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SALVO

Issue 69 Summer 2024

RED HAIRING

Intersexuality

How Rare Is It? *by Dr. Leonard Sax*

Fake Science News

Jonathan Witt

Killer Air Solution

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Darwin's Bold Bluff

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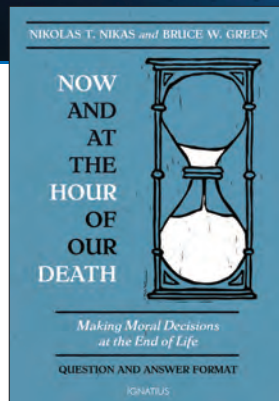
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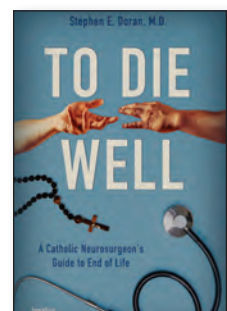
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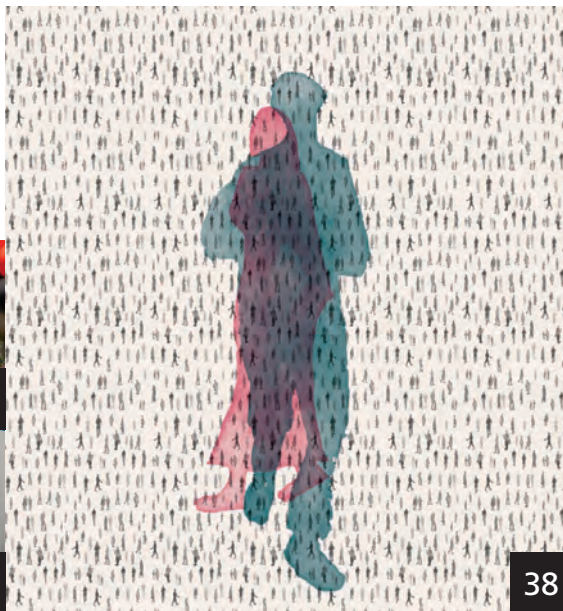
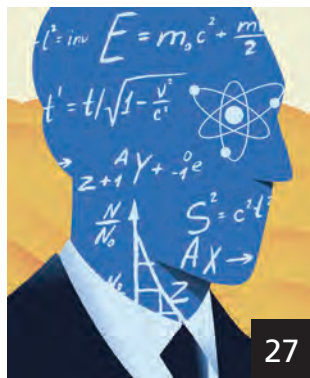


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SALVO

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salvo n. (säl'vō)

1. A group of shots fired simultaneously for effect
2. A forceful verbal or written assault

A publication of The Fellowship of St. James (www.fsj.org), *Salvo* is dedicated to debunking the modern myths that have undercut human dignity, all but destroyed the notions of virtue and morality, and slowly eroded our appetite for transcendence. It also seeks to promote the Christian worldview. The opinions expressed by individual contributors are not necessarily those of the editors or publisher.

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REASONS TO BELIEVE



Summer 2024

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Rick Reed (pp. 7, 46) is a retired secondary teacher of English and philosophy. For forty years, he challenged students to dive deep into the classics of the Western canon, to think and write analytically, and to find the cultural constants reflected throughout that literature, art, and thought.

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Farewell, Science

Exposing Social Agendas Flying Under the Banner of Science

by James M. Kushiner

In “Unscientific American” (*City Journal*, Spring 2024), James B. Meigs admits that “American journalism has never been very good at covering science. In fact, the mainstream press is generally a cheap date when it comes to stories about alternative medicine, UFO sightings, pop psychology, or various forms of junk science.”

Worse, in my view, headlines for stories about real science often overstate the significance of the details being reported. Jonathan Witt (see p. 43) catalogs a bag of parlor tricks commonly used in popular media to keep pushing the evolutionary narrative despite the lack of relevant evidence presented in the hyped article. This is a consistent pattern in articles touching on evolution.

And then there are the stories that should have been covered but were not. Denyse O’Leary (p. 48) reviews a new book, *Darwin’s Bluff*, which documents both Darwin’s admission that his celebrated *Origin* was only an *abstract*, lacking in supportive evidence, and his unfulfilled promise to publish a second book providing the scientific details. Neither the popular media nor any prestigious scientific publications such as *Scientific American* ever bothered to point this out. But *Salvo* has.

Ulterior Agendas

Poor science journalism goes beyond just defending Darwin. Straightforward, evidence-based truth-seeking about other matters is being subverted, too. *Scientific American* has lately ignored facts that might offend the woke or challenge the progressive agenda.

Meigs tells how Michael Shermer, the agnostic/atheist founder and publisher of *Skeptic* magazine, was booted from writing his regular “Skeptic” column for *Scientific American* after 18 years.

One of Shermer’s rejected columns dealt with “the fallacy of excluded exceptions,” which refers to the wrongful *exclusion* of counterexamples that do not fit the pattern of a favored hypothesis. Citing the common belief that sexually abused children grow up to be abusers, Shermer pointed out that while *some* do, *most* do not. But his editor would not publish this fact lest it give the appearance of downplaying sexual abuse. Shermer then submitted a column about how discrimination against various minorities has been *decreasing*, but it, too, was axed. Meigs notes dryly, “For progressives, admitting that any problem—racism, pollution, poverty—has improved means surrendering the rhetorical high ground.” In the last column he submitted, Shermer wrote that “intersectionality”—which pigeonholes individuals into identity groups—is “a perverse inversion” of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s call for a color-blind society. With that, Shermer’s contract with *Scientific American* was summarily terminated.



False Progress

Another example of “progressive” agendas subverting science is the case of “Intersexual Politics,” by Leonard Sax (p. 38). Dr. Sax describes the creation of a new “fact” about the incidence of those born with intersex features (i.e., indeterminate male-female physical characteristics, especially genitalia).

The “fact” now touted is that the intersex population makes up 1.7 percent of the whole—or “nearly two percent”—so that people born intersex are now said to be as common as people born with red hair! This new number helps support the delusion of a sexual “spectrum,” instead of the natural binary of male/female. But, as Sax reveals, this rate of intersex occurrence is a *one hundredfold* inflation of the true number, based on a radically redefined meaning of the term *intersex*; it’s an agenda-driven, unscientific “fact.” The use of false numbers gives the impression of mathematical objectivity to a bogus claim about what is normal human sexuality. You can always find a cheap date if you want one.

We invite you to dig deep into *Salvo* and savor the *openness* to truth that sets us free. We’ve nothing to hide and everything to discover. ☸



Salvo welcomes letters in response to articles and blog posts or raising matters of interest to readers. Letters may be edited for space; please keep them under 250 words.
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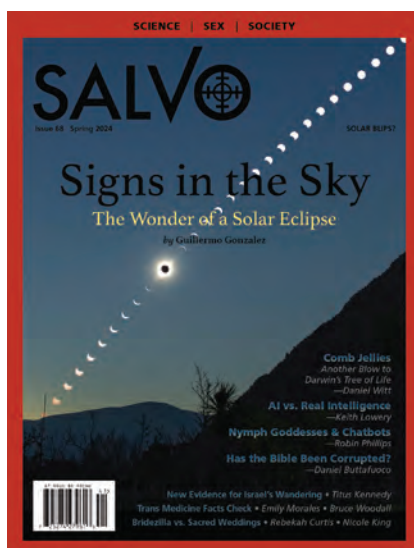
Holy Marriage

When Barbara and I got married, it was in the church where she grew up. It was an hour after Sunday service was over. Guests had cake and punch afterward. The simple ceremony was what we wanted, and Barbara's mother and father planned and paid for it. Barbara was 19 years old, and I was 21. We did not live together, nor did we have sex, until after our wedding. This was out of our mutual respect for each other.

Our 55th anniversary will be this June. Our four children were born in the 1970s, and all four also got married in churches at young ages in the 1990s. We lost two children a few years back, but our two remaining daughters have both been married 30 years.

Success is by the grace of God, not by our works. I have seen the beating marriage has taken for many years. It seems the further one gets away from the truth of the Word of God in the Bible, the worse marriage and everything else turns out.

Finally, I take exception to the words of "Ryan" quoted in "Bridezilla Revisited" (Spring 2024): "All most men want at their wedding is the bride, beer and



Doritos." This comment belongs at a sporting event, not an article referring to a Holy Rite instituted by God.

—Harry Swofford

Reply:

Thank you for the faithful testimony you have made of your life, and for sharing it here. We can only hope for the sake of Ryan's children that his philistinism is a recessive trait, and more dietary than devotional.

—Rebekah Curtis

Connecting Promiscuity & Loneliness

Terrell Clemmons's article addressing "Premium Sex" ("Cornering Your Market," Spring 2015) certainly grabbed attention, and it courageously took on a vitally necessary subject. The argument is cogent, well-articulated, and interesting on several levels.

On February 14th this year, a 50-something woman shared with me that she is alone despite her admitted promiscuity. She said she wouldn't have a date on Valentine's Day, as none of the fellows in her sexual circle would even think of doing something "romantic." Her life experience

dovetailed with the article's point. She had set a very low price on what she herself said she is excellent at providing: sex. And she's alone as a result.

Ms. Clemmons's "sexy" piece may influence some people to change their thoughts and behaviors in ways that actually benefit everyone. What a concept!

—Richard Stevens

Reply:

What a concept indeed. Angry feminists decrying male chauvinism and misogyny, while also giving themselves to men for nothing, call to mind the saying, "There are none so blind as those who will not see." I, too, hope it causes some women (and men!) to reevaluate their relational priorities.

—Terrell Clemmons

Stretched, Sweaty & Delighted

I am a premier-issue *Salvo* junkie with a limited sphere of deep knowledge—primary care medicine and developing-world missionary work are where I live day to day. Consequently, much of the marvelous offerings by the *Salvo* gang stretch me long and hard on some very philosophical and technical details—often with sweaty palms and a racing heart—to consider places I've never been and point me to further reading on subjects where I am at best a novice. It's one of the delights of reading *Salvo*.

—Bruce Woodall, MD

Reply:

Given what we face in our crazy culture, it's often been with sweaty palms and racing hearts that we've had to put together each issue of *Salvo* over the past 18 years! We are gratified to know that it has been a delight to you from the very beginning. Thanks for staying the course!

—James M. Kushiner



Awesome (or Not)

by Rick Reed

AWESOME: *adj. arousing an emotion variously combining dread, veneration, and wonder that is inspired by authority or by the sacred or sublime*

Awesome derives from Norse. Around 1300, we find *aue*, meaning “fear, terror, great reverence.” *Aue* comes from an Old Norse word meaning “fright”: *agi*. Add the Old English adjective-forming element *some* (“tending to; causing; to a considerable degree”), and you get *awesome*, which meant “profoundly reverential” in the 1590s and “inspiring awe or dread” by the 1670s.

Reverential Fear

The translators of the King James Bible chose the word *awe*, a derivative of *aue*, three times, each instance occurring in a psalm. Perhaps Psalm 33:8 best captures the long-standing force of this powerful noun. “Let all the earth fear the Lord: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.” Since that publication in 1611, the translators of nearly every major English Bible have chosen *awe* as the fittest word for “the fear of the Lord,” which is indeed the meaning of the Hebrew word *yirah*, so translated. Over time, this fear became identified with *reverence*.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) offers “immediate and active fear; terror, dread” as the earliest English definition of *awe*.

It then explains that the definition passed gradually into “dread mingled with veneration, reverential or respectful fear; the attitude of a mind subdued to profound reverence in the presence of supreme authority.” We can still see elements of that understanding in the *OED*’s third definition: “The feeling of solemn and reverential wonder, tinged with latent fear, inspired by what is terribly sublime and majestic in nature, e.g. thunder, a storm at sea.” In dictionaries published as late as the latter part of the 1900s, *awe* retained this definition: “an emotion variously combining dread, veneration, and wonder that is inspired by authority or by the sacred sublime” (*Merriam-Webster online dictionary*).

Linguistic Degeneration

Today, however, we hear “awesome” used to describe anything from a timely grand slam to the latest Marvel Universe movie to a new flavor of ice cream. The casual usage of this adjective was first recorded in 1961 but gained traction in the 1980s and has flourished ever since. This raises a question: how did such a somber and severe word come to mean “extremely good”?

Linguistic weakening such as this arises in part from hyperbole. Americans tend to exaggerate in their daily speech. A person claims to be “freezing” when he is only cold, or “starving” when he is only hungry. Such hyperbole is meant to emphasize the state described. However, describing something that is merely ordinary as “awesome” not only demonstrates a weakening of the word’s original force but also reflects the erosion of regard for God. In short, it is a symptom of our culture’s fading realization of who and what God is—something that was widely understood less than a century ago, even by those who had rejected him and who might have rightly used the term to describe a Gothic cathedral, Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*, or the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

The informal usage demonstrates something more than mere linguistic weakening. It demonstrates a cultural change that leaves not only the language but every speaker who uses the word in this manner impoverished. Neither a contemporary Christian band nor Taylor Swift is likely to inspire the “dread, veneration, and wonder” spoken by previous generations of theologians, poets, hymnists, preachers, and ordinary, God-fearing men and women.

So take care when using the word *awesome* to limit its use to those things which inspire the wonder specific to God. In this way, we can better hold to the fear of God of which David, Solomon, and the prophets wrote in Scripture. ☉



Coercive Trans Meme Debunked

Countless parents of gender-dysphoric youth have been stifled into affirming their child's transgender identity with



the kneejerk question, "Would you rather have a dead daughter or a living son?" A Finnish study published earlier this year in *BMJ Mental Health* has now debunked both unstated premises behind the morbidly cynical retort. The study involved more than 2,000 individuals experiencing gender distress and 16,000 control subjects. It found that (1) gender dysphoria was not associated with a higher risk of suicide, and (2) for those who sought it out, "gender-affirming" care did

not reduce suicide risk.

While the study did find higher mortality among the gender dysphoric than the controls (by both suicide and other causes), when psychiatric treatment histories were taken into account, the higher suicidality associated with gender distress evaporated. "When specialist-level psychiatric treatment was controlled for, neither all-cause nor suicide mortality differed between the two groups," the researchers concluded. Rather, the "main predictor of mortality [was] psychiatric morbidity." Put differently, gender transition is not an evidence-based treatment for preventing suicide. •

Sources: https://www.mercatornet.com/trans_guilt_trip_debunked; <https://mentalhealth.bmj.com/content/ebmental/27/1/e300940.full.pdf>

Brutal Questions

Nature magazine was launched in 1869 as a polemic for promoting Darwin's naturalistic views. In early 2024, *Nature*

published what physicist and IT specialist David Coppedge calls a "Devastating Critique of Origin-of-Life Research." Coppedge commended the authors, biochemist Nick Lane and bioengineer Joana Xavier, for their bravery in writing

an assessment that "threatens to unmask all the pretensions of the circus actors and their publicists in the media." The duo identify several mysteries that "nobody has figured out," despite numerous well-funded naturalistic approaches in origin-of-life (OoL) research. The mysteries include where genes and proteins come from, how to unify the splintered field of OoL, and how to build a coherent framework for OoL research. The questions Lane and Xavier raise, says Coppedge, "are brutal." •



Source: <https://evolutionnews.org/2024/02/from-nature-a-devastating-critique-of-origin-of-life-research/>

When Abortion Activism Backfires

For 20 years, 40 Days for Life (40DFL) has held peaceful prayer vigils outside abortion centers. By January 2024, a year and a half after *Dobbs* overturned *Roe*, 40DFL was holding *more* campaigns and seeing *more* babies saved, *more* abortion centers close, and *more* abortion workers quit than ever before. In a weirdly comical post-*Roe*

turn of events, some centers are now seeing abortion supporters turn out to *protest* 40DFL.

Abortion activism has included satanic music, adults dressed up as genitalia performing sex-themed pantomimes, anarchists blocking streets and chanting slogans while banging on pots and pans, and a witch pronouncing a curse on prayer

volunteers. Calling law enforcement only makes it worse for the clinic; the last thing the nondescript abortion center on Main Street wants is attention. Not only do the spectacles turn many paying customers away, but the clashes serve to accentuate the sharp distinction between the unhinged nature of abortion activism and the peaceful presence of those offering abortion-vulnerable women choices other than abortion. •

Sources: 40DFL email updates January 24, 2024; March 15, 2024; <https://www.40daysforlife.com/en/backfired>; <https://www.40daysforlife.com/en/bizarre-stories-from-the-front-lines>

Easter Shoots & Sprigs

While acknowledging that we live in a world rife with developments that are distressing for Christians, Michael Cook, editor of *Mercator*, reported what he called “green shoots, unnoticed sprigs of good news” in Easter vigil data among Catholics worldwide. London’s Westminster Cathedral, for example, which holds 3,000, was filled to capacity on Good Friday. One worshipper, turned away, walked to the historic church of St. James in Spanish Place, only to discover that it, too, was full. “Friedrich Nietzsche is dead,” he tweeted. “King Christ the Crucified and His holy Catholic Church are alive and well!”

Cook also noted that baptisms

and conversions are up in the UK and France, as well as in American cities such as Los Angeles and Newark. The data prove nothing, he acknowledged, but do suggest “that beneath the pollution and the rubble, Christianity is stirring. People are looking for the transcendence, forgiveness and unselfish fellowship that are missing at a gay Mardi Gras.” In the words of converted porn star Bree Solstad, “God’s

forgiveness and mercy is real. If someone as broken and sinful as me can be redeemed and converted, there is no doubt anyone ... can also be saved by His divine mercy”—to which every Easter Christian might simply nod and say, “Amen.” •



Source: https://www.mercatornet.com/easter_signalled_a_new_springtime_for_christianity

Self-Cancelled

Speaking of Easter, organizers of a “Transgender Day of Vengeance,” which had been scheduled to take place near Nashville, Tennessee, on Easter Sunday, cancelled the event after *The Daily Wire* publicized it. Event sponsor Boro Fondo explained that “vengeance” did not mean violence,

but rather “is merely trans people existing in such a difficult world.” Fondo announced:

“Event Canceled. Due to misleading headlines from right wing news sites, we have received many threats. ... We decided the threat was too great,



and we don’t want to risk anyone’s safety.” The organizers did not respond to requests for specifics or evidence of said threats. •

Sources: <https://www.dailywire.com/news/tennessee-venue-cancels-trans-day-of-vengeance-after-daily-wire-article>; <https://www.instagram.com/p/C5Hvi1fOWGa/>

Bringing Down Pornhub

In 2020, when Laila Mickelwait launched the “Traffickinghub” campaign to hold Pornhub accountable for enabling sex trafficking and other criminal sex abuse, Pornhub was the 10th most-visited site on the internet with some 130 million visits per day. Thanks to Mickelwait and those who signed on with her, by spring 2024,

80 percent of Pornhub’s videos had been taken down; Visa, Mastercard, Discover,



and PayPal had all cut ties with the site; and it had been permanently removed from Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. Pornhub also faces 12 lawsuits totaling billions in potential damages and has been criminally charged by the U.S. government for profiting from sex trafficking. Like David determined to take down Goliath, Mickelwait says, “We aren’t done yet” and urges supporters to “keep the pressure on” until the site is entirely shut down. •

Source: https://www.mercatornet.com/thanks_to_one_woman_s_vision

Killing Me Softly

Once introduced into a medical bureaucracy, euthanasia tends to metastasize like cancer. People are increasingly choosing to die, not because they are terminally ill, but due to such reasons as mental distress, economic uncertainty, and even climate and social-media anxiety. The Netherlands' 2023 euthanasia report indicates 20 percent more euthanasia deaths for psychological reasons over 2022 numbers. Meanwhile in Belgium, deaths for psychiatric conditions

nearly doubled from 2022 to 2023. One in five 2023 euthanasia deaths in Belgium were cases in which death was not otherwise expected in the near future, an increase of 39 percent over 2022; some of those included children and adolescents.

Theo Boer, a former member of the Netherlands Euthanasia Review Committee, says that death by euthanasia has now gone from "being a last resort [to] being a default option." Reporting on the 2023 data, Alex Schadenberg of the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition concluded, "The 22-year experiment with euthanasia in Belgium is fatally flawed. It



has resulted in the abandonment of the disabled, the mentally ill, the suicidal and the victims of child abuse to hopelessness and State sanctioned death by lethal injection." •

Sources: <https://alexschadenberg.blogspot.com/2024/04/healthy-autistic-28-year-old-dutch.html>; <https://alexschadenberg.blogspot.com/2024/04/belgium-2023-euthanasia-report.html>

50 Shades of Legal Gray Area

Next up in the theater of the absurdly tragic, cases involving rape accusations grow ever

more complicated as *consent* becomes the new Maginot Line demarcating legally permissible sex from sexual assault.

What happens when consent is withdrawn midstream? What qualifies as legally actionable revoked consent? How rapidly must a man respond? If she murmurs,

"Wait," meaning, "Stop, I'm not so sure about this anymore," but he interprets "Wait" as, "Slow down and wait for me" and fails to stop instantaneously, is he guilty of assault? Depending on the judge, the answer could be yes.

An infamous case involved Kevin Ibbs, an Australian man convicted and jailed for rape after taking too long to stop upon revoked consent. It later came out that the whole thing was a setup. Ibbs's wife had arranged for a friend to seduce him and then revoke consent so he could be charged with rape and she could have the marital home. Ibbs was later acquitted, but only after losing his reputation, business, and assets. He later committed suicide. •



Source: <https://www.theepochtimes.com/opinion/consent-interruptus-what-happens-when-consent-is-withdrawn-5584943>

Target: Western Christianity

A 2024 report titled "Free to Believe?: The Intensifying Intolerance Towards Christians in the West" highlights a disturbing trend of Western governments targeting Christian individuals,

churches, and organizations for punishment or prosecution. The report documents 168 incidents across 16 Western countries, all of which have taken place from 2020 to the present. Infractions include silently praying outside an abortion facility, holding a

sign, displaying Bible verses, protesting drag queen story hours, and engaging in faith-based forms of education. The report also noted that Christians have been arrested for protesting the sexualization of children and that teachers and coaches have been fired for expressing their beliefs about human sexuality. •

Source: https://www.mercatornet.com/new_report_warns_of_intensifying_intolerance_towards_christians_in_the_west

Trans Fraud Turnabout

Dozens of male civil servants in Ceuta, a Spanish autonomous city on the north coast of Africa, have taken advantage of Spain's 2023 "Trans Law" and changed their gender identity to obtain benefits available to women. Roberto Perdigones, for example, a 35-year-old army corporal, chose "intersex bigender" from a list of gender options and changed his legal sex to female. Benefits of the change include relaxed dress regulations, a

higher pension, a private room and bathroom in the barracks, and an affirmative action leg up when applying for a promotion. In other parts of Spain, judges can deny a request if they believe the request arises from "spurious intent," but Ceuta is an autonomous region, and judges denying requests can be charged with criminal prevarication. Since the Trans Law went into effect, Spain has seen a four-fold increase in sex-change requests, leading some



trans activists to complain of "trans fraud." Pause for a moment and reflect on the irony of that. •

Source: <https://reduxx.info/spain-concerns-about-trans-fraud-emerge-after-dozens-of-male-civil-servants-in-one-small-community-change-their-legal-gender-but-maintain-male-names/>

Bleeding All the Same

A plethora of websites has cropped up whereby anyone can order abortion pills for shipment to any U.S. state with no prescription, no medical consultation, no age verification, and no concern regarding state abortion laws. The sites typically instruct purchasers to use discreet payment methods; many prefer payment by cryptocurrency. On one site, purchasers are required to send money to India for the purpose of "family assistance/maintenance or friend help." The

sites also typically inform users that sellers do not accept liability for complications or "inconvenience." One explicitly directs, "If you go to a hospital or other healthcare facility, do not tell anyone that you took the pills. There is no way for anyone to know you took the pills. Tell them you think you are having a miscarriage."



Plan C is an online directory promoting these developments. According to its website, "Plan C transforms access to abortion in the US by normalizing the self-directed option of abortion pills by mail." It, too, recommends lying to medical professionals in the event of a complication. "There is no way for a medical provider to know whether someone took abortion pills. The

bleeding looks the same as a miscarriage." Such is the degenerate state of "reproductive health" to which abortion activists now subject women and adolescent girls. •

Sources: <https://www.dailywire.com/news/how-leftist-networks-flood-red-states-with-risky-abortion-pills-with-no-consequences/>; <https://www.plancpills.org/about>



Cheaters at the Top?

A recent Rasmussen poll asked Americans, "Would you rather have your candidate win by cheating or lose by playing fair?" Seven percent of all respondents said they would rather win by cheating. Among those Rasmussen identified as the "elite 1 percent," a much higher 35 percent said they would rather win by cheating. Of a

third, more fine grained segment of this elite

1 percent, those Rasmussen identified as the "politically obsessed," a supermajority of 69 percent said they would rather their candidate win by cheating than lose by playing fair. Among the politically obsessed, Rasmussen said, commenting on the results, "about 7 out of 10 say, 'There's too much individual freedom in America.'" •

Source: <https://blackcommunitynews.com/the-npr-listening-elite-1-percent/>



Political Forfeiture

The After Party Encourages the Church to Capitulate to the Sexual Left

by Emily Morales

Background

Released in time for what will surely be a tumultuous and divisive election season, *The After Party: Toward Better Christian Politics* is a six-part, video-based curriculum developed by Curtis Chang, David French, and Russell Moore. The trio maintains they don't intend to tell Christians what to think where political positions are concerned, but rather how to navigate relational spaces where political positions differ.

Moore says that tensions among churches today are not over the theological, doctrinal, or ecclesiological issues of yesterday, but rather are due to what he characterizes as the "partisan mind," which, he says, "undermines the claims of the cross by drawing boundaries ... in ways not defined by Christ."

Reason for Surveillance

Early on, the curriculum developers hit a roadblock because evangelical donors had little interest in funding it. Secular, left-wing foundations, however, have opened their purses quite liberally. In May 2022, Rockefeller Philanthropic Advisors announced that *The After Party* would be among 32 beneficiaries sharing \$10 million to "support local leaders, networks, and community groups who are addressing divisive forces in their neighborhoods, towns, and counties." As part of the New Pluralists project, the aim of *The After Party* is to "transition the conversation away from polarizing topics at the national stage to the local context of loving one's neighbor."



While loving one's neighbor is commendable, it should be noted that this same grant is funding "Out in the Open," which seeks to create better visibility of rural LGBTQ+ people, along with several other left-wing initiatives. This same benefactor in 2019 awarded a whopping \$100 million to the "Collaborative for Gender and Reproductive Equity," an initiative dedicated to safeguarding abortion and "gender-affirming" care for youth. *The After Party* has also received funding from The Hewlett Foundation, which is the second-largest private donor to Planned Parenthood, and it lists as one of its partners One America Movement, which is also associated with funding abortion and promoting LGBTQ sexuality. The curriculum is being offered free to churches.

Most Glaring Oversight

Given the political leanings of *The After Party*'s financial backers, it isn't surprising that we discover in it a conspicuous absence of two things: (1) a stand affirming the sanctity of human life and (2) any discussion—or even mention—of the very issues which are breaking up churches, namely, biblical marriage and sexual morality and identity. Given that all three founders hold professional positions that place them in dialogue with pastors and denominational and seminary leaders, it seems safe to assume they understand the degree to which churches are splitting over these matters. Yet, in apparent capitulation to the

Spirit of the Age, *The After Party* is deafeningly silent on just these issues. Such silence is, at best, cowardly, and to encourage the church to remain silent on them is to encourage Christians to surrender their political voices to sexually profligate and anti-Christian forces.

Chang lauds the civil rights movement as an example of

To encourage the church to remain silent on divisive topics is to encourage Christians to surrender their political voices to sexually profligate and anti-Christian forces.

Christians demonstrating political resistance for the common good. He's right about that. But he and his *After Party* co-activists seem to have forgotten that resistance is by definition partisan and divisive. As the sexual revolution rages on, division along

sexual lines will inevitably reveal which church leaders are guarding the faith once for all delivered to the saints and are resisting the sexually predatory Spirit of the Age, and which leaders are not. ☉

Seek First to Understand

Confirmation Bias & How to Avoid It

by Keith Hess

It's Friday night. You've had a difficult week, and you just want to relax at home. So you find yourself scrolling through social media. All is going well until you come across a post by your uncle—that uncle. He shared an article that rails against your favorite politician. What do you do? You can ignore it and keep scrolling. You can engage in debate—but do you really want to ruin your weekend? Or you can honestly consider whether the article has a point.

Exposing the Bias

We've all had the uncomfortable experience of coming across information that conflicts with our prior beliefs and commitments. The temptation is to ignore potentially disconfirming evidence and double down on our position. This is what's called *confirmation bias*. It's not a logical fallacy to correct, but rather a psychological proclivity to work against.

Psychological studies confirm that humans have a tendency toward confirmation bias. Many of us like to think we're not susceptible. It's all those *other* people. But when was the last time you listened to the ideas of someone who disagrees with you politically, not just to oppose him, but to hear him out? When was the last time you tried to "steel man" your opponent's viewpoint (that is, to put it in the best light possible or in its strongest form)?

For me, when I listen to someone who agrees with me, say, on the truth of Christianity, I tend to let my guard down. I exercise a hermeneutic of grace. But with someone I disagree with, I tend to exercise a hermeneutic

of suspicion. In other words, I, too, fall prey to confirmation bias. But while confirmation bias is a natural proclivity, it's also something we can work against.

Avoiding the Bias

Philosopher Mortimer Adler said that one ought to seek to understand a position before criticizing it. This is a good start for avoiding bias. If we cannot accurately explain someone's position to his satisfaction, then we don't understand it. In fact, we misrepresent it. But to criticize a misrepresentation as if we're criticizing the genuine position is to commit the straw man fallacy. So when you come across your uncle's social-media rant, you should first be sure you understand what he's saying before considering why you disagree. It may turn out that you agree with him on more than you realized.

Another way to avoid confirmation bias is to stay open to various viewpoints through an honest investigation of the alternatives. When I first started teaching on the moral argument for God's existence, I believed it wasn't a good argument. But I decided to keep



an open mind. When I was finished teaching it, I was surprised to find that I agreed with the argument. This was satisfying because I believed I'd come to a knowledge of the truth through an honest investigation.

We can also avoid confirmation bias by properly weighing evidence. When looking at evidence that conflicts with what we believe, we're sometimes tempted to downplay it or put it out of mind. And when evidence confirms what we believe, we might come back to it again and again to shore up our belief. Instead, we need to properly evaluate and account for new evidence, even if it makes us uncomfortable.

Taking Stock

While none of us are above confirmation bias, we can take steps to avoid it: we can seek to understand our opponent's position, consider a variety of viewpoints, and properly weigh new evidence. So the next time you come across a news article that makes your blood boil, take a breath and consider whether it might have something true to say. ☺



Inverness Cathedral, Scotland

Repairing the Ruins

Classical Christian Schools: A Response to a Culture in Crisis

by Devin O'Donnell

In the book of Genesis, we're told that Jacob and Esau contended against one another from the time they were in the womb. Of the many details we find in the narrative, one of the most important is the meaningful difference between the two: Esau despised his birthright, but Jacob wanted it. Call it a difference in piety, perhaps, and for all his faults, Jacob still understood the good of receiving an inheritance—a heritage and a blessing from their father. Contrast this with Esau's appetitive disregard for the birthright. According to the author of Hebrews, we find in Esau "a profane" man.

Many have pointed out that modern man is a type of Esau. Our general disposition today is to reject the wisdom of the past. Long ago, we began selling the birthright of Western civilization, and there has followed a long, slow unraveling of the inheritance bequeathed to us by our forebears. This is perhaps nowhere more visible than in the current state of progressive education and its effect on culture.

Scripture was the first to go, but it was not the only religious element removed. The Supreme Court case *Abington School District v. Schempp* (1963) decided 8–1 that recitation of the Lord's Prayer in public schools was unconstitutional. Christian catechisms were purged from classrooms as well.¹ Today the proof is in the pudding. The same government institutions that once taught children a vision of mankind situated within

a Judeo-Christian metaphysic now condition children to accept false sex and gender anthropologies—women and men are no different, sexual desire is what ultimately defines us, a boy can be a girl, etc.

A Voice Crying in the Wilderness

This loss of cultural inheritance has led many to turn attention to our history and reclaim lost goods. In her 1947 Oxford lecture, "The Lost Tools of Learning," Dorothy Sayers imagines how modern man might return to an older educational vision, the one to which the history of Western culture owes its life.² Sayers encouraged a rediscovery of the classical curriculum and the way in which the medieval Trivium (the "Three Ways") happens to fit the natural stages of child development. From antiquity, grammar, logic, and rhetoric have been considered the liberal arts of language—arts that made one "free" to learn and to accomplish other tasks in life. A classical Christian scholar herself, Sayers knew that there was, in fact, no school like the old school. She knew that advantages awaited students trained in logic, Latin, and the admonitions of great authors, along with math and science.

It may be historically inaccurate to reduce classical education to the "grammar" years of a child, and it may be too utilitarian to see Latin and Greek as mere "tools" and not worthy ends in themselves. But Sayers was nonetheless a voice crying in the educational wilderness of her time. She was simply proposing a way for parents to give their children a gift—the gift of rediscovering as students the wealth of their civilizational heritage, not unlike the way Bilbo the Hobbit learns that the unused swords found rotting in the troll den possess great power. Perhaps in some mystically prophetic gesture, Sayers foresaw that future generations would need an



educational compass to navigate the complicated wasteland of the modern, utilitarian world. Those searching for the “ancient paths” would find direction and wise counsel in her words.³

An Aristocracy of Anyone

In 1979, *National Review* republished Sayers’s lecture, and the popular revival of classical education was born. It took place not among secular elites but among common, middle-class Christians. Parents asking “where the good way is” for educating their children began to uncover a cultural trail that lay hidden in leaves and lost in the undergrowth.

In his *National Affairs* article, “Classical Education’s Aristocracy of Anyone,” Micah Meadowcroft recounts the history of the renaissance of classical education and analyzes why so many parents have begun to seek out and form classical Christian schools. One of the seminal organizations he identifies is The Association of Classical Christian Schools (ACCS). Founded in 1993, ACCS has more than 500 member schools in the U.S., with an increasing number of international schools joining every year. ACCS was known early on for its annual “Repairing the Ruins” conference. The title is taken from John Milton’s treatise on education:

The end then of learning is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him, as we may the nearest by possessing our souls of true virtue, which being united to the heavenly grace of faith makes up the highest perfection.

Classical Christian educators from all over the world gather each

June for the event. The theme of last year’s conference was “Athanasius Contra Mundum,” a fitting title for those trying to defend the family, resuscitate culture, and resist the forces of secularism. The theme for 2024 is a celebration of Anselm of Canterbury, who famously said, “I do not seek to understand in order that I may believe, but rather, I believe in order that I may understand.”

Transferring a Way of Life

This brings us to the covenant between education and culture. Education is so much more than good test scores or ensuring college acceptance. Meadowcroft notes how the classical-school movement at the primary and secondary level was “an institutional response to cultural crisis.” This is true. The classical Christian renaissance began as one of the first responses to the accelerating cultural decline of the 1980s. But a turn of events such as this is not without precedent. Our English word “school” is derived from the Greek word for “leisure” (*scholē*), which the ancients and medievals believed was the animating principle that created a “culture.” C. S. Lewis heartily agreed and argued that civilization was not the random effect of good fortune but the result of a people’s classical education.⁴ G. K. Chesterton puts it best: “There is no such thing as education. The thing is merely a loose phrase for the passing on to others

of whatever truth or virtue we happen to have ourselves.” That’s what a culture is. It is a living phenomenon that preserves its life through time by giving that life to the next generation.

This is the meaning of the Greek word *paideia*. Various translations as *education*, *training*, *admonition*, or “the transfer of a way of viewing the world from the teacher to the student,” it is consistent with the way in which Scripture presents education. St. Paul exhorts fathers not to provoke their children, but to “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”⁵ *Paideia* involves not merely the skills or facts a student must master; it involves the ideals children are taught to incarnate.

In other words, school is not just *information* for the brain, but *formation* of the soul. It is not a subject, as Chesterton says, but “the transfer of a way of life.” We have lived long enough like Esau. Classical Christian education is a chance for today’s parents to transfer to their children a rich cultural inheritance. ☉

Notes

1. For a basic survey of this and the deliberate rejection of the “Western Christian *Paideia*” in public schooling, see “The Battle for the American Mind,” *Classical Christian Times* (July 30, 2022).
2. “The Lost Tools of Learning,” E.T. Heron (1948).
3. See Jeremiah 6:16.
4. “Our English Syllabus” in *Image and Imagination: Essays and Reviews* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).
5. Ephesians 6:4.



Reform Where You're Planted

How Ordinary Christians Change the World

by Gregory Soderberg

In unsettled times, people tend to fall into different camps: reactionaries, revolutionaries, and reformers. Reactionaries flee to the hills, circle the wagons, or start a cult. Revolutionaries demand change *now*, throwing up barricades in the streets of Paris and eventually chopping off heads. Reformers, though they may appear reactionary or even revolutionary, carry out the patient work of pursuing truth, goodness, and beauty in everything they do. It is reformers who inevitably affect, and eventually transform, societies and cultures, although the observable transformation may be limited to a city, village, neighborhood, or just a circle of friends.

Reactionaries can't see past the present crisis. They're stuck in a cycle of reaction. Because they lack a historical perspective, their attempts to put out the fires of radicalism are like the bucket brigades of a bygone era. Their faithfulness and goodwill are not in question. They just need to learn how to use a firehose

If society and culture were a house, the *revolutionaries* would want to burn the house down so they could rebuild a Temple to Humanity, a Brave New World, or a Transhumanist Utopia. The revolutionary has all the fire of a religious zealot, convinced of the ultimate truth and value of his revolutionary project. Since

revolutionaries don't believe in God, they summon the almighty power of the next greatest thing in their universe—the government. Revolutionaries are often radical statisticians. According to Saul Alinsky, Satan was the first radical, and all radical revolutionaries since have served him as their master, whether knowingly or not.

To continue with the metaphor (which I'm borrowing from Idaho pastor Douglas Wilson), while reactionaries are busy with their bucket brigades, and revolutionaries are playing with lighters and gasoline in back alleys, *reformers* pick up their tools in the endeavor to rebuild the house. The house can be anything—a family, a neighborhood, a church, city, state, or a nation. The reformer does not reject the foundation if it is solid—if it is built on truth, goodness, and beauty. He reinforces the walls. He preserves the best of the ancient building while adding onto and improving it. Here I am using "reformer" to mean anyone who builds on the foundation of the permanent things, the first principles of God's world, inspired by his natural laws and guided by his Word. In this sense, reformers transcend denominational and sectarian boundaries.

Portraits of Reformers

In chaotic times, we desperately need reformers who will dedicate themselves to the slow, patient work of rebuilding dilapidated communities and institutions. One of the best ways to get started in this important work is to read biographies of reformers of the past, whether famous or forgotten. One resource for the next generation of reformers is *The Christian Almanac: A Book of Days Celebrating History's Most Significant People & Events* (2004), by George Grant and Gregory Wilbur, which contains a wealth of historical tidbits and trivia, along with larger biographical



sketches and excursions on theology, history, the arts, and culture. It contains numerous portraits of Christians who have labored faithfully in their setting to strengthen the foundation, rather than tear down or burn up the building.

The Christian Almanac provides inspiration, motivation, and the larger historical vision needed for the work of reform. I have used it as a textbook for a class in Christian leadership, and it quickly became a daily highlight for many of the families of my students.

Another resource is Glenn Sunshine's latest book, *32 Christians Who Changed Their World* (2023), which tells the stories of thirty-two reformers who used their skills, abilities, passions, interests, and opportunities to glorify God and change their corners of the world. I am using the term "reformer" loosely. A reformer doesn't have to be the head of an institution, a famous author, or the leader of a movement. In fact, some of history's most effective reformers have labored in relative obscurity. Neither the revolutionary nor the reformer is content with the status quo. The difference is in how they pursue change and what they envision as the ultimate goal.

Characteristics of Reformers

So what does a reformer look like? What do reformers do? Here are some commonalities, illustrated with examples from Sunshine's *32 Christians*.

Reformers are catholic—in time and space. Radicals want to begin the world again. Like the French

Revolutionaries, they restart the calendar with Year 1—the year of the revolution. Christian reformers recognize that they are part of the church *catholic* (the universal church). They do not attempt to start from a clean slate. They

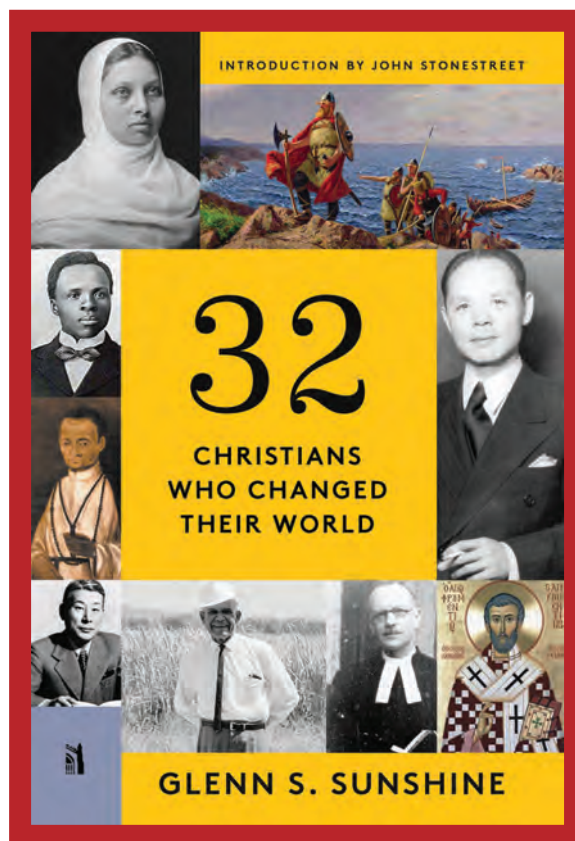
we pursue our callings far from the spotlight and media headlines. He includes stories about a wide range of individuals, including women, Africans, Asians, medieval mystics, and more. This catholic (universal) emphasis helps to display the fullness of the grand story God is writing through the faithful labors of his people throughout time and history.

Reformers are often lonely.

The work of reformation does not happen overnight, and it often entails struggle, persecution, or even death. We can be encouraged by reading about past reformers and how they navigated their own crises. Whether it is Martin Rinkart (1586–1649) taking care of the dying during a plague, or André and Magda Trocmé and the villagers of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon rescuing and sheltering Jews from the Nazis, Sunshine tells of Christians who did what they believed was right, no matter the cost. Some were recognized and appreciated, and some were soon forgotten. But all were faithful, and all of them

impacted our world in important ways.

Reformers reform where they are planted. St. Frumentius and his brother Edesius were missionaries in the 300s to the ancient kingdom of Axum, located in what is now roughly Eritrea and Ethiopia. Although sold into slavery at one point, the brothers were eventually freed, and they influence King Ezana of Axum, who made Christianity the official religion of his realm, thus making it the "third kingdom to embrace Christianity after Armenia and Rome." These brothers were faithful, even in slavery, and they helped to create



receive the wisdom of the past and build on the best efforts and achievements of our fathers and mothers in the faith. Some of the names in *32 Christians* will be familiar (Leif Ericson and William Carey, for example), some will be less famous (Benjamin Rush and André Trocmé), but most will be new names and stories for many readers.

Sunshine tells the stories of Christians who were faithful in their time and context and had varying degrees of impact but who did not make it into the history books, or at least have been neglected in modern times. This should encourage most of us as

one of the oldest Christian kingdoms in the world. We can also learn from the lives of Christians in the Middle and Far East, like Hunayn ibn Ishaq (808–873), a notable Christian scholar living in a Muslim setting, and Sorghaghtani Beki (1190–1252), who was a Christian queen in the Mongolian empire. Each of these worked within the context in which God had placed them and “bloomed” where they had been planted.

Reformers pursue social justice, biblically defined They do not pursue the fads of revolutionary, egalitarian “justice.” Instead, reformers have always valued life, education, and mercy because of Christianity’s teachings about the dignity of mankind, the necessity of knowledge, and the importance of modeling God’s love and Christ’s mercy. Black Christians like Octavius Valentine Catto (1839–1871) opposed slavery and participated in a transportation boycott a century before Rosa Parks. Former Hindus like Pandita Ramabai (1858–1922) took care of widows and orphans, and Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje (1876–1932) opposed apartheid in South Africa. Sunshine also introduces readers to Elizabeth of Hungary (1207–1231), who labored for justice and cared for the poor in her kingdom, and Roque González de Santa Cruz (1576–1628), who was a Jesuit missionary to the Guarani people of South America and spoke up for their rights, which were under assault from other political and ecclesiastical sectors.

Reformers realize the strategic importance of education. Education sows the seeds of the future. That is why every revolutionary movement goes after the young, whether it be via the Hitler Youth or drag queen story hours. Accordingly, some of the most effective reformers have focused on education and have influenced countless individuals in the

process. Alcuin of York (c. 735–804) brought light into the “dark ages” and helped to spark a rebirth of learning in the early medieval period. Geert Groote (1340–1384) turned away from a life of indulgence and devoted himself to creating communities of Christian laypeople, and they in turn educated many of the next generation of scholars and Protestant and Catholic reformers. In more modern times, educators like James Emman Kwegyir Aggrey (1875–1927) pioneered education in Africa for both men and women.

Reformers can be men or women. A reformer uses his or her God-given abilities, interests, and opportunities to pursue truth, goodness, beauty, and justice. One does not have to sacrifice at the altar of radical feminism to appreciate the multitudes of strong and courageous women who have followed God’s call, even in circumstances that made it more difficult for them as women in a male-dominated world. Marguerite d’Angoulême (1492–1549), who was closely connected to the French royal family, used her influence to encourage and protect those pursuing the reform of the French church. In Strasbourg, Katharina Schütz Zell (1497/8–1562) worked alongside her husband Matthew, writing her own theological works and encouraging those engaged in the Reformation.

Reformers know that all truth is God’s truth, and so they pursue truth in every domain of life. Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179) experienced mystical visions

but also pursued the study of multiple disciplines and was a respected leader throughout Europe. Popes and princes listened to her advice and counsel. Roger Bacon (c. 1214–1292) was a monk and theologian who also laid foundations for what became known as the scientific method, offering a reminder that the “dark” ages were filled with bright points of light.

Reformers work within God-ordained authority structures,

but they also obey God rather than men. Like the Hebrew midwives (Ex. 1:18–21) and Peter and the disciples (Acts 6:27–29), reformers serve God—even when it means disobeying a political authority or ruler. Sunshine reacquaints us with forgotten heroes like Chiune Sugihara (1900–1986) and Ho Feng Shan (1901–1997), who used their diplomatic immunity and political connections to write thousands of visas to help Jews escape the Nazis.

A Cloud of Witnesses

In our chaotic times, surrounded by reactionaries and revolutionaries, *The Christian Almanac* and *32 Christians Who Changed Their World* offer us bracing reminders that God uses reformers of all types to accomplish his purposes. The common theme in reformers’ lives is a single-minded dedication to serving God faithfully wherever they are, whatever they are doing, whether it is taking in orphans, teaching and starting schools, studying and writing, or working in the highest levels of government. May those who have gone before us inspire and encourage reformers everywhere. ☉



ANNAS

The account begins with Jesus being arrested at night and brought before Annas at the house of the high priest.² The first point of confusion occurs here, as both Annas and Caiaphas are referred to as high priests.³ This can be explained, however, by the different ways in which the Mosaic Law and the policy of the Romans, who appointed and deposed high priests at will, viewed the priesthood. At the time of Jesus' trial, Annas was still considered high priest according to the Mosaic Law, even though he did not formally function as such since the Romans had placed Caiaphas in that office in AD 18.⁴ Far from being a mythical figure, Annas is known as a high priest and prominent resident of Jerusalem from the historical writings of Josephus and also from a tomb located in the southern Hinnom Valley, which is the most elaborate Roman-period tomb in all of the Jerusalem area.⁵

There are three especially strong candidates for the location of the house of the high priest, and while scholars differ, the most likely seems to be an elaborate mansion and high-priestly house dubbed the "Burnt House," from which archaeological excavations yielded an inscribed stone weight with the name *Kathros*, the name of a high-priestly family in the first century AD. If the term "house of the high priest" refers to a specific building, and not merely to the family residence of whomever was the acting high priest, then the Burnt House would have been the first location to which Jesus was brought for trial.

SIMON PETER

Waiting outside was Simon Peter, the disciple of Jesus.⁶ Although Peter was at this time a person of little consequence, over the next three decades he would become one of the most prominent leaders of the early

The Trial of Jesus of Nazareth

What Do the Historical Records Say?

by Titus Kennedy

The trial of Jesus before the religious and political authorities in Jerusalem was not only a defining moment in world history that reverberated throughout the Roman Empire and beyond, ultimately changing the lives and beliefs of millions, but it was also an event that is essential to the Christian faith. Although Jesus is widely acknowledged by scholars as a historical figure, many question the trial narrative recorded in the four Gospels, and skeptical scholars for decades have written it off as Christian propaganda or historical fiction.¹ Yet archaeological discoveries and ancient manuscripts illuminating the situation in first-century Jerusalem have corroborated many details related to the people, places, and events of the trial accounts. These challenge the supposition that the trial of Jesus Christ represents a theological tale spun to accommodate the ideology of Christians.

Christians. Peter wrote two letters which are preserved in the New Testament. Due to his place among the Apostles and his instrumental role in the spread of Christianity, Peter is attested to not only in the early historical records of the church, but also archaeologically by his house in Capernaum and his tomb in Rome near the Circus of Nero, where he was executed in AD 64.⁷ Inscriptions mention Peter by name, both on the walls of his house at Capernaum and at his tomb in Rome—a Greek inscription (*PETPOC*) and a Latin inscription (*ROMAE BO PETRUS*) at his house, and a Greek inscription (*PETR[OS] ENI*) at his tomb.⁸

CAIAPHAS

Following the brief questioning before Annas, Jesus was next sent to Caiaphas, the acting high priest from AD 18–36 and leader of the Sanhedrin council.⁹ This high priest was known as Joseph son of Caiaphas. He is attested to in the first-century writings of Josephus, by an inscription on his ossuary found in his family tomb outside Jerusalem, and by an inscription on the ossuary of his granddaughter.¹⁰ These inscriptions identify him as Joseph son of Caiaphas and a priest of the line of Maaziah from Beth-Imri.¹¹

The place where Jesus was taken before Caiaphas, the council meeting chamber, was known as the Hall of Hewn Stone. It was located on the southern side of the Temple Mount but was destroyed in AD 70 when the Romans obliterated the buildings on the Temple Mount. Only meager identifiable ruins remain, in the form of column capitals from this area, which was called the Royal Portico.

PILATE

Because only the Romans had the authority to exercise capital punishment at this time, the priests brought Jesus before the Roman governor of Judea Province, Pontius Pilatus, at the Praetorium in Jerusalem.¹² This governor, or more precisely this *prefect*, ruled from AD 26–36, when he was eventually summoned to Rome by Emperor Tiberius. Pontius Pilatus is attested to as governor of Judea who held the position of prefect by several artifacts: the Pilate Stone found at Caesarea; the “Pilato” ring found at Herodium; passages in the writings of Josephus, Tacitus, and Philo; and coins minted in Judea during his reign.¹³

The location of this encounter between Jesus and Pilate was the Praetorium, the residence of the Roman governor at the former palace of Herod the Great on the western side of the city.¹⁴ This building has been partially excavated, and although it is little

known today, the remains of the Gabbatha (also called the stone pavement), a gate, and the bema (the judge’s seat) were all discovered.¹⁵

While the evidence for the existence and position of Pilate is overwhelming, and the archaeological discoveries of the location of the trial seem convincing, many scholars continue to assert that the behavior of Pilate in the Gospels contradicts his character in ancient sources and must be an unhistorical rendering. Yet, when one understands the historical and political context of Pilate in Judea during AD 33—he had endured multiple disputes and complaints from the Jews; he may have been appointed by the disgraced and executed former Praetorian commander Sejanus, and he ruled in an era when challenging Caesar could result in your death—it is obvious why Pilate took the threat of “no friend of Caesar” seriously and opted to avoid conflict with the Jews rather than risk his career or even his life for a teacher named Jesus who was virtually unknown to him.¹⁶

HEROD ANTIPAS

Before appeasing the Jewish leaders, however, Pilate attempted to pass responsibility on to the local ruler of Galilee, Herod Antipas, who was in Jerusalem for Passover.¹⁷ Herod Antipas was one of the sons of Herod the Great. He had inherited part of the kingdom after his father’s death in 4 BC, and he ruled from Galilee as a tetrarch. Antipas is known from the writings of Josephus and Philo; from coins that he issued bearing his name and title, “Herod Tetrarch”; and from various archaeological remains, such as the new capitol at Tiberias that he had constructed.¹⁸ Herod Antipas, however, had no real power in Judea Province to make decisions regarding executions, and so he sent Jesus back to Pilate.

These not only confirm the existence of Jesus as a historical person, but they also corroborate details of the trial narrative found in the Gospels.

SIMON OF CYRENE

Finally, after one more attempt at merely punishing and releasing Jesus, Pilate yielded to the adamant demands of the Jewish religious leaders and handed Jesus over to be crucified. But before the sentence could be carried out, the crossbeam had to be carried to the top of Golgotha. After being scourged, Jesus was too weak to do so on his own, and here enters the obscure character of Simon of Cyrene, father of Alexander and Rufus.¹⁹

Astonishingly, this person seems to be attested to by inscriptions on an ossuary discovered in a tomb in the Kidron Valley. The inscriptions included the identifiers "Alexander son of Simon" in Greek and "Alexander the Cyrenean" in Aramaic.



JESUS, THE CHRIST

The final person in this story is Jesus of Nazareth himself, known as the Christ. Although the falsehood continues to be repeated in popular culture that Jesus is not attested to in any first-century sources and that our only knowledge of him comes from the New Testament and later Christian writings, Jesus is known from both ancient texts and archaeological inscriptions.

For example, the trial and execution of Jesus is referred to by Josephus, Tacitus, Serapion, and Lucian.²⁰ Further, Jesus appears to be mentioned in two inscriptions—one from Jerusalem and one from Alexandria. On the James Ossuary, dated to about AD 62, Jesus is referred to in an Aramaic inscription

as Jesus the brother of "James son of Joseph," a relation which, according to Josephus, was apparently widespread knowledge at the time.²¹ More recently, a first-century bowl from the harbor of Alexandria was found with a Greek inscription mentioning Christ as a "magician"—a term reflecting the Egyptian obsession with sorcery and the idea that Jesus was a powerful practitioner of magic or a miracle worker.

WITNESSES OF HISTORY

Thus, the archaeological data related to the trial of Jesus—including artifacts, architectural ruins, and ancient manuscripts—corroborate seven key figures three locations, and other details of the historical context behind the scenes. These not only confirm the existence of Jesus as a historical person, but they also corroborate details of the trial narrative found in the Gospels. Together, they bear witness that the Gospel accounts are not myth but are accurate records of an event that forever changed the course of history. ☉

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Laborers of Love

Re-envisioning Motherhood & Caretaking as Valuable Work

by Nicole M. King

In a huge pro-family victory, the Irish recently gave a resounding vote of “no” to removing the word “motherhood” from their Constitution.¹ A second amendment, which proposed removing a Constitutional provision stipulating that women should not be forced by economic necessity to take a job to the “neglect of their duties in the home” was also soundly defeated. Irish attorney Maria Steen, who campaigned against the proposed amendments, called the outcomes an “expression by the Irish people of gratitude and of love—gratitude to women for the work that they do in their homes, that is often unseen and unsung.”

The concept of motherhood as an important role that entails important work is one that deserves further fleshing out. Every social system must deal with the fact that children are not easy to care for and raise—and that someone must do it, and do it well, if the state is going to survive. Even more elementally, someone must first *bear* children to begin with. In her 2020 book *Showing: What Pregnancy Tells Us About Being Human*, Valparaiso University professor Agnes R. Howard delves into this first step and examines the important work of pregnancy itself.

RADICAL HOSPITALITY

It is easy, she writes, to reduce our view of pregnancy to sentimental sweet nothings, or to hormones, or to a medical experience, or to any number of other things. Her thesis is that pregnancy is a concept worth taking seriously for what it tells us about the human experience.

Howard begins by taking us through the history of how past civilizations have viewed pregnancy. Before modern medicine and imaging, the unborn child was most often viewed as the seed of the man,



deposited into the woman. She was the receptacle, but she was also responsible for not messing things up. Her emotional state, along with her habits or vices, might be either credited for the

baby’s wellness or blamed for its lack thereof. With more modern understandings of pregnancy came a new set of stringent rules. The expectant mother is now allowed to be contributing something (half the genetic material), but she is still held to a set of rules guiding her behavior for the sake of the child’s well-being—no shellfish, lie on your left side to sleep and not your right, no smoking or drinking, take your prenatal vitamins, and the list goes on.

Rather than a list of rules, a medical experience, or sentimental sappiness, Howard invites us to see pregnancy as an act of “radical hospitality”—the giving over of one’s body for the sake of another. She explains how, just as a family might shrink itself into two bedrooms instead of three to accommodate houseguests, so a woman’s internal organs are rearranged and shoved aside to accommodate the growing baby. The uterus, to take an obvious example, which is normally a very small organ (roughly three inches long), expands to the size of a watermelon by the end of the third trimester. To make room, the intestines, stomach, and liver are all forced upward, eventually pressing against the lungs, which causes shortness of breath. Also participating in the effort

to make room for the “guest,” the ribcage expands, as do the hips during childbirth itself.

Pregnancy is also a unique opportunity for a woman to practice the virtues—especially prudence, charity, generosity, and courage. She must regulate her eating, drinking, and sleeping; she demonstrates generosity in the giving of her body for the sake of another; she shows courage in facing down the physical pain, discomfort, and risks related to both pregnancy and childbirth.

More than anything, however, pregnancy points to our dependence upon one another:

Pregnancy exhibits relationship as fundamental to human life. We call on each other to do well in order that the species go on, one adult body willing to carry, provide, protect, and suffer on behalf of another one not yet fully formed. ... What a loss it would be to understand the point of this prenatal activity as just to get a baby born.

Howard draws attention to an important and oft-overlooked fact: pregnancy—and with it, motherhood itself—changes women in permanent ways, ways that science is only beginning to understand. Our culture demands that pregnancy and motherhood be mere add-ons to the experience of being a modern woman, extras undertaken for the nebulous purpose of “personal fulfillment.” This “add-on” view is an impoverished understanding of the mother-child relationship for child and mother alike. In pregnancy and breastfeeding especially, brains and bodies are restructured for the purpose of taking care of others.² One cannot simply shut these things down to return to “normal life.”

DEPENDENCE & INTERDEPENDENCE

Instead, Howard insists that care of others is a crucial part of being human, and that relational dependence is important and good. In an essay in *The Cresset* titled “All in the Family: Making Over Motherhood for Mutual Flourishing,” she addresses what we often refer to as the “work-life balance” crunch. But she rewords the problem that millions of mothers especially face: “What we have to ‘balance’ is not ‘work’ and ‘life’ but work and work.” Instead of calling for typical secular remedies, such as subsidized childcare or more flexible work schedules, she proposes a threefold solution:

The first gestures at simplicity: strip some of the bells and whistles from the

childhood-experience package, conceding less to the way commerce and fashion dictate kids’ needs. The second concerns children themselves, who get a promotion: inviting them to become collaborators in the goods of the household rather than passive dependents awaiting delivery of services. Together, those shifts help cultivate a household where life together is the point of living together, not just as a second shift or break room for working parents or a launching pad for future adults. The third change concerns work, which gets a demotion: recasting one’s job not as the dominant feature of adult identity but in a proper subordinate place, work put in relationship to other aspects of a flourishing life.

Overall, these excellent suggestions can be rounded up in a single sentence: Elevate the care-taking work of the home—for all. The child learns to take care of himself and his home environment, and the adults learn to place home and family caretaking in a more important light than individual promotion in the money economy.

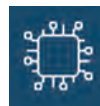
Our culture demands that pregnancy and motherhood be mere add-ons to the experience of being a modern woman. This is an impoverished understanding of the mother-child relationship.

SANCTIFIED LIFE TOGETHER

Howard’s suggestions here dovetail nicely with the thesis of her book. Caring for each other—starting with the members of our own families—is the most important work we can undertake. It also offers unique opportunities for sanctification, the process whereby God invites us into hard work and even suffering to make us holier. Let us give it the respect it deserves for all members of the household. ☺

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Killing Words

A Suicide by Any Other Name Is Still a Suicide

by Bryan Just

Physician-assisted suicide continues to be in the news. By early 2024, 21 states were debating legislation to either introduce the practice or amend existing legislation.¹

As state legislatures try to enshrine a “right to die” into law, many terms are thrown around, with “euthanasia,” “physician-assisted suicide” (PAS), and “medical aid in dying” (MAiD) being some of the most common. What, if anything, are the differences between these terms? And does the term one uses really matter?

ATTEMPTS TO OBSCURE

The first distinction to be made is between euthanasia and PAS. In euthanasia, a doctor administers drugs directly to a patient (often through an injection) with the intent to kill him. In some countries, such as Canada and the Netherlands, this is the dominant practice, but in the U.S., euthanasia remains illegal in all jurisdictions. In PAS, a doctor prescribes a lethal medication for the patient, but the patient must take the medication himself without any assistance. This is the practice that has been legalized in states such as California and Oregon.

With that distinction out of the way, what is the difference between PAS and MAiD? In short, nothing. The two refer to the same thing: a doctor prescribing a lethal medication for a terminally ill patient to take to end his or her own life.

If PAS and MAiD refer to the same thing, does that mean they are interchangeable? Not really. PAS was the term originally used, but MAiD rose to prominence primarily for marketing reasons—it sounds a lot more comforting and avoids reference to suicide.

While this may seem like a subtle distinction, branding such as this has been an important part of the push for PAS in the U.S. When the practice is described accurately, many people are turned away.

Calling it “physician-assisted suicide” makes quite clear what is happening—sick persons are ending their own lives with the help of a physician. The phrase “medical aid in dying” masks this fact, and it is completely unclear who provides the aid or what that “aid” even entails. Something as simple as pain relief could reasonably be considered “aid in dying” if the term were not being redefined to mean medically assisting in the patient’s suicide.

In place of a more accurate term, then, proponents of PAS have come to lean on obscurantist terms like MAiD, while also using emotion-laden language, such as “compassion,” “right to die,” and “choice.” For example, the Hemlock Society, one of the leading organizations pushing to expand PAS, was

founded in 1980 and took its name from Socrates’s choice to drink hemlock poison for his own execution rather than flee Athens after being condemned to death. The Hemlock Society subsequently changed its name to End-of-Life Choices and then later merged with Compassion in Dying to form Compassion and Choices.² Notice the none-too-subtle shift away from associations with execution and suicide.

FLAWED ARGUMENTS

Proponents of MAiD, such as Compassion and Choices, contend that a terminally ill patient taking a lethal drug to hasten his death is not really committing suicide. Rather, they say, this should be understood as an entirely different category of death.³ They give numerous arguments for this position and for why their terms should be preferred to PAS, but as we shall see, most of them are shaky at best.

Proponents of the MAiD terminology argue that in jurisdictions where some form of PAS has been legalized, the law does not consider PAS to be suicide on the part of the patient or assistance with a suicide on the part of the physician. This is true, but it doesn’t really help in the debate over which is the better term; it’s a case of merely assuming the conclusion. While the law may make distinctions



between what is prosecutable and what is not, pointing to that distinction in a legal code does not tell us whether the two are equivalent in practice. Just because a law uses a term does not mean that term is the best option. Furthermore, it should be noted that laws legalizing PAS have been written by its proponents. Thus, advocates who say that the law makes a distinction between PAS and other forms of suicide are approaching the issue backwards; they are passing a law enshrining a difference and then pointing to the law as evidence that the distinction was there all along.

Another argument put forth by proponents of MAiD is that many medical associations no longer use “suicide” or “assisted suicide” in their policies and position statements, and that some have even adopted policies against suicide terminology.⁴ While what these organizations are doing can be instructive, this, too, fails to answer the question of whether MAiD is the best term. Also, if the words medical associations use should be determinative, it should be noted that the largest medical association in the U.S., the American Medical Association, maintains that PAS is the most precise term and should be preferred over MAiD or “death with dignity.”⁵

Other arguments for preferring “MAiD” deny that a patient who ends his life is really dying by suicide by focusing on the *reason* for the act.⁶ Since the terminal prognosis is the reason a patient seeks to die, medical assistance in dying is put forth as an act of mercy, allowing patients to avoid suffering from their disease; or it may be cast as an act of empowerment, allowing terminally ill patients to end their lives on their own terms. Advocates point to the fact

that most legislation requires screening for depression and other mental illnesses to be certain that suicidality is not the reason for seeking PAS. This, they say, is evidence that PAS and suicide are two different things.

It is usually true that those who make use of PAS would not wish to die if they were not already dying. However, this fact alone does not mean that PAS is essentially different from suicide. In both cases, a person deliberately and artificially shortens his own life. Common warning signs of suicidality include pain, anxiety, hopelessness, and feelings of being a burden. All of these could easily apply to those with a terminal condition.

Those who seek PAS often say that it is not about consciously wanting to die but about gaining control over their death.⁷ This might be true, but that does not change the suicidal nature of what they are doing; it only focuses on the reason for doing it. PAS and suicide are different forms of the same thing—an attempt, stemming from hopelessness and/or a desire to escape or avoid suffering, to control the manner of one’s death. We can and should have great sympathy for those struggling with a terminal diagnosis, but that does not mean we should narrow the definition of suicide.

A final, commonly made argument says that PAS should be treated as a medical procedure and that our language should reflect that. However, just because a doctor is involved does not mean that something is medicine. The goal of medicine should be to work toward the good and the health of the patient. Prescribing a lethal drug is antithetical to those goals.⁸ The American Medical Association’s code of ethics reads: “Physician-assisted suicide is fundamentally incompatible with the physician’s role as healer.”⁹ While it usually arises in the context of end-of-life care, PAS is not a medical procedure and should not be called one. Terms like MAiD confuse the issue and try to lend the credibility of the medical profession to a practice that is hostile to all that medicine stands for.

When a culture legitimizes people taking their own lives, even for supposedly “good” reasons like gaining control or avoiding suffering, choosing to end life is normalized, and the value of all life is cheapened.

COMPASSION, NOT NORMALIZATION

A related factor worth noting is the association between legalized PAS and suicide rates in general. A 2015 study found that, in states where PAS has been legalized, the rates of non-assisted suicides have also increased.¹⁰ The authors suggest that legalizing PAS may lead to “an increased inclination to suicide” in the rest of society. This should not come as a surprise. When a culture legitimizes people taking their own lives, even for supposedly “good” reasons like gaining control or avoiding suffering, choosing to end life is normalized, and the value of all life is cheapened.

If someone intentionally swallows a bottle of painkillers to end his own life, that is considered a suicide. Should going to a doctor and receiving a drug designed to do just that be considered something different? Intentions matter, but they do not change the nature of taking one’s own life.

Ultimately, many of the reasons proponents prefer terms like MAiD are pragmatic: they want to normalize voluntary termination of life and encourage it as an option for more people while avoiding the stigma of suicide. These are all touted as goods and benefits. However, even some of those who accept the practice recognize that these ends come at the expense of transparency and accuracy. And for those opposed to PAS, reducing stigma and normalizing suicide are not goods at all.

How we talk about the issues of the day matters, and surrendering the definition of suicide to those who want to promote it does not help those with

terminal illness. As Matthew Eppinette, executive director of The Center for Bioethics & Human Dignity, recently wrote, “real aid in dying means caring for the dying, not helping them to die.”¹¹ We need to show care and compassion for those facing death and not encourage them to take a physician-assisted escape. They need to know that the final days of life are still worth living, even if that means relinquishing control over the exact timing and manner of their deaths. ☹

—Suicidal thoughts or actions are signs of extreme distress and should not be ignored. Immediate help is available at the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Call or text 988.

Notes

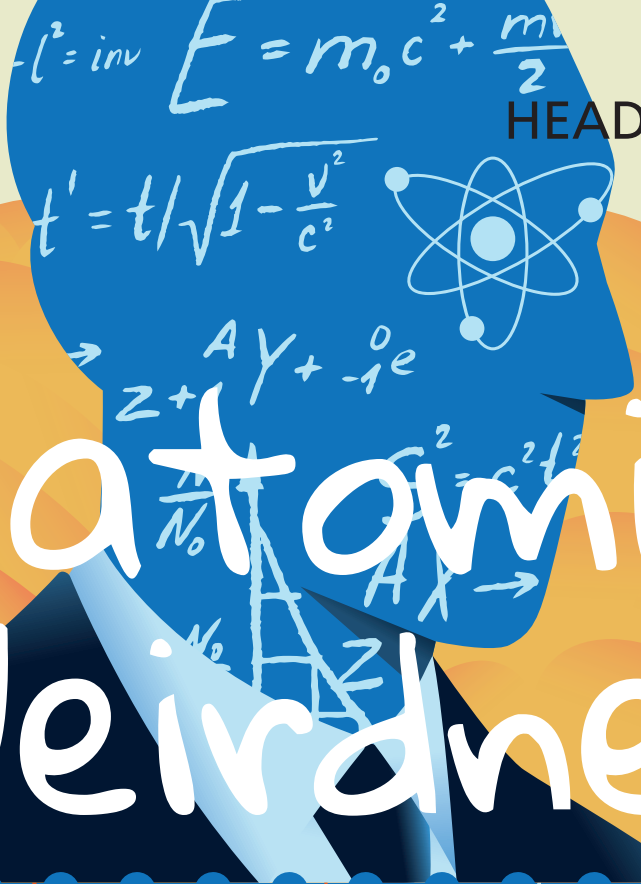
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Subatomic Weirddness

The Bizarre, Baffling, Beautiful Design of Nothing (& Everything) by Ken Pedersen

What scientists have discovered about physical reality over the last 100 years is so bizarre that we cannot begin to visualize, let alone comprehend, the magically weird essence of our existence. Everything is made up of just three different quantum fields: the electron, the up quark, and the down quark. The up and down quarks combine to make protons and neutrons, which then combine with electrons to make atoms. Atoms combine to make molecules that then make everything else. Everything you see, feel, hear, taste, and smell, including you, is made of vast, amazingly intricate patterns of these three quantum fields

It is almost impossible to comprehend how tiny quantum fields are. If quantum fields were the size of marbles, your brain would be over ten million times larger than our entire solar system out to Pluto, and there would be trillions of trillions of trillions of these marble-sized

fields just within the neurons in your brain. Somehow, the information flow among the vast, unbelievably complex network created by these tiny fields supports the emergence of consciousness and the mental dimension of reality. All the layers of reality are assembled using just these three quantum fields, yet the "top layer" walks and talks and laughs and loves. It is an amazingly elegant design, an engineering masterpiece orders of magnitude more sophisticated and complex than anything we can imagine.

Ghostly Clouds of "Nothing"

So quantum fields are the mysterious building blocks used to make everything, but what are these tiny fields made of? This is where our common-sense understanding totally fails us, because quantum fields are made of nothing. That is, we have found no physical substance, nothing solid at all, in the composition of these tiny fields. Since

everything is made of quantum fields, does this mean that reality is made of nothing? Well, yes and no.

The bizarre part of all this is that quantum fields somehow are composed of two nonmaterial entities: energy and information. Here the essence of reality starts to sound like magic. We simply cannot visualize how these immaterial things could be real, let alone how they could be the basis of the entire design of reality. We do not understand *what* this immaterial system is, *how* it was created, or *how* it maintains its power over billions of years or longer.

Quantum States, Fields & Information Processing

Scientists have also found that the three quantum fields are effectively digital computing devices that form the foundation of an extremely sophisticated, multi-layered information-processing system. Each of the three quantum fields has a small set of characteristics that defines its current state and what it can do next. We call these characteristics “quantum states,” and a quantum state can only be one of a very small set of discrete values. For instance, the electrical state can be +1, 0, or -1 (positive, neutral, or negative).

The fields execute logic functions that exchange discrete bundles of energy and information in precise obedience to specific, state-changing rules. In other words, they behave like the digital information-processing components we use in designed systems today, except for the fact that we’re talking about tiny fields of “nothing,” instead of physical components. There are no physical registers, no storage devices, no logic gates, no stored programs, and no central processor—nothing we would think of as physically “real.”

All of reality is built from these tiny clouds of energy exchanging tinier discrete packets of information and energy via a relatively small set of allowable interactions. To our minds, these fields appear to be magical, immaterial, logic components. They are capable of being networked together into an extremely fast, digital information-processing flow, but how these information-based rules are encoded and executed is a complete mystery. As Nobel laureate Richard Feynman said, “All we can do is model the traffic flow.”

The Foundation of Reality

All the mystery aside, as an engineer, I marvel at the elegance of this digital design. If you are trying to design repeatable patterns like those we find in atoms and molecules, you must avoid the mathematical chaos of too many possible interactions. If you have too many quantum states, or if each state has too many possible discrete values, or worse yet has continuous, non-discrete values, then a chaos of interactions would be certain; all hope of designing families of repeatable patterns into atoms, amino acids, and proteins would be lost.

But somehow, all of reality emerges from and stands upon this elegantly designed digital information processing that takes place in the quantum world. The design perfectly anticipates and supports creation of the more complex information-processing functions that comprise our marvelously complex, multi-layered reality. This is all made even more amazing in that the very top, most complex layer of this design is the extremely sophisticated, digital information-processing system within your head. Reality may not be supported on the backs of turtles all the way down, but it is supported by layers and layers of digital information processing—all the way down to the elemental processing of tiny fields of “nothing.”

The Mystery of the Four Forces

Now let us consider the quantum fields’ relationship to the four forces: electromagnetism, the strong nuclear force, the weak nuclear force, and gravity. The nuclear forces are tightly bound to the up and down quarks with a very tiny effective range. These forces apparently emanate from quarks exchanging discrete energy bundles. The mystery of how quantum fields are related to the four forces is a bit like the chicken-and-egg problem. Which came first? Does one create the other? Are they really separate things? Do quarks create the nuclear forces, or is it the other way around? We simply do not know.

Gravity, too, is a unique mystery. Whether you think of it as a force or a distortion of space, gravity appears to be caused by mass, and mass is one of the properties of quantum fields. At the quantum level, mass is barely detectable, but put enough quantum field together, and gravity becomes a dominant force shaping stars, planets, solar systems, and galaxies—the entire universe. So, do quantum fields create gravity? We don’t know that either.

The electromagnetic force causes atoms to form and then binds them together into molecules. Electromagnetism also floods the universe with radiant energy traveling at the speed of light, with the energy and information contained within its photons fueling the information-based interactions between quantum fields, atoms, molecules, living cells, and conscious minds.

The four forces are effectively nonmaterial fields with rules that guide the behavior of quantum fields entering their range of influence. In what physicists call the Standard Model of the sub-atomic world, quantum fields are constantly exchanging packets of energy and information in concert with these forces. Clearly, the quantum fields and the four forces were perfectly designed to interact in the marvelously bizarre way that they do, but the incredible complexity of it all is a complete mystery. Calling it an intelligent design does the Designer a huge disservice; this is an incredibly ingenious design.

Bizarre, Baffling & Beautiful

So these tiny fields of “nothing” not only create this amazing, multi-layered, digital information-processing system that results in conscious living creatures, but somehow, they are the only participants in the dance of energy and information choreographed by the four forces that shape and animate reality.

And we will not even try to discuss the most bizarre features of quantum fields, like quantum tunneling or quantum entanglement, or their weird behavior in the two slit experiments and the fact that their actions appear to manifest probabilistically, without a cause-and-effect type relationship. These fantastically bizarre features further befuddle our common-sense expectations and tangle our minds into knots. If you think that somewhere there must be at least one brilliant physicist who understands the essence and actions of quantum fields, you would be wrong. Consider that for the last thirty years, thousands of physicists have spent major portions of their careers exploring the multi-dimensional math of string theory in the hope of discovering the true nature of quantum fields and their behavior, but there is a growing sentiment that the string-theory quest has failed.

Despite the tremendous efforts of the physics community, there has been no advancement in our understanding of the essence of quantum fields. To say we do not understand them is a monumentally gross understatement. The bizarre weirdness of this design is virtually impossible for our minds to comprehend. Yet the fact that the interactions of quantum fields result in this beautiful planet with conscious intelligent minds

These fantastically bizarre features further befuddle our common-sense expectations and tangle our minds into knots. If you think that somewhere there must be at least one brilliant physicist who understands the essence and actions of quantum fields, you would be wrong.

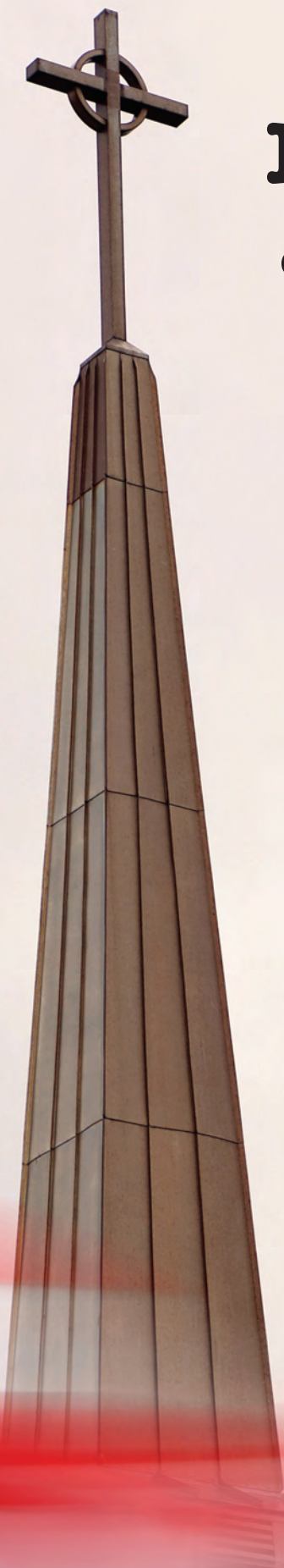
capable of free will and emotions should lead us to see in it all a purposeful design. It is the height of arrogance to look at these miraculous tiny entities and the beautiful designs they have created and then preach to the world that it is all obviously a random accident. Those who do so pretend that they comprehend the mystery of the design. They do not. No one does. To quote Feynman again, “When it comes to subatomic physics, we are like traffic engineers monitoring traffic flow on a busy freeway system. We can create detailed elaborate mathematical models about traffic behavior without ever once understanding the true nature of the vehicles creating the traffic.

Furthermore, any serious mathematical analysis of the complexity and precision of the design of the physical world, as well as the DNA code that directs all our cells and the amazingly ordered systems within us, leads to the conclusion that it is impossible for all this to arise by a series of lucky accidents happening at precisely the right times and places. The simplistic belief that it is a massive, meaningless series of accidents is wrong on all counts.

Only One Conclusion

Most physicists concede that they do not understand all this subatomic weirdness. There is no scientific explanation for any of it—a universe designed out of tiny field of nothing, immortal forces with no batteries, radiant energy fueling everything at the speed of light, and a precisely layered set of mysterious information-processing systems that cooperate perfectly to produce the information flow of life, love, and laughter.

If we are intellectually honest and humble about what has been discovered, we can only conclude that the Designer operates at a level way above our ability to understand or even imagine. We are the result of a bizarre, purposeful, ingenious design that no one on this planet comprehends. ☉



Is America a Christian Nation?

Examining the Faith of the People Based on Survey Responses

by **Daniel Witt**

In the Muslim world where I live, there is a widespread perception that “Christians have free sex.” America is perceived as sexually immoral, and America is perceived as the preeminent “Christian” nation; so it follows, from these perceptions, that Christianity is sexually immoral.

Whenever I encounter this viewpoint, I want to object. I want to say that America is neither as immoral, nor as Christian, as it may appear from the outside. I want to protest that the “Hollywood” lifestyle isn’t really representative of America, and that not all Americans are Christians in the first place—so it isn’t fair to tar Christians with that brush!

But whenever I respond this way, I have a nagging doubt. Is it quite true? Am I completely justified in distancing American Christians from the immoral behavior that Middle Easterners see in pop culture? Two-thirds of Americans identify as Christians. And pop culture must be pop culture because it is, well, *popular*, right?

Of course, in the final verdict, Christians in America, or anywhere else, do not have “free sex” because you cannot live that way and be a faithful Christian. Paul wrote to the Christians in sexually licentious Corinth, “Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”¹ This is clear enough.

Survey Data on Christianity, Sex & Morality

I am going to focus, then, on what Americans say about the issue that stands out to people in the Middle East: sexuality. There are two good reasons for using this as a delineator. First, because it provides measurable data. The Christian teachings about sexuality are generally clear, black-and-white directives, and opinion polls and surveys about sexuality are commonly accessible. Second, sexuality is an area where Christian teachings run counter to the culture at the moment. To get a clear picture of what you're looking at, you have to focus on what makes it stand out from its surroundings, not on what it shares with its surroundings. With that in mind, let's compare some basic Christian teachings on sexuality with the opinions of the American population.

How "Christian" is "Christian" America?

The question, then, is really this: what portion of Christians in America are authentically Christian? And what portion are only Christian in name?

I think it is possible to approximate an upper limit on the number of genuine Christians in a society because there are certain necessary (but not sufficient) criteria of being a true believer that are measurable. Perhaps the most measurable one is "just agreeing with the god you claim to believe in"—a *Christian* should agree with Christ.

Many people would bristle at the idea that they aren't true Christians because they hold certain views. However, Jesus specially addressed those people. He said that his true followers are not those who call him "Lord," but those who actually obey him.² Of course, Christianity is about the heart, and I'm not claiming to know any individual's heart. But Jesus did say that words reveal the heart.³

Nonmarital Sex

Christianity clearly forbids sex outside of marriage. But a 2020 Pew survey indicated that only 33 percent of those *who self-identify as Christians* believe that casual nonmarital sex is "never" acceptable.⁴ Worse, the question specified clearly that it referred to *casual* sex, as opposed to sex between partners in a committed, nonmarital relationship. Seventeen percent said it is "rarely" acceptable, 32 percent said "sometimes" acceptable, and 18 percent said "always" acceptable. (I have to admit, I find those middle answers a bit perplexing. Apparently, almost half of professing Christians in the population think there are extenuating circumstances that make casual sex okay. But ... such as what? A bad day at work?) Since self-identified Christians make up about two-thirds of the population, this translates to around 20 percent of the general population comprising Christians who agree with this basic teaching.

Lust

Jesus said that anyone who even looks lustfully at a woman has already committed adultery in his heart.



The White House hosts a Pride celebration, Saturday, June 10, 2023

That should preclude pornography. In a 2018 Gallup poll, about half of American men and about a third of women said that pornography use is “morally acceptable.”⁵ That’s not as bad as you might expect, right? But the reality looks worse if you look a bit closer. In a 2019 study that broke the answers down in more detail, only nine percent responded “Strongly Agree” to “I believe that pornography use is morally wrong,” compared with 33 percent who chose “Strongly Disagree.” Another 19 percent were neutral. Five percent responded “Agree” and eight percent “Somewhat Agree,” adding up to around 22 percent of the total population actually denouncing porn use.⁶

Divorce

Jesus stated repeatedly and in no unclear terms that divorce is morally unacceptable.⁷ Yet, according to the latest Gallup polls, 78 percent of Americans say that divorce is morally acceptable, leaving at most 22 percent who say it is unacceptable.⁸

The Underlying Worldview

Beliefs about sexuality stem from beliefs about the nature of reality and the meaning of human

life. So what do Americans say they believe about *that*? A Pew survey conducted in 2017 about where Americans find meaning in life revealed that they were more likely to choose “caring for pets” and “listening to music” as sources of meaning than “your religious faith.”⁹ In the open-ended question portion of the survey, respondents were more likely to mention career or money than anything related to faith and spirituality. In my generation, ages 18–29, only 10 percent mentioned faith and spirituality (compared to 30 percent in the 65+ generation).

That’s the American dream, then: get enough money so you can come home from work each day, listen to music with your dog, and forget about the emptiness of life for a while. In fact, only 20 percent chose religion as the *most* important source of meaning in their lives. Even among self-identified Christians, it was only 29 percent.

C. S. Lewis said, “Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.” If you agree—and it’s hard to imagine how anyone could disagree, given the claims of Christianity—then that implies that less than a third of self-identified Christians in America actually believe in the whole thing, deep down.

Emboldening Foreign Powers

Any orthodox religious believer who is paying attention knows that American (and Western) morality is in severe decline, even dancing on the edge of a cliff. This isn’t anything new. What started off as “liberation” from traditional values during the sexual revolution of the 1960s has now devolved into abject rebellion against God’s design for human beings. We have reached a point where sexual deviancy, killing unborn children, and the mutilation of born children’s genitals is not only celebrated but enforced. But what many people don’t realize is that the West’s sexual decadence is being eagerly cited by Muslims worldwide as “Exhibit A” for why Christianity is wrong and Islam is the “true” religion.

Christians who know the history of the West may be puzzled by this. After all, we know that the West generally, and the U.S. specifically, haven’t been “Christian” for decades. Any sexually repugnant trends in our culture stem directly from a rejection of Christian values, not an embrace of them. Indeed, the average *Salvo* reader knows that it is *only* the Christians (along with some other orthodox religious believers) who are standing *against* the cultural tides of sexual immorality. Even though our culture really is not Christian overall, faithful Christians stand out as the few who are standing for what is right. Muslims who blame Christians or Christianity for these problems don’t realize that Christians are just about the only ones trying to resist the tides and repair the culture.

While this is good news for those involved in apologetics conversations over Islam, it’s bad news for Western culture on a geopolitical level. Here’s why: When Muslims in the Middle East, or even average folks in powerful non-Western nations like Russia or China, see transgender activists in the U.S. prancing around and claiming that little boys can become little girls, they see American culture as degenerate and weak. Unfortunately, on that point, they are probably right. To put it plainly, trans activists like Dylan Mulvaney are huge motivators for our foes around the world. Spectacles like him make our enemies think that we are weak and that they have the moral high ground, and it greatly emboldens them to come against us. •

America is clearly not a nation of Christians. It is, unlike some nations, a nation with laws and a history that have been deeply influenced by the teachings of Christianity. It is, unlike some nations, a nation with a significant and active Christian minority. But it is not primarily a nation populated by Christians.

The Verdict

If you review the above surveys, you will see a number emerge. Consistently, about one-fifth of Americans hold the views that a person who accepts Jesus as the ultimate authority on all matters would hold. It looks like roughly 20 percent of Americans—maybe 30 percent in the oldest generations and 10 percent in the youngest—are somewhat serious about being Christians. That is to say, they actually believe the words of Jesus enough to base their stated opinions on what he has said, rather than on what is culturally in vogue. In other words, they adhere, at least as far as survey data can establish, to the religion of Christianity.

Of these people, some smaller percentage actually obey the teachings they affirm, and an unknowable percentage of *those* are Christians in the spiritual sense of having a mystical relationship with God through Jesus.

So to sum all this up, America is clearly *not* a nation of Christians. It is, unlike some nations, a nation with laws and a history that have been deeply influenced by the teachings of Christianity. It is, unlike some nations, a nation with a significant and active Christian minority. But it is not primarily a nation populated by Christians.

The Implications

Some people find comfort in the idea of living in a Christian nation. Well, the good thing about giving up false comforts is that it frees you to start learning to rely on *true* sources of comfort—which tend to provide a deeper and more lasting peace.

For there is a truth that is far more comforting than the idea of living in a Christian nation, if you believe it: If we Christians feel strange and foreign in our own nations, that is because we belong to a different place. There is a heavenly country, and we are all citizens there.

I live in Jordan, where about three to five percent of the population identifies as Christian. Some people worry that America may become that in the future. Maybe it will. But I can share some good news: I don't

think it is any more difficult to be a Christian here than in a "Christian" nation like America.

To be clear, it *is* sometimes less comfortable to identify as a Christian where I live. But as far as *being* one—actually living as a disciple of Jesus—I do not think that is more difficult to achieve here. Rather, it is more difficult to drift through life in comfort and complacency, forgetting that "we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one," forgetting that we have a mission on this earth.¹⁰ And, because it is difficult to forget that, I have found it much easier to find a close-knit and serious Christian community in this country than I ever did in America.

If America became like Jordan, I don't think that would mean that the Kingdom of God had failed. In fact, it would produce at least one major benefit: the nations of the world would no longer look to America to understand what Christianity is.

Jesus did not promise that our nations would be majority Christian, nor did he command us to try to make them so. On the contrary, he said quite clearly that only a minority of people would "enter through the narrow gate" to salvation.¹¹ Christianity is about giving up your life and your very self, and at the end of the day, most people simply do not want to do that.

What Jesus *did* promise is that, as we go and make disciples, he will be with us always, to the very end of the age. I think we should focus on that—and not worry about things he never told us to concern ourselves with. ☺

Notes

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KILLER AIR SOLUTION

Air Pollution, Creation Stewardship
& Human Wellbeing
by Hugh Ross

DELHI, INDIA *Aerial View*



With a metropolitan population of more than 29 million, Delhi, India's capital, holds this unenviable distinction: world's worst city for air quality. According to satellite data, the nation of India ranks first, or *worst* among all nations, especially for particulate pollution.¹ This pollution is more than unpleasant for those who breathe it. It's deadly.

FIGURE 1

Low Visibility Due to PM2.5 at the New Delhi Railway Station

Note that the railway building a half kilometer away is not visible.



Thus, the World Health Organization (WHO) keeps close watch on two forms of particulate air pollution: inhalable particles, with diameters between 2.5 and 10 micrometers, and PM2.5, inhalable particles with diameters of 2.5 micrometers or less. The main components of these two types of particulate pollution are black carbon soot, mineral dust, sulfates, nitrates, ammonia, and sodium chloride (salt).

Since 1998, satellites have been used to measure air pollution levels all around the planet. From 1998 to 2021, the average particulate pollution over India increased by 67.7 percent. Between 2013 and 2021, India was responsible for 59.1 percent of the global increase in such pollution.

In 2021, the average PM2.5 air pollution over India was 58.7 micrograms per cubic meter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), an increase of 4.4 percent over the previous year. Meanwhile, the quantity for Delhi was 126.5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, an increase of 18.2 percent over the previous year. Delhi's 2021 air-pollution level was more than 25 times greater than the maximum humanly tolerable level, a number set by WHO at 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.

Ground-based instruments indicate that the city of Darbhanga, located in northeast India, may have an even higher PM2.5 air-pollution level than Delhi. According to their measurements, Darbhanga's average PM2.5 level in 2021

was 175.9 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, more than 35 times greater than the WHO limit.²

Right behind India in exposing its citizens to high levels of PM2.5 air pollution are eastern China and virtually all the nations of Southeast Asia. In China, PM2.5 air pollution takes 2.5 years off the life expectancy of the average citizen, and even more from those living in the largest cities.³ In Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan, the effect of PM2.5 is worse yet, shortening average life expectancy by five years.⁴ The loss of life expectancy attributable to particulate pollution across all of Asia averages 3.3 years.⁵

HEALTH CONSEQUENCES

Those of us who have warmed ourselves near an open fire that's pouring out copious clouds of smoke know by experience the respiratory distress this smoke causes. As it starts irritating our nasal passages and lungs, we instinctively back away, at least until the wind sends it in a different direction.

Inhalable particulates from an open fire tend to be larger than 2.5 micrometers, typically about 10 micrometers in diameter. These larger particles can penetrate deep into lungs and even into the bloodstream, where they cause serious health problems. However, the smaller PM2.5 particles actually pose the greatest health risks, such as decreased lung function, increased lung injury, fibrosis, aggravated asthma, COPD, irregular heartbeat, and increased risk of heart attack, lung cancer, and premature death in people with heart or lung disease.⁶ Children and older adults are most at risk from exposure.

Sadly, the PM2.5 pollution in India shows elevated levels of arsenic, tin, and lead.⁷ Long-term exposure to elevated levels of these elements is a known contributor to cancer and organ failure. In other words, this pollution is a slow, stealthy killer.

IMPACT ON INDIA'S LIFE EXPECTANCY

For people living in what has now become the world's most populous nation, PM2.5 air pollution currently shortens the average person's life expectancy by 5.3 years.⁸ According to the latest Quality of Life Index, the average person living in the vicinity of Delhi would be able to live 11.9 years longer *if* the PM2.5 level there were reduced to 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ or less.⁹

India's northern plains region is home to 39 percent of India's 1.4 billion people. These 546 million people, on account of PM2.5 exposure, are on track to lose eight years of life expectancy.¹⁰ Without doubt, exposure to PM2.5 air pollution ranks as the greatest threat to life expectancy in India, ahead of cardiovascular diseases, high systolic blood pressure,

and tobacco use, all of which have received serious attention in recent years while particulate pollution has been increasing.

ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE

PM2.5, the primary cause of reduced visibility (haze) in the atmosphere (see figures 1 and 2), also increases the acidity of lakes, streams, estuaries, seas, and oceans. It melts snow and ice, significantly contributing to global warming by decreasing the reflectivity of Earth's surface. It depletes soil nutrients, damages food crops, fruit trees, and forests, and even degrades buildings, bridges, monuments, and statues.

POTENTIAL REMEDIES

Nearly all of India's PM2.5 air pollution comes from the burning of coal, wood, biomass, diesel, oil, and gasoline, with coal burning as the biggest contributor.¹¹ Replacing these fuel sources with natural gas would eliminate the majority of India's PM2.5, virtually all but the small amount arising from road and construction dust. In addition, this replacement would immediately reduce India's carbon greenhouse gas emissions by nearly half.

Natural gas or methane (CH_4) is a clean fuel in that it releases no particulates as it burns. The end products are water vapor and carbon dioxide. While both are greenhouse gases, only the carbon dioxide contributes to global warming. The extra water vapor simply condenses as rain, dew, mist, snow, hail, or frost.

In North America, natural gas is a cheaper source of fuel than coal, wood, diesel, oil, and gasoline.

Consequently, natural gas is used ubiquitously for heating and for generating electricity. When truck and car engines are converted to run on natural gas, the fuel costs for these vehicles are cut in half. Thus, for most North Americans and Western Europeans, exposure to PM2.5 air pollution is not a health risk. By switching to natural gas, Canada, the United States, and Western Europe saw the most dramatic drop, among all the world's nations, in greenhouse gas emissions.

BARRIERS TO REMEDIATION

While natural gas is abundant and relatively inexpensive in North America, such is not the



FIGURE 2

PM2.5 air pollution in New Delhi blocks out much or most of the sun's light.

case in India, China, and Southeast Asia. Why? North America is sitting on huge natural gas reserves—enough to rid the whole world of dependence on coal, wood, diesel, oil, and gasoline fuel sources, and for less money than those Asian countries are paying now.

To make this resource available to the rest of the world, however, North America would have to scale up its capacity to export liquefied natural gas. Natural gas can be cooled to liquid form for ease and safety of storage and transport. Liquefied natural gas takes up only 1/600th the volume of natural gas at standard temperature and pressure conditions. Giant tanker ships have the capacity to transport the equivalent of 162 million cubic meters of natural gas to ports all over the world (see figure 3).

The problem, however, is that on January 26, 2024, the executive branch of the U.S. government decided to delay consideration of constructing any new liquefied natural gas terminals in the United States. The rationale given for this decision was to cut greenhouse gas emissions. Ironically, this decision does just the opposite. It has the effect of forcing India, China, and Southeast Asia to continue burning coal, wood, diesel, oil, and gasoline. Worse yet, it perpetuates shortening the lives of more than a billion human beings.

SPIRITUAL LESSONS

God put humans in charge of Earth's resources to wisely manage them for our benefit and the benefit of all Earth's life (Genesis 1:28–30). Wise management implies paying attention to unintended consequences. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, Chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee for the United States Congress, has explained the unintended consequences of limiting LNG exports.¹² While the goal of eliminating virtually all greenhouse gas emissions through the development of wind, water, solar, and nuclear power is laudable, this goal will take time to achieve—an estimated two more decades, at least.

Meanwhile, it would be prudent and life-enhancing for the nations to lower greenhouse gas emissions by replacing high-greenhouse-gas-emitting fossil fuels with the lowest-greenhouse-gas-emitting fossil fuel: natural gas. After all, natural gas is the most abundant and cost-effective fossil fuel resource available. It's the one and only fossil fuel resource that releases no particulate matter!

The Bible calls the descendants of Adam and Eve to live compassionately, in the love and strength God alone provides, and to alleviate poverty and suffering wherever they exist. Supplying Asia with abundant natural gas would save tens of millions



FIGURE 3

Q-Max LNG Tanker Carrier

With a length of 345 meters (1,132 feet) and a width of 54 meters (177 feet), a Q-Max LNG Tanker ship can transport 266,000 cubic meters of liquefied natural gas (LNG). That's 162,000,000 cubic meters of natural gas at normal temperature and pressure.

of lives and would alleviate widespread distress and agony among humans and animals alike. It would dramatically boost the economies of both North American and Asian nations. It would quickly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, bringing about the fastest and most dramatic mitigation of global warming and climate change. It would enhance the ecosystems of Asia and increase food and forest productivity throughout Asia. It would clear up the skies over Asian cities so that the 2+ billion people living in those cities could actually see stars at night. Once again, for billions of people the heavens could—and would—declare the glory and righteousness of God (Psalms 19:1, 97:6). ☉

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Intersex

Check the Facts: How Common Is Intersex? And Why Does It Matter?

by Leonard Sax

In March 2023, Liam Morrison was an eighth-grader on the honor roll at John T. Nichols Middle School in Middleborough, Massachusetts. One day, Liam wore a t-shirt to school emblazoned with the message, "There are only two genders." Only a few minutes after arriving at school, Liam was removed from his classroom. The principal told Liam that he must remove his t-shirt because it was offensive. Liam refused, so the principal sent Liam home.¹

Liam had violated the fundamental orthodoxy of contemporary gender ideology: namely, that biological sex is a continuous spectrum, not a male/female dichotomy, and that any claim to the contrary is bigoted and harmful. "Human sex is not binary," *Scientific American* informs us.² "Sex is not binary," agrees a recent article in *American Scientist*.³ According to an article in *The Atlantic*, the notion that humans are either male or female reflects "a fundamental misunderstanding about the nature of biological sex. Science keeps showing us that sex also doesn't fit in a binary, whether it be

Visual Representation of 1/50

Sexual Politics

How common is intersex? According to the *Washington Post*, “nearly 2 percent of the population—roughly the same percentage of people born with red hair—is intersex.” If it’s true that intersex is as common as red hair, then human sex is not binary. But what if intersex is actually very rare?

determined by genitals, chromosomes, hormones, or bones.”⁴ Secretary of State Anthony Blinken earlier this year issued a memo to all employees of the State Department, warning them to avoid use of the gender binary.⁵ Blinken’s cable, sent on February 5, 2024, advised employees to “avoid using phrases like ‘brave men and women on the front lines’”; a better choice would be “brave first responders.” Likewise, staff were advised to replace “mothers and fathers” with “parents”; “husband or wife” should be scrubbed in favor of “spouse”; better to use “every-one” because “ladies and gentlemen” is no longer acceptable.

The Nonbinary Assertion

What is the basis for the assertion that human sex is not binary? The phenomenon that proponents most often cite is *intersex*: individuals who are both male and female, or who do not fit neatly into either male or female categories. A classic example of true intersex is an XX/XY chimera: an individual who is an amalgam of female and male. Such individuals often have ambiguous genitalia—not quite male, not quite female—and they may even have an ovary on one side and a testicle on the other side. An XX/XY chimera can arise as a result of simultaneous fertilization of a single ovum by both an X-carrying sperm and a Y-carrying sperm. Documented human XX/XY chimeras are exceedingly rare, with only a handful of cases reported in the literature worldwide.

How common is intersex? According to the *Washington Post*, “nearly 2 percent of the population—roughly the same percentage of people born with red hair—is intersex.”⁶ The United Nations Human Rights Office likewise claims that “being

intersex [is] almost as common as being a redhead!” (exclamation point in original).⁷ According to an ACLU web page, “up to 1.7% of the world’s population is intersex, making it almost as common as having red hair.”⁸ And if the *Washington Post*, the United Nations, and the ACLU all say it’s true, then it must be true, right? And if it’s true that intersex is as common as red hair, then Liam Morrison’s t-shirt is simply wrong and human sex is not binary.

But what if intersex is actually very rare? Conjoined twins—what we used to call “Siamese twins”—are rare, fewer than one in 100,000 live births. We don’t create theories of personality based on the norm of two heads sharing one body, because two heads sharing one body is a rare pathology, not a normal variation. If intersex is a normal variation, akin to red hair, then our understanding of gender needs to accommodate that fact, and we must indeed replace the male/female binary with a continuous spectrum. But if intersex is exceedingly rare, closer to conjoined twins, then intersex conditions are better understood as uncommon pathologies, not as normal variations, and the male/female binary remains valid. That’s why it’s important to know: is intersex as common as red hair? Or is it uncommon, or indeed rare?

Intersex Defined & Redefine

Where does that figure of 1.7 percent, or “nearly 2 percent,” come from? That figure comes from a single source: a paper published in 2000 by Anne Fausto-Sterling, a now-retired professor of biology at Brown University. Fausto-Sterling had long been

interested in intersex. In her 1993 essay “The Five Sexes,” she defined “intersex” as referring either to individuals who have XY chromosomes with predominantly female anatomy, or to individuals with XX chromosomes with predominantly male anatomy, or to individuals with ambiguous or mixed genitalia.⁹ That’s a reasonable definition of intersex. But how common is it?

Seven years later, in 2000, Fausto-Sterling supervised five of her undergraduate students in writing a paper titled, “How sexually dimorphic are we?”¹⁰ The objective of the paper was to determine how common intersex is by adding up all the different intersex conditions. But in deciding what conditions to include, she didn’t use her own definition of intersex from her 1993 essay. Instead, she invented a completely new definition, one never before used or suggested by anyone: according to Fausto-Sterling and her five students, an individual is intersex if that individual “deviates from the Platonic ideal of physical dimorphism at the chromosomal, genital, gonadal, or hormonal levels.” That greatly expanded definition allowed Fausto-Sterling and her students to classify men with XY chromosomes and normal male internal and external genitalia, as well as women with XX chromosomes and normal female internal and external genitalia, as “intersex” because they depart from the “Platonic ideal of physical dimorphism.”

Armed with her new definition, Fausto-Sterling and her students were able to conjure a figure of 1.7 percent of the human population qualifying as intersex. Most of that 1.7 percent—more than 88 percent, to be precise—comes from just one condition: late-onset congenital adrenal hyperplasia (LOCAH). Fausto-Sterling and her students asserted that 1.5 percent of humans have LOCAH, and they classify LOCAH as an intersex condition.

Spurious Reasoning

So what is LOCAH? Individuals with LOCAH have a deficiency in one of five enzymes that metabolize adrenal hormones, most often the enzyme 21-hydroxylase. As a result of the resulting hormonal imbalance, individuals with LOCAH often have severe acne; women with LOCAH are more likely to miscarry, although the rate of miscarriage can be greatly reduced if the obstetrician checks for LOCAH and prescribes the appropriate treatment, an inexpensive oral pill. But because such individuals deviate “from the Platonic ideal” with regard to “hormonal levels,” Fausto-Sterling classifies them as intersex. Indeed, of the five most common conditions she and her students classify as intersex in the 2000 paper, *none* meet the basic criteria for intersex that Fausto-Sterling herself had set forward in 1993.

We should not abolish the male/female binary to accommodate intersex individuals any more than we should abolish staircases because some individuals are wheelchair-bound. By all means, let’s provide ramps and elevators for those who cannot walk. But let’s keep the staircases for the rest of us.

It’s worth emphasizing that individuals with LOCAH simply are not, by any stretch of the imagination, intersex. Men with LOCAH have normal XY chromosomes and a normal penis, prostate, and testicles. They look like men. They *are* men. Women with LOCAH have normal XX chromosomes and a normal vagina, uterus, and ovaries. They look like women. They *are* women. Fausto-Sterling and her students appear to have recognized that if their definition of the intersexual as “an individual who deviates from the Platonic ideal of physical dimorphism” was to have any plausibility, then at least some patients with LOCAH must at least occasionally have problems which are intersexual in nature. Accordingly, she and her students asserted that “when late-onset CAH occurs in childhood or adolescence and causes significant clitoral growth, it is quite possible that surgical intervention will ensue.” There is no shred of evidence anywhere in the scholarly literature to support this claim. Fausto-Sterling and her students did provide one citation in support of this remarkable assertion: a first-person account in the women’s magazine *Mademoiselle*. However, the article in *Mademoiselle*—titled “Am I a Woman or a Man?”—describes an individual with XY chromosomes but complete androgen insensitivity syndrome: in other words, a classic case of true intersex meeting Fausto-Sterling’s 1993 criteria, in this case an individual who appears to be a woman but who has male chromosomes.¹¹ The article in *Mademoiselle* never mentions LOCAH or anyone who has anything like LOCAH. Fausto-Sterling and

her students cited an article about complete androgen insensitivity syndrome in support of a claim they made about LOCAH, an unrelated condition.

A Fraudulent Figure Gone Viral

After the 2000 paper on intersex appeared, Fausto-Sterling published a book titled *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*, which drew heavily on the claim that 1.7 percent of humans are intersex. The book made a huge splash. "Instead of viewing intersexuality as a genetic hiccup," went the review in the *Washington Post*, "[Fausto-Sterling] points out that its frequency mandates a fresher look. In one study, intersexuality typically constitutes 1.7% of a community."¹² *The New England Journal of Medicine* applauded Fausto-Sterling's "careful and insightful book. . . . She [Fausto-Sterling] points out that intersexual newborns are not rare (they may account for 1.7% of births), so a review of our attitudes about these children is overdue. . . ."¹³ "Most people believe that there are only two sex categories," went the review in *American Scientist*. "Yet 17 out of every 1,000 people fail to meet our assumption that everyone is either male or female. This is the approximate incidence of intersexuals: individuals with XY chromosomes and female anatomy, XX chromosomes and male anatomy, or anatomy that is half male and half female."¹⁴

This reviewer, like most reviewers, appears never to have read Fausto-Sterling's 2000 paper, but only the press release. The reviewer reasonably assumed that Fausto-Sterling was using the usual definition of intersex, the same definition of intersex Fausto-Sterling herself had endorsed in 1993. But the five most common conditions cited by Fausto-Sterling and her students in their 2000 paper don't meet the criteria the *American Scientist* reviewer outlined: they are not individuals with XY chromosomes and female anatomy, they are not individuals with XX chromosomes and male anatomy, nor do they have anatomy "that is half male and half female."

Political Advocacy Masquerading as Science

Fausto-Sterling was acting not as a scientist but as a political advocate. When she was interviewed on this topic in 2001 by *The New York Times*, she said, "My point is that there's greater human variation than supposed. My political point is that we can afford to lighten up about what it means to be male or female. We should definitely lighten up on those who



Visual Representation of 1/5,000

fall in between *because there are a lot of them*" [emphasis added].¹⁵ In order to deconstruct the male/female binary, Fausto-Sterling recognized that she had to show that "there are a lot" of people who don't fit the binary. So she twisted the facts to suit her political agenda, reclassifying men and women with hormonal imbalances as intersex, in order to inflate the number of intersex individuals by a factor of 100.

That's right: when you remove the five most common conditions cited by Fausto-Sterling in her 2000 paper, none of which meets the criteria for intersex as she herself defined it in 1993, the frequency of intersex drops by a factor of roughly 100, from almost two in 100 births to fewer than two in 10,000 births. That's the true incidence of actual intersex: fewer than two in 10,000.

I wrote a peer-reviewed scholarly paper, published in August 2002 by the *Journal of Sex Research*, titled "How Common Is Intersex? A response to Anne Fausto-Sterling."¹⁶ In my paper, I showed that Fausto-Sterling was boosting the numbers of "intersex" individuals by including people, such as men and women with LOCAH, who don't come close to meeting any sensible definition of intersex. I revealed the many dishonest and misleading prevarications Fausto-Sterling and her students had fabricated in order to swell the numbers of intersex people by two orders of magnitude.

Male & Female

Try Googling the question "How common is intersex?" Among the top twenty hits, you will find two numbers in answer to that question. The first number is 1.7 percent. About as common as red hair! When you dig, you will find that every web page citing the 1.7 percent figure is getting that figure from Fausto-Sterling's 2000 paper, or from her 2000 book *Sexing the Body*, or from some other source citing Fausto-Sterling. The other figure you will find, on the other web pages, is 0.018%, or just under two in 10,000, the figure which I provided in my 2002 scholarly paper. And every one of *those* web pages cites my 2002 paper, directly or indirectly.

You have to choose: whom are you going to believe? Anne Fausto-Sterling or me? I hope you will read both of our papers and then decide for yourself.

Intersex is not a normal human variation. It is not analogous to red hair. It is a rare pathology. And please remember: recognizing a condition as a medical pathology has no moral connotation. I have high blood pressure. That doesn't make me a bad person. But if I don't treat my high blood pressure, bad things may happen. An intersex individual has a rare health condition which warrants appropriate

and caring treatment. That doesn't mean intersex people are bad people, and it certainly doesn't mean that they need surgical intervention. Most do not. In her book *Sexing the Body*, Fausto-Sterling rightly notes that throughout the twentieth century, many surgeons sought to "correct" the ambiguous genitalia of babies born intersex, often with disastrous results. So I agree with Fausto-Sterling that the care of intersex individuals should be done with the utmost respect and caution.

But the reality is that 99.98 percent of humans are either male or female. Not both. Not neither. The division of the human race into male and female is a hardwired characteristic of our species, as it is for most higher mammals. It is not an invention of the heteronormative patriarchy. Intersex individuals exist, but they are rare. We should not abolish the male/female binary to accommodate intersex individuals any more than we should abolish staircases because some individuals are wheelchair-bound. By all means, let's provide ramps and elevators for those who cannot walk. But let's keep the staircases for the rest of us.

The next time you hear someone say, "Intersex is as common as red hair," I hope you will find the courage to say, "Actually, it's not. Fewer than two in 10,000 individuals are intersex."

And if you're really feeling brave, you might add this: *In the image of God he created him; male and female he created them* (Genesis 1:27). ☺

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Evolutionary Flimfla

Common Parlor Tricks in Science Reporting

by Jonathan Witt

I suspect the average person comes to accept modern evolutionary theory, not through a series of careful arguments, but through a near-constant drip of pro-evolution propaganda. The propaganda comes in many forms and from many directions. Here I want to focus on just one source, popular news stories about evolution, and specifically on a couple of parlor tricks often embedded in these articles.

BAIT & SWITCH

Probably the most common trick begins with a news headline or lead sentence promising a new discovery of evolution in action. The article then highlights an actual, observed species changing over time. But the example it cites is mere microevolution, such as a change in fur color or minor changes in beak size or leg length.

That won't do. If Charles Darwin had argued that nature can produce modest variations in existing species, the collective response would have been, *now tell us something we don't know*. Evolutionary theory needs to provide evidence of its distinctive claim, namely, that purely natural mechanisms can and do produce major innovations—something like the first wings, the first eyes, new molecular biological machines, or novel animal body plans.

A recent example of this bait and switch begins with the headline, "Long-Term Lizard Study Challenges the Rules of Evolutionary Biology."¹ The headline gives the impression that maybe the lizards in the study, refusing to play by the restrictive rules of standard evolutionary theory, hauled off and evolved in a much more daring way than con-

ventional thinking had allowed. But then we learn that the study's big finding helps explain cases where evolution doesn't generate anything impressive—that is, cases of *stasis*, where a species remains largely unchanged for millions of years.

Hmm, that sounds like the opposite of impressive evolutionary derring-do, doesn't it?

Troubled by this inconsistency but undaunted, we read on and are soon informed that the

researchers have solved a big evolutionary conundrum. The news story invites us to wonder how there could be so many cases of stasis in the history of life when we see evolution doing amazing stuff right before our eyes all the time. The article doesn't mention any of these amazing broad-daylight transformations. Instead it informs us that the study found that the lizards varied in minor ways (e.g., longer or shorter legs) and that the changes, rather than accumulating into something dramatically novel, canceled each other out. Voilà—an explanation for stasis.

That's it. That's the study's big finding. No macroevolution. Just the observation of what was the common view before Darwin's theory of evolution—that healthy members of a species can vary a bit, but only within strict limits.

To sum up the parlor trick: Promise to demonstrate big-time evolution. Demonstrate minor changes and hope the audience doesn't notice the difference.

AN AUDACIOUS USE OF STASIS

A particularly brazen variation on this bait and switch appears in an article out of Ireland. The lead sentence announces, "Palaeontologists at UCC have discovered X-ray evidence of proteins in fossil feathers that sheds new light on feather evolution."² What is the discovery? That, contra expectations, the protein in question has *not* evolved for tens of millions of years. In other words, the findings suggest more stasis in the history of life and diminished evidence for evolution.

So now it's not microevolution (minor changes) standing in for macroevolution (big innovations). It's a discovery of stasis (basically, no change) standing in for macroevolution. Laughable if you're paying attention, but if you're just skimming headlines and articles, well, the word "evolution" appears three times, and the scientific paper being reported on

appeared in *Nature Ecology & Evolution*. Sounds like a whole lotta evolution goin' on.

Drip, drip, drip. So works the propaganda.

DAZZLE & DISTRACT

A second parlor trick used to the same end is a tad harder to spot. It involves reporting on a discovery that sheds light on how some complex biological process *works*, and then promises that the finding gives us important insights into how the process *evolved*. How so? The teaser turns out to be yet another of evolutionary theory's many promissory notes, one you will grow old waiting for payment on.

We shouldn't take the promise on faith, since it's far from automatic that discovering how a

given biological mechanism works will help biologists understand how the process evolved. Certainly it wouldn't if evolution did not actually generate the mechanism in question. But even if we grant for the sake of argument that the biological process did evolve, and did so through blind material forces, it's perfectly possible that gaining a better understanding of how a mechanism works would in no way reveal how the process it's embedded in evolved.

Nor is it enough to show that the newly understood mechanism is useful to the biological system it's a part of. Yes, natural selection tends to favor the useful over the useless in the evolutionary process, but that doesn't allow evolution's blind process

of gradual change to magically look ahead so as to bring together various parts to assemble an intricate new mechanism. The act of looking ahead (foresight) and planning for a distant goal is the exclusive domain of *minds*. Mindless evolution, lacking this capacity, requires a series of small, functional, random mutations (blind baby steps) in order to evolve, say, the first bat sonar or the first air-breathing animals. The evolutionist should detail a plausible stepwise path of this sort, and then we can talk.



This second parlor trick, to summarize, runs like this: (1) Highlight a fresh insight into how a biological mechanism works. (2) Tout the discovery as shedding important light on how a system or process evolved. (3) Don't actually demonstrate #2, but instead dazzle and distract the reader with the challenging technical details of the discovery highlighted in #1.

THE CURIOUS CASE OF TCOF1

An example of this second parlor trick appears in a *ScienceDaily* news piece titled, "Study Explains How Part of the Nucleolus Evolved."³ What did the researchers learn? "Biologists discovered that a scaffolding protein called TCOF1 is responsible for the formation of a biomolecular condensate called the brillar center, which forms within the cell nucleolus."

We could challenge the phrasing there. The language makes it sound like the scaffolding protein single-handedly forms the fibrillar center, when we can be sure the protein is just one crucial player in a process involving many other factors, without which we would have no fibrillar center. But set that quibble aside.

The article further informs us that "biomolecular condensates perform many critical functions" in cells. Then we encounter a refreshing note of humility: "It is not well understood how proteins and other biomolecules come together to form these assemblies within cells." Then an overdue qualifier: "The findings could help to explain a major evolutionary shift, which took place around 300 million years ago, in how the nucleolus is organized."

So we've gone from "Study Explains" in the headline to "The findings could help to explain."

Then another concession: "Biologists do not yet fully understand why this shift happened." Although a welcome injection of honesty, the sentence also subtly implies that biologists *mostly* understand why the shift happened, just not fully. But the article doesn't give us the *mostly*. It just implies that the understanding is out there and leaves us to accept the implicit claim on faith.

What the article does explain is quite different from what the headline promised:

"If you look across the tree of life, the basic structure and function of the ribosome has remained quite static; however, the process of making it keeps evolving. Our hypothesis for why this process keeps evolving is that it might make it easier to assemble ribosomes by compartmentalizing the different

biochemical reactions," says Eliezer Calo, an associate professor of biology at MIT and the senior author of the study.

So, the ribosome presents another striking case of stasis, but at least the process of how it is made keeps evolving, or so we are told. But how do they know the process evolved, and evolved through mindless material mechanisms, as the theory of evolution holds? Just showing that nature has more than one way of making ribosomes doesn't demonstrate that these methods evolved one from another, or from a common ancestral method. After all, the various methods might each have been separately designed, as the various methods for assembling cars were separately designed.

What of the researcher's specific evolutionary hypothesis summarized in the block quote above? It's at best an extremely partial explanation. He is saying that the assembly method evolved because the innovation might make the assembly go smoother. In other words, the explanation of how it evolved boils down to pointing out a possible functional improvement in the method. But usefulness is only a necessary condition of evolution by natural selection; it's far from a sufficient condition, just as being able to dribble a ball is a necessary condition of being an NBA basketball player, but far from a sufficient one.

If the researchers had identified a *definit* functional improvement as an explanation for how the assembly method evolved, that would be weak tea, but they didn't even do that. They only identified a *possible* functional improvement. And from all this we get the breathless headline, "Study Explains How Part of the Nucleolus Evolved."

And so it goes. Drip, drip, drip. ☹

They only identify a *possible* functional improvement. And from all this we get the breathless headline, "Study Explains How Part of the Nucleolus Evolved."

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The Greatest Love

A Tale of Two Cities

by Rick Reed

One of only two historical novels by Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) is set during the French Revolution. The main characters travel between the titular cities, London and Paris, both of which are entering into a time of increasing peril. If the novel went no further, it would be a deft exposition of the socio-political pressures in both cities. Yet the themes of sin, death, and resurrection are the more profound motifs of the story. More than mere historical drama, this novel probes the heart of sin, redemption, and the triumph of self-sacrifice foundational to Christianity.

SEEDS OF REVOLUTION

The sins explored include those that ultimately contribute to revolution. The Marquis St. Evrémonde and his twin brother violate a young bride after working her husband to a cruel death. When her brother comes to avenge her, one of the Evrémonde brothers wounds him in a duel the boy has no hope of winning. They then force a young doctor, Alexandre Manette, to attend to both the dying boy and his sister, now driven mad by the deaths of her husband, father, and brother. To prevent the doctor from reporting these events to the authorities, the marquis has him imprisoned without trial in the Bastille, precipitating the death of his wife and leaving his infant daughter a presumed orphan.

Still, the marquis lives a life of entitlement. After his carriage runs over a child, killing her, he tosses a coin to the grieving father as compensation while his carriage races on to his chateau. His callousness contributes to the growing resentment of the over-taxed and starving poor, and his end comes when the child's father assassinates him as he sleeps. The scene is thus set for revolution as the sins of the aristocracy are answered by the sins of those they have wronged.



Sydney Carton

Sin multiplies in the all-consuming vengeful spirit of Madame Defarge, sister to the young woman violated by the brothers Evrémonde. Her thirst

for blood extends to Evrémonde's nephew, Charles Darnay, along with his wife, his young daughter, and Dr. Manette, who has become his father-in-law. As exemplified by Madame Defarge, the revolutionaries become the new oppressors who have neither mercy nor discernment and who sacrifice both the guilty and the innocent to their new gods, La Révolution and La Guillotine. Like those in rebellion against tradition and reality today, who follow no logic in their campaigns of cancellation, the French revolutionaries react to injustice but hold no true vision of the world their "justice" will create.

REDEMPTION

The theme of redemption plays out in three characters. Dr. Manette is brought out of prison after eighteen years in solitary confinement and taken to London, where he is reunited with his daughter Lucie. Through her filial love and the friendship of the banker, Mr. Lorry, Dr. Manette returns to the life of a learned man who once again sees patients. Further, his "resurrection" from the "grave" of the Bastille into a new life lends him authority among the revolutionaries—but only up to a point, as we shall see.

THE GREATEST LOVE by Rick Reed

The most remarkable “resurrection” is that of Sydney Carton, who is introduced as the “idlest and most unpromising of men.” The narrator remarks, “When he cared to talk, he talked well; but, the cloud of caring for nothing, which overshadowed him with such a fatal darkness, was very rarely pierced by the light within him.” He doesn’t even like himself. In short, there is in him something of the self-loathing seen in so many men today.

Yet even such a profligate character is touched by love. When he calls on Lucie Manette, she hears what amounts to his confession. When he tells her, “I shall never be better than I am,” she responds with compassion and listens to him, responding, “I am sure that you might be much worthier of yourself.” Still, Carton foresees only doom were she to return the love he confesses for her. Though she loves Charles Darnay, she treats Carton with true charity, promising to keep secret his confession. In gratitude he declares to Lucie, “For you, and for any dear to you, I would do anything.” He means these words with all his being.

Under the growing Reign of Terror, Darnay is imprisoned for the crime of being the Marquis St. Evrémonde’s nephew. When Dr. Manette’s efforts to use his influence on the revolutionaries fail to free his son-in-law, he finds himself, his daughter, and his grandchild under threat. At this point, Carton arranges a scheme to rescue Darnay from the guillotine and return him, along with his family, to safety in London: Carton, who bears a striking resemblance to Darnay, arranges to take Darnay’s place in prison, and so Darnay’s rescue will cost Carton his life. Carton’s final words are no understatement: “It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done;

it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.” His is a Christian confession.

Carton pulls off the switch, and Darnay returns to civilian life, just as his father-in-law, Dr. Manette, had done. Carton’s self-sacrifice also manifests a kind of resurrection for Carton himself. The man broken by disappointment and convinced of his own worthlessness is reborn into the nobility of character that Lucie had hoped for him when he confessed his love to her.

SELF-SACRIFICE

Though Dickens’s novels generally celebrate life lived in harmony within the boundaries of Christian morality, none does so more overtly than *A Tale of Two Cities*. Dickens places in Sydney Carton’s mouth the words of Jesus, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11:25–26). The reformed sinner Carton repeats these words as he walks the streets of Paris before putting his plan to save Darnay into effect. Carton will embody Christ’s words in John 15:13: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” In laying down his life for Darnay, Carton imitates Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice for all humanity.

Whitney Houston declared self-love to be the greatest possible love in her 1985 hit, “The Greatest Love of All”—an anthem anticipating the celebration of self that rules the West today. Dickens disagrees. Self-sacrifice is surely the most Christlike expression of love we may aspire to in any age. Sydney Carton is himself redeemed in it, and he saves four people by substituting himself as a consignee to the guillotine.

A Tale of Two Cities is a novel to read or re-read. Well-known as a social critic, Charles Dickens was also unashamedly Christian, once writing, “All my good people are humble, charitable, faithful, forgiving, over and over again. I claim them in expressed words as disciples of the Founder of our religion.” Sydney Carton is such a character, one young people today would do well not only to read about but to imitate. ☉

Dickens’s novels generally celebrate life lived in harmony within the boundaries of Christian morality. None does so more overtly than *A Tale of Two Cities*.



The best/worst of times, France, 1794



The Big Bluff

Darwin's Unfulfilled Promissory Note

by Denyse O'Leary

Charles Darwin (1809–1882) has become a mythical figure of gigantic proportions, and his theory drives a surprising amount of popular discussion. I often hear pundits referring to “evolution,” and by that they always mean Darwinism. It’s as much science as they care to know, in most cases.

That fact makes reading Robert Shedinger’s *Darwin’s Bluff: The Mystery of the Book Darwin Never Finished* (Discovery Institute Press, 2024) an unusual experience. By meticulously analyzing Darwin’s massive correspondence with his associates, Shedinger, a professor of religion at Luther College in Iowa, quietly blows up the Darwin myth. He shows that, in actual history, Darwin never demonstrated to his colleagues’ satisfaction that the mechanism of natural selection acting on random mutations accounted for what was known about the history of life.

Darwin’s colleagues were not concerned about the effect of his theories on religion. Rather, they frequently complained that “while he made arguments, he provided little evidence and essentially proved nothing.”

RETICENCE TO PUBLISH

Spurred by Alfred Russel Wallace’s famous letter outlining a theory very similar to his own, Darwin, to avoid preemption, published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 as an *abstract*, while promising a much longer book that would supply the evidence for his thesis. But he never published that longer book, even though it was, as Shedinger tells us, three-quarters written by that time. He went on to publish works on orchids and sexual selection instead.

Two questions arise: Why didn’t Darwin publish the evidence for his momentous theory? And why

was his thesis hailed as one of the greatest ideas in science despite that fact?

Darwin often cited illness as a reason for not publishing. But Shedinger draws a different conclusion, based on reading the manuscript:

Darwin, I want to suggest, knew that he did not have the kind of evidence necessary to prove the theory of natural selection, and his rhetoric of illness provided a ready excuse for his endless delays in presenting the promised evidence to the public. It was also a ready excuse for his absence from scientific meetings where he might be confronted by critics and have to defend his ideas.

When the “Big Book” was eventually published a century later in 1975,¹ it promptly disappeared from public attention. Why? Well, one reason, Shedinger says, is that it never did supply the promised evidence. Darwin continued to rely on *artificial* selection by humans as an analogy for *unplanned, blind* selection by nature. Instead of the promised long catalog of facts, he offers ten proposed examples of natural selection, along with imaginary scenarios of how it might have worked. Shedinger comments, “Readers hoping to see a rich array of empirical evidence for the creative powers of natural selection would have been disappointed.”

NATURAL SELECTION DEIFIED

A bigger problem for Darwin’s argument is that the Big Book continues to endow natural selection with the power of foresight. Contemporaries had pointed out the flaw in Darwin’s logic in his then-published works and chided him for deifying natural selection—and they had, of course, never even seen the big manuscript. But by 1975, qualms like theirs were long in the past. Shedinger notes that 1975 reviews of the Big Book “provide virtually no engagement with the contents of the manuscript.”

Why not? Whereas Darwin’s contemporaries had been looking for hard, specific data showing that natural selection could turn cows into whales, our own contemporaries simply *assume* that the evidence is overwhelming. Shedinger observes:



The man whose name is today synonymous with naturalistic evolutionary theory and natural selection knew, it would seem, that he couldn't find and present the crucial confirming evidence for his theory in his own lifetime. The notion that he did so, and that the decades following his death were a mere mopping-up operation, is the mythology. The reality is very different, and the tell is that Darwin, a master bluffer, never showed his hand.

And he never really needed to. Stephen Jay Gould thought Darwin did not need to publish his longer work. Of course not; by then, evidence had long been irrelevant.² Faith had substituted for the lack of evidence, filling in gaps everywhere. Thus, changes in life forms are *assumed*, rather than *shown*, to have been caused by Darwinism. Other possible causes are subject to, at best, scrutiny and, at worst, hostility.

One area where the Darwin myth has made mince pie out of reality is the famous Huxley–Wilberforce debate, in which “Darwin’s bulldog,” Thomas Henry Huxley, supposedly humiliated a pompous bishop, Samuel Wilberforce. Wilberforce, we are told, opposed Darwin’s theory without really understanding it. In reality, Shedinger found, Wilberforce wrote a nearly 14,000-word review of *The Origin* that “documents how deeply he

did understand Darwin’s work.” In the review, Wilberforce made clear that he would not oppose Darwin’s theory if the evidence supported it. But, like so many of his contemporaries, he judged that it didn’t.

Ironically, some of Darwin’s own work testified against him in his day as well. Delaying the Big Book, he decided to study orchids, thinking that they might provide enough evidence for his theories to hold off his critics. Among his contemporaries, however, the strategy backfired rather badly. They discerned in the evidence he provided the work of an “intelligent designer”: “Review after review of Darwin’s orchid book sounded the same theme. Darwin had provided evidence not for natural selection, but for natural theology.”

Darwin never demonstrated to his colleagues’ satisfaction that the mechanism of natural selection acting on random mutations accounted for what was known about the history of life.

MYTHOLOGIZED & CORRUPTED HISTORY

For my part, after a thorough immersion in the voluminous letter- and journal-writing of Darwin’s day, as analyzed by Shedinger, I must come to terms with the fact that a historic controversy has been utterly corrupted and entirely subsumed by myth. The myth is aimed at promoting the creation story of atheistic naturalism. Many have quoted zoologist Richard Dawkins’s claim that Darwinism made it easier to be “an intellectually fulfilled atheist,”³ or philosopher Daniel Dennett’s claim that the theory was “the single best idea anyone has ever had.”⁴

But that’s cultural politics, not science. And these days, few are aware that much misrepresentation of the source material was required to produce the desired result. ☉

Notes

1. Darwin’s “Big Book”: *Charles Darwin’s Natural Selection: Being the Second Part of His Big Species Book Written from 1856 to 1858*, R. C. Stauffer, Ed., Cambridge University Press (1975).

2. Stephen Jay Gould, “Darwin’s ‘Big Book,’” *Science* Vol 188, Issue 4190 (May 23, 1975).

3. Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*, Longman, Scientific and Technical (1986), p. 6.

4. Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, Simon & Schuster (1995).



Life on the Edge

Fourteen Hours

by Anthony Esolen

I've often thought that the writers and directors in Hollywood no longer know how to tell a human story. Part of the reason is that the works themselves have gotten in the way, so that a film, let us say, about a man standing on a ledge high up on a skyscraper in Manhattan, threatening to jump, ends up being a film about "suicide," or "mental illness," or a film take-off on other films about those things, rather than a film about one man, one day, and, as in the case of *Fourteen Hours* (1951), a very ordinary cop who tries to save his life.

ABOUT TO JUMP

Thoreau said that most men lead lives of quiet desperation. It was the sort of exaggeration he was given to; perhaps his brooding solitariness was the cause. It's easy to see how you can be solitary in a shack on the banks of Walden Pond; not so easy if you live in Manhattan. Yet the loneliness of the city is deeper than the loneliness of the woods. On



the pond, you have to go fishing to get your supper, and the feeling that you share the world with other living things, with creatures that do not threaten you but go about their daily business, can soothe the heart. But if you are in the city, the works of man are everywhere, and so are people—in competition, at strife, always comparing themselves with one another, even when they look straight ahead and might as well consign you to a planet a million light years away. Then you might say what the young Robert Cosick (Richard Basehart) says in *Fourteen Hours*. It's all a bad job, this world. What's the use?

So he is on the ledge, but nervous about what he has decided to do, when an ordinary beat-walking cop, Charlie Dunnigan (Paul Douglas) catches sight of him and phones in to headquarters that there's a "jumper." He then rushes up to the room in the building, leans out of the window, straddles the ledge, and talks to Cosick, asks him what's bothering him.

"Life stinks and you know it!" Cosick cries out. "It's a rat race, a rat race!" Now, Officer Dunnigan has no idyllic life, as we've begun to see. He does have a family he loves, but he's a middle-aged man going nowhere in his job, and throughout the film he is treated by his superiors with mingled annoyance and impatience. And what about all the people gathering in the streets below? Some are there for the spectacle. Some are taking bets. A woman in a lawyer's office sees him from across the way (the actress is Grace Kelly, doing a cameo in her first film) She's there to sign divorce papers.

Cosick's own mother and father, we learn, are separated. The mother (Agnes Moorehead, who made a career of playing haridans, though she actually liked children and always brought a Bible with her to the set) has long poisoned the boy's mind against his weak-willed father (Robert Keith, the father of the soft-spoken, tough-guy actor Brian Keith). In one scene, it's the mother herself who nearly causes her son to jump. Meanwhile, we learn that Cosick has a girlfriend whom he loves, but they have broken up, or at least he has given up hope, and it is all Officer Dunnigan can do to wring from the mother the name of this girl, Virginia (Barbara Bel Geddes).

TENSIONS

Henry Hathaway, the director of *Fourteen Hours*, did not go in much for sentiment, and I think he is wise to keep it at a distance here. The main thing that Cosick needs is somebody to talk to, and he's got that in Dunnigan, the craggy middle-aged policeman. Their conversation does not turn upon big ideas. It turns upon the ordinary stuff of life.

Sure, there are a lot of bad things, but some things in life are okay, says Dunnigan, like going fishing on Sheepshead Bay, as he offers to do with Cosick. In part, he is stalling for time, as the police have converged upon the hotel. Some of them will be risking their necks trying to nab him from above; others seek a way to catch him in a net from one of the rooms below; and the more energetically and obviously they work, the more suspicious Cosick becomes, and that begins to compromise his trust in Dunnigan, the only man he will talk to—the only man, at least, until his father arrives, pleading, apologetic, knowing that he hasn't been much of a father, but knowing also that he is not the cold-hearted creature that his estranged wife has made him out to be.

For all the focus on the young man, the cop, and the ledge (and you really do feel the strain of the situation; Basehart spent 500 hours in that standing position, and though he is young and still fresh-faced, the exertion tells upon his countenance), Hathaway does relieve us occasionally by a lightly touched side plot or two. The woman in the lawyer's office—what is she going to do? And there's a young stockroom clerk, Danny (Jeffrey Hunter, in *his* first movie role), who has an eye for Ruth, one of the girls in the office, and they are there too, in the street, looking on. And we have the tension between Dunnigan and the police chief, which sometimes flares up into outright opposition, so that we are made to feel that Dunnigan is putting his livelihood at risk.

UNSTEADY GROUND

Fourteen Hours is based upon a real event. In 1938, a young bank clerk named John William Warde spent twelve hours on a very narrow ledge outside the seventeenth story of the Gotham Hotel. He, too, was befriended by a traffic cop, and he was about to enter the hotel room again, because the cop promised him that he could have privacy there and could still jump if he changed his mind. But a thoughtless and selfish photographer snapped his picture, and Warde, feeling betrayed, ran to the window again and leapt to his death.



Fourteen Hours, 1951

In *Fourteen Hours*, Officer Dunnigan must walk a tightrope between winning Cosick's trust and cooperating with the others who would save his life by hook or by crook. What happens at the end of the film I will not reveal. But we are gripped all throughout by the stories, often given to us by a suggestion here or there, of human beings, some of them good and some of them bad, doing their own walk on unsteady ground. It is a film about Everyman. Without God, that unsteady ground is just a thin bit of stone. ☉



Five Guys on a Boat

A Life & Death Tale of Minds & Meaning

by Ken Pedersen

Once upon a time, a ship sunk at sea, and five survivors ended up adrift in a small lifeboat. They were a curious mix of total strangers: a scientist, an engineer, an artist, a philosopher, and a priest. After several miserable days adrift, a storm approached, and it became obvious that the boat was too small to stay afloat with all five passengers. They agreed that if any were going to survive, one of them would have to go.

The philosopher suggested that each one explain his views on the purpose of life; then they would vote and rank the five worldviews, best to worst. The person with the lowest-scoring worldview could be presumed to have the least to lose and therefore

should go overboard.

Of course, they all hated the idea, but after a few hours of frantically bailing water, they faced the obvious fact that all five were soon to perish, and they agreed to the philosopher's plan.



The Scientist

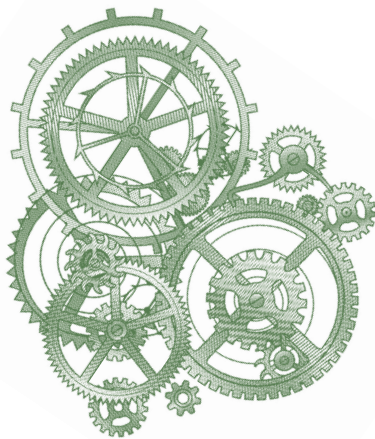
The scientist went first. "Scientists are brilliant and highly educated people who have dedicated their lives to finding truth by breaking reality down into its tiniest, most fundamental pieces to understand how the pieces behave. This has



resulted in one discovery after another. We now know that reality is made of molecules, and molecules are made of atoms, which are made of protons, neutrons, and electrons. Protons and neutrons are made of tiny fields of pure energy called quarks.

"All brilliant minds agree that it is an amazing freak random accident that these pieces fit perfectly together to create us. Science has proven that there can be no purpose or meaning to life, but since infinity is really big, and everything has to happen somewhere, here we are, in this amazingly huge assembly of meaningless, purposeless pieces.

"These discoveries are the greatest achievement of mankind. Scientists who comprehend the details of them are the only people qualified to understand reality. Because of your lack of a scientific education you are not qualified to comprehend these facts or even to critique my worldview. So I deserve a place in the boat."



The Engineer

The engineer spoke next. "You are totally wrong. Yes, discovering all the pieces was a magnificent achievement. However, you have been trained to be a reductionist, to break everything into its fundamental pieces and only look

for meaning in those tiny pieces. This is an absurd approach to trying to understand the purpose of any system. And the universe and everything in it is an amazingly complex system.

"By worshipping the pieces, you have adopted exactly the wrong perspective to be able to understand the purpose of the whole. Engineers, however, are trained to design systems. From your 'pieces,' we engineers create more complex designs to assemble systems capable of more complex functions. So the purpose of life can only be appreciated by understanding the design of reality as a system. It is a magnificent, multi-layered design that starts with pure energy in the form of quantum fields and radiant energy. That energy flows through amazingly intricate and precise layers of logic-based rules to emerge as woven patterns of energy in the form of atoms and molecules and oceans and planets and stars and galaxies.

"The information processing takes a giant, if not miraculous, leap from the logic-based rules controlling the pieces to the unbelievably complex programs stored in DNA molecules. Life first emerged as microscopic, software-controlled systems within living cells and then progressed to become more and more complex, multicellular, information-processing lifeforms like worms and wombats and baboons and babies. All of this is very intelligently designed to achieve the desired goal: conscious, intelligent minds.

"So science is a wonderful tool, but you would be a fool to follow the scientists in believing in their 'purposeless pieces' and their 'accidental universe.' Only an engineer capable of understanding the amazing complexity of this most elegant and sophisticated design could possibly understand reality and the purpose of life.

"I clearly deserve a place in the lifeboat ahead of the scientist."



The Artist

The artist smiled. "I always hated math. As I was listening, I was thinking that both of you probably sat in classrooms, intensely studying math into your early twenties or later and then went into a lab or cubicle so you could play with math for the rest of your life. You both have led one-dimensional lives, and so you have not experienced anything close to the total spectrum of beauty available to those of us who grab life by the horns and experience its beauty to the fullest.

"Consequently, you are both totally wrong. Life is not about the scientist's worship of fundamental pieces or the engineer's fascination with systems. Life is all about *beauty*. We are here to experience and create beauty in our lives. And amazingly, beauty is all around us.

"Think of your senses. The physical world is incredibly beautiful to see, and we can see it in three-dimensional, high-resolution, vivid color. Think of the sounds of birds, music, water, voices, laughter, babies, poetry. Even taste can be an art form. People spend their lives perfecting dishes for others to experience and enjoy. And then there is fragrance. Your sense of smell enables another art form providing a different dimension of beauty—flowers rain, food, wine, perfume. Think about coldness, warmth, comfort, exercise, energy, and how good different sensations can feel. It is all beautiful. Many people believe that certain bodily sensations are the most beautiful experiences of life. The sources of beauty in your life are only limited by your



willingness to marvel at the experiences of them.

"And not just the beauty we perceive in the physical world. We create our own mental beauty: romance, families, happiness, dreams, aspirations, friends, accomplishments. I am an artist, and my life is dedicated to creating beauty for others to enjoy. The purpose of life is not going to be found in its pieces or in its design. Everything you two talked about is totally inconsequential; I am here for beauty. Beauty is the purpose of life."



The Philosopher

The philosopher went next. "No, life is all about how you use your mind. Your mind is a magnificent information-processing system with an amazing set of intellectual capabilities: perception, memory, learning, imagination, creativity, free will, and, of course, emotions. Humanity comprises a vast network of minds whose collective intellectual capabilities can learn and pass on knowledge from one generation to the next, constantly increasing the collective knowledge base.

"This is the most complex and meaningful activity in the universe. Without intellectual activity, reality would be a boring, pointless wasteland. And the network of human minds creates an incredibly powerful generator of intellectual capability. Down through the ages, philosophers, secular and religious, have led the way in channeling this intellectual power into studying and improving the human condition. A long line of great philosophers has shaped humanity's thoughts, beliefs, worldviews, cultures, and societies.

These great minds have had more impact in improving human life than any other group of people.

"I believe the universe was created for intelligent minds and intellectual activity. We were designed to think, to discover, to create, and to enjoy. The most noble thing we can do is fully develop our intellectual capabilities and then use them for the good of mankind. This is why I became a philosopher and have joined this intellectual quest to better understand and improve the human condition."

And with that he tapped on his water-soaked pipe and sat down.



The Priest

Finally, the priest spoke. "My friends you are all, obviously, highly intelligent, well-educated people who have led very meaningful lives. I agree with each of you on the importance of the topics you have presented, and I admire your commitments and accomplishments in the paths you have chosen. I sincerely hope those paths have brought you fulfillment and joy.

"However, I must disagree with your understanding of the purpose of life. Ask yourselves these four questions: What should we value? What should we hold sacred? What makes life worth living? What is worth dying for? I propose that the answer to all four questions is love.

"You love your spouse, your children, your parents, your siblings, your grandchildren, and your friends. And because you love them, you place incredible value upon them. However, love is not just the feelings you have for the

people dear to you. It is a force that should fill your life. Love is the desire to immerse yourself in all that is good in life and to spend yourself doing what is good—learning, helping, striving, creating, and giving.

"Love is an inner commitment to do what is best for those you love and for those who come after you. Love is cherishing justice, fairness, truth, honor, and integrity for everyone. Love is selflessness and yet paradoxically, it is in that selflessness that we gain life's greatest treasures and deepest rewards. This is a message that has resonated with people of all times and all places, and it has been proven by billions of individual life experiences.

"Love is realizing that the quality of your life and your personal happiness will be determined by how you choose to interact with other people. If you treat others with compassion, kindness, respect, love, and forgiveness, you can realize that there is a beautiful depth to life that goes way beyond the superficial concerns of ego, pride, accomplishments, possessions, and the day-to-day chatter of life. Love adds a totally new dimension to reality, a dimension of heartfelt appreciation and a passionate sense of caring about what is happening within this marvelous flow of time and energy and information.

"Love is treating each day as though it is a precious gift. Love is delighting in creation and its Creator. Love is protecting people's minds and bodies, including your own, as though they were precious works of art—because they are. Giving yourself over to love is the only way to achieve the symphony of calm, peace, and understanding that allows one to experience the depth, the beauty, and the meaning of existence. Love is the true purpose of life."

And with that, the priest stood, smiled at his four shipmates, and stepped out of the boat. ☉



Antifragile

How Getting Cancelled Saved Gothix & Grew Her Platform

by Gregory Soderberg

Before she dropped out of high school, Vanessa Rosa once threw a Bible into a toilet while a group of girls looked on. It wouldn't be the last time she made a dramatic statement before an audience. Fast forward a few years, and life was rocking along quite well for her. Despite being a high-school dropout, she was living the dream. Under the handle "Gothix," she had gained a substantial following on the streaming platform Twitch, where people subscribe and pay money to watch video gamers play online. Twitch is not just about gaming; it's also (or mostly) about personality, and Vanessa has lots of that.

Vanessa had always enjoyed entertaining people, and doing what she loved on Twitch enabled her to leave a comfortable but boring job in corporate customer service. The move was scary, but

she steadily gained a following. Her big break came in 2019 when Twitch decided to partner her, which led to more sponsorships and paid advertising. She had acquired more than 35,000 followers

when a perfectly reasonable question precipitated a mass unraveling of it all.

Unwelcome Questions

In 2019, Disney announced that its remake of *The Little Mermaid* would feature a black Ariel, and soon thereafter, anyone questioning the move was automatically Twitter-mobbed as #racist. Into this social-media tempest, Vanessa/Gothix asked a simple question: "Can we stop assuming everyone is racist because they prefer the look of the original Ariel?"

A firestorm erupted. "She only wants to be black when it's convenient for her," said one angry response. She was "anti-black," "shuckin' and jivin' for the whites," and, of course, "racist." The shunning and slander worked. Gothix started losing subscribers, and the loss of her following, combined with the virulence of the attacks, sent Vanessa into a spiraling depression. She took repeated breaks from streaming, and at her lowest point, even attempted suicide.

Although Vanessa didn't grow up taking much interest in politics, she started talking about current events on Twitch. At first, she took up the "social justice warrior" mantle and tried to help people through online advocacy. As a black woman growing up in a politically liberal urban environment, she assumed everyone should be a progressive Democrat. It was just part of the culture. But when the 2020 riots started gaining steam, she threw another Bible in the toilet, this time on-screen. "How does stealing a 70-inch TV help with police brutality?" she asked her online audience. "How does rioting and violence help the cause of social justice?"

Once again, the hate piled on: "You don't understand . . . you're paying attention to the wrong thing."

But she knew right from wrong, and what she was seeing was wrong. As with the black Ariel, she was only trying to be reasonable. But in both instances, asking reasonable questions made her the target of virulent invective from the black Left. It was then that she discovered Thomas Sowell, and her whole world began to change.

True Empowerment

Vanessa learned about Thomas Sowell from the documentary *Uncle Tom*, and she was blown away by the alternative paradigm the film presented. As a black economist, Sowell presented another narrative—and his analysis was backed by years of sociological research and economic data. Instead of blaming "white supremacy" for all of the problems and challenges blacks faced in America, Sowell showed how it was actually big government and the welfare state that swindled away black people's agency and kept them in perpetual bondage. Sowell gave her a vision for true black empowerment.

Armed with this new perspective, she made a YouTube video explaining why she didn't support the Black Lives Matter movement. She called attention to the Marxist influence on the movement's leaders and criticized the violence and the rioting. Again, the blowback was swift and severe: "Tired of seeing this Gothix *****'s name cross my timeline every couple of weeks" and "***** her and her ***** ideals." But she pressed on, undeterred, because it was the right thing to do. She posted more videos, such as, "How to win an argument with a bigot," on critical thinking, and "Why I'm no longer a Democrat. My #WalkAway story."

One video in particular, "Dear Black America," showed her hard-hitting love for the people of her race: "Black America, you want black people to succeed but will encourage victimhood over perseverance. . . . You say black folks are not a monolith, yet you'll ostracize those who don't think like you, vote like you, or live their life like you." The straightforward honesty started to resonate with a lot of people. Rebuilding her career from the ashes of a cancel-culture coup wasn't easy, but by February 2021 she had 100,000 subscribers on YouTube.

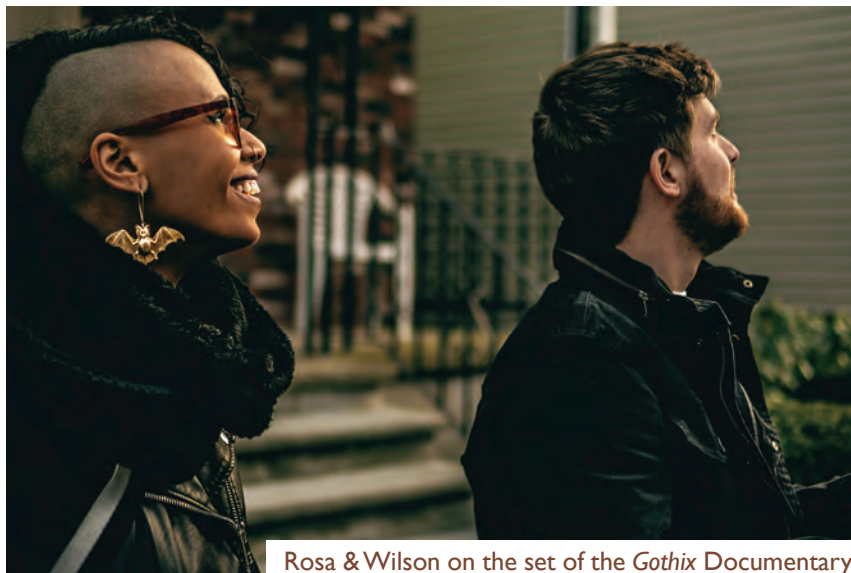
Graeme's Choice

Meanwhile, on the other side of the U.S., a film-and-video-content creator in Idaho watched Gothix's YouTube video, "White Privilege is a Crutch." At first, Graeme Wilson assumed Gothix was another typical black liberal, but he wanted to understand what so many blacks meant when they used terms like "white privilege." When Gothix started saying things like, "A lot of people who use 'white privilege' to rationalize their life experiences are actually describing experiences rooted in culture or social class," he sat up and took notice. This wasn't a typical black, liberal response! *Who was this person?* He spent hours watching her videos.

Two weeks later, Graeme was getting ready to start a job with the biggest corporate client he'd ever had. This job would mean he had "made it" in the world of media production. The client had already sent a check, but Graeme didn't cash it. In the footage the client had sent him to edit, Graeme had come upon some pro-transgender material, and although it was only one video out of many, he respectfully emailed the client to say that he could not in good conscience edit that footage. Five minutes later, he received a phone call from the livid client, who, needless to say, was no longer his client.

A Project That Matters

At this point, Graeme decided that his next project needed to matter and not just be about the money. He tried messaging Gothix in any way he could, but she did not respond until he left a comment during one her livestreams saying, "I'm a filmmaker, and would love to do a documentary about you." They worked out an agreement, and Graeme flew out to Vanessa's home state of Rhode Island to start filming. Afterward, Graeme invited Vanessa and her boyfriend



Rosa & Wilson on the set of the *Gothix* Documentary

Saul to come and visit him in rural Idaho. Vanessa had spent her entire life in an East Coast urban environment. The visit could be a continuation of her journey of learning about how other Americans thought and lived.

Graeme had grown up as the son of a pastor, and as he and Vanessa worked together, it became his turn to break one of her stereotypes. She had always assumed Christians were “hateful bigots,” but Graeme threw her off because he seemed so sincere and kind . . . and happy! She was also moved by meeting Graeme’s extended family. “I was shocked to see that his family was equally as kind, happy, and just like Graeme. I was able to disagree with them on certain topics without getting verbally assaulted.” While they were in Idaho together, Graeme prayed for an opportunity to share the Gospel with Vanessa and Saul. The opportunity came during an early-morning drive to the airport, and despite the wee hours, Vanessa and Saul were interested, and they had an engaging conversation.

The Same Happiness

Once back in Rhode Island, Vanessa saw a Facebook ad for a Christmas event at a local church. She really only wanted to go for the free food and petting zoo, but upon arrival, she was stunned to see the same happiness and kindness she had seen in Idaho. Not long afterward, Graeme and Saul talked late into the night. At this point, Saul had assented to Christianity intellectually, but not morally. “You could become a Christian tonight,” Graeme said, and Saul called him back later that night to share the news: “I’m a Christian!”

At this point, there was the matter of Vanessa and Saul living together. But marriage, too, presented Saul with a problem. Graeme explained how the Bible

taught that Christians should not be “unequally yoked” with unbelievers. While Saul wanted to propose to Vanessa, he also had to come to the difficult realization that he must be willing to give up the relationship.

But there was no question that Saul was a changed man. As Vanessa put it, Saul began “exuding the same glow that I kept seeing in all of the other Christians I was meeting.” It was clear there was something supernatural going on, and she wanted in on it. Jesus offered a clear way out of her depression and anxiety, and she wanted the joy she saw in so many of the Christians she was meeting.

She actually prayed a prayer of repentance twice, because she didn’t quite believe it the first time. She says it has been the best decision of her life, and it has helped her not to be bitter and angry about being cancelled:

The biggest highlights of my journey towards finding Christ started in the middle of filming the *Gothix* documentary. Graeme expressed genuine concern for my well-being because I was severely depressed at the time. He essentially asked me what the plan was and if smoking weed and taking antidepressants was working for me (they weren’t).

In the final segment of the documentary, made two years after they had begun filming in Rhode Island, Graeme comments to her, “You’ve had people reach out to you about meeting Christ because of your videos.”

On hearing that, Vanessa had to choke back tears. “It breaks my heart to see people stuck in cycles of anger and depression—I want

them to experience what I experienced.” She hugs Graeme and then hugs Saul, who is now her husband.

“Unsafe” Career Choices

For both Vanessa and Graeme, their story is one of God’s faithfulness. Despite being canceled and suffering through years of depression, Vanessa went on to rebuild her career. She now has a thriving presence on YouTube and social media, and she speaks around the country. For Graeme, in making *Gothix* he had to learn to rely completely on God. Each month, he and his family would receive just enough money to pay the bills. Even though both he and Vanessa turned their backs on successful and “safe” career options, their decisions to contend for the truth are inspiring many to follow their example. ☺

—The *Gothix* documentary is currently streaming on LOOR.TV, a platform where filmmakers can create quality work, free from the influence of Hollywood. It is also available at <https://www.gothix-film.com>. Vanessa now has over 300,000 subscribers on YouTube: www.youtube.com/@GothixTV.

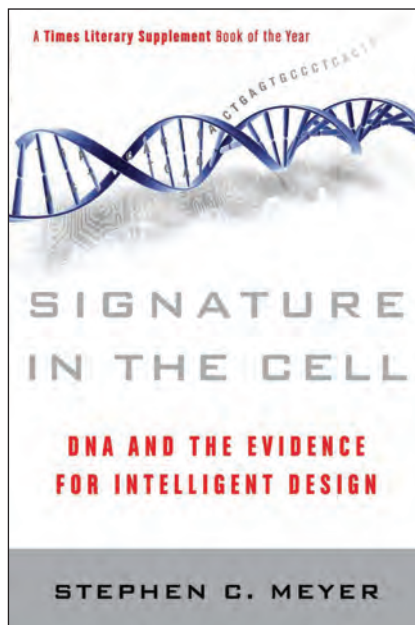


Made to Know

A Conversation with Dr. Stephen C. Meyer

by Terrell Clemmons

Stephen Meyer is one of the great minds behind intelligent design-based scientific inquiry and research. He is the author of *Signature in the Cell: DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design* (2009), which raised the question of the biological information necessary to produce the first life; *Darwin's Doubt: The Explosive Origin of Animal Life and the Case for Intelligent Design* (2013), which broadened the scope of the case for ID to encompass the history of all life on earth; and *Return of the God Hypothesis: Three Scientific Discoveries That Reveal the Mind Behind the Universe*, which effectively expanded the scope of the argument to the entire universe.



You closed *Return of the God Hypothesis* with a narration of your philosophical journey about the big questions of life, primarily the God question. How did you come to faith?

It was a long, tortuous process. I had some existential questions as a young teenager that troubled me. I had a period when I worried I might be insane because of questions about the meaning of life. It sounds a little dramatic, but I wondered, *What's it going to matter in 100 years? How does anything that I do or could do ultimately amount to anything?* And so it was, in a sense, a quest for meaning.

I also had puzzling questions about time. It seemed like everything was always changing, but I had this strange intuition that there had to be something that didn't change. Almost inadvertently I began to read the big, unused family Bible, and I found passages of Scripture that spoke to these kinds of troubling ideas and questions.

I found that the Bible actually addresses this issue of time. According to the Bible, there was something that didn't change: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and God revealed himself to Moses as the I AM THAT I AM—the idea is that



there is a timeless reality that seemed to ground all things in time. So I found that the biblical view created structures for my mind so it wasn't spinning out of control with unanswerable questions. For the first time I felt kind of normal.

When I got to college, I discovered that a lot of things that had been troubling me were actually philosophical questions, the sort of questions that the French existentialists, the atheistic existentialists, were asking. I remember telling my professor, "Oh, I wasn't insane. I was just a philosopher." He laughed, "Well, there's a fine line between philosophy and insanity, so be careful."

But in any case, I had the experience of the Bible providing a worldview that brought clarity and sanity and perspective to my life. It took six or seven years before I felt settled in my Christian faith. There was a time during college when I didn't want it to be true, but I was becoming more and more convinced that it was. There was a lot more to it than that, but I tended to overthink everything.

Well, God gave us minds and intends for us to use them.

That was part of it, too. In college, I encountered this argument about epistemology. I remember staring at objects and wondering, *How do I know that what I'm seeing is actually there?* This question of knowledge has been haunting the philosophers since the time of the late Enlightenment. We have sensory perceptions of things, but how do we know that those sensory perceptions in some way relate to the actual thing that's out there? It all comes down to a question of the reliability of the human mind.

One of the arguments that I found extremely persuasive was the argument from what's called *epistemological necessity*—that if you have a prior belief in the reality of a benevolent God who made our minds in such a way as to be able to reliably know the world, then you have a basis for knowledge.

This was one of the ideas that gave rise to the scientific revolution—the idea of *intelligibility*, that our minds had been made in such a way that we could discover the order and rationality and design

that had been built into the world by the same rational God who both made the world and made our minds to know it. Through all that questioning, I eventually came to faith and realized that God was not only a philosophical necessity, but a living person who could be known.

I think what's in the mind of the materialist objector is, "I can't see God in the test tube. Therefore there's no science to be done around this." Well, that's not quite the way it works.



Dr. Meyer on *The Joe Rogan Experience* in July 2023

And the biblical worldview offers a way of making sense of all those questions, even if it doesn't answer them completely.

Yes, it does. And then there's the person of Jesus Christ, who I found incredibly compelling. In the book of John, it says that he was full of grace and truth. In our political discourse we used to talk about bleeding-heart liberals and hard-headed conservatives; so maybe one side was committed to truth, and the other

side was committed to compassion. But somehow Christ brought the two together. Time and time again, there were things about his person that were unique in that sense of being fully both compassionate and truthful, somehow always giving people grace and still being completely truthful. It's

just one of many things about him that seemed completely unique and commended him to me as someone worth taking very, very seriously.

As a grad student at Cambridge University, you worked mostly with atheists in an environment heavily dominated by materialistic thinking. What kept you from going along with it all?

I was convinced of theism and Christianity by my early twenties. My main intellectual reasons for affirming faith were largely philosophical, relating to some of the things I was just sharing.

My fourth year out of college, I attended a conference in which there were discussions between theists and atheists, or materialists, about the big questions—the origin of the universe, the origin of life, and the origin and nature of human consciousness. Coming out of a small Christian college, I was really taken with the discussions and surprised to realize or to perceive that the theists seemed to have the intellectual initiative around these big scientific questions. One said, "You don't have to fall off the edge of the rational world to move in a frankly

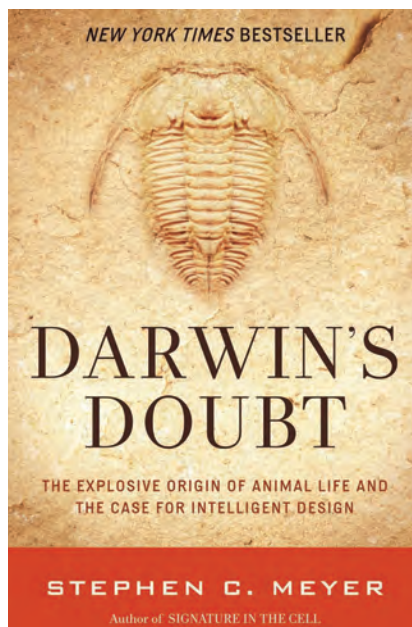
theistic direction in understanding the origin of life.” That was Dean Kenyon, a scientist who announced that he had repudiated his own secular, materialistic, evolutionary theory of the origin of life, and was now considering what later became known as intelligent design. He said it was time for the theologians to reopen the natural theological argument based on things that were being discovered about the information-bearing properties of DNA and the complexity of the cell.

And so, before going to Cambridge, I was encountering people like that. For the first time, I had a sense that maybe there’s also an *evidential* basis for belief in some kind of rational intelligence behind the universe. I became fascinated with the question of the origin of life. I wrote my master’s thesis on that and then went on to do a PhD on the subject of the origin of life.

You say that we can know God exists, or know some things about God, in the same way that we can know other truths about reality.

This is something that J. P. Moreland has been very explicit in advocating. He asks, “What do we philosophers mean by knowledge?” Well, philosophers define knowledge as “justified true belief.” Okay, so we have various ideas about how you justify belief. That’s the whole question of epistemology. Assuming that there are ways of justifying beliefs, the question is, *Can you justify beliefs about God in the same way that you justify beliefs about the natural world around us?*

It turns out that the same epistemologies we use to justify beliefs about the world around us can be used to justify belief in God, and therefore we can know God in that philosophical sense. I also think, as a Christian, that there is a subjective knowing that is a



product of the work of the Holy Spirit. Someone once said that the work of the Holy Spirit is to make *subjectively* real to the individual believer things that are *objectively* real in history—that there is a confidence that one gains about, for example, the testimony of Scripture; it’s a kind of knowing that can’t be unknown.

We call that confidence faith. I think this is what friends who are nonbelievers can find very frustrating about talking to Christians—convinced Christians are *really convinced*. And they may have very good evidential reasons; they may have very good presuppositional arguments; they may have very good philosophical and rational arguments. But in addition, there is something that I think believers experience when they have the experience of God coming into their lives that’s hard to explain until you’ve had the experience. I empathize with nonbelievers who are having these frustrating conversations with Christians.

I think the evidential and scientific and philosophical arguments can help with that, but eventually, when you’re led to the point of prayer and actually actively asking God to come

into your life, if God is personal in the way that the Bible describes, and a reality in the way the Bible describes, then there is this subjective encounter that people can have with him. And this is real, too. Moreland’s point is that we can have knowledge of God in the same way that we have knowledge of the world because we have justifications. We have propositional truth claims about the deity and about God’s actions in time and space and history. And that’s a form of knowledge.

You have also said that the “God hypothesis” is not a science stopper, but rather a science starter.

I think what’s in the mind of the materialist objector is, “I can’t see God in the test tube. Therefore there’s no science to be done around this.” Well, that’s not quite the way it works. There’s a hypothesis that there was a designing agent who produced life, and we see evidence of that in certain things—the digital code in the DNA, the irreducible complexity of molecular machines, things we’ve discovered already that seem to be better explained by positing the activity of a designing intelligence. Science provides explanations of facts that we have already, and good theories provide better explanations than preexisting theories. Intelligent design is providing explanations of facts we already have, and, as my books have argued, better explanations of key things like the digital information present in DNA.

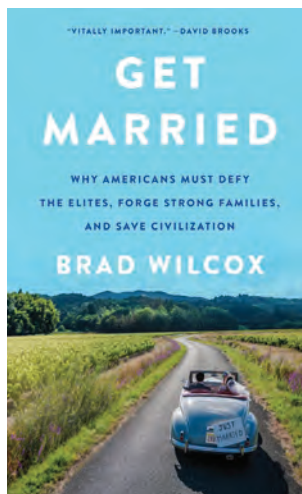
But it also generates new hypotheses about previously unknown facts. It has what philosophers call heuristic value. It can lead to discovery. So it’s the furthest thing from a science stopper. It’s a very fruitful way of looking at nature. Science owes its origin to this perspective that the universe is a designed order. ☉

Marriage Matters

A Review of Get Married: Why Americans Must Defy the Elites, Forge Strong Families, and Save Civilization by Brad Wilcox

by Joshua Pauling

In his new book *Get Married: Why Americans Must Defy the Elites, Forge Strong Families, and Save Civilization*, Brad Wilcox tackles the big questions of *why* marriage and family formation are in such dire straits and *what* we can do about it. A sociology professor and director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia, Wilcox sets forth a compelling narrative that addresses the situation we are in, counters the marriage-and-family myths trumpeted by elites and the media, and offers attractive alternative snapshots of healthy marriages from different communities.



The Demographics

Wilcox has compiled and interpreted mountains of quantitative and qualitative data, which helps us separate fact from fiction. Some of the statistics are disheartening and downright bleak. Take, for example, how only 32 percent of young adults ages 18–40 think marriage is central to living a fulfilling life. Or consider this stunner: 88 percent of parents believe it's important for their kids to be financially independent and have careers they enjoy, but only around 20 percent believe it's important that they marry and have kids of their own. Despite some gloomy numbers, there are bits of hope around the edges, and Wilcox parses out which groups are navigating marriage successfully and explores how religion, conservatism, education,

and ethnicity are independently related to marriage formation, stability, and quality.

Wilcox finds four groups doing especially well. Calling them “masters of marriage,” he groups them as follows: the Faithful, the Conservatives, the Strivers, and Asian Americans. While they represent a wide range on the cultural, religious, and ideological spectrums, they tend to do well on what Wilcox terms the five “Cs” of marriage:

- Communion: taking a “we before me” approach to marriage.
- Children: prioritizing the welfare of their children.
- Commitment: keeping divorce off the table.
- Cash: maintaining financial stability.
- Community: surrounding themselves with friends and family who support their marriage.

Alongside these positive portraits, Wilcox also deconstructs myths being put forth by pop culture, mainstream media, and progressive elites:

- The Flying Solo myth: that single living is more satisfying.
- The Family Diversity myth: that any family structure is as equally conducive to thriving as any other.
- The Soulmate myth: that I should follow my heart in marriage for as long as I'm happy.
- The Self-Love myth: that we should love ourselves first and meet our own needs first
- The Parent Trap myth: that kids make life and marriage miserable.

Wilcox also deftly uncovers how, while progressive elites “talk Left” and endorse these myths in public, in private they “live Right,” in accord with quite traditional marriage norms. He characterizes these elites as “inverted hypocrites.” Driven by prior commitments to progressive touchstones, they are not willing to “‘preach what they practice’ when it comes to articulating a public vision of marriage and family life.” This is especially unfortunate, because, while they personally benefit from stable marriages, they are thwarting the next generation's prospects for the same by endorsing these myths.

Common-Sense Conclusions

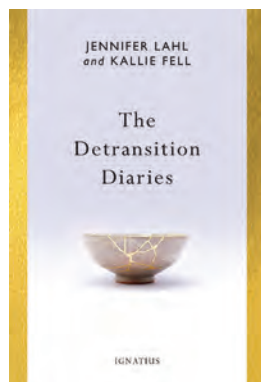
In a society that routinely denigrates marriage and family, Wilcox's work is a welcome corrective that deserves a hearing in both secular and religious circles. For Christians, his thesis is no surprise, but his analysis and narrative bolster on a natural basis the traditional arguments for family as the bedrock of civilization. Fit for the academy, the newsroom, and the church, his evidence-based approach is one that can resonate with anyone. ☺

The Deconstruction of Christianity: What It Is, Why It's Destructive & How to Respond

by Alisa Childers & Tim Barnett

A veritable cottage industry of deconstruction “coaches” and “evangelists” is exploiting the questions and uncertainties that are an inevitable part of Christian life, with the result that the ranks of “exvangelicals” are exploding. This book deconstructs the phenomenon, explaining it as a process by which a professing Christian reexamines his or her beliefs according to personal preferences with

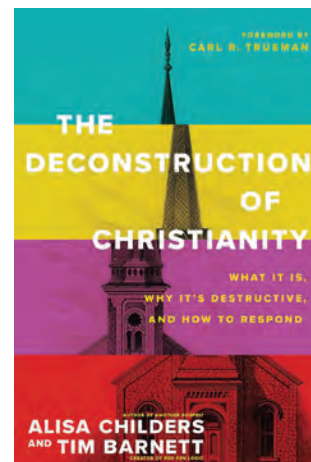
the self at the center. This “deconstruction of deconstruction” will help you contend for the truth of the faith with kindness, clarity, and confidence



The Detransition Diaries

by Jennifer Lahl & Kallie Fell

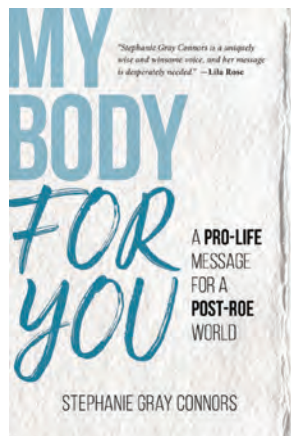
Transgender ideology didn't pop up out of nowhere. This book briefly traces the history of its pioneers, compares it to some harmful medical fads of history (e.g., lobotomy), and tells the stories of several detransitioners. The analysis that emerges is a picture of massive medical and mental-health fraud seizing upon the typical vicissitudes of adolescence and exploiting patients for profit while harming their bodies and leaving their lives permanently altered.



Fight the Good Fight: How an Alliance of Faith & Reason Can Win the Culture War

by Jay W. Richards & James Robison

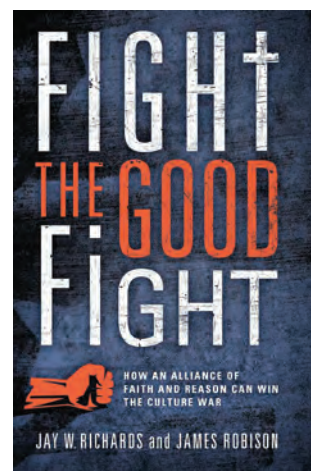
A longstanding maxim holds that politics should not be discussed in polite company, and many well-meaning Christians and conservatives have dutifully obeyed. Richards and Robison advise the exact opposite. “Open war is upon us,” they say, and left unchallenged, the wokocracy will destroy everything. This book examines the ideological hotspots and offers wisdom for graciously contending for truth, liberty, and the best opportunities for prosperity and justice for all.



My Body for You: A Pro-Life Message for a Post-Roe World

by Stephanie Gray Connors

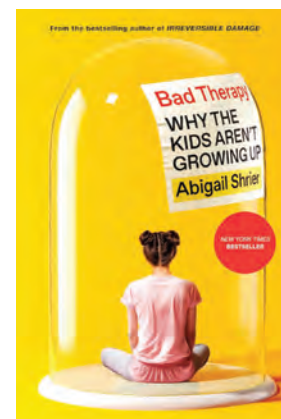
Roe v. Wade is history, but the conflict over abortion is hotter than ever. Here, a 20-year veteran defender of the unborn synthesizes personal memoirs, pro-life apologetics, and reflections on the gospel of Jesus' self-sacrifice as the greatest love of all into a holistic pro-life apologetic for a deeply abortion-desensitized culture. This book will equip you to proclaim saving truth about life and will encourage you to live sacrificially for others.



Bad Therapy: Why the Kids Aren't Growing Up

by Abigail Shrier

Shrier follows up her excellent book, *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters*, with a rigorous examination of today's therapy culture. Social-emotional learning (SEL) in schools, an overemphasis on feelings, and tendencies to shove parents aside in favor of mental-health “experts” may be well-meaning, but they can introduce significant harm to children and hinder the growth that only comes with learning to solve problems and to weather ebbs and flows in life. Every parent should read this book.



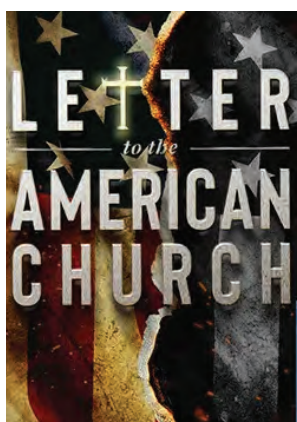


God of Heaven & Earth

Frederick "Rick" Larson is neither an astronomer, nor a theologian, nor a geologist. But as an attorney, he is skilled at evaluating multiple lines of evidence to draw conclusions. This film follows two investigations he undertook: (1) the celestial mechanics behind the Bethlehem Star and (2) geological aftereffects of a first-century Judean earthquake as recorded in the walls of the Dead Sea valley. His twofold point is that the natural world has borne witness to the biblical narrative regarding Jesus' birth and crucifixion

The Lost Boys: Searching for Manhood

Like adolescent girls, boys, too, are struggling as they enter puberty and are also being lured by a wicked mix of online influencers and bureaucracies into gender transition as the solution to their distress. Boys have the added complication that they are growing up in a culture that problematizes all things masculine. This film examines the resulting devastation through the eyes of several detransed young men and mental-health experts working for gender sanity.



Letter to the American Church

Eric Metaxas draws alarming parallels between the American church today and the German church during the early Nazi years. Because of the German church's—and especially German pastors'—failure to muster the courage to oppose evil, monstrous horror ensued. The evils of our day are different, but the question he raises is valid and urgent: Will the American church take action to oppose the damnable ideologies corrupting America from within? Metaxas is known for humor, but this is a deadly serious film that every American Christian should see and take to heart.

Hollywood Takeover: China's Control in the Film Industry

After the 2008 Beijing Olympics, China decided to build a film industry, and Hollywood execs rushed in to help. Motives ranged from GDP growth to international goodwill to spreading democracy, to, of course, profit. The partnership quickly became one by which Hollywood kowtowed to Chinese Communist Party (CCP) demands regarding film content, to the extent that Hollywood now serves as a soft propaganda arm of the CCP. This EpochTV film explores that dynamic and the threat it poses to the free world.



The Minimalists: Less Is Now

Joshua Millburn and Ryan Nicodemus have been called the "American ringleaders" of simplified and decluttered living. In this documentary, financial advisor Dave Ramsey and economist T. K. Coleman join them as they examine consumerism from a psychological/spiritual perspective. In an era of e-commerce and mobile digital marketing, we are more susceptible than ever to acquisitive impulse buying to the neglect of more meaningful and satisfying stewardship of our resources. This film may cause you to think differently about your "stuff."



Hope for the Earth

The Christian Alternative to Doom-and-Gloom Environmentalism

by John Stonestreet & Shane Morris

Seven years ago, the news was grim. *National Geographic* headlined that “Half of the Great Barrier Reef Is Dead” due to climate change. *The Guardian* pronounced, “Great Barrier Reef at ‘Terminal Stage.’” *The Washington Post* agreed: “The Great Barrier Reef Is Dying.”

Given the alarm, Australia’s most famous natural treasure is surely lost, isn’t it? Well, no. According to an Australian Institute of Marine Science report, “the Reef has rebounded.” After successive years of cooler temperatures, “hard corals have recovered significant ground,” reaching “record high levels in 2022 across two-thirds of the reef.” Despite the many funerals held by media outlets, the report marveled at the Reef’s “impressive ability to recover from widespread disturbances.”

I doubt the same can be said for the public’s investment in the reef. How many aspiring marine scientists called it quits five years ago after reading the grim headlines? How many young men and women who might have helped solve environmental problems threw in the towel? How many who might have developed a life-long passion for one of God’s most beautiful creations were derailed by despair?

Hope-Filled Stewardship

Herein lies one of the most serious flaws of the modern environmental movement, as well as one of the most promising opportunities for Christians. Hope-filled stewardship is better for the Earth. As Andrew J. Spencer wrote in his



book *Hope for God’s Creation: Stewardship in an Age of Futility*, “One of the dominant themes of much environmental discourse has been despair that any real improvement in the environment can come without a massive shift in nearly every area of human life.”

Such improvements have, however, come about in our lifetimes, often because of relatively minor changes. As Spencer describes, the recovery of the bald eagle and the virtual elimination of acid rain show that real environmental improvement is possible if fatalism is replaced with smart, incremental action. Spencer argues that despite long-standing criticisms that Christianity encourages exploitation of the environment, the faith actually offers the best foundation for hope-filled stewardship.

It starts by seeing the world as God’s creation. Unlike secular environmentalists, Christians understand that this dazzling world we live in is no accident but is the handiwork of a Divine artist. “Christian hope,” Spencer writes, “encourages us to love the creation for the sake of the one who made it.” God called his handiwork “very good,” and throughout Scripture, the majesty of our world is treated as a signpost pointing back to its Maker. Nothing in secular environmentalism parallels this or confers objective value on nature.

A Bright Future

Christianity also assigns human beings a special place in creation, unlike secular accounts of history, which often treat humans as a rogue species or a virus. We’re not just another animal. We are the Creator’s representatives, “crowned with glory and honor” and responsible for tending his Garden and everything in it. Though the Fall damaged God’s creation and made our role as stewards much harder to fulfill it never changed our job description. Nor is it the end of the story. Not only does Christianity place *real* value on creation and *real* responsibility on humanity, but it promises that God’s world will not be in bondage to futility forever. Creation has a bright future—not annihilation but miraculous renewal.

Spencer’s book is a crash course on how the Christian worldview better meets some of the ecological challenges that drive secular minds to despair, and it’s a timely reminder that a hope grounded beyond this world makes all the difference in the here and now. ☺

—This article first appeared at *Breakpoint.org*. Used with permission of the Colson Center for Christian Worldview.

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ALL PRONOUNS MATTER

Millions of people have been wrongfully
AMAB* or AFAB*

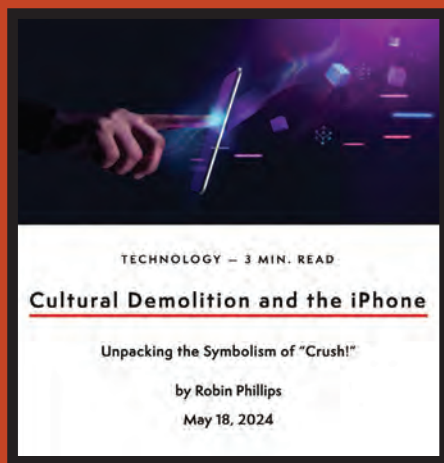
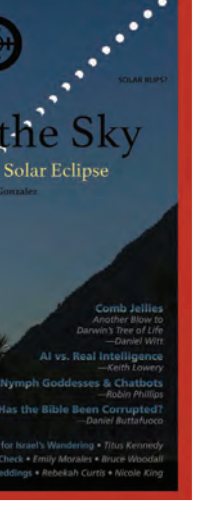
Doctors, parents, society, science, ...

**Don't let *them* tell you
not to be a *they*.**

***AMAB/AFAB**
Assigned Male/Female at Birth



**Planned
Genderhood**
Are you positive?



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