THE TWISTED SELF
Feelings as truth. Sex as destiny. Carl Trueman on the new cultural orthodoxy and how we got here

THE MISSIONARIES’ DAUGHTER
How Valerie Elliot Shepard learned to carry the weight of her family legacy
BY KIM HENDERSON

COMIC RELIEF
A clean comedian’s uphill climb
BY RACHEL COCHRANE AND LES SILLARS

BACK TO SCHOOL
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# Old Western Culture

## Year 1: The Greeks

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I MENTIONED BACK IN JULY that WORLD Radio Executive Editor Paul Butler had a major new initiative on the horizon that deserved its own column to introduce properly.

Before I get to it, here’s a brief history of WORLD Radio: It all began more than a decade ago as a single weekend radio program on SRN, the Salem Radio Network. That early iteration of The World and Everything in It ran on hundreds of stations, mostly on Saturdays, which was not a day many people listened to the radio.

I’ll shorten the history lesson considerably and say that eventually we stopped distributing The World and Everything in It via broadcast altogether, and the program is now our daily podcast. A key element, as regular listeners know, is the opening newscast—a five-to-seven-minuteish rundown of current news, with some deeper reporting on one or two stories.

This brings me to WORLD’s new initiative. In partnership with two radio networks, Moody Radio and Faith Radio, which together represent more than 1,500 outlets around the world, WORLD will provide top-of-the-hour newscasts produced jointly by our WORLD Radio team, led by Paul Butler, and our News team, led by Lynde Langdon. As of this writing, we’ve been on-air for about five weeks, and the station count is closing in on 200.

This won’t simply be our current newscast repeated over and over every day. Broadcasters need crisp, three-minute (exact, not ish) newscasts, and those need updating throughout the day.

Our teams will produce multiple newscasts for each of the networks’ key “dayparts,” so their listeners will hear updated reporting throughout the day, produced by WORLD. Our goals for these newscasts: to serve those stations’ listeners by delivering Biblically objective reporting on issues that are important to them, and to introduce those listeners to WORLD’s other content, so we eventually can serve them as members of our own audience.

With this initiative, hundreds of thousands (perhaps millions) of radio listeners will now be able to hear Biblically objective reporting multiple times per day. We thank God for this opportunity to share WORLD’s work.
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- Oct. 7
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[UU.edu/campusvisit](http://uu.edu/campusvisit)
Pro-lifers played the long game p38
That beautiful photo of the baby on your cover was worth the subscription price for the entire year. The angels in heaven must be rejoicing, too.

BILL BOUKNIGHT
Columbia, S.C.

I am, of course, enthusiastic about the lead article on the overturning of Roe v. Wade, but the entire issue was filled with the kind of detailed, behind-the-news looks at many issues that I came to expect of WORLD back in the 1990s.

KEN LOCKRIDGE
Charles Town, W.Va.

Plain truth p60
Kim Henderson’s article gave a wonderful insight into the Amish belief system. It brought me joy to read about the desire of those who have left the Amish life to help those still clinging to the Amish culture to know the full truth of the saving grace of Jesus.

DEBBIE SHULTZ
Baltimore, Md.

My wife and I left the Amish church 50 years ago. We were not constrained by fear of shunning, nor threatened with damnation for leaving. We continue to have many friends and relatives among the Amish and maintain excellent relationships with them.

LESTER TROYER
Stone Lake, Wis.

It is sad to say that Kim Henderson’s article is true for a segment of the Amish. But as members of the Amish church, our experience is different. As a minister, I preach assurance of salvation by grace through faith resulting in fruit and works.

TIMOTHY YODER
Evart, Mich.

I’m Amish. I accepted Jesus as my Savior at age 12. Our seven children are all born again. And I was reading your article with my LED headlamp on so I don’t disturb my sleeping husband.

ANNA YODER
Evart, Mich.

Higher and higher p52
Two and a half years ago, we were energy independent and selling energy instead of buying it. The destruction of our energy independence not only harms our economy but also places our country at greater risk of foreign attacks.

STEVE CONWAY
Edwardsville, Ill.

A blunt challenge p10
The need for the church to support the start of Christian schools across America is huge. I have prayed that God would raise up Christians who would start scholarship funds so that we no longer have to rely on government-sanctioned funding programs.

KAREN J. ELLIOTT
Eustis, Fla.

Correction
Lyndon Azcuna earns $58,560 a year in his full-time role as executive director of LifePlan (“Building stronger families,” July 30, p. 58).

Clariﬁcation
A razor-thin majority of lawmakers in the U.S. Senate can stop radical pro-abortion legislation, but not all of those senators are pro-life (“Pro-life education pioneer,” Aug. 13, p. 38).

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I WAS, AFTER ALL, only 4 years old. My parents were devout people. But they hadn’t made it a point—yet—to teach me any details of the Ten Commandments.

Wendell was my best friend. His toys were newer and nicer than mine. I loved to run quietly all the way across the town of Holland, Iowa (population 240), so I could join him in his sandbox, which was also several degrees newer, bigger, and more fun than mine.

Never mind that I had strict instructions from my mom and dad not to wander from our house toward Wendell’s—not even with his personal welcome. I knew Mom would be serving lunch right at noon, Dad would join us, and I was expected to be there too.

On that particular day, my wandering feet tugged me where I knew I shouldn’t go. It was a good morning, playing with Wendell. So much fun, I guess, that I lost track of time. A bit later than was wise for me, I started the five-minute trek home. My goal was to get there before Dad did—so he’d never suspect my rebel heart.

But my calculations were off, and Dad was ahead of me.

“Where have you been?” he asked me.

“Nowhere,” I replied evasively.

“So what’s wrong with your shirt?” Dad asked while running his accusing hand—first down the front, and then the back—of my sandy shirt.

Just that fast, truth was making its presence known. My delayed departure from Wendell’s home had occurred because, just a few minutes earlier, I had decided Wendell probably wouldn’t miss one of his new, highly colorful aluminum shovels if I borrowed it for a few days. I had clumsily tried to stuff a 10-inch shovel behind a 6-inch shirt.

There’s a great deal I don’t remember about the “court scene” that followed. What I’ve reported to you here was one little 4-year-old boy’s first face-to-face encounter with truth-telling. In the 76 years since, I have been sometimes successful in pursuing truth and sometimes embarrassingly feeble.

This was my very first encounter with what I came to know as God’s Law. By that I mean to stress the interrelatedness of truth. The most obvious “lesson” of that experience was my lying to my father. But just as serious was the covetousness that preceded all this, and the theft from my friend that followed. My account might well have included a reference to the dishonor all this had brought to my parents.

My parents did the right thing. Dad apologized to Wendell and his family and had me return the shovel. I got a serious spanking, and I lost some privileges for a painful stretch. I wish I could tell you I never again lied to my father. But that would add yet another lie to my record.

So how would you say you’ve been doing as a teacher of truth-telling? Have the children whose education you’re responsible for been getting a full dose? Or have you let them off the hook with a narrow, truncated view of things? ■
A Biblical solution to health care

As soon as I heard about the mission of Samaritan Ministries, I knew I wanted to be part of it.

— Moriah, member since 2017

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IN THE NEWS

Crossing the Rubicon?
Mar-a-Lago raid may mark new era in American politics

by LYNN VINCENT

FORMER U.S. ATTORNEY Robert Higdon was driving home from an elder board meeting at his North Carolina church when he heard the news: On Monday morning, Aug. 8, some 30 FBI agents swarmed Donald Trump’s seaside estate in South Florida armed with warrants and weapons.

Higdon, a former federal prosecutor who knows his way around search warrants and big cases, kept his hands on the steering wheel but glanced down at the radio, stunned. Had the feds really just raided the private residence of a former president?

In the ensuing days, more questions ricocheted around the country. Trump had been at odds with the National Archives for months, dickering over documents he had taken with him when he left the White House in January 2021. Why the dramatic raid? Why now? Was the former president embroiled in a modern Watergate, or were Democrats trying to hobble him for 2024?

Higdon knew one thing for sure: Something unprecedented in American politics had just happened. “I thought we had just crossed a line we had never crossed before.”

Political observers say the Aug. 8 raid on Mar-a-Lago may mark a new era in American politics: one in which the in-party brazenly uses the levers of power to punish political opponents. It’s a practice common in sweltering banana republics and fracturing Balkan states. But not here. Not yet.

From the founding, “we’ve tried to be very careful that we don’t turn political accusations and vendettas and grudges into criminal prosecutions,” said Higdon, who served in the Department of Justice for 30 years, prosecuting both criminal and public corruption cases, including the one against Sen. John Edwards, D-N.C., in 2011.

But has the camel’s nose crept under the tent? The Mar-a-Lago raid was like “nothing that has ever, ever happened in this country,” said presidential historian Larry Schweikart, best-selling author of A Patriot’s History of the United States. Americans do not typically pursue political opponents once they leave office, Schweikart said. The closest parallel to the Trump case is Ronald Reagan. Lawrence Walsh, the special prosecutor appointed under Reagan to probe the Iran Contra scandal, deposed Reagan by video even after he left office. But the case fizzled when Reagan’s Alzheimer’s-related memory...
problems rendered his testimony unreliable.

Democrats say the Mar-a-Lago raid was not politically motivated. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi pointed out that FBI Director Christopher Wray is a Trump appointee. Meanwhile, five different civil and criminal probes are nipping at Trump’s heels. Among them: the documents flap, the investigation of the Jan. 6 Capitol riot, and a probe into whether Trump tried to overturn 2020 election results. In addition, an Atlanta prosecutor is looking into election-tampering in Georgia, and New York Attorney General Letitia James is scouring Trump’s tax records for evidence of fraud.

On Aug. 8, federal agents scoured Mar-a-Lago, the 126-room mansion Trump called the “Winter White House.” Agents “even broke into my safe,” Trump said in a statement issued late that day. He described the operation as an “unannounced raid” and unnecessary.

Higdon is inclined to agree. Now in private practice, he worked with federal law enforcement agencies as they executed scores of search warrants over the years, many of them targeting armed thugs in dangerous locations. “But this is the home of a former president of the United States,” he said. “Every moment of every day it is guarded by the United States Secret Service. So you don’t go in there with the same concerns and risk that you would somewhere else. My first reaction was, boy, that looks like overkill to me.”

So: political persecution ... or the logical next step in the legitimate prosecution of Donald J. Trump? The White House claims it didn’t know about the raid, and Higdon says that’s plausible: “If a Justice Department is functioning properly, then there’s very little coordination between Justice and the White House.”

Still, he finds the timing troubling. Normally, the DOJ strictly bars splashy enforcement actions when the nation is approaching a federal election since the optics might sway voters. For example, when Higdon learned of the allegations against Sen. Edwards in 2008, it was August, just as it is now. DOJ ordered him to stand down until after the election, which he agreed was proper.

Many conservatives say the Mar-a-Lago raid was meant to hurt Trump-backed candidates this November. But Schweikart suggests Democrats are looking further ahead, trying to scuttle a congressional “MAGA caucus” before it can solidify across the 2022 and 2024 elections. When a reporter asked Pelosi whether the raid might hurt Democrats this November, she replied with five words: “No, no, no, no, no.”

After Higdon got home from church on Aug. 8, he flipped on his television and tuned into the news. Flashing blue and red lights lit up the streets around Mar-a-Lago. Police vehicles and FBI agents in black, or sporting neon vests, blocked exits and a lane of traffic outside the grounds.

“It’s an unnerving thing to see the FBI raid the home of a former president,” Higdon said. “We should keep in mind that while your guy may not be in right now, your guy will be in next time, and you want the same rules to apply.”

“We should keep in mind that while your guy may not be in right now, your guy will be in next time, and you want the same rules to apply.”

—with reporting by Leigh Jones and Grace Snell

Mar-a-Lago
DEPARTURES

David McCullough
Best-selling historian, storyteller, and narrator David McCullough died on Aug. 10 in Hingham, Mass., at the age of 89. The Pulitzer Prize winner authored 23 books covering subjects ranging from the Panama Canal to President Harry Truman. McCullough chronicled the determination and courage of the American spirit, doing much of his writing on a typewriter in an 8-by-10-foot backyard shed. His 751-page biography of John Adams took seven years to complete. He read his drafts aloud with his wife, Rosalee, whom he married in 1954 and with whom he raised five children. “People often ask if I’m working on a book,” he once told The New York Times. “That’s not how I feel. I feel like I work in a book.”

Ron Sider
Theologian Ron Sider, whose 1977 book Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger sold nearly half a million copies while sparking a debate about Christians’ duty to the poor, died July 27. He was 82. After growing up as a self-described Mennonite farmer, Sider earned a Yale doctorate and argued that not just wealthy believers but governments should do more for the poor—putting him at odds with some evangelicals who promoted market capitalism. But Sider also opposed abortion and affirmed traditional marriage. In a 2015 revised edition of Rich Christians, he noted that market capitalism had proven more capable of lifting people out of poverty than Marxism.

BY THE NUMBERS

Luggage limbo
by JOHN DAWSON

219,723
The number of bags domestic airlines mishandled in April according to the most recent figures from the Department of Transportation. That number, more than double from a year ago, reflects what some are calling a global lost luggage crisis brought on by staffing problems and mass flight cancellations.

0.55
The number of bags domestic carriers lost per 100 handled according to the Air Travel Consumer Report.

4.7x
The increased likelihood of airlines mishandling a piece of luggage on an international flight compared with a domestic flight according to airline IT provider SITA.

1,000
The number of mishandled bags that Delta Air Lines carried on July 11 from London to Detroit on a baggage-only flight.

31
The increased percentage in the number of domestic U.S. flights in the first five months of 2022 from the same period in 2021 according to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics.
**GLOBAL BRIEFS**

**Russia’s Syrian operation**

**Syria** A Russian airstrike on a farm in Idlib, Syria, killed seven people, including four children, and wounded 12 others in late July. Idlib is home to an estimated 3 million people, the majority of whom were displaced by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s violent crackdown on peaceful protesters in 2011. Russia has backed Assad since protests turned into a civil war, and Moscow intervened militarily in 2015. War crimes monitors estimate Russian attacks in Syria have killed close to 24,000 civilians. Idlib and the nearby Kurdish territory are the only regions in Syria that have remained outside Assad’s control. —Jill Nelson

**Spain** This summer, the evangelization project Reach Mallorca marked its 12th year of outreach on the Spanish island known as the “party capital of Europe.” One hundred fifty young believers from partner groups in Germany and Switzerland hold worship services on the beach, inviting tourists to join. Teams meet partiers on the main avenue in La Palma to offer prayer and Bibles, and “Street Angels” bring drunk tourists back safely to their hotels. Days and nights of partying, binge drinking, and casual sex leave many island visitors feeling empty, and outreach participants say the harvest is ready. “People are interested and unbelievably open to the gospel like nowhere else,” says Gernot Elsner of sponsoring group Gospeltribe, a missions organization based in Germany. —Jenny Lind Schmitt

**POPULATION**
21.6 million

**LANGUAGE**
Arabic (official)

**RELIGION**
87% Muslim, 10% Christian, 3% Druze

**GOVERNANCE**
Presidential republic

**GDP**
$50.28 billion (2015 est.)

**MAJOR EXPORTS**
Olive oil, cumin seeds, pistachios, tomatoes, apples, pears, spices, pitted fruits

SYRIA: SYRIA CIVIL DEFENCE—THE WHITE HELMETS; MALLORCA: COURTESY OF REACH MALLORCA
China  More than 900 Chinese civil society groups signed an open letter urging United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet not to release a report about Xinjiang. The July 26 letter is part of Beijing’s pressure campaign to suppress the UN report about human rights abuses against more than 1 million Uyghurs and other minorities in China’s northwestern region, said William Nee, research and advocacy coordinator for the Network of Chinese Human Rights Defenders. Earlier, China sent a letter to UN diplomats expressing “grave concern” about the report. Bachelet has still pledged to release it. —Erica Kwong

Egypt  Two Christians, Joseph Israel and his son Emil, received medical treatment after a knife-wielding, radicalized Muslim stabbed them in July in Giza, Egypt’s second-largest city. The suspect, Ahmad Muhammad, shouted “Allahu Akbar” (“Allah is great”) as he committed the stabbings. Muslim neighbors near Joseph Israel’s wine store intervened and captured the suspect, according to Christian Solidarity Worldwide. Attacks targeting Christians in Egypt have increased since April, when a Coptic priest was stabbed in Alexandria. In a separate incident in Dabaa in April, masked men shot a Coptic Christian man 22 times. Lawyers have filed complaints against Islamic preachers like Sheikh Mabrook Attia, whom they accuse of inciting hatred of Christianity. —Onize Ohikere

Mexico  Volunteer networks that distribute abortion-inducing drugs are looking to expand north across the U.S. border. Necesito Abortar México, based in Monterrey, is one of several organizations building a network of volunteers and stockpiling medication in strategic locations for rapid distribution. They target states like Texas, where unborn babies have the most protection following the reversal of Roe v. Wade. The unregulated networks provide pills and instructions on how to use them. But any woman experiencing complications must still seek help from a doctor. Although abortion-inducing drugs are sold over the counter in Mexico, they require a prescription in the United States. That could put the unlicensed volunteers at risk of civil penalties or criminal prosecution. —Leigh Jones

Switzerland  Global childhood vaccination rates dropped in 2021 for the first time in almost 30 years, according to a report from UNICEF and the Geneva-based World Health Organization. The data indicate a decline in immunization against diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus from 86 percent in 2019 to 81 percent in 2021. Medical experts attribute the decline in part to COVID-19 policies that halted vaccine services. “The avoidable suffering and death caused by children missing out on routine immunizations could be far greater than COVID-19 itself,” said WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. —Heather Frank
**U.S. BRIEFS**

**Narcan vending comes to the West Coast**

**California** San Diego County is set to install vending machines that dispense free naloxone, a drug that reverses the effects of opioid overdose. The first machine is set for installation at a rehab center in the border town of Chula Vista, with 11 more units on the way in other parts of the county. As of July 2022, all 50 states had some form of naloxone access law, according to the Legislative Analysis and Public Policy Association. Also known by the brand name Narcan, naloxone blocks the effects of opiates on the brain, restores breathing, and can prevent death. While first responders frequently dispense Narcan, access programs are intended for laypeople who may find themselves in a position to save a life. Opponents of free Narcan distribution have charged that wide-scale availability will increase illicit opioid usage. But a 2018 study in the journal *Addictive Behaviors* found that programs designed to “increase layperson engagement in opioid-overdose reversal” reduced overdose deaths without increasing illicit opioid use. Vending machines represent a brand-new wave of naloxone access, with the first in the nation installed in Philadelphia and Jeffersonville, Ind., earlier this year. —Lynn Vincent

**Michigan** The Patmos Library in Jamestown, Mich., lost at the Aug. 2 primaries. Leading up to election day, a small group of residents urged voters to oppose renewing the property tax rate that funds the library, citing its refusal to discard LGBT books. Voters won. Now, the library is scrambling to stay open: The millage accounted for 84 percent of its $245,000 annual budget. According to Bridge Michigan, the conflict began earlier this year when dozens of residents demanded staffers remove the graphic novel *Gender Queer* from library shelves. The book tells the story of a girl who comes out as nonbinary and includes sexually explicit illustrations. The library staff moved the book behind the counter, but other LGBT books remained on the shelves. —Leah Savas

**South Dakota** The Oglala Sioux Tribe passed an ordinance in late July banning churches and missions groups from working in tribal territory without permission. Under the new rules, outside religious organizations must register with tribal authorities before conducting ministry in the Pine Ridge Reservation, a reservation of about 20,000 residents located in the state’s southwest. The restrictions came as the Sioux Tribe banned an evangelist with the South Dakota–based Jesus is King Mission from the reservation due to the organization’s tract referring to the Lakota divinity Tunkashila as a false god and demon. Churches and ministries run by tribal members are exempted from the ordinance. —Daniel James Devine
Texas One of the only issues that unites Democrats and rural Republicans could play a big role in the upcoming governor’s race. After keeping the issue at arm’s length for years, Republican Gov. Greg Abbott has embraced school choice. And not just in the abstract. Abbott now supports a proposal that would allow public funding to follow students to private schools. That’s a sticking point in rural areas, where public schools are often a source of community pride—and among the largest employers. Abbott’s Democratic challenger, Beto O’Rourke, is making the most of Abbott’s policy shift, in hopes it will help him woo otherwise conservative voters to his campaign. Statewide polling on the issue shows mixed results, but Republicans want lawmakers to make school choice a priority. Nearly 90 percent of GOP primary voters backed a proposition that said education funding should follow the student. —Leigh Jones

Florida Using an executive order, Gov. Ron DeSantis suspended Hillsborough County State Attorney Andrew Warren for refusing to prosecute doctors who violate Florida’s 15-week abortion law. The governor said Warren “put himself publicly above the law. ... Our government is a government of laws, not a government of men.” Warren had signed letters stating he would not enforce laws protecting unborn children or those that might prohibit minors from receiving transgender medical interventions. Warren argued Florida’s law banning abortion after 15 weeks of gestation, now under review by the courts, violated long-standing precedent established by the Florida Supreme Court that guarantees a right to privacy. DeSantis himself, though, acted under a clause in the state constitution. Hillsborough County Court Judge Susan Lopez will serve as state attorney while DeSantis works to remove Warren permanently. —Addie Offereins

Minnesota Another win for life: An Aitkin County, Minn., jury ruled Aug. 5 that a central Minnesota pharmacist did not discriminate for declining to fill a woman’s prescription for a morning-after pill in 2019. The pharmacist, George Badeaux of McGregor, Minn., declined to fill Andrea Anderson’s prescription, citing his personal beliefs. The Minnesota Board of Pharmacy allows pharmacists to deny emergency contraception drugs if doing so would contradict their beliefs. They can instead refer the patient elsewhere, which Badeaux did. A CVS pharmacist 20 miles away also refused to fill the prescription, so Anderson drove 50 miles to another pharmacy that filled it. Anderson sued, claiming sex discrimination under the Minnesota Human Rights Act. The jury awarded Anderson $25,000 in damages for emotional harm, but Badeaux is not liable unless a future jury finds him guilty of discrimination. Anderson’s Gender Justice attorney intends to appeal. —Sharon Dierberger
How transgender activists define man and woman
by MARY JACKSON

HAVE YOU WONDERED why politicians, academics and even doctors now struggle to define woman and man? Our new feature, “Backgrounder,” lays out what you need to know:

How do transgender activists explain the difference between sex and gender? They say gender is a social construct. Within the transgender movement, gender is an umbrella term that includes a spectrum of disembodied, intrinsic “identities” a person could assume that do not match his or her biological sex. Transgender ideology rejects sex as binary, or referring only to males and females. Terms such as nonbinary, gender queer, and gender fluidity reflect a belief that one’s gender identity can change over time.

But isn’t sex obvious at birth? Biological sex is an assumption, not a statement of reality, according to transgender proponents. They seek to reframe sex as “assigned at birth” but subject to change based on one’s inner sense of who he or she is.

What are the roots of these definitions of sex and gender? Carl Trueman (see p. 44) has traced the origins of believing one could be “a woman trapped in a man’s body” to philosophers including Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Sigmund Freud, who planted ideas that downplayed the physical body and elevated our inner feelings and desires as holding decisive authority on who we think we are. In the 20th and 21st centuries, sexologists Alfred Kinsey and John Money promulgated ideas about childhood sexuality and gender norms. They are considered pioneers of the transgender movement.

So what makes a person transgender? Transgender people typically change their names, pronouns, and appearance to present as the opposite sex. Many obtain puberty-blocking drugs, cross-sex hormones, and surgeries to remove or alter healthy organs to mimic those of the opposite sex. A “transgender woman” is a biological male who identifies as a female.

What about cisgender? Cis in Latin means “on the side of.” Cisgender is a novel term referring to anyone who identifies as and is comfortable with his “sex assigned at birth.”

Do transgender activists believe men can get pregnant? A female who identifies as male and retains her ovaries and uterus may still be able to conceive despite having used cross-sex hormones. Transgender activists call these cases of “pregnant men.” They seek to redefine terminology involving menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth to include male-identifying females, referring to “people who menstruate,” “pregnant people,” and “birthing people.”

Can’t a dictionary settle this? Maybe not. Merriam-Webster has updated its online dictionary to include secondary definitions of female as “having a gender identity that is the opposite of male” and of male as “having a gender identity that is the opposite of female.”
**QUOTABLES**

“It was 55 years ago, babe.”

Baseball legend PETE ROSE, 81, dismissing a female *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter’s question about an unidentified woman’s claim that Rose had sex with her in 1973 when she was 14 or 15 and Rose was in his 30s. Rose has claimed he thought the girl was of the legal age of consent at the time.

“Right now I find myself lying awake at 3 in the morning wondering if everything I’ve ever done is wrong.”

University of Kansas astronomer ALLISON KIRKPATRICK, describing to *Nature* how new images from the James Webb Space Telescope (see p. 75) have upset theories of galaxy evolution.

“100 percent real.”

Right-wing radio host ALEX JONES, admitting during a two-week defamation trial that the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting was not a hoax as he had previously claimed.

“It’s like the church head deacon having an affair with the choir director, then wanting to be the preacher.”

Kentucky state REP. KEN UPCHURCH, commenting on elected state’s attorney Matthew Leveridge, who had affairs with a juror and a criminal defendant in 2013 and 2014 and is now campaigning to become a judge.
Rude robot
Next time, perhaps programmers will adjust the algorithm to include some manners. A chess-playing robot broke a 7-year-old boy’s finger during a match at the Moscow Chess Open according to the Russian news outlet Baza. A video of the incident shows the robot grabbing the finger of the child while both players attempted to make moves on the board. Once the robot latched onto the boy’s finger, adults rushed over to free the boy. Moscow Chess Federation President Sergey Lazarev said the youth didn’t give the robot enough time to make its move.

Quick Takes
Do your ears hang low?
The sensational ears that are giving Dumbo a run for his money

by JOHN DAWSON

THE BIGGEST EARS ever seen on a goat? Guinness World Records is listening. Pakistani goat farmer Hassan Narejo noticed something different about the new kid in town. The baby goat, named Simba, had unusually long ears after he was born June 4. By June 13, Narejo measured the kid’s ears at nearly 19 inches long. By mid-July, Simba sported 23-inch ears and had become a viral social media sensation boasting a video with more than 8 million views. Narejo submitted Simba for a spot in Guinness World Records and has even fielded inquiries about selling the animal. No sale, says the goat farmer who insists his celebrity animal provides him something better than cash. Narejo told NPR, “Simba gave this profession a whole new meaning and respect.”

Never too late
The future looks bright for Italy’s newest, oldest graduate. Giuseppe Paterno recently completed his master’s degree in history and philosophy at the University of Palermo despite his advanced age. The family of the 98-year-old graduate said he earned high marks for his advanced degree, just like he did when he completed his undergraduate degree in 2020 at age 96. Now that he’s a man of letters, Paterno says he plans to write a novel on his favorite typewriter.
A nosey guy
Bob Salem posed July 15 at the top of Pikes Peak after becoming just the fourth man to push a peanut up the 14,115-foot mountain with his nose. The 53-year-old affixed a spoon to a CPAP mask in order to spare his bare nose the strain of scraping along the Barr Trail. According to Salem, he made more progress at night partially because of the daytime heat and partially because he got distracted talking to other hikers. Salem said he did it to help nearby Manitou Springs, Colo., commemorate its 150th anniversary. How will Salem celebrate? “No plans,” Salem told the Colorado Springs Gazette. “Watch some TV, maybe.”

Unauthorized sandwich
A poor understanding of Australian customs regulations and a mild appetite combined to cost a 19-year-old traveler a princely sum for a sandwich. Preparing to fly home to Australia after a vacation in Singapore, Jessica Lee bought a Subway sandwich on her way to the airport. She ate half of the sandwich on the flight, but saved the rest for after she got home. An inexperienced traveler, Lee failed to declare the Singaporean sandwich and faced questioning by Australian customs officials for violating the nation’s strict biosecurity regulations. Later, Lee got a fine in the mail for nearly $1,850. A semi-happy ending: After learning of the fine, Subway officials sent Lee a store gift card equal to the value of the fine.

Loafing on the job
A workforce survey in Japan suggests some older Japanese men have perfected the ancient art of slacking off. Consulting firm Shikigaku polled 300 workers and asked, among other questions, whether there was an “old guy who doesn’t work” at their company. Nearly half of those polled said they could identify such an older man. The respondents said the individual took “many breaks for smoking and eating” and “[stared] off into space.”

Hyperbolic haul
A routine traffic stop by police in a small English city yielded the motherlode of smuggled smokes. Police in Lowestoft, U.K., made the stop July 15 and searched the detained BMW after the driver was found to be operating without a license or insurance. Inside the car, officers discovered a cache of cigarettes enormous enough to merit a bit of police-report hyperbole: “The vehicle was found to contain enough tobacco and cigarettes to cater an entire 1980s darts tournament.” Police arrested the driver and two passengers for money laundering and peddling contraband smokes.
WHEN MY NEIGHBORS

Bob and Diane bought a small brood of hens, Bob named all but one. He left a single plump, speckled bird for their granddaughter to name.

“What do you want to call her?” Bob said, standing by the henhouse with 5-year-old Cailin in the willowy shade of a giant pepper tree.

“I want to name her … Chicken Carrot!” Cailin exclaimed.

“No!” Cailin said, grinning. “Chicken Carrot!”

And so, the hens living across the street are named Frick, Yahoo, and Chicken Carrot.

I live where the Old West used to be, east of San Diego in the foothills of the Cuyamaca Mountains. Chicken Carrot and her girlfriends share their slice of the Old West with a trio of piebald alpacas named Gandalf, Oliver, and Shush. Same-sex alpaca herds are docile and curious. Oliver and Shush like to nibble grain from my hand. But let the lads near the ladies and look out! They become cloven-hoofed Casanovas liable to bloody each other in pursuit of a mate.

In normal times, the sex lives of alpacas wouldn’t be worth mentioning. But these are not normal times, and even the animal kingdom is being pressed into service to advance the new gender orthodoxy—a development that should be a scary canary in a surrealistic coal mine.

To wit: Steven the Gay Alpaca is a TikTok sensation. The Washington Post this June: “Queer animals are everywhere. Science is finally catching on.” In May, NPR interviewed Eliot Schrefer, author of Queer Ducks, a book that teaches teenagers about animal sexuality.

“We can no longer argue that humans are alone in their queerness or in their LGBTQ identities,” Schrefer seriously said.

The libertarian in me says, Who cares? If you want to believe animals are queer, do your thing. If you want to declare that a castrated man in a dress is a woman, fine—just don’t drag me into your delusion. The trouble is, the new gender police are decidedly not libertarian.

For one thing, the point of all this is, of course, indoctrination: See, kids? It’s only natural. (Kind of like hating Jews and Kulaks.) For another, the American left takes its cues from Marxist methodology. It builds political constructs using words alone, then enforces its fictions using state power—and, these days, the useful idiots of woke capitalism. It is not the creation of trans liberty the left seeks, but instead the destruction of intellectual and spiritual liberty, the liberty of others to disagree. Those inclined to question the new orthodoxy based on, oh say, DNA, must now often choose between scientific rigor and keeping their jobs. Between religious expression and public shaming. Between speaking truth and, sometimes, a literal beating in the streets.

But we speak truth here. In these pages. And will continue to do so as long as God gives us resources and breath.

Here’s one: “The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble” (Proverbs 4:19). Even as we lament these attacks on God’s very creation, we must make room for compassion, as we seek to love blind people who sincerely believe they can see.

In this issue, Mary Jackson unpacks the transgender lexicon (p. 20): What do activists mean by terms like cisgender, gender fluid, and gender queer? On page 44, Grove City College professor Carl Trueman peers down the cultural rabbit hole: How did we arrive at this moment, when feelings are truth, sexual identity is the zenith of human existence … and NPR conducts straight-faced, tax-funded interviews about queer ducks?

In Schrefer’s book, comic-book animals attend meetings of the Gender Sexuality Alliance, and according to recent research, chickens can be gay. At this point, I’m seriously wondering how Chicken Carrot identifies. ■
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RANDON YOUNG walked onto the stage of Gutty’s Comedy Club in Indianapolis, Ind., last winter and got right into his act. “I am 41 years old,” he said. “I’m middle-aged. I tell that to this friend, my friend’s like, ‘You are not middle-aged. There is no way you’re making it to 82. Like, 52. Tops.’”

The audience that night was tiny, about 20 people, but they were enjoying the show. Young is a big guy, towering over most people. Maybe a little too big, he allows: “You know you need to lose weight when your shadow starts setting off automatic doors.”

There aren’t a lot of comedy clubs like Gutty’s. It looks like a normal comedy club from the outside, but inside are lots of families instead of clubbers and couples. And instead of beer and liquor, there’s soda and popcorn.

Young fits right in. He lives in San Diego and works at Truck Hero selling aftermarket auto parts. But when he clocks out, he sits down in his bedroom and writes jokes—clean jokes, because Young is a clean comic.

He became a Christian soon after he got into stand-up, but he tries to appeal to everyone. He’s not very political. Usually. One of his jokes is about how, thousands of years from now, archaeologists will be digging up Chuck E. Cheese coins all over the country. “They’ll be like, ‘Wow, their president was a giant rat.’” Depending on your politics, he added, that’s “kind of true.”

Some comedy is pure silliness, but many comics see their role as making fun of things that deserve it. They expose foolishness or injustice and hold them up for a hearty round of contempt. But that’s difficult to do well and consistently. You have to be observant, insightful, and surprising.

Clean comedy is even harder because you can’t shock people with crude or profane language. Shock comes cheaper than surprise, so mainstream comedy is dominated by comics who work “blue.” They try to connect with audiences while jolting them off balance.

But blue comics also have to keep escalating, trying to be more shocking than the last performer. They don’t just break taboos. They mock them. And along the way they transform how our culture thinks and talks about things. They reshape our very language.

*Anything* for a laugh.

Comedy wasn’t always like this. In 1934, in response to scandals involving actors and comedians, Hollywood voluntarily adopted the Hays Code. It said no movie should...
“Comedy is an escape, not from truth but from despair; a narrow escape into faith. In tragedy we suffer pain; in comedy, pain is a fool, suffered gladly.”

CHRISTIAN COMEDIAN

Chonda Pierce is Emmy-nominated and has platinum records. She might have been even bigger in 1955. But these days, she says, working clean can limit your career. “I’ll probably never have an HBO special or Comedy Central special,” she told us, “because that seems to be reserved for the ones that like to dance on the edge.”

Both clean and blue comedy try to deal with life in a broken world, but in very different ways. Blue comics deal with darkness by becoming dark themselves. They tend to be subversive and antagonistic. They attack with words. Not all do, and many can be very funny.

“Comedy is an escape, not from truth but from despair; a narrow escape into faith. In tragedy we suffer pain; in comedy, pain is a fool, suffered gladly.”
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WORLD

OPINIONS

Sound commentary from trusted voices

SEE WHAT READERS ARE SAYING:

MARY V.
“The new opinion section of WORLD is thoughtful and helpful. People like me need help in thinking about the world/culture. Those who are writing for Opinions are solid, Biblical, and not overtly political. Biblical Christians need to stand together.”

STEVEN T.
“I really appreciate the new WORLD Opinions effort. I am grateful for the convicational base that seems to lie behind this new thrust. The articles are timely, rightly sobering, penetrable, and informative.”

CAP S.
“I am enjoying WORLD’s new opinion page. I think it is providing a platform for some excellent voices and thought-provoking pieces to serve and challenge the body of Christ. Thank you for adding this feature to your publication.”

Columns post each weekday on wng.org/opinions.
These brief biographies span about 350 years and look at leaders from three theaters of war—the Crusades, the reconquest of Spain, and the Ottoman expansion in Eastern Europe. Some of the heroes are well known, others less so. Ibrahim begins with Godfrey of Bouillon, a leader of the First Crusade who eventually became king of Jerusalem after the Crusaders successfully captured the city in 1099. He then introduces readers to El Cid, Richard Lionheart, Ferdinand III of Castile, Louis IX of France, John Hunyadi, Skanderbeg, and Vlad Dracula.

Ibrahim says the Christian West has been locked in a constant struggle with the Islamic East for 1,400 years, and he credits these men of violence with saving Christianity. He hopes to inspire contemporary Christians to rediscover some of their martial virtues, claiming, “It must be understood that premodern Christianity was for at least the first three-quarters of its existence a muscular religion.” He implies the Protestant Reformation hurt Christianity’s fighting spirit.

Much of the book is well researched, often citing the best scholarship on these medieval conflicts, and Ibrahim quotes expansively from primary sources. But all this doesn’t save what ends up being a flawed book.

He accepts his primary sources at face value, never analyzing their historical context. Following his sources, Ibrahim claims all conflict is rooted in Islamic teaching, but esteemed historian Bernard Lewis, whom Ibrahim cites at times, demonstrated that political and social concerns often sparked religious violence and the rhetoric surrounding it. Ibrahim makes sweeping statements about 1,400 years of constant antagonism between East and West, but he pulls from a relatively narrow slice of that time frame. He absurdly claims not enough source material exists to write a chapter on the eighth-century French kings. It’s more the case eighth- and ninth-century sources don’t contain the inflammatory rhetoric he needs to make his point. This is the same reason he ends his narrative in the 15th century.
“Ibrahim portrays Muslim rulers as continuously trying to stamp out Christianity.”

Ibrahim portrays Muslim rulers as continuously trying to stamp out Christianity. Yes, there were periods of intense persecution, and certainly Muslims placed heavy social liabilities on the Christian population. But Ibrahim exaggerates the historical situation, reading the Middle East’s current religious climate backward in time. If Muslim rulers wanted to exterminate the Christians, why were there still millions of Christians living in Asia Minor at the beginning of the 20th century?

And he doesn’t play fair in this polemic. He calls these men “defenders of the West,” but not all of them fought defensive wars. He rightly condemns Muslim atrocities, but he excuses Christians who massacred Muslims by saying the Muslims started it. He also glosses over evidence of cooperation between Christians and Muslims.

Ibrahim wants Christianity to be a martial religion, invoking just war theology to justify religious violence. There’s a place for strength, courage, and loyalty in the Christian faith—even expressed in the military—but Ibrahim avoids a robust discussion of just wars, setting the bar much too low.

By the end of the book I had the unsettling feeling that Ibrahim actually wishes Christianity were more like Islam, which doesn’t distinguish between the political and religious spheres. It’s telling he fails to mention the example of Jesus and the martyrs who willingly died unjust deaths rather than fight for their rights.
BECAUSE CHRISTIANITY is founded upon grace, it is sometimes called a “religion of second chances.” The idea of a second chance is also a powerful theme for novels about life, love, and faith.

In Autumn Lytle’s All That Fills Us, Melanie Ellis, suffering from anorexia, wakes up in the hospital after another fainting spell. Instead of attending therapy as her doctor suggests, she decides to hike cross-country from Michigan to Washington state. Pushing her body to its limits, she keeps coming dangerously close to collapse. Throughout her travels, Melanie sends postcards to an ex-boyfriend, contemplative her relationship with her mother, and tries to comprehend God’s love for her. Told in first person, Melas narrator is a funny, likable heroine. Readers will root for her—if they can stomach her constant self-loathing.

Where the Road Bends by Rachel Fordham takes place in 1880 Iowa. To save her family farm, Norah King agrees to a marriage of convenience. Days before the wedding, she stumbles upon a gravely injured man on her property. Nora and the stranger, Quincy, become fast friends while he recovers in her home. Not wanting to cause trouble with her betrothed, Quincy leaves as soon as he’s able. He settles in a new town and becomes a successful businessman, but he can’t forget Norah. When he realizes he inadvertently took something belonging to her, he returns to find her in dire circumstances. Mutual affection grows as they realize they’ve been given a second chance at happiness.

In The Girl Who Could Breathe Under Water by Erin Bartels, Kendra Brennan tries to begin work on her second novel. But she’s having writer’s block after receiving an anonymous letter that criticized the details in her first book. Some characters were heavily inspired by real people, and she thought she had portrayed them honestly. But now she’s plagued with doubts about her own memories. Bartels’ lyrical style draws readers in, but the subject matter repels. Novels marketed by Christian publishers can include tough subjects like sexual assault and substance abuse, but readers would rightfully expect at least a hint at Christ’s redemptive power. Sadly, they’ll find none here.

Finally, in Dangerous Beauty (debuting Sept. 6) by Melissa Koslin, Mexican-born Liliana Vela escapes sex traffickers by hiding in a Texas truck-stop bathroom. She’s trapped there until a stranger—mega-wealthy businessman Meric Toledan—rescues her. Realizing she faces deportation, Meric offers to marry her. Their impromptu union seems rash on his part, but as the story progresses, his actions make more sense. Liliana proves resourceful and resilient as she helps Meric flush out the mysterious person who tried to buy her. This page-turner contains scant spiritual content but the surprise ending satisfies.
CHILDREN’S BOOKS

Mysterious reads with female leads

by KATIE GAULTNEY

The Amelia Six
KRISTIN L. GRAY

Millie Ashford, an 11-year-old Rubik’s Cube phenom, deals with social anxiety in the wake of her parents’ separation—and she’s due for a win. That comes in the form of a letter from The Ninety-Nines, a foundation of female aviators, sharing that she and a group of similarly gifted girls have won the opportunity to spend a night at Amelia Earhart’s childhood home. But the STEM-themed sleepover goes awry when someone within the mansion steals Amelia’s famed aviator goggles. Is it the down-to-earth cook, the crotchety maid, the caretaker’s ne’er-do-well nephew, or someone else entirely? Readers will enjoy the tightly crafted and fast-paced mystery, appropriate for the upper elementary and middle school set. Ages 9-13

Aggie Morton, Mystery Queen: The Body Under the Piano
MARTHE JOCELYN

In Book 1 of this series, mystery maven Agatha Christie serves as inspiration for author Jocelyn’s heroine. The father of 12-year-old Aggie Morton has recently died and the girl whiles away the hours in coastal Cornwall. Her mournfulness changes to intrigue when Aggie arrives early for her regular dance lesson only to stumble upon the body of an apparent victim of poisoning. With her new friend, a Belgian immigrant named Hector Perot (note the similarity to Christie’s Hercule Poirot), Aggie determines to work through a long list of potential perpetrators to solve the murder mystery. A rich slate of supporting characters enhances this charming Edwardian era whodunit. Ages 10-13

Too Many Secrets
PATRICIA H. RUSHFORD

An early-1990s middle grade mystery that stands the test of three decades, this book offers Nancy Drew-esque sleuthing with a similarly wholesome tone. Jennie McGrady, 16, is preoccupied with plans to spend the summer at her grandmother’s house—particularly because of the dreamy neighbor boy. But those summer plans are upended when Gram, a retired police officer-turned-travel writer, disappears. Her family’s ambivalence—perhaps she extended a recent trip and didn’t call—prompts Jennie to investigate. Add a diamond heist and complicated family relationships, and Jennie finds herself in dangerous waters. Christian overtones mark this dynamic first in a series. Ages 11-14

A Pocket Full of Murder
R.J. ANDERSON

Mystery meets fantasy in Book 1 of two as intrepid Isaveth Breck seeks to free her imprisoned father—wrongly accused of murdering a government official. Anderson sets the action against the squalor of dystopian Tarreton, a Dickensian wasteland where the use of magic sharply divides the classes. Isaveth joins forces with an enigmatic young man, Quiz, to clear her father’s name. A labyrinth of class warfare, deceit, and surprising revelations make Isaveth and Quiz’s race against the clock all the more suspenseful. Impressive world-building, family loyalty, and faith elements come together for a complex and worthwhile read. Ages 9-14
KERMIT GOSNELL operated a filthy abortion facility on Lancaster Avenue in Philadelphia, Pa. State officials had not inspected it for over a decade, despite numerous complaints and recorded failures to meet health and safety standards. Even after the death of one woman in 2009, officials didn’t shut down his facility until a drug investigation spurred a 2010 raid. Investigators then uncovered evidence of possible illegal late-term abortions, killings of infants born alive, and unsafe medical practices. That led to murder charges in 2011 and a 2013 trial that should have been front-page news but that many media outlets failed to cover.

In the six-episode podcast series *Serial Killer*, investigative journalist Ann McElhinney tells this true story. It’s a well-researched, deep dive into the investigation, trial, and lies of abortionist Gosnell, who is now serving three life sentences in a Pennsylvania state prison.

McElhinney’s husband and co-producer, Phelim McAleer, was one of the few journalists to attend Gosnell’s trial before it gained national attention. The couple co-authored a 2017 book and co-produced a 2018 feature film about the case. Their familiarity with the story shows: The podcast is thorough and engaging. It features reenactments of grand jury proceedings and the trial, as well as interviews with the people involved. Investigators recall vivid memories, including the initial raid: Gosnell first finished an abortion then chatted with agents, snacking on teriyaki chicken while still wearing bloody surgical gloves. An attorney who worked on the prosecution describes her hours of sorting through files to find witnesses and of inspecting the bodies of babies Gosnell had killed and frozen. Such images still keep investigators awake at night.

Untrained former workers from Gosnell’s facility remember their suspicions of Gosnell’s techniques and the horrors they saw. McElhinney and McAleer also interview Gosnell himself. The podcast features portions of phone calls that show his charismatic personality, his dishonesty, and his continued professions of innocence.

The podcast is not for everyone. It includes gruesome details and descriptions of unsanitary practices, infant killings, and mistreatment of adult female patients. But as host McElhinney says in one of the episodes, it’s a story that many people need to hear. That’s not because it tells an interesting and even thrilling tale but because it exposes evil. It’s especially suited to wake up those who assume abortion is a normal part of healthcare—and to drag this dark corner of the world into the light.
Over 3 Billion people... 40% of the world’s population... have never heard the name of Jesus or been discipled.

How will we reach them?

- National and nearby missionaries are 23 times more effective than western missionaries at reaching the unreached.

- The apostles entrusted the gospel to faithful, local leadership able to teach others also. (II Timothy 2:2)

- Today, only about 1% of western missions giving goes to reach the unreached.

- The apostle Paul said he aimed to “preach the gospel where Christ has not been named, so that... ‘those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.’” (Romans 15:20-21)

Love exhorts us to follow the better way found in Scriptures. Join us.

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MOVIE

Luck

by COLLIN GARBARINO

★ Rated G
★ Apple TV+
★ S1/V2/L1*

LUCK IS THE FIRST feature film from Skydance Animation, the new studio led by Pixar co-founder John Lasseter. Lasseter created beloved classics like Toy Story and Cars, and under his leadership Pixar revolutionized animation with cutting-edge technology and storytelling that resonated with all ages. In 2018, he lost his job at Pixar after some female employees complained he made them uncomfortable. Upstart Skydance Animation hired Lasseter the next year, hoping he could recreate Pixar’s magic.

In this entertaining and heartfelt film, bad luck follows Sam Greenfield (voiced by Eva Noblezada) wherever she goes. She fumbles through life, dropping her toast and losing her keys. And most unluckily of all, this foster child never found the forever family she’s always longed for. Now she’s aged out of the foster system, and she’s struggling to make it alone. Despite her unlucky breaks, Sam isn’t bitter. She has a tender heart, and she hopes to help her young friend Hazel, who’s still in foster care, find a family of her own.

Sam’s luck seems to change when she finds a penny dropped by a black cat. But before she can give the lucky charm to Hazel, she loses it. In need of another, Sam pursues the magical talking cat, named Bob (voiced by the funny Simon Pegg), through a clover-leaf portal into the Land of Luck. It’s a magical world populated almost entirely by cats, bunnies, and leprechauns, and it’s the place from which all luck—good and bad—flows.

Sam needs a lucky penny from Bob, and Bob needs Sam to leave the Land of Luck before he gets into trouble for having a human follow him home. The two decide to work together. But having the unluckiest girl in the world walk through the Land of Luck leads to chaos in this magical realm.

Luck is a pleasant and entertaining film, free of objectionable content. It’s a rare movie these days that has both a G rating and a plot. But Luck doesn’t break much new ground, and it certainly doesn’t rival the Pixar classics from Lasseter’s days at the studio.

The animation is solid, but it won’t wow viewers. The characters’ styling looks a little rubbery, and the action sequences aren’t as smooth as those Pixar produced a decade ago. The dialogue can be amusing, and the movie is filled with likable characters played by distinctive voices like Whoopi Goldberg, Jane Fonda, Lil Rel Howery, and Pixar veteran John Ratzenberger.

The movie has a few creative elements, but the foundational plot device has problems. The Land of Luck manufactures and tracks luck for what purpose? This magical realm was too reminiscent of Boss Baby’s Baby Corp to feel fresh or

*Ratings from kids-in-mind.com, with quantity of sexual (S), violent (V), and foul-language (L) content on a 0-10 scale, with 10 high
“It’s a rare movie these days that has both a G rating and a plot.”

MOVIE

Thirteen Lives

by JULIANA CHAN ERIKSON

A SPECIAL KIND of panic comes over drowning victims. That panic reverberates through Thirteen Lives, Amazon’s dramatization of the 2018 rescue of a Thai soccer team and their coach trapped in a cave by floodwaters. Director Ron Howard elicits thrills even though we know the story will end happily.

Thirteen Lives throws viewers underwater. Zero visibility, oxygen canisters screeching against tight corners, helmets hitting rocks, and constant bubbles of respiration—the film is a captivating, otherworldly experience. (The parental rating is for peril, a drowning death, and some strong language.)

Howard drops viewers into the action in northern Thailand. The film has no narrator, and the first several minutes are entirely in Thai. The heroes of the story are Rick Stanton (Viggo Mortensen) and John Volanthen (Colin Farrell), the British divers who find the 13. John’s an introverted divorcé; Rick’s a brusque loner who despises niceties. They hatch the audacious rescue plan to anesthetize the group beforediving them out. Both shun the media and awkwardly accept thanks, preferring the quiet of the cave to the chaos of crowds.

The divers were supported by 5,000 to 10,000 volunteers, and that’s the beauty of the film’s title. This is the third film to deal with the rescue, with previous entries titled The Cave and The Rescue. But Thirteen Lives emphasizes the enormous ratio of rescuers to the rescued—and the value placed on the lives of the 13.

If you look at it that way, Thirteen Lives is a big-budget dramatization of the parable of the lost sheep—and a reminder we have all gone astray, each to his own cave, each in need of rescue.

VINCE VALITUTTI/METRO GOLDWYN MAYER PICTURES/AP

original. We should have spent more time exploring a fantastical world rather than worrying about corporate inventories and bureaucracies.

No one believes luck comes from a magical land of leprechauns, but Christian families who watch Luck might want to have a conversation about the difference between believing in chance and believing in the providence of God. Christians know all things come from the hand of God, and God’s providential care for His creation causes us to believe there’s a purpose behind events. We might not understand why something happens, but we don’t believe in random chance.

Despite the film’s title, the filmmakers know they can’t make an interesting movie about randomness. Luck might be central to the movie’s plot, but this story isn’t really about luck. Director Peggy Holmes said her real inspiration came from talking with kids in foster care: “They were so positive and hopeful and generous of heart, and we were so inspired by them.”

At its core, Luck is a story about sacrifice and finding love and family. Random chance—good luck and bad luck—is a metaphor for life’s circumstances outside our control. This film teaches that while we might not be able to control our circumstances, we can determine how we’re going to respond to them.
BRAD PIT'TS slick movie Bullet Train speeds along with style, but by the end it derails and leaves behind a bloody mess.

Pitt plays an assassin code-named Ladybug who's taken some time off to see a therapist. It’s his first job back after his time of soul-searching, so his handler gives him an easy assignment: Board the bullet train from Tokyo to Kyoto, grab a silver briefcase, and get off. She encourages him to bring a gun, but in keeping with his more hope-ful attitude he leaves it behind. He'll wish he had it when this simple smash and grab goes all wrong.

Ladybug isn’t the only assassin on the train. He’s trying to steal the case from a pair of British killers named Tangerine and Lemon, played by Aaron Taylor-Johnson and Brian Tyree Henry. Besides carrying a case full of cash, the “brothers” are babysitting a ruthless mob boss’s son. And as the train makes more stops, bad guys from all over the world keep boarding. There’s also an extremely venomous snake on board.

Bullet Train is not for the faint of heart. With so many killers on one train, the body count mounts quickly, and each act of savagery becomes bloodier than the one before. Director David Leitch doesn’t flinch from depictions of brutal and disfiguring violence.

Leitch knows something about the genre. He co-directed John Wick, though he wasn’t credited, and he followed up that film with Atomic Blonde, Deadpool 2, and Fast & Furious Presents: Hobbs & Shaw. Each of his films features kinetic action sequences performed by quirky characters. With its varied cast, Bullet Train doubles down on the quirkiness.

Ladybug uses most of his lines to spout self-help platitudes that everyone else recognizes as nonsense. Having a hired killer seek a more optimistic and fulfilling life through therapy is one of the many incongruities meant to make this ultra-violent movie more entertaining. Pitt headlines the cast, but Taylor-Johnson and Henry steal the show. The brothers who look nothing alike engage in good-natured, yet crude, sibling bickering, and Lemon continually explains that everything he’s learned in life he learned from Thomas the Tank Engine.

Coupling humor with foul language and splatter-gore violence isn’t a new technique, but Bullet Train tries to convince you that it’s doing something fresh with its large ensemble cast. Pitt and the other actors seem to revel in the film’s absurdity, but the movie isn’t as clever or funny as it thinks it is. The plot tries to form some inchoate notion about fate, tying a dozen assassins and a water bottle into one gigantic web, but despite the linear ride from point A to point B, the storytelling is choppy. And while the film contains some truly funny moments, even philosophical musings on Thomas the Tank Engine begin to wear thin.
FILIPINO COMEDIAN Jo Koy is a funny guy. His stand-up routines—which are not family friendly—contain insightful politically incorrect jokes about the Asian American experience. He often speaks fondly about the trials and joys of having a big family. His feature film Easter Sunday was supposed to capitalize on the humor that goes along with being part of a large immigrant family, but in the end the movie is a missed opportunity.

Koy plays a film version of himself named Joe Valencia, who struggles to make it in Los Angeles as an actor. Right before his big break, his Filipina mother guilts him into coming home for a big family gathering on Easter Sunday. In addition to going to church and dealing with family squabbles, Joe tries to build a relationship with his son, gets mixed up with his cousin’s shady business partners, and scrambles to keep his TV deal from falling through.

The movie showcases a predominantly Asian cast, and they deliver some entertaining performances. The scenes featuring Joe’s Filipino family are the best parts. The dynamics of large family gatherings can be quite funny. But the movie suffers from an unfocused script.

For a movie titled “Easter Sunday,” Easter Sunday didn’t have enough Easter. The story needed more about the family and more about what makes this holiday special to them. We get too many minutes of seeing Joe run from bad guys—a failed gimmick to raise the movie’s stakes. Easter Sunday also isn’t helped by Joe’s relatively blasphemous stand-up routine that he delivers in church at the request of his mother’s priest.
WHAT DO THE LATEST
albums by Big Thief, Belle and Sebastian, and Lit have in common? They’re uncommonly fetching examples of their respective genres.

Big Thief plays a free-floating folk-rock/country-rock hybrid—a sound more suggestive of a hydroponic Grateful Dead than of a band rooted in tradition—and Dragon New Warm Mountain I Believe in You is its most ambitious album to date.

Despite running to 80 minutes, it never bogs down. And for every experiment, there’s a slice of simple, haunted loveliness such as “No Reason,” “Wake Me Up To Drive,” and the Leonard Cohen-esque “Promise Is a Pendulum” keyed to Adrianne Lenker’s Midwest-meets-Appalachia voice.

Belle and Sebastian’s A Bit of Previous doesn’t bog down either. Twenty-six years and 11 albums in, Stuart Murdoch and his fellow purveyors of breezily sophisticated Scot-pop are still adding to their highlights reel.

Among the new additions: “Young and Stupid” (a wistful appreciation of the bliss accompanying ignorance) and “Deathbed of My Dreams” (a melancholy waltz that deserves to become an oft-covered classic).

Compared with the music of Belle and Sebastian and Big Thief, the 90s pop-punk to which Lit remains wed on Tastes Like Gold feels one-dimensional. But when that dimension’s main ingredient is an unpretentious commitment to the hook, resistance is more or less futile.

Alas, Big Thief’s, Belle and Sebastian’s, and Lit’s latest also have something less salutary in common: one song apiece that in these contentious times will divide more than unite.

In Big Thief’s “12,000 Lines,” Lenker (who considers herself “queer”) pines for her “woman.” In Belle and Sebastian’s “Working Boy in New York City,” Murdoch assures a same-sex-attracted young man that “God doesn’t care about the way you’re leaning” and that heaven’s gate is “wide.”

And in Lit’s “The Life That I Got,” a certain four-syllable profanity features prominently in the refrain. (Lit’s Jeremy Popoff recently called—as a fan—into The Clay Travis and Buck Sexton Show and, before ringing off, asked the audience to check out Tastes Like Gold, apparently oblivious to the likelihood that gold will be the last taste left by “The Life That I Got” in the average conservative’s mouth.)

Such songs, of course, are nothing new. But as lovely (Big Thief), catchy (Belle and Sebastian), and rousing (Lit) as these lightning-rod songs are, their host albums would be just fine—and probably better—without them.
**Halcyon Days**  
**CHAGALL GUEVARA**  
Finished versions of “A Bullet’s Worth a Thousand Words,” “Still Know Your Number by Heart,” and the title cut were in the can when this Steve Taylor–led supergroup broke up in the early ’90s. So whatever one thinks of those songs’ wisdom, it isn’t something Taylor has spent 30 years aging into. What Taylor and band have been aging into is a sound that rocks harder and keener than the sound of their relative youth—and a song like “Surrender,” a summary of C.S. Lewis’ *The Great Divorce* in 3½ minutes.

**Flutterama**  
**HALF-HANDED CLOUD**  
John Ringhofer’s mission is to set Biblical texts and cliché-free Christian expression to music so playful, weird, and slight that without eternity-rooted lyrics it would waft away on impact. The chipper “doo-doo-doos” and “ba-ba-bas” that run through these 18 ditties (including the ones in “Under Your Breath” borrowed from Pachelbel) might have roots in the Beach Boys, but all else that Ringhofer brings to bear on his mission makes “unique” feel like an extreme understatement.

**Exodus (Deluxe Edition)**  
**BOB MARLEY & THE WAILERS**  
So how does the recording that *Time* called the best album of the 20th century hold up in 2022? It depends on what you’re listening for. Between the 15 million-selling Marley compilation *Legend* and the first of Marley’s three new live albums (see “Encore”), only “Turn Your Lights Down Low,” a Marley composition in praise of canoodling believed to have been inspired by one of his adulterous affairs, isn’t available in broader contexts. The 20-cut second disc, however, will make the day of anyone who can’t get enough of “Punky Reggae Party.”

**Paint This Town**  
**OLD CROW MEDICINE SHOW**  
This album constitutes both a crash course and a master class in Americana—a crash course because it’s only 43 minutes long, a master class because it contains heaping helpings of what Americana is supposed to contain (country, folk, bluegrass, and the demesnes that there adjacent lie), and mixes them up so that it’s sometimes hard to tell where one genre ends and another begins. What’s easy to tell is that Ketch Secor understands the pressure points of life in the American South. Whether he’s imagining a new Mississippi flag or what it’s like to face the opioid crisis head-on, it’s clear that he hasn’t just heard about these topics in the news.

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**ENCORE**

The video of the June 4 show Bob Marley & the Wailers performed at the end of their 1977 Rainbow Theatre engagement in London has long been available, as well as ensconced in a time capsule not to be opened until the year 3000. And because two of the three new digital Marley live albums (*Live at the Rainbow 2nd June 1977* and *Live at the Rainbow 3rd June 1977*) comprise set lists almost identical to June 4’s, they’re redundant. *Live at the Rainbow 1st June 1977*, though, tells a somewhat different story.

Replacing “Trenchtown Rock,” “Burnin’ and Lootin’,” and “Them Belly Full” with three selections from the then just-released *Exodus*, the June 1 show feels less like a highlights run-through and more like a promise of something new. And whether to punctuate that promise with the reggae equivalent of an exclamation point or simply because Marley was having fun, the June 1 performance of “Exodus” detonates for 16 minutes. —A.O.
IN EVERY LIFE, UPSETS OCCUR. How did it come to this? you say. What happened to the country I grew up in, the family we once were? How could my church turn on me? Where did my security go? In some ways human experience hasn’t changed from a few thousand years ago when King David expressed his own life upsets in extravagant terms. When we’re on a more even keel, his laments can sound like complaining. But when we’re in the middle of it, an outcry like Psalm 4 is practical advice.

*Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness!* …
*Be gracious to me and hear my prayer!* …

First, call on the Lord. Demand His attention, if you must. It’s OK to sound desperate—to be desperate. The mere act of calling out indicates you know whom to call out to. That, by itself, indicates that if you are not right side up in your own person and mind, you know who is.

*O men, how long shall my honor be turned to shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies?*

The upside-down world laughs at serious matters and takes seriously trivial slights. Its denizens disregard searching questions and seek answers within themselves. Overlooking, or dismissing, the source of their honor, they decay into shame. Looking everywhere else for trust, they breed lies.

*But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself; the LORD hears when I call to him.*

This may sound like pride or self-righteousness, but when one is in the crosshairs, it is comfort and reassurance. Even as you cling to Him, He holds on to you; even as you search for Him, He finds you. It’s not a retreat to the bunker with the other chosen few, but a rallying to the flag in the middle of the conflict.

*Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord.*

There’s plenty to be angry about: rank injustice slathered with relentless talk of justice, oblivious hypocrisy while pointing out hypocrites, real deception leading to real harm. But you must see to yourself first. Examine your own motives and reactions; pull the planks out of your own eyes. Before going off like a reactionary firecracker, purify yourself. And above all, trust in God who will supply justice in time.

*There are many who say, “Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord!”*

The godless have no real good to offer. Their chatter is empty. Their incessant clamor for affirmation and safe spaces and guaranteed income pours out from a heart of fear. In the abundance of consumer goods lurks want and desperation. But in the light of God’s face fear melts away. You can show them some good, if they ask. If they want it, they can have it. If they seek it, they’ll find it. Let it shine.

*You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.*

Which would you have, settled joy or transient happiness? A big house with a big mortgage or a secured mansion in heaven? Foundational truths or the shifting sand of common knowledge and public opinion? Well, then—

*In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.*

You began vertically, crying out and clinging. You flushed out your fears, and now look around with eyes refreshed. You see all the threats, lies, and troubles hurled at you in your true position—stood on their heads. You let go; you lie down. Your Father pulls up the covers, lays a reassuring hand on your forehead, reminds you that He knows, He cares, and He controls. Safety is here, with Him, and nowhere else.

Now close your eyes and drift off to sleep in the right side up.
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THE NEW CULTURAL ORTHODOXY 
AND HOW WE GOT HERE

THE TWISTED SELF

by Carl R. Trueman

ILLUSTRATION BY 
Mark Fredrickson

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any of us are familiar with books and movies in which plots revolve around characters who find themselves trapped in worlds where nothing works in quite the way they expect. Whether it is Alice wandering through Wonderland or Keanu Reeves trapped in the Matrix, they feel disoriented, confused, and anxious. And that is the way many people feel today in our world, where everything that seemed certain only the day before yesterday—the definition of marriage or the meaning of the word woman, for example—seem now to be in a state of flux.

To understand this chaos, some historical reflection is necessary. Take, for example, the observation of Christian ethicist Oliver O’Donovan on the abortion debates of the 1970s. He noted that he and other pro-life advocates had made a fundamental mistake: They did not anticipate that the weakest argument of the abortion lobby would ultimately prove to be its strongest and most persuasive: that the baby in the womb is merely part of the woman’s body. Everyone, whether pro-life or pro-abortion, knows that isn’t the case. That’s why wombs and their contents arouse so much passion on both sides of the debate. Why then did this obviously weak argument triumph? The answer, according to O’Donovan, was that it appealed to the deepest intuitions of modern men and women who think of themselves as free and autonomous—who conceive of life’s purpose as attaining personal psychological happiness, a sense of inner well-being. In short, modern men and women got behind the argument that would give them what they wanted anyway—personal peace and contentment.

Decades on from O’Donovan’s reflections, it is more clear than ever that this intuitive understanding of what it means to be human has empowered far more than just the rhetorical arguments of the abortion lobby. Take the transgender issue, for example. Until recently, most people would have scoffed at a man who claimed he is really a woman trapped in the wrong body. And they would have dismissed as nonsense any suggestion that the term gender could have meaning apart from bodily sex. Now such statements and ideas are standard fare in our culture, from sitcoms to human resources departments to elementary schools.

And not only is transgenderism deemed merely plausible in our world, it’s become a requirement of the new cultural orthodoxy. An article of faith. So much so that critics of trans ideology, such as author J.K. Rowling, are being digitally drawn and quartered. All of this indicates that, if we wish to understand the real nature of the remarkable changes that are fracturing our society, we must set them within the broader context of how people think or imagine themselves to be. In the abortion debate, O’Donovan pointed not to the importance of arguments per se, but of the broader moral imagination that made certain arguments—even very weak ones—rhetorically powerful.

How have we become a society where we think of ourselves as autonomous? Where our emotions and
inner feelings determine who we think we are? Where personal, individual, psychological happiness has become a basic criterion for deciding what is and is not moral—and even what’s real?

**HOW WE GOT HERE**

There is no single, simple answer to these questions as a variety of factors have all played a critical role. There is an intellectual narrative involving key thinkers whose ideas have shaped the view of reality. The playing of educational elites, this narrative has trickled down through media and entertainment and into our streets. Meanwhile, technological developments have not simply changed how we behave, but have reshaped how we think about and relate to the world around us. Then there is the rise of a politics predicated on new and often volatile identities: gender, race, and sexuality. No longer just a clash of worldviews, this politics poses a fundamental challenge to the very coherence of our society. And all of these connect to basic transformations of the nature and purpose of the institutions that define our culture.

Many thinkers have helped shape the modern mindset. One particularly influential example: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the 18th-century Genevan philosopher. Few may read Rousseau today, but he is still casts a long shadow as arguably one of the key sources for child-centered educational theories. Rousseau’s statement that “Man is born free and everywhere is in chains” might well serve as the most concise summary of the modern myth of what it means to be a human being. Rousseau believed that human beings are born in a fundamentally pristine state. Indeed, despite his protestations to the contrary, his own autobiography, *Confessions*, reads in part as a response to the great author of a book with the same title: Augustine. Augustine may have thought we human beings are born depraved, but Rousseau disagreed. For him, we emerge from the womb naturally empathetic and moral. It is only the demands of polite society that pervert us, encouraging us to be selfish in our dealings with others and to advance our status by conforming to the expectations society places on us. It is society that has morally ruined us.

Rousseau believed that we all share a common, objective, moral human nature. This meant that, for them, the move inward to feelings and sentiments was not a move to pure subjectivity. Rather it was a *return* to the pristine self—to the built-in moral structure that society had obscured or corrupted. But once the notion that we all share a common, objective, moral human nature is denied, then everything changes. Then the individual will becomes sovereign, and human beings do descend into pure subjectivity, and ideas such as happiness, flourishing, good, and evil become matters of personal preference. That is where we are today.

**THE DESIGNER SELF**

This rejection of human nature as having an intrinsic moral structure and unavoidable authority really emerged as a potent philosophical force in the 19th century. A key source is the German thinker G.W.F. Hegel. Hegel noted that human beings thought differently throughout history. An ancient Athenian, a medieval Tuscan, a Reformation Englishman, and a 19th-century Prussian would each think about themselves, the world, and their place within it in different ways.

Hegel was not pressing for a radical annihilation of the notion of human nature in its entirety, but he...
Jean-Jacques Rousseau  
- June 28, 1712–July 2, 1778  
- Location: Geneva

Rousseau's career as a public philosopher began in 1750, when he won first place in an essay-writing contest by arguing that the development of the arts and sciences led to moral degradation. He believed that man is naturally free, equal, and peaceful and that corruption comes from external institutions. Rousseau argued that man can never return to his free, pre-rational state. But he believed man could recover freedom by creating a government whose power came from the consent of the governed. Rousseau became one of three major social contract theorists. His ideas helped spark Romanticism, the French Revolution, and American democracy.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel  
- Aug. 27, 1770–Nov. 14, 1831  
- Location: Germany

Hegel published his most famous work, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, in 1807. In it, he argued that every thesis—or premise—has a weakness. Such a weakness leaves room for an antithesis—an argument in opposition. Pitting a thesis against its antithesis will eventually create a
“synthesis” that, by drawing ideas from both, moves closer to the truth. Hegel proposed that this process continues until eventually hitting the endpoint of knowledge. He believed history worked the same way, moving from thesis to synthesis as people learned and got closer to the truth. The work, which would later inspire Karl Marx, made Hegel famous, and he spent the rest of his life working as a newspaper editor and academic.

**Charles Darwin**
- **Feb. 12, 1809–April 19, 1882**
- **Location: England**

Darwin studied to be a clergyman after his distaste for corpses drove him from medicine. After deciding he felt no call to ministry, he took geology and zoology classes on the side and set sail on the HMS Beagle. During a five-year voyage, he discovered the famous Galapagos tortoises and finches, ate the tortoises, and began to doubt the Bible’s accuracy. His resulting book, *The Descent of Man*, argued that man evolved from lower life forms. His rejection of the Bible’s account of creation undermined Christianity and redefined how man viewed himself, individually and socially.

**Karl Marx**
- **May 5, 1818–March 14, 1883**
- **Location: Germany**

Marx studied law and philosophy, particularly Hegel’s theory of history. In the 1840s, he moved to Paris, where he grew increasingly unhappy with capitalism and began adopting socialist views. He viewed history in economic and political terms, with common ownership, private property and slavery, feudalism, and capitalism as four major stages. Each ended through violence, Marx believed, and the discontented lower class would inevitably overthrow the greedy upper class and replace capitalism with communism. Marx supported several uprisings across Europe and helped launch the Communist League, a political society that appealed to the working classes. He co-wrote its plan of action, *The Communist Manifesto*, with Friedrich Engels. Driven out of mainland Europe due to his political activities, Marx settled in London, where he wrote his major life work, *Das Kapital*.

**Friedrich Nietzsche**
- **Oct. 15, 1844–Aug. 25, 1900**
- **Location: Germany**

Nietzsche believed striving for the “good” moral character outlined by traditional religion is an affront to life, because it means rejecting certain sources of happiness as morally wrong. But, concerned that removing religion would leave a hole, he developed the idea of the *Ubermensch*, a superman who lives only by his own standards, who values and is driven by the “will to power”—to perfect and transcend the self. Nietzsche suffered a mental collapse in 1889 after trying to save a horse from a whipping in the street. He died 11 years later.

**Sigmund Freud**
- **May 6, 1856–Sept. 23, 1939**
- **Location: Austria**

Freud argued that instincts are the main motivating forces in the mental realm, and that sexual energy is the most important motivator. He believed babies are born with impulses that lead them to be sexually attracted to the opposite-sex parent. He attributed his poor relationship with his father to this phenomenon. But Freud redefined sexuality to include any pleasure that can be obtained from the body. Most famously, he founded psychoanalysis, a technique for verbalizing and confronting trauma that sought to cure mental disorders. —Abi Churchill
not action, defines sex, which defines us. To say “I am straight” is to make an identity claim, but it is not to assert that I have ever had a sexual encounter with someone else. It is a statement of felt desire, not action.

Few today have read Rousseau, Marx, Nietzsche, or Darwin, let alone reflected deeply upon Hegel and his heirs. So how did their ideas, expressed through sophisticated arguments in lengthy books, become the instincts and intuitions of society at large? A large part of the answer is technology. Technology panders to the myths that fallen human beings want to believe about themselves. First, that we are free, answerable to no one, and masters of our own destinies. Second, that human nature involves no accountability to some set of objective moral standards.

**THE DIGITAL SELF**

So how do technological developments do this? The short answer is: Technology is decisive for the way we interact with the world and, therefore, how we come to imagine who we really are.

First, technology weakens the bonds of community. Take music, for example. Two hundred years ago music was a matter of communal production. To enjoy music, one needed to be either part of a group making it or present at a gathering that witnessed its production. Today most of us experience music most of the time as a matter of individual consumption. We listen in private. We choose what we listen to. We listen when we want to.

You might consider that a trivial matter of entertainment, but it captures in miniature how technology shapes the way we imagine ourselves in the world. We are sovereign. We can bend the world to suit our individual desires. This leads to the second important impact of technology. It gives us a sense that we are all-powerful and the world is so much raw material we can simply bend to our wills. Further, institutional authority is eroded. Using the internet as the bridge to all places, we are no longer tethered to bricks-and-mortar … or to the institutions therein. The worker can seek work where he wants, the churchgoer can worship where he wants, and the shopper can shop where he wants.

Technology has also fostered a third cultural intuition: Phenomena once regarded as moral problems are now really no more than technical problems. STDs used to be seen as the result of immoral behavior. That was an easy position to maintain in a time when there was no way of addressing prevention other than encouraging celibacy outside of marriage and monogamous fidelity within it. With the advent of antibiotics, STDs became simply problems to be solved with the right medicine.

In fact, the technological revolution lies at the heart of the transformation of sex in society. In time past, the idea of sex as recreation was impractical. Before easy access to reliable contraception and abortion, it was hard to imagine sex as mere recreation. The risk of disease or pregnancy meant that sex came with responsibilities. Technology has broken that connection. Further, pornography objectifies the sexual act, repurposes it as entertainment, and severs sexual pleasure from any broader interpersonal relationship. This further fuels the notion that what counts in sex is my desire and my satisfaction—and reinforces the idea of individual happiness and expression as the goal both of living and of modern identity politics.

These three strands of our culture’s technological imagination have come together in a potent form in transgenderism. Transgenderism grants huge authority to the desires of the autonomous individual. It
assumes that nature is really just raw material. And it sees technology as a key component in determining not only what is right and what is wrong, but indeed what is possible. What is real and what is merely an oppressive ideological imposition. Thus, even our bodies cease to have authority in the face of our minds, our feelings, our inner desires ... and our access to certain medical procedures. It is only because of technological developments that we can even imagine the possibility of changing from a man to a woman.

There is one more notable way in which technology helps to cultivate expressive individualism. That is the central role it allows for public performance. If authenticity is found by giving outward expression to inward feelings, then social media makes all the world a stage. Now we all can present any part of our lives as a public performance to a vast audience. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok all provide platforms for exhibitionism.

In very real terms, such platforms have taken expressive individualism shaped by intellectuals and mainlined it into the larger culture. You do not need to have read Nietzsche to think that nature has no intrinsic authority, that human nature has therefore no intrinsic moral shape, that reality is whatever you might care to make it, and that happiness is to be found by satisfying your inner desires. You do not need to have heard of Freud to believe that sex defines who we are. You need only a steady diet of social media—or even to follow the basic plotlines of myriad mainstream movies or TV shows. Sex is destiny and sexual fulfillment is meaning. That is the not-so-subliminal message.

FUTURE SHOCK
So far, so depressing. But what broader cultural and political transformations is this view of the self bringing in its wake? How is expressive individualism, infused with sex and supercharged by the advent of social media, reshaping the practical realities of the world in which we live? What new strangeness looks set to further twist our strange new world?

First, the old values of social engagement are being overturned. In an expressive world, where authenticity is found in performance, those things once considered virtues—modesty, reserve, respect for authority, etc.—start to look more like signs of repression. Second, given the central role of sex to modern identity, sexual exhibitionism and the destruction of traditional sexual mores becomes a central part of the modern program of cultural transformation. For the progressive, this must be taught ever earlier into childhood. Children will be taught to express themselves sexually because that, according to modern cultural assumptions, is actually who they are. Anyone puzzled by the number of families with young children happily cheering on the ostentatious and explicit sexual flamboyance on display at pride rallies need only reflect on the narrative of the modern self to understand what they are seeing. The modern world does not think it is sexualizing children. It thinks kids are born sexualized. To be truly themselves, they merely need to be helped to realize that.

Third, cultural principles that used to enjoy support across the mainstream political spectrum, such as freedom of speech and freedom of religion, will become increasingly implausible—and vulnerable. Once the self becomes psychologized and happiness is identified with an inner sense of contentment, words become weapons. Their use must be regulated as tightly as physical violence. Hence the advent of restrictive speech codes and increasing pressure on the freedom of religion in the public space. To refuse to use a trans person’s preferred pronouns is to refuse to acknowledge them for who they think they are. Such refusals will be regarded as an assault on their person because it denies the sovereignty of their inner feelings and the legitimacy of their chosen identity.

Of course, this will itself lead to further difficulties because not all identities are compatible—the vocal Christian, for example, and the outspoken drag queen. So somebody will have to decide whom to recognize and whom to silence. Hence that other strangeness we see emerging even now: Radical individual freedom is fostering remarkably intolerant and sometimes totalitarian policies in the workplace and even society at large.

We do indeed live in a strange new world. The good news? It is built on a myth. We are not born free but radically dependent on others and subject to nature and her God. The bad news? We can do a lot of damage trying to deny those basic and obvious truths. Yet, as O’Donovan saw in retrospect with regard to the abortion debate, this strangeness has a logic to it. And while its roots are deep and its foundations well established, grasping that logic is surely the first step to mounting a thoughtful response.

—Carl R. Trueman is a professor of Biblical and religious studies at Grove City College and author of Strange New World
Living with a legacy

by KIM HENDERSON
photos by TED JACKSON/GENESIS

The bold faith of Jim and Elisabeth Elliot marked a generation of Christians, none more than their daughter.
Jim and Elisabeth Elliot married in 1953 in Ecuador, where they were intent on evangelizing unreached people groups. Valerie was born in 1955. Just 10 months later, her father and four other missionaries landed a yellow Piper plane on a sandy riverbank deep in the Amazonian jungle. They’d recently made contact with members of the Waorani tribe, and now they prepared to try talking, even though she might have to face an eye roll expressing boredom. But the worst reaction, Valerie knew, was no reaction—when Elisabeth clearly wasn’t present, although she was.

Just a few years earlier, Elisabeth Elliot was still touring the country, captivating audiences with the account of her first husband’s death at the hands of Waorani tribesmen in 1956. But by 2004, dementia had ravaged her mind, leaving Valerie to take up the mantle of the Elliot legacy. She’d spent her whole life preparing. But standing there by her mother’s fireplace, she wondered if she was really ready.
to meet them face to face. Two days after they did, Waorani warriors murdered all five of the young men.

That was more than half a century ago. But the Elliots’ story still resonates. And it’s still very much a part of Valerie’s daily life. A menagerie of black-and-white images, many taken in the 1950s by famed photojournalist Cornell Capa, hugs the walls of her retirement home on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Valerie toddling in the Ecuadorian jungle. Valerie boarding a dugout. Valerie walking hand in hand with a Waorani. Some say Capa grew fond of Valerie’s widowed mother while capturing those scenes of missionary life among the tribesmen who murdered her husband. It’s certain that a growing number of Americans did after they saw Capa’s Life magazine spreads.

But it would take a while before Valerie understood the depth of that fondness. Even as Elisabeth’s Through Gates of Splendor gripped readers in 1957 on its way to bestseller status, mother and daughter managed to live discreetly for seven years in the jungle, and another six in New Hampshire. Valerie was 14 by the time her mother remarried, and during that happy, settled period, Christendom learned Elisabeth was available to speak. And that she was good at it.

“Things really amped up then,” Valerie says thoughtfully, careful to keep the timeline accurate. As the only child of perhaps the most famous missionaries of the 20th century, she understands the importance of being accurate. The Elliots’ story—their legacy of commitment, sacrifice, forgiveness, suffering—requires it.

Valerie is now 67, the same age as Elisabeth when she was convincing daily Gateway to Joy listeners they were “loved with an everlasting love.” On this June morning, she’s seated in a room filled with light and treasures, like the coffee table Jim Elliot carved from native wood at his first mission station in Shandia. It’s not easy to look dignified on a sectional sofa, but Valerie pulls it off. Back straight, legs crossed, hands placed gracefully one over the other near the knee. It helps that she’s tall and trim like her mother, with the same intense blue eyes, but it’s her dad’s dimples that soften her expressions. They show up in kind, easy smiles like the one that crosses Valerie’s face when she recalls it’s been seven years to the day since her mother died, and she misses her. “Mostly our talks, sipping tea,” she says, pausing at the memory. That their cups always held Earl Grey, or that the view from the Massachusetts waterfront home Elisabeth shared with her third husband was unmatched, will not surprise the average Elliot reader. The bit about a seagull that visited every day, banging on the picture window until Elisabeth brought scraps outside, might.

Valerie’s living room in Long Beach, Miss., is a long way from the New England home that shaped her—from where Valerie as a child sat listening to her Uncle Dave tell stories about her late father, teaching her about the dad she never got to know. “That he was lots of fun, loved adventure, loved to sing,” she remembers.
As a freshman at Wheaton, Valerie was a thousand miles away from her mother, but she couldn’t escape her, or even the father whose legend outlived him. On campus, she walked past the Elliot dorm, and on dates “the daughter” made guys as nervous as cats. When Valerie’s grades began to suffer, the man she still calls “Daddy,” Elisabeth’s second husband, theologian Addison Leitch, reined her in with a letter. “I really needed that authority figure, and my mother was glad he could be the dad. He was a wonderful stepfather.” Leitch’s death from cancer the next year hit hard. For Valerie, it was a big lesson in the sovereignty of God. For her mother, it was Round No. 2. Maybe that’s why Elisabeth didn’t think Valerie should return for the funeral, a decision Valerie still laments today.

Walter Shepard entered the picture during that grief, and in time the young seminary student won Elisabeth’s blessing and a bride with a singular pedigree. The week before the wedding, Elisabeth presented the couple with a set of sterling silver flatware and a copy of her latest project, *Let Me Be a Woman*. This was 1976. The women’s liberation movement was roiling, and Elisabeth wanted to provide her daughter with a Biblical response to it. All these years later, Valerie still seems struck by the thought that her mother would write a book especially for her. “I think it was an amazing wedding gift. I had no idea she was working on it.”

In the absence of Jim Elliot, Elisabeth’s brother, Tom, walked Valerie down the aisle and into her new role as a pastor’s wife. When she joined Walter at his first church, Valerie says, she went in thinking she couldn’t be herself. She and her family had to be an example because of who her parents were. That struggle intensified through the years, eventually affecting her marriage. “I was all about changing my husband until one day Walt said to me, ‘Val, I’m never going to be an Elliot. … You’re going to have to accept me as a Shepard.’” Valerie says that got her attention, but it was another five years before she really understood the problem behind her desire for a flawless family. The Shepards were living in California, and discouragement had Walter wanting to quit the ministry. A study in Galatians helped them change course. The couple realized they had placed her parents on the top rung of a spiritual ladder, with everyone else trying to climb up to their disciplined and holy level. “We thought God was more pleased with them than us, but we came to understand we’re all sinners in need of God’s grace. It’s about Jesus and not how holy we look.”

Humbled, Valerie says she had a new spirit of grace toward her children and a new honesty with women in their congregation. Even her mother noticed. When Elisabeth expressed concern that she may have contributed to Valerie’s bent toward legalism, her daughter wouldn’t let her take the blame. She knew the truth. It’s everybody’s bent.

But Elisabeth apparently went to lengths to avoid the appearance of legalism. While Walter pastored Presbyterian congregations, the kind that catechize, Valerie as a child only quoted the 23rd Psalm. Elisabeth
wasn’t big on showy recitations, and she didn’t teach Valerie about hard theological concepts like predestination, although she believed in it. Even so, Valerie says she did absorb theological truths from Elisabeth—through prayers on the nights her mother was home, during their talks, watching her day-to-day testimony: “My mother’s trust in the Lord and her teaching me that God was in charge, that’s what I learned from her.”

Valerie learned much from Jim Elliot by reading Shadow of the Almighty, a book she admits overwhelmed two of her sons. In it, they saw a grandfather who was far out of their reach with a zeal they did not possess at the time. Few do. Still, as the Shepards’ children aged, most of them preferred to keep their lineage hush-hush when they went to a new school. They’d sit incognito at conferences to avoid the attention—the fawning—that came along with their famous connections.

By this time, Valerie had her own speaking schedule, appearing at colleges, churches, even on television programs. She hints at disappointment over her children’s reluctance to embrace their remarkable heritage, and she wonders if she spent too much time away, telling others about what happened in Ecuador. “Maybe they resented that,” she muses. But two daughters have come to share her enthusiasm for the platform, and they’re happy to address interested audiences. The question is, how long will interest in the Elliots last? Even Valerie once confided to her mother she was concerned about telling the same story over and over again. Elisabeth had concise counsel on the ready: That’s the story God gave you to share.

Moments like that make clear Valerie didn’t just inherit a legacy, she lived alongside one—the kind that not only gave wise advice but also possessed the drive to answer hundreds of fan letters a month. By hand. Still, Valerie knows her mother wasn’t perfect, and that she never claimed to be. In 2019, Valerie wrote a book about a part of her parents’ lives missing from other publications—their five-year, long-distance courtship. In the dedication to Devotedly, she lists each of her children, including namesakes Elisabeth and James, and she quotes from Jim’s journal: “Mayhap, in mercy, He shall give me a host of children.” Surely Valerie’s eight qualify. Once, however, Elisabeth wasn’t thrilled to hear of another Shepard pregnancy. She got as far as a plane headed home before she wrote her daughter a letter apologizing for her reaction to the news. “She just thought it was too much work for me. She was very protective,” Valerie explains. That doesn’t mean Elisabeth didn’t enjoy her grandchildren, or that they didn’t relish the summer weeks she’d host them, three or four at a time. The kids knew the drill. Elisabeth spent mornings in her study and afternoons with them exploring the coastline’s crags and tide pools. The same held true when “Granny” visited them.
She had lessons to write, and sometimes 30 recording sessions in a week. But Elisabeth brought a story—a true, funny one—to every meal.

Valerie says she never expected her mother to be the kind of woman who takes her grandkids to Disneyland. It was Elisabeth’s practicality she counted on, like when Valerie went into labor with her firstborn, and more than two hours lay between the manse and New Orleans General Hospital. Elisabeth’s training for jungle deliveries kicked in, and she grabbed scissors and twine before climbing into the backseat of Walter’s truck. She was much the same when that baby turned 18. No car keys for a gift, but Elisabeth made sure he, and all his siblings, could go to college debt-free.

That’s the Elisabeth her fans assume they know, not the one Valerie recalls getting flustered under a portable hair dryer when guests surprised her or scooting down the streets of Franconia, N.H., in her VW. Valerie has always been measured with the pictures she paints. Enough, but no exposé. Still, some readers expressed surprise at her decision to include in Devotedly intimate portions of her parents’ love letters, like Jim’s scoffing at Elisabeth’s “militant morality.” Valerie’s response? Don’t place her parents on a pedestal. “The physical longing was, to me, just real. Readers need to see that they were real people.”

Real enough to die with dementia. In sharp contrast to Jim Elliot’s sudden spearng death, his wife began a slow descent in 2002, even though her family wouldn’t know exactly what to call it for another two years. Against that backdrop, Elisabeth continued to keep a speaking schedule, relying more and more on manuscripts, and less and less on eye contact. She quoted Amy Carmichael’s “in acceptance lieth peace” to her loved ones, and “He knows the way through the wilderness” to herself, even as it became more and more like a wilderness in her mind. The Shepards were living in Africa when Elisabeth would call and forget where they were, and why. Valerie and Walter would exchange glances and wonder the same thing. Maybe they shouldn’t have taken the mission assignment. Maybe they should have stayed near Elisabeth and her husband, but they had no idea they were buckling up for a 15-year journey with the disease.

By 2008, the Shepards had returned to the United States. They prayed hard that Walter could secure a job in Massachusetts that would allow them to live near Elisabeth and Lars, but that was not to be. And for the first time in two hours of heavy reflection, Valerie tears up. “I’d go to see her every few months and stay a week.”

It was on one of those visits that Lars spent the afternoon running errands, leaving Valerie to face the prospect of her once vibrant mother’s vacant stare.

“I just thought I couldn’t do four hours with that happening,” she says. “But as I stood there, the phrase ‘In acceptance lieth peace’ came, and I realized the Holy Spirit was reminding me that I needed to accept the fact that my mother had dementia.” So she did. After fighting her mother’s progression for seven years, Valerie sat down in peace. Her nightly prayers for a miraculous healing ceased, and her belief that Elisabeth was in God’s hands deepened. Whether she lived or died, whether she stayed in her own home or went to a nursing home, He would take care of her.

The Shepards were asleep at their home in North Carolina when a call jarred Valerie awake. Elisabeth’s condition had changed. For the next two hours, Valerie and Lars and the night shift’s caregivers sang hymns in her mother’s ear. Even the family’s other Elisabeth, Valerie’s oldest daughter, joined in from the U.K., making it through all five verses of “Jesus! What a Friend for Sinners” while her grandmother, quiet and still, listened.

It would later take a cousin’s acumen to point out the irony in the timing of Elisabeth Howard Elliot Leitch Gren’s death. Elisabeth had routinely started writing at 6:15 every morning, just after completing devotions that started at 5:00. She died at 6:15 on the morning of June 15, 2015. “How punctual,” the cousin said. “Aunt Betty would have loved that.”

The couple that together parented Valerie for less than a year left a sizable footprint for their daughter to manage. Elisabeth’s syndicated radio show ran more than a dozen years, and Through Gates of Splendor spawned two documentaries. Then there are...
some 30 other books Elisabeth wrote.
And Jim Elliot’s published journals.
Piles of their letters. Audio files. A
trunk of collectibles from Ecuador.
Since her mother’s funeral, it’s been up
to Valerie to decide what goes to the
Wheaton archives and what to keep as
family heirlooms. Is she done?
Not really. Author Ellen Vaughn
has all the personal papers needed to
write Elisabeth’s authorized biography.
Valerie and Lars share the copyrights to
the other books, and Valerie must con-
tinue to tune in to the Elisabeth Elliot
Foundation’s monthly board meetings.
An extra bedroom in the Shepards’
coastal home is painted a stormy gray.
Valerie takes me there to see her grand-
mother’s antique writing desk and a
shelf lined with books by her mother’s
favorite writers—Amy Carmichael and
George MacDonald. In blank pages at
the back of the MacDonald novels,
Elisabeth’s scrolling penmanship
defines terms the author is prone to
use, her own glossary of the old
Scottish brogue. Valerie shakes her
head at the sight of such an endeavor.
She is not made that way. She is no
glossary maker.
The few photographs Valerie has of
herself during the months before her
father’s death decorate an adjacent
wall. They’re yellowed, but Valerie has
heard they can be retouched, restored.
She plans to undertake that project
soon, maybe after the family vacation
in Kissimmee, Fla., with all the Shepard
children, spouses, and grands. Valerie
walks over to a frame and points to a
photo in the top right corner. It’s her at
the crawling stage, less than a year old,
playing alone on a sandy bank along a
Quichua river. For a moment, the Elliot
heir stares at the picture, then she turns
around to furnish a final memory:
Elisabeth always believed the photo
was taken the day her husband died.
Ah. But Valerie does not relate this
as some might, with sadness or a ques-
tion of what might have been. Instead,
she extends perspective: “I was pro-
tected and cared for by the Father of
orphans, as well as a mother who was
kind and wise, even lots of fun. I con-
tinue to be thankful for my parents.
We all can.”

LEFT: Elisabeth Elliot later in life. ABOVE:
Valerie sits at her grandmother’s desk.
XINHUA VIA GETTY IMAGES
Afghan names and locations in this story have been changed for safety reasons.

Mal’s brother and three young children were driving down a dirt road in Afghanistan, talking and laughing together in a Toyota Hilux pickup truck, when a Taliban landmine exploded in front of them. Windows shattered, shards of glass rained down on the children, but all survived. A few years earlier, a similar landmine killed Amal’s uncle. Taliban fighters grabbed another uncle from a mosque while he was praying. They accused him of spying and shot him dead 300 feet from Amal’s house.

Amal has lost eight other relatives to Taliban attacks, including a brother killed by a car bomb last year. He himself escaped a car attack en route to Kabul, Afghanistan’s capital, by quickly accelerating as a nearby Afghan army patrol fired back at Taliban militants.

The crimes warranting these attacks? Amal and members of his family had helped Americans and U.S. troops deployed in Afghanistan.

Over the last two decades, Amal’s family and thousands like them risked their lives to join U.S. efforts to overthrow Islamist rule and rebuild Afghanistan. But a year after the United States abruptly pulled out of Afghanistan and Kabul fell, these allies continue to live in constant danger, hunted by the Taliban militants who now control the country.

Those who haven’t lost their lives have lost homes, jobs, relationships, and freedoms. Some wait in limbo in another country. But most are stranded in Afghanistan, where they can’t work publicly and must rely on friends, extended family, or foreign donations for food and other necessities. Some, like Amal,
his wife, and four children, must change locations frequently to stay one step ahead of the Taliban. Amal’s wife miscarried a son because of the constant stress. Amal burned his old uniforms and any information linking him to the U.S. military.

Amal, who gathered intelligence for Americans and the Afghan army, told me his story in broken English from a safe location in Kabul. Two months ago, the Taliban arrested and tortured another of Amal’s brothers. He remains imprisoned for thwarting an attack on Americans by a corrupt Afghan government official secretly working with terrorists. Days after we first talked, Amal learned the Taliban had just captured a younger brother.

Many U.S. service members who worked with Afghan allies are frustrated and ashamed that so many of their colleagues live in constant fear for their lives.

The images from August 2021 are still vivid. American units leaving the country. Billions of dollars in military hardware abandoned to the Taliban. The fall of Kabul. Frightened Afghans mobbing airports. Anguished families, many torn apart as some members scrambled aboard evacuation flights while others didn’t make it.

“I can’t believe we’ve cut and run, abandoning the people who carried a heavier load than we did,” former U.S. Army Capt. Roger Hill told me. “They never got to rest, weren’t as well trained as we are, were always under Taliban threat, and still are.” As an infantry commander in Afghanistan, Hill relied on Afghan interpreters who often fought alongside him. Some, he says, saw more combat than many U.S. soldiers and Marines.

“It’s shameful,” Hill says, his voice breaking as he tears up. “These are our brothers, and we’ve left them behind.”

Today, those left behind can apply for the Special Immigration Visa (SIV) program originally created to aid Iraqi translators who worked with U.S. troops, but the process is a slow government grind. The SIV program grants legal permanent residency for those employed by, or on behalf of, the U.S. government for more than a year. All eligible applicants went through rigorous vetting even before they began working for American forces and contractors.

According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. forces evacuated about 80,000 Afghans when Kabul fell, most under the SIV program. Others left through humanitarian parole, a program providing temporary U.S. residency, and about 4,000 qualified through other visa programs.

But more than 160,000 SIV-eligible Afghans are still waiting for approval. The SIV system involves complicated paperwork and requests, convoluted State Department bureaucracy, and poor to nonexistent communication with applicants.

Lt. Col. Erhan Bedestani, who now works at the Pentagon, was a Special Forces operational detachment commander in Afghanistan for two rotations and later worked in the State Department. He helped his Afghan interpreter immigrate to the United States through the SIV program in 2012. Even then, Bedestani says, the slow, understaffed program revealed government dysfunction, with delays in processing visas, zero transparency, and no communication. Today, inundated by applications, the system hasn’t improved. “Even immigration attorneys are struggling to figure out the process to get Afghans here,” he said.

Bedestani and other military members say that without public outcry and media attention, the political will does not exist to fix the system. And yet, as Hill and others noted, the Biden administration has expedited visas for refugees from other perilous countries. Meanwhile, on the U.S. southern border, a steady stream of immigrants continues to enter the country illegally.

Although Hill supported the U.S. exit from Afghanistan, he called the sudden nature of it a debacle, causing near-immediate deterioration in women’s rights and education, healthcare, infrastructure, and freedoms—and abandonment of allies to terrorists besides.

Hill said many combat veterans feel guilt over U.S. treatment of their Afghan battle brothers. He believes that’s one reason suicides have increased among combat vets: “We got to go home, sleep in comfortable beds while our Afghan brothers are being hunted down ... This is crushing many of us.”

It was compassion, driven by his faith, that motivated Hill to embrace an Afghan family of five brothers—two of whom were interpreters for U.S. forces during combat—and help get them into Pakistan.

“My gratitude for what Jesus has done for me, and the Holy Spirit in me, makes me want to repay God’s generosity,” he said. A Christian organization opened a safe house normally used for missionaries in Pakistan to shelter the Muslim
brothers and their families. But they are stuck, unable to hasten visa approval and reliant on others for aid.

Hundreds of nonprofits and nongovernmental organizations are trying to help in similar ways, becoming human points of contact for Afghans. Terri Selph, a former Army major who served in Afghanistan, is a volunteer fundraiser with Heart of an Ace, a nonprofit providing supplies for Afghans. She’s also a handler, or shepherd, with Task Force Argo, a group of U.S. volunteers working behind the scenes to help evacuate SIV-eligible Afghans. Selph works directly and confidentially with applicants, ensuring they’ve followed State Department requirements. She also provides something that government can’t: encouragement.

One of Selph’s charges, Mohammed, told me that when Kabul fell he was in Turkey on a business visa. But his wife and children were in Afghanistan. Months later, he was able to return to see them. As he recounted his story by phone, he abruptly hung up, later explaining he’d feared someone nearby was listening. He fears for his life daily because of his previous work for U.S.-contracted companies. The Taliban also considers Mohammed an infidel because he criticized the group when he managed an Afghan television station.

He’s soon heading back to Turkey alone. It’s the only country where he holds a visa, and he hopes to get a job so he can send money home via Hawala, an off-the-grid, unregulated money transferring network.

Meanwhile, Mohammed awaits approval of his U.S. visa application, submitted a year ago.

Jeff Phaneuf, a former Marine infantry officer, now works with No One Left Behind, a nonprofit begun by an Afghan interpreter who saved the lives of five American soldiers. Active duty service members, veterans, and others work with the group to expedite immigration through the SIV program, volunteering time and money.

Phaneuf recently spoke to Secretary of State Antony Blinken via Zoom and urged him not to forget Afghans, including those stranded in Pakistan. Blinken commended NGOs and nonprofits for aiding Afghans. He said the government couldn’t do it alone. But as one NGO volunteer who heard his remarks noted, it’s the job government is supposed to be doing. In mid-July, the State Department announced it’s streamlining the SIV process, dropping one of the required forms. Then again, the agency promised to fast-track visas a year ago, too, but nothing changed.

Despite their plight, Afghans I spoke with praised the United States and are still glad they helped Americans fighting terrorism. “I will never forget their sacrifice and humanity for my country,” Amal said. “And I am happy and proud I worked closely with them to help keep them safe in the trenches.”

Hill said America has a duty to repay that loyalty: “We must follow through on our responsibility to get our friends out.”

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CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS STRUGGLE TO MEET THE GROWING DEMAND FOR SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION
ven before the pandemic upended the world, Kevin and Kristen Hamilton had their hands full. With four kids, including three with special needs, they struggled to find their footing in local schools in Somerset County, N.J. Andrew, a fifth grader, struggled with ADHD, and some school officials said his behavior hinted at autism. James, who spent his first four years of life in a Chinese orphanage, has bilateral limb differences and had academic and developmental delays. Emily, a pre-K student, has spina bifida, and like James joined the Hamilton family via adoption from China.

Then came COVID—and chaos. Kevin and Kristen both work from home. Trying to juggle all their children’s educational needs with their own work responsibilities proved impossible: “We literally couldn’t get anything done,” Kristen said.

Kevin and Kristen also realized that as Christians, a public school environment wasn’t working for their theater-loving oldest daughter, Gabrielle, an eighth grader. But where would they find a Christian school that could meet their laundry list of needs? Kristen searched online for nearby Christian schools, but none looked promising. Even if they did find one that could meet their children’s needs, would extra services mean extra fees?

Kristen’s brother, a Christian school administrator in Texas, cautioned her against getting her hopes up. Even if such a school existed, the Hamiltons probably wouldn’t be able to afford it, he said.

Christian pioneers

The demand for Christian special education is growing, but there’s still a long way to go if Christian schools are to catch up with public ones. Around 14 percent of public school students have disabilities, and by law, all public schools must offer special education programming. A March 2020 Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) survey found that only about 1 in 3 of its member schools offered special education services or programs. Of those that did, students with special needs made up just 7 percent of the school population, on average. But a few pioneering Christian schools are paving the way for others to stretch their learning limits.

Before President Gerald Ford signed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975, U.S. schools didn’t always have a place for students with disabilities. But some Christian schools valued students with special needs even before the federal government insisted on it.
Christian Reformed Church Pastor William Masselink and his wife, Mary, started Elim Christian School—then the Chicago Christian School for Handicapped Children—in 1948. Their son, Paul, had Down syndrome. Only four people in the Masselinks’ entire denomination had special education qualifications at that time.

The school now has 198 students. Many of them have multiple disabilities and often come with referrals—and tuition payments—from their local school districts due to their complicated needs.

But that reliance on public funds hasn’t compromised the school’s Christian focus. “We want children taught from the perspective that God is sovereign, that He has a purpose and a plan for each of us,” said Dan Vander Plaats, Elim’s director of advancement. “We believe that people with and without disabilities have a purpose and a place in God’s kingdom.”

In 1979, a group of Michigan parents pursued a similar vision, founding the Christian Learning Center to help equip Christian schools to meet the needs of all students, including students with disabilities. Now known as All Belong Center for Inclusive Education, the organization offers consultations, evaluations by school psychologists, professional development, and other resources. Last year it added school social workers to help address social-emotional support. With about 90 members in 11 states, membership has grown by 30 percent annually the last two years, said Executive Director Elizabeth Lucas Dombrowski.

Some Christian schools try to emulate the public school approach to special education. But Dombrowski said it works better to build a unique system around the needs of current or incoming students. “Our Christian schools are not going to look like public schools,” she said. “That’s not what we’re trying to go for in any other aspects of our education.”

Like a unicorn

That’s not what the Hamilton family was going for, either. In early September 2020, a mom Kristen met through a Facebook group contacted her with a possible solution for their family’s needs. Would the Hamiltons consider a school in Michigan? Kristen was skeptical about moving her family more than 700 miles just to be near a particular school. But she looked up the website anyway and thought, this school “feels sort of like a unicorn.”

Zeeland Christian School, founded in 1915 in Zeeland, Mich., serves about 1,000 children from pre-K to 8th grade. It first began implementing inclusive education in 1989. Stacy Deters, the school’s director of support services, said its support staff now works with about 60 students in a typical week. While the school doesn’t turn away students solely because of their needs, Deters said administrators do consider their current student population and whether the class in question has room for another child with extra needs.

Deters said Zeeland’s special needs students represent an array of conditions: Down syndrome, spina bifida, cerebral palsy, ADHD, and autism. Since COVID, an increasing number suffer from anxiety. Some are nonverbal, and two use assistive technology to communicate. Due to families adopting or fostering, some students are also dealing with trauma or conditions like fetal alcohol syndrome.

A 2014 paper in the Journal of Catholic Education found that funding is the biggest obstacle for Christian schools that want to educate students with varying needs. Zeeland makes it work with a creative mix of tuition, government funding, and fundraising. Special education services make up about 10 percent of the school’s budget, or around $700,000. Administrators factor that into the per-student tuition—about $7,500 per year—and spread the cost across the student body.

Head of School Tim McAboy sees sharing the cost as a natural fit for a Christian school. When he interviewed for the job in 2017, he’d never heard of
inclusive education. At first he saw Zeeland’s focus on special needs as a benefit for students with disabilities. But he soon realized the spiritual benefits for himself and his own family. “It’s the body of Christ—we are incomplete without one another,” he said. “It should not be any other way.”

A 2019 survey by ACSI bears that out: Alumni of Christian schools that include students with disabilities are almost twice as likely to continue in their faith as adults.

Zeeland employs seven salaried teachers with special education backgrounds and 20 part-time assistants. The assistants are generally assigned to classrooms instead of individual students, to help allow the students to be as independent as possible. Each student has a home base in a regular classroom, but students with extra needs have access to a support classroom for sensory breaks or extra lessons. Two speech therapists who work for the local public school district spend most of their time each week at Zeeland.

In late September, all six Hamiltons traveled to Michigan to visit Zeeland. In the school’s classrooms and hallways, Kristen noticed adaptive equipment she usually saw in therapy offices. Kristen said she and Kevin typically make more calculated decisions. But this time? “We took a leap,” she said. They enrolled their children at Zeeland and called a moving company.

**Embracing change**

As with the Hamiltons, it took a journey for Annapolis Area Christian School superintendent Rick Kempton to convince his staff to embrace inclusive education. When he first raised the idea back in 2015, he faced immediate pushback from several longtime staff members. The school in Annapolis, Md., traditionally focused on college preparation and required incoming students to pass an admissions test. Opening admission to just anyone, especially students with special needs, would radically change the school’s culture. But Kempton refused to give up. He chose a few key opponents to travel with him and the school principals to visit All Belong and some of its nearby member schools.

After their two-day tour, Kempton and his staff members returned to the airport to fly home. Sitting in the departure lounge, Kempton took a deep breath and asked the question he’d nervously pondered the whole trip. Did the visit change anyone’s mind? “It was unanimous,” Kempton said. Everyone was ready to welcome students with special needs.
Today Annapolis Area Christian School serves almost 900 students from kindergarten through 12th grade. About 260 used special education services or required accommodations last year. The school provides academic interventions and social-emotional services and offers an allotted workspace for private occupational therapists paid for by parents. Qualifying students can get speech and language services through area public schools.

Last year, the school served students with autism, learning disabilities, communication and language needs, and ADHD. A student who has Down syndrome is enrolled for this fall. About 10 students are currently on the waiting list. While the school still serves college-bound students, a placement test has replaced the previous admissions test.

**Welcomed and wanted**

It took several weeks for Kevin and Kristen Hamilton to move their family of six from New Jersey to Michigan. But by November 2020, the kids were ready to start in-person school again. COVID-19 restrictions kept most parents off campus, but administrators at Zeeland Christian School made an exception for the Hamiltons’ first day. It was still dark when they arrived that morning. When they walked in, Kristen heard praise music playing in the hallways and saw teachers greeting students at the door with fist-bumps and high-fives. At other schools, it had seemed like educators saw her family as a hassle. At Zeeland, “we just felt so welcomed,” she said, even with all their extra needs.

When James’ classmates learned how to play recorders in music class, his teacher talked with colleagues to figure out an alternative. Instead of the recorder, James played a melodica. It allowed him to participate without having to grip something tightly or fatigue his arms.

When doctors diagnosed Andrew with level 1 autism in fall 2021, Kristen didn’t worry about telling teachers and administrators. “It’s another part of who Andrew is, and we love him,” Andrew’s teacher told the family.

McAboy, the head of school, said when other school leaders ask for advice, he encourages them to start where they are. “Move forward with one family, with one student, and figure it out as you go, and before you know it, you’ll be doing it,” he said.

“Stepping out in faith means that we’re not going to have it completely figured out before we start, that there’ll be difficult days, that it’ll be complicated. But it’s worth it. The children are worth it. ... Our community’s worth it.”

**Classrooms in crisis**

**(FROM FAMINE TO WAR, DISRUPTIONS LIMIT LEARNING AROUND THE WORLD)**

**BY LAUREN DUNN & ONIZE OHIKERE**

Two miles from a bombed-out village in Myanmar, students worked quietly in an open-air jungle classroom as mortar explosions echoed in the distance. Their teacher had divided them into small groups in separate clearings to prepare to take their final exams. The teacher told them they had one hour to complete the test.

None of them protested about struggling to concentrate with a battle raging close by.

After Myanmar’s military coup on Feb. 1, 2021, ruling officials tried to reopen schools closed since the pandemic, with limited success. Over half of the country’s teachers—and about 90 percent of Myanmar’s students—refused to show up for class.


**BOTTOM:** Myanmar students use the jungle as a classroom. **RIGHT:** Rohingya refugees attend class at an open-air madrassa, or Islamic school, in a camp in Bangladesh.
in conflict-rife countries, leaving teachers struggling to keep educational needs at the forefront.

As Myanmar’s military junta sought to solidify its control over the country, some teachers opened their own schools in defiance and with significant risk. During a single week in July, the military arrested 15 teachers from an online school with ties to the National Unity Government, an anti-military group. Since the takeover, the United Nations has reported at least 260 attacks on schools.

Dave Eubank, director of Free Burma Rangers, said students in the jungle schools are always prepared to move because of attacks. “They get to a new hiding place, clear the jungle, make shelters, find a way to get food, and then start school again,” he said.

Resources vary widely at these clandestine schools. Some shelters are made from wood or bamboo. Teachers use dark rocks in place of chalkboards, while others use whiteboards they’d whisked away when they fled their villages.

Even before the 2021 military coup, members of the minority Rohingya group faced ethnic violence. After targeted military operations escalated in August 2017, the number of Rohingya fleeing to neighboring Bangladesh swelled to over 900,000. Today, many of the primarily Muslim families stay in camps, where the children attend schools typically run by international aid groups.

Fredrick Christopher, World Vision’s Rohingya Crisis Response director in Bangladesh, said by mid-July 2022, only about 10 percent of 6,000 camp learning centers had reopened their doors since COVID-19 first closed them.

Fires and flooding during seasonal rains compound school disruptions: A March 2021 fire killed at least 15 refugees and displaced 45,000. Violence also erupts between different groups living in the camp, prompting more school closures.

When schools are open, children attend class under bamboo structures with thatched roofs. Christopher said the refugees are not allowed to build concrete buildings. The pandemic also barred volunteers from entering the camp, which Christopher said kept organizations from addressing child marriage, child labor, and trafficking problems.

“When I see [the children] on a daily basis, my heart really bleeds,” he said. “They don’t have any hopes at all... [Parents] want their children to grow in knowledge and develop their skills and to fly away. But there is no school.”

Playing catch-up

Raucous chatter and laughter breaks the early morning quiet inside Rafiki Village, a 54-acre property one hour south of Ethiopia’s capital, Addis Ababa.
The village, run by Rafiki Foundation, provides schooling and housing for orphaned and vulnerable children. Each morning, teachers walk some 172 day students from the gate to the dining hall. The 51 children who live in the village have their meals during an earlier shift.

Divided mealtimes started with the pandemic, and the practice has continued, said Amy Ketcham, who oversees the center’s childcare program. When the Ethiopian government shut down schools on March 16, 2020, the Rafiki children kept busy. They repainted walkways, helped with mowing, and worked on creative art projects in their library. But their education suffered.

Schools reopened in September, but Ketcham said the government gave Rafiki’s classical Christian school only four weeks to help the children catch up to where they should have been at the start of the new school year. The youngest students showed the most learning deficiencies; still, the preschool had to alternate school days to comply with social distancing regulations.

“Our early childhood students, especially those going from kindergarten to first grade, were really lagging behind not only in language skills, but in numeracy skills, even in social skills,” Ketcham said.

Two months after students returned to class, war broke out between ethnic Tigrayan forces and government troops in the northern Tigray region.

Classes continued at Rafiki, but students and teachers felt the impact. Checkpoints complicated travel. The conflict also blocked some supply routes. The village prepares about 600 meals daily during the school year, and the staff struggled to obtain staples like beef. Tekle Kumera, the village administrator, said staff prepared meals over circles of firewood outside the kitchen until they could get cooking gas.

Fighting eased after a humanitarian truce in March, but its effects linger.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said more than 2.93 million children across Ethiopia are still out of school, mostly due to conflict. Aid groups are trying to pick up the slack. Karen Elliott, Rafiki’s executive director, said the center plans to take on 432 more children across its 10 African villages, including in Ethiopia. “We trust the Lord to provide what we need,” she said.

In the Western African nation of Mali, threats from Islamist groups have kept children out of school. The Norwegian Refugee Council recorded a 15 percent jump in out-of-school children in the past year.

But in the northern town of Touba, the Salesian missionaries have managed to keep their classical Christian education center open. At the mission’s technical college in the capital, Bamako, teachers used WhatsApp to send lesson notes and collect students’ assignments during the pandemic.

For students without smartphones, teachers printed copies of notes and assignments and dropped them off at the school. “The students would pick it up, solve it and return, and the teachers would collect it,” said the Rev. Roméo Salami, a school administrator.

When the government lifted pandemic restrictions, Salami said, some students could not return. The lockdown had cut off their parents’ income, leaving them with no money for school fees. School staff went through the registry to identify absent students, visit their homes, and offer discounts or other incentives to get them back to school.

“It’s a passion,” Salami said. “That’s what pushes us to go around and do everything possible to give a future to the young generation.”
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NOTEBOOK
All the rage
The pro-abortion front’s new tactic is to target small businesses

by CAROLINA LUMETTA & JOSH SCHUMACHER

JOHN LILLIS LOVES LIFE and coffee. He started Lifeboat Coffee Co., based in Phoenix, 10 years ago, branding it as “America’s Pro-Life Coffee Co.” That catchphrase eventually changed to “The Official Coffee of the People Who Love Life” as the business continued to post pro-life messages and support protections for the unborn.

So it surprised Lillis—aka “the Skipper”—when people who’d bought his self-roasted coffee for years and followed his social media pages suddenly turned on him after the Supreme Court’s Dobbs v. Jackson decision, in which five justices voted to overturn Roe v. Wade. Hate mail flooded his inbox: “[Obscenity] you.” “You hate women!” “I’m never buying your coffee again!”

One night, about a week after Dobbs, a brick flew through a $1,000 window at Lifeboat Coffee.

“The culture of death has been fomenting under the surface, and now it’s bubbling over,” Lillis told WORLD. “Anybody who offers joy versus suffering or life versus death, becomes a threat to them.”

Other pro-life companies have shared Lifeboat’s experience post-Dobbs: hate mail, social media savagery, and the occasional “brick, meet window” introduction. But pro-life owners must now also contend with invisible enemies in a post-Roe world, as armchair anarchists target them with fake online reviews.

We called half a dozen establishments that had experienced pro-abortion harassment. Of those, only two responded. The rest declined our interview requests, citing concerns about safety, and just kept quiet.

It’s easy to see why. In May, a coffee shop in Colorado “liked” and commented on a pro-life Instagram post. That led to a mass boycott that prompted the café to delete its social media accounts and hide identifying information for its employees. At a food business and coffee shop in Western Michigan, pro-abortion protesters sprayed “SHAME” in red paint over the business’s windows after finding out the owners attended a local church. We contacted the owners, but they worried that talking about their experience might renew unwanted attention and even turn violent.

Gen Z protesters have traded sit-ins for spamming. In the digital age, internet-savvy protesters can hide behind a screen, create fake accounts, and bury their identities, making detection nearly impossible. One activist organization, Gen Z for Change, →
advises its SAFER Initiative: The first letter of the acronym stands for “spam,” and one click on the initiative’s website allows armchair protesters to download a code that distributes a fake online review of a pregnancy resource center every 20 seconds. The same type of code has been replicated for other businesses deemed politically incorrect.

The U.S. Communications Decency Act protects third-party websites like Yelp from liability for reviews, and it also includes provisions for patrons to sue a business for posting fake reviews of itself. But legal recourse for an influx of reviews from people who have never entered the establishment is uncharted territory.

In some cases, businesses can sue customers or reviewers for libel or defamation. The catch? They have to prove not only damages but also the identity of the person who posted the review.

It’s not just Christian-owned businesses on the receiving end of pro-abortion ire. Morton’s The Steakhouse in Washington, D.C., became the rallying point for protesters on July 6 when activist groups learned conservative Justice Brett Kavanaugh (who voted to overturn Roe) was eating dinner there. Protesters swarmed outside the restaurant, forcing Kavanaugh and his security detail to retreat out a back entrance.

In the following days, online reviews tanked the high-brow restaurant from 4.5 stars to barely one. Comments like, “Sucks that they hate women,” or “If you don’t want protesters, don’t feed fascists,” filled Google, Yelp, and Facebook posts.

Morton’s umbrella corporation reached out to Yelp and Google, which ran keywords to remove most of the obviously politically motivated reviews. A Morton’s representative told Politico, “Politics, regardless of your side or views, should not trample the freedom at play of the right to congregate and eat dinner. ... Disturbing the dinner of all of our customers was an act of selfishness and void of decency.”

Afterward, protesters changed tactics. Thousands booked fake reservations at the restaurant, causing significant revenue loss until managers enforced a new policy to include credit card information in a reservation.

Patrons dine at Morton’s in Washington, D.C., where protesters showed up to harass Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh.

In a world increasingly connected online, internet reviews can make or break a small business. Interestingly, big tech companies disabled the review feature for pregnancy resource centers. Other oft-targeted businesses have tried to reply to Google reviews with civility, leaving a polite reminder that the reviewer has not been a customer and an offer to improve service.

But the attacks have also inspired fear. Lifeboat Coffee’s John Lillis said his teenage daughters—who used to help make food and coffee and clean up—no longer come by the shop.

Still, for the Skipper, the opposition is an opportunity to show kindness. When he receives a hateful email, Lillis said, he tries to craft a cheerful response: “Thanks for your feedback. God bless your day!”
STUDY LINKS

ABORTION AND HEART RISK

A study of low-income pregnant women suggests they are at higher risk of long-term cardiovascular disease (CVD) when their first pregnancy results in loss.

The study’s authors, who published their work in Open Heart on June 9, included both miscarriage and induced abortion in their definition of pregnancy loss. Using Medicaid data from over 1 million women living in a state that funds abortion, they reported an 18 percent increased risk of long-term CVD for women who miscarried or aborted their babies, compared with women who had live births, after controlling for variables such as age, race, and medical history. “A take-away message is that women should be advised and counseled, especially those who are seeking an abortion, that they may be exposed to higher cardiovascular risk later in life,” study co-author David Reardon told WORLD. —H.F.
SPORTS

Real women prevail
After a winning year in the pool, Lia Thomas loses out on prestigious NCAA award

by RAY HACKE

ONE THING’S CERTAIN:
Transgender swimmer Lia Thomas won’t win an NCAA Woman of the Year award.

In a move that was sure to relieve those who wish to keep biological males out of women’s sports, the NCAA surprisingly eliminated the former University of Pennsylvania athlete from consideration for the honor in late July. The governing body chose Sylvie Binder, a champion fencer for Columbia University in New York, to represent the Ivy League as a finalist for the award in Division I, the NCAA’s top division. The NCAA will announce the Woman of the Year winner in January.

The former Will Thomas became the first male to win an NCAA women’s swimming title earlier this year, placing first in the 500-yard freestyle at the Division I championships in Atlanta. He also tied for fifth in the 200 freestyle and placed eighth in the 100 free, displacing women for the honor of first-team All-American in both events. Last month the University of Pennsylvania nominated the swimmer for the Woman of the Year award.

The nomination ignited criticism from those who recognized Thomas had an unfair competitive advantage over his female competitors, since he had undergone puberty and competed in college for three years as a male. One of them was the University of Kentucky’s Riley Gaines, the swimmer who tied with Thomas in the 200 freestyle in Atlanta. She called the Woman of the Year nomination “yet another slap in the face to women.”

Now that he’s graduated from Penn, Thomas plans to attend law school and become an attorney to advocate for transgender rights. He also hopes to compete in the Olympic trials. At press time, there was no word on whether Thomas planned to file a discrimination lawsuit against the NCAA.

BASKETBALL TRAILBLAZER

NBA icon Bill Russell, who won 11 titles in 13 seasons playing with the Boston Celtics and was also the league’s first black head coach, died at age 88 on July 31. His death came nearly 50 years after Russell served as a pallbearer at the funeral of another trailblazing athlete—Jackie Robinson. When Robinson’s widow, Rachel, asked Russell to fill that role, Russell asked why she’d chosen him. “Because you’re his favorite athlete,” Rachel responded.

Russell’s prowess on the court probably had something to do with that—the 6-foot-10 center was a five-time Most Valuable Player, after all. But Russell’s civil rights activism likely had much to do with it, too: In 1961, for instance, Russell convinced the Celtics to skip an exhibition game in Lexington, Ky., after a restaurant there refused to serve him and his black teammates. Russell also marched with Martin Luther King Jr., ran an integrated basketball camp in Mississippi with Medgar Evers’ brother after Evers’ murder, and supported Muhammad Ali when the Muslim boxer went to prison for declining to serve in the Vietnam War for religious reasons. —R.H.
EDUCATION

Enrollment rollback
Public schools haven’t regained pre-pandemic numbers
by LAUREN DUNN

PUBLIC SCHOOL districts around the country saw drops in enrollment during the pandemic and the resulting remote learning that began two years ago. But a return to in-person classes hasn’t brought back all of the missing students.

According to a July American Enterprise Institute report, 82 percent of U.S. school districts served fewer students in 2022 than they did in 2020. California public school enrollment fell to its lowest ebb in at least 20 years, partially due to families moving out of state. Seattle Public Schools lost 6 percent of its student population from 2019 to 2022, and the district expects a further drop this year, even as local Catholic schools grew by about 6 percent. In New York City, where public school enrollment has dropped by 8 percent, the number of homeschoolers has doubled. Meanwhile, census data show families with young children leaving urban areas.

Despite declines in public school numbers overall, public charter schools grew during the pandemic. Many families have turned to private institutions. Education leaders say the falling birthrate is also beginning to affect student numbers.

Since schools are often funded on a per-pupil basis, districts have to address the lost revenue. The Center on Reinventing Public Education found that, due to lower student numbers, almost 40 percent of the 100 largest urban school districts are reducing staff or closing schools in an attempt to pool resources. Three districts in Texas, California, and Minnesota are closing at least nine schools each.

NEUTRAL SPACES FOR STUDENTS
As schools across the country grapple with restroom policies while serving transgender students, two schools in Virginia and Michigan are trying a different tack. John M. Gandy Elementary School, scheduled to open for the 2024-2025 school year in Ashland, Va., and Charles Hackley Middle School, planned for January 2024 in Muskegon, Mich., will have only gender-neutral restrooms, with fully enclosed stalls and a common sink area. Some other Virginia schools are also planning gender-neutral restrooms, and in California’s Long Beach Unified School District, new schools are required to include them. But while most schools with such facilities offer gender-neutral restrooms in addition to gendered, multi-stall restrooms, Gandy Elementary and Hackley Middle School claim to be among the first to provide gender-neutral restrooms exclusively. —L.D.
I WOULD LIKE TO set this up for you Robert Altman–style, like one of his films running two separate plots simultaneously that finally converge on one fateful day.

The first protagonist in this tandem narrative is your humble servant, who woke up uncharacteristically early one morning in the middle of the July heat wave. As Christian readers you will want to recall that uncharacteristic early wakings from sleep are not coincidences but may be pregnant with divine purpose. See Esther 6:1: “That night the king could not sleep. …”

The second protagonist is the ailanthus tree, literally “tree of heaven,” an invasive species from China whose distinctive feature is its rapid reproduction and aggressiveness toward native plants in its vicinity. Reaching heights of 49 feet, it is considered a noxious weed, and if that were not enough, it gives aid and comfort to the menacing lanternfly. Its ignominious journey from the Far East took it to Europe in the 1740s and the United States in 1784.

Now arrives the fateful day in question. When I was awakened, “before one could recognize another,” as the ancient Hebrews might say (Ruth 3:14), thinking to beat the worst of the sun, I decided to head to church immediately to start my weeding assignment. It was 6:15 a.m. when I stationed myself along the property line, under the neighbor’s aforementioned ailanthus tree. After a delightfully serendipitous encounter and prayer with an early walker cutting through the parking lot, I did my weeding and returned home at 9 a.m.

About noon, my famously understated boss tacked at the end of a text requesting floor mopping of the new sanctuary: “By the way, a huge branch fell from the tree right in the area that you were working in this morning. Glad you weren’t there when it happened.” He spent part of the next day with a power saw cutting the 20-foot-long trunk into stacking logs, and the ones I could lift I hauled off to the dumpster in the wheelbarrow.

Weeks later I ran into a construction worker who had been on site, and he made a point to say: “That branch fell right where you were 15 minutes after you left. I saw it fall.” “I don’t understand it,” I said. “There was no wind that day.” “It must have been rotten,” he guessed.

You will forgive my present little obsession with all things ailanthus, for it is not every day you get to know the cause that nearly killed you, the bullet that had your name on it but for the grace of God and a decision to skip coffee. What if I had slept in and had breakfast? I find myself thinking, I’d be dead right now. And wouldn’t that be the well-deserved judgment of God?

Which is a funny line of thinking, because the opposite is what in fact occurred: I was spared from death. “To God the Lord belong escapes from death” (Psalm 68:20).

Was the great limb’s crash a warning, then? “You’re spared this time, but stop trifling with sin or else!” Note the intriguing ambiguity in Christ’s comment on freak deaths. On the one hand He seems to delink those deaths from sin: “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners … because they suffered in this way?” On the other hand, He calls those deaths a warning: “But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:1-5).

And another thing: Why don’t all men receive “escapes from death?” Does God show partiality? He says He does not. We must presume that He is patient and merciful with all, and that we all, like so many spiritually blind and stubborn Mr. Magoo, have been spared innumerable deaths throughout our pilgrimage. We weren’t aware of them, that’s all.

“It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). Lazarus died two times, poor bloke. And as for why the Lord takes some so soon and others tarry, this is not for us to know. That weeding day was not my time.

But I am warned.

VOICES ANDRÉE SEU PETERSON

Life and limb

Escapes from death belong to God, including those from under a tree
Key memory verses to help you KNOW and SHARE the Gospel

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”
- John 14:6

scripturememory.com/TheWay
GROVE CITY COLLEGE professor Carl Trueman is, as they say, “having a moment.” I hear his name, and more importantly, his thinking, in multiple contexts—including in church one recent Sunday, when our guest speaker, a brainy missionary named Brooks Buser, quoted Trueman’s 2020 book, The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self. The book, along with Trueman’s latest, Strange New World (Crossway 2022), explores how we arrived at this surreal time in history when feelings define—and increasingly twist—reality (see p. 44). Here I ask Trueman a few not-so-usual questions.

America is your adopted country. What do you love most about her? How has she changed in ways you regret?

America has been very kind to me and my family. For me it has delivered on that American promise: Work hard and you will find you do well. What I have seen since moving here from England a few weeks before 9/11 is a nation increasingly ill at ease with itself. It shocks me how so many Americans seem to have contempt for their country now. Given the support for this malign silliness among so many of the ruling class, I fear that the country will soon talk itself into mediocrity through this indulgence in masochistic self-loathing.

What is one thing often said or written about you that doesn’t happen to be true? I am told by others that members of the tweeting class have accused me of every sin under the sun (short of actual murder) and of being everything from a cultural Marxist and radical feminist to a white supremacist and misogynist. I hope that none of those accusations ever becomes true! A less highly charged claim regularly made about me is that I am a theologian. I am not. I have no formal theological training. I studied Classics as an undergraduate, Reformation history as a postgraduate, and I have spent my life working as an intellectual historian, albeit largely of religious ideas.

You’re a professor and author, but have also served as a pastor. How does your time as pastor of Cornerstone Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Pennsylvania inform your life and work now? It taught me that ideas are one thing, human beings another. I want to be clear and firm in my critiques of ideas but compassionate and respectful when dealing with individuals. I am very careful, for example, that when addressing matters such as the LGBTQ movement, I do so in a manner that does not compromise the truth but also acknowledges the pain of the people and the families for whom this is not an abstract problem but a very real, personal issue.

When you’re not writing, teaching, or speaking, what avocation(s) do you enjoy? My greatest joy is spending time with my wife and my family. My wife and I regularly open our houses to students for hospitality, which is tremendous fun. I also love riding my road bike around the lanes of rural Pennsylvania. And I’m taking lessons in bluegrass banjo playing.

As the culture has crossed from what now seems by comparison garden-variety moral depravity into a kind of mass psychosis, Christians are asking, “OK … now what?” How do you answer that question? First, remember that we know how the story ends: Christ and His Church will win. That does not mean my congregation or my denomination, still less my nation, will win. But it does mean that Christ will bring all His own home. Second, we need therefore to think long-term. If we think that the success of Christ does depend upon us and should be fulfilled by a week from Wednesday through our efforts, we are setting ourselves up for despair. Third, focus on your family and your church. Be a strong community in the present. That is surely a more effective witness than any argument, let alone a silly tweet. Love the people and the place in which the Lord has set you, do the work He has given you to do, and trust Him for the rest.
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