JANUARY 18, 2020

47

ANOTHER ROE V. WADE ANNIVERSARY
I had spent 8 years traveling the world filming Ark Hunter, a documentary on my search for Noah’s Ark, when I decided to put it on the shelf and shift my attention to porn. Yes, porn. I was at church one Sunday morning when my pastor reported that nearly 70% of Christian men are hooked on porn. I leaned over to my wife and said, “This is serious! We’ve got to do something about this.”

Over the next several months, my wife and I researched why so many Christian men who love God can’t stop watching porn. What we discovered was astounding.

Watching porn impairs the prefrontal cortex part of the brain where moral decisions and executive reasoning are made. Over time, the prefrontal cortex, along with other brain regions, develop “holes”, causing one to lose brain power.

What starts out as a moral failing, quickly becomes a brain problem. Trying to fix your porn problem by yourself is like trying to do brain surgery on yourself.

Over the next two years, we embarked on a mission to produce the Conquer Series – a tool we believed would help men find freedom from porn addiction. We met with Dr. Lawrence Tucker who specializes in brain SPECT imaging.

He showed us brain scans of a healthy brain, a cocaine addict’s brain and a porn addict’s brain. The porn addict’s brain looked like Swiss cheese - almost identical to that of the cocaine addict.

There was obvious shrinkage and loss of tissue volume in the prefrontal cortex. So, watching porn is like snorting digital cocaine - it becomes highly addictive.

Right there, it dawned on us why the Church hasn’t been able to effectively help men in this area.

It’s a Brain Problem

For years, the Church has been treating the problem as a moral issue. Well-meaning church leaders would tell men to try harder - pray more, read your Bible more and just “stop it.” They didn’t understand how watching porn changes the physical structure of the brain. These men need a process.

Not A Quick Fix

We had a single goal with the Conquer Series: to effectively help men find freedom. So far, over 1,000,000 men in 70+ countries have been helped. Praise God! The key is the renewal of the mind, which is a process. There’s no quick fix. It’s hard work.

Dr. Ted Roberts, who has led thousands of men to freedom, lays out an effective process in the Conquer Series. He shows men how to transform their minds and find lasting freedom.

We have a sexual addiction screening test on our website to determine if you’re a sex addict. It was developed by world renowned sex addiction expert, Dr. Patrick Carnes. You don’t need to register or sign up to take it. Just go to our website ConquerSeries.com/SAST

Conquer Series Volume 1 is a 6-disc DVD set that lays out the battle plan for purity. It teaches men proven strategies and practical tools to walk in freedom.

We recently updated the conquers series into a powerful 2 Volume set. It’s packed with a lot of new content, powerful new tools, real practical strategies and insights from new experts. Overall, this is a much more powerful and effective Conquer Series.

If you’re struggling with porn, or know someone who is, then order the Conquer Series. Use it in your men’s small group. If you think it wasn’t worth the investment, then send it back within 14 days and you’ll get your money back. There’s no risk. Doing nothing is a far greater risk.

Jeremy Wiles is the CEO of KingdomWorks Studios and the Film Director of the Conquer Series.

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FEATURES

32 Buildings with baggage
*ROE V. WADE ANNIVERSARY* Groups are turning old abortion centers into pro-life spaces, but the facilities’ horrific histories are difficult for many to overcome.

38 Abominable enterprise
*ROE V. WADE ANNIVERSARY* A year in abortion battles: Abortion proponents defend the gruesome practice as pro-lifers push to repeal Roe v. Wade.

44 Losing the history wars
*ROE V. WADE ANNIVERSARY* A recent slate of pro-abortion history books shows pro-life authors are ceding important ground.

48 A long slide
Years of decline led the Boy Scouts of America to mortgage its biggest property in 2019.

DISPATCHES

7 News Analysis • Human Race Quotables • Quick Takes

CULTURE

19 Movies & TV • Books Children’s Books • Q&A • Music

NOTEBOOK

55 Religion • Technology Sports • Lifestyle

VOICES

4 Joel Belz
16 Janie B. Cheaney
30 Mindy Belz
61 Mailbag
63 Andrée Seu Peterson
64 Marvin Olasky
Notes from the CEO

Because this column appears only in WORLD Magazine, I find myself more often telling you about all the other things we do at WORLD than about the magazine itself. I guess it seems more important to talk about things you may not know than about what you’re holding in your hands.

Perhaps that benign neglect sends the wrong message. After all, you no doubt are hearing from other sources that magazines are a thing of the past, that print is dead, that the future is digital.

I do hear the question fairly regularly, “How long will you continue publishing a printed magazine?”

My answer: A very long time.

WORLD Magazine remains the core of all of our work. Nick Eicher, WNG’s chief content officer and co-host of our daily podcast, has often said that the best journalism is done in magazines, and that our magazine journalism is what powers all of our other outlets. And that comes from a broadcast journalist.

I bring this up now because with the next issue, we are introducing a completely redesigned WORLD Magazine. Often, magazine redesigns are accompanied by a detailed explanation for the reason behind every single design decision. At this point, I’d rather just say: We are trying to create a magazine that is easier and more enjoyable to read, with a clean, classic look, larger type, and bolder art and photography.

In other words, we’re investing in the future of print rather than running away from what is a powerful medium, good old-fashioned ink-on-paper. We figure, if you’re going to go to the trouble and expense of subscribing to a magazine, we want to give you as much value as we can.

Along the way, we hope the newly designed WORLD Magazine will be even more appealing to the friends, family members, and co-workers to whom you introduce it.
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Affirmative action—or else

VIRTUE DOESN’T BEST COME BY FORCE

Civil governments, by their very nature, are better at telling people what not to do than what they should do. That’s why affirmative action, as a function of civil government, fails so miserably.

I noted in this column some years ago that the Bible refers to two functions of government—both suggesting a sort of “enforcer” role. The book of Romans speaks of government as the agency that “bears the sword.” It also talks about government’s role as a collector of taxes. Neither assignment brings immediately to mind a spirit of volunteerism. Instead, government carries with it a “do it or else” image. I think God designed it that way.

Teaching moral goodness is always difficult. It takes a deft teacher, as any parent knows, to encourage someone to do something from the heart rather than merely to avoid bad results.

Government can’t normally be that deft. If it were, we wouldn’t need troopers to keep us driving at safe speeds. The IRS could send out fundraising appeals instead of audit threats. Libraries could forget overdue notices, trusting all their patrons to return books in timely fashion.

Somewhere, though, troopers, tax collectors, and librarians have discovered that teaching good behavior is not their main calling. They can offer a few carrots here and there, but mostly it’s the threat of a stick that keeps people honest.

Affirmative action, as it has come to be known in our generation, is about forcing people—using the government’s power—to do the right thing even if it isn’t totally evenhanded and fair. Affirmative action assumes that people won’t be good-spirited enough on their own to hire minorities in the workplace or to admit more women to medical school, for example.

Affirmative action is different from the civil rights laws of the 1960s that made it illegal to cut people out of specified privileges, benefits, and opportunities. Those laws, expanded and still in effect today, applied to all citizens, and said quite simply that if you didn’t treat everyone by the same standard, you could get in big trouble. You might even argue that most affirmative action laws directly violate the spirit of the best civil rights laws. We’ve been watching a subtle shift that has switched government’s task from enforcing evenhanded justice to teaching specific values. In doing so, we’ve demonstrated pretty conclusively that assigning such a role to government doesn’t work very well.

The problem isn’t primarily with the basic concept of affirmative action, which by itself is a totally Biblical concept. God Himself is perhaps the ultimate implementer of affirmative action. In His own language, He “set His love” on the nation of Israel for reasons suitable to Himself. And Jesus told the memorable story of the manager who hired people at different times of the day and, for reasons satisfactory to himself, chose to pay them wildly disparate wages for their work. The people hired late in the afternoon benefited inordinately from that man’s affirmative action—with full approval from Jesus.

And all of us, both personally and institutionally, exercise affirmative action—and, dare I say, discrimination—on every front in our everyday lives. We do our charitable giving in selected sectors. We send our missionaries to selected countries. Against the hordes of hungry and needy people, we pick a few to help. From all the orphans in the world, we pick one to adopt. There’s a certain arbitrariness to it, of course—but because we intend good, no one objects that our selection is somehow “unfair.”

By itself, affirmative action is a wholesome, natural, and totally defensible kind of human behavior. Christians, of all people, need to understand that.

Affirmative action gets off the track when it is mandated and enforced by the civil government.

It’s like pushing a string when a string was intended to pull. The agency that was intended to be the enforcer of justice is not a good agency to require demonstrations of love and goodness.

So the next time you’re inclined to bellyache about affirmative action, keep in mind that there’s an important place for it. It’s a function individual Christians should exercise with generous abandon—but one that civil government is perpetually likely to get all messed up.
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One of the brightest stars of the night sky is fading, and scientists aren’t sure why. Since October, Betelgeuse—the right shoulder of famous constellation Orion—has continued to dim. It’s possible the star, which goes through cycles of darkening and brightening, is experiencing a particularly dim cycle. But scientists say if it continues, Betelgeuse could burn into a supernova, blazing through the firmament.

Meanwhile, a decade’s blaze into oblivion is obvious for all to see. In the closing days of 2019, many debated the legacy of the preceding 10 years. Conservative New York Times columnist Ross Douthat argued that the decade was relatively uneventful but “filled with angst and paranoia” as America grew more divided.

Angst shone brightly in the year’s final days in a series of attacks on religious communities, both in the United States and abroad. Several attacks on Jews in the New York area—including a shooting at a grocery store and a stabbing—prompted police to step up patrols in Jewish communities. Then on Dec. 28, a man carried a machete into a rabbi’s home where a group of
Hasidic Jews celebrated Hanukkah. He slashed and stabbed five people, one man critically. Would-be victims ran out of the home past the still-lit menorah. But some fought back, throwing furniture at the attacker.

Police arrested him later that night as he fled, covered in his victims’ blood. FBI investigators said they found anti-Semitic journal entries in the man’s home, questioning why “Hebrew Israelites” took power from “ebionid Israelites,” what may be a reference to the Black Hebrew Israelite movement. His family and attorney say he is mentally ill.

One day later, a hooded attacker shot and killed two men in a worship service at West Freeway Church of Christ near Fort Worth, Texas. A church livestream caught the attack on video and showed congregants ducking under pews as the man fired a shotgun. Two members of the church’s security team shot back and killed him almost immediately. “We lost two great men today, but it could have been a lot worse, and I am thankful that our government has allowed us the opportunity to protect ourselves,” senior minister Brit Farmer said later that day.

Dozens died in Christmas Eve and Christmas Day attacks in Burkina Faso, the latest in the country’s growing trend of attacks from Islamic extremists. And one day after Christmas, Islamic State militants in Nigeria released video of fighters killing 11 Christians. They shot one man, beheaded the other 10, and said the murderers were to avenge the death of former ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

In the United States, debate over the impeachment of President Donald Trump burned about as hot as a supernova for much of 2019’s final weeks. It hit its hottest point on Dec. 18, when the House of Representatives approved two articles of impeachment against Trump along party lines. But as the year waned, what would happen next was unclear. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi hadn’t sent the articles of impeachment to the Senate as of Jan. 1—the first step in...
the Senate beginning a trial. Democrats and Republicans had not agreed on procedures for the trial, with Pelosi saying she wouldn’t send the articles to the Senate until she knows “what sort of trial the Senate will conduct.”

A Christianity Today editorial published the day after impeachment illuminated the debate about evangelical Christians’ relationship to Trump. The editorial, hinging on Democrats’ impeachment case, argued Trump should be removed from office. Many media outlets treated the editorial as a sea change for evangelicals. But as commentator Terry Mattingly pointed out days later at the website Get Religion, evangelicals are not monolithic in their view of the president. Nor have they been monolithic at any point in his candidacy and subsequent presidency, despite the claims of the White House and mainstream media.

One thing still burns brightly: the economy. Consumer spending continued to rise (holiday sales rose 3.4 percent over 2018), unemployment remained low (3.5 percent in November), and the economy grew (at a 2.1 percent annual rate in the third quarter of 2019). Consumer confidence boosted the stock market to new heights. On Dec. 26, the Nasdaq composite, Dow Jones Industrial Average, and S&P 500 indexes all closed at record levels.

Hollywood is a constant holiday rocket booster for consumer spending, and thanks in part to a new Star Wars film, late 2019 was no exception. The Rise of Skywalker, the final entry in the “Skywalker Saga” that began with George Lucas’ iconic 1977 movie, opened Dec. 20. In its first 10 days Rise of Skywalker hauled in nearly $362 million at the box office, even though critics (including WORLD’s Megan Basham) gave it less-than-stellar reviews. As the Star Wars series and Betelgeuse both dimmed, Christians on Dec. 25 again remembered when a star guided Wise Men to see the Messiah. Whichever stars darken or battles blaze at the dawn of a new decade, the God who gave “the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night” (Jeremiah 31:35) remains in control. ©

BY THE NUMBERS

$0

The cost to become owner of The Skagway News, an Alaskan newspaper with two staff members. The publisher is giving away the small-town newspaper to anyone willing to run it.

30%–50%

The increase in nighttime light intensity in U.S. suburban areas due to Christmas decorations, according to NASA.

11

The number of consecutive AFC East division titles that the New England Patriots have won, the most of any NFL team.

$26 million

The amount that 8-year-old Ryan Kaji earned from his YouTube channel in 2019, making him the site’s top earner. Ryan’s videos show him doing science experiments, crafts, music videos, and more.

52%

The share of Americans who say they read news on Facebook, according to the Pew Research Center.
Stommed
Iraqi Shiite militia supporters lit fires, threw rocks, and chanted, “Death to America,” at the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad on Dec. 31. President Trump sent Marines and other security forces to the embassy, and the rioters retreated from the compound and set up tents around the compound. On Jan. 1 they reportedly began to leave. The rioters were angry over American airstrikes that had killed 24 members of the Iranian-backed militant group Kataib Hezbollah over the previous weekend. The United States holds the group responsible for a missile attack on an Iraqi military base on Dec. 27 that killed an American contractor and wounded other U.S. and Iraqi military personnel.

Proclaimed
Gun owners across numerous states are joining together to declare “Second Amendment sanctuaries” in their counties, cities, and towns. The movement began last year in Illinois as a response to increased restrictions on gun ownership and has spread to California, Colorado, New Mexico, Florida, and Virginia. The sanctuary movement gained further momentum in Virginia after incoming state Senate Majority Leader Dick Saslaw suggested making the purchase, possession, and manufacture of assault weapons a felony, a move that angered many gun owners and spurred several counties to pass “sanctuary resolutions.” Most of these resolutions state that local sheriffs and prosecutors will refuse to arrest residents who break unconstitutional laws, such as the amendment proposed by Saslaw.

Launched
President Donald Trump has signed into law the creation of a new branch of the U.S. military, redesignating the U.S. Air Force Space Command as the United States Space Force. The move makes the Space Force the first new military service since the U.S. Army Air Forces became the U.S. Air Force in 1947. The Space Force’s first commander is Gen. Jay Raymond, who will be a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Most of the details of the Space Force’s goals, uniforms, and logos are still in the works, according to Raymond, and plans are to keep the force small. The Pentagon will transfer personnel from the Air Force on a voluntary basis, and their numbers are expected to stay around 15,000. Support personnel, such as engineers, will remain part of the Air Force.

Declined
Japan’s population is in steep decline, with the number of recorded births in 2019 the lowest since records began in 1899. The country had 512,000 fewer people in 2019 than in 2018, according to an estimate released by the country’s welfare ministry. Births were expected to be below the 900,000 mark as the number of deaths increased to an expected 1.4 million. For years, Japan has had a smaller, consistently declining workforce to support its growing number of retired people: Almost 28 percent of the population is over 65. Since the first recorded population decline in 2007, the country has been trying to encourage young people to marry and have more children, but efforts so far have been insufficient.

Reopened
ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) has been reopening deportation cases across the United States that were closed under DACA, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. Immigrants brought illegally into the country as minors had been protected from deportation under the program. As long as DACA beneficiaries stayed out of trouble with the law, their cases were administratively closed, meaning their trials were put on hold indefinitely. However, ICE confirmed to CNN in an email that it will reexamine cases against DACA recipients “nationwide.” The U.S. Supreme Court is slated to decide in June whether the Trump administration can end the program entirely. The recent ICE actions come even as the president has said that ending the program does not mean he will deport DACA beneficiaries.
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AGNES OUYANG, a technology worker in the city of Shenzhen, on Chinese government surveillance in the country’s cities.

‘The citizens who were inside that church undoubtedly saved 242 other parishioners.’

JEFF WILLIAMS, regional director of the Texas Department of Public Safety, after armed members (and security volunteers) of West Freeway Church of Christ in White Settlement, Texas, shot and killed a gunman who attacked the congregation during a worship service on Dec. 29.

‘Like a steady drumbeat getting louder each year.’

ELIZABETH NASH, state trend analyst for the Guttmacher Institute, on the increase in pro-life policies in the past decade. “It’s been a rough decade for those that support abortion rights,” she said.

‘Woe to you, for you see evil as kindness and see kindness as evil. You are not sending a criminal to prison, you are crowning a righteous man!’

Human rights lawyer ZHANG PEIHONG after pastor Wang Yi was sentenced to nine years in prison. Wang had originally appointed Zhang as his lawyer, but Chinese officials would not allow him to represent Wang.
A wise old guest
The Newman family had about a dozen owl ornaments on their Christmas tree at their home near Atlanta, Ga., this Christmas, but daughter India, 10, told her parents on Dec. 12 that one of them scared her. Mother Katie McBride Newman decided to take a look—and, she says, the owl turned its head and looked at her. That particular owl wasn’t an ornament but a real owl. “It was surreal, but we weren’t really freaked out about it,” McBride Newman told the Associated Press. “We’re really outdoorsy people.” Newman and her husband Billy decided to leave the windows open overnight in an effort to entice the bird to fly out. When the Eastern screech owl was still in the tree the next day, they called the Chattahoochee Nature Center for advice. Workers at the center told her to leave some raw chicken out for the owl and then came by later to help the family release the bird back into the wild.

Password patience
More than 38,000 German university students were asked to stand in line to receive new passwords after the network at Justus Liebig University suffered a malware attack. Beginning Dec. 8, university officials at the school just north of Frankfurt, Germany, took down the school network and began scanning each individual computer on campus for malware. As a precautionary measure, the school reset every password for every email account issued by the school. German law prevented the university from emailing out new passwords to students’ personal email accounts. That meant the school had to issue new passwords on slips of paper during a massive five-day exercise concluding Dec. 20.

Search and destroy
For the second time this year, a Detroit-area contractor has demolished the wrong house. Detroit Building Authority officials issued a citation to the Adamo Group for wrongful demolition. According to the DBA, the demolition company knocked down 14661 Alma in November rather than the fire-damaged 14461 Alma. Earlier this year, the company bulldozed an abandoned house next door to the house it was supposed to demolish. The Detroit Land Bank, an organization that attempts to dispose of abandoned properties in Detroit, owned both of the demolished houses. The wrongful demolition could lead to a three-month suspension of lucrative house demolition contracts for the company.

USDA approved
An accident by employees of the U.S. Department of Agriculture left a fictional nation on a list of trade partners on the agency’s website. A USDA spokesman said an agency employee accidentally added the Kingdom of Wakanda, a fictional East African nation in the Marvel superhero movie Black Panther, during a staff test. A New York–based software engineer first discovered the error and published it to social media on Dec. 18. The website has since been updated to remove Wakanda from the USDA’s agricultural tariff tracker.
**Bad first impression**

An Indian bride called off her own wedding after getting a look at her groom for the first time on their wedding day. At a reception preceding the ceremony on Nov. 24 in Uttar Pradesh, the bride- and groom-to-be both lifted their veils and saw one another for the first time. But the would-be bride didn’t like what she saw. According to local news reports, the woman complained the man was too dark-skinned and appeared to be too old. After the woman called off the wedding, the families that had arranged the marriage began fighting, stopping only when police were called to the scene.

**Noises in the night**

Thomas and Elisa Milam of Forsyth County, N.C., thought an intruder had entered their home, but it turns out they were just hearing things—or, actually, one thing. Hearing loud noises downstairs after midnight, Thomas Milam reportedly retrieved his gun and pointed it at the door as his wife called 911. But arriving deputies didn’t find an intruder; instead they found a robotic vacuum that had turned itself on and was banging against a wall to become unstuck. The couple had purchased the vacuum three days earlier. “It definitely is better safe than sorry because having heard what we did, I still would have called the police and because you just never know,” Milam told WGHP-TV.

**Flight delay**

A man and his possum were booted off a JetBlue flight just after Thanksgiving, leading to a four-day delay that left Gerald Tautenhahn looking for a new airline. Tautenhahn flew from California to Austin, Texas, before Thanksgiving to spend time with his mother during the holidays. He boarded his JetBlue flight at Long Beach Airport with his pet opossum in a soft-sided carrying case made for a cat or small dog and flew to Texas without incident. But while he was waiting for his return flight to take off, a crew member saw the animal and told Tautenhahn that JetBlue allows only dogs and cats on flights. After being escorted off the plane, Tautenhahn tried to negotiate with the airline but finally purchased passage on a United Airlines flight four days later that allowed him to return home with his animal.

**Canine catastrophe**

Firefighters in Essex, U.K., are blaming a dog for a small house fire. According to emergency crews, the blaze began when a husky managed to turn on a microwave while its owner was away. The homeowner had been using the appliance to store a loaf of bread. Thankfully, the homeowner spotted the fire while checking in on the dog via a streaming video app. Fire crews were able to put out the fire before it spread beyond the kitchen. No one was hurt in the fire, and the dog escaped unharmed.

**More moving money**

Not to be outdone by Tulsa, Okla. (see Quick Takes, Dec. 7, 2019), a pilot program in Topeka, Kan., has offered $15,000 for anyone to move to the city for a year. The Greater Topeka Partnership plans on paying $10,000 for people who move to the Kansas capital and rent a home and $15,000 to those who purchase a home and rehabilitate it. According to a spokesman for the program, between 40 and 60 people will receive the funding. The George Kaiser Family Foundation has been paying people $10,000 to move to Tulsa, Okla., since 2018.
Math gets woke
ANTI-WESTERN PHILOSOPHY AND HISTORY WILL NOW BE PART OF ARITHMETIC LESSONS

If you scan alarmist websites as I do, you may have run across the alarming news that the Seattle School Board is considering new guidelines for what might be called “social justice math.” Some culture watchers have taken this to mean that 2 plus 2 is no longer 4, but that’s not exactly the case. Math functions will remain the same, and there will still be such a thing as a right answer.

The reason for the proposed changes, as reported by Education Week, is “to infuse all K-12 math classes with ethnic studies questions that encourage students to explore how math has been ‘appropriated’ by Western culture and used in systems of power and oppression.”

Math felt like a tool of oppression to me in junior high, but that’s beside the point. More important than the doing of math will be who figured it out first and who stole that knowledge and who has been using 2 plus 2 to calculate the profit of slavery and the cost/benefit ratio of armies and how many white oppressors will be needed to colonize all of Africa.

Seattle may be the first major school district to infuse diversity studies into math, but the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics applauds the move. “What [Seattle is] doing,” says Robert Q. Berry, NCTM president, “follows the line of work we hope we can move forward as we think about the history of math and who contributes to that, and also about deepening students’ connection with identity and agency.”

A task-force report from the council (Catalyzing Change in High School Mathematics) lays out appropriate goals for quantitative learning, but also attempts to make math a wrap-around subject for psychological reflection. Students should be encouraged to develop a positive “mathematical identity” and “mathematical agency.” Agency is a good thing if it means giving a high-school senior the confidence to start a lawn-care business or build a robot. But if it means learning just enough about appropriation to browbeat the oppressors, it’s pretty much limited to the faculty lounge.

Rehumanizing is another key word, as if math has somehow been stripped of its natural warmth and sympathy. Rehumanizing insists that teachers “understand the roles of power, privilege, and oppression in the history of mathematics education.” One elementary school in Seattle is already experimenting with the proposed guidelines, but the supervisor’s office won’t say which one because of the “hate and vitriol” social media is certain to unleash.

But the vitriol is not limited to one side. A “top official at one math organization,” whom Education Week agreed not to identify, acknowledged the value of all students learning about cultural contributions to mathematical knowledge. “But you don’t need to talk about liberation and oppression and how Western mathematics has somehow taken over. It just turns people off and makes the goal of being inclusive that much tougher.” That view doesn’t seem arguable, but the fact that this person couldn’t speak openly indicates that oppression is now coming from other quarters.

We were warned: Francis Schaeffer, among others, saw that the “fact/value” split (separating objective information from an overarching worldview) would leave us with no reliable means of distinguishing one from the other. And since there is no such thing as “neutral” or “values-free” education, the fact part of the equation is going to migrate up to the value, and vice versa.

That’s what seems to be happening in education. For 50 years or more, we tried to keep supposedly subjective principles in the upper, theoretical level, while objective facts occupied the classroom below. But the new indisputable “fact” of history is entirely the story of power and oppression and how all Western religions, philosophies, and rational structures are merely power grabs. This is actually a value judgment, but it has become the bedrock of practically all educational theory. What began in university education schools is spreading to elementary arithmetic, and how much math—or anything else—are the kids really going to learn if they start with the premise that it was all a big cheat? ©
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Perhaps no tale better exemplifies this kind of devotion than Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*. In fact, just to save a draft of this review on my laptop, I had to give it the title “Little Women 2019” to differentiate it from three other *Little Women* film reviews that already live on my hard drive.

Yet, remarkably, the latest film version from director Greta Gerwig, rated PG for smoking, does manage to surprise us. And she still hits all those treasured beats and respects the traditional themes that have won over audiences for generations.

By jumping back and forth between past and present rather than using a standard chronological narrative, Gerwig injects something fresh into *Little Women* that allows us to experience the March sisters’ story anew no matter how many times we’ve swooned over it in the past. We still see Jo burn Meg’s hair. See Amy burn Jo’s manuscript. See Beth receive her beautiful piano. But we see it all through Jo’s memory.

The story begins in a period that so often causes the first real self-reflection in young people’s lives—the first time they move away from the home they grew up in. Jo (Saoirse Ronan) is now a writer living on her own in New York, just as she always wanted. But
CULTURE

**Movies & TV**

 reality can have a funny way of undercutting those visions that seem so fine and aspirational when you’re still a girl safely tucked up in the restraining arms of your family and community. The actual experience of them is almost always lonelier.

Gerwig takes the conflict at the heart the novel—whether individual or communal pursuits are more worthy—and explores how different answers can be equally valid depending on the personality and giftedness of the girl in question. She takes pains to show that Jo’s decision to strike out after her dreams is no more noble than Meg’s choice to forgo a grand career on the stage in favor of marriage and motherhood.

Some secular critics have asserted that Gerwig is offering a feminist take on the story. I’d hate for anyone to be put off from reading Alcott, knows what kind of stories are most likely to win female affection. What we most want from the Little Women is to see them grow into loving, self-sacrificing adults we can join Marmee in being proud of. With that one heartbreaking exception that makes the other sisters all the more dear, we do.

Supported by a phenomenal cast that includes Meryl Streep, Timothée Chalamet, and Emma Watson, Little Women’s warm heart makes it well worth venturing out to theaters during a cold winter.

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**Television**

*Tom Clancy’s Jack Ryan*

Season 2 of Tom Clancy’s Jack Ryan on Amazon is an entertaining adventure, with plenty of plot twists and surprises. But the eight-part series is marred by frequent blasphemy, excessive violence, and unnecessary foul language.

In Season 1, a low-level economic analyst battled an Islamist mastermind who used ISIS and Ebola in a quest to destroy America. This season, Jack Ryan fights a corrupt president determined to hang on to power by any means, including election tampering.

Fictional Venezuelan President Nicolás Reyes (Jordi Mollà) lives in luxury while his people suffer from lack of food and jobs. When a visiting U.S. senator of Venezuelan descent is assassinated, Ryan (John Krasinski) becomes determined to find out who was behind the plot. Ryan’s pursuit of justice brings him closer and closer to President Reyes, and mayhem follows as Reyes orchestrates political maneuvers to remove all Americans from the country.

Ryan chases the hired assassin all the way to London, where some of the series’ most gripping moments take place. The murky world of murderers for hire makes it tough to prove who paid for the killing. Back in Venezuela, President Reyes, facing a formidable political opponent, becomes desperate to maintain his power, eventually murdering one of his own relatives.

Krasinski, best known to many as Jim from *The Office*, has played enough serious roles since that sitcom that it isn’t jarring to see him as a leading man in an action-adventure. It’s refreshing to find a modern drama that presents an American as an uncorrupted hero, courageously standing for justice and the voice of the people. Christian viewers might not be surprised by the series’ on-screen violence, given the subject matter, but the amount of blasphemy makes this a show that I can’t recommend.

—by MARTY VANDRIEL

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**Box Office Top 10**

FOR THE WEEKEND OF DEC. 27-29 according to Box Office Mojo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Studio</th>
<th>Studio Code</th>
<th>Opening Day</th>
<th>Daily Gross</th>
<th>Gross To Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker</em></td>
<td>Disney &amp; Lucasfilm</td>
<td>DFL</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>Jumanji: The Next Level</em></td>
<td>Columbia Pictures</td>
<td>CP</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><em>Frozen II</em></td>
<td>Disney</td>
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<td><em>Little Women</em></td>
<td>Columbia Pictures</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><em>Spies in Disguise</em></td>
<td>Blue Sky Studios</td>
<td>BSY</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><em>Knives Out</em></td>
<td>Lionsgate</td>
<td>LNT</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td><em>Uncut Gems</em></td>
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<td>8</td>
<td><em>Cats</em></td>
<td>Deuce Films</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td><em>Bombshell</em></td>
<td>Lionsgate</td>
<td>LNT</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td><em>Richard Jewell</em></td>
<td>Warner Bros.</td>
<td>WB</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Reviewed by *WORLD

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

3. *Frozen II*: PG
4. *Little Women*: PG
5. *Spies in Disguise*: PG
7. *Uncut Gems*: R
8. *Cats*: PG
9. *Bombshell*: R

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*WORLD Magazine • January 18, 2020*
Movie

The Aeronauts

If you’re a parent of school-aged children and anything like me, you’re just coming out of a Christmas season of too many sweet treats and too much syrupy family entertainment. To wake up those sugar-shocked brains for a new semester, Amazon’s The Aeronauts (rated PG-13 for realistic peril) offers a pleasing mental palate cleanser.

It traces the true-ish story of how two Victorians nearly lost their lives breaking the French altitude record in a basket dangling from an inflated bag at a height jets soar at today. The achievement helped create the modern field of meteorology.

Royal Society astronomer James Glaisher (Eddie Redmayne) doesn’t want to join in the latest 19th-century amusement of taking an aerial pleasure cruise. Armed with gauges and notebooks, he’s set his sights on the wild blue yonder in the cause of science. When no male balloon pilots are willing to take him as high as he needs to go for his measurements, he turns to Amelia Wren (Felicity Jones).

This brings up the movie’s weakest point. Likable as Jones’ performance is, why did Glaisher’s real-life pilot—a dashing figure named Henry Coxwell—need to be supplanted by a fictional jill-of-all-trades? While there were women balloonists in the 19th century, we have a sense while watching The Aeronauts that the filmmakers pass over much intriguing detail in favor of the same old free-spirited-lady-teaches-serious-minded-man-how-to-embrace-life trope.

Not only is it unfair to write Coxwell out of history, but the film’s portrayal of Glaisher as overly clinical also seems inaccurate. At least if his poetic waxings—like how a common road looked from the sky like a “line of brilliant fire … covered with gold-dust”—are anything to go by.

That said, the film does a good job working within the stereotypes. For children ages 8 to 12 who are just beginning to appreciate thrilling tales that don’t star animated characters, The Aeronauts is a winner. What it lacks in original storytelling it makes up for in exuberance over the beautiful world God has created for us to explore—and the joy in applying our minds to its mysterious workings.

—by MEGAN BASHAM

Movie

Spies in Disguise

Among movies targeting younger audiences, Spies in Disguise doesn’t stand out. Sure, it’s action-packed like Despicable Me, but not half as clever or funny. The new animated film does succeed in reinforcing the modern reorientation of gender roles. Viewers won’t need a secret decoder ring to decipher the film’s message: Boy power is all hugs and glitter.

The story revolves around hotshot agent Lance Sterling (voiced with swagger by Will Smith). Villains are trying to kill the spy agency’s agents and frame Sterling for the crime. It won’t be easy for him to prove his loyalty: For one thing, he’s paired with tech specialist Walter (Tom Holland), who believes he can “save the world with a hug.”

“There’s no good guys or bad guys,” Walter chides. “There’s people.”

Sterling prefers weapons that match his enemies’ lethal power, but young Walter has fashioned grenades that explode into clouds of smile-inducing glitter and colorful “SO Shades of Yay” fountains.

Another hurdle: One of Walter’s scientific experiments transforms Sterling into a pigeon. Being a pigeon is a good disguise but makes Sterling dependent on others. He learns the value of teamwork.

Sterling must also stay one step ahead of Internal Affairs agent Marcy Kappel (Rashida Jones). The film’s three authority figures are all women: Marcy, the agency’s director (Reba McEntire), and Walter’s police-officer single mom. Nothing un-Biblical there, but the same can’t be said for multiple full-length shots (in a kids movie) of a man’s bare backside.

Arousing children’s curiosity for adult sexuality used to be called grooming. (Officially, the film is rated PG for action, violence, and rude humor.) Two sweater-clad male characters embrace fondly throughout the film.

Boys today are buying into “glitter” just as little Lone Rangers in the 1950s blazed cap guns and just as mini pro wrestlers in the 1980s “suplexed” off the backs of sofas. God made us in His image, so we are imitators by design. Sadly, instead of following Christ’s example, too often we accept a Hollywood imposter.

—by BOB BROWN

See all our movie reviews at wng.org/movies
Liberally applied
A LOOK AT LIBERALISM’S PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE by Marvin Olasky

James Traub’s What Was Liberalism? (Basic, 2019) has as its sweeping subtitle The Past, Present, and Promise of a Noble Idea, but it’s more an elegy for a faith now in hospice than a hopeful look ahead. The questions that need more exploration: What fatal flu infected liberalism, and who spread it?

Halfway through Traub’s book comes a chapter about the liberal high point, with “Liberalism as Civic Religion” in the 1960s. The next chapter is “The Great Society Goes Up in Flames,” but I don’t think the failure of anti-poverty programs made a crucial number of idealistic Americans conclude that liberal leaders were hypocrites. My speculation: The penny dropped when Ted Kennedy, Jesse Jackson, and a host of others who were pro-life, saying they cared about “the least of these,” showed they cared more about political expedience.

Traub blames our current political malaise on “the absolutism of the religious right.” He labels the Republican Party “the home of dogmatic absolutism.” He complains about “the Republican effort to reduce the courts to a partisan instrument.” He keeps spewing: “contempt for neutral principle…” The principle that the goal of Republican rule justified any and all means. … Republicans won the 2000 election by playing dirtier than the Democrats.

He also doesn’t grasp the proper use of the Bible in political discussions. He describes theology as “a trump card, for discussion ends where God’s will begins.” That’s not true for questions on which the Bible is silent, and only partly true regarding issues where the Bible is clear, such as abortion. On those, a determination of God’s will does not foreclose debate, but starts the pragmatic discussion of how precisely to effect change: Should we pass heartbeat laws? Fetal pain laws? Should we emphasize partial-birth abortion? Pragmatically allow rape and incest exceptions?

Traub backs up a bit only two pages from the end. He writes that “liberals must fight for judicial autonomy,” but recognizes that “defending through the judiciary rights that cannot prevail in democratic debate ultimately endangers both the courts and political parties. … Recent decisions on abortion, gay marriage, and other controversial questions of personal morality have helped fuel the culture war that rages all around us. The Democrats’ dependence on the judiciary implies a Hamiltonian distrust of the people. Populists like Donald Trump can go to town on that condescension.”

If Traub had started with that recognition instead of tossing it in at the end, his book would have been much stronger. He admits, “Even the great holy war over abortion has begun to look increasingly Pyrrhic. The fact that abortion is adjudicated in the Supreme Court rather than in legislatures, state and national, has turned every Supreme Court nomination into a life-and-death battle, has vastly exacerbated national polarization, and quite possibly got Donald Trump elected president.”

Hmm: Who moved the issue to the Supreme Court? Who moved the judiciary from neutral to activist? Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch put it well recently: “It’s not up to nine people to tell 330 million Americans how to live.” And millions of small ones when to die.

BOOKMARKS
Tremper Longman’s The Bible and the Ballot (Eerdmans, 2020) offers useful analysis of some issues, notes accurately that overturning Roe v. Wade would not eliminate abortion, and shows that some Bible verses cited by pro-lifers are not slam dunks over abortion defenders. But he also writes that abortion is not infanticide and “an abortion in the last trimester is a greater moral violation than in the first two weeks.” Is it? Very late abortions, when the unborn child resembles so closely a born one, grab our hearts more, but are they greater moral violations? And while Christians should pray and work to persuade others to trust and obey God, should we settle for the last line of Longman’s abortion chapter: Until there’s more gospel faith, “there may be wisdom in making abortion rare and safe.” Safe for whom? —M.O.
PASSIONS OF THE HEART: BIBLICAL COUNSEL FOR STUBBORN SEXUAL SINS  
John D. Street

Street, a Biblical counselor, offers hope for escape from enslaving sexual sin. He helps readers find the root of their sin and take Biblical action. As a seasoned pastor who has seen it all, he includes many anecdotes from his counseling experience. The help in this book will only benefit Christians who are ready to work hard and rely on God. Street writes in the first chapter, “If you are more concerned about the consequences of acknowledging your sin than of the purity of your own heart, then your heart is not ready for change.”

SUFFICIENT HOPE: GOSPEL MEDITATIONS AND PRAYERS FOR MOMS  
Christina Fox

Despite its many joys, motherhood can be lonely, thankless work. Fox reminds fellow mothers that the gospel offers hope for the daily challenges of raising kids. Her book covers struggles like worry, exhaustion, discontentment, and addressing children’s sin. She reminds moms that they are not alone and that the Bible provides a way to overcome these temptations. Each chapter is short and accessible, with a prayer at the end to help moms apply the truth to their situation. Fox shares personal stories and promises from Scripture, while challenging mothers to renew their thinking according to God’s will.

PURSUING A HEART OF WISDOM: COUNSELING TEENAGERS BIBLICALLY  
John Kwasny

Many assume bad decisions and sinful habits are just part of being a teenager. But the Bible provides everything that we—including teens—need to live godly lives. Kwasny offers a topical resource to help parents and youth leaders teach teens to think Biblically about common struggles. He dives into 15 issues teens often face, including anxiety, identity problems, pornography, and eating disorders. Each chapter gives examples of how the problem can appear, questions to ask, and Biblical principles to apply. Kwasny doesn’t shy from hard topics and gives parents Biblical hope for their teens.

DON’T LOSE HEART: GOSPEL HOPE FOR THE DISCOURAGED SOUL  
Jason Meyer

Pastor Jason Meyer gives Christians good news: “The reasons to take heart are greater than the reasons to lose heart! In other words, we can defeat discouragement because it is only a half-truth.” The first half of the book is “How to Fight for Sight,” and the second is “How to Defeat Despair.” Meyer gives memorable analogies and simple but powerful truths: Christians should “check the score” when the devil gets a victory in their lives, remembering ultimately he is already defeated. This short, 147-page book is warm and readable and a helpful resource for Christians striving for joy.

AFTERWORD

Bible stories can comfort Christians in many ways, but Gienna Marshall’s The Promise Is His Presence: Why God Is Always Enough (P&R, 2019) guides readers to focus on one specific truth: God’s presence with His people. Through examples in Scripture, she shows that God does not always explain why His people suffer, but He always promises to be with them. God’s presence is the only answer given and the only answer needed. Throughout the book, she describes time after time in her own life when she learned that God’s presence with her made all the difference. This book provides readers with a fresh look at familiar Bible stories, and the simplicity of the profound truth allows readers to find abundant applications on their own. Discussion questions at the end of each chapter make it well-suited to a women’s Bible study or as counseling homework. – C.K.
CULTURE / Children’s Books

Facing dangers
MIDDLE GRADE AND TEEN FICTION reviewed by Mary Jackson

BRAVE OLLIE POSSUM Ethan Nicolle
Ollie Mackerelli is almost 10 and still afraid of the dark. This is a strain on his parents, who are already struggling to keep their Italian restaurant open in a small town. Ollie’s troubles worsen, however, when his therapist turns into a monster who wields her magical powers to transform him into a possum, with plans to eat him. But with help from some animal friends, he begins to face his worst fears, and a wise owl tells him, “All brave acts are done in the midst of fear.” A wild, imaginative tale with lively illustrations that readers will find humorous yet encouraging. (Ages 8-12)

THE FIRST FOWLER S.D. Smith
In the latest Green Ember series installment, war is far from over for a band of clever, sword-wielding rabbits fighting against Morbin’s wolves, raptors, and other evil servants. Jo Shanks eagerly joins a team of rabbits tasked with diverting the enemy so Prince “Smalls” can make it to safety. Even when wolves vastly outnumber them and a cunning raptor stalks them, Jo and his counterparts make up for their smallness with bravery, wit, and allegiance. The First Fowler, a sequel to The Last Archer, offers fast-moving, action-packed chapters, but includes many references to previous books. (Ages 8-12)

THE WINTER KING Christine Cohen
Cora and her family have lived in poverty—and under a perceived curse—ever since her father died in a freak ice fishing accident. Overwhelmed with bitterness and desperate to help her mother and siblings, Cora breaks rules and challenges preconceptions in order to cope and obtain food, money, and warmth during the harsh winter months. But she also begins to uncover forbidden secrets, and her quest for the truth takes her down dangerous paths, pushing her own limits and those of her loved ones. Author Christine Cohen fills her debut novel with courage, suspense, unexpected twists, and deep Biblical truths. (Ages 10-15)

LOOK BOTH WAYS Jason Reynolds
This book tells 10 separate narratives of urban teens reentering a neighborhood after their school day, each one highlighting unique obstacles and unexpected detours. Parents should know that one narrative features two boys who share a love for gaming, but who experience same-sex attraction initiated by a kiss on the cheek and ending with one of them bringing the other roses. With this book, Reynolds, an award-winning author whose book Ghost was a runner-up for WORLD’s 2017 Children’s Novel of the Year list, veers from his previously wholesome content. His characters find camaraderie, but not the gospel. (Ages 12-15)

AFTERWORD
In J. Ryan Lister’s Emblems of the Infinite King: Enter the Knowledge of the Living God (Crossway, 2019), readers embark on a journey to turn ancient “keys.” Each one symbolizes various theological truths about God, humanity, sin, Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation, the church, and last things.

Lister, a professor of theology at Western Seminary, breaks down Christian doctrine with simplicity and creative storytelling—a “Key Keeper” invites readers to see their roles in the greatest narrative, one involving an Infinite King, a poisonous serpent, and a Death Killer.

The book, geared for ages 10 and up, ends with a list of Scripture references for further study of each doctrine. It is not intended to replace Scripture but to set the stage for young people to open the Bible, “the King’s speech,” with a framework of “the beautiful story of God’s work in God’s world for the worship of God.” Gold-gilded pages and captivating artwork by Anthony M. Benedetto add magical intrigue. —M.J.
We all need to stay informed and educated, but it’s often overwhelming to even try. WORLD produces facts-based, biblically objective journalism. Because truth-seeking resources must reference the ultimate authority on truth.

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WORLD’s Q&As include perspectives from Christians who diverge from the evangelical mainstream: a Democrat in the last issue, two libertarians in this one. Elise Daniel, co-founder of Bellwether Communications, edited Called to Freedom: Why You Can Be Christian and Libertarian (2017). Taylor Barkley, a program officer at Stand Together, wrote a chapter in that book. Here are excerpts of their comments before a student audience.

**How did you become a Christian libertarian?**

Elise Daniel: I was raised in a conservative Christian home with the basic understanding that free markets and limited governments are good. A book about prohibition helped me understand what happens when the government tries to legislate something like alcohol consumption: corruption, hypocrisy, crime. I came to a position where I saw how bad the government is at legislating morality, and how costly it is.

Taylor Barkley: I grew up in a Christian household and was homeschooled K-12. In high school I was earning a minimum wage and thought, Who could be against the minimum wage? But I read Thomas Sowell’s Basic Economics and read how the minimum wage harms the people it’s meant to benefit. That blew my mind: I loved the counterintuitive nature of free-market economics.

**Isn’t government inevitably involved in morality in some ways? For example, the welfare system encourages people not to get married because they often lose money when they marry.**

ED: A law may have some small success in creating culture, but it always comes at a greater cost, and even the changes don’t necessarily change hearts. For example, there’s not much virtue in not drinking because you don’t know the right bootleggers.
Many people confuse libertarianism and libertinism.
TB: Libertarianism is a political philosophy, and libertinism is the stance that there is no moral structure, so “I’m gonna live my life however I see fit.”
Libertinism often leads to abortion, and you’re against that.
TB: I think the government should protect lives of unborn children.
On what grounds?
TB: On that it’s a human being.
ED: Yes, on the grounds that it’s a human being and abortion is a violation of the nonaggression principle.
The nonaggression principle that you shouldn’t kill or hurt other human beings. How does that apply internationally?
ED: Foreign policy is hard to grapple with because there doesn’t seem to be a good outcome either way. My dad was a Marine, so I think about what’s necessary to protect our freedom. My foreign policy position is still moving.
What drugs would you legalize?
TB: Marijuana, similar recreational drugs. Not harder drugs that have a clearer link to life destruction like methamphetamine or even heroin. I lost a friend to a heroin overdose in college.
ED: I’m not super passionate about drug legalization. We want a virtuous society. Conservatives will tell me they don’t want to raise kids in a culture where gambling, drugs, prostitution, all these things are OK. Neither do we. Our culture needs to have virtue, which we learn from our faith, from God, from the Bible. The church had a big role. We can’t just shift responsibility to the government. The church needs to do culture work. Just because we’re free doesn’t mean we’re off the hook. It means we have a much greater responsibility.
TB: People are free to make decisions that are harmful for themselves. That comes with the package of liberty. I don’t think we can, neither should we, stop people from making harmful decisions. They have autonomy over themselves. Stewardship of the body, soul, and spirit is important. That comes from God.
How do you come at the current and growing battle of LGBT groups versus bakers, photographers, and florists?
TB: What do we want a free society to look like? A free society means people are going to be doing things you don’t like, and do I have other means to that product or service from someone who maybe is more friendly to my perspectives? But it’s a tricky question.
That’s why we’ll go to Elise for the answer.
ED: That’s a really tricky one. We have to learn to work together in society and live peacefully.
As you were growing up, how did the presidencies of George W. Bush and Barack Obama affect your thinking?
ED: During the Bush presidency, I considered myself more or less a Republican. Supported George Bush. Supported the war in Iraq. Later I realized that government really expanded under him, but Republicans were supposed to be for limited government. Republicans were not living and implementing liberty in a consistent way.
During the Obama presidency, social justice, especially in the Christian church, was a very popular movement. I was in college and having conversations with my Christian friends about what they believed in politics. That turned a lot of my attention to how the government cares for the poor. I asked, who deals best with poverty? Is it the church or the government?
What influence is Donald Trump having on people in their 20s and early 30s?
ED: It takes a divisive president to forge a new path, but some of the tribalism going on is discouraging. He’s been outspoken on pro-life issues, and from a libertarian position he’s sided more with former candidates like Rand Paul on foreign policy. His presidency is giving libertarians fresh ground and motivation for the next election cycle.
TB: His presidency has caused people to take a look at the system we have. After his election former Obama staffers and liberal commentators were all of a sudden talking about the importance of state legislatures. People are reconsidering executive power. This has been a libertarian talking point for a long, long time.
What about compulsory vaccination of children?
ED: I approve of vaccination, but I don’t want the state to have that kind of power, even though I do want everyone to be vaccinated. It’s tricky. Freedom is not safe. And we just need to recognize that the government’s involvement in these things is even more risky.
TB: I’m also very pro-vaccination. I’m glad my child will not be subject to immense physical suffering due to measles, mumps, rubella, tuberculosis, typhoid. The libertarian part of me grapples with forced vaccination, but let’s take a step back first: The evidence is not on the side of anti-vaccination. Even if there is a nonzero chance that there’s a risk of a certain vaccination, the risk of death and typhoid or immense high fever is a worse risk to take.
Some conservatives believe libertarianism has contributed to a breakdown of society by promoting a radical individualism that creates a culture of people with no obligations beyond themselves to history, tradition, or community, or anything like that. Doesn’t libertarianism contribute to that problem?
ED: Libertarian circles do need improvement on that. You can’t tell the government to get out of the way and then not do anything about it. We have to come together in a community and work to solve those problems.
Mission to Egypt

ALBUM CAPTURES THE FLAVOR OF FRANCIS’ ATTEMPT TO CONVERT A SULTAN
by Arsenio Orteza

1219: The Saint and the Sultan (Berlin Classics), the latest recording by Mehmet Cemal Yeşilçay and his Pera Ensemble, commemorates the 800th anniversary of Francis of Assisi’s journey to Damietta, Egypt, the economic heart of the 13th-century Muslim world, to convert the sultan al-Malik al-Kamil.

The context came with unusual perils. The Fifth Crusade was underway, and Francis was therefore “the enemy,” subject to imprisonment, torture, and execution. He experienced at least one of the first two. He avoided the third but not for lack of trying: At one point, he challenged al-Kamil’s priests to an “ordeal of fire.” (They declined.) In the end, the sultan proved as almost-persuadable as Agrippa had while listening to Paul. And Francis, who had expected either a miracle or martyrdom, was honorably escorted back to the crusaders’ camp.

To capture in music the flavor of such a dramatic event must have been daunting. Yet Yeşilçay and his ensemble have captured exactly that.

From the crusader hymn “Deus Lo Vult: Pax in Nominee Domini,” which opens Disc 1, to “Surah Al-Hujurat 9/13 & Surah Al-Ahzab 33/56,” which concludes Disc 2, 1219 combines vintage Oriental and Occidental compositions and texts, situating spirited singing and original-language recitation amid period-piece instrumental virtuosity.

Ultimately, what eventuates over the course of 1219’s distinctively Middle Eastern-sounding two hours and 13 minutes feels less like a competition of worldviews (although it was, and remains, that) and more like the mutually respectful dialogue that historians believe actually took place between Francis and al-Kamil once each got over his surprise at the other’s not being as threatening or as antagonistic as he’d expected.

Like 1219, the 10 selections constituting John Zorn’s suite for three acoustic guitars Nove Cantici per Francesco d’Assisi (Tzadik) were inspired by the poor man of Assisi. Unlike 1219, they focus not on a specific Franciscan episode but on highlights from throughout the course of Francis’ life and thought.

The pieces owe their genesis to Zorn’s 2018 residency at New York City’s Frick museum and contain no lyrics, so the titles do much of the heavy lifting. The 3½-minute “Fioretti,” for instance, refers to the collection of Franciscan legends known in English as The Little Flowers, the seven-minute “Meditations” to Giovanni Bellini’s painting Saint Francis in the Desert (which also provides the cover art).

The heaviest lifting, however, is done by the guitarists Julian Lage, Gyan Riley, and Bill Frisell, whose intricate and tensile interactions make the lifting seem light. They’re at their lightest on “Poor Clares,” the title of which alludes to the order of contemplative nuns founded by Francis’ best-known female disciple and the melody and lilt of which escort the spirit of not only the Clares but also Erik Satie (in his Gymnopédie mode) into the 21st century.

Long before Zorn took up the Franciscan theme, Hartmann von Andel-Hochbrunn—a Franciscan monk, composer, and organist better known as Father Hartmann—delivered the oratorio San Francesco. It’s a too-little-known work whose 1998 live recording by Sylvia Rieser, Barbara Hötz, Frieder Lang, Vito Maria Brunetti, and the Haydn Orchestra has just been reissued by Nar Classical in a budget-priced, MP3-only edition.

Reviewing a 1902 performance of San Francesco, the critic Eduard Hanslick called it a “clean, pleasant, and uncomplicated” work that, along with Hartmann’s other oratorios, he had “learned to appreciate with genuine delight.” Faint though such praise may seem, coming from Hanslick, who did not hand out encomiums lightly, it meant something.

And now, with the Haydn Orchestra’s stately performance back in circulation, anyone with $5.99 can find out what that genuinely delightful something was.
New or recent albums
reviewed by Arsenio Orteza

THANKS FOR THE DANCE Leonard Cohen
It turns out that Cohen had one more album in him, or at least enough of one to enable his son Adam and a sympathetic coterie of background singers and musicians to turn it into something befitting his singular legacy. The sepulchral whispers, the poetic verbal economy, the intermingling of the sacred and the profane—everything that ever made Cohen fascinating is here. Most fascinating of all, he ends by imploring his fans not to listen to him anymore but to listen instead to “the mind of God.”

IF YOU'RE GOING TO THE CITY: A TRIBUTE TO MOSE ALLISON Various artists
In an uncommon twist where tribute albums are concerned, most of these various artists are A-listers. Not that their status automatically grants them access to Allison's sardonic paradoxes: The difference between those who come across as Allison admirers (Taj Mahal, Iggy Pop, Chrissie Hynde) and those who come across as Allison soul mates (John Chin and Richard Julian, Robbie Fulks, Loudon Wainwright III) is palpable. That being said, three cheers for Fiona Apple singing "Your Molecular Structure." And Jackson Browne's “If You Live” could delight Tonio K.

THREE CHORDS & THE TRUTH Van Morrison
That the dark night of the soul (the title of Track 3) from which Morrison has emerged may have been of his own making does not diminish these performances. He hasn't sung with this much je ne sais quoi since Into the Music. One explanation may be that he no longer smokes, another that his last four albums were palate-cleansing genre exercises. Whatever the reason, it's nice to hear him recycling his favorite melodies and ideas for the purpose of bidding yet another period of transition farewell.

I Jon Troast
First-time fatherhood has brought out the advice giver in this itinerant singer-songwriter. Although three of his latest five songs address his wife (including “Please Look Me in the Eye,” Troast's most musically soulful statement to date), there's an unmistakably paternal quality to “Leave Some of the Ends Loose” and “How the World Works.” The former contains Troast's prescription for not finding oneself “all tied up in knots.” The latter adapts 1 Corinthians 12 to society at large and wouldn't sound out of place coming from Mister Rogers.

ENCORE
This year, King Crimson's In the Court of the Crimson King and Robert Fripp's Exposure turn 50 and 40 respectively. And, to mark the occasion, Discipline Global Mobile has released expanded editions of each. Absorbed back to back, they reveal more clearly than ever the vast creative distance that Fripp (King Crimson's leader and only continuous member) traveled while evolving from a progressive rocker with a severe case of the moody blues into a cutting-edge crafter of art-damaged art songs. The only even remotely common sonic ground? In the Court of the Crimson King's “21st Century Schizoid Man,” certainly the only song ever to be sampled by Kanye West and quoted by Ravi Zacharias.

It's Exposure's minute-and-a-half “Water Music I,” however, that provides the most interesting footnote. Amid “Frippertronic” tape loops, the esoterist J.G. Bennett solemnly predicts mass climate-change-related destruction. His time frame? Forty years (i.e., now). The cause? Global freezing. —A.O.
In our business a proverb about good news rarely gets the attention it deserves, but a journalist at the start of a new year will be wise to ponder how good news “refreshes the bones” (Proverbs 15:30).

So in late 2019 I began to list the good things overlooked in the mad dash to cover famine, persecution, and war. It’s a necessary exercise, a balancing act to restore perspective, because once you start looking for good news you find it, even in abundance.

For one, we are living in a time of remarkable advances in medicine. Anti-retroviral treatments are giving those with HIV/AIDS longer lives and less chance of spreading the virus. Since 2016 such therapy has saved about 1 million people from early death.

One of the most dramatic medical breakthroughs came in late 2019 with a new therapy for cystic fibrosis, a breakthrough so profound it brought doctors and researchers to tears. The new drug regimen targets the gene mutation causing the disease, and its effects are both immediate and long-lasting. A crippling malady that once killed most victims by their 30s, cystic fibrosis now can be reduced to a condition like diabetes, chronic but manageable.

Improving health leads to economic and other gains. On the economic front, a decade that began in recession and high unemployment has ended with strong job growth and the longest economic expansion in modern history. The year 2019 ended without realizing the inflation fears that began it, and U.S. stocks on average grew by 30 percent.

Such gains have global ripples. Africa, long considered the world’s problem child, in recent years has posted a higher rate of economic growth than East Asia. While the continent’s GDP per capita still lags all others, it is climbing at a new clip thanks to oil and mineral wealth and technology. Decades of dictatorships in Zimbabwe, Sudan, and elsewhere are passing away, hopefully paving a way for slowly emerging efforts at more democratic governance.

Out of Africa comes a heartening new focus on reckoning with rape as a weapon of war. The Global Survivors Fund launched in 2019 to provide trauma treatment and reparations for survivors of wartime rape. It’s the brainchild of Nobel Peace Prize laureates Denis Mukwege, a Congolese surgeon, and Nadia Murad, a survivor of ISIS slavery. It promises to bring together disparate groups with long-standing and legitimate concerns to protect the dignity of women and girls.

Last, and certainly not least, the growth of the Church universal is perhaps the most overlooked—and important—news story. I had the privilege of ending the year 2019 in a Skype conversation with two pastors, both converts from Islam, who are leading a church of similar converts in war-torn Syria. It is growing, buoyed by the very things that threaten it, terror attacks and the march of radical Islam.

Such new churches need trained leaders, and a new seminary in the region took 40 potential candidates through its first classes this fall. Nearly all of them are former Muslims eager to launch church congregations around orthodox Bible teaching. Everywhere I go in the beleaguered Middle East I meet new converts who testify of new life born from sorrow and suffering.

And that brings me to the questions worth contemplating as we begin 2020. Are we ready to embrace the suffering to come in the new year? And are we able to look beyond the bad-news headlines to find opportunities for helping neighbors and to glimpse more of the good news to come?
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BUILDINGS WITH BAGGAGE
Groups are turning old abortion centers into pro-life spaces, but the facilities’ horrific histories are difficult for many to overcome

by LEAH HICKMAN // illustration by Krieg Barrie

AUSTIN AND BRYAN, TEXAS. Chattanooga, Tenn. Elkton, Md. Grand Rapids, Mich. Toledo, Ohio. Wichita, Kan. These are seven of the at least 20 cities where pro-life groups have taken over and repurposed former surgical abortion facilities. They are now crisis pregnancy centers, pro-life offices, or memorials.

The old Planned Parenthood building in Bryan is now headquarters for 40 Days for Life. The Choices Chattanooga pregnancy center occupies part of a building that used to belong to an abortion business. The Greater Toledo House of Prayer is constructing a memorial park on the former site of an abortion facility. The list goes on.

One building has flipped repeatedly: A Grand Rapids synagogue became a Greek Orthodox church that became a college performing arts center that became a legal office building that in 1994 became an abortion facility. During the following 10 years, 20,000 unborn babies died there. It is now an office building for LIFE International, a hub for global pro-life training and resources.

In eight other cities, pro-life clinics and activist groups have moved into former Planned Parenthood buildings where women obtained abortion pills or received referrals for surgical abortions. Two are in the small Iowa towns of Creston and Dubuque. The others are scattered from Washington state to Michigan.

It’s a nationwide trend: When old abortion facilities close down, pro-life groups move in. For some organizations, taking over the buildings where thousands of children died is a part of their strategic attack on abortion providers. To others, replacing an abortionist is just a bonus to other location benefits.

All these groups have faced obstacles in the process. They acquired creepy and filthy buildings and the bad memories that come with them. The biggest questions for these pro-life groups: Does preserving these places hurt post-abortive mothers and repentant abortionists—or help them heal?

When 40 Days for Life CEO Shawn Carney first walked into the former Planned Parenthood in Bryan, Texas, it was the first time he had ever entered a structure previously used for abortions: “It was a very sterile building... It was creepy.” The creepiest part was the baby mobiles he saw hanging from the ceilings in the two rooms where an estimated 6,400 abortions took place.

Others I talked with described their buildings with similar words: sterile, clinical, cold. To counteract this sterility, staffers redecorated with their clients in mind. Andy Schoonover, executive director of Austin LifeCare (recently rebranded as The Source), tells how decorators replaced a “medical-grade tile” with a warm faux-wood flooring. They painted the walls light blue and brought in couches, patterned pillows, bohemian rugs, and succulents.

Others needed more than redecoration. Troy Newman of Operation Rescue recalls his first impression of the old Central Women’s Services building in Wichita: dusty, moldy, “stinks to high heaven.” The building had old carpet and stained walls. The recovery room featured 1970s recliners. This, he said, was where hundreds of women sat bleeding after their abortions: “You wouldn’t let your dog sit in these things.”

Newman described the sink between the two procedure rooms and its “super powerful” industrial strength garbage disposal. He said the abortionists used that disposal to get rid of babies’ remains. According to Newman, a plumber said the drain was clogged for about 10 feet with “biomatter”—which Newman said was the “old, rotting, decomposing flesh” of...
aborted babies. Workers replaced the old plumbing along with the drywall and windows.

Newman also said Central Women’s Services had left behind medical records and not disconnected its phones, so Operation Rescue staff took calls from the former abortion center’s patients. Leslee Unruh, founder of the Alpha Center in Sioux Falls, S.D., and Hannah Shady of LifeCare Clinic in Creston, Iowa, also mentioned finding patient files in the former Planned Parenthood buildings they acquired.

Denise Emerine is the founder of the Greater Toledo House of Prayer, which in 2014 bought a former abortion facility in Toledo with plans to demolish it and build a memorial park for the unborn on the site. On her first day in the building, Emerine saw a hospital gown on the floor, dried blood in the examining rooms, and a basement closet full of abortion vacuum equipment: “It was like a slaughterhouse. ... It wasn’t like walking into a doctor’s office with everything crisp and clean.”

**TWO MONTHS AFTER THE DEMOLITION,** the Greater Toledo House of Prayer hosted a three-hour worship service on the land and invited other pro-life groups to join. Other pro-life organizations have held prayer services at their new sites, and staff members in Sioux Falls, Bryan, Wichita, and Creston had Catholic priests perform exorcisms on their buildings.

On April 13, 2019, Austin LifeCare hosted 75 people with Sharpie markers at the two sand-colored buildings that had been the home of Whole Woman’s Health. LifeCare volunteers, donors, sidewalk counselors, and churchgoers prayed as they walked through each of the rooms and wrote messages and Scripture on the walls. Many cried. Many sang.

In what had been the “product of conception room”—where abortion staffers made sure they had removed from wombs all the pieces of aborted babies—the 75 Sharpie wielders covered walls with names to represent the thousands of unnamed babies who had died there. Later, redecorators needed two coats of paint to conceal the names.

Sharpies were also the tool of choice at a 2014 prayer event at the former Planned Parenthood in Bryan, Texas. Catholic priests and Baptist preachers, former abortion providers and
local pro-life activists all wrote verses on the walls. Some wrote about their miscarriages or their own abortions. In Wichita in 2007, pro-life construction workers posted Bible verses on walls and studs.

But some women, and sometimes the men involved, find it difficult to return to the scene of their abortions. Alpha Center in Sioux Falls moved into a former Planned Parenthood in 2000 but sold the building in 2008, partly because the pregnancy center had grown but also because the building had a bad effect on women who came back for post-abortion recovery. Founder Leslee Unruh said the building, despite symbolizing redemption, wasn’t worth the extra heartache: She wishes her organization had torn it down and built a park or memorial instead.

Patti Giebink was one of the physicians who performed abortions in Sioux Falls when the building was a Planned Parenthood center. She later became a Christian and is now on the Alpha Center’s board of directors. She faced her own difficulties with the building as a post-abortion doctor. The first time Giebink stepped into the building after it became the Alpha Center, almost a decade had passed since she had last been in the building.

The old carpet was gone and the building was cleaner, but the sink in the lab room was the same. There, at that sink, she used to examine the tissue of the aborted babies. There, only two times, she had seen that a piece of the baby was missing and had returned to the mother to take out the rest. Walking to that sink, said Giebink, “was overwhelming, and I think I made a pretty quick exit.” She said she hardly spent two minutes in the building.

Pat VanderKolk works at LIFE International in Grand Rapids, headquartered in a former abortion facility. Her abortion didn’t happen in this building but in a facility two minutes down the street—and that business is still open. She said post-abortion women do not want to work in a place where abortions occurred.

The executive directors of pregnancy centers in Chattanooga and Creston are also concerned that their buildings’ former connection to abortion could deter local women from seeking healing. More than two decades have gone by since Choices Chattanooga moved into one half of the former abortion facility, but executive director Carol Ann Ferguson said most women in their post-abortion therapy program had abortions 20 to 50 years ago. For them, it’s traumatic to return to the

“It was like a slaughterhouse. ... It wasn’t like walking into a doctor’s office with everything crisp and clean.”

Hard bargains

SOME PRO-LIFE ORGANIZATIONS have faced little conflict when buying or renting a building previously used for abortions—because the abortion business had already moved or closed. In Creston, Iowa, Planned Parenthood had left a building several months before LifeCare board members began to consider buying it. Leaders negotiated with a landlord unaffiliated with either side of the abortion debate, according to executive director Hannah Shady.

Troy Newman, executive director of Operation Rescue, tells how he used a third party to make an offer on the building in Wichita, Kan., that housed abortion provider Central Women’s Services. He used the third party because he thought the current landlord would try to sell to another pro-abortion landlord. When Newman closed on the building and Central Women’s Services asked to renew the lease, Newman evicted it and made the building Operation Rescue headquarters. Central Women’s Services accused Newman of being deceptive by using a third party, but Newman said, “I don’t believe the enemies of God are deserving of the truth.”

Most other pro-life groups that used third party buyers did not echo this aggressive language or adopt Newman’s strategic approach. When a Planned Parenthood center in Bryan, Texas, closed in 2013, the Hope Pregnancy Center of Brazos Valley partnered with 40 Days for Life and made an offer on the building. Hope board member Catherine McIntyre said board members foresaw pushback and contemplated using a third party for the negotiations but decided against it and made an offer as Hope. Planned Parenthood initially said no, but after the building sat empty for a year and Hope put in another offer, Planned Parenthood accepted. 40 Days for Life CEO Shawn Carney said the abortion giant ended up selling for 40 percent of the original asking price. —L.H.
Flipped buildings

Former surgical abortion facilities that are now pro-life pregnancy centers, offices, or memorials—plus other converted facilities

**Anchorage, Alaska:** Community Pregnancy Center

**Ashland, Pa.:** Mercy House of Ashland (undergoing renovations, not yet open)

**Austin, Texas:** LifeCare/The Source

**Baton Rouge, La.:** National American Holocaust Memorial

**Bettendorf, Iowa:** Women’s Choice Center

**Bryan, Texas:** 40 Days for Life

**Chattanooga, Tenn.:** National Memorial for the Unborn and Choices Chattanooga

**Elkton, Md.:** Cecil Pregnancy and Family Resource Center

**Fayetteville, N.C.:** Agape Pregnancy Support Services

**Grand Rapids, Mich.:** LIFE International

**Hialeah, Fla.:** Heartbeat of Miami (fourth location)

**Lansing, Mich.:** New Life Center

**Manassas, Va.:** Mother of Mercy Free Medical Clinic

**Miami, Fla.:** Heartbeat of Miami (first location)

**Ocala, Fla.:** Interfaith Emergency Services

**Severna Park, Md.:** Severna Park Pregnancy Clinic

**Springfield, Mo.:** Missouri Baptist Children’s Home

**Toledo, Ohio:** Hope Park

**Wichita, Kan.:** Operation Rescue

**York, Pa.:** Human Life Services

**Milwaukee, Wis.:** CareNet Milwaukee (doctors who performed abortions worked there, but we couldn’t confirm that they did abortions in the building)

**Sunnyside, Wash.:** Life Options (once a nonsurgical Planned Parenthood)

**Valparaiso, Ind.:** The Women’s Center of Northwest Indiana (site of a nonsurgical Planned Parenthood; same building, different space)

**Warsaw, Ind.:** Right to Life of North Central Indiana (site of a nonsurgical Planned Parenthood; same building, different space)

**Ypsilanti, Mich.:** Family Life Services (once a nonsurgical Planned Parenthood)

**Amarillo, Texas:** Hope+Choice (once a nonsurgical Planned Parenthood)

**Carson City, Nev.:** Life Choices (site of a nonsurgical Planned Parenthood; same building, different space)

**Creston, Iowa:** LifeCare Clinic (once a nonsurgical Planned Parenthood; performed telemed abortions)

**Dubuque, Iowa:** Clarity Clinic (once a nonsurgical Planned Parenthood; performed telemed abortions)

**Middlebury, Vt.:** Pregnancy Center of Addison County (site of a nonsurgical Planned Parenthood; same building, different space)

**Lubbock, Texas:** Generation Covenant (once used two former Planned Parenthood buildings)

**Sioux Falls, S.D.:** Alpha Center (once in a former abortion building; Alpha Center relocated; now a sandwich shop)
place of their loss: That’s one reason Choices is planning to relocate this summer.

Hannah Shady, executive director of the Creston, Iowa, clinic, originally didn’t like the idea of opening a clinic in a former Planned Parenthood building. When she first heard about the plan, she feared the building’s history would keep women and couples from coming for help. Even though that Planned Parenthood site didn’t perform surgical abortions, it did provide telemed abortions, using videoconferencing to prescribe abortion-inducing pills to women.

Shady didn’t “want to be involved in going into a place like that where there’s already so much hurt.” But she now wonders if her concern about the building was “just me listening to myself about that and not listening to the calling from God.” Shady recalls a former Planned Parenthood client who compared her warm welcome at LifeCare with Planned Parenthood’s coldness.

In Grand Rapids, VanderKolk’s connection to the building turned out to be a part of her healing process: Before joining the LIFE staff in May 2010, VanderKolk spent a month and a half that winter making weekly visits to the basement of LIFE’s headquarters. Before LIFE moved in, the basement had been the surgical wing, where the abortions took place. Now, a large open prayer room, hung with deep blue and bright gold banners, claims the space that once held a fluorescent-lit surgical room, waiting room, and recovery room.

In the prayer room, VanderKolk often sat on the red, richly patterned carpet with her back to the rough stone wall. She’d ask God, “What do you want?” A hallway away, one of the former surgical rooms sits as it would have looked under the abortion business: beige walls, blue linoleum flooring, an exam table, a vacuum aspiration machine, and shiny metal tools.

During her final drive to the LIFE headquarters at 72 Ransom Street, VanderKolk decided it would be her last trip to the building. But, before leaving that day, she received a job offer from a LIFE staff member. “I didn’t want to work in a pro-life place,” VanderKolk said, “because that says to me that…what I did was wrong.” She said she wanted to avoid the building and any connection to her past abortion, but she took the job. Looking back, she said it was God’s way of bringing her full circle.

About five years ago, VanderKolk met a woman whose abortion had taken place in the LIFE International building. She invited the woman to visit. In the prayer room, they looked at pictures of what the room had looked like as an abortion recovery room. The woman had “a fallen look on her face” as she looked at the pictures and told VanderKolk she remembered sitting in that room. The woman then hurried to the bathroom at the end of the hall.

When she came back, she was teary-eyed and “her complexion had almost turned white.” The woman told her, “I remember being in that bathroom and throwing up.” At the end of the visit, VanderKolk and the woman went up to the third story of the building to the paper shredder. VanderKolk watched as the woman shredded the receipt and medical records from her abortion. The woman hooted in celebration as the paperwork disappeared.®
IN C.S. LEWIS’ *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, young King Caspian visits an island under his rule and discovers the territory embroiled in the slave trade. The Narnian king demands the lazy governor explain why the islanders have resorted to this “abominable and unnatural traffic in slaves.” The governor’s reply? “Necessary, unavoidable. … An essential part of the economic development of the islands, I assure you.”

Lewis may have been criticizing his own nation’s excuses for prolonging the slave trade a century and a half earlier, but the lazy assurance he puts in Gov. Gumpas’ mouth is like what pro-lifers encountered throughout 2019, despite some life-affirming legal gains. With principled arguments for abortion losing whatever potency they may once have had, abortion proponents increasingly tried to make money talk.

New York, still America’s commercial capital, started the year with a euphemistically named Reproductive Health Act. The act effectively denies the personhood of the unborn, creates loopholes for abortion at any stage of pregnancy, and loosens the qualifications for medical practitioners who can perform the procedure. The legislation cements the Supreme Court’s 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision into New York state law.

Proponents of the measure argued that New York’s previous laws put a financial burden on women who want late-term abortions by forcing them to travel out of state. Likewise, a July 2019 report from the Institute for Women’s Policy Research claims the inability to obtain an abortion for an unwanted pregnancy can push mothers and their other children closer to poverty. That’s why supporter state Sen. Andrew Gounardes argued, “A woman’s autonomy over her own body is a basic human right and a necessity in order to attain and preserve economic security in her life.”

Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed the Reproductive Health Act on Jan. 22, 2019, the 46th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, setting the tone for a year of polarizing abortion legislation. The city celebrated by lighting up One World Trade Center in pink.

From February to May, Arkansas, Kentucky, Missouri, and Tennessee responded by passing legislation that will outlaw abortion in those states if the Supreme Court overturns *Roe*. From March to May, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Ohio passed “heartbeat” bills—laws to ban abortion after the baby has a detectable heartbeat. Alabama passed legislation banning abortion at any stage of pregnancy with exceptions for a mother’s health. Missouri, Arkansas, and Utah passed abortion bans with cut-off periods ranging from eight weeks to around 20 weeks of gestation. Governors in Indiana and North Dakota signed bills to ban a common abortion method known as dismemberment abortion. (Federal judges have temporarily blocked some of these laws, including Indiana’s.)

Before Gov. Brian Kemp signed the Georgia “heartbeat” bill in May, a group of Hollywood actors signed a joint letter and sent it to the governor, promising to boycott Georgia should the heartbeat bill pass: “We can’t imagine being elected officials who had to say to their constituents ‘I enacted a law that was so evil, it chased billions of dollars out of our state’s economy.’ It’s not the most effective campaign slogan, but rest assured we’ll make it yours should it come to pass.”

Colorado Secretary of State Jena Griswold was riding the same brainwave when in May she announced she would no longer send state staffers to Alabama because of the state’s new abortion
restrictions. Four months later, an Illinois state representative presented a bill that would prevent state agencies from requiring employees to travel to states with restrictive abortion laws or to fund travel to those states. In October, San Francisco blacklisted 22 states with pro-life laws and announced the city would not do business with them.

Echoing the language of the Hollywood actors, a full-page *New York Times* ad sponsored by NARAL Pro-Choice America, the American Civil Liberties Union, Planned Parenthood, and the Center for Reproductive Rights declared all restrictions to abortion access put “communities and the economy at risk” and are “bad for business.” For Planned Parenthood’s business, certainly. But leaders of 348 businesses (mostly small startups) also put their names to the June ad, probably thinking the exposure would attract clients: According to a 2018 report from the public relations firm Weber Shandwick, 46 percent of consumers say they “would be more likely to buy from a company led by a CEO who speaks out on an issue they agree with.”

Also in June, Illinois’ state government followed in New York’s footsteps and passed its own version of the Reproductive Health Act, effectively undoing all previous pro-life legislation in Illinois and establishing it as a destination for abortion seekers. The same month, Vermont and Maine also backed abortion: Vermont’s law prevents the state government from putting any restrictions on abortion, and Maine’s law allows physician assistants and some nurses to perform the procedure.

The polarization seeped down to the city level. In June, the City Council of Waskom, Texas, passed an ordinance declaring itself a “sanctuary city for the unborn”—the first of seven Texas cities to do so in 2019. Already-progressive Portland, Ore., retaliated by passing a resolution affirming the city’s dedication to protecting abortion access. New York City and Austin, Texas, set aside parts of their 2020 budgets to help fund abortion access.

Meanwhile, Planned Parenthood continued to show its prioritization of abortion. In July, the business fired its president, Leana Wen, who had been on the job only eight months. The split reportedly was over “philosophical differences,” a primary one likely having to do with President Donald Trump’s changes to the Title X funding requirements.

Since 1970, Planned Parenthood had been receiving millions of dollars through the Title X program. But in February the Trump administration announced that it would require Planned Parenthood and other recipients to stop referring for abortions and to keep their abortion services in separate facilities. Since her presidency began, Wen had been shifting the focus of Planned Parenthood away from abortion politics and toward healthcare. By firing Wen, the organization halted that shift. One month later, the board rejected the $60 million in Title X funds altogether. To further cement its position as a political influencer, the company pledged $45 million to support pro-abortion political candidates in the 2020 elections.

Planned Parenthood could add another $2.2 million to its cash pile now that a federal jury has ruled in the company’s favor regarding its lawsuit against David Daleiden and his group the Center for Medical Progress. Planned Parenthood sued Daleiden in 2016 after he and his colleagues released sting videos of Planned Parenthood executives discussing the strategic removal and sale of intact body parts obtained from aborted babies. A federal jury found Daleiden and his associates liable for recording the videos illegally, breaking laws against trespassing and fraud, and violating the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act. Daleiden’s defense team argued he and his colleagues acted as undercover journalists exposing violent crimes.

Planned Parenthood didn’t deny the accuracy of the videos’ content, but a judge with ties to the abortion giant prevented a jury from viewing the videos. Daleiden’s lawyers at the Thomas More Society say they have plenty of cause to appeal the ruling. Thomas More Society President Tom Brejcha said, “This case puts the constitutionally guaranteed right to free speech on trial.”

When King Caspian demanded that the slave trade end, Gov. Gumpas objected, “But that would be putting the clock back.”

Likewise, Planned Parenthood fears a rewind to pre-*Roe* 1972, when a state’s only abortion facility might have been a back-alley office. In Missouri, that reality is becoming possible again. The last abortion facility in the state is a St. Louis Planned Parenthood that failed to pass inspection in March. Since the center did not make the required changes, the state denied its request for a license renewal, which would mean the facility could no longer provide abortions. Planned Parenthood

As the political and legal battles rage, the gruesome reality of abortion continues to play out in facilities across the country, ending an estimated 862,320 lives in 2017 alone.
disputed the state’s decision in court, and the judge gave the business permission to continue providing abortions until a state administrative commission decides on the case. The parties expect to receive a verdict early this year.

To combat the possibility of losing ground in Missouri, Planned Parenthood brought reinforcements into the neighboring state of Illinois. The company secretly built a mega clinic 15 miles from St. Louis and opened it in October.

That same month, federal district courts blocked the Georgia heartbeat bill and the Alabama abortion ban. They were the last of 2019’s nine state abortion bans that courts placed on hold because of lawsuits from pro-abortion groups afraid of putting the clock back.

But that was part of the pro-life plan: Incremental protections of the unborn had been the pro-life strategy, but many legislators have switched tactics in an attempt to get one of their bolder bills onto the U.S. Supreme Court docket. The hope is that the justices will use such a bill to overturn Roe v. Wade.

Flipping that decision will prove difficult, though—past attempts have borne little fruit. At the end of the 2018-2019 term, the newly conservative-majority Supreme Court disappointed pro-lifers by passing up cases that would have challenged Roe. The justices handed down a decision affirming part of an Indiana law that requires the cremation or burial of aborted babies but refused to consider the other part of the law that prohibits abortion based on disability, race, or gender. They also turned down an opportunity to reinstate an Alabama law banning “dismemberment abortion.”

One 2014 law out of Louisiana did make it to the Supreme Court in the fall. The legislation requires abortionists to have admitting privileges with a nearby hospital and, if enforced, would close two of the three remaining abortion facilities in the state. The case, scheduled for a March 2020 hearing, is unlikely to overturn Roe but could help whittle down that court precedent.

Pro-lifers aren’t entirely optimistic: Some are uncertain about the position Justice Brett Kavanaugh will take on the abortion issue. And even if Roe is overturned, the battle over abortion will continue at the state level. But the pro-abortion left has become increasingly frantic since Donald Trump’s election and his appointment of two conservative Supreme Court justices.

A December New York Times article fretted that complacency under the Obama administration, followed by cultural, financial, and political divisions, has weakened the pro-abortion left. One of the biggest divisions cited is that between political giant Planned Parenthood and the small, independent providers that perform around 60 percent of abortions in the country but lack a strong voice in the pro-abortion movement. Planned Parenthood is their main advocate in politics, but many don’t appreciate the organization’s emphasis on political power over the practical needs of small abortion facilities and their clients.
The Times noted similar tensions within the Democratic Party itself: While the party has abandoned the language of “safe, legal, and rare” (the Democratic Attorneys General Association even made the pro-abortion stance a requirement for candidates to receive the group’s support), some abortion activists worry a radically pro-abortion stance will alienate moderate voters.

Meanwhile, some abortion allies seem to have learned a thing or two from pro-life pregnancy centers. One Alabama nonprofit, the Yellowhammer Fund, helps low-income women with abortion costs and gained overwhelming financial support from Planned Parenthood and Democratic presidential candidates after the state’s abortion ban passed. But the group set aside only a fraction of its budget for abortions: The rest will cover doula care and pay for pro-abortion versions of pregnancy centers that will offer pregnancy tests, diapers, and other essentials to pregnant women. According to the nonprofit’s director, Amanda Reyes, “If all we do as an organization is pay for abortions for low-income people, we are eugenicists. That is not transformational work. That is slapping a Band-Aid on a huge problem.”

AS THE POLITICAL and legal battles rage, the gruesome reality of abortion continues to play out in facilities across the country, ending an estimated 862,320 lives in 2017 alone. According to a new report from the Guttmacher Institute, this total represents a 7 percent drop from 2014 figures. One explanation may be that fewer women are conceiving in the first place due to increasing use of contraception, and others are using abortifacients and so-called emergency contraceptives, which can induce early abortions not counted in Guttmacher’s estimate.

But the drop in total abortions also came with a rise in chemically induced “medication” abortions. In this method, women take two drugs: mifepristone cuts off life support to the baby and misoprostol causes contractions that expel the baby’s remains. These drugs still require an abortionist’s prescription in the United States, although some organizations sell them illegally to U.S. women online.

Occasional visual reminders of the lives at stake spring before our view. Many are delightful, such as the 3D ultrasound of Abby Johnson’s 36-week unborn baby livestreaming on monitors in Times Square in May. Or the world’s tiniest surviving baby (8.6 ounces), born in late 2018 at the legal abortion age of 23 weeks of gestation, leaving a California hospital five months later.

Others are awful: the hundreds of names of aborted babies written on the walls of the “product of conception” room in Austin’s former Whole Woman’s Health building. The 2,246 preserved baby bodies discovered in the garage of late abortionist Ulrich Klopfer.

“All you no idea of progress, of development?” the forward-thinking governor asks the young king.

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“WHO CONTROLS THE PAST controls the future,” George Orwell wrote. Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun constructed his 1973 Roe v. Wade decision with historical rebar provided by an NYU law professor, Cyril Means, who just happened to be the lawyer of the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws.

Blackmun cited Means seven times in his Roe opinion, even though abortion proponents knew the falsity of his contention that abortion prior to the mid-19th century was legal. David Tunderman, one member of the legal team that brought us Roe v. Wade, noted in a memo that Means’ “own conclusions sometimes strain credibility, [but] where the important thing is to win the case no matter how, however, I suppose I agree with Means’s technique: begin with a scholarly attempt at historical research; if it doesn’t work, fudge it as necessary.”

In the 1989-1992 period, when the advent of new justices raised hopes for an overturn of Roe v. Wade, several hundred historians rallied to the pro-abortion cause and signed amicus briefs in the Webster and Casey cases that claimed 19th-century pro-life laws did not stem from the belief that unborn children were human beings. The presence on the court of Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh is now raising pro-life hopes—but will these new justices rely on the same faulty history?

I recently found on Amazon.com 20 books published in the past three years that include aspects of abortion history. It turns out that all come from a pro-abortion perspective. On other controversial issues, such as LGBT status and the evolution-creation debate, books with Biblical perspectives continue to emerge. In abortion publishing, Christians and other pro-lifers are badly losing the history war.

One result: The New York Times just last month (Dec. 13) could blandly assert the fake history consensus that “in the 17th and 18th centuries, abortion was legal under common law” through the first 16 weeks and “not considered immoral or murderous.” Even in the late 19th century a focus on the rights of the unborn was purportedly “a view at odds with much of public sentiment at the time.”

We need to challenge such falsehoods, as well as statements that in recent decades pro-life Americans have shown themselves to be liars or terrorists with smiling faces but pistols up their sleeves. Advocates sometimes complain about oppressive workplaces for minorities, but these books certainly contribute to an unwelcoming environment for pro-lifers in many companies and campuses.

Here are a few examples, starting with the most prestigious academic publisher, Harvard University Press, which offered up Mary Ziegler’s Beyond Abortion. In a previous Harvard book, After Roe, she had done a drive-by maligning of 19th-century pro-life leaders who purportedly had “financial motives” for advocating “harsher laws.” Her new book claimed, “By the mid-1990s, the debate about the limits of conscience seemed settled.... When protestors claimed to act for reasons of conscience or to interpret the law, few believed them.” Which few are those?

The University of California Press put out Reproductive Justice by Loretta Ross and Rickie Solinger, which contends that until the mid-19th century “contraception and early abortion were entirely legal, but 19th-century doctors wanting more status and money “stamp[ed] out women’s traditional prerogative.” (Twenty-five years earlier I showed the falsity of that historical judgment in Abortion Rites: A Social History of Abortion in
America, readable for free at wng.org/olasky_books.)

The University of Illinois Press published Karissa Haugeberg’s Women Against Abortion, which claimed pro-lifers “maintained thousands of pseudo-medical clinics” or were “violent extremists who were willing to commit arson, bombings, and murder... The various wings of the movement worked in tandem to collect taxpayer money for privately run crisis pregnancy centers, to offer meeting space for covert operations, and to provide cover for those who torched clinics and terrorized providers. Pro-life activists demonstrated how ruthless and unflappable the movement had become.”

Some authors seem to have ignored their own evidence in order to provide pro-abortion conclusions. Rutgers University Press published Lost: Miscarriage in Nineteenth-Century America, in which University of New Mexico history professor Shannon Withycombe wrote, “Women and doctors in the nineteenth century did not view pregnancy as inclusive of another person.” And yet, she shows how Lucy Garrison, three months pregnant, named her child Katherine and wrote notes to parents in the voice of her unborn daughter.

For example, “Katherine” wished “a Happy New Year to her kind Grandparents” and promised to knit them something in a few years, but not immediately because she did not yet have working fingers. A generation later, Katherine herself was pregnant and described in a letter to her cousin “the presence of a little Norton which (since it won’t be a ‘who’ until December) makes any more traveling than is absolutely necessary rather risky.” Withycombe’s interpretation: “Women like Katherine Norton still did not think of their pregnant bodies as containing a person.” Really?

My wife started the Austin Crisis Pregnancy Center in 1984, so I know something about the recent decades of abortion in Texas: A Johns Hopkins University Press book, Abortion Across Borders, edited by Christabelle Sethna and Gayle Davis, describes the state as a land of “crisis pregnancy centers, essentially fake clinics providing free ultrasounds and misinformation [that have] wreaked havoc upon millions of reproductive-age women. Texas serves as a frightening wake-up call to the rest of the country.”

Many of the most distorting books come from university presses, including those of NYU, North Carolina, Wisconsin, and Cornell. One reason may be that the publishing industry sees books on abortion history as unlikely to sell well, so most emerge from nonprofit or taxpayer-supported publishers rather than commercial ones. The rationale for university press independence from some financial pressures was their traditional publication of scholarly work designed to create light rather than heat. Now, though, the university presses, like their faculty, overwhelming tilt left. Some professors published their work with general academic publishers rather than with specific college connections — but I found no evidence of increased truth-telling there. Polity Press published Lehigh sociology professor Ziad Munson’s Abortion Politics, which argued that in the 19th century “most people thought about abortion” the way people today view a urinary tract infection: Abortion “was not a question of principle, or of good and bad,” but became important only because doctors used the abortion debate to “accomplish their goal of improving their status in society and monopolizing control over medical care.”

As a believer in telling books by their covers, I was hopeful about Critical Perspectives on Abortion, edited by Anne Cunningham for Enslow Publishing, which provides books for school and public libraries: The cover had a photo of a blue “Keep Abortion Legal” sign and a red “Stop Abortion Now” sign. Only four of the 22 essays in the book were pro-life, though. A headline typical of the rest read, “Ethicists Generally Agree: The Pro-Life Arguments Are Worthless.” Author John Messerly concluded, “No doubt much of the anti-abortion rhetoric in American society comes from a punitive, puritanical desire to punish people for having sex.”

No doubt. And what of the four pro-life essays? After each essay, the editor listed two questions designed to elicit critical thinking. After a reprint of National Review article by Ryan Anderson, the editor asked, “Despite its extreme conservatism, do any of the author’s views, such as limited federal government and states’ rights to experiment with democracy, have any merit, in your opinion?” The lead question after an article by Clarke Forsythe of Americans United for Life asked, “Can you identify any distortions of fact in this piece? If so, what?”

Questions after articles by abortion proponents were different: “How does evidence in this article contradict some of the claims of abortion-rights opponents?... How does the author make the case that U.S. abortion restrictions specifically target women of color?... With so many potential risk factors facing pregnant women, do you think that the legal system has any business regulating the specifics of abortion? Or should that be left to doctors?”

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Two Books From early in this decade fulfill the function of an academic press, publishing scholarly work that would otherwise go unpublished. Wolfgang Müller’s *The Criminalization of Abortion in the West: Its Origins in Medieval Law* (Cornell University Press, 2012) isn’t exactly a page-turner, but it is a work of valuable scholarship about the interface of theology, law, and medicine. Justin Dyer’s *Slavery, Abortion, and the Politics of Constitutional Meaning* (Cambridge University Press, 2013) looks at the dehumanizing of two classes of people in American history, law, and political philosophy.

Three pro-abortion authors during the past three years have recognized potent pro-life arguments—the existence of post-abortion syndrome, the desire to protect baby humans at least as well as we protect baby animals, and the personhood of the unborn—and suggested ways to defeat them.

In *Scarlet A* (Oxford University Press), Katie Watson recognizes the reality of post-abortion syndrome but trivializes what she calls “abortion regret.... The possibility of regret doesn’t distinguish abortion from the rest of medicine.... A well-informed patient might later wish he or she had not chosen back surgery, a kidney transplant, or a panoply of other procedures.... A patient who chooses knee replacement instead of joint pain might regret choices he made years before on the football field.”

I’ve told animal rights activists that I’d sympathize with their battle if they supported human baby rights. In *Beating Hearts: Abortion and Animal Rights*, Sherry Colb and Michael Dorf try to show why animal rights activists should not lift a finger to protect tiny fingers. Their rationale: Adult animals can perceive and feel things that humans at early stages of gestation cannot. Colb and Dorf admit the argument weakens as the child moves closer to birth, but they fall back on calling anti-abortion laws a form of gender-based exploitation.

In *Beyond Roe: Why Abortion Should Be Legal—even If the Fetus Is a Person* (Oxford), University of Colorado philosopher David Boonin says personhood doesn’t matter because laws that protect the unborn involve letting a person “who has no right to use it” use another’s body. There’s where believers in God can take a stand. A baby has the right to use a mother’s body because that’s the way God made us.

But the best way to understand how the other half thinks might be to go back 20 years to Vincent Genovese’s *The Angel of Ashland: Practicing Compassion and Tempting Fate*, a biography of Robert Spencer. As the title suggests, it’s a positive look at the man recognized as “The King of the Abortionists” for—from 1919 to 1969—killing close to 100,000 unborn children at the rate of almost 2,000 per year, or eight for every working day.

Genovese shows how Spencer went to Penn State and grew dubious about his parents’ Methodist beliefs: “As a science major he was naturally introduced to Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species*. The direct conflict of the theory of evolution assaulted the religious beliefs he held so dubiously, further eroding his faith.” Spencer wrote, “You have two choices—religion which is a myth or science which deals with facts. The religionist believes we were created by a god. The evolutionist believes we evolved.... I am an evolutionist, hence I am an atheist, it is impossible for me to believe in the God as described in the Bible.”

Genovese shows how “within this worldview, Spencer began in earnest in the 1920s and 1930s to perform abortions.” By the 1960s Spencer was fixating on “the population problem”; Killing unborn children was his way of dealing with “the growing problems of pollution, diminishing resources, the soaring costs to keep pace.” Spencer’s “simple equation [was] more people equals more poverty.” He even saw medicine generally as a problem: “By overcoming countless fatal diseases and conditions it gave society a low death rate along with unheard-of longevity. The result was wall-to-wall humanity.”

Spencer went on trial for abortion in 1955, 1959, and 1965, each time escaping imprisonment in part through good lawyering and community regard for the financial benefits Spencer’s Ashland, Pa., practice brought. Ashland became known nationally and internationally as a place of maternal safety, so girlfriends of the rich and powerful flocked there, along with celebrities whom author Genovese describes elliptically: “One of the major trade publications in 1956 has this blonde, green-eyed actress listed as the number-one box-office attraction. This sometimes moody and insecure actress found her way to Ashland, Pennsylvania.” —M.O.

David Boonin says laws that protect the unborn involve letting a person ‘who has no right to use it’ use another’s body. There’s where believers in God can take a stand. A baby has the right to use a mother’s body because that’s the way God made us.

“
A LONG SLIDE

Years of decline led the Boy Scouts of America to mortgage its biggest property in 2019

by Warren Cole Smith

MARK STINNETT HAS PHILMONT SCOUT RANCH IN HIS BLOOD.

As a youth, he became an Eagle Scout and member of the staff of Philmont, Scouting’s premier high adventure camp in New Mexico. While on staff, he met the young woman, Carol, who would become his wife. After graduating from college and law school, he became president of the Philmont Staff Association, an alumni group made up of thousands of former Philmont staff members. He took a position on Philmont’s Ranch Committee, an oversight board charged with making strategic decisions for the ranch.

But last year, when the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) mortgaged Philmont, using the 220-square-mile ranch to secure up to $450 million in loans, Stinnett had enough.

In a forceful letter that eventually made its way into an Associated Press story, Stinnett resigned from the ranch committee, saying the mortgaging of Philmont was a “betrayal.”

Stinnett is not alone in his disappointment with the Boy Scouts. Since 2012, the year before the BSA made a decision to allow gay boys into...
Boy Scouts at a solemn Memorial Day event at Los Angeles National Cemetery in California

JOE SOHM/VISIONS OF AMERICA/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES
Scout troops, membership had fallen by 16 percent. That drop translates to more than a half-million Scouts and their leaders. The Scouts have spent more money than they’ve taken in for five of the past six years. The deficit for these years amounts to nearly $180 million. BSA’s national leadership announced at the end of 2018 it was considering bankruptcy.

The mortgage agreement between BSA and JPMorgan Chase & Co. puts Philmont up as collateral against almost $272 million in loans, lines of credit, and bonds—some of which were originally issued as early as 2010. The document caps the total amount of debt secured by Philmont at $450 million.

“Healthy nonprofits seek to pay off debt, not incur more debt,” Calvin Edwards said when WORLD asked him to analyze the mortgage agreement. Edwards runs a firm that since 2001 scrutinizes nonprofits and advises them on financial operations. Some have defended the mortgage as a normal way to secure revolving lines of credit. Edwards disagrees: “This is peculiar. It’s desperate measures.”

This state of affairs is a huge decline for the century-old organization that was once one of the pillars of what sociologists call “civil society,” organizations that teach democracy, leadership, and civic engagement. As of 1970, the Scouting movement had more than 6 million members in the United States. Throughout the 20th century, more than 100 million men and boys (and many females as well) have raised their right hands and recited the Scout Oath, which begins, “On my honor, I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country.”

It all leads to the question: “What happened?”

FOR A CENTURY, Scouting was one of the great institutions of American civil society. Alvin Townley has written two books on Scouting. He told WORLD that Scouting was second only to the military in its ability “to bring together so many from so many different backgrounds over such a long period of time. Scouting has played a unique role in American culture. It is part of the fabric of American life.”

It’s also had a close relationship to the churches of America.

All Scout units—more than 100,000 of them—have chartered organizations, which are the “owners and operators” of these units, not just by providing meeting space, but by approving the units’ leaders. More than 70 percent of these chartered organizations are churches. Until Jan. 1, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints used the Boy Scouts as its primary youth program for most of the BSA’s history, and had more than 37,000 units and 430,000 youths in the program. But as recently as 2013, United Methodist, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Southern Baptist churches combined for nearly 30,000 units and nearly 1 million Scouts.

Scouting’s highest rank, the Eagle, has become a widely recognized mark of achievement for
more than 2 million young men. Famous Eagle Scouts include President Gerald Ford, Sen. Mike Lee, former Attorney General Jeff Sessions, Mike Rowe (host of TV’s Dirty Jobs), and Walmart founder Sam Walton.

That so many political, business, and civic leaders are former Scouts is no accident, Townley said. “Producing leaders and developing character are explicit goals of the Scouting program,” he said. “The Boy Scouts provided millions of boys and men their first experiences with leadership.” They also learn about democracy and cooperation: Scouts elect their own leaders, and patrols and troops plan cookouts, hikes, and camping trips as a group. Every Scout must perform service projects, and Eagle Scouts must plan and lead a major project that is “helpful to any religious institution, any school, or your community.” Eagle projects total more than 9 million hours per year. That’s the equivalent of 4,500 people working full time, every year.

In recent decades, Scouting has been a victim of culture wars. But other factors have also played a role in its decline.

America is much more urban and technological today than in Scouting’s heyday. By the 1980s, learning how to tie knots and build fires had

Scouting is second only to the military in its ability ‘to bring together so many from so many different backgrounds over such a long period of time.’

—Alvin Townley
become less attractive to boys than video games and year-round sports programs. Instead of promoting outdoor adventure as an alternative to urban life, the Scout Handbooks of the '70s and '80s taught boys to read a bus schedule. The Scout motto—“Be Prepared”—stopped meaning always having your multipurpose Scout knife with you. Instead it meant having a dime in your pocket for the pay phones then ubiquitous in urban areas.

Membership in Scouting fell even as the population grew. Then, in the late '90s, Boy Scouts found themselves on the front lines of cultural battles when they became the target of atheist and homosexual groups.

In the 1990s, an openly homosexual man, James Dale, sued the Boy Scouts in order to be an adult leader. The case went to the U.S. Supreme Court, where the Boy Scouts won in 2000. But this case and others, despite the Scouts’ legal victories, cost millions in legal fees.

While homosexual groups fought the Boy Scouts from one direction, atheist groups advanced from another. Beginning in 1981, the Scouts held their quadrennial National Scout Jamboree at Fort A.P. Hill in Virginia. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) argued that the Scouts’ use of the military facility amounted to a government subsidy. Because the Scouts require “duty to God,” the ACLU said government support amounted to an establishment of religion, a violation of the First Amendment.

The ACLU made a similar argument in 2004, prompting the U.S. Department of Defense to force more than 400 Scout units off military posts. Most of these units easily found other sponsoring organizations—often churches. But whether the Scouts won or lost—and, as in the Fort A.P. Hill case, they often won—the legal bills mounted. Slowly the Scouts lost their appetite for defending themselves. In 2004, Scout spokesman Bob Bork told WORLD, “[The ACLU is] like a dog with a bone. They’ve been gnawing on us for 30 years now. It isn’t cheap. Our lawyers aren’t working pro bono.”
In part to keep from fighting the ACLU at every jamboree, in 2009 the Scouts bought a 10,600-acre tract in West Virginia with the help of a $50 million gift from Stephen Bechtel, an Eagle Scout whose grandfather founded the Bechtel Corp., the world's largest engineering firm. Despite Bechtel's gift—and others that totaled at least $85 million—the development of Summit Bechtel Reserve was soon over budget. A project originally estimated to cost $150 million ballooned to more than $500 million, forcing the Scouts to take on debt to keep construction on schedule.

Taking on so much debt may have seemed reasonable as recently as 2007, when the assets of the Boy Scouts approached $1 billion and Scouts, though a not-for-profit organization, had financial surpluses that in some years topped $40 million. But because of the Great Recession, the Scouts' investment portfolio lost more than $173 million in 2008 alone. By 2011, the financial situation of the Scouts had deteriorated dramatically. With the losses of the past six years, the situation has become even more dire.

But the Scouts can’t blame James Dale, atheist groups, or the ACLU for its most recent, self-inflicted wounds. A 2013 decision to allow homosexual boys to participate in the program accelerated the membership drop. In 2015, others left or considered leaving after BSA’s leadership took the next step and began allowing gay adult leaders. The BSA began accepting transgender youth in 2017.

This drop in membership contributed to a flood of red ink in the organization's finances, leading to consideration of bankruptcy and in 2019 the Philmont mortgage. MinistryWatch and WORLD broke the story about the mortgage in November. The mortgage, held by JPMorgan Chase, is “not to exceed” $450 million, much of which has been tapped out to pay off previous debts.

It’s not hard to think of the Philmont mortgage as an act of desperation by an organization rapidly running out of options. In October the BSA made another such move. The Scouts announced a dramatic increase in membership fees, from $33 to $60, a price hike of 80 percent. The Scouts said the rising cost of insurance was a key reason the increase is necessary. In its last available tax return, BSA reported paying more than $66 million for insurance. “It’s astonishing,” Calvin Edwards said. “I’ve never seen anything like it. It’s always going to be higher for nonprofits dealing with children, but usually it’s nominal.”

This rise in the cost of insurance brings us to the most recent cause of Scouting’s decline: a pile of sexual abuse cases.

In August, a group called Abused in Scouting filed a lawsuit in Philadelphia on behalf of a former Scout who claims he was abused by a Scout leader. The BSA has long kept a list of “ineligible volunteer files” that could include as many as 7,800 names. Victims’ advocates in lawsuits have pressured the Scouts to release the list, but the BSA has resisted, saying that to release a list of suspected abusers would violate their civil liberties and their rights to due process.

The Philadelphia lawsuit says, “It is apparent that the Boy Scouts defendants continue to hide the true nature of their cover-up and the extent of the pedophilia epidemic within their organization.”

THAT BRINGS US BACK to Mark Stinnett, who in his letter of resignation from Philmont’s Ranch Committee wrote, “The first point of the Scout Law is ‘A Scout is trustworthy.’ I am distressed beyond words at learning that our leaders apparently have not been.”

Indeed, that breach of trust between the leadership of the Boy Scouts and the rank-and-file members may be the most severe break. Many former Scouts had enough back in 2013 and formed Trail Life USA, which recently held its first national conference.

“We’re here to honor the legacy of the Boy Scouts of America,” radio personality Bill Bunkley told a gathering of founders in 2013. “But now, quite frankly, we are called in a new direction.”

Six years later, the Christ-centered ministry has grown to 30,000 members.

The BSA, on the other hand, has battened down its hatches. Staff reductions continue at the national headquarters in Irving, Texas. Both the director and the associate director of the National Eagle Scout Association have been laid off. The recent near-doubling in membership fees will likely result in more departures, on top of the loss of 400,000 Mormon scouts this month.

And the Scouts have all but stopped talking with the media. I made repeated requests for interviews for this story. The only response I received: “Earlier this year [2019], the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) renewed and revised certain credit facilities through a process approved by our National Executive Board.”

The spokesperson added, “We will not be providing additional commentary.”

—with reporting by Michael Reneau
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Religion

Threats by text

HARASSING TEXT MESSAGES ATTEMPT TO DETER HONG KONG CHRISTIANS’ ENGAGEMENT IN THE PRO-DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT  

by Erica Kwong in Hong Kong

Last August, the night after 26-year-old seminarian Samuel Chau spoke at a large Christian rally on how believers should respond to Hong Kong’s pro-democracy protests, a stranger sent him a message on WhatsApp. The text was filled with profanities, accusations, and threats.

The sender warned Chau against participating in any more prayer meetings and condemned him to hell. When Chau asked if the stranger had contacted the right person, he responded with Chau’s full name and the name of his seminary. (WORLD has given Chau a pseudonym due to the threats against him.)

Since the end of July, about 40 pro-democracy Christians in Hong Kong have received similar messages to their phones and apps attempting to stop them from supporting the protest.
movement. Many texts included details about the recipients’ families and churches. The protests, which began in June in opposition to a now-withdrawn extradition bill, have grown into a wider resistance movement against Beijing’s control over the semi-autonomous region of Hong Kong.

The Christians who received the texts are affiliated with Alliance Bible Seminary, Flow Church, youth ministry coalition G-Power, and the Divinity School of Chung Chi College at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Most of the recipients are pastors, seminary students, or Christians who are outspoken on social media.

That August evening, Chau ended up chatting with the stranger for an hour. According to screenshots of the conversation, the man called himself “Lai” and claimed to be a riot police officer and a Christian on a “mad search” for Christians like Chau. Using obscenities, he urged Chau to stop his activities. Lai added that it was a difficult time to be a police officer: He had stopped attending his church, he said, due to mistreatment toward him and his family.

“It was a good conversation, because I learned a lot about the police and what they’re thinking,” Chau said. He invited Lai to his church, but the man remained noncommittal and eventually blocked Chau’s number.

Chau has received anonymous messages on four other occasions. The messages claimed he was anti-government and anti-police, contained death threats (“Your whole family’s gonna die”), and accused him of accepting U.S. funding for anti-communist activities. One message said that because he is Chinese, he shouldn’t criticize China.

Other Christian leaders have received similar messages. Pastor Elton Lo, 37, chairman of G-Power, received anonymous threats beginning on July 31. In mid-August, he formed a WhatsApp group for fellow Christians who have also been targets for harassment. The group now has 38 members. Lo said his harasser initially targeted him and John Chan, an assistant professor of theology at Alliance Bible Seminary and founder of Flow Church, for their support of the pro-democracy protests.

“The sender] thinks that starting from June we led the church, pastors, and Christians in doing a lot of things during the anti-extradition movement,” Lo said. “Based on what he said, we have offended the police, so he threatened us.”

Lo said that he and Chan organized the first public prayer meeting related to the protests on June 10, and that he was the first to sing the hymn “Sing Hallelujah to the Lord” on the front lines to calm protesters and police. The song later became an unofficial protest anthem.

Christian churches have had a visible presence in the pro-democracy movement, hosting public prayer meetings and opening their doors to provide sanctuary for protesters, and church leaders have spoken out about social justice. China’s Communist leaders view churches and Christian leaders as a threat, and many police officers may have adopted a similar attitude. Chan also received threatening messages from someone seemingly connected to the police force: The sender posted a photo believed to be the back of a Police Sports and Recreation Club membership card, according to Christian Times.

Pastor Hui Shuk-fun of Enoch Christian Fellowship, a ministry for police officers, said that rather than “framing the police,” the pastors should report the cases to the police so they can investigate. Yet Chau and the other targeted Christians have not reported the threats—they do not trust the police to help them, especially when the perpetrators may be police officers themselves. One recipient of the threats, a lawyer, advised others in the WhatsApp group against reporting, reasoning that such cases usually go unsolved and might complicate their relationship with police officials.

News footage of police brutality and accusations of police collusion with gangs have caused residents of Hong Kong to lose faith in the police force. A poll by the Chinese University of Hong Kong found that 70 percent of Hong Kongers distrust the police.

Although Lo still receives threatening texts, he continues to organize prayer meetings. Apart from being more careful about what he posts online about his family, Lo says he has not let the threats impact his participation in the democracy movement.

Chau has speculated that a friend may have leaked his information to the anonymous trolls, as one sender knew about Chau’s girlfriend, whom he had never mentioned online. The experience hasn’t stopped Chau from attending events and protests, but it has prompted more caution: “Whenever I do something sensitive, I… watch my back to see if anyone is following.”

‘Whenever I do something sensitive, I… watch my back to see if anyone is following.’
—Samuel Chau
Technology

Watchdog on the web

WITH A NETWORK OF INFORMANTS, THE BITTER WINTER WEBSITE DOCUMENTS RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION IN CHINA  by June Cheng

Last year, a reporter for the website Bitter Winter captured never-before-seen video footage of the inside of a reeducation camp in Xinjiang, China. The video showed bars and wire netting fitted over the dormitory windows, rooms with double iron doors and a keypad lock, surveillance cameras throughout the campus, and outdoor areas surrounded by chain-link fences. On the exterior of the building were words of appreciation for China's Communist leader: “Heartfelt thanks for the cordial care of the Party Central Committee, with Comrade Xi Jinping as its core.”

The reporter visited the camp, then under construction in Yining city, in August 2018. By the time Bitter Winter published the video that November, authorities had already arrested the reporter, according to website editors.

Since Bitter Winter launched in May 2018, the website has been a thorn in the side of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Published by the Center for Studies on New Religions in Italy, Bitter Winter also reports on the persecution of the Church of Almighty God, a religious cult that China has officially banned. In Shandong, authorities arrested more than 1,000 of the group’s members this year.

Hackers have attacked the website’s servers two or three times. Bitter Winter uses encrypted emails and asks informants to pass along videos and documents in small segments sent to different locations. To authenticate the reports and the trustworthiness of the informants, website editors use connections in China’s religious diaspora community, as well as experts.

Respinti said the Communist Party accuses Bitter Winter of propagating lies. “But it’s an ideological attack. They can’t demonstrate that a single piece of information, video, picture, name, or document we published is false, because it’s not.”

Xinjiang reeducation camp building with the words “Heartfelt thanks for the cordial care of the Party Central Committee, with Comrade Xi Jinping as its core”
Sports

The Huns, the Herd, the Barbarians

RUGBY SETS OUT TO CONQUER AMERICA
by Daniel Van Oudenaren

If you were trying to pick a sport that wouldn’t land your child on a stretcher, you might not think of rugby. But a belief that rugby is safer than football is helping the sport grow.

Julie Nicholson is an Austin mom who put her son in rugby in part because she heard it was safer than football—less plagued by controversy over CTE, a neurodegenerative disease caused by repeated head injuries.

Her son, Connor, 16, ended up tearing his shoulder on the rugby field and needing surgery.

Nevertheless, Julie, who knew next to nothing about rugby just a few years ago, is now quite the fan. Undeterred by the injury, she sent her son back out to play: “It was rough to let him go back out there. But it’s part of the game.”

I caught up with her on a recent Saturday at a youth rugby event in Round Rock, Texas. Sporting a rugby hat and manning a recruiting tent for a local club, she told me, “What made me feel a lot better about rugby is they learn how to tackle properly, they’re not going in with their head, and they’re more leading with their shoulders.”

The technique that she’s describing, formerly a key distinctive of rugby, has begun to influence American football and has even been adopted by some professional teams, most notably the Seattle Seahawks.

“You hear a lot more about rugby on the NFL these days when they say, ‘there’s a scrum,’ or they talk about the ‘rugby punt’—those words are starting to make their way into American football,” says Richard Osborn, owner of the Austin Herd, a recently established professional rugby team.

Scott Constable, the director of Huns Youth Rugby, says it’s not uncom-

mon for Texas high-school football coaches to recruit rugby players: “The football coaches usually like the rugby players because they know how to tackle and they start seeking contact.”

The games are similar in many respects: Players score “tries” instead of touchdowns, and they can kick a “drop goal” that’s similar to a field goal. But the play is more continuous, and there are 15 players per side.

Rugby players don’t wear pads, except sometimes a thin “scrum cap” designed to prevent a condition called cauliflower ear. Proponents say the absence of pads actually reduces the risk of injury. Paul McCartney, a Round Rock chiropractor who coaches a high-school select team, explains that hits are generally softer in rugby because players don’t want to injure themselves: “The contact is controlled, and there are certain rules that protect the players from getting injuries.”

Allan Lester is the father of two boys introduced to the sport by McCartney, their chiropractor. Both boys played football as well. “My older son had a neck injury in football. When we went to the thoracic surgeon, we were asking him, could he play football again? He said, ‘Well, I don’t know about football.’”

The doctor was less worried about rugby, Lester recalls. “He said he sees more broken fingers than any other injury in rugby, because you get stepped on. But not a lot of neck injuries.”

Rugby’s elevation to Olympic status in 2016 has helped the sport grow. That’s how Nicholson’s son first learned of the sport. The launch of a professional league in 2018, Major League Rugby, also provided a boost.

The league has 12 teams in the United States and Canada and secured a TV deal with CBS. But unlike, say, Ultimate Fighting or the short-lived XFL (“Extreme Football”), Major League Rugby is not the product of outside money or media hype.

It’s instead a natural outgrowth of club-level rugby, which is competitive but not professional. Scattered throughout the country, club teams tend to have martial, wild-sounding names like the Norsemen, the Saracens, or the Barbarians (a name held by at least three American clubs).

Major League Rugby’s 2020 regular season will run from February through May, with playoffs and a final taking place in June.
Blessings by the dozen

ZACK AND JUDY GUESS RAISED A LARGE FAMILY, BUT THE TASK CAME WITH CHALLENGES by Charissa Koh

(Ninth in a series on long marriages.)

Zack Guess’ mother died when he was 19. His father died five years later. With his parents gone, he developed a close relationship with an older couple at his church and often visited them at their home.

One day, he noticed that the couple’s teenage daughter, Judy, was growing up. Zack fell in love and told her he planned to marry her. Startled, Judy at first avoided him, but over time her heart changed as she observed his passion for the Lord. They married in 1969, when Judy was 17 and Zack was 28. A few years later, Zack became a pastor at Grace Chapel Primitive Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn.

The couple chose to let God decide how many children they would have. God ultimately gave them 12, though one died as a baby. They discovered that raising so many children while working in the ministry was no easy feat.

The family had a two-bedroom house: They put two sets of bunk beds in one room, two sets in the other, and one set on a closed-in front porch. Judy creatively kept everyone organized. Instead of always cleaning up after the kids, she confiscated things the children left on the floor. To get their shoe or pencils back, the child would have to wait until Saturday and do an extra chore. But Judy also made things fun: She had the children draw names to see who would be their “secret pal,” a sibling to secretly serve that week.

With such a big family, finances were often tight. Zack remembered one occasion when the family was squeezing into a station wagon and couldn’t afford a new van. Judy told the children they would eat only cornbread and milk for breakfast and save the money and pray for a new van. The Guesses said God always provided: In this instance, several people donated a used van to them.

Parenting was difficult, especially when the kids misbehaved. Once, two children ate the candy they were supposed to be selling. The kids denied it persistently, but Judy could see chocolate around one child’s mouth. Zack and Judy prayed that the children would choose to confess, and after a few days, they did.

In 1991, the Guesses struggled when their 11th baby died a month after her birth. Zack had recently preached on the resurrection, and Judy remembers her 4-year-old son insisting they buy baby food at the store. She explained that the baby was in heaven and wouldn’t need it, but her son said that when Jesus came back, the baby would be resurrected and need food. Judy bought the baby food.

The Guesses remember the pressure their baby’s death put on their marriage. “I’d read that when parents go through the death of a child, they are vulnerable to divorce,” said Judy. Instead of pulling away, the couple worked to stay close to each other.

As the children grew up and started their own families, having so many siblings has provided opportunities for mutual support. Judy said that when their oldest daughter Hannah became pregnant with twins, lost one in utero, and developed a terrible infection, a carload of family members drove 13 hours to Virginia to be with her for the weekend.

There are fun times, too, especially on birthdays and holidays. Thanksgiving traditions for the Guesses include games, singing together, and a family talent show. In 2019 they had 82 people attending, including a few friends. Every other Sunday, Judy has the whole family over for a meal. “We try to keep a lot of togetherness,” she said.

After 50 years of marriage, Zack is 78 and Judy is 67. Zack still pastors Grace Chapel Primitive Baptist Church in Memphis after 44 years. One of his sons, Isaac, serves as an associate pastor there. The couple is enjoying their children, most of whom live nearby, and their 35 grandchildren.
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‘The slow work of God’

[Nov. 23, p. 30] Thank you to Jamie Dean for an inspiring and hopeful article about WORLD’s Daniel of the Year, Michael Miller, and his ministry in Honduras. His comment that preaching to a “broken population” means you deal with “very significant loss and disappointment” was a reminder I needed as a teacher at a nonprofit school in Virginia. The world is broken, but God is not.

—RACHEL HOOD / Grundy, Va.

Great article. I’m glad there are folks like Miller. A friend of mine has a very similar ministry in Tegucigalpa. They care enough to live in difficult places and try their best to make a difference.

—LOWELL WHITE on wng.org

I am overwhelmed by Miller’s example. You did a great job capturing the highs and lows of his story and his redemptive work in Honduras. The picture of the wedding feast at the end was just beautiful.

—ERIN LONG / Egg Harbor Township, N.J.

Married to the minister

[Nov. 23, p. 59] It would be sinful to expect a pastor’s wife to be perfect and extroverted and responsible for anything other than being an extraordinary helpmate to her husband. In fact, pastors’ wives should not be so involved in the church that it prevents them from being primarily wives.

—PATRICK ROWE on Facebook

Being a pastor’s wife is just as much a calling as being a pastor. If the wife is not supportive, a pastorate is doomed.

—STEVEN ANDERSON / Auburn, Maine

Baptist battles

[Nov. 23, p. 42] I was saddened to read that an adviser at Southwest Baptist University told a student that Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was a “bastion for Calvinism,” as if that’s a bad thing, and that “there won’t be a Calvinist on my street in heaven.” I suspect his street in heaven will be very short.

—HARRY KOOPS / Grand Rapids, Mich.

It is tragic to see the left gaining any ground among Southern Baptists.

—JOHN GUILL on wng.org

Moral incoherence

[Nov. 23, p. 28] Mindy Belz’s column about the refugees is heartbreaking. It’s difficult to comprehend such an environment. One is compelled to weep and pray for them every day. I applaud your efforts to discover the truth and eagerly await your continued reporting.

—MELVIN LEE / Dover, Pa.

Is the tone of the headline necessary? How to develop and implement American foreign policy is a difficult and thorny issue. This is not, on WORLD’s journalistic scale, a class one issue on which the Bible is clear.

—JEFF SINGLETARY on wng.org

Exemption attack

[Nov. 23, p. 3] Beto O’Rourke suggested that religious institutions that oppose same-sex marriage be stripped of their tax-exempt status. He and his supporters should be reminded that higher education, healthcare, and adoption services were started by “religious people.” It’s government that has drifted over the line.

—JoAN ALLMENDINGER / Fort Collins, Colo.

I would argue that the Founders believed that certain human institutions are grounded so deeply in natural rights that the government has no right to tax them. I do not believe the loss of tax-exempt status can cripple the work of Christ, but I am concerned with the underlying attack on the idea of God-given natural rights and how it furthers the power of the government.

—RANDY MARTIN / Bakersfield, Calif.

No cape necessary

[Nov. 23, p. 17] Harriet, about Harriet Tubman, was excellent and emotionally moving. The script is a bit stilted at points, but the story overcomes all that as does the acting. Also, the music is really, really good.

—GARY W. HENDRIX on wng.org

Twists of grace

[Nov. 23, p. 46] I work at a nursing home, and in our town we have occasional tornado watches. It short-circuits my brain to think, “What if a tornado hit our facility?” Some residents are around 100 years old. It teaches me to pray, pray, pray.

—KATHY PETERSON on wng.org

The lost supper

[Nov. 23, p. 14] Too bad that somebody didn’t teach Janie B. Cheaney some basics of cooking. This is what we do with our kids, boys and girls: teach them how to shop, cook, do laundry, balance a checkbook, and change their car’s oil to prepare them to be on their own.

—REXANN BASSLER on wng.org

The great disappearing film

[Nov. 23, p. 50] This is one of the ironic conundrums for creators this decade. It is easier to publish a book, audio drama, or movie now, but finding...
an audience has become exponentially harder.

—NATHAN JAMES NORMAN on Facebook

**Surrendering to the state**  
[Nov. 9, p. 32] Michigan now requires all organizations that want to find homes for children in foster care to consider foster care applications from all families—including same-sex couples. Not complying would have jeopardized Bethany's ability to provide any foster care services in Michigan. It would also mean violating our sincerely held belief that Christians are called to serve children in need and eliminating the opportunity for children to experience Jesus through Bethany's loving care.

WORLD's article cited South Carolina's Miracle Hill as a victory for religious liberty. Yet, there is a catch. Miracle Hill received an exemption from the current administration in Washington, as requested by South Carolina's governor. The next president or governor could easily overturn that. Numerous Christian nonprofits have been shut down during these legal battles (like Catholic Charities in Illinois and Massachusetts) or have lost related lawsuits, such as with *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*.

—CHRIS PALUSKY, President & CEO, Bethany Christian Services / Grand Rapids, Mich.

**A good cop's calling**  
[Nov. 9, p. 21] A major component of the Netflix series *Unbelievable* was how rape victims were treated. The temperament and procedures of the different investigators ranged from almost hostile to sensitive and compassionate. Detective Karen Duvall's faith-based demeanor and compassion were worth mentioning.

—GARY ZAJICEK / Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

**Prayers for NPR?**  
[Nov. 9, p. 5] Much of what Joel Belz said about NPR also applies to the public education system. He noted, for example, that his father used to say it would be better to have the government feed and house his children than let it shape their minds. Isn't that what public schools do?

—GLENN R. ANDES / Gratiot, Wis.

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**THE NEW BOOK CHALLENGING POPULAR CHURCH TEACHINGS**

As we anticipate the Lord’s return, it is important for each of us to examine what we believe and test it against the unchanging truth of God’s word. It is imperative that we not simply trust only what is said from the pulpit. Blind trust in men alone can lead to the feeding of the flesh. *Pulpit Fiction* identifies false doctrines of cheap grace, explains how they put believers at risk, and builds a scriptural basis for our salvation.

*Pulpit Fiction* (How the Modern Church Is Endangering the Eternal Destiny of Its Followers) by Gregg Powers and Ed Noan

Available at Amazon.com and other online booksellers.
You are invited to an event featuring exotic coffees and spiced ciders, and you avidly go.

Upon arrival you find a large and festive room, every wall covered with photos of coffees, teas, and fruit nectars. As at a museum, you mosey slowly past each one in studious attention: here a lavender French Perle Groove mug, there a clay hand-warmer mug from Oregon, a few steps further a Pfaltzgraff Winterberry glass, turning the corner a pair of Waterford Crystal Irish coffee glasses.

Each receptacle, more lovely than the last, is photographed and framed with care, attention paid to capture light and surface beads of frost to tantalize the eye. Off to the side is a table with free color brochures that describe each coffee’s pedigree and each cider’s land of origin. Descriptions of the wares include such words as earthy, spicy, bouquet, and almond finish.

That’s it. Then you go home.

God is not such a host. He says: “Taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8). You think at first He must mean “Come and see.” The word taste is poetry, you think, like the writing on key chains at curio shops to make us sigh and mewl. (“Love is never having to say you’re sorry,” remember that?) Still, I got curious enough to find a dictionary.

Taste: “to try or test the flavor or quality of (something) by taking it into the mouth.”

“Oh, the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God”—but these depths are reserved for those who taste. They step out on His Word and prove it true. They cast all to the wind and drink it down. To nontasters, the Scriptures and promises attached to discipleship remain flat pictures at an exhibition, nothing more.

“The proof is in the pudding,” your teacher said. And she spoke profoundly. How do you know puddingness? By a graduate-level course in pudding? By a study of ingredients and origins? You have missed the essence if you haven’t put spoon to mouth. It isn’t those who say “Lord, Lord” who know God best but those who do His will. When you obey, you know God better afterward. You feel better afterward. “Trust and obey / For there’s no other way / To be happy in Jesus.” That’s the surprise discovery.

The prodigal son sort of knew beforehand that his father was a decent man. But he never would have learned the extent of the old man’s goodness had he not ventured on him wholly—had he not tested the “flavor and quality” of him. There was more to his father than his feckless youthful self had ever known.

Jesus asked Levi to leave everything and follow Him. Had Levi not immediately done it, he might have known Jesus as a good teacher but wouldn’t have known what it was like to taste Him—the thrill, the fear, the freedom of absolute free fall, of cutting loose all financial security, social identity, and predictability. He might have had a fine little life for himself and died with his family around his bed. But that’s all.

The Israelites were robbing God (Malachi 3:8). They thought they had to “take care of No. 1.” God proposed a taste test. “Bring the full tithe into the storehouse... put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need” (v. 10).

Hear the yearning in His voice. “Oh, that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways!... The Lord... would feed you [tasting!] with the finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you” (Psalm 81:13, 16).

Jesus did not shrink from tasting, but “taste[d] death for everyone” (Hebrews 2:9). And as reward for downing that foamy cup “God has highly exalted him” (Philippians 2:9).

This year let us not just know about God. Let us know God. It doesn’t even have to be a big thing. Just the breakthrough of being first to say “I love you” or “Forgive me” to your spouse.

Let’s begin.
NEW PRO-FAMILY LEGISLATION FOR 2020?

Hadley Arkes, my oldest academic friend, turns 80 this year. We met when he was 40 and I was a 30-year-old at DuPont headquarters in Delaware. Part of my job was to bring in scholars to meet with up-and-coming DuPont executives. The goal: Let the future corporate leaders see how the other half thinks, and learn which could match wits with the academic elite.

Hadley was an Amherst College political philosophy professor—he taught there for half a century—with the makings of a Borscht Belt comedian, probably because he grew up a single child in a Chicago Jewish family with two parents and four grandparents who praised his performances. (Visualize a 2-year-old wandering into the kitchen, saying “Good morning,” and receiving a standing ovation.)

Hadley discomobulated the DuPont execs with his combination of rapid-fire references to Aristotle, Rabbi Akiva, Abraham Lincoln, and absurdities from American popular culture—and that was just the A’s. (Visualize a meld of Socrates and Groucho Marx.)

Ten years later, Hadley at age 50 was the top Jewish pro-life, and I was briefly chairing quarterly D.C. meetings that brought together squabbling Christian pro-life leaders. Hadley the outsider made a proposal that the insiders grew to support: In 2002 it became the Born-Alive Infants Protection Act, which gave some legal protection to a baby who had somehow dodged a fusillade of abortion bullets and emerged breathing and crying. In Hadley’s sometimes-macabre humor, a right to abortion did not guarantee assassins the right to a dead baby.

For years Hadley said he thought the gospel story was wonderful and beautiful, but he just could not believe it. At age 70 in 2010, though, Hadley converted to Catholicism. When we had dinner recently, he related his four current legislative goals, starting with the establishment of penalties for those who dropped born-alive babies into a discard bucket. Hadley thought Donald Trump should pragmatically push this: “He could drive the Democrats into the sea, even before the oceans start rising.”

Next, Hadley says, should come a Defense of Monogamous Marriage Act (DOMMA): Governments should not have to call “marriage” any union of more than two persons. If you think that’s unneeded, think again: Polygamy is roaring down the track. Nothing in the arguments the Supreme Court accepted in overturning the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) will stop it. Nothing in our official friendliness toward Islam will help us ban Muslim multi-marriage. The 19th-century Latter-day Saints dropped polygamy to gain statehood: Maybe they were just prematurely woke.

Third would be a bill to allow discrimination on the basis of some sexual orientations. The Supremes legislated same-sex marriage, and we’re stuck with it (although I wouldn’t be surprised to see its popularity among gays decline once the thrill is gone and we start seeing huge numbers of same-sex divorces). But could a company discriminate against pederasts? You might say it could because pederasty is illegal—but could it discriminate against practitioners of bestiality, which is still legal in four states?

Finally, Hadley would like laws to protect parents from losing custody of minors if they refuse to approve use of “sex change” drugs and surgery. That’s happened occasionally and will happen more often if transexuality continues to be hot in our culture.

I’d recommend another law along these lines: “The Protection of Women’s Sports Act of 2020,” which would keep DNA-men from yanking medals and scholarships out of female hands. Confronted by thoroughly modern gender definitions of “male” and “female,” can we just go by chromosomes and call one kind of human “XY” and the other kind “XX”? That’s how God made us.

Let’s look at one objection straight on: What about the very rare humans in the middle? The website of the Intersex Society of North America says “not XX and not XY” occurs once in 1,666 births. Individuals stuck in the middle are also made in God’s image, but we shouldn’t let the tail wag the mastiff. Can we find a fair solution for the one, rather than messing with the 1,665? Anyway, it’s a pleasure to see Hadley at age 80 still producing clever proposals. He needs help from several gutsy members of Congress. WORLD has some readership in those parts: Let me know if you’re willing to run with the ball.

In Hadley’s sometimes-macabre humor, a right to abortion did not guarantee assassins the right to a dead baby.
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