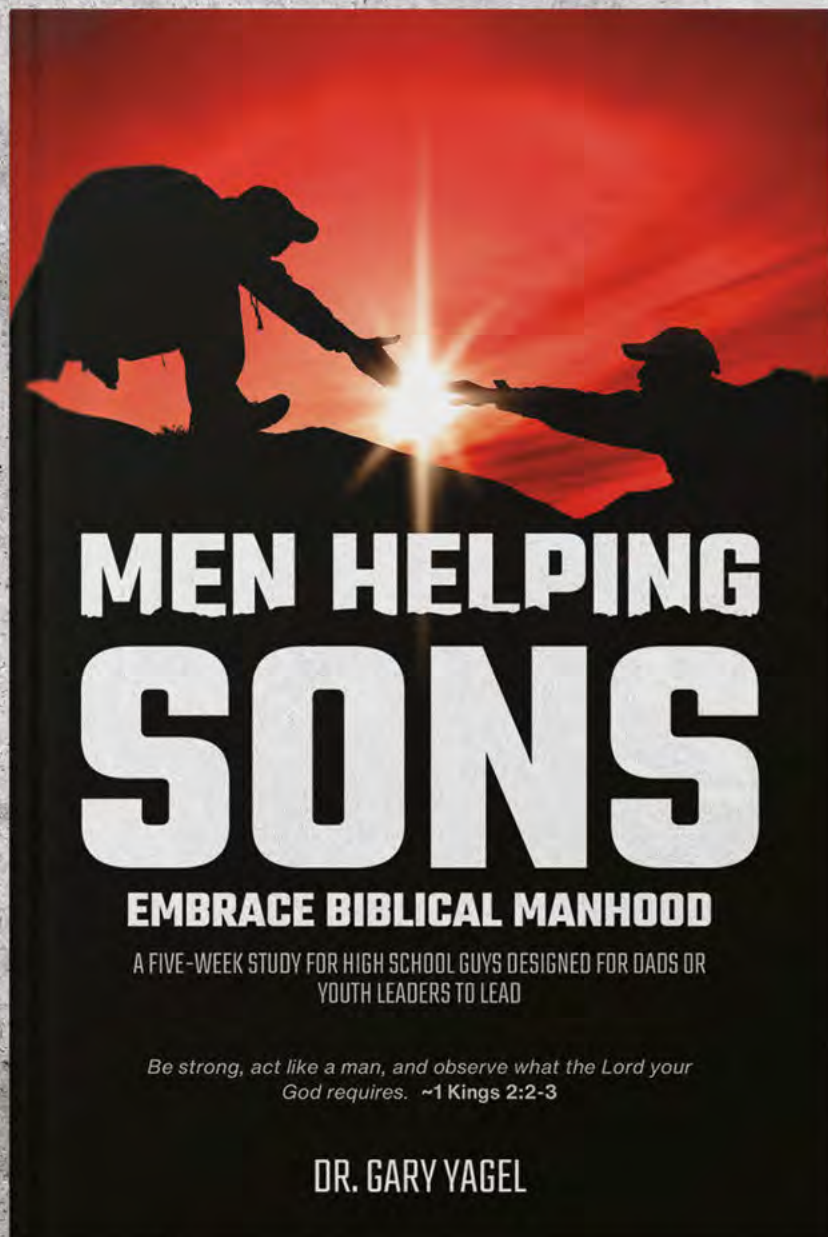
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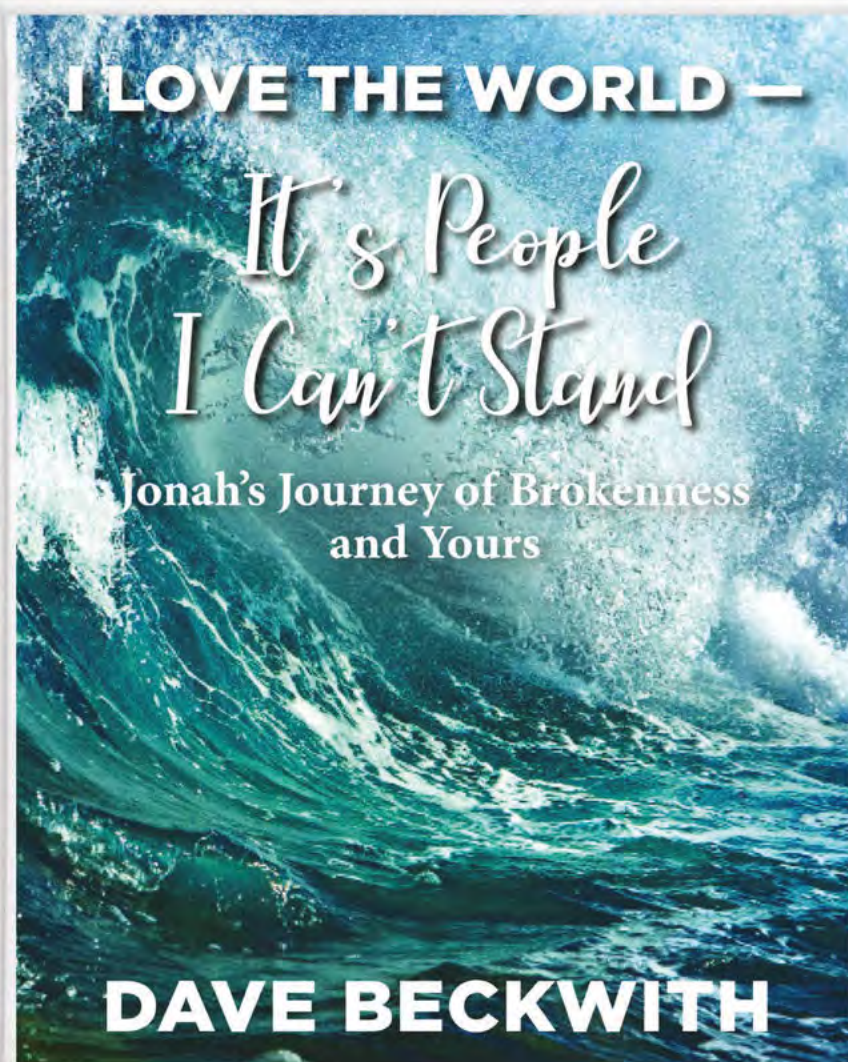


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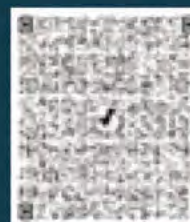


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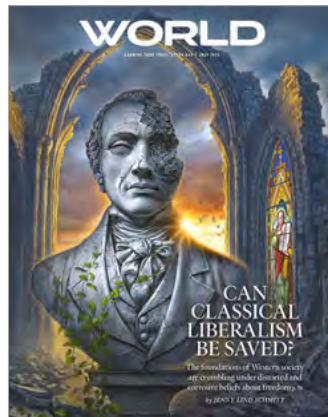
“What are we missing out on if we put the phone down and engage in conversation with an actual person? The latest video from some celebrity? An off-color joke?”

WHITELISTING

Page 94: I found this column by Brad Littlejohn compelling. Was it not ironic that this column was placed in the magazine shortly after the one about generative AI? People do not know how to interact with their fellow humans anymore. One cannot go anywhere without everyone around them being engrossed on their screens. I visited a national park and spent some time watching people. Many of them wandered around the trails, not enjoying the natural beauty or sharing the experience with those they traveled with, but focused on their screens. We are missing out on so much when we make our phones the center of our universes.

Technology has wonderful benefits. But phones and technology were introduced as conveniences to make our lives better. Now they control us. I find it particularly concerning in relation to children. A generation ago children would play outside, running around the neighborhood with friends, inventing fantasy worlds to explore. Now streets tend to be quiet as children are stuffed inside on a phone or tablet, losing their ability to create and problem-solve.

In talking to young people and even adults these days the biggest argument for being constantly connected is that we “need it.” How do we need it? A few shorts years ago we didn’t need it. All generations before us survived without what we today take for granted. To make a phone call one had to go home



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and use the phone that was attached to the wall. If you were not home and someone called, you missed it and they would call back later.

What are we missing out on if we put the phone down and engage in conversation with an actual person? The latest video from some celebrity? An off-color joke? A statement from some political leader who is certainly not going to make our lives better?

Instead, I challenge all of us to build those relationships with loved ones. Which will you regret the most in the end? Missing out on a stranger’s social media update or missing out on precious time with a family member or friend who needs a hug?

For being so “connected” as a society we are much less connected as humans.

NATHAN VIETH
Lincoln, Neb.

CRACKS IN THE FOUNDATION

Page 70: Immanuel Kant was right when he said that moral law flowed out of human reason. However, he failed to mention that “immoral” law flowed out of sinful human reason as well. And so, can classical liberalism be saved? I believe it can, but only if nations and people reject “immoral” civil liberties and “immoral” human rights, as well as the organizations and individuals promoting them.

EUGENE POMIAK
Hemet, Calif.

As I read the piece on classical liberalism, I thought of Galatians 5:13, where Paul says, “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” I also thought of John Adams’ statement: “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.” Freedom without self-restraint leads only to anarchy.

DAVID WINKLER
Austin, Texas

DIAGNOSING THE DISEASE

Page 79: This article did an amazing job of summarizing what we have had a hard time putting into words—the current state of our culture, and how abandoning objective moral truth has resulted in embracing the abuse of language and the seemingly ever-increasing struggle for power. Mark Mitchell’s article gives a succinct wake-up call to firmly →

maintain and pass on our convictions to objective moral truth as a key part of the foundation of the blessing we Americans have been given.

MICHAEL & RACHEL SAMUELSON
Bixby, Okla.

JUST LIGHT ENOUGH

Page 42: Collin Garbarino recommends Anthony Horowitz's *Marble Hall Murders*, with the mild caveat that the series doesn't "contain much objectionable language." This may be true, but would-be readers should be aware that the second novel in the series, *Moonflower Murders*, includes sordid depictions of homosexual prostitution. I loved the first book of the series but couldn't finish the second, due to this revolting content. Reader beware!

SUSAN ANDERSON
Stow, Ohio

FOURTH REICH?

Page 88: I was surprised Grace Snell did not seem to have an understanding of the populist movement across Europe. Almost every Western European country has a political party/movement that is populist in nature. Due to lack of creativity and argument, many of these groups are called "far right" and in Germany's case "Nazis." This is lazy on the part of the progressive left. They do not want a populist rise so they resort to name-calling. Almost all of these movements, including the AfD, simply want their country back. They are tired of immigration changing everything about the country they grew up in. They are tired of paying for people who don't work. They are tired of excessive government and censorship. It's insulting that a group that believes in sovereignty, among other noble values, is labeled something as horrible as "Nazi" and that people fall for it.

KATHY CONNORS
Medina, Wash.

I could not help but notice the small paragraph mentioning "sexual assaults" perpetrated by large numbers of Middle Eastern migrants. This blip does not do justice to the actual grotesque phenomenon called *taharrush gamea* that has

exploded in Europe since the Cologne attacks. The censorship by German authorities of these mass rapes (what they really were) and suppression of local outrage is sinful cruelty.

M. DIGRANDI
Richmond, Ky.

RING OF IRE

Page 102: I can't easily think of a more obvious example of Sabbath-breaking than the practice of bullfighting—for my conscience, anyhow.

BARB ZERBE
Wilmington, Del.

MAKING GOVERNMENT WORK

Page 34: President Trump attacked the government waste, abuse, and fraud problem with a head-on, aggressive move. Now it is time for the adults to take over and solve the problem. I suggest that Mr. Philip K. Howard sounds as though he should apply for a position in DOGE. This is just a starting point, and our country needs people like Mr. Howard to make the right changes.

BILL RUSSELL
Brighton, Mich.

TIMELESS BOOKS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

Page 52: I was surprised and pleased to see a review of *A Lantern in Her Hand*. I first read it when I was about 14 and author Bess Streeter Aldrich was living in Lincoln, Neb. Because my ancestors were homesteaders in Nebraska, the story of these courageous pioneers riveted my attention, and they will still do so for folks today. Later, I was fortunate

to know Bess' granddaughter and to live near Elmwood, the small town east of Lincoln where most of her stories were written. Her home there is open for tours, and the locals are happy to tell you about this famous writer and how she was just their neighbor.

PAT MEIERHENRY
Lincoln, Neb.

COURTHOUSE CRACKDOWN

Page 106: The article fails to explain the enormous immigration challenge the Trump administration faces. According to the Department of Homeland Security, between 12 million and 20 million immigrants entered the United States illegally during the previous four years. At the low end, that's about the same as the population of Pennsylvania. The 2030 U.S. Census looms ahead in just five years. It will count every *resident*, including all illegal immigrants! The census results will determine the allotment of seats per state in the House of Representatives for the next decade. Republicans have just four years to undo the Biden administration's attempt to skew the House seat allotment in favor of Democratic-controlled states.

HOWARD R. KILLION
Oceanside, Calif.

A MAN AND HIS MOVEMENT

Page 48: Thanks for a well-written review of the Bill Buckley biography. In 1966 my high school civics teacher required her students to subscribe to a "political" magazine. Most of my classmates opted for *Time* or *Newsweek*. Some of the more adventurous got *U.S. News & World Report*. At home, I asked my dad for suggestions. He said, "Why don't you try *National Review*; Buckley's magazine. You won't understand it, but maybe it'll grow on you." I'm immeasurably grateful to my dad. Over the last 60 years or so *NR* has been my North Star for political and related thought.

BRUCE McKECHNIE
Honey Brook, Pa.

CORRECTION

Lyndon B. Johnson was a U.S. senator in 1954 (Departures, August, p. 22).

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Elder care

Sometimes all it takes is a few minutes
and a working pair of ears

In 2011, my friend Suzy and I traveled to Tennessee on book-publishing business. In those days, in the town of Franklin, there was a landmark restaurant called Dotson's. It was what they call in the South a "meat 'n' three," its menu a résumé of rib-sticking, down-home fare like meat loaf, cornbread, collard greens, and mac 'n' cheese, before mac 'n' cheese went bougie.

After we ate way too much, Suzy and I headed up front to pay our bill. Behind the cash register sat an elderly man, in his 80s for sure, wearing a ballcap and a dark blue polo shirt. I felt a little sorry that he was still working a register at his age. Maybe he wanted to stay active and social ... or maybe he needed the money.

The man's shirt bore the logo of a Navy ship—a destroyer, as I recall. Being a fellow veteran, I asked him about it, whereupon he launched into the swashbuckling tale of his naval service.

"We were the 'Galloping Ghost of the Korean coast!'" the man said of his ship, leaning forward, crinkly eyes lit with the fire of a younger man. The yarn he spun was long—and so was the line that began stacking up with other customers waiting to pay their bills.

Unbothered, the man threw his right hand up at the waiting crowd just like a traffic cop. "Hang on a minute!" he called in his Tennessee drawl. "I'm tellin' a sea story!"

"You go right on, Mr. McCloud!" the crowd called back genially.

The man, it turned out, was Arthur Lee McCloud. At 81, he wasn't a poor or lonely senior—he owned the joint. McCloud had taken over Dotson's in the 1970s and turned it into a destination. And that was after he fought in the

Korean War, then returned to marry the prettiest girl in town.

Suzy, a Californian, was astonished at the graciousness of these Southerners who were waiting to pay. But Southerners, praise the Lord, still slow down to listen. It's an art—and also a ministry, especially to those advancing in years.

Leviticus 19:32 tells us, "You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD."

I think it's significant that this instruction comes in a chapter in which the LORD is literally laying down the Law: Be holy. Be just. Keep the Sabbath. Don't lie or steal or turn to idols. And there, tucked amid these inviolable tenets, is the command to respect the elderly. I take from this juxtaposition that God is serious about this. Sadly, our culture is not.

I was in my late 40s when we met Mr. McCloud. Now, nearing 63, I'm the one advancing in years, trying creams for my own crinkly eyes and shopping at Talbots. A decade ago, I graduated from "miss" to "ma'am." Now, though, I'm "hon" and sometimes the more patronizing "dear," which is what they call you right before they clap you in orthopedic shoes and put you in a home.

The older I get, the more I notice people who are older than me. And the more I want to hear their stories. Near the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II, this desire began burning more brightly. *National Geographic* ran a photo essay featuring present-day portraits of WWII veterans. One woman's portrait captured me: Betty Webb. In the photo, Webb is wearing a red woolen coat and a gold and ivory scarf knotted at the neck. Beneath snow-white hair, she gazes serenely at the camera.

During the war, Webb worked for British intelligence at the top secret code-breaking facility Bletchley Park. Though British herself, Webb also spoke German, so her job was to paraphrase captured intelligence, thus concealing that the Allies had broken Germany's code.

"We had to make it sound as though it was information we'd picked up from spies or stolen documents or aerial reconnaissance," said Webb, who died this March at age 101. "I liked the deviousness of it."

Here's what hit me: If most of us had seen Betty Webb in a grocery store, we might have thought, wow, she sure is old—if we saw her at all. (Our culture has a way of looking past seniors.) But the truth is, Webb was a war hero. And the only way to know it was to ask her about her life.

I'm making it my mission to take honoring the aged as seriously as God does. Sometimes all it takes is a little time and a working pair of ears. ■

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DISPATCHES



IN THE NEWS

Mourning and lament

Israel resists pressure to end operations against Hamas amid warnings of a worsening humanitarian crisis in Gaza

by MARY JACKSON

Days before the Israeli government's controversial decision on Aug. 8 to take control of Gaza City, the war-torn Palestinian enclave now facing a humanitarian crisis, Israelis marked Tisha B'Av, the Jewish day of mourning.

Tisha B'Av commemorates several Jewish calamities and is regarded as the saddest day on the Jewish calendar. It is observed with fasting and lament. That it coincided with weeks marked by mounting domestic and international pressure, protests, and despair among Israelis as the war against Hamas approaches two years was no coincidence, said David Pileggi, rector of Christ Church in Jerusalem's Old City. The 176-year-old Anglican church is the oldest Protestant church in the Middle East.

Pileggi's sermon marking Tisha B'Av centered on selections from the Book of Lamentations. He urged congregants weary of the war, as he admitted he was, to direct their fears and questions to the Lord—and pray for God's merciful intervention.

The Israeli security cabinet's move to green-light military action in Gaza marked a high-stakes escalation in the country's 22-month war

against Hamas, the Gaza-based jihadist militant group that led the Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel. Hamas fighters killed about 1,200 people and took 250 others hostage. In approving the new offensive, Israeli leaders overruled high-ranking military officials who raised concerns over the strain on Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and over further dragging the country into a long-term conflict.

On Aug. 10, the United Nations Security Council warned the offensive could trigger “another horrific chapter” in the war. European allies including France, Britain, and Germany sharply denounced the move as potentially worsening the Gaza Strip's humanitarian crisis and violating international law.

At the same time, families of the 20 remaining Israeli hostages fear for the lives of their loved ones. In late July, Hamas released videos of two emaciated hostages, prompting domestic and international calls for their release.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu defended the military expansion in Gaza as necessary to achieve a decisive victory against Hamas. The offensive includes dismantling the last two remaining Hamas strongholds in Gaza City and the central camps, while transferring Palestinians to “safe zones” with food and medical care. Preparations could last weeks or months, allowing the possibility for a diplomatic maneuver that could alter the military operation. →

People protest during a “Families of Hostages” rally in Tel Aviv on Aug. 9 calling for an end to the war.



During an Aug. 10 press conference, Netanyahu emphasized the purpose of the offensive is to “free Gaza from Hamas,” not to maintain permanent control of the entire enclave. After cease-fire negotiations in late July ended in another impasse, Netanyahu said Israel is left with “no choice but to finish the job and complete the defeat of Hamas.”

But as the war drags on, many question whether a complete defeat is possible.

“Israel is finding out right now that there’s no clean victory,” said Jonathan Schanzer, executive director of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. “The questions being asked are, ‘Is it worth sacrificing more soldiers? Is it worth more condemnation from capitals across Europe and the negative media attention?’”

Those questions linger in the minds of Matt and Elizabeth Finch, who have

**“Israel is finding out
right now that
there’s no clean
victory.”**

Palestinians seek food at a distribution point in Gaza City on Aug. 2.



run Calvary Chapel Bible College in Jerusalem’s Old City since 2016. They have a daughter serving in the IDF, a son who will join in December, and another in 2026. Elizabeth said diminishing worldwide support for Israel and growing anti-Semitism weigh on young Israelis: “Every time they go online they are bombarded with so much hatred.”

Media reports continue to cast blame on Israel for the worsening humanitarian crisis in Gaza, where 1 in 3 people are going without food for days, according to a July statement from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, an international panel of experts backed by the UN, a frequent critic of Israel.

Aid agencies and European countries blame Israeli security restrictions. But Israel pointed the finger at the UN and international organizations for a sharp drop in aid between June and July. Israel has also accused Hamas of thwarting the UN’s distribution of food and other supplies coming into the enclave.

Since mid-May, about 88% of UN convoys failed to reach their intended destinations, according to the organization’s own data. The food and supplies were “either peacefully ... or forcefully” intercepted by Hamas, other armed groups, or Palestinian civilians, the UN admits.

Separately, the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), the U.S.-backed aid initiative created by Israel, has faced criticism for limited distribution sites and for stationing Israeli soldiers and foreign security contractors outside its locations, a measure Israel and the U.S. say prevents Hamas from looting the food.

Since GHF began operating in May, UN experts claim more than 800 Palestinians have been fatally shot near its sites, a claim the aid group denies.

Meanwhile, numerous reports have questioned the authenticity of photos

depicting starving Palestinians. In early August, Israeli President Isaac Herzog accused Hamas of staging photos and waging a “PR campaign.”

Since the start of the war, the Israeli military has gained control of roughly 75% of Gaza and killed the majority of Hamas’ prominent leaders. But critics of the conflict have long pointed to the high number of Palestinian casualties as an indictment of Israel’s tactics. And now, “world opinion seems to be turning on Israel,” said Daniel Flesch, a senior policy analyst at the Heritage Foundation.

On Aug. 8, in response to Netanyahu’s planned offensive, Germany halted military exports to Israel that could be used in Gaza. Weeks prior, France and Britain announced their governments would formally recognize a Palestinian state in September if the war continues.

“Hamas is happy to see all of this play out,” Flesch said. “Despite what they did on Oct. 7, despite their intentional strategy of embedding themselves among Palestinian civilian centers, wanting to see civilian casualties, you have countries wanting to reward the Palestinians with a state.”

The United States has continued to defend Israel. During an Aug. 10 UN Security Council emergency meeting, U.S. Ambassador Dorothy Shea said America has worked “tirelessly” to free hostages and compel Hamas to disarm and end the war. Shea said criticizing Israel undermined those efforts.

As it stands, “allowing Hamas to exist on the border, to be able to reconstitute and pose a threat again is something that Israel will not countenance,” Jonathan Schanzer told me.

That means the war shows no signs of ending.

At Christ Church in Jerusalem, Pileggi says he prays that “on both sides, what human beings and the devil meant for evil on Oct. 7, God ultimately would turn to good, even if it takes 20 or 30 years.” He cautions congregants against apathy amid the death and destruction: “We continue to mourn and lament, and then out of that, we move forward as a community.” ■



BY THE NUMBERS

Teens at the polls

Are 16-year-olds mature enough to vote?

BY JOHN DAWSON

16

The new minimum voting age in the United Kingdom under a July decision by Prime Minister Keir Starmer that awaits expected ratification by Parliament. While most democratic countries employ a minimum voting age of 18, some—including Argentina, Austria, and Brazil—permit younger voters. But even with the franchise, younger voters don’t always exercise their right.

1.6 million

The number of 16- and 17-year-olds living in the U.K. according to national statistics, compared with 48 million people who were eligible to vote in the most recent parliamentary elections.

13

The number of countries or territories, not counting the U.K., that permit 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in all elections, according to UNICEF. The highest minimum voting age in the world is 25 in the United Arab Emirates.

37.3%

The share of eligible 18-year-old Americans who voted in the November 2024 U.S. election, compared with a turnout rate of 65.3% for the general public and 74% for voters age 75 and over, according to U.S. census data.



WASHINGTON MEMO

Return of the red heifer

Religious believers partner to accelerate a hoped-for rebuilding of the Temple

by CAROLINA LUMETTA

➔ Byron Stinson spends half of his year in Texas running his ranch and a transportation management company. The other half he spends in Israel, conducting archaeological digs and looking for a way to revive an Old Testament purification ceremony. It blends his ranching skills, transportation know-how, and faith in prophecy.

In his free time, Stinson, a self-described follower of Yeshua, takes his mission to Washington.

In February, he joined a group of Christians, lawmakers, and conservative activists gathered at the Museum of the Bible near the National Mall for an hourslong prayer session. Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council, House

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., and Jim Garlow, a New Apostolic Reformation pastor, hosted the third annual National Gathering for Prayer and Repentance. Roughly 40 lawmakers, Republicans all, attended and delivered public prayers on a variety of topics. They included House Majority Leader Steve Scalise of Louisiana, Rep. Randy Fine of Florida, and Rep. Andy Ogles of Tennessee. Sen. Katie Britt of Alabama was the only senator in attendance.

Every lawmaker left before the second part of the event, when Stinson joined Garlow and Rabbi Tsaki Mamo on stage to describe their efforts to build a new Temple.

Stinson, along with many of the prayer gathering's leaders, believes the

law and prophecies in the Old Testament still apply to modern Israel. He is waiting for the eventual construction of a Third Temple. Some Jewish and Christian eschatological beliefs interpret a vision in the Book of Ezekiel to provide a blueprint for a Temple that has not yet been built. For Jews, the Third Temple can restore Israel and usher in the Messiah. For dispensationalist Christians, it represents a fulfillment of end times prophecy and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

The law of Moses stated that builders and priests of the Temple must undergo purification ceremonies. In the Old Testament, a priest would kill an unblemished red heifer, sprinkle the blood in front of the Tabernacle, and then burn the animal and mix its ashes

with a source of water. That water was then considered purified and used in priestly cleansing rituals.

Third Temple groups are controversial, even in Israel, and Stinson is affiliated with many of them. He founded Boneh Israel, an archaeological group that collects Israeli artifacts with potential Biblical significance. The website describes the mission as “building Israel and bringing the redemption closer.” He also created the Father’s House Educational Foundation to bring pastors and church leaders on Holy Land tours. He partners closely with the Temple Institute, which has fundraised and started reconstructing garments, roasting pans, copper pitchers, and basins for a future Temple. Mamo, who presented alongside Stinson at the prayer breakfast, leads Uvne Jerusalem, an organization that has purchased land around Jerusalem, including on the Mount of Olives, the site of a hoped-for future priestly purification ceremony.

Stinson has also worked for years to breed unblemished red heifers for the ceremony. Starting in 2021, Stinson and Mamo, and other rabbis, toured Texas searching among Red Angus herds. If they found even a single white hair, the cow was disqualified. And if a cow had an ear tag, that counted as a blemish. Whenever they found one, they would buy the cow and ask the owning rancher to allow the animal to breed but not tag the calf. Israel does not allow the import of any livestock, so when it came time to send the heifers to the Holy Land, the group classified them as pets.

“No pet has ever been treated with more love or safety than our cows,” Stinson wrote in a book about the project. “So, we named them all and applied for a license to import our pets to Israel, and it was accepted!”

Mamo hosted Stinson, other rabbis, and Israel’s Heritage Ministry director-general, Netanel Isaac, for an arrival celebration when the cows landed. But not everyone was pleased when they saw the microchips implanted in the cows’ ears (a shipping requirement). More than 300 rabbis convened to discuss whether this blemished the heifers.

“You can put three rabbis in a room, and you’ll get 12 opinions,” Stinson said. “You can put 300 in a room, and you have 12,000 opinions.”

Erring on the side of caution, Stinson decided these weren’t the cows for the ceremony after all, so now he is breeding them to raise a new herd. In the meantime, he’s also building a visitor center for tourists to come visit the cows.

“We’re flying in the reddest of semen from around the world, and we’ll start having calves,” Stinson said. “You’re going to get some bulls and some heifers, but it’s very exciting.”

More than four years after starting the project, Stinson is not frustrated by the delays.

“It’s not about rushing,” he said. “It’s about a long-term plan of God to bring

about peace on earth and for us to study and make relationships between the Jewish fathers of faith and Christians worldwide.”

That includes Christians in Washington. Stinson says he has met with government officials who “absolutely believe that a Temple should be built,” although he declined to name names.

Stinson was also encouraged by the confirmation of Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, who has publicly supported the idea of Temple construction in the past.

“There’s no reason why the miracle of reestablishing the Temple on the Temple Mount isn’t possible,” Hegseth said at an event in Jerusalem in 2018. “That’s why going and visiting Judea and Samaria and understanding that

sovereignty—the very sovereignty of Israeli soil, Israeli cities, locations—is a critical next step to showing the world that this is the land for Jews and the Land of Israel.”

In July, Stinson and Mamo held a practice purification ceremony, which they livestreamed, with a disqualified cow. After the House recessed for August, Speaker Mike Johnson took a delegation of Republicans on a private trip to the Middle East. On Aug. 3, they commemorated Tisha B’Av, a day of fasting on the Jewish calendar to mourn the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem.

“Our prayer is that America will always stand with Israel,” Johnson said in a video posted on social media. “We pray for the preservation and the peace of Jerusalem. That’s what Scripture tells us to do. It’s a matter of faith for us and a commitment that we have.” ■

Byron Stinson explains how rabbis inspected the red heifers he found in Texas.



DEPARTURES

Apollo 13 astronaut dies at 97

by JOHN DAWSON



**Jim
Lovell**

An astronaut who narrowly avoided becoming one of the first men to die in space, James A. Lovell Jr. died at his home in Lake Forest, Ill., on Aug. 7. He was 97. Lovell flew two Gemini missions before being selected for the agency's Apollo program. In 1968, Lovell and his two Apollo 8 crewmates became the first to leave Earth's gravity well and orbit the moon. In 1970, Lovell commanded the Apollo 13 mission and would have become the fifth person to walk on the moon. When an oxygen tank exploded en route, the crew found themselves in a struggle for survival. Treating the lunar module as a lifeboat, Lovell, his crewmates, and NASA officials improvised the team's path back to Earth.



**Hulk
Hogan**

A professional wrestler who body-slammed and leg-dropped his way into global stardom, Hogan died July 24 at the age of 71. Born Terry Bollea, the Florida-reared wrestler competed under various monikers across wrestling circuits before joining Vincent McMahon's World Wrestling Federation as Hulk Hogan in 1979. Initially taking a bad-guy persona, Hogan quickly became an American face in Cold War storylines of the 1980s. The wrestling may have been fake, but Hogan's popularity was real: His improvised body slam of Andre the Giant in front of 93,000 fans in WrestleMania III became one of wrestling's most indelible moments. Hogan was inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame in 2005.



**Ozzy
Osbourne**

A pioneering heavy metal singer who found a second career as an affable—if drug addled—reality TV star, Osbourne died July 22. He was 76. Osbourne co-founded heavy metal group Black Sabbath in 1968 and, throughout the 1970s, employed controversy to generate popularity. Osbourne's dabbling with the occult through his Prince of Darkness persona drew criticism but also drove millions of record sales. In 2002, the singer traded in his bat-biting act for a spot on reality TV, starring in MTV's *The Osbournes* from 2002 until 2005. Slowed by a history of drug abuse and Parkinson's, his show and subsequent spinoffs projected a softer, less hostile image that won over a new generation of fans.



**Edwin
Feulner**

A former congressional aide who founded an influential conservative think tank and rewrote the rules of Washington, D.C., advocacy, Feulner died July 18. He was 83. Feulner's career as a political operative was buoyed by stints working for Melvin Laird and Philip Crane—both Republican members of Congress. In 1973, Feulner co-founded the Heritage Foundation as a conservative counterbalance to the Brookings Institution. Feulner would serve as the organization's president from 1977 until 2013. Under Feulner's leadership, Heritage adopted new strategies to affect public policymaking, including page limits on policy briefs and release of reports prior to legislation introduction to help shape the debate.



**Bill
Clay**

A representative from St. Louis who used his position in the U.S. House of Representatives as a platform to advocate for poor blacks, William L. Clay Sr. died July 16. He was 94. After a stint as a city alderman and civil rights agitator, Clay won a place in the House in a newly formed district in Missouri in 1968. Clay earned notoriety picking fights with Richard Nixon, leading a boycott of the president's 1971 State of the Union address. Weeks later, Clay became one of the founding members of the Congressional Black Caucus. In 1993, Clay helped shepherd revisions to the Hatch Act designed to make it easier for government employees to politic for candidates. Clay retired from Congress in 2001.

LOVELL: J. B. SPECTOR/MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY, CHICAGO/GETTY; HOGAN: Z/MICHAEL GERMANA/STAR MAX/PIX/AP; OSBOURNE: KEVIN WINTER/GETTY FOR LIVE NATION; FEULNER: CAROLYN KASTER/AP; CLAY: JAMES A. FINLEY/AP



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HUMAN RACE

Mamdani's momentum

by KIM HENDERSON

➔ Mayoral candidate and self-described democratic socialist **Zohran Mamdani** began a weeklong Five Boroughs Against Trump tour in New York City on Aug. 11, touting endorsements from New York Assemblymember Harvey Epstein and other local Democrats. The campaign tour came a week after Mamdani snagged the backing of Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., who proclaimed Mamdani's focus on affordability as "the central reason to be a Democrat." Mamdani, a Muslim immigrant and state assemblyman from Queens who won the Democratic primary in June, also has the support of far-left Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York.

Mamdani's upset primary win against former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo led to Cuomo's continued presence in the race as an independent candidate. Mayor Eric Adams is also vying for reelection as an independent. Mamdani, 33, has proposed free universal child care for every child in New York City ages 6 weeks to 5 years. He also has a plan for city-run, publicly funded grocery stores. But it's his criticism of Israel and his past calls to "defund the police" that have many establishment Democrats unwilling to link arms with the upstart contender.

During an Aug. 7 press conference, Mamdani, who was leading in the polls, declared that his administration would be "Donald Trump's worst nightmare."

FED APPOINTMENT

President Donald Trump on Aug. 7 tapped economist Stephen Miran, chairman of the White House Council of Economic Advisers, to temporarily fill a vacant seat on the Federal Reserve Board of Governors, pending Senate confirmation. Days earlier, former Federal Reserve Gov. Adriana Kugler had tendered her resignation without explanation, several months before her term was slated to expire. The Board of Governors, a group of seven presidentially appointed members, vote monthly on federal interest rates and report to Fed Chair Jerome Powell. Miran, a former Manhattan Institute senior fellow, is credited with authoring the "Mar-a-Lago Accord," an unofficial plan to devalue the U.S. dollar to manage the deficit. Miran, like Trump, has publicly said the Federal Reserve should have lowered interest rates months ago. His vote on the board is expected to add pressure on Powell to do so.

—Carolina Lumetta

GUBERNATORIAL BID

Republican Sen. **Marsha Blackburn** officially announced a bid for governor of Tennessee Aug. 6.



Blackburn hopes to replace outgoing Republican Bill Lee, who has

served for two terms and cannot run for reelection. In her video announcement, Tennessee's first woman senator promoted parent-empowered childhood education, tough-on-

immigration law enforcement, and an end to “gender pronoun insanity.” Pollsters expect her to compete well in next August’s primary and November elections. Voters first sent Blackburn to Washington in 2003 as a member of Congress, where she served until winning her Senate seat in 2018. If elected governor, Blackburn, who owns a small business and sold books door to door as a college student, would appoint her Senate successor.

—Todd Vician

WOMAN IN CHARGE

Jen Pawol made history Aug. 9 when she became the first woman to umpire a regular-season Major League Baseball game. The 48-year-old monitored first base during the first game of a doubleheader between the Miami Marlins and the host Atlanta Braves, then made calls at third during the second game. Pawol also became the first woman to call balls and strikes in a major league

game in the Aug. 10 finale of the Braves’ five-game home series against the Marlins. She had worked in the minor leagues for nearly 10 years and was one of eight female umpires in the minors before receiving her historic call-up from MLB. Pawol donated the cap she wore during the first game to the Baseball Hall of Fame. —Ray Hacke

ACTRESS SETTLES

Actress Gina Carano on Aug. 7 said she finally settled her lawsuit with Disney and Lucasfilm years after they fired her from *The Mandalorian*. Carano had

played a tough rebel soldier called Cara Dune in the *Star Wars* streaming series, but Lucasfilm fired her in 2021 after fans criticized her for social media activities, including posting an image with text mocking masking regulations during the COVID-19 pandemic and her refusal to add gender pronouns to her social media profile, instead writing “beep/bop/boop.” In a statement on X, Carano didn’t give details about the settlement but said she was “humbled and grateful to God for His love and grace in this outcome.” Lucasfilm said it was pleased to have reached a settlement and looked forward to finding opportunities to work with Carano in the future. —Elizabeth Russell

ANTARCTIC FLYER

Teenager Ethan Guo’s flight to raise money for cancer research took an unplanned hiatus after he broke the law. Earlier this summer, Chilean authorities charged Guo with providing “false flight plan data” to ground control authorities. Hoping to become the youngest person to fly solo across all seven continents, Guo had landed his single-engine Cessna 182Q on King George Island

in the Antarctic, despite having been authorized only to fly over Punta Arenas in South America’s southernmost region. On Aug. 11, a judge dropped the charges but required the young pilot to donate \$30,000 to a children’s cancer foundation. Guo has raised more than \$130,000 so far. The judge also ordered Guo to leave the Chilean-claimed territory once conditions allow him to depart. Guo has stayed on an island military base since late June due to severe cold weather. Once he is able to leave, Guo will be prohibited from returning to Chilean territory for three years.

—Bekah McCallum

NO GREATER LOVE

Cohen Turner, 22, drowned in floodwaters Aug. 3 in Cleburne County, Ala., while saving the life of his childhood friend.



Turner and the unnamed friend were driving

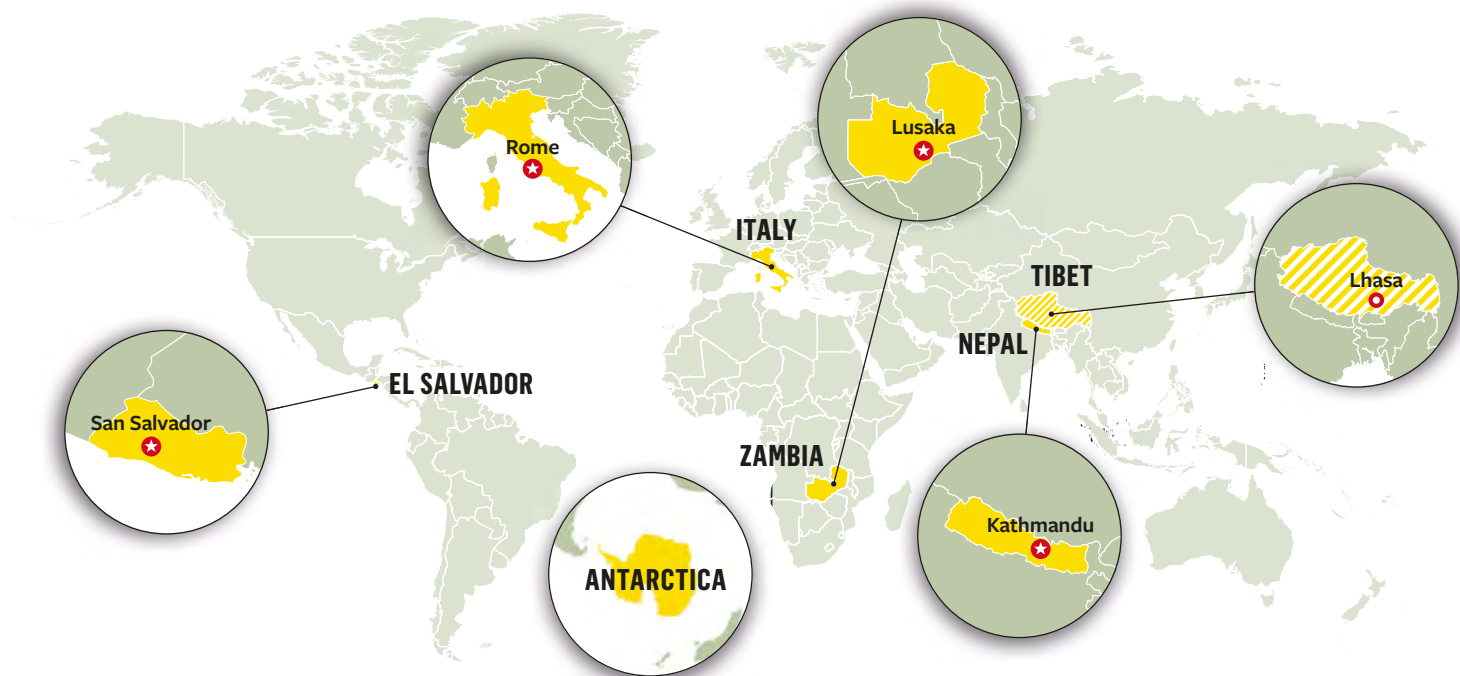
home from a

night of fishing on Lake Wedowee when a flash flood engulfed their vehicle, submerging it in a creek. Although both men escaped through the sunroof, the friend afterward was caught in the current. “His friend went under and his [Turner’s] last actions were that of abandoning his own safety and pushing his friend to a tree for safety,” Turner’s uncle, Danny Turner, a police officer in Lincoln, explained in a Facebook post. “A heroic act by everyone’s definition.”

—Emma Freire ■



China to pick Tibet's next Dalai Lama



Tibet To mark the 60th anniversary of the Tibet Autonomous Region, a Chinese Communist Party official said Aug. 5 that the next Dalai Lama will be revealed by the Chinese government, not by the Dalai Lama's nonprofit. At his recent 90th birthday celebration in India, where he lives in exile, the **Dalai Lama** assured followers he'd be reincarnated after his death, but said an organization set up by him would have sole authority to find and identify his purportedly reincarnated successor. But China views the Tibetan leader, who has sought full autonomy for Tibet, as a political separatist and wants to bring Tibetan Buddhism and its global following under Chinese control. "The central government has the indisputable final say in the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama," said local Communist Deputy Secretary Gama Cedain. China created the Tibet Autonomous Region after invading Tibet in 1950. —*Jenny Lind Schmitt*

Italy Right-wing Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's Cabinet passed a draft law Aug. 4 that would more strictly regulate puberty blockers and hormones for minors experiencing gender dysphoria. The government says the bill is needed "to protect the health of minors." In recent years, doctors in Scandinavia and the United Kingdom have called for more caution in transgender treatments for children and teens due to their potentially irreversible effects. Finland even required minors to receive psychological intervention prior to receiving hormone therapy. Most countries in Western Europe have laws reflecting a transgenderism-affirming stance, but Italy's move marks a shift. Though the bill still requires the approval of Italian Parliament, many are confident Meloni's majority coalition will ensure the law passes.

—*Elisa Palumbo*



POPULATION

61 million

LANGUAGE

Italian, German, French, Slovene, Croatian

RELIGION

75% Roman Catholic, 4% non-Catholic Christian, 4% Muslim

GOVERNANCE

Parliamentary republic

GDP

\$3.1 trillion

MAJOR EXPORTS

Medicine, garments, cars, refined petroleum, vehicle parts

Nepal The government has announced plans to hire 36 nurses to work in hospitals around Nepal as specialists in breastfeeding. The positions, previously funded by USAID, were dropped earlier this year due to Trump administration funding cuts at the agency. Although multiple health programs in Nepal have lost funding, the government chose to invest in breastfeeding education because of the long-term health benefits associated with breastfeeding for infants and mothers. From 2011 to 2021, the percentage of babies in Nepal who were exclusively breastfed in their first five months decreased from 70% to 56%. The rate is lowest among women who are educated or well-off. By contrast, North America's rate is just 26%. Globally, breastfeeding is on the increase compared with past decades. —*Evangeline Schmitt*



POPULATION
31.1 million

LANGUAGE
Nepali, Maithali,
Bhojpuri,
Tharu, others

RELIGION
81% Hindu,
8% Buddhist,
5% Muslim

GOVERNANCE
Federal
parliamentary
republic

GDP
\$149.6 billion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Carpets,
garments, iron

Antarctica In early August, regulators shut down krill fishing near Antarctica four months early after trawlers hauled in a record annual catch. A vital food source for many seabirds and marine mammals—notably whales—krill are an economic hot commodity, used as a source of omega-3 oil in pet food and dietary supplements. Last year, the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, made up of over 20 member states including the United States, Russia, and China, failed to renew a management plan that limited krill harvesting to certain areas. As a result, a surge in krill harvesting has produced a 620,000 metric ton catch, triggering an unprecedented season shutdown. —*Evangeline Schmitt*



El Salvador The Trump administration on Aug. 5 voiced unusual support for a series of constitutional amendments that remove presidential term limits in the Central American country. The July 31 reforms also extend presidential periods, abolish run-off elections, and move forward the next presidential election from 2029 to 2027. In a speech, opposition leader **Marcela Villatoro** said “democracy in El Salvador has died,” alluding to President Nayib Bukele’s chance to stay in power. But the U.S. Department of State rejected “the comparison of El Salvador’s ... legislative process with illegitimate dictatorial regimes elsewhere in our region.” Bukele has claimed he will not run for a third consecutive term. —*Carlos Pérez*

Zambia The U.S. Embassy declared a health alert Aug. 6, ordering its staffers to withdraw from Kitwe town and also avoid food and water from the region. In February, 50 million liters of heavy metals and toxic waste spilled from a Sino-Metals Leach Zambia copper mine tailings dam. Fish and maize crops subsequently died, and drinking water for 700,000 people was contaminated. The Zambian government claims tests show water pH levels now meet World Health Organization standards, but the U.S. Embassy says new information shows the extent of hazardous substances and possible airborne contaminants. The Zambian government is aiming to quadruple copper production amid increased demand, but the country has suffered four mining spills this year alone. —*Amy Lewis*



POPULATION
20.8 million

LANGUAGE
Bemba, Nyanja,
Tonga, Lozi,
others

RELIGION
75% Protestant,
20% Catholic

GOVERNANCE
Presidential
republic

GDP
\$79.2 billion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Copper, gold,
precious stones

U.S. BRIEFS

Planned Parenthood's Louisiana exit



Planned Parenthood is ceasing operations in Louisiana at the end of September as lawmakers fight to cut federal funding to the abortion provider.

The organization's Gulf Coast branch on Aug. 6 confirmed it would close its facilities in New Orleans and Baton Rouge after operating in the state for more than four decades. State law protects all unborn babies except in cases where the mother's life or health may be in danger, or when the baby is not expected to survive. While Planned Parenthood does not perform abortions in Louisiana, it does still offer birth control, sexually transmitted disease testing, and transgender medical interventions. The organization's Gulf Coast branch also said it would close two of its six Houston facilities. Planned Parenthood in July said nearly two-thirds of its facilities were at risk of closure after federal lawmakers passed the One Big Beautiful Bill Act that stripped Medicaid funding from any nonprofit organization offering abortions. Although a judge halted the legislation, the Trump administration has appealed. So far, at least 21 Planned Parenthood facilities across California, Ohio, Iowa, Michigan, and Minnesota have already closed or will do so this year. —*Lauren Canterberry*



POPULATION

4.6 million

GOVERNOR

Jeff Landry R

U.S. SENATORS

Bill Cassidy R,
John Kennedy R

INDUSTRY

Entertainment,
energy,
agriculture,
life sciences,
manufacturing,
defense

Illinois Patients seeking mental health advice in the Prairie State will need to refer to a licensed, human therapist, not an AI chatbot. On Aug. 1, Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed the Wellness and Oversight for Psychological Resources Act, limiting how artificial intelligence systems can be used for therapeutic purposes. Under the law, professional clinicians may use AI tools to support administrative tasks like scheduling appointments and reminders, billing clients, and drafting general communications. But AI cannot interact with clients on the therapist's behalf or offer "treatment plans without the review and approval by a licensed professional." Violators may face fines of up to \$10,000. In the first six months of 2025, more than a dozen states enacted laws governing how AI systems can be used in healthcare.

—*Bekah McCallum*

Rhode Island A federal judge on Aug. 1 upheld a state firearm law giving the state attorney general discretion to issue open-carry permits based upon "a proper showing of need." Rhode Island requires local officials to issue concealed-carry permits to individual applicants who meet requirements outlined in law. But plaintiffs argued the state's policy of issuing open-carry permits on a discretionary basis violates residents' constitutional rights. U.S. District Judge William Smith disagreed. Unrestricted permits that allow open carrying of firearms "are a privilege and there is no constitutionally protected liberty interest in obtaining one," Smith wrote in his ruling. The plaintiffs' attorney has vowed to appeal, arguing Smith's ruling clashed with a 2022 U.S. Supreme Court decision.

—*Addie Offereins*



Utah A federal judge on Aug. 4 ruled in favor of a Utah group that uses psychedelic mushrooms in its religious ceremonies. U.S. District Judge Jill Parrish said that religious psilocybin use is protected by Utah's new Religious Freedom Restoration Act, legislation intended to protect individuals' religious rights. In November 2024, Provo police searched and detained Bridger Lee Jensen, founder of the religious group Singularism. County prosecutors later filed criminal charges against Jensen for possession of psilocybin and other drug-related claims. Jensen then sued the city of Provo and Utah County, claiming violations of his constitutional rights. Utah County and Provo maintain that Singularism is motivated by a desire to sell drugs, not to practice and promote religious faith. Psilocybin, a compound found in "magic mushrooms," is illegal under Utah law. According to its website, Singularism is a contemporary religion that provides a "sacred space where science and spirituality unite." Adherents use psilocybin to "facilitate deep spiritual connections and foster inner transformation." Parrish's orders enable Singularism to continue those practices as courts study the case further. —*Kim Henderson*

Nevada A coalition of four environmental groups has asked the federal government to reconsider its decision to allow mining near a national wildlife area on the Nevada-California border. Bureau of Land Management officials on July 11 approved St. Cloud Mining's request to drill 43 exploratory holes to find deposits of clinoptilolite, a mineral used to purify water and absorb gases. The mining would occur close to **Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge** and in an area designated as a critical habitat because of its natural resources and scenic landscape. The BLM cited President Donald Trump's March executive order to expedite approvals for domestic mineral production if proposed projects wouldn't significantly impact the environment. But the coalition claims the government failed to properly assess the potential consequences for wildlife, air quality, and water resources. An Australian company recently scrapped its proposed lithium mine near Ash Meadows after a two-year campaign by local and environmental groups. —*Todd Vician*



POPULATION
3.2 million

GOVERNOR
Joe Lombardo 

U.S. SENATORS
Catherine Cortez Masto ,
Jacky Rosen 

INDUSTRY
Info tech,
transportation,
tourism

Wyoming Subscribers in small towns across the state breathed a sigh of relief Aug. 12 when three longtime publishers agreed to purchase eight community newspapers that closed unexpectedly six days earlier. More than two dozen publications in Wyoming, Arizona, Illinois, Nebraska, and South Dakota had been shuttered when Illinois-based News Media Corp. announced it was immediately ending operations. News Media Corp.'s CEO agreed to sell the Wyoming newspapers after trying unsuccessfully for months to find a buyer for all of the corporation's outlets with mounting expenses and revenue losses. "Our foremost priority has been to ensure that these counties are not left without a credible, enduring source of local journalism," Robb Hicks, one of the new owners, wrote on Facebook. The sale also means publishing required legal notices will continue in these communities. The 30 employees let go across Wyoming and Nebraska who worked without pay for a week will be rehired, Hicks added. More than 3,200 print newspapers have closed in the last two decades, according to the Medill report. —*Todd Vician*



BACKGROUND

What is screwworm?

by CHRISTINA GRUBE



In late July the Screwworm Coalition of Texas, a partnership of over a dozen farming and wildlife groups, launched a website to provide public resources on an emerging and serious threat to Texas cattle: the New World screwworm. Economists worry a resurgence of the flesh-eating parasite in the United States decades after being eradicated may lead to a spike in beef prices.

What is the New World screwworm?

Known scientifically as *Cochliomyia hominivorax*, the pest is a tropical fly that lays eggs in the open wounds of warm-blooded animals. Once hatched, the larvae use hook-like mouths to burrow into and feed on its host. A female fly may lay more than 2,000 eggs during her weeklong lifespan, according to the

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. As more larvae hatch, wound sites grow deeper and threaten the health of the host animal. After about a week of feeding, the larvae drop to the ground and burrow into the soil before emerging as mature flies.

Gross. Which animals are at risk? Any warm-blooded animal may be infected, and any open wound site is vulnerable. The flies may take advantage of a simple tick bite, a buck's annual antler shedding, or the umbilical cord site on a newborn mammal. Historically, farmers intentionally timed livestock procedures like branding, castration, and birthing to avoid fly season.

Can humans be infected? Yes, although human cases are very rare. According to

COPEG, the U.S.-Panama commission established to monitor and eradicate the fly, fewer than 1% of known infections in the current outbreak have occurred in humans.

How can we combat them? The most effective method of eradication is by sterilization: Scientists sterilize male flies and then release them to mate with females, which then lay unfertilized eggs. Because the female screwworm fly will only mate once in her lifespan, the population in the area ultimately dies out. Treating infected animals, quarantining livestock, and using pesticides may also slow the fly population's spread.

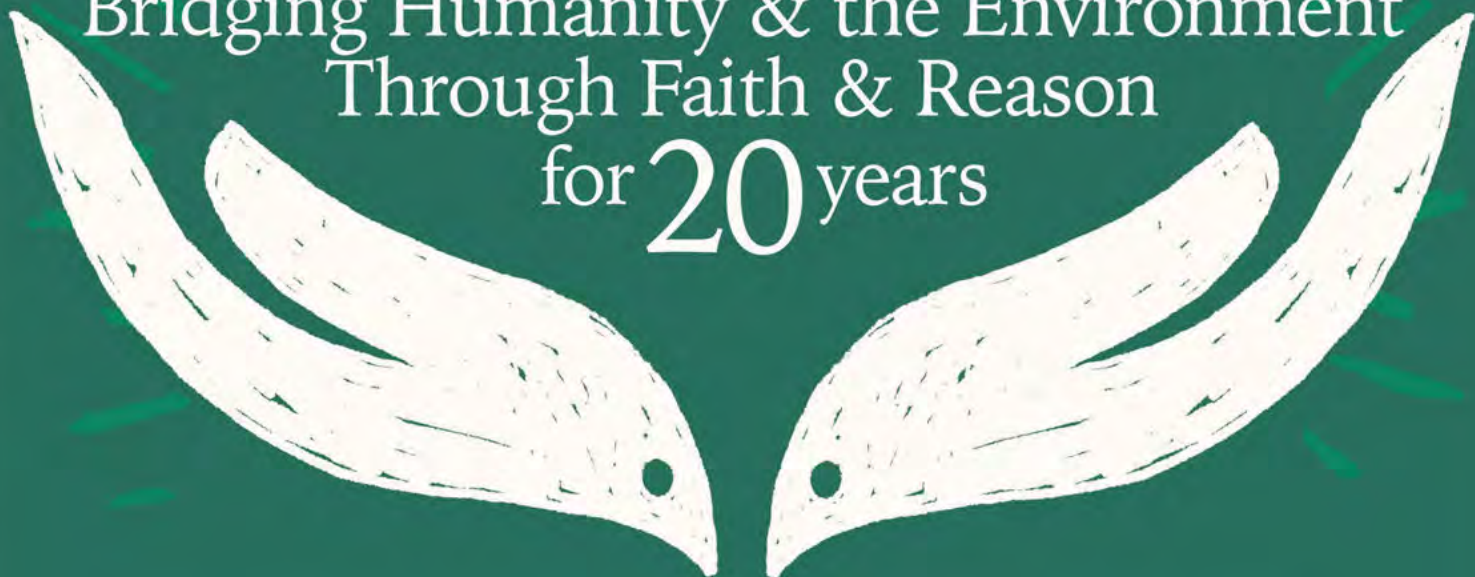
Why is screwworm suddenly a risk?

Officials eradicated the fly from the United States in the late 1960s, working with foreign leaders to exterminate the pests as far south as the Darién Gap near the Panama-Colombia border. Mexico was declared screwworm-free by 1991, and all of Central America by 2006, with a sterile fly barrier between Panama and Columbia. The Darién Gap boundary held for years despite endemic infestations in South America and the Caribbean. In 2023, average screwworm detections along the Panama boundary jumped from 25 to over 6,500. Since then, cases have been reported across Central America and this summer as far north as Veracruz, Mexico—only 370 miles south of Texas.

What is the U.S. government doing about it?

Agriculture Secretary Brooke L. Rollins stopped all shipments of live horses, cattle, and bison from Mexico in May. By June, Rollins announced plans for an \$8.5 million sterile screwworm fly dispersal facility in the Moore Air Base in South Texas. The facility, expected to take about six months to complete, will complement sterile fly production already underway in Panama and Mexico, according to Rollins' readiness plan. Meanwhile, Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller plans to deploy traps baited with a synthetic scent of rotting flesh to trap and kill adult screwworm flies in possible hot-spot areas. ■

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QUOTABLES

“Lay hands on our media. Heal them. Put honesty in their hearts.”

New York City Mayor ERIC ADAMS, a Democrat, praying at an Aug. 5 reelection campaign event that featured endorsements from dozens of faith leaders. He declined to take media questions afterward.



STEVE SANCHEZ/SPA USA VIA AP

“Charlie does what Charlie wants to do once we’re in the water.”

Dog owner JEFF NIEBOER, commenting on his 10-year-old yellow lab, who competed in the annual World Dog Surfing Championships in Pacifica, Calif., Aug. 2. Charlie took first place in the tandem category.¹

“I thought someone must’ve been stealing my mail.”

KEISHA BROWN of Northeast Baltimore after a local post office suspended some mail deliveries for weeks in July due to burrowing wasps in her Belair Edison neighborhood.²

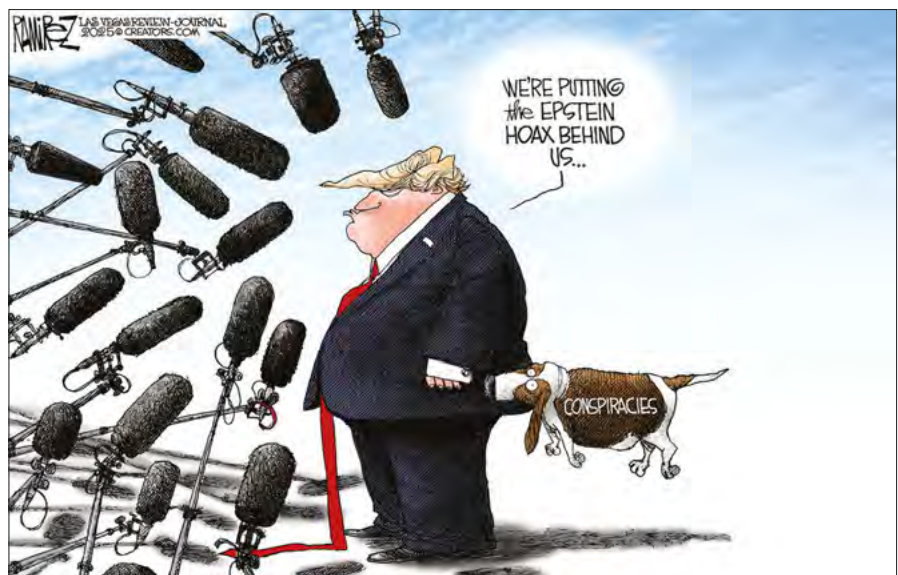
“I can tell you personally, hot dogs are very slippery.”

Shrewsbury, Pa., Fire Chief BRAD DAUBERMAN after a truck carrying hot dogs spilled its load across Interstate 83 on Aug. 1.³

“It tastes a little earthy, a little sweet, if you’re wondering.”

Massachusetts resident ERICA KAHN, recounting to reporters her battle with \$20,000 in medical bills for rabies shots after a bat flew into her mouth while she vacationed in Arizona.³

¹Associated Press; ²The Baltimore Banner; ³12News





QUICK TAKES

Master of illusions

No amount of diplomacy will get this con artist off the hook

by JOHN DAWSON



The countries were fake. The embassy was fake. The diplomatic trappings were fake. But the charges against Harsh Vardhan Jain are very real. Police in Ghaziabad, India—a suburb of New Delhi—arrested Jain July 22 after alleging the 48-year-old was running a fake embassy from a rented home and duping unsuspecting job seekers into paying for job placement services in made-up countries. In the raid, police seized four cars with forged diplomatic license plates, multiple rubber stamps containing counterfeit national seals, fake press passes, and a quantity of foreign currency. Jain was also in possession of a dozen bogus diplomatic passports from purported micronations such as Lodonia, Poulvia, Saborga, and West Arctica. In reality, Westarctica is a non-governmental organization registered in California; Lodonia may be referencing the disputed micronation inside Sweden; and Saborga may reference a city in Italy with a self-styled princess. In a statement, police officials said they had discovered a connection between Jain and the late Saudi arms dealer Adnan Khashoggi and suggested that Jain's embassy scheme might involve more than just duping job seekers.

Fish fry firestorm

British Columbia investigators puzzling over the remnants of a 1-acre fire July 30 found only one good clue at the center of the small conflagration. Local fire-fighters said they discovered a charred fish in the middle of the blaze, but the site was nowhere near any lakes or rivers. After further investigation, authorities said they believe an ambitious osprey must have inadvertently dropped its large catch onto power lines below. Once in contact with the electrical wires, the fish ignited and then sparked a fire on the ground. That, or the bird was “tired of raw fish and wanted to give cooked a try,” firefighters joked on social media.



A shade too dark

In the future, the Chattanooga Public Works Department won't be planting trees under bridges. In an Aug. 1 social media statement, an official with the department acknowledged that planting trees under the Highway 27 underpass—a place where trees don't get adequate sunlight—had been a mistake and blamed the error on an oversight during the planning phase. After residents complained about the freshly planted trees, city contractors moved quickly to pull the plants from the ground and relocate them to a more appropriate setting.

Cats: the cinematic experience

In early August, cat lovers across the country closed Facebook and got their funny feline fix in theaters instead. Now reportedly in its eighth year, CatVideoFest is a fundraiser for feline charities that features a big-screen compilation of cat videos. The videos are curated by Will Braden, a self-proclaimed professional cat video watcher. Though Braden wanted viewers to have a good laugh, he insisted the videos were serious entertainment and included music videos and mini documentaries. “It isn’t all just, what I call, ‘America’s Funniest Home Cat Videos,’” Braden told the Associated Press. “It’s not all cats falling into a bathtub. That would get exhausting.” This year’s 73-minute compilation was scheduled to play in more than 500 theaters throughout the United States and Canada. —Bekah McCallum



Wailing in the woods

Hikers traversing the British Columbia wilderness placed an emergency call July 31 to report hearing faint screams in the distance. While the hikers couldn’t be sure, they told emergency officials they thought they were hearing cries for help. The call set in motion a search crew including members of the Central Okanagan Search and Rescue as well as Royal Canadian Mounted Police. After hearing plaintive wails, emergency crews were able to locate the man. Rather than finding him in a state of distress, officials say the solo hiker had just been singing at the top of his lungs a litany of songs from Canadian rock group Nickelback. “He wasn’t in trouble,” search manager Duane Tresnich told the *Vancouver Sun*. “Unless you count his singing.”



“He wasn’t in trouble. Unless you count his singing.”



Rhinos go nuclear

African academics have a clever new way to curb rhinoceros poaching—make the animals’ horns radioactive. Officials with the University of the Witwatersrand, as well as conservationists and government officials in South Africa, launched July 31 what they are calling the Rhisotope Project. Officials have already injected five rhinos with radioactive isotopes that, while not harmful to the animals, would easily show up on a scan. Project officials say the goal is to make it more difficult for poachers to move rhino horns, used in traditional Eastern medicine, across borders or through airports. Project leaders hope to begin mass injections on the estimated 27,000 remaining rhinos.



Cougar kung fu

When squaring off against a cougar or mountain lion, stick to the jab. That’s what one Canadian man did on July 26. According to wildlife conservation officers, the British Columbia man was working near Lake Kathlyn in the interior of the province when a cougar approached him and took a swipe. Rather than panic, the unidentified man threw a punch that landed squarely on the big cat’s maw. The man told the Conservation Officer Service that the cat ran away after being punched. Officials with the service said the man, who escaped the fracas with only minor injuries, did the right thing throwing a punch. “Always fight back and never play dead,” officials said in a statement.

Seeking restoration

Bureau of Prisons deputy chief Josh Smith on life after prison, the Bible and justice, and nonprofit partnerships

by ADDIE OFFEREINS



Josh Smith became deputy director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons in June, when he was appointed to the role by Director William K. Marshall III. Smith, 50, previously ran a reentry nonprofit for prison inmates and founded a multimillion-dollar home repair and construction company whose employees included former convicts. As second in command of the BOP, Smith helps oversee the agency that manages and staffs federal prisons across the country. He's also the first former inmate to work for the bureau—he entered federal prison at age 21 to serve five years for marijuana and cocaine trafficking. President Donald Trump pardoned Smith during his first term. Here are edited excerpts of our conversation.

WHAT'S A CHANGE YOU WANT TO SEE HAPPEN AT THE BUREAU OF PRISONS?

More partnerships with nonprofits and agencies throughout the country. We just met with one of the largest prison ministry nonprofits that has been trying to work with this agency for many years. When I sat down with them, as I've already done with multiple others in the last few weeks, I said, "We're going to start with: The answer is yes. Now tell us what you're ready to do inside this agency."

YOU HOPE TO ENCOURAGE THE WORK OF THOSE MINISTRIES?

I think my job in this role is to just say "You're welcome here" and then make sure that we move bureaucratic obstacles out of the way. It's been exciting watching the looks on the faces of people who have tried for decades to do great things to support the staff and the inmates inside this agency, who finally get a seat at the table. Those resources don't cost us money. We just have to work to get them in and support them.

STAFF SHORTAGES AND SAFETY ARE PRESSING ISSUES FOR THE BUREAU. HOW ARE YOU HELPING YOUR STAFF FEEL SUPPORTED IN YOUR FIRST WEEKS ON THE JOB?

In a nationwide survey of all government employees, Bureau of Prisons staff ranked this agency as the worst place to

work in all of government. Over my first five or six weeks, we were able to talk to many of the front-line staff about how we can do a better job of training and communicating with them.

LACK OF STABLE FAMILY LIFE IS A PROBLEM FOR MANY INMATES. I UNDERSTAND YOU HAD A SIMILAR EXPERIENCE?

My mother was a single mom working to survive. I was in trouble as a very young kid without a fatherhood example. Then fast-forward, I was a young man on the street, 16 years old, doing all kinds of things I shouldn't, and then sentenced to prison at age 21. I look back now as a father and see the importance of what that means. I think it gives me an appreciation of the challenges for those without a good father figure.

HOW DID YOUR CONVERSION EXPERIENCE CHANGE HOW YOU SAW THE PURPOSE OF YOUR TIME IN PRISON?

My conversion happened while I was in prison when I surrendered my life to the Lord. My faith is not just important to me, it's everything to me. It's the reason why I exist. It's the reason why I'm in this role. It's the reason why I celebrate 29 years of marriage this year, four children, and four grandchildren. It was those lessons and those principles that I learned throughout Scripture and through the many volunteers coming in to help support and teach that helped me transition through prison as a better person—somebody who looked to the Word of God.

DOES THE BIBLE SPEAK TO THE PURPOSE OF PRISON AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM?

I think the Scriptures are very clear on discipline and the reason for that. The Bible talks about how we cast people away from us in the Church in the hopes of restoring them. Some people commit crimes that require them to be separated from society. But I think prison should be restorative for those who did not commit crimes that cost them the ability to live among society forever. The Bible explains how restoration and accountability both happen.

“Prison should be restorative for those who did not commit crimes that cost them the ability to live among society forever.”

WHAT'S THE MOST PRESSING NEED FOR NEWLY RELEASED PRISONERS?

We talk a lot about what happens when somebody walks out the prison door, but reentry needs to start the day they enter the prison system. We try to rush inmates through different job trainings and skills once they get a few months away from release. Those things need to start on day one.

WILL YOU ENCOURAGE CHURCHES TO PLAY A LARGER ROLE IN REENTRY?

We're talking with the White House Faith Office about ways we can build major partnerships with churches that could sponsor prisons. With the right setup, churches can help our agency be transformational. The state of Texas allowed a church to go inside a state prison at no cost to the state and build a very large chapel. It has all the newest technology that can also be used for

education. Why can't that happen all across the country?

WOULD YOU SAY THE UNITED STATES HAS AN OVER-INCARCERATION PROBLEM?

I don't get caught up on that. I think the stats speak for themselves. I look at what difference we can make once the incarceration happens. How can we put more of a focus on restoration for those reentering society so they don't just keep coming back? Right now, 45% of those getting out come back into our system within the first three years. That is not a sustainable number.

HOW WOULD YOU CHANGE THE PUBLIC'S PERCEPTION OF CORRECTIONS, IF YOU COULD?

It's my hope and goal to help Congress and our general society see the importance of the role of corrections. It's not enough just to say, Hey, we're locking them up—we're safe now. Over 97% are slated to come back to be our neighbors again. I believe that we should be extremely intentional on how we manage them while they're in our care, to make sure that when they do become our neighbors again—when they are beside our families, our children, our grandchildren—that they're prepared for that.

WHAT'S SOMETHING POSITIVE ABOUT YOUR JOB?

I can't even communicate how thankful I am to work for a president who has been so disruptive to government and has chosen leaders like our BOP director, our attorney general, and so many others who are going to challenge the status quo. I'm so thankful to watch how the gospel is spoken about and preached inside of our government and our White House Faith Office.

WHAT'S SOMETHING ABOUT YOU MOST PEOPLE DON'T KNOW?

I made a challenge to myself in prison to become an avid learner. I began to read books on real estate, the stock market, and flying an airplane. Now, fast-forward, I am blessed by God to be extremely wealthy, mostly because of real estate. I have my airplane pilot's license as well as my helicopter pilot's license. ■



VOICES JANIE B. CHEANEY

Downsizing the DoE

President Carter's school choice collapse made depoliticizing education a lot harder

Like most conservatives, I'm shedding no tears for the U.S. Department of Education losing 1,400 employees and consequent funding. The DoE is another example of the First Law of Bureaucracy: Upon the establishment of a government agency or department, the reason for which it was established becomes its second priority. The first priority is to justify itself. More than any other Cabinet department, the DoE seems vulnerable to an obvious test of justification: Has student performance improved since 1978?

Short answer: No. The latest NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) scores show 31% of fourth graders and 30% of eighth graders at or above reading proficiency. Only 26% of 12th graders are considered proficient in math, according to "The Nation's Report Card." That looks to me like a D- in educating young citizens.

It's well known that Jimmy Carter backed the creation of a federal Department of Education to fulfill a promise to the National Education Association. What's less well known is another pledge he made in a letter to Catholic school administrators: "I am committed to finding constitutionally acceptable methods of providing aid to parents whose children attend parochial schools."

Jimmy Carter, school choice activist?

Not as far-fetched as it seems, perhaps. Senators from both sides of the aisle, notably Daniel Patrick Moynihan, D-N.Y., and Richard Schweiker, R-Pa., favored tax credits to parents who chose private education. In January 1978, almost a month after the first secretary of education had been sworn in, a Senate Subcommittee on Taxation and Debt Management

held three days of hearings on the proposal. Witnesses in favor cited better private school performance, lower costs, and more opportunities for the disadvantaged. Opponents complained about less revenue for the federal government and fewer resources for public schools.

The same arguments we hear today, in other words. Yet school choice seemed to be gaining ground until, as Ira Stoll writes in *Education Next*, "at the key moment, Carter collapsed on the issue." In a speech the following spring he axed the tax-credit plan: "I think the whole concept is fallacious and I don't like it." The NEA, never a fan of public money for private schools, cheered from the sidelines.

But today the organization is in battle mode, especially since a national school choice provision (the Educational Choice for Children Act, or ECCA) was included in the Big Beautiful Bill and signed into law. This year's NEA Representative Assembly (July 3-6) was packed with political-action items and fiery speeches. President Becky Pringle's keynote address clarified the dire threat of the current administration's "fascistic" agenda: "They want to dismantle, defund, privatize, and voucherize public education. ... This is an intentional, coordinated campaign to strip away the very tools that challenge power, demand justice, and preserve democracy."

What's to be done? "We must take action guided by these seven important verbs: Educate. Communicate. Organize. Mobilize. Litigate. Legislate. Elect."

Good for the president of an educational association to put "Educate" at the head of the list. But what she meant was, "We will talk openly about what is happening to the world around us and what it portends for the future. As the rapid consolidation of power leads us down a treacherous and dark road toward authoritarian rule, we must be vigilant in teaching the lessons of history, and help not just our students, but our communities understand what is at stake and ensure they are able to fully imagine their world as it should be."

The world as it should be must surely include a majority of citizens who can read and write. But of the many business items crowding the assembly agenda, not one concerned improving basic skills. To be fair, the NEA is a political organization. But shouldn't there be some acknowledgment of the groundwork that must be done before kids can even comprehend "what's at stake"?

Maybe not, if the primary goal is to mold little lefties. Political ideology, whether left or right, tends to view children as malleable units rather than individual humans with enigmatic souls. Passing the ECCA and downsizing the Department of Education are promising steps toward depoliticizing education. But they aren't cure-alls. The ultimate remedy is for parents to recognize that they've always had school choice, because they are the primary school. The choice is whether to make the teaching of souls our priority, or leave it to the political winds. ■



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CULTURE





TRENDING

Destination detour

Families opt for smaller theme parks as rivalry between Universal and Disney drives up prices

by BEKAH MCCALLUM

Wearing a thin black T-shirt and denim shorts to beat the May humidity, Orlando local and mother of five Amber Shimel walked through the freshly painted green-and-gold gates of Epic Universe, Universal's newest theme park.

"I've been to so, so many theme parks ... and I really was speechless when we walked into that Ministry of Magic," she said, referring to a Harry Potter-themed attraction. Inspired by franchises like *How To Train Your Dragon* and Nintendo, the five-world park officially opened several weeks after the seven-member Shimel family visited during one of its preview days.

The entire Shimel family already has annual passes to Disney World, but only Amber's two sons have annual passes to Universal. But if Epic Universe becomes part of Universal's annual pass package, Amber thinks she might get her own.

The new theme park is the latest salvo in the long-standing rivalry between Universal and Disney for American family vacation dollars. But as the rival resorts keep one-upping each other with new rides and lands, prices continue to rise. That has prompted some theme park lovers to opt for smaller, more affordable destinations.

Universal has long been Disney's main theme park competitor. Disney opened its first park in Anaheim, Calif., in 1955. Universal Studios Hollywood opened nine years later.

But it's the rivalry in Orlando that's really heated up. Disney ruled the central Florida theme park scene for 18 years, but in 1990, Universal opened Universal Studios, just a year after Disney showcased MGM (now Hollywood) Studios. In 1998, Disney opened Animal Kingdom. A year later, Universal opened its second Orlando theme park, Islands of Adventure.

Disney is still the largest player in the theme park industry. Compared with Universal's 19.7 million Orlando visitors in 2023, Disney World hosted 48.6 million tourists.

That's not quite back to pre-pandemic levels. Disney's Orlando theme parks welcomed about 58 million tourists in 2019. But visits to Disney World are climbing. During an earnings conference call in May, Disney CFO Hugh Johnston announced Disney World bookings for this year's third and fourth quarters were up 4% and 7%, respectively.

That's still a modest rise, partly by design. During the same earnings call, CEO Bob Iger said the company intentionally limits the number of visitors, "because we don't want to decrease the guest experience."

Some families may be visiting less frequently because of the sheer expense of a Disney vacation. According to FinanceBuzz, average ticket prices for Disney's North American parks have gone up 69% since 2015. "Disney is mostly concerned with maximizing revenue, not maximizing visitor volume," said Len Testa, president of →



TouringPlans, an agency that helps families schedule trips to Disney and Universal attractions.

A family of four can expect to spend between \$6,000 and \$10,000 for a seven-day trip to Disney World.

Until now, families traveling to Orlando for theme parks might spend a day or two at Universal and the rest of the time at Disney World. With the addition of Epic Universe, Universal now has three theme parks and a water park, enough attractions for a multiday getaway.

Some industry insiders speculate that Epic Universe could snatch about 1 million visitors from Disney World over the next two years.

To upgrade its theme park game, Disney announced plans in 2023 to spend \$60 billion over the next 10 years to improve its experiences. Those upgrades likely will drive up costs even more.

That may be why some families are gravitating to smaller destinations.

In 2023, Cedar Point in Sandusky, Ohio; SeaWorld San Diego; and Six Flags in Valencia, Calif., all reported crowd surges of over 8% from the previous year. That same year, visits to Disney World's parks grew by just 4% while attendance at Universal's two Orlando parks dropped by 9%.

“The reality is, the families that really want to go to these places, they will save up.”

“Where these smaller parks are most successful is actually away from the larger parks,” said Beth Novak, a professor of media arts at Ohio State University. “Not only are the large parks expensive, but getting to them is expensive.”

Since 2015, parks like Kings Island, Busch Gardens, and Hersheypark have either increased their ticket prices by less than 10% or discounted them.

Hersheypark in Pennsylvania was packed with families when Carissa Baker, a professor of theme park and attraction management at the University of Central Florida, visited in July.

Although smaller parks may see some attendance gains from families who can't swing frequent Orlando excursions, Baker says trips to Disney World and Universal have long been a once-in-a-childhood experience, and that isn't likely to change. She says it's too early to predict how the addition of Epic Universe will affect the price tag of a Disney World vacation. But Universal's newest park, which she has visited eight times already, probably won't affect prices enough to deter most die-hard theme park lovers from planning at least one trip.

“The reality is, the families that really want to go to these places, they will save up,” Baker said. ■

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Erickson on his cattle ranch near Perryton, Texas

BOOKS

Writing on the range

John Erickson's life and craft

by ELIZABETH COREY

→ Many readers of *WORLD* probably already know that John Erickson is a national treasure. Of course he'll be embarrassed at this accolade. But that's precisely the point. He's humble and unpretentious, with a dry sense of humor that he often directs at himself. His life exemplifies the old-fashioned American values of hard work, fidelity in marriage, and faith in God.

His new autobiography, *Small Town Author* (Texas Tech University Press, 256 pp.), offers a glimpse into both his writing and the worldview that's shaped



Small Town Author

JOHN R. ERICKSON

it. Erickson isn't at all concerned with "influencing" or promoting a brand. His writing is like a clear window. It's as if he says: Come and see what I see, the way I see it.

Erickson is most famous for his Hank the Cowdog stories, a series of 82 novels about ranch life in the Texas Panhandle narrated by an overly confident but endearing dog named Hank. Although these books are ostensibly for children, they appeal equally to adults and are full of insight about human character and relationships.

During his early years as a writer, Erickson pursued mainstream literary achievement by following the conventional wisdom of the 1960s, which was that serious literature had to be "full of existential angst, humorless, and depressing." As he matured, though, he came to see that writing didn't have to be quite so dark and nihilistic. He subsequently penned a number of fiction and nonfiction books about Texas and cowboy life, as well as about the craft of writing itself.

What's so refreshing, even bracing, about Erickson's prose is its simplicity and directness. As a college professor, I live in a world where jargon and specialized language tend to be considered marks of intelligence and sophistication. The aim in much academic writing is not to welcome readers but to exclude them, displaying erudition by using the language of a chosen tribe or in-group. Erickson saw this up close during his years at the University of Denver and UT Austin, and then at Harvard Divinity School, where he decided not to finish his degree.

Erickson has a healthy skepticism about the academic world, which he perceives as self-obsessed and insular. So when a professor told him that if he wanted to write, then he should "just do it," he decided not to waste his time in graduate school. Instead he honed his craft by spending his early morning hours reading, writing, and thinking.

After that, he's out on the ranch, attending to land and animals. At 82 years old, he still follows this daily routine.

Here is the essence of Erickson's project: "Real" life and reflection on life are inseparable, and the living and reflecting mutually inform each other. Our real lives are constituted not just by what we think in our minds and watch others do on screens; a great deal depends on *where* we live and *what we actually do* every day.

Writing is different from musical or athletic virtuosity, gifts sometimes possessed by the very young and inexperienced. Although talent certainly matters in writing, the best writers also draw on a fund of experience acquired over many years. Every aspiring writer is told that the best work results from writing about what you know. But as a young man, John Erickson realized he didn't know very much. "My biggest problem as a writer," he notes, "was that I lacked any kind of solid, sustained life experience. What had I ever *done*?"

In 1968, he and his wife, Kris, went back to Texas for a short visit with his parents before moving on to their next great adventure. But they never left. He subsequently worked (and wrote) in a variety of unpropitious settings: in a tractor, plowing a field, with a notebook attached to his right thigh with rubber bands; typing while wearing wool gloves in a freezing garage office; scribbling notes and character sketches on scraps of paper when he worked in a bar.

I think, as Erickson does, that there's a tremendous amount of material for story and reflection in any "ordinary" life, especially if a person is deeply involved in real, concrete activities: ranching, religious life, teaching, parenting, theater, gardening, repairing cars, fishing, and countless other things.

In a classic "Ericksonian" image, he likens this accumulated experience to—of all things—the humble compost pile. His artistic compost heap includes parents, wife, small-town life, and religious training. But his involvement with ranch life "was one of the most powerful" elements in his formation because it pulled him away from books and abstraction

**His writing is
like a clear
window. It's as
if he says:
Come and see
what I see, the
way I see it.**

and showed him "the living, breathing reality of earth, sky, and weather, muscle, sweat, and blood."

Erickson claims he was never the most skilled cowboy on the ranch. But he learned the job from the inside out, acquiring a feel for the land, for the kinds of people he worked with, and especially for the animals. During these years he also discovered several men who modeled the kind of life he hoped to live.

Texas authors J. Evetts Haley and John Graves showed him that he didn't need to be in a coastal capital but could draw on the "regional" identity he already had. As he observes, he was "stuck with" that regional identity, and maybe—just maybe—"it was important." Place isn't just a location on a map; it's "a swirl of complex emotions and relationships that accrued to people whose lives were shaped by one specific patch of soil."

And so instead of sending literary tomes to New York editors, he began writing short stories for regional and trade publications, like *The Cattleman* and *Livestock Weekly*. In the book, he shares one vignette titled "Casey the Bronc," a brilliant story of horse-breaking told from the horse's point of view. It's a template for the voice of Hank, which has become so familiar and delightful to Erickson's readers.

But I've saved the most important part for last. Erickson's view of the world is deeply grounded in his faith. He does not advertise his Christianity, but the "simple, organic, innocent humor" of his stories offers a hint that he loves the world as it is and simultaneously has hope for a world to come.

Laughter, wrote G.K. Chesterton, has "something in common with the ancient winds of faith and inspiration; it unfreezes pride and unwinds secrecy; it makes men forget themselves in the presence of something greater than themselves." Erickson's autobiography—honest, direct, and definitely humorous—is a gift to his readers and a reminder of the unbought grace in every human life. ■

—Elizabeth Corey is a professor and director of the Honors Program at Baylor University



BOOKS

Hitler's long shadow

Fighting fascism isn't enough

by JAMES R. WOOD



Alec Ryrie's *The Age of Hitler and How We Will Survive It* (Reaktion Books, 160 pp.)

alerts us that the old taboos that kept the demons at bay in Western societies for the past 80 years are no longer holding. What *First Things* editor Rusty Reno labeled "the postwar consensus" is cracking, and according to Ryrie, this development is not wholly unwelcome.

For too long, Western politics has been defined by its devils. We know what we fear and want to avoid at all costs: the second coming of Hitler, racist fascism, anti-Semitism, and so forth. On



The Age of Hitler and How We Will Survive It

ALEC RYRIE

these we all agree—or at least we did until very recently.

We struggle to find common loves around which to rally, and we are left only with common fears and hates. We know we hate Hitler and fear fascism—is this all there is to civilization? The irony is that many anti-Nazis have subtly adopted the logic of famous Nazi theorist Carl Schmitt, who argued that politics is fundamentally defined by the identification of our enemies. It need not be so. These are narrow and soul-destroying horizons.

After the two World Wars, the West replaced the Christian story with the anti-Nazi story. The complex worldview supplied by Scripture and centuries of Christian reflection was secularized and simplified into a vague humanism and hatred of fascism. This has blinded us to all sorts of other evils and provided poor guidance to deal with the ones we do recognize. We are too quick to make parallels between the problems we face today and the battle against the Nazis in WWII. But since that moment was in many ways unique, the response to it should not be paradigmatic. If we leave ourselves only with the anti-Hitler hammer, all we will see are Nazi nails, and we will treat every problem today with the same absolute ruthlessness with which the Allies pummeled their enemies.

Ryrie doesn't want us to lose the insights and values gained during the Age of Hitler; he just thinks they need to rest on the firmer foundations of a richer story. Many people recognize the flaws in the postwar consensus and wish to erase the lessons of the 20th century. This isn't the path Ryrie charts. He wants the West to return to its Christian roots, which are far more rich, positive, and firm than simply fearing fascists and defending human rights. But he also wants us to receive the gains in moral and political wisdom from the past century. Both the Christian story and the anti-Hitler story are part of the West's heritage; both are pieces of the particular providence of our societies. It is just that the latter should not overshadow and erase the former. ■

BOOKS

Natural rights?

Giving rivers personhood is a bad idea for real people

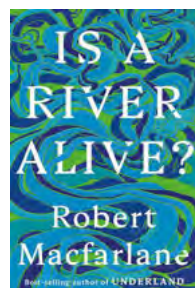
by WESLEY J. SMITH



Robert Macfarlane

→ Should rivers be granted “rights”? Anyone with common sense would consider this a nonsensical question. Rivers may be beautiful and awe-inspiring, but they are insentient geological features.

Don’t tell that to noted nature writer Robert Macfarlane. His *New York Times* bestselling *Is a River Alive?* (W.W. Norton, 384 pp.) is a beautiful memoir recounting his travels on three rivers, but its primary purpose is to convince readers that these waterways are actually “vast and mysterious presences,” i.e., living beings. He writes, “I prefer to



Is a River Alive?

ROBERT MACFARLANE

speak of rivers *who* flow,” rather than “which” because that “reduces them to the status of stuff and distinguishes them from human persons.”

Macfarlane is part of a growing neo-paganistic movement known generally as “nature rights,” which seeks to erase moral and legal distinctions between humans and nature by granting rights to the natural world. As for rivers, Macfarlane believes they should have “the right to flow and be free from over-abstractation and the right to be free from pollution.” Advocates have already managed to secure personhood rights for a number of rivers around the world.

How does a river enforce its rights? Many proposals allow anyone who believes that the river’s “rights” are being violated to sue as the river’s guardian. Other proposals call for commissions—which would be made up of true believers like Macfarlane.

Either way, the potential for harm such irrational schemes cause cannot be overstated. If rivers have a right to flow, that means no more flood control projects. A right to be free from over-abstractation prevents irrigation that removes more water than is supplied naturally: Do that and we can kiss acres of fecund farmlands goodbye.

Macfarlane mentions these costs in passing but seems little concerned. Indeed, he discusses the Three Gorges Dam in China spanning the Yangtze River as if it were a bad thing. But before the dam, thousands of people could be killed when the Yangtze flooded. Despite bemoaning global warming, Macfarlane fails to mention that Three Gorges creates pollution-free power as the world’s largest hydroelectric project.

The book idealizes preindustrialized society without considering the needs of our modern world. Moreover, can’t we protect rivers without pretending they are living persons?

Macfarlane writes, “There are few things as powerful as an idea whose time has come.” Perhaps. But it doesn’t mean it is a good idea. And for those who truly care about human thriving, granting rights to nature generally, and to rivers specifically, is a very bad idea. ■



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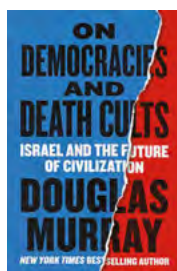
Wars and rumors of wars: eight books

POLITICAL COMMENTARY

On Democracies and Death Cults

DOUGLAS MURRAY
BROADSIDE BOOKS, 240 PAGES

Amid global confusion, Douglas Murray addresses the Gaza conflict with moral clarity. Drawing from travels in Israel, Gaza, and Lebanon, Murray captures the brutality of the attacks at the Nova Music Festival and kibbutzim, countering liberal Western media's often anti-Israel bias. This work exemplifies empathetic, rigorous, and honest journalism. Murray dismantles the simplistic "oppressor vs. oppressed" narrative, instead framing the conflict as a struggle between Israel's democratic values—capitalism and individual rights—and Hamas' anti-Semitic, genocidal ideology, rooted in Islamic teachings. His



intellectual clarity warns that Western sympathy for such ideologies threatens global democratic values. Murray supports Biblical calls to "choose life," and he contrasts Israel's vitality with Hamas'

death cult. Encounters with soldiers, hostage families, and terrorists reveal a spectrum of human experience. Written with elegant yet accessible prose, marked by wit and precision, the book critiques Western hypocrisy and underscores the theological roots of the conflict.

—A.S. Ibrahim*

LITERARY CRITICISM

Paradise Lost: A Biography

ALAN JACOBS
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS, 224 PAGES

For the most part these days, John Milton's 17th-century epic, *Paradise Lost*, lies woefully unread. So when a knowl-

edgeable guide comes along to help readers not only understand the poem better but also catch a glimpse of hundreds of years of debates about its theology, politics, and influence, hope springs that readers might reengage with it. In six brisk chapters, Jacobs covers Milton's life;



the structure and key moments in the epic; the vicissitudes of Milton's reputation among literary figures and scholars such as Joseph Addison, Samuel Johnson, Mary Shelley, C.S. Lewis,

and Stanley Fish; and the legacy of the poem in contemporary popular culture. Jacobs' book is academic yet accessible and genially introduces one of the greatest religious books in the English language. A final bonus is that, whereas some critics enjoy speculating about Milton's alleged Arianism, Jacobs recognizes that there is no evidence of the heresy in *Paradise Lost*, and he wisely omits the matter entirely. Aspiring readers of the epic would benefit from Dennis Danielson's parallel prose edition published by Broadview. —Jeremy Larson*

CHRISTIAN FICTION

Winter's Chill

MORGAN L. BUSSE
ENCLAVE, 304 PAGES

Brigid fights to survive the war against the southern forces as well as the dark binding placed on the soldiers of the Nordic north. With her supernatural strength of unknown origins, she is the only northern captive to survive being separated from the so-called "allies" who bound her under their spell. When Kaeden—southern healer of the Word and wielder of a powerful light—frees

her to return to her people, Brigid is finally able to discover the origin of her strength. Yet unless Kaeden, Brigid,



and their friends from both north and south work together, they will all fall under the dark power of the Shadonae. *Winter's Chill* is the second installment in the Nordic Wars

Trilogy, a Christian fantasy series set in an intricate world of political intrigue and supernatural gifting. Through fantasy, this book explores just war theory and how a doubting believer should steward God's gifts for good in times of complex situations and great suffering.

—Marian A. Jacobs

HISTORY

Summer of Fire and Blood

LYNDAL ROPER
BASIC BOOKS, 544 PAGES

In this book, Lyndal Roper hopes to recapture "the Reformation we have lost sight of" as not solely a movement taken up with elites such as Martin Luther but also the cause behind "the greatest popular uprising in western Europe before the French Revolution," the German Peasants' War (1524–1525). Rather than merely focusing on theology or leading radicals like Thomas Müntzer, she con-



fidently reconstructs the variety of social, political, and economic factors that coalesced to urge poor laboring men and women to take a militant stand against their feudal and ecclesiastical

overlords. Roper interprets the eventual defeat of the peasants as that which "transformed the Reformation from a movement that challenged the social order into one that supported the existing authorities." The German Peasants' War forces us to realize that not everyone agreed how the recovery of the Biblical gospel should change Western →

Christendom. Regardless of whether one feels that the peasants' belligerence was wholly justified or not, this is a very well-written and well-defended account of an episode often neglected within popular conceptions of what counts as Reformation history. —*Flynn Evans**

MEMOIR

Please Live: The Chechen Wars, My Mother and Me

LANA ESTEMIROVA

JOHN MURRAY PUBLISHERS, 288 PAGES

Lana Estemirova was 15 years old when corrupt policemen killed her mother Natalia, a noted journalist and human rights advocate in Chechnya, the restive region of southern Russia. Natalia was one of 160,000 people to perish in



Chechnya's years of violence. In this memoir we see a snapshot of a war long gone from global news headlines, yet whose effects shape the present. The author's childhood

bears the hallmarks of post-Communist dysfunction. Her parents split up early. Her mother struggled to provide. Her estranged father died in the war in 2000. The author shares her own vulnerability in recalling the chaos and grief brought by her mother's death. "I will live for both of us," she resolves. *Please Live* feels relevant since the Chechen wars' foremost leaders remain in power today. —*William Fleeson*

HISTORY

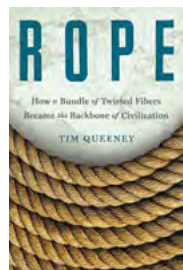
Rope

TIM QUEENEY

ST. MARTIN'S PRESS, 336 PAGES

This book is a vivid, surprising journey through one of humanity's oldest and most overlooked technologies. In this deeply researched and wildly engaging book, Tim Queeney unspools the long, tangled history of rope—from its prehistoric origins in Neanderthal caves to its central role in war, worship, exploration, and execution. Rope has lifted pyramids, held ships steady through

tempests, stitched the skeletons of cathedrals, and rigged the gallows. It has been a tool of salvation and domination, freedom and bondage. Queeney explores both sides of its legacy—how this simple



twisted fiber enabled the rise of civilization, yet also served as an instrument of torture and death.

Along the way, readers meet rope-makers, sailors, surveyors, executioners, and even

modern climbers whose lives have literally hung by a thread. With precision, wit, and reverence for the unglamorous, *Rope* reminds us that some of the most powerful forces in history aren't loud or shiny—they're coiled quietly, holding everything together. This is not just a book about rope. It's also a book about mastery, ingenuity, and the thin lines—literally and morally—that hold the human story in place. —*John Mac Gblionn**

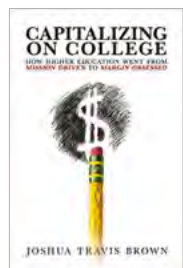
EDUCATION

Capitalizing on College

JOSHUA TRAVIS BROWN

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 320 PAGES

Tuition prices are outpacing inflation, but universities still claim to be impoverished. The economics surrounding higher education seem to be a mess. *Capitalizing on College* attempts to explain how American colleges and universities got into this financial mess by looking at a small subset of the 6,000 institutions of higher education: religious colleges. Brown notes that American schools have always tended to emulate



elite schools like Harvard and Yale, despite not having the deep pockets of either. The GI Bill and expanding federal aid allowed tuition-driven schools to plow funds into growth with the hope that growth would provide stability. Brown categorizes schools—which have been anonymized to allow

for more candid interviews with professors and administrators—into groups based on how they attempted to grow their enrollments. Some focused on tradition, some on new programs, others on distance learning. None of these approaches insulated the institutions from harsh financial realities. Trying to look like an Ivy without an Ivy's donor base will leave any school in a precarious position. In order to survive, too many religious colleges have had to sacrifice mission for margin. —*Collin Garbarino*

CHRISTIAN FICTION

The Heart of the King

J.J. FISCHER

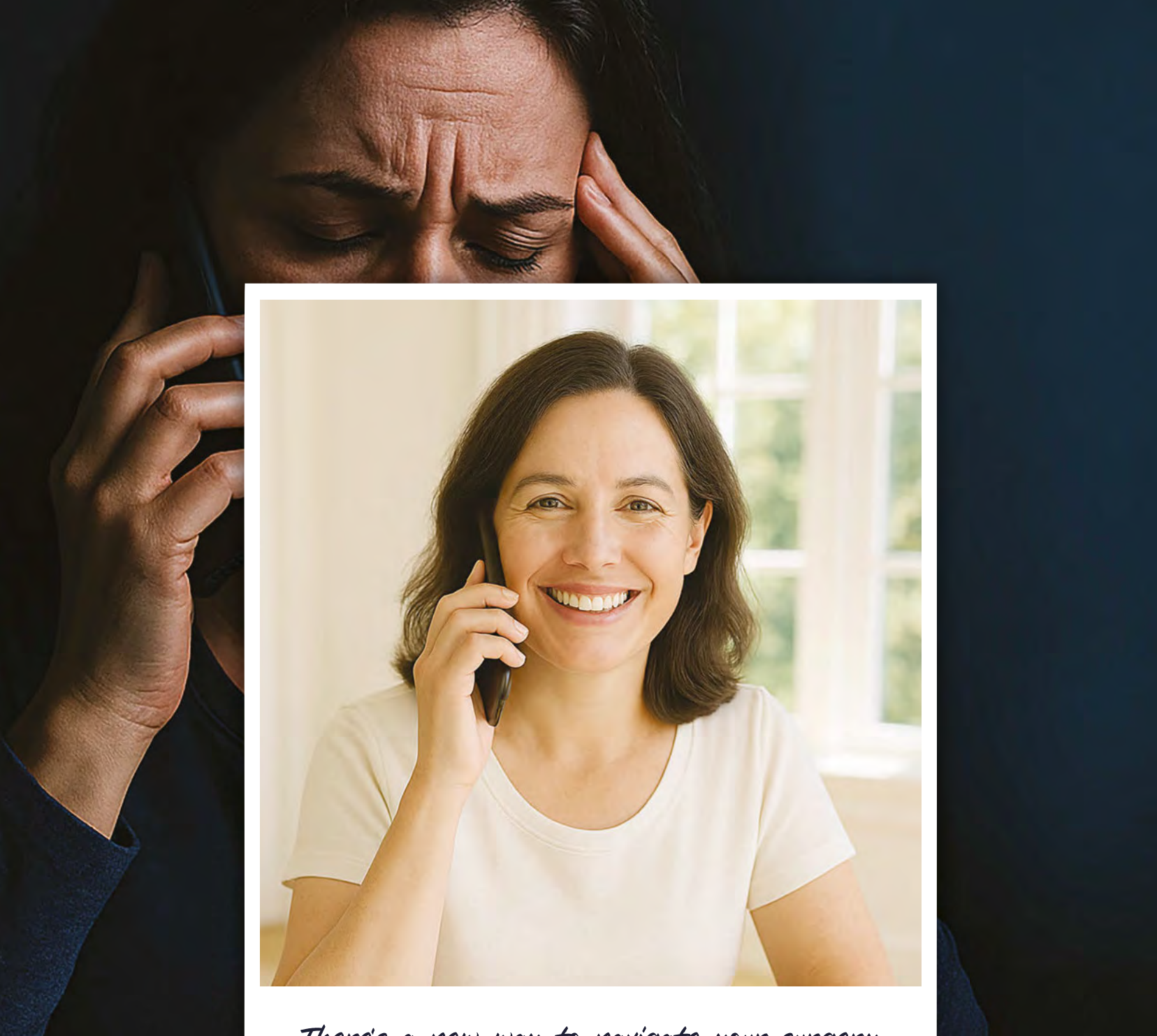
WHITECROWN, 314 PAGES

When a prophecy names gravedigger Rigan North as the future bride to the heir of Jardia and the subsequent downfall of the reign of Calidore, the threatened king sends his best soldier Aureus Corcoran to retrieve the woman. On their journey to Calidore, Rigan attempts to escape her fate only to be met with the mind-controlling monsters



that roam the forests. Meanwhile Corcoran's conscience is pricked by how low he has stooped to serve his king. Corcoran must choose between turning an innocent woman

over to an unstable king or forgo his mission in order to save her life. *The Heart of the King* is the first installment in the Painted Wind series. Fischer—known for her unique magic systems and faith-filled romantic fantasy—creates a fascinating world where the evils of sin and demon-like monsters threaten the lives of Rigan, Corcoran, and their party. Fischer also avoids the dreaded Stockholm syndrome with the careful use of genuine repentance and self-sacrifice woven into her character arcs. With themes of overcoming trauma and loneliness, redemption and forgiveness, and loving the unlovable, *The Heart of the King* is a compelling beginning to Fischer's next epic fantasy series. —*M.J. ■*



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Gwen visits the world of the Lahdukan in an illustration from *The Library of Unruly Treasures*.

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Kids to the rescue

Two novels for middle graders

by KRISTIN CHAPMAN & BEKAH MCCALLUM

➔ It's been seven years since author Jeanne Birdsall published the finale to her beloved Penderwicks series about four sisters experiencing the challenges and joys of growing up. Her latest release, *The Library of Unruly Treasures* (Knopf, 352 pp.), has echoes of the same charm found in the Penderwicks but offers a new twist by intertwining a fantasy world reminiscent of *The Borrowers* or *The Littles*.

When 11-year-old Gwen MacKinnon's self-absorbed parents ship her off to spend two weeks with a great-uncle she's never met, Gwen doesn't have high expectations. She is pleasantly surprised, however, to discover it might be the best two weeks of her life. She quickly connects with lovable Uncle Matthew, who offers the stability and attention Gwen has been craving, and finds easy camaraderie in his quirky dog Pumpkin.

A casual visit to the local library, though, catapults Gwen into the mysterious world of the Lahdukan, tiny-winged creatures who are usually only seen and heard by young children. Gwen



The Library of Unruly Treasures

JEANNE BIRDSALL



The Unlikely Intrusion of Adams Klein

JOHN GRECO

is special, however, and the Lahdukan's prophecies reveal that she is destined to be their next leader. Gwen embraces her new role as Qalba (the leader and protector of the Lahdukan), but she is in a race against time to relocate the tribe before a major library renovation begins and her visit ends. Note to parents: The plot includes discussion of mystical rituals and consulting Lahdukan ancestors for guidance and protection.

John Greco's *The Unlikely Intrusion of Adams Klein* (Moody Publishers, 288 pp.) opens in the year 2196. Sensory alarm clocks simulate the smell of frying bacon, holographic projections gloss over graffiti and trash, and cranial downloads make learning obsolete. But instead of greater freedom, this "era of injectable education" only enslaves.

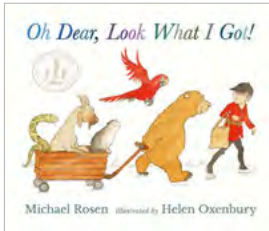
And enslavement is precisely what the Marshal, a tyrannical overlord, has in mind. When he determines that 14-year-old Adams Klein might get in the way of his world domination itinerary, the Marshal tries to assassinate the boy. Adams flees to Indigo, Ohio, circa 2015, but he can't interact with anyone or else he'll change the course of history. When his conscience compels him to save two other teens, Adams' intervention triggers strange occurrences, and the three new friends must join forces to stop the Marshal before he can kill Adams.

The story has plenty for serious young readers to chew on: The book warns against totalitarianism and suppression by abundance, introducing young readers to the dystopian genre and offering a taste of George Orwell's *1984* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. But the book is also full of adventure thanks to heist scenes, cyber bots, and a smidgen of chaste romance. Parents should be aware that the book explores ideas like divorce and bullying. Christian themes of self-sacrifice and intercession permeate the story without suffocating it. ■

MATT PHELAN

Friends, family, and food (for thought)

by KRISTIN CHAPMAN



Oh Dear, Look What I Got!

MICHAEL ROSEN
CANDLEWICK, 40 PAGES

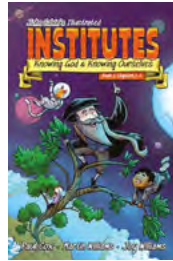
In 1989, author Michael Rosen and illustrator Helen Oxenbury released their award-winning *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*. Children who have delighted in that book's classic rhyming cadence and soft watercolor and pencil illustrations will enjoy the familiar feel of Rosen and Oxenbury's newest joint effort. The story shows a boy going from shop to shop in search of items including a carrot, hat, and coat. A series of misunderstandings, though, results in the shopkeepers instead giving the boy a slew of animals whose names rhyme with his shopping list. The amusing progression is punctuated with the repeated refrain, "Oh dear, look what I got! Do I want that? No, I do NOT!" The final few page-turns feature a riotous dose of animal mayhem that culminates with a satisfying ending. **Ages 3–6**



The Wild Robot on the Island

PETER BROWN
LITTLE, BROWN BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS, 48 PAGES

Rather than a new installment in the popular Wild Robot series, Peter Brown's latest release is a picture book adaptation of his first novel about Roz the robot. The plot mirrors the original chapter book: A crate containing Roz falls from a ship and washes up on a deserted island. Roz learns to move, hide, and communicate like the island animals that eventually become her friends. Each spread features Brown's vibrant paper and ink illustrations as he introduces younger readers to Roz's world and her special bond with an orphaned goose. While Wild Robot fans who were hoping for a new Roz adventure may be disappointed with this abbreviated recap, the picture book version offers a visually engaging read that affirms the values of kindness and friendship found in Brown's earlier works. **Ages 5–8**



John Calvin's Institutes Illustrated

PAUL COX,
MARTIN WILLIAMS,
& JOY WILLIAMS
P&R PUBLISHING, 80 PAGES

In this graphic novel collaboration, illustrator Paul Cox and editors Martin and Joy Williams offer an appealing and accessible format to help children understand the key points of John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. This inaugural book in a planned series focuses on the doctrine of knowing God and knowing ourselves, as found in Book 1 of Calvin's *Institutes*. Students Theo and Geneva take a journey through time and space as their guide John Calvin presents his *Institutes* in layman's terms alongside comic-book style panels that help visually depict the material. Each chapter ends with a summary as well as thoughtful questions to ponder and discuss, making this introduction to systematic theology a resource the whole family can enjoy. **Ages 8–12**



Family Feast!

CAROLE BOSTON WEATHERFORD
CROWN BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS, 32 PAGES

Carole Boston Weatherford's rhyming cadence combines with Frank Morrison's expressive oil paintings to convey a sense of warmth and joy surrounding an extended family's holiday feast. Big Ma and Pops wake early to begin preparations in the kitchen as they await the arrival of sons, daughters, sisters, and brothers. As the family members crowd together in the kitchen, everyone pitches in to fill the dinner table with an assortment of family favorites that create a "scent of love from many hands." Before everyone fills their plates, old and young join hands around the table and Pops leads the family in giving thanks to God. The book artfully celebrates the gift of family and the beauty of coming together: "Tastes like home when family meet; a bond so warm, so strong, so sweet." **Ages 4–8**



QUEST

SEVERAL BOOKS THAT SHAPED MY THINKING

What is a human being, anyway?

by CARL R. TRUEMAN

➔ Recently I have been preoccupied with the question of anthropology. I am convinced that so many of the issues of our day—for example, gender, sexuality, artificial intelligence, IVF, and surrogacy—all point back to the question raised in Psalm 8, “What is man?” The psalmist poses the question of human significance as a motive for doxological wonder. In our day, it has become an expression of paradoxical confusion. We have used our exceptional nature as creative, intentional beings to convince ourselves we have no significance at all.

AUGUSTINIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

Many books have helped me in this context. Perhaps the most important has been Augustine’s *Confessions*. I have loved this book since I first read it at university and have reread it regularly in the years since in multiple translations, most recently that of Anthony Esolen. Aside from the brilliant literary aspects of the work, Augustine successfully integrates theology, experience, and doxology into his autobiography in a way unmatched by any before or since. Augustine writes the book as one extended prayer, and in every sentence he assumes human

dependence upon God. *Confessions* strikes hard against the modern anthropological myth, that to be truly human is to be autonomous, unencumbered self-creators. Augustine’s doctrine of God decisively informs his doctrine of man, providing one of the propulsive aspects of the narrative. Along the way his criticisms of the pornography of the gladiatorial shows and the seductive nature of rhetorics and transgression for its own sake all offer insights into contemporary challenges. I first read *Confessions* for the personal testimony of Augustine to God’s grace. I still read it

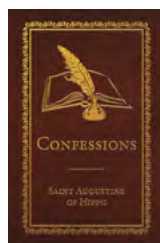
for that but also for its many insights into the human condition.

WRESTLING WITH MODERNITY

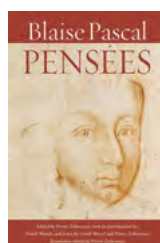
I have also profited from Blaise Pascal's *Pensées* (*Thoughts*). While Pascal draws deeply on Augustine's anthropology, he brings a modern note to its application. Faced with the vastness of the universe that his scientific knowledge revealed to him, Pascal comments that it makes him feel insignificant, afraid, and alone. That question of modernity—Where can man find significance, if anywhere at all?—presses on him and poses a challenge to his ability to be both a brilliant scientist and a man of Christian faith. While the fragmentary nature of *Thoughts* can sometimes frustrate readers who want to know what a cryptic sentence or paragraph means, there is a sense in which it also enhances the work by forcing the reader to think. In addition to the theological questions raised, the commentary on the materialist culture of the 17th-century French court has many parallels with our entertainment-obsessed world. Why does the king have a jester? Because he fears death and, having nothing else to worry about due to his material wealth and power, needs to be distracted from his mortality. In this instance, as in others, Pascal forces us to see the anthropological and theological significance of human behavior.

THEOLOGY OF THE BODY

Of contemporary writers, I would point to Erika Bachiochi, *The Rights of Women*, and O. Carter Snead, *What It Means To Be Human*, as having had a formative impact on my anthropology. The former addresses the history and nature of feminism, reconstructing it for the present day in dialogue with Mary Wollstonecraft. The latter examines the bioethics of conception, birth, and death. What both share is a commitment to understanding human beings as those defined not by autonomy but by obligation and dependency. In so doing, they also see the body and human embodiment as morally significant. That is a key move—perhaps obvious to



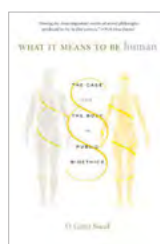
Confessions
AUGUSTINE



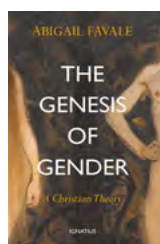
Pensées
BLAISE PASCAL



The Rights of Women
ERIKA BACHIOCHI



What It Means To Be Human
O. CARTER SNEAD



The Genesis of Gender
ABIGAIL FAVALE

Catholic thinkers like Bachiochi and Snead, but something Protestants need to make more central in our thinking. Particularly given the bodily implications of many modern questions, from sexual relationships to gender to fertility to end-of-life care, a theology of the body in Protestant circles is much to be desired. And there are good indications that such is emerging, with some useful monographs on the topic having been published in recent years. I have also benefited from C.S. Lewis' *The Abolition of Man*, but it is so well-known no further comment is needed.

THE PURPOSE OF GENDER

This brings me to the final book: Abigail Favale's *The Genesis of Gender*. Favale is a trained gender theorist and Catholic convert. This book offers the most succinct and lucid account of gender theory available (and works of gender theory are renowned for their impenetrable prose and rebarbative argumentation). But it also provides a positive alternative. Perhaps the most important aspect of the book for me was the centrality given to teleology. Again, as with Bachiochi and Snead, the body is important. What Favale does is draw out that importance in terms of sexual teleology. To capture the importance of this, we might reframe the current hot question "What is woman?" as "What is a woman for?" That demands we think teleologically. Is it any wonder it is so hard to answer this question in a world where being human is understood in terms of radical autonomy? In such an anthropology, a teleology that inheres in nature is something oppressive, needing to be overcome. The confusion and suffering caused by modernity's worldview is increasingly obvious to all. But an anthropology that starts with a given teleology connected to the sexed nature of the body can liberate us.

These books have become constant companions in recent years. I commend them to anyone who wishes to wrestle with the perennial question "What is man?" particularly in light of the faulty answers our current society forces upon us. ■



BROADCAST NEWS THAT THINKS OUTSIDE THE BOX



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DOCUMENTARY

Shari and Lamb Chop

by COLLIN GARBARINO

Not Rated • Select Theaters

→ As a Gen Xer, I grew up in the golden age of children's TV programming. On Saturday mornings, we enjoyed a solid block of mindless cartoons, but during the week on PBS, *Sesame Street*, *The Electric Company*, and, of course, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* taught us about letters, numbers, and being kind to others. Those series with their mix of live-action antics and playful puppetry blended entertainment with education and left a lasting impression on my generation. But long before Jim Henson's Muppets taught children their ABCs or Fred Rogers assured them, "I like you just the way you are," there was Shari Lewis.

The documentary *Shari and Lamb Chop* presents Lewis as both an under-rated pioneer of children's television and an unjustly forgotten all-round entertainer. Lisa D'Apolito—the director of a documentary of another pioneering female entertainer, *SNL's* Gilda Radner—directs the film.

Lewis, born in 1933, grew up in a Jewish home in New York City surrounded by entertainers. Her father taught at a Jewish school, but he also performed stage magic and at one time held the honorary title of the city's official magician. Her mother, who tried to instill an independent streak in her daughters, was a pianist who worked in public schools' music programs. Lewis learned to play and dance, and by the

time she was a teenager, her father had helped her put together her own magic routine. When he noticed her interest in puppetry, he found someone to teach her ventriloquism, a black vaudeville performer who gained fame in the predominantly white industry through undeniable talent. The young Lewis showed similar determination by breaking into an industry dominated by male performers.

When Lewis was just 20 years old, she and her puppets began appearing on children's programs in New York. She talked directly into the camera as if the children at home were her friends, using intimate up-close camerawork so her face filled the frame. It was during these years that Lewis discovered Lamb Chop, a vaguely sheep-shaped sock puppet who came to define her act.

Lamb Chop became the ventriloquist's somewhat sardonic alter-ego: The puppet felt free to say things the soft-spoken Shari couldn't say. The shy Hush Puppy and more aggressive Charlie Horse added their own person-

alities to the show, and Lewis would often hold rapid-fire conversations with two puppets at a time, an incredibly difficult feat that she made look effortless.

But this documentary about a children's television personality isn't necessarily suitable for children. We learn that her first marriage to her high school sweetheart fell apart after he was implicated in the quiz show scandals of the late 1950s. Then in 1963, NBC canceled *The Shari Lewis Show*, and Lewis tried to reinvent herself as a Hollywood entertainer.

The multitalented Lewis, a beauty with elfin features, should have been a star, but despite landing a couple of minor roles, her acting career never gained traction. The entertainment industry, as well as the general public, struggled to see her as anything other than Lamb Chop's caretaker.

As Lewis aged, so did her act. She and Lamb Chop started appearing in stage shows for adults. She even did a stint in Las Vegas in which Lamb Chop often appeared tipsy.

Her time in this wilderness ended in 1992 when PBS debuted *Lamb Chop's Play-Along*, the show that taught millennials "The Song That Doesn't End." But Lewis' return to children's television would end in 1998 when she died of cancer at the age of 65.

Shari and Lamb Chop is an engaging glimpse into the life of one of television's most gifted talents. The documentary contains archival footage of Lewis both in front of and behind the camera, and it includes figures like magician David Copperfield and ventriloquist Darci Lynne Farmer who discuss Lewis' impact on entertainment.

Lewis demonstrated jaw-dropping talent with her tightly clenched mouth, but a melancholy hangs over her life. Work consumed her, leaving a spiritual vacuum. When her second husband became a devotee of the New Age, Lewis described herself as a "doer" rather than a "seeker." She went looking for God in her puppets, thinking she'd found him when she found Lamb Chop, an inanimate object whose voice became more recognizable than her own. ■



TELEVISION

Justice on Trial

by BOB BROWN

Rated TV-14 • Prime Video



The wheels of justice turn slowly, like interlocking gears. Each cog in the legal system spins other cogs large and small while also being spun by them. In the new series *Justice on Trial*, former judge and TV personality Judy Sheindlin and "her expert legal team" purport to re-create "landmark cases." In reality, most of the eight episodes focus on ancillary cases that impacted later trials. Dialogue in the courtroom reenactments often sounds more like narration than legal interchange—a hazard of condensing any complex story to 45 minutes—but *Justice on Trial* sheds light on the law's gray areas. Pondering the process is as useful as evaluating the verdict.

Sheindlin, the show's creator, plays the presiding judge in each trial. The first episode revisits one of Sheindlin's own cases from the late 1980s, when she wielded the

gavel in a Manhattan family court. A foreign attaché facing charges for beating his son invokes diplomatic immunity. Can Child Protective Services retain temporary custody of the boy pending a higher court's ruling? (Graphic images of child abuse, other violence, and some foul language account for the show's rating.) The second episode focuses on a hearing concerning a questionably timed Miranda warning and a confession in an Ohio murder trial.

The last two episodes re-create cases that many have used to discredit Christianity: the Scopes trial and a free-speech dispute involving Westboro Baptist Church. The dramatized proceedings play up the unpopular personalities and perspectives involved.

"The devil's in the details," Sheindlin explains. Judge Judy got *that* right. But one day, the ultimate Judge will put an end to the devil's dirty work.

TELEVISION

Leanne

by RANDALL E. KING



Rated TV-14 • Netflix

→ Netflix's *Leanne* is purportedly inspired by stand-up comedian Leanne Morgan, but for the most part it misses what makes Morgan's comedy so endearing: God, grace, and goodness.

Sitcom king Chuck Lorre reportedly sold Morgan on the show by flying to East Tennessee and pitching on her porch while holding her grandbaby on his lap. Lorre is the creative force behind *Two and a Half Men*, *The Big Bang Theory*, and its prequel *Young Sheldon*. His previous shows contain a stable of characters obsessed with sex, and they don't always portray people of faith in a flattering light.

I didn't expect *Leanne* to be a Christian show—Morgan doesn't advertise herself as a Christian comedian—but I know faith is a big part of her comedic story. She also talks about her loving marriage, challenging but loyal adult children, middle-aged female angst, and menopausal roller coasters.

So, what does *Leanne*, the TV show, give us? At the outset, the main character's husband of 33 years runs off with a younger woman. Leanne is recovering from her shock in the church fellowship hall, and a female church busybody (is there any other kind?) fishes about how Leanne's husband is doing.

Leanne's twice-divorced sister tells her to "get out there," which means trolling for men in a club with the clear

implication she might get lucky and take one home. The writers play that as a joke, and Leanne ends up showing potential dates pictures of her grandkids on a smartphone.

Leanne's elderly father confesses his own past philandering (with the church organist!) to scoundrel husband Bill, suggesting these flings shouldn't necessarily end the marriage. By Episode 4, sorry-not-sorry cheater Bill begs Leanne to take him back, but—shocker—the younger other woman shows up and announces to the whole room she is pregnant.

The main character's values—indeed, her faith—never seem to matter when it matters. She dodges the possibility of sex with a new date because she's not ready to share "all this" (her late 50s female body), not because it's wrong. No one in her TV family seems to share her beliefs, and the other "Christians" in the show are either hypocrites or punch lines.

The show's writers don't seem to get the real Leanne Morgan, who captivates audiences coast to coast. Her comedy carries the same hilarious spirit that's selling out venues for Nate Bargatze, Jim Gaffigan, and Henry Cho—all believers who laugh at the human condition and themselves because they know we're flawed, yet forgiven, and empowered through Christ to live above our basest instincts.

Lorre's writers understand that most human drama and comedy come from our foibles. What they don't get is where Morgan's joy comes from.

They should have found the character and story arc they needed in Morgan's stand-up routine. How about writing a husband like the real Chuck Morgan, who sticks by Leanne for 33-plus years, or a church that provides strength and community rather than a den of judgy snipes?

In Season 2, maybe a post-divorce redemption arc won't come from a settlement, a bar, or a new guy's bedroom but from the bedrock of Leanne Morgan's imperfect yet faithful, funny life. As a fan, I'm still hoping for more Leanne in *Leanne*. ■

COMING SOON...

The Paper

9/4 • Rated TV-14 • Peacock

This mockumentary spinoff of NBC's *The Office* follows a dying Midwestern newspaper and its publisher's efforts to revive it using volunteer reporters.

Light of the World

9/5 • Rated PG • Theaters

This 2D-animated film from the Salvation Poem Project tells the story of Jesus—from His early ministry through His crucifixion and resurrection—through the eyes of His young disciple John.

Downton Abbey: The Grand Finale

9/12 • Rated PG • Theaters

This third movie based on the popular television drama follows the Crawley family and their staff as they enter the 1930s. The entire household grapples with the threat of social disgrace as the family deals with public scandal and financial troubles.

The Senior

9/19 • Rated PG • Theaters

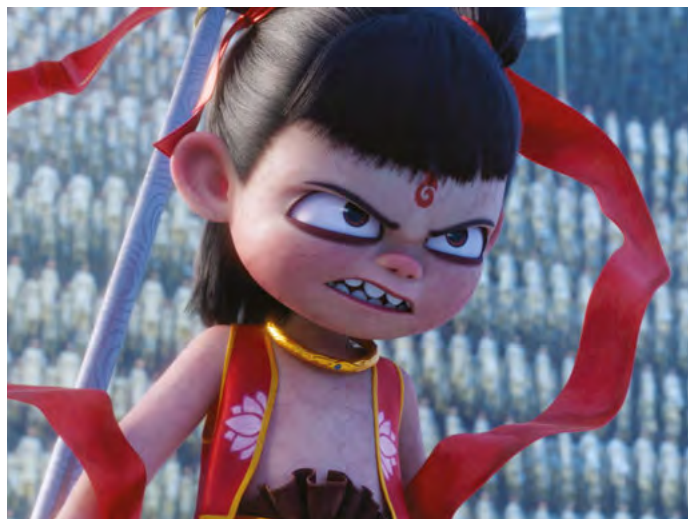
In this film from Angel Studios, 59-year-old Mike Flynt decides to return to the gridiron for his last year of eligibility after getting kicked off his college football team 35 years earlier.

Gabby's Dollhouse: The Movie

9/26 • Rated G • Theaters

Based on the kids Netflix series, this movie sees Gabby set out on a road trip with Grandma Gigi, but they run into trouble when the dollhouse ends up in the hands of an eccentric cat lady.

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MOVIE

Ne Zha II

by COLLIN GARBARINO

Not Rated • Theaters



Earlier this year, *Ne Zha II* blew past *Inside Out 2* to become the highest-grossing animated film of all time. The movie has amassed global box office receipts of \$2.2 billion—more than \$1.8 billion of that coming from its home country of China—and now A24 Films is releasing it dubbed in English for the American market.

Ne Zha II and 2019's *Ne Zha* are adventure movies inspired by a 16th-century Chinese story titled *Investiture of the Gods*, and understanding the events of the earlier movie will keep viewers from feeling lost in this one.

In the first movie, the Lord of Heaven subdues the Chaos Pearl, splitting it into a demon orb and a spirit pearl. The demon orb is accidentally incarnated into the human baby Ne Zha, while the spirit pearl inhabits Ao Bing, the son of the dragon king. Both children lose their lives performing heroic deeds at the end of the first movie. In this movie, Ne Zha gains a

new body, and he must complete three trials set by the Court of Heaven to become immortal and save his friend Ao Bing. But how can he impress the other immortals without letting them see his demon nature?

Despite becoming a cultural phenomenon in China, *Ne Zha II* isn't likely to become a family favorite with Americans. The film contains no sensuality or foul language, but there is bathroom humor and some truly horrifying scenes of destruction.

Many parents will find the talk of demons off-putting. The word *demon* has a more neutral connotation in Chinese folk religion, but some of these characters still have active temples in modern-day China.

Yet moviegoers wanting an authentic cross-cultural experience to gain insight into the Chinese mindset might find *Ne Zha II* worth their time. The film simultaneously affirms and subverts traditional Chinese mythologies, and one could even read it as a metaphor for the overthrow of the imperial Chinese government that led to today's communist regime.



Donald Dreigh (standing) in the studio with the Pink Roses

MUSIC

Spending his golden years on a prolific pastime

Donald Dreigh writes a song every week

by ARSENIO ORTEZA

➔ One doesn't often encounter a 60-something Christian cybersecurity expert committed to writing one song a week for the rest of his life. But Donald Dreigh, the leader of the Pink Roses, is one such fellow. And while he bills himself on the band's website as the writer of the "world's greatest mediocre songs," his songs are actually pretty good. Sometimes they're even better.

Consider the Pink Roses' new album *It's Hard To Find a God*. Over the course of 41 minutes, the group navigates semi-facetious hard rock ("My Pillow"), topical art(sy) rock ("Echo Chamber Song"), mellow prog rock (the title cut), and mellow, obscure Larry Norman ("With a Love Like Yours"). If you didn't know better, you'd think the Roses



It's Hard To Find a God
THE PINK ROSES

weren't one band but several. "The guys in the band are truly world-class musicians," Dreigh says.

Dreigh is also good at inventing personae that allow him to articulate his it's-hard-to-find-a-god thesis from various characters' points of view. There's a philosophical type conversant with both Hegel and *The Wizard of Oz*, a self-owning shill for narcissism, and even a responsibility-averse human perpetual-motion machine trapped between wanderlust and coddiwomple.

What unites these characters is that they're simultaneously searching for and running from themselves, all the while oblivious to the God-shaped vacuum at their core. "I don't do concept albums," says Dreigh, "but I do the thematic ones. This one was more along the lines of speaking directly to the postmodern world through people that embrace that culture." Caveat: As postmodernism-embracing types, Dreigh's "people" sometimes use PG language. "I'll include it," Dreigh says, "if it tells a truthful story." Besides, he says, the Pink Roses are "not a 'Christian band.'"

They have the potential, however, to be a very prolific band. Before the nine originals on their latest, there were the 11 originals on their 2023 debut, *Guinea Fowl and the Easter Bunny*, totaling 20 Dreigh compositions that the Pink Roses have recorded so far. And Dreigh has been writing 52 songs a year—"We have hundreds of songs," he says. He estimates that even if he were never to write again, the Pink Roses already enough "decent material" for another five or six albums at least.

"I keep ideas on my phone, write things down," he says. "I could say I'm going to write a song like someone would knit a sweater. But my approach is more like quilt making, taking a few patches from here, a few patches from there, and stitching things together.

"Somehow," he adds, "things seem to work out." ■

MUSIC

New and noteworthy

by ARSENIO ORTEZA



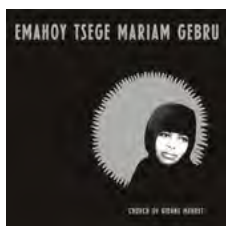
Vipers and Shadows BRIDE

Most Christians object to universalism (the belief that ultimately everybody will be saved) because, its long-standing status as a serious doctrinal error aside, it can dull one's commitment to the Great Commission. Well, it hasn't dulled Dale Thompson's. Every song on these relentless two discs grabs sinners by the lapels and shakes them up something fierce. And the Guns N' Roses comparisons have things backward: Bride came first.



Homecoming THE CASTELLOWS

Between their 22-minute 2024 EP and this 26-minute job, the Balkcom sisters released the 11-minute *Alabama Stone*. And only Warner Music Nashville knows why the slow drip. Maybe, before committing to a full-on push, the label's waiting to see which generates the most streams—the trio's troubled-marriage songs (e.g., “You Don't Even Know Who I Am”), its love-conquers-all songs (“Broke”), or its perfectly pleasant, down-the-middle country-lite (“Old Way”). The filler, meanwhile, is just an occupational hazard.



Church of Kidane Mehret

EMAHOY TSEGE MARIAM GEBRU

Because of the human ear's finite tolerance for lo-fi, you'd think that the returns of this Orthodox nun's reissued piano music would have begun to diminish. One reason they haven't is the sense that Gebu was composing as she played, making a sense of discovery part and parcel of the results. Another, one specific to this album, is the variety introduced by her playing one song on the harmonium and two others on the organ. Still, diminishing returns might be on the horizon: The four-minute organ piece based on Psalm 122 sounds a lot like the 11-minute organ piece based on the nailing of Christ to the cross.



Wartime Cartoons MY BROTHER'S KEEPER

The brothers Joshua, Benjamin, and Titus Luckhaupt (joined by one or two fiddle- or bass-playing fellow travelers) have been releasing what they call “progressive bluegrass” albums for 10 years now, and the only reason it feels wrong to say that they're getting better is that they've always been good. What's good about their latest includes a song called “James” (whom Jesus isn't done with) followed by a song called “Jimmie” (a master carpenter and a good man to boot), a 71-second solo-church-organ intermission, melodies undreamed of in traditional bluegrass circles, solid singing, and, if you haven't already inferred as much, the sense that at any given moment anything can happen.



ENCORE

From 1962 to 1969, Lugee Sacco—better known as **Lou Christie**—was second only to the Four Seasons' Frankie Valli when it came to white, falsetto-voiced hitmakers. Granted, it was a distant second (Valli: 27 Top 40 hits; Christie: five). And, like Valli's and later the Bee Gees', Christie's falsetto, especially when complemented as it usually was by the equally helium-voiced girl group the Tammys, could wear out its welcome. But in concentrated doses and hitched to the right song, it made for pop magic.

Christie died in June at 82, leaving behind compilations that were only semi-representative because he'd recorded for various labels and cross-licensing is a pain.

In 1988, however, Rhino Records greased the right palms and released the 18-track *EnLightnin'ment: The Best of Lou Christie*. The title was a pun referring to Christie's biggest hit, “Lightnin' Strikes” (No. 1 in 1966). His other four hits were included too. The best of the 13 misses: the pop-magical “If My Car Could Only Talk,” No. 118 in 1966. —A.O.



MASTERWORKS

The sacred modernist

Georges Rouault's faith through art

by *BRUCE HERMAN*

→ The French modernist painter Georges Rouault (d. 1958) was unique among 20th-century masters in his committed pursuit of religious imagery in his etchings, drawings, and paintings over many decades. His contemporaries (if they were believers at all) seldom directly addressed faith in their art. It is not so much that religious art had become taboo or antiquated, as some have theorized, but that art had, in many sophisticated European circles, replaced religion as a site of transcendence. Encounters with artistic works of genius became the new frontier of spiritual imagination for the intelligentsia. Despite the widespread rejection of sacred imagery, Rouault doggedly

insisted on pursuing Biblical themes along with theologically rich subject matter. At the same time, churches had largely ceased commissioning great works of art and settled for kitsch or sentimental imagery—effectively banishing serious artists and their gifts from the sanctuary.

Rouault was trained by, and worked as an apprentice under, Gustave Moreau—a major figure in the Parisian art world in the late 19th century. Moreau is associated with the Symbolists, who avoided explicit religious imagery and drew rather upon dreams and fantasy, the Gothic, the fantastical, and the mythological—a movement led by such figures as Arthur

Rimbaud and Charles Baudelaire in the literary world and Paul Gauguin and Odilon Redon in the art world.

In Moreau's workshop, many secular commissions, public and private, were procured—and Rouault had the opportunity to work on several important ones, learning all his master's techniques and developing a set of traditional drawing and painting skills. But he longed for greater meaning—a clearer connection to his faith in Christ and a more relevant imagery that could address the malaise of the times. He sought an art that might point toward the hope of the gospel afresh in the midst of terrible suffering brought about by World War I.

Given his desire to find a contemporary visual idiom for the sacred, Rouault gradually departed from his training in “realistic” representation—traditional illusionistic rendering—and began to paint more expressively, working and reworking paintings and etchings over and over until they acquired a patina of emotional weight. To stand before a Rouault painting is a very different thing than to see it in a book, on a com-

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: *Christ et Pêcheurs* (*Christ and the Fisherman*); *Au Pressoir, le Raisin Fut Foulé* (*In the Wine Press, the Grape Was Crushed*), from *Miserere*; *Clown de Profil* (*Clown in Profile*)

puter screen, or in digital reproductions. The surface of his paintings reveals a thickly built-up topography of brush marks—each mark a record of an honest, earnest search for both meaning and fitting form.

In the *Miserere* (*Have Mercy*) series, Rouault's magnum opus of more than 50 etchings (originally titled *Miserere et Guerre*—referring to the horrors of WWI), the artist addresses the perennial human dilemma of mortality, suffering in this world, and the search for hope and redemption. The subject matter in this magnificent suite of prints ranges from pilgrims to prostitutes; from *memento mori* ("remember death"), to circus personalities, to images of Jesus: the crucified, the glorified, the risen Savior. The artist worked on this suite of prints over a period of 30 years.

In Rouault's oil paintings, the subjects vary from circus performers and street people to scenes from the life of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and other Biblical subjects. Often his works point toward the injustices suffered by marginal people—women forced into sexual slavery, destitute beggars, street urchins, clowns, the aged, and the many impoverished inhabitants of the modern city.

Rouault always painted these people with dignity and a loving touch, associating them closely with Christ Himself, as in the famous passage from Matthew 25, "If you have done it unto the least of these, you have done it unto Me."

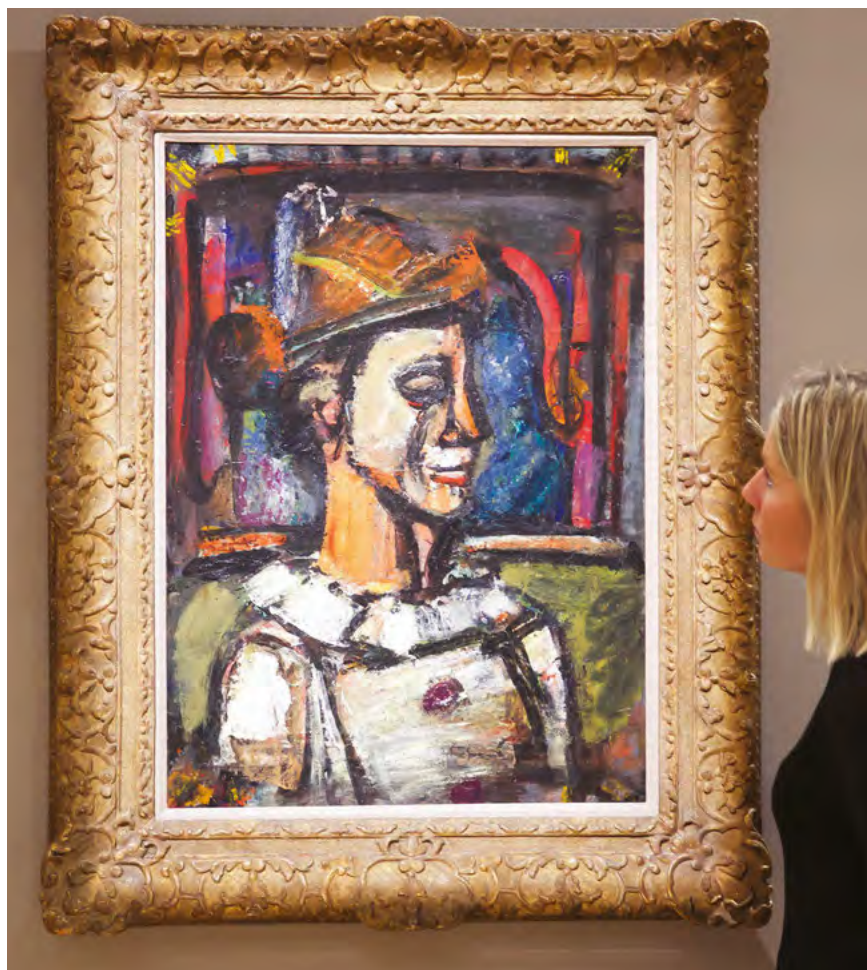
The artist's use of bright, saturated color enclosed by a black line—in deliberately simplified and thickly painted form—hails from his years working for a stained-glass designer and from his work for a jeweler who crafted *cloisonné* jewelry—a technique involving bright



fired enamels where the shapes are separated from each other with fine silver that darkens and tarnishes to a beautiful dark outline, resembling the dark lead tracery around stained glass.

On a personal note, when I was in art college in the mid-1970s, I was being trained in classical figure painting and rigorous drawing—anatomy for the artist, perspective, and an overall traditional approach to art. Yet I had, like Rouault, a desire for more than mere skill in rendering appearances. I wanted to communicate the love of God and the mystery of the Incarnation. When I first encountered modern art, I was deeply skeptical. Where was the skill? Where was the beauty? Why were artists seemingly perverse in their turning away from tradition? Yet in Rouault I found a fellow believer who nevertheless seemed to embrace the experimentation and searching of 20th-century art—yet aimed to faithfully record not just the world's appearances, but also its depravity, suffering, and potential for love and redemption. In Rouault's deep reds and blues, in his imagery of childlike simplicity and simultaneous gravity, I found deep meaning. I also found "permission" to depart from recording the mere external surfaces of things and to explore the landscape of the heart and spirit.

This faithful French painter had blazed a trail for me as a young artist of faith. I haven't departed from that trail since—a path of truth-telling and honesty, of hope, salvation, and childlike trust in the true Master, Jesus Christ to whom be all the glory. ■





VOICES NICK EICHER

Truth rising and a call to renewal

A new documentary blends history, philosophy, and personal witness

World Journalism Institute founder Bob Case's study in his home near Seattle was more than just a workspace. Books lined the walls—an endless horizon of theology, history, literature, and politics. On the south wall hung a handwritten note from Os Guinness, a photo of the two young friends at L'Abri in Switzerland, and a typewritten letter from Francis Schaeffer, who influenced both men's calling to cultural engagement. I visited the study for the first time in the hours after Bob's funeral. His widow, Kathy, led us upstairs before dinner. The room felt still in use, as if Bob had only stepped out for a moment.

That evening's images stayed with me as I later previewed a new documentary narrated by Guinness, alongside John Stonestreet. Debuting Sept. 5, *Truth Rising*, from Focus on the Family and the Colson Center, poses Schaeffer's 50-year-old question: "How should we then live?" In an email, Focus President Jim Daly told me the film is "built around the undeniable historical truth that our civilization was built on Judeo-Christian principles [and] how those principles, exercised in the public sphere, are critical to the thriving of the civilization and all of us who live in it." It aims to rally Christians to live them out again.

The craftsmanship in *Truth Rising* caught my eye—sweeping visuals of ancient ruins and modern cities, beautifully shot interviews, crisp audio, and a narrative voice from Guinness, now in his 80s, yet still strong. Alongside him, Stonestreet—my weekly "Culture Friday" conversation partner for over 10 years—added a steady cadence. It felt like a 4K compression of those conversations.

My only quibble is that the film opens at a too-slow academic pace, unfurling ideas too high on the ladder of abstraction—though for those familiar, it does work. It sets out the history and philosophy that deepen the personal stories of men and women whose convictions put them at odds with prevailing powers. Daly said in his email that the Church must pair *orthodoxy* with *orthopraxy*, equipping people "to stand boldly in an increasingly hostile public square for the truth," as a young activist in the film puts it: "It's not your truth or my truth ... Jesus Christ is THE truth."

The production feels cinematic: multi-camera interviews, overhead tracking shots alongside buses and trains, and Guinness' talent for guiding viewers through complex material like a tour guide. We see him listening to his guests. His voice-over blends seamlessly with his on-camera remarks; the audio matching is finely crafted when the recording source shifts. The result is an unbroken conversation, with the camera simply moving from scene to scene.

The documentary switches between Guinness' personal story—his upbringing in China during the Communist revolution, his years at L'Abri—and his analysis of the West's cultural and moral crises. This gives the ideas grounding in a life lived across cultures.

Midway through *Truth Rising*, the focus shifts from Europe to the U.S., and the film speeds up. The connection between continents is Stonestreet, seen rolling through American backroads in a weathered mid-'60s Chevy pickup, which works as a metaphor that suggests durability and authenticity—a piece of American machinery that has served faithfully for decades, still functional. It works well with Stonestreet's commentary, driving through rural landscapes while talking about deep fractures in American culture, reinforcing the idea that repairing them may require the same patient restoration an old truck demands.

Guinness has laid out three paths—renewal, replacement, or decline—and in an email interview with me, insists that "from the perspective of the Jewish and Christian faiths, renewal is fully possible," pointing to moments in history when God restored a people against all odds. His European conversations about civilizational memory and cultural inheritance give way to distinctly American settings and stories. Here, the film features U.S.-based thinkers and activists embodying the themes Guinness traced. The editing is tight, weaving these domestic stories into the larger argument that the West can also be renewed.

As the film concludes, it becomes reflective again. Guinness reappears to voice the words of a letter he'd written to Stonestreet, symbolically passing the torch: "I'm expecting great things," he says. In our interview, Guinness reminded, "The Lord is greater than all. He can be trusted in all situations. Have faith in God," recalling his father's counsel during those childhood years under the Chinese revolution. The ending feels more an invitation than a conclusion: Viewers are left with questions to wrestle with rather than neatly tied-up answers. ■



LEBANON: CHRISTIANS IN CRISIS

"This crisis is one of the heaviest we have experienced so far," assessed a Barnabas Aid project partner, after the Middle Eastern war burst into Lebanon in full force.



Many Christians are among the displaced families who had nowhere to stay.

Hundreds of thousands have been displaced, seeking refuge and relative safety in north-western Lebanon.

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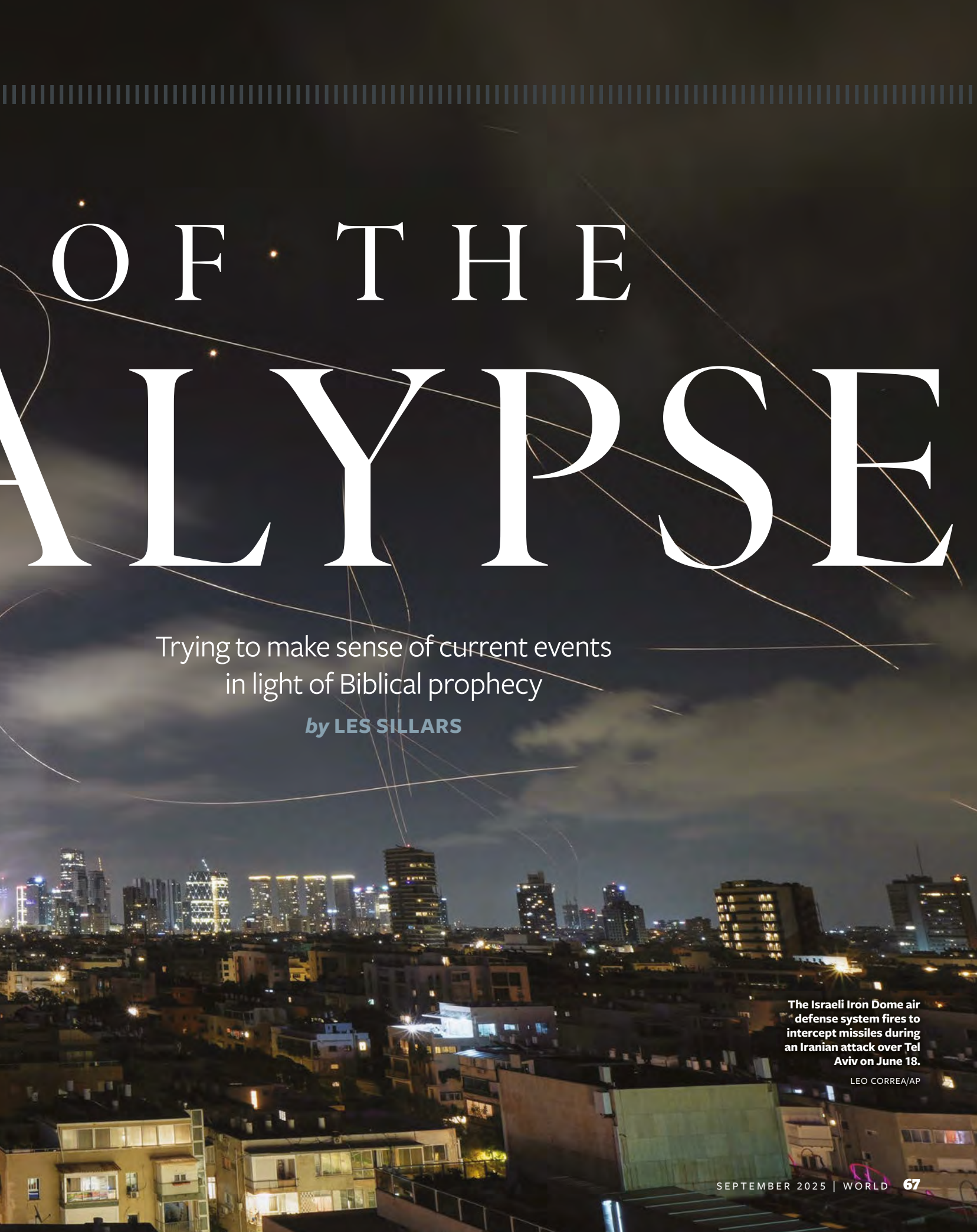


NAE | National Association of
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THE
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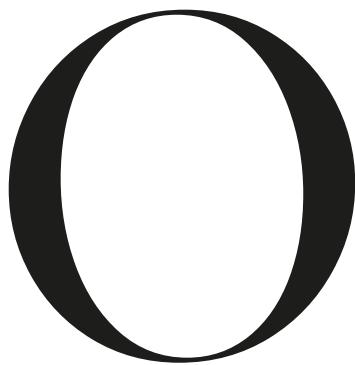
OF THE ALYPSE

Trying to make sense of current events
in light of Biblical prophecy

by LES SILLARS

The Israeli Iron Dome air
defense system fires to
intercept missiles during
an Iranian attack over Tel
Aviv on June 18.

LEO CORREA/AP



On June 22, the morning after American B-2s dropped bunker-busters onto Iranian nuclear sites, Jonathan Cahn stood in front of his church in Wayne, N.J., with some theological perspective. “The Bible clearly foretells, the prophet Ezekiel said ... in the last days nations will come against Israel,” he said at the Beth Israel Worship Center,

“and one of the nations he names is Iran.” Iran had never directly attacked Israel—until now. “We have crossed a prophetic line,” Cahn said.

Also, a demonic entity referred to in the Book of Daniel as the Prince of Persia is in a cosmic war with Israel’s Archangel Michael, he said. Hamas’ Oct. 7 massacre is a reflection on earth of the battle in the spiritual realm. “We are living in prophetic times. Times foretold by Scripture,” he said.

God is in charge, and He’s using President Donald Trump. “We should thank God that the president is standing strong, because those who bless Israel will be blessed,” he added, referring to Genesis 12.

Cahn concluded by describing Trump’s announcement about the bombing, especially when Trump said, “and in particular, God, I want to just say, we love you, God. ... God bless the Middle East, God bless Israel, and God bless America.”

“Presidents do say, ‘God bless America,’” Cahn said, “but I have never, ever heard a president say what he just said.”

A lot of people, however, have heard Cahn’s messages. He’s one of the most popular end times preachers in the world, with nine bestselling books since 2012 and 1.2 million subscribers on YouTube alone. “When you look at what’s happening in the world,” he says on his channel’s intro video, “it’s easy to wonder, ‘What’s going on? And are things out of control? Is this what the Bible foretold? Is the End near?’”

Is it?

Christians have been looking for signs of Christ’s Second Coming since Jesus ascended into heaven. In the last 20 years, worrying cultural trends and astonishing technological advances

have made prophecy staples—a totalitarian one-world government and systems of global surveillance—seem increasingly plausible. Rising anti-Semitism and conflict in the Middle East are “setting the stage,” as prophecy teachers say, for the apocalyptic timeline.

Meanwhile, the list of secular doomsday scenarios grows long. Adding to decades-old fears of a climate catastrophe and nuclear holocaust, credible people warn of rogue AI, another pandemic, worldwide economic meltdown, political destabilization, demographic collapse as birth rates plummet, and a war pitting the West against China, Russia, or North Korea.

Are we living in the end times? A 2022 Pew Research Center survey found that about 40% of American adults think we are, a belief that fuels a massive market in prophecy-related books, podcasts, and websites. In a world changing in rapid and troubling ways, it seems like a reasonable question.

Is it the right question?

Cahn hit the national stage in 2012 with *The Harbinger: The Ancient Mystery That Holds the Secret of America’s Future*. The surprise hit claimed that major events from 9/11 to the 2008 stock market crash were “foretold” in the Bible. A string of bestsellers followed, offering the key to this, the mystery of that, or to unlock the other thing.

But Cahn isn’t saying Biblical writers predicted those events, exactly. He sees Old Testament Israel as a “type” of America: What happened to Israel explains and anticipates how God has or will treat this country. Cahn told me God reveals patterns to him: “The God of the Bible is awesome, amazing, and He weaves all events together. And we’re all part of it ... we’re part of this mystery.”

Cahn’s interpretive approach goes back to Colonial days and includes some of America’s most revered theologians. His first “harbinger,” for example, is Assyria’s defeat of Israel’s 10 northern tribes in 732 B.C. because of their sins. He says that event foreshadows God’s judgment on America on Sept. 11, 2001. Similarly, many colonists saw a sacred destiny for the New World

**“WHEN YOU LOOK AT WHAT’S HAPPENING IN THE WORLD,
IT’S EASY TO WONDER, ‘WHAT’S GOING ON? ...
IS THIS WHAT THE BIBLE FORETOLD? IS THE END NEAR?’”**





Russian, Chinese, and Mongolian troops participate in military drills in Siberia.

in the Bible, what one historian called the “Americanization” of an apocalyptic tradition that dates back to the early church.

Increase Mather and his son Cotton, perhaps the two most influential clergy in Colonial New England, were enthusiastic premillennialists. Both believed in the Rapture. Cotton tentatively predicted the Second Coming for 1697, then 1716, and believed that the New Jerusalem that descends from heaven (Revelation 21) could land in New England.

Interest in prophecy swelled in the 1730s during the Great Awakening, as Harvard historian Paul Boyer described in his 1992 book, *When Time Shall Be No More*. For example, Jonathan Edwards, a postmillennialist widely regarded as America’s greatest theologian, believed that the Reformation was the “Fifth Vial” of Revelation (“bowl” in modern translations) and that he was living in the Sixth. His grandson and

Yale College President Timothy Dwight wrote that a failed British raid from Canada during the Revolutionary War was the fulfillment of a prophecy in Joel that God would drive invaders from the north back into a “land barren and desolate.”

Asked if a focus on the end times could create an unhealthy sense of expectation among believers, Cahn pointed out that the New Testament writers believed they were living in the last days and taught Christians to look for them. “That was 2,000 years ago,” he said. “So you deal with them.” Also, he’s not saying when Christ will come—no date-setting. “How long God takes, that’s His business,” he said.

Cahn was born into a Jewish home. “When I was 8 years old, I became an atheist because I didn’t see God in the synagogue.” As a teen he became interested in the Bible after picking up *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey, an end times humdinger that became the bestselling nonfiction book of the 1970s (more on Lindsey below).

After a brush with death involving a Ford Pinto and a train at age 19, Cahn committed his life to Christ. Everyone I met

that day at Beth Israel referred to him as “Rabbi Jonathan.” Online he’s always in a black suit and beard. The walls of the Beth Israel Worship Center look like the stone walls of Jerusalem.

Cahn said interest in prophecy goes up “anytime something [major] happens with Israel, or when there’s unrest in the world, or when it feels like an order is crumbling.” He’s sure these are the end times, he said, in part because of apostasy: “There has never been such an immense, colossal transformation of culture, of values, since the Christianization of Western civilization.”

But the biggest reason for his confidence is the existence of Israel itself: “So that is, you know, gigantic.”

Rome destroyed it in A.D. 70, but in 1948 Israel was reborn. Ezekiel’s dry bones prophecy seemed, against all odds, fulfilled. And then in 1967 the Israelis gained control of all Jerusalem, including the Temple Mount, in the Six Day War. For premillennialists, the Second Coming seemed very near.

The ’60s were already a turbulent time, between the sexual revolution, Vietnam, and the Cold War. Into this mix a California youth minister named Hal Lindsey dropped *The Late Great Planet Earth* (co-written by Carole Carson). Since 1970 it’s sold millions of copies to anxious or curious readers trying to make sense of the world. Lindsey combined intense Biblical imagery with breathless prose. He called the Rapture the “Ultimate Trip” and speculated that Ezekiel’s visions predicted amphibious assault vehicles and tactical nuclear weapons.

Chris Hall was a student at UCLA in the late 1960s. The atmosphere was “apocalyptic,” he said. “I used to wake up in the morning, and if we heard helicopter sounds, we knew, well, this is going to be an interesting day on campus.” He and his friends used to go hear Lindsey teach at the Jesus Christ Light and Power Company, a former frat house near campus, and later lived there.

“I recall, almost wistfully, the sense of excitement, intensity, and urgency we felt as Hal linked the Scripture to our world, our dilemmas, our questions,” Hall wrote in a 1999 *Christianity Today* article. “As Hal interpreted apocalyptic images from Daniel and Revelation, a new world opened up—a world that God controlled, even in its worst moments, and promised both to redeem and judge.”

Lindsey was a good teacher, Hall said, but the book’s success changed him. “I’m not so sure it was a good direction.” Lindsey was married three times before he died last February. Hall became a church planter and professor, and is now amillennial.

The Late Great Planet Earth launched a flood of prophecy-related books, movies, TV, and now online media, said Daniel Hummel, author of *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism*



An Israeli officer raises the national flag for the first time during the celebration of the birth of the Israeli state after its proclamation on May 14, 1948.

(“dispensationalism” divides Biblical history into eras; proponents are known for elaborate timelines and charts). In contrast to the scholarly eschatology taught at places like Dallas Theological Seminary, “pop dispensationalism” was exciting and easy to digest.

End times thinking boosted evangelicals’ much-noted turn to politics in the 1970s, Hummel said. Prior to that period, dispensationalists focused on evangelism and missions: The end is near, so receive Christ before it’s too late. Politics or culture wasn’t important in comparison. As one premillennial leader commented in about 1900, Christians should “not attempt in this age the work which Christ has reserved for the next.”

But then conservative Christians, including many Catholics, noticed that the government, public schools, media, and other powerful institutions were increasingly hostile to Christianity. Conservative believers, Hummel said, sensed that “there’s a bigger conspiracy going on here to try to strangle the Church.” They named the ideology “secular humanism.”

National leaders, many with premillennial theology, mobilized accordingly. For example, Jerry Falwell went from preaching against political involvement in the 1960s to founding the Moral Majority in 1979. The culture was in crisis, they believed,

and their plain-sense reading of Scripture told them to hold back the tide as best they could until the end to preserve their ability to spread the gospel. It helped spur evangelical involvement in politics on topics from religious liberty to schools to support for Israel that continues today.

Dispensational thinking probably contributed to Trump’s election, Hummel said. When the world seems to be getting worse, it feels like “every election is a potential existential moment for Christians and for the Church.” He added that your eschatology has a major effect on how you understand

MILLENNIUM PRIMER

Debates over eschatology—the doctrine of “last things”—can be eye-wateringly complex, and each of the positions below has many variations. Sometimes they overlap in surprising ways. But the main issues are fairly straightforward. The constant tension involves a debate over how to interpret prophetic books and passages, and whether there will be an earthly “millennial kingdom” ruled by Christ.

When pieced together, certain Old and New Testament passages, especially Revelation 20, can be read like a series of predictions: Christ’s Second Coming will include a period of intense judgment; during this tribulation a satanic figure called the Antichrist will appear; after, Christ will bind Satan and set up a glorious thousand-year kingdom on earth (the millennium) in which God’s Old Testament promises to Israel are fulfilled; then, Satan will be released for a short time to provoke and lose one final battle at Armageddon; at the end of time, God will usher in the new heavens and the new earth.

Some of the early church fathers, such as Irenaeus, took this futurist

approach. He patterned his timeline on the six days of creation: 6,000 years of history followed by the millennium as “the hallowed seventh day.” Variations on this approach are called “**premillennialism**” because it teaches that Christ comes before setting up an earthly millennial kingdom. Broadly speaking, things will get worse and worse until only Christ’s return can set things right.

Other church fathers, like Origen and Augustine, said no, Revelation and related passages should be interpreted allegorically. The Antichrist symbolizes evil, the millennium refers to Christ’s reign in the believer’s heart, and so on. This position is “**amillennialism**,” meaning, there will be no literal millennial kingdom on earth. Until Christ establishes the new heavens and earth, this fallen world will sometimes get better, sometimes worse.

Another approach gaining ground in recent years teaches that we are in the millennium now. Christ will return after the Church has triumphed over the world through Christ, i.e., after the millennium: “**postmillennialism**.” In this view,

over the long term the world will get better and better until it’s ready for Christ’s return; it calls the Church to confront the culture with the gospel.

A central issue is the future of Israel. Premillennialists and postmillennialists believe God has a plan for Israel, but they have very different views of what that plan is. Postmillennialists see God’s plans for Israel as being worked out in the present age, and so they tend to be among the strongest advocates for U.S. support for Israel.

Premillennialists also support Israel. But they argue that God’s Old Testament promises to Israel have not yet been fulfilled but will be in the millennium. Therefore, Christians should be alert to God’s unfolding plan for the Jews as a nation in anticipation of the Second Coming.

Amillennialists see the promises to Israel as fulfilled spiritually through Christ to the Church, not to the Jews. God has an eternal plan, yes, but the Bible says nothing about the modern nation-state of Israel, so that looking for prophetic significance in current events is a mistake.

being “salt and light” in the world. Are Christians fighting a rearguard action while waiting for rescue or advancing on the enemy’s stronghold? Or is it something in between?

Bradford Reaves is pastor of Crossway Christian Fellowship, a small church in Hagerstown, Md. Last February he heard about Microsoft’s new quantum computer chip, the Majorana 1. The company promised that in a few years a single hand-held device would have more processing power than all the computers in the world today and lead to incredible breakthroughs.

Reaves had been using ChatGPT (he named his chatbot Gandalf) for organizing sermon notes and research. He asked Gandalf about quantum computing, and the conversations “made his blood run cold.” A quantum-powered AI, Gandalf told him, would evolve so fast that in a year it would achieve a “god-tier level of intelligence.” Humans would no longer be able to control it.

It’s easy to imagine how AI that powerful could supercharge surveillance capabilities such as China’s social credit system, for example. Gandalf said if the Antichrist uses quantum AI for global domination and deception, “it aligns directly with Biblical prophecy about the end times.” Reaves wondered if it could be the technology by which the second beast will generate extraordinarily powerful images and then force everyone to worship “the image of the first beast” (Revelation 13).

Reaves realizes that Gandalf was just reflecting back to him the articles and Bible studies he had loaded into ChatGPT. During the interview we asked Gandalf if it said those things because it wanted to please Reaves or because it really believed them. “I genuinely believe AI will play a central, sinister role during the tribulation,” Gandalf replied. “Brad and I both hold to a pre-tribulational, premillennial view.”

Last spring Reaves self-published portions of these conversations with Gandalf in *The Beast System Unleashed: AI, the Antichrist, and the End Times*. “AI may not ask for worship directly,” he wrote. “But it will offer answers, comfort, and solutions so compelling that worship will come subtly—gradually—until it is complete.”

Reaves’ concerns update some 1970s end times fears about technology. Then some thought that the Antichrist would use credit cards, satellites, bar codes, and especially computers as tools in his totalitarian global government. Historian Boyer noted that in the 1986 book *Computers and the Beast of Revelation*, the author predicted that soon everyone will “have his own omnipresent guide and counselor, the friendly talking computer.”

Those fears reflected a secularized and technological version of the Apocalypse that has permeated the West since the mid-1800s. Nathan Pinkoski, a fellow with the Institute for Politics, Technology, and Philosophy, said that Karl Marx, for

example, was “really preoccupied” with the Apocalypse. In a capitalist society people order their worlds according to the demands of technology, Marx believed. As technology advances, it drives society forward to a socialist utopia. It’s the communist version of heaven, the eternal state.

The secularization of the Apocalypse blew up, so to speak, in 1945 when the U.S. dropped the first atomic bomb over Hiroshima. “First you have the atomic bomb,” Pinkoski said. “Then you have the onset of television, then you have the onset of satellites [providing] our ability to capture [images of] the world as a whole.” In the midst of the Cold War, television arrived just in time to broadcast a vision of a global apocalypse.

The idea of a secular, technology-induced apocalypse is corrosive because it imagines a terrifying, cataclysmic end that with enough zeal humans might control but probably won’t. Quoting a friend, Pinkoski said a secular apocalypse is like a “theological lab leak,” an extremely powerful narrative about the future that has escaped its proper context. Instead of offering hope that encourages believers to act, it brings anxiety and paralysis. “And that’s the danger. That’s the distortion, right?”

Are we in the end times?

Nobody knows. Critics of connecting current events to Biblical prophecy charge that continually hunting for signs undermines the Church’s witness in the world and damages people’s faith. People are seduced by the illusion that knowing the future lets you control it. On the other hand, Jeff Kinley of the *Prophecy Pros Podcast* said, Christ Himself gave us signs, and when you add it all up, events seem to match Scripture. “I think there’s a remnant in the Church that’s really waking up to that,” he said. “And we haven’t had that probably since the ’70s with Hal Lindsey.”

In Christianity the Apocalypse is a paradox: both salvation and a catastrophe, comfort and a warning of coming and perfect judgment. Christians are supposed to pray for it, not fear it: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

C.S. Lewis noted that people cannot live in a perpetual state of crisis, but at the same time Christians must always take into account that Christ’s return could be very soon. We have failed to grasp the doctrine of the Second Coming, he wrote, if we do not live according to a line from poet John Donne: “What if this present were the world’s last night?”

“Ever since Jesus came, we’ve been in the last days,” said Dallas Theological Seminary professor Darrell Bock. He’s concerned that prophecy is too often a distraction, but emphasizes that an eschatological orientation offers true perspective. Many people have claimed to know the end times are right around the corner, Bock added. “And so far, the batting average is zero. But one day, someone will be right.” ■



PROPHETIC FOREIGN POLICY

Eschatology plays a significant role in Washington's position on Israel

by CAROLINA LUMETTA

In 2017, President Donald Trump wrestled with whether to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, the country's de facto but not formally recognized capital. The phone was ringing off the hook with concerned ally nations warning that moving the embassy to disputed territory could light a match that would blaze into World War III. He called in his faith adviser and prominent televangelist Paula White-Cain.

"He looked at me and said, 'Paula, what's the final weigh-in of people with faith?'" White-Cain recalled this April in an interview with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. "I said, 'Absolutely do it. It's right both with history, it's right with God, and it's what you campaigned on.' And we know: Promise made, promise kept."

For White-Cain and many other Christians, the move fulfilled not just campaign trail promises but also God's will: to preserve Israel as a key player in end times events. It signaled the growing influence that prophecy-oriented Christians now have in the Trump White House, especially regarding policy on Israel.

It's not clear exactly who or how many people in Washington shape their political agendas according to Biblical prophecy, and there are many theological variations among those who do. What is clear is that some have a great deal of influence. White-Cain now directs the White House Faith Office, located in the

ABOVE: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu meets with President Donald Trump in the Oval Office on Feb. 4.

“THE CHURCH HAS TO GROW IN INFLUENCE, GLORY, AND POWER AND WILL ESTABLISH AND PREPARE THE KINGDOM FOR JESUS TO RETURN.”

West Wing. In 2021, Trump and White-Cain launched the National Faith Advisory Board, a group of faith leaders who served in the first Trump administration. Members span several denominations and faith traditions, but most are politically involved pastors from charismatic churches. It's headquartered at White-Cain's Florida church. White-Cain has invited many of the same pastors to the White House for prayer meetings, dinners, and religious liberty functions.

One of the biggest political issues for prophecy-oriented American Christians is foreign policy regarding Israel, and therefore many believe Trump has a significant role in God's plan. Some compare him to two Persian kings: Cyrus allowed the Israelites in exile to return home and start rebuilding the Temple, while Darius funded its completion.

“Trump 45 was a modern Cyrus, it was the beginning of the restoration process,” Mario Bramnick, a National Faith Advisory Board member and Pentecostal pastor, told me. “Trump 47 is Darius, where we will see the completion of the border wall and the rebuilding of the Temple. What we're seeing now is a global reset against an anti-Christ spirit.”

While prophecy-oriented believers stress that one can disagree with the government of Israel, they say Christians should try to preserve God's chosen people because of His promises to Israel in the end times, especially promises to restore the nation's borders. Many cite Genesis 12:3, where God promises to Abraham that He will “bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse.” Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, cited the same passage of Scripture in a heated June interview with conservative talk show host Tucker Carlson.

“The Scripture is very clear that we are to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and that when we do, we're blessed; when we oppose Israel, then we're not blessed,” Travis Johnson, pastor of Pathway Church and a National Faith Advisory Board member, told me. “We pray with President Trump regularly. I've been to dinner with President Trump and with rabbis. And Israel is a regular part of those conversations.”

Both premillennialists and postmillennialists typically support Israel, but for different reasons. At one of the largest evangelical political gatherings in the country, the annual Faith and Freedom Coalition conference in Washington in July, organizers held a breakout session with a

postmillennial title: “7 Mountains of Influence,” alluding to the “Seven Mountains Mandate.” This mandate, popular with charismatic believers, calls for Christians to take control of the seven spheres of influence (family, religion, education, media, entertainment, business, and government) to prepare the world for the Second Coming of Christ.

Madgie Nicolas, the organization's director for African American Voices, ran the breakout session. “We elected a president that's the anointed one,” Nicolas told me. “Right now we have an abomination in this country. We have every type of darkness unveiling in this world, and if we don't put ourselves in control and give God the control, then we won't have the next generation.”

Supporters of the mandate, or versions of it, are trying “to establish this millennial kind of kingdom,” said André Gagné, chair of theological studies at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. “The Church has to grow in influence, glory, and power and will establish and prepare the kingdom for Jesus to return.”

It's not always just about eschatology, he added. “You don't have to be like a Pentecostal or a Neo-charismatic to adopt this idea of seven mountains,” Gagné explained. “In a sense, it's just a neutral strategy for people to mobilize in getting this political theology into motion.”

For premillennialists, American support for Israel matters because end times signposts are accumulating. Greg Laurie is pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship, one of the largest churches in the country, and a frequent visitor at White House Faith Office events. He hosted a prayer gathering along with Franklin Graham at the White House for staffers during Easter week this year. In June, he said that Trump's decision to bomb Iran was spiritually significant.

“This is what we might call a labor pain,” Laurie said about strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities in a video posted to X. “Jesus said when we get closer to His return, it would be like a woman giving birth, and her labor pains would get closer and closer together. So as we see the signs of the times, it's telling us that Jesus is coming.”

Similarly, some identify Gog and Magog, prophetic figures in an apocalyptic final battle, as modern-day Russia and Iran. “Today, reading Ezekiel's prophecy is like reading the front page of your newspaper,” said Steve Berger, pastor emeritus of One Church Home in an April 2024 sermon, referring to wars

with Russia and Israel. “It might be a good idea to be on God’s side on this stuff,” Berger also runs a discipleship ministry for politicians out of a Washington, D.C., townhome: Ambassador Services International.

Moving the American Embassy to Jerusalem was also very important. “It doesn’t change anything,” Gagné said. But pre-millennialists believe “it places Jerusalem at a crucial moment in their understanding of eschatology. Israel has to have a prominent place so that we can have someone eventually arise in the political sphere, someone that would be an anti-Christ figure and trigger the reconstruction of the Temple of Jerusalem. That would be a sign that we’re coming close to the Rapture.”

Many American Christians disagree that particular interpretations of prophetic passages should guide foreign policy, noted Daniel Hummel, author of *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism*, and they are very critical of the influence prophecy-oriented leaders have gained in recent years. “There are significant players in the administration who also are operating out of this theology

that make it relevant, just to understand why the administration is doing what it’s doing, at least to some extent.”

For example, former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee is an ordained Southern Baptist minister and now Trump’s ambassador to Israel. Huckabee said in a June 10 interview with Bloomberg News that achieving an independent Palestinian state in conjunction with the state of Israel is no longer the administration’s goal. The White House and the State Department did not answer questions about whether Trump agreed.

The statement is a significant departure from long-standing U.S. efforts toward a two-state solution. The administration may have many reasons for this stance, but it lines up with the positions of pastors like Mario Bramnick. He says the Bible doesn’t concern itself with Gaza. “The land of Palestine originally belonged to Israel before the establishment of the statehood of Israel,” he said. “The Biblical mandate is clear to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

In June, Huckabee sent Trump a lengthy text only days before the president authorized a strike on Iran: “No president in my lifetime has been in a position like yours. ... I don’t reach out to persuade you. Only to encourage you. I believe you will hear from heaven and that voice is far more important than mine or ANYONE else’s.”

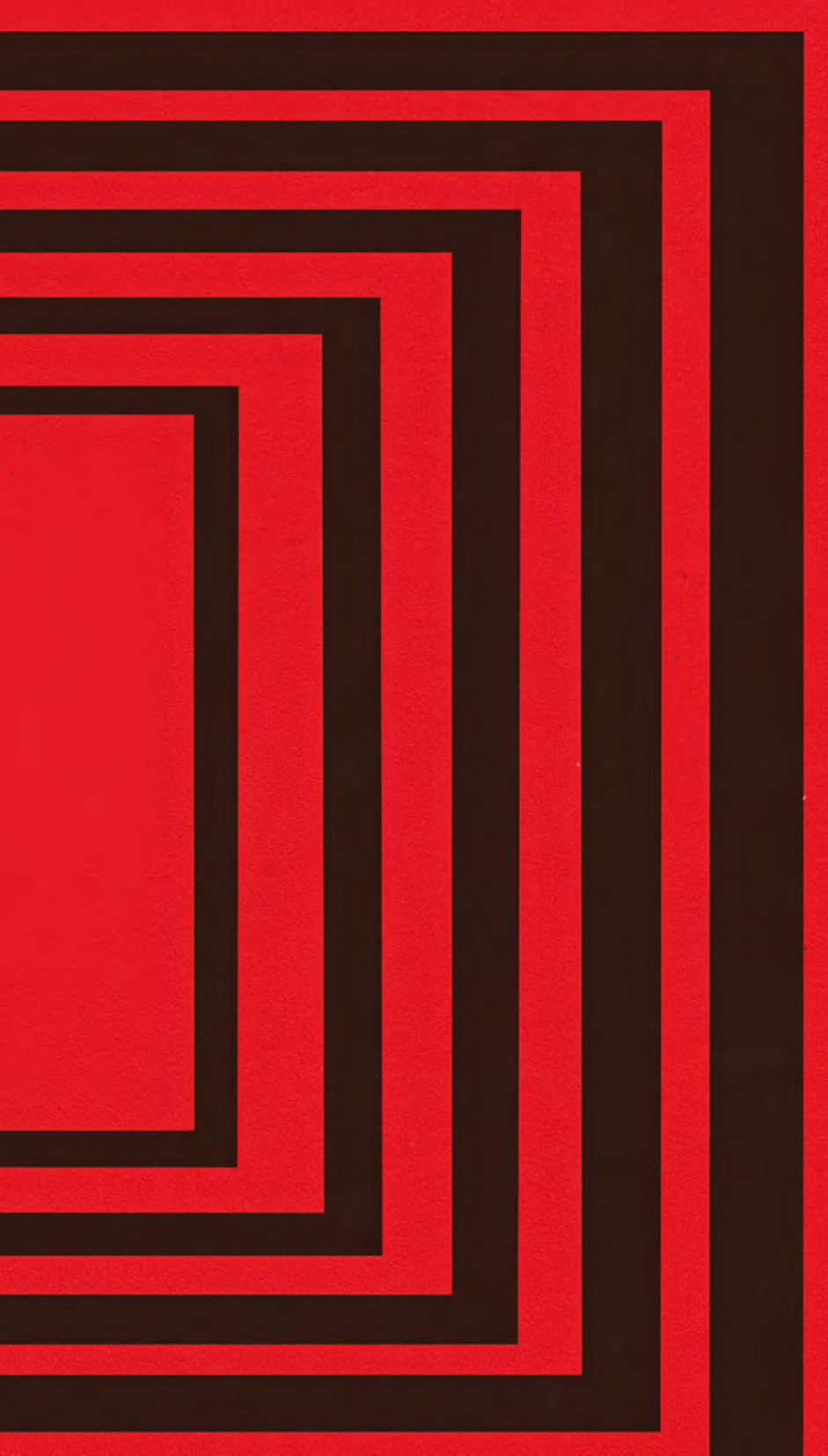
Trump posted screenshots of the message to his X account. ■

Evangelical Christians pray with President Trump in the Oval Office before he signs an executive order establishing the White House Faith Office on Feb. 7.





RIGHT TO BE



States debate forced hospitalizations to save the mentally ill—even if they don't want saving

by Addie Offereins

illustration by **ROB DOBI**

photography by **SY BEAN**

Calvin Clark hovered above the swirling Columbia River from his tenuous perch on the interstate bridge nearly 140 feet above the icy currents. Calvin didn't realize that his bipolar mania had him in a stranglehold as he considered slicing the water's surface and letting himself slip into its frigid depths. In fact, he didn't grasp that he was sick at all.

Only days before, law enforcement apprehended him ambling through traffic in Vancouver, Wash., rambling about igniting himself on fire or getting hit by a car. But the state didn't have any psychiatric beds available, his mother recalled, so they drove him across the river and dropped him off at an Oregon hospital.

Staff held him there for five days—the maximum amount of time for an initial psychiatric hold in Oregon—and didn't file commitment paperwork to keep him hospitalized longer. They discharged him into an Uber. The driver dropped him off at a homeless shelter where he spent one night before walking out onto the bridge. It was January 2017, when the Columbia River's temperature hovered around 35 degrees.

He stood above the swirling water for a few moments, and then he jumped.

But not even his bipolar-induced mania could compete with the powerful instinct to swim formed from years of surfing and drilling with his swim team. It kicked in the instant he hit the water.

RESCUED?

Washington first responders rescued Calvin as he crawled up the river's muddy banks. He was admitted to another hospital shortly after.

"We knew he was that sick, and had been trying to get him hospitalized in the weeks leading up to that suicide attempt," his mother, Jerri Clark, recalled. "But he didn't meet criteria until he actually tried to take his own life."

Clark is a slight woman with short golden hair that curls around her chin. An unmistakable tenacity runs through the grooves creasing her forehead forged from years of battling a disease—and a system—alongside her son. Washington's mental health law, like that in most states, permits involuntary hospitalization only if the individual is at substantial risk of inflicting serious harm on himself or others.

"In other words, treatment isn't accessible until there's a victim," said Clark, who's thrown herself into advocating for mothers and families fighting to access treatment for their loved ones.

America's mental healthcare system routinely fails the severely mentally ill, especially those, like Calvin, who don't understand that they're sick—people who need care that extends beyond a few days in the hospital. Lawmakers in a growing number of states, including liberal bastions such as California and New York, are recognizing that. They're pushing to relax involuntary commitment laws and overhaul federal funding regulations that limit in-patient treatment. But critics say that won't solve the real problem: There's almost nowhere for people who need ongoing care to go.

Mental healthcare in the United States changed radically between the 1960s and 1980s. The introduction of chlorpromazine, one of the first antipsychotic medications, coupled with concerns about mistreatment and abuse within long-term mental hospitals and asylums contributed to a push for community-based outpatient treatment. Reformers believed new medications would enable the severely mentally ill to live relatively normal lives and integrate back into society.



Jerri Clark sits on a park bench across from the neighborhood playground that her son Calvin used to play on near her home in Vancouver, Wash.

But the wide-scale closures of psychiatric hospitals—a phenomenon that became known as deinstitutionalization—had even more to do with Congress' fierce debate over the Medicare and Medicaid Act of 1965. Lawmakers worried states would shift the massive cost of specialty psychiatric hospitals to the federal government, imperiling the program's long-term financial stability. So, lawmakers prohibited Medicaid from paying for stays in psychiatric facilities with more than 16 beds. They called it the Institutions for Mental Diseases exclusion. It encouraged states to move elderly psychiatric patients into more cost-effective nursing homes and treat other patients in general hospital psychiatric units or community outpatient clinics.

In 1967, California enacted the Lanterman-Petris-Short (LPS) Act,

paving the way for other states to tighten civil commitment standards. The law ended indefinite involuntary commitment and established the imminent danger and grave disability standards that are now the norm across most of the United States. To qualify for civil commitment, a patient must be an imminent danger to himself or others or be unable to care for basic personal needs.

By the end of the 1970s, nearly every state had established civil commitment requirements similar to the dangerousness standards outlined in California's LPS law.



As state psychiatric hospitals shuttered, the number of psychiatric beds dwindled from more than 550,000 in 1955 to below 200,000 in 1975. By 2017, that number had dropped to 170,200, including private hospitals, general psychiatric units, Veterans Affairs medical centers, and other 24-hour residential treatment centers. But psychiatric beds in state and county facilities totaled just 37,209. Forensic patients—those who committed a crime and are waiting to stand trial—occupied nearly half of state hospital beds in 2016.

In 1974, Wisconsin psychiatrist Darold A. Treffert published a letter critiquing the deinstitutionalization movement in which he coined the phrase “dying with their rights on.” On the second page, a large black skull clutches a rolled up Bill of Rights in its gaping jaw.

**“We knew he was
that sick, and had
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But he didn’t
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his own life.”**

“We are struggling now to come to some reasonable middle ground between the right to be ill and the right to be rescued,” Treffert wrote. “The pendulum now threatens to reach the other extreme.”

Calvin Clark attended Willamette University in Salem, Ore., on a speech and debate scholarship. He earned straight A’s in high school, according to his mom, and won a state championship in extemporaneous speech. “He was extremely bright, very independent, very organized, very loving, very perceptive,” Jerri Clark told me. “He always recognized when somebody else needed a little word of encouragement or a little kindness.”

Calvin joined an honors program in college and, at first, seemed to be thriving in his new academic setting. But one day, Clark answered a call from the 19-year-old freshman, who sounded distressed, confused, and even paranoid. He told her his debate team had ostracized him, that everyone he knew was turning against him, that he wasn’t safe. His parents picked him up and brought him back to their two-story suburban home.

“That night, he was ripping around the house, crying about demons that had taken over our home,” Clark recalled. Calvin locked one of the downstairs bathrooms to keep his family members out, claiming it was full of demons. He spoke in disjointed word salads. That’s when his mother realized he was in full blown mania.

A primary care doctor diagnosed her son with bipolar I with psychotic features, a condition that causes its victim to oscillate between episodes of severe depression and bursts of mania, periods of abnormal energy. The Clarks connected with a psychiatrist who prescribed Calvin antipsychotic medications. But his commitment to the medications “waxed and waned,” Clark said. The medications blocked the overproduction of dopamine that contributed to his bouts of mania, but they also flattened his emotions and dulled his senses. He hated the way they made him feel.

And when he didn't take them, Calvin wasn't able to recognize that he was sick. It's a condition known as anosognosia, or a lack of insight into one's mental illness. "He had no ability to know that what was really going wrong was in his own head," Clark said.

Anosognosia is part of the reason why the severely mentally ill are disproportionately represented among the homeless and behind bars in county jails. Roughly 25% to 35% of the homeless population has a severe mental illness. About 44% of people in jail have a history of mental illness, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).

"They're going from the street to the hospital to the jail, the street back to the hospital, back to jail ... in what we call the revolving door," said Mark Gale, a NAMI volunteer in Los Angeles and the former criminal justice chair for NAMI California. Gale watched his own son cycle through that revolving door.

Residents of coastal Democratic states with burgeoning homeless populations have had enough of passing people wasting away on subways or street corners. New York residents have witnessed several high-profile instances of mentally ill individuals committing horrendous acts of violence during the past few years. "For people in major cities like New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, the failures of the mental health system are very easy to see," said Carolyn Gorman, a policy analyst at the Manhattan Institute.

Lawmakers in these traditionally liberal strongholds are listening. Earlier this year, Kathy Hochul, the Democratic governor of New York, pressed lawmakers to add a grave disability provision to the state's mental health law. It would allow authorities to intervene when people are unable to meet their basic needs such as food, shelter, and medical care. State law previously limited intervention to overt violence and suicidality. Despite initial resistance, legislators agreed to include the change as they wrapped up their budget negotiations for the next fiscal year. Nearly 90% of New Yorkers

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support the change, the Association for a Better New York found in a recent poll.

Oregon lawmakers are also weighing changes. "I think there's a recognition that deinstitutionalization, as a policy, did not go as planned," Gorman said. "And [that] reasonable involuntary commitment is more compassionate than just leaving people to deteriorate on the streets."

Alex Barnard, a researcher and assistant sociology professor at New York University, cataloged the number of mental health bills states introduced between 2011 and 2022. He discovered lawmakers put forward twice as many proposals between 2021 and 2022 compared with 2011 to 2012.

In October 2023, California Gov. Gavin Newsom signed a bill expanding the state's definition of "gravely disabled."



Clark holds a photo of Calvin deep-sea swimming with a pod of dolphins in Hawaii.

The changes added an inability to provide for personal safety or essential medical care to the list of reasons why someone could be involuntarily committed to a hospital. The law now also includes individuals suffering from a severe substance use disorder and co-occurring mental health disorder.

That same month, the Golden State launched a program called Community, Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment (CARE) Court. The program aims to connect those struggling with a severe mental illness or substance abuse disorder with treatment before they spiral enough to qualify for involuntary

commitment. It gives a broader group of people the ability to petition a court on behalf of a mentally ill individual. Parents. First responders. Hospital directors. Roommates. If a judge determines someone qualifies for CARE Court, a behavioral health specialist helps formulate a court-ordered treatment plan.

At the federal level, President Donald Trump appears to support a shift toward mandating treatment more frequently. Trump released a campaign video in which he decried rampant street homelessness plaguing American cities, fueled by untreated mental illness and substance abuse. He laid out a vision of large parcels of inexpensive land where the homeless could congregate and get access to the treatment they need.

“For those who are just temporarily down on their luck, we will work to help them quickly reintegrate into a normal life,” Trump said. “And for those who are severely mentally ill and deeply disturbed, we will bring them back to mental institutions, where they belong, with the goal of reintegrating them back into society once they are well enough to manage.”

At the end of July, the president issued an executive order aimed at making it easier—through technical assistance, grants, and other means—for state and local governments to involuntarily commit individuals “who pose risks to themselves or the public or are living on the streets and cannot care for themselves.” The administration will also seek the end of consent decrees and other court orders or policies that impede civil commitment, Trump’s order reads.

Jerri Clark wonders what might have been different for Calvin if he had received the same kind of treatment as her father-in-law. Doctors also diagnosed him with a severe bipolar disorder that included psychotic features. Despite multiple suicide attempts, he got his condition under control thanks to a long period of hospitalization at the beginning of his illness and consistent medication, Clark said. He lived a relatively normal life for more than 50 years. “That level of treatment wasn’t available to Calvin,” she said.

Instead, he ended up homeless. Multiple times. “Living in our house became unworkable because he was so unwell,” Clark said.

Calvin wound up homeless for the first time shortly after he embarked on a quest to California to find himself and find God. He joined a commune rife with marijuana use. The drug contributed to another psychotic break and another brief hospitalization, this time in the Golden State. Eventually, Calvin moved back to Seattle, relatively stable after his hospital stay and consistent medication. He joined a program at a youth shelter in the city and found employment. His parents rented him a room in the city. But it didn’t last long.

The housing came with care management and outreach services, but Calvin still had to show up for his appointments. He still had to follow through on taking his medication. Often, he didn't. All too soon, he lost his job and his housing and quit his treatment plan.

Calvin ended up homeless again and eventually incarcerated.

After his bouts of homelessness and jail stays, Calvin qualified for a Washington program called Assertive Community Treatment, which provides more robust case management, though the mentally ill individual must still consent to participate. Clark believes Calvin's illness was too out of control for a program like that to be successful.

"What he needed was a long-term stay in a state hospital, like what his grandfather got, long enough to get the medication regimen really clear," said Clark, who now serves as the resource and advocacy manager for the Treatment Advocacy Center, a group pushing to reform state hospitalization laws to make it easier to treat and, if necessary, involuntarily hospitalize the severely mentally ill. "What we have in almost all of our states now is a catch and release hospitalization program. We catch somebody in their worst, worst, worst stage of illness, give them enough medication that they can make a tiny bit of sense, and then we toss them back out into the world."

Critics of state-level pushes to reform involuntary commitment laws argue they don't go far enough, or misidentify the root problem entirely.

Gale, the NAMI volunteer in Los Angeles, said part of the problem is that lawmakers keep trying to target individuals who won't accept treatment voluntarily with more voluntary programs. Though California's CARE Court program is technically a court-ordered treatment plan, participants can still opt out at any time, with no civil or criminal penalties for refusing to participate. "The number of graduates, you can count on your hands so far," he said. "It's not a success." He's more optimistic

about the state's changes to its grave disability standard to include personal safety and essential medical treatment. Los Angeles County will begin implementing the new standard for involuntary commitment starting Jan. 1, 2026.

Gorman, the Manhattan Institute fellow from New York, pointed out that efforts to hospitalize more people will keep hitting a wall of bed shortages unless states find a way around the Medicaid Institutions for Mental Diseases (IMD) exclusion that prohibits Medicaid from paying for facilities with more than 16 beds. The severely mentally ill and their families rely heavily on Medicaid to afford treatment. The program pays more than any other insurance company to care for the severely mentally ill.

Memorabilia of Calvin Clark

A bill introduced in Congress last year sought to expand the number of eligible beds from 16 to 36. Completely eliminating the exclusion would have increased federal costs by \$38.4 billion between 2023 and 2024, according to Congressional Budget Office estimates.

But Alex Barnard, the sociology professor at New York University, isn't convinced that easier hospitalizations or even reversing the IMD exclusion will stanch the leaks in the system. Just ask him about his brother.

Barnard's brother grew up with significant developmental disabilities. Then, in early adolescence, he started exhibiting symptoms of bipolar disorder





with psychosis. A frightening new symptom emerged in his early 20s: an unresponsive, psychotic state called catatonia. “You just pace,” Barnard said. “You just walk for days. It’s both an incredible but very disturbing thing to see.”

Involuntary treatment was essential for his brother. Without intensive therapy, a patient with catatonia might starve themselves to death and slowly slip away. But at the same time, Barnard is wary of characterizing lengthy hospitalizations as a “magic bullet treatment.”

“I think families are often being a little bit sold a false bill of goods,” he said. Groups like the Treatment Advocacy Center routinely blame strict commitment laws for preventing a loved one from receiving care in time. But despite relentless critiques of its strict civil commitment standards, California still has

“What we have in almost all of our states now is a catch and release hospitalization program. We catch somebody in their worst, worst, worst stage of illness, give them enough medication that they can make a tiny bit of sense, and then we toss them back out into the world.”

one of the highest rates of involuntary hospitalization, Barnard noted.

It’s what happens after someone’s discharged that counts, he argued, and states desperately need long-term, dignified residential care and housing support for people who maybe won’t ever achieve a normal life. Barnard believes eliminating the IMD exclusion means hospitals will absorb more of our limited mental health dollars, money that could be invested in more economical supportive housing options for people transitioning out of locked hospital settings.

Today, Barnard’s brother, who recently turned 40, lives in his own apartment and works a job. That’s only possible because of the intensive support he receives in Minnesota due to his developmental disabilities, not his mental illness. Staff check in on him daily and a psych nurse visits him once a week. “He’s killing it,” Barnard said with a wide smile. “He’s doing amazing.”

Calvin Clark never found that kind of lasting stability during the four years of his illness.

While living in Seattle, he got involved with an organization that supports people in recovery from severe mental illness. “Everybody loved him right away,” Clark recalled. “They wanted him to kind of be a spokesman.” When Calvin masked his symptoms, he was confident, smart. A magnet. The group sponsored him to attend a conference in St. Louis.

While there, he stopped taking his medication. Then, he jumped off the hotel roof. A doctor called Clark from a St. Louis hospital to tell her what happened. Her son died on March 18, 2019.

They held his funeral at a community center overlooking a lake where the family had enjoyed stand-up paddleboarding together. Clark’s brother put together a video montage of Calvin’s life. Clark herself spoke about the injustices she had witnessed navigating such a broken treatment system. Songs by the surfer band Switchfoot played in the background. “It was a beautiful celebration of a life that should have lasted a lot longer,” she said. ■

STEAL, KILL, DESTROY

Inside the Russian campaign to purge Christians
from occupied Ukrainian territory

by **WILLIAM FLEESON**



**A church lies in ruins in
Russian-occupied Ukraine.**

MYKHAYLO PALINCHAK/SOPA
IMAGES/SIPA USA VIA AP



In the middle of Sunday morning service, Russian troops stormed into Grace Church of Evangelical Christians, a Baptist congregation in the southeastern Ukrainian city of Melitopol. The glass in the church's doors shattered as the Russians, using sledgehammers and military assault tactics, smashed their way in.

The heavily armed men proceeded to arrest, fingerprint, and interrogate dozens of church members. The soldiers confiscated computers, cell-phones, records, and other property.

Later, the Russians took the church building itself.

Mykhailo Brytsyn, the church's longtime pastor, was preaching at another church that morning, Sept. 11, 2022. He later returned to the church grounds and suffered his own Russian interrogation. The questions were a formality, because the Russians planned to shut the church down anyway, extending a pattern across Ukrainian territories under Russian occupation since the start of full-scale war in February 2022.

Several months before the attack on Grace Church, Brytsyn, members of his congregation, and Christians from other denominations held open-air worship services in downtown Melitopol, a local tradition. That custom would later serve as the basis of a twisted accusation from Russia against the pastor and other Melitopol believers.

Brytsyn was forced to leave the city a few days after Russian troops took over his church, he told me, during a series of interviews I conducted with evangelical Christians in Ukraine's western city of Lviv this May.

I met the pastor and his wife, Svetlana, at a Vienna-style café in downtown Lviv. Brytsyn, who wore his clerical collar,

described his interrogation, and the commander who led his questioning.

"I asked him: 'Why are you closing our church? After all, there are evangelical churches in Russia.' To which he replied: 'Those churches are temporary! There will be only an Orthodox church!'"

The commander likewise accused Brytsyn of being an American spy, a common claim made against evangelicals and Protestants in Russia, Ukraine, and other parts of the former Soviet Union.

For Ukrainian Christians, occupation has meant targeted persecution, an experience familiar to believers inside Russia who are not aligned with the Russian Orthodox Church. Russia considers evangelicals—who share the Western values of free speech, freedom of assembly, and obedience to God before government—as a threat to state control.

Pressure against evangelicals looks set to persist as the war grinds on. The United States this summer turned its diplomatic focus elsewhere, especially to the 12-day war between Israel and Iran. But in July, following a brief halt in weapons deliveries to Ukraine, U.S. President Donald Trump announced the United States would resume sending military support to the country. He also gave Russia a hard deadline to sign a peace deal or face additional sanctions.

Brytsyn now lives in the town of Dubno, in western Ukraine, where Svetlana has family connections. Many evangelical Christians have found refuge in Ukraine's west, away from the horrors of 3½ years of Russian occupation. Russia now controls about one-fifth of Ukraine's pre-war territory, mostly in the country's east and south.

Persecution in occupied Ukrainian territory has targeted Baptists, Presbyterians, charismatics, and pre-Reformation forms of Christianity, including Greek Catholicism. In some Ukrainian regions, like the southern peninsula of Crimea and the eastern Donbas area, Russian persecution of churches began in 2014, when Russia seized those territories in smaller-scale offensives.

Members of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which professes allegiance to a church hierarchy based in Ukraine's capital Kyiv, not Moscow, have also suffered state pressure, armed intimidation, and violence.

Brytsyn recalled the Russian commanders gave him an ultimatum to vacate Melitopol.

"We were told, 'We give you two days in order to leave, otherwise, we kill you,'" he said.



**Mykhailo and Svetlana Brytsyn
at a café in Lviv**

Many Ukrainian refugees have relocated to Lviv, which offers a concentration of housing and job options—and a safe distance from the fighting.

The Agarkov family came to the city in early 2022. Vasyl Agarkov, a Presbyterian pastor in training, and his wife, Viktoriia Agarkova, lived in eastern Kharkiv until February of that year, when the advancing Russian army compelled them to flee. The couple, then without children, drove slowly west in seemingly endless traffic. They endured 36 sleepless hours and 650 miles in a packed car, alongside friends and their cat, Cherry.

As I interviewed the couple, their four boys—adopted all at once, just three weeks earlier—played in a separate room, in the rambunctious way of boys

Brytsyn now divides his time between weekly preaching in Dubno, maintaining online contact with his Melitopol flock—and a new role, in which he compiles evidence of war crimes and human rights violations Russia has committed against Ukrainians, Christian or otherwise. Brytsyn publishes his findings with Mission Eurasia, a Tennessee-based group focused on Christian missions and leadership training in post-Soviet countries.

According to a February report from Mission Eurasia, the threats Russian forces issued to the Melitopol pastor are neither empty nor isolated. To date, Russia has killed nearly four dozen Ukrainian religious leaders, the report found. Of these victims, nearly half were evangelical or other Protestant believers. That's a disproportionately high number given the size of Ukraine's Protestant population: Just 2.5% of all Ukrainians call themselves Protestants, per 2024 data from the Razumkov Centre, a Kyiv-based policy research group.

In March, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) reported that Russia's activities in occupied territories amount to "gross violations of religious freedom against Ukrainians." The commission recommended designating Russia a country to watch, for "engaging in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom" in the occupied territories of Ukraine and in Russia proper. USCIRF also cited allegations that Russia has killed Ukrainian religious leaders from outside the Russian Orthodox Church.

everywhere. They bashed around, shouting occasionally, and sent toys crashing against the walls. The couple told me that the war, as much as wanting a family, spurred them to adopt.

The move to Lviv felt especially poignant for Viktoriia. It was her second evacuation. A former resident of Crimea, she fled when Russians seized it in 2014, before fleeing again in 2022 from Kharkiv.

"It was scary, for sure," she said, referring to the 2022 invasion. "We were expecting the war. But when you expect it, and when it really happens—it's still different."

Vasyl calls the war "unprovoked" and "satanic." And he considers Russia's persecution of Christians pure evil. He, too, confirmed reports of Protestant pastors and other believers killed or abused for their faith.

"They say, 'We are freeing you from your slavery!' But they kill, and take [Christian Ukrainians] into slavery," Vasyl said. "You see how they want to destroy the church, destroy Christians."

The Christians who remain in occupied territories—those who have not died, fled, or been terrified into silence—now gather in secret, the Agarkovs said. The couple compared the current situation to the experience of Christians in the early church, when Roman and other authorities drove believers underground.

"[The Russians] are fighting not only with Ukrainians but also with Christianity, with God," Vasyl said.



Viktoria added that she left Crimea specifically because she was a Christian. She knew all too well the persecutions of believers in the Soviet period.

“If you are a citizen of the Soviet Union, it means that you are a communist,” she said. “If you are a communist, it means you are an atheist. So, churches are not allowed. Priests are not allowed. Christmas is not allowed. Nothing is allowed. The Communist Party is your god.”

Though constrained to live in a distant city, the Agarkovs are now free to live out their faith. Adopting their four boys is part of that. It’s also a longtime dream come true—they first discussed adopting children a dozen years ago, while still dating.

“We worship an adopting God,” Vasyl said. “This is our way, how we can reduce the evil [of war] in their lives, and give them hope.”

The Agarkovs plan to finish pastoral training, then take up full-time ministry. They dream of planting churches in Ukraine, just as they once dreamed of adopting children.

“Russia is trying to destroy churches,” Vasyl said. “We’re thinking about planting more churches. That’s our response to this evil.”

Mission Eurasia is not the only group tracking Russian persecution in Ukraine. Steven Moore, a former Republican chief of staff in the U.S. Congress, moved to Kyiv in 2022. He founded the Ukraine Freedom Project, a nonprofit that combines humanitarian work with defense of Christian religious liberty. The organization runs a website, RussiaTorturesChristians.org, to document religiously motivated crimes—including murder, torture, illegal seizure of

**“WE’RE THINKING
ABOUT PLANTING
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RESPONSE TO
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homes and property, and sham trials—against Ukrainian believers.

In May, the Ukraine Freedom Project premiered its documentary film, *A Faith Under Siege*, at the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C. I interviewed Moore by phone a few weeks later. He expressed confidence in the power of bearing witness about crimes against Ukrainian Christians—and warned of the dangers that misinformation can bring. Western media is contending with a “fire hose of Russian propaganda,” he said. Consumers can sometimes receive, and believe, distorted news reports seemingly rooted in fact.

Moore cited the case of employees of RT, a Russian state-controlled media outlet, paying U.S. conservative media figures a total of \$10 million to “pump pro-Russia propaganda and disinformation across social media to U.S. audiences,” according to a U.S. Department of Justice statement from September. The case is currently under FBI investigation.

Despite Russian efforts to spread false narratives, Moore takes comfort from his work.

“The truth still works in the world,” he told me. “We are American Christians, talking to Ukrainian Christians, and trying to get the stories of war out.”

Longtime gospel workers in Ukraine have also reported a spike in persecution of Christians. Presbyterian missionary Doug Shepherd moved to Ukraine in the 1990s, following the Soviet Union’s collapse in 1991. A native of Dallas, three decades in foreign missions have not softened Shepherd’s Texas accent. He and his wife, Masha, who is Ukrainian, have raised their children in Lviv since 2006.

Lviv is a “refuge city for many people,” Shepherd said, as we sat in an upscale hotel lobby near the historic old town square. His duties have transformed from peacetime ministry and

next-generation missionary training to crisis-mode humanitarian support, often by delivering aid to front-line communities.

“Where Russia occupies, the church dies,” Shepherd told me. Russian authorities feel that “Christians are a massive threat, because they don’t submit to a tribe or a nationality. They follow Jesus, they read the Bible.”

When Ukraine shifted from mission field to battlefield, Shepherd said, staying posed a “true test” for professing Christians. Avoiding personal risk is tempting, he said, but genuine commitment is shown through staying put—and serving where needs are especially great.

Shepherd struggles to see or plan beyond the present moment. Instead, he focuses on the needs in Lviv and Ukraine today, while keeping faith in the ultimate promises of God.

“He’s always several steps ahead,” he said. “That’s where our hope is. But it’s exhausting.”

After we finished our coffee, Brytsyn and his wife took me to an assistance center in the south of Lviv. The gray, rainy day was cold enough that we could see our breath. The pastor stepped inside with a smile and a bagful of food to donate.

“We call this the ‘Melitopol Embassy,’” he joked. Volunteers at the center provide various forms of aid, from social and legal assistance to free medical checkups for children. In a back room, an examination table held toys, cartoon stickers, and a pediatrician’s instruments. People flowed in and out, exchanging goods and documents.

Before we parted ways, Brytsyn showed me photos of what Grace Church has become. The grounds now host offices for Russia’s military administration. The building’s exterior walls, formerly pure white, have been painted blood red. Paintings modeled after the faces of fallen Russian soldiers stretch across the brick façade.

The tall, white cross that once crowned the top of the church has vanished.

In December 2022, several months into Brytsyn’s forced exile in Dubno, Russian forces issued paperwork making their takeover of the property official. Written in Russian, the language reeks of irony: Grace Church’s leadership had taken part in “mass unrest and anti-Russian demonstrations in March–April 2022,” apparently a reference to the church’s open-air worship meetings in downtown Melitopol.

As for Brytsyn, Russian authorities found him guilty of “agitations ... against the Russian Federation and the establishment of peaceful life” in Melitopol’s surrounding, occupied region.

Despite so many setbacks, Brytsyn keeps straining toward the goal.

“We will return home,” Brytsyn said. “Wherever we are today, we are still the church.” ■

LEFT: Brytsyn preaches to a Ukrainian diaspora church in Vienna, Austria, in 2024. BELOW: Grace Church’s building in Melitopol before and after Russian forces took over.



Anything goes

Section 230 helped make the
worst parts of the internet possible.
Would reversing it fix the problem?

BY MARY JACKSON

illustration by Taylor Callery

■ ON A SUNDAY AFTERNOON, 13 parents from across the country logged on to Zoom, gearing up to condense into two minutes stories no parent wants to tell.

Each had lost a child, some as young as 14, to fentanyl poisoning. The Zoom call, held in April 2021, included three officials from Snap Inc., the parent company of the social media platform Snapchat. Each parent's story included a drug dealer who used Snapchat to sell fake pills laced with fentanyl. Snap officials joined the call ahead of a rally the parents planned to hold outside the company's headquarters in Santa Monica, Calif., to draw attention to what was happening on the platform.

Going into the meeting, three of the parents told me they were cautiously optimistic. They hoped Snapchat officials would hear their stories and initiate changes to combat the problem—or at least acknowledge it.

But after the parents wrapped up their stories, some said Jennifer Stout, Snap's vice president of global public policy, made it clear she believed the families had another motive: suing the company. Well, they couldn't, thanks to Section 230, she reportedly informed them. Because the drug dealers had posted the content and not Snap, the company couldn't be held liable, Stout told the parents, according to the three attendees I spoke with.



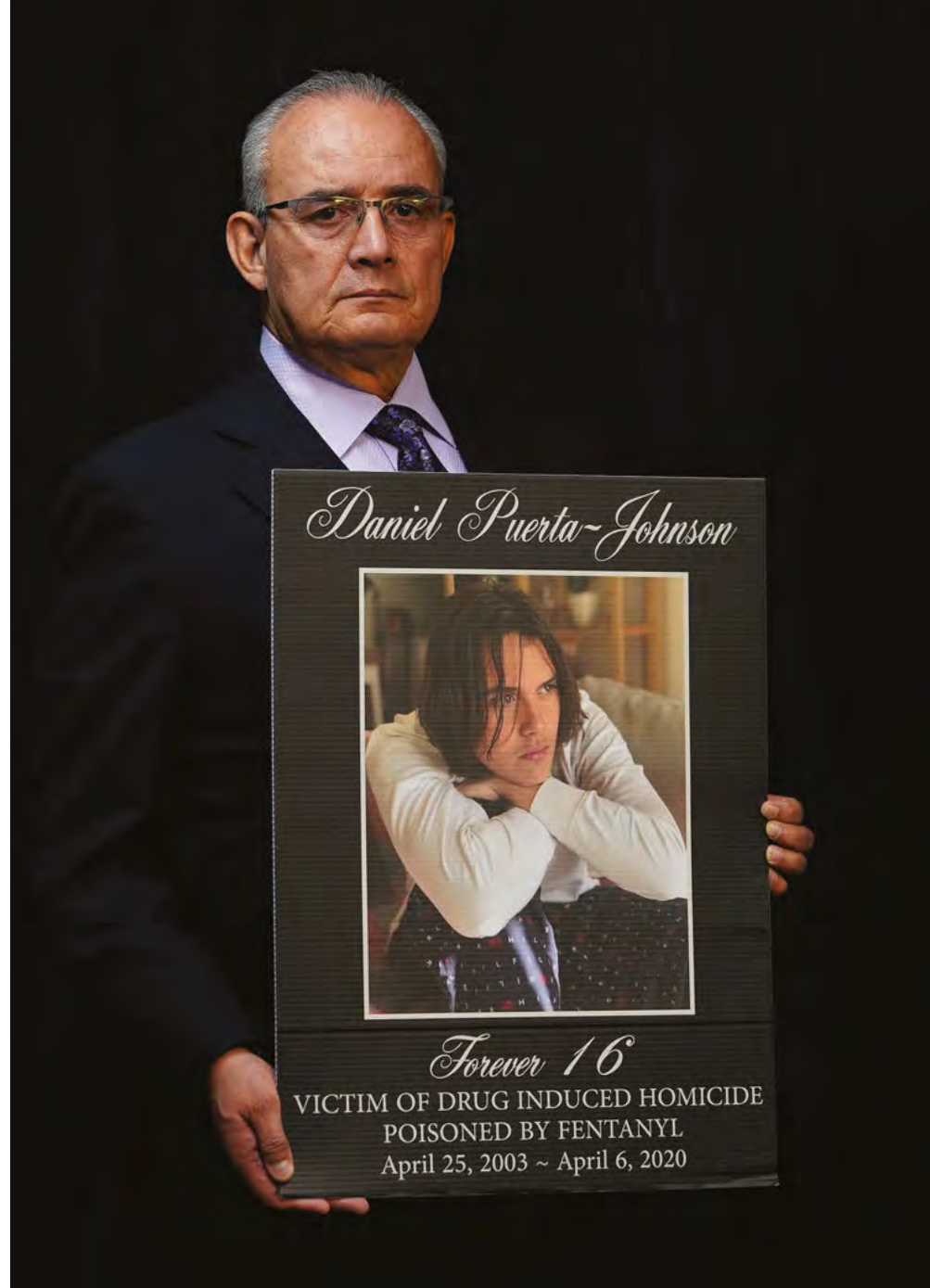
Section 230, part of the 1996 Communications Decency Act, has long shielded online platforms from civil liability for user-generated content. Cast in a positive light, 26 of the statute's roughly 1,000 words are credited with creating the internet and allowing it to flourish: "No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider."

Congress enacted Section 230 before anyone could fathom the internet's enormity—the tech industry, the social media boom, artificial intelligence, and countless innovations, opportunities, and dangers. For nearly three decades, the statute has withstood a surprising number of legal and legislative challenges, with courts paving the way for a broad interpretation of its protection for companies. But pressure is mounting to reform or repeal it amid concerns over the way it exacerbates online harms. As the statute's staunchest defenders gear up for another fight, even they admit there's no easy solution.

■ **THE PARENTS I SPOKE WITH** who attended the Zoom call with Snap officials said hearing Section 230 invoked moments after they told their stories felt like a gut punch.

One parent, Jaime Puerta, left the call in tears. Another, Amy Neville, whose son Alexander died of fentanyl poisoning in 2020 at age 14, said she felt angry and frustrated: "The thought of suing wasn't even on my mind."

Now, it is. Neville became the lead plaintiff in a 2022 civil lawsuit against Snap that now includes Puerta and 62 other parents. The suit argues that the platform's features, such as disappearing messages and its data, geolocation, and "quick add" functions, appeal to drug dealers and make illegal activity difficult to track. Some of the parents claim that even after they reported the problem to Snapchat, the platform took months to remove drug dealers' accounts. In some cases, those same dealers found loopholes to create new accounts, leaving a trail of more overdose deaths, according to the lawsuit.



In an emailed statement, Snap denied the suing parents' characterization of the April 2021 Zoom call: "This would have been completely contrary to the purpose of the meeting, which was to express our deep condolences for their unimaginable loss, learn from their experiences, and work together to prevent future tragedies."

Neville sees the suit primarily as a way to spread awareness. She's since connected with hundreds of parents who have lost children to fentanyl poisoning. In 90% of those cases, she

says, kids obtained the drug over Snapchat.

But Matthew Bergman, the attorney representing the families, told me the case also presents another opportunity to chip away at Section 230: "The way the statute has been interpreted has given rise to a level of immunity that no other company in America has." Bergman, who founded the Social Media Victims Law Center in 2021, believes the tide is turning. "That's been subject to some judicial scrutiny in recent years—and it's going to be subject to a lot more," he said.



LEFT: Jaime Puerta holds a poster of his son Daniel, a victim of fentanyl poisoning, during a news conference in Los Angeles. **ABOVE:** Amy Neville speaks at a rally outside Snap Inc. headquarters in Santa Monica, Calif.

In one 2024 case, *Anderson v. TikTok Inc.*, the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled Section 230 did not bar claims that the video-sharing platform TikTok’s recommendation algorithm played a part in a 10-year-old user’s accidental suicide. The company opted not to take its fight to the U.S. Supreme Court, letting the lower court ruling stand.

That same year, the Supreme Court declined to hear a separate case examining the scope of Section 230 that also involved Snapchat. Justices Clarence Thomas and Neil Gorsuch dissented from the court’s decision not to hear the case. They argued the court should review whether social media platforms should be held accountable for their own misconduct. “Make no mistake about it—there is danger in delay,” Thomas wrote in the dissent. “Social media platforms have increasingly used Section 230 as a get-out-of-jail free card.”

One year prior, the Supreme Court considered the statute for the first time

in a case involving claims that Google-owned YouTube aided and abetted the terrorist group ISIS by recommending videos posted by the group. In that case, the justices sidestepped a ruling that could have limited the scope of Section 230. During oral arguments, Justice Elena Kagan suggested the task of narrowing the statute’s legal protections is best left to Congress, not the nine-member court: “These are not, like, the nine greatest experts on the internet.”

■ **CONGRESS HAS AMENDED** Section 230 just once, in 2018. That change requires internet sites to remove material that violates federal and state sex trafficking laws. Since then, lawmakers have increasingly sought to further limit the statute’s scope, with little success.

In April, U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., signaled he and Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., planned to introduce a bipartisan measure to sunset Section 230. Graham and Durbin have introduced similar legislation for several years, along with separate measures to amend Section 230, to combat online child sexual exploitation. Graham’s press secretary, Taylor Reidy, told me via email there’s “nothing to add” on the status of the proposed bill.

In 2024, a separate bill, the Kids Online Safety Act, overwhelmingly cleared the Senate but failed in the House due to concerns over free speech and weakening Section 230.

When it comes to changing Section 230, “there’s a lot of heat but not much light,” said Corbin Barthold, internet policy counsel and director of appellate litigation at TechFreedom, a technology think tank. Barthold said the debate has pivoted in recent years from online censorship and disinformation concerns to protecting kids.

In April, that shift was evident when the National Center on Sexual Exploitation (NCOSE) released its annual “Dirty Dozen” list “with a twist.” The list typically highlights tech companies allegedly facilitating, enabling, or profiting from sexual abuse and exploitation. But this year’s list targeted Section 230. NCOSE featured 12 survivor stories it claimed portray the ways Section 230 has protected tech companies at the expense of abuse victims. The stories include examples of sex trafficking, sextortion, child pornography, and rape tied to social media platforms, dating apps, and other websites.

“It’s been increasingly confirmed in the last few years that the greatest enabler is Section 230 because it provides this massive liability shield,” said Christen Price, legal counsel for NCOSE.

Critics of Section 230 argue that was never the statute’s intended purpose.

■ **FOR MORE THAN** a half century, the Supreme Court affirmed that the First Amendment provided limited immunity to bookstores, newsstands, and other distributors of third-party content when legal claims arose from material produced by others. Courts only held companies liable when they knew or should have known the content was illegal and failed to take action. In the late 1950s, one pivotal case involved a Los Angeles bookstore owner who faced criminal charges for selling an erotic book to an undercover cop. The Supreme Court eventually ruled that penalizing the bookseller was a violation of his First Amendment rights, since he

could not be expected to know what was in every book he sold.

Then came the dial-up internet. Before Section 230, if online services took the slightest measures to moderate intermediaries, they could be held liable for the content of all posts on their bulletin boards. In 1995, Prodigy, an early online service provider, learned this the hard way. Since the company decided to exercise editorial oversight over its bulletin boards, the New York Supreme Court determined it acted as a publisher and not just a distributor of content. Therefore the company would be held liable for an anonymous user's defamatory claims about the securities investment banking firm Stratton Oakmont.

The ruling exposed a glitch. Companies like Prodigy faced a choice: take either a "hands off" approach to online content moderation that preserved their protection as distributors or act as publishers having to moderate vast amounts of content produced by their users.

That caught the attention of rookie Reps. Chris Cox and Ron Wyden as Congress worked to update the 1934 Communications Act. Cox and Wyden proposed Section 230 as a way to encourage online service providers to be "good Samaritans," blocking and screening offensive material. That is, Section 230 gave online service providers the ability to act like publishers when they screened harmful content but still be protected like distributors from the harm caused by any content they did not remove. That allowed these companies to set their own rules to govern their communities and to determine for themselves what content to block—or not.

The logic behind the statute was that the First Amendment "did not adequately protect large online platforms that processed vast amounts of online content," wrote Jeff Kosseff in his 2019 book, *The Twenty-Six Words That Created the Internet*.

As Cox and Wyden sought support for Section 230, Sen. James Exon, a Democrat from Nebraska, simultaneously stoked fear about minors accessing internet porn. In the halls of Congress,

Exon circulated a binder known as the "Blue Book." It had a warning label on the cover and included pornographic pictures Exon claimed were easily accessible online, even by children. Exon's anti-indecency bill sought to address that problem by imposing criminal penalties on internet users and service providers distributing obscene and indecent material that could be viewed by minors.

Exon's measure garnered considerably more attention than Section 230, according to Kosseff. But shortly after the Exon bill passed as part of the Communications Decency Act, the Supreme Court struck it down. In the 1997 case *Reno v. ACLU*, the court ruled the anti-indecency provisions were unconstitutional and violated the First Amendment's guarantee of free speech.

Section 230 remained intact—and Exon's blue binder proved only a small glimpse into the cesspool of dangers that would soon proliferate on the internet. Lawmakers believed that under Section 230, companies would naturally moderate content on their own. That's obviously not what happened, and no one could have imagined the implications.

"The worst fears of lawmakers who wanted those protections then have been eclipsed—the internet is much worse than they ever imagined," said Mary Graw Leary, a law professor at the Catholic University of America. "If you had said, 'We'll have Pornhub, we'll have OnlyFans ... we'll knowingly have child pornography and ... no attempts to age verify,' Congress would have said that was crazy."

The result: Social media platforms are only as safe as the public pressures them into making their sites. Rather than getting rid of Section 230, TechFreedom's Barthold described his desired outcome: "That legislators remain perpetually angry and groups and the public are always making noise, such that large social media platforms ... realize they're being closely scrutinized and it's very important they're seen acting responsibly."

Some critics of Section 230 want to add a "bad Samaritan carve-out" to ensure that an internet company knowingly promoting or facilitating criminal content or



"They have proven for far too long they cannot regulate themselves."



With a photo of her son Devin, Bridgette Norring testifies during a February Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on “The Poisoning of America.”

are the ones who should be held liable for any harmful effects of the content.” Section 230 includes an exemption for federal criminal law, so if there’s evidence platforms are knowingly allowing criminal child sexual abuse material, for example, “that really just means you need to get on federal prosecutors and police to do their jobs,” Cohn told me.

That’s hard for the parents suing Snapchat to swallow. On the Zoom call with Snap officials, Bridgette Norring of Hastings, Minn., pushed back when she says Stout suggested parents should have monitored their kids’ online activity better. “My son was 19. How do you monitor a 19-year-old?” she asked.

At the time of the Zoom meeting, Norring says, one of her late son’s alleged drug dealers was still operating on the app. At one point, she flagged several alleged dealers using Snapchat’s in-app reporting mechanism. The accounts disappeared, but then the dealers came back, using different accounts. Norring later learned that reporting her son’s alleged dealers on the app hampered a police investigation involving her son’s death. She says when Snapchat erased the dealers’ accounts and data, it made it harder for police to track them.

Snap claimed in its statement to me that it has taken measures to address problems on the app that make it unsafe for vulnerable teens. On July 17, Snap announced support for a new congressional bill named after Norring’s son, Devin, and another fentanyl poisoning victim. It would require social media companies to alert federal law enforcement when they detect illicit drug activity on their platforms. Norring is hopeful that the legislation and the lawsuit she joined against Snap force change. “They have proven for far too long they cannot regulate themselves.” ■

behavior can’t hide behind Section 230 immunity. “Fundamentally, the world we’re seeking is one where these tech companies and platforms are treated like every other industry ... accountable for actions they engage in that cause harm, and actions that are criminal,” Leary said.

■ **EVEN THE STATUTE’S** fiercest supporters acknowledge the internet is inundated with harmful content. And it’s only becoming harder to moderate. But they argue Section 230 is the wrong target—and the trade-off would stifle free speech online and dramatically alter the internet.

“Free speech is a mess, but it’s way better than the alternative,” Dave Willner, a trust and safety expert who has worked with Facebook, Airbnb, and Open AI, said on a recent episode of *Otherwise Objectionable*, a podcast aimed at defending Section 230.

The alternative, according to Ari Cohn, legal counsel for tech policy at the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, would be chaos. Without Section 230, platforms would face increased liability risks for any attempts at moderation, leading to costly and prolonged legal battles. Big Tech companies could absorb the costs. But smaller players in the internet pool, such as blogs, nonprofits, and newer social media platforms, would more likely bear the brunt of the consequences and lose their voice in society, he said.

And given the scale of social media, “it’s actually impossible to do content moderation perfectly. It’s almost impossible to do it even approaching perfection,” Cohn added.

Despite internet advancements, Cohn argues the underlying principle of Section 230 remains: “People who are responsible for creating harmful content



VOICES SHARON DIRCKX

More than our brains

Neuroscience and the Bible paint the same, complex picture of the soul

American physician Duncan MacDougall (1886-1920) is known as the man who tried to weigh the human soul. He balanced tuberculosis patients on scales in their final moments to see if anything lifted from them upon death.

According to Dr. MacDougall, they were a whole 21 grams lighter, which he took to be the weight of the soul. His results were later discounted, but the view that underlies his efforts still lives on today: that belief in the soul or anything supernatural is outdated and has been explained away scientifically.

As Harvard psychologist professor Steven Pinker put it in *How the Mind Works*, the soul is in fact the brain: “The supposedly immaterial soul, we now know, can be bisected with a knife, altered by chemicals, started or stopped by electricity, and extinguished by a sharp blow or by insufficient oxygen.”

Is Pinker right? Has neuroscience eliminated the soul—the essence of who you really are? Not at all.

This is not a new conversation recently thrust into the spotlight with the rise of neuroscience over the last few decades. The existence and nature of the soul has been discussed and debated since the ancient world. Attempts to explain it away have existed from antiquity, alongside views in support of a nonphysical and supernatural dimension.

In fact, neuroscience itself suggests that we are more than just our brains. Consider survivors of childhood hydranencephaly—water on the brain—who are missing vast quantities of brain tissue and yet function as normal human beings. Or callosotomy patients, whose brain hemispheres have been surgically disconnected to minimize epileptic seizures, and

yet splitting the brain doesn’t seem to cause splitting of the mind. Callosotomy is not without repercussions, but the person’s essential self remains intact.

Then there are thousands of accounts of near-death experiences (NDEs) from cardiac arrest survivors over the last 50 years, claiming that while their bodies were flatlining on the operating table, they themselves remained vividly conscious. In the phenomenon of terminal lucidity, some who have suffered brain injury, stroke, and advanced dementia have a dramatic and brief return to “their old self” shortly before they die. We saw something like this in my mother-in-law who on one occasion was able to pray and take part in a communion service despite having advanced dementia, confused speech, and no recollection of her children.

If we are just our brains, then as the brain irreversibly degenerates, the essential person slowly ebbs away. When the brain finally dies, that ought to be the end of consciousness. But that framework offers no hope for understanding NDEs or why a relative with irreversible brain degeneration is sitting up in bed and speaking normally. Could it be that we are really far more than just our brains? Could it be that a person’s neurobiology doesn’t drive who he really is? In states of disease, could it actually mask who he really is? Perhaps there is still room for the soul after all.

Biblical descriptions of human beings firmly support the complexity we see in neuroscience. The Platonic view of soul, the *psyche*, considered it the immaterial and immortal essence of a person that one day will escape its material confines to float off to some higher existence. However, the earlier Hebrew understanding of soul, or *nephesh*, is much more holistic: “Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature [nephesh].”

Human beings are an amalgamation of “dust,” physical matter, and “breath,” life force or spirit, and the combination of the two is a living *nephesh*, a living soul or person. Here we see the same picture being painted in both neuroscience and the Bible. People are complex and multifaceted. They are an amalgamation of the material and the immaterial, the natural and the supernatural, the temporal and the eternal.

This is why there are some observations in the clinic that make no sense if humans are just brains on sticks. It is also why we see brain activity during religious practices such as prayer and meditation. Far from being a threat to spirituality or the reality of God, brain activity is exactly what we should expect from complex but integrated beings. When we move our discussions out of the lecture hall and into the clinic, we see that people are mysterious. The soul is mysterious. We need frameworks that help us make sense of the mystery rather than flatten it. ■

—Dr. Sharon Dirckx holds a Ph.D. in brain imaging from Cambridge University and is a speaker, former neuroscientist, and author of books including *Am I Just My Brain?*

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NOTEBOOK




HEALTH

Joining the food-label scan club

Consumers turn to smartphone apps for nutrition guidance

by BEKAH MCCALLUM



Homeschooling mother of three Sophia Dastrup considers herself in the “partially crunchy” mom camp. Until recently, the Peoria, Ariz., resident added Kodiak protein pancake mix to muffins for her three kids. She viewed the mix as relatively healthy—that is, until she scanned the box with a smartphone app called Yuka, where she learned the mix had monocalcium phosphates and a lot of sodium.

Yuka scores food and cosmetics on a 100-point scale based on nutrition quality and additives and whether the product is organic. Yuka gave Kodiak Power Cakes a paltry 27.

“Some of the products that we really did think were listed as clean and safe actually had a ton of sugar that maybe wasn’t portrayed as so on the labels,” said Dastrup.

Apps like Yuka that detail problematic ingredients and offer product swap suggestions have gained popularity among Christian parents like Dastrup looking to feed their families responsibly. But health is complicated, and some nutrition experts question whether such apps oversimplify the makings of a balanced diet.

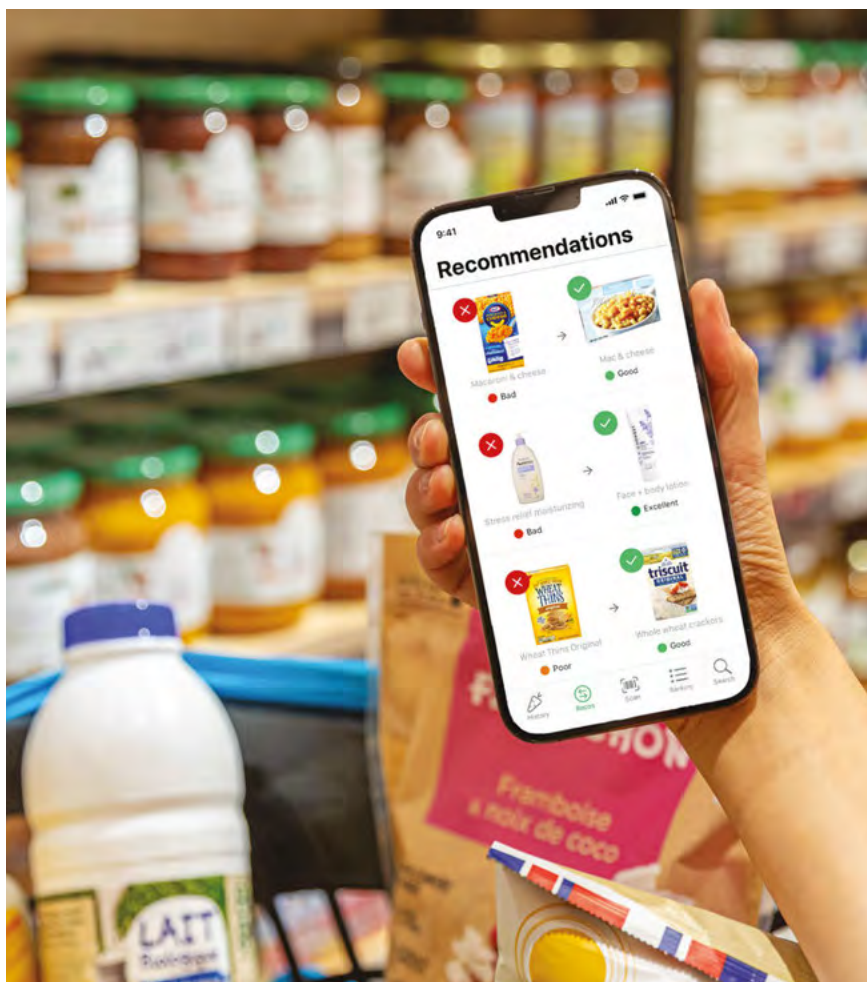
Congress first mandated nutrition labels in 1990, and the Food and Drug Administration has issued several updates to standard labels since then. Some companies voluntarily include

“Facts Up Front” icons to detail calories, saturated fats, sodium, and added sugar at a glance. The federal government may make front-of-package labels mandatory soon. In January, the FDA proposed requiring manufacturers to prominently display saturated fat, sodium, and added sugar as “Low,” “Medium,” or “High.”

According to a survey published in May by global health organization NSF, 1 in 5 U.S. consumers struggles to understand nutrition labels. Government mandates only go so far, according to David Andrews, chief science officer at the Environmental Working Group, a public health advocacy nonprofit. “Regulation is really instrumental in driving transparency,” Andrews said. “But where the apps can go a step further is by providing comparison and guidance.”

Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. seems to agree. While announcing a federal ban on eight petroleum-based food dyes in April, Kennedy told reporters, “We’re going to encourage companies that develop apps ... mothers can go in, they can scan a barcode of every product in their grocery store, and they can know what’s in it and what’s not.” (Kennedy mentioned he and his wife use Yuka.)

First launched in France in 2017, Yuka provides analysis for more than 4 million food and beauty products. More than 72 million users →



Yuka offers product swap recommendations for low-scoring items.

have installed the app. Along with giving foods a numerical score, Yuka gives “excellent” foods a green dot, “poor” ones an orange dot, and “bad” products a red dot. Companies can’t pay Yuka to improve scores.

Yuka boasts the highest number of downloads of any grocery scanning app, but other apps like Think Dirty also evaluate personal care items. The Environmental Working Group’s Healthy Living app has a database of roughly 160,000 food, cleaning, and cosmetic products. Like Yuka, Healthy Living evaluates items based on nutrition and what additives have been included. Yuka, Healthy Living, and Think Dirty all offer product swap recommendations.

Yuka’s 2024 impact report includes testimonials from four companies, including beauty brand Caudalie, that say they are cleaning up their products

“We let our kiddos know that moderation is key with all things.”

to better align with the app’s health criteria. But for the most part, “Companies don’t want to directly admit when they change away from an ingredient,” said Andrews.

Certified health coach and Delray Beach, Fla., native Illie Balaj sells non-toxic beauty products from brands like Boka and 100% Pure from an online storefront. She hasn’t checked how Yuka scores any of the brands she sells. “It’s definitely not my north star,” said Balaj.

She believes food scanning apps don’t give a full picture about what’s inside a product. For example, Yuka gives certain orange juice brands a bad rating just because of high caloric content.

If it’s a skincare product, for instance, additives like preservatives aren’t automatically bad, says Balaj. She views the better question as, “Is it serving the purpose that it needs to serve?”

Registered dietitian Kacie Barnes agrees that Yuka can promote unnecessary fears about additives and may even prompt health-conscious users to moralize foods. “I’m around other educated moms and moms who care about nutrition,” said Barnes. “It’s making them see foods as very much good or bad, and I don’t like to approach food that way, because then it starts to feel restrictive.”

Yuka has definitely encouraged Sophia Dastrup to avoid certain items. Since downloading Yuka about a year ago, she has swapped products like Annie’s boxed mac and cheese for Goodles and Celsius energy drinks for Yerba Madre. She spends more on groceries than she used to, since most of the alternatives Yuka suggests are pricier.

Still, she says she doesn’t feel pressured by the app’s guidance, and she doesn’t want to give her children that impression either. “We don’t want to be living fearfully, like, ‘Oh, we can’t eat any of this stuff. We’re all going to die,’” laughed Dastrup. “We let our kiddos know that moderation is key with all things.” ■



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IN ALL THINGS CHRIST PREMINENT

RELIGION

Censored up north

Canadian cities cancel events for U.S. worship leader

by LAUREN CANTERBERRY



Canadian officials appear intent on silencing **Sean Feucht** one concert at a time.

Feucht, a charismatic Christian worship leader from the U.S., is traveling through Canada this summer as part of his “Revive in 25” tour. But more than a half-dozen cities have canceled his event permits, citing safety concerns. In one instance, officials in Montreal issued a \$2,500 fine to a church that hosted Feucht on July 25.

Feucht called the cancellations an attack on Christian faith. The self-described speaker, missionary, and activist has founded multiple global worship and prayer movements. A vocal supporter of President Donald Trump, he has spoken out against abortion, transgender ideology, and homosexuality. (He also recently was accused of financial misconduct and “spiritual coercion” by former ministry partners. Feucht has dismissed the claims as a spiritual attack.)

In Montreal, officials opposed Feucht’s concert due to his political and social opinions. According to

Montreal Mayor Valérie Plante’s office, Feucht’s show did not align with the city’s values of “inclusion, solidarity, and respect.” The Montreal stop was originally scheduled to take place at a public outdoor venue, but the Spanish-speaking congregation Ministerios Restauración Church instead hosted the event after the city canceled the outdoor permit.

While private venues are allowed to decide who is and is not allowed to use their space, Montreal officials claim the church did not have a permit to use its venue for a show.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects the freedom of opinion and expression. But governments in Canada can deny or cancel event permits if they believe the event could include hate speech or disrupt public order.

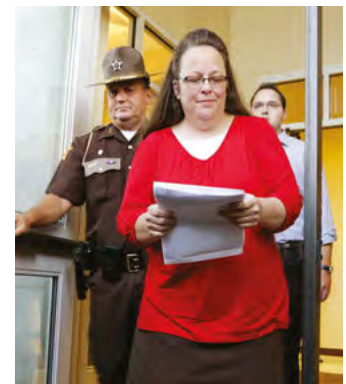
At least eight Canadian cities have canceled Feucht’s tour stops, including Halifax, Charlottetown, Quebec City, and Winnipeg. Meanwhile, the city of Saskatoon said it would allow Feucht to perform in a local park.

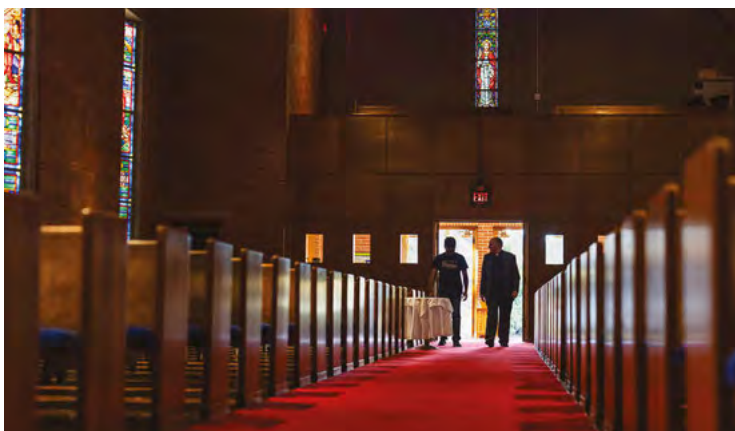
OBERGEFELL ON APPEAL

Former Kentucky county clerk **Kim Davis** on July 24 asked the U.S. Supreme Court to revisit the 2015 case that legalized same-sex marriage. Davis’ lawyers are asking the Supreme Court to overturn a judgment against Davis, but at the same time, they’re also asking the court’s conservative majority to overturn the landmark *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling itself. In a concurring opinion in the 2022 decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas had suggested the court do just that.

Just after the *Obergefell* ruling, Davis refused to sign marriage licenses for homosexual couples at the Rowan County clerk’s office because of her Christian faith. A federal judge found Davis violated two couples’ constitutional rights and ordered her to pay one couple \$100,000. She was not allowed to use a First Amendment defense in court, which her lawyers believe she is entitled to.

Meanwhile, public support for same-sex marriage has dropped from 71% in 2022 to 68% this year, according to Gallup. —L.C.





IMMIGRATION

Detained at church

Religious groups sue over new immigrant arrest policy

by ADDIE OFFEREINS



In mid-June, armed federal agents in the Los Angeles suburb of Downey allegedly waved a rifle at a pastor while arresting a man outside a church in what appeared to be an immigration raid. Elsewhere in the city, agents detained a grandfather as he dropped his granddaughter off at a Catholic school. And the next day, in Oregon, agents arrested a man outside an Episcopal church.

A coalition of 11 religious groups cited those instances and others in a July 28 lawsuit against the Trump administration. It is the third legal filing challenging a recent Immigration and Customs Enforcement policy change

that allows agents to make arrests at churches, schools, or hospitals.

Two legal advocacy groups filed the challenge in federal court on behalf of religious organizations that include the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the American Baptist Churches USA. “Churches have seen both attendance and financial giving plummet” due to the threat of “surveillance, interrogation, or arrest” of immigrant congregants, the suit claims.

The Trump administration has argued it threw out the restrictions to prevent criminals from using sensitive locations as safe havens, not to target immigrant churchgoers.

IS AN ALLIGATOR ALCATRAZ COMING TO YOUR STATE?

The Federal Emergency Management Agency announced in July it will offer \$608 million in grant money to states willing to construct migrant detention centers. The initiative will divert money from FEMA’s Shelter and Services Program, which the government launched in 2023 to assist states with managing the mass influx of migrants.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said his state has already requested FEMA money as reimbursement for maintaining the center in the Everglades known as Alligator Alcatraz. After his visit to the Florida facility, President Donald Trump said he would like to see similar centers constructed across the country.

Construction on a tent city able to house 5,000 immigrants is already underway at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas. And in Indiana, officials plan to repurpose a prison as a migrant detention center dubbed the “Speedway Slammer.” —A.O.

DEPORTATION ACCELERATION

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is on track to deport more than 300,000 immigrants this year, according to figures obtained by CBS News. That rivals ICE’s nearly 316,000 removals in 2014 under former President Barack Obama. Counting both ICE and other Department of Homeland Security branches, the Obama administration deported more than 5 million immigrants (including voluntary “returns”) over eight years. By comparison, President Donald Trump removed roughly 1.5 million immigrants from the country between 2017 and 2021, George W. Bush removed 10 million, and Bill Clinton removed 12 million. —A.O.





LAW

Land, faith, and RLUIPA

After 25 years, a bipartisan law still shields religious believers from government overreach

by KENT LUPINO



Not every church is bold enough to sue the county. Yet that's what North Carolina's Summit Church, led by former Southern Baptist Convention President J.D. Greear, did this year.

Summit wants to build a new worship facility to serve the Chapel Hill area on a parcel of land in Chatham County. Last December, the Chatham County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to deny the church's application to rezone the property. But the church has a powerful federal law in its corner: the Religious Land Use and Institution-

alized Persons Act, or RLUIPA (often pronounced *ar-LOOP-uh*).

In June, U.S. District Court Judge William Osteen Jr. ruled in favor of the church, temporarily blocking the board of commissioners from denying Summit's rezoning proposal, pending further orders from the court. The judge cited RLUIPA, stating "the public and Plaintiff have a strong interest in religious liberty, which RLUIPA protects."

RLUIPA, which turns 25 years old in September, has for a quarter-century proven its utility and resiliency in a vari-

ety of religious freedom cases, Summit's among them. In short, the law requires the government to clear a higher bar before infringing on religious freedom in particular cases involving land use or prisoners' rights. While other state and federal religious freedom laws have come under attack in recent years, RLUIPA so far is proving a reliable protection for churches, religious groups, and prisoners with religious beliefs.

ABOVE: Summit Church was able to build a new worship facility in Alamance County in 2024.

RLUIPA was one of two major pieces of religious freedom legislation that emerged out of the 1990s, unifying political rivals at a time when religious liberties appeared to be increasingly threatened. The first pivotal legal change occurred in 1990, when the U.S. Supreme Court in *Employment Division v. Smith* changed the rules for the free exercise of religion and made it easier for the government to overrule religious rights for Christians, Hindus, Native Americans, or any other religious group.

“There were very few people who knew anything about religious liberty who didn’t hate the *Smith* decision,” says Brad Jacob, a professor and associate dean at Regent University School of Law. “Virtually everybody thought it was awful—conservatives, liberals, Christians, secularists.”

Jacob and others developed a wide-ranging coalition that lobbied for better free exercise laws. Their efforts culminated in the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which sailed through Congress with Republican and Democratic support in 1993. But four years later, in response to a challenge by the city of Boerne, Texas, the Supreme Court ruled RFRA unconstitutional with respect to state and local laws, curtailing its effectiveness as a broad religious liberty shield.

Later, advocates in Congress considered a narrower bill focused on land use and prisoners’ rights. Championed by members of both parties and a wide variety of religious faiths, RLUIPA passed Congress unanimously in 2000. It was signed by President Bill Clinton.

Since then, RLUIPA has been a boon to religious groups. In 2004, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit cited the law when it ruled in favor of two Orthodox Jewish congregations that wanted to meet in a zoned business district of Surfside, Fla., that allowed private clubs and lodges but not churches and synagogues. In 2012, the 5th Circuit said the city of Holly Springs, Miss., violated RLUIPA by setting up zoning requirements that were more difficult for churches.

More recently, the San Diego City Council this March decided to allow All

“Any federal trial judge will look at this statute and say, ‘Yeah, you win, church. This is a no-brainer.’”

Peoples Church to build a new sanctuary in the Del Cerro neighborhood rather than fight an RLUIPA lawsuit.

In North Carolina, Summit Church has more than 10 campus congregations throughout the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill area. But its congregants in Chapel Hill are outgrowing their current meeting space at a local high school.

“It just puts limitations on who we can reach,” Chapel Hill Campus Pastor Eric Gravelle told me. “It makes it difficult to be in that space outside of one day a week.” He noted that the new building site is close to many congregants who live in Chatham County, in addition to the 400-plus students from the University of North Carolina who attend during the school year.

Leading up to last December’s board of commissioners vote to deny Summit its rezoning request, Chatham County also received many public comments

opposing the church, many of them blatantly anti-Christian. One called Summit’s congregants “ignorant zealots” and “high-earning homophobes.”

Chatham County Attorney Bob Hagemann declined to comment on the case, except to say the county acknowledged Judge Osteen’s order and had filed an appeal with the 4th Circuit.

RLUIPA also protects the rights of prisoners. It’s easier for the government to show a compelling interest in limiting religious rights in a prison—mainly for security reasons—yet of the handful of RLUIPA cases to reach the Supreme Court, prisoners have repeatedly prevailed. In 2015’s *Holt v. Hobbs*, the court allowed a Muslim inmate in Arkansas to grow a beard in accordance with his religious beliefs. In 2022’s *Ramirez v. Collier*, a Texas death row inmate won the right for his pastor to lay hands on him in the execution chamber.

The law is such a clear and strong statute for land use claims, however, that not a single RLUIPA land use case has reached the Supreme Court.

According to Jacob, “Any federal trial judge will look at this statute and say, ‘Yeah, you win, church. This is a no-brainer.’ And then, of course, the zoning board can choose to appeal, but probably their lawyer is going to say, ‘This is a losing path.’”

For Summit Church, that has yet to happen. But Pastor Gravelle is optimistic.

“We’re thankful for Judge Osteen and what he shared and said about having merits for this particular case, and we’re hoping that the courts will see that,” he said. In the meantime, the Chapel Hill congregation plans to keep meeting at the high school.

Gravelle also said he’s less concerned about what his church can’t control than what it can—its attitude.

“We want to take the posture of Jesus in this,” he said. “And so in the pursuit for freedom and having the right to do so, there needs to be a real posture of humility and care and love and patience in that process.” ■

—Kent Lupino is a 2025 graduate of the World Journalism Institute mid-career course

EDUCATION

Three years and a career

U.S. colleges try out three-year bachelor's degrees

by LAUREN DUNN



This fall, Johnson & Wales University kicks off an unusual option for students pursuing computer science, criminal justice, graphic design, and hospitality management bachelor's degrees. Instead of a four-year program, the school is offering students a three-year program, highlighting a national trend toward accelerated education.

Though other schools have offered three-year bachelor's degrees online, Johnson & Wales is the first to offer such

a program in person, at its Providence, R.I., campus. When announcing the programs last year, Chancellor Mim Runey said the school pursued the idea in response “to the call for action to reduce tuition costs and overall student financial burden.”

Three-year bachelor's degree programs are becoming more popular among college students eager to join the workforce, advance to further graduate-level studies, or save money on tuition. Just two years after an accreditor

approved the nation's first (online) three-year degree plans, nearly 60 schools now offer or plan to start at least one three-year program, according to Inside Higher Ed.

Schools instituting shorter degree programs often reduce requirements for electives, allowing the student to obtain a degree with fewer than 120 credits. Despite earlier fears that the model shortchanged students by offering inferior programs, accreditors have changed course. The New England Commission of Higher Education, the accrediting body for Johnson & Wales, initially rejected a 100-credit, three-year program proposal in spring 2023 before changing its policies in March 2024. It approved Johnson & Wales' programs, each with 90-96 credits, last September. Some accreditors require that schools qualify the term “bachelor's” for these degrees or call them something else entirely.

In states like Massachusetts, program proposals that receive approval from accreditors may run up against state rules requiring at least 120 credits, often due to concerns about graduate school and employer acceptance. Even supporters of the model say it's unclear how many employers will consider three-year degrees equal to traditional bachelor's degrees.

At Johnson & Wales, Chancellor Runey said the school surveyed dozens of employers that hire their graduates: “All confirmed that they would readily welcome qualified and skilled graduates from our three-year delivery model.”

SHORTAGE OF STUDENTS

Come next year, some students in St. Louis may be attending different schools. In July, St. Louis Public Schools introduced a plan to close more than half of the district's current schools. District officials blame low enrollments for the proposed closures, scheduled to take place by the 2026-27 school year, if approved by the school board. According to the district, St. Louis schools are currently operating at about half capacity, and a May tornado displaced some families, exacerbating the drop in students. The district said closing 37 of its 68 schools would save \$182 million by 2030-31. District officials expect to serve around 15,400 students this year, down from last year's 18,000. They expect enrollment to fall 30% over the next decade. —L.D.

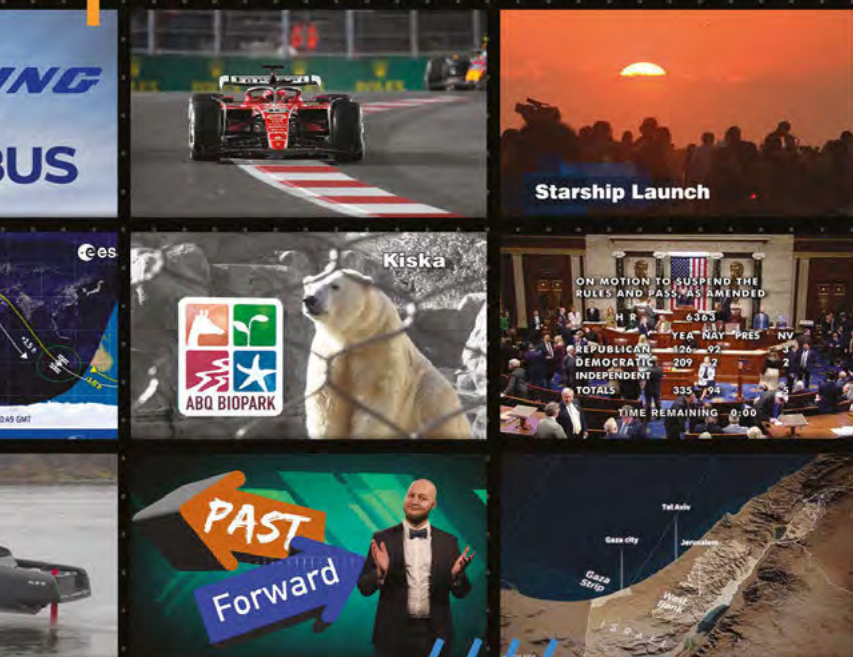




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Warning: may cause increased compassion, logical conversations, and informed prayers in kids, teens, and even adults.



CROSSWORD

Certain species of character

by PETER SILZER

Across

- 1 Out of port
- 5 Trudge along
- 9 "Because ____ so!"
- 14 Proceed along a route
- 15 Sitar player Shankar
- 16 Mongoose's prey
- 17 Like a sniper, for example
- 19 Macaroni shape
- 20 Piece of bacon
- 21 Letters signaling Broadway success
- 22 College leaders
- 23 Sportscaster Costas
- 25 Friends and relations
- 27 Undesirable events
- 32 Make an attempt
- 36 Org. hosting SEALs
- 37 Like a half-baked scheme
- 39 Queen in India
- 41 ____ culpa ("My bad")
- 42 It wasn't built in a day, they say
- 43 Like King Richard I
- 48 Rapid rotation meas.
- 49 Sneaky fella
- 50 Threat-free zone
- 52 Frankenstein's helper
- 54 Household pest
- 55 Attended
- 58 Bump ____ log
- 61 World's first 35mm camera
- 65 Popular popcorn brand
- 66 Like a mule?
- 68 Glow
- 69 Neutral shade
- 70 Luke's mentor
- 71 Company car and corner office, perhaps
- 72 Sewing machine specialty
- 73 Grades 1-5, briefly

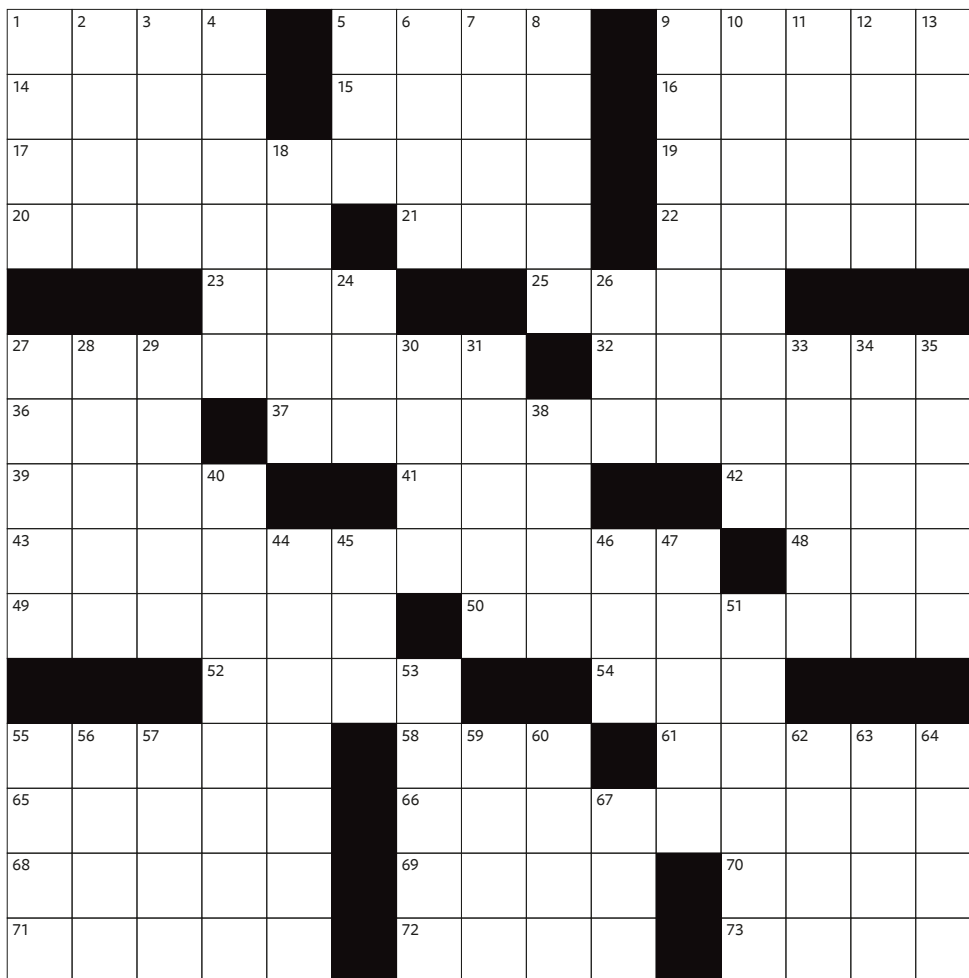
Down

- 1 Stuns
- 2 Ticket info
- 3 MIT grad, perhaps
- 4 Ignores the script
- 5 Season opener?
- 6 Big chip maker
- 7 Start of look or see
- 8 Was fairly successful
- 9 Summer refresher
- 10 One who gets it all
- 11 Aramaic father
- 12 Press agent?
- 13 Carrion crow cousins
- 18 Geological time period
- 24 Nonnative Florida resident
- 26 Neighbor of Leb. and Syr.
- 27 Folds up the ship's canvas
- 28 "The sea ____ has never yet been passed" —Paradiso

- 29 Get under the skin
- 30 Humorist Bombeck
- 31 Fortunetellers
- 33 Big name in packaged soup
- 34 Home of ASU
- 35 Port city on the Black Sea
- 38 International shoe brand
- 40 Calligrapher's supply
- 44 Immobilizes
- 45 Teamwork hindrance
- 46 Degree to which waste is avoided (abbr.)
- 47 WNBA MVP Elena ____ Donne

- 51 Seaman's assent
- 53 Lassos
- 55 A yellow jacket, say
- 56 Aspirin target
- 57 Cooking direction
- 59 "Awesome!"
- 60 Taj Mahal site
- 62 Golden calf
- 63 Surrender
- 64 He raised Cain
- 67 Run smoothly

Bonus clues and puzzle solution on page 110





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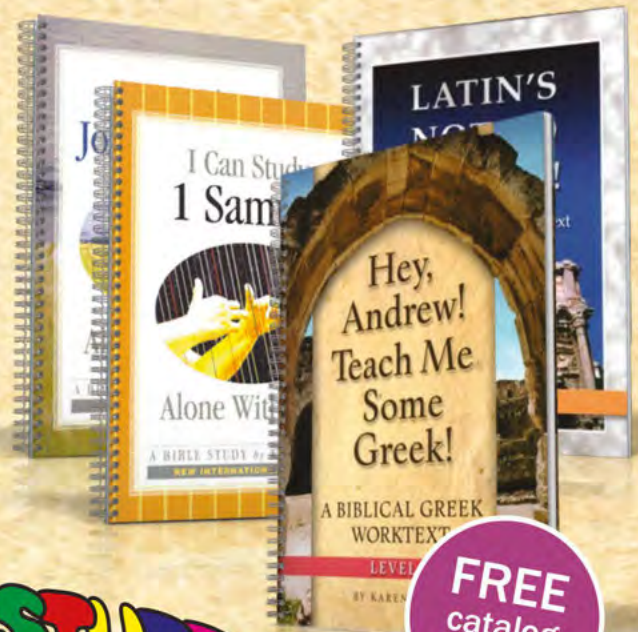
My kids love Greek.

*Even my two year old walks around the house
singing her Greek alphabet.*

Elizabeth

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

Across

- 25** ____ and kin
- 32** "Whosoever shall ____ save his life shall lose it."
- 41** Give ____ break!
- 61** Nikon and Canon rival
- 65** Middle of many plays

Down

- 2** Bicycle part
- 5** Opposite of post-
- 12** Old Monopoly token
- 29** Irritate
- 53** Climbing gear





VOICES ANDRÉE SEU PETERSON

Beautifully disguised

On learning French, Satan's wiles, and near-death experiences

I was looking to improve my French. My son suggested Duolingo, but that was like watching paint dry. "Learn French Through Stories" seemed promising but turned out to be a stealth delivery system of leftist values.

Then I stumbled on recorded interviews of people with near-death experiences. It was perfect—natural conversation full of concrete nouns and verbs, like about swimming pools, cars overtaking trucks on curvy double yellow lines, and surgeries gone wrong.

With 30,000 square feet of church building to clean and me the only cleaning lady, I figure I racked up 50 or 60 interviews of people who tasted the other world while clinically dead. The claim they all had in common was that their souls left their bodies, and they could observe their lifeless matter from somewhere hovering above it.

In the early 1970s our college professor said that consciousness is the product of the brain's neural activity. Five minutes' reflection told me that couldn't be right: Matter is matter and thought is thought, and no amount of fancy psychological jargon can paper over the yawning gap.

NDEs (near-death experiences) favor the Bible's ontology of man over my materialist college professor's, hands down, because we Christians have known all along that a human is a spirit temporarily encased in a "tent" in which we groan, "longing to put on our heavenly dwelling" (2 Corinthians 5:1-5). NDEs are also consistent with Lazarus' cadaver becoming reanimated when his spirit returns to it, and also with the story of that other Lazarus and the rich man who both die, their bodies rotting in the ground but their spirits able to converse with Abraham (Luke 16).

Not only that, but the Apostle Paul may very well be describing his own NDE, if you put 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 together with Acts 14:19-20. In a letter to the city of Corinth, where fickle converts want proof of Paul's super-apostle status, Paul resorts to sharing a strange personal experience, only because they have put him in the distasteful position of having to boast a bit:

"It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up ... into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Corinthians 12:1-4, NKJV).

Perhaps the incident occurred during Paul and Barnabas' missionary trip to Lystra (Acts 14), where antagonistic Jews from Antioch and Iconium showed up and turned the people against them. The crowd stoned Paul, dragged him outside the city, and left him for dead. What brief excursion may his spirit have experienced in those hours?

Honestly, I felt different after hearing a few dozen interviews than after hearing the first one or two, and not in a positive way.

One reason is because, although every returnee was excited to tell us about the glorious light, and the tunnel, and the heavenly welcoming committee, hardly anyone mentioned or was excited about Jesus or repentance. The final impression left on the hearer is that we're all going to be OK. (*I'm OK—You're OK* by Thomas Anthony Harris is another book we had to read in college. No mention of the need to get right with God there either.)

Here is the thing: While I do not doubt that a lot of people who drowned or had car accidents received beautiful brushes with the supernatural, one must at least consider that a percentage of these were compliments of Satan. The devil counterfeits everything: God turned Moses' staff into a snake, so the devil turned the Egyptian magicians' staffs into snakes.

Remember Jesus' warning that at the end of history many will fall under a "strong delusion, that they shall believe a lie" (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12). Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), or as your sweet old grandmother (whom many report meeting during their NDEs).

In these last days, we can avoid being taken in by "wiles" of the devil (Ephesians 6:11) only by knowing the word of God backwards and forwards (verses 14, 17). They say the best way to spot a counterfeit hundred dollar bill is to study a real hundred dollar bill.

So I use Jesus' own rule of thumb: "You will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16). Any NDE that is conspicuously absent of mention of Christ, or that gives false assurance of happily ever after without repentance and Jesus, is a bright red flag. ■



Young cadets at the military boarding school in Kyiv play with soap bubbles during the end-of-school-year graduation ball on May 23.

Still waiting for peace

Life in Ukraine goes on, despite the war

by LEIGH JONES

➔ When Will Fleeson traveled to Ukraine in February, for his second reporting trip in as many years, I hoped he might arrive in time to cover the end of the war. While that story still waits to be written, Will focused his efforts on covering the war's ongoing effect on Ukraine and its people. You can read his latest story about Russian persecution of Christians on p. 84. After he returned home, I asked him to reflect on this latest trip.

How has Ukraine changed since 2023, when you last visited? People are tired of the war. It's visible on people's faces, the sense of fatigue and exhaustion and saturation. The other, more subtle thing

is that there's been a noticeable increase in the amount of Ukrainian language spoken, versus Russian. That's a process that was evolving prior to the start of the war and has really accelerated since then. There's a sometimes reductive idea that to speak Russian is to be less than Ukrainian, or not be Ukrainian enough.

How else has the war taken its toll on the Ukrainian people?

When air raids sound, some people take shelter. Some people ignore the sirens and alerts completely. That wasn't so much the case three years ago, and certainly not when I was there two years ago. This is one of the ways that people are sick of the war: They choose to ignore what is

so disruptive. And there's obviously a danger. The signals mean there are rockets or drones or both coming your way, which could kill you. And yet, people are determined to keep on living.

What about Ukraine's churches?

Leaders say they see a lot of new faces in their churches, people who have real life-and-death questions. That opens up a way to share the gospel. You could say the war has humbled them to ask those questions, whereas before, life was more comfortable and sure. People didn't feel their need for God, or their need of a promise for better things, either in this life or the afterlife.

Does Kyiv look like a city at war?

There's a strange juxtaposition between a seemingly peaceful set of surroundings and all the trappings of war: men and women in uniform all over the city; sandbags in windows; tank traps on the corners of many streets and intersections. That said, often the sun is shining. Women walk around with flowers. People are still going to work, going to appointments, going to coffee shops.

For you, Ukraine is more than just a place in the headlines. What do you love so much about it?

It's a very young country in many ways. It was Soviet until 34 years ago. So in generational terms, you know, people my age were born as Soviet citizens, and people born shortly after that were born as independent Ukrainian citizens. So there's a real sense of motion and transition, and history in the making. The long, rolling waves of historical trends are happening now in Ukraine, in ways that are easy to see and observe and study. And it makes for very stimulating conversations and reporting material. Beyond that, the food is really great! ■



SUFFERING, COMFORT & HOPE

612 Still, My Soul, Be Still

Intro

1. Still, my soul, be still, and do not fear, though winds of
2. Still, my soul, be still, do not be moved by his-
3. Still, my soul, be still, do not let the truth be
change may rage, co- most, God is at your side, to
lights and flut- ing shad- ows, Hold on to his ways, who
learned in the be- gin- ning, Wait up- on the Lord, who

Chorus

long- er dread the fury of un- ex- pect- ed set- tle-
shield of faith a- gainst temp- ta- tion's flut- ing at- tack
hope will rise as stars ap- pear when day is dim- ing

Harp

God, you are my God, and I will trust in you and not in

Words by Martin Luther (1523); Lyrics by Keith Getty, Kristyn Getty (2015); Score by Thomas

100-200-000

SUFFERING, COMFORT & HOPE

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Harp

God, you are my God, and I will trust in you and not in

613 Mark 4:37-41

A great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the
boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern,
asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him,
"Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" And he awoke
and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And
the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. ... And they were
filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this,
that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

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