

May 22, 2024 | Waynesboro, Virginia | *a newsletter supplement*

Resisting our ‘new dark age’

In a time of information excess, the need of the moment is more love and more rest.

By Karen Swallow Prior
Religion News Service

(RNS) — It’s an election year. Perhaps you’ve heard? You couldn’t escape the news if you tried. But perhaps you...or we...or I might try to take in a bit less of so much news.

I’m trying. Not in an attempt to put my head in the sand or be a less responsible citizen. Quite the opposite, in fact. I am what in today’s parlance is called a “knowledge worker.” I’m also a recovering news junkie, one whose addiction goes way back before the 24-hour news cycle and endless social media feeds. Indeed, I come from a newspaper family. I don’t mean I’m descended from media magnates like William Randolph Hearst, Michael Bloomberg or Rupert Murdoch. No, I mean my grandfather, father and uncles all delivered newspapers for some portion of their working lives.



Prior.

I’m a third-generation daily reader of local, print, home-delivered newspapers. And most days, I watch the evening news, local and national, almost religiously.

Until recently.

These days, I skim the paper, if that. I catch the nightly news if I’m not writing, reading, Zooming or — now that spring is here — sitting on the front porch. These changes in my habits owe in part to the fact that, like many people today, I get more and more of my news from social media. By the time the latest breaking story hits the local presses and gets dropped off in my newspaper box in the morning, it’s old news. (Some days, the newspaper doesn’t even come. I don’t think the folks who deliver newspapers get paid enough to keep a reliable vehicle. I do try to tip well, but the newspaper business is dying in more ways than one.)

I also care less these days about the latest news.

I don’t mean I care less about the suffering, dying, missing, beaten, assaulted, arrested, tried, convicted, newly appointed, recently retired, campaigning, elected, impeached, awarded, overdosed, underpaid, celebrated, decried, defamed, scammed, vindicated, ordinary and extraordinary souls who fill the headlines. Rather, I care about them so much that I want to know fewer of the sordid sorts of details that sell so well.

I want to know less about the things that divide us and more about the things that unite us. Less about the scandalous and personal and more about the transcendent and universal.

Continued

Resisting our ‘new dark age’ continued

I want to know more about the church moving into my neighborhood, converting a closed bank building into a sanctuary and a ministry center that, I’m told, meets the needs of neighbors and strangers alike.

I want to watch the slow resurrection of blooms on the orchid on my windowsill that I thought had died long ago. I want to hear the cicadas that are getting ready, right now, right under the very ground on which my neighbors and I are walking about, to emerge, after 17 years of preparation, in a massive, hurtling cacophony of sound. And when their short lives on earth have been spent, I want to collect their empty exoskeletons from the foliage and offer them as a feast to the fowl who feed my family.

I want to observe the life span of dogwood trees, half a dozen of which grow in my yard. Three are young, and three are very, very old. I hope they all live for a long time.

I want to know more about my niece, the one living the #vanlife, who called me from a ski slope in the western mountains to catch up. Her call came just as the nightly news was coming on with a story I thought I wanted to watch, but I couldn’t turn that television off quickly enough to take her call. Now I don’t even remember what that news story was. But I recall every vulnerable and funny word my loved one shared with me.

I want to know more about my other niece’s serious boyfriend, too, and how he came to love Wendell Berry. Because anyone who loves him (and her) is someone I care about.

I want to know more about Taylor Swift. Well, not her exactly. But I want to know more about what it is that her words and music and person mean to so many people and why. I love that she is beloved by so many. I love the way something or someone can come along once in an age and tap into something so very much of that age and yet possibly so much more than that age. Isn’t that what we should all want to be?

I want to know a little less news because all this information we are inundated with has created — paradoxically — what James Bridle calls “a new dark age.” Bridle describes this current condition as “an apparent inability to see clearly what is in front of us, and to act meaningfully, with agency and justice in the world.” Perhaps by knowing, not less, but more — more deeply — we can regain our agency and better fulfill the demands of justice. Agency and justice begin and end, after all, on the ground, bodily, in community and real relationships, in flesh and blood. In the midst of the darkness that besets us in the digital world, Bridle urges us to “seek new ways of seeing by another light.”

In contrast to the darkness brought by the information (and misinformation) overload of the digital age, Bridle points to the wisdom of the unknown medieval Christian mystic who wrote *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

“Go after experience rather than knowledge,” the mystic writes. Echoing 1 Corinthians 8:1, he continues: “Knowledge tends to breed conceit, but love builds. Knowledge is full of labor, but love, full of rest.”

It is not, of course, an either/or proposition. Escaping the “new dark age” doesn’t entail returning to the old one. But in a time of information excess and the compassion fatigue it inevitably generates, the need of the moment for many of us is more love and more rest. Sometimes unknowing can be better than certain kinds of knowing.

*Karen Swallow Prior earned her Ph.D. in English at the State University of New York at Buffalo. She is a popular writer and speaker, as well as a columnist for Religion News Service. Her most recent book is *The Evangelical Imagination: How Stories, Images, and Metaphors Created a Culture in Crisis* (Brazos, 2023). She and her husband live on a 100-year-old homestead in central Virginia with dogs, chickens and lots of books.*

MUSIC NOTES FOR TRINITY SUNDAY

This Sunday, we honor the Holy Trinity – *Father, Son and Holy Spirit* – in Scripture and in song. The opening hymn, *Holy, Holy, Holy*, is the very first selection in our hymnal. This stirring hymn will conclude with an arrangement created by Roger decades ago.

This weekend, we also honor those who have made the ultimate sacrifice. For Memorial Day, the closing hymn will be *Eternal Father, Strong to Save*. A British hymn traditionally associated with seafarers, its author, William Whiting, was inspired by the dangers of the sea described in Psalm 107. It was popularised by the Royal Navy and the United States Navy in the late 19th century, and variations of it were soon adopted by many branches of the armed services in the United Kingdom and the United States. The chant melody was harmonized by John B. Dykes (1823-1876) and published in 1861 in *Hymns Ancient and Modern*. The hymn is known as MELITA, named after the island of Malta where Paul was shipwrecked.



Musician 2nd Class Harry E. Pettit, Sr
US Navy, World War II.

OUR WORSHIP CHANNELS

CLICK ON THE LOGOS



WORSHIP THIS WEEK.

Psalm 29

Isaiah 6: 1-13

Sermon: *No Excuses.*

THE FOOD BANK NEEDS EGG CARTONS



BRING THEM TO CHURCH

This Week in History.



Anne Boleyn, the second wife of Henry VIII of England, is beheaded for alleged adultery, treason, and incest.

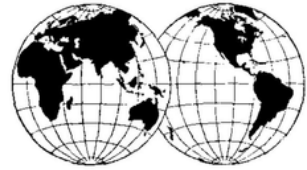
May 19, 1536



Levi Strauss and Jacob Davis receive a U.S. patent for blue jeans with copper rivets.

May 20, 1873

Fédération de Football Internationale Association

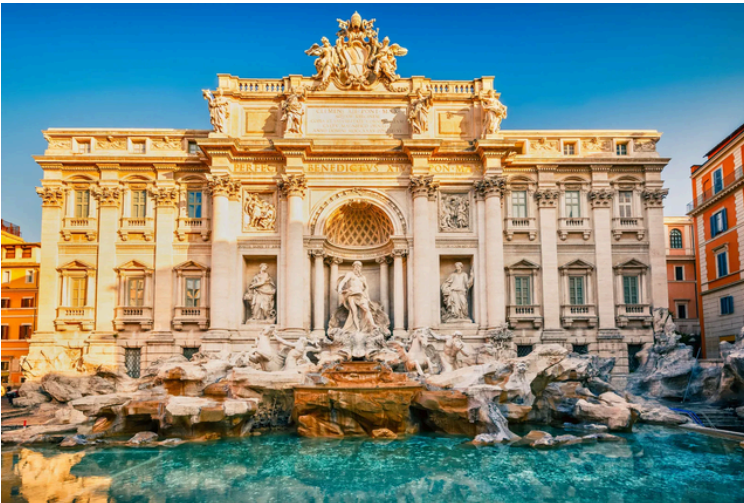


FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

FIFA

The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) is founded in Paris.

May 21, 1904



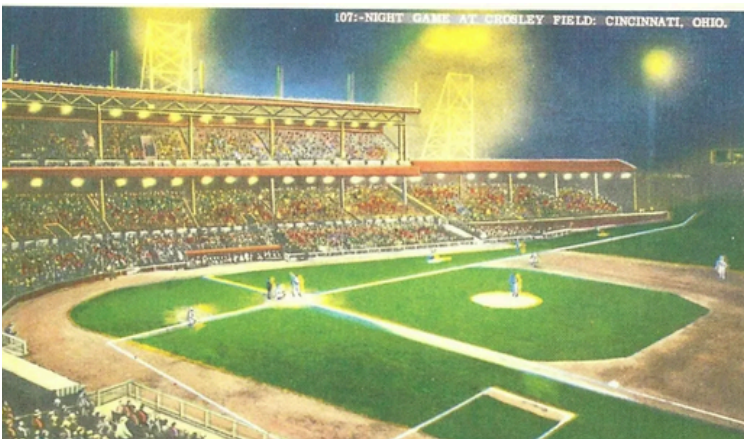
The Trevi Fountain is officially completed. Designed by Italian architect Nicola Salvi and completed by Giuseppe Pannini and several others, it is the largest Baroque fountain in Rome and one of the most famous fountains in the world.

May 22, 1762



A patent for the Accordion is granted to Cyrill Demian in Vienna, Austrian Empire. *Lady of Spain* would not be composed for another hundred years.

May 23, 1829



The first night game in Major League Baseball history is played at Crosley Field in Cincinnati, OH, The Cincinnati Reds would defeat the Philadelphia Phillies 2-1.

May 24, 1935

Channel 8
KUHT
HOUSTON

KUHT, the first public television station in the United States officially begins broadcasting as from the Texas campus of the University of Houston.

May 25, 1953