

# THE NEW YORKER

## IN THIS WEEK'S ISSUE

### If the Southern Baptist Church Can't Be Bigger, Russell Moore Wants It to Be Better

In the November 7, 2016, issue of *The New Yorker*, in “The Moral Minority” (p. 34), **Kelefa Sanneh** reports from Nashville, where he sits down with Russell Moore and other leaders of the Southern Baptist Church to explore the state of the church amid this year’s Presidential election. After centuries of regional dominance, the denomination has been shrinking: last year, the church reported fewer than three hundred thousand baptisms, the lowest number in more than half a century. The S.B.C. is a church whose history is inseparable from the history of race in America—and the church’s current push for diversity is in large part a push for new members, and an acknowledgment that the white share of the country’s population is declining. Sanneh joins almost a thousand people, many of them pastors, at the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission’s annual conference, and speaks extensively with Russell Moore, who became the public face of the S.B.C. in 2013, when he assumed the presidency of the E.R.L.C. (the previous president, Richard Land, resigned after saying on his radio show that, following the 2012 shooting of Trayvon Martin, activists were trying to “gin up the black vote for an African-American President.”

Moore’s political views are generally in harmony with those of the mainly white and thoroughly evangelical worshippers whom he serves, but this year Moore has found himself at odds with his flock over the candidacy of Donald Trump. He is a Trump detractor leading a church largely peopled by Trump supporters—recent polls suggest that white evangelicals overwhelmingly support Trump, and that they have grown more tolerant of politicians who behave badly. Moore says that Christians in America must learn to think of themselves as a marginal community, struggling to survive in an increasingly hostile secular culture (in such a context, Muslims might seem less like enemies and more like allies in the fight for religious freedom). He has urged pastors to stand firm in defense of religious freedom: “when you have a government that says we can decide whether or not a house of worship can be constructed based upon the theological beliefs of that house of worship, then there are going to be Southern Baptist churches in San Francisco and New York and throughout this country who are not going to be able to build.” Moore has spoken out about the Christian duty to be compassionate toward immigrants, including refugees from Syria. When asked about the Black Lives Matter movement, he has urged pastors to think harder about perspectives that were “invisible” to them. After the recent police shootings of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile, Moore told his followers that for African-Americans such incidents “reverberate with a history of state-sanctioned violence, in a way that many white Americans—including white evangelicals—often don’t understand.”

Robert Jeffress, the pastor of First Baptist Church, in Dallas, suggests that Moore’s refusal to support Trump might be disqualifying, because the result of the election will likely decide the balance of the Supreme Court. “Any conservative Christian who stays at home in November and allows Hillary Clinton to become the next President has *forever* forfeited his right to speak out about the sanctity of life, the sanctity of marriage, or religious freedom,” Jeffress says. Sanneh writes, “the good news for Moore is that election season will be over soon and, perhaps more important, younger Southern Baptists seem more likely to agree with him.” Moore’s generation, having come of age when the religious right was triumphant, is more attuned to the corrosive effects of politics. Erick Erickson, the conservative pundit, says Moore is less likely than Land to issue threats and, for that matter, is less interested in politicians altogether: “Everyone knows that Russell isn’t going to ratchet up the rhetoric. But he can influence young pastors coming out of seminary.” Sanneh writes, “In 2016, it is clearer than ever that American evangelical Christianity is a counterculture, which may mean that the church is freer to espouse ideas at odds with the egalitarianism that the secular mainstream preaches.”

### An Ostentatious Billionaire Is Using Art to Put China on the Cultural Map

In “The Emperor’s New Museum” (p. 28), **Jiayang Fan** reports from Shanghai, where she profiles Liu Yiqian, the ostentatious billionaire who is using art to put China on the cultural map. At fifty-three years old, Liu is the forty-seventh-richest person in China. In



2014, Liu spent more than thirty-six million dollars on a fifteenth-century porcelain cup that had been owned by the Qing-dynasty emperor Qianlong—and publicly sipped tea from the artifact, scandalizing the art world. He recently spent a hundred and seventy million dollars on a painting by Amedeo Modigliani, exceeding the record paid for a work by the artist by a hundred million dollars. Among Western dealers, Chinese buyers like Liu are known for being more interested in an art work's associations than in its aesthetic properties. Of Modigliani, Liu tells Fan, "Maybe if he hadn't flung himself out of a window at thirty-six, his work wouldn't be anywhere in the millions." But, Fan writes, "Liu had his facts tangled: Modigliani died at thirty-five, from tuberculosis; it was his mistress who committed suicide." Zhu Shaoliang, a prominent collector of Chinese antiquities, recalls first meeting Liu in 2009, at an auction: "He was making these wild claims about ancient Chinese art, and it made me so angry. I thought, This person is just so uneducated!"

Liu opened his first museum, the Long Museum East, in 2012. Today, his wife, Wang Wei, runs three museums, which together house China's largest private art collection (a fourth will open in 2018). According to Liu, "The mission of the Long Museum is to educate the Chinese public, and to present quality work that is on par with other state-of-the-art museums around the world." But Alexandra Munroe, head of Asian Art at the Guggenheim Museum, concluded, from repeat visits to the Long Museum West, that the owners "are lacking in the absolute fundamentals of how to handle art." Walking through the antiquities section, she noted that fabric cords, which are attached to scrolls for the purpose of tying them when they are rolled up for storage, were left dangling in front of the art. "It's the equivalent of walking into a museum here and seeing a van Gogh hung upside down," she said. Liu's museums face other challenges, including economic sustainability: the volatility of the domestic stock market casts doubt on the permanence of anything built on a private fortune.

Liu's buying spree is one of many developments that are turning Shanghai into a global center for art. In 1949, China had only twenty-one museums; today there are more than four thousand. Adrian Cheng, the owner of K11—a venue that is part art museum, part shopping mall—tells Fan, "The Chinese love luxury. But the concept of luxury is evolving here on the mainland. It used to be fast cars and designer clothes. Now the focus is shifting to culture." Liu says, "Since the standard of living has improved, more people are concerned about spiritual satisfaction. Culture, which we neglected for a while, we are now picking up again as a people."

### After Years Spent Battling Hollywood Producers, Kenneth Lonergan Returns with "Manchester by the Sea"

In "Lost Time" (p. 46), **Rebecca Mead** profiles Kenneth Lonergan, the screenwriter, director, and playwright whose works include "Analyze This" and "This Is Our Youth," and speaks with Martin Scorsese, Mark Ruffalo, Matt Damon, and others about Lonergan's contentious career and his new film, "Manchester by the Sea." Lonergan's earlier film "Margaret," which seeks to capture New York City in the first years after September 11th, caused a long battle between Lonergan, his producers, and the studio. After shooting ended, in 2005, the movie did not emerge from the editing room for six years, because they could not agree on what version of the film to release. Eventually, one of the producers sued Lonergan for breach of contract. The story of the making of "Margaret" has become a cautionary tale among writers and filmmakers about the hazards lying at the intersection of art and commerce, and about the ways an artist can become derailed in the pursuit of his vision. Scorsese, who considers the film a masterpiece, felt that Lonergan had become lost in the process. "This happens sometimes—the film starts to talk to you," he told Mead. "You have to make a decision about the flicker of an eyelid, or the turning of a head—and they are both valid, so what do you do? . . . This is the beast you are dealing with."

Lonergan acknowledges that he was difficult about "Margaret." "I was pigheaded in my behavior," he told Mead. "I am proud of being stubborn about wanting complete control over the work, and wanting it to come out as well as it can. I am not proud of being stupid enough to arouse the wrath of a studio that is much more powerful than I am." The lawsuit was resolved, in Lonergan's favor, but both his psyche and his art had suffered considerably. Ruffalo, who is a close friend of Lonergan's, told Mead, "The biggest loss is the fricking years of lost time—whatever he could have been doing during that time . . . It hurt his confidence, it really did. He couldn't write. He couldn't do anything." Damon told Mead, "A lot of his friends were, quite frankly, worried about him. He needed money but he couldn't write—it was this horrible limbo." Damon arranged for Lonergan to write a draft of "Manchester by the Sea." "It was long, and it was meandering, and it was fucking incredible," Damon told Mead. "Manchester by the Sea," which will be released on November 18th, was praised at Sundance, and the domestic rights were acquired by Amazon Studios, for nearly ten million dollars. Damon, who is a producer of the film, recalled, "I told Kenny, 'Look, it's not going to be anything like "Margaret." It's going to be easy, and it's going to be fun.' Kenny said, 'I don't believe you can have fun making movies.'"

### A Brooklyn Love Story

In "Adrift" (p. 20), **Dianne Belfrey** tells the story of leaving her husband for "William," an artist and "Renaissance man," who writes to her daily, builds her a dining table out of maple salvaged from a horse barn in Maine, and asks her to live in his town house in Brooklyn—before the relationship begins to unravel. After telling William she has doubts about moving in together, Belfrey recalls, "I caught a glimpse of his face, then opened the door, jumped from the car, and ran into the co-op, where I called my

sister in California, my hands shaking so badly that it took me three tries to get the number right . . . I told her that I thought William might be a psychopath.” She moves in anyway—to a town house that William neglects to repair after it is badly damaged in a fire—and finds herself in the heart of Park Slope, “with rats and without heat.” As William’s volatility becomes more and more pronounced, Belfrey begins to encounter women like herself: “once they’d ceased being objects of obsession, their lives had sailed off the grid.”

**Plus:** In Comment, **Amy Davidson** examines the ongoing controversy over Hillary Clinton’s e-mails (p. 15); in the Financial Page, **James Surowiecki** looks at the fall of John Stumpf, who recently lost his job as the C.E.O. of Wells Fargo, and considers how today’s corporate climate has affected the role of C.E.O.s (p. 19); in Shouts & Murmurs, **Megan Amram** imagines Trump’s American Girl dolls (p. 27); **Emily Nussbaum** considers how, amidst coverage of the 2016 Presidential race, Fox’s Megyn Kelly “has emerged as an unlikely feminist warrior purified by her struggle to say things that no one else will” (p. 64); **Caleb Crain** reads Jason Brennan’s new book, “Against Democracy,” an argument for an epistocratic system, in which the political power of the irrational, the ignorant, and the incompetent is limited (p. 67); **Joshua Rothman** reads several books about the relationship between politics and everyday life (p. 72); **Alex Ross** attends Gioachino Rossini’s “William Tell” at the Metropolitan Opera (p. 76); **Peter Schjeldahl** visits a Kerry James Marshall retrospective at the Met Breuer (p. 78); **Hilton Als** attends four plays in New York City: “Duet,” “A Life,” “The Front Page,” and “Falsettos” (p. 80); **Anthony Lane** watches Mel Gibson’s “Hacksaw Ridge” and Jeff Nichols’s “Loving” (p. 82); in a Sketchbook, **Barry Blitt** imagines how past Presidential campaigns have set a precedent for the 2016 race (p. 44); poetry by **Ocean Vuong** (p. 51) and **Adrienne Su** (p. 61); and new fiction by **T. Coraghessan Boyle** (p. 56).

**Podcasts:** **David Remnick** speaks with Ben Rhodes, President Obama’s Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications, about the Obama Administration’s view on American power; **Dorothy Wickenden** and **George Packer** discuss how the Democrats lost working-class voters; **T. Coraghessan Boyle** reads his short story “Are We Not Men?”; and **Ben Marcus** reads **Mary Gaitskill’s** “A Dream of Men,” and discusses the story with **Deborah Treisman**.

**Digital Extras:** Paintings from the Kerry James Marshall retrospective at the Met Breuer; and **Adrienne Su** reads her poem “The Lazy Susan.”

The November 7, 2016, issue of *The New Yorker* goes on sale at newsstands beginning Monday, October 31.

