GROUPS GET LOUD AND PROUD ABOUT THE ABORTION VICE
P. 40
NO MATTER WHAT. NO MATTER WHEN. GOD IS WITH YOU.

Regardless of your circumstances or feelings, one thing never changes: you can trust God because He keeps His promises. In *Great is Thy Faithfulness*, Pastor Rob Morgan reminds us through 52 devotions that our loving God can be trusted to always follow through on what He says He will do.

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An Afghan Christian family that has managed to reach Pakistan. Barnabas Aid is assisting them.

Converts from Islam and their children face almost certain death at the hands of the ruling Taliban, who will kill them as apostates. Barnabas Aid is in direct contact with many hundreds of Afghan Christian families.

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LETTERS AND COMMENTS

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PLEASE INCLUDE FULL NAME AND ADDRESS.
LETTERS MAY BE EDITED TO YIELD BREVITY AND CLARITY.

CREAM OF THE CROP
AUG. 28, P. 62: Our milkman, who delivered milk to our home when our children were growing up, loved Jesus. We would pray together and encourage one another in our faith with each delivery. He was such a blessing to me and still is, even though he retired many years ago.
Beth Pfister/Fishers, Ind.

EDUCATION WITHOUT TRIBALISM
AUG. 28, P. 32: I encourage all parents and grandparents to read Marvin Olasky’s interview with Gene Edward Veith before making any decisions about which college or university to choose for their children and grandchildren.
Kristofer Sandlund/Zanesville, Ohio

As director of a college planning service, I want to support and reward Christian colleges and universities that are courageously standing against the current of our culture by recommending them to the students I work with.
Karen Davis/Exton, Pa.

GENESIS RAISINS AND MYSTERIES FULFILLED
AUG. 28, P. 28 AND P. 76: Dennis Prager is one of our favorite speakers. I was sad to hear on one of his Fireside Chats that his favorite word is earn and he believes we earn everything, including our salvation. I pray for him and ask the Lord to open his eyes to the truth.
Carroll Mantell/Waxhaw, N.C.

It was refreshing to read Marvin Olasky’s observations and the areas where he disagrees with Prager’s understanding of Genesis.
Cherie Bowman/Cornelia, Ga.

JURY OF OUR PEERS
AUG. 28, P. 10: I am saddened by the clear statement of reality Joel Belz presented in his column. No amount of top-down governance will transform a people who have neither motivation nor tools to govern themselves.
Larry Swindell/Kingsport, Tenn.

As an attorney who has practiced law for almost 20 years, I believe most jurors do their best in determining the facts and applying the given law to those facts. Were their determinations always right? Of course not. But we should not argue they should be.
David Schmidt/Signal Mountain, Tenn.

SHIFTY WITH WORDS
AUG. 28, P. 20: As always, Janie B. Cheaney’s column is informative. Our Lord is not the author of confusion, which is what the vocabulary by diktat creates.
Sharon Skinner/Carlsbad, N.M.

FACE TO FACE WITH GOD
AUG. 28, P. 40: One can fail to make their parents’ faith one’s own. I faced this challenge as I grew up, and now I pray my children will “know and love God on an intimate, heart-to-heart level.”
Kenton Scantlin/Fort Wayne, Ind.

TALKS WE NEVER HAD
AUG. 28, P. 74: Andrée Seu Peterson’s column brought a healthy but sad discomfort. Perhaps when we fear to talk about Christ in our everyday interactions, we can at least speak in a way that opens doors that point in His direction.
Steve Ferrier/Corvallis, Ore.

PLAYING FOR PEANUTS
AUG. 28, P. 73: I knew minor leaguers weren’t paid very well, but I was surprised at how poorly paid they are. What dedication, for those who stick it out for several years before finally making it to the big leagues.
Emily Fose/Bailey, Colo.

Read more letters at wng.org/mailbag
NOTES FROM THE CEO  | Kevin Martin

Giving thanks for a devoted board

As our board of directors meets this month, will you remember them in prayer?

Our 11-member board of directors holds its annual meeting in October of every year. Most years, that meeting is here in Asheville, N.C. Giving our directors a good excuse to be in Asheville in its most beautiful, colorful season may be the very reason our bylaws dictate an annual meeting in this month. I’m only half kidding.

The board has other reasons for the October date, though. One reason is that our corporate audit is completed by October, and its review of the audit represents an important aspect of our board’s fiscal oversight of the organization, one of its vital roles.

It has several others, too. Broadly, our board is responsible for our mission: Together, the members determine what our mission is, and they ensure that the things we’re doing fulfill the mission. Then they provide direction—that’s why they’re called a board of directors.

As with most nonprofits the size of WORLD, our directors are unpaid. In spite of that, they spend a lot of their time and energy working on organizational matters. Aside from the annual meeting, we have two other regular meetings every year, and we almost always add a special meeting or two. Every director sits on at least one committee, and those committees have meetings and specific work to do.

Each man and woman on our board has made a serious commitment to serve you through their service to WORLD. Their sacrifice of time, energy, resources, and low-stress lives (being a WORLD director is not always a low-stress role!) is significant. I thank God for them. When you pray for WORLD, please pray for our directors, and thank God for them as I do.

All our directors get involved in a variety of other ways. They have provided housing when we travel, hosted dinners for supporters, represented WORLD at conferences and other events, encouraged our people with meals, generally promoted WORLD everywhere they go, and prayed for us. They make themselves available year-round, not just at meetings.

Each man and woman on our board has made a serious commitment to serve you through their service to WORLD. Their sacrifice of time, energy, resources, and low-stress lives (being a WORLD director is not always a low-stress role!) is significant. I thank God for them. When you pray for WORLD, please pray for our directors, and thank God for them as I do.

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Doctors who deserve gratitude

Plenty of doctors have outsized influence

HAVING SPENT AN UNCOMFORTABLE and annoying part of the last 20 months in hospital beds, doctors’ offices, urgent care facilities, and emergency rooms—and having allowed an uncomfortable cynicism to shape my outlook—I’ve decided over the last few days to try to steer a more positive course.

Who, I asked myself, were the doctors to whom I owed a lifelong debt of gratitude? Were there any who had changed my life’s course?

I couldn’t help thinking of Dr. H.W. Bender, the eye specialist in Waterloo, Iowa, who during the summer of 1945 mended and then reshaped my left eyeball. I had poked a stick through it while pretending to help my mother in the garden. Doctors watching the procedure worried I might lose sight in both eyes because of damage to the optic nerve. But Dr. Bender’s treatment preserved my vision and the course of my life. The Bender family, I discovered later, had a vast reputation in medical circles in the Midwest, including the University of Iowa hospital system.

A decade later, my life got another boost through the generous personal support for the Cono Christian School that came from Dr. Frederic Sloan. He and his brother were graduates of the then one-room schoolhouse. That tiny school was closed and moved in the early 1950s to Cono, and is still there. Ric became a gifted surgeon, then in the 1950s became the chief of surgeons for both Cedar Rapids hospitals. He ultimately had to leave his medical practice after some personal problems, but his support for Cono Christian School was enormous. I remember his handing my dad a check just before morning worship almost every Sunday. He also encouraged his colleagues in the medical profession to support Cono. Humanly speaking, there would have been no Cono school without Ric Sloan.

Dr. Robert Kyle was a similarly gifted neurosurgeon in eastern Iowa who, in spite of the complexity and sophistication of his specialty, always found time to stretch the thinking and interests of us young students. In the years before cancer cut his career short, he taught us to push the boundaries of “safe” practice. He intrigued us with his sense of adventure.

Nor will I ever forget the stern warning I got (I think it was in the early ’80s) from a pediatrician here in Black Mountain, N.C., Dr. John Wilson. My daughter Katrina had lacerated her scalp in a basketball skirmish.

While watching Dr. Wilson stitch things together, I was also leafing through an outdated waiting room magazine. The cover featured a focus on young doctors who had pocketed $100,000 or more in their first year of practice. “Put that magazine down,” Dr. Wilson barked at me. “It’s an embarrassment to my profession.”

Dr. Wilson was already known in the community as the doctor who for a month or two every year hung a sign on his office door to announce that “DR. WILSON IS GONE TO HELP THE CHILDREN IN CONGO.” I dropped the magazine on the floor and as a journalist have tried hard ever since to remember that financial success isn’t the only measure of life.

To say I’ve been influenced by Dr. Priscilla Storm for more than 70 years is an understatement. After early schooling in India, where she was born and raised, and at the boarding school in Iowa founded by my parents, she finished pre-med studies at Covenant College and her medical credentials at Emory University. She went next to serve as a missionary doctor in Bangladesh, and came back to become chief of staff at the major hospital in Gainesville, Ga., where she focuses now on breast cancer surgery.

I’ll never forget her answer some years ago when I asked quite directly, “What do you enjoy most about being a surgeon?” “I love Saturday nights at Grady Hospital,” she said, “when I get to help repair all the awful things that happen out there. I get to help fix so much that is broken.”

I had to ask Pris over dinner a few days ago whether my memory was correct. “Yes,” she said. “I remember that. Helping fix things that way is part of the gospel, isn’t it?”
Let us run with endurance, the race God has set before us.

It's been said that life is a race, and no matter our age, we are running one. What is it that keeps you running? During the good times? During the times you want to quit? Let us run with confidence the race set before us.

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HEN SENATE DEMOCRATS LEARNED on Sept. 19 their chamber’s rules prevented them from attaching a controversial immigration measure to a $3.5 trillion spending bill, it was the second time in seven months an obscure congressional staffer dashed their legislative hopes.

Senate Parliamentarian Elizabeth MacDonough ruled that altering the path for immigrants to get legal status does not qualify as “budget reconciliation” and thus needs more than a simple, filibuster-proof majority vote to pass the Senate. MacDonough made a similar ruling in February when Democrats tried to raise the

THE PERSUASION PROBLEM

Congress devolves from “the first branch of government” to shock-jock showmanship

by Michael Reneau

October 9, 2021
minimum wage to $15 an hour through the same process.

Following the recent ruling, New York Times columnist Ezra Klein tweeted, “This is just my occasional reminder that you can eliminate the filibuster with 51 votes. The parliamentarian is not the obstacle. The obstacle is Senate Democrats who support the filibuster.”

Klein’s partially right: The parliamentarian isn’t the obstacle to big legislative changes. But his prescription—ending the filibuster—would be another step in the debasement of one of history’s greatest deliberative bodies. As Congress grows weaker (and consistently bottoms out in public opinion polls), the power of the executive and judicial branches soars. Now every executive order or Supreme Court decision seems it could upend an already polarized republic.

Congressional leaders have abandoned legislative persuasion and anointed raw political power for more than a decade, and big milestones mark the way. In 2013, then–Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., muscled through a measure eliminating the 60-vote threshold needed to confirm presidential nominees other than Supreme Court justices. In 2017, then–Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., took it further and did the same for Supreme Court nominees.

Since 2013, Congress has shut down the federal government three times while fighting over spending bills. Both parties have pulled that lever. Fears of another shutdown loomed in mid-late September.

But smaller surrenders have diluted Congress’ power along the way too. A 2018 ProPublica and Washington Post report showed partisan fighting growing more intense during the Obama administration. Congressional Democrats began focusing only on the bare minimums to pass their legislative wish lists (with the Affordable Care Act being the worst power play). Republicans continued the trend into the Trump years.

Congressional committees—in which much of the legislative horse trading necessary to craft workable bills takes place—have a much smaller role to play now than they did 15 years ago. Per the ProPublica report: In 2005 and 2006, House committees met 449 times to deliberate legislation. By 2015 and 2016, that number fell to 254 times. The Senate’s fall was worse: 252 committee meetings to 69.

Floor votes on amendments in both chambers have seen similar drops.

The net effect of all this plays out each night on the cable news: Instead of hammering out compromises and deliberating toward solutions both sides can live with, congressional politics turns into a hunt for raw power.

Scholars such as the American Enterprise Institute’s Yuval Levin are focusing on how to reform Congress and encourage its members to incentivize the right things. Levin thinks Congress would benefit from an organization akin to the Federalist Society, which helped reform the judiciary. He advocates changing parliamentary rules and decentralizing power from party leaders in Congress. That’s one piece of the puzzle.

But stunts are stunting our politics. Democratic Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez got attention with her hypocritical “Tax the Rich” designer dress at the Met Gala in September. So did Republican Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene by blowing up a Toyota Prius with a .50-caliber rifle. Are we reasoning together, or are we rationing common sense?

A good start for reform would be for the electorate to start rewarding political candidates who are more serious about statesmanship and less addicted to treating a term in Congress as an audition for a game show.

"ARE WE REASONING TOGETHER, OR ARE WE RATIONING COMMON SENSE?"
THE AVERAGE AGE of a member of the 117th Congress when taking office, according to data provided by the Congressional Research Service. As the United States gets older, its congressional representatives do too. According to U.S. Census data, the United States’ median age increased from 37.2 to 38.1 between 2010 and 2019. The average age of a U.S. representative in the 111th Congress was 57.2 years. The average age of a senator was 63.1 years. Fast-forward to the 117th Congress: The average age was 58.4 for U.S. representatives and 64.3 for senators.

66
The number of baby boomers in the 100-member United States Senate. Eleven senators are members of the older Silent Generation. Boomers made up just over 20 percent of the American population in 2020.

96%
The share of members of Congress who hold college degrees. Just 23.4 percent of Americans over age 25 hold bachelor’s degrees, according to the Census Bureau.

143
The number of female senators and representatives, constituting just 26.7 percent of Congress’ members.

11
The average tenure in years of senators in the 117th Congress, compared with an average tenure of 4.1 years for salaried American workers, according to the Department of Labor.
ENCAMPED

Border backlogs
Thousands of Haitian migrants escalate the already-dire border situation

An encampment of mostly Haitian migrants under a bridge between Del Rio, Texas, and Ciudad Acuña, Mexico, swelled to 14,287 occupants at its peak on Sept. 19. U.S. officials said they had expelled thousands of migrants from Del Rio via plane and bus a day later, and Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas warned that those entering the country illegally would be returned to their home countries. But some officials said border agents released thousands of Haitians into the United States and gave them notices to appear at an immigration office in 60 days, undercutting the administration’s stance on immediate expulsions. The Associated Press reported the releases were happening on a “very, very large scale.” The United Nations high commissioner for refugees called for the United States to roll back Title 42, a public health rule that rejects most asylum-seekers for fear of coronavirus spread.

SUED
Two out-of-state former attorneys seeking to challenge the Texas heartbeat law sued a San Antonio abortionist. Alan Braid revealed in an opinion column that he provided an abortion to a woman who had a baby with a detectable heartbeat. He wants to test the law in court. Arkansas-based Oscar Stilley said his lawsuit intends to force a court review of the heartbeat law, which allows private citizens to sue people involved in aborting babies with a detectable heartbeat. Felipe Gomez of Chicago called the law a form of government overreach and asked the San Antonio court to declare it unconstitutional.

TAPPED
Actress Mayim Bialik and former Jeopardy! contestant Ken Jennings will split hosting responsibilities for the popular game show through December. Shorttime host and executive producer Mike Richards left the quiz show abruptly on Aug. 20 after offensive comments from podcast episodes resurfaced. Bialik, who was originally hired as an interim host, will film episodes to air through Nov. 5. After that, she and Jennings, a consulting producer for the show and record holder for the longest winning streak, will take turns as their schedules allow. Sony Pictures Television confirmed it is still searching for a permanent host but did not announce further auditions.

CONVICTED
On Sept. 20, a Rwandan court convicted Paul Rusesabagina, 67, of forming and financing an illegal armed group and sentenced him to 25 years in prison. Rusesabagina gained celebrity status after a 2004 movie told how he saved more than 1,000 people at his hotel during the 1994 genocide. He began criticizing President Paul Kagame for alleged human rights abuses and founded an opposition platform called Rwandan Movement for Democratic Change, which has an armed wing, National Liberation Front (FLN). FLN claimed responsibility for 2018 and 2019 attacks that killed nine Rwandan citizens. Rusesabagina denied inciting violence but admitted sending FLN money. Rusesabagina says the government wants to silence him.
“This brutal, unilateral, and unpredictable decision reminds me a lot of what Mr. Trump used to do. ... This isn’t done between allies.”

French Foreign Minister JEAN-YVES LE DRIAN, speaking to France Info radio about the Biden administration’s new defense pact with the United Kingdom to build nuclear-powered submarines for Australia. As a result, Canberra scrapped a $60 billion submarine deal with France.

“I wanted to become a doctor! And that dream has vanished. I don’t think they would let us go back to school.”

A 16-year-old SCHOOLGIRL from Kabul, Afghanistan, commenting on the Taliban’s exclusion of girls from Afghan secondary schools.

“You’d think you’d kind of know before you off someone with a Predator drone.”

Sen. RAND PAUL, R-Ky., after Secretary of State Antony Blinken admitted during a Senate hearing that he didn’t know whether a U.S. drone strike in Afghanistan on Aug. 29 had mistakenly killed an aid worker instead of an ISIS-K terrorist. Military officials later admitted the strike had wrongly killed the aid worker and nine members of his family, including seven children.

“I have never refused the Eucharist to anyone.”

POPE FRANCIS, speaking to reporters on Sept. 15 about whether bishops should refuse the Lord’s Supper to politicians who support practices the Roman Catholic Church deems sinful. Some U.S. bishops argue President Joe Biden, who is Catholic, should not be allowed to partake due to his support of abortion.

“I don’t know this country anymore.”

Haitian NICODEME VYLES, speaking to a New York Times reporter in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, where the United States deported him and around 300 other Haitians on Sept. 19. The deportations began after 12,000 Haitians crossed the border to Del Rio, Texas. Vyles, 45, had lived in Panama since 2003.
2 **SUBWAY SHUTDOWN** Investigators in New York said Sept. 10 the multi-hour shutdown of several subway lines in August was likely caused by someone pressing an “Emergency Power Off” switch. The August outage idled more than 80 trains along several of the city’s transit lines, leading to stranded passengers and mass confusion. State investigators say they believe the plastic guard over the button, meant to prevent such accidents, was missing.

3 **STUCK IN THE SUEZ** For the second time this year, a shipping vessel has gotten stuck in the Suez Canal. The Suez Canal Authority reported Sept. 9 the 738-foot-long bulk carrier *Coral Crystal* became lodged after running aground in the canal. Unlike the grounding of the *Ever Given* in March, tugboats were able to pull the *Coral Crystal* free with minimal disruption to traffic in the canal linking the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. Canal spokesman George Safwat said roughly 3.2 million tons of cargo traversed the canal on that day and the grounding didn’t impede traffic.

4 **ROAD READY OR NOT** There’s a small problem with the Netherlands’ newest military trucks: They’re not legal to drive on Dutch roads. The Dutch military purchased 1,600 utility trucks earlier this year to haul 8-foot-tall containers for the European nation’s defense forces. Upon closer inspection, officials with the Ministry of Defense announced the new trucks are just slightly taller than the 4-meter (or 13.1-foot) limit on the nation’s roads. Dutch defense officials say they’re working to solve the problem. In the meantime, Minister of Defense Ank Bijleveld has asked the nation’s legislature for an exemption.

5 **GROUNDED LAWMAKER** Alaska Airlines banned an Alaskan lawmaker in April for refusing to wear a mask on a flight, and now she says she cannot reach the state capital of Juneau for Senate votes. On Sept. 9, Republican state Sen. Lora Reinbold of Anchorage filed a request with the lawmaking body to excuse her from business at the state Capitol until she can find a way to travel there. Set in the Alexander Archipelago,
Alaska’s capital is inaccessible by car and only sparsely served by airlines. Reinbold had recently used Delta to reach Juneau by connecting through Seattle. But as of Sept. 11, that route shuttered for the season, leaving Alaska Airlines as the only provider of flights between Anchorage and Juneau. Last April, she also traveled overland through Canada and then took a ferry to reach Juneau.

6 A HOUSE OF CARDS A Los Angeles area mansion considered the most expensive home in the world will soon hit the open market after the house’s developer went bankrupt. In September, a Los Angeles County Superior Court judge placed the 105,000-square-foot property into receivership after its owner, developer Nile Niami, defaulted on $165 million in loans. In 2017, real estate watchers expected the Bel Air mansion with a 4,000-square-foot master bedroom suite to list for $500 million. But construction at the 8-acre site ground to a halt under the weight of Niami’s growing money problems. Last year, Niami listed his own Beverly Hills mansion for sale for $100 million, but ultimately only received $38 million for the residence. The most expensive home sold in Los Angeles is a Beverly Hills estate Amazon founder Jeff Bezos purchased last year for $165 million.

7 CENTENARIAN LOBSTERWOMAN While most 101-year-olds are decades into retirement, Virginia Oliver is still hard at work. The Maine centenarian still works three days a week on a lobster boat doing roughly the same work she’s done since she was a young girl just before the Great Depression. Between May and November, Oliver helps process lobsters by measuring the animals caught and throwing back crustaceans that are too small to keep. Working alongside her 78-year-old son Max, Oliver is also responsible for banding lobsters’ claws and sometimes steers the lobster boat if it’s not too foggy. Some urged her to quit, but Oliver says she’ll keep lobstering until she dies. “And the doctor said to me, ‘What are you out there lobstering for?’” Oliver told CBS News. “And I said, ‘Because I want to.’”

8 MISSING TEETH It wasn’t their most important case ever, but troopers with the Illinois State Police were able to reunite a state fair patron with a set of lost dentures Sept. 6. In a social media posting, the state police said another fairgoer found a set of dentures in the Conservation World section of the fairgrounds in Springfield, Ill. After posting a picture of the dentures in a clear cup of water, the owner of the teeth contacted troopers to lay claim to the property.

9 PLANKING THROUGH PAIN An Australian man has shattered the Guinness World Record for longest plank, holding himself in the painful abdomen-straining position for 9 hours, 30 minutes, and 1 second. Daniel Scali, who made his world-record attempt in Adelaide, Australia, in August, said he began feeling pain in his arms after 14 minutes. But for Scali, who developed chronic pain syndrome after injuring his arm when he was 12, pain was something he could endure. For the challenge, Scali had to hold his body straight while resting all his weight on his elbows and toes for the duration of the challenge. The previous record of 8 hours, 15 minutes, and 15 seconds was set by American 62-year-old George Hood last year. “It was only recently, when I’ve grown up, [that I’m] accepting the cards I’ve been dealt and using them to my advantage,” Scali told Guinness.
The influence game
Chasing followers is no substitute for exercising dominion

I WATCHED MY FIRST YouTube video after a tortuous wait on our dial-up connection: two minutes buffering for every two seconds of play. It was “Charlie Bit Me.” Once uploaded, I couldn’t delete it for a week, as it was such a hard-won treasure.

Now, like most Americans, I consult YouTube almost every day for advice on changing a water filter or unlocking an ignition key. And about once a week I get sucked into the vortex of video clickbait. From the promising brainchild of three former PayPal employees, YouTube now accounts for about 15 percent of all internet traffic, with 500 hours of content uploaded every minute.

According to most accounts (the founding myth is a little hazy) Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim wanted to build a dating website. Offering $100 each for videos of attractive women didn’t build content fast enough, so they opened the platform to anyone with uploading capacity. That led to a mixed bag of homegrown talent like the “Star Wars Kid” (aka, Ghyslain Raza), who in January 2006 uploaded a demonstration of his skill with a double lightsaber (aka, a golf ball retriever), going down in history as one of the first viral videos.

Google saw the possibilities, and in November 2006 purchased the platform for a reported $1.65 billion. Since then, YouTube has made celebrities out of Ukrainian preschoolers and Latin American amateur singers and trick-shot Dudes from Texas A&M. “YouTuber” has replaced “astronaut” as a popular ambition of elementary-school children—at least that was the case in 2019 and is probably more so after a pandemic year. Who wouldn’t want to become rich by being themselves in front of a camera?

“There’s no amount of explanation that can account for the strange alchemy of YouTube stardom,” observes the website Thrillist. In 2014, a teenage Target shopper secretly snapped a photo of the cute boy at the checkout. She posted it on Twitter, and before his shift was over “Alex from Target” had become an internet sensation, going on to a brief career as a YouTube celeb. Felix Kjellberg, aka PewDiePie, a brash Swedish American who built his fame on videos of himself playing video games, has remained in the top ranks of YouTubers since 2013.

Who knows what strange alchemy will catch fire? Yesterday a chunky teen jumping around with a make-shift lightsaber, today Vlad and Niki brushing their teeth. And tomorrow?

YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok are the preferred platforms of today’s “influencers” who market themselves as much as any product. Schoolboys who dream of becoming the next PewDiePie (110 million YouTube subscribers) have as much chance of becoming the next LeBron James (98 million Instagram followers). Most influencers built internet careers on their singing, acting, or athletic talent. Being sensational is not as easy as it looks.

Still, the lure of nobodies becoming famous is right in front of our faces every day. Why can’t we be the ones uploading pandemic song parodies like the Marsh Family or Rube Goldberg contraptions like Joseph’s Machines?

Because those things are difficult and take more time, energy, and talent than most of us have. But all of us have influence.

One of the unhappiest effects of YouTube celebrity, especially among the young, is depriving them of their sense of agency. It creates “followers” rather than actors, who dream of making their mark in the social-media world rather than moving purposefully through their own world. Our boundaries may be small, depending on age, ability, and position, but we have more impact within those boundaries than we realize. Doing what your hand finds to do (Ecclesiastes 9:10) follows surveying your territory and figuring out how to make it better. This is what dominion means, and everyone has a personal share of dominion. In the end, when accounts are added up and eternal consequences weighed, that’s the influence that will matter.
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A QUIET MASCULINITY

Clint Eastwood’s Cry Macho explores what the old can teach the young about being a man

by Collin Garbarino

OUR-TIME ACADEMY AWARD WINNER Clint Eastwood has directed films for half a century and starred in them since 1955, but the nonagenarian doesn’t seem interested in retirement. Cry Macho, his new movie in theaters and streaming on HBO Max, is a quiet meditation on masculinity that explores the value of old age.

Eastwood plays Mike Milo, a rodeo cowboy whose glory faded decades earlier. Mike takes a job from his old boss, Howard (Dwight Yoakam), who needs Mike to drive from Texas to Mexico City to retrieve his estranged son Rafo (Eduardo Minett). Rafo’s mother lives in debauched luxury and her string of boyfriends abuse Rafo, who opts to live
on the streets. Rafo wants to be tough and trains a fighting rooster he names Macho, saying the rooster is just like him.

Rafo doesn’t trust anyone, but he agrees to go with Mike because he’s attracted to the authentic manliness he senses in the squinty-eyed cowboy. The drive back to Texas is slow, but that doesn’t mean it’s easy as Mike and Rafo are pursued by both the Mexican police and thugs hired by Rafo’s mom. They find themselves stranded in a small Mexican town, living off the kindness of Marta (Natalia Traven), a widowed restaurant owner raising her three granddaughters.

Mike tries to earn his keep by training horses and fixing broken things: busted machines and wounded animals. Mike finds a purpose for a life he thought was over, and through his quiet example, he also manages to fix Rafo’s hurting heart.

Rafo has never experienced the love of a father, and he imagines being a man is to be tough and violent. He’s a little disappointed when his new cowboy friend doesn’t meet expectations. The film critiques Hollywood toughness when Mike tells Rafo, “This macho thing is overrated.” Protecting those we love rarely requires physical violence. Mike demonstrates quiet masculinity rooted in a care for others. He teaches and shapes, and he sometimes does this by simply asking the right questions.

Cry Macho, rated PG-13 for rough language and behavior, isn’t a fast-paced adventure. Mike’s drive through the countryside and his hunt for Rafo on the streets of Mexico City could be described as leisurely. When he arrives in Marta’s small town, the movie slows down even further. For a movie about a duo on the run, much of the running time is taken up by dialogue. But it’s not that there’s lots of talking—everyone just talks so slowly. Mike’s an old laconic cowboy who thinks a long time before he says anything, and Rafo, who’s speaking in his second language, starts to match Mike’s cadence. It’s only when Rafo and Marta speak Spanish that you feel any urgency and you’re reminded the world hasn’t stopped completely.

This slowness might be off-putting for some viewers, but there’s beauty in the pacing. Eastwood stretches our patience and reminds us the arc of redemption can be long. Solving the world’s problems takes time, and contrary to what we’ve seen lately, most of those problems can’t be solved with an earthshaking explosion or a well-timed superhuman punch.

To appreciate Cry Macho, you need to watch it for what it is: an old man’s movie. But if I had to lodge a complaint, it might be that I found Eastwood a little distracting. He looks pretty good for his age, but when he walks across a room, I feel all 91 of his years. Perhaps he should have made this movie 10 or 20 years ago. Even so, I marveled at his dedication to filmmaking: He obviously feels he still has something to say.

At one point in the movie, as Mike helps a lady with her sick dog, he mutters, “I don’t know how to cure old.” Maybe old isn’t something to be cured. Maybe it’s something to be worked out with grace and dignity, with an eye toward passing on the most important lessons to the next generation. Eastwood’s done exactly that with Cry Macho.
**Lesser of two evils**

by Marty VanDriel

The trailer for the R-rated new release *Copshop* makes the film look campy yet intriguing. But the movie itself, about a police officer caught between three criminals, is a disappointment.

In the opening scene, Teddy Murretto (Frank Grillo) races away from unseen pursuers in the Nevada desert before scheming to get himself arrested to evade his enemies. When a drunk driver without any identification (Gerard Butler) is also locked up and suddenly tries to kill Murretto, rookie cop Valerie Young (Alexis Louder) saves her prisoner and her boss. Corruption in the police force adds to the intrigue, and soon a third villain invades the police station: mobster Anthony Lamb (Toby Huss), who is also after Murretto. Mayhem ensues.

Injured by her own bullet, Young doesn’t know whom to trust when she’s locked up in the cellblock with two of the three criminals, threatened from without by Lamb, and warned by both detainees how wicked the other is. She must choose which of these two bad eggs is the least scrambled if she is to save her own life (and theirs).

So why does the movie fail? It’s a case of “too much and too many”—too many coincidences, too many near-dead villains coming back to life, and too much unnecessary swearing and blasphemy. As it stands, *Copshop* is worth a skip.

**DARK FAIRY TALE**

Kids’ fantasy *Nightbooks* is distastefully violent

by Bob Brown

WITH WHISPERS OF “Hansel and Gretel,” the new Netflix film *Nightbooks* spins a Grimmesque fairy tale in a modern, urban setting. It’s darker than its TV-PG rating suggests, and too violent for its targeted audience. The use of blasphemies and other expletives also detract from an otherwise nicely crafted and occasionally humorous film.

A 12-year-old boy named Alex (Winslow Fegley), who likes to write scary stories, winds up imprisoned in the magical apartment building of a glamorous witch named Natacha (Krysten Ritter). Natacha has already killed many “useless” children, but spares Alex when he reveals his hobby. She demands a new scary story from him each night, or else she’ll kill him, too.

“This beautiful darkness dances inside your brain. ... You should celebrate it.” The witch’s words are praise Alex has longed for. A captive girl, Yasmin (Lidya Jewett), also encourages his macabre tales. The film offers no counter to the voices grooming children to explore morbid things.

Intense images of violence against children also make the film unsuitable for viewers under age 12. A visualization of one of Alex’s stories involves dead children with their eyes whitened. In another scene, Natacha uses Darth Vader–like powers to choke Yasmin.

As Alex and Yasmin plot their escape, they discover the apartment’s strange rooms: a cavernous library and a nursery with glowing plants. The film’s a visual masterpiece, but parents should be wary of this eye candy.

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**2021 EMMY AWARD WINNERS**

*Best Drama:* *The Crown* (Netflix)

*Best Comedy:* *Ted Lasso* (Apple TV+)

*Best Limited Series:* *The Queen’s Gambit* (Netflix)

*Best Actor in Drama:* Josh O’Connor (*The Crown*)

*Best Actress in Drama:* Olivia Colman (*The Crown*)

COPSHOP: OPEN ROAD FILMS; THE CROWN: ALEX BAILEY/NETFLIX; NIGHTBOOKS: CHRISTOS KALOHORIDIS/NETFLIX

October 9, 2021
LARGER-THAN-LIFE EVANGELIST

The Eyes of Tammy Faye portrays a famous televangelist as a sympathetic but muddled character of contradictions

by Sharon Dierberger

In the 1980s, Tammy Faye Bakker and her husband Jim Bakker were riding high as the founders of the world’s largest religious broadcasting network as well as a Christian theme park in South Carolina. Yet in 1987 their enterprises started crashing down after Jim Bakker’s financial fraud and sexual improprieties hit The Charlotte Observer’s front page.

The Eyes of Tammy Faye, a new biopic directed by Michael Showalter, follows the Bakkers’ trajectory based on a 2000 documentary of the same name. Jessica Chastain laudably portrays the titular Tammy Faye, imitating her giggle, mannerisms, and childlike conversational tone. Her makeup is obvious and overdone, like Bakker’s, whose signature look included long false eyelashes thick with black mascara, heavy eye shadow, and permanently ink-lined eyes, eyebrows, and lips. Actor Andrew Garfield captures well Jim Bakker’s initial earnestness and sincerity devolving into arrogance and self-righteousness.

The Bakkers, both from humble beginnings, met at the Assemblies of God’s North Central Bible College in Minneapolis. After marrying, they began a traveling children’s puppet ministry and eventually took it to Pat Robertson’s Christian Broadcasting Network, where the two also began The 700 Club. Broadcasts always included Tammy singing, which Chastain admirably replicates in the movie.

One of Jim Bakker’s early beliefs, “God does not want us to be poor,” permeated their ministry from the beginning, becoming part of that era’s prosperity gospel movement. The Bakkers lived lavishly, with multiple estates, two Rolls-Royces, a private jet, expensive clothes and jewelry, and an air-conditioned dog house.

They preached that listeners would be blessed by God if they gave to the couple’s PTL Satellite Network. In one scene, while trying to raise ministry funds, Jim tells his audience, “If you’re not giving, you can’t expect an abundance to come back to you.”

Despite realistic portrayals of Tammy Faye and Jim, it’s unclear how much liberty the film takes in embellishing the details—for instance, one scene shows premarital groping between Tammy and Jim, and the movie plays up a questionable relationship between Tammy and another man. It portrays Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell in a negative light. Other cringeworthy moments depict Christians as dumb, gullible, manipulative, or greedily shrewd.

Tammy comes across as genuine, but viewers can’t help but wonder how she could be unaware they were scamming people as the couple lived opulently from ministry donations. She even bought her mother a fur coat and a house from ministry proceeds, calling them blessings from God. Her mother, herself a Pentecostal preacher, questioned—but accepted—the gifts.

Tammy’s mixed-up theology, combined with her seemingly sincere love for God and all types of people, makes her a sympathetic yet muddled character of contradictions.

The film, rated PG-13 for sexual content and prescription drug abuse, leaves Christian viewers repulsed to see God’s Word so misused and exploited. For more accuracy and only slightly less entertainment, skip the movie and rent the documentary.
A PERFECT FATHER

A new documentary by the Kendrick brothers, Show Me the Father, tells how the presence or lack of a father points us to God the Father

by Collin Garbarino

“HAS YOUR FATHER let you down? Has your stepfather let you down?”

Show Me the Father, a documentary in theaters, wants viewers to know they have a heavenly Father who will never let them down. This is the first documentary by the Kendrick brothers, creators of faith-based films like Fireproof and Courageous, and it might be their strongest film yet.

The film highlights the importance of fathers by telling the stories of several men whose father figures impacted them for good and evil.

Sherman Smith played eight seasons in the NFL before starting a coaching career, and his father encouraged him to work hard and to set high goals. Through the witness of NFL teammates, Smith began to understand God was a Father who wanted him to think beyond earthly accomplishments. As a coach who has worked with football players at every level, he tries to pass on these fundamental truths—especially to players who don’t have fathers of their own.

The film also tells the story of Jim Daly, president of Focus on the Family. He grew up with an alcoholic father and abusive stepfather, and these experiences haunted him for years. In high school, Daly’s football coach became a father figure to him and changed the trajectory of his life. Daly came to know Christ through the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and started a long journey of healing. He now sees God as a good Father he can depend on.

The Kendrick brothers also share the story of their own father and how his courage in physical and familial hardships shaped their lives. Stephen Kendrick tells how his faithful love encouraged him to pursue adoption.

Throughout all these stories, Pastor Tony Evans provides theological commentary. The focus usually stays on the gospel, but occasionally the film conflates God’s divine promise to send Jesus with tips for good parenting. The documentary also might have been stronger if the Kendrick brothers focused on just one of the three stories or broadened their interviews to include more perspectives on the importance of fathers. For example, we don’t really hear about the legacy a father can leave on a woman’s life.

In spite of these quibbles, the film is one families can enjoy together, and it’s likely to provoke good theological discussion. While the filmmakers’ fictional films could at times lack subtlety, Show Me the Father’s documentary format effectively allows its subjects to tell their personal experiences of how God healed and restored them.

But the best part of this film is its unapologetic focus on Jesus. This focus is necessary because the Bible teaches that apart from Jesus, you can’t see the Father.
What if government and media leaders found a way to silence pro-lifers? Would opposition to abortion end? I think not. Mothers know what is growing inside them. The truth also gnaws at abortion-supporting poets. That’s what I saw in *Choice Words: Writers on Abortion*, edited by Annie Finch (Haymarket Books, 2020). Its publicists praise “a landmark literary anthology of poems, stories, and essays” that will “renew our courage in the struggle to defend reproductive rights.”

Maybe so, but the very bones cry out. In an unwilling testament to the sanctity of human life, so do at least 20 of the 150 authors in Finch’s compendium, although almost all seem committed to a pro-abortion (or at least pro-choice) position. So is Poetry Witch Community founding director Finch, a feminist Yale graduate who had an abortion in 1999 and writes about “abortion as an act of love,” but loves poetry enough to include verses that show how abortion sometimes leads to self-hatred and is always tragic.

For example, Gwendolyn Brooks, the first African American to win a Pulitzer Prize for poetry, wrote in 1945: “Abortions will not let you forget. / You remember the children you got that you did not get, / The damp small pulps with a little or with no hair, / The singers and workers that never handled the air. … / You will never leave them, controlling your luscious sigh, / Return for a snack of them, with gobbling mother-eye. / I have heard in the voices of the wind the voices of my dim killed children. … / If I stole your births and your names, / Your straight baby tears and your games.”

*Choice Words* shows that guilt is worldwide. Pratibha Kelapure wrote that “blood, hope, and the whisper of a life flowed away,” leaving “the elephant of guilt on your shoulder until / Your heart is buried too deep to pulse with life.” Iranian poet Farideh Hassanzadeh-Mostafavi wrote, “Since your death / in the eyes of all flowers / I am nothing but the wind / with the bloody hands.”

*Choice Words* also shows how abortion hardens some. Leyla Josephine of Glasgow offers a lovely musing at the beginning of her poem, “I think she was a she,” but concludes with militance: “I will not be tamed. / I have determination that this termination will still have a form of creation. / It will not be wasted. / This is my body. This is my body. This is my body. I don’t care about your ignorant views.”

Deborah Maia’s “Self-Ritual for Invoking Release of Spirit Life in the Womb” espouses a deadly anti-Christian religion: “During ritual today, I sat naked in the midst of a circle of red silk, red wool, garnet, and red coral. I drummed and chanted to Mother Earth.” Then, “I walk outside. … When I look inside my pants, my eyes meet with a loose formed clot of bright red. / I feel uplifted to a peak of elation. / I offer gratitude / to my Body for strength. / I offer gratitude / to my Intuition for guidance.”

**SOMETIMES I THINK THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF THE PRO-LIFE MOVEMENT DEPENDS ON HEROES BATTLING LONG ODDS. YET THEN I REMEMBER THE APOSTLE LUKE’S REPORTING ON THE FIRST PALM SUNDAY NEARLY 2,000 YEARS AGO.**
Holy practices
Four accessible theology reviews
by Jamie Dean

BRAVE BY FAITH by Alistair Begg
Begg offers a series of reflections on the Old Testament book of Daniel to help Christians think about honoring God in an increasingly hostile world. But he begins with a disclaimer: “No, this book will not tell you to be like Daniel. Instead, it will call you to believe in Daniel’s God.” He explains: “We will be able to navigate our present moment to the extent that we realize that the God of the exiles in the sixth century BC has not changed in the intervening two and a half millennia.” Begg offers specific ways to think about both drawing lines and engaging culture, and he urges hope. “Don’t look back to the ‘glory days,’” he writes. “Live well in this day.”

PRACTICING THANKFULNESS by Sam Crabtree
When it comes to cultivating Christian maturity, we might think of all sorts of important virtues: wisdom, perseverance, faithfulness. But author Sam Crabtree suggests there’s one quality that’s especially pivotal: thankfulness. “The very dividing line between glory and dishonor is whether a person gives thanks or not,” he writes. “Idolatry itself springs from thanklessness toward our Creator.” Crabtree explores the Bible’s teaching on gratitude, and he highlights why Christians should thank God in all situations, including hardships: “In this very moment he is using your current set of circumstances as one link in the unbreakable chain of links forged by his unrelenting love and infinite wisdom to accomplish for you the unsteadably valuable privilege of being conformed to the image of his Son.”

TAMING THE TONGUE by Jeff Robinson
For Christians who squirm a little when absorbing the Bible’s teaching about how we use our tongues, Robinson’s book won’t let us off the hook. “Is your heart full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control?” he asks. “The words that come from your mouth answer that question with brutal honesty.” Ouch. The scalpel Robinson uses to show what our speech reveals about us is a helpful tool to lance the wounds we inflict on ourselves and others. But Robinson doesn’t leave us without hope: Growing in contentment and genuine love for God and others changes the tenor and aim of our words. We learn to serve others in our conversations, and also to ask, Are my words leading toward life or death?

BE THOU MY VISION by Jonathan Gibson
During the first months of the pandemic, Gibson reevaluated his devotional life. He craved more structure and found he benefited from including elements found in a worship service: adoration, confession, Scripture, prayer, and reading historic Christian creeds and catechisms. He used his selections to construct a 31-day liturgical guide for daily worship. Each day follows the same order, with Scripture readings, ancient prayers, creeds, and confessions. Readers might decide to use the guide daily, weekly, or perhaps in family settings. But even occasional use offers encouraging exposure to ancient prayers with current resonance: “Write your blessed name, O Lord, upon my heart, there to remain so indelibly engraved, that no prosperity, no adversity shall ever move me from your love.”

October 9, 2021
WHO WAS MARTIN LUTHER? by Danika Cooley
In 96 pages, homeschool mom and blogger Danika Cooley offers a conversational introduction to Martin Luther. Covering Luther’s childhood, his years as a monk, and his role in the Reformation, Cooley provides a faith-based alternative to Penguin Workshop’s popular Who Was? series. While this book, part of a new Who What Why series by CF4Kids, doesn’t match Penguin Workshop’s superb writing and illustrations, Cooley provides a useful primer for Protestant families. Independent readers may find this treatment more engaging than Simonetta Carr’s more thorough kids’ biography. (Ages 6-11)

TALES OF THE GREEK HEROES by Roger Lancelyn Green
Green honed his appreciation for mythology studying under C.S. Lewis at Oxford and as a member of Lewis’ Inklings club. Today, several of his more than 25 books remain in print, including this 1958 retelling of Greek hero stories. From hero origin stories to Jason and the Argonauts, Green offers a timeless presentation connecting loosely related tales. This book isn’t as gripping as Rick Riordan’s more recent compendiums, but Green’s matter-of-fact presentation reads quickly and mutes the stories’ most salacious details. (Ages 10 & up)

THE EAGLE OF THE NINTH by Rosemary Sutcliff
Sutcliff wrote more than 50 novels and won the Carnegie Medal in 1959 for a spinoff of her Roman Britain series. In this first installment of that series, a young former centurion named Marcus rescues a British warrior from a Roman arena. Eventually, the two young men scour the British hinterlands, hoping to find Marcus’ Roman father, his missing Ninth Legion, and the legion’s standard (an eagle) that disappeared years before. Sutcliff’s gripping action will keep readers hooked, while her vivid characters offer an insightful—and at times chilling—window into pre-modern, pagan British history. (Ages 10-15)

JEWEL OF THE NILE by Tessa Afshar
Christian author Tessa Afshar draws readers back to the time of the book of Acts. When Chariline discovers her father may still be alive, she sneaks on board a Mediterranean cargo ship, determined to find him. Chariline soon meets Christians like Priscilla and Aquila, and with the help of Theo—her chaste romantic interest—she learns how to seek her heavenly Father, too. Several plot elements (including a royal assassin) feel forced at times, but teen girls will likely relate to Chariline’s struggles and the hope she finds in Christ. (Ages 15 & up)

Fame and faith
Engaging stories from history
by Emily Whitten

In Steeped in Stories (Broadleaf Books, 2021), Mitali Perkins argues that although classics like Heidi and The Hobbit aren’t perfect by today’s literary standards, they enrich our lives and help us “resist demoralizing patterns” of our day. As a Christian author, she makes much of Jesus and classical Christian content, but like many liberal readers and critics today, she echoes problematic theories of intersectionality and colonialism. Although Perkins, an immigrant from India, doesn’t fit neatly into U.S. political boxes, Christians of any political stripe will find her voice winsome and her ideas worth debating.

A rerelease with appeal for teens (and adults) is The Story, Student Edition (Zondervan, Comfort Print edition, 2021). It features flipbook animation, but the real draw is the big-picture presentation, with NIV Bible passages appearing in order of historical events. (Example: Isaiah’s biography and some of his prophecies appear within the history of Israel’s kings.) With timelines and tabs for easy navigation, this version may boost Bible comprehension. —E.W.
What if current missions strategy is actually limiting the global spread of the gospel?

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returnmandate.org/world
What was it like getting a bachelor's degree in religious studies at Yale?

The joke on campus was that the Women's Studies department was only the second-most godless at Yale. The Religious Studies department studied the religious as if they were some remote tribe. But by the time I figured that out, I was too many credits in to change majors.

Were you a member of the Party of the Right, the organization where guys a half-century ago, to
show they were conservative, wore three-piece suits, drank port, and smoked cigars? I was. Still three-piece suits, sipping port, smoking cigars. Some things never change. But what shocked me arriving on campus was that the Yale Political Union had not one conservative party, but three. I respect members of the other two, but they were more about croquet and seersucker and the aesthetics of conservatism, whereas the POR—I think even our enemies will concede—are serious people interested in serious, intense arguments. Sometimes too intense, but the substance drew me in.

**Why are you a journalist rather than a political or public policy person?** By accident. I didn’t know what I wanted to do when I graduated in 2008. But in my senior year, for lack of any other venues to publish my writing, I started a blog about things I was reading and things in the news. Off of that a few magazine editors called. That led to regular writing assignments, internships, then a proper job.

You write about six leaders from the baby boom generation. One is Al Sharpton. You were more impressed with him than I expected you to be, and you describe him as transactional rather than transformational: What’s the distinction? Sharpton speaks of two kinds of leaders in the world. Transformational ones like Martin Luther King Jr. change the way we look at problems. Transactional leaders don’t change anybody’s mind. They make compromises and broker deals. Baby boomers have believed that transformational leadership is the only good kind. I can see why: They are idealistic, wanting grand sweeping changes to make the world a better place. But they have unfairly denigrated just how hard it is, and the value of being a nose-to-the-ground grassroots leader who can take two sides that don’t have anything in common and find a way to broker a deal between them. Sometimes muddling through is the best that you can hope for.

Sharpton sees himself as a transformational leader. Yes, but the reason I have grudging respect for him has nothing to do with his soaring flights of rhetoric. They undermine his claims to be a serious leader. I have grudging respect for Sharpton as transactional. Sometimes he brokers deals to line his own pockets, but you can’t blame a man for that. In the chapter about Sharpton I showed how transactional people like Mayor Daley of Chicago helped to make the world a better place.

You write that Richard J. Daley and other machine politicians weren’t projecting their own fantasies, but actually knew what their constituents thought. You offer a fascinating anecdote about the Kennedy brothers back in 1963: They were ready to do a transaction, but the people they were talking with wanted transformation, and they thought, *What use is that?* That was a meeting in New York City between John F. Kennedy and Bobby Kennedy on one hand, and James Baldwin plus a lot of activists and writers on the other hand. Jack told Bobby he wanted to meet with some black leaders to figure out how he could appeal to the black vote. They were not just Irish but Boston Irish, with a hereditary connection to the old world of machine politics, where the way that you keep the peace is by giving various constituencies a little payoff, buying their votes almost nakedly. I talk about that in a morally neutral way: They were trying to put together a ruling coalition, and doing good things that help voters is the way you do that.

**What happened?** Baldwin and his friends verbally abused the Kennedys. One of them told John Kennedy, the war hero, that patriotism was a racket. That was one of the less offensive things said to the Kennedy brothers at that meeting. Bobby Kennedy walked away saying, “I don’t understand these people. I’m not even mad at them. I just don’t know what their problem is. They have the president and the attorney general in the room asking them what favor they could do for them, and they couldn’t come up with anything. How do you even work with people like that?” That’s what happens when you don’t believe in transactional leadership. You don’t have any sense of how little incremental steps can eventually lead to greater change.

In your chapter on Camille Paglia, you write that the advent of streaming video would not have been such a rout for decency if the legal and cultural barriers against pornography had not been obliterated in a pretty short time. Could you unpack that? It’s almost impossible for anyone over the age of 35 to understand how devastating a plague pornography has become. I watched a debate among various conservative talking heads on the future of conservatism. The debaters, journalists in their 40s and 50s, were...
talking about foreign policy, domestic politics, whatever. But they were in front of an audience of 20-year-olds who wanted to hear about opioid addiction and pornography addiction. Young people today understand that pornography is ubiquitous and more depraved than it has ever been before.

Some people, even conservatives, say pornography is bad but uncontrollable because of the First Amendment and the internet. Until the 1960s the idea that pornography was protected by the First Amendment would have been laughable. The spirit of license and cultural revolution—the boomers’ 60s heyday—decimated the legal protection against obscenity that had been taken for granted up until then. I write in the Paglia chapter that the rout of those legal protections against obscenity didn’t become a cultural plague until the advent of streaming video in the last 15 years. That match started the current pornography addiction fire. Those legal reforms done in a spirit of blithe optimism about human sexuality in the 1960s meant that when technology made pornography such a potent social ill, we were completely unprepared to do anything about it. Today any 10-year-old with a smartphone can watch any sex act he wants as long as he has an internet connection.

You write that a defense sometimes offered for erotica and then in turn for pornography is “artistic merit,” but you say artistic merit should be an aggravating factor, not a defense. Not just that it should be, but that it was, until the 1960s. Well-written pornography doesn’t make it better: It makes it worse, more enticing.

Someone who campaigns against pornography gets depicted as weird. What are the steps to bring back some sanity?
The people who engage in that kind of work know they won’t be thanked for it, but they’re doing important work anyway. We don’t need to convince the younger generation that we need to do something about the scourge of pornography, because they know it already. I predict the anti-pornography fight in the next 10 or 15 years will become more salient once the baby boomers finally fade from the scene.

Let’s go quickly through the others you profile. Economist Jeffrey Sachs throws tantrums? The aspect of Jeffrey Sachs’ persona that is most hubristic and elegant and boomerish to me is not even the way he goes about things, but how he takes it as his goal not to alleviate poverty but to eliminate it. He really did tell the world that we could get rid of all extreme poverty if only governments listened to him.

You have a nice line about American interaction with Africa: “America went from sending Africa brigades of engineers to sending brigades of economists ... [to] sending PR consultants.” But let’s move on to Justice Sonia Sotomayor. As an undergraduate at Princeton, did she learn that she’d be rewarded for throwing a tantrum? That’s right. Sotomayor has built her entire public persona on the idea that she is a victim who has overcome great adversity—but she has been able to get her way at pretty much every stage professionally by playing the victim card. Far from trying to thwart her, authority figures have moved the way for her at every step of the way.

Steve Jobs, establishment rebel? No, real rebel. I came to respect his genuine belief in setting people free. When he came onto the scene, IBM dominated the computer world with a mainframe model—one computer in any given office and you ask for permission for time on the computer. Some people thought the vegan diet, pilgrimage to India, John Lennon glasses, Bob Dylan lyrics-quoting were all just a put-on, but I wanted to show that, whatever his other faults, he genuinely was a believer in individual creativity and setting it free.
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California sound, revisited

A new box set highlights some of the Beach Boys’ most innovative music

by Arsenio Orteza

For Baby Boomers, few sounds capture the spirit of America like the harmonizing voices of the Beach Boys. And in the late ’60s and early ’70s, Carl Wilson, Mike Love, Al Jardine, Bruce Johnston, Dennis Wilson, and Brian Wilson were working harder than they ever had to put their voices to captivating use.


Regarded as avatars of good, clean fun at a time when many of rock’s hippest acts were aiming for bad, dirty, and dangerous, the Beach Boys had hit a commercial ebb.

They also found themselves increasingly unable to depend on Brian Wilson (whose well-documented psychological unraveling was already under way) to provide them with the kind of music that would reverse their downturn. The others stepped up.

The first fruit of their newly democratic labor was Sunflower: Aesthetically, it contends for their best long player ever. It yielded no hits, but in the 51 years since its release, the structurally ingenious “This Whole World,” the achingly tender “Forever,” the panoramically meta-pop “Add Some Music to Your Day,” and the irresistibly dreamy “Our Sweet Love” are among the group’s most beloved deep cuts.

Commercially, it landed with a thud. Convinced that they’d been harmonizing up the wrong tree, the Boys hired former DJ Jack Rieley as their manager.

The first Beach Boys album recorded under Rieley’s auspices, Surf’s Up, found them swapping the timeless for the timely, singing protest songs that endeared them to the moment but that now sound embarrassingly contrived.

A few of the apolitical tracks showed signs of the old Beach Boys magic—the harmony-drenched “’Til I Die,” the prog-folky “Feel Flows,” and the title cut (leftover from the unfinished album Smile). And Bruce Johnston’s “Disney Girls” was new Beach Boys magic at its most ethereal. But the album as a whole came off as a hodgepodge.

Feel Flows finally makes it easy to appreciate the quality of that hodgepodge’s music. The instrumental-track-and-backing-vocals-only versions of Surf’s Up songs on Disc 4 reveal a fascinating intricacy of construction. Scraped of its lyrics and Rieley’s creaky guest vocals, the moribund “A Day in the Life of a Tree” could almost pass for a hymn.

Meanwhile, many of the tracks that either never saw official release or wouldn’t appear until later on other albums or compilations are—in their stereotype-defying variety—more revelatory yet.

For one brief, shining moment, the group’s ability to generate one new pet sound after another seemed as endless as the summer of their dreams.
cultural footnotes (Brute Force’s profanity-smuggling “King of Fuh,” for instance), but on the whole they sound like the soundtrack to a pretty fun party to which the digital cheapskates have not been invited.

**INTERROBANG by Switchfoot**

The word *past* occurs six times in five songs, the word *future* six times in three, and the word *present* twice in two—neither of which is the very present-oriented song that finds Jon Foreman wondering whether there’s “any remedy” for the conflicts roiling “2020 enemies.” But while time is on Foreman’s mind, it’s not on his side. “The river is the same,” he sings, “but moving fast lately.” It’s no wonder then that the penultimate song is called “Backwards in Time” and that Foreman wants to go there, or that one song later, if only to foster love not war, he’s flirting with Luddism. In short, these songs are olive branches, the catchiest of which (“Splinter”) Forman extends to himself in the hopes of ending the war in his own mind.

**THE MONTREUX YEARS by Muddy Waters**

There’s a kind of “rockist” (yes, it’s a term for fans who idolize certain classic rock over other music) whose Muddy Waters awareness begins and ends with Waters’ performance of “Mannish Boy” at the Band’s farewell concert in 1976. The modern-blues classic that he released a year later (*Hard Again*)? The role that his Chess recordings played in transforming the blues from a rural folk art to an urban force of nature? Not important. These selections from Waters’ Montreux Jazz Fest appearances in 1972 (five songs), 1974 (four), and 1977 (seven) won’t likely change rockist minds. (The drums could definitely rock harder.) But they will reaffirm for those already in the know that they’ve been right about the man all along.

**THE PET PARADE by Fruit Bats**

Eric D. Johnson’s quest to find the ideal folk-rock timbre for his delicate tenor voice reaches its climax eight tracks in: With “Holy Rose,” the album’s acoustic sheen yields to an electricity that heats up the soundscape until it shimmers like a desert highway’s vanishing point. Not that the rising action feels provisional. If the likes of Jackson Browne or Fleetwood Mac were to cover the easy-rolling “Cub Pilot” or the Lillian Gish–inspired “Eagles Below Us,” they might end up with a latter-day hit. They’d have a tough time improving on the originals though, not to mention explaining why it took someone else to provide them with the most observant and compassionate lyrics that they’d ever sung.

**GOOD AS GOLD: ARTEFACTS OF THE APPLE ERA 1967-1975 by various artists**

The $15 digital version of this collection of tuneful “artefacts” with tenuous connections to the Beatles (Stealers Wheel, for example, simply recorded at Apple Studios) contains 82 songs. The $40 hard-copy version contains 107. Ordinarily, such a difference wouldn’t matter much—albums get released in standard, deluxe, and super-deluxe editions all the time. In this case, though, the 25 hard-copy-only songs are the liveliest by far. A few are just pop-
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Dumping on America’s oldest ally is short-sighted

IT WASN’T A GOOD WEEK TO BE FRANCE.

French President Emmanuel Macron on Sept. 15 announced his forces had killed the leader of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi. It was a major victory in the France-led battle against jihadists in Africa’s Sahel region.

It should have been a win for the United States, too: Al-Sahrawi had a U.S. bounty of $5 million on his head after plotting an attack that killed four U.S. soldiers in Niger in 2017. His death, along with more than 500 jihadists killed by French troops in the Sahel in the last year, takes us all closer to disrupting terrorists outside Afghanistan, something President Joe Biden claims he wants to focus on following the demoralizing U.S. withdrawal in August.

Instead the United States was busy backstabbing one of its oldest allies. Within hours Macron learned U.S.-led efforts snatched a massive naval defense contract with Australia from France—a $60 billion deal at least seven years in the making and the largest French defense contract ever.

After months of secret meetings, Australia abandoned its 2016 contract with France for a dozen conventional submarines in favor of a new deal from the United States and U.K. to build eight nuclear-powered submarines. The new tripartite alliance, called AUKUS (“awk-us”), leaves France out of Western efforts to confront China’s aggression in the Pacific.

The Australians as recently as Aug. 30 had reaffirmed their commitment to the arrangement with France, prompting one French diplomat to assert, “We weren’t lied to by omission, we were lied to openly.”

There are at least two reasons the double-dealing should matter to more than the defense establishment. Besides another trust buster with Biden, it will now be harder to convince France to continue playing its outsized role fighting terror in Africa. Jihadist attacks there are spreading at an alarming rate and targeting young Christian communities in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. The insurgency by ISIS and al-Qaeda-linked groups has killed more than 900 people, displaced more than 850,000, and left some 2 million people in need of humanitarian aid. This year Burkina Faso has endured seven major attacks targeting Christian communities since April.

These are among the fastest-growing areas for Christian faith in the world. In 2019 Africa became the most Christian continent in the world at 631 million believers. Salafi jihadist movements target these communities in the Sahel, mainly made up of Muslim converts. Overall, French-speaking Africa is growing so fast that by 2050, language experts say, French may be the most-spoken language in the world, more than English or Mandarin. Already more French is spoken in Africa than in France.

France since 2014 has led counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel with more than 5,000 troops. It’s currently in the midst of a withdrawal to be completed in early 2022 (ahead of French presidential elections). The latest rift will make it harder for the United States and France to counter spreading Sahel terrorism, and already analysts are wondering if it will become the next Afghanistan.

Macron recalled ambassadors from Canberra and Washington on Sept. 17—a first in U.S.-France relations since France signed on to defend the Colonies against Britain in the American Revolution.

To state the obvious, we’d be hearing a lot more scrutiny had this happened in the Trump era. Was there no way to counter Chinese aggression without undermining France? Without opening the Pacific to a nuclear race?

The AUKUS deal marks the first time the United States will share sensitive nuclear technology with a state other than Britain. And Australia will be the first nonnuclear state to acquire nuclear subs. The arrangement is a major departure from nonproliferation policy and is likely to escalate U.S.-China tensions in a way the acquisition of a dozen French subs would not.

Those who thought Biden would return the United States to a more carefully calibrated and compassionate foreign policy are thinking again. Europeans, in less than a month’s time, are left to collect pieces from sloppy, America-first decisions that are life-changing for the rest of the world.

NOTE: We continue to follow closely efforts to evacuate vulnerable Afghans but have agreed not to report some developments until they reach safety. A list of organizations working to support Afghans is at wng.org/helping-afghans.
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Radical abortion advocacy groups push to claim moral high ground despite the experiences of post-abortive women

by LEAH SAVAS
According to one abortion advocacy group, it took the Biden administration 224 days to use the word abortion in a notable public statement. That might be an exaggeration, but the group, We Testify, is basically right: The administration prefers euphemisms like “reproductive health,” “right to choose,” and “access to care.” The Biden press release on the 2021 anniversary of Roe v. Wade failed to use the word once. Renee Bracey Sherman, the activist who runs We Testify, sees use of the word abortion as a “signal that someone is fully supportive of abortion access and unapologetically loves and cares for people who have abortions.” Biden’s failure to use the word signaled insufficient support. Today’s radicals want to “shout their abortions,” but radical activists have been around for a long time. In the 1960s Patricia Maginnis, who died this year at age 93, was a radical abortion activist who traveled California teaching women to perform abortions on themselves. Although Maginnis was never a household name, she got what she wanted: ready abortion with women in charge. But she didn’t get abortion regarded as a moral good. That’s what the shouters want: abortion freed from any negative connotation, which would be a fundamental shift in the long history of abortion. It’s an audacious goal with one problem: the post-abortive regrets of many women who learned the truth of abortion too late.
Thirty-year-old Amelia Bonow was in her Seattle apartment in 2015 when she found out on Sept. 18 that the House of Representatives had voted to defund Planned Parenthood. According to her account of the moment on Oprah.com, she cried on her couch and wondered who was standing up for abortion facility workers and women who’ve had abortions. She later opened Facebook and wrote 153 words about her own abortion experience that she said made her “happy in a totally unqualified way. Why wouldn’t I be happy that I was not forced to become a mother?”

Her friend and Jezebel writer Lindy West shared a screenshot of the post on Twitter with the hashtag #shoutyourabortion to her 60,000 followers. It blew up. Just three days later, BBC News reported that it had been used more than 100,000 times in 24 hours. Other women also used the hashtag to share their own abortion experiences, many of them also incredibly positive. West’s later post about her own abortion under the hashtag was typical of the tone: “My abortion was in ’10 & the career I’ve built since then fulfills me & makes me better able to care for kids I have now. #ShoutYourAbortion”

Within five weeks of sharing that post, Bonow had quit her graduate school studies in mental health counseling and put all her time and attention toward promoting Shout Your Abortion (SYA) as an organization with a website where women can post their abortion stories and buy “Congratulations on your abortion” notecards and “Thank God for Abortion” baby onesies.

Six years later women continue to use the hashtag to celebrate their abortions, but other posts to the website inadvertently expose some of the problems with Bonow’s loud approach. Although she dismissed the concern for unborn life in a 2019 New Republic op-ed, claiming that “the question of when life begins is deeply personal, and there will never be anything approaching consensus on the matter,” many of the women who write on her website see their babies as living humans.

An anonymous Ohio woman who wrote about her abortion in July said she never regretted her decision. But seeing her 6.5-week twins on the ultrasound machine made her heart sink. “I found myself loving them… Having them made me feel less alone for that short period of time.” Her abortion led to severe depression.

Other mothers said they “mourn the loss of my child every day” and “don’t want my babies to think that they weren’t wanted or loved for one minute, because they were, more than anything.” Another woman, writing in August, still thinks she made the right decision, but “it doesn’t make it any easier. I grieve every day for...
my little one.” Imagine sending a “Congratulations” card to one of these sorrowful mothers.

The year 2015 was a seminal one for abortion-shouting organizations. That was the year David Daleiden released his undercover videos of Planned Parenthood executives talking about selling baby body parts. Just as the abortion industry was on the political ropes, pro-abortion groups rose up to try to destigmatize abortion.

One of these was Bracey Sherman’s We Testify, a 2016 offshoot of the National Network of Abortion Funds, a network of local abortion funding organizations. We Testify trains and supports, financially and logistically, storytellers who speak at advocacy events with the goal of shifting “the culture around abortion experiences.”

One page on the website shows pictures of the group’s more than 60 abortion storytellers with links to their bios. Nancy Cárdenas Peña calls her abortion a “miracle,” Isabelle got a uterus tattoo to honor her abortion, and Kelsea McLain says her abortions “are a beautiful part of who I am.” Many of the women mentioned feeling lonely after their abortions and turning to abortion storytelling as a way to get rid of the stigma they felt, and more than one called abortion an act of self-love.

Lexis Dotson-Dufault, a We Testify storyteller, spoke at an August event hosted by several pro-abortion groups in Charlotte, N.C. Standing in front of a microphone with balloons behind her, Dotson-Dufault talked about how her 2019 abortion changed her life. She acknowledged feeling some emotional turmoil after her abortion but attributed that to “internalized stigma.” The abortion had allowed her to live out her hopes and dreams, she said. It renewed her physical body: “Like even before I was pregnant, my body hadn’t felt that good, so it was a complete reset.”

In 2015 Viva Ruiz launched Thank God for Abortion, an art collective that promotes Thank God for Abortion T-shirts. It also develops videos and costumes promoting the philosophy behind that phrase: that God thinks abortions are good and wants people to have them. Ruiz, also artist-in-residence at Shout Your Abortion, reacted to the recent Texas abortion law with a video on SIA founder Amelia Bonow’s Instagram page. Ruiz said it is “a blasphemy to force childbirth on a person,” adding, “abortion is about self-love and is actually sacred.”

Ruiz, a self-proclaimed Catholic who often dons a cross necklace and incorporates Christian symbols into her work, told a Jsebel reporter that people who have had abortions “are more holy” and that “abortion providers are doing Jesus-work.”

For a long time Grayson Dempsey felt she was fighting a lonely battle to get abortion advocates to claim the moral high ground for abortion. WORLD wrote about her background in 2004 when she was 24 and known as Grayson Crosby. A volunteer at Planned Parenthood at age 13 who later worked for the organization as an educator, Dempsey made Choice USA’s Top 30 abortion rights activists under 30 in the early 2000s. Around that same time, she was a birth doula, a counselor at an abortion facility, and a board member of an adoption agency.

According to Dempsey, women who choose abortion, adoption, and parenting are “all the same women at different points, often, in their lives.” She said she saw some who came to her Portland abortion facility and insisted they were pro-life and not like the other women in the waiting room. She grew frustrated with mainstream abortion groups that insisted they weren’t pro-abortion and that stuck vigilantly to the language of choice.

In 2004, Dempsey and her friends used funds from their grandmas to start a phone hotline called Backline (now called All-Options). The 800 number went to a landline on the top floor of Dempsey’s house. By 2009, it was getting 1,000 calls a year from families facing complex pregnancy situations. Dempsey and her team would discuss abortion with these families as an equally valid option to adoption and parenting.

Backline’s unapologetic approach to abortion set it apart at the time. “There was a real lack of feeling that we could also hold moral high ground,” she said. Since then, things have changed, and Dempsey is glad to see other groups echo her view: She says people who create access to abortions that are safe for women are the morally right people in this argument.

Their power is growing in some abortion circles. It’s no longer enough to be “pro-choice” at Planned Parenthood. It’s now necessary to be pro-abortion, as former Planned Parenthood president Dr. Leana Wen learned.
Wen describes in her book *Lifelines* her surprise in 2018 at finding out that many of her new colleagues described themselves as pro-abortion rather than pro-choice. They found her pro-choice perspective outdated. “Of course I’m pro-choice and agree that abortion should be safe and legal,” she recalls saying. “But that’s not being an advocate for abortion. It’s more accurate to say that we’re advocates for all aspects of reproductive health, including birth control and sex education to reduce the need for abortion, right?”

Apparently not. National Planned Parenthood staffers would correct her, saying that talking about reducing the need is equivalent to covering up abortion. “If we don’t talk about abortion openly, loudly, and proudly, as a positive moral good, then we are further stigmatizing it and the people who need it,” they would say. Wen lost her job with the abortion giant in July 2019.

Wen learned that radical abortion advocacy demands acceptance. Groups like SYA and We Testify are bold in their safe spaces, but they aren’t willing to talk to those who disagree with them. I contacted Thank God for Abortion, We Testify, and Shout Your Abortion to request interviews. Thank God for Abortion did not respond. Both We Testify and Shout Your Abortion declined. Shout Your Abortion did so by suggesting “the 12th of never” as a possible date for an interview.

When I pressed both to reconsider, they sent incendiary email responses accusing me of not respecting people’s decisions by asking multiple times. But SYA’s Bonow said she was not surprised I asked again, “since your position is rooted in trying to enforce your will on others without their consent.” At the end of the message, she told me if I ever needed an abortion in the future, “I hope you know that there’s a whole universe of people out there who don’t think you’re a bad person; at least, not for that!” She signed the email “In Jesus [sic] name.”

If abortion shouters could build a big enough bubble, they would never have to interact with those who oppose abortion, and maybe they could stay protected from the reality of abortion. But that’s not the real

“THAT’S BEEN THE ANSWER FOR ME:
KNOWING THAT JESUS CHRIST IS
THE PROPITIATION FOR MY ABORTION,
JUST LIKE WITH EVERY OTHER SIN
I’VE COMMITTED.”
world. Who knows when truth will break through: a playground, a cute baby on TV or in a magazine, a sound, a smell?

For Pat Layton the trigger was a Christian talk show playing on her car radio. Women who’d had abortions mentioned their struggles with drugs, alcohol, anger, depression, and shame. Layton had experienced all of those problems and realized they were a result of post-abortion trauma. “The whole reason that I had wanted an abortion was to be independent and to have a good job,” Layton said. She had accomplished what she had wanted but was still “the most miserable woman in the world.” Layton later authored the post-abortive Bible study Surrendering the Secret. She said her recovery from her abortion started that day in the car.

For Pamela Whitehead, the executive director of ProLove Ministries, the trigger was learning the science of unborn life. She became convinced that she had played a part in killing her own child: “I’m the one that has to live with that.” But understanding God’s redemptive love helped her move past the attempts to punish herself for what she did: “That’s been the answer for me: knowing that Jesus Christ is the propitiation for my abortion, just like with every other sin I’ve committed.”

Grayson Dempsey and the abortion shouters say those guilt feelings after abortion come from the “shame and stigma” surrounding abortion rather than the abortion itself. Try telling that to AK, who this past February on Shout Your Abortion wrote about her chemical abortion in the United Kingdom. She described how she was a 17-year-old college student struggling to work with morning sickness and not getting any support from the father, so she decided to abort.

“It’s been a week since I said my last goodbye to you,” she wrote. “I remember sitting on the toilet, I saw you. That’s when I felt guilt. ... Words can’t explain how I feel. I want you back. You’re my baby. ... Mummy loves you. Sleep tight. I’m sorry.”
Families evacuated from Kabul, Afghanistan, walk through the terminal after arriving at Washington Dulles International Airport.

JOSE LUIS MAGANA/AP
ON AUG. 18, THREE DAYS AFTER the Taliban seized Kabul, Greg Wilton tweeted, “Any Southern Baptists interested in helping Afghans as they resettle in the US? Gauging interest.”

“I’m in!” one person tweeted back. “Very interested!” another tweeted. A pastor from Columbus, Ohio, responded: “Working with a lot of refugees currently. Would love info on how to help!”

Wilton is the Care for Refugees director at Send Relief, the compassion ministry arm of the Southern Baptist Convention’s North American Mission Board. Within a day of his tweet, Wilton partnered with World Relief, an evangelical resettlement agency, to put together a Care for Refugees workshop in Clarkston, Ga.

On the eve of the 20th anniversary of 9/11, about 130 individuals showed up in person to learn how Christians can respond to the ballooning numbers of Afghan refugees and immigrants entering the United States. An additional 200 households, church groups, and individuals livestreamed the event. That morning, Send Relief President Bryant Wright implored Christians to welcome and love refugees and immigrants: “Oh Church, let us not miss this incredible opportunity! Let us rise to the occasion and opportunity that God has given us.”

Despite political fighting over immigration, recent polls suggest most Americans are welcoming Afghan refugees: An NPR/Ipsos poll says 69 percent of Americans support admitting Afghans who worked with the U.S. government, served in the Afghan special forces, or face...
refugees also shows majority opposition to admitting refugees from other countries, such as Syria. That’s why current momentum for Afghans is pivotal, Noorani said.

In 2015, the picture of a dead Syrian boy, face-down and limp-limbed on a beach in Turkey, wrung the hearts of Americans for the plight of Syrian refugees. Three months later, terrorist attacks in Paris hardened that sympathy. When the Obama administration, under international pressure, announced plans to resettle 10,000 Syrian refugees, about 30 governors—all Republicans but for one—refused, citing security concerns.

“It was such a whiplash,” recalled Matthew Soerens, director of church mobilization at World Relief. “That was only a couple months after that poor little child washed ashore in Turkey, when every American was jumping forward and saying, How can we help? Right now, it feels like a similar moment.”

Consistent public support is even more critical now, advocates say, as the Biden administration plans to resettle nine times more Afghan refugees than Syrian refugees under the Obama administration. After the biggest military evacuation in history, the administration anticipated the arrival of 65,000 Afghans in the United States by the end of

CAMBRIA TORTORELLI, executive director of International Institute of Los Angeles (IIA), an LA-based refugee services nonprofit, said the kind of proactive engagement she saw from locals, churches, other religious groups, and businesses has been “unprecedented in terms of the numbers, intensity, and scope—certainly unprecedented within the last 20 years.”

People called, emailed, then called and emailed IILA again offering spare rooms, furniture, household items, transportation, and time. The local Afghan American community, many of them refugees themselves with friends and family stuck in Afghanistan, formed teams to pick up Afghan refugees arriving at the airport, shop for groceries, and take them sightseeing to Hollywood and the Southern California beaches.

“We’re doing what we should be doing,” Tortorelli said. “That’s very encouraging and restores my faith in humanity. I think the vast majority of people, in this country and around the world, have good hearts.”

But amid the gratification and gratitude is also an unease. Hard-line anti-immigration advocates, including former Trump adviser Stephen Miller, are trying to raise Republican opposition against the Biden administration’s refugee plans. And in September, someone left “Afghan refugee hunting permit” stickers around the University of Michigan campus. “We have to remember that there are some really dark and evil forces in our nation that want to do harm,” said Ali Noorani, president of the National Immigration Forum.

The same poll showing majority support for Afghan refugees also shows majority opposition to admitting refugees from other countries, such as Syria. That’s why current momentum for Afghans is pivotal, Noorani said.

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MEANWHILE, THE IMMEDIATE and long-term needs of the Afghan families continue to grow. Many arrive in the United States with little more than a rucksack of personal items. Refugee resettlement agencies are overwhelmed, underfunded, and understaffed after the Trump administration downsized refugee caps to historic lows. But agency workers are scurrying to prepare to resettle as many people in the next three months as in the last three years combined.

Still, Wilton, the Care for Refugees director, is hopeful. Back in 2016, in the midst of a tumultuous election and rising concerns over Muslims and refugees, many Christians pushed back against popular anti-refugee sentiments. That year, Southern Baptists overwhelmingly passed a resolution encouraging churches and families to “welcome and adopt refugees into their churches and homes as a means to demonstrate to the nations that our God longs for every tribe, tongue, and nation to be welcomed at His throne” but to do so with strict and secure vetting measures.

Wilton said he has received messages from some people apprehensive about the government’s ability to properly vet refugees entering the country (see sidebar). So he was surprised to see how eager those who showed up at the workshop were to help new Afghans in their neighborhoods: “I had so much hope coming out of that meeting.” What he saw, Wilton said, was “so many people are saying, ‘Here I am, Lord. I’m raising my hand.’”

The 95,000 Afghans the Biden administration expects to enter the United States have a wad of red tape to untangle before they’re resettled on American soil.

First, a round of processing in countries including Germany and Qatar. The United States has sent about 400 FBI agents, officers, and others to those countries to run security checks, according to Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas. Former Homeland Security official Elizabeth Neumann said officials check fingerprints again and ask evacuees to hand over cellphones to look for suspicious contacts and data. If a fingerprint or phone raises concerns, counterterrorism officers dig deeper.

By Sept. 10, security checks had flagged 44 people as potential risks to national security, according to The Washington Post. Sixteen were still overseas, 13 were in U.S. Customs and Border Protection custody waiting for more screening, and 15 were either in custody with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, sent back overseas, or cleared after further review, the Post reported. Mayorkas has not confirmed how many Afghans have failed the vetting process but said the number is small.

After security clearance, Afghans’ next steps depend on their legal statuses. Those on Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) will get help finding jobs and apartments. Others are on “humanitarian parole,” a rarely used status that comes without much help. Some parolees are midway through SIV applications, which they can now finish. For the rest, the Biden administration asked Congress to offer support services and a clear path to permanent residency. —Esther Eaton

THE NEXT STEP FOR AFGHAN REFUGEES

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Next, evacuees arrive in the United States and run another round of security screening, Neumann said. Customs officials check fingerprints again and ask evacuees to hand over cellphones to look for suspicious contacts and data. If a fingerprint or phone raises concerns, counterterrorism officers dig deeper.

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The hard work of foster care takes a toll on families and children, but churches and ministries can help foster parents persevere and help birth parents stabilize their lives.

BY GRACE SNELL

PHOTO BY CHRIS LANDSBERGER/GENESIS
Rebecca Bauer, a lawyer in Oklahoma, is a foster mom who has provided long-term care to 15 children over seven years. Despite her experience, when she received a text telling her that her 12-year-old foster daughter Ava had threatened suicide at school, she felt overwhelmed by the gravity of the situation. She told her caseworker about the “red alert,” then called a counselor with a simple plea: “Help me.”

While Bauer felt sad over Ava’s suicidal thoughts, Ava feared Bauer’s reaction. Would she get in trouble? Would Bauer beat her? Ava had already experienced one failed adoption after she told a teacher her parents beat her.

Ava is one of tens of thousands of children removed each year from their families because of abuse or neglect. In 2019, the most recent year for which statistics are available, 251,359 children entered the U.S. foster system and nearly the same number left. Altogether there were almost half a million children in care in 2019—a number that has risen during the opioid epidemic.

Each of the children has experienced trauma that affects the way they behave and react to stress. Foster parents willingly take on the care of these children but need training to recognize and deal with trauma. They also need practical support and an understanding community, something churches can help provide. And since the goal of foster care is to return most children to their birth families, those birth families also need help—but rarely get it. Some Christians are trying to change that.

WORLD throughout the summer of 2021 interviewed 21 people with experience and expertise in foster care. These are some of their stories and insights. (We’re using pseudonyms for the children in this story to protect their privacy.)

Ava had bruises all over her body when she arrived at Bauer’s house for what was supposed to be a weekend, until a more permanent placement opened up. She ended up staying for more than two months.

School was hard and Ava had trouble making friends. Her past left her struggling with what Bauer calls “big emotions.” Ava often had dramatic responses to frustrations at school and cussed out other students.

Responses like these are common for children with past trauma. Trauma makes the amygdala, the brain’s threat detector, more sensitive. Under stress, the brain jumps quickly to one of four threat response modes: fight, flight, freeze, or faint. Children often don’t know how to handle these strong emotional responses and revert to age-inappropriate behavior. When parents respond in frustration—towering over children or raising their voices—conflicts can escalate.

Bauer attended a monthly foster parent support group hosted in a local church. She appreciated the atmosphere of grace and humor among the parents: They were able to acknowledge and laugh about their mistakes. They joke about how they will “pay for therapy out the nose” someday.

People tell her fostering is God’s calling, but some nights Bauer believes she must be insane to keep bringing strangers’ children into her home. She bonded with another single mom who was also crazy enough to do it.

David and Tiffany Cortright decided after two decades of marriage and four children to become foster parents. They were unprepared for their first placement, two severely malnourished toddlers—a brother and sister ages 2 and 3. Both were nonverbal and a year behind in development.

Within the first two weeks, the boy developed a septic bacterial infection, which required doctors to drill into and drain his hip. For the next two weeks, he received antibiotics every eight hours through a direct line running up his arm, down his shoulder, and into a port in his chest. He tugged constantly at it, trying to rip it out.

Caring for the girl was no easier. Although she was only 3, she already had eating problems. She played with her food, rolled it into a ball, and refused to eat. When she did, she made herself throw up.
Tiffany’s time was taken up by appointments, three for each child each week: speech therapy, physical therapy, and occupational therapy. They had visits with a psychologist and a weekly weigh-in at a hospital in San Antonio.

By the time Child Protective Services (CPS) sent the toddlers back to their family, the Cortrights were exhausted and discouraged. Their church gave them emotional support, treating them as heroes, but did little to meet their practical needs.

Since none of their family or friends had taken the necessary training to watch their foster children, the Cortrights were constantly on duty. Tiffany remembers crying on her friends’ shoulders because of how difficult it was to parent the toddlers nonstop.

Looking back, David Cortright says they should have done a better job communicating their needs, but most days the immediate challenges of life took all their energy. They wish someone had stepped in to help without being asked.

The Cortrights didn’t give up fostering. After the toddlers left, David Cortright said, “We’ve experienced the worst. Let’s go from here.” They fostered nine more times, with their last placement turning into an adoption.

Many foster parents do quit. The National Council For Adoption (NCFA) estimates more than half of foster families give up during their first year. The University of Chicago estimates the median length of service to be 10 to 12 months. Major reasons: lack of support and lack of a say in what happens to the children.

Tara Thornton and her husband Luke started the foster-to-adopt process in 2012. They attended a small church with members who were willing to help with meals and babysitting. Yet, Thornton resisted the offers to help because she did not want to be a burden: “We signed up for this.”

Eventually the paperwork, rules, and parent visits took a toll, and the Thom-tons stepped back from fostering.

In 2016 they began reading about the need for more foster parents in Texas. By this time the Thomtons had moved to Georgetown, Texas, and were attending First Baptist Church of Georgetown there. They decided to begin fostering again, but Luke Thornton told his wife they wouldn’t do it alone.

They spoke to two groups within their church, asking, “Who wants to go with us?” Another couple agreed to train as foster parents with the Thomtons, and others said they would bring meals and become certified for babysitting and respite care.

Over time, more people in the church became interested in supporting foster care and adoption. With the help of the children’s ministry pastor, a small group met together to plan ways to serve. The church hosted a meeting at a city park and advertised in a community Facebook group. Several new families attended the event. Afterward, Thornton invited people to connect with certified babysitters and meal providers from First Baptist.

Thornton said that even if churches cannot fund an official foster care and adoption ministry, they can pray consistently, ask other churches for advice, and find unofficial ways to serve families. She said churches need to remember they might not have 20 families sign up right away, and that’s OK. Growth such as First Baptist experienced cannot be forced: “It’s all God.”

Foster care support requires compassion and an understanding of what foster parents are doing. Foster families may find it hard to attend church. They may be embarrassed by their foster children’s bad behaviors and frequently feel judged by other congregants. The resulting isolation can motivate the foster parents to quit—meaning another transition and still more trauma for their foster children.
against him. He and his wife Mandy lost their 2-year-old and 3-month-old sons after a tumultuous marriage and drug addictions led Mandy to file a domestic violence report against Josh—a claim he denies. CPS investigated both parents and removed the boys from their custody. Determined to get his sons back, Josh Thornton entered a drug rehab program and convinced his wife to enter one also.

The Thorntons’ CPS case was a legal maze. The domestic violence report made it especially complicated. To Josh it felt as though the lawyers and social workers made up their minds against him as soon as they read the case file. He felt overwhelmed by continually changing rules and information.

Amid the conflict, a few people—Josh calls them his “little angels”—stood by him. One of these was Tonya Foulkrod, a mother of four who advocated for him in court. She and her husband, Jay, run a ministry called Family Restoration Coalition to train and support parents in crisis. They believe the way to break the foster-care cycle is to fix it at the root: “The best service to an orphan is to help them never become an orphan.”

The Foulkrods created a Biblically based parenting class called Three Strands, which the Thorntons attended on their judge’s recommendation. For Josh, Three Strands was the turning point. A couple with two young sons mentored the Thorntons for hours each week. Josh found that getting down on his hands and knees to play with his mentors’ sons and jumping on the trampoline with them helped ease his pain. It kept him from relapsing.

The Foulkrods say most parents in Josh’s position are capable of being good parents with the right support and training. They base that on their experience with more than 100 parents in crisis.

For a long time, Christians have overlooked birth parents—and that’s a mistake because most foster children will return to their birth families. It’s in everyone’s interest to help the biological parents learn to be better moms and dads. State governments often lack resources to support birth parents as they work to get their children back. Help often comes in the form of hurdles: checklists of rehab, employment, housing, therapy, and education requirements that can seem overwhelming to parents caught up in the system.

For Josh Thornton (unrelated to Tara Thornton) it felt like everyone was
The best service to an orphan is to help them never become an orphan.

In December 2020, the Thorntons moved into an apartment after four months of living with friends in an RV. The couple owned very little. With the help of their church, the Thorntons’ Three Strands mentors paid for a U-Haul, collected donated furniture, and helped cover rent.

On May 12, 2021, the boys came home. Josh and Mandy prepared for two to three weeks in advance. They threw a welcome home party with Spider-Man and PAW Patrol balloons, cake, and kazoos. Their Three Strands mentors and closest friends came to celebrate.

The boys are 4 and 2 years old: When they came home, all Josh wanted to do was hold them. Now, the Thornton house is filled with “Nerf guns galore,” and Josh plays with his boys even though the projectiles can hurt. Sometimes water guns make it into the house accidentally, or the boys run screaming through the house “like gorillas,” but he doesn’t mind.

The Foulkrods get to see happy endings, but most foster parents don’t.

After the Cortrights had their toddlers for 5½ months, CPS decided they could return to their biological family. Although both children had gained weight, the Cortrights did not feel it was safe for them to return home yet. It’s hard not to see results: “We don’t know what kind of impact we’re having on these kids in the long term.”

Ava, the 12-year-old who threatened suicide, went to summer camp—and got kicked out. When she returned to Rebecca Bauer’s home, she shocked Bauer by saying she didn’t want to live with her anymore. So Bauer went to work, fighting for Ava to be able to live with an older biological sister, despite the sister’s minor marijuana-related record.

Bauer knows she may not see Ava again. She texts with the older sister and hopes to stay in touch. Even though the placement didn’t work out, Bauer sees purpose in it: God used her to get Ava back with her family. She hopes to help ensure the prosecution of the adoptive parents who abused Ava.

In addition to 15 long-term placements (lasting from a month to a year), Bauer estimates 10 children have stayed with her for a night or two. Sometimes, she gets a call at 2 o’clock in the morning to pick up a child with nowhere else to go. After these children move on, she may never hear from them again.

Bauer holds out a stubborn hope for these children, despite their terrible experiences: “I know things will work out the way they are supposed to.”

For now, she remembers them by hanging their initials on a remembrance wall in her home and displaying their pictures by the window.

—Grace Snell is a graduate of the World Journalism Institute
In our issue dated June 30, 2007, WORLD published “Seven fat years,” alluding to the dream Joseph interprets in Genesis 41, and offering 100 recommendations of books published during the first seven years of this century. In our issue dated June 28, 2014, we published “Seven more fat years,” showing 160 books published since 2007.

Now it’s time for “Seven leaner years,” with the title reflecting hard times for publishing in two ways. Many publishing houses put out politically correct books, and
the few conservative ones often emphasize opinion aimed at “owning the libs” rather than thoughtful analysis. Some Christian publishers remain forthright, but at others, marketing rules.

Here are my top 70 of the past seven years, in six categories that indicate my idiosyncratic reading interests—America Now, American History, World History, Scientific Debates, Applied Theology, and Fiction—with one candle at the end to put atop the cake.
America Now

ALIENATED AMERICA: WHY SOME PLACES THRIVE WHILE OTHERS COLLAPSE
Tim Carney shows how less church and community involvement often leads to a give-up attitude that among 10 percent of the populace worsens job prospects. He also observed the political difference between "evangelicals" who do not go to church and those who do.

BARRIO AMERICA: HOW LATINO IMMIGRANTS SAVED THE AMERICAN CITY
A.K. Sandoval-Strausz shows how in deteriorating areas of Dallas and Chicago "immigrants restored the shopping streets and storefronts that had been emptying out in favor of suburban landscapes designed around the automobile."

THE ONCE AND FUTURE WORKER
Oren Cass notes that 1 in 5 men in their prime do not work full time, and many are without accomplishments like building strong personal relationships, succeeding at work, and supporting a family. Proposals: Do not have a "college or bust" attitude, and do not pursue economic growth in ways that sicken the labor market.

WHO KILLED CIVIL SOCIETY?
Howard Husock shows how poverty-fighters a century ago promoted an American three-self doctrine: self-respect, self-control, self-government. Today we turn the spotlight not on the strengths of the poor but their weaknesses.

DISCRIMINATION AND DISPARITIES
An enlarged edition of Thomas Sowell’s insightful work on why multiple factors—some systemic, some individual, and many a combination of both (as in miseducation and crime)—contribute to radical differences in outcomes within American society.

PLEASE STOP HELPING US
Jason Riley unflinchingly examines whether government policy is the chief engine of black progress, or whether numerous national programs have harmed rather than helped the poor and uneducated.

AMERICA IN RETREAT
Bret Stephens shows how isolationist rhetoric is on the rise in America, along with balance-of-power appeasement. The consequence may be more disorder than we bargained for, including world war and the avoidable sacrifice of countless lives: If America does not lead, Russia, China, or Iran very likely will.

BOOTLEGGERS & BAPTISTS
The grandson-grandpa writing team of Adam Smith and Bruce Yandle created a book that’s both serious and fun to read. The title stems from Prohibition, when Baptists and bootleggers, for different reasons, worked to shut down taverns. Recently, both bankers and community organizers supported the risky loans that created a housing bubble.

REBOOTING JUSTICE
Benjamin Barton and Stephanos Bibas show how much criminal justice in the United States has become impersonal, amoral, and hidden, with plea bargaining replacing trials. They propose ways to make it individualized, moral, transparent, and participatory.

THE SECULAR CREED
Rebecca McLaughlin helps us distinguish between racial equality (a Biblical concept) and the LGBT agenda, which is clearly un-Biblical. Staying low on the ladder of abstraction, she also explains why Christianity is the basis for women’s rights and why we need to oppose firmly transgender trends. Mocking does not help. Biblical objectivity does.

PATRIOT NUMBER ONE: AMERICAN DREAMS IN CHINATOWN
Lauren Hilgers gives us the inspiring story of Zhuang Liehong, a democracy protester from south China who escapes and starts from scratch in Queens. Excellent street-level reporting brings to life hardship and opportunity.

FREE TO BELIEVE: THE BATTLE OVER RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN AMERICA
Becket law firm attorney Luke Goodrich shows that some leading abortion and gay rights activists are not content with legalization, acceptance, and even general approval. What if declining to perform an abortion becomes an illegal act of sex discrimination?

LIVE NOT BY LIES: A MANUAL FOR CHRISTIAN DISSIDENTS
Rod Dreher summarizes well what we can learn from those who lived under 20th-century totalitarianism. Stand firm but let bitterness stand down. Appreciate the value of suffering but be merciful to those whose capacity is
less. Practice hospitality. Speak up but don’t worry about being prudently silent at times.

American History
I’ve written before about the two textbooks published in 2019 that I recommend for bright high-school and college students: Thomas Kidd’s AMERICAN HISTORY (two volumes) and Wilfred McClay’s LAND OF HOPE: AN INVITATION TO THE GREAT AMERICAN STORY. Both offer coherent narratives that recognize problems but honor American accomplishments. Here are 12 books for general readers.

BLOOD MOON
John Sedgwick avoids the children’s version of the Cherokee Trail of Tears and eloquently shows how less racism among whites and less political maneuvering within the Cherokee tribe could have mitigated the disaster.

DID AMERICA HAVE A CHRISTIAN FOUNDING?
Historians offer radically different answers to the title question, so Mark David Hall’s thoughtful analysis is helpful. He views many founders as Christian and others not, but progressive secularists are wrong in trying to re-create the 18th century in their own image: The Constitution and other early documents certainly emerged from a Biblical worldview.

THE CROOKED PATH TO ABOLITION
James Oakes shows the battle between those who saw the Constitution as pro-slavery and those who saw it through the light of a liberty-embracing Declaration of Independence. Pro-life readers will perceive the Dred Scott–Roe v. Wade parallels.

FEARS OF A SETTING SUN: THE DISILLUSIONMENT OF AMERICA’S FOUNDERS
Dennis Rasmussen shows how George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson all thought the American experiment was a failure and the United States would soon be disunited. Yet we’ve lasted for almost 250 years, so we must have done something right.

A NATION FORGED BY CRISIS
Jay Sexton presents a challenging new perspective on American history in 200 tightly written pages. Instead of telling a conventional story of social evolution, he offers the historian’s equivalent of a biologist’s “punctuated equilibrium”: long periods of little change punctuated by dramatic disasters that create surprising benefits.

LOOMING CIVIL WAR
Jason Phillips punctures the view that Americans both north and south anticipated “a short, glorious war.” Some politicians and soldiers did talk that way, but many civilians “felt dragged into a terrifying future by extremists from both regions,” as “unreason and dread” poisoned politics, and the telegraph offered “instantaneous information that promised more knowledge than it delivered.”

CITIZEN REPORTERS: S.S. MCCLURE, IDA TARBELL, AND THE MAGAZINE THAT REWROTE AMERICA
Stephanie Gorton shows how early 20th-century reporters like Ida Tarbell and Willa Cather captured the imagination of McClure’s Magazine’s 400,000 readers and the nation as a whole. As in the early 21st century, even the subjects of investigative stories often wanted to be known and photographed: “Click! Click! Click! … Everybody posing, smirking, attitudinizing!”

ARMIES OF DELIVERANCE
Elizabeth Varon supplements Civil War battle accounts by focusing on how Northerners thought the war would liberate poor Southern whites living under slaveholder domination. Meanwhile, the failure of Reconstruction became likely as Confederate leaders succeeded in portraying white Southerners generally as victims of Yankee aggression.

GREAT SOCIETY: A NEW HISTORY
Amity Shlaes teaches how the failure of 1960s suite-level planning has led to current economic and racial tensions—and our hard experience suggests that today’s top-down programs won’t do any better. She deftly and delightfully profiles leaders of the era like union head Walter Reuther, young radical Tom Hayden, and economics ear-whisperer Arthur Burns.

THE AGE OF ENTITLEMENT: AMERICA SINCE THE SIXTIES
Christopher Caldwell details the impact of two 1960s laws: the Civil Rights Act and the Immigration and Nationality Act. The first law, designed to help the descendants of slaves, now primarily benefits many others. Caldwell then explains insightfully how the 1960s revolution affected sex, war, debt, and diversity, creating winners and losers.

THE YEAR OF PERIL: AMERICA IN 1942
Tracy Campbell shows that U.S. victory in World War II was not a sure thing. Life proclaimed 1942 “the critical
year in the existence of the United States.” Three out of 10 Americans hoped for a negotiated settlement with Hitler. Some thought America would go the way of Poland, Greece, and France.

**THE ONLY PLANE IN THE SKY**
This is the book I’d want today’s and tomorrow’s college students to read if they want to understand what 9/11 was like. Garrett Graff’s gut-pounding compilation makes the day come alive, hour by hour.

**World History**

**MARTIN LUTHER: VISIONARY REFORMER**
Many religions designate some ground as holy, emphasize ritual sacrifices, and go through other procedures that, when checked off, guarantee eternal rewards. Scott Hendrix shows how “separating religion from moralism was Luther’s revolutionary innovation.” (For reviews of two dozen other books about Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation, see WORLD, Oct. 28, 2017.)

**AUGUSTINE ON THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: TRANSFORMED BY THE POWER OF GOD**
Thomas à Kempis in the 15th century told us we should imitate Christ, but Gerald Bray shows how Augustine a millennium earlier came to see that Jesus “took our sins upon himself, not in order to set us an example that we should imitate but in order to remove from us the burden of sin and death. ... We must be crucified with Christ, not strengthened by his example.”

**THE BEGINNING OF POLITICS: POWER IN THE BIBLICAL BOOK OF SAMUEL**
Moshe Halbertal and Stephen Holmes brilliantly analyze “the first and greatest work of Western political thought.” The books of 1 and 2 Samuel in the Old Testament show how an ambitionless Saul became a paranoid tyrant and an ambitious David loved and was loved by God, but was still a sinner.

**THE MYTH OF THE ANDALUSIAN PARADISE**
Darío Fernández-Morera punctures the myth of multicultural harmony in medieval Spain among Muslim overlords and Christian or Jewish subjects. He shows how Muslims ran a gangsterlike protection racket, with Christians and Jews paying up and accepting second-class citizenship.

**DEAD WAKE: THE LAST CROSSING OF THE LUSITANIA**
Erik Larson re-creates the weeks leading up to 1,198 deaths (mostly civilian) in 1915, when a German subma-

rine torpedoed and sank the luxury liner Lusitania off the coast of Ireland. He masterfully weaves human interest into the history and asks the what-ifs.

**YOU SAY YOU WANT A REVOLUTION? RADICAL IDEALISM AND ITS TRAGIC CONSEQUENCES**
Daniel Chirot takes us through the Russian, German, Iranian, and Chinese revolutions, with a detour to Mexico as well, and shows why they all became bloody tragedies, with the most ruthless killing high-minded reformers: “If you want a revolution, beware.”

**THE HOUSE OF GOVERNMENT**
Yuri Slezkine’s 1,104 pages of astonishing research shows how Russian revolutionaries dug a pit and fell into it. Andrei Bubnov, the People’s Commissar of Enlightenment, emphasized the need for opponents of Communism to be “squashed like vile vermin,” but did not like being treated like a cockroach himself.

**THE ORDER OF THE DAY**
Translated from the French, *The Order of the Day* is Éric Vuillard’s beautifully written short book about an ugly incident, Nazi Germany’s annexation of Austria. Vuillard describes those capitulating to Adolf Hitler for short-term gains “like 24 calculating machines at the gates of Hell.”

**JUSTIFYING GENOCIDE**
Stefan Ihrig shows how Turks justified mass murder of Armenians during World War I, and how Hitler in 1939 told his officials they could kill without consequences to them or to Germany: “Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?” Moral: When an evil policy “works” and perpetrators go unpunished, other power-seekers will go and do likewise.

**ANATOMY OF A GENOCIDE**
Omer Bartov’s masterpiece of ground-level history shows that for more than four centuries in the border town of Buczacz, Poles, Ukrainians, and Jews mostly got along. That quickly changed with World War II, where German soldiers “shot Jews eagerly,” but local volunteers, including Ukrainians and Poles, wanted in.

**IN THOSE NIGHTMARISH DAYS**
Two extraordinary Polish journalists came to realize they were on the road to something beyond even their worst nightmares: extermination. Peretz Opoczynski, Josef
Zelkowicz, and almost all their subjects died in concentration camps or from starvation. (Germans provided ghetto occupants with a daily allotment of 184 calories.)

**MUNICH**
Robert Harris’ two key fictional characters interact with Neville Chamberlain, Adolf Hitler, and other leaders during the four days that led to the infamous agreement that would purportedly prevent World War II. Harris makes historical and imagined characters come alive and gives us Chamberlain’s logic in waving a piece of paper that promised “peace in our time,” which made as much sense as President Joe Biden trusting the Taliban. (Derogatory references to Hitler include F-bombs.)

**BLOOD LETTERS**
Author Lian Xi describes how Lin Zhao lost faith in the Chinese Communist Party and regained faith in Christ. Chinese officials killed her in 1968, but 13 years later a judge returned to her family hundreds of pages of writings Lin penned in prison with ink and her own blood.

## Scientific Debates

**THE WIZARD AND THE PROPHET**
Charles Mann describes how Norman Borlaug persevered through failed experiments and political challenges to increase global grain harvests, while William Vogt, a prophet of population doom, started the modern environmental movement by incorrectly forecasting mass starvation unless we stop being fruitful and multiplying.

**FALSE ALARM**
Bjorn Lomborg says “global warming is real, but it is not the end of the world. It is a manageable problem.” If we obsess about it, we make children unnecessarily fearful and waste trillions of dollars, crowding out investments in immunization, education, better crop varieties, more fertilizer, and other needs that would save and prosper many more lives.

**THE MYSTERY OF LIFE’S ORIGIN: THE CONTINUING CONTROVERSY**
Charles Thaxton, Walter Bradley, James Tour, and others give us two books in one: a classic that in 1984 provided the base for the intelligent design movement of the 1990s, and a series of new, cutting-edge chapters that set the stage for a Roaring ’20s decade of scientific advancement.

**THE SECRET LIFE OF SCIENCE**
Jeremy Baumberg describes a hyper-competitive scientific establishment where researchers build careers by conforming their work to a mainstream vision and gaining grants from vested interests.

**THE MIRACLE OF THE CELL**
For centuries “fearfully and wonderfully made” were just words about our bodies from Psalm 139. Now we have proof: Biochemist Michael Denton shows how vast is the chasm between some chemical soup and a cell filled with genetic information encoded in the double helix, and much besides.

**DARWIN DEVOLVES**
Michael Behe explains how the evolutionary process can make a creature look different, but it builds or creates nothing at the genetic level. He highlights new scientific discoveries that show how Darwin’s mechanism works by breaking down genes: devolution, not evolution.

**DARWIN’S HOUSE OF CARDS**
Tom Bethell shows how “Darwin and his contemporaries had no way of knowing just how complex a cell is.” Darwinists today offer bait-and-switches—moths in England changing color, finches developing larger beaks—that depend on listeners not understanding the difference between microevolution and macroevolution.

**THE KINGDOM OF SPEECH**
Here’s Tom Wolfe having fun with Darwinism and then linguistic theory. Wolfe sees evolution as a fable for atheists and Charles Darwin as an ambitious but fearful upper-class Brit beaten to the punch on natural selection by the lowly Alfred Russel Wallace.

**PURPOSE & DESIRE**
J. Scott Turner notes that modern Darwinism is an echo chamber: He raises deep questions with a measured tone that will entice scientific materialists to look in the mirror and wonder what they’re missing. Good for those who might be put off by Bethell’s attacks, but we should realize we can’t worship both God and current science dogma.

**THEISTIC EVOLUTION: A SCIENTIFIC, PHILOSOPHICAL, AND THEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE**
Those influenced by the well-funded BioLogos campaign to sell macroevolution to Christians should read how...
neo-Darwinism fails scientifically, with neither the fossil record nor genetics undermining the first two chapters of Genesis. Transitional ape-to-human fossils remain unfound, and humans and chimpanzees are not similar at the genetic level.

**ADAM, THE FALL, AND ORIGINAL SIN: THEORETICAL, BIBLICAL, AND SCIENTIFIC PERSPECTIVES**

Fifteen thoughtful essays in this volume edited by Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves connect the dots of basic Christian teaching and God-breathed science. Nothing in oversold Darwinian theory forces us to give up the Biblical teaching that “because Adam first sinned, we all participate in that one sin, and as a result we are all in the same sinking boat”—with only Christ keeping us afloat.

**RETURN OF THE GOD HYPOTHESIS**

New this year: the third in Stephen Meyer’s excellent beyond-Darwin trilogy, following up *Signature in the Cell* (2009) and *Darwin’s Doubt* (2013). Meyer summarizes the new evidence from biology and physics and shows that those with a “Science is Real” sign on their lawns should logically put a “God is Real” sign next to it.

**WHAT ABOUT EVIL?**

Scott Christensen comes as close as any human can to explaining why bad things happen. He shows how God is the master Playwright whose storytelling we creatures strive to imitate. God’s long-range perspective is apparent in His support of marriage and criticism of adultery, which can provide a fleeting buzz.

**LIVING LIFE BACKWARD**

David Gibson reminds us how we should act at funerals. Instead of racing away to resume our normal activities,
we should linger, realize it will all too soon be our turn, and ask ourselves, “What will my life have been worth?” Realizing that life is finite pushes us not to morbidity but to an eagerness to use each day for God’s glory.

THE COMPELLING COMMUNITY: WHERE GOD’S POWER MAKES A CHURCH ATTRACTIVE
Co-authors Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop distinguish the subtle but significant difference between a “gospel-plus” community and a “gospel-revealing” community: The first facilitates comfort-based relationships rooted in the gospel plus something else, while the latter builds relationships between people who have little in common other than Christ.

THEODICY OF LOVE: COSMIC CONFLICT AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL
John Peckham takes a deep dive into the coexistence of divine omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence with human freedom and rampaging evil. This theodicy goes beyond free-will defenses and does not see evil as evidence of a weak God.

EMBODIED HOPE
Kelly Kapic emphasizes that our hope is in God “who made and redeemed heaven and earth, not in our own intellectual acuity.” He asks Christians to mix hope and lament in faithful suffering, rather than emphasizing hope with no lament (that’s naive optimism), lament with no hope (“unrelenting despair”), and neither hope nor lament (“detached stoicism”).

REMEMBER DEATH
Matthew McCullough asks, “How can you enjoy anything about life if you know that, in the end, the more you love something the more it will hurt when you lose it?” Buddhists say the answer is nonattachment to anyone and anything. McCullough shows how Christians can see that bid for support and raise it through Christ’s promise of eternal life.

Fiction

BLACK RIVER and EDEN MINE
Author Sarah Hulse writes about personal change in these two wonderfully crafted novels. In an interview published in this year’s June 26 issue, she said, “I write about very flawed characters in very difficult situations, and the possibility of redemption is central.” (Some bad language reveals character under pressure.)

VINEGAR GIRL
Anne Tyler’s retelling of The Taming of the Shrew features good writing and good praise of marriage. The orphaned protagonist, Pyotr, once stayed at a friend’s house and heard from a distance the parents sitting in their living room. “Wife said, ‘Mumble mumble?’ Husband said, ‘Mumble.’” Pyotr asks Kate, who at first uses shrewish language, “You would maybe sit sometimes in this living room with me? You would say, ‘Mumble?’ And I would say, ‘Mumble mumble.’” Kate finally says, “We could do that sometimes.”

PACHINKO
Min Jin Lee’s moving multigenerational saga of Koreans in Japan provides a positive view of Christianity. It’s a modern rendition of Hosea, which Lee summarized this way in our WORLD interview (June 30, 2018): “God tells Hosea, a perfectly nice guy, go marry the town slut. … God says, ‘I want you to do it, Hosea, so you’ll know what it’s like when you cheat on me.’ What an interesting, very troubling idea.” (Some scenes of adultery, and bad characters speak crudely.)

THE BOOK OF STRANGE NEW THINGS
Michel Faber’s main character is an addict-turned-missionary who knows that Jesus saved him, so he wants to save the inhabitants of a planet far from Earth, Oasis. The Oasans have already heard of Jesus and many of them ardently believed: They now call themselves “Jesus Lover One” or “Jesus Lover 30,” in order of when they made professions of faith. They yearn for more teaching from the Bible, which they call “the book of strange new things.” (Warning: Sex on page 8—between a husband and wife just before he heads to the distant galaxy—and some later cautions.)

And here’s one final recommendation:

WORKING: RESEARCHING, INTERVIEWING, WRITING
This is the book I’d want every historian and in-depth journalist to read. Robert Caro explains how he researched his vivid books: “Turn over every page” in libraries, and (when interviewing) “keep saying, What would I see? Sometimes these people get angry because I’m asking the same question over and over again. If you just keep doing it, it’s amazing what comes out of people.”

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With the nation in turmoil...

Why are our political leaders the most neglected mission field in America today?

I've wondered about this for quite some time. When I served as U.S. Secretary of Energy in Washington, D.C., nothing prepared me better for the work that needed to be done for our nation than the hour I spent every week in the Capitol Ministries White House Cabinet Bible Study. Our political leaders desperately need God's Word and yet they are all but forgotten when it comes to evangelism and discipleship. Let's fix that. I am spearheading this bold effort to reach political leaders with the Word of God throughout America! Please join me.

— RICK PERRY
FORMER SECRETARY OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
FORMER GOVERNOR OF TEXAS

CAPITOL MINISTRIES

For 25 years Capitol Ministries has planted discipleship ministries inside the halls of government to state and federal political leaders in the United States and around the world. Now we are working to build weekly discipleship Bible study ministries to city and county officials who serve across America. I t’s a daring vision. But we already have the Bible studies written specifically to meet the professional, personal, and faith needs of public servants. We are seeking men to teach them—retired businessmen, pastors, former pastors, lay leaders, and the person who senses his heart is being tugged by God. Is this you? We provide support and training. Share the Word of God with America's national leaders of tomorrow in your neighborhood today.

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LIFE WITHOUT WI-FI

Seven percent of Americans still don’t use the internet. Most of them are elderly and say they have better things to do

by Liz Rieth

BILL AND JEAN KERCHER’S retirement days consist of calling family on the landline, watching cable television, biking, bowling, and thrifting in Goshen, Ind. One thing they’re not plugged into: the internet.

At ages 78 and 79, they don’t own cell phones or have internet access at home. But they don’t feel they need it, as they keep busy enough for their age, Jean said. She’s afraid they would spend too much time online if they had it.
then she decided she didn't need to either. Decades later, Jewett's decision still stands. When she needs to talk to someone, she picks up her phone and gives them a call. Occasionally, she writes a letter.

“I know there’s good things on it, but there’s a lot of bad things on it too … quick responses that you don’t sometimes think through,” Jewett said. “Communication is very different, you know, than what it used to be.”

Karen Sunderwirgh agrees that the internet has impacted the way humans interact.

The 92-year-old Springfield, Mo., resident learned to use computers when she worked as a registered nurse. As the internet became a larger part of her job, she felt it took away from one-on-one interactions with patients. Before she retired in 2004, she tried to have a computer at home, but it never worked quite right. So she went without it.

Even though she’s offline, the constantly connected world still impacts her life. She remembers going into a doctor’s office for some tests and the woman operating them never made eye contact with her. Instead, she only looked at her computer, Sunderwirgh said.

“I miss being with people one-on-one, not through a machine,” Sunderwirgh said. “I think I am much happier [without it].”

The couple is a part of the 7 percent of Americans who don’t use the internet, according to a recent Pew Research Center survey. That’s roughly 23 million people who live life completely offline. Education, socioeconomic status, and age impact one’s internet usage, with age being the largest determinant: A quarter of adults older than 65 years old report never going online.

The Kerchers’ lack of use doesn’t stem from a lack of knowledge on how to use it. Jean was a computer tech aid in the local school system and taught others how to use computers. When they retired, the couple decided they would be fine without it.

“We just don’t feel like we would use [the internet] very often,” Bill said. “My boy Barry says you need one, but when we get in a bind we call him up and he can readily access the information that I need.”

The Pew survey also found that 1/4 percent of adults with a high-school education or less don’t use the internet. American adults living in a household that earns less than $30,000 a year are far more likely to stay offline than those whose annual household income is $75,000 or more—1/4 percent compared with 1 percent. One explanation is the average cost of a broadband internet connection in the United States is $61.07 per month, one of the highest rates in the world, according to BroadbandSearch.net.

For some, going online just isn’t necessary or interesting. That includes 89-year-old Barb Jewett, who also lives in Goshen. She said she has no desire to go online: The internet arrived at a stage in life when she didn’t need it.

“I’m a very unusual person I’m sure,” Jewett said. “I guess the things I am more interested in are things … that I have done all my life that don’t require that I have to have [the internet].” Jewett volunteers at the library and was previously involved in an Extension Homemakers group, both of which are in-person activities.

Jewett remembers in the ‘80s that her husband’s office started to bring in computers. However, he didn’t want to get “involved” with them, she said. If he didn’t,
INCE THE BEGINNING of the COVID-19 pandemic, health officials, government leaders, and media reports have discussed reaching herd immunity—when enough people have become immune to a virus (either by vaccination or natural infection) that the virus can’t meaningfully spread.

Some countries seemed to be approaching herd immunity by the end of this summer. In the United Kingdom, for example, 81 percent of the population age 16 and up had been vaccinated as of mid-September.

Yet as the virus mutates, new variants may put that goal out of reach. Even with its high vaccination rate, the U.K. continued to see high numbers of new COVID-19 cases.

We take herd immunity for granted with diseases like measles: In the United States, when outbreaks do start (typically via someone who has traveled from a country where it remains endemic), they spread through a small number of unvaccinated people before fizzling out. “Large” outbreaks are measured in the hundreds of cases, and no American is known to have died from measles since 2015. This makes sense, because 92 percent of Americans have received the measles vaccine.

Early in the pandemic, some people hypothesized that the threshold for herd immunity to COVID-19 might be much lower, with the Swedish ambassador to America predicting the United States would reach herd immunity as early as May 2020. Those hypotheses continued through last year, with our coverage from September 2020 noting that estimates for the herd immunity threshold ranged from 20 percent to 70 percent. All of those, however, predated the virus’s more contagious delta variant.

Delta transmits more easily between people: An August study in the Journal of Travel Medicine found that it roughly doubles infectivity compared with the original strain. Second, Nature reports that during an outbreak in southern China, almost three-fourths of delta transmissions appeared to happen before symptom onset. In other words, before a person began to feel sick and knew to stay home, he or she could have passed the virus on.

WILL WE EVER REACH HERD IMMUNITY?

More contagious variants of COVID-19 may push herd immunity out of reach, but vaccines remove the virus’s sting

by Charles Horton, M.D.
Vaccines also appear to be less effective in preventing minor infections from the delta variant, which may be enough to pass COVID-19 on to others. Over time, even vaccinated people and those who had previously contracted the coronavirus may begin to lose their immunity. This has given rise to debates about whether the COVID-19 vaccines should join the list of vaccines needing three—or more—shots. (For instance, the diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine involves a series of five doses, and the polio vaccine involves four.)

Will we reach herd immunity, then, with COVID-19? Sir Andrew Pollard, who heads the Oxford Vaccine Group, says no: He told the British All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) in August that “this current variant, the delta variant, will still infect people who have been vaccinated and that does mean that anyone who is still unvaccinated at some point will meet the virus.”

The participants in the APPG forum emphasized vaccines still protect their recipients: While the shots don’t reliably prevent mild cases of the delta variant, they remain strong against more severe infections. This might sound odd, but it makes sense: A vaccine’s goal is to teach the immune system to recognize a given invader and make antibodies quickly. An invader that moves more quickly might get a foothold—that’s the mild infection—but ramping up antibody production without delay can prevent that mild infection from becoming serious. This makes a major difference: A Public Health England study found the vaccines continued to offer excellent protection against hospitalization, including from the delta variant. (That explains why the vast majority of hospitalized patients in the current COVID-19 wave are unvaccinated.)

Evidence now points to the virus becoming a permanent, rather than temporary, part of our lives—albeit with variants raising the stakes for people who avoid vaccines. Pollard may be correct that we will fall short of true herd immunity, but it isn’t a binary all-or-nothing phenomenon. Each person who receives a vaccine before exposure, each person who doesn’t get sick after exposure, and each person who gets a mild case instead of more severe case of COVID-19, represents one more step toward the end of the public health emergency.
and prayer—the sister of the deceased.

Funerals in Hong Kong are commonly Taoist, and most take place at multistory funeral parlors whose exteriors resemble industrial buildings. On any given floor, priests chant loudly in one room as incense smoke wafts in another. Families in white garb mourn among white flower wreaths. Paper offerings in the shape of luxury cars and yachts occupy the hall before being burnt in the belief the dead will receive them in the afterlife.

In contrast, the funerals Wong offers are Christian or nonreligious, and almost all take place inside a church. The mission is to evangelize and bring people into the church, Wong said. For some funeral attendees, it is the first time they step inside a church or hear a sermon. Confronting death also prompts people to ask the bigger questions on the purpose of life.

Spotting his clients outside the mortuary, Wong rushed to greet the wife and elder sister of the middle-aged man who had died a few weeks ago from a heart problem. Wong is aware that body collection is a jarring process for families, so he makes sure a familiar face from his company accompanies them. Speaking gently, Wong warned, “Sometimes the mouth might be open.” It turned out the man’s unembalmed body was in worse condition than he had expected, but he assured them there was still hope with makeup. Two other families entered the body identification area in silence and came out crying.

While Wong supervised the makeup process and the dressing of the body with the outfit and ring the wife had brought, he also trained his employee, who was new to the mortuary aspect of the job. The conventional funeral industry in Hong Kong is a closed community that people enter through connections and apprenticeship, Wong said. As an outsider, he had to figure things out on his own.

As his clients waited—in tears, silence, and prayer—the sister of the deceased told me it was good to have Wong’s support so she could focus on taking care of her mother, who was distraught over her son’s sudden death. For instance, while sitting in the hearse on the way to the church in Tsim Sha Tsui, she fretted she would be too emotional to deliver the eulogy at the funeral. Wong assured her it would be OK: The ceremony wasn’t about the speech.

Dealing so much with death, Wong admits he struggles with the tension of becoming desensitized while still needing to remain compassionate for his clients. He is also more aware than most that anyone can die tomorrow: Going from handling a funeral for a child to returning home to his young son is not easy. “I dreamed about my son dying every night for a month,” he said. Seeking Christian counseling has helped him process all the deaths he encounters.

Wong has also faced pushback because of the taboo of death in Chinese culture. A landlord denied him rental after finding out his occupation. Jobseekers have turned down his company’s offers after their parents disapproved of their career choice. Some churches have refused funerals with a dead body on the premise out of fear, Wong said.

Inside the Victorian-Gothic church in Tsim Sha Tsui, Wong darted around to ensure the funeral proceeded smoothly. Flanked by white flowers, 50 or so attendees wearing black sang “Amazing Grace” accompanied by a flutist and a pianist as a photo slideshow of the deceased played. Ng officiated the ceremony and delivered the sermon.

Afterward, Ng and the guests boarded a bus to a crematorium in Diamond Hill. Due to land scarcity in the city, nearly 90 percent of the dead are cremated.

While this funeral lasted under an hour, other funerals can be much more complicated. One time Wong worked frantically to keep the many mistresses of the deceased and his brother, who was arranging the ceremony, from running into each other.

Another time, an elderly woman called from Australia to plan the funeral for her sister, who at the time was still healthily living in Hong Kong. When the sister eventually died, Wong learned the woman who contacted him had already passed away as well. She was dying at the time of the call, and arranging her sister’s funeral was her way of trying to take care of her before her own death.

While he spends his days planning others’ funerals, Wong has not planned his own. “It’s not important,” he said. “Funerals are for the living. It’s not for the dead from a Christian standpoint.”
Be worthy of your gray

What reminders of mortality can do for us

The Brits say “grey”; the Yanks say “gray.” But either way, it’s “a horse of that color,” as Olivia’s servant Maria said in *Twelfth Night* (Act 2, Scene 3): My hair is now officially achromatic.

It was threatening gray for many years, first with halfhearted peek-a-boo threats in my 50s, then more stridently. So I finally defused the power of the terror by throwing down the gauntlet: “Come and get me, gray! I’m ready for ya.”

Scripture says men are held in bondage all their lives by fear of death (Hebrews 2:15). And women by fear of gray. The secret is that once confronted, the boogeyman is not so formidable after all. Indeed, the good thing about gray hair is that you don’t have to dread roots anymore—those little pinpricks, those thousand points of white on the scalp that you pretend for two weeks not to see; that portend an imminent takeover of the brown team by the gray team; that publish the lie for all to see that your youth is from a bottle.

’Tis a long and unsavory story, this quest for endless youth. The ancient Romans fermented leeches in a lead vessel to make black dye. The Germans concocted red hair coloring of goats’ fat and beechwood ash. Human ingenuity employed henna, alfalfa, saffron, and indigo. Despite being dyed, they all died.

I embrace thee, gray! In the late 20th century we sang, “Let my freak flag fly” (Crosby, Stills, Nash, & Young). In the early 21st century, let that flag be gray—which is the new “in” color, I am told. A real estate agent says the house down the block will never fetch the asking price, with its deep red and dark blue interior walls and porcelain dolls on every shelf and cove: “Today’s generation wants to walk into a prospective house and see gray walls and white trim,” she educated me.

Even cars are mostly shades of gray now, which makes it hard to find mine in the Walmart lot. Ah, for the bright, distinct cars of my childhood: our 1950 cornflower blue Pontiac convertible; 1955 two-tone green Ford Fairlane; 1960 Ford Country Squire with the woodgrain trim on the side; 1967 black Pontiac Tempest; copper-colored AMC Javelin; canary yellow Karmann Ghia. Today we’ve practically reverted to the automobile before 1925, which you could get in any color “as long as it’s black.”

I told my sister that I’ll be respected now. She wrote back to me, “You’ll be invisible now.”

Maybe so. But the fact that God—the all-wise Creator who did all things well and pronounced it “very good” (Genesis 1:31)—so designed our hair follicles to run out of pigment in our 40s and our hearts to stop beating only in our 80s makes me grope for a deeper purpose in His will. Can it be that prematurely graying is the gentle warning that we need? Who else will trade in worldly merriment for “sober-mindedness” (2 Timothy 4:5) unless he gets a preview of life’s ending from afar?

Indeed, God calls them foolish who rush about in this world’s business heedless of the signals that their body’s alterations are supposed to lead them to repentance: “Strangers devour his strength, and he knows it not; gray hairs are sprinkled upon him, and he knows it not” (Hosea 7:9).

A worse fate than gray hair awaits the one who plunges partying and mindless into dotage. He is like the fig tree that the Lord spied from a distance and would fain have slaked His hunger, which He found bereft of figs. And seeing it was useless for all nourishment, He cursed it and it withered on the spot. Gray heads should have mouths that impart food to weary travelers through life. “Gray hair is a crown of glory” (Proverbs 16:31)—but only on the pates of wise men, not of fools.

The ancients said, “Be worthy of your beard.” The Bible bids us, men and women, to be worthy of our gray. Or grey.
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WORLD’s leadership and commitment to Biblically objective journalism

ISSOURI PRO-LIFE LEADER Samuel Lee has given three decades of his life to the pro-life movement, so he naturally enjoys reading highly positive stories about it. That’s why I particularly value a letter he sent about an article by Leah Savas in our Sept. 25 issue.

The article was about women who came to pro-life centers after the Texas law protecting 6-week-old unborn children went into effect. Sam Lee praised WORLD because we did not “cherry-pick quotes to tell the story for a particular, predetermined outcome.” Sam said it would have been easy—and convenient—to say every pregnancy center saw an increase in the number of clients, and every woman came to a center happy and ready to carry her baby to term: “But that would not have been the truth!”

WORLD is thoroughly pro-life. Staff members and volunteers at pro-life centers are heroes to us. But that doesn’t mean we do public relations for them. Our job is not to make readers and listeners feel warm and fuzzy. Nor is it to make them scornful of liberals: They are also made in God’s image. Our goal is to report accurately and challenge you to think more deeply. If you agree with everything you read and hear at WORLD, we’re not doing our job.

This goes against the grain in much of journalism these days. It’s easy to be tribalistic and work to satisfy a conservative or liberal base. But WORLD is not right-wing: We try to ride on the wings of angels (and we often fall off). Sometimes, when the Bible is not clear, we offer opinions based on history and a Biblical understanding of human nature, but we always try to hold those opinions lightly—and you should too.

OUR GOAL IS TO REPORT ACCURATELY AND CHALLENGE YOU TO THINK MORE DEEPLY.

WORLD Magazine, Digital, and Radio will continue to emphasize reporting, because that’s the only way to know what’s happening at street-level. But we are sinners reporting on sin. We will get things wrong. When we criticize a non-Biblical perspective, we will try to look at its strongest proponent, rather than nitpick or nutpick. Nutpicking may make us feel good—"Look at those crazy people"—but it doesn’t educate us or you. We will continue to emphasize Biblically objective journalism that informs, educates, and inspires. When we fail, please tell us.

Our staff has changed over the years, of course, but we’ve had a consistent theology and practice. You should know who’s in charge now. Michael Reneau continues as the terrific editor of WORLD Magazine, and Angela Lu Fulton becomes managing editor. When my wife Susan and I in 2011 started having interns living with us each summer, Angela was in the first group, and it’s been wonderful to see her progress. Lynde Langdon, with super journalistic experience and instincts, moves up from managing editor of WORLD Digital to editor. Daniel James Devine will use his eye for detail as Digital managing editor.

At WORLD Radio, we also have an excellent male and female team at the top: Paul Butler is executive producer and Leigh Jones is managing editor. All six of these great people are graduates of the World Journalism Institute (WJI), as are all our Magazine and Digital senior reporters, reporters, reviewers, and correspondents, with the exception of Arsenio Orteza, who has been our distinguished music reviewer for three decades.

When I think of all these people, along with senior editor Mindy Belz, national editor Jamie Dean, and our WORLD Radio and WORLD Watch staffers, most of whom are also WJI grads, I’m deeply grateful for all God has done. I’m also thankful to the God’s World Publications board for an extraordinary 29 years of not letting business concerns dictate editorial direction. I remember the times WORLD barely survived financially, so I’m also thankful to donors who appreciate our Christ-first perspective and have put us in a stronger economic position than ever before.

With that funding we have expansion plans. More international coverage, including development of a European bureau. More online stories and columns. Free weekly roundups on life, education, the arts, poverty-fighting, family, intelligent design, religious liberty, politics, and globe-trotting. Please sign up at wng.org/newsletters.
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  --Thomas Jefferson
- There are two ways to destroy a nation...one is by the sword, the other is by debt.
  --John Adams

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