

A large, diverse choir of people, including men and women of various ages and ethnicities, are singing from books. In the foreground, a conductor with a large, curly grey wig and a dark blue robe is seen from behind, with arms raised, leading the choir. The background is filled with many more choir members, creating a sense of a large-scale performance.

WORLD

EARNING YOUR TRUST, EVERY DAY / DECEMBER 23, 2023

Hallelujah!

How *Messiah*, the oratorio Handel composed for Easter, became a Christmas anthem for the ages *p.44*

by CALEB BAILEY

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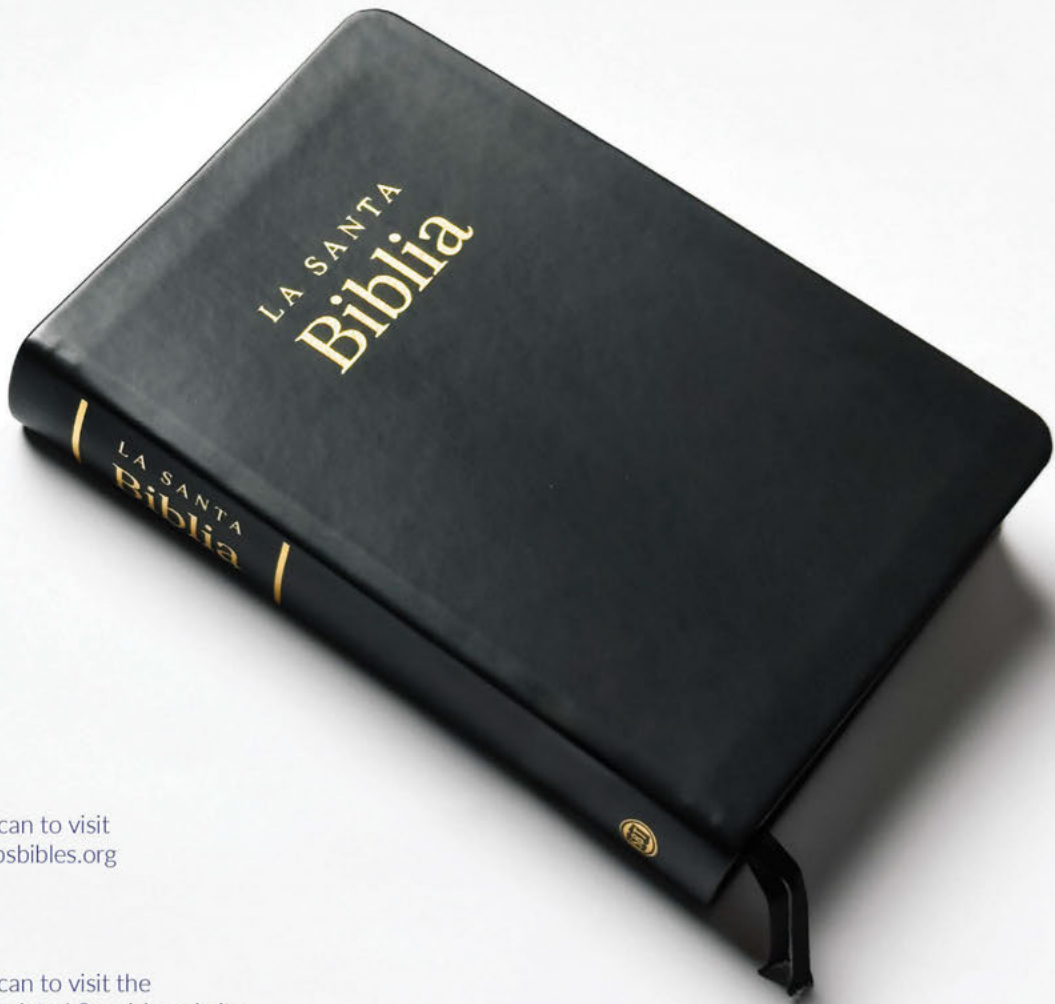
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How a Christmas classic written for Easter cemented an 18th-century composer's legacy

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GRAVE ASSUMPTIONS

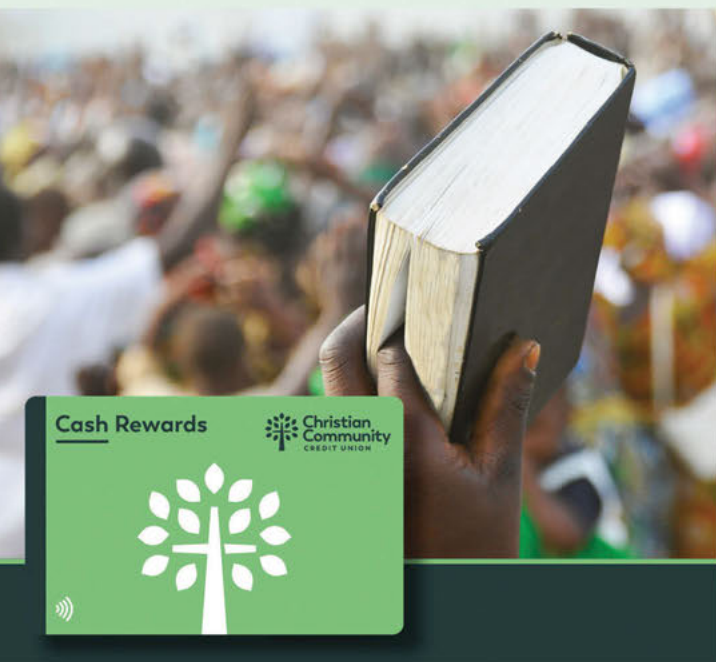
Claims of mass burial sites in Canada spark rash of church arsons

ON THE COVER: Illustration by Mark Fredrickson

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and those who dwell therein.” —Psalm 24:1

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Letters to the editor editor@wng.org
Mail PO Box 20002, Asheville, NC 28802
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C E O N O T E S



IN THIS FINAL ISSUE OF 2023, I thought it would be appropriate to share the all-staff photo from our recent staff retreat. What you see in the picture below are the men and women who have served you this year, the very same men and women whose work your support has made possible.

If you look at the masthead on the previous page, you'll see that it lists the names of all WORLD editorial staff members, some contributors who are not employees, and our board of directors. With the limited space we have for a masthead, we simply don't have room to list most of our noneditorial employees and the student editorial team—although we do include the names of the editorial leads of our student products.

This photo, then, is a rare public look at the dozens of behind-the-scenes staff members who make everything work. We're smiling in the picture, and most of the time we smile even when the photographer isn't around. We're happy and grateful to be doing what God has called us to do. Thank you for supporting us this past year.

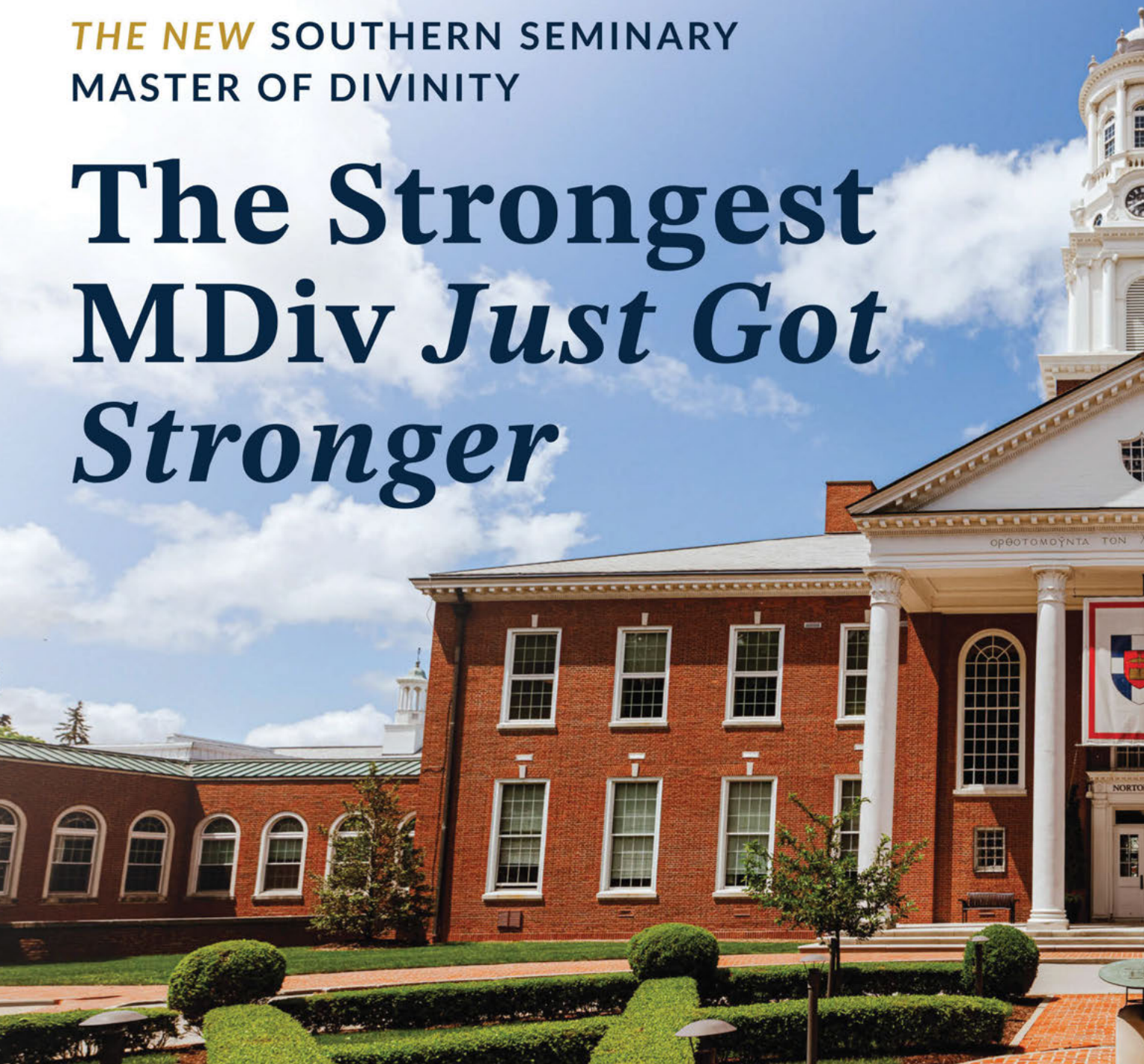
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A history of violence *p42*

I was disappointed in Jill Nelson's failure to report in some detail the horrendous atrocities committed on the Israelis on Oct. 7. This was not just another Hamas incursion.

FREDRICK ALDRIDGE SR.
Russiaville, Ind.

Jill Nelson summed up the barbaric atrocities committed by Hamas fighters with the muted phrase "the ensuing death and carnage." If that doesn't sound muted to you, try reading about some of the things Hamas terrorists did to the Israelis they murdered, raped, tortured, and kidnapped. I expected better of WORLD.

ERIC EIPPER
Eden, Md.

The final salute *p58*

In this world of so much negativity, it was a breath of fresh air to read about Air Force veteran Hal Smarkola and his touching visits to the dying. Well done, Colonel.

DAVE DAHLKE
Port Orchard, Wash.

Living in primary reality *p70*

Andrée Seu Peterson has amazing insight into life. I was astounded at the naming of what is a primary reality as opposed to a secondary reality. Many of us are spinning our wheels for that secondary reality. It's time to reassess what we value most and work for the primary.

LUCY SHARKEY
Youngstown, Ohio



NOVEMBER 4, 2023

How true it is that many professing Christians live lives governed by secondary realities instead of *the* primary reality. And how true, "Getting old is God's natural aid toward focusing on primary reality, but even that's no guarantee." Amen!

DWIGHT OSWALD
Council Bluffs, Iowa

The democracy of the dead *p24*

As a daily reader of Proverbs, I appreciated the way Lynn Vincent explained that the deficiency of progressive thinking is its lack of wisdom.

MIKE SHARRETT
Forest, Va.

What to do about bad manners? *p40*

I saw things start to fall apart in the 1970s when women lambasted men for holding doors open for

them. Men became afraid to show the courtesy their fathers had taught them.

CHERYL IRISH
Bastrop, Texas

Engine trouble *p22*

The last two issues of the magazine had photos of snakes, and I don't even like to touch a picture of a snake. It would do me and other squeamish ones a favor if you placed photos of those creatures on the inside columns so we wouldn't have to touch them (*yuck!*) when we turn the pages.

JOYCE DEVIVO
Grand Gorge, N.Y.

A house for the centuries *p32*

I bought *North Woods* by Daniel Mason on the recommendation of David Kern's review. I was about halfway through the book and

decided it wasn't worth reading. There was no warning there would be so much immoral behavior described in detail. My husband and I were highly disappointed with this review.

CARLA WHITE
Westerly, R.I.

Words matter

Words mean something, and we are losing that and losing truth. The Palestinian protest mentioned in your cover story didn't "evolve," it *degenerated*. And the hiding place in the review of Daniel Mason's book didn't "evolve," it *became*. Using *evolve* normalizes the atheistic term and subtly replaces God-given human choice or influence with blind chance.

DAVE GREIG
Virginia Beach, Va.

Corrections

Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif., denies ever having an official chapter of the pro-LGBT group Embracing the Journey ("Mainline slide," Oct. 21, p. 47).

Retirees make up about half of the congregants at Crums Church ("Emergency exit," Dec. 2, p. 61).

Send your letters and comments to:

- editor@wng.org
- WORLD Mailbag,
PO Box 20002,
Asheville, NC 28802

Please include full name and address. Letters may be edited to yield brevity and clarity.



Merry Christmas

***For unto you is born this day in
the city of David a Savior, which
is Christ the Lord. And this shall
be a sign unto you; Ye shall find
the babe wrapped in swaddling
clothes, lying in a manger.***

Luke 2:11-12

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VOICES **JOEL BELZ**

Freedom of speech under fire

I lost \$2, but America is losing much more

This is the latest in a series of classic columns (edited for space) by Joel Belz. Joel wrote this column for the April 15, 2000, issue of WORLD.

I'M JUST BACK FROM the Asheville Mall, and I bring back bad news. Folks there have lost their sense of values; they no longer know a bargain when they see one.

I did my own little poll, you see, stopping the first 10 people who came down the big atrium to ask them a simple question: "Can you tell me something about the Bill of Rights? Can you identify one of the rights included in that document?" Only three people out of 10 could mention a single one of the great liberties guaranteed by those grand articles.

Alarmed, I went on with 10 more people. "Can you tell me something about the First Amendment? I'll give you a dollar if you can tell me one thing it says." Sadly, the experiment cost me only \$2.

So set aside all your other worries. Really, only one thing in the year 2000 is worth being concerned about on the public-policy front—and it's big enough, all by itself, to eclipse every other problem.

Wonder of wonders: It's also a traditionally liberal cause. But it's one many liberals seem more and more ready to trade in for the rest of their agenda.

I'm talking about First Amendment freedoms—and especially about freedom of speech. It's such a cornerstone of the traditional system of American liberties that

we tend to think of it as indestructible. Yet even while we bask in what could be the sunset of that freedom, some folks are chipping away big pieces of the old rock.

No, this isn't just a worrywart's interpretation of things. Within the last couple of weeks, Congress actually voted on a proposal to give to itself "power to set reasonable limits on the amount of contributions that may be accepted, and the amount of expenditures that may be made by, in support of, or in opposition to, a candidate for nomination for election to, or for election to, federal office." The measure lost, but a third of the senators who once had taken an oath to defend the Constitution voted to chisel away at one of its most foundational articles.

WORLD took a lot of heat for saying so in our Feb. 19 issue, but such also would have been the effect of Sen. John McCain's proposal for campaign-finance reform. Our critics didn't like the bluntness of the inference we drew with this statement: "Mr. McCain would essentially suspend the First Amendment for 60 days prior to any federal election." But nobody argued with our evidence for that inference in the very next sentence: "He would make it illegal for nonprofit groups—from the National Rifle Association to the National Right-to-Life Committee—to advertise against a candidate, publish 'report cards' on votes, or even mention a candidate's name in a way that might 'materially benefit' his opponent."

Like the pedestrians at the mall, the media, educational, and political elite have been so distracted by other issues that they have forgotten what the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights are all about. Willy-nilly, they start proposing remedies whose poison is much more potent than the evils they are out to correct. We shouldn't be surprised. For if anything has come to characterize freedom in our age, it is the spirit that says, "You can say anything you want, of course—just so long as you don't offend our sense of what is appropriate to be said."

What will surprise many Christians will be the discovery, more and more in the near future, that First Amendment freedoms and the Bill of Rights were meant not so much for the majority to revel in as for the protection of minorities. As one of the newest minorities in society, Christians may devoutly wish over the next decade or two that they had worked harder to protect the very tools by which they could discuss, debate, and promote their point of view on many other issues. Freedom of speech is going to become a very big issue. ■



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DISPATCHES




IN THE NEWS

The pope and his critics

Censuring of conservative clergy points to larger tensions in the Roman Catholic Church

by KIM HENDERSON & CHRISTINA GRUBE



THRONGS OF MARCHERS streamed through downtown Tyler, Texas, last month in a show of support for their local Roman Catholic bishop. The marchers wore sunglasses and Skechers, rosary beads and Rangers caps.

And while a few in the lead wrestled with unwieldy banners, many wrestled with a bigger problem—how to practice their conservative Catholic faith under the leadership of the current pope.

The Nov. 18 march came just days after Pope Francis removed Joseph Strickland, 65, as the head of the Diocese of Tyler. Known for his political and theological conservatism and his criticism of the pope, Strickland had refused to resign upon request.

Later in November, Francis reportedly revoked privileges belonging to 75-year-old Cardinal Raymond Burke, a conservative American who openly speaks out against the pope. Burke will no longer have a Vatican-subsidized apartment and salary.

Pope Francis, who turns 87 on Dec. 17, has long stirred consternation among

Catholics for his left-leaning views. He has emphasized social justice, called for action on climate change, revised Catholic doctrine to prohibit capital punishment, and made controversial if vague comments about the church's need to welcome homosexuals. His recent censuring of prelates who criticize him suggests Francis may be trying to put a lid on dissent, despite a church movement toward traditional and conservative beliefs.

Strickland, for example, has repeatedly denounced the pope for his lack of clarity on hot-button issues like sexuality. On May 12 he tweeted criticism of the pope's "program of undermining the Deposit of Faith," the body of traditional Catholic teaching. Strickland advised Catholics, "Follow Jesus."

In 2019, Burke was the first of five signatories on a document that, among other things, condemned homosexuality and transgender surgery and upheld capital punishment. Burke also disagreed with the pope's promotion of COVID-19 vaccines.

Burke and Strickland are not alone. Last year, the Vatican also defrocked outspoken pro-life activist and priest Frank Pavone over what it called "blasphemous communications on social media."

In August, Francis acknowledged a growing rift but took a hard line. He labeled conservative Catholics in the United →

Pope Francis attends his weekly General Audience at the Vatican in August.

States “backward” for viewing church doctrine as “a monolith” that doesn’t change with the times. That could explain an Oct. 31 ruling by the Vatican that opened the door to Catholic baptism for transgender people and babies of same-sex couples.

Such posturing puts conservative Catholic leaders in a tough spot. Many are questioning exactly what they owe the pope in terms of obedience. They’re also perplexed by the long leash Francis has extended toward Catholics who have abandoned church teaching—such as U.S. Catholic politicians promoting abortion. Although conservative bishops in 2021 drafted a plan to stop such church members from receiving Communion, the Vatican derailed it.

Catholic influence on American politics is consequential. A 2023 Pew

“Francis has been persistently critical of Catholics who are inclined towards more traditional modes of worship, or even a more traditional sort of piety.”

A family listens to Bishop Joseph Strickland during a rally to support him outside the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in Baltimore on Nov. 15.



poll shows Catholics make up 28 percent of the current Congress. President Joe Biden is a professing Catholic, along with two-thirds of sitting Supreme Court justices, including Chief Justice John Roberts.

J.D. Flynn, a Catholic journalist and canon lawyer, says the tension between Francis and conservative Catholics has built since Francis’ election in 2013. “There was an expectation that Francis would carry on the same theological approach as John Paul II and Benedict XVI, but it became clear that he came from a different theological school,” he said. “Francis has been persistently critical of Catholics who are inclined towards more traditional modes of worship, or even a more traditional sort of piety.”

A church split is unlikely in the short term, but Heritage Foundation research fellow E.J. Antoni, a lifelong Catholic, believes mixed messaging has American Catholics living through a sort of split right now. He’s observed the effect on young people: “They look at the modern drapery which the church has adopted today, and in so many of its more liberal circles, and they can’t tell the difference between it and the rest of the world.” Antoni says a new movement is afoot—young Catholics attracted to conservative parishes where priests champion traditional church teachings on abortion, sexuality, and family.

The Survey of American Catholic Priests has also found that U.S. priests are growing more conservative in their moral views, politics, and theology.

At the Tyler, Texas, march for Bishop Strickland, Francis did have at least one supporter. She stood curbside, dressed in black, with a poster marked by two words and a mathematical symbol: “Pope > Bishop.”

It’s a position Flynn can understand. He believes the developing conflict will serve a purpose. “Certainly God is allowing this, and hopefully it will clarify critical questions about what the papacy is.” ■



BY THE NUMBERS

Money trap

Some nations that benefited from China's lending program now face staggering bills

by JOHN DAWSON

\$1.34 trillion

The value of grants and loans made to developing countries as part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), according to William & Mary's AidData research lab. While the BRI has poured money into infrastructure projects around the world, poor nations are struggling to repay debts, and critics argue China is leveraging the program to expand its influence.

20,985

The number of rail, harbor, highway, and other infrastructure projects undertaken through the BRI, according to AidData.

165

The number of nations—out of a global total of 195—that have participated in BRI projects.

44

The number of countries whose debt to China accounts for more than 10 percent of their gross domestic product. Fifty-five percent of the loans have entered the principal repayment period, with interest rates up to 8.7 percent if nations fall behind.

Henry Kissinger

An American diplomat who helped reshape the world during the Cold War, Kissinger died Nov. 29. He was 100. Kissinger's Jewish family fled Nazi Germany in 1938, when he was 15, and moved to New York City. During World War II, Kissinger served in Army intelligence as a translator. After an academic career, he proceeded through the ranks of the foreign policy profession, becoming Richard Nixon's national security adviser and, later, secretary of state. Kissinger's negotiations with China helped Nixon achieve rapprochement with the Asian nation and also drive a wedge into Sino-Soviet relations. Kissinger won the 1973 Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to wind down the Vietnam War, but critics blamed some of his policies—including the carpet-bombing of Cambodia—for unnecessary deaths.



Sandra Day O'Connor

O'Connor, the first woman to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court, died Dec. 1 at age 93. After earning a law degree at Stanford, O'Connor worked in local politics, eventually accepting an appointment to the Arizona Senate. She later left the Senate to take



judgeships in Arizona's state courts. In 1981, Ronald Reagan nominated O'Connor to fill a Supreme Court vacancy over the objections of pro-life activists. As an associate justice, O'Connor became a swing vote on narrow decisions. In 1992, she co-authored a *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* majority ruling that upheld a right to abortion.

EU upholds workplace religious-symbol ban



Luxembourg The European Union Court of Justice ruled Nov. 28 that government offices can ban employees from wearing religious symbols. The ruling stemmed from the case of a Muslim employee banned from wearing a headscarf at work. The municipality later banned all workers from wearing overt signs of religious affiliation. The woman claimed discrimination, but the EU court said the ban was not discriminatory if “applied in a general and indiscriminate manner to all staff.” The court also noted governments could allow employees to wear visible signs of their religion, as long as enforcement applied equally. —*Jenny Lind Schmitt*



POPULATION

660,924

LANGUAGE

Luxembourgish,
Portuguese,
French

RELIGION

71% Christian,
27% unaffiliated,
2% Muslim

GOVERNANCE

Constitutional
monarchy

GDP

\$74.05 billion

MAJOR EXPORTS


Iron products,
cars and vehicle
parts, tires,
gas turbines,
adhesive
plastics

New Zealand The world’s first “smoke free generation” laws will be repealed by March, Prime Minister Christopher Luxon announced shortly after taking the oath of office in late November. Just over a year ago, lawmakers in New Zealand banned tobacco sales to anyone born after Jan. 1, 2009, and reduced the number of retailers by 90 percent. World health ministers applauded the laws, and the U.K. made plans to introduce similar measures. But Luxon campaigned on promised tax cuts, and after making compromises to form a coalition government, he found himself with a revenue shortfall. He now says he needs \$619 million in tobacco taxes to plug the economic hole. He also said keeping the laws would increase black market sales and retail theft. Lisa Te Morenga, co-chair of Health Coalition Aotearoa, called it “a major loss for public health, and a huge win for the tobacco industry.” —*Amy Lewis*



Panama The country's Supreme Court has ordered the closure of a major copper mine. Judges ruled the concession contract for the **Cobre Panamá mine**, operated by a subsidiary of the Canadian company First Quantum Minerals, is unconstitutional. Last year, the mine produced over 86,000 tons of copper, contributing to about 5 percent of Panama's GDP. Environmentalists celebrated the ruling. They argued the mine exacerbated a current drought, threatened migratory birds, and hindered sustainable economic development. The government said it would shut down the mine in an "orderly and safe" fashion. —*Javier Bolanos*

Nepal Authorities recorded the country's first same-sex marriage on Nov. 29—a first for any South Asian nation. The move follows a Supreme Court order allowing interim registration of gay marriages while the court considers a relevant case. Nepal's civil code still defines marriage as between one man and one woman. In June, a district court rejected the order, saying Parliament must change national law first. But a Lamjung district municipality permitted two men—one of whom identifies as a woman—to register their marriage last month. The two have lived together for six years and reportedly married with their families' blessing. Nepal's decision comes on the heels of a Supreme Court ruling in India that refused to legalize homosexual marriage. —*Grace Snell*



POPULATION
30.9 million

LANGUAGE
Nepali, Maithali


RELIGION
81% Hindu,
8% Buddhist,
5% Muslim,
3% Kirat

GOVERNANCE
Federal
parliamentary
republic

GDP
\$115.09 billion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Soybean and
palm oil

Niger The military junta on Nov. 27 overturned an 8-year-old law that penalized human traffickers. The law mandated a five-year sentence for convicted smugglers. The military also cleared previous sentences under the law. Niger passed the European Union-backed measure in 2015 when more than 1 million migrants tried to enter Europe illegally. EU officials hailed Niger's legislation as a success, citing decreased arrivals. But the United Nations rights office warned that migrants only sought more dangerous routes. Military leaders overthrew President Mohamed Bazoum in July, and the EU and other Western nations have suspended aid to Niger since then. The landlocked nation serves as a hub for migrants and asylum-seekers heading for Europe via Algeria or neighboring Libya. —*Onize Ohikere*



POPULATION
25.4 million

LANGUAGE
French, Hausa,
Djerma

RELIGION
99% Muslim

GOVERNANCE
Semi-
presidential
republic

GDP
\$29.96 billion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Gold, sesame
seeds, uranium,
refined
petroleum

Saudi Arabia A public investment fund controlled by Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud has agreed to buy a 10 percent stake in London's **Heathrow Airport**. The current owner of the stake, Spanish infrastructure giant Ferrovial, said the deal is worth more than \$1 billion. Saudi Arabia has one of the world's most active sovereign wealth funds, with over \$700 billion in assets built on the country's oil wealth. The prince has invested much of it in sports like football and golf. Those efforts have created controversy because the government stands accused of numerous human rights violations, including the brutal 2018 killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Qatari and Chinese funds also own stakes in Heathrow. —*Elizabeth Russell*





U.S. BRIEFS

Christians face foster care freeze-out

Alabama In a letter dated Nov. 27, Attorney General **Steve Marshall** and 18 other state attorneys general urged the Biden administration to rescind a foster placement rule they say would drive away Christians. The Department of Health and Human Services proposed the plan in September. It requires children who identify as LGBTQ to be placed with foster parents who will defend their preferred sexual orientation, gender identity, pronouns, and choice of dress. Just two years ago, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of Catholic Social Services, which refused to place children in households led by same-sex couples. The attorneys general argue the Biden administration's proposed plan would restrict parents' freedom of religion in violation of that ruling. They also noted the proposal would limit the number of available homes for children in need since Christians are three times more likely to consider foster parenting. Currently, 391,000 children are in foster care and many others still await placement. —*Bekah McCallum*



POPULATION

5 million

GOVERNOR

Kay Ivey*

U.S. SENATORS

Katie Britt*,
Tommy
Tuberville*

INDUSTRY

Aviation &
aerospace,
biotechnology,
agriculture

Maryland A federal watchdog announced on Nov. 30 it will review how a site in Maryland was selected for the FBI's new headquarters. The General Services Administration (GSA), which manages the government's real estate portfolio, announced on Nov. 8 it had chosen Greenbelt as the site for the new headquarters. Both Virginia and Maryland competed for the honor. When Virginia lawmakers complained about the decision, the GSA inspector general said he would review the selection process. FBI Director Christopher Wray also expressed concern in a leaked email to personnel. Wray noted a GSA panel recommended a Virginia site but was overruled by a political appointee who picked land in Greenbelt owned by a previous employer.

—*Emma Freire*

Massachusetts State Supreme Court justices struggled during an early December hearing to apply last year's U.S. Supreme Court ruling on a New York concealed carry ban to the state's ban on switchblades. In *New York State Rifle & Pistol Association Inc. v. Bruen*, the court said a weapons restriction is unconstitutional if it isn't "consistent with the nation's historical tradition." Massachusetts justices questioned what history they should apply, national or state, and from what era historical precedents should be drawn. "Does *West Side Story* ... fit into the Bruen analysis?" asked Justice Frank Gaziano, noting switchblade bans proliferated in the 1950s following the movie about knife-wielding gangs. The case will likely return to the trial court for a do-over. —*Steve West*



Puerto Rico National Park Service officials announced Nov. 28 they intend to select an animal welfare group to rehome about 200 stray cats that live at the 75-acre San Juan National Historic Site. Local residents who call the cats a wonder of Old San Juan and even erected a statue in their honor decried the move. But park authorities said the animals can transmit illnesses to humans, while urine and feces tarnish visitor experiences. Food left for the cats also attracts rats and encourages people to abandon unwanted pets at the 16th-century fortress. Nonprofit Save a Gato manages the cat population through an agreement with the park service and hopes to get the rehoming assignment. But representatives called the proposed six-month timeline unrealistic. Park officials will pay to remove the cats, if necessary, but are open to extending the yet-to-be awarded agreement if they see steady progress. About 1 million people visit the site in Puerto Rico's capital each year. —*Todd Vician*

Michigan On Nov. 28, the Wolverine State joined a growing list of those with carbon-free energy mandates. Gov. **Gretchen Whitmer** signed legislation requiring utility providers to transition to 100 percent carbon-free energy generation by 2040. Michigan currently ranks 10th in carbon emissions nationally. The new measures call for utility companies to generate 50 percent of energy from renewable sources by 2030. The remaining 50 percent can consist of nuclear energy and natural gas. Renewables, which naturally replenish over time and include wind and solar power, made up just 12 percent of Michigan's energy use in 2022, while natural gas and coal made up the bulk of it, at 34 percent and 29 percent, respectively. While Whitmer claimed the new measures will lower household energy costs and create new jobs, Republicans warn they will increase energy costs and make the energy grid less reliable. —*Heather Frank*



POPULATION
10 million

GOVERNOR
Gretchen Whitmer*

U.S. SENATORS
Debbie Stabenow*, Gary Peters*

INDUSTRY
Agriculture

Texas Secession advocates may have garnered enough signatures in November to ask Republican voters next year if the Lone Star State should reassert its status as an independent nation. The proposal didn't receive enough votes to make it out of the Texas Republican Party Executive Committee on Dec. 2, but it can still make the March statewide primary ballot if 97,709 of the more than 100,000 signatures are verified. The Texas Nationalist Movement has lobbied for what it calls "TEXTIT" since its founding in 2005, and the Republican Party has more recently asked the state Legislature to put the issue to a statewide vote. "It is abundantly clear that Republican voters want to be heard on this issue," said the group's president, Daniel Miller, in a letter to the Texas Republican Executive Committee. "As these questions are advisory only, there is no harm in asking the question." No word yet if advocates can get 53,780 valid signatures to gain a place on the Democratic Party primary ballot. —*Todd Vician*



BACKGROUNDER

What's inside the Gaza Strip tunnels?

by JENNY LIND SCHMITT

IDF spokesman Daniel Hagari shows a tunnel complex under Shifa Hospital in Gaza.

wide enough for men to walk comfortably in single file. From the transit tunnels, larger tunnels open into compounds with rooms for living and working, complete with desks, air conditioning, kitchenettes, cots, and fully plumbed toilets.

What is Hamas using the tunnels for? The terrorists have used tunnels in the north of Gaza to launch attacks into Israel. Tunnels in the south have been used to smuggle goods and weapons into Gaza via Egypt. As the Israeli military has advanced into Gaza, it has found evidence of tunnels being used to store weapons, equipment, and more recently, hostages.

Are the passageways connected to hospitals? While Hamas has flatly denied claims it uses hospitals as a shield for terrorist activities, the Israeli military has found tunnels and compounds under both Shifa and Rantisi hospitals. The tunnels' electrical and water systems were connected to the hospitals' infrastructure. Because Israel delayed its ground operations for a month, Hamas had time to evacuate most of its equipment, but in both locations, the military uncovered munitions caches that included automatic rifles and grenades.

Is Israel destroying the tunnel system? The military has moved slowly into the tunnels due to the risk for its soldiers and Israeli hostages. Most of the entrances are booby-trapped. The military uses robots to explore newly found tunnels and a K-9 unit to sniff out bombs. Once individual tunnels are cleared, specialty teams destroy them with explosives. Israel is also considering pumping the tunnels full of seawater. ■



BENEATH the Gaza Strip, the terrorist organization Hamas has built a vast network of defensive tunnels and command centers, ostensibly safe from spying eyes and Israeli airstrikes. In a video released Nov. 22, the Israel Defense Forces spokesman, Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, gave a rare tour of tunnels under the Shifa Hospital compound—part of Israel's effort to show the world how Hamas operates behind civilian infrastructure.

How many tunnels are there?

Hamas started building its tunnel network after it came to power in 2007, likely using stolen materials. By 2021 it claimed to have built over

300 miles of tunnels in the Gaza Strip—a distance rivaling the length of the New York City subway system. Since Israel began its ground offensive in response to Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, Israeli forces have discovered over 800 tunnel entrances hidden under abandoned cars, in residential areas, or under schools and mosques.

What are they like inside? The tunnels are built 65 feet or more underground with reinforced concrete and often have blast doors to withstand explosives. Many have lighting and electricity installed. The main transit tunnels, with arched ceilings 6½ feet high, are

QUOTABLES

“A year.”

Nine-year-old Israel resident EMILY HAND, previously thought killed by Hamas but released from captivity on Nov. 25, in reply to her father Thomas asking her how long she thought she'd been gone, according to CNN. It had been 50 days.

“It took 50 years for my work to win the prize. That’s how long it takes for opinions to change.”

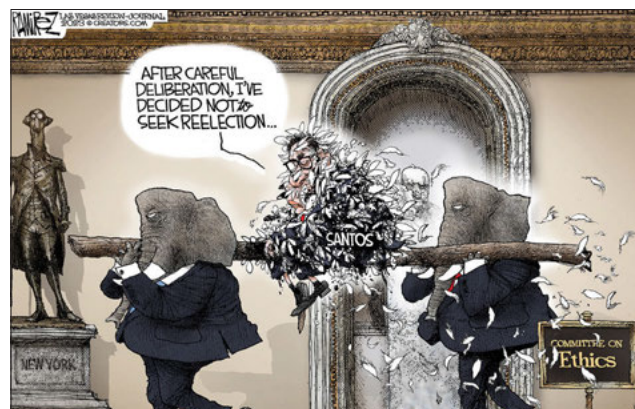
JOHN CLAUSER, co-recipient of the Nobel Prize in physics last year for his experiments with light particles in the 1970s, telling *The Washington Post* why he disbelieves the mainstream view on climate change.

“A week ago the river was just alive with rats floating around.”

Karumba, Australia, resident YVONNE TUNNEY, describing a rat plague that the Guardian Australia reported her coastal town has endured following Queensland’s unusually wet weather this year.

“He sits on his throne with his sword in one hand and a beer in the other and leaves me in peace.”

Cubatão, Brazil, resident MARIA CLAUDETE SILVA, whose eccentric businessman husband Ivanio Batista da Silva has built himself a castle-like house, complete with throne and turrets, and styles himself as “His Majesty Ivan I of Cubatão,” according to *The Wall Street Journal*.





QUICK TAKES

Delivery dilemma

Woman discovers a windfall of lottery tickets in unsolicited package

by JOHN DAWSON

➔ **A FEDEX DELIVERY** to the wrong address left a Massachusetts woman in a quandary in November: return the package or get scratching? According to Danielle Alexandrov, the heavy parcel contained a huge bundle of lottery tickets. “And I’m thinking, ‘Is this a joke?’ until I look at the receipt and its value is \$20,000 worth of scratch tickets,” she told WCVB. After investigating the package label, Alexandrov learned the box should have gone to a nearby liquor store that sells lottery tickets. Alexandrov said she briefly considered keeping the tickets, but instead returned the box to assuage her conscience. That was the best move, a lottery official said, because without activation at a retailer, the tickets would have been rendered void.

Dogs get into trouble ...

Vehicles at a Texas car dealership got a toothsome makeover when a pair of stray dogs ripped into at least five cars on the lot. Surveillance footage at G Motors in Harris County, Texas, showed the dogs damaging fenders and tearing bumpers in three separate November attacks. Store personnel initially blamed a wolf because of the severity of the damage, which a representative estimated at up to \$350,000. Surveillance footage pinned the blame on the stray dogs. In the first attack, the dogs appeared to be chasing a cat, which strategically took shelter under the cars to escape the attacks.



... And get out

As sheriff’s deputies in Martin County, Fla., executed a drug bust, a dog from the suspects’ home knew the jig was up. SWAT team members were attempting to serve warrants at a mobile home in a Nov. 21 raid when the dog, later identified as Bear, bolted out the door. Instead of running away, however, the dog ran straight into the back of an armored vehicle and waited while officers arrested five people inside the home. “He made the right decision,” a spokesperson said. “He is in good hands.”

Between rocks and a hard place

One person's art is another person's eyesore. A St. Paul, Minn., city inspector has told **Iris Logan**, 70, she'll have to clean up her front yard rock garden



because it violates city code. The inspector's recommendation to the City Council says Logan will have until Dec. 22 to demolish the handiwork that made her home a local landmark. Logan said she began placing rocks and statues in her yard decades ago after a city construction crew inadvertently killed her tree. She is appealing the decision.



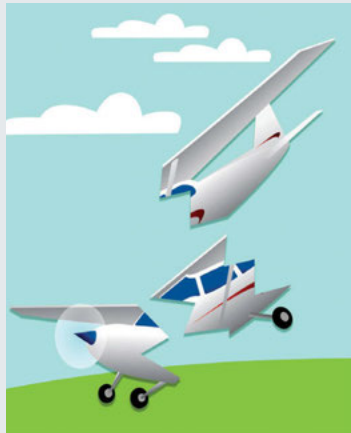
Caught in the slammer

Three men who broke into an abandoned jail in St. Louis, Mo., accidentally got trapped in a cell Nov. 16 and needed help from police to break out. A police spokesperson said the three men illegally entered an abandoned jailhouse colloquially known as the "Workhouse." The jail, which opened in 1966 and was officially known as the Medium Security Institution, closed in 2021 amid allegations of inhumane conditions. The trespassers had to phone 911 for help escaping the locked cell. After rescuing the trio, police immediately arrested the men on trespassing charges and took them to a different city jail.

What happened here?

The discovery of an apparently crashed Cessna in the Canadian wilderness sparked an investigation by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. With only a wrecked fuselage—and no registration number—police initially believed the plane had crashed more than 20 years ago, but no plane fitting its description had been lost in that area during that time period. Canada's Civil Air Search and Rescue Association solved the mystery Nov. 16: Last year its members dragged the fuselage up the mountaintop for training exercises. A spokesperson told *The Guardian* he's not sure how the mix-up happened: "There are placards in the wreck and even a phone number to call."

"There are placards in the wreck and even a phone number to call."



Tails it is

A flip of a coin is all it took to resolve a tight mayoral election in Monroe, N.C. **Robert Burns** and Bob Yanacsek each garnered 970 votes to tie for first place in the five-way race held Nov. 7. Neither man sought a recount, so to resolve the deadlock, the men flipped a coin at a county elections board meeting Nov. 17. Yanacsek called heads, but an election official flipped tails, making Burns the winner. Under North Carolina law, tied elections are resolved by casting lots. Some other states pull names out of a hat. In Nevada, electoral contestants have drawn for a high card to resolve ties, and New Mexico state law says a game of chance can serve as a tiebreaker.





VOICES **LYNN VINCENT**

American Areopagus

Thanks to your support, we are earning a hearing with the wider world

WHEN A MEDIA RATING SERVICE called NewsGuard contacted WORLD and asked us to cooperate while its staff graded our journalism, I was skeptical.

Founded by lawyer and journalist Steven Brill and former *Wall Street Journal* publisher Gordon Crovitz, NewsGuard's website says it uses "transparent tools to counter misinformation for readers, brands, and democracies." *Misinformation*, a liberal shibboleth of recent vintage, usually means Anything Not Liberal. I thought cooperating with NewsGuard would be a waste of time at best. At worst, it felt a little like being asked to loop the noose around your neck at your own hanging.

Sometimes it's great to be wrong. After spending months scouring our website and peppering us with questions, NewsGuard issued its report, which graded us in nine categories. You'll have to pay their fee to learn the details, but boiled down, NewsGuard's conclusion was simply this: Readers can trust WORLD's reporting.

Here's a question, though: Should Christian journalists care what secular watchdogs think? J.I. Packer thought so. "Think of what revitalizing journalism would do for the cause of Christ in America," Packer said famously in a conversation with WORLD's editor in chief nearly 20 years ago. "It is the most needed sort of pre-evangelism."

In other words, to succeed in our calling as Christian journalists in a fallen world, we must earn trust *as journalists*. Think of Paul at Athens: After first-century cul-

tural influencers heard him reasoning from the Scriptures with everyday people, they invited him to argue at the Areopagus. Fast-forward to the 21st century: If WORLD's journalism is to help in redeeming the culture, we too must earn a hearing—and we have. Today's zeitgeist winds bring storms without rain, leaving people thirsty for truth. More people are learning that WORLD delivers the Truth on which the zeitgeist breaks.

We arrived here via strong Christian leadership, but also through faithful Christian partnership. For 40 years, you've partnered with us financially, enabling us to serve hundreds of thousands of believers each month and also reason Biblically with the larger world.

This year, we are looking for two very special kinds of partners. First, I am asking each of you to consider a new category of giving—WORLD Sustaining Partner—at the very modest rate of just \$15 a month.

Why so little? Because of the exponential power of pooling our gifts. Consider this: Nine in 10 of WORLD's 10,000 donors give an average of \$183 over the year. That's only \$15 per donor per month—but combined, it's more than \$1.6 million!

Why a monthly gift? Because our Sustaining Partners will provide regular, reliable funding that helps us both "keep the lights on" and plan new initiatives.

We would also like to partner with larger-dollar donors, who in 2023 can rightly claim to have beaten secular media to the punch. American news is now losing two newspapers per week and will by 2025 employ two-thirds fewer reporters than in 2005. Meanwhile, fully half of U.S. counties now have little or no access to reliable local news. The secular solution? Charitable giving. In 2023, major donors ponied up \$500 million to rescue ailing local news. Yet WORLD donors have understood for decades the value of nonprofit journalism—but on a national scale and with a more eternal commitment. So if giving is your gift (Romans 12:8), we hope you'll consider a generous gift this year.

In 2023, the media watchdog Ad Fontes included WORLD in its annual Media Bias Chart. It charted us center-right on worldview (in the vicinity of *The Wall Street Journal*) and, like NewsGuard, acknowledged that we trade in the coin of real journalism: reliability.

What secular watchdogs giveth they can also taketh away, of course. And as real journalism crumbles in both quantity and quality, we still stand *only* because of you.

Please visit wng.org/donate, scan the QR code, or use our handy envelope to partner with us today as we serve believers and engage the culture—without Biblical compromise. ■

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CULTURE



TRENDING

The walking wounded

Barbara Jenkins considers the lessons of her celebrated marriage and famous divorce

by JENNY ROUGH



IN THE WINTER OF 1978-79, a brutal snowstorm hit eastern Oregon. A 30-year-old woman trudged outside through the blizzard, enduring the icy cold with her head down. Though she was bundled in a down jacket, her feet felt like stumps. They had no sensation. Her hands felt numb, too.

Then she heard a twig snap. “I thought who in their right mind is out in this weather besides me?” she recalls. When she looked up, she saw a gorgeous fawn staring at her. The deer wore a blanket of snow across its back, and the encounter heartened her. “It was as though this little animal said to me, ‘Barbara, you can make it.’”

Barbara Jenkins did make it. A few weeks later, she and her then-husband, Peter, finished their walk across America. The walk catapulted the Christian couple into fame and fortune. Their story was featured on the cover of *National Geographic*. Bestselling books followed, along with TV appearances, radio interviews, and three kids, Rebekah, Jedediah, and Luke. But when news broke of their divorce in 1987, they were forced to step away from the spotlight.

Now, decades later, Barbara is out with a new memoir, *So Long as It's Wild*. In the book, she retraces the couple's cross-country trek, updates readers on what's happened

since, and dismantles the sugary portrait of the Jenkins' marriage by the Christian press.

Perhaps you remember the Jenkins' story from the 1970s: Peter and Barbara didn't know one another when he started his epic walk across the U.S. *A Walk Across America* chronicled not only his physical journey from Alfred, N.Y., to New Orleans, La., but his spiritual one. Booze and drugs had left him hollow. In Alabama, he attended an event that was wilder than the wildest of parties: a revival. That night, he responded to a call to repent of his sin and accept Christ as Savior.

Barbara says she was attracted to the things of God for as long as she can remember. As a girl, no one in her family went to church, so she walked there alone. Church helped her escape from a tumultuous home life. She had stacks and stacks of Bibles and preferred to read the Bible over other books. In time, she became a social worker, and eventually enrolled in New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary because of her love for Biblical history. As it happened, Peter had been invited to stay on campus for a stretch. When Barbara saw him—blond hair, blue eyes, and tattered clothes—she said it seemed like he'd just stepped off a ship from Norway. “He looked like a Viking,” she told me in a recent interview. →

The two began a whirlwind romance, and Peter asked Barbara to marry him and finish the walk together. But she didn't want to carry a 35-pound pack on her back for miles under a scorching sun (or through blizzards). She had no interest in pinching seed ticks off her skin or swatting away swamp mosquitoes. And sleeping in a tent? Not the honeymoon she envisioned. She planned to break things off with Peter after attending one last church service together.

Then Sunday came. At church, a guest speaker named Mom Beall told of Abraham's servant who sought a wife for Isaac. The speaker quoted a line from Genesis 24:58: "Will you go with this man?" Stunned, Barbara took it as a sign from God. Yes, she would go. After Peter and Barbara reached the Pacific Ocean, they co-authored *The Walk West* to chronicle their trek from Louisiana to Oregon. Yet they divorced after nearly 12 years of marriage.

Looking back now, Barbara sees how the media and public held her and Peter out as a model Christian couple. And in her recent book, she says they played right into their roles: "We were all smiles for the camera and in front of others." But behind the scenes, their relationship was fraught with frustration and disappointment.

So Long as It's Wild recounts Barbara's most intense moments on the walk, good and bad, but also gives readers an intimate peek into her crumbling marriage. She details Peter's explosive personality and the verbal abuse she says he unleashed on her. And she writes of their failed attempts to build a life together after the walk.

Much of the tension stemmed from trying to reconcile a restless husband who longed for the road with a homebody wife who wanted to settle into a permanent home. Barbara is aware that her own flaws contributed to the marital friction. "I was ... self-righteous and stubborn as an Ozark mule," she writes in her book. But she blames the ultimate demise of the marriage on Peter's infidelity. She says she hasn't spoken to



Peter and Barbara at the end of their three-year, 3,000-mile journey across America.

"So Long as It's Wild recounts Barbara's most intense moments on the walk, good and bad, but also gives readers an intimate peek into her crumbling marriage."

him in years. Peter didn't respond to my interview requests and hasn't updated his Facebook page since 2016.

Though *So Long As It's Wild* kept me up until 3 a.m., I have to admit I was hoping Barbara would delve more deeply into how she wrestled through the very public implosion of her faux-fairy tale marriage—and how, or even whether, her faith saw her through.

Interestingly, her son Jed explores Barbara's faith in his own book, *Mother, Nature*. Jed is a gay man who says he's renounced the evangelical interpretation of the Bible. Barbara doesn't agree with Jed's lifestyle, she says, but simply assures him she loves him, that God loves him even more, and that the story isn't over yet.

After all these years, does she still interpret the Genesis quote that Sunday in church—"Will you go with this man?"—as a sign from God?

"Oh, absolutely!" she tells me. The heartache that followed wasn't God's fault: "Anywhere along life's path, we can all choose to go a different way." ■



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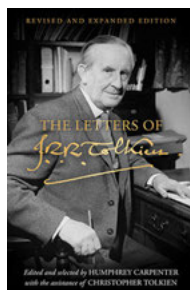
BOOKS

Tolkien in his own words

Famous author's letters illuminate his life and fiction

by DANIEL R. SUHR

➔ **READING THE LETTERS OF J.R.R. Tolkien: Revised and Expanded Edition** (William Morrow 2023), I wondered whether such a volume could exist for writers from our day. It's hard to envision *The Collected Emails and Text Messages of J.K. Rowling*, featuring the author of the Harry Potter series. Yet *Letters* serves an important function for fans, as the brief foreword to this edition points out, because "*Letters* has become the closest thing we can ever have to J.R.R. Tolkien's autobiography."



The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien
HUMPHREY CARPENTER, EDITOR

Tolkien left us, according to the list on the inside cover, nine published works from his lifetime, plus 20 published posthumously, and an additional dozen volumes of his notes and drafts. It is a monumental corpus. Yet I doubt the idea of a memoir ever crossed his mind. He saw himself as a hobbit, one of the little people of the world, yet confident in his belief that "the great policies of world history, 'the wheels of the world,' are often turned not by the Lords and Governors, even gods, but by the seemingly unknown and weak—owing to the secret life in creation, and the part unknowable to all wisdom but One."

Plus, autobiographies tend to give the "approved" version of a life, and sometimes leave out the interesting tidbits and colorful details that a collection of letters would not. Here we learn the hardships of Tolkien's life, including his many illnesses and the even greater number of ailments facing his wife Edith. We hear him complain of the drudgery of grading papers and sitting through departmental meetings as a professor, but also witness his joy at sharing beers and book drafts with the Inklings.

Chief among that incredible literary club was the equally famed Oxford professor C.S. Lewis, "a very old friend and colleague of mine, and indeed I owe to his encouragement and the fact that in spite of obstacles (including the 1939 war!) I persevered and eventually finished *The Lord of the Rings*." *Letters* acts almost as a diary, recording his dislike of Disney, his affection for alcohol, and his deep Catholic faith.

Of course, Tolkien's life will be interesting to many because of his *legendarium*, his history of Middle Earth. Several essay-length letters provide color, background, and explanation for his books, for example, explaining the penultimate scene of Frodo's struggle with Gollum over the ring inside Mount Doom by reference to the Lord's Prayer: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." The letters also weave Tolkien's own

“Letters is
best enjoyed by
true lovers
of Tolkien.”

life together with his fiction. For instance: “My ‘Sam Gamgee’ is indeed, as you say, a reflection of the English Soldier, of the privates and batmen I knew in the 1914 war, and recognized as far superior to myself.”

Letters is best enjoyed by true lovers of Tolkien. As Humphrey Carpenter explains in the original preface, “It is assumed that the reader will have a fairly thorough knowledge of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.” (I would add *The Silmarillion* as well.) More casual fans looking for an epistolary holiday gift should start with Tolkien’s entertaining collection for children: *Letters From Father Christmas*.

This “revised and expanded edition” contains over 150 new letters, and 45 of the original letters are published at an expanded length compared with the 1981 original. Recall, though, that the letters were originally dashed off, not honed through multiple rounds of editing, so one must sometimes sift dross to grab the golden nuggets—like telling his editor he need not include his academic address, for “professor” is “a title one has rather to live down than to insist on,” or to the same friend as World War II drew to a close, “one is still hesitant to ask news of sons.”

But the work is worth it, because Tolkien explains, inspires, and encourages, for as one letter closes: “Up with the Ents! Down with the Ruffians! And may the King return!” ■

BOOKS

Missing the narrative mark

A flop from a beloved novelist

by BEKAH MCCALLUM



THE SECRET BOOK OF FLORA LEA was written by a Christy Award recipient and set in London during the Blitz. The book seemed Narnia-like in its potential. Well, fans of Patti Callaghan Henry might be disappointed in her latest novel, mostly because the author seemed confused about who her audience might be.

If you do pick up the book, don’t expect Christian fiction.

In 1939, the British government urges parents to send their children away from London. Bridie Aberdeen and her son Harry invite two evacuees, Hazel and Flora Linden, to live in their picturesque cottage near Oxford. Away from their home, Hazel tells stories to

her younger sister, transporting them to a magical land called Whisperwood. The sisters fall in love with the hamlet and find refuge from the horrors of war. All is well until little Flora disappears, leading everyone to assume that she drowned. Everyone, except Hazel.

Two decades later, Hazel works at a rare book shop, trying to move on with her life. When she discovers a book about Whisperwood, it confirms her hope that Flora might have survived.

Because of its emphasis on magic and fairy tales, young adults would be the ones most likely to enjoy the book. It has a

clever plot and includes off-handed references to beloved stories like *The Hobbit* and *Alice in Wonderland*. But there are too many swear words and sex scenes (a couple of them rather detailed), to the extent that I couldn’t recommend this book for any teens. I wouldn’t recommend it for adults either. Henry missed the mark for both age groups by trying for a combination of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and a romantic comedy.

Even women who enjoy light reads might find this one annoying. In one scene, a grown man tells his sweetheart: “You are my fairytale. You always have been.”

Oh, and the Christians are definitely the bad guys, while “Pagans” have an open-minded perspective about the world. Overall, the book lacks a satisfying redemptive arc.



**The Secret Book
of Flora Lea**

PATTI CALLAGHAN
HENRY



BOOKS

Courageous truth-tellers

Dispatches from the front lines of information warfare

by EMILY WHITTEN



FOX NEWS correspondent

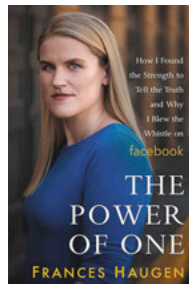
Benjamin Hall was on assignment near Kyiv on March 14, 2022, when shrapnel from a Russian bomb ripped through his vehicle, killing his driver and gravely wounding him. Seeming to hear his daughter's voice say, "Daddy, you've got to get out of the car," he dragged himself out of the mangled car and closer to the road. A Ukrainian military officer found him and rushed him to a nearby hospital.

In his new memoir *Saved* (Harper 2023), Hall first tells of his early years, from his time facing down bullies in a Roman Catholic boarding school to traveling the world with his mother, which primed him for adventure. He then spent more than a decade as a freelance reporter in places like Syria and Afghanistan. In 2022, as Russia invaded Ukraine, he went to Kyiv to cover that conflict for Fox News. Hall chronicles his harrowing journey home after his bombing injury and his painful recovery over the next months.



Saved

BENJAMIN HALL



The Power of One

FRANCES HAUGEN

Christians should note the book isn't about being "saved" spiritually, though Hall is influenced by Roman Catholicism. He or his friends occasionally drink alcohol to excess, use offensive language, and make poor choices—even visiting a voodoo shaman. That said, he courageously risks his life to report the truth, and we see his love grow for his wife and especially his three daughters: "Now all I want to do is sit at the table with them and give them baths and put them to bed and read them stories and kiss them good night."

Frances Haugen's autobiography, *The Power of One* (Little, Brown and Co. 2023), offers a bombshell look at how Big Tech—and particularly Facebook—makes choices that harm society. After Haugen's "civic integrity" unit was disbanded by Facebook, she worked with a *Wall Street Journal* reporter to leak more than 22,000 pages of Facebook's internal communications in 2021: "I wanted to be able to sleep at night, free from the burden of carrying secrets I earnestly thought endangered the lives of tens of millions of people."

Early chapters cover her challenges as a child math prodigy and an awkward teen. Readers also see her develop debate skills and a thick skin at places like Harvard Business School, Yelp, and Google. But readers will most appreciate the summary of what her leaked Facebook communications really mean. For instance, she reveals why Facebook did not act on internal evidence of how its products harmed users, especially teen girls. She also explains how a 2018 decision to promote "engaged" content (that is, content with more likes, shares, and comments) incentivized "angry" speech and led to a "surge of extreme content." Such content can lead to violence in the United States and has fueled genocide in smaller countries like Myanmar.

Haugen's story contains a few instances of coarse language and one scene in which a man exposes himself. But she offers critical insights into technology's impact on our lives and how we can work together to make it better. ■

Far-off worlds and hidden places

by KRISTIN CHAPMAN

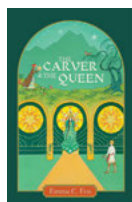


Nothing Else But Miracles

KATE ALBUS

(MARGARET FERGUSON BOOKS 2023)

While Pop is overseas serving during WWII, Dory and her two brothers must manage on their own at home in Manhattan. Surrounded by caring neighbors, the siblings fall into a comfortable routine until a new landlord threatens to uproot them. The discovery of an abandoned hotel, however, offers them a haven of renewed security and hope. Dory also finds comfort by talking to “Libby” (aka, the Statue of Liberty), but it’s the kind of interaction one would expect someone to have with God, not with an inanimate monument. Still, the story emphasizes the importance of family and community and reminds readers that wonderful treasure can be found in ordinary and unlikely places. Note: One use of Jesus’ name in vain. **Ages 9-12**



The Carver & the Queen

EMMA C. FOX

(OWL'S NEST PUBLISHERS 2023)

In this fairy tale set in Imperial Russia, Petr is determined to become a master carver so he can free himself and his best friend Lena from a life of serfdom. Under the tutelage of a gruff but caring old stonecutter, Petr and Lena work to perfect the art of carving malachite while plotting their future together. Their plans go awry, however, and Petr’s obsession with success leads him to seek help from the bewitching Malachite Queen who promises to fulfill his heart’s desires. Her promises come at a cost, though, and Petr soon discovers Lena is his only hope to escape the enchantress’ underworld. The plot offers an allegory for the struggles teens may face from sin’s enticements and the twisting of truth. **Ages 13-17**



Heartwood Mountain

S.J. DAHLSTROM

(PAUL DRY BOOKS 2023)

In the latest Wilder Good installment, Wilder’s friend Corndog has settled into a stable routine with his new foster family. But when a man from Corndog’s past shows up in town, Corndog gets scared and runs away, determined not to fall victim to his past. After Wilder and his friends find Corndog hiding in an abandoned coal mine cave, they must make hard decisions about the best way to help their friend. Alone in the wild, Corndog embraces life as a mountain man and relishes the opportunity to be himself in a way he’s never been able to before. When his past catches up to him, though, Corndog discovers that he no longer has to face hard things alone thanks to good friends and a caring community. **Ages 9-14**



Forbidden Child

GWEN NEWELL

(CANONBALL BOOKS 2023)

It’s the year 2070 and Piper Pascal is a devoted spy for the secret police aboard the *Escape*, a ship carrying the only Americans to survive a great flood 40 years earlier. Piper, 13, knows nothing of life before the flood, only that she will do anything to please their ship’s leader, the Godmother, even if it means ruthlessly turning in anyone who doesn’t obey the rules. But then Piper finds a baby—an illegal organism—and everything she thought was true begins to unravel as she uncovers the web of lies that have entombed her and everyone else aboard the ship. In this debut novel, Newell offers an engaging dystopian read with a strong message of love leading the way out of darkness. **Ages 13-17**



BOOKS

Telling Corrie's story

A fresh biography of the woman behind *The Hiding Place*

by LAUREN DUNN

→ **MILLIONS OF PEOPLE** have read the Ten Boom family story of courage and faithfulness during World War II as shared in the 1971 bestseller *The Hiding Place*. Corrie ten Boom, along with her father and sister, coordinated underground work during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, hiding Jews and other underground workers in their home. Larry Loftis' *The Watchmaker's Daughter* (William Morrow 2023) pulls together information from letters, journals, and books written by Ten Boom family members or their friends to tell about their underground activities and their faith even after Nazis arrested them.

The Watchmaker's Daughter sets out to tell what *The Hiding Place* left out, and it succeeds. Loftis intersperses

accounts familiar to *The Hiding Place* readers with details of Allied and Nazi military tactics and espionage attempts as well as wartime experiences of Anne Frank and Audrey Hepburn, who both lived in the Netherlands at the time.

Loftis includes Corrie's post-war travel, as she told her family's story in more than 60 countries, and a final section that tells what happened to several people during or after the war. He describes Nazi atrocities in slightly more detail than Corrie shared, but his accounts are not overly graphic.

The Watchmaker's Daughter includes ample references to Dutch Christians' faith, including several accounts of various Ten Booms' evangelistic conversations with a Nazi officer who interrogated them individually. "Because I had lived so close to death, looking it in the face day after day, I often felt like a stranger among my own people—many of whom looked upon money, honor of men, and success as the important issues of life," Loftis quotes Corrie. "Standing in front of a crematorium, knowing that any day could be your day, gives one a different perspective."

But while Loftis largely succeeds in including material *The Hiding Place* left out, he ironically leaves out much material that Corrie's bestseller left in. For instance, the Ten Boom family's faith defined them long before the Luftwaffe began bombing Dutch cities, but *The Watchmaker's Daughter* rushes through decades of the family's pre-war story. It's also questionable whether Corrie would have agreed with some of Loftis' comments, such as a mention of Corrie's "Road to Damascus" and his assertion that Corrie's sister Betsie "had taken the place of their father as her spiritual leader and guide."

The Ten Booms testified to God's faithfulness even in unimaginably dark times. *The Watchmaker's Daughter* faithfully puts the Ten Boom story before us again, reminding us that God is working in our times, too. As Corrie wrote to a friend, "It is great to know that whatever we do in love for the Lord is never lost and never wasted." ■



The Watchmaker's Daughter
LARRY LOFTIS



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MOVIE

The Zone of Interest

by COLLIN GARBARINO

► Rated PG-13

► Theaters

IN 1961, HANNAH ARENDT coined the phrase “the banality of evil” to describe Nazi Adolf Eichmann, who helped orchestrate the Holocaust. When Arendt saw Eichmann at his trial, she was surprised to find him so normal. He was a small, balding man who claimed he was guilty of nothing because he was merely following orders. Arendt noted that all kinds of horror could be justified under the guise of doing one’s job.

Jonathan Glazer’s *The Zone of Interest* brings Arendt’s memorable phrase to the cinema, depicting the

boring, everyday existence of a German family living in the shadow of Auschwitz during World War II.

Rudolf Höss (Christian Friedel) is the commandant of Auschwitz in Poland, and his family lives in a house that’s separated from the notorious extermination camp by a garden wall. While Rudolf works long hours managing the tedious logistics of gassing and incinerating thousands of Jews, his wife Hedwig (Sandra Hüller) works to make a home for their five children. In her mind, they have an idyllic life, having found the *Lebensraum*—the Eastern European lands that were the target of Hitler’s expansionism—

necessary for German flourishing. She gives little indication she’s bothered by the horrific price others are paying for her lifestyle.

The movie progresses through a series of mundane events that highlight the evil of the Nazi regime. The family celebrates Rudolf’s birthday, and after hugging his children he says he must get back to work. Hedwig works diligently in her garden. The children go off to school and spend their afternoons at play. And all the while the cries of anguish can be heard coming over the wall.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about *The Zone of Interest* is what’s absent. In this 105-minute-long movie about the Holocaust, Glazer doesn’t show a single Jew. The closest we get to seeing Auschwitz’s victims is a scene in which a worker brings a bundle of fancy clothes for Hedwig and the women of her house to pick through. Dividing up the clothes of the murdered Jews elicits little comment from the household. It’s as if Glazer decided that the Holocaust is too evil to capture on film—as if any glimpse inside the camp would risk trivializing the atrocity. Or perhaps Glazer is suggesting that the erasure of Jews from the movie symbolizes an unjust society’s attempts to erase the minorities it oppresses.

There’s a certain detachment that goes hand in hand with banality, and Glazer crafted *The Zone of Interest* to accentuate that detachment, making it hard for the viewer to get close to this family. Most scenes feature full-body shots emphasizing the distance between the viewer and the Höss family. The dialogue is in German with English subtitles, and the movie has almost no background music. Plaintive cries and shouts from over the wall provide the soundtrack. The movie has an alienating effect on the audience that’s punctuated by even more alienating experimental scenes

“Glazer wants us to consider who might be guilty of propping up systematic oppression today.”

filmed in photographic negative.

During these weird interludes, Rudolf reads the story of Hansel and Gretel to his daughter, unironically recounting a fairy tale about children destined for an oven when that very thing is happening on the other side of the wall. Rudolf thinks he and his family are the story’s heroes, but we know he’s the wicked witch. Glazer wants us to consider who might be guilty of propping up systematic oppression today through adherence to the prevailing system, but the film’s detached style ensures viewers will never identify themselves with Rudolf and Hedwig. We’ll only read our enemies into the narrative.

The Zone of Interest demonstrates the challenge of making a movie that depicts the banality of evil: Banality is actually pretty boring. Glazer ostensibly adapted Martin Amis’ 2014 novel of the same name, but Amis depicts a family’s disintegration through betrayal and murder in the shadow of Auschwitz. Glazer’s movie erases these lurid elements, focusing on everyday life. But even everyday life, separated from Auschwitz by a wall, becomes mundane and tedious after an hour and a half, giving the film an aura of pointlessness. ■



MOVIE

Mr. Monk’s Last Case

by COLLIN GARBARINO

► Rated TV-PG

► Peacock

FANS OF QUIRKY crime shows can rejoice. After more than a decade, Tony Shalhoub returns as Adrian Monk, the obsessive-compulsive detective plagued by a laundry list of phobias.

At the beginning of *Mr. Monk’s Last Case: A Monk Movie*, Monk is struggling. Retired for 10 years, he’s trying to puzzle out a purpose for his life. He was working on a book about his exploits, but the publisher canceled his contract because his prose focuses on minutiae rather than the solving of crimes. To top it off, COVID-19 left the germophobic genius even more of a nervous wreck than usual.

Monk decides the world would be better off without him, so he begins planning his own death. That might sound heavy, but the audience knows that’s a plot device and that their hero is never in serious jeopardy. Viewers

know Monk just needs a crime to solve, and he becomes his old neurotic self when he crosses a tech titan who won’t stop at murder to get what he wants.

Mr. Monk’s Last Case proves to be an enjoyable diversion for fans of the original *Monk* TV series. Besides Shalhoub, most of the core cast return. Traylor Howard and Héctor Elizondo are back as Monk’s assistant and therapist respectively. Ted Levine and Jason Gray-Stanford return as Monk’s law enforcement allies. Andy Breckman, who created the series, pens the witty script.

This movie isn’t much weightier than a typical episode of the series, only running to 90 minutes. The first half-hour gets us up to speed on Monk’s bleak life, and the rest of the movie unfolds more or less like a TV episode. But staying true to the old *Monk* formula works—we get a satisfying police procedural with just the right blend of comedy and drama.

DOCUMENTARY

The Mission

by BOB BROWN



► Rated PG-13

► Theaters

JOHN ALLEN CHAU was martyred in 2018 at age 26. As the new documentary *The Mission* recounts, the Washington state native was seeking to evangelize the Sentinelese, a highly isolated community of 200 people on North Sentinel Island in the Bay of Bengal. On just his second encounter with the island's inhabitants, one or more of them shot him to death with arrows. The saddest part about Chau's story, though, may be in the opposition he faced at home.

In this National Geographic documentary (which has several

images of National Geographic-type tribal nudity), producers Simon and Jonathan Chinn, who have two Oscars and two Emmys between them, paint Chau as a thrill-seeker. Repeated references to Chau's fondness for stories such as Jim Elliott's biography and *Robinson Crusoe* present a secular motivation for his dangerous mission. Video clips and animated reenactments chronicle Chau's teenage and college years, including several outdoor exploits. Voice actors read excerpts from Chau's diary and a letter his father sent to the producers.

Friends, and an anthropologist who wrote a book about the Sentinelese, remember Chau with a

mixture of admiration and disapproval. A member of his anti-porn accountability group laments, "My friend did something stupid and courageous he knew he had no business doing." Chau's pastor declares, "Odds are [Chau's mission was] idealism masquerading as God's calling."

The film brings in Dan Everett, who spent 30 years ministering to an Amazonian tribe, as its missions expert. Everett initially sympathizes with Chau, but then reveals he "abandoned" his Christian faith. In his view, missionary activity "should not be allowed." (One wonders whether this is an uns subtle message from the film's producers.) It's Chau's father, however, whose pain stings the most. Never a supporter of the mission, he blames the "radical evangelical extreme" for his son's "reckless mistake."

I wonder, though: Chau didn't wake up one morning and storm North Sentinel's beaches. And the film shows he researched the Sentinelese people for years, crafting a detailed plan to reach them. His skills as an outdoorsman and marathoner made him readier than most to live in dire conditions. Chau also worked through All Nations, a missionary sending agency. In the film, a representative assures viewers they're "careful to screen [out] candidates who might have a Messiah complex."

So there's evidence Chau had planned carefully. And his death in the field may not invalidate his mission any more than his having lived would have proved his calling. Still, perhaps he shouldn't have gone alone, which isn't the Biblical norm.

Chau's first arrival on the island had resulted in violence, but he escaped unscathed. He wrote in his diary that though he feared a second trip might mean his own death, he accepted God's will for him: "I think it's worth it to declare Jesus to these people." ■

BOX OFFICE TOP 10

For the weekend of Dec. 1-3,
according to Box Office Mojo

- 1 **Renaissance:**
A Film by Beyoncé
not rated
- 2 **The Hunger Games: The**
Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes*
PG-13 • S2 / V6 / L3
- 3 **Godzilla Minus One**
PG-13 • not rated
- 4 **Trolls Band Together***
PG • S1 / V3 / L1
- 5 **Wish***
PG • S1 / V3 / L1
- 6 **Napoleon***
R • S6 / V8 / L5
- 7 **Animal**
not rated
- 8 **The Shift***
PG-13 • not rated
- 9 **Silent Night**
R • not rated
- 10 **Thanksgiving**
R • S4 / V10 / L10

*Reviewed by WORLD

†Ratings from kids-in-mind.com, with quantity
of sexual (S), violent (V), and foul-language (L)
content on a 0-10 scale, with 10 high



THE MONSTERVERSE FILMS AND TV SERIES

- **Godzilla** / 2014
- **Kong: Skull Island** / 2017
- **Godzilla: King of the Monsters** /
2019
- **Godzilla vs. Kong** / 2021
- **Skull Island** / 2023
- **Monarch: Legacy of Monsters** /
2023
- **Godzilla x Kong: The New**
Empire / 2024



TELEVISION

Monarch: Legacy of Monsters

by COLLIN GARBARINO

► Rated TV-14

► Apple TV+

WHILE GODZILLA MOVIES are marked by massive monsters toppling skyscrapers (and mostly ignoring the insignificant people scrambling beneath them), Apple's new series, set in the MonsterVerse, tries to humanize the franchise by taking the action to the street level.

Monarch: Legacy of Monsters explores the aftermath of the destruction of San Francisco that occurred in *Godzilla* (2014). The world still reels from the knowledge that these Titans exist, and governments have developed disaster plans to cope with future attacks. Despite the global stakes, the series' main action involves untangling a family drama.

Cate Randa (Anna Sawai) and her half brother Kentaro (Ren Watabe) try to solve the mystery of their father's disappearance, even though he was a pretty terrible dad. Their search leads them to Monarch, a shad-

owy government agency that's been tracking Godzilla and the other Titans for decades.

The series jumps back and forth in time, fleshing out the Randa family legacy and the history of Monarch. Kurt Russell and his son Wyatt both play Army officer Lee Shaw, one of Monarch's founders, in the present and in flashbacks.

Despite the big money Apple spent, the series has problems. Adding a more human element to the MonsterVerse is a nice touch, but *Monarch* suffers from overwrought melodrama and occasional cringe-inducing dialogue. We also don't get enough monsters. The Titans lie low for most episodes.

The series sticks to PG-13 language, and there's no nudity. But halfway through the 10 episodes, an LGBTQ subplot appears out of the blue. Did Apple delay revealing the main character was gay because they were afraid the show won't find an audience without the bait and switch?

Concerts recaptured

Albums showcase a capricious Dylan and bebop jazz

by ARSENIO ORTEZA



The revisionism didn't hurt "Ballad of a Thin Man" or "It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)." But giving "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right" and "Knockin' on Heaven's Door" the reggae treatment, recasting "All I Really Want To Do" as the heir apparent of Simon & Garfunkel's "The 59th Street Bridge Song (Feelin' Groovy)," and outfitting "I Shall Be Released" for Las Vegas seemed capricious. Critics gave the album a drubbing.

The Complete Budokan is getting a warmer reception. Yet except for a new mix and the addition of "Tomorrow Is a Long Time," "I Threw It All Away," "Girl From the North Country," and Roland Janes and Tampa Red covers, it's hard to see why. Sure, there's more of the music, but the music itself hasn't changed.

The real reason for the belated enthusiasm is probably that, with Dylan currently engaged in what could very well be his final tour, his audience is more grateful than ever for anything bearing his name. Fair enough. Just take the glowing reviews with a grain of sand.

Hot House: The Complete Jazz at Massey Hall Recordings presents in its entirety the legendary May 15, 1953, Toronto performance of the jazz supergroup Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell, Charles Mingus, and Max Roach.

What makes *Hot House* less of an occasion than it might've been is that the concert has been released and re-released before. So the main selling points for owners of 1973's *The Greatest Jazz Concert Ever* or 2004's *Complete Jazz at Massey Hall* are the new edition's negligible "audio restoration" and its inclusion of both the un-overdubbed 13-song program and the six-song 1953 version with overdubbed bass.

Is it the greatest jazz concert ever? The "greatest bebop concert ever" maybe. Yet even then the now 70-year-old performance would only qualify as superlative if bebop qualifies as the greatest jazz genre ever. After listening to what the Parker-Gillespie quintet accomplished that night in Toronto, you just might think it does. ■



OTHER THAN THE WORD

complete, what do *The Complete Budokan* 1978 and *Hot House*:

The Complete Jazz at Massey Hall Recordings have in common? Both seek to capture, recapture, or re-recapture concerts unique among their respective performers' onstage recordings.

Bob Dylan's *The Complete Budokan* 1978 presents the two Tokyo shows initially mined 45 years ago for what at the time was Dylan's third live offering in four years, *Bob Dylan at Budokan*. It was an album that, despite going gold, flummoxed the faithful, many of whom felt that the new arrangements of some of their hero's most beloved songs showcased his 11-member band at the expense of the material itself. They had a point.



The Complete Budokan 1978

BOB DYLAN

Yuletide selections

by ARSENIO ORTEZA



Capriccio Pastorale

CAPELLA DE LA TORRE, KATHARINA BÄUML

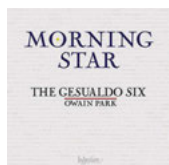
The subtitle, *Christmas Music From Renaissance Italy*, tells you what to expect: sounds made by alto shawm, recorder, sackbut, bass curtal, organ, percussion, and theorbo; vibrato-free singing by two sopranos and a tenor; sacred lyrics in Italian (with German and English translations in the booklet); and melodies akin to those used in period-faithful productions of *Romeo and Juliet*. Of the nine composers (assuming, that is, that the seven identified as “Anonymous” are the same fellow), only Frescobaldi, who provides the title cut, is remotely familiar. Five pieces have gone unrecorded until now—in other words, for approximately 600 years. They were worth the wait.



The Nutcracker Suite

CHINEKE! ORCHESTRA

In the first episode of the 1995 PBS miniseries *Marsalis on Music*, Wynton Marsalis and his jazz combo performed Duke Ellington–Billy Strayhorn arrangements of *Nutcracker* excerpts while a Seiji Ozawa–conducted orchestra performed them Tchaikovsky style. Now, this “[b]lack and ethnically diverse” youth orchestra unites the two, enhancing five Ellington–Strayhorn–arranged movements with strings—the same five, incidentally, that lead off UMG’s new digital compilation *A Night With Duke Ellington* should you choose to compare.



Morning Star

THE GESUALDO SIX, OWAIN PARK

The Feast of the Epiphany provides this album’s raison d’être, with the Magi’s arrival serving as the basis for 10 selections, the presentation of Jesus in the Temple one, and less event-specific references to God’s becoming man the others. The texts (mostly English and

Latin) come from sources old when not ancient (Scripture, liturgies, prayers, poems), the settings from composers ranging from Byrd to Pärt. The four-part, all-male a cappella singing honors the awe-inspiring nature of the feast by inspiring an awe of its own.



Christmas Harmonies

ALED JONES & RUSSELL WATSON

The tenors Aled Jones and Russell Watson released 12 of these tracks last year as *Christmas With Aled & Russell*. And if you liked those, you’ll like the seven that they’ve added for 2023. “Christmas Medley” is somewhat redundant (“In the Bleak Midwinter” and “O Holy Night” appear individually earlier on), but the other six (“The Lord Is My Shepherd,” “The Lord Bless You and Keep You,” “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas,” “Silent Night,” and the two non-Schubert versions of “Ave Maria”) give bonus cuts a good name.



ENCORE

When it comes to Christmas music, nothing bridges the gap between the lowest rung of the high-brow ladder and the highest rung of the low-brow ladder like Windham Hill/Legacy’s *Windham Hill Christmas Collection*. Drawing on the Windham Hill label’s vast storehouse of crystalline seasonal recordings, the 4½-hour, digital-only release compiles 71 selections—almost every one a sacred favorite—and provides a vista-like overview of the label’s better-known and lesser-known artists in the process.

In the former category are the acoustic guitarists Will Ackerman, Alex De Grassi, and Michael Hedges; the pianists Liz Story and Jim Brickman; and the multi-instrumentalist and Oregon founding member Paul McCandless. In the latter are the guitarists Steve Erquiaga and Tuck Andress, the harpist Áine Minogue, and the Celtic-jazz ensemble Nightnoise. That none of them inflict their personalities on the material would be a weakness in most genres. Christmas music is an exception. —A.O.



VOICES **JANIE B. CHEANEY**

A fellow traveler?

Ayaan Hirsi Ali may be coming to Christ in an unexpected way

IN YOUR TRAVELS have you ever met strangers who gave off a certain vibe or overheard conversations with key words that tipped you off: *He (she) is one of us?* Walls come down, personal space dissolves, blessings and sometimes phone numbers are exchanged. Meeting fellow believers in foreign places is like passing through the dry Valley of Baca that suddenly flows with fresh water.

I've followed Ayaan Hirsi Ali ever since she emerged as an outspoken critic of radical Islam, a brave stand that could easily have cost her life. Her confession on the UnHerd website, "Why I Am Now a Christian," both lifted my heart and puzzled my brain, a reaction common to believers and skeptics alike. Her spiritual journey is both common and hers alone. After her family fled political persecution in Somalia to settle in Kenya, she joined the Muslim Brotherhood to parrot anti-Semitic diatribes and burn Salman Rushdie novels. But sent off by her father for an arranged marriage in Canada, she gave up on Islam, jumped ship in Germany, and sought political refuge in the Netherlands.

A famous essay by Bertrand Russell called "Why I Am Not a Christian" helped her let go of religion altogether and seek meaning in politics. While a member of the Dutch Parliament, she collaborated with filmmaker Theo van Gogh on a documentary called *Submission: Part 1*, in which four young Muslim women reveal their sexual abuse by male relatives. For this, van Gogh was shot to death on an Amsterdam street, a fate the assassin

promised for Ali. She escaped to the United States, where she eventually married Niall Ferguson, the Scottish-American conservative author and commentator.

In Ali's confession, I heard only some of what I wanted to hear. As many Christians have observed, her newfound faith seems more pragmatic than personal. She recognizes Christian teaching as the basis for Western freedom and order. She understands that skeptical rationality is powerless against religious extremism. She acknowledges the God-shaped hole in humanity and that she can no longer live without some sort of spiritual solace. "I have much to learn about Christianity"—but where is Christ?

The comments below her essay leaned toward the skeptical, most wishing her well, with the inevitable but: Wasn't she just exchanging one irrational system for another? Isn't the spiritual solace she hungers for merely a crutch? Can't her thirst for social order be found in Enlightenment reason?

"All that the Father gives to me will come to me," Jesus said (John 6:37), but He doesn't say how they will come, and there may be as many ways as there are comers. Does His Spirit touch our hearts first, or our heads? I'm reminded of C.S. Lewis, who, when intellectually convinced that there was a God, became "the most reluctant convert in all of England." The joy he was seeking came later. On the other hand, Christians who were excited about Kanye West's showy, emotional conversion a few years ago must have felt some disappointment when he went off the deep end. That's not to say that one way is better than another. The gospel seed falls on many types of soils, and even the fertile kinds produce in their own way.

But something has happened to Ali. In a Thanksgiving reflection published in *The Free Press*, she says, "Last year, this time, I was in a place of darkness. I felt small, scared, and alone. I shrank away from love. I trusted no one. I felt lost and longed for oblivion." Her husband and children supported her through this dark time, but "Most important of all it took surrender to God to get here, to allow myself to feel at peace with Him."

From *Submission: Part 1* to sweet surrender was a long journey, and she's not arrived yet. Nor have any of us. May she go from strength to strength, through the valley to the sunlit uplands, where "each one appears before God in Zion" (Psalm 84:7) and all travelers meet. ■

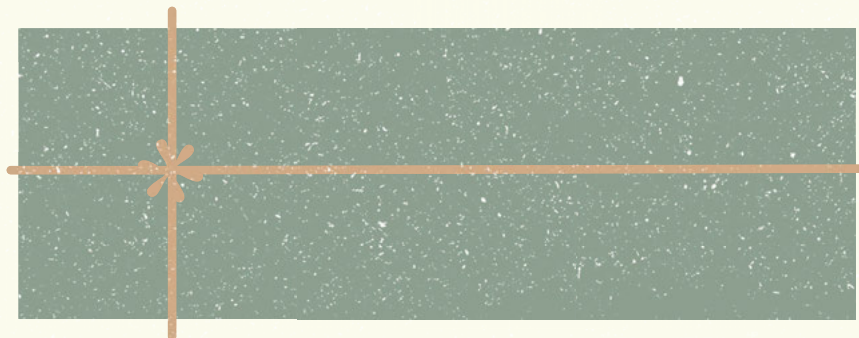
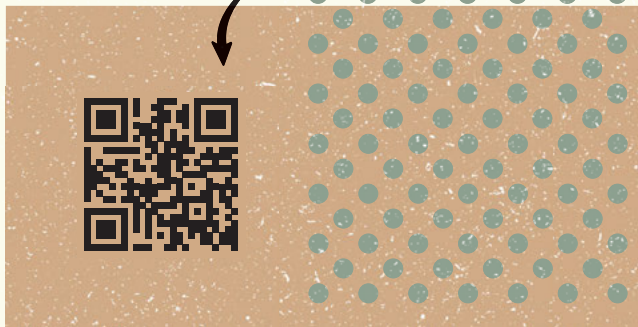


IN CASE OF FRIENDSHIP

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HANDEL'S TRIUMPH

A Christmas classic written for Easter cemented an 18th-century composer's legacy

BY CALEB BAILEY

Illustration by Rachel Beatty



SOURCE IMAGES: HANDEL: DEAGOSTINI/
GETTY IMAGES; NEW YORK, SAN FRANCISCO:
GETTY IMAGES; LONDON: MARKUS
SCHREIBER/AP; NEAL'S MUSIC HALL:
LEBRECHT MUSIC/ALAMY



Ginger Wyrick raps her baton on a music stand. The sound of discordant small talk and squeaking wooden chairs dies out, leaving the cavernous sanctuary silent. It's so quiet inside Charlotte's First United

Methodist Church that the sounds of construction and traffic seep into the century-old building.

In front of Wyrick, underneath a towering set of organ pipes, sit 50 choir members.

Each holds a copy of the best-known classical piece of the Christmas season. A gray-haired man squints at his score through a pair of glasses, while a teenager behind him peers out through a mop of curly hair. The rows of multigenerational singers focus expectantly on the conductor.

Wyrick is a professor of music at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Each year in December, she volunteers to conduct the Charlotte Music Club's

performance of Handel's *Messiah*. It's a challenge she's relished since 2010.

Some of this year's singers are veterans of previous performances. Others are singing the notes for the first time. At least half missed their cue into the previous song and are now scribbling furiously on their sheet music.

"We're shaking off the cobwebs ... that's OK," Wyrick assures the group.

She gestures behind her to the vast, empty sanctuary with its stone pillars, tall arched ceilings, and stained glass windows.

"Allow the architecture to join with us," she urges the singers.

Then she nods to the accompanying pianist. After a few lilting measures, a group of altos begins to sing. "*And the glory, the glory of the Lord.*"

Reverent refrains like this are masterfully woven throughout George Frideric Handel's *Messiah*. Those lyrics, today, have become a staple of Christmas music. Each December *Messiah* returns to churches and concert halls around the world like *The Nutcracker* returns to ballet stages.

Members of Our Lady's Choral Society at Fishamble Street in Dublin perform Handel's *Messiah*.





But Handel didn't write the piece for Christmas. Its debut in 1742 coincided with Easter.

Handel's 18th-century fame waxed and waned, and before writing *Messiah*, he was scraping the bottom of the creative barrel. Opera, Handel's bread and butter, had taken a nosedive in popularity. As his bank account dwindled, Handel refused to answer knocks at his door for fear he'd be hauled off to a debtors' prison.

His friend Charles Jennens had no such concerns. Jennens was a renowned librettist—someone who writes the text portion of long vocal works like operas. In 1742, Jennens sent a newly written libretto to his struggling and impoverished friend. It was made up of passages from the Old and New Testaments.

Inspiration struck, and Handel barricaded himself in his room while he wrote furiously. It only took him 24 days to set Jennens' words to music in a three-part oratorio. He called it *Messiah*.

Handel had an advantage over many Baroque composers. Since he had previously written operas, he knew how to compose a catchy melody. Unlike fugues and minuets, operas have identifiable tunes. They are easy to hum along to. As Handel pored over Jennens' libretto, these hummable melodies flowed from his pen.

Oratorios are like operas but shorter and without sets or costumes. Operas were considered "highbrow music" during the Baroque era and were usually performed in German, French, or Italian. Oratorios were written for the middle class and performed in the audience's language.

Handel took *Messiah* to Dublin, Ireland, for its debut at the New Music Hall on April 13, 1742. The

following year, the piece premiered in London, with King George II in attendance.

During the "Hallelujah" chorus, the monarch rose to his feet. According to royal protocol, the rest of the audience followed suit. Some claim he stood in awe. Others venture he likely needed a good stretch after sitting for two hours. No matter the royal motive, the king began a tradition that continues during *Messiah* performances today.

Even if the king wasn't expressing his amazement, many over the last few centuries have.

Tim Slover wrote the play *Joyful Noise*, an account of Handel's journey to writing *Messiah*. Slover calls it the best-known piece of classical music in the Western canon, which is why many communities today host not only performances but *Messiah* singalongs.

"It was an oratorio given to the people," Slover said.

During this year's first *Messiah* rehearsal in Charlotte, Ginger Wyrick commands the stage like a high school football coach at halftime. If a member jumps the rhythm, her baton raps the music stand, bringing the choir to a halt. Details matter. Cutting words short means you "aren't honoring the note," she barks.

The choir only has five rehearsals before its performance on Dec. 10. And this piece, she reminds the singers, is worthy of an excellent performance.

"When we sing those words, they are transformative," she pleads. "They don't just tell a story. They tell a relationship, the love of God and the love of Jesus Christ, in mercy, that has been shown to His people."

The entire oratorio is 2½ hours long and features three scenes or themes: the Nativity, Christ's life and suffering, and His resurrection and judgment.

The most identifiable movement of the entire piece—the “Hallelujah” chorus—brings Scene 2 to a close.

The Charlotte Music Club performs only part of the entire *Messiah*, with song selections related to the Christmas season. In addition to the famous “Hallelujah” chorus, they sing Movement 12, better known as “For Unto Us a Child Is Born.”

In this buoyant chorus, the melody seems to float between choral parts as each group takes turns carrying the tune.

This year’s performance is the club’s sole opportunity to raise funds for music student scholarships. Many other musical groups use the

In 1818, Boston’s Handel and Haydn Society gave the first full American performance of *Messiah* on Christmas Day. Since 1854, the organization has hosted the annual Christmas favorite without skipping a beat. Even during World War II, the society performed a scaled-down version.

Nearly three centuries after its debut, *Messiah* has been resized to suit venues, audiences, and demand. Handel’s first performance included 60 members. Over a century later, London’s Crystal Palace organized a concert that included 4,500 total cast members.

As of 2019, *Messiah* has been performed 524 times at London’s Royal Albert Hall.



popular holiday performances as fundraisers for various causes. That tie to philanthropy harks back to *Messiah*’s inception.

The debut in Dublin raised funds for a debtors’ prison and two hospitals.

Nearly a decade later, Handel kept the piece alive by performing it at the Foundling Hospital in London as part of an annual benefit concert. He even gifted the musical score to the hospital, ensuring the benefit performances that began in 1749 would continue after his death in 1759. The hospital continued to host them into the 1770s.

Messiah formally entered the Christmas canon when the Caecilian Society of London introduced December performances in 1791. A third of *Messiah* narrates the prophecy and birth of Christ, making it a fit for Advent as much as Lent.

American musicians soon took note of the seasonal relevance.

After his death, prominent composers took turns tipping their cap to Handel.

Beethoven called him “the greatest composer who ever lived.” Mozart aimed at reorchestrating Handel’s *Messiah* after the composer’s death. With that attempt came high praise for Handel. “When he chooses,” Mozart reportedly said, “he strikes like a thunderbolt.”

Ace Collins, author of multiple books on Christmas songs and traditions, fondly compares Handel’s fame to that of Elvis.

“He wasn’t writing classical music,” Collins said of the 18th-century composer. “He was writing the pop hits of his time. Just a different style than we had.”

But Collins believes the seasonal swap from Easter to Christmas gets credit for *Messiah*’s continued prominence: “Christmas music is unique in the fact that it’s a time machine.”

Decades after their lifetimes, performers like Burl

For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth
 Hallelujah Hallelujah
 King of Kings and Lord of Lords
 And He shall reign forever and ever
 Hallelujah Hallelujah



LEFT TO RIGHT: Handel's *Messiah* performed on the UCLA campus in Los Angeles, 1970; the Trinity Choir with the Trinity Baroque Orchestra performs *Messiah*; George Frideric Handel; page detail from "Hallelujah" chorus.

Ives, Perry Como, and the Carpenters all return to the airwaves and personal playlists each December. Their contemporaries who didn't have a Christmas hit faded into musical history.

"Christmas hits make you immortal," Collins said. "I mean, when was the last time you heard a Bing Crosby song other than a Christmas song?"

Immortality was certainly on Handel's mind when he composed *Messiah*, but not the pop culture variety.

Near the oratorio's conclusion, alto and tenor soloists exchange the following words:

"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law."

Ginger Wyrick describes the first time she heard *Messiah* on national broadcast with one word: *joy*.

"Singing these words each year, we as believers remind ourselves and center ourselves on who we are, and the promises of God fulfilled, and the promises that are yet to be fulfilled," she said. "It's just transformative."

The First United Methodist Church in Charlotte has hosted a Christmas *Messiah* performance for the last 20 years. Wyrick has conducted most of them, and each year brings the same amount of anticipation.

A rich text calls for rich musical accompaniment. And according to Wyrick, that's what makes Handel's work so remarkable.

"Handel understood the theology that he was writing," she said. "There are places where things are repeated three times. That's Trinitarian. And so he understands the theology. It's not just well-crafted counterpoint. It is well-crafted theology." ■

Ukrainian expats turn to soft diplomacy

to shore up support for the war effort

by William Fleeson

CULTU



RAL COMBATANTS



Ukrainian band ProBass & Hardi on the United Help Ukraine float during the Fourth of July parade in Washington, D.C.

THE UKRAINIAN FOLK DANCERS leaping and twirling across the stage under a cloudless September sky never seemed to tire. While the rainbow of streamers flowing from the women's floral wreath headdresses whipped and fluttered, the dancers' smiles held steady. Their vibrant costumes included white, blue, and green, but red provided the dominant shade—a tribute to Ukrainian tradition. In Slavic cultures, the color symbolizes blood—and life.

The dance performances made up just one part of the three-day Washington Ukrainian Festival at St. Andrew Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral in Silver Spring, Md. Between performances, visitors munched on piroshki dumplings and shopped for unique handmade crafts like the vyshyvanka, a traditional embroidered shirt. Other, less-traditional items made direct reference to Russia's February 2022 invasion.

"When life gives us lemons, we make Molotov cocktails," declared one T-shirt emblazoned with an exploding, cartoon-style bomb. It hung above a table of patches, stickers, and other military paraphernalia in contrast to the festival's more lighthearted offerings.

The Molotov cocktail is an apt symbol for the Ukrainian cause: a homemade weapon, built by civilians determined to support a battle they are desperate to win. While that fighting spirit remains widespread among Ukrainians and their diaspora in Washington, D.C., recent polls suggest support among U.S. legislators and voters has cooled.

That's given renewed significance to this annual festival that began in 2002 in the shadow of the capital. While diplomats and professional lobbyists address growing opposition in Congress, Ukrainians living in the United States are doubling down on a softer form of cultural diplomacy aimed at shoring up grassroots support for their country's cause.

The rising disagreement over funding for Ukraine, and open-ended support for the country in general, has come to be known in Washington's policy circles by its vivid shorthand: "Ukraine fatigue." It mirrors a discernible trend of waning support across the rest of the country. According to numbers released by Gallup in November, 41 percent of respondents said the United States is doing "too much" to help Ukraine, while just 25 percent say we're not doing enough. Only 33 percent feel the country is doing the "right amount." Sentiments also vary drastically along partisan lines: 62 percent of Republicans say we're doing too much, compared with 44 percent of independents and just 14 percent of Democrats.

On Capitol Hill, the question of continued aid to Ukraine complicated proceedings to find a new speaker for

RIGHT: Dancers perform the Ukrainian dance Shevchyky (Shoemaker's dance) at the annual Ukrainian festival at St. Andrew Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral in Silver Spring.

FAR RIGHT: Maryna Baydyuk (left), president of United Help Ukraine, and leaders of other Ukrainian organizations walk with members of the Ukrainian diaspora in the Fourth of July parade.



the Republican-controlled House of Representatives and pass a government funding bill. The House Freedom Caucus and other conservative Republicans have grown increasingly adamant that Washington reduce or eliminate what they say is excessive funding to the beleaguered Eastern European country. A September open letter, signed by more than two dozen Republican senators and House members, vowed to oppose further aid until the White House can provide more clarity on how U.S. funds are being spent.

"What is our strategy, and what is the president's exit plan? What does the administration define as victory in Ukraine?" the letter demanded to know.

The Ukraine funding debate encountered a new complication when Hamas attacked Israel in early October. Newly elected House Speaker Mike Johnson of Louisiana supports separating funding for Israel from that for Ukraine, while Democrats want the aid packages combined under one bill. Johnson has voted against further Ukraine aid in the past. Democrats, including President Joe Biden, broadly support continued aid to Ukraine. The issue is sure to feature prominently in next year's presidential campaigns.



For Ukrainians like Tamara Woroby, a university professor who attended the recent festival in a white vyshyvanka with blue floral embroidery, the brinkmanship on Capitol Hill—with Ukraine aid treated as a so-called “political football”—sets a deeply troubling precedent.

“It concerns me,” she said in between trading hugs with passersby. Woroby’s Ukrainian parents immigrated to Canada after World War II, and she now serves St. Andrew as president of the parish council.

The desire to help the war effort remains a top priority at St. Andrew. Every week, the church sends a 67,000-pound shipping container of supplies to Ukraine, Woroby told me. A local pharmaceutical group has donated \$6 million worth of Ukraine-bound goods through the church’s channels. St. Andrew also printed and delivered 10,000 Ukrainian-language prayer books for soldiers and civilians.

Woroby sees U.S. aid to Ukraine as a cost-effective means of countering Russia, one of the few countries with nuclear weapons, whose potential menace reaches far beyond the borders of Ukraine.

Russia’s aggression remains a daily reality for many expatriates who visited the festival. Nina Kravetz, 21, left her native Kyiv before the war to study economics in New York City. Her father is a Ukrainian army general, and her brother also serves in the military, she said. That makes her loved ones—two generations of one family—targets in Russia’s war against Ukraine.

Kravetz, dressed for the festival in a black-and-red vyshyvanka, came to Maryland from the Big Apple to celebrate Ukrainian culture, in spite, or perhaps because, of the war that keeps grinding on.

“There is the war, but this festival is life,” she said.

WHILE THE UKRAINIAN diaspora maintains its grassroots advocacy, Ukraine-focused diplomacy has continued in parallel at the highest levels. In September, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy spoke at the United Nations headquarters in New York City, then came to Washington to engage U.S. officials at the White House, Congress, and the Pentagon. Analysts described the visit as less successful than the one

Zelenskyy made to Washington in December 2022, when he addressed a joint session of Congress. Zelenskyy asked to do the same this fall—and House Republicans declined. Then-Speaker Kevin McCarthy said Congress “just didn’t have time.”

Below the commanding heights of international diplomacy, Ukrainians living in Washington are conducting diplomatic efforts of their own. Ukraine House, a cultural center in Washington’s tony Kalorama neighborhood, sits among the capital’s concentration of diplomatic offices, embassies, and ambassadors’ residences. Opened in 2021 with a visit by Zelenskyy, Ukraine House is officially private but exercises well-connected influence in the city, including regular events in “close synergy” with the Ukrainian Embassy, according to the Ukraine House website. Events run the gamut from concerts of Ukrainian folk music played on the bandura, a traditional stringed instrument, to Independence Day socials held every August to celebrate Ukraine’s break from the Soviet Union in 1991.

Marianna Falkova directs Ukraine House. She told me that when the war began last year, “the biggest challenge was to keep on going.” She and her team initially canceled events but reversed course the following month.

“We decided that keeping silent is what Russia wants us to do,” Falkova said, her voice full of indignation. Ukraine House held its first humanitarian fundraiser the same month, together with the U.S. Peace Corps, to help buy and deliver first aid kits to Ukraine.

Today, the organization’s “Unbreakable” program coordinates medical care for Ukrainian victims, mostly children, who need prosthetic limbs after Russian attacks. In partnership with U.S. organizations, the center has so far raised \$40,000 to bring five Ukrainian patients to the United States for treatment.

Ukraine House also has taken its cultural diplomacy on the road with exhibits traveling across the United States. One photo series called “Relentless Courage: Ukraine and the World at War,” features striking images from the front lines.

FOUR DAYS BEFORE the Russian invasion, the Washington-based nonprofit United Help Ukraine (UHU) held a rally at the Lincoln Memorial.

Ukrainians and their supporters gathered on the monument’s steps to protest Russia’s buildup of troops and weapons on the Ukrainian border.

During the initial days of the invasion, UHU staffers and volunteers took to the phones, said Maryna Baydyuk, a Kyiv-born Ukrainian and longtime D.C.-area resident who teaches neuroscience at Georgetown University. Baydyuk has served as UHU’s president since 2018.

“We were calling members of Congress, asking, ‘What are you doing?’” Baydyuk recalled. The U.S. government immediately sent \$350 million in military aid to Kyiv.

Total U.S. aid to date has swelled far beyond that. It now stands at nearly \$77 billion, according to the Kiel Institute for

the World Economy, a prominent German research group. About \$47 billion went to direct military aid, while the rest supported nonmilitary needs like government funding and humanitarian assistance. Total Ukraine aid makes up about 0.3 percent of U.S. gross domestic product and amounts to just under 10 percent of the Defense Department budget, according to the Kiel Institute.

The discussion of U.S. funding for Ukraine, and the competing ideas on how to support the country from abroad, have evolved along with the war. During the conflict’s early months, Baydyuk said UHU decided its cultural diplomacy was “not as useful” as providing hard assistance in the form of money, logistics support, and battlefield supplies like medical kits, tourniquets, and bulletproof vests.

The group’s efforts have not gone unnoticed among Ukraine’s official diplomats. As a part of his visit to Washington in September, Zelenskyy awarded Baydyuk and UHU a National Order of Merit, which recognizes exceptional national service.

Amid the new normal of a longer war, UHU’s strategy for U.S.-based engagement has had to adapt, Baydyuk said. The group’s awareness team shifted its focus to raising funds



for Ukrainians by organizing concerts, festivals, art sales, and other specifically cultural means to promote the Ukrainian cause.

In late October, UHU hosted a Ukrainian festival at Truro Anglican, a church in Fairfax, Va. The partnership between Truro and UHU began with a student in the church's English-as-a-second-language ministry. It serves learners from dozens of countries in the diverse immigrant communities in Washington's suburbs. That student, a Ukrainian woman, also worked as a volunteer with UHU. She asked to use the church grounds to hold a festival celebrating Ukrainian life and culture. Funds raised through the festival support Ukrainian children and others displaced by the conflict.

Matt Yi, Truro's director of outreach, said the number of English-language students from Ukraine has grown since the larger war began, though a Ukrainian community existed previously at Truro and in the area. The church's members, Ukrainian or not, have connected local Ukrainians with the English classes, helped them find jobs, hosted war-displaced Ukrainian families, and assisted with practical needs, like clothing and furniture, that come with resettlement.

Despite pockets of local support like this, Baydyuk admits "Ukraine fatigue" is real. But she believes the same arguments in favor of continued support for the country still apply, even as the war grinds toward its two-year mark in February.

Baydyuk notes Washington gave Ukraine security guarantees three decades ago, when it left the Soviet Union and began to develop as an independent country. Those guarantees included a 1994 agreement known as the Budapest Memorandum, in which Ukraine agreed to surrender its Soviet-era nuclear arsenal—a significant national security gamble—in exchange for pledges of peace from both the United States and Russia.

Washington offered support for Ukrainian sovereignty then, and the letter and spirit of that agreement have only grown more important since, Baydyuk insists. Yet the language of a diplomatic accord often fails to translate to action—or to the prevention of action, in the case of Russia's current invasion.

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a U.S.-based policy research center, has criticized the Budapest Memorandum as unenforceable and too vaguely worded to carry much weight in courts of international law. The center

"We decided that keeping silent is what Russia wants us to do."



Flags in yellow and blue symbolize the Ukrainian flag at Ukraine House in Washington.

also faulted Ukraine for long neglecting its own military.

A Carnegie report from June called the Budapest agreement a "prime example of a model not to be repeated."

But Baydyuk insists the Budapest Memorandum still holds security imperatives for Russia, Ukraine, and the United States: "People can say, 'This is not our war,' but the U.S. has an obligation to protect."

But when asked what she would say to someone with no particular stake in Ukraine's current struggle, Baydyuk summarized her argument—and the argument of millions of Ukrainians—in moral terms.

"This is not [just] a conflict," she said. "This is a war between good and evil. It concerns anyone who values human rights, sovereignty, democracy, independence. This is a black-and-white issue. If you believe in good, you should care about Ukraine." ■

—William Fleeson is a writer and journalist based in Washington, D.C. His work has appeared in BBC Travel, National Geographic, and Newsweek



GRAVE ASSUMPTIONS

Claims of mass burial sites in Canada spark rash of church arsons

by SHARON DIERBERGER

BERNARD AKUM'S stomach lurched when he saw the urgent text: "Smoke is pouring out of the church!" An immediate second text announced the Royal Canadian Mounted Police were on-site and the fire department was trying to douse rapidly spreading flames. Akum's mind raced. And so did he.

Panicked, the 41-year-old parish priest jumped into his car. Weaving in and out of traffic, he sped to St. Bernard Catholic Church in Grouard, a small hamlet in northern Alberta. Cars full of gawkers blocked his path, so he abandoned his vehicle and sprinted toward the church. Fueled by adrenaline and ignoring firefighters' shouts, he dashed inside to grab items from the altar. He scrambled outside moments before the ceiling of the 121-year-old church collapsed.

"I wasn't touched by any fire. I didn't inhale any smoke. I feel like that was a miracle," Akum tells me. As he describes that May morning seven months ago, he shakes his head as if still in awe over his narrow escape.

The next day, police arrested two men and charged them with arson. They were drunk and have so far refused to talk about why they set the church ablaze.

Akum has his suspicions. He believes St. Bernard was targeted—part of a long streak of crimes directed against mostly Catholic but also Protestant churches in Canada.

By July, arsonists and vandals had destroyed or damaged at least 83 sanctuaries across Canada over the course of two years, according to True North, the media arm of Calgary's True North Centre for Public Policy. More churches have erupted

St. Bernard Catholic Church
in Grouard, Alberta

“Zero human remains have been discovered so far at any of the residential schools where groups claimed ground-penetrating radar identified them.”

in flames since then. Although not all incidents are connected, many began with a false claim that gained world-wide attention.

The fires started in June 2021, a month after the leader of a First Nations tribe in British Columbia claimed ground-penetrating radar had discovered 215 unmarked children’s graves at the now-shuttered, church-run Kamloops Residential Indian School. Soon, other First Nations tribes reported that radar had detected nearly 1,000 more unmarked graves at the sites of other boarding schools for Indian children on church properties. First Nations groups across Canada said these findings proved terrible abuse happened to children at the schools, where they say many vanished.

In 2022, First Nations groups homed in on St. Bernard, which operated a residential school from 1880 to 1969. They said ground-penetrating radar found 169 unmarked children’s graves on the church-school grounds.

That’s why Akum believes the church was set aflame in May—retribution for assumed abuses of another era.

While arsonists have destroyed churches around Canada in the name of supporting the indigenous, many of the churches they’ve ruined are filled with people they say they’re trying to help.

St. Bernard is no different: 90 percent of its congregation is indigenous.

“After the fire, many members came to me and said, ‘We are so sad this has happened to our dear church,’” said Akum, raising his hands in a gesture of puzzlement. “‘The residential schools were sometimes bad, but how can someone within our own community do this?’” A native of Cameroon, Akum didn’t expect to find such deep-seated emotions in the tiny Grouard community of fewer than 200 souls.

THREE months after the St. Bernard fire, Chief Darren Nepinak of the Pine Creek First Nation made a startling admission on Facebook: Excavations hadn’t found any human remains at the Pine Creek Residential School, where ground-penetrating radar had previously pinpointed them. The ground anomalies turned out to be unrelated soil disturbances.

In fact, zero human remains have been discovered so far at any of the residential schools where groups claimed ground-penetrating radar identified them, said Tom Flanagan, professor emeritus of political science at Calgary University.

But the news came too late for St. Bernard and the other churches targeted by arsonists.

Flanagan refrains from saying, “I told you so.” He was one of the few academics and politicians who cautioned against making assumptions about what, exactly, the radar showed.

More than a year ago, Flanagan said claims of mass unmarked graves of indigenous children had created nationwide “moral panic” and “near hysteria.” He called such repeated reports “the biggest fake news story in Canadian history” because no hard evidence supported them.

The intense, gray-haired professor tells me many people were all too ready to believe the worst because universities and Liberal Party politicians continue to fan flames of guilt over past wrongs at the schools. Others joined in, often afraid to appear politically incorrect. Genuine wrongs and abuses occurred, he says, but other claims are unproven or exaggerated. Still, over the last 30 years, a narrative has grown that the schools were really dens of horror, abuse, and genocide. News of presumed unmarked graves seemed to confirm the narrative—and it spread like wildfire.

To prove his point, Flanagan recounts what happened within days of the first 2021 claim of mass graves: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau ordered federal building flags flown at half-staff for a record-breaking five months. The



Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Church near Redberry Lake, northwest of Saskatoon, burns on July 8, 2021.

government pledged another \$40 billion to indigenous individuals and groups. It designated Sept. 30 as a new federal holiday: National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

International headlines (including at **WORLD**) blared stories about the graves. The pope flew to Canada to apologize publicly on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church and ask for God's forgiveness.

Historically, the Catholic Church operated most of the more than 130 government-mandated residential schools, with several Protestant denominations overseeing many of the

rest. The federal program ran from about 1883 to 1996. Roughly 150,000 indigenous children are estimated to have attended the schools, though Flanagan says that number has never been verified.

When Canada initiated the residential school program in the 1800s, politicians, churches, and educators embraced it as a progressive method to assimilate Native children into larger Western culture. Flanagan says many Indians wanted the government to help their children with education, food, and shelter, especially during harsh winters. But when stories of forced

family separation, abuse, and missing children proliferated in the 1990s, the government changed its stance and started paying billions of dollars in reparations to all indigenous people affiliated in any way with the schools.

The 2021 announcements of burial site discoveries seemed to validate those stories of harm and disappearing children. Some activists called anyone who disagreed a "genocide denier." Others started burning churches.

ARNOLD Viersen is a conservative Member of Parliament from northern Alberta who lives near the sites of several arsons.

I caught up with him as he was hauling hay home for his cow. He pulled over to chat while his young son, Danny, one of his five children, sat quietly in the passenger seat. When Parliament isn't in session, Viersen is an auto mechanic. He's also friends with Bernard Akum, the parish priest.

"Although I may not agree with Catholic doctrine, I'm horrified by what happened to St. Bernard, the oldest church building in Alberta, and the many other affected churches," says Viersen, an evangelical Christian. "I feel a need to defend the Church, defend Christianity, defend faith, because the whole issue has been another way to attack the Church."

Less than an hour from Viersen's hometown of Barrhead, Alberta, arsonists razed a 113-year-old church in Morinville in 2021. Only a smoldering pile of charred bricks and church bells remained. Alberta's then-premier, Jason Kenney, called the fire a "criminal act of hate-inspired violence." At his prodding last year, Alberta more than doubled funding for places of worship to beef up security, but many churches have yet to update their systems.

Since the initial flurry of reporting on the 2021 church fires, Viersen is disappointed but not surprised by the near lack of attention from the national media and from Trudeau on the

CANADIAN TOWNS REPORTING CHURCH ARSON ATTACKS



ongoing problem. “When a mosque or synagogue gets spray-painted, it’s national news, repeated over and over,” he says, adding that it should never be OK to attack any house of worship.

Viersen is also chagrined by how the media jumped on the bandwagon when First Nations claimed they’d found unmarked graves. He notes it’s well known that churches and residential schools usually provided on-site cemeteries: “It’s not uncommon to find graves in a graveyard,” Viersen says with a grimace. He’s trying hard to be tactful.

Flanagan, too, speaks to incongruity: In years past, grave markers across Canada were often made of wood. They have long since disappeared at both residential school cemeteries and other Canadian cemeteries after years

of brutal weather—leaving unmarked burial sites throughout the country that prove nothing about missing children.

The narrative of residential school deaths should be based on evidence, not conjecture, he insists. “Death rates were high in the Indian community. Many children were often brought to schools because they were orphans. Disease was prevalent, especially tuberculosis.” He and others say the claims that children’s deaths were suspicious—based on faulty assumptions from radar equipment—harmed the country. And churches paid the price.

Viersen agrees. “The Native people I represent just want to get on with their lives,” he says. “Their focus is on helping their communities ... addressing issues like joblessness and drugs.”

Many indigenous communities are fraught with alcoholism, drug addiction, poverty, and other social problems. “That’s where our attention and resources should be,” Viersen adds.

Although the accusations of unmarked graves haven’t been proven, Viersen surmises the fires have continued anyway because criminals and mischief-makers now view churches as easy targets. Within a week of Chief Nepinak’s announcement about the lack of human remains, arsonists destroyed a Winnipeg Church of God sanctuary. It had no affiliation with residential schools.

Viersen illustrates church vulnerability with his own story of a woman in his hometown who tried to set a church ablaze. A witness took photos of her dousing the building with accel-

erant from a fuel container, then trying to light it. The witness quickly extinguished the flames while the woman jumped in a black SUV and fled. Law enforcement officials caught her the next day, but they do not believe her crime was politically motivated.

“People have simply found out they can often get away with attacking churches,” Viersen observes. “She was one who got caught. But whatever her—or others’—motivation, it seems like it’s become a ‘thing to do.’” He notes many of the churches are rural, still have inadequate security, and often can’t afford insurance.

Many of the recent church fires, though deemed arson, remain unsolved, with no known motive.

AS in the United States, no national government organization in Canada tracks crimes against churches. (The FBI tracks designated hate crimes against religious organizations.) Most information only can be gleaned through contact with local provincial fire marshals, police, or mounties or from community media reports. Officials won’t talk about ongoing investigations, but say no one has died

in any church fires. The Canadian Security Intelligence Service declined to respond to information requests.

An Alberta mounted police spokesman did confirm the numbers of church arsons shot up to 30 in its province alone since the unmarked burial site claims in 2021. Just over one-third of those happened this year. In 2019 and 2020 combined, church fires tallied only seven.

Flanagan says the human remains story has dropped off the national media’s radar and the national political scene. Ditto for the ongoing church attacks. Most Canadians seem totally oblivious to the church arsons, Viersen says. Only a few church newsletters and conservative news sources have addressed the fires since 2021, despite this year’s surge.

Although First Nations groups loudly condemned the church burnings initially, they’ve made no public apologies since their excavations turned up nothing. A government representative said, “This does not negate the experiences and living memory of horrific abuse experienced by indigenous children in residential schools.”

Members of Parliament echoed that emphasis. In October, a federal parlia-

mentary committee struck down a motion from Viersen condemning the church arsons and reaffirming freedom of religion and assembly. The motion also called for attackers to be brought to justice. But Liberal MP Jaime Battiste shut down debate, asserting the topic is “triggering” to many who attended residential schools.

First Nations groups aren’t doing further excavations now, but opinion is divided over whether they will continue to look for suspicious unmarked graves or stop disturbing ground they consider sacred. Impartial researchers are delving into church records to identify children who died—children some say simply disappeared.

Viersen doesn’t think the residential schools were ever a good idea because they separated families, but he says reports about them contain mixed reviews. Regardless, he roundly condemns the church burnings, as do many of the indigenous in his district.

That contrasts with Trudeau, who said in 2021 that burning churches is wrong, but “understandable.” He’s remained conspicuously silent since excavations failed to turn up human remains at the Pine Creek site.

Meanwhile, Canadian and provincial governments continue to pay reparations to First Nations and other indigenous groups. And Catholic churches and the Church of England periodically apologize anew for past harms at residential schools. Flanagan and a group of his colleagues continue to call for more evidence of abuses and thorough record-checking.

Some congregational leaders, including Bernard Akum, may never learn why arsonists targeted their churches. But Akum, being from a country governed at one time by the German, French, and British, says he understands the struggle between indigenous people and later arrivals.

And he knows those wounds can only be healed through forgiveness. ■

The Roman Catholic church at God’s Lake Narrows First Nation in northern Manitoba burns on May 6, 2022.





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NOTEBOOK



POLITICS

Bullets in the bush

Western Australia aims to tighten already-strict gun laws

by AMY LEWIS

AT STEELO'S Guns & Outdoors in Narrogin, Australia, owner Bevan Steele sells guns, camping gear, and outdoor equipment. According to "Steele," as he's locally known, customers sometimes drive two hours southeast from Perth, the coastal capital of Western Australia, to shop.

When Western Australians were forbidden from leaving their state during COVID-19 a few years ago, Steele says, people rediscovered childhood pastimes. They bought motorbikes, fishing gear, and camping gear. And guns. Families found that using a modest box of .22-caliber bullets to shoot at targets provided all-day entertainment for 8 Australian dollars—less than the cost of a two-hour movie at the theater.

That could change next year. Although Western Australia already has the strictest gun laws in the country, Paul Papalia, the state's police minister, has proposed sweeping gun control legislation to promote public safety: Lawmakers plan to vote in early 2024 to tighten shooting rules and make their state the first in Australia to restrict the number of guns a person can own—10 for

farmers and competitive shooters, five for recreational shooters—and require online registration for each shooting event. Licensees would also need an annual mental health check.

In Western Australia, police struggle to curtail illegal gun importation and use. The reform plan, which includes a gun buyback scheme, is ostensibly meant to reduce the number of guns that could be used to commit crimes. Yet the reforms don't address illegal guns. Many farmers depend on licensed recreational shooters to help protect their land and livestock from feral animals. When some of those shooters lose their licenses under the proposed laws, landowners may have to protect thousands of acres alone.

Australia, unlike the United States, does not have a constitutional guarantee of gun ownership. The continent's penal colony past meant keeping guns out of the hands of citizens. Today, self-defense is not an approved need for ownership.

The country's federal gun laws saw significant reform in 1996. Twelve days after an attacker shot and killed 35 people and wounded several others in Port Arthur, Tasmania, Parliament enacted countrywide legislation banning semiautomatic and pump-action shotguns and rifles from civilian ownership. (Farmers and ranchers are exempt.) The government bought back →

Bevan Steele explains the workings of a Lithgow LA102 rifle at Steele's Guns & Outdoors.



and destroyed 650,000 privately owned guns. Officials enacted a 28-day waiting period, background checks, and a state-by-state gun registry.

Australian gun-related homicides, already in decline before the buyback, by 2020 had decreased to 0.08 deaths per 100,000 people. (The U.S. rate that year was 4.05 per 100,000.)

One thing the 1996 laws didn't prohibit was states enacting even stricter controls. Western Australia will likely take advantage of that option. Both parliamentary houses enjoy a Labor Party majority. Papalia says the new buyback scheme will remove up to 13,000 guns of the current 360,916 registered to civilians. Steve Harrison, an advocate for the lobbyist group Shooters Union Western Australia, says he will likely lose his licenses and his six guns, scopes, and reloading equipment under the new law, because he

"The new buyback scheme will remove up to 13,000 guns of the current 360,916 registered to civilians."

A salesperson checks rifles in a gun shop display in Sydney, Australia.



would not be able to prove his need for the types of guns he owns.

For now, firearms owners can shoot their bolt- or lever-action long guns anywhere on private property with permission. (Handguns may only be discharged in a sporting club.)

Harrison says gun dealers made permission letters from property owners available to gun license applicants who had to demonstrate their need to own a gun. He says the Western Australia police commissioner was generous about approving such applications. But will that last?

The proposed legislation requires landowners to upload data electronically for each hunter or target shooter on their property—each day they shoot. Steele anticipates this additional regulatory hassle will discourage hunting. He predicts increased mobs of feral animals will wreck fences and water sources. Not only kangaroos but herds of feral camels, donkeys, horses, goats, wild dogs, and pigs roam the arid reaches of Western Australia.

"We've got a big issue with pigs at the moment," Steele says. "Pigs don't just destroy the environment. They also eat livestock. They're attacking sheep and baby lambs, because they taste good."

Police Minister Papalia made his proposals public on Oct. 17 and closed feedback after 29 days, despite a 13,000-signature petition to extend consultation.

Steele thinks the current debate superimposes the American culture war on Australian outdoorsmen. "Even though we emulate you in a lot of things, our gun culture over here is very much 'waltzing Matilda,'" he says, using an Australian phrase that alludes to bush camping, traveling, and shooting whatever you and your family need to eat.

During the pandemic, Steele's typical customer didn't want a firearm to protect his family, he says. "He wanted a firearm in case the grocery stores shut down and he had to go and shoot a kangaroo to keep his family alive." ■



Students at University of the Pacific

EDUCATION

Expedited enrollment

Can “direct admissions” fix a college attendance slump?

by BEKAH MCCALLUM



THE CALIFORNIA-BASED

University of the Pacific is sending letters of acceptance across the country to an unusual group of students: those who haven’t yet applied. That’s because the school uses an increasingly popular recruiting method called direct admissions, in which students who meet a predetermined set of criteria—usually weighted GPA or test scores—are automatically approved and invited to enroll.

Many schools have begun adopting this admissions model. This October, Gov. Brian Kemp announced that 45 Georgia colleges would offer direct admissions, joining states like Hawaii and Wisconsin. Direct admissions appears to be a low-risk option for schools to boost declining enrollment rates and tailor their expectations. Schools might also use it as a back door for minority recruitment.

In 2022, University of the Pacific partnered with Niche, a college

search site, to provide direct admissions. Some 1,300 students accepted direct admissions offers at Pacific this year alone. Vivian Rendon, the school’s senior director for first-year admission, says the new process gives students a wider view of their options and allows colleges to set academic standards. “Kind of like a match-making process where we have our set of criteria,” said Rendon. “If the student matches what we’re looking for, they automatically get the direct admissions offer.”

Before rolling out the nation’s first direct admissions program at its public colleges in 2015, Idaho had the lowest college enrollment rate. A report published in *Research in Higher Education* last year indicated that direct admissions boosted enrollment in Idaho by about 12 percent.

And many colleges need the boost. According to the U.S. Department of Education, college enrollment dropped 15 percent

between 2010 and 2021. Adam Kissel, a fellow at the Heritage Foundation, says enrollment has declined for multiple reasons, including high costs: The average college student shoulders over \$37,000 in student debt, so many Americans choose alternatives like technical schools. University of the Pacific has a daunting sticker price (over \$70,000 for on-campus students), so it includes a potential scholarship amount in its offers of acceptance. Direct admissions might encourage young people to consider college if they’re on the fence. “There’s a psychological effect of being told that you’re already admitted,” says Kissel.

Direct admissions may help colleges compete for those dwindling applicants. Because Americans had fewer children around the 2008 recession, there will be fewer college-aged students after 2025.

The end of affirmative action has played a role in the direct admissions trend. When the Supreme Court ruled against race-conscious admissions this year, the Biden administration recommended direct admissions as a way for universities to pursue campus diversity. The Common App, another college planning website, has a direct admissions program that targets low-income and first-generation students. Out of 33,000 admissions letters recently sent out through Common App, though, only 6 percent of students subsequently applied.

Students from abroad, often lacking parental support, may find it especially difficult to apply to U.S. colleges, according to Rendon, who was once an international student herself. She hopes direct admissions can aid these students and American students, too.

Pacific is helping to “remove the hurdles and obstacles for students,” Rendon says. “And that is really the future of admissions.” ■



SCIENCE

Going with the gut

A pill-like device could monitor critical vital signs

by HEATHER FRANK



WOULD YOU SWALLOW a pill that senses your heartbeat?

That may sound like science fiction, but it's actually the latest development in modern medicine. The size of a vitamin capsule, Celero Systems' VM Pill detects small vibrations in the body associated with breathing and heart rate and can indicate if a person stops breathing. The pill has important implications for treating serious respiratory and cardiac conditions.

A study published Nov. 17 in *Device* describes the successful first human trial of the new device. Researchers tested the VM Pill in 10 sleep study participants at West Virginia University

Medicine's Sleep Evaluation Center. The device reported participants' breathing rates with 92.7 percent accuracy. In comparison with external vital monitoring machines, the VM Pill monitored heart rate with 96.2 percent accuracy.

The VM Pill opens up possibilities for monitoring vital signs outside a hospital setting. Scientists say the device could diagnose a sleep disorder without putting someone through the hassle of an overnight stay in a sleep lab, for example. It could also detect changes in respiratory status associated with conditions like asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

RISKY INJURIES

Researchers examining the relationship between concussion history and suicidal behavior in U.S. high schoolers found that boys with multiple concussions are at a much higher risk of attempting suicide. Their recent study adds to the pile of evidence confirming that concussions affect mental health.

Publishing their findings Nov. 16 in the *Journal of Athletic Training*, the researchers analyzed survey data from over 28,000 high schoolers. They reported that teen boys who had two or more concussions in the past year were twice as likely to attempt suicide than males who only had one concussion. Suicide attempts increased for teen girls with one concussion, but remained relatively constant with multiple concussions.

Lead author Jacob Kay noted that males are less likely to discuss mental health struggles. "In the context of concussion, this could mean there are even fewer red flags among males intending self-harm," he said in a press release. —H.F.

COVID-19 VACCINE UPTAKE DWINDLES

Approximately half of U.S. adults don't plan to receive the latest COVID-19 vaccine, made available in September. According to a KFF survey, only 20 percent of adults had received the updated vaccine as of early November, with just 1 in 4 reporting intentions to get it. Survey respondents also indicated shrinking concern about COVID-19's spread during the holiday season: Only 26 percent said they were worried about catching the virus. —H.F.



Redistricting duel

Wisconsin Supreme Court weighs electoral maps

by STEVE WEST



IN LATE NOVEMBER, the Wisconsin Supreme Court heard arguments in a gerrymandering case that could upend the state's electoral map. In the lawsuit, voters represented by a left-leaning law firm are challenging the constitutionality of a voter map that the formerly conservative high court approved in 2022.

Voters represented by Law Forward asked the Supreme Court to weigh in on the case in August, one day after Justice **Janet Protasiewicz** was sworn in after a hotly contested race. Her election swung the court to a 4-3 liberal majority. The challengers contend the 2022 map violates a state constitutional provision that requires electoral districts be "contiguous."

In the Nov. 21 hearing, attorneys for the voters argued that 75 districts on the 2022 map included isolated "islands" that, while law-

fully annexed by municipalities in the district, do not connect with the remainder of the district.

Luke Berg, deputy counsel for the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty, which intervened in the appeal, called the lawsuit a "transparent attempt to use the new Wisconsin Supreme Court majority to reshape Wisconsin's political landscape." Stakes are high, as a redrawn map would likely give Democrats an opportunity to retake power in the Legislature.

Periodic redistricting—necessary because of population changes—is a politically infused process, since most states give elected legislators the power to draw the often oddly shaped districts. Charges of partisan gerrymandering (drawing voter maps to favor a political party) are common: Lawsuits are also ongoing in North Carolina and Maryland.



DILUTING NORTH CAROLINA'S BLACK VOTES?

Days before Thanksgiving, two black voters in North Carolina challenged electoral maps for the state Senate adopted by the GOP-controlled Legislature. They say an October redistricting violates federal law by diluting black votes.

The voters claim the General Assembly's redistricting plan breaks up multiple majority-black districts in a so-called "black belt" in the state's northeast, diluting their ability to elect a black candidate. Unlike political gerrymandering, racial gerrymandering is prohibited by the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which bars voting practices that discriminate on the basis of race.

The lawsuit asks a federal court to draw new lines—including a "minority opportunity district" in the state's majority-black counties.

In early December, black and Latino voters filed a similar lawsuit challenging North Carolina's federal congressional districts. —s.w.



VOICES **ANDRÉE SEU PETERSON**

The problem with Buddha

Detachment from reality is not the solution to suffering

CHRISTIANS ARE NOT SO DIFFERENT from Buddhists. We all put our pants on one leg at a time, and we all experience life as suffering.

This morning my husband and I sang the 19th-century Christmas hymn “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear” and were struck by the melancholy strain woven through the angels’ glad tidings: “heavn’ly music floats o’er all the weary world; above its sad and lowly plains they bend on hov’ring wing; and ever o’er its Babel sounds the blessed angels sing. And ye, beneath life’s crushing load, whose forms are bending low, who toil along the climbing way with painful steps and slow.”

There are moments of happiness in life, but they are only moments, preceded by suffering and followed by suffering. A Texas inmate explained to me how he ended up in prison after his forlorn quest for relief from the solitariness, nastiness, and brutishness of life: “Nothing lasts long enough,” he wrote.

The Buddha’s first noble truth or *dukkha* is that “life does not satisfy,” and he cites three kinds of sufferings, only the first of which is in the physical domain. The second and third stem from dissatisfaction and impermanence, and angst over the lack of substance of the soul.

“Other than that, Mrs. Lincoln, how was the play?”

Well, the play was not so good, mourns Jaques in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, delineating the several stages of disappointment: the infant “mewling and puking”; the schoolboy “creeping like a snail unwillingly

to school”; the lover “sighing like a furnace”; the soldier “seeking the bubble reputation even in the cannon’s mouth”; the justice “with eyes severe”; the sixth age, “with spectacles on nose and pouch on side”; the last scene, “second childishness and mere oblivion, sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.”

I can tell that my children see me as having moved into the last scene, and they wonder at my happiness.

I met a remarkable woman once who had a strategy regarding suffering. She was beautiful with two healthy children and a husband who adored her, but complained that she could enjoy none of it because she was hagridden by a fear of “the other shoe dropping.” Her remedy was to be sure to worry sufficiently every day. That is, she chose preemptive miserableness so that misery would not be able to jump out of the shadows to ambush her.

There’s a Pyrrhic victory for you.

The Buddha’s approach is somewhat different, his recommendation being the cultivation of a state of mind of detachment. It reminds me of one of C.S. Lewis’ methods confessed in his short book about the death of his wife, *A Grief Observed*: “There are moments, most unexpectedly, when something inside me tries to assure me that I don’t really mind so much, not so very much, after all. Love is not the whole of a man’s life. I was happy before I ever met H. I’ve plenty of what are called ‘resources.’ People get over these things. Come, I shan’t do so badly. One is ashamed to listen to this voice but it seems for a little while to be making out a good case. Then comes a sudden jab of red-hot memory and all this ‘commonsense’ vanishes like an ant in the mouth of a furnace.”

Buddha is right up to a point when he talks about cultivating a mindset. But the mindset that gives freedom is not detachment from reality but the embrace of *more* reality. It is the truth that sets free, but only the whole truth. “Spectacles on nose and pouch on side” are incomplete considerations.

What my children do not see is that I set my sights beyond this present world and therefore do “not grieve as those who have no hope.”

“For lo, the days are hast’ning on, by prophet bards foretold, when with the ever-circling years comes round the age of gold; when peace shall over all the earth its ancient splendors fling, and the whole world give back the song which now the angels sing.” ■



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The Handel monument in front of Market Church in Halle, Germany

Beautiful theology

What Handel taught the world about Jesus

by LEIGH JONES

CALEB BAILEY spent a good portion of his childhood sitting on a piano bench, training his fingers to play pieces by Chopin, Rachmaninoff, and Gershwin. He never cared much for Baroque music until he listened to Handel's *Messiah*. Caleb's story on page 44 explains how the piece became a Christmas classic, even though the famous composer wrote the music for Easter. That's also when Caleb heard it for the first time.

What do you remember about that

first, live performance? I've never heard the complete piece live, but I was 17 when I heard the "Hallelujah" chorus performed by the Master's University Collegiate Singers at Forest Lawn in Southern California. By then, I'd tired of the classical shtick—dressing up to sit still for two hours and barely keep my eyes open. But when the group of singers belted "Hallelujah" in harmony, I was entranced. In fact, it took me a few seconds to realize everyone but me was standing. There was something about the four-part melody

that worked so well with the text. Heavenly.

***Messiah's* libretto is deeply theological. But so is the music. How did Handel incorporate theology into the score?** I think Charles Jennens is the unsung hero. That libretto is rich. Which meant the music also needed to be rich. The words inspired the notes.

Dr. Paul Plew is the former dean of the School of Music at Master's, and he conducted that "Hallelujah" performance I attended. When I called him a couple of months ago, he pointed out some of Handel's masterful compositions that matched the text. Keys had meanings in the Baroque period. The key of D Major symbolized victory. The "Hallelujah" chorus was written in D. "For Unto Us a Child Is Born" comes before the "Pastoral Symphony," which is all instruments, no voices. Plew compares the placement of the symphony to a Selah in the Psalms. It encourages reflection on the previous lyrics. Wonderful Counselor. Prince of Peace. And it's as if Handel said, Let me give you a second to digest that.

What's one thing you learned about music while reporting this story that 11 years of piano lessons didn't teach you? I realized the plight of musicians was no different 300 years ago. They were still paying bills on a piece-by-piece basis. I was shocked reading about Handel's lowly status when he wrote *Messiah*. It also makes the piece a true triumph—rags to riches, so to speak. And at the end of the day those riches became gifts to the sick and abandoned. I think that's because Handel understood the free gift of grace *Messiah* heralded. ■



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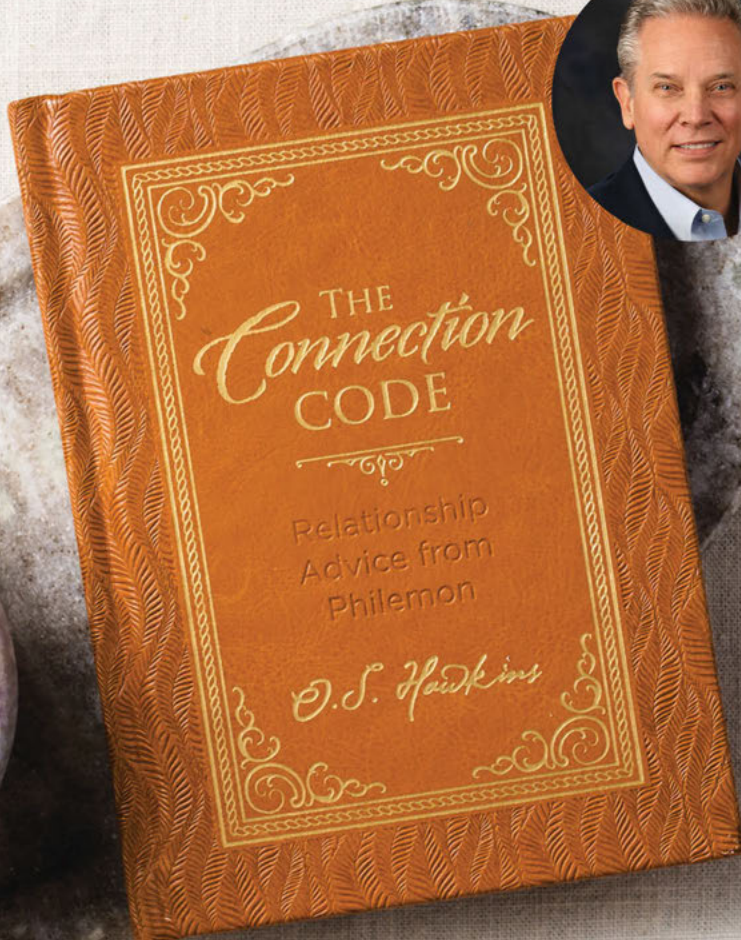
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