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FEATURES

30 Books of the Year
Great books tell stories. Here’s our pick of vivid and insightful new releases for better understanding America, world events, history, science, and theology

UNDERSTANDING AMERICA: Will religious liberty survive?

UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD: Explaining an “unmitigated, genocidal disaster”

HISTORY: Asking probing questions, diving into details

SCIENCE: Michael Behe says evolution degrades genes but doesn’t create them

ACCESSIBLE THEOLOGY: Paul Miller explains how true living comes through dying

46 Battles on La Rambla
Two great older books illuminate the Spanish Civil War and the road to polarization

ON THE COVER: Illustration by Krieg Barrie
Notes from the CEO

Marvin Olasky’s column in this issue is a fundraising column. No surprise, given the quality of its writer, the column is packed with useful information and insights that have to do with more than fundraising. Still, it’s a fundraising column.

In the next issue—the last issue of the year—Joel Belz will do the same. You will find return envelopes for donations in this issue and the next issue.

During this month of December, we will send you a snail-mail fundraising appeal or two, and we’ll send you a handful of email appeals. Listeners to The World and Everything in It have noticed by now that we have begun our December “giving drive.”

There’s one big reason we do all of this every December: Your support of WORLD’s work is important. Really important.

When we say we can’t do our work without your support, we mean it literally. Less than 15 percent of our revenue comes from advertisers. The rest comes from you, in the form of charitable contributions, gift subscriptions, and memberships.

In the month of December alone, our members provide one-third of our annual giving. It is your December giving that helps us set our direction for the new year. And the new year promises to be an eventful one, Lord willing: The national election comes to mind, along with WORLD’s ongoing coverage of effective compassion, the battles for life, marriage, and religious liberty, and international and cultural reporting.

There’s more to cover than we can cover. But by God’s help, we have always tried to put your financial support to good use, providing Biblically sound journalism on the stories that matter. And as always, 100 percent of your contribution will be used to produce that journalism for you and your families. As you read and hear our appeals this month, I hope you will consider supporting this crucial work.

Kevin Martin
kevin@wng.org
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Mailbag medicine

YOU HELP KEEP US ACCOUNTABLE EACH DAY

Every now and then, during the 33 years since we launched WORLD Magazine, I’ve thought it might be helpful to our readers to make an editorial confession. You may remember my telling you of the discomfort I have felt when we found it necessary to report on the negative behavior of some Christian leaders or organizations.

What may startle you a bit—as it did me when I first noted it—is the fact that through all those years we have also devoted no fewer than 1,800 of WORLD’s pages to frank and open evaluation and criticism of a single Christian organization we actually hold in some esteem.

Some of this criticism has been sharp. Our editorial staff, in fact, tells me some of it was so intemperate in its original form that it had to be toned down before we felt right sending it off to the printer.

If that strikes you as editorial overkill, keep this in mind: That organization is WORLD Magazine itself, and its parent company, WORLD News Group. Our “Mailbag” section has appeared in every issue since March 1986. You’ll find this issue’s installment of the continuing harangue on pp. 61-62.

Does this mean WORLD thinks it has some exclusive handle on God’s truth? Hardly. I mention it here because, as WORLD’s founder, I’ll admit I still sense a certain self-consciousness when we choose to report on the weaknesses and failures of other Christians. On occasion, those “other Christians” have been personal friends. But it’s not just a one-way street. The fact that we provide a forum in every issue where readers can lob rocks back at us demonstrates, I hope, a certain equity in the process.

None of us, of course, enjoys bad publicity. We at WORLD aren’t thrilled when people point out that we dropped the ball in a certain instance. But we are still committed to providing a regular opportunity for people to make those points for a very simple reason: It adds to our overall credibility. In the end, it helps us earn your trust.

Oddly, many Christians (and the leaders of too many Christian organizations) believe an open forum for criticism injures their credibility. So they sit on the facts and suppress discussion. They clam up and shut off the flow of information. Such folks forget, however, that light always ultimately trumps darkness. Truth, by God’s order of things, always wins the argument with ignorance.

Yes, light and truth can sometimes hurt a little. But far better to endure that hurt for a brief time than to suffer the festering cancer of a dark cover-up or the enervating sickness of an uncorrected wrong.

Light and truth, of course, must be what they claim to be. To rush into print with shadowy rumors or with assertions unfounded in fact or in Biblical evidence is wrong. It is to hear the Apostle Paul tell us to “speak the truth in love”—and then immediately to strike out on both counts.

Yet, with appropriate safeguards, Biblically directed Christians should welcome a vigorous and sometimes feisty sounding board where we mutually measure how we’re doing. That’s part of what Hebrews means when it calls us to “provoke each other to good works.” Such provocations aren’t always comfortable, but they’re necessary for the ultimate good of the body.

Every ministry you support should be able to show you a mechanism—a built-in system—for self-criticism. And that system should be just as transparent and public as the ministry’s appeals for support.

Here at WORLD, we’ll continue to poke and probe and scratch and tickle—always trying to encourage the body of Christ in all its expressions to move closer to the Biblical model of what we’re supposed to be.

And we’ll encourage you to poke and probe and scratch and tickle back. Surveys tell us that Mailbag is among the best-read sections of the magazine, and that makes us sense our accountability to you just that much more. We won’t hide our editorial mistakes in a closet.

Some readers tell me that we hang out too much dirty linen. So keep in mind this old journalistic rule of thumb: For every negative letter you see, there are probably 20 other readers who’d be inclined to say the same things. But for every positive letter you read, there are probably 200 who agree. The reason? We all tend to sound off faster when we’re upset than when we’re pleased. ☮
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A brand new podcast from WORLD Radio is here. It’s called The Olasky Interview.

WORLD has given us the privilege of sitting in, and I am very grateful. These interviews are well worth your time.”—iTunes reviewer

There’s always been more to the interviews you’ve read in the magazine and heard on The World and Everything in It.

Now, you have full access. The new podcast is in. Season 1 guests include Charles Murray, Ron Sider, Lauren Green, Bill Bennett, and others.

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During the 1970s, former advertising executive Jerry Mander wrote about the early days of television, when only three channels existed: “It was as if the whole nation had gathered at a gigantic three-ring circus. Those who watched the bicycle act believed their experience was different from that of those who watched the gorillas or the flame eater, but everyone was at the same circus.”

The first two weeks of November felt more like a 30-ring circus in American news and politics, but many viewers watching the same act in the same ring weren’t seeing the same thing.

As televised impeachment hearings began, American opinion appeared divided along political lines.
President Trump maintained that his scrutinized phone calls with the Ukrainian president had been “perfect.” Some Republicans agreed, but others might have resonated with former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley’s opinion: It’s not a good practice for a U.S. president to ask a foreign government to investigate an American, “but I don’t see it as impeachable.”

Democratic presidential candidates faced pressure to render ironclad verdicts, and some candidates who also serve as senators seemed to have decided pre-trial: Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., said the impeachment inquiry should proceed quickly because Trump is “probably the most corrupt president in the modern history of this country.” Sen. Kamala Harris, D-Calif., put it simply: “Dude gotta go.”

Trump mulled testifying in writing, and he drew big crowds on the campaign trail. At a rally in Louisiana, he told a crowd that “evangelical leaders” had called to tell him: “The church has never been more energized as it is right now because of what they are trying to do to our president. Ever.”

If that’s true, it’s tragic.

Many evangelicals do support Trump and his policies, but if evangelical advisers are telling the president that political concerns should energize churches more than the Holy Spirit’s work of saving sinners through the cross of Christ for the glory of God, they’re dangerously misleading him (and themselves) about God’s purposes for the church.

Trump’s Louisiana rally wasn’t enough to sway voters to oust Democratic Gov. John Bel Edwards a few days later. The incumbent governor won his contest against a Republican challenger in the Deep South state on Nov. 16.

Pundits parsed what the Republican loss might mean for 2020 elections, but Edwards’ victory might also signal something else: Democrats should pay more attention to pro-life candidates. In May, Edwards signed a bill aimed at banning abortion after an unborn baby reaches six weeks in the womb.

But on Nov. 18, one Democratic group rebuked such laws instead of learning from Edwards. The Democratic Attorneys General Association—a national committee for state attorneys general—announced it will refuse to endorse or assist any candidate who does not publicly support abortion.

Meanwhile, a federal jury in California ruled against pro-life activist David Daleiden for publicly exposing abortion.

After a six-week civil trial, the jury said Daleiden and the Center for Medical Progress broke the law by secretly recording Planned Parenthood officials callously describing abortion procedures and discussing the sale of unborn baby parts. The price Daleiden could pay for his efforts to expose the industry: as much as $2.3 million in damages.

Exposure of a different kind embarrassed a major television network in November: A leaked video showed ABC News anchor Amy Robach complaining that the network had refused to run her reporting on Jeffrey Epstein years before he was charged with sex trafficking of minors. (Epstein died in his prison cell in August.)

Caught on a hot mic between tapings, Robach told someone off camera: “I’ve had this [Epstein] story for three years. We would not put it on the air.” ABC later denied Robach’s claims, and the anchor walked back her comments.
Cultivating journalistic judgment starts long before editors and journalists are faced with a high-stakes national story, but that seemed lost on some college newspaper editors.

Editors at *The Daily Northwestern* profusely apologized for their paper’s coverage of a speech by former Attorney General Jeff Sessions at Northwestern University on Nov. 5. (Some students protested Sessions’ appearance.) Among the paper’s offenses: Reporters used a student directory to text sources and ask for interviews in advance.

If that sounds like basic news gathering, the editors lamented: “We recognize being contacted like this is an invasion of privacy.”

Meanwhile, some of the current and former editors of *The Harvard Crimson* joined a petition demanding the paper apologize for its coverage of a student rally calling for the abolition of the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency.

The paper’s offense? A reporter asked ICE officials for a comment. (A student group complained that contacting ICE could harm undocumented students on campus.)

The *Crimson*’s president, Kristine E. Guillaume, explained the paper seeks comments from all subjects in an article. That’s Journalism 101, but Harvard’s undergraduate student government voted to support the petition to protest the paper for trying to get both sides of a story. (Ironically, ICE didn’t respond to the paper’s request for comment.)

It’s best for journalists (and readers) to learn early that covering the circus of news can be stressful, but it’s ultimately more stressful to back down from doing it properly.

WORLD’s editor in chief Marvin Olasky has recounted the story of John Stubbes, who faced true stress after writing a pamphlet criticizing Queen Elizabeth in 1579: Officials cut off his right hand. Olasky notes that the Christian writer under duress “set the pattern of respecting those in authority over us, while exposing their unbiblical actions.”

Stubbes reportedly pulled his hat off with his left hand and cried: “God save the Queen.”

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**BY THE NUMBERS**

**90 minutes**

The time limit, per weekday, that children under the age of 18 may play video games in China under new governmental regulations. The rules also set a 10 p.m. gaming curfew for youngsters.

**2,172**

The number of lung injuries in the United States linked to vaping as of Nov. 13, according to health officials. An investigation is focused on vitamin E acetate and bootleg vaping products containing THC.

**35,000 square feet**

The floor space of Starbucks’ new five-level store in downtown Chicago, the largest Starbucks coffee shop in the world.

**59%**

The share of U.S. adults ages 18 to 44 who have ever cohabited with a romantic partner. Only 50 percent of Americans in that age bracket have ever married, according to Pew Research Center.

**$38.4 billion**

The sales recorded in a 24-hour period by Chinese e-commerce website Alibaba during the Nov. 11 Chinese shopping event known as “Singles’ Day.”
Cries for vengeance, prayers for justice
HONG KONG PROTESTS INTENSIFY FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF A PROTESTER by June Cheng & Joyce Wu

Fires blazed through a thick fog of tear gas on Nov. 12 at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), where students dressed in black clashed with riot police and tried to regain control of a bridge on campus. In mid-November the Hong Kong protests entered university campuses and the city’s financial hub following the death of a protester who fell from a parking garage.

Protesters called for a general strike on Nov. 11, setting up barricades on roads and disrupting the city’s subway system. Anger against the police escalated after an officer shot a 21-year-old protester in the abdomen that morning. Office workers on their lunch break filled the streets of the city’s central business district in protest, while police shot tear gas in front of luxury stores and high-rises in response. Later in the day, a video circulated of protesters dousing a Beijing supporter with lighter fluid and setting him on fire.

The Hong Kong protests, which began in June in opposition to a controversial extradition bill, are continuing with no end in sight. The Beijing-backed Hong Kong government eventually withdrew the extradition bill but has refused to concede to other protest demands. Although a poll found 90 percent of Hong Kong residents support an independent inquiry into police conduct during the protests, the government justifies police violence as necessary to keep order.

Police arrived at CUHK, one of the top schools in Hong Kong, on Nov. 11 after accusing protesters of throwing objects from a bridge on campus down to the Tolo Highway and railway tracks, blocking traffic and rail services. Riot police took control of the bridge, and students treated the action as an invasion: For two days, protesters built blockades, set fires, and threw bricks and Molotov cocktails to reclaim the bridge. Police fired more than 1,000 rounds of tear gas and rubber bullets at the students.

“If there was a suspect inside the university who threw bricks on the road, then send in a few police to find out who it was and make an arrest.... Don’t deploy so many platoons,” said Francis Yip, an associate professor at CUHK’s divinity school who lives on campus. “There was no riot, no mass gathering of students before the police came in, so they have no legitimate reason to do so except for the claim that they need to occupy the bridge.”

University President Rocky Tuan and other school officials tried to negotiate a cease-fire between the police and protesters, but talks fell apart as students demanded police ensure the safety of three arrested students. Later on Nov. 12, police finally retreated from the bridge.

But the following week, another multiday standoff began between police and students at Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Police on Nov. 18 fired 1,458 rounds of tear gas and 1,391 rubber bullets in clashes with protesters, some of whom fought back with bows and arrows and other homemade weapons.
Police arrested about 1,100 people on Nov. 18 and 19, many of them students seeking to flee the Polytechnic University campus.

One reason the protests intensified was the death of 22-year-old protester Chow Tsz-lok, believed to be the first confirmed death resulting from the protests. Chow died from severe brain damage and cardiac arrest on Nov. 8 after falling from a third floor to a second-floor platform at the Tseung Kwan O parking garage four days earlier. Although the cause of the fall remains unknown, it happened about the time when police officers were clearing out demonstrations from the area. Given growing public distrust in the police, some residents suspect police are to blame for Chow’s fall and subsequent death.

Public sentiment after Chow’s death is reflected by the escalation of protest slogans: In June demonstrators chanted, “Hong Kongers, add oil!” In the fall they shouted, “Hong Kongers, resist!” Now they chant, “Hong Kongers, avenge!”

Protesters held two memorials for Chow, who was a professed Christian. An estimated 100,000 people showed up at Tamar Park on Nov. 9 to commemorate the computer science student. Mourners laid white flowers on a stage, while pastors and activists led prayers and gave speeches.

Jack Ng, a 19-year-old student who attended the memorial, expressed his anger toward the police: “If protesters have really done something wrong and you arrest them, that’s no problem…. But once you’ve arrested and subdued them, it’s very unreasonable to continue to use violence to add more blows.”

At a Nov. 10 prayer meeting for Chow at Chater Garden, democracy activist and pastor Chu Yiu-ming said the vengeance demanded over Chow’s death is not blood for blood, but that the wrongdoer should bear legal responsibility. Even police officers need to be under the law, Chu said: “Hatred needs to be dispelled by justice. When there’s justice in society, there’ll be stability; according to the law, everyone is equal.”

A 28-year-old prayer meeting participant, giving only her first name as Sophia, echoed the pastor’s call for justice. “Sometimes I would ask God, Where is justice?” she said, tearing up. “I tell God, Even if I don’t avenge, could You help us, help these people, help Hong Kongers? I would hope that I wouldn’t let the hatred control me, but I am very angry.”

Pastor Yuen Tin-yau of Chinese Methodist Church stressed the need for an independent inquiry into police action. He said a fact-finding investigation should include the possibility of reconciliation and provide amnesty for both protesters and police. “If it’s the way of revenge with everyone harboring hatred, then you’re scared and I’m scared and no one will have the courage to honestly express what they’ve seen, experienced, or thought.”

Still, Chief Executive Carrie Lam has refused to allow an independent investigation, instead claiming that the Independent Police Complaints Council (IPCC) is sufficient to handle allegations of excessive police force. But a panel of international experts recently found that the council lacks the “powers, capacity, and independent investigative capability” to conduct a fair investigation.

Whatever happens in Hong Kong, God is still working His purposes, said 20-year-old Michael Chung, another attendee at the prayer meeting. “I may not understand God’s big plan, but I can be sure that He has never been absent from history. So I know that no matter how bad things can still get, when we get to the future and look back, we will find the meaning.”
Recognized

John and Charlotte Henderson have a combined age of 211, making them the oldest married couple alive, according to Guinness World Records. At 106 and 105 years old, respectively, they will celebrate their 80th anniversary on Dec. 15. John and Charlotte met at the University of Texas at Austin in 1934 and married five years later, KTXA-TV reported. Both are reportedly in good health. John told KTXA that the secret to a strong marriage is a moderate lifestyle and being cordial to your spouse.

Mortgaged

The Boy Scouts of America (BSA) has mortgaged Philmont Scout Ranch, one of the BSA’s largest and most valuable properties, according to documents obtained by Ministry-Watch.com. The Boy Scouts filed the mortgage in Colfax County, N.M., where Philmont is located, in March. The document places a mortgage on the entire Philmont property—which covers more than 140,000 acres, or about 220 square miles—in northeastern New Mexico. JP Morgan Chase Bank holds the mortgage, and the filing states that “the lien secured by this Mortgage shall not at any one time exceed $450,000,000.” BSA has suffered membership drops in recent years, and in August, a group called Abused in Scouting filed a lawsuit in Philadelphia on behalf of a former Scout who claims he was abused by a Scout leader.

Approved

The British Parliament has approved a bill that would allow opposite-sex couples to register for civil partnerships. Previously, this legal option was only available to same-sex couples. The change came after a man and woman brought a case before the U.K. Supreme Court arguing they should receive the financial aid of a civil partnership without having to get married. The court ruled in their favor, saying the British limits on civil partnership were a breach of human rights, since many couples oppose traditional marriage.

Dropped

Fast-food giant Chick-fil-A announced on Nov. 18 it would end its multi-year donations to two organizations that have faced criticism from LGBT advocacy groups. In 2018 the Chick-fil-A Foundation donated $115,000 to the Salvation Army and $1.65 million to the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, which affirms heterosexual marriage. But in 2020, Chick-fil-A says it will instead give $9 million to other nonprofits focusing on homelessness, hunger, and education. The restaurant promised a boost in funding to Covenant House International, an organization that helps homeless and trafficked youth and describes itself as LGBT “affirming.” Chick-fil-A President Tim Tassopulos told Bisnow the new funding priorities would help the company “be clear about who we are.”

Released

A man wrongly convicted for a string of armed robberies has been released after 11 years in prison. Ruben Martinez Jr. was brought to trial in 2008, accused of stealing multiple times from a Los Angeles auto body shop. Martinez claimed he was at his job during two of the robberies. Witnesses contradicted each other, with two saying he was not the robber and one saying he was. Despite this conflict and the lack of physical evidence, the judge gave Martinez a sentence of almost 48 years in prison. After two unsuccessful appeals, he was able to bring the District Attorney’s Conviction Review Unit onto his case. These investigators found witnesses, records, and pay stubs proving Martinez’s alibi, and Judge William Ryan vacated his conviction. “It was God’s strength that got me through this,” he said at a press conference.
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‘Giving General Secretary Xi the unearned title of “President” lends a veneer of democratic legitimacy to the CCP and Xi’s authoritarian rule.’


‘Pastors and leaders, this is not nearly as hard as so many are making it.’

RACHAEL DENHOLLANDER applauding the swift response from Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, after someone brought an allegation of sexual misconduct against an SBTS professor.

‘I, as I say, never, never, never say never.’

Former Secretary of State HILLARY CLINTON on a potential 2020 run for president.

‘Well, do you want me to go get the Kurds to make one about what you’ve done?’

U.S. Sen. LINDSEY GRAHAM, R-S.C., to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan after the Turkish leader showed an anti-Kurd propaganda film to five U.S. senators in the Oval Office. The film portrayed Kurds as terrorists.

‘It’s called Darwinism.’

AN ANONYMOUS SIGN, reportedly planted next to a flyer posted near a Toledo, Ohio, mall. KC Ahlers had posted the flyer seeking to raise money for the treatment of his baby son, who suffers from a rare medical condition. The sign read: “Stop asking for money. Let the baby die. It’s called Darwinism. Happy Holidays.”
None in a million

Tellers at a Lincoln, Neb., bank say a man tried to open an obviously fraudulent checking account on Oct. 28. The reason it was obvious: He tried to open it with a fake $1 million bill. According to police, the man appeared at a Pinnacle Bank shortly after the bank opened and presented a teller with a bill with an apparent face value of $1 million. After a short argument, the man left the bank with the bill but without a checking account. The largest note ever printed in the United States is a $100,000 gold certificate featuring Woodrow Wilson on its face.

A sad chapter

The government of Quebec recently denied the residency application of a French national because, officials claimed, she had not demonstrated proficiency in the French language. Earlier this year, Quebec’s Immigration Ministry turned away Émilie Dubois because part of her Ph.D. thesis was written in English. The 31-year-old completed her degree at Laval University in Quebec City, but wrote one chapter of her thesis in English because she submitted it to an English-language academic journal. “I have a diploma from a francophone university, the first in Canada. I’m a French citizen, too, and I did all of my studies in French,” Dubois, who has been living in Quebec since 2012, told Radio-Canada. After reviewing her case, Quebec authorities reversed their decision.

Moving money

What’s the best way to get people to move to Tulsa, Okla.? Pay them. That’s the solution offered by the George Kaiser Family Foundation. After testing a program in 2018, the Tulsa-based charity announced on Oct. 29 it would pay 250 people $10,000 to move to Tulsa and work remotely in Oklahoma for a year. Last year, the program received more than 10,000 applications and ultimately paid just over 100 people to move to Tulsa. Program director Aaron Bolzle said the initiative is meant to show how Tulsa can be a good, cheap city for workers who telecommute. “Tulsa suffered from a lack of perception,” Bolzle told CNN. “We had an opportunity to expose the country and the world as to what was happening here.”

Waaay out of the way

Roadwork on a 65-foot stretch of the A352 in Godmanstone, U.K., has created a 41-mile detour and delays lasting more than an hour. Roadworkers shut down a portion of the road on Oct. 28 to repair sewage lines. Rather than use smaller streets to create a short detour, officials with the Dorset County Council created a 41-mile detour on major roads. Officials said anyone caught driving over the 65-foot section of closed road would face a fine equivalent to nearly $1,300.
Out of bounds?
An August kickball game has turned into a lawsuit against the mayor of a small South Carolina city. Umpire Graylnn Moran claims that Moncks Corner, S.C., Mayor Michael Lockliear used the power of his office to have him fired from officiating because Moran called Lockliear’s son out during a recreational league game. According to the lawsuit filed in October, Lockliear approached Moran after the close call and asked, “Are you stupid?” Moran’s lawyers say the mayor continued to yell at the umpire until Moran told him to calm down. The lawsuit says Lockliear then declared, “I own this town,” and that days later Moran discovered he had been fired from umpiring in Moncks Corner. Lockliear told The Post and Courier that the episode had been blown “out of proportion.”

A concrete problem
One day it was there. The next day, Gina Coutlakis’ sidewalk disappeared. The Richmond, Va., homeowner says someone stole her sidewalk while she was at work, and she has no idea who it could have been. The homeowner said she discovered orange caution cones surrounding what had been her walkway on Sept. 26. Neighbors say they saw workmen removing the sidewalk but didn’t notice any company markings on the truck. “I did not ask for this,” she told WRIC. “I did not authorize this.” Coutlakis said she was hoping the mysterious workmen would return and pour concrete for a new pathway. But after a few days of waiting, she said, she gave up hope and filed a police report.

Arrest warranted?
Melinda Sanders-Jones of Charlotte, Mich., said she has only a vague recollection of checking out Where the Sidewalk Ends and Night from the Charlotte Community Library in 2017. She returned the books this year after a library employee reminded her, and she expected to get a bill for the late fees in the mail. Instead, the library pressed charges, and local police issued an arrest warrant. Sanders-Jones said her employer informed her of the warrant on Oct. 29 after he ran a background check required for a promotion. Sanders-Jones faces a charge of failure to return rental property, a charge that can carry three months in jail and a $500 fine.
Fortunate sons

BOOMERS AND THEIR GRANDCHILDREN’S GENERATION SQUARE OFF

Are baby boomers—the generation born between 1946 and 1964—the most privileged, spoiled, and clueless generation in history? Subsequent generations seem to think so, which is why “OK boomer” has become a thing on social media. The phrase is described as an electronic eye roll, a dismissal of lectures from the old folks in their mortgage-free suburban homes with riding mowers and Medicare. Are you of an age to wonder why millennials can’t move out of Mom’s basement? OK boomer. To riff on the unrealistic expectations of your company’s latest 25-year-old employee? OK boomer. Fulminate on the latest campus meltdown from outraged snowflakes? Well, you get the picture.

An amusing Twitter exchange occurred when veteran actor William Shatner got OK boomer’ed. “Sweetheart,” he replied, “that’s a compliment to me.” Born in 1931, he’s of an earlier time, though his signature character is certainly a boomer icon. His respondent fired back, “What’s the term for people when they can’t interpret a joke?” Shatner’s response: “Millennial!” Kirk out!

Speaking as a boomer, all this sounds eerily familiar. We ragged on our parents—the Greatest Generation—for their materialism and racism and suppression of women, and then went on to do something about it. The civil rights movement, the gold standard of modern social reform, was led by Greats but fueled by boomers who marched and sat in and got themselves arrested. For good and for ill, boomers initiated social revolution. And invented rock ‘n’ roll.

But then we got old, and the eternal gripe of the oldsters is, You kids don’t appreciate what we did for you. The protest of youth, then and now, is, Look at the mess you left us to clean up! Both are true: Every generation, at least in living memory, can point to some positive accomplishments and to some consequential failures. Are boomers exceptional?

In some ways, exceptionally blessed. We arrived at the beginning of a postwar boom that saw a dramatic rise in blue-collar wages and college attendance. Most of us grew up in comfort, if not abundance, with cheap medical insurance, low taxes, and Mom fixing after-school snacks. Our homes were stable and our churches well-attended, and our parents were determined to spare us the hardships they endured.

We came of age in a time of particular social importance, with a sense of destiny and mission, intensified by assassinations and campus violence and chemical highs. We went through some bad years in the 1970s but rebounded into the sunlit 1980s, acquiring kids and McMansions and running up the national debt. Very possibly, we’re the last generation to receive regular Social Security checks.

And another thing, perhaps more significant than all the rest: Boomers were the first generation to take control of childbearing, through available contraception and legal abortion.

The natural bond between generations became a matter of choice (ideally if not actually), and children less an obligation than an experience—perhaps even an experiment. That may be why our grandchildren are looking askance at us. And they have a point.

For all the benefits of the civil rights movement, and to some extent the women’s movement, unintended consequences limped behind like wounded refugees. As “rights” expanded, responsibilities shrank, both personal and political. Now, with fewer young people getting married and starting families, apocalypse around every corner, and a staggering multitrillion-dollar deficit threatening to topple any moment, it’s not entirely wrong to trace millennial angst back to their grandparents.

But we boomers didn’t invent ourselves. Our parents, flush with victory after World War II, wanted to give us everything. We, fired up with unrealistic expectations, wanted to deny our children nothing. Our children, increasingly anxious, want to shield their children from anything that causes anxiety, and those children are floundering in the wake of unmoored certainties.

Each generation passes on its inheritance, good and bad, from the previous to the next, but each will have to answer for itself. The next time I’m tempted to complain about kids today, may I have the grace to pray for them instead. ♦

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Feel-good movies come in two kinds. One kind simply offers fun escapism. It features car chases, characters with superpowers, and declarations of love in the rain. The purpose is to let you forget your problems for a couple of hours.

A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood is the other kind of feel-good movie. The new film, starring Tom Hanks, doesn’t make us feel good by taking us away from the difficulties of the world. Instead, it takes us into the heart of what often causes anxiety, depression, and anger, especially as we enter the holiday season: difficult family relationships. Then, it inspires with a story that tells us it’s possible to overcome even our oldest, most entrenched conflicts.

Lloyd Vogel is an award-winning journalist who confuses being a hard-hitting reporter for being a jerk. His relationship with his father is so strained, they can hardly be in the same room without coming to blows. As for his career, most public figures refuse to speak to him after reading the hit jobs he’s done on others. No surprise, then, that both Lloyd and his wife think he’s a strange choice to profile America’s most beloved children’s television host. “Please don’t ruin my childhood,” Lloyd’s wife begs before he heads off for his first meeting with Mister Rogers.

Fred Rogers surprises Lloyd by being exactly what anyone who’s ever watched his children’s show expects. Yet while his personality is marked by gentleness, he shows no signs that Lloyd’s probing questions make him...
nervous. In fact, he’s happy to open wide his life to him. If that is, Lloyd will let Fred into his life as well.

Great as Tom Hanks is as Fred Rogers—and he is great—it is Matthew Rhys (The Americans) who steals the show.

As Lloyd, he’s cynical and suspicious. He thinks his complex, adult problems are beyond the lessons Fred teaches to children, such as trying to like each other just the way we are. In short, Lloyd is like most of us, and he’s looking for evidence that Fred Rogers is a phony baloney. Except, the more Lloyd gets to know Fred, the more he discovers Fred’s self-sacrificial love and kindness aren’t a put-on.

“The way he led his life, I believe Dad tried to follow the example of Christ,” James Rogers said of his father in a recent documentary. A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood likewise makes it clear that Fred’s lessons were based on his Biblical beliefs. He tells Lloyd the source of his almost supernatural calm isn’t that he’s innately so much better than everyone else and harbors no ugly thoughts or feelings. Rather, it’s the result of his spiritual disciplines. These include daily Scripture reading, praying for lists of people by name, and striving to treat others as more important than himself.

The same unselfish interest Fred takes in overlooked children, he takes in Lloyd. And Lloyd, who sees himself as hopelessly broken, begins to find hope. His bitterness and anger don’t magically disappear, but he’s able to take the first steps toward forgiveness, a softened heart, and change.

The real Lloyd Vogel is an Esquire writer named Tom Junod. In a 1998 cover story, he recounted how Rogers asked the audience members at the Emmy Awards to take 10 seconds to reflect silently on those who’d shown them love. The result: “The jaws clenched, and the bosoms heaved, and the mascara ran, and the tears fell upon the beglittered gathering like rain leaking down a crystal chandelier.”

When Junod met Rogers, he discovered it takes a heavenly kind of strength to face a cynical world with so much meekness. That’s what should happen when the lost encounter people who are modeling the love of their Savior. Even when they don’t ultimately come to the faith, our grace becomes their grace.

If you’re a parent of children under 10, you might be dreading it or looking forward to it, but there’ll be no avoiding it. Six years after it blew the doors off the box office, Frozen is back. The real Lloyd Vogel is a phony baloney. Except, the more you want her to achieve her goal?

Little beyond that will raise parents’ eyebrows, though the song “Show Yourself,” while ambiguous enough to maintain plausible deniability, will likely goose social media rumblings about what kind of love interest Elsa ought to have. More irritating is the “you’re the one you’ve been waiting for” lyric. It’s no less narcissistic now than it was as a 2008 campaign slogan.

Balancing this out, though, is Anna. Once again, Elsa’s plucky little sister proves more admirable. She’s too busy trying to serve her family and her kingdom to get angry about her feelings. “I won’t look too far ahead, it’s too much for me to take,” she sings, “I’ll walk through this night, stumbling blindly toward the light. And do the next right thing.”

Little people need to hear that each day has enough trouble of its own. And the next right thing is the best any of us can do.
Men of the church

THE TWO POPES PORTRAYS A FRIENDLY RIVALRY BETWEEN POPE EMERITUS BENEDICT AND POPE FRANCIS by Rikki Elizabeth Stinnette

Until Pope Benedict XVI resigned from the papacy in 2013, there had not been more than one living pope in 500 years. Why did Benedict step down? And what of the relationship between Benedict and Jorge Bergoglio, the man who became Pope Francis?

The answers offered to these questions in The Two Popes, a new Netflix drama, prove to be merely speculative. But as a parable about finding common ground amid warring beliefs, the film succeeds.

Jonathan Pryce plays Bergoglio, an Argentine who travels to the Vatican to persuade the German Pope Benedict (Anthony Hopkins) to sign off on his retirement from the cardinalate. In a depiction of the papal conclave, we see Bergoglio being narrowly passed over for Benedict in 2005. The rivalry between the two men is intense: In an early scene, a rapid-fire theological debate shows the differences in the men’s theology.

“Change is compromise,” Benedict says in response to Bergoglio’s pleas to adapt.

“God changes—He moves towards us,” Bergoglio answers.

Director Fernando Meirelles portrays the liberal Bergoglio as the more attractive of the two pontiffs. Bergoglio displays charming humor, enjoys sports and pop culture, and refutes Vatican glamour. Benedict is a dour traditionalist who nevertheless has some reason for his beliefs.

For a film that consists largely of two men debating, The Two Popes is an intriguing watch, in part because of the lead actors’ impressive performances and in part because of Anthony McCarten’s entertaining, time-hopping script. The men shift from accusing each other to enjoying each other to appreciating (if not always agreeing with) each other’s viewpoints and backgrounds. Brief strong language, wartime violence, and discussion of subjects like the clerical sex abuse scandal earn the film’s PG-13 rating.

The film is frank about both men’s faith, presenting an interesting depiction of vocation: Benedict and Bergoglio bond over their certainty that God called them to the priesthood, either through divinely arranged circumstances or by His direct voice.

In a sequence in a beautifully re-created Sistine Chapel, the men bond over their recognition that both are sinners. When they look up at the Last Judgment painting, the camera lingers over the nail mark on Christ’s hand—a symbol of His conquest over sin.

Although writer McCarten said the filmmakers did extensive research, including working with a Vatican insider, the truth about the relationship between the real Benedict and Francis is unknown. McCarten ultimately imagines them as buddies, having them watch a soccer match together in a far-fetched credits scene and showing real-life video of the two men giving each other a friendly greeting.

But reports in Vanity Fair and The New York Times suggest their relationship may not be so easygoing: Acrimonious factions have arranged themselves behind each of the religious figures, with traditionalists supporting Benedict, and liberals backing Francis. Earlier this year Benedict wrote a letter about the clerical sex abuse crisis that in some ways contradicted Francis’ stance.

Regardless, the message of The Two Popes—that we should seek to love and pray for everyone, including those with whom we disagree—seems more necessary than ever at a time when public discourse often turns to finger-pointing and vilification.
’Tis the season

FAMILY DEVOTIONALS FOR ADVENT
reviewed by Kristin Chapman

THE 25 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS  James Merritt
Merritt’s The 25 Days of Christmas is A Family Devotional to Help You Celebrate Jesus. This beautiful, cloth-wrapped edition gives families a guide for treasuring the season by redirecting them away from the holiday commercialization and to the miraculous details of Jesus’ birth. The devotional opens with the first mention of the Christmas story in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15) and ends on the 25th day with reflections on the cross. Each daily reading concludes with an activity to help families ponder and apply the lesson as they anticipate the arrival of Christmas. A worthy addition to the Advent library. (Ages 8 & up)

A JESUS CHRISTMAS  Barbara Reaoch
Reaoch’s devotional offers a way for families to Explore God’s Amazing Plan for Christmas. She writes, “Christmas tells us that Jesus is God’s ‘YES’ to all of his promises. When God came out of heaven, in Jesus, he proved that all of his promises are true.” As the book leads families from the Old Testament into the New, the daily readings explore a Scripture passage, explain what it means, engage children in discussion, and conclude by entering into prayer. Families with children of diverse ages will appreciate the options for age-appropriate questions and journaling space at the end of each devotion. (Ages 5-12)

THE WAY TO THE MANGER  Jeff & Abbey Land
In The Way to the Manger the Lands encourage parents not to squelch their children’s Christmas excitement but instead enhance it through observing the Advent season together. They center each week of devotions around the key ideas of hope, love, joy, and peace. Intermingled among the readings are discussion prompts, questions to dig deeper into Scripture, and space to record Christmas memories. At the end of the first, second, and third weeks, the authors offer suggestions for activities families can do together, including service projects, snack time, and holiday outings. Vibrant mixed media illustrations will appeal to children. (Ages 4-10)

JOTHAM’S JOURNEY  Arnold Ytreeide
In Jotham’s Journey Ytreeide uses narrative as a tool to help families more deeply explore Advent themes. The plot follows shepherd boy Jotham as he embarks on a harrowing journey to find his family. Along the way he encounters key characters in the Christmas story and learns the importance of obedience. Ytreeide incorporates Scripture and a short devotional at the conclusion of each day’s reading that connects Jotham’s unfolding story to Biblical themes. Note to parents: Some portions of the story depict violence that may be too intense for young or sensitive children. (Ages 10 & up)

AFTERWORD

In Shooting at the Stars: The Christmas Truce of 1914 (Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2014), John Hendrix tells the true story of how German and Allied soldiers laid aside their weapons and came out of the trenches to sing songs, exchange gifts, and celebrate the holiday in peace. Hendrix’s fictionalized account of the World War I truce, based on letters and interviews with soldiers who were there that day, captures the miracle of the historic moment: “Perhaps an angel of the Lord was among us today—what else could create such spontaneous peace but the hand of God himself?”

Hendrix, whose graphic novel The Faithful Spy was WORLD’s 2019 Children’s Nonfiction Book of the Year, illustrated Shooting at the Stars with gripping graphite, acrylic, and gouache drawings. Additional information in the prologue and endnotes will help elementary schoolchildren ponder the greater context of the story. – K.C.
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Another Sunday Service

MUSIC FROM JARVIS COCKER’S BBC SHOW REVEALS AN INTERESTING AND OPEN MUSICAL MIND by Arsenio Orteza

Kanye West’s film Jesus Is King, which documents one of West’s gospel-extravaganza “Sunday Services,” garnered more than $1 million during its weeklong run in IMAX theaters.

The good news for those unable to score a ticket is that there’s another musical Sunday Services project worth investigating.

Music from Jarvis Cocker’s Sunday Service (Ace) is an eclectic compilation of 23 tracks featured by the erstwhile Pulp frontman Jarvis Cocker on the Sunday-afternoon BBC Radio 6 Music show that he hosted from 2010 to 2017. And although the album is greater than the sum of its parts, the taxonomy of those parts reveals the workings of a most interesting, and refreshingly open, mind.

There are offbeat covers (the Katzenjammers reimagining Gary Numan’s “Cars” as a lo-fi steel-drums exercise, the King’s Singers reimagining Prelude’s version of Neil Young’s “After the Gold Rush”) and not-so-offbeat covers (Nina Simone’s reimagining Randy Newman’s “Baltimore” as a horn section, Headless Heroes reimagining Daniel Johnston’s “True Love Will Find You in the End” as an end-credits theme for an imaginary art-house chick flick, the Camarata Contemporary Chamber Group playing Satie’s “Gymnopédia No. 3” straight).

There are quizzical spoken bits (Cocker and David Cunningham’s 32-question survey “The Interrogative Mood,” Jake Thackray’s disquisition on sheep-counting arcana in “Old Molly Metcalf”), not-so-quizzical spoken bits (the atheist Christopher Hitchens sharing his “Thoughts on Religion” and music and love—as the Phoenix Foundation plays the progressive-folky “Corale”), and laugh-out-loud comedy (Miranda July shouting postmodern romantic clichés throughout all 61 seconds of “Rock Intro” as a horde quite possibly sampled from Kiss’ Alive II roars approval).

There are even surprisingly deep cuts from relatively shallow artists (Art Garfunkel’s “Waters of March,” Bob Welch’s “Don’t Wait Too Long”). Together, they almost make up for the inclusion of “Crazy in Love” by the insufferable Antony & the Johnsons.

Gospel Storytellers, Cocker has found an ideal way (whether as a religiously unaffiliated “None” he meant to or not) to remind listeners of the holiness of the Sabbath.

He excavated “Peter and John” from Side 2 of Andrew Wartts & the Gospel Storytellers’ 1982 underground gospel classic, There Is a God Somewhere (vinyl copies of which, incidentally, are currently fetching $200-$400 among collectors). Compared with the sleuthing required to locate that nugget, finding “Won’t That Be a Happy Time” on Nonesuch’s seminal 1966 Joseph Spence showcase, The Real Bahamas: In Music and Song (aka The Real Bahamas Vol. 1), must’ve been a breeze.

The Spences’ song, on which Louise sings lead while Joseph contributes Bahamian Blind Willie Johnson backup vocals and joyful acoustic fingerpicking, celebrates heaven. The Wartts track, which unfolds amid experimentally moody funk, transforms the details of Acts 3 into a powerful sermonette.

Between the two, a voice (Cocker’s?) says, “Think about it.” Kanye West—and anyone else for whom Jesus is King—will gladly comply.

Arsenio Orteza
New Christmas albums
reviewed by Arsenio Orteza

**LLEGÓ NAVIDAD** *Los Lobos*
These songs, mostly South American folk favorites played for all their sprightly worth by a band that at this point probably couldn’t play them any other way, emphasize the season’s less-religious aspects—festivity for festivity’s sake, one might say. Spanish speakers, however, will recognize an exception in the opening track, “La Rama,” which bases its festivity on Christ’s birth and His virgin mother's beauty. In other highlights, the band has a go at doing for Freddy Fender and José Feliciano what it once did for Ritchie Valens.

**MUSIC FOR THE CHRISTMAS SEASON**
*Peter Fletcher*
For the first 16 tracks, carol follows hard upon carol. Yet as performed by Fletcher, a classical guitarist of strikingly economical virtuosity, there’s no sense of haste or waste. In the dozen that follow, the familiar—Bach’s “Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring,” Pachelbel’s Canon in D, excerpts from Praetorius’ *Terpsichore*, Joseph Brackett’s “Simple Gifts”—alternates with the less familiar, concluding, and climaxing, with Andrew York’s “Jubilation” (aka “Sunburst”). The simplest but most appreciated gift of all: Fletcher’s opting for Kirkpatrick’s “Away in a Manger” over Mueller’s.

**IMMANUEL: THE FOLK SESSIONS**
*Melanie Penn*
You can look at this unplugged, EP-sized condensation of Penn’s full-length, plugged-in 2017 Christmas project in three ways: as a trailer for the latter, as a bonus disc completing the latter’s so-far-nonexistent deluxe edition, or as an uncommonly pellucid, stand-alone work of Scripturally based Christmas folk-pop. Two selections appear for the first time—“I’ve Seen the Glory” (sung from the point of view of Simeon) and Penn’s rearrangement of “The First Noel.” Neither feels like filler (unless stocking filler counts).

**WE WISH YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS**
*The Seekers*
Three-hit ’60s wonders in the U.S. (”Georgy Girl,” anyone?) but a veritable ’60s hit machine Down Under and in the U.K., the Seekers originally released this refreshingly unpretentious collection of carols and Santa songs in 2001 under the title *Morningtown Ride to Christmas*. This Decca Records reissue adds “We Wish You a Merry Christmas” (thus justifying the new title) and a much more attractive cover. The overall effect is not unlike being serenaded by a band of carolers straight out of Currier and Ives.

**ENCORE**
Born in 1913, **Margaret Bonds** was a black, female composer and classical pianist at a time in which to be either black or female, let alone both, reduced a musician’s chances of being taken seriously. **Margaret Bonds: The Ballad of the Brown King & Selected Songs** (Avie), a gorgeous new recording by the Malcolm J. Merriweather—conducted Dessoff Choirs & Orchestra and assorted soloists, shows how much those unaware of her output have been missing.

A cantata with lyrics by Langston Hughes, *The Ballad of the Brown King* triples as a moving celebration of Balthazar (tradition’s dark-skinned, myrrh-bearing wise man), black identity, and Christ’s birth. As an aesthetic and philosophical hat trick, it has few if any equals. “With this recording,” writes the harpist and Bonds scholar Ashley Jackson in the liner notes, “Malcolm Merriweather and I hope to bring [Bonds’] music to new audiences and to encourage future [Bonds] performances.” It’s hard to imagine its accomplishing anything less. —A.O.

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December 7, 2019 • WORLD Magazine 27
QAMISHLI, SYRIA—Two long tents straddle the street in this Kurdish neighborhood near the home of Amer Mohamed Said Berlan, a 25-year-old business owner killed in a car bombing on Nov. 11. The mourners have been coming all day and from across the city to pay their respects. The women sit in clusters on the floor of one tent, children in their laps and talking low. In another, the men sit in chairs in rigid lines, smoking and talking. A boy weaves in and out, serving cups of water.

I am the only American to come, and I am met by Amer’s uncle, Raenas Selo, who takes my hand and thanks me.

Amer was an uncomplicated man, he says, who loved his family and Syria and was willing to work hard for both. “He is one of millions of innocents made to pay for the conflict in our country.”

Like many in this, the largest city in northeast Syria, Selo believes, “This bomb is the work of Erdogan. Our area was returning to peace, we were working and able to be with our families, in our houses. And now we have war again.”

Qamishli and this region have been roiled with ISIS sleeper cells and Turkish-backed militias since October’s U.S. pullout from key border points, which precipitated an invasion by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. An unprecedented number of U.S. generals express open disagreement with Trump policy, and the senior American diplomat on the ground warns Turkey’s military offensive “represents an intentioned-laced effort at ethnic cleansing.” Locals, who already have endured nearly nine years of war, are paying the price.

Selo said: “We want our pain to reach your government.”

Amer worked in his mobile phone shop that Monday when his mother called. There were protests as Turkey advanced and Russian forces had just rolled into town. Already the city sits divided between the Syrian army and the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces. “Would you please come home?” she asked. “It’s dangerous.”

Amer was helping a group with internet access, and he would come home later, he said. Besides his shop, Amer volunteered with NGOs helping Syrians displaced by the Turkey action, including U.S.-based Partners Relief and Development.

I sat across the street from Amer’s shop when the car bomb exploded at about 3 p.m. I was alone at a second-floor hotel conference room table, talking by phone and taking notes. Like thunder underground, it was followed by a sucking thwoosh of air as an inferno rose from the street. In slow seconds I moved away from the window, aware of glass washing over me and pooling at my feet. A ceiling tile fell and ductwork above me dropped down as the building shook. Hotel maids screamed, and we all crowded into the hotel stairway.

Secondary explosions rang out (the car bomb had exploded another car), and suddenly two armies were in the street below, summoning fire trucks. The wall of fire was 40 paces away but its heat poured through the open window. We retreated to a downstairs lobby. Later I discovered the entire window I sat by had blown out, and also a glass partition behind me, yet I emerged with not one scratch.

Amer died instantly. He was one of seven killed, with dozens wounded.

In America we absorb this news from a studied distance. In Qamishli, I didn’t have that option. I watched as shopkeepers moved toward the flames. They jumped atop fire trucks, carried out dead and wounded, and later joined workers who spent hours upon hours sweeping glass and debris from the streets. The next day much of the street reopened for business, and men sat brazenly on the sidewalk.

Seeing their determination moved me to carry on my own reporting trip. And to visit Amer’s family in their grief.

Four days after the bombing, I found Amer’s mother in her home near the tents, surrounded by women on mats, alternately crying and wailing. Like them, I sat on the floor beside her and held her as she held me.

“He was the groom of tomorrow,” she said through sobs, “and I had bought his wedding clothes. But he has gone and left me, taking our future with him.”
There are certain fashion essentials every woman simply must have: A little black dress. A great pair of jeans. A strand of pearls. And, to round things out, a pair of great hoop earrings. And when it comes to adding a fresh twist on a classic, you can't beat the timeless style of Italian design. So, to Italy we went. And, we returned with earrings that run circles around the competition. The Cerchi Scanalati Earrings are perfect classic hoops crafted of .925 sterling silver and covered in lustrous Italian gold. Updated with a grooved texture, these earrings are the ideal size that walks the line between bold and dainty with ease.

You could easily spend $300 for gold over sterling silver hoop earrings, but why would you? A fancy name isn't worth the price difference, and that is the only difference. These earrings can go head to toe with the best of them. Satisfaction guaranteed or your money back. Try the Cerchi Scanalati Earrings for 30 days. If you aren't perfectly happy, send them back for a full refund of the item price. Limited Reserves. Italian-made earrings for such an unbelievable price won't last. Don't let these gorgeous earrings get away. Call today!
Great books tell stories. Here’s our pick of vivid and insightful new releases for better understanding America, world events, history, science, and theology

by Marvin Olasky
WORLD's Books of the Year issue differs from similar efforts at some other Christian magazines. We cheer for Christian and some conservative publishers but recognize the worthwhile output of big secular companies that tilt left but sometimes employ good storytellers who transcend liberal orthodoxy.

One of this year’s examples of the latter: *Working* by Robert Caro, who previously wrote five superb books on the use of power by Robert Moses and Lyndon Johnson. For instance, look at the results of Caro’s interview with Johnson aide Horace Busby, who rode in the presidential limo with LBJ from the White House to Capitol Hill when Johnson was about to give the most significant speech of his life: He’d throw his support to the civil rights movement by reciting the movement’s motto, “We shall overcome.”

Caro quotes Busby saying, “Lyndon Johnson was really big. And sitting on that backseat, the reading light was behind him, so he was mostly in shadow, and somehow that made him seem even bigger. And it made those huge ears of his even bigger. And his face was mostly in shadows. You saw that big nose and that big jutting jaw.”

For WORLD readers who never saw Johnson in action: Are you starting to see him now? Caro is just getting warmed up. He describes his questioning of Busby: “I didn’t stop. ‘Come on, Buzz, what did you see?’ And he finally said, ‘Well, you know—his hands. His hands were huge, big, mottled things. He had the looseleaf notebook with the speech open on his lap, so you saw those big hands turning the pages. And he was concentrating so fiercely. He never looked up on that whole ride. A hand would snatch at the next page while he was reading the one before it.’”

Caro snatched that granular look only by pushing hard for it. Interviewees tend to speak in generalities, and sometimes capturing concreteness is hard. You’ll be able to judge for yourself when we succeed as you read in the pages that follow four interviews with Books of the Year authors: Luke Goodrich, Seth Frantzman, Michael Behe, and Paul Miller.

All of these books have 2019 publishing dates, but we try not to forget C.S. Lewis’ recommendation to read old works as well as new ones. Many Americans are concerned about the increasing polarization of our society. One of my favorite pieces of journalism, and my favorite novel, focused on the tragic result of such polarization in Spain during the 1930s. So, once you’ve read about some current books, please read on to learn about George Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia* and José Gironella’s *The Cypresses Believe in God.* These are our 2019 Books of the Year:

**UNDERSTANDING AMERICA**

*Free to Believe* by Luke Goodrich (Multnomah)

ON OUR SHORT LIST: *How America’s Political Parties Change (And How They Don’t)* by Michael Barone (Encounter); *Alienated America* by Timothy P. Carney (HarperCollins); *Dignity* by Chris Arnade (Penguin Random House); *Who Killed Civil Society?* by Howard A. Husock (Encounter)

**UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD**

*After ISIS* by Seth J. Frantzman (Gefen) *The Thirty-Year Genocide* by Benny Morris and Dror Ze’evi (Harvard)

ON OUR SHORT LIST: *The Great Successor* by Anna Fifield (PublicAffairs); *The Outlaw Ocean* by Ian Urbina (Knopf); *Crisis in the Red Zone* by Richard Preston (Random House); *Dominion* by Tom Holland (Basic)

**HISTORY**

*American History* by Thomas S. Kidd (B&H) *Working* by Robert A. Caro (Knopf)

ON OUR SHORT LIST: *Did America Have a Christian Founding?* by Mark David Hall (Nelson); *Armies of Deliverance* by Elizabeth R. Varon (Oxford); *The Color of Compromise* by Jemar Tisby (Zondervan); *The Only Plane in the Sky* by Garrett M. Graff (Simon & Schuster)

**SCIENCE**

*Darwin Devolves* by Michael J. Behe (HarperOne)

ON OUR SHORT LIST: *Foresight* by Marcos Eberlin (Discovery); *Humans 2.0* by Fazale R. Rana with Kenneth R. Samples (RTB); *Rethinking Radiometric Dating* by Vernon R. Cupps (ICR); *Fearfully and Wonderfully* by Paul Brand and Philip Yancey (IVP)

**ACCESSIBLE THEOLOGY**

*J-Curve* by Paul E. Miller (Crossway)

ON OUR SHORT LIST: *Work* by Daniel M. Doriani (P&R); *Adorning the Dark* by Andrew Peterson (B&H); *The Whole Armor of God* by Iain M. Duguid (Crossway); *A Big Gospel in Small Places* by Stephen Witmer (IVP)
Four years ago the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 5-4 in favor of same-sex marriage. Despite the closeness of the vote and faulty reasoning in the majority decision, that battle (unlike the 47-year battle concerning abortion) seems to be over—for now.

Persevering pro-life counselors outside abortion businesses contribute to some last-minute changes of heart, but pro-Biblical-marriage counselors are not standing outside city halls and wedding chapels pleading with same-sex couples about to make their vows.

The gay lobby, though, is not declaring victory and going home. It’s pressing for unconditional surrender, not just acceptance. Christians need to respond to attacks carefully and non-hysterically. That’s why Becket attorney Luke Goodrich’s *Free to Believe: The Battle Over Religious Liberty in America*—a reasonable and hype-free work—is WORLD’s Book of the Year in the Understanding America category.

The battle over wedding cakes and nuptial photographs is only one among others—contraception and abortion are still hot issues—so Goodrich’s overview gives an excellent context for understanding the headlines of the next several years. Here’s an abridged and edited transcript of Sarah Schweinsberg’s conversation with Goodrich.

**You write that violations of religious freedom are when the government demands what belongs to God. What or who determines what belongs to God versus the government?** In American law, we start with freedom of belief. The Supreme Court has repeatedly recognized that freedom of belief is basically absolute. But the freedom to act on your beliefs is necessarily limited. And that’s really the hardest challenge: How do you discern the limits of religious freedom?

**Do health, welfare, and safety concerns transcend any free religious context?** Just because the government invokes health or safety doesn’t give it a blank check to restrict religious practices. Take our Hobby Lobby litigation in the Supreme Court. The government required many businesses across the country to provide insurance coverage for all forms of contraception, including those that could cause an abortion.

**What happened?** We invoked the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, RFRA. It creates a balancing test, says if the government is going to substantially restrict religious practices, the government must prove that imposing the restriction on the religious person is “the least restrictive means of furthering a compelling govern-
The legal scholarship on what makes discrimination a necessary part of human judgment, and why is complete moral acceptance and not just legality so important to the dominant secular culture right now? Our culture currently draws a distinction between good religion and bad religion. Good religion according to our culture is tolerant. It doesn’t make absolute truth claims. A bad religion makes absolute truth claims and tries to evangelize and actually convert people. I think some of the modern beliefs about abortion, human sexuality, and even who we are as human persons are held with an increasingly religious fervor. It’s not enough to hold those convictions and be left alone. You want to convert others to holding those same convictions.

When is discrimination a necessary part of human judgment, and when is it morally wrong? The legal scholarship on what makes discrimination wrong is very badly under-theorized. It’s very hard to come to clear agreement on what’s invidious discrimination that the law should punish and what is legitimate “discrimination” that’s necessary for running an organization.

Do you have any predictions on how long it will take for all of these legal questions concerning abortion, gay rights, and religious freedom to shake out? We’ll be arguing about these issues or some variation of them until the Lord returns or our civilization disintegrates. But there are a lot of things we can do to push the outcome in a better direction. We’re not called to win a culture war. We’re not called to fix the American legal system as our primary calling. We’re called to honor Christ in everything we do and everything we’ve been given to do. When I’m litigating a case, it helps tremendously if the organization has thought through its religious beliefs, inculcated those beliefs throughout the organization as adopted policies that are consistent with those beliefs, and enforced them consistently but in a kind and humble manner. The other side in these cases is always looking for the bad examples. It’s extremely unlikely that we’ll have a single case that provides a clear answer and resolves all these conflicts.

How do we get people who are not religious to care about religious freedom? There are purely philosophical arguments about how religion affects society. When religious people are perceived as being in a pitched battle against everything the culture holds dear, others are not very excited to protect religious freedom. But when we’re caring for the poor, educating people, providing homes for children in foster care, providing for the needs of strangers, that opens the door for others to say these religious people are doing a lot of good, and we should respect what they’re doing.

What do Christians who are afraid of the current climate need to know? One of the biggest problems with Christians and religious freedom today is how much we’re driven by fear of losing our rights, fear of suffering, fear of losing the culture war. As Christians, we’re called to approach this not with fear but with faith. Part of that is having basic knowledge you need to know about religious freedom, where it comes from, how it’s threatened. Part is knowing about many of the victories, the good results. Ultimately, it’s getting recentered from trying to win a fight to protect ourselves, to seeking an issue of justice and trusting the sovereign God to prosper us in our work.

Christians on the other side of the spectrum who aren’t concerned at all: What do they need to understand? They need to have a consistent ethic of justice. When a Christian ministry is hugely effective in placing children in foster care and supporting foster families like Christian ministries, they are caring for the fatherless and for the widows. When it gets shut down because the government says, I don’t like your beliefs about human sexuality, that is unjust. It also harms children who would otherwise be helped. And so if you care about justice, you also need to care about religious freedom.
BOOK OF THE YEAR

**Free to Believe: The Battle Over Religious Liberty in America**

Becket law firm attorney Luke Goodrich shows that some leading abortion and gay rights activists are not content with legalization, acceptance, and even general approval. We’ve already seen the assault on anyone who doesn’t applaud a same-sex marriage, but what if declining to perform an abortion becomes an illegal act of sex discrimination? Goodrich shows how to combat views that not baking a wedding cake is the same as refusing to serve lunch at a diner. He also takes on misunderstandings among Christians who are pilgrims, martyrs, or beginners: Religious freedom should not be a tool for regaining Christian cultural dominance.

**SHORT LIST**

**How America’s Political Parties Change (And How They Don’t)**

Many pundits in their 20s and 30s talk of unprecedented developments in American politics, but such chatter often means that they haven’t seen something before during their brief careers. Michael Barone, co-author for half a century of *The Almanac of American Politics*, has seen it all and refuses to panic. He points out that our current political situation resembles the polarized partisan parity of the 1880s, and that Republicans have always formed themselves around a core group considered to be “typical Americans,” while Democrats have typically been a coalition of disparate demographic groups.

**Alienated America: Why Some Places Thrive While Others Collapse**

Tim Carney connects the dots: White Americans are less likely to attend religious services when they are unemployed and more likely to be divorced. Less church and community involvement often leads to a give-up attitude that among 10 percent of the populace worsens job prospects. Carney is also helpful in distinguishing between two kinds of Trump supporters. When Trump was running in the primaries against opponents like Jeb Bush, Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, and John Kasich, his base was “white evangelicals who do not go to church.” Phase two support came once Trump won the nomination: “white evangelicals who go to church.” For more, see WORLD’s Carney interview in our July 19 issue.

**Dignity: Seeking Respect in Back Row America**

With gut-punching photographs and stories, Chris Arnade shows what life looks like from the “back row,” the benches of the unemployed and uneducated, the drugged and depressed, the homeless and hopeless. When Emily Belz interviewed Arnade, he described himself as an atheist who nevertheless understood the spiritual hole in many lives. Is Arnade himself on the path to faith in God? He says he doesn’t have the humility “to understand other things greater than we can understand,” but his book can help the affluent and middle class understand how the other fifth lives. For more, see WORLD’s Arnade interview in our Oct. 26 issue.

**Who Killed Civil Society? The Rise of Big Government and Decline of Bourgeois Norms**

Howard Husock shows how poverty-fighters a century ago promoted an American three-self doctrine: self-respect, self-control, self-government. He compares that emphasis on honesty, trustworthiness, and truth with a social work textbook published in 2012 that turns the spotlight not on what the poor can do but on how the rich “oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create or enhance privilege and power.” That textbook misses the need to promote what Husock calls “constructive norms for personal behavior...the ethical soil in which individuals and their communities can thrive.”

*Who Killed Civil Society?* reminds me of Marsh Ward, a leftist who created Clean and Sober Streets to help drug addicts in Washington: Ward used to think society imprisoned them in a brick cell, but “if I take a guy from outside, sober him up, teach him how to read, and teach him the computer, there’s a hole in the wall for that man. He goes right through.”
Grappling with evil
Explaining an ‘unmitigated, genocidal disaster’

Co-winner in our Understanding the World category is After ISIS by veteran journalist Seth Frantzman. He chronicles contorted alliances in the wake of ISIS and shows how to understand conflict in Syria, Iraq, and even Africa as part of the three-way battle of Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia—with a proactive Russia and a retreating America hovering over the scene.

Frantzman takes readers on a first-hand tour of the terror-strewn battlefields, providing able analysis while also grappling with unspeakable human suffering. “Here in the killing fields of Sinjar,” he writes from Iraq, “the bones of those killed in 2014 sit on the surface. Human hair pokes through grass that has grown on the bodies.”

I asked Frantzman some personal and professional questions.

**How did growing up in Maine without electricity prepare you for covering the wars of the Middle East?** It helped me view the world through an unconventional lens. That leads to asking some skeptical questions and not accepting mainstream views automatically. In the field, I could always look back at a young rural outdoors life where my parents taught self-sufficiency. Lacking some basic essentials felt familiar.

**Now you live in Jerusalem, an American in the heart of a region hostile to America.** This is an exciting place to live, and it’s often at the heart of world affairs. As a journalist there are few places that have as much breaking news. Also, what happens here matters to the world. The forces that caused 9/11, ISIS, or the Iran tensions with the West all converge in the Middle East.

**Did any particular event move you toward writing about Islamic terrorism?** In June 2014 I was sitting at a coffee shop in Beit Hanina in East Jerusalem with friends who began watching a video on Facebook showing the murder of Shiites at Camp Speicher, a massacre we now know claimed the lives of around 1,500 people. I thought it couldn’t be real. The images of people being murdered in droves looked like something out of the Holocaust, not something that could happen today. I decided I had to focus on the crimes of ISIS, and help tell the stories of those suffering and fighting this group.

You write that the conflict with ISIS “formed a bookend to the optimism that emerged from the Cold War.” How did we come out of that 20th-century madness only to land back in the seventh century? The Cold War was a struggle between a more free and democratic world and totalitarianism. The United States allied itself with unsavory regimes to topple Soviet Communism. In 1979 the Islamic Revolution in Iran claimed to present a third way, one that meshed with the so-called Non-Aligned Movement. Elites in the West generally believed religion was a thing of the past. Few understood that →
The U.S. decision to leave parts of Syria on Oct. 6 led to a predictable Turkish invasion, the deaths of hundreds, and displacement of 300,000 people. This is not a good legacy for U.S. involvement in Syria. Washington should have found a way to display strength and work with Russia, Iran, and Turkey to stop the need for a new round of fighting.

You write sympathetically about the region’s Christians. Do Christians have a sustainable presence in the Middle East, anywhere? As recently as 120 years ago Christians had major communities throughout the Middle East. Yet the period from 1914 to 2014 has been an unmitigated, genocidal disaster. From the massacre of Armenians in 1915, Assyrians in the 1930s, or deaths in the Lebanese Civil War, and abuses of Copts in Egypt, Christians have faced one attack after another. Like Jewish minorities historically, Christians have survived under the generosity of various authoritarian regimes or monarchies that agree to “protect” them. But protection is not tolerance.

What now? Most Christians have fled to the Kurdish region of Iraq now. In Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and Egypt, the future of Christians appears more secure but still some of their communities feel under siege. It is a massive failure of Western governments that leaders only pay lip service to the rights of Christians in the region. These are often indigenous communities that have been in the same place for thousands of years, yet find themselves unable to choose their destiny, awaiting the next iteration of ISIS or whatever hateful extremism will emerge next.

After reporting on some of the worst violence of our times, do you sleep at night? And do you have any bit of hope to share at the end of it all? The trauma of reporting some of the tragedies I saw, such as mass graves of Yazidis in northern Iraq, or interviewing refugees leaves permanent scars. I see the sights of the ISIS genocide every day in my mind. Many of the people who suffered greatly also give a sense of hope because they do not give up. If they have hope, how can a privileged person like me not also have hope?
The Outlaw Ocean: Journeys Across the Last Untamed Frontier

The Outlaw Ocean does for the offshore world what Upton Sinclair’s The Jungle did for the meatpacking industry. Ian Urbina—an investigative reporter for The New York Times with an iron stomach—tracks across the world’s oceans human traffickers, rat-infested ships, undersea grave robbers, and destitute port workers, along with governments all too happy to look away. Readers will bristle at some of Urbina’s views, particularly one uncritical chapter aboard Dutch abortionist Rebecca Gomperts’ seagoing abortion center. But this vivid account of the blue yonder compelled me to think more about a vast frontier for missions and service that is 70 percent of the earth’s surface. —M.B.

Crisis in the Red Zone: The Story of the Deadliest Ebola Outbreak in History, and of the Outbreaks to Come

The words nonfiction and thriller don’t often go together, but they are just right for Crisis in the Red Zone, a page-turning account of the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa. Richard Preston’s authority on the subject as well as his storytelling skill come through in every page (see his 1994 also-thriller The Hot Zone). A large part of the book takes place at a Christian hospital in Liberia that was the first Ebola treatment center in the capital. Preston’s capture of the heroism of the Christian medical workers there, and the drama and horror of what they faced, is a gift to his readers. —E.B.

Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World

Scholar Tom Holland notes that ancient Rome had no problem assigning divine status to victors, as measured by the power to crucify opponents—but to see a crucified man as God was anathema. Holland shows how the last-shall-be-first understanding has played out over two millennia throughout the West and then the whole world, as the cross became a symbol of courage amid adversity rather than disgrace.

Some of Holland’s specific historical judgments are questionable, but he’s right that many of the writers and leaders most hostile to Christianity are unconsciously operating within its framework. Holland’s powerful writing may lead some who discount Christianity to take a look at why billions of people today think it nobler to suffer than to inflict suffering, and to profess that every human life has value. —M.O.
Vivid memories
Asking probing questions, diving into details by Marvin Olasky

Our Oct. 12 issue included 40 of my history book recommendations for this category (see “Pages of providence”), so here’s a brief update. Thomas Kidd’s two-volume American History continues to stand out from the crowd as an overview for college students, bright high schoolers, and general readers (homeschool parents particularly). Its excellence and usefulness make it our History co-Book of the Year, alongside Robert Caro’s Working: Researching, Interviewing, Writing.

Here’s more from Caro, because he has so much to teach not only about history but about how to report and write it. Watch how Caro gains the information to show what it was like working for President Lyndon Johnson. He asks, “So if I were standing next to you in this scene in the Oval Office, Joe, what would I see?” Caro says sources “never understand” what he means, so he pushes: “Was he sitting behind the desk or was he getting up to walk around?” A source might respond, “Well, he jumped up from that desk all the time because he had the wire tickers over there. He had these three wire tickers, and he’d go over to them every few minutes to look.”

To visualize this, it’s important to understand that before our 24-hour public news cycle, politicians and editors had a private news cycle, with a “wire ticker” printing out stories from the Associated Press and other agencies. Caro asked LBJ’s cronies, “What were you seeing? How would he look at the wire tickers?” One replied, “He couldn’t wait for the next lines to come, so he’d open the lid, and he’d grab the paper with two hands, as if he was trying to pull it out of the machine.” There’s a scene that tells you about a politician’s urgency.

Caro explains his method further: “You keep saying, What would I see? Sometimes these people get angry because I’m asking the same question over and over again. If you just keep doing it, it’s amazing what comes out of people. Eventually, a lot of people tell you about [Johnson’s] bad breath. And the couches.” Caro asks about the Oval Office furnishings, “What was it like sitting on those couches? And people would say something like, He’d be towering over you, leaning over you. So you keep saying, What was it like sitting there? They’d say, Oh, I remember those couches. They were so downy you thought you’d never get up. And then you realize that Johnson made the couches in the Oval Office softer so people would sink down.”

Caro creates scenes to help a reader see the physical settings “clearly enough, in sufficient detail, so that he feels as if he himself were present while the action is occurring.” He keeps pushing for specific detail and acknowledges, “I’ve had people get really angry at me. But if you ask it often enough, sometimes you make them see.”
Tisby shows how slave owners deprived their property of not only freedom but education: South Carolina’s Negro Act of 1740 decreed that slaves could not learn to write or assemble in groups without white supervision. That act gave lip service to decency: It declared cruelty to be “highly unbecoming to those who profess themselves Christians” and established fines designed to “restrain and prevent barbarity being exercised toward slaves”—but this clause was rarely enforced.

Each generation squandered opportunities. Although some writers still point to a few humane slave owners, Tisby shows that of the 600,000-plus interstate slave sales in the decades before the Civil War, one-fourth destroyed a first marriage and half broke up a nuclear family. Enslaved women gave birth to nine children on average, which meant millions grew up fatherless. In 1865 Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman reserved 7,000 square miles of land on the East Coast from Charleston to Jacksonville for freed slaves and promised each family a mule. President Andrew Johnson countermanded that order.

President Lincoln had warned in his Oct. 12 article about history books, so here’s more about History, as the Civil War battle accounts by focusing on how Northerners saw the war as one that would help poor Southern whites living under slaveholder domination. Meanwhile, Confederate leaders succeeded in portraying not just plantation kings but white Southerners generally as victims of Yankee aggression—and that understanding underlay the failure of Reconstruction.

Reconstruction’s failure led to another century of racial misery on top of the previous two-plus centuries: Jemar Tisby’s The Color of Compromise overviews the whole sad saga. Tisby shows how even George Whitefield, the great 18th-century preacher, took time off from evangelism to advocate slavery: Without it, he said, “Georgia can never be a flourishing province.”

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Inhumanity seemed always in season. More than 1,000 Mississipians gawked and cheered at the torture and lynching of Luther and Mary Holbert in 1904. In Georgia in 1918, when eight-months-pregnant Mary Turner vocally protested the lynching of her husband, a white racist lynching mob tortured her, then cut open her womb: As NAACP head Walter White put it, “The infant, prematurely born, gave two feeble cries and then its head was crushed by a member of the mob with his heel.”

In 1919, East St. Louis, Chicago, Houston, and Washington, D.C., were all venues for racial conflict. Millions in the 1920s joined the Ku Klux Klan, a pseudo-Protestant order. We have much to lament—so it’s good that an increasing number of Southern museums make it less likely we’ll merely look away as old times are forgotten.

We should also not forget America’s most shocking day of the 21st century so far, Sept. 11, 2001. Garrett Graff’s The Only Plane in the Sky makes our History short list because, like Robert Caro, Graff makes us feel what being a witness to power—in this case, clearly malign—was like. His book would be a good gift for millennials who know about the day without having any intimate knowledge of it.

WORTH YOUR TIME

At a time when some pundits say America is in a downward spiral, it’s worth studying ancient Israel’s tragic history. The Reformed Expository Commentary, our 2017 Series of the Year (P&R), has two new volumes out, one on Psalms 42-72 and the other on 2 Kings. In the latter, Philip Graham Ryken offers excellent insights into the inspired history book that shows both the consequences of idolatry and God’s concern for those undergoing great hardship.

Our 2019 Series of the Year is the ESV Scripture Journal (Crossway). I like the 55 thin, convenient-to-carry volumes with the English Standard Version translation on the left of each two-page spread and lightly lined blank paper on the right. Warning: For optimal usage, be in a church where the pastor preaches through books. —M.O.
Michael Behe, a 67-year-old biochemistry professor who has taught at Lehigh University since 1985, has helped to create nine children and two major theories.

His first book, *Darwin’s Black Box*, focused on “irreducible complexity,” the idea that major evolutionary change requires dozens of small changes to happen all at the same time, an event so statistically improbable as to be virtually impossible.

Behe’s new book, *Darwin Devolves*, focuses on how “Darwinian processes nicely account for changes at the species and genus levels of biological classification, but not for changes at the level of family or higher”—in other words, microevolution but not macroevolution.

Behe’s explanation: “The heyday of Darwin’s theory took place in the absence of answers to very basic biological questions such as, among others: What is the nature of a gene? Exactly how is genetic information physically passed to an offspring? Beginning in the 1940s with the discovery that DNA—not protein or something else—is the genetic material, experimental work progressively uncovered more and more basic facts of molecular biology.”

To learn those facts, Behe explains, scientists need to “examine huge numbers of organisms over many generations. ... Only in the past twenty years have such detailed, rigorous evolutionary studies even begun to be conducted. ... [Now] we are in a much stronger position to judge Darwin’s theories based on sound experiments, not blinkered postulates.”
Darwin Devolves is our Science Book of the Year because its message to standard issue Neo-Darwinists is, to quote the book of Daniel, “Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Parsin”: Conventional evolutionary theory is being weighed in the scientific balance and found wanting. It will be overthrown. Here are excerpts from J.C. Derrick’s interview of Michael Behe:

You start Darwin Devolves by comparing the study of economics and biology—two disciplines most people would not associate. What are the parallels? The most significant is complexity. In economics, lots of factors affect the sale and trade of goods: supply, demand, taxes, people’s education, all sorts of things. Economists are highly motivated to explore their subject because it involves money and people’s welfare, and yet economics is not an exact science. Their predictions are not always reliable.

Just educated guesses. And economists have it easier than evolutionary biologists do. Economists don’t try to account for the origin of the goods that they trade. Evolutionary biologists explicitly claim that not only can they explain how something fits into an environment, but they say, “We can account for the origin of that, too.” The claims are well beyond what they can honestly make.

Yet they present their findings as irrefutable facts. Why? An idea takes hold in an academic community and never lets go. Darwin proposed the idea that animal variety may be because an animal is born with some helpful trait, and that trait would spread in the population because degrading processes in biology would not associate. What are the parallels? The most significant is complexity. In economics, lots of factors affect the sale and trade of goods: supply, demand, taxes, people’s education, all sorts of things. Economists are highly motivated to explore their subject because it involves money and people’s welfare, and yet economics is not an exact science. Their predictions are not always reliable.

And that’s a problem? Here’s an analogy: Suppose your life depended on your car getting a little bit better gas mileage. Now, how could you quickly improve that and save your life? You could throw out the spare tire, take off the doors and backseat—throw them all away to lighten the load. You’ll get a little bit better gas mileage. Of course, those things are helpful in other circumstances, but if your life depended on better gas mileage, that’s the way to go. And Darwinism does that, too. If there’s any advantage in getting rid of something, then natural selection and random mutation will get rid of it without a moment’s thought, because they can’t think.

What’s an example of that in biology? Polar bears are very similar to brown bears, so for a long time people thought the polar bear was a great example of Darwinian evolution. It’s likely true the polar bear is descended from brown bears, but we didn’t know how or what changed within the biology of the polar bear to allow it to adapt to its frigid region. Now we do, because the entire genomes of the grizzly and polar bears have been sequenced. It turns out, of the 17 most important changes, about three-quarters of them are degraded genes in the ancestor, the brown bear. One gene involved in making pigment in the brown bear’s coat was broken, so the polar bear has a white coat. Another one involved fat metabolism. By breaking one gene, the polar bear can tolerate much higher levels of fat. So the polar bear was derived from the brown bear not so much by evolution, but by devolution.

You also looked at the development of dogs. Popularizers of evolution said if we can breed dogs that are so different from each other and only do it in the past few hundred years, how much better could nature do? But again, we didn’t know what was going on in the biology of these dogs. In the past 10 years, the entire genomes of many different dog breeds have been sequenced. And again, it turns out if you want a Chihuahua, you can break one of the genes involved in growth. If you want French poodles with curly hair, you break a gene involved in hair growth. If you want a dog with a short muzzle, you break a gene involved in facial shape development.

How does time play into all of this? Neo-Darwinists seem to believe that with enough time anything is possible. Over long periods of time the only thing you would expect is more degradation, because degrading processes in biology are far faster than constructive ones.

Was there ever evidence that random mutations could create? The best “evidence” for natural selection: My professor in graduate school said it happened. He can’t be wrong. And everybody nods in agreement. But there was zero real evidence that Darwin’s mechanism could build anything complex. When people saw a mutation that helped, they confused beneficial mutations with constructive mutations.

Like with dogs and polar bears. Right. In the absence of science’s ability to track down those mutations at the molecular level—which is where the rubber meets the road in biology—people assumed. But there was never any such evidence. →
BOOK OF THE YEAR

Darwin Devolves: The New Science About DNA That Challenges Evolution

Two decades ago, in Darwin’s Black Box, Michael Behe flipped the conventional understanding that the evolutionary battle is one of science vs. faith: He showed scientifically that macroevolution is a satisfactory explanation only for those who are true believers in the words of a 19th-century prophet. Now, Behe highlights new scientific discoveries that show how Darwin’s mechanism works by breaking down genes: devolution, not evolution. Darwin Devolves is our Science Book of the Year because it shows that the evolutionary process can build or create nothing at the genetic level, but it can make a creature look different.

SHORT LIST

Fearfully and Wonderfully: The Marvel of Bearing God’s Image

Three decades ago wordsmith Philip Yancey turned theological reflections by Dr. Paul Brand, an innovator in treating leprosy, into two short books. Now, IVP has combined the two into one book. Brand brilliantly describes how human traits decried by evolutionists—why does God have us feel so much pain?—are actually lifesavers. For example, he explains how blood is a cleansing agent in the body and notes that “wearers of contact lenses might wish for less sensitivity in the eye, but the sensitivity benefits the great majority of people and their need to preserve vision.”

Foresight: How the Chemistry of Life Reveals Planning and Purpose

Marcos Eberlin, a member of the Brazilian Academy of Sciences, does not always provide explanations that are clear for nonscientists, but his book Foresight is valuable for its numerous examples of how structures in the natural world reflect engineering solutions more sophisticated than the best human engineers could provide. Eberlin concludes, “There are no demonstrated examples of unguided, mindless processes anticipating and solving problems that require a sophisticated orchestration of fine-tuned parts. Intelligent design thus represents the best and, indeed, the only causally adequate explanation.”

Rethinking Radiometric Dating: Evidence for a Young Earth From a Nuclear Physicist

Vernon Cupps contends that current radioisotope dating models depend upon constant decay rates—but decay rates can be as much as 1 billion times faster under extreme conditions. He examines many dating modes—argon, alkali metal, rubidium-strontium, rare-earth, heavy metal, thermoluminescence, etc.—and shows they all depend on unverifiable assumptions. Cupps compares radioactive decay to dropping salt into a large jar of water: At room temperature the salt will slowly diffuse throughout the water, but cooling or heating the water changes the diffusion rate. His bottom line: think of the earth’s age in thousands of years, not billions.

Humans 2.0: Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Perspectives on Transhumanism

Should we put our faith in human enhancement? We all hope for breakthroughs against debilitating diseases, but biotechnology has become an alternative faith for some: Imagine there’s no heaven, and instead let’s design babies, extend our lives past 120 years, and meld humans and machines to gain superhero abilities. Transhumanism is the ultimate techno-faith, one that “plays an eschatological role for people who embrace an atheistic, materialistic worldview [and] stands as a competitor to the gospel.”

Books for evangelicals abound on how to talk with Muslims, Latter-day Saints, and atheists, but not much is out there from a Biblical perspective about neuroprosthetics, brain-computer interfaces, a cybernetics future, human enhancement, transhumanism, and artificial intelligence. Humans 2.0 authors Fazale Rana and Kenneth Samples sometimes sit too high on the ladder of abstraction, but their book is a good start at laying out the parameters of the problem.
It’s so simple, it’s brilliant: The Christian life is shaped like a capital J. You descend on the left and rise on the right.

Our Book of the Year in Accessible Theology—readable by everyone, not just seminary professors—is Paul Miller’s J-Curve: Dying and Rising With Jesus in Everyday Life. The idea that Christians need to go down to come up challenges prosperity gospel sponge cake—and it’s just what we need to understand when times get tough. Not just once but again and again, the everyday Christian life is dying to convenience, worldly success, and approval, only to be resurrected into repentance, humility, and hope.

Miller grew up on the West Coast. He moved east when his dad Jack Miller began teaching at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. After years as a teacher and principal at inner-city Christian schools in Philadelphia, Miller in 1999 founded and became executive director of seeJesus, a global discipleship mission. His parenting, teaching, and discipling experience helped him see that Jesus serves us so we can serve others.

Understanding the J-Curve makes all the difference when we miss a flight connection, fail to soothe a crying baby, or strike out when trying to help a homeless person: As Miller writes, “If rising is embedded in dying, then not running from the customized dying that God permits in our lives is essential for resurrection.” Understanding the J-Curve helps us persevere. Here are excerpts from our interview:
Say you’re faced with a difficult marriage or a difficult child, a painful situation you can’t control—you’re trapped and there’s no good exit. How do you survive? With the map of the J-Curve. Instead of saying to ourselves “everything has gone wrong,” we realize we’re in the story of Jesus. My Father has given me this story. It’s unjust. It’s a suffering J-Curve. So we go back to Philippians 2, where Paul explains that Jesus did not count equality with God the Father a thing to be grasped. He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave. Jesus descends into the problem. That’s the love J-Curve. Those two curves are always linked like that: A love J-Curve leads to a suffering J-Curve.

You write about the repentance J-Curve, when you’ve caused pain and need to kill the evil in yourself. But how would you kill something like pornography use, which is so common? Our desire for love is misdirected into pornography, often because users have not learned to cultivate a real person. We have to, through God’s grace, kill that in ourselves. That’s the normal Christian life.

We need to see we’re hitting bottom, and that’s miserable—but it’s also part of the normal pattern of going down in order to come up, through God’s grace? That’s right. It’s helpful to know we don’t control the dying or the rising. I’ve had some long times when I was sure I was at the bottom. I could begin to see some hope coming, and then there was a trapdoor, and I went down again. Sometimes I’ve gone down a whole series of trapdoors and I keep thinking I’ve bottomed out.

You write about the young woman who has gone from being a Disney princess at age 5 to multiple sex partners but no lovers at age 25. She’s come to believe her life is pointless, meaningless, cruel. She’s on her way to loneliness and bitterness. The Disney story shows how our modern world has reversed the J-Curve. It takes Christian hope and secularizes it. What to say to her? First, enter that woman’s world. Help her to see there’s an entirely different way of doing life.

What about men who don’t commit? You write on page 131, “We instinctively sense that love will narrow our life. It is one reason so many young men are fearful of marriage.” Is it true that unless men narrow their lives to one woman, they will not mature? That’s the suffering J-Curve. Those two curves are always linked like that: A love J-Curve leads to a suffering J-Curve.

Your life in some way. She finally begins to break out of it when her youth pastor introduces her to Philippians 3:10-11 and Philippians 1:29—“It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.”

Each year 125,000 or so rapes are reported across the United States, and in 49 of every 50 rape cases the alleged assailant goes free. With an unjust conclusion, how would you help a young Christian rape victim apply J-Curve thinking to her suffering? First, I would enter into her suffering. That’s what Jesus does: the Philippians 2 J-Curve. You listen to them and hear their story, if they want to tell it. You don’t lecture them.

You become Jesus to that person, not one of Job’s comforters. That’s right. The prayer of the J-Curve on the dying side is the Hebrew lament. You turn toward God with what breaks your heart—what you don’t understand about this world.

Let me ask about an abnormal situation: When Corrie ten Boom hid Jews in her home, that was the love J-Curve. That began to cost her: That’s the suffering J-Curve. People rethink the love. I should never have done that or I wouldn’t be in this mess. People do that with marriage all the time. As they begin to enter into the suffering that comes with marriage or any close, committed relationship, they start thinking, “I made a mistake.” But if you know the map of the J-Curve, you know that suffering follows love. So Corrie enters into a fellowship of His suffering. Corrie came out of that camp having lost Betsy and her father. She came out a different person with a message of reconciliation, and she took that message all over the world.

**FOUR KEY SENTENCES FROM J-CURVE:**

“Human history is one long declaration of independence from God, riddled with Towers of Babel, monuments to our pride. ... As descendants of Adam, left to ourselves, all of us re-enact Adam’s story by living a life of self-seeking.”

“With the borderland in view, we can revel in even fleeting joy, knowing this is a down payment on future joy, and embrace sadness. ... If dying and rising with Christ is the new normal, then when we encounter dying, we don’t have to collapse or withdraw into ourselves.”

“Our children by the millions are being seduced by a better version of the good. ... In the public square, secular liberalism feels inclusive, compassionate, accepting, and nonjudgmental, while Christianity is portrayed as narrow, backward, uptight, and judgmental. ... We must recover a vision of the beauty of Jesus and the beauty of those who emulate his life.”

“The story of Jesus’s dying and rising isn’t just for us as individuals; it’s for the church as a whole.”
reviews by Jamie Dean, Marvin Olasky, & Susan Olasky

SHORT LIST

Work: Its Purpose, Dignity, and Transformation
Christian authors have written about work for centuries, but Daniel Doriani offers a deep dive into Biblical theology and its practical applications. In a chapter that might become increasingly helpful, Doriani offers guidelines for Christian workers wrestling with whether to remain in a compromised organization or get out. He also offers Biblical principles for common questions like How long should I stay in a job I don’t like? (Maybe longer than you think.) Doriani’s vision of work remains hopeful: “Christians can do more than make a living or avoid sin. ... Christ, the King, has come ... his kingdom has arrived, even in our work.” —J.D.

Adorning the Dark: Thoughts on Community, Calling, and the Mystery of Making
Musician and author Andrew Peterson offers a poetic but practical look at how Christians can use the gifts God gives them to glorify Him and encourage others. Writers, artists, and musicians might find the book especially helpful, but it’s delightful for anyone craving to find or cultivate beauty in a broken world. Part creative memoir, Peterson’s book is realistic about the plain difficulty of hard work of any kind, but he also holds out the rewards: “Daily pledge every cell of every tool at your disposal to His good pleasure.” —J.D.

The Whole Armor of God: How Christ’s Victory Strengthens Us for Spiritual Warfare
Iain Duguid brings a fresh approach to a familiar passage in this book about spiritual warfare. Many Christians might think of Ephesians 6, where the Apostle Paul writes about putting on the whole armor of God to stand against the devil. Duguid also examines passages in the Old Testament to show how Christ has already worn the armor on our behalf. For example, “The breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation come from the divine warrior’s arsenal in Isaiah 59:17.” Duguid reminds us: “What God clothes us with is nothing less than His own armor. ... Jesus has Himself worn the armor and won the victory.” —J.D.

A Big Gospel in Small Places: Why Ministry in Forgotten Communities Matters
Stephen Witmer grew up in a very small town in Maine. Like many young pastors, he dreamed of pastoring a big, center-city church—where God could do significant work. He has found significance as a pastor in Pepperell, Mass. (pop. 11,497 in 2010). This book weaves together Witmer’s personal about-face and a theological vision for small-place ministry. He illustrates both bright and dark sides of small places, explores joys and temptations facing pastors called to rural areas, and challenges un-Biblical definitions of significance and strategy. Witmer, in an ironic way, counters arguments put forward by Christians who prioritize urban ministry: He shows the joys of embracing a big gospel and delighting in the small and seemingly insignificant. That makes its message applicable to just about anyone. —S.O.
BATTLES ON LA RAMBLA

Two great older books illuminate the Spanish Civil War and the road to polarization

by Marvin Olasky

Republicans of leftist parties fight (left) and demonstrate (right) in Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War.

LEFT: UNIVERSAL HISTORY ARCHIVE/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES • RIGHT: STF/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES
Polarize might be 2019’s Word of the Year and publishing meme. Sitting to the right of my MacBook are recent books from two leading academic presses: Polarized: Making Sense of a Divided America (Princeton) and Polarization: What Everyone Needs to Know (Oxford). What do we need to know? That polarization occurs when one side demands rapid social change and the other refuses to give in? When mass media ignore Biblical objectivity and celebrate subjectivity, that turns opponents into enemies?

Maybe, since few things are new under the sun, history holds some lessons for us. In the 19th century’s worst civil war in the Western world, 600,000 Americans died out of a population of 30 million. In the 20th century’s worst in the Western world, 500,000 Spaniards died out of a population of 25 million: oddly, the same percentage as in the United States. When my family and I visited the battlefield in Shiloh, Tenn., which witnessed the most deaths in a two-day Union-Confederate battle, we went to church near where the fighting began in 1862 and relished hand fans with the slogan, “Moonshine kills.” We need to know that polarization also kills.

Spain’s downward spiral escalated in 1931 when it kicked out King Alfonso XIII. During the next five years Spain became politically polarized, with a far-right and then a far-left government taking turns. On July 19, 1936, 5,000 soldiers marched to Plaça de Catalunya, “Catalonia Square,” the center of Spain’s second-largest city, Barcelona, as part of a military coup. But an odd coalition of Marxists and anarchists overwhelmed the rebels and created the Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias, which ruled Barcelona for the next 30 months and ordered the killing of conservative leaders.

The Spanish left was also successful in Madrid and other large cities, but the Spanish right had strength in the countryside, and a civil war began. It was especially vicious in Catalonia, the area of northeast Spain that periodically tries to declare its independence from the rest of the country: This fall it once again was home to riots. But the war also gave birth to one of my favorite works of journalism, George Orwell’s Homage to Catalonia, and my very favorite novel, José Gironella’s The Cypresses Believe in God.

George Orwell

Orwell wrote in the 1940s his two famous novels, Animal Farm and 1984, but they both grew out of his experience in Barcelona in 1937. He had come to Spain as a socialist idealist and enlisted in a military force under the control of POUM, the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (Workers’ Party of Marxist Unification). Another major power on the left was the Spanish Communist Party, which pledged allegiance to Moscow. After four months on the front lines Orwell journeyed in May to Barcelona’s Hotel Continental for one or two weeks of R&R with his wife.

One morning, though, he woke up to “a fusillade of shots from the Plaza de Cataluña, a hundred or two hundred yards away.” He wondered what to do: “The last thing I wished for was to be mixed up in some meaningless street-fight. To be marching up the street behind red flags inscribed with elevating slogans, and then to be bumped off from an upper window by some total stranger with a sub-machine-gun—that is not my idea of a useful way to die.”

Still, he was a journalist, so he headed south on La Rambla, Barcelona’s main street, to see what was happening. Suddenly, “shots rang out... and a crowd of panic-stricken people was rushing... away from the firing; up and down the street you could hear snap—snap—snap as the shopkeepers slammed the steel shutters over their windows.”

Orwell’s R&R quickly turned to Q: He began asking questions he could not answer. Orwell did not know that Yan Berzin, the Soviet Union’s chief military adviser to the Spanish left, was telling Moscow that POUM members were “scum” who must be “liquidated.” (Yes, they were fellow socialists, but they refused to worship Soviet dictator Josef Stalin.)

Orwell only later heard the screams in the night that changed the thinking of
some socialists. During the May days in Barcelona he heard “devilish noise, echoing from thousands of stone buildings. ... Crack-crack, rattle-rattle, roar—sometimes it died away to a few shots, sometimes it quickened to a deafening fusillade, but it never stopped while daylight lasted, and punctually next dawn it started again.”

Orwell spent three days with a rifle on the roof of a building that housed a movie theater: If 20 or 30 Communist Party–directed “Assault Guards” in the Café Moka across the street began to attack the adjacent POUM headquarters, he was supposed to shoot to kill. (The Moka is still there, but it now caters to tourists.) It turned out that those particular Assault Guards chose not to assault, and Orwell spent much of the time reading Penguin Classics novels, but he had a great vantage point to see the madness of socialists shooting across the street at other socialists.

He also spent several hours in POUM-controlled buildings—the Hotel Rivoli, the Teatro Principal, and the Hotel Falcon. One’s now a hip hotel, one has its doors chained and its walls covered with graffiti, and the third is a library named after Andreu Nin, the POUM leader during those May Days. Orwell and his wife managed to escape from Barcelona just before the Communist Party gained firm control of the city and put out a warrant for Orwell’s arrest. His crime: independent thinking.

That June the Communist Party, now with total power, arrested the POUM’s Nin. Jesús Hernández Tomás, a party member who became Spain’s minister of education, later summarized the torture that came next: “Nin was not giving in. He was resisting until he fainted. His inquisitors were getting impatient. They decided to abandon the dry method to get results. Then the blood flowed, the skin peeled off, muscles torn, physical suffering pushed to the limits of human endurance. Nin was subjected to cruel pain of the most refined tortures. In a few days his face was a shapeless mass of flesh.”

Orwell began to discern that the goal of leaders was not equality but for them to be more equal than others, as the inhabitants of Animal Farm learned. He saw, as 1984 ends, that totalitarian leaders could and would insist that 2+2=5. Orwell did not believe in original sin, but in Barcelona he saw sin in action among socialists who flew similar flags: Compare the POUM and Communist Party banners shown below. That observation changed him. Orwell later said he once believed reporting of communist ruthlessness was capitalist propaganda, but he had learned: “It’s true.”

Barcelona, which changed Orwell, hardly remembers him. The Plaça de George Orwell became, because of rampant drug use there, the first square in Barcelona to sport a 24/7 security camera: Big Brother was watching.
Graffiti dominate a white concrete pillar in the middle of Orwell Plaza. Some old church walls in the city remember the civil war: One in Plaça Felipe Neri shows shrapnel marks of bombs that killed 42 people. Most victims were children who had headed obediently to the church basement and been trapped by the fire.

What has Barcelona learned? The spot at the northern end of La Rambla that was once Communist Party headquarters is now an Apple Store. Chanel, Dior, and other high-end stores are across the street. Capitalism in practice has clearly won, but socialist ideology is still strong: Three of Barcelona’s left-wing parties totaled 60 percent of the vote in May 2019 municipal elections. La Rambla also sports a museum of sex, as does Fifth Avenue in New York City. As the Christian tide has receded, the search for other gods and goddesses has become more intense.

In May 1937, Orwell sensed “an unmistakable and horrible feeling of political rivalry and hatred.” Some of that is still palpable in Spain today. In a nationwide vote on Nov. 11, Spain’s fourth in four years, the country’s governing socialists won 120 seats in the 350-member legislature and are wooing other factions on the left: If successful, they will have a majority coalition. But two parties on the right, PP and Vox, jumped from 90 seats to 140. The big loser was Ciudadanos (Citizens), a moderate group that dropped from 57 seats to 10.

While politicians preened, Barcelona burned. During October riots, protesters demanding that Catalonia gain independence from Spain burned 700 garbage bins and damaged signs and traffic lights. That destruction of property evoked concern among some Spaniards that the fire next time will not merely consume trash: Lives will end in an ideological auto de fe.

But how had Spain gotten to that point? Here’s where my favorite novel, The Cypresses Believe in God, comes in. José Gironella, a Spanish Christian conservative who died in 2003, shows how Spain from 1931 to 1936 polarized to the point where people could “tell from the trademark in a man’s socks where he stands on the mystery of the Incarnation.”

The first half of the novel is warm and humorous. The main character is Ignacio Alvear, who wants to help the poor and had been educated
to think socialism is the way to do it. Ignacio’s father, Matías, leans that way also, but his mother is a devout Catholic. A younger brother, César, is saintly.

Bright family scenes contrast with political shadows, giving flesh to C.S. Lewis’ wise statement in Mere Christianity: “The State exists simply to promote and to protect the ordinary happiness of human beings in this life. A husband and wife chatting over a fire, a couple of friends having a game of darts in a pub, a man reading a book in his own room or digging in his own garden—that is what the State is there for.”

But others think the State is theirs to control, as both hard left and hard right become replacements for Christian faith. Anarchist José says, “You have to wipe out whatever stands in the way of the good of mankind.” Professors blacklist a Christian-oriented academy “because the director has refused to remove the crucifix from the classrooms.”

Early in the novel, saintly César gives free classes to poor children, and sees happiness, but by the midway point “even in the children’s eyes there was evidence of a certain disturbance. Now, as César looked at them carefully, those children frightened him. They were growing and they would absorb all the poison the neighborhood exuded.”

More: “There were moments when he felt like leaving the class, going up into a balcony as though it were a pulpit, and gathering together all the people below—the children, the sick, the barflies, the railroad workers, the gypsies—and talking to them of the Gospel, of the words it contains: ‘Blessed are the...’ But he did not dare. Because life there was like a liquid under pressure which might suddenly explode. The children grew in insolence, the grown-ups demanded justice and new clothes. ... If he did manage to talk, they would think him crazy.”

In 1934, after the left tries a takeover and fails, “the gulf between victors and vanquished was ten times deeper... The vanquished withdrew to their spiritual island, and defeat had united them in a common cause. Triumph had gone to the others’ heads.” The conservatives decided to “do nothing. Everything would go on the same.”

Ignacio has “a foreboding that all of them, together, were approaching a great catastrophe, and for that reason he loved his neighbor more than ever. ... And the Bible! Great heavens! ‘Those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell.’”

But the head of the local Communist party makes a dirty fighter, Murillo, one of the leaders: “Cosme Vila was well aware that a man without scruples would come in handy some day. Naturally, they would have to keep an eye on him. But if he ever washed that raincoat, he’d lose half of his value.”

Vila instructs the comrades: “‘You already know the ultimate goal: the total destruction of the bourgeois setup in the city and the province. The means we will use are those which best fit each case, so nobody is to get upset if we shout viva for something one day and muera the next. We believe that what counts is the future.’ ... Cosme Vila felt equal hatred for the landowners, the military, and the clergy. He felt the same way about the dissident elements” among the revolutionaries. (One of whom became George Orwell.)

Given the differences in technology, Spaniards in 1936 seem like some of our internet lynches mobs: “Feeling rose like a rip-tide ... the air would suddenly be filled with handbills that floated slowly groundward from roofs and housetops. They were anonymous and colored red and yellow with the four bars of blood... A group of men filled to overflowing with anger ... spent their time filling the city with signs. ‘Down with this one, Down with that one’ ... with a skull underneath.”

Some of the flashpoints seem similar to our own. A Christian schoolteacher sexually abuses children. The government decrees no public prayers, and when a priest begins the Lord’s Prayer at a cemetery, “In a flash the policemen had leaped across the three steps ... instantly a concert of shrill whistles broke out on the other side of the wall.” On the rear entrance of a church “someone had written: ‘Long live Me!’”

By 1936 Ignacio sees how “the prevailing atmosphere had addled people’s brains. A great transformation was taking place.” That’s when the anti-fascist revolutionary committees take control, lining up and murdering thousands—first conservatives, then revolutionaries who did not bow to Moscow—as the three-year Spanish Civil War begins.

The English translation of The Cypresses Believe in God, published in 1955, is 997 pages long yet beautifully composed and accelerating in intensity, like the orchestral piece Boléro by Maurice Ravel, who died in 1937. Some of the names of 1930s political movements are different now, yet Spain then is a warning to the United States today: One genteel socialist learns that when a leader “shouts ‘Long live our historic mission!’ you ask yourself how many coffins are going to be needed.”

But this great novel has, along with its relentless theme, a redemptive title: The Cypresses Believe in God. The tall Mediterranean cypress in the ancient world was a symbol of both mourning and God’s sovereignty. Ancient Israelites used cypresses to construct Solomon’s Temple. Their long, thin shape made cypresses, growing and gaining nurture through God’s power, an example of uprightness. Evergreens that grow in Barcelona still suggest the immortality of the soul. ©
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The holiday season is a time for extended family reunions. A huge one came earlier this year for Japanese Americans smiling and embracing in the Holiday Inn lobby here. From the lobby’s leather couch, 90-year-old Bacon Sakatani gazed at the gathering from under bushy gray eyebrows and a Korean War veteran’s cap. His wrinkled skin, stretched over high cheekbones, crinkled with the smile of a thankful grandfather watching his loved ones gather.

Sakatani, though, said the reason for this Heart Mountain Pilgrimage was not a happy one: “We went through an injustice together.” For decades he has spurred efforts to bring Japanese Americans back to where the federal government incarcerated them from 1942 to 1945. Now, for two days each year, about 400 former Japanese American incarcerees and their families and friends gather in northwestern Wyoming to pass on their stories and teach younger generations what resilience looks like.

In 1941, Bacon Sakatani, age 12, hoped to buy a new bike like other boys at school. Sakatani’s parents and four siblings lived on a small rented farm near Los Angeles where they grew cauliflower, cantaloupes, and onions. He vividly remembers Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor and what came next: The FBI arrested Sakatani’s father along with 6,600 other “high risk” Japanese Americans the government suspected could be loyal to the emperor of Japan. Sakatani’s older brother dropped out of high school to run the farm in their father’s absence.

Ten weeks later, on Feb. 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed an executive order authorizing the military removal of Japanese Americans from a West Coast military exclusion zone. The new War Relocation Authority made plans to move 120,000 Japanese Americans to 10 hastily built camps scattered...
throughout the West. Families could only bring what they could carry.

Bacon Sakatani filled his suitcase with clothes, blankets, and a baseball glove. He helped his mother put the family furniture into their landlord’s shed. After a three-month stay at a local detention center, the Sakatani family traveled four days by train to the Heart Mountain Relocation Center, named for the mountain topped with a cardiac-shaped rock.

Other families also arrived. Brothers Sam and Nobuo Mihara, 9 and 10, had lived in San Francisco’s Japantown neighborhood. Sam Mihara remembers his father dragging collections of Japanese films from their basement and burning them: “He kept saying, we can’t have anything Japanese around here.” Norman Mineta, 10, had lived in San Jose, where his parents ran an insurance business. He watched his father cry on Dec. 7 because “he couldn’t understand why the land of his birth was attacking the land of his heart.”

Bacon Sakatani can still recall his camp “address:” Barrack 22, Room E. “We were told to call our rooms ‘apartments.’” Size of the rooms depended on family size. Because the Army had built the entire camp in just 60 days, the buildings were poorly constructed and insulated. Plaster boards separated rooms but didn’t go all the way to the ceiling, leaving little privacy. A potbelly stove, a single lightbulb, and Army cots with two blankets per person furnished the rooms.

The camp had 20 occupied blocks, each with 24 barracks. Each barrack housed six families in six one-room “apartments.” Every half-block had a cafeteria, laundry room, latrines, and a shower room shared by about 250 people.

Days began around 7 a.m. with ringing bells that announced breakfast. Children attended camp schools while adults worked as cooks, janitors, teachers, and nurses. Some worked in the camp’s garment factory or in the vegetable fields.

Used to the temperate Coast, internees had to adjust to Wyoming’s searing summer temperatures and freezing winters. The wildlife was also foreign. Nine-year-old Shigeru “Shig” Yabu, from San Francisco, spent his first day at Heart Mountain exploring the barbed wire fence around the camp’s perimeter. Yabu noticed a bug that he felt sure would be his pet, until it tried to sting him with its tail. He quickly learned to stay clear of scorpions.

After several months, camp guards relaxed the rules, and hundreds of people could leave camp boundaries in their free time to swim in the Shoshone River, hike, or eventually go into nearby Cody to shop. Inside the camp, children played baseball, marbles, and capture the flag. In the winter, adults flooded a rectangular mound with water to make an ice rink. To combat gang formation, camp leaders organized Boy and Girl Scouts and music bands.

While children played, life for adults was stressful. They had left businesses, land, and possessions. Many were bored and hopeless. Life in close quarters was hard on individual family life. Bacon Sakatani remembers the lack of a family dinner table. “The family life broke up at the mess hall.”

Sometimes medical care in the camp was inadequate. Sam and Nobuo Mihara’s father suffered from glaucoma before coming to Heart Mountain: Without any specialist in the camp, he went blind. Their grandfather did not receive proper medical care and died of colon cancer.

But life for most went on, and 550 babies were born in the camp hospital.

Kathy Yuille was one of them. In 1943, her mother walked a mile and a half from her barracks to the camp hospital to give birth. Unlike her older siblings born in San Francisco, Yuille has just one baby picture.

On Dec. 18, 1944, the Supreme Court ruled in Ex parte Endo that the War Relocation Authority had “no authority to subject citizens who are concededly loyal” to military removal. The decision meant the U.S. government could not continue to detain Japanese American citizens not convicted of any crime.

Throughout 1945, Japanese American families left the camps. After living in tightknit communities for nearly three years, heading into the unknown was hard: After the camp, internee suicide rates were twice the national average. Sam and Nobuo Mihara’s parents feared ongoing discrimination against Japanese Americans in San Francisco, so they opened a bookshop in Salt Lake City. It eventually failed, and they returned to San Francisco.

Bacon Sakatani went to Idaho with his family to pick potatoes. When the
Snow came, the family returned to California and lived in an Army tent in their former landlord’s backyard before moving into an old farmhouse. In their absence, their landlord had rented his farmland to someone else, so Sakatani’s father—with no farm equipment and hardly any money—began the process of slowly finding new land to farm.

Shigeru Yabu’s family returned to San Francisco and lived in a condemned church for six months before moving into an apartment with another family. Yabu says it quickly became clear to him that he shouldn’t discuss Heart Mountain. In a high-school English assignment, Yabu wrote about his time at the camp, but the teacher told him she “did not ever” want to hear about it.

Children and grandchildren, though, have pushed their elders to break the silence. Shirley Ann Higuchi’s parents met at Heart Mountain as children, bumped into each other years later at the University of California, Berkeley, fell in love, and married. But all Higuchi heard from her mother was that her parents had met at Heart Mountain and it was “not that bad of a place.”

After her mother died in 2005, Higuchi began digging for answers at the National Archives. She read her parents’ relocation files and learned about her mother’s 14-day hospital stay after a difficult appendix removal. From family members, she learned that in the removal panic her grandparents sold 14 acres of farmland in what is now Silicon Valley, a decision that haunted them until their deaths.

Higuchi also discovered that her mother had sent money to the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation with the dream of purchasing land for a Heart Mountain museum. Higuchi now chairs that foundation. It sponsors the annual Heart Mountain Pilgrimage, opened the long-dreamed-of museum in 2011, and maintains the camp’s building remnants: a hospital boiler house, two hospital buildings, an administrative building, and a guard tower. The foundation is also restoring an original wartime barracks.

After leaving Heart Mountain, Shigeru Yabu served in the Korean War, married, and raised three sons. He spent 28 years directing Boys and Girls Clubs in California. After his grandson’s fourth grade teacher asked him to share his war years’ experience, Yabu started talking about Heart Mountain. In 2007, he published Hello, Maggie!, a children’s book about his pet magpie in the camp.

Norman Mineta entered politics and represented his San Jose district in Congress from 1975 to 1997. He led the successful push for what became the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which gave 100,000 Japanese Americans about $43,000 each (in 2019 dollars). Mineta later served in the cabinets of Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.

Nobuo Mihara opened a Japanese origami shop in San Francisco. Sam Mihara became a rocket engineer at Boeing. At the request of the Department of Justice, he’s spending his retirement traveling the country educating students about the injustice his people suffered.

Sam Mihara never wanted to return to Heart Mountain, but he finally came and saw how the camp’s once dusty, sagebrush-coated grounds are now irrigated fields. In Cody, where Mihara remembered shop window signs warning “No Japs,” he now saw a different message: “Every store window had signs of ‘Welcome Japanese Americans.’ I’ll never forget that.”

Bacon Sakatani fought in the Korean War. Later, he opened a produce market and eventually became a computer programmer. He married, raised three daughters, and now has seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Sakatani says he struggled with anger over the treatment of Japanese Americans later in life. At times, he’s still angry, but the federal government’s apology to Japanese Americans helped: “I could feel it within my own body. … Something happened that made me feel better.” Now, it helps when people see his veteran hat and thank him for his service.

Sakatani says the pilgrimage each year leaves his heart filled with pride for the friends he met at Heart Mountain and for what they overcame: “We rebuilt our lives. We led a good life.”
Politics

From watchdogs to lapdogs?

A NOVEMBER RESIGNATION FROM THE U.S. INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM COMMISSION HIGHLIGHTED CONGRESSIONAL ATTEMPTS TO REGULATE THE PANEL

by Harvest Prude in Washington

A commissioner on the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) resigned in mid-November in protest over what she says were attempts to muzzle the panel.

Commissioner Kristina Arriaga cited a legislative attempt to “undermine the independence of the commissioners” to the point “where I can no longer be an effective advocate for religious freedom,” she told me.

While USCIRF commissioners have at times disagreed on various religious freedom issues, a commissioner resigning over being unable to perform her role effectively is unprecedented. Arriaga said the congressional proposals will “get rid of the qualities that give USCIRF its independence and Special Forces-like nimbleness.”

USCIRF faced a Nov. 21 deadline for congressional reauthorization. Amid Capitol Hill negotiations over continued funding of the commission, some said this year’s legislative proposal would have curtailed the independence that allows USCIRF to be an effective watchdog for religious freedom around the world.

In more than a dozen interviews with former and current USCIRF commissioners, congressional staffers, and religious freedom organization employees, many advocates told me they viewed some of the proposals as attempts to micromanage the commission.

Congress created USCIRF in 1998 to monitor religious freedom and persecution worldwide and offer policy recommendations to the president, the secretary of state, and Congress. Members of both parties of Congress and the president nominate commissioners. While the body has no authority to enforce sanctions, its narrow focus has allowed it to speak unencumbered by economic or national security considerations—factors the State Department has to weigh when compiling its annual religious freedom report.

Lawmakers clashed over the structure, purpose, and future of the commission in the reauthorization processes in 2011 and 2015. This year, congressional negotiators met early in the process with the office of Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., to work out a compromise.

On Sept. 18, Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., along with Sens. Bob Menendez, D-N.J., Cory Gardner, R-Colo., and Chris Coons, D-Del., introduced a stand-alone reauthorization bill providing the commission with $4.5 million for the next four years. In a statement, Durbin said the legislation “includes important reforms to improve the Commission’s accountability and transparency so it can more effectively fulfill its mission.”

But critics said the measure would do more harm than good. USCIRF Chairman and Family Research Council President Tony Perkins said some of the bill’s proposals are “Congress micromanaging this independent agency that they created to be a watchdog for religious freedom. In many
One proposal removes staggered terms for commissioners and gives each commissioner only one, non-renewable three-year term. So all commissioners depart at once, leaving inexperienced members coming on.

Other proposals subject the commission to rules that usually apply to federal government employees or congressional commission employees even though commissioners serve as volunteers. The legislation would require them never to be identified with USCIRF if publicly speaking as private citizens. If someone identifies them as commissioners, they must report that to the Senate or “appropriate congressional committees.”

Another requirement: annual reports to Congress of any foreign travel paid for by someone other than the commissioner, a relative, or the U.S. government.

Another proposal mandates that any commissioner invited to speak in his official capacity must notify all other commissioners and the commission’s executive director. Members could then vote to send a different commissioner. The bill also requires commissioners to keep records of all official communications.

Perkins said he didn’t oppose more accountability, but he thought the proposed changes were onerous: “I’m talking about micromanaging to the point where operating procedures are in the statutes.” Perkins added that negotiators never consulted with any commissioners when they introduced the legislation.

Rubio pulled the bill after an outcry, and neither his nor Durbin’s offices returned requests for comment. (In a Nov. 15 tweet, Rubio said he’d prefer to reauthorize USCIRF with a “simple extension,” but said Democrats were insistent on the controversial changes.)

As WORLD went to press, it appeared likely Congress would fund USCIRF under a continuing resolution, putting these questions off for the next reauthorization.

But Arriaga said the attempt to regulate the commission has been repeated, and she expects lawmakers to try again in the future.

Arriaga, a fiery Cuban American, has been a religious freedom advocate for more than 25 years. She served for seven years as executive director of the Becket law firm, which defended the Little Sisters of the Poor against Obamacare’s mandate to provide contraceptives and abortifacients. In 2016, Speaker of the House Paul Ryan, R-Wis., appointed her to USCIRF and reappointed her in 2018. She served in 2017 and 2018 as vice chairwoman. Her term was set to expire next year.

During her time at USCIRF, Arriaga adopted Pastor Andrew Brunson as a “prisoner of conscience” to bring attention to his case. Her advocacy for Brunson included traveling to Turkey twice, the second time to attend a hearing during his trial.

Arriaga said she believes USCIRF “is doing good things, but it could be doing great things.”

Former USCIRF Commissioner Cliff May, now president of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, shared Arriaga’s concerns. He said some of the recent congressional proposals would bog down the commission, turning it into “another administrative agency” and wasting taxpayer money: “Commissioners have to be independent. They have to be disrupters.”

Faith McDonnell, director of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, worked on the International Religious Freedom Act in 1998 that created the commission. She said the original legislation intended the commission to be independent from Congress.

Extensive reporting requirements “[take] the bones out of the commission.” She added: “These don’t seem to be provisions that make [USCIRF] more effective—they’re provisions that domesticate it and cripple it. Instead of being a lion, it’s a house cat.”

Meanwhile, restriction of religion is on the rise worldwide, according to Pew Research Center, with recent examples grabbing headlines: China’s imprisonment of over 1 million Uighur Muslims, ethnic cleansing against Rohingya Muslims in Burma (also known as Myanmar), systemic persecution of Christians and Yazidis in Iraq, and growing anti-Semitism in Europe.

The USCIRF reauthorization process was not controversial until 2011. That’s when Durbin launched an 11th-hour bid to reform the commission, hours before the funding deadline. Most of the reforms failed, but a key provision became law: term limits for commissioners.

In 2014, Durbin proposed more drastic changes, including making the commission partisan. That would have meant giving the body both Democratic and Republican staffs. Many international religious freedom advocates criticized the move.

“There is no Democratic and Republican view of religious freedom in Saudi Arabia,” former Commissioner Elliott Abrams said at the time.

In 2015, WORLD reported that Durbin’s proposals stemmed from a single legislative aide, Joe Zogby, counsel for the Senate Judiciary Committee. USCIRF falls under the Foreign Relations Committee’s jurisdiction, but in order to get Durbin on board, other offices had to work closely with Zogby.

Zogby’s father, James Zogby, served on the commission at the time—despite business dealings in Saudi Arabia that critics said equated to a conflict of interest. The elder Zogby left in 2017, but his son continues to shape legislation around the commission.

‘Commissioners have to be independent. They have to be disrupters.’ —Cliff May
Activists appear to have two approaches to controlling the narrative concerning transgender athletes’ successes in women’s sports: Attack the critics or keep things hush-hush.

Neither has proven particularly effective at quelling a controversy that needn’t exist, isn’t going away, and really has only one solution.

Rachel (formerly Rhys) McKinnon went on the offensive after defending his 200-meter sprint title in the women’s 35–39 age group at the UCI Masters Track Cycling World Championships in Manchester, England, in late October. After setting a world record during qualifying, McKinnon won the race for the second straight year—by four-tenths of a second, or roughly 15 meters in a race typically decided by centimeters.

In the wake of victory, McKinnon blasted those who decry the unfairness of biological males defeating women: “I have yet to meet a real champion who wants trans women banned,” the 37-year-old Canadian said. “If you win because bigotry got your competition banned...you’re a loser.”

Meanwhile, publicity handlers tried—in vain—to keep June (formerly Jonathan) Eastwood’s transgender status quiet after the Big Sky Conference named the University of Montana cross-country runner its Female Athlete of the Week in late October. Eastwood received the honor after placing second in the women’s race at Santa Clara University’s Bronco Invitational in Sunnyvale, Calif.

In touting Eastwood’s accolade, both the Big Sky and Montana websites failed to mention that Eastwood had competed as a male—with moderate success—as recently as last year. Eastwood’s bio on the Montana women’s cross-country website omits the senior’s prior running experience entirely.

Something similar happened with CeCe (formerly Craig) Telfer of New Hampshire’s Franklin Pierce University after he won the NCAA Division II title in the women’s 400-meter hurdles last spring (see “Built-in advantage,” June 29, 2019). And yet, Eastwood’s transgender status, like Telfer’s, still surfaced—not least because the Missoulian, the newspaper that covers Montana athletics in the university’s home city of Missoula, ran a pre-season profile hailing Eastwood’s history-making turn as the NCAA’s first openly transgender cross-country runner.

While Union Cycliste Internationale, cycling’s international governing body, has a testosterone threshold that biological males cannot exceed if they wish to compete as women, the NCAA has none: The governing body for major-college sports simply requires biologically male athletes to take testosterone-suppressing hormones for at least one year. McKinnon and Eastwood have apparently done enough to comply with the rules of their sports’ respective governing bodies.

Still, science is proving that even after taking testosterone-suppressing hormones, biologically male athletes retain competitive advantages over women: The Journal of Medical Ethics published a study in August stating that biological males do not lose significant muscle mass or power after suppressing their testosterone levels below International Olympic Committee standards. The study also found that biological males who suppress their testosterone levels can retain and rebuild their muscle mass, power, and strength through training.

Some, like McKinnon, say transgender athletes should be able to compete according to their gender identity and without suppressing their testosterone levels. They might counter any arguments about unfairness by pointing to Eastwood’s performance at the Big Sky cross-country championships on Nov. 2: He placed eighth—proof that biological males are not automatically better than biological women in head-to-head competition.

In light of the study’s findings, the only real way to ensure competitive fairness in women’s sports is to keep men out.
Margaret Guth grew up as a missionary kid in Puerto Rico. Her husband, Dennis Guth, grew up on a farm in Klemme, Iowa. They met in high school and married in 1978, a year after Dennis graduated from college. Dennis was quiet and hardworking. Margaret was very relational.

But a few months into their marriage, Margaret remembers crying frequently: “We weren’t connecting emotionally.” She felt increasingly distant from her husband.

Dennis, though, thought things were fine. “I didn’t realize there was a big hole in Margaret’s life,” he says, “and she was looking for a friend. And I wasn’t being that friend.”

Meanwhile, Margaret had failed to anticipate the realities of farm life. Dennis sometimes became frustrated with her mistakes. She failed to stop the tractor when oil leaked into the cabin, and she did not realize she had to look at a pig’s eyes while chasing it. She wasn’t aware of how physically taxing farm work was and thus underestimated how much food Dennis needed. Plus, in Puerto Rico, her mother employed a maid, and Margaret hadn’t learned to cook.

The small differences led to big disagreements. Eventually, Dennis says, “most of our conversations ended up pretty heated and in an argument.”

Eleven years into their marriage, the two were sleeping in different rooms of the house, Dennis downstairs and Margaret upstairs. At that point, Margaret despaired, thinking things would not improve, despite their attempts at counseling.

But in August 1989, the couple attended a friend’s wedding, and Margaret found the beginnings of a solution: “I felt God telling me, ‘It’s going to be OK. I’m going to work a work. Stay with him.’” Without a plan but with new hope, she reconciled with Dennis and moved back downstairs.

After that, the Guths’ relationship gradually improved: Margaret stopped mentioning her need for emotional connection and expecting Dennis to meet it. Instead of getting upset by Dennis’ logical personality and comments, she turned to God in prayer—and saw Him provide opportunities for her and her husband to grow closer.

One such opportunity came in their difficult adoption experience: After having four biological children, the Guths adopted a girl from Brazil. During the seven-year process, Margaret and Dennis realized they could not nurture little Anna until they first learned to support each other.

When Anna and her siblings grew up, their parents experienced another time of growth. Now an empty nester, Dennis decided to run for the Iowa Senate. He did, and won. Margaret acted as his clerk. Seeing him in a different environment showed her his giftings in a new light, she says: His logical mind and problem-solving abilities enabled him to lead confrontational meetings without getting upset when people were critical. As Margaret’s perspective changed, Dennis was also learning to understand his wife: He began giving Margaret hugs when he came in the house and building bonfires for them to make s’mores and relax together in the evening.

After 41 years of marriage, Dennis, 64, and Margaret, 62, say they are still learning to understand and appreciate each other in their differences. But through patience and perseverance, they have seen God work.
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I was born and raised in Hong Kong and came to the United States many years ago. I am saddened by your report, which focused on the protesters’ side of the story. The protest may have started with good cause, but some of the radical rioters now use violence against people of opposite views. Christians should be peacemakers in such a turbulent time.

—THOMAS FONG / San Francisco, Calif.

A new low
[Oct. 26, p. 28] Excellent column. Mindy Belz describes in detail a heartrending turning away from Godmandated compassion for the refugee, and this by conservative Republican leadership, of all amazing things.

—CHRISTINA WILSON on wng.org

Christians should help refugees, but maybe the Trump administration is right that we should help where the problem is, in their home countries, instead of allowing all the good people to flee here.

—JEB RICE / Fishers, Ind.

I’m pro–legal immigration. We need massive immigration reform, but that does not excuse those who break the law to get into the United States.

—MIKE BRICKER on wng.org

Everyone a target
[Oct. 26, p. 6] We Christians often forget to look vertically. We need these reminders and the reasonable, Godfearing voices of Marvin Olasky and Joel Belz (“A better tone,” Oct. 26). Thank you.

—BETTY GRIFFIN / Mallica Hill, N.J.

Mourning over sin in our nation is a Biblical thing to do, but we don’t despair because Jesus has overcome.

—HOLLY MASSIE on Facebook

The avian species that are growing are generally doing so because of careful management practices. Such successes do not cancel out the precipitous declines of so many other species. Canada geese may be doing well, but there are only 300 spoon-billed sandpipers left on the planet.

—ABIGAIL VALINE / Carlton, Minn.

Silence of the sheep
[Oct. 26, p. 42] Imagine if the Apostle Paul or Timothy were forced to sign an NDA or a non-compete agreement. How Machiavellian can a church get? I thought that Jesus is our example in all things; obviously I am wrong when it comes to the church and NDAs.

—TERRY JANSEN / Orland Park, Ill.

The large churches that did not respond to WORLD’s interview request perhaps had NDAs that prevented them from doing so. When a church abandons faith in Jesus and depends on secular tools to survive, it will surely die. And it should.

—BOB CREMER on wng.org

Never a catch
[Oct. 26, p. 64] Marvin Olasky’s column about not playing catch with his dad reminded me of growing up in Chicago’s inner city. My dad never, and I mean never, played anything with my brother or me. My three sons and I played every game we could think of, the rougher the better. Often I would deeply regret not having those memories with my dad.

—ROBERT ERICSON / Loudon, Tenn.

This was one of the most poignant pieces ever in WORLD. Thank you to Olasky for his vulnerability and insight.

—SCOTT BAHR on Facebook

Removing fines allows low-income people to access the library like the rest of us. If you work an erratic schedule, returning books on time can be a struggle and the fines a major problem.

—CHRISTA LEHR on Facebook

The burden of the pioneer
[Oct. 26, p. 63] Andrée Seu Peterson’s column opened my “pioneer” eyes to the very things I’ve been dealing with. I hope we pioneers can stage a comeback using phone calls for personal interaction with our progeny, regardless of what they think.

—DOROTHY BRUNER / Penney Farms, Fla.

Texting is very useful and not as intrusive as a phone call. My family uses
Snapchat a lot; it’s helpful for group chats or coordinating family dinners. Peterson should sign up for Snapchat and send something once a week to her kids.

—REXANN BASSLER on wng.org

The saddest word
[Oct. 26, p. 14] My cheeks are still wet from reading this column, fresh from my daddy’s unexpected death and in anticipation of my second grandson’s birth. I am so grateful for this hopeful reminder. Weeping may remain for a night, but a joyful morning is coming, followed by an eternity of joyful mornings.

—SUSAN HARBAUGH / East Bernard, Texas

Strangers no more
[Oct. 26, p. 58] What a wonderful story about a school custodian given the privilege of befriending and then bringing the gospel to the Hmong. May God bless and multiply his efforts.

—CAROL BLAIR / Gladewater, Texas

Emergence
[Oct. 26, p. 19] Indeed this TV series is well done. No sex, no nudity, and no gore, so how can it be so engrossing? Because the focus is on plot and character.

—NICK PATAPOFF on wng.org

A back-row seat
[Oct. 26, p. 24] This interview was so revealing, not just about class division and lack of contentment but because of Chris Arnade’s acknowledgment that secular solutions do not work.

—JOHN F. WYNN / Lutherville, Md.

Correction
The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services granted an exemption to Miracle Hill Ministries after South Carolina’s Department of Social Services said the Christian group couldn’t use religious criteria in selecting foster parents. The ACLU later filed a lawsuit over Miracle Hill’s declining to work with a same-sex couple (“Surrendering to the state,” Nov. 9, p. 37).

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Looking forward

ANTICIPATION IS IN OUR NATURE, AND OUR MAKER WANTS IT THAT WAY

My father and I have a steady date at the diner on Saturday mornings. One thing I have observed from our booth week after week is that people always look happy when they walk into a restaurant, whereas they look just regular when walking out. I am sure it is the same with me.

The reason is not hard to guess. It is the power of anticipation, in this case, of the enjoyment of the visualized meal and the ceremony of being served by an affable waitress and of conversation with a person whose company one likes.

Built into human nature is a need to have something to look forward to. If we don’t always realize the truth of that proposition, is it not a testimony to the consistency of blessings from God that daily satisfy the need before it has a chance to rear its head?

Our Creator, in His very particular knowledge of our frame, has even thought to arrange these vivifying anticipations in a series of concentric circles, from the banality of three meals a day to alleviate the tedium of work (you wouldn’t think it banal if you had to go without), to the seven-day rhythm of the Sabbath rest, to the longer-term anticipation of a child returning home from college on Christmas break, to the long-long-term anticipation of bouncing a grandchild on your knee.

I have worked in several factories and textile mills, and I can vouch for the fact that the dominant topic in those places is the 15-minute break and lunch break. “When’s my break?” “Did you go on break?” “Twenty more minutes till break!” “Hey, I didn’t get my break!” “Can’t help you now, I’m going on break.”

A young man I know always seems to have a trip he’s looking forward to. Last year it was Iceland, Scotland, the Dominican Republic, and skiing in Colorado. It is obvious to me that he lives for these travels, and that he needs them like a drug to make his life, without a Christian focus, bearable between them.

I have learned a thing or two about the secret of aging well. I know two elderly men, one of whom wakes up in the morning excited about his plans for the day, and the other who has no interests. The former is thriving while the latter is not. We are hard-wired for goals, and the absence of them mitigates shalom.

Even my cat, by all evidence, is imbued with some rudimentary anticipatory apparatus. She knows she gets her canned food treat only in the morning—not a bite in afternoon or evening!—and brays pathetically at my bedroom door when day arrives. Can an animal really lie in its basket in the wee hours and visualize the dollop of pâté-colored mixed-meat products coming to her little bowl? It would appear so.

But for humans it is undisputable. Marriage counselors will tell you how important it is for spouses to go out on dates, ideally once a week. Nothing to look forward to on the weekend may make for a grumpy Mommy on the weekdays. And I feel certain that the poorest woman in the poorest hut in deepest, darkest Africa has contrived some little mental game to make her daily drudgery fly by; perhaps a secret garden of her favorite flowers that she goes to after work.

It is the Master who has made us all this way. He has no interest in us changing this peculiarity about us. He only wishes that anticipation would be fixed on things above, not things below that pass away. Anna and Simeon, by all outward appearances, had nothing going for them. But they ventured daily to the Temple in anticipation of Messiah’s coming, and were not disappointed.

What about us? “Christ... will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (Hebrews 9:28). Say with me this Christmas, “I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning” (Psalm 130:5-6).
Be the solution
PRAYER AND BIBLICAL OBJECTIVITY CAN HELP US RESIST THE MARCH TO DISUNION

Apart from bedtime reading for kids, I've read only one novel three times: José Gironella's The Cypresses Believe in God, published in Spanish and English 65 years ago.

The first two times—1983, 2001—I mourned for Spain, because Cypresses shows a country during the 1930s polarizing to the point where a half-million died. But this time I mourned for America. The past as covered by George Orwell and Gironella (see p. 44) could also be our future.

Is that possible? In September, former Trump aide Steve Bannon told a conservative gathering in St. Louis, “Do you think it’s been unpleasant and nasty to date? You haven’t seen anything. The 2020 campaign will go down as the most vitriolic and nastiest in American history. It’s very simple. We win, we save the country.”

No, we don’t—if we win by escalating anger. Whoever on the left or right wins by that sword will eventually die by it.

Vitriol does not have to poison us. The U.S. has been thoroughly disunited six times before. A rough list of rough times: early 1800s, 1830s, 1860s, 1890s, 1930s, late 1960s. Each time at the brink. Each time a step back. Only one civil war.

We still have another decade or two to stop the craziness, before cultural decay and debt-driven national bankruptcy lead more people to go from fierce words to sticks and stones.

We at WORLD can do one big thing and lots of little things. The big thing: Pray. The little things: Try to make our journalism part of the solution. Take a strong position on an issue when the Bible is clear, but while doing so treat others as opponents, not enemies. When the Bible is unclear on a particular issue, do not claim our own opinions are God's.

You may have already heard our basic themes: Biblical objectivity, not existential subjectivity. Street-level reporting, not suite-level opining. Sensational fact, understated prose. The sky is not falling, because God holds up the sky. Do not ignore the “uns”: the unborn, uneducated, unemployed, unsafe, unchurched, unfashionable. We want such thinking to become habitual among our reporters. Scholar Arthur Brooks once got Barack Obama's jaw to drop when he told him he was a conservative because he cared about the poor.

We also believe in teaching young and old how to become citizen journalists who know how to write and speak with Biblical objectivity. I mentioned in our July 18 issue a possible expansion of our World Journalism Institute. Dozens of readers emailed me expressions of interest, so here are dates for the three new mid-career courses we are planning: July 23-29, 2020, for journalism teachers at Christian schools. Jan. 7-13, 2021, for missionaries who want to write more effectively. July 22-28, 2021, for Christian professors who hope to gain a popular audience. To learn more about our mid-career and college programs, including application procedure, please go to worldji.com.

We think our WJI training works for the benefit of WORLD readers: We now employ full time or part time 45 college and mid-career course grads. But the training also benefits the Christian community generally: Hundreds work for ministries and other nonprofits. More than 100 labor in secular newsrooms, often as a lone Christian voice.

How does all this work financially? The lawyers, business executives, and professors coming to our courses have been paying their own way, but college course students, Christian school-teachers, and missionaries pay no tuition and get free room and board. WORLD pays the salaries of all our staff members who serve as instructors.

Of course, when I say WORLD pays, I really mean that our generous members and donors pay. They've made it possible for us to upgrade our podcast coverage, investigative reporting, and Hope Award programming. Politicians hustle for contributions, but early in the 20th century Joseph Pulitzer laughed at those who placed their hope in presidential elections and did not see who really ruled America: big media such as his New York World. Pulitzer said presidents have four-year terms but the World “goes on year after year.”

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