WHEN THE PRESSURE IS ON, SOME WILL FOLLOW JESUS, AND SOME WON’T.” —BETHANY CHRISTIAN SERVICES SURRENDERS ON SAME-SEX ADOPTION, P. 11

PUTIN’S CAMPAIGN TO SMOTHER RUSSIA’S DISSENTERS AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES P. 52
Most of us know Billy Graham as a man who preached God’s Word to millions of people around the world. But who was Mr. Graham to those who knew him personally?

In Saturdays with Billy, Pastor Don Wilton shares heartwarming stories of his decades-long friendship with Mr. Graham. Just as Billy’s words changed Don’s life, they can change our lives today—a testament to a man who leaned on God’s grace into eternity.

COMING TO BOOKSTORES EVERYWHERE APRIL 13TH
46
WAITING IN A RISKY PLACE
For refugees in a prolonged crisis, limbo in Turkey can turn to danger
by Mindy Belz

40
WITH EQUITY—AND DIVERSITY—FOR ALL?
Debate over an elite San Francisco school’s admissions policy encapsulates fraught conversations about a new buzzword
by Sophia Lee

52
CRIMES AND PUNISHMENTS
As Russia silences political dissidents, religious minorities—including evangelicals—find ways to grow during a chill
by Jamie Dean

58
FAMILIES RED AND YELLOW, BLACK AND WHITE
Transracial adoption brings unique challenges, but intentional parenting can help multiracial families thrive
by Charissa Koh
Dispatches

**11 NEWS ANALYSIS**
After decades of affirming Christian teaching on marriage, Bethany Christian Services will allow same-sex couples to foster and adopt children in all its locations.

**15 BY THE NUMBERS**

**16 HUMAN RACE**

**17 QUOTABLES**

**18 QUICK TAKES**

ON THE COVER:
Illustration by Alexis Marcou

---

**Culture**

**23 MOVIES & TV**
The Father, City of Ghosts, Coming 2 America, Penguin Bloom, Crash Landing on You

**28 BOOKS**
The destructive pursuit of happiness above all else

**30 CHILDREN'S BOOKS**

**32 Q&A**
Ryan T. Anderson

**36 MUSIC**
Cover albums can offer adventurous takes on classics or bland strolls down memory lane

---

**Notebook**

**65 LIFESTYLE**
Neighbors in need: For one February week in Texas, polar temperatures beat polarization

**67 MEDICINE**

**68 RELIGION**

**Voices**

8 Joel Belz
20 Janie B. Cheaney
38 Jamie Dean
70 Andrée Seu Peterson
72 Marvin Olasky
THE DOCTOR of MINISTRY
in Expository Preaching

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JOHN MACARTHUR

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ANY UPDATES SINCE YOUR INTERVIEW WITH RYAN ANDERSON ABOUT AMAZON DELISTING HIS BOOK?

“Readers report Walmart and Barnes & Noble canceled their orders. For several days, the title didn’t appear in search results on Walmart.com, but it has now returned with an ‘out of stock’ notice, though the publisher says it has shipped thousands of additional copies.”

—WORLD Film and TV Editor

Megan Basham, whose Q&A with Anderson is on p. 32

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KELLY CARLSON/MONTGOMERY, TEXAS
The Feb. 13 issue of WORLD was appalling. I wish your magazine would focus on the people who love God and country and who stand for truth in these hard times. I will not be subscribing anymore.

JAMES MARSHALL/CONCORD, N.C.
If the so-called prophets would take passages such as Deuteronomy 18:20–22 seriously, they would hesitate to speak prophecies they did not receive from the Lord. Sadly, we have a generation poorly schooled in sound doctrine.

JOSEPH FLETCHER/ENID, OKLA.
Violence condoned every day inside the Capitol—abortion, physical castration of our kids, etc.—far exceeds a few broken windows and messed-up desks.

REBECCA ZIEGLER/LAWRENCEVILLE, GA.
My husband and I feel hard-pressed to find anyone in the Church with reasonable political thoughts, so your cover story was encouraging and a breath of fresh air.

SOUTHERN BAPTIST DIVISION
FEB. 13, P. 44—JULIE LAWRENCE/NEW YORK, N.Y.
Sophia Lee fairly portrayed the complexities facing churches regarding racism and critical race theory. I pray Christians are “quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry” as we engage with one another across racial and ethnic divides, loving each other as Christ loved us.

STEPHEN NORRIS/CARMI, ILL.
I believe racism continues to plague our country in significant ways, and dialogue between good-willed people from both sides is necessary. But it is discouraging, to say the least, that critical race theory and Black Lives Matter are considered necessary starting points for that discussion.

CRISIS OF FAITH
I have read WORLD for 25-plus years and recently struggled with your attempts to be theologically careful over being politically conservative. Thanks for the Feb. 13 issue and for helping me think more carefully about politics and race.

FEB. 13, P. 38—MITCHELL E. CONSIDINE/ELKHORN, WIS.

ALTERNATE UNIVERSES
FEB. 13, P. 72—TIM FRIEDRICH/STERLING, ILL.
As a Christian, I can legitimately be saddened by events, laws, election results, and so many other things that seem like obstacles in my path. We can, and should, work for the benefit of our fellow man while remembering that God’s strength is made perfect in our weaknesses, not in urging us to make nice with the devil or his chosen instruments.

FREEDOM FIGHTER
FEB. 13, P. 56—LINDA DECKER/SIERRA VISTA, ARIZ.
What a tremendous lesson for Christians in the United States. In Hong Kong, the changes came swiftly and they had people like Benny Tai to help hold back evil, while Americans have been like the frog in the pot waiting for the water to boil. Well, it’s boiling now!

INAUGURAL MIRACLES
FEB. 13, P. 36—TIMOTHY MCCARTHY/LONG LAKE, MINN.
Mindy Belz’s column was beautifully written and reminded me of my journey of faith. I am a bit older than her but also had people who appeared in my life when I needed them.

STRENGTH AMID STRUGGLE
FEB. 13, P. 28—DOUG PERKINS/WILMINGTON, DEL.
Kudos to Kristin Chapman for her children’s book reviews for Black History Month. I am buying them for our multiethnic ministry.

CLARIFICATIONS
Christopher Wray is the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (“Uncivil unrest,” Feb. 27, p. 46).

The Proud Boys is an extremist group that identifies itself as “Western chauvinist” (“Canceled and deplatformed,” Feb. 13, p. 67).

READ MORE LETTERS AT WNG.ORG/MAILBAG
Notes from the CEO KEVIN MARTIN

Two decades of making a mark

World Journalism Institute is making a difference because of the annual generosity of WORLD members

Although World Journalism Institute (WJI) has been around for just 22 of WORLD’s 40 years, it has made a huge mark on our organization, a significant mark on journalism in America, and a small but growing mark on journalism around the world.

WJI’s mark on WORLD: More than half of our editorial staff—around 50 reporters and correspondents—have been through at least one WJI program. That trend started with Jamie Dean, who graduated in WJI’s second year.

WJI’s mark on journalism in America: Nearly 700 Christian journalists have graduated from WJI since Bob Case, Joel Belz, and Marvin Olasky launched the program in 1999. Many of those alumni are working in local, regional, and national newsrooms across the country. Being a Christian in the newsroom is difficult, and WJI’s training prepares young journalists to be light in those dark places.

WJI’s mark on journalism around the world: We’ve held one course in Uganda for Christian journalists from Africa and two courses in China, and we’ve done a good bit of work with international journalists training in America for work in their homelands. It’s harder to track the work of those journalists (almost impossible in China), but we believe those efforts are worthwhile.

We expect WJI will continue to be the main pathway to reporting for WORLD.

How much more can WJI do? Quite a lot, I think.

For WORLD, WJI’s training already has expanded to include mid-career journalism courses for professionals who’ve worked in other fields. We already have plans to expand those courses because of the demand. We also already have expanded our core course for college students to include audio formats (radio, podcasts), and we plan to add video journalism training to the mix in a big way. We expect WJI will continue to be the primary pathway to reporting for WORLD.

Even with the growth in WORLD’s platforms, though, WJI still will be sending the majority of its graduates to work in other newsrooms. We hope to place more WJI-trained Christian journalists in the industry and support them, which will require growth in both our training programs and our alumni-encouragement programs.

We have a few plans, and quite a few dreams, of additional overseas training. A second Africa course is in the planning stages, and we’re exploring virtual training for remote areas.

WJI is funded 100 percent by charitable contributions, and almost all of those contributions come from WORLD members. We do one WJI fundraising appeal every year, at about this time, in the six weeks or so leading up to WJI’s main course in May. I invite you to support the training of aspiring Christian journalists by visiting WJI’s website at worldji.com/donate.

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God’s law library

Man makes his rules complex, but God keeps His simple

ONE OF THE ADVANTAGES of taking a few weeks of medical respite from your regular work schedule is that you get to do your taxes early. Really!

Recovery from a fractured leg has kept me hobbling around at home, nudging me to look around for tasks I’d otherwise put off and letting me for the first time in memory file my tax returns before the end of January. It must have caught the IRS off guard, because federal and state offices promptly accepted my returns, confirmed my figures, and issued appropriate refunds. It’s one thing in life I don’t have to worry about again until early 2022.

The IRS may have simplified things a bit for us this year, but it’s still an ugly, tedious process. And it always reminds me how relatively simple God’s approach to rule-making has always been.

God’s rules tend to be few, simple, noncontradictory, and sufficient to stand the test of time without constant updating.

Man’s laws—even when well intended—tend to be complex, lengthy, repetitive, full of contradictions, and constantly in need of revision and amendment.

This isn’t just another swipe at the feds. The contrast between God’s approach and man’s approach to writing rules is just as evident when you look at the bylaws of your church, your PTA, or your golf club. We’re just not very good at anticipating all the needs and eventuations that our weak human natures give rise to. Once we think we have everything nailed down, someone’s evil inventiveness finds another loophole—and we must come up with another list of amendments.

We have limited power and look to the law as a means of controlling other people’s behavior. God, meanwhile, uses His law not so much to control us (which He does anyway) as He does to teach us His wisdom.

That’s why He started, early in the Bible, by expressing His desires for our behavior in 10 brief, broad strokes. (You might even suggest that He started even earlier, in Genesis 1 and 2, in one broad stroke!) Any one of these terse statements had a thousand applications, but part of His wisdom was not to spell all that out with subtopics, footnotes, or subsections. Instead, He left it simple—and memorable.

That’s one of the great benefits of brevity: People can remember what you say. A great shame of our day, even in evangelical circles, is that so few have taken time to memorize the Ten Commandments—an altogether possible and even easy task. That’s no accident—God made it easy because “he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust” (Psalm 103:14).

God starts with profound simplicity rather than with multivolume legal codes because He wants us to apply our hearts not to rote obedience but to the task of wisdom. Yes, He wants compliance. But He could have that any time He desires it. What He wants even more is for our remade hearts to think their way through, and then to desire fervently, the way of life He designed for us. No legal library in the world has shelves long enough for all the books it would take to spell out such a code.

So He gives us instead a few brief and clear starting points. If we incline our hearts in His direction, those basic points blossom into a thousand new challenges we never thought of before.

Prudent parents want the same thing as they work to bring their children to wisdom and maturity. They don’t want to burden their children with code books to carry around for the rest of their lives. Instead, they seek to help them adopt a few basic principles from which wise choices flow as challenges or temptations arise.

Those who fashion civil law should consider such wisdom as an appropriate goal too. Maybe the IRS isn’t the place to begin. But wherever they start, Congress and the Washington bureaucracy had better come to understand—and soon—that however much they think they’re refining and improving the process, stacks and stacks of regulations actually breed contempt for the law. It’s tough to obey what you have no chance of comprehending.
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ON THE FIRST DAY OF MARCH, a brief email announced a big change at Bethany Christian Services: The organization plans to follow “consistent inclusive practices” and “offer services with the love and compassion of Jesus to the many types of families who exist in our world today.”

The language was vague, but the meaning was clear: After a practice of declining to place children in gay and lesbian households in states that...
didn’t require it, Bethany now allows same-sex couples to apply to foster and adopt in all of its locations—whether local laws require it or not.

The change was big news for the nation’s largest Protestant foster care and adoption agency, but the email delivered another jolt: Bethany President and CEO Chris Palusky told some 1,500 employees that Bethany “will not take positions on the many doctrinal issues for which Christians disagree.”

After years of Bethany affirming the Bible’s teaching on marriage as a union between a man and a woman, the 77-year-old organization is abandoning its position on the foundational, Scriptural issue.

Southern Seminary President Al Mohler (also a WORLD board member) lamented the decision and said in a changing cultural and legal landscape every Christian and every Christian organization eventually will face decisions about whether they will pivot on this question.

In the meantime, evangelical organizations with formal ties to Bethany must grapple with how to respond to the organization’s seismic shift—and how to make sure their own positions are clear.

Denny Burk, a professor at Boyce College and Southern Seminary, reacted to Bethany’s change in a tweet: “We are watching a great sorting unfold before our very eyes. When the pressure is on, some will follow Jesus, and some won’t. It’s only just begun.”

“BETHANY’S TRAJECTORY toward same-sex placements began years ago, as a handful of states and cities began requiring some agencies involved in foster care and adoption to allow same-sex couples to apply.

Plenty of agencies facilitate services for same-sex couples, but some Christian organizations have declined, citing a sincerely held belief in the Bible’s teaching on marriage as a union between a man and a woman. In those cases, organizations referred same-sex couples to another agency, an approach Bethany had followed.

When a Bethany staffer in Philadelphia referred a lesbian couple to another agency in 2018, the city suspended its foster care contract with the organization. City officials also suspended a contract with Catholic Social Services over the group’s similar policy.

The city issued an ultimatum: If the groups wanted to continue facilitating foster care, they’d have to allow same-sex couples to apply. Bethany complied. The Catholic agency refused.

A year later, officials in Michigan made a similar demand. Again, Bethany complied. A Catholic agency refused, and Catholics filed lawsuits in both Michigan and Philadelphia, seeking to retain conscience protections that now await a U.S. Supreme Court ruling. Bethany didn’t join the legal action.

In 2019, Kris Faasse—a Bethany senior vice president at the time—told WORLD that Bethany agreed to the government’s demands because it didn’t want to stop placing children in homes. She said the agency considered the probabilities of winning lengthy court battles, then balanced that with a desire to continue serving children in foster care.

She acknowledged the same-sex placements created tension for Christians.

“AS AN ORGANIZATION, BETHANY IS NO LONGER TAKING AN OFFICIAL POSITION ON THIS ISSUE.”
to disagree: Denominations have split apart over the doctrine.

(A spokesperson confirmed the ECFA believes the Bible teaches that “sexual activity be expressed exclusively within the covenant of marriage, which Scripture consistently describes as the holy union between one man and one woman.”)

Bethany is also a member of the Virginia-based Christian Alliance for Orphans (CAFO). Jedd Medefind, the group’s president, says CAFO asks member organizations to commit to placing children “in healthy families with mature Christian faith to the fullest extent possible.”

He says CAFO policy does allow member organizations to comply with government mandates regarding sexuality in locations that require it. That would extend to Bethany’s practice in places like Michigan, Philadelphia, and other jurisdictions requiring same-sex placements.

But Bethany’s policy now seems to go well beyond the CAFO allowance by requiring all of its branches to serve same-sex couples, whether the government mandates it or not.

When asked about Bethany’s shift, Medefind said his group would be pursuing discussions with the organization’s leadership about the changes.

THE CHANGING LEGAL landscape underscores the pressures some Christian groups face, particularly if they accept government funds in conjunction with foster care or refugee services.

Bethany’s 2019 annual report showed private donations from individuals and groups had dropped from $19 million to $17 million from 2018 to 2019. In the same time period, the group’s service revenue had increased from $103 million to $113 million. A Bethany spokesperson confirmed the “vast majority of our service revenue is from government funding.”

Government funding often comes with government strings, and some government officials are determined to tighten those strings for religious groups and others.
In late February, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Equality Act—sweeping legislation that would write LGBTQ protections into civil rights statutes, prioritizing them over religious liberty. The bill is unlikely to gain the 10 or more Republican votes needed to pass the U.S. Senate, but it demonstrates the kind of pressures on Christians that will likely grow.

Still, religious liberty advocates remain hopeful: In November the U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments regarding the Catholic foster care agency in Philadelphia, and likely will decide the case in June.

It’s impossible to predict the outcome, but its decision could protect, and even strengthen, conscience protections for religious organizations—and could show legal struggle is worth the battle for Christian organizations.

MEANWHILE, FOSTER CARE remains a gaping crisis in the U.S., with some 400,000 children in the foster care system—a need Bethany rightly says points to the urgency for more families to help.

Many foster children are eventually reunited with their families, but some 63,000 were adopted from foster care in 2018. An ongoing opioid crisis has spiked the crisis in some Midwestern states.

Katy Faust, director of the child advocacy organization Them Before Us, says it’s vital to keep the focus on children and what’s best for them, instead of leading with perceived rights of adults to foster or adopt.

Faust’s own parents divorced when she was young, and she grew up splitting her time between her father’s home and the home her mother shared with a lesbian partner.

She says her mother was a good, loving parent, but she still argues for the need for children to grow up in homes with moms and dads, if possible. Faust realizes that’s not always possible, but she urges agencies not to give up on pursuing that as the ideal: “Any adoption agency that is able to furnish children with a mother and father but fails to do so because of political correctness ... fails their true client, which is the child.”

The growing debates aren’t a reason for Christians to withdraw from foster care and adoption, but to step up to it, she says. She hopes those who don’t think same-sex foster care or adoption is best for a child will “send in your application to become a foster parent today.”

Herbie Newell, president of Lifeline Children’s Services, an Alabama-based, Christian adoption and child welfare ministry, agrees that Christians should continue advocating for a Biblical definition of marriage when caring for children.

Newell’s organization released a statement reaffirming its belief in marriage as an institution between a man and a woman, and Newell said Bethany’s recent decision saddens him. But he also remains hopeful for Christians making a case for adoptive mothers and fathers.

“Everything we stand up for is for human flourishing, and human flourishing within child welfare,” he says. “But we’ve allowed the secular world to say that’s bigoted, narrow-minded, and not for good. We haven’t stood up to say—no, this is for human flourishing—this is for good.”

Newell’s organization doesn’t accept government funding, but he knows it’s possible it could face similar government pressures in the future. What would he do?

“I would just say we’re not going to compromise who we are,” he says. “When you base who you are on the Word of God, you don’t change who you are to fit social constructs. You stay true to who you are with consistency based on the Word of God.”
90%
Amazon’s U.S. market share of e-book sales.

$17B

$9.6B

45%
Amazon’s U.S. market share of e-commerce in 2018, with about $524 billion in sales.

32%
Amazon’s U.S. market share of the cloud computing industry in 2018, which includes hosting customers’ websites.

751M
The number of print books sold in the U.S. in 2020, an 8 percent jump in print book sales over 2019.

42%
Amazon’s U.S. market share of book sales, according to reports from Bloomberg and the BBC. In August 2020 the Association of American Publishers told members of Congress it could be as high as 70-80 percent in some industry segments. The company may face antitrust scrutiny after pulling some conservative books from its virtual shelves (see “Big tech and a canceled book,” p. 32) and for refusing to host some controversial websites with its cloud computing business.
EW YORK ATTORNEY GENERAL LETITIA JAMES has opened an investigation into at least four sexual harassment claims against Gov. Andrew Cuomo from former or current aides. On March 8, James announced a former federal prosecutor and an employment attorney will jointly lead the probe. Cuomo has said his behavior toward the women “may have been insensitive or too personal,” but he insisted his accusers misinterpreted his actions as unwanted flirtation. The fourth accuser says Cuomo touched her inappropriately in late 2020, which Cuomo denied. Several New York lawmakers, including New York Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, have called for the governor to resign. The accusations came as news surfaced that Cuomo’s administration altered statistics to downplay COVID-19 nursing home deaths last year.

Cuomo claims stack up
Investigators probe several sexual harassment complaints against New York governor

SPLIT
Conservative leaders from the United Methodist Church (UMC) have announced the logo, website, and mission of a proposed new denomination, the Global Methodist Church. The reveal came days after the UMC delayed this year’s general conference until August 2022 due to COVID-19. Supporters of the breakaway asked the church to consider the proposal during an online conference on May 8. The Global Methodist Church said it would affirm “the traditional understanding of Christian marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman.” In 2019, the UMC’s global church delegates voted 438-384 to strengthen the ban on LGBT inclusivity, but many liberal American clergy said they would not abide by the restrictions. One proposal, the Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation, would set aside a total of $27 million for any new denominations and allow them to keep their properties.

REMOVED
The ministry named after late apologist Ravi Zacharias is removing all his content from its platforms, CEO Sarah Davis announced on March 8. Days later Davis told employees Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM) “cannot—indeed should not—continue to operate as an organization in its present form” and announced that it would significantly reduce staff and become a grant-making organization. An Atlanta law firm found Zacharias engaged in significant sexual misconduct before his death in May 2020. Since RZIM released the findings, the organization’s branch in Canada said it would shut down, RZIM Africa took down its website and said it would take three months to decide what to do, and the U.K. ministry branch cut ties with RZIM.

DIED
Vernon Jordan, 85, a Washington, D.C., lawyer and power broker who survived an assassination attempt, died on March 1. He began his career after law school working as a civil rights lawyer and then as head of the National Urban League. He used his connections with business and political leaders, including Bill Clinton, to help the next generation of black leaders advance.
“Whenever a nation’s laws no longer reflect the standards of God, that nation is in rebellion against Him and will inevitably bear the consequences.”

Rep. GREG STEUBE, R-Fla., quoting from The Tony Evans Bible Commentary on Feb. 25 while speaking on the House floor in opposition to the Equality Act, which would make it illegal to discriminate against homosexual and transgender individuals. Rep. Jerry Nadler, D-N.Y., replied: “What any religious tradition ascribes as God’s will is no concern of this Congress.” (The House voted 224-206 in favor of the bill.)

“You just can’t say, ‘Yeah, yeah, let everybody in,’ because then we’re affected down there at the border.”

U.S. Rep. HENRY CUELLAR, D-Texas, telling Axios he supported President Joe Biden but saw risks in trying to appease pro-immigration groups. Cuellar’s district includes land along the southern border, where immigrant crossings have surged in recent weeks.

“It’s clear that our differences are irreconcilable and there is no way to bridge them.”

Rev. KEITH BOYETTE, a Methodist elder from Virginia, on the split in the United Methodist Church over same-sex unions and gay and lesbian clergy. Boyette chairs a group of conservative Methodist leaders that on March 1 announced the name and logo of an alternative denomination, the Global Methodist Church (see “Split,” p. 16).

“I felt in my spirit today it was time to tell you that I am not a practicing Christian anymore.”

Former Christian singer-songwriter AUDREY ASSAD, writing in a series of tweets on March 3 that she had stopped practicing her Catholic faith about three years ago.

“Some animals can autotomize [regrow] their legs or appendages or tails, but no other animal shed their whole body.”

Nara Women’s University aquatic ecology professor YOICHI YUSA, describing the discovery that Japanese sea slugs, after being decapitated, can regenerate their entire bodies.
TOO FAT TO FLY Government officials in Bahrain are sounding the alarm about seagulls too obese to fly. The reason for the overweight avians? They’ve been gorging on leftovers from humans. The technical committee chairman of the Middle Eastern nation’s Northern Municipal Council called on residents to stop leaving out plates of food for the seabirds. “We can see them walking on the ground, it’s like they just left work and came home for lunch,” Abdullah Al Qubaisi told Bahrain’s Gulf Daily News. In particular, the gulls have been spotted feasting on the carbohydrate-rich machboos, a spiced chicken and rice recipe considered the small country’s national dish. Elsewhere in Bahrain, councilors have complained about a rat infestation also caused by diners failing to dispose properly their leftover machboos.

HOME AWAY FROM HOME Coronavirus pandemic restrictions have stressed every household, but for one man in southern England, the clamor of his own house was too much. Police in Burgess Hill, U.K., say a local man wanted on criminal charges called police to turn himself in. According to authorities, the man was looking for some peace and quiet. “He would rather go back to prison than have to spend more time with the people he was living with,” Inspector Darren Taylor told the West Sussex County Times in February. Police were willing to oblige: They took the wanted man into custody.

ANTI-WORK SCHEME In the end, 19-year-old Brandon Soules got what he wanted. Police in Coolidge, Ariz., say the teen faked his own kidnapping in order to avoid work on Feb. 10. Officers found Soules bound and gagged near a water tower, and the teen told authorities he had been abducted by two masked men. When a subsequent investigation by police couldn’t corroborate the young man’s story, authorities asked him for more details. That’s when Soules admitted he had staged the story to avoid having to go to work. Police arrested Soules on Feb. 17 for filing a false report. According to authorities, Soules was also fired from his job at a local vehicle repair shop.

THORNYSITUATION

WHAT WAS INTENDED AS AN ACT OF KINDNESS in Coshocton, Ohio, turned into a police investigation. After her fiancé spent roughly $300 on roses for Valentine’s Day, Brittaney Strupe of Ohio decided she didn’t want the surplus of flowers to go to waste. “He was just going to throw them outside or in the trash, so I told him, instead of wasting, we should pass it on,” she told WBNS. So Strupe and some family members took the roses to a local Walmart and left them on cars for strangers. But Walmart customers confused the kind gesture for something more nefarious. A Walmart employee reported the odd behavior to police, fearing it was part of a human trafficking recruitment scheme. As other concerned calls poured into the Coshocton Sheriff’s Office, the department put a plea for more information on its Facebook page. Eventually Strupe saw the post, called sheriff’s deputies, and cleared up the matter.
SO GOOD IT'S CRIMINAL In an effort to stave off a rash of video challenges of young people ruining desserts, Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey signed into law on Feb. 18 a piece of legislation banning the contamination of food. Legislators in Arizona aimed the bill at people who enter grocery stores and film themselves licking from cartons of ice cream before putting the containers back on the shelves. The law makes a class 1 misdemeanor out of putting “any bodily fluid or foreign object not intended for human consumption with water, food, or drink.” Even if no one consumes the product, violating the new law could cost miscreants four months in jail and a $750 fine. In 2019, a video of a Texas teen licking from a container of Blue Bell ice cream went viral and has inspired numerous copycat attacks.

ANIMALS WITH BENEFITS After a lifetime of service, police dogs and horses in Poland may soon be able to retire on a pension. On Feb. 18, officials with the nation’s interior ministry said they were pushing legislation for the government to provide lifelong retirement benefits—including veterinary care—for all retired dogs and horses that previously served Polish police officers. Interior Minister Mariusz Kaminski said the legislation will affect about 1,000 retired police dogs and several dozen horses. “They are extraordinary animals. Thanks to them, many human lives have been saved and many dangerous criminals have been apprehended,” Kaminski told Polsat. “Caring for them is our ethical duty.”

VACCINATION DISGUISE You can’t blame them for wanting to stay healthy. Health officials in central Florida caught two women last month posing as grannies in order to get their second doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. Orange County Department of Health director Raul Pino said his crew on Feb. 17 turned away two women ages 34 and 44, dressed in bonnets, gloves, and glasses, whose driver’s license dates of birth didn’t match information in the county’s registration database. Currently Florida has prioritized people above the age of 65 for vaccination. Pino says the unnamed women somehow managed to slip through the system to obtain their first round of vaccines. Authorities gave the two women trespass warnings and sent them away. “We haven’t had any lack of willing arms to get vaccinated,” Pino said. “We also have people faking to be old to be vaccinated.”

OUTHOUSE OCCUPIED It’s the stuff of nightmares: An Alaskan woman sitting down to use a backcountry outhouse felt something bite her. “I got out there and sat down on the toilet and immediately something bit my butt right as I sat down,” said Shannon Stevens, who was staying with family in a yurt in southeast Alaska on Feb. 13. “I jumped up and I screamed when it happened.” Stevens believed she had been bitten by a small animal. As she tended to her flesh wound, her brother Erik came to the outhouse to investigate the screaming. But when he opened the toilet seat, he didn’t see a mink or squirrel. He saw a black bear. “I just shut the lid as fast as I could. I said, ‘There’s a bear down there, we got to get out of here now,’” her brother said. “And we ran back to the yurt as fast as we could.” In the morning, the family found bear tracks all around the property, but the beast had apparently moved on.
When lived experience becomes the law

A college’s fight over racism illuminates the Equality Act

**The Case of the Racist Janitor:**

At Smith College in midsummer 2018, a student was innocently eating lunch in a deserted dorm lounge when a janitor and a campus police officer approached and asked why she was there. The men were white. The student was black and traumatized by the confrontation with an armed police officer. That night she posted on Facebook, “It’s outrageous that some people question my being at Smith College, and my existence overall as a woman of color.”

The ACLU got involved. On Facebook the student identified the janitor, police officer, an off-duty staff member, and a cafeteria worker and accused them of “racist, cowardly acts.” All received nasty, threatening messages. The college administration put the janitor on paid leave, mandated anti-bias training for all of the staff, and hired a law firm to investigate.

The law firm’s report received much less attention, even though (or because) it qualified what really happened. As Michael Powell recently reported in *The New York Times*, the janitor was over 60, with poor eyesight. The dorm lounge where the student decided to eat her lunch was part of a children’s day camp, open only to authorized personnel. Administrators had advised staff to contact campus police before approaching unauthorized individuals. The police officer was unarmed. The cafeteria worker and off-duty janitor had nothing to do with the incident, but were stigmatized anyway—leading, for the former, to a flare-up of her chronic lupus triggered by stress.

The administration never apologized. The ACLU lawyer sniffed, “It’s troubling that people are more offended by being called racist than by the actual racism in our society.” The ruin of one’s reputation, after all, can’t be compared to the lived experience of an elite student belonging to a historically oppressed group.

“Lived experience” is a key phrase to keep in mind when contemplating the Equality Act (H.R. 5), which the U.S. House of Representatives passed on Feb 25. It’s doubtful that H.R. 5 will pass the Senate—at least for now. But the “Findings and Purpose” section of the bill hangs like an ominous cloud over the future of personal interaction in the United States.

Twenty paragraphs list particular areas of discrimination faced by LGBTQ individuals. These parallel acts of racism in the past because the Equality Act is a rewrite of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The phrase “and women” is inserted into three of these paragraphs, perhaps to make the bill seem more inclusive. But its purpose is to outlaw all forms of discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. But who decides what is or is not discrimination?

In paragraph 14, “transgender people often encounter discrimination when credit checks or inquiries reveal a former name.” Does questioning a name change indicate bias? Paragraph 15: “About 1 in 5 transgender people experience homelessness.” Is that because they’re denied housing, or because some have psychological needs that haven’t been met? 16: How often are LGBTQ people denied a credit card or student loan “simply because of their sexual orientation or gender identity”? How does the credit card company even know? 17: Why do “older women in same-sex couples have twice the poverty rate of older different-sex couples”? And what’s the remedy?

If H.R. 5 becomes law, anyone of a nontraditional sexual status will be able to bring any charge, based not on objective standards but on the plaintiff’s lived experience. That is, the plaintiff’s perception of harm, like the Smith student whose interpretation of the facts was more valid than the facts. Sincere religious beliefs will be irrelevant by law. It’s hard to miss the triumphalist tone of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, cheerleading the bill on its website: “a major step forward in stopping the Religious Right’s aggressive agenda to weaponize and redefine ‘religious freedom.’”

The Equality Act makes no attempt to define religious freedom. But it will go a long way toward weaponizing everyday human interaction.
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END-OF-LIFE LESSONS

*The Father* shows why dementia taxes both parent and child

by Megan Basham
T’S EASY TO SEE THE STAGE ORIGINS of Anthony Hopkins’ latest movie, *The Father* (playing in theaters and coming to streaming platforms March 26 and rated PG-13 for language), which critics are justly hailing for his tour-de-force performance. Writer-director Florian Zeller adapted the film from his 2012 French play, and nearly all the action takes place in a flat that may be Anthony’s (Hopkins) or may be his eldest daughter, Anne’s—late-stage dementia makes it difficult for him to remember where he is.

But the close set and small cast are the ideal building blocks to illustrate the narrowing that so often comes with the end of life, when the world available to us, both physically and socially, grows so small.

Anne (Olivia Colman) tells him she is moving to France to get married, but even if she weren’t, she’s no longer equipped to see to his needs, so they will have to make arrangements about his care. Anthony blithely wonders who would be interested in her romantically and goes back to fixating on his favorite watch. Anne’s lined face and hunched shoulders show months, possibly years, of bearing her father’s verbal blows. Is it illness making him say these things, or are these the thoughts he’s always had, his tongue loosening as the restraint of a sound mind falls away?

Through Anne, we see the conventional story of dementia—the bone-deep weariness and isolation it causes loved ones and caretakers. But *The Father* quickly moves past that usual construction and pushes us to experience the story from Anthony’s perspective as well.

Throughout the film, we feel unmoored by time—unsure of when conversations are occurring, or even if they’re occurring at all or are merely figments of Anthony’s increasing paranoia. This confusion creates sympathy that doesn’t come from sentimentality or easy melodrama but from allowing us to experience the world as Anthony does. He is obsessive and frequently cruel. “The thing is she’s not very bright. You know, not very intelligent,” he says of Anne to a horrified nurse. Later, he confesses within earshot of Anne that his younger daughter was always his favorite.

But when the scene shifts and we see similar exchanges from Anthony’s point of view, where faces are unrecognizable and adults speak to him slowly and simply as if he’s a child, we wonder how much of his behavior may be a mechanism for exerting control over his fracturing sense of himself.

Anne tries to arrange for a series of home nurses so her father won’t be on his own during the day, but one by one, Anthony chases them off. We see how easy it is for a stranger—only there to collect a wage—to walk away.

In an increasingly aging culture beset by divorce, smaller families, and fewer siblings to shoulder the burden of sick parents, the question of how we honor our fathers and mothers at the end of their lives becomes a crucial part of living out our theology. Good fathers and bad, cruel and kind, will need to lean on children who themselves have fewer networks to rely on for support.

As their absence in *The Father* illustrates, the ties of extended family, church, and close community may ask much of us in the years of our strength. But when we need them, they pay back exponentially what they take.
LA HAUNTS
Japanese American writer-director Elizabeth Ito (Adventure Time) created City of Ghosts to reflect her experiences growing up in LA neighborhoods.

What would make kids watch a show about Los Angeles history and culture? Ghosts, of course! Netflix’s new animated series City of Ghosts (rated TV-Y7) will likely also draw adult viewers into its authentic explorations of communities throughout the City of Angels. But while the show contains nothing scary, parents might object to its un-Biblical spirituality.

Zelda and three young journalist friends interview adults in Boyle Heights, Venice, Leimert Park, and other LA neighborhoods who experience strange things. For example, a vegan café owner’s coffee machine turns on by itself. The Ghost Team finds friendly ghosts who “tell us their stories.” The team mediates conflicts between adults and ghosts, all of whom talk about their old haunts.

Although the child characters’ voices sound like those of kindergartners, the show’s sophisticated dialogue targets tweens (or older). Three episodes I watched had much to like: fun animation and tidbits of local history. Yet, one child declares, “I use ‘they’ and ‘them’ for my pronouns.” And there’s no shortage of spiritism, including an adult character who, having visited a medium, claims, “The spirits love you and are protecting you.”

Concern that kids won’t separate fact from phantasm will spook many parents.

BACK TO ZAMUNDA
Explicit material and lack of noble characters spoil Coming 2 America

IN 1988, THE FILM Coming to America had a noble side that seemed, to a less discerning college student like me, to redeem its R rating. The normally foul-mouthed Eddie Murphy played a delightful Prince Akeem from the fictional African country of Zamunda. To find true love, Akeem traveled to Queens, N.Y., where he laid aside his crown and took up mop so his wealth would not sway his bride-to-be. (Murphy and co-star Arsenio Hall still expressed their raunchy brand of comedy through the other characters they portrayed.)

Amazon’s newly released sequel Coming 2 America reunites almost the entire original cast. The story is different, but not the lewd content. Akeem, now king of Zamunda and father of three girls, faces a hostile General Izzi (Wesley Snipes) from Nextdoria. Izzi will assassinate Akeem unless the two countries forge ties in a royal marriage. The problem is Akeem has no male heirs—or so he thinks, until he learns he conceived a son out of wedlock 30 years before. Akeem returns to Queens to bring Lavelle (Jermaine Fowler) to Zamunda to assume his royal role. Lavelle, his mother Mary, and Uncle Reem (Tracy Morgan), who all move into Zamunda’s royal palace, aren’t exactly royal-palace material. At an elegant meal, Mary asks why the mashed potatoes are black.

“It’s caviar,” Queen Lisa scoffs.

“You know,” Mary remarks, “our cousin’s named that.” The film picks up its racial humor where it left off in 1988.

With frequent suggestiveness and explicit language, Coming 2 America deserves stronger than its PG-13 rating. And as Lavelle doesn’t possess the original Akeem character’s decency, the film lacks any nobility that, at least for some viewers, might have redeemed it.

FIVE G OR PG EDDIE MURPHY MOVIES

1 Mulan: as Mushu
2 Dr. Dolittle 2: as Dr. John Dolittle
3 Daddy Day Care: as Charlie Hinton
4 Imagine That: as Evan Danielson
5 Shrek Forever After: as Donkey
LEVEN-YEAR-OLD NOAH finds a squawking magpie that’s fallen from its nest near an Australian beach and can’t fly. He brings it home to help it heal. But the bird isn’t the only character who needs healing.

Alternating between Noah’s narration, flashbacks, and real time, Penguin Bloom relates the horrific accident that befall Noah’s mom, Sam, and left her paralyzed from the chest down. The new film, based on a true story and streaming on Netflix, immerses its audience in tender, painful, intense, and sometimes comedic moments of an Australian family grappling with Sam’s life-changing injury, and the unconditional love that keeps the family together.

Portraying the real Sam Bloom, Naomi Watts brings nuance to transient emotions—despair, resentment, anger, hopelessness—that accompany her devastating prognosis.

We hurt when she sobs, unable to get out of bed to help her three sick sons who now call out for Daddy instead of her. Sitting in her wheelchair, she stares at photos of her energetic former life of surfing, swimming, running, and playing with her boys, and we understand her exploding anger over her self-perceived worthlessness and loss of identity. Constant activity with family, her nursing profession, and the ocean had defined her. She doesn’t believe life will ever hold purpose again.

This is where I wish we’d hear her call out to God. That never happens in the film, but we do see her husband’s daily devotion and encouragement as he moves her in and out of bed; attends to their rambunctious, trampoline-jumping sons; and defends his wife in front of a loving but overbearing mom. He continually reassures her of his love and her worth, and helps Sam discover new passion and purpose—one involving the ocean again.

Noah, the oldest of the three boys, is the most affected by his mom’s accident and blames himself. To help cope, he’s secretly filming and telling his version of his mom’s life. At one point he refers to her in the past tense: “It’s like Mom was stolen from us. … She was awesome.”

Like a literary device woven through a novel, Noah’s recovering black-and-white magpie, Penguin, symbolizes Sam’s journey. As Sam grudgingly begins to help it along, the bird endears itself to her with its antics, and she, with the family, cheers its progress. Sam slowly moves forward, too.

Though somewhat predictable, the film is still satisfying, thanks to believable characters who selflessly love each other, beautiful photography, the true storyline, and a remarkable magpie.

Watch through the credits to see photos of the real Bloom family, including Penguin. The movie, rated TV-14 for mature themes and mild language, may remind you to assess where your own worth resides and to hold your family close.
**LOST IN FOG:** A South Korean actress strayed near North Korean waters in a boat in 2008, inspiring *Crash Landing on You.*

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**BOX OFFICE TOP 10**

**WEEKEND OF MARCH 5-7, ACCORDING TO BOX OFFICE Mojo. QUANTITY OF SEXUAL (S), VIOLENT (V), AND FOUL-LANGUAGE (L) CONTENT ON A 0-10 SCALE, WITH 10 HIGH, FROM KIDS-IN-MIND.COM**

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*REVIEWED BY WORLD*

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**CLASSIC CRITIQUE**

On Thursdays in March, Turner Classic Movies is airing 18 classic films that have come under fire due to changing attitudes about race and gender. The series, *Reframed,* shows films like *Gone With the Wind* and *The Searchers* alongside critical discussions placing them in their cultural context. —from wng.org’s Muse

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**LOVE BEYOND BORDERS**

South Korean romance series *Crash Landing on You* hits big with audiences for all the right reasons

by Juliana Chan Erikson

CRASH LANDING ON YOU, a stirring South Korean series on Netflix, smashed viewership records throughout Asia last year. While winning over viewers, it expertly navigated a diplomatic minefield with its deft telling of forbidden cross-border love.

What’s perhaps most stunning about the show is that in the middle of a pandemic, when millions of Americans were binging on anything—even *Tiger King*—to jump-start our socially distant hearts, this gem went largely unreviewed and unwatched.

The 16-hour serial does what few American romances do: It refreshes the soul-sick without expletives, sex, or liberal politics. Its characters are faithful, its depictions of North Koreans and South Koreans are dignified and heartening, and its finale sticks the landing. The dialogue may all be in Korean, but *Crash Landing on You* communicates a love so universal that it transcends the subtitles.

You do have to jump through some far-fetched plot points, though: A poorly timed paragliding attempt and a well-placed tornado launch South Korean fashion mogul Yoon Se-ri (Son Ye-jin) across the Demilitarized Zone and into the arms of Capt. Ri Jeong-hyuk (Hyun Bin). Days before she left Seoul, Se-ri had leapfrogged her brothers to helm their chaebol (read: filthy rich family business), but trapped in the North she finds herself suddenly without status and devoid of the distractions that made her life bearable.

The sympathetic Jeong-hyuk stretches every North Korean won to buy her creature comforts and smuggle her back to the South. As it turns out, Jeong-hyuk is no ordinary soldier, and Se-ri’s heart is not as shallow as we’d imagined.

Seeing Se-ri transform through Jeong-hyuk’s love is what makes this drama so special. Everybody knows the cruel fate that awaits any North Korean who risks his life to save an enemy. The cost is real—even if this show isn’t. That’s why, after he rescues her time and again from North Korean villains, we lose our collective breath when Yoon Se-ri looks at Jeong-hyuk’s wounds and realizes, “Your life might be shattered because of me.”

That’s love: Not that Se-ri loved Jeong-hyuk, but that he loved her and nearly died for her. Sound familiar?

Of course, there are side plots and comic relief to break up the heaviness. The ragtag soldiers in Jeong-hyuk’s command are hilarious yet loyal accomplices. The gossipy but harmless North Korean neighbors serve as delightful foils to Se-ri’s predatory family members.

*Crash Landing on You* is rated TV-14 for subtitled crudities and glimpses of torture and murder—this is North Korea after all. Beyond that, there’s nothing here a teenager couldn’t watch.
I KNEW A 2-YEAR-OLD WHO, when motivated by another tot taking his toy, could speak not just in sentences but in whole paragraphs like “My car. Not your car. My car.”

Many adults have developed similar thinking, and Carl Trueman explains how and why in his excellent _The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self_ (Crossway, 2020). He asks why the sentence “I am a woman trapped in a man’s body” makes sense to many people whose heads are otherwise screwed on straight. The answer: Due to technological, medical, and communications progress “we all live in a world in which it is increasingly easy to imagine that reality is something we can manipulate according to our own wills and desires.” The key question in resolving any dilemma is no longer “What’s the right thing to do?” but “Will it make you happy?”

This has implications for many issues. Christians believe “the embryo is a person of potential and protected in ... the Christian sacred order because she possesses the image of God from the moment of conception. That at six weeks she cannot fend for herself or even be parted from her mother’s body and survive is irrelevant, because such material factors are really incidental to the core notion of personhood.” If we remove that “sacred order” understanding, though, “the question of the embryo’s status is much more contested.” Life or death depends on “whether giving birth to the child will be conducive to the mother’s mental well-being.”

One reason the emphasis on immediate happiness is wrong: Suffering often drives us to God and makes long-term happiness more likely. In _What About Evil?_ (P&R, 2020), Scott Christensen comes as close as any human can to explaining why bad things happen. He shows how God is the master Playwright whose storytelling we creatures strive to imitate. God’s long-range perspective is apparent in His support of marriage and criticism of adultery, which can provide a fleeting buzz.

Long-range over short is how Randy Alcorn can give a resounding and easy-to-read YES to his question, _Does God Want Us To Be Happy?_ (Tyndale, 2019). The difference between Christian understanding and worldly wisdom is evident in the edgy short stories within Pamela Painter’s _Fabrications_ (Johns Hopkins Press, 2020), Susan Minot’s _Why I Don’t Write_ (Knopf, 2020), and Caitlin Horrocks’ _Life Among the Terranauts_ (Little, Brown, 2021). They can be good training for modern evangelism, if you can put up with occasional bad language and pessimistic existentialism.

The _Upswing_ by Robert Putnam and Shaylyn Garrett (Simon & Schuster, 2020) fits alongside those depressing stories. It features charts purportedly showing that mid-20th-century American life was better than life a generation before or after. Maybe, but is the solution potentially dictatorial governmental action? It’s time to pay more attention to the capabilities of churches and beneficial community groups.

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Sean Flynn’s _The Cure That Works: How To Have the World’s Best Healthcare—at a Quarter of the Price_ (Regnery, 2019) examines Singapore’s system. Ronald Grigor Suny’s _Stalin: Passage to Revolution_ (Princeton, 2020) shows the rise of a cure that did not work. John Vile’s _The Bible in American Law and Politics_ (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020) has interesting articles on subjects from abortion to Zionism.

The Trinity: An Introduction by Scott R. Swain: The Bible provides the perfect example of how to praise the triune God, says Swain. Far from containing “a latent or undeveloped biblical Trinitarianism,” the Scriptures show that each person of the Trinity is “the one God in all his fullness.” “The divine being, the divine mind, the divine will, and the divine power ... are one and indivisible.” Yet “because God is three, all of God’s actions with respect to creatures” proceed “from the Father through the Son in the Spirit.” Chapters on each person, and on the shape and end of God’s triune work, round out the volume’s 130 pages. God’s goal is Himself: To Him are all things. But we are the beneficiaries of His work, and that, says Swain, teaches us to praise our triune God.

Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption by L. Michael Morales: Morales’ Exodus Old and New appears in a series titled Essential Studies in Biblical Theology. Many “essential” books aren’t, but this one’s insights actually might be. Morales offers a high-level overview of Exodus and gives attention to literary detail. The theme of Exodus is the knowledge of God, worked out in the Israelites’ deliverance from Egypt, the covenant laws, and the construction of the Tabernacle, where God can live among Israel and make Himself known. But Morales doesn’t stop there. He goes on to comprehensively tie Exodus back to Genesis and forward to the Gospels, especially Jesus’ resurrection “exodus” (Luke 9:31). This is Biblical theology at its finest. Most commentators can explain a verse, but Morales can and does explain a whole book.

Systematic Theology by Robert Letham: Letham’s theology is emphatically part of an ongoing conversation. It’s targeted to those who have read some other one-volume systematic theologies, know the issues, and are interested in further discussion. That discussion makes no attempt to cover everything, primarily skipping right to the trouble spots and points of historical interest. Letham is a seasoned pastor, teacher of theology, and author of books on the Trinity, the Westminster Assembly, and the Eastern church. Given that background, he highlights the joys of reading and understanding Scripture, and he’s fascinated with Rome’s and Orthodoxy’s alternative understandings. But he always returns to the historic Reformed view, with charity, humor, and a profound delight in the beauty of God, the profundity of the Word, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Rejoice and Tremble by Michael Reeves: Both sinful fear and right fear produce, says Reeves, the psycho-physical state “of being staggeringly discomposed.” This is good, because the fear of God is “a startlingly physical, overpowering reaction” not merely to God’s grandeur as Creator but especially to His goodness as Redeemer in Christ. Though he quotes many Biblical passages, and much from Calvin, Luther, and the Puritans, Reeves’ primary text comes from Jeremiah 33:9: “They shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide.” This fear is not a being afraid; it is a being overwhelmed, “a way of speaking about the sheer intensity of the saints’ happiness in God.” Christians gain this fear of God by contemplating the crucifixion, Reeves notes, adding that pastors need to model this joyous fear.
Wonder and remembrance
Four new picture books
by Mary Jackson

**The Boy Whose Head Was Filled With Stars** by Isabelle Marinov: Edwin Hubble’s curiosity as a young boy led him to stargaze and wonder about the night sky. “How many stars are in the sky? How did the universe begin? Where did it come from?” These questions reappear in silver lettering and in full-page spreads of starry skies showcasing Hubble’s study of astronomy. Hubble was unafraid of how big the universe was but “saw beauty in its immensity, and it gave him comfort.” In an author’s note, Marinov describes Hubble’s discoveries as humbling and putting earthly problems into perspective. (Ages 6-10)

**Twenty-One Steps** by Jeff Gottesfeld: Sentinels keep watch over the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery with precision and perfection, during all hours of the day and in any weather condition. Gottesfeld captures their deliberate dress, clicking heels, 21 steps, and 21 seconds of silence that show honor to the “nameless and faceless” victims of war. The guards take their job seriously and ascribe to a “Sentinel’s Creed,” reproduced in the beginning of the book. Masterfully illustrated by Matt Tavares, this sobering story is written from the perspective of the unknown soldier. (Ages 7-10)

**My Red Hat** by Rachel Stubbs: In this imaginative book, a grandfather gives his granddaughter a bright red hat “full of possibility.” The hat does more than keep her warm and dry or cool on a sunny day. At times it appears bigger-than-life, holding dreams, secrets, fears, and adventures. With the hat, the grandfather passes on wisdom to his granddaughter. She and her hat travel way up high and way down deep “until home calls you back to where you belong.” Stubbs’ illustrations combine red and blue-gray tones, making each page pop. (Ages 3-7)

**Road Trip!** by Steve Light: Bear’s truck needs a new headlight after a minor accident. He coaxes four animal friends to join him on a road trip to Elephant’s junkyard for a new one. In the charming world of Whiskers Hollow, the animals emerge from hollowed stumps and traverse rickety bridges and thorny tunnels, arriving at a massive tree decorated with old car parts and rusty treasures. Each animal finds something special at the junkyard. Children will delight in the book’s intricate and whimsical details and each creature’s character traits. (Ages 3-8)

Rebecca McLaughlin’s *10 Questions Every Teen Should Ask (and Answer) About Christianity* (Crossway, 2021) examines modern messages young adults will encounter about God, the Bible, and the world they live in. She sets out to prepare them for real conversations with people who think differently from them. “If what I believe is true, it will stand up to scrutiny,” she writes.

Questions cover a range of topics including diversity, morality, truth, science, marriage, sexuality, gender, God’s sovereignty, and heaven and hell. This simplified version of McLaughlin’s 2019 book for adults, *Confronting Christianity*, addresses common misconceptions with refreshing honesty and points teenagers to the truth of the gospel.

Although the book’s intended audience is teenagers, McLaughlin says she wrote the book in a way that she would be comfortable reading to her 10-year-old. Harry Potter and Disney movie references abound. Still, some parents will want to read it first or with their child, depending on their age and understanding.

—M.J.
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A HARP VAD CLABS-HARRIS POLL released on March 1 revealed that 64 percent of Americans—including 48 percent of Democrats—believe cancel culture poses a threat to U.S. freedom. Amazon.com’s recent decision to deplatform Ryan T. Anderson’s 2018 bestseller When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment (Encounter Books) is the sort of news likely contributing to those fears. The megaretailer purged the book from its main site, as well as subsidiaries Audible and AbeBooks, sometime around Feb. 21. Here are edited excerpts of my conversation with Anderson, president of the
You’re a prominent critic of the Equality Act, and Amazon deplatformed your book around the time the U.S. House of Representatives was voting on that legislation. Do you think the timing was strategic? My publisher reached out to Amazon, asking what was going on, and didn’t hear back. Obviously, this is a concern—and not just for my book, which is three years old and has already sold well. Amazon controls a huge market share in the United States, and it can now pressure publishers into not publishing controversial books. If you are a publisher, you might say, “If we publish this and Amazon yanks it, are we ever going to sell enough books to recoup our costs?” So this could have a stifling effect on the entire market of book writing, book publishing, and book buying. Amazon might be using its market dominance to actually distort the market.

Some conservative Christians say that, as much as we may dislike it, Big Tech is composed of private companies that can do what they like. What are your thoughts on that argument? It’s not true. Our government has never said private businesses can do anything they like. The most obvious example, though not morally equivalent, is if Amazon said, “We’re not going to sell books by authors of a certain race.” Or, “We’re not going to sell books to buyers of a certain religion.” We would say private businesses can’t do that, right? In the same way, the electric company can’t say, “We don’t provide electricity to conservative homes any longer.”

Obviously, economic liberties have limits. Historically, we’ve had robust competition. If one local bookstore decided not to sell a conservative book, other independent bookstores would carry it. We could say, “Leave it to the market.” But when companies grow so large and exercise so much power, I think it’s a little naïve for people to say, “Just leave it to private businesses.” Just as big government can be a threat to our liberty and to our flourishing, so too can big business, particularly Big Tech.

WHEN COMPANIES GROW SO LARGE AND EXERCISE SO MUCH POWER, I THINK IT’S A LITTLE NAÏVE FOR PEOPLE TO SAY, ‘JUST LEAVE IT TO PRIVATE BUSINESSES.’

I’ll play devil’s advocate. Here’s a specific challenge I’ve heard: If government can’t force Christian baker Jack Phillips to bake a cake for a gay wedding, it can’t force Amazon to sell Ryan Anderson’s book. In one of my books that Amazon is still selling, I’ve written precisely on this—how we think about the tension between non-discrimination laws and the free exercise of religion or free speech. So is Amazon asserting a religious claim, that it violates their religious beliefs to sell my book? Because if that’s the case, let’s hear it! And, if so, I would want to know how selling Mein Kampf doesn’t violate their religious beliefs, but selling my book does.

What about the free speech argument—We only sell books that we agree with? Looking at all the other books that Amazon sells, it’s hard to see that. In Jack Phillips’ case, he says, I only make custom-order cakes that support messages and events that I agree with. So he wouldn’t do anti-American cakes. He wouldn’t do a “happy divorce” cake. He wouldn’t do cakes with lewd images. He ran his entire business in keeping with a certain moral vision. If Amazon wants to say that’s the type of business it is, then let us know about it. Because it doesn’t seem like that’s what they’ve been doing.

What if Jack Phillips had a policy of not serving gay people at all? In that case, I don’t think you would have seen any conservatives defending him. His argument wasn’t that as a private business, he can do what he wants. His argument was that there’s an important distinction between saying, “I don’t serve gay people,” and, “I don’t celebrate things that I don’t believe are moral.” A lot of people on the left refused to acknowledge that distinction. If Amazon wants to say, “Look, we have sincerely held beliefs about transgender issues, and we don’t sell books that violate our sincerely held beliefs”—OK, just let us know. Because the way that they’ve marketed themselves to customers is that they sell all books worth reading, not just books they agree with.

Amazon didn’t respond to my request for comment, but it has pointed a few reporters to its guidelines on “hate speech.” That seems to imply they’re classifying the contents of your book as hate speech. If so, it took them three years to discover it. The book has sold tens of thousands of copies through Amazon. So the timing of this is suspicious, the very week when the House of Representatives is going to ram through the Equality Act. But also, anyone who has read the book will tell you that even if they disagree with

03.27.21 WORLD 33
it, it is a model for how someone with my perspective on the issue should write.

How so? It has 30 or 40 pages of footnotes. At the end of the book, I cite all the relevant scholarly sources. It was endorsed by the former chief of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins Hospital, by a professor of psychology at Boston University, by a professor of neurobiology at the University of Utah, by a former professor of psychology at New York University, by a medical ethicist at Columbia’s medical school. This isn’t some fringe, bomb-throwing, red meat, name-calling book. This is about as mainstream as you get from someone who holds the positions that I hold. So it seems like it doesn’t matter how charitably you say it or how rigorously you argue if you have the opinion that I have. It’s about the position that orthodox Christianity holds on this issue, not about the way that we say it.

Is Amazon testing the waters with your book, seeing how long it can hold out? They’re possibly thinking, “We no longer have to worry about President Donald Trump, Attorney General William Barr, or Sen. Josh Hawley doing something in response.” Throughout the Trump years, there were various tech-related hearings on Capitol Hill, and the Department of Justice filed an antitrust lawsuit against Google. And so Big Tech feared that if it engaged in too much blatant censorship, there might be legal ramifications. Maybe now they’re saying, “Look, there’s a new sheriff in town, let’s see what we can get away with.” Again, I don’t know, because no one from Amazon has said a word about this to me or to the publisher.

Though your story has made the biggest headlines, this isn’t completely new for Amazon. In 2019, it removed books about how to overcome unwanted same-sex attraction, as well as books from ex-gay authors. Last June, it blocked publisher Regnery from purchasing ads for Abigail Shrier’s book, *Irreversible Damage*. Last August it stopped selling *The Health Hazards of Homosexuality*. Right now, it appears Christians have few options for pushing back besides exercising the power of the purse and the press. Is that enough? In the short run, it’s going to have to be enough. Consumers can complain and perhaps cancel Amazon Prime accounts and start shopping at Barnes & Noble, Target, and directly from Encounter Books. And it may be that economic pressure in the short run is what forces Amazon to change its policy.

And in the long run? I think conservatives are going to have to think about the limits of economic liberties when it comes to Big Tech. We have various limits for mom-and-pop stores, right? They have all sorts of rules and regulations they have to comply with to be on Main Street. We’ll also have to think about the rules and regulations those businesses will have to comply with to be on the cyber-streets. Just saying, “It’s a private business, they can do whatever they want” really doesn’t address those questions.

Meanwhile, many conservatives may get soured on Amazon. I think the lack of transparency on these issues leads many consumers to be a little skeptical: How much can we trust that Big Tech is actually doing what’s in the common good versus its own private interests?
One of the most popular ways to buy silver is the Silver Eagle—legal-tender U.S. Silver Dollars struck in one ounce of 99.9% pure silver. When the COVID-19 pandemic began sweeping the world, demand skyrocketed. But there was a problem...

Emergency Production!
Due to the pandemic, the West Point Mint—the U.S. Mint branch that normally strikes Brilliant Uncirculated (BU) Silver Eagles—temporarily locked down. Demand was skyrocketing, and so the U.S. Mint turned to its other branches, ordering them to strike special “Emergency Production” runs of Silver Eagles. It was great news for silver buyers, and even better news for collectors. Here’s why:

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This year marks the 35th anniversary of the Silver Eagle. It’s also the final mintage to feature the coin’s original eagle design by John Mercanti, 12th Chief Engraver of the U.S. Mint. “Lasts” are always a big deal for collectors—almost as big as low populations. This Emergency Production release is both. In fact, it’s tied for the third lowest bullion Silver Eagle mintage ever! But how do we tell which coins are from the Emergency Production run?

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Homage or nostalgia?
Cover albums can offer adventurous takes on classics or bland strolls down memory lane
by Arsenio Orteza

The subject of this column is the new albums by Pete Yorn and Harry Dean Stanton with the Cheap Dates. But first, some context.

At some point in the not-too-distant future, every musician who has ever been referred to as a “rock star” will be dead, his music left to fend for itself amid the indifferent algorithms of the Cloud.

How much of it will survive, or what forms that survival will take, is anyone’s guess. But as the final generations raised on rock follow their musical heroes into the Great Beyond, a lot of that music will probably suffer neglect.

In the meantime, “cover” albums—long-players made up largely or entirely of beloved rock-star-era songs performed by musicians who found them inspirational—are becoming a thing.

They’ve been a thing before. In the 1950s and ’60s, performers regularly padded their albums with their own versions of other people’s hits. But today’s cover albums seem less about capturing a moment than about recalling one. Even at their most enjoyable, they end up feeling nostalgic.

Sometimes that feeling seems deliberate. On Pete Yorn Sings the Classics (Shelly), for instance, those classics emerge through a soft-focus lo-fi redolent of AM radio’s glory days, making the more contemporary material (the Pixies’ “Here Comes Your Man,” the Stone Roses’ “Ten Storey Love Song”) sound as wistful as the oldest (“Moon River,” “Surfer Girl,” “I Am a Rock”).

Yorn’s version of Bob Dylan’s “Lay Lady Lay” feels fresher thanks to a sped-up tempo and the addition of mariachi horns. And no one who covers hits by Diana Ross (“Theme from Mahogany”) and Tracey Ullman (“They Don’t Know”) and misses by Roxy Music and the Velvet Underground (“New Age”) in one place can be said to lack a sense of adventure.

But at 46, Yorn is about two decades older than the original performers when they recorded the prototypes. And the temperamental distance between singer and song that inevitably ensues is somewhat distracting even when Yorn—as he often does—overcomes it.

There’s no such distance between Harry Dean Stanton and the Chuck Berry, Bob Dylan, Jimmy Reed, William Bell, and Ben E. King covers that he sings on the half-studio, half-live October 1993 (Omnivore), which documents the late actor’s work during the ’90s with the Cheap Dates.

A veritable supergroup (the Iggy Pop and Tin Machine bassist Tony Sales, the Stray Cats drummer Slim Jim Phantom, the Kingbees guitarist Jamie James, the Steely Dan and Doobie Brothers guitarist “Skunk” Baxter on pedal steel), the Dates and Stanton made music that sounded a lot like the Flying Burrito Brothers.

They had fun too. Whether cracking jokes between (or in) songs onstage or recording the loveliest version ever of the Cooder-Hiatt-Dickinson classic “Across the Borderline,” nostalgia was clearly the last thing on their minds.
Catch and rerelease

Noteworthy new or recent releases

by Arsenio Orteza

Stage Fright (50th Anniversary) by the Band: It’s heretical to say so, but these guys are overrated—not unfunky in their backwoods way or even historically unimportant (they had Dylan’s back and seeded Americana), just less monumental than their larger-than-life reputation. They were really good at what they did, but what they did didn’t evolve: The Winterland act captured in The Last Waltz is essentially the same as the Royal Albert Hall act from five years earlier captured on this deluxe reissue’s second disc. Yet it’s this installment of the group’s 50th-anniversary series that’s the best so far. Why? A resequencing of the original 10 tracks so that the title cut and “The Shape I’m In” get front-loaded and the paeans to wine and sleeping get put to bed at the end.

Chick Corea Plays by Chick Corea: “Plays” is right, in both senses of the word. Not only does Corea tickle the ivories, but he has lots of fun too. There’s no way that anyone attending the intimate 2018 solo shows from which these recordings came (Berlin, Paris, Clearwater) could’ve suspected that in less than three years their genial and talented host would be gone, the victim of late-diagnosed cancer. He improvises portraits for two audience members and duets with two others (Yaron Herman and Charles Heisser). He medleys Mozart and Ger-shwin. But most impressive of all, he makes the contention that Monk, Evans, Kern, Scarlatti, Chopin, Jobim, and Wonder can’t peacefully coexist on the same program seem utterly preposterous.

1970 by Bob Dylan: These minimally curated New Morning outtakes became an instant collector’s item when they appeared last December as the no-frills, limited-edition, copyright-extending 50th Anniversary Collection: 1970—one sealed copy on eBay went for $2,487.04. This marginally frillier version lists for $19.95 and adds the subtitle With Special Guest George Harrison. Al Kooper, however, looms larger. More than any other component, it’s his Muscle Shoals–like organ playing that situates this music outside Dylan’s previously established stylistic orbits. Speaking of Dylan, he’s in finer voice for at least half of these trial runs than he is on what eventually saw official release. And what eventually saw official release was pretty good.

Steinzeitgeflüster by Frank Ober-schelp, Reinhold Westerheide: An album whose instrumentation includes the block flute, recorders, African harp, various drums, seashells, stones, crotales, and temple gongs (as well as earth, water, fire, and air) is probably the last place that you’d expect to encounter Chick Corea compositions. Yet here three of his “Children’s Songs” are. And, rendered as “Stone Age whispers” (Steinzeitgeflüster in English), their mischievously mysterious melodies prove porous enough to accommodate this project’s prevailing spirit of soft Luddism. Not that it’s a tribute to the good old days exactly, but the pieces by Racheal Cogan (one) and Reinhold Westerheide (seven) sound even hoarier than the three from the 14th century.

Encore

From band member to bandleader to solo star, Chick Corea recorded so many albums in so many styles that identifying one as his best or his most definitive is difficult. The sprightly My Spanish Heart (Polydor) would have to be high on the list. Appearing in 1976, not long after he’d decided that having an audience that understood his music was more important than membership in the avant-garde hall of fame, the album has consistently found favor with Corea’s naysayers and yaysayers alike.

It’s a microcosm of everything into which Corea had thrown himself up to that point, condensed so that only the best bits and few of the pretensions remain. He plays piano, sure (acoustic and electric), but he also plays the organ and four kinds of synthesizers something mean, and with Stanley Clarke and Steve Gadd for a rhythm section (and on “Armando’s Rhumba” Narada Michael Walden as a hand clapper), he makes sure that they dance. Even the cover photo is one of a kind.

—A.O.
When trouble comes, God asks us to take Him at His word

HERE WERE YOU during the lockdown? Many of us have vivid, specific memories of what we were doing this time last year as COVID-19 began its dramatic spread. I had just finished crisscrossing South Carolina, where Democratic presidential hopefuls were stumping and candidate Joe Biden’s hopes were fading unless he pulled out a primary victory in the Palmetto State. During a debate in Charleston on Feb. 25, the candidates barely mentioned the mysterious virus creeping our way.

Across town, Pastor Steve Wood was busy with his duties as rector of St. Andrew’s Church and bishop of the Diocese of the Carolinas. It was almost March, and the month brought an anniversary of sorts: In 2010, the congregation had departed from The Episcopal Church over issues of Biblical fidelity. St. Andrews became part of the Anglican Church in North America.

A few years later, the church secured the right to retain its property after a long legal battle, but in April 2018 another mile-marker arrived: A few hours before worship on a Sunday morning, the church building caught fire.

Hundreds of members gathered outside in disbelief, and Wood managed to collect himself for local reporters as he peered through the worship center’s caved roof. “The Lord promises to bring beauty out of ashes,” he said. “And we’re taking Him at His word.”

The congregation met in an elementary school while a new building project got underway, but two years later church members faced another furnace: COVID-19 struck, and Wood became one of its early targets in late March.

At age 56, Wood was healthy, but he landed in the ICU. His wife waited at home, separated by tight visiting restrictions. Wood called his four adult sons to tell them he was proud of them and he loved them. Doctors put him on a ventilator. Church members gathered in the hospital parking lot to pray.

Wood remembers waking up on April 1 with ringing in his ears. (The tinnitus still lingers nearly a year later.) Ashes piled up: The pastor who preached to more than 2,000 congregants on Sundays now needed speech therapy. He couldn’t think clearly. He couldn’t walk without help.

But there was also beauty: He remembers the day a nurse got him into a chair and shaved his scruffy face: “I was so thankful and so happy to be alive.” Another nurse noticed he couldn’t tie his shoes and helped him regain that simple skill.

Wood’s wife cared for him during his long recovery at home. In June, he returned to preaching on Sunday mornings—now in an open-air farmers market, since the school the church rented had closed during the COVID-19 outbreak.

He regained his physical strength, though doctors still consider him a COVID-19 “long-hauler,” with lingering conditions. He also regained his joy. Wood realized it had been a long time since he focused on personal evangelism. Now he finds himself in frequent conversations about the Lord. “It’s been fun,” he says. “And I had forgotten.”

Late last year, the church’s new worship center finally opened. Wood is still waiting for his office to be completed, but on a recent Sunday morning he plucked his preaching Bible from a storage box. The pages still smelled like smoke.

He turned to Mark 10 and preached about following Christ. “What does the Lord require of you?” he asked his congregation. “He requires all of you.”

The new sanctuary still contains remnants of the old: Firefighters salvaged the cross, the baptismal font, and the Communion table. Wood says he asked workers to restore the pieces, but with one caveat. “Don’t take out the burn marks,” he told them. “I want those to stay.”

In the church foyer, a painting on the wall shows the remains of the old building after the fire, with the cross still visible. It hangs in a simple golden frame—a reminder of all the possibilities in our own afflictions, when we remember the Lord’s promise to bring beauty out of ashes, and take Him at His word.
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With equity—and
diversity—for all?

Debate over an elite San Francisco school’s admissions policy encapsulates fraught conversations about a new buzzword / by Sophia Lee
THE FIRST DAY

Joseph Huayllasco entered Lowell High School, an academically selective public high school in San Francisco, a Latina student spotted him in the swarm of mostly Asian and white faces. She grabbed him by the hand: “Hey, you speak Spanish?” When Huayllasco nodded, she barked, “Come with me,” and led him through the courtyard to a huddle of about a dozen other Latino students.

That was 1988, and they were the only Latinos among the more than 2,000 students at Lowell. That was when Huayllasco, the son of Peruvian and Costa Rican immigrants, felt his first racial discomfort at Lowell. He’s now an entrepreneur with a nonprofit that teaches underprivileged kids how to code, but that discomfort hit him again when on Feb. 9 the San Francisco Board of Education decided to stop admitting students to Lowell based on academic performance, saying that’s “incompatible with diversity, equity, and inclusion.” Lowell will instead use the same lottery-based system as other public schools in the district: Any student who applies would have a shot at Lowell, whatever his academic level.

The debate over Lowell reveals two fundamentally different views on “equity.” One side sees unequal results as a sign of inequity and believes government and society have a moral and intellectual mandate to eliminate it. The other side, while acknowledging problems, argues that human efforts cannot eradicate them and warns the unintended consequences would be worse than the solution. Such different views lead to completely different approaches: One side focuses more on ethnic diversity and inclusion, while the other focuses more on making sure the process treats everyone the same. What’s happening in San Francisco and at Lowell is significant because it indicates where liberalism is headed in education reform.

LOWELL HIGH SCHOOL is one of the nation’s top-rated public high schools for its academic rigor, the sort of crème-de-la-crème institution that parents name-drop at dinner parties. For more than a century, Lowell attracted top-scoring, high-achieving students from all across the San Francisco Unified School District. To get in, students had to take entrance tests and display near-perfect grades.

Huayllasco assumed he got into Lowell because of his stellar test scores. But he felt hurt when his classmates found out he had the highest grade in a particularly challenging math class, and their jaws dropped: Were they shocked because he was Latino?

He squirmed during the many times his Asian American friends complained about Lowell allotting spots for underrepresented students, saying that’s discriminatory against Asians. For several decades, Lowell’s student body has been majority Asian. His friends didn’t accuse him of getting into Lowell because of his skin color—but the implication was there, and he felt torn between empathizing with his friends but also quietly seething.

“I felt embarrassed,” he recalled. “The way we talked about Latinos or African Americans was like, maybe they’re not good enough to come [to Lowell] and if we let them in, they’re not going to make it. It made one feel like you don’t belong.”

Many black and brown students still feel that way at Lowell. In January someone posted anti-black, anti-Semitic
slurs and pornographic images on an online forum for Lowell students, prompting an uproar from students who said such racism isn’t out of the norm at Lowell.

Soon after, four school board commissioners and two student delegates drafted a resolution titled “In Response to Ongoing, Pervasive Systemic Racism at Lowell High School.” They wrote that Lowell’s merit-based admissions process “perpetuates segregation and exclusion” and that black and brown students “do not feel physically, emotionally or culturally safe and valued at Lowell.” Included in the resolution is a call for an “equity audit” that will create a plan to address racism at Lowell. The school board had already decided to use temporarily a lottery admissions system for Lowell last October, but the February vote made it permanent.

Two commissioners (out of seven) voted against the resolution. One of them, Jenny Lam, a second-generation Chinese American, pointed out recent anti-Asian attacks in the Bay Area and urged the board to consider other community voices as well. The other opposing commissioner, Kevine Boggess, who’s black, said he too experienced “anti-blackness and institutional racism” during his school days at San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD). But he wondered if focusing on Lowell’s admissions without broader community input would achieve equity across the district: “How do we make sure every student who wants access to a class that’s offered at Lowell … has access to that?”

Equity was also on Huayllasco’s mind as he observed other Lowell alumni discuss the board’s resolution on Facebook. He saw former classmates vehemently argue that the new admissions policy is anti-Asian, that it’ll “dumb down” academic standards at Lowell—and once again, he wrestled with that familiar inner conflict he felt at high school.

Huayllasco’s parents taught him diligence, personal responsibility, and fairness. He attributes his great education at Lowell mostly to the social climate: Like grains of rice speed-steaming inside a pressure cooker, being around highly motivated, academically excelling classmates challenged him to study harder, reach higher. He credits Lowell for preparing him for the University of California, Berkeley, and for his Wall Street career—and he wants those same opportunities for others like him.

Joseph Huayllasco works at home in Antioch, Calif.
But as he observed the impassioned chatter among Lowell alumni, Huayllasco also felt the familiar “Oh, I’ll prove you all wrong!” indignation that used to spring up when people questioned his place at Lowell. Many of his Latino friends didn’t get the quality education he did—not because they weren’t smart or didn’t work hard, but because their families didn’t have the knowledge and resources to blast open paths of opportunities as his did. What does equity look like for those kids?

EQUITY ADVOCATES say inequitable systems exist by design. Like other districts, San Francisco’s school district has a history of systemic racism that created disparities persisting to this day. The first public schools opened in 1851 were only for white children. California law prohibited nonwhite students from attending white public schools. Explicitly segregated schools, along with redlining maps, continued until the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court ruling that “separate education facilities are inherently unequal.”

But segregation persisted for more than a decade longer in San Francisco (and many other cities). SFUSD tried a busing program to integrate schools, but black and lower-income families noticed it was mostly their kids being ferried across town, whereas middle-class white and Asian students found ways to attend schools within their own neighborhoods. Meanwhile, the white student population dropped by more than 30,000 between the mid-1960s to late 1970s as white families moved out.

In 1978 the NAACP and a group of black parents sued the district, accusing them of maintaining school segregation. In 1983 the NAACP and the district reached a court-approved settlement (called a consent decree) that set racial quotas in schools and called for increased resources for historically neglected schools. The consent decree was partly successful in desegregating many schools, but disparities in academic performance persisted. By the 1990s segregation had increased again as Latino and Asian populations burgeoned while the white population dipped.

In 1994 a group of Chinese American parents sued the district, upset that SFUSD assigned their children to schools outside their neighborhoods. They settled in court in 1999: SFUSD could no longer consider race or ethnicity in student assignments. The district then decided to use a lottery system to assign students to schools, focusing on race-neutral factors such as socioeconomic status, English proficiency, and test scores. The idea was that allowing more choice for families would break down class and racial barriers to high-demand schools. But segregation and inequities continued.

In 2011 the school board tweaked the lottery: Families ranked their choices of any school in the district. Again, the opposite happened: San Francisco’s schools are more racially segregated today than they were 30 years ago. The district didn’t factor in the numerous preexisting disparities between families. Parents working two to three jobs, low-income single parents, and those who don’t know how the system works fell behind parents who had the time, resources, and connections to go on multiple school tours and navigate the complicated application process. As a result, more upper- and middle-class children than poor children enrolled in desirable schools.
THE SOCIAL ENGINEERING hasn’t worked. For families who cannot afford private schools, Lowell offered a private school education at a public school price. And Lowell did try to diversify its student body. For years, the school reserved one-third of spots for underrepresented students who had lower test scores but met minimum academic standards.

Francisco Lopez, a 71-year-old retired principal, said tinkering with Lowell’s admissions policy won’t make a dent in fixing the disparities among students: “There’s no quick fix. This is a societal problem that’s been going on for a long time.” The son of working-class immigrants (his father fled the Spanish Civil War as a refugee), Lopez graduated from Lowell in 1967 when many students were Jewish and the Chinese population was steadily growing. He loves Lowell: He can still sing the alma mater, he sent his daughter to Lowell, and he donates to its alumni association.

Lopez also worked 27 years as a teacher and principal in preschools and elementary schools in SFUSD. Some kids entered his preschool reading at second-grade level, while others couldn’t tell letters apart. Lopez remembers thinking, “How can that be? That’s such a big gap!” By the time the kids entered high school, their academic trajectory was already set.

He also saw a resource gap. One preschool consisting predominantly of Mexican and Salvadoran immigrants needed a playground, so parents spent hours wrapping and selling tamales. They raised $900. In another elementary school with a Japanese immersion program, the mostly upper-middle-class Japanese parents raised $190,000 in one fundraiser. Lopez was principal of that elementary school, and he remembers how easy it was to find parents willing to volunteer. But in the other preschool, most parents worked two to three jobs as house-cleaners and gardeners. Meanwhile, students brought their trauma into the classroom: Lopez had foster children who moved from home to home, kids with severe disciplinary problems that disrupted the entire class, boys who died from gun shootings before they turned 18.

How does a school district close those gaps? “They want to hold schools responsible for all the problems of society. It’s the great American experiment: We’re trying to make all of us equal when we’re not created equal,” Lopez said, meaning people are born with different learning styles, family backgrounds, gifts, and personalities.

WHEREAS LOPEZ believes some inequalities can’t be changed, the school board blames racism for perpetuating inequalities. Its measure of equity is racial and ethnic diversity, and Lowell’s previous admissions system, the board said, “excludes students of color.”

Much of that discussion focuses on negative experiences of black and brown students at Lowell. Helena Colindres, who graduated from Lowell in 2014, remembers one teacher using a racial slur and Asian students refusing to partner with black and brown students because they’ll “bring down their grades.” Jessica Yu, a senior and president of the Student Body Council at Lowell, told me Lowell’s selectiveness “breeds an elitism that makes students think they’re so much better and smarter” and resent black and brown students, assuming they got in because of their skin color. She thinks worrying that diversifying the student body will bring down academic standards is “an incredibly classist and racist idea.”

But another Lowell alumnus, a Chinese American, told me he and his classmates simply worked hard to get into Lowell and felt like they “earned it”: “If you don’t get an A, people will tease you. It’s not based on ethnic background or skin color.” He and those who agree with him ask different questions than the San Francisco school board is asking: Is a merit-based admissions system really inherently racist? Is racial diversity a measure of equity? What are the unintended consequences of changing schools’ admissions?

Those are all questions Joseph Huayllasco ponders today. He knows his hard work and intelligence aren’t the only reasons he got into Lowell. He was 10 when his parents encouraged him to set his sights on Lowell, and his family moved into the San Francisco district so he could attend Lowell.

But perhaps his success had to do with personality and personal choices: Huayllasco is competitive, and he wanted to go to Lowell because he thrived in that stressful environment, loved the challenge and competition. Can anyone, given the same privileges as he had, do what he did?

Last year, Huayllasco instinctively signed an online petition opposing the school board’s decision to suspend Lowell’s merit-based admissions process. Today he’s not so sure: “I think I have too many questions in my mind. I feel that equity is important. But I’m just not sure if San Francisco is solving it the right way.”
Asylum-seekers wait behind razor wire in a buffer zone between border gates in March 2020 as they seek to leave Turkey and enter Greece.
Esmaeil Falahati is no stranger to police raids. Plainclothes intelligence agents arrested the Muslim convert to Christianity in 2015 while he was leading a house church service in Iran in the garden of a fellow believer. The agents flattened to the ground the home’s owner and put a gun to his throat. They arrested Falahati and five others, searching his home and seizing his Bibles and other belongings. ¶ For five years now, Falahati has lived as a refugee with his family in Turkey. They have settled into a residential apartment building in an ancient city outside Ankara. But they thought of it as a safe haven, not where Falahati expected to be arrested again by security officers. ¶ Turkey throughout the winter months has been under a strict coronavirus lockdown, with dusk-to-dawn curfews nationwide, plus restrictions by age: Older residents are permitted outdoors only during morning hours, while those under age 20 may be outdoors in specified afternoon hours. Only grocery stores and essential businesses have been allowed to open with limits on public transport and gatherings.
The 41-year-old Falahati—who helps to lead a Farsi-speaking church operated by the International Protestant Church of Ankara—was spending most of his time at home with his family when immigration officers summoned him to appear before them and bring his family on Jan. 25.

When he showed up at the immigration office with his wife Sara and two children—a 12-year-old son and 6-year-old daughter—security officers arrested the whole family on the spot. The officers told Falahati his family would be deported. Falahati protested. He’d received no deportation letter, and he knew the sudden roundup was against Turkish law and international treaties.

After two hours of wrangling and paperwork, the officers transported the family to one of dozens of migrant detention centers scattered throughout Turkey. Falahati’s children perhaps comprehended more from the tense discussion than their parents because they know Turkish better, and they began to cry. They were entering a camp for deportation processing, to be sent back to Iran, where their father would likely face more time in prison, or death.

The Turkish government is the reluctant but opportunistic caretaker to the largest concentration of refugees in the world. More than 3.6 million people fleeing their own countries in search of asylum now live within Turkey’s borders. Falahati’s case shows how the fates of individual asylum-seekers—often Christians—have become subject to Turkish officials sometimes unsympathetic with their plight. More broadly, cases like his illustrate the repercussions of the United States and European Union largely closing their borders to refugees seeking safe harbor.

The rise of Islamic terror groups, wars in neighboring countries, and a strategic location straddling Asia and Europe all make Turkey a likely first stopping point to seek asylum. That’s particularly true for fleeing Syrians, Afghans, Iraqis, North Africans, and Iranians like Falahati.

After Iranian agents arrested Falahati in 2015, officials charged him and others attending the garden service with “propaganda against the regime” and disrupting public security. Authorities sent him to Evin Prison, the well-known compound for political prisoners outside Tehran. For 33 days they held him in solitary confinement in Ward 209, a shadow ward within Evin that Iran’s intelligence ministry runs off the books, where many Christians have been jailed and many have disappeared. After a month, though, Falahati went free after posting bail set at $25,000. He and his family, along with other relatives, fled the country after his interrogators told him he would be harmed “in an irreversible way.” After he departed, the Revolutionary Court in Tehran sentenced Falahati “for taking action against national security,” a sentence that still hangs over him.

Reaching Turkey, Falahati followed the formal guidelines to request asylum for his family through the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). But in 2018 the agency turned over all refugee vetting to Turkish immigration authorities. The processing, say lawyers and advocates I spoke to, has been uneven and opaque ever since.

Local officers now handling cases like his look unfavorably on a Muslim convert to Christianity. His filings to be resettled in another country
had gone nowhere, until he received notice he might be deported. En route to the camp, Falahati phoned relatives and friends who work in Turkey, asking them to pray for his family. At the detention center, the family went through processing, including health checkups at the camp’s hospital. Then officials served Falahati and his wife deportation papers. They told them to sign the papers, which they did. Falahati explained they signed the documents to show they were challenging the deportation, and feared they could be deported without documents if they refused. Still, they worried a forced departure was imminent. The children, he said, were distraught, afraid of being separated from their parents.

The next thing that happened, Falahati told me, was “a miracle.” An argument broke out among the officers about what to do with the family. When it ended, they ordered Falahati, with his stack of papers in hand, to take his family and return to his home in Turkey.

“Being released so soon was good news for all of us,” said Salih Efe, the attorney representing Falahati in filing an appeal to the deportation orders. But his file “was closed based on some strange procedural rules.” The appeals process stops imminent removal.

The family’s release has not ended their ordeal. Falahati continues to work with the community of Iranian Christians living in Ankara and elsewhere through the International Protestant Church. Every day, the prospect of being sent back to Iran weighs on him. His travels now even inside Turkey are restricted and monitored. He has to report to authorities regularly, and if he is stopped without identity papers, officials could deport him immediately.

“There are many refugees in Turkey who face a similar situation,” Falahati told me by phone, “A lot of refugees have called to say, ‘We are all afraid. If they are treating you this way, then how might they treat us?’”

The 1951 Refugee Convention forms the legal foundation for protecting refugees. It established under international law the non-refoulement principle—that governments should not return refugees to countries where they face serious threats to life or freedom.

Working in the aftermath of World War II, the UN established its own agency under the convention (ratified by 145 countries) to register asylum-seekers in the first country outside their own that they reach. It’s up to individual nations to accept refugees and establish their own protocols for who qualifies for admission.

Turkey has ratified the convention, but as its refugee crisis mounted, it resisted working with the UN, first blocking international access to refugee camps then refusing to cooperate in processing resettlement claims. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan repeatedly demands funding and other concessions to manage refugees, threatening to release them to Europe, most recently as the COVID-19 crisis began a year ago.

As tensions mounted, the UNHCR in 2018 passed responsibility for vetting asylum-seekers to Turkey. Determining the status of cases like Falahati’s became the responsibility of local Turkish immigration authorities. Once deportation notices are issued, the only recourse a refugee has is to hire a lawyer and file a claim in court.

“It’s really left up to the individual handling each case for personal assessment, even sometimes to the interpreter in each case,” said Rob Duncan, regional manager of Middle East Concern, a Christian advocacy group. “Lawyers say they are seeing immigration authorities rejecting 90 percent of cases. They are
not looking at the validity but responding on a personal basis.”

Duncan said his group is tracking multiple cases like Falahati’s. Some end up with good outcomes, he said, but not all. There’s also a growing indication of cooperation between Turkish and Iranian intelligence officials, he said. The Iranian regime’s harassment of Iranians who already have fled the country was highlighted by a UN representative along with other monitors at last year’s UN Human Rights Council gathering in Geneva.

“I want to come out of this dark tunnel and go somewhere safe,” said Falahati. “Turkey is not safe for me. Those who are ministers of the Lord here are not wanted.”

Of 80 million people displaced from their homes worldwide, 1.4 million are classified by the UN as in “urgent need” of resettlement.

Those cases should be prioritized, said Chris Boian, spokesman for UNHCR. They include someone like Falahati, who has a demonstrated risk of imprisonment for his beliefs if he returns to Tehran, and now faces threats in Turkey.

The reality, though, said Boian, is “there are far more refugees in the world at this moment who need resettlement than there are places being made available for them.”

European countries began turning away refugees soon after a migrant crisis—sparked largely by war in Syria—drove more than 1.3 million refugees to EU countries in 2015. By March 2016 the EU reached an agreement with Turkey aimed at stopping the flow.

The Europeans agreed to pay Turkey millions of dollars in aid in exchange for its pledge to halt “irregular” migrants taking dangerous boat journeys to Greece. And it paid $3 billion toward Turkey building detention centers and camps like the one where the Falahati family was detained.

The 2016 agreement fundamentally reshaped refugee resettlement. Just 10 months later, President Donald Trump suspended refugee resettlement to the United States.

Both moves—made in response to fears that refugees posed economic and terrorist threats—left refugees in limbo in places like Turkey. The Istanbul Bar Association says it has received hundreds of complaints from Syrian refugees forced, like Falahati, to sign deportation papers.

“The vast majority of refugees in recent years, 85 percent, are hosted in developing regions and countries ill-equipped to handle them,” said Elizabeth Neumann, assistant secretary for Threat Prevention and Security Policy at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in the Trump administration.

Neumann left DHS in 2020 because of what she describes as flaws in the Trump administration’s approach to refugees. She told a U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) hearing on Feb. 10 that secure processing and resettlement of refugees is crucial to global stability and U.S. national security.

“Despite recent rhetoric, refugees are the most thoroughly vetted individuals who come to the United States, but we have to move faster,” said Neumann at the hearing. “The sometimes decade-long wait for resettlement is not only inhumane, but it increases an individual’s susceptibility to being radicalized.”

Starting with a Feb. 4 executive order overturning many of Trump’s halts to refugee processing, the Biden administration has pledged to rebuild and expand the U.S. program. That includes enhanced vetting and fraud detection for individuals, along with broadening ties to communities, many of them church-based networks, that work with resettlement agencies.

Biden plans to “significantly increase” refugee resettlement in the United States over the next four years, and in February announced he...
would raise the refugee cap to 62,500 for the current fiscal year. That is still below the historic average of 95,000 per year, but it far surpasses the 11,814 refugees the Trump administration admitted in fiscal year 2020, a record low. Biden plans to raise the cap to 125,000 by 2022.

Biden will need Congress to approve those annual limits, along with the federal funding needed to expand the program. Under Trump, more than one-third of U.S. refugee resettlement offices closed, with hundreds of workers let go.

Persecuted religious minorities, meanwhile, have suffered from the U.S. drop in resettlement, according to a report released last year by World Relief and Open Doors. Fewer than 950 Christians from 50 countries ranked for severe persecution were granted admission into the United States during the first six months of 2020—a 90 percent drop from five years ago.

Those declines leave many in the same predicament as Falahati. Over time, Biden’s refugee policy announcement could help to open doors for him and others not only in the United States but in other countries who follow its lead, said UNHCR spokesman Boian. “Those refugees already vetted by the U.S. government will benefit in big ways, but addressing the refugee situation around the world is no single country’s responsibility.”

For now, refugees in Turkey fear no one is looking out for them outside Turkey. Falahati believes UNHCR “has no concern for our case,” and Middle East Concern’s Duncan said refugees fear that “UNHCR has more or less given up monitoring cases in Turkey.”

Boian and others at UNHCR did not respond to a question about whether they continue to monitor refugees in Turkey who are registered with the agency.

For Falahati’s children, the trip to the detention camp was traumatizing, refreshing memories of their father being seized in Iran. His son has been locking the doors at their house before going to sleep, and his daughter has wet herself several times since the January incident. COVID-19 restrictions are compounding Turkey’s own shutdown of refugee processing. Embassies in Turkey aren’t processing asylum claims, and consular services are restricted. Two church organizations in Turkey have written letters endorsing the family’s court claims, but Falahati knows it will require patience to resolve his status through the courts.

A month after his family’s brief detention, I asked him how he felt about his future. It’s natural to worry, he responded, “but worries and stress can make us slow and cold and faithless. I can say I have worries, but what rules in me is the goodness of God, is hope in Jesus Christ, is knowing that the Lord wants what’s best for us—even if the results are scary, hard, and what I and my family don’t want.”

His refugee status does not allow him to work apart from ministry in the Ankara church, and his family has no income apart from donations. “We don’t have the power to do anything for ourselves,” he said. “We hope and pray and wait for the Lord to make a way for us.”

—To read more of Esmaeil Falahati’s testimony, visit wng.org
In the Siberian city of Omsk, Russia, police detain a man during a protest against the jailing of opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
CRIMES AND PUNISHMENTS

As Russia silences political dissidents, religious minorities—including evangelicals—find ways to grow during a chill

BY JAMIE DEAN
WHEN RUSSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER ALEXEI NAVALNY BOARDED A PLANE BOUND FOR MOSCOW, HE KNEW HE WAS ALSO A MAN BOUND FOR PRISON.

Before his flight on Jan. 17, the political dissident had spent five months in Germany, recovering from a near-fatal poisoning he blamed on Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The Kremlin denied the accusation, but Navalny posted a video that he said revealed a Russian intelligence officer explaining how an operative broke into Navalny’s hotel room in Siberia and laced his boxer shorts with poison.

Navalny knew what happened next: During a flight across Russia last August, he fell critically ill and collapsed. Russian authorities allowed a medical team to airlift him to a hospital in Berlin.

German officials said Navalny had been poisoned with Novichok, a military-grade, chemical nerve agent developed during the Soviet era. After a grueling recovery, Navalny announced he would return to Russia, where authorities announced they would arrest him.

Russian police said Navalny had violated his parole connected to a conviction for embezzlement—a charge that outside observers deemed politically motivated. Navalny noted he couldn’t report for parole while he was in a coma.

Navalny knew authorities didn’t want him to return: His freedom from Russia would mean the Kremlin’s freedom from Navalny’s decade-long political opposition and his withering criticisms of Putin’s 20-year grip on power.

But on a frigid January night, Navalny and his wife, Yulia, landed in Moscow as journalists livestreamed the famous couple’s arrival. Police waited for Navalny on the other side of passport control, as Navalny told reporters: “This is the best day of my life in five months. … This is my home.” He kissed his wife before police led him away. Two weeks later, a judge sentenced Navalny to 2½ years in prison.

During the same month, a separate case drew less attention but a harsher punishment: In the southern region of Krasnodar, a judge sentenced 63-year-old Alexander Ivshin to 7½ years in prison. Ivshin’s crime, according to the court: He organized online religious studies with fellow Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Indeed, even as Navalny’s high-profile return and quick imprisonment sparked the largest street protests in Russia in a decade, Russian authorities in some regions continued a less noticed effort to silence or stifle religious minorities they view as a potential threat.

Jehovah’s Witnesses often suffer most under Russia’s outright ban on their organization, but evangelicals say recent laws have posed challenges for them too. Vitaly Vlasenko, the ambassador-at-large for the
Russian Evangelical Alliance, says a slate of confusing restrictions leave some evangelicals unsure about what’s permissible and what’s forbidden in a land where evangelicals make up less than 2 percent of the population.

But Vlasenko says he and other evangelicals are committed to the country that is often perplexed by them: “We are not leaving for a better life. ... Remember, we are Russians.”

OR NAVALNY, pressing for a better government has been central to his political activism for over a decade. After maintaining a blog about Russian corruption, he started an online media organization aimed at exposing abuse of power.

In 2018 Navalny attempted to run in the country’s presidential election, but Russian officials said an embezzlement conviction barred him from participating. A year earlier, the European Court of Human Rights ruled Navalny’s embezzlement trial had been arbitrary and unfair.

Navalny’s supporters are vocal, and thousands of demonstrators turned out in cities across Russia after his January detention. Police arrested some 10,000 demonstrators, in some cases saying the protests were unauthorized. Footage of Russian police clashing with demonstrators shocked some Russians watching the crackdown online.

But Navalny remains a controversial figure in Russia, with only about 20 percent of the population expressing support for him in a survey late last year. Meanwhile, a majority of Russians still support Putin, despite a stagnating economy and ongoing corruption allegations.

Leon Aron, a Moscow-born scholar at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) in Washington, D.C., says many Russians remember the chaos and impoverishment that followed the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

After the situation improved and Putin came to power in 2000, Aron says, some Russians grew wary of losing a sense of stability they didn’t have during those difficult years. Navalny may represent a source of uncertainty for Russians unsure of what he would do with political power.

In a country with state-controlled media, others may be uneasy with the provocative language Navalny uses to criticize Putin and other officials he calls “crooks and thieves.” From his perch in a glass cage during his February trial, a defiant Navalny taunted Putin, saying the president would be remembered as “Vladimir the Poisoner of Underpants.”

Criticizing the government can be costly. Columbia Journalism Review noted investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya survived a poisoning in 2004, only to be gunned down in 2006. Authorities arrested Ivan Golunov, another investigative reporter, in 2019 on drug charges they eventually dropped. Late last year, secret police detained journalist Ivan Safronov on treason charges they linked to his past reporting.

The harsh government crackdown on protesters in February suggests Navalny strikes a nerve with the Kremlin, and a constitutional referendum passed last summer could extend Putin’s presidency until at least 2036—if he keeps winning elections.
Jehovah’s Witnesses have no political ambitions, but they remain the target of political aggressions. Days after Navalny’s sentencing on Feb. 2, Russian police raided 16 homes of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Moscow.

The Feb. 10 operation was a fraction of the 1,000-plus raids that agents have conducted across Russia since 2017, when a court dissolved the group’s legal standing and accused it of extremism.

It’s an irony for a religious organization that eschews politics and declines to participate in military service. But the organization’s apolitical stance likely fuels Russian suspicions that the group is a threat to the state, even as the organization has long faced repression in the country.

Maria Kravchenko of the SOVA Center, a Moscow-based think tank, described the raids in a report for the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF): Police frightened families by breaking into houses and apartments in the early morning, searching for banned literature and electronic communications.

Before the court ruling in 2017, Kravchenko says, police would burst into religious gatherings “wearing masks and brandishing their automatic weapons, when children, women, and elderly people were present.”

But members of the group continue to find ways to practice their religion despite not having legal protection as an organization. Jarrod Lopes, a spokesman for the organization’s headquarters in the United States, says since 2017 authorities have raided over 1,300 homes and filed charges against over 400 Jehovah’s Witnesses. The oldest is a 90-year-old woman.

Though many receive fines, nearly 50 Jehovah’s Witnesses are in prison, and 27 are under house arrest. Some have reportedly faced torture. In late February, a court in southern Siberia sentenced Valentina Baranovskaya, 69, to two years in prison for participating in a banned organization.

The judge sentenced her 44-year-old son, Roman Baranovskaya, to six years.

Yaroslav Sivulsky, a representative for the European Association of Jehovah’s Witnesses, told The Moscow Times: “Modern Russia in terms of the level of unmotivated religious persecution is approaching the Soviet Union.”

A report last year, USCIRF cited Russia’s campaign against Jehovah’s Witnesses as one of its reasons for recommending the U.S. State Department designate Russia a country of particular concern for religious freedom.

But problems extend to other religious groups as well.

In 2016 the Russian government passed a law it said would take aim at religious extremism and terrorist activities. The government leveraged the law to dissolve the legal status of Jehovah’s Witnesses a year later, but the legislation has created pressures for evangelicals as well.

Some 72 percent of Russians identify as Russian Orthodox, though regular church attendance remains scant among the population. Many see identifying as Russian Orthodox as a core part of Russian identity, making outside religious groups subject to suspicion.

USCIRF noted: “The Russian government views independent religious activity as threatening social and political stability and its own control, while simultaneously cultivating relationships with the country’s so-called ‘traditional’ religions.”

Suspicion of evangelicals goes back more than a century. Vlasenko, the ambassador for the Russian Evangelical Alliance, says when he was growing up as a Baptist in Russia, friends at school teased him by saying he was an American spy.

“They thought because you are not Russian Orthodox, you are not Russian,” he said. “From a young age, I was trying to explain that Baptists are good citizens and good believers.”

Following an unprecedented period of religious freedom after the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, restrictions on religious groups slowly tightened again.

The 2016 law limited certain forms of religious activity to church gatherings in registered church buildings. Vlasenko says those rules are confusing for some Christians who meet in homes for social gatherings, but then might pray or sing hymns together. They wonder what activity is allowed.

Vlasenko and other Christians said they feel free to talk to outsiders about the gospel, but the law does create restrictions on
inviting them to church. Public evangelism events are banned without government permission. Foreigners aren’t allowed to preach and teach in public church settings without government permission.

Mark Elliott, the editor emeritus of the East-West Church and Ministry Report, says the confusing 2016 law is part of a pattern of the Russian government passing laws that could be interpreted or applied in multiple ways.

He notes a case where authorities took to court a Protestant congregation because it did not advertise the name of the church on the outside wall. In another case, officials pursued a different congregation because it did display its name.

Much of the legal action against evangelicals involves officials levying fines for minor offenses, but the psychological pressure can be especially difficult for small churches with few resources to pay fines or hire lawyers.

An American living in Russia told WORLD the small church he attends has faced small hassles, and the law creates more uncertainty than legal action. “A lot of things in Russia are about creating self-censorship,” he says. “To get people to be quiet on their own without the government having to do anything.” (WORLD agreed not to identify the American to protect his job and legal status in the country.)

When a visitor came to the small church he attends, he decided not to teach his prepared Sunday school lesson, since the 2016 law restricts foreigners from teaching or preaching in church without government permission. “It plays on your psyche,” he says. “What if someone comes that you don’t know?”

Evgeny Bakhmutsky is pastor of Russian Bible Church, a Baptist congregation in Moscow with some 500 congregants. Bakhmutsky says he’s developed a good relationship with local authorities, so his church has faced few legal problems.

He says churches and evangelicals often face more social and cultural challenges than legal ones: He knows of cases where seven or eight evangelical congregations share a single building over the course of a weekend—not because renting is expensive, but because some landlords are hesitant to lease space to Protestants.

While his church has faced few hurdles, he acknowledges religious liberty is shrinking, and he’s publicly spoken out against the crackdown on Jehovah’s Witnesses: “Even if we do believe that their doctrine is quite wrong, they still have freedom to express their conscience.”

His own ancestors’ history with severe persecution offers perspective: His great-grandfather was executed for his Christian faith. His grandfather was exiled to Siberia. Over the next decades, Russian officials killed millions of Christians, along with other perceived enemies. Bakhmutsky says even under heavy persecution from the Soviet regime, believers in Siberia grew stronger.

“You can borrow wisdom from past generations,” he says. “Even if things get harder, we will survive.”

For now, he’s encouraged at the opportunities his church has to share the gospel. He says some with Russian Orthodox backgrounds have asked, “Why have I never heard about the cross?” Despite their lifetime, cultural connection to the Orthodox Church, Bakhmutsky says, many are hearing the gospel for the first time.

That makes the pastor want to “maximize the time of freedom. … On the one hand there are obstacles, but on the other, there are so many opportunities.”

When it comes to politics, Bakhmutsky says he has people in his church who are pro-Navalny and anti-Navalny. The divide tends to split along age lines, with older members gravitating toward Putin, often for a sense of stability. The president’s opposition to gay marriage also makes him popular among many Protestants.

Bakhmutsky says people are talking about politics now more than usual, but he encourages his congregants not to allow politics to divide them or to dissuade them from the greater importance of spiritual realities. “It’s about spiritual awakening,” he says. “It’s about transformation of hearts—not just power and politics.”

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N A C O U R T R O O M on Feb. 20, Navalny smiled and flashed a victory sign before a judge denied the appeal of his prison sentence. Navalny skewered Putin in what was likely his last public appearance for some time.

(A few days later, Valentina Baranovskaya became the first woman sentenced to prison by a Russian court for her connection to Jehovah’s Witnesses—a fresh reminder that political opposition isn’t the government’s only target.)

Navalny has spoken more about politics than religion, but during his last courtroom appearance, he said he had turned from atheism to belief in God. He said a particular verse from the Bible has helped him press on: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”
Families red and yellow, black and white

TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION BRINGS UNIQUE CHALLENGES, BUT INTENTIONAL PARENTING CAN HELP MULTIRACIAL FAMILIES THRIVE

BY CHARISSA KOH

photo by Bear Gutierrez/Genesis
Jim and Susan Kyner with four of their children at their home in Colorado Springs
ON THE FIRST DAY OF MARCH, several members of the Kyner family sat around their kitchen. Anna, 16, wore her blond hair in two braids and sat at a round kitchen table. High-school senior Noël leaned against a counter and talked about studying at community college while figuring out the best degree for pursuing missions work. Their goldendoodle lay sprawled out on the floor beside the table. ¶ Yosi, the Kyners’ 12-year-old adopted son from Ethiopia, sat at the kitchen table too, eating a corn dog and pizza. Mihret, 15, also adopted from Ethiopia, arrived home from her job tutoring a 5-year-old Ethiopian girl in reading, math, and English. She brought leftover Ethiopian food—stewed chicken and flatbread called doro wat and injera—from the girl’s house. Mom Susan and the other Kyners rushed to grab some before it was gone. “Don’t take it all!” Mihret said.
who seek to adopt black children are valorized.” In 1972, the National Association of Black Social Workers said it took “a vehement stand against the placement of Black children in white homes for any reason.”

Those critical takes identify some challenges of transracial adoption but acknowledge how transracial adoption can be good for kids and their adoptive families. Since Barrett’s confirmation, I’ve spoken with adoptees, parents, and adoption agencies who acknowledged transracial adoption’s particular challenges—facing racism as a family and helping a child not feel out of place. But they also said that intentional, humble parenting can help families navigate these challenges, and transracial adoption can teach empathy and dependence on God in unique ways.

ONE WARM AFTERNOON in Louisville, Ky., Jaime Gray took her almost 2-year-old son Henry for a neighborhood walk. At the corner by their house, an elderly man stopped them.

“What is going on here?” he demanded. “Why do you have this black boy?”

“He’s my son,” said Gray, who is white.

“How much did you pay for him?” the man asked. “Why is adopting black children so popular?” Gray tried to be respectful but eventually told the man it was none of his business and walked on. Henry squeezed her hand, and her adrenaline pumped as she called her husband Tim. Months later she saw the man leaving a house on her street and realized he was their neighbor.

The Grays’ adoption agency had prepared them for such moments ahead of time. Gray had read agency-assigned articles and books on how to respond to scenarios depending on the particular comment, tone of voice, age of the child, and relationship with the person. When a friend asks a rude but sincere question, she might try to explain more. When someone at the grocery store makes a racist comment, it’s often better to ignore. Gray is still “shocked and saddened by strangers’ responses” to seeing a black child with white parents.
Years later Gray found Henry, 5, reading *Abe Lincoln: The Boy Who Loved Books*. Henry stared at a picture of a slave auction. “The kids can easily latch onto the horror of it all,” Gray said. “That is a little bit tricky to navigate.” Knowing they had talked about slavery before, Gray asked her son, “Why don’t you tell me what is happening?” Henry said that a man was buying those people “because they’re black.” Gray asked why, and Henry said he knew the law allowed white people to sell black people.

Gray said in those conversations she sees Henry putting together the pieces of what he has learned: “I don’t always want to answer the questions for him. I remember … wanting to see if he would tell me what he thought was happening.”

As children grow, their parents have the tough duty of preparing them to deal with racism they may face themselves.

Kyner remembers taking 10-year-old Yosi to Walmart. He had saved his money and picked out a pair of blue and white football gloves. They walked to the self-checkout line. Kyner paid for her items, then Yosi scanned and paid for his gloves. As Kyner gathered her bags, she noticed her son was holding the gloves, ready to leave: “I knew that I had to teach him that he, as a young black man, could not walk out of Walmart carrying those gloves in his hands.” She told Yosi to put the gloves in a bag and hold the receipt, concerned some people might view him suspiciously as a young black man. “I was tearing up as I talked with him,” she said. “He just took it in stride.”

**Billy Cuchens is the White Father** of four adoptive children, three of them black and one multiracial.

He says parents must balance an openness to talk about anything, including racial differences, while not focusing on those differences too much: “Being a good parent in a transracial family is just like being a good parent. It’s being a student of your child and understanding what it is that they need.”
Cuchens’ two sons share the same birth mother. As they grew up, their parents asked them if they wanted to see her Facebook page. One declined, but the other enjoyed scrolling the page, finding the family resemblance in her selfies and pointing out the foods he also liked in the pictures of her dinners.

Cuchens and his wife adopted Isaac, who is black, now a high-school sophomore in Dallas, from foster care as a baby. “I’m never going to have the same life experiences as my dad or my mom,” he said. “But I can always learn from what they have to teach me and apply that to my life.” When former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick began kneeling in 2016 during the national anthem to protest police brutality, Isaac defended Kaepernick while his mom disapproved. Last year the family had more discussions about the merits of the Black Lives Matter protests. Isaac appreciates that even when they disagree they get along: “OK, you have it your way, I’ll have it mine. Want to go out to lunch? I wish the world was a lot more like that.”

**TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION** can leave some children feeling isolated or confused about their heritage.

Tara VanderWoude’s American parents adopted her from South Korea in 1981, when she was a year old, and kids in their hometown of Grand Rapids, Mich., teased her about her eyes. They playfully karate-chopped her or pretended to speak in an Asian language. She didn’t know who to talk with as she processed the experiences: Her family—including her brother, also adopted from South Korea—didn’t discuss them. She felt from peers “this pressure to accept some of it because, ‘Come on, I have this greater life,’” she said. She didn’t talk to many people about her confusion because she wanted so badly to assimilate. Instead, VanderWoude worked for good grades and to excel in extracurricular activities: “My goal was to be as invisibly Asian as possible.”

The chance to be around people who looked like them helped some adoptees feel at home. Tiana Hawver, 49, who is black, says her white parents moved from Dansville, Mich.—a rural community outside Lansing whose residents are 84 percent white—to Remus, Mich., which has a larger population of black residents. Her mom learned how to cornrow Hawver’s hair and sewed dashikis, an African shirt. In Remus, Hawver went to school with white, black, and multiracial kids: “Having some connection with people who looked like me in my growing up was so huge.”

All the adoption agencies I interviewed said parents should make sure their kids have friends and positive role models who look like them. That could mean moving to a new area, like Hawver’s family. For the Kyners in Colorado Springs, that means being intentional with movie nights; finding diverse music, books, and decorations; praying for and intentionally pursuing black friends; and talking to their kids about which church and school they feel comfortable in.

The family’s bookcases feature books like *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* by Mildred Taylor alongside SAT prep manuals. In their kitchen, a bookshelf displays figurines of giraffes, zebras, and a hippopotamus above small round baskets from Ethiopia. On their bulletin board are pictures of the two Ethiopian girls the family sponsors.

Alicia Olsen, executive director of social services at Nightlight Christian Adoptions, explained why parents should care about activities like these: One girl told her adoptive parents her dream was to work at McDonald’s because that was the only place she saw other black people.

**WORKING THROUGH** such challenges can strengthen families. Jaime Gray said these conversations remind her of her own limitations: “There are burdens for our kids’ hearts that the Lord is going to have to care for.”

Susan Kyner said transracial adoption has made her family more sympathetic to others: “I hear the way my kids talk about situations in culture or on the news or even things that happen at school, and I hear them being more sensitive,” she said.

Tiana Hawver sometimes struggles with feeling like an outsider or worrying close friends will leave her, like her birth parents did. But she takes comfort in her faith, which she watched her adoptive parents model consistently. Images of her dad praying and studying the Bible early each morning are etched in her memory: “I’m really thankful for how God was watching over me from the beginning, with placing me in a Christian family ... seeing my parents model their faith and taking that on as my own. That’s really gotten me through a lot of this stuff.”
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Volunteers from Fountain Life Center in Houston distribute water to residents impacted by freezing temperatures.

For one February week in Texas, polar temperatures beat polarization

by Sharla Megilligan

Volunteers from Fountain Life Center in Houston distribute water to residents impacted by freezing temperatures.
As Texas energy supplies faltered amid a record-breaking freeze, churches, businesses, and individuals stepped up to help each other where the state fell short.

During the third week of February, millions of Texas homes were without power, water, or both, leaving residents desperate for help. Some reached out to local churches, many of which already had disaster relief teams in place. Mosaic Church of Austin was one of those to jump into action. It created an online form for community members to request help. More than 100 volunteers from the church delivered food, water, and other necessities in four-wheel-drive vehicles, the only way to get around on the ice and snow.

Mosaic also helped out when nursing home employees were unable to make it to work: Volunteers cooked, cleaned, and provided care for residents. Mosaic and other churches opened their doors as 24-hour warming sites. When the water went out, volunteers found ways to bring in water to flush toilets. One volunteer trucked in water from his pool, as melting snow was too time-consuming for the demand.

Some businesses stepped up too. Beloved Texas grocery store chain H-E-B garnered praise on social media for out-performing the government (“Let H-E-B run the grid!” read one sign). In addition to limiting quantities of items each customer could buy—water, propane, and yes, even brisket—to ensure sufficient supply to go around, H-E-B also managed to keep most stores open during much of the freeze. When the Leander store lost power while many shopped, H-E-B announced that shoppers could take whatever was in their cart, free of charge.

Two Austin businesses, Deep Eddy Vodka and Kendra Scott jewelry, gave a combined $30,000 to local restaurants to provide free meals. Texas Beer Co. delivered canned drinking water to distribution centers. Many breweries throughout the state offered free filtered water when the city couldn’t provide clean water due to power outages at water processing facilities.

Lots of individuals acted on their own volition. Using the Nextdoor app and neighborhood “Buy Nothing” groups on Facebook, neighbors offered meals, water, rides, firewood, and charging stations for phones. Many pharmacies weren’t open for days, so those in need of medicine posted requests. Strangers gave each other life-saving medication when the only other option would have been a precarious trip to the ER. Neighbors let each other know which stores had food and supplies in stock, including gas—in short supply as tankers couldn’t navigate the roads to refuel gas stations.

Individual stories abound. Melissa Harjehausen took in a couple who had a newborn baby but no power or water at their home. The couple, whom Harjehausen had never met, went from a birthing center to her house with their newborn and stayed for the week. Ryan Sivley used his 4x4 vehicle to rescue 145 stranded drivers over two days on icy roads in Austin. Fifteen-year-old Meadow Quigley of San Antonio used her Construction Careers training at her high school to fix pipes that had burst in her house, then started knocking on doors of neighbors to see if they needed help.

More: Teens in Rockwall went door to door offering bread to anyone who needed it. Erik Howard took multiple five-hour round trips to bring 720 gallons of well water to Austin. Toshi Miya used his 4x4 to transport nurses to and from work. Jeanette Pérez delivered water for formula to a couple whose infant had been without anything to drink for nine hours. Steven Bush and Shane Mikeska delivered generators and fuel to neighbors in Taylor during the freeze, then helped fix pipes as the thaw began.

In a season characterized by political polarization and COVID-19 angst, many Texans chose to look outside of themselves and focus on something more important: loving their neighbor.

"—Sharla Megilligan is a graduate of the World Journalism Institute mid-career course"
A RAPID TEST FOR CORONAVIRUS

Some researchers propose 15-minute screening tests to help beat COVID-19

by Heather L. Frank

IS A CHEAP, AT-HOME TEST sophisticated enough to combat COVID-19? Researchers at Harvard University and the University of Colorado Boulder think so. Using forecast modeling in a study published in Science Advances in January, they concluded that frequent rapid testing would significantly decrease COVID-19’s spread. By quickly identifying anyone carrying the coronavirus, rapid tests enable infected individuals to self-isolate before they spread the virus to others.

In one scenario the researchers modeled, when 75 percent of the population participated in rapid-test screening every three days, the infected population dropped from 4 percent to extinction in six weeks.

But while the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued emergency-use authorization for the first rapid-screening test in May 2020, over-the-counter testing today remains limited. Some researchers argue for changing that.

Although President Joe Biden recently pledged to accelerate the U.S. vaccination timeline, the coronavirus is still mutating. Some mutations could result in new viral strains that the current vaccines are not effective against. And while vaccines may soon be available to all U.S. adults, they’re still not approved for children, and 1 in 4 Americans say they won’t get the shots—all hurdles a rapid-testing strategy could circumvent.

The rapid tests are antigen-based, meaning they detect viral proteins on the surface of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. Some medical experts are skeptical of rapid tests because they are not as sensitive as polymerase chain reaction–based tests, which are considered the gold standard. These PCR tests look for viral genetic material, so they can detect infection at the low viral loads seen very late in infection.

But multiple studies, such as a meta-analysis published in The Lancet Microbe, show that most people are only contagious during the first week of infection. PCR tests are often late to catch cases: Laboratory processing of PCR tests takes 24 hours, and sometimes results aren’t available for days due to backlogs and supply shortages. A person with a negative PCR test could contract the virus while waiting to receive test results. Worse, a person with a positive test could spread the infection to others during the lag period.

IF WE CAN PILE TESTING ON TOP OF VACCINES AND MASKS, WE CAN DRIVE THIS PANDEMIC INTO THE GROUND.
By contrast, rapid-screening tests can be taken at home and yield results in 15 minutes. While not sensitive enough to guarantee accurate diagnosis on an individual level, they are a valuable tool for decreasing the rate of spread at the community level, according to Daniel Larremore, lead author of the January study. He compares them to other types of broad safety measures: “We know that seat belts don’t provide perfect protection. But we accept that they can statistically cut down our automobile accident fatalities.”

Of the antigen-based COVID-19 tests with emergency-use authorization, only Ellume’s COVID-19 Home Tests are available without a prescription. They cost $30 each. The Biden administration’s $230 million federal contract with Ellume, signed Feb. 1, allows the company to produce 19 million tests each month with over-the-counter availability expected early this year. Abbott’s BinaxNow rapid tests cost $25 and can be purchased for at-home use with an eMed prescription.

But Larremore believes scaled-up production can drive down the cost per test to $5, making frequent testing accessible to everyone. Innova Medical Group in Pasadena, Calif., developed an at-home COVID-19 test costing less than $5. The company has exported it to 20 countries, including the United Kingdom, since the FDA hasn’t yet authorized it.

Some clinicians question the public’s willingness to participate in frequent testing. Another concern is user error. “Conducting a test on yourself can be a stressful process, and you may unknowingly make a mistake,” said Micah Bhatti, a pathologist at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, in an online Q&A.

Mandatory PCR testing once or twice a week allowed many U.S. college campuses to return to in-person classes last fall. Abroad, implementation of mass testing in Slovakia brought the infection rate down by 60 percent in one week.

Larremore and his colleagues believe cheap, rapid testing would make the current vaccine drive all the more effective. “If we can pile testing on top of vaccines and masks,” he said, “we can drive this pandemic into the ground.”

—Heather L. Frank is a graduate of the WORLD Journalism Institute mid-career course

ALTHOUGH MYRUE SPIVEY grew up attending church with his devout mother, he became disillusioned with Christianity after seeing pastors live hypocritically. As a teenager living in Melbourne, Fla., in the early 1960s, he embraced the cause of black nationalism, seeking freedoms and political power for African Americans. With two friends, he sought “to riot and create ethnic divisions” in Norfolk, Va., Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and Melbourne.

Little did he know that one day God would use him to do just the opposite: repair divisions across racial lines as the pastor of a multiethnic church.

As a young man, Spivey was interested in Islam until he read civil rights leader Malcolm X’s autobiography and concluded Muslims were just as hypocritical as he thought Christians were. At age 27, Spivey listened as a neighbor...
in Miami explained the gospel to him. This time, when he read in Romans that Christ died for the ungodly, “it was as if that was my name.” His life changed dramatically: His $150-per-day drug addiction disappeared, and he suddenly wanted to evangelize. After marrying his Bible study partner in 1975, he studied at Miami Christian College and returned to Melbourne as a Christian businessman to show how Christ changes people.

But Spivey found his hometown racially divided. “Blacks just didn’t go to white churches, and whites didn’t go to black churches,” he said. At first, he and his wife, Patricia, attended a mostly white Brethren church. Spivey started a home Bible study where several black families became Christians. They didn’t feel comfortable going to a white church, so Spivey started a small church for them, intending only to pastor temporarily. After a few years of meeting, the church officially organized in 1985.

Initially community members opposed the church: It emphasized Bible teaching and practiced church discipline. “We were called an unloving church,” Spivey said. On top of that, “if it wasn’t super enthusiastic, jumping, then that wasn’t really church in the black community.”

When they began meeting in the community center, locals complained to the city, saying the church services prevented others from using the space on Sundays. The city decided the church could only rent the center on a week-by-week basis—if anyone else wanted to use it, they had to meet elsewhere. But soon after, a local man who heard of their situation offered the church free use of a building he owned.

In the new building, the church gained its first white family. “That was just amazing,” said Spivey. “In this area, at that time, no one crossed those lines.” The church had to adjust in different ways. One example: Spivey remembers people complaining the wife of the new family only brought salad to church potlucks. In response, he said from the pulpit: “Just because this family of the lighter hue eats this way, and we of the darker hue eat this way, there’s nothing wrong. It’s just different.”

As the church became more established, Spivey struggled to stay focused on his expository preaching. He devoted himself to local causes, joining the boards of Christian organizations, and soon found himself stretched too thin for his pastoral duties. Things came to a head when a disagreement between Spivey, who headed the state branch of Promise Keepers, and the organization’s national board consumed him so much that he took time off pastoring to study Scripture about the issue. During the time away, he realized he was neglecting his ministry at the church. He resigned from all the boards he was serving on. “I came to the conviction that we best serve people when we serve God faithfully,” he said.

Through more than 35 years in ministry, Spivey said, God convicted him of his hidden sin of racism. Instead of only looking at the sins of other races, he realized areas where his own people fell short, especially in missions. Although, at the time, most of the countries open to missions were composed of dark-skinned people, the black church sent less than 1 percent of American missionaries. He felt this was an area where black Christians had failed.

Now Grace Bible Sanctuary has 67 members—about 60 percent black and 40 percent white or Hispanic. After more than four decades of pastorizing, Spivey plans to retire soon. He hopes to start a foundation to help seminary grads prepare for ministry.

Spivey said his church did not intentionally pursue diversity. “We need to be faithful,” he said. “We need to be asking our own selves within our own hearts, ‘If someone comes to this church who is different … what’s my attitude towards this person? What do I do?’ Because that’s where the battle is.”
Lassitude

Lockdown fatigue is hard to break out of

About 3 o’clock on Sunday afternoon, as I’m walking aimlessly with my head down around the empty church parking lot, a car pulls in with Steve and Susan in it (not their actual names).

I’m walking in the church parking lot because I lost my keys in the morning—somewhere between the car and sanctuary, or possibly between the sanctuary and curb behind the building where I put out the recyclables after the service—all steps I have retraced three times. AAA came an hour earlier and broke into my vehicle with a slim jim, dashing the hope that my keys fell between the seats.

Susan says, “Yeah, we were just driving back from Produce Junction, and Steve says, ‘Isn’t that Andrée over there?’” It was a time for catching up because I hadn’t seen them in a while. Twelve months, in fact, they told me. Last March was the last they were in church, because of COVID-19. A year marks my last contact with many church members, people who I expect will have more salt than pepper in their beards next time we meet.

Steve and Susan and I had taught ESL courses together back in B.C. (before corona) for six or seven years, till the virus forced the church program online instead of in person in the classrooms. And that didn’t work for some reason: Few students bothered with the Zoom teachings, till we just decided it wasn’t worth it.

I myself started reattending church on a regular basis in December 2020. I’m not boasting, because the only reason I did it was my father’s insistence that we go. (He stopped driving a year ago.) Every Sunday morning since last spring he has been dressing in his Sunday clothes, even though all we had done was pull three chairs up in front of the computer and watch the pastor and musicians minister to a tooth-gapped seating arrangement.

Back in spring I was telling myself that it was to protect my 96-year-old father—the most vulnerable age group, remember?—that I was staying home on the Lord’s Day morning, because that’s what was initially touted as the responsible course. Now we go to church with my dad and nobody says boo. I don’t think the science changed. It just seems we all got bored with the science. Or weary with ever-changing rules we don’t understand. (No masks. Masks. Double masks.)

At some point after post-lockdown onset, I noticed that the less I saw people, the less I wanted to see people. I just got comfortable like a hobbit. I hardly had to clean the church building anymore because hardly anybody is using it. So income is down, but I don’t even mind. We did have one socially distanced staff meeting in January, which looked like a Biden rally, where I saw that a few of our respective diets have succumbed to the daily “I’m bored, I’m going to eat something” temptation.

That is a thing. But worse for me is the temptation of an inexplicable lassitude—not feeling like calling anyone, going anywhere, or even answering the phone. It’s like that green powder the Queen of Underland sprinkled on Prince Rilian in The Silver Chair that had a “sweet and drowsy smell” and “made it harder to think.” The devil will have you thinking that going to Produce Junction is safer than going to church, even though I’m sure that place is more crowded than church.

It gnaws at me a little every day, because I can’t shake what I know from the Bible: Certain verses about not forsaking assembling (Hebrews 10:25); not being slothful (Hebrews 6:12); not looking only to my own interests but to the interests of others (Philippians 2:4).

So this column is by way of confession—as in “confess your sins to one another” (James 5:16).

I’ve started calling one or two people a day, and it seems to dispel the green dust in some measure. Also, I did find my keys.

Voices ANDRÉE SEU PETERSON

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**SNOVID-21**

Surviving the snowpocalypse

If an issue of *World* arrived only once in 50 years (by design, not by postal inefficiency), what surprising headlines would dominate our magazine’s first appearance since 1971? Three of them would be OUT-OF-WEDLOCK BIRTH-RATE TRIPLES … ABORTION TOLL TOPS 60 MILLION … LGBT TRIUMPHS. We’d also report two evidences of God’s mercy: NO NUCLEAR WAR and SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERIES UNDERMINE ATHEISM.

Nevertheless, since *World* appears biweekly, this issue’s headlines include BETHANY’S BREAK and BIG TECH AND A CANCELED BOOK. And yet, since last March we’ve had the pleasure and misery of reporting on two and one-fifth once-in-a-century stories. The first two are well known: COVID-19 (worst pandemic since 1918) and ELECTION-20 (the first since 1876 that sent armed bands heading to Washington). The third, SNOVID-21, is just a one-fifth because it was a major event only for some who live in the South, particularly in parts of Texas.

Northerners with well-insulated houses and utilities prepared for cold might ask: Why was a half-foot of snow and ice a big deal? Well, take Austin, please. We have a slight dusting of snow once every five years, and single-digit temperatures only five times since 1898. (Last time was 1989.) A “snowplow”? What’s that?

Just because I’m now an Austinite is no reason for *World* to be Austin-tacious. On the other hand, the city has quadrupled its population in the past half-century (from 250,000 to a million) and is now the 11th largest in the United States, so it’s worth a little coverage. Plus, *U.S. News & World Report* three years in a row (2017-2019) ranked it the best place to live in the country.

Much of the South had storms and hard freezes during the week that began on Valentine’s Day, but Austin had it among the worst: no heat, light, or running water. Some elderly people died of hypothermia as their body temperatures fell below 95 degrees and stayed there. My wife and I had it relatively easy: We were without power Monday through Friday, and the temperature inside almost all of our house was in the 30s, but we sat close to our fireplace in layers of clothes that made us laughably look like the Michelin Man.

We also used a gas-powered stovetop for tea and soup, ran our car twice a day to warm up and recharge our cell phones and computers, and piled on the blankets at night. Most important, we had each other and God. Sadly, my prayers often overload on the supply end, but that week we had a lot of thanksgiving for food, fire, bottled and boiled water, and marriage. I can truthfully say it was an OK experience physically and an excellent experience spiritually.

Our correspondent Sharla Megilligan reports on page 65 some of the ways churches, businesses, and individuals helped the needy. Austin, home to the University of Texas and Silicon Prairie biggies, is highly secularized, but it also has a Christian-led Austin Disaster Relief Network that comes up big during floods: It came through again amid snow and ice. Hundreds of volunteers with 4x4 vehicles drove people to shelters and hospitals. They distributed food, water, and hygiene kits. At least 10 churches became clean and safe shelters.

Ecclesiastes and other parts of the Bible tell us our life is but a breath—and sometimes we report breathlessly. Still, our half-century issue could report that 55 years after *Time* (channeling Friedrich Nietzsche) suggested God is dead, He and His people show amid crisis that Biblical faith is still very much alive.

“May you live in interesting times” is an ironic curse, since what’s interesting is often hard—but for Christians hard times can be a blessing. Some people list two other similarly ironic curses: May you come to the attention of a powerful person, and may you find what you are looking for. Those two do not apply to followers of Christ: A powerful Person cares for us as well as for sparrows, and we can look forward to finding joyfully what we seek.

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**Voices**

**MARVIN OLASKY**

55 YEARS AFTER *TIME* SUGGESTED GOD IS DEAD, HE AND HIS PEOPLE SHOW AMID CRISIS THAT BIBLICAL FAITH IS STILL VERY MUCH ALIVE.

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