AN APOCALYPTIC INTERNET MOVEMENT SNARES UNWARY CHRISTIANS

P.46
ARE YOU MARRIED AND ALONE?

Why would anyone intentionally withhold love?

Millions of spouses in Christian marriages feel unloved by their marriage partner. We’re not talking about an emotional disposition that fluctuates with the ups and downs of marriage, but rather a chronic relational disorder where one spouse hurts the other by actively withholding love from them. However, there is a way to heal and transform what may seem like a lost cause. The first step is to identify the problem.

A SILENT MARRIAGE KILLER

It’s killing you on the inside. The life portrayed on the outside of a happy couple doesn’t match the secret life you’re experiencing with your spouse. You try to make sense of this emotional divorce, but you can’t. Why can’t he or she just love you?

Over time, chronic rejection from a spouse doesn’t just cause immense pain but erodes at the core of the hurting spouse’s identity. They believe something must be wrong with them for their spouse not to cherish, pursue, and love them.

According to a study made by Dr. David Clarke, 85 percent of husbands and 15 percent of wives are intimacy avoiders. Dr. Doug Weiss, of Heart to Heart Counseling Center, discovered and coined the term to this silent, invisible marriage killer. It’s called Intimacy Anorexia.

INTIMACY ANOREXIA

So what exactly is Intimacy Anorexia? Intimacy Anorexia (IA) is the active withholding of emotional, spiritual, and physical intimacy from the spouse. According to Dr. Weiss, “To everyone else, this person looks and acts very normal, even engaging. However, when they go home they are disconnected and even avoidant of any real intimacy with their spouse.” Dr. Doug Weiss is the host of a powerful new video series that helps marriages heal from intimacy anorexia and provides the couple with a blueprint for renewed intimacy.

A spouse of an IA feels unwanted, unnoticed, hurt, resentful, and angry. They have to beg to be loved, heard, seen, or touched. In public, their spousepretends to be affectionate and caring but at home, he or she rarely praises or touches their spouse.

IA is prevalent and in many Christian marriages, the reason being, there’s a lack of awareness in the Church about this issue and the IA usually has created walls of denial.

For decades, Dr. Doug Weiss has successfully helped couples heal from the pain of emotional and sexual divorce.

Stronger Together is a powerful new marriage series that delves into the stealthy epidemic of intimacy anorexia. This intensive bible-based video series is designed to help couples begin their healing journey towards lifelong intimacy.

Stronger Together is only available at SoulRefiner.com, a groundbreaking platform bringing inner-healing and discipleship to the Church. At Soul Refiner, a church can easily signup, create a small group, add their members and start watching Stronger Together in no time. It’s a 5-week marriage series, so it’s great for small groups or individual study.

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—Senior Reporter Emily Belz, whose story is on p. 46

WHAT DID YOU LEARN INTERVIEWING PEOPLE WITH FAMILY MEMBERS OBSESSED WITH QANON?

“THE EARTH IS THE LORD’S AND THE FULLNESS THEREOF; THE WORLD AND THOSE WHO DWELL THEREIN.” —PSALM 24:1

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RUNNING DEFENSE

I love this nation but hate what politics, politicians, and those who want to destroy this country have done to it. My sixth grade teacher told us that America “is too strong to be destroyed from the outside, but can only be destroyed from within.” We see that happening right now.

AUG. 1, P. 40—PETER E. MASTI/RAVENA, N.Y

who suggest George Floyd’s past sins mitigate the horror of his death and the criminality of his killers. “Gentle giant” was perhaps too generous, but “thug” is derisive and dismissive. Floyd was on a journey, and so am I.

HENRY HARVEY/MEMPHIS, TENN.

This tragedy points out the important responsibility of police chiefs, who must screen out the bad apples and give the rest proper training.

TELEMEDICINE’S BIG MOMENT

As a family physician, I see the advantages of “telehealth” visits, especially during the epidemic, but there are disadvantages. Virtually every week I see patients with problems that I would have misdiagnosed through video chats, such as the asymptomatic patient who needed a pacemaker.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS, UNMET

This encouraging read delivered a powerful reminder that all of us are searching for hope and security and that the only true source of such hope and security is Christ.

STANDING FOR THE GOSPEL IN THE NBA

Not long ago the NFL told Tim Tebow that the field was not a place to kneel. Relativism is a funny thing.

CORRECTION

Two pre-print research papers that described studies in Indonesia and the Philippines linking severe COVID-19 with vitamin D deficiency have been retracted amid doubts about their authenticity (“Studies on COVID-19 severity,” June 6, p. 16).

READ MORE MAILBAG LETTERS AT WNG.ORG
THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF A

BIBLICAL LIBERAL ARTS DEGREE

And how The Master’s University stands apart in equipping students of service to the Lord and His church.

“How can this degree help me (or my child) get a job?” I hear the question often and it is understandable. A job is a major part of life, society views college as the place where people go to secure jobs, and the most immediate and lucrative jobs seem to be in science, technology, or business. So, why would anyone get a broader education in the liberal arts? How does that produce a return on a tremendous educational investment? Liberal arts simply seem irrelevant in our current paradigm.

Perhaps we need a different paradigm. Some might think this is just an excuse. This is just the philosophical talk of people who live in an ivory tower and don’t understand the practical realities of life. Let me be clear, my concern is far more pastoral than philosophical. It is about the truth and preventing a life of regret. Our culture has programmed us to be consumed with work and money, but that is not objective reality. Ecclesiastes reminds us of how people pursued riches only to reap vanity and strive after the wind (Ecc 4:8; 5:12). Why? While the Bible acknowledges that work is a major component of life (cf. Eph 4:28; Col 3:22-4:1), it also reminds us that life is far more than this. Our lives also deal with our families (Eph 5:22-6:3), church (1 Tim 3:14-16), government (1 Pet 2:13-14), and society (Col 4:4-5). Most importantly, our lives will extend far beyond the here and now into eternity, and we will need to give an account to God for all we have done, not just relative to our jobs (cf. 2 Cor 5:10).

We tend to ignore this truth because the accountability for these things comes at the end and not right now. That does not make it any less real. When all we think about is jobs and income, we are not being practical and realistic. We are being extremely short-sided and dangerously so. “For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?” (Lk 9:25). You can make all the money in the world and still fail at life. And that failure causes the greatest grief to all. Life is bigger than our work in the here and now. Everyone knows this, which is precisely why people on their death beds do not wish for more money or success but to have been a better parent, spouse, or person.

So, what do we really need? Death and eternity clarify what matters, and the true paradigm is revealed. We don’t just want a nice job for ourselves or for our children. We don’t just want to gain the world and lose our soul. We want to live a life in its entirety for Christ. That’s the richest life, the real paradigm.

In essence, the purpose of a liberal arts education is to instill wisdom. It is about subjecting every category of thought—language, logic, science, math, history, and society—to the lordship of Christ (cf. Acts 17:22-31; 2 Cor 10:3-5). We are equipped to make the best choices in every area of life and lead a life that matters now and for eternity. That is what we truly want and need.
Of course, this only occurs when the liberal arts are done rightly. To be sure, people can and have engaged in the liberal arts the wrong way, divorcing it from objective truth and reality. Such studies can become quite bizarre and utterly unhelpful, causing people to question their value. But the liberal arts, when subjected to Scripture, give us the best grasp on reality. They teach us to understand all of life correctly, the way God intended it to be. And that kind of wisdom not only honors Christ but consequently gives us an edge in this life.

It gives us an edge in the workplace. This may seem to be a stretch. How can liberal arts be useful when vocational tracks in STEM or business directly set us up for a successful job? Certainly, a specialized education is a great fit for specialized jobs, but those jobs are also a great fit to be automated. You can program a robot or computer to do technical work, and we already see it happening. A report from World Economic Forum projected that 5.1 million jobs could be lost over the next few years because of automation. Likewise, a study from Oxford found that 47% of jobs in the United States are at risk. A specialized education may get you a job quickly, but those jobs may also be ending (or changing) just as quickly. So, what do we do? Experts from Adobe to Bloomberg say it is simple. We need to be what computers are not: creative, good with people, and able to bring multiple disciplines together in determining a solution. The Christian liberal arts foster these skills. They train us to think through all of life and thereby approach problems comprehensively. Even more, they produce in us the character people want in the workforce. Christian liberal arts position us to be leaders in our vocations. They provide their own set of skills that specialized disciplines may not have, skills that make us resilient in a changing marketplace. For this reason, even if you are entering a field which requires expertise, Christian liberal arts are still vital.

However, as we noted, life is more than just a job and requires far more than just a specialized education. In our families, we encounter issues of business and finance as we think through budgets, buying a home, cost of living, retirement, or investing. We think through philosophy and theology as we contemplate how to raise our children well. We certainly deal with science as we wrestle with technology, medicine, and health. Leading your family well demands that you be much more than just good at your job. The same goes for the church. People in the church have all the issues mentioned above and more. If we are to serve them, we need to understand how the lordship of Christ plays into every area of their lives. In an increasingly anti-Christian society, we need more than ever to properly discern all the ideas, laws, and movements coming our way. If we fail to do this, the church will just be tossed and fro by every wind of doctrine (Eph 4:14) and eventually will give up its calling to be the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim 3:15). The church, God’s institution for this time, needs us to be equipped for far more than just a job.

The list could go on, discussing how we interact with government, entertainment, all forms of media, fads, and culture. Life demands that we be able to handle all its complexities. This isn’t something we can ignore. Your (future) family is at stake. The church is at stake. As you think about your education, these people are depending upon you to be prepared for them. Are you seeking an education that will succeed perhaps in one area but to the detriment of the rest?

Put differently, God has an eternal plan (Eph 1:3-14). He has redeemed us and bestowed upon us the honor to participate in His work to ultimately glorify His Son in all things (Eph 1:10). We do not just want to be prepared for a job but for this all-consuming calling. This is what will be remembered in the end (Rev 21:10-14) and what God will hold us accountable to (2 Cor 5:10). Our decision about education matters, and we should choose one that makes us the most faithful before the Lord.

Thus, the liberal arts are more important than ever. In a workplace that increasingly demands creative solutions, they give us an edge. In an increasingly anti-Christian society, they give us the discernment to stay true to Christ. In life with its many issues, they allow us to make the right decisions for ourselves, our families, and our churches. The stakes are too high to ignore this crucial part of our education for life.

WRITTEN BY DR. ABNER CHOU

Dr. Abner Chou is the John F. MacArthur Endowed Fellow at The Master’s University in Santa Clarita, California where he teaches in the School of Biblical Studies.
And now a word about our sponsors

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That’s a good thing. For example, had we been heavily reliant on advertising revenue back in 2008, I’m not sure we’d be here today.

And had we been heavily reliant on advertising going into the recent shutdown-induced economic slump, when our ad revenue declined to just about 10 percent of our total funding, we would have had a much more difficult road ahead, financially speaking. As I reported here recently, we took a hit, but so far it looks like more of a glancing blow than a knockout punch.

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That’s true even with our occasional advertisers. As our founder Joel Belz wrote more than two decades ago: “In our editorial pages, we pledge never to tell you something we do not absolutely believe to be true. In our ad pages, the commitment’s a little different: In our ads, we pledge never to print something we know to be false.” We can’t possibly do more than a cursory evaluation of every product and service advertised on WORLD’s platforms, but we do try to be careful.

In the end, we thank God that we are not reliant on ad revenue. We thank God that we are reliant on our members, whom we are called to serve through the Biblically objective journalism they support—with a little assist from advertising.

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ALLING SOMEONE a “single-issue voter” may be accurate—but not the fastest way to win that person as a lifelong friend.

I know that to be the case based on experience. When someone says I’m a “single-issue thinker,” I hear them calling me shallow, superficial, simplistic, and probably at least a little bit lazy.

But it’s a rare week that goes by without my hearing from some WORLD reader or listener charging that I need to get out and broaden my perspective on public policy issues. Specifically, they want me to know there are topics other than abortion for thoughtful Christians to keep in mind as we approach a presidential election. And fairly often, the language these folks use to reprove me isn’t too nice.

Furthermore, these critics tend not to limit their comment to me personally, but typically paint WORLD itself with the same brush. “Why doesn’t WORLD admit,” one woman from Phoenix wrote me not long ago, “that on Judgment Day God is going to be talking about a lot of other sins besides abortion?” She (let’s call her Bertha—as she asked me not to use her real name) suggested that we deploy our staff to some big American cities and do some serious reporting on racism in evangelical churches.

Skeptics like Bertha might be surprised if they took a little time to do an accurate word or story count measuring WORLD’s actual treatment of “abortion” and “racism.” So my first inclination was to scold Bertha a bit and dare her to get off her high horse, check her facts, and admit that maybe she’s the one with a lopsided focus on her own “single issue.”

But wait, I thought. Where is this getting us? Haven’t we been round and round enough times like this? If Bertha’s view of WORLD and me is skewed—and it is—then it wouldn’t be surprising to discover that my view of her is also less than accurate. Given all that background, what practical steps might we take now to sharpen our perceptions of each other? What concrete actions, however small, could we take to enhance our cooperative teamwork as fellow Christian believers?

It took a few days, but I finally got Bertha on the phone. She was skeptical about my intentions. “I’m frustrated,” I told her, “that we can agree with each other that abortion is evil, and we can agree with each other that racism is evil—and then we tend to part ways just because we can’t seem to agree on a few priorities.”

“Maybe,” she said perceptively, “that’s why there are so many different organizations out there—somebody to cater to every preference!” Frankly, although I worried that Bertha might be about to cancel her membership, that wasn’t my biggest concern. My bigger fear was that we in the Christian community might continue to fragment on all sorts of key issues—splintering again and again and thereby minimizing our effectiveness.

That’s when it struck me that Bertha and I might be well situated to do something valuable.

“How often do you pray,” I asked her, “specifically for deliverance from our nation’s dark racist habits?”

“I try to do that,” she said honestly, “but not nearly as often as I should. It seems easier to read and talk about it than to pray about it.”

“So let me be just as open,” I said. “I am not nearly as faithful as I should be in praying for an end to the evil of abortion. If the two of us aren’t even diligent in praying for the issues we tend to identify with most, who’s going to be praying for those we see as less important? What would happen if great companies of us, smaller groups, or couples were to spend the next 30 days praying regularly for issues and causes we perhaps have never prayed for before?”

Bertha and I certainly aren’t forming a movement. We’re barely even talking to each other about it. But neither of us is still a “single-issue” voter.
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NEARLY FIVE YEARS TO THE DAY after his father died and he became president of Liberty University, Jerry Falwell Jr. told a local newspaper his leadership style differed from that of his father, Moral Majority founder Jerry Falwell Sr.: “I think it’s good that my profile’s lower because the less dependent Liberty is on a family or personality, or a name, the healthier it is for the school.”

But by the time Falwell Jr. resigned on Aug. 25, Liberty University was most often in the news because of his personal scandals.

Cult of personality

Jerry Falwell Jr.’s 13-year tenure as president of Liberty University ends in personal scandal

by Michael Reneau
Even at the end of his tenure, Falwell Jr. grabbed attention with his on-again, off-again resignation—first indicating to Liberty officials he was resigning on Aug. 24, then withdrawing his resignation, then telling a Wall Street Journal reporter he was resigning after all, then on Aug. 25 submitting that resignation to Liberty’s board of trustees.

The last scandal was the most salacious: Reuters reported on Aug. 25 that a former pool boy from a luxury hotel in Miami says he carried on an affair with Falwell’s wife, Becki, for seven years. He also claimed Falwell would sometimes watch the two have sex. Both Falwells denied Jerry Falwell’s involvement but admitted the affair. (Becki Falwell did not return my phone calls and text message. Jerry Falwell Jr. told me he couldn’t talk when I reached him.)

Three weeks before Reuters published Giancarlo Granda’s claims, Liberty’s trustees placed Falwell on an indefinite leave after he posted to Instagram a photo from on board a yacht. The photo showed Falwell draping an arm around an assistant to his wife. Both had their bellies exposed and pants unzipped. Falwell later deleted the photo and said it was for a spoof movie trailer they filmed and admitted he shouldn’t have posted it.

But Falwellian scandals had snatched headlines long before his resignation, with Falwell’s brand overshadowing Liberty’s. His personal business dealings with Granda—the two bought a Miami hostel together—and Donald Trump attorney Michael Cohen’s involvement in helping cover up racy photos of Jerry and Becki Falwell attracted criticism. The fight spilled into Florida courtrooms before the two settled in late 2019.

Falwell repeatedly jabbed at Christian leaders and shunned his role as a spiritual leader. He told Pastor David Platt on Twitter to “grow a pair” in 2019. He removed the tweet but in response said he’s not a spiritual leader: “I have never been a minister. UVA-trained lawyer and commercial real estate developer for 20 yrs,” he tweeted. “The faculty, students, and campus pastor ... are the ones keeping LU strong spiritually.”

In May 2020 he faced more backlash when he protested Virginia’s COVID-19 face mask mandate: He tweeted a photo—showing Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam in medical school dressed in blackface, standing next to someone in a Ku Klux Klan robe—superimposed over a face mask. Black Liberty alumni responded with a letter asking Falwell to apologize and retract the tweet. He did so more than a week later, after several black employees resigned. Several student-athletes also transferred from Liberty.

When confirming his resignation on Aug. 25, Falwell said: “The quote that keeps going through my mind this morning is Martin Luther King Jr: ‘Free at last, free at last, thank God almighty I’m free at last.’” Former longtime Liberty English professor Karen Swallow Prior—who this year joined Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary’s faculty—said Falwell’s behavior didn’t match a Christian university president’s: “It’s a great relief that Liberty no longer has a leader who clearly no longer wants to be in that position. … His behavior for a long time has not been that of a spiritual leader.”

With Falwell’s larger-than-Liberty behavior behind it, the school’s board of trustees now faces the task of choosing a new leader. But given Falwell’s longtime behavior and the $10.5 million Liberty’s board of trustees allowed him to walk away with, many question whether the board is up to the challenge. Mark DeMoss, who chaired the board’s executive committee, resigned in 2016, and Forbes reported in 2019 that “remaining board members appear to have let Falwell reap personal profit from the university and have kept silent, having signed non-disclosure agreements that remain in effect even after leaving the board.”
GOODBYE, CITY LIFE?

-11.1%
The decrease in the median rent for a one-bedroom apartment in San Francisco since August 2019.

-7.4%
The decrease in the median rent in Seattle since August 2019.

-6.9%
The decrease in the median rent in New York since August 2019.

-6.0%
The decrease in the median rent in Boston since August 2019.

-4.0%
The decrease in the median rent in Los Angeles since August 2019.

0.7%
The increase nationwide in the median rent for a one-bedroom apartment between August 2019 and August 2020, bringing the price up to $1,233, according to the Zumper National Rent Report. The overall increase stands in contrast to decreases in rent prices in the nation’s most expensive cities, which saw people and jobs leave during the COVID-19 pandemic and an upsurge in crime and unrest. Eight of the 10 cities with the most expensive rent prices saw year-over-year decreases. The two that didn’t were Miami and San Diego.
ACOB BLAKE, A 29-YEAR-OLD BLACK MAN, was in serious condition after police officers responding to a “domestic incident” on Aug. 23 in Kenosha, Wis., appeared to shoot him in the back seven times, according to a video posted on social media. The video shows Blake going around the car as three officers shout and point weapons at him and then opening the driver’s side door of an SUV. As Blake leans inside the SUV, one officer grabs his shirt from behind and opens fire.

The incident prompted multiple nights of violent protests in Kenosha, as rioters threw bottles at police, ignited fireworks, and set buildings and businesses on fire. Gov. Tony Evers deployed 125 members of the Wisconsin National Guard to the city in an attempt to quell the violence.

MARVIN CREAMER, the first recorded person to circumnavigate the globe without navigational instruments, died on Aug. 12 at age 104. Creamer, born in New Jersey, set sail on Dec. 21, 1982, in a cutter with a small crew. They would spend a year at sea, braving storms, fog, and whales, rounding the terrifying Cape Horn blind. Creamer navigated by observation, watching the direction of the wind, the colors of the waves, and the moisture in the air. The crew was in the Atlantic when they found a housefly on board and realized they were near land. Four days later, they landed in New Jersey, ending their historic voyage. Creamer continued to sail into his 90s.

BEN CROSS, star of film *Chariots of Fire*, died on Aug. 18 at age 72. The actor, born in London, England, was trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. He began his career on the stage before landing his first movie role in *A Bridge Too Far*. However, it was his role as Harold Abrahams in the 1981 film *Chariots of Fire* that would launch his career. Cross, playing a Jewish athlete fighting to overcome prejudice, co-starred with Ian Charleson, as Eric Liddell, in this retelling of the 1924 Olympic Games. He played Spock’s father in the 2009 reboot of *Star Trek*.

REleased

Florida officials have approved the release of 750 million genetically modified mosquitoes in the Florida Keys. The mosquitoes are part of a yearslong project, run by the company Oxitec, that aims to reduce the mosquito population. The insects, *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes, are invasive in southern Florida. The females are known to spread deadly diseases, such as Zika and dengue, to humans. The genetically modified insects are all male. They carry a gene that, if passed on to wild female insects, will kill off any female offspring before they mature to biting age. Environmentalist groups have denounced the plan as risky, but Oxitec insists there will be no negative effects. According to the group’s website, researchers have carried out successful trials in Brazil.
“I have been praying, even before this, for the healing of our country.”

JULIA JACKSON, the mother of Jacob Blake, who was shot in the back by police in Kenosha, Wis. The shooting was captured on video and shared on social media, leading to riots in Kenosha. “We really just need prayers,” Jackson said. “As I was riding through here through the city, I noticed a lot of damage; it doesn’t reflect my son or my family.”

“I see women as a distinct political class but not to the detriment of others’ rights. That is not hateful or bigoted. Does that mean I shouldn’t have a job?”

SASHA WHITE, a feminist who lost her job as an editorial assistant at Tobias Literary Agency (TLA) for such tweets as, “Being a man who doesn’t identify with men doesn’t make you a woman.” A twitter mob pressured TLA to fire her.

“Under our Constitution, the government can’t force them to march for, or salute in favor of, or create an artistic expression that celebrates, a marriage that their conscience doesn’t condone.”

U.S. District Judge JUSTIN WALKER in granting a preliminary injunction that blocks Louisville, Ky., from enforcing a law that requires a photographer in the city to photograph same-sex weddings if she photographs any weddings.

“The virus is a formidable foe. For the past week, it has been winning. Let us as the Fighting Irish join together to contain it.”

JOHN JENKINS, president of the University of Notre Dame, on suspending in-person classes eight days into the current semester after 146 students and a faculty member tested positive for COVID-19.
1 EPONYMOUS RESCUE

A FEW DAYS AFTER A LYNCHBURG, VA., television station featured a black cat with an unusual name up for adoption, a new owner has been tracked down. During its annual Clear the Shelters initiative, WSLS featured a cat named “Dennis Quaid” for adoption. The NBC affiliate credited the cat with a “big heart” and noted he “likes to curl up on the couch.”

Days later, actor and pet podcaster Dennis Quaid reached out to the Lynchburg Humane Society saying he’d like to adopt the cat for his office. After a Zoom meeting between the cat and actor with the same name, Quaid’s Pet Show podcast co-host Jimmy Jellinek said he would fly out to Virginia to retrieve the cat. “Just couldn’t resist. I had to,” WSLS quoted Quaid saying. “I’m out to save all the Dennis Quaids of the world.” He also offered a suggestion: “Maybe they should start naming animals in shelters after different celebrities and see who bites.”

2 HELP FROM ABOVE Quick thinking by a helicopter pilot helped save an elderly couple in California that had gained the attention of an angry cow. The California Highway Patrol reported that the couple phoned in the emergency after both fell and injured themselves trying to flee from a large black cow in Lynch Canyon Regional Park. A CHP helicopter was able to scare the cow away from the couple by blaring a loud siren. The couple was later airlifted to a nearby hospital. According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, cows kill roughly 20 Americans every year.

3 THE VOICE OF INEXPERIENCE A 19-year-old Kansas Democrat seems poised to unseat an incumbent state representative. A day after the Aug. 4 primary election, teenager Aaron Coleman held a single-vote lead over Rep. Stan Frownfelter for the Democratic Party nomination. Days later as more mail-in ballots were counted, Coleman’s lead increased to 14 votes. Coleman, a dishwasher in the Kansas City area, drew the ire of both Republicans and Democrats when he told a Kansas radio host he would “giggle” if the host contracted the coronavirus and died as a
result of not wearing a mask. The teenager later apologized.

4 Calendar Crash Geneticists around the world finally have a solution to one of their most niggling problems. For years, geneticists using Microsoft Excel to collect data ran into software problems when entering the official shorthand for particular genes. For instance, when inputting MARCH1—the code for a gene called “Membrane Associated Ring-CH-Type Finger 1”—the Microsoft spreadsheet software autocorrected the entry into the “1-Mar” calendar date. Without a way to prevent the software from autocorrecting shorthand codes into calendar dates, the organization in charge of genetic nomenclature announced it would change the official symbols for 27 genes.

5 Rules Wearing Thin Students in Springfield, Ill., don’t have to go back to in-person school for the fall semester, but they will have to get out of bed. The Springfield School District’s plan for online education included a dress code that required students to change out of pajamas before attending video classes. The decision incited some parents. “I don’t really see how any district can come in and say what my kid can’t wear in my house,” parent Elizabeth Ballinger told WCIA. The district claimed the rule existed to promote a learning environment.

6 The Unfriendly Skies In what Michigan officials call a “brazen attack,” a bald eagle attacked a state-owned drone and sent the device to the bottom of Lake Michigan. The Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy announced it lost the $950 drone during an ecology survey near Escanaba, Mich., on the Upper Peninsula. The attack generated 27 warning notifications from the drone’s software, including an indicator that a propeller had been ripped off the device.

7 All for Show A Wisconsin official says his employees must wear face coverings during Zoom calls. In an email to agency employees, Department of Natural Resources Secretary Preston Cole said agency workers would have to wear face coverings while teleconferencing with anyone outside of the department. Cole said his directive to wear masks while videoconferencing was designed to “set the safety example which shows you as a DNR public service employee care about the safety and health of others.”

8 What a Hoot Residents of an Ontario, Canada, town can let out a cheer—and not be fined. Niagara-on-the-Lake Lord Mayor Betty Disero announced in August the town had dropped a proposed bylaw that would have prohibited loud sounds within city limits. The rule would have banned “yelling, shouting, hooting, whistling or singing” as well as any other sound over 50 decibels after 9 p.m. Disero attributed the council’s about-face to nearly universal negative feedback from residents. The mayor said the council was trying to find a way to squash loud parties at short-term Airbnb rentals.
Human fragility

Listening to each other may work where dogma fails

Humans share many traits in common, but each human is a universe unto himself, a peculiar mix of experiences, prejudices, pains, pleasures, and conflicts. That’s why it’s a mistake to judge another human by one’s own dogma.

This happened to me, years ago, in a church setting. Because I did not subscribe to a set of extra-Biblical doctrines, I was judged as recalcitrant and stubborn. When I tried to discuss it, they only listened for key words and phrases to seize upon and demolish. All my accusations, however tactful, ricocheted on me: You’re the one who’s legalistic. You’re the one who’s contentious and self-righteous.

Over time, I felt less than human in their eyes, at least in regard to anything spiritual. I represented the Enemy. They’d already heard my objections and dealt with them (i.e., dismissed them). My failure to get with the program was proof of what they’d been saying all along.

I suspect most of us have experienced judgment by someone else’s prejudices, because that’s how we tend to judge others. Until we get to know them. Real problems develop out of a worldview or set of assumptions so rigid we can’t get to know them.

Robin DiAngelo has an answer for that. She’s the author of White Fragility, a book published in 2018 that received a huge boost with the recent racial upheaval. For years DiAngelo (who is herself white) has led seminars in corporate and academic settings for audiences notably pale. She’s heard every objection to her thesis that “people who identify as white” exist in a bubble of self-deception about race—especially progressives. “When we try to talk openly and honestly about race, white fragility often emerges as we are met with silence, defensiveness, argumentation, certitude and other forms of pushback. These are not natural responses”—instead, they are the conditioning of centuries of a white hierarchy desperate to hold on to its position.

To me, these seem like perfectly natural responses—human responses. Humans of all colors get defensive and argumentative when blamed for a situation they didn’t directly cause. What’s unnatural is to put aside one’s immediate response, listen thoughtfully, and judge whether any blame is justified. Maybe; maybe not. Having listened to Robin DiAngelo’s online talks, I can credit some of what she says, at least enough to think about it. It’s doubtless true that the black experience is different from white, that color influences perspective, and that biases can lie deeper than we know.

I’m not so sure that every white person is socialized to feel superior, or that the American system is built on racism. I would be willing to discuss those reservations, but to DiAngelo, any pushback is proof of my inherent racism. And there’s nothing I can do about it, except to sit in dust and ashes and vaguely hope for improvement someday.

African American sociology professor George Yancey doesn’t entirely disagree with DiAngelo’s thesis: “I believe that many whites are defensive and do not want to confront the reality of our racist past and the current manifestations of that past.” Still, as a Christian and as a scientist, he finds the blunt absolutism of White Fragility unempirical and unhelpful.

In a long article at Patheos.com he argues for “Mutual Responsibility.” Blame may be understandable, but it won’t get us anywhere. We are all human, and humans can’t be compelled to heart changes. Even if all the demands of black activists were met, any gains would be temporary. Whites, being human, will push back. “The practical smart play is to engage in active listening to work out win win solutions if what we want is long term success.”

In other words, each accept the other side as individual humans with legitimate concerns and try to reach a compromise. To ignore actions and words in order to purge the psyche of an entire population, as White Fragility attempts to do, is impossible and ultimately destructive.

Voices JANIE B. CHEANEY
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-Jeff Garrett

But where did this unique hoard come from? Read on...

Morgans from the New Orleans Mint

In 1859, Nevada’s Comstock Lode was discovered, and soon its rich silver ore made its way across the nation, including to the fabled New Orleans Mint, the only U.S. Mint branch to have served under the U.S. government, the State of Louisiana and the Confederacy. In 1882, some of that silver was struck into Morgan Silver Dollars, each featuring the iconic “O” mint mark of the New Orleans Mint. Employees then placed the freshly struck coins into canvas bags...

The U.S. Treasury Hoard

Fast-forward nearly 80 years. In the 1960s, the U.S. government opened its vaults and revealed a massive store of Morgan Silver Dollars—including full, unopened bags of “fresh” 1882-O Morgan Silver Dollars. A number of bags were secured by a child of the Great Depression—a southern gentleman whose upbringing showed him the value of hard assets like silver. He stashed the unopened bags of “fresh” Morgans away, and there they stayed...

The Great Southern Treasury Hoard

That is, until another 50 years later, when the man’s family finally decided to sell the coins—still in their unopened bags—which we secured, bag and all! We submitted the coins to respected third-party grading service Numismatic Guaranty Corporation (NGC), and they agreed to honor the southern gentleman by giving the coins the pedigree of the “Great Southern Treasury Hoard.”

These gorgeous 1882-O Morgans are as bright and new as the day they were struck and bagged 138 years ago. Coins are graded on a 70-point scale, with those graded at least Mint State-60 (MS60) often referred to as “Brilliant Uncirculated” or BU. Of all 1882-O Morgans struck, LESS THAN 1% have earned a Mint State grade. This makes these unopened bags of 1882-O Morgans extremely rare, certified as being in BU condition—nearly unheard of for coins 138 years old.

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ALL FOR LAUGHS

Film serves up *David Copperfield* as a farce

by Megan Basham
WHETHER DAVID COPPERFIELD (as played by Dev Patel) shall turn out to be the hero of his own film, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, this review must show. And, in truth, while Dickens’ tale is still up to entertaining the crowds, his erstwhile orphan is more confectioner than hero in director Armando Iannucci’s *The Personal History of David Copperfield*. He stands mostly off to the side, casting whimsical Victorian visions, but seeming little invested in events himself.

In many ways Iannucci’s *Copperfield* bears a striking resemblance to the charming 2017 Dan Stevens film, *The Man Who Invented Christmas*. That, too, was a story about the creative writing process, showing us how *A Christmas Carol* came to be assembled in Dickens’ imagination based on events in his youth. Something similar happens with *Copperfield*.

The difference is *Carol* is 31,000 words. *David Copperfield* the novel runs more than 10 times that. So while the holiday classic is just the right length for reimagining while still having time to hit the high notes of the original, whittling Dickens’ magnum opus down to a mere two hours means choosing a thin slice out of a very large pie. The wedge Iannucci serves up is the tartest and, in some ways, least representative of the whole.

Essentially, he recasts *Copperfield* as a farce.

The complex, though admittedly often ridiculous, characters who populate David’s life become nearly as fantastical as Scrooge’s three ghosts. The winsome family by the sea, the Peggottys; the artful debt dodger, Mr. Micawber (Peter Capaldi, aka Dr. Who); donkey-foiling aunt, Miss Trotwood (Tilda Swinton), and her sidekick, the kite-flying Mr. Dick (Hugh Laurie)—Iannucci draws them all as outlandishly as cartoons.

In the novel, the humor comes from wincing at relatable shortcomings as much as guffawing at parodies and pratfalls. Even today, I can hardly hand over my debit card at the Nordstrom annual sale without ruefully reflecting on that sage wisdom Micawber always failed to follow: “Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen nineteen and six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery.”

The same goes for Mr. Wickfield’s alcoholism and Dora’s immaturity and attention-seeking. Iannucci plays them solely for laughs, never for the tragedy we see in the source material. We don’t yearn to see David come to his senses and finally recognize that Agnes would be a wife worth more than rubies because we never fully appreciate what counterfeit glitter Dora offers.

The most redemptive arc of the novel—the fall and recovery of Little Em’ly—is present in broad strokes, but there simply isn’t time to touch on Dickens’ deep, Biblical theme of Hosea pursuing his wayward wife or the prodigal’s father abandoning honor to run to his son. That would require an entire film to itself (one I’ve often longed to see).

The upside to a lighter, more candy-colored *Copperfield* is it’s short, sweet, and PG enough to please all but the youngest ages. Even the villains are more amusing than threatening (especially Ben Whishaw’s sniveling, ‘umble Uriah Heep, who has all the menace of a Roald Dahl illustration). Meaning, there’s little to cause nightmares or spark questions parents may not be ready to answer. While it may not have as much salt to balance out the sugar that Dickens purists might wish, this *Copperfield* is still a treat.
COVID-19 VICTIM?
TV ad spending has fallen 9 percent during 2020, according to the media agency Zenith.

NOTHING CUTE ABOUT CUTIES
Netflix film about pre-adolescent dancers draws criticism

by Megan Basham

NETFLIX APOLOGIZED LAST WEEK after promotional materials for one of its upcoming films sparked accusations it hypersexualized young girls.

The summary for the French drama Cuties, which is scheduled to hit the streaming platform on Sept. 9, originally read, “Amy, 11, becomes fascinated with a twerking dance crew. Hoping to join them, she starts to explore her femininity, defying her family’s traditions.”

As social media backlash to the idea of children performing sexually suggestive dance moves such as twerking grew, the company amended the language to say, “Eleven-year-old Amy starts to rebel against her conservative family’s traditions when she becomes fascinated with a free-spirited dance crew.”

The streaming giant also jettisoned an image that showed four pre-adolescent girls wearing hot pants and midriff-baring tops while striking seductive-looking poses. The original French advertisement depicted them skipping together in street clothes, carrying shopping bags.

“We’re deeply sorry for the inappropriate artwork that we used,” Netflix said in a statement posted on Twitter. “It was not OK, nor was it representative of this French film, which won an award at Sundance. We’ve now updated the pictures and description.”

But critics are upset with more than Netflix’s promotional campaign; they also find the subject matter of the film unacceptable.

“Cuties clearly sexualizes children, and, in particular, girls of color,” said Dawn Hawkins, senior vice president and executive director of the National Center on Sexual Exploitation. “The pornography industry is built on these stereotypes, and Netflix is taking a page from this playbook by featuring these children in such a manner.”

One of several Change.org petitions calling for Netflix not to add the movie to its library already had more than half a million signatures by Aug. 25.

(UN)WELL

(UN)well: The pros and cons of health fads
by Bob Brown

(UN)well is a new Netflix documentary series that examines different wellness trends. Many viewers likely have familiarity with the booming essential oils business, but some episodes will take viewers on trips into strange spaces. Successful practitioners, disillusioned ex-reps, and skeptical scientists issue conflicting opinions.

“Frankincense is really good for cancers, cuts, scrapes, and emotional issues,” says Allison Huish, a high-level seller in a leading essential oils company. The FDA has condemned such claims, and an attorney in a class action suit calls one company’s structure an "illegal pyramid scheme." Huish earns a portion of profits from 16,000 team members under her.

The second episode probes tantra, an Eastern sex practice. A client calls his experience “an exorcism ... of the demon of no self-love.” Breast milk does a bodybuilder good, evidently, in Episode 3. An Oregon woman breast pumps five hours a day, stirring her milk into home meals and shipping frozen bags of it to weightlifters nationwide.

Intermittent fasting, purported curative uses of a hallucinogenic plant called ayahuasca, and bee-sting therapy round out the first six episodes (rated TV-MA.) I did not come away convinced to stir any of these ingredients into my daily regimen.

(UN)WELL, CUTIES: NETFLIX
THE WHIMSICAL WORLD OF STUDIO GHIBLI
A Japanese animation studio tells beautifully realized coming-of-age stories

by Angela Lu Fulton and Harvest Prude

For many Americans, classic Disney films defined their childhoods. Yet in Asia, a different animation studio captured the imagination of a generation: Japan’s Studio Ghibli. Founded in 1985 by directors Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata and producer Toshio Suzuki, Studio Ghibli has produced 20 animated films full of the fantastical and whimsical, the realistic and the thought-provoking.

Despite the inclusion of the magical and mystical, the core elements of the films are universal: courage, friendship, love of family, coming of age, caring for nature, and the reality of war. Unlike the action-packed pacing of modern Hollywood films, Studio Ghibli operates at a slower pace, taking in the beautifully lush animated scenes and developing characters’ relationships.

Here we introduce three of our favorite Studio Ghibli films that the family can watch together:

**Castle in the Sky** (1986)
Pazu, an orphan boy, rescues a girl who falls out of an airship in the sky, her descent slowed by a magical blue pen-dant. The girl, Sheeta, is chased by both pirates and an army eager to steal her necklace, which they believe will lead them to the floating island of Laputa. The two work together to elude their captors and reach Laputa, a long-lost civilization capable of advanced military prowess but now overgrown with vegetation. The movie is full of action, humor (especially from the family of pirates and their crusty but loving matriarch, Dola), and melancholy as it tackles whether humans should be capable of possessing weapons of mass destruction.

**My Neighbor Totoro** (1988)
Two sisters, Satsuki and Mei, move with their father into an old house to be near their mother, who is sick at the hospital. While playing outside, younger sister Mei follows two rabbitlike spirits down a tunnel where she lands on the large, gentle Totoro. Later Satsuki finds her sleeping on the ground, the creature nowhere to be found. Later Totoro shows up to both of them in times of need, including when Mei goes missing while delivering corn to their sick mother. The film moves at a gentle pace with little conflict, yet wonderfully depicts familial relationships: the bickering and playfulness between sisters, the caring attention of a father, and the concern the girls have for their mother.

**Spirited Away** (2001)
Ten-year-old Chihiro and her parents take a detour in the woods and accidentally cross into the spirit world. Then, Chihiro’s parents are enchanted into pigs by the witch Yubaba. With the guidance of the mysterious boy Haku, Chihiro finds a job working at Yubaba’s bathhouse. In her quest to save her parents and return to the human world, Chihiro learns that hard work, persistence, and kindness open many doors. She also learns that people are rarely as bad as they first seem. Some elements may disturb young children, including some blood, smoking, and a greedy monster who will gobble up anything that gets in his way.
The best thing about the new documentary *In His Image* may be its confidence in the goodness of God’s establishment of—count ’em—two sexes, male and female. The browbeaten body of Christ needs the boost. This American Family Studios film will encourage congregations struggling to hold their ground and challenge others who’ve rejected the Creator’s design for sexuality.*

*In His Image* largely consists of interviews with Christian leaders and theologians. Ryan Anderson of the Heritage Foundation sets the record straight: The premise that “sex is assigned at birth” has no scientific support. What’s really going on, he says, is “the high priests of our culture—doctors and scientists—are dressing up ideological statements as if they are scientific or medical.” Stephen Black, executive director of First Stone Ministries, points to a study from Johns Hopkins University that found “there is no propensity towards a genetic disposition to homosexual behavior.”

Translation: DNA doesn’t lie.

Why not just live and let live? Because children suffer spiritually and physically. Abraham Hamilton of the American Family Association explains that same-sex adoption “deprives a child of a full illustration of God’s image born with a marital union.” And a study from alt-lifestyle-friendly Sweden shows that despite acceptance, transgender folks are 19 times more likely than the general population to commit suicide.

The stories are heartbreaking. Denise Shick from Help4Families tells how her father bombshed her at age 9 with the news that he wanted to become a woman. Envying her maturing body, he abused her for years, she says. On her wedding day, he told her, “I wish it were me in that gown.” Parents will want to shield youngsters from the film’s disturbing content, including YouTube clips of transgender kids talking up their hormone blockers. It’s painful to see what passes for respectable nurturing nowadays.

Despite the politically fueled sexual turmoil, the church is not helpless and transgender people are not hopeless. Relief from bodily confusion begins with Christ and His body, not body-rearranging surgery. Laura Perry provides one of the film’s moving testimonies. She grew up in a Christian family, transitioned to male characteristics, but was won to a true relationship with Jesus and a new appreciation of her femininity through the love of several older church ladies. Today’s godly grandmas have a calling they probably didn’t see coming 10 years ago.

“The Lord wants transgendered people in the pews,” one interviewee reminds Christians. For even if you *were* “born this way,” still you must be born again.
THE JEWISH NEW YEAR begins the evening of Sept. 18, and Elliott Rabin’s The Biblical Hero: Portraits in Nobility & Fallibility (Jewish Publication Society, 2020) shows differences between Judaism and Christianity but also points of contact.

Rabin is willing to undercut accounts in the Talmud, the 63 books of rabbinical discussion produced between a.d. 100 and 500. For example, Rabin writes that “the Rabbis want to see Abraham, the religion’s founder, in far more visibly heroic terms than the biblical account offers.” He criticizes tendencies to “varnish” or “whitewash” six heroes: Moses, Samson, Esther, Abraham, David, and Jacob. (In “Rabbinic tradition ... Esau is the real deceiver.”)

Rabin rightly argues that a Moses or a David should be neither “on a pedestal, nor a figure whose feet of clay cause the whole statue to collapse.” Instead, we learn that Moses’ “flaws and virtues are inextricably bound together.” Esther’s “heroism is inseparable from the messiness of her story and the murkiness of her motives.”

But here’s a problem: Rabin uses the word “flaw” seven times in one paragraph about Moses and avoids the crucial word in the last sentence uttered by Stephen as he is stoned to death: “sin.” The word does appear on page 242—“David is fully cognizant of his sin”—but that recognition is hard to avoid since Rabin is commenting on Psalm 51, in which “sin” appears six times.

Two other problems affect this well-written book. Rabin makes Abraham seem like an existentialist loner: “He lives independent of anything resembling a society” and has a “dearth of lasting, meaningful human contact.” He is “the most solitary figure in the Bible” and lives in “the tension between abundant bounties offered in the future and the meager circumstances of present life.” Yet, later in the Abraham chapter, Rabin acknowledges that “he never travels entirely without his family ... and for most of his life a considerable retinue of household servants accompanies him as well.”

The main difficulty: Rabin has to go to extraordinary lengths to explain the Akedah, the story in Genesis 22 of Abraham’s almost-sacrifice of Isaac: “Until Abraham, human history has presented God with a string of disappointments. ... God chooses Abraham because in him God senses the opportunity for a new beginning to God’s relationship with human beings.” By being ready to kill his son, his only son, “Abraham restores God’s faith in humanity.”

Hmm. Our omniscient God does not need man to educate Him: God educates us. He’s against human sacrifice, so why order a killing and stop it only when Abraham shows he’s ready to kill? Doesn’t it make more sense as preparation for when God the Father kills His Son, His only Son, to save all who believe in Him?

We don’t know what Moses was thinking as he recorded the strange Abraham and Isaac saga, but we do know that he was looking ahead: Kevin Chen’s The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch (IVP, 2019) is a useful survey.
Fellowship and faith

Four accessible theology books
by Jamie Dean

2 Corinthians for You by Gary Millar: Millar offers a lively study of the New Testament book of 2 Corinthians, taking the reader verse by verse through the Apostle Paul’s extraordinary letter to a church he longed to see grow in Christ and generously serve others. Millar shows how suffering is part of that service: Paul teaches that we suffer for the benefit of other people. We face pain—and receive God’s comfort—so we can comfort others in the Church. Comfort isn’t a dulling of pain or a peaceful, easy feeling. It’s a fortifying of the soul to trust God and look forward to “an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” Millar reminds us that one of our chief aims is to “love people enough to spend ourselves to engender joy in those we serve.”

A Place to Belong by Megan Hill: A casserole-laden table in a church fellowship hall takes on new beauty in Hill’s rich treatment of the local church. The breaking of bread and sharing of lives isn’t a quaint tradition or an old-fashioned ideal but a key piece of what it means to be part of God’s people: “In loving the local church, we experience the presence of Christ.” We also experience the privilege of family: “Belonging to the church will always increase our obligations and decrease our independence.” Simple worship, humble prayer meetings, and quiet service become the means God uses to display His glory and draw others to Christ. The book would make a thoughtful gift for new church members or a helpful discussion guide for study groups.

The Ten Commandments of Progressive Christianity by Michael J. Kruger: This small book takes on a big challenge: refuting some of the most common arguments against Biblical orthodoxy. Kruger interacts with a set of 10 principles outlined in a book by Richard Rohr that Kruger describes as “a kind of confessional statement of modern liberalism.” For example, Kruger shows why Rohr is Biblically incorrect to argue that “Jesus is a model for living more than an object for worship” or that “affirming people’s potential is more important than reminding them of their brokenness.” Kruger points out where Rohr gets some things right but how he steers directly into un-Biblical teaching that ends up withholding the truth people need most.

A Way With Words by Daniel Darling: Darling isn’t the first to write about “using our online conversations for good.” But he’s chosen a subject that is pressing enough to warrant another book aimed at helping Christians think about how to avoid some of the common pitfalls of pride, incivility, and distraction lurking in our online lives. Darling doesn’t advocate abandoning the internet, but he does encourage us to consider: “Social media often brings out our inner Pharisee. Every day, it seems, we are at our digital temples crying loudly, for everyone to hear, that we are so very unlike those other people.” The book seems especially helpful during an acrimonious election year, and Darling is transparent in speaking about what he’s learned from his own failures.
A sea of faces
Four recent children’s biographies
by Mary Jackson

**Through the Wardrobe** by Lina Maslo: This book acquaints a new generation with C.S. Lewis and the experiences that shaped his beloved Narnian world. Lewis’ childhood imagination—fueled by books and heroic characters—influenced how he handled loss, hardship, wartime horrors, and career highs and lows. Maslo helps readers see parallels between Lewis’ own journey and Narnia’s “battles between good and evil, where one learns things like courage and love and forgiveness” and where a person’s worst moments shape his future. Endnotes highlight Lewis’ family, education, faith, marriage, career, and involvement in the wars and with the Inklings. *(Ages 4-8)*

**The Strange Birds of Flannery O’Connor** by Amy Alznauer: Alznauer paints a portrait of a girl whose fascination with strange birds influenced her life and stories. As a child, O’Connor wore special shoes for pigeon feet and always felt a bit like an odd bird herself. Early in her life, she lost her father. Then, at age 25, she learned she had lupus. Strange and dazzling birds colored O’Connor’s quiet and short-lived adulthood, shaping her writing and understanding of people’s attraction to oddities. Illustrator Ping Zhu’s first children’s book radiates with color and outsize people, objects, and fowl, spotlighting the “brightest, oddest bird you ever did see.” *(Ages 4-8)*

**John Bunyan** by Simonetta Carr: This latest installment of Christian Biographies for Young Readers introduces kids to John Bunyan, a simple tinker with little education who brings the gospel to common people. Bunyan penned most of his writings, including *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, during his more than 12 years of imprisonment for preaching independently of the Church of England. Children will gain an appreciation for God’s grace in Bunyan’s life and for the experiences that shaped his understanding of sin and the glory of Christ’s death and resurrection. *(Ages 7-12)*

**Prairie Boy** by Barb Rosenstock: Frank Lloyd Wright’s architectural style reflected his childhood years spent soaking up spacious Wisconsin prairie landscapes and his attraction to shapes, angles, and grids. As a budding architect, Wright appreciated natural light; long, cozy hearths; rectangular lines; and uncluttered spaces. He veered from European-style houses, turning “the shapes he loved into America’s home,” and experimented with new ideas, even venturing into furniture and clothing. Illustrator Christopher Silas Neal adds visual appeal with shape-filled pages. The author’s note and pictures of some of Wright’s most famous works give readers a taste of his creativity. *(Ages 7-10)*

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**Afterword**

In *Saving Lady Liberty* (Calkins Creek, 2020), Claudia Friddell tells the story of Joseph Pulitzer, a poor Jewish immigrant who became a crusader for the magnificent monument in New York’s harbor. Pulitzer used the power of the press to rally ordinary Americans to fund the pedestal for the Statue of Liberty. The book includes original quotes, editorial excerpts, and letters from children who donated, as well as interesting facts about Pulitzer and the statue.

In *The Next President* (Chronicle Books, 2020), Kate Messner takes readers on a tour of U.S. presidents, emphasizing what they did before they reached the highest-ranking public office. When George Washington became president in 1789, the next nine presidents were alive. Abraham Lincoln sold groceries and worked on a farm before his stint in the White House. Filled with snapshots and amusing facts, this book invites children to consider: What are future presidents doing right now? Note: The book diverges at the end to include a portrait of Hillary Clinton as the first female presidential nominee by a major party. —M.J.
Old Gateway, Pyongyang, North Korea near the Presbyterian Mission Compound where the response to the Gospel and the growth of the church became legendary.

Author’s Life verse: “HE will cover you with HIS feathers and under HIS wings you will find refuge.” —Psalm 91:4

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“ I want the American people to be able to read what you have written ... an accurate account. ”

—General Curtis E. LeMay
AT WAR WITH PRAGMATISM

It’s important to preach both the law and grace—without the hurdle of pragmatism

JOHN MACARTHUR DURING HIS 51 YEARS AS PASTOR of Grace Community Church in suburban Los Angeles has published best-selling books including the MacArthur Study Bible. He’s also chancellor of the Master’s University and Seminary and has a daily broadcast, Grace to You. His church is holding worship services that don’t satisfy the restrictions on church gatherings that Los Angeles County officials have imposed. Here are edited excerpts of our Aug. 11 conversation.
Some Christian leaders and organizations argue civil disobedience isn’t the best option right now. The government has no right to tell a church it can’t meet. That’s an unalienable right from God. They’re violating the Constitution when they tell the church how, where, or when it can meet. Also, the requirements for us to meet outdoors are so unreasonable, vast, and complex as to make meeting essentially impossible. If we were to follow them, we’d just cancel church. We’ve tried to be sensible and say, “You’re adults. You decide if you want to come.”

Was Grace Community’s elder’s statement a rebuke to other churches that aren’t reopening? We didn’t want to indict anybody. If you’re doing a church that’s an adult event, you might not meet. But more than 1,000 children here have been kept out of church for six months. Their parents have been heart-sick over this. We have 4½ hours on Sunday of Bible teaching and sound doctrine for little kids, all the way up to sixth grade. This is a multigenerational church. Not all churches are like that. I can’t imagine the future when this particular society all of a sudden loves and tolerates the church. You may not want to fight at this particular point, but you may have to fight down the road.

Evangelical political writer and lawyer David French claimed your criticism of #MeToo was reflexive. He wrote: “There is nothing inherently un-Christian about a movement that has mainly exposed celebrity rapists and mainstream media Lotharios. It has also exposed abuse within the church.” Grace Community Church does church discipline, following our Lord’s instruction in the Gospel of Matthew to confront sin with two or three witnesses. Then if they don’t repent, you tell the entire church. Some people would say to me: You can’t do that! People won’t come if they know they’ll be scrutinized and their sin is going to be revealed. We’ve been doing that for 50 years. This church doesn’t tolerate any kind of perpetuated sin at any level, even on the board of elders. Rarely do we have a communion service where I don’t read a name of someone who wouldn’t repent.

How does this compare with #MeToo methods? The #MeToo movement smacks of a feminist ideological agenda. If you give an open forum for everyone’s complaints—some legitimate, some maybe invented—everybody becomes a victim. That cuts people off from real gospel ministry. As long as people think they’re victims and somebody else is a worse criminal than they are, they’re trapped in the biggest lie sinners can get trapped in: that they’re somehow better than somebody else. That’s not how it is before the Lord.

You’ve said you’re concerned about the effect of evangelical anger on children? Kids raised in a family where there’s hostility and anger will be exponentially more of what their parents were. The Lord wants us as parents to teach love, forgiveness, and mercy. Every believer has enough to do before God with his own sin and righteousness. It reminds me of the parable our Lord gave of the man who owed the unpayable debt to the king. The king forgave him his debt. The man then grabbed by the throat somebody who owed him a small amount. I see some strangling others for offenses when they have been forgiven an incalculable offense by the goodness and grace of God.

Your friend R.C. Sproul spoke frequently about the consequences of bad ideas. What idea in the past decade has had the worst consequences for the church? Pragmatism: Whatever works is what we need to do. If we think sinners will be saved by our methodology, we’ve got to give the sinners what they want. Pragmatism has re-created the church into a “sinner-friendly church”: That expression has been used. But you cannot—by any human method—overcome every sinner’s inborn, depraved resistance to righteousness that leaves us both unable and unwilling to come to Christ. The natural man understands not the things of God: To offer the natural unconverted sinner what the natural unconverted sinner wants in his depravity, as if it were what God wants to give him,
is an affront to God. It’s a heresy, another gospel. This pragmatic philosophy is behind the shallow, superficial approach that over the last 20 years has taken root in the church.

You discuss the relationship of grace and law. You can’t preach grace until you’ve preached law. The sinner can’t be saved from anything until the urgency in which he stands before God, headed for eternal judgment, dawns on his soul. Great, sound theology understands that. But the church is so loaded with pragmatism that people think they’re successful if they draw a crowd of people who are hearing what they want to hear, even in their unconverted state. Very often that makes them feel they’re Christians because they have some nice feelings about Jesus.

Some issues people have with your preaching comes down to tone. A famous charismatic pastor who’s a good friend once introduced me by saying, “This is my friend, John MacArthur, who is much nicer in person than he is in his sermons.” I love the guy, but there’s a sense in which my job is to be truthful. I don’t want to be harsh. I don’t want to be unloving, but I also know the most loving thing I can do is tell the truth. I’m sure at times I come across in an unkind or ungracious way, but there’s an urgency, a passion, in proclaiming the truth. People ask, Does it bother you to offend people? If I offended someone personally, that bothers me a lot. If the truth offended someone, I’m thankful. I’m in the business of offending sinners to the point that they honestly take a look at themselves and see if there isn’t something very dire and serious that they need to consider.

Are you unusual? I understand I’m a bit of an anomaly. Homespun Gospel: The Triumph of Sentimentality in Contemporary American Evangelicalism is a very thoughtful book that talks about the preaching of Bill Hybels, Joel Osteen, and Max Lucado. It analyzes the sentimentalism in preaching that’s very popular. Many megachurches feature a sanctified TED talk. I come across as more explicit, more coarse in some ways, than the sentimentalists. I’m just trying to take the Word and explain it one verse at a time. There was a golden age of preaching that emphasized Biblical truth through Biblical texts: That makes the tone of the text the tone of the sermon. Then there’s backing off from that: Biblical truth from cultural texts. Then there’s completely lost preaching: a cultural message from cultural texts.

Do you see the affectionate memes that have grown up around you on social media? The Babylon Bee, for example, frequently runs funny fake news stories portraying you as a spiritual Chuck Norris. I don’t access social media myself, but they’re sent to me. My kids are all in our church, and they keep me informed. I take it as a compliment. It’s amazing how endearing the Word of God is. That spills over on me because in a sense I’m the guy in Romans 10: “Blessed are the feet of those who bring the good news.” I’ve known the blessing that comes to one who faithfully brings the good news.
Five years ago, we were seeing part of our city explode on TV. There was a police shooting in Ferguson, Missouri. Fire and chaos filled the screen.

The authorities came in with armored vehicles and riot gear. They were ready to fight back and create even more chaos.

The story we could tell—because we went and looked for it—was about an African American, Christian police officer by the name of Captain Ron Johnson. After the authorities couldn’t make any kind of progress, they turned to Capt. Johnson. We followed him around with a microphone and listened to him tell his own story of growing up in the area. Armed with nothing but moral authority, he walked through the crowd of demonstrators and urged everyone to remain calm.

He was able to defuse an incredibly tense situation just by saying, “Let’s calm down. There’s no reason for this.” There was a sense of hopelessness amid angry protests, but Capt. Johnson had credibility in the neighborhood.

Most of the media didn’t cover this. WORLD told a story about bringing order to disorder. We look for stories like these. We find them, and we bring them back, because we want to show our readers and listeners how God is at work in the world through His people.
An enjoyable “immersive exhibition” of Flannery O’Connor’s novel

by Arsenio Orteza

Wise Blood as opera

The Great Catholic Short-Story Writer and novelist Flannery O’Connor is in the news again—and for the same reason that it seems she’s ever in the news anymore: racism.

O’Connor was no racist. But you’d never know if your only information source were The New Yorker, which recently published an essay by Paul Elie bearing the question-begging title “How Racist Was Flannery O’Connor?” Feel free to skip to Jessica Hooten Wilson’s rebuttal in First Things and Justin Lee’s at Arc Digital for succinct explanations of why Elie’s thesis leaks like a sieve.

Then, thus reassured of the purity of O’Connor’s intentions, log on to your favorite digital-music web store and grab the new original-cast recording of Wise Blood (New Focus), a one-hour-and-19-minute “immersive opera exhibition” by the composer Anthony Gatto and the artist Chris Larson based on O’Connor’s 1952 novel of the same name. (The opera is called an “immersive exhibition,” incidentally, because it’s staged so that the action surrounds the audience; a full-length video of a 2015 performance is available on YouTube.)

Wise Blood the novel follows the efforts of the disillusioned World War II veteran Hazel Motes to free himself of every last vestige of his intense, fundamentalist-Christian upbringing, convinced as he is that the gospel is nothing but a hoax meant to bamboozle the ignorant. Reality, however, in the form of a series of bizarre antagonists, keeps breaking in, and eventually Motes fails at his task while paradoxically (and reluctantly) attaining something of inestimably greater worth.

Wise Blood the opera transforms O’Connor’s story into a fever dream, blending subtly tormented music as performed by a brass-heavy orchestra and a smaller woodwinds-heavy ensemble with vocal performances that require as much in the way of effective spoken-line delivery (i.e., acting) as they do in the way of singing. It’s as if the principal performers (each of whom is magnificent) only burst into song when the passions warring within their blindered souls become too much for mere speech. Other characteristics of the work make it especially timely given the latest attempts to banish O’Connor into outer darkness. One is Gatto’s excising of the “N-word” from his libretto (it’s spoken or thought over a dozen times by the characters in O’Connor’s novel). Another is his casting of the African Americans Martin Bakari and Brian Major as Hazel Motes and the charlatan preacher Asa Hawks respectively. Whatever their flaws, race-based bigotry is evidently not among them.

Admittedly, such revisionism puts a crimp in the characters’ hubris and therefore makes Motes in particular a shade more likable than O’Connor intended him to be. But it also nudges him toward an Everyman status that places him and the story beyond the reach of the cancel-O’Connor mob.

Forty-one years ago, the director John Huston oversaw a painstakingly literal cinematic adaptation of Wise Blood, one that, despite strong performances from Brad Dourif and Harry Dean Stanton, came off flat. Gatto’s Wise Blood is the aesthetic antithesis of Huston’s in every way that matters.
Too good to overlook

Noteworthy new or recent releases
by Arsenio Orteza

**Heart’s Ease by Shirley Collins:** Buoyed by the warm reception greeting her 2016 comeback, *Lodestar*, this British folk heroine returns with a dozen more explorations of the traditional and the neo-traditional songbooks. The perpetually haunting effect results in part from the backward-time-travel instrumentation (acoustic guitars, hurdy-gurdies, fiddles, harmoniums), in part from the emotionally rich subject matter (tragedies and comedies associated with seafaring, romance, and domesticity), in part from the presence of “What Wondrous Love Is This,” and in part from Collins’ voice, which along with the rest of her turned 85 in July and which she metaphorically assesses in couplet: “The feet that were nimble tread carefully now / As gentle a measure as age do allow.”

**The Delta Sweete (Deluxe Edition) by Bobbie Gentry:** This reissue’s timing—two years past its subject’s 50th anniversary—suggests that were it not for the love shown this year by Mercury Rev (see “Encore”), Capitol’s deluxe-edition overseers might have overlooked it altogether. Still, they’ve done the job right, leading with a new stereo remastering that makes the ambitiously diverse sonic details easier than ever to appreciate. So why, in retrospect, did it bomb? Because it was a folk-country-gospel-blues concept album with whiffs of Percy Faith, Dusty Springfield, and Simon & Garfunkel in the age of *Tommy*? Because only “Okolona River Bottom Band” sounded anything like the “Ode to Billie Joe” follow-up that everyone was expecting? Whatever the reasons, they no longer apply.

**I’ve Got You Covered by Wendy Moten:** Moten has a wonderful voice. Warm, full, and alert to nuance, it’s arguably the best on the pop-country-R&B spectrum yet to get its rightful due. Enter Vince Gill, who besides producing this project has also had the good sense to employ Moten as a member of his touring band for the last four years, during which time they’ve road-tested Bobbie Gentry’s “Ode to Billie Joe,” Linda Ronstadt’s “Faithless Love,” Jeannie Seely’s “Don’t Touch Me,” and Ernest Tubb’s “Driving Nails in My Coffin,” all of which appear herein. As for the other five, Moten has said that Gill “surprised” her with them on the day of recording to keep her sounding “spontaneous and fresh.” The strategy worked.

**Nashville Tears: The Songs of Hugh Prestwood by Rumer:** Except maybe in Nashville, into whose Songwriters’ Hall of Fame he was inducted 14 years ago, Hugh Prestwood is not a household name. But if this album gets the attention it deserves, the situation could change. His country-folk, country-pop, and country-country inclinations give Rumer something new against which to test her velvet alto, resulting in one quiet revelation after another. One example: Both “Hard Times for Lovers” (a minor hit for Judy Collins in the Me Decade) and “Ghost in This House” (a major hit for Shenandoah in whatever the ‘90s were) cast divorce in a negative light. But they’ve never reinforced each other by appearing in the same place until now.

**Encore**

The psychedelically inclined pop experimentalists Jonathan Donahue, Grasshopper, and Jesse Chandler—aka Mercury Rev—chose wisely when they made Bobbie Gentry’s sophomore effort the basis of their entry into the album-covering sweepstakes last year. *Bobbie Gentry’s The Delta Sweete Revisited* (Partisan/Bella Union) capitalizes on the multifaceted nature of the original.

First, it honors Gentry’s stylistic roots smorgasbord by transferring its mosaiclike quality from the instrumentation to the vocals, enlisting a different female singer for each track. Some of them are relatively obscure (Hope Sandoval, Lætitia Sadier), some relatively well known (Beth Orton, Phoebe Bridgers), and two are bona fide stars (Norah Jones, Lucinda Williams). Second, the album imbues the smorgasbord with an otherworldly dreaminess faithful to the spirit of Gentry’s conceptual philosophy. The only dodgy call is the replacing of “Louisiana Man” with “Ode to Billie Joe” and convincing one of the bona fide stars to sing it.
Bloody paths
Following the hurt brings opportunities for transformation

ONE THING THE VICTIMS of the August explosion in Beirut all said in recounting their stories: They could tell where to go by following the trails of blood. As evening fell in the hour after the blast, they struggled to leave buildings blocked by debris and broken glass, only to make it to streets filled with rubble and pancaked cars.

Wilma Saloum, one of those I profiled (see p. 40), said only motorcycles could make it through the blast zone that night. She and her friend George, like many I spoke to, followed other injured to one, two, three hospitals before finding care. Some of the injured I contacted did not want their stories published or their photos taken. Glass shrapnel isn’t pretty. One woman I hoped to visit had 68 stitches, another 250.

I arrived in Beirut four days after that dark night and spent 48 hours in a quarantine hotel awaiting results of a COVID-19 test, my second of the trip. By the time I could walk the devastated streets, most international journalists had gone home. The story of what’s being called one of the largest non-nuclear explosions in history faded from headlines in the face of lesser news.

For days in Beirut good and evil did battle in visceral and visible ways. At the American University of Beirut Medical Center, 500 injured arrived the night of the explosion—to a hospital without power and with walls of broken glass, its ICU beds full of COVID-19 patients.

Further, Lebanon’s financial crisis had forced the medical center to lay off 850 medical workers in recent months. Yet off-duty nurses and regular folks rushed there to help, holding their phones aloft to shine light over the shoulders of doctors who tied off sutures in the dark.

Some of the injured showed up in the streets the next day to begin cleanup. Hicham Nassif was shopping with his wife near the port and barely escaped serious injury. With six stitches in his swollen forehead, he bought buckets and broom and cleared gutted apartments for strangers. He, too, said he followed the trails of blood.

What you have to understand about the aftermath in Beirut, the outpouring of help that most reporters missed, is that this sort of homegrown relief effort came out of no one’s plenty. It came from their want.

Through years of government corruption and loan defaults, Lebanon’s currency over the past 10 months has lost 90 percent of its value. A salary of $500 a month now is worth $75. Only weeks before the blast, economists warned of a Venezuela-style collapse with hunger, food, and medicine shortages in what had been an oasis of stability in the Middle East.

“There used to be a middle class in Lebanon, but now the rich are rich, the middle class has become poor, and the poor have become destitute,” said Lebanese celebrity chef Antoine El Hajj.

COVID-19 too is taking a toll. A surge in cases by late August meant nearly 600 health workers have been diagnosed with the disease. The government announced new lockdown measures, including a curfew and closures of restaurants for at least two weeks.

There are protests and unrest, to be sure, in such times of crisis. But there are also people who know their call is to follow the blood and the hurt, the way Jesus would do, without letting up.

“Addressing the outer needs with aid and care is a transaction, but when you can address people’s inner wants too, that’s transformation,” said Tom Atema, co-founder of Heart for Lebanon, an evangelical ministry. “The explosion is bad, but Lebanese already are living in unprecedented troubling times. These unprecedented times give us unprecedented privilege and opportunities.”
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AN EXPLOSIVE RECKONING FOR BEIRU
A record blast leaves opportunities and new fears for a devastated Christian community.

BY MINDY BELZ IN BEIRUT
ELCOM, this is my summer resort now,” says Joy Mal- lough, spreading his arms wide as I enter his office. The second-floor room with tall windows on two sides is bright with August sun, and airy because all the windows are blown out. Shards of glass still poke from metal window frames. Plasterboard walls are cracked and buckled. Through the open windows, the sounds of sanding and sawing rise to us, as workers below repair broken doors and pews.

Mallouh’s Church of God is one of many churches heavily damaged in the Aug. 4 explosion at Beirut’s main port, a blast that struck at the heart of Christian neighborhoods in East Beirut. The church sits just a half-mile from the warehouse where several thousand tons of ammonium nitrate ignited, sending a mushroom cloud over the city and a pressure wave faster than the speed of sound. It stormed through buildings within a 10-mile radius.

That day Mallouh left his office around 5 p.m. to go to the bank, then to his parents’ home in the hills above Bei- rut. Traffic was heavy, and Mallouh with his wife reached his parents’ home shortly before 6 p.m. “We brewed coffee and sat on the balcony when we felt the earth shaking. ... I stood up because during the Lebanese war I watched bombardments that sounded like this. Then there was a second shaking like a bomb and then a third blast that was really scary.”

Mallouh’s 23-year-old son called him from the apartment adjacent to the church. He trembled as he spoke: “I don’t know what’s happened, but it is like a nuclear bomb here.”

Even for Lebanese who survived decades of wars, the Aug. 4 blast is the most terrifying moment of their lives. Scientific analysts believe it is the third-largest industrial disaster ever involving ammonium nitrate and one of the largest non-nuclear blasts in history. It left a 160-acre scar near the seaport that’s a lifeline for millions. By late August, the death toll stood at 181, according to Lebanon’s Ministry of Health, with 30 people missing and more than 6,000 injured. The blast directly affected 300,000 people in a city of 2 million. It devastated neighborhoods near the port, a center for the city’s Christian population. Many blame Lebanon’s corrupt government for the disaster, and Beirut’s residents are demanding long-term change even as they dig themselves out from under rubble.

OUTSIDE THE PORT ITSELF, the historic heart of East Beirut took the most direct hit. The neighborhoods of Acharifeh—where Mallouh’s church is located—include Beirut’s largest and oldest churches, its up-and-coming arts and restaurant scene, and its best hospitals and universities. The mostly Christian residential areas are both poor and well-to-do, marking cosmopolitan diversity unique to Lebanon in the Arab world. The wife of the Dutch ambassador, looking out her embassy residence window in Acharifeh, was injured and later died.

Many Acharifeh residents remember Lebanon’s 100 days’ war with Syrian forces in 1978, when Christian militias defended the city in these same neighbor- hoods. Bullet holes are still visible in some buildings. “My parents hid me in a bathroom those 100 days while defending Acharifeh,” said Michel Salim Habib, who was 9 years old at the time. “We were bombed seven times, and it was nothing like this. This explosion we could not defend ourselves against.”
After the explosion, rubble left streets impassable for days. Smashed cars, piles of glass, and busted drywall sat in heaps near crumbled buildings along once-trendy Gemmayzeh Street. A week after the blast, cleanup crews picked through large glass shards and swept thousands of tiny fragments over pavement. The waterfall-like sound competed with the clamor of power saws and hammers.

Besides three of the city’s leading hospitals damaged and closed, at least four Christian schools need rebuilding, and most churches have significant damage. At the National Evangelical Church, the oldest Protestant church in Beirut and first led by a Lebanese, Pastor Habib Badr was in his office and took refuge behind a door just as glass shattered across his desk. Offices for Youth for Christ, International Ministries, and the Near East School of Theology also were damaged. At the Evangelical Christian Alliance Church just blocks from the port, the explosion demolished a second-story room surrounded by windows on three sides. Normally a Tuesday night prayer meeting begins at 6 p.m., but the coronavirus forced a change there and in many other places.

Mallouh’s congregation, like others, faces many injuries and damaged homes. One woman underwent five hours of surgery to remove glass shrapnel from her face. One mother is hospitalized with broken bones, her daughter receives treatment at another hospital, while her son is at a third, in a coma and unlikely to survive, doctors say.

Pastors such as Mallouh face the same dilemma: “We have limited funds, but we will help them.”

Church of God member Wilma Saloum hoped in September to begin her 29th year teaching English at Christian Teaching International. On Aug. 4 she had surgery for bulging discs at Wardieh Hospital near the port area. Two nurses had wheeled her into her room after the procedure, where her fiancé George Ghannam waited. “I had a panoramic view,” she told me of the blast’s mushroom cloud. One of the nurses died instantly. Ghannam was thrown against a door, bleeding from a head injury, while debris and glass covered Wilma and the other nurse. She disconnected Saloum’s IV tube, and the three made their way down a stairwell in the dark.

“There were people injured or dead on the floor, and blood everywhere. There was no one to help us. All the roads were blocked, no way to move really,” she said.

Strangers took them to hospitals so damaged they couldn’t accept patients before a friend got them to Sacre Coeur Hospital. Twelve days later, Ghannam remained in the ICU there with skull fractures, a broken elbow, and internal bleeding. “They say he will be OK but it will take time,” Saloum said.

Saloum’s 22-year-old daughter and 19-year-old son, university students, survived the explosion. But glass and wind shattered their fifth-floor apartment and smashed her car. The family now lives with Saloum’s sister. “My daughter is scared at any noise and is crying at night. Always she is scared.”

Saloum saw her surgeon five days later. “We had to meet outside as he doesn’t have an office anymore. He examined my stitches from the surgery and had to remove tiny glass pieces from between the stitches. But I will heal.”

Mallouh plans to work with local ministries to help restore his church families. But he echoed what I heard from many Christian leaders in Beirut: “We are tired.”

The 62-year-old has watched the Christian presence in Lebanon diminish, its access to political power and economic progress loosen even as it remains one of the more durable church communities in the Middle East. In 30 years leading the Church of God, he has seen his congregation drop in number and its
families become poorer while militant Islamic groups draw closer. A car bomb at the church in 2007 also blew out windows and walls.

“I cried then,” Mallouh said. “Now I have no tears at all. It’s more anger because this is the result of negligence and lack of care for our people.”

ANGER OVER THE EXPLOSION has kindled solidarity among Lebanese unlike any previous crisis. “My government did this,” reads a sign on a concrete barrier facing the port wreckage. Residents believe the explosion is the result of years of endemic corruption.

An extensive document trail makes clear how the government knew for years—and neglected—to remove the nearly 3,000 tons of ammonium nitrate stored in Warehouse 12.

A Russian freighter sailed with the cargo in 2013, bound for an explosives company in Mozambique. For unclear reasons it docked in Beirut. A wage standoff between cargo owners and crew eventually led owners to abandon the vessel and port authorities to impound it.

Memos starting in early 2014 repeatedly warned customs officials, security officers, and eventually the country’s leaders about the shipment’s volatility. President Michel Aoun admitted he received a warning only weeks before the blast. That same report arrived on the desk of Prime Minister Hassan Diab, who sent it on to the Supreme Defense Council—yet no one acted.

The blast caps months of avid street protests over the country’s economic crisis and runaway inflation, all tied to a corrupt government held hostage by Hezbollah.

“The explosion of Aug. 4 was the icing on the cake of Lebanon’s miseries,” said Habib Malik, associate professor of history at American University of Beirut. “Economic crisis, currency collapse, the coronavirus pandemic, and the constant threat of a war between Hezbollah and Israel—all of that was staring at us up to Aug. 3, with root causes that are very clear.”

Those root causes are crony politicians who lead the sectarian government, with a constitution that apportions key positions among the country’s leading religious groups: The president is a Christian, the prime minister is a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of Parliament is a Shiite Muslim. In recent years, Iran-backed, Shiite-led Hezbollah exercised growing control over all three. The militant group, a U.S.-designated terrorist group, has long operated as political power broker in Lebanon.

“Hezbollah gets political cover from all of them, including some Christians, and it gets to continue smuggling, money laundering, and stockpiling precision-guided missiles,” said Malik.

Anger spilled into massive protests the weekend following the blast, leading to hundreds more injuries for overwhelmed hospitals. The protesters stormed government buildings demanding political leaders resign. For the first time, they also called out Hezbollah.

Using nooses, protesters hanged in effigy leader Hassan Nasrallah and others. Their slogan: “All of them gone means all of them.”

The Cabinet resigned Aug. 10, acknowledging the public anger and corruption, but whether such moves will bring real change remains in question.

Malik sees a silver lining to Beirut’s recent anguish. Three-fourths of Lebanese reject Hezbollah, he said, including many Christians, all Sunnis, and “a grow
ing number of courageous Shiites.” Young Lebanese driving the push for change are “by and large secular” and are bent on rebuilding civil society, he said.

O

N THE STREETS OF ACHRAFIEH, the public discontent also fuels cleanup efforts. The government failed to organize rubble removal, but day after day crews of young people showed up in the heat to clear streets and houses. Some wore matching T-shirts and carried brooms and pails. While they swept and piled debris, others set up tents and tables to serve food and water.

Work crews came from area churches, local ministries, charity groups, and groups formed out of the protest movement. Iraqi and Syrian refugees also served pita bread, kebabs, and water to cleanup crews.

“We bought brooms and whatever tools we could buy. We just headed out into the streets, we didn’t even know where, and we said, ‘Do you need help?’” explained Hicham Nassif, who started the Broom Brigade with wife Julie Tegho, an anti-government organizer.

The couple divides time between their native Lebanon and the United States, where Nassif is an assistant professor of government at Claremont McKenna College. In the days following the explosion, their crew of 15 cleaned dozens of houses, helping elderly to find family photos among the rubble, clearing debris so people could sleep on their own floors.

“People are absolutely devastated by the absence of government help and its inability to prevent this disaster,” said Tegho. “They are angry, but also now they are ready for something new.”

The couple worry about the number of homes with structural damage. There’s no official inspection program, but engineers from the American University of Beirut have set up a hotline for residents to request an inspection by faculty members.

At St. Maroun Maronite Catholic Church, Father Richard Abi Salih apologizes for his damp T-shirt and obvious fatigue. His church is damaged from the blast, with windows out and the upstairs floors buckled where Abi Salih’s own apartment is.

Yet the church sits full of relief supplies—5-gallon water jugs, flour sacks, boxes of oil, and other food items.

A crew of 300 St. Maroun volunteers delivers food kits throughout Abi Salih’s diocese of 1,400 families.

Nearly every family has a gutted home in this area of Achrafieh, Abi Salih said, and 42 of his parishioners died. Over two days, he buried 38.

“How were you able to do that?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” he replied. “I don’t have an answer. I don’t have time to think, I am just doing:”

Abi Salih restarted Mass services—all livestreamed on Facebook—just days after the blast and tries to keep up with the needs of so many now homeless. Many have relocated, but some won’t leave. Maurice is one, a 70-year-old living alone. He refused an offer of shelter because he fears he will lose his apartment. So he sleeps on the street, and Abi Salih checks on him.

Having survived the explosion, many residents worry about losing their homes in the aftermath. Older buildings have some form of rent control, which may give landlords more incentive to sell the property than to fix it.

“It’s something to celebrate that so many are offering to shelter, feed, and restore these families, but it will take moving on from these early volunteers to the heavy lifting of actually rebuilding,” said Camille Melki, the Lebanese director of Heart for Lebanon, a U.S.-based charity that’s been working in Lebanon for 14 years. Melki believes a concerted effort by donor countries, NGOs, and churches will be needed to rebuild areas like Achrafieh. And that the rebuilding is essential to preserving Lebanon’s Christian community.

Melki sent out five crews to help with cleanup in the week after the blast but launched a campaign in late August to begin long-term repairs for Christian schools, damaged homes, and churches, including Mallouh’s Church of God.

To begin those long-range efforts, Melki and other area ministries held a prayer meeting with Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (its dorm facilities are housing displaced families while seminary classes are held online) on Aug. 14. About 40 pastors and ministry leaders gathered on campus to sing and pray. Hikmat Kashouh, senior pastor of Resurrection Church Beirut, said: “We come with a broken heart and a holy anger.”

Visit wng.org for a list of Christian organizations working in Beirut.
The apocalyptic internet movement QAnon is gaining followers by the thousands, and churches are being slow to respond

by Emily Belz

illustration by Jan Feindt

KELLY WOLFE had been dating her boyfriend since January, but it wasn’t until the pandemic hit that she found out he was deep into QAnon. The apocalyptic internet movement’s central tenet is that a secret Satanic cabal is running the world and using sex trafficking and other nefarious activities to preserve its power.

Wolfe’s boyfriend started talking to her about how 5G networks caused the coronavirus and how suspicious it was that Tom Hanks became a Greek citizen recently (QAnon followers allege he and many other celebrities are pedophiles). Wolfe sent him an article
from the Gospel Coalition that states how harmful slander and gossip from QAnon is to the church. He broke up with her.

More recently, she watched a Christian friend of hers dive deep into QAnon on social media over the course of a few weeks: The friend started by posting concerns about child trafficking (World Day Against Trafficking was back in July), then other friends responded by sending her posts and videos about QAnon. Before long she was posting more and more about Q and the “cabal” running the world: “She is almost militant about it now,” Wolfe said.

Wolfe and her boyfriend eventually reconciled and started dating again, and they have agreed to conversation boundaries about QAnon. But Wolfe is at a loss in knowing how to respond to such theories, and she knows of no Christian resources for it. She is not the only one.

In the pandemic lockdown, QAnon accounts exploded in popularity as people spent more time online. Many Christians have sunk so deeply into Q that it fills a lot of their conversations and most of their time online. Cult expert Steve Hassan said he is swamped with thousands of emails from family members concerned about their loved ones who are suddenly deep into QAnon.

Family members and friends of QAnon followers know and love them: They know what the backstory is that caused them to distrust the medical, political, or media establishments, and they understand why
QAnon is appealing. People I interviewed, like Kelly Wolfe, wanted to make sure their loved ones were portrayed with compassion and respect.

But they don’t know how to respond when someone slides off the plane of reality and then begins actively recruiting others into the movement or spreading misinformation online. And the church hasn’t provided any help.

Churches, pastors, and denominational groups I talked to had no resources or system for approaching this. Church elders might pull someone aside to talk about spreading misinformation online, but otherwise family members I talked to grasped for a few Christian articles or podcasts online that they could send to their relatives who are suddenly into Q.

“I used to appeal to sources, but the entire point is that he doesn’t believe the sources,” Wolfe said. So she has started trying to explore what “the thing under the thing” is that motivates his interest in QAnon: “Are you hating injustice or elitism?” Another idea she has is that he might find human suffering to be difficult to understand in the face of God’s sovereignty, so he “needs to assign a bigger, demonic dark force behind it.”

QAnon followers on one level can be people who are simply suspicious that the system is rigged in favor of elites or that the media isn’t reliable so they have to find their own information. But as they go deeper, Q followers spread conspiracy theories, such as that John F. Kennedy Jr. is still alive or that Mother Teresa was a child trafficker and Dr. Anthony Fauci is her son. Online posts of such false allegations often rest on the ubiquitous Q defense to “do your own research.”

The movement’s prophecies come from an anonymous account, Q, presumed to be someone high up in U.S. military intelligence who posts cryptic messages called “Q drops.” Q posts not just about military intelligence but also writes about rampant Satanism among celebrities and the “bloodletting of children” while quoting from the book of Revelation. Q and his followers emphasize symbolism, noticing, for example, when 17 boxes were sitting behind President Donald Trump in a particular press conference (Q is the 17th letter of the alphabet). According to QAnon, Trump is the one who will undo the elites’ plans.

Followers who consider themselves “digital soldiers” for the QAnon cause take the Q oath, a standard oath to defend the U.S. Constitution with the concluding line added from Q himself, “Where we go one, we go all.” Gen. Mike Flynn, Trump’s former national security adviser, recently posted a video of himself taking the Q oath. Followers take from the online world of Q what they want—some focus more on the military aspect of it, others the trafficking aspect—but the algorithms of social media amplify and reward the most radical posts.

SANDY STAAB is a Christian who lives on a ranch in north central Idaho. He watches QAnon YouTube channels like PrayingMedic, a big QAnon-evangelizing channel, and blogs about some of the ideas himself. While Staab says he doesn’t fully buy into QAnon, he tracks with its main ideas.

Staab was a University of California, Berkeley, graduate and a developer for Microsoft and in 1999 moved his family to Idaho to ride out Y2K on a ranch with its own power grid. Because of personal experiences, he has long distrusted the medical, political, and media establishments: In college a television reporter took a quote of his out of context to make him look bad, he’s seen corruption in both parties, and he felt doctors ignored alternative medicines that might have saved his mom when she died of lung can-
cer in the 1980s. Some parts of QAnon fit into his preexisting ideas about the world.

“His [Q’s] predictions of future events, though encoded, seem incredibly insightful,” said Staab. The QAnon movement has given him “hope and encouragement that there may actually be an alliance of patriots out there that are on our side” to stop the trend toward a totalitarian “world government.” Staab said the things he thinks are most important for society are to “tell the truth and keep your promises.”

Staab is part of an evangelical church in Idaho, but he thinks back fondly to a previous church he was part of locally that was like “the first-century church.” He explained why he’s not still there: “Y2K was the common point we all held, and it held us together till it didn’t happen.”

His 30-year-old son Jonathan Staab, a Christian who also lives in Idaho with his family, recalled that they grew up reading books like *Left Behind* and that his dad often reads the Apocrypha and Jewish apocalyptic literature. His dad believes the coronavirus pandemic was orchestrated by governments, Bill Gates, and others to control people. In fact, Q’s lack of posts about the coronavirus being part of a larger plan makes Sandy wonder whether Q might be “another distraction.” Jonathan’s mom—his parents are divorced now—has also been buying into QAnon more and more, and recently sent him an article about nanobots in vaccines.

Jonathan has many years of experience listening to and in some cases agreeing with his dad’s theories about the world, but they’ve had conflicts on such topics: One recent Easter he had to ask his dad to leave in the middle of an Easter egg hunt, and they didn’t speak for several months. They later reconciled, and Jonathan told him he disagreed with him but loved him.

“Just treating them like a person, someone you love, is the most important thing you can do,” he said. “If you dig down and listen hard enough, there’s something there. ... Every lie has some sort of truth built into it.”

He added that he didn’t know of any resources for anyone in a similar familial conflict. What he’s found in his experience is that his dad often covers his true fears and insecurities under the discussion about such ideas and a never-ending search for truth. His dad’s marriage is over, he’s facing charges over burning brush out of season, and he’s in financial difficulty. Sandy says he has lost money because of con artists; his son says he’s too trusting, so he gets into bad business relationships.
“He wants to argue with me about 5G. … I’ll say, ‘I want to talk about you,’ ” said Jonathan. “How are the cows on your property? How is your renter? Are you reading the Bible? I like it when you are around my kids because you’re a good grandpa.”

REV. BOB AND JUDY PARDON are some of the few Christian specialists nationally who do interventions and rehabilitation for people coming out of isolated, authoritarian groups that twist the Bible to their particular purposes. When law enforcement officers or family members need help with interventions for those in certain destructive groups, they call the Pardons.

Last year when I visited them at their recovery home, they told me that these splinter groups were proliferating across the country, but the groups were so small that no one had really noticed it. Many of these groups withdraw from the wider community, medical care, or the financial system—but as they told me at the time, nobody notices “until someone dies or there’s child abuse or a kidnapping.” Quoting cult expert Jan Karel Van Baalen, Pardon has called such groups “the unpaid bills of the church.”

Right now the Pardons have a man staying at their Massachusetts recovery facility, MeadowHaven, who was raised in a controlling Christian cult. The man is deeply into QAnon and believes Q followers are working to root out the “deep state.”

“This is not some kind of toothless individual from the backwoods who has no experience with the world,” said Pardon, who added the man is “highly educated.” However, he also believes in the theory about a government-funded research program (HAARP) controlling the weather and in the possibility of time travel.

When Pardon asked him about Q’s prophecies that haven’t come true—such as that Hillary Clinton’s arrest was imminent after Trump’s election—the man says Q gives misinformation to throw off “blackhats,” the agents of the deep state. “All very convenient,” said Pardon.

In QAnon, Pardon sees trademark “cult thinking,” where everything is black and white, good versus evil, but he wouldn’t call QAnon a cult because it doesn’t have the authoritarian structure he usually sees in his work. He thinks of it more as a movement that is “a sign of the times,” that people feel there is no solid place to stand.

“Whenever you have these kind of social upheavals, this stuff tends to rise to the surface,” said Pardon. He recalled that the 1970s saw an explosion of cults. “I myself do think there are powers of evil that are beyond what we see with our five senses … but on this plane of reality that we live in, it’s not always [black and white]. There are gray areas we can’t discern. We’re sinners.”

The Pardons have faced the deep darkness of cults: the Satanists, the child abusers, the murderers—all the types of destructive behavior that QAnon followers see themselves as fighting. What they’ve also seen over and over is the healing process, where people can begin to distinguish “what’s reality and what’s not,” Pardon said, as they slowly disengage from the cult community and reengage with their immediate relationships and the wider world.

For regular churches, he suggests bringing this up in adult education classes or Bible studies, where other current-event subjects might come up that don’t get to the pulpit. And he thinks pastors should address parishioners personally who are sharing slander.

Cult expert Steve Hassan, who sometimes works with the Pardons on interventions, recently did a session with a husband whose wife had gone deep into QAnon. He told them to start marriage counseling, and then asked the wife not to go on her Facebook groups for the time that they were working through it. She agreed.

For the man recovering at MeadowHaven, Pardon said, “If he gets more in touch with a healthier experience of his Christian beliefs, some of this will drop away. Not intentionally, but unintentionally, because his trust will be more in God being in control of all things. If you’re looking at this Biblically, we are to be on the alert [about apocalyptic things], but not to be so obsessed and focused that you’re forgetting everything else.”

“EVERY LIE HAS SOME SORT OF TRUTH BUILT INTO IT.”
SEVERAL WOMEN COMPLAIN
OF AGGRESSIVE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR
FROM YOUNG NORTH CAROLINA
CONGRESSIONAL CANDIDATE
MADISON CAWTHORN

by Harvest Prude
MADISON CAWTHORN, a 25-year-old Republican nominee, will become one of the youngest members of Congress in history if voters in western North Carolina elect him in November.

Political pundits have declared him the new face of the GOP, and the Republican Party leadership tapped him to speak at its national convention in August. He campaigns on a platform of conservative values and calls himself “pro-Trump, pro-life, and pro-Second Amendment.” His emphasis on “faith, family, and freedom” has so far resonated in his district: In a June primary, he bested his Trump-endorsed opponent, Lynda Bennett, in a race for the congressional seat of former Rep. Mark Meadows. Afterward, Cawthorn scored an Oval Office meeting with President Donald Trump.

Cawthorn, who turned 25 on Aug. 1, has no previous political experience and describes himself as a Christian. He also uses a wheelchair: A car accident when he was 18 left him paralyzed from the waist down. Despite the accident, he’s an athlete: His Instagram shows him lifting weights and working out. His campaign message is powerful: Having overcome personal tragedy, he can now challenge inside-the-Beltway politicians.

But is Cawthorn the great representative of family values his campaign indicates? Several women, citing his behavior toward them, say no. The women say Cawthorn exhibited sexually or verbally aggressive behavior toward them when they were teenagers.
Two women say he forcibly kissed them. One woman told me he grabbed her thigh and moved his hand an inch or two beneath her dress. WORLD has corroborated each woman’s account with at least one other individual.

I contacted Cawthorn’s campaign to ask about the women’s claims. Cawthorn’s campaign turned down my initial request to interview him and did not respond to three subsequent requests. The campaign did email me a statement addressing one woman’s claims.

THE FIRST INCIDENT, which occurred in 2014, became public on Aug. 13. Katrina Krulikas posted on Instagram a statement describing a date she had with Cawthorn when she was 17 and he was 19. During the date, she said, Cawthorn—who is now engaged—tried forcibly to kiss her, although she had rejected his earlier attempt to do so.

When I contacted Cawthorn’s campaign with questions about the incident, a spokesman replied that Cawthorn had previously reached out to Krulikas and “apologized if his attempt to kiss her when he was a teenager made her feel uncomfortable or unsafe.” The spokesman, John Hart, claimed Democrats were using Krulikas in a political attack on Cawthorn. That same week, Democrats and leftwing media accused Cawthorn of being a white supremacist because of the name of his real estate investment business, a trip he took to Adolf Hitler’s vacation retreat in 2017, and a symbol on his gun holster in a campaign photo (see photo on p. 52). But the accusations were over-the-top, and even the Anti-Defamation League downplayed them.

I interviewed Krulikas earlier in August—before her Instagram post—after learning about her claims. I also spoke with people to whom she described the incident before Cawthorn announced his run for Congress. I obtained screenshots of text messages in which Cawthorn confirmed some details about Krulikas’ account.

Krulikas was a high-school senior at the time of the fall 2014 incident in Asheville, N.C. She was part of the same Christian homeschool community as Cawthorn, and she described the community as one where parents organized activities such as sporting events, dances, and cooperative classes.

Nineteen-year-old Cawthorn was popular at the time. When he contacted Krulikas over social media, she says, she had no misgivings. She said Cawthorn told her she was pretty and complimented her green eyes. He asked her for a date. She agreed.

Krulikas says the date occurred on a cool fall day and that she had dressed warmly. She drove to meet Cawthorn at Biltmore Park—a town center with a movie theater, restaurants, stores, and businesses—at around 6:30 to 7 p.m. Cawthorn, who drove a handicap-accessible vehicle, invited Krulikas to get into his car, and the two rode together about 20 minutes away to a secluded field for a campfire.

Krulikas does not remember the exact location or many details of the drive because it was already dark. Here’s what she does remember: Once they arrived, Cawthorn lit the fire. She sat next to him in a chair he had brought for her. The date soon took an uncomfortable turn. He asked her a series of intimate questions: whether she had had sex, when she was planning to have sex, and why she hadn’t had sex. He asked her to sit on his lap. Krulikas tried to laugh the request off, but Cawthorn insisted, she said: “I felt pressured and unsure of how to say no.” She sat in his lap and felt tense and unsure of how to get out of the situation.

Krulikas says she was sheltered and naïve at the time: “Sex was just not something that I talked about often or really at all. ... I’m not sure I even knew anybody who was having sex because I was so sheltered at that point.” Here’s more of her recollection: Cawthorn tried to kiss her. She turned her head away. After an awkward moment, they continued talking. A few minutes later he tried again, this time grabbing her face: “He was much stronger than me.” As Cawthorn tried to kiss her on the mouth, Krulikas pulled away and attempted to jump out of his lap. While doing so, her hair, which reached midway down her back, caught in Cawthorn’s wheelchair: “I had to pull out some of my own hair just to free myself.” She describes herself as panicked. She remembers leaving a tangled chunk of her hair in his wheelchair.

Krulikas doesn’t remember how long the remainder of the date lasted and doesn’t remember Cawthorn saying anything during the drive back to her car. That night she texted a friend to say the date had gone horribly and left her feeling unsettled.

Since 2014, Krulikas said, she has not spoken to Cawthorn again about the
incident, but she told three Asheville-area friends about it. I interviewed two of them. They confirmed that Krulikas told them about the date with Cawthorn.

One, Lizbeth Sherill, a childhood friend of Krulikas, confirmed that Krulikas called her and told her about the date a few weeks after it occurred. A second, Madison Jamieson, learned about the incident while exchanging Instagram messages with Krulikas in August 2019. In one of the messages, which WORLD has seen, Krulikas told Jamieson he tried to “forcibly grab” her after she declined to kiss him.

Earlier this year, Sherill received a text message from Cawthorn’s campaign asking if she could count on her vote. Assuming it was an automated message, she texted back, saying she would not vote for Cawthorn because of what he had done to her friend.

Soon after, on Feb. 3, Krulikas received two texts from someone who identified himself as Madison Cawthorn. The texts said his campaign had heard from someone claiming Cawthorn had “sexually assaulted [my] friend Katrina in high school.”

The texts, which WORLD has viewed, added: “I remember you and I went on a date to that campfire years ago and I remember I asked if I could kiss you, you said no, but I thought you were just being coy and then I really quickly kissed you and that’s all I can remember. I can see in hindsight how that was over the line and I am sorry.”

While the texts described a quick kiss, Krulikas told me she doesn’t remember an actual kiss—only an attempted one. Krulikas said she didn’t respond to the messages and blocked the number. The apparent apology from Cawthorn, she said, struck her as insincere, coming after the launch of his campaign for Congress: “This message came six years after the fact, when … he faces the possibility of public scrutiny.”

John Hart, the campaign spokesman, said in a response to this account that voters in North Carolina should “process this unfounded allegation with common sense and grace. … This was one of Madison’s first dates after he was confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life. … When an anonymous person brought this matter to the campaign’s attention, Madison personally reached out to Katrina Aldona [Krulikas] and apologized if his attempt to kiss her when he was a teenager made her feel uncomfortable or unsafe. He was relieved when Ms. [Krulikas] shared that she does not feel like a victim. It’s unfortunate that she is now being used by Democrats to further their political agenda.”

Asked about the campaign’s response, Krulikas told me by text, “I have not been used/put up by any Democrats.” Krulikas has described herself on social media as a Democrat but says she no longer lives in Asheville and will not be voting for either Cawthorn or his opponent.

In her statement posted to Instagram, Krulikas said she did not feel like a victim, but that she was concerned that “while the media portrays Madison as a role model for Christian
values, my experience with him leads me to believe otherwise.”

**KRULIKAS ISN’T THE ONLY PERSON** who tells of sexual aggression.

Francesca McDaniel, who grew up in the same community as Cawthorn, describes a similar incident that occurred several months later, on May 29, 2015. She was at Biltmore Baptist Church in Arden, N.C., for her homeschool graduation ceremony. Cawthorn was the featured speaker for the ceremony.

McDaniel had a boyfriend at the time, and although he attended the ceremony, he left immediately after it following an awkward exchange with McDaniel’s father. Before his speech, McDaniel said, Cawthorn began sending her flirtatious Facebook messages complimenting her appearance. After a reception, Cawthorn—a friend of McDaniel’s brother—tagged along with her family to dinner at Papa’s & Beer, a Mexican restaurant about 10 minutes from Biltmore Baptist.

After the dinner, McDaniel planned to go to a friend’s house for a graduation party. Initially, her parents were going to drive her. Instead, McDaniel said, Cawthorn offered her a ride.

Here’s what McDaniel remembers: The friend’s house was a 15-minute drive away, but Cawthorn pulled onto the Blue Ridge Parkway and took what seemed to be a longer route. She asked, “Where are we going?” Cawthorn said he wanted to go stargazing. During the drive, he asked why she seemed not to like him. McDaniel responded, “I don’t like you because I think you’re a huge player.” He asked other personal questions: whether she was a virgin and why she was with her current boyfriend.

Here’s what else McDaniel remembers: He talked about his genitalia and said he could still have fun. Cawthorn pulled off the road and into the Walnut Cove Overlook on the parkway. He leaned toward her seat, reached for her face with both hands, pulled her in, and kissed her. McDaniel resisted: “No, I have a boyfriend.” Cawthorn persisted. He told her nobody had to know. He kissed her again. She pushed him away with two hands to his chest. She turned and tried to grab the passenger door handle. At that moment the lock snapped shut, but at the same time he assured her that they would head to the party.

McDaniel remembers him then leaning in for another kiss, putting one hand around her head and his other on her left thigh: “I felt, like, pressured to give in to it because he started being aggressive, and he is a strong guy. He had buff arms and worked out his upper body a lot.”

McDaniel says they kissed for perhaps one minute. Her nervousness did not subside. She told him she didn’t want her parents, who were strict, to learn she wasn’t at her friend’s house. They could track her location using the smartphone app Life360, and she told Cawthorn she needed to send them her location. At that point, she says, Cawthorn agreed they should leave and drove her to the party.

Before they reached the house, McDaniel remembers, Cawthorn asked to take her out again. She gave Cawthorn her number and had several text conversations with him: In one she expressed remorse because she felt the kiss constituted cheating. She did not go out with Cawthorn again and tried to avoid him after that.

McDaniel told childhood friend Julie Maxwell about the incident a few days after it happened. Maxwell remembers: “She was upset because he was forcefully—wasn’t letting her out of the car and he kept saying, no one would find out. She had a boyfriend at the time, she was freaking out.”

McDaniel agreed to share her story after reading Krulika’s Instagram post.
Patrick Henry College (Purcellville, Va.) in fall 2016 and stayed there for part of one academic year. He initially made a good impression on fellow students, many alumni told me. (I also attended PHC with some time overlapping with Cawthorn’s. But I did not know him personally.) At one point, while speaking to the student body during corporate chapel time, Cawthorn told of his accident and recovery and the lessons he had learned: “Whatever your gift is, I want to challenge you to take that gift to the ends of the earth for Christ and for liberty, to make His name known.”

But some students’ impressions soured. One PHC alumna said Cawthorn grabbed her thigh while the two talked in the school’s dining hall. WORLD is withholding the woman’s name because speaking to media would jeopardize her current job in the federal government.

The alumna was 19 years old at the time. Here’s what she remembers: She walked into the dining hall wearing a brown dress that hit around 6 inches above her knees. Cawthorn waved her over to his table. He asked her whether she thought one of her girlfriends would go out with him on a date. Suddenly Cawthorn placed his hand on her upper left leg near the hem of her dress: “His hand was on the side, and his fingers were on the back of my leg.”

She remembers nothing like that happening to her before at PHC: “Going to a Christian school—no one does stuff like that. ... He was talking to me and then he moved his hand up my skirt. Not significantly but enough to where it was under my skirt and not appropriate. ... It was in public where people could see. ... It was a super weird situation where we were talking about another girl that he liked, but he was touching me.” After that, she avoided him. She did not report the incident to school officials but told her roommate. The roommate confirms that.

“I do not know who Madison Cawthorn is today,” Katrina Krulikas said in her Instagram statement on Aug. 13. “But I do know how threatened and belittled he made me feel six years ago.”
Fostering changes

Trump administration efforts are starting to mend a foster care system that has been in crisis for years
by J.C. DERRICK
Trent Taylor’s earliest childhood memories involve trauma. His biological mother left him crying in a swing for hours. His parents regularly allowed an uncle to babysit, even after they knew he was sexually abusing Trent and his siblings.

After neighbors spotted 4-year-old Trent and his siblings digging through a trash can for food, the North Carolina Division of Social Services removed the children. Trent entered the foster care system—but the trauma didn’t stop. That’s partly because his older brother continued to abuse him sexually. It’s also because Trent spent the next five years in five homes.

“When a child floats around in the system for five years, it affects their ability to trust and attach to people,” Trent, now 19, says. “Every one of those moves is traumatic for the child.”

Trent’s biological family members fought legally to retain their rights, but they continually failed to meet court-appointed benchmarks. The court granted repeated extensions, but finally, in 2010, a Christian couple named Mac and Pam Taylor adopted Trent at the age of 9.

“It was an answer to prayers, that’s for sure,” said Trent, whose younger brother Michael was also adopted by the Taylors. Trent has since written two books and with his family runs a ministry to foster families called Watch Me Rise.

The nation’s foster care system has long been troubled. Each state administers its own program, and some—including Oregon, Texas, and West Virginia—are so broken that they’ve become entangled in years-long litigation. System neglect, poor oversight, and accusations of racism have led some to call for the abolition of the system.

Whatever government problems may exist, at least as many problems come from societal factors. The opioid epidemic has funneled more minors into state care (parental drug use was the cause of 34 percent of removals in 2019, but some experts believe the real number is higher), and the further breakdown of the two-parent home continues to wreak havoc (children living with their mother and a boyfriend are 11 times more likely to suffer abuse or neglect than children who live with their married parents). A shortage of eligible foster care parents is also a perpetual problem, leading some children to bounce around in group homes and even juvenile detention centers.

This complex stew of issues contributed to a steady rise in the number of children in foster care from 2012 to 2017—an increase nationally of roughly 45,000. Last year the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) reported a small decrease, and in August HHS reported a decline for fiscal 2019 from 435,000 to 424,000. That’s the fewest children in the foster care system since 2015.

Naomi Schaefer Riley, a senior fellow who focuses on child welfare issues for the American Enterprise Institute, cautions against reading too much into the numbers, because removal decisions can be based on external factors—such as the availability of foster care homes.

“The numbers may not be directly tied to how children are being treated in this country,” Riley said.

Still, fewer children in foster care is a good thing, and interviews with a range of child welfare advocates and policymakers revealed praise for the Trump administration’s efforts to make that happen—at both ends of the foster care system.

Spearheading the push is Lynn Johnson, a devout Catholic from Colorado with a long history in social work. She was active in state politics and spent a decade as executive director of Jefferson County Human Services (which includes part of Denver).

President Trump nominated Johnson in 2017 to become assistant secretary for the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at HHS, and the Senate finally confirmed her more than a year later. With a portfolio ranging from Head Start to the then-ongoing child separation crisis at the southern border, Johnson made foster care and adoption a top priority. Under Johnson, ACF has moved to eliminate red tape and pressure states to do the same.

“I’ve worked with ACF for a long time, and it’s not always easy to get them
to move on something,” said Joseph Ribsam, director of the New Hampshire Division of Children, Youth, and Families. “They approved our ‘foster care to 21’ program in a month.”

Last October, Johnson launched the All-In Foster Adoption Challenge, which aims to get some 125,000 children adopted out of the foster system by October 2020. To promote that effort, Johnson and her staff have met with all 50 governor’s offices—often with Johnson talking directly with governors—to emphasize the importance of eliminating barriers to adoption.

“There is not a single place that has said, ‘We don’t want to be all in for foster adoption,’” Johnson says. She specifically praises the work of Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey, Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards, Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine, and New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu—whose state has only 43 foster children available after adoptions tripled between 2016 and 2019.

Johnson’s message to governors also includes encouragement to seek out and work with faith-based groups—to find both foster care and adoptive homes. She says during the last decade she watched as faith-based groups in Colorado were defunded and boxed out due to their beliefs and the religious component of their programs.

“These kids just went on to the streets because no one else wanted to deal with them,” Johnson says. “By bringing nonprofits and faith-based together, we build a bigger team.”

Some of that team-building has occurred in concrete ways: Last year HHS issued a waiver for a South Carolina ministry with a long-standing commitment to work only with Protestant families, a policy that came into conflict with a nondiscrimination regulation the Obama administration enacted in its final days. This year HHS proposed a rule to remove that regulatory burden from all 50 states.

(A Catholic woman is suing the state and federal governments for allowing Miracle Hill Ministries to work only with people who share its Protestant beliefs.)
This fall the Supreme Court is scheduled to hear a case in which Catholic Social Services of Philadelphia is challenging the city’s right to cancel the agency’s contract because it will not place foster children with same-sex couples.

The Taylor family has felt the effects of Johnson’s effort to create a more friendly environment for faith-based organizations. “I have seen that change,” said Pam Taylor, Trent’s mother. She says the most important part of their ministry is the hope and healing found in Christ, but they had seen doors close if they included it in their work.

Earlier this year they changed their organizational structure to incorporate their Christian faith more clearly. “There are a few agencies I assumed would no longer work with us, but they were very, very willing,” Pam said.

The net result has been compelling: In addition to the number of children in foster care dropping, adoption numbers are rising. Foster care adoptions have consistently totaled 50,000-plus per year, but the last two years saw 63,000 and 66,000 adoptions—the highest numbers since data collection began in 1995.

“The degree of emphasis Assistant Secretary Johnson has put on adoption has been greater than her predecessors,” said Nate Bult, senior vice president for government affairs for Bethany Christian Services, the nation’s largest evangelical adoption agency. “It’s not that previous assistant secretaries were hostile, but Johnson has put it at the top of her agenda.”

IN JUNE, President Trump signed an executive order that does little now but encourages improved data collection about public-private partnerships, support for caregivers, keeping siblings together, and eliminating bureaucratic barriers to adoption. “The executive order is a long-term solution,” AEI’s Naomi Riley said. It also mandates a study of the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (which aimed to remove barriers to interracial adoption) and emphasizes the need for faith-based organizations. Nancy Kay Blackwell with the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute said the latter two objectives are directly related: “A lot of faith-based partners led the way in interracial placements and adoptions.”

Much of the order’s success will hinge on the better data collection it requires from states. Right now most states don’t know exactly how many foster families they have or the retention rate among the families they do have (between 30 percent and 50 percent of foster parents quit in the first year). Most states also don’t have a good profile of the most successful foster families, preventing them from launching targeted recruitment efforts. Most foster recruitment consists of a broad call for help.
using mediums such as TV, radio, and billboard ads. “The data is hugely important, because it can be used to do more targeted recruitment of potential families,” Riley said.

Even with better data, the challenges appear daunting. More than 120,000 children are waiting on a family to adopt them, and each year about 20,000 age out of the system with no permanent support—which makes them much more likely to experience a range of negative outcomes as young adults. Critics said the executive order did not provide “tangible supports” (i.e., funding for things like housing and day care) for low-income families or sufficiently address racial disparities in the foster care system: “The administration could achieve greater impact by researching front-end inequities—such as reporting and investigations—which could shrink the universe of youth considered for care,” the left-leaning First Focus on Children said in a statement.

But, undoubtedly, the biggest challenge is COVID-19 and its related fallout. Since March, child abuse hotline calls have plummeted, hospital reports of severe abuse cases have risen, and mandatory reporters (school counselors, pediatricians, etc.) have much less to report with fewer touch points with children. Perhaps worst of all, this month The New York Times reported many child welfare workers are not investigating incidents out of coronavirus fear.

“A 2018 reform bill sought to change that. The bipartisan Family First Prevention Services Act—which President Trump signed into law as part of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018—aims to fund more family supports that could prevent children from entering the foster care system. “We all know kids do better in the home,” New Hampshire’s Joseph Ribsam told me. “This is the first time the federal government recognized that and backed it up with resources.”

Full implementation of Family First was originally scheduled to occur this fall, but the law includes a cap on funding for group homes (“congregate care”) and a requirement that preventive services be evidence-based—two areas where compliance proved difficult. So far, 42 states have received extensions, while HHS has approved plans submitted by five states (Arkansas, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, and Utah) and the District of Columbia. Several other states and tribal jurisdictions have submitted plans for evaluation. —J.C.D.

**FAMILY FIRST**

Federal and state governments roughly split the cost of foster care, but most of that funding goes to help people already in the system. Of more than 2.5 million children who live with nonparent relatives, only about 5 percent are currently eligible to receive support.

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KAREN SWALLOW PRIOR, author of Fierce Convictions

Kaitlyn Schiess is a staff writer at Christ and Pop Culture and a ThM student at Dallas Theological Seminary. Her writing has appeared at Christianity Today, Relevant, and Fathom Magazine.

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ONE WEDNESDAY IN JULY, Jill Page chatted with three other women in the stuffy craft room of a church outside Philadelphia. Each woman wore a cloth mask and sat by herself at a table with a sewing machine and box of supplies. Over the whir of the machines and an electric fan, they talked about Houssei Bah’s plans to get married later that month and Cassandra Gruszka’s new job at UPS. Cassandra’s first shift was that night, and she was nervous. Page encouraged

SEWING BLESSINGS

Every Good Gift sells crafts while aiming to teach young mothers job skills, responsibility, and Bible lessons

by Charissa Koh
Page started Every Good Gift, a job training program for young moms, in 2015 after almost two decades in pro-life ministry. She has seen the women in the program build friendships, grow spiritually, and move on to full-time jobs and independent housing. But running the ministry almost single-handedly is draining, and knowing how best to help the women, who may lack education or life skills, takes patience and wisdom.

Every Good Gift makes and sells gift baskets, mug cozies, face masks, and other items. Typically, four women work from 9 a.m. to noon on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. On Mondays they have Bible study, and on Thursdays workshops—though currently due to the pandemic, Bible studies and workshops occur on Mondays via Zoom. The women sit at tables in the host church’s craft room and talk as they assemble products. Volunteers provide child care in a room across the hall. At the end of the work shift, everyone has lunch. The workshops focus on parenting and job skills, and Page brings in local pastors or church volunteers to lead Bible studies.

Employees, mostly single moms, come from all backgrounds: One was in foster care, a few lived in a shelter, and some have supportive families. Cassandra, 26, has two children, ages 5 and 2. She found Every Good Gift a couple of years ago through a Facebook group for moms. “I like it a lot,” she said. “Everyone is very helpful and friendly. You don’t get that at a lot of places. And the support is there.” She and her children live with her parents, and her daughter’s father helps with raising the children. Cassandra grew up going to church occasionally but through the Bible studies at Every Good Gift she has grown closer to God. Now she attends church with a friend.

Pastor Alonzo Johnson is a regular Bible study teacher. He grew up in a housing project in north Philadelphia, and when he heard about Page’s vision for Every Good Gift, he asked how he could help. Page asked him to join the board, and he did, though he prefers teaching the Bible studies over sitting in board meetings. “I do believe that Every Good Gift is addressing an issue that’s been long-standing, especially with minority moms,” he said. “How to do that in a way that doesn’t enable but truly helps ... is a learning curve for all of us.”

Page tries to hold the women to workplace standards of communication and punctuality. Between 7:30 and 8 a.m., each must text Page to confirm she is coming and bringing her children. If she doesn’t, Page demotes her to working as a substitute for a time. Sometimes she explains to the woman that such behavior would get her fired at a normal job, but that she gets another chance. Knowing when to show grace and when to enforce standards is hard, Page said, especially when women need the money. But without the challenge, they might not develop the skills to work full time and support their children when they leave.

So far, about 50 women have worked at Every Good Gift. Page works 50 hours a week, coordinating volunteers and employees, keeping track of supplies, and writing grants—all for no pay. “If I had known how hard it would be, I wouldn’t have done it,” Page said. “And there are blessings all along the way through the challenges.”

PREVIOUS PAGE: Houssei Bah
BELOW: Cassandra Gruszka
OVER A MILLION NONPROFITS USE Amazon.com’s charitable giving program, AmazonSmile, to collect donations. It’s not hard to see why: The online retail giant’s donate-while-you-shop function gave away over $100 million to enlisted charities in 2018.

AmazonSmile’s most popular recipients range the spectrum. They include Planned Parenthood and Human Rights Campaign but also Christian nonprofits such as Samaritan’s Purse and Compassion International. The latter each collected over $80,000.

But not all Christian charities have been welcome.

That’s because groups like Liberty Counsel, Family Research Council, and the American College of Pediatricians appear on the Southern Poverty Law Center’s hate list for opposing the LGBTQ activist agenda. According to AmazonSmile’s website, the program relies on SPLC data to identify charities that “engage in, support, encourage, or promote intolerance [or] hate.”

This summer, conservative politicians and groups pressured Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos to rethink how his company decides whom to ban from its charitable program.

In July, House Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., interrogated Bezos on AmazonSmile’s use of SPLC during Congressional tech antitrust hearings. Bezos said SPLC’s list was “not perfect, and I would like a better source if we could get it.”
Yet back in May, a conservative investor had already made that suggestion, introducing a resolution at Amazon’s annual shareholders meeting that would reconsider its reliance on SPLC. Bezos and Amazon board members opposed it, and shareholders subsequently voted it down.

Frank Wright says SPLC is wrong to paint his group, D. James Kennedy Ministries, as extremist for following Biblical views on marriage and sexuality, and he says Amazon is wrong for listening. Wright’s group was the first from the anti-LGBTQ hate list to sue Amazon and SPLC, and he believes AmazonSmile’s denial has cost him more than lost donations.

“We received letters and calls from donors, essentially asking: What’s wrong with you guys? When did you become haters?” Wright said via email. “Each donor we communicated with was satisfied by our explanation, but what about the donors or potential donors that never called or wrote to us?”

SPLC states on its website that “viewing being LGBTQ as unbiblical or simply opposing marriage equality does not qualify an organization to be listed as an anti-LGBTQ hate group.”

However, recipients of SPLC’s anti-LGBTQ designation told me the Alabama-based organization has never told them how they got on the list—or how to get off.

They further contend SPLC is superfluous because Amazon already filters hate groups out from legitimate charities by requiring all applicants to prove tax-exempt status. In IRS terms, this means groups must annually file under a 501(c)(3) designation.

“Amazon doesn’t need the SPLC to tell them that the KKK is a hate group, and KKK wouldn’t qualify for AmazonSmile anyway because it doesn’t have 501(c)(3) status,” said Jeremy Tedesco, senior counsel at Alliance Defending Freedom, the Arizona-based legal advocacy group that received SPLC hate group designation in 2016. Amazon booted Alliance Defending Freedom from AmazonSmile in 2018.

That same year, SPLC collected $37,379 from AmazonSmile.
became strained or impossible across parts of Africa and Asia. Closed borders and limited travel disrupted humanitarian shipments. During the early months of the pandemic, UNICEF reported low- and middle-income nations had seen a 30 percent decrease in “essential nutrition services”—or even 75 percent to 100 percent during lockdown scenarios.

Among the 100,000 families that the Christian aid group Compassion International serves in Burkina Faso, 30,000 are at high risk for malnutrition and starvation. That’s up from 3,000 to 5,000 last year. Kiemtore says lockdown restrictions are a major factor in that increase. “We had to move much of our intervention into a relief mode, instead of what we’ve previously been doing, like teaching,” he said. “We are focusing on child protection, on healthcare, on food.”

In July, medical journal The Lancet published a troubling report calling attention to skyrocketing child malnutrition. “Some of the strategies to respond to COVID-19—including physical distancing, school closures, trade restrictions, and country lockdowns—are impacting food systems,” the report warned. Researchers predict wasting among children under age 5 globally will increase 14 percent, and the UN anticipates an increase of 10,000 child deaths per month during pandemic restrictions.

The UN has requested $2.4 billion to provide emergency nutrition to children in need. According to the Lancet report, 4 out of 5 of the affected children live in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Parts of Africa and Asia are also beset by devastating locust swarms this year.

In South Sudan, 7.5 million people depend on food aid. Before the pandemic, World Vision was a partner in school feeding programs that served 200,000 children. “That’s the main meal they would get per day,” said Dr. Mesfin Loha, World Vision’s national director in South Sudan. When schools closed in early April, the meal program was forced to end. The World Food Program and the Minister of Education began negotiations to implement take-home rations, but Loha said it took two to three months for the new program to be approved.

In March, India’s lockdowns trapped many of the nation’s 160 million migrant workers in large cities. Public transportation shut down. Daily wage earners have ration cards only in their home states, so millions set out for home by foot, often carrying children.

Vanaja Hyd, a journalist who lives in Hyderabad, joined a WhatsApp group of professionals who organized to help the migrants. “We have seen people who walked along with their children for hundreds of miles without food. Some of them said they had walked 50 miles without water. Nobody cared for them,” she said. “We have seen so many little children waiting in the street for food.”

Local governments, fearing that the incoming migrants might carry infection, sometimes met them with chlorine sprays.

India has seen 2 million COVID-19 infections and recently surpassed 40,000 deaths. In several Indian states, officials have denied deaths by starvation, but reports to the contrary circulate widely. Stories of migrant mothers killing their children and committing suicide have gone viral on Indian social media. An independent group of developers and academics in Bangalore had identified nearly 1,000 reports of lockdown-related deaths in local media by the beginning of July. The leading causes of death were starvation and accidents during migration, followed by suicide and inability to access medical care.

“Lockdowns have massive costs,” says Jay Richards, a senior fellow at the Seattle-based Discovery Institute and co-author of the upcoming book The Price of Panic. Richards cites the spread of tuberculosis during the pandemic as well as missed cancer screenings and increased addictions globally: “Too many authorities and scientific officials advising the government treated COVID-19 as a one-sided risk.”

In a May report, representatives from the Red Cross, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and others cautioned against blanket shutdown policies. Speaking of those “affected by humanitarian crises,” the report warned that the COVID-19 prevention measures used by developed nations could be “potentially harmful to the survival” of people in poorer countries.
Finding nontraditional morality in Brooklyn

It’s good to be needed. So I drove to Brooklyn to help a sleep-deprived couple with a baby. My job included daily walks to Prospect Park.

People in Brooklyn are afraid of the coronavirus, but I was more concerned with catching a stray bullet than a disease. In college I had a friend whose aunt lived in New York City, and she would walk home from work one foot on the curbstone and one in the gutter so the bad guys would leave her alone. That’s before Rudolph Giuliani cleaned house. Hers is my age group now, but old age and feigning mental illness are no deterrence from attack in these times, I am thinking as I push the pram.

On night 70 of Portland’s “mostly peaceful protests,” youths hurling rocks and glass bottles at police to administer social justice to the East Precinct station were met by a pair of white-haired women pleading for calm. For their troubles one was circled with yellow tape and splattered with paint by a young man twice her size. Others laughed, and a female yelled out, “This isn’t your world anymore!” while another called her the B-word.

The young female spoke truly. It isn’t that old woman’s world anymore. Nor mine. So though I tried to make myself look elderly and an uninteresting target (I haven’t colored my gray roots since January) while proceeding up Washington Avenue to Grand Army Plaza, I kept eyes out on both sides of my head.

Of course, that’s no guarantee either. I’ve seen the street surveillance videos of the 92-year-old woman pushed to the ground by a young male stranger passing her on a sidewalk in Gramercy Park in Manhattan; and of the 80-year-old man yanked to the pavement by a young male stranger in Bedford Park, the Bronx.

Camus’ lawyer character, Clamence, in the novel La Chute, having come to realize he is a hypocrite and all his righteousness as filthy rags, figures he may as well go whole hog and contemplates “jostling the blind on the street.”

Thus does absence of God beget random violence. Clamence continues in his meditation on the weak and defenseless pedestrian: “From the secret, unexpected joy this gave me, I recognize how much a part of my soul loathed them; I planned to puncture the tires of wheelchairs, to go and shout ‘lousy proletarian!’ under the scaffoldings where laborers were working, to smash infants in the subway.”

It is not as if he has no more morality; it is rather that he’s swapped the old one for a new one.

In an English tavern in 1763 a conversation between the 18th-century man of letters Samuel Johnson and his biographer James Boswell comes around to Boswell’s mention of “an impudent fellow from Scotland who affected to be a savage, and railed against all established systems.” Johnson’s comment is that such people are mere attention seekers—but on the off chance that the Scotsman is a sincere iconoclast and not just a poseur, Johnson says: “If he does really think that there is no distinction between virtue and vice, why, Sir, when he leaves our houses let us count our spoons.”

Back on Washington Avenue with my grandson in tow I am thinking about all the nontraditional morality swirling around me—women holding hands with women; rainbow flags that no longer refer to God’s promise to Noah; the magnificent 50-foot entry portico to the central branch of the Brooklyn library, its bronze doors flanked by two enormous limestone pylons adorned with gilded relief carvings depicting the arts (the southern pillar) and science (northern pillar)—and placed above the portico in towering letters: “B-L-M.” One window on the south side bears a large sign with a saying by Bayard Rustin: “I believe in social dislocation and creative trouble.”

If you believe that too, I will count the silver when you leave my house, and walk my baby stroller near you with a touch of fear and trembling.
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Happy Grandparents Day

Thanks and honor due

The First Sunday after Labor Day is National Grandparents Day, which has its own official flower: the forget-me-not. If your grandparents are still alive, have you thanked them? If they’re deceased, do you honor them?

I haven’t honored my maternal grandfather, Robert Green. He sometimes treated his six children brutally, but he did go through great hardships in the Russian army in 1902: He deserted in 1903, evaded arrest, and somehow got across Europe and made it to Liverpool, England. There he bought the cheapest ticket on an ocean liner, one entitling him to floor space in the ship’s hold.

He slept alongside hundreds of others amid—according to a report of the U.S. Immigration Commission—“the unattended vomit of the seasick, the odors of not-too-clean bodies, the reek of food, and the awful stench of the nearby toilet rooms.”

After arriving in Boston on Dec. 3, 1903, Robert Green first lived in a North Boston three-story tenement. Almost all single men were boarders and lived in two-bedroom apartments. Typically, a husband, wife, and children slept in one room, with two boarders sharing a thin and dirty straw mattress—often loaded with lice, fleas, and bedbugs—on the floor of the second bedroom.

The kitchen was the most-used room: It had the only sink, so everyone washed there. The landlady used it to wash her family’s and the boarders’ laundry. One toilet in the hall typically served the four families on one floor plus eight boarders who ate herring, pea or barley soup, and maybe a plum or pickle, chased down by a glass of beer. Breakfast was typically black bread and coffee, usually consumed while standing.

Thus fortified, Robert Green passed by shopkeepers in their doorways and Italian organ-grinders on the street, on the way to following a business plan he had probably developed while lying awake at night on that uncomfortable mattress: Wouldn’t families and boarders sleep better and be happier if he fumigated and restuffed old ones?

He went door-to-door, sometimes carrying four mattresses at a time on his strong back and—16-hour day by 16-hour day—receiving pay from satisfied customers when he returned them. He eventually moved up to a pushcart, then to a wagon drawn by a horse with three legs, and then to a four-legged one.

Mattress by mattress, Robert Green went from peddling used ones, to making new ones, to starting his own company and opening up a furniture store in East Boston. He survived a fire in 1934 that almost killed him and a daughter. He employed his own children and African Americans as well. He never forgot his start: In 1956, after a half century of work, he still supervised the restuffing of mattresses at $8 each, the equivalent of $76 now.

Robert Green’s final material accomplishment in the 1960s was the purchase of a new lime-green Mercury. He never learned how to drive, and no one else drove it: The beautiful car sat in front of his house, showing all that he had arrived. But the real trophies were his grandchildren: dentist, psychologist, lawyer, computer programmer, editor, and more.
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