



AI: “YOUR MOVE, HUMANITY”

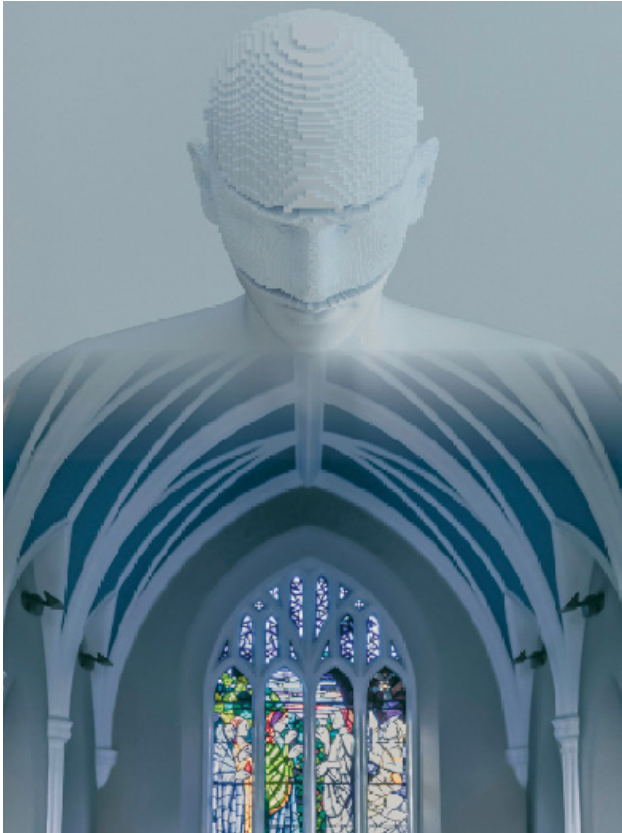
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“Wedding the Rift”: Karen An-Hwei Lee is author of several poetry collections and serves as provost and professor of English at Wheaton College, IL.

“The Vanishing”: Bruce Bond is the author of 37 books including, most recently, *Patmos* (Juniper Prize, UMass, 2021), *Liberation of Dissonance* (Schaffner, 2022), *Invention of the Wilderness* (LSU, 2023), *Vault* (Ashland, 2023), *Lunette* (Green Linden, 2024), and *The Dove of the Morning News* (U of NV, 2024).

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In This Issue

This issue focuses widely on how the faith community can and ought to think about the digital universe we inhabit (with or without our consent). The explorations span a wide swath of input and ideas from a variety of thought leaders, including our lead article wherein the AI platform, **Grok**, learns a lesson from a probing pastor about the resurrection. Beyond that, **Sean McDowell** and **John Lennox** highlight AI's bad news for atheists, **Sean McDonough** captures an arresting vision of "two cities," **Alex Koh** explores Niebuhr's paradigm of "Christ and Culture," **Wendy Murray** reminds us of Fred "Mister" Rogers' sacred use of media, **Brad Howell** guides

us through the temptation of dancing cats, and **Autumn Ridenour** discusses her upcoming book on the subject and her sense of technology as an intruder.

There's more. This powerful issue also includes (among other things) **Tim Morgan's** hard look at the deadly cost for Christians in the Middle East by Western intervention of regime changes. **Nicholas Rowe** reviews a ground-breaking new book about the Black Church in American Protestantism, and news writer **Anne Shearer** details the latest archaeological investigation of the mysterious Shroud of Turin. 



We hope you enjoy this probing and enlivening feast for the mind.
And be sure to tell a friend about Ex Fonte.

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“GOD MAY HAVE FORGOTTEN US”

Chaos in the Congo continues as militant groups disrupt

Decades of chronic conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) regained attention this year as militant Islamist insurgent group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) along with M23 increased their aggression.

The ISIS-linked ADF is upping attacks on Christian villages in the North Kivu province, killing people, kidnapping, and destroying homes. In February, the world was shocked to hear of 70 Christians rounded up and decapitated inside a church in the Lubero Territory. ADF is allegedly responsible, though no one had claimed credit for the attack at time of writing.

Elsewhere in DRC's eastern region, the rebel group M23 overtook provincial capitals Goma and Bukavu. These cities are trade hubs for minerals essential to technology production. Though M23 claims it fights to protect the Tutsi ethnic minority, their motivations are purely economic, says Gideon Mashauri. Mashauri is a Congolese national and PhD student at African International University in Nairobi, Kenya. He founded the *Agape Great Commission Association*, which serves people in the DRC war zone.

Mashauri says his mother-in-law witnessed the thousands killed in Goma. “The corpses of these people were found on the street; they started smelling . . . I think that alone could

just tell the international community that this is not okay,” he said.

Mashauri worries for his family in Goma, where daily survival is uncertain. “They have formed a group of gangs in the city who are going during the night to just steal people's things, like phones and money, and intimidate people—even killing,” he states. “Getting food has become very difficult, because almost everything has been plundered.” Mashauri also reports M23 is forcing young people to join its ranks.

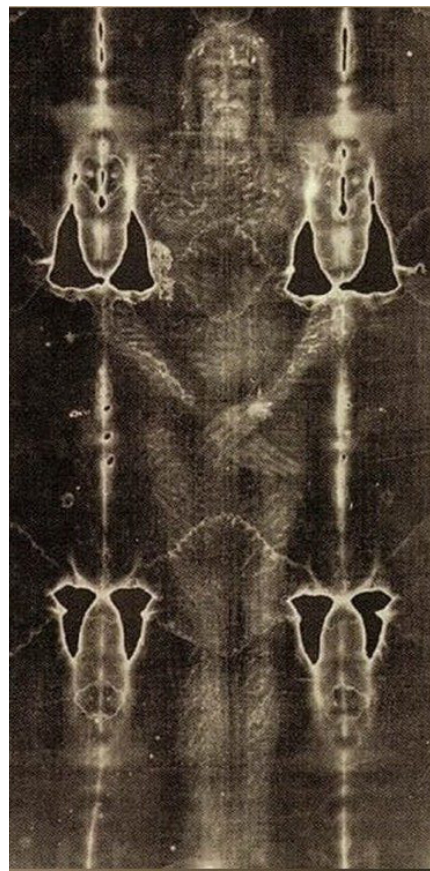
The DRC's government is aiming for peaceful dialogue with other Central-African presidents to soothe the conflict, but many international actors benefit from the mineral smuggling taking place under the chaos. Rwanda is suspected of fueling M23 to pirate minerals. Mashauri says local people have found Rwandan military IDs on fallen M23 members.

The Congolese people need power to restore peace, says Mashauri, but “we are not even given that opportunity. We do have many good ideas coming from young people [and] from politicians, but I think the international community mostly interferes simply because they are targeting their agenda.”

The DRC is 80 percent Christian, but Mashauri says this is a mostly nominal majority. The Congolese feel neglected by the world and God, he says. People are asking, “It seems like God may have forgotten us. Why are we living like animals who are forgotten in this world? Are we not like other human beings?”



Mashauri (in white shirt) visited family in Goma just before M23 invaded.



SHROUD OF TURIN RESURFACES IN THE NEWS

The most studied archeological artifact in the world still incites curiosity

The Shroud of Turin has garnered a fresh wave of attention after podcaster Joe Rogan shared a video about it in March. The Shroud is a linen cloth bearing the image of a man with bloodstains and wounds comparable to the biblical account of Jesus' crucifixion. Some believe it to be the burial cloth of Jesus.

The video Rogan shared is by retired clinical nurse and nursing teacher Dr. John Campbell. Campbell states that various areas of science seem to point to the shroud's authenticity: pollen and dirt samples tested are from the Jerusalem area, DNA tests of the bloodstains show them to be from a human male, and visible bruises and wounds align with

Roman torture and crucifixion. Campbell also notes that the image of the man penetrates only one fiber deep on the linen weave, a phenomenon which researchers are unable to replicate. Campbell states, “The pathology, the medicine, the physiology, the photography, the botany, the geology, the mineralogy, the history all come together to form a . . . very consistent story.”

Science has produced a range of statements about the Shroud. A 1988 study dated the shroud to medieval times using Carbon-14 dating. Skeptics say newer carbon material contaminated the sample dated.

A 2022 study used Wide-Angle X-Ray Scattering (WAXS) to examine the molecular state of the linen fibers, comparing their degradation levels to a linen sample dated 55-74 AD. The WAXS results from both linen samples were compatible, though the researchers stated, “A more accurate and systematic X-ray investigation of more samples taken from the TS [Turin Shroud] fabric would be mandatory to confirm the conclusions of our study.”

The Roman Catholic Church has not made a statement about whether the Shroud is an authentic relic.



Artistic depiction of the Shroud of Turin, incorporated into a scene of the Descent from the Cross, by painter Giulio Clovio, c. 1540.



SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION: NO CHARGES

A lack of federal prosecution garners mixed reactions, while denominational growth shifts to New England.

This spring, the U.S. Department of Justice closed a two-and-a-half year investigation into the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) regarding alleged mishandling of sexual abuse reports. The investigation began in 2022 following a third-party report by Guidepost Solutions that SBC leaders silenced sexual abuse survivors and failed to report abuse by SBC pastors. The Guidepost report led to concerns about a widespread abuse crisis in the SBC.

The DOJ investigation closed with no sexual-abuse related charges. The only charges raised were against Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary professor and interim Provost Matt Queen, who falsified claims to investigators.

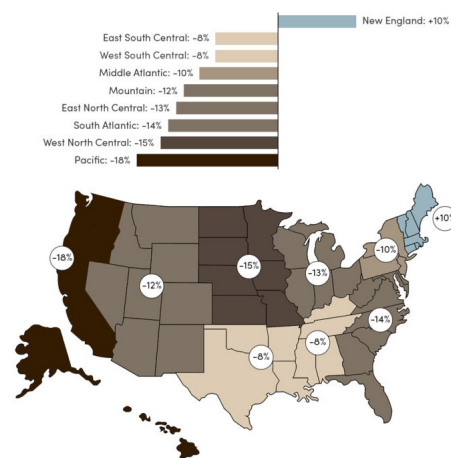
SBC reform advocate Christa Brown wrote in an opinion piece for *Baptist News Global*, “The absence of federal prosecutions does not in any way indicate the absence of criminal conduct, the absence of immoral conduct or the absence of harmful conduct,” stating sexual assault and abuse crimes “typically . . . fall under state law.”

Abuse survivors like Brown want the SBC to be held liable for abuse in SBC-affiliated churches. Because the SBC’s structure currently renders churches independent, the SBC is not liable for abuse occurring within these churches.

The SBC’s Executive Committee (EC) voted in September 2024 to create a department “to assist churches in the area of sexual abuse prevention and response,” reported the Baptist Press. Survivors and reformers had pushed for a database of abusive pastors to be posted on the SBC’s website. This idea seemed to be losing steam by early 2025, with the SBC opting to focus instead upon educational prevention

Only one region of Southern Baptist churches grew in total membership in the past five years

Analysis by Lifeway Research of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Annual Church Profile in 2018 and 2023



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and care materials for churches instead. The abuse investigations and fallout had cost the SBC \$13 million in legal fees and other spending.

Meanwhile, the most recent data from the SBC shows every U.S. region saw a decline in SBC churches except for New England, which saw 10 percent growth.

Anne Shearer is a news writer for this magazine.