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Fatality flaw
The U.S. death rate in Iraq is indeed rising, but some comparisons are still in order

Almost two years ago, when the war in Iraq was only four months old, I noted in this space how manipulative the mainstream media had been in their portrayal of the number of American deaths. We ran that column under the headline, "It could be worse"—and provided some historical comparisons to make the point.

Surely enough, in the 700 days since then, things have indeed gotten worse in Iraq. We owe it to careful readers to update our statistics, and we are doing that on this page. We will not bury the fact that the toll in American lives has climbed from 1.4 per day when we first discussed this topic to 2.1 per day over the course of the whole Iraqi war.

You can obviously make the argument, if that is your purpose, that an increase from 1.4 to 2.1 is a ghastly 50 percent increase in the daily death rate. And statistically, of course, that is indeed the case.

Not a good analyst looks for comparisons in more than one dimension. That's why I think it's so suspect that no other reporter I can find has made the historical comparison with other U.S. wars—or with other causes of death.

For while a jump from 1.4 to 2.1 seems huge, the daily 2.1 figure remains startlingly low by historical standards. Only the Revolutionary War and the much more recent Gulf War dipped below that absolute figure—and when adjusted for the nation's population at the time of those wars (note the last two columns), the present death rate equals the lowest on record.

We also noted here a couple of years ago the importance of keeping war deaths in perspective with other causes of dying. Throughout the United States, 115 people die every single day from motor vehicle accidents. Another 37 people die every day simply from falling, and 35 more from accidental poisoning. Still 5 people more (that's seven times the current death rate in Iraq) die daily from suffocation, 10 from fire and burns, and nine from drowning. At least two dozen separate causes of death are statistically more dangerous than the war in Iraq.

Opponents of the war, of course, argue—with some merit—that comparing accidental deaths with preventable deaths is spurious. "We may not be able to stop traffic accidents," such people say, "but we can demonstrably eliminate 2.1 deaths every day just by ending the war in Iraq."

Which takes us right to the core of the issue. Somewhere in this statistical maze you also have to tally in the 3,000 Americans who died on a single day in September 2001, along with some kind of estimate as to how many more might have perished at the hands of terrorists since then if a stiff response had not been mounted. And then how do you figure in the 30 Iraqis who have been dying every single day since the war to liberate their country started 27 months ago? No one knows for sure, but almost certainly, more than 25,000 men, women, and children have been wasted by the terrorists. Fewer than a third of those have been in the military or in law enforcement; most were civilians. Such awful wantonness—of both the New York and the Baghdad variety—will only continue if the perpetrators are not restrained. In context, that makes the 2.1 figure look small indeed.

And yes, I have considered how big even 1.0 would look if it were a member of my family. My son-in-law, the father of five of my grandchildren, serves in Iraq right now—and I think about the risks several times every day. That's precisely why all of us have got to see the numbers in perspective.
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IRAQ Insurgents set off six bombs in one day on June 20 targeting Iraqi army units. One explosion killed 20 policemen, bringing to over 1,000 the number of Iraqi soldiers and police killed this year. The death toll is not slowing U.S. training of Iraqi units, nor a handover of control scheduled to begin this month (story, p. 18).

SENATE Dick Durbin should remember that all politics is local. The Democratic senator from Illinois stirred ire on both sides of the aisle with a June 14 statement that U.S. treatment of Guantanamo detainees "must have been done by Nazis, Soviets in their gulags, or some mad regime—Pol Pot or others—that had no concern for human beings." Some applauded him (see sidebar), but every state has loyal members of the armed forces, Mr. Durbin himself represents Holocaust survivors, and they were incensed with the comparison. After a week's preparation, Mr. Durbin took the Senate floor to apologize June 21. "I made references to the Nazis and Soviets and other repressive regimes," he said. "Mr. President, I've come to understand those were very unfortunate words."

HOUSE The House of Representatives on June 22 approved a constitutional amendment to ban desecration of the American flag, a measure that for the first time stands a chance of passing the Senate as well. Conservatives are divided, with some arguing the flag deserves special protection, while others say an amendment would interfere with First Amendment protections (story, p. 28).

The House declined to censure the Air Force Academy for campus evangelism after Rep. David Obey (D-Wisc.) attached an amendment to the Pentagon budget that would condemn the "coercive and abusive religious proselytizing." (See Attack formation, May 7.) That maneuver prompted Rep. John Hostetler (R-Ind.) to note, "Democrats can't help themselves when it comes to demonizing and demonizing Christians." Democrats briefly demanded that Mr. Hostetler be censured for the remark, but when it was all over, the amendment was voted down 210-198.

KKK A mixed-race jury convicted one-time Ku Klux Klansman Edgar Ray Killen on June 21 of the 1964 slayings of three civil-rights workers. The murders, which took place exactly 41 years before the conviction, galvanized the struggle for equality, spurring passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and later inspiring the Oscar-winning movie Mississippi Burning. Jurors convicted Mr. Killen, 80, of manslaughter rather than murder as the alleged ring-leader of klansmen. With each count carrying a 20-year sentence, he could still spend the rest of his life in prison.

Missouri attorney Al Johnson, a longtime researcher into the case, said he believed the verdict was fair if unprecedented. "To go out and get a conviction using testimony from a previous case," he told WORLD, "with all the testimony read into the record from transcripts of previous proceedings now nearly four decades old, and with three out four primary witnesses dead—it's a remarkable achievement."

CARD FRAUD MasterCard announced June 17 that up to 40 million credit-card accounts, including Visa, American Express, and Discover accounts, had been exposed to fraud after computer hackers stole credit information. Besides the hackers themselves, the problem arose with CardSystems Solutions, which stored cardholder information in breach of contract. The scam could affect consumers as far away as Japan and Hong Kong (story, p. 64).

CHINA Microsoft has agreed to block certain "profanities" from parts of its new internet portal in China—words such as democracy, freedom, and human rights. Beyond the wild, wild internet, China is also trying to rein in runaway growth among underground churches. Starting May 22, police raided 100 house churches in Jinlin Province and arrested 600 Christians (story, p. 24). They released most
within two days, but 100 leaders remain in custody, among them university professors.

VIETNAM Prime Minister Phan Van Khai made a White House visit June 21, the first time a Vietnamese premier has met with an American president since 1975. Topping Mr. Khai's agenda was cultivating trade ties, but hundreds of pro-democracy protesters outside the White House had a different priority: improving Vietnam's human-rights record. The same day, three Vietnamese house-church leaders submitted congressional testimony detailing abuses against Christians.

MIDEAST U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice marked her end-of-June Middle East tour chiding allies to "abandon the excuses that are made to avoid the hard work of democracy." Ms. Rice hammered home the theme in Saudi Arabia and in Egypt, where she canceled a February trip because a prominent opposition leader was jailed. Saad Hariri's anti-Syrian slate won parliamentary elections in Lebanon after four stages of voting. The win sparked waves of flag-waving, horn-honking celebrations in the country.

In Iran, an expected run-off for the presidency turned into an unsavory choice between evils: Tehran's ultra-Islamist mayor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad rose to second place against top-runner Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. Mr. Ahmadinejad's ascendency sparked off allegations of vote-rigging, newspaper shut-downs, and a scramble among reformers to support hardliner-turned-pragmatist Rafsanjani.

A WEEK AFTER ILLINOIS DEMOCRATIC SEN. DICK Durbin said on the floor of the Senate that American conduct at Guantanamo reminded him of the conduct of the Nazis, the Soviet Gulag, and Pol Pot, the Minneapolis Star Tribune's editorial writers surprised many with a full-throated defense of Sen. Durbin's remarks. The Star Tribune proclaimed that in the aftermath of Sen. Durbin's slander on the military "[t]he heat got so bad that, late in the week, Durbin apologized if his remarks had been 'misunderstood.' They weren't, and Durbin should not have apologized."

The paper said "Durbin was spot on in his assessment of Guantanamo. That's why he was so roundly attacked. He told the truth."

Columnist Mark Steyn had used a recent offering to educate Sen. Durbin and his fans that the Nazis murdered around 9 million, the Soviet gulag claimed at least 15 million, and Pol Pot's butchers 1.7 million. There have been no deaths at Gitmo. Every death at any American detention facility has been rigorously investigated, and where criminal conduct has occurred, prosecutions have followed. Sen. Durbin spent an entire week attempting to persuade Americans that Abu Ghraib defined American conduct, but the public outside of the feverish left knows better.

The Star Tribune does not. The paper threw in with the hard-core Michael Moore left with its demand on Sen. Durbin, the second-highest ranking Democrat in the Senate: "The senator should stop apologizing and keep up the criticism of the hellhole America's military has created at Guantanamo."

The vile, jihadist propaganda created by our enemies will soon find a place for the "hellhole" comment, as it already has the Durbin speech, and the Star Tribune's editorial board will have joined hands with those intent on blackening the name and deeds of the United States military. This paper is famous for its defense of Kofi Annan and the UN, about whom and it they cannot find a harsh word to say. The Star Tribune is quick to defend the crooked dealings of a corrupt international bureaucracy, and quicker to invent crimes and hellholes committed and constructed by the United States armed services.
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Hard target

Folks in Charleston, WV., swear they've been seeing something rather strange in their backyards early in the morning. "People will call in and say, 'I swear I'm not drunk or on drugs, but I just saw a kangaroo,'" explains state conservation officer Clyde Armstead. Officials cornered the animal in June, but it got away. "There was no way to catch him, it was like chasing a deer," Mr. Armstead said. "And even if we did get him, I don't know what we would have done with our bare hands. They can kick pretty hard."

Canine court

A Newton, Mass., dog received a court summons in June demanding it appear to answer charges of being walked without a leash. Steven Dean was supposed to get the summons. Instead, the court sent it to Murphy, Mr. Dean's 3-year-old Golden Retriever. Mr. Dean played along, saying, since Murphy is a dog, he couldn't actually sign the summons—so Mr. Dean signed it for him.

Bomb away

News of a missing nuclear ordnance may make for more movie plots than terrorist plots. Or perhaps, more movie plots about terrorist plots. Whatever the case, Air Force officials say there's nothing to worry about, even though they can't locate a lost nuclear bomb. Air Force search teams concluded an investigation on June 17 of waters off the coast of Georgia where a damaged B-47 jettisoned a nuke in 1958 after colliding with another plane during training exercises. The Air Force says the nuke, a Mark-15, contains an undisclosed amount of uranium, but no plutonium capsule, crucial to trigger the weapon. Officials say the bomb is probably buried under up to 40 feet of water and up to 15 feet of mud and sand.

I'll fly away

Who says there's nothing to do in Fort Payne, Ala.? A 14-year-old Rainsville boy found trouble in the sleepy northeastern Alabama town when he stole his mother's van and drove five miles to Ft. Payne's small private airport. There the boy hopped in an unlocked Cessna 152, began a taxi joyride and eventually took off. Authorities say the boy, who apparently had no flying experience, was in the air for about 30 minutes, somehow avoiding nearby Lookout Mountain and the summer camps thereon, while buzzing the town. On his second landing attempt, the boy touched down roughly and was soon arrested. The boy was charged with theft and thrown in the juvenile lockup.

Southwest flavor

A little bit of West Texas has arrived in Sri Lanka. In the wake of the devastating tsunamis that hit the Pacific island nation at the end of 2004, ecologists have discovered that prickly pear cactus and mesquite trees have begun to grow on Sri Lanka. Both plants would be commonly found in the American Southwest, but on an island off the coast of India? Scientists say that seeds floating about in the Pacific Ocean were pushed inland by walls of water that throttled the island just after Christmas. But scientists say they have no clue how the seeds got halfway around the globe.

Crash course

If John P. Renfer ever leaves the sanitation business, he might have a future in racing. Witnesses say Mr. Renfer's control of a Blue Ribbon Sanitation truck was nothing short of heroic and amazing once the massive vehicle lost its brakes. The malfunction occurred while Mr. Renfer and a passenger were driving down a steep grade outside Syracuse, N.Y. Once the brakes failed, Mr. Renfer managed to steer the runaway truck down the slope, through a construction zone, around sharp curves at 55 mph, past workers, pedestrians, and oncoming cars, before safely crashing into a hair salon. Mr. Renfer suffered only minor injuries. No one else was hurt.

Air force nuclear weapons advisor Billy Mullins points out bomb site off Tybee Island, Ga.
Extreme makeover: Batman edition

The Batman franchise receives an intensely serious, but not always successful, new look in Batman Begins. Director Christopher Nolan (the talented British director behind Memento and Insomnia) and screenwriter David S. Goyer take perhaps one step too far in their effort to ground the iconic superhero in gritty reality, but still manage to breathe new life into an ailing series.

Mr. Nolan adds his effort to a growing list of comic book–sourced films that are proving the genre to be one of the most vital and provocative in the industry. The PG-13 rated film (for intense action violence, disturbing images, and some thematic elements) is too frightening for younger kids but will provide teenagers with slightly more to think about than the typical summer blockbuster.

The film opens with millionaire heir Bruce Wayne (Christian Bale) imprisoned in some Far East jail, but during the course of the first hour goes all the way back to the very beginning—establishing young Bruce's fear of bats (he falls into a well full of them) and hate for crime (his parents are murdered by a petty thief as he looks on helplessly). Batman Begins isn't a prequel; it pretend that the four films that preceded it don't exist, starting over without the nihilism, kitschiness, or creepy sexuality of the previous films.

The pre-Batman Wayne is rescued by the mysterious Ducard (Liam Neeson), a representative of the equally mysterious Ra's Al Ghul (Ken Watanabe). Ra's leads a group of shadowy Ninja-like operatives dedicated to battling crime worldwide. Wayne receives his martial-arts training under Ducard's tutelage, a mentor equally adept at knocking his pupil down and flinging Eastern-mystical nonsense at him.

Wayne and Ducard part ways eventually, and Wayne returns to his Gotham (played by an only modestly stylized Chicago) home. With the help of loyal butler Alfred (Michael Caine) and Lucious Fox (Morgan Freeman), a tech wizard in the family business, Wayne works at establishing a new crime-fighting persona that will strike fear in the hearts of Gotham's criminal underworld.

Messrs. Nolan and Goyer are extremely faithful to the idea that Wayne's transformation into Batman can be explained through a rigorously logical progression. We see Wayne's discovery of the Bat Cave under his family estate, the evolution of his costume and the gadgets that accessorize his new wardrobe, his selection of the Hummer-like Batmobile ("Does it come in black?" he asks Lucious).

The approach shows both a refreshing commitment to the material and a respect for the intelligence of the audience—as opposed to the typical summerfare assumption that the fast and furious easily distracts drooling audiences from problems with logic and continuity. The film cleverly succeeds in explaining the practical aspects of the bat-man, namely, as did the recent Spider-Man films, showing the hero sometimes unsuccessfully growing into his new role.

Batman Begins is somewhat less successful in explaining the psychology of Wayne/Batman. The basic foundation is there—Wayne channels the anger of his parents' death into his role as the Dark Knight. But to the film's credit, a lot more is going on. Mr. Nolan alludes to, but doesn't completely flesh out, a few key internal conflicts that define Batman; he sets up a potentially interesting contrast between Wayne and Ducard. But Batman Begins suffers from its ambitions; committed to explaining so much, there's little time to develop the wealth of interesting supporting characters. A top-notch cast that includes Gary Oldman, Cillian Murphy, Tom Wilkinson, and Rutger Hauer is an embarrassment of riches of which the film is unable to take full advantage.

Despite some structural weaknesses, Batman Begins' solemn take on super-heroism is a welcome overhaul. The world found in comic books is offering filmmakers not just an escape from the constraints of physical realities, but a retreat from a world awash in moral relativism. The genre allows for bold contrasts between good and evil, right and wrong. There is an implicit understanding that heroes need a special sense of purpose, something outside of themselves, to exist. That sense of "calling" is available to men in masks and capes, even if it rarely shows up in films about the rest of us. —Andrew Coffin
Empire strikes out

THE HISTORY OF ROME HAS ALWAYS been a rich source of instruction, example, and warning. Rome once was a republic, a model of representative government and the rule of law, until the rise to power of Julius Caesar. Patriotic senators assassinated him, but then rival strongmen and civil war tore Rome apart. When the dust settled, Caesar's nephew Octavius was left standing, turning himself into the divinized emperor Caesar Augustus and turning Rome into an empire.

Shakespeare turned the historical details into great art in Julius Caesar and its strangely neglected sequel Antony and Cleopatra. Now ABC is taking on the subject in Empire, a five-part miniseries (Tuesdays, 9:00 p.m. ET, June 28-July 26) that is a total rewrite of history.

In Empire, Julius Caesar is a socialist who wants to redistribute Rome's land and wealth to the people. The evil, capitalistic members of the Senate assassinate him before he can implement the new law. His young nephew Octavius leads the people in rising up against the corrupt system. This, of course, is the Hollywood left's version of political virtue, but—while it unwittingly illustrates how socialists favor dictators and oppose freedom—it has nothing to do with Roman history. Shakespeare too, being a monarchist, was pro-Caesar, but he recognized the Republican virtues, hailing Brutus as the "noblest Roman of them all."

Empire replaces history with Hollywood clichés: The main character is a gladiator. Caesar is killed because his gladiator bodyguard was lured away, and the gladiator's heroics make Octavius emperor. The writers also work in a vestal-virgin-in-love subplot and a sexual orgy.

Strangely, the writers ignore the real story of Octavius' victory over Antony, which would seem to be made for Hollywood. The truth is stranger, more interesting, and more entertaining than this fiction. That the fiction pretends to be truth is the most unkindest cut of all. —Gene Edward Veith
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### BESTSELLING CDS

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<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Weeks on Chart</th>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Worldview</th>
<th>Overall Quality</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Shadows Are Security</td>
<td>Asl Lay Dying</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jackhammer metal.</td>
<td>&quot;Your love has set me free / as You've awakened every star / that has been sleeping / in the constellation of my soul. / How could I go back / to live amongst the dead?&quot;</td>
<td><strong>OVERALL QUALITY</strong> No: his best, not his worst, no sign of being his last.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Another Day On Earth</td>
<td>Brian Eno</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Spacily electronic dreamscapes for late-night male and female voice.</td>
<td>Slow and eerie wins the race.</td>
<td><strong>OVERALL QUALITY</strong> Avoids the oversubtlety of so much &quot;ambient&quot; music by imagining and matching the genre's necessarily minimalistic elements, by incorporating echoes of Mr. Eno's famous 70s collaborations with David Bowie and Roxy Music, and by not being too uptight for sheer beauty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Blame The Vain</td>
<td>Dwight Yoakam</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Roadhouse boogie, honky-tonk weepers.</td>
<td>Casual cursing (&quot;Intentional Heartache&quot;), stylishly suggestive inner-booklet photos.</td>
<td><strong>OVERALL QUALITY</strong> Would be (merely) obnoxious if not for the bounce in the rhythms and the fun in the chords.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The Woods</td>
<td>Sleater-Kinsey</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Garage punk as volatile vehicle for female self-expression.</td>
<td>Obscenity (&quot;Entertain&quot;), lesbian double-entendres (&quot;Rollercoaster,&quot; &quot;Let's Call It Love&quot;).</td>
<td><strong>OVERALL QUALITY</strong> The dropping of Ralph Reed's name notwithstanding (&quot;Merchants of Soul&quot;), the album's intent would appear to reside less in its inconsequential lyrics than in its inner and outer cover photos, in which Little Red Riding Hood's hood resembles a turban and the wolf blood on her finger the purple ink of Iraqi voters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Gimme Fiction</td>
<td>Spoon</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Melodic, mid-tempo college rock with a few jagged edges.</td>
<td>Reality is the new fiction, they say. / Truth is truer these days. Truth is manufactured. / If you're here 'cause you want to be entertained, / please go away.</td>
<td><strong>OVERALL QUALITY</strong> Pleasant, fleeting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**In the spotlight**

Friday Morning Quarterback (fmqb.com) categorizes the five albums above as "submodern/independent," yet none of them deserve the description as much as Columbia/Legacy's three-disc You Ain't Talkin' to Me: Charlie Poole and the Roots of Country Music. Recorded between 1902 and 1940 and packaged in a cardboard cigar box, these 72 songs chronicle the role of that most submodern and independent of instruments—the banjo—in what would eventually be called "country" music. The tale's tragic hero (he drank himself to death at 39) is the singing North Carolina banjoist Charlie Poole, whose entire recorded output is documented here, supplemented by recordings of musicians who influenced him or vice versa. Rural realists all, they were politically incorrect before political incorrectness was cool. Thus while their banjo-playing has proved influential, it's their wry humor ("I'm the Man That Rode the Mule 'Round the World," "The Man That Wrote Home Sweet Home Never Was a Married Man") that makes them enduring. 

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**THE BUZZ**

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**QUOTABLES & 'TOONS**

“I look forward to death. I look forward to seeing God face to face.”
- Evangelist **BILLY GRAHAM** during a news conference ahead of what may be his last crusade, in New York, scheduled to begin June 24.

“He wasn’t the granddad we wanted.”
- **DAGMAR ARVIA** of Bergamo, Italy, after the Riva family’s “adopted” grandfather, Giorgio Angelozzi, 80, skipped town, leaving behind $2,860 in dental bills and bounced checks. Mr. Angelozzi’s plea to join a family in a classified ad made international headlines last year, and the Rivas decided to take him in.

“Everyone was cheering me on so I kept thinking I mustn’t fall over.”
- **KOZO HARAGUCHI**, 95, on what he was thinking as he set a new 100 meters world record for the 95-99 age group on June 19 in Miyazaki, Japan. His time of 22.04 seconds beat the previous record of 24.01 seconds.

“We should be shunning those people.”
- Atheist filmmaker **BRIAN FLEMMING**, whose new documentary _The God Who Wasn’t There_ has opened in five states, on Christians who speak up about their beliefs.
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MC:ELEMWM05
Marathon men

IRAQ: Military handovers begin next month—and Iraq’s new army still has a long way to go | by Edward Lee Pitts at Camp Caldwell, Iraq

A SQUAD OF IRAQI ARMY soldiers searched from hut to house last month in a small village south of Balad Ruz and east of Baghdad, weaving among the palm tree groves and the yards where metal bed frames sat covered in clumps of freshly shorn wool. Nearly invisible in their midst, a solitary U.S. sergeant eyed every movement.

The silent observer stayed clear of the action, save for quick corrections when he spotted an Iraqi army soldier striding through the village without his AK-47 trigger on safe; and when the patrol failed to cover its own rear. Only once did he directly interfere in a search, entering a home after hearing yells from an upset Iraqi woman.

In the distance, a convoy of U.S. armored humvees, loaded with more U.S. troops, sealed off the area under Iraqi search and prepared to strike if insurgents attacked. But this day’s mission ended with no bigger adversary than the angry, black-robed female who brandished a stick while chasing the men out of her house.

In recent weeks Iraqi army platoons leading U.S. troops on patrol has become a common sight throughout Iraq. The success of an independent Iraq hinges on the ability of the country’s new army, so the U.S.-led coalition forces have stepped up military training. Since April small military transition teams—each made up of about seven U.S. soldiers—have embedded themselves into Iraqi army units. Acting as coaches, these Americans are preparing the Iraqi soldiers to take control of their own destiny.

The preparation takes on new urgency as the Iraqi army is scheduled to be capable of conducting independent operations by the end of next month. Throughout July, area U.S. units are set to officially transfer military authority over certain sectors to the Iraqis, leaving the U.S. forces as backup.

“We are stepping back, letting them make their own decisions and letting them fall,” said Spc. Wayne Schumacher, one of the trainers in Diyala Province. “But we will be there to pick them back up just like when you are teaching a child to walk.”

MIRRORING THE U.S. ARMY PROTOCOL, U.S. officers teach Iraqi commanders while U.S. enlistees instruct Iraq’s lower ranks in what U.S. troops call the meat and potatoes of any army—how to shoot, how to move, and how to communicate. “We’re not saying they have to be like us,” said U.S. Army Lt. David Andrews, who oversees one team. “We are just giving them suggestions on ways to operate their army.”

The majority of U.S. soldiers here agree this process is going to take time. Many believe the Iraqis will need help long after most U.S. regiments currently stationed in Iraq return home later this year.

“You can’t get years of proper training in a few weeks,” said Pvt. 1st Class Clay Rader, who is training a unit of 200 Iraqis; only 30, he says, have been soldiers for longer than two months.

Their four-week basic training regimen has become a crash course: Soldiers learn about rank, basic marksmanship, how to clean and assemble their weapons. In that time, U.S. soldiers say, it is impossible to learn the complex tactics involved in searches, raids, firefight, convoy escorts, base security, and roadblocks.

Lt. Andrews said that to develop the mindset of an effective fighting force, the Iraqis can’t stop training after learning the basics. Yet many want to. “We in the American army train over and over on the same things,” he tells the unit, using classroom PowerPoint slides in Arabic. “Basic training is over for us on the last day of our 20th year when we retire.”

THE TRANSITION FROM U.S. TO IRAQI military control is taking place against a backdrop where insurgents more and more focus their attacks on the Iraqi security forces. Over 1,100 Iraqi police and military personnel have been killed this year in insurgent attacks, over 500 of those since the Shiite-led government was announced April 28.

The Iraqi army and police have become the fulcrum in an information battle between the U.S.-led coalition forces and the insurgents for the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people, according to Lt. Col. Darrell Darnush. “Insurgents are trying to say, ‘the Iraqi army and police cannot protect you,’” said Lt. Col. Darnush. U.S. strategy, he said, is to drive a wedge between the insurgents and the civilians, using the Iraqi security forces. “The people have to feel secure by their local leadership,” he said.

Putting an Iraqi face on the military presence also includes having Iraqi soldiers—not the Americans—hand out donated charity.

But newly formed Iraqi units at the Kirkush Military Training Base surrounding Camp Caldwell received a baptism by fire in April when insurgents ambushed an Iraqi patrol looking for weapons caches south of Balad Ruz. For hours the attackers in fixed defensive positions fired rocket-propelled grenades, hurled hand grenades, and unloaded their AK-47s at the Iraqi force and its small contingent of U.S. troop observers. The daylong firefight left two U.S. soldiers, two Iraqi soldiers, and an estimated 17 insurgents dead, even after U.S. forces called in air support. Of the 90 Iraqi troops involved in the combat, 30 were new soldiers.

Two-thirds were veterans who had fought in Fallujah with other units, according to U.S. Army Lt. Col. Chuck Tipton.

U.S. soldiers returned from the battle with mixed reports on the Iraqi fighters.
Some praised the unit’s efforts while others reported that the Iraqi troops fled at critical moments. Iraqi army Pfc. Ahmad Kneb, 19, said a few of the troops in his company quit the army after the battle but most, like him, became more angry at the insurgency after the incident.

Unlike the U.S. Army, Iraqi soldiers leave their army at will, so far with little repercussions. Gate guards at Camp Caldwell report seeing Iraqi soldiers arrive at the main gate, slip off their uniforms, revealing civilian clothes underneath, and walk to a nearby taxi stand to head home.

Fear factor for new Iraqi recruits increases in a real-world environment—what their U.S. observers and coaches call a “two-way firing range” —where the enemy shoots back, and with live ammo. Soldiers learn how to set up roadblocks in the morning, do it for real on the streets later in the day, and by that afternoon face the real threat of car bombs. “It’s like trying to teach someone to be a cop in a bad neighborhood,” said Spc. Trenton Sipes.

The new Iraqi Army is a mix of young and old. It includes veterans of the former army along with green troops who, just weeks before, were shepherds or farmers. U.S. instructors say they spend as much time undoing the bad habits of the army as they do teaching the rookie troops from scratch. U.S. instructors also want to focus on building a corps of Iraqi noncommissioned officers, mainly sergeants, which they say should form the backbone of any army but was missing in the Saddam Hussein-led force.

When asked why they join, most talk at first about helping their country by fighting the terrorists. Maj. Ghaleb Zayad, 32, from Baghdad said he is more proud to serve now than he was during a decade in the Republican Guard, the former regime’s elite troops. “The old army, they didn’t help Iraqis,” he said through a translator. “But this army is for the people.”

Despite this patriotic fervor it doesn’t take long for the Iraqi soldier to start talking about the money. Pfc. Kneb, who has been a soldier for about five months, said he makes the equivalent of about $350-$400 a month as a soldier. The average Iraqi civilian makes about $150 a month. Before he joined the army Pfc. Kneb didn’t own anything, he said. But now he is saving up to buy a truck and to get married. “I make too much money to quit,” he said.

Most Iraqi soldiers publicly praise the training they are receiving from the Americans. Their biggest complaint so far: lack of equipment. What they do have, the soldiers say, is old and frequently malfunctions. At a recent target-practice session several Iraqis had to share AK-47s because there were not enough to
“All the bad guys have to be is polite and they will let them go,” said Sgt. Pendleton.

U.S. trainers say they must work against numerous cultural roadblocks in remaking the Iraqi army into the U.S. Army’s image. Iraqi soldiers tend to be reactive, waiting for the fight to come to them, rather than proactively rooting out the insurgents—a lack of initiative developed through years living under extreme government and military domination.

“They will wait for that phone to ring and for the caller to say, ‘Ali Baba, a thief, is in my house,’ and then they all jump into the back of a truck like the Dukes of Hazard and go,” Lt. Andrews said.

Afternoons of inactivity, spurred by the 140-degree heat, are another problem. But the biggest barrier, according to the U.S. instructors, is the language differences. Many common military words in English simply do not have Arabic equivalents. Pointing to the ground and demanding push-ups, say instructors, is sometimes the best way to communicate that the Iraqis are doing something wrong.

Much as it did for race in America, Lt. Col. Tipton said the ethnic mix of the Iraqi army is helping to desegregate this long divided country. Kurds and Arabs are marching side by side and learning to discount many of the myths they were taught about one another. “Once they go out and get into a couple of firefight together, all of a sudden they are all friends,” said Lt. Col. Tipton.

Other instructors report that in the beginning Kurdish soldiers manning roadblocks would stop cars with Arab drivers, while Arab soldiers detained only Kurdish vehicles. Now Kurds and Arab troops run roadblocks together.

More than two months into full-time training, U.S. soldiers cling to a cautious optimism about the Iraqis’ progress. They realize a fully trained Iraqi army offers the U.S. military its best chance of making its own future deployments smaller and smaller.

“My main driving force is to train them so I can get home,” said Sgt. Barrett Vaughn, 24.

But this hope is always tempered with the acknowledgment that a long road lies ahead. “This is definitely a marathon,” said Lt. Col. Tipton, who also trained soldiers in Afghanistan. “You can’t take a short-term approach to any of this.”

—Edward Lee Pitts is military affairs correspondent for the Chattanooga Times Free Press
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Freedom to conform

CHINA: Chinese leaders say a new law protects religious liberty, but unregistered house churches seem to be facing repression as usual | by Priya Abraham

Along the Road to New Freedom, Chinese house-church Christians in northeastern Jilin Province have collided with a communist regime that may still be talking in doublespeak. Government officials proclaimed new freedom for China's religious believers in March, with an unprecedented law that granted rights to religious adherents—even underground house-church worshippers—if they conformed to certain registration requirements. But 600 Christians saw little of that new liberty when police rounded them up and ferried them to detention centers in May.

According to the Texas-based China Aid Association, the sweep against approximately 100 house churches began May 22, on a Sunday morning when authorities knew Christians would congregate for worship.

The raids continued over the next week, targeting homes in Jilin's provincial capital, Changchun. Officials released most of those arrested within two days after detaining and questioning them, but about 100 remain in custody—among them local university professors.

Christian influences are strong in Jilin, a province that borders North Korea, where a large group of Korean émigrés have churches. The professors were known to conduct secret Bible study groups, and several university students were also in the group taken into custody. What grabbed the authorities' attention, explained China Aid President Bob Fu, was their bold advertisement of faith. "These university students were actively engaging in evangelism, outreaching to the campus," he said. "They were found distributing gospel tracts."

By the end of June, Mr. Fu was still trying to scavenge information about where authorities were holding the remaining Changchun Christians, and how authorities were treating them. Mr. Fu, a former house-church leader himself, had to flee to the United States in 1996. He maintains a reliable network of contacts among house churches and even some connections to the Communist Party, though the Chinese government attempts to stymie his advocacy efforts.

The latest raid, Mr. Fu said, boils down to China's implementing the March 1 law, called the Provisions on Religious Affairs. "There's a national campaign to carry out..."
Major arrests of Christians

April 2004: 100 Christians in Heilongjiang arrested.

June 2004: 100 members of the 5-million-strong China Gospel Fellowship arrested in Hunan Province. A woman in Guizhou tortured to death in police custody after distributing Bibles.

July 2004: 100 Christians arrested in Xinjiang Province.


April 2005: A bishop and two priests arrested.

May 2005: 600 house-church Christians in Jilin arrested in a raid on about 100 churches. Near the end of June, about 100 remained in custody.

SOURCES: CHINA AID ASSOCIATION, U.S. COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Religious Affairs Bureau. “They are the ones who arbitrarily define who is legal and illegal,” Mr. Fu said.

Many underground groups fear to register in that climate and now are beginning to feel the heat for not registering. Among the 600 Jilin Christians taken into custody was 58-year-old Zhao Dianru, a leader of some 18 Changchun house churches. Authorities recently asked Mr. Zhao three times to join the state-sanctioned church, but he refused. About a dozen police and security officers raided his home. They confiscated 20 boxes of Christian books, according to China Aid, but released him on June 6.

Another house church in Shanxi Province faced a similar raid on May 13 during a theological training session for 30 of its leaders. Officials arrested the host pastor, Zhang Guangmin, and released him after 15 days but kept another elder until mid-June. Both leaders refused to join the government’s Three-Self Patriotic Movement, the official Protestant church.

“Already the Department of National Security and these agencies have started meetings negotiating with house-church groups, encouraging them to register,” Mr. Fu said. The officials invite Christians for quiet chats over coffee and offer assurances, such as, “We want to make sure there’s no illegal activity—we want to protect you. Be careful of what you write and what you say.” But now, groups who refuse the “protection” of the March law stand to be prosecuted under it.

What remains unknown is how China will apply the law across different locales. Prohibitions against unregistered churches have always been enforced region by region, with some provinces enjoying greater freedom than others. In all, an estimated 30 million Protestants and 3 million Catholics are believed members of unofficial house churches.

“The regulations seem to imply much less space for house churches,” said Mickey Spiegel, a senior researcher on Asia at Human Rights Watch. Still, they are “very, very loose. They’re almost impossible to interpret.”

But has a fresh crackdown begun this year? Ms. Spiegel said it is hard to identify a trend among scattered reports of raids and arrests. About the only certainty is that state repression has not eased—“not by any stretch of the imagination.” For underground Christians, these early portents are troubling.
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Red tide
Up and down the New England coast, shellfish beds have been closed. An outbreak of red tide—the worst in more than 30 years—began in early May. The toxic algae bloom will fade but its effects may linger in the shellfish, restaurant, and tourism industries of Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts.

The culprit
Alexandrium fundyense—a microscopic, single-cell plant. Like plants on land, it needs sunlight. With good water conditions and the right nutrients, this algae will bloom quickly—each cell multiplying by millions in a few weeks. Red tide gets its name from the pigment in the algae, which can turn water murky red.

Anatomy of a bivalve
Filter-feeders, like this clam, strain nutrients (and toxins) from sea water.

Life cycle of Alexandrium
1. Alexandrium cyst lies dormant in sediment on ocean floor.
2. Cyst germinates, "hatches" with warmer temperature and more light.
3. Single swimming cells each divide, then new cells divide, and so on.
4. Growth stops due to lack of nutrients, gametes form.
5. Gametes fuse, form a single cell zygote, sink to ocean floor.
6. Becomes a cyst, goes dormant, capable of germinating again.

RED MENACE
SCIENCE: Algae bloom takes the bloom off summertime rituals | by Mindy Belz

W
hat's the Fourth of July without fireworks, sweet corn, something hot off the grill, and—if you live in New England—a clam bake by the sea?

New Englanders need a backup plan for their quintessential rite as the height of summer draws nigh. Shellfish beds from Maine to Massachusetts—representing over a third of the nation's clam harvest—are closed due to one of the worst outbreaks in years of red tide, an algae bloom that is toxic to humans and absorbed by some shellfish.

The unusually heavy algae outbreak closed clam flats in northern Massachusetts starting in May, and many shellfish workers expect beds to be closed until September. While many fishermen remember the last severe red tide outbreak 12 years ago, or another historic influx in 1972, oceanographers say it has never traveled so far south or stayed so long. Shellfish beds in Nantucket Sound off Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket have never been closed before.

Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney declared an emergency last month, allowing shellfish farmers—who say they are losing as much as $600,000 a week—to seek federal disaster aid.

Red tide, or Alexandrium fundyense, thrives in fresh water that washes into the ocean. Normally its natural enemy is zooplankton, but—in a process biologists say is like chemical warfare—the algae fights off the plankton by releasing its own toxins. Heavy rains this spring over the Atlantic are blamed for launching this cycle of vengeance.

Shellfish including clams, mussels, oysters, and some scallops retain the algae's toxin. (The fish aren't harmed, yet the toxin can be deadly to humans or wildlife if eaten.) Lobsters, crabs, shrimp, and finfish are safe, according to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

Health officials—and tourism operators—are worried about half-baked publicity. Northeastern restaurants serving the beloved fried clam are importing their bivalves from Canada or Maryland, yet visitors may wonder. Red tide-infested waters are safe for swimming, but tourists may decide that affected waters—and canceled clam bakes—are reasons to stay away.

Shellfish harvesters, meanwhile, are no fair-weather farmers. "No one made me go into this profession. I knew it would be feast or famine," 40-year-old John Grundstrom, a fourth-generation clammer, told The Boston Globe. He's seen red tide before, and bad weather, and predators, and other plagues on what is at best a cyclical profession. He's painting houses until the clam beds open again.
Blaze of Old Glory

**POLITICS:** Showdown nears over how best to preserve the flag | by Jamie Dean

When Beverly Crissman reported for work at the American Legion Post in Sturgis, Mich., on June 13—the day before Flag Day—she noticed something odd: Two American flags usually flying out front were missing. Later that morning, a co-worker discovered the charred remains of the flags on the east side of the building. The banners had been torn down and burned the night before.

Mary Justis of the national office of the American Legion, the nation’s largest veterans organization, told WORLD that though the Michigan incident isn’t common, it is emblematic of the need to protect the American flag. The Legion is one of dozens of groups lobbying Congress to pass a constitutional amendment banning the desecration of the U.S. flag, a measure that the House approved on June 22 and that the Senate plans to consider after its July 4 recess.

Congress has voted on a flag-desecration amendment six times since 1989, the year the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a Texas law banning the practice. The measure has passed the House each time, but has always died in the Senate. Amendment supporters believe the tide could turn their way this year, citing an expanded Republican Senate majority and the support of at least five Democratic co-sponsors. Liberal groups like the ACLU and People for the American Way are using their weight to oppose the amendment, but opposition isn’t coming only from the left. Some conservatives say the amendment is unnecessary and could even be harmful.

Jesse Benton of the American Conservative Union (ACU), the nation’s oldest conservative lobbying organization, said the ACU is sympathetic toward amendment supporters: “We think burning the flag is a bad thing.” But the ACU does not support the amendment, Mr. Benton says, because the measure is unnecessary given the rarity of reported flag-desecration instances. The Citizens Flag Alliance—an outgrowth of the American Legion and one of the leading proponents of the amendment—has reported five such incidents in the past year.

Roger Pilon, director of the Center for Constitutional Studies at the Cato Institute, agrees the amendment is unnecessary, but is even more concerned that “this amendment would amend the First Amendment.” Mr. Pilon argues that while he does not defend flag desecration, the fundamental principle of free speech is at stake. “The right to free speech isn’t a right to enjoy only popular speech,” he said. “In fact, it’s especially the right to enjoy unpopular speech.”

The American Legion’s Mr. Justis isn’t swayed by his critics. On the charge that the amendment would harm the right to free speech, he said: “I don’t think any veteran would say they fought overseas so that the flag could be burned on the streets of America.” On the charge that flag desecration is relatively rare and the amendment is unnecessary, Mr. Justis says it’s not about the number of incidents: “If it’s wrong to burn a thousand flags, it’s wrong to burn one flag.”

If the legislation passes the Senate, it will head to the states for ratification. Though some political analysts think the amendment would breeze through the ratification process, Mr. Pilon isn’t so sure. “It would only take 13 states to block the amendment,” he said. “I wouldn’t be surprised if that happened.”

Public sentiment regarding the amendment is difficult to gauge. The American Legion released a study on June 20 that said 75 percent of Americans support a flag-desecration amendment. The Freedom Forum First Amendment Center released a study one week earlier that said 61 percent of Americans oppose an amendment.

The upcoming congressional vote comes some 228 years after the Continental Congress approved the first official national flag, with its 13 stars and 13 stripes, and nearly 191 years after the banner inspired Francis Scott Key to write one of the most important poems in American history. After witnessing the British invasion of Fort McHenry in the Baltimore harbor, Mr. Key gazed at the embattled fort through his telescope and was struck to see that “our flag was still there.”
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Breakfast with Bush

RELIGION: The president makes the prayer breakfast rounds, the pope discusses unity with liberal Protestants, and other religion news
by Edward E. Plowman

President Bush is becoming a fixture at prayer breakfasts in Washington. In recent weeks, he has spoken at three of them: a National Day of Prayer at the White House (a slimmed-down version of the main one that attracts thousands each February at the Washington Hilton), the second annual National Catholic Prayer Breakfast in May, and the fourth annual National Hispanic Prayer Breakfast last month.

"America was founded on los valores de fe y familia" (the values of faith and family), he declared at the Hispanic breakfast, prompting thunderous applause and shouts of "Yes" and "Amen" from hundreds at an auditorium. "Religion and morality were the cornerstones of this country and great democracy."

The Hispanic event was founded in 2002 by Rev. Luis Cortes, head of Philadelphia-based Esperanza (Hope) USA. The evangelical social-service agency has received millions of dollars in federal grants, thanks in part to the Bush administration’s emphasis on faith-based initiatives.

At the Catholic prayer breakfast, organizers said they invited President Bush to speak because he "holds Catholic positions against gay marriage, abortion, and stem-cell research." Indeed, Mr. Bush praised "the Catholic contribution to American freedom" and repeated his support for "a culture of life" that rejects abortion and euthanasia.

The event attracted 1,600 people, including 14 members of Congress.

Not everyone was pleased. A spokesman for Americans United for Separation of Church and State dismissed prayer breakfasts as little more than lobbying efforts that allow conservative politicians and religious groups to cater to each other. But Esperanza leader Danny Cortes insisted it is all about values, not politics.

Equal status proposal

When Pope Benedict XVI was still Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the Vatican’s chief doctrinal watchdog, he issued an official document in 2000 that shocked many Protestant leaders. It said that other Christian faiths, excluding the Orthodox churches, "suffer from defects" and therefore are "ecclesial communities" and not "churches in the proper sense." Only Catholics are assured of salvation, it said.

But since his election in April, the new pope seems intent on mending the ecumenical fences. In mid-June, he met with leaders of the World Council of Churches, an alliance of 330 Orthodox and Protestant communions. The Vatican has had formal contacts with the WCC since 1965. He told the WCC delegation that the Catholic Church’s commitment "to the search for Christian unity is irreversible."

WCC general secretary Samuel Kobia suggested the pope consider three areas for further Vatican-WCC cooperation: spirituality, teaching ecumenism to young people, and dialogue on the "fundamental" issue of whether Christian churches can "recognize each other’s baptism as well as their ability or inability to recognize one another as churches."

"Mutual recognition of churches as churches [is] very important," Rev. Kobia told reporters afterward.

Site under construction

Organizers decided last month to postpone the public launch of Christian Churches Together (CCT), a broad new ecumenical organization spawned by leaders of the National Council of Churches (NCC) several years ago. Its debut was set for September at the National Cathedral in Washington. Wes Granberg-Michaelson, chair of CCT’s steering committee and head of the Reformed Church in America, indicated the delay would give some prospective members time to make up their minds. So far, he said, 31 denominations and parachurch
groups have formally decided to be part of CCT, including the U.S. Catholic bishops.

More than half of the 36 NCC member denominations have agreed to join, but some predominantly black ones have not. They cite the presence of conservative groups, unnecessary overlap between the NCC and CCT that could compete with or threaten the NCC's existence, and other factors. For example, Bishop McKinley Young of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, which has voted not to join, told reporters that the involvement of conservatives would diminish CCT's "capacity to be responsive on the issues of peace and justice."

Indeed, as envisioned, CCT will seek to be more inclusive by not issuing so many controversial statements on social and political issues, for which the NCC has been known. That's because CCT will be organized into five church "families"—Catholic, Orthodox, mainline Protestant, racial/ethnic, and evangelical/Pentecostal—and will take official action only when all five families are largely in agreement. CCT is "more a place to be together than to act together," NCC general secretary Robert Edgar said.

Evangelical groups that have signed onto the CCT include the Evangelical Covenant Church, Salvation Army, Christian Reformed Church, World Vision, and Open Bible Churches. The nation's largest Protestant denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, and most member denominations of the National Association of Evangelicals have not.

Sins of the fathers

Cases of sexual abuse by priests so far have cost U.S. Catholic dioceses more than $1 billion in settlement and legal costs since 1950, according to figures assembled by Catholic bishops and researchers and covering more than 11,500 abuse claims. At least $278 million was spent in the last three years alone. The meter is still running. Hundreds of cases remain unsettled, so the total soon could rise by tens of millions of dollars or more.

This month, the Covington, Ky., diocese agreed to settle for a record-breaking $20 million. But the judge rejected the deal, saying the diocese had only $40 million to pay; it had sued its three insurance companies to pick up the rest of the tab. The insurance companies are contesting the diocese's claims.

Mission impossible

Most of the some 500 missionaries in Haiti have been ordered out for security reasons by their mission agencies and churches. The impoverished island country has been racked by worsening unrest, kidnappings, mob violence, rape, and murder since the military-led ouster of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide more than a year ago. Human-rights groups say 700 people have been killed in the past eight months, including seven United Nations peacekeepers. The New York Times reported that six to 12 kidnappings occur each day, with ransom demands ranging from $30 to $200,000; Haitians and foreign nationals alike are targeted.

Shifting stands

Support for stem-cell research involving destruction of human embryos is rising, even among church members who once opposed it, according to recent surveys. In a Gallup Poll taken last month, 60 percent of respondents said research from stem cells involving human embryos is "morally acceptable," up from 52 percent three years ago. Polling by Pew researchers found the largest increase for such research was among white Catholics and mainline Protestants.

In 2002, 43 percent of white Catholics said it was more important to conduct embryonic stem-cell research than to protect embryos. Last December, the figure increased sharply to 63 percent. Among mainline Protestants, the percentage went up from 51 to 69 in the same period.

The December Pew results showed opposition to embryonic research to be strongest among those who attend religious services weekly. But even in that group, 38 percent said research is more important than protecting embryos—up from 28 percent three years ago.

Man knows not his time

Kenneth N. Taylor, originator of The Living Bible, a popular paraphrase of Scripture, died at his home in Wheaton, Ill., on June 10. He was 88. Mr. Taylor's career in Christian literature spanned 65 years. He was editor of His magazine (InterVarsity Christian Fellowship), long-time head of Moody Press, founder of Tyndale House Publishers, and author of many children's books (The Bible in Pictures for Little Eyes; My First Bible in Pictures). The Living Bible has sold more than 40 million copies and was the best-selling book in the United States for three years.

Theodore Gill, prominent liberal Presbyterian theologian, former president of San Francisco Theological Seminary, and a former managing editor of Christian Century magazine, also died June 10 in Princeton, N.J., following a long illness. He was 85.
Torchlighters: Jim Elliot

Geared for ages 8-12, Torchlighters: Heroes of the Faith is a series of action-packed programs which use top quality animation to bring to life the true stories of men and women who were committed to serve God, no matter what the cost. The first episode is on the life of missionary martyr Jim Elliot.

In 1956, news spread around the world that five young American men were mercilessly killed in Ecuador by members of the Aucas tribe (now known as the Waodani), a people the missionaries had gone to serve and befriend. The seemingly senseless tragedy has become an inspirational marvel as that same tribe is now friends with the families of those they killed.

Follow Jim's adventures from his college years to his work in the jungles. Young people will be challenged at seeing his faith in action as he carried a torch of faith to a savage people.

Included is a pdf leader's guide containing additional background information, discussion questions, reproducible games and puzzles, a letter to the parents, and more. 30 minutes

DVD - #4868D, $17.99
VHS - #4867, $14.99
VHS in Spanish - #500770, $14.99

Agent Abbey

This powerful production from The Voice of the Martyrs will educate and inspire those who need to hear the truth about Christian persecution. Abbey, a typical American teenager from Nashville, Tennessee, enjoys being a Christian, going to church, and having fun with her friends. She has never heard about Christians suffering for their faith in Christ. But when she travels with her dad to China for the first time, Abbey quickly becomes caught up in a plot that involves her new Christian friends, a mysterious secret agent, "illegal" Bibles, and the police! Desperate to undo the mess she inadvertently causes, Abbey finds herself on a daring mission, and in the process mourns her own naiveté and vows to carry the message of the persecuted church to Christians back in America.

Filmed on location in China and Taiwan, this drama from Voice of the Martyrs reveals both the harsh reality where 80% of the church is illegal and the all-too-common ignorance of Christians in the free world. Ages 10 and up. 30 minutes

DVD - #500768D, $19.99
VHS - #500769, $19.99
VHS in Spanish, #500796, $19.99

The Changing Face of Worship

Today's Christian churches face the challenge of existing in a postmodern world, where all principles are questioned, all opinions and beliefs are proclaimed equally valid and everything is considered relative. Throughout North America, a rapidly growing movement known as "alternative worship" is experimenting to meet this challenge and bring Christianity to a new generation. This program from FamilyNet Television explores the changing expressions of modern-day worship as churches use visual arts, edgy music, or even a chat room online to offer experiences that attempt to be both culturally relevant and theologically sound.

Narrated by popular, award-winning, contemporary Christian music artist Rebecca St. James. 58 minutes

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Apostle Paul and the Earliest Churches

Apostle Paul and the Earliest Churches is a brilliant and illuminating production. Beginning with Paul's conversion, it follows his missionary journeys on Anatolian soil (modern Turkey). Here is a diverse treasury of mosaics, frescoes, statues, amphitheaters, agoras, temples and more. The historical, religious, and archaeological background of each region in which Paul preached the gospel is shown. The recollection of the miracles Paul performed, the difficulties he encountered, and the persecution he faced beckons the viewer to experience with the Apostle himself the birth of the Christian church. The film is enhanced by 3D animated maps and footage of cities important to Paul's ministry. Significant artifacts from a variety of Turkish collections are also uncovered. Includes pdf study guide. 48 minutes

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TO: Our Chinese monitor
Your efforts to stamp out the church will only make it grow

SOME CHRISTIANS LIVING IN CHINA ARE SUFFERING a new wave of persecution. I have just learned from a source in China that WORLD magazine is one of the publications monitored by Chinese authorities.

We don't know the results of such monitoring. But we treasure all of our readers. So I have a few words to say to the officer reading this column.

Sir or madam, with all respect, I urge you to stop playing your part in the persecution of Christians. If you identify, through any of your sources, any possible Christians, please do not mention them to your superiors. Just let them go.

Christians are good citizens. Their Bible tells them to obey their rulers and to pray for those in authority. Their Lord, Jesus Christ, tells them to love their enemies and to pray for those who persecute them. That means, sir or madam, that despite your efforts to harm them, they are praying for you and they love you.

Also, realize that your efforts are counterproductive. Your attempts to stamp out the church are only making it stronger. Your efforts to punish Christians will only result in more of them.

When you read WORLD magazine, you must think that the churches in the United States are thriving and powerful. But they are really not. Many Americans attend church because, unlike in your country, it is socially expected. Therefore, some church members do not have strong beliefs. There is no cost, no danger in being a member of a church. If there were, if our government threw Christians in prison as you do, these members would likely quit their churches at once.

Some Americans even have the idea that the way to make their congregations grow is to make Christianity less demanding. And yet, despite such efforts, the number of Christians in America over the last few decades has hardly grown at all. But in China, as you know, the number of Christians is rising exponentially. This is because God's way of growing the church is through hardship and trial.

In China, where a profession of faith can mean loss of one's job, imprisonment, beating, and torture, only true Christians with a genuine faith risk going to church. That faith is so real that it attracts the attention of others. And in that climate the Holy Spirit is at work in a powerful way.

Surely, sir or madam, you are curious about why these people you are spying upon continue in these beliefs, despite all you can do to them. The reason is that they have found a reality beyond the state, beyond economics, beyond this material world. They have come to know that God has come as a human being in Jesus Christ. He too was arrested, tortured, and killed by His government. But after three days, He rose from the dead.

In His death, He bore the punishment that evildoers deserve and gives them His righteousness. He forgives and offers a joyous life after death. Through Christ, God the Father grants salvation, and the Holy Spirit gives those who believe a new life.

Sir or madam, Jesus Christ can do this for you. Your sins, including that of betraying His followers, will earn you a horrible judgment after death. Yet, He offers you free forgiveness. He can give you a new life. Trust Him. Pray to Him.

Contact some of those Christians you have been tracking. They will tell you more about Jesus. Despite your role in persecuting them, they will eagerly welcome you. You know who they are. And they will keep your secret.
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Out of the ghetto

**BOOKS:** Christian publishers reach for a share of the secular market, mainstream publishers jostle for Christian market share—and readers win from the competition | by Gene Edward Veith & Lynn Vincent

**S**ince Bruce Wilkinson's *The Prayer of Jabez* (Multnomah) was published in 2000, it has sold 9.3 million copies. The *Left Behind* books by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins (Tyndale House) have sold 62 million copies over the last decade. Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life* (Zondervan) has sold a million copies a month since it was published in 2002, making it, according to *Publishers Weekly*, "the bestselling hardback in American history."

Such numbers have caught the attention of even secular publishers and booksellers. "Evangelical publishers have managed to turn out a steady stream of blockbusters in recent years," observes *Business Week*, "making religion the hottest category in books."

No longer are Christian bookstores the sole outlet for evangelical books. Now evangelical titles—from inspirational meditations to Christian fiction—can be found at Barnes & Nobles, airport bookstands, grocery stores, and Wal-Marts.

Christian publishers are taking advantage of their newfound respectability in the publishing industry by opening new lines specifically designed to attract readers who are not necessarily Christians. And the reverse is also true: Secular publishers are opening new lines specifically designed to cross over into the evangelical market.

Not too many years ago, Christian titles were excluded from the mainstream publishing world. No matter how many copies a title from a Christian publisher
"What we’re seeing in the market is Christians moving toward buying books at their regular outlets,” says Chip MacGregor, who oversees Time-Warner’s efforts to reach this market, subdivisions called Warner Faith and Center Street Books. “Titles like *Left Behind* and *Prayer of Jabez* gave the folks in New York the nod that there is a group out there—an evangelical Christian demographic—that is buying this book,” literary agent Don Pape told WORLD. “The commerce has indicated that these religious people are everywhere.”

In other words, Christians make up a large part of the so-called secular marketplace. Christians, like most people, shop at grocery stores, go to Wal-Mart, and pick up books at megachains like Barnes & Noble or Borders. Mr. Pape pointed out that only 25 percent of Christians ever darken the door of a Christian bookstore. The other 75 percent buy books elsewhere. Much of the change in the Christian publishing industry is discovering ways to reach them. In this sense, reaching the secular marketplace does not necessarily mean reaching nonbelievers.

Some Christian publishers are trying to reach beyond the evangelical demographic by starting lines of books that are not explicitly religious. Moody has a division called Northfield Press, which publishes self-help, business, and family-relationship books. NavPress has Pithon Press, which publishes self-help, family and adoption and even medical books on Attention Deficit Disorder and dealing with stress. While NavPress titles assume that the reader is a believer,” explains the website, “the goal of Pithon Press is to present a biblical worldview to those outside the kingdom of God.”

Thomas Nelson is experimenting with tying in to another once-neglected but huge field: conservative politics. Nelson president and COO Mike Hyatt had long pushed for more sales in the broader market, a vision that bore fruit in the form of a partnership with WND Books, the book-publishing arm of WorldNetDaily, a conservative online news site. The imprint published edgy, politically conservative books that reflected or at least didn’t conflict with, a Christian worldview.

WorldNetDaily commentary editor Joel Miller signed on as senior editor. In September 2002, the alliance produced its first title, *Center of the Storm* by Katherine Harris, in which the former Florida secretary of state gives her account of the 2000 Bush-Gore vote-counting controversy. Bestsellers followed, including conservative talk-show host Michael Savage’s debut, *Savage Nation*, which became a No. 1 *New York Times* bestseller, spending 15 weeks on the list.

In summer 2004, the Nelson-WorldNetDaily alliance ended, and the religious publisher pulled the imprint under its own roof, renaming it Nelson Current. The imprint continues books that are “relevant, provocative, and timely,” its tagline says.

Why provocative? “Because people don’t think about nonprovocative books and nonprovocative books don’t change the way people think,” Mr. Miller said. “We want to have an impact.”

Buyers, so far, haven’t looked askance at political and current-events books coming out of a Christian house. That, said Mr. Miller, is because though the books reflect a biblical worldview (or consciously undermine unbiblical ones), they don’t make a pretense of being “Christian” per se. Instead, they are tailored for the general market. The fact that several have become bestsellers has enabled Nelson Current authors such as Jayna Davis (author of *The Third Terrorist*) and Barry Minkow (*Cleaning Up*) to “get into big media and have their voices taken seriously,” Mr. Miller said.

But does this foray into hardball politics compromise Nelsons Christian ethos? For example, Mr. Savage is known for no-holds-barred commentary that sometimes includes name-calling, as in his most recent Nelson Current title *Liberalism Is a Mental Disorder*. How does that fit with Scripture’s admonition for gentle, reasoned argument?

Because they often report controversial history and current events, Nelson Current books also sometimes include coarse language. “Because the books are intended for the mainstream market, we
have a little more latitude there," Mr. Miller said. "We don’t want the language to become gratuitous, but the story is the story." He added that Nelson Current uses salty or provocative language only when it’s relevant and appropriate to the truth of the subject. "It’s not in your face all the time," he said.

JUST AS CHRISTIAN publishers are trying to reach the secular audience, secular publishers are trying to reach the Christian audience—sometimes simply by buying a Christian publisher. That is what happened to Zondervan. Acquired by HarperCollins, it became part of the even bigger media empire of the international media tycoon Rupert Murdoch, whose holdings range from Fox News to the Los Angeles Lakers. Secular publishers also form partnerships with Christian publishers, as Penguin/Putnam is doing with Strang Communications.

And secular presses start religious divisions of their own, as with Time-Warner’s two new divisions. Random House, in another example, started Waterbrook. These ventures were not a case of a big company venturing into a market that it did not understand. Lee Hough, a Christian literary agent, said that these secular publishers brought in editors and staff with experience from Christian publishing companies. But the greater financial resources and industry clout from the parent companies give them an advantage.

Time Warner in 2001 hired Rolf Zettersten, a senior executive at Thomas Nelson, to start Warner Faith. With his contacts, he signed best-selling Christian author Joyce Meyer, and with the Time-Warner distribution clout doubled her sales to 2 million. This success story attracted other big name authors, including Joel Osteen, whose Lakewood Church in Houston is America’s largest.

But though some Christian publishers complain about the unfair advantages the big corporations hold, Mr. Hough says that the secular publishers have broadened the market for everyone. Time-Warner and Random House are trusted in the secular book industry, so when they introduced evangelical stars into that marketplace, it also opened the door for other evangelical authors and the Christian companies that published them.

But does going after secular markets mean watering down the Christian message? "We’ve never asked an author to water down, or change their message," says Alan Arnold, head of Thomas Nelson’s crossover fiction line, Westbow. But he points to another problem with conventional Christian fiction from the other side. "I feel very strongly that to water down—or bloat a novel with more water—can be equally harmful to the story."

According to the principles of free-market economics, competition improves quality. And when Christians had only to publish for each other, quality did slip. "There is reason for some Christian writers to be quarantined," said Mr. Lee. "You want Christian writers to be writing on the level as in the regular market." Mr. Arnold agrees: "Most traditional Christian fiction was less focused on the art of story and more focused on an agenda-driven approach," he said. "The goal of many authors was to 'teach' the reader a doctrine through an often one-dimensional story. Ironically, it often wasn’t a prejudice against Christian content that caused most of these novels to be rejected in the general market—the stories simply did not pass the test of great fiction."

And if Christian bookstores are losing market share, it may be partly their fault. Many long ago stopped carrying many books beyond a few bestsellers, filling up their shelves instead with plaques, figurines, and knick-knacks. Though there are significant exceptions, many are no longer bookstores. "Let’s face it," said Mr. MacGregor. "They’re Christian ‘gift centers.'"
happen is not the closing of Christian stores as a result of unfair business practices by publishers, but rather the propagation of loose theology making Christians more 'spiritual' but less godly."

Indeed, it is hard to accuse secular publishers of watering down Christian theology when Christian publishers have been churning out de-gendered Bible translations, Christless moralism, "have faith in yourself" tracts, and sentimental uplift—oblivious to sin, grace, and salvation—and all presented as Christian inspiration.

Publishing in this new environment may result in better Christian books for everyone. SaltRiver, Tyndale's line of books intended to react to the secular marketplace, publishes explicitly Christian books, but has a slogan not always associated with the genre: "intelligent, thought-provoking, authentic." Mr. Hough and Mr. Pape, the literary agents, say that the new marketplace calls for better writers. They defend the efforts to publish books on non-theological subjects—such as politics, health, and contemporary issues—as demonstrating that Christianity applies to all of life.

Mr. Arnold says that his WestBow line of fiction receives half of its sales from non-Christian Bookseller Association outlets, and has placed novels on both the CBA and the New York Times bestseller lists.

"When you have a great story," he says, "the term crossover becomes irrelevant. You're not starting in one market and hoping to slosh over into the other somehow—you're selling well in both markets. When you have a powerful story, people embrace and buy it in all markets."

Mr. Arnold said many of the great fiction classics of past decades and centuries followed this exact model. "Great writers wrote from their Christian worldview and created novels that still sell today," he said. "They weren't trying to write Christian Fiction (which unfortunately is often a man-made list of do's and don'ts) but simply great fiction that reflected how they looked at life. That's what we're reclaiming today."

In one sense, Christian publishing is coming full circle. The secular giant Random House is owned by Bertelsmann AG, a German media mega-conglomerate that got its start in 1835 as a publisher of Bibles, hymnbooks, and revival resources. The King James Bible—including the dispensationalist Scofield Reference edition—was published by Oxford University Press. And most of the great Christian authors published their works through secular presses. This was true well into the 1960s, from Catherine Marshall's A Man Called Peter and Christy (McGraw Hill) to C.S. Lewis' Mere Christianity and Screwtape Letters (Macmillan).

"Having our novels sell well in the general market is a way for us to be salt and light through the power of story," Mr. Arnold said. "We're supposed to be an influence in the world—not hide or retreat. People who view the general market success of fiction from a Christian worldview as something negative puzzle me. Why wouldn't we want more Christian artists and authors creating more masterpieces that are God-honoring in a sea of entertainment options that mostly are not? Why wouldn't we want .our neighbors reading novels infused with a Christian worldview? Our goal with fiction isn't simply to evangelize evangelicals—but to create world-class literature and page-turning commercial fiction that has an impact on the world at large. The great news is we're succeeding beyond our wildest dreams."
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Denominations within the new religion include cyborgians, who see a merger of man and computer, and chimerists, who see human-animal combinations down the road. There are a lot more, too—but let’s jump into our look at two books that sell the new gospel, two others that raise questions about its rationality and honesty, and two more that oppose it ethically.

**More Than Human**


SOFTWARE ENGINEER RAMEZ NAAM argues that the engineering of humans is inevitable: “Scientists cannot draw a clear line between healing and enhancing, for they’re integrally related.” Research on Alzheimer’s and other diseases “is the very same research that could lead to keeping us young, improving our memories, wiring our minds together, or enhancing ourselves in other ways.”

*More Than Human* takes us from drug therapy (common now) to gene therapy (just beginning): “Drugs sent into the body have an effect for a while, but eventually are broken up or passed out. Gene therapy, on the other hand, gives the body the ability to manufacture the needed protein or enzyme or other chemical itself. . . .

Insertional gene vectors penetrate all the way into the nucleus of the cell and splice the genes they carry into the chromosomes. From that point on, the new genes get all the benefits your other genes enjoy. . . . If the cell divides, the new genes get copies to the daughter cells, just like the rest of your DNA.”

Here’s an example of how biotech companies could make big bucks from gene therapy: “Leptin regulates body weight by controlling metabolism. Mice given a single gene therapy injection lost weight while eating just as much as undosed mice. . . . As Sergei Zolotukhin, a professor at the University of Florida, noted, ‘This would be the couch potato’s dream: You can eat what you want but stay lean.’

Other research offers “eccentric cosmetic possibilities. There’s no reason, for example, that gene therapy couldn’t be used to deliver green fluorescence genes to human skin or hair. Such gene therapy would produce humans who glowed under black light.”

People could even have brightly colored skin or hair and look like tropical birds or fish. In a step up from such play, gene therapy could be a longer-lasting or permanent alternative to powerful anti-depressants and ADHD drugs like Prozac and Ritalin: “If and
when gene therapy in the brain is ever feasible, it will be possible to opt for permanent or semipermanent alterations of personality."
The biggest market for genetic engineering, though, may be among parents of early embryos. Mr. Naam notes that "altering the genes of a person before he or she is born is in some ways actually easier than doing so after birth. It’s easier to get a gene into every one of a small number of cells than into a large number." As genome mapping becomes faster, we may learn which genes dispose a person to certain personality traits. (The word dispose is important: Environment also plays a major role, and Christians understand that God's grace is decisive over both nature and nurture.) Genetic engineering will then "give parents a tool that can increase their odds of having a certain kind of child."

Will parents do better than God? Mr. Naam doesn’t pose the question that way, but he does acknowledge some drawbacks: "Genetic alterations of personality come with [the] risk of overshooting the target. If you genetically engineer an embryo to select genes associated with, say, agreeableness, you increase the odds of getting not only a pleasant, agreeable child but one who is agreeable to a fault. If you genetically engineer your child to increase the odds that he’ll be an aggressive go-getter, you also increase the odds that he’ll become an overbearing bore."

Citizen Cyborg
James Hughes, Citizen Cyborg: Why Democratic Societies Must Respond to the Redesigned Human of the Future (Westview, 2004)

R R. HUGHES ALTERNATES SARCASTIC attacks on "bio-Luddites" (those opposed to genetic engineering) with proclamations of a glorious future: Now-emerging "transhuman technologies will not only let us live longer, be smarter and have more control over our emotions and our bodies. They will also permit us to clone, to mix human and animal DNA and genetically modify our bodies for aesthetic reasons. We will incorporate computers into our bodies and brains, and simulate human brains in computers.”

This book goes beyond Mr. Naam's, though, by packing a political punch. Mr. Hughes says we should drop the idea that humans are special and substitute for it the Peter Singer concept of "personhood" based on thinking ability (the very young and the very old are out, great apes are in). Here's the core proclamation: "Persons don’t have to be human, and not all humans are persons. To create a transhuman democracy we will have to establish a new definition of citizenship, a 'cyborg citizenship,' based on personhood rather than humanness. With cyborg citizenship we can deal with the scary boundary-crossers, the cyborgs, the animal-human hybrids, the genetically engineered kids, the clones and the robots. We can add more chairs at the table.” Mr. Hughes uses and abuses the 14th Amendment's mention of "persons" and then grandly predicts, "We will give non-human animals human-level intelligence. . . . Soon we will have identified the genes that distinguish human intellectual and communication capabilities from those of the great apes. Soon we will be able to genetically enhance primates to have human intellectual capabilities— and anyone who opposes that will be called a "human racist." Maybe yes, maybe no, but the prospect of "uplifted chimps" is a wake-up call. Citizen Cyborg takes seriously wild high-tech prophets such as "extropians" who hate their "meat puppet" bodies and want to meld their minds with computers or . . . something else.

Rapture

NOT EVERYONE TAKES THE PROPHECIES so seriously. Brian Alexander offers an amusing tour (in Michael Lewis style) of the excesses of a fast-growing biotech industry that has its share of either con men or con men who have themselves been conned. Funny stuff aside, Rapture explains well the basic worldview behind genetic engineering: "If you don't believe in God, and you don't believe in heaven, then what are you supposed to do when you stare into James Frazier's 'darkness of the grave?'" Mr. Alexander quotes Richard Cutler, a National Institute on Aging scientist, as saying, "If you are not religious, then you see biotech as a hope—because the alternative is to sit in a French café 'feeling depressed and drinking absinthe.'"
The book's title comes from biotech pioneers who prophesy a dramatic world-shaking change—the Singularity, some call it—when computer minds will link up in a new world consciousness. But here's Mr. Alexander's description of the reality: Even if bio-utopians "made all the disease go away and imparted immortality and introduced a full-option LX model human, there would still be no posthuman future. A thousand years from now, people will wish they felt as good at 520 as they did at 350. They'll wish their kids would have listened and not ruined their lives by becoming artists instead of lawyers specializing in interplanetary torts. People will still hate each other.

But will 220 years or 350 or anything much beyond 90 come? Mr. Alexander writes that the biotech rapture will be "much more difficult to call forth" than its prophets contend. We're already seeing backtracking: For example, in all the debate about human embryonic stem-cell research "there was very little evidence that ES cells would provide any of the miraculous advances science had advertised, at least for now . . . developmental biologists began to air their own misgivings, even predicting a backlash when the public realized there had been far too much promise and far too little delivery.”

Rapture memorably profiles some of the overpromisers, such as "big, blustering salesman" Wallace Steinberg, a former pharmaceutical company executive, who saw himself becoming "the gene Rockefeller." He wanted literal immortality for himself and at least $1 billion in sales for his companies, but he died in 1995 at age 61, perhaps because "he dozed off and choked to death on his false teeth."
Are We Spiritual Machines?

Ray Kurzweil et al., *Are We Spiritual Machines? Ray Kurzweil vs. the Critics of Strong A.I.* (Discovery Institute, 2002)

Mr. Kurzweil, an inventor and entrepreneur who wrote a 1999 bestseller, *The Age of Spiritual Machines,* argues that man can become essentially immortal by downloading consciousness and then having it placed in a new “body” of some kind: “We scan someone’s brain and [place] their personal mind file into a suitable computing medium. The newly emergent ‘person’ will appear to other observers to have much the same personality, history, and memory as the person originally scanned. That is, once the technology has been refined and perfected. Like any new technology, it won’t be perfect at first. But ultimately, the scans and recreations will be very accurate and realistic.”

They would still be recreations, not the real thing—and that’s where Mr. Kurzweil’s critics smack him around. University of California professor John Searle notes that the software-based human will not be alive:

“Actual human brains cause consciousness by a series of specific neurobiological processes in the brain. What the computer does is a simulation of these processes, a symbolic model of the processes. But the computer simulation of brain processes that produce consciousness stands to real consciousness as the computer simulation of the stomach processes that produce digestion stands to real digestion.”

University of Oklahoma zoology professor Thomas Ray is skeptical of claims that computers will be able to replicate themselves and change their form and structure: “The exponential increase of computing power is driven by higher densities and greater number of components on chips, not by exponentially more complex chip designs. The most complex of artifacts designed and built by humans are much less complex than living organisms. Yet the most complex of our creations are showing alarming failure rates. Orbiting satellites and telescopes, space shuttles, interplanetary probes, the Pentium chip, computer operating systems, all seem to be pushing the limits of what we can effectively design.”

Consumer’s Guide to a Brave New World


Here’s a basic introduction to both the scientific and philosophical debates involving stem-cell research, personhood theory, and other hot topics. Mr. Smith advocates pushing forward with adult stem-cell research and notes an imaginative proposal by Stanford professor William Hurlbut, a member of President Bush’s Council on Bioethics: Scientists could genetically engineer a human egg so that it could create embryonic stem cells without ever becoming an embryo. Pro-life leaders such as Princeton professor Robert George find that approach acceptable. Mr. Smith also lists and explains what he and many others find unacceptable: human cloning; genetic alteration of human sperm, eggs, or embryos by inserting into them chromosomes from animal, artificial, or other human genes; and the fabrication of chimeras, those part-human, part-animal creatures of mythology and fantasy. He points out the importance of not allowing companies or universities to patent bioengineered human genomes and related products and techniques: “No scientist, university, or corporation should be able to own any human life. Period.”

Human Dignity in the Biotech Century


The authors here go deeper into the theological and ethical questions. For example, Ben Mitchell, a bioethics professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, notes that “if we permit germline [sperm and egg] experimentation in humans, we could cause great harm not only to one individual, but also to all the children and the children’s children. The
only way to control a failure in germline engineering would be to sterilize those whose reproductive cells had been altered. Mandatory sterilization of competent adults is not itself morally defensible."

But the issues go even deeper, as Christopher Hook of the Mayo Clinic points out. "The greatest flaw of any utopian dream of human perfection is the failure to understand, or even recognize, the darkness of the unredeemed human heart." After all the revolutionary failures of the 20th century, Dr. Hook writes, man again "seems ready to plunge headlong into another human, or demonic, contrivance promising salvation and eternal happiness for all."

The contrast between salvation by biotech and salvation by Christ is clear: In Christianity, "the two greatest commandments given to us are to love the Lord God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves... Do we need to remodel our bodies and brains into some trans- or posthuman form to fulfill these commands?" We don't, Dr. Hook says, and concludes with a telling question: "Why did Jesus not make the apostles the most amazing of men, with towering intellect and bodies impervious to pain, illness and death?"

His answer: "He did not do so because they didn't need to be altered that way to accomplish their mission. And I believe Jesus also recognized that if they were so altered, they would probably soon strike out over using their own power: and opinions, refusing to be dependent on the Holy Spirit and on God's provision and guidance."

**Conclusion**

WHERE ARE WE? MONEY FUELS biotech exploration, and some money will be spent on pets: As the periodical Nature Biotechnology harrumphed about "Cc," the first cat clone, "Cc was not created to advance medical knowledge or provide funda-

mental biological insights. She was created because there is a market among certain rich cat owners for resurrected animal companions." Such money could be better spent, but idiosyncratic expenditures of that sort do not threaten mankind.

Much money will be spent by people who don't believe in life after death and are desperate to live longer. Christians and others who see this life as a vestibule to the next, or a school from which we will graduate to eternity, will regard 80 years or so as long enough to serve the purpose of such an entryway. Those without faith, though, see prolongation as an altern-

displacement we sometimes feel is not a symptom of disease but a pointer toward the cure.

After all, the restlessness within riches that is typical of our society shows the truth of the Christian understanding that we all have ineradicable spiritual longings. Some will want to attempt to eradicate them through genetic engineering. They won't succeed, but if power falls into the hands of individuals who aspire to be utopian redesigners of the human race, a lot of misery will result. We may witness a drive through germline genetic engineering to change not just the next generation but all generations to come. Yet we can be confident that God is not helpless before such an assault.

In his 2003 book Our Final Hour, British astronomer Martin Rees gives mankind a 50-50 chance of surviving the coming natural and man-made disasters of the 21st century—but the same could have been said of other centuries. It's astounding, for example, that the Cold War at some point didn't become nuclear hot (it came close several times). But the 5C-50 prospect often seems to be where God places us individually and collectively. That's where we are now as the genetic bomb is almost ready to explode.
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Mo-om, I’m bo-ored

BOOKS: Looking for reading ideas for summer-sated middle schoolers? Here are a few suggestions

*New Found Land* by Allan Wolf (Candlewick Press, 2004)
- Here’s a unique retelling of Lewis and Clark’s journey across the continent, written by a poet. Each short entry, usually a page or two, is written in one of 14 distinct voices belonging to various members of the Corps of Discovery. Except for the entries by the prose-writing Oolum, a Newfoundland dog, they are poetic and reveal the various ways the characters understood their journey. It may take some prodding to get kids to pick up this big book, so parents or teachers may want to make it a read-aloud.

*SilverFin* by Charlie Higson (Miramax Books, 2005)
- There’s a problem with *SilverFin*, and it’s not with the plot or writing, because the book is a terrific adventure story pitting a brave boy and his friends against an evil genius intent on creating a race of super soldiers. The boy shows grit and determination, as well as a well-developed sense of right and wrong, as he takes on a pre-WWII baddie who’s creating monsters in his lab. The problem is that the book is about the young James Bond, who grows up to be the amorous spy of movie fame. Only those willing to have their teens watch the movies should take up the book, because it’s a page-turner.

*Peter and the Starcatchers* by Dave Barry and Ridley Pearson (Hyperion Books for Children, 2004)
- Peter and his band of fellow orphans are shanghaied and put on the *Never Land*, a creaking old ship that will take them to serve a far-off king. Peter then discovers on board a trunk of magic “starstuff” and must help to keep it away from pirates and cannibals. In this prequel to *Peter Pan*, readers discover where Tinker Bell came from, what makes Peter fly, and why Captain Hook has a crocodile on his tail. It’s an old-fashioned story told with some of Dave Barry’s wise-acre style. He’s managed to restrain his tendency toward crude humor, although in one scene the pirate Black Stache gives the command to “Raise the Ladles,” which turn out to be sails in the shape of a enormous black brassiere (with accompanying illustration).

*Girls in Pants: The Third Summer of the Sisterhood* by Ann Brashares (Delacouerce Books for Young Readers, 2005)
- Girls in Pants, the third book in a series about four best friends and a shared pair of propitious jeans, takes place the summer before they go off to college. These books are understandably popular because Ms. Brashares understands how teenage girls think. The problem is the morally permissive world in which the characters all operate. In the first book, one of the girls loses her virginity and sinks into a deep depression afterwards. The book’s message was not that premarital sex is wrong, but that it’s heavy—and she wasn’t ready to bear the weight. That’s pretty much the worldview of the books: The girls support each other no matter what, they do well at school, work hard, and use their feelings to guide their actions.

*Wanted to Be Her* by Michelle Graham (InterVarsity Press, 2005)
- Here’s one nonfiction book to round out the list. Many girls aren’t able to enjoy who they are because they compare themselves to more beautiful girls. Michelle Graham tackles the topic of body image, with the aim of getting girls to see themselves the way God sees them rather than through the lens of popular culture. Ms. Graham shares stories from her own life and others’ as she writes about weight, body shape, and standards of beauty. Girls and their moms who are sometimes the worst critics, will both benefit from reading it.
Annals of the World

Covering history from the beginning of the world through the AD 70, The Annals of the World has not been published since the 17th century. Almost completely inaccessible to the public for three centuries, this book is a virtual historical encyclopedia of information that otherwise would have been lost forever. Ussher relates both famous accounts and little-known events in the lives of the famous and infamous including pharaohs, Caesars, kings, conquerors, thieves, pirates, and murderers. He tells of the rise and fall of great and not-so-great nations and gives accounts of the events that shaped the world. (Hardback, 96c pages, & CD-ROM with colored charts, graphs, time-lines, etc).

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Foretastes of heaven

BOOKS: An upcoming Narnia movie means rich new book releases | by Gene Edward Veith

When THE LION, THE WITCH, and the Wardrobe comes out in a new film release in December, an avalanche of new books will follow. The big-budget collaboration between Disney and Walden Media will feature stunning visual images (brought to you by Weta Workshop, of Lord of the Rings fame). These will show up in picture books, movie companions, and new editions of C.S. Lewis’ classic Christian fantasy. And judging from advance publication lists, virtually every Christian publisher will put out a book about The Chronicles of Narnia.

Most of these will not come out until closer to the movie date, but some of the authors have track records that make their books especially promising. Bruce Edwards, one of the top Lewis scholars, has two: Further Up & Further In: Understanding C.S. Lewis’ the Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe (Broadman & Holman) and Not a Tame Lion: Aslan and the Spiritual World of Narnia (Tyndale). Another prominent Lewis scholar, Peter Schakel, has repackaged some of his earlier work in The Way into Narnia: A Reader’s Guide (Eerdmans).

Of the new books I have seen, Finding God in the Land of Narnia by Kurt Bruner and Jim Ware (SaltRiver/ Tyndale) takes a meditative approach, beginning each short chapter with an episode from the series followed by discussion, leading to personal reflection. More analytical is Thomas Williams’ The Heart of the Chronicles of Narnia, with the evocative subtitle, Knowing God Here by Finding Him There (Thomas Nelson).

Most of the new books are about The Chronicles of Narnia as a whole rather than the specific novel the movie is based on. An exception is A Reader’s Guide Through the Wardrobe: Exploring C.S. Lewis’s Classic Story (InterVarsity Press) by Leland Ryken, the renowned Christian literary scholar, and Marjorie Lamp Mead, the associate director of the Wade Collection, Wheaton’s treasure trove of Lewis manuscripts and memorabilia, including the actual wardrobe that inspired the series.

Mr. Ryken and Ms. Mead convey a wealth of learning, not just on Lewis’ ideas but on the literary conventions and techniques he uses to convey them so effectively. The authors teach with a light, easily understandable touch, including illustrations, graphics, and discussion questions.

To bolster the impression that everybody and his dog is writing a Narnia book, I have written one myself, The Soul of the Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe (Victor/Cook). It, too, concentrates on the one novel, unpacking its meanings and its methods. It also suggests how Christians should approach fantasy writings, including the difference between those that are helpful and those that are harmful. The book compares The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe not only to Harry Potter books but also to another popular children’s fantasy series, one also slated for major motion pictures: His Dark Materials by Philip Pullman, whose goal is to do for atheism what Lewis does for Christianity.

Which is a reminder that, as nearly all of these books emphasize, the frozen world under the domination of an evil power who turns living hearts to stone is not just the imaginary realm of the White Witch, but it is our own fallen, sinful world. Non-Christians will flock to a Narnia movie, creating a prime opportunity for evangelism.

A good way to get ready would be to read Lightbearer in the Shadowlands: The Evangelistic Vision of C.S. Lewis (Crossway), a collection of essays edited by Angus Menage. (I have an essay in that one, too.) Also useful would be Not a Tame God: Christ in the Writings of C.S. Lewis by Steven Mueller (Concordia).

Those books have been out for a while, but my favorite recent book on Lewis would also arm evangelists: Wayne Martindale’s Beyond the Shadowlands: C.S. Lewis on Heaven and Hell (Crossway). The book sheds light both on Lewis and on the eternal life ahead, which can be even more wondrous than Narnia.
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Clerical mysteries

BOOKS: The greatest mystery is why the genre’s minister-detectives are so liberal | by Lauren Winner

Here’s what I’m reading this summer: a few books about infanticide in colonial Virginia; some commentaries on the Gospel of Matthew; a history of salt; and a whole lot of mysteries. There’s something satisfying about a mystery. Wrongdoers are punished, order prevails. As J. I. Packer once observed, mysteries “would never have existed without the Christian gospel. Culturally, they are Christian fairy tales, with savior heroes and plots that end in what Tolkein called a *catastrophe*—whereby things come right after seeming to go irrevocably wrong. . . .

The gospel of Christ is the archetype of all such stories. Paganism unleavened by Christianity, on the other hand, was and always will be pessimistic at heart.”

My favorites are clerical mysteries. You’ve heard of police procedurals—mysteries where the detective is, naturally enough, a cop, who comes into contact with corpses and catches culprits as part of his regular, salaried work-week. Clerical mysteries, by contrast, are those mysteries in which the hero, the detective, is a pastor or priest. (Should the same cleric figure over and over again in a series, the author must ingeniously explain why the non-cop keeps stumbling over dead bodies . . . but, then, death does the clergy almost as much as it does cops.)

Since G. K. Chesterton gave us Father Brown, the majority of clerical mysteries have been set in Catholic or Anglican communities. There are, of course, exceptions—Charles Merrill Smith’s Reverend Randolph is a Methodist, for instance—but in the main clerical detectives seem to emerge from liturgical churches: Vicar Westerham is the Anglican hero of five mysteries by V. L. Whitechurch; Margaret Scherf’s Father Buell is Episcopal, as is Isabelle Holland’s Rev. Dr. Claire Aldington; H. H. Holmes’ Sister Ursula; Leonard Holton’s Father Bredder, Ralph McInerny’s Father Dowling. Carol Anne O’Marie’s Sister Mary Helen, and, of course, Ellis Peters’ Brother Cadfael are all Catholic. This liturgical trend is, perhaps, understandable. Maybe the reverence for and emphasis on liturgical and theological mystery in liturgical Christianity lends itself to an interest in fictional mystery. But it is by no means a given. I’d be all over a mystery series whose lay-detective was a PCA pastor.

The last few years have seen a sudden spurt of clerical mysteries—in particular, mysteries presided over by female Episcopal priests. Just a few weeks ago, for example, *To Darkness and to Death*, the fourth installment of Julia Spencer-Fleming’s Clare Fergusson mysteries was published. The Rev. Fergusson is an army pilot turned Episcopal priest, and she serves a small parish in Miller’s Kill, New York. “Kill” is an old Dutch term for “shallow river,” but, of course, it makes a nice foreshadowing sort of pun, for an awful lot of murder befalls the small Miller’s Kill community.

I love the books in this series. They are uniformly clever, surprising, and utterly engrossing. I’m enchanted by the local color (I never thought I’d dream about moving to upstate New York, but this series has sparked a certain fantasy). I want Clare Fergusson to teach me to cook (like many clerical detectives, she’s quite the gourmand), and, frankly, I think she’d be a fun friend.

But I have begun to grow tired of the theology that infuses Ms. Spencer-Fleming’s novels, and many of the other contemporary clerical mysteries I read. You should know that, in general, I do not evaluate fiction principally by theological or ideological litmus tests. I have
never believed that novels have the same function as tracts or Sunday school curricula, and I have enjoyed, and been edified by, novels born in just about every ideological and theological context imaginable. But perhaps the cavalierly liberal Episcopalianism in these recent mysteries hits too close to home. Can't the Episcopal Church approach orthodoxy even in fiction?

Let's start with the observation that several Episcopal priest heroines seem to have fallen for married men. There's been no out-and-out adulterous sex (yet) in any of the mysteries I've read, but there's been some smooching, some emoting, and some fantasizing. Indeed, as Betty Smartt Carter has noted in a recent essay in the Christian Century, the female-cleric-falls-for-married-cop is becoming something of a topos in contemporary clerical mysteries.

Kathryn Koerner, rector of an Episcopal Church in New Jersey, is the heroine of Cristina Summers' Divine Mystery series (the first, Crooked Heart, is excellent—a taut, riveting read with an utterly surprising climax and conclusion; the second, Thieves Break In, is a little less taut and riveting). Kathryn finds herself attracted to Tom, a local policeman who attends her church; for his part, Tom's marriage is desiccated, and he is totally smitten with the comely Kathryn.

"Why do writers think readers will accept as a hero a female priest who flirts with a married man?" asks Mrs. Carter perspicaciously. "Some may respond that priests are real people, after all, and real people have complicated desires and longings. Grace often comes through our frailties, and even sinful relationships can be redeeming. But however we might try to rationalize it, a strange dynamic seems to be afoot. It's as though the moral rules are different for female clergy. What if Kathryn Koerner were a married male priest flirting with a woman in his congregation? What if Clare Fergusson were a single male pastor (say, a Southern Baptist) having regular lunch dates with a married woman in his church and whispering double-entendres into the telephone? We'd hardly accept such a hero. Indeed, we'd probably figure that he was the prime suspect in the case."

Massachusetts-based mystery novelist Michelle Blake has created yet another Episcopal priest heroine, Lily Turner. (Her cop-beau is blessedly single.) Lily is a self-described "spiritual nomad." She liked "the elasticity of Episcopal doctrine.... At seminary, she had studied Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism"—when, one wonders, did she have time to study the gospel?—"and her faith now contained elements from all those religions. So she had ended up as an ordained Episcopal minister .... teaching the acceptance of all religions, all beliefs, all people."

The third installment of the series, The Book of Light, finds Lily serving as an interim chaplain at a Boston college. She admits to a conservative Christian student that she "respect[s] the fundamental[ist] wing of the Protestant community in this country, because I think that you guys are, often, less hypocritical than we are. I actually believe in a close and literal reading of Biblical texts—within reason. And I think the liberal wing of the church doesn't do enough of that, doesn't check in with the Bible often enough." Ah, the Episcopal Church! If only we would check in with the Bible as often as we check in with, say, our inner child.

Clare Fergusson, too, embodies a caricature of liberal Episcopalianism, although she herself doesn't think so. In To Darkness and to Death, a diocesan representative confronts Clare about rumors he's heard: not, as Clare fears, that she's fallen for a married man, but rather equally true rumors that she performed a ceremony blessing the union of two gay men. When Clare defends her actions, the diocesan representative asks whether she believes in the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ. Give me some credit, avers Clare; I may be a liberal, but that doesn't mean I've signed up with the heterodox agenda of Bishop Spong. Oh, really? You could have fooled me.

In presenting a less-than-orthodox version of Christianity, Ms. Blake and Ms. Spencer-Fleming are following well-established conventions of the genre. A survey of clerical mysteries reveals that—except for Chesterton's Father Brown—most fictional clerics-cum-detectives have little patience for classical Christian doctrine. For example, Mr. Smith's Reverend Randolph, first introduced in the 1974 novel Reverend Randolph and the Wages of Sin, has no patience for "conventional pious attitudes": The Trinity is "trivial," the Bible recherché, the Great Commission unnecessary, and Paul's proclamation of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 "glorious sounding, sublimely phrased nonsense" and "lilting literalistic goop." Even Brother Cadfael, the generally orthodox (and ironically Calvinistic) medieval monk created by English novelist Ellis Peters, occasionally slides into a vague universalism.

What bothers me about the recent bumper crop of clerical mysteries is not the mere fact that they feature female clerics. What ticks me off is the irresponsible liberalism of these clerics.

—Lauren F. Winner is the author of Girl Meets God and Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity

Mr. Caputo brings vividly to life many scenes—Arab jihadists killing or enslaving black Christians, soldiers of the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army fighting the Khartoum regime—that WORLD has covered journalistically over the past decade. He lets us smell, as his characters do, “the acrid stink of sweating horseflesh and sweaty saddle leather,” and he skeptically assesses the results.

**WORLD:** One of your main characters in *Acts of Faith* seems to be speaking for you when he describes two of the other characters as “so American in their narcissism, in their self-righteousness, in their blindness to their inner natures, in their impulse to remake the world and reinvent themselves.” Do you see that as an American trait or as a human trait—and how do we guard against narcissism and self-righteousness?

**CAPUTO:** It is a human trait, but it seems more prevalent in Westerners, Americans especially. It would take a skilled psychologist to tell you how to guard against narcissism, a personality disorder. A knowledge of other cultures and beliefs, combined with a sensitivity to them, can be a powerful prophylaxis against self-righteousness.

**WORLD:** The life of your vividly depicted American evangelical character, Quinette Hardin, takes unexpected turns. In what ways should evangelicals take your description of her as a warning?

**CAPUTO:** In large part, the theme in *Acts of Faith* is how faith, whether it is religious or a belief in some secular ideology or cause, can curdle into fanaticism. I did not create Quinette to be a warning. I was interested in presenting a character whose lack of full self-awareness blinds her to the self-centeredness at the core of her personality. That trait, in turn, leads her to bend her beliefs toward fulfilling her own ends, satisfying her own desires. Someone involved in evangelical or missionary work needs periods of self-examination to ensure that the needs of the people he or she is serving are being met rather than his or her personal needs. Quinette’s laziness in this respect can serve as a warning if anyone chooses to see it that way.

**WORLD:** Bureauocrats of the UN and the relief organizations you describe in *Acts of Faith* seem largely to be making a living out of people dying. In what ways, if any, have humanitarian efforts—

including the well-intentioned campaign to buy back slaves and set them free—helped, and in what ways have they hurt?
several times the cost a slave would have brought on the open market. Air drops I observed in southern Sudan sometimes delivered food to regions that were not remotely in danger of famine. This routine occurred so often that some southern Sudanese farmers had stopped farming and simply sat back and waited for the UN to bring supplies to them. In effect, they were on welfare and saw no need to work. That’s how aid and humanitarian efforts hurt. They helped in the sense that many of the captives who were redeemed would not have been if human rights organizations had not intervened. As for food deliveries, it is very difficult for aid organizations to determine if they are getting to the right people, but they often do and that’s as good a reason as any to continue them.

**WORLD:** You don’t seem to have much patience for images of the saintly poor. Your British character Moody in *Horn of Africa* says about one of his experiences, “First time in life I’d known real hunger, not some pleasant tummy-rumbling before dinner. Know what that does to you after a while? Makes you nasty.” Why do many Westerners, looking from afar, tend to romanticize suffering and forget that it is more likely to make people nasty?

**CAPUTO:** It is natural, when we see misery and suffering, to want to alleviate it and to pity the victims. Westerners, because they are so prosperous, tend to feel guilty about their own good fortune and to make saints of the victims. One needs to remember that in many parts of the world, today’s victims can be tomorrow’s perpetrators. As one of my characters, Diana Briggs, observes, it is a mistake to equate poverty with virtue—“it’s merely poverty.” In so many words, compassion should be uncoupled from sentimentality.

**WORLD:** You seem to take seriously questions of good and evil. What religious beliefs of your own do you try to convey in your writing? Do you see God and the devil as real, as human projections, or as something else?

**CAPUTO:** I am the product of a Jesuit education. I take moral problems very seriously. Almost all of my work has been concerned with them. I do not try to convey any doctrinal beliefs of my own in my writing, but I do try to present people facing moral predicaments, choices between doing the right thing or the wrong thing in circumstances wherein it is often very hard to tell the difference between the two. I believe in God and the Devil as real beings. The one is the Divine intelligence who created and sustains the universe, the other is the destructive force. Think of them as two

**WORLD:** Your ambivalent narrator in *Horn of Africa* says after reading the journals of a brutal man, “The picture would not have been so disturbing if it had not been so familiar. . . . The demons who dwelled in him dwelled in me, as they do in all men: the attraction to violence, the need to be free from all restrictions, the impulse to follow one’s desires wherever they may lead and without regard for others.” Do you see our human natures as inherently good or inherently sinful? If you have any hope for change, what is the basis of your hope?

**CAPUTO:** I believe in Original Sin, that is, in the fallen nature of man. He is inherently sinful, but he has the power to overcome his inherited demons. The first step in that conquest is to realize that they dwell in each one of us. In *Acts of Faith*, Fitzhugh Martin makes this observation about his partner, Douglas Braithwaite: “Anyone who does not acknowledge the darkness in his nature will succumb to it. He will not take precautions against its promptings, nor recognize it when it calls.” Later in the narrative, he expresses this thought in conversation with Diana Briggs. Speaking of Douglas, he says, “He lacks a moral imagination when it comes to himself. . . . The man cannot imagine himself doing anything wrong. It’s a blindness. He can’t see his own demons because he doesn’t think they exist, and so he’s fallen prey to them.” Although that sounds stern, there is hope in it. We can behave with virtue so long as we recognize how capable we are of doing the opposite.
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Lost in cyberspace

Masterton International announced on June 17 that up to 40 million credit-card accounts had become exposed to fraud after computer hackers stole account information from a credit-card payment processor. MasterCard accounts made up 13.9 million of those exposed, while Visa accounts made up about 20 million. American Express cards and Discover cards may also have been exposed, as have cardholders as far away as Japan and Hong Kong.

Jessica Antle, spokeswoman for MasterCard International Inc., says only 68,000 of the 13.9 million exposed MasterCard accounts were at “higher levels of risk,” and the risk to those was for fraudulent charges on existing cards, not identity theft. “Social Security numbers, dates of birth, information like that are not stored on your credit card” and were not exposed to theft, she said. Overall, about 200,000 accounts fall in the high-risk category.

Who is at fault? Other than the hackers themselves, the problem seems to lie with Card Systems Solutions Inc. The Atlanta-based company processes credit-card transactions and, in breach of contracts with Visa and MasterCard, was storing cardholder information for “research purposes.”

“Card Systems provides services and is supposed to pass that information on to the banks and not keep it,” MasterCard official Joshua Peirez told The New York Times. “They were keeping it.” Since Card Systems doesn’t have the internal safeguards that MasterCard and Visa have, the stored records were at greater risk of a security breach.

The FBI is investigating the theft, but in the meantime, cardholders are not powerless in the face of fraud. The most important thing they can do, say experts, is closely monitor their credit-card statements—either when the statements come in the mail or more frequently online—and contact their credit-card company if a fraudulent charge appears.

On the broader issue of identity theft, Americans are gaining new tools to protect themselves. By September, all Americans will be able to receive a free copy of their credit report each year (see box).

A person who has lost his wallet or otherwise may be a potential victim of identity theft can also request a 90-day fraud alert from the three credit-reporting bureaus. With a fraud alert in place, lenders have to call the person and obtain approval before a credit account can be opened in his name. With a police report or other evidence of potential identity theft, the fraud alert can be extended to seven years.

Depending on where you live, you may also be eligible for a “credit freeze.” In states with credit-freeze laws, a person can freeze his credit so that no new accounts or loans can open in his name at all. The downside is that it can take several days to lift the freeze when a person wants to obtain a credit card, buy a car, or refinance a mortgage.

Credit-freeze laws (some of which limit freezes to identity-theft victims) are in effect in Colorado, California, Louisiana, Maine, Texas, Washington, and Vermont, and 22 other states are considering similar laws.
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Game winners, ratings killers

Perhaps basketball fans, sensing oncoming labor strife, tried a preemptive strike against the NBA. For whatever reason, NBA executives have reason to worry. This year's NBA Finals bombed in the ratings, down 27 percent from the first game of last year's finals between the Los Angeles Lakers and Detroit Pistons. Game 1 between the defending champs Detroit and the San Antonio Spurs drew the second smallest television-watching crowd for a Finals Game 1 ever.

Game 1 this year couldn't even beat a rerun of CBS's CSI.

Why such low interest? Don't blame the Pistons. Last year's squad drew impressive ratings against the Lakers. The league may have accidentally tipped its hand. An official NBA press release, trying to spin the abysmal TV numbers, noted the Pistons-Spurs matchup actually drew 9 percent more viewers than the last Finals Game 1 (2003) that didn't involve the popular Lakers. The problem: The Spurs were playing in 2003, too.

And there's the bad sign for the NBA. Fans don't seem to care for the Spurs style of basketball. What's good for winning games—tough defense, consistent post play from Tim Duncan, and solid passing—isn't much good for attracting fans. What's worse, the Spurs could conceivably spawn a whole league full of copycat teams who neither attract new fans nor excite the ones they already have.

Extraordinary and commonplace

By now the Lance Armstrong story almost seems cliché. This July, Mr. Armstrong will race for his seventh Tour de France championship in a row before retiring. Looking back, his ride from cancer patient to champion seems even beyond fairy tales.

In October 1996, Mr. Armstrong, a young, up-and-coming American cyclist, was diagnosed with testicular cancer. Once the cancer spread to his lungs and his brain, doctors gave him a 50/50 chance of survival. After surgery to remove a testicle and brain tumors—and sessions upon sessions of chemotherapy treatments on his lungs—doctors declared Mr. Armstrong cancer-free in 1997. In the summer of 1999, Mr. Armstrong entered the Tour de France—cycling's major event—and, though he was considered an underdog, he stunned cycling fans, winning the race.

One victory would have been sufficient to cement Mr. Armstrong's place in sports lore. But with victory came questions. Surely a former cancer patient couldn't walk away with a Tour de France victory? The French media began whispering about steroid allegations. Mr. Armstrong never failed a drug test and maintains to this day he's clean. His subsequent five victories have only served to solidify some Europeans' belief that the American dopes.

Win or lose this July, Mr. Armstrong won't be able to escape those claims. He can't prove a negative.

But if Mr. Armstrong wins his seventh Tour de France in a row, will anybody be surprised? Will anyone be impressed? Has Mr. Armstrong become too much like the Harlem Globetrotters and his competition too similar to the Washington Generals? If Mr. Armstrong's story were a fictional movie, cynical film critics would denounce it for lacking realism, for being too triumphant. That may be Mr. Armstrong's most impressive accomplishment—making the truly extraordinary seem commonplace.
AROUND THE HORN

One of baseball's most exclusive clubs will soon likely add its second Baltimore first baseman. Rafael Palmeiro, who during 2003 collected his 500th home run, is closing in on his 3,000th hit. Only three major leaguers have ever amassed 3,000 hits and 500 homers. Hank Aaron and Willie Mays accomplished the feat decades ago. Former Oriole Eddie Murray joined the club in 1996.

It's not the way to attract a fan base. Just before the running of Formula One's United States Grand Prix on June 19, bad tires knocked out 70 percent of the field. During a practice lap, several teams using Michelin tires noticed their F1 cars struggled to maintain traction during a banked high-speed turn. As a result, all 14 cars using Michelins pulled out leaving just six cars in the race. Fans at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway showed their displeasure, showering the racers, including winner Michael Schumacher, with boos.

Aaron Kinloch's business model was part baseball, part traffic jam, and part information super highway. The Omaha, Neb., resident, like others living in the neighborhoods surrounding College World Series home Rosenblatt Stadium, carved up pieces of his property to create 20 parking spots. But Mr. Kinloch went one step further, putting his parking spots up for auction on eBay, the internet bidding site. Mr. Kinloch says his parking spots won't necessarily go for more, but he won't have to stand on the street waving flags or signs trying to get people in his parking lot.

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Fifteen years ago in WORLD magazine...

The first year of the Bush administration is moving toward its end without providing an answer to a crucial question: What might Americans expect of George Bush in terms of future nominees to the Supreme Court?...

The Bush nominees will join a court that was reshaped dramatically during Ronald Reagan's eight years as president. The most liberal members of the court—Brennan, Marshall, and Blackmun—all are over 80 years old... The conservative wing of the court, meanwhile, comprises its youngest members: Chief Justice William Rehnquist is 64, Sandra O'Connor is 58, and both Antonin Scalia and Anthony Kennedy are 52. More importantly, perhaps their energy and rigorous intellect have begun to dominate the debate and direction of the court. ... Yet the answer is difficult, because even after eight years as loyal vice president to the most conservative president since Calvin Coolidge, George Bush's commitment to some conservative principles remains suspect. It is instructive to recall that "moderate" Republican presidents provided much of the current liberal wing of the court: Dwight Eisenhower nominated Brennan, Richard Nixon nominated Blackmun, and Gerald Ford nominated John Paul Stevens.

Whoever President Bush selects... will face a Senate even more hostile than before the 1988 elections. The Kennedy-Biden-Metzenbaum triumvirate that defeated Robert Bork recognizes that the court's philosophy has shifted away from liberal judicial activism. They have dropped all pretense of bipartisan cooperation and will resist any nominees who oppose expansion of the liberal agenda. ...

FORMER SENATOR AND UN Ambassador John Danforth has performed a valuable service between elections by writing about a Christian's role in contemporary American society. In an op-ed for The New York Times last Friday, Mr. Danforth, an ordained minister, observed: "Many conservative Christians approach politics with a certainty that they know God's truth, and that they can advance the kingdom of God through governmental action."

He writes that the "only absolute standard of behavior is the commandment 'to love our neighbors as ourselves.' One can quibble over where Mr. Danforth's "absolutist" position may lead politically (and I do, given the position of religious moderates and liberals when it comes to a host of other issues in which they are engaged—from anti-war activism and the environment, to civil rights and same-sex "marriage"), but his central thesis is correct: Christians are limited in what government can do for them and for an earthly agenda.

In a week when evangelist Billy Graham is visiting New York for what may be the last mass meeting of a long and noble ministry, Richard Ostling of the Associated Press asked him about social issues. Mr. Graham replied, "I don't give advice. I'm going to stay off these hot-button issues."

Mr. Graham hasn't always shied away from those topics, but he learned where the greater power comes from and it isn't government. The 86-year-old Mr. Graham "now seeks to shun all public controversies—preferring a simple message of love and unity through Jesus," writes Mr. Ostling.

John Danforth seems to flirt with universalism when he says that he and his fellow religious moderates believe "religion should be inclusive." Not exactly. Different religions make competing claims and the Christian faith separates "sheep from goats," the saved from the lost, and heaven from hell.

Jesus said He came to bring a sword. A sword divides. The primary objective for the Christian should be to seek and to point others toward Jesus, not to political parties and agendas.

The social ills confronting us have not produced our collective indifference to a moral code. They reflect that indifference. Fixing social ills does not begin in the halls of Congress or the Supreme Court, but in individual human hearts.

Government can't go there. God can. But if God's servants prefer government to God, or seek to attach God to political parties and earthly agendas, they are doomed to futility. —Cal Thomas |

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68 WORLD | JULY 2/9, 2005
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Stem-cell garden

We can do research on stem cells from sources other than embryos, such as umbilical cords, without destroying potential life. Why should we continue to be intrigued by this “fruit” of embryonic stem cells when a garden of stem cells exists for research (“Stemming the Asian tide,” June 4)? As a quadriplegic for 30 years, I too could increase my quality of life dramatically if I could walk or regain the use of my hands, trunk, bowel, and bladder. However, it is important to me to advocate research that does not put man in God’s place. —JEFF MONTAG, Kearney, Neb.

A big gamble

Joel Belz’s analysis of government schools, the religion of secularism, and the loss of the “littlest of our lambs” is absolutely correct (“Leaving the back door open,” June 4). Christian parents who send their children to public schools are taking a big gamble. If a child makes it out of high school with his faith intact, it only shows that God was gracious.

—MARK MAKI
Templeton, Calif.

If parents do not back up and model what is taught in the church and the Christian school, a child does not have much chance of carrying on a “heritage of faithfulness.” Similarly, a child in a public school does not necessarily turn out devoid of morals. Children need to receive teaching and, more importantly, a model of Christianity in the home. Without that, we’re not just leaving the back door open, the whole barn has been burned down.

—ROBIN SITES
Wichita, Kan.

A large portion of our day is spent completing politically motivated activities and our curriculum is so replete with secular humanist ideologies that we have far too little time left to teach the basics. Yet our students receive such a daily bombardment of secularist and relativist ideas that the work done at home and church by conscientious Christian parents and teachers is all but undone.

—DAN BARBARA
Bouse, Ariz.

It is not a tragedy that 85 percent of our kids go to public schools, but a brilliant chance to evangelize children who don’t have parents of faith.

—SHAWNA WRIGHT
Sedro Woolley, Wash.

I formerly considered Christian schools and especially homeschools to be hideouts for the timid and socially inept. However, in five years of student ministry I have prayed, built teams, and trained volunteers in all aspects of shepherding students in the church, only to see a vast percentage of them reduced to minimal, nonexistent, or (even worse) apathetic faith when they reach college and beyond. This is because, as Mr. Belz pointed out, a whopping percentage were sacrificed on the altar of being “salt and light” to a fundamentally flawed system of education.

—MARK MATSON
Rockford, Ill.

Congenial Calvin

Regarding your recent story that implied Calvin College gave U.S. President George W. Bush the “Cold shoulder” (June 4) at our commencement, Calvin Fieldhouse held 5,300 people who greeted the president warmly and enthusiastically. He received standing ovations and appreciative laughter throughout the course of his 15-minute address, and his staff commented on the generous reception that he and they had at Calvin College.

—RANDY BYTWERK
Prof. of Communication Arts, Calvin College
Grand Rapids, Mich.

The protest against President Bush by Calvin College students, faculty, and friends illustrates why I left the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church and entered another denomination. Those individuals involved in the protest showed dishonor, disloyalty, and impatience by their disgraceful behavior. Shame on them.

—JAMES STASTNY
Germantown, Md.

I am a graduate from the Class of 2005 who was present. When conversing with many students who do not agree with much of the current administration’s policies, I found them overwhelmingly appreciative of the honor of having the president as the commencement speaker.

—GRETE DIETLIN
Kewadin, Mich.

WORLD told it exactly as it was. We could not have been more disgusted with the protests and the ads that appeared in the newspaper.

—TOM & BETTY COOPER
Grand Rapids, Mich.
Refreshingly clear

Thanks to Andree Seu for "You were available" (June 4) regarding women and adultery. As we live in a world that glamorizes adulterous relationships, it was refreshing and inspiring to hear such a subject clarified by a biblical perspective.

—HEATHER WEBER
North Pole, Alaska

Downsize it

Timothy Lamer's article concerning President Bush's liberal spending ("Bush's binge," June 4) was excellent. More of us should be concerned about his largesse so we can take seriously our task to place in the White House a true fiscal conservative come 2008. Republicans are supposed to downsize the government, not supersize it.

—CHERRY BLATTERT
Ellettsville, Ind.

JAGged end

The "voluntary end" of the television show JAG ("Turned off," June 4) deserves more than a half-sentence mention. I have been amazed how JAG has often been summarily dismissed despite its fine cast and writers. A 10-year run is admirable anyway, but one where our military is treated respectfully is unheard-of. And, I am afraid, it will remain unheard-of in the future—except for JAG reruns on TISA Network.

—JANICE A. SCOTT
Norcross, Ga.

Honorable tribute

I was moved to tears after reading Marvin Glasky's column, "Choose the harder right" (May 28). Thank you for writing such an honorable tribute to our men and women who have sacrificed so much for freedom.

—HEIDI HARPER
Overland Park, Kan.
In the WORLD

1. Please cancel our subscription. We have become uncomfortable with the many articles that do not encourage Christians to remove themselves from the world.

    —GARRY SIMMONS
    Pequannock, N.J.

2. Our family’s WORLD usually comes on Monday, and I and four of my younger sisters connive, scheme, and sneak to get it first. Thank you for a magazine that is enjoyable, helpful, and entirely free from the corruption of the liberal media.

    —LIZ ORRICK
    LaGrange, Ky.

A Christian leader

1. A recent guest speaker at my church said that the secret of Christian leadership is “red eyes, bent knees, and a broken heart.” It sounds like Spc. Brett Hershey learned that on his own, as shown in his journal entries (“Fallen soldiers in a forgotten war,” May 28).

    —CHAS. BYRAM
    Hatboro, Pa.

Corrections

1. The character in Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith who becomes emperor is Chancellor Palpatine (“The Darth Vader fallacy,” June 11, p. 26).

2. Former Democratic Sen. Tom Daschle is from South Dakota (“Vanishing species,” June 18, p. 26).

3. The Church of England’s investment holdings stand at $7.2 billion (“Double jeopardy,” June 18, p. 34).

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All alone in the world?

“Edgy” children’s fiction is popular with adults, but kids know better

All children’s books are about growing up—that’s the underlying theme, no matter the genre, length, or reading level. Since most of them are written by adults who have already grown up, the author-as-teacher role is tough to shirk. Even the goofiest or most formulaic fiction for young people contains some nugget of practical wisdom the kids can take away (possible exception: Captain Underpants).

While children’s authors agree that preachiness is the ultimate crime against kids, most accept their didactic responsibility—with gusto, even. For what other audience is so impressionable, so pliable, so captive? The vast majority of children spend approximately 30 hours per week, nine months a year in school, where novels are either heartily recommended or outright assigned to them every day.

So the question is not whether children’s books teach, but how. Though exceptions abound, the trend is: realistic juvenile literature has been toward the gloomy: stories in which very bad things happen to good kids. The “edgiest” subjects are reserved for the young adult market (average age, 13), but death and divorce are common themes for younger readers. The zeal with which some authors (and by extension, some teachers and librarians) push these “problem” novels at fifth- to eighth-graders borders on the sadistic. At the least it makes one wonder who benefits from stories about teen suicide or parental abandonment.

Let’s be realistic, runs the usual rationale: Since kids have to face these problems today, a fictional character in similar circumstances can help them to cope. Has there been a death in the family? Let him read Walk Two Moons. Does the girl seem beset with self-loathing? Introduce her to the teen masochist in Cut. Doesn’t fit in? Try The Outsiders. Parent problems—Wow, where do we start? Here’s one called, When Dad Killed Mom . . .

In a memoir titled Welcome to Lizard Motel, Barbara Feinberg recalls herself with chagrin as an overzealous day-care facilitator trying to raise five-year-old consciousness about oppression in Central America. Years later, she observes how her own children are depressed by books like Bridge to Terabithia, which deals with the grief and guilt of an 11-year-old after the accidental death of his best friend. Though she finds the novel to be moving and beautifully written, Ms. Feinberg has to wonder why we adults are so driven to impress kids with the bleak side of modern life. Trying to put a finger on what it is that disturbs her children, she realizes that the protagonist in most of these books is despondent (or at least misunderstood) by parents and friends, and must work out a solution to the problem entirely alone.

In other words, the existential dilemma that infected literature in the early 20th century has worked its way down to 10-year-olds. The notion that the individual is his own best and final arbiter has fueled self-esteem and “values clarification” programs for 20 years, and now dominates the genre of realistic juvenile fiction.

But pre-teens don’t normally see their world in existential terms. Their proverbial self-centeredness—the folly bound up in the heart of a child—has one positive facet: a conviction that the universe is somehow interested in them. While enemies lurk out there, so do allies. The dark is a personal threat, but the wind murmurs a lullaby.

Without sentimentalizing the so-called wisdom of children, in this case their instincts are correct. We are not alone. The universe is interested in us. One reason for the phenomenal growth of fantasy literature may be a rejection of the bleakness of contemporary realism. Very bad things may happen in fantasy, mystery, or adventure tales—but the hero is never alone. He or she can count on at least one loyal friend on earth and one supernatural ally beyond.

After years of curriculum-directed navel-gazing, fantasy provides a way out via the magic key, the secret book, the quest that takes one beyond himself.

“How can a young man keep his way pure?” asks the psalmist, with this immediate answer: “By guarding it according to Your Word.” The secret book is right under our noses, the quest is our daily walk. In this very world, the morning stars sing for joy, the trees clap their hands, the mountains skip like rams. The ultimate fantasy turns out to be real, and we are manifestly not alone.
Future shocks

The fundamental things will still apply, as times go by

I ENJOYED REVIEWING THE BOOKS NOTED ON PAGES 43-46 because it’s fun to think about the technological developments likely to occur over the next half-century. For example, I suspect that by 2055 publishers will be printing many nonfiction books on electronic paper, with buyers purchasing not only the volume but a warranty promising that the information won’t be out of date. When a reader opens such a book, an immediate link to an advanced internet will open and update the material.

Regular dental visits may well be a thing of the past because of nanopaste, by which enamel in microscopic cavities will replace bacteria so that decay does not occur. Instead of having our teeth cleaned in dental offices every six months, though, we’ll schedule artery cleanings, with microscopic devices entering our arteries to knock away fatty deposits, or hitting the colon to destroy polyps that could become cancerous.

We may also have clothes that will adjust to temperature and precipitation, and change color on wearer demand. Maybe the late summer hurricane season will be only a blip because of turtle buildings with sidings that can create a hard shell to protect buildings against high winds and floods. Homes might include not only three-dimensional printers but small molecular assemblers so that people can order some products and have them made automatically in their kitchens. I suspect that illiteracy will grow as voice-recognition computers become universal. Study of foreign languages will decline as people can have instantaneous translation in computerized earpieces. We may have computerized glasses that will give us immediate background information on people we meet or even encounter while walking down the street—although some may decide to go without such data in order to maintain the thrill of strange encounters.

But, with all these changes, it’s unlikely that high tech will make as much of a difference as some science fiction writers predict. For example, say that VRMs—virtual reality machines—do replace DVDs or similar devices; say a young man can buy a Valentine’s Day program that will place him in a virtual walk on the beach with a beautiful woman, and it will seem as real as the most vivid dream. So what? The participant will still know that it has been just a dream. Virtual reality could well be the opiate of the masses, but people will know that it’s an opiate—and that will leave a sense of dissatisfaction.

Prospects for deeper changes are all overrated, I suspect. If Christ does not first return, will artificial intelligence be in the saddle, riding mankind? No—computers will still be glorified calculators. They will be able to imitate humans and leave a person reading a transcript unable to know whether computers or humans are speaking, but they will still be responding to software and without the spark of life that is God’s gift.

More likely than a melding of man and computer is the genetic engineering of half-human, half-animal chimeras through the uniting of human and great ape sperm and eggs. Guidelines published this spring by the National Academy of Science and three affiliated groups gave species-mixing experiments the go-ahead, and if those experiments proceed all kinds of legal, ethical, and theological issues will arise. Will such creatures be considered persons? Can they be owned? Might they have souls?

Potential increases in human longevity could also bring about difficult issues. Since the Fall, God has commonly limited our spans to 70 or 80 years, as Psalm 90 points out, and I doubt whether we’ll typically go longer than the number of that psalm. Doctors will be able to patch many holes in our systems, but after a while one system or another will still spring a leak. Still, if medical innovations more often send us into three digits, how will Christians respond? If this life is only a vestibule for the life to come, how much time do we need to spend in the waiting room?

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