CHILDREN’S BOOKS OF THE YEAR

Amid attempts to politicize reading, here are 18 suggestions for family enjoyment

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CALIFORNIA NIMBYS VS. YIMBYS
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<td>Individuals</td>
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A flawed design
WHY IS SOCIALISM SUDDENLY ATTRACTIVE?

Who might have guessed that already, right here in the U.S. of A., we’d be at a point where a growing number of candidates for public office seem to think it’s advantageous to refer to themselves as socialists?

For all of my lifetime, that’s been a putdown. Call someone a socialist, and you mean nothing good. You’re deliberately putting your opponent on the defensive.

But apparently we’ve now reached the place where so many voters have become so smart and sophisticated that you can offer them a real-life socialist—and be rewarded with a victory on Election Day.

These days, in fact, in more and more settings, any positive reference to the “free market” may carry you to defeat. For many of these people, to equate free market principles with the law of God is close to blasphemy.

Yet I think it’s even more demeaning to the character of God to say what many Christians blithely claim—that any one system of economics is the same in God’s eyes as any other system.

To claim though, as a growing number of Bible-believing Christians do, that God is all-wise but has no evaluative opinion about what He knows is the ultimate putdown. Does God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, have opinions about what is beautiful? Is the One who created the musical scales and the chirps of the birds tone-deaf when it comes to deciding whether some music is good and some is forgettable?

If such people mean to say that Christians should be prepared to live under any kind of economic system, just as they should under any political system, I agree. But that’s a different argument. Recognition of God’s creation ordinances, mind you, never implies slavery to them. Real obedience bears the fruit of glorious freedom.

The free market that I think God has established as a basic building block of human society is pretty elementary. It refers to two (or more) parties making a voluntary and lawful agreement to exchange an item of value. When they do so—in a context of good will—God has planned things so that both parties can walk away from that exchange happier, or more fulfilled, than when they approached it. And both of them actually have the opportunity, through that exchange, to be wealthier! It makes no more sense than the flight of a bird—but it works. It works everywhere, in every culture, in every era of history. It works, not because Adam Smith said it would, but because God planned that it would be so.

Can this simple scenario be abused? Of course it can—and regularly is. But the abuse of anything is no signal that the thing itself is wrong, or even that it’s suspicious. Take sex, for example. The whole mystery in which our sexuality is packaged is a textbook case of God’s having designed something to perfection, only to have us muck it up with a zillion kinds of abuse. Yet the foulest of our abuses takes nothing from the glory of God’s original design.

The same is true with the market economy. Its beauty can be obscured with greed, with laziness, with impatience, with pride, and with failure to love our neighbor as ourselves. But none of these sins is a refutation of the magnificence of the original model.

All of which is not to say that the GHP (Gross Heavenly Product) in God’s eternal kingdom will be measured in U.S. dollars. One of the problems friends of the market economy always face is that they’re asked to defend historic American abuses of the free market system. What’s partly odd about that is that the United States is no longer a very pure example of a free market economy at work. Thousands of restraints have been tacked on, and any resemblance between a classic market economy and what you see today in America is almost coincidental.

A Christian’s responsibility is to learn to distinguish between the obedient use of God’s systems on the one hand and the disobedient abuse on the other. Putting a railing around a 100-foot-high ledge is an obedient response to God’s law of gravity. Jumping off that ledge is a disobedient use.

Similar responses need to be spelled out for virtually all of God’s marvelous systems—including his economic systems. If we’ve been doing that a bit more thoroughly over the last couple of generations, voters would be a little less attracted to the socialist label.
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Wolves and lambs

PREDATORY SCANDALS UNFOLD IN A CHURCH AND A STATE

As Southern Baptists headed to church on Sunday, Feb. 10, the Houston Chronicle published a major investigation into devastating patterns of sexual abuse in Southern Baptist congregations. The findings: Since 1998, some 380 Southern Baptist church leaders and volunteers have faced sexual misconduct allegations involving more than 700 victims. More than 200 offenders have been convicted or have taken plea deals. Nearly 100 remain in prison. Others have returned to Southern Baptist pulpits.

In one case, a married pastor admitted to impregnating a teenage girl in his congregation years earlier. He was never convicted of a crime, and the newspaper said he remained listed as a pastor in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) as late as 2016.

Some SBC leaders cited the denomination’s structure as an obstacle to confronting churches: While local congregations affiliate with the SBC, they remain autonomous. But the
article pointed out that SBC policy can affect local churches: Over the last decade, the SBC has ended its affiliation with at least four churches for endorsing homosexuality.

The most basic next steps (among many others) seem obvious: If a church knowingly employs a sexual abuser, the SBC should eject that church from the denomination, warn the congregation, and help victims. As WORLD went to press, the discussion about the scandal was intensifying, but the Biblical principle is simple: Protect the lambs, not the wolves.

In Virginia, another kind of lamb faced danger: A proposed bill would allow abortions of babies up until the point of birth. Kathy Tran, a Virginia state delegate, reluctantly confirmed the law’s provisions would apply even if a mother was actively in labor.

Two days later the state’s Democratic governor, Ralph Northam, elaborated: He said doctors would deliver the baby, and “the infant would be kept comfortable, the infant would be resuscitated if that’s what the family and mother desired, and then a discussion would ensue between the physicians and the mother.”

A discussion about killing a child? Sen. Ben Sasse, R-Neb., noted: “In just a few years pro-abortion zealots went from ‘safe, legal, and rare’ to ‘keep the newborns comfortable while the doctor debates infanticide.’”

That reality barely had time to register before another controversy eclipsed it. A photo surfaced of the governor’s personal page in his 1984 medical school yearbook that included a deeply racist picture of two men at a party: One person wore blackface. The other dressed as a KKK member.

Northam apologized for appearing in the photo, but soon proclaimed he wasn’t in the picture after all. He said he would have remembered since he once darkened his face to impersonate Michael Jackson in a dance contest.

Calls for Northam’s resignation buzzed, but his potential successors imploded: Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring—second in line to replace Northam—announced he had once worn brown makeup to dress up like a rapper at a college party in the 1980s.

But the Virginia firestorm gained potentially criminal proportions when Lt. Gov. Justin Fairfax faced accusations of sexual assault by two women. Fairfax admitted to encounters, but...
said they were consensual. Most of Virginia's Democratic delegates said he should resign, and some raised the possibility of impeachment.

Democrats on the national level were slower to comment on Fairfax—even some who called on then–Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh to be removed from consideration from the high court over accusations of sexual assault.

Sen. Kamala Harris, D-Calif., a Democratic presidential candidate and fierce Kavanaugh critic during his hearing, initially said the accusations against Fairfax should be investigated. Later, she called for his removal.

State politics do loom large in the fast-approaching presidential contest, but candidates for the Democratic nomination preferred to keep it national: Four of them endorsed Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Green New Deal—a massively unviable plan that includes replacing air travel with train travel, retrofitting every building and home in the United States, and throwing in universal medical care and free college education.

Democratic candidates might be going far and wide with early promises, but they're also pushing far left just months after Democrats running as moderates snatched victories in several key midterm races.

President Donald Trump pushed south to El Paso, Texas, on Feb. 11 for a rally staged in an arena 1,000 feet from the southern border. Across the street, Democrat Beto O'Rourke, who lost a bid for the U.S. Senate but is contemplating a presidential run, held his own rally. O'Rourke argued against a border wall. Trump vowed to build it, regardless of whether he gets the funding he wants from Congress.

But the biggest headlines went to the scandals, which hit conservatives and liberals, Democrats and Republicans, and were a reminder of the Apostle Paul’s teaching that there is none righteous: “No, not one.” But it’s also a reminder of how extreme fallenness calls for extreme redemption—and that’s available to anyone who calls on Christ for mercy.

---

**BY THE NUMBERS**

98.2 million

The number of Americans who tuned in to the 2019 Super Bowl on Feb. 3, down from 103.4 million last year, according to Nielsen.

20.2

The inches of snow that had fallen on Seattle by the first 12 days of February, making it the city’s second-snowiest February on record.

2.99 billion

The number of trips the Chinese government expected travelers in the country to make by train, plane, and automobile between Jan. 21 and March 1 as they visit family for Chinese New Year.

5,050

The number of people killed in Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte’s war on drugs as of November, according to Philippine officials. Human rights groups say the death toll could actually be 20,000.

$1.9 billion

The amount consumers expected to spend on flowers for Valentine’s Day this year, according to a National Retail Federation survey.
Died
Frank Robinson, Hall of Fame outfielder and the first African-American manager in the major leagues, died on Feb. 7 at age 83. Robinson was National League Rookie of the Year in 1956 and became known as a lethal hitter. Robinson played professionally until 1974, winning a host of individual awards and two World Series titles. Then, in a history-making move, the Cleveland Indians hired him as player-manager for the 1975 season. He would later manage the Giants, the Orioles, and the Washington Nationals. Toward the end of his career, President George W. Bush presented Robinson with the Presidential Medal of Freedom for his achievements as a player and manager.

Admitted
Pope Francis has admitted for the first time publicly that Roman Catholic clergy have sexually abused nuns. For years, nuns in India, Africa, Latin America, and Italy have accused priests and bishops of sexual abuse. These accusations include stories of repeated rape and possible sexual slavery. An investigation by the Associated Press found evidence for many of these accounts and reported on the Vatican’s coddling of offenders. In some cases, the Catholic Church responded by removing the nuns who reported the abuse. Pope Francis admitted to the media that this is a persistent problem and says the Vatican is working on it, having suspended some priests under accusation.

Sentenced
A U.S. judge has sentenced Chinese student, Zhao Qianli, to one year in prison after the 20-year-old pleaded guilty to taking illegal photos of an important American defense installation. According to documents of the trial, Zhao entered the Florida base despite signs that the area was restricted. He then walked directly to a line of satellite dishes and antennas to take a series of videos and photos of the base equipment. The court gave no official statement indicating that Zhao intended espionage, and the student’s attorney refused to comment on the subject.

Discovered
Egypt’s government has unveiled a recently discovered Egyptian burial site. Excavations began last year after a university research group accidentally discovered the tomb in Minya, central Egypt. They found a hall in the rock, leading to stairs and a large room with several mummies. Later, two more chambers were found with more mummies and large stone sarcophagi. Egypt’s Ministry of Antiquities, which opened the site to diplomats and journalists, reported that more than 40 mummies are in the site dating back to the Ptolemaic era, 323 B.C. to 30 B.C. The mummies, all of which are in good condition, are probably from the same rich family, according to the ministry.

Fired
The elders of Harvest Bible Chapel dismissed James MacDonald as senior pastor on Feb. 12 after a Chicago radio show aired audio of vulgar and inflammatory comments he purportedly made against Christianity Today leadership and journalist Julie Roys. In a statement released the next day, the elders said they had decided, after a time of reflection and prayer, to remove MacDonald from the position, and “that timeline accelerated, when on Tuesday morning highly inappropriate recorded comments made by Pastor MacDonald were given to media and reported.” WORLD has previously reported on accusations of overbearing leadership at the Chicago megachurch under MacDonald.
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‘Nobody cares.’
Interim White House Chief of Staff MICK MULVANEY on whether President Trump would mention the rising federal budget deficit in his State of the Union Address.

‘He should never have to buy another beer in his life.’
REBECCA FERRELL, spokeswoman for Colorado Parks and Wildlife, on a trail runner in Larimer County, Colo., who successfully fought off an attack by a mountain lion. The runner reportedly wrestled the lion to the ground and choked it to death.

‘When churches don’t combat this, we are in active cooperation with the works of the devil.’
RUSSELL MOORE of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention on reports of widespread sexual abuse by pastors in the SBC (see p. 9).

‘A fraud perpetrated by psychiatry, the likes of something the United States and [the world] hasn’t experienced since the lobotomy era.’
JAMIE SHUPE on transgenderism, in a statement announcing he would “no longer identify as a transgender or non-binary person and renounce all ties to transgenderism.” Shupe’s life as a transgender “woman” had been celebrated by The New York Times.

‘About abortion, I don’t want to make it illegal. I want to make it unthinkable.’
FRANK STEPHENS, who has Down syndrome and who testified before Congress in October 2017 on abortion.
Out with the new
In a ruthless business calculation, Japan’s Henn-na Hotel chain announced it would terminate much of its workforce in the name of cost-effectiveness and efficiency. The robots that have been serving as front-desk staff, cleaners, porters, and in-room assistants have to go. Human beings will replace them. The South China Morning Post reports that the hotel found the dinosaur and humanoid robots expensive to service, unable to answer many customer questions, and prone to annoying habits. According to the Wall Street Journal, one in-room assistant interpreted snoring as a command and woke up a guest with a request to repeat it.

Do-it-yourself dentistry
After waiting more than 18 months to see a dentist, a 62-year-old British man opted to yank a sore tooth with his own pliers in January. David Woodhouse of Truro, Cornwall, told the BBC that he made his initial request to see a dentist in mid-2017 after complaining about tooth pain. This past December, emergency officials with the country’s National Health Service offered to pull the sore tooth for him. Woodhouse objected, saying the sore tooth was only part of a larger problem and said he’d hold out for a dental appointment. But three weeks later, the pain became too much for him: “So I got the needle-nose pliers and out it came.”

A good time for hockey
Stuck in an hourslong traffic jam, Canadians on Highway 40 east of Montreal reverted to stereotypes. After waiting in their cars for a while, the Canadian motorists eventually hopped out of their vehicles, grabbed their sticks, and started playing hockey on the frozen road. A massive, 75-car pileup caused the Jan. 27 traffic standstill. One Twitter user, responding to a CBC report on the impromptu hockey game, captured the moment: “Of course, in Canada, everyone has an emergency stick and puck in their trunk.”

Accidental offering
A Conyers, Ga., resident is out $6,500 after his plan to hide a wad of cash backfired. In January, Devon Silvey, 27, sold his car and took the cash to his mother’s house for safekeeping. Rather than tell his mom about the money, Silvey hid it in an old Mickey Mouse coffee tumbler. When he returned days later, Silvey discovered the mug missing. Silvey’s mother, Lindsay Preiss, had put the mug and other clutter in a box and taken the items to a Goodwill store. “That mug had literally sat in our cabinet untouched for about 15 years,” she told Newsweek, adding that she felt like “the worst mom in the world.” Goodwill apparently sold the mug without checking the contents, and Preiss is now asking the person who bought the mug to return the money.

Zero tolerance
On second thought, perhaps 30 days in jail is too severe a punishment for speeding around the city on a scooter. A spokesman for the Baltimore Transportation Department said they plan to remove criminal sanctions against electric scooter speeding from an ordinance passed by Baltimore’s City Council last year. Had police enforced the legislation, persons caught zipping around Baltimore on a rental scooter could have faced a $1,000 fine or 30 days of jail time. The harsh penalties, the Transportation Department says, were intended to apply only to officials who operate scooter rental companies. Regular riders will face a $20 citation for speeding.
When the cows come home

Officials in India’s Hindu north have begun marking stray cows with bar codes in an effort to manage the growing problem of abandoned livestock. As government officials in Uttar Pradesh have closed more and more slaughterhouses, farmers are increasingly cutting their cows loose rather than lose money feeding the animals. The stray cows have become the bane of farmers whose crops become the stray cows’ new pastureland. Many Hindus consider cows to be sacred, and as a result slaughtering the animals is illegal in many Hindu areas of India. Government officials have proposed using abandoned buildings to shelter the animals.

Unwanted intrusion

At least one nation plans to build a wall to deal with border migration. In January, Denmark started construction on a 43-mile fence along its border with Germany, but not to control human migration. The small Northern European nation is concerned about infected wild boar crossing the border. A recent case of two wild boars infected with African swine fever in Belgium has sparked fears that Denmark’s pork production industry might be threatened. Denmark exports $1.7 billion in pig products each year, making the $12 million fence seem like a reasonable investment. While African swine fever is harmless to humans, pigs usually die from the disease within days of contracting it.

Seven somethings

Pop singer Ariana Grande may make millions with her new hit single “7 Rings,” but that can’t buy her a do-over on a botched tattoo celebrating the song’s release. On Jan. 29, Grande shared a picture of a new hand tattoo on social media. She had instructed the artist to tattoo “seven rings” on her hand in a highly stylized Japanese script known as Kanji. Instead, the artist accidentally tattooed “seven wheels,” a phrase most commonly associated in Japan with a popular barbecue grill.

Lost and found

Will the owner of an abandoned McDonnell Douglas MD87 please step forward? Officials at the Adolfo Suárez Madrid-Barajas Airport in Spain are searching for the owners of an old passenger jet abandoned on their tarmac. A spokesman for the airport said no one knew exactly how long the twin-engine jet had been sitting at Madrid’s airport, but officials believe it has been parked for over a year. Spanish law requires authorities to declare a plane abandoned and wait 15 months prior to taking it over and selling it at a public auction. The plane was last registered in 2009 to Saicus Air, a Spanish cargo service, but the company went out of business the next year.
Constricted by ‘constructs’

PSYCHOLOGY GROUP OFFERS A CONFUSED TAKE ON MASCULINITY

If you weren’t spending last month on sabbatical in Tibet, you probably saw that notorious Gillette ad that set the internet water-cooler buzzing. The razor blade manufacturer, which once modestly promised the finest shave a man can get, now pontificates on how men can be their best—and what’s wrong with that?

Absolutely nothing, but to a male populace already pulling prickly charges of “toxic masculinity” out of its hide, the ad was a sermon too far. Scrolling past scenes of bullying, cat-calling, and sexual harassing, as dads robotically intone “Boys will be boys,” the narrator insists things have to change: “because the boys of today will be the men of tomorrow.” This is all true, but having been lumped indiscriminately with the sexual predators and serial killers of this world, numerous right-leaning commentators, of both sexes, lashed out at the enlightened mansplaining of it all.

As many have pointed out, we need more masculinity, not less: the good kind, where fathers teach their sons to be strong and brave as well as thoughtful and courteous. But who can tell us what masculinity even is?

The American Psychological Association (APA) takes its best shot with Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Boys and Men, published in August. In 17 pages, the eight guidelines set forth some observations that are true, some that are useful, many that are confusing, and one that is glaringly wrong.

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First, what’s true: Men are far more prone than women to sociopathic behavior and acting out; they are far more likely to be diagnosed with attention deficits leading to poor school performance; and they commit far more violent crimes and constitute the vast majority of the prison population. Also, the APA acknowledges that fathers are very important, if not essential, to a young man’s development.

In attributing causes, though, the document gets confusing—and confused. Throughout, “studies show” and “research indicates” that “traditional masculine ideology” is causing most of the problems. The APA helpfully defines this ideology as “anti-femininity, achievement, eschewal of the appearance of weakness, and adventure, risk, and violence.” That’s quite a viper’s nest, but after teasing out the obvious negatives, what’s the problem with strength and ambition? Or being adventurous and taking risks? Even violence has its place in defense of one’s country or family.

No one doubts hyper-masculinity can get out of hand, but the APA, while exposing male stereotypes, assumes its own stereotypes. Reading through Guidelines brings to mind all those barbecue dads chanting “Boys will be boys.” Traditional male ideology is much more nuanced. Most men understand that their sons won’t grow up to be Captain America, General Patton, or Moses, but that doesn’t mean responsible, attentive fathers shouldn’t encourage their sons to be resolute and courageous. And maybe even restrain their emotions, sometimes.

More confusion comes from the APA’s constant referrals to “alternative masculinities” expressed in the LGBTQ spectrum (which must also make room for “feminine identities”). They seem more solicitous of trans men than biological men, and while floundering in all these alternatives, the reader can’t find any footing for defining legitimate masculinity at all.

Hence the glaring inconsistency: From the beginning, Guidelines claims that all defining characteristics of masculinity are socially constructed. All of them. Men are that way because they are taught that way. Testosterone? A trifle. DNA? Forget it. The only place, oddly, where the APA even suggests that nature may play a part is in the supposed genetic makeup of trans men (i.e., biological women).

This is the big disconnect of all current gender theory. Assuming these professionals are firm Darwinists, why don’t they attribute anything to natural selection? Whether God designed them, or evolution did, men and women are physiologically different from birth. Social science is denying that, to society’s ruin.

Being “traditionally” male is not a psychological problem. But if we don’t figure out that men and women are, by and large, a certain way because they’re created that way, and learn to work with it rather than against it, some psychological mainspring within the collective culture is certain to break.
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Memorize more Scripture

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Perhaps the rumors are true that Amazon wants to develop a few cleaner series that don’t feature the sex, violence, or profanity common to streaming and cable dramas. Although *Vanity Fair*, the famous “Novel Without a Hero,” offers numerous opportunities to visually capitalize on the adulterous affairs and other unbecoming conduct William Makepeace Thackeray merely hinted at, Amazon’s gorgeous, wonderfully acted seven-part series (rated TV-14) wisely resists the bait. Instead, it allows the viewer to assume from context the natural results of playing with fire. It’s long been speculated that Thackeray’s Becky Sharp (Olivia Cooke) inspired Margaret Mitchell’s quintessentially selfish heroine, Scarlett O’Hara. And certainly there’s plenty of Becky in Scarlett’s fiddle-de-dee refusal to consider the long-term consequences of her actions. The main difference, if you can believe it, is that Becky is more egotistical and less given to sentiment. She’s also more interesting for her unapologetic assessment of her own corrupt nature. Whether she’s trying to seduce her best friend Amelia’s foppish brother; running off with the reckless son of her employer; or making herself financially beholden to a notoriously mad, bad, and dangerous-to-know lord, Becky can’t resist chasing after the wind. Yet it’s hard to entirely condemn or even dislike her when she looks so much like us. Who can blame Becky for letting her ambition run away with her scruples, given that she started life as the penniless, orphaned
daughter of an artist and opera girl, with only her formidable IQ and pretty face to rely on? Indeed, if the manipulative Miss Sharp were scratching and clawing her way up the social ladder of modern America, we’d be applauding her at awards shows and profiling her in magazines instead of denouncing her as an “artful little hussy.”

Bad as Becky is, though, look closely at Thackeray’s sweet, submissive Amelia (Claudia Jessie), and it seems she may have helped inspire Mitchell’s Melanie character as well.

As she’s written in the 19th-century bestseller, the insipid Amelia provokes our pity as she pines after childhood sweetheart George Osborne, a man whose character she never really understands. Even after his death, she carries on, year after year, so idolizing the memory of the vile cheat, she misses chances at happiness with a loyal, upright man who sacrifices half his life trying to win her love.

Amelia’s stubborn refusal to look things in the eyes and call them by their right names makes her, as Thackeray intended, nearly as worthy of our scorn as scheming, cold-blooded Becky. Thus, his Vanity Fair is nonetheless a deliciously entertaining and edifying place.

New Amsterdam

New Amsterdam, an NBC medical drama, stars Ryan Eggold (The Blacklist) as a status-quo-busting medical director, Dr. Max Goodwin. Now in the second half of its first season, the show grew out of Eric Manheimer’s 2012 memoir of his time as director at Bellevue Hospital in New York City.

In the pilot, Goodwin gathers hospital staffers and announces, “I work for you so you can work for your patients.” That’s the show’s theme: radically changing hospital protocols to put patients first. Goodwin fires the cardiac surgical department, eliminates waiting rooms, agrees to make hospital food healthy, and refuses to place billing above patient care. By the pilot’s end, skeptical doctors are on board.

The first season portrays typical medical crises and character relationships. It emphasizes compassion, but sometimes unrealistically, as when Goodwin invites homeless people into the understaffed hospital. Ongoing subplots revolve around why the winsome and witty Goodwin is so driven, as well as how he will handle his own dire health diagnosis.

Despite engaging characters, the show has predictable (and secular) scenarios and views: The male head of psychiatry has a husband and two adopted children, and he supports surgical change for a transgender teen. Law enforcement and race issues seem one-sided. Characters rarely broach religious thoughts, but in one episode a doctor turns to another and says, “The Lord works in mysterious ways”—and the second replies, “Yes, she does.”

Positive elements include Goodwin’s overt love for his wife and unborn daughter, a hospital counselor’s desire to find a permanent home for an angry teen lost in the foster system, and staff kindness to a prisoner-patient about to give birth. Doctors routinely call unborn children babies. The script allows for development of deeper issues, so New Amsterdam could improve in its planned second season—or fall into a propagandizing pit.

—by SHARON DIERBERGER

BOX OFFICE TOP 10
FOR THE WEEKEND OF FEB. 8-10
according to Box Office Mojo

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

1. The Lego Movie 2* PG……. 1 3 2
2. What Men Want R………… 7 2 9
3. Cold Pursuit R…………… 4 7 5
4. The Upside PG-13…….. 4 3 4
5. Glass* PG-13…………… 1 7 4
6. The Prodigy R…………… 5 7 5
7. Green Book PG-13……… 4 5 5
8. Aquaman* PG-13……… 2 5 4
9. Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* PG……. 2 4 2
10. Miss Bala PG-13……….. 5 6 5

*Reviewed by WORLD
**Movie**

**The Lego Movie 2: The Second Part**

It’s safe to take the kids to see *The Lego Movie 2: The Second Part*: The PG-rated film has little bad language (“heck” twice), one instance of borderline innuendo, and a message (“You have to find your own way”) easily corrected. But ask your kids afterward what the movie was about, and they’ll probably only say, “It was cool!” A plot and a plot twist gradually emerge from the mania, but it takes a saint’s patience to piece it all together. Like those complicated Lego kits, I suppose.

The story picks up years after the events of 2014’s *The Lego Movie*. Duplo invaders are destroying Bricksburg. The alien Duplo queen kidnaps Lucy (voiced by Elizabeth Banks), Batman, and other friends of Emmet Brickowski (Chris Pratt). Although the spunky Lucy has rejected Emmet’s romantic overtures because he’s too much of a nice guy for her taste, Emmet sets out to rescue her. Rex Dangervest, oozing (toxic?) masculinity, shows up to help Emmet “change for the tougher.” Emmet must save his friends before the queen’s wedding, which will usher in “Our-Mom-Ageddon.” But not everyone is who he or she seems to be.

In the (live-action) real world, Finn and his little sister, Bianca, aren’t playing together nicely. Their selfishness manifests as calamity in the Lego world.

I think I got all that right—the narrative’s design tested my saintliness.

Like the other Lego films, *Lego 2* aims to capture a broad spectrum of viewers. The popularity of the plastic brick toys makes the Lego movies a sure hit among youngsters, and abundant pop-culture references largely appeal to older viewers. (The opening-night *Leggo 2* showing I attended consisted almost entirely of 20-something males who were having a lot of fun—more than I was.)

Few of the nonstop one-liners and sight gags are sidesplitting, but they do speak of a script pored over and polished. My favorite moment came when Lucy, crawling through an air duct, encounters (in a nod to *Die Hard*) a Lego-version Bruce Willis.

—by BOB BROWN

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**DVD**

**Bohemian Rhapsody**

The five Oscar nominations for *Bohemian Rhapsody*, released in theaters last year and on DVD Feb. 12, suggest the pop-culture canonization of rock star Freddie Mercury is now complete.

But measured against the standards of truth, reason, and history, the movie falls far short.

The biography *Somebody to Love* by Matt Richards and Mark Langthorne documents a truer story of the Queen frontman. They estimate Mercury had hundreds, perhaps thousands, of sex partners. His drug use was epic. In the late 1970s, Mercury spent $7,000 British pounds per week on drugs for himself and his friends. That’s about $45,000 in 2018 dollars.

Perhaps most horrific: Mercury likely had sex with hundreds of men after he became HIV-positive, probably in 1982. Many of those relationships occurred after Mercury either knew or strongly suspected he carried the AIDS virus.

All these details are conveniently omitted from *Bohemian Rhapsody* (I discuss them more fully in a longer review of the movie at wng.org). Richards and Langthorne partly blame British boarding schools for Mercury’s behavior. But the movie downplays any possibility that Mercury was gay or an addict because of environmental factors. Instead, it suggests that he was gay because he was gay, and that his creative output was somehow linked to his addictive personality.

Why did *Bohemian Rhapsody* leave out these unsavory aspects of Freddie Mercury’s life? It’s possible the film’s producers did not want to sully the name of a gay icon. It’s also possible money was a motivation. To come even close to reality, the film would have been rated R. But the movie’s PG-13 rating guaranteed access to the lucrative teen market.

That strategy was a wild financial success. *Bohemian Rhapsody* raked in over $200 million in the United States alone. And like the band Queen in real life, the movie is even more popular overseas: Worldwide ticket sales are at over $800 million and climbing.

—by WARREN COLE SMITH
CULTURE / Books

Crowd-sourcing evolution

TIME FOR SCIENTIFIC FACT, NOT DARWINIAN FAITH by Marvin Olasky

Afghanistan 99.7 percent, Iran 99.4 percent, Algeria 99 percent, Somalia 99 percent, Niger 98 percent, Azerbaijan 97 percent, Libya 97 percent, Saudi Arabia 97 percent, Djibouti 97 percent, Sudan 97 percent, Senegal 96 percent, Gambia 95 percent, Mali 95 percent.

Those statistics display country-by-country adherence to Islam, according to surveys by the Pew Research Center and other organizations. If such high percentages of inhabitants have those beliefs, they are likely to be right, yes? How could so many people be wrong?

They could be because those countries typically have laws against blasphemy and apostasy. Those who criticize Muhammad or abandon Islam often go to prison and may even face execution, so some poll respondents probably lie. Others may pledge allegiance because they’ve never heard arguments against Islam from sources they consider reliable. Their mullahs say critics of Islam are idiots or liars:

Why listen to them?

A Pew survey in 2009 showed 87 percent of scientists agree: “Humans and other living things have evolved over time due to natural processes.” How could 87 percent be wrong? The same caveats apply as with Islam. Few scientists have themselves done experiments related to the evolution debate, so they’re basing their response on what their professors and deans have told them. Given the academic scimitars wielded by the mullahs of materialism, it’s remarkable that 1,000 Ph.D. scientists have signed the “Scientific Dissent From Darwinism” list: You can see their names online.

BOOKMARKS

One more book to add to Feb. 2’s listing for Black History Month: Charles Boothe’s *Plain Theology for Plain People* (Lexham, 2017), a succinct handbook from an African-American pastor first published in 1890.

Adam Arenson’s *Banking on Beauty* (University of Texas Press, 2018) shows that commercial architecture does not have to be drab. Barbara Haskell’s *Grant Wood: American Gothic and Other Fables* (Whitney Museum, 2018) has 105 beautiful plates and interesting analyses of the famous artist, but also what seems obligatory these days: speculation about Wood’s sexual orientation.

Steve Turner’s *Turn, Turn, Turn* (Worthy, 2018) provides brief information about 100 songs with some connection—usually a loose one—to Biblical words.

Tim Wu’s *The Curse of Bigness: Antitrust in the New Gilded Age* (Columbia Global Reports, 2018) skilfully and succinctly applies 19th-century lessons to today’s high-tech Goliaths and others: They may reduce consumer costs, but they also limit freedom. George Gilder’s *Life After Google* (Regnery, 2018) says Silicon Valley is suffering a nervous breakdown. Gilder suggests a blockchain economy will bring salvation, but he does not clearly explain how that will work.

Benjamin Quinn and Walter Strickland II’s *Every Waking Hour* (Lexham, 2016) succinctly explains the importance of God-glorifying work of all kinds. Does work have a future? *Class Dismissed* by Nick Adams (Post Hill Press, 2019) notes that high schools try to push everyone toward college today: He ambles through many good reasons not to attend college and proposes alternatives for those not academically inclined. —M.O.
UNHOLY LAND  Lavie Tidhar
In Unholy Land, Tidhar designs an alternate reality in which Jews establish a Jewish state, Palestina, in former British East Africa. Here pulp fiction writer Lior Tirosh starts to believe himself the hero of one of his novels. Yet Tirosh may not be insane, because even as Palestina seeks to build a wall against African refugees, the wall between true reality and his own crumbles. Tidhar, an Israeli by birth, avoids sermonizing: He merely alludes to the Israel-Palestine conflict and shuns simplistic solutions. The blend of politics, allegory, and alternate-history detective novel is unconventional yet weirdly wonderful.

EMPIRE OF SILENCE  Christopher Ruocchio
This far-future, epic space opera borrows elements from Ancient Rome for a tale of privilege-to-rags-to-glory. The patrician Hadrian Marlowe will one day destroy mankind’s greatest alien threat—but first, as a boy, he rejects his inheritance and flees to the limits of the human galactic empire, where he’s enslaved and forced to compete as a gladiator. Hadrian’s growth through friendship, as he learns to survive the streets, the coliseum, and the forum, creates the grand story of an illustrious hero. Exciting fight scenes and political intrigue keep the plot moving.

(Cautions: a gay character, sexuality)

NO COUNTRY FOR OLD GNOMES  Delilah S. Dawson & Kevin Hearne
This hilarious, pun-filled comedy often sacrifices plot for a joke. A Goth gnome, a pretentious gryphon, a vain lawyer halfling, a hapless dwarf, and a part-sheep girl travel across the world of Pell to stop the genocide of the industrious gnomes by their onetime allies, the gourmand halflings. Each new encounter puns and mocks standard fantasy elements. The clever humor comes from overturning reader expectations. It’s a laugh-out-loud comedy for wordplay and fantasy enthusiasts alike. A few sex jokes pepper the tale, and profanity is limited except for one extended joke punning a character’s initials.

DRAGON’S CODE: ANNE McCaffrey’S DRAGONRIDERS OF PERN  Gigi McCaffrey
Gigi McCaffrey pens her first novel set on Pern, a world first created 50 years ago by her mother, Anne McCaffrey. A coalition of humans and dragons protects Pern’s inhabitants from the ravages of the mindless Thread, but trouble brews between two factions of “dragonriders,” and a young, forlorn ex-singer, Piemur, goes undercover to discover why. Much of the simplistic, uneven plot contains a sequence of apparent coincidences or accidents, but gentle lessons about family, self-worth, and cooperation make this an excellent novel for parents and teens to share.

(Caution: alcohol abuse)

AFTERWORD
Kathy Tyers’ Shivering World (Enclave Publishing, 2018) examines society and the Christian faith and remains as relevant today as when it was first published in the early 1990s. Convinced the colonists have the cure for her rare genetic disorder, microbiologist Graysha Brady-Phillips accepts a job working on their cold planet, even though the eugenics board, headed by Graysha’s mother, has banned genetic engineering. Meanwhile, trouble brews between the colonists and the scientists, and Graysha falls in love with a local man whose faith intrigues her as much as the man himself does. Tyers’ novel is a complex interweaving of competing groups, all vying for Graysha’s loyalty. This novel particularly deserves notice among a crowded field because of how Graysha struggles to come to grips with a faith too bound up in the people who represent it, only to discover truth through a reading of John’s Gospel. – J.O.
In worlds away

TEEN FANTASY FROM CHRISTIAN PUBLISHERS
reviewed by Charissa Crotts

KING’S WAR Jill Williamson

King’s War concludes a three-book series about the kingdom of Armania, a land where people follow Arman (who represents the true God) instead of the surrounding nations’ pagan gods. Trevn struggles with his new responsibilities as king, but his wife and friends support him as he navigates the final showdown with Armania’s enemies and frenemies. The book contains endearing but flawed characters and inspiring portrayals of obedience to God despite the odds. The plot is heavy with magic. Good characters use it with self-control and wisdom, while bad characters grasp it for power. Spiritual allusions and war descriptions make the book better suited for older teens. (Ages 14 & up)

UNBREAKABLE Sara Ella

The Unblemished trilogy comes to its conclusion in Unbreakable. With her friends by her side, Eliyana Ember relies on the Verity to help her defeat the Void and take her place as queen. The story highlights friendship, loyalty, and perseverance with likable characters and engaging writing. Each chapter jumps between different characters’ perspectives, though, and readers have to sort through their jumbled thoughts and feelings, which slows the action. Themes of self-worth and identity run throughout the story as Eliyana learns to appreciate her unique strengths and weaknesses. She must also navigate a love triangle subplot that involves kissing and lots of romantic thoughts. (Ages 14 & up)

THE CRESCENT STONE Matt Mikalatos

Madeline Oliver is dying from a lung disease, but then an Elenil appears and offers her a bargain: one year of service in the Sunlit Lands for the ability to breathe freely again. She accepts the bargain and goes to the strange land with her wisecracking friend Jason Wu. As the plot unfolds, the book diverges into social injustice discussions: The main characters hear from friends who experienced discrimination because of their African-American, Chinese, or Native American heritage. While the story becomes interesting and meaningful at the end, the writing throughout is mediocre, and Jason is the only character with energy and humor. (Ages 13 & up)

MARK OF THE RAVEN Morgan L. Busse

Selene is heir to the secretive House Ravenwood. Unbeknownst to the six neighboring houses, Selene’s cruel mother has trained her to “dreamwalk”—enter a person’s dream and manipulate fears. Selene wavers between duty to protect Ravenwood and guilt for hurting others, but when her mother targets the kind leader of House Maris, Selene must make a choice. In Mark of the Raven, Busse has crafted a well-written story with believable (if stereotypical fantasy) characters and a compelling world with unique culture and detail. Note: Some dark dreams and descriptions of suffering might make the book too intense for younger teens. (Ages 14 & up)

AFTERWORD

In The Warrior Maiden (Thomas Nelson, 2019), Melanie Dickerson reimagines the story of Mulan. After her father’s death, Mulan disguises herself as a man and takes his place in battle. In the army she meets Wolfgang, the Christian son of a German duke. He discovers her secret, and romance blossoms between them. They spend the rest of the book wondering if their feelings are mutual and whether they should express them.

Some war scenes at the beginning are brief and muted, while romance fills the second half but does not get more intense than kissing. Although the setting of 15th-century Lithuania feels strange for the story of Mulan, it provides opportunities for characters to talk about the role of the church and priests in understanding the Bible. It is a sweet story of sacrificial love, but readers expecting the Disney version may find it slow and bland. – C.C.
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German paleontologist Günter Bechly, former curator of the Stuttgart State Museum of Natural History, is a world expert on fossilized dragonflies. He has discovered more than 170 new species, and 11 new genera have been named after him. To prepare for an exhibit celebrating Charles Darwin's 200th birthday, Bechly read intelligent design books—and became an ID proponent. He is now a fellow at the Discovery Institute and a senior research scientist at Biologic Institute. He now lives in Austria, but I interviewed him in Seattle, Wash. Here's an edited Q&A.

Why dragonflies? When I was researching in the tropics, I simply discovered that I loved these animals and found them very interesting: aquatic larvae with helicopterlike flight, compound eyes, beautiful colors, and strange, intricate mating behavior.

In what ways do they add to the case for intelligent design? One way is their sudden appearance in the fossil record with fully formed wing articulation. Another evidence concerns the reproductive system in suborders of dragonflies. While the organs in each suborder are constructed from the same basic parts, in each one a different part of the system has the function of sperm transmission—a parallel development in which it appears the same kind of solution was derived independently in several instances. It indicates a kind of design template used several times, as an engineer would use to build different motor engines, using the same parts.

Their mouths are interesting? Larvae have prehensile mouths that can be thrust forward like a chameleon’s tongue. To do that, they must be partially detached from the head. How this happened at each intermediate state, as the Darwinian process would require—to be a viable state with an adaptive advantage—is very hard to imagine.

What challenges do intelligent design proponents face in Europe? The reaction I received was as hostile as it would have been in America, but most people reject ID arguments without knowing what they reject. The problem for neo-Darwinists is that if this idea should fail, there is no alternative. If the only naturalistic explanation for complex information is the Darwinian process and this process is shown to be unfeasible, then it’s game over for naturalism. That is why, especially in biology, the aggression is very high against intelligent design explanations.

Could the overwhelming percentage of biologists who reject ID be wrong? The problem is that, of the biologists who reject ID, 98 percent don’t work on the actual underpinnings of the neo-Darwinian theory. They simply learn the theory at university, accept it as true, and apply the theory to detailed problems: They study whether the East African locust is related more closely to the Asian or Australian locust, but they don’t think about the mathematical feasibility of the neo-Darwinian process. The few theoretical biologists who work on the underpinnings of the theory have mostly become critical of the neo-Darwinian process.

You cite a conference organized by the Royal Society in London in 2016. The opening talk by a famous evolutionary biologist was about the explanatory deficits of the neo-Darwinian theory. The failure of Darwinism as an explanation is not at all an exclusive, idiosyncratic idea of ID proponents or creationists.

What do you think of the link scholars have made between Darwinism, 19th-century social
Darwinism, and the rise of 20th-century fascism? It is certainly not simple causation, but a certain mindset combined with a rejection of human dignity leads to atrocities. This is true in Nazism, in Soviet gulags, and now in North Korea. If humans originated from the animal realm by a purely unguided process, there is no real reason in nature to treat humans differently from stones. It’s just a different aggregate of atoms. But the connection is not simple: Darwin wouldn’t have been a supporter of Nazi Germany.

Wikipedia users deleted an article there about you? I was a scientist with a certain profile who changed my mind for rational reasons. That’s something that’s not supposed to happen. That made me dangerous, so I was ostracized. It shows that Wikipedia is not unbiased. The best alternative is to google to find the information and weigh its reliability yourself.

How would you encourage someone entering the field of biology today? Be open-minded, read both sides, and don’t be indoctrinated by propaganda. Weigh all the evidence and then look for the best explanation of the evidence. Those who see that the standard Darwinian picture might be wrong should attend a Discovery Institute summer seminar to meet the scientists and ask critical questions. But I would also advise staying undercover until their career is a bit settled, because the risk to ruin their career is real, as I and many others have encountered.

What areas of biology are particularly compelling for the future? One is the whole field of genetics, where you see the striking phenomena of overlapping genes where the same strands of DNA are used to code different genes. It’s like a book that you can read backwards and forwards and it still makes sense. This is nearly unbelievable to believe with a Darwinian process.

Evo-devo? “Evo-devo”—evolutionary development—strongly suggests that the whole paradigm about the organism being coded only in the DNA is wrong. Look at how sugar coating on the cell membrane is necessary to produce a viable fetus. If you want to change an organism from one type to another, it’s not sufficient to just fiddle with some mutations in the DNA.

What does paleontology tell us? The gaps we can observe in the fossil record are certainly real. More and more strong statistical support means we should look at gaps as data and not anomalies.

What are your current projects? I’m working on discontinuities in the fossil record and explosion-like events in the history of life. Not just the Cambrian explosion, but all over the history of life you see new body plans and complex new structures appearing out of nowhere without the kind of gradual transitions you should find according to Darwinian predictions.

You’re working on the “waiting time problem”? Darwinian evolutionists seek confirmation in the fossil record and population genetics. But if you combine these two fields, you find that the time necessary for certain transitions would be at least 10 times longer than the time available. Michael Behe used mathematical modeling to study mutations where we have empirical data: for example, mosquito resistance to malaria drugs. Applying that model to a vertebrate species with a smaller population size and longer generational turnover, we find the time needed to get a single coordinated mutation is much longer than the existence of the entire universe. Just not enough time? A mathematician is doing the modeling, I’m establishing the fossil dating and windows of time. Molecular biologists and biochemists are working on the genetic underpinnings. We want to show that across nature and through all eras of Earth history, this time problem is everywhere and is the rule, not the exception. This refutes Darwinism. If Darwinism is still upheld as the ruling paradigm, it will be in spite of the contradictory, conflicting evidence.
Poetry, as it has been said, is like love in that almost anything that one says about it is true. But is almost any music to which a poem can be set somehow “true” as well, if only to the poem’s spirit?

The singers and musicians behind three new albums apparently think so.

With Fearful Symmetry: The Songs of William Mac Davis (Centaur), the wife-husband team of Lynda Poston-Smith (soprano) and Robert Carl Smith (piano) present settings by the Fort Worth composer William Mac Davis of poems by William Blake (from Songs of Innocence and of Experience), Christopher Smart (from Hymns for the Amusement of Children), Rainer Maria Rilke, Wendell Berry, Hildegard von Bingen, half a dozen anonymous Medieval or Elizabethan versifiers, and the author of what’s commonly called the “Priestly Blessing” in Numbers 6.

Davis’ art-song melodies command immediate attention, respecting the metrical contours of the lyrics while taking exciting rhythmic and dynamic liberties rooted in a sober appreciation of the texts’ latent emotions. But what’s most striking about Fearful Symmetry is Poston-Smith’s diction.

Whereas many classically trained vocalists sacrifice sense on the altar of sensation, Poston-Smith achieves a healthy balance and maintains it even at her most dramatic. The pathos that she quietly wrings from “A Sick Rose” allows the inner music of the poem’s eight brief lines to unfold with a patient intensity.

In Shakespeare’s Sonnets (ArcoDiva), the sopranos Lucie Silkenová and Markéta Foukalová take turns achieving and maintaining a similar sense-sensation balance, although first impressions might suggest otherwise: They sing seven of the 11 sonnets in their native Czech. This decision, however, is not excessively problematic. Anyone with internet access can easily track down Shakespeare’s originals and thereby get their gists. And the sprightly accompaniment of the Duo Teres (the violinist Lucia Fulka Kopsova and the chamber guitarist Tomáš Honek) ensures that the melodies take on an enjoyable life of their own.

The melodies come from the Czech composers Zdenek Merta, Matej Benko, Juraj Filas, Lukáš Hurník, Martin Brunner, Štěpánka Balcarová, Jiří Chvojka, and Ondřej Kukal, none of whom seems constricted by notions of the “right” way to treat the Bard. Merta’s settings of Sonnet 144, for instance, and Benko’s of Sonnet 39 sound like fantasias on echoes of Satie, and Filas’ 7½-minute setting of Sonnet 1 juxtaposes a romantically yearning tune that wouldn’t sound out of place in the canon of Nino Rota with an energetic, operatic aria keyed to the sonnet’s cautionary second quatrain.

Purists, meanwhile, troubled by the composers’ tendency to repeat, re-sequence, or omit whole lines will be glad to know that all of Sonnet 18 (which is best understood as the anti-climax of the “procreation sonnet” sequence and not as a piece of “homoeroticism”) survives intact.

That sonnet (under the title “Summer’s Day”) also appears on The Road Not Taken (RNT), the debut album by the jazz singer and multi-instrumentalist Johno (aka John Keating). It joins the equally famous Sonnet 130 (“Mistress Eyes”) and well-known poems by Robert Frost (two), Mahmoud Darwish, Lord Byron, Robert Herrick, William Blake (an excerpt), and Rudyard Kipling.

But if the conventionality of Johno’s taste in verse is only exacerbated by his similarly conventional taste in cover songs (John Denver, Simon & Garfunkel, “The Long and Winding Road”), his serpentine blend of jazz, adult-contemporary pop, and world music of a distinctly Middle Eastern flavor adds a remedial dollop of the exotic.

And as a singer who falls somewhere between Michael Franks and Donovan—clear enunciators both—Johno is always easy to understand. 🎵
New or recent albums
reviewed by Arsenio Orteza

DELTA Mumford & Sons
If you’d never guess from the ubiquitous electronics or the arena hooks that leaven these musical meditations that Mumford & Sons were ever considered “folk,” you could surmise from the lyrics that they’re sometimes considered “Christian.” The ardent monogamist of “Forever” may question his eternal standing, but “42” is a prayer on behalf of an evil and adulterous generation, and “The Wild” intuits the paradoxical relationship between fearlessness and the fear of God. And speaking of the fear of God, “Darkness Visible” features Gill Landry reciting Milton’s description of hell.

PHOENIX Pedro the Lion
“Tell them your stories,” sings David Bazan at the climax of “Black Canyon.” “If you carry them by yourself, / the gorier the details, the more you walk alone in Hell.” To that end, he rakes through his Arizona upbringing with a fine-toothed comb, keying his memories to Sean Lane’s pounding drums and the garage-friendly guitars through which they punch holes. Glimpses emerge of a tattered faith. Bazan, for instance, knows that the Lord giveth and taketh away. “Blessed Be the Name,” however, remains (just?) beyond him.

FATHER’S SON Pierce Pettis
Pettis’ first solo album in a decade begins with the brisk three-chords-and-the-truth “Wouldn’t Change It for the World.” After that, the tempos drop, the voice gets creaky, and introspection prevails. “The Adventures of Me (and This Old Guitar)” is a sharper showman’s-life song—especially given the kind of “showman” that Pettis is—than Jesse Winchester’s “A Showman’s Life,” which he covers nevertheless. What kind of showman is Pettis? One who can make a new wineskin of and for the “Prayer of Saint Francis.”

NATIVE TONGUE Switchfoot
The ballads dig deep and soar simultaneously. The louder upbeat numbers take unpredictable yet rewarding turns. The six songs beginning with “Joy Invincible” (nimble pop), peaking with “Wonderful Feeling” (the calm after the storm), and ending with “The Strength to Let Go” (the highest soaring of the deep-digging ballads) unfold like a mini-musical loosely based on a modernized retelling of The Pilgrim’s Progress. And still the Brothers Foreman have an encore up their sleeve. It’s called “Oxygen,” a song as lovely as it is haunting.

ENCORE
With The Bucket List, Phil Keaggy has finally made the big time (Glass Harp never quite got over), layering his multivalent guitars atop 12 distinctive pulses generated by the celebrated (and co-billed) rhythm section of Tony Levin and Jerry Marotta. And if the title of the second-catchiest song, “Steely Funk,” seems too literal given the Becker-Fagen-esque pop-jazz to which it’s attached, it also serves as accurate shorthand for the project’s slinky airiness as a whole.

Fans hoping, in other words, that Keaggy would let rip and prove once and for all that God-fearing ax wielders can too shred might be disappointed. Only “Carved in Stone,” “Good Stuff,” and “Caravan” (not Duke Ellington’s) gather rock ‘n’ roll momentum, and even their riffs sound as if Keaggy could’ve played them sitting down. Not that there’s anything wrong with that. The catchiest song, “Sometimes We Up,” practically reifies kicking back—that is, until its last-minute crescendo. —A.O.
Fellowship of suffering
HOW TO MAKE A MICRO-BUSINESS FROM REFUGEE STRIFE

ERBIL, Iraq—Like many living in northern Iraq, Nour Adil watched helplessly as her city filled with Syrian War refugees and Iraqis when ISIS took over and destroyed nearby cities. “We saw lots of ladies looking for jobs but having a hard time finding them,” Nour recalls. Her mother was skilled at sewing, and Nour had management skills from years in banking. Hopeful Hands was born.

It was a less-than-hopeful start. Only two women signed up for a free one-month sewing course. “We’d already bought four used sewing machines and fabric,” Nour laughs. But 15 women came by the end of that week, and 29 the second week.

Sewing projects are common charity startups, yet few thrive. Hopeful Hands, now in its third year, has employed dozens of women, Christians and Muslims, most from Syria.

The women work four days a week making flat and fitted bedsheets, pillowcases, tote bags, and more. A seamstress who is homebound makes quilts using leftover scraps. Hopeful Hands fills custom orders, too, sewing drapes in January for two local hotels.

Nour believes there’s a simple reason for the success: “My heart is in this. I was a refugee and I watched my mom when I was young. I know what these ladies are going through.”

Born in Baghdad, Nour and her family fled Iraq under threats from the Saddam Hussein regime. They spent seven years in Turkey before gaining asylum in Canada. If you’ve read They Say We Are Infidels, my 2016 book about Iraq and Syria, you’ve met Nour and her mother, Insaf Safou. As a refugee Insaf took up tailoring to help the family make ends meet in Turkey and Canada before returning to lead sewing projects in Iraq. Now the next generation is meeting needs in a new era of turbulent conflict and suffering.

Nour left Iraq when she was 6 years old, and didn’t return until 2009, at age 21. On that trip she met Malath Baythoon, a pastor in Baghdad. They married in 2011 and planted an evangelical church in Erbil, a growing congregation. They have three children, and return for visits to Canada, where Nour’s parents, brother, and other relatives remain.

“God took me on this journey, from here to Turkey to Canada, but I always said I wanted to use what I know to benefit my country. I knew I wanted to be here,” said Nour.

When Insaf comes for visits, she teaches the women to make new products. “Nour has carried this work beyond anything I could dream,” she told me by phone from her home in Canada.

A visitor feels the friendship in the basement workshop, as women from different backgrounds and places are united by their common experience. Mornings begin with devotions, then the sewing machines start to whir. Two women measure drapery panels over a cutting table, while another crew stuffs decorative pillow covers, and several women work the ironing station, puffing steam.

When Menad, a woman displaced from Mosul, arrives, everyone stops to embrace her. Her mother died in Germany, having received asylum there when Menad did not. Menad longed to see her again before she died, and fought tears as the women surrounded her. “They all have stories,” said Nour.

The women are paid 3,000 Iraqi dinars ($2.50) an hour—something uncommon in Iraq. Working four days a week, said Nour, “they can buy groceries, and in that way are supporting their family.”

Plus, for the unpredictable life of the displaced, the work gives them something they crave: routine.

Sales—mostly through local stores and bazaars—cover the salaries. NGOs and church donors cover other costs, and Nour volunteers. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) pitched in after one of its officers heard Nour interviewed on Babylon FM, a popular radio station. An IOM grant made possible industrial sewing machines, a custom cutting table, and needed supplies.

“We would like to expand, to see if we can sell overseas or simply display our work and share the stories of how lives have been changed through this work,” Nour told me.

For now, I’m sleeping soundly on my pillowcase made by Hopeful Hands.®

Visit facebook.com/hopefulhandserbil/ to learn more about Hopeful Hands.
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1. God’s World is Central
Celebrate the world through God's eyes. Our comprehensive preschool through high school program thoroughly integrates Bible with the study of history, geography, science, literature, art, and music while helping children learn a biblical worldview.

2. Engages the Whole Family
Nurture the joy of learning for the entire family as you share inspiring read-alouds, simple hands-on projects, and gurgling science experiments. Take a family outing or plan a historic vacation. Dad is encouraged to lead family devotions using the Bible texts in the daily lessons. Our curriculum can be taught to children at several different grade levels all at the same time, resolving the issue of how to split your time among your children and keep track of many different topics.

3. Enhances Retention with Hands-On Activities
We all remember what we learn when we experience it. Utilizing simple hands-on projects, children not only read about important concepts and places, but also discover them with fun activities such as history notebooks, timelines, cooking, nature walks, and science projects.

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Timeless classics and inspiring biographies that develop character are read aloud for the whole family to enjoy together. Our curriculum packages also recommend wholesome grade-appropriate books for independent reading to inspire your child’s love for learning.

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It is not all about school. We know families have other responsibilities. Our efficient yet complete schedule leaves time for life and service. Use the afternoon for trips to the library, shopping, laundry, family outings, or good old-fashion outdoor play.

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God’s World is Central

Engages the Whole Family

Enhances Retention with Hands-On Activities

Wholesome Classic Literature

Structured Mornings with Flexible Afternoons

Most families that homeschool are on a single income. We make our curriculum affordable (often less than $2 per day per child) by incorporating reusable elements and choosing the best yet most reasonable and lasting resources.

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With millions of members, the IGLESIA NI CRISTO might be the largest religious sect you’ve never heard of—and critics claim it governs by intimidation and violence

BY EMILY BELZ in New York

It’s a group with millions of members and at least 7,000 congregations in more than 100 countries, and it claims to be the only true church. Most Americans don’t know about the Iglesia ni Cristo, or “Church of Christ,” with its gleaming, spire-topped buildings that have popped up everywhere from South Korea to South Africa.

In the last decade this religious sect has expanded rapidly, and it now has about 340 congregations in the United States. It has recently bought entire ghost towns in Connecticut and South Dakota. The Connecticut town will serve, among other things, as an educational center to train ministers.

In New York City last fall, the Iglesia ni Cristo (INC) hosted oratorios at the famed Lincoln Center, and its members have banded together to do disaster recovery in the Philippines, to give to local food banks, and to break Guinness world records. Much of its work looks similar to that of any Christian church, with worship services, meals, voluntary tithing, and community service. It is built on intense communal relationships and has schools, a university, sports activities, and piano competitions.

But the group’s beliefs are non-Trinitarian, and critics also link it with patterns of intimidation and violence toward former or dissenting members—patterns the INC, headquartered in the Philippines, has avoided acknowledging.
At least three expelled members of the group have been granted asylum in Canada in the last two years because of reported threats to their lives.

Some others who have been expelled say they have been threatened and stalked for criticizing the sect, which prizes unity and commitment to its central leadership under Eduardo V. Manalo, the grandson of the founder.

“When the members ask questions ... you are automatically deemed as a defector, that you’re against the administration,” said Liezl Deocampo, who was expelled from the INC in California in 2015 along with her family.

Deocampo said she has been stalked, with online threats and people parked outside her home, and her sisters cannot visit her for fear of expulsion themselves. She recently bought a gun and took gun training lessons.

The INC has denied every accusation of maltreatment or intimidation of former members.

“These people who are coming up with all these allegations, they were expelled from the church,” said Edwil Zabala, one of the group’s top ministers, who is based in the central office in the Philippines. “It’s just like dealing with a disgruntled ex-employee. We don’t expect them to have good or nice words about us.”

Iglesia ni Cristo began in the Philippines in 1914 with the vision of founder Félix Manalo syncretized with aspects of Christianity. Manalo, disillusioned with both Catholicism and Protestantism, started the INC.
the group with his own revelations and interpretations of Scripture. He became the INC's first executive minister.

“They are a significant unreached people group for which the evangelical community has no intentional evangelical strategy,” wrote Anne Harper, a longtime missionary with Action International in the Philippines, in her book Understanding the Iglesia ni Cristo.

The INC does not believe in the Trinity or in Jesus’ divine nature, and it considers itself the only church that offers salvation. It considers Félix Manalo to be the “angel of the East” (referenced in Revelation 7) whom God appointed for the last times. Zabala, explaining the executive minister’s role, quoted Romans 16:25, where the gospel is a “mystery,” and the only ones who understand it are the “messengers” (Mark 4:11), including current executive minister Eduardo Manalo and the New Testament apostles.

Thanks to its centralized authority under Manalo, the INC also has political power in the Philippines that rivals the much larger Catholic Church. During every election, the group’s central administration releases a list of endorsed candidates, and millions of INC members vote as a bloc. (The political endorsements and bloc voting do not extend to other countries like the United States or Canada.)

The last four candidates to win the presidency of the Philippines had the backing of INC, including current president Rodrigo Duterte. Last year Duterte appointed Manalo as the special envoy for Overseas Filipino Concerns.

The group’s theology focuses on a works-based salvation, with a strict commitment to the executive minister’s interpretation of God’s will. On threat of expulsion, members must submit to the executive minister’s decisions, attend worship services consistently, live a holy life as defined by the INC, and never do anything causing disunity in the group. Members are discouraged from posting negative things about the INC on social media, for example.

“Factions are of the devil,” said Zabala. “So how can we remain a church if we allow factions inside the Iglesia ni Cristo?”

To be baptized and join the group, a prospective member must study 28 lessons over several months, then complete a probationary period to prove commitment to INC principles.

Eunice Raposas, an evangelical originally from the Philippines and now in college in New York, once visited the headquarters in Quezon City. She noticed the beautifully maintained gardens and the huge, immaculate building in the midst of a poverty-stricken neighborhood. The group evangelized her, but she did not join.

In the Catholic Church, she said, “it’s just like you go to church, do your prayers, do what you got to do, and then leave;” she said. “But when you go into Iglesia ni Cristo, it’s different... People feel like they are a part of a really big family.” But she found the commitment level unnerving: “Their mission is to try to make people be perfect... If you want to be a part of their church you have to be dedicated.”

Most of the Iglesia ni Cristo’s members belong to the world’s Filipino diaspora, though services are open to anyone. A congregation in Queens, one of seven in the New York City area, has services in Tagalog, English, and Spanish.

At the packed Sunday service I visited, the Queens congregation sang an INC hymn about remaining in the book of life: “Please do not blot out my name, Lord, I beg you.” Ministers prayed for unity with the central administration.

The service exhibited the values of orderliness: Choir members, when they finished a hymn, closed their binders in unison. At collection time the ushers—men in suits, women in white—lined up in perfect choreography, canvassing each aisle with white bags. Men and women sat separately, but after the service everyone spilled into the basement to eat and talk together.

The sermon, delivered by district minister Joji Crisostomo, came from the central office in the Philippines. The administration sends an outline for the sermon every Sunday to all INC congregations around the world, so everyone hears the same message. The topic on this day focused on the expulsion of members, which is controlled by the central office.

INC ministers often quote Scripture from memory, but in this sermon it was mostly warning passages—like Titus 3:10: “Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them.”

“Those who cause division—remember them, report them...and avoid them,” preached Crisostomo, delivering the brimstone with the charm of an NPR radio host. He went on to underline the consequences of expulsion: “If we leave the church, salvation will not follow us outside.”

In 2015, trouble began boiling in the Iglesia ni Cristo that led to several high-profile expulsions. That year someone began anonymously posting critical details about INC administration on a blog using the pen name “Antonio Evangelista.” Then the executive minister’s brother Angel Manalo and his mother appeared in a video, saying Angel’s life had been threatened and that ministers had been held captive for attempting to expose corruption among the INC’s leadership. Executive minister Eduardo Manalo expelled his mother and three of his siblings from the group for causing disunity.

“They only want to gain sympathizers in order to achieve their ambition to have a hand in the administration of the church,” INC leaders said in a statement about the video at the time.
Caught in this controversy was Lowell Menorca, an unordained minister whose father was in the top levels of the INC administration before his death in 2011. Menorca came under scrutiny as a critic of Eduardo Manalo’s administration and as one of the people purportedly behind the damaging Antonio blog.

Menorca claims that armed men, including an INC minister, kidnapped him, interrogated him, and then tried to kill him by shutting him in a car with a grenade that did not go off. He escaped and later fled to Southeast Asia, and then to Canada. (Menorca said his wife and daughter are in hiding and are awaiting an exit visa to join him in Canada.)

The INC has denied any role in Menorca’s troubles, and members of the sect have sued Menorca for libel many times. INC members in the Philippines whom I interviewed seemed unconcerned about any of these accusations, saying they seemed “fabricated,” though they recalled the 2015 rift creating a lot of discussions within the group.

But the Canadian immigration and refugee board determined Menorca was a “credible witness,” saying his story fell remained consistent over the years. The board granted him asylum in 2017, saying the INC was “motivated by a vendetta against the claimant.”

“The INC will have both the means and the motivation to seriously harm or kill the claimant if he were to return to the Philippines,” the board said.

A refugee board ruling is by no means a legal determination of the INC’s guilt in this situation, because the INC was not on trial. The board merely had to determine if Menorca’s sworn testimony appeared credible.

The refugee board also granted asylum in 2017 to another expelled member, Rovic Canono, who testified that he had experienced harassment, death threats, a libel suit, and false charges of assaulting his wife.

“While in detention... the claimant was held in extremely abusive conditions under the eye of INC-affiliated management and inmates,” the refugee board said in its ruling for Canono.

INC leaders have insisted that their accusers bring their serious allegations to court and offer proof. When I asked the district minister Crisostomo about the asylum cases, he said: “I think it’s just a matter of time, the Canadian government will really see who these people are. I really believe in God’s justice. Leave it to God.”

There are more stories of bad things happening to INC critics. Jose Norilito de Luna Fruto, an American citizen living in the Philippines, submitted testimony to the Canadian refugee board on Menorca’s behalf. He was another expelled member and highly critical of the INC. The INC had reportedly filed multiple libel cases against him.

A few months after his testimony, Fruto’s body was found shot multiple times in his car. The Philippines murder rate is high, and there was no evidence of any INC connection to the death, but Menorca and other INC defectors drew a connection.

A Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) investigative team also reported on a Canadian citizen living in the Philippines who was murdered last year after having a long-term dispute with INC members who were building a house of worship next door. Again, there was no evidence of the group’s involvement in the murder.

This isn’t a new issue. Harper, the missionary to the Philippines, recalled threats against missionaries she knew in the 1990s—including one missionary, Blair Skinner, whom she said several men beat up outside the INC’s main building in Quezon City.

Zabala, from the central office, said he is “not surprised” at the vilifying of the INC when he considers the history of the early church. He mentioned how ancient Romans thought early Christians were cannibals.

“It’s really part of the history of Christianity to be misunderstood. Just imagine if we were really doing what you are accusing us of doing,” he said. “Do you think that the majority of the members would not react?”

Sporadic instances of seemingly threatening behavior continue, though INC ministers say they teach members to be peaceful. In late 2018, a camera crew from the CBC, investigating Menorca’s claims, showed up at an event in California where Eduardo Manalo was speaking. They tried to interview Manalo, but his security team repelled them. When crew members returned to their car, they found their tires slashed.

I had only positive interactions with the INC. Zabala offered hours of his time to talk from the Philippines, and Crisostomo (who oversees 24 congregations in the U.S. Northeast) was always cordial and drove long distances to meet me twice in New York. The local minister at the Queens congregation laid out a gorgeous spread of fruits, cookies, and Filipino candy for our meeting, and invited me to any events that I wished to attend.

Still, during the Sunday service I visited, congregation officials asked me to turn my phone off before allowing me into the chapel, and made me promise not to interview any members, to record, or to take pictures. Then, with my permission, they took photos of me to send to the central office.
Rick Swinger has an odd hobby as a photographer. He likes to walk around his neighborhood with his camera jostling by his side, looking for disgusting things to photograph. He doesn’t have to look very hard. Swinger has lived in Venice, an Instagram-famous beach town in Los Angeles, for 38 years. Just a block away from his two-bedroom condo resides one of the largest homeless encampments in Venice, where tents, sleeping bags, gallon-sized garbage bags, and random pieces of furniture litter the sidewalks.

The other day, Swinger found two brown splashes of feces and an orange mush of vomit not far away from his doorstep. He later uploaded those photos to “Stop Illegal Dumping in Venice Beach,” a Facebook group he created that now has more than 1,500 followers.

“Hepatitis A, anyone?” he wrote on the post, prompting upset neighbors to comment, “I see it all the time. Disgusting.” Another wrote, “Unfortunately for us, the thinking has changed and homelessness isn’t a crime. ... What about our right?” Another simply commented, “Homeless people are kinda gross.”

When I visited Swinger in his two-bedroom condo, he showed me more pictures of street pollution that he’s saved on his computer. He says he’d much rather take pictures of sunsets, but he’s fed up with all the literal crap splattering his neighborhood and wants someone to do something about it. So he chases after scavenging rodents with his camera, advocates for more rat-proof trash cans, and attends public meetings to oppose projects such as...
homeless facilities that in his words would attract more “serial poopers” into town.

Swinger is what some homeless advocates and housing activists call a “NIMBY.” Short for “Not in My Backyard,” NIMBY is a pejorative term used to describe homeowners who oppose controversial development projects such as low-income housing or metro stops in their neighborhoods.

Few people self-identify as a NIMBY. Swinger despises that term—he says it mischaracterizes him as a wealthy racist who places property values above others. That’s not true, he says: He’s a 59-year-old formerly homeless guy who got a job and worked hard to buy the condo he now lives in with his Filipina wife.

Today he says “no” to homeless shelters and housing in his backyard, because “you’ll be a fool to say yes to [expletive for poop] in your backyard.” He says he too wants to help the homeless—and has many ideas on how—but not at the expense of neighborhood safety: “Once you take away sanitation, you take away civilization.”

Homeless activists say Swinger is painting a false narrative of the homeless population. Homelessness, they say, may be a drug or alcohol or mental illness or unemployment problem for some, but it’s a lack-of-housing problem for others in high-cost states. And many Californians are now demanding changes to the housing policy status quo that they say is making California a more inequitable, unsustainable place to live.

This status quo, they say, includes outdated zoning laws,
NIMBYism, and cumbersome regulations, which prevent significant housing development from taking place, thus leading to extreme housing shortages, rent hikes, and displacement of mostly poor minorities.

These housing advocates are calling themselves YIMBYs—“Yes in My Backyard”—and they’re making their presence seen and heard in public meetings, city council elections, and social media. YIMBY groups are sprouting across the nation in housing-crunched cities such as Portland, New York City, Boulder, Boston, Minneapolis, and Austin, but the movement is particularly strong in California. Their unofficial slogan: Build, baby, build!

In California, YIMBYs helped pass a new package of state laws aimed at creating more affordable housing. Recently, local YIMBYs helped elected self-proclaimed YIMBY state Sen. Scott Wiener, who’s pushing for sweeping pro-housing bills in the state Legislature that will prevent cities and towns from banning apartment construction near transit and job centers.

YIMBYs are also pumped about newly elected Gov. Gavin Newsom, who calls California’s housing crisis “an existential threat to our state’s future.” He promises to create 3.5 million new housing units by 2025 and to begin enforcing a law that requires cities and towns to meet regional housing needs.

If a neighborhood in Los Angeles most dramatizes the clash between so-called NIMBY and YIMBY values, it’s Venice. Over the last decade, this once-eclectic, mixed-income town has become one of the most expensive neighborhoods in LA. The median rental price: $6,272 per month. The median home value: Almost $1.9 million.

Amenities have changed too, from hippie to hipster. The offices of Google and Snapchat are only a short walk away from Swinger’s apartment. Walk a little farther, and a raw vegan restaurant sells kelp noodles for $18, a coffee shop offers $5 coffee blended with grass-fed butter, and an ice creamery churns $5-per-scoop vegan frozen treats.

But one persistent problem stains this up-and-coming scene: The homeless population in Venice has grown to about 1,000 individuals, and neighbors are complaining about human excrement, property theft, needles, and overflowing trash on their sidewalks.

Because of new legal measures that allow the homeless to camp on public property, police mostly leave the encampments alone. So residents decided to take care of the matter on their own: Recently, a group of residents raised more than $80,000 on a GoFundMe page to landscape a pedestrian pathway that for the last three years had become a mini-tent city. Though the neighbors supporting this project insist it’s not “some anti-homeless agenda,” the goal is clear: Plants and rocks would take the place of human bodies along the pathway.

Over the past few years the number of homeless in California has grown enough to form a separate city—134,000 in 2017, up 14 percent from 2016 according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). More than one-quarter of the nation’s total
homeless population lives in California, and LA County alone has more than 50,000 homeless individuals.

Hand-wringing local officials have pushed millions of dollars into creating more “bridge” shelters, but such temporary solutions don’t fix a critical issue: There simply isn’t enough housing to help people exit from the shelter into permanent housing. According to HUD, about 1 in 5 Californians spend more than half their incomes toward housing. Meanwhile, California lacks more than a million affordable and accessible rental units to extremely low-income Californians.

In LA County, 600,000 residents spent 90 percent or more of their income on housing, according to an Economic Roundtable analysis. Although unemployment is low in LA, homelessness has continued to swing up, partly because the majority of new jobs in the city don’t pay enough for housing in the area. For those scraping by to rent, even a minor setback—health problems, an unexpected expense, a rent hike—can start a vicious, traumatic cycle of homelessness.

One obvious solution is to build more supply to meet housing demand so that the housing market gradually balances out to more affordable costs. But California needs millions more housing units for this to happen—and for neighborhoods such as Venice, where housing construction has remained mostly stagnant, residents aren’t keen on the idea of losing their small-town charm to high-rise apartments or a concentration of homeless services that’ll turn Venice into the next Skid Row.

Last October, several hundred residents showed up at a town hall meeting to oppose the city’s plans to create a 154-bed transitional housing shelter on a former metro bus yard in Venice. For hours, the group chanted, “Venice says no!” Residents contended that the proposed shelter would draw more crime and drugs, lower property values, endanger schoolchildren nearby, and attract more homeless people. A few voiced support for the project, but the opposing side was louder.

That’s when the YIMBYs stepped in: YIMBY leaders tell me it’s time for an organized countereffort against these opponents of development, one that’s louder and
The YIMBY strategy is simple: Update people on new projects and policies through social media; vote for ballot measures and officials who support more housing, particularly for the homeless; attend public meetings and write letters to show elected officials that a significant group of residents wants more housing.

The majority of YIMBYs are young urbanites who realize that if nothing changes, they’ll never be able to buy a house in their city. That’s how Brent Gaisford, director of housing advocacy nonprofit Abundant Housing LA (AHLA), got interested in housing issues. He says the crisis affects everyone: “Having a job is not enough anymore.”

Gaisford moved to LA eleven years ago and fell in love with the city, but prospects for having a family and finding “a safe place to live” seemed out of reach. The more he researched why, the more he realized how entrenched and complicated the housing crisis is. So he and about 35 like-minded people founded AHLA, a member-funded nonprofit with more than 2,000 members. This year, AHLA hired its first full-time managing director.

But YIMBYs also include homeowners who want to help others and also worry that their kids won’t be able to afford to live near them. Josh Albrektson, a radiologist and homeowner in Miracle Mile, founded two popular YIMBY Facebook groups after seeing people he knew become homeless despite having jobs. His friend who was making $60,000 a year working two jobs lost her rental unit and lived in her car for nine months. His building’s security guard also lived in a car, even though she was working two jobs and 60 hours a week.

“That’s why it’s such a big thing for me,” Albrektson said. “It’s a humanitarian reason.”

YIMBYs showed up at a Venice Neighborhood Council meeting in November and a city planning commission meeting in January. For both meetings, YIMBYs outnum-

bered NIMBYs, and they all wore black T-shirts that read, “I support housing for unhoused people in my neighborhood.” They held single stalks of red and yellow roses to show their support for the proposed Rose Avenue Apartments in Venice, a permanent supportive housing project for 34 formerly homeless individuals and families.

The project, developed by nonprofit Venice Community Housing (VCH), would redevelop VCH’s current administrative offices into a four-story building, which would require the city’s approval to build 18 feet higher than the permitted 25 feet. Half of the units would go to transitional-age youth and the rest to the chronically homeless.

In both meetings more than 50 people lined up to make public statements: One opponent worried that the proposed building would “set a precedent” for “too massive” developments in Venice. Another worried that visitors to the building would leave scooters on the sidewalks. Opponents also complained that they weren’t properly notified about this project. As they spoke, YIMBY supporters sighed, moaned, shook their heads, and laughed.

Then one white-haired woman who has lived in Venice for 50 years stepped up. “It’s ridiculous that the opponents are placing their minor quality of life issues over poor people’s right for housing,” she said. A retired physician in a tweed jacket who has also lived in Venice for more than 50 years recalled Venice’s history of integration: “Venice needs to continue to be a welcoming community.”

Another long-time resident said she fell in love with the diverse community of Venice, but “now Venice has become
the poster child for income inequality.” Another older Venice homeowner said, “This boils down to humanitarianism or elitism.”

When one neighborhood leader called the homeless “transients” who have “disregard for the law,” the YIMBYs booed. When he then said, “The most productive thing [the homeless] do is strip down old bicycles and recycle them into new bicycles,” the YIMBYs howled. One woman stepped up to castigate him: “Your hatred is tangible, your terminology is toxic. I’d love to put you on a boat and ship you out.”

I later met up with that man, Jim Murez, at Venice Farmers Market on a chilly Friday morning. Murez founded the farmers market 32 years ago, and he’s been serving the Venice Neighborhood Council for 13 years. Murez bought a two-bedroom house on a 1,800-square-foot lot about 35 years ago, back when Venice was affordable enough for a young married couple with some savings.

He’s also a vocal opponent of building shelters and supportive housing in Venice, including the Rose Avenue Apartments project: “LA is using the fact that all these services are here to build more services and housing. The more services you provide, the more you attract people who need those services. And that’s what’s happening—we’ve provided in Venice, and they’ve been coming.”

Murez says building basically free housing for the homeless on prime real estate makes no economic sense:

> “Why not sell that $60 million piece of land, and buy something five times as big a mile out east for them? Why does the homeless have to have affordable housing right across the beach?”

As we talked, a couple stood near us by a white van covered with graffiti. They carried big black trash bags filled with recyclables that they had collected along the boardwalk, and glasses clinked as they divided the recyclables into cartons in the back of their van. A few steps away, a woman napped on the passenger seat of an old beat-up Toyota Corolla. The bags of clothes stuffed into the back seat indicated that she’s homeless.

That scene was a jarring juxtaposition from the farmers market, where young families and slim blondes in yoga pants shopped for farm-pastured eggs, purple cauliflower, heirloom tomatoes, and fresh-baked bagels with their recyclable bags and artisanal baskets. I smelled fresh flowers and brewing coffee where I stood, but a couple of blocks away, I smelled weeks-old body odor and urine.

“See this dirt right here?” Murez said, pointing at the major boulevard we stood on. In 1995, he had applied for state grant money to plant trees along the streets, and residents volunteered to plant them. “They were all once beautifully landscaped four years ago. Those YIMBYs saying it’s OK to support the homeless to live here? They’re not the ones who have to replant this.... Is the city sincerely trying to help the homeless? No. Are they pushing them to those who are trying to create a nicer community for themselves? Yes.”

But next Thursday morning at the public hearing regarding the Rose Avenue Apartments project, Murez stuck to land-use objections: He said the project didn’t plan for enough parking spots, which Venice already lacks.

Later, LA City Planning Commissioner David Ambroz spoke first by sharing a personal story: He was homeless for 11 years as a child in New York City, he said. He shuffled around foster homes until he received a college scholarship, and now he holds an influential position in the city’s planning affairs.

Contempt dripped from Ambroz’s voice as he reviewed the complaints against the homeless housing project: “I am tired of parking cars at the expense of people.” He shook his head. “Shame on us! And scooters? Are we really talking about that? Shame on us!”
CHILDREN'S BOOKS OF THE YEAR
Against the Grain

Our 2019 Children’s Books of the Year stand out from an increasingly troubling crowd

BY JANIE B. CHEANEY • illustration by Krieg Barrie

Many Bible-readers know Proverbs 22:6, which reads, “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.” So do many publishers of children’s books, and they may not have the best interests of your child at heart.

In the Young Adult section of your local bookstore, paranormal romance and dystopian fiction have given way to what we might call girl-power fantasy, in which female characters behave as ruthlessly as men in quasi-medieval Game of Thrones scenarios. Girls have seized the action-hero role in Middle Grade (MG) fantasy as well, but MG novels aren’t as likely to have “blood” in the title.

The most striking trend in nonfiction this year is militant political activism (see p. 56)—all from the left; none from the right. Liberal causes naturally appeal to the young, but there’s a gap for conservative writers to fill.

This year has seen a heightened interest in refugees and immigration, reflecting recent news events. Diversity remains a high priority, as more Muslim/Middle Eastern voices join African-American, Hispanic, and Asian authors and main characters. Diversity is a positive when it increases cultural understanding and sympathy. More problematic are agenda-driven LGBT themes. Gay and lesbian main characters appear more often in YA, but in MG fiction the number of same-sex parents is increasing. Transgender characters are still relatively few, but expect to see more as gender confusion among teens increases in the real world.

On a more heartening note, Christian authors like Jonathan Auxier, Mitali Perkins, Nikki Grimes, and John Hendrix continue to produce books that are both spiritually edifying and well-reviewed by secular media. Also, this year an unusual number of sympathetically portrayed Down syndrome characters played important roles in lauded MG novels like Inkling, Sweep (both reviewed in this issue), and Ebb & Flow.

Some notable sequels from previous Book of the Year winners caught our attention. The Penderwicks series (winner, 2015) came to a satisfying conclusion with The Penderwicks at Last. The Vanderbeekers and the Hidden Garden continued the noble family tradition of last year’s winner, The Vanderbeekers of 141st Street. Sunny and Lu followed Ghost (honorable mention, 2017) to round out Jason Reynolds’ Track series, and Rebound carried on the vivid basketball action of The Crossover (honorable mention, 2014).

Most encouraging, this year’s crops of excellent picture books and excellent children’s novels were so rich that we couldn’t decide on a single winner in either category, so in both we picked two. Together with The Faithful Spy, our nonfiction winner, they form a fabulous five featuring warmth, drama, suspense, humor, and heart.
Last January our committee of seven started on a hunt to find a picture book worthy of being WORLD’s Picture Book of the Year for 2018. Our mission: to find a book beautiful to look at, appealing to children, and full of wisdom.

This year when our committee voted, we found ourselves torn between two excellent choices: Adrian Simcox Does NOT Have a Horse by Marcy Campbell, with illustrations by Corinna Luyken (Dial Books for Young Readers, 2018, ages 3-5), and Hello Lighthouse by Sophie Blackall (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2018, ages 5-8).

Chloe is the elementary-aged narrator of Adrian Simcox Does NOT Have a Horse. She’s indignant because poor, red-headed Adrian insists he has a horse. She knows that’s not true and wants everyone else to know it.

The inside jacket flap reads, “Sometimes we have to learn to see with kindness.” That’s the message of this pitch-perfect picture book, but as in the best books, it shows rather than tells.

Through pictures that perfectly complement the text, the book depicts children going about daily life, picking weeds at the playground, clumping together at the lunch table, messing with bike repairs—and gossiping about whether Adrian Simcox really has a horse. Chloe puts it plainly, “He can’t take care of a horse. Adrian Simcox can’t even take care of his own desk.”

PICTURE BOOKS OF THE YEAR: Top choices show imagination, nobility

By Susan Olasky

A young boy dreads visiting his grandfather because they don’t speak the same language. When the grandfather sees his grandson doodling with markers, he brings out his ink and pen. Suddenly the two have a lot to say with their art. Vibrant superhero illustrations in dueling styles depict the cultural divide and also highlight the bridge that art provides. The comic-book-style art powers the story, making the book accessible even to those without much English. It’s a sweet story of going beyond words to connect and love one another. (Ages 4-7)

Two children come across an old house in the woods: “a house just a house that once was but now isn’t a home.” With poetic language Fogliano explores the mystery of the old house, which draws in the children just as it draws in the reader. We wonder about the people who left it so suddenly and imagine the lives they had in this house that once was a home. The impressionistic illustrations add to the mystery (though some children may find them confusing). A nesting bluebird flits from page to page. Children may enjoy finding it. (Ages 3-6)
We love Chloe’s authentic voice and feel her frustration as she insists on what she knows must be true. She complains to everyone, including her mother, who devises a clever way to deepen Chloe’s understanding. Just as Chloe is about to let Adrian have it—“You. Do. Not. Have. A. Horse.”—she sees a sad expression cross his face, and she swallows the words. The book ends with Chloe enjoying hearing one of Adrian’s tall horse tales. She realizes that despite his poverty, the boy is pretty special: “I thought Adrian Simcox had just about the best imagination of any kid in our whole school. I also thought he had the most beautiful horse of anyone, anywhere.”

The illustrations have a hand-drawn quality that captures the children’s gestures, postures, and expressions. The pictures also hide secrets. Notice how the horses hidden in the grass become more visible as Chloe’s empathy deepens.

This book should delight children and satisfy their parents.

Our second winner is Hello Lighthouse. It portrays the daily life of a lighthouse keeper as he faithfully tends the light that keeps passing ships from crashing onto rocks.

The book offers colorful, rich-in-detail illustrations that repeat motifs: the round rooms, views through round windows, spiral stairs, views through a round telescope lens. That visual repetition reinforces the repeated choruses: hello, hello, hello and clang, clang, clang. And then we see the daily chores required to keep the lighthouse working. The faithful lighthouse keeper records each day in his logbook.

The book contrasts the lighthouse, built to last forever, and the always-changing wind and weather. Inside the lighthouse, a growing family shelters within sturdy walls. Blackall offers a sweet view of family life—the wife cares for the keeper (and the light) when he is ill, and he cares for her when she gives birth.

One of our reviewers loved this book’s portrayal of a noble man living a simple and good life without accolade. It may be a life that our culture undervalues, but it is an example for our children. At the back of the book, Blackall includes many facts about lighthouses for those who want more.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Pamela Palmer, Sandy Barwick, Megan Saben, Kristin Chapman, Mary Jackson, Courtney Russell, and Susan Olasky
CHILDREN’S NOVELS OF THE YEAR: When the ordinary becomes extraordinary

**INKLING**

by Kenneth Oppel

Only the cat saw the wind blow across Mr. Rylance’s open sketchbook, just before a blob of ink rose off the page and leapt upon the drafting table. Meeting “Inkling” for the first time, Ethan Rylance suspects this unexplainable phenomenon may be the secret of his missing artistic talent, or the cure for his graphic-artist father’s depression. Inkling himself is a most unique character: excitable, naive, charmingly impressionable (his efforts to imitate the style of every author he absorbs will make grown-up readers smile). But beyond its comedy-of-errors plot, the book has much to say about human creativity, integrity, and imagination. *(Ages 10-14)*

**THE ORPHAN BAND OF SPRINGDALE**

by Anne Nesbet

In the desperate days of the Great Depression, Augusta Neubronner has learned from her father that life is struggle. Father, a union organizer and suspected Communist, had to disappear suddenly while taking Gusta to stay with her grandmother in Springdale, Maine. But “struggle” is not just the way of the world; it’s the way of growth. And life is full of delights: music, friendship, small pleasures of creation. The vision nearsighted Gusta receives with her new glasses is beautifully portrayed; a metaphor for the “clear light of trouble” where we find our strength. Worth noting: An illegitimate birth is pivotal to the story, but handled in a moral way. *(Ages 12-15)*
Random House, ages 12-15), Caleb and his brother Bobby Gene belong to a nice ordinary family in Sutton, Ind., a nice ordinary town. That’s the problem: Caleb hates ordinary. To his dad, everything is fine. To loyal, easygoing Bobby Gene, everything is OK and they’re still kids after all. Nobody understands Caleb, until he and his brother literally stumble over Styx Malone.

Styx, a foster kid, is anything but ordinary, with his long snaky limbs and dazzling smile and head full of plans and schemes. Styx’s plan for getting out of Sutton involves wheeling, dealing, and trading up—and some aspects of it may not be legal or ethical. But Caleb is on board, no matter the cost to family and relationships:

What’s the cost of being “extra-ordinary”? Caleb exhibits an ambition that is seldom explored in children’s literature: a restless desire to be more than everyone thinks. “How do you survive knowing there’s more of you than anyone will ever touch? That you’re bigger than your own skin?” His mom says, “Everybody is special in their own way,” but that’s just mom talk. What does it really mean?

A couple of our reviewers remarked on the “classic” feel of the story, harking back to Tom Sawyer. Humor balances the serious moments, and the strong family is a plus, especially as an antidote to bad behavior: One objection readers may have is Caleb’s occasional mild swearing, but he’s trying to be provocative.

As immortal souls created for glory, we’re all bigger than our own skin. The tension between everyday life and uncommon destiny haunts us, and makes this an extraordinary story.

NOWHERE BOY
by Katherine Marsh

Max is unhappy about spending a year in Brussels while his father serves as a liaison officer for NATO. But when he discovers Ahmed, a Syrian refugee hiding in his basement, Max gains a sense of purpose in helping Ahmed any way he can. Some of that help involves lying to authorities (e.g., forged papers), and his schemes stretch credibility near the end. But their friendship is well done, and while sympathetic to Muslim immigrants the story does not soft-pedal terrorist incidents in Europe. Max is not religious, and Ahmed is, but the self-sacrifice Max displays is deeply rooted in the Christian heart of the West. (Ages 12-15)

HOPE IN THE HOLLER
by Lisa Lewis Tyre

Wavie Conley never had much, but when her Mama passes away from cancer, Wavie realizes how much she’s losing—especially after her hitherto-unknown Aunt Samantha shows up and claims guardianship. It soon becomes clear that Aunt Samantha sees Wavie mostly as a welfare check and a source of unpaid labor. A court decision will make this unhappy situation legal, but Wavie finds allies who help her uncover a family secret that may provide a way out. Sparkling dialogue, an engrossing plot, and explicit Scriptural references (particularly Jeremiah 29:11) lead to a genuinely happy ending. (Ages 10-14)
CHILDREN’S NONFICTION BOOK OF THE YEAR: One theologian’s struggle to understand God and defeat Hitler

BY JANIE B. CHEANEY

Few “Christian heroes” attract the admiration of the modern age more than Dietrich Bonhoeffer. His courage in standing up to an obvious evil like Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich, his devotion to his family, and his musical and literary gifts are all virtues anyone, secular or religious, can appreciate. But our nonfiction winner presents a figure few secular readers can grasp: a man smitten by God from an early age. Perhaps the most sensitive treatment of this life can only come from an author or illustrator with similar leanings.

The Faithful Spy: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Plot to Kill Hitler (Abrams, ages 10 & up) by John Hendrix is a biography like no other. Author/illustrator Hendrix describes it as “a sketchbook or journal come to life”: words, pictures, and graphic word art combine in a singular blend framing a singular life. Chapter 1 begins with the words, “This is Dietrich. Our story begins and ends with him.” The small image of a bookish young man stands against a map of Europe, suggesting broader events that will soon sweep over our hero and his family. Sixteen pages in, another figure strides forward,

COUNTDOWN: 2,979 Days to the Moon
by Suzanne Slack

January 1967: Apollo 1 sat on the launchpad at Cape Canaveral for a practice countdown in preparation for the first moon launch. Next moment, a spark from a frayed wire ignited the oxygen-filled cabin: Three astronauts died before their moon rocket even left the ground. But each Apollo mission after the tragedy pushed a little closer to the goal until the Apollo 11 mission left human footprints on the moon. The story gets full-page, oversize treatment with each mission presented in blank verse and lavish watercolor illustration. Chapters end with biographical sketches and photos of the mission. (Ages 6-12)

THE GIRL WHO DREW BUTTERFLIES: How Maria Merian’s Art Changed Science
by Joyce Sidman

In 1660 science was in its larval stages, a pastime mostly for the leisure class and entirely for men. Maria Merian broke the pattern—not only as a woman, but as one of the first systematic entomologists. Insects were considered a form of life too low to engage the interest of a respectable scientist, but Maria followed them passionately, even to sojourn in Suriname to catalog rare species. Her exquisite drawings and painstaking observation set standards for the discipline for centuries to come. This beautifully illustrated biography paces her life through the stages of butterfly development, giving due credit to Maria’s faith. (Ages 10 & up)
“who was ready to grab the reins of power while the great German horse was without a rider. His name was Adolf Hitler.”

With the stage set, in 167 packed pages these two lives unfold against the drama, terror, and final resolution of the Third Reich.

Dietrich set out on his spiritual journey very young, smitten with the notion of divinity and the goal to become a theologian. While studying at the University of Berlin, he began to feel like “God’s zookeeper... making careful observations and measurements but always at a safe distance.” A visit to New York and encounters with the African-American church brought him face to face with a being much more dynamic, demanding, and forceful than Dietrich had ever encountered: a God who came near, shook up lives, and changed them forever. Just in time, for God would soon be shaking him.

Bonhoeffer’s early pacifism, coming into conflict with his conviction that Hitler must be destroyed, receives graphic treatment that forces readers to question their own convictions. He endured periods of doubt and depression, never more so than during his internment at Tegel prison. But the visual narrative walks us through these days and out the other side: “for me, the beginning of life.” Throughout the book, an unusual color scheme of red and teal, sometimes in jittery juxtaposition, emphasizes the contrast between Hitler and Bonhoeffer, as well as the conflicts within both Germany and her faithful son.

Among the excellent biographies of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Faithful Spy stands out as economical but amazingly informative, factual but emotionally gripping, stunningly illustrated and beautifully written: a combination readers will not soon forget.

2018 was a good year for nonfiction: not only The Faithful Spy and our four runners-up, but also a beautiful poetry book. Sing a Song of Seasons offers a nature-related poem for each day of the year. The lively illustrations and verses from a variety of poets make it a keepsake for lit-loving families.

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Books of the resistance

A wave of activist-themed children’s books has surged in the Trump era  
BY JANIE B. CHEANEY

One remarkable feature of Donald Trump’s constantly surprising tenure,” reported Publishers Weekly last May, “is this: he is a professed nonreader whose presidency just might launch a thousand books.

Indeed, shortly after the election of 2016, the publishing world rose up with cries of “Resist!” Dozens of children’s authors expressed their dismay, followed shortly by determination to push back against this new wave of supposed racism, sexism, and xenophobia. Within months, books aimed at encouraging teen activism were rolling off the presses.

Books were remarkably—or not so remarkably—similar in theme, and even title. Last year’s activist lineup included How I Resist; Girls Resist; We Rise, We Resist, We Raise Our Voices; and Steal This Country: A Handbook For Resistance, Persistence, and Fixing (Almost) Everything. Political action is the key for fixing (almost) everything, and many of these books include contact information for activist groups—though presumably not for the College Republicans, Young America’s Foundation, or Live Action.

Pre-teens and toddlers needn’t feel left out. A board book titled A Is for Activist, published in 2013, received a sales boost after 2016 for lines like this: C is for Co-op. Cooperating Cultures. Creative Counter to Corporate vultures. Oh, and Cats. Can you find the Cats? “Finding the cats” is just about the only nod to the actual proclivities of a 3-year-old. The rest of the book features festive alliterations about “Silly Selfish Scoundrels” who oppose solar power and “LGBTQ: Love Who You Choose.” As over the top as some of these books are, they illustrate a basic truth of children’s literature: It’s inherently moralistic. As much as they may testify to the supposed inherent wisdom of

From hand to heart

A Q&A with author and illustrator John Hendrix

BY JANIE B. CHEANEY

Illustrator John Hendrix’s picture book Miracle Man: The Story of Jesus gathered rave reviews three years ago. This year, The Faithful Spy, an unabashedly Christian take on Dietrich Bonhoeffer, has attracted even more attention. Hendrix, a Presbyterian Church in America elder, has a secular publisher that has never made an issue of his spiritual themes. “Christians are a market, and my editor recognizes that,” he says.

Raised a Methodist in St. Louis, Hendrix dug deeper into his faith while studying at the University of Kansas. After

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children, children’s authors know more than their readers do, and naturally wish to pass on some of that knowledge and experience. Almost all children’s books, whether fiction or nonfiction, include some kind of lesson; the question is what kind.

Conservative Christians tend to couch their messages in example or illustration. New-wave “resistance” tends to sacrifice subtlety for stridency and example for exhortation. It assumes a leftward tilt in the reader and doesn’t waste time on persuasion. These authors say they feel a mission: never again to let the reactionaries take over. But in their uniform prescription of political and community action, they sound more than a little reactionary.

Politics does not consume most households, but kids may still absorb the lesson from teachers and librarians, from politically inclined classmates, and possibly from required reading. Christian parents could usefully check out some of these books and read them with their teens, evaluating together the pros and cons of the argument. Rational or irrational? Realistic or utopian? Where does the logic hold up, and where does it falter? What’s missing from these perspectives that Christ can provide? Is the answer political or more a matter of doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God (Micah 6:8)?

Christians can’t flee from “Resistance,” but we can meet it with firm, assured, and loving resistance of our own.

a move to Manhattan to work in graphic design at The New York Times, he became involved with the metropolitan mission of Tim Keller and Redeemer Presbyterian Church. When the opportunity arose to move back to his hometown and teach at Washington University, he didn’t hesitate. He lives there now with his wife Andrea and two children, Annie and Jack.

How long have you been interested in Bonhoeffer? Since college—that’s when I read Life Together, and The Cost of Discipleship a few years later.

What kind of research did you do? I spent a year just reading about him, particularly the four major biographies. I also went to Germany and visited his house, along with several Third Reich sites and the place along the Czech border where he was executed. There’s a memorial there—a pile of ash. His body is in there somewhere. My most helpful resource turned out to be Bonhoeffer’s letters. I saw many of the actual letters in Berlin.

With all the research and artwork involved, it must have taken a while to produce this book. Five years.

Is the text really hand-lettered? I hired a guy to create a font based on my hand-printing. That really helps with translations!

What about the word art? Do you have to create that in other languages? No. I revised the cover myself for the French edition, but someone else is doing the interior word art.

The Faithful Spy is a moving biography but also an excellent overview of World War II in Europe. Thanks; other people have told me that. My intention was just to focus on Bonhoeffer, but it ended up being almost a dual biography of Bonhoeffer and Adolf Hitler. I was fascinated by just how opposite they were.

Does teaching cut into your “creative” time, or enrich it? Some of both. It does take time, but an artist needs to be around people. And a steady income allows me time to focus on the projects I really want to do, instead of taking any illustration job that comes along.

What do you see as the greatest challenge for a Christian in the “art world”? First, to make excellent art. Christian artists also have to see through the lens of culture. Some topics and some approaches just won’t track with the public. For instance, I presented Miracle Man as kind of a folk tale or legend.

But in the afterword, you clearly stated you were a follower of Jesus. Right.

What’s next? A follow-up to Miracle Man, called Go and Do Likewise: The Parables and Wisdom of Jesus. Due from Abrams in 2020. •
Join thousands of young people who are learning how to unlock the Scriptures and memorize God’s Word through the 8-week Summer Study!

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Use code WNG19 during registration to receive 15% off your order.
Registration opens March 15.
A canceled event at South City Church (PCA) in St. Louis, Mo., brought renewed attention to ongoing friction among Presbyterians in the city also home to Covenant Theological Seminary—the denominational seminary of the PCA.

In January, South City Church leaders had agreed to allow an event to take place on its campus that was sponsored by an organization called Faith for Justice. The MLK Day–related gathering was set to include speaker Jay-Marie Hill, a lesbian and an activist for transgenderism.

A Faith for Justice announcement said Hill would “teach us how to not only mourn the tragic death of trans folx, but learn to celebrate their lives and humanity.”

In a Jan. 14 statement, the session of South City said the elders and pastoral staff had become aware of the details over the past few days and “determined that some of the planned elements... appeared to be inconsistent with South City Church's theological convictions.” They retracted the offer to use the church’s building.

The statement didn’t mention that one of the founders of Faith for Justice is Michelle Higgins, the lead pastor of South City.

The event moved to a nearby PCUSA church, and both Mike Higgins and Michelle Higgins attended. (South City elders and the Higginses didn’t respond to emails seeking comment.)

Mike Higgins is also dean of students at nearby Covenant Theological Seminary, a school that faced criticism last year when Jay Sklar, a professor of Old Testament, spoke at the “Revoice” conference.
organized and hosted by Memorial PCA in St. Louis.

Revoice leaders bill the event as a gathering to support “gay, lesbian, same-sex attracted, and other gender and sexual minority Christians,” and they say they want to help such men and women observe “the historic, Christian doctrine of marriage and sexuality.”

But many pastors expressed objections about such language. At the time, PCA pastor and author Kevin DeYoung wrote about his concern over phrases like “sexual minority”: “It’s troubling because it makes disordered sexual desires (which can be repented of and forgiven, just like any disordered desire) essential to one’s personhood.”

Covenant professor Jay Sklar published a letter last year explaining he planned to speak at Revoice about verses in Leviticus prohibiting homosexuality. He noted that many people argue the verses don’t apply to God’s intent for sexuality today: “I argue the opposite.”

By mid-January of this year, Covenant President Mark Dalbey said he had received calls from alumni concerned about the recent developments at South City Church, and he noted the developments came on the heels of last year’s Revoice.

“Let’s just be candid: these events look, at best, confusing in language and, at worst, compromising of our denomination’s doctrinal integrity,” he wrote in a Jan. 19 letter.

But Dalbey rejected charges of liberalism at Covenant, and he said the seminary affirms the Bible’s teaching on sexuality and the principle that Christians’ foundational identity is rooted in their union with Christ. (He told WORLD no Covenant professors would speak at Revoice this year.)

When it comes to Higgins, Dalbey said the seminary was in conversations with the South City session and the Missouri Presbytery, and that any further comment would be premature.

The Missouri Presbytery of the PCA announced it was aware of the recent developments at South City Church and had established a committee to look into those events. A separate statement said the pastor of Memorial PCA had asked the presbytery to investigate complaints against his church related to organizing the Revoice conference.

The presbytery formed a committee last fall, and it noted it had received concerns from several other presbyteries as well. The announcement said the presbytery hopes to hear a report before the PCA’s General Assembly in late June.

Meanwhile, the 2019 Revoice conference is set for early June in St. Louis. Conference organizers say they expect last year’s attendance of more than 400 to at least double. ©

PAST ORTHODOXY NOT ALLOWED

At an important liberal Protestant seminary, it’s not enough to offer enthusiastic support for the LGBTQ+ agenda now.

In 2017, United Lutheran Seminary (ULS)—created in Pennsylvania by the merger of two Evangelical Lutheran Church in America seminaries—named Theresa Latini president. But last year the ULS board ended her tenure due to “issues related to trust as the president of this institution.”

These “trust issues” stemmed from her failure to inform the whole board prior to her presidency of her former opposition to the seminary’s liberal LGBT stance. From 1996 to 2001, Latini directed OneByOne, a group that calls any sexual expression outside of heterosexual marriage “sexual brokenness.” Students and staff members complained the board was negligent in missing that part of Latini’s history.

One month before her termination, Latini published an article apologizing for her participation in OneByOne. She says she is now “open and affirming of LGBTQ+ persons.”

Grove City College religion professor Carl Trueman, formerly of Westminster Theological Seminary, remembers Latini’s letter as “embarrassing the way that she was made to grovel, but it still didn’t do any good. … The views that Latini held in the 1990s were not particularly conservative or particularly exceptional at the time.... That she’s being held to account for those more than 20 years later is remarkable.”

Eight members of the ULS board of trustees resigned during the controversy. One of them, Pastor Lisa Leber, complained that the board both failed to remove Latini promptly after hearing of her past and did not apologize to LGBTQ+ individuals. —Alyssa Jackson
In a dramatic turnabout rarely seen in formerly communist Eastern Europe, the Bulgarian parliament passed a law protecting the liberties of the country’s religious minorities on the final day of its 2018 session.

The original version of the bill threatened to restrict the rights of religious groups representing less than 1 percent of the population—which included at least 100 of the country’s growing evangelical churches. How the turnaround happened—through eight weeks of prayer vigils and organized protests—is a lesson for other threatened believers.

When the government first proposed revisions to an existing religion law in spring 2018, many Bulgarian evangelicals assumed the restrictive articles would be rejected outright. But by autumn, concern turned to alarm as the revisions moved forward, according to Vlady Raichinov of the Bulgarian Evangelical Alliance.

The proposed law would have negatively affected evangelical and Catholic churches, some Muslim communities, and other minority religious groups: It called for restricting seminary training, limiting foreign donations, banning foreign preachers without the presence of a Bulgarian minister, and banning worship outside of designated registered buildings.

The government claimed the measures were to protect Bulgaria—one of the EU’s border nations—from outside radicalism. Critics voiced alarm that majority parties would back a proposal that threatened a return to communist-era repressions. Although exempted by the 1 percent population threshold and standing to gain financially from the new law, Orthodox and Muslim leaders also criticized the proposal as dangerously intrusive on religious life.

By October it became clear parliament would proceed with considering the measure. Evangelical leaders across denominations gathered to plan a unified response. Pastors mobilized churches to pray and encouraged congregants to write their parliamentarians. They also organized protests. For seven consecutive Sundays in November and December, evangelicals went from church services to the streets, rallying 4,000 demonstrators in Sofia, Bulgaria’s capital, alone. The peaceful protests spread to 11 other major cities.

Initially Bulgarian media ignored the protests, but the letter-writing campaign spread to European diplomatic institutions, and the movement gained wider traction. Bulgarian television invited evangelical leaders to present their case, and international pressure began to mount on the Bulgarian parliament.

“This is a quick issue with far-reaching effects that caught our leaders there by surprise,” Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Elijah Brown told WORLD, as the group’s network of congregations on five continents took a stand against the proposed law.

In December, blizzard conditions threatened but didn’t halt protests. Leaders gathered in front of the parliament building, gave Bibles to passing lawmakers, and explained why they opposed the legislation. Evangelicals held a vigil outside the parliament building during the Dec. 21 vote on the law, praying for an outcome that seemed anything but certain. “It’s amazing that the parliamentarians took out every offensive article when only two months before they had voted the complete opposite,” said Raichinov.

“Only God can do that.”

Raichinov believes the legal challenge brought unity to the Bulgarian evangelical churches. An unexpected positive outcome is recognition of the evangelical community by government and society: Even with protests still underway, a government committee invited evangelical leaders to provide input on moral considerations regarding other issues, like human organ donation.

“We were encouraged by the response of the global Christian community. No country is an island, and every denomination is a global family. We want to support other countries in the same way,” said Raichinov.

Sofia was the setting in A.D. 311 for the “Edict of Toleration” that paved the way for the legalization of Christianity in the Roman Empire. Evangelicals believe they’ve again witnessed a victory over excessive state control. Said the Baptist World Alliance’s Brown: “God has granted us a remarkable blessing, by allowing us to see the will of the political powers changed.”

Bulgaria’s parliament building, with the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral on the left
It’s been seven years since NBA guard Jeremy Lin rocketed to stardom. Seeing his first action as a starter for the New York Knicks, Lin promptly erupted for an average of 24.4 points per game as New York won seven straight in February 2012. That span included a 38-point performance against Kobe Bryant and the Los Angeles Lakers.

That brief stretch began what was known as “Linsanity,” and Lin wasn’t shy about his Christian faith as he became an NBA star. Today, Lin is a backup guard and a journeyman who recently left the Atlanta Hawks for the Toronto Raptors, and Linsanity has died down a bit. But he still professes his Christian faith, and Linsanity is still strong among basketball fans in at least one country—China.

Lin is a native Californian with family roots in both China and Taiwan. In China, Lin has basketball camps that teach the game to thousands of kids, a reality TV show, and a celebrity charity game. “We’ve done it two years in a row,” he told the South China Morning Post of the charity game. “And this past year we had I believe 18 million people watching online.”

Before a recent game between the Atlanta Hawks (Lin’s team at the time) and the Portland Trail Blazers in Portland, Ore., Lin told me about the challenges of sharing his faith. He estimates that he visits China three or four times a year, and he admits he can’t be as open about his faith as he’d like to be while he’s there.

“It’s difficult because it’s a communist country,” Lin said. “You can’t really be direct about your faith there. I try to push my values, but I can’t be outright about it.”

His efforts were not lost on two Chinese fans at the Hawks-Blazers game. “He’s always posting quotes from the Bible on Instagram,” said Anbio Shen, a University of Oregon (UO) graduate student from Shanghai. “He’s always saying that everything is the best arrangement of God. He always has a positive attitude toward everything, which is why Jeremy’s very popular not just in China, but everywhere.”

His actions speak even louder, according to Shen.

“NBA players have a lot of affairs,” said Shen, who wore
a “Linsanity” T-shirt to the Hawks-Blazers game and owns one of Lin’s game-worn jerseys from his days with the New York Knicks. “He never has that sort of thing. That’s very important in China, which is still very conservative. Jeremy’s a very good role model for a lot of kids in China.”

“We all love him,” said Haoyue Li, a UO graduate student who hails from Shenzhen: “Jeremy’s very hard-working. His physical talent is not outstanding, and he’s had a lot of injuries”—he missed practically all of the 2017-18 season after hurting his knee with the Brooklyn Nets in their season opener—“but he’s very persistent in proving himself.”

Lin is also popular in the United States, but his NBA career has not been without controversy: He briefly wore dreadlocks, a hairstyle popular among African-Americans. Former NBA player Kenyon Martin took offense at Lin’s hairdo in an Instagram video, accusing Lin of cultural appropriation: “We get it. You wanna be black.”

Lin responded via Twitter stating Martin was entitled to his opinion but that the more minorities “appreciate each other’s cultures, the more we influence mainstream society.” Lin coupled his statement with a picture showing multiple tattoos of Chinese characters on Martin’s forearm.

Lin—who has since shorn his locks—saw Martin’s attack as an opportunity to be a light for Christ. “I always feel you can be loving in your response, no matter what,” he said. “[Being a Christian] doesn’t mean you always have to get stepped on. You can be firm and loving at the same time.”

The Raptors will be the eighth team Lin has played for in his nine-year NBA career. When news came about Lin’s move to Toronto, William Lou of Raptorsrepublic.com wrote that Lin was a solid acquisition for the team and noted Lin’s status as an “icon” in Asia: “This means the Raptors gained a massive fanbase, and all the consequences that come with it... It won’t be long before fans start calling for Lin to start ahead of Kyle Lowry, and I’m sorry in advance.”

**TRANSGENDER ROUNDUP**

**SOUTH DAKOTA:** A bill that would have classified high-school athletes according to their gender at birth died in a state Senate committee in late January. South Dakota current policy allows athletes to compete according to their proclaimed gender identity. Numerous school and business groups opposed the bill, calling it discriminatory and pointing out the negative impact other states have suffered after passing “bathroom bills.” However, the bill’s supporters said the legislation was necessary to keep boys from winning state championships in girls’ sports. Currently, only four states—Alabama, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Texas—classify athletes exclusively according to the gender on their birth certificate.

**FOOTBALL:** Cut from a women’s semi-pro football team in a league that prohibits biological males from competing for safety reasons, a transgender “female” sued the team in Minnesota state court—and won. Christina Ginther, a 6-foot male in his 40s, tried out for the Minnesota Vixen of the Independent Women’s Football League (IWFL) in 2016. When the Vixen discovered that Ginther was transgender, the team told Ginther he was ineligible to play.

Ginther sued the Vixen and the IWFL under Minnesota’s Human Rights Act, which prohibits businesses from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation. In December, a jury sided with Ginther, awarding him $20,000 in damages, including $10,000 in punitive damages.

**WOMEN’S HANDBALL:** Biological male Hannah Mouncey led Australia to a fifth-place finish at the Asian Women’s Handball Championships in Japan in December. Listed as tall as 6-foot-3 and as heavy as 250 pounds (media reports vary), Mouncey scored 23 goals in seven contests, including six against New Zealand on Dec. 4.

The Australian Football League Women’s (AFLW) banned Mouncey from entering its 2017 draft because his height, weight, and testosterone levels were too high. Mouncey denounced the AFLW’s decision as a form of “body shaming.” —R.H.
When Darwinist propaganda dominates academia and media, how can Christian students develop countercultural convictions and, like Günter Bechly (see p. 28), the courage to defend them?

Several organizations promoting alternatives to Darwin also offer educational alternatives. The Discovery Institute, which emphasizes intelligent design and doesn’t say how long it took, has Education Days: Some 312 students and educators attended one in Seattle last year, and this year’s schedule includes Richmond and Dallas.

Answers in Genesis (AiG) provides Bible-based programs that range from daily workshops and lectures at its Creation Museum in northern Kentucky to student homeschool programs and monthly high-school science labs. It also hosts Explore Days, daylong, hands-on programs for students in grades four through 12.

Another young-earth group, the Institute for Creation Research (ICR), hosts conferences across the country in which ICR scientists provide interactive tours, games, and lessons geared toward helping children see the evidence of Biblical truth and God’s creation in nature.

Reasons to Believe, which holds to an old-earth view of creation, provides a yearlong, self-paced homeschool curriculum, including video and audio lectures geared toward high-school students. It also offers a unit study for upper elementary students based on Psalm 104 (King David’s meditation on Genesis 1) and a YouTube series titled Through the Lens.

This summer AiG will offer multi-day camps that provide a week of interactive science investigation, and the Creation Museum will offer its first three-day Explore Forensics camp, focusing on how the personal qualities of each individual point to the Biblical Creator. Meanwhile, ICR will open in Dallas a Discovery Center for Science and Earth History: It will feature a planetarium and interactive exhibits that begin with the creation account in Genesis and end with the return of Jesus.

For homeschooled high-school students, AiG holds a yearlong lab practicum in biology, chemistry, physics, and forensic science. Creation Ministries International offers books, workbooks, and study guides. Students at the Discovery Institute’s program last year in Seattle were mostly homeschool or from private schools. They enjoyed interacting directly with scientists, and some were surprised to learn that not all intelligent design scientists are Christians: They are simply following the science where it leads.

The 18 students from Providence Classical Christian School at last year’s Discovery Institute program had a mix of reactions. Trynn Haney, 15, came away understanding more about the intelligent design argument as applied to genetics: Disturbing one gene disrupts the whole system, leading to more detrimental effects than good. Olivia Hatcher, 17, appreciated having irreducible complexity—one of intelligent design’s underpinning arguments—clearly explained. But Dane Kowalick, 18, would have liked hearing counterarguments from the evolutionary perspective.
Nearly 11 million Americans suffer from age-related macular degeneration (AMD), the leading cause of vision loss in people 65 and older. Currently, no cure exists.

But now the federally run National Eye Institute has announced plans to begin human trials of a stem cell therapy to treat the disease, pending FDA approval. The treatment technique avoids the use of embryonic stem cells, which require the destruction of human embryos, and instead uses alternative lab-produced cells called induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs). If the human trials gain approval, it will be the first time researchers have used iPSCs to treat a human disease, said National Eye Institute researcher Kapil Bharti in a statement. And since iPSCs are made with a patient’s own cells, they face a minimal chance of rejection once implanted.

In the advanced stages of AMD, retinal pigment epithelial cells (RPEs) begin to die. Light-sensing cells in the retina, or photoreceptor cells, depend on the RPEs to supply them with nutrition and oxygen. When RPEs die, so do the photoreceptors, causing blindness.

In animal studies described in the Jan. 16 issue of Science Translational Medicine, the researchers took iPSCs derived from rat and pig blood cells and programmed them to become RPEs. They then grew these cells into small, thin sheets and inserted them into the animals’ eyes between their RPEs and photoreceptor cells. The lab-made RPEs integrated with the animals’ retinas within 10 weeks and kept the remaining photoreceptor cells alive, stopping progression of the disease.

Any stem cell therapy involves the potential risk that the cells will form tumors, but when the researchers analyzed their lab-created cells, they found no mutations that would lead to tumor growth.

SAY WHAT YOU WILL

Can a computer translate a person’s thoughts into speech? Engineers at Columbia University hope their new technology will soon do so.

When people speak or imagine speaking, their brains produce specific patterns of activity. The Columbia researchers trained a speech synthesizing machine to detect specific brain patterns produced when subjects heard people reciting the digits 0 to 9. Then a type of artificial intelligence translated those brain patterns into intelligible words like one, two, three, etc.

If the system is further developed, the researchers believe doctors could implant it into the brains of people who have lost the ability to speak, and the system would then translate their thoughts into verbal speech. The team’s paper was published Jan. 29 in Scientific Reports. —J.B.
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[Link: dts.edu/more]
**Against the tide**

[Jan. 19, p. 36 ] How did the taking of an innocent human life become a matter of preference, convenience, personal finances, or shame? Imagine abortion extended to 5-year-old children—they’re even more of a burden than a baby.

—DAVID WESTRATE / Ellenton, Fla.

I have read your abortion articles for years with a broken heart. The New York law that legalized late-term abortion and removed penalties for botched abortions is beyond disgusting and evil. North Carolina and Indiana have faced travel bans and boycotts due to their pro-family policies. What if pro-lifers refused to visit or do business in New York? Companies headquartered in New York should consider moving elsewhere.

—KIMBERLY M. CHASTAIN / Liberty, S.C.

A question of ethics

[Jan. 19, p. 50 ] I do not share bioethicist William Hurlbut’s optimism about the future of genetic engineering. IVF and embryo selection have been going on for decades, and genetic testing commonly ends in abortion. We’ve been softened up for He Jiankui’s brave new world.

—JEFF SINGLETARY / Lebanon, Ind.

Human beings are not biological templates that scientists can freely re-engineer without significant consequences. The fact that a scientist can do something does not make it moral to do it.

—MARK B. BLOCHER on Facebook

It is easy to imagine gene editing to treat disease morphing into attempts to create the most beautiful woman or the ultimate male athlete. Is He Jiankui playing God?

—ROBERT FRANCIS / Wakefield, Mass.

Unsafe spaces

[Jan. 19, p. 54 ] Thank you for this reminder of how human brokenness is so complex and self-perpetuating. Let us pray for the homeless, for their healing from abuse, for restoration of hope and forgiveness in Christ, and the wisdom and resilience to break the cycle. God bless all those who help.

—JENNYBETH GARDNER on wng.org

And some people want to force women’s shelters like these to allow biological men in at night. God help us all.

—LAURA WEIENETH on wng.org

Sophia Lee’s articles give a keen glimpse into other worlds. Thank you!

—ROSIE O’BRIEN RICHARDS on Facebook

A society’s secrets

[Jan. 19, p. 25 ] You praised The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society as a delightful escape, but it is also a reflection of the prejudices of our times. The heroes in the story are all strong, independent women and the villains are powerful white males, while the only Christian is a judgmental spinster.


People should do themselves a delightful favor and read the book before seeing the movie.

—CHERRY NEILL / Fort Worth, Texas

Loss of faith

[Jan. 19, p. 34 ] The Kurds have bled and died in Syria to help us defeat our enemies, and we’re about to leave them at the mercy of theirs. We made a promise, and we’re breaking it. This isn’t even Nixon’s “peace with honor.” This is giving up a war, and there is no honor in it. Eventually we will need to return, and we will find ourselves without friends.

—JOHN KLOOSTERMAN on wng.org

Finding success in the new year

[Jan. 19, p. 67 ] Andrée Seu Peterson’s column reminds me that success is not always obvious in the midst of our struggles, and that some apparent failures are successes for the gospel. I’m reminding myself of that as my wife and I raise our four sons.

—WES WOODWARD / Minnesota City, Minn.

This article, coupled with the division occurring at Harvest Bible Chapel, hurts the cause of Christ. Do we want to be part of the enemy’s plan to divide the church and become distracted from our main purpose, which is to reach the world for Christ?

—TODD TAYLOR / Eastvale, Calif.

So this is how some modern evangelical churches are run, with nondisclosure and noncompete agreements? Then we wonder why young people do not want to come to church. Why would they, when such inauthentic Christianity is on display?

—TERRY JANSEN / Orland Park, Ill.
Surely a megachurch could afford to lose a few willing members to support a new work, even if it was only a few miles away.

—Merv Auchtung / Holland, Mich.

It is appalling that a man can pastor a church $42 million in debt and still live in a 6,800-square-foot house with a 10-car garage. I have long questioned the justification for megachurches swallowing up millions of urban dollars to build empires for men while servants of God around the world struggle.

—Jim Schultz / Decatur, Ill.

‘Faithful disobedience’

[Dec. 29, p. 10] Regarding Chinese believers suffering persecution: It is during times of intensity that the power and beauty of the gospel are so evident. The more the world openly rejects the gospel, the tighter it will be embraced by those who seek the truth and believe. God is in control here as well as there.

—Ken Isgrigg on wng.org

Sizing up our hearts

[Dec. 8, p. 5] We often don’t listen well, but it’s helpful to ask our political opponents why they believe what they do. We are not always that far apart, and sometimes the debate is more about how to solve the problem than whether there is a problem.

—Janet Seagraves on wng.org

When Jesus taught us the Golden Rule, He never promised that others would treat us the way we treat them. This doesn’t let us off the hook, but our behavior will not necessarily affect the way others act, especially if they don’t believe that Jesus was more than just a very nice man (if they believe He existed at all).

—Richard Armering / Rohnert Park, Calif.

Correction

Harvest Bible Chapel Senior Pastor James MacDonald preached at HBC Naples on Jan. 6 (“Command and control,” Feb. 16, p. 57).

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LETTERS and COMMENTS

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Death of a poet

A TALENTED WRITER ISN’T NECESSARILY A WRITER TO BE HEENDED

A friend texted, “Mary Oliver died.” I looked up at my husband, “Do we know a Mary Oliver?” Shrug. I typed back, cagily: “How old was she?” No clue forthcoming there: “83,” she replied. Then, after a quick Google search on this end: “Did you know her personally?” “My aunt took her in when she was a teen ager and she lived with her in Provincetown for a few years. … My aunt has all of her books personally signed by her. … [Mary] ventured into lesbian life later on. She was sexually abused at home. … Tell me if you write something about her.”

“I doubt I would write anything about her. I don’t know what I would say about a homosexual writer.” “She is also a good poet who opens the heart to God’s creation and its beauty. Isn’t that worth something?” “Yeah but what would I say in a Christian magazine? I’m asking a sincere question. I really don’t know what my angle would be.”

“Wasn’t Jesus a friend of sinners? Didn’t he appreciate the good things that they could do? … their gifts of humor, carpentry, poetry, etc?” “N----, really?”

“He was fully human and fully divine.”

Well, for one thing, no, I don’t think we find evidence in Scripture that Jesus “appreciated the good things that they could do.” And I think Jesus was a friend of sinners to save sinners from their sin and not to leave them as they were before He found them.

Besides, I was troubled. When churches go raving rainbow-and-alphabet soup, the murder weapon usually is not a strong theological argument: It’s a winsome next-door neighbor, or favorite nature poet. Isn’t the way N---- is talking exactly the way they started to talk at Harvard just before Harvard went under, and then Yale before Yale went under, and then Princeton before it went under?

I spent the whole day reading Mary Oliver poems and watching her readings on YouTube. The writing was unadorned and beautiful and evoked white-washed Cape Cod cottages and cool salty-aired mornings, and I came across any number of phrases of which I thought, “Man, I wish I had written that.”

But it didn’t go so well with N----. And I started second-guessing myself. Was she right that I should separate the poem from the poet? I wouldn’t not commend a Shakespeare sonnet just because the man may be consigned to blackest night for all we know, right? Miss Oliver does me the favor of making me stop and see and smell what I am normally too rushed to stop and see and smell, to my impoverishment. She notices that grasshopper jaws move side to side, not up and down. She ends one poem with this amazing challenge: “Tell me, what is it you plan to do / with your one wild and precious life?” (“The Summer Day”).

But Oliver also says things like: “Let me keep my distance, always, from those who think they have the answers” (“Mysteries, Yes”). And in her most requested poem, “The Journey” (she must have groaned as much as Led Zeppelin being asked the thousandth time to play “Stairway to Heaven”), she says to shoo away the voices that tell you to mend your life, and listen to the one that says to save yourself—but counsels it so prettily that I am almost in her pocket!

I am sensitive to the charge, first sneered by H.L. Mencken, that a Puritan is a person who’s afraid that someone, somewhere, might be enjoying himself. I don’t want to be that guy. And it’s hard to hate a poet who writes, “I was a bride married to amazement.”

But a poet is not a plumber. A poet is a prophet and a teacher. God says those whose gift is speaking will be judged the more severely. The road “soft underfoot” that leads to hell is just as much to fear as is the one that looks all dark and potholed. All of which is why I don’t think I can write a column on this poet, my dear N----. I hope you understand.
Necessary trips?
ENDANGERING CAREERS TO OPPOSE DARWIN

Washington Post columnist and former Bush administration speechwriter Michael Gerson says 20th-century evangelicals “made a crucial error in picking evolution as a main point of contention with modernity.” Gerson quotes William Jennings Bryan from a century ago: “The contest between evolution and Christianity is a duel to the death. If evolution wins … Christianity goes.”

Mike Gerson recognizes that “many people of his background believed this.” (“Bless their hearts,” a chorus of Southern Christian women would add.) Gerson, though, says “their resistance was futile, for one incontrovertible reason: Evolution is a fact. It is objectively true based on overwhelming evidence.”

Gerson hasn’t done his homework. A huge and mostly unreported story is that the 21st-century battle is not science vs. Christianity but science vs. Darwin. While microevolution—finches developing larger or smaller beaks—is obvious, Darwin’s unavoidable ignorance concerning cell structure and much besides condemns his theory to be among the many whose time has come and gone.

More than 1,000 Ph.D. holders have signed the “Scientific Dissent From Darwin” list visible at dissentfromdarwin.org. The list of signatories includes members of national academies of science in 16 different countries. Many are senior professors or researchers at universities and research institutions such as Cambridge University, the British Natural History Museum, the Institute of Human Paleontology in France, Ben-Gurion University in Israel, MIT, and so on.

At least they all were at such distinguished places last time I looked—because coming out against macroevolution takes courage, and for some it’s been career suicide. I suspect many of them have thought, “Is this trip necessary?” I’ve thought that too: Some writers who respected my history books lost confidence in my judgment when they learned I doubted Oz the Great and Powerful, aka Darwin.

Gerson asks, “What if Bryan and others of his generation had chosen to object to eugenics rather than evolution, to social Darwinism rather than Darwinism?” Or, what if they had spent more time developing “compassionate conservatism,” which Gerson and I both strove for two decades ago?

What he doesn’t get is what Bryan understood: That acceptance of Darwinism logically leads to eugenics, social Darwinism, militarism, racism, and attempts not to serve the poor, homeless, and addicted, but to kill them for the purported good of all. Darwin himself wrote, “The civilized races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace the savage races through the world.” He wasn’t responsible for either callous conservatism or cancerous progressivism, let alone mass murders by Darwin-believers like Adolf Hitler. Still, ideas do have consequences.

This issue of WORLD went to print on Feb. 13, one day after the 210th birthday of two world-changing individuals: Both Darwin and Abraham Lincoln were born on Feb. 12, 1809. Lincoln died only six years after Darwin published On the Origin of Species, and it’s doubtful that the Great Emancipator ever read it because a little thing like the Civil War soon occupied his waking hours and his nightmares as well.

Nevertheless, historian John West brought to my attention a comment (with spelling mistakes) by James Keyes, one of Lincoln’s neighbors in Springfield, Ill.: “In my intercourse with Mr Lincoln I learned that he believed in a Creator of all things, which had neither beginning nor end, who possessing all power and wisdom, established a principal, in Obedience to which, Worlds move and are upheld, and animal and vegetable life came into existence.”

Keyes concluded, “A reason he gave for his belief was, that in view of the Order and harmony of all nature which all beheld, it would have been More miraculous to have Come about by chance, than to have been created and arranged by some great thinking power.” That was true in the 19th century and it’s true now: So true that Darwinians are grabbing onto theories of multiverses or computer simulations to explain how we could find ourselves in such a finely tuned world and universe.

But if somehow all of this could be the product of chance, with survival of the fittest our operative principle, power rules. Why emancipate slaves? Why help the poor? Why not kill our neighbor? Happily, evidence against macroevolution is growing. Mike Gerson and others: Read Michael Behe’s new book (due out on Feb. 26, reviewed on p. 24) and dozens of others I could recommend. ©
As home educators, for 25 years we have carefully chosen curriculum and classes for our six children, focusing on a classical education approach. When it came time to select a college, Union felt very familiar — solid academics AND a genuine Christian worldview.

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