THEY CAN KILL US IN ONE HOUR. —BEHNAM BENOKA, PRIEST IN IRAQ, ON IRANIAN MILITIAS THREATENING CHRISTIANS. P. 36.

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02.01.20  VOLUME 35  NUMBER 2

THE GOSPEL
ACCORDING TO

PETE

P. 38
For the last twenty-five years, Samaritan Ministries members have been sharing medical costs while praying for and encouraging one another — all without health insurance. Faithful. Affordable. Biblical.

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In the Netherlands, legal prostitution hasn’t turned out the way advocates predicted, and some are fighting to end it.

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THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO PETE
Democratic presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg speaks often of his religion—but he tailors it to fit his politics, and it focuses on works over faith
by Jamie Dean

50
INVISIBLE HANDS
Anyone can be an author nowadays, but knowing who wrote the book may be a different story
by Jenny Rough

56
GROUNDHOG YEARS IN ARGENTINA
Argentina was once one of the richest countries in the world, but an embrace of ever-growing government made it poor
by Marvin Olasky
Two weeks after the last treatment, the disease returned, this time shutting down everything except her breathing.
Does your student know how to ride the waves of today’s culture … without going under?

Gender identity. Social media. Addiction. Can your teen navigate the challenges of today’s culture with truth and grace? How do they even know what is right or wrong anymore? John Stonestreet and Brett Kunkle offer hope, answers, and ideas to help your student live well in today’s world.

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“THE EARTH IS THE LORD’S AND THE FULLNESS THEREOF; THE WORLD AND THOSE WHO DWELL THEREIN.” —PSALM 24:1
DARWINISM’S BIG BREAKDOWN
[ DEC. 7, P. 40 ]—MICHAEL DUMEZ / OOSTBURG, WIS.
It’s great that Michael Behe discovered that life changes only by genetic degradation and not by self-creation of new genetic information. Creationists have known for years that God created the world as He described in Genesis, and He didn’t use long and wasteful methods to do it.

VIVID MEMORIES
[ DEC. 7, P. 38 ]—TOM BURLEY / ALTO, MICH.
On your short list of history books is Did America Have a Christian Founding?, and your brief review noted the range of opinion on this question. There were a number of deists, notably Ben Franklin, but given the way the government was formed, the Christian influence must have been very strong.

A 30-RING CIRCUS
[ DEC. 7, P. 7 ]—STEVE SHIVE ON WNG.ORG
Thanks to Jamie Dean for this balanced report. I appreciate WORLD’s call to consider where our ultimate loyalties lie. If churches are linking themselves to President Trump, we are truly in a tragic position. No president deserves our unfettered support, regardless of party, agenda, or view on abortion. Churches are to represent the Church.

SAM LOCHINGER ON WNG.ORG
As a supporter of Trump, I am praying that the office would humble him and bring him to a right relationship with God through Jesus.

MUSCLING IN
[ DEC. 7, P. 58 ]—PAUL K. LIM ON WNG.ORG
How can that photo of a male bike racer sitting next to two female opponents not be from a satirical website? As somebody said, these are challenging times to be a satirist. What a bizarre and self-destructive age we live in.

CARA MCCARTHY-BOES ON FACEBOOK
It surprises me that males who compete against women don’t find it humiliating to win.

LEARNING TO WRESTLE PIGS
[ DEC. 7, P. 59 ]—LINDA HUNT / PEQUEA, PA.
I have really appreciated your lifestyle series on long marriages. We have been married 38 years, and God has brought us through many ups and downs. We’ve seen many couples, including three of our pastors, get divorced. Doesn’t anybody stay together anymore?

FORTUNATE SONS
[ DEC. 7, P. 18 ]—BOB CREMER ON WNG.ORG
Janie B. Cheaney called boomers “exceptionally blessed” and she makes some good points. But what about the Soviet threat of nuclear holocaust since the 1950s, the disaster of the Vietnam War through the 1970s, and insanely high interest rates in the 1980s? It was not all candy and cake, but I totally agree with the need for grace to pray instead of complain!

CORRECTIONS
Don Newcombe was the first African American pitcher to start a World Series game (Dan Bankhead was the first black pitcher in the major leagues), and “Jumping” Johnny Wilson was Indiana’s second African American “Mr. Basketball” (George Crowe was the first) (“2019 Deaths,” Dec. 28, pp. 88, 92).

A corrected April 2019 study in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences estimated 45 million missing baby girls globally from 1970 to 2017 due to sex-selective abortions (By the Numbers, June 8, 2019, p. 13).

LETTERS AND COMMENTS
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We’ve redesigned WORLD and hope you’ll share it

We hear frequently from our WORLD readers, listeners, and supporters, and I’ve noticed a recurring theme: You are eager for your friends, families, colleagues, fellow church members, and neighbors to engage with WORLD in the same way you have. God has used WORLD in your life, you tell us, and you’d like others to enjoy that same benefit.

With that in mind, we’ve come up with an easy way to make that happen. We are offering a free, two-month trial membership to every one of those people in your life. You just tell us who they are, and we’ll send them two full months of this thoughtfully redesigned magazine. (More about that in a moment.)

So from now until Feb. 29, you can tell us through a special website we set up for this program—getworldnow.org—or by calling our member services department at 828-435-2981. We will not ask you for a credit card number—remember, it’s free—and we will not barrage your friends and family with unwanted emails. We really won’t.

We do hope, though, that new readers will begin to view WORLD as you do: as a resource to help view everything that happens in the world as a chapter in the story that God is writing.

That brings me to the redesign: Our team hired an exceptional design firm—Metaleap Creative, which has helped many organizations and individuals we respect (such as magazines like Tabletalk and Modern Reformation, the overall ministries of Ligonier and Albert Mohler, along with dozens of other ministries and churches)—to lead the effort.

The challenge we presented to Metaleap was to enhance readability (by now I trust you’ve noticed the larger, cleaner text) and at the same time provide a look that’s fresh, new, and bold.

In addition to the type size and typeface changes, we also changed the layouts of individual pages to minimize distractions to reading, all to serve the practical interest of improved readability. Many other changes are purely aesthetic—the “fresh, new, and bold” part of the redesign. You spend a lot of time with WORLD Magazine, and we want you to enjoy it.

And while we had you in mind during this redesign process, we also thought about all those people to whom you would introduce WORLD, for the first time or for another look. We hope this new design will encourage them to pick up the magazine, to find something in it that they need and want. We hope God will use this redesign to make our work more useful in the lives of your people, and His people.

KEVIN MARTIN

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Voices

JOEL BELZ

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10

WORLD

02.01.20

My turn: the three hardest words to say

Mankind’s ingenuity and the sun’s power show I was wrong about solar energy

WAS WRONG.” Some wise soul says those are the three hardest words for a human being to say.

Hard or not, I think it’s time for me to apply the confession to my long-standing disdain for those who think we’ll soon be heating our homes and powering our cars with solar energy. “Maybe in 100 years,” I’ve stubbornly conceded. “But no way in my lifetime.”

Even in this column, in discussions about climate change and stewardship of resources, I’ve been way too condescending. I scoffed at the dreamers who imagined modern civilization might ever replace proven petroleum riches with something as distant and erratic as the sun.

But I was wrong. The distant and erratic sun has grabbed my attention more and more.

I have no technical training in fields related to this discussion. But I have learned something about watching what we call the “free market.” You don’t have to stand outside very long on a sunny day—even in the dead of winter—to sense how much heat the sun can produce. Whether we see it or not, it makes its warmth available to every nation and culture on earth, every day of every year, for centuries or even millennia on end. You might consider the sun an equal opportunity space heater—and so very much more. Experts tell us there’s no evidence at all that the sun is burning up! We’re using not even a tiny fraction of its capacity.

So common sense suggests that even some of us skeptics should swallow our pride and do whatever we can to hook up to God’s giant energy generator. The challenge isn’t so much to find vast new sources of energy. That source has already been discovered. The challenge instead is to get that energy from its source to its ultimate users.

Such a distribution system, if it is to succeed in the free market, needs to be both efficient and timely. So far, it is neither—though we are making progress, and it does show promise.

Just take a look across almost any gathering of new buildings—residential or commercial—and try to see how many solar collectors you can count. Folks aren’t installing such devices these days just for the fun of it, or for their decorative appeal. They actually work. About 40 years ago, I actually installed a primitive solar panel just outside our home’s laundry room—a happy improvement that has saved our family budget at least $30 every single month, or a total of almost $15,000—without a single penny of operational or maintenance costs. And the newer models capture the sun’s energy far more efficiently than mine does.

But what about the issue of timeliness? How can 6 billion people around the world ever learn to lean on a solar source the earth’s rotation obscures every single night? The humble solution may be closer than you’ve imagined. Think batteries.

The essence of a battery is its ability to store energy until you need it. So for most of our lifetimes, we’ve called on batteries for some pretty meager tasks. Getting our homes or our businesses or our factories from sundown one day, through the night, and on to sunup the next day, just hasn’t been in the job description of most batteries. That kind of load is simply too heavy.

But all that is changing. High-powered batteries—even in race cars, if you can believe it—are the coming thing. Which is why you shouldn’t be surprised one of these days to encounter a variety of vehicles, not just in Detroit but in your town as well, with labels that proclaim “Experimental Electric Vehicle.” I used to think this was only the thing of wild dreams. But I was wrong. Now I’m thankful God still infuses His marvelous creation with a spirit of invention and creativity.
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An earthquake comes with little warning, but it’s possible to notice the effects of a tremor before feeling the earth move. A few days after Haiti’s massive earthquake on Jan. 12, 2010, I noticed pieces of loose stone falling from a wall moments before I realized the earth was rumbling in an aftershock.

On Jan. 2, 2020, a U.S. drone strike killed Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad, but the dramatic moment followed signs that the ground was shifting. U.S. Gen. David Petraeus once called Soleimani “a truly evil figure.”

In Iraq, Christians had suffered in areas controlled by militias backed by...
Soleimani’s forces, and they said tensions remained high after his death. (WORLD senior editor Mindy Belz spoke with Christians in the region after the U.S. strike and reports on their plight on p. 36.)

At least a million Iranians poured into Tehran’s streets after Soleimani’s assassination. Some chanted: “Death to America.” But days later, the ground shifted again, when Iran admitted it accidentally downed a Ukrainian jetliner leaving Tehran, killing the 176 people on board. Iranian officials initially had denied responsibility, and throngs of anti-government protesters shouted: “Death to the liars.”

In the United States, a different kind of fissure cracked open: Leaders from the United Methodist Church (UMC) announced a proposal on Jan. 3 to allow conservative congregations to break away from the denomination in the United States and form their own church body.

Last May, the UMC voted to uphold the Biblical definition of marriage, but the global vote included many African delegates embracing historic Christian teaching on sexuality. In the Unites States, conservative Methodists are in the minority, and they remain at odds with church leaders supporting gay ordination and same-sex weddings.

The proposal would allocate $25 million for departing conservatives. Churches would keep their property, and ministers would keep their pensions. Still, Mark Tooley of the Institute on Religion and Democracy said since many Methodist congregations aren’t “strictly liberal or conservative,” the process likely will be “messy and often tragic.”

On Jan. 7, the ground literally shifted in Puerto Rico: A 6.4 magnitude earthquake was the most powerful to hit the island in a century. The quake damaged or destroyed hundreds of homes and businesses and caused widespread power outages in the U.S. territory.

In Australia, the ground didn’t quake, but it did burn. Wildfires consumed some 26,000 square miles of land and destroyed thousands of homes and businesses. Firefighters warned the blazes might continue into February.

Back in the United States, Ricky Gervais scorched celebrities at the Golden Globe Awards on Jan. 5. The British comedian exposed the divide between Hollywood elites and much of their audiences. He exhorted the actors not to make political speeches if they won an award: “You know nothing about the real world.”

That didn’t stop actress Michelle Williams from using her win to offer an unusual tribute: “I wouldn’t have been able to do this without employing a woman’s right to choose—to choose when to have my children and with whom.”

The speech came a few days before Planned Parenthood officials released their annual report and disclosed the number of abortions they conducted during the last fiscal year: 345,672. The group also reported the amount of funding it received from government grants and reimbursements: nearly $617 million.

Abortion will expose divides in the 2020 presidential election, but a presidential impeachment trial forced several Democratic contenders to prepare to leave the campaign trail. Sens. Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, and Amy Klobuchar faced returning to D.C. for the Senate trial and leaving the road open in early primary states to front-runner candidates Joe Biden and Pete Buttigieg.

As American politics rumbled, Haitians marked 10 years since the 2010 earthquake that killed an estimated 220,000 people in the Caribbean nation. They also lamented the political upheaval and demonstrations that ground the nation to a halt over the last few months.

Benjamin Hopp, a missionary with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, said the resilient Haitians in the churches he serves haven’t lost hope in God’s care for them, but they are weary of the turmoil that has shaken the nation again: “Pray they won’t be discouraged.”
Median weekly earnings of wage and salary workers in the third quarter of 2019, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Earnings have risen steadily since the fourth quarter of 2017, when median weekly earnings stood at $854. Meanwhile, the BLS reported that the unemployment rate stood at 3.5 percent in December, a 50-year low as the economy added 145,000 jobs. Employers added an average of 176,000 jobs per month in 2019.

29.6%
The combined federal income and payroll tax burden on a single childless worker in 2018, according to the Tax Foundation. (Families often face lower burdens.) The burden fell 2.2 percent from 2017, which the Tax Foundation attributed to the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

11.8%
The U.S. poverty rate in 2018, according to the Census Bureau. The rate was down from 12.3 percent in 2017 and has been dropping since 2014.

704
The average FICO credit score in 2018, an all-time high and an increase of 14 points since 2008.

$13.95 trillion
The total amount of U.S. personal debt in the third quarter of 2019, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. Personal debt has increased for 21 consecutive quarters.
**DECLINED**

The American Cancer Society reported the largest-ever one-year decline in the rate of U.S. deaths from cancer. The rate has fallen by about 1.5 percent a year since 1991, but that accelerated to 2.5 percent between 2016 and 2017. Rebecca Siegel, the lead author of the report, said that’s the largest drop since 1930. Siegel said advances in lung cancer treatments drove most of the decline. Smoking has also been on the decline for decades.

**APPROVED**

With the comfortable majorities the party won in December’s national election, Conservatives in the British Parliament finally passed a Brexit bill on Jan. 9. Lawmakers approved the Withdrawal Agreement Bill by a vote of 330–231, clearing the way for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union on Jan. 31. The country still has to negotiate new trade agreements with the EU once that’s done. “Leaving the EU doesn’t mean that we will have got Brexit done,” said Paul Blomfield, a spokesman for the opposition Labour Party. “We’ll have completed the first step, departure, but the difficult stage is yet to come.”

**RESIGNED**

U.S. Rep. Duncan Hunter, R-Calif., vacated his congressional seat on Jan. 13. Hunter pleaded guilty in December to a federal charge of conspiracy to misuse campaign funds after denying wrongdoing for more than a year. In 2018, Hunter and his wife, Margaret, were indicted on charges of using $250,000 in campaign funds for things like family vacations, school tuition, and five extramarital affairs. The seat will remain vacant until voters choose a new representative in November.

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**Breaking free from the royal purse strings?**

Prince Harry created an uproar in the United Kingdom on Jan. 7 with the announcement that he and his family would step back from royal duties. He and his wife, Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex, said they plan to become financially independent from the queen’s Sovereign Grant (if not from British taxpayers generally), focus on charity work, and split their time between the United Kingdom and North America. The couple’s main complaint appears to be with the British press and its obsession with the royals. Meghan, an American who had a successful acting career before marrying Harry in 2018, has admitted to struggling with the media pressure, especially since the birth of the couple’s son, Archie, in 2019. Harry is currently sixth in line for the throne.
“I’m not turning my back on those people.”

Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee, a Republican, on his decision to decline the Trump administration’s offer to stop resettling refugees in the state. Other GOP lawmakers in the state had sued the federal government over the refugee resettlement program.

“Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee, a Republican, on his decision to decline the Trump administration’s offer to stop resettling refugees in the state. Other GOP lawmakers in the state had sued the federal government over the refugee resettlement program.”

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“It’s the story of a man who’s going through a lot of pain and trauma and he’s trying to find a way to cope. I think it’s a great story.”

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“I call myself a bleeding-heart libertarian.”

Musician Neil Peart, drummer and lyricist for Rush, who died at age 67 of brain cancer. In a 2012 interview with Rolling Stone, Peart described his youthful interest in the writings of Ayn Rand that gave way to a different outlook. In 1997, Peart lost his 19-year-old daughter, Selena, to a car crash, and then five months later his common-law wife to cancer.

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“Lost souls influenced by lost souls.”

Chart topping rap artist DaBaby, in a comment about social media. He wrote: “I encourage people to have the courage to find themselves without the false sense of security they search for on the internet.”

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“I have never been discouraged because all conditions that one finds himself [in are] in the hand of God.”

Nigerian Pastor Lawan Andimi in a video appeal for his release after Boko Haram abducted him on Jan. 3 during a raid on his hometown of Michika. Andimi also is head of the Christian Association of Nigeria in northeast Adamawa state.

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1 Not-so-long winter’s nap

ZOOKEEPERS AT A Ukrainian zoo took to Facebook in December to complain about their grumpy bears. Blaming temperatures several degrees above average, zoo officials said 29 of the 32 bears housed at Synevyr National Nature Park had yet to fall into hibernation, leaving them in a state of insomnia. The typical average December temperature at Synevyr is about 28 degrees. But this December, the average temperature was 39 degrees. Zoo officials said the unseasonably warm December temperatures felt more like April—the month when the zoo’s bears typically wake up—than winter.

2 DIET DENIAL Federal judges have ordered up a denial for a Santa Rosa, Calif., woman who blamed Dr Pepper for not making her skinny. In a federal lawsuit, Shana Becerra claimed her 13 years of drinking Diet Dr Pepper made no difference to her waistline and claimed the soda company engaged in deceptive advertising because she “did not receive what she paid for.” A three-judge panel of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals disagreed and unanimously dismissed her suit on Dec. 30. “No reasonable consumer would assume that Diet Dr Pepper’s use of the term ‘diet’ promises weight loss or management,” Judge Jay Bybee wrote in the decision. Earlier in December, the 9th Circuit dismissed a similar case Becerra launched against Coca-Cola.

3 DUTCH NAME GAME According to some, it’s the Netherlands. Others call it Holland. As of Jan. 1, though, the Netherlands has dropped its official nickname. In an effort to more accurately market its international image, the Netherlands Board of Tourism dropped the name “Holland” from all marketing. Officially, Holland will only refer to a region encompassing two of the nation’s 12 provinces. A Dutch official, speaking anonymously to news agency EFE, said, “It is a little
strange to promote only a small part of the Netherlands abroad, that is, only Holland."

4 TUMBLEWEED TRAFFIC JAM Tumbling tumbleweeds closed a road in an arid part of Benton County, Wash., on Dec. 31. Washington Department of Transportation officials blamed heavy winds for piling up tumbleweeds on State Road 240 running alongside Hanford Reach National Monument. State troopers closed 12 miles of road way after several motorists became stuck in the mass. After 10 hours of clearing debris, troopers were able to reopen the road and allow motorists to continue down the desolate highway.

5 Y2K PLUS 20 Twenty years after Y2K glitches failed to materialize, New Year’s Day finally brought some software glitches. On Jan. 1, parking meters around New York City began rejecting payments from credit cards, frustrating and confusing New York motorists. Within 48 hours, the New York City Department of Transportation discovered the parking meters’ software was programmed with an “established end date” of Jan. 1, 2020, and had never been updated by the city’s software vendor. The city announced the meters were fixed on Jan. 7.

6 TRASHY TYPO The new garbage cans issued to residents of Prichard, Ala., proudly declare the town to be the “Crossroads of Mobile Country.” One small problem: The city’s nickname is actually “Crossroads of Mobile County.” The city distributed 10,000 of the new trash cans, and each one contains the typo. Prichard Mayor Jimmie Gardner blamed the Public Works Department for not proofreading the logo. “Things like that do happen in the proofing,” he told news station WPML. “We just have to look at and hope that in the process of proofing that those kinds of errors don’t take place.” Officials with the mayor’s office said the city has no plans to replace the trashcans.

7 AFTER 23 YEARS on the road, the Hershey Kissmobiles are headed for a museum. Citing safety concerns, candy giant Hershey announced it would park its small fleet of Kissmobiles at the beginning of 2020. For decades, the 12-foot-tall Hershey Kisses, built on 26-foot-long custom-built chassis, traveled over 30,000 miles promoting the chocolate company’s brand. Now the cruisers will be on display at the Antique Automobile Club of America Museum in Hershey, Pa.
Atheism’s second thoughts

Nonbelievers have realized they must reckon with original sin

In a satirical epilogue to The Screwtape Letters, C.S. Lewis imagines his venerable old demon rising to propose a toast after the annual Tempters’ Training College dinner. While commending his hosts, Screwtape can’t refrain from genteel complaints about the disappointing dinner—that is, the poor quality of the sinners it comprised. That Municipal Authority with Graft Sauce was barely palatable, much less the lukewarm Casserole of Adulterers. It wasn’t the fault of the kitchen staff, for it could only do so much with what it had. But goodness me, what’s become of the brazen sinners and brawny atheists of yesteryear?

If Lewis had been around in the first decade of this century, he might have had Screwtape hopefully appraising the “four horsemen” of take-no-prisoners atheism. But where are they now? Christopher Hitchens has passed into eternity, Daniel Dennett into obscurity, Sam Harris is still waiting to see his dream of a rational society emerge, and Richard Dawkins is thinking that dream may be DOA.

Dawkins has been, in many ways, the scourge of what he understands as traditional Christianity. Only a few years ago he was agreeing with Dennett that it might be wise to separate children from their fundamentalist parents (see “Children of the state,” May 14, 2016). But lately he seems to be doubting whether the eradication of Christianity would be an unvarnished good. His latest book, Outgrowing God, makes a confession that should be obvious: “Whether irrational or not, it does, unfortunately, seem plausible that, if somebody sincerely believes God is watching his every move, he might be more likely to be good.”

That is not something Dawkins likes to admit: “I hate that idea. I want to believe that humans are better than that.” But he may be running smack into the notion of original sin, which Chesterton described as the most verifiable fact of human history. Other well-known atheist/agnostics, such as Douglas Murray and Jordan Peterson, are even less sanguine about the basic goodness of humanity. Talk-show host Bill Maher, who thinks Christianity is “ridiculous,” nevertheless believes that it wouldn’t be wise to ditch it right away, as a relatively benign faith might be the best defense against an explicitly violent one, meaning radical Islam.

The British comedy team Mitchell and Webb produced a popular skit featuring two SS officers retreating from Russia during World War II. One of them has just noticed that the most prominent feature of their insignia is a skull. It makes him wonder, “Are we the baddies?”

Some atheists like to see themselves as heroes in the story of mankind’s relentless march toward freedom in the bright dawn of unbelief. Psychologist Steven Pinker’s latest book, Enlightenment Now, makes that very point. The world is richer, life spans are longer, and wars are shorter because, sometime in the mid-18th century, mankind began building an intellectual framework that excluded God. (The 20th century must have been an unfortunate glitch.) And because humans are fundamentally decent, things can only get better from here.

Yes, about that, Dawkins and others seem to be wondering: What if we humans are the baddies?

Or, if only a few of us are really bad, how will the rest of us gin up the moral certainty and courage to stop them? Pinker celebrates better quality of life through technology, but in China a totalitarian government has begun to use technology to bring the behavior and thoughts of an entire population under its control. Technological carrots and sticks are cleaner than bloody massacres, and more effective besides—who’s to say that’s wrong?

Screwtape concluded his toast by looking on the bright side: Yes, half-baked sin is barely palatable, but thank Our Father Below, unrepentant sinners abound these days. Their atheism owes nothing to intellectual rigor; it’s more a default setting that removes all barriers. To their credit, serious atheists are beginning to question whether that’s desirable. But they should have questioned earlier.
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ON THE EVE of its nationwide release, surprise wins at the Golden Globes catapulted war drama 1917 to the front of the Oscar race for best picture.

Rated R for realistic violence and a fair amount of bad language, it tells the harrowing tale of two British soldiers in World War I. Writer/director Sam Mendes, best known for the recent Bond movies, based the script on a family legend and dedicates the film to his grandfather, who was a veteran.

I mention this because 1917 is as much about the stories we tell about war as about a particular conflict. In what appears to be a single camera take, we follow Lance Cpls.
Blake and Schofield, two young men entrusted to carry a vital message across enemy territory. If they reach their destination, they’ll foil an audacious German scheme. If they fail, 1,600 of their fellow soldiers, Blake’s brother among them, will likely be wiped out.

This is the historical backdrop of the story. It’s the one you can look up on Wikipedia under the title “Operation Alberich,” complete with names and dates and distances. But these cold facts won’t help Operation Alberich live in your imagination. It won’t capture the collective memories of whole battalions that go on to become myths, growing and becoming neater and more embellished in the telling.

As the film goes on, turns in plot feel too contrived to be accurate. What are the odds that an encounter with a bucket of milk would become so vital to life later in the narrative? But that’s only a drawback if you expect 1917 to function like other great war dramas like Saving Private Ryan or All Quiet on the Western Front. It seems fairly clear that Mendes’ aim isn’t to give viewers another gritty, realistic experience of battle.

Strange as it is to say it, there’s a fairy-tale quality amid 1917’s carnage. As we follow Schofield and Blake, we witness how the stories of generations are already taking root.

This visual poetry culminates in an extended scene that functions as the film’s thesis. Schofield drifts along a river as spring blossoms—an exact echo of a story Blake told him earlier—float down to him like snow. The shallows he comes to rest in after this idyllic image, however, is a horror. Pale, bloated casualties, like the faces in the Dead Marshes on the road to Mordor, hem him in on every side. Crawling out of this morass, his attention is caught by a haunting, otherworldly tenor. He follows it to find silent warriors sitting among still trees, contemplating their deaths as the lilting song tells of the hard road to heaven.

“REMEMBER THE DAYS OF OLD; CONSIDER THE YEARS OF MANY GENERATIONS; ASK YOUR FATHER, AND HE WILL SHOW YOU, YOUR ELDERS, AND THEY WILL TELL YOU.”

Deuteronomy tells us, “Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you.” The battles a nation chooses can reveal its character. The tales its people tell about them go on revealing it.
Dolittle does little that’s new
by Megan Basham

DOLITTLE, BASED ON Hugh Lofting’s classic children’s stories, feels like two different movies. The first third embodies all the prickly, off-kilter charm an Anglophile’s heart could desire. It opens, as all English children’s stories should, in a wild wood hiding a mysterious, crumbling manor. Dreamy-eyed village lad Stubbins (Harry Collett) can’t bring himself to follow in his family’s footsteps and fire upon forest creatures. His gentle heart gets a reward: an invitation from a talking parrot (Emma Thompson) to a secret animal sanctuary where he meets a pretty, young aristocrat; an array of furry, feathered, and scaled hosts; and the most eccentric man of science the 19th century—an era famed for eccentric men of science—ever produced: Dr. John Dolittle (Robert Downey Jr.).

All shipshape and Bristol fashion so far. It’s when the animals start to speak that we sense the first whiff of danger—they all have inexplicably modern, American personalities. Still, even when his accent goes a bit wobbly, Downey Jr. offers such a pleasingly crusty old Welshman our concern is easy enough to brush off. As Dolittle, Stubbins, and Lady Rose (Carmel Laniado) set off for Buckingham Palace on a mission to save her majesty, we settle in for a feast of charming Victoriana.

And that’s when this sweet PG frolic becomes less Paddington and more South Park. Every cheap, juvenile gag a lazy Hollywood screenwriter can be counted on to produce suddenly arrives to grate on parents’ nerves: crude jokes, puerile references to body parts, inane puns, cut-off expletives, and, finally, rhymes-with-expletives.

We already had a loud, crass, Americanized version of the story with 1998’s Eddie Murphy vehicle. We didn’t need a new one with an old accent.

DOLITTLE: UNIVERSAL STUDIOS; UNDERWATER: 20TH CENTURY FOX

FISHERS OF MEN
Mysterious sea creatures stalk human prey in the thriller Underwater
by Bob Brown

SCI-FI FILMS ABOUT human-hunting creatures usually feature one of three different settings: outer space, New York City or some other metropolis suited to skyscraper scalers, or the murky oceans. Guess which one the new film Underwater takes place in.

A deep-sea mining station begins to collapse. At first suspecting an earthquake, the station’s crew soon learns it’s under attack from creatures never seen before. Where did they come from?

“We did this. ... We’re not supposed to be here,” one crew member whimpers, reckoning the interspecies clash as the inevitable result of humans’ exploitation of the ocean.

Happily, this is the lone bucket of environmental “told ya so” the film sloshes in viewers’ faces. Otherwise apolitical, Underwater is a subaqueous Aliens in which creatures chase the mining crew inside damaged structures and across the open seafloor, picking them off one by one. Will anybody survive?

The film (rated PG-13 for terror and language) is par for the coarse—the usual rough talk and shots of women in skimpy skivvies. The ensemble is also formulaic: the no-nonsense captain, the Sigourney Weaver tough-girl type (Kristen Stewart), the doomed jokester, and the fraidy-cat newbie. There’s little fresh in this saltwater nightmare. Still, props to the props: The twisted wreckage and seabed terrain are vividly realistic.

I’m convinced now: Creepy things lurk in the oceans—and outer space. But New York City? No way!

2019 GOLDEN GLOBE WINNERS

Best Actor in a Motion Picture, Comedy or Musical: Taron Egerton, Rocketman
Best Actress in a Motion Picture, Comedy or Musical: Awkwafina, The Farewell
Best Actor in a Motion Picture, Drama: Joaquin Phoenix, Joker
Best Motion Picture, Comedy or Musical: Once Upon a Time ... in Hollywood
Best Motion Picture, Drama: 1917
PRESUMED GUILTY
Northern lawyer goes to the South to fight corrupt judicial system in historically based legal drama Just Mercy

by Bob Brown

Walter McMillian (Jamie Foxx), a black resident of Monroe County, Ala., faces the death penalty for the murder of an 18-year-old white woman. A convicted felon’s dubious testimony put him there, and local law enforcement officials have suppressed exculpatory evidence.

“You’re guilty from the moment you’re born,” McMillian says of the legal system’s treatment of many blacks in the South.

Into this hostile environment walks Bryan Stevenson (Michael B. Jordan), a young African American graduate of Harvard Law School. He establishes a tiny nonprofit called Equal Justice Institute, dedicated to representing the poor on death row. He takes up the cases of six defendants—at least one wrongly convicted, others inappropriately sentenced. The more Stevenson digs, the more he enrages powerful people.

Stevenson’s education and profession mean nothing to the county’s sheriff and district attorney. They see a black man who doesn’t know his place. When police lights flash in Stevenson’s rearview mirror during a late-night drive down a country road, he experiences firsthand the same helplessness and humiliation that many poor individuals, especially people of color, have endured at the hands of those sworn to protect the rule of law.

Viewers feel this same helplessness—at least for two riveting hours. (The film is rated PG-13 mainly for explicit language.) The abuses of power roll in relentlessly, as conspirators and their dupes seem to cut off every avenue of relief. You wonder: How can people be so cruel? Is turning a blind eye our default reaction to injustice?

Foxx and Jordan give career performances, as does Tim Blake Nelson, who plays a criminal regretting his false testimony against McMillian but fearing the consequences of coming clean.

Although the film makes little of Stevenson’s church background, the real Bryan Stevenson told me he’s a Christian who finds inspiration in Micah 6:8: “The Scriptures tell us to … advocate for the poor, disfavored, excluded, and condemned.” He’s working for the day when Americans no longer look in their rearview mirrors and see so many stories of injustice.
**LEADING THE GULLIBLE**

Nothing can save Netflix’s *Messiah* from its many drawbacks

by Marty VanDriel

ISIS TROOPS SURROUND DAMASCUS, pummeling the city with rockets and bombs. It seems only a matter of time before they pour in and take over. A mysterious long-haired figure appears, assuring the growing crowds that they will be saved from destruction if they just believe that God will save them. From nowhere, a violent sandstorm swells up and buries ISIS trucks, tanks, and weapons, forcing the fighters to flee for their lives.

*Messiah*, a 10-part Netflix miniseries rated TV-MA, is from executive producers Mark Burnett and Roma Downey. It follows Al-Masih, an enigmatic prophet, on a journey from Damascus, through Israel, and on to the USA, gathering more and more followers who thirst for his message of peace and are willing to do whatever he suggests. Is his message truly peaceful or a sinister plot to destroy the social and political fabric of the Western world?

This is not a series I recommend, not just because of disturbing violence and coarse language. More seriously, characters speak about Christianity and Jesus in such a mocking and disrespectful way that it is hard to witness. Scenes where a CIA agent and her Israeli rival ridicule the true Christ and His ministry, comparing Him to a street minstrel or charlatan, are shameful. Yes, we know these are unbelieving characters and perhaps in a potential Season 2 they will change, but the thoroughness with which they express their disgust with Christ and his followers is explicit and profane.

Why write about it then? Christians should know what our fellow citizens are watching, because entertainment informs and influences worldview, and much of the content of this series portrays followers of the Lord as gullible or corrupt.

While Jews and Muslims seem skeptical, naïve Christian characters like the Rev. Felix Iguero blindly follow their new leader. Iguero never opens his Bible to see if the claims Al-Masih makes align with Scripture and the clear prophecies of the true Jesus about His return.

Actor Mehdi Dehbi (as Al-Masih) has perfected the art of sitting perfectly still, staring into space with a mystic glow in his eyes. His favorite way to get his followers even more entranced is to take their faces into his hands and intone that they have a special job to do and that they will know what that job is when the time comes. Beyond preaching peace, Al-Masih mixes vaguely Christian sentiments with platitudes about being true to oneself. None of his message sounds at all inspiring in a way that would justify the crowds who follow him.

By the end of the 10-part show, viewers are not yet clear on the nature of the title character. Is he divine or a sinister human? I for one do not care to find out, and hope Episode 10 is the end of this sorry series.
Historians since Edward Gibbon in the 18th century have tended to call “the decline and fall of the Roman empire the greatest, perhaps, most awful scene, in the history of mankind.” But Walter Scheidel in *Escape From Rome* (Princeton, 2019) sees that imperial collapse as positive, since it “ushered in an age of open-ended experimentation” and enabled Europeans eventually “to build societies that enjoy freedom, prosperity, and general welfare.” Scheidel shows decentralization was helpful. China in the 1400s sent fleets to Africa, yet when emperors lost interest, expeditions ceased. By contrast, when half a dozen power centers turned down Christopher Columbus, Spain could eventually say yes. Now, China’s president aggressively centralizes power, as Elizabeth Economy shows in *The Third Revolution: Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State* (Oxford, 2019). That didn’t work out well for previous dictators and the people they said they served.

If you’ve been curious about the battles between the two major Islamic clans, your ship is coming in on Feb. 4: Laurence Louër’s *Sunnis and Shi’a* (Princeton, 2020) explains that today’s dispute is not really about political events that purportedly occurred almost 1,400 years ago. It’s about what kinds of leaders Muslims should have and who should choose them, and what practices are legit: Shiites allow temporary marriages and lying (taqiyya).

Gay Talese’s *High Notes: Selected Writings* (Bloomsbury, 2017) shows how a journalistic stylist wrote masterful profiles—as in “Frank Sinatra Has a Cold”—based not on quoting words by the subject but describing actions and reactions.

Cal Thomas is pessimistic in *America’s Expiration Date* (Zondervan, 2020). He sees education as part of the problem and tells parents, “Remove your children from government schools and either homeschool them or send them to good Christian schools. Do not send them to universities that have largely become propaganda centers for secular progressives.” Linking religious and political decline, he asks, “What makes those promoting supposedly righteous America think we can escape judgment? ... America is headed for foreclosure. We are drowning in financial debt and submerged under an immoral tsunami.”

Gene Edward Veith in *Post-Christian* (Crossway, 2020) says a global religious explosion means the postmodern world is becoming post-secular. Some say a post-Christian trend signals reversion to a pre-Christian, pagan worldview, but Veith is not sold about that notion, particularly after traveling in Scandinavia. Now that African Christians have disappointed liberal U.S. and British prelates by preferring God’s Word to Karl Marx’s, young Christians in northern Europe are doing the same.

I thought Angela Denker’s *Red State Christians* (Fortress, 2019) would be another journalistic foray into America’s heart of darkness. Her dislike for the Christian Right is clear: “Jesus’s message of love and sacrifice has been perverted to lift up power and hatred.” Still, she does try to show “the humanity and diversity” of those with whom she disagrees, and admits her surprise that the annual March for Life in Washington is not “a thinly veiled Trump rally” with “chants of ‘Build the wall’ and ‘Lock her up.’”
Four books about technology and change

by Susan Olasky

Betrayal in Berlin by Steve Vogel: During the Cold War, the West was desperate to know what the Soviets were up to. That need for intelligence led to an audacious plan to build a tunnel in Berlin and tap into the East German telephone lines through which calls between Moscow and Berlin flowed. Vogel tells the fascinating story of how the closely guarded tunnel project came about, how CIA officials dreamed it up and carried it out, and how British double agent George Blake betrayed the tunnel project to the Soviets. Based on interviews and declassified documents, Vogel makes vivid this Cold War project and era.

The Passion Economy by Adam Davidson: Planet Money’s Adam Davidson has a knack for explaining complex economic matters simply. He uses that storytelling gift to tell about ordinary people who are succeeding in today’s economy by paying attention to their passions and linking what they have to sell with people who want it. Fifty years ago making that match would have been impossible, but Davidson shows how new technologies and global trade allow today’s entrepreneurs to “find those people, spread thinly around the globe, who most want what we have to offer.” He provides thought-provoking rules and on-the-ground reporting to show those rules in action.

A Town Like Alice by Nevil Shute: This 1950 novel appeared recently on a list of the best novels about economics. It tells the story of a young British woman who inherits money and has to decide how to use it. She survived the Japanese occupation of Malaya—a gripping part of the novel—and wants to help the women in the village who saved her. She also wants to find the Australian soldier who risked his life for her. Finally she turns her attention to turning an isolated Outback station into a thriving town like Alice. Caution: Casual racism reflects British attitudes of the time—but is jarring today.

The Second Sleep by Robert Harris: A young priest, Fairfax, takes a harrowing journey to the village where an older priest has died. It’s his job to perform the burial and then return home. But he discovers that Father Lacy owned forbidden books, books that would mark him as a heretic. Fairfax is ambitious, the books are dangerous, and yet he is drawn to them and to solving the mystery of Father Lacy’s death. Harris is a vivid writer who creates wholly believable worlds. This novel offers many twists and turns on its way to a surprising end. Caution: brief sexual situations.

Afterword

All the Days Past, All the Days to Come (Viking, 2020) is the long-awaited conclusion to Mildred D. Taylor’s Cassie Logan stories, which began with the Newbery winner Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry. The faith of Cassie’s parents made those earlier books hopeful despite the gross injustice her characters endured. This novel offers more racial bitterness—it gallops through postwar and civil rights eras—and sexual situations that make it more suitable for adults than the young people who loved the earlier books.
Five picture books
reviewed by Susan Olasky

Wild Honey From the Moon by Kenneth Kraegel: How far would Mother Shrew go to make her son Hugo well? All the way to the moon, she’s determined to make the perilous journey. Carrying her red umbrella, she overcomes obstacles including a horned owl that wants to eat her, “night mares” that run like crazy, and a swarm of bees. “Silence,” she commands the bees. “I am a mother on a mission, and I will not be held back.” Gorgeous ink-and-watercolor illustrations depict a charming fantasy world for young readers. (Ages 4-8)

Bear Is Awake! An Alphabet Story by Hannah E. Harrison: Harrison tells an amusing story about a bear who wakes up from hibernation and embarks on a day of ordinary activities with a little girl. The book has no sentences, just words that begin with the letters of the alphabet: The N spread has “naughty,” a series of “no’s,” and “nice” accompanied by wonderful pictures of astonished shoppers watching as the bear grabs too many groceries and crams himself into the seat of a shopping cart. As the day ends, the girl leads the bear back to his cave for more winter sleep. (Ages 2-5)

Madame Badobedah by Sophie Dahl: Mabel lives at the Mermaid Hotel, a bed-and-breakfast that her dad manages. She has an oversized imagination, which goes into overdrive when a mysterious old woman moves into Room 32. The woman has trunks heavy enough to be loaded with gold. She is rude, calls Mabel “Darlink,” and orders her about. Naturally, Mabel decides to spy outside her door. Flamboyant watercolors illustrate what’s happening in the hotel and in Mabel’s imagination. Mabel is somewhat reminiscent of Eloise, but the story is sweeter, as is the budding friendship between Mabel and Madame Badobedah. (Ages 5-8)

Noah: A Wordless Picture Book by Mark Ludy: Ludy beautifully tells the Noah story using only richly detailed pictures: A domesticated dinosaur nibbles a tree; a polar bear licks Noah’s face like a dog; Noah lays his hand on his wife’s pregnant belly; she plays with his boys. The faces are an ethnic mishmash, suggesting that all peoples will descend from this family. This version of the story doesn’t ignore death. On one page a drowning man reaches his hand out of the water in a futile gesture for help. The book ends with hope: an altar, the rainbow, Noah and his wife embracing, and Noah looking up to heaven. (Ages 3-8)

Have You Seen My Blankie? by Lucy Rowland: Princess Alice has a cozy blankie she always took to bed until it goes missing. Her brothers say he used it as a curtain until a giant took it. The giant says he used it as a hankie until a witch took it. Alice’s journey ends up at a dragon’s lair: “But then she saw her blankie with a dragon who looked cranky.” She has to figure out how to get her blankie back, and how to get the dragon his own comfort object. The rhyming text and mixed-media illustrations tell a story about empathy played out in a fairy-tale world. (Ages 2-5)

In The Moon Is Always Round (New Growth Press, 2019), Jonathan Gibson offers a reassuring way to explain God’s goodness to children even when it’s hard to see (in this case, after a stillbirth).

Author Silke Schnee is the mother of a child with Down syndrome. It’s fitting that the hero of her book, Prince Noah and the School Pirates (Plough, 2016), has the same syndrome. The story affirms the value of all children and continues the adventures of Noah, introduced in a previous book as “the prince who was just himself.”


In Special God (Crossway, 2018), Julie Melilla explains the book’s purpose: to communicate theological truths to those like her special needs daughter, who is not a native English speaker and has physical and cognitive challenges requiring simple, concrete language. She covers basic topics—Jesus, forgiveness, and salvation—in simple declarative sentences. When she introduces a new term, she defines it in the next sentence: “So God has made a plan of salvation. Salvation means to be saved... Salvation means being saved from your sins forever by God.” The book’s calm color palette and simple geometric motif suit the text.
AS IN THE DAYS OF NOAH

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ECONOMIST VITO TANZI grew up in Italy, gained a Harvard Ph.D., became a senior staff member of the International Monetary Fund for 27 years, and is now honorary president of the International Institute of Public Finance. Here are edited excerpts of our interview. For more about Argentina, see p. 56.

Was Argentina when you first went there in the 1960s better off than it is now?
I was living in Washington at the time, and my first impression of Buenos Aires was that I was going from a village to a metropolis. Argentina started as a welfare state when it was still a very rich country relative to other countries, but once you created a new mentality, you created a lot of vested interests. Argentina had a very wealthy agricultural
sector but did not use that money to accumulate resources for bad days. It used it to hire additional people and expand the welfare state—and eventually got into difficulty in the 1970s and 1980s.

**Should countries follow some basic rules to avoid economic failure—such as, “Don’t make slicing up pies more important than baking new pies”?**

Yeah. Some people say keep spending and it doesn’t matter. The U.S. is moving in a very dangerous direction: If it continues to have a fiscal deficit of 4 or 5 percent per year, so the debt keeps going up, at some point there will be problems. But the first responsibility of a country is to keep its macroeconomic data in equilibrium: You cannot run a large fiscal deficit for a long time without paying a price. The second one is related to the first: You cannot spend for welfare more money than you have.

**Is Modern Monetary Theory, which is becoming popular among some U.S. politicians, an attempt to rely on magic: run deficits but don’t have to pay up, eventually?**

Yeah, it’s become a cult. In the last two years we have not had much inflation, so the U.S. government has been able to borrow a lot of money with very little immediate cost. There are problems. Pension funds are not accumulating assets, and people when they reach 65 will find out the problem with that.

**What lessons does the experience of Argentina hold for the United States?**

Bad habits: too much spending in relation to taxes. If you spend too much and don’t have a high savings rate, you have to sell more and more bonds. The public debt of the U.S. is slowly approaching the level of Italy. You project this for 10 years more and you could have a disastrous situation where the debt has grown so much that people would not want to buy it anymore.

Then comes hyperinflation. Argentina President Juan Perón, who kept expanding the welfare state, dies in 1974. Inflation in Argentina hits 183 percent in 1975, 444 percent in 1976. How does that happen?

Two things. First, the central bank creates more and more money to finance the fiscal deficit. People begin to anticipate that prices will be higher next month than they are today, so they buy all kinds of things, essentially running away from money, and inflation starts zooming up. The moment this happens is always uncertain.

In the 1980s Argentine inflation slowed down but then jumped again: 400 percent in 1988, 5,000 percent in 1989. What happened? The bad habits came back. The government started spending more than it should.

Don’t people learn from the past? When the government repeatedly defaults on loans, does that make it difficult to get more loans later, with higher interest rates required?

Carmen Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff, in *This Time Is Different*, presented lots of historical data related to your question. The answer: People continue to be fooled. They hear lots of good promises. They’re looking for a higher rate of return. Right now many junk bonds are sold in the U.S. because the alternative is to get 0 or 1 percent, but you can get 7 percent by lending to a risky place. The temptation is to do that.

**So the U.S. has a big junk bond problem now?**

Definitely. It’s a huge amount of debt. Investment companies say they spread the risk over many giant bonds so if one goes broke, they still get from the other. That ignores the systemic risk when you have a recession that affects everybody.

**You’re saying what has happened in Argentina could happen here?**

It’s less likely. The dollar is still a world currency. But if you keep drinking too much alcohol, there’s a problem. When you have almost no unemployment and you have a fiscal deficit of 5 percent, you begin to worry. What will happen if unemployment goes to 10 percent?

**Keynesian theory allows for deficits in bad times, but we’re now running deficits all the time.**

Yeah, and most governments don’t spend money on the most productive projects. They fund money for welfare or a group that should not be getting the money, and they’re inefficient.
**Rousing moments**

“Sunday Service” Choir picks up with *Jesus Is Born* where it left off with Kanye West’s *Jesus Is King*

by Arsenio Orteza

As he promised that he would in October, Kanye West released his second gospel album, *Jesus Is Born* (INC), on Christmas Day.

Maybe he noticed the second half of Psalm 15:4 and realized that he really should stop missing deadlines of his own making.

Anyway, the implications of its title and release date notwithstanding, *Jesus Is Born* isn’t a Christmas album except in the broad Jesus-is-the-reason-for-the-season sense. In some ways, it isn’t a Kanye West album either, credited instead to the Jason White–directed Sunday Service Choir (or “Sunday Service,” as the ensemble is identified on the cover). West’s direct involvement is limited to his having served as the project’s executive producer (i.e., its money man) and to his having contributed two compositions that originally appeared on his 2016 album *The Life of Pablo*: “Ultralight Beam” and “Fade” (the latter of which undergoes gospelization on the *Jesus Is Born* song “Follow Me/Faith”).

And although West is listed as one of *Jesus Is Born*'s four producers, that fractional designation could indicate anything from significant sound shaping to almost no sound shaping at all. He doesn’t sing or rap either (at least nowhere near a hot mic). Instead, the spotlight stays focused on the dozens of “A-list” voices that White assembled at West’s request early last year and who have since gone on to become the most widely listened-to gospel choir in the world.

Those voices provided the most rousing moments on *Jesus Is King*, and they pick up right where they left off. After opening *Jesus Is Born* with an explosive rendition of Timothy Wright’s “Count Your Blessings” that turns an improvised, upwardly spiraling vocal from the original’s last 30 seconds into a climactic centerpiece, they downshift into a faithful rendition of Brenda Joyce Moore’s cascading “Perfect Praise” (re-titled “Excellent”).

Such stylistic flexibility characterizes all of *Jesus Is Born*'s 84 minutes—a length, incidentally, that exceeds that of *Jesus Is King* the album and *Jesus Is King* the film put together. From that statistic alone, it seems reasonable to conclude that the sound of many minimally accompanied voices lifted in praise to his Lord and Savior, as opposed to the sound of one man rapping, is currently West’s favorite way of spreading his newfound faith—or at least of hearing that faith spread.

Listening to *Jesus Is Born*, it’s easy to understand why.
Noteworthy new or recent releases

Resurrection Kinky Friedman: Friedman’s no more a singer now than he was 45 years ago, when he was making uniquely American folk art out of being politically correct before being politically incorrect was cool. And, in terms of lyrics, there’s no more art among these songs than there was among those on last year’s Circus of Life. Even by the standards of sentimental liberalism, “Mandela’s Blues” and “Carryin’ the Torch” (about the Statue of Liberty) are predictable. There is, however, an increasingly ingratiating devil-may-care quality to his brand of C&W, one that not only grows with repeated listenings but also extends to the musicians, who, under the supervision of the Americana maestro Larry Campbell, are clearly having a good time.

Love Letters: The Allen Toussaint Sessions Aaron Neville: Most of these recordings—each written or produced by Allen Toussaint and cut by Aaron Neville between 1968 and 1977 for Bell, Mercury, and other labels with whom Toussaint’s Sansu Enterprises had struck mutually beneficial deals—have long been available on other compilations (Rounder’s The Classic Aaron Neville: My Greatest Gift, Music Avenue’s Mojo Soul, Charly’s Make Me Strong and Hercules, a couple on Hip-O’s Ultimate Collection). But never before have so many of them appeared in one place. And never again, except intermittently (with his brothers, with Linda Ronstadt), would Neville consistently find, or have found for him, material so well suited to his singular voice. Even the misbegotten “Tell It Like It Is” remake isn’t all that bad.

Who (Deluxe Edition) The Who: Who is credited to “the Who” and not just to the more accurate “Pete Townsend and Roger Daltrey” because it reflects Townsend and Daltrey’s genuine desire to make another (although “one last” is probably more like it) album worthy of the musical legacy that they created with Keith Moon and John Entwistle between 1965 and 1978. To that end, there are power chords, vocals, and synthesizers that echo past glories, and changes of pace beyond the reach of any Who tribute band. Chief among them: a Simon Townsend–penned folky shuffle (“Break the News”), a Pete Townsend Stevie Wonder impersonation (on harmonica, “I’ll Be Back”), and an anachronistic bonus track whose title, “Got Nothing to Prove,” is truer now than ever.

Folk Music of China, Vol. 3: Folk Songs of Yunnan Various artists: Apparently, the excerpts constituting most of this series’ first two installments were meant to condition listeners for the full-length performances by the Wa, the De-ang, and the Blang peoples therein. Or maybe Volumes 1 and 2 were simply meant to tantalize. Either way, the 11 minutes over which this volume’s “A De-ang Duet Love Song” droning unfolds feel as intense as they do epic, with the layering of Sansuo and Yu Xi Li’s vocals signaling the series’ concession to technological enhancement. Instruments make their first appearance: The 48-second instrumental “Gu Gan” features an anonymous soloist playing the 10-centimeter, grain-stalk carved gigan di flute. Still, it’s the voices—piercing, unerring, mostly a cappella—that do the enthralling.

Encore

There’s more as well as less to Voices (BMG), the new album by the longtime Brian Wilson and Beach Boys collaborator Jeffrey Foskett, than its bittersweet backstory might at first suggest. The less is that while the toll taken on his voice by his treatments for anaplastic thyroid cancer has imbued Voices with the significance of a last will and testament and therefore given it thematic unity, it’s not Foskett’s most consistent solo long-player. That honor would go to Stars in the Sand or one of his other best-ofts if not to California Project, the 1985 Papa Doo Run Run Beach Boys tribute to which Foskett contributed voluminous ghost vocals, lead and otherwise. Assembled mainly from previously unreleased, pre-cancer-treatment recordings and containing renditions of songs written by Bob Dylan, Jimmy Webb, and Burt Bacharach and Hal David, Voices feels, unsurprisingly, like a hodgepodge.

The more is that Voices includes three of Foskett’s highest career highlights: his takes on the Association’s “Everything That Touches You,” Neil Sedaka’s “Laughter in the Rain” (in a “fantasia” arrangement), and nine seconds of the Mamas & the Papas’ “Twelve Thirty”—each a shimmering cappella showcase for Foskett’s pure, soaring tenor at its lustrously overdubbed finest. You know that those performances are special when you keep finding yourself skipping past the spot-on Beach Boys covers (“Wouldn’t It Be Nice,” “Warmth of the Sun,” “Good Vibrations”) and the tender Buddy Holly covers (“Heartbeat,” “True Love Ways”) just to hear Foskett’s unaccompanied “voices” one more time.
Living with brutal realities

Soleimani’s death raises new tension for Iraq’s Christians

As the United States and Iran traded air strikes in Iraq this month, Behnam Benoka made middle-of-the-night pastoral visits. “It’s important I am available to meet with them in their homes at this hour,” the Syriac Catholic priest said of parishioners when I reached him by phone on Jan. 7. “We wake in the night due to the situation, and people are worried.”

About two hours later, Iran launched a retaliatory barrage of missiles. Several landed, without casualties, at U.S. military installations 30 miles from the town of Bartella where Benoka lives. It was the first significant counterattack since a pre-dawn drone strike by the United States on Jan. 3 killed Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani, his Iraqi deputy Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, plus three others associated with the Iran-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).

Like Americans, Benoka and his fellow Iraqis have urgent questions about whether the new tension in Iraq will lead to another war. Unlike many Americans, though, long experience has trained them to recognize real threats when they see them. Benoka and his parishioners faced the Islamic State in 2014, but it was a member of Soleimani’s PMF militia who put a gun to his face in 2018.

Benoka cared for his displaced parish and ran a medical clinic that saw 500 patients a day in Iraqi Kurdistan while ISIS occupied his town. When he and other residents returned to Bartella following its liberation, they found a wreck of burned churches, pulverized storefronts, and tunneled-under houses. Maintaining the fragile security was the PMF.

Soleimani helped form the militias to bolster the Iraqi army in its campaign to defeat ISIS starting in 2016. While the West dragged its feet to secure liberated areas and help rebuild communities, Soleimani worked with Iraqis to deploy PMF units—part of the 62-year-old commander’s grand strategy to spread Iran’s brand of Islamic influence across Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. Soleimani brutalized multitudes, earning U.S. designation as a terrorist in 2005 and sanctions in 2011.

The Christians and Yazidis who suffered genocide at the hands of ISIS faced new harassment with the Iranian-led militias: PMF checkpoints even now control roads and most access to what once were their homelands.

The PMF, known locally as the Hashd al-Shaabi, raised flags and banners depicting Iran’s mullahs at the entrance to Bartella. They moved local Shiites, known as Shabaks, into residential areas and urged boycotts of Christian businesses. They blocked access to churches at Easter, and fired on Benoka’s St. George’s Church during a service in December 2018. Benoka walked boldly into the street to demand the gunmen stop shooting. One grabbed him and held a handgun to his face before releasing him.

Such threats are the leading reason only a fraction of those ISIS displaced have returned to their communities. The militias “put our existence in peril,” Benoka said.

The United States under George W. Bush dismantled the Iraqi army and under Barack Obama quit the long effort to reconstruct it. That left Baghdad’s leadership, mostly Shiites we helped to power, more and more captive to Shiite Iran.

The Trump administration stepped up the campaign to defeat ISIS and has redirected some aid to help revive communities like Bartella. The decision to take out Soleimani was bold and at the same time grounded, the president (and the U.S. military) showing a steady hand in the face of growing belligerence by Iran. With Soleimani’s killing, Democrats missed an opportunity to show they can be statesmen in return.

But all of it may have come too late to check Iran’s inroads in Iraq, or to save communities like Bartella. The local Hashd al-Shaabi unit, with its tanks and heavy weapons, temporarily pulled back from the town under threat of further U.S. airstrikes. That left 24 members of a lightly armed Christian militia protecting Bartella. “What they have is no comparison to what we have,” said Benoka. “They can kill us in one hour.”
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The gospel according to Pete

DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE PETE BUTTIGIEG SPEAKS OFTEN OF HIS RELIGION—BUT HE TAILORS IT TO FIT HIS POLITICS, AND IT-focuses on works over faith

BY JAMIE DEAN
ON THE SATURDAY BEFORE New Year’s Day, Notre Dame trounced Iowa State in the annual Camping World Bowl in Orlando, Fla. The contest wasn’t close: The Fighting Irish pummeled the Cyclones 33-9.

The next week, Pete Buttigieg finished an eight-year run as mayor of South Bend, Ind., the midsize city adjacent to Notre Dame’s campus. And he turned his full attention to fighting a contest of his own in Iowa.

In early January, polls showed the 38-year-old leading a tight race in the Iowa caucuses—the first contest for the Democratic presidential nomination. The kickoff for Democratic votes is set for Feb. 3, the day after the Super Bowl.


He’s also argued that when it comes to abortion, “there’s plenty of Scriptural basis to reach different conclusions about that.”

As the primary season unfolds, voters may come to different conclusions about Buttigieg’s rise. (He faces a steep uphill climb in the South Carolina contest on Feb. 29.) But for now, the likable politician has a large pulpit to reach millions of Americans with a faith-based message that does seem earnest but doesn’t always deliver the good news it promises.

URING HIS LAST election, South Bend voters delivered resoundingly good news to Buttigieg: He was reelected mayor of the city in 2015 with 80 percent of the vote.

He’d won his first term in 2011 as a 29-year-old Oxford University graduate who had moved back to his hometown. He breezed to reelection in 2015, but turmoil struck six months into his bid for the Democratic presidential nomination last year.

In June 2019, a white police officer in South Bend fatally shot a black robbery suspect. Sgt. Ryan O’Neill said Eric Logan didn’t heed his warning to drop a knife during their encounter. The suspect’s family questioned that account. Though Buttigieg faced angry citizens in South Bend, he eventually rebounded on the campaign trail. Still, the racially charged incident fueled questions about whether the presidential hopeful could win over black voters on a national scale. In November, a Quinnipiac University poll reported Buttigieg’s dismal support among black voters in South Carolina: less than 1 percent.

As Buttigieg began to regain traction in some states, another tragedy gripped...
South Bend. In September, police in neighboring Illinois reported they discovered the remains of 2,246 unborn children in the home of Ulrich “George” Klopfer, a retired abortionist who had died earlier that month.

Klopfer had conducted abortions in South Bend for decades.

The scene was grisly: Police say they found the aborted infants’ remains in moldy boxes and Styrofoam coolers in Klopfer’s garage and car. On Sept. 19, officers raided the abortionist’s abandoned office on Ironwood Drive in South Bend. (They also searched offices he once operated in Fort Wayne and Gary.) Klopfer closed the South Bend business in 2016 after the state suspended his medical license for multiple violations at his center.

Police said they found a trove of medical records at the site, but no human remains.

On the same street, workers at two pro-life organizations were fielding phone calls from distressed women: The callers said they had gone to Klopfer for abortions in the past, and now wondered if he had crammed their children’s remains into his home.

“We were bombarded with calls,” says Jackie Appleman, executive director of St. Joseph County Right to Life. “I was shocked at how many wanted to know if their child was in his garage.” Jenny Hunsberger of the Women’s Care Center, a pregnancy resource center with a location on the same street, said women called their office with similar concerns.

Appleman said most of the callers expressed regret over their abortions and wanted to find out if the children’s remains could be identified for a proper burial: Were the bodies labeled? Could police conduct DNA tests?

“It was very emotional,” Appleman says. “And it was a concrete reminder of the horror of abortion.”

For a few days, Buttigieg didn’t mention the reports publicly. When a reporter asked, the mayor said the discovery was “extremely disturbing, and I think it’s important it be fully investigated.” He added: “I also hope it doesn’t get caught up in politics at a time when women need access to healthcare.”

For most of his term, Buttigieg didn’t have to confront issues related to abortion. But in 2018, the Women’s Care Center announced plans to open a new pregnancy resource center on Lincoln Way. The location was next to a...
site slated for a new abortion business. The residential property would have to be rezoned, but Hunsberger said the center’s leaders thought it would be a simple process.

At first, they were right: The city’s common council approved the rezoning in April 2018. Buttigieg vetoed the plan. The mayor said he thought it was unhelpful to have the two groups on the same street. He also said officials from the abortion business claimed research shows violence and harassment increase when a pregnancy care center opens near an abortion business.

Hunsberger said she met with Buttigieg, and assured him the care center doesn’t mount protests or demonstrations. Instead, Hunsberger says the centers in South Bend serve the mothers of nearly two-thirds of the children born in South Bend. The organization offers pregnancy tests, ultrasounds, and other forms of support and help until a child reaches five.

She said the conversation with Buttigieg was cordial, but the mayor vetoed the plan.

“It was very difficult,” she says. “We did not know what our next step would be.” A few days later, an unexpected offer surfaced. A property owner across the street from the planned abortion site said he would sell his land to the Women’s Care Center. No rezoning necessary.

Buttigieg didn’t interfere, and the center opened in July. Hunsberger said it’s bigger than what they could have opened at the other location. She’s thankful “something so good could come from something so hard.”

Meanwhile, Appleman says it was disappointing to see Buttigieg veto the original plan for a pro-life center, and to see his full-orbéd support for abortion since declaring his presidential candidacy.

Buttigieg doesn’t favor restrictions on abortion, even after 24 weeks of pregnancy, and he dodged a *New York Times* survey question about whether pro-life Democrats have a place in the party. He favors repealing the Hyde Amendment, a legislative provision that bars federal funding for abortions.

On the radio show *The Breakfast Club*, as Buttigieg discussed the GOP and Christianity, he said: “Right now they hold everybody in line with this one piece of doctrine about abortion. ... Then again, there are a lot of parts of the Bible that talk about life beginning with breath. And so even that is something
that we can interpret differently.”

That might not be comforting for some of the women grieving their decisions to go to Klopfer for abortions. Officials with the Catholic dioceses of Fort Wayne–South Bend and Gary, Ind., have offered to bury the remains in cemeteries they operate, but Indiana’s attorney general said in December it would likely be difficult or impossible to identify the infants’ remains.

In Southlawn Cemetery in South Bend, a burial plot already exists for babies who died through miscarriage. At the site, a long marble bench is inscribed with a piece of Scripture that’s difficult to interpret differently than its plain reading: “Truly God has formed my inmost being and knit me in my mother’s womb. I praise God that I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

St. James obliged, though its willingness was a recent move for the parish. The diocese was once one of the more conservative in the Episcopal Church: It objected to the consecration of the first openly gay bishop in 2003 and initially resisted the push for same-sex wedding ceremonies. The tide shifted with the retirement of Bishop Edward Little, and by the time Buttigieg wanted to marry in 2018, the dean of St. James conducted the wedding.

At the ceremony, the minister said, “Today we hold up their life as an icon, a window into which we can peer into the realm of God’s hope and will and intention.” Chasten Buttigieg now often accompanies candidate Buttigieg on the campaign trail.

When Buttigieg talks about salvation, he often connects it to worthy ideas: helping the poor and the oppressed, for example. But he doesn’t emphasize core Christian doctrines like repentance and saving faith in Christ.

When asked by Joe Scarborough on MSNBC whether Jesus was his Lord and Savior, Buttigieg initially skirted the question. (He said that means different things to different people.) Scarborough pressed. Buttigieg offered a fleeting “yes,” but quickly pivoted back to the idea of good works.

Buttigieg rightly points out that no political party can claim ownership of Christian faith, but that’s a separate issue from affirming the historic Christian teaching about the inerrancy of Scripture and embracing the Bible’s clear teaching on sexuality. Jeff Walton, Anglican director at the Institute on Religion and Democracy, says letting go of the authority of the Bible “leads down the path to make ourselves the ultimate authority to interpret Scripture.”

Indeed, holding to historic Christianity isn’t a matter of aiming to exclude people, as Buttigieg has sometimes suggested.

“It is simply a matter of what creedal Christianity is, and therefore, what it’s not,” says Walton. Part of that creedal Christianity is the offer of salvation to any who come to Christ in repentance and faith and trust His work on the cross: “And I think that’s a very inclusive message.”
In the Netherlands, legal prostitution hasn’t turned out the way advocates predicted, and some are fighting to end it

by Jenny Lind Schmitt
The streets were crowded on a recent Saturday night in Amsterdam’s red light district. Thousands of pedestrians strolled the cobbled streets under pink neon signs and over canals where trash floated on brown water. High-pitched laughter occasionally punctuated the excited murmur of sightseers and crescendos outside an X-rated cinema. Bachelor parties of different nationalities—the groom-to-be identifiable by his ridiculous costume—walked alongside couples strolling arm-in-arm. Shop windows displayed all the paraphernalia imaginable in a city where marijuana and prostitution are legal. The other ware displayed in shop windows: young women trafficked here from poor countries of Eastern Europe and forced into sex work. By all accounts, it’s just a normal Saturday evening in Amsterdam. The Netherlands legalized prostitution in 2000, a move politicians said would help curb trafficking and offer safety to “sexual workers” by trying to normalize their employment and standardize conditions. The opposite happened. Freedom of movement within the European Union made it easier for traffickers to bring women from eastern countries like Romania and Bulgaria to rich western cities with liberal laws. It also made it harder to trace links between prostitution and organized crime.
Amsterdam became a human trafficking destination.

But now some among the Dutch are fighting for the once unimaginable—the end of legalized prostitution—and they achieved enough signatures on a petition to force the Dutch parliament to debate the matter. One grassroots group, called Exxpose, wants the Netherlands to adopt what’s known as the Nordic model, where authorities prosecute customers and give help to prostitutes in leaving prostitution.

The day before I visited the red light district, Exxpose co-founder Natasja Bos met me in Utrecht, a 30-minute train ride east of Amsterdam. In the group’s headquarters—a barebones office space shared with video game programmers—the tall, dark-haired, 29-year-old Bos explained the Nordic model. Adopted by Sweden in 1999, this approach criminalizes buyers, decriminalizes prostitutes, offers help to get out of prostitution, and educates the public on the realities of prostitution and sex trafficking.

The model has been a success: Street prostitution in Sweden has dropped 50 percent, and communications intercepted between organized crime members indicate the country is “no longer a good place to do business.” Several European countries, as well as Israel, have since adopted the Nordic model.

The research behind Sweden’s approach resonated with what Bos and co-founder Sara Lous—both social workers—already knew from their experience counseling women leaving prostitution: Women exiting the profession exhibited the same symptoms as survivors of sexual abuse: disassociation, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. They also knew that contrary to the common Dutch view of women freely choosing sex work, those who “chose” prostitution almost all came from vulnerable backgrounds of trauma and abuse. In 2012 Bos and Lous saw an Al Jazeera documentary about Amsterdam’s role in modern-day slavery and had to speak up. They started a blog to expose truths about prostitution and human trafficking.

Bos and Lous, who call themselves abolitionists, are both Christians, but they say their organization is for anyone who wants to fight the injustice of trafficking. Their work led to a social media campaign last spring. “I Am Priceless” showed photos of young people asking, “What if she was your sister?” The campaign linked to a petition to end legalized prostitution. In the wake of #MeToo, the petition hit a social nerve and by early April had passed the 40,000 signature threshold required to introduce debate into the Dutch parliament. “In the Netherlands we’ve educated our citizens with a lot of propaganda about prostitution,” says Bos. “If it’s visible you can control it. If you criminalize it, it will go underground. It’s just a normal job—it’s the oldest job in the world. It’s really hard to change those belief systems, so we focus on young people who are more open to change.”

They also want to educate visitors to Amsterdam. One campaign involves giving tourists facsimiles of 50-Euro bills. On the reverse side is a list of possible options for how to spend them: rent two bicycles for the day, take a barge tour through the canals, buy a poor woman for sex. Bos says the point is to demonstrate that the purchase of other humans has no place in a modern city.

Dutch society values freedom and choice, but the growing global spotlight on human trafficking has raised
questions about how much “freedom of choice” the women behind the windows actually have.

Frits Rouvoet ministers to prostituted women in Amsterdam’s red light district with Bright Fame, a group he founded with his wife 14 years ago. Rouvoet estimates there are between 4,000 and 8,000 prostituted women in Amsterdam, and of those, 60 percent are trafficked. (The most conservative estimates suggest 5,000 prostitutes with 10 percent trafficked.)

Ease of international travel and cheap airfares from London, Dublin, and Hamburg mean Amsterdam’s streets are often filled with drunken sex tourists coming to gawk and buy. That brings drug use, disorderly conduct, and crime. Femke Halsema, Amsterdam’s first female mayor, vowed to clean up the red light district and in January banned walking tours of the area, even while declaring her support for the sex industry. But Rouvoet says the city council has begun to see the limits of Dutch pragmatism, and he sees a definite shift in public opinion: “The council is asking, ‘Do we have to be proud of the fact that drunken guys from England, Scotland, and Germany come here to abuse poor women from Eastern Europe?’”

The city’s youngest council member, Don Ceder, 30, wants to close the windows completely. “Thousands of men judge women behind the windows every day: too fat, too short, too black, not tasty enough. Is that the feminism we strive for as a society?” Ceder, a member of the Christian Union Party, brought soup to prostitutes in the red light district as a teenage church volunteer. That’s when he saw the dichotomy between the image the women projected and their reality.

“Amsterdam is the end station of a very evil chain, one of the best-known sex destinations in the world,” he said. He says that even the most conservative estimates of trafficking (10 percent of 5,000 prostitutes forced into the work) still mean 500 women are regularly raped. “I choose the side of the most vulnerable women,” he said.

### Three Approaches

According to Taina Bien-Aimé, executive director of the Coalition Against the Trafficking in Women, internationally there are three legal approaches to the problem of prostitution:

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**THREE APPROACHES**

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Rouvoet has seen firsthand the importance of having systems to help women out of prostitution. “The women tell me, ‘Yes, we need social workers and accountants to help us with taxes, and so on, but what we really need is relationships.’”

“Maria” is a Romanian woman who was first brought to Western Europe and trafficked by her mother at age 14. (WORLD isn’t using her real name for safety reasons.) Soon after they met, Rouvoet invited her to a weekend personality assessment training. Afterward Maria told him, “You are the first person who invested in my life. No one ever did this for me.” That training started her on the road to changing her life: Through support from Bright Fame she received training and now works as a hairdresser. “For the first time I have normal people in my life. I don’t want to do prostitution anymore.”

Bos encouraged me to go to the red light district. “If you can, take a walk through. It’s important to go see the truth, so you can’t ignore it.” It was a short disturbing walk, through narrow alleys where police officers directed unruly tourists into orderly traffic patterns. I prayed as I walked, and forced myself to look at women being sold in shop windows, in a “civilized” country, while hundreds of people strolled by. My eyes met those of a young woman, hair and makeup done to make her resemble a life-size doll. Our gaze met for a split second that haunts me.

At the end of that lane, the alleyway opened onto a canal across which stands the Oude Kerk—the Old Church—Amsterdam’s oldest building, built in 1306. Bos explained it was congregants of this church who first decided to tolerate prostitution nearby, creating Amsterdam’s medieval red light district. Their argument was that without prostitutes, visiting sailors would rape their daughters. When asked if Dutch churches today support the work of Expose, she shrugs and says the same mindset remains today, even among Christians. Rouvoet says simply, “The logic is wrong. Why are we OK with protecting one person’s daughter and not someone else’s daughter?”

Expose formally submitted its petition to parliament at the end of the spring, and committee meetings took place in the fall. Bos and Lous are awaiting the results of those hearings. Meanwhile, the minister of justice and some members of parliament have shown support, and there is a growing sense in the Netherlands that something has to change. The debate over what is legal and “normal” is far from over.

**Full criminalization.** This is the approach in the United States, with the exception of a few counties in Nevada. It fails to recognize the vulnerabilities of the prostituted persons and punishes them for their exploitation. In this model, women are arrested disproportionately while buyers are less often apprehended.

**Legalization or decriminalization.** This approach is practiced in Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. Bien-Aimé calls it “an unmitigated disaster in every country where these laws have passed.” Local authorities see a rise in organized crime activity and trafficking of undocumented workers. Legal brothels propose “menus” of degrading acts, some amounting to torture.

**Nordic or Swedish model.** Only buyers and pimps are prosecuted. Prostitutes are offered help out of prostitution. This model is based on the premise of prostitution as a form of gender-based violence and that sex buyers are the linchpin of the lucrative trade. Without buyers the industry would collapse and traffickers would lose markets for their victims. In Sweden this model has also brought about an important cultural shift: The vast majority of the population now believes purchasing sex is unacceptable and a barrier to equal gender rights. —J.L.S.
ANYONE CAN BE AN AUTHOR NOWADAYS, BUT KNOWING WHO WROTE THE BOOK MAY BE A DIFFERENT STORY

BY JENNY ROUGH

ILLUSTRATION BY DIEGO PATIÑO

INVISIBLE HANDS
RITER ANGELA HUNT WORKS FAST. In her 30-year career, she’s published over 180 books. “I may not be the best writer in the world, but I do try to be fast and professional,” she says. In the early days, she took whatever assignments she could. “I wrote magazine articles, catalog copy, you know, anything anybody would pay me to write.” One day a ministry representative asked Hunt to ghostwrite the biography of a famous preacher. She accepted the gig, and her career as a ghostwriter took off.¶ Ghostwriting is when one person writes a book, but it’s published under somebody else’s name. It’s an umbrella term that covers two big branches. In the first, the writer’s name doesn’t appear anywhere on or in the book; the writer is a true phantom. In the second, the writer’s name appears somewhere, usually in the acknowledgments or on the title page, but credit isn’t obvious (here, some prefer the trendier term collaborative writer). ¶ Ghosts write for authors who don’t have the time, desire, or ability to craft a book. Ghostwriter Frank Ball says a lot of people have no idea what it takes to write a book: “They assume, I can write this in my spare time over the weekend.” But writing a book involves multiple drafts of obsessively arranging and rearranging words, agonizing over sentence structure, and thinking deeply to develop a narrative arc. A speaker who excels at verbal communication doesn’t necessarily have writing talent. Same with Biblical counselors—they might be great at talk therapy, but their writing can be bogged down with clinical language. Ghostwriting has long been the standard practice of the industry in both secular and Christian publishing houses.

You’ve probably heard of Gary Sinise, the Hollywood actor who played Lt. Dan in Forrest Gump. But have you heard of Marcus Brotherton? Brotherton wrote Grateful American, Sinise’s book about converting to Catholicism and his military service work. Over the years Sinise poured his time and energy into founding Steppenwolf Theatre Company and honing his acting chops, not his English composition skills. When it came time for his book, he looked for help. “It would have to be someone who could hear my voice and tune in naturally and easily to what I was trying to communicate,” Sinise says. Sinise and Brotherton had lengthy conversations over FaceTime and met in person four times so Sinise could talk out his story. Brotherton, who received title page and acknowledgments credit for Grateful American, has also written books for Atlanta megachurch pastor Louie Giglio. He describes his job as “taking a person’s work, whatever it is, and developing that into a written message.”

Not all authors are as transparent as Sinise, who talked openly with WORLD about the partnership. Literary agent Madeleine Morel works with about 100 professional ghostwriters, including a coterie of ghostwriters who specialize in what she calls “soft God” books in the Christian market. Her unscientific guess is that 60 to 70 percent of books on The New York Times nonfiction bestseller list are ghostwritten. Joey Paul, senior acquisitions editor for Thomas Nelson and Zondervan, thinks the practice is less common with Christian nonfiction books. (Paul defines ghostwriting more narrowly than Morel does and would exclude certain collaborative projects from the term.)

Adam Bellow, formerly of Broadside Books, the conservative nonfiction imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, says almost all politicians’ books are ghosted, and that Sarah Palin and Ted Cruz had ghostwriters for books he published. He notes that most ghostwriters earn about $30,000 to $60,000 for a book but that some may receive as much as $250,000 plus participation in royalties.
Having a skilled writer at the keyboard is smart, but critics of ghostwriting say trouble pops up when it’s unclear to book buyers that the author and writer are two different people.

In other industries, supervisors take credit for the writing of underlings. Politicians use speechwriters. Law clerks draft opinions for judges, including U.S. Supreme Court justices. Our society has developed customs and expectations in these fields, but when it comes to most readers’ assumptions about the literary world, “I don’t think we’re there yet,” says Karen Swallow Prior, an English professor and the actual writer of On Reading Well. “We still understand books as having authors and authors as being the writers whose names are on the books.”

Dan Gerstein, founder of Gotham Ghostwriters, an agency featuring 2,500 ghostwriters, said, “It creates backlash with readers when an author falsely claims they wrote the whole book themselves, and deny that they had any help, and then it gets out that they worked with a ghostwriter or collaborator.”

Tom Williams says people misunderstand the profession. He has worked on books for megachurch pastor David Jeremiah and counselors Henry Cloud and John Townsend. “I do not come up with the concept, the thrust, or the bulk of material,” Williams says. “My client gives me all this.” Williams might work off of sermon transcripts, presentation notes, or sometimes even some rough pages. “I meet with the author and spend considerable time helping him organize his material into a comprehensible form. Once he agrees to the shape of the book, I take his content, go home, and start writing.” Williams strengthens and expands the information. He might also conduct research, incorporate Biblical illustrations, and add nuance.

Kris Bearss, a former editor at Worthy Publishing and Thomas Nelson Publishers who now occasionally ghostwrites, thinks a better understanding of the process can correct misperceptions. “I and my peers do very much care about the integrity of our work, both Biblically and personally—and so do the authors and publishers I work with.”

Still, some believe the true writer’s name belongs on the book cover. “When...
the greater proportion of work done and number of hours invested in the book is not by the person whose name stands alone on the cover,” that’s problematic, says Randy Alcorn, a writer of nearly 60 books. He compares the omission to students turning in papers they didn’t write—a form of cheating that results in students being expelled. “Full disclosure is an ethical practice whether you’re talking about medicine, car sales, or book sales.”

Thirty years ago—before the World Wide Web and the cult of social media personalities—Cecil Murphey debated becoming a ghostwriter. He wrestled with the ethical and spiritual implications for a couple of days. Then he decided: “God, if I can use my gifts for you, OK.” Murphey ghostwrote 35 books for Fleming H. Revell Co., now Revell, a division of Baker Publishing. Two of those books won prominent awards, and the named author received the recognition.

But things changed when Murphey crossed paths with editor Penny Wheeler. Wheeler was a Seventh-Day Adventist who hired Murphey to write Ben Carson’s book, *Gifted Hands*. She insisted Murphey’s name go on the cover with Carson’s. “She thought it was the ethical thing to do,” says Murphey, who detailed the nuts and bolts of his job in *Ghostwriting: The Murphey Method*.

*Gifted Hands* sold well. Murphey suspects the book squashed industry fears that including the name of an unknown person on the cover would negatively affect sales. Today, it has become more common to see two names on the cover. Musician Michael W. Smith shared cover credit with Tom Williams in *Gifted Hands*. Smith insisted Murphey’s name go on the cover, whereas mine needs a magnifying glass.” (A number of people determine font size.) Mark Dagostino, whose clients include Chip and Joanna Gaines and Hulk Hogan, says regardless of whether he receives cover credit, “All of my books appear on my site. I believe in transparency.”

Angela Hunt received a call from an editor one day asking Hunt to ghostwrite a novel for a famous female Bible teacher. The teacher wouldn’t provide materials—or even the idea for the novel. “Anything with this celebrity’s name on it sold a lot of books, so the editor said, ‘Let’s get a novel with her name on it,’” Hunt recalls. Inventing characters and a plot felt different than bringing someone else’s message to the page. Hunt turned down the project. But the editor continued to shop around for a writer, and Hunt soon saw internet chatter about it in an online writing group.

Randy Alcorn was a member of that same group. Amid the banter, Alcorn posted a link to his article “Scandal of Evangelical Dishonesty” that included his views on ghostwriting. Hunt read it—and decided to stop ghostwriting unless she was named on the cover or title page. She realized it wouldn’t cost authors anything to reveal they had help. “It doesn’t belittle them to admit they’re not professional writers. Many secular writers refuse to ghostwrite for the same reason we Christian writers do—it’s not honest, and it disparages the work of the writer who has worked hard to learn the craft.”

Seventy-five writers from the group signed a letter and sent it to editors and publishers asking them to stop using ghostwriters for fiction. “We pretty much blanketed the Christian publishing industry,” Hunt says. The letter, finalized in January 2007, said ghostwritten novels are a form of false advertising and quoted Proverbs 20:10: “False weights and unequal measures—the Lord detests double standards of every kind.” Some publishers became defensive. Others promised to tighten practices.

But no industry standards exist.

Ghostwriting can be especially unpalatable in Christian publishing precisely because the book’s message often focuses on the Bible, a text that speaks against deceit. Karen Swallow Prior, the English professor, sees ghostwriting as misrepresentation plain and simple. “I don’t pretend to be a pastor giving sermons, so I don’t know why pastors pretend to be writers,” she says.

Alcorn makes the same point in one of his most popular books, *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*: “If we’re not telling the truth about who wrote the book—on the cover in large print—why should people believe what’s inside the book, in small print?”

How Can You Tell If a Book Is Ghostwritten?

Authors may have never written a word of their books. Who wrote the text, and to what extent, isn’t always easy to discern. Readers might be able to spot the true writer by scrutinizing a book’s acknowledgments page, but a ghost or collaborative writer can be incorrectly described as an editor, or thanked with squishy language, like for doing the “heavy lifting.” Practices are all over the map and range from bad to better to best.

Literary agent Sealy Yates works almost exclusively with celebrity authors and expects them to be honest about the involvement in their books—or lack thereof. “It doesn’t have to necessarily be on the cover, but it should be disclosed somewhere in the credits,” Yates says. Disclosure is done on a case-by-case basis and is often the author’s call. Books his firm has overseen: *Kisses From Katie* where Katie Davis Majors shares cover credit with Beth Clark; *5 Levels of Leadership* by John C. Maxwell where the acknowledgments straightforwardly thank “Charlie Wetzel, my writer”; and *The Theft of America’s Soul* where Duck Dynasty reality television star Phil Robertson shares title page credit with writer Seth Haines.

If truthfulness to the reader is the highest priority, consider the approach in *Forgiving My Father, Forgiving Myself* by Ruth Graham with Cindy Lambert. Celebrity Graham is the big name on the cover, but Lambert’s name is also prominent. The dust jacket has a bio of author Graham that takes up two-thirds of the column, followed by a bio of writer Lambert who gets one-third of the space.
Argentina was once one of the richest countries in the world,

by Marvin Olasky
but an embrace of ever-growing government made it poor

in Buenos Aires
Either way, the security fence that now surrounds the Casa Rosada gives it a different look than was common from 1945 to 1952, when Juan and Eva would step onto the balcony and orate to thousands—or early in 1996, when Madonna used Eva’s words in singing to 2,000 extras, “Don’t cry for me Argentina. The truth is I never left you.”

That is the truth. Eva Perón still retains the official title, “Spiritual Leader of the Nation.” Two nine-story-high Eva murals on the Ministry of Health building overlook the city’s major thoroughfare, Avenida 9 de Julio. Named after Argentina’s July 9, 1816, Independence Day, the boulevard—16 lanes, 153 yards—is twice as wide as Paris’ Champs-Élysées. Its construction displaced thousands of residents.

Eva Perón gained support from the Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT). This General Conference of Labor, similar to the AFL-CIO at its height but more powerful, worked with the Peróns to create Argentina’s welfare state, which periodically runs out of money, so the government prints more, which leads to runaway inflation, which leads to more poverty, which leads to more calls for more government welfare spending.

That’s where the second movie, Groundhog Day, starring Bill Murray, kicks in. Murray’s selfish character is stuck in a time loop in a town he hates: No matter what happens on Feb. 2, he awakens the next morning in the same bed-and-breakfast bed with the clock radio blaring Sonny & Cher’s “I Got You Babe”—and it’s still Feb. 2. Argentina regularly displays not the fast-motion disaster of Venezuela, but a decade-after-decade replay of the destructive cycle that leaves millions suffering.

In Groundhog Day, Murray’s character eventually learns to live—and enjoy life more—by serving others. That’s what happens in an economy that works well: As Adam Smith wrote, the baker serves others by selling them bread. He then receives money that helps him feed, clothe, and educate his own children. Economies break down when the powerful grab bread without paying, and others stop baking or never learn to bake.

Evita grew out of a long-running Broadway musical focused on the short, sweet, and sour life of Eva Perón (1919-1952), who ascended from poverty to fame as the wife of populist President Juan Perón during the last six years of her life, then died of cancer. Argentina’s government allowed the movie’s star, Madonna, to replicate Eva’s most famous speech from the balcony of the Casa Rosada, the presidential mansion informally known as “the pink house.” ¶ The distinctive color dates from the 19th century, when—some say—it brought together the two bitterly opposed political parties at that time, known as the reds and the whites. Another explanation is more representative of Argentina’s beefy tradition and allergic reactions to cross-class harmony: Painters mixed white paint with cow’s blood to reduce damage from humidity.
Argentina, blessed by a good climate, productive farmland and grassland, vast mineral resources including petroleum, a long coastline, and humans able to make use of those gifts, was one of the five or 10 wealthiest countries in the world at the end of the 19th century. A recent study by Maddison Historical Statistics even suggests that in 1895 and 1896 Argentina had the world’s highest gross domestic product per capita.

Buenos Aires in those years was “the Chicago of South America,” with industry adjacent to rich farmland and immigrants filling factory jobs. Argentina continued to progress for a while: Economist Vito Tanzi says, “In 1913 its per capita income was higher than that of France, twice that of Italy, and almost five times that of Japan.” But Tanzi adds, Argentina for a century now has become like the child “with good genes who, after an initial growth spurt, failed to grow to his potential.”

Why not? Young Americans can escape poverty if they graduate from high school, develop character traits and gain skills that make them valuable to employers, and get and hold a job. In a parallel way, countries may have three rules to avoid falling into poverty: Don’t make slicing up pies more important than baking more. Don’t make politics more important than enterprise. Don’t borrow more than you can pay back.

As Argentina has repeatedly broken those latter three rules, stagnation has been the norm. Some historians suggest that Argentina’s wealthy became like some antebellum Southern plantation owners who thought hard work was for the poor and commerce an unworthy calling. Many agree that the tendency of left and right to use force—small-scale revolutions in 1890, 1893, and 1905, coups d’état in 1930, 1943, 1955, 1962, 1966, and 1976—created an instability that became chronic.

Col. Juan Perón became president in 1946 as a synthesizer of revolt and military precision. In the granite base of the Ministry of Economics building on Plaza de Mayo, the big square adjacent to the Casa Rosada, you can still see bullet holes from the 1955 coup that attempted to overthrow him. Navy flyers dropped bombs to kill their president, but they hit a school bus and numerous innocent bystanders, killing 308 people in all.

Perón was not one of them, but a coup later that year sent him into exile, from which he returned twice to become president again. The long-term result economically: Groundhog Day. During the first decade of Perón rule the government share of the gross domestic product rose to about 30 percent, and businesses were forced to “contribute” everything from canned beef to sewing machines to politically connected workers and descamisados—shirtless ones.

Perón and his followers nationalized companies and established an export monopoly, the Argentine Institute for Promotion of Exchange, that forced producers to sell their commodities to the government for low prices. The government temporarily had lots of pesos to distribute for worker housing, pensions, vacations, and a variety of social programs. When the money streams dried up, it was hard politically to cut back. That’s when governments repeatedly borrowed and sometimes defaulted.

Perón’s third time as president ended when he died in 1974—but the government’s currency printing presses were speeding up. Inflation hit triple digits in 1975 and set the record of 5,000 percent in 1989. Hyperinflation particularly harmed retirees. Overall, per capita income declined by 25 percent from 1975 to 1990.

Economist Tanzi, who visited Argentina often as a senior staff member of the International Monetary Fund, recalls, “People shopping at supermarkets would at times experience price increases of as much as 20 percent from the time they entered a cashier’s line to the time they had to pay for their purchases. Loudspeakers would announce the
Argentina declares independence from Spanish rule.

Argentina has the highest gross domestic product per capita in the world, according to a recent report.


Perón dies in office, sparking more political struggle and continuing economic decline.

Argentina’s inflation rate hits 5,000 percent, an all-time high.

Inflation rate again begins running at least 25 percent each year.

Argentina’s unemployment rate increases to 32 percent (from 26 percent the previous year), mostly as a result of a 45 percent inflation rate.
increases in prices that would become effective at a specific moment.”

In 1992, a new government emphasized some frugality, privatization, and deregulation. Argentina’s economy grew for five years at the fastest rate in Latin America and the inflation rate fell to only 4 percent per year. But unemployment grew as the new owners of privatized government enterprises often cut the workforce by 40 percent.

A neo-Perón movement eventually led to the Cristina Kirchner presidency from 2007 to 2015 and a new expansion of governmental control. At the end of her two terms government expenditures exceeded 40 percent of GDP and the value of a peso had fallen from $1 in 2001 to about 8 cents in 2015. Now it’s about 2 cents, and Kirchner, constitutionally forbidden to serve more than two terms as president, is vice president.

Is she the new Eva Perón? Kirchner doesn’t have the charisma of her predecessor, whose funeral in the streets of Buenos Aires in 1952 attracted 3 million Argentines. As officials moved the body to lie in state at the Ministry of Labor, those rushing to be close to the corpse crushed to death eight people. City hospitals treated 2,000 others for injuries.

In December I visited Eva Perón’s tomb in the Recoleta Cemetery, home of the most expensive real estate in Buenos Aires. Three bouquets of flowers lay at the doorstep. Journalists have reported tight security established by officials worried about tomb robbers: A trapdoor in the tomb’s marble floor leads to a compartment containing two coffins, and under them is a second trapdoor that opens to the compartment containing the corpse.

No flowers or fans were at the tomb of Gen. José de San Martín, known as the liberator of Argentina, Chile, and Peru from Spanish rule two centuries ago. It’s inside the Catedral Metropolitana, a massive Roman Catholic church near the Casa Rosada: Two stolid soldiers guard the tomb, standing at attention almost unblinkingly, like Buckingham Palace guards in London.

In the cathedral across from the tomb is what became in 1997 the world’s first Holocaust memorial inside a Roman Catholic cathedral, with fragments of Hebrew prayer books and songbooks preserved behind glass. (It seems a penance of sorts, given the way Argentina in 1945 became a haven for escaped German Nazis.) Near that memorial is another for Ukraine’s Holodomor (killing by starvation), where 4 million died in 1932-1933 in a Communism-caused famine.

Argentina has been home to neither Holocaust nor Holodomor, but had its own, smaller horror known as “the dirty war,” in which the 1976-1983 military dictatorship “disappeared” at least 9,000 radicals. On some days Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, mothers of those who disappeared, still make their presence felt outside the Catedral: They wear white head scarves.

But a more common demonstration took up that space on one December day: Some 500 protesters, including government employees from the Ministerio de Modernización (“We connect the Argentines and put the State at the service of the people”), milled around at noon. Some wore the classic “Pax, Pan, y Trabajo” (peace, bread, and work) T-shirts and fluttered a banner from the Asociación Trabajadores del Estado (Association of Government Workers).

Inflation not only of money but words is increasing once again: The propaganda known as Relato K—glorifying the government, portraying economic difficulties as the result of capitalist conspiracy, viewing economics as a zero-sum game where any wealth must originate in exploitation—is becoming common.

With many great people, rich agricultural land, large deposits of lithium (used in computers and cell phones), and the biggest shale deposit in Latin America, Argentina’s finances should be looking up. But groundhog economists on the other side of the equator are seeing shadows, and many expect more than six weeks of winter in 2020 and beyond.

—see the interview with Vito Tanzi on p. 32
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PAUL VOLCKER, 92
DEC. 8
The cigar-smoking chair of the Federal Reserve in the 1980s, he used tight money policies to tame double-digit inflation and warned against rising government debt.

LATE DEPARTURES
A News of the Year addendum:
Notable deaths in the final weeks of 2019

compiled by Susan Olasky
DANNY AIELLO, 86
DEC. 12 Character actor who received an Oscar nomination for his role as a pizza shop owner in Do the Right Thing. He was married to his wife, Sandy Cohen, for 64 years.

HERMAN BOONE, 84
DEC. 18 The coach depicted in the movie Remember the Titans, he overcame racial tensions to lead Alexandria, Va.’s T.C. Williams High School to the Virginia state championship in his first year as head coach.

NICK CLIFFORD, 98
NOV. 23 Last surviving rock carver to work on the Mount Rushmore monument.

LOIS EVANS, 70
DEC. 30 The wife of Dallas Pastor Tony Evans, she founded a ministry to pastors’ wives.

HAYDEN FRY, 90
DEC. 17 Hall of Fame football coach who led the Iowa Hawkeyes to three Big Ten championships. He coached or hired as assistants many who went on to have notable coaching careers: ESPN said, “Fry is the trunk of the biggest coaching tree in modern college football.”

Y.C. “BERT” FUNG, 100
DEC. 15 Researcher known as the “father of biomechanics,” a field combining biology, engineering, and medicine that has led to advances like heart valves and prosthetics.

LEONARD GOLDBERG, 85
DEC. 4 A Hollywood producer and programmer, he transformed television with shows like Starsky & Hutch, The Mod Squad, Charlie’s Angels, Fantasy Island, and Blue Bloods.

FRED P. GRAHAM, 88
DEC. 28 A lawyer who covered the O.J. Simpson trial and other high-profile criminal cases for Court TV.

RICHARD HATCHER, 86
DEC. 13 The first black mayor of a major American city (along with Carl Stokes of Cleveland, elected on the same day in 1967), he led Gary, Ind., for 20 years.

JERRY HERMAN, 88
DEC. 26 A Tony Award–winning composer and lyricist who wrote the songs for Mame, La Cage aux Folles, and Hello, Dolly!

GERTRUDE HIMMELFARB, 97
DEC. 30 Historian whose writings on Victorian virtues influenced debates over U.S. welfare reform.
DON IMUS, 79
DEC. 27 Controversial and crude host of the Imus in the Morning radio talk show.

JAMES “RADIO” KENNEDY, 72
DEC. 15 The inspiration for the 2003 movie Radio, starring Cuba Gooding Jr.

GEORGE LAURER, 94
DEC. 5 IBM electrical engineer who developed the Universal Product Code (UPC), which transformed commerce.

ROBERT K. MASSIE, 90
DEC. 2 The author of best-selling books about prerevolutionary Russia, including Nicholas and Alexandra. He won a Pulitzer Prize for his biography of Peter the Great.

ALONZO MCDONALD, 91
NOV. 21 A successful businessman and Carter White House “efficiency czar,” he acknowledged that God was “playing second string” in his life and set up a foundation to advance Christian thinking.

SONNY MEHTA, 77
DEC. 30 He headed Alfred A. Knopf for more than three decades, publishing bestsellers including Michael Crichton's Jurassic Park.

LEE MENDELSON, 86
DEC. 25 Emmy-winning producer of more than 50 Peanuts television specials, including A Charlie Brown Christmas.

YASUHIRO NAKASONE, 101
NOV. 29 Postwar prime minister of Japan who wanted his country to have a stronger military.

MICHAEL J. POLLARD, 80
NOV. 29 Round-faced character actor who received an Oscar nomination for best supporting actor for his role as the getaway driver in Bonnie and Clyde.

MARY TAYLOR PREVITE, 87
NOV. 16 A great-granddaughter of missionary Hudson Taylor, she spent nearly three years in a Japanese prison camp.

JOHN ROBBINS, 86
NOV. 27 The co-developer of a vaccine to protect infants from bacterial meningitis, a disease that killed more than 400,000 babies a year before the vaccine.

JOSEPH SEGEL, 88
DEC. 21 The businessman who founded the QVC shopping channel and Franklin Mint.
Brad and Kris Bemis grew up in Seattle and met during their junior year of high school. In college, they stayed in touch as Brad studied to become a dentist and Kris a dental hygienist. During seven years of dating, they planned out their lives together, and in 1973 they married. Two decades in, things were going more or less according to plan: They had three kids, their own dentistry practice, and a home near their parents. Brad was researching places to visit for their upcoming 25th wedding anniversary.

In 1994, at their oldest daughter’s high-school graduation party, all their plans fell apart.

Kris, then 44 years old, felt a strange paralysis grip her body. The next morning, she could not move at all. Over the next six weeks, doctors ran tests and performed a spinal tap. Finally, the diagnosis: Guillain-Barré syndrome, a rare disease in which the immune system attacks the body’s nerves. Doctors gave Kris eight infusions, replacing her blood with sterilized plasma. Two weeks after the last treatment, the disease returned, this time shutting down everything except her breathing. She dropped to 70 pounds and felt needles of pain. She couldn’t swallow, move, or get out of bed.

Meanwhile, Brad struggled to maintain the dental practice and to care for their 13-year-old twins alone. When Kris came home from the hospital, he helped dress and feed her and took her to the bathroom. He cleaned the house, made the kids’ school lunches, and never
missed a day of work. “I was doing my best to hang on day by day,” he said. But he remembers nights when Kris would shake uncontrollably, and all he could do was hold her, caress her, and pray, “God, please don’t take her.” He had no idea whether his wife would improve or even survive.

In early 1995, he lost hope: One evening, Kris wept at the dinner table and told Brad, “You have never loved me the way I needed to be loved, and you never will.” (Kris does not remember this: “A lot of the things I said were not me at all. My brain was very, very garbled.”) Brad broke down and walked outside, despite the rain, to pray: “I told [God], ‘I can’t take this anymore. I can’t do anything more for her. ... This woman is not lovable.’” He felt God replying, Do you think my disciples were lovable? Brad said, “The question pierced my heart and humbled my being to its core. I knew I am to love my wife as Christ loved the Church. I resolved to persevere a day at a time.”

At that point in their marriage, Kris said, “there wasn’t any communication. We were absolutely in survival mode.” But the disease did not return a third time. As months passed, the symptoms gradually eased. Slowly, the marriage healed too. On New Year’s Eve 1997, they crossed the Canadian border for a concert. “That was the watershed moment of our relationship, getting back to being able to do some fun things together,” Brad said.

Now the Bemises, both 70, enjoy visiting Cannon Beach and taking their dog for walks on the trails near their home in Woodinville, Wash. Kris volunteers at a pregnancy resource center, and Brad participates in men’s Bible studies at their church. Kris still has lingering effects from the disease—she still has no feeling in the bottoms of her feet, for example—but she and Brad are thankful for their 46 years of marriage together.

“My wife has recovered and been renewed to her wonderful ‘dynamo’ self,” Brad said. “There are few, if any, things in our culture that bless more people than a Christ-centered marriage.”

**CHESS FRENZY**

Nigerians are working to make chess and other mind games pay—literally

by Onize Ohikere in Abuja, Nigeria

On a Saturday afternoon in December, the sounds of clicking timers echoed from a white tent in an Abuja garden. There, 36 chess players focused on their boards while observers stood on both sides of the tent.

The spectators included nine children from a primary school waiting for their own tournament after the nine 10-minute rapid rounds.

Folarin Adebayo, the children’s coach of four years, told me he’s taken them to several tournaments, including one in Lagos state, where a 6-year-old won a bronze medal.

“Most of the grandmasters played before 14,” he said. “We’re planning to get a grandmaster in the space of five to seven years.”

The event is part of a goal to provide more opportunities for chess and other mind games. Several groups like Adebayo’s are also training younger children, hoping to establish the game as a professional sport that could lead to the first grandmaster in West Africa.

Efe Onodavberoh, 24, who organized the tournament, first started playing chess while he attended the →
Since his victory, his family moved into an apartment and received multiple donations, including from elite private schools. The Daily Show’s Trevor Noah is set to co-produce a motion picture based on his story for Paramount Pictures.

“What I want to do next is to start going for my goal of being the youngest grandmaster in the world,” he told New York’s NBC News 4 in March.

Luke Owolabi said Tani’s story proves many young Nigerians have talent but lack the “conducive environment” to thrive. In 2017, he launched the Lagos-based Mind Games Incorporated (MGI) and organized his first tournament in Scrabble, chess, and checkers.

His background is stronger in Scrabble: In 2015, he represented Nigeria at the World Scrabble Championship. His initial plan was to keep Nigerian youth engaged, but that changed along the way: “We can create a means of livelihood around these games.”

MGI has trainers in about 23 private schools across Lagos, and Owolabi is talking with the education ministry and other groups about creating the same opportunities at little to no cost at public schools.

They are also raising money for a national championship. In November, MGI’s annual premier championship included players from Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Gambia. The winners for Scrabble and chess each walked away with $1,600. Such contests are essential if the games are to become a sustainable income source, he added. “If you don’t provide that kind of platform, the kids have the mentality that the game is for leisure and move on with their lives.”

University of Abuja. He tried to organize his first tournament in 2017 but didn’t know enough players.

But through social media he gathered enough participants to host the Abuja tournament and wants to make it a regular occurrence: “I’m already planning my next event for April.”

Ngozi Uba-eze was the only female participating in the main competition. She typically plays chess for leisure and was attending her first tournament. In the second round she lost to the more experienced Joshua Adejo.

He won a national open championship in Lagos, where players from Ivory Coast and a grandmaster from India attended. Adejo, 30, runs a business on the side but is working toward becoming a grandmaster.

One challenge is the scarcity of rated tournaments in Nigeria. “I’m praying, but I don’t have time on my side,” he said, laughing.

Nigerians’ chess prowess appeared on the global stage earlier this year when 8-year-old Tanitoluwa Adewumi, a Nigerian refugee in Manhattan, won in his grade in the New York State chess championship.

He did so with a little more than a year’s worth of training—defeating children from elite schools with private tutors—and while living at a homeless shelter. His family fled northern Nigeria in 2017, fearing attacks from Islamist terror group Boko Haram.

He attended P.S. 116, where a part-time chess teacher taught him the game and waived his fees for the chess club. He practiced on the floor of the shelter, and his mother took him to free chess sessions in Harlem on the weekends.
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nations, as he had been told, ‘So shall your offspring be’” (Romans 4:18). We are privy to Abe’s internal reasoning processes when he was later ordered to offer up this heir on an altar: “He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back” (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Such are the internal mechanics of faith reasoning—provided in Scripture’s record for our emulation.

An obscure man named Jabez exhibited godly optimism in overcoming the curse of his birth name (“Jabez” means “he will cause pain”), and so was singled out for honorable mention in an otherwise boring litany of names (1 Chronicles 4:9-10). Good for Jabez for not settling for what seemed unchangeable fate.

One of my favorites is the tribe of Levi. Levi and his brother Simeon were put under a curse by no less an authoritative figure than their father Jacob (Genesis 49:5-7) for their cruelty in the slaughter of Shechem (34:25-31): Their punishment was to be scattered throughout Israel. Who’s going to have unquenchable optimism in the face of a sentence like that?

But consider the inscrutable ways of God! Both tribes ended up scattered, sure enough. But while Simeon’s scattering was an absorption into Judah and a being passed over in Moses’ later blessing (Deuteronomy 33), the tribe of Levi’s scattering became almost a promotion: They were chosen to be priests over all the other tribes, and thus were divided into all the territories for this privileged role.

What made the difference? Was it not the unquenchable optimism of faith? For whereas the Levites could have resigned themselves and hardened their hearts, they stirred up faith in a moment of truth during the notorious golden calf incident (Exodus 32:26). While men are still in the land of the living, God is always ready to reverse a curse for those who come in faith (Ezekiel 18:21-23).

Why does God have us pray and pray (Luke 18:1)? Why is His answer delayed? Because God is not only interested in saving the girl whose name is pinned to your refrigerator, but in transforming you in the process. Christians are changed in the act of praying. Pray once and receive, and in a week’s time you may forget you even prayed. Pray for 10 or 20 years, and you are daily faced with the choice of holding on to faith or chucking it. Each time you choose to hold it you are blessed. Let’s keep those names up on the fridge in 2020.

**Voices ANDRÉE SEU PETERSON**

**Having an optimistic faith for the new year**

**Pray and pray and pray—and be transformed**

A Woman I See Every Blue Moon shared with me at a party that her daughter, whose name I had taped to my fridge in exchange for my kids’ names on hers, phoned after a five-year estrangement to say she had returned to the Lord. When I told my husband the news, he said, “Imagine if she had given up praying for her daughter just a day before the phone call came.”

You don’t want to give up on God just a day before He answers your prayers. Trouble is, you don’t know when that day will be, so you have to keep praying. Jesus says so: “My righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him” (Hebrews 10:38).

Have we given up on anyone or anything as the calendar rounds the bend into 2020? Time to remember what we signed up for at the start of this journey: God’s righteous ones are saved by faith. There is no emptier word in the dictionary than “faith” when bandied about and not exercised; it comes to signify nearly nothing. Faith, if it means anything at all, means unquenchable optimism in God.

Abraham exhibited unquenchable optimism when, faced with the fact of his own decrepitude versus the fact of God’s promise of an heir, he thought God’s character the greater fact. “In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, ‘So shall your offspring be’” (Romans 4:18). We are privy to Abe’s internal reasoning processes when he was later ordered to offer up this heir on an altar: “He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back” (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Such are the internal mechanics of faith reasoning—provided in Scripture’s record for our emulation.

An obscure man named Jabez exhibited godly optimism in overcoming the curse of his birth name (“Jabez” means “he will cause pain”), and so was singled out for honorable mention in an otherwise boring litany of names (1 Chronicles 4:9-10). Good for Jabez for not settling for what seemed unchangeable fate.

One of my favorites is the tribe of Levi. Levi and his brother Simeon were put under a curse by no less an authoritative figure than their father Jacob (Genesis 49:5-7) for their cruelty in the slaughter of Shechem (34:25-31): Their punishment was to be scattered throughout Israel. Who’s going to have unquenchable optimism in the face of a sentence like that?

But consider the inscrutable ways of God! Both tribes ended up scattered, sure enough. But while Simeon’s scattering was an absorption into Judah and a being passed over in Moses’ later blessing (Deuteronomy 33), the tribe of Levi’s scattering became almost a promotion: They were chosen to be priests over all the other tribes, and thus were divided into all the territories for this privileged role.

What made the difference? Was it not the unquenchable optimism of faith? For whereas the Levites could have resigned themselves and hardened their hearts, they stirred up faith in a moment of truth during the notorious golden calf incident (Exodus 32:26). While men are still in the land of the living, God is always ready to reverse a curse for those who come in faith (Ezekiel 18:21-23).

Why does God have us pray and pray (Luke 18:1)? Why is His answer delayed? Because God is not only interested in saving the girl whose name is pinned to your refrigerator, but in transforming you in the process.

Christians are changed in the act of praying. Pray once and receive, and in a week’s time you may forget you even prayed. Pray for 10 or 20 years, and you are daily faced with the choice of holding on to faith or chucking it. Each time you choose to hold it you are blessed. Let’s keep those names up on the fridge in 2020.
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The arrogance of the new

At Brazil’s Museum of Tomorrow, the past is inferior and the future is trouble

WHAT RESPECT DO WE OWE THE AGED—NOT JUST OLD PEOPLE BUT OLD BOOKS, ARTIFACTS, BUILDINGS, AND IDEAS THAT AREN’T WOKE?

My wife and I walked around Rio de Janeiro in December and saw beautiful old buildings including the Municipal Theater and the National Library—but not Brazil’s oldest scientific institution, the National Museum. A fire in 2018 destroyed it and its nearly 20 million natural history and anthropological artifacts, along with 470,000 volumes and 2,400 rare works.

Supporters of the museum had said it was a firetrap. They were right: The fire began in an air conditioning unit with loose wiring and without external grounding and individual circuit breakers. Some blamed liberal politicians who had cut funding for traditional museums while throwing $59 million into building the Museu do Amanhã—Museum of Tomorrow—along the waterfront.

The new building’s futuristic exterior is striking. But what’s inside is an even more striking combination of left-wing prophecy and child abuse.


Rio’s Museum of Tomorrow ratchets up the tension. To the noise of thunderstorms and police sirens, Rio children and adults learn their city “will become hotter and more humid. The sea will invade the coastline.” Giant screens shout “MAS MAS MAS. [More, more, more.] WE ARE OVER 7 BILLION AND WE WILL BE MORE.” Then come photographs that make humans seem like swarming insects, with a suggestion that Earth takes revenge: “WE ACT, THE PLANET REACTS.”

Here’s what’s odd, though: While many dozens of screens display panic about global warming, tucked away on a small interactive display is a different fear. Touch the screen and learn we might be on our way to global cooling, since “the water from the thawing of the eternal ice cover in the north of the planet could reach the Gulf Stream, [leading to] an increase in the snow cover in the north of the planet, causing a drop in temperature.”

More: “Changes in the gas composition of the atmosphere or variations in the intensity of solar radiation could lead to a major cool down of the planet. Many believe that our Sun could be entering a period of low activity, similar to what happened between 1645 and 1715 ... in which there was a ‘Little Ice Age’ which caused the freezing of the river Thames in England.”

The only common denominator: Climate change of any kind creates trouble. That’s silly in some ways, but if we don’t believe God created and sustains the world, Earth becomes a fearful place indeed. The Museum of Tomorrow by 99-1 says we will face fire rather than ice, but it’s 100 percent Darwinian materialist: “Much has happened since single-celled organisms began to reproduce in the primitive ocean. From that initial biological soup emerged increasingly complex beings.”

Do alternative explanations exist? The museum says all ancient civilizations—no exception for one in ancient Israel—were “based on their myths. ... For many centuries, only mythology and philosophy conjured explanations for the totality of the universe.” Happily, St. Darwin changed all that: We now know that “all animal and plant diversity is the result of the evolutionary process.”

Ironically, the Museum of Tomorrow sells presentism: The past was inferior and the future is trouble. But old buildings, books, and artifacts tell a different story: We were physically but not intellectually poorer. Without our national museums, history is high on the ladder of abstraction. We should read new books but keep the old: Some are silver, some are gold. And the best old book teaches us to be humble before God.
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