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Monthly costs starting at:

Based on age, household size, and membership level

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<th>Membership Level</th>
<th>Monthly Cost</th>
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<td>Individuals</td>
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As of October 2017

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UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD: Stalin’s command—to starve millions of Ukrainians
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Give the gift of clarity: wng.org/giftofclarity
ike many nonprofit organizations, WORLD makes appeals around this time of year for charitable contributions. We try not to overwhelm you, but neither can we be bashful about reminding you how much we depend upon the support of our readers. Very simply, we cannot fulfill our mission without contributions from our members.

As a WORLD member, you are in one of two groups—members who have made charitable contributions to WORLD in the past, or members who have not yet made a charitable contribution to us. Here is my straightforward appeal, whichever group you are in:

First, if you are a member who has never made a contribution to WORLD, please consider giving a gift to support our work before year end. Pretty straightforward, right?

Listen, I know our members support many causes, starting with their churches. You probably already are giving substantially more than the average American (which is shockingly little, considering the magnitude of God’s blessings to us). But I would encourage you to think about the benefits of supporting WORLD with a gift. Your support allows us to provide more of what you love and value—a source for Biblically objective journalism in our man-centered culture that does not recognize truth.

Because of the multiple tens of thousands of WORLD readers, if everyone made some kind of contribution to our mission, that would make an enormous difference.

Second, I’d make an additional appeal to those of you who have made a contribution before. You would fall into this camp in one of two ways: you give generously every year (and often more than once a year) or you’ve given in the past, but it’s been awhile (maybe even years) since your last gift.

Here’s my appeal to you: Please give again this year, and consider giving a little more than your last gift. We promise to be good stewards of whatever you send our way.

Nothing fancy here—I’m asking you to support the mind-renewing, Biblically objective journalism of WORLD this year. One easy way to give right now is to visit wng.org/donate.

Kevin Martin
kevin@wng.org

CONTACT US: 800.951.6397 / WNG.ORG

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AP
If I wasn’t right when I first made the
point in this column more than 25 years
ago, I probably should be super careful with
such a warning now.

Here’s what I said in our issue from Jan. 25,
1992:

“There are three things we who are
American adults in the 1990s will teach our
children, if we want to be faithful to them.

“First, we will teach them that they are not
likely to live such financially prosperous lives as
we have been blessed to live.

“Second, we will teach them that they are
not likely to have the same kinds of social
stability—or even freedoms—we have enjoyed
throughout our lives. They may not even see
the United States endure beyond another
generation.

“Third, we will teach them that neither of
those things ultimately matters. What matters
is that they learn to live faithfully with God,
their creator and friend.”

I did protect myself, as you will note, with
that third point. And it still holds. But I am a bit
concerned that my children might conclude
that if I was wrong on the first two assertions I
made that are so measurable, maybe I shouldn’t
be trusted on the third claim.

I argued back then that the cycle that had
made us so relatively rich simply could not be
sustained. “Most of us, for better or for worse,
have lived better than our parents did. We’ve
had more appliances in our homes earlier.
We’ve eaten out more. We’ve traveled more.
We’ve come to expect that’s the way things
are—and we’ve intuitively supposed it would be
that way for our children.” I stressed that we’d
built that lifestyle on way too much credit, and
that such an empire was bound to collapse—
and that the collapse was likely to come sooner
rather than later.

With each passing year, though, such warn-
ings have sounded more and more suspect.

“The next
generation
doesn’t
seem
nearly as
fearful as we
used to be
about the
vulnerability of our polit-
ical structure
and its
attendant
freedoms.

Sure,” a 35-ish father told me a few weeks ago,
“I’ve been hearing those cautions all my life.
First thing you know, I’ll be an old man—and I
will have denied myself and my family all the
good things your generation has enjoyed.”

For this young father, the wolf-at-the-door
warning about the economy had lost much of
its credibility.

Similarly, the next generation doesn’t seem
nearly as fearful as we used to be about the
vulnerability of our political structure and its
attendant freedoms. Many seem open to tinker-
ning with socialism. I’m not sure
they’ve ever thought about the way
a collapsed economy leads to civil
unrest and in-the-streets violence
across a nation.

But it’s not just a wobbly econ-
omy that threatens to undo us, I
warned “back then.” We are by no
means the unified culture that once
was able to counteract our weak-
nesses more or less as “one nation.”
No more. Our racial divisions taunt
us with every evening’s newscast.
We may be more divided economi-
cally, theologically, linguistically,
sexually, culturally, and every other
way than at any time in our history.

Some of that division has been on
purpose—raising the question as to whether we
can endure as a society while at the very same
time promoting diversity.

But we’re still here! I raised these concerns
in this column 25 years ago, and my tone sug-
gested I thought the dangers were imminent.
But I was wrong in my timing. Should I now no
longer use these arguments with the next
generation?

No matter. We still ought calmly to teach
our children that however much we’d like them
to enjoy God’s economic largesse and social
tranquility, much worse things could happen to
them than to be deprived of those blessings.

Most of the memorable stories of people walk-
ing closely with the Lord their God come from
times and cultures that were economically
deprived and socially unstable.

Of course, God could choose otherwise. He
could flood our families with all kinds of riches
and stability and other good things. If He does,
those who have been expecting and preparing
for something much more difficult won’t find it
hard to adjust. But if they think such things are
owed them, their lives could be very hard
indeed. ©
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Fleeing still

A group of Rohingya Muslims on a raft made with plastic containers cross the Naf River from Myanmar into Bangladesh, on Nov. 12. They are part of a wave of more than 600,000 Rohingya Muslims who have left Myanmar since August (see “Hundreds of thousands to help,” Nov. 25).

A.M. AHAD/AP
Our kids pay some attention to what we say. They pay much more attention to what we do. And many are absorbing lessons from what some evangelicals are both saying and doing regarding Senate candidate Roy Moore.

I can set the scene by going back to politics-and-sex conversations of the 1990s, bookended by a 1990 *GQ* article lionizing Sen. Ted Kennedy and by the 1999 failure of the Senate to remove President Bill Clinton from office.

Michael Kelly’s article in 1990 noted, “In Washington, it sometimes seems as if everyone knows someone who has slept with Kennedy, been invited to sleep with Kennedy.” Kelly vividly described the senior Massachusetts senator’s propositioning of a 16-year-old congressional page, his employment of an aide “whose real position was to procure women for Kennedy,” and his sexual activity in restaurants with a congressional lobbyist and a waitress. The Kennedy soap opera had hundreds of episodes.

Kelly, an accurate reporter who was officially the first journalist killed during the 2003 Iraq invasion, quoted Orrin Hatch, the GOP senator from Utah, saying of Kennedy, “He has the kind of personal wealth where he can do just about anything he wants to do, but I wouldn’t trade life with him for ten seconds. I’d rather be poor and in the condition that I’m in than trade with Ted.”

But Hatch also called Kennedy “one of the all-time-great senators.” No, no, no. When Massachusetts voters did not oust Kennedy following the fatal Chappaquiddick episode of 1969 or other abuses over the decades, the Senate Ethics Committee should have voted to expel him, as it did Bob Packwood in 1995. (The Oregon Republican, accused of sexual misconduct, resigned before the whole Senate voted.)

Mitch McConnell, the Kentucky Republican who is now the Senate Majority Leader, was chairman of the Ethics Committee then. Four years later, during the Senate debate on Bill Clinton, McConnell said, “We Republicans were aware during the Packwood debate that we would likely lose that Senate seat if Sen. Packwood was removed from office. So, we had a choice: Retain the Senate seat or retain our honor. We chose honor, and never looked back.”

McConnell concluded, “Do we want to retain President Clinton in office, or do we want to retain our honor, our principle, and our moral authority? For me, and for many members in my impeachment-fatigued party, I choose honor.” Sadly, the Senate did not choose honor regarding either Ted Kennedy or Bill Clinton. Neither was truly penalized for using the prestige and power of a government position for sexual advantage, even if the activity was consensual. When Clinton rode high in polls despite lying about his exploitation of Monica Lewinsky—she was a 22-year-old White House intern in 1995—he popularized oral sex among many young people.

The Roy Moore situation is difficult because, even as the number of accusers mounts, we have no photographic evidence of misconduct as with Sen. Al Franken of Minnesota, or diary evidence as with Bob Packwood—and the Moore incidents happened many years ago. Some of the teenagers he dated or tried to date, while serving as an assistant district attorney, thought he was creepy. The claims of sexual assault are in a different category.

Some WORLD readers may carefully examine all the evidence and conclude that Moore is getting a raw deal. Some may want to vote for Moore and let the Senate Ethics Committee decide what to do with him. Others may...
And hard questions for secular liberals

The left has its own problems now—not only Al Franken's groping of a sleeping woman, but the teaching many liberal culture gurus have offered over the years.

Many movies have glamorized much older men hitting on much younger women. In 1979, the same year 32-year-old Roy Moore may have accosted teenagers, Woody Allen's Manhattan centered on the romantic and sexual relationship of a 42-year-old character played by Allen and a 17-year-old character played by Mariel Hemingway (who was 17).

Manhattan received “universal acclaim” from movie reviewers, according to the Metacritic website. None of the reviews I saw criticized the basic premise. Roger Ebert wrote, “It wouldn’t do, you see, for the love scenes between Woody and Mariel to feel awkward or to hint at cradle-snatching or an unhealthy interest on Woody’s part in innocent young girls. But they don’t feel that way: Hemingway's character has a certain grave intelligence.”

Grave intelligence: Hemingway makes comments such as, “I like it when you get an uncontrollable urge.” The Gershwin music in the background as the 42-year-old and the 17-year-old kiss in a Central Park carriage makes the scene seem romantic, not yucky. When Allen's character temporarily decides to dump Hemingway's and says, “This was supposed to be a temporary fling,” she responds, “We have great sex”—and he asks, “Why should I feel guilty about this?” (Not the sex, but the breakup.)

Woody Allen lost some supporters 25 years ago when he was in “a relationship” with actress Mia Farrow and entered into “a relationship” with (and later married) Farrow’s adopted daughter, Soon-Yi Previn. Manhattan’s reputation, though, survives: It is now No. 46 on the American Film Institute’s list of the 100 greatest American comedies—comedies, not tragedies.

Nearly two decades after Manhattan, feminist Gloria Steinem offered a fulsome defense of Bill Clinton’s use of Monica Lewinsy. Steinem acknowledged in a New York Times column on March 22, 1998, that “President Clinton may be a candidate for sex addiction therapy. But feminists will still have been right to resist pressure by the right wing and the media to call for his resignation or impeachment.”

Steinem said the Monica Lewinsky affair really did not count, despite Lewinsky’s age and the power differential, because she welcomed the attention. Regarding Clinton’s attack on Kathleen Willey, Steinem said he “made a gross, dumb and reckless pass at a supporter during a low point in her life. She pushed him away, she said, and it never happened again. In other words, President Clinton took ‘no’ for an answer.”

Steinem concluded by saying it didn’t even matter that Clinton lied under oath, because “we have a responsibility to make it O.K. for politicians to tell the truth—providing they are respectful of ‘no means no: yes means yes’—and still be able to enter high office, including the Presidency. Until then, we will disqualify energy and talent the country needs.”

As the Moore debate escalated in mid-November, liberal social critic Caitlin Flanagan wrote in The Atlantic. “The Democratic Party needs to make its own reckoning of the way it protected Bill Clinton. The party needs to come to terms with the fact that it was so enraptured by their brilliant, Big Dog president and his stunning string of progressive accomplishments that it abandoned some of its central principles.” —M.O.

And here’s what I most want us to keep in mind: More important than any particular election, more important even than our cultural direction, is the gospel. The Good News is not a favorable political poll but the Bible’s announcement that God saves sinners. Our goal should be to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, not to abandon central Biblical principles regarding women’s worth, or to glorify a politician and win a Senate seat.

When we and our candidates are under pressure, we should convey to our children this message: Nothing in my hand I bring; / Simply to Thy cross I cling; / Naked, come to Thee for dress; / Helpless, look to Thee for grace; / Foul, I to the fountain fly; / Wash me, Savior, or I die. ®
Voted
In a nationwide postal poll, Australians voted overwhelmingly in favor of legalizing same-sex marriage. The government of Australia announced the results Nov. 15: About 12.7 million people voted, with 61 percent in favor of gay marriage. Legislators had promised to pass a law changing the legal definition of marriage to include same-sex couples if voters first approved it. A bill to do so has been introduced to the Senate but is still open to amendments, and conservative lawmakers are pushing for faith-based exemptions to guard free speech and religion.

Approved
The Pentagon has agreed to cover the cost for gender-reassignment surgery for an active-duty service member. The surgery, which took place at a private hospital on Nov. 14, came four months after President Donald Trump first tried to ban transgender individuals from the military, citing the high medical costs of transgender service members. The Pentagon said the individual, who identifies as a woman, had been under a sex-reassignment course of treatment—and it said a doctor claimed the surgery was medically necessary.

Relented
Queens College in New York City has agreed to stop discriminating against a pro-life student group. Last fall, the college chapter of Students for Life applied for official student club status, yet was rejected without explanation while other clubs were approved. The Alliance Defending Freedom filed a suit arguing the school’s student club policy was unconstitutional, allowing a committee to deny clubs recognition and funding for any reason: These practices forced pro-life club members to fund pro-abortion groups through mandatory student activity fees, but did not allow the pro-life group to access such funds itself. Queens has now agreed to draft new policies to protect students’ freedom of viewpoint.

Praised
Authorities said staff members at an elementary school in rural California saved “countless” lives by quickly putting their building into lockdown on Nov. 14 when a malicious gunman arrived. Kevin Neal, a 43-year-old local man, had begun a shooting spree following a dispute with his neighbors. The police believe he was in possession of at least one semi-automatic rifle and two handguns. They said he seemed to choose his victims at random, wounding 10 in multiple locations and killing five. He arrived outside the elementary school, but when the teachers heard gunfire, they locked the doors: Neal fired into the building but drove away after six minutes. One child was shot in the leg and chest, and others were reportedly injured by broken glass, but no one at the school was killed.

Wounded
A North Korean soldier was shot by his fellow troops while making a successful escape from his country to South Korea. The man fled from Panmunjom, part of the Joint Security Area, a heavily armed location where soldiers from North Korea and South Korea stand guard at posts only feet apart. The soldier drove a vehicle into Panmunjom, and then ran south while other North Koreans fired at him, shooting him in the shoulder, knee, armpit, and elsewhere. He hid in a building until American and South Korean troops found him and took him to a hospital. It was the first defection from the Joint Security Area in 10 years. More than 30,000 North Koreans have fled their country since the late 1990s, with most traveling through China.
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I don’t want to be on a very select roll of wonderful people with a killer. Someone who is at best a handmaiden to genocide and an accomplice to murder.’

Irish musician and activist BOB GELDOF on Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Geldof returned his Freedom of the City of Dublin Award in protest over Suu Kyi’s response to the of Rohingya Muslim crisis. Suu Kyi was given the award in 1999 while under house arrest.

When it hit us, it came fast.’

Valparaiso University president MARK HECKLER on the sudden decline in applications to the university’s law school. The incoming class this year had 29 students, down from 206 in 2013, and the school announced it would stop enrolling new students. Law schools across the country have faced steep declines over the past few years.

‘They worshipped Charlie like a god.’

Former “Manson Family” member BARBARA HOY on cult leader Charles Manson, who directed members of his cult to murder seven people in August 1969. Manson died in prison on Nov. 19 at age 83.

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‘I spent more than 20 years of experience as a surgeon, but I have not found parasites this big in the intestines of South Koreans.’

Dr. LEE COOK-JONG on treating a soldier who defected from North Korea (see p. 8). The soldier’s intestines were full of worms and other parasites—and soldiers typically have better access to food in North Korea.
Multiple, brave women told their stories of how a charming Southern lawyer sexually assaulted and harassed them...

But, luckily, most people ignored them.

Stay together as a group watch your step and if you’re groped by a congressman, blow the whistle.
Another anthem controversy
Some football fans are now booing the national anthem. But they aren’t fans of American football, and the anthem is China’s. With anti-Beijing sentiment on the rise, fans at soccer matches in Hong Kong have begun booing the Chinese anthem. The trend began at a World Cup qualifying match against Qatar in 2015. In September, China adopted a new law to punish people who disrespect its national anthem. The semiautonomous Hong Kong is expected to adopt a similar measure soon, a concern for democracy activists in the former British colony who want to preserve freedom of expression in the city.

Repeat offender
A deliveryman in Clackamas, Ore., had his wife call 911 when he heard a woman screaming for help on Nov. 7. But when authorities arrived at the scene, they didn’t find any woman in distress or any other human beings at all. What they found instead was a green-and-yellow parrot named Diego. The parrot, which was in good health and not in distress, was the “woman” screaming for help.

Say something nice
Darren Young of Maui, Hawaii, will be sending his ex-girlfriend nice letters, but nobody would blame her for not believing them. The reason: Young will send them because of a court order. Hawaiian Circuit Court Judge Rhonda Loo made the ruling on Oct. 27 after Young violated a protection order by sending 144 harassing text messages to a woman he once called his girlfriend. At sentencing, Loo ordered him to send the woman 144 compliments, serve two years of probation, pay a $2,400 fine, and perform 200 hours of community service.

Low-speed chase
Rondell Tony Chinuhuk may have stolen an automobile, but few would call his alleged theft grand. Chinuhuk on Nov. 7 reportedly took a motorized shopping cart from a Safeway grocery store in Fairbanks, Alaska, and drove for 10 minutes before police caught him. The cart’s top speed: 1.9 miles per hour. Authorities charged Chinuhuk with felony theft.
Eyes ahead
The lampposts in Salzburg, Austria, are getting a new feature: airbags. The local city council voted to install the airbags to cut down on injuries suffered when pedestrians crash into them while staring down at their smartphones. According to the city's Board for Traffic Safety, pedestrian accidents are now more common in Salzburg than driving or cycling accidents.

Dangerous dips
German officials have decided that children should no longer swim with crocodiles at a popular zoo in the European nation. In August, the Darmstadt regional council voted to shut down a children's program at the Crocodile Zoo in Friedberg, which previously allowed youngsters to swim with the large reptiles. The move, which was upheld by a court decision on Nov. 2, means the zoo will have to cancel its popular jungle-themed birthday parties. However, adults may still swim with crocodiles at the zoo.

Google with cheese
An Oct. 28 Twitter post by a well-known technology writer caught the attention of Google CEO Sundar Pichai and sent the company employees into a frenzy. Tech author Thomas Baekdal tweeted a comparison photo of the burger emojis for Apple and Google and added this caption: “I think we need to have a discussion about how Google’s burger emoji is placing the cheese underneath the burger, while Apple puts it on top.” The next day, Pichai promised the tech giant would fix the problem promptly.

Vegetable attack
It looked like a bomb, and it was in a country where unexploded bombs from World War II are occasionally unearthed. So an 81-year-old man in Bretten, Germany, called police when he found the large, dark object in his garden. Police arrived and determined that the object, which they said in a statement “really did look very like a bomb,” was actually a 16-inch, 11-pound zucchini. Apparently someone had tossed the vegetable into the garden, prompting the confusion and concern.

Sticky situation
With global demand soaring, France is facing a culinary catastrophe in a land known for excellence in food—a butter shortage. As global butter prices nearly tripled from $1.46 per pound in 2016 to $4.08 per pound in November, French retailers have been locked in a price war. According to Thierry Roquefeuil, head of a French dairy group, retailers have refused to pass along the increased costs to consumers, therefore French suppliers have begun selling their butter to German grocers. A report showing that 30 percent of French butter demand went unmet prompted France’s Parliament to summon the nation’s agricultural minister to answer questions in October.
In 1905, Hollywood was a peaceful suburb of Los Angeles populated mostly by orange trees, unconcerned with the new art form taking shape on the East Coast. “Motion pictures” were a novelty predicted to fade within a decade: What was drama without dialogue? Within five years the film pioneers were migrating from New Jersey to Southern California for three reasons: the climate, the sunlight, and freedom from Thomas Edison’s stranglehold on film patents. D. W. Griffith arrived in 1910. Mack Sennett, of Keystone Cops fame, set up shop in 1912, followed by Cecil B. DeMille shortly after. That was only the beginning.

Though not the only suburb to host a movie studio, by the 1920s “Hollywood” designated the entire film industry. That industry, far from a flash in the pan, had developed an entirely new medium for telling stories. The lack of sound technology in the beginning was actually an advantage, because it forced the filmmakers to devise a visual vocabulary of close-ups, fade-outs, jump cuts, and pans. The camera brought audiences up close and personal, into a character’s closet or bedroom; even, perhaps, into his mind. Never before could a roomful of spectators experience such intimacy with people they didn’t know.

The camera doesn’t lie, they say. But it does distort. Those who mastered the art of the camera, whether behind or in front, were often mastered by it. To be fair, even a levelheaded banker or judge would find it difficult to maintain a sense of proportion with his face stretched 10 feet high on screens all over the world—and actors are not known for levelheadedness. Ever since the days of Charlie Chaplin and Mary Pickford, screen idols splashed their extravagant lives over the cultural landscape, the very definition of “celebrity.” But their heyday might be ending now.

The chain-reaction sex scandals that began with Harvey Weinstein just keep exploding. Breitbart’s Big Hollywood website features an hour-by-hour update detailing the latest. In retrospect, the only surprise may be why the backlash took so long. “Everybody knew” about that actor’s predilection for teen boys or that top agent’s habit of hurling office supplies at underlings. The “casting couch” has been a rite of passage for ambitious starlets since studios acquired studio heads. “For a lot of jobs,” says industry blogger Richard Rushfield, “abetting [bad] behavior has been part of the job requirement.” Why lay it all bare now? Possibly the cup of wrath is full and even industry insiders have decided enough’s enough. But more likely, Hollywood is slipping from its high perch and weakness draws the wolves. The summer of 2017 was the worst ever for box-office receipts, with not one, but three big-budget flops—King Arthur, The Mummy, and The Dark Tower. Audiences are bored even with projects that were considered “safe”: endless sequels and established IP (intellectual property) like superhero “universes” and Stephen King novels. Bankable stars no longer draw, and the industry’s outspoken liberalism wins no friends in the hinterlands. In fact, it’s debatable whether American filmmakers are making films for Americans at all, especially since the global box office earns more than double the domestic take.

Nor have they read the digital writing on the wall. Who could have predicted that Amazon, an online bookseller, and Netflix, an online DVD service, would grow up to be video powerhouses? Or that long-form TV storytelling, an update of the old matinee serial, would generate more buzz than the latest blockbuster? The triple whammy of technological one-upmanship, an unreliable box office, and its own moral turpitude has industry watchers wondering how long until Hollywood goes on life support. The holiday season looms, with the dreadful possibility that not even Star Wars can reverse its long decline.

No kingdom lasts, especially the kind built on vanity and illusion. But vanity and illusion won’t go away; hundreds of big screens surrender to millions of little ones. An empire of make-believe surrenders to a democracy of make-believe, and that’s not all bad. Let creativity bloom on YouTube and festival screens, but ground it in the ultimate reality of heaven.

**Dreamland faces reality**

**NEW TECHNOLOGY AND MORAL TURPITUDE CREATE A CRISIS FOR HOLLYWOOD**

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**The chain-reaction sex scandals that began with Harvey Weinstein just keep exploding.**

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**Harvey Weinstein at the 2017 Tribeca Film Festival**
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In an exchange some scholars now believe may never have happened, the great Russian novelist Dostoevsky described meeting the great British novelist Charles Dickens. As the story goes, Dickens told Dostoevsky that he based the pure, good-hearted characters in his novels on what he wished to be, while his selfish, cruel villains sprang from the tendencies he actually found within himself. And yet there is one character—arguably Dickens’ most iconic—who embodies both the “clutching, covetous, old sinner” and the man “as good... as the good old city ever knew.”

Starring Dan Stevens in the kind of role in which Downton Abbey fans like him best—with a plummy British accent in plummy period dress—The Man Who Invented Christmas traces the origins of Dickens’ A Christmas Carol. The film’s lighthearted tone imagines the author as a sort of literary Forrest Gump, lucking his way into overhearing brilliant dialogue and accidentally crossing paths with people who inspire his most beloved work. No doubt, much of this is more fantasy than biography, but the broad strokes of truth are there. Dickens was, by his own admission, a keen observer of the teeming masses that crowded Victorian London, and he...
borrowed from them freely. In the film, as Dickens picks up a line here and a gloowering expression there, the character of Scrooge takes shape in his mind—and on the screen in the inimitable form of Christopher Plummer.

From there on out, Plummer-as-Scrooge hounds and harasses his creator so hilariously, audiences will likely leave clamoring for Plummer to star in a proper remake of the classic tale next Christmas.

But the movie isn’t all twinkles and snowflakes. It also explores the inner wounds and personal failings that Dickens likely drew on in his work. For a time, hung up by writer’s block, he falls prey to more palatable versions of the sins that plague his character, treasuring up resentments the way Scrooge treasures treasures coins and being as miserly with his time as the old moneylender is with his coal. If he hopes to write a satisfying ending, he has to confront his own need to give and receive forgiveness.

There’s little in the PG-rated Man Who Invented Christmas to keep anyone away besides a few instances of minor, mostly British-specific foul language. Some viewers might be a little bothered by what isn’t there—that is, much mention of the Savior whose birth we celebrate at Christmas.

While Christ doesn’t feature heavily in this story, the true, the good, and the noble shine through brilliantly. Watching Dickens’ and Scrooge’s arc, I was reminded again of how much A Christmas Carol reflects the story of Zacchaeus. We know next to nothing about the dinner our Lord had at the taxman’s house or what they said to one another, but we see the transformation. The cheat, born again, gives away half his wealth. Old Scrooge awakes distributing raises and prize turkeys, whooping hilariously, and saying, “I’m quite a baby. Never mind. I don’t care. I’d rather be a baby.” A fairly obvious allusion to Scrooge, too, being born again.

So while Dickens may not have invented Christmas, we can’t deny that through the phenomenal talent with which God gifted him, he’s been challenging audiences for nearly 200 years to manifest the qualities Christ and His birth symbolize—hope, mercy, and a chance to become a new creation. In its own cheerful way, The Man Who Invented Christmas does the same. You’d be hard-pressed to find a more enjoyable film in theaters this Christmas season. ☺

**Movie**

**Coco**

Parents will probably ascertain from the trailers that Pixar’s big PG holiday release, Coco, centers on the Mexican tradition of *Día de los Muertos*—Day of the Dead. This could cause concern for some, as the plot involves 12-year-old Miguel (Anthony Gonzalez) participating in all the myths associated with the holiday, including leaving his living family to visit his long-deceased ancestors in the land of the dead.

Personally, I took my 8-year-old and used it as an opportunity to discuss how the story shows that all cultures have a natural understanding that our souls live on after death, but that there is only one story that stands outside culture to make sense of our longing for eternal life. I’m glad I did. Coco’s rich visual details and splendid Mexican music gave her a newfound enthusiasm for a country she’s been studying in school. Even better, Coco’s main theme, as valuable as it is unusual, serves as a counterweight to a message modern America continually lobs at kids her age.

Music and forbids him from performing. It sounds like the same story we’ve seen before in countless kids’ movies—follow your dreams. Seize the day. Be true to yourself. Eventually your talent will win out and your killjoy family will get with the program. Except that’s not where Coco goes. As Miguel meets his ancestors, he learns that there are many things more precious than your dreams, and following them too hard can make you a monster.

Even more than *Up*, *Coco* is a story about honoring our elders and cherishing the contributions they make to our lives. As it builds to its surprising twist, Coco becomes one of the most emotionally satisfying tales from a studio that has built a reputation for emotionally satisfying tales.

—by MEGAN BASHAM

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**BOX OFFICE TOP 10**

FOR THE WEEKEND OF NOV. 17-19 according to Box Office Mojo

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CAUTIONS: Quantity of sexual (S), violent (V), and foul-language (F) content on a 0-to-10 scale, with 10 high. from kids-in-mind.com

Reviewed by WORLD
Wonder

Wonder makes you think: How great would fifth grade be if you had Mr. Browne (Daveed Diggs) as your teacher, Mr. Tushman (Mandy Patinkin) as your principal, and a children’s book illustrator (Julia Roberts) as your mom? Pretty great, except fifth-grader Auggie (Jacob Tremblay) has a rare genetic disorder that has disfigured his face and made him ashamed to go to school or even look other children in the eye.

Imagine, then, Auggie’s struggle as he stops homeschooling to start fifth grade at a local middle school, where he tries to fit in. Based on the best-selling novel Wonder by R.J. Palacio, the film switches between perspectives of the younger characters: Auggie, his sister Via (Izabela Vidovic) who feels ignored as her parents lavish attention on their needy youngest child, the sister’s best friend, and one of Auggie’s classmates. Much of the story centers on Auggie dealing with school bullies and might require Kleenex.

The film, rated PG (for the bullying and brief profanity), is as predictable as a Hallmark card but as comforting as a holiday tradition. As a warm live-action family drama, Wonder harks back to the 1990s heyday of PG-rated family films and has some vintage touches too: Auggie’s family has a landline phone, and the principal writes physical letters to students who get in trouble.

Some cheesy Hallmark lines make it into the film. Auggie says at one point, “We all deserve a standing ovation once in our lives.” Eye roll, yes, but the underlying idea is the heart of this movie: Everyone has struggles, but everyone has inner worth. By the end you’re rooting for all (OK, most) of the characters.

The cast raises Wonder above mediocrity: Owen Wilson (who plays Auggie’s father) always makes me laugh, and he and Roberts are dynamic together. When one kid expresses jealousy over Auggie’s close family, you understand it. Fifth grade isn’t so bad after all. —by EMILY BELZ

Mudbound

Few escape a mud fight—literal or metaphorical—without getting dirty. This seems to be the theme of Mudbound, independent writer-director Dee Rees’ sprawling drama about two families in the race-charged, 1940s South. The film provides a sobering look at the past—though the look provides little to uplift.

The film is not shy about depicting every facet of racism, and much more besides: It earns a strong R for paralinguage, graphic violence, sexual and non-sexual nudity, and adultery across the screen.

The Jacksons, an African-American family of sharecroppers, have lived in Mississippi for generations but never owned the land they farm. “This place say you need a deed, not deeds,” father Hap says in one of the many poetic voiceovers from each of the main characters. The McAllans, a white family, move to the farm from town. As outsiders, they must grow used to the rural culture.

The first half of the film centers on the personal struggles and subtle friendship between the two matriarchs, played masterfully by Mary J. Blige and Carey Mulligan. The second half follows the friendship between Ronsel Jackson and brother-in-law Jamie McAllan, both former GIs affected by PTSD and a war where black and white served with equal valor.

However, the other McAllan men—and their culture—tarnish these friendships with hideous racism.

Mudbound manages to balance tragic epic with intimate family drama, sweeping shots of muddy fields with weathervane faces. Netflix, the film’s distributor, is releasing it to selected theaters as well as streaming in a likely hope that it will gain Academy Award nominations for its strong acting and direction.

Certain scenes provide moments of racial reconciliation and hope: As Blige’s character embraces the McAllan children to provide for her own family, she says, “I know that love is a kind of survival.”

But more of the film’s tone is suggested by the film’s framing sequence: a burial where everyone literally wallows in mud, without real hope of forgiveness. —by RIKKI ELIZABETH STINNETTE

See all our movie reviews at wng.org/movies
This issue lists our best books of the year, so this is an opportune time to describe the worst I read in 2017: Sally Quinn’s memoir, Finding Magic (HarperOne).

Washington Post writer Quinn, now 76, was from 1969 to 2015 one of America’s most influential journalists. She had been a go-go dancer and a social secretary for the Algerian ambassador when she met Post Executive Editor Ben Bradlee. He asked her, “Can you show me something you’ve written?” She responded, “I’ve never written anything in my life.” He said, “Nobody’s perfect. You’re hired.”

Quinn’s memoir is full of religious words. Early on, she decided to lose her virginity: “There was something sacred, holy to me about what we were doing. … It was a powerful spiritual experience.” When Bradlee committed adultery with her, she felt “so transcendent, so sacred, so divine. I had never experienced anything like it. … He was, of course, still married.” Bradlee left his wife to move in with Quinn in 1973. Five years later they married.

Quinn did not pray only at the altar of sex. She had faith—in witchcraft. She writes about putting “hexes” on three people: a beautiful woman whom her boyfriend lusted after, an editor who ran a negative cover story on her, and an astrologer who gave her a brutally negative reading. The woman committed suicide, the editor lost his magazine in a hostile takeover and came down with cancer, and the astrologer dropped dead of a cerebral hemorrhage. Quinn then felt bad, “thought for a long time about what I could do, and came up with the idea of donating money to … the American Heart Association.”

Quinn now wears two gold chains with the Hindu god Ganesh and a bracelet “with a small blue evil eye with a diamond in the center. I never take it off.” She praises Wicca and witchcraft, which she calls magic: “I believe magic is based on faith and hope. It’s like prayer … spiritual and uplifting.”

Quinn believes in necromancy: Ben Bradlee died three years ago but a medium told her, “Ben wants you to have another relationship. … Ben also said to her that he’s met some interesting people on the other side” and has talked with Richard Nixon, his Watergate adversary. Quinn takes horoscopes seriously: “If I am under the influence of Saturn (no good), I just know that I have a hard time ahead. … If I come under the influence of Venus, it’s a pretty sure thing that I will be feeling loving.”

Quinn has no love for the God of the Bible. She writes that when her son was ill she sat in a hospital chapel and “waited for God to show himself to me.” When she “felt nothing” and “heard nothing” she said “[Obscenity] you!” Parts of Washington society have reacted that way to Quinn’s latest. The Washingtonian called her “a seasoned provocateur” and snarled that Quinn, once the D.C. hostess with the mostest, had become “largely irrelevant. What better way to reinsert herself into the conversation than shaking up buttoned-down Washington by letting her spiritual freak flag fly?”

But her freakiness is becoming more common. Whenever we don’t follow the God of the Bible, we echo Quinn’s statement that “I have my own religion. I made it up.” Others say the same: One woman famous to sociologists, Sheila Larson, made up her own faith and called it “Sheilaism.” Quinn does show the childish faiths of atheists: She tells how Christopher Hitchens “confided to me” that he read his daily horoscope, while Richard Dawkins feared haunted houses and was “afraid to step on a crack for fear of breaking his mother’s back.” Some decry both theism and atheism and call themselves “spiritual.”

Bob Dylan said it well: “You’re gonna have to serve somebody, / It may be the devil or it may be the Lord, / But you’re gonna have to serve somebody.”

A walk on the dark side

A LOOK AT SALLY QUINN’S ‘RELIGION’

by Marvin Olasky
RECENT NONFICTION BOOKS
reviewed by Susan Olasky

EDUCATION A LA CARTE Kevin Leman

Leman brings his clear, commonsense wisdom to the subject of school. He deals straightforwardly with questions of kindergarten readiness, homework organization, and learning styles. Those looking for a philosophy of Christian education won’t find it here. But parents wanting a good overview of the questions they should be asking and the best options for their particular children will find it a helpful resource. He clearly puts parents—not school officials—in the driver’s seat of their own children’s education. His story, and the lessons learned from his own educational failures and successes, shape his understanding.

COME, LET US ADORE HIM Paul David Tripp

In the introduction to this short devotional, Tripp says he decided to write an Advent devotional out of the recognition that familiarity with some things “often does bad stuff to us. ... We begin to take them for granted. ... We quit noticing them. ... We tend not to celebrate them as we once did.” This collection of short meditations on Christ’s advent offers fresh takes on the familiar story. Each day’s offering centers on themes like singing, willingness, and promises. He connects the stories to other portions of Scripture and offers suggestions for ways parents can connect their children to the theme.

THE ALL-OR-NOTHING MARRIAGE Eli Finkel

Psychology professor Eli Finkel approaches marriage as a scientist, largely ignoring religion in his exploration of the institution. Those who believe the Bible best describes what marriage is—and how fallen creatures can succeed at it—won’t find more insight here. But Finkel does show how the broader culture understands marriage and how that understanding has changed over the centuries. As self-actualization has come to be marriage’s highest end, the institution has become both more rewarding and much more fragile. The last section includes “love hacks”—secular reworkings of Biblical wisdom—such as “Be kind one to another.”

AWKWARD Ty Tashiro

Awkward people have problems meeting social expectations. Tashiro draws on his own experience, neuroscience and social science research, and clients from his psychotherapy practice to develop the idea of awkwardness and present strategies for surviving it. The book moves comfortably between anecdote and research (sugar and medicine) to provide helpful insights. Here are a few: Awkward people have a “spotlight” focus. They may cut in line because they didn’t notice the line. They can be blunt, less able to read facial expressions, and obsessive about their areas of interest. Tashiro’s clear writing style and vivid stories make this both entertaining and informative.

AFTERWORD

Lizzie Collingham’s The Taste of Empire: How Britain’s Quest for Food Shaped the Modern World (Basic Books, 2017) looks at how the British need and desire for certain foods fueled an empire—and how the far-flung empire expanded British appetites. The story (along with recipes) speaks of ingenuity, adaptability, and also exploitation.

Rich Pérez’s Mi Casa Uptown (B&H, 2017) offers a hopeful and wise perspective on gospel work in the city. He structures the book’s chapters around this guiding philosophy: “Plant roots, make homes, build families, love neighbors, trust Jesus, and die well.” He saturates the book with love for his Dominican culture and the Uptown NYC neighborhood in which he grew up and now has a church. He describes beautifully the mixed reality of immigrant children—and shows how Biblical characters like Saul of Tarsus speak to that. —S.O.

To see more book news and reviews, go to wng.org/books
Complicated plots

2017 YOUNG ADULT NATIONAL BOOK AWARD WINNER AND FINALISTS reviewed by Rachel Aldrich

CLAYTON BYRD GOES UNDERGROUND
Rita Williams-Garcia

The only finalist geared toward middle schoolers, this book tells the story of a young African-American boy grieving the loss of his grandfather, “Cool Papa,” who was a jazz musician and passed that love to his grandson. Clayton tries to process his grief and anger in different ways, and Williams-Garcia weaves the language of blues throughout the story to communicate emotion. Although Williams-Garcia portrays complex and fractured relationships, the book is as much about forgiveness and reconciliation as it is about grief. Unlike the rest of this list, this book is appropriate for any age.

I AM NOT YOUR PERFECT MEXICAN DAUGHTER Erika L. Sánchez

Julia was already the black sheep of her Mexican-American family, but the death of her perfect, saintly sister Olga made things worse. What unfolds is a story of family secrets, tangled emotions, and mental illness. Predictable clashes occur between feminist Julia and her strict, traditional Catholic parents. Slowly, she learns that not everything is as it appears—her sister was not perfect, her parents have struggles, and her own emotions and thoughts are clouded by mental illness. Julia’s burgeoning (sexual) relationship with a young man complicates things further. An interesting story that ends with little change of heart for Julia.

AMERICAN STREET Ibi Zoboi

When Fabiola flies from Haiti to the United States, authorities detain her mother and send Fabiola on to Detroit, where she lives with cousins and encounters a dangerous world of drugs, gangs, and lies. She must tackle these dangers if she wants her mother to make it to the “other side.” The compelling story is dark and original, weaving in Haitian folk religion for a unique style of magical realism. Interactions between Fabiola’s consistent character and the homosexual identity of another character seem forced. Cautions: disturbing violence, a sex scene, and nearly all the characters use R-rated language.

WINNER FAR FROM THE TREE Robin Benway

Three siblings are all placed for adoption at birth. They never meet until the middle one brings them together when she decides to place her own child for adoption, spurring questions about her own birth family. Despite the story’s complex premise it often feels tidy and unrealistic. The characters frequently explain that they are open-minded and nonjudgmental. Everyone always knows the right thing to say—and the end ties up a little too neatly for the story’s complicated and deeply broken relationships. Cautions: a lesbian romance and strong language.

AFTERWORD

This year’s National Book Award finalists dealt with an array of contemporary issues: race, broken families, immigration, and sexuality. The authors tell these stories in a way that betrays a deep ambivalence to any kind of standards, morals, or duties (other than the duty to cast off outside expectations). Most were full of gratuitous cursing, casual attitudes toward sex, and careful genuflecting to modern sensibilities and obsessions. Counseling—useful in its place—replaces forgiveness, reconciliation, and character growth.

All this is most apparent in the last finalist, What Girls Are Made Of (Carolrhoda Lab, 2017) by Elana K. Arnold. It justifies and even wallows in the worst parts of being a young woman today—casual sex, abortion, and broken families. It blames everything on men, religion, and other cultural forces. It tells girls the way to survive is to throw off any guilt, restraints, or responsibilities toward others and embrace it all. —R.A.
ASSURED
like Thomas

GROUNDED
like Paul

GUTS
like Peter

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FENGGANG YANG

Persevering saints

REPRESSING CHRISTIANS IN CHINA MAY BE HARDER THAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS THINK by June Cheng

When sociology professor Fenggang Yang, who directs Purdue University’s Center on Religion and Chinese Society, said China will be the most Christian nation in the world by 2030, major Western newspapers headlined that hope. China’s Global Times scoffed, though, and new regulations are making life harder for Chinese Christians. I asked Yang about his expectations now. Here are edited excerpts of his remarks.

The Chinese government has announced it will implement new regulations in February 2018 targeting religious groups, schools, and media, restricting religious activities and meeting places. How will this affect the house churches?

If enforced and implemented seriously, it will have a very significant negative effect on churches and other religious groups. Is it enforceable? I’m not sure whether the government will put resources into implementing it. The regulations said township-level governments are responsible for managing religious affairs, but most of these local governments don’t have a designated person for religious affairs. The government would need to increase the number of officials in tens of thousands of towns.

Also, the restrictions make the penalty for renting spaces to house churches very heavy. Can the government enforce that? It’s cost the government so much to kick Shouwang Church in Beijing out of its building. That’s just one house church in Beijing. If there were five or 10, would police be used to control all those house churches? I doubt it.

If it’s hard to enforce the rules on all the house churches, will the government make examples of a few bigger churches? Yes, that is the Communist strategy: a few examples to pressure others to comply without resistance. But now it has become more difficult to decide which large house churches to target. Some of them are too well-known in the world. Any action against Pastor Wang Yi or the Chengdu churches will be covered in newspapers around the world. In Beijing, will the government target Zion Church, which is much bigger than Shouwang? It’s hard to say.

Could you give us a brief history of the regulations? The initial two religious restrictions on foreigners evangelizing in China and specifying religious values were passed in 1994. Eleven years later the religious affairs regulation took effect. It’s now been another 12 years, and I think leaders...
They can’t, unless they close borders as government leaders try to stop that? in Hong Kong and elsewhere. How will Christians going to attend conferences? I’ve seen thousands of Christians could not go overseas for conferences. I’ve seen thousands of Christians could not go overseas for conferences. Now, a push back into the black market. The authorities’ intention is clear: Tighten up control, restrict the de facto freedom house churches have enjoyed. I’m not sure they can still do that: too many Christians, too many churches. Authorities can’t control the economic and social spheres, so how can they effectively reduce that free space for house churches? How do you think Christians will respond to the regulations? Some house church leaders I spoke with said they are prepared to break down into small groups—they already have Bible studies and fellowship groups, so they would simply stop gathering as a congregation. As long as local officials claim to follow the rule of law, then Christians will take them to court and try to challenge the rule. This is different from when China was going through the Cultural Revolution. With leisure travel to Hong Kong and neighboring countries allowed, it’s very hard to stop conference travel. Sometimes they will try to stop speakers from going. Sometimes they ask them to report to the police before and after the conference.

Weren’t many church members hopeful a decade ago? Around 2008 and 2009 there was a moment of hope for a change in policy toward house churches as the government allowed some public discussion. In 2009 an official Chinese Academy of Social Sciences report printed the word “house church,” meaning it was recognized by scholars. After 2009 it’s increasingly difficult to talk about the house churches publicly. Since 2010, a more militant atheism pervaded. The new regulations are a result of that.

The government is trying to eliminate the gray area: You’re either in the legal market or the black market. Before 2000, house churches were in the black market. Recently they have been very much in the gray market. Now, a push back into the black market.

One regulation mentioned Christians could not go overseas for conferences. I’ve seen thousands of Christians going to attend conferences in Hong Kong and elsewhere. How will government leaders try to stop that? They can’t, unless they close borders as they did during the Cultural Revolution. With leisure travel to Hong Kong and neighboring countries allowed, it’s very hard to stop conference travel. Sometimes they will try to stop speakers from going. Sometimes they ask them to report to the police before and after the conference.

Would the government really release that information? I believe someone in the legislative council is a hidden Christian, or there may even be multiple Christians. They can’t stop the process, but they can do things within their power. You have to prompt them to do it.

What is the current situation for Christian journalists in China? It’s very challenging. It’s becoming more difficult with the overall campaign toward the left, as the government controls what people say and do. Certainly all mass media have felt tightened control. But I do see Christians popping up in the media. I liked the writing of the managing editor of one popular news site, which is now shut down. Then he became seriously ill and died. Afterward people who knew him shared his life story, and it turns out he was a Christian. I thought, “Of course!”

Many Christian leaders sent in their opinion. There is a Chinese freedom of information act: Someone should ask the government how many people commented on the draft regulations and what they said.

The [Chinese] authorities’ intention is clear: Tighten up control, restrict the de facto freedom house churches have enjoyed. I’m not sure they can still do that: too many Christians, too many churches.”

Now I could understand why he wrote what he did.

The number of Christians in China is increasing in all professions, including journalism. But even non-Christians have a difficult time staying in the journalism field. They say the job is so restrictive that if you’ve been in journalism for more than 10 years, something is wrong with you. Some Christians have left journalism, but quite a few remain. I am amazed at how brave the people in China are—they could lose their jobs, their children could get kicked out of school—nonetheless, they are public about their faith.
With her new album *Immanuel*, Melanie Penn has risen to the challenge of creating original Christmas music that neither exploits nostalgia nor struggles to be trendy. Of its 10 songs, only “Joy to the World” taps tradition.

“We wanted to salute the Christmas canon,” Penn told me of the carol’s inclusion, “and to give a nod to the fact that ‘Hey, we know we’re in a space where there’s lots of familiar music.’”

Penn’s use of “we” is a nod to her producer, Ben Shive. As he also helmed Penn’s *Wake Up, Love* (2010) and *Hope Tonight* (2014), it would be tempting to quip, “The third time’s the charm.”

In other ways, though, it is. It’s Penn’s first album, for instance, to appear on her Equally Well label, an imprint that takes its name from Ecclesiastes 11:6: “Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let your hands not be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.”

Whether writing and recording albums or leading worship at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, Penn has taken to heart the verse’s call to avoid the devil’s workshop.

*Immanuel* also demonstrates Penn’s ability to write from points of view other than her own, perspectives specified by each song’s parenthetical subtitle: “Love’s Coming Down (Isaiah),” “All Things Are Possible (Gabriel),” “Great Things (Mary),” “Gift of Love (Angel Chorus),” “What Child Is This (Joseph)” (not the carol), and the like.

Inhabiting characters was, according to Penn, both “really hard and really wonderful.” “And,” she adds, “it could also be that this album got me writing again in a safe way.”

The reason that she hadn’t been writing, safely or otherwise, was that in May 2016 she was hospitalized with acute endometriosis. One month later, she underwent a hysterectomy and began a long period of recovery. With Christmas approaching, she began work on a song that would eventually end up on *Immanuel* as “Follow the Star.”

“As I started writing the verses, I realized that it was about one of the Wise Men. I finished the song and sang it at a Christmas show, and the response was really good. Then two weeks later I wrote a song from the perspective of one of the angels in the angel chorus. And then I had a sense that I was kind of onto something.”

The irony of what she was onto—telling the story of the Greatest Birth of All after losing the ability to give birth herself—wasn’t lost on her. Not surprisingly, the album’s Mary song proved particularly hard to write. “A pregnancy is what God used to usher in this new era of God dwelling with us. But I felt so incredibly distant from that experience that I didn’t even know how to break into it. Eventually, though, I reconciled all those feelings.”

Penn also reconciled herself to the title *Immanuel* despite worrying at first that its simplicity might fail to convey the recording’s conceptual nature and multiple viewpoints.

“Every other title I came up with just didn’t feel good. And I realized, ‘You know what? This isn’t my story. This is a story about Immanuel. This is God’s story, and He should have the title.’”
NEW OR RECENT RELEASES
reviewed by Arsenio Orteza

CHRISTMAS CHRISTMAS  Cheap Trick
Most of these songs are bang-zoom-crazy covers of Yuletide numbers made semi-famous by Wizzard, Slade, Charles Brown, Chuck Berry, the Ramones, the Kinks, Harry Nilsson, and Saturday Night Live. The exceptions: an ill-fitting go at tradition (“Silent Night”), two rocking Cheap Trick originals (“Merry Christmas Darlings” and the title cut), and a prayerful Cheap Trick original called “Our Father of Life” that sounds like what John Lennon might’ve come up with if he’d believed in “mak[ing] the holidays bright in honor of Your Son.”

THE BOTTOM LINE ARCHIVE  Ralph Stanley
“O Death”’s absence aside (it’s listed on the cover, but it’s really “Twelve Gates to the City”), this 2002 show finds the then-75-year-old Stanley in fine form and even finer humor. He describes the Primitive Baptist churches of his youth as places “where they don’t believe in music in the church but they love everything I do when I’m out of the church.” And why shouldn’t they have? Much of what Stanley did—and does here—was gospel. And heartfelt, moving gospel at that.

SOUTHERN GOTHIC  Tyminski
Having been introduced to EDM production by Avicii, Dan Tyminski (of Alison Krauss and O Brother Where Art Thou? fame) has now taken that acquaintance and run with it. Purists might chafe, but the electronic mists enshrouding his multitracked Southern accent and the echoing beats punctuating his rhythms add mystery to his gimlet-eyed examinations of conscience and to the hooks that make those examinations singable. The sharpest songs explore hypocrisy or X-ray small-town America to reveal a heart of darkness. Nathaniel Hawthorne would understand.

O GLADSOME LIGHT  Lawrence Wiliford
This Canadian tenor has the kind of voice that could convince rock ‘n’ roll fans to give art song and even opera a fair shake. Unlike the many classically trained singers who sacrifice texts on the altar of sound, Wiliford adds to his skillfully modulated purity of tone a clarity of diction that makes what he’s singing easy to understand. So although the printed lyrics of these 19 exquisite “sacred songs, hymns and meditations by Holst, Rubbra and Vaughan Williams” (the subtitle) are included, you won’t need them.

ENCORE
One of the finest Christmas albums ever, the perennially available A Festival of Carols in Brass by the Philadelphia Brass Ensemble, turns 50 this year. But, unlike practically every other album of note released in 1967, it hasn’t gotten the deluxe reissue treatment—maybe because, as the work of pros, the sessions yielded no alternate takes worth salvaging. Or maybe because, having stuffed 25 crisply executed carols into its audio stock- ing, the Ensemble had accomplished the musical equivalent of bowling 300 and simply left no room for improvement.

Its tradition, however, lives on, and nowhere more clearly among recent recordings than on The Christmas Album (MSR Classics) by the American Horn Quartet and the Queensland Symphony Horns. The selections are more eclectic, but carols predominate, burnishing a glow that not even “You’re a Mean One, Mr. Grinch” can tarnish. And speaking of the album’s sense of humor, Harry Wilson supplies a solo didgeridoo improvisation that lasts all of 16 seconds. —A.O.
Showdown over Lebanon
SAUDI ARABIA’S POWER PLAY NEEDS TO START AT HOME

Never mind that Lebanon is half the size of New Jersey, its national melodrama is not to be missed.

Scene 1—lunch in Beirut, Friday, Nov. 3: Prime Minister Saad Hariri is hosting the French cultural minister, Françoise Nyssen. Mid-conversation, Hariri takes a phone call, excuses himself, and disappears.

His whereabouts remained unknown for hours, but Hariri left lunch for the airport, then turned up on television, in Saudi Arabia, to resign. In the surprise address, the 47-year-old head of state said he feared an assassination plot and accused Iran of meddling in the region, causing “devastation and chaos.”

Scene 2—evening at the Ritz Carlton in the Saudi capital Riyadh, Saturday, Nov. 4: Without warning, authorities clear guests, turning the luxury hotel into a staging ground for a purge of top royals—in all, more than 200 of Saudi Arabia’s elite detained inside the hotel and elsewhere on orders of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. He charged them in a grand corruption scheme amounting to more than $100 billion. Yes, billion.

Over the coming days, photos on social media showed the detained moguls bedding down on sofas and floor pillows beneath Ritz chandeliers, their assets seized and bank accounts frozen: money in the bank, power consolidated around the 32-year-old crown prince.

Scene 3—Riyadh’s King Khalid International Airport, Monday, Nov. 6: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas arrives at the invitation of the crown prince. The Saudis give Abbas a warning: no more cooperation with Tehran.

And so you have in four days’ time dramatic events, perhaps the start of a climactic act in the simmering Arab-Iranian confrontation, the long-felt tension in the Middle East.

Prodded by recent Iranian provocations via its militias in Iraq, its armies in Syria, its rebels in Yemen, and its terror surrogates in Lebanon and Gaza, Saudi Arabia wants its own on lock—like the Riyadh-born Hariri and the riyal-dependent Abbas.

Beyond the historic religious feud pitting Saudi Arabia’s Sunni royals against the Shia ayatollahs of Iran is a blatant play for political dominance. Prince Mohammed may want to turn a new leaf, but he is going about it the old-fashioned way, through intimidation.

Arguably, this run-up began in May, when President Donald Trump aboard Air Force One took a historic flight from Riyadh to Tel Aviv during his first foreign trip as commander-in-chief. No American president had arrived in Israel via the Arab state, which has no diplomatic relations with Israel. That, too, is changing. Israel Defense Forces chief of staff Gadi Eisenkot announced in November Israel for the first time will share intelligence with the Saudis as part of “a major regional plan to stop the Iranian threat.”

Trump has shifted U.S. policy from negotiating with Tehran, as the Obama administration did, to isolating it. But for the moment, the United States is the backseat partner in a drama directed by the Saudis and Israelis, thanks in no small part to years of Obama negligence in the region. The current president has had his stumbles, most recently agreeing to “deconfliction” lines in Syria with Russia that could mean leaving Assad in power and Iran at the broker’s table.

Prince Mohammed says he wants to return Saudi Arabia to “a country of moderate Islam that is open to all religions and to the world.” This is good news. But the Saudi royals have never obliged Christians and Jews, or even non-Sunni Muslims in their own country. His moves may suggest the start of a new day—or a way out for a war-exhausted, oil-depleted regime.

The United States falters when it sidles to the emergent strong man. Prince Mohammed, to be believed, must take concrete steps toward religious liberty, steps to roll back his country’s propagating violence and oppression in the name of Islam.

Currently, his government favors only its interpretation of Sunni Islam and prohibits all non-Muslim public places of worship. It regularly imprisons and flogs individuals for apostasy, blasphemy, or even dissent. A 2014 law deems blasphemy a form of terrorism.

Changing course in the Middle East may start in tiny Lebanon, but to be believed it must take root in Saudi Arabia, and the United States should settle for no less.
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B is for Books

WORLD’S 2017 BOOKS OF THE YEAR  
by Marvin Olasky

On the following 12 pages you’ll see reviews of 30 books published in 2017 that members of WORLD’s books committee heartily recommend. You won’t see any beer recommendations, but in the 21st century beer and books have in common both the letter B and an industry description: bipolar. Small presses and craft beer are common, and so is production by massive conglomerates.

Five big corporations—Simon & Schuster, Penguin Random House (which includes Doubleday, Knopf, and Pantheon), Holtzbrinck (a German publishing house that includes Macmillan), Hachette Livre (a French group that publishes Basic Books and Twelve), and HarperCollins (part of Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp. that includes Zondervan, Thomas Nelson, HarperOne, and Broadside Books)—control much of American book publishing. Those companies published 10 of the books on our short lists of excellent reading.

And yet, small presses publish some good books, and long-lived Christian publishing houses like Crossway, Baker, Moody, and P&R have maintained their independence. So have conservative entities like Encounter Books and the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, moderate organizations like the Philanthropy Roundtable, and the Darwin-criticizing Discovery Institute. These smaller organizations published 12 of the books on our short lists.

The remaining eight books come from university and educational publishers: Princeton, Oxford, and Stanford universities, and Houghton Mifflin and Transaction. We are not reviewing fiction in this issue: Since novel tastes and tolerances among our readers vary particularly widely, we’d need more than a two-page spread to dive into nuances, and will do that in our June summer reading issue. For now, here are authors, titles, and publishers of our nonfiction 30:

Book of the Year in our “Understanding America” category is Peter Cove’s Poor No More (Transaction). Others in that short list: Karl Zinsmeister, The Almanac of American Philanthropy (Philanthropy
Roundtable); Benjamin Barton and Stephanos Bibas, Rebooting Justice (Encounter); Daniel Drezner, The Ideas Industry (Oxford); Henry Olsen, The Working Class Republican (Broadside); and Gene Dattel, Reckoning with Race (Encounter).

In the “Understanding the World” category, Anne Applebaum’s Red Famine (Doubleday) is our Book of the Year. Also in the short list: Emma Reyes, The Book of Emma Reyes (Penguin); Paul Kengor, A Pope and a President (Intercollegiate Studies Institute); Ian Johnson, The Souls of China (Pantheon); Walter Scheidel, The Great Leveler (Princeton); and Condoleezza Rice, Democracy (Twelve).

Our “History” category leads with Moshe Halbertal and Stephen Holmes, The Beginning of Politics (Princeton), and follows with Victor Davis Hanson, The Second World Wars (Basic); John Cogan, The High Cost of Good Intentions (Stanford); Norman Ohler, Blitzed: Drugs in the Third Reich (Houghton Mifflin); Eric Metaxas, Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World (Viking); and Yuri Slezkine, The House of Government (Princeton).

“Origins” is for books exploring the creation/evolution battle, which is the most significant worldview clash of our time outside those concerning theology itself. As in all these categories, we looked for books that intelligent nonspecialists—that’s most WORLD members—could understand. Our Book of the Year is Tom Bethell’s Darwin’s House of Cards (Discovery). Others on that short list: J. Scott Turner, Purpose & Desire (HarperOne); Jonathan Wells, Zombie Science (Discovery); and two multiauthored books, Theistic Evolution (Crossway) and Four Views on Creation, Evolution, and Intelligent Design (Zondervan).

In our final category, “Accessible Theology,” we again spotlight books for thoughtful laypeople rather than theologians. David Gibson’s Living Life Backward (Crossway) is our Book of the Year. Our short list includes Nathan Busenitz, Long Before Luther (Moody); Kenneth Samples, God Among Sages (Baker); Brett McCracken, Uncomfortable (Crossway); Christopher Wright, Hearing the Message of Daniel (Zondervan); and Thomas Robinson, Who Were the First Christians? (Oxford).

You’ll find reviews of all these books on the next 10 pages. Our special section ends with two more pages, one on a book from 2016 that we overlooked last year and a final page on our Series of the Year, P&R’s Reformed Expository Commentary, with a specific look at its newly published commentary on Revelation.
Conquering job insecurity

Many writers have criticized the past half-century of anti-poverty programs that have merely allowed most of the poor to stay poor. They and I have pointed out that faith and work make a difference and nothing else works. But it’s rare that a welfare establishment veteran blows the whistle on it—and that’s why Peter Cove’s Poor No More: Rethinking Dependency and the War on Poverty (Transaction) is WORLD’s Understanding America Book of the Year.

Peter Cove has the standard background for a social justice warrior—grew up in Massachusetts, B.A. in sociology from Northeastern University, graduate work at the University of Wisconsin, New York City government jobs, Community Action Agency in Boston, Manpower Assistance Project consultant, New World Foundation program officer. After holding key posts in New York City municipal government, he worked for the Community Action Agency in Boston, where he developed grassroots health, housing, and education programs.

He did his share of the spending of $20 trillion on poverty programs since 1964, but at some point he recognized a pattern: “I saw with my own eyes the value of work—any kind of paid work—in reducing welfare dependency and attacking poverty. I learned that if we helped welfare clients get jobs, even entry-level jobs, they would then attend to their other needs. … Work demonstrates that behavior has consequences. And it allows people to feel the pride and self-respect that come with supporting their spouses and children.”

Poor No More has many specific examples of how real change occurs. Here’s one: “When some mothers on welfare came to us, they often explained that they could not work because they had no day care. We would still send them on a job interview, and when the company wanted to hire them, miraculously, they found a grandmother or daycare center. Childcare wasn’t ultimately the problem—it was their insecurity about being worth anything in the private marketplace. Once they were offered a job, all the barriers to work fell away. By contrast, if the government continued giving them money and other benefits, they were likely to remain dependent.”

Cove founded America Works, a for-profit, welfare-to-work company that has placed more than a half-million people in jobs with an average pay of more than $10 per hour plus benefits. Instead of putting welfare recipients through extended education and training programs, he ran weeklong training sessions on the basics needed to gain an entry-level job: showing up on time, having a businesslike personal appearance, speaking clearly, having a resume, displaying a good attitude.

Getting a job helps a person with shaky self-confidence to take the first step out of dependence.

I’ve seen what Cove says: A person without self-confidence does not want to be turned down again, so he’d rather not risk losing out again.

Cove found that long-term welfare recipients “used the most convenient excuse to make themselves unavailable for work.” He’s now proposing a radical solution: abolish all cash welfare and housing assistance—except for the elderly and the physically and mentally disabled. He writes, “On balance, the poor make rational economic decisions. If the government makes welfare more economically desirable than work, who are we to blame—the recipient or the wasteful government?”

America Works has found that tax credits to encourage hiring do not work, but supplementing wages does: New workers are thrilled to get extra money at the end of the month. His work-first plan proposes cutting $270 billion in welfare of various kinds and supplementing wages and the earned income tax credit.
SHORT LIST

**THE ALMANAC OF AMERICAN PHILANTHROPY: 2017 COMPACT EDITION** Karl Zinsmeister

Last year Zinsmeister’s 1,342-page Almanac became the best compendium of readable information about great donors, major philanthropic achievements, statistics on U.S. generosity, and more. This year’s 460-page version includes stories, stats, and insights on good charity vs. bad charity and the relationship of donors and passion, plus comparisons of philanthropic and government problem-fixing. Also worthwhile: quotations on charitable goals (C.S. Lewis: “The proper aim of giving is to put the recipients in a state where they no longer need our gifts.”) and data showing that those who attend religious services give four times more than those who don’t.

**REBOOTING JUSTICE** Benjamin Barton and Stephanos Bibas

Most of what passes as criminal justice in the United States is now impersonal, amoral, and hidden. Benjamin Barton and Stephanos Bibas want it to be individualized, moral, transparent, and participatory. They show how plea bargaining almost always replaces trials and insiders do what’s convenient rather than what’s just. They show how we could simplify and clarify the process so most litigants, guided by trained paralegal, court clerks, and online programs, could proceed effectively without a lawyer. Felony public defense could be beefed up and misdemeanor and civil cases handled in faster and cheaper ways: Do those public defenders need six-figure law degrees?

**THE IDEAS INDUSTRY** Daniel Drezner

Daniel Drezner offers an amusing analysis of how ideas spread and pundits become brands. He portrays intellectuals competing for the attention of wealthy benefactors, in the process adjusting their ideas and demeaning themselves as proximity to power offers seductive opportunities. Meanwhile, some students take on enormous debt to get degrees that might enable them to become merchants of flighty ideas, but the country does not benefit. We do get to hear witty remarks and TED talks that fit the formula for standing ovations, but thoughtful analysis becomes less important than hitting green rooms to feed big media beasts.

**THE WORKING CLASS REPUBLICAN: RONALD REAGAN AND THE RETURN OF BLUE-COLLAR CONSERVATISM** Henry Olsen

Henry Olsen now writes about politics for WORLD, but his latest book made my list before he became our correspondent several months ago. In The Working Class Republican he shows how Ronald Reagan developed a blue-collar conservatism based on his understanding of Americans who proceed paycheck to paycheck and want a social safety net if the factory closes, the business goes bankrupt, or an injury leaves them unable to work. Republicans have the opportunity to build a business–working class coalition, but the GOP may be blowing it by bowing to big funders rather than hard workers.

*American sins*

*Reckoning With Race (Encounter)*

by Gene Dattel is subtitled *America’s Failure*, and that’s important: Racism was as much a Northern failing as a Southern one. During the first half of the 19th century Northerners tried to keep African-Americans from coming into their states and took away voting rights if they did. After the Civil War, Northerners worked hard to keep freed slaves away. That worsened conditions for ex-slaves: Their former masters could turn millions who had no alternative into sharecroppers. Only when the Great War in 1917, followed by the 1924 immigration cutoffs, left employers desperate for workers, did Southern blacks take the steel rails north. One result was enormous disruption. Dattel looks at African-American family demoralization and high illegitimacy rates and also notes two major broad structural problems that bulwark cultural failings: poor schools, and War on Poverty laws that reward failure instead of success. —M.O.
To wage a famine

UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD:
Stalin’s command—to starve millions of Ukrainians by Mindy Belz

Communism is an aberration,” said President Ronald Reagan. “It’s not a normal way of living for human beings.” Amen, say the readers of Anne Applebaum’s latest book, Red Famine (Doubleday), a meticulous and blistering revelation on the Soviet revolutionaries’ use of famine in an attempt to destroy Ukraine 85 years ago.

From Harvard to Kiev to Moscow, Applebaum unearthed new archives and survivor accounts to reconsider the catastrophic Soviet famines, culminating in 1933 with what Ukrainians call “Holodomor,” from the words for hunger and extermination—forced starvation that left millions dead across the Soviet Union. Applebaum’s thorough reporting and vivid writing make Red Famine WORLD’s Book of the Year in our Understanding the World category.

The lessons of Moscow’s cruel intervention under Josef Stalin reverberate to today’s interventions in Ukraine under Vladimir Putin. The 2015 annexation of Crimea and continued fighting in eastern Ukraine represent an 80-year obsession by Russian leaders to bring the large and wealthy province, now its own country, to heel. Applebaum’s account reminds us that understanding the scope of what happened then, helps us prepare for what will happen next.

Ukrainians were the first to revolt after the Russian Revolution in 1917 and the first Soviet state to declare independence after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Red Famine begins with peasant uprisings of the 1920s and ’30s, each leading to successive and harsher state-enforced famines—“created for the express purpose of weakening peasant resistance and Ukrainian identity.” Applebaum shows in detail the propaganda campaign accompanying Soviet force, as Moscow and its Kiev party hacks created a faceoff between “loyal” Soviet citizens and “enemy” kulaks. Communists portrayed farmers as privileged and rebellious, while commissars seized their land, crops, and grain for next year’s plantings.

Once known as the region’s breadbasket, Ukraine descended into something akin to Dante’s seventh circle of hell. Applebaum draws on survivors, freer to speak after the collapse of the Soviet Union, to recount the desperation as food supplies disappeared. “Frogs didn’t last long,” recalls one. “People caught them all. All the cats were eaten, the pigeons, the frogs; people ate everything. I imagined the scent of delicious food as we ate weeds and beets.”

Using new research, Applebaum provides conclusive and grim numbers: 4.5 million Ukrainians died, most in 1933 alone. Life expectancy was in free fall: for urban men, from 40 years of age before 1932 to 30 years after.

Stalin used the famine to seize church property and empty church treasuries, part of a larger strategy to eliminate future resistance. Nevertheless, news of the famine reached the outside world: primarily through Catholic churches in Poland and Ukraine that delivered reports to the Vatican. To this day the only verified photos taken in Ukraine of famine victims in 1933 are preserved in the Catholic diocese archive in Vienna. But a complication of world history kept the Vatican mostly quiet on the crisis—1933 also was the year Hitler won election in Germany. Suddenly, to criticize the Bolsheviks in Moscow was to look like a Nazi sympathizer.

Americans succumbed to Soviet propaganda as well, with New York Times Moscow chief Walter Duranty famously defending the Communists, winning in 1932 a Pulitzer Prize for reporting on Soviet successes. Duranty ridiculed the early accounts of famine reaching the West, headlining one story “Russians Hungry But Not Starving.” In Red Famine Applebaum, who lives in Poland and writes for The Washington Post, counters such historic fake news, giving us at last a documented account of lasting atrocities.
A POPE AND A PRESIDENT  
Paul Kengor

While many writers have recounted the roles of President Ronald Reagan and Pope John Paul II in bringing down the Iron Curtain, Grove City College professor Paul Kengor breaks new ground. He shows the depth of their friendship and discourse (including secret letters shuttled to Rome by New Jersey Democrat Peter Rodino), starting only weeks after both men survived assassination attempts. Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev described the Cold War as a “war on religion,” and Kengor covers it as such—showing how Russians were behind the plot to assassinate the pope. —M.B.

THE BOOK OF EMMA REYES  
Emma Reyes, translated by Daniel Alarcón

A remarkable voice and illuminating writing make this gritty 175-page collection of letters an unforgettable look at growing up impoverished in Colombia. Painter Emma Reyes, who settled eventually in Paris, begins her memoir at age 5 in a one-room, windowless Bogota hovel. Her first chore each day was carrying the household’s brimming bedpan to a garbage heap. Reyes and her sister moved from cycles of neglect to rounds of abuse, including some in a Catholic convent. Reyes allows us to see the world through the narrowed lens of an illiterate reject who would not give up on her future. —M.B.

THE SOULS OF CHINA: THE RETURN OF RELIGION AFTER MAO  
Ian Johnson

In The Souls of China, Pulitzer Prize winner Ian Johnson explores how religion has flourished in China in spite of oppression by the Chinese Communist Party. Following the lunar calendar, Johnson brings readers along as he makes pilgrimages with Buddhists, attends funerals with Taoist musicians, and spends time at a Reformed house church (Chengdu’s Early Rain Reformed Church, which WORLD has covered extensively). The book clearly shows man’s natural inclination to search for something beyond the material: The heavens declare the glory of God, and China’s government is unable to hide His handiwork. —June Cheng

THE GREAT LEVELER: VIOLENCE AND THE HISTORY OF INEQUALITY  
Walter Scheidel

Walter Scheidel’s closing sentence is, “Be careful what you wish for.” Scheidel says “the prospects for future leveling are poor,” and that’s not a bad thing, because large reductions in inequality have come about only in four ways: mass warfare, transformative revolution, utter government collapse, and pandemics. Huge disasters lower the wealth of the rich, but in such periods the poor become poorer. Whenever demagogues and intellectuals shout or simper for class warfare—think of Josef Stalin’s forced collectivization or Mao Zedong’s “Great Leap Forward”—one thing is clear: It will not end well. —Marvin Olasky

Empowering the people

Democracy: Stories from the Long Road to Freedom (Twelve) by Condoleezza Rice begins with the former secretary of state’s own story, in which she writes that as a child she was part of “the second founding of America, as the civil rights movement unfolded” in her Birmingham, Ala., hometown, and finally expanded “to encompass people like me.” For these racially divided times, Rice provides a good way to begin a chronicle of democracy around the world—and to consider U.S. foreign policy from Bush 41’s “New World Order” to Trump’s “America First” era.

Rice is an honest broker, accurate in her data and candid about mistakes—like pushing (under Bush 43) for elections in Gaza. She was confident Hamas would lose when in fact it won and has ruled with an iron fist ever since. But democracy promotion isn’t wrong, Rice argues, only hard. Her latest book may revive an increasingly isolated America and help it grow again. —M.B.

Rice
Kings and politics

HISTORY: The view from the Prophet Samuel’s front-row seat

by Sophia Lee

More than 3,000 years ago, the people of Israel crowned a human king against God’s warnings. Before then, Israel stood apart from other ancient kingdoms by recognizing God’s exclusive kingship. Then, Israelites got the king they demanded—and saw every warning come true.

The Old Testament books of 1 and 2 Samuel mark the first shift in Israel from divine sovereignty to dynastic monarchy. In The Beginning of Politics: Power in the Biblical Book of Samuel (Princeton University Press), Jewish professors Moshe Halbertal and Stephen Holmes bring out the power of “the first and greatest work of Western political thought.” The two books of Samuel are not political tracts, a manifesto, or a biography, but books about politics, the first literature in world history to document truthful, even unflattering accounts of its nation’s leaders. Halbertal and Holmes analyze it brilliantly—and that’s why their book is our History Book of the Year.

The authors recognize that God is “certainly no subject for systematic critical scrutiny and political analysis,” but the humanly flawed Saul and David certainly are, and their stories provide timeless truths about why and how people have gained, abused, and lost power over three millennia. As Chapter 3 of Genesis shows what happened when God gave Adam and Eve the freedom to disobey, so 1 Samuel shows how God granted Israel its desire—“that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.” The rest of 1 and 2 Samuel explores the consequences of that desire: “If the sovereign is powerful enough to protect the people against hostile neighbors, he will also be powerful enough to abuse the people for reasons having nothing to do with collective security.”

That’s what happened with Saul, a once-humble, once-ambitionless man who turned into a paranoid blood-hunter, bringing doom upon himself and others. Rulers think they wield political power, but “political power wields rulers, toying with their motivations, aspirations, and inhibitions.” That’s also what happened with David. While Saul’s extreme insecurity and self-pity led him to distrust everyone and slaughter the innocent priests of Nob, David’s sense of entitlement and self-indulgence at the peak of power led him to kill Uriah. So secure was David in his authority that from the detached comforts of his palace he murdered his loyal soldier in the battlefield.

Halbertal and Holmes portray David as not quite the lion-wrestling, giant-lopping, harp-plucking, God-loving poet of Sunday school. Here, he’s a “master of masked intentions” who cunningly stood by while the Philistines defeated the Israelites in battle and killed Saul and his sons. His ostentatious kindness to Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth may really have been a clever way to imprison Saul’s last remaining descendant in his court. No longer a figure of moral authority after the Uriah incident, David becomes weak and blind, allowing his own sons to manipulate and betray him.

The Beginning of Politics introduces the dynamics of power with God’s warning about worldly kings. The author of 1 and 2 Samuel performed “an act of witnessing” Israel’s political project and then warning, “Beware of what I saw and have told you.” As astute and fascinating as it is, The Beginning of Politics misses out on a larger truth: Samuel is just one book under a grand narrative of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As the authors themselves acknowledge, God never withdrew from human events. David, like Saul, was a royal sinner, but God still called him a man after His own heart and used David’s utterly flawed, very messy line to bring the one true and eternal King.

King David (center) and Uriah (left)
THE SECOND WORLD WARS
Victor Davis Hanson combines expertise about both ancient Greece and modern war to present a comprehensive look at not just war but The Second World Wars plural. Not only were the wars against Germany and Japan largely distinct, but so were the wars on land, at sea, and in the air—and Hanson brilliantly shows that once the wars became global, Germany and Japan had nothing to look forward to except utter destruction. Hanson also shows how all the technical innovations—saturation bombing, rockets, aircraft carriers, massive tank envelopments—didn’t change fundamentals of barbarity or geography.

THE HIGH COST OF GOOD INTENTIONS
John F. Cogan
John Cogan’s history of federal entitlement programs warns us that the ice we skate on has grown thinner decade by decade. Both Democrats and Republicans are now kicking the can down the road, apparently uncaring that the iceman cometh in a few years. Cogan provides useful case studies of measures that were sensible, self-limiting, and freedom-enhancing like the GI Bill, and current ones that grow as each benefit expansion leads to future entitlements that leave worthy original goals no longer recognizable. As annual deficits lead each year to record-breaking debt expansion, it doesn’t seem that we’ll learn—until it’s too late.

BLITZED: DRUGS IN THE THIRD REICH
Norman Ohler
Norman Ohler’s tautly written account, based on previously overlooked documents, shows the role of drugs in fueling Hitler’s rapid rise during the 1930s and sensational fall during the second half of World War II. Among the conclusions: Methamphetamine distributed to millions of soldiers made possible the blitzkrieg that killed France in 1940. Hitler became dependent on a witch’s cornucopia of heroin and other drugs during World War II. Tragically, the mass lessons Germans learned—live by meth, die by meth—have not been absorbed by many addicted Americans, but Ohler provides a valuable lesson: Dance with the devil and die.

MARTIN LUTHER: THE MAN WHO REDISCOVERED GOD AND CHANGED THE WORLD
Eric Metaxas
Eric Metaxas is the best storyteller among Luther’s many recent biographers. He describes “comically bungling and tragically scandalous” popes and a heroic but very human Luther who is brave not because he lacks fear but because he fears—yet still stands immovable before previously irresistible papal pressure. Metaxas shows how Luther wanted to save the Roman Catholic Church from itself and didn’t become a fiery opponent of the whole structure until it gave him no choice: Luther’s opponents were “unmoored from the rock of the Scriptures…blithely floating down the river toward a great cataract and didn’t seem to notice.” —Marvin Olasky

The house revolutionaries built
Yuri Slezkine’s The House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution (Princeton University Press) is an immense historical and publishing achievement: 1,104 pages of astonishing research available in hardback for under $30. I wrote about it in last month’s survey of 100th-anniversary-of-tragedy books (see “Revolutionaries dug a pit and fell in,” Nov. 11) and noted sagas such as the life and death of Andrei Bubnov, the People’s Commissar of Enlightenment, who emphasized the need for Stalin’s opponents to be “squashed like vile vermin,” but did not like being treated like a cockroach himself. The House of Government is not our Book of the Year in history because we emphasize books for typical WORLD members: well-educated and thoughtful, yet unlikely to dive into a book this long. But those who want to get a granular feel for revolutionary lives and saw reading War and Peace as a walk in the park—let me know what you think. —M.O.
Fragile philosophy

ORIGINS: Skewering Darwinism’s ‘science of the gaps’  by  Marvin Olasky

Darwin’s House of Cards (Discovery) by Tom Bethell is not the hurricane that will collapse the evolution empire, but it’s a gusty and gutsy look at a dogma edging beyond its sell-by date—and that makes it our Book of the Year for exploring the origins of the world and of life. Today’s progressives aren’t progressive: They are defending mid-19th-century scientific understanding. As Bethell writes: “Darwin and his contemporaries had no way of knowing just how complex a cell is. Today it is sometimes compared to a high-tech factory. But a cell is far more complex than that. For one thing, factories can’t replicate themselves.”

Bethell punctures Darwin defender Kenneth Miller’s “God of the gaps” critique, which some theistic evolutionists have mimicked. Miller sneers that “as humans began to find material explanations for ordinary events, the gods broke into retreat.” He skewers creationists for their faith in God’s action and their refusal to give up on finding theistic explanations. But the retreat is going the other way these days: Darwinists lack adequate materialist explanations, so Miller requests faith in “scientific progress” and says we should not assume “that science will never come up with” an explanation.

This “science of the gaps” attempt to bulwark a crumbling structure gives Bethell plenty of opportunity to point out inanities. In chapter after chapter he reports the disappointments of those who put their trust in material things changing human nature or transcending it, as proselytizers for artificial intelligence (AI) propose. Bethell shows how Darwinists offer bait-and-switches—moths in England changing color, finches developing larger beaks—that depend on listeners not understanding the difference between microevolution (changes within kinds that happen all the time) and macroevolution, where a creature truly new and different emerges.

The overarching bait-and-switch may be the distinction some scientists make between methodological naturalism (MN) and philosophical naturalism (PN). Darwinians often offer MN to Christian students and peers: You can be a philosophical non-naturalist on and other members of the “Kurzweil cult” for “strong AI,” machines with creativity and reproducibility like that of their human creators, but intelligence far greater. That’s malarkey, because as time goes by a kiss will still be a kiss, but a machine will still be a machine. In the mid-19th century leading intellectuals dropped faith in God and substituted faith in human-driven Progress, but that honeymoon is long gone.

Bethell concludes that “the science of Darwinism amounts to little more than the ‘wedding’ of materialism and Progress. We have seen that if materialism is true, then Darwinism—or something very much like it—must also be true. But materialism is highly implausible and has been widely challenged. At the same time it only takes one partner to break up a marriage, and as we now know, Progress has wandered off the straight and narrow. As a result, the break-up of Darwinism seems likely in the years ahead.”

Douglas F. Kelly’s Creation and Change came out two decades ago, so it’s not eligible for Origins Book of the Year consideration, but the revised and updated edition published this year by Mentor deserves a place in church, school, and personal libraries. Kelly, professor of theology emeritus at Reformed Theological Seminary, brings careful exegesis to Genesis 1:1 to 2:4 and a young-earth perspective to developments of the past two decades concerning analysis of fossils, the age of the world, the speed of light, the human genome, and other crucial matters. —M.O.
THEISTIC EVOLUTION Various authors

This 962-page book edited by J.P. Moreland, Stephen Meyer, Christopher Shaw, Ann Gauger, and Wayne Grudem is a tremendous achievement. Its bulk and $60 list price will overawe typical readers, but it's a must-read for pastors and professors taken in by the well-funded BioLogos campaign to sell macroevolution to Christians. Thoughtful chapters by scholars and scientists show that Neo-Darwinism fails scientifically, with neither the fossil record nor genetics undermining the first two chapters of Genesis. Transitional ape-to-human fossils remain conspicuous by their absence, and humans and chimpanzees are not similar at the genetic level. We cannot worship both God and current science dogma.

PURPOSE & DESIRE J. Scott Turner

Darwin's House of Cards is a good gift for someone who already sees the weaknesses of macroevolution. Purpose & Desire is perfect for a Darwinist just starting to wonder whether he's pledged allegiance to the modern version of the geocentric solar system: Hmm, the new data undermine it, but add an epicycle here, a few fixes there, and some tweaks on the fixes, maybe that will work. J. Scott Turner explains homeostasis, the incredible resiliency of living things seeking equilibrium, and raises questions about our essence with a measured tone that will entice scientific materialists to look in the mirror and wonder what they're missing.

ZOMBIE SCIENCE: MORE ICONS OF EVOLUTION Jonathan Wells

Jonathan Wells has fun zinging Darwinists in Zombie Science. If you've fallen for tree-of-life charts, embryo drawings that make us start off looking like little animals, or lectures on how eyes slowly evolved and how “god” (if there was one) botched the job, you've fallen for zombie science. The same goes if you applauded science illuminati who waxed on about “junk DNA” and thought “vestigial organs” had no purpose. Wells shows that much contemporary science teaching isn't merely innocent error, because discredited evolutionary ideas keep coming back.

FOUR VIEWS ON CREATION, EVOLUTION, AND INTELLIGENT DESIGN Ken Ham, Hugh Ross, Deborah B. Haarsma, and Stephen C. Meyer

Four Views on Creation, Evolution, and Intelligent Design gives Ken Ham (young-earth creation), Hugh Ross (old-earth creation), Deborah Haarsma (theistic evolution), and Stephen Meyer (intelligent design) the opportunity to put their best feet forward, have the other three participants step on them, and then kick back, gently. The format works, and the result is a lively discussion that shows the sharp differences among the various positions. Editor J.B. Stump works for BioLogos but played fair and hopes the book will be “a first step that leads to some in-person interaction” down the road.
Few of us like thinking about our own deaths—yet that's what we must do if we are to live life properly. That's the premise of David Gibson's excellent book *Living Life Backward: How Ecclesiastes Teaches Us to Live in Light of the End* (Crossway).

When we read “all is vanity” at the beginning of Ecclesiastes, does that mean “all is meaningless”? Gibson says no. The Hebrew word *hebel* is often translated “breath”—and that makes sense of what the Preacher is saying: “The merest of breaths... the merest of breaths. Everything is a breath.”

Gibson then begins to unpack what that means. You can get a sense of it from three subheads in the book's first chapter: “Life is short.” “Life is elusive.” “Life is repetitive.”

Subheads capture truths that we try desperately to escape—and Gibson doesn't try to soften their blows: “You gain nothing from grinding your fingers to the bone, because the world will go on impervious to what you've done, and it will not remember you anyway. It will not even remember the children we are yet to have (v. 11).... People do not gain from their labor and toil because ultimately they are going to die and be forgotten.”

Gibson argues that the Preacher wants the reality of death to “sink into our bones and lodge itself deep in our hearts. ... The single question that animates him is this: If we won't live forever, or even long enough to make a lasting difference to the world, how then should we live?”

The rest of the book follows closely the reasoning of Ecclesiastes. Gibson's pastoral tone, clear exposition, timely anecdotes, and care with Scripture make this a book that rewards careful reading with a Bible in hand. It's full of bracing phrases: “You do not know the future or what lies around the corner, whether good or ill. Perhaps these are indeed the very best days of my life. Maybe I'll be dead tomorrow.”

His point: “Live the life you have now instead of longing for the life you think you will have but which you actually cannot control at all.”

As Gibson works through the text, he makes sure the reader doesn't get lost. Big-picture phrases connect previous sections with new ones: “Once we grasp the big message of Ecclesiastes—that life in this world eludes our control—how then should we live?”

He spends time on difficult passages. What does it mean that the day of death is better than the day of birth (Ecclesiastes 7:1)? He says it's not “because death is better than life... but because a coffin is a better preacher than a cot [crib]. When life ends, or is about to end, absolutely everything else comes into focus.” Gibson compares two people at a funeral. One can't wait to leave and get back to his normal activities. The other lingers and “realizes that one day it will be his turn. The wise person asks himself, ‘When it is my turn, what will my life have been worth?’”

The book teaches us to live within the limits God has set for us. Even wisdom has limits, he writes: “But never forget that it is God who controls the times. It is God who rules the universe. And so although you can live well, and die well, and know some things truly, you cannot know all things completely.”

Much in this book is worth chewing over and digesting. Each chapter ends with thoughtful discussion questions.

‘Once we grasp the big message of Ecclesiastes—that life in this world eludes our control—how then should we live?’
LONG BEFORE LUTHER  Nathan Busenitz
Protestants and Catholics for five centuries have debated the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith. Nathan Busenitz shows that long before Luther theologians such as Origen, Augustine, Anselm, and Bernard of Clairvaux understood that we are saved by God’s grace. Busenitz skillfully examines Augustine’s writing and includes many specific quotations from church leaders before and after him. As Ambrose stated in the fourth century, “I do not have the wherewithal to enable me to glory in my own works, I do not have the wherewithal to boast of myself, and so I will glory in Christ.”

GOD AMONG SAGES  Kenneth Richard Samples
Kenneth Samples compares Krishna, Confucius, Muhammad, and the Buddha with Christ and shows “why Jesus is not just another religious leader.” I wish this book had been around 10 to 20 years ago when I taught a comparative religion course at the University of Texas: It shows how other extraordinary religious leaders were still broken and far from divine, yet Christ claimed to be God and showed through His life and resurrection that He is. Samples also examines the strengths and weaknesses of pluralism and tolerance and notes that historic Christianity “consistently resists and defies all attempts to homogenize and mythologize its central truth claims.”

UNCOMFORTABLE  Brett McCracken
Spoiler alert: Brett McCracken begins Uncomfortable with a hilarious send-up of many millennials’ dream church: architecturally contemporary and environmentally sustainable, with a community arts space and organic garden, a sanctuary rented out multiple nights a week as a concert venue, a fully equipped fitness center with CrossFit and personal training, Robinson and Malick societies for fans of 21st-century fiction and films, and so forth. His book is then a plea to avoid bubbles like that and instead embrace what’s uncomfortable: cross, holiness, truths, love, mission, worship, unity, commitment, and more. Christianity means the uncomfortable loss of being your own boss.

HEARING THE MESSAGE OF DANIEL: SUSTAINING FAITH IN TODAY’S WORLD  Christopher J.H. Wright
Christopher Wright provides a deeper sense of the distinction between Jerusalem and Babylon. The latter was like a beast of prey, but Daniel and his three friends nevertheless did not choose “pious separatism.” Instead, they were diligent during their “downright offensive and idolatrous” Babylonian education. They said yes to hard jobs but no to majority religious pressures. Wright opposes separatism and says we “need to understand the culture we live in without sharing its belief system.” He notes how the revelations of Chapter 8 left Daniel “worn out. I lay exhausted for several days. Then I got up and went about the king’s business.”

Country Christians?
Thomas A. Robinson’s Who Were the First Christians? (Oxford) in one sense doesn’t belong in this section, because it’s not evangelistic like the others on these two pages, all of which try to deepen our Christian understanding. But Robinson’s subtitle, Dismantling the Urban Thesis, carries an ecclesiastical kick, since we hear so often how early Christianity has an urban basis and from city strongholds went out into the countryside. Robinson shows how we have only guesstimates about the overall population of the Roman Empire as well as how many Christians and Jews there were, so we should be wary of all demographic claims. He does show that Christianity may not have been primarily an urban movement and that rural growth was also important. That’s relevant today: People in cities need Christ, but so do people in suburbs and rural areas, and it’s not necessarily true that urban influence will move outward.

—M.O.
We recommend 30 books in our Books of the Year special section. Nicholas Guyatt’s extraordinary book *Bind Us Apart: How Enlightened Americans Invented Racial Segregation* would be one of them except for an impediment: Basic Books published it last year. I missed it then, so I want to give it very honorable mention here.

Guyatt, as his subtitle suggests, shows that most anti-slavery Americans during the late 18th and early 19th centuries were segregationists: They typically wanted gradual emancipation with ex-slaves then moving to Africa or lands west of the Mississippi. That’s well-known among historians.

But Guyatt also reports on a gutsy minority who thought the road to racial reconciliation lay in “amalgamation” via intermarriage between whites and Indians (no one called them Native Americans then) or between whites and blacks. Such proposals, now largely forgotten, grew out of Christian belief: “When they consulted the authorities of scripture or science ... a separate creation for black people could not be squared with the descent of humanity from Adam and Eve; racism, put simply, was a rejection of the Bible’s authority.”

Among the Christian amalgamators:

- In 1784 Virginia legislator Patrick Henry proposed a law offering 10 pounds (a British laborer’s half-year wage) to any white man who married an Indian woman. A white woman would receive a similar payment for marrying an Indian man, in the form of a voucher to purchase the agricultural equivalent. (He hoped that it and she would help to “civilize” him.)

- When Kentucky Presbyterian minister David Rice in 1792 pushed for gradual emancipation, pro-slavery opponents complained it would lead to racial mixing, so “our posterity at length would all be Mulattoes.” Rice agreed and said he would accept that future, although it would “appear very unnatural to persons laboring under our prejudices.” He then said he would not let that prejudice “influence my judgment, nor affect my conscience.” He appealed to the “reasonable man who can divest himself of his prejudice.”

- Samuel Stanhope Smith, president of Princeton (then called the College of New Jersey) from 1795 to 1812 and the Presbyterian General Assembly moderator in 1799, wanted freed blacks to move west and receive farmland, with the goal of eventually having integrated communities. To that end he said the U.S. government should offer incentives for whites to move in with the new black colonists: “Every white man who should marry a black woman, and every white woman who should marry a black man, and reside within the territory, might be entitled to a double portion of land.”

- After Jedidiah Morse, a New Haven Congregationalist minister and foreign missions executive, traveled through Michigan and Wisconsin in 1820, he bluntly told Secretary of War John C. Calhoun that Indians were “of the same nature ... and of one blood with ourselves.” Morse hoped “intermarriage with them become[s] general.... They would be literally of one blood with us.” He said large Indian nations east of the Mississippi should be allowed to stay where they were, with smaller ones encouraged to migrate west.

Calhoun disagreed, and eventually proposed that all should be placed west of the Mississippi: Tragically, the end result was what became known as the Trail of Tears.

Calhoun was different from a predecessor, Secretary of War William Crawford, who in 1816 said about the Indians, “Let intermarriages between them and the whites be encouraged by the government.” Crawford saw a melding of the races as far better than the alternative—extinction or removal. Many politicians attacked him, but the *Virginia Argus* offered a defense with this Biblical basis: “The present varieties of the human race have originally sprung from the same parent stock.”

Guyatt’s book is fascinating. Sorry to have missed it last year.
This year for the first time we are recognizing a series, the publication of which requires great perseverance. Chartres Cathedral took 25 years to build, Salisbury Cathedral 45 (except for the spire), Notre Dame de Paris 100, and Cologne Cathedral 600. By those standards, P&R Publishing's 30-year plan to publish a Reformed Expository Commentary (REC) series covering all 66 books of the Bible is not record-setting. By American publishing standards, though, it's audacious.

The first REC publication was in 2005. Twelve years later, P&R has put out 26 volumes covering 29 Bible books. Editors Richard Phillips, Philip Ryken, Iain Duguid, and Daniel Doriani deserve congratulations: Both quantity and quality are impressive. The REC goal is not to be another heavy academic or light devotional series, but to exhibit strong expository preaching. Each commentary is made up of coherent units that work for sermons or Bible lessons, and all of the contributors are pastor-scholars who have preached through the books.

Good editing has removed some of the gas that can turn sermons into blimps, but they still have the feel of good preaching, not academic reaching. On weekends, though, we listen to excellent podcast sermons by Tim Keller and Kevin DeYoung—and REC commentators have the same feel of a Keller or DeYoung delving into whole books of the Bible. That makes the series ideal for a church library where pastors and Bible study teachers can dig into it.

Richard Phillips' Revelation commentary is a good test of the approach. The book's drama is familiar not only to Bible readers but to fans of the Left Behind series (more than 65 million copies sold) as well as The Book of Revelation for Dummies: four horsemen of the apocalypse, seven seals, plagues and disasters, Antichrist, Armageddon, Christ's return, a new Jerusalem! But Phillips sees the visions of Revelation as more important than fodder for cable television specials or puzzles for scholars.

Instead, he illuminates John's vision, such as his examination of the dragon, the woman, and her child in Chapter 12: “A wife is never more beautiful and precious to her husband as when she is carrying his child. And nothing so stirs up manly protectiveness as the image of his pregnant wife…. The church is the mother to God's covenant children, and we are to raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord…. He is the strong, loving, and faithful Father who will keep the mother of all his children safe.”

Phillips stands with the redemption-historical and amillennial interpretation of Revelation, yet he appreciates the work of premillennial and postmillennial scholars. His practical application is clear: With “spreading, virtually worldwide opposition to biblical Christianity,” Revelation is “the book especially designed by the Sovereign Christ to convey strength for perseverance unto spiritual victory.”

Overall, REC is explicitly Reformed, but it pushes up from Scripture and not down from a systematic theology chart. Phillips concludes, concerning Revelation 12, “Everything in the world that is contrary to God and his Word—whether sexual immorality, secularist ideology, or consumer idolatry—is a weapon forged by Satan to afflict mankind and oppose Christ and his church. When pressed to conform to worldly ways, we should see the devil’s hand at work and resolutely refuse to aid and abet the enemy of our King.”

Each commentary is made up of coherent units that work for sermons or Bible lessons.
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THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER’S SCATTERSHOT LABELING OF ‘HATE GROUPS’ LEAVES MANY UNFAIRLY TARNISHED

BY JULIANA CHAN ERIKSON
In one corner sits Stedfast Baptist in Fort Worth, Texas, where Pastor Donnie Romero isn’t ashamed to use words this magazine won’t print to describe the homosexuals he’d rather not see. “I’m not gonna let any of these dirty [vulgarity] inside my church,” preaches Romero in a December 2014 sermon. “They are all pedophiles.”

In the other, there’s Probe Ministries not one hour away in Plano. Like Stedfast, this Christian apologetics group also believes homosexuality is a sin, but it argues thoughtfully. A Probe blog post arguing against same-sex marriage reads like a research paper, with 18 references to books and academic studies and this conclusion in the 37th paragraph: “God cannot and does not sanction homosexual relationships, so we cannot either. We can respect those involved without capitulating to their demands.”

Oddly, both have been labeled hate groups by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), the nonprofit famed for monitoring white supremacists and other extremists. In 2010 the SPLC expanded its mission to include anti-LGBT “hate” and subsequently added groups it deemed harmful to the LGBT community to its expanding list of active hate groups. Stedfast and Probe are two of the most recent additions, having been inducted in 2015.

To be a hate group, SPLC says organizations must have used dehumanizing language and pseudoscientific falsehoods to portray LGBT people as a danger to society, or else supported the criminalization of homosexuals.

It’s not hard to figure out why Stedfast Baptist makes the cut. WORLD looked at all 45 anti-LGBT hate groups on SPLC’s list, and some do fit the Stedfast mold. They include Westboro Baptist Church, infamous for picketing gay funerals; Verity Baptist Church, whose pastor praised an Orlando gay nightclub shooting that left 49 dead; and Faithful Word Baptist Church, whose pastor can be seen in a YouTube video driving past a gay rights rally and blasting “God hates [vulgarity]” out of his car stereo. Everyone in the car has a good laugh as they drive past.

The others, though, are different. Many of these groups say they are puzzled how their words translated into hate. We took a look at the accusations of hate the SPLC leveled against these groups, to see whether they proved true.

Let’s first look at Probe. In a 2015 interview with the Plano Star Courier, SPLC’s Mark Potok called out Probe for “linking homosexuality to mental illness, stating that gay men are more likely to be involved in pedophilia and that children raised by same-sex parents are more likely to be molested than children raised in a traditional marriage.”

We looked up the blog posts. Probe does connect homosexuality to alcoholism and depression, with references to several 20-year-old scientific studies. We also checked the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s website: It currently supports both claims, saying gay and bisexual men are at greater risk for mental health problems.

We were hard-pressed to find Probe associating gay men with pedophilia, but Probe did say children are more likely to be molested in same-sex marriages—buried in the...
20th paragraph of a 2014 post about same-sex marriage. It pointed to research cited by the American College of Pediatricians (ACP), which said children raised by gay parents also tend to be more dissatisfied with their own gender, have homosexual experiences more often, and are encouraged to experiment in dangerous, destructive lifestyle choices.

The ACP, not to be confused with the much-larger American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), is a coalition of doctors who say scientific research shows father-mother families are ideal for children. The AAP argues differently, and while it’s hard to know whose research is most accurate, the SPLC has cleverly silenced debate on the issue—by adding the ACP to its anti-LGBT hate list.

Probe isn’t alone.

In September, Bloomberg View columnist Megan McArdle examined another SPLC anti-LGBT hate lister, the Ruth Institute, and looked into each accusation the SPLC made against the San Diego–based family advocacy group. McArdle found the SPLC had, in one instance, taken words out of context during a radio interview with Ruth Institute President Jennifer Roback Morse. In another, SPLC maligned Morse, a Catholic, for saying homosexuality is “intrinsically disordered,” even though those words were lifted directly from the Catholic catechism.

And there’s the Pacific Justice Institute. PJI’s president, Brad Dacus, said the SPLC also took his words out of context when it accused Dacus of comparing homosexuality to incest and polygamy. We reviewed a radio transcript of Dacus’ interview with Jim Schneider on VCY America’s radio show Crosstalk where he apparently made the comparison. It’s clear after reading Dacus’ entire quote that he was pointing out the slippery slope argument and legal loopholes if the Defense of Marriage Act was ruled unconstitutional. The SPLC added the Pacific Justice Institute to its hate list in 2014.

Being labeled a hate group didn’t mean much until this past August, when clashes with white supremacists in Charlottesville left one person dead. After that, it didn’t take long for people to notice groups like Stedfast, Probe, Pacific Justice Institute, or the Ruth Institute. A week after Charlottesville, the local paper called the Ruth Institute’s Morse to investigate “hate groups in San Diego’s backyard.” A month later, its credit card processing company cut ties with the group.

The Ruth Institute is the first instance of an online vendor cutting ties with an SPLC-designated anti-LGBT group for “promoting hate.” It may not be the last. Some groups told WORLD they’re concerned not just about staying legitimate, but staying in business.

The SPLC itself has little power beyond litigation, but because big companies, law enforcement agencies, contribution platforms, and media outlets all use the Montgomery, Ala.–based NGO’s hate list to determine who’s who in the world of hate and intolerance, its influence is surprisingly
In the wake of Charlottesville, several companies swiftly distanced themselves from white supremacist and other hate-related organizations. GoDaddy, Cloudflare, ICANN, and Google all cut ties with The Daily Stormer, a neo-Nazi site. GoFundMe deleted fundraising campaigns for the man who plowed through the Charlottesville crowd. PayPal and Apple piled on, suspending accounts associated with white supremacists. All used the SPLC’s hate group list as a reference point.

If the tech companies all used SPLC’s hate group list to identify these groups, and Christian organizations with unpopular views on homosexuality are also on that list, could they be next to lose access to their accounts? The short answer: Not yet, but since companies have all remained silent on how they will treat anti-LGBT groups, this doesn’t rule out the possibility.

Of the 45 anti-LGBT groups on the SPLC list, WORLD found at least nine still use PayPal to process online donations. PayPal spokeswoman Kim Eichorn seemed unaware that their group had SPLC-designated anti-LGBT groups on its books and requested the names of the nine organizations WORLD had identified with PayPal accounts, but would not comment further. So far, none have lost their PayPal accounts, but because the SPLC has repeatedly pushed PayPal to suspend the 81 accounts affiliated with all hate groups on its list, some are taking matters into their own hands. Morse said the Ruth Institute is dropping PayPal, following in line with the American Family Association and Family Research Council, both on SPLC’s hate list since 2011, which canceled their PayPal accounts last year and told their members to do likewise.

Two of the anti-LGBT groups use Amazon Smile, the online giant’s charitable donation outlet, to boost donations: the legal advocacy group Alliance Defending Freedom and Citizens for Community Values (CCV), an Ohio family-rights group. Neither has seen an impact on their Amazon Smile accounts, but in August, D. James Kennedy Ministries—another group on SPLC’s list—sued Amazon because its hate group designation excluded it from Amazon Smile.

The Florida-based ministry is the first anti-LGBT lister to take legal action against the SPLC and has a similar lawsuit pending against Guidestar, a nonprofit index that in June used the SPLC’s list to flag 46 organizations on its list as hate groups.Guidestar promptly removed the designations following an outcry from conservative groups. Liberty Counsel, a religious liberties defense group that has been on the SPLC’s list since 2015, is also suing Guidestar.

CCV President Aaron Baer said neither PayPal nor Amazon has canceled its accounts since it made the hate list in 2014, but because Charlottesville heightened the profile of the SPLC’s hate list, he took more measures to protect his organization. He removed the group’s physical address from its website and is avoiding companies that support liberal causes, for fear they would not protect donor information or would drop CCV because of its beliefs about same-sex marriage.

“It would be irresponsible for us to not be preparing for what it means to work in this environment,” Baer said. “We’re moving to companies where we’re more comfortable with protecting our data and resources. It’s going to be more important than ever to be able to give anonymously.”

CCV and other small groups have also tried to keep a low profile since their designation, choosing not to join the D. James Kennedy lawsuit and limiting their responses to the public. For them, the SPLC’s large legal staff, influential allies, and long-standing trust as an expert on hate groups gives the groups little latitude to speak up. No matter how wrong-headed she believes the SPLC to be, the Ruth Institute’s Morse realizes it would be foolish for a small group like hers to take on the well-endowed civil rights group: “I’m not going into a battle I know I’m going to lose.”

Each group we spoke with said the SPLC blindsided them with the hate designation. With no warning or explanation, members say they’ve effectively become hostages with no clear demands on release. Sue Bohlin, who writes on marriage and sexuality issues for Probe, called the SPLC in the hopes of finding a listening ear, only to be turned away without explanation.

WORLD made numerous attempts to reach the SPLC, but SPLC spokesperson Kirsten Bokenkamp did not answer our questions, only sending a link to the SPLC’s FAQ page, which clarifies that the groups listed aren’t there merely because they believe homosexuality is a sin or oppose gay marriage. When pressed to explain how anti-LGBT groups could get off the hate list—were they one apology from freedom, or would it be more involved?—there was no response.

All of the groups we spoke with say they have gone out of their way to reach out to the LGBT community. Probe’s Bohlin said she’s rented rooms to lesbians and counseled many more as part of her work with Living Hope Ministries, a same-sex support group. The Pacific Justice Institute’s Dacus said he provided legal counsel to a lesbian mother fighting to retain custody of her child. CCV’s Baer used the word love to describe his feelings for his LGBT neighbors. All said they harbored no ill will toward the LGBT community. All said their hate group designation would not alter their belief that homosexuality is a sin, and if anything, their hate group designation may have cemented them deeper in that belief.

“I’m not letting them separate me from my beliefs,” said the Ruth Institute’s Morse. “If I’ve done something wrong, I’ll apologize—but I don’t think I have.” ☿
Not invisible

Medicaid is bloated and ripe for reform, but the disabled who rely on the program worry cuts could target them / by Emily Belz

IT WAS A HOT DAY LAST SUMMER, and the parade was slow to start. Ten minutes, 15 minutes, an hour passed before it crawled to a move. But the thousands of New Yorkers who showed up for the third annual Disability Pride Parade patiently milled around in wheelchairs or using walkers or the white cane of the blind. The crowd, significantly bigger than the first two years, brimmed with the deaf, the autistic, those with cerebral palsy—New Yorkers from many different races and backgrounds. Children with Down syndrome carried homemade signs.

Some New Yorkers in sunglasses toting Starbucks drinks wove through the boisterous masses, clearly annoyed that the parade was slowing their trip from Point A to Point B. Even if spectators along the route up Broadway were minimal, the parade was buoyant, with music blasting and an appearance from young actor Micah Fowler, who has cerebral palsy, of ABC’s Speechless. Jazz musician Mike LeDonne, whose daughter has a rare syndrome that puts her in a wheelchair, founded the New York parade in 2015, and some of his musician friends showed up to blast trombones and trumpets along the route.

“A crowd like this, it feels like home,” said Gabriel Antoine, looking around from his wheelchair. A bullet passing through his spinal cord put him in the chair 12 years ago, but he has stayed as active as he can. A friend whom Antoine met in a workout class for the wheelchair-bound rolled up, and they shared a handshake.

Antoine took a two-hour bus ride from Brooklyn to be at the parade because he was concerned over cuts to Medicaid, which he relies on. Every person with a disability whom I interviewed at the parade used Medicaid and was anxious about potential cuts. Medicaid is the government-funded insurance program for low-income children, adults, and the disabled. Few in the public think of those with disabilities as receiving Medicaid, but it covers a third of nonelderly adults with disabilities, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, and half of them are above the poverty level.

The case for some kind of reform of Medicaid is strong. The program has grown massively in recent years to the point that it is one of the big contributors...
sible
to the federal debt, and it has done so by covering more and more able-bodied adults. Among the problems:

- Medicaid spending grew 9.7 percent to $545.1 billion in 2015, which was faster growth than for both Medicare or private health spending, according to the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).
- Medicaid.gov reports that in 2013, 56.8 million Americans were enrolled in Medicaid or the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP). In just four years that number has grown to 74.3 million.
- Medicaid is eating up state budgets. In 1987, states spent about 10 percent of their budgets on Medicaid. By 2015, it was 28 percent, according to the National Association of State Budget Officers.

That growth has reached the point that in 24 states, Medicaid now finances more than half of all live births, with New Mexico leading the way at 72 percent of live births, according to the Henry K. Kaiser Foundation.

Seema Verma, administrator for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, told the Wall Street Journal that “one of the major, fundamental, flaws of the Affordable Care Act” was “putting able-bodied adults into a program that was designed for disabled people.” The addition of so many able-bodied adults “stretched the safety net,” she said, “and it jeopardizes care for the individuals that the program was originally intended for.”

Trying to tackle Medicaid’s many problems, Republicans in their proposals to repeal and replace Obamacare have included slowing Medicaid’s growth and changing the structure of Medicaid to state block grants or a per-person allotment. The restricted growth in federal spending is not technically a cut, but healthcare experts say it could result in states cutting spending in areas where they have discretion. One of those is expensive services that the disabled tend to use, like in-home care, which is difficult to find coverage for anywhere else.

As pro-lifers hope for fewer abortions, including of those with genetic conditions diagnosed in the womb, like Down syndrome, the question arises of how communities will support the medical costs of those with disabilities. Right now, those with disabilities rely on Medicaid.

“DISABLED PEOPLE are kind of invisible,” said Daniel Florio, a lawyer who is quadriplegic from spinal muscular atrophy, as he watched the New York parade go by with several friends. His condition requires 24-hour care at his home, partly funded through Medicaid, and he lives with his parents in New Jersey. He relies on a respirator at night, which requires monitoring.

Without Medicaid and his parents, Florio said, he would be institutionalized. His parents cover the hours for free that Medicaid doesn’t cover, though they are now 68 and 71, which raises question marks in Florio’s mind about the future.

“I’m always going to require at least as much help as I have now,” he said.

Private insurance typically will not cover long-term home care for the disabled. It’s possible to purchase separate long-term home care insurance, but those policies don’t cover those with pre-existing conditions (even under Obamacare). Florio had to spend over an hour explaining his complex insurance arrangements to me. Insurance through one of his previous employers covered home health assistance, but Florio didn’t qualify for it because he had a pre-existing condition.

Florio, who has degrees from Berkeley School of Law and Harvard University, worked as a lawyer for years as his health and insurance coverage has permitted. He’s not working now, due to a delicate web of circumstances: He has to stay with his parents for care, but in New Jersey it has been hard to find accessible work. And if he earns too much, he loses some of his government coverage without having sufficient income to make up for it.

At one job, he had to use a para-transit service to go to work that took two hours each way, making each of his workdays an exhausting 10 or 12 hours. And getting up, getting dressed, going to the bathroom, bathing, and eating with the help of an attendant can take hours.

To cover his healthcare now, he relies on Medicare as his primary insurance, and then Medicaid waivers (which cover
his in-home assistance services), and free assistance from his parents and friends. Based on doctors I interviewed, this is a very common arrangement for those who have had disabilities from a young age.

“The waiver services ... are available if [states] have extra money lying around, essentially,” Florio said.

**AT BEACON CHRISTIAN** Community Health Center on Staten Island, most of the clinic’s patients use Medicaid and Medicare. The Mariners Harbor neighborhood surrounding the clinic, a federally designated “medically underserved area,” is mostly black and Hispanic, with slices of white and Asian populations. The staff sees patients from firefighters and cops to the homeless. Dr. Janet Kim, the chief medical officer who started the clinic with her husband after prompting from a church friend, said their patients with developmental or physical disabilities are almost all on Medicaid.

One police officer brought his disabled daughter to the clinic—the officer had private insurance, but because of the high cost of his daughter’s care, he had to apply for Medicaid. Coverage depends on the disability—one man at the clinic became a paraplegic after an accident and never qualified for Medicaid. Kim also emphasized acute problems with Obamacare that she sees every day in her work: rising premiums and problems with health exchanges. But she says any reform that would cut Medicaid for patients with disabilities would put them “in a very precarious position.”

In New York, Medicaid covers half of those with disabilities, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, and 42 percent of Medicaid spending in New York goes to those with disabilities.

While New York accepted the Medicaid expansion as part of Obamacare, it has shrunk its Medicaid spending since 2011 as part of an effort to cut costs. The state is second only to California in Medicaid expenditure, but since the cost-cutting program, its per-person spending is lower than it has been in almost 20 years. Broadly speaking, the cuts involve capping certain automatic growths in spending.

For the Beacon clinic, the cost tightening means “more authorizations and approvals,” said Kim. Though the clinic takes Medicaid, finances aren’t easy, and Kim says the clinic scrapples for donations and grants. The staff has devotionals every morning to stay grounded. When other groups ask how to replicate what the Kims have done, Kim tells them to “pray a lot. And pray more.”

**DR. BRIAN SKOTKO** also has to scrape for donations to supplement Medicaid reimbursements—he heads up the Down syndrome program at Massachusetts General Hospital, one of just 58 clinics in the country specializing in Down syndrome for adults and children.

Most of the patients who come to the Down syndrome clinic rely on Medicaid in some way, but Skotko says for every patient who walks through the door, he loses $400. He has to raise about $200,000 every year to cover costs. The clinic encourages families to sign up for Medicaid as a secondary insurance. In Massachusetts, a Down syndrome diagnosis automatically qualifies a child for Medicaid as a secondary insurance, either for free or for a premium. That might be worthwhile if primary insurance won’t cover certain care—and sometimes the primary insurer would cover the premium for Medicaid as a secondary insurance.

Those kinds of complexities in the insurance market are always changing, so the clinic regularly has to talk to Medicaid staffers to stay current.

Down syndrome care is important to Skotko because his sister has it. She is the reason he went to medical school, and she has relied on their parents and Medicaid for help. Right now she has sufficient services; but as those with Down syndrome age, more health complications can set in. Skotko said he is there to take care of her if his parents become unable to do so, but he’s concerned about how caps might limit her coverage.

“One thing people are holding their breath,” he said.

Medical costs vary widely based on the disability. For Down syndrome children, costs are high without insurance, according to research that Skotko and several colleagues recently published. But with insurance, out-of-pocket health-care costs for a Down syndrome child are only slightly more than a typical child, about $1,000 a year. Skotko hoped the data would help reassure parents receiving a prenatal Down syndrome diagnosis.

**OUT ON BROADWAY,** Daniel Florio moved from the sidelines to join the parade. A very social person, Florio enjoys going to the city to meet friends from Harvard for lunch, and he has traveled to four continents. He says when he’s not as active, he gets depressed, thinking about what he could be doing instead of being unemployed at his parents’ house.

Down the road, “Despacito” played on a boombox, and a city bus driver honked in celebration as he drove past the marching crowd. A fire truck joined the honking. The disabled paraders let out whoops. One little girl had sticks of chalk secured to the bottom of her wheelchair and a bubble machine by her arm, so even though she couldn’t move, she left a stream of bubbles and a rainbow of colors on the streets and sidewalks where she passed.
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This year marks the 50th anniversary of San Francisco’s 1967 Summer of Love—a summer that quickly turned into a winter of discontent, rife with drug overdoses, sexually transmitted diseases, and other miseries. The deteriorating Haight-Ashbury scene proved fertile ground for the Jesus Movement, as disillusioned hippies professed faith in Christ. Many, now old, remember those weird and wonderful days.

In 1966, Rick Sacks was 18, fresh out of the Army, and disgusted with the Vietnam War. He left behind his wealthy Jewish family in Boston and moved to San Francisco “with a whole lot of dreams about a new society.” He spent his days listening to spiritual gurus, feeding people in Golden Gate Park, working for a Haight-Ashbury free store, and “sharing” psychedelic

Finding Jesus after the Summer of Love

50 YEARS LATER, SOME FORMER HIPPIES STILL FOLLOW CHRIST by Mary Jackson in San Francisco

Jesus Movement members sing in Los Angeles in 1971.
drugs. But he was discouraged: “I couldn’t find a way past the selfishness and greed.”

At a storefront Christian coffeehouse serving soup, doughnuts, and the New Testament, two “straight-looking” men in bow ties told a barefoot Sacks about Jesus. He knelt on a piano bench and asked Jesus to forgive his past and give him a new future. Soon he was telling his friends about his faith.

Ted Wise was a drug-using sailmaker who said he encountered Christ during an LSD trip. After his conversion, he began attending Mill Valley Baptist Church, where his wife and two children already went. He invited Rick Sacks and other hippies to come. Although some conservative congregants didn’t like the hippies, the Baptist pastor took this growing group of converts under his wing.

Other San Francisco pastors created the nonprofit Evangelical Concerns to support a coffeehouse ministry and disciple the hippies. WORLD senior writer Ed Plowman, 86, one of the participating pastors, remembers: “We wanted to see the counter-culture come to Christ. They were rebels off the street … drinking coffee and smoking bongs.”

Shoe salesman and seminary student Kent Philpott, then 25, was listening in the car to Scott McKenzie’s “San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair)” when he says God said to him, Go to the hippies in San Francisco.

The following night, the straight-laced Baptist wandered the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood and met David Hoyt, a Hare Krishna devotee fresh out of prison for smuggling drugs. Philpott talked to him about Christ, and the two began to meet once a week—first in a utility closet, then in the basement of the Krishna temple where Hoyt lived. They drank tea, read the Bible, and talked. Others joined. Philpott enlisted a professor and another student to accompany him on his daily forays into Haight-Ashbury.

It was often tough. Philpott recalls pulling stoned teenage girls from orgies and Satanic rituals. Hoyt wrote, “Sometimes people would yell, spit, curse, or try to hit us.” By late 1968, they began opening communal houses for new converts trying to get off drugs.

In Novato, Calif., 30 miles north of San Francisco, Sacks, the Wises, and a few other couples formed a commune they called the “House of Acts.” Sacks recalls spending the days working odd jobs and witnessing in Haight-Ashbury, then hitchhiking or driving back to the house with carloads of hippies. The women would “dumpster dive” for ingredients to make pots of soup large enough to feed everyone. They read Scripture and sang praise songs, sometimes using pots, pans, and wooden spoons as instruments. During one Tuesday night Bible study, Sacks married Megan (they’ve now been married 50 years).

The “House of Acts” commune lasted for over a year. By then, the Jesus People movement had spread to Southern California and other pockets around the country, even catching media attention. When reporters showed up at the commune, Sacks thought it was a joke: “We were reaching celebrity status from people we didn’t even want to know us. What mattered to us was that people’s lives were changing. … Our lives were changing.” Ted Wise, who died in 2014, said in 1997, “It wasn’t a movement when it began. People just thought we were on a Christ trip.”

Fifty years later, Kent Philpott, 75, pastors the Mill Valley Baptist Church that many of the hippies once attended. He keeps in touch with many of the original converts. In recent years, he says, people are “coming out of the woodwork” and talking about their experiences: “Despite some major struggles, many of them continue to follow Jesus.”
Sowing catastrophe?
THE SPECULATIVE SCIENCE OF GEOENGINEERING COULD POSE A THREAT TO THE PLANET by Julie Borg

Geostorm is Hollywood’s latest disaster drama. The movie depicts a fictional, futuristic world where scientists use a satellite system to control the Earth’s weather and battle climate change—until the system suddenly goes awry and attacks the planet. Critics called the movie’s technology laughable, but some researchers believe geoengineering isn’t a thing to take lightly.

Even if Geostorm’s depiction of climate engineering technology is unrealistic, it should inspire serious global discussions regarding real-world geoengineering research happening now, says Andrew Maynard, director of the Risk Innovation Lab at Arizona State University.

Geoengineering refers to technological methods to control climate change. It could include removal of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere or methods for reducing the amount of sunlight reaching the Earth.

Writing at The Conversation, an academic news website, Maynard and co-author Jane Flegal noted that the benefits of climate manipulation could easily be offset by other adverse outcomes. For example, injecting particles into the atmosphere to cool the Earth could disrupt Asian and African monsoons, threatening food security for billions of people. Such unanticipated consequences might be irreversible and affect every person on the planet.

According to Maynard and Flegal, lack of clear economic or political gain from geoengineering projects means industry and governments are unmotivated to fund such endeavors. So scientists are turning to private sources: Bill Gates and the Hewlett Foundation, for example, fund a Harvard University research program in which scientists plan to inject a small amount of fine, sunlight-reflecting particles into the atmosphere above Tucson, Ariz.

Geostorm or not, it’s time for a discussion of geoengineering, the researchers wrote, otherwise “wealthy individuals and philanthropy may end up pushing the boundaries of geoengineering research—with or without the rest of society’s consent.”

TUMOR SEARCH AND DESTROY
Researchers have developed a nuclear medicine treatment for colorectal cancer that showed a 100 percent cure rate in a mouse study, with no indication of toxic side effects.

The technique, featured in The Journal of Nuclear Medicine’s November issue, uses a chemical agent that finds and destroys cancerous cells but does not harm healthy ones. If the treatment passes human clinical trials, doctors could potentially use the same approach to treat other types of cancerous tumors, the researchers said. —J.B.
The nonprofit advocacy group Athlete Ally intends to do for college athletics what the Human Rights Campaign has done for corporate America: force compliance with LGBT demands.

The group in September launched the Athletic Equality Index. It scores 65 Division I schools on a 100-point scale that measures how friendly the schools are to LGBT issues. Athlete Ally hopes eventually to rank all 1,281 NCAA member schools, publicize their rankings, and use pressure to force compliance.

Athlete Ally sent schools in the NCAA’s Power Five conferences an initial index score on Aug. 21 and gave athletic departments until Sept. 5 to provide feedback. Scores went public on Sept. 12. A handful of schools appealed and successfully wrangled higher initial scores.

Only two schools scored a perfect 100—Stanford and the University of Southern California. Overall, Pac-12 schools were the most LGBT-friendly, averaging 79.9 out of 100. The Southeastern Conference was least LGBT-friendly, with an average ranking of 56.7. Baylor’s statement supporting a Biblical view on marriage and sexuality earned it a -45 score.

Athlete Ally ranked schools based on publicly available information about nine criteria, which include: whether schools have schoolwide nondiscrimination policies, openly LGBT staff, pro-LGBT resources for student-athletes, LGBT interest groups, promotion of LGBT pride events, partnership with LGBT organizations, and policies that include transgender athletes.

Some athletic departments across the country complained about the methodology. “If you’re a researcher and you’re reading that index and you see how they gathered their information, I think a lot of red flags would go up,” said Iowa State’s Patrice Ayeni.

The NCAA has been pushing member schools to become more LGBT-friendly. Its website offers “best practice” documents for schools to use, but the organization doesn’t require them. NCAA spokeswoman Gail Dent said in an email that Athlete Ally helped the NCAA develop those documents, but the Athletic Equality Index is independent of the NCAA.

Although college athletics departments still retain the freedom to develop their own policies, Athlete Ally hopes to bring economic and public pressure against schools with low scores—just as the Human Rights Campaign has used economic pressure and shame against corporations that haven’t toed the LGBT line (see “Casting corporate bread upon the waters,” Oct. 14).

“When you look at the Corporate Equality Index, it has been extremely successful in moving corporate America forward on their LGBTQ policies,” Hudson Taylor, Athlete Ally’s executive director, told me. “If we can in any way attempt to do the same thing in athletic communities ... I think we’ll have done a real service to the culture of sports.”

The shaming seems to be working. Before the September release of the index, only three schools had adopted the NCAA’s pro-transgender recommendations. Today, nine schools have.

Taylor said he intends to release a new Athletic Equality Index at the beginning of each school year, expanding it to include more Division I schools and eventually including Division II and III institutions, which include many faith-affiliated schools.

‘When you look at the Corporate Equality Index, it has been extremely successful in moving corporate America forward on their LGBTQ policies. If we can in any way attempt to do the same thing in athletic communities ... I think we’ll have done a real service to the culture of sports.’ —Hudson Taylor
The Museum of the Bible will impress you with its scale and amenities, but not with its evangelism. Located two blocks from the National Mall, the brand-new museum showcased its 430,000-square-foot building, historical artifact collections, and $42 million worth of cutting-edge technology to the public for the first time on Nov. 17.

Steve Green and his billionaire evangelical family sought to launch a museum solely dedicated to Scripture nearly a decade ago. Plans changed over the years, but the goal was always to be one of the most innovative and awe-inspiring museums in the world.

“Wow, that’s the most incredible museum I’ve ever visited, and two, maybe there’s something about this Bible.”

But he quickly added a disclaimer, saying that does not mean evangelism.

The first-floor lobby of the museum features a 140-foot-long digital ceiling display that cycles through images of historic landscapes, art, and artifacts from the Museum of the Bible’s 1,600-item collection.

Visitors tour the “History of the Bible” exhibit at the Museum of the Bible.

Upon arrival, each visitor can pick up a small digital tablet that syncs with 86-inch touch tables where guests can customize their visit. The tablets have indoor GPS capabilities to track guests in the museum, display relevant information, and locate children who wander off.

Admission is free to the public, but the museum has suggested donations and asks visitors to reserve timed-entry passes to avoid overcrowding.

The museum has a limit of 5,400 guests at one time. Museum staffers claim it would take nine eight-hour days to review all of the content.

One floor up from the lobby visitors can take a tour through a permanent exhibit on the “Impact of the Bible.” This floor highlights how Scripture has influenced culture throughout history on everything from education, literature, art, and fashion to the civil rights movement. Large displays outline the Bible’s influence on U.S. founding documents and give information on influential Christian leaders.

The third floor focuses on the narrative of the Bible. Guests can choose from three distinct exhibits: a movie-set re-creation of Nazareth from when Jesus walked the earth, a 12-minute video of stories from the New Testament, and a 40-minute immersive, cinematic walk through the Old Testament narrative.

The museum cost $500 million and took more than three years to construct. It hosts one of the world’s largest private collections of Torah scrolls, and it will temporarily showcase artifacts from the Israel Antiquities Authority—the first public viewing of the collection. The Green family led the funding effort along with 50,000 smaller donors.

The Museum of the Bible opens amid a Justice Department settlement where the Green family paid $3 million and returned 3,500 artifacts illegally obtained from Iraq (see “Not exactly Indiana Jones,” Nov. 25, 2017). Green said he made “mistakes” early on while acquiring artifacts for the museum but claims no provenance problems with any items on display at the museum—and if doubt remains about something, he will remove it.

Green told me he always intended the Museum of the Bible to be a “non-sectarian” view of Scripture, and the museum is not bound to any denomination. For Green, any exposure to truths found in God’s Word is a good thing.
The annual NRB International Christian Media Convention is the largest nationally and internationally recognized event dedicated solely to assisting those in the field of Christian communications. Highlights include Super Sessions, Industry Sessions, Film Screenings, Networking Events, LiveBroadcasts, and more!

And with more than 100,000 square feet of exhibit space, the Exposition is a vibrant, active marketplace of around 200 vendors — including an all-new 20,000-square-foot Museum of the Bible exhibit — for those seeking tools and services to expand and strengthen their organizations.

This is a “must attend” event for Christian communicators!

Day passes and special first-timers rates available!
‘From Luther to Merkel’

OCT. 28 It seems as though Chancellor Angela Merkel has more faith in humanitarianism and multiculturalism than she has in God. She has done more harm than good in Germany.

—HELEN CHRISTOFF on Facebook

WORLD appears to paint Merkel in a positive light, but she does not deserve it. The acceptance of so many refugees, including many able-bodied Muslim men, has resulted in deadly attacks.

—RICK RYAN / Cleveland, Ohio

As much as I admired Luther, about 25 years ago I left my Lutheran denomination because, as I put it in a poem, for it “there is no compromise too great / for one more favor from the State, / or one more clink of coin in plate.”

—RICH ASPER / Menomonie, Wis.

‘Lord, open European eyes’

OCT. 28 The article on the Protestant churches in Vilvoorde didn’t mention the large monument on the spot Tyndale was executed. It is easily accessible via the high-speed train to Brussels, from there a local train to Vilvoorde, and then a short cab ride. It is worth the effort.

—CAROL BLAIR / Gladewater, Texas

Tyndale did all that work to bring the Bible to the masses, and now the masses just want to watch cat videos on YouTube. What a travesty.

—PHILLIP WOECKENER / Tallahassee, Fla.

‘Leaving benign behind’

OCT. 28 Google “bragged that it helped reelect Barack Obama in 2012,” and its head lobbyist visited the White House more than any other corporation. Whether it’s placement of information during a web search, millions of dollars directed to certain people, or foreign countries dropping tidbits about an opponent, all this unfair influence stinks.

—D.M. CLARK on wng.org

Francis Schaeffer also had the foresight to understand that it matters little whether a totalitarian government originates from the political right or left. Internet giants should be regulated as monopolies.

—DAVID DILEAS on wng.org

It is scary the way things have escalated online, but how do we get off the wheel?

—DARILLYN FLONES on wng.org

We’ve gotten used to getting valuable services for free by allowing providers to have an enormous amount of control over our information. People need to demand, and then be willing to pay for, privacy and control of their own information.

—STEPHEN E. CAMP on wng.org

‘Why so many criminals?’

OCT. 28 I agree with Anthony Bradley that we should look at why so many Americans are incarcerated, but we should not let moms and dads out of prison just so they can be with their families. People are in prison because they’ve committed serious crimes. The only solution for them is Christian life restoration programs.

—JIM RICHARDSON / Oro Valley, Ariz.

We as a society don’t want to get to the root of the problem. It’s too messy, too big, and would require Christians to get too involved. Society is broken, and the brave Christian ministries fighting the good fight are like a garden hose against a raging wildfire.

—DEBORAH M. O’BRIEN on wng.org

Having worked in the criminal justice field and later adopting a child whose parents are in the system, I know that the realities are harsh. Individuals are trapped in self-defeating cycles of crime, abuse, and neglect. But for God’s intervention, the future looks grim.

—SHARON MURPHY on Facebook

‘Cadillac-friendly tax plan?’

OCT. 28 I am not sure there is a tax plan that a majority could agree is fair. The GOP plan is not perfect, but Henry Olsen should acknowledge the value in simplifying the tax code and eliminating the estate tax, and the simple immorality of progressive taxes.

—SCOTT KIEWIT on wng.org

Business is the engine that drives the economy and provides jobs and income for the rest of society. The GOP has it right.

—MARILYN J. HATFIELD on wng.org

‘Single-minded’

OCT. 28 I am a 41-year-old Christian single who has never been married. I work hard not to pity myself or expect married people to have a clue about my struggles. It was so heartening to read Janie B. Cheaney’s observations.

—RUTH POTTER / Greenville, S.C.
We should be welcoming and encouraging unmarried people in our churches. Chastity is a virtue that is undercelebrated, and that contributes to an unhealthy attitude that sexual fulfillment is necessary for a full life. Nonsense! I’ve often seen it otherwise.

—MEG CROSSMAN / Tempe, Ariz.

‘A time to prepare’

Thank you to Jamie Dean for this sensitive and insightful treatment of this “season of disasters” and the reminder that we should be ready to reach out with the love of Jesus to a sin-sick world.

—ANDI MICHELSON / East Sparta, Ohio

The world has been dark for a long time, and I didn’t really notice. This string of events scares me. I pray that God will help those families and their relatives, and that He will be the shining light in the thick darkness.

—JASPER TEAGUE, 14, on wng.org

‘Director’s cut’

I appreciate Andrée Seu Peterson’s insight into God’s providential plan. He chooses our living arrangements to prepare us for the future He has planned, while so many of us look forward instead to an empty nest and a winter home in Florida.

—MIKE DOHERTY / Cleveland, Ohio

‘Powerful proclamations’

These two White House pronouncements are the answers to many fervent prayers for the Little Sisters of the Poor as well as Christian colleges and businesses. So many people felt boxed into a corner by Obama administration decisions that would force them to violate their consciences or face fines.

—BETH SAND DARANCIANG on Facebook

Correction

The pregnant woman killed in the Sutherland Springs, Texas, church shooting was due to give birth in April, according to relatives (“Protecting the flock,” Nov. 25, p. 7).

Read more Mailbag letters at wng.org

LETTERS and COMMENTS

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Please include full name and address. Letters may be edited to yield brevity and clarity.
The new rules
WE LOSE SOMETHING WHEN WE LOOK TO LEGAL FENCES FOR SAFETY

There has been climate change in America. I came close to changing a stinky diaper the other day. They caught me in time. On my next volunteer shift at a local Christian ministry, I was taken aside and told in hushed tones that someone had walked into the room and seen me and reported it. I am served notice never to change a diaper in that nursery unless another woman is watching me. That’s the new rule.

I was delivering an item to my father at church where he works on weekdays and where our congregation uses a portion of the building for a community school. The glass-paned main entrance doors were locked, but I was able to wave down a teacher in the hallway, a woman familiar to me from ages of church attendance. Having let me in, she stayed by my side even after I told her I knew where I was going and escorted me to my destination in the building. It was awkward. It’s the new rule.

The woman who assists me in ESL happens to be a veteran kindergarten teacher. Last year was the first year the school had to cancel its spring field trip. When I asked why, she said there are not enough parents with criminal background checks to be their chaperones. Too bad for the kiddos; it’s the rule now.

My Peruvian friends who wanted to take our ESL classes are out of luck. *Por qué? Porque* the only way they could attend is if we had child care, and we don’t. *Por qué? Porque* the few people who are game to put out time and money to have their backgrounds inspected are already plugging holes in other vital ministries.

If there are not two babysitters who show up to mind the toddlers of a local ministry I serve one shift a month, the single sitter may not take the children into the playroom across the hall, but all parties must crowd together in the project area though it is most inconvenient for conducting business.

Weather changes incrementally, below the threshold of our observation. When you are first aware of a warm day turning chilly, it has already been going on for some time. When you first sense you are getting uncomfortably warm in a room, the temperature has been rising without your notice as you were busy with other things.

The Bible predicts increase of evil in the last days, and precautions must undoubtedly be taken: “For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive.... Avoid such people” (2 Timothy 3:1, 5). So we “avoid such people,” and to do so, multiply our fences.

But bad men still breach good fences. And something’s gained (maybe), but something’s lost when we look to rules and legal fences for safety. It may be that reliance on the blunt instruments of one-size-fits-all safety measures has the unintended effect of making us complacent in the fundamentals we once knew for generations—that there is no substitute for knowing the flock of your pasture before placing anyone in positions of responsibility.

Everyone’s a suspect now and eyes his neighbor warily.

And there is something even worse, as stated better than I could myself by a reader of this magazine, whose 11-year-old daughter wanted to help a lifelong family male friend in his first-grade classroom—a room lined with windows on a hallway constantly monitored—but was denied because the child protection policy would not allow it. The mother wrote:

“It grieves me to see the institutional church training the innocent to think in such sinister terms about herself, and training all of us to look at one another as potential predators or potential prey. I had to introduce to her the notion of sin where there was no sin. I had to create in her a skepticism and suspicion that had previously been only purity.”

The climate has changed in America. You feel it subtly in every interaction. And somewhere out there an 11-year-old child is wondering things about a family friend that never should have crossed her holy mind.
Tumultuous times
2017 TEARS, CHEERS, FEARS—AND A PEER INTO 2018


I’ve just been looking at mostly domestic stories in the first draft of WORLD’s next issue, which will be our Year in Review special—or maybe we should call it the Year of Tears. The international stories are also heart-rending: Peruvian floods. Coptic church bombings. Terrorism and fire in England. Venezuelan protests. China crackdown. Mexican earthquakes. North Korean missiles.

Christians should keep track of this bad news for at least three reasons. First, God tells us to mourn with those who mourn and pray for them. Second, tragedies remind us of our own mortality and push us to yearn for heaven: As Puritan pastor Increase Mather put it, “Man knows not his time.” Third, if we discern the times, we can slightly influence the world through our buying, voting, and other actions, and we can greatly influence our churches and communities.

How to follow what’s going on? The Washington Post and most television news networks are so anti-Trump all the time that it’s hard to know what’s fact and what’s just friction. I’ll watch Fox News over CNN, but Fox fear-selling also increases demands for antacids and high blood pressure medications. WORLD reminds us to be watchful but not anxious, because God is still in charge.

Through God’s grace in keeping our staff members healthy and hardworking, a relatively small number of WORLD reporters and editors create the magazine you read, the website and podcast an increasing number of you access,

and our educational tools—newspapers for children and the World Journalism Institute for adults. Our daily half-hour podcast is perfect for busy people commuting to work or cleaning house. My wife and I listen as we walk our dog, Greeley: I hope you give the same present to both your body and your mind.

One big change in 2017 came on our website. We inaugurated The Sift, a daily wrap-up of the major news stories that allows you in several minutes to avoid blindsiding by a neighbor or co-worker who asks what you think of hot news and hopes to get more than a confused “wha?” We also created weekly Roundups of developments in abortion, education, culture, family issues, politics, science, religious liberty, and other areas, along with our thrice-weekly Globe Trot.

I’m amazed and grateful that we produce all these publications, programs, and educational resources with a budget roughly the size of a Christian high school’s. We’d like to do much more. Investigative reporting in America today is like a soccer game with 4-year-olds: Everyone surrounds the ball and leaves wide open 95 percent of the field, often including the goals themselves. “What can we dig out on Trump?” is today’s common journalistic refrain, while the battles fought out within corporations and colleges go largely unreported.

If we receive funding from our donors and ferret out information, I hope you will read on our magazine pages during 2018 investigative stories about how the LGBT offensive is steadily pushing ahead in large corporations whose decisions then affect all our lives. (Realizing the pressure on Christian business insiders, we offer confidentiality when needed: Write to me at the email address below or call 800-951-NEWS and leave a message with June McGraw at the WORLD business office in Asheville.)

We’re also continuing to expand our World Journalism Institute activities, which reach into secular as well as Christian schools. We take advantage of opportunities: In November I spoke to some Christians at the University of California at Berkeley and felt secure but mildly insulted when protesters did not surround me. We hope to be of service to young Christian journalists in China and Africa as well.

If reading or listening to any of our WORLD products during 2017 was helpful to you, or if you’d like to see more of our investigative reporting and educational activities in 2018, please donate by using the adjacent envelope or giving online at wng.org/worldmovers.
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—Paul & Francis