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CALLING ON A FIGHTER TO FIGHT
Most pro-lifers are enthusiastic about President Donald Trump’s record on abortion, but some say he could be—and should be—doing more
by Leah Hickman

PROSECUTOR AND PERSECUTOR
Kamala Harris has a complicated record, but her zeal to support abortion and attack its opponents has been consistent
by Jamie Dean

FALLING BACK WITH LOOKS AT THE PAST
FALL BOOKS: Twenty-five history books and biographies in a trying year
by Marvin Olasky

BRAWLS IN THE HIMALAYAS
A deadly border clash between Chinese and Indian troops has put relations between the two most populous countries in the world on a precipice
by June Cheng
People gather at the Supreme Court on the morning after the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.
A Biblical solution to health care

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“The first few months after movie theaters shut down and major releases kept getting delayed, I found myself at sea as to what WORLD should cover. But not having obvious options has forced me to find interesting selections I might have overlooked in normal circumstances.”

—WORLD

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WORLD (ISSN 0888-157X) (USPS 763-010) IS PUBLISHED BIWEEKLY (24 ISSUES) FOR $69.95 PER YEAR BY GOD’S WORLD PUBLICATIONS, (NO MAIL) 12 ALL SOULS CRESCENT, ASHEVILLE, NC 28803; 828.253.8063. PERIODICAL POSTAGE PAID AT ASHEVILLE, NC, AND ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES. PRINTED IN THE USA.

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Legal Docket
Mary Reichard, Jenny Rough
AUG. 29, P. 44—DAVE EXLEY/WEST MELBOURNE, FLA.

PUBLIC SCHOOL UNCERTAINTIES

The phrase “police their children” during virtual education is misleading for parents. To train up a child, I suggest “supervising” and “mentoring” offer a better mindset.

AUG. 29, P. 8—HENRY HUIE/OCEAN ISLE BEACH, N.C.

EXPANDING THE FAMILY

Via a videoconferencing app, I started Grandpa’s homeschool lessons for my seven grandchildren. Our daily lessons are less than five minutes on random topics: classical music, how to tie a square knot, English language idioms (the kids’ favorite), antonyms versus synonyms, etc. It helps me connect with my grandkids and provides a needed break for their moms.

AUG. 29, P. 44—DAVE EXLEY/WEST MELBOURNE, FLA.

THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE PAST

Excellent interview. It’s a clear explanation of the bigger problems with the 1619 Project.

AUG. 15, P. 20—BOB MCKEE/HIGH POINT, N.C.

I am struck by the need to understand the evil within ourselves, the rescue from outside of ourselves through Christ, and the need to extend His grace and love to others still resisting or in process of discovery.

AUG. 29, P. 5—PHYLLIS BRUMM/HASTINGS, MICH.

I’m disappointed you have reduced Mailbag to just one page. I find the letter writers insightful and helpful in putting topics in perspective. You have pages of entertainment, books, and other articles I skip over. You seem to lack balance.

THE SIFT AND WORLD WATCH

LINDA WEST/RANCHO BERNARDO, CALIF.

I am a longtime reader of WORLD Magazine, and more recently I started reading The Sift and watching World Watch each morning. Because my local newspaper has grown more and more progressive, I had this thought: I pay for a subscription to the paper, so I like the idea of starting a regular donation to support WORLD.

CORRECTIONS

The documentary Uncle Tom (“On a lonely road,” Aug. 29) has no affiliation with the American Enterprise Institute.

Until COVID-19 arrived, Overflow Café hosted an open mic night every Friday, led biweekly by Levin Lewis (“Overflow of love,” Sept. 26, p. 61).
A robust theology of reporting news

Current events are critical, but we exist to remind you the purpose of the LORD will stand

Whatever the news, the purpose of the LORD will stand.”

We close every daily episode of WORLD Watch, WORLD’s news program for students, with that Biblical catchphrase. It’s based on Proverbs 19:21, “Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.”

It’s much more than a catchphrase, though. Those few words represent the theological underpinning of our entire journalistic endeavor, whether the journalism shows up here in the pages of WORLD Magazine, the pages of our student news magazines, our podcasts, or—now—in our 10-minute daily video program for teens.

We serve the God whom the Apostle Paul tells the Ephesians works all things according to the counsel of His will—and, for His children, works all things together for good, as He says in Romans. Our aim is for our student viewers to begin to see God’s hand in everything that happens in the world, and in their own lives, even when they can’t discern His reasons. The daily reminder is good for them.

And not just them, but all of us. I’ve heard it said nearly 100 times, because we included it for the first time in our May 21 program, and now I can hardly read or hear a news story without adding that catchphrase in my mind:

Coronavirus cases increasing? Whatever the news, the purpose of the Lord will stand.

A tense election? Whatever the news, the purpose of the Lord will stand.

A longtime justice of the United States Supreme Court passes away? Whatever the news, the purpose of the Lord will stand.

The stock market takes a big one-day dip, or roars back without much explanation? Whatever the news, the purpose of the Lord will stand.

As we begin to see the big stories as part of God’s purpose—all within His control and according to the counsel of His will and for the good of those He loves—we can begin to see our small stories the same way. Sometimes it’s easier to trust that God has a purpose in a global pandemic than to trust that He has a purpose in the loss of a job, or the loss of a relationship, or the loss of our health.

Only God knows what the news will hold over the next few months—we can hope for specific outcomes, but our real hope is in the trustworthy promises of the God who loves us and who is working in the world to accomplish His purposes.

EMAIL kevin@wng.org
“This is a Sensational book!”

— ERIC METAXAS, Bestselling author and host of Eric Metaxas Radio Show

I have taught apologetics for many years. Of all the books on apologetics, Richard E. Simmons' book is the best I have ever read.

— WALLACE HENLEY, The Christian Post columnist

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“This book is clearly Richard’s masterpiece.”

— BEW WHITE, Birmingham, AL

“It is one of the most comprehensive and straightforward books on Christian apologetics I have ever read.”

— HILARY, United Kingdom

“The evidence is astonishing, great read.”

— SUSAN ANDERSON, USA

"Richard E. Simmons' book is the fruit of many years of thoughtful reading about the relationship of theology to the issues of modern life. He brings the biblical doctrine of God into conversation with the most basic questions about meaning and morality, science and human reason. Chapter after chapter offers helpful insight.”

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United we spend

Americans don’t seem at all divided when it comes to debt

Finally found some “common ground.” Not quite what I was looking for, but as best I can tell, it’s an issue where Republicans and Democrats seem to have virtual agreement.

They’ll do that by simply remaining silent. The topic is debt retirement. I may repeat myself—but it’s important to our families and businesses; our churches and schools; our city, state, and national economies; and to the world.

It’s a current issue because here in the United States we’ve just taken on some $3 trillion in brand-new debt. That’s $13,000 in new debt for every man, woman, and child—which has now been added to the $100,000 already owed by every individual coming into this most bizarre era.

How do we handle this? By staying silent on the subject—like our political “leaders”?

The sober fact is that we as a nation approach this tough fiscal assignment with a credit-card mentality. No need, we say, to tighten our belts and trim our budgets. We’ll just borrow our way out; that’s what we’ve always done.

Well, maybe for the last generation or so. We are a people unable to defer the gratification of our desires. By and large, we live in homes that are nicer than what our parents had at the same age. The same is true for cars, clothes, use of leisure time, travel and vacations, and everything that drives our family budgets up, up, and up.

We Christians are, in this regard, virtually indistinguishable from the society we live in. And by blending in with our surroundings, we are missing a strategic opportunity for witness to a key element of the gospel.

Make no mistake here. This is not another call to simple living. The guilt I suggest we ought to feel has less to do with enjoying the good things God has made than it does with the timing in which we are privileged to enjoy them. Like the world around us, we Christians tend to assume early enjoyment is our prerogative.

But Christians, of all people, should understand that the Mastercard mentality is not the way to master life. The pattern Jesus established was one of deferring desires—not because the fulfillment of desire is wrong, but because “my time has not yet come.” Most of us think our time has come five minutes after the desire first pops into our minds.

Yet few concepts are more central to a Christian way of thinking than the idea of deferring a present desire—in the confidence that something richer lies down the road. It is a constant and unrelenting theme of Scripture.

“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies,” Jesus said, “it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” Deferral now, rich reward later. He understood the concept perfectly, and His obedience to the death of the cross is, of course, the key to His and our future glory.

The theme permeates our lives. Train now, win the game later. Pull the weeds now, enjoy the sweet corn later. Skip the dessert now, enjoy a trim waistline later. The principle is everywhere except in our consumer consciousness. There, the infection still rages. And for such an infection to rage within the Christian community is costly in two ways.

First, it is costly in terms of wasted resources. In following the world’s pattern of satisfying so many of our desires almost as soon as we feel them, we are spending far more than we should on interest, carrying charges, and fees. We would literally have 50 percent more to spend on what we want—maybe even more—if we were patient to wait until the resources were in. Think what impact that might have on the underfinanced ministries of God’s kingdom.

Second, it is costly in terms of a wasted witness. If Christians were known around the world as people who through their patience, thrift, and keen sense of priorities lived prosperous lives, the gospel they preach and teach would have more credibility than it does now when so many of us spend most of our years playing catch-up with the finance companies.

As it stands, our political leaders—from both parties—have nothing but silence when it’s suggested that such basic principles of finance be applied to the nation’s astonishing debt. And their silence is becoming more and more deafening.
Coronavirus, lockdown restrictions and locusts are placing many vulnerable Christians, already marginalized and persecuted, in an even more severe situation.

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HE WEEKEND THAT BEGAN AT DUSK on Friday, Sept. 18, brought us Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year’s Day, and one more hard twist in a year, 2020, that already looks like three years—COVID-19 year, racial tensions year, and a knife’s-edge presidential election campaign—rolled into one.

The weekend began with the news of Ruth Bader Ginsburg’s death. President Donald Trump’s initial response to the Supreme Court justice’s passing was gracious: “Whether you agree or not ... she led an amazing life.” Ginsburg did. If you live in a conservative bubble, either of two recent films that turned her into a pop culture
celebrity—RBG and *On the Basis of Sex*—is worth watching to learn how the other half thinks.

Ginsburg also had an amazing friend, the late Antonin Scalia. They were opposites ideologically, but hours after Ginsburg died, Scalia’s son Christopher tweeted a story about Scalia buying her two dozen roses for her birthday. Asked if the gift softened her up so she voted with him on a 5-4 decision, Scalia said, “Some things are more important than votes.”

Saturday, Sept. 19, brought another milepost on this memorable weekend: the 100th birthday of America’s greatest writer on baseball, Roger Angell. He’s lost much of his sight but can still follow games. Angell centered his greatest article on what seems to me the greatest game ever, the sixth game of the 1975 World Series on Oct. 21, 1975. When Carlton Fisk ended it with a 12th inning home run, Angell visualized Red Sox fans all over “dancing and shouting and kissing and leaping about like the fans at Fenway—jumping up and down in their bedrooms and kitchens and living rooms.”

I imagine that will be the reaction of millions of Christians and others some day when the Supreme Court reverses *Roe v. Wade*. Angell continued his description: “And on back-country roads, a lone driver getting the news over the radio and blowing his horn over and over, and finally pulling up and getting out and leaping up and down on the cold macadam, yelling into the night, and all of them, for once at least, utterly joyful and believing in that joy—alight with it.” Pro-lifers await that moment.

Angell titled his essay “Agincourt and after.” The Battle of Agincourt in 1415 was a smashing English victory over a far more numerous French army. It became grist for William Shakespeare’s eloquence. He has one noble, Westmorland, complain of having not enough soldiers. Henry V replies, “The fewer men, the greater share of honour... But if it be a sin to covet honour, I am the most offending soul alive. ... We few, we happy few, we band of brothers; for he today that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother.”

Even before Ginsburg’s death this coming presidential election looked like an Agincourt contest, with Donald I trying to rally his forces against Democrats more numerous in polling and in the House of Representatives. The Supreme Court opening ratchets up the tension. Concerned Women for America head Penny Nance says, “Our happy warrior women are battle-tested.” Majorie Dannenfelser, president of the Susan B. Anthony List, calls on Trump and GOP leaders to “move swiftly to fill this vacancy.”

How swift is swift? Eight months before the 2016 election Barack Obama nominated Merrick Garland for the Supreme Court seat suddenly vacant via Scalia’s death. Republicans refused to vote on it. Now, six weeks before the 2020 election, Republicans are in a hurry. True, in 2016 the White House and the Senate were in opposing hands: Now they are both in GOP control. True, Democrats have also switched positions: “Just do it” in 2016 and “no, no, no” now. Nevertheless, the switches supplement the Critical

ESTEEM LEADERS WHO KNOW GOD’S IN CHARGE.
So I have only three pieces of advice. The first is to read a variety of views, not just those that confirm what you’ve already decided. Here’s centenarian Roger Angell’s favorite joke: A beat-up worker after a hard day comes into a diner and says, “Give me a cup of coffee, a piece of pie, and a few kind words.” The waitress serves him the coffee and pie. He says, “Hey—where are the kind words?” She leans over and says, “Don’t eat the pie.”

Second, read what the Bible says about people confident that they know exactly what “the smart play” is in judicial nominations or theology. For example, Psalm 2 offers one of God’s favorite jokes: “The nations rage and the peoples plot in vain. … He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.”

Third, esteem leaders who know God’s in charge. A millennium ago King Canute’s kissing-up courtiers said he could control the ocean tides. Storyteller Henry of Huntingdon described Canute—king of Denmark, England, and Norway—setting his throne at the sea-shore and saying, as the incoming tide wet the bottom of his robe, “Let all men know how empty and worthless is the power of kings, for there is none worthy of the name, but He whom heaven, earth, and sea obey by eternal laws.”

Theory view that everything is a matter of power, not principle. Evangelicals who have already abandoned the previous insistence that “presidential character matters” may gain more disdain.

Adding to the complexity: Scalia rightly said, “Some things are more important than votes,” but some votes are life and death. Shouldn’t we seize the opportunity to throw Roe v. Wade into the dumpster of inhumane decisions next to Dred Scott v. Sandford and Plessy v. Ferguson (“separate but equal”)? Yes, a Roe v. Wade reversal that would empower state legislatures won’t come close to ending abortion—New York, California, Illinois, and other blue states would still be magnet murderers—but it would probably save 100,000 lives per year.

On the other hand, Republicans can’t act in a vacuum. If Mitch McConnell pushes an affirmative vote on Trump’s nominee and finds a way to have his caucus hang together, the Democrats have an obvious response if they win the White House on Nov. 3 and gain a Senate majority: Expand the court and add two more liberal justices. (Or if the radicals have their way, add six.)

And yet, as our Jewish brothers and sisters celebrated Rosh Hashana, it was all too easy in thinking through moves and counter-moves to sound like Tevye in Fiddler on the Roof: “On the other hand … on the other hand.” Harry Truman, complaining about the conflicting advice economists offered him, said he was looking for a one-handed economist.

Some WORLD members may be looking for the same, but our editors and reporters are unlikely to comply. Our operating principle of Biblical objectivity means that we present clear views where the Bible is clear, as it often is, but we don’t pretend to say “God saith” when God hasn’t saith whether it is wiser to push for a Supreme Court vote before the election or wait. We all have our opinions, but we should acknowledge they are just opinions.

On Aug. 14 and Sept. 1, I interviewed two Christian conservatives, pro-Trump Wayne Grudem and anti-Trump David French. You’ll see their arguments on pages 30-33. The new court opening is likely to move the national focus from a physical virus to a judicial virus, which probably increases the pressure on pro-life people who oppose Trump, but I’ve seen no indication of French modulating his criticism. Instead, he noted on Sept. 20 that we are in for “another sharp escalation in the culture war, and this escalation could well lead to a cascading series of events that could strain the constitutional and cultural fabric of this nation.”

So I have only three pieces of advice. The first is to read a variety of views, not just those that confirm what you’ve already decided. Here’s centenarian Roger Angell’s favorite joke: A beat-up worker after a hard day comes into a diner and says, “Give me a cup of coffee, a piece of pie, and a few kind words.” The waitress serves him the coffee and pie. He says, “Hey—where are the kind words?” She leans over and says, “Don’t eat the pie.”

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Flooding hits Texas, and wildfires continue to scorch California

TREETS IN HOUSTON AND GALVESTON, TEXAS, flooded on Sept. 22 after Beta, a tropical depression, made landfall near Port O’Connor. By that afternoon, Beta had dumped up to a foot or more of rain in areas south and east of Houston, on top of storm surges. Forecasters started calling storm systems for letters of the Greek alphabet after going through their predetermined seasonal list of names based on the English alphabet for the second time since the 1950s.

Meanwhile, the Bobcat fire, which began Sept. 6 in northeast Los Angeles, continued to spread, scorching more homes and structures in the mountainous area. The blaze had burned through 156 square miles, and many surrounding communities remained on evacuation alert. Firefighters in late September were still battling more than two dozen major wildfires throughout California.

ACCUSED
U.S. Attorney General William Barr accused New York City, Seattle, and Portland, Ore., of “permitting violence and destruction of property” while failing to support the police and protect their citizens. A memo President Donald Trump sent earlier this month would allow the federal government to designate the cities as “anarchist jurisdictions,” which could cost them federal grant money. Barr noted that New York cut its police department budget by $1 billion despite a rise in shootings over the past three months. He also cited Portland’s refusal to accept federal law enforcement support during more than 100 days of violent protests and Seattle’s failure to shut down the Capitol Hill Occupied Protest quickly in June.

REPORTED
A UN investigative team has accused the Venezuelan government of “serious human rights violations,” according to the mission chairperson’s public statement. Marta Valiñas went on to describe crimes including arbitrary killings, the use of torture, and violent government response to opposition protests. The team concluded that these actions were part of a coordinated government policy to terrorize and control the Venezuelan people. The report cites 223 specific cases and nearly 3,000 witnesses against President Nicolás Maduro’s socialist government. The report will be presented to the UN Human Rights Council before further action.

SPIKED
The 53 countries that make up the World Health Organization’s European region confirmed more than 300,000 new COVID-19 cases in the second week of September. More than half of the countries reported a 10 percent or greater jump in new infections in the past two weeks. Of those, seven saw a more than twofold increase. Dr. Hans Kluge, the WHO’s European director, called it “a wake-up call for all of us.” The United Kingdom, meanwhile, reimposed a six-person limit on indoor or outdoor groups in an effort to avoid another nationwide lockdown as COVID-19 cases increased.
“These battles are going to rage no matter what the Supreme Court decides to do.”

ANDREW BATH of the Thomas More Society on how the reversal of Roe v. Wade won’t mean the end of the abortion debate in America.

“Every week we gather to worship a Savior who died for the whole world, not one part of it. What we call ourselves should make that clear.”

J.D. GREEAR, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, speaking in favor of changing the name of the Southern Baptists to “Great Commission Baptists.”

“Instead of us doing business with China and China becoming more free, what has happened is a place like China has bought our silence with their money.”

Flimmaker JUDD APATOW on Hollywood’s censoring of movies so as not to offend China’s Communist government.

“It was 30 feet of flames on one side, 40 feet on the other side, and I’m the piece of toast in the middle.”

Caretaker RON JARRIE, whose cabin was destroyed after he escaped the North Complex fire in California.

“That’s definitely a MiG-29. I’m glad to see it’s supporting our troops.”

PIERRE SPREY, who helped design both the F-16 and A-10 planes for the U.S. Air Force, on an ad from the Trump campaign that urges readers to “support our troops” but pictures a Russian jet in the background.
2 A FINE MESS Italian authorities say they have fined a French tourist who attempted to smuggle valuables out of Sardinia. The fine: $1,200. The valuables: about 4½ pounds of beach sand. A 2017 law prohibited stealing sand from Sardinia’s beaches. A regional authority passed the law after discovering the unique pink or white sand for sale on the internet. The Sept. 1 heist wasn’t the first. “The bottle was confiscated and is now in our operating room where we hold these confiscated items,” a spokesman for Sardinia’s Forest Rangers told CNN. “At the end of the year we usually have many bottles of sand accumulated.” Last year, authorities caught another French tourist trying to pilfer 88 pounds of sand.

3 GETTING HER GOAT A Georgia police officer has a good excuse for not finishing her paperwork. The unidentified Douglas County Sheriff’s deputy returned to her car after serving papers at a residence only to find a goat had jumped in the opened door and was eating paperwork that had been left in the passenger seat. The deputy struggled with the animal, alternating between trying to pull it out from the passenger side and pushing the goat out from the driver side of the cruiser. Finally, the deputy was able to force the goat out of the car. The goat managed to knock the officer down during the ruckus, but neither the goat nor the officer was hurt.

4 A LESSON IN OVERKILL A Frenchman in Parcoul-Chenaud was trying to kill a housefly when he destroyed a portion of his home. Local French media reported the unidentified octogenarian was disturbed by the fly as he sat down for dinner. He grabbed an electric fly swatter and began swinging at the fly. The swatter then ignited a leaking gas canister in the home, leading to an explosion that damaged his kitchen and the roof. The man escaped the explosion with a burn to his hand. The fly’s fate is unknown.

5 THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE Officials in Bristol, U.K., have shut down a recurring silent dance party. The problem? It was causing too much noise.
According to neighbors, revelers gathered in Owen Square Park on Sept. 5 in order to dance communally to music blasted through headphones. And though neighbors didn’t hear the music, they did hear the screaming—and the gas-powered generators. After complaints to local police, local authorities issued an order giving officers the ability to shut down gatherings if they get too loud.

**Calling It Off** Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me 1,171 times, shame on me. Police in Memphis, Tenn., have arrested a local man accused of placing 1,171 phone calls to 911 since July 15. On Sept. 1 alone, police say Huu Nguyen dialed emergency services 241 times. The next day, police say Nguyen called 911 an additional 32 times. During one of the Sept. 2 calls, Nguyen asked 911 dispatchers if they would like to purchase egg rolls. In Tennessee, an aggravated nonemergency 911 call is a Class A misdemeanor offense.

**Sent Through Time** The United States Postal Service delivered a postcard to an address in Michigan just a few weeks shy of 100 years after its initial postmark. Brittany Keech of Belding, Mich., discovered the Halloween postcard in her mailbox on Sept. 8. After observing the wear and tear of the mailing, she noticed a George Washington 1-cent stamp and a postmark that read Oct. 29, 1920. The cursive writing on the back is from a child named Flossie Burgess and is addressed to her cousins. According to a USPS spokesman, letters and postcards sometimes get lost while at the post office. Whenever an old letter is found, the agency attempts to deliver it to the address listed or the addressee. As for Flossie’s postcard, Keech says she hopes to find and give it to a relative of Flossie’s who will remember her. If she can’t find a relative, then she’ll find out whether the museum in Belding would like to display it.

**Bottled Bonanza** In order to buy his first house, an Englishman is hoping to liquidate his savings. Matthew Robson of Taunton, U.K., is seeking to sell 28 bottles of Macallan single malt Scotch whisky to finance a down payment on his first home. Each of the bottles of Scotch has been a gift from his father, a native of Milnathort, Scotland. Father Pete Robson purchased the first bottle of Scotch shortly after his son’s birth in 1992. Every year since, Robson bought another bottle for his son, leaving strict instructions not to open the bottles. Now 28 years later, the younger Robson says he thinks he can fetch more than $50,000 for the entire collection. Broker Mark Littler says buyers in New York and Asia have shown interest in purchasing the bottles.

**Wave of the Past?** For the first time since the 1980s, vinyl records outsold CDs in the United States. The Recording Industry Association of America reported $232 million in vinyl sales during the first half of 2020, which made up “62 percent of total physical revenues.” But this didn’t mean vinyl was all that popular: Even as vinyl bested CDs, it only made up 4 percent of total revenue for recorded music. Streaming music, on the other hand, made up 85 percent of revenue from recorded music. Digital downloads accounted for 6 percent of recorded music revenue.
A pervasive theory with no moral core

Postmodernist dogma is everywhere now

I read about it two years ago on The College Fix. An academic article called “Human reactions to rape culture and queer performativity at urban dog parks in Portland, Oregon” had been published in a feminist journal. It was about “dog rape,” apparently. Were college professors actually writing—and publishing—stuff like this? Right-wing education sites buzzed about it for days until the punchline hit: the doggy piece was a hoax.

But what a hoax—the brainchild of three liberal professors who set out to test the limits of academic credulity. Of the 20 spurious papers they wrote (with titles like “An Ethnography of Breastaurant Masculinity”), four were published, three were awaiting publication when the whistle blew, and five were under consideration.

The serious purpose behind the high jinks was to expose the sophistry of “grievance studies,” in which all social problems came down to oppression by white males. Stated the hoaxers, “[A] culture has developed in which only certain conclusions are allowed … and put social grievances ahead of objective truth.”

The university crowd was not amused. One of the three, philosophy teacher Peter Boghossian, immediately went under investigation for research misconduct. Another, Helen Pluckrose, now declares herself “an exile from the humanities” and resides in England with her family. The third, mathematician James Lindsay, has been promoting the book he wrote with his colleague Pluckrose, Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything About Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody.

According to the authors, it began in the 1960s—like so much else—with the broad acceptance of postmodernism as an academic philosophy. “Po-Mo” asserts that objective truth can’t be determined, that knowledge is socially constructed, and that dominant forms of knowledge always favor the dominant. So, for example, it’s pointless to read Shakespeare for his insight into humanity; the only purpose in studying Shakespeare is to “deconstruct” him, to determine how he privileges his own class and identity as a white male.

The problem with postmodernism was that, by rejecting absolutes and objective truth, it had no moral core. But beginning in the 1980s, academics seized the limp philosophy and repurposed its main tenets. If knowledge was a social construct benefiting the powerful, we must make room for other “ways of knowing.” If science was a tool of the white patriarchy, it couldn’t be trusted. If indigenous groups, people of color, LGBTQs, and the disabled had been kept down, it was time for them to step up.

That’s how theory became Theory—not a discipline, but a dogma. After destroying literature, it marched through the social sciences and eventually invaded the STEM fields as well. And now, after two decades of indoctrinating graduates whose diplomas grant them access to high ranks of culture, corporation, and government, Theory is everywhere. The Motion Picture Academy unveils diversity guidelines for Oscar-nominated movies. Corporations sponsor retreats for white males only, where participants confess “I am a racist” or write apology letters to female colleagues. American schoolchildren learn that their country was built on racism and owes its wealth to slavery.

President Trump has issued an executive order meant to purge diversity training, based on Critical Race Theory, from federal agencies. That’s a step in the right direction, but compared with the depth of the problem it looks like the tortoise just crawled off the starting line. It took decades for an inert academic philosophy to rise to rowdy life as activism and will take decades more to defeat it. Lindsay and Pluckrose, both agnostics, wistfully hope for a return to liberal progressivism, of the kind that welcomes all opinions to the public square and privileges none.

But humans don’t operate that way. Societies need absolutes and moral standards. The spinelessness of postmodernism is exactly what allowed activists to hijack it and now prevents them from moderating their own radicalism. The blunt narrative of oppressor and oppressed won’t stand the test of time but can wreak a lot of havoc before it falls.
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WAX ON, WAX OFF ... AGAIN

*Cobra Kai* is a clever reboot winning over audiences

by Megan Basham
It’s a Cinderella Story worthy of any cheesy sports movie. A few years ago, YouTube made a late, halfhearted attempt to enter the streaming game. Most of its scripted series were flops. But it gambled with a reboot of the 1984 film The Karate Kid with the original two stars (whom America had barely heard from in decades). The show became a sleeper hit and eventually landed a lucrative Netflix sale.

Once Cobra Kai hit that platform, it officially became the most popular show in the United States. It would be hard to find another ’80s update that’s even half as clever.

We catch up with Johnny Lawrence (William Zabka), the high-school bully who inspired a thousand tousled-blond copycats, in middle age. He might’ve been the big man on campus at 17, but at 50 he spends his days in an alcoholic haze, zoning out on Reagan-era macho movies, trying to block out the fact that his nemesis, Daniel LaRusso (Ralph Macchio), now owns a successful car dealership.

About as elegant and introspective as the heavy metal he blares from the subwoofers of his cherry Pontiac Firebird, Johnny couldn’t be a further cry from Mr. Miyagi. Yet when a nerdy immigrant teen moves into the run-down apartment next door, he starts to think he may still have something to offer and decides to resurrect Cobra Kai dojo.

Living well may be the best revenge, but the Karate Kid isn’t content to let his opulent house, beautiful wife, and thriving business speak for themselves. When he gets wind of Johnny’s plans, he, too, decides to return to the ring. Then it’s on like Godzilla vs. King Kong.

Daniel-san isn’t the bad guy by a long shot, but he’s a lot less lovable than has-been Johnny, who makes us laugh out loud with his throwback attitude. Unlike Daniel, who’s the very model of a modern major-domo, Johnny didn’t get the memo that it’s no longer acceptable to call women “babes” or hang massive American flags on his wall. He’s today’s underdog—a working-class junkyard mutt who gets kicked around by his (supposed) intellectual and ethical betters, yet still has enough spirit to haul himself out of a tangle of greasy sheets every morning and snarl in the face of safe spaces. When someone phones asking if he accepts gender-nonconforming students, a confused Johnny wonders if it’s a prank call.

Is it only nostalgia and weariness with a world that suddenly feels overrun with hall monitors that’s won Cobra Kai legions of fans? No doubt that’s a significant factor. But the show isn’t politically incorrect just for political incorrectness’s sake. Cobra Kai weighs what it means to be a man in a world that no longer seems to have any use for them. It looks at how fathers, both biological and adopted, shape their sons, and how growing up without them is leading to extremes of aggression and helplessness.

Take the scene where an athlete at a martial arts competition feels he has to give a virtue-signaling speech condemning toxic masculinity before he can compete. A viewer can’t miss the irony that the woke adults in these young men’s lives demand a conformity and submission far more pitiless than anything a high-school clique could come up with.

The most frustrating thing about Cobra Kai is that for a series so well tailored to watch with tweens and teens, it includes a hefty amount of language and crude humor. Thankfully, VidAngel has the show on its service too, so families have the option to enjoy the fun and thoughtful themes while filtering out what’s truly toxic.
Glimpses of abortion’s divides
by Leah Hickman

When is a person a person? Who determines a child’s quality of life? What happens in an abortion procedure?

Former NFL athlete and current father of seven Benjamin Watson started asking these questions of prominent thinkers last year. Filming for his documentary Divided Hearts of America began in 2019. Even with race issues and social justice taking center stage in 2020, Watson says abortion is the “core issue” at the center of all others.

His 80-minute documentary, streaming on SalemNOW, addresses the history and current state of the American abortion debate. Watson interviewed more than 30 thinkers on both sides of the issue to find a solution.

Watson delivers in production value. But the script attempts too much. The many voices and topics crowd the film. The film’s tagline is “Discovering the secret that will unite us”—a secret that, when revealed in the film, is too vague to do any good.

But the documentary has strengths: A former abortionist recounts the pregnancy that changed her mind. An abortion survivor talks about the saline solution she soaked in for five days in her mother’s womb. A woman shares the heartbreak of her own abortion: Her abortionist grabbed the baby’s remains and announced, “Just so you know, it was a girl.” In these moments, the documentary moves beyond punditry to glimpse the wounded hearts abortion leaves behind.

DATA MONSTERS
Former social media execs decry Big Data
by Bob Brown

FORMER SOCIAL MEDIA COMPANY EXECUTIVES tell all in the new Netflix documentary The Social Dilemma. The practices that have made Facebook, Google, and other platforms wealthy and powerful are “bringing out the worst in society,” former Google design ethicist Tristan Harris alleges.

Social media services record “every single [online] action” and run them through complex algorithms, according to former Twitter exec Jeff Seibert. The better these formulas predict people’s internet habits, the more advertisers pay.

The harm exceeds annoying pop-up ads. These companies employ “manipulative” psychological techniques to keep users generating more data. Former Facebook VP Chamath Palihapitiya explains that users then conflate “likes” with value and truth. The result: a “brittle popularity that leaves you more vacant and empty.” Some interviewees fault their former employers for the past decade’s spike in suicide among girls.

But viewers must also sit through evolution malarkey, six expletives, and an intermittent fictional story about a family wrestling with online routines. The docudrama (rated PG-13) doesn’t consider that users share in the responsibility for their own choices. Three modest (and obvious) suggestions for parents conveyed during the end credits don’t include Romans 12:2.

BIGGEST SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

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PLAYING POLITICS

"Boys State" offers a look at the political instincts of young Americans

by Emily Whitten

EVERY SUMMER, THE VETERANS ORGANIZATION American Legion hosts nearly 20,000 teens in weeklong camps called Boys State. Hundreds of boys in each state run for mock political office (or did before COVID-19, at least), including the top spot of governor. Even if you’re not a political junkie, the experience seems like a lot of fun, especially as presented in the new documentary "Boys State," filmed in Texas in 2018.

You could summarize the award-winning film this way: Two liberal documentary-makers crash a conservative boys camp. Yet despite clear Democratic bias, filmmakers Jesse Moss and Amanda McBaine use a cinéma vérité style that lets the boys speak for themselves, giving viewers real insight. At times, "Boys State" feels relaxed or tongue-in-cheek. At other times it bursts with excitement—and testosterone—as more than a thousand raucous and rowdy 17-year-olds converge on Austin.

Amid the chaos, McBaine and Moss focus on four boys—Steven, Robert, René, and Ben. Much of the time they portray the boys as three-dimensional people who make real moral choices. Choices like whether to lie to get ahead in their political ambitions. As Robert says, “My stance on abortion would not line up well with the guys out there at all. So I chose to pick a new stance.” Unlike in grown-up politics, here we see behind the curtain to what’s really in their hearts and minds.

"Boys State" contains bad language and negative role models. But we also see a clear difference between servant leadership and self-serving politicians. Progressive Steven talks with the boys across the aisle and tries to represent their views as well as his own. In contrast, the Ronald Reagan–loving conservative Ben smears his opponents with whatever dirt he can find. To get ahead, he misrepresents Steven’s stance on guns. In Ben’s mind, lying is just part of the game.

Since the film’s August release on Apple TV+, many media outlets have focused on the boys with progressive views. In an opinion piece for The New York Times, René describes encountering racism at the camp and suggests the U.S. political system rewards such behavior. “I believe that to love America is to be as cynical about our political system as necessary until real change is made,” he writes.

But the most hopeful reflection I’ve seen comes from Ben, the Reagan fan. The film brought him face to face with his shortcomings, as he explains in an interview with the Aspen Institute: “You know, when Steven’s gun control issue came out, my first instinct was, let’s smear him on it. ... "Boys State" was a wonderful opportunity to reflect on it and say, just because that’s how it’s been, that’s not how it should be.”

Ben’s mature introspection and repentance feels almost shocking in our culture today. And it offers some hope God isn’t done with these boys—or our country—just yet.
THE U.S. SPACE PROGRAM has been a source of pride to Americans and an inspiration to millions around the globe. But these missions into space have come with a cost—both financially and in human lives.

The four-part Netflix documentary *Challenger: The Final Flight* tells the story of the space shuttle disaster of 1986. Producers use original footage of flight crew training and interviews with NASA officials, subcontractor employees, and journalists to paint a picture of an agency rushing to complete missions to justify its massive budget.

NASA began planning the space shuttle program in the 1970s to provide transport into orbit and launch satellites and exploratory missions. *Challenger* was the third shuttle built, and by 1986, launches had become routine.

Or so it seemed. June Scobee Rodgers, widow of flight commander Dick Scobee, recalls her husband wondering if he should tell civilians “this is a risky business, [when] they were being told it’s like a commercial aircraft.”

A subcontractor company, Morton Thiokol, built the booster rockets that fired up and returned to Earth after each launch. Thiokol engineers noticed that the O-ring seals between sections of the solid rocket boosters were damaged after some launches, especially during cold weather. Despite damage to redundant systems—and seemingly in violation of safety protocols—NASA kept the schedule rolling.

“They had 16 flights scheduled in 1986, and nine the previous year,” states one reporter. “They had promised this to Congress, and they were ... determined to pull it off!”

*Challenger*’s 10th mission was scheduled from Cape Canaveral during a January cold spell. Thiokol employees raised concerns about the O-ring seals in an emergency meeting the day before the launch. But seemingly under pressure from NASA managers, Thiokol gave the go-ahead for launch. Interviewed 34 years later, these engineers still feel terrible guilt for signing off on the decision.

Crowds gathered to watch *Challenger* take off. As the craft cleared the tower, spectators cheered and hugged. Then, 73 seconds after liftoff, the shuttle exploded, killing all aboard.

In subsequent investigations, NASA officials were not forthcoming in acknowledging they knew about problems with the O-ring seals. But today, William Lucas, former director at NASA’s Marshall Space Flight Center, concedes, “My engineers knew that the joint should be redesigned, and that was in the process.”

Still, he stands by his decisions: “Going into space is something that great countries do. ... They want to advance technology. They want to learn. It’s also risky. ... It’s regrettable, but costs sometimes are very difficult.”
Are you a racist?

Critical thinking about deceptive polling
by Marvin Olasky

*White Too Long* by Robert P. Jones (Simon & Schuster, 2020) was No. 3 among Amazon’s “history of Christianity” books on Sept. 6. That’s both good and bad news: Jones provides useful information on white supremacy but builds a sinkhole too far by constructing a 15-question test and claiming the answers show white evangelicals are racists.

Try question No. 2 yourself: “What should be done with Confederate monuments that are currently standing on public property such as statehouses, county courthouses, public universities or city parks?” One in 5 said “left in place just as they are.” One in 4 said “removed but allowed to be reinstalled in a museum or on private property.” Almost half said “left in place but have a plaque added that explains their historical context.” Only 9 percent wanted to destroy the statues.

What do you think?

I wrote to Jones to ask how he scored the answers. He courteously responded, “the ‘removed and destroyed’ response option is scored as the less racist response.” Fascinating: The Taliban blew up statues of Buddha, and to be fully anti-racist Americans should also be destructive. Famed artist Elisabet Ney lived in Austin and sculpted slave owners and slavery defenders including Stephen F. Austin, Confederate Gen. Albert Sidney Johnston, and Confederate Postmaster General John Reagan: Should her work be destroyed?

My own preference: Move statues to a museum. In a book setting out to show the omnipresence of racism, it’s manipulative to include as evidence a question to which 91 percent of Americans don’t give the author’s preferred Talibanesque answer. Other questionable analysis sets up “a stunning contradiction,” as Jones puts it: “White evangelical Protestants report the warmest attitudes toward African Americans while simultaneously registering the highest score on the Racism Index.” In other words, these whites personally like blacks but support systemic racism.

It’s not a contradiction but an ideological difference. Most evangelicals are conservatives who criticize the systemic racism that keeps many black kids trapped in terrible public schools, even though educational choice programs in several large cities have shown excellent results. Many also criticize the systemic racism that for a half century has encouraged single parenting by offering welfare to single moms and imprisoning dads for minor drug offenses. (One out of 5 black kids grew up in a single-parent home in 1960: Now it’s 2 out of 3.)

Liberals, though, rarely admit that their liberal programs have contributed to systemic racism. They rightly lay out the brutality of slavery and the semi-slavery that continued even after the Civil War, but often ignore the analysis of black economists like Thomas Sowell and black journalists like Jason Riley, whose book title offers a good request to liberals: *Please Stop Helping Us.*

Some common right-left ground on prison reform exists, and the COVID-19 shake-up may open up common ground on the need for radical changes in public schools. But why turn conservative/liberal differences of opinion into a racist/nonracist divide?

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**Bookmarks**

Katharina Bonzel’s *National Pastimes: Cinema, Sports, and Nation* (University of Nebraska, 2020) provides provocative analysis of *Chariots of Fire*, the Rocky series, and other films. Jonathan Tepper’s *The Myth of Capitalism* (Wiley, 2019) shows we have too much crony capitalism and should develop a reinvigorated anti-trust policy. Ron Sider’s *Speak Your Peace* (Herald, 2020) makes the case for pacifism.

If you think fascism is right-wing, you might benefit from socialist-turned-libertarian David Ramsay Steele’s *The Mystery of Fascism* (St. Augustine’s Press, 2019). Steele’s essays are creative, politically incorrect analyses of many political and cultural issues. His 2001 essay on fascism identifies fascism as the refuge of socialists disappointed to find workers interested in reform rather than revolution: Fascism was a leftist variant in Italy and deserves a spot at that dictatorial end of the spectrum, with liberty at the other end. —M.O.
Spiritual guidance in a confusing world

Four counseling books
by Charissa Koh

**You’re Not Enough (And That’s Okay)** by Allie Beth Stuckey: Sometimes worldly lies can sneak into churches and books labeled Christian. Stuckey takes on five common lies women hear, including “You are enough,” “You determine your truth,” and “You’re perfect the way you are.” Stuckey explains where to look for these lies and the Biblical truth that corrects them. But she also explains the grain of truth in each lie—why they sometimes seem to resonate but leave women feeling empty. Her willingness to address the heart and keep God central makes her corrections very useful. At certain points, the author goes on tangents not directly related to the chapter topic, but the content is all good.

**Untangling Emotions** by J. Alasdair Groves and Winston T. Smith: Some people steamroll their emotions with truth, while others let their emotions run wild. Groves and Smith write that both approaches miss the point. God made emotions intricately connected to body and soul, and people should engage their emotions as a way to grow. This means identifying the emotion, examining its cause and whether it is a valid response, and then acting accordingly. The authors give excellent illustrations from their counseling experiences, and the clear writing and practical points make this book a pleasure to read. They speak about emotions precisely. For example, our culture values feeling good, but sometimes feeling grieved or angry is a godly response and will come more deeply with spiritual maturity.

**Safe and Sound: Standing Firm in Spiritual Battles** by David Powlison: With characteristically clear and gracious writing, Biblical counselor David Powlison delivers his final book, published posthumously. He explains what spiritual warfare looks like in the Bible, contrasting that with much of what we give that label today. One of his main points: Jesus cast out demons in the Bible as a subset of healing, but the Apostles modeled and taught that people should repent of sin and trust Christ, no matter what sins are in their past. Counselors will find Powlison’s section on spiritual warfare in counseling particularly helpful, but this book can also serve as a God-focused primer on how Christians should fight their spiritual enemies.

**God, You, and Sex: A Profound Mystery** by David White: Sex pervades the culture but is rarely understood rightly, even in the church. Pastor David White starts with the basics of God’s design, then applies it to numerous areas of life, including marriage, singleness, and sexual sins. Throughout the book, he continually returns to the picture of Christ and the Church: Sex is a sweet gift, but ultimately it pictures the even better reality of God’s intimate and loving relationship with His people. White addresses topics like pornography and what should and shouldn’t be allowed within marriage. He also devotes a chapter to how parents can shepherd their children in a sex-saturated world. This book could be an excellent discipleship tool or resource for a Christian trying to understand what God says about sex.
Voices of the past
Nonfiction reads for all ages
by Kristin Chapman

**Saving the Countryside** by Linda Elovitz Marshall: In this book, Marshall chronicles the experiences that shaped Beatrix Potter into the artist and author best known for her beloved books about Peter Rabbit and friends. With perseverance and savvy business skills, Potter published 23 little books and sold them at lower prices so families could afford to buy them. Later in her life she grew concerned about the growing urbanization of the idyllic countryside that inspired so much of her work. To protect it for future generations, she amassed more than 4,000 acres and bequeathed them to the U.K.’s National Trust. *(Ages 4-9)*

**Wood, Wire, Wings** by Kirsten W. Larson: Larson’s picture book biography tells the story of Emma Lilian Todd, an inventor who used ingenuity and perseverance to design a better airplane. Growing up during a time of great technological progress, Todd was fascinated particularly with the Wright flyer, but she thought it was an impractical model. “Imagine,” Larson writes, “if pilots today still lay on their stomachs and slid their hips back and forth to help control the plane.” Todd’s efforts centered on creating an airplane that could be flown and steered like a car or bike. *(Ages 4-9)*

**My Survival: A Girl on Schindler’s List** by Rena Finder with Joshua M. Greene: Inside the walls of Plaszow concentration camp, Rena Finder’s future looked bleak. But when Rena and her mother start working at Oskar Schindler’s factory, they and hundreds of other Jewish workers receive food and protection. As Finder recounts her experiences, she notes that although Schindler was not a saint, he took a stand against evil at great personal cost. Finder encourages young readers to do the same and have “the courage to stand up for the innocent. Be an upstander, not a bystander.” An excellent book for introducing more sensitive readers to the horrors of the Holocaust. *(Ages 9-13)*

**We Had to Be Brave** by Deborah Hopkinson: Hopkinson introduces middle-grade readers to the World War II Kindertransport that rescued Jewish children from the Nazis and brought them to England. The book focuses on the stories of three children but incorporates the voices of many others to capture the courage it took them to say goodbye to families and face an uncertain future in a country where they didn’t even speak the language. The chapters feature numerous historical photographs, and endnotes tell what happened to the children after the war. *(Ages 9-14)*

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**Afterword**

Greta Eskridge wrote *Adventuring Together* (Thomas Nelson, 2020) to help parents learn *How to Create Connections and Make Lasting Memories With Your Kids*. She urges parents to be “diligent about carving out consistent time to adventure” with their children while cautioning them from filling up their schedules with lots of extracurriculars that prevent families from spending quality time together. As she shares about her struggles to pursue adventures with her kids, Eskridge challenges families to embrace new or hard experiences as a way to build confidence and grow empathy. She also offers encouragement and advice to moms who may feel overwhelmed or ill-equipped for solo adventuring with their little ones.

In the vein of Dr. Seuss’ *Oh, the Places You’ll Go!*, Melissa Kruger’s *Wherever You Go, I Want You to Know* (The Good Book Company, 2020) encourages kids to dream big about their futures while remembering their most important call: loving Jesus with all of their hearts. The rhyming text pairs well with Isobel Lundie’s whimsical illustrations. —K.C.
Prepare yourself to defend the truth against the greatest worldview threat of our generation.

WHY SOCIAL JUSTICE IS NOT BIBLICAL JUSTICE

AN URGENT APPEAL TO FELLOW CHRISTIANS IN A TIME OF SOCIAL CRISIS

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OVER THESE NEXT FOUR PAGES we offer contrary views of President Donald Trump from two people I greatly respect. First, Wayne Grudem, professor of Theology and Biblical Studies at Phoenix Seminary, offers a positive perspective. Grudem is the author of *Christian Ethics, Politics—According to the Bible*, and 20 more books and was general editor for the *ESV Study Bible*. Here are edited excerpts from our Sept. 1 interview.

**Christian journalist and lawyer David French says Christians spent decades saying “character matters.” Now we rarely say that. What kind of testimony is that before the watching world?** I recognize, and evangelicals in general who support Donald Trump recognize, that he has character flaws. But they do not seem to us to be disqualifying. Character matters, but policy also matters.

**Can we separate character from policy, especially during a crisis?** You partly judge a person’s character by the actions he takes. President Trump has made wise decisions regarding the coronavirus pandemic in the midst of misleading,
lying information from China and conflicting advice from scientific and economic experts. On racial issues, his leadership led to an economy with the lowest black unemployment since we’ve been keeping records, with great gains among lower-income workers. He pushed for greater school choices in minority neighborhoods and stronger law enforcement to bring more safety to inner cities.

Former Secretary of Defense James Mattis said, “Donald Trump is the first person in my lifetime who does not try to unite the American people… He tries to divide us.” Mistaken evaluation? It’s bearing false witness against President Trump to say he seeks to divide us. He isn’t responsible for the rioting, the burning of cars, the blocking of public roads and sidewalks that began on day one of his presidency. No Americans legitimately have a fear of physical violence … for putting a Biden sticker on their car or wearing a Joe Biden campaign shirt or hat. But I know many evangelicals, including myself, who fear being physically attacked or shouted at if I were to put a Trump bumper sticker on my car or wear a MAGA or Trump-supporter hat in public.

The political left certainly has a lot to answer for, but what about the responsibility of Christian leaders? When Barack Obama made untruthful claims, he received a lot of criticism; but have we seen similar criticism regarding President Trump? I’ve publicly criticized his previous marital infidelity and his vindictiveness at times, and his brash, confrontational behavior at times. I looked at The Washington Post’s list of what it calls 16,000-some “lies” Trump has spoken and examined 20 or 30 of them. They’re what I’d call conclusions drawn by a hostile interpreter of words that a sympathetic listener would understand in a positive way. President Trump is often not careful in some of the things he says. He is given to exaggeration. Sometimes he’s made a statement after being given inaccurate information. I’m not sure he’s ever intentionally affirmed something he knows to be false, which is how I define a lie. As you know, I have written an ethics textbook. I believe it’s never right to affirm X when you believe X is false. If someone wants to point out to me some actual Trump lies that fit that definition, I’d be happy to look at them.

Will America in 2024 be in better or worse shape if Biden is elected, or if Trump is reelected? The Trump presidency has resulted in a stronger economy, stronger national defense, positive steps toward achieving border security, standing up to China and Russia, negotiating new trade agreements, advocating educational freedom, standing with Israel, strengthening our military, and reforming our judicial system. Those are all what seem to me to be evidence of God’s blessing on the nation with President Trump. If he wins again, I expect there will be more blessing on our nation. If Biden is elected, he’ll support abortion, cripple the economy, weaken our military, largely abandon Israel, select more judges who legislate from the bench, weaken religious freedom. We’ll have more crime, a complete federal takeover of our healthcare system, and much more that looks like the withdrawal of God’s blessing.

How much power does the president have over abortion? The influence the president has on abortion, right now, is through the appointment of judges who will undo the protection that Roe v. Wade in 1973 gave to abortion. President Trump has appointed two Supreme Court justices who indicate they are willing to overturn Roe, which would allow the American people through state legislatures and through Congress to make laws restricting the practice of abortion that the American public in general would support.

What do you think about the Trump administration dropping the number of refugees allowed in the United States to an all-time low? We should allow more legal refugees to come into the United States, but we don’t have the national will to do that until we have a sense that there’s a secure border. Once that border wall is completed in all the major areas where it needs to be to have a secure border, it will be a calmer, more thoughtful atmosphere on the part of the American people to provide a just and humane solution.

We’re probably agreed that President Trump has faced a hostile media. The Media Research Center evaluated the evening news broadcasts of NBC, CBS, and ABC for all of June and July. It found for every negative comment about Joe Biden there were 158 negative evaluations or statements about President Trump. That’s led to popular misimpressions.

I’m not critical at all of people who look at the Trump-Biden race and vote for Trump as the lesser evil. I do wonder about those who call Trump the “Greatest Christian President” ever. I have not done that. He’s a good president with some flaws. It’s a choice between two flawed candidates, and it boils down to an issue of what policies he will enact.
The Case Against Donald Trump

A negative assessment of Trump’s tenure and future outlook

David French is Senior Editor of The Dispatch, a conservative website, and a member of Christ Community Church in Franklin, Tenn. He served in the Iraq War, was a senior counsel at the Alliance Defending Freedom, and was a staff writer for National Review from 2015 to 2019. Here are edited excerpts from our Aug. 14 interview.

Theologian Wayne Grudem acknowledges problems with President Trump’s character, but he likes the policies. The Christian community spent decades saying character mattered. It was right. The separation of character from policies is impossible. Look at the terrible course of the pandemic through the USA. The ability of a president to respond to a pandemic was not a policy issue in the 2016 election, but almost every president deals with unexpected crises, in a way often determined by their character.

How has President Trump dealt with the pandemic? Early on he was extremely focused on minimizing the impact of this virus in large part because he
wanted to inflate artificially the American economy to aid in his reelection. That is a sign of very low character that deeply influenced the course of the way the United States reacted to this virus.

Has he helped or hurt regarding our racial division? The extraordinary racial division in the United States is not just dealt with by policy. That is dealt with through character, personality, leadership, and charisma. The core of former Secretary of Defense James Mattis’ critique is that Trump by pattern and practice intentionally tries to divide the United States of America. I think that critique is right. A president of good character doesn’t try intentionally to divide the United States of America. All of this stuff is super basic. You ask Christians about this in 2015, and they say, “Of course.” But Christians have joined with Trump and look for a rationalization.

What success has Trump had on policy matters? He has had essentially one significant legislative achievement, a temporary tax cut. He has had marginal effects on American foreign policy, some good, some bad, but no fundamental transformation. He has appointed good judges—but if you look back at the last Supreme Court term, would you say conservatives are ascendant and triumphant in the American judiciary? These things are very, very complicated. Does this president’s control over policy trump his own incompetence and poor character? The plight of the country now says that’s not just wrong, but laughably and tragically wrong. There is nothing MAGA about where we are now. There is an enormous amount of heartbreak, misery, death, division. That Donald Trump had a better platform than Hillary Clinton did not spare us from any of that. His character made it all worse.

In 2024, will America be in better or worse shape if Biden is elected or if Trump is reelected? America will be in much worse shape if Donald Trump is reelected. A second consecutive victory by an intentionally divisive president with a popular vote minority, especially when he is on the record saying he didn’t want to enhance the ability of the post office to deal with mail-in balloting in a pandemic, would make things worse quickly. Regarding Joe Biden, a lot remains to be seen based on the ambition of his administration and the way his administration would treat disagreement and dissent.

So, you are cheering for Joe Biden? I do not want Donald Trump to win reelection. Absolutely not. I want Trump to lose to Biden and the Republican Party to retain the Senate. That would prevent a triumphalist sweeping away of institutions like the filibuster. It would check any temptation to pack the courts, for example. It would remove from the field the worst-case scenarios at the same time that you remove from the field a president who has done more than any single human being in my lifetime to divide this country—and governed incompetently while he did it.

You’d want affluent conservatives to help Republican senatorial candidates? If they’re conservative like me and typically donate to a Republican president, I would say do not donate to this Republican president. Spend your money to save good Republicans on down-ballot races who now face long odds for reelection.

So you want a narrow Democratic win? No, I want a decisive loss for Trump, because if the loss is very narrow you’re going to have extraordinarily divisive forces in the U.S. calling into question the legitimacy of the election. A decisive win is the only way Americans are going to have confidence in the legitimacy of the election, sad to say. The margin will matter a lot. My hope is that a resounding rejection of Donald Trump doesn’t carry with it a resounding rejection of Republicans who are not like Trump. That’s what I’m pessimistic about. I suspect the resounding rejection of Trump will also lead to resounding rejection of Republicans who are not like Trump. That outcome is not best for the country.

A decisive win would lead to triumphalism? It always does. Even relatively narrow wins lead to triumphalism. There was a lot of GOP triumphalism when Trump won on the strength of about a 75,000-vote margin in three states.

We’re hanged either way? We’re not in a good position. The Trump nomination was the product of forces building for some time, including negative partisanship. Trump is a symptom of a disease that makes the disease worse, like a hacking cough can break a rib.

How do you answer the charge that a vote for Biden is a vote for abortion? The power of the president over abortion is profoundly limited. American abortion peaked in the 1980s and has gone down since then regardless of whether the president is pro-life or pro-choice. The federal judiciary has time and time again been a source of pain, anguish, and frustration.

We’ve had repeated disappointments. It’s like Lucy with the football. People have said for 40 years, Vote on this one issue. It hasn’t worked.
Bowie and his fans
Albums show the celebrated star’s gratitude
by Arsenio Orteza

Shortly after David Bowie’s death, the high-culture aesthete Theodore Dalrymple published an essay titled “Not a Fan” in which he pondered why the British daily The Guardian (“a newspaper directed at the most highly educated and intellectual portion of a large population”) “should devote so much space to the posthumous adulation of such a person as David Bowie, and why his activity should be treated with such breathlessly awed veneration.”

As if picking up Dalrymple’s gauntlet, Parlophone Records has spent the last four years putting into circulation special editions of rare Bowie recordings. This year’s bumper crop includes two studio EPs and three full-length live albums. And if the EPs (Is It Any Wonder? and ChangesNowBowie) aren’t substantial enough to change the minds of Bowie skeptics, I’m Only Dancing (The Soul Tour ’74), Ouvrez Le Chien (Live Dallas ’95), and Something in the Air (Live Paris ’99) should at least ameliorate their dismissal of Bowie as a showbiz charlatan.

Interestingly, the most ameliorating quality common to the live albums has nothing to do with Bowie’s music (unless a quarter century of the keyboardist Mike Garson’s holding Bowie’s bands together counts). Rather, it has to do with his onstage manner in general and his onstage manners in particular.

Whether riding his first surge of fame (1974), endeavoring a comeback (1995), or continuing to endeavor a comeback (1999), Bowie can be heard between songs making friendly, self-deprecating small talk with the thousands in attendance (he could always fill arenas) and offering brief but sincere expressions of gratitude to them for their having chosen to buy tickets to his show.

Admittedly, banter may seem like a weak foundation on which to base arguments for a rock star’s redeeming qualities. But given what has become the fore-, aft-, and ‘tween-song-banter norm—a tired combination of button pushing, profanity, and grandstanding—Bowie comes off debonair, even gentlemanly.

He comes off generous too, especially on The Soul Tour ’74. Recorded when he’d been on the road for a lengthy stretch, it finds him in ragged voice. He has to sing the refrain of “Changes” in a lower octave and blows the climax of “Young Americans” altogether. But like an old-school trouper he knows that the show must go on.

He was in fine vocal form for the ’95 and ’99 concerts. (Despite his reputation as a rock ‘n’ roll chameleon, Bowie was clearly comfortable in his own skin.) He was also intent on honoring a promise he’d made at the end of his 1990 tour never again to be a human jukebox simply churning out the hits. So while he includes the occasional “classic,” he focuses on deep cuts and songs from his latest moderately selling albums, rendering himself endearingly vulnerable in the process.

“You might actually enjoy this material,” he seemed to be saying, “if only you have the chance to give it a chance. That chance is what I’m offering. So please take it.

“You never know when it might be your last.”
**Love, life, and mercy**

Noteworthy new or recent releases

by Arsenio Orteza

**Talking About the Love of God** by the Harvester: The only readily available information on this charming, just-re-issued album of Southern-gospel songs is that it was initially released in 1977 on the Irish label Emerald Gem. And even then it must have seemed anachronistic—not because of its material (songs such as “One Day Too Late,” “More Than Just a Swear Word,” and the “There Goes My Everything” rewrite “He Is My Everything” were more or less contemporary at the time) but because of its style: a throwback to the well-mannered coffeehouse folk of the ’60s, replete with acoustic guitars, dulcet vocal harmonies, and just enough harmonica and steel guitar to suggest that the Byrds’ *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* was waiting in the wings.

**First Rose of Spring** by Willie Nelson: For his first marijuana-free album, Willie Nelson hasn’t exactly knocked himself out writing. Only two cuts bear his name, and he composed those with his producer Buddy Cannon. So assume that Nelson exhausted himself deciding which songs by other people to record, and conclude that it was energy well spent. Not only do the nine covers crystallize crucial facets of his ornery-old-cuss-with-a-heart-of-gold persona, but they also find him emoting with tender loving care. That he’s not getting any younger we knew. That he was squirreling away definitive interpretations of Toby Keith’s “Don’t Let the Old Man In,” Roy Clark’s “Yesterday When I Was Young,” and Beathard, Sampson, and Cannon-Goodman’s “Stealing Home” we didn’t.

**Living on Mercy** by Dan Penn: At 78, Penn no longer has the voice to make the Southern soul in which he specializes sound as special as it is. But Will McFarlane, Clayton Ivey, Michael Rhodes, and Milton Sledge (Penn’s band) could almost be the Memphis Boys. And whether the songs are new, 15 to 20 years old (Penn’s estimate of the title track’s vintage), or over 50 (“I Do”), they’re of a piece with the hits that he co-wrote for Aretha Franklin, the Box Tops, James Carr, and James & Bobby Purify. Mind you, “of a piece with” doesn’t mean “on par with.” Then again, Penn’s par is pretty high. And he does go out of his way to specify that the mercy that he’s living on is God’s.

**The Absence of Presence** by Kansas: If you still have a soft spot for the 1970s Kansas, you’re perfectly within your rights to pass on this effort from the current lineup if only on principle. With just Phil Ehart and Rich Williams on hand from the original band, exactly how “Kansan” can it be? As it turns out, plenty. Composed exclusively by the four-year veteran Zak Rizvi (six songs) and the two-year veteran Tom Brislin (three), the music’s FM-friendly lengths, hard-rock brawn, and prog-rock multidimensionality sound like the missing link between *Masque* and *Leftoverture*. What also doesn’t hurt: the vocal similarities between Ronnie Platt and Steve Walsh, and the demi-philosophical concerns common to both Brislin and the pre-conversion Kerry Livgren.

**Encore**

Critics are calling Dan Penn’s *Living on Mercy* (The Last Music Co.) his first new album in 26 years. And not counting a live album with Spooner Oldham, a live bootleg with Allen Toussaint, and two “demos collections” (Penn’s term), it is. There was also, however, a new “old” Penn album in 2012: an Ace Records compilation called *The FAME Recordings*. Named after the Muscle Shoals studio in which Penn cut the tracks, the compilation makes the strongest case to date for Penn’s outsized role in the development of Southern soul.

Recorded during the mid-’60s, *The FAME Recordings* is, technically speaking, a demos collection as well. But neither Penn nor his Alabama accompanists approached the material as if they were merely minting blueprints. Instead, they sound as if they intended to take the songs to the bank themselves, whereupon they would’ve almost certainly cashed in. Sam Cooke, after all, was dead, Otis Redding soon to be—and, believe it or not, Penn sang like a mixture of the two. —A.O.
A Middle East moment

New Arab-Israeli deal makes peace possible

For many Americans the prospect of travel to the Holy Land is reason enough for an Israel at peace with its neighbors. And that’s no trivial thing. Religious sites for Jews, Christians, and Muslims helped bring 4.5 million visitors to Israel in 2019, pilgrimages driven by Israel’s history and its Western-style welcome.

Street-level perspective helps to understand the geopolitics driving the Arab world’s move to normalize relations. It’s an issue as important as Arab worry over Iranian aggression and falling oil prices.

On a sunny day in Tel Aviv, which is most days, you can find a brunch spot between the Jaffa art galleries or join a fitness class just off the boardwalk. Freedom of movement.

On a Saturday at the city’s beach, you’ll see bikini-clad Israeli women next to Orthodox Jews in long dresses and Muslims draped in swim burkas, all dabbling in the waves and laughing as they go. Freedom of expression.

When the rocket sirens blare, as happened 18 months ago when Hamas launched two long-range missiles from Gaza toward Tel Aviv, Israelis head indoors and wait for anti-missile defense system Iron Dome to kick in. Afterward, they return to the restaurants, art galleries, and beaches. Freedom of security.

Israel is a country hemmed by those who want to wipe it out, yet it brims with prosperity. Decades of unstinting U.S. aid no doubt have helped, but the engine of commerce driving its $43,000 per capita GDP is largely self-determined.

Other Middle East countries, that like Israel missed out on oil reserves but not substantial U.S. aid, have squandered their advantage: Egypt’s per capita GDP is $3,000. Jordan’s is $4,000.

These are the pedestrian undercurrents carrying Arab leaders to Israel’s doorstep. What Israel stands for in 2020 is less a pariah in the Middle East and more of an answer—to decades of terrorism and instability that for too long have characterized the region.

The Sept. 15 ceremony on the South Lawn of the White House marking peace between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain is the first such moment since 1988. Each leader signed a bilateral agreement with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu opening the countries to trade, travel, and diplomacy. All three signed the “Abraham Accords,” a brief declaration “to advance a culture of peace among the three Abrahamic religions and all humanity.”

President Donald Trump and senior adviser Jared Kushner, his son-in-law, along with envoy Avi Berkowitz, saw an opening where other presidencies have failed. By delaying Israel’s plans for further West Bank annexation, they brought the Gulf states into a relationship with Israel that may lead to a two-state solution for Palestinians.

Trump leaned into a reality recent administrations pushed against: that Palestinian leadership repeatedly shunned peace deals in Palestinians’ interest. He didn’t wait to bring along the Palestinian Authority, a sidelined that may be good news for Palestinian people held hostage by leadership aligned with Hamas.

For Christians, the Arab thaw also is an opening toward the Jewish state. Armenia upgraded diplomatic relations, opening an embassy in Tel Aviv in September. The move helps secure the Armenian Apostolic Church’s continued presence in Jerusalem and gives new impetus to once-estranged relations—all over the objections of Iran, a long-standing Armenian ally.

Christian leaders in Lebanon, too, are rethinking hostile relations with Israel. Maronite Church Patriarch Bechara Al-Rai welcomed the UAE and Bahrain deals, even though Lebanon is far from such an arrangement.

The deals say nothing about wars in Syria and Yemen but suggest the region is realigning its compass and ready to do business with Israel on new footing.

That’s good news, because Israel has much to offer. In the Negev last month scientists harvested and tasted the first Judean dates, a species of the fruit celebrated in the Bible, the Quran, and other ancient texts but extinct for centuries. Scientists germinated seeds collected at an archaeological dig at Masada. They used the latest in microsatellite genotyping to date and geolocate the six seeds, then coaxed them to germination. They gave them the Biblical names Adam, Jonah, Uriel, Boaz, Judith, and Hannah. The seeds’ resurrection is a tangible gift to Jews, Christians, and Muslims, and a sign of what determined prosperity makes possible.
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KAMALA HARRIS HAS A COMPLICATED RECORD, BUT HER ZEAL TO SUPPORT ABORTION AND ATTACK ITS OPPONENTS HAS BEEN CONSISTENT

BY JAMIE DEAN
POLITICAL CONSULTANT
Ace Smith kept an amusing souvenir from his time working on Kamala Harris’ campaign for attorney general of California. A framed copy of a *San Francisco Chronicle* headline hung in his office: “Cooley beats Harris to win attorney general race.” The website clipping was amusing because it proved untrue.

Though Los Angeles District Attorney Steve Cooley declared victory in a close contest on election night in 2010—and the *Chronicle* initially ran with the news—a full count of the votes rendered a different verdict three weeks later: Harris prevailed over Cooley by less than 1 percent.

The episode echoed the famous 1948 headline in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*: “DEWEY DEFEATS TRUMAN.” An exuberant Harry Truman hoisted a newspaper with the errant headline after it became clear he had defeated Thomas Dewey in a close presidential contest.

In the decade since Sen. Kamala Harris, D-Calif., clinched the attorney general’s job in her home state of California, she’s run a successful Senate race, and now she’s running in what could be a close contest for the White House as the Democratic vice presidential nominee.

And she’s still contending with Steve Cooley.

Cooley—still a California attorney—has spent the last four years detailing what he calls Harris’ mishandling of one of the most dramatic pro-life cases of the last decade: David Daleiden’s undercover videos showing Planned Parenthood’s practice of charging fees for providing aborted baby parts to research companies.

Cooley is one of the lawyers defending Daleiden against 15 felony counts related to his undercover journalism for the Center for Medical Progress. One of the group’s earliest videos showed a Planned Parenthood official in California describing how an abortionist strategically crushes an unborn baby to preserve his or her organs intact.

Prosecutors allege Daleiden recorded the videos illegally. Current California Attorney General Xavier Becerra announced the criminal charges in 2017, but the investigation began in 2015 while Harris led the state’s Department of Justice—and it included a raid on Daleiden’s home.

It’s a lesser-examined but revealing chapter in Harris’ criminal justice record. That record includes efforts that some progressive activists have criticized and that some conservatives have applauded. But it also reveals a focused determination on certain issues, including defending abortion and undermining religious liberty. Given Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden’s advanced age and concerns about his health, the record of Harris, his running mate, rises in importance.

**BY THE TIME HARRIS,** now 55, took over as California’s attorney general in 2011, she was already well known in San Francisco: Harris had served as the city’s district attorney since 2004.

Harris focused on winning cases, and when she ran for reelection as district attorney in 2007, she touted raising the city’s felony conviction rate from 52 percent to 68 percent in three years.

She also considered how to prevent more crimes: Harris established a Back on Track program that offered pretrial diversion for certain offenders ages 18 to 30. (The program required community service, weekly meetings with case managers, and signing up for job training.)

The program was small but apparently successful: The cost of the program was less than the cost of incarceration, and the recidivism rate among graduates was less than 10 percent. (It was about 53 percent among most drug offenders in the state.)

Some critics thought Harris was too tough an attorney general: During her inaugural address, Harris told parents of public school students the city would penalize them if their children were chronically absent. Critics noted the policy could disproportionately affect low-income and minority parents, but Harris said stemming absenteeism was an important way to keep kids on track in school and out of the criminal justice system themselves.

In other cases, critics said Harris wasn’t tough enough: During her tenure as district attorney, she refused to pursue the death penalty for an assailant...
who killed a police officer. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., received a standing ovation at the officer’s funeral after giving a speech that included criticism of Harris’ decision.

Years later, Harris told voters she would enforce capital punishment as the state’s attorney general. She appealed a judge’s decision deeming the state’s death penalty system unconstitutional.

But in another case, Harris chose not to defend a new law: She refused to defend Proposition 8, the successful California voter referendum that defined marriage as an institution between a man and a woman. Harris said the referendum violated the Constitution.

In 2016, Harris won a U.S. Senate seat and continued with efforts on criminal justice reform: She sponsored legislation with Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., to reform the cash bail system for criminal defendants, and she worked with Sen. Tim Scott, R-S.C., on anti-lynching legislation. In 2018, she voted for a bipartisan criminal justice bill called the First Step Act. Republican attorney Holly Harris of the Justice Action Network called Harris “one of our most zealous advocates on the Hill.”

But bipartisanship hit its limits earlier this year, when Harris strongly opposed a police reform package introduced by Scott. The South Carolina senator expressed disappointment in Democrats’ refusal to debate the bill after the death of George Floyd during a police encounter in Minneapolis.

Harris denied accusations that her vice presidential aspirations had gotten in the way of working with Republicans. But her devotion to a range of Democratic policies was already well established, along with her longtime advocacy for positions once considered extreme by her own party.

WHEN HARRIS ASSUMED HER ROLE as attorney general of California, abortion-related issues weren’t foreign to the office, but they took center stage after Daleiden began releasing his undercover videos regarding research companies paying fees to Planned Parenthood for aborted baby parts.

In July 2015, the Center for Medical Progress released its first undercover videos, showing California Planned Parenthood officials discussing how to obtain the optimal specimens from abortions.
Daleiden’s attorneys say Harris and other political appointees in her office should have recused themselves from the deliberations over an investigation related to Planned Parenthood.

The attorneys also note the argument that Daleiden violated state law by recording conversations without the knowledge of Planned Parenthood didn’t seem to apply when other activists and journalists conducted undercover investigations that included video recordings.

In 2013, the group Mercy for Animals published videos of an undercover investigation into animal cruelty at a California farm. In 2015, Harris’ office appealed a California judge’s decision to allow farmers to continue the practice of force-feeding ducks to produce foie gras.

One official mentioned being willing to ask an abortionist to use a “less crunchy” method to preserve an aborted baby’s body parts for later use by medical researchers. The official said she wasn’t in it for the money, but she did negotiate potential fees for specimens. She joked: “I want a Lamborghini.”

Federal law prohibits the sale-for-profit of fetal tissue. It also prohibits abortionists from altering an abortion method in order to obtain human tissue for the purpose of medical research. Planned Parenthood denies both charges, but the videos raised searing questions about the abortion provider’s practices.

Still, the questions quickly turned on Daleiden and whether his method of recording the videos violated California privacy laws. Daleiden’s attorneys say emails show that Planned Parenthood officials reached out to the attorney general’s office and a March 2016 meeting included Harris and Planned Parenthood officials. Two weeks later, agents from Harris’ office raided Daleiden’s apartment and seized computer equipment with videos and other work-related material.

Cooley and Daleiden’s other attorneys contend Harris likely greenlighted the investigation at least in part because of her political connections to Planned Parenthood.

The group’s PAC had donated to her Senate campaign, and during the same week that agents raided Daleiden’s home, a page on Harris’ Senate campaign website urged supporters to sign a petition to “Defend Planned Parenthood” against a loss of federal funds.
The animal rights group heralded Harris’ move.

A few months later, Daleiden released his first videos showing Planned Parenthood officials discussing how abortionists determine where to crush an unborn baby in order to kill the child but preserve his or her organs. Daleiden still faces 15 felony charges brought by Harris’ successor.

As Daleiden’s criminal case winds its way through the courts, he’s filed a civil lawsuit naming Harris and other California officials he says violated his civil rights by conducting “a brazen, unprecedented, and ongoing conspiracy to selectively use California’s video recording laws as a political weapon to silence disfavored speech.”

HARRIS’ DISFAVOR FOR PRO-LIFE VIEWS

isn’t a secret in Washington. In the Senate, she co-sponsored the Women’s Health Protection Act—legislation designed “to protect a woman’s ability to determine whether or when to bear a child or end a pregnancy.”

Among other provisions, the bill would invalidate any law prohibiting an abortion “after fetal viability when, in the good-faith medical judgment of the treating physician, continuation of the pregnancy would pose a risk to the pregnant woman’s health or life.” The provision doesn’t specify whether mental health could be a reason to allow a late-term abortion.

During her bid for the Democratic nomination, Harris unveiled a plan to require some states to obtain preclearance from the federal government before enacting new abortion laws.

“We cannot tolerate a perspective that is about going backward and not understanding that women have agency, women have value, women have the authority to make decisions about their own lives and their own bodies,” Harris said at an MSNBC town hall.

“On this issue, I’m kind of done.”

The issue spilled over into the acrimonious confirmation hearings for Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh in 2018. Harris, who sits on the Senate Judiciary Committee, asked Kavanaugh, “Can you think of any laws that give the government power to make decisions about the male body?” (Kavanaugh said no.)

Harris’ work on the same committee brought up questions about her views on religious liberty later the same year.

During hearings on the nomination of Brian Buescher as a district judge in Nebraska, Harris questioned the nominee about his participation in the Knights of Columbus, a charitable Catholic organization. Harris specifically asked whether Buescher knew about the group’s opposition to gay marriage when he joined, and she inquired about whether he had ever opposed abortion.

The Senate eventually confirmed Buescher, and Sen. Ben Sasse, R-Neb., successfully urged fellow senators to vote to affirm the constitutional clause forbidding religious tests for public officeholders.

Early last year, Harris reintroduced the Do No Harm Act—legislation that would strip religious liberty protections in the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). Harris said “the freedom to worship” is a fundamental right, but that the First Amendment shouldn’t be used to “undermine other Americans’ civil rights or subject them to discrimination on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity.”

Thomas Jipping of the Heritage Foundation noted that the Constitution protects the “free exercise” of religion, and the Do No Harm bill “seeks to dilute the substance of religious freedom to nothing more than speech or private worship and to reduce its significance to nothing more, and often less, than other political priorities.”

Jipping noted that RFRA doesn’t settle conflicts between the government and how people exercise religion in their daily lives, but the law dictates that courts must sort out such disputes. He said the Do No Harm bill would “deny anyone the chance to argue that the government ever goes too far. The government would always win.”

Heading into the final stretch of the election season, Harris will try to introduce herself to more voters who are starting to pay closer attention to the contests. She may also lean into her past record and into the LL Cool J song her campaign played when she walked into earlier campaign events: “Don’t call it a comeback / I’ve been here for years.”
LESS THAN SIX MONTHS AFTER MIKE PENCE became vice president of the United States, he offered intriguing advice to the graduating class of Grove City College. “Servant leadership, not selfish ambition, must be the animating force of the career that lies before you,” he told graduates of the Christian school. “Don’t fear criticism. Have the humility to listen to it. Learn from it. And most importantly, push through it. Persistence is the key.”

It’s good counsel, but hard to mesh with Pence’s own boss: Humility and acceptance of criticism haven’t been hallmarks of President Donald Trump’s tenure.

The contrast is hard to miss: Critics have ridiculed Pence for his unwillingness to dine alone with any woman who’s not his wife and pointed out that Trump has bragged about past promiscuousness, had three wives, and faced multiple sex scandals.

How does Pence persist?

Part of the answer lies in Pence’s belief that the president is pursuing good policy. Another part might be found in a commencement speech he gave to the U.S. Naval Academy during the same month he visited Grove City College. He told the graduates that “an orientation to authority” was critical to good leadership: “Follow the chain of command without exception.”

Pence did criticize Trump during the 2016 Republican primaries, and he endorsed Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, ahead of the contest in Pence’s home state of Indiana. But after Trump tapped Pence as his running mate later that year, Pence followed the chain of command.

Overt criticism of Trump by Pence has been rare. The most serious criticism Pence leveled came just before the 2016 election when an Access Hollywood tape from 2005 revealed Trump making sexually lewd and aggressive comments about women.

Pence reportedly considered dropping out.

He publicly said he was offended by Trump’s remarks and that he could not condone or defend them. After Trump offered a public apology (calling the statements “locker room talk”), Pence continued in the race, and his public support for the president has been unwavering.

It’s an interesting relationship and an interesting contrast: While Trump relishes Twitter battles and campaign rallies, Pence has remained low-key and understated in his work.

After widespread rioting erupted in June following the death of George Floyd, Trump made a high-profile walk to St. John’s Church in Washington, D.C., where authorities had dispersed demonstrators in a chaotic scene before the president’s appearance.
Two days later, Pence made a quiet visit to a mostly black church in Maryland to listen to a small group of men and women discuss their concerns about race and other issues. The group expressed support for some of Trump’s policies but also told Pence of the struggles they face.

Derek McCoy, a black Christian who works for Compassion International, told the vice president he sometimes has to advise his adult sons about where it’s safe to go and asks them to check in with him. McCoy said he wasn’t bitter, but that it was important to acknowledge the struggles in the country: “America is listening, and we have to have the right tone.”

Pence sat quietly in the circle as others in the group took turns talking about their experiences and giving their suggestions. He told them: “We are here with ears to hear.”

On other issues, Pence has listened to an admittedly surprising source: Joe Biden. In her 2018 book First in Line, Kate Andersen Brower reported that during the first year of the Trump administration, Biden and Pence talked at least once a month.

Biden told Brower that Pence has asked for his advice on the office and that they often discussed foreign policy. He acknowledged the pair disagree on plenty of issues, “but Mike’s a guy you can talk with, you can deal with, in a traditional sense.”

A final motivation for Pence’s loyalty to Trump may be embedded with an obvious question: If Trump wins a second term, does Pence want to run for the presidency in 2024?

Pence, 61, mostly refuses to talk about presidential prospects publicly. And speculation has already swirled around other potential Republican hopefuls, including former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley and Sen. Tim Scott, R-S.C.

But it’s hard to imagine it’s not on Pence’s mind. Democratic vice presidential nominee Kamala Harris seemed to show accidentally how much the prospect can occupy even a potential vice president’s mind when she recently started a sentence: “In a Harris administration ...”

She quickly added, “with Joe Biden as the president.”
BRAWLS IN THE
HIMALAYAS

A DEADLY BORDER CLASH BETWEEN CHINESE AND INDIAN TROOPS HAS PUT RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO MOST POPULOUS COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD ON A PRECIPICE

by JUNE CHENG

A member of India’s border security force keeps vigil inside a bunker next to the highway leading toward Ladakh.

IDREES AbbAS/SOPA IMAGES
Conflict between the two countries could have worldwide implications. China and India are the world’s two most populous countries, the second- and fifth-largest economies, and two nuclear powers that share a more than 2,100-mile-long border. The border clash, the deadliest in 45 years, sparked a fierce backlash in India against its neighbor, leading the government to deny contracts to Chinese companies and ban Chinese apps. Talks between the two countries have resolved little, and the conflict opens the door to India’s greater cooperation with the United States and the formation of a larger anti-China alliance.

“I would say that the Chinese have lost the trust of 1.3 billion Indians in one go,” said Nitin Gokhale, founder of India’s Strategic News Global. “India now realizes its largest challenge is not Pakistan, but China.”

After the skirmish, Indians took to the streets, stomping on pictures of Chinese President Xi Jinping, burning Chinese flags, and smashing Chinese-made televisions.

“India wants peace,” Indian President Narendra Modi said in a televised address June 17. “But if provoked, India is capable of giving a befitting reply.”

INDEPENDENT INDIA and the People’s Republic of China formed only two years apart and fought a war over disputed borders in 1962. Today there are 23 disputed and sensitive areas along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the de facto boundary.

British negotiator Henry McMahon proposed the border between Tibet and the northeast region of India—known as the McMahon Line—at the 1914 Simla Convention. Tibet and Britain agreed to the border, but China’s government didn’t. The border became an increasingly contentious issue after the People’s Republic of China occupied Tibet in 1950, ridding the two countries of a de facto buffer. China’s territorial claims also expanded in the west as it built a road connecting Tibet and its Xinjiang province through the disputed area of Aksai Chin by Ladakh in Kashmir.

Although India was one of the first non-communist countries to recognize the People’s Republic of China, relations soured as China blamed India for supporting the violent 1959 Tibetan uprising and allowing the Dalai Lama and Tibetans to escape to the Indian city of Dharamshala. China began constructing roads and infrastructure to transport troops to the border, while India initiated the Forward Policy in 1960, setting up outposts along the border. On Oct. 20, 1962, as the United States was caught up with the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Chinese began artillery barrages along the disputed area of Arunachal Pradesh in the east as well as in the west by Aksai Chin.

Chinese troops easily overtook small Indian outposts lacking supplies and ammunition. The rocky roads up to the border and India’s poor infrastructure in the region meant supply lines were dangerous and soldiers poorly equipped. In contrast, the well-prepared People’s
Liberation Army easily pushed south into Indian-administered territory, leading then–Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to call on U.S. and Russian aid.

Before aid arrived, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai told the Indian ambassador that the Chinese had agreed to a cease-fire and would withdraw all its troops to 12 miles north of the LAC. The war was over. China had not captured any new land, and none of the territory disputes were resolved.

Bertil Lintner, author of China’s India War, noted that at the time China wanted to dethrone India as the leader of newly independent Asian and African nations, and the 1962 Sino-Indian war had attained its goal. China succeeded in becoming the new leader of the Third World. India’s defeat humiliated Nehru, feeling tricked by the Chinese friendship, and he died two years later.

The war was not fought over “control of some remote mountaintops in the Himalayas,” Lintner wrote in his book. Rather, it was a “clash of civilizations” between a growing democracy that had taken on the British system of governance and an authoritarian system that had little regard for international law.

The current border conflict echoes the earlier war—a power play by China rather than any real desire to occupy barren landscapes. Since the 1980s, China and India have met more than 20 times for border talks. To prevent escalation, the two sides promised not to engage each other’s patrols or to open gunfire or use explosives. But they didn’t agree on a definitive border. The ambiguity has led to skirmishes through the years.

In May, China began to enforce its presence in the disputed zones and build structures. By Pangong Tso, a high-altitude lake between India and Tibet, Indian and Chinese soldiers engaged in fistfights and stone-throwing. Skirmishes continued, culminating in the Galwan Valley clash on June 15.

The skirmish didn’t surprise Vara-prasad Dolla, professor of Chinese studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, India. But the timing did surprise him, he said. Indian President Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping had a good relationship, holding several summits in both countries.

So why now? Experts point to a few reasons: First, India’s move in 2019 to revoke the limited autonomy granted
to Jammu and Kashmir state, which includes the disputed area in the Ladakh region, caused an angry backlash from China. China believes that changed the status quo of territorial claims along the border.

Also, India had been constructing roads and rail lines and updating airfields along the LAC, and it had just completed a new 140-mile road to the high-altitude Daulat Beg Oldi airbase in Ladakh. This would allow the quick transportation of soldiers and equipment into the area. Some believe China acted more aggressively because it felt threatened by India’s infrastructure buildup.

But India said it was just catching up with China, which has already built a network of air bases, an extensive railroad network, and physical infrastructure along the border. India’s construction has hit numerous delays due to difficult terrain, budget constraints, land acquisition problems, and bureaucracy, according to the BBC.

Meanwhile, international alliances are shifting. Dolla noted China is concerned about India’s growing relationship with the United States, which India sees as a way to counter China’s growing threat. China has not responded to India’s demands for more balanced bilateral trade relations, as its trade deficit with China was around $50 billion in 2019. Meanwhile, India is increasing trade with the United States and purchasing U.S. defense equipment. During President Donald Trump’s visit to Modi’s home state of Gujarat in February 2020, the Indian president called the United States its most important partner.

China is also concerned about the informal Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (known as the Quad) between India, Japan, Australia, and the United States. The Quad shares information and holds summits and military drills. This summer India indicated it would allow Australia to join the annual trilateral Malabar naval exercise with the other three countries in the Indian Ocean. India avoided inviting Australia in past years to avoid upsetting China.

“The recent attempts at strengthening relations is one issue ... causing the Chinese to send a signal to both the West and India to make sure that your bonhomie, your cooperation, doesn’t become successful,” Dolla said.

The India-China border clash also distracts from the negative attention China has received over its handling of the coronavirus. The United States and other Western countries have called for investigations into the origins of the virus and China’s complicity in covering up the outbreak during the crucial early days. The clash also came as most Indians were stuck inside their homes during COVID-19 lockdowns, and India faces an economic downturn caused by the pandemic. More than 64,000 Indians have died from the coronavirus.

SOON AFTER THE JUNE border skirmish, Indian officials called for a boycott of Chinese goods, a tall order as China is India’s largest trading partner and has invested millions in Indian tech startups. Over the next two months, India banned more than 100 Chinese apps in retaliation, claiming they pose a threat to national security. The most notable app on the list was TikTok, which had 200 million users in India, its largest overseas market. Local Indian apps competing with TikTok such as Roposo and Bolo Indya saw a large number of downloads. Facebook has also benefited from the ban: Its own app and Instagram— which launched a TikTok-like platform called Reels—saw a 30 percent surge in user engagement after the ban, according to research firm Kantar.

India’s quality control agency has also delayed the approval of goods from...
Chinese companies such as electronics companies Xiaomi and Oppo, according to Reuters. These two brands make 80 percent of the smartphones sold in India. It also restricted Chinese investments in India’s technology, power, and critical infrastructure sectors, including in 5G. Visas for Chinese businessmen, academics, industry experts, and advocacy groups will require security clearances, reported Bloomberg. The government is also reviewing Indian universities’ relationships with Chinese institutions to reduce Chinese influence.

The Indian public has been largely supportive of these moves. An August Mood of the Nation poll by the India Today Group found that 84 percent of Indians believe India cannot trust China because Xi betrayed Modi. A whopping 91 percent said it was the right move for the government to ban Chinese apps and deny contracts to Chinese companies.

AFTER MORE THAN 10 ROUNDS of high-level talks, China has withdrawn in some parts of Galwan Valley and Pangong Tso yet has not agreed to India’s demand to return to its pre-May positions. In late August, India’s Ministry of External Affairs acknowledged gaps remained between the two sides, but they both “will continue to sincerely work towards complete disengagements of troops.” The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs agreed, saying it hoped the discussions would “further cool down the border situation.”

In early September, tensions heated up again as India and China accused each other of provocative incursions by Pangong Tso and firing warning shots, the first exchange of fire in 45 years. Days later the two countries’ foreign ministers met for the first time and agreed in principle on a five-point plan to end a standoff at the border, though they admitted they still hadn’t reached an agreement as several differences still remain.

Satellite images by Stratfor, a U.S.-based intelligence platform, show China has continued to build, adding 50 new encampments, support bases, and heliports on the Chinese side of the LAC in Ladakh. India sees this as violating a 1993 agreement between the two countries’ foreign ministers met for the first time and agreed in principle on a five-point plan to end a standoff at the border, though they admitted they still hadn’t reached an agreement as several differences still remain.

Satellite images by Stratfor, a U.S.-based intelligence platform, show China has continued to build, adding 50 new encampments, support bases, and heliports on the Chinese side of the LAC in Ladakh. India sees this as violating a commitment to maintain peace, according to The Hindu: A 1993 agreement between the two countries vowed to “keep its military forces in the areas along the line of actual control to a minimum level compatible with the friendly and good neighborly relations between the two countries.”

As talks continue, tens of thousands of troops along the border have a new hostile enemy to contend with: the harsh winters in the Himalayas, where temperatures can drop to minus 70 degrees Fahrenheit. Gokhale said that’s an advantage for India: More of its troops are acclimatized to the weather. There are hints that the troops may decide to withdraw for the winter on humanitarian grounds.

Gokhale noted that the clash has in one fell stroke undone 40 years of engagement between China and India and will have a “chilling effect” on how the border is managed. “Galwan Valley has shown us that Chinese forces can’t be trusted,” Gokhale said. “They lost the opportunity to settle the border.”

The recent crisis has also aligned India closer to the United States, where suspicions toward Chinese influence and security concerns have grown. The Trump administration has recently taken similar steps in banning Chinese apps such as TikTok and investigating Chinese ties to U.S. campuses. India-U.S. relations are at their best in years, Gokhale noted, as the two countries strengthen their defense cooperation.

But India doesn’t want to simply do the United States’ bidding in trying to contain China in Asia. It also desires to maintain strategic autonomy in foreign policy: The United States and India have differing views on countries such as Russia, Iran, and Pakistan.

Gokhale said China’s plan to prevent India from getting closer to the United States and other like-minded countries seems to have backfired. Instead it has strengthened India’s partnership with Quad members and led to New Zealand, South Korea, and Vietnam joining the Quad in the Economic Prosperity Network. While the latter is an economic alliance, Gokhale noted it could turn into a military alliance if China continues its aggression in the region.

“It’s showing a lot of aggression toward all countries big and small,” Gokhale said. “The ball is in China’s court to stop progress toward an anti-China alliance in Asia.”

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**An Indian army convoy heads to Ladakh following the deadly confrontation.**

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**Email editor@wng.org Twitter @WORLD_mag**
CALLING ON A FIGHTER TO FIGHT

Most pro-lifers are enthusiastic about President Donald Trump’s record on abortion, but some say he could be—and should be—doing more

BY LEAH HICKMAN
Penny Nance of Concerned Women for America is one of these supporters. “He’s done everything that he could possibly do to be a pro-life president,” she said. “I can’t think of anything that we’ve asked him to do that he hasn’t tried to do.” She and others note his pro-life makeover of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the establishment of a new Conscience and Religious Freedom Division of the Office of Civil Rights that protects pregnancy centers and pro-life medical professionals.

Compared with the long-term pro-life letdowns of the presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, U

Nearly children have never had a stronger defender in the White House,” said President Donald Trump to thousands of pro-lifers filling the National Mall at the annual March for Life in January. To many listening, it didn’t seem like a bold claim. Pro-life leaders and other politicians had been saying the same thing for months, pointing to the pro-life successes of his presidency. Even his speech at the march was historic: He was the first president to speak at the event in person.

Penny Nance of Concerned Women for America is one of these supporters. “He’s done everything that he could possibly do to be a pro-life president,” she said. “I can’t think of anything that we’ve asked him to do that he hasn’t tried to do.” She and others note his pro-life makeover of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the establishment of a new Conscience and Religious Freedom Division of the Office of Civil Rights that protects pregnancy centers and pro-life medical professionals.

Compared with the long-term pro-life letdowns of the presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, mainly over disappointing nominations for the Supreme Court, Trump’s pro-life record seems impressive. But Trump also has critics in the pro-life movement. They say that, when compared with his own pro-life campaign promises and his willingness to fight on other issues, Trump’s pro-life track record contains notable absences. Concerns about his character have also kept some pro-lifers from supporting him fully.

Many in the pro-Trump camp emphasize Trump’s appointment of Supreme Court Justices Neil Gorsuch
and Brett Kavanaugh. This summer they both supported Louisiana’s pro-life law in the first abortion-related case to come before the court. Trump has also nominated 200 state and federal judges: Pro-lifers believe most of them will rule in favor of pro-life laws.

But that’s the only one of the four pro-life commitments he made in a letter to pro-lifers during the 2016 campaign that he has fulfilled. The other three were to sign into law the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act, defund Planned Parenthood, and make the Hyde Amendment permanent law to prevent taxpayer-funded abortions.

Many pro-life leaders I talked with said that three-fourths failure is not Trump’s fault. The Defund Planned Parenthood Act, which would have withheld federal funds from Planned Parenthood for a year, never received a vote in the Republican-controlled House during the 115th Congress. The No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act would have made the Hyde Amendment permanent. It passed the House four days after Trump’s inauguration but never received a vote in the Senate. The Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act, also introduced in January 2017, passed in the House nine months later. That next January, the Senate version of the bill fell nine votes short of the 60 needed to break the filibuster. Each bill failed again during the following congressional term, after Republicans lost the House.

Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of the Susan B. Anthony List and the national co-chair of the Pro-Life Voices for Trump coalition, defends Trump, noting that in each Congress he’s issued a statement in support of the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act. Trump has also issued three statements in support of the Pain-Capable bill. Dannenfelser said Trump used his presidency to promote the legislation to the public at rallies, through tweets, and “even putting it in the State of the Union message.”

Trump’s use of Twitter in his administration is certainly unprecedented. He’s fired officials, started foreign disputes, and proposed policy through the platform. His tweets have become a window into his mind—especially into his political goals. In the 22 months between Trump’s inauguration and the day the Republicans lost the House, Trump tweeted more than 5,500 times, averaging about eight per day. But during that time, Trump tweeted about “life” in the context of abortion fewer than 10 times, mostly in reference to a candidate’s political stance or the annual March for Life. He used the word “abortion” once, and “unborn” never appeared.

Trump mentioned “Planned Parenthood” only twice in those 22 months, in complaints about Republican opposition to the repeal-and-replace Obamacare plan, which would have defunded the abortion giant. (Some pro-life leaders today say that repealing Obamacare through the filibuster-proof budget reconciliation process was the administration’s best chance of defunding Planned Parenthood.) He did not mention other pro-life legislation. Meanwhile, in that timespan Trump tweeted about “immigration” more than 100 times. He mentioned the southern border wall more than 70 times. On Twitter, pro-life policies were clearly not his priority.

What about his speeches? The annual State of the Union address is the president’s opportunity to state his legislative goals for the year. On Feb. 28, 2017, President Trump stood for the first time before hundreds of politicians and VIPs in the House Chamber of the United States Capitol. His hourlong address before both houses of Congress touched on some pet campaign topics: lowering taxes, creating jobs, repealing Obamacare, and securing the border. He spoke of his plans for a southern border wall. All three pieces of pro-life legislation sat in Congress at the time, and yet he made no mention of them.

A year later, Trump addressed the joint houses of Congress for a second time. The day before, the Senate fell nine votes short of the 60 needed to break the filibuster and bring the Pain-Capable bill to a vote. In his speech, Trump called on Congress to give government agencies the ability to fire federal employees. He called on Congress to revamp the country’s infrastructure. He told the story of an Albuquerque police officer agreeing to adopt a home- less woman’s unborn child.

Trump, though, made no mention of his pro-life promises or of his disappointment in the Pain-Capable bill’s failure. Still, Ryan Bomberger of the pro-life Radiance Foundation says the president was not the problem in 2017 and 2018: “I was very publicly frustrated with the Republican Party. Republicans had control of both houses, and they were spineless.”

In 2019, when Republicans were in the minority in the House of Representatives, Trump did include in his 2019 State of the Union address a call to action on pro-life policies: “I am asking Congress to pass legislation to prohibit the late-term abortion of children who can feel pain in a mother’s womb. Let us work together to build a culture that cherishes innocent life.” In his 2020 State of the Union speech, Trump again called on Congress to pass the legislation.

The only explicitly pro-life legislation Trump has signed into law during his presidency was a Congressional Review Act in 2017. It revoked an Obama-era rule requiring states to give Title X funds to abortion providers like Planned Parenthood. The filibuster-proof bill passed both the House and the Senate, with Vice President Mike Pence casting the tie-breaking vote. Unlike the other rule changes to HHS programs Trump made during his presidency, this one came

“I THINK THE TRUMP SUPPORTER BASE EXPECTS TO SEE BOLD AND DECISIVE ACTION.”
with a level of permanence: Congressional Review Act resolutions prohibit the federal agency in question from reissuing any future rule that is “substantially the same” as the nullified rule.

With this Congressional Review Act and the subsequent Title X rule change in 2019, Trump explored two avenues for partially fulfilling his promise to defund Planned Parenthood. The 2019 change was successful, but it only cut around $60 million (about 10 percent) of the abortion giant’s government funding. Trump had other avenues to cut larger portions of the funding. In September 2018, five pro-life leaders sent him a letter suggesting one of them.

Nance, Peggy Hartshorn of Heartbeat International, Tom McClusky of March for Life, Lila Rose of Live Action, and Kristan Hawkins of Students for Life referenced Trump’s campaign promise to defund Planned Parenthood: “Due to congressional inaction, getting taxpayers out of the abortion business remains one of your key promises that remains unfulfilled. Since Congress will not lead, we are asking you to do so. ... We ask that you send this bill back to Congress without your signature and continue to do so until it stops funding abortion providers with our taxpayer dollars.”

Trump signed the bill anyway. Nance said she was disappointed with Trump’s decision: “I wouldn’t have signed the letter if I didn’t want him to do it.” But she has since praised Trump’s other crackdowns on Planned Parenthood—mainly through the Title X grants: “To be fair, he found other ways to reach the same conclusion by going after Title X.”

It wasn’t exactly the same conclusion, though. Defunding Planned Parenthood completely at the federal level would have meant a loss nine times the size of the Title X change, leaving only the estimated 10 percent that comes from state coffers. The bottom line: Planned Parenthood’s overall government funding during 2016, the last year of the Obama administration, was $554.6 million. Last year, before losing Title X money, it took in $616.8 million.

Hawkins said continued funding of the abortion giant was not inevitable, even after Republicans lost control of the House of Representatives. She said the administration could divert taxpayer dollars from Planned Parenthood, without going through Congress, through the process of “debarment.” That means disqualifying the organization from participating in the Medicaid program since it has shown itself to be a bad agent by participating in the trafficking of baby body parts.

The Department of Justice investigation into Planned Parenthood’s alleged misconduct—launched in response to activist David Daleiden’s undercover videos in 2015—has continued for nearly three years. Hawkins said concluding that investigation could speed up Planned Parenthood’s reckoning and that Trump should hasten the conclusion by pressing the attorney general to wrap it up.

“Here we are years later and they have not announced the findings of that investigation,” said Terrisa Bukovinac from Democrats for Life. “In the meantime, the Trump administration has allowed Native Americans to be prosecuted for selling eagle body parts.”

Trump’s apparent unwillingness to use his political capital to meet his pro-life legislative goals suggests his promises about abortion aren’t a priority to him. On other issues Trump has repeatedly proven himself capable of pushing the limits. In 2018 Trump was willing to let the federal government go into the longest shutdown in the nation’s history over the issue of immigration. He spent Christmas Eve tweeting demands for border wall funding from the Oval Office.
Similar action on Planned Parenthood would have shown a definitive commitment to his campaign promises. “I think the Trump supporter base expects to see bold and decisive action,” said Lila Rose. She was one of the leaders I spoke with who was most vocal about Trump’s missed opportunities. “Refusing to sign a spending bill that funds the abortion industry would be bold and decisive action, and we haven’t seen that. ... Ultimately the hard work is doing what can cost you politically, and that’s where we want to see actual creative leadership.”

Rose added that Trump’s public persona contributes to her lack of Trump enthusiasm. She said the “dehumanizing tone” that colors some of his statements “goes against what we’re fighting for as a movement.” This concern is typical, even among pro-lifers who express strong support for his policies. But it’s often not enough to overshadow what they see as a staunchly pro-life presidency.

I spoke with more than a dozen grassroots pro-lifers across multiple generations to get their perspective on Trump. Some are political activists; most work at pregnancy centers. Most who talked to me expressed discomfort with Trump’s public persona but said he has overall helped build a culture of life by protecting unborn babies through his policies and emboldening pro-lifers through his support of the movement.

One pregnancy center staff member, Weeseetsa Maeding at Alternatives Pregnancy Center in Sacramento, Calif., said having Trump as a spokesperson for the pro-life cause has not helped the movement: “We get lumped in with Donald Trump, and I don’t know if that is going to have a positive, long-lasting effect for people who are going to outlast Donald Trump for fighting for the pro-life movement.”

Longtime pro-life activist John Cavanaugh-O’Keefe criticized Trump’s lack of repentance for his past and his contribution to current divisiveness: “If you’re going to end abortion in the United States and around the world, you do need to build a national consensus.”

In June, Stephanie Ranade Krider resigned as executive director of Ohio Right to Life, citing similar concerns. She told Christianity Today, “All people matter to God. My greatest fear is that in the pro-life movement and the evangelical church, we’ve become so tied to the Republican Party and President Trump, they don’t all matter to us.”

The administration in August released Trump’s second-term agenda. The original version made no mention of abortion-related goals. The promise to “protect unborn life through every means available” didn’t appear on the 54-point list until five days later, after complaints from some pro-lifers. Trump’s September campaign letter to pro-lifers made the same commitments as in his 2016 campaign letter and added the goal of signing the Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act.

Meanwhile, the Biden campaign has made its plans clear. In July, it released “The Biden Agenda for Women,” a 23-page document that includes a section on Biden’s “Reproductive Health” promises. Pledges include: Require states to fund Planned Parenthood through Medicaid. Reverse the Title X rule that pushed the abortion giant out of the program. Rescind the Mexico City policy.

It’s that agenda that has most pro-lifers solidly behind Trump, even though a second Trump term doesn’t guarantee more pro-life victories. Said Hawkins: “I know with 100 percent certainty what will happen if Donald Trump doesn’t get reelected.”
FALL BOOKS

FALLING BACK WITH LOOKS AT THE PAST

Twenty-five history books and biographies in a trying year

by Marvin Olasky / illustration by Krieg Barrie
Where have you gone, Dwight Eisenhower?
A nation turns its lonely eyes to you.

Based on mail from WORLD members, many are reading more during coronavirus time—and history books plus biographies or autobiographies remain their favorites. So as we spiral toward the Nov. 3 presidential election, three new biographies of the mid-20th-century general and president are worth a look. In this 75th year since the end of World War II I’m also recommending five more books connected to the war and 17 other well-written histories.

First, the Eisenhower books, which show that the 34th president is thrice-blessed in biographers. Granddaughter Susan Eisenhower is a good writer, and her *How Ike Led: The Principles Behind Eisenhower’s Biggest Decisions* (Thomas Dunne, 2020) shows his strong character and work ethic. I didn’t expect the whole truth from a family member, so Jerry Bergman’s *God in Eisenhower’s Life, Military Career, and Presidency* (Wipf and Stock, 2019) provides interesting detail about religious beliefs. Paul Johnson’s *Eisenhower: A Life* (Penguin, 2014) is a good, brief account.

Susan Eisenhower is particularly powerful in detailing her grandfather’s visits to concentration camps as the war was ending: “Eisenhower was unprepared for both the sights and the smells of these hellholes. Even miles outside the camp, the stench of rotting flesh was overpowering. As they entered, they saw corpses piled up like cords of wood, hastily dug trenches, and emaciated survivors who looked like walking cadavers.” Tough Gen. George Patton refused to enter some rooms, saying he would get sick if he did so, but Eisenhower visited “every nook and cranny” and came out saying “he had never seen anything equal to what they had seen that day; that no punishment was too great for a people who could do things like that.”

Eisenhower’s reaction should be kept in mind as we read Sinclair McKay’s *The Fire and the Darkness: The Bombing of Dresden, 1945* (St. Martin’s Press, 2020). McKay, like Kurt Vonnegut before him, suggests that the firebombing of the German city (an attack as deadly as the atomic destruction that would soon come to Hiroshima and Nagasaki) grew out of a brutal bureaucracy at work, killing because it could. But with Germany reeling in February 1945, Americans and Brits wanted to make sure World War II would not end as World War I did, with a future dictator able to claim the German defeat was a stab in the back. The Allies understood that their enemy was not only Hitler but an entire society given over to evil—much like ancient Israelites saw the Canaanites.

And how did it all begin? Peter Fritzsche’s *Hitler’s First Hundred: When Germans Embraced the Third Reich* (Basic, 2020) is a cautionary tale: Hitler gained power early in 1933 through backroom political manue-
vering, but 100 days later his mass political support was evident. Saddest of all: Hitler during the first radio address to the German people as leader vowed his new government would “take Christianity under its firm protection,” for it is “the basis of our entire morality.” His atheism later became evident, but some “German Christians” went along with a plan to replace the Old Testament with “100% German mythology—Wotan for Moses, Siegfried for Saul.”

Frederick Taylor’s 1939: A People’s History of the Coming of the Second World War (Norton, 2019) details the war’s start. I also recommend Last Letters: The Prison Correspondence, 1944–45 by Freya and Helmut James von Moltke (New York Review Books, 2019). Hitler’s minions hanged resistance leader Helmut, 37, in January 1945. A sympathetic prison chaplain helped him exchange letters with his wife during the last four months of his life, when every day brought possible execution and the prisoner wrote with understated prose, “There is a great deal of stress involved if you can be taken away at any minute between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. to be executed.” His last letter: “I’m ready and willing to entrust myself to God’s guidance. ... Farewell, my love. May the Lord watch over you and us.”

Tough-minded readers might pair those books with Brian Reid’s The Scourge of War: The Life of William Tecumseh Sherman (Oxford, 2020). President Ruth-
erford B. Hayes called Sherman “the most interesting and original character in the world,” and Reid details the intellectual general’s rare combination of thought and action that made him both a military innovator and a hater of what he had to do to win. Sherman did not exactly say “war is hell,” but he told the mayor of Atlanta in 1864, “War is cruelty and you cannot refine it.” He repeated that observation before a crowd of veterans and their family members in 1880: “There is many a boy here today who looks at war as all glory, but boys, it is all hell.”

While we’re on biographies: Nearly two millennia ago the Roman essayist Suetonius acidly profiled emperors like Nero and Caligula in Lives of the Twelve Caesars, available in many editions—but I like the abridged version, in a new translation, cleverly titled How To Be a Bad Emperor (Princeton, 2020). Robert Hutchinson’s The Death of Hitler (Regnery, 2020) is a thorough account of what happened to the worst emperor. Hitler should have had a chapter in another of this year’s Regnery books, Scott Rank’s sadly entertaining History’s 9 Most Insane Rulers. Among Rank’s subjects: Caligula, Kim Jong II, and King Charles VI of France (who thought he was made of glass).

Turning from the ridiculous to the sublime, I learned a lot from Gerald Bray’s Preaching the Word With John Chrysostom (Lexham, 2020), which humanizes the fourth-century preacher. In one of his sermons, Chrysostom noted that God cursed the serpent and the ground, not the man. God thus gave Adam a chance to regain spiritual health: “When we judge the guilty, we should not berate them harshly or display the savagery of wild beasts toward them, but employ as much long-suffering and mercy as we can, because we are dispensing justice to our fellows, and out of a sense of kinship with them we should temper justice with love.” But Chrysostom didn’t do that in regard to Jews, whom he attacked in harsh terms that anti-Semites in succeeding centuries imitated.

Another provocative book, Peter Thuesen’s Tornado God (Oxford, 2020), shows how theologians and others over the centuries have thought about God’s providential control in the light of unpredictable twisters. Puritan divine Cotton Mather emphasized God’s sovereignty but also man’s responsibility, saying, “If Adam had not Sinned, there had been no hurtful storms known on the earth.” Eliphalet Adams told his congregation that “even when Storms and tempests are raised by Satan ... they are still under God’s Ordering and Government. And no more Damage shall be done thereby than he is pleased to permit.”

Nineteenth-century pastors tended to emphasize education by tornado: God sent one in 1821 “to teach man his impotence,” and another in 1840 because “Never does man more deeply realize his utter helplessness.” Similarly, the St. Louis “Great Cyclone” in 1896 served “to teach man that in his fallen condition he is a creature incapable of self-government.” One St. Louis pastor said the “tornado has done more to make the people of this city think upon the serious problems and duties of life than anything else that has happened in years.” Sadly, when Thuesen near his book’s close turns from historian
to pundit, he complains about the “evangelical shibboleth of biblical inerrancy.”

And what of the human tornado, Karl Marx, and his followers? Paul Kengor’s The Devil and Karl Marx (TAN Books, 2020) explores Satanic fascinations from Karl Marx to the Frankfurt School to radical feminist Kate Millett, author of Sexual Politics. Others left a better legacy: Clare Carlisle’s The Philosopher of the Heart: The Restless Life of Søren Kierkegaard (FSG, 2020) shows how the Danish philosopher wrestled with the Bible. And others were and are confused. John Kaag’s Sick Souls, Healthy Minds: How William James Can Save Your Life (Princeton, 2020) mixes personal confession with a thoughtful look at James, author in 1903 of The Varieties of Religious Experience. That book is fascinating for its secular equivalent of a Christian’s born-again experience: James wrote of sick souls hitting rock-bottom, at which point they had to be “twice born” to avoid committing suicide.

Tim Tran’s American Dreamer: How I Escaped Communist Vietnam and Built a Successful Life in America (Pacific University Press, 2020) shows how he left his homeland with 350 others on a rickety boat, survived pirate attacks, and finally reached Oregon. Tran summarizes “many people’s last hope: that no matter who else rejected them, the United States would take them in.” Two histories examine the history and political leanings of our largest group of recent immigrants. Geraldo Cadava’s The Hispanic Republican (HarperCollins, 2020) shows how Republicans alienated Hispanics, George W. Bush won back many, but the GOP has again lost most. Benjamin Francis-Fallon’s The Rise of the Latino Vote (Harvard University Press, 2019) provides the backstory through a detailed examination from Viva Kennedy to Ronald Reagan.

I can’t resist mentioning two journalism histories I really enjoyed. Stephanie Gorton’s Citizen Reporters: S.S. McClure, Ida Tarbell, and the Magazine That Rewrote America (Echo, 2020) shows how early in the 20th century McClure’s 400,000 readers learned about big city corruption and corporate power grabs through the enterprise of editor McClure and star reporter Tarbell. Gorton captures the excitement: “McClure’s keenness for stories that helped readers imagine the future and understand the present was infectious.” McClure helped make famous many writers he hired, including Willa Cather, Rudyard Kipling, and Lincoln Steffens. Cather wrote about McClure’s young reporters, “You often thought them a little more able than they really were, but those who had any stuff in them at all tried to be as good as you thought them, to come up to your expectations.”

McClure, though, also inspired confusion: Tarbell found “his editorial direction could be frustratingly vague, as when he shot her a request for ‘something startling.’” But Steffens understood investigative reporting. When one corporate executive declined an interview by saying, “I don’t care for write-ups,” Steffens replied, “I don’t propose to write you up... I want to write you down.” Most people, though, wanted to be known, as a writer nicknamed “the Cynic” understood a century before selfies became fashionable: “Click! Click! Click! / ... Everybody posing, smirking, attitude-ing! / Trying to look their best while being photographed, / Trying to look intellectual unconscious, beautiful!”

Nancy Cott’s Fighting Words (Basic, 2020) tells of journalism’s next generation through portraits of four leading foreign correspondents in the 1920s and 1930s: Dorothy Thompson, John Gunther, Vincent Sheean, and Rayna Raphaelson. It was a great time to be a magazine freelancer, since with radio an infant, television unborn, and the internet hardly imagined, 2,500 newspapers and dozens of national magazines were hungry for stories. Cott fluently describes career-making scoops and propagandistic swoops, but also marriage-breaking stoops into adultery and homosexuality.

Finally, here are quick mentions of four history books that will be shortlisted on our Books of the Year (Dec. 5) issue. I’ll review Christopher Caldwell’s The Age of Entitlement: America Since the Sixties and include a full Q&A with Daniel Chirot, author of You Say You Want a Revolution? Radical Idealism and Its Tragic Consequences. Our Aug. 1 issue included a Q&A about War Fever, a book on the 1918 pandemic. I’ll also have a full review of Tracy Campbell’s The Year of Peril: America in 1942 (Yale, 2020): Hitler did not think Americans could pull together as we did. If we think 2020 a hard year, it’s good to remember that Franklin Roosevelt’s first name for World War II was the “Survival War,” since the U.S. was fighting for “the survival of our civilization, the survival of democracy, the ... survival of what we have all lived for.”
The year 2020 is the 100th anniversary of one of the most influential books of the 20th century, The Outline of History by H.G. Wells. It was a huge bestseller in 1920 and still popular in 1964, when I read it and declared myself an atheist. Wells, who was also a skillful science fiction writer, appealed to my sense that children might believe in God, but at age 14 I thought: “Time to grow up and believe in Darwinian evolution and socialism.”

The Wells doctrine is now more popular than ever at schools and colleges in both the United Kingdom and the currently Disunited States. His is the evolutionary vision of mankind “at first scattered and blind and utterly confused, feeling its way slowly to the serenity and salvation of an ordered and coherent purpose.”

That sounds pretty mellifluous, and Wells clearly had learned to write bestsellers: Who’s against “serenity and salvation”? But I read during days of social isolation his first major work as a social and political commentator, Anticipations (1902). In that he did not hide what he felt about the “swarms of black, and brown, and dirty-white, and yellow people. … The world is a world, not a charitable institution, and I take it they will have to go. … It is their portion to die out and disappear.”

Similarly, in 1902 Wells truthfully argued that, for those who read and believed, “Darwin destroyed the dogma of the Fall upon which the whole intellectual fabric of Christianity rests. For without a Fall there is no redemption, and the whole theory and meaning of the Pauline system is in vain.” But 18 years later he merely complained how “foolish attempts were made to suppress Darwinian literature. … In the end men may discover that religion shines all the brighter for the loss of its doctrinal wrappings.”

The greater success of Wells in 1920 than in 1902 demonstrated once again that you can subvert more minds with honey than with vinegar. A century later, professors in some Christian colleges sell a mild version of Darwinism (under the label “theistic evolution” or even “evolutionary creationism,” a PR genius term) and claim that it will preserve faith in Christ, rather than kill it. —M.O.
Over the years, I kept hearing from a number of different people who thought we needed a Christian counterpart to Time or Newsweek. So we went to work. And we discovered that God’s Word is full of foundational truth, but it doesn’t express an opinion on every single little thing.

I like to keep one of John’s epistles in mind, where he says, ‘That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands . . . that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you.’ From its start in 1986, WORLD has striven to exemplify that.

We are not here to repeat or regurgitate stories that other people have researched and written about. Our goal is to do our own research so that we can come to our readers and say we actually went to the scene, and our reporting reflects that. This concept is essential to what we consider to be sound journalism.

Our reporters must be trained in pursuing biblical principles in the midst of their reporting. We have to be there, and we have to be asking questions in terms of biblical truth.

JOEL BELZ
Founder of WORLD in 1981
ANOTHER SHOT FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

Universities write student vaccinations into this year’s COVID-19 plans

by Esther Eaton
HEN STUDENTS AT DORDT UNIVERSITY, a Christian liberal arts school in Iowa, read the school’s COVID-19 behavior agreement this year, they found standard precautions: mask-wearing, hand-washing, social distancing. But the four-page document, which students must sign before returning to campus, included an unusual paragraph. By signing below, it said, students agreed Dordt could require them to get an influenza vaccine—and a COVID-19 vaccine when one became available.

The paragraph launched Dordt into a brewing debate about schools and COVID-19 vaccinations. Often, universities rely on national and state regulations to set their vaccine policies, but the potential benefit of an effective COVID-19 vaccine may tempt some to require it on their own. With such a vaccine likely months away, though, many schools remain focused on ensuring students get the flu shot.

A May poll from the Associated Press and the University of Chicago found about half of Americans said they would get a COVID-19 vaccine when one became available. Another 20 percent said they would not, mostly citing concerns about side effects. That month the American College Health Association advised college health centers to budget for providing COVID-19 vaccinations for students.

After fielding questions about its vaccine requirement, Dordt emailed students a clarification kicking the issue down the road. “At present,” the email said, “the best information we have is that an effective vaccine will most likely not be available until after the spring 2021 semester.” Dordt removed the mention of COVID-19 vaccines from its behavior agreement but left open the possibility of a mandatory flu shot.

Unlike Dordt, Cedarville University in Ohio specified it would not mandate any COVID-19 vaccine unless required by state or federal regulations. University representative Janice Supplee said the college’s reopening plan mentioned vaccines in case students already had questions, but it did not state a comprehensive policy decision: “We don’t have a vaccine yet, so it’s not really on our radar.”

Few schools mentioned COVID-19 vaccines in their reopening plans. But like Dordt, a growing number have embraced the flu vaccine, hoping to prevent a double outbreak. About 70 percent of college students think an annual flu vaccine is important, but only 46 percent usually get one, according to a 2017 survey by the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases. Cedarville provides free flu shots for students and says it vaccinates 20-25 percent of its students each year. This year the school has emailed and texted students reminders to get vaccinated at the school health center or a local pharmacy.

Others go further: The University of Tennessee announced in June it would require all students to get the flu shot before January. The school also said it might require a COVID-19 vaccine,
though, like Dordt, it doesn’t expect one to arrive before the school year ends. In August, the University of California system announced its students must get a flu shot by Nov. 1.

Also in August, Massachusetts became the first state to require flu shots for students from kindergarten to graduate school, with religious and medical exemptions. The move sparked protests, but Vermont’s health department said it’s considering following suit.

Ben Thomas, a junior studying pharmaceutical sciences at Cedarville, has to get a flu shot to shadow at hospitals, required for his degree. Thomas said he understands why other schools have mandated flu shots, but that in his opinion, Cedarville would face resistance.

“There are a lot of Cedarville students who are against vaccines in general, by choice or by parental guidance,” Thomas said.

He says he’s had the flu twice and sees getting vaccinated as a way to protect more vulnerable people who might catch the virus from him, such as his immunosuppressed friend and pneumonia-prone grandfather. Getting a COVID-19 vaccine could be another safeguard for them.

“I’ll probably get it when it comes out,” he said, “just as a protection.”
or more of the following groups: women, LGBT individuals, or people with a disability. The movie could also have a storyline that focused on one of those groups.

To fulfill Standard B, a film must have a certain level of diversity in its creative leadership. Standard C asks whether a studio offers paid internships to underrepresented groups, and Standard D promotes diversity in marketing and distribution.

For all the fanfare, the criteria won’t require sweeping changes of the industry. Major studios can easily meet Standards C and D. Vanity Fair noted all of the best picture nominees in the last 15 years have satisfied either A or B.

“Wealth even mandating it, the industry is going toward diversity,” said Andrei Constantinescu, who owns a casting company in Dallas.

He recalled uncomfortable conversations from his early days in the business, when producers would ask that 90 percent or more of the extras on set be white “because if there’s too many people of color on screen, then the audience is distracted.” He believes things have changed for the better—now he gets asked for more diversity on set rather than less.

Jesse Groth Olson, an independent filmmaker who teaches cinema at Houston Baptist University, hopes some of his minority students will feel that the world wants to hear their stories.

“At best I see this as a way to initiate good trickle-down that will move standards at all levels of execution in the industry,” he said. “At best, it could initiate a kind of industry overhaul that puts workers into positions for reasons that have nothing to do with their skills and everything to do with their sexual identity or racial makeup.”

Some worry the diversity initiative will harm the Oscars’ reputation for honoring the best in artistic achievement. In January, author Stephen King, a voting member of the academy, tweeted, “I would never consider diversity in matters of art. Only quality. It seems to me that to do otherwise would be wrong.” But moviemaking isn’t just an art form. It’s a business, and diversity is big business these days.

OBERT “SMOKEY” NEVINS met his future wife at California’s Sacramento State University. Smokey, born blind, needed someone to drive him to a music appreciation class, so he checked the school’s list of assistant readers for, he said, “girls with pretty names.” He decided to call Patricia.

Patty remembers how, the first time she came to pick up Smokey, his father invited her to watch football. “So I instantly passed the test with his parents,” she said. After dating, breaking up, and getting back together, the couple had a 10-day engagement and a 14-person wedding in January 1980. (“We’re both ... extremely lazy about wanting to do big production things,” explained Patty.)
Smokey and Patty spent the next decades raising a family and learning to love and care for one another, but health problems, Smokey’s disability, and the uncertainties of life were a constant challenge.

The Nevinses settled down in Sacramento: Patty did clerical work, and Smokey played jazz guitar at coffee lounges. The couple got creative to find things they could enjoy together. Some of their go-to hobbies were braille Scrabble and Monopoly and riding a tandem bicycle. “When you ride bikes separately, it’s hard to connect and talk,” said Patty. “We had a great time riding around and having conversation.”

Soon after they married, Patty pointed out that husbands are responsible to provide for the family. Smokey was surprised: He dreamed of one day becoming a pastor but hadn’t had many job opportunities growing up. With Patty’s encouragement, he started working in telemarketing and eventually became an analyst for the state. His 31-year career allowed Patty to stay home and raise their children—all nine of them.

Their first baby came five years into the marriage, and after that Patty was “changing diapers for 20 years straight.” The Nevinses tried to follow advice they heard in the Christian world to raise their children right: homeschooling, Scripture memorization in the car, nightly family devotions, church activities. But as the children grew up, they realized parenting methods alone couldn’t guarantee spiritual life. Today, the couple says, some of the kids are following Jesus, some are unbelievers, and some they aren’t certain about. They have determined to trust God to save the children.

One of the biggest challenges of their marriage has been health issues. Since age 17, Smokey has suffered from epilepsy. During seizures, Smokey would lose consciousness, sometimes yelling or cursing, and then become sick and disoriented as he recovered. The couple endured treatments and drugs with painful or personality-altering side effects. Both say the prayers and support from their small church have been essential. Patty remembers one day when Smokey had a flurry of seizures and she couldn’t

Staying close and communicating with one another has been key to the Nevinses’ marriage. “The success of our life ... is because of the Lord being true to His Word,” said Patty. “Relying on His people to sustain us, His Word to sustain us, His Spirit to sustain us.”

Smokey’s health problems now prevent him from balancing on the tandem bike. But the Nevinses have gotten creative about that problem too: For his 60th birthday, Patty bought a two-person tricycle for them to ride side by side.
Nothing

The fact that we exist should trouble those who say there is no ultimate meaning

My father gave me my first tip on writing. His own writing was limited to the jotting of room measurements for the installation of carpets and linoleum. While all he did was run a furniture store, I, at the tender age of 10, was being asked to return to school the next morning with a composition. I understand they don’t call them compositions anymore.

Sometimes I wish my editors would assign me a specific topic to talk about on this penultimate page of the magazine, but they don’t, and neither did Soeur Jeanne de Valois. Hence my terror, then and now.

So as I complained bitterly over the unfairness of life and uncertainty of survival of the morrow’s English class, my father stepped into my brother’s room (which had a desk), knelt on one knee, as is still his habit, and suffered with me in a camaraderie of silence over a blank paper.

After enough of this, he came out with what may have been an excuse to beat a retreat, or may have been genius, and said to me, “Why don’t you write about nothing!”

“Nothing?” I said incredulously as he tiptoed away, then found myself alone again, a gauntlet thrown at my feet.

Try for a moment to imagine nothing, and you will find that you invariably cheat: You smuggle in something. People who think there is nothing after death, for example, probably are picturing sleep, which is very different. If they thought harder about it, I wager many would fear and come to Christ. “Nothing” is not something you want for your future—not after experiencing all these sparkling lakes and starry nights and golden fields. Nothing is like drawing a circle that is empty inside, and then erasing the circle. Annihilation!

But back to the task at hand: How do you predicate anything about nothing for two pages (front and back) for the unappeasable Valois? Now that I think of it, Seinfeld was a TV show about nothing, and it ran for nine seasons. And there are politicians who say nothing but say it convincingly enough to get reelected for longer than that. There is an art to milking nothing.

You can overdo the art, though. As when the reputed greatest orator of his time, Edward Everett, bellowed for two hours in 1863 what is now considered the “other” Gettysburg speech, the memorable one of that day being Abe Lincoln’s 272 words. I like Everett, however. Behold his graciousness to the president in oratorical defeat: “I should be glad if I could flatter myself that I came as near to the central idea of the occasion in two hours as you did in two minutes.” Makes me want to read his speech.

Let us not forget that God created out of nothing. Or ex nihilo, as college people like to call it. Note that He did not create nothing, but something. I see that as a repudiation of nothingness and a thumbs up to somethingness, the state of which is problematic to any thinking philosopher. For as German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz said (here I show my own college credentials), the problem is not that there is nothing: The problem is that there is something.

That is to say, no explanation would be needed for there being nothing. Indeed, there would be no one around to raise the question. But it should trouble stubborn atheists and evolutionists alike who still insist there is no God and no ultimate meaning in the universe. Why, then, sirs, is there anything at all?

But I digress again. Back to the empty page, let us dip our pen and begin: “Any fool can write about something. But I propose for this writing assignment to write about nothing...” May it be judged by Soeur Jeanne de Valois that I have succeeded in honoring my father’s instructions.
Son or daughter questioning the faith?

The Case for Evangelical Christianity: Why Biblical Christianity Still Makes Sense in the 21st Century, by Robert W. Wheeler, offers clear, concise answers to life’s important questions, ranging from “Why Religion?” to “Why Church?” In between it offers an explanation of the nature of morality and of the Christian gospel. This could make an ideal birthday, Christmas or graduation present for the college age son or daughter who is faced with the challenges of today’s secular environment.

Also by the same author: The Road to Heaven: A Practical Guide to the Faith of Our Fathers (Second Edition).

BOTH BOOKS ARE AVAILABLE ON AMAZON.COM IN BOTH PAPERBACK AND KINDLE FORMATS.

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HERE’S A MILLION THINGS I haven’t done /
But just you wait, just you wait.” Those lines
in the great musical *Hamilton* are ones
many of us feel, but at some point in God’s
choosing our time runs out, and we get to
experience greater things. It’s no contra-
diction for Christians to look forward to
heaven but to be in no hurry to get there:

Major league starting pitchers know that these days
complete games are rare, but they still want to get
through seven or eight innings.

That’s how I feel this October. At our WORLD staff
retreat last October I said I’d retire as editor in chief
in three years but continue with my column, book
reviews, and occasional interviews, God willing. My
goal was to give lots of advance notice so we could get
the right editors in the right seats on the bus. You’re
probably aware of editors who also write regularly in
the magazine: Mindy Belz and Jamie Dean. You hear
frequently on *The World and Everything in It* podcast
Nick Eicher and Paul Butler, who is now its executive
producer. Nick, as chief content officer, also thinks
through our long-term strategic direction. But I’d now
like to introduce you to eight editors whose names or
voices probably aren’t familiar to you.

First, Michael Reneau is the new editor of WORLD
Magazine. He’s been deputy editor during the past
year and has shown himself to be a tough-minded,
warmhearted staff leader. He’s a World Journalism
Institute graduate, as is virtually every Worldling under
age 45, and learned the trade in Tennessee as editor
of *The Greeneville Sun*. Tim Lamer is now executive
editor of WORLD Digital. He joined WORLD in 1999
after directing the Free Market Project at the Media
Research Center. He makes sure our reporters empha-
size street-level Biblical objectivity rather than suite-
level opinionizing. Along with taking responsibility for
our online content, he’ll oversee news on the podcast.

Next come two managing editors. Daniel James
Devine worked until 2012 for the family construction
business, Devine HomeKrafters: He then began con-
structing WORLD stories and building magazine issues.
Lynde Langdon exerts day-to-day website leadership.
She joined WORLD in 2013 with experience at the
University of Missouri journalism school, a local new-
paper, and a healthcare company.

And two more vital staffers: Leigh Jones, formerly
a *Galveston Daily News* reporter, is *The World and
Everything in It*’s news editor. Rachel Lynn Aldrich
joined WORLD from the Discovery Institute and is
assistant editor of the website. She is also in charge of
our Saturday Series—wng.org/saturday-series—where
we run Books of the Year chapters and essays from
John “Hank the Cowdog” Erickson and me.

When our pages look good, you should thank David
Freeland, who has been WORLD’s art director since
1995. He came our way after designing *Tabletalk*
(among other things) for Ligonier Ministries. If you
have either praise or criticism, you can communicate
with our writers—their email addresses are at the
bottoms of feature articles and columns—or with David
and editors by writing to editor@wng.org. We try to
respond personally to every letter.

Many of you will receive responses from Mickey
McLean, now in charge of Mailbag and other commu-
ications with WORLD members. He joined us in 2008
after editing Delta’s inflight magazine, *Sky*. Mickey
will help us roll out more terrific email roundups of a
week’s news in areas like science and family issues.
Right now you can go to wng.org/newsletters and sign
up for our daily news updates along with weekly feeds
of news about education, abortion, arts and culture,
poverty-fighting, religious liberty, and politics. They’re
all free.

After 28 years of editing, I continue to thank God
and Joel Belz for calling me into WORLD and mentoring
me. I hope to help others. At a time when many Amer-
icans read and listen only to news that confirms exist-
ing biases or creates new ones, WORLD will continue
to be often surprising and sometimes annoying, with
allegiance not to human leaders but only to God.
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From the Foreword by Joni Eareckson Tada