2018 BOOKS of the YEAR

CALIFORNIA: Carnage and Conflagration

GOOD READING IN SCIENCE, SOCIETY, HISTORY, THEOLOGY

TREND: DISCUSSING DEATH
Join a nationwide community of over 400,000 Christians who enjoy huge savings on their healthcare.

I've always been healthy, so I never expected to be hit with cancer. Medi-Share was there for me—their prayers pulled me through.

José Fernandez

Medi-Share is not health insurance.
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Notes from the CEO

“He comes to make his blessings flow ... Far as the curse is found.”

Far as the curse is found: Have you ever thought how far that is? It’s not just a long way. It’s the throughput and through.

The curse is wide. It extends to every nation, every organization, every government, and every person. It covers nature, society, and culture. It allows the effects of sin to rampage over the landscapes of our lives, like wildfire, leaving desolation in its path. It captures you and me, our spouses, and our children. It captures our friends, neighbors, pastors, and presidents—all overrun by its greedy destruction. In the end, it kills everything.

The curse is deep. It permeates. It seeps into the cracks. It grows roots and makes things rotten to the core. It intertwines itself in our hearts, weaves its way into our motivations, and strangles our loves. It grows thorns and kills fruit.

When we speak, or we eat, or we think, or we work, we must deal with the curse.

That’s not the end of the story. Thank God, His blessings flow: “All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God” (Psalm 98:3b).

His blessing is more powerful than the curse. He will uncurse His creation. He will burn the tares and replant the vineyards. He will stop the burning advance of sin. “He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity” (Psalm 98:9).

“He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness” (Psalm 98:3a). He will restore our loves, purify our motivations, and heal our hearts. Indeed, He has already begun this work.

When we speak, or we eat, or we think, or we work, we will glorify Him and enjoy Him forever.

“Make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD! Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it!” (Psalm 98:6b-7).

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

Kevin Martin
kevin@wng.org
Sizing up our hearts
A GOLDEN RULE SUGGESTION FOR AMERICA'S INTENSE POLITICAL DIVISIONS

For a few hours on the morning of Nov. 7, things seemed remarkably and almost unbelievably tranquil.

“Today,” said Nancy Pelosi, “you have to like being a Democrat.” “Everyone,” said Republican Karl Rove, “gets a ribbon. Everyone leaves with something to brag about.”

Or call it “politics as usual”—but defining “as usual” the way we did 30, 40, or maybe 50 years ago. Back then, we’d just forget the agonies and miseries of the midterm campaign and get on with the nation’s agenda.

It would be nice to think that’s what’s happening now. It would be so refreshing to know that—at least for a few months—we might set aside rancor, acrimony, and bitterness while we join hands in addressing our nation’s needs.

I’ve read at least a dozen columns in various media calling on Americans to study the concept of “civil discourse.” And indeed, a large dose of polite civility on the national political stage is something Christians should work for and pray for. After all, don’t polite and politics come from the same root?

The challenge, however, is enormous. “I don’t want ever—I mean never—to go through another campaign like this,” a visitor to my office after Election Day said. Then he started weeping. And he told me how politics has divided his workplace, his church, and now even his family. “We can’t talk about things the way we used to,” he said. “I remember when it was actually fun.”

But maybe it’s a mistake to paint the past with an overly rosy hue. If we think the midterm campaign of 2018 has been especially ugly and mean-spirited, we should keep in mind that it was not unusual for some of our “statesman” forefathers to use pistols as tools of argumentation. And the pistols were loaded!

Yet neither should we suppose that “civilizing” our society is a simple matter of calming our rude and boorish behavior and conversation. Nor is there any real future in precisely counting my episodes of ugliness, then counting yours, and then—armed with the numbers—definitively announcing who moved first and who responded. Everyone is the champion of rudeness.

In the recent scuffle in the White House press briefing room, for example, the video record is clear that CNN’s Jim Acosta went way beyond presumptive propriety in demanding over-the-quota questions and in attempting to make his own policy speech. But then, President Trump returned the arrogant favor by calling Acosta “an embarrassment” and disabling the reporter’s right to attend future presidential press conferences. On exhibit here was much more than the need for two grown men to get a little further exposure to Amy Vanderbilt’s book on etiquette. Both men knew exactly what they were doing.

So while all this talk about civility certainly includes our culture’s need for better manners, it in fact involves much, much more. Specifically, it involves Jesus’ penetrating teaching in what we call the “Golden Rule”: “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

Do we want to be treated in genuinely warm and civil terms by our political opponents? Then that’s exactly how we need to treat them. Keep in mind that Jesus’ instruction fits in both directions—regardless of our political and ideological alignment. So if you want those opponents to go beyond superficial kindness, try sizing up your own heart. As He did again and again, Jesus speaks to the inner person.

One friend told me he’s not so sure this part of Scripture is meant to apply to something so dark and ugly as politics. But if it doesn’t, what aspect of our sinful nature does it cover?

Either way, let me hear from you with brief, real-life examples of what happened when you applied the Golden Rule to something as wild and woolly as American politics. I’m eager to report back to you in a future issue.

Sizing up our hearts
A GOLDEN RULE SUGGESTION FOR AMERICA’S INTENSE POLITICAL DIVISIONS

Yet neither should we suppose that “civilizing” our society is a simple matter of calming our rude and boorish behavior and conversation. Nor is there any real future in precisely counting my episodes of ugliness, then counting yours, and then—armed with the numbers—definitively announcing who moved first and who responded. Everyone is the champion of rudeness.

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**Florida recount**

Workers at the Broward County Supervisor of Elections office show ballots to Republican and Democratic observers during a hand recount on Nov. 16 in Lauderhill, Fla. The recount confirmed the election-night victories of Republican Rick Scott in the U.S. Senate race and Republican Ron DeSantis in the race for governor.

*WILFREDO LEE/AP*
In 1861 and 1865 war surged to Virginia farmer Wilmer McLean’s front doors. In 2017 and 2018, mass shootings rocked pastor Jim Crews’ communities.

McLean first: After Confederate and Union soldiers fought on his land the initial skirmish of the First Battle of Manassas/Bull Run, McLean moved his family 120 miles south to a safe, out-of-the-way village, Appomattox. Four years later a Confederate messenger knocked on McLean’s door and requested the use of his home for Robert E. Lee’s surrender to U.S. Grant. McLean reportedly said, “The war began in my front yard and ended in my front parlor.”

And Crews: Last year he pastored a church near the Las Vegas killing of 58 country music concertgoers. This year he planted a church in Thousand Oaks, Calif., across the street from the Borderline Bar & Grill. That’s where on Nov. 7 a gunman in a black trenchcoat killed 12 country music fans and then himself.

For more on that tragedy and one of the worst wildfire seasons in California history, please turn to Sophia Lee’s exceptional story about real people on page 44. Newspapers are also supposed to quote only real people, but on Nov. 8 the Houston Chronicle retracted or corrected 72 stories by political reporter Mike Ward, who has resigned. After readers wondered whether some people Ward quoted actually existed, the Chronicle found that 122 he quoted could not be found, even though “in this age of online records, including property ownership and court filings, almost everyone can be found quickly.”

On Nov. 13 CNN sued the Trump administration after Jim Acosta, its White House correspondent, broke the presidential press conference rules (ask a question and a follow-up, then hand back the mic) and ended up in “time out.” On Nov. 14 The New York Times criticized the organization that had replaced it as the nation’s most influential media giant, Facebook. The Times charged that Facebook, criticized for facilitating Russian misinformation and violating data privacy, had decided to “delay, deny, and deflect.” Sounds like what the Times has repeatedly done when accused of rampant bias.

Meanwhile, Campus Reform research into 2017-2018 political contributions found that college professors and administrators in Oregon, Missouri, Texas, and Florida gave 94 to 99 percent of their political contributions to Democratic candidates. Maybe such one-sidedness explains why students at the University of California, Berkeley, on Nov. 15 and 16 were still lambasting Isabella Chow, a courageous member of the university’s student senate.

Chow’s crime: not voting for a resolution condemning the Trump administration’s proposal to define “sex” in federal legislation as biological rather than anything a person decides. In a scene reminiscent of Soviet and Chinese Communism, students one by one had verbally blasted Chow during a large campus meeting. The Daily Californian, the student newspaper instrumental in the battle for campus free speech half a century ago, personally attacked Chow.
and refused to publish her Christian response: You can read it on WORLD’s website at wng.org/isabella.chow.

Sadly, by now we can expect mass killings, big fires, journalistic arrogance, and campus political correctness. The most surprising events of the fortnight—one terrible, one encouraging—occurred on Nov. 10 and 11.

The bad news: On Nov. 11, a white Chicago police officer shot and killed Jemel Roberson, 26, an African-American security guard who was bravely protecting restaurant patrons. Local police Chief Daniel Delaney called Roberson “a brave man who was doing his best to end an active shooter situation.” And now he’s dead, leaving behind a 9-month-old son and another child yet unborn.

The good news: On Nov. 3 Saturday Night Live comic Pete Davidson had said Texas Republican Dan Crenshaw, who lost an eye fighting Islamists in Afghanistan, looks like “a hit man in a porno movie. ... He lost his eye in war, or whatever.” Many conservatives reacted angrily to such mocking. Crenshaw, though, was firm but gracious, and made a surprise appearance on the Nov. 10 SNL. There, Davidson apologized: Crenshaw (elected to Congress on Nov. 6) responded humorously and then spoke of “heroes like Pete’s father,” a firefighter who died on 9/11. The video on YouTube—type in Crenshaw, Davidson, SNL—received 8 million views during the following week.

It’s not as if SNL brought about a new armistice on the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I, but grace like that will help us avoid a second civil war in America. A century and a half ago, following the Confederate surrender, Union army officers grabbed as souvenirs any piece of McLean furniture not tied down. When he protested, they threw money at him. Union cavalry Gen. Phil Sheridan gave McLean gold coins equivalent to $320 today, took the table on which Grant had drafted the surrender document, and told George Armstrong Custer to carry it off on his horse. (The table is now at the Smithsonian.)

McLean later moved to Alexandria, Va., and worked for the Internal Revenue Service.

**BY THE NUMBERS**

|$32 million|
The hammer price at a Nov. 14 Sotheby's auction for a drop-shaped pearl pendant that once belonged to French Queen Marie Antoinette.

|$1,139|
The average cost of obtaining a permit to operate a food truck in Austin, Texas.

|$252,692,000,000|
Federal revenues collected in October, a tax-collection record for that month. The government still ran a $100 billion deficit.

|29.8|
The average age of an American man getting married for the first time in 2018. For American women, the average age is 27.8 years.

|8 hours|
The amount of time a 4-year-old girl spent locked inside an impounded minivan in freezing temperatures overnight in Milwaukee, Wis., before police discovered her.

|230|
The number of reports of contaminated strawberries in Australian grocery stores after a vindictive farm employee allegedly spiked produce with needles.
**Accused**

Seven graduate students are suing Dartmouth College for what they say was more than a decade of sexual assault, harassment, and discrimination by three prominent professors in the psychological and brain sciences department. The suit says the college ignored the behavior of the three men, Todd Heatherton, William Kelley, and Paul Whalen, for more than 16 years. In the lawsuit, the women told stories of being forced into drinking and sex, as the professors said their academic success and future jobs hinged on their cooperation. The suit accuses Dartmouth of improperly handling investigations of the three professors, including two harassment claims made in 2002 against Heatherton.

**Departed**

The Canadian government reported that 2,550 Americans sought asylum in Canada during 2017, a big jump from the 395 Americans who did so in 2016. Canadian officials explained that most of the asylum-seekers were the American-born children of Haitians who had been in the United States under the 2010 Temporary Protected Status program. The Trump administration had sought to end the TPS program, prompting Haitians and their American children to seek entry into Canada. The Canadian government, however, emphasized that asylum in Canada would not necessarily lead to permanent residence in that country.

**Died**

Country music star **Roy Clark**, best known for co-hosting the TV show *Hee Haw*, died on Nov. 15 of complications from pneumonia. Clark, 85, had received one Grammy Award and seven CMA awards during his career and was a member of the Country Music Hall of Fame and the Grand Ole Opry. He played numerous instruments, including guitar, banjo, fiddle, mandolin, and harmonica, and his hit songs included “The Tips of My Fingers” (1963), “Yesterday When I Was Young” (1969), “Come Live With Me” (1973), and “Honeymoon Feeling” (1974).

**Passed**

The first female soldier has passed the Special Forces Assessment and Selection, making her an eligible candidate for the Green Berets. Several women have tried but failed to pass the test since January 2016 when the Department of Defense opened all armed combat positions to females. The successful candidate, unidentified for security reasons, must now pass the Special Forces Qualification Course. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has said the number of women in combat positions is too small currently to make a judgment on their success.

**Restored**

U.S. District Judge Timothy J. Kelly ordered the Trump administration to restore White House press credentials to Jim Acosta, CNN’s chief White House correspondent. The White House had revoked Acosta’s credentials after an argument between President Trump and Acosta during a Nov. 7 press conference, during which Acosta refused to yield the microphone after a heated discussion with Trump. CNN sued the administration, and Kelly ruled that the administration’s actions had violated Fifth Amendment guarantees of due process. The administration plans to write new rules governing press access to the White House that it said would address Kelly’s concerns. “We will end up back in court,” Trump said later, “and we will win.”

**The litigants in a lawsuit against Dartmouth College**

Oscar-winning screenwriter **William Goldman** died on Nov. 16 of complications from colon cancer and pneumonia. His screenwriting credits include *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and *All the President’s Men*. He also turned his novel *The Princess Bride* into a screenplay. His novels included *Marathon Man*, *Magic*, and *The Temple of Gold*, and Goldman considered himself a novelist first and a screenwriter second. Still, filmmaker Aaron Sorkin hailed Goldman as “the dean of American screenwriters.”
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‘I’ll change my name to Amazon Cuomo if that’s what it takes.’
New York Gov. ANDREW CUOMO on the race among cities to be the site of Amazon’s new “HQ2.” Amazon chose to split its new headquarters between New York and the Washington, D.C., suburbs. New York promised Amazon $1.7 billion in incentives.

‘The UAW believed those bids were too high for the cabin construction.’
United Auto Workers spokesman BRIAN ROTHENBERG on the UAW declining to use union labor to build a house for the UAW’s retired president, Dennis Williams.

‘And it would be a short war my friend. The government has nukes.’
U.S. Rep. ERIC SWALWELL, D-Calif., in a Twitter response to a tweet arguing that a Swalwell proposal—which would have the government buy back assault weapons and prosecute anyone who didn’t go along—would lead to “war.”

‘It’s a miracle that there’s not been a tragedy here in nearly 80 years.’
Russian TV correspondent ROMAN ISMUHKHAMETOV on a World War II minefield found by historians in a wooded area near St. Petersburg. The minefield was reportedly created in 1941 to stop invading German tanks.

‘There were multiple men that got on their knees and pretty much blocked all of us... ready to take a bullet for any single one of us.’
TEYLOR WHITTLER, a woman who was in the Borderline Bar & Grill in Thousand Oaks, Calif., on Nov. 7 when a gunman opened fire (see p. 44).
President Macron, does France really believe nationalism is a dangerous and selfish ideology?

I refuse to answer questions that are not in French.
The final chapter?
Tempers flared in the Antarctic in October when one Russian scientist attacked another with a knife. According to a spokesman for Russia’s Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute, the relationship between the two scientists who had been living in close proximity for four years had soured. Both passed time on King George Island by reading. But Sergey Savitsky, 55, allegedly snapped after Oleg Beloguzov, 52, kept telling him the ending to the books he was reading. Beloguzov suffered a chest wound as a result of the stabbing, but the injury was not considered life-threatening.

Driven to extremes
A high-speed police chase in Florida reaching speeds over 140 mph resulted in a fire but not an arrest. The Florida Highway Patrol released footage of the incident, which occurred in April, on Nov. 6. The officer reportedly spotted a Toyota RAV4 speeding on the other side of the highway. The officer made a U-turn in the median and started to chase down the Toyota. According to the Dodge Charger’s speedometer, the officer reached 142 miles per hour while weaving through traffic to catch the speeder, who was driving 20 mph over the speed limit. He pulled the RAV4 driver over onto the center median, where the cruiser’s hot undercarriage sparked a grass fire. The trooper then told the RAV4 driver to leave the scene before a potential explosion.

Hungover layover
An employee at Kansas City International Airport fell asleep on Oct. 27 and awoke to find himself in Chicago. That’s because he had fallen asleep in the cargo hold of a Boeing 737 plane. According to American Airlines, the baggage handler was loading a pressurized and heated cargo hold for American Flight 363. After being found by airport employees in Chicago, the man told police he had too much to drink and fell asleep among the luggage. Police did not arrest the man, and he was flown back to Kansas City.

The Snake crossing
Government officials in Southern Illinois have closed a 2.5-mile stretch of road because of a combination of warm weather and snakes. Officials responsible for maintaining Snake Road in the Shawnee National Forest southeast of Carbondale, Ill., declared that the annual snake migration through the park was taking a bit longer this year. Typically, they close the road to traffic in September and October. Due to unseasonably warm temperatures, officials decided to keep the road closed into November to make certain all the migrating snakes had slithered across. Park officials said that although no vehicles were allowed on Snake Road, pedestrians were more than welcome to test their courage.

Document retrieval
Plans to steal the Magna Carta failed when an American tourist tackled the would-be thief. The incident occurred in Salisbury Cathedral, a church in South West England that houses one of four surviving copies of the 1215 agreement between King John and nobles to limit the power of the crown. According to a cathedral spokesman, a thief pulled the fire alarm in the 760-year-old church on Oct. 25 and then began bashing the safety glass encasing the Magna Carta with a hammer. That’s when Matt Delcambre, a tourist from Little Iberia, La., leapt into action. “I just had to stop him,” Delcambre told The Sun. The Louisiana man tackled the thief and pinned him until security arrived.
Reptilian roommate

While evicting a tenant, a Kansas City landlord stumbled upon an undisclosed extra tenant who is 6 feet tall, weighs 150 pounds, and spent most of his time in the hot tub. The extra tenant was a pet alligator named Catfish. Tenant Sean Casey told The Kansas City Star that Catfish is “a big cuddly lizard” that is “gentle as a puppy.” Nonetheless, Kansas City doesn’t allow pet alligators. When animal control workers later visited the house they also discovered two boa constrictors and a rabbit.

Long overdue

Going through his late mother’s personal effects, Robert Stroud of Shreveport, La., found a curious object: a dusty copy of Spoon River Anthology by Edgar Lee Masters. Inside the book jacket, he found a library card indicating the book belonged to the Shreve Memorial Library. It turned out that Stroud’s mother, Margaret, had checked out the book on April 14, 1934, when she was 11. When Stroud returned the book, the library waived the late fee, a maximum of $3 according to 1934 rules. But Stroud presented the library with a check for $1,542.65 anyway, pointing to the library’s Depression-era 5 cents per day late rule. Library director John Tuggle told the Shreveport Times he hopes the story reminds patrons that “it’s never too late to return an overdue book.”

A gift with a bite

A Fort Worth, Texas, Goodwill employee got quite a scare when looking through a donation bin on Nov. 2. Among the donations in the bin was a large yellow boa constrictor. Believing that someone had pranked the Goodwill store by donating a snake, store employees alerted local media. That’s when Austin Pair of Keller, Texas, stepped forward to claim the snake as his own. Pair said he lost track of the 6-year-old boa constrictor named Toki in May, after which he searched his home thoroughly but unsuccessfully. In October, Pair donated a couch to Goodwill and apparently Toki hitched a ride. After taking care of the animal for the weekend, a store employee returned Toki to Pair whole and healthy.

Among the living

Ryan Meganack of Alaska wasn’t even mostly dead. A U.S. district court sentenced the commercial fisherman, 35, to 15 months in prison after he faked his death in order to avoid a 15-year prison sentence for sexual assault. Meganack reportedly swamped his boat at sea, returned to Alaska on another boat, and hid out while the Coast Guard searched for him. Meganack’s girlfriend, who was in on the scheme, blew his cover when she tried to comfort his parents by telling them he wasn’t really dead. The Coast Guard reportedly spent $384,261 on the search for Meganack.
Chosen and hated

ANTI-SEMITISM IS AN ANCIENT DISEASE THAT WON’T GO AWAY

I don’t understand anti-Semitism, and don’t believe I’m afflicted with it. That’s no credit to me, any more than I should pat myself on the back for not having cancer. Anti-Semitism is a cancer, an inexplicable blot on human consciousness. It’s different from every other prejudice—none are as deeply rooted or pervasive. Many decent, talented individuals harbor the disease, including personal acquaintances. For example:

• Someone I know subscribes to online newsletters that regularly report the supposed nefarious doings of “Zionist agents.”

• Someone else I know believes that today’s so-called “Jews” are actually descended from the Khazars of far-eastern Europe, who appropriated the Biblical heritage of the chosen people and have exploited it ever since.

• Someone else I know always sides with the Palestinians whenever violence breaks out in their region. Whatever happens, Israel is to blame. Those who present a more balanced view are, according to this person, either blindly partisan or sadly ignorant.

The collective fever called anti-Semitism has many facets. It can be racial (They’re an inferior subset of humanity); political (They control the world’s secret levers of power); economic (The banking system is their tool); religious (Christ-killers!); cultural (Who runs Hollywood?)—or any combination.

Now playing, on every continent, history’s longest-running hatred. God Himself is an anti-Semite, according to some.

God shaped them into a people who would bear His mark forever. As such, they would make an outsized impression on the world. How could they not? Those entrusted with the very oracles of God (Romans 3:2) are specially blessed and specially cursed.

The prophesies of Isaiah encapsulate the story from God’s point of view: His wrath and His mercy continually shifting, sometimes in mid-sentence, from righteous judgment to gracious reconciliation. Throughout Isaiah, a personality emerges that a modern-day psychiatrist might label “schizophrenic.” But the repeated reversals capture what we might, in human terms, call God’s dilemma: “The LORD of Hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness” (Isaiah 5:16). He can’t be holy and righteous without judging. And He can’t judge without holiness and righteousness. But, “I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people” (Isaiah 55:2). Every parent with wayward children knows that tortured love. What to do—let them in to wreck the house, or lock them out?

There is a third way: “For unto us a child is born...”

The Jews, as a whole, do not accept their Father’s unexpected solution. Paul, a Hebrew of Hebrews, agonized over their rejection but perceived in it a divine means of opening the way for all nations, as Isaiah predicted. Therefore, Paul warns us Gentiles, don’t be proud or hateful. God will not uncall those He originally called. Anti-Semitism testifies to that very calling.

In his spiritual autobiography, The Great Good Thing, writer Andrew Klavan describes his struggle with history, especially the Holocaust, as the last hurdle of a secular Jew coming to Christ: “The Jews are ‘chosen’ in the sense that God selects them as his doorway back into the world after the separation of the Fall. As such, they represent all people everywhere, a microcosm of what we are like in relationship to God.” All Christ-killers, all connivers, all contenders, but none forgotten.

God will gather His own, Jew and Gentile alike, in Christ. And “all Israel will be saved.”

flawed man wrestled with an unknown adversary on a riverbank and received a new name: Israel, or He-struggles-with-God. The story theme emerged: Israel struggled, God contended—and vice versa. Wrestling His people every step of the way, the Lord taught them, corrected them, restrained them, delivered them, delighted in them, grieved over them, and shaped them into a people who would bear His mark forever. As such, they would make an outsized impression on the world. How could they not? Those entrusted with the very oracles of God (Romans 3:2) are specially blessed and specially cursed.
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It’s a curious thing about the latest Harry Potter–related movie, Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald—until the last 15 minutes, the eponymous character hasn’t committed much in the way of crimes. The story’s big plot twists that have Potter allies running around the internet begging people not to reveal spoilers have nothing to do with Grindelwald’s crimes either. Come to think of it, we’re never particularly clear on what Grindelwald’s heinous crimes were from the first movie that landed him at the very top of the Most Dangerous Dark Wizards of All Time list in the second one. But the fact that his so-called “silver” tongue has been cut out seems to offer a clue.

In some ways, The Crimes of Grindelwald (rated PG-13 for a half-clad statue and scary action) is the perfect big-budget fantasy movie for our thought-policing times. For while we’re to take it on faith that Gellert Grindelwald (Johnny Depp) will commit some horrendous acts in the future, mostly all he has done to land himself in the maximum security Ministry of Magic cell we find him in at the beginning of this story is a bit of Auror impersonating. Oh, and he’s given some speeches.

Speeches so dangerous, they alone appear to be the main threat he poses. Even the ostensibly freethinking Albus Dumbledore (Jude Law) agrees that the best way to combat the persuasive powers of his childhood friend is physical defeat and suppression as opposed to more and better-reasoned speech.

To be fair, there are some vestiges of classically liberal thought in Dumbledore’s caution to the Ministry of Magic that to treat Grindelwald’s followers too harshly is to drive them toward his...
extremism. But the notion that the simple-minded masses must be protected by their betters from rhetoric they lack the intellectual capacity to sift is nearly as offensive as the idea that wizards have a natural right to rule Muggles “for the greater good.” Certainly the premise that one becomes the greatest threat to the wizarding world primarily on the basis of words is. If cutting out tongues to prevent them uttering things we don’t like is the standard, exactly who are the bigger villains here?

As to the quality of the movie beyond this troubling theme, it’s revealing that a bad guy with an outlandish blond hairdo and a predilection for holding rallies isn’t getting more love on the Rotten Tomatoes meter.

It’s not that the movie fails on all levels. Rowling and director David Yates, along with their likable cast, are too talented for that. There are still witty parallels between the wizarding reality and ours, and though he’s criminally underused, Dan Fogler as Muggle baker Jacob Kowalski never fails to get a chuckle whenever he’s on screen. The big sell of the Harry Potterverse—world-building—is present as well and taken to new, gorgeous heights. If we got to ooh and ahh at a 1920s American Flapper version of Harry Potter in the last movie, in this one we get delightful parallels between the wizarding reality and ours, and though he’s criminally underused, Dan Fogler as Muggle baker Jacob Kowalski never fails to get a chuckle whenever he’s on screen. The big sell of the Harry Potterverse—world-building—is present as well and taken to new, gorgeous heights. If we got to ooh and ahh at a 1920s American Flapper version of Harry Potter in the last movie, in this one we get delightful visions of a Parisian Art Deco variety.

But on one significant level it fails spectacularly: plot. While I’d be the first to cheer the fact that Crimes of Grindelwald drops the Puritan-bashing of the previous film, it goes one step further and drops everything else along with it. Like a low-rent soap opera, characters we saw die are miraculously resurrected with little explanation. Others whose histories are well-established are suddenly rewritten to accommodate additions that cannot conceivably fit into previous timelines. Our protagonists run from one place to another with almost no rhyme, reason, or clear purpose. Worst of all is that everything that occurs for a good hour and a half of the two-hour runtime turns out not to have mattered much at all.

What we’re left with is a pretty parable that whispers to the young that it is sometimes right to silence bad ideas by force. I combat it not by confronting Rowling and Yates in the street and demanding they not be allowed to make films but by coming here to tell you about it.

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**BOX OFFICE TOP 10**

For the Weekend of Nov. 16-18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Film</th>
<th>Studio/S...</th>
<th>Gross (Million)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fantastic Beasts/ Crimes of Grindelwald</td>
<td>ROADSHOW FILMS</td>
<td>342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dr. Seuss’ The Grinch</td>
<td>ROADSHOW FILMS</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bohemian Rhapsody</td>
<td>ROADSHOW FILMS</td>
<td>143</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Instant Family</td>
<td>ROADSHOW FILMS</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Widows</td>
<td>ROADSHOW FILMS</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The Nutcracker and the Four Realms</td>
<td>ROADSHOW FILMS</td>
<td>710</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>A Star is Born</td>
<td>ROADSHOW FILMS</td>
<td>740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Overlord</td>
<td>ROADSHOW FILMS</td>
<td>397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The Girl in the Spider’s Web</td>
<td>ROADSHOW FILMS</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Burn the Stage</td>
<td>ROADSHOW FILMS</td>
<td>Not Rated</td>
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*Reviewed by WORLD*

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**Oddball**

The 2015 Australian film Oddball, based on actual events, is a traditional family dog flick that is streaming on Amazon and that the whole family can enjoy during the holidays.

Squirrely sheepdog Oddball is more interested in causing trouble than guarding chickens, even though it’s what he’s bred for. His mom is the right-hand hound of chicken farmer Swampy Marsh. Without her, Swampy wouldn’t be able to keep foxes from killing his precious merchandise. Unfortunately, Oddball is not up to defending fowl, and he isn’t particularly popular with Swampy’s neighbors. But that’s before foxes start wiping out the fairy penguin population on the nearby Middle Island preserve. Swampy hits on the idea that if Oddball’s breed can protect chickens, why not penguins?

Unfortunately, the real Oddball died last year. But only after he lived a happy 14 years protecting birds, launching an unprecedented conservation project, and making a name for himself on the big screen.

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**Oddball**

One possible concern: the movie’s opening scene involving Swampy’s daughter’s budding relationship with an American played by Alan Tudyk. He’s at her house, and she apologizes for their first morning together being a mess. It’s an ambiguous scene, but there’s nothing to indicate he spent the night.

On the very positive side, Oddball offers some splendid real-world education on the amazing instincts God gives his creatures and the ingenious ways we’re able to use them. The real Maremma initiative Oddball started was a stunning success. Not one Middle Island penguin was lost to fox attack after he and his fellow Maremmas started guarding them.

Sadly, the real Oddball died last year. But only after he lived a happy 14 years protecting birds, launching an unprecedented conservation project, and making a name for himself on the big screen.

—by MEGAN BASHAM
**Movie**

**Beautiful Boy**

Beautiful Boy is difficult to watch. It hurts on many levels. Based on the dual memoirs of David Sheff and his son, Nic, the film despairs that a drug addict can ever kick his habit. Nic gets clean for a while, but again and again chooses to shoot up with crystal meth. As surely as highs crash, so too recoveries collapse, the film seems to say.

Many former users might disagree, but Christians can respect the Sheffs’ perspective. The Bible teaches that our battle with the flesh lasts a lifetime. Eventually victorious or not, for many nonbelieving and believing viewers, Beautiful Boy tells their story. Drug addiction is rampant, and families like the Sheffs suffer for one person’s choices. The film ends with the mind-blowing statistic that drug overdose is now the leading cause of death for Americans under age 50.

Parents will agonize together and shared a bond with Nic (Timothée Chalamet): They surfed the streets searching, then lifting his beautiful, broken boy out of trash-strewn alleys into his car.

But the film doesn’t search beyond the temporal, and that’s what makes it so painful to watch. If humans are merely the sum of chemical processes, why not tweak (i.e., use crystal meth), drug, and be merry? Perhaps, though, David’s inscrutable love for his son points to a heavenly Father who’s full of compassion for His broken children.—by BOB BROWN

**Television**

**Homecoming**

If you’re an Amazon Prime customer, you’ve seen a lot of hype for Homecoming, a new series of 10 half-hour episodes released in early November. Critics love the show. Should you watch too?

Julia Roberts stars as Heidi Bergman, the head of a transition center, helping veterans whose combat memories make normal life difficult. Despite thin credentials, Heidi runs the isolated campus as its primary counselor. One patient, Walter Cruz (Stevan James), recalls every detail of the death of one of his men and blames himself for his friend’s demise.

Heidi’s cell phone is a constant connection to her off-site boss Colin Belfast (Bobby Cannavale), a controlling, malevolent force with a surface charm. Heidi drops everything, including connections to family and friends, whenever he calls, mostly to berate or chastise her about what a poor job she is doing.

The Homecoming facility is a private venture, run by a mysterious corporation named Geist. Are the patients truly volunteers, or are they prisoners undergoing experimental treatments? Walter’s mother does not trust this strange program, and she sleuths her way to the undisclosed location. Her maternal instincts tell her something is not right, but she can’t convince her son to leave.

The storyline bounces back and forth between events at the Homecoming center and four years later. Future Heidi is a waitress back in her hometown, and she has almost no memory of her years at Homecoming, except a vague feeling that things ended poorly. When Thomas Carrasco from the Department of Defense (Shea Whigham) begins investigating what happened to Heidi and her patients, her unease heightens.

Bumbling and endearing, Carrasco doggedly pursues the case. He wins the trust of Walter’s mother, and the pieces start to fall into place.

Slow buildup, beautiful cinematography, and frequent profanity, some depictions of adultery, and blasphemous language mar the experience, making Homecoming a difficult series to recommend. —by MARTY VANDRIEL

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Rachman’s doesn’t need much introduction because these days its message is standard, and it might be true: Asia (and particularly China) up, the West receding. Minzner’s is a minority report about “eye-popping contradictions for the vanguard of the proletariat,” with 160 of China’s wealthiest in the Communist Party Congress, or the national legislature, and their total worth—about $221 billion—20 times greater than the total worth of the 660 top officials in the U.S. government.

Minzner notes a surge in Chinese debt and a “potentially dramatic slowdown in economic growth.” He notes that early in this century “a generation of crusading and muckraking journalists arose,” but Xi Jinping has cracked down while simultaneously becoming known as “Papa Xi,” as Stalin was known as “Uncle Joe.” Minzner describes “the closing of the Chinese dream,” as colleges admit urban youth with expensive private tutors and freeze out rural or migrant students who have “spent winters shivering in an unheated, dilapidated classroom.”

As journalists report less, poor workers protest more. “Direct action” includes “blocking roads and construction projects, or mobilizing hundreds of supporters to encircle government buildings and engage in defiant, face-to-face negotiations with officials.” Furthermore, thanks to the finally (and belatedly) abrogated one-child policy, “China is now graying more rapidly than any other major economy in history.”

Princeton University Press has out an enjoyable way to absorb two key books of traditional Chinese thinking that President Xi Jinping has popularized again: *The Analects of Confucius* and *The Art of War* by Sunzi, both playfully illustrated by C.C. Tsai. Some wisdom from the former: “If a gentleman is deferential and cautious, if he treats others with respect and propriety, then everyone will consider him his brother.” Some advice of the latter: “A commander who has to win at any cost is likely to be cut down by the enemy. ... A commander with an explosive temper who is easily angered is likely to be moved by enemy insults.”

Andrzej Franaszek and Aleksandra Parker’s *Milosz: A Biography* (Harvard University Press, 2017) is heavy going concerning the Polish poet who outlived Nazism and Communism, but Milosz deserves praise both for bravery and for flipping atheist bias in this lapidary line: “A true opium of the people is a belief in nothingness after death—the huge solace of thinking that our betrayals, greed, cowardice, murders are not going to be judged.” Real solace comes from believing in life after death, with a righteous and compassionate Judge.
Science fiction novels
reviewed by John Ottinger III

A PRINTER’S CHOICE  W.L. Patenaude
When Father John McClellan, an artificial intelligence expert and retired marine, investigates the murder of a covert Dominican priest on a vast space station that tries to ban faith, he does his job while shepherding the hidden faithful. McClellan’s gentle guidance focuses the fast-paced mystery: He is a strong-willed soldier for Christ whose deep well of compassion flows from a love of Jesus. Patenaude has accomplished a rarity: a science fiction story of faith that neither descends into the saccharine nor limits the power of faith in a science-driven world.

BALL LIGHTNING  Cixin Liu
Chinese author Liu’s near-future story of an obsessed scientist is both a cautionary tale and a celebration of science’s power to reshape knowledge. When Chen’s parents are turned to ash by ball lightning, he becomes consumed with discovering the weather phenomenon’s cause. Imitating Robinson Crusoe’s confessional style, Chen relates his own musings on science in his single-minded pursuit of truth. In this story, science consumes lives. Even as its successes bring fleeting happiness, science can through failure expand our understanding of the universe. Liu’s riveting novel reminds us of the dangers and rewards of the all-too-human need to know.

LEGION: THE MANY LIVES OF STEPHEN LEEDS  Brandon Sanderson
Stephen Leeds solves cases of corporate espionage. He also sees people who are not there, each a representation of knowledge or a skill set buried deep in Leeds’ subconscious. His hallucinations make him the best problem-solver in the business, but they are also his greatest weakness. In this three-novella set, Sanderson’s mind-bending near-future thriller attracts readers with its relatable, misunderstood middle-manager hero, then keeps them engaged with madcap action, hilarious dialogue, and the ever-present danger of descending madness. This witty and thought-provoking story is a wonderful cross between buddy comedy and the movie Inception.

SALVATION  Peter F. Hamilton
Hamilton is a master at creating realistic future societies. In 2204, an investigative team tries to discover where an alien ship (discovered on a new planet) came from and what it means for humankind. Hamilton’s tense novel alternates various storylines: the investigative team’s intertwined mercenaries’ histories, corporate espionage, failed relationships, an advanced technology, a secretive alien race hidden in plain sight, and the strange far future. The reader will wonder how all the different pieces connect in this first volume of a promising series. (Cautions: sexual references and profanity)

AFTERWORD
Warhammer 40,000 and Warhammer Age of Sigmar, two popular tabletop role-playing games, bear the tagline “In the grim darkness of the far future there is only war.” These spawned the subgenre of science fiction and fantasy known as “grimdark.” The tone, style, and setting of grimdark are particularly gruesome, depraved, and violent. Characters embrace their baser natures, heroes are often false or self-deceiving, and most forces are malevolent.

It was surprising, then, when publisher Black Library announced it would publish a grimdark series for readers ages 8-12, beginning in February 2019. Warhammer Adventures are age-appropriate books (based on my reading of pre-released chapters) written by experienced writers, but they are still an introduction to a world of stories that prides itself on the inclusion of sex, violence, and profanity. Parents and young readers should approach them with caution. —J.O.
Proceed with caution

NEW NOVELS BOOKSELLERS ARE PROMOTING TO TEENS reviewed by Lynde Langdon

A MAP OF DAYS Ransom Riggs

The story of Miss Peregrine’s Peculiar Children continues as Jacob Portman heads home to try to make things work with his parents. But his tutor and her pupils with powers quickly re-recruit him. Jacob grows bored with Miss Peregrine’s assignments and decides to take matters into his own hands. But things would have gone much better if he had just trusted Miss Peregrine in the first place. The other peculiar children raise thoughtful questions about teenage obsessions with fashion and electronics, but that is the only redeeming theme in a book that recycles every tired trope in young adult fantasy and science fiction. (Ages 13 and up)

THE LADY’S GUIDE TO PETTICOATS AND PIRACY Mackenzi Lee

Sixteen-year-old Felicity Montague wants to become a doctor despite the profession’s prejudice against women in the 1700s. Her quest to land an apprenticeship with a famous physician takes her on a cross-continental, swashbuckling adventure. Like Felicity, the book (a sequel to The Gentleman’s Guide to Vice and Virtue) suffers from an identity crisis, taking turns as a coming-of-age tale, an LGBT love story, a treatise on women’s rights, and a quest for dragons. It’s really a wolf in sheep’s clothing, marketed as historical fiction but breaking all the moral norms of the period in which it is set. (Ages 16 and up)

DEAR EVAN HANSEN Val Emmich

Anxiety-ridden high-school senior Evan Hansen writes himself a motivational letter every morning. One of his missives falls into the wrong hands and causes a case of mistaken identity that catapults Evan to popularity. His dreams start to come true, but he risks losing everything if his peers find out the truth about the letter. Based on the Tony Award–winning musical of the same name, the novel is intended for older teens and includes discussion of suicide, sexual confusion, and sneaking around behind parents’ backs. But it also defines a clear line between the healthy and unhealthy ways teens handle loneliness and isolation. (Ages 16 and up)

CRUSH Svetlana Chmakova

The Berrybrook Middle School gang is back in Crush, Chmakova’s third graphic novel in this series. Jorge is a big dude with a bigger heart who mentors his schoolmates as they figure out which friends are worth fighting for and which ones aren’t worth the time. Though the plot centers on Jorge’s first crush, the book studies the challenges of adolescent relationships. Too bad Chmakova doesn’t reveal anything about Jorge’s family or where he got his morals and maturity. Still, the strong emphasis on right and wrong combined with a fun, diverse cast of characters make this the best Berrybrook story yet. Note: A character is in a same-sex marriage. (Ages 12 and up)

AFTERWORD

In The War Outside (Little, Brown, 2018) Monica Hesse weaves a story about life inside a family internment camp during World War II. Haruko, a Japanese-American teenage girl, is drawn to Margot, the German-American daughter of a suspected Nazi sympathizer. Margot helps Haruko adjust to the oddities of camp life—there are free movies on the weekends but no plumbing in the homes—and Haruko gives Margot something she’s never had, a true friend. In each other’s company, the girls almost forget the injustice of their imprisonment—almost.

The camp in Crystal City, Texas, really existed, and the questions the story raises about immigration and culture are timely in today’s political climate. At one point, the author implies the heroines might have crossed the line into same-sex attraction, but the strength of their bond ultimately comes from their sisterly commitment to one another, no matter what the cost. —L.L.
"Do not try to make the Bible relevant. Its relevance is axiomatic. Do not defend God’s word, but testify to it. Trust to the Word. It is a ship loaded to the very limits of its capacity."

-Distich Bonhoeffer

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Ann Gauger received her bachelor’s degree from MIT, did a postdoc at Harvard University, and received her Ph.D. from the University of Washington’s department of zoology. Her scientific writing has appeared in Nature, the Journal of Biological Chemistry, and other scientific publications. These establishment credentials are helpful because she’s also involved with the Discovery Institute, the world leader in developing and explaining intelligent design theory, which many establishment scientists despise. Here are edited excerpts of our interview.

How did your professors react when you became involved with Discovery? “She used to be smart.”

But defenders of Darwin do admit that life appears to have been designed. Richard Dawkins says biologists have to constantly remind themselves that life is evolved.

I used to work at DuPont, the inventor in the 1930s of nylon—and 40 years later scientists found a bacterium with an enzyme dubbed nylonase that was able to digest nylon, which is a synthetic chemical not found in nature. Evolutionists use that as proof that new proteins can rapidly evolve, but you found a different story. It wasn’t what we call a frameshift mutation, a DNA deletion or insertion that shifts the whole way a sequence is read. I discovered a whole body of literature by some Japanese workers who had found pre-existing protein folds. There was no new protein, no novel protein fold, no new mutation.

And now you’re undermining what we’ve seen frequently reported in newspapers and magazines: that a special creation of Adam and Eve, one couple from whom all of us are descended, could not have happened. Most of my scientific career seems to be involving people asking me questions and then I start down a path. In this case, a philosopher asked me how strong was the genetic evidence against Adam, because everywhere it’s been proclaimed we had to come from a population of 10,000. It’s led to people in the church suggesting there is no such thing as a historical Adam. So when the philosopher asked me, I said, “I don’t know. I’ll go look.” I started with a paper that Francisco Ayala, a very famous evolutionary biologist, wrote to disprove the possibility of a first pair.

I understand that part of the detective work involves mitochondria, the tiny power plants within a cell that nonscientists like me became conscious of when we began hearing about “mitochondrial Eve.” We inherit mitochondria mother to daughter, mother to daughter. Some scientists in the 1980s sequenced mitochondria from people from all around the world, and then came up with a map showing the pathway of sequence descent and tracing it back to a single sequence, one woman in Africa. Everybody said, “Look: mitochondrial Eve.” Ayala didn’t like that idea. He did some calculations and concluded there were too many variants to pass through Adam and Eve.

Seemed like a solid argument? Yes, but I kept looking and found two papers a few years later suggesting that the number of variants was much smaller. So I’m working on an alternative population genetics model that doesn’t depend on evolutionary assumptions.

The Templeton Foundation, a very well-funded group based in Philadelphia, gave Ayala its big award and so forth. Has it given you an award? Of course not. I don’t even know if he’s issued a retraction of his paper, even though it was mainstream scientists who demonstrated he was wrong.

I suspect many of the Patrick Henry College students here have heard that man’s evolutionary path is pretty obvious since 95-99 percent of our DNA is the same as that of chimps, thus proving evolution. But doesn’t that show similarity, not descent? That two things look alike doesn’t mean they came from a common origin. Also, the fossil record shows a gap between apelike creatures and humanlike creatures.

No one’s found the missing links. They have things they attribute to being intermediate, but it’s usually just a jawbone or a piece of skull—and that’s a lot of weight to put on one piece of bone. Gaps can be filled, but mathematical analysis shows you can’t get specific mutations in the number you need in order to have that transition take place. Mathematicians from Cornell asked how hard it is to get a binding site in the DNA.

That’s a place where the combining of chemical substances can take place? Yes, a place requiring only one mutation: How long would it take? The answer: 60,000 years for a mutation to arise, 6 million years for it to become general in the population, to go from an apelike ancestor to us. That’s just one mutation. If you need two coordinated mutations, it takes 216 million years.

The idea is that you have to have these mutations coordinated and...
appearing simultaneously in the same individual? Yes. Another group from Harvard looked at *Homo erectus* from 2 million years ago and Lucy—*Australopithecus*—from 3 million years ago. How many changes would you have to make to the skeleton to enable *Homo erectus* to run? Minimum estimate is 16. If you don’t have enough time to get one or two mutations, how will you get 16? And 16 mutations is an absurdly low estimate for how many mutations it would take to get spine, pelvis, legs, feet, rib cage, skull all changed, etc.

You’re skeptical about some fossil finds? Paleontologists know fossils that are transitional between groups can make a career. There is a desire to release the news with the most fanfare and public exposure possible. That happens with declarations in *Time* magazine: the latest breakthrough ... first example of the ability to walk upright ... Lucy, she’s bipedal. Then, a few years later, comes careful reconsideration. Other paleontologists examine the remains, and they say, “Lucy could have been on all four. She has long arms, looks like she could knuckle walk, swing through the trees. Maybe she didn’t walk upright.”

Paleontologists in 1974 discovered the fragments they say made up Lucy about 3 million years ago: small brain plus legs that theoretically could have been for walking. Here’s a joke: They looked at her fossil skeleton to see if they could determine a cause of death. Do you know how she died? She fell from a tree.

You face strong opposition from BioLogos, an organization that receives funding from the Templeton Foundation and others to push into churches what’s called “theistic evolution.” BioLogos has a firm statement of faith on its website: There never could have been a historical Adam, or a first pair. But with evidence that there could have been, BioLogos may have to revise its statement and all of the things it’s taught to churches.

What motivates the scientific establishment to defend its assumptions of common descent? Most scientists are blind to their own assumptions. They don’t even consider that there might be another explanation. For them, common descent is an automatic. It’s a given.

Some of your writing is in a big white book, *Theistic Evolution*, that’s a great resource for people who are being propagandized to accept Darwinism. We call the book the great white whale. It’s a comprehensive scientific, philosophical, and theological critique of theistic evolution.

Where else can people go for information? EvolutionNews.org every day has new content about intelligent design.

And WORLD’s website, wng.org, has a weekly roundup, Beginnings, that reports on science and intelligent design.
One sign that gift-giving season has arrived is the release of critically acclaimed rock ‘n’ roll albums in boxed, freshly remastered, multidisc editions tantalizingly marketed as the best-ever way to experience the music contained therein. It’s an impression cemented by the enthusiastic reviews that inevitably flood the relevant publications and that get collated into verbal highlight reels for the pack-ages’ Wikipedia entries.

What almost no one will admit is that often much of the material in these box sets tends to be either inferior to what has long been available on the “official” versions or redundant, and that after you’ve plowed through all of the alternate versions, rehearsal takes, and other arcane offerings once, you may never want to hear them again.

Buyer’s remorse has been known to ensue.

The compilers of the Super Deluxe Editions of John Lennon’s Imagine: The Ultimate Collection (Capitol) and the Kinks’ The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society (Sanctuary/BMG) (in commemoration of the latter’s 50th anniversary) have taken this phenomenon into account and made slimmed-down, wallet-friendlier versions of their respective projects available.

In the case of Imagine, the decision was wise. With the exception of its head-in-the-clouds title track, the album still retains its political, personal, and/or philosophical acuity despite the 47 years that have elapsed since its initial unveiling. The six-disc Super Deluxe Edition’s multiple takes, incomplete versions, and alternate mixes (which only make you say, “Why, yes, that one does sound a bit different”) water down the effect.

Imagine’s effect is worth experiencing at full strength. The song “How?,” for instance, could pass for a pop-level distillation of G.K. Chesterton’s oft-quoted statement about the uselessness of the word progress (“Progress takes for granted an already defined direction: and it is exactly about the direction that we disagree”).

And both the two-disc and the single-disc editions of the “ultimate” Imagine include among their “singles and extras” the song “God Save Us” (aka “God Save Oz”). From its playful musicality to its invocation of a Deity with whom Lennon was known at least briefly to be friendly, the song makes imagining there’s no heaven seem dull by comparison.

The single- and double-disc editions of The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society, on the other hand, don’t so much preserve and refurbish the original’s unique charms as whet the appetite for more. It’s an appetite that the Super Deluxe configuration’s five CDs, three LPs, three 7-inch singles, one 52-page book, and assorted swag succeed in appeasing.

About those unique charms: In the wake of the Kinks’ having gotten themselves banned from the United States after their first stateside tour in 1965, Ray Davies doubled down on his Englishness, writing songs based in part on his memories of the people and the places that he’d known and loved (or at least closely observed) while growing up.

Recording began in 1966 and ended 23 months later.

The lyrics were specific and sharp, funny and sad (sometimes in the same line), the music rollicking, the melodies indelible. No two songs sound alike, yet each enriches the others. And, as the Super Deluxe box attests, there was more material where those came from.

Strictly speaking, some of it falls outside Village Green’s chronological parameters (“Where Did My Spring Go?” and “When I Turn Off the Living Room Light,” for instance, were both recorded in 1969, the previously unreleased “Time Song” in 1973). And, of course, there’s surfeit.

But it’s really wonderful surfeit.
SHE REMEMBERS EVERYTHING (DELUXE EDITION) Rosanne Cash

On this album’s second song, Cash commits herself to doing what she does best: exploring “the undiscovered country between a woman and a man.” Not that it’s her only terrain. “8 Gods of Harlem” addresses (with help from Kris Kristofferson and Elvis Costello) disquiet on the inner-city front, and the title song finds her (with help from Sam Phillips) exploring the undiscovered country within herself. But the male-female vortex keeps drawing her back, as do Americana musical settings that throw her melodies into evocatively shadowy relief.

HEARTS OF GLASS Beth Nielsen Chapman

Chapman’s lyrics are so forthright, her chord progressions so inevitable, and her singer-songwriterly voice and instrumentation so unassuming that it’s easy to miss the telling details—her rhyming “diving headlong off the overpass” with the album’s title in “Epitaph for Love” or the sandwiching of the abusive-marriage sketch “Rage on Rage” (one of several rerecordings) between the bouncy “Enough for Me” and the sweet “You’re Still My Valentine.” Then there’s the ghostly coda that stands athwart her maudlin-bound Alzheimer’s song, whispering “Stop.” It’s stunning.

LOOK NOW (DELUXE EDITION) Elvis Costello & the Imposters

Twenty years after his Burt Bacharach collaboration Painted from Memory, Costello reignites the torch that he’s obviously still carrying for his nonagenarian hero. Bacharach co-wrote only three of these songs, but all of them (with the exception of the Costello/Carole King outlier) bear traces of his sense and sensibility. Still, the album belongs to Costello, who hasn’t corralled this many instantly memorable melodies or—maybe because the lyrics rank among his (or Bacharach’s or King’s) most natural and sympathetic—sung this naturally or sympathetically in years.

BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY Queen

Although “We Will Rock You” and “Crazy Little Thing Called Love” have been excised from the Live Aid performance that’s this album’s obvious selling point, they do appear elsewhere in the program (the former in a clever studio-to-live splice). On the whole, however, like the film to which they function as an approximate soundtrack, the proceedings recycle highlights and skim a surface long familiar to cognoscenti. And, also like the film, the tale that lies therein is every bit as cautionary as it is celebratory.

ENCORE

Rhino Records’ new four-CD collection Phil Collins Plays Well with Others proves that during his nearly 50-year career its subject has been much more than Genesis’ drummer or a one-man ’80s pop juggernaut. He has, for instance, been a highly sought after hired gun. Discs 1 through 3 document his contributions to 47 different projects by over 30 different acts and in the process trace his development from an arty prog-rocker to an ego-checking chameleon who has never met a genre that he doesn’t like.

Disc 4 focuses, or at least narrows down, Collins’ eclecticmism. Subtitled Live 1981-2002, it begins with rock royalty (George Harrison, Bee Gees), downshifts into jazz both classic (Tony Bennett, Quincy Jones) and contemporary (the Buddy Rich Big Band), and ends with more rock royalty (Eric Clapton, Joe Cocker). It culminates mid-disc with an amazing “Pick Up the Pieces” that even at 21 minutes never wears out its welcome. —A.O.
On the night before her final hearing before Pakistan’s Supreme Court, Asia Bibi had a dream. “I saw in a dream that all the doors of the prison are open,” she described, “and I’m worrying that if the jail superintendent comes she will be very furious.”

Hope can burn from the faintest wick. For Bibi the dream was a fresh fire. A field worker who does not read and a mother of five, Bibi is in her late 40s or early 50s and has been jailed since 2009. From a dispute with two Muslim women, who alleged she blasphemed Islam after one asked Bibi to bring her water, she has been on death row.

Her children, including one who is mentally handicapped, have grown up without her. Pakistan has had four prime ministers while Bibi has been behind bars. And multiple courts upheld a death-by-hanging sentence in her case, which has been pending before Pakistan’s Supreme Court since July 2015.

But on the eve of an expected ruling in October, she told her attorney, Saiful Malook, “From my dream I am very, very certain that my appeal is going to be accepted and I am going to be free.” Then she said, “I have such a full faith in God that I have [a] strong feeling that nobody can hurt me.”

To Malook, Bibi said, “I assure you, sir, you also don’t worry.”

The following day the Supreme Court ruled in her favor, saying she had been accused falsely and ordering her freed, but her ordeal was far from over. Islamic hard-liners sparked widespread protests, shutting down roads and services. Bibi was not guilty, but not free, and clearly needed to leave the country. On Nov. 7 authorities reportedly flew Bibi from the detention center in Punjab to Islamabad, where she remained in an undisclosed location. The government caved to the hard-liners, agreeing to review the Supreme Court’s decision for technical issues.

Malook told the story of Bibi’s dream at a church in the Netherlands, where he was forced to seek temporary shelter after threats against his own life. For offering to shelter him, the Netherlands faces threats too: On Nov. 13 Dutch officials had to close their embassy in Islamabad and withdraw staff over threats against Dutch diplomats.

The case already has become a watershed moment for Pakistan and the Muslim world, something like the 1979 Revolution in Iran. Hard-liners threaten Christians using the blasphemy laws, while their tactics threaten Pakistan’s democratic government. Two leading statesmen—Muslim Salman Taseer and Christian Shahbaz Bhatti—were assassinated in 2011 for defending Bibi.

The only thing more astonishing than the bravery and faith of Asia Bibi in the face of so much hatred and violence is the cowardice and retreat of nations more powerful than Pakistan. The United Kingdom granted shelter to those calling for the murder of Salman Rushdie and has allowed rallies parading the Hezbollah flag, but British leaders stayed silent on Bibi’s future.

The United States took in the very publicly threatened Russian Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Chinese democracy movement leader Wei Jingsheng, yet made no offer of asylum for Bibi. Privately U.S. officials say the situation is too sensitive to talk about, but while they remain silent the hard-liners are winning.

Besides wanting to kill Asia Bibi, Pakistan’s Islamist parties and their mullahs want to silence Western powers through fear and intimidation. They want to threaten violence in such a way that they get their way. Until Bibi is fully freed, they have made a sham of Pakistan’s rule of law and its court system. Unless the traditional protectors of freedom step forward in a public and profound way to offer safe passage, it will appear the greatest powers in the world can be lassoed by a jihadist-ruled street.

Weeks after a brave verdict, few are looking brave beside the farm worker and mother, Asia Bibi herself. Attorney Malook told the Dutch congregation: “I have not seen such a strong woman in my life, nor in any book story, who is behind the bars for more than nine years ... and still can be so strong.”
The Fantasy Makers

J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and George MacDonald were the pioneers of the fantasy genre, and their impact is unmistakable. Their works—exploring Middle-earth, Narnia, and other tales of redemption, sacrifice, and the battle of good and evil—have become best-selling books and blockbuster movies. Contemporary fantasy writers grew up inspired by their works. All three were deeply committed Christians, and their spiritual convictions permeate their writing. They engaged and challenged from the pulpit of imagination, speaking truth through fantasy.

_The Fantasy Makers_ examines the spiritual influences of these fantasy pioneers and the lasting impact their works have on our present-day culture.

Featuring Rowan Williams, Kristin Jeffrey Johnson, Malcolm Guite, Allister McGrath, and Michael Ward. 88 minutes.

DVD - #501732D, $14.99

C.S. Lewis Onstage with Max McLean

Using C.S. Lewis’s own words, award-winning actor Max McLean inhabits Lewis to take us on his rigorous journey from hard-boiled atheist to “the most reluctant convert in all England.” Discover how the “Hound of Heaven” pursued Lewis relentlessly until he finally “gave in”...only to become the most influential Christian writer of the 20th century. 77 minutes.

DVD - #501800D, $12.99

The Shortest Way Home

Doubt and disbelief live in the hearts of many people as they wrestle with the questions of good and evil and the existence of God. _The Shortest Way Home_ is an introductory review to Lewis’s classic work, _Mere Christianity_. Viewers will find honest discussion and helpful insights for the tough questions asked by believers and skeptics alike. 56 minutes.

DVD - #501563D, $9.99

Affectionately Yours, Screwtape

Journey inside the mind of C.S. Lewis in this introductory review of _The Screwtape Letters_, a thin volume of imaginative letters between two devils. Explore the Biblical, historical, and cultural depictions of Satan and hell and gain a deeper understanding of the nature of temptation and redemption. 56 minutes.

DVD - #501167D, $9.99

Shadowlands

This drama is about the agonizing spiritual crisis of C.S. Lewis when his wife died from cancer. The love, grief, pain, and sorrow were so shattering to Lewis that his basic Christian beliefs, magnificently communicated in his many books, were now called into serious doubt. Starring Joss Ackland and Claire Bloom. 90 minutes.

DVD - #4813D, $9.99

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Before becoming WORLD’s chief editor, I sat on the board of directors of a Christian publishing house. When the editorial team spoke of upcoming books, it emphasized the intellectual worth of the book for readers and (since every enterprise needs to make at least a small profit) the material worth to the company. The job of authors was to write good books and do media interviews to promote them, but the marketing department did most of the selling.

Two developments during the past 25 years have changed those expectations. First, most Christian publishers now look for authors who have their own “platforms,” which means either the lecture circuit hustle or a megachurch pulpit. Second, social media and email have conditioned us to expect instant gratification via snappy patter and lists of items, nothing that makes us wait too long or expend too much mental energy.

I’ve just opened the Baker Publishing Group’s Spring Nonfiction catalog. Note how it advertises its January-April 2019 new releases: “Significant speaking platform—audiences topped 73,000 people in 2017… speaks regularly to women across the country… spoken to over 500,000 people to date… speaks more than 100 times per year… highly sought-after brand strategist and speaker… has a multimedia ministry that reaches more than 1 million listeners a week… pastor of the fifth largest church in America… speaks internationally to over 60,000 annually.”

The problem with that: Few people are both good speakers and good writers. (Os Guinness and Tim Keller are two exceptions, and their books are among the Top 30 on the pages that follow.) Publisher emphasis on “platforms,” with the assumption that most sales will be at book tables following a speech, leads to the publication of many poor books by speakers who stand tall only in platform shoes, and the non-publication of good ones by platformless writers.

Combine that with our desire for speed and ease, and titles like these in the Baker catalog become inevitable:

**Christian Theology for People in a Hurry; 40 Verses to Ignite Your Faith; 10 Choices Successful Couples Make; A Shift a Day for Your Best Year Yet.** Descriptions of contents include: “Easy and enjoyable… Streamlined format covers each topic in a page or two for maximum return on a minimal time commitment.”

Just about every publisher’s catalog has titles and come-ons like Baker’s (and Baker is one of the better publishing houses, with Baker Academic offerings that are meatier). But it’s sad that the choice is between simple and “academic,” with serious but accessible books often frozen out.

Nevertheless, in 2018 we’ve been able to recommend about 500 books on our three regular review pages and our quarterly special sections: Children’s Books (Feb. 17), Summer Reading/ Mostly Novels (June 30), History Books (Oct. 13), and Books of the Year (on the following 10 pages). Here are authors, titles, and publishers of our five nonfiction books of the year, 25 short list honorees, and four theological honorable mentions:

**SCIENCE BOOK OF THE YEAR:**
- Charles C. Mann, *The Wizard and the Prophet* (Knopf)

**Short list:**
- Matti Leisola & Jonathan Witt, *Heretic* (Discovery)
- J.P. Moreland, *Science and Secularism* (Crossway)
- Christian Smith, *Atheist Overreach* (Oxford)
- Hugh Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos* (Reasons to Believe)

**UNDERSTANDING AMERICA BOOK OF THE YEAR:**
- Oren Cass, *The Once and Future Worker* (Encounter)

**Short list:**
- Os Guinness, *Last Call for Liberty* (IVP)
- Abdi Nor Iftin, *Call Me American* (Knopf)
- Lauren Hilgers, *Patriot Number One: American Dreams in Chinatown* (Crown)
- Ben Sasse, *Them* (St. Martin’s)

**UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD BOOK OF THE YEAR:**
- Bruce K. Chapman, *Politicians* (Discover)

**HISTORY BOOK OF THE YEAR:**

**Short list:**
- Lian Xi, *Blood Letters* (Basic)
- Michael Scott Moore, *The Desert and the Sea* (Harper Wave)
- Jonathan D. Quick, *The End of Epidemics* (St. Martin’s)
- Ken Bensinger, *Red Card* (Simon & Schuster)
- Dambisa Moyo, *Edge of Chaos* (Basic)

**ACCESSIBLE THEOLOGY BOOK OF THE YEAR:**
- Jay Sexton, *A Nation Forged by Crisis* (Basic)

**Short list:**
- Daniel T. Rodgers, *As a City on a Hill* (Princeton)
- John Sedgwick, *Blood Moon* (Simon & Schuster)
- Omer Bartov, *Anatomy of a Genocide* (Simon & Schuster)

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- John Sedgwick, *Blood Moon* (Simon & Schuster)
- Omer Bartov, *Anatomy of a Genocide* (Simon & Schuster)
Norman Borlaug—the wizard in Charles C. Mann’s The Wizard and the Prophet (Knopf)—is the only plant breeder to win the Nobel Peace Prize, and that’s because he used new agricultural technology to increase global grain harvests, making it possible for the world’s population to increase. Borlaug became a scientist because he realized in 1932 that he would not be able to become a second baseman for the Chicago Cubs.

William Vogt—the prophet of population doom—started the modern environmental movement by forecasting mass starvation unless we limit the number of people and the amount of natural resources we consume. Vogt’s Road to Survival in 1948 was a main selection of the Book of the Month Club, and Reader’s Digest published a condensed version of the book for its 15 million worldwide subscribers. Vogt followed the arc of his thinking by spending the 1950s as national director of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, and killing himself in 1968.

Mann does not write from a Christian worldview, but he tells great stories in which optimists beat pessimists. Planting the varieties of wheat developed by Borlaug doubled or tripled harvests, and his “miracle rice” yielded in Pakistan 10 times more than the average of the day. Borlaug persevered through failed experiments and political challenges, and the rest is history: “Even though the continent’s population soared, Asians had an average of 30 percent more calories in their diet … better food, better clothing, money for school. Seoul and Shanghai, Jaipur and Jakarta … all are built atop a foundation of laboratory-bred rice.”

A terrible foundation, Vogt believed. Mann correctly notes that Vogt, through his influential writing, was not responsible for China’s one-child policy that led to possibly 100 million coerced abortions, “but his intellectual guilt is heavy.” Mann does not note that God makes men and women in His image, so big cities contain more beauty than pristine wilderness, but the big difference is whether having more people is good or bad.

That different perspective has many practical outcomes. Wizards and prophets, for example, disagree about how to measure agricultural productivity. Wizards ask: “Which farm creates more calories—more usable energy—per acre?” Prophets concentrate on issues like habitat loss or the destruction of rural communities. Prophets condemn but wizards praise industrial farming operations and synthetic fertilizer. (Today, almost half of all crops depend on nitrogen derived from synthetic fertilizers: We “extract an additional 3 billion people’s worth of food from the same land” that fed a relative few.) And what about fossil fuels? Before we started using them, kings and presidents froze when temperatures dropped. Water in the Palace of Versailles froze in February, as did Thomas Jefferson’s ink in his Monticello inkwells, “preventing him from writing to complain about the cold.” Petroleum experts in the 1880s, 1920s, and 1990s all predicted an end of oil, and 21st-century books with titles like The Post-Petroleum Survival Guide and Cookbook sold well. Mann judiciously examines coal, wind, and solar energy, and shows that “even to scientists, climate change can be as hard to nail down as a blob of mercury.”

Mann accepts evolution as valid but includes suggestive observations: “Remarkably, C4 photosynthesis has arisen independently more than sixty times. … When many different species develop the same traits, the implication is that a lot of plants are ‘preadapted’ to create that trait.” How do they become preadapted? And are humans “wholly controlled by the natural processes that control all other creatures”? Or are we also preadapted to be different?

In his closing chapter, Mann reviews the famous 1860 debate between Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, son of Christian anti-slavery pioneer William Wilberforce, and Thomas “Darwin’s Bulldog” Huxley, grandfather of Brave New World author Aldous Huxley. As Mann reports, “Over the decades Huxley came to be seen as triumphant,” but the reality is more complex. A century and a half later, if we aren’t to be prisoners of biology, it’s more important than ever that we realize human beings are special creatures.
**THE CREATOR AND THE COSMOS**

Hugh Ross

In the fourth edition of a classic with the subtitle *How the Latest Scientific Discoveries Reveal God*, Ross shows how more than 100 different parameters for the universe must have values falling within narrowly defined ranges for physical life of any conceivable kind to exist. The long list includes gravitational, electromagnetic, and nuclear forces; electron to proton mass ratios; initial uniformity of cosmic radiation; and on it goes in area after area about which Charles Darwin could know little or nothing.

Ross offers analogies even better than Fred Hoyle’s hurricane sweeping through a junkyard and assembling a Boeing 747. He writes that the universe’s “fine-tuning is 10 to the 43rd times more exquisite than someone blindfolded, with just one try, randomly picking out a single marked proton from all the protons existing within the entire extent of the observable universe.” Or try this: “a billion pencils all simultaneously positioned upright on their sharpened points on a smooth glass surface with no surface supports.”

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**HERETIC**

Matt Leisola & Jonathan Witt

Leisola was an upwardly mobile European bioscientist until he read a book questioning evolutionary theory and started reading more in an attempt to defend Darwin. The more he learned, the more skeptical he became regarding “fossilized materialism,” and his chapter titles show his ascent in knowledge and his descent in reputation: “Students Begin Listening ... Professors and Presidents React ... Publishers Hesitate.” Leisola lays out “the overwhelming problem facing the materialistic theories of life” and punctures the claim that almost all support Darwinism: Many fear being called Darwin deniers and labeled science heretics, but Leisola’s last chapter title shows why honesty is best: It takes us “Through a Doorway to Adventure.”

**SCIENTISM AND SECULARISM**

J.P. Moreland

Philosophy professor J.P. Moreland defines scientism as the belief that natural science is the supreme intellectual authority, while theology depends on blind faith, emotion, and cultural upbringing. Moreland says such arrogance is why “scientism is not science but philosophy,” and not “a friend of science but rather its enemy.” Humble science tells us what is testable, but believers in scientism pretend to know about past and present what they can’t possibly know—and that makes it detestable. Moreland shows the Darwinian revolution was a revolt against God, but the fine-tuning of the universe is powerful evidence for God.

**ATHEIST OVERREACH**

Christian Smith

Smith’s subtitle is *What Atheism Can’t Deliver*, and paramount among its failures is explaining how we got here. Smith is rightly severe: “The ideology of scientism” changes science from “(1) one fantastic way to know many things about ourselves and the world into (2) an imperialistic, exclusivist, totalizing source of any and all legitimate knowledge about everything.” Smith points out that atheism’s advocates advance crucial claims that are neither rational nor realistic, and that “deeply personal pseudoscientific commitments” drive scientific discovery. As physicist Steven Weinberg said in 2003, “Maybe at the very bottom of it ... I really don’t like God.”

**THE SECRET LIFE OF SCIENCE**

Jeremy J. Baumberg

Baumberg, a University of Cambridge scientist, shows how publicity-dependent and cutthroat Big Science has become. He explains scientific pecking orders, groupthink tendencies, the competition of journals and conferences, and the lack of dialogue and debate. Baumberg also shows the influence of “fluffy marketing” via press release patter and clickbait-conscious journalism, which turn the selection of articles “into a political act.” Scientists can keep up with only a fraction of research in their own field, let alone “over the grand landscape.” All that makes it hard for new paradigms to gain traction, especially since anyone courageous enough to criticize Darwinistic materialism faces ostracism.
WAR ON POVERTY: NEARLY WON (AND LOST)

UNDERSTANDING AMERICA ▶ OUR BOOK OF THE YEARfocuses on the War for Work ▶ by Marvin Olasky

Factoring in government welfare payments, very few Americans lack food, shelter, and clothing—but what about purpose and productivity? *The Once and Future Worker by Oren Cass (Encounter)* helps us understand America by pointing out a fundamental problem: trillions of dollars poured into low-income households to guarantee consumption, but very little to help those adults become productive.

The statistics are grim: Nearly 1 in 5 men in their prime do not work full time, and some die “deaths of despair.” Mortality rates have risen since the end of the century for middle-aged Americans, driven by higher levels of suicide, liver disease, and drug overdoses for those with only a high-school degree.

Cass, a Manhattan Institute senior fellow, points out that “material living standards contribute to prosperity, but accomplishments like fulfilling traditional obligations, building strong personal relationships, succeeding at work, supporting a family... are far more important to life satisfaction.”

Cass concludes, “A labor market in which workers can support strong families and communities is the central determinant of long-term prosperity and should be the central focus of public policy.” The lack of such a labor market in much of the Rust Belt packed a political charge as well: Welcome to the White House, President Trump.

We also need an educational system that does not turn college entrance into a fetish: “The education system’s obsession with college for all left many students ill prepared to join the labor force at all,... We can prepare Americans to work more productively if we shift some attention and resources from the college track to the other tracks down which most people actually travel.”

In short, when schools adopt an attitude of “college or bust,” we shouldn’t be surprised to find far too many busts. Cass: “If we pursue growth in ways that erode the labor market’s health, and then redistribute income from the winners to the losers...we will not generate the genuine and sustainable prosperity that we want.”

In this political environment *The Once and Future Worker’s* analysis is particularly important. Cass points out that even a low-paying job develops experience at coming to work on time, developing skills, and entering into a social network that often leads to more opportunities. He concludes, “A UBI would redefine the relationship between individuals, families, communities, and the state by giving government the role of provider. It would make work optional and render self-reliance moot.”

In short, America has succeeded in the “War on Poverty” that began some 50 years ago. The “consumption poverty rate”—measuring the number of Americans in material deprivation—is now 2.8 percent, thanks to welfare expansion. Now, a majority of nondisabled, working-age adults who collect food stamps or Medicaid do not work during any given month of receiving benefits. But does the welfare state feed the body while impoverishing the soul?
**POLITICIANS**

**BRUCE K. CHAPMAN**

When frustrated by election results, it’s useful to remember why it’s hard to live with politicians but even harder to live without them. *Politicians: The Worst Kind of People to Run the Government, Except for All the Others* offers warm wit seasoned with some sharp-edged anecdotes that show how the growing influence of “middlesmen”—including activists and Big Media—has obstructed the deliberative process and created a kill-or-be-killed atmosphere.

The flourishing of lobbyists does not surprise Chapman, who quotes Paul Douglas—a realistic Democratic senator—saying in 1952, “Whenever government controls a business, it becomes inevitable that the business should try to control the government.” Chapman proposes re-democratizing elections by giving a 50 percent tax credit for contributions up to $1,000. He also wants to prioritize civics education in schools, reduce government intrusiveness, strengthen political parties, and reduce the length of campaigns.
Peopling a War

Understanding the World: Profiling the Syrian War’s Rebels, Jihadists, and Casualties > by Mindy Belz

Perhaps one day we can read Rania Abouzeid’s No Turning Back: Life, Loss, and Hope in Wartime Syria (W.W. Norton) and be grateful for her meticulous attention to detail and to humanizing a brutal and misunderstood conflict. For now, as the Syrian war grinds on, Abouzeid brings us uncomfortably face to face with its ongoing horror. That hard encounter, plus the persistence of U.S. policymakers and others in doing the wrong thing, is why No Turning Back is our Book of the Year in Understanding the World.

Abouzeid puts to work her own close encounter with civil war in the Middle East. The freelance journalist, who has written for prominent U.S. news outlets, grew up in Australia after her own family fled Lebanon’s civil war in the 1980s. She returned to live in Lebanon as an adult and used her base in Beirut (and ability to blend in) to cross into the war zone undetected via Turkey, starting in 2011.

Inside Syria the author encountered all sides of the escalating conflict. Syria’s civil war quickly morphed from an internal conflict to a regional conflict to a proxy war pitting the Cold War powers against one another. It also grew into an existential contest between the 20th century’s postwar global order and the forces of chaos—in the form of multiplying Islamic jihadist factions.

Abouzeid recounts enough of the geopolitical terrain to make a dizzying battlefield as comprehensible as war ever can be. She structures the book (353 pages, not counting notes and an index) around the individual stories of Syrians sucked into the mire: “The Syrian War, like every war, is about many things, but at its core, it’s about people.”

Suleiman Tlass Farzat “was a rich man with the right name,” and had no apparent reason to rebel against the Syrian government, we learn—yet the Arab Spring demonstrations drew him in. By day a law-abiding citizen running an insurance office, Suleiman by evening becomes an anti-government activist deploying aliases and multiple Facebook accounts to upload video footage—spiking in new ways a social-media-driven conflict, ways now widely used to deadly effect by terror groups.

We meet Mohammed, a prisoner of Syria’s Bashar al-Assad regime, radicalized behind bars to serve such groups, and Abu Azzam, a university student and a poet who joins the Free Syrian Army. Azzam watches as outsiders hijack his revolution, turning it into “a project cooked up by foreign states and fed to us.”

Bystanders also people No Turning Back, including 9-year-old Ruha, whose village is hit by government-instigated chemical weapons and barrel bombs, forcing her family to make a hold-your-breath escape. Talal is an Alawite whose family was kidnapped in 2013 amid atrocities committed by rebel groups. We could use more of Syria’s diverse and victimized minorities in the book, including Christians, but they are not entirely overlooked.

With the Alawite family we glimpse the tireless work of author Abouzeid, who herself has faced death threats and blacklisting from Syria. She met Talal in Lebanon, where he arrived three weeks after his family’s kidnapping. She also had access to the groups in Syria holding his daughters and infant son (including a rebel unit receiving U.S. weapons). And later she interviews those who are freed.

It’s this level of journalistic enterprise and gritty ground-level storytelling that sets apart No Turning Back from a thick stack of eyewitness books on the war in Syria. We leave it better informed but also better burdened for the human stories and the seemingly inhuman endurance of war-battered Syrians.
Two leading thinkers have tried to cut through a shifting fog of agendas and alliances. In *Edge of Chaos*, economist Dambisa Moyo confesses that “politics, and not economics” drives human prosperity, and argues that a country’s economic growth lies in the strength and breadth of its institutions: She warns against government growth.

In *The Jungle Grows Back*, Robert Kagan points out that the American-led liberal order of the last century is an aberration, and not the work of evolution and human desires. The story of man “is a long tale of war, tyranny, and poverty,” he writes, yet somehow he (like Moyo) marshals the data to tell us good news about the world we live in now: Inventions reach billions, doctors fight disease, and great powers aren’t fighting. Such macro perspectives help remind us peace isn’t the natural order under the sun: Chaos is.
Jay Sexton’s *A Nation Forged by Crisis: A New American History (Basic)* is our Book of the Year in History because it presents a challenging new perspective in 200 tightly written pages. Instead of telling a conventional story of America’s evolution, he offers the historian’s equivalent of a biologist’s “punctuated equilibrium”: long periods of little change punctuated by dramatic disasters that create surprising benefits.

Sexton’s section on the Civil War shows how denominational divides among Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians set the stage for civil war. “How little is to be expected from any other Union, if the union of Christians fail,” one reporter noted in 1845. Henry Clay said, “If the Churches divide on the subject of slavery, there will be nothing left to bind our people together but trade and commerce.”

Political splits followed theological ones: In slave states “candidates for office raced to establish themselves as the most ardent defender of Southern institutions and honor. There was little political incentive for Southern statesmen to pursue compromise with... Northern Democrats.” In the North, the massive immigration of the 1840s and 1850s increased tensions: “Each vessel that arrived from the Old World with more migrants increased the ire of ‘native’ white Protestants.”

Worries about increased labor competition contributed to the demise of the Whig Party: Some young men of modest means “joined the nativist American Party, popularly known as the Know-Nothing Party... whose name came from the response members were to give when asked about their political association.” Know-Nothing concerns brought new people into the political process, and one result was formation of a new party, the Republicans.

Immigration also made the difference in the Civil War. Some 543,000 Union army soldiers—about one-fourth of the total—were foreign-born. About 84,000 foreign-born seamen made up 40 percent of the whole Union navy. The Union’s 144,000 Irish soldiers outnumbered Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia. The Union (Republican) Party platform in 1864 supported “foreign immigration, which in the past has added so much to the wealth, development of resources and increase of power to the nation, the asylum of the oppressed.”

Sexton notes that today “immigration has also divided the country, as the percentage of the U.S. population that is foreign-born reached 13.4 percent in 2015, close to its historic high of 14.8 percent in 1890.” He doesn’t go into a major difference, though: In the 19th century immigrants entered a melting pot and through both education and experience came to value America. Today, a professor who praises the “melting pot” concept is likely to be fired.

Now, reaction to the Central American caravan heading north illustrates our problem. Abraham Lincoln in 1861 said the Civil War “presents to the whole family of man the question whether a constitutional republic...can or cannot maintain its territorial integrity against its own domestic foes.” Some U.S. cheerleaders for the caravan are so devoted to upsetting the apple cart that they don’t pay attention to millions of apples rolling into the gutter.

Sexton does explain that our current political conflicts are not new: “As in the past, politics at home have been destabilized by changes in the international system that followed an American triumph. ... The sudden implosion of Soviet-led communism transformed the international landscape, eliminating America’s ideological rival while freeing up resources and political energy previously devoted to the half-century-long struggle.”

That makes sense to me. I was able to develop “compassionate conservatism” during the decade between Soviet demise in 1991 and Islamist assault in 2001. America had the luxury of thinking we had no foreign enemies, so we could concentrate on problems at home and agree that an enemy-less America could afford to be compassionate. That frame of mind changed on 9/11.

Sexton rightly says, “A moment of flux such as the present is precisely the time in which we should embrace the more complex historical record of volatility, unanticipated change, and moments of crisis.”
AS A CITY ON A HILL
DANIEL T. RODGERS
New England, founded in the 1620s and 1630s, almost died in the 1640s and 1650s. With the Puritans in power in old England, few headed west and many—including most Harvard grads—went east. What kept New England going was a vision that John Winthrop had enunciated probably aboard ship in 1630: That the Puritans could build “a city on a hill” that would be “a Model of Christian Charity.” In practice, that meant giving destitute families permission to cut wood from the town’s common lands, taking in widows, paying nurses to attend to the sick, and spending a quarter of town budgets on poor relief.

BLOOD MOON
JOHN SEDGWICK
The children’s version of the Cherokee Trail of Tears is black-and-white about red-and-white: Evil Andrew Jackson and other leaders railroaded noble Native Americans, except that in the absence of railroads thousands without adequate clothing or food had to walk. The reality that Sedgwick explores in his eloquent work is far more complicated. Sedgwick doesn’t minimize the misery of a midwinter ordeal without adequate food, clothing, or shelter for many of the travelers, but he shows how less racism among whites and less political maneuvering within the Cherokee tribe could have mitigated the disaster.

THE ORDER OF THE DAY
ERIC VUILlard
Translated from the French, The Order of the Day is a beautifully written short book about an ugly incident, Nazi Germany’s annexation of Austria. Vuillard begins with a scene of the heads of major industries capitulating to Adolf Hitler in 1933: “There they stand, affectless, like 24 calculating machines at the gates of Hell.” Then we move to 1938 and the key role of Austrian Minister of the Interior Arthur Seyss-Inquart, who finally “finished his pathetic career as a walk-on at Nuremberg … who helped craft the policies that entailed the deaths of a hundred thousand Dutch Jews—this man knew nothing.”

ANATOMY OF A GENOCIDE
OMER BARTOV
Bartov’s masterpiece of ground-level history shows that for more than four centuries in Buczacz, a border town, Poles, Ukrainians, and Jews mostly got along. That quickly changed with World War II, where the two nominally Christian populations fought each other—and both murdered Jewish neighbors. German soldiers “shot Jews eagerly,” but volunteers, including local Ukrainians and Poles, wanted in. Typically, Jews were stripped, ordered to stand by a newly dug pit, and machine-gunned, until the corpses were packed like sardines: When one shooter “emptied his magazine, another one would be lying in wait for the right moment to step in.”

LOOMING CIVIL WAR
JASON PHILLIPS
Phillips punctures the view that Americans both north and south anticipated “a short, glorious war.” Some politicians and soldiers did talk that way, but many civilians “felt dragged into a terrifying future by extremists from both regions.” For example, anti-slavery architect Frederick Olmsted thought more was needed than a war for abolition: “An extraction of the bullet does not at once remedy the injury of a gun-shot wound.” Pro-slavery editor John Beauchamp Jones thought war would shred the fabric of America: In his vision “the gutters ran with blood, and the waysides were strewn with the dead.”

By 1860, anticipation of war was so common that many bowed to what appeared inevitable. “Unreason and dread” poisoned politics, and the telegraph offered “instantaneous information that promised more knowledge than it delivered.” Virginian Edmund Ruffin prophesied pro-slavery victory and gained the honor of firing the first cannon shot of the war. In June 1865 he shot himself and died.
**WHAT PRICE HOPE?**

ACCESSIBLE THEOLOGY • FINDING TRUE COMFORT, SUSTENANCE, AND REDEMPTION

by Marvin Olasky

Many Christian authors have produced tear-jerking books centered on a child’s death or a friend’s demise. It is good and right to cry about death stalking those we love—Jesus wept and thus gave all of us permission to weep—but manipulating emotion to gain more clicks or sell more books seems not only unseemly but sub-Christian.

That backstory is why Cameron Cole’s cry from the heart and mind is our Accessible Theology Book of the Year. *Therefore I Have Hope* (Crossway) can benefit both sufferers and their friends who want to help. Not settling for bathos, Cole steps through the Bible honestly in pursuit of—as the subtitle says—**12 Truths That Comfort, Sustain, & Redeem in Tragedy**.

Cole’s first truth in surviving the worst fear of many parents—that a child will die—is essentially what good journalists learn: stay low on the ladder of abstraction. Instead of agonizing about how to survive the next 20 years, remember: “I am only called to today. God has given me grace for today, not for tomorrow. Stay focused on the present.”

The center of the book physically and spiritually is Cole’s sixth truth: God’s providence. Cole relays a story about a woman lamenting her son’s death in a car accident: “Why did God do this to me?” A well-intentioned hospital chaplain replies, “Ma’am, God didn’t have anything to do with your son’s death.” The woman snaps back, “Don’t you take away the only hope that I have.”

Cole then gets personal: “The idea that God had nothing to do with my son’s death terrifies me.... For all of these years I would have falsely believed in a universe with higher order and purpose.... If God had nothing to do with my son’s death, then certain pockets of life—the really awful ones in particular—are given over to chaos.”

Cole acknowledges that “the matter of God’s sovereignty and goodness invokes tension.” He (and I) knows only one way to reconcile the two: the cross. If Jesus’ suffering was part of God’s goodness, in some hard-to-fathom way ours can be too. As illogical as that seems to atheists, they have failed for 2,000 years to come up with anything better even in their own eyes: In their blindness they say light does not exist.

What do we say? In his chapter titled “Doubt” that examines the very ancient book of Job, Cole shows that Job’s sin was not doubt but overconfidence. Job presumed to know what God was doing, unlike Habakkuk, who admitted his fogginess. We can speculate on why some big events and small events happen, but all we can know is that God is good and His character does not change.

No, we can know one thing more: That we are sinful. Cole writes, “When I found myself becoming angry and entitled, I would write down the twenty worst things that I had ever done or thought in my life.... Knowing that God completely accepted me through Christ enabled me to lay all my dark deeds on the table.” What a merciful God we have!

Spoiler alert: Cole told himself not to yearn for happy endings, and *Therefore I Have Hope* doesn’t offer one—but that doesn’t mean life after tragedy is unrelenting sadness. Cole ends the book on this note: “On November 13, 2013, we had buried our precious son, Cam. On November 13, 2014, God brought new life into our family. God is real. God is good. Christ reigns forever.” And that’s true even when there aren’t such bittersweet anniversaries.

‘If God is not fully sovereign in your suffering, then you cannot trust that he is fully in control of your healing and recovery. If God’s hands are tied when the Worst enters your life, then maybe his powers are also limited in helping you.’

—CAMERON COLE
**ACCESSIBLE THEOLOGY BOOKS OF THE YEAR > SHORT LIST**

**THE PRODIGAL PROPHET**  
TIMOTHY KELLER

Keller skillfully exegetes the four chapters of Jonah and shows the importance of failure and suffering: “It is only when you reach the very bottom, when everything falls apart, when all your schemes and resources are broken and exhausted, that you are finally open to learning how to completely depend on God.” Jonah thought he understood God, but he initially didn’t know that God cared about Assyrians—and then he worried that God did care about Assyrians. Like Jonah, “We naturally believe that we have far more ability to direct our lives wisely than we really have.”

**IDOLS OF A MOTHER’S HEART**  
CHRISTINA FOX

Fox explores ways in which motherhood can turn from good gift to idol, from sanctifying experience to sinful one. Her opening discussion draws heavily from R.C. Sproul, Tim Keller, and John Piper, applying their insights to the particular situation of mothers. In her second section, she looks at the particular idols common to mothers, including idols of achievement, comfort, control, and approval. She helpfully lays out how to identify idols and offers wise counsel on the means of grace that train our hearts to love and worship the Lord rather than puny idols.

**DISRUPTIVE WITNESS**  
ALAN NOBLE

Noble describes the problems Christians face in today’s culture, where the gospel is one of thousands of options, and buffered selves intensely adopt stances after seeing compelling viral images on Facebook. Some churches, Noble notes, push back with services “that feel more like a concert and TED Talk than a sacred event.... The pastor paces the stage with a headset mic, skillfully weaving facts, stories, and dramatic pauses.... Each element of the service alludes to bits of popular culture.... The cumulative effect is to give the impression that the Christian faith is something akin to a good motivational conference.”

**EMBODIED HOPE**  
KELLY M. KAPIC

Kapic emphasizes that our hope is in God “who made and redeemed heaven and earth, not in our own intellectual acuity.” He asks Christians to mix hope and lament in faithful suffering, rather than emphasizing hope with no lament (that’s naïve optimism), lament with no hope (“unrelenting despair”), and neither hope nor lament (“detached stoicism”). Practical application: “When contemporary churches cease to sing laments as part of their regular catalog of songs, instead only choosing happy or upbeat music, ...our muscles for godly mourning atrophy.” Good news: Christ saves us from the tyranny of death, which no longer has the final word.

**HONORABLE MENTION**

Owen Strachan & Douglas Allen Sweeney’s *The Essential Jonathan Edwards* is an excellent introduction to the great theologian who is heavy sledding for modern readers. Matthew McCullough in *Remember Death: The Surprising Path to Living Hope* asks, “How can you enjoy anything about life if you know that, in the end, the more you love something the more it will hurt when you lose it?” Buddhists say the answer is nonattachment to anyone and anything: McCullough shows how Christians can see that bid for support and raise it through Christ’s promise of eternal life.

Jonathan Leeman’s *The Rule of Love* explains why the Biblical pronouncement that “God is love” does not mean zapping moral boundaries or judgments, or unconditionally accepting everything except authority and institutions. John C. Peckham’s *Theodicy of Love: Cosmic Conflict and the Problem of Evil* is a deep dive into the coexistence of divine omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence with human freedom and rampaging evil.
People gather to pray for the victims of the mass shooting during a Nov. 8 candlelight vigil in Thousand Oaks, Calif. Opposite page: Residents evacuate as the Woolsey Fire approaches Simi Valley on Nov. 9.

VIGIL: RINGO H.W. CHIU/AP • FIRE: THE ASAHI SHIMBUN VIA GETTY IMAGES
In a California town struck by a mass shooting and a wildfire, stunned neighbors and churches offered comfort to one another

by SOPHIA LEE in Thousand Oaks and Malibu, Calif.
or days, the sun and moon were blood-orange—that is, if you could see them through the thick haze of ashes and smoke. Three major wildfires in California in November—the Camp Fire in Northern California, the Woolsey and Hill Fires in Southern California—devoured hundreds of thousands of acres, killing at least 80 people and destroying thousands of homes. In some areas, the haze was so dense that it tinted everything orange-yellow, as though the world had transformed into an old sepia photograph.

But for residents of Thousand Oaks, a hilly, oaky suburbia about 40 miles northwest of Los Angeles, the Nov. 8 arrival of the massive Woolsey Fire—scorching an area the size of Denver—was only the second crisis to hit in one week. The first struck the night of Nov. 7, when a local man shattered the sounds of laughter and country music with gunshots at the Borderline Bar & Grill.

So began a week of chaos in Thousand Oaks: In a Southern California city known for mild weather and quiet, upper-middle-class neighborhoods, residents found themselves blindsided by two life-altering tragedies at once. For Christians in the community, the crisis became a time to minister and weep with those who were suffering—and to grapple with their own losses.

The clock was ticking toward midnight Wednesday, Nov. 7, when the first frantic text messages and phone calls arrived.

Shawn Thornton, the 52-year-old senior pastor of Calvary Community Church in Westlake Village, received his text at about 11:45 p.m. It was from his youngest daughter, who said a mass shooting had occurred at Borderline. Thornton immediately checked a local news website and Twitter, but saw nothing about a shooting. He was about to text his daughter back when the news broke on his screen: “Mass shooting.”

Thornton’s heart sank. Borderline was a friendly neighborhood bar that doubled as a community center. It was a Western-style venue known for country dancing and theme nights. Every Wednesday was “College Country Night.”

Thornton’s daughter relayed more bad news: Her friend Noel Sparks, a 21-year-old student at Moorpark College, went to Borderline every Wednesday. That night, about 10 minutes before the shooting, Sparks had posted a video of the bar on Snapchat. “It’s quiet tonight,” she had remarked on the app. Sparks also worked for the early childhood ministry at Thornton’s church—a committed, bright-smiling servant who would arrive at church a half hour early and leave a half hour late.

Now, it seemed nobody was hearing from Sparks. That morning, Sparks’ mother, Wendy, had undergone surgery, and she was still recuperating at the hospital when news of the shooting broke. Thornton wasn’t sure if Sparks’ parents knew their daughter was missing.

Thornton didn’t sleep much that night.

Neither did Lacy Williams. The 26-year-old optometrist technician met Sparks while line-dancing at Borderline. They quickly became close friends when they realized they attended the same church.

When Williams first heard about the shooting, at around 11:50 p.m., she immediately messaged Sparks, asking if she was OK. Sparks never responded. Williams texted other friends, asking if anyone had heard from her. They even tried to locate Sparks’ iPhone using a tracking app until the phone eventually shut off.

Early the next morning, Williams and her mother sat at the Thousand Oaks Teen Center, where anxious family members and friends awaited information on their loved ones. All morning, Williams and her friends called various hospitals, hoping Sparks had checked in somewhere.

It was several hours before Williams received the news she dreaded. She turned to her mother. “We need to go see Wendy,” she said. “She needs someone right now.”

Around that time, Thornton was busy leading a prayer vigil at Calvary. About 600 people had showed up, tense but still hopeful for good news. By the time Thornton realized Sparks was gone, the church’s executive pastor was already at the hospital, telling the young woman’s parents she was missing. Now he had to tell them she was dead.

By Thursday evening, everyone had heard the terrible story: A Marine Corps veteran, dressed in a black trenchcoat and a dark baseball cap, had walked toward Borderline Bar & Grill with a Glock .45-caliber handgun and shot the security guard. He then shot a 20-year-old woman at the cash register and fired
into the crowd. According to survivor testimonies, patrons were momentarily confused, then scattered, screaming in utter chaos. They dropped to their knees, crawled under pool tables and stools, and ran and hid in the attic and restrooms. Bodies tripped over one another, bar stools crashed through windows, and limbs flailed as people scrambled out exit doors and windows.

By the time the gunshots stopped, 12 people were mortally wounded. The 13th was the gunman himself, reportedly killed by a self-inflicted wound. Two victims were military veterans. Two others were planning to enlist. One was 10 days away from his 21st birthday. Another had survived the 2017 Las Vegas shooting, but not this one.

Throughout the day, more details trickled out, giving personality to the 12 victims: A father’s fishing buddy; a proud owner of a new coffee shop; a music-loving freshman at Pepperdine University; a recent California Lutheran University graduate who reportedly died while saving others; a Borderline employee who had just bought her first car. The last victim, 54-year-old Ron Helus, was a 29-year veteran sergeant at the Ventura County Sheriff’s Office. As a first responder, he had charged the scene before the gunman shot him several times.

Jim Crews, the lead pastor of a new church plant in Thousand Oaks, was watching the news about the shooting when he saw a familiar face. “Hey, that’s my Starbucks buddy!” he realized. During his weekly Bible studies at a local Starbucks, Crews would regularly strike up conversations with local police officers: One of them was Helus.

For Crews, it all felt like déjà vu. This September, he launched Atmosphere Church at a golf course right across the street from Borderline. Eleven months earlier, Crews was pastoring another church in Las Vegas when the country’s deadliest mass shooting took place in that city. A member of his original church campus in Bakersfield, Calif., Bailey Schweitzer, was among the 58 concertgoers who died at the Route 91 Harvest country music festival.

Crews remembers hurrying to meet and comfort devastated parents. That first Sunday service after the tragedy, he saw many new faces in the pews, including survivors, hotel employees, performers, and an FBI investigator. The image of their ashen, shell-shocked faces never left his mind.

Now, here he was in supposedly one of the safest cities in the nation, again witnessing the same anguished faces.

On Thursday evening, Crews joined a prayer vigil at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza, where people still walked around dazed. Groups from about 10 different local churches stood in prayer circles to pray for victims and survivors. As more people arrived, phones began buzzing with evacuation alerts about a wildfire that had broken out that afternoon. Soon, sirens and honks from ambulances, fire trucks, and police cars reverberated throughout the streets.

“In one day, it went from a sleepy town to the most chaotic city in America,” Crews said. As he drove home that night, he watched the early blazes of the Woolsey Fire soaring some 50 feet in the air: “It was like the apocalypse was happening.”

The community had little time to process the shooting. That evening and for days afterward, thousands of residents in Thousand Oaks and the surrounding areas evacuated their homes.

Williams was one of them. She had just returned from visiting Sparks’ mother at the hospital when she saw the fires fast approaching her house in Simi Valley. She grabbed her Bible; dragged her horses, chickens, and goats into a truck; and fled.

Thornton too had to evacuate. After leading a second prayer vigil Thursday evening and returning home to Simi Valley, feeling drained, he had just settled on his couch to watch TV when his son called: “There’s a fire in the hill behind you.” Thornton frowned: “No, I heard the fire is way off.” His son replied, “Look outside.” Thornton stepped out, and his son was
right: Golden flames glowed beyond the shadows of the trees, and plumes of magenta smoke danced up into the dark sky.

The fire department told him the fires could go whichever way, but that if they began heading toward him, he needed to leave—fast. The fires moved away from him that night, but the next morning, the winds shifted. By noon, Thornton got an evacuation notice. He and his family moved to his brother’s house across town.

Meanwhile, 2,000 miles away in Chicago, Greg Zanis had just hopped into his old Nissan Titan and was gunning west on I-80 with a dozen white wooden crosses, a bucket of popcorn, and some canned chicken. On Thursday morning, Zanis, a 67-year-old retired carpenter, had awoken to phone calls from people asking if he was going to Thousand Oaks to erect his signature crosses. He had just returned from the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting, where he had set up 11 white crosses with Stars of David near the Tree of Life Synagogue.

While Zanis was driving, 85-year-old Michael Garcia was sitting in his backyard in Malibu (just south of Thousand Oaks), breaking open a bottle of merlot. Behind him, embers from the Woolsey Fire rained onto the cracker-dry hills, igniting flames that roared and gamboled their way onto his property. As his pool house, avocado tree, and apricot tree burned to a black crisp, Garcia removed his dust mask from time to time to sip his wine. He lives alone in his 2,000-square-foot house and ignored the mandatory evacuation notices, even as blazing-hot fires swarmed the hills around his neighborhood and destroyed phone and power lines.

“Eh,” he said. He had already survived the Great Malibu Fire of 1993, which ignited under the same conditions—low humidity, high temperatures, strong winds. He lost his house plus four cars then, but his wife consoled him: “They’re only things. You and me are what’s important.” His wife is now dead, but he has a nice house full of things and three cars. So what if his pool house burns down? “It’s just things, you know?” Both Garcia and his house survived the Woolsey blaze: When I met him, he was trying to resuscitate his blackened avocado tree.

For others, it wasn’t just things. The Camp Fire, north of Sacramento, is now the deadliest U.S. wildfire of the past century, with at least 77 people confirmed dead and nearly 1,000 still missing as of Nov. 19 (see p. 55). In Southern California, wildfires killed at least three people, burned more than 100,000 acres, and destroyed 1,500 structures. Los Angeles County closed major highways, and tens of thousands of people evacuated homes. The Thousand Oaks Teen Center turned from a mass shooting victim support center into an evacuation center within a span of hours. Thousands of firefighters worked overtime to save buildings and animals, while some residents tried to save their homes with garden hoses.

On Sunday morning, I drove to Borderline Bar & Grill from Malibu, detouring around a closed highway and glancing up at wind-blown plumes of smoke and whirring helicopters.

At a gas station across from Borderline, I met Zanis. He had just arrived in California and had set up 12 white crosses at the corner of the street near Borderline. Each cross had a victim’s name scrawled on it in black marker, a picture of the victim, and a mosaic heart that read Psalm 34:18: “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” Zanis told me students at a private Christian school in Aurora, Ill., had made 100 of these hearts for this very purpose. By the end of the day, people were calling that intersection “the memorial,” and layer upon layer of fresh flowers and gifts soon stacked up before the crosses.

Ever since Zanis lost his father-in-law to a murder in 1996, he’s been extra-sensitive to such tragedies. He had found his father-in-law lying in a pool of blood at the bottom of the stairs after someone shot him in the head. The trauma sucked 50
pounds out of Zanis, but injected a new mission into his life: He now travels all over the country to the sites of mass shootings and sets up his homemade crosses.

Now his white crosses seem ubiquitous: Zanis was in Littleton, Colo., after the Columbine High School massacre, and he was at Pulse after the Orlando nightclub shooting. He was at the Strip after the Las Vegas shooting.

“I just want to tell people someone loves them, that’s all,” Zanis said. He nodded toward the makeshift memorial by Borderline. “At one point, that gunman was loved, and somehow, that changed. ... That’s what’s wrong in our country.”

With all the wildfire evacuations and road closures, Thousand Oaks was eerily quiet, even for a Sunday morning. But at the Borderline memorial, people streamed in and out. Some were neighbors who still couldn’t believe what had happened. “This is crazy,” one elderly neighbor said, her face crumpling. “We’re the safest community ever. This is utterly crazy. These are all our kids,” she continued, gesturing at the crosses.

A group of survivors from the Las Vegas shooting also showed up, carrying coffee and bagels. Alicia Soto told me she drove here because she was still so grateful for the comfort she had received from other mass shooting survivors after her own traumatic experience: “People who have been through it don’t even have to say much. We just understand. We become family.”

Just then, a police car zipped by, squealing sirens, and every- one from Soto’s group instinctively cringed. “See?” she told me. “Sirens are a trigger. It reminds us of that night when sirens were everywhere.”

I also met parents of victims of other mass shootings. Bob Weiss, 62, had his life uprooted when he lost his daughter Veronika to the Isla Vista shooting in 2014. Veronika was a 19-year-old freshman at UC Santa Barbara when a 22-year-old man shot her seven times and also shot her two friends while they were walking near the campus. “When you send your kid away to college, you don’t expect them to come back in a cardboard box,” Weiss said. He quit his job and now supports other survivors and gun control campaigns.

Weiss lives a mile away from Borderline and also had to evacuate his house. The night before, he and his wife, two sons, and two dogs had slept in their Lexus CT 200h because their local evacuation center was full. The next morning, he was hugging and weeping with mourners: “It never goes away. It’s still shocking when it happens. And it’s still painful, because memories come back.”

Crews and his church also showed up for community support. The golf course where Atmosphere Church usually meets for its Sunday service had closed due to the evacuation, but when Crews heard about the memorial, he told his congregation to come ready to serve: “God doesn’t want us meeting in a building today. Our church needs to be taken outside to be the Church.”

As Crews and his church members formed prayer circles, strangers slipped in to hold hands and bow their heads. Many survivors opened up to Crews once they learned he had ministered to the Las Vegas shooting survivors. “By having the church building closed, it was the best church service we’ve had,” Crews later told me. “The love of God was there.”

Crews plans to continue reaching out: Atmosphere Church is currently mobilizing other affiliated ministries to provide supplies for those affected by the fires and is planning ways to further minister to the families and police officers affected by the Borderline shooting.

O

n Monday night, I drove back to the memorial, where I met Thornton. He said his week would be busy with memorial services. He said his church would also be helping with disaster relief for fire victims and providing grief counseling for the shooting survivors. Thornton saw this as more than a short-term project—the effects of the double-punch tragedies to his community would be long-lasting. In addition to the Borderline massacre, hundreds of local residents had lost their homes and belongings. The last time Thornton faced something so challenging in his pastoral career was in 2001: “This is the 9/11 of our community.” (As of Nov. 19 the Woolsey Fire continued to burn, and was 94 percent contained.)

I also met Williams, who had slept little in the past few days. Her house had survived the fire, and she had come to see the crosses along with Sparks’ other friends. Their eyes were red and welled with tears as they shared fond memories of their companion.

“She’s just such a beautiful person,” Williams said, voice breaking. “I don’t know why God needed her, why He called her home. But when I go up there, I’m going to ask Him questions. ... Boy, am I angry.”

Another friend agreed: “That’s what I keep asking God too: Why?”

Williams sighed: “Eventually we’ll know. I know where I’m going, I know where Noel is now. She once told me her biggest dream is to work for the church.” Williams paused and smiled. “Well, she got it. She got her dream. She got it down here, and she got it up there too.”

Williams then told me she and her friends had to leave. They were going to visit Sparks’ mother at the hospital with a special order from her: An Orange Dream Machine Smoothie with fresh orange juice, extra sherbet, no ice, and a scoop of soy protein from Jamba Juice. They had written down the precise order so they wouldn’t forget and planned to double-cup the smoothie so it stayed fresh. This was a time to mourn together and love one another, and they were going to do it right. ©
Memento mori

A citywide reckoning with death in New York shows Americans may be ready to talk about a topic they once sought to avoid

by EMILY BELZ in New York

photo by Margaret Ferrec for WORLD
In a high-end co-working space in Manhattan’s NoMad, where trendy crystals decked out a candlelit bar, a group lounged on pillows scattered on the floor for an open mic to talk about death.

“I am going to die,” the room of mostly millennials said in unison at the beginning of the event.

A man in his 30s talked about losing three young friends to cancer in recent months. One woman worked for a suicide prevention line. A musician, Chelsea Coleman, sang about her sister, who was homeless and has been missing for many years. “Why does everyone have to die? Why does everything have to end?” Coleman asked the room. Her dad was sitting in the back, nodding along.

Alanna McLeod got up to speak about losing her mom right after she graduated from college, and losing her dad right before she got married. Herself an only child, she said, “My family went extinct.”

One man talked about visiting a medium to contact his lover who had died. Another woman talked about caring for her mother with dementia, and how much she hated it. A young reporter for the New York Post, Ruth Weissmann, talked about her first assignment as a reporter a year ago, when she went to a scene where a woman was standing on the edge of the 18th floor of a building.

Weissmann remembered the woman wearing a straw hat. As a police officer tried to get close to save her, the woman stepped backward off the ledge, “like stepping into a pool.” Weissmann had to write about the aftermath. Since then she’s covered stabbings, fires, and more suicides.

“I’ve seen a lot of death,” said Weissmann. “I came tonight because I’m afraid I won’t feel it when something happens to me or someone I love.”

This open mic on death was part of a citywide festival called Reimagine End of Life, coming to New York for the first time. More than 300 events about death took place over a week in city hospitals and comedy clubs and bars and nursing homes. A children’s hospital had parents illuminate lights for children they had lost, and Memorial Sloan Kettering physicians talked about palliative care. The U.S. poet laureate, Tracy K. Smith, read poems that were elegies to her late mother.

For much of the 20th century, sex was a taboo topic; now death is. But baby boomers are heading toward death, and many in younger generations are watching friends die from overdoses, from cancer, and from suicide.

Cultural historian Lawrence Samuel, writing in Psychology Today, predicted a social crisis as the United States faces a wave of baby boomer deaths in coming decades: “The emerging ‘death-centric’ society will be a period of considerable turmoil, perhaps equivalent to that of the counter-cultural 1960s and 1970s.”

Matthew McCullough, pastor of Trinity Church in Nashville, Tenn., urges more Christian discussion of death in his new book Remember Death. The Puritans, he notes, would walk through graveyards to go to church, a regular reminder of mortality. Gravestones would be engraved with the Latin phrase Memento mori, or “Remember death.” Now American culture has detached itself from death unlike any culture in history, he argues.

“I want to help us number our days—to remember death—as a spiritual discipline,” he writes. “By avoiding the truth about death, we’re avoiding the truth about Jesus. Jesus didn’t promise us so many of the things we want most out of life. He promised us victory over death.”

About 2.7 million Americans die a year. The National Academy of Sciences, in a book titled Approaching Death, notes that most Americans encounter death through media—seeing violent deaths—rather than through intimate experience, because families are mobile and disconnected. Many adults have never lived near or cared for anyone who is dying.

The New York City event set three goals for attendees: that they would be more comfortable talking about death, that they would move in closer to be with the sick and dying, and that they would talk to their doctors about their own end-of-life decisions (i.e., create an advanced directive).

The audiences skewed more to the baby boomer demographic, but millennials had a surprisingly strong turnout at events. About 7,000
Most Americans encounter death through media—seeing violent deaths—rather than through intimate experience.

people attended the festival in total. The clash of cultures and beliefs and demographics created moments of comedy, but also sparked deeper conversations.

Reimagine End of Life started just two years ago in San Francisco, the nonprofit child of Silicon Valley company IDEO. Reimagine's youthful founder and executive director Brad Wolfe is the grandson of an Auschwitz survivor, and he grew up hearing stories about death.

Wolfe was so frightened and fascinated by death that when he would go to bed as a boy, he would ask his parents to bang pans down the hall so he knew they were alive. He started off the opening night of the festival saying that he does not think death is a good thing. I asked him about that later, and he referenced the “death positive” movement (a word play on the “sex positive” movement). “I don’t get that,” he said.

Jeannie Blaustein, a New York psychologist who has worked in hospice care and presided over a synagogue, met Wolfe recently and asked him how she could bring the Reimagine event to New York. Now she is Reimagine's board chair.

The Jewish leadership of the festival meant that many of the events took place in Jewish contexts, though Blaustein when I talked to her emphasized her openness to Christian participation. She had just come from an event with a Baptist preacher the night before.

Union Theological Seminary hosted several events, and Redeemer Presbyterian Church opened its event space for a talk with a hospice worker. Most of those in ministry whom I talked to in New York didn’t know the festival was happening.

Anyone could apply to host an event on the topic, subject to Reimagine’s approval. At each event the host would read a mission statement from Reimagine that boiled down to the question, Why are we here?

An obituary writer talked about her work, and a synagogue hosted a Shabbat dinner to discuss Jewish rituals surrounding death. There were events on dying in the Asian, African-American, and Haitian communities. At another gathering, six speakers from different generations talked about death.

A tattoo parlor had an event about remembering people on your body, and a Midtown art gallery hosted an exhibit made of clothes that people wore to a loved one's funeral that they couldn't bring themselves to throw away, but also couldn't wear again.

A stand-up comic, Chris Garcia, performed and talked about his dad dying last year after living with Alzheimer's for 10 years. “It's brutal,” he said of Alzheimer’s, recalling that his strong, Cuban immigrant father was reduced to having
his son change his diaper. Garcia shared a list of rules for after your dad dies. Rule No. 1: “No Pixar for two years.” People in the audience laughed and shouted back knowingly, “Yes!”

There were workshops for parents with seriously ill children, for those coping after a suicide, for those with illnesses, for employers dealing with grieving employees. An artist did 100 portraits of residents at the Hebrew Home. A walking tour chronicled death in Colonial America.

A funeral home director did a workshop on writing condolence letters, nursing homes did workshops on advanced directives, and a 30-year-old with ovarian cancer spoke about her brush with death. A songwriter who lost his young son set up a phone booth where people could enter and talk into the phone, and whatever they said would be beamed out on a satellite.

The festival took place right after the Tree of Life attack that left 11 dead in Pittsburgh, and in a city with a large Jewish population, the attack was on the mind of many. A Jewish funeral chapel on the Upper West Side hosted a comedy show as part of the festival. The improv group, Chicago City Limits, delayed the show because a nearby synagogue was hosting a vigil for the victims of the attack at the same time.

One of the members of the improv group, Paul Zuckerman, was waiting for people to return from the vigil and noted that the night was “way over-poignant for a comedy show.” Looking across the empty chapel room, Zuckerman recalled that he had been to many funerals there. But when he saw the chapel as a potential venue, he thought, “Good sight lines!”

“People need relief, a release,” said Linda Gelman, one of the other members of the improv group. “It’s been a whole week of bad news.”

When the show began, the comedians acknowledged the awkwardness and painfulness of the situation. Zuckerman asked how many had been in the funeral chapel before—a third of the audience raised their hands. But people were soon laughing.

The group did a variety of sketches: a fake eulogy for an aunt where the audience filled in the blanks; then dead “celebrity Jeopardy” with the audience-generated categories of gefilte fish, funerals, and Jell-O. Later, the group tossed a question to the audience: Has anyone had a near-death experience? A millennial named Gia raised her hand.

“In bed, I felt my soul lift out of my body,” she said. She elaborated that she felt her soul hit the ceiling and that she was able to look down at her body. But then her soul returned to her body. The room shifted uneasily, not knowing whether to laugh or not.

One of the comics asked more questions about the story, then they introduced their show: “Gia Hits the Ceiling: The Broadway Musical,” an array of made-up songs enacting her story backed up by an improvising pianist. At the end, as the audience was recovering from laughing, one of the comics asked Gia whether the musical was fairly representative.

“That was so accurate it was terrifying,” said Gia, laughing herself.

Downtown on a windy Friday afternoon, a crowd gathered at the 9/11 Memorial to build a large “earth art” memorial out of bits of nature that had fallen to the ground, led by earth artist Day Schildkret.

Schildkret tried to raise his voice over the roaring water cascading down in the footprints of the twin towers, explaining that the art-building crowd would be turning a place of loss into beauty. Adding that the ritual would help “align ourselves with earth’s harmonic movement,” he sent the gathered crowd, which included some curious onlookers from the busy memorial, off to forage for leaves and twigs to create overlapping circles on the ground. Schildkret hoisted a basket of acorns to distribute in circles and ripped petals off roses to scatter in patterns.

Lorenzo Gallo, a 9/11 first responder who has been fighting what was supposed to be terminal cancer for the last decade, came to the memorial-building after he heard about it from his tattoo artist. He has been progressively getting a large dragon tattooed across his shoulder and chest, but had to do it in small batches because of his cancer treatment. He proudly lifted his shirt to show the completed dragon—he had just found out the night before that he was cancer free.

“It’s the first time I’m here celebrating,” Gallo said. He built a circle with flowers and leaves and twigs to represent the number of people who had died on the spot in the attacks. Building a circle of leaves and petals next to Gallo was a young woman, Camille Boxhill, who came to the event on her lunch break from her office nearby. Her brother died when he was 20; his death is always on her mind, and she wanted to do something tangibly about her grief.

Blaustein was standing nearby, looking at the haphazard circles of twigs and leaves and flowers forming a memorial.

“[Death] is really hard to talk about, but it’s on people’s minds all the time,” she said. “People say it’s taboo. Three hundred events says to me that there’s a hunger.”

—with reporting from Princess Jones

Day Schildkret (left) creates designs out of natural materials.

A crowd gathers at the 9/11 Memorial plaza (top left); a discussion about disparities and discrimination in end-of-life care (lower left).
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Starting over
SURVIVING THE MOST DESTRUCTIVE FIRE IN CALIFORNIA HISTORY
by Samantha Gobba in Chico, Calif.

Gold paper stars hung from the rafters of the 1932 building in Chico, Calif., as Shawn Shingler gave a toast for his daughter’s wedding.

Nearly every eye in the packed room filled with tears as he described the days since the deadliest and most destructive fire in California history tore through the mountain town of Paradise, burning his home and thousands of others to the ground.

“These past nine days have been incredible, and a test for many of us in this room,” he said. “We were angry, but we loved. We had questions, but we had faith that God could pull us through this.”

Around 6:30 a.m. on Nov. 8, fire sparked along Camp Creek Road near the tiny town of Pulga, Calif. Unusually high winds ripped the flames across the dry, forested landscape toward Paradise, a town formerly of more than 26,000 residents. The fire eventually consumed more than 151,000 acres, and firefighters reported it was only 66 percent contained eleven days after it began.

Evacuation notices came too late for many.

Those who did get out of affected towns barely had time to gather pets, throw belongings in laundry baskets, and sit in the gridlock that formed down the single, four-lane road to Chico, the nearest major city.

“It was such a frightening time, to be trapped in your car knowing the fire was going closer and we couldn’t move any quicker. All I could pray was ‘Jesus,’ over and over,” evacuee Lisa Spencer told me. She and her husband Don escaped with her 76-year-old father-in-law, and met up with their three teenage sons later that day.

Some burned alive in their cars while traffic wouldn’t allow them to outrun the flames. Some arrived in town with half-melted vehicles, clothes adhered to their skin.

While people fled, acting Gov. Gavin Newsom issued a state of emergency, and President Donald Trump requested emergency disaster funding.

As of Nov. 19, officials had counted 77 dead. An additional 993 were missing.
That makes the Camp Fire California’s deadliest on record, far outpacing the 29 killed in Los Angeles’ Griffith Park in 1933. It’s also the most destructive, having destroyed at least 15,850 homes and other structures, more than double the previous record holder.

Repairing the damage to life and property is a daunting task. What people can do is help one day at a time, and they are. Local churches stepped up to help the evacuees of Concow, Magalia, Paradise, and the canyons that line the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

East Avenue Church, Pleasant Valley Baptist Church, Evangelical Free Church of Chico, and Neighborhood Church all set up shelters. Bidwell Junior High, Butte County Fairgrounds, and Plumas County Fairgrounds also housed evacuees. Churches like St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church organized teams of parishioners to help serve food and sort donations.

Donations continue to pour in to cover the losses. Dennis McCourt, a bespectacled, middle-aged man in a gray shirt and jeans, tipped his head at the dozens of people rummaging through cardboard boxes of clothing in the now-defunct Toys R Us parking lot. “It’s amazing how this came together. It was a divine appointment,” he told me the Wednesday after the fire.

His nonprofit Got Hope, based in Oakhurst, partnered with its local Youth With a Mission to start a distribution site for fire victims. McCourt said his main goal is to share the gospel with the people who come for the clothes.

At East Avenue Church in Chico, at least 200 evacuees have found shelter in the church’s gym, family room, and parking lot. Aaron Freer, 45, stood in the parking lot of the church and held the leash of his white Siberian husky. The morning the fire broke out, he was working at his landscaping job in Chico when he saw smoke rising ominously from the hills.

He phoned his girlfriend Rita Miller, 40, to tell her to get out of their home in the canyon. Miller loaded the dog into their truck and drove out. Then she hit the gridlock. Transmission problems on their truck forced her to abandon the vehicle and walk.

A woman in another car picked her up, and they continued on to where Miller’s mother lived. The journey was harrowing. “There was fire everywhere. Things were exploding everywhere,” Miller said. They eventually reached her mother, and packed her and her medications into their rescuer’s vehicle.

Miller and Freer don’t know what they’re doing next, but plan to rebuild in Paradise eventually. Not everyone is sure they want to go back.

“At this point I can’t imagine rebuilding in Paradise,” Spencer said. “Ninety percent of the town is gone.” John and Monica Heyden aren’t sure if they will return to Concow, the first town the fire hit. They are renting a house in Roseville while they figure out what to do with the “overwhelming mound of toxins” Monica said used to be their home.

“It will be a transition, especially figuring out where we’ll end up next, but we know God is with us and trust that He will lead us in the same way He led Abraham and Daniel when they were displaced,” she wrote in a Facebook post on Nov. 17.

Before Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) can restore power to the area, county workers have to clear the roads of downed trees, burned-out cars, and bodies of those who didn’t escape. The destruction is so bad, said PG&E President Geisha Williams, that “immediate restoration” probably isn’t going to happen.

In the meantime, PG&E faces a lawsuit from fire victims claiming the power company is guilty of criminal negligence. The company faces at least 200 lawsuits for last year’s fires, with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection blaming the company’s failure to properly maintain its equipment for starting at least 16 of last year’s 9,000 wildfires.

But no matter how long it takes them to restore power to the area, some residents will rebuild. The Shingler family is among those planning to go back. “We’ve been there for over 30 years, so it’s home,” Shawn’s wife Shere Shingler told me. “If everyone leaves, there will be no town anymore.”

Either way, no one will ever be the same.

Spencer said the fire dramatically altered her relationship with Jesus, as “He literally spared my life from fire”: “I’m forever changed by this in a beautiful way. It may seem strange to those on the outside that I can have such joy and peace in the middle of this storm, but that is because of our God. We were stripped of everything except family and the one thing we treasure most. Jesus.”

Mourners pray for Camp Fire victims at the First Christian Church in Chico, Calif.
A new category of mobile learning apps seeks to help the large segment of the American labor force that struggles with literacy skills.

More than half of the workforce reads at less than the sixth-grade level, and many are illiterate, according to Jessica Rothenberg-Aalami, the founder and CEO of Cell-Ed, a mobile learning platform targeting low-skill workers.

“When you talk about adult literacy, it sounds like you’re referring to a few folks who fell through the cracks, but that’s not the case at all,” she told Fast Company. “It’s a hidden epidemic.”

Cell-Ed and another application called Learning Upgrade—which teaches English and math using songs, video games, and rewards—were among five finalists for the $7 million Adult Literacy X Prize, sponsored by the Barbara Bush Foundation.

Users of the Cell-Ed app don’t need a computer or smartphone, just a phone that can text. Once logged on, they can access learning modules on subjects that include English as a second language, reading, writing, math, and more. The short “micro-lessons” last no longer than three minutes, allowing users to fit them in to work or home schedules. Cell-Ed coaches, available around the clock via text or phone, offer additional support to learners.

Several studies have backed up Cell-Ed’s approach. A 2014 assessment by the Center for Global Development found the app improved reading levels an equivalent of two to four years in a four-month period.

“I was a little skeptical at first,” said Kyle Teague, the learning and development manager at the Four Seasons in Silicon Valley—one of six Four Seasons hotels across the nation participating in a Cell-Ed pilot program with 100 Spanish-speaking housekeepers. “It has enabled them to speak with guests comfortably,” Teague told Fast Company. “There is a change in their confidence level.”

Cell-Ed charges nonprofit and government clients an annual license fee of $50 per user. For corporate clients, the cost is less than $10 per user, per month.

School bathrooms have long been associated with prohibited behaviors such as smoking or bullying. But the growing popularity of smoking electronic cigarettes—known as vaping—among middle- and high-school students has alarmed many school districts. Now, they are combating the trend with technology.

More than 200 U.S. and Canadian schools have installed an artificial-intelligence-based system called Fly Sense, which can detect both vaping and elevated sound levels that might indicate fighting or bullying.

Fly Sense isn’t 100 percent accurate at detecting vaping signatures, and sometimes triggers false alarms. But when school officials get a Fly Sense alert, they can investigate to determine whether the system correctly identified a vaping incident. Feedback from these events helps the system become more accurate.

Fly Sense can monitor noise levels in bathrooms or locker rooms to detect potential bullying or fighting. The system alerts administrators when noise levels exceed a certain school-determined threshold. (To protect student privacy, Fly Sense cannot identify specific voices.)

Soter Technologies, which developed Fly Sense, claims it has helped schools decrease vaping incidents by 70 percent, on average, according to IEEE Spectrum. —M.C.
When Yazidi advocate Pari Ibrahim goes back to the Yazidi refugee camps in the Kurdistan region in Iraq, the people always ask, “What did the U.S. say? What will happen now?” Four years ago ISIS radicals began a genocidal campaign against the Yazidis, killing or kidnapping almost 10,000 people; now survivors languish in refugee camps on Kurdistan’s Mount Sinjar and in Syria and Turkey.

At a Nov. 9 event in Washington hosted by the Religious Freedom Institute and Baylor University, Ibrahim said her people desperately look to the American government for help: “If the U.S. says something, then the whole world will listen.”

On the 20th anniversary of the passage of the International Religious Freedom Act, advocates say the IRF Act offers persecuted religious groups their best chance for relief, even as conditions continue to worsen around the world. By some estimates, more than 80 percent of the world lives in a religiously restrictive environment.

“When you look at countries from which some of our gravest threats, terrorism, instability, violence emerge... these are overwhelmingly countries where religious freedom is badly abused and oppressed,” said Katrina Lantos Swett, former chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

The offices the IRF Act created, including USCIRF and the ambassador-at-large position, monitor religious freedom conditions, release an annual report, and make recommendations for the United States to sanction offending countries.

Knox Thames, special adviser for religious minorities at the State Department, said an often overlooked aspect of USCIRF’s annual report is that it trained a generation of foreign service officers in religious issues. “There, we are ahead of the curve from just about every other country,” Thames said.

In countering new and old challenges, a growing number of religious freedom advocates argue that neglecting religious freedom in the interest of national security actually harms both in the long run. Since 2004, the United States has given Saudi Arabia a waiver on USCIRF-recommended sanctions, citing national security. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia continues to earn its status on USCIRF’s annual report as a “country of particular concern,” most recently by the brutal killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

The Trump administration took a different tack with Turkey, squeezing its economy to secure the release of Pastor Andrew Brunson, WORLD’s Daniel of the Year.

At the 20th anniversary event, Ambassador-at-Large Sam Brownback at one point asked how many knew someone who was in jail because of their faith. Hands shot up around the room—the majority of them concentrated in just a couple of rows.

When they later opened a mic for questions, one man, a Uighur Muslim named Ferkat Jawdat, said he came with a group of Uighur Muslims. All had family members in re-education camps. China has detained over 1 million Uighur Muslims in camps for what officials call counterterrorism measures (see next page).

After the event, Jawdat showed me a picture of his mother, whom officials detained in February. He has not spoken with her since. Jawdat said he has been seeking help from State Department officials, lawmakers, and anyone else who will listen. He believes other countries are hesitant to act, intimidated by China’s economic power. “The U.S. has the same gun in their hands—economic power,” he said. “They are just softly speaking to the Chinese government officials. They should directly use it for human rights violations. They should have used it a while ago.”

In describing the Yazidi genocide, panelist Ibrahim said, “This will happen again tomorrow if the root causes are not tackled.”

Jawdat and his aunt, who held a yellow plastic binder filled with pictures of their missing family members, have only too much reason to fear it is happening again today.
As Western countries accuse China of indefinitely detaining 1 million Uighurs in its Xinjiang region, China continues to defend its action as a counterterrorism measure that has been misconstrued for “politically driven” reasons.

“This protects the human rights of the vast majority, while also saving these people,” Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng said at a review by the United Nations Human Rights Council. “It’s another important contribution of China to the global counterterror field.”

At the review of human rights in China, which comes every five years, 150 UN member states had 45 seconds to speak, some using their time to compliment China’s economic growth or asking softball questions of the Communist country: Many of the countries in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East depend on large Chinese investments. Outside the UN meeting in Geneva, up to 1,000 Tibetan and Uighur activists protested China’s actions against their people groups.

Western countries including Australia, Canada, the United States, France, and Switzerland spoke out most strongly about the Uighur re-education camps. Mark Cassayre, the representative of the U.S. Mission to the UN in Geneva, called on China to “abolish all forms of arbitrary detention, including internment camps in Xinjiang, and immediately release the hundreds of thousands, possibly millions, of individuals detained in these camps.”

He also called on China to release human rights lawyer Wang Quanzhang, Uighur professor Ilham Tohti, and human rights activist Huang Qi. International groups fear Huang will die in prison as the Chinese government refuses to give him medical care for his kidney disease, heart disease, and hydrocephalus (buildup of fluid in the brain). However, the United States commented only as an observer state, since it withdrew from the council in June.

The 66-member China delegation continually defended its human rights record, stating in a written report submitted before the review that there was “no universal road for the development of human rights in the world,” and that China would pursue “human rights with Chinese characteristics.”

During the review, Yasheng Sidike, the Uighur mayor of Ürümqi, claimed the camps were necessary because “the threat of terrorism was quite serious.” He added that there had been no terrorist attacks in the past 22 months, and those in the camps have “never thought life could be so colorful and meaningful.”

Even though 50 Muslim countries were present, only Turkey broached the subject. Its representative spoke out against China’s “restriction on basic rights and liberties, like confinement of individuals without any legal grounds, and their separation from families and society.” Kazakhstan started to discuss the detention camps, but was cut off due to the time limit.

Several countries called on China to allow the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights access to the camps. Yet because the Council has no power to enforce a recommendation, China will likely refuse.

“China is trying to develop a response that can at least keep allies at the UN comfortable or deflect international criticism,” James Leibold, a China expert at Australia’s La Trobe University, told The New York Times. “What they probably fear the most is if... Muslim countries start to think this is unacceptable. That would be far more damaging.”

Uighurs and Tibetans demonstrate against China in front of the European UN headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.
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A House divided
[ Oct. 27, p. 30 ] I am always amazed (but shouldn’t be) that the cornerstone of the Democratic platform is the slaughter of children. Equally surprising is how the party of unbridled sex suddenly becomes prudish if it helps destroy a Republican.

—RICK FLANDERS on wng.org

Shadow of death
[ Oct. 27, p. 33 ] Sen. Cory Booker is going to the Bible to defend ripping children from their mothers’ bodies? Using Scripture to attack righteousness reminds me of Satan’s temptation of Jesus. Perhaps Booker should read his Bible rather than just pound it.

—JOHN COGAN on wng.org

The upshot of pot
[ Oct. 27, p. 42 ] If FOMO stands for the “fear of missing out,” WORLD’s series about the inevitability of nationwide marijuana legalization driven by the corporate pot industry makes me GIMO—“glad I’ll miss out”—on the coming world of legal dope.

—JAY RYAN / Cleveland, Ohio

I am leery of making addictive substances easier to obtain. But because this train seems to have left the station, it should at least be labeled properly. If it is to be treated like medicine, it should list dosage, side effects, and so on; if as a recreational substance, with warnings and age restrictions.

—ELIZABETH JONES on wng.org

As a state representative, I struggled but finally voted to legalize medical marijuana after observing the benefits for a lady struggling with the side effects of chemotherapy; I oppose it for “recreational” use. What Scriptural principles apply and what tools are there to help parents and teens facing down this fast-approaching monster storm?

—STEVE HOLMES / Alton, N.H.

Mere sponge cake
[ Oct. 27, p. 64 ] Marvin Olasky’s review of Andy Stanley’s Irresistible helped me understand my own discomfort with the book. As Jesus said, if we do not listen to Moses and the prophets, we will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.

—I sympathize with educators who don’t want to touch subjects like morality with a 10-foot pole. Given our culture, I wouldn’t want to either. It is our parental responsibility to teach our children to tell the truth in every situation.

—KARRIE POPE on wng.org

Christian parents should have demanded school choice and vouchers decades ago. If the vast majority of our children continue to be indoctrinated in public schools by “progressives,” the future looks grim.

—DONNA NEEDHAM on wng.org

Back to the sources
[ Oct. 27, p. 46 ] I concur that Ann Voskamp technically plagiarized Cynthia Occelli. But the debate reminds me of Jesus’ teaching in John that a grain of wheat must fall into the earth and die to bear fruit. I think that if it were possible for the apostle to roll his eyes from the grave, he certainly would.

Christian writers, actors, musicians, and even pastors who rely on their public presence to sell books should be honest and public with their apologies, not hide behind publishers and lawyers. Millions of Christians look to them for guidance or encouragement.

—DEBORAH M. O’BRIEN on wng.org

McDonald’s and McGuffey
[ Oct. 27, p. 3 ] I must push back on the idea that public schools should teach ethics. I’ve been in public schools for most of my life and watched their ability to educate deteriorate because people expect them to make up for the ills of society. It’s not possible.

—I concur that Ann Voskamp technically plagiarized Cynthia Occelli. But the debate reminds me of Jesus’ teaching in John that a grain of wheat must fall into the earth and die to bear fruit. I think that if it were possible for the apostle to roll his eyes from the grave, he certainly would.

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—DEBORAH M. O’BRIEN on wng.org
**The Hate U Give**
[Oct. 27, p. 19] This review saddened me. Bob Brown dismisses this film for containing too much “cop-bashing” and for lacking “substantive solutions” to race issues in America. But our black brothers and sisters in Christ have painful stories to share; are we willing to enter into their experience?
—LINDSEY GUTBROD / Grand Rapids, Mich.

**China’s coming**
[Oct. 27, p. 28] I enjoyed the professor’s scenario of China taking over the United States nonviolently. The student who wondered, “What reason would we have for fighting?” shows that our schools are failing to teach students the history of communism and its crippling effects, or to teach them to cherish our First Amendment rights and personal freedoms.
—ROBERT FRANCIS / Wakefield, Mass.

**Every tribe and tongue**
[Oct. 27, p. 50] The stunning photos and the touching story of the Hmong people left me with such a warm feeling. I was captivated by their beautiful, joyful faces.
—CHERYL IRISH / Bastrop, Texas

**Shop of horrors**
[Oct. 27, p. 17] I strongly encourage pro-lifers to see Gosnell. It tells a powerful story without being unnecessarily graphic or sensationalized. Abortion was, and is, a powerful and well-funded industry of evil that has bought the protection of government officials.
—TERRY L. BROWN on wng.org

**Growing heavenward**
—ARLENE DEANS / Mission Viejo, Calif.

**Clarification**

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Please include full name and address. Letters may be edited to yield brevity and clarity.
Not the least of the pleasures you missed if you are a millennial or a Gen Xer is “Professor” Irwin Corey, “World’s Foremost Authority.” And that is how he was introduced—on Mike Douglas’ daytime show in the 1960s, on Johnny Carson’s The Tonight Show in the ’80s, and until old age. He died at 102 and required less and less of a studied stoop and unkempt hair for his shtick as the rambling academic on the interview circuit.

Here is a sample. “Professor, tell us, why does water run downhill?” The sartorially challenged college escapee in rumpled black tux with tails, a string tie, and ratty sneakers, begins in absentminded earnestness punctuated with apropos gesticulations:

“Well if you will look at the globe itself, you will find that the cylindrical field—or the more or less spherical outlook—leads us to believe that it is impossible unless there is confusion. Therefore the difficulty arises in the fact that chaos reigns supreme. I feel not only honored. But I feel the confrontation upon which we have set our sights can no longer endure the propensity of the developing prognosis. Not only has my information deterred those who have contributed financially to the establishment and realize that we can have another diphthong. The objective basis, on consumption, rather than the acceptance of a vital curiosity, which makes it impossible to sustain the allegations made in favor of those who seek to supplement themselves.”

Let’s play a game. I will cite another sample, and you guess which era talk show it comes from. The question is on sexuality and the answer goes like this:

“Where and how do compulsory heterosexuality and phallogocentrism converge (Luce Irigaray’s question)? Where are the points of breakage between them? How does language itself produce the fictive construction of ‘sex’ that supports these various regimes of power? What kinds of cultural practices produce subversive discontinuity and dissonance among sex, gender, and desire, and call into question their alleged relations? ... For Beauvoir, the ‘subject’ within the existential analytic of misogyny is already masculine, conflated with the universal, differentiating itself from a feminine ‘Other’ outside the universalizing norms of personhood, hopelessly ‘particular,’ embodied, condemned to immanence. Beauvoir and Irigaray clearly differ over the fundamental structures by which gender asymmetry is reproduced; Beauvoir turns to the failed reciprocity of an asymmetrical dialect, while Irigaray suggests that the dialect itself is the monolithic elaboration of the masculinist signifying economy.”

Give up? Haha, it was a trick question. It wasn’t Professor Irwin Corey at all! It may indeed be your own child’s professor if you sent him off to college and it’s not a Christian college. The author is Judith Butler, the book is Gender Trouble, and the course could be political philosophy, ethics, English, social studies, or even math or science. Everything’s infected.

Having nothing better to do one day, I analyzed Professor Corey’s interviews to try to understand what makes them funny. Here is my conclusion:

You will notice that the sentences have a semblance of sense. By that I mean they are not made up words, as in this nonsense verse from Lewis Carroll’s “Jabberwocky”:

’Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

It is important in creating satire not to romp too far outside the boundaries of verbal rules and structures. The more serious and plausible you sound, the more delicious the cheat when the listener finally catches on that you are mad.

But unless your own child is studying satire at the university to the tune of $30,000 a year, you may want to think twice about subjecting him or her (if we’re allowed to use these pronouns anymore) to this diet of “dysrhythmic isomorphic and hegemonic trichotomy of shifting fields in alternative temporalities.”

Give me slithy toves instead.
Miles to go

IF THE 1900S WERE THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY, WHAT ABOUT THE 2000S?

Late in 1899 a magazine known as The Christian Oracle changed its name to The Christian Century. In January 1900, its editors predicted that “glory’s mantle shall enwrap the world, and golden years enfold in an unbroken round of sweet and happy peace.” World War I began 14 years later.

For decades The Christian Century (CC) was the most influential U.S. magazine with the word “Christian” in its title. Recently I bought a 1935 issue at a flea market. One CC story had the headline “Japan Denounces the Treaty—So What?” The article denounced those who with “great apprehension” were warning that “a cloud of bombing planes will take the air near Tokyo, intent on leveling the defenses of Hawaii. ... This is nonsense, of course.”

Of course. Since Tokyo is almost 4,000 miles from Honolulu, Japanese planes six years later attacked from much closer aircraft carriers.

CC’s theological analysis in 1935 was as inaccurate as its military predictions. It opined that a wise guy should accept this life as “the only homeland of his soul” and abandon the “childish rebellion” of looking toward a “supernatural realm. ... Man’s original sin is to refuse the God of this existing world. ... Riotous dreams of another realm is man’s perversity.”

Over the following decade we saw man’s perversity fully revealed not in thoughts of heaven but in atheistic leaders who created earthly hells: gas chambers, death camps, and warfare that killed millions.

The biweekly CC, despite being wrong for a century, still limps on as “the flagship magazine of U.S. mainline Protestantism” with a circulation of 36,000, according to Wikipedia. Asaph in Psalm 73 says to God, “You guide me with your counsel,” but CC ignores it. For example, instead of condemning abortion in an October 2018 issue of CC, Associate Editor Amy Frykholm asked, “Is abortion only the lesser of two evils, or can it be a moral good?”

What we can do in 2019 depends on you and other readers and listeners.

Note how short her allowable spectrum is: from reluctantly accepting abortion to enthusiastically backing it whenever a mom does not “consent to the giving of life.” That’s because a preborn baby, according to CC, is only a “potential child.” But God inspired David to write 3,000 years ago in Psalm 139, “You formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

The continuing influence of CC and others on the left is one strong reason among others to support the opposing work of WORLD. This year, instead of going with the flow of our troubled culture, we have joyfully pointed out pro-life growth in China, good children’s and adult books, Andrew Brunson’s Daniel-like courage in Turkey, Christians surviving in Nineveh, and much else. We’ve told the stories of 2018 Hope Award winners from Colorado, Connecticut, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Vietnam.

We’ve also reported bad news such as opioid deaths, transgender propaganda in elementary schools, and attacks on churches in Nigeria and Nicaragua. But while we’ve had to investigate some troubled Christian groups, it’s been great to have stories honoring Billy Graham and Rachael Denhollander, Christian chess grandmaster Wesley So and Christian surfer Bethany Hamilton, and Christians broadcasting into Iran.

We’ve run series on marijuana legalization and homelessness, sent reporters to the Euphrates and the Rio Grande, and examined questions about donor-conceived children and matchmaker-conceived marriages. We’ve sifted the news on our website, produced surprising stories on the World and Everything in It podcast, and doubled the number of our listeners.

What we can do in 2019 depends on you and other readers and listeners. At one time I wondered if enough Christian journalistic talent existed to staff our potential positions. Through the work of the World Journalism Institute we’re now three-deep at every writing spot, and we’ll work hard to develop more World Radio talent. We have many ideas for in-depth features and podcast reports.

If you have investigative story ideas or radio/podcast talent, please write to me at the address below. If reading or listening to any WORLD products this year has been helpful to you, or if you’d like to help us meet more of our reporting and educational goals in 2019, please donate by using the adjacent envelope or giving online at wng.org/worldmovers.
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“I got a notification on my phone, ‘you received a share’ and there was a prayer written there and that was encouraging!”
— Cameron & Roanna

Monthly costs:
(Ranges based on age, household size, and membership level)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Cost Range</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>$200 - $440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3+ People</td>
<td>$250 - $495</td>
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As of October 2018

For more information call (877) 578-6787 or visit samaritanministries.org/world