A Nobel Peace Prize winner dies in captivity

WITHERING HEIGHTS

In a city with sky-high violence, Chicago Christians find hope

PLUS:
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NO-CASH COUNTRIES?
NO-KILL CITIES (FOR DOGS)?
“Medi-Share covered me in prayer in ways they didn’t even know.”
—Vanessa
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ON THE COVER: Photo by marchello74/iStock

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Give the gift of clarity: wng.org/clarity
Notes from the CEO

Have you noticed the changes we’ve made to WORLD Digital?

The most obvious change, and the one many of you have seen already, is the introduction of The Sift, a quick read on the biggest stories of the day.

Beyond that, we have grouped most of our digital content into eight major categories, and we’ve given each of those categories a memorable name and visual identity:

- **Vitals** | Stories of the fight to protect life, primarily at the beginning and end of life.
- **Liberties** | Coverage of the ongoing struggle for Creator-endowed freedoms, both domestically and globally.
- **The Stew** | Politics. If that’s your cup of soup.
- **World Tour** | International reporting.
- **Relations** | Issues of marriage, family, and sexuality.
- **Schooled** | Education reporting.
- **Beginnings** | Stories on science and origins.
- **Muse** | Coverage of popular media and fine arts, including book, music, and movie reviews.

If you’ve been a WORLD member for more than a few months, you’ll know that we do extensive reporting in each of these areas. We hope that by grouping our digital content this way will help you make sense of the dozens of stories we cover every week. In addition to all that, we’ve continued Mindy Belz’s frequent dissemination of her own international news reading (Globe Trot), and we hope you’ll take advantage of the work she does to pull together important stories from around the world.

If it has been a while since you’ve visited WORLD Digital, drop by today at wng.org. As I’ve noted before, the magazine you’re reading right now contains about one-fifth of the content WORLD produces. So if you’re not reading WORLD Digital and listening to WORLD Radio, you’re missing out!

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Admission of bias

WE WON’T PRETEND—BUT YOU SHOULDN’T EITHER

When a U.S. military plane crashed July 10 in rural Mississippi, killing all 16 Marines onboard, nobody tried to balance the account with an obligatory “bright side” of the story. And when Lake Tahoe in California found itself almost running over after several years of regional drought, I didn’t hear a single reporter calling on folks—in a spirit of “fairness”—to moderate their thanksgiving and delight.

Every so often, I take it as part of my journalistic duty to remind readers that objectivity is simply not all that it’s cracked up to be. So I’m saying a few things I’ve said before.

The simple fact is that most of us have adopted some important assumptions well before we’ve picked up the newspaper or turned on our TV. On some topics, we work hard to appear evenhanded. On others, we hang out our prejudices for all to see.

But how do we know which standard to apply in each situation?

On some stories, like the coverage of a plane crash, reporters can rightly assume that 99.9 percent of any audience will agree with a bias against accidental and even violent death. In similar fashion, we take it for granted here at WORLD that both we and our readers are for spreading the gospel, that we’re against abortion, that we’re for racial harmony, and that we’re against the New York Yankees.

“Wait a minute,” you say. “How did such raw prejudice against one of America’s traditionally great baseball teams get in there?” To which we reply: In the same way that so many other of our biases sneak in. If we didn’t arbitrarily introduce the bias ourselves, we may well have done our permissive part in allowing the bias to flourish and grow.

Here at WORLD, we walk the same tightrope journalists walk everywhere. On one side is the danger of acting clinically sterile about our subject matter.

We used to try to sort this out in some measure by distinguishing between “News” on the one hand and “Commentary” and “Analysis” on the other. Through the years, that got harder. But just by putting significant emphasis on a topic, we were making a statement. Just by including whole pages relating to the abortion issue, for example, we were saying that we think that issue is more important than most other periodicals and radio newscasts seem to suggest by giving so little space and time to it. We’ve all got our biases.

But there’s still a big difference between WORLD and most of its larger counterparts. We not only admit our bias—we’re ready to state right up front what we base that bias on. In our masthead on p. 2, you’ll see our commitment to the Bible as the standard that should settle all our prejudices. Simply put, if the Bible teaches it, we won’t apologize for including such a bias in our columns—and, perhaps more implicitly, in our news coverage as well. If the Bible doesn’t teach it, we’ll try to exclude such inclinations and preferences from the news stories and reserve them for sections intended as commentary and opinion.

We’re not so naïve as to suppose that such a declaration makes everything easy. Folks will (and do) disagree on what the Bible teaches. But at least it’s a start—and a significant one, given the breadth of the Bible’s interests. All of human relations—gender issues, family life, economics, justice, education, aesthetics, and dozens of other issues—are included.

For some, especially in many of the traditional media, such a commitment seems narrow and doctrinaire. To them, we issue this simple but good-hearted challenge: We’ve been up front with the basis for our bias. Will you tell us now where you get yours? Spell out for us the standard by which you judge airplane crashes bad and a surplus of rain as good.

And if you’re tempted to say that majorities decide such issues, that it’s mostly a matter of consensus among civilized people, then what do you think of the unsettling report a couple of weeks ago that 68 percent of the American people don’t think they can fully trust the mainstream media to tell the truth? Is the majority right on that one too?
The previously untold story exploring the unlikely friendship between famed preacher Charles Spurgeon and his friend Thomas Johnson, a former slave turned preacher.
Champion again
TIM IRELAND/AP
Patients in detention

AS CAPTIVES IN HOSPITALS, BRITISH BABY CHARLIE GARD AND CHINESE ACTIVIST LIU XIAOBO HAVE POWERFULLY EMBODIED THE DIGNITY INHERENT IN GOD-GIVEN HUMAN LIFE

by Jamie Dean

British-born baby Charlie Gard is set to have his first birthday on Aug. 4—unless hospital officials turn off his ventilator, against the wishes of his parents.

Courts have debated whether to let Charlie live, and his parents have made a simple plea: Let us decide what's best for him. A British judge's consistent answer has been no, with a final decision possibly looming before the end of July.

By July 17, a U.S.-based physician had traveled to London to assess Charlie's condition, including whether he's a candidate for an experimental therapy his parents would like to try. They waited for results and battled for their parental rights.

Charlie’s diagnosis—mitochondrial DNA depletion syndrome—is a rare genetic disease that causes brain damage and a progressive weakening of muscles. Charlie can't move his arms and legs on his own. The disease has no known cure.

The baby’s parents planned to travel to the United States to seek an experimental treatment. They knew it was a long shot, but wanted to see if Charlie could possibly improve.

Officials at Great Ormond Street Hospital in London protested. They told a judge the infant had no hope, and they asked for permission to remove life-sustaining care. The judge agreed, despite the parents’ plea to allow them to use the $1.7 million they've raised from an outpouring of international support to seek treatment outside England.

The parents lost their appeal in the Supreme Court, and European court judges refused to intervene, even as European officials came to a different conclusion in another case of life and death.

Meanwhile, the world rightly mourned the loss of Chinese activist Liu Xiaobo, 61, who lost his freedom after he helped draft Charter 08—a pro-democracy document that insists, “Every person is born with inherent rights to dignity and freedom.”

In late June the Nobel Peace Prize winner lay dying in a Chinese hospital after eight years of imprisonment for promoting democracy in the Communist regime (see story, p. 38). But Chinese officials refused to let Liu leave the country, insisting his late-stage liver cancer was beyond treatment and saying he wasn't well enough to travel.

An American physician and a German doctor visiting Liu disagreed, but it was too late: Liu died July 13. Critics of China say Liu likely lingered without adequate medical care far too long.

But even when his prognosis seemed most grim and his prospects of survival nearly gone, officials in the European Union urged China to allow Liu to “receive medical assistance at a place of his choosing in China or overseas”—yet they didn’t say the same regarding Baby Charlie.

Indeed, British officials refused to let Charlie leave the hospital, much less travel abroad for treatment. Even when it appeared doctors would remove his life support in late June, officials refused to allow his parents to take him home to die.

The anguishing dynamic raises a critical question: If a dying man like Liu Xiaobo should be allowed to choose the course of his own care, shouldn’t the parents of a vulnerable infant be given the same choice?

The hospital argued no, saying Charlie’s parents have “parental responsibility” for their son, but “overriding control” belongs to the courts.

Charlie’s court-appointed advocate: Victoria Butler-Cole, an attorney and the chairman of Compassion in Dying—a group backing euthanasia.

The judge in the case agreed to hear more evidence, and Dr. Michio Hirano of Columbia University arrived in London on July 17 to examine Charlie and conduct brain scans.
Before his arrival, the doctor said he thought nucleoside therapy presents a “small but significant” chance Charlie’s brain function could improve. Tests on Charlie would give him further info, and his parents hoped for a reprieve.

Liu’s death came weeks after another notable death following abuse in a communist regime: American college student Otto Warmbier, 22, died days after returning to the United States in a coma after more than a year of imprisonment in North Korea.

In both cases, grief is palpable: Mourning over Liu’s loss after a lifetime of advocacy, and sadness over Warmbier’s relatively short life cut off at the threshold of an adulthood of potential.

For Baby Charlie, it hasn’t been clear what his life would be like, even if treatment worked beyond expectations. But it is clear he’s brought his parents joy and that they see the inherent dignity of human life that Liu wrote about before his own death.

Christians know inherent dignity flows from God making every person in His own image. Without that knowledge, the value of human life becomes debatable, especially if it’s based solely on man-made notions of value or potential.

Where can it all lead?

A pair of philosophers from Australia showed the extreme end in a 2012 article published in the *Journal of Medical Ethics*, where they argued for “after-birth abortion.” The professors wrote that infants aren’t persons in a “morally relevant sense” since they haven’t developed future aims.

The writers argued for a legal option for parents to kill their newborn child if the baby is born with a birth defect—or if a healthy baby poses an undue burden on the parents or society. In one perverse way, their logic makes sense: “We claim that killing a newborn could be ethically permissible in all the circumstances where abortion would be.”

That’s a far cry from the view of King David, who knew what it was like to love—and lose—a newborn child of his own. Though David’s infant son did not live, he afterward still worshipped God as the giver and taker of life. And he still wrote about the wonder of every child God forms in a mother’s womb: “I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

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*Connie Yates and Chris Gard, parents of Charlie Gard (above); protesters carry pictures of Chinese Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo (left).*
An ethical blemish

THE TRUMP TEAM’S RUSSIA MEETING RAISES CONCERNS, EVEN IF IT WASN’T ILLEGAL  by Timothy Lamer

In the 1997 movie *Conspiracy Theory*, Mel Gibson plays cab driver and conspiracy nut Jerry Fletcher, who weaves together wild theories on everything from the United Nations to the Vietnam War—and then one of his theories turns out to be true, and very dangerous.

The media in the first months of the Donald Trump presidency have been Jerry Fletcher, obsessed to the point of derangement with Trump and especially with the idea that he “colluded” with the Russian government in its attempts to influence the 2016 presidential election. The Trump administration strongly denied the charges, and reporters produced very little evidence. It seemed like a “nothingburger” that served only to boost ratings, as a hidden camera caught CNN’s leftist commentator Van Jones saying.

That calculation changed on July 11, as the president’s son, Donald Trump Jr., released emails showing he responded with great interest last year to a proposed meeting with Russian lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya, who claimed to have documents from the Russian government that would damage Hillary Clinton’s campaign and be “very useful to your father.” Trump Jr. told an intermediary, “[I]f it’s what you say I love it,” and arranged for a secret meeting on June 9, 2016, with Veselnitskaya that included Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort and Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner.

It later came out that another participant in the meeting was Rinat Akhmetshin, a Russian-American lobbyist who formerly served in a counterintelligence unit in the Soviet army. Akhmetshin, an immigrant to the United States, has recently worked with Veselnitskaya to lobby against the Magnitsky Act, which includes sanctions against Russians who violate human rights.

In other words, the Jerry Fletcher media may have stumbled onto a real scandal. So far, no evidence suggests the meeting comes anywhere near the definition of treason, as some Democrats have argued, or was likely even illegal, but it’s more than a nothingburger. The question of legality turns on a federal statute that prohibits foreign nationals from “making any contribution or donation of money or other thing of value” to a U.S. political campaign. But many legal experts say that interpreting information as a “thing of value” would probably render the statute unconstitutional.

The real concern here is most likely ethics. The Russian government has its own purposes in everything it does, and those purposes do not involve the best interests of the United States. It is a hostile power that attacked Ukraine and annexed Crimea, spies on the United States, and launches hundreds of jet fighters into NATO airspace. Americans have a right to know whether Trump aides discussed offering policy concessions (such as a lifting...
or softening of sanctions) to this adversary of America in return for campaign help.

Even if they didn’t do so, the secret meeting may have put the Trump team in a position to have this hostile foreign government politically blackmail the administration later, as National Review columnist David French points out. (No evidence suggests such blackmail happened, but the meeting opened up the possibility.) And while it may not be illegal for a candidate to go to an American adversary for help in defeating a domestic political opponent, it certainly should concern us. Members of the Trump administration know this, given their previous denials that any such meetings took place, including denials from Trump Jr. himself, before he finally released the emails.

Have Democrats made similar errors? Certainly. Democratic Party officials reportedly met with Ukrainian officials to help the Clinton campaign, including in the area of opposition research. The Clinton Foundation, meanwhile, was a vehicle for foreign interests to try to buy influence in what they thought would be a future Clinton administration. But those ethical breaches don’t excuse the Trump team, which is now in the White House, from showing a dangerous lapse in judgment.

Donald Trump as president has done some excellent things. A person can be enthusiastic about the Neil Gorsuch appointment to the Supreme Court, the promised repeal of the contraceptive/abortifacient mandate, and Trump’s defense of Western civilization during his July 6 speech in Poland, and still be concerned that some of his top advisers seemed eager to meet secretly with Russian officials hoping to influence the U.S. election.

The meeting, even in its best possible light, is an ethical blemish on the administration. It’s not Watergate or Whitewater, but we need to know more about what happened on that June day in Trump Tower. ©

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<th><strong>BY THE NUMBERS</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>431</strong></td>
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<td>The number of people euthanized without their permission in the Netherlands in 2015, according to recent figures. The country logged a total of 7,254 “assisted” deaths that year.</td>
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<td><strong>610,524</strong></td>
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<td>The backlog of cases in U.S. immigration courts as of June 30, a record high.</td>
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<td><strong>21</strong></td>
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<td>The new age at which Oregonians will be able to buy tobacco come Jan. 1. Oregon joins California and Hawaii as states that have raised the smoking age.</td>
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<td><strong>$26 million</strong></td>
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<td>The amount the Human Rights Campaign announced it would spend to promote LGBT-friendly political candidates and initiatives in 2018.</td>
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<td><strong>17</strong></td>
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<td>The average number of hours per year that an American spends searching for parking.</td>
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DISPATCHES

Human Race

Sentenced
Brazil’s superior court on July 12 found former Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva guilty of corruption and money laundering and sentenced him to almost 10 years in prison. Silva was planning a return to politics and a campaign for president. Prosecutors uncovered evidence against Silva in a scandal involving Petrobras, Brazil’s national oil company. The company and other powerful contractors paid out billions in bribes to politicians like Silva. Silva’s lawyers are launching an appeal.

Sued
Faith-based pregnancy centers in Hawaii are suing the state over a law they claim forces them to promote abortion. Senate Bill 501 says limited-service pregnancy centers must post a statement in the viewing areas of their clinics directing women to public programs that include abortion services. Calvary Chapel Pearl Harbor’s pregnancy center and the National Institute of Family and Life Advocates are behind a lawsuit, claiming the bill violates their First Amendment right to free speech. The bill, which includes large fines for violators, has become state law, but the case is still in court.

Banned
The European Court of Human Rights on July 11 ruled in favor of the Belgium ban on wearing a full-face veil in public. The law, passed six years ago, came under pressure after a Belgian citizen and a Moroccan national said it violated their rights to privacy and freedom of religion. Belgian politicians argued that the ban provides facial recognition necessary to preserve democracy in the nation and promotes freedom. A similar argument has been behind laws passed in Austria, France, Bulgaria, and the Netherlands restricting the full-face veil.

Died
Chuck Blazer, a disgraced U.S. soccer official, died on July 12 at age 72. Blazer was the ex-boss of CONCACAF, the North and Central American soccer governing body. He also served on the executive committee for FIFA, governing body for world soccer from 1997 to 2013. While part of these organizations, Blazer accepted millions in bribes, including over $20 million in payments from his time at CONCACAF alone. The FBI and the IRS arrested him in 2011 for failing to file five years’ worth of tax returns. Reportedly, that was when he agreed to become an inside informant on corruption in FIFA in exchange for mitigated penalties. He pleaded guilty to bribery, money laundering, and tax evasion in 2013, but his evidence helped prosecute dozens of FIFA officials and clean up the organization.

Died
Neil Welch, the FBI agent behind a major political corruption sting operation, died on June 29 at age 90. Welch joined the FBI after law school in 1951 and became a special agent in charge of field offices in Buffalo, Detroit, Philadelphia, and, later, New York. His landmark case was the Abscam investigation, an operation that stretched on for years, culminating in 1980 with charges against a senator and six congressmen when Welch proved they accepted bribes in return for political favors. He also negotiated the surrender of a notorious killer, Winston Moseley. Welch talked to him for an hour, with Moseley’s gun on his chest, until the man gave in. Welch left the bureau in 1980 and later served as justice secretary for the state of Kentucky.
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The article contains a mix of quotes and news items. Here is a summary:

**Quotables**

- **Brandon Judd**: "Nothing short of miraculous." National Border Patrol Council president Brandon Judd on the drop of more than 50 percent in apprehensions of illegal immigrants at the border this year. "If you look at the rhetoric that President Trump has given," he said, "it has caused a number of illegal border crossings to go down."

- **Scott Cross**: "We as humans have a built-in defense mechanism where you just bury this. For myself, I didn’t say anything for 37 years." Sexual abuse victim Scott Cross on the time it takes for victims of sexual abuse to speak about their abuse. Former House Speaker Dennis Hastert left prison on July 18, released early from a 15-month sentence for financial crimes. Hastert had admitted to sexually abusing boys in the 1970s, but the statute of limitations had passed in Illinois. Cross testified that he was one of the boys sexually abused.

- **Donald Trump**: "I’d say the only thing more difficult than peace between Israel and the Palestinians is healthcare." President Donald Trump on a healthcare bill he supported that failed in the Senate in mid-July.

- **Al Blackman**: "When you like what you do, it’s not work." American Airlines mechanic Al Blackman, 91. Blackman celebrated his 75th year on the job in July, and the company did a commemorative flight in his honor over the Hudson River in New York, where he works. He began earning 50 cents an hour in 1942, on AA planes that were just beginning transatlantic routes.

- **Katherine Hsu**: "We just can’t keep up." Massachusetts health official Katherine Hsu on the growing number of syphilis cases. Hsu said it is difficult to track down and inform sexual partners of many patients because they are anonymous users of dating apps.

- **Brandon Judd**: "I’d say the only thing more difficult than peace between Israel and the Palestinians is healthcare." President Donald Trump on a healthcare bill he supported that failed in the Senate in mid-July.

**News Items**

- Former House Speaker Dennis Hastert left prison on July 18, released early from a 15-month sentence for financial crimes. Hastert had admitted to sexually abusing boys in the 1970s, but the statute of limitations had passed in Illinois. Cross testified that he was one of the boys sexually abused.

- President Donald Trump on a healthcare bill he supported that failed in the Senate in mid-July.

- Katherine Hsu on the growing number of syphilis cases. Hsu said it is difficult to track down and inform sexual partners of many patients because they are anonymous users of dating apps.

- Al Blackman on his 75th year on the job at American Airlines, celebrated with a commemorative flight over the Hudson River in New York.

- Brandon Judd on the drop of more than 50 percent in apprehensions of illegal immigrants at the border this year due to the rhetoric of President Trump.

**Images**

- Border patrol agent Lorena Apodaca monitors the U.S.-Mexico border in New Mexico.

- National Border Patrol Council president Brandon Judd.

- Massachusetts health official Katherine Hsu.

- American Airlines mechanic Al Blackman.

- Former House Speaker Dennis Hastert.

- President Donald Trump.
Standing room only
A budget South American airline is wondering whether its customers would be willing to trade savings for the most basic amenity in the industry: a seat. In an interview with the Miami Herald, VivaColombia founder and CEO William Shaw said his company is studying whether passengers would be willing to fly standing up rather than sitting down as a way to make travel less expensive. “Who cares if you don’t have an inflight entertainment system for a one-hour flight? Who cares that there aren’t marble floors or that you don’t get free peanuts?” Shaw told the paper. Ryanair, the Irish discount airline, proposed a similar bus-with-wings approach in 2010, but civil air authorities rejected it.

Car quack
Researchers at a South Korean university have suggested that carmakers replace the blare of a car’s horn with the sound of a duck quacking. Scientists from Soongsil University in Seoul said that while a traditional car horn is effective at garnering attention, a duck quack could perform the same task without annoying other passersby. “Our new klaxon sound can immediately alert the pedestrians of the danger while also reducing the unpleasantness and stress of the sound,” professor Myung-Jin Bae said.

Height of confusion
Volvo’s self-driving car project has run into a roadblock that might mean trouble for its Australian market. The Swedish carmaker says its “Large Animal Detection System” designed to prevent collisions with caribou, deer, and elk has been flummoxed by kangaroos. Volvo officials say that when a kangaroo jumps, it confuses the system. “When it’s in the air, it actually looks like it’s further away, then it lands and it looks closer,” Volvo technical manager David Pickett told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. The Australian government estimates there are more than 16,000 road collisions with kangaroos every year.

Card in hand
A man in Sydney, Australia, has gone to extremes to make sure he never forgets his transit card. He had it surgically implanted into his left hand. The man, who legally changed his name to Meow-Ludo Disco Gamma Meow-Meow, claims to be a biohacker. “My goal is to have frictionless interaction with technology,” he said. “It gives me an ability that not everyone else has, so if someone stole my wallet I could still get home.” Meow-Meow acknowledged he may run into trouble with transit authorities: Tampering with the transit cards violates the terms of service.
Smoke and fire

Mike Tingley of Grand Blanc Township, Mich., destroyed his garage when he tried to expel a bee hive from the property on July 3. The problem was his choice of method: fireworks. He reportedly was using the fireworks to try to create a smoke bomb to pacify the bees when he lost control of the situation and created a fire. Neighbors dialed 911 when they heard fireworks exploding over the roof of the burning building. Tingley told reporters the garage is a total loss, but that “everyone is safe and that’s the main thing.” Everyone—that is, except for the bees.

Coin tosser

A Chinese woman hoped to bring good luck to a flight she was about to take on June 27. Instead she brought a lengthy delay. The superstitious 80-year-old woman’s supposed charm? Coins, several of them, which she tossed into the plane’s engine. Only one of the coins actually entered the plane’s engine, but it was enough to force a five-hour delay as mechanics checked for damage. One Chinese social media user quipped, “Grandma, this is not a wish fountain with turtles.” According to Chinese reports, authorities didn’t give the woman jail time because of her age.

Fire starter

A truck ignited and started a brush fire on I-82 in Washington state on July 3. That was unusual enough. Even more ironic was the type of truck that caught fire: a Richland, Wash., fire truck. According to fire officials, the driver of the wildfire fighting unit was able to escape the vehicle, but the flames from the engine bay spread to the grassy shoulder of the highway and caused a stoppage in traffic in both directions on I-82 before Richland firefighters were able to control the fire. The driver suffered no injuries, but the department says the truck is a total loss.

Bad news bear

The Chisago County, Minn., Sheriff’s Office would like motorists in the county to stop pulling over and taking selfies with a dead bear. Officials with the sheriff’s office tweeted a warning on July 4 after receiving multiple reports of motorists stopping to take pictures with a bear carcass on Highway 8. Hours later, sheriff’s officials tweeted out another reminder, this time asking locals not to try to perform CPR on the dead bear.

Joining the fun

A noise complaint from a neighbor drew police in Asheville, N.C., to the scene of a Slip ‘N Slide party on July 2. But rather than bust the children playing, the two officers decided to join in. Officer Carrie Lee donned a black trash bag and took the first trip down the slide. Officer Joe Jones split an inflatable raft with a local kid for the second ride. After taking a ride—and determining that the partiers were breaking no laws—the two officers left without issuing any tickets.
A couple I know is celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary. They’re the first baby boomers—my generation—whom I know personally to reach that milestone. Others of us have only a few years to go before observing their own golden anniversaries, and that’s something to celebrate. But our generation also marks where those bonds began to break down.

After rising throughout the 1970s and ‘80s, divorce rates have leveled off or declined, and that’s good news. But it’s partly because of the bad news: Fewer young people are getting married in the first place. An indication of even worse news: We’ve lost sight of what marriage is. We’ve heard the warnings for decades now, and with the widespread—and surprisingly sudden—acceptance of same-sex marriage, we’re told that horse has left the barn. But if and when the horse wanders back, we should be ready to explain to it where it went wrong.

All of Western history might be seen as a struggle between the individual and his society (clan, tribe, or nation). For most of that time, society won, hands down. In any social group, civilized or not, “the many” defined “the one”—even in Athens, the birthplace of democracy, individuals were defined by citizenship, and citizenship depended on birth. The measure of any individual act, good or bad, was how it affected the city.

Individual needs and desires have a way of intruding, though, and “the one vs. the many” is more often than not seen as a problem. How to balance the needs of the one against the needs of all? When our efforts to solve the problem overbalance in favor of the many, it often leads to the soul-crushing, initiative-sapping “collective.” But overbalancing in favor of the one leads to chaos and brokenness, with “every man doing what is right in his own eyes” and accountable to no one. Both ways, if allowed to continue unchecked, end in slavery.

Freedom is possible only when the one and the many balance each other. This reflects our Creator: one divine being in perpetual relationship among three persons. Ravi Zacharias likes to say that the nature of the Trinity solves the “one vs. many” problem, and in the Bible we see a vision of how it’s supposed to work in the church: a communal body with each member individually connected to Christ.

But how does it work in civil society? The American experiment in self-rule might give us a clue. What built America was not “rugged individualism,” as some right-wingers would have it, but voluntary community, and the point where individuals regularly intersected with community was, and is, marriage.

You could call it the great compromise between the one and the many: two individuals come together to create community, and their bond is biological, societal, economic, emotional, and spiritual. While providing individual satisfaction, marriage also forms a triangular base of father, mother, and children: a stable shape capable of supporting other shapes. Even when the two partners are less than satisfied, society benefits in ways we don’t fully appreciate.

Justifications for same-sex marriage appeal to this very benefit: Shouldn’t we allow homosexual couples to enjoy community with each other as they’re accepted in a broader society? It’s obviously a convincing argument, but with two major flaws. First, without the means of producing children, the biological bond is null and void. Second, it confirms marriage as an individual preference, undoing the long-term benefits of a marriage culture. Instead of 1+1=2, the fundamental equation becomes 1+1=1+1. Or, instead of stable triangles, we’re trying to build a civilization on straight lines, parallelograms, and trapezoids.

After a rush to the altar following the Obergefell decision two years ago, the rate of increase in same-sex marriage has dropped. It’s as we suspected: The fight was more about affirming homosexuality than affirming marriage. But heterosexuals have been making the great compromise all about “the one” for the last 50 years. Same-sex marriage didn’t fray that rope; it was already on its last threads. The consequences for “the many” are yet to be seen. ©
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Rev. Dr. Bassam Chedid
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The Arabic Study Bible (ASB) text is based on the timeless Van Dyck faithful translation from the original languages which remains the best and most loved translation.
After the evacuation of over 300,000 Allied troops from the French beach of Dunkirk in 1940, Winston Churchill announced to the House of Commons, “A miracle of deliverance, achieved by valor, by perseverance, by perfect discipline, by faultless service, by resource, by skill, by unconquerable fidelity, is manifest to us all.”

In Dunkirk, a shattering and stirring retelling of that rescue, writer/director Christopher Nolan undercuts Churchill’s lofty eloquence to some degree, demonstrating that no human service or discipline this side of heaven is ever perfect or faultless. Yet within his clear-eyed realism, Nolan manifests the miracle all the same.

Always the master time manipulator, he divides the story into three parts—land, sea, and air—each with separate chronologies. Land, which occurs over the course of a week, opens on a sequence that is more of an execution than a gunfight. Within seconds the lone survivor (Fionn Whitehead), a boy in a man’s uniform, finds himself yet another fish in a different barrel. His wide, traumatized eyes take in hundreds of thousands of soldiers waiting futilely, like lines of sheep to be slaughtered, on the sun-bleached sand for rescue. He joins a scrabble of other terrified lads making various attempts to get to...
We don’t know anything about them beyond their names. Not where they came from, what their families are like, or what plans they might have if they make it home alive. Nolan’s entire point seems to be we don’t need to. Helped immensely by Hans Zimmer’s screeching, ticking, pounding score that gives voice to abstract notions like anxiety and dread, Nolan brings us so intimately into the men’s experiences, our common humanity alone creates empathy for their choices—both the heroic and the cowardly.

It bears mentioning that Nolan brings us viscerally into the hell of war without turning to the gore now common to films in this genre. Dunkirk is rated PG-13 almost solely for the intensity of the scenes, not for their bloodiness. Blurred images of men burning, drowning, and blowing up wound not so much the eyes as the soul. The MPAA also cites brief bad language. It must have been very brief. I don’t doubt it’s there, but I didn’t notice it.

What we’re left with at the end of the horror, panic, and grim determination is a dawning sense of grace. We at last hear Churchill’s rousing “We shall fight on the beaches” speech not from the British bulldog but from a young soldier feeling crushed under a weight of guilt and failure, convinced his nation is more likely to spit on him than cheer him. As he reads the words from the newspaper, a wider, truer perspective dawns—whatever his deficiencies, he too has been used by the hand of Providence.

Inception movies like Memento and Inception, Nolan’s nonlinear framing has come close to gimmickry. Here, this occasionally disorienting approach is absolutely worthwhile. As the separate narratives do their individual work, it becomes clear, in a quiet closing scene, how each contributes to the greater story of Nazi defeat.

In an unusual move, Nolan never bothers to lay out the historical background. But why should he? Nearly every viewer will already understand the stakes and the terrible tyranny Europe might have fallen under had the Allied forces failed. More surprising is that he doesn’t provide any backstory for the characters either.

We don’t know anything about them beyond their names. Not where they came from, what their families are like, or what plans they might have if they make it home alive. Nolan’s entire point seems to be we don’t need to. Helped immensely by Hans Zimmer’s screeching, ticking, pounding score that gives voice to abstract notions like anxiety and dread, Nolan brings us so intimately into the men’s experiences, our common humanity alone creates empathy for their choices—both the heroic and the cowardly.

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Movie

To the Bone

The biggest lie people struggling with an eating disorder tell is “I got it under control.” That’s the straightforward, self-deluded lie that Ellen (Lily Collins), the main character of Netflix-produced drama To the Bone, tells her stepsister (Liana Liberato). Clearly, after four expensive treatment programs and a weight that’s ever-dropping, Ellen doesn’t have anorexia under control. To the Bone uses gallows humor and nuanced sensitivity to explore how much an eating disorder controls its victims.

Ellen doesn’t know if she can ever recover. The 20-year-old artist has played the recovery game for so long that her distraught mother (Carrie Preston) kicks her out. Her well-meaning stepmother (Carrie Preston) then procures a bed for her at Threshold, a seven-patient facility in Los Angeles run by an eating disorder specialist (Keanu Reeves) who uses unorthodox treatment methods. There, surrounded by young housemates who struggle with various eating disorders and life issues, Ellen struggles to regain desire—and hope—for life.

It’s not easy to make eating disorder patients relatable to people who have never suffered from this twisted, irrational illness that robs typically smart and reasonable individuals of the most basic function of a human being: eating. Writer/director Marti Noxon, who once almost died from anorexia, understands the lunacy of eating disorders very well and doesn’t try to sanitize it.

Her characters teach each other the easiest food to barf out, proudly state the number of times they’ve been in treatment programs, and discuss the body shape of actress Emma Stone. Collins, who also recovered from anorexia, displays the torments of an anorexic’s obsessions and guilt and self-hatred without sacrificing the sharp wit and introspection of her character.

To the Bone is not an easy movie to watch. It’s downright depressing and, for people who still struggle, can be triggering with its graphic scenes of protruding rib cages and sunken stomachs. But the movie serves as a limited but illuminating window into the hidden dungeons of their dark, dirty battles.

Documentary

City of Ghosts

Raqq, Syria, the capital of the Islamic State’s self-proclaimed caliphate, is an isolated place. The terror group’s government has been so oppressive that it has threatened death to city residents who take videos or photos. The smuggled images from the city that the wider world has seen—of lines of children waiting for food, of public crucifixions, of women in black niqabs—are largely thanks to the dangerous and fair-minded work of young Syrian journalists who make up Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently (RBSS).

The gripping documentary City of Ghosts tells the story of RBSS. We don’t learn all of the members’ identities, but the ones we meet are Syrians in their 20s who became journalists in the fog of war. Director Matthew Heineman (Cartel Land) spent eight months building a relationship with RBSS spokesman Abdalaziz Alhamza to create this film.

The Islamic State (ISIS), which draws much of its manpower from propaganda about its Islamic paradise, hates RBSS. It has called for the assassination of its members (some attempts of which have been successful) and has executed relatives of escaped RBSS journalists. RBSS doesn’t align with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s regime, ISIS, or militant rebel groups. It reported on the oppression of Christians in Raqq, calling them “the most vulnerable group in the country.”

The film rightly focuses on the journalists’ individual stories and doesn’t cover much political or historical ground. Heineman avoids gratuitous violence in depicting ISIS cruelty, although we see enough to know the evil the Syrians are facing. The R-rated film shows RBSS footage of the first public executions when ISIS conquered Raqq—but in future executions, the filmmakers cut away before the moment of murder. Amid American anger toward the media, City of Ghosts is a reminder of the value of truth-telling journalism. The world simply wouldn’t know about some of the Islamic State’s actions without these young men.

—by Sophia Lee

—by EMILY BELZ

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Blue-collar concerns

PONDERING THE DEMISE OF COMPASSIONATE CONSERVATISM by Marvin Olasky

Henry Olsen (see p. 59) is a New York Yankees fan but otherwise knows what’s good for America—and it shows in his new book, The Working Class Republican (Broadside).

The subtitle, Ronald Reagan and the Return of Blue-Collar Conservatism, is a BLUF (bottom line up front) and also a bluff, because he shows how Reagan’s conservatism was a reaction to leftward-ho Democrats rather than a staunch ideological doctrine: Reagan retained many New Deal sympathies but realized in the late 1940s that communism is evil, in the 1950s and 1960s that liberal formulas weren’t working, and in the 1970s that Democrats were becoming an elite party and giving up on democracy.

The results were huge. In foreign policy, he knew the Soviet empire had to be dubbed as evil and undermined. In domestic policy, he was a conservative with compassion for not just those on welfare and those in ghettos, but those who proceeded paycheck to paycheck and wanted to know they had a social safety net if the factory closed, the business went bankrupt, or an injury left them unable to work.

Since I was involved in developing “compassionate conservatism,” I’ve thought often about what went wrong, and have even had enough ego to think that I not become WORLD’s editor and instead gone whole-hog with George W. Bush instead of remaining semi-aloof, maybe the idea would have had more legs. That’s dumb, in part because God suited me well for WORLD and poorly for Washington, but also because I never analyzed the problem as well as Olsen has.

Here’s what he writes: Compassionate conservatism failed politically because it “offered nothing to the working-class whites whose votes determined the outcome in Midwestern states. … They weren’t members of Baptist, Methodist, or nondenominational Christian churches. They weren’t poor so the Bush administration’s focus on helping the poor didn’t affect their daily lives. … Suppose you were a non-evangelical trucker or a cashier listening to the radio while ‘W’ spoke about compassionate conservatism. Did you hear anything during the talk that made you think he cared about people like you?”

Turning to today, Olsen writes, “Reagan would want to cut the federal budget, especially since a number of programs he always tried to cut such as farm subsidies and the Export-Import Bank remain part of the federal government. [He would find] ways to cut spending within entitlements without endangering core social commitments.” For example, part of the $200 billion in disability spending each year is not for disabled people but people over 55 who have lost their jobs, feel useless, and are—surprise, surprise—depressed. Challenging, personal, and spiritual help could reinvigorate lives—and save billions.

BOOKMARKS

Witty Nebraska Sen. (and Ph.D.) Ben Sasse said in a recent interview, “I wrote a 520-page dissertation because I didn’t have time to write a 220-page dissertation. That thing is woefully under-edited.” Sasse’s new book, The Vanishing American Adult (St. Martin’s, 2017), is better written (or edited). He argues—with good evidence—that the United States has “a collective coming-of-age crisis without parallel in our history.”

Sasse offers pungent data: Most men ages 18 to 30 view pornography more than once a week, and more Americans 18 to 34 live with their parents than with a spouse (or partner, which suggests another problem). He shows how parents can help kids learn to work hard, become truly literate, resist peer culture, and learn the difference between “need” and “want.” But he also knows how hard this is.

Anthony Esolen is a brilliant writer, and Out of the Ashes:

Rebuilding American Culture (Regnery, 2017) abounds in pungent phrases. He criticizes abstraction and proposes, since we are embodied souls, that we “immerse ourselves in things: trees, stars, mud… dogs, fire… shovel… wheel.” He shows “how inhuman it is to project history onto the flat template of political action or political ideology. We do not, in the first instance, want to know about the politics behind Ellis Island; we want to know the stories of the people.”

Esolen also offers some unconventional ideas: Conservatives complain about government work, but the New Deal’s WPA was superior to today’s welfare: We still have bridges and roads to show for it. One reason we don’t see that today: “The training and hiring of craftsmen would shift funds away from women indoors and toward men outdoors, and that will be viewed as harming the women—even though the same men might then be able to marry and support a wife and their children.” —M.O.
**FOUR CLASSIC BOOKS**
reviewed by Emily Whitten

**LES MISÉRABLES** Victor Hugo

“So long as ignorance and misery remain on earth, books like this cannot be useless.” So wrote Victor Hugo of his 1862 novel, Les Misérables. Today’s publishers and playwrights seem to agree, keeping Jean Valjean’s story of redemption easily accessible in numerous formats. Readers willing to brave roughly 1,500 pages of Hugo’s original text will find many complex political and historical arguments left out of other versions. In addition, supporting characters like Fantine get more room, provoking further sympathy for the poor. That said, a good adaptation of Les Misérables remains substantive reading from a master storyteller.

**DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA** Alexis de Tocqueville

Alexis de Tocqueville’s travel through North America in the early 1800s led to one of the most influential books ever written on American democracy. Like Victor Hugo, Tocqueville writes out of his experience with political revolutions in 19th-century France. Yet, he ably contrasts French and American revolutions, identifying distinctives like religion and geography, which led to American success. Some of Tocqueville’s generalizations miss the mark, including stereotypes of native “savages” and black slaves. Still, Democracy in America remains a prescient look at how America’s founders contributed to human flourishing. A good complement to the political theater of Les Misérables.

**THROUGH GATES OF SPLENDOR** Elisabeth Elliot

When Waorani (Auca) Indians speared Jim Elliot and four other missionaries in 1956, Elisabeth Elliot lost her husband and the father of her young child. Written roughly a year after their deaths, this book employs diary entries and photos to bring readers into their story. Elisabeth’s calm demeanor evidences a strong faith in God. So does the book’s shocking ending added in 1958, as she goes to live with the Waorani to win them for Christ. (See the 2002 documentary Beyond the Gates of Splendor for how God later blessed these sacrifices.) Inspirational reading for both older children and adults.

**THE JOURNALS OF JIM ELLIOT** ed. Elisabeth Elliot

Many readers familiar with Christian martyr Jim Elliot know this quote from his diary: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.” This collection of journal entries edited by his wife in 1978 gives a more complete picture of Jim—including his doubts, failures, and really bad poetry. Entries often summarize his daily Bible studies, and perceptive readers will see God slowly preparing a sinful, fallen man to show forth His glory. Women may especially appreciate Jim’s romance with Betty (Elisabeth), but young readers should skip this title’s frankness about sexual temptation.

**AFTERWORD**

Martin J. Schreiber spent a life in Wisconsin politics, even serving as governor of Wisconsin in the 1970s. That experience didn’t prepare him to deal with his wife’s Alzheimer’s disease. In My Two Elaines: Learning, Coping, and Surviving as an Alzheimer’s Caregiver (Book Publishers Network, 2016), Schreiber offers practical insights from a caregiver’s perspective. He lays out common temptations for caregivers: self-reliance, and overusing alcohol to deal with stress. He also explains how stress affects caregivers’ health. Schreiber is Lutheran, but the book does not offer much spiritual insight.

John Dunlop’s Finding Grace in the Face of Dementia (Crossway, 2017) combines solid Scriptural wisdom with a medical perspective. Dunlop’s parents both had dementia. He is a doctor who specializes in geriatrics and has diagnosed many patients with dementia. This book brings together his professional and personal experience grounded in the sovereignty of God. Throughout, he reminds readers that God will be glorified even in this terrible disease. —Susan Olasky
Lyrical literature
POETRY FOR CHILDREN reviewed by Emily Whitten

HEROES, HORSES, AND HARVEST MOONS: A CORNUCOPIA OF BEST-LOVED POEMS, VOL. 1 Jim Weiss
Weiss narrates this collection of children's poems (available on CD and digitally) that includes “Casey at the Bat,” “The Charge of the Light Brigade,” and “Paul Revere's Ride.” Weiss' dramatic style is best savored a few poems at a time. Older children may want to skip the nursery rhymes in the first section, but the whole family can enjoy his readings of poets like Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson. Weiss helpfully includes short descriptions of each poet's place in history. One caution: Christian parents or educators will need to discuss the last poem with children, as it conveys questionable theology.

GETTY KIDS HYMNAL: IN CHRIST ALONE Keith and Kristyn Getty
The first children's hymnal by Keith and Kristyn Getty (available on CD or digitally) presents both old and new hymns in their genre-bending style. Mixing folk, Irish, and contemporary music with theologically rich poetry, these hymns will help connect today's kids to the faith and music of Christians of earlier generations. The Gettys recorded this CD with a children's choir. They also offer a printed hymnbook well-suited for children's choirs, and this June released a second kids' hymnal titled For the Cause.

OUT OF WONDER Kwame Alexander, Chris Colderley, and Marjory Wentworth
Alexander, Colderley, and Wentworth provide 20 new poems inspired by significant poets of (mostly) the last 100 years. In the preface, Newbery Medal winner Kwame Alexander (The Crossover) hopes the poems will be “stepping-stones to wonder,” inspiring kids to compose their own poetry as well as read each author's original poems. The collection here varies in quality, and the poems tend to reflect the narrow subject matter of today's secular poetic voices. Still, Caldecott Honoree Ekua Holmes' brilliant collage illustrations invoke the complexity of a jazz call-and-response ballad. Overall, a creative complement to more straightforward classic poetry collections.

POETRY TEATIME COMPANION Julie Bogart and Nancy Graham
As a homeschooling mom, Bogart developed the habit with her children of reading poetry during teatime. The practice spread to others and led to a website (poetryteatime.com) plus this 2016 book—a “sampler of British and American poems.” It includes 52 poems by 52 poets, organized by season. The book also contains short biographies, child-friendly discussion questions, poetry concepts, and writing prompts. Poets range from John Milton and Shakespeare to Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Robert Frost. While the watercolorlike photographs aren't exceptional, they do leave room for readers' imaginations to soar.

AFTERWORD
Author N.D. Wilson underwent brain surgery for a “farm egg sized tumor” in May, but wrote late in June that he has partially recovered. For news and prayer requests, go to @ndwilsonmutters on Twitter. On June 27 Random House released Wilson's The Door Before, a captivating prequel to his best-selling 100 Cupboards series. In April, Katherine Tegen Books released Book 2 in Wilson's Outlaws of Time series, The Song of Glory and Ghost: It has swift action and fantastic elements, including a child with snakes for arms, but suffers from uneven pacing and heroes who act out of character. —E.W.

S.J. Dahlstrom's The Green Colt (Paul Dry Books, 2016) is the fourth book in the Adventures of Wilder Good series. In this volume Papa gives Wilder a horse to break and hires a Mexican vaquero to guide him. It's full of Texas Panhandle cowboy lore—and shows Wilder learning some harsh realities of life. —Susan Olasky
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Brad Wilcox, director of the National Marriage Project, is a University of Virginia sociology professor and author or co-author of many books: The most recent is Soul Mates: Religion, Sex, Love, and Marriage among African Americans and Latinos. Here are edited excerpts of our interview before students at Patrick Henry College.

Marriage rates are down and the percentage of children born out of wedlock is up. What’s going on in American culture? More Americans are embracing a secular, unaffiliated kind of identity, with a decline in church attendance. That’s important because religion tends to reinforce strong marriages. We’ve seen a shift away from community, tradition, and authority and toward expressive individualism, following what you desire and feel.

Has feminism had an effect? A rise in feminism has raised expectations for marriage. In some ways, that’s good: Fathers are more engaged practically with their families and their kids than they were years ago. It also means that people can be almost too picky about entering marriage and more likely to resort to divorce when there is difficulty or conflict. That may not serve your marriage or family well.

Economic factors? Less-educated men are employed less stably. Their real incomes are down. That matters, because men not stably employed are less likely to get married, stay married, or be attractive as potential husbands. This economic shift away from an industrial economy to a service economy has tended to benefit people with more education and undercut the value of working-class and poor men in our economy.

What’s the effect of public policies that penalize marriage? For some lower-income mothers, it makes more sense not to get married when you’re concerned about Medicaid, food stamps, etc.

How are these factors interwoven? Harvard sociology professor William Julius Wilson has made the point that our higher view of marriage, in terms of delivering both emotional and to some extent financial satisfaction, has made the relative fragility that less-educated men face today in the labor force market more problematic when it comes to marriage. In the 1930s, people forged ahead and maintained their marriages even in the face of tremendous economic difficulties.

When we see marriage as a capstone agreement between people whose careers already are established… Once you have that model or a soul mate model, where people see marriage as intense romance, people are more likely to wash their hands of marriage with a spouse when financial difficulties hit.

We think marriage should follow maturity and establishment in a
‘Probably the most powerful predictor of a happy marriage, on the religious side of things, is when a couple prays together outside of just grace at meals.’

career, but marriage is a prod toward maturity and careers. Many poorer Americans don’t have their “ducks in a row,” so they are not getting married but are still having kids.

George Gilder a generation ago wrote a book mellifluously titled Naked Nomads—his description of unmarried men... Men who get married work more hours, earn more money, and are less likely to be fired than their single peers. They go to church more often, taverns less often.

Some in the “men’s rights” movement say divorce laws have made marriage a bad deal for men. They say you invest yourself emotionally, practically, and financially in marriage, have kids, and years later you can be divorced unwillingly: You’ve lost your kids, are stuck with a bill for child support and maybe alimony, and have had to divvy up your property.

Any merit to that critique? Divorce law now is not just. So often you’ll see where one spouse has an affair and wants a divorce and the other spouse is left reeling, maybe losing primary custody or a substantial share of assets, with the behavior that preceded the divorce not taken into account.

How would you change divorce laws? Ideally, we wouldn’t go back to a no-fault model, but we would take into account whether either spouse engaged in infidelity, physical or emotional abuse, drugs or alcohol.

Isn’t that getting rid of no-fault? No. In the 1950s and 1960s you often couldn’t get divorced unless you showed a breach in marital conduct. I would allow divorce but take into account these factors as far as child custody and division of property.

We should also note that most marriages don’t end in divorce. Men who work diligently, attend church with their spouse regularly, are emotionally engaged in their marriages, and don’t abuse drugs and alcohol have a pretty slim chance of getting divorced.

You published in 2004 Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands. How does Christianity shape fathers and husbands? Christianity turns men’s hearts and minds toward the family. They are more emotionally engaged with their wives and children. They are more likely to read to their kids, to hug and praise their children. Feminists tend to be concerned about the traditionalistic character of religion but miss the familialistic side that encourages men to put their families, marriages, and kids first.

Thinking about kids: Secularists tend to favor publicly funded child care; Christians tend to be more family-oriented. What’s best for the children? Most scholars who are honest about the data would acknowledge that in the first year it is better for children to be at home with lots of bonding time, usually with their mothers. Kids who spend more than three hours a week in some kind of institutional child care are more likely to have social and emotional problems.

Should public policy encourage more staying at home in the first year? There has been a push to expand child care or expand a tax credit targeting child care. In place of that approach, I’d much prefer that we expand the child tax credit to $3,000 per child age 4 and under, with that money given to families to do as they please. This recognizes that we live in a pluralistic country: Different parents will want to do things differently, and we should let them decide how they want to use that money.

In 2011, in your State of Our Unions project, you noted that God-centeredness in marriage makes a huge difference. We found couples who reported an intense engagement with God were much more likely to say they were happy. In our new book, Soul Mates, with Nicholas Wolfinger, we find that probably the most powerful predictor of a happy marriage, on the religious side of things, is when a couple prays together outside of just grace at meals.

You found that in the armed forces most couples get married and there’s no racial divide regarding marriage rates. Why? Progressive takeaway: stable work, decent-paying jobs, access to free or inexpensive housing, and free healthcare. Conservative takeaway: a culture that honors marriage and the traditional family life, and policies that say you don’t get housing on base or other benefits if you are cohabiting.

You reference the findings of Harvard professor Tyler VanderWeele. He is tracking thousands of women in the United States across many years. He’s found that women who are attending church regularly are about 40 percent less likely to get a divorce than their female peers not attending church.
Reflections on Ravel

ARTISTS OFFER MASTERFUL NEW INTERPRETATIONS OF TWO OF MAURICE RAVEL’S ENDURING WORKS

by Arsenio Orteza

It’s commonplace among classical-music marketers to wait for anniversaries of composers’ births or deaths to release multiple renditions of their works.

Sometimes, though, windfalls occur irrespective of the calendar. And where the French composer Maurice Ravel is concerned, 2017 is turning out to be such a year, with two or more new recordings of several of his most enduring compositions having recently hit the digital-age equivalent of store shelves.

Two of these—Miroirs and Le tombeau de Couperin—can be found on Miroirs: Ravel Piano Works (Sony Classical), the fifth album by the German pianist Alexander Krichel. Not yet 30, Krichel acquits himself well on both, but it’s with the five-piece title suite that his sensitivity to the demands of the music and to the piano itself shines most brightly.

Make that “shimmers,” because the Miroirs only shine in iridescent flashes, like sunlight sparkling on flowing water. (Water is, of course, one kind of surface to which the term “mirrors” can refer.)

Not to be outdone, the 30-year-old American pianist Andrew Tyson performs Miroirs on his new album Ravel, Scriabin: Miroirs (Alpha), proving himself the equal of Krichel with an interpretation that differs mainly by proceeding at a slightly faster tempo.

Starker contrasts occur between Krichel’s Le tombeau de Couperin and that of the harpist Kateřina Englichová and the oboist Vilém Veverka on their new album Impressions: Ravel, Debussy, Sluka: Works for Oboe and Harp (Supraphon). Not only does the Czech duo omit the fugue (as Ravel himself did, along with the toccata, when he orchestrated the suite, originally composed for solo piano), but they also locate and heighten emotional nuances left dormant by piano-only renditions, even those as expressive as Krichel’s.

The oboe, for example, has a piercing quality that, especially hovering atop the crystalline delicacy of the harp, resists fading into the background in a way that the piano, no matter how crisply attacked, does not. And in the case of Le tombeau’s fourth (or fifth) movement—the minuet—the sharpness of Veverka’s oboe emphasizes the piquancy of memory and loss.

Dedicated to Jean Dreyfus, a casualty of World War I and the stepson of a woman whom Ravel practically regarded as his surrogate mother, the movement telescopes a wide range of emotions into its 4 minutes and 23 seconds. And it demonstrates the capacity of musical shorthand to function as a kind of non-verbal stream of consciousness.

Reflections on Ravel

 ARTISTS OFFER MASTERFUL NEW INTERPRETATIONS OF TWO OF MAURICE RAVEL’S ENDURING WORKS

by Arsenio Orteza

Actually, 2017 is somewhat significant as Ravel-related anniversaries go, marking the centennial of Ravel’s acceptance of the commission to compose the music for what would become the one-act opera L’enfant et les sortilèges. (He would not, however, begin work on it until three years later.)

The libretto, written by the French novelist Colette, dramatizes the coming of age of a “bad child” (enfant méchant) who, not unlike Toy Story’s Sid, finds himself marked for revenge by toys that he has abused. And, as with all operas, one should see it as well as hear it.

But for those who know it well enough not to need the visuals, two new renditions commend themselves: Debussy: L’enfant prodigue//Ravel: L’enfant et les sortilèges/(Live) (Erato) by the Mikko Franck–conducted Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France and Ravel: Complete Orchestral Works Vol. 5 (SWR Classic) by the Stéphane Denève–conducted Radio-Sinfonieorchester Stuttgart des SWR.

The opera’s straightforward plot, phantasmagorical quality, and relative brevity (both new versions come in under 50 minutes) make it a useful introduction to opera for those convinced that they could never like the stuff. —A.O.
NEW OR RECENT POP ALBUMS
reviewed by Arsenio Orteza

BATTLE CREEK TRANSIT AUTHORITY: LIVE IN CONCERT Brass Band of Battle Creek
The “Transit Authority” part of this live recording’s title derives from the original name of the band whose hits constitute the program’s latter portion—Chicago. But, unlike the first portion’s “Funiculì, Funiculà,” “Jamaica Farewell,” or “Children of Sanchez,” all but one of the Chicago numbers feature a vocalist who, although up to the challenge of hitting Peter Cetera’s high notes, distracts from what his fellow Michiganders do best: namely, provide the thrills of a high-quality halftime show without requiring their audience to attend a football game.

THE SINGLES Can
Eleven of these 11½ oddball singles (23 tracks in all) first appeared between 1970 and 1979, the decade before the one in which the influence of Can and others of their ilk would become apparent. That ilk, by the way, was called “krautrock.” What better name for a playful, avant-garde pop originating in Germany? A better question: If after 40-plus years even the catchiest of these ditties sound ahead of their time, is it possible that their time might never come?

WE’RE ALL ALRIGHT (DELUXE EDITION) Cheap Trick
The deluxe edition in this case trumps the regular one because the bonus tracks (“Like a Fly,” the epilogue-providing “If You Still Want My Love,” a cover of the Move’s “Blackberry Way”) equal or surpass the best of the 10 on the regular edition. Not that those 10 lack for energy—the first six are almost nothing but. It’s the “pop,” however, rather than the “power” that has always set Cheap Trick’s power-pop apart. And it’s the pop element that the bonus tracks extend and sustain.

WHITE KNIGHT Todd Rundgren
In the man-bites-dog department, Rundgren seems to have chosen the guests who stud this refreshingly pop-friendly album to serve their respective songs rather than to serve his ego or his bottom line. In the dog-bites-man department, there are an anti-Trump song (you know, lest folks assume that, as a rock star, Rundgren swings to the right) and two declarations of left-on-right culture war—three if Rundgren intends to fund the good intentions of “I Got Your Back” with other people’s taxes.

ENCORE
With every member aboard except the solo-careering Stevie Nicks, Lindsey Buckingham/Christine McVie (East West/Warner) is a Non-Fleetwood Mac Album in Name Only. And although Nicks’ absence does decrease the variety quotient, almost every song holds its own, hookwise, among the group’s many hits. Admittedly, one expects dreamy pop singalongs from McVie (“Feel About You,” “Red Sun,” “Game of Pretend”), but with “Love Is Here to Stay” and “Lay Down for Free” [sic], even Buckingham gets in on the act. And, in a particularly interesting switcheroo, it’s McVie who provides the song with “Tusk”-y drums (“Too Far Gone”).

For those who prefer vintage Mac, there’s a newly expanded, 30th-anniversary edition of the band’s second-biggest-selling album, Tango in the Night. What almost justifies the extravagance is the disc containing extended mixes of the album’s five singles, at least three of which (“Everywhere,” “Little Lies,” “Big Love”) are strong enough to survive the repetition. –A.O.
The head of Iraq’s Chaldean Church can be forgiven for a little ouchiness. “Those who have the right to talk about the future of Nineveh Plain are mainly the indigenous people of the region,” he said following the early July liberation of Mosul.

Patriarch Louis Raphael Sako for three years watched nearly his entire flock be made churchless and homeless by Islamic State, or ISIS. Many of them also were kidnapped or killed. World leaders declared it genocide but did little else to stop the militants until launching a military offensive in late 2016. In February I attended a Chaldean service where he officiated, probably a thousand worshippers crowded into a hall big enough to hold a few hundred in Iraq’s safe Kurdish region, all displaced Christians huddled against the world.

As Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi arrived July 9 in Mosul to declare the city’s liberation, Sako and many Iraqis felt more than elation. For them, it’s like stepping from the film version of their three-year nightmare into the living, breathing reality of it. Destruction they’ve only heard about, or seen in bootlegged cell phone videos, they now must walk through, wondering how to begin again.

More than 1 million people—half the city—have been displaced from Mosul, and an estimated 86,000 homes have been destroyed. ISIS destroyed more than 40 churches and reduced to rubble nearly all Mosul’s landmarks, from the tomb of the prophet Jonah to the Grand Mosque, a site pictured on Iraq’s 10,000-dinar banknote.

Study drone footage of Mosul and think a history that now includes surviving ISIS.

Iraqi flags now fly above buildings once topped by black ISIS flags, and some Mosul residents are returning.

As the Iraqi army freed up the city, beleaguered residents emerged from holes in the ground, looking like Auschwitz victims. Women held captive by ISIS militants had to be put on IVs for dehydration and malnutrition.

Yet Iraqi flags now fly above buildings once topped by black ISIS flags, and some Mosul residents are returning. The Iraqi government has pledged $100 billion to help returnees, while the United States has announced another $150 million. Overall the United States has made $1.3 billion in humanitarian aid available, but much of it is going through the UN and has not reached those targeted by ISIS. A shortage of Trump appointees at the State Department, I’m told, means Obama holdovers are calling shots and do not see Iraq’s Christians as vulnerable or as a priority to securing the region.

Millions in money won’t matter if Iraq and its allies don’t realign methods, if they don’t listen to local stalwarts like Bishop Sako. Mosul and its Nineveh province ran well early on in the U.S. occupation under Gen. David Petraeus because Petraeus ran a democratic council of city elders, welcoming even former Baath Party members who signed a pledge of good faith. Mosul’s stability unraveled as Baghdad insisted on centralized, not federalist, governance and as Washington played along, favoring Shiite outsiders.

Now the neighborhood has grown tougher. Former U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter warns against countering Russia, insisting Moscow has been ineffective in the fight against ISIS. Former Iraqi foreign minister Hoshyar Zebari warns against cooperation with Iran, which wants to carve a corridor from Tehran to Damascus through Mosul and Nineveh. Iranian recruits, he said, “are breathing down our neck.”

As Dawlat Abouna, a church layman and former editor at the Bagdad Monitor, told me, “Neither the Kurds nor Iran nor any other side can serve the Iraqi Christians; the only way to serve them is a united Iraq far from sectarianism.”

All leads back to letting locals lead. But it will take more fortitude than ever before. Iraqi Christians, Bishop Sako said, must “leave useless quarrels” and recognize with Muslims their need to fight corruption and terrorism together with their long history surviving as neighbors, a history that now includes surviving ISIS.
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Chicago Police officers and detectives investigate a vehicle at the crime scene where a man was shot in North Lawndale on May 28.
The increasing violence in Chicago’s poor neighborhoods seems impervious to social programs, but small churches see small changes as they preach the gospel and model better lives.

BY JAMIE DEAN
in West and South Side Chicago

PHOTO BY JOSHUA LOTT/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

For Chicago’s summer tourists, most travel guides suggest familiar stops: Millennium Park, Navy Pier, Wrigley Field, or one of the boat tours along the winding river through a gleaming downtown.

Less popular: Hot spots in the West and South sides, where scores of residents have been shot this year. Over the Fourth of July weekend alone, at least 102 people were shot. Fifteen people died.

By mid-July, Chicago’s toll rose to 1,924 people shot this year, with 353 killed. Last year, the city endured 762 murders—more than the homicides in New York City and Los Angeles combined.

Ask locals what’s happened in the South and West sides, and many say there are no simple answers. Problems like gangs, drugs, and poverty aren’t new, and it’s unclear why violence spiked dramatically in the last couple of years.

But looking at the last few decades offers a glimpse of a bigger picture. Black communities in Chicago endured overt discrimination for a large chunk of the 20th century, and the city’s attempts to address problems were often as destructive as the longtime abuses.

A prominent example: Chicago’s approach to public housing created dangerous ghettos with deplorable living conditions. It also dehumanized many residents by discouraging work for able-bodied adults and marriage for those with children.

Similar problems afflicted other communities and underscored a fundamental need beyond the scope of
government: spiritual care for those suffering from the effects of their own sins, the sins of others, or both.

Indeed, if decades of large-scale social engineering brought disaster for thousands of families in Chicago, one way forward may be more modest: smaller-scale ministry that creates pockets of redemption that could grow.

On a summer Sunday in Chicago, it’s not hard to find some of those pockets in hot spots like the West Side neighborhood of North Lawndale and the South Side community of Roseland.

In these pockets, they’re toting Bibles—and they’re gathering for church.

The streets of North Lawndale are quiet on an early Sunday morning, as warm sunlight filters onto shady roads with brownstone-style homes built a century ago.

For several months in 1966, Martin Luther King Jr. lived here in a dilapidated apartment building on Hamlin Avenue, attempting to bring a message of racial equality to northern cities. He focused on the area’s housing woes.

Hundreds of thousands of black Southerners had moved to Chicago during a decadeslong Great Migration from Southern states. Black citizens didn’t face the same Jim Crow laws of the South, but they did face entrenched discrimination.

A housing shortage forced many black residents into cramped flats in a packed chain of neighborhoods known as the Black Belt. Those who tried to find better housing met staunch resistance. When World War II veteran Harvey Clark tried to move his family of four into the white suburb of Cicero in 1951, the neighborhood revolted.

A crowd of locals burned the family’s belongings, including furniture, baby pictures, and a marriage license. They destroyed the home’s plumbing and appliances and smashed a piano Clark had bought for his daughter.

By the next day, a mob of 4,000 residents firebombed the entire apartment building. The governor called in the National Guard. A jury handed down indictments—against the realtor and the owner of the apartment building for renting to the Clarks.

In other neighborhoods, realtors urged white residents to sell their homes before black families moved in. The ensuing scramble drove down property values, as white families tried to leave quickly. Local businesses fled too.

A similar scenario unfolded in North Lawndale. King met with local leaders and led a march in Chicago’s Marquette Park on Aug. 5, 1966. Counterprotesters hoisted banners with racial slurs, including, “King would look good with a knife in his back.”

Twenty months later, King died in Memphis, Tenn., from a gunshot wound to the neck.

Joe Atkins remembers those days. The lifelong resident of Lawndale grew up in the neighborhood in the 1960s and watched the community decline over the decades. For years, Atkins declined too.

On a recent Sunday morning in a North Lawndale gym, Atkins led worship near the home where he attempted suicide three decades ago. He read from Psalm 146: “Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day, their plans come to nothing.”

Atkins is thankful God thwarted his worst plans.

Atkins—now the associate pastor of Lawndale Community Church—grew up with eight siblings in a Lawndale home with his mother and an alcoholic father. When Atkins was 9, his father died from injuries sustained in a fight. The young boy grew into a depressed teenager. He turned to marijuana and to alcohol, and eventually to cocaine.

Many others in Chicago and cities around the country also turned to cocaine during the drug epidemics of the 1980s and 1990s. And as Lawndale deteriorated under gangs and drugs, so did the public housing projects nearby.

Chicago officials began building high-rise public housing in the late 1950s.

The largest complex, Robert Taylor Homes, was a string of 28 buildings, 16 stories high, with 4,400 apartments in the South Side. Another major high-rise complex—Cabrini-Green—once housed 15,000 residents in 3,600 units on the North Side.

In 1969, Congress passed a portentous change to public housing policy: Instead of paying a fixed rent, residents would pay a percentage of their income.

That meant families on welfare paid little and had little incentive to try to earn more money. For couples with children, getting married would raise rents too, since both incomes would count, and welfare policies favored single parents over married ones.

By the time officials began dismantling Robert Taylor Homes in 1998, 96 percent of the residents were unemployed, including many single mothers.

As rents fell with income, housing officials neglected maintenance, and the buildings fell into disrepair. Crime and gangs took over large swaths of the complexes full of school-age children. Drug dealers traded openly. Authorities added chain-link fences to upper levels when residents threw objects off the balconies.

The towers looked like prisons.
Some mothers kept their children inside. Other residents tried to form patrols, but the dangers grew. In 1991, snipers killed a police officer from the balconies of Robert Taylor Homes. By the late 1990s, Chicago officials decided to dismantle the high-rise units across the city, as other cities made similar changes.

When residents started moving out of Robert Taylor Homes in 1998, a New York Times report captured the chaos inside: “Lenzie Jones packed his grandchildren’s clothes for the movers but did not know what to do with his mother’s belongings. She had fled a few days before, after the drug gang she hawked heroin for accused her of stealing and beat her with a baseball bat and a two-by-four.”

In the Cabrini-Green complex, photos of vacated units bore signs of other families who had been striving for productive lives. One apartment wall still bore a handwritten chart of after-school chores: “Set table/Help Mama with dishes/Homework/Set out clothes/Bathtime.”

Families scattered to different parts of town over the course of several years, with many using housing vouchers to find different homes. Many ended up staying near their dismantled complexes in homes or apartments on the South and West sides.

As Chicago dismantled the high-rises, the city became one of a handful with housing authorities that now have work requirements for public housing residents. Ben Carson, secretary of Housing and Urban Development, has discussed expanding the Moving to Work program to more cities.

In Chicago, employment rates have risen among public housing residents and those receiving housing vouchers, though in some cases the rules require 15 to 20 hours of work.

Back in Lawndale, Joe Atkins was working in the 1980s, but his drug habit was growing. He fathered a child out of wedlock and couldn’t bear the thought of being a dad and a drug addict. Late one night in April 1987, Atkins drank liquor to thin his blood, crawled into a bathtub, and slit his wrists. Seven hours later, he woke up.

“And I was depressed that I woke up,” he remembers. “I felt worthless because I had even failed at that.”

Atkins entered rehab. He relapsed, ended up in jail, and was homeless for a time. Finally, he discovered a Christian recovery program in another part of Chicago. He stayed for a year. His understanding of the gospel grew. His relationship with Christ deepened. And this time he stayed clean.

After reconnecting with longtime friend Wayne Gordon, a white pastor who founded Lawndale Community Church, Atkins helped start the Hope House as a ministry offshoot of the church.

The 50-bed facility serves as an intense discipleship and rehabilitation program for men. Twenty years later, Atkins still leads it, and he works as an associate pastor at the church. He’s married and has four children. He still lives in Lawndale.
Lamar Simms thinks a lot about the fatherless.

Simms grew up in Englewood, one of the roughest neighborhoods in Chicago, without his dad in his home. These days, he lives in the South Side neighborhood of Roseland, with his wife and four small children.

Roseland ranked 12th among 77 Chicago neighborhoods for violent crime in June. When Simms moved here with his family 18 months ago, he says the neighborhood was everything they thought it would be: “A gang war on this block ... a shooting two or three times a week.”

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Legacy is a Chicago church network that aims to plant churches in neighborhoods around the city. More specifically, the network wants to plant churches in homes. Simms thinks that’s especially fitting in neighborhoods where broken homes abound.

A little over a year ago, Simms, 28, and his wife, Sade, purchased a home in Roseland for about $15,000. Outside, the house was a wreck, but inside it had beautiful hardwood floors, arched doorways, and a new kitchen.

The price proved real estate isn’t in high demand in Roseland, but Simms was convinced the neighborhood needed a Christ-centered church with Biblical teaching and consistent Christian fellowship.

He knows because that’s what changed his own life.

And he is thankful for churches and ministries that stick it out in tough places, even when results aren’t immediate or easy.

Living in Lawndale still isn’t easy.

The Chicago Tribune reports the neighborhood ranked fourth out of 77 neighborhoods for violent crime in the month of June 2017. Nearly 40 percent of households are below poverty level.

On a Saturday night ride through North Lawndale, longtime pastor Phil Jackson leans out the window to chat with residents hanging out near a vacant lot on the corner where Martin Luther King Jr. once lived. At a nearby intersection, a hand-painted sign bears the names of local residents who have died in violence: “Freddie ... Sandra ... Tamir ... Akai.”

Despite the turmoil, Jackson is thankful he’s seen encouraging outcomes both at the Lawndale church and “The Firehouse,” a ministry for youth he runs nearby. Local kids have gotten scholarships, gone to college, and found good jobs. His lament: “It’s probably 3 percent of the people in Chicago shooting everybody, but those 3 percent cause so much havoc.”

Atkins is familiar with the havoc. One of his duties at the church is to provide funerals for families in the community. Since 2000, he’s conducted scores of funerals, many for victims of violence.

Does the ongoing turmoil in Lawndale discourage him?

After all, the church has worked for nearly 40 years, and the ministry has grown to include a major healthcare clinic and a wellness center that completes thousands of medical visits a year. There’s a legal-aid organization for locals and a learning center. A nonprofit development corporation offers affordable housing.

Still, problems abound. Poverty persists, businesses struggle to take root, and within 24 hours of my conversation with Atkins, three more young men would die in overnight shootings in Lawndale.

Atkins says he doesn’t fixate on results. He says the church and its ministries have seen progress, but they ultimately trust God for the fruit of their labors: “It ain’t our tree.”

Gordon, the pastor of the church, admits it’s harder to live in Lawndale today than when he moved in 40 years ago. The neighborhood has seen at least 32 murders this year.

But like Atkins, Gordon says he focuses on what the ministries have accomplished, not how many problems remain. Four decades ago, he says, he probably dreamed the church “could save all of Lawndale.” But Lawndale is big, problems are systemic, and progress is block-by-block.

He’s seen drug addicts become deacons, neighborhood residents embrace Christian faith, and local kids go to colleges across the country. “The most encouraging thing I can tell you is that the Bible is right,” he says. “If we live Biblically, it works. That’s what we’ve tried to do here.”

Atkins agrees, and as he leads the church’s 10:30 a.m. worship service, he finishes the same Psalm he read earlier in the day: “The LORD sets prisoners free, the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the foreigner, and sustains the fatherless and widow. ... Praise the LORD.”
Tensions in Chicago have grown worse since a video revealed a police officer shooting Lawndale native Laquan McDonald 16 times during a 2014 encounter. Officer Jason Van Dyke has pleaded not guilty to charges of first-degree murder in the shooting, and three other officers face charges of lying about the incident.

Meanwhile, officials in Chicago and Illinois have grappled with infamous cases of government corruption from convicted governors to local aldermen and a slew of mismanaged funds. The problems are complex, and Simms says there are no simple solutions. Programs abound, and plenty of churches are reaching out in some of the worst neighborhoods. Pastors and prayer groups meet on a regular basis.

Simms believes much of that is good, but he says lasting help is more basic. It comes from Christians being good neighbors who get involved in each other's lives and show Biblical hospitality and discipleship: “Your house should be ministry.”

Back at Simms' house, we walk to the end of the street: Bullet holes riddle the front of a home on the corner. Simms’ small backyard seems like a good place to grill hamburgers on a summer afternoon, and he talks about plans for renovating the back porch to host neighbors. But he also points to the spot a few feet away where a man died in January.

After a man ran through the pathway between the two houses, Simms says, gunmen in a passing car opened fire and struck the victim while he fled through the backyard. When Simms approached him, he was still alive.

Despite such a heart-wrenching experience, Simms is optimistic about his block. Though the January death was brutal, he says they’ve gone several months without a shooting. Since they moved in, the block went from a shooting two or three times a week to two shootings in a year: “That’s still sad, but it’s remarkable growth.”

Simms does teach his kids to stay away from windows at certain times, and they know they can’t play at the park directly across the street. But more people have been willing to linger outside, and the street has grown closer. That’s what he’s focused on now: “My goal is to reach my block.”

Some people on the block did wonder why the family moved here when the dangers were especially acute. Simms says he told one woman: “Because my Savior and my Lord made His home in a world that hated His Father, and He came into enemy territory, and He lived and He loved people. And they killed Him. He died on that cross. But He rose from the grave.” Simms prays for safety, but he remains confident “there is a resurrection.”

It's time for church to start, and inside the Simmses’ home, a dozen people mingle over plates of jerk chicken and homemade macaroni and cheese. After fellowship, they gather for singing and preaching. The group sings along with the accompaniment of Christian songs playing through a television in the living room:

“When darkness seems to hide His face / I rest on His unchanging grace / In every high and stormy gale / My anchor holds within the veil / ... Christ alone, cornerstone / Weak made strong, in the Savior's love / Through the storm, He is Lord / Lord of all.”

After becoming the parents of two children out of wedlock, Simms and Sade embraced saving faith in Christ nearly a decade ago. They married two months later, and eventually encountered Legacy Church.

Simms was struck by meeting a group of young Christians serious about their faith. He says growing up in local churches, he didn’t learn about the practical outworking of saving faith. For example, Simms says people in his church knew he was promiscuous, but their counsel was: “Be careful.”

After attending another Legacy location for a few years, and learning from mentors like founder Brian Dye, the church leaders asked Simms to consider leading a church group in his home.

Initially, Simms was reluctant to be an elder, and he was reluctant to buy a home in Roseland, but he couldn’t ignore the opportunity and the need. About half the people at church on Sundays come from the neighborhood.

He says meeting in a house is particularly powerful in this community, where many deep-rooted problems start in homes: “The house isn’t stable, so they go to gangs looking for family. The ladies go to guys—looking for family!”

He wants to model a Biblical family and believes loving his wife and raising his children well is one of the most crucial witnesses he can have to the neighbors on his block.

Before church begins on Sunday afternoon, Simms offers a tour of the surrounding area, and he explains some of the realities of living in a neighborhood with gangs.

For example, a standard, unspoken rule: If you can’t walk to a store from the house where you live, you shouldn’t go to that store. Simms says gangs often “take ownership” of a store, and residents who don’t live in the gang’s territory should stay away.

Why has the violence become so bad recently?

One possible factor Simms points to: When the city tore down the high-rise projects, residents scattered across the city, including some of the gang members. Violence spread, even as gang members scrambled for power.
EVEN AS IMPRISONED NOBEL PRIZE LAUREATE LIU XIAOBO lay dying on a hospital bed, his body emaciated and skin sallow, Chinese officials refused to give the human rights advocate the one thing he’d sought his entire life: freedom.

The Chinese Communist Party considered Liu—who died July 13 at age 61—so dangerous that a dozen plainclothes police surrounded the hospital building where he was treated for advanced-stage liver cancer during the final weeks of his life. Officials barred doctors from bringing cell phones into his hospital room and stopped his friends from visiting. Only his wife, poet Liu Xia, stood by his side, dressed in black with her head shaved, herself having lived under house arrest since her husband won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010.

The government of China denied the couple’s last request to seek medical treatment in Germany or the United States. In late June, 154 Nobel laureates signed a letter urging the Chinese government “on humanitarian grounds to grant Liu Xiaobo and Liu Xia’s wish to travel to the United States for medical treatment.” Beijing, though, would not relent, even after two Western doctors declared Liu well enough to make the trip.

When Liu Xia asked for her husband’s medical records from his time in prison, officials refused to let her see them: They insisted he had been given weekly checkups and that everything came up normal until the May 23 cancer diagnosis that led to his release on medical parole. Yet many of Liu’s supporters remain suspicious, as China has a history of withholding medical treatment to get rid of political prisoners.

“We don’t know if they purposefully delayed treatment until it was late-stage cancer or if the disease was caused by the food or environment in the prison,” said Yu Jie, a fellow activist and a close friend of Liu. “If China democratizes in the future, these are things we will need to look into.”
W HAT MADE LIU, A FORMER PROFESSOR at Beijing Normal University and Chinese literary critic, such a threat to the Communist government that Beijing froze relations with Norway after his Nobel Prize win?

“He is very straightforward and genuine; he's not afraid to share his thoughts,” Yu said of his friend. As a major contributor to Charter 08, a manifesto calling for basic freedoms, human rights, and democratic reform in China, Liu frightened the government with his ability to unite Chinese intellectuals to his cause. For that, and for his refusal to leave China, officials sentenced him to 11 years in prison for “instigating subversion of state power.”

Born in Changchun in northeast China, Liu was a teenager when the Cultural Revolution began in 1966, closing down schools and sending Liu and his family to a commune in Inner Mongolia. Liu looked back at that time as a blessing, since it allowed him to escape the school system's Communist indoctrination. Instead he devoured books, including some banned by the government, and learned to think for himself.

Once universities reopened following the death of Mao Zedong, Liu studied Chinese literature at Jilin University, and went on to pursue a master's degree and Ph.D. at Beijing Normal University. While earning his doctorate, he began teaching as a lecturer and gained acclaim for his literary critiques of popular writers and of established ideas such as communism and traditional Chinese Confucianism. Yu said that although Liu did not spend much time in the West, he thought more like a Western scholar than his Chinese peers. Liu frequently read Western works such as those of Plato, Kant, and Nietzsche, and encouraged China to pursue a government system similar to that of the West.

When Liu, while visiting Columbia University in New York City in 1989, heard news of college students filling Tiananmen Square to demonstrate for political reform, he hurriedly returned to Beijing to join them. He stayed with the students on June 4 even as the tanks rolled in and the Chinese army opened fire on students and bystanders. Liu tried negotiating with the army and persuaded students to leave the square, saving countless lives.

A day later, authorities arrested Liu and imprisoned him for two years for his involvement as a “black hand” behind the protests. After his release, officials maintained a tight rein on his influence: The university fired him from his teaching position and the government banned the publication of his writing.

Yet with the advent of the internet, Liu reached a wide audience by publishing his articles in Hong Kong and Taiwanese media and sharing essays online. He advocated changing society at the grassroots level with the help of human rights lawyers. Rather than seeking abrupt change, individuals “pushing for a free and democratic China should concentrate on gradual change in society and expect that this will eventually force a change in regime,” Liu wrote in 2006. Unlike other Chinese activists, he did not agree that China should reunify with Taiwan and Hong Kong, but rather supported autonomy. For these radical ideas, the government jailed him three more times—most recently in December 2008 for his work on drafting Charter 08.

L IU DIDN'T THINK CHARTER 08 WOULD CAUSE any problems, as the manifesto's language was much milder than essays he had previously written. In 2008, Liu, his friend Yu, and other activists carefully crafted the document to ensure a wide range of intellectuals could endorse it, often meeting at a friend’s restaurant to circumvent government wiretaps of their phones. Only Liu Xia feared Charter 08 would land her husband back behind bars.

With Liu’s prominence, he convinced 70 scholars to sign the manifesto. By the time the document was unveiled, it included 303 signatures from public intellectuals, leaders of workers’ and farmers’ groups, and some government officials. After it was published online, more than 12,000 people signed it.

It was the first time since 1989 that intellectuals had rallied around a common cause, and the government was worried. Before Charter 08, the government had successfully silenced scholars by increasing their salaries and benefits, then threatening to take away their cushy jobs if they criticized the Chinese Communist Party. Those who spoke out anyway were crushed: Officials barred them from speaking to the media, harassed their family members, and restricted their freedoms.

The manifesto’s predecessor, Czechoslovakia’s Charter 77 (released in 1977), similarly called for the then-Communist government of Czechoslovakia to respect human rights. The 242 Czech signatories faced persecution, yet by 1989, they were able to help bring about democratic reforms in their own country and in Eastern Europe. Václav Havel, a Charter 77 author who later became the first president of the Czech Republic, wrote in a New York Times op-ed that the power of China’s Charter 08 was that it “forged connections among different groups that did not exist before.”

Fearing such influence by the manifesto, Chinese authorities arrested Liu and later sentenced him to 11 years in prison. When Liu won the Nobel Prize in 2010, police clamped down on celebrations in China, pressured world diplomats to boycott
the awards ceremony, and barred Liu’s friends and family from traveling to Oslo, Norway, to accept the prize on his behalf. It was the first time a Nobel Peace Prize was left unclaimed since pacifist Carl von Ossietzky won the prize in 1935 while imprisoned by Nazi Germany.

Yu, 43, befriended Liu after writing his first book, the critically acclaimed Fire and Ice, in 1998. Liu Xia brought a copy of the book to Liu in prison, and once he was released, he called Yu with his thoughts. “Most Chinese are polite and speak in a roundabout way, but Liu was very straightforward,” Yu said. “He shared areas where he had different views and critiqued my ideas.” The two met in person soon afterward and quickly became close friends, meeting up every week.

Besides Liu’s intellect, Yu admired his humility. Some Chinese activists who have waged long battles against the Communist regime expect others to idolize them. Yu said he’s read many accounts of the Tiananmen Square massacre by democracy leaders, and most portray themselves as flawless heroes—a communication style not unlike Communist propaganda.

Yet in an essay titled, “Listen carefully to the voices of the Tiananmen Mothers,” Liu is contemplative and remorseful: “How was it that university students and high-level intellectuals led the 1989 movement, but when the dust settled all the people who were massacred, went out to rescue the wounded, or received heavy sentences were common people? Why is it that we scarcely hear the voices of the people who paid the heaviest prices, while the luminaries who survived the massacre can hardly stop talking?”

In an attempt to repay the debt to his students who died that day, Liu felt burdened to stay in China to help bring their dreams of a reformed China to fruition. Even when friends and fellow dissidents urged him to find sanctuary overseas, he refused to leave.

Yu, who is a Christian, said Liu also influenced his faith. While Liu was not a professing Christian, he wrote extensively about Christianity during his third prison sentence from 1996 to 1999. While behind bars, Liu read the Bible, John Calvin, Martin Luther, and St. Augustine’s The City of God and wrote about the relationship between Christianity and democracy. Yu said his friend understood how the tenets of the Bible brought about ideals such as freedom and human rights. Throughout their friendship, Liu would join Yu at his church, Beijing Ark House Church, for outreach events, Christmas services, and evangelistic meetings.

Yet Liu would tell Yu that he wanted to wait until he became a better person, a man more like Jesus, before he professed faith. Although Yu explained that man could not perfect himself—that Jesus died on the cross for the sinner, not the saint—Liu never publicly converted to Christianity, Yu said.

During Liu’s Charter 08 trial on Dec. 23, 2009, he read his final statement, claiming his innocence without bitterness toward his accusers.

“I have no enemies, and no hatred. None of the police who have watched, arrested, or interrogated me, none of the prosecutors who have indicted me, and none of the judges who will judge me are my enemies....

“Hatred only eats away at a person’s intelligence and conscience, and an enemy mentality can poison the spirit of an entire people (as the experience of our country during the Mao era clearly shows).... I hope that I can answer the regime’s enmity with utmost benevolence, and can use love to dissipate hate.”

—YU JIE
More growing
PAINS,
more great
GAINS
Trials of many different kinds have not stopped the work of these Christians in China  BY JUNE CHENG

What's the cost of faithfulness? For Christians living in China, it may be a police raid, an arrest, or censure for following Biblical teaching. Setbacks like these are what can strengthen believers' resolve—or break it.

In the May 2015 article “Growing pains, great gains,” I visited three groups of Christians working to help mature the burgeoning Chinese church: a Singaporean pastor whose online sermons led to church plants throughout China, an American missionary family leading a house church and school, and a group spreading the pro-life message to Chinese Christians.

Two years later, the situations for these three groups have changed—for better and for worse. Authorities detained the Singaporean pastor in late April and forced him to leave the country. A disgruntled church member called the cops on the Americans’ house church, leading to raids on the church and school. Meanwhile, despite temporary opposition, the pro-life group has grown, helping more mothers keep their babies. It has even registered as a legal organization.

Through trial and tribulation, all three groups remain firmly committed to helping the Chinese church flourish and grow deeper roots into fertile soil.

Kicked out, but not down

When I last saw Singaporean Pastor Joseph Su (names in this story have been changed for safety reasons) in 2015, he was preaching and baptizing new believers inside a well-worn hotel conference room in eastern China. Since 2010, Su had journeyed to China three times a year to hold conferences and disciple the leaders of his church’s 25 small church plants. Attendees knew Su from watching his sermons online, and when he visited, they’d line up to ask for advice on living out their faith at home and at work. Not once, Su told me then, had they faced government interference.

This year, in late April, Su was preaching in a large northeast city when about 20 police officers barged into the room, video cameras in hand. The police forced the 130 conference attendees to write down their names and identification numbers and took Su, his two co-workers, and several Chinese church leaders to the local station. There, the main investigator told Su they had broken Chinese law by gathering for religious activity without a permit. Su said the investigator seemed to know a lot about him and his church and questioned him about the church’s connection with the United States (the Singaporean church’s founder currently heads a Chinese church in the United States).

The police fingerprinted them, took their photos, and had them sign a statement, before releasing them with a warning: If you want to come back to China to preach, go through the registered Three-Self church. They held on to the foreigners’ passports, forcing Su and his co-workers to cancel the rest of the conference and book a flight home for the next day. At the airport, the police returned their passports and snapped photos as Su and the others boarded the flight as proof they had left the country.

Su suspects that someone reported them, causing the police to take action. The church does not publicize its conferences, but spreads news of the events by word-of-mouth among the church plants. Still, all of Su’s sermons in Singapore and China are live-streamed on a WeChat account. The Chinese government targets pastors from the United States and...
Su believes his connection with the American church intrigued the authorities. Su has no plans to re-enter China anytime soon and may hold future training events in Hong Kong or Taipei, cities to which Chinese church members could easily travel. For now his top goal is to ensure the Chinese government does not shut down his church’s social media accounts and online sermons, which reach more people than his conferences in China. “This is the way the ministry is growing. It can’t be stopped,” Su said. “I think [persecution] is good for the Chinese people because without these trials and pressures, we grow very superficial.”

**Patient in trials**

In the outskirts of a large northern Chinese city, longtime American missionary James Smith and his sons, Aaron and Mark, together pastor a Mandarin-speaking house church and run a Christian school out of the same location. Foreign-run churches are especially sensitive in China: The government fears Christian ties to the West. Yet Smith’s church has met for the past 15 years by staying low-key and vetting newcomers. But troubles began recently when a church member approached the Smiths asking if they could help a friend in need. The man, John Xu, claimed to be a missionary from western China. He said he’d been persecuted by the government and was struggling to provide for his family, including four children and a fifth on the way. The church decided to rent an apartment for the family and invited Xu to join the church’s Bible institute. Yet after a few months, Xu began secretly contacting other church members, criticizing the Smiths and saying the church should rid itself of foreign leadership. Last fall, Xu approached Aaron Smith, asking the church to give him money to send him back to western China, and when Aaron refused, he left upset.

Two weeks later, Xu’s wife had a miscarriage, and Xu snapped under the emotional toll. He lashed out at the Smiths, ranting about their poor leadership on the church’s WeChat group and defaming the pastors on his own social media account. When Aaron and his father tried to talk to him in person, an irate Xu cussed them out and threatened to report the church to the authorities.

Before church the next morning, Aaron instructed his wife to pack up some essentials for the two of them and their three young daughters in case they weren’t able to return home in a while. The church service began as usual, but after the singing ended, Xu walked in pounding his Bible and screaming, “I have something to say!” Congregants tried to ignore him, and the service continued. Frustrated, Xu pulled out his phone, dialed the police, and reported an illegal religious meeting with foreigners present. When a 75-year-old woman pleaded with Xu to stop, he shoved her roughly, prompting the men in the congregation to drag him out of the service.

At that point, Aaron knew they had 20 minutes before police would show up. The church leaders prayed, held a quick vote to excommunicate Xu, then dismissed the congregation. The Chinese leaders quickly gathered the illegal Bibles, songbooks, literature, and identifying items such as computers, placing them in the back of a van. The Smiths also left, knowing the church would get into more trouble if police found foreigners on the premises.

When the police arrived, Xu told them everything he knew about the church, including the addresses, phone numbers, and Chinese names of the Smiths. Since police had not found any foreigners or illegal books on the site, they couldn’t launch a larger investigation, so they simply asked the Chinese church leaders to sign a statement saying they would only worship at the Three-Self church and left.

James and his wife booked tickets back to the United States the next day, while Aaron’s family stayed in the homes of various church members for a month. Afterward, they rented a new place in the countryside.

Meanwhile, the church continued to meet: Congregants held Thursday night prayer meetings in homes, and every Sunday rented a different facility for two hours. The church was open only to its members, who learned the location of Sunday worship each week through a Saturday text message. Attendance remained high. “The Lord blessed us through this trial,” Aaron said. “We saw the growing of our faith and the faith of our church people as many of them traveled one to two hours to get to the new locations.”

‘[Persecution] is good for the Chinese people because without these trials and pressures, we grow very superficial.’
In March, police showed up at the church's school, which still met in the church building. Although the school had a business visa, the police asked questions about the foreign teachers, whether the school relied on any foreign money, and how the school was related to the church. The school decided to send the foreign teachers home, and the leadership plans to separate the school from the church.

James and his wife safely returned to China in March to continue their work with the church. Aaron and his family, currently in the United States to meet with donors and speak at churches, also plan to return to China long-term. During the recent trials, Aaron said he was reminded of James 1:4: “But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

“If we’re going to be the people God wants us to be, we need to allow the trial to work in us,” Aaron said.

**An unexpected welcome**

While foreign pastors feel the heat, a pro-life movement in China is progressing largely unhindered. In 2014 and 2015, I attended training events by a pro-life group seeking to teach Chinese house churches about the sanctity of life. During my first trip, I visited the group’s pregnancy help center, housed inside a hospital in central China.

At the time, the ministry was struggling to stay afloat. While the Christian hospital director had originally promised that women seeking abortions would first visit a counselor at the pregnancy center, the non-Christian doctor in charge of the ward barred volunteers from meeting with the women. Furthermore, ministry leaders had difficulty finding enough volunteers to man the center. On that sweaty summer day, a distressed volunteer asked me to pray God would allow the center to stay open and continue its work of helping mothers keep their babies.

Today the center is up and running with a paid counselor and a consistent team of volunteers, and the uncooperative doctor has been transferred to a different department. Incredibly, the government allowed the group to legally register as a nongovernmental organization in China called Good Neighbors Center for Pregnancy Help. The Christian hospital director who originally greenlighted the center retired from his position and now works with Good Neighbors to promote pregnancy help centers at other hospitals.

Good Neighbors hosted a party last Christmas, and 12 women showed up who had found help at the center: Some were pregnant, others had babies bundled close. They shared how the center supported them in giving birth to their babies even when their parents, boyfriends, and doctors pressured them to abort. In order to reach more people, Good Neighbors plans to start a nationwide hotline for women in crisis pregnancies.

Jim Peters, the American pro-life activist who started this group in China, said that after six years of training local leaders and crisscrossing China to teach churches about the sanctity of life, he’s “worked himself out of a job.” He handed control to a local pastor, who now trains Chinese leaders to continue the work.

While Good Neighbors has shared the pro-life message in the four major house church networks, Peters admits it’s difficult to follow up and track how often these pastors preach pro-life messages from the pulpit. The work has also faced setbacks as government scrutiny of house churches increases: Authorities barred “uncles” or top leaders of the church networks from leaving the country and warned house church pastors that they are gathering illegally. This has led to the cancellation of training sessions held at those house churches.

However, the pro-life work itself hasn’t faced direct government persecution, and Good Neighbors’ newfound legal status indicates that pro-life issues are becoming less sensitive in China. In fact, encouraging mothers to keep their babies can actually help China correct a demographic problem caused by the long-standing one-child policy: Even though the government switched to a two-child policy last year, Chinese couples still aren’t having enough children to care for the country’s rapidly aging population.

“I think the government probably wants to end the population control policy completely if they could do so without losing face,” Peters said. “That’s why they’re allowing us so much freedom: They welcome it.”

©
IS CASH AN ENDANGERED SPECIES?

The world is abandoning paper money, but many on the margins rely on it

by EMILY BELZ in Baltimore

illustration by Krieg Barrie
A
ter the fifth robbery at gunpoint of
Park Café & Coffee Bar in a few
months, owner David Hart decided something
had to change. He was trying to keep his young
coffee shop afloat in one of the few economically
thriving Baltimore neighborhoods, Bolton Hill.
It was a welcoming café, with delicious espress-
os, minimalist white counters, exposed brick
walls, and a restored garage door that opened
onto a porch on the street. The proximity to the
street created an easy getaway for thieves.

Primarily worried about the safety of his
employees, Hart switched to cash-free transac-
tions earlier this year. The move, and arrest of a
repeat robber, ended the string of robberies. The
café stayed busy, but Hart was conflicted about
his decision.

He didn’t want to exclude from his shop people
without bank accounts or cards, like the children
at the school across the street who sometimes
came in with cash only to have a barista gently
turn them away. Hart addressed this issue on a
person-to-person basis, figuring out gift cards or
reimbursing the fee for a credit gift card at a drug
store. (Hart decided in July to close the Park Café
for “personal reasons.” The café, he said, was
doing well businesswise, but he told Baltimore
station 11 News that the series of robberies in
recent months “rejiggered my priorities.”)

Like Hart, the world is moving away from
cash, and for some of the same reasons he aban-
donered it. Removing cash reduces theft and vio-
 lent crimes. Cash is expensive to produce,
maintain, transport, and secure, and it’s often the
lifeblood for illicit transactions like government
corruption, sex trafficking, and drug deals.

But some people without extra financial mar-
gins rely on cash, and it is unlikely to disappear
completely (see sidebar on negative interest
rates). A laborer earning only a few dollars a day
might not have enough income to open a bank
account. Those living on day-to-day expenses
might not have the ability to wait for a check to
clear, so they go to a payday lender or check
cashing place to make their payments in time.
And in some cultures, people don’t trust finan-
cial institutions—banks might have a history of
being discriminatory or unreliable.

The ubiquitous fruit vendors on the street
corners in New York City conduct only cash
transactions, mainly because their transactions
are so small (five bananas for one dollar!) that
the hassle of electronic payment isn’t worth it.
Small-business owners can’t always pay the swipe
fees associated with cards or mobile payments.

But the trend away from cash is happening
rapidly. In November 2016, India eliminated its
large denominations of currency in an effort to
move its economy away from cash. Just in the
last few years Nigeria, Kenya, and China have
begun to rely more and more on mobile elec-
tronic payments. Sweetgreen, a booming salad
restaurant chain in the United States, recently
decided it would no longer accept cash.

China now has 770 million users on 4G
networks, according to government data. Mobile
payments on apps like WeChat and Alipay are
increasingly common there, and the strong
mobile infrastructure enables those even in rural
areas to make payments without cash.

Kenya—until recently a highly un-banked
country—has similarly seen success with
Vodafone’s M-Pesa system, where users can
make payments using their mobile phones.
M-Pesa transactions now add up to almost half
of the country’s GDP, and it is expanding to
other countries.

Christian community development experts
think the move away from cash is a good trend
overall. HOPE International, a Christian financial
services group, began its savings and loan groups
in Ukraine 20 years ago and recently began dis-
bursing all of its Ukraine loans electronically. Dave
Wasik, vice president of operations for HOPE,
said it’s cost prohibitive to offer small cash loans
(like $50) in rural areas—a loan officer can’t travel
out and meet with clients. Mobile technology will
allow them to reach places they haven’t before.

The key, development experts say, is how
countries go about the move to digital financing. A
top-down edict to eliminate cash, as happened in
India, will create more problems than an organic
move away from cash as electronic infrastructure
improves for everyone. “The risk for poor families
is... where merchants adopt cashless policies, or
the government mandates the limitation of the use
of cash before the poor families have the ability to
participate in the mobile economy,” said Wasik.

HOPE uses curriculum from the Chalmers
Center, a Christian community development
group, for its savings and loan programs. Mark
Bowers, the curriculum specialist at the
Chalmers Center, understands what India is
trying to do from “a mechanical perspective,” but
he said “there’s a human side of it.”

“Everyone’s just going to get banked all the
sudden in a month?” said Bowers, about India’s
sudden move away from cash. “It’s unrealistic
and really does punish people on the lower end
of the spectrum.”
The Indian farming sector, which tends to rely on cash, felt the shift painfully. After the Indian government’s ban on larger denominations last fall, the head of a farmers’ federation, K.V. Illengeeran, reported dozens of suicides because farmers couldn’t withdraw money. One farmer, Kanndukuri Vinoda, thought her cash savings in those denominations were now worthless and hung herself. Another, Madhukar Bahale, waited hours in line at a bank to withdraw money to pay his workers, but the bank had run out of cash by the time he got to the counter. That night he died of a stroke, which the son blamed on his father’s stress over the government’s policy. U.S. Awasthi, managing director of the Indian Farmers Fertilizer Cooperative, said farmers would benefit from the policy “in the long run.”

In Nigeria, cash used to be king. Bank transfers used to take several days, so people paid all their bills in cash, even if that meant walking around with plastic bags filled with it. The cash-based economy also helped hide extensive government corruption. In February, a raid of a building owned by a former government official in Kaduna, Nigeria, uncovered a safe filled with $9.8 million in cash. The official, Andrew Yakubu, told investigators the money was a gift from unnamed sources.

The move to electronic transactions was happening organically in Nigeria, as mobile infrastructure improved and people used their phones for purchases. But in 2012, the central bank hastened this trend by charging a percentage fee for large cash withdrawals in certain areas of the country, part of an effort to crack down on corruption.

In 2015, the Bank of England’s chief economist, Andy Haldane, gave a controversial speech in which he suggested switching from cash to an entirely digital currency. Haldane sees this as a way for central banks like his to impose negative interest rates, a radical fiscal policy that is not easily feasible when cash exists. The Cato Institute’s Daniel Mitchell, like other free-market economists, has decried the “war on cash” as an effort from central governments to have greater control over people.

When central bankers set the interest rate below zero, investors generally pay for money in a deposit, rather than earning money on a deposit. The idea is to push people to spend money instead of holding it in a bank account. Cash allows people a way to escape a negative rate, which is why negative rates are rare. Central banks in Sweden and Denmark recently resorted to negative interest rates, but they are among the few.

“In a system without cash, we can basically set negative interest rates without any problems at all,” said the Swedish central bank Riksbank in a 2015 report. But the report acknowledged that it didn’t know how to get rid of cash.

For now, talk of negative interest rates is mostly theoretical. As Haldane admitted, economists like him face a “significant behavioral constraint,” meaning regular people don’t want to get rid of cash. The places that have experimented with it, like Sweden, are seeing some concerning results. The danger for consumers in Sweden is that, as they begin to experience the effect of negative interest rates, they might take on more debt. So a bank might pay a mortgage holder interest on a mortgage. When rates rise, consumers might find that debt difficult to repay. Sweden now has one of the highest ratios of debt to disposable income in the world. —E.B.
Those who tend to carry cash after payday, like Hispanic immigrants in the United States, are often targets of crime. Bowers has noticed this in his largely Hispanic neighborhood in Chattanooga. Illegal immigrants are also unlikely to report crimes against them for fear of questioning about their immigration status.

In the United States, Christian financial advisers like Dave Ramsey have often counseled people to use cash as a way to avoid overspending and credit card fees. But Bowers said that means you must “live in a safe community where you aren’t going to get mugged. ... The reality for a lot of people is they don’t have a choice.” Ramsey Solutions declined to comment.

Neither Chalmers nor HOPE sees electronic transactions as an ultimate solution to black markets or government corruption or poverty. The internet has encrypted marketplaces where illicit transactions happen electronically (like the drug market Silk Road that the FBI shut down in 2013), often using state-less currency like bitcoin.

The concern for HOPE’s Wasik is that as HOPE clients move to digital transactions, they might lose motivation to attend face-to-face savings group meetings, a critical part of the group’s work. Christian community development groups often focus on in-person savings and loan group meetings where clients build trust and engage in gospel-based financial training together. The Chalmers Center too evaluates success based on savings groups: where people learn to work together, pray together, be honest, and escape vulnerability.

“We don’t just want people to move from being poor to middle class,” said Bowers. “The ultimate goal is people seeing their money as part of God’s work in this world, ... that reconciled communities of hope are forming as a part of local churches.”

—with reporting by Onize Ohiere in Abuja, Nigeria
Mimi the chihuahua, who was fostered through Austin Pets Alive!, poses in Austin.
WHEN AMBER MOON WANTED A DOG for a hiking partner, she strolled into the Austin Animal Center, a shelter with a bright, cavernous lobby and “suites” or “studios,” some as large as 50 feet square, for the animals.

Austin is an ideal place to find a shelter animal. The city recently celebrated five years as the largest “No Kill” city in the United States, meaning that it avoids euthanizing at least 9 out of 10 animals that enter its shelters each year. (Austin’s cat and dog average: 96 percent survival.) The city spends $6.9 million annually on its animal shelters, about what it spends to operate 51 public swimming pools.

Over the past decade, hundreds of cities and towns have joined the No Kill movement, signaling the growth of a new “animal rights ethic.” But some animal welfare groups oppose the No Kill movement, and some pro-lifers hope the animal rights push could lead to No Kill zones for unborn humans.

THE NO KILL MOVEMENT had its beginnings in San Francisco in the 1990s, when the city and the San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) agreed that no healthy dog entering the city shelter would be euthanized. The movement took off when Nathan Winograd, a Stanford-educated lawyer and former criminal prosecutor, established the No Kill Advocacy Center (NKAC) in 2004. It has been instrumental in promoting a purist vision: “The right to live is every animal’s most basic and fundamental right; ... life always takes precedence over expediency.”

NKAC believes the traditional shelter system is “tragically broken,” with many leaders of national groups refusing “to have standards and benchmarks that would hold them accountable.” NKAC accuses traditional shelters of making excuses—pet overpopulation, irresponsible breeding, too many unadoptable animals—for euthanasia. NKAC says, “No Kill policies and procedures are the only legitimate foundation for animal sheltering.... It is incumbent upon all shelters and animal groups to embrace the philosophy of No Kill.”

Austin’s transition to No Kill took time. In the late 1990s, the city killed around 85 percent of the animals it took in. By 2005, the euthanasia rate had dropped to 55 percent, but that still meant the city euthanized 14,304 animals. Austin attorney Ryan Clinton described the city’s shelter as still “a very dangerous place for lost and homeless pets.... There were just a lot of excuses and a lot of killing.”

Clinton founded FixAustin, a group that took on entrenched national organizations and local shelter leaders. It crafted a simple message: No Kill is righteous, and it works when communities recruit committed volunteers and animal foster homes, develop partnerships with rescue groups, become skillful marketers, and encourage adoption. In 2011 the city achieved No Kill status and official bragging rights.

GOWN AND GLOVES ON, veterinarian David Allman summarized the surgery he was about to start: “We’re giving Elsa Rose a leg to stand on ... actually, two legs!” His patient—a Siberian husky mix—lay motionless on the operating table. Surgery to repair her two remaining legs, both injured from overuse, is her last hope for being able to move around independently.

The surgery took place at Austin Pets Alive! (APA), a nonprofit shelter that purposely takes in the hard cases—dogs and cats that would have been euthanized in the old days. Drawing from five counties, APA took in 7,500 animals last year—including 3,000 from the Austin Animal Center. APA director of community engagement Lisa Maxwell says few of the animals are ready for adoption when they arrive. Many are sick, injured, or orphaned: “If they got here, it’s because it was their last chance.”

APA serves as a safety net for animals often considered too labor-intensive to save: bottle babies (puppies and kittens not yet ready for solid food), abused animals needing special behavioral training, puppies with parvovirus, kittens with...
ringworm, and adult cats with feline leukemia. At traditional shelters, these animals would be euthanized, but APA even saves 90 percent of orphaned kittens. It places no limit on the time an animal can stay: The record stands at over 1,200 days.

Saving sick or behaviorally challenged animals takes volunteers—about 1,800 last year. It also takes money. APA pays minimal rent for use of the old city shelter, which sits on prime downtown real estate. Its funding comes from donations, adoption fees, and fundraisers. Finding homes for animals once considered unadoptable takes creativity and patience. Dogs with a “high prey drive” may end up training to be police dogs. Some feral cats are adopted out as barn cats: Maxwell calls them “environmentally friendly pest control.”

In its early days, APA had rocky relations with the more traditional city shelter, which balked at requests to share a list of animals slated for euthanasia. But APA, following the blueprint laid out by the No Kill Advocacy Center, took its case to the City Council, which mandated the two shelters work together. Now APA has cozy relations with the city—as many as four APA-affiliated persons serve on the city’s Animal Advisory Commission.

Mobile veterinary surgeons David Allman and Kelly Might come to APA twice a month to operate. Allman says working with APA has allowed them to see and treat neglected animals that often pose medical challenges that boost their skills.

NOT ALL ANIMAL RIGHTS ADVOCATES like No Kill policies. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) says it is inhumane to keep certain animals alive. On its website, PETA suggests that No Kill policies lead to overcrowded shelters, debilitating confinements for animals, and still other animals being turned away to die more gruesome deaths. Its website recounts shelter horrors.

Local critics in Austin speak similarly. In a series of two-minute speeches at a City Council committee meeting last August, residents complained about problems they say have worsened since the city became No Kill: “roaming packs of dogs,” shelter overcrowding, skyrocketing costs, and a more than “40 percent increase in dog bites in just the last five years.”

These residents suggested that No Kill adversely affects poor areas because stray dogs and feral cats are more likely to be a problem there. Some testified...
that Austin can only claim to be No Kill because city-run facilities often turn away animals: “They may go to another shelter that’s a kill shelter. ... When the shelter is full and you close intake, you put more animals back on the street.”

Despite criticism, Austin is unlikely to retract its No Kill promise. Protocols since 2015 mandate that the city can kill only dogs that have harmed a person or another dog—and even those get a seven-day reprieve. A bill of rights requires an elaborate protocol—layers of review, and checks and balances—before dogs can be euthanized.

NKAC and other advocates are right-to-live absolutists for all animals—from animals in utero to animals that may never be socialized. At a January meeting of the Animal Advisory Commission, the city official in charge of euthanasia protocols described one dangerous dog, Goowa. He couldn’t be safely placed in a home because he’d been trained as a “sic” dog (“I’m going to sic him on you ...”) and had badly injured someone’s hand. Advocates raised $6,000 to send Goowa to a sanctuary in New York. The trip required two escorts, a volunteer and a city staff member.

The No Kill movement is spreading. Both NKAC and a relatively new group born in Austin, American Pets Alive!, hold annual conferences to train people in No Kill philosophy and practice. Last year, attendees at the American Pets Alive! conference came from the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

We repeatedly asked No Kill advocates to connect the dots: Since you’re promoting the sanctity of animal life, what about the sanctity of human life? Kristen Auerbach, Austin’s deputy chief of animal services, like every other animal advocate we asked, declined to address the question directly: “I cannot make any comment on equating a pro-life standpoint with animal rights.”

—Ron Friedman, Laura Hendrickson, Charles Horton, and Tom Pfingstten are graduates of the World Journalism Institute mid-career course

Animal and human No Kill cities

No Kill founder Nathan Winograd has written about the common practice of spaying pregnant animals: “When we spay pregnant animals and the unborn kittens and puppies die, the fact that they are not yet born does not relieve our responsibility toward assuring their right to live. When we abort kittens and puppies, we are literally killing puppies and kittens.”

Are we literally killing human beings when we abort unborn children? Winograd writes, “Unlike the human context, the issue is not clouded by cases of rape or incest, and there is no question about the mother’s choice because a dog or cat cannot consent. Literally speaking, we are trapping a mother against her will, cutting her open, and killing her offspring, and we claim to do so for her and their own good.”

Jesus was clear on the value of human life. He asked, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?” He told those following Him that God cared about sparrows, and, “You are of more value than many sparrows.” How does Austin value life? In 2015 a.d., 96 percent of the cats and dogs that entered its animal shelters survived. (Total intake: 10,255. Euthanized: 409.)

Austin’s record regarding humans was worse. Latest statistics are from 2014 and are county-by-county: Travis County—Austin is about four-fifths of it—had 16,386 births and 3,412 abortions. That adds up to 19,798, which makes Austin 83 percent human No Kill. (We’re not counting miscarriages, because only God knows that sad total.)

What this means for human life: If hearts in Travis County, like the Grinch’s, had only grown two sizes larger so we’d defend unborn human babies as we defend cats and dogs, 2,620 fewer babies would have been euthanized.

Texas as a whole did better than Austin in 2014: The state suffered 55,230 abortions and celebrated 399,482 births, for a total of 454,712 and a No Kill record of 88 percent. Going to 90 percent for the state would have saved nearly 10,000 lives.

The growing No Kill movement regarding animals has a 90 percent No Kill rate as its minimum goal. The United States has 95 No Kill communities according to Saving90.org. Among them: Huntsville, Ala.; Palm Springs, Calif.; Jacksonville, Fla.; Duluth, Minn.; and Kansas City, Mo.

Washtenaw County, Mich., which includes Ann Arbor, boasts “a save rate of 92 percent of dogs, 93 percent of cats, 96 percent of rabbits, 96 percent of rodents, and 100 percent of ferrets.” Most No Kill shelters aren’t as liberal concerning rodents and ferrets.

If we applied that baseline to human unborn babies in the United States on a state-by-state basis, 13 states would be No Kill. Arkansas, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming all hit the 90 percent mark.

The United States as a whole has a human No Kill rate of about 81 percent. At least that’s up from 70 percent during the worst years of the abortion plague, 1978-1986—and the rate has improved consistently since 1996. That still means hundreds of thousands of lives would be saved if we just hit 90 percent.

Some animal No Kill—unborn baby Kill people say the difference is that a human mother is choosing to have an abortion and animals do not choose. That makes choice our god—and if animal moms could bark for abortion, would that make it a right? How about treating unborn children at least as well as we treat cats and dogs? —Marvin Olasky
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When Ben Carson on March 11, 2016, endorsed Donald Trump and praised him as “very cerebral,” they formed one of the most unlikely political marriages in American history.

Trump had called Carson “a liar” with a “pathological temper.” But that didn’t keep Carson from the Trump endorsement in March: He said he wanted to be “practical.” Trump in turn called Carson a “great man,” “a special person,” and “well-respected.” The retired neurosurgeon now sits in Trump’s Cabinet as secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

But the political bonding had a caveat. Carson wanted to endorse Trump to avoid a brokered convention but decided to strike a deal first: He would endorse Trump if the likely GOP nominee agreed to meet with Texas televangelist James Robison for at least one hour. Carson thought Robison’s forceful evangelism could influence Trump—and Trump welcomed Robison to the Trump Tower on April 13, 2016.

“I felt that James was a person who could really get through to him and give him perspective on the faith community,” Carson told me. “James was somebody very much respected.”

Robison specified to me that Trump descended to the lobby to meet him, that the meeting in Trump’s 26th floor office lasted not 60 but 90 minutes, and that Robison did most of the talking. Robison also said he met often with President Ronald Reagan and both President Bushes, and has now “prayed with Donald Trump more times than I can count and he’s woken me up more than once.”

Now six months into his presidency, Trump doesn’t make early morning calls to Robison as the evangelist says Trump did in 2016.
Robison noted that he spent time with Trump on May 4 (when the president signed a religious liberty executive order) and was onstage at Liberty University for Trump’s commencement speech nine days later.

Some evangelicals who hesitated to praise Trump early on—Family Research Council President Tony Perkins, Focus on the Family founder James Dobson, Faith & Freedom Coalition Chairman Ralph Reed, and evangelist Franklin Graham—have also spoken of their closeness to him now. So have some early supporters: Florida megachurch pastor Paula White, Liberty University President Jerry Falwell Jr., and Southern Baptist pastors Robert Jeffress and Jack Graham.

Falwell recently declared on Fox News, “I think evangelicals have found their dream president.” Perkins told Fox News he went back and forth with the Trump administration for weeks leading up to the religious liberty executive order. Even though some evangelicals, including Perkins, thought it was too watered down, he said Trump’s outreach to Christians has been “music to our ears.”

Trump has also solidified support from some pro-life leaders. Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of the Susan B. Anthony List, said Trump has invited her to the White House seven times. Trump signed a letter last September pledging support for four pro-life hopes: Nominating pro-life justices to the U.S. Supreme Court, signing into law legislation banning late-term abortions, defunding Planned Parenthood, and making the Hyde Amendment permanent law to protect taxpayers from funding abortions. Neil Gorsuch is now on the Supreme Court. The rest require congressional action.

Carson told me it’s fine if Trump doesn’t sound like a Christian as long as he continues to welcome input from Christians and his policies reflect their values.

In May, Franklin Graham and Vice President Mike Pence teamed up for a Washington, D.C., event raising awareness for persecuted Christians. Pence said he, his family, and Trump pray for oppressed Christians around the world. The next day, a tired Graham sat in a mustard-yellow chair in a Mayflower Hotel conference room and said, “I try to avoid this city as much as possible.” I asked Graham about Trump’s faith: “Do you believe Mike Pence when he said Trump prays for persecuted Christians?” Graham responded, “If the vice president said it, I believe it.” He then added regarding Trump, “You’ve asked me about his prayer life. I can’t answer that.”

Twenty years ago, the year before the Monica Lewinsky scandal broke, WORLD interviewed President Bill Clinton’s spiritual advisers and concluded that he “craves acceptance and is spiritually needy, but at the same time is big into self-justification.” Trump has a similar reputation, but Tony Campolo 20 years ago said regarding Clinton, “The idea that someone has to tell him what the gospel is about, is silly.” It’s common for evangelicals, though, to say they have to tell Trump what the gospel is about. Robison said Trump has “a childlike spirit.”

WORLD’s article 20 years ago also quoted ABC’s Peggy Wehmeyer on the political effects of publicized meetings: “Courting the evangelicals can only help Clinton politically. He also gets the gratification of knowing some accept him as a man of faith.” Trump is more dependent politically on evangelicals and displays psychological bonds as well. In June he told the Faith & Freedom Coalition, “We’re under siege.”
Crowdsourced consensus

AN INTERACTIVE SURVEY LETS PARTICIPANTS ASK THEIR OWN QUESTIONS by Michael Cochrane

Public opinion in Taiwan over proposed regulations for online liquor sales had already been deadlocked for six years when, last year, the government tried a new approach. Instead of relying on traditional surveys to map public opinion, officials employed a new, interactive survey tool called Pol.is.

Within months, the government finally agreed on a plan for online liquor sales. Audrey Tang, Taiwan’s digital minister, credits the crowdsourced survey tool for breaking the deadlock. “It allowed different sides to gradually see that they share the same underlying concern despite superficial disagreements,” Tang told MIT Technology Review. The Taiwan government now uses Pol.is to gauge public opinion in real time on such issues as the regulation of Airbnb rentals and of ride-hailing services like Uber and Lyft.

In Pol.is surveys, users see a series of statements about an issue and are asked to agree, disagree, or pass. Users can add relevant statements of their own to the survey for others to vote on, but unlike the comment forums on social media sites, they can’t reply to statements. Pol.is uses artificial intelligence to analyze the votes and the user-added statements in real time, uncovering clusters—what Pol.is founder Colin Megill calls “opinion groups”—and identifying areas of overlap and points of consensus.

Promising as Pol.is may sound, it might need more testing: Technology Review noted the survey platform would need to prove it could stand up to subversion attempts “from political pressure groups or mischief-makers.”

BUS BUST
An innovative Chinese public transit concept—an elevated bus that straddled two lanes of automobile traffic—has ground to a halt.

According to The New York Times, investigations into Huaying Kailai, the company behind the so-called Transit Elevated Bus, revealed questionable marketing practices that lured investors with promised annual returns of up to 12 percent. Beijing police arrested 32 company staffers in June on charges of “illegal fundraising.”

“The truth is the bus was a fake science investment scam,” complained a Beijing News op-ed on July 3. —M.C.

SAILORS AND GAMERS

Many military service members spend some of their off-duty time playing video games. To young sailors or Marines, blasting aliens or enemy fighters in first-person shooter games such as Doom or Call of Duty may just be great entertainment. But research shows that playing action-oriented video games may actually enhance cognitive skills, including attention span, reaction time, visual acuity, and multitasking ability.

To take advantage of these benefits, the military wants to develop its own training-oriented games. Under a grant from the Office of Naval Research, Shawn Green, a psychology professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, worked with a video game developer to create a customized first-person shooter game called Elemental. The nonviolent fantasy game (players “shoot magical spells at otherworldly creatures”) includes factors believed to boost human cognition, such as changing background colors, rapidly appearing and disappearing objects, and varied mission intensities.

“We know people will spend hours playing a video game,” said Ray Perez, a program manager in ONR’s Warfighter Performance Department. “Is there a way to use some of those entertainment elements to design training that will keep warfighters engaged, help them learn faster, and perform their jobs better?”

Green is conducting experiments with student participants using MRI brain scans to document changes in brain activity before and after playing the game. Participants also complete a range of cognitive tests after six weeks of game play. Green hopes to have a refined version of Elemental ready for sailors and Marines within two years. —M.C.
Appealing to both Christian and LGBTQ fan bases isn’t easy, as major league teams across America are finding out. Hosting a promotion for one group risks alienating the other.

Lance Berkman, a six-time All-Star who led St. Louis to a World Series title in 2011, was scheduled to be the featured speaker at the Cardinals’ “Christian Day” on July 30. After Berkman, a father of four daughters, said he does not want “troubled men to enter women’s bathrooms, showers, and locker rooms,” the PrideCenter of St. Louis branded Berkman a bigot “whose words and actions toward the LGBTQ+ are divisive and demeaning.” The Cardinals have now scheduled their first-ever “Pride Night” for Aug. 25.

The Pittsburgh Pirates handed out hats featuring rainbow versions of their block “P” logo when they hosted their first Pride Day on July 2, but on that same day a Pirates promotion offered replica jerseys to children 14 and younger, leading to fan complaints. The Pirates have scheduled a Faith Night for Aug. 17.

The Los Angeles Dodgers also came under fire for LGBTQ+ celebration in the presence of children. At the Dodgers’ June 9 home game, the team’s “Kiss Cam”—a popular feature in which supposedly random couples, upon seeing themselves on the stadium’s giant television screen, smooch to fans’ delight—showcased several same-sex couples. The Kiss Cam in 2015 also showed gay men kissing.

The Dodgers will host a Christian Faith Day on Sept. 10. Pitcher Clayton Kershaw and first baseman Adrian Gonzalez are scheduled speakers. The Dodgers have also scheduled a Lutheran Night (Aug. 12) and a Catholic Night (Sept. 9).

The Cardinals, Pirates, and Dodgers did not respond to multiple interview requests from WORLD.

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$12 MILLION TITHE

After signing a five-year, $125 million contract in late June to become the highest-paid quarterback in NFL history, Oakland Raiders quarterback Derek Carr pledged to tithe 10 percent, $12.5 million. Carr says he has tithed regularly since his college days at Fresno State, where he received a $700 stipend each semester as part of his scholarship package. Carr threw for 3,937 yards and 28 touchdowns in 2016. —R.H.
During a June gathering in an Illinois chapel, a Nigerian archbishop and a group of North American Anglicans consecrated a British missionary to serve churches facing an erosion of Biblically orthodox teaching in Scotland.

Sounds complicated?
Consider it a summer tableau of the ongoing battle to maintain basic Christian teaching, as some churches around the world continue to embrace perilous compromise on issues of marriage and sexuality.

One of the latest rounds of compromise came earlier this summer, as the Scottish Episcopal Church voted to endorse same-sex marriage. (The Scottish Episcopal Church is part of the worldwide Anglican Communion.)

The move provoked a response from leaders of GAFCON, a group of conservative Anglican clergy from around the world. At a meeting in Nigeria, GAFCON leaders called for the appointment of a missionary bishop to serve churches in the United Kingdom and Europe striving to hold to the authority of the Bible.

The new bishop: Andy Lines—a British-born Anglican serving with the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA), a body of conservative Anglicans formed in 2009. Members of the ACNA consecrated Lines at their June meeting at Wheaton College in Illinois.

Archbishop Nicholas Okoh of Nigeria participated in the service, and he later reminded fellow Christians that false teaching is “restless and relentless” and leads to “grave spiritual danger.”

Okoh wrote that the danger extended to the Church of England as well: In February, the church’s General Synod rejected a report reaffirming Biblical teaching on marriage, though it didn’t vote to change church law. (A new report in 2020 could lead to such changes.) Then in July it passed a motion that said transgender individuals should be “welcomed and affirmed” by local churches and called for the House of Bishops to consider preparing a liturgy service to mark a person’s gender transition.

While churches should welcome anyone—including transgender individuals—to hear the good news of Christ’s gospel, those churches shouldn’t affirm sinful behavior that contradicts the Scriptures and leads to deeper confusion. “Our calling is not to be conformed, but to be transformed,” said Okoh.

Conformity on issues of marriage and sexuality is an ongoing temptation for churchgoers across denominations. In July, well-known Christian author Eugene Peterson startled many by appearing to affirm gay marriage in an interview with the Religion News Service.

When reporter Jonathan Merritt asked the retired pastor if he were leading a church today and a gay couple “in your church who were Christians of good faith asked you to perform a same-sex wedding ceremony, is that something you would do?”

Peterson responded: “Yes.”

The comments evoked a firestorm of criticism from disappointed Christians, and LifeWay Christian Resources announced it was prepared to stop selling Peterson’s books, including his well-known paraphrase of the Bible called The Message.

Two days later, Peterson, 84, retracted his comments: “When put on the spot by this particular interviewer, I said yes in the moment. But in further reflection and prayer, I would like to retract that.”

Al Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, noted “Peterson is also 84 years old. The interview with RNS was actually a valedictory event, of a sort. He announced that he would not be doing any more public speaking or teaching. Peterson had every reason to expect that he would conclude his public ministry without having to answer these questions.”

That didn’t happen, and Mohler noted that journalists will ask even elderly retirees LGBTQ questions—and, “Every pastor, every Christian leader, every author—even every believer—will have to answer ... Evasive, wandering, and inconclusive answers will be seen for what they are.”
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Thank you for my new favorite sentence, a great play on Eric Liddell’s beautiful line: “For many of us, God made us to love words. And when we read, we feel His pleasure.”

—DEBORAH M. O’BRIEN on wng.org

With every new issue my reading list gets longer. For every book I cross off, I have to add four fantastic-sounding books you recommend!

—LAURRYN P. MCDANIEL on Facebook

I appreciate Joel Belz’s kind words about President Trump’s selections of a running mate and a Supreme Court judge. Surely this hardworking president deserves more favorable coverage.

—TOM DRESSEL / Oregon City, Ore.

I found Democrats’ affinity for “democratic socialism” perplexing given the many examples that show it’s a failed economic model.

—TODD FINCH on wng.org

My husband is from Venezuela and many of his relatives still live there. It’s true: Even if you have money, you can’t buy what isn’t on the shelves. My husband has gotten packages of food and medicine through to his mother in the last year despite restrictions, so recently we started a drive among churches here to send food and medical supplies for churches to distribute there. It may be only a drop in the bucket, but we are praying for eternal results.

—SARAH SEPÚLVEDA / Milwaukee, Wis.

I felt a new thankfulness for life in America after reading this article. Americans may complain about government inefficiency, healthcare, and long lines at Walmart, but things are exponentially worse in Venezuela. I am 17, and the socialist leanings of many young people are concerning.

—I am 17, and the socialist leanings of many young people are concerning.

—NOAH G. LERAAS / Hendrum, Minn.

With much of the media trying to force their opinions down our throats, it is nice to know that WORLD believes we can think for ourselves; all we have ever needed is the truth.

—TODD TAYLOR / Eastvale, Calif.

I have witnessed the incredible harm a person who “came out” did to the family. The children and spouse underwent years of counseling following the betrayal. The repercussions could last for generations.

—PAMELA GUINN CATE on Facebook

This article highlights a huge gap in churches’ education and discipleship. We tend to love those whose sins are “acceptable” or “normal” by embracing the sinner and not mentioning the sin. Yet with certain sins we inflate the sin and ostracize the sinner. I long for guidance on how to love all sinners and hate all sins.

—LINDA BUSCH / Wichita, Kan.

No-fault divorce and the horror stories of women abusing the court system to get alimony and child support, literally making men destitute, have made many young men gun-shy of marriage.

—PHILLIP WOECKENER / Tallahassee, Fla.
When I asked someone why she was now marrying a man she has lived with for about 10 years, she was taken aback but said they wanted to have kids and marriage made more sense now. Cohabitation is now so ingrained in our culture that even to ask questions about it results in pregnant pauses, or worse.

—STEVE SHIVE on wng.org

‘Deadly D’s’

As you point out, one of the six D’s that led to World War II was Darwin, leading to the Nazis adopting the doctrine of the survival of the fittest. That doctrine also contributed to World War I. A popular book by a German officer in 1910, for example, called war a “biological necessity” and said the country must choose “world power or downfall.” The killing of Ferdinand by Serbian nationalists was just a small spark.

—GARY VANDER HART / Orange City, Iowa

‘Your son, John Allen’

I loved this article. My son is a Marine and wrote letters to us regularly from Iraq, sometimes after horrific battles. He was going to be a computer guy, but after leaving active duty he went to seminary. He saw God in the middle of the horrors of war and needed to tell people there is a God.

—SUSAN STODDARD / Monument, Colo.

‘Fault lines’

If I had lost a loved one in a train accident, the engineer’s criminal conviction and sentence would not relieve my grief. The philosophy that someone must pay won’t bring peace to the hurting person; it just feeds the desire for vengeance.

—HOLLY McMILLAN on wng.org

Corrections

The lesbian women who encountered opposition when attempting to become foster parents are Amy Ford and Kim Rasmus (“Fostering freedom in Texas,” July 1, 2017).


The Day After was a 1983 made-for-TV movie (“Ready for the worst?” June 10, 2017).

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WE DON’T HAVE TO ALLOW A WHAT-CAN-BE TO BECOME A WHAT-MIGHT-HAVE-BEEN

The photo that accompanies this story is of my father and aunt. I sent it with this story because it is the last picture in the album before you close it and put it away, and you can see that it is a happy one.

For a long time I was sad because I thought the album was already finished, and that the final entries were the most miserable things in the world, and that I would have to live with that. There were the fairly happy childhood ones, of course, or at least how memory bathes all yellowed photos from the long-ago past, even the Depression era. There were the World War II soldier poses on the front lawn, and one of two brothers on a tractor, and a later Christmas gathering in the parlor with the whole clan present. But my father and aunt had not spoken for 20 years.

I don’t know about other family systems, but mine has been, as far back as I remember, a series of internal combustions followed by a swift realignment of factions of unstable elements. Even the buried hatchets are buried so shallow any dog can dig them up.

My cousin has been after me for years to visit and to bring my Dad, and more insistently than ever this summer since they put in her new gazillion-dollar deck. My father has often said he would never set foot in Rhode Island again, but a promise of my brother flying up from Florida sweetened the deal. I said nothing to Dad about his estranged sister; this would be a trip to see a niece.

The first day we sat on the deck and watched the Tour de France. The second day we went in the pool and watched the Tour de France. The third day we saw Newport, and watched the Tour de France. The next morning I woke up with the first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer on my mind: Thy Name be glorified, Thy kingdom advance, Thy will be done—and the feeling that all three prayers lined up with a choice before us: Either we could continue our Rhode Island time in this worldly vein and then go home and have had a pleasant vacation, and never ever know what God could have done with a little courage. Or we could take a risk and storm the gates of hell.

The four Pevensie children, whisked back into the Narnian world, make their way through woods in search of the refugee Prince Caspian. They use sound navigational reasons for the course they take, led by the boys, who have the better sense of direction. But Aslan appears to little Lucy and tells her to follow him. When she shares this epiphany with the others in the expedition party, they vote her down, and with bitter tears she falls in line behind them, as they proceed to get more and more lost. Aslan appears to her a second time, and there is this exchange:

“But it wasn’t my fault, was it?’ The Lion looked straight into her eyes. ‘...I couldn’t have left the others and come up to you alone, how could I?... What would have been the good?’ Aslan said nothing. ‘You mean,’ said Lucy, rather faintly, ‘that it would have turned out all right—somehow? But how? Please, Aslan! Am I not to know?’ ‘To know what would have happened, child?’ said Aslan. ‘No, nobody is ever told that.’ ‘O dear,’ said Lucy. ‘But anyone can find out what will happen,’ said Aslan. ‘If you go back to the others now and wake them up; and tell them you have seen me again; and that you must all get up at once and follow me—what will happen? There is only one way of finding out’ (Prince Caspian).

And so there was, indeed, only one way of finding out. Against a few voiced reservations we drove to my father’s sister’s home. The brother and sister embraced and wept, and I snapped this photo. For we may choose our adventure and a better ending, even now.
If you’re having a bitter day, this column is for you. Let’s start with a memory:

Saturday in the park / I think it was the Fourth of July / People dancing, people laughing / A man selling ice cream... / And I’ve been waiting such a long time / For Saturday.

The band Chicago released that song 45 years ago on July 10, 1972. It’s all-American joyful, like Beach Boys music of the previous decade. But coins have two sides.

Many Christians know of the Jewish New Year’s Day, Rosh Hashanah, but few are aware of a day that resonates even more powerfully through Jewish history: Tisha b’Av, the ninth day of the month of Av, the day on which the Jerusalem temples were destroyed 2,603 and 1,947 years ago.

On that same sundown-to-sundown fast day (Av 9 on the Hebrew calendar is July 31/Aug. 1 this year) monarchs expelled Jews from England in 1290 and from Spain in 1492. If we start counting at Rosh Hashana, Av is the 11th month of the Jewish year, and some—fancifully but poignantly—connect 11/9 to Kristallnacht, when Nazis on Nov. 9, 1938, accelerated their attacks on Jews, and our own 9/11.

Here’s one more date: July 30, 1967—50 years ago. That’s the day Joni Eareckson dove into Chesapeake Bay after making the innocent little mistake of misjudging the shallowness of the water. She suffered a fracture between the fourth and fifth cervical levels and became a quadriplegic, paralyzed from the shoulders down.

That little mistake has left her in a wheelchair for 50 years. It also changed her, she said in an interview we did almost five years ago, from a person who had “confused the abundant Christian life with the great American dream: I was a Christian and would... marry a wonderful man who made $250,000 a year, and we’d have 2.5 children. It was me-focused: What can God do for me?”

I don’t have to recap before WORLD’s mostly Christian readership how the Joni and Friends ministry has helped millions of people. But I didn’t want the interview just to be warm and fuzzy, so I asked, after she mentioned her superficial but not evil 2.5/$250,000 aspirations, what she thought her life actually would have been like had she not broken her neck.

Joni replied, “I don’t say this in front of hardly any audience, but in front of this [Patrick Henry College] audience I will: I believe what happened to me was an example of Hebrews Chapter 12 discipline. I do. I’ve had Christians ask, ‘How can you say that of God? That’s awful for you to say He would discipline you by making you a quadriplegic.’ No, no, no. Read Hebrews Chapter 12: God disciplines those He loves. Had I not broken my neck I’d probably be on my second divorce, maxing out my husband’s credit cards, planning my next ski vacation. I wouldn’t be here extolling the glories of the gospel and the power of God to help a person smile, not in spite of the problems, but because of them.”

That’s important: She’s had a better life “not in spite of the problems, but because of them.” Whenever we think our lives have too much Tisha b’Av and not enough Fourth of July, we tend to blame God—but who knows better than God how much adversity we need to build our character, glorify Him, and fit us for heaven?

And in less dramatic ways than Joni Eareckson Tada experienced, small Tisha b’Avs make for sweeter July Fourths. Four years ago an article, “Why no Calvinist should ever be a Cubs fan,” asked such fans, “Why would you put yourself through that torture?... The Cubs are notoriously known for being cursed by God.” It went on in that vein, but I’m not citing the author because he has now deleted the website containing that article, perhaps after the dramatic Chicago win in the World Series last fall.

After all, Russians have a saying, “Two small hands at the breast, and the pangs of childbirth are forgotten.” And, when not just hardships but deaths leave us bitter, remember: We would have no Fourth of July celebrations but for those who died at Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill.®
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Chad & Destiny

“My husband and I look forward to sending our share each month because we know it’s going to directly help a family or individual during a difficult time in their lives.”

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