OVERWHELMED
A ground-level look at the U.S. border emergency

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In those days ten men from all the nations will grasp the garment of a Jew, saying, «Let us go with you...» (Zech. 8:23)
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ON THE COVER: Central American migrants hesitate as others climb the Mexico-U.S. border fence in Tijuana, Mexico; photo by Guillermo Arias/AFP/Getty Images
Notes from the CEO

I use this space to update you on important WORLD-related news. As I write this, the important news on my mind is the result of our internal NCAA men’s basketball tournament “bracket challenge.” This cannot wait.

For those of you who may not have been paying attention, the University of Virginia beat Texas Tech in the championship game. Here’s how unlikely that matchup was: It was the first time in 40 years that two teams met in their first-ever trip to the championship game. The last time it happened was in 1979, when Magic Johnson’s Michigan State team beat Larry Bird’s Indiana State team.

Nationally, according to ESPN stats, about 8 percent of all brackets picked Virginia to win it all. That represents the lowest percentage among the four top seeds. Five of our colleagues here picked long-shot Virginia to win, and the same five took the top five spots in our bracket challenge.

I feel compelled to note that all five of those employees work in the Asheville home office. Of those outside the office, WORLD Magazine editor Tim Lamer had the best bracket, good enough for sixth place overall. He made the mistake of picking Duke to win it all. That’s hard for a Kansas guy to do, and he’s probably wishing he had picked differently now.

Our overall winner was Danielle Builta, a design and production assistant at God’s World News. Danielle not only had the best bracket in our challenge, but her bracket was better than 98.4 percent of all brackets submitted nationally. She will not reveal her selection methods.

We also give a prize to the worst bracket in our group. Alison Foley, a member of our IT team, will proudly display the coveted “plunger” award in her office for the coming year. She picked Abilene Christian to win the championship. If I didn’t know better, I’d say she was trying to lose.

All right. Now back to work!
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When I argue, as I have in this space for the last 25 years, that we evangelical Christians should seek to codify just as little of God’s law as possible, it’s easy to be misunderstood. So let me clarify.

I start with two main assumptions—one about God, and the other about human government.

Concerning God, we assume (because the Bible tells us so) that His main method of bringing human beings into compliance with His law is through the gracious work of His Spirit.

Concerning human government, I assume (both from the Bible and from our experience throughout history) that efforts to micromanage human behavior through public law tend to end up in messy disaster.

Even when Israel was a literal theocracy and God was governing several million of His people directly as a nation and a civil entity, He had an impressively skinny book of laws. Put your fingers around the entirety of the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, and you’ll find a swatch of printing not a whole lot bigger than Medicare’s annual directory of updates. I’m not ignoring the possibility that Israel’s judges may have started to accumulate a few interpretive tablets on the side—but it’s noteworthy that a nation about the size and population of Pennsylvania seems to have run itself pretty well with this slender constitution. Wise judges could take the basics and make things work.

Indeed, this minimal code of civil legislation is clearly based on the much more concise statement of God’s laws in the Ten Commandments. And then Jesus stressed this point of simplicity by compressing those 10 rules down to just two!

But human beings have developed an ironic habit. As they discover that they can neither keep God’s laws and patterns for life nor even appreciate the beauty of them, they respond by multiplying and amending those laws ad infinitum. People mistakenly suppose that God’s law is too broad and too vague, so they refine and correct and footnote and clarify until what started as a fairly digestible code becomes so many roomfuls of heavy volumes—at which point no citizen, however dutiful, can any longer know for sure whether he or she is really law-abiding. Even well-intended laws become mischief-makers.

Laws governing so-called “hate crimes” have in recent years become a prime example. Even assuming the good intentions of their proponents, such laws have snarled our courts and launched us into orbits from which there seems to be no return.

Micromanagement of the tax code is another telling example. Efforts at fairness have produced a system so complex that it was all but impossible for you, two weeks ago, to submit an IRS return you were sure was accurate.

So, given our human record at trying to correct things by passing all the right laws, there’s little room for optimism. Every time we try it, we botch it instead.

Some people say that’s only because we’ve passed so many bad laws. If we could only get to the place where wise legislators prevailed! So are you encouraged on that front? Have you looked up and down the lineup of candidates likely to offer their services in the big election 19 months from now—and then responded by saying that things will be different this time? If only!

If we were really good—in our own homes and churches and schools—at enacting and then administering the laws and Biblical standards we believe in, maybe we’d do better when we ask the rest of society to join us. But our very fallenness as human beings makes it an incredible challenge for us first to adopt and then to administer God’s good laws in our own lives. Indeed, if we were really good at that, or even potentially good at it, we wouldn’t need God’s grace. We wouldn’t need the gift and work of a Redeemer like Jesus.

But WORLD Magazine, WORLD Digital, WORLD Radio, our readers, our listeners, and all the broken culture around us desperately need that Redeemer. Even if we win a few strategic electoral races in the next few months, and even if we can point to a few dozen legislative victories in statehouses on key issues across the country, we’ll never lean on that political process. We’ll remember instead that it’s “not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the Lord.
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— Ginger & Tony, Samaritan members since 2014

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Twenty-five years later
A mourner in Kigali, Rwanda, participates in an April 7 vigil as part of the 25th anniversary commemoration of the Rwandan Genocide. In 1994, Hutu militias in the country killed an estimated 800,000 Rwandans, most of them minority Tutsis.

YASUYOSHI CHIBA/AFP/Getty Images
Like many spots in the South, springtime in Georgia sings: The azaleas bloom, the dogwoods burst, and the acres of sprawling peach orchards stand hopeful against the threat of a late-spring freeze.

But as springtime unfurled in early April, a few other threats stalked the Peach State. They didn’t come from the cast of faux zombies filming *The Walking Dead* in the small town of Senoia, Ga., but they did come from another set of performers.

Television star and activist Alyssa Milano marshaled at least 50 fellow actors to threaten an acting boycott of productions filmed in Georgia. The trigger point: if Republican Gov. Brian Kemp signed legislation outlawing abortion after an unborn baby’s heart—beat could be detected.

Milano posted the demand letter to Georgia Republicans: “We can’t imagine being elected officials who had to say to their constituents, ‘I enacted a law that was so evil, it chased billions of dollars out of our state’s economy.’ It’s not the most effective campaign slogan, but rest assured, we’ll make it yours should it come to pass.”

Two days later, the Georgia House passed the bill. The pro-life governor has until May 12 to sign the bill into law, and Kemp told *The Atlanta-Journal Constitution* he can’t govern based on a fear of “what someone in Hollywood thinks about me.”

Not everyone in the film business thinks poorly of protecting the unborn: Ashley Bratcher, a Georgia resident and star of the newly released film *Unplanned,* penned a response to Milano: “In Georgia, we care just as much about being pro-life as being pro-film.”

In the first two weeks of April, moviegoers across the United States showed they were pro-film when it came to *Unplanned*—a movie depicting Abby Johnson’s unexpected transformation from an abortion worker to a pro-life advocate.

Despite an advertising blackout by television networks like the Hallmark Channel and Lifetime, the movie hauled in some $9.3 million from domestic audiences in its opening week. That was fourth place nationwide, trailing only behind *Dumbo, Us,* and *Captain Marvel.*

With the abortion rate at its lowest since *Roe v. Wade,* it’s a marvel that Democratic politicians don’t rethink their unyielding devotion to being a monolithic pro-abortion party.

Former Democratic President Jimmy Carter—a Georgia native—has said he thinks Democrats should abandon their staunch pro-abortion plank. In early April, John Fea, an author and a history professor at Messiah College, wrote that he thinks there are plenty of pro-life Democrats who agree with Carter. But Fea thinks they won’t speak out because—among other reasons—they don’t want to be ostracized by the party or perceived as opposing women’s rights.

At least one prominent Democrat has another set of worries related to the treatment of women: Former Vice President Joe Biden appeared on the verge of announcing a presidential bid when a former Nevada legislator complained he had “inhaled” her hair and kissed the back of her head during a 2014 presidential campaign appearance.

Biden, a politician well known for openly showing physician affection, on April 3 denied any inappropriate intentions—or even remembering the incident—but he promised to be more careful in the future. (I remember a 2008 presidential campaign stop when Biden flung his arm around me before realizing I was a journalist. I sensed nothing awry about it, but offering women personal space isn’t a bad idea.)

Still, as Biden seeks to reassure voters of his innocence, he may find it difficult to meet the standards he helped set.

KC Johnson, a history professor at Brooklyn College, wrote a column noting that Biden had helped champion Obama-era policy undercutting due process for students accused of sexual assault on college campuses. The Title IX changes weakened basic standards like the presumption of innocence and the right to cross-examine an accuser.

When current Education Secretary Betsy DeVos moved to restore basic protections in 2017, Biden called those who agreed with her “culturally Neanderthals.” In his column, Johnson noted this leaves Biden in the position of “demanding that he receive the benefit of the doubt that he denied to others.”

As Democrats watched their field of presidential hopefuls expand despite...
Biden’s troubles, President Donald Trump watched his Cabinet shrink: On April 7, Kirstjen Nielsen resigned her post as secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (see p. 12).

The move came as Trump continued to grapple with an influx of migrants seeking to cross the U.S. border.

The president appeared to back off his threats to close the southern border, as secure-border allies like Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, warned that closing it would be disastrous for U.S. trade with Mexico: “The answer is not to punish those who are crossing the border legally.”

Farther south, the border remained closed between Venezuela and Colombia in the heavily trafficked border town of Cúcuta. Three months after legislator Juan Guaidó took the oath of presidency, Venezuelan dictator Nicolás Maduro clung to power.

Meanwhile, Venezuelans continued to stagger under the near-daily loss of electrical power in major cities, as the nation’s neglected grid failed. Maduro announced electricity rationing while workers labored to make repairs—a process one official estimated could take at least a year to complete.

Venezuelans are accustomed to rations—grocery shelves are largely barren—but losing electricity heightens the misery. It’s impossible to know how long the political standoff will continue, but until then, South America’s once-richest nation continues its alarming freefall.

Whatever Maduro’s plans, failing to protect his citizens’ freedoms by pursuing an intensely self-serving form of socialism made the collapse inevitable. It’s another extreme example of how some of the worst-laid plans can bring the worst results.

Still, springtime brings the much-needed reminder that a sovereign God can turn man’s worst plans into man’s greatest good. The resurrection of Christ that Christians celebrate every Sunday—and especially at Easter—points back to a cross that sinful men intended to be the end of the Savior they refused to recognize.

But in the most glorious way possible, what man intended for evil, God meant for good. ©
Resigned
Kirstjen Nielsen resigned as secretary of the Department of Homeland Security on April 7, and President Donald Trump named Kevin McAleenan, previously the U.S. Customs and Border Protection commissioner, as acting secretary of the department. Nielsen faced criticism for the department’s family separation policy from April to June 2018, a policy DHS enacted to enforce Trump’s requirement to prosecute anyone entering the country illegally. Illegal immigration rates have surged in recent months, and Nielsen wrote to Congress in March that “DHS facilities are overflowing, agents and officers are stretched too thin.” She said that in February, border agents apprehended 75,000 migrants and expected to apprehend 100,000 in April, the highest numbers in more than a decade.

Pledged
Actress Felicity Huffman and a dozen other wealthy parents agreed to plead guilty in a college admissions cheating scam involving some of the nation’s top universities. In March, prosecutors charged Huffman and other parents in a scheme to rig standardized test scores and bribe coaches at prestigious schools, including Yale and Georgetown universities. Huffman, 56, will plead guilty to conspiracy to commit mail fraud and other crimes, punishable by up to 20 years in prison. The plea agreement indicates prosecutors will seek a sentence of four to 10 months. Actress Lori Loughlin and her husband, fashion designer Mossimo Giannulli, were charged in the scandal but were not among those who agreed to plead guilty.

Repealed
Mormon officials on April 4 announced the repeal of a 2018 rule that banned baptizing the children of LGBT parents and made same-sex marriage a sin that could lead to expulsion. The group maintains its doctrinal support of marriage as between one man and one woman and still considers homosexual relationships a “serious transgression,” the religion’s highest leadership group said in a statement. But members who identify as homosexual, bisexual, or transgender can now have their children baptized as Mormon as long as they acknowledge children will be taught the religion’s official stance.

Denied
Chaplains may no longer accompany condemned prisoners into the execution chamber in Texas but may watch only from a viewing room. The state made the change after the U.S. Supreme Court granted a stay of execution to Buddhist inmate Patrick Henry Murphy. The inmate had requested a Buddhist chaplain to accompany him, but only Christian and Muslim chaplains who had gone through the extensive vetting process Texas required for chaplains were available when Murphy was scheduled for execution in March. Luke Goodrich, legal counsel with the religious liberty defense firm Becket, called Texas’ new chaplain rule a “problematic example of ‘leveling down.’” When a Buddhist asked for the same rights as Christians and Muslims, “instead of leveling up and broadening the accommodation for the Buddhist, the government has leveled down and eliminated the accommodation for everybody.”

Designated
President Donald Trump announced he will designate the elite Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps as a “foreign terrorist organization,” the first time the United States has given the label to a foreign government entity. The Revolutionary Guard, directly controlled by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, acts as a domestic paramilitary force for the Islamic regime. The designation will freeze the organization’s assets and prohibit Americans from doing business with the group. Anyone who has supported the Revolutionary Guard could be deported from the United States or barred from entering. The move is the latest action by the United States against the Islamic regime. In May 2018, the Trump administration withdrew from a global nuclear pact with Iran and later reimposed sanctions on the country.

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Quotables

‘It’s bad for business.’

Democrat Stacey Abrams, unsuccessful candidate for governor of Georgia in 2018, on the Georgia bill that would ban abortion of babies with a detectable heartbeat. She called the bill “abominable” and “evil.”

‘We will persist, and we will not give up.’

Law professor Benny Tai, a leader in Hong Kong’s pro-democracy Umbrella Movement demonstrations, speaking to supporters on April 9 as a Hong Kong court convicted him and eight fellow activists of “public nuisance” crimes.

‘It’s a tsunami here and we’re drowning.’

Baltimore Councilwoman Mary Pat Clarke, calling on Baltimore Mayor Catherine Pugh to resign after a Baltimore Sun investigation into possibly improper purchases of Pugh’s book by those getting city deals. Baltimore city government has dealt with a series of high-level corruption scandals in the last several years.

‘Yet here we are, with the council of a city named for a Catholic saint singling out a fast-food restaurant ... because the owners gave money to religious organizations that share the Catholic Church’s view of marriage.... What an amazingly stupid time to be alive.’

Peter Kirsanow, commissioner with the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, in a letter to the San Antonio City Council and mayor and Texas Gov. Greg Abbott regarding the city’s “bigoted virtue-signaling” in banning Chick-fil-A from the city’s airport concessionaire contract.

‘I’m a member of the straight-arm club.’

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., on her practice of keeping people at a literal arm’s length. Her comments came as multiple women accused former Vice President Joe Biden of improper touching that made them uncomfortable. She added, “To say ‘I’m sorry that you were offended’ is not an apology.”

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Flying solo

Skirmantas Strimaitis didn’t have any problem finding a seat on a March 16 flight from Vilnius, Lithuania, to Bergamo, Italy. The reason: He was the only passenger on the 188-seat airplane. A travel agency had reportedly chartered the Boeing 737-800 to fly a group from Italy to Vilnius, and the airline sold one-way tickets for the return trip. Strimaitis, going to northern Italy for a ski trip, was the only person to buy one. The plane’s crew reportedly outnumbered him seven to one. The two-hour-plus flight was, he told The Associated Press, “a once in the lifetime experience.”

Antarctica or bust

Flat-earthers may have something to talk about after a 2020 cruise returns to port. The Flat Earth International Conference announced it is organizing a cruise to Antarctica next year to prove the flatness of the Earth. Conspiracists who doubt the Earth is globe-shaped believe Antarctica lies at the edges of a flat, disk-like Earth forming an ice wall to prevent water from running over the edge. But sailing away from port and observing land fall below the horizon may pose a challenge for the passengers’ theories.

Elevated worries

A new elevator button inside the California Department of Tax and Fee Administration has state workers worried. In March, elevators in the Sacramento, Calif., building were retrofitted with a “RIOT” button placed above the normal floor selection buttons. According to state employees who work in the building, no one in California’s government explained the meaning or purpose of the new fixture, leading workers to speculate about building security. According to a State Department of General Services spokesman, the buttons were installed to indicate to passengers the elevators would not be descending to the ground level. The spokesman said the button reflected a new security protocol designed to secure the building in the event of a riot.

Caught in a can

A skunk in Billerica, Mass., apparently thought this Bud was for him. Animal control officers posted a photo on Twitter of a skunk that somehow got its head stuck in a beer can, saying the skunk “gives a new definition to the saying ‘skunked beer.’” They took the skunk to the Tufts Wildlife Clinic in North Grafton, Mass., where clinic workers planned to sedate the skunk, remove the can, and then monitor the skunk for a few days to make sure it could return to the wild.

Spring fever

Bottled water maker Nestlé is heading to court to defend itself against a litigant claiming the company’s spring water doesn’t come from a spring. U.S. District Judge Jeffrey Alker Meyer is allowing the case to proceed in his New Haven, Conn., courtroom despite a protest from Nestlé that the charge is frivolous. Lawyers for the plaintiffs say Nestlé has defrauded the public by billing its Poland Spring water as natural spring water. According to the plaintiffs, the nearly 1 billion gallons of Poland Spring water produced every year is just regular ground water, and they noted that the actual Poland Spring in Maine hasn’t produced bottled water in 50 years.
Taking the long way
Passengers expecting to fly from London to Düsseldorf, Germany, on March 25 required an explanation from British Airways after their flight mistakenly landed in Edinburgh, Scotland. According to the airline, an incorrect flight plan led the pilots to believe they were supposed to fly north to the Scottish city rather than east to Germany. The pilots discovered the error when passengers complained after landing in Edinburgh. British Airways said the plane was quickly refueled and flown directly to the intended destination, causing a delay of more than three hours.

Supreme approval
Good news for amphibious hunters in Alaska: Hunting from a hovercraft received approval from the United States’ highest court. In a unanimous decision announced March 26, the Supreme Court overturned a National Park Service decision that had barred an Alaska man from hunting moose from a hovercraft. Writing for the majority, Justice Elena Kagan wrote that the Park Service could not enforce its bans on Alaska’s Nation River, where John Sturgeon had been hunting, because the river is not public land. According to Kagan, the ruling “means Sturgeon can again rev up his hovercraft in search of moose.”

As good as their word
When Vincent Browning learned about Petco’s policy that “all leashed pets are welcome” at stores, he decided to test it. On March 18, Browning gingerly led his massive African Watusi steer named Oliver into the Petco store in Humble, Texas, to see if staff stood by the policy. Watusi cattle typically weigh 1,300 pounds. “They welcomed Oliver with open arms,” Browning wrote on his Facebook page. “The staff members here are always super friendly and courteous to us.” Inside the store, employees quickly moved to pet the animal and pose for photographs with its massive set of horns.

Coastal cat
For nearly 40 years, residents along France’s Brittany coast have been picking novelty Garfield telephones from off their beach. The problem began in the early 1980s when orange phones designed to look like the famous cartoon character began washing ashore now and again. It may have at first seemed to be a prank, but after 35 years volunteers with an anti-litter group named Ar Vilantsou decided to find the source of the now-vintage Garfield phones. In late March, the anti-litter campaigners solved the mystery: a lost shipping container broken open inside a sea cave accessible only during low tide. The container remains out of reach, however, meaning the Garfield phones will likely continue appearing on French coasts.
The luxury liner was steaming through a calm, star-studded night when it happened. Fast asleep after days of rough weather and turbid fog, passengers were thrown from their beds by a violent shuddering and noise like an explosion. The prow of an iron-hulled sailing vessel had rammed them amidships and split the hull. Passengers who were not killed in the crash crowded the deck and swarmed the lifeboats. Many were crushed under the collapsing mainmast.

A young mother from Chicago clutched her 2-year-old daughter and tried to keep her other three girls close. “Don't be afraid,” little Annie told her. “The sea is His and He made it.” Within minutes the ship rolled over, spilling the family into the sea. The mother clutched frantically as her baby was torn out of her arms.

A few days later, she telegraphed her husband from Wales: “Saved alone. What shall I do.”

Upon receiving the news, Horatio Spafford—successful lawyer, Presbyterian elder, and confidant of Dwight L. Moody—paced the floor all night in agonizing grief. Just before dawn he finally spoke: “I am glad to trust the Lord when it will cost me something.” A week later he was crossing the Atlantic to rejoin his wife Anna when the captain called his attention to the very spot where the wreck occurred. That night, in his cabin, Spafford wrote the poem beginning “When peace like a river attendeth my way...”

That part of the story is well-known in church circles. But there's more. The Ville du Havre disaster in November 1873 was only the Spaffords' latest and greatest misfortune. Two years before, the Chicago fire had wiped out Horatio's liquid assets. The collapse of Jay Cooke's investment firm shortly after sank him further into debt. He was already putting off creditors and mismanaging funds entrusted to him. Sending his family on an excursion he couldn't afford was another irresponsible decision; guilt as much as grief wracked him when the telegram arrived.

He could only bear it if deliverance were at hand. “Lord, haste the day...”

His own ship, breached by disaster, was sinking. Rather than confess his failures and start repaying his debts, Spafford abandoned his faithful church and embraced the fervent millenarianism and spiritualism of his day. Jesus must be coming soon, and His sinful, broken, yet obedient servant must be on hand to meet Him. With Anna beside him, Spafford gathered a band of followers in their Chicago home, preached a message of purity and self-sacrifice, and launched a pilgrimage to Palestine, where they would celebrate the Lord's return. No one else would die.

Jesus failed to appear. Nonetheless, the “Overcomers” established themselves in Jerusalem as the American Colony, an authoritarian cult. After Horatio died in 1888, Anna carried on as “Mother,” handing down draconian revelations (forbidding marriage at one point) and confiscating all the money her followers earned. The Colony scraped by for years until an infusion of hard-working Swedish converts made it prosperous. Gradually it gained favor with Muslims and Jews and became a bulwark of stability during the terrible privations of World War I. That stability, though, did not survive Anna's death.

As far as we know, the Spaffords died as heretics, denying hell and preaching Universalism while demanding the utmost in works-righteousness. “A bad tree brings forth bad fruit,” Jesus said. Does that make the hymn that has comforted thousands “bad fruit”? Put another way, were you ever blessed by the work of someone who turned out to be a false prophet?

God sometimes ordains praise from unconverted lips, like Balaam's and Nebuchadnezzar's. And all of us, even the truly converted, are of unclean lips, crooked pencils writing straight by grace alone. We can't know for certain the final state of Horatio Spafford's soul, but we can know the effect of his words. Like any work of art, they became a tool in God's hand, to confirm truth or deny it. His sheep hear His voice, however it reaches them. For that, “Praise the Lord, O my soul.”
Jesus loves me, this I know.
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Over the past decade, in the so-called Golden Age of Television, PBS has more than held its own against behemoth streaming services and big networks. It’s scored massive ratings with *Downton Abbey*, *Victoria*, and *Sherlock*, as well as critical acclaim with *Broadchurch* and *Call the Midwife*. If the reaction of U.K. critics and audiences is anything to go by, its latest partnership with the BBC, an expansive, glittering adaptation of Victor Hugo’s novel *Les Misérables*, seems poised to carry on the winning streak.

Note again that the drama, which premieres April 14, is based on Hugo’s novel, not the heady musical that audiences know well. So no songs here. Screenwriter Andrew Davies, the man who gave us the brilliant 1995 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* starring Colin Firth, has over six hours at his disposal. This means the series delves much deeper into the historical background of Hugo’s tale than perhaps any filmed or staged version so far. It also means that in portraying the vice and poverty of revolutionary France, the drama at times goes in grittier directions than some *Masterpiece* viewers may be used to.

There are pluses and minuses to greater crudity than we saw in the glorious Oscar-winning 2012 film starring Hugh Jackman. The quick flash of Jean Valjean’s whipped, chained bare backside reveals his wretchedness. A brief, gut-wrenching scene that illustrates Fantine’s tragic fall into prostitution feels more explicit than necessary, however. As with the Anne Hathaway version, actress Lilly Collins is fully clothed, but the violation happening to her body is still clear and horrifying.

What’s different is Davies also shows Fantine’s romance with the wealthy...
Félix. We see her drink, dance, and bask in his sweet words until we actually see the lyric, “he slept a summer by my side,” play out. Though no sex is depicted, Félix and Fantine lounge in bed, sheets barely covering them.

It’s certainly more instructive to see the steps in how Fantine’s dream is turned to shame rather than just the tragic after-effects. But Davies could have done it without skirting so close to the nudity line. Similarly, though several instances of profanity in the three episodes I screened for review are clearly intended to indicate lower-class criminality (and aren’t worse than what you might hear on any of the big four broadcasters on a weekday), given the historical setting, they actually jar us out of the moment.

But back to the plus side. Given so much time to work with, the new PBS version is better able to flesh out Hugo’s characters, allowing an even deeper experience of the spiritual themes that have captured Christian audiences for generations.

Olivia Coleman turns in a much more satisfying performance as Cosette’s abusive foster-mother Madame Thénardier than she did in her recent Oscar-winning role in The Favourite. Her husband, Monsieur Thénardier, grows into someone far more layered and threatening than the buffoonish innkeeper we’ve seen before. David Oyelowo’s Inspector Javert also takes on greater complexity. At last we see how he became such an unmerciful legalist.

Without menacing songs or stalking malevolence, it’s clear Javert doesn’t view himself as a villain, any more than we do when we fixate on the sins of others. Oyelowo, a professing Christian who also executive-produced the series, recently put it this way to a U.K. paper: Javert is simply a twisted picture of Old Testament law. What he demands may be just—according to French rulings—yet it is terrible.

The greatest reason to watch, however, is Dominic West as Jean Valjean. Throughout we see little nuances and shades that do so much better to explain his relationships. Why he feels so responsible for Fantine. Why he must struggle so hard to succumb to Javert’s taunting disbelief that he can ever really be a new creation. Juxtaposed against the one who accuses him night and day, Valjean’s mercy, grace, and self-sacrifice show, once again, that he’s the true keeper of God’s law.

Television

The Enemy Within

At the start of each episode of the new NBC drama The Enemy Within, the show flashes an audacious announcement: An estimated 100,000 foreign spies work within U.S. borders, it claims. These “enemies within” have infiltrated the everyday lives of average Americans—one could be sitting on a morning commuter train or managing a local storage unit. While it’s unclear whether the statistic is true, the first few episodes of The Enemy Within try hard to hook viewers by building up paranoia around this tension.

Former CIA operative Erica Shepherd (Jennifer Carpenter) is in prison after giving up the names of four colleagues to Mikhail Tal, a foreign terrorist. Now FBI agent Will Keaton (Morris Chestnut) needs Shepherd’s help to track Tal down. Keaton’s unsure whether he can trust her—after all, one of the names Shepherd gave up belonged to his fiancée, whom Tal subsequently killed. Can Shepherd and Keaton cooperate well enough to take out the terrorist?

Carpenter is superb in her role as a smart and determined agent. Sophia Gennusa, who plays Shepherd’s daughter Hannah, does a fine job portraying an emotionally distraught teenager. But with too much crammed into each episode, the series feels cluttered. Profanity and sexual content weren’t strong in the initial episodes I viewed, but families watching this TV-14 show should beware: There’s a lot of physical aggression and gun violence.

Even so, The Enemy Within raises some intriguing moral questions. What’s the right thing to do when faced with a choice that will cause the death of either your only child or four co-workers? Shepherd withholds the truth from others. Is that the same as lying? And there’s Keaton’s dilemma: How to navigate job responsibilities when motives become personal?

—by JENNY ROUGH

BOX OFFICE TOP 10
FOR THE WEEKEND OF APRIL 5-7
according to Box Office Mojo

CAUTIONS: Quantity of sexual (S), violent (V), and foul-language (L) content on a 0-10 scale, with 10 high, from kids-in-mind.com

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<th>Film</th>
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<td>1. Shazam! PG-13</td>
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<td>2. Pet Sematary R</td>
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<td>3. Dumbo* PG</td>
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<td>4. Us R</td>
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<td>5. Captain Marvel* PG-13</td>
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<td>6. The Best of Enemies* PG-13</td>
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<td>7. Five Feet Apart PG-13</td>
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<td>9. Wonder Park R</td>
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<td>10. How to Train Your Dragon: The Hidden World PG</td>
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*Reviewed by WORLD

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Television

**Manhunt**

Imagine Mister Rogers playing a criminal, or Sean Connery as a stay-at-home dad. Fans of the British series *Doc Martin* might be temporarily jarred to see Martin Clunes as a caring, empathetic police detective, but will soon lose themselves in Acorn TV’s three-part miniseries *Manhunt*.

Based on the memoirs of the real-life Detective Chief Inspector Colin Sutton (played by Clunes), *Manhunt* opens with a pedestrian discovering a body in the middle of Twickenham Park. The victim is Amélie Delagrange, a young French woman who had moved to London. Police looking for the killer find few clues, and Sutton is brought in to head up the investigation.

But police department rivalries get in the way of the work. Sutton’s wife Louise, who works for the Surrey Police force, warns him that such a high-profile case can make or unmake the investigator in charge.

Louise’s boss is furious when Sutton tries to convince him that a murder case in Surrey may have connections to Delagrange’s killer. Still, Sutton persists and pushes his team to chase every lead.

The series masterfully portrays the human side of police work, but includes some vulgar language and occasional blasphemy. Sutton insists on personal and heartfelt communication with Delagrange’s parents: She was their only daughter, and the scenes of their grief are moving. As he interacts with the couple and accompanies them to Twickenham Park, we see a character much different from Doc Martin, infamous for his brutal and brusque communication with patients and friends.

Through dogged and plodding police work, Sutton’s team narrows its suspect list down to one, and discovers connections to other recent murder cases. Eventually, Sutton realizes that rivalries and lack of cooperation between departments and precincts are what have allowed his suspect to remain on the loose for so long. Delagrange’s parents accept his sincere apologies—delivered in person at their home in France—with grace.

Blinking back tears, Mr. Delagrange urges the detective: “What is important to us is that you carry on, and bring this evil man to justice.”

—by MARTY VANDRIEL

Movie

**The Best of Enemies**

It’s so simple yet so marvelous: Spending time with someone can radically change your opinion of him or her—for the better! The new film *The Best of Enemies* is based on the true story of C.P. Ellis, a Ku Klux Klan chapter president, and Ann Atwater, an African American community organizer, who couldn’t stand each other until they sat down together.

It’s 1971, and the public schools of Durham, N.C., are still segregated. After a fire destroys a black elementary school, NAACP attorneys file a lawsuit to send the children to a white school to finish out the year. Spineless city leaders pass the buck to Bill Riddick, an outside consultant who leads a “charrette”—basically, a protracted community meeting.

Ellis (Sam Rockwell) and Atwater (Taraji P. Henson) reluctantly agree to co-chair a panel of 12 Durham citizens, six black and six white. The panel meets daily, guiding the charrette, with Riddick (a splendid Babou Ceesay) its hag­gard referee. White­power groups spread fear, and black residents despair of change. At the end of two weeks, the panel will vote: A two-thirds majority is required to enact integration. Durham officials hoping the charrette seals school segregation may just have underestimated the power of fellowship.

*The Best of Enemies* (rated PG-13, with racial epithets, expletives, and some violence) delivers an uplifting message but with less emotional force than I anticipated. Still, as the story testifies, sharing a meal with an enemy, listening to his life story, meeting her children—all these can strike mortal blows to fear and hatred. The Christianity on display in the film seems little more than cultural, but Atwater makes a point that stops Ellis cold.

“Same God made you, made me.”

Would people today set aside a week or two to sit down together to discuss race relations—or anything? I wonder, for not only has our nation largely abandoned God, we are abandoning each other. Yet there’s a marvelous empathy that meeting face-to-face produces that phone-to-phone conversations can’t. —by BOB BROWN
China in three views
THE COUNTRY IS THE NEW RIDDLE WRAPPED IN A MYSTERY INSIDE AN ENIGMA  

by Marvin Olasky

How China Sees the World, by John Friend and Bradley Thayer (University of Nebraska Press, 2018), stresses the troubling growth of Chinese racism, which first emerged as pushback against dominance by European nations and Japan. Then Chinese intellectuals channeled Darwin and argued racial groups were “either superior or inferior, modern or primitive, with the yellow and white races more advanced and civilized and the brown, black, and red much less so.”

Friend and Thayer note, “Within the Han-centric perspective, the Chinese are more cunning and virtuous than the rest. The United States, in contrast, is easily manipulated, although strong and violent just like an adolescent.” They quote Sun Yat-sen, who spoke of “the Han or Chinese race with common blood, common language, common religion, and common customs—a single, pure race.” Now, Xi Jinping’s “China Dream feeds into the narrative of Chinese exceptionalism.”

Gideon Rachman’s Easternization: Asia’s Rise and America’s Decline From Obama to Trump and Beyond (Other Press, 2017 and 2018) assumes China will succeed, even though some of its new elite major in gambling in Singapore and Macao. Rachman advocates retreat and asks why the United States, no longer dependent on imported oil, should “maintain massive naval and air bases in Bahrain and Qatar, [and] insist on naval dominance in the Pacific, when the oil that sails through the Strait of Malacca is bound for China, not California.”

Invisible Crisis asks a crucial question: Will China develop the better-educated, high-tech workforce needed to yield wider affluence? I’ll let you know what the authors eventually report.

BOOKMARKS
Three thin books and three big ones supplement the list of books about Judaism that I presented in the last issue. Elan Journo’s What Justice Demands (Post Hill, 2018) shows why those who value human life and freedom should be on Israel’s side. Evan Moffic’s First the Jews (Abingdon, 2019) explains the evil longevity of anti-Semitism. Kirk Schneider’s The Lion of Judah (Charisma House, 2018) shows how Jesus completes Biblical Judaism and why Judaism and Christianity separated.


Louise Shelley’s Dark Commerce (Princeton, 2018) shows how legitimate corporations and governments facilitate illicit trade in narcotics, sex, weapons, and more. Some legitimate psychiatrists also facilitate harm to the desperate: Alisa Roth’s Insane: America’s Criminal Treatment of Mental Illness (Basic, 2018) depressingly shows almost no light at the end of the tunnel. Beating Guns by Shane Claiborne and Michael Martin (Brazos, 2019) lays out the case for gun control.

Mark Vroegop’s Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy (Crossway, 2019) explains how to lament Biblically when hard providences shake our faith. Philip Ryken’s The Love of Loves in the Song of Songs (Crossway, 2019) is good exegesis of the Bible’s most romantic (and sexiest) book. The 13 chapters in Abby Hutto’s God for Us (P&R, 2019) explain the gospel message that Christ is for those who are: distant, skeptical, desperate, wandering, ashamed, afflicted, lost, grieving, captive, betrayed, wounded, hopeless, and failed. Namely, everyone. —M.O.
LETS TALK ABOUT DEATH OVER DINNER

Michael Hebb

Back in 2013, Michael Hebb founded the organization Death Over Dinner to encourage people to engage in frank discussions about death while eating a tasty meal. This book expands on that idea, drawing from dinners he's attended and others he's heard about. The book's chapter titles function as conversational prompts that probe feelings and memories about death. For example: “If you were to design your own funeral or memorial, what would it look like?” Though not written from a Christian perspective, the book offers suggestions that believers and nonbelievers could find profitable.

PERFECTLY HUMAN: NINE MONTHS WITH CERIAN

Sarah C. Williams

This poignant book tells how a British husband and wife discover their unborn daughter has a catastrophic abnormality that will result in certain death. Against the advice of their doctors, they choose to carry the baby to term. They name their unborn daughter Cerian, which in Welsh means “loved one.” During this difficult pregnancy, they also discover that one of their two daughters has very serious Crohn’s disease. Sarah Williams describes how God drew near to them in their suffering. She notes the ways modern culture dehumanizes the unborn, de-emphasizes fathers, and delights in the perfect.

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH: A GOSPEL-CENTERED GUIDE TO END-OF-LIFE MEDICAL CARE

Kathryn Butler, MD

Butler is a critical care doctor who has dealt with all kinds of end-of-life issues. Here she shares some of the painful conversations and decisions families face. She helps readers go beyond buzz words to apply the Bible to these weighty matters, giving readers basic medical terminology to understand what interventions do and when they might be helpful. She explains how to tell when something is lifesaving and when it might prolong death. She uses stories to show how lack of knowledge can tear apart families. This book will be a valuable resource for individuals, families, pastors, and churches.

FINISHING OUR STORY: PREPARING FOR THE END OF LIFE

Gregory L. Eastwood, MD

Eastwood is a medical doctor and ethics consultant with long experience dealing with patients and families at the end of life. He offers a mainstream, nondirected discussion that reflects what patients and families are likely to encounter at hospitals and emergency rooms. Kathryn Butler writes for the Christian who wants to make Biblically informed choices. Eastwood wants his more general readers to have the information they need to make informed choices at the end of life. Despite the difference in worldview, this book offers a lot of clearly written, helpful information.

AFTERWORD

Joni Eareckson Tada’s Heaven: Your Real Home… From a Higher Perspective (Zondervan, 2018) is an updated version of the book that first came out in 1995. Eareckson acknowledges that many Christians don’t like to think about heaven and often have un-Scriptural ideas about our future home that make it seem unappealing. She draws from Scripture to sketch out the joys awaiting us—and shows us the hope that comes from a heavenly perspective.

In She Has Her Mother’s Laugh: The Powers, Perversions, and Potential of Heredity (Dutton, 2018), science writer Carl Zimmer crafts a readable account of the history and science of heredity. The historical sections include shameful episodes that show scientists going to great lengths to define “feeblemindedness” and keep those deemed feebleminded from passing on the trait. He uses analyses of his own DNA to illustrate the advances in genetic science. Zimmer’s materialist perspective leaves unanswered many questions that Christians might have. —S.O.
Discovering Austen

BOOKS THAT INTRODUCE JANE AUSTEN TO CHILDREN
reviewed by Rachel Lynn Aldrich

GOODNIGHT MR. DARCY Kate Coombs

If parents find themselves reading the same picture book over and over again (as we know they often will), it might as well be a funny take on a witty and popular book. Goodnight Mr. Darcy offers a crossover parody between Pride and Prejudice and Goodnight Moon. Illustrator Alli Arnold captures the classic colors and style of Goodnight Moon while Coombs supplies the clever lines and rhymes: “And Jane with a blush and / Mr. Bingley turned to mush / And a gossiping mother / and a father saying ‘hush.’”

Goodnight Mr. Darcy is a charming board book for the youngest of readers. (Ages 3-5)

BRAVE JANE AUSTEN: READER, WRITER, AUTHOR, REBEL Lisa Pliscou

Brave Jane Austen uncovers how Austen cultivated her witty and insightful writing style as the story follows the development of Austen’s mind and writing from childhood to adulthood. Pliscou writes about the pieces of Austen’s life—including her curiosity and nightly family read-alouds—that shaped her future. The book uses simple words and fun illustrations to show what life was like in the English countryside during Austen’s time. Pliscou also includes a short biography in the endnotes with more dates, details, and educational notes. With its bright, charming illustrations, this picture book biography will delight the youngest of aspiring writers. (Ages 5-9)

ORDINARY, EXTRAORDINARY JANE AUSTEN Deborah Hopkinson

Like Brave Jane Austen, Hopkinson’s book explores the life of Austen in picture book format. Hopkinson’s take on Austen’s life emphasizes the more relatable and ordinary aspects of her family and personality. The storyline highlights what made Austen unique among other novelists of her time: her wry wit and decision to write about everyday people instead of larger-than-life heroes and daring deeds. The book features lovely watercolor illustrations and fun details about Austen’s life. The endnotes include a timeline of her life and a list of her novels with significant dates, plot summaries, and famous quotes. (Ages 4-8)

THE BEAUTIFUL CASSANDRA Jane Austen

This novelette by a 12-year-old Austen is a perfect way to introduce middle-grade readers who aren’t quite ready for Austen’s full-length novels. Each of the 12 chapters is only a few sentences long, chronicling the misadventures of a mischievous young girl named Cassandra. It’s a simple read but already displays the keen eye and good-natured satire that marked Austen’s later works and endeared her to readers past and present. The Beautiful Cassandra also serves to expose young readers to older works of literature while expanding their comfort with unfamiliar vocabulary and sentence structure. (Ages 9 & up)

AFTERWORD

The “Book-to-Table” edition of Pride and Prejudice offers Austen’s Classic Novel With Recipes for Modern Teatime Treats by Martha Stewart (Puffin Books, 2018). This elegant version includes the beloved novel’s original text, which seems to grow sharper and funnier with every reread. Even younger middle-grade readers will likely have no problem following the plot if it is read aloud to them with proper voices and accents.

The beautiful hardback book also includes illustrations of elaborate confections, excerpts of famous quotations, and 12 period-appropriate recipes. None of the recipes are overly complicated, and all of them call for ingredients that readers can find at a regular grocery store. This perfectly executed edition invites families to an afternoon of reading and baking petits fours together. Consider it a mentally enriching version of watching The Great British Baking Show. —R.L.A.
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D.J. WALDIE

Weight of the ordinary
CROSSES AND STUCCO IN THE ‘HOLY LAND’ OF SUBURBIA by Steve West

Prickly social critic James Howard Kunstler once said “suburbs are the embodiment of existential evil.” Critics regularly condemn them as wastelands of cookie-cutter construction, social conformity, anomie, and racial segregation—and yet that’s where 55 percent of Americans live.

Author and historian D.J. Waldie’s home of Lakewood, Calif., a 1950s-built suburb of Los Angeles, became an early target of urbanist critique. Laid out on a grid imposed over plowed-under bean fields between Los Angeles and Long Beach, Lakewood’s modest single-family homes sprang up quickly. When the sales office opened on Palm Sunday in 1950, 30,000 people were waiting to view the seven model homes: Carpenters built 26,000 houses between 1950 and 1953.

Waldie was born into one of those stucco-over-chicken-wire houses, and he’s still there 70 years later. His 1996 book, Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir, is both the story of his life in Lakewood and a disarming, poetic argument for the possibilities of suburban living. He remains a soft-spoken if ardent advocate for these ordinary places.

Edited excerpts of our recent conversation follow.

You don’t strike one as argumentative, yet in its own way Holy Land was a rejoinder to critics of suburbia. There’s a long tradition of regarding suburbs as lesser, diminished places. Between the 1950s and 1970s a body of screeds against suburban places damned them as soulless, dehumanizing, inhuman, and hellish. I knew the place where I lived was none of those things. So not very deeply into the process of writing Holy Land, it became an argument that these flattening and
diminishing criticisms of suburban places needed to be enriched and made more nuanced for them to have any validity.

You've described suburbs as the “paradise of the ordinary.” That phrase contains two words that don't seem to belong together. I've tried to understand how paying attention to ordinariness—ordinary things, ordinary places, everydayness—is an enriching encounter. So in other work since Holy Land I've emphasized the value of paying attention to wherever you are, not making distinctions between this place of privilege and that place lacking in value, but trying to make the argument that everywhere you are, if properly engaged and understood, might contain something enriching to one's inner life.

The world has been flattened by our connectedness, both economically and digitally. Are the places where we live still important? The world is much more distracting and distracted, and being a connoisseur of a particular place seems strangely narrow or old-fashioned. People often live in a variety of places, some virtual and some real, but not all of it coheres into a sense of place. Yet the sense of place is part of the equipment of a whole person as much as a sense of self. Not having a sense of place is a handicap. If you aren't smelling, tasting, hearing, and seeing the stuff of the place where you are... you are hurting yourself.

Just driving through suburb upon suburb of Southern California, it's apparent that some places are better-tended than others. If the residents of a community don't have a place-bound loyalty, then they are quite willing to permit all sorts of evils to rise up around them. We've seen it here in Southern California over the last 20 years where communities have driven themselves into the ditch because no one's paying attention.

So what can be done to nurture a place-bound loyalty? Get outside and walk across your place. You only become fully oriented to your place, only begin to acquire a sense of where you are in your place, by literally crossing the miles of it at the human pace of a walker. When every aspect of the place you are passing through impinges upon your senses—you hear it, you smell it, you see it, you feel it—and it touches you in some way, physically touches you, then you truly know it. One should learn how to fall in love with the place where one is.

‘Not having a sense of place is a handicap. If you aren’t smelling, tasting, hearing, and seeing the stuff of the place where you are... you are hurting yourself.’

Why “holy land”? My then-cranky, slightly bitter self was saying, It’s no junkyard, it’s a holy land. After all these years, I’m less cranky. But I’m saying that every place where people have invested so much feeling, so much longing, so much life, particularly any place where one’s parents are buried, automatically becomes a sacred place. It becomes a holy place, a holy land.

Yet that’s not just a human-centered notion of the holy but one rooted in your faith, isn’t it? All the things of the world can be sacralized: A sacred quality can be imparted to them and flow from them. So I’m prepared to think of the world as not a dead place but a lively place full of spiritual possibilities. I’m no pantheist, no animist: I don’t think everything has a soul. Yet I do think that stuff isn’t just dead matter but can be experienced as an aid to spiritual enrichment.

Holy Land is bookended by images of the crucifixion, by the cruelty of the cross. In fact, it ends on Good Friday. I knew it would end that way early on. I live in a community that is almost entirely made out of wood nailed together by untrained carpenters in 1950, guys who had recently been GIs in the Second World War, hammering buildings together for pay. And yet from that grew so much I value, so much that is of supreme importance to me, like the nailing together of the cross and the losses and gains that led to. Even from the worst materials something of supreme value might come. So even from the not-together everydayness of a nowhere place like Lakewood, something of inestimable value might rise.

You've even said that living in a suburb is part of your own crucifixion. I don't want to absolve myself of the burden I carry in living here: my lack, my incapacity to be the virtuous person I want to be. Part of what Jesus does in raising us up is to raise us up on our crosses. My crucifixion is the middle-class comforts that I have acquired. How do I get beyond that, beyond the little world that I live in, rather than just turning the ordinary and everyday into a cocoon? What I'm talking about is the humiliation of being human, but once one understands that, there is an answer. There is someone who takes with us our humiliation. It's not just resignation in the carrying of the burden. It's not just because that's what human beings are and I understand my fallen state, get the theology of redemption, and now grim-faced trudge forward yearning for the end of all this. No. It's a burden I want to carry.

—Steve West is a World Journalism Institute mid-career course graduate
Coherent complexity

PASSION ORATORIO ASSUMES AND REWARDS AN INTELLIGENT AND PATIENT AUDIENCE by Arsenio Orteza

Gabriel Jackson’s The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ is not by any means an “easy” work. Irregular rhythms jostle with mercurial dynamics. Orchestral instruments respond to the calls of operatic soloists who soar and dip amid or atop choral vocals. Sounds begin in mimesis and end in abstraction. Form yields to content, adapts, then yields again, creating phantasmagoric effects.

Yet for all of its eclecticism and complexity, the 69-minute oratorio coheres. Its new, world-premier recording on Delphian Records by (in order of billing) the soprano Emma Tring, the tenor Guy Cutting, the Choir of Merton College, Oxford, and Benjamin Nicholas’ Oxford Contemporary Sinfonia provides an illuminating and a challenging meditation on seven pivotal events associated with Holy Week and Easter.

How challenging is it? Well, the gulf between The Passion and the typical contemporary “praise and worship” album may not be as great or as fixed as the one separating Lazarus from Dives, but Jackson’s pigeonhole-resistant music still requires powers of concentration seldom demanded by projects that—their good intentions notwithstanding—underestimate the intelligence and the patience of their audience. Jackson takes the intelligence and the patience of his audience as a given.

Consider, for instance, the lengths of the piece’s seven movements. The shortest (“Last Supper and Footwashing”) unfolds for eight minutes and 54 seconds, the longest (“Crucifixion”) for 10:49. And because of the scarcity of refrains (either instrumental or vocal) and other mnemonic earmarks of music intended to “meet people where they are,” the pieces feel even longer. “Could ye not watch with me one hour?” Jesus asked Peter, James, and John. Anyone unprepared for the demands on their attention spans made by Jackson’s Passion will gain new insights into how that notoriously sleepy trio felt.

It is perhaps with such listeners in mind that Delphian Records has included in the CD booklet not only the printed lyrics of each selection but the English translations of the occasional Latin texts as well. Or maybe the providing of such aid is a tacit admission that lyrics sung mainly as recitatives by a 33-voice choir accompanied by 10 orchestral instrumentalists (or simultaneously by Emma Tring and the choir, in Latin and English, during “Last Supper and Footwashing”) don’t always come across intelligibly after just two or three listens.

The familiarity of the numerous King James Version New Testament passages that unite the narrative helps bridge the intelligibility gap. But some of the other texts are relatively obscure. Edward Reynolds’ “General Thanksgiving” from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer is interpolated into sections of Luke 7 (“Anointing at Bethany”), Thomas Carew’s “Psalm 137” into sections of Mark 14 and 15 (“Caiaphas, Peter and Pilate”), and Edmund Blunden’s World War I poetry into sections of Matthew 26 (“Gethsemane”). And the final fifth of T.S. Eliot’s “Little Gidding” comprises the whole of the concluding movement, “The End and the Beginning.”

But even the nonce authorial diversity plays into the work’s inner unity: Edwards, Carew, Blunden, and Eliot each spent quality time at Oxford’s Merton College, the 750th anniversary of which inspired the commission of The Passion and the chapel of which provided the setting of this recording. Why, as the liner notes point out, even parts of the KJV were translated at Merton!

What happens after the first several listens is that the method behind what may have at first seemed like madness begins to emerge. And as the source material’s dramatic and emotional richness accumulates, it takes shapes that in their suggestive semi-recognizability foreshadow nothing so much as the appearances of the post-resurrection Christ.
New releases
reviewed by Arsenio Orteza

HIGH HOPES Here’s the Steeple
The group’s name suggests Christian origins unsupported by anything more specific lyrics-wise than recurring metaphors consistent with any pilgrim’s progress. But the group’s leader, Dan Walters, isn’t just any pilgrim. Besides having a soothing voice and a nice feel for folk arrangements in which acoustic guitar and banjo mesh with clarinets, trumpets, violin, and viola, he has a direct line to paternal emotion. “High Hopes” is a literal father-to-son wake-up call, “Father’s Son” a game changer for any deadbeat dad with ears to hear.

THE HEALING GAME (DELUXE EDITION) Van Morrison
When The Healing Game was originally released in 1997, fans and critics alike greeted it as evidence of Morrison’s undiminished willingness and ability to transmute his familiar obsessions (poetry, myth, the days before rock ‘n’ roll) into the kind of music one might expect to hear programmed by pop stations on the lake isle of Innisfree. That none of Morrison’s many follow-ups have approximated this effect makes this three-disc edition—especially the Montreux concert (Georgie Fame! Pee Wee Ellis!)—special. And a little sad.

LOVE & REVELATION Over the Rhine
Karin Bergquist sings most of these probingly introspective songs by herself. But three cuts in, she’s joined by Linford Detweiler, her husband of 23 years, in what’s essentially a renewal of their vows: “I don’t want to let you go / That’s the one thing for sure I know / You can bet I’ll stick around / ’Cause I don’t want to let you down.” Thus squared away, they freely explore darker moods. The best may not be yet to come, but it’s not in imminent danger of going away either.

CALL ME LUCKY Dale Watson
Watson’s latest adds three must-hears to his neo-traditionalist country catalog. The funniest (and smartest) is “The Dumb Song,” in which Watson reproaches himself for vices that include eating Southern fried chicken and being outspoken (then vows not to change). The catchiest is “David Bukemper,” a gift to a Llano Estacado “truckin’ farmer” (or “farmin’ trucker”) who wrote Watson a fan letter. The swingingest is “Tupelo Mississippi & a ’57 Fairlane.” “They don’t make ‘em like that anymore,” Watson sings. He might as well be singing about himself.
The most popular episode of one of the most popular religion podcasts begins with a sound check: “Check one-two, we’re ready to go.”

That Sounds Fun podcast host Annie F. Downs and her guest, comedidian John Crist, are recording in her father’s office, surrounded by boxes of tax returns, forced to share one microphone. For the next hour and a half, the two drift, as close friends would, from lighthearted jabs to the deep and serious, from their complicated dating lives as Christian celebrities to their respective rehab visits.

Such unscripted goofiness may sound strange to some, but it’s won Downs many fans. Last year, listeners downloaded her relatable coffee-talk show more than 6 million times. It regularly sits in the Top 20 of 92,000 active podcasts in the Religion category—the largest category in the podcasting industry by far, according to podcasting publishers Blubrry and Libsyn.

Blubrry says downloads in the Religion category have increased by 85 percent over the last 10 years—but just what are people hearing? For the last several months, I’ve turned myself into a podcast junkie, sampling 50 different shows, mostly in the Religion category. Here’s what I learned.

1) Don’t expect religion podcasts to convert anyone.

Most listeners download podcasts for the same reason they subscribe to magazines like WORLD. They’re enthusiasts who care about a particular topic, worldview, or storyteller. Rob Walch, vice president of podcaster relations at Libsyn, says comparing podcasts to radio is a mistake: “Podcasts are made for niches,” while most broadcast radio is for a broad audience. Most of the religion podcasts I listened to presume you’re a Christian who knows the territory.

Christian podcaster Jeff and Alyssa Bethke say some episodes of their The Real Life podcast “might be about a fight we just had... potty training... or eschatological realism.”

2) Don’t expect the irreligious podcasts to convert anyone either.

Turns out podcasts are a great place for post-Christian millennials to find their tribe too. Shows like The BadChristian Podcast, Rob Bell’s The RobCast, and Snarky Faith feed off of modern millennial distaste for Biblical views on homosexuality, the role of women, and social justice. But where they steer listeners is never very clear.

3) Podcasts are rough around the edges, unless you’re Albert Mohler.

That’s because 99 percent of podcasts work on shoestring budgets by independent podcaster with no production teams, according to Blubrry CEO Todd Cochrane. The same is true of religion podcasts. Annie F. Downs, the host who interviewed John Crist in her dad’s office, said she personally financed and produced That Sounds Fun when it began four years ago, and only hired a producer a year and a half ago.

The Briefing is a neat and tidy exception, hosted by Southern Baptist Theological Seminary President (and World News Group board member) Albert Mohler, who offers a well-voiced reflection on the day’s headlines trimmed to under 30 minutes. Emily P. Freeman’s The Next Right Thing also strives for pith and polish by offering wisdom in 20 minutes or less. Many other podcasts aren’t like Mohler’s or Freeman’s, though—episode lengths fluctuate wildly, hosts overshare during long tangents, and conversations are left unbleeped.

Strange, two-hour-plus podcasts are very popular across the board, but Libsyn’s Walch says podcasters shouldn’t assume their audiences will stay: “Don’t do long to do long. We like to joke, ‘There’s no such thing as too long. Just too boring.”’

Juliana’s favorites
1. Serial (WBEZ Chicago)
2. Unbelievable? (Justin Brierley)
3. Freakonomics Radio (Stephen J. Dubner)
4. StartUp (Gimlet Media)
5. The World and Everything in It (WORLD News Group)

Marvin Olasky’s favorites
1. The World and Everything in It
2. The Briefing (Albert Mohler)
3. Christ Covenant Church (Kevin DeYoung sermons)
4. Conversations With Tyler (economist Tyler Cowen)
5. Revisionist History (Malcolm Gladwell)
Recent Christian albums
reviewed by Jeff Koch

HOLY ONE  Michael & Becci Ball
Michael and Becci Ball strike a balance of beauty and earthy simplicity, with silver-flecked harmonies and a maturity born of raising four children (and a hamster). Shades of pop bring accent and depth to a beguiling, Michael Card–like gentleness—and do so without breaking the fragile thread of worship. In the song “In Every Season,” bass and drums enter as smooth as a sigh to buoy the clear waters of Michael’s voice as he learns “to know Your voice that speaks peace to me / … You are good in every season.”

RELEASE THE SOUND  Devante Lamont & Renewed
Lamont doesn’t just flirt with repetition. He basks in it, constructing entire songs largely from a single sentence such as, “When Jesus is here, everything changes.” But simple truth can be potent when given space to breathe and plied with jazz stylings and gospel-soaked singing. One soulful interlude refreshingly roots true change not in outward circumstances but inward ones: “My soul has got to change, / my desires, they got to change.” On several songs (including the old-fashioned jubilee jam “The Lord Is Great”), the bass player’s fingers fly up and down the fretboard as if powered by rocket fuel.

GOSHEN  Donald Lawrence & the Tri-City Singers
Lawrence commands his gospel choir like a boss, drawing out a dynamic range the envy of any orchestra and effortlessly fusing styles and eras. After “He Heard My Cry” begins on a simple foundation of bluesy moaning and foot-stomping goodness, Sir the Baptist raps with Auto-Tuned swagger and eccentric (and exciting) vocal leaps. Lawrence’s use of Old Testament imagery, though, is a little more uneven. Certain songs emphasize healing and prosperity much more than the perseverance that arises from long-term trials.

WORKING ON A BUILDING: HYMNS & GOSPEL CLASSICS  The Singing Contractors
With beards straight out of Duck Dynasty and broad smiles to match, Josh Arnett and Aaron Gray always looked the part of what they were: hard-working construction subcontractors. What they didn’t look the part of were trained singers with precision control, until a YouTube video showed them on a work site singing “How Great Thou Art” in stunning harmony. The video went viral and “The Singing Contractors” were born. The steady hands of the Gaithers are behind this Southern gospel project, which means this building is bound to attract admirers from miles around.

ENCORE
In his new album Son, K-Ross examines his spiritual journey with a dry sense of humor and an intriguing mix of Drake-inspired hip-hop, R&B, rock, and jazz. Sometimes the genres are smushed together uneasily. At other times they dance together fluidly, as if in quantum entanglement.

Couched in a catchy acoustic pop-blues groove, “Sorry for Me” pokes fun at the current Christian obsession for “authenticity” as manifested by a preoccupation with criticizing God and feeling sorry for yourself. The song begins by plaintively asking, “Why, oh why God, don’t you answer my prayers?” The complaint turns on its head when God enters, as in the book of Job, to point out, “I came and saved you from depression and you still remain faithless.” Then God ironically mentions that, despite myriad interventions ignored and His ultimate sacrifice spurned, “No one is sorry for me.” —J.K.
How full is FULL?
DISTINCT WARMHEARTED VOICES ARE NEEDED ON IMMIGRATION

Nowhere do I hear more confusion—amid what David Brooks calls “a rapid, dirty river of information coursing through us all day”—than when Christians have conversations about immigration, perhaps the central issue of the Trump presidency.

Is there a crisis at the border? Do we need the military to settle it? How many minors have been separated from parents? Are they part of “a big fat con job,” as President Donald Trump says?

My colleague Sophia Lee has been crossing the border—nine times since January—in a painstaking and sometimes risky effort to report the complex realities of border security, humanitarian crisis, and legal logjam. You can read her latest report on p. 36. I and other colleagues have been reporting on overseas plights—like the prosecution of Yazidis in Iraq and stranded Christians from Iran—in an effort also to better understand the global migration crisis.

For, you see, the problem actually is much bigger than President Trump is letting on. About 60 million people are displaced in the world, and a recent Gallup poll found 15 percent of the world’s adult population—750 million people—would like to move to another country if they part of the opportunity. The percentage is growing, despite recent clampdowns on migrants by American and European leaders. And the United States remains their destination of choice.

We live in a time of chaos and upheaval where prolonged conflict and failed states feed forced migration. A post–World War II order no longer holds sway; its leaders are fading. Meanwhile, victims of chaos almost anywhere in the world have access to information like never before, an ability to measure their miserable lot against those in the ordered world—or just one distant cousin who made it to Denmark. An uptick in arrivals at the U.S. southern border is one small bulge in a great wave of human movement.

Such a problem won’t be addressed by a wall, won’t be settled in Tijuana or McAllen, and won’t be fixed by Washington Post fact-checkers. The policy issues will come into focus only when we know how to think about migration, which begins by thinking about migrants, who are largely mothers and fathers with children and futures at stake.

To be serious, policy on so large a problem must be comprehensive—involving border states, overseas allies, countries in crisis, and nongovernmental organizations. To be wise, it must be grounded on some moral imperatives because its subjects, at the end of the day, are families in turmoil.

Policy makers need help here from Christians, whose story from Genesis to Revelation is one of forced exodus, wandering in the wilderness, and finding rest in strange lands. We may disagree on the particulars—a wall, which kind, a quota of how few or how many—but we should agree a warmhearted, compassionate approach is needed.

That’s precisely what’s missing as Trump and key members of his administration rush from government shutdown to border showdown sprinkled liberally with outrageous presidential tweets (“Our Country is FULL!”). As White House policy adviser Stephen Miller responded, when asked about refugee protection for persecuted Christians, he “would be happy if not a single refugee foot ever again touched American soil.”

We have reached a point where leaders of both the right and the left boast in their cold-heartedness toward the persecuted.

We have reached a point where leaders of both the right and the left boast in their cold-heartedness toward the persecuted. With U.S. refugee admissions down overall by 72 percent from 2016, Christian refugee admissions also are plummeting. The United States took in 2,000 Christians fleeing Iran in 2016, and is on track to receive just 71 in 2019—a 97 percent decline. Once, American leaders saw it as strategic to take in the enemy of our sworn enemy.

I see Christians everywhere at work in the trenches of conflict and along the migratory routes, binding up wounds of war and looking for ways to rebuild shattered communities. Yet in America, many are far from speaking or acting prophetically, paralyzed perhaps by the political divide, intimidated by callous rhetoric when it should move them to resolve and action.
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While President Trump in February declared a national emergency at the southern border, another migrant caravan headed north: About 2,000 Central Americans were walking, busing, hitchhiking, and riding trains for 2,800 miles toward the United States. They planned to join tens of thousands more migrants already overfilling shelters at border towns, stretching Border Patrol resources, and clogging a severely backlogged immigration court docket.

Among that caravan were Oscar Munoz and his wife Telma, his 20-year-old daughter Ericka and her husband Jesus, and his 1-year-old grandson Jilar. They left Honduras two months ago after reading announcements on TV, in newspapers, and on social media about the latest migrant caravan: “You don’t want to be the last person remaining. Get out while you can!” So Munoz and his family did. There were no job opportunities in Honduras anyway, Munoz said, and when gangs in his neighborhood forced him to cooperate, he decided the only way out alive was to flee.

Munoz and his family witnessed many deaths during their travels. One evening, while crossing the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, a truck carrying several dozen of their fellow caravaners overturned, killing at least 25 people and injuring 29 others.
Central American migrants fleeing gang violence look for a way to cross the U.S. border fence in Tijuana.

EMILIO ESPEJEL/AP
On another leg of the journey, Munoz and his family hauled themselves up on top of running freight trains and clung onto the top, the women taking turns to hold onto the baby. The migrants have a name for this mode of transportation—La Bestia (The Beast)—and Munoz quickly learned why: The winds howled in their ears as the train whooshed at 60 miles per hour, and no layers of clothes could soothe their shivers. Munoz says anyone who couldn’t hold on fell to a gruesome death on the tracks.

Munoz and his family’s journey put them in the center of a raging debate in the United States. Since last October, U.S. Border Patrol agents have apprehended 268,044 people who illegally crossed the southwest border between ports of entry—and about half of them (136,150) were families, while about 10 percent (26,937) were unaccompanied minors. That’s a 300 percent jump in the number of family apprehensions compared with the same time period during the entire 2018 fiscal year.

Conflicting narratives muddy up what’s actually happening at the border. Humanitarian activists say that asylum-seekers crossing the border to request asylum is in line with international and U.S. asylum laws and that what President Donald Trump’s administration has been doing—keeping asylum-seekers in Mexico and returning them there to wait for court hearings—is inhumane. They are challenging him in court. Meanwhile, Trump has mocked the stories of asylum-seekers, calling their pleas for help a “big fat con job.”

The truth is much messier: What’s happening is a collision of a humanitarian crisis, a border security issue, and an immigration court crisis that has been decades in the making.

Munoz and his family finally arrived in Tijuana after taking a bus 110 miles from Mexicali. They were glad their journey was over, and as Munoz sat on the steps at the beach of Tijuana, overlooking the metal border fence that divides Mexico from the United States, he set his gaze toward the possible future, not past trauma.

“Pues, me siento bien,” he said, looking at the Pacific Ocean waves crash through the steel bars and over U.S. sands. “I feel good. Even just this glimpse of the other side brings me relief.” His toddler grandson also looked cheerful as he tottered about, his little fingers stained red with hot sauce from the duros (Mexican puffed wheat snack) that someone bought him from a street vendor.

Like most migrant family heads from Central America, Munoz plans to seek asylum in the United States, but he seemed clueless about how it’s impacting the national debate on immigration. For one, he said he didn’t know that thousands of migrants were stuck in Mexican border cities due to recently changed U.S. policies.

When asked if he had heard about immigration authorities separating migrant children from their families at the border, his eyes widened: “No, no sabía! [No, I didn’t know!] That’s bad.” Then he added, “But if that’s the required process, I’ll oblige.” It was obvious he didn’t know that authorities had deported hundreds of migrant parents without their children, or that many of them have yet to find their children. But somehow, somewhere, someone had told him that he could seek asylum in the United States if he came with his family and that authorities cannot keep families in detention for longer than 20 days, so here he was.

And what if Munoz and his family cannot gain asylum in the United States? “I cannot ever return to Honduras,” he declared. But neither does he want to stay in Mexico: “I’ll look for other countries that will accept us.” That’s a Plan B for many asylum-seekers: If not America, then Canada?

The majority of migrants such as Munoz do not meet the criteria for asylum, which requires evidence of persecution or well-founded fear of persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Most incoming migrants are not direct targets of death threats or persecution, but are people who say they read the signs as neighbors started disappearing house by house—and decided to run before they were the gangs’ next target.

Even though they might be facing impending danger, such circumstances usually don’t qualify them for asylum. But they’re entitled by law to a court date in an immigration court system that is clogged. Ever since Trump took office, the government has taken a “zero tolerance” approach: One of the first things Trump did as president was issue an executive order to prioritize deportations of all illegal immigrants in the United States, including individuals with no criminal records. This plus the wave of migrant families has led to a backlog of more than 800,000 cases in the courts.

Meanwhile, the White House during March implemented and expanded a policy dubbed “Remain in Mexico,” which returns asylum-seekers to Mexico to wait while authorities process their claims. These policies, though aimed at discouraging unlawful border crossing, failed to do that very thing. Instead, more people continued crossing, and Trump is threatening to shut down the border with Mexico completely if the Mexican government doesn’t do more to stem the flow of migrants.

The caravans have “really changed the game,” said San Diego Sector Border Patrol public affairs officer Fabian Carbajal. In the last few years, he’s seen so many kids crossing
the border that he’s carried toys and stuffed animals in his trunk. “Before, it was a cat-and-mouse game, people trying to hide from Border Patrol. Now families come and just stand there waiting for us—and in groups of 30, 40, 50 families.”

Whenever that happens, a Border Patrol agent will have to radio in other agents in the field to come help, because he or she doesn’t have enough vehicular space to transport them to the station. If babies or toddlers are among the group, someone has to hurry over to the station to pick up baby car seats, crackers, milk, and juice. By the time everyone has been transported and medically checked, hours have passed, and dozens of Border Patrol agents have been pulled away from their primary duties—to safeguard U.S. borders from dangerous criminals, illicit materials, and illegal crossings.

To understand what Border Patrol agents deal with on a daily basis, I went on a three-hour ride with Carbajal in his mud-splattered Subaru. A Marine Corps veteran who has been a Border Patrol agent for 13 years, the 34-year-old Carbajal has built his entire career on law enforcement, so his perspective about the border is one of law and order—and very pro-wall. Before 1991, no physical barrier existed at the southern border, but over the last two decades, Border Patrol has been gradually walling off the border as part of an increasing effort to prevent people from illegally crossing the border rather than arresting them within the country.

The San Diego Sector has one of the most thoroughly barricaded parts of the border, but that hasn’t stopped people from passing through. As we bumped and jostled our way up a steep hill, Carbajal pointed out a spot where a Trump-era 18-foot-high steel bollard fence abruptly ended at the foothills of the rocky, sun-beaten Otay Mountain Wilderness, a wilderness area that peaks at 3,566 feet and stands as a semi-effective natural barrier.

On the other side in Tijuana, I saw shacks and houses made of concrete blocks and wood panels, clearly a poorer neighborhood. Wild dogs barked somewhere in the Mexican plains. On the U.S. side, construction workers were still building and fortifying the wall, welding the steel plates in place as sparks flew to the ground. One Border Patrol agent stood guard next to her jeep at the end of the wall. As we drove back down, Carbajal nodded over at that agent. “You see that? We’ve been driving for several miles, and she’s the first Border Patrol agent we saw. That’s a problem.”

To Border Patrol, the massive spike of family apprehensions at the border creates plenty of opportunities for criminals to take advantage of the chaos and dysfunction. Many migrants arrive with no birth certificates or ID, so Border Patrol has to call their country’s consulate to procure their biographical information—and at times, the supposed parent has no relation to the child. “That’s scary,” Carbajal said. “Are these kids kidnapped? Rented out? What if drug cartels are taking advantage of these kids and our laws?”

Sometimes, the children unwittingly put themselves in danger. In one case that Carbajal worked on, a 17-year-old girl from Guatemala showed up with two younger siblings, ages 4 and 7. She said she had a 45-year-old male contact in New York whom she had met on Facebook—and when Border Patrol ran the man’s records, several child molestation charges came up. Out of sheer desperation or foolish naiveté or both, the girl had been willing to travel thousands of miles to seek refuge from a man she had never met.

“This can’t be the new normal,” Carbajal said. “Something has to change. This is not sustainable. Something drastic needs to happen.”

I witnessed that “new normal” an hour after my interview with Munoz. I heard a commotion going on over at the border fence on the beach. Someone had pried the corroding steel bars open 2 inches wider with a big rock, used a lighter to heat the steel wire blocking the bars, and then cut the wire open with a sharp tool. A Border Patrol agent parked on the other side of the border honked a warning, but the migrants ducked, crawled, and dashed through the fence.

As I watched, 52 individuals—17 of them children ages 1 to 14—ran across the beach and then marched toward the Border Patrol agents. Minutes later, more agents showed up in ATVs and on horseback. Among the migrants, I saw a middle-aged man limping on the sand in a black jacket, black hat, and streaming pink scarf, and I instantly recognized him as Oscar Munoz. I then spotted his wife, his daughter, his son-in-law, and grandson. Everyone in that group claimed asylum. Munoz has found his way into the United States after all.
On a Sunday morning in the fall of 2017, I arrived at Jiangxin Building in downtown Chengdu, walked past rows of parked scooters, and waited for a rickety elevator to take me up to the 23rd floor. As the elevator doors opened, Early Rain Covenant Church was abuzz with activity.

That Sunday, Elder Li Yingqiang preached on Philippians 2 to a packed sanctuary, as latecomers slipped into a side classroom to watch a live feed of the service. Then Pastor Wang Yi baptized more than a dozen people, and the congregation sang the hymn “I Believe in a Hill Called Mount Calvary.”

Today, Sunday mornings look different for Early Rain members. Instead of meeting all together, they gather in homes for worship and log into an encrypted video conference call to hear the sermon. With the church’s leaders imprisoned, small-group leaders pastor church members, and some members have left the church due to the pressure. Even meeting in homes carries a risk: In February, officers raided two gatherings and took all 44 churchgoers into the police station for questioning.

Chengdu authorities shut down Early Rain in December and since then have taken more than 300 churchgoers to the police station. Twelve remain in detention. Authorities are holding Pastor Wang Yi and his wife, Jiang Rong, in secretive detention on charges of “inciting subversion of state power,” which could result in up to 15 years in prison. Authorities have sent some church members back to their homes for worship and log into an encrypted video conference call to hear the sermon. With the church’s leaders imprisoned, small-group leaders pastor church members, and some members have left the church due to the pressure. Even meeting in homes carries a risk: In February, officers raided two gatherings and took all 44 churchgoers into the police station for questioning.

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hometowns and banned them from returning to Chengdu, while other churchgoers have lost their jobs or their homes. Those who have been released from prison tell of both beatings by police as well as opportunities to evangelize to fellow inmates.

Nearly 950 miles away, the government also shut down Beijing’s Shouwang Church in March. Shouwang’s former pastor Jin Tianming penned a letter of solidarity after Wang’s arrest, stating, “What Pastor Wang Yi declared as his stance on the relationship between the church and the state is also where I stand!”

Shouwang is no stranger to government persecution: In 2011, Beijing officials evicted members of the church from the church’s meeting space and forbade a property manager to hand over the keys to a $4 million building the church had purchased. Police placed Jin under house arrest and arrested parishioners as they tried to meet outdoors at a park. Since then, most church members gather in homes for Sunday worship, while others have joined other churches.

In March, police raided two meeting spaces that Shouwang rented for Bible classes, prayer meetings, and baptisms, and officially banned the church.

Shouwang and Early Rain are two high-profile examples of China’s renewed crackdown on unregistered churches, just one part of the Chinese government’s campaign to “sinicize” religion, which means to reshape religion so that it supports the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The most severe case of this sinicization is in Xinjiang, where Chinese officials are trying to erase Muslim Uighurs’ cultural and religious beliefs by sending more than 1 million to reeducation camps and transforming the region into a surveillance state.

Christians in China are also facing a bitter winter, beginning in February 2018 with the implementation of revised religious regulations. Areas with large concentrations of Christians such as Henan have been hit the hardest, with thousands of churches closed and crosses torn off rooftops. Prominent unregistered churches like Shouwang, Early Rain, Beijing’s Zion Church, and Guangzhou’s Rongguili

Church have experienced targeted raids, sending a clear message to churches in China: No matter your size, your prestige, or your connections, we can destroy you.

Yet even as the Chinese government flexes its muscles and tries to shape Christianity into its own image, history shows that the greater the persecution, the greater the growth of the church. Given the Chinese church’s own history, many Christians hope that the fire will refine and strengthen the church.

Mao Zedong’s Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 saw pastors imprisoned, churches destroyed, and religion ostensibly extinguished. Yet in the shadows, Chinese believers kept their Christian faith alive by meeting in secret, memorizing bits of the Bible they could get their hands on, and evangelizing.

After Mao’s death, President Deng Xiaoping took a different approach to religion: In 1982’s Document 19, he acknowledged the existence of religion and tasked the CCP with controlling religion so that it wouldn’t grow too fast or too large. Purdue sociology professor Fenggang Yang says religions fell into one of three categories: the red market of state-sanctioned religions, the black market of banned “cults,” and the gray market of everything in between, including house churches. While black market religions faced government suppression, gray market religions generally continued unmolested.

As the attitude toward religion relaxed, house churches began meeting openly in rented or purchased spaces in office buildings. Despite some occasional flare-ups, government persecution seemed a thing of the past.

This view of religion shifted with President Xi Jinping’s ascent to power. In an April 2016 National Religious Work Conference, Xi said the party should take a more active role “to guide religious believers to love the motherland and people… to obey and serve the interests of the Chinese nation, to support the leadership of the CCP and the socialist system, and stick to the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics; promote Chinese culture and integrate beliefs with Chinese culture, and contribute to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”

This shift specifically targeted the “foreign religions” of Christianity and Islam. The 2018 Regulations on Religious Affairs forbade landlords from renting space to unrecognized churches, banned Chinese citizens from traveling overseas for religious conferences or operating religious schools, and required churches to implement core socialist values. In essence, Yang noted, the government is trying to eliminate the gray market, forcing churches to join the state-sanctioned church or face suppression.

In the year since the regulations have been in place, both government-sanctioned Three-Self churches and unregistered churches have suffered heavy blows. Regions with large pockets of Christians—such as Henan, Anhui, Zhejiang, and Guangdong—have been the first to feel their effects.

In Henan, a province with 95 million people, government officials burned Bibles, destroyed churches, and tore down crosses from more than 90 percent of all churches, according to Texas-based China Aid. Authorities
also shut down two-thirds of the Three-Self churches in order to merge churches, while banning minors and Communist Party members from attending services. Local officials forced some government-sanctioned churches to place pictures of Xi and Mao Zedong inside the sanctuary, while others had to raise the Chinese flag and sing the national anthem before worship.

Even though Henan’s China Gospel Fellowship house church network has long maintained a good relationship with the government, authorities declared illegal all of the thousands of churches in the network. Christians faced pressure outside of Sunday worship as well: Employers would ask Christian employees to either renounce their faith or lose their jobs.

Besides looking out for local police, in some areas house churches also need to be wary of snooping neighbors: In the city of Guangzhou, the ethnic and religious affairs department announced recently that residents would be awarded up to $1,500 for providing tips about “illegal religious activities,” according to Hong Kong’s South China Morning Post. The highest-paying rewards are for tips leading to the arrest of a non-Chinese religious leader.

The government’s Three-Self Patriotic Movement and China Christian Council also developed a five-year plan for sinicizing Christianity that includes retranslating the Old Testament—even adding Buddhist and Confucian texts—and adding new commentary to the New Testament to point out supposed commonalities with Chinese-style socialism. In March, online retailers stopped selling Bibles.

“The CCP’s aim is not only to control religion, but their real aim is to try their best to destroy and disappear religion,” said Bob Fu of China Aid, noting that sinicized Christianity was no longer real Christianity.

Early Rain’s Wang has spoken out passionately against the persecution of the church—at one point calling for Xi Jinping to repent—and this has made Early Rain the target of the most severe church crackdown in the country. On Dec. 9, police throughout Chengdu led coordinated raids on the homes of Early Rain church leaders and members, detaining more than 100 people. In the months that followed, interrogations, detentions, harassment, and monitoring have continued.

Authorities are now holding Wang and his wife Jiang Rong in an undisclosed location on charges of “inciting subversion of state power,” the same charge the government leveled at the late Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo. Lawyers and family members have not been able to contact them or the 10 other church leaders and members who are in prison. Authorities are holding Jiang—and likely Wang as well—in “Residential Surveillance in a Designated Location,” a type of solitary confinement where torture, injection of unknown medicines, and forced confessions are common.

Yang believes the government’s treatment of Wang is actually more severe than that of Liu, as authorities have gone a step further and charged Jiang with the same crime even though she had never made any public statements criticizing the party. Police kept...
WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Here’s an update on some persecuted Christians WORLD has covered in the past:

The Rev. John Sanqiang Cao: A missionary who set up schools in the rural mountains of Myanmar, Cao was arrested in March 2017 after crossing the border into China. Officials sentenced Cao, who has U.S. permanent residency, to seven years in prison for “organizing illegal border crossings.” Today he remains in Yunnan prison.

Gao Zhisheng: A Christian human rights lawyer, Gao was one of WORLD’s 2012 Daniels of the Year. Because of his work representing the marginalized and documenting torture inside Chinese prisons, the government detained him multiple times. In 2014, he was placed under house arrest but disappeared again in August 2017 after an attempt to escape house arrest. Today he is in custody in an unknown location.

Huang Yan: A Christian human rights advocate who worked with Gao, Huang had also experienced torture and multiple detentions. After doctors refused to perform a necessary surgery for her ovarian cancer, she escaped to Thailand for medical care then made her way to Taiwan. The Taiwan government allowed her to stay as she waited for the United States to grant her asylum. In January, Huang finally received refugee status and settled in Los Angeles. —J.C.

Liu’s wife, Liu Xia, under house arrest but never locked her up.

“[Wang’s] criticisms have pointed to the spiritual sins and moral problems of the officials and society,” Yang said. “I think it will be difficult to build up a case against Wang Yi as a political activist subverting the Party-state.”

A week after the Early Rain crackdown, 60 police and government officials raided a children’s Bible class at Guangzhou’s Rongguili Church. Officials confiscated church property, took down the ID numbers of the attendees, and issued a notice suspending all church activities. Rongguili, which attracted 5,000 worshippers each week, was founded by the late Pastor Samuel Lamb, a leading house church pastor who spent 20 years in prison for his faith.

Then in March, officials came for Shouwang Church again, shutting down its meeting spaces and officially banning the church. Yet Sunday worship will continue as it has been for the past eight years: gathering in homes, singing along to recorded hymns, reading Scripture passages, and listening to a recorded sermon, all of which are shared on the church’s website.

Shouwang Church members noted that rather than feeling angry, they wanted to see what God is doing amid the persecution and ways that they can be a witness to nonbelievers, including the security guards stationed in front of their homes. Early Rain church members also shared stories of God’s work during the hard times: Shen Bing, the husband of one of the imprisoned Early Rain members, tried to visit his wife in December, but police threw him in prison for five days. At the time, Shen was not a Christian, and when police asked him what he thought about Wang’s preaching, he answered that he didn’t know because he had never listened to Wang’s sermons.

While he was in prison, many people eagerly wanted to hear the gospel, so Shen told them what he knew. When it was time for Shen to be released, the other inmates decided to wash his feet with hot water, which deeply touched Shen. Once he returned home, he started listening to Wang’s sermons, and after a few weeks he professed faith in Christ. In March, Shen posted on social media about how he agreed with one of Wang’s sermons, and police immediately carted him back to prison.

Wang and other house church pastors have been preparing for this latest wave of persecution. Last September, a group of house church pastors including Wang, Pastor Ezra Jin of Zion Church, and Pastor Jin of Shouwang, issued a statement condemning the government’s crackdown on churches. It was later signed by more than 400 church pastors. In it, they pledged, “For the sake of the gospel, we are ready to shoulder losses, and if we have to, pay the price of losing freedom and even life.”®
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Medellín, Colombia, once the murder capital of the world, now bustles with better activity

by Jamie Dean in Medellín

PHOTO BY HOLGER METTE/ISTOCK

FOURTH IN A SERIES ON CHANGING CITIES
On a clear morning in mid-February, a giant boom and a billowing cloud brought a dramatic turn in one of Colombia’s most infamous storylines. Engineers in the northern city of Medellín triggered 180 detonators and demolished the six-story building that drug-lord Pablo Escobar once called home.

The cartel chief died in a shootout with Colombian authorities in 1993, but the building where Escobar once orchestrated his terrifying campaign of bombings and murders still stood decades later.

Onlookers both cheered and wept as Escobar’s abandoned headquarters crumbled on Feb. 22. The city’s mayor vowed to create a park on the site as a memorial to the thousands of people—including hundreds of police officers—killed by Escobar and his sicarios during a cocaine-fueled heyday in the 1980s and 1990s.

But while many of Medellín’s residents were relieved, at least some tourists were disappointed.

Though the bustling city nestled in the Andes Mountains has experienced remarkable progress in the years since it was known as the murder capital of the world, a macabre tourism business has flourished around the sites of Escobar’s criminal reign.

What locals call “narco-tourism” has surged, particularly since Netflix produced a popular series based on Escobar’s life and international drug empire. Tourists visit “narco-ruins” like the abandoned prison Escobar designed for himself as part of an agreement to surrender to authorities. (He escaped from it a year later.) At the home where the fugitive spent his last night before his death, visitors can climb into a bullet-riddled truck and pose for pictures.

Many Medellín residents bristle at the terror-turned-entertainment in their hometown—at least partly because Escobar’s violent grip was a reality they lived, not a show they watched. But it’s also because cartels and cocaine are only one part of the city’s story.

Indeed, since Escobar’s death, the homicide rate in Medellín has dropped 90 percent, while major industries have set up shop and the city’s poorest citizens have gained more access to jobs and education.

That’s not only because of Escobar’s demise, but because city officials and community leaders embraced a distinct plan: pursue ambitious projects and involve some of the most marginalized citizens. It’s an ongoing narrative in Medellín’s story, and plenty of substantial obstacles...
remains. But it’s also a chapter that’s at least as compelling—and far more hopeful—than the one that came before it.

At an outdoor table on a bustling corner in Medellín, a waiter serves tall glasses of mango juice as Diego Cardona recounts the life he witnessed on these streets a few decades ago: “Violence was very natural.” Cardona, now a pastor of a local Baptist church, grew up here amid two conflicts: Colombia’s guerrilla armies fighting the government, and Colombia’s drug cartels fighting the guerrillas, the government, and each other.

Escobar rose to power as head of the Medellín cartel in the early 1980s, and some residents revered him: The drug lord—awash in extravagant wealth from the international drug trade—became popular among Medellín’s poor for building homes and apartments in some of the neediest neighborhoods.

But his persona suffered in 1984 when Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara exposed the cartel’s dealings and died in a drive-by assassination. Escobar was never convicted, but his image never recovered. Violence in the streets escalated, as the cartel waged a bloody war against rival cartels and the police.

Cardona says many of the youth in his neighborhood were drawn into working for the Medellín cartel. He estimates half of the young men he grew up with died before he reached 25. It wasn’t uncommon to see two or three people killed in the streets each week.

By the late 1980s, Escobar launched a campaign of bombings around the city, killing many innocent bystanders. Cardona recalls hearing a massive boom near his home one afternoon, and discovering a bomb had destroyed most of the block nearby: “You really didn’t see any homes—just a massive crater and thousands of bricks.”

Authorities finally hunted down Escobar in 1993 and killed him as he attempted to escape capture on a Medellín rooftop. The drug wars continued, but violence did begin easing, and the country’s president cracked down on offenders.

Others left the cartels voluntarily. Cardona says years of both criminals and innocent citizens losing mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters took its toll: “I really think there was just a desire for another life.”

In many ways, Medellín was primed for another life. The city sits in a lush valley in the Andes and enjoys such idyllic weather it’s known as “the city of eternal spring.”

It’s also known as a city of hard work. The region’s citizens have a reputation for industriousness and entrepreneurship, and during the days of Colombia’s guerrilla warfare, many Colombians fled here to seek a safer life. The migration swelled the city’s population to 1.5 million by the 1980s. (The population is over 2.5 million today.)

Many of the city’s poorest residents settled into the steep hills rising up from the valley, and neighborhoods grew dangerous in both the city and surrounding mountains during the drug wars.

When city officials and community leaders began discussing how to move Medellín forward after decades of chaos, they made a deliberate decision to include the poor in the city’s improvements.

As they planned new projects like libraries and parks and soccer fields, they located some of them in Medellín’s poorest areas. And when engineers planned an innovative gondola system to serve as part of the city’s metro, they deliberately connected poorer parts of the city to more prosperous areas, making it easier for residents high in the hills to commute down into the city for better jobs and schools.

Cardona remembers a heated public debate over whether residents in poorer sections would vandalize the Metrocable.
cars: “But it turned out the people who cared most about them were the poor.”

Indeed, a ride in the city’s Metrocable system reveals clean, well-kept cars traversing high into the mountains. (You’ll realize just how high if the car that’s suspended from a wire pauses for a moment and swings back and forth above the trees and houses below.)

In Comuna 13, once known as one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in the city, engineers built a series of outdoor escalators zigzagging up the hillside and allowing easier commuting into areas below.

The center city boasts a new science center, bustling plazas, outdoor restaurants, a lush botanical garden, and a museum full of pieces by Colombian artists. City officials have also drawn in tech companies and multinational corporations.

Many of Medellín’s public projects are paid for through a series of public-private partnerships, and in 2013 the Urban Land Institute named the town that had been one of the most dangerous cities in the world the most innovative city of the year.

The improvements have made Medellín safer and more stable, but they haven’t solved the problem of poverty that still besets many living in neighborhoods and communities throughout the city.

That includes thousands of Colombians who have fled violence and moved into the surrounding hills over the past three decades. And it increasingly includes Venezuelans now fleeing their own country’s collapse and eventually making their way to Medellín.

Take the Metrocable to its last stops high in the hills, and you’ll still have to hike up steep terrain to reach communities living above. Many include tin-roofed homes perched precariously on the mountainside.

At a Christian community center situated high on a steep hill, the workers say many teenagers living in the surrounding area suffer from depression and troubled homes, and also from the temptation to get involved with the still-ongoing drug trade and prostitution.

Violence still plagues some areas both in the hillsides and the city below, and concerned locals give plenty of warnings about areas to avoid.

It’s a reminder that even the best programs won’t solve decades of poverty and warfare, and it leaves plenty of work for churches looking to bring hope to communities of both the rich and poor.

Cardona says that’s a challenge in Medellín, where the number of evangelicals has grown in the last two decades but still lags behind evangelical growth in other cities in the predominantly Catholic nation.

He thinks part of the slower pace may be due to the entrepreneurial spirit that helped revive Medellín: “People want to be leaders, but many don’t want to be followers.”

Whatever the case, Cardona says good teaching is critical for evangelical churches to grow.

David Adams agrees. The American lives in Medellín and runs Poiema, a nonprofit Christian publishing company that specializes in publishing Reformed theology books translated into Spanish. Adams says there’s a growing demand among Colombian evangelicals for good books and an ongoing need to teach Christians how the Bible informs all of life. Adams says this is where both personal and cultural change begins.

“It’s not just that Christianity has rules that can apply to all areas of life,” he says. “But that the gospel can transform all areas of life... We have to aim for the heart.”
North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un in Hanoi, Vietnam
AP
North Korean defectors say joining together national security negotiations and humanitarian concerns is the key to unraveling Kim Jong Un’s abusive regime

by Harvest Prude in Washington

IN NORTH KOREA, THE SIN OF A SINGLE family member can condemn the next three generations to fearful suffering. Many transgressions can lead to arrest and imprisonment in the regime’s political prison camps, but perhaps the cardinal sin is attempting to escape to China or South Korea.

Kim Hye Sook learned this in February of 1975, when authorities dragged her family off to a political prison camp in Bukchang-gun. She was 13. Her family, previously members of the elite in North Korea’s capital of Pyongyang, did not know what they had done wrong.

Kim would not learn the truth until her release from the camp 28 years later. An older relative told her that during the Korean War her paternal grandfather had gone missing, and the event finally caught up to the family. That suspicion doomed Kim’s family to prison camp, where her parents, grandmother, husband, and one of her brothers would die.

I met Kim, a diminutive woman with kind eyes and a softly waved bob, in March. She and another North Korean defector had testified that week before a United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. We talked with the help of an interpreter, and Kim showed me pictures that brought to life the heartbreaking details of her story.

She lost her father first: Authorities dragged him away for asking why they had been locked up. The family never saw him again. Three years later, while scavenging for food on a mountainside, Kim’s mother missed a step and fell to her death before her children’s eyes.

Death visited the camp often. Sometimes workers, like Kim’s brother and later, her husband, would die from accidents in the dangerous coal mines. Sometimes prisoners died from malnourishment, like Kim’s grandmother. Sometimes, guards publicly executed inmates. Kim remembers the execution of one woman who, so
Kim Hye Sook testifies on Capitol Hill in Washington during a hearing on human rights in North Korea.

desperate for food, had killed and cooked her 9-year-old daughter. Everyone in the camp had to attend the execution, where guards tied the prisoner to a wooden stake and blindfolded her. A firing squad fired round after round until the stake holding the bullet-hole-ridden body cracked.

Death visited but hunger never left. After the death of her parents, Kim became the primary caretaker of her four younger brothers. The authorities only provided food for coal miners, so Kim would save her lunch ration—a small packet of jasmine rice—until she got home so she could make it into a thin porridge for the whole family. After she got married and became pregnant, she could no longer work in the mines and instead had to find her own food.

While nine months pregnant in May 1991, she went up the mountain to gather acorn sprouts. On her way down, she unexpectedly went into labor and ended up giving birth. Afterward, unable to walk or even stand up, she wrapped her baby in the sack with the sprouts. She crawled around 50 feet, pushing the backpack in front of her. Eventually, an old man herding goats and sheep found her. He couldn’t lift her, but he fetched her husband.

Even when she earned release from the camp in 2001, her hardships continued, and both her daughters died during a flood. Kim decided to defect. But during her first attempt in 2005, border guards caught her and sold her to a Chinese broker for 3,000 yuan. Because she looked so much older than her 43 years, he found he could not sell her to sex traffickers. He sold her instead to a restaurant owner for 2,500 yuan, where she worked until authorities repatriated her in 2008. In 2009, Kim escaped for a second time and successfully made it to South Korea.

But even for ordinary North Koreans, who never experience the political prison camp, life is often unbearable. I also spoke with Pak Tae Kyeong, a woman in her mid-30s who defected in 2008.

Pak was a teenager during the so-called “Arduous March,” the severe famine that from 1994 to 1998 resulted in the death of an estimated 3.5 million North Korean people.

“There was nothing to eat,” Pak said through the interpreter. “You will never understand that someone will basically starve to death without having a bowl of rice, or a handful of rice to feed themselves.”

To escape the famine, Pak’s older brother defected to China. But within a few months, Chinese authorities repatriated him. He spent seven months in a reeducation camp. After his release, he returned home a shell of the “very tall and big” oppa (brother) she remembered. He couldn’t recover from the starvation and torture and died two days later.

When that happened, Pak realized North Korea offered her no future. Even though she had a respected job as a schoolteacher, she did not make enough to support herself. She began to ask, “What’s the purpose of my life? Is it just an everyday struggle to find the food... or can I do something other than seek my own survival?”

One day, she was talking on the phone with her sister, who had successfully defected to South Korea. As they spoke, she could hear a crisp sound of her sister chewing. “What are you having?” Pak asked. “An apple,” her sister responded. Apples are Pak’s favorite food, so half-jokingly, she asked, “Can you just send a box of apples to me?”

“If you come to South Korea—I’ll get you a truck filled with apples,” she promised.
The image of a truck full of apples began haunting her thoughts. Eventually, Pak decided to defect. Her sister hired a broker, and six months later Pak made it to South Korea. While she has not gotten a truck full of apples, she eats at least one every day.

⭐ SINCE KIM AND PAK DEFECTED, THEY have shared their stories to decry North Korea’s human rights abuses. Both have found it discouraging that for years, America’s foreign policy on North Korea has often focused primarily on the regime’s nuclear threat and relegated human rights to the back burner. They believe that solving the regime’s nuclear threat will require jointly addressing the two issues.

Suzanne Scholte, chairman of the North Korea Freedom Coalition, called human rights the “Achilles’ heel” of the Kim regime. She said the United States must prioritize human rights to combat what she calls Kim Jong Un’s “Art of Deception.” For years, the regime has falsely promised to give up its nuclear program, winning concessions and aid from the international community while conceding almost nothing.

The regime also deceives its own people, using propaganda to brainwash them into believing that all Americans are “Yankee imperialist wolves” bent on the country’s destruction. This threat is how the regime justifies depriving the North Korean people of their human rights.

“We are told we must sacrifice so that we have nuclear weapons to protect the people,” Pak said.

So for 70 years, the North Korean people have sacrificed everything: Like Pak Tae Kyeong, they have witnessed their friends and family members die of starvation. Like Kim Hye Sook, hundreds of thousands of people have labored in the political prison camps, where their work is used to “support the missile and weapons program,” policy analyst Olivia Enos noted in an analysis for the Heritage Foundation.

“We feed into the lie of the regime when we don’t talk about human rights... when we show up at the negotiating table and all we talk about is the nuclear program,” Scholte said.

Kang Seo with the Defense Forum Foundation agrees that the United States should emphasize human rights, but she sees why Trump doesn’t confront Kim directly on human rights abuses. It may be, she says, part of his “Art of the Deal” strategy: “Businessmen don’t say bad things to your face, but his tactic is to keep negotiation and momentum ongoing.”

Seo noted that the administration has demonstrated its commitment to North Korean human rights in other ways. The State Department recently increased funding earmarked to address North Korean human rights issues from $1.5 million in 2018 to $6 million in 2019. The funding is awarded to organizations that support defectors and seek to get information to the North Korean people.

In the meantime, Scholte wonders whether Trump’s “Art of the Deal” will best Kim’s “Art of Deception.”

At the 2018 North Korea–United States summit in Singapore, Trump showed Kim a four-minute video on an iPad that contrasted scenes of prosperity and plenty with images of rocket launches and mushroom clouds. The voiceover says the North Korean leader has a choice whether he will be a “hero” and “shake the hand of peace.”

“Trump was basically saying, door No. 1 or door No. 2?” she said. “He’s showing the regime, you have a choice.”

An estimated 80,000 to 120,000 people are laboring in the political prison camps, where their work is used to ‘support the missile and weapons program.’
In Southeast Africa, a massive cyclone strike is testing the resilience of local communities and the ability of aid groups to avert a long-term crisis

BY ONIZE OHIKERE

At 2 a.m. on a Friday—hours after Cyclone Idai struck—Robert Koehn and his wife, Karis, bailed water by the bucketful from their home in Lamego, 51 miles inland from the central port city of Beira in Mozambique.

The American missionary couple with the Africa Inland Mission lived in the village for more than 18 years. They witnessed past storms and had shuttered their windows in advance.

“We really had no idea how strong it was going to be.”

In the coming days, the Koehns’ home became a focal point for assistance in the village. Robert helped transport a pregnant woman to a hospital and—as floodwaters stubbornly refused to subside—housed some 300 villagers in every available space in his home.

He also helped to create a makeshift crossing over a flooded area that allowed possibly hundreds of stranded people to pass for about 48 hours. “I don’t know that I pulled one single person out of the water,” he said. “I just made a path so that they could get out.”
The community’s experience echoes other narratives of the struggle for survival and courageous assistance that emerged from one of the worst weather-related disasters to hit the region in recent history.

The storm that hit land on the night of March 14 first struck Beira. It destroyed 90 percent of the city, home to about 500,000 people. Packing 105 mph winds, the cyclone persisted for days, overflowing rivers and submerging entire villages and cities.

By March 20, 836 square miles of Mozambique were covered in water as the storm created vast inland oceans. It continued on to eastern Zimbabwe and to the southern part of Malawi.

More than 800 people were confirmed dead across the three Southeast African countries as of early April. Due to the scale of the damage, the final exact death toll may never be known.

For those who have survived, the next phase of the crisis is only beginning. Officials are still learning the extent of damage to infrastructure and agricultural produce. Health officials confirmed more than 3,100 cases of cholera in the weeks following the storm, a potentially catastrophic outbreak.

The calamity brought back memories from 19 years earlier, when widespread flooding struck Mozambique, followed by the powerful Cyclone Eline. Some 350 people died in that disaster.

Mozambique has made progress in its social institutions since then. Responders are hopeful the improvements, coupled with inflowing aid across the region, will help in the long-term recovery process.

After Cyclone Idai made landfall, U.S.-based Food for the Hungry lost contact with its country team in Mozambique. Shep Owen, senior director of relief and humanitarian affairs, deliberated with the regional director and left Washington for Beira.

Extensive damage on ground greeted him: Strong winds had knocked down a welcome sign at the airport. Overhead, divers from neighboring South Africa jumped out of helicopters to...
rescue people drifting in the water. Away from the noise of the rotors, an unnerving silence blanketed the city.

Members of Food for the Hungry's local team lost relatives in the storm, and about half of their homes were destroyed. In the rural communities where the group works, mud homes and grass roofs did not withstand the gusting winds and rain, Owen said. “It just melted under the intense weather.”

The group's first response included providing chlorination to aid water treatment, distributing tarpaulins for temporary shelter, and providing other hygiene items. It also partnered with a Chinese crew that brought dozens of boats to deliver food from the World Food Program to people stranded in flooded areas.

Owen said the region will likely battle long-term with the food shortage. “This hit during the second growing season, so for all those farmers who were expecting crops, it’s all gone.” The Famine Early Warning Systems Network warned the region would face “acute food insecurity” starting in August and possibly lasting until early 2020.

Beira quickly became the command center for aid efforts. Various groups responding to the disaster set up workspaces at the airport, one of the only places that retained some electricity immediately after the disaster.

Government officials in the city housed more than 140,000 people in makeshift camps set up in empty schools and church buildings. Mosquito nets and smalls sacks of clothing and valuables marked off each occupant’s personal space.

The crowded centers and regions still without assistance raised concerns over infectious waterborne diseases like cholera. Officials by April 7 had confirmed more than 3,100 cases of the disease in and around Beira. At least six people had already died from the disease.

Cholera, a bacterial infection, spreads via contaminated food and water and causes severe diarrhea and vomiting. Without treatment, victims often die within hours. The disease is endemic in Mozambique: It infected about 2,000 people in a previous outbreak that ended just a year ago.

The World Health Organization dispatched 900,000 oral doses of cholera vaccine to the affected regions earlier this month.

Owen said his group will partner with U.S. Medical Teams International to repair damaged health centers in some of the affected communities and will bring in medical teams that will operate for about three months.

Due to damaged roads and the distance from Beira, aid did not reach Robert Koehn’s village of Lamego until almost two weeks after the disaster. Locals had to rely on each other to survive.

Two days after the storm struck, more people arrived at the Koehns’ home, some with updates and others in need of aid. One man explained his pregnant daughter-in-law was already in labor and needed help. Koehn took her to a hospital in a nearby town, using the only road that wasn’t flooded.

That had changed by the time he made it home a few hours later. People who came asking for help explained the south side of the road had flooded.

“This was a village that was now 5, 6 feet deep in water, with a current that defied swimming.”

Looking out over the water, he saw several students from a nearby teacher training school latching on to acacia trees. Fathers held their babies around their heads while clinging to the trees for their lives.

Another boy, no more than 9 years old, Koehn said, sat on top of drifting bamboo and grass that once served as his family’s rooftop. He had floated from another village about 3 miles away before grasping a tree in Lamego.

Koehn grabbed a 325-foot rope and strung it through about 20 yellow plastic containers that once held 20 liters of cooking oil. Clinging to fallen telephone poles, he then worked with other people to extend the makeshift lifeline across the moving floodwater.

The stranded locals used the floating rope to pull themselves closer to land. “Some people had some bamboo poles that would pull people out of the current if they got all the way across,” he explained.

When darkness fell, another person with a car turned on the headlights to help people still crossing to see their way. The lifeline stayed up for the next 48 hours.

At least 38 people from Lamego died, and the storm destroyed many homes. About 300 people came to the Koehns’ home seeking shelter. Reached by phone, Robert described the
Some 80 mothers and children slept in his garage. At least 25 younger men climbed onto the cement roof over his office. Others slept in his car.

The Koehns sheltered people like Victory Dolidje, who waded through waters as high as her waist with her four children to get to safety. They had spent a rainy night on top of a roof before receiving dry clothes and food at the Koehns’ home.

“All the food we had in our house and in our fields rotted,” she said. “Our clothes, our pots and pans, all got taken away in the flood.”

Lamego has already turned its attention to rebuilding. Once the waters started to recede, people walked about picking up scattered zinc roofing sheets to reconstruct shelters. At least 12 families collected some of the eucalyptus poles the storm pulled down in the Koehns’ yard.

Robert said he sees resilience across his community, where people say, “Lamego is different now, but let’s go forward.”

In the previous disaster that struck Mozambique in February 2000, Cyclone Eline displaced about 650,000 people. The ordeal drew global attention after news outlets filmed an air force medic assisting one woman as she gave birth on a tree, where she sought refuge.

Ken Isaacs, vice president of programs and government relations at Samaritan’s Purse, said it took three to five years for a new normal to return to the country.

Ken Isaacs, vice president of programs and government relations at Samaritan’s Purse, said it took three to five years for a new normal to return to the country. His group assisted in rebuilding roads and cities and distributed agricultural produce, mostly through a food-for-work program. This time around, Samaritan’s Purse also set up an emergency field hospital with a special obstetrics section in the town of Buzi.

Isaacs sees similarities in the scale of the current disaster. Mozambique still suffers from poverty and corruption. This time, the country has developed a stronger capacity to respond, he explained.

“The first goal is to get the people stabilized so their lives are not at risk,” he said. “We need to see what [Mozambican authorities] are asking for and how they want to effect these rebuilding efforts in the country.”

In Zimbabwe’s worst-hit Chimanimani district, the cyclone destroyed about 95 percent of road networks, said Nicholas Shamano, the country director with Christian Aid. As rescuers cleared paths to access blocked-off areas, rainfall muddied some of the new routes.

The storm displaced at least 16,000 households, and more than 250,000 people needed some form of assistance.

Zimbabwe’s minister of local government, July Moyo, said dealing with the aftermath of the cyclone could cost the government $18 million.

Idai had a similar impact in Malawi, where it wiped out about 12 percent of the expected output from the 2018/2019 farming season. At least 60 people died in the country and 860,000 others needed assistance.

At the Njeleza camp in Chikwawa district, people built temporary shelters with sticks and leaves, the squalid homes scattered around an empty plot. One nearby mud house stood partly collapsed with the zinc roof caved in.

The conditions and the reports of cholera outbreak in Mozambique created an urgent scenario for South Carolina–based Water Mission, a nonprofit that provides safe water systems in communities. The country team strengthened the productivity of its systems in 10 locations, the majority of them camps for internally displaced persons.

Mark Baker, the group’s disaster response director, said Water Mission plans to set up additional water systems in five new locations. The group partnered with Doctors Without Borders to analyze the quality of 40 existing water sources, including village pumps. As more roads open up, Baker said the group will also send assistance to Mozambique from its offices in Malawi and Tanzania.

The installed water systems will serve the communities until the government shuts down the camps. In cases where the camps become long-term residences, Baker said the systems will transition into community-based projects. “We provide them with all the follow-up they need for that.”

The extent of the disaster highlights the need for disaster management programs, said Charles Franzén, the director of humanitarian and disaster response with World Relief. He called for adaptive, community-based programs that can respond to such threats with localized solutions.

“Things like this happen more frequently than they did before, so people need to be more prepared.”

In the previous disaster that struck Mozambique in February 2000, Cyclone Eline displaced about 650,000 people. The ordeal drew global attention after news outlets filmed an air force medic assisting one woman as she gave birth on a tree, where she sought refuge.
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When Chris Gargiulo finished his 30th year of working at a McDonald’s in this city 37 miles north of Tampa, 60 people attended a celebratory surprise party. Gargiulo “was shocked,” according to Cheryl Stark, a friend from church, but someone else might have been even more surprised: the doctor Gargiulo’s mother, Elizabeth Bridwell, consulted after Chris was born with Down syndrome (DS) in 1960.

That physician advised her to invest all her energies in Chris’ older sister, Lisa, saying Chris would “make a nice pet.” The children’s father and Elizabeth divorced in 1963, but her second husband, Ward Wedlake, vowed Chris is “going to live in our world.” They did not institutionalize Chris or treat him indulgently due to his differences. They raised him alongside Lisa and younger half-brother Scott, with similar disciplinary expectations.

“We had to educate the doctors,” says Elizabeth. As a youngster, Chris could outperform older children with special needs, since he followed instructions well. Attempts to mainstream him in public school failed, however: Only after seeing
the “F” in PE on his report card did Bridwell learn for the people who’ve gone there the last 30 years.”

On a recent sunny Saturday, Elizabeth dropped Chris off at 8 a.m. for breakfast before his shift. An upbeat oldies soundtrack accompanied a steady stream of patrons at both ends of the age spectrum, veteran’s caps and canes mingling with Crocs and swim trunks. Clad in a black hooded McDonald’s sweatshirt, black pants, and black New Balance shoes, Gargiulo peeled bills out of his wallet and headed for the counter to order. After eating, he chatted with co-workers and an elderly regular, checking his watch every few minutes.

At 9:00 sharp, Gargiulo disappeared into the kitchen. He emerged with gloves on to empty trashbins behind the counter, weaving seamlessly among his bustling co-workers. Only his salt-and-pepper hair and the shiny “25-year employee” pin on his visor suggested he is decades older than most of them.

He entered the dining area with disinfectant spray and a large roll of paper towels, alternating between wiping down tables and retrieving trays from trash stations, resetting them with fresh placemats. The picture of industry, he constantly looked out for ways to be useful.

Around 11:30, Gargiulo brought in mail from the store’s curbside box. Afterward, he took lunch—a grilled chicken breast and flour tortilla, seasoned with mustard packets. Sometimes he has a burger, but he prefers the ones at a rival chain. Does his employer know? Chris smiled and put a finger to his lips.

Gargiulo seeds conversations liberally with “happy” and “love”: “I love my mom.” “I am happy to work here 25 years.” “I love kids.” “I am happy.” Now and then, he spells out words, whether discussing his role passing the offering plate at church (“I do m-o-n-e-y”) or his favorite soap opera, The “Y-o-u-n-g” and the Restless (“I am hooked on it”). The quirk validates notions of being “differently abled”—we speak before we spell, yet spelling seems to facilitate his speech.

The only topic that darkens his mood is the possibility of losing his mom: “Oh, my eyes!” he cries, holding back tears. “Hope not,” he says earnestly, “hope not.” Both Lisa and Scott have homes with space for Chris to move into if needed.

Meanwhile Elizabeth, a vigorous 84, is vigilant for signs of decline in Chris’ health. Average life expectancy for individuals with DS is around 60 years, but Chris had none of the heart defects that sometimes accompany DS. At 5-foot-4 and 140 pounds, he maintains a healthy weight.

Ironically, as medical advances extend life expectancies for those with DS, prenatal testing has decreased their chances of making it out of the womb. Figures vary, but studies indicate most parents abort a baby who tests show is likely to have DS.

For Elizabeth Bridwell, though, Chris “is the glue that keeps me together.”

For the people who’ve gone there the last 30 years.”
Artist Roger Blum, now 78, grew up in a troubled Seventh-day Adventist home in Northern California. That upbringing led him to register as a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War. In 1965, when he was beginning a master’s degree program and trying to establish himself as an illustrator, he received a draft notice. Soon he rode a bus to Fort Polk, La., where he refused to carry firearms. When he wouldn’t work on Saturday, his drill sergeant dismissed him to the chapel. “I kinda hid in the pulpit,” Blum recalls. Then the Army selected him and four others as the first soldiers to go to Vietnam solely to paint combat scenes in the war zone. Plenty of official photographers and war correspondents with cameras were already in Vietnam, but the Army asked the artists to express their own observations and feelings. Blum carried sketch pads, pens, colored pencils, and a small watercolor set. Blum tried to soak in the mood, the lighting, and any action, as he quickly sketched his impressions. He also took photos to corroborate details for later renderings.

Blum saw a lot to paint. Vietnamese shot in front of him. Enemy snipers. Helicopters whirring off to the Mekong Delta and Cambodia. One time, Blum hiked to the Montagnard people in the Vietnamese highlands to sketch the Army bringing medicine. Here friendly villagers insisted he and the soldiers eat ground-up ox ears and rice wine. Blum kept drawing.

Blum’s job required him to look hard at the results of combat, an especially difficult task for a conscientious objector: “I didn’t like to have to paint combat situations because I saw human beings dying. I saw body bags in numerous places, especially airports.” Even now, the memories force Blum to blink back tears: “I’m sitting in that helicopter, with the guy at my knees, and I was sketching him, and he had shrapnel wounds across his face.”

Blum recalls that “painting combat scenes was not relaxing. It was intense and personal.” He had to leap from helicopters and run for cover while battles raged. Officers told him to carry a weapon, but he wouldn’t, preferring to trust in God: “I admit that at that time ‘trust in the Lord’ meant stand close to someone who had a machine gun!”

But amid life-and-death situations, another combat artist who was a Christian stunned Blum with his visible happiness and freedom in Christ, and his challenge to Blum: Examine your theology. The “grace through faith” Blum read about in Romans transformed his legalistic understanding of the Bible.

Blum’s Vietnam paintings eventually traveled to the Pentagon. The secretary of the Army chose Blum’s Swamp Patrol for his office. The Indianapolis Art Center and the National Constitution Center have exhibited the entire collection, and soon they’ll be on permanent display at the U.S. Army Museum at Fort Belvoir, Va.

After the war, Blum continued seeking Biblical answers. Neighbors invited him to their Bible church where he grew and fell in love with Christ. Blum moved from commercial artwork and college teaching into painting wildlife and landscapes that show God’s creative glory.

Blum now paints in a studio on the second floor of his home in Stillwater, Minn., where he lives with Renée, his wife of 25 years. He describes his oil painting style as expressive impressionism and is not shy about expressing the way God impresses him: “I give God all the glory, even for the times I didn’t know Him, because He was with me… I dedicate my work to Him.”

—Sharon Dierberger is a World Journalism Institute mid-career course graduate
Greenland’s Jakobshavn Glacier, formerly one of the fastest-shrinking glaciers on earth, is suddenly growing again—and many climate scientists are stunned. “At first we didn’t believe it,” Ala Khazendar, a NASA researcher who co-authored a new study on the glacier, said in a statement.

Scientists worried about global warming say that even Jakobshavn’s unexpected growth is ultimately bad news for the planet. But skeptics of man-made climate change say the glacial surprise is further evidence that the dire predictions of global warming alarmists aren’t reliable.

For 20 years the Jakobshavn Glacier continued to thin and move inland at ever-increasing speeds. In the summer of 2012, its retreat accelerated to a record speed of 10 miles per year, three times the rate it moved in the 1990s, NASA reported.

Scientists studying the glacier believe its recent growth is likely due to a flip in the North Atlantic Oscillation, a natural cooling and warming cycle in parts of the ocean. That natural cycle has caused the water in Disko Bay, where Jakobshavn flows into the ocean, to cool by about 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit in the past few years.

All of this seems like good news: Researchers previously warned that the shrinking glacier was draining a large portion of the Greenland Ice Sheet and significantly contributing to sea level rise in the Northern Hemisphere—a phenomenon they warned would prove disastrous for agriculture and bird and fish habitats. But Ian Joughin, a University of Washington ice scientist, told The Associated Press it would be a “grave mistake” to interpret the latest data as contradicting climate change science. The glacier’s reversal is just “a temporary blip,” he said.

According to Josh Willis, a co-author of the study, published March 25 in Nature Geoscience, the glacier’s new growth isn’t good news in the long term. Instead, it shows that ocean temperature influences glacier shrinkage and growth even more than previously thought.

But John Christy, director of the Earth System Science Center of the University of Alabama, told me that glacial regions are very complex and thus predictions are often unreliable. Glaciers come and go: “It’s the natural variability of the system.”

Christy said climate alarmists may turn even a failed prediction into a reason to foresee disaster. “You can’t let a potential catastrophe go to waste if you want to advance some type of environmental political agenda.”
Kevin Washington, 31, gets just a few feet into the Moncrief-Neuhaus Athletic Center at the University of Texas at Austin (UT) when he spots someone he wants to talk to. “Yodes!” he calls out, giving senior football player Tim Yoder a handshake and slap-on-the-back hug. Yoder, at 5 foot 9, just reaches Washington’s shoulder. They exchange a few words and continue on.

As director of player development, Washington talks with players about everything from girlfriends to the gospel to life after football. The team has 88 players from diverse backgrounds and religious beliefs. There’s never enough time.

Washington became a Christian while playing college football, first at Notre Dame and then at Abilene Christian University. He then worked for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and became chaplain for the University of Houston football team, where he met coach Tom Herman.

When Herman became head coach at UT in 2016, he asked Washington to come with him.

Herman doesn’t share Washington’s Christian faith, but he appreciates the relationships his assistant develops with students. Washington says about others at UT: “They know that what I believe is Christianity. I believe in the Bible. I believe in Christ.”

Washington learns about his players. One chilly Wednesday in February, he shot pool with freshman Justin Mader in the football players’ lounge before teaching a Bible study with the Longhorn Christian Fellowship. It’s one of three Bible studies Washington leads. Dressed in a white Longhorn polo, slightly baggy jeans, and sneakers, he straddled a short stool and faced a group of 31 students.

After praying, he led a study on God’s omniscience. Most of the players at the study were not Christians. Freshman Luke Brokermeyer explained: “Christian or not, everyone has a respect for Kevin, because he’s not someone who will force Christianity on you, but if you have questions, you can talk to him.”

Washington knows he has limited time with players: “That’s the hard part because you don’t want to sacrifice intentionality, but you also want to get in touch with everybody.” He knows that once guys graduate, his window of opportunity closes. He wants to minimize the what-ifs: “Man, I should have prepped him more for interviews, or man, I should have pushed him more to decide what he wants to do when he graduates. Or I should have asked him the hard questions about his girlfriend to see how they were doing. Or even if we have a guy who has a kid, I should have said, ‘Hey, how are you doing in fatherhood?’”

Lots of such conversations take place on the leather couch and chair in Washington’s office. Junior Collin Johnson explains: “You go in there and sit down and mention what you’re going through, and he will pull up a book, a passage in the Bible, an experience from his life or somebody else’s life... Tie it in and change your perspective on your situation.”

For senior Tim Yoder, who played in only one game and wants to become a coach, conversations have focused on planning for life after football. He says Washington texted contacts at various schools “and set up phone calls and all this stuff. Some people say they’re willing to help, but he’s really willing to go and serve and do whatever it takes for those around him.”

With junior D’Andre Christmas-Giles, a Muslim, conversations have focused on religion. He says Washington has helped him open up about his Islamic beliefs, and he admires how Washington carries himself faithfully: “Like Jesus Christ.”

Sometimes the bonding takes place during team workouts every morning at 6. “He’s one of us,” Collin Johnson said. “When he gets in the weight room and works through those hard workouts at however old he is, it’s hard not to respect him.”

—Alyssa Jackson is a former WORLD intern
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Survivors in a great war

[March 16, p. 34] We always enjoy Mindy Belz’s articles from overseas and just read her excellent piece from Syria about challenges Yazidi women are facing. We never know where she’s going to pop up next.

—PETER & GAIL BERGESON / New Richmond, Wis.

One family’s ordeal

[March 16, p. 48] Central Americans make the treacherous journey only to discover the dream is unattainable and they have exhausted their resources. It is an invasion when thousands of these hopefuls arrive at our southern border. The wall is a needed deterrent.

—GARY S. KARWOSKI / Brookfield, Ill.

I appreciate the personal accounts and the questions about activists and financing. Sophia Lee and WORLD are top-notch.

—CHRISTINA JOY GILLEY on Facebook

The individual stories are heart-wrenching and endless, but we already have a huge and growing homeless population that needs to be addressed. The constant demonizing from both sides just makes things worse.

—KENNETH ISGRIGG / Valley Lee, Md.

Thank you for helping to put a human face on these issues. They are so easy to keep out of sight and out of mind.

—LAURA WEINETH on wng.org

Excellent report. We are affiliated with a Baptist church in Tijuana that has for decades assisted migrants from Central America in the barrios. They come to the border and get stuck, then build shantytowns out of cardboard and wood. The church provides assistance, but most importantly it provides hope in Christ.

—RICK FLANDERS on wng.org

Never give an inch?

[March 16, p. 8] Some say the emergency on the border justifies Trump’s plan to fund the wall, but if it was such an emergency, why drag out the shutdown? Trump should take a page from Reagan. He encouraged immigration and thought that, short of a war, the president had no right to declare a national emergency.

—JOHN KLOOSTERMAN on wng.org

Mind and body

[March 16, p. 18] As a licensed marriage and family therapist, one of the hardest things I face is convincing Christians to try antidepressant medication when they have struggled for years with no relief. They often feel God has abandoned them, but would they only pray for insulin or high blood pressure medicine?

—KIMBERLY M. CHASTAIN / Liberty, S.C.

As a psychologist, I’ve concluded that the medical model of “mental illness” is deeply flawed. The drug companies and medical establishment tell us that we need psychiatric drugs to function, but that is not the answer. With rare exceptions, mental health problems are simply problems in life. Love, empathy, constructive action, faith, and, when necessary, therapy help far more without the toxic effects.

—JEFFREY C. DANCO / Bridgewater, N.J.

Pharmaceuticals are a gift from God, but we must use them wisely, neither idolizing nor fearing them. Thank you for an insightful column.

—KARL JOHENS / Santa Cruz, Calif.

Thank you for addressing this issue. As a Christian and a psychologist, I’ve seen the damage that not addressing mental health holistically can cause.

—CINDY WARREN MIKEAL on Facebook

The Venezuela test

[March 16, p. 4] Joel Belz states that socialism cannot survive the “Venezuela test,” and our president declares that the United States will never become socialist. Yet in the 2020 election about half of the population will likely vote for the Democratic candidate, even as the party of infanticide lurches toward socialism. Why? The promise of free stuff for all.

—BRIAN CAGE / Shawnee, Kan.

Governments, capitalist or communist, are run by people who are capable of evil yet by God’s grace can do good. If the government is evil, the people...
suffer. “When the righteous increase, the people rejoice,” as Proverbs says, “but when the wicked rule, the people groan.”

—PARKER THOMSON on Facebook

I once saw a show in which socialists explained that switching from capitalism to communism was so messy because people needed a new way of thinking to accept the joys of socialism. Earlier revolutions called that “re-education,” and back then we called it “brainwashing.”

—TONY McCORD on wng.org

Authority in question

[March 16, p. 40] Part of the difficulty in holding autonomous churches accountable is our freedom. We do not like the idea of oversight, but freedom without responsibility is un-Biblical.

—DAN WAGNER on wng.org

Anatomy of an epidemic

[March 16, p. 56] Painkillers surely are overprescribed. After my horse kicked me in the face, they gave me enough codeine to take every four hours for a week. People don’t just want to avoid pain, they also want to avoid discomfort.

—ANNA STEWART on Facebook

Connecting the dots

[March 16, p. 28] Is it even possible to put the genie of the sexual revolution back in the bottle before it destroys Western civilization?

—JOHN COGAN on wng.org

Restless souls

[March 2, p. 50] I was uncomfortable with some of your children’s book recommendations, especially The Orphan Band of Springdale, which you noted has a sympathetic character described as a possible Communist. We must tread very carefully with artists and writers who defy Biblical truth while capturing elements of beauty and quality. We must be doubly careful when such work is aimed at children.

—DAVID BUNN / Salinas, Calif.

Correction

Wang Yi was a teacher at Chengdu University (“House church on a hill,” April 30, 2016).

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The joke is the gauge of freedom at its simplest testing point. 

The Joke is also the title of a 1967 novel by Czech writer Milan Kundera, about a university student named Ludvig in Soviet Czechoslovakia in 1951 who gets sent to a work camp for a joke he dashed off on a postcard to his super-serious girlfriend. It sounded so familiar that I had to read it.

There was a time when the plot would have produced a shudder throughout academia. Nowadays a college student might shrug: “The dude had it coming.” This is why dystopian forewarnings by George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, H.G. Wells must be deemed flops in the end, having failed to foresee that the future, once here, will have been arrived at with such gradual and gentle acclimations as to be embraced and not recoiled at.

Rod Serling, mortician-suited, Chesterfield-King-chain-smoking 1950s prophet to the TV generation, sent up a flare in episode 65 of The Twilight Zone, titled “The Obsolete Man” (1961). He introduces the imminent execution of a librarian gone afoul of state orthodoxy, now entering a courtroom for a kangaroo trial:

“You walk into this room at your own risk, because it leads to the future; not a future that will be, but one that might be. This is not a new world: It is simply an extension of what began in the old one. It has patterned itself after every dictator who has ever planted the ripping imprint of a boot on the pages of history since the beginning of time. It has refinements...[for] destruction of human freedom. But like every one of the super-states that preceded it, it has one iron rule: Logic is an enemy, and truth is a menace.”

I’ve been thinking about what a joke is. Why do people laugh, and what is laughter, that spontaneous, spasmodic total body reflex to an artfully delivered string of words? Are not the best jokes nine parts truth and one part fabrication? Truth and irony are what have been obliterated from the public discourse today. Joseph Goebbels, German Reich Minister of Propaganda from 1933 to 1945, tells why that’s necessary: “It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State.”

A Human Rights Tribunal in Canada fined comedian Mike Ward $42,000 for a joke. (There’s inflation, folks.) In my opinion any country with an arm of government called “Human Rights Tribunal” is a country already in trouble. Quiz: Can you spot the difference between modern Human Rights Commissions and Kundera’s ’50s Party University Committee? Me either.

Pakistani-born Norwegian comedian Shabana Rehman mocked the wrong imam and now needs police protection after her family’s restaurant was fired at. Dutch internet cartoonist Gregorius Nekschot (former friend of Dutch film director Theo van Gogh, who was assassinated by a Muslim extremist) was arrested with great fanfare in 2008 after eight of the cartoons in his book Misselijke grappen (Sick Jokes) were said to ascribe negative qualities to certain groups, and therefore be chargeable under article 137c of the Dutch Penal Code.

I thought I would end this column with actual jokes from Soviet Union days, doubtless passed along in whispers and with nervous glances over the shoulder lest the teller be delivered to the “Humor Department of the Censorship Apparatus of Soviet Ministry of Culture” (it was a real thing):

First: Stalin has lost his favorite pipe. Some days later, Minister Lavrentiy phones his boss and asks, “Have you got your pipe back?” “Yes,” replies the Premier, “I found it under the sofa.” “Impossible,” exclaims Lavrentiy. “Three people have already confessed to the crime.”

Second: Guy goes to a car dealer to buy a car. “OK, put your name on the list, come back in 20 years and pick it up,” the salesman says. “Morning or afternoon,” the buyer asks. “What difference does it make, it’s 20 years from now,” the dealer says. “It matters,” says the buyer, “cause the plumber’s coming in the morning.”

Ah, remember when we used to laugh? 😊
Telescopes and theodicy
FROM DARK MATTER AND ENERGY TO THE PRINCE OF DARKNESS

If you haven’t taken a science course since high school or college decades ago, here’s some news: We know a lot less now about the basic makeup of the universe than we thought we did then.

Several decades ago scientists knew the universe was expanding. They believed the expansion had to slow down. No astronomer had observed such slowing but it had to happen because the universe is full of matter, matter has gravity, and gravity pulls things together.

In 1998, though, the Hubble Space Telescope let us look at very distant stars. It became apparent that the universe was expanding faster and faster, not slower. Why? No one knew, but it seemed that something else we couldn’t see or measure had to be present. Theorists named the mystery stuff “dark matter,” possibly made up of some subatomic particles, and “dark energy,” maybe made up of something else for which we have no name.

To explain the behavior of what we perceive through telescopes and other instruments, scientists now guesstimate that “dark energy” makes up 68 percent of the universe and “dark matter” makes up 27 percent. That adds up to 95 percent, which means we can see or measure only 5 percent of reality, a humbling number indeed. Again, we know of the dark stuff only because of its effect on visible matter.

Let’s apply this to one of the hardest theological problems, theodicy, which literally means “justifying God.” Christian theodicy attempts to explain why an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent God allows evil to exist and even—as with Nazi and Communist butchers—expand.

Theologians over the centuries have proposed many explanations. The most popular hinge on man’s free will: God could have made us like robots or Stepford wives, only able to obey orders—but how then would we be in the image of God? He could have kept bad things from happening to us, but it’s often those things that make us realize how desperately we need His grace.

Many people understand that some suffering is educational, and tragedies affecting other families may warn us. I remember as a white-water rafter on the Nantahala River in North Carolina hearing that three people out of 14,000 going down the river had drowned, so if you fall out of your boat don’t try to walk and possibly get your foot snagged on a rock and fall facedown: Float downstream, feet first. A California newspaper editor ran a photo of a mourning family standing over the corpse of a child who entered a lake against parental instructions and drowned: Readers protested, but that alert may have saved other lives.

We might say what does not kill us makes us stronger, but what about all those who die suddenly without the opportunity to learn lessons? What about hurricanes, tsunamis, and earthquakes that kill both innocent and guilty? What about diseases that take the lives of children? What about the scale of disaster? Six million Jews gassed or shot in the Holocaust, along with 6 million others? Tens of millions in China, the Soviet Union, Cambodia, and elsewhere? Tens of thousands year after year in Syria, Yemen, and other venues of war. Why so many, Lord?

Dark energy and dark matter: Scientists can’t see or measure any of it, but they believe it exists because of its effect on what they can see and measure. The apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus in the fourth century, Bernard of Clairvaux in the 12th century, and John Milton in the 17th century also had a name for what they could not see or measure, except by its effect on the visible: They wrote about princeps tenebrarum, the Prince of Darkness.

We don’t tend to talk about Satan these days, except in weak, semi-joking excuses (“the devil made me do it”) or Rolling Stones songs: “Please allow me to introduce myself / I’m a man of wealth and taste / I’ve been around for a long, long year / Stole many a man’s soul and faith / ... When the blitzkrieg raged and the bodies stank.” Yet, as Jeffrey Burton Russell writes in Satan, “The depth and intensity [of evil] exceeds and transcends what could be expected in an individual human... No theodicy that does not take the Devil fully into consideration is likely to be persuasive.” Dark energy. Dark matter. Dark supernatural power.
Feel something jump.

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"At the name of Aslan each one of the children felt something jump in its inside." - C.S. Lewis

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