MAINLINE CHURCHES: FROM PEWS TO CONDOS

WORLD

JUNE 27, 2015

Our books of the year

2015 BOOKS ISSUE

Brilliant fiction, worldwide friction, careful depiction
We don’t believe in paying for things that break God’s heart.
So when we learned our health insurance plan covered the morning-after pill, we knew . . .

We had to find a better healthcare option!

**Medi-Share is our answer.**
It’s not insurance, it’s Christian medical sharing—thousands of Christians who share each other’s healthcare bills. We pay half the cost of other healthcare programs, and we know every penny is helping fellow believers. Plus, the healthcare law has a special provision for Medi-Share members. So we’re not required to buy insurance or face penalties. **Medi-Share is healthcare without compromise.**


- Over 143,000 members sharing your medical bills
- Less than half the cost of other healthcare programs
- No enrollment period—you can join any time

Medi-Share™ Affordable, Biblical Healthcare

Medi-Share is not health insurance. Medi-Share is not available in Montana.
This fall, you can study the ancient text of Scripture with Dr. Patterson through this flexible-access class on the book of 1 Corinthians, which can be taken on campus or online and is free to anyone wishing to audit the course. Designed as a massive open online course (MOOC)—an innovative educational method practiced by the nation’s leading universities—Dr. Patterson's class provides seminary-level training to individuals, families, small groups, and churches for free. The course is also available for undergraduate and graduate credit at the standard tuition rates.

**Sign up today.**

Paige Patterson serves as president and professor of theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He is also a noted outdoorsman, scuba diver, and adventurer, holding memberships in Safari Club International and the National Rifle Association. He is author of commentaries on 1 Corinthians, 1 Peter, Titus, Song of Solomon, and Revelation, as well as numerous articles on various aspects of theology.

Visit [swbts.edu/mooc](http://swbts.edu/mooc) to see course times, download an application and find out more about registration.
Christian Businessman Giving Away $10,000 Trip To Scotland

I’m so excited about the worldwide success of our new family audio drama “In Freedom’s Cause” that...

I’m giving away a $10,000 “Braveheart” tour and “trip of a lifetime” for two to Scotland!

Dear World Magazine Reader,

Have you had a chance to listen to America’s top selling audio drama for families... In Freedom’s Cause?

If you had, you would know why it’s created so much excitement among Christian parents and grandparents. And why this new way of learning history is spreading like wildfire from one homeschool family to another across the entire world. (The whole idea, of course, is to make learning history fun.)

Hearing the story of Scottish freedom in In Freedom’s Cause is enough to stir the soul, but actually seeing Scotland up close, walking where William Wallace walked... is a life-changing event!

So I’ve decided to send two people... from one winning family... to one of the most beautiful and historic places on the globe... to see for themselves the true and very remarkable “Christian History” side of the Braveheart story.

To get your copy of In Freedom’s Cause (be sure to submit your entry for the trip) go to www.InFreedomsCause.com.

Or to get all contest details and enter (no purchase necessary), go to InFreedomsCauseTour.com.

Important

My legal team wants us to make it abundantly clear -- there is a slight, but very cool and very family-friendly “catch” to winning the contest and going on the trip.

In fact, when you find out about how to win this contest, you’re going to be even more excited about how much fun this is actually going to be.

Even Better: If you love Godly, fast-moving, family-friendly entertainment, then I’m convinced that purchasing a copy of In Freedom’s Cause will be one of the best decisions you’ll ever make, whether you win the contest or not. Kirk Cameron recently listened to In Freedom’s Cause and told us this: “My son’s favorite! Can’t wait for the next one!”

And you know what? Even though we have hundreds of reviews just like that one... I think his comment sums the whole thing up.

Go to InFreedomsCause.com and get your copy of In Freedom’s Cause today, use coupon code WLD8 to get 50% off the Family Four Pack! (And then be sure to submit your entry for the giveaway.)

And for all the details on how to enter our “Trip To Scotland” giveaway, simply head to InFreedomsCauseTour.com. (No purchase is necessary to enter.)

God bless and safe travels!

Bill Heid, Executive Producer, Under Drake’s Flag & In Freedom’s Cause

P.S. Already have a copy of In Freedom’s Cause? No problem! Just go to InFreedomsCauseTour.com.
COVER STORY

Mmmm ... four books of the year

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Every moment, every milestone, every breath belongs to Him. You believe it. And we nurture it—with the web’s largest selection of Christian books, Bibles, gifts, music and resources. Always at the very best value. Because ultimately, “everything Christian” isn’t simply what we sell. It’s who we are.
My, how you readers took me seriously just three issues back. Imagine, I challenged you in our May 16 edition to pretend that you are the owner/operator of a neighborhood bakery (see “Taking the baker’s challenge,” May 16). In walks a homosexual couple, asking you to prepare a cake for their wedding coming up a month from now.

Then I made my challenge very specific. I was interested, to be sure, to get a sense of how WORLD’s readers might line up into opposing camps on such a volatile issue. But that was secondary. My main goal was to discover whether we, as a group, might come up with some winsome rhetoric for delivering what was likely to be a negative message. I specifically asked you all to follow the pattern Jesus used so often in His public ministry. Make your point, I said, by asking a pertinent question designed to help clarify the issue. And I added: “No smart-aleck put-downs. No insults.”

By June 4, I received more than 200 replies to that invitation—the biggest response I’ve received to any column since WORLD’s first issue almost 30 years ago. About 165 of the replies came by email, the rest by traditional mail. They came from all over the United States. At least five came from readers who are imprisoned and apparently have a little extra time to devote to puzzlers of this kind.

You took me, I must tell you, somewhat too seriously—even while a great number of you ignored my most important assignment! I thought I suggested that brevity would be a virtue in framing such a question. But fully a third of you filled two or even three pages with your eloquent arguments on one side or the other of the baker’s choice. And typically, the question I’d asked for was either nowhere to be found, or buried so far in your prose that its force was totally lost.

The question looms
I HAVEN’T YET HEARD A GOOD ANSWER TO THE BAKER’S CHALLENGE

Conservative evangelicals don’t by any means agree on what the baker’s basic response should be.

"Which of these three," Jesus memorably summarized after telling the story of the good Samaritan, “proved to be a real neighbor?”

In that brief, pithy query—as at so many other times in His teaching—Jesus both surprised His listeners and stretched their understanding to brand-new levels. Again and again, He managed to go right to the heart of a matter by springing on His listeners an unexpected question that summarized the whole matter.

My goal three columns back was to explore together our aptitude to imitate Jesus’ remarkable rhetoric. Might we find some collective ability to speak the truth about homosexuals and marriage—and still to demonstrate at the very same time a winsome spirit?

When I tell you bluntly that you have so far flunked my test, I hope you’ll hear that judgment against the backdrop of my own prior failure. I’d been trying for several weeks myself to propose a model of a penetrating question that would dazzle and silence (and ultimately help) the would-be cake buyers. Only after puzzling unsuccessfully for some time over that self-inflicted assignment did I pass it on in my column to all of you.

So, after the fact, here’s my sense of things. I failed my own test repeatedly, unable to address the issue with something memorable, clever, or pointed. So I turned to you for help—but even with more than 200 submissions, you too missed the mark. You’d be embarrassed by some of what was suggested. The proposals were full of put-downs and self-defensiveness.

Part of the problem is that we conservative evangelicals don’t by any means agree on what the baker’s basic response should be. Should he make and sell the cake—or should he exercise his rights and say no? Should he, as a surprising number of you proposed, make the cake and hand it back to his customers as a gift?

Or is there, I can’t help wondering, still some way to summarize this whole dilemma in the form of a pointed, good-spirited, helpful question that we might all memorize and tuck away for use when we’re surprised by the events of some future day?

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WOULD YOU RATHER
YOUR DAUGHTER TRY ON SOMEONE ELSE'S FAITH?

...OR HAVE HER OWN?

When your daughter leaves home she'll be confronted with an attractive display of ideas and beliefs. She might even be tempted to try them on, see how they fit. Make sure her faith already fits.

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A Thoroughbred named American Pharoah made history and carried horse racing into the limelight when it jumped across the finish line in first place at the Belmont Stakes in Elmont, N.Y., nabbing the sport’s first Triple Crown in decades. The last horse to win all three races in the Triple Crown series—the Belmont Stakes, the Kentucky Derby, and the Preakness Stakes—was Affirmed, in 1978. The horse’s name was misspelled during registration (it should have been “Pharaoh”).
JUNE 2
SKY SPYING

Dozens of small, nondescript Cessna aircraft that sometimes fly in circles above U.S. cities are actually FBI surveillance planes, the Associated Press said in a report. Over the course of a month the AP identified at least 50 of the planes, which often flew in unusual counterclockwise patterns above such cities as Seattle, Minneapolis, Chicago, Boston, Dallas, Houston, Phoenix, and Washington, D.C. The planes, registered with fake companies, carry surveillance cameras and occasionally technology to track cell phones on the ground. The FBI has used the spy planes to support its ground operations since at least the 1980s, but has kept them quiet. The Drug Enforcement Administration and the U.S. Marshals Service have similar programs.

JUNE 5
CRUISE AND CALAMITY

Rescuers looking for survivors inside a cruise ship that sank in the Yangtze River in central China found mostly bodies. The Oriental Star capsized while caught in a windstorm June 1, and out of the 456 crew and predominately middle-aged and elderly vacationers aboard, just 14 people survived, including the captain. Family members of the dead questioned why the captain did not drop anchor during the storm, while Communist officials tried to censor media reports of the recovery effort. It was China’s worst ship disaster since 1948, when the steamship Kiangya sank near Shanghai, killing up to 3,920.
Joseph “Sepp” Blatter announced his pending resignation as president of FIFA, international soccer’s governing body, just four days after his reelection to a fifth term—and just six days after U.S. investigators indicted nine current and former FIFA officials for alleged involvement in a long-running scheme of fraud and money laundering. The U.S. Justice Department said FIFA officials awarded soccer marketing rights in exchange for bribes and kickbacks worth over $150 million, and took bribes to cast votes allowing South Africa to host the 2010 World Cup. In a separate probe, Swiss officials were investigating whether Russia and Qatar fairly won their bids to host the World Cup in 2018 and 2022. Blatter was not among those indicted but served as FIFA president throughout the time of the alleged corruption.
LETHAL HEAT

A scorching heat wave descended on India from mid-April to early June, driving temperatures to 118 degrees Fahrenheit, melting asphalt roads, and causing 2,500 deaths from dehydration and heatstroke. Unreliable or nonexistent electricity meant most Indians went without air conditioning, and some took to their roofs to avoid stifling indoor heat. Delayed monsoon rains, needed to cool the air and quench crops, finally arrived in southern India June 5.
JUNE 2
SHOT IN BOSTON
Boston police and FBI investigators shot and killed a black Muslim man, Usaama Rahim, who they said lunged at them with a foot-long, military-style knife after they tried to question him. Rahim, 26, had been under FBI surveillance for allegedly planning to carry out a jihadi attack. Hours before his death, investigators said Rahim told his nephew, David Wright, in a secretly recorded phone call that he planned to “go after them, those boys in blue... ’cause it’s the easiest target,” a reference to police officers. Police later arrested Wright at his Everett, Mass., home.

MAY 28
HASTERT ACCUSED
A federal grand jury indicted former U.S. House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert, 73, on charges of lying to FBI agents and making illegal payments to keep an undisclosed person quiet about “prior misconduct” by Hastert. The indictment claimed Hastert, an Illinois Republican who retired in 2007, paid $1.7 million to someone from Yorkville, Ill., where Hastert was a high-school teacher and wrestling coach from about 1965 to 1981. Officials familiar with the investigation said the misconduct claim involved inappropriate touching of a former male student. Hastert on June 9 pleaded not guilty to the charges.
**YEMEN** Three-quarters of the Yemeni population is in dire need of food, water, or medical supplies because of the country’s civil war and a Saudi-led naval blockade, the UN said.

**AFGHANISTAN** Three gunmen stormed a compound at night and killed nine Afghans working for People in Need, a Czech charity. Militants have killed 26 aid workers this year.

**MEXICO** Mexicans voted in midterms on June 7, electing their first independent governor and taking several legislative seats away from President Enrique Peña Nieto’s ruling party.

**UNITED STATES** The wholesale price of eggs hit a record $2.62 per dozen due to a Midwest bird flu outbreak affecting 47 million turkeys and chickens.

**CUBA** The United States on May 29 officially removed Cuba from its list of state sponsors of terror, paving the way for both countries to re-establish mutual embassies.

**TURKEY** More than 3,000 Syrians fled into Turkey over two days in early June, escaping fighting between Kurdish forces and ISIS and joining 1.7 million Syrian refugees in Turkey.

**MALAYSIA** At least 16 climbers died after a strong earthquake shook the country’s highest peak, 13,435-foot Mount Kinabalu, and buried trekking routes with rocks and boulders.

**SOUTH KOREA** More than 2,000 schools closed due to an outbreak of Middle East respiratory syndrome, or MERS. By June 9 the country had logged 95 cases and seven deaths.

**FRANCE** The European Court of Human Rights ruled it was legal to remove a minimally conscious man’s feeding tube at the behest of his wife and doctors, although his parents objected.
Looking ahead

JUNE 21 Just in time for its 40th anniversary, classic Hollywood thriller Jaws will return to theaters today. The limited release, sponsored by Turner Classic Movies, will take place at 500 theaters across the country. TCM will sponsor an encore presentation on June 24.

JUNE 23 NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell today will hear New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady’s appeal of Brady’s four-game suspension for his role in the ball deflation scandal that rocked the AFC Championship Game. The Patriots earlier accepted a $1 million fine and a loss of two draft picks due to the scandal.

JUNE 26 Tech giant Apple will begin selling its new Apple Watch in stores today. In the weeks since its April release, the newest gadget has only been available through online sales. June 26 will also mark the day Apple expands watch sales in Italy, Mexico, South Korea, Spain, and Switzerland.

JULY 1 The U.S. Army will begin transitioning to a new camouflage design for fatigues today. The Army says it hopes to phase out the old camouflage pattern by October 2018. Until then, Army units in combat uniforms could be a mish-mash of designs.

JULY 4 Americans will celebrate the Fourth of July today with BBQs and parades. President Barack Obama will take in the festivities from the South Lawn of the White House where in the past he has hosted volleyball games for military families, concerts, and the traditional fireworks display.

Download WORLD’s iPad app today; details at wng.org/iPad
The Supreme Court on June 1 set a high bar for employers to accommodate religious practice in the workplace, siding with a Muslim woman who was denied employment over her hijab. The court ruled 8-1 that employers can’t claim ignorance as a way of avoiding accommodating religious practice in the workplace.

The ruling has already affected other similar cases and has implications for anyone practicing his or her beliefs in the workplace, such as Christians who don’t believe in working on Sundays. Evangelical, Muslim, Sikh, and Jewish groups filed an amicus brief together in the case, arguing on the woman’s behalf.

“The law may not assume that people are irreligious unless proven otherwise, and it should not assume that the workplace is a religion-free zone,” wrote lawyers from the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty in a separate brief.

In 2008, managers at an Abercrombie & Fitch clothing store in Tulsa, Okla., denied Samantha Elauf, then age 17, a job, despite Elauf’s favorable scores in the application and interview process. The managers cited her hijab in deciding against hiring her. Elauf is a practicing Muslim and her hijab, or headscarf, didn’t conform with Abercrombie’s dress code for employees on the floor. But they didn’t ask her about it or try to work out an accommodation.

Under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, employers cannot discriminate in hiring on the basis of religion, and they are supposed to provide reasonable accommodation of religious practice if it doesn’t expose them to “undue hardship.” The almost unanimous Supreme Court said the burden of accommodation was on Abercrombie. The company would violate Title VII as long as not accommodating religious practice was part of the motive in not hiring someone.

“An employer may not make an applicant’s religious practice, confirmed or otherwise, a factor in employment decisions,” wrote Justice Antonin Scalia in a short, tight opinion, coming in under seven pages. “[A]n employer who acts with the motive of avoiding accommodation may violate Title VII even if he has no more than an unsubstantiated suspicion that accommodation would be needed.”

The court said religious practice has special protection under Title VII.

“Title VII does not demand mere neutrality with regard to religious practices—that they be treated no worse than other practices,” Scalia wrote. “Rather, it gives them favored treatment, affirmatively obligating employers not ‘to fail or refuse to hire or discharge any individual... because of such individual’s religious observance and practice.’”

Justice Clarence Thomas was the only dissenting vote.

The ruling had immediate effect on another religious employment case. Last summer in Nobach v. Woodland Village Nursing Center, the 5th Circuit had ruled against a Jehovah’s Witness employed at a nursing home who had been fired for refusing to pray the rosary with a patient. The employee told her boss when she was fired that praying the rosary was against her religion.

The 5th Circuit ruled that Woodland wasn’t liable because the company didn’t have sufficient knowledge of her religious objection. A week after the EEOC v. Abercrombie & Fitch ruling the Supreme Court ordered the 5th Circuit to reconsider the Woodland case in light of Abercrombie.
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— Ron B.

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DISPATCHES

HUMAN RACE

ACQUITTED

Eight people reportedly convicted in April for the 2012 shooting of Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai weren’t convicted after all. Pakistani officials changed course on June 5, revealing only two suspects in fact received 25-year sentences, while the others were acquitted due to lack of evidence. The Taliban took responsibility for the attack on the then-15-year-old schoolgirl. The trial, held in secret, raised suspicion. Public prosecutor Sayed Naeem claims he was misquoted in April. The eight acquitted men’s whereabouts are unknown.

ANNOUNCED

Rick Perry, the former 14-year governor of Texas, on June 4 announced his presidential candidacy in Addison, Texas. “This will be a show-me-don’t-tell-me election where voters look past the rhetoric to the real record,” he said, touting his experience dealing with border security and leading the nation’s top job-creating state. Perry’s 2012 presidential bid was unsaddled by gaffes, including during one debate in which he forgot the name of a government agency he hoped to eliminate, but he says he’s better prepared in this campaign.

EVOLVING

After what he said were “countless hours of prayer, study, conversation and emotional turmoil” author and Eastern University professor Tony Campolo released a statement on June 8 endorsing same-sex marriage and saying the church should accept unrepentant “gay Christian couples who have made a lifetime commitment to one another.” He compared opposition to same-sex marriage in the church to Christians in the past who supported slavery. David Neff, former editor of Christianity Today, posted a Facebook message supporting Campolo’s new position.

SHOT

Hartford, Conn., pastor Augustus Sealy is recovering from three gunshot wounds received outside First Church of the Nazarene on May 24. The bullets shattered his femur as he arranged flags for a Memorial Day Sunday tradition. No suspect is in custody, but the family has prayed for the person, wife Sharon said. The drive-by shooting added to a wave of violence Hartford has experienced in recent weeks, mirroring other troubled cities. Holiday weekend shootings wounded or killed at least 108 people in Chicago, Baltimore, and New York.

SETTLED

Unmarried lesbian partners Jaclyn Pfeiffer and Perry Jenkings/Getty Images • Cam Polo: handout • Methodist-church: Getty Images • Cortés: Bradley C. Bower • Biden: Ann Heisey/aP foto • Follow us on Twitter: @WORLD_mag

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Kelly Bardier will receive $28,476 from a Florida church over a dispute as employees of the church’s day care. The couple threatened to sue Aloma United Methodist Church under a county ordinance, claiming they were fired, while the church maintains they quit. The United Methodist Church accepts churches on both sides of the question of whether homosexuality is sinful, and Aloma said the couple was simply in a sexual relationship while unmarried, which remains discouraged in the UMC. But LGBT-affirming Florida bishop Ken Carter chastised Aloma and prompted the church to settle on May 18. The church will meet with gay rights groups.

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The price of a child in Nepal is $500 to human traffickers. So says Sam Ellis, a Southern California youth pastor helping rebuild homes in the earthquake-ravaged nation. As many as 15,000 women and children are targeted every year in the Himalayan nation, but the risk has increased this year with many displaced. Families who lost livelihoods now face traffickers promising jobs, authorities say. Many end up in South Asian brothels and garment sweatshops. Indian officials and NGOs have rescued dozens of children in India so far.

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Beyond Bieber

Walmart raised wages and handed over thermostat controls to individual stores. But no action brought the kind of ovation from employees like one the company announced June 3: an end to Celine Dion and Justin Bieber. More than 3,000 employees gathered in Fayetteville, Ark., cheered when Walmart officials told them the company would phase out looped CDs featuring pop stars Dion and Bieber playing on each store’s public address system. Instead of playing the short, looped Dion and Bieber mix—which employees insist has been playing in most stores for months—a company DJ will arrange the in-house music.

Cheaper by the hundred

When Jaxton Zanger was born on April 8, he was the second child of parents Austin and Ashleigh Zanger. However, for great-grandparents Leo and Ruth Zanger, Jaxton marked the 46th great-grandchild. In all, the Quincy, Ill., couple has 12 children, 53 grandchildren, 46 great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandchild—more than 100 children in their lives. “The good Lord has just kept sending them,” Leo Zanger, who has been married 59 years, told the Quincy Herald-Whig. The Zanger family’s numbers make holidays challenging, according to one of the grandsons: “We rent out a church hall.”

L.A. excess

If Nile Niami succeeds, his behemoth Los Angeles residential development will become the most expensive house in the world. According to city records, Niami, a film producer and speculative developer, has started moving earth on what will become a 74,000-square-foot house high atop a hill in L.A.’s Bel Air neighborhood. The compound will include three smaller guest houses and will require builders to remove 40,000 cubic yards of earth from the hilltop. Niami’s listing price: $500 million.

Reptilian citizen

Tokyo city officials have one more resident to account for: Godzilla. In a special April 9 event, city officials issued a residency permit for the fictional giant lizard best known for climbing the Tokyo skyline. A man in a Godzilla costume posed for photos during the event beside city officials holding his residency certificate and a plaque signifying Godzilla as an official tourism ambassador for the Shinjuku ward of Tokyo.
Lessons from the past
When workers in early June began taking out chalkboards at Emerson High School in Oklahoma City, Okla., to make room for new whiteboards, they found something behind the chalkboards they weren’t expecting: Older chalkboards with almost perfectly preserved chalk lessons from 1917. The lessons included work from teachers and students in math, history (with drawings of the pilgrims), handwriting, reading, cleanliness, and music. The district and the city plan to find a way to preserve the chalk work from the city’s past. “The penmanship blows me away, because you don’t see a lot of that anymore,” Principal Sherry Kishore told the Oklahoman. “Some of the handwriting in some of these rooms is beautiful.”

Driven to drive
Drenched by a month of heavy rains and rising floodwaters, rancher Pat Henscey turned to a 19th-century solution to save his cattle. On May 31, the East Texas rancher saddled his horse, rounded up some cowboys, and commenced an old-fashioned cattle drive to move his herd out of pasture in danger of flooding. Henscey moved his herd through Dayton, Texas, where residents came out with lawn chairs and treated the event like a parade. The Liberty Bell Ranch herd will graze at a borrowed rail yard until floodwaters subside.

Pork payoff
Years after the bacon fad began, officials with the Indiana lottery hope to cash in by using it to entice ticket buyers. The Hoosier Lottery debuted a new bacon-scented scratch-and-sniff scratch-off lottery ticket, with winners receiving cash prizes up to $10,000 as well as the possibility to win a 20-year supply of bacon. To celebrate the new lottery offering, industry group Indiana Pork will offer bacon tastings and bacon-themed giveaways in three Indiana cities in June and July.

Costly cheers
When Lanarcia Walker crossed Senatobia (Miss.) High School’s graduation stage on May 21, the senior’s family cheered loudly—too loudly for some tastes. Moments later, Walker’s father, aunt, and two other relatives were asked to leave the event for ignoring the prohibition on loud cheering in the middle of graduation exercises. Days later, at the direction of Superintendent Jay Foster, police officers issued arrest warrants on the family members and others, charging the cheerers with disturbing the peace. Each charged well-wisher faces a $500 bond and a June 9 court date.
From 2005 to 2007, HBO ran a series called Rome. It was the most elaborate and costly cable series produced up to that time, and in some ways it was excellent: brilliantly acted, historically rich, and lavishly detailed. The plot circled around the pivotal years leading to the assassination of Julius Caesar, who “bestrode the world like a colossus” (according to Shakespeare) before a band of conspirators, driven by motives venal and noble, brought him down. The Season One DVDs included fascinating historical notes about politics, Latin derivatives, and daily life on the streets of antiquity’s greatest city.

But in another way, Rome was awful. Pornographic graffiti popped up all over the sets, and the real thing featured prominently in the storyline. One instance of full-frontal nudity stood out among many instances of partial nudity, and the violence sometimes involved literal buckets of blood. Though HBO, as is its wont, sensationalized the sex and gore, scholarly advisers to the show assured us that life in Rome, ca. 40 B.C., was very much as depicted.

Into such a world Christ was born. Since 2011, the most popular series on HBO is Game of Thrones. For those of us largely innocent of pop culture, it’s a dungeons-and-dragons fantasy based on a series of novels by George R. R. Martin, detailing endless intrigues between warring families who rule mythical kingdoms. The synopsis reads like a score sheet for the Wars of the Roses (one source for the novels), fueled by gruesome murders, wrenching betrayals, and casual, brutal, or multiple couplings. Every season ups the body count while the plot circles around an empty moral vortex.

Such might the world be (minus dragons) if Christ had never come. In fact, devotees of the show like to point out how illustrative it is of human nature unconstrained by conscience, philosophy, or religion. But even faithful watchers sometimes complain that Game of Thrones goes too far. In the notorious “Red Wedding” scene of Season Three, a pregnant woman was stabbed repeatedly through the belly. This season’s “they went too far” episode included the brutal rape of a character who had become a feminist icon. Novelist Martin defends the show with the such-is-life argument: “The true horrors of human history derive not from orcs and Dark Lords, but from ourselves.” Not for nothing is he called the “anti-Tolkien.” Though periodically an online reviewer or blogger will swear off the show forever, and Christians advise other Christians to stop watching, the seasons roll on: Five just concluded, and Six has begun filming. Fans have a year to anticipate the next “too far” scenario.

I’ve never seen an entire episode of Game of Thrones. That’s no credit to someone who sat through 12 episodes of Rome, but I couldn’t go for 13. Once Caesar was dispatched, only gore and skin remained, swirling around an empty vortex. The emptiness was getting to me.

About a hundred years after the actual assassination of Julius Caesar, a man sat in a prison in Rome and wrote, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable…if there is anything worthy of praise, think on these things.” The city outside those stone walls was even more depraved, if anything, than the place gaudily depicted on HBO. He had encountered the graffiti and the bawdy street performances and vicious brawls. And Paul—“chief of sinners”—also knew the depravity in his own heart.

But Christ had come and filled the empty center. Paul now saw everything from that perspective. Rather than rail against gladiator games and pornographic plays, he directed his readers to truth, nobility, excellence, and the source of all those good things—born as a man to dignify men and women. Paul’s advice was not about seeking wholesome diversions, but about centering ourselves in Christ.

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FOR THOSE WHO HAVE EVER PRAYED,

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If Chris Pratt’s character on Parks and Recreation, Andy Dwyer, were to write a movie script about a dinosaur park starring his alter-ego, karate-chopping FBI agent Burt Macklin, it would probably look a lot like Jurassic World. That may sound like a negative reaction, and I don’t necessarily intend it as a positive one; but I can’t entirely pan the movie either. There is a sense in which Jurassic World doesn’t seem to be trying to be a good film in the accepted definition of the word, merely an outrageously action-packed one. How seriously can one take, for example, a storyline that begins with a genetically engineered super-dino christened Indominus Rex? Or one that includes an evil private security contractor with a plan to replace drones and other wartime technology with weaponized velociraptors? Perhaps there’s some analysis to be made of Hollywood’s ongoing unflattering portrayals of our military, but that would be giving the script way (read that as way, way, way) too much credit.

The rest of the storyline gleefully includes every eye-roll-inducing trope ever crammed into a summer popcorn flick. The rugged-est of rugged men, former Navy Seal Owen Grady (Pratt) now works as a dinosaur whisperer at the revived Jurassic Park. In case the audience has any question about Owen’s place in this jungle, when another character asks who the alpha is among a pack
of razor-toothed reptiles, Owen replies, with maximum swagger, “You’re lookin’ at him.”

Is there anyone who can’t guess how things will play out when buttoned-up-yet-beautiful executive Claire Dearing (Bryce Dallas Howard) is forced to ask Owen (a man she ostensibly loathes) to help her secure the premises after a dino jailbreak? Eventually, we know, Owen’s regular displays of manliness will make her sharp, corporate hair-plays of manliness will make her secure. Eventually, we know, Owen’s regular displays of manliness will make her secure. Eventually, we know, Owen’s regular displays of manliness will make her secure. Eventually, we know, Owen’s regular displays of manliness will make her secure.

There’s also no denying the magnificent 3-D extravaganza on display. It’s actually a shame the PG-13-rated film includes so many excessively bloody moments and several annoying expletives that feel at odds with the whole’s overall spirit. Without them, it’d be an easy movie to recommend as a dad/son date for the kind of dads who can embrace corny one-liners when uttered by a muscle-bound hero carrying a flame-thrower in one hand (which, in my experience, is most of them).

Summer moviegoers cannot live by superheroes alone, and darn if the entire time my grown-up, film critic head was saying, This is so stupid, some little-kid corner of my heart wasn’t crowing, and yet so awesome.

World is to Park what King Solomon’s Mines is to Indiana Jones. That is, they’re not even close to the same league artistically, yet there’s no denying the former will have, for Mystery Science Theater–loving types, a certain campy appeal.

It’s impossible not to pity the grown man cowering like a child as another man screams into his face. That’s one of many heart-wrenching scenes in Love & Mercy, an Oscar-bekoning biopic of Brian Wilson, formerly the genius behind The Beach Boys. But it takes more than a visceral pity to save Wilson, as the movie title suggests. Love & Mercy follows the full creative process of Pet Sounds, The Beach Boys’ innovative, psychedelic 1966 album, which also earns the movie a PG-13 rating for thematic contents, drugs, and language. The music is cacophonous, evocative, sometimes ethereal—much like the movie, which switches narratives back and forth from the young, drug-addled Wilson (Paul Dano) in the 1960s to the middle-aged, broken Wilson (John Cusack) in the 1980s.

The effect is disjointed and unsettling—exactly like Wilson’s debilitating mental state—and it works, sucking the audience into the mind of Wilson, who thinks and feels through clashes of vocals, symphony, and sound effects. Pet Sounds isn’t just another push-the-envelope “greatest” album, but an eruption of his fears, insecurity, and depression—a siren call for help.

Cusack’s Wilson finally finds help at an L.A. Cadillac dealership with model-turned-salesperson Melinda Ledbetter (Elizabeth Banks). They then date awkwardly under the supervision of his unctuous psychotherapist/legal guardian Eugene Landy (Paul Giannatti), who saved Wilson from gradual suicide but now controls him by overdosing him with antipsychotic drugs. Wilson is surrounded by people who pity him and define him by his mental illness—but Melinda is the first to delight in him as a person and free him from his oppressors.

Every lead actor deserves a standing ovation: Cusack tugs hearts and wrings tears playing a slow-reviving Wilson, while Dano dissolves into his character’s former exhilarating soul and passion. They make Love & Mercy both beautiful and devastating to watch without condensing its human subject into the stereotypical mad genius.
**MOVIE**

**Inside Out**

When a studio partnership has engendered as much success as Disney/Pixar has over the years, it’s easy to judge a film by how it measures up to previous successes. Is it as emotionally compelling as Toy Story 3? Does it delight like Finding Nemo? Does it contain the artistry of Wall·E? With each release, Pixar hopes to continue its streak of excellent and beautiful films that exceed the audience’s ever-growing expectations. With Inside Out, rated PG for mild thematic elements and some action, Pixar has delivered.

The film tells the story of Riley Anderson, an 11-year-old girl who moves to the West Coast and struggles to adapt to her new home and school. Inside Riley’s mind, at “headquarters,” are characters that personify her primary emotions: Joy, Sadness, Disgust, Fear, and Anger. As Riley’s emotional issues surface in her new experiences, Joy and Sadness take a journey through Riley’s mind (“Long Term Memory,” “Imagination Land,” “Dream Productions,” and the subconscious), hoping to restore Riley’s happiness.

The story world of Inside Out is incredibly complex, reminiscent of Christopher Nolan’s Inception, and yet the story is told simply enough for young children to follow. The film emphasizes the foundation of the family for emotional well-being. When everything else crumbles (literally) inside Riley’s mind, the restoration of her relationship with her family drives the narrative forward.

Though the film features five emotions, the spotlight is on Joy and Sadness (brilliantly voiced by Amy Poehler and Phyllis Smith respectively). A simplistic resolution would have Joy and Sadness battling to become Riley’s permanent state. Instead, Joy and Sadness are partners, and by the end of the film, it becomes clear that sadness is an appropriate emotion when it is required for repentance, or when it serves as the catalyst of greater and more lasting joy. Through this, Inside Out features a richly layered vision of human emotion and challenges the idea that one can suppress sadness merely through the assertion of “positive thinking.” —by TREVIN WAX

**DOCUMENTARY**

**An Open Secret**

It is possible there is an institutionalized issue of child molestation in Hollywood, but this is not the film to expose it. Amy Berg’s documentary An Open Secret is marketed as “the secret Hollywood doesn’t want you to know.” But the film obscures its “secret” through euphemism, irrelevant context, and insinuation.

In this film, former child actors accuse trusted adults with power over their careers of pedophilia (the film is rated R for descriptions of sexual abuse). These serious charges are framed by cheesy re-enactment footage and clips of more famous child actors that are not part of the film’s investigation. The irrelevant details are rampant: The parents of a child star talk about how they first met; famous names like Leonardo DiCaprio and Bryan Singer are referenced because they have some loose connection to someone else mentioned in the film.

The film almost seems more preoccupied with the fact that the crime might be happening in Hollywood than with the crime itself. The founding of Digital Entertainment Network (DEN) is explored in detail, even though it’s not entirely clear whether the filmmakers are targeting its three founders or its legitimacy as a film studio (DEN has been the target of several lawsuits alleging sexual abuse).

The film makes accusations and gets up close and personal with alleged molesters, but it relies heavily on hearsay, opinions, and “inappropriate” appearances to make its case. Corey Feldman, writing in 2013 about being sexually abused as a child star, provided a more persuasive look at pedophilia in Hollywood.

By trying to look at the big picture—how children are easy prey in Hollywood—An Open Secret glosses over the details, presents little evidence, and fails to make a call to action necessary to any reform-oriented documentary. —by ALICIA M. COHN

See all our movie reviews at wng.org/movies
Holding the lines
BY HONORING MARRIAGE AND WORK
by Marvin Olasky

June is a big month for gay parades. Jesus Outside the Lines, by New York, now Nashville, pastor Scott Sauls, is designed to appeal to younger Christians chafing at the evangelical-conservative alliance, so it’s significant that he stands firm on the toughest current issue. Sauls writes that he recently told a gay man who wanted affirmation regarding sex with another gay man, “the love of his life,” that “to affirm his union with the love of his life would mean I’d have to deny the love of mine.”

Sauls continues: “Christ, the love of my life... says that anyone ‘who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.’ I am irresistibly drawn to him. I must be his disciple. ... I grieve because I want my friend to be able to share life and be romantically involved with another person. I do not want him to be lonely or alone. Yet as a Christian I am bound to yield my personal feelings and wishes to the sacred words of Jesus.” Sauls notes that all the biblical references to homosexuality are negative, “with no affirmation to counter them.”

June Carbone and Naomi Cahn’s Marriage Markets (Oxford, 2014) looks at declining marriage (and the social problems that brings) through not only an economic lens but a class-emphasizing one as well. That leads to a cherries-and-oatmeal book: useful facts amid a porridge of conclusions. Carbone and Cahn argue that “the easiest way to reduce inequality is to reduce top incomes.” That might be a crowd-pleaser, but it’s far better to promote competition and help the poor gain greater skills.

Sadly, Carbone and Cahn minimize the importance of competition and offer this proof: Charles Darwin “understood from his study of peacocks’ tails that competition might produce considerable rewards for winners without necessarily benefiting the larger group at all.” Happily, people aren’t peacocks: American history shows that economic inequality creates tensions but the competition that leads to inequality tends to lift all boats over time.

One key task is to change high schools so kids not inclined to college gain training in technical subjects that prepare them for good jobs. Putting Education to Work by Megan Sweas (HarperCollins, 2014) shows how the work-study programs of Cristo Rey high schools are helping students graduate into jobs and not drop out into frustration: Evangelicals could learn from this Catholic experience.

SHORT STOPS
The lack of job training for noncollege-bound kids is a big problem in high school today, and so is getting boys to read anything: An intriguing book series—talented screenwriter Brian Godawa’s novels about Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Joshua, and other patriarchs—may be helpful. For example, David Ascendant, seventh in the series, has lots of angels and devilish “gods” bashing each other with swords in the This Present Darkness Frank Peretti tradition: Teenage boys will turn the pages.

Parents will need to decide whether the sword fights are appropriate, and they should also be aware of extrabiblical plot complications including Joab and Abishai visiting a prostitute, Saul’s henchmen slaughtering babies in Bethlehem, and Abigail knitting her husband Nabal. I asked Godawa about those, and he responded, “No biblical text for visiting the cult prostitute. However, Joab and Abishai’s history is a very dark one and they do some wicked things that even brings David’s curse upon them.... The Bethlemeh slaughter one was just creative license to foreshadow Herod’s murder spree” in Godawa’s forthcoming Jesus Triumphant.

Godawa acknowledges that “Nabal was a tricky one. But I do have a justification for that creative license. The text says after his stroke, ‘And about ten days later the Lord struck Nabal, and he died.’ One could interpret that as a different ‘strike’ by God that finishes him off.... [S]o I made Abigail engage in justifiable self-defense as God’s means for striking Nabal, even after he had the stroke.” That’s a stretch, but I’d still rather have high-school boys read these books than play Grand Theft Auto. —M.O.
Notable books
FOUR NONFICTION BOOKS reviewed by Tim Challies

AFTER ACTS Bryan Litfin
The book of Acts ends suddenly and, with it, the Bible’s narrative of the earliest Christian churches and leaders. Many Christians have wondered what happened after Acts, and this is the question Bryan Litfin sets out to answer in his new book. He combs through history, tradition, and existing evidence to learn what became of the disciples, the apostles, and other important figures. His interesting research results and reader-friendly format will strengthen your confidence in both the authority and the truthfulness of God’s Word.

THE QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL ADAM William VanDoodewaard
Is Adam a historical figure who actually lived and is actually the father of all humanity? Or is the story of Adam in the garden of Eden a kind of metaphor we should understand figuratively? This has become a pressing question in the church today, and William VanDoodewaard’s *The Quest for the Historical Adam* carefully examines what Christians have believed from the time of the church fathers until today. He advocates a traditional understanding of the historicity of Adam by showing what Christians have understood and what is at stake if we waver.

SIDE BY SIDE Edward Welch
I wholeheartedly agree with Ed Welch’s conviction that, in general, “God is pleased to use ordinary people, ordinary conversations, and extraordinary and wise love to do the heavy lifting in his kingdom.” God has assigned the joyful work of doing ministry to each of us who profess faith in Christ. *Side by Side* is a book of practical and biblical counsel for excelling at that very thing, and for teaching Christians to walk with others in wisdom and love. If we all did what this book advises, our churches would be much stronger and much healthier for it.

THE WRIGHT BROTHERS David McCullough
It makes sense that David McCullough has twice won the Pulitzer Prize, for few historians have his ability to recount history with such skill and verve. His latest, and perhaps final, work is a biography of the Wright brothers. From their humble beginnings as bicycle mechanics in Dayton, Ohio, they achieved worldwide fame as the first to successfully take to the air in a machine-powered aircraft. This account is both thrilling and fascinating, a quintessentially American tale of opportunity, ingenuity, and determination. No one could tell it better than McCullough.

At the annual gathering of the biggest book publishers, the BookExpo America, top representatives from book subscription services met to talk about the new trend. Book subscription services, like Scribd, Oyster, and Amazon Kindle Unlimited, use the Netflix model for reading: Customers pay a monthly fee, usually about $9, for unlimited access to a digital catalog of books. The companies at BEA had collectively seen a windfall of $64 million in venture funding. Scribd, for one, argues it is only adding to publishers’ bottom line, paying publishers near-retail rates for every book a subscriber reads.

But publishers are wary. Of the “big five” publishers, three (Macmillan, HarperCollins, and Simon & Schuster) share their content with Scribd and Oyster, and only their back catalog, not new releases. Andrew Weinstein, the vice president of content acquisition for Scribd, said publishers think the numbers are “too good to be true forever.” They think the subscription model might be an unsustainable revenue stream. But Weinstein pointed to diving retail book sales and said, “Everything is too good to be true forever.” —Emily Belz
Lynn Vincent spent a decade as WORLD’s feature editor and action-adventure writer before becoming the best-selling co-author of Heaven Is for Real and Same Kind of Different As Me. She also collaborated on Sarah Palin’s Going Rogue: An American Life, and now specializes in writing narrative or “dramatic” nonfiction books—true stories that pull readers from page to page like fast-paced fiction.

I understand your mom was not the greatest mother in the world. No, she was not. I grew up in a child protective services quality childhood. And there were drugs. I’m coming to terms with this after all these years. My mom, trying to fit in during the ’70s, gravitated to every fringe group that there was, whether Hell’s Angels, local drag queens, even witchcraft. As she tried to find her way, we felt we were luggage just being carried around.

It didn’t get any better when you were a teenager. When I was 14, she lost her job and we wound up homeless in Hawaii. We wound up living in a tent in a beach park. At some point one of her boyfriends told her something: I don’t know even what it was, but she chased me, knocked me to the ground, and tried to choke me. So I ran away and wound up in a home for runaways. That was the first time someone ever witnessed to me—a beautiful lady with red hair talked to me about God. I did not feel that my constitutional liberties were being encroached upon.

What do you think the lasting effect of your hard childhood is? How do you overcome that? You don’t overcome it right away. God has used it for me to be able to tell the story of a homeless man or the story of an addict, Michael English. God has given me empathy, along with the gift He’s given me to be able to string
words together. One reason I’m able to talk to people is because I don’t ever feel I’m better than anyone else. I’ve done every sin, including murder, because I’ve had an abortion. I can approach people on that level and they feel comfortable opening up.

Your parents separated when you were 3. Then there was a stepfather, but that didn’t work out either. How do you overcome fear of marriage? I did not have a fear of marriage, but I was not very good at it at first; but I put my trust in God’s Word, and once I decided to get married, no matter what happened, I was going to continue to be married. So we worked at it, we worked at it, and we’ve been married 26 years.

‘My mom, trying to fit in during the ’70s, gravitated to every fringe group that there was, whether Hell’s Angels, local drag queens, even witchcraft.’

With two children—and your younger son, Jacob, just graduated from Navy boot camp, following the family business. Both you and your husband Danny were Navy air traffic controllers, and you joined when you were 21. Good move? It’s worked out really well. The military instilled in me a discipline I didn’t have.

After nine years as an air traffic controller, and writing for Army Times, Navy Times, and Air Force Times, you started writing for WORLD. I remember your “Keeping secrets” article from 2002, about Planned Parenthood, and your article about clergy sexual abuse. How did your own experience of abortion and abuse play into your reporting? When Planned Parenthood people would say outlandish or ridiculous things, it was hard for me to just write it down and move on. With the sexual abuse story, I worked on it for six or eight months. The victims were women who had usually been sexually abused in childhood and because of that conditioning had an inability to say no to a pastor who seemed like a god-figure, an authority figure, because of the conditioning of their childhood. Having been a victim of sexual abuse I was able to relate to the women: They felt ashamed but felt I wouldn’t judge them.

Your first books came out in 2008, with Same Kind of Different As Me becoming a huge bestseller. Why? It has the Christian theme of redemption, salvation, and racial and class reconciliation, but it doesn’t preach.

You were the ghostwriter for Sarah Palin’s autobiography. I know how you’ll answer this question, but I’ll ask it anyway: Inside stuff about her? I signed a non-disclosure agreement.

Now that you are established as an author in your own name, you have a lot of projects from which to choose. What’s your decision process? I have to be passionate about the story. I also have to know that the story can carry a narrative. A lot of times people will come with a story, but it’s one brief window in their lives and there aren’t enough “narrative reversals”—when a story goes from good to bad or bad to good—to carry a full-length book.

What about the book you just finished that has an Afghan locale and comes out in November? It’s called Dog Company: A True Story of Battlefield Courage, and it combines battlefield action and military courtroom drama. [WORLD will have more about this book in November.]

How should people who want to write popular books prepare themselves? Read everything you can, from classics to “airport books” that create suspense. Reading fills your tank. Then write. Close the doors, turn off the phone and internet, put words on a screen.

Many people really don’t like writing but they like having written. Seems to me book writing is hard to sustain unless you enjoy the process. You have to be willing to do the work, and it’s not glamorous at all.

Many people have said that 90 percent of writing is rewriting. Ninety percent of writing is rewriting, but the hardest 10 percent is the first draft.

You talk about “the sacred ICPID.” ICPID is my acronym for readers saying, “I couldn’t put it down.” After I write a book or even an article, I go through it at cellular level and try to make sure that they can’t put it down.

How about your anti-procrastination formula? It’s [(B + C) - (I + P)]n. I’ll decode that for you. B is for butt. C is for chair. So butt plus chair, minus internet and phone. The variable n is for how many words can I write without breaking a sweat. My number is 300 words.

Without breaking a sweat or without throwing up? Without having little dots of blood break out on my forehead. If I can’t make myself buckle down I say, “If I can just write 300 words, I’m going to get started.” If you write 300 words for five days that’s 1,500 words. That’s a feature length article. Do that for 10 days, that’s the length of a chapter. ©
Mixing match

RECENT RELEASES OFFER VERY DIFFERENT POP-CLASSICAL HYBRIDS

by Arsenio Orteza

Like most terms invented by musical taxonomists, “classical crossover” has its limits. Generally, it means pop-friendly music with one foot or at least a few toes in the Classical, Baroque, Romantic, or operatic repertoire. Specifically, it can mean almost anything, as demonstrated by fascinating recent releases from the pianist Simone Dinnerstein, 2Cellos, and the London Symphony Orchestra.

They’re fascinating for strikingly different reasons. Dinnerstein’s Broadway-Lafayette: Ravel, Lasser, Gershwin (Sony Classical) is the most high-minded of the lot. It identifies motivic links between George Gershwin’s Rhapsody in Blue (Track Seven) and Maurice Ravel’s Piano Concerto in G Minor (Tracks One through Three), then explores them with a world-premiere recording of the contemporary composer Philip Lasser’s The Circle and the Child: Concerto for Piano and Orchestra (Tracks Four through Six).

The logic is plain. Gershwin, an American, composed Rhapsody in 1924. He and Ravel met in 1928, after which Ravel, a Frenchman, composed his concerto in 1929. And Lasser is of French-American parentage—the missing link as it were. These connections give listeners a reason to concentrate and an opportunity to interact by assessing just how airtight the logic is.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is 2Cellos, a.k.a. the youthful Croatian duo Luka Šulić and Stjepan Hauser. Unlike Dinnerstein, their intention is not to unite high-cultural strains but high culture and low.


Is the playing of pop songs on cellos a gimmick? Of course. Can pop-classical-fertilization gimmicks produce enduringly entertaining hybrids? The perennial popularity of Walter Murphy Band’s “A Fifth of Beethoven,” Wendy Carlos’ Switched-On Bach, and Emerson, Lake & Palmer’s Pictures at an Exhibition suggests that the answer is yes.

But whereas Murphy, Carlos, and ELP lowered their source material, Šulić and Hauser elevate theirs, suggesting that even if its pop-era composers had lived during the 17th or 18th century their God-given musical instincts would’ve secured them the necessary patrons.

2Cellos also demonstrate and expand the expressive capacities of their instrument, both sonically and, on Celloverse’s “deluxe edition” videos, visually. If the Electric Light Orchestra’s Jeff Lynne should ever enlist them for a tour, they’ll steal the show.

Somewhere between Dinnerstein and 2Cellos falls the 78-year-old Japanese video-game composer Nobuo Uematsu. His music has been given the symphonic treatment before, but the London Symphony Orchestra’s Final Symphony (MerriToner Studios/ X5 Music Group) refurbishes the music’s stand-alone luster.

One needn’t, in other words, know anything about the popular Final Fantasy video-game series to respond to Uematsu’s compositions. Stylistically, Uematsu borrows from sources as varied as Grieg, Bernstein, and Berlioz. But he does so with an ear toward cutting to the quick of the thrills that only an orchestra can provide. And provide such thrills the LSO and its conductor Eckehard Stier certainly do.

They might even manage to turn gamers on to the richness of the world beyond their computer screens.

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Notable CDs

NEW OR RECENT ALBUMS reviewed by Arsenio Orteza

BROADCHURCH: ORIGINAL MUSIC COMPOSED BY ÓLAFUR ARNALDS
Ólafur Arnalds
If you’re a follower of the British television drama with which these ominously suggestive tracks enjoy a symbiotic relationship, they’ll call to mind the series’ moral conundrums and emotional intensity as effectively as they’re meant to. If, however, you’ve never seen it, this music will probably mean no more to you than Angelo Badalamenti’s best-known compositions mean to people who’ve never seen Twin Peaks. One difference: Whereas both soundtracks could make the benighted curious enough to give their respective shows a go, Broadchurch is actually worth watching.

EASTER AT EPHESUS
Benedictines of Mary, Queen of Apostles
“We seek to be what [Mary] was for the early Church,” reads the website of the order to which these singing nuns belong, “a loving and prayerful support to the Apostles, the first priests, and [we] daily offer prayer and sacrifice for the sake of her spiritual sons.” Heard in that spirit, these 27 a cappella performances should inspire even Protestants to fresh heights (and depths) of worship. The vast range of composers, meanwhile, should inspire musical archaeologists to fresh investigations of subjects too long off the radar.

TARANTA PROJECT
Ludovico Einaudi
The ancient Greek belief that a tarantula’s bite is fatal and that dancing the frenzied taranta provides a cure undergirds this attempt by the Italian composer Ludovico Einaudi “to bring the taranta to a more universal level by connecting it with music from West Africa and Turkey.” Do you have to share that belief to appreciate the degree to which Einaudi’s attempt has succeeded? No—or at least no more so than you have to believe that disco dancing equals liberation to appreciate the Saturday Night Fever soundtrack.

SINGLE STRING
Lei Ying
Finding this hard-to-find album is well worth the effort if only to experience the unique beauty that China can contribute to the world-music tapestry. And “single string” does not mean single instrumentation. Accompanying Lei Ying (a former member of China’s 12 Girls Band) as she plays the one-stringed duxianqin is a full array of easy-listening accompanists. Purists would probably wish that those accompanists had lain lower, but less persnickety listeners won’t mind. As exotica for exotica’s sake goes, sounds this euphonious are rare.
Tell your story, they say. Everyone has a story to tell.

Our books of the year in this issue do precisely that—some layered up with the stories of characters stretched even across galaxies, some straightforward in tackling an issue of the day, and some overwhelming like a wave shedding new light on an old topic, namely our pilgrim journey.

All of these stories fit the formula laid down by Aristotle: They have a beginning, a middle, and an end. But if we’re honest, when it comes to telling our own stories, on our own we don’t have enough information to do it. We weren’t fully conscious at the beginning of our own story, and we may descend again into some altered state of reality at the end.

One of the earliest stories I know about my life is that when my mother and father brought me home from the hospital, my brother gazed inside the bassinet and exclaimed, “That’s not a girl, she doesn’t have pigtails.”

That quip formed my earliest image of my brother, gave me a window into his personality from a time I don’t remember actually. And that’s where the stories others tell, and the stories our culture tells, come in. They fill in the beginning we don’t remember, and the end we may not see, plus help us understand the living it out we do in the middle.

Because the trick to telling our own story is actually living it out in the middle, knowing there is a verifiable beginning and an end, and being alert to the clues of its temporal and eternal meaning.

Some of the greatest news in life is that our stories can change, the past and future be remade in a moment. I’m profoundly grateful my story changed upon hearing a pastor recount Nebuchadnezzar’s drinking out of the stolen goblets and the writing on the wall. It was a telling that brought me to faith in Jesus Christ.

But different forces can be at work to shape our stories, and one of the most cautionary of these is ourselves. Ultimately, we aren’t the best mediators of our own stories. We know too well we present versions of ourselves; just take a look at social media. And we can make and remake versions of our lives, patching and mending beginning, middle, and end from whole cloth, as though we are gods.

After Bruce Jenner appeared as Caitlyn on the cover of Vanity Fair, he-cum-she tweeted, “I’m so happy after such a long struggle to be living my true self.” And Barack Obama (via one of his accounts) retweeted it with the comment, “It takes courage to share your story.”

Besides the sex change operations, Jenner had taken a new name profoundly at odds with any attachment to the reality of his story. In 1949, the year Jenner was born, Bruce was the 26th most popular name among boy names. Caitlyn didn’t enter the list of top 1,000 until 1976, the year the 26-year-old Jenner won an Olympic gold medal in the decathlon.

Then it was Caitlin, the Irish name, which wasn’t popularized as Caitlyn until the 1990s. Taking a name more suited to one of his daughters, Jenner took his own metanarrative to a new level, recasting not only its middle and end but its beginning.

Jenner isn’t alone guilty of reshaping one’s facts, though he did it in profoundly disfiguring and disturbing ways. Decades ago journalist Malcolm Muggeridge in The End of Christendom wrote about our “built-in propensity” to twist facts so much we miss the most important thing—“... if I had been correspondent in the Holy Land at the time of our Lord’s ministry, I should almost certainly have spent my time knocking about with the entourage of Pontius Pilate, finding out what the Sanhedrin was up to, and lurking around Herod’s court with the hope of signing up Salome to write her memoirs exclusively.”

On a day-to-day basis we journalists have to admit we miss the big news, too. A starting point is having care and integrity in the story we’re writing of our own lives. America’s preoccupation with fantasy, and its grotesque propensity to create fantasy lives, may come at the expense of telling the greatest story of all.
The Intersection of Church and State NEW!
Debates about the proper relationship between church and state date back to the time of the founding fathers and the arguments continue to dominate the news today. The Rev Gregory P. Seltz assists viewers in understanding the multi-layered and sometimes contentious arguments that surround this issue. Despite the challenges, Seltz believes there is still tremendous potential for church and state to work together for the common good. 110 minutes.


Proof through the Night
“Oh Say, Can You See...?” In the 200 years since Francis Scott Key first wrote those words on the back of a letter, they have inspired millions. The hope and joy expressed in the American National Anthem are so moving that more than five million people signed petitions for its official adoption. Yet within those words is an expression of a Christian’s faith and gratitude for deliverance. Told through the words of eyewitnesses and those who knew him best, this presentation tells the story not only of the song, but of the man and the beliefs that inspired it. 56 minutes.


People of Faith
Survey the history of Christianity in the United States from before the Pilgrims to the present in this six-episode DVD series. You’ll gain valuable perspective on the people and ideas that shaped America and see how it came to be the first nation in history based upon the ideal of religious liberty. You’ll meet the spiritual visionaries, leaders, and entrepreneurs who shaped Christianity across the centuries, including Jonathan Edwards, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Martin Luther King Jr., and Billy Graham, among many others. Well researched, balanced, fast-paced, and insightful, People of Faith features expert commentary from an array of scholars including Martin Marty, Joel Carpenter, Thomas Kidd, Kathryn Long, and more. 3 hours.

DVD - #501437D, $29.99 SALE! $23.99

We the People
Travel back in time through the eyes of America’s unsung patriots to experience the trials and victories that have formed our nation’s destiny and secured the blessings of liberty for future generations. In this six-episode series you’ll meet a diverse cross-section of people who have all played a role in our nation’s history. Each episode presents a phrase from the Preamble with examples of people whose lives embodied that ideal. Six 30-minute programs.

DVD - #501245D, $29.99 SALE! $19.99

The Gospel of Liberty
Produced by Colonial Williamsburg, the program recreates for students of American independence the fire of George Whitefield, the zeal of the Reverend Samuel Davies, and their pursuit of the right to worship according to one’s convictions. With Colonial Williamsburg as a backdrop, Thomas Jefferson guides viewers to understand how the axiom that government ought not legislate belief became a fundamental pillar of American democracy. 37 minutes.

DVD - #500839D, $19.99 SALE! $14.99

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Francis Bacon died almost 400 years ago, but his famous description of words on pages still animates our selection process: “Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested: that is, some books are to be read only in parts, others to be read, but not curiously, and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention.”

We—our committee of five WORLD writers—throughout the year looked for books that tempt us to delay writing projects: “Couldn’t put it down,” one committee member wrote about our novel of the year. Good books are exciting to read. We look for books that are thoughtful and capable of planting among our readers new ideas consistent with what the Bible teaches. Exciting, accessible, thoughtful: What the Francis Bacon in us would like to e-a-t.

A few other introductory notes. Our books issue, dated June 27, comes at this time of year because the 2015 International Christian Retail Show begins on June 28. Publication between May 1, 2014, and April 30, 2015, made this year’s winners and honorees eligible for consideration. Our committee members read numerous books, developed a short list of 14, and voted. The winners are:

- **FICTION**: The Book of Strange New Things (Michel Faber)
- **ACCESSIBLE THEOLOGY**: enGendered: God’s Gift of Gender Difference in Relationship (Sam Andreades)
- **CURRENT EVENTS/PUBLIC AFFAIRS**: America in Retreat (Bret Stephens)
- **HISTORY/BIOGRAPHY**: Dead Wake: The Last Crossing of the Lusitania (Erik Larson)
Novels

**WINNER**

*The Book of Strange New Things*

**BY MICHEL FABER**

These days, in books from secular publishers, we expect to see pastors depicted as hypocrites and missionaries as agents of exploitation. That’s what we’d expect from Michel Faber’s *The Book of Strange New Things* (Hogarth), which has as its protagonist a pastor called to be a missionary to the strange creatures of a planet galaxies away from his wife. Does he (a) steal precious minerals, (b) molest the females, (c) create a bizarre cult with himself as God, or (d) all of the above?

The answer is (e) none of the above. Instead we find empathy and splendid writing, and that’s why *The Book of Strange New Things* is our novel of the year. Peter the missionary is a rock. He tells his worried wife that “God will guide me.” He appears to be genuinely committed to the members of his flock on the planet Oasis: They are about 5 feet tall with two legs, small bones, narrow shoulders, two hands of five fingers each, and big heads with faces that “look nothing like a face” and more like “a massive whitish-pink walnut kernel.”

But Faber doesn’t emphasize their appearance or the science elements of this science fiction. He cares about souls, and here’s the shock: The Oasans have already heard of Jesus from a previous missionary, and many of them believed. Seventy of them greet Peter by singing what first seems to be abstract sound, but he then discerns “maaaazzz-liiiiiing graaaaaa how weeeeett a ouuund thaat aaaaaavaed a wreeee liiike meeeee.” The Oasans can’t pronounce s but the message of their lives is also the message of Peter, formerly an addict: I once was lost but now am found.

Not only that: These Oasans are hungry for more. They call themselves “Jesus Lover One” or “Jesus Lover 30,” in order of when they made professions of faith. Some Oasans are standoffish, but many listen eagerly to sermons, quickly build a church, and yearn for more teaching from the Bible, which they call “the book of strange new things.” A fourth of the way through Faber’s 500 pages, then half the way, I continued to wonder: “What’s the catch?” No way a mainstream British publisher is going to put out a book with Christian faith at its core that’s actually ... sweet, right? No way?

I can mention one subplot: Bea, Peter’s wife, sends him from galaxies away increasingly distressed messages about problems on Earth, and he is so enraptured by the pure faith of his Oasan flock that the reality of her life seems increasingly unreal to him. But I’ll stop here to avoid spoilers, except to note the personal tragedy that Dutch-born author Faber, who lives in Scotland, had while writing the novel: His wife Eva developed terminal cancer, and she died last July just as he was doing the final edits on his manuscript.
Faber, 55, now says The Book of Strange New Things is his last novel, but he’s been writing poetry about Eva and may publish some of it. Faber’s publisher says the book’s emotional integrity and power come out of the heartbreak Faber had as he was writing it. Or maybe this extraordinary novel is a gift from God at a time when many Christians are facing hard times: Maybe we need to bury our pride and become Jesus Lover two billion. —M.O.

**RUNNER-UP**

Chinese dissenters have called controversial Nobel Prize winner Mo Yan a mouthpiece for the Communist Party—but his newly translated novel Frog (Viking) takes a hard look at China’s one-child policy and its trail of devastation.

Set in a rural village in Northeast China, the 400-page novel barely mentions the post–Great Leap Forward famine that killed 40 million civilians and the terror-reigning Cultural Revolution that pitted families and neighbors against each other. Mo, though, swings hard at his main target as he describes the descent of Gugu, a revered midwife who delivered thousands of new lives into the world, and later aborts more than 2,000 unborn babies.

Desperate to prove state loyalty after her fiancé defected to Taiwan, Gugu becomes a zealous champion of the national family planning policy and its twisted logic: “Before it was ‘out of the pot’ it was just meat, and it needed to come out one way or another. But once it was out of the pot it was a human being, even if it had no arms and no legs, and was protected by national laws.” She thus goes to outrageous measures to enforce abortions, even using a motorboat and loudspeaker while chasing a pregnant woman trying to swim out of her reach.

The country folks aren’t innocent, either: Their deep-seated favoritism for boys drives husbands and wives to terrible acts, and a husband whose wife just died giving birth to a second daughter mourns his family line rather than his dead wife.

Frog imagery infuses the text. Frogs—wu in Chinese—symbolize fertility, family prosperity, and femaleness in China. But wu also sounds exactly like the cry of babies: wu, wu. This theme culminates in one terrifying night scene when, surrounded by the croaks of frogs, Gugu suddenly hears the cries of thousands of newborn infants—wu, wu, wu!—“as if the souls of countless murdered infants were hurling accusations.”

Not even the iron-willed Gugu can withstand such guilt, and Mo does a masterful job of weaving the system’s comprehensive human toll into a humorous yet chilling tale. —Sophia Lee

**RUNNER-UP**

Marilynne Robinson’s Lila (Farrar, Straus and Giroux) is a prequel to her highly regarded Gilead. Lila, the young wife of 67-year-old Rev. John Ames, bears him a child in his old age—and in Lila Robinson moves her from the wings to center stage.

The book begins with misery: young Lila locked out of her house because she won’t stop crying. It’s not clear who the evicting adults are, but they clearly have no compassion regarding the dirty, wet, hungry child. A mysterious woman, Doll, who lives in the house with the others, returns home, finds Lila, cleans her up, and nurses her back to health. Lila then travels the country with Doll and a band of migrants who eke out a living picking crops and doing odd jobs.

By the time Lila ends up in the tiny Iowa town of Gilead, she’s alone and carrying a life’s worth of shame. There she meets John Ames, who spots her taking refuge in the back of his church. Critics have praised the book for the way it develops the relationship between the learned Rev. Ames and the uneducated, deeply wounded Lila. Christians will appreciate the many ways Robinson incorporates biblical themes and imagery, sometimes explicitly. Lila is like the cast-off baby in Ezekiel 16. She’s like the wild olive branch, grafted in.

In many ways, John Ames is like Abraham, surprised in his old age to find love and become a father. Lila is just as surprised to find an accepting home. She’s been hurt and abandoned so often, she remains poised to run. Although Lila stands alone as a story of grace amid suffering, it’s probably more understandable to those familiar with Gilead. —Susan Olasky
WORLD’s book of the year in the theology for nonacademics category is *enGendered: God’s Gift of Gender Difference in Relationship* (Weaver). That’s because author Sam Andreades guides readers through at least three crucial cultural debates: Are men and women different? How should husbands and wives help each other? What about same-sex marriage?

His key concept is asymmetry: Men and women are different and have different tasks in marriage. Husbands should make their wives secure, and wives should give their husbands rest: “The principles of rest-giving and secure-making are the roadway underneath the snow of cultural practices.”

Andreades shows how at the beginning of the book of Judges, men treasure women: “Othniel secures the woman by taking the city for her. At the end, though, men are raping and mistreating women as if they were disposable objects.” He exegetes passages about Jael slaying Sisera and a woman using a millstone to crack Abimelech’s skull: “These brave women, in creative ways, brought rest to their homes… [T]hey teach us that the way in which we do gender is not limited to one narrow job.”

Andreades shows how “embracing gender distinction in housework improves marriage.” It makes sense that nine of 10 evangelicals say “marriage should be an equal partnership [and] the husband should be head of the family,” because he provides security and she gives him rest. In short, “a real man is someone who lays down his life for the women in his life.”

He notes that the Bible is unlike the Quran, which teaches that “men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other” and advises husbands to “admonish [wives], forsake them in beds apart, and beat them.” The Bible praises women business executives such as Lydia in Acts 16 and Bereans in Acts 17, but indicates that women should not be elders.

Andreades also emphasizes the importance of asymmetry in critiquing same-sex relationships. He learned much while pastoring a PCA church in Greenwich Village and offers insights from 10 men who had a history of same-sex relationships but are now in thriving man-woman marriages lasting five years or more.

Throughout, Andreades writes with wonderful flow and shows how the principles of secure-making and rest-giving underlie so much in the Bible. For example, Mosaic gender statutes forbidding prostitution “kept the home a refuge by forbidding women from selling the gift of sex outside of it. And they kept the men securing their wives and daughters by disallowing a society where men could bed women without commitment. A land without the possibility of prostitution is a land where women sense safety.” —M.O.
RUNNER-UP  Dane Ortlund’s 
Edwards on the Christian Life: Alive
to the Beauty of God (Crossway) is important at a time when television demands visible emotion: Arms thrust upward mean happiness; screwed-up eyes and grimacing mouth mean intense prayer.
Ortlund shows that Edwards went deeper: “When we first picture joy, we might think of loud shouts of praise, exuberant exclamations, expressive displays of exultation—the sort of response you’d expect from someone who has just won the lottery. Edwards’s theology of joy goes in a different direction. He speaks of the quiet sweetness of true joy;”
That doesn’t play well on television: “For Edwards, a person may be enjoying true joy yet without looking joyful in terms of the way the world tends to define joy. True joy is not frothy. It does not equate with laughing or joking.” Ortlund’s good summary: “The calm, exquisite contentedness...of resting satisfied in God, in his beauty and love...the nondramatic, discrete happiness of a heart filled with the love of heaven. Authentic joy is not ostentatious. It does not draw attention to itself. It need not; it has all it needs in God.”
Ortlund delivers clear chapters and useful metaphors showing Edwards’s view of aspects of the Christian life: New Birth (the ignition), Love (the essence), Joy (the fuel), Gentleness (the aroma), Scripture (the treasure), Prayer (the communion), Pilgrimage (the flavor), and Obedience (the fruit). Regarding pilgrimage, he writes that at the beach we “feel the waves beginning to come against us. First our ankles, then knees, waist, and so on. As we continue out into the water, though, inevitably a wave comes that cannot be out-jumped. It washes over us. We become completely submerged, and there is no way to avoid it. The total-submersion wave is what Edwards knew God sends to his children to drive home their pilgrim status.”—M.O.

RUNNER-UP  Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives, edited by Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves (Baker), includes 15 thoughtful essays on this basic Christian teaching now under assault by those who say an individual Adam never existed. Jettisoning the doctrine, though, has consequences.
Madueme and Reeves, in an essay well-titled “Threads in a Seamless Garment,” show that without a real, historical fall Christian teaching transcends both good and evil.
Other authors show how man’s loss of personal fellowship with God—communion with the Holy Spirit—explains the corruption of our nature. They show how original sin is crucial to biblical understanding even when it’s not explicitly mentioned: It’s why the world goes from “very good” at the end of Chapter 1 of Genesis to “only evil continually” in Chapter 6, to Abraham and Isaac both risking their wives, to Moses teaching all Israel that only radical heart changes will allow them to obey God, to all the problems that emerge in Judges and Kings.
The biggest debate in the early Christian church was on this issue: Pelagius denied original sin and argued that we are born innocent and start sinning by imitating what we see around us. Happily, Augustine understood differently and won the debate 1,600 years ago, but in the 19th and 20th centuries neo-Pelagians argued that the state could preserve children from dire ecclesiastical or capitalist influences and have them retain their natural goodness.
That revolutionary project did not work out well. Recent history provides evidence of what Paul and Augustine knew: Our sin is incurable, so we need Someone to heal us. That’s good news, as Madueme and Reeves declare: “Inherited sin is a dark reality, but it is one with the widest silver lining. ... Because Adam first sinned, we all participate in that one sin, and as a result we are all in the same sinking boat, we all have the same problem”—and we have the solution in Christ. Happily, nothing in oversold Darwinian theory forces us to give up that solution, as two of the chapters note.—M.O.

RUNNER-UP  Many books examining same-sex marriage emerged over the past year: Solid exegesis and tight writing make Kevin DeYoung’s What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality? (Crossway) stand out. DeYoung faithfully explains the hard-hitting words in Genesis 19, Leviticus 18 and 20, Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, and 1 Timothy 1, but he also contextualizes those verses in the whole story of God creating, man sinning, and “a holy God making a way to dwell in the midst of an unholy people.” That whole story explains giving ourselves over to sexual immorality can lose us the opportunity to eat of the tree of life.
DeYoung helpfully focuses on seven of the gay lobby’s objections to seeing marriage as a male-female bonding, and demonstrates that no persuasive historical, cultural, pastoral, or hermeneutical objections should move us to abandon the plain meaning of the Bible. He shows us that God objects to every kind of homosexual activity, that the objections are of a different character
than critiques of gluttony or divorce, that churches should welcome broken people but not affirm continued destructiveness. He also offers good responses to common claims that "you’re on the wrong side of history," "it’s not fair," and "the God I worship is a God of love."

It would be much easier for biblical Christians today if the Bible were not so clear about homosexuality, but DeYoung shows that the underlying question is not same-sex marriage but the authority of the Bible and its entire grand narrative. That's not giving up so as to attain a temporary peace that offers us no true peace. —M.O.

Current Issues/Public Policy

**America in Retreat**

by Bret Stephens

"A balance of power may seem plausible in theory. But the nature of power is that it seeks preeminence, not balance." That’s how Bret Stephens, foreign-affairs columnist for *The Wall Street Journal*, critiques unrealistic hopes in *America in Retreat* (Sentinel)—and his lucid analysis makes it WORLD’s current issues/public policy book of the year.

Stephens shows how isolationist rhetoric is on the rise in America, along with balance-of-power appeasement. The consequence may be more disorder than we bargained for, including world war and the avoidable sacrifice of countless lives. He counters the clichés about how the United States cannot be “the world’s policeman” by saying the United States must take on that role, for if America does not lead, Russia, China, or Iran very likely will.

Can this country make an international comeback? Stephens argues that retreat does not imply decline. For all our problems, the United States is still the world’s leader in innovation, with the strongest military. He notes that we have “surprised ourselves” several times in recent history: winning the Cold War, halting runaway crime, leading the digital revolution in the 2000s and the energy renaissance in the 2010s.

Besides, our not-entirely-eroded bedrock values make the United States as close to a moral power as exists in the world today. Stephens applies the “broken windows” theory of urban policing—ignoring minor problems creates a sense of lawlessness that leads to major crimes—to the international scene. That means the United States should maintain a visible presence, demand some degree of reciprocity from our allies, and focus on putting out fires and punishing bad actors rather than remaking nations.

*America in Retreat* does have limitations. Stephens sees problems in our current military structure and diplomatic corps, but gives less attention than he should to political obstacles and deep-seated isolationist tendencies that go back to Washington’s warning to “avoid foreign entanglements.” His strategy for keeping order may sound utopian—or worse, Wilsonesque (as in...
Woodrow)—but Stephens sees it as merely practical: Instead of trying to make the world “safe for democracy,” the United States should simply try to make the world safer.

Is that modest goal attainable? The possibility is worth an honest debate, and America in Retreat sets forth a solid case for the affirmative. —Janie B. Cheaney

RUNNER-UP American Christians haven’t had to sacrifice much. That’s the opening argument J. Paul Nyquist makes in his book Prepare: Living Your Faith in an Increasingly Hostile Culture (Moody). But then comes the warning: The nation’s culture war is over.

Christians have lost, and persecution is on its way: “Christians are being ordered to leave the room and take their Bible talk with them.”

Nyquist predicts more hostility, rejection, and marginalization as religious liberty protections continue to fray. He not only gives numerous examples but contextualizes them with his sense that America is a modern retelling of the book of Judges where “everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes.”

That the spiritual climate has shifted is no surprise to WORLD readers, but Nyquist’s attitude may be “We are to be super-abundantly, overflowing, exceedingly overjoyed persecution knocked on our door.”

That’s a lot of excitement over pain. Why? Nyquist argues that oppression will challenge American Christians to live what the Bible teaches. He reminds us that persecution is the norm for Christianity: The World Evangelical Fellowship estimates 200 million Christians live under daily threat of imprisonment or torture. Nyquist chides American believers who think all of God’s blessings are pleasant: “In God’s economy persecution means we’re blessed not cursed.” We should embrace suffering because it is part of “God’s perfecting work” in our lives, allowing us to know Christ and become more like Him.

Nyquist encourages American Christians to avoid the easy exit. Then his instruction gets harder: God commands us to respond to our persecutors with compassion, not anger. Only by embracing such meekness can we turn mistreatment into opportunities for spreading the gospel: “God wants us to be his witnesses, not his prosecuting attorneys.” Nyquist writes.

Prepare opens with a dose of reality, transforms into a pep talk, and ends with a message of hope. Nyquist reminds us we are not alone. God promises that the steadfast will be rewarded, not forgotten. Our goal? “Fear God, not man.” —Edward Lee Pitts

RUNNER-UP In Please Stop Helping Us: How Liberals Make It Harder for Blacks to Succeed (Encounter), Jason Riley quotes Lyndon Johnson’s commencement speech for Howard University in 1965: “Fear God, not man. ”

—Janie B. Cheaney

RUNNER-UP The B&B concept also has broader applications. Natural gas producers and environmentalists fight use of coal: one

most vulnerable (the poor and uneducated), while benefiting middle-class and high-profile black leaders. Riley effectively uses facts, figures, and personal recollection to support his case and doesn’t spare the Republican Party, which could have done much more to reach out to African-Americans.

Riley, a leader in the new generation of black conservatives, is following the trails Thomas Sowell, Walter Williams, and Shelby Steele blazed. Unlike them, he experienced firsthand the downturn of black culture during the 1990s. In many ways he is blessed: Though his parents separated, his father remained a purposeful presence in his life, incorporating a strong work ethic and sparing his son the reactionary scorn for “acting white” that sprawg up with hip-hop and gangsta rap. But Riley saw his own sisters succumb to single motherhood and remembers his 9-year-old niece mocking his diction: “Why you talk white, Uncle Jason?”

The book ends abruptly and lacks a ringing call to action, but that makes sense: Given the harm liberal help has done, a ringing call to inaction might help more. —Janie B. Cheaney

RUNNER-UP Bootleggers & Baptists (Cato Institute), by the grandson-grandpa writing team of Adam Smith and Bruce Yandle, is a public policy book that’s both serious and fun to read. The title stems from Prohibition, when Baptists and bootleggers both worked to shut down taverns and other places where alcohol could be publicly consumed. More recently, the religious right has worked alongside bricks-and-mortar liquor sellers to fight interstate shipment of wine and lobbied alongside casinos to oppose online gambling.

The B&B concept also has broader applications. Natural gas producers and environmentalists fight use of coal: one
more example of an economic interest gaining a halo by uniting with a supposedly disinterested group. Another example: Traffic safety groups and big trucking companies both supported a U.S. Department of Transportation proposal that all trucks have Global Positioning System (GPS) devices. The reason: Big companies that already have GPS on their trucks are happy to run up the costs of smaller competitors that usually don’t.

The biggest grab of recent years, Obamacare, squeaked through Congress with support both from the AARP and other groups supposedly representing public interests and from the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, which had language inserted into the bill that barred importation of less expensive drugs manufactured or sold abroad. That was political pork, but Smith and Yandle note that “politicians who deliver pork to the Bootleggers can justify their actions by appealing to higher Baptist morality.”

The key understanding behind this: “Most government-provided goods and services are not really ‘public’ at all. They are bundles of private goods that redound to the benefit of specific individuals, communities, and organizations rather than society as a whole. These benefits do not spring randomly from public wells but are generated by the behavior of particular special interests—Bootleggers—working with particular political entrepreneurs.”

The housing crash that turned into our Great Recession shows one result of such entrepreneurship: “What could be more noble than enabling people everywhere to experience the American homeownership dream, even if they lack the income to qualify for regular loans? Yet perhaps it is not so noble when families by the thousands are bounced from their homes.... The great housing bubble and its collapse were rooted in a complex witch’s brew of special interest legislation.... Bootlegger/Baptist-driven legislation had spurned the expansion of such risky loans.” —M.O.

Readers of Erik Larson’s Dead Wake (Crown) are immune to spoilers. We know how the story ends: A German submarine torpedoed and sank the four-stack steam luxury liner Lusitania off the coast of Ireland in 1915. But Larson creates tension by painstakingly recreating the weeks leading up to the disaster. He masterfully tells the story of those responsible for sinking the Lusitania and makes us empathize with the ordinary men, women, and children who were war’s collateral damage. That appeal to emotion as well as intellect makes Dead Wake our history/biography book of the year.

Larson’s real-life characters grip readers. He sketches the ship’s experienced captain, William Thomas Turner; famous and not-so-famous passengers who thought the ship too fast and too mighty to be in danger; the German submarine captain, Walther Schwieger; British politicians, including Winston Churchill, who wanted to draw the Americans into the war; and the codebreakers in Room 40, who successfully tracked the German subs.

But Larson also focuses on the whys and what-ifs of the story. What if the Cunard company had paid attention to German warnings? What if the ship’s crew had run life boat drills and taught passengers how to wear their life jackets? Why didn’t the Admiralty warn Capt. Turner about the presence of a submarine along his route, or send warships to escort it safely into port?

Larson depicts the cramped life on the German submarine while it searches for targets. He shows the video-game-like disconnect between men on the submarine and the carnage they inflict with their torpedoes, which they see only from the end of a periscope. He cuts to quotidian scenes on the Lusitania, then to the Admiralty where analysts track the killer sub, then to Capt. Turner who doesn’t understand the danger he’s speeding toward. But the tragic end is what we know: It took the mighty Lusitania only 18 minutes to sink, killing 1,198 people, most of them civilians. Two years later, the United States entered the war. —Susan Olasky

—M.O.
tells the riveting parallel tales of two extraordinary North Koreans.

One, cunning fighter pilot No Kum Sok, noisily proclaimed his love for Kim while planning to defect in a Soviet MiG-15 jet. The son of a middle-class, baseball-loving family did just that in 1953, and today he is 83-year-old Kenneth Rowe, a retired aerospace engineer and American citizen. The other, Kim Il Sung, was an under-achiever turned into a demigod by state-sanctioned myths. Harden calls Kim a “Soviet poodle” whose “monotonous, plain, and duck-like voice” annoyed listeners. Josef Stalin considered Kim “a man of no consequence.” Mao Zedong thought him an “irritating incompetent.”

But Kim was shrewd enough to turn “the Yankee bastards” into his perfect enemy. After U.S. planes during the Korean War bombed and napalmed the North’s cities and towns, Kim cleverly utilized this devastation as a fear-mongering propaganda tool to empower his own legitimacy. Part biography, part history, and part memoir, the book can help readers understand the Kim dynasty’s longevity, bizarre antics, and obsession with nuclear weapons.

Harden’s best-selling previous book, Escape from Camp 14, churned opaque information about human rights in North Korea into a best-selling thriller by narrating the harrowing life of prison camp survivor Shin Dong-hyuk, who later confessed to fabricating certain details of his account. Harden’s second book also chases a human interest angle, but eyewitness testimonies, archival material, and recently declassified documents made possible more substantial fact-checking. —Sophia Lee

Runner-up

Mary Sarotte’s The Collapse: The Accidental Opening of the Berlin Wall (Basic Books) overtly blows the whistle on those who think earth-shaking changes are the inevitable results of massive economic and social pressures—and also on those who see change trickling down from the decisions of leaders.

USC professor Sarotte combines the sensibility of a journalist and a historian in showing how Lutheran pastors in Leipzig—some brave and bold, others hesitant and ambivalent—called for marches that gradually increased the pressure on Communist Party leaders running out of both money and vision. The Collapse tracks well the hour-by-hour process in Berlin on Nov. 9, 1989, that led the terrible wall to come tumbling down.

Sarotte concludes, “The Wall’s opening was not a gift from political elites, East German or otherwise, and was in no way predetermined. It resulted from a remarkable constellation of actors and contingent events—and not a little courage on the part of some of the individuals directly involved—that came together in a precise but entirely unplanned sequence.” She twice refers to “fortuitous timing,” because, if the pressure hadn’t peaked until 1990, Mikhail Gorbachev would have been under greater pressure from hardliners and the United States would have been involved in Iraq War I.

But Sarotte also notes that “the history of 1989 shows just how many things have to go right for such a revolution to succeed”—and that leaves me thinking that Christians should change “fortuitous timing” to “providential.” A quarter-century later we tend to take history of /one.onum.pnum/nine.onum.pnum/eight.onum.pnum/nine.onum.pnum shows just how many things have to go right for such a revolution to succeed”—and that leaves me thinking that Christians should change “fortuitous timing” to “providential.” A quarter-century later we tend to take the happy ending for granted, but in Tiananmen Square the revolutionary stirrings ended in mass murder. It could have been that bad or far worse in Berlin, with hundreds of thousands of troops on both sides of the border and nuclear missiles minutes away.

Praise God from Whom all blessings flow. Sarotte may or may not understand that, but she does a great job of providing the details. —M.O.
Our favorite genre

Readable and insightful history books from the past 12 months

BY MARVIN OILASKY

photo illustration by Krieg Barrie

Over the years, when meeting WORLD members, I’ve often asked what kinds of books they like best. Almost always the reply is: history. Here are a dozen books in American history that I learned from during the past year but have not previously reviewed, and a second dozen concerning Europe, Turkey, and Israel.

Robert Middlekauff’s Washington’s Revolution: The Making of America’s First Leader (Knopf, 2015) is a solid retelling of how the great general matured through his first 50 years and persevered throughout the Revolution when others despaired. Joe Loconte’s God, Locke, and Liberty (Lexington, 2014) examines John Locke’s views of religious toleration, which (usually indirectly) influenced Washington and other key founders.

Baptists in America: A History, by Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankins (Oxford, 2015), is a elegantly written account of how Baptists became the largest Protestant bloc by emphasizing toleration, minimizing bureaucracy, and maximizing the opportunity for church entrepreneurialism.

Kathryn Lumm’s Damned Nation: Hell in America from the Revolution to Reconstruction (Oxford, 2014), documents varying American ideas about hell from the Revolution through the Civil War: Many pastors subscribed to the “scared straight” school of preaching, but others worried that “human scaring by frightful imagery” was more likely to make “confident imposters” than genuine Christians.

S.C. Gwynne’s Rebel Yell: The Violence, Passion, and Redemption of Stonewall Jackson (Scribner, 2014) shows how the famous general embodied strong Christian faith and scared Union generals. Jackson would have been fascinated by specific detail in Empire of Cotton: A Global History (Knopf, 2014): Sven Beckert shows the role Southern cotton played in the 19th-century world economy, and the European interest in making sure that enslaved had little choice but to accept contracts that virtually reenslaved them.

John Compton’s The Evangelical Origins of the Living Constitution (Harvard, 2014) offers a fascinating and innovative analysis of how the federal government started to lord it over private property: 19th-century evangelicals tried to eliminate immorality by restricting property rights, and judges “bent the constitutional framework to accommodate a series of ever more restrictive state and federal morals laws” concerning lotteries, alcohol sales, and other matters. “Progressive” jurists were then able to use those precedents to make the point that legal concepts and categories were in flux, with traditional constitutional principles only serving to mask the judiciary’s subjective preference for laissez-faire economic policies.

ALSO PRESIDING over American devolution have been presidents with a variety of religious commitments that two scholarly books document well. Gary Scott Smith in Religion in the Oval Office (Oxford, 2015) assesses Madison, both Adames, Jackson, McKinley, Hoover, Truman, Nixon,
Bush 1, Clinton, and Obama. The Faiths of the Postwar Presidents by David Holmes (University of Georgia Press, 2012) takes readers from Truman through Obama.

Allan Ryskind’s Hollywood Traitors: Blacklisted Screenwriters, Agents of Stalin, Agents of Hitler (Regnery, 2013) has strong content about 1930s and 1940s moviemakers—some followed the Communist line so vigorously that they even supported the 1939-1941 Stalin-Hitler alliance—but scornsful language that will put off those not already convinced of the Hollywood left’s turpitude.

Ivan Eland’s Recarving Rushmore (Independent Institute, 2014) is a topsy-turvy ranking of our best and worst presidents as measured by the peace, prosperity, and liberty that their administrations bullied or undercut. Woodrow Wilson is rightly Eland’s worst, and his best (John Tyler, Grover Cleveland, Martin Van Buren, and Rutherford B. Hayes) may get you thinking about individuals long forgotten. Eland gets really weird when he calls Jimmy Carter “our best modern president,” but Carter does deserve credit for his marital faithfulness.

Richard Smith’s On His Own Terms: A Life of Nelson Rockefeller (Random House, 2014) extensively profiles the man who desperately wanted to be president but died with his boots off, apparently suffering a massive heart attack while committing adultery. Rockefeller once said, “When you think of what I had, what else was there to aspire to?”

HEADING TO EUROPE: This year is the 200th anniversary of the signing of a great document, and Stephen Church’s King John: And the Road to Magna Carta shows how John’s subjects forced him to sign the historic semi-surrender. Regarding later battles against authoritarian power wielders, Adam Zamoyski’s Phantom Terror: Political Paranoia and the Creation of the Modern State, 1789-1858 underplays the impact of real terror but has fascinating tidbits, including Czar Alexander’s attempt following Napoleon’s defeat to turn Europe into a Christian federation.

This year is also the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo, which ended Napoleon’s power. Readers wanting an overview of the battle should turn to Waterloo (HarperCollins, 2014) by Bernard Cornwall, an action-packed novelist turned historian. The Longest Afternoon by Brendan Simms (Basic, 2015) tells the story of how 400 German soldiers at La Haye Sainte farmhouse decided the contest by beating off waves of French infantry.

Christian Caryl’s Strange Rebels: 1979 and the Birth of the 21st Century (Basic, 2014) shows how Margaret Thatcher brought England back from the grave and John Paul II’s energy began digging the grave of the Soviet Union. Caryl also juggles stories of Afghanistan, Iran, and Deng Xiaoping without dropping a ball. Philipp Blom’s Fracture: Life & Culture in the West, 1918-1938 (Basic, 2014) shows how the bitter disillusion of war gave way to hedonism in the 1920s and political movements in the 1930s that built their appeal on countering decadence. Adam Tooze in The Deluge: The Great War, America and the Remaking of the Global Order, 1916-1921 (Viking, 2014) shows—most pointedly in a chapter entitled “The Fiasco of Wilsonianism”—that Europe had deep-rooted problems and U.S. good intentions were not enough.

WHILE REPORTING on a socialist convention a decade ago, I was surprised to see a burgeoning alliance of Leftists and Islamists. Now, two scholarly histories recently published by the Harvard University Press show how leader-worshipping birds flock together. Stefan Ihrig’s Ataturk in the Nazi Imagination shows how Hitler, who cherished his bust of Turkish strongman Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, modeled his dictatorship on Ataturk and admired his exiling of Greeks and execution of priests.

The other book, David Motadel’s Islam and Nazi Germany’s War, with its 155 pages of footnotes, will be the definitive scholarly study of Hitler’s attempt to build a Muslim alliance on the basis of shared enemies (particularly Jews and the British) and willingness to murder. Motadel shows how Hitler in his Berlin bunker, as the Third Reich crumbled, mourned missed opportunities: “All Islam vibrated at the news of
our victories. ... Just think what we could have done to help them, even to incite them, as would have been both our duty and our interest.”

Hitler learned from Turkey’s murder of Armenians how he could get away with murdering Jews, and Ronald Suny’s *A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton, 2015) tells the miserable story well. One Muslim official, Sukri Bey, summarized a survival of the fittest rationale: “It is the continual battle between the Muslims and the Armenians that is now being finally fought. The weaker of the two must be the one to go.” Suny’s summary: “Officers, officials, and ordinary people participated in mass killing, plundering, and rape for myriad reasons, from sadism to personal profiteering to fulfillment of duty.”

While most Jews in Europe went to their Holocaust deaths without battling back, Jews in British-mandated Palestine fought for their lives with every weapon they had: Scholar Bruce Hoffman tells that savage story in *Anonymous Soldiers: The Struggle for Israel, 1917-1947* (Knopf, 2015). Had the British not chosen to appease Hitler and Arabs, hundreds of thousands of lives could have been saved: That road not taken plays into Jeffrey Gurock’s *The Holocaust Averted: An Alternate History of American Jewry, 1938-1967* (Rutgers, 2015).
Tucked in a nondescript Taipei alleyway crowded with parked cars and scooters, the White Horse Inn coffee shop sits under a weatherworn apartment building next to a hardware store. Inside is typical fare: cappuccinos, milk tea, free Wi-Fi, and curry chicken lunch combos. But the shelves lining the walls contain Chinese translations of books familiar to many American Christians, particularly those in Reformed circles: John Piper’s *The Pleasures of God*, Charles Spurgeon’s *Sovereign Grace Sermons*, and even Rosaria Champagne Butterfield’s *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*.

Beyond the overflow room of the café is the office of Reformation Translation Fellowship Press (RTF), a publishing group that has translated famous works into Chinese since 1949. RTF began publishing works in 1949 from a small office in southern China, but Communist troops forced a move to Hong Kong. RTF in 1968 found a home in Taipei and eventually published 80 titles, but nearly floundered in 2004 after the sudden death of its director.

Now it’s publishing 12 books per year with a staff that’s entirely Taiwanese. Taiwanese interest in Reformed theology has increased thanks to the influence of 75-year-old Indonesian megachurch pastor Stephen Tong, whose sermons, DVDs, rallies, and books have a wide reach all over Southeast Asia. Still, Taiwan’s population is less than 5 percent Protestant or Catholic, and only 35 small churches claim to be distinctly Reformed.

RTF now focuses on China as both an evangelical opportunity and an untapped market to keep the organization afloat. Every type of Christianity is growing in China—the “local” church movement, charismatic churches, and even cults claiming the name of Christ—and some churches in urban cities have turned to Reformed theology. While customers in Taiwan might buy two books, some customers in China buy 200 and resell most at a higher price. For such bulk orders, RTF offers a 50 percent discount to encourage legal purchases, as some Chinese will buy one copy of an RTF book, copy it illegally, and sell it for a fifth of the price online.

RTF also works with publishers within China to secure Chinese ISBN numbers to sell the books inside of China. Sending religious books—or any
foreign books—into China has not always been easy, as the government will at times stop shipments from entering the mainland. Still, in the storage room workers carefully wrap stacks of books in bubble wrap and pack them into cardboard boxes headed to China.

The press’s newest translation project also has China’s needs in mind. Laid out on a display table at the coffee shop are colorful craft cut-outs, a children’s worship CD, and Sunday school teacher’s manuals. Called Bible Building Blocks, the curriculum will teach through the Westminster Shorter Catechism in the course of eight years. Translators have finished only part of the catechism so far, but local churches are interested because the material is more gospel-focused than the other curriculum available.

RTF’s seven staff members meet to decide which books to translate. They ask whether books are well-known and influential, whether they have stood the test of time, and whether they touch on topics relevant to Chinese-speaking readers. “Relevance” pushed Butterfield’s book to the front of the list, as homosexuality is currently a hot topic in Taiwan as well. Once RTF has chosen a book, it buys the exclusive copyrights from the author and hires translators. Because the books often contain specialized theological terminology, three editors scour over each line, making sure the translated copy is as close to the original as possible. ©

Students sit between shelves reading books in the wee hours at a Taipei Eslite bookstore.

Earlier it was difficult to hear over the chatter, but now the soft classical music seemed to be on full blast and the floorboards squeaked with every footfall. Penny Yong, a tourist from Malaysia I spoke to at 3 a.m., held a book in one hand and her suitcase in the other. She had just landed in Taipei and camped out in the bookstore quieted, yet readers still filled every nook and cranny—I almost stumbled over a few who sat between bookshelves.

After the in-store café closed at 1:30 a.m., the bookstore quieted, yet readers still filled every nook and cranny—I almost stumbled over a few who sat between bookshelves.
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The Church of the Intercession is a beautiful stone building constructed in 1915, with vaulted ceilings, large stained glass windows, and a nave that could seat several hundred. It now needs $1 million in repairs, and its members face difficult choices.

Outside this Episcopal church in Harlem is its sweeping cemetery that includes the grave of naturalist John Audubon. Inside on a Sunday only 42 worshippers, including the choir, were present. Almost everyone was elderly. There were three canes, one walker, and one child.

Those 42 seemed a megachurch in comparison with the congregation across the street in North Presbyterian Church (PCUSA). In its historic stone building Pastor Carmen Mason-Browne preached to an audience of six women in a room with space for several hundred. The women weren’t even sitting together, but spaced like strangers on an empty train.

Over clanking radiators Browne preached on the television show Call the Midwife and how it revealed the importance of women. The sanctuary had beautiful stained glass windows and sweeping wooden pews and a balcony; but paint peeled off the walls, and duct tape covered frayed patches on the carpet. The church, like its Episcopal neighbor, had a thermometer poster in the back to raise money for building repairs. The church was shooting for $20,000 and had raised $3,000 so far.

Overall the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shed about 90,000 members, or 5 percent of its membership, in 2013 according to its latest report. The denomination’s membership has fallen 27 percent over the last decade. Other mainline denominations, including The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church, are also seeing decades-long declines in attendance and membership.

With dwindling and aging congregants, many mainline churches, often with high-value historic properties, are becoming real estate holders. When they

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AS THE AMERICAN CHURCH BECOMES MORE EVANGELICAL, MAINLINE DENOMINATIONS WITH EMPTY BUILDINGS ENTER THE REAL ESTATE BUSINESS

**BY EMILY BELZ IN NEW YORK**
The 148-year-old Episcopal Church of the Redeemer in Brooklyn sold for $20 million to a real estate developer.

Marilynn K. Yee/GENESIS
struggle to finance their massive, empty historic buildings they often sell them off, and usually to developers instead of other churches.

The American church overall is not booming. The percentage of the U.S. population that identifies as Christian is declining, according to a recent study from the Pew Research Center, down 7 points from the last survey in 2007. But the American church is becoming more evangelical, according to the survey.

In cities like New York, evangelical churches without their own properties are multiplying. The fastest-growing churches in New York are young, evangelical, and meeting in places like school gyms and the Best Buy Theater in Times Square. Evangelical leaders say the disconcerting Pew survey shows a more theologically committed church as people shed the denominations they were merely born into.

“What’s disappearing is cultural Christianity,” said Al Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, about the Pew survey. That interpretation is supported by Pew’s surveys: Weekly church attendance has held mostly steady over the last decade.

As mainline churches shed parishioners, they are shedding church buildings. In September, the Church of the Redeemer, an Episcopal church in downtown Brooklyn, sold for $20 million to a real estate developer, Lawrence Provenzano, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island, which owned the building, explained the decision: “It became clear in a short time there were no realistic prospects for a large increase in donations or in members that could have covered immediate and ongoing expenses.” The historic church, which has a mosaic in the walls of the subway station there, sits in one of the priciest neighborhoods in Brooklyn. The developer will likely raze the building.

The story repeats all over the city. Christ Lutheran Church in Manhattan sold to a real estate developer, and a new seven-story condo building will open in its place this winter. St. Mark’s Evangelical Lutheran Church in Brooklyn also sold to a developer: It will be a building with 99 apartments.

The Episcopal Church (TEC) is working on handling its assets more as investments when a congregation disappears. Bishop Stacy Sauls, the chief operating officer of The Episcopal Church, said he thinks it is “unwise” for churches simply to liquidate their real estate to pay expenses. The denomination will be offering more financial advice for churches to handle their assets like investments.

Sauls says they should be keeping the real estate to generate revenue for the church, like leasing property. Most churches rely on their members when making real estate decisions, Sauls said, and “complex real estate deals” are often beyond the expertise of members. The denomination hopes to offer that expertise.

“We’re just beginning to work on that,” he said. “I think we can be much smarter.”

The denomination doesn’t pay for buildings if congregations can’t support them, and it also doesn’t necessarily benefit from these church sales. Episcopal dioceses typically donate about 20 percent of donations to the larger denomination, and that would likely include revenue from property sales. But people who have observed Episcopal finances closely, like Allan Haley who has served as an attorney for departing dioceses in these property disputes, don’t think the denomination at large is seeing big benefits from property sales.

“They evidence a failing institution,” said Haley.

Selling buildings is “something we wouldn’t like to see,” said Sauls.

Under Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, TEC has also spent tens of millions on litigation over the properties, Haley has estimated. This June, Schori is stepping down after a decade characterized by thousands of churches, and in some cases entire dioceses, leaving the denomination over its embrace of theological liberalism. The congregations, even if they had the means to buy their buildings, in most cases had to leave their properties with the diocese of the denomination.

Schori has said in the past, in regard to departing congregations, that she doesn’t want TEC to “be in the business of setting up competitors.” Sauls said TEC would sell property to departing congregations if they didn’t associate
themselves with “another Anglican bishop.” He added that TEC would happily sell to other churches from other denominations, although that has happened rarely. The church has sold property to a few departing congregations that join the Anglican Ordinariate in the Roman Catholic Church or turn nondenominational.

The newly formed American Anglican Council (the “competitors”) now advises churches leaving TEC to let their property go. Courts have almost never sided with individual Anglican congregations in these property battles. “There’s a benefit to not fighting,” said Robert Lundy, spokesman for the American Anglican Council. “Those who left the keys on the table avoided a lot of the difficulty of going through protracted legal disputes.”

Other mainline denominations are going through the same demographic shifts as The Episcopal Church. One Methodist church in Queens is fighting the aging, theologically liberal trend. Glendale United Methodist Church is a collection of other mainline congregations that have merged into one. Most of the congregants are elderly. One member fought in the Battle of the Bulge. Twelve-year-old Zara counted those in the youth group on her hand: one, two, three, four, five, five.

“When I was growing up, it was a lot of kids, teenagers,” said Lorraine Miller, a longtime lay leader at the church. “Generally speaking, there are not as many young people coming to church as there used to be. My grandkids aren’t coming to church anymore. They went to college and they didn’t come back.”

At Glendale’s lively service one Sunday, after Pastor Phil Hardt preached his sermon, he asked his congregation: “Who can you call this week? Who’s been away from the church?”

Hardt is working on a turnaround. He heads up the Wesley Fellowship, a group of theologically conservative pastors within the New York conference of the UMC. He is working to revitalize his church first, and he hopes, the conference and the denomination with the work of the other pastors in his group. The church has rented its space to other non-English-speaking evangelical churches.

“People in the conference kind of know where I stand,” he said. “It’s viewed as an evangelical church.... The idea is to be a seed for renewal, to stay no matter what—pretty much no matter what.”

Meanwhile, other evangelical churches are blooming in New York. Demographic researcher Tony Carnes, who has tracked religious trends in New York for decades, unofficially listed the Protestant churches he thought might be growing the fastest: New Life Fellowship in Queens, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Trinity Grace Church, Church of Grace to the Fujianese People (a Chinese church), First Corinthians Baptist Church in Harlem, and Hillsong Church NYC. Trinity Grace and Hillsong are the newest churches on the list.

Hillsong, a plant of the Australian megachurch, has exploded since its start in 2010. About 7,000 young people attend weekly services. Both Hillsong and Trinity Grace have very young congregations. The first few years Hillsong met in New York, the church moved from building to building, and at one location attendees had to climb many flights of stairs.

A Hillsong service is the opposite in every way of the dusty, empty mainline services I attended. After passing through security and about 30 greeters, young people in tight jeans and fedoras packed into a service in a theater in Times Square. Hillsong has five services on Sundays in that location, and another five at a theater downtown. As the Times Square service let out that Sunday, people were in a line around the block waiting for the next service that was still 45 minutes away.

Hillsong lacks the meaty liturgy of, say, The Episcopal Church. The sermon from Pastor John Termini had self-help overtones (“Thinking inside the box will keep your outcome inside the box”), although the pastors repeatedly emphasize the importance of God’s Word and that salvation comes only through knowing Jesus.

“Maybe you don’t know why you stumbled in here, but maybe it’s just to hear this one thing: Jesus died on the cross for you and rose from the dead for you,” said Pastor Joel Houston, opening the service.

After the service people snapped pictures in front of the church’s LCD sign that said, “Welcome Home.” Instead of the dusty church “information table,” Hillsong has an “info bar,” where people wanting to be baptized can enter their information on iPads. In a packed “welcome lounge” off the theater, volunteers serve strawberry-infused water to visitors. The church has a coat check.

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Another non-denominational evangelical church is booming in New York. Trinity Grace Church started in 2006 and now has 12 churches around the city, some with multiple services. The congregants are young, and they pack out rented spaces from schools to other churches. Despite its size, Trinity Grace has no real estate. Some of Trinity Grace’s parishes rent from historic churches, like St. Paul’s German Evangelical Lutheran Church, founded in 1861, in Chelsea. One parish rents from a Seventh-day Adventist church, a convenient option for churches who need space on Sundays. And Redeemer rented space for its service in the evenings from First Baptist Church on the Upper West Side, until Redeemer completed constructing a building of its own.

Redeemer is one relatively new evangelical church that has its own real estate for its Upper West Side congregation, a 45,000-square-foot space it bought and retrofitted for $32.5 million. New York City Councilman Fernando Cabrera said he could not recall another church that had built a building in Manhattan in the last decade or two.

Sociologist George Yancey unpacks the underlying perspectives and root causes of “Christianophobia,” or intense anti-Christian hostility. He considers to what extent Christians have themselves contributed to this animosity and explores how we can respond more constructively, defusing tensions and working toward the common good.

“Yancey urges us to get in the war in an honorable way, adding our courage and insight for cultural survival and renewal. At times we’re to fight fire with fire. That might mean calling out bigotry and hate where you see it. Love speaks. Love tells the truth. Love risks. Love does not fail.”

Kelly Monroe Kullberg, founder of the America Conservancy and the Veritas Forum and author of Finding God at Harvard

Another non-denominational evangelical church is booming in New York.

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Gordon & Diana Severance
Foreword by TIMOTHY GEORGE

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—TIMOTHY GEORGE, Dean of Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, and Executive Editor of Christianity Today

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Old and alone

MANY IN THE ‘ME GENERATION’ FACE A LONELY FUTURE
by Julie Borg

Nearly one-quarter of Americans over age 65 are at risk of becoming “elder orphans,” a new term used to describe aging people who are single and childless, according to a study conducted at the geriatric and palliative medicine department of the North Shore-LIJ Health System in New York.

Increasing numbers of single people who do not have children are heading into their senior years alone. One-third of Americans between the ages of 45 and 63 are single, an increase of 50 percent since 1980. The number of women aged 40 to 44 who are childless has nearly doubled since that time.

Elder orphans face a wide range of potential difficulties, including health issues, mental health decline, and premature death. Research author Maria Torroella Carney said they will require more community and social services, emergency response, and education. Although it is hard to draw conclusions based on one study, it is likely that decisions to remain childless, which increased with the baby boom
generation born between 1946 and 1964, are a contributing factor. “My generation was one of the first that elected not to have children,” Joyce Varner, director of the Adult-Geron Primary Care Nurse Practitioner program at the University of South Alabama, told CNN.

Varner began to see the problem surfacing in the 1990s. “I see a lot of sadness and regret on the part of the elderly people who decided not to have children,” she said. “A lot of fear: ‘How are we going to get care? Is there going to be anyone with me at the end of life?’”

“It comes down to the chickens have come home to roost for people who were young in the 1970s and 80s and thought children were a burden,” said Glenn Stanton, director of Family Formation Studies at Focus on the Family. This generation became known as the “Me generation,” spawning a societal devaluation of children and the double-income, no-kids group that didn’t want to be tied down. They didn’t want children to get in the way of “their self-actualization,” he said.

With the advent of the pill, having sex no longer had to mean having babies; with legalized abortion, becoming pregnant no longer had to mean becoming a parent. Environmentalists, meanwhile, sounded the alarm about a population explosion, claiming the earth didn’t have enough resources for everybody and we were ruining our world. The ideological impact of those warnings made remaining childless seem like a virtue, Stanton said. But it was blown out of proportion. The population bomb never exploded. And now a significant number of the Me generation are facing their senior years alone.

SMOKE SCREEN

E-cigarettes, once promoted as an aid to stop smoking, are not reducing the number of teen smokers. In fact, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the number of middle- and high-school students using e-cigarettes has tripled in just one year, from 660,000 to 2 million students between 2013 and 2014. Overall tobacco use has not declined in the last three years. Nearly one-quarter of high-school and 7 percent of middle-school students use some type of tobacco product.

E-cigarettes are not harmless. They combine a poisonous substance with unsafe chemical mixtures, said Garry Sigman, director of the Loyola University Health System Adolescent Medicine Program.

“We want parents to know that nicotine is dangerous for kids at any age, whether it’s an e-cigarette, hookah, cigarette, or cigar,” said CDC director Tom Frieden. “Adolescence is a critical time for brain development. Nicotine exposure at a young age may cause lasting harm to brain development, promote addiction, and lead to sustained tobacco use.”

The modern aspect of e-cigarettes appeals to adolescents whose world revolves around technology and electronics. “The development and marketing of e-cigarettes has the potential of hooking a whole new generation on nicotine,” Sigman said. —J.B.

IN THE BLOOD

Each year more than 14,000 women in the United States die of ovarian cancer, a disease often undetected in the early stages because symptoms frequently do not appear until it is well-advanced. Current screening methods have not decreased the death rate.

But now, researchers at the University College London (UCL) have developed a blood test for ovarian cancer that tracks changing levels of the protein CA-125. The new test correctly diagnosed 86 percent of deadly and invasive epithelial ovarian cancer cases during the 14-year study—twice as many cases as conventional screening methods are able to pick up, according to The Independent.

The study included more than 200,000 post-menopausal women, aged 50 and above, randomly assigned to different screening strategies. “While this is a significant achievement, we need to wait until later this year when the final analysis of the trial is completed to know whether the cancers detected through screening were caught early enough to save lives,” said UCL professor Usha Menon. —J.B.
Graffiti Sniffer
Vandalism of railcars is a worldwide problem. Removing graffiti spray painted on train cars is expensive and catching the perpetrators—called “taggers”—is notoriously difficult. But Australia’s Sydney Trains is fighting back with a new technology that sniffs out spray paint vapor.

The project, called “Mousetrap,” uses chemical sensors to detect vapors from taggers’ paint cans and marker pens. Once the vapors alert the electronic “nose,” the system cues live cameras at the location to capture images of the vandals and forward them to police.

According to the New South Wales website, the system has so far led to the arrest of more than 30 offenders. —M.C.

Clearing a path
The International Space Station (ISS) has altered its trajectory many times over the years to avoid collisions with space debris. But nearly 3,000 tons of space junk orbiting the earth make it difficult for the ISS to step out of the way, and an alternative may be for the ISS simply to blast dangerous space debris with a laser cannon.

Researchers from Japan’s Riken Computational Astrophysics Laboratory are proposing a space-debris tracking system coupled with a 100,000-watt ultraviolet laser that would vaporize the surface of a target, pushing it away from the station and toward the atmosphere. A smaller-wattage proof-of-concept laser is scheduled to be delivered to the ISS as early as 2017. —M.C.

Creative construction
Engineer hopes a new type of toy will pry older children from video games by Michael Cochrane

Creative building toys such as Legos and Duplos seem to fascinate young children—right up to the age when they migrate to more passive video games. Electrical engineer Charles Sharman noticed this trend in the children he taught in Sunday school and wished there was a building toy that appealed to older kids and encouraged them to create rather than be passively entertained.

So he designed it himself. Sharman’s concept, called Crossbeams, is what he refers to in his company website as a creating toy rather than an assembly toy. He researched building toys and found that many of them have a huge number of specialized pieces such as those for airplanes, cars, or special angles and shapes. He believed that too many piece types tended to stifle creativity.

Crossbeams claims it requires only 18 distinct pieces to create the frames that form the basis for many types of structures. The same set, according to the website, can make an airplane, a train, a house, and a mountain.

Sharman also designed his building toy concept so the structures would be sturdy. He noticed that in traditional building toys, the force required to join the pieces is equal to the separation force, which significantly limits the strength of the joints and the complexity of the structures.

Crossbeams solves this problem with joints that are connected in a simple, two-step process involving a slight twist of a small ring. The resulting joints are strong enough to create models with real functionality. The product website shows examples that include an outdoor pet run, a book prop, and an elevated trash can holder.

Kits are available with instructions for building anything from a 123-piece fighter jet at $26.02, to a 1,482-piece model of the Brooklyn Bridge at $266.03. But Sharman says he is committed to keeping costs down by limiting the number of distinct pieces in a model.

“Once you own a few thousand pieces, you can build nearly anything,” he says. “And you no longer need to purchase new pieces. In our opinion, however, increasing your creativity is more important than increasing our profits.”
USA unified
CHRISTIAN PLAYERS SEEK TO HELP TEAMMATES WIN THE WOMEN’S WORLD CUP by Andrew Branch

U.S. Women’s National Team players Lauren Holiday and Tobin Heath are products of a Christian soccer sub-culture. They played on the 2006 Under-20 team at the FIFA Women’s World Championship, where virtually “the entire team” was Christian, Holiday said. Coach Tim Schulz’s ability to laugh and cry over things of faith, she told journalist Chad Bonham, awakened her own faith from cultural to personal.

At least four professing Christians join hands on the current team, including Amy Rodriguez and Heather O’Reilly, as the U.S. team tries to get back to the World Cup Final July five, where the United States women lost to Japan in two-one-one-one. Holiday says she will seek not only to live so that people notice a difference, but to play that way too. So far, defying the cultural moment, the U.S. women have again developed the unity that comes through hard work and vulnerable relationships. “That’s just why I love team sports,” Heath told Bonham. “It’s a great example of that selflessness that I think is really pleasing to God.”

WORLDVIEW WINNER
The day Bruce Jenner debuted as “Caitlyn,” ESPN announced that Jenner will receive in July the Arthur Ashe Courage Award, named for the tennis great who fought both racism and AIDS. Jenner won over the likes of Iraq war vet and amputee Noah Galloway and Lauren Hill, the 19-year-old basketball player who publicly fought terminal cancer until her April death. (Hill and Galloway were not runners-up, as many had stated.)

This makes the second straight year ESPN has used the award to explicitly endorse its sexual worldview. In raising awareness about gender dysphoria and the pain which sufferers face, ESPN invoked words like “progress” and “educate people.” Last year’s winner was Michael Sam, a prospective NFL player who “came out” leading up to the draft. Ashe’s family championed both selections. —A.B.

MAN KNOWS NOT HIS TIME
The last time the Chicago Cubs played in the World Series was in 1945, not long after V-J day, in a losing effort to Detroit. Deferred from the military for color blindness, Lennie Merullo was on the field for three of the games in that series. He was the oldest living Cub when he died May 30 at age 98. Though never an All-Star, fans loved him, honoring him last year at Wrigley Field’s 100th anniversary. Merullo’s eldest son, Len Jr., retains the nickname “Boots,” which The Chicago Daily News penned after his father made four errors in one 1942 inning upon news his wife had given birth. —A.B.
Parishioners join Rev. Peter Owen Jones as he lights the beacon at Firle Beacon hill on May 23. Church of England clergymen lit a chain of beacons across the Diocese of Chichester to celebrate Pentecost and, according to Bishop Richard Jackson, to “remind the communities they serve of the reason Pentecost happened in the first place.”
Legal eagle feathers?

*Hobby Lobby Decision Gives New Life to Native American Lawsuits* by James Bruce

Native Americans are pushing back against attempts to keep them from wearing eagle feathers. The federal government restricts possession of eagle feathers as part of its effort to protect eagles. But early this month a California school system, under judicial pressure, allowed a high-school senior to wear an eagle feather to his graduation ceremony. Last month a federal district judge refused to dismiss a lawsuit against the government has no business sending undercover agents to raid peaceful Native American religious ceremonies.

That's what happened in 2006 when Robert Soto, a Lipan Apache and the pastor of McAllen (Texas) Grace Brethren Church, participated in a powwow: A federal agent interrupted the ceremony after seeing Soto and others with eagle feathers. The agent threatened prosecution unless they abandoned them. They did so, but they sued to get them back.

Some Native Americans receive special permits to possess eagle feathers if they are members of federally recognized tribes, but the Lipan Apache Tribe lacks such recognition. The district court sided with the government, granting summary judgment.

Then along came *Hobby Lobby*, last June’s landmark Supreme Court decision. It offers an important interpretation of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), a 1993 law requiring strict scrutiny when a generally applicable law creates a substantial burden for the free exercise of religion. *Hobby Lobby* says the government should seek the least restrictive means of furthering a compelling state interest.

Given *Hobby Lobby* and other precedents, the 5th Circuit reversed the earlier decision and remanded the case back to the district court. The 5th Circuit seriously questioned whether the government could protect eagles only by restricting feathers to permit-holders from specific Native American tribes.

The government gave Soto back his feathers this March, but Soto didn’t hold a celebration, much less a powwow. The government gave him a dispensation to keep those feathers, but he has no right to give them to anyone, even to his descendants, and other members of the congregation remain in legal limbo. So the lawsuit continues.

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A ‘PUZZLING’ BOOKLET

National Association of Evangelicals president Leith Anderson says his group’s new book, *When God and Science Meet*, attempts “to bring faith and science onto the same page.” But Center for Science and Culture research coordinator Casey Luskin calls the booklet “puzzling,” because it seems “designed to make the reader feel good while never actually providing them with real scientific discussions or real answers to hard questions.”

The book offers a welcome interdisciplinary approach: Historian Mark Noll shares space with biologist Dorothy Boorse and pastor John Ortberg, among others. But it is low on specifics and does not deal with the movement toward theistic evolution at some evangelical colleges. Luskin said the book offers “a nice theological critique” of Carl Sagan’s quip that we live on an “insignificant planet,” but he notes, “Sagan meant that claim also as a scientific one, and the booklet could be far more powerful if it also offered a scientific critique of that claim, because we now know that Earth is a special planet with many unique features that make it ideally suited for life.” —J.B.
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I’m sorry that Jackie LaBaron does not have hearing aids for both ears, but not that she takes home only $6 a month. Certainly Medicaid could be better, but it appears her problem is that she did not adequately prepare financially for old age and became dependent on the government.

BARBARA WAGNER / HURON, OHIO

‘Coverage vs. care’

We should pray for more Christian doctors willing to look past the red tape to people and their needs. We should support medical school students: They are choosing a challenging profession, and we need more with the faith and integrity to lessen the impact of future shortages.

CHELSEY MCNEIL ON WNG.ORG

Washington is one of the states that expanded Medicaid, but it doesn’t cover hearing aids: It just covers the test to let us know we need one. Some people can’t find a primary care physician because so many doctors no longer accept Medicaid. This nightmare is exactly what I expected from the ACA.

JOELLYN CLARK ON WNG.ORG

‘Taking the baker’s challenge’

Beautiful. What if Christians were known as the people who made the best cakes ever, even for people they disagreed with? When should we take a stand against sin? When others are asking us to commit it.

RICK FLANDERS ON WNG.ORG

‘Remembering the forgotten’

My mother was born in Istanbul four years after the killing of Armenians started and escaped with her family to America. Hebrews tells us to remember the martyrs as if we were martyred with them. You have done this honorably.

JEFFREY C. DANCO / BRIDGEWATER, N.J.

My and my wife’s parents were all born in the old Armenia around 1900 and uprooted as teens. We saw in them the huge daily adjustments they made as they overcame a violent past. Both our fathers were so traumatized that they never spoke of the atrocities, but our mothers spoke of their sufferings regularly. Thank you—this gave us more information about our past.

LEO & SONA SETIAN / SILOAM SPRINGS, ARK.

‘Coverage vs. care’

True stories such as these make me wonder why God does not put a cap on the human capacity for evil. Come soon, Lord Jesus.

WONNIE KANG ON WNG.ORG

I love WORLD but found this story extremely disturbing in its graphic descriptions of torture, rape, and murder.

JEANNINE LIEBMANN / EUREKA, MO.

Endzingeni, Swaziland submitted by Ellen Decker

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LEO & SONA SETIAN / SILOAM SPRINGS, ARK.
‘Outside the playbook’
If God had intended modern, loving, faithful, long-term same-sex relationships to qualify as marriage, then He would not have excluded them by definition.

JAMES AIJST ON FACEBOOK

‘Death by proxy’
Why argue that small shareholders should not be able to confront companies like Wal-Mart with important social issues? Why shouldn’t small shareholders be able to speak their minds?

EDWARD HESS / LANSING, MICH.

‘Disorientation’
Various state governments have outlawed minors’ ability to seek help for dealing with same-sex attraction because they’re “too young” to decide if they need or want help. When a 5-year-old boy says he wants to wear a dress, he is old enough to make that decision?

WAYLON GLUNT ON FACEBOOK

‘Harmful hype?’
The more questions climate change pushers face, the more hysterical and aggressive they become. Such manipulative tactics don’t give the impression they are very confident.

STEVE ARNOLD ON WNG.ORG

‘The river of your delights’
Beautifully written! In a world that so distorts the pleasures God gives us to enjoy, how sweet to stop and ponder the delights of a spring day or any of His other handiworks.

KIM MILLER ON WNG.ORG

‘U-N’
Over 50 million—I can’t begin to fathom that number of displaced people.

JAN MANSFIELD / BUFFALO, N.Y.

‘Auto report cards’
Many companies have offered monitoring devices, but the key is to instill correct behavior before the teen is behind the wheel. If you have to monitor where your teens are driving, they should not be driving.

RANDY CREWS / SPOKANE, WASH.

‘Losing their shirts’
Whoever said that legislating freedom costs freedom is right on! And legally forcing a person to undergo “diversity training” is tantamount to Communist brainwashing.

JIM CRAIG ON WNG.ORG

‘Waiting to break free’
Thanks for this story on Cambodia. It is always challenging and refreshing to be informed of what God is doing beyond the USA.

DON SEDERDAHL ON WNG.ORG

‘California’s drought denial’
This article didn’t mention that, rather than keeping water on farms where it is most needed, environmentalists in government are sending much of it into the ocean to help protect endangered fish. And then California wants Colorado’s water?

HANK COLL / PARKER, COLO.

‘Brain scam’
When Janie B. Cheaney compared genome mapping with phrenology, she could also have mentioned Francis Crick’s ridiculous belief that DNA is so complex that aliens must have seeded it here. Fortunately, for those with ears to hear, God destroyed our attempts to find the Fountain of Youth with one simple statement: “Whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

ROB CARPENTER / KERRVILLE, TEXAS

‘Raw risks’
I’m somewhat indignant over all the hoopla about the dangers of raw milk. There is indeed some risk; but my ancestors and family were all raised on raw milk, and I have known only one person whose health was affected by its use.

W.J. McCHESNEY / NEW GALILEE, PA.
‘You be the judge’

Of course a new Christian lacks deep spiritual understanding. Ana Marie Cox should neither be judged for her immaturity nor be held up as a role model for other believers. Only time will tell if her walk is toward Jesus or not.

JENNIFER MURRAY ON WNG.ORG

‘Forfeited struggle’

Joel Belz argued that Christians in America don’t have the courage of their convictions because they recognize the cost. Sadly, most will capitulate to whatever the culture says is right, and those who don’t will suffer tremendous consequences. The future will be challenging and convicting in our morally repugnant society.

PHILLIP WOECKENER / TALLAHASSEE, FLA.

‘It’s no mystery’

Getting Muslims to the point that they trust us enough to receive the gospel is the issue. A major barrier of distrust must be broken down on both sides.

JOHN WILLBY ON FACEBOOK

Corrections


The first Star Wars prequel came out in 1999 (“The Force is weak,” May 16, p. 26).

LETTERS & PHOTOS

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Beyond pessimism
ARE A CHRISTIAN’S LABORS ON EARTH IN VAIN?

Curious to peek down the road a few years to know what it feels like not to write a column, I read the swan song of Tom Fleming, outgoing editor of the monthly Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture (June, 2015). It was not happy. Thirty years of raging against the dying of art, and corruption, and cupidity were rewarded with nothing but an increase in ugly art, corruption, and cupidity.

Evaluating his own epistolary efforts in the fray, Fleming compares himself to satirical bandleader Spike Jones (1911-1965), who retired when he saw that the serious music coming down the pike was worse than any satire he could concoct using cowbells and kitchen implements. Fleming complains: “If only I had followed his advice, I should have spared myself and my devoted handful of readers three decades of bitter satire that fell on blind eyes and deaf ears.”

“To be (a columnist) or not to be, that is the question.” Is Fleming correct that when all is said and done the conscientious writer labors for nothing against the forces of boorishness and immorality? Is he also right that in any case, “readers do not have to be reminded ad nauseam that rap and death-metal music are toxic waste for the mind and soul”? Would one or two readers not playing with and talking to my children...? [Along the way we betray our spouses and our children."

Ouch! (Or to copy Chronicles’ penchant for Latin: mea culpa.) I have in the bookcase beside me three score personal essays never sent—and never to be sent—to WORLD, each representing the conscienced writer labors for the “yes” column that sends shivers through the heart... "to WORLD, each representing a new perspective on the decomposing paper stack: “They were your practices,” he said, salvaging the situation with one well-placed remark, I hope that is true, at least in part. It might fascinate the reader to know that Jesus Himself was bedeviled (literally, I would say) with the notion of failure and futility. We have it on good authority, of course, that this never slipped over into sin, for He was “in every respect... tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). But the sight of the eyes posed a challenge to the eye of faith with its counterfeit evidences of the vanity of the Messiah’s mission. Hear the lament of a wordsmith (like Fleming) in Jesus’ complaint:

“The Lord called me from the womb... He made my mouth like a sharp sword... And he said to me, ‘You are my servant...’ But I said, ‘I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my right is with the Lord, and my recompense with my God’” (Isaiah 49:4).

My husband helped immeasurably by offering new perspective on the decomposing paper stack: “They were your practices,” he said, salvaging the situation with one well-placed remark, I hope that is true, at least in part. It might fascinate the reader to know that Jesus Himself was bedeviled (literally, I would say) with the notion of failure and futility. We have it on good authority, of course, that this never slipped over into sin, for He was “in every respect... tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). But the sight of the eyes posed a challenge to the eye of faith with its counterfeit evidences of the vanity of the Messiah’s mission. Hear the lament of a wordsmith (like Fleming) in Jesus’ complaint:

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Jesus, in taking the assignment, had “emptied himself” (Philippians 2:7) and was required “to be made like his brothers in every respect” (Hebrews 2:17), so in His voluntary limitations He may have had to study Isaiah, just like you and me, to be assured that things would work out well in the end (see verses 5 and 6). He went on to tell parables of unimpressive seeds that grow into large bushes, which indicates that He understood that servants of God should not “despise the day of small things” (Zechariah 4:10).

The Fleming farewell ends with him daydreaming about a retirement more focused on Palermo than Iraq, and eating fish at a place called Il Blu while watching “the sun rises blazing on the sea.” Before laying his quill down he pens his pessimistic conclusion, “I wasted time, and now doth time waste me.”

Maybe. It is good to peek ahead and think on how we’ve used our time; it yields a heart of wisdom (Psalm 90:12). It is also good to take heart if you find you are doing the Lord’s work, whatever your field of endeavor, “knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58).
Fifty years ago the two greatest songs of all time (so the magazine Rolling Stone declared in 2004) emerged just one month apart. The Rolling Stones’ “I Can’t Get No Satisfaction” (#2) came out in June 1965, Bob Dylan’s “Like a Rolling Stone” (#1) emerged in July.

That’s three rolling stones in one paragraph, and that same year public policy rolled erratically, as if our legislators were stoned. The United States curved toward the debtors’ prison that now looms, as Medicare, Medicaid, and a variety of Great Society entitlement programs zipped through the most liberal Congress of the seven decades from 1939 through 2008. But the two greatest songs show an even wider cultural swing.

Dylan’s song describes life in a meaningless world. He asked how it felt to be without a home, like a complete unknown. Dylan knew that fine clothes and a fine school are a vanity of vanities. He saw the frowns of jugglers and clowns. He knew what the writer of Ecclesiastes wrote 3,000 years ago: All things under the sun are full of weariness.

The Stones’ “Satisfaction” was about more than sex. Mick Jagger and others could readily attain momentary physical pleasure, but contentment in daily life—“when I’m driving in my car … when I’m watchin’ my TV”—eluded them.

Radical autonomy has merely left us even more like rolling stones.

Life seemed meaningless (and the advent of no-fault divorce and fault-filled but legal abortion soon undercut two big satisfactions for most people: marriage and family).

Underlying both songs was the perceived absence of God. In October 1965, Time reported on the tendency of trendy academics to construct an anemic theology without God. The magazine followed up six months later with an all-black cover featuring three words in red, “Is God Dead?” The Los Angeles Times in 1968 called that startlegram one of “10 magazine covers that shook the world.”

The Time cover provoked 3,500 letters to the editor, the most in the magazine’s history. Other magazines went with the flow. Easter in 1969 was on April 6, so that’s when Newsweek tried to increase its newsstand sales with a cover story headlined (in red letters on a black background) “The Decline and Fall of Christian America.” Time tried to increase its Christmas sales later that year with a Dec. 26 cover story that asked, “Is God Coming Back to Life?”

Director/screenwriter Roman Polanski understood what the purported death of God meant: In his 1968 film Rosemary’s Baby, set in 1965, Polanski had protagonist Rosemary Woodhouse (played by Mia Farrow) picking up the “Is God Dead?” issue of Time in a doctor’s waiting room. Many critics have called Rosemary’s Baby, with its depiction of a woman pregnant with Satan’s child, the top horror film of all time—and a life without God is certainly meaningless at best and horrifying most of the time.

Songs, magazines, and movies led the way. The Supreme Court soon went with the flow with its Roe v. Wade ruling in 1973, but didn’t spell out the philosophy behind it until another abortion decision in 1992: In Planned Parenthood v. Casey, Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote that “at the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.”

Vague spirituality has accompanied such vague jurisprudence. Countless liberal theologians have said we can all stand in a hallway of religion without going into particular rooms—but remove the rooms and the hallway is no longer a hallway, just an empty space. Once beliefs are not important and only actions are real, the reason to act disappears.

In short, radical autonomy has merely left us even more like rolling stones. Happily, the Bible repeatedly shows us how to stop rolling and gain satisfaction: “If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them … you shall eat your bread to the full and dwell in your land securely. I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid.”

Ancient Israel had such peace only briefly—and taught us in the process that long-term peace comes only with Christ. And the alternative? Lack of satisfaction, but something even worse: “If your soul abhors my rules … I will visit you with panic…. I will set my face against you” (Leviticus 26:3-6, 15-17). ®
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