“WE'RE STRUGGLING TO PUT GROCERIES ON THE TABLE NOW.” — JARED LUTZ, A WORKER IN CALIFORNIA, ON THE EFFECTS OF A NEW LABOR LAW. P. 52
How These Three Men Quit Porn

“Read your Bible more. Pray more. Become a better Christian.” That’s the three-step process that most churches prescribe to a man who’s struggling with porn. Those are all good things, but contrary to what most of us believe, reading your Bible more, praying more, and trying harder to keep your halo tight and straight are the very things that can keep men trapped in bondage because they don’t help him deal with the core issue: Shame. He doesn’t have a moral problem. He has an intimacy disorder.

These three men took a surprising approach to find freedom from porn. It’s surprising because it’s not the “try harder” approach that most churches advocate. The process they followed was deeply rooted in sound, biblical teaching taught in the Conquer Series, a film series that’s been watched by over 1 million men and used in 40,000 churches.

Like most young boys, Kyle was introduced to pornography at around 10 years old. He quickly became addicted. “It ruined my high school life, my college life, and my young adult life,” Kyle explains. God took everything away from Kyle after the collapse of his marriage due to “multiple extra-marital affairs and a secret second life.” Kyle explains, “Immediately, through the teachings in the Conquer Series, I was able to understand my 25+ years of pornography and sexual addiction. I was able to understand what it had done to my brain… I was able to completely break the chains of sexual bondage.” The great news is God restored Kyle’s relationship with his wife and they just welcomed their third child into the world.

What starts as a moral problem, quickly becomes a brain problem. Watching porn creates neural pathways in the brain that quickly turns into super neural highways. At the moment of sexual release, dopamine is released in the brain, along with other neural chemicals that bond the viewer to the images. So the advice to “just stop it” does not work. It takes time to renew the mind, so there is no quick fix. The Conquer Series lays out biblical strategies and provides practical tools that men are using to find freedom.

The Conquer Series isn’t just helping men find freedom from pornography, it’s making them ACTIVE members of their church! According to Ronald, “Ever since the first time I watched the Conquer Series I have felt a pull to be more involved. The Conquer Series has given me the vehicle to help other men realize their identity. I want to be a recovery coach and guide other fathers in leading their families with eternity in mind.”

Free men, free men. If you want your church to grow, then help men find freedom.

I’m in the military, and have struggled with porn addiction in the past. I bought the Conquer Series to share with other military men, but ended up watching it in the living room with my dad over a 3-week period. My dad and I are both thankful to the Lord and KingdomWorks for producing the Conquer Series.”

~Andy

(The views presented here are personal and do not necessarily represent the views of DoD or its components.)

As Christians, we’ve developed notions of God that have crept into our own thinking which are keeping us in bondage. The Conquer Series helps to destroy those strongholds while providing real solutions to live porn-free.

How could your small group or congregation benefit from watching the Conquer Series and understanding God’s design for sexuality? Will you help the men of your church find freedom from pornography?

Check out ConquerSeries.com and consider how this cinematic film series might benefit you or your church.

ORDER TODAY AT CONQUERSERIES.COM
CALL (561) 681-9990
Abduction

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We pay attention to people like Schaeffer Lewis Chesterton Bonhoeffer Edwards... and Cheryl.

It takes a powerful team to give your daughter an unstoppable faith. The kind that makes her fearless, wise, servant-hearted, and bold. At Worldview Academy Leadership Camps we amplify what moms like Cheryl started. She knows where solid faith comes from. You should register your teen today.
“THE EARTH IS THE LORD’S AND THE FULLNESS THEREOF; THE WORLD AND THOSE WHO DWELL THEREIN.” —PSALM 24:1
TROUBLING TREND
GINNY TEAGUE ON FACEBOOK
It’s telling that the more “progressive” New York gets, the worse this problem gets.

IT’S A DOG’S LIFE
FEB. 15, P. 32—JENNIFER PLEC/TROPHY CLUB, TEXAS
No, do not have Greeley’s teeth cleaned at the vet. We love our pets Elsie and Inky dearly, but we have to balance their place in our lives and budget with the people and ministries we love.

DONALD F. THOMPSON/BRISTOL, TENN.
$429? It’s just a dog! I know moms on Medicaid who struggle to find $10 to purchase over-the-counter ibuprofen for their kids.

JOHN D. COGAN/FARMINGTON, N.M.
Five years ago we almost put down Tinkerbelle, a gray tabby we rescued, because of gum disease. My wife, Karen, was heartbroken, so we spent $1,000 to pull out all of Tinkerbelle’s teeth. It was a good investment. I get a lot in return watching Karen on the couch at night with Tinkerbelle lying on her shoulder, purring.

PARTY POLITICS, PAST AND PRESENT
FEB. 15, P. 30—W. GARY HAYWARD/BARRE, MASS.
I laughed out loud at Michael Barone’s comment that there’s “strong evidence contrary to my belief” that there is no God and his honest summary of the evidence for the work of divine providence in American history. Thanks for an indispensable read.

LONG TIME STAYING
FEB. 15, P. 69—KATIE POWNER ON WNG.ORG
What a refreshing story. Ministering long term in a small town is a very challenging task. My husband and I are in our 15th year of youth ministry in a rural town. I love Richard Hornok’s final quote: “You can do this, and you can do this well all the way to the end.”

MACHEN’S MIRACLES, METHODISTS’ MORALITY
FEB. 15, P. 66—SHELLY VIVIAN ON FACEBOOK
I’m teaching the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy to my ninth-grade class; nothing is new in Church history.

UNCONVENTIONAL ALLY
FEB. 15, P. 67—SANDY GUSTAFSON ON FACEBOOK
I am adding this brave woman to my hero list. She’s an unconventional leader doing good for the innocent unborn.

FINDING LIFE IN A LIFE SENTENCE
FEB. 15, P. 56—ALLEN JOHNSON ON WNG.ORG
David Berkowitz in jail is more free in his spirit than many people on the outside. His encouraging story of deliverance, sorrow, and repentance can perhaps quell those thirsty for the death penalty.

THE FAIRER SEX GETS UGLY
FEB. 15, P. 70—LIZ JONES ON WNG.ORG
The contradictions between what some feminists say and do are astonishing. Maybe some prostitutes love their jobs, but those I’ve met did not consider it a positive career choice; it was the outcome of years of abuse.

A CARTOON FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY
FEB. 15, P. 24—CHRISTINE DELMATER ON FACEBOOK
We love Bluey. It’s adorable. Sometimes I’m more into it than my kids are.

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Notes from the CEO KEVIN MARTIN

Here and there

We’re moving our headquarters to a new location, but it won’t be difficult to find

The spring tourist season in Asheville, N.C., is just getting started, and I hope that if our fair city is on your travel itinerary, you’ll plan to drop in on us here in historic Biltmore Village. We love to receive WORLD readers at headquarters, and I’ve had the pleasure of meeting hundreds of you over the years. The invitation is always open, and I’d like to give you a fresh reason to come visit.

You see, an odd thing has been happening over the past few years: It seems as though our building has shrunk. The reality is, of course, that we have a lot more people working here than when we first set up shop almost 10 years ago.

One example: Joel Belz gave up his large upstairs office in 2017 for a smaller one on the main floor, and now four of our people crowd into his former space upstairs. In fact, in that same part of the building we originally had three employees; we now have 12.

At this point, most of the office spaces designed for one person now house at least two. And when we have remote staff visiting, which happens almost every week, it’s hard to find a place to meet, work, or record a podcast.

For the past year, we’ve been weighing whether to leave this building—an unhappy prospect because we love it, and we love the neighborhood. It fits, like a good broken-in shoe. Except now, it pinches our toes and rubs blisters on our heels.

All the while we desperately and reluctantly sought new office space elsewhere, God was calmly at work vacating the building directly across the street from our office. The landlord was tiring of the turnover his previous retail tenants had experienced and was ready for a nice, boring office tenant like us.

So last week we thanked God for giving us 50 percent more space, in a building about 10 yards from our front door—and, as it turns out, whose landlord also owns the building we’re in. So within a few weeks, after some minor modifications to the new space, we expect to get started on what we hope will become a new overcrowding project that will take at least a few more years.

If this reads like a complaint, it’s not meant to be. The problem of growth is a welcome one, and it’s a reminder that I need to thank you for your part in giving us this wonderful “problem.” Your generous support of our work, your enabling of our growth, your encouragement of new directions, and your prayers for God’s blessing and wisdom have contributed to our across-the-street expansion.

So now you have a new reason to visit. If you wait a week or two, we’ll walk you through both buildings, and we can praise God together for His work on our behalf.

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Every fiscal issue is social, and every social issue is fiscal

Are you a fiscal or a social conservative?

“Wait a minute!” you say. “That’s a fallacious question—on a couple of counts.” The distinction is superficial at best. At their worst, the terms may be phony and unhelpfully misleading.

For one thing, it’s possible for someone to land in both camps. For another thing, I know a handful of people who are credibly in both camps but would never call themselves “conservatives.”

I’ve stressed all this in this space before, but a highly charged political season suggests the need to remind ourselves. In both big political parties—but especially among Republicans, and among the media folks who cover them—it’s become commonplace to make distinctions like these even when such distinctions don’t really exist. (If there are still any conservatives left among the Democratic leaders, they’ve become harder and harder to identify.)

For in God’s order of things, everything fiscal is also moral, and every social policy has fiscal implications. In God’s scheme, everything hangs together. You might say He was the original holistic thinker.

But among our “conservative” political leaders are still too many who think they can promote old-fashioned economic principles while ignoring social issues like abortion, no-fault divorce, homosexual “rights,” and radical gender matters—all nurtured and exacerbated in the friendly context of godless public school classrooms.

It is not, however, just our leaders. Sadly, they represent millions of soft-thinking Americans, all comfortable in supposing it’s just OK to try to divide what God has created to be all of one piece.

People who try to peel off the moral layers of the onion so they can concentrate on the “real stuff” of fiscal and economic issues should be ready to encounter this reality: The whole onion—all the way to the core—is made up of interrelated layers.

Here’s a vivid example: The relationship of abortion to the coming Social Security crisis has been far too little explored. Everyone knows that the great threat to the future of Social Security is that there are too few wage earners over the next 20 years to support those who will be retiring during that timespan. That may well have been true, of course, even in a pyramid scheme that was flawed from the beginning. But what was questionable way back then has now been exacerbated beyond repair by a society’s decision in the 1970s that it would be all right year after year to snuff out a third of all its pregnancies.

In a society where every tiny statistical nuance of every cause and effect known to humanity has been studied, and then restudied (recent examples are the Australia and California fires and the coronavirus), where is the public discussion of the actuarial impact of permissive abortion policies on the future of Social Security? Who took time to study the long-term effects of gender reversals? Why haven’t the media ballyhooed such issues at least as much as they have global warming?

But all this works just as well the other way around. Fiscal policies always have moral, ethical, and social implications. We humans are not just economic beings, as Karl Marx insisted. But it’s nonetheless true that we rarely make decisions in life apart from economic influences. So when a combination of governments at different levels steps in to take 40 percent to 50 percent of your income every year—which is not unusual—that has a profound effect on your ability to give to your church, to spend on education, or to give to the needy. In such a manner, tax policy affects whether you develop a generous or a stingy outlook on life.

Similarly, the decisions governments make now about spending the wealth of future generations minimizes the freedom our children and grandchildren will have to make those decisions for themselves.

So for anyone to pretend that he or she has discovered a neat way to cordon off the money issues from the moral ones is wishful thinking. It denies the very manner in which God has put us, and our society, together.
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By early March the novel coronavirus that causes the COVID-19 respiratory disease had spread to more than 110 countries and topped 118,000 cases worldwide. Three-quarters of its 4,000 deaths had occurred in China, but non-China cases began multiplying.

COVID-19 first struck the United States in the Seattle area. After the first deaths came at a nursing home in Kirkland, Wash., in late February, authorities decided to close schools in an “abundance of caution.” Costco stores reported up to five times the regular number of members entering

COVID-19 calling

As the deadly disease hit the United States, Christians began praying, planning, and caring for their communities

by Jenny Lind Schmitt in King County, Wash., Charissa Koh in Austin, Texas, and Sophia Lee in Los Angeles
hourly. Entrance lines at the Lynnwood, Wash., warehouse store stretched around the building, and police arrived to keep order as customers tried to cut the line and force their way in. Employees reported shoppers stockpiling toilet paper, cleaning wipes, and food staples, emptying shelves. Situations at other stores matched.

Churches in the area also saw the effect of the coronavirus scare. In early March, many had noticeably fewer congregants in the pews. Reach Church, which meets in a public high school in Kirkland, canceled its services. “We think folks should begin to think about avoiding large events and assemblies,” Washington Gov. Jay Inslee said in a March 1 press conference. More “social distancing” would come.

Businesses headquartered in the region encouraged employees to plan for telecommuting, and fewer cars on the road indicated many had already begun to work from home. Sports teams and clubs canceled most after-school and evening events.

Bothell resident Leigh Laird said her sons’ school district closed on March 3: “This is the first time in all the years that my kids have been there that I’ve seen the school district close the schools due to illness, even though we have had some nasty flus in past years.” Christians should “pray Psalm 91 over our families and communities,” she said.

At Covenant Presbyterian Church in Issaquah, Wash., Pastor Eric Irwin preached his March 1 sermon from Luke 14:26 and related it to the current crisis: “To hate your life means you don’t live primarily to protect your life. If you get the coronavirus and die taking care of other people, that’s a life well spent. ... Staying alive is not the ultimate good. The glory of God is the only ultimate good.”

On March 6, officials in Austin, Texas, canceled this year’s South by Southwest, the city’s massive film, music, and tech conference. It would have started March 13.

More than 400,000 people attended last year. But by March 6, more than 50,000 people had signed an online petition to cancel it. Big businesses such as Facebook, Twitter, Apple, and Netflix had withdrawn from the festival.

In early March—before South by Southwest’s cancellation—Christians were preparing for a possible COVID-19 outbreak.

Austin Disaster Relief Network (ADRN) is a group of 185 churches that trains volunteers to work together in crises. In 2018, ADRN Director Daniel Geraci told WORLD’s Marvin Olasky: “God so loves the world and His church that He’s preparing the church to be the best asset when disaster strikes—not the one where the city says, ‘Stay away,’ but the one that provokes a ‘We need these guys’ response.”

Geraci told WORLD ADRN is coordinating with the Emergency Operations Center for the city of Austin regarding the coronavirus. ADRN stocks supplies for disaster response, with volunteers and vehicles ready to deliver them if needed. The leadership team was praying about opening an emotional and spiritual care hotline, and its prayer room already had people praying specifically that COVID-19 will stop spreading. An epidemiologist adviser held conference calls with church leaders to answer questions and talk about responses.

Some Austin church leaders contacted the Austin Baptist Association (ABA) for advice. Director David Smith said ABA encourages pastors to read the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website and create a plan
The decisions frustrated many students whose semesters abroad ended early. Spencer Schmidt, a Pepperdine sophomore in the Florence, Italy, program, said though students were following the coronavirus outbreak in Italy—as of March 10 the country had more than 10,000 cases and more than 600 deaths—most of them weren’t worried: “We’re all 19, 20, 21 years old. We have strong immune systems. This is just like the flu, and we were smart enough to be aware of that.” He wasn’t surprised when Pepperdine brought home students from China, but he held high hopes for the Florence program right until he received the email from Pepperdine.

Meanwhile, the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), an organization of Christian K-12 schools, encouraged its members to monitor the World Health Organization and CDC websites for the most current information and be proactive in communication about canceling school trips, quarantines, or possible school closures.

“The most important measures to take at this point are to continue to pray, stay calm yet vigilant, and maintain coordination and communication on all matters related to this evolving situation,” said ACSI spokesman Larry Lincoln.
THE U.S. FEDERAL DEBT as a percentage of GDP in 2019. It is the highest percentage since the federal debt was 119 percent of GDP in 1946, when the country was beginning to demobilize from fighting World War II. Fifty years ago, in 1969, the federal debt was 35 percent of GDP, and in 1989 it was 50 percent of GDP. By 2009, the debt had reached 83 percent of GDP, and it surpassed 100 percent of GDP for the first time since 1947 in 2014. In most years, federal revenues increased as the debt was building, but not by enough to catch up with federal spending.

$506.7
The increase (in billions of dollars) in federal spending in 2019 compared with 2012 in constant dollars, according to the Tax Policy Center.

$691
The increase (in billions of dollars) in federal receipts in 2019 compared with 2012 in constant dollars, according to the Tax Policy Center.

$14,652
Federal spending per capita in the current fiscal year, according to a New York Times analysis.

$1,441
The increase in inflation-adjusted federal spending per capita since 2016, when Donald Trump was elected president, according to the Times.

106%
Right now, mothers are forced to work alongside their children for the profit of others.


IJM.org/world
A 23-YEAR-OLD BRITISH WOMAN is suing a gender-transition clinic that treated her in her teens, saying the clinic did not confront her sufficiently before giving her hormones to try to make her a male. Keira Bell went to the Tavistock GIDS clinic, the only one of its kind in the United Kingdom, when she was 16. She told the BBC that the clinic put her on puberty blockers after three hours of appointments. “I should have been challenged more,” said Bell. “No one was there to say anything different.” Bell says the clinic should have given her more therapy before it put her on drugs. She stopped taking testosterone and cross-sex hormones last year and now says she accepts that she is female. Bell’s lawyers will argue minors are incapable of understanding the impact of gender transition therapy on their future lives.
“I haven’t touched my face in weeks. I miss it.”

President DONALD TRUMP on changes he’s making during the coronavirus outbreak.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident. All men and women are created, by the, you know, you know the thing.”

Democratic presidential candidate JOE BIDEN in one of an increasing number of verbal gaffes he has had on the campaign trail.

“It was clear from the start that it is being done to keep Putin in power forever. But the brazen manner in which it was done elicited outrage.”

Russian opposition activist ALEXEI MINIAYLO after Russia’s parliament approved a bill to allow President Vladimir Putin to stay in power potentially until 2036.

“If I had known what was to happen, I would not have cared about the reprimand.”

AI FEN, a Wuhan doctor who was reprimanded for speaking about the coronavirus in December. Chinese censors have worked around the clock to delete her interview with Chinese magazine Renwu from social media sites, but Chinese netizens are finding ways around the censors.

“There will be a day we will look back on this season in American history and we will say: ‘What were we thinking?’”

U.S. Sen. JAMES LANKFORD, R-Okla., saying Americans in the future will view abortion the way Americans now view the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II and women not having the vote 100 years ago.
**Horsing around**

**ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS STAR PITCHER** Madison Bumgarner has a secret life that now stands exposed. In a Feb. 23 story, The Athletic revealed that the former San Francisco Giants ace has been competing on the professional rodeo circuit for years using a pseudonym. The story broke when Rancho Rio, an Arizona rodeo venue, posted a picture of Mason Saunders to its Facebook page after he won a roping competition on Dec. 3. Reporters recognized the man billed as Saunders as the former World Series MVP. The victory in Arizona netted the pitcher and his roping partner $26,550 in prize money. Two weeks later, Bumgarner, who has been roping since he was in high school, signed a five-year, $85-million contract with the Diamondbacks.

**A BAR BEHIND BARS** An emergency at an Irish prison was quietly resolved after prison officials discovered the hostage taker had a sweet tooth. Two inmates took another inmate hostage on Feb. 23 at a prison in Portlaoise, Ireland. The prisoners barricaded themselves in a cell and engaged in a five-hour standoff with officials. During negotiations, prison authorities said one of the hostage takers agreed to open the cell door if guards would bring him a Mars bar. Guards delivered the candy bar, subdued the inmates, and freed the hostage.

**A BIG SHOT** Up 3-1 with 8:41 left in the second period, the Carolina Hurricanes turned to a seldom-used NHL rule to win a road game against the Toronto Maple Leafs. After both goalies for the Hurricanes were injured, Carolina looked to the arena’s official emergency goalie. NHL rules state that home teams must provide an emergency backup in case of injury. That’s how David Ayres, a local Zamboni driver with no professional or college experience, made his NHL debut at age 42. Once in the game, Ayres quickly allowed two goals. But the Hurricanes answered, and the former junior league player settled in, blocking the next eight shots on goal en route to sealing a 6-3 win for Carolina.
A FINE IDEA Turkmenistan is a desert nation, and it announced in February a deal with a British company to import 10,000 tons of a needed resource: sand. The sand will come from the shores of the United Kingdom for the building of a horse-racing track. Sandy deserts account for 80 percent of Turkmenistan’s land, but officials say the Turkmeni sand is too rough for horse tracks. The sand will cost the builder nearly $1.3 million.

PARIS NIGHTLIFE Bedbugs are back. They had been dormant for decades in France, but on Feb. 20 the French government opened an information hotline and a website dedicated to dealing with a growing bedbug problem in Paris and other French cities. According to the government’s bedbug website, increased international travel and the bedbugs’ new resistance to insecticides have caused the resurgence.

PHOTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE A California man’s brilliant photograph of the blood moon over the Golden Gate Bridge may wind up being evidence of his guilt in court. According to officials with the Golden Gate Bridge District, the angle of Bruce Getty’s 2014 photograph demonstrates he took the picture while trespassing in a restricted area. Getty put the picture on his website in 2018 and this February received a cease-and-desist letter from Bridge District lawyers directing him to take the photo down. The Bridge District also asked for any profits Getty has made from sale of the photo. Claiming not even one sale of the snapshot, Getty told KGO-TV, “I’m just a nobody taking pictures.”

WORD GAMES Chalk one up for politically correct language enthusiasts. Worried that the term “at-risk youth” had developed a negative connotation, lawmakers in California have scrubbed the term from the state’s books. From now on, what California had termed “at-risk” will now be called “at-promise youth.” Assemblyman Reginald Byron Jones-Sawyer, who represents part of Los Angeles, proposed the law: “I learned that words matter—and once they were called ‘at-risk,’ they almost were in the school-to-prison pipeline automatically.”

MISSING MILLIONS More than $53 million worth of bitcoins seized by police in Ireland has been lost due to a missing fishing tackle box. Authorities in Ireland sentenced Clifton Collins in 2017 to five years in jail after he was arrested for distributing marijuana. It turns out Collins had invested some of his drug money in bitcoins in late 2011 and early 2012 when prices were less than $5 per bitcoin. In February, when the officials revealed to The Irish Times that it had confiscated Collins’ 6,000 bitcoins, a single bitcoin was worth nearly $8,900. But though the police have confiscated the accounts, officials are unable to access them: Collins’ account keys were hidden in a fishing tackle box that his landlord threw out after Collins landed in jail.
A plea for beautiful buildings

Proposed executive order challenges soul-crushing architectural fads

Most of us don’t think about architecture unless it slaps us in the face. That may say more about bland, blocky public buildings than we’d like to admit, but several years ago I was slapped by the central public library in a Midwestern university town. The entrance, opening to a four-story atrium, resembled an upended, corrugated, glass-and-aluminum Dixie cup. The main body of the building, constructed of native red granite, sloped slightly inward, decorated with random strips of window. Inside, an abundance of industrial metal in the warehouse modern style, accentuated with geometric shapes in primary colors. At least it wasn’t bland.

But what did it say? Not, “Here’s a repository of the world’s learning, dedicated to the principle that all men and women may freely partake, according to their inclinations.” The message I got was, “Aren’t we clever?”

What brought this to mind is a modest proposal put forward by the National Civic Art Society, in the form of a proposed executive order titled “Making Federal Buildings Beautiful Again.” The draft states that “Federal architecture should once again inspire respect instead of bewilderment or repugnance”—and, to that end, buildings in the “classical architectural style” are to be preferred for federal buildings in D.C. and elsewhere.

The Civic Art Society singles out two modernist styles for particular condemnation. First, Deconstruction, which “subverts the traditional values of architecture via fragmentation, disorder, discontinuity, distortion, skewed geometry and the appearance of instability.” (One jaw-dropping example of this is the San Francisco Federal Building.) The other style is Brutalism, “characterized by a massive, monolithic, stark, and block-like appearance with a rigid geometric style and large-scale use of exposed poured concrete.” The name actually derives from béton brut, meaning “raw concrete,” but it well describes the thuggish character of, for example, the Hoover FBI headquarters in D.C.

The proposed executive order did not originate with the executive, and Trump has not indicated he’ll sign it, but the predictable outcry is mostly aimed at him. Every art-and-architecture society is up in arms, citing reasons from (1) mandating classical architecture costs too much, to (2) it diminishes our diversity and chills innovation, to (3) it reeks of white supremacy and classism. A New York Times piece roars, “MAGA War on Architectural Diversity Weaponizes Greek Columns.” Linking to that, one Twitter user warned of fascism and genocide: “The cult of antiquity & the imposition of monuments to a nation’s mythical glorious past precede both of those disasters.” Got that? Pediments today; swastikas tomorrow.

To me, “weaponizing” looks more like 41 Cooper Square (Google it) than the Jefferson Memorial. The outrage, mind you, stems from a modest proposal that federal buildings have a unity in design that suggests order and stability, rather than “officially sanctioned stylistic chaos” (in the words of Catesby Leigh, a founding member of the Civic Art Society). State and city governments—including libraries—can go all in for any sheet-metal fad they want to waste taxpayer money on. But the United States government shouldn’t be subjecting its citizens to oversize shards of glass.

Against the fearsome prospect of a coronavirus pandemic and a nail-biting presidential campaign, an architectural dispute doesn’t even register a blip on the radar of public concern. But it’s a dispute that’s been going on for decades, and the continuing presence of ugly, brutal, show-offy, impractical, inhuman blocks of concrete and bent steel indicate who’s winning. Traditionalists like Leigh and Theodore Dalrymple hope that a positive word from the executive office will at least validate classical notions of beauty and function. But any word from this particular executive will only intensify the anti-authoritarian umbrage, so that’s not likely to happen.

Trump is not the authoritarian, though; it’s the modernist elites whose egotism insists on subjecting the public to soul-crushing structures. Architecture is a language—God-given, like all languages—that can inspire us or welcome us or shout us down. What will it take for the public to start shouting back?
How does YOUR ministry protect children from sexual abuse?
Life’s a mess. And nobody escapes it.

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Thankfully God has a plan to deal with the mess. It involves you, and it involves me.

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DRAMATIC POTENTIAL

*I Am Patrick* is a worthy tribute to a hero of the faith

by Megan Basham

**BEER, PARADES, THE WEARING O’ THE GREEN.** After Nicholas, no one commonly called a saint has had more celebration and legend grow up around him than “Ireland’s apostle,” Patrick. Yet unlike jolly old Sinterklaas, Patrick left an autobiographical record that offers a fascinating glimpse into not only his own life but also the spread of Christianity after the fall of the Roman Empire.

Few stories boast as much cinematic potential as this fifth-century Roman Briton’s. As Patrick describes his adolescence in his *Confessio*, he sounds startlingly similar to countless teens in modern evangelical families. The spoiled, uncaring son of a
wealthy deacon, he sees affluence as his birthright and scoffs at his priests’ teaching about sin and salvation.

But, as is so often true, an encounter with suffering draws his heart to God. After pirates kidnap him and send him to Ireland for six years of punishing captivity, he writes, “The Lord opened up my awareness of my lack of faith ... and he looked down on my lowliness and had mercy on my youthful ignorance. He guarded me before I knew him, and ... protected me and consoled me as a father does for his son.”

A daring escape follows, after which Patrick’s parents receive him home with rejoicing. They beg him never to leave, but the missionary-minded young man enters ecclesiastical training determined to return to his enslavers and teach them about Christ. His life becomes no less dramatic once he begins to formally evangelize the Emerald Isle. He battles druids and pagan chieftains for the souls of the Irish people on one front and church hierarchy on another.

While I’m still waiting for a full-scale, big-budget treatment of a life that more than warrants it, CBN’s new docudrama, I Am Patrick, offers a wonderful primer on Patrick, separating the man from the myth.

Starring John Rhys-Davies (Raiders of the Lost Ark, The Lord of the Rings), it hit theaters on March 17 and 18 for a special Fathom event and will likely land on a streaming service sometime after.

As Thomas Cahill laid out in his delightful little book, How the Irish Saved Civilization, without Patrick, there may well have been no Christian Ireland. And without Christian Ireland, countless Bible translations and other Christian records would have fallen victim to marauding Vikings.

It would have been nice if I Am Patrick had spent a little more time setting the saint’s life in this larger context and explicitly exploring how God used one faithful shepherd to preserve His Word in the Western world. But even with its tight focus on the two documents Patrick wrote, it’s still an engaging and inspiring tale (with plenty of on-location Irish scenery to boot).

Rather than joining the culture in drinking or debauchery, believers each year could better honor Patrick’s legacy by watching a nicely executed film about this hero of the faith.

CULTURE  Movies & TV

JOHN RHYS-DAVIES AS OLD PATRICK

YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO SIGNAL FOR A HIT-AND-RUN!!

I KNOW, BUT THE CDC SAYS NOT TO TOUCH MY FACE...
I Still Believe doesn’t give characters wide (or quiet) enough range

by Megan Basham

THE ERWIN BROTHERS are back with their first new film after their surprise 2018 hit, I Can Only Imagine. While I Still Believe similarly tells the true story behind a popular Christian song, it isn’t likely to reach I Can Only Imagine’s heights.

Based on the romance between contemporary Christian music star Jeremy Camp and his first wife, Melissa, it features a likable cast (including Gary Sinise), cute rom-com moments, and plenty of good music.

Unfortunately, as star-crossed lovers facing down cancer, the young leads only have two speeds to work with: saintly acceptance of God’s will and melodramatic raging against the dying of the light. It’s either lying prostrate with grief on the hospital room floor or anger-sprinting through the rain—things people in movies do all the time, but people in real life hardly ever do.

One of the best things about the similarly themed Kara Tippetts documentary was that it allowed her to express herself quietly, like her fear when she realized her husband was talking about her in the past tense. We don’t see anything so raw in I Still Believe.

I Still Believe succeeds when it bucks the Christian movie trend of suggesting only miracles and victories make good stories. The Erwins are careful to show God is faithful even when He says “no.” In a prosperity gospel culture, that’s a theme worthy of any filmmaker.

SELECTIVE INCLUSIVITY

A minor character in Onward gets major focus

by Megan Basham

IT WAS ONE OF THE BABYLON BEE’S characteristically barbed headlines that skate so close to reality, it’s hard to tell if it’s satire or commentary: “Disney to Introduce New LGBTQ Superhero Whose Superpower Is Turning Invisible in International Markets.”

That’s exactly what’s happening with Pixar’s latest movie, Onward.

The PG-rated film tells the story of two elf brothers who live in a once-magical land that no longer is. When they discover a spell that can revive their deceased father for one day, they set off to bring enchantment back to their world. Or at least back to their house.

The much-ballyhooed LGBT representation comes from a character so minor she needn’t have a name, though she does for the sake of all that promotional press. Specter the Centaur says, “My girlfriend’s daughter got me pulling my hair out.” That’s it.

But for the Russian release, producers changed the line. Specter, a police officer, says “my partner’s daughter.”

We’ve seen this from Disney before. The studio strikes a progressive pose in English-speaking nations while leaving the “inclusivity” on the cutting room floor in other places.

Onward is fun enough when it focuses on brotherhood. Too often, though, it reaches for the obvious joke and expected message of believing in yourself. The lame PR campaign surrounding Specter is symptomatic of the movie’s overall shortcomings. Like the fantasy world in which the story takes place, Pixar has sacrificed part of its magic to commercial interests.

TOP-GROSSING MOVIES BY YEAR

—SOURCE: IMDB

70 years ago: Cinderella (1950)
60 years ago: Let’s Make Love (1960)
50 years ago: Love Story (1970)
40 years ago: The Empire Strikes Back (1980)
30 years ago: Ghost (1990)
10 years ago: Toy Story 3 (2010)
PREVENTIVE CARE

A new documentary recounts how his son’s drug-related death inspired a pharmacist to investigate his murder—and an industry.

by Marty VanDriel

THE DAY YOU READ THIS, approximately 125 Americans will die of an opioid overdose. One in 5 teenage deaths in 2016 in the United States was related to opioid addiction. Netflix’s new documentary, The Pharmacist, tells one man’s quest to make his son’s drug-related death prevent some of those deaths.

Pharmacist Dan Schneider was a regular family man living on the outskirts of New Orleans, raising his son and daughter. Danny Jr. was a regular teen with regular problems but a bright future. But the Schneiders’ world came crashing down when the police knocked on their door late one night in 1999: Someone shot and killed Danny Jr. in the Lower Ninth Ward, a troubled neighborhood and a common place to buy drugs.

Shock, disbelief, grief—viewers hear and see those raw emotions, through recordings Dan made soon after his son’s death and in more recent interviews. The scenes are poignant and powerful. The Schneiders were not even aware Danny Jr. was using drugs, or that he had been out that night.

Dan Sr. vowed to find out more about his son’s death and investigate his murder after growing disillusioned with the New Orleans Police Department. He developed a massive library of tapes chronicling his quest for justice, which ultimately resulted in a murder conviction.

Dan Sr. returned to normal life as a pharmacist. But he noticed a disturbing trend: Doctors were prescribing OxyContin, a painkilling opioid, far more frequently and in higher doses than seemed necessary. Patients were dying of overdoses.

Schneider tracked down one particular doctor whose practice was little more than a pill mill addicts from hundreds of miles away visited. They camped out for days to get their prescriptions and returned as quickly as possible for refills. When federal agents moved too slowly, Schneider acted on his own. He pushed for the local medical board to remove the doctor’s license and won.

Meanwhile, other pill mills popped up all over the country, as OxyContin manufacturer Purdue Pharma continued marketing, despite evidence that it was far more addictive than initially advertised. Interviews with foul-mouthed but seemingly honest Purdue sales representatives provide more insight into the company’s aggressive marketing and seeming lack of care about the drug’s effects. Eventually Purdue Pharma, after selling an estimated $35 billion of OxyContin, faced lawsuits from states and counties across the country. The company filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in September 2019.

The Pharmacist is a powerful story of how one man’s persistence and courage can make a difference. Viewers should be aware of some blasphemous and foul language.
A HAPPY MEAL IT’S NOT: The recent six-part HBO docuseries McMillions serves up the convoluted, unsavory, but engrossing story of the Monopoly game scam of the 1990s that duped America’s largest fast-food chain out of $24 million.

To boost sales, McDonald’s hired an outside marketing firm to run a game requiring people to collect peel-off Monopoly pieces to win cash and gifts. But in 2001, the FBI began investigating after an anonymous tipster claimed someone was rigging the game. The tip cited multiple winners within one family, with someone named “Uncle Jerry” masterminding the chicanery.

With a McFlurry of colorful backgound and recent interviews, clips, and reenactments, each episode ends with a tease and cliffhanger. The series eventually reveals whether anyone within McDonald’s was culpable and who the ringleader and his cronies were. Not until the final episode do we see how he stole game tokens from a supposedly secure system and finally learn the informant’s identity.

FBI agent Chris Mathews, an affable smart aleck, chattily recounts much of how the fraud transpired and how agents stopped it. He apparently reveled in his role as a young undercover agent cooking up ideas to help solve the crimes, but etiquette lessons would help him tell his tale without profanity.

McDonald’s, more concerned about potential loss of its reputation than the money, worked quietly with the FBI to set up stings to con the cons into confessions. Perhaps because more than two decades have passed since the story broke, all the fraudsters seem quite willing to talk about their roles, including relatives of an Italian mafioso who helped run the ruse but died in a car crash.

A menu of interviews with FBI agents, an assistant U.S. attorney, and the scammers themselves evoke incredulity on many fronts, especially over how so many ordinary people could join the deception. They willingly paid for and accepted purloined game pieces from Uncle Jerry or his cohorts, then smiled about it on national TV when they won, with no evident misgivings.

The overwhelming and underlying rationalization seems to be that McDonald’s was awarding the prizes anyway, so what did it matter if someone “diverted” the money to someone else? Most of the fraudulent winners acknowledge they did wrong but leave the impression the real bummer was getting caught. The mention of any moral standard is glaringly absent.

If viewers can stomach periodic bad language, including multiple F-bombs, watching this entertaining exposé may inspire a gut check, asking yourself what you’d do if someone proffered you a million hamburgled bucks.
Answers to hard problems

How to live: Alec Hill’s *Living in Bonus Time* (IVP, 2020) shows how Hill, president emeritus of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, USA, twice suffered from and survived rare cancers—and how that changed him. Randy Alcorn’s *Giving Is the Good Life: The Unexpected Path to Purpose and Joy* (Tyndale, 2019) shows how generosity pleases God but also enlivens ourselves.

How to die: Johann Christoph Arnold’s *Be Not Afraid: Overcoming the Fear of Death* (Plough, 2014) is a good book for those facing death or the death of a loved one. He quotes Leo Tolstoy: “I like my garden, I like reading a book, I like caressing a child. By dying I lose all this, and therefore I do not wish to die, and I fear death.” But Tolstoy prays for “the desire to do the will of God, to give myself to him in my present state and in any possible future state—then the more my desires have changed the less I fear death, and the less does death exist for me.”

How to keep others from dying prematurely: Wayne Grudem’s *What the Bible Says About Abortion, Euthanasia, and End-of-Life Medical Decisions* (Crossway, 2020) succinctly summarizes Biblical teaching. Grudem exegetes the controversial passage in Exodus 21 that gives severe penalties for harming a woman and her unborn child. He says some mistranslate verses 22-25 to suggest that the death of an unborn child is no big deal, thus imitating a provision in the law code of Hammurabi, written in Babylonia around 1760 b.c. That’s an error: “the moral and civil laws in the Bible often differed from those of the ancient cultures around Israel.”

General apologetics: Rebecca McLaughlin’s *Confronting Christianity* (Crossway, 2019) is a good book to give to millennials who believe Christianity crushes diversity, causes violence, denigrates women, condones slavery, hates gays, and is soft regarding suffering or hard regarding hell. *Unquestioned Answers* by Jeff Myers (David C. Cook, 2020) dissects contemporary Christian clichés such as “it’s not my place to judge” and “Jesus was a social justice warrior.”

Science: Given the improbability of Darwinian evolution, Neil deGrasse Tyson and other TV scientists speculate that we are living in a simulation created by some advanced civilization: He put the odds at 50-50 that “our entire existence is a program on someone else’s hard drive.” Essays by 14 authors in *The Story of the Cosmos* (Harvest House, 2019) undermine that weird theory: The universe is so incredibly big that only a God who is—as children sing—“so big, so strong, and so mighty” could bring about such vastness. (For more on this question, see “Stimulating simulations,” March 30, 2019.)

The Bible: My favorite of many that publishers have sent during the past year is the *ESV Literary Study Bible* (Crossway, 2020 with new typesetting—first published in 2007). It focuses on the Bible as a unified 66 books with a protagonist, God. Studying Biblical style does not mean suggesting the Bible is fictional or denying its divine inspiration. It means observing: “The general preference of biblical authors is for concrete vocabulary. ... God is portrayed as light and rock and thunder. Thunder is a sharp knife. Living the godly life is like putting on a garment or suit of armor. Heaven is a landscape of jewels. ... The general tendency of the Bible is toward everyday realism. The Bible displays the flaws of even its best characters (Oliver Cromwell famously said that the biblical writers paint their characters ‘warts and all’).”

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Books from Christian publishers

by Marvin Olasky

How to govern: Michael Wagenman’s *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper* (Lexham, 2019) is a good introduction to the theologian, journalist, and politician who scolded the Dutch Conservative Party for abandoning principles “in exchange for the short-term rewards of political power.” He traced “a failure of the church’s ultimate allegiance” back to the Constantinian conversation.

The problem of evil: Ronnie Campbell Jr.’s *Worldviews & the Problem of Evil* (Lexham, 2019) compares explanations of evil in naturalism, pantheism, panentheism, and theism. He shows that any troubling difficulties within a theistic understanding are much more troubling in the other worldviews: Christianity offers a God who loves, acts, and defeats evil.
And in the Vienna Woods the Trees Remain by Elisabeth Asbrink: A stash of 500 letters between members of an Austrian Jewish family survived World War II. Asbrink uses them to tell the Ullmann story—parents trapped in Vienna, their 13-year-old son Otto sent to safety in Sweden. In the early days, the Ullmanns expected reunification. They wrote about everyday life and peppered their letters with expressions of love and admonishments to be good and work hard. As conditions in Vienna worsened, the parents hid their circumstances from Otto—and he hid from them the rising anti-Semitism in Sweden. Asbrink’s thorough research and interviews—including with the Nazi-sympathizing Ikea founder who befriended Otto—allows her to describe what parents and son left unsaid. Hostility to Christians seeps in from time to time.

Cold Warriors: Writers Who Waged the Literary Cold War by Duncan White: White documents a time when literature was so important that both the Soviet Union and the United States used writers and books as Cold War weapons. He tells in rich detail the stories of writers like Stephen Spender, Ernest Hemingway, Mary McCarthy, Boris Pasternak, and Graham Greene. The book begins with the Spanish Civil War, where George Orwell and Arthur Koestler first saw the Stalinist left in action. Though the book at times becomes a general history of the Cold War, it’s most interesting when it focuses on the writers who took sides and those who found themselves without a side: They abhorred America’s civil rights record and Vietnam policy, but also recoiled from Soviet purges and crackdowns on dissent.

A Prayer for Orion by Katherine James: Author Katherine James begins this heartrending account of her son’s heroin addiction with a phone call from her son’s friend: “Hey, we can’t wake Sweetboy up. ... He’s breathing, but he’s really blue and he won’t wake up.” As a writer, James offers an unflinching portrayal of addiction, and the fear and devastation it leaves in its wake. Since she writes as a Christian, she also shows the many ways, both large and small, that God enters into the mess. James jumps around in time, so we see Sweetboy as a small child, a curious kid, and an addict. We see a family engaged in deep conversations with other Lost Boys while missing warning signs from their son. Intense and emotionally powerful, the book offers hope that God hears the prayers of the brokenhearted.

Grace Will Lead Us Home by Jennifer Berry Hawes: When 21-year-old white supremacist Dylann Roof murdered nine African Americans in Charleston while they prayed at church, it shocked the city and nation. Reporter Jennifer Berry Hawes tells the story of the shooting, the police manhunt that followed, and the federal trial. She goes behind the scenes to show how the shooting brought white and black Charleston together for a time. It also opened up new wounds, especially after some family members spoke words of forgiveness to an unrepentant Roof. Hawes fleshes out the trial record with interviews of survivors and others. The result: a detailed accounting of how the tragedy played out in the lives of individuals and institutions. Christian readers will appreciate Hawes’ respectful treatment of the Christian faith in the lives of victims and survivors.
Resurrection reads

Books to help children prepare for Easter
by Rachel Lynn Aldrich

He Is Risen: Rocks Tell the Story of Easter by Patti Rokus: Though the format of this picture book may be surprising at first, Rokus' simple language and elegant rock designs tell the story of Christ's death and resurrection in a fresh and effective way. The book's pages feature photographs of rock arrangements on a black background, each depicting events from the Passion Week. Rokus pairs these scenes with short sentences and reference verses, keeping the format uncomplicated and easy for children to follow. The tactile textures and colors of Rokus' rock illustrations will appeal to children and spark their imaginations, leaving space for readers to connect to the story in their own way. This quiet retelling allows the reader to focus on the magnitude of a story that has been oft repeated. (Ages 4-8)

Miracle Man: The Story of Jesus by John Hendrix: The first half of this book focuses on the miracles of Jesus, and the second on His death and resurrection. The bright illustrations pop off the page—but the pictures aren't the only art. The words themselves help illuminate the story as well as tell it, weaving in and out of the drawings, with colors and styles changing to support the narrative. Hendrix's account of Jesus' life taps into universal themes of healing and restoration. He goes to great lengths to defamiliarize the story, making it fresh and new even for those who have heard it repeatedly in the church. This book gives the broader context of Christ's life, helping children better understand the importance of how the story ends. (Ages 5-9)

Benjamin's Box by Melody Carlson: Families can use this book alongside "resurrection eggs," a set of plastic Easter eggs with small items inside them that help tell the Easter story. Carlson introduces readers to Benjamin, a young boy living in Jerusalem during the first century, and then tells how Benjamin's story intersects with Christ's—from helping serve the Last Supper in the upper room to seeing the events of the crucifixion unfold. Along the way, Benjamin collects mementos to help him remember these amazing events, such as a coin from Judas, a nail from the cross, and a stone from the garden where Jesus rose again. Reading the Book with a set of resurrection eggs will create a fun and tactile way for children to experience the Easter season. (Ages 4-8)

On That Easter Morning by Mary Joslin: Colorful illustrations pair with compelling storytelling in this book to lead young readers from the last week of Christ's life on earth through His resurrection. Joslin's dialogue and descriptions bring the Easter story down to ground level with a straightforward account that intentionally taps into the emotional responses of the characters involved. Joslin also helps children understand historically and theologically important connections, like how the Last Supper was a celebration of Passover. The illustrations are unique and beautiful, ranging from a simple and somber watercolor for the scene on Golgotha to a garden filled with brightly patterned trees on Easter morning. This simple picture book is an excellent way to help young children connect to the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. (Ages 5-8)

Afterword

Helen Haidele's Journey to the Cross: The Complete Easter Story for Young Readers (Zondervan, 2001) would work well as a family read-aloud leading up to Easter. The story includes narratives of each day in Jesus' last week of life before His crucifixion, concluding with the resurrection and the events of Pentecost. Haidele carefully works through the story's key tenets of Christian theology, helping children engage emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually with the events and meaning of the Passion Week. She also incorporates references for parallel Scripture reading, memory verses, and discussion questions, as well as sidebars with historical context and Old Testament connections that make it an ideal resource for preparing for Easter as a family. With beautiful illustrations by father-and-son duo David and Paul Haidele, Journey to the Cross is a thorough and accessible Easter devotional.

For families with older children, Rob Burkhart's On the Road to the Cross: Experience Easter With Those Who Were There (Abingdon Press, 2016) offers reflections on the side characters in the Easter story. Chapters correspond with the traditional weeks of Lent leading up to Easter weekend. Each chapter begins with a fictional exploration of how the Easter story may have affected witnesses like Malchus, Pilate, Simon of Cyrene, and others. Devotional readings explore the lessons these characters can teach us about following Christ and include a personal story from the author's life that further illustrates the theme.
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CALVIN COLLEGE PROFESSOR JAMES K.A. SMITH, 49, grew up in Canada and recently became a U.S. citizen. He is the author of numerous books, including You Are What You Love, Awaiting the King, and (in 2019) On the Road With Saint Augustine: A Real-World Spirituality for Restless Hearts. Here are edited excerpts of our discussion.

You’ve written that you’ve been estranged from your dad since you were 13, and haven’t seen him for 28 years. Your stepfather also disappeared. What effect did that have on you?
That partly explains why hearing the good news of a Father who chose me and came looking for me was very poignant. It’s one thing to be intellectually convinced of that, and another to make it the story you carry in your bones.

You started editing a magazine as a teenager.
Freestyle BMX biking, the kind of thing you see on the X-Games, was my religion. I actually published my own little BMX magazine. It was very much about belonging, a bit like what Augustine was looking for in the Manichaeans when he joined them. I still have a BMX bike, but I’m not so tempted by that cult quite as much anymore.

You quote Augustine saying, “To desire the Age of Grace is the beginning of grace”—and coming to the end of your self-sufficiency is the first revelation. When and how did that happen to you?
Before I became a Christian at 18, I had a kind of hubris and pride about what I was going to accomplish. I’ve gained an appreciation for the limits of my own self-sufficiency. Christians can fall into the trap of imagining that we can manage our spiritual lives.

I had a hard time taking a Sabbath. What’s your experience?
It was a long time in my Christian walk before I really understood what Sabbath was. That’s such an Augustinian idea because it means resting enough so you don’t think God’s depending on you.

Arthur Brooks has observed that both trust fund babies and welfare recipients often feel inadequate because they don’t have “earned success.” He’s right, but do any of us earn our success?
A verse that’s always lived with me is from 1 Corinthians: “By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.”

Our work, God’s grace?
One of Augustine’s favorite verses is also from 1 Corinthians: “What do you have that you did not receive?” So my creative talents and capacities are gifts, yet I’m called to be a steward and use those gifts. There’s a big difference in acting out of gratitude as opposed to doing it out of performance and imagining my actions earn me dignity, and worse: that I imagine I can earn the love of God. It’s a fine line to dance, but a really significant one.

You write that we expect to find fulfillment from people looking at us: How many “likes” is enough, how many followers will make us feel valued? What if we’re wired not to be liked but to be loved, and not by many but to be loved by One?
This is Augustine’s important intuition, the in-built hunger and desire of the human heart. As he famously put it, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

We search for alternatives.
As human beings we chase a million alternative ways of trying to satisfy that in-built hunger and longing to be seen and known by God. We keep trying to satisfy it by being seen and known and liked and clicked by everybody else. That’s doomed to disappointment and failure because human attention is so fickle, whereas God’s covenant attention, love, is of course the one friendship you can never lose.

You write about Andre Agassi’s alienation from a father who forced him to play tennis. That culture of ambition is certainly present in America now, but is there also a culture of no ambition: We don’t want to direct children in any way, since they must “find their own bliss.” Which tendency do you think is dominant now?
Yes, the dominant default cult of our age is the cult of autonomy. We imagine, “I am my own master and I get to decide what the good is.” Or people say, “You do you.” That comes with its own burden to make something of yourself.

It looks like a hands-off approach.
But it still is part of high expectations that you should now forge your utter uniqueness. Parents expect you to be successful in forging your own identity. Christian communities can sometimes confuse ambition with arrogance, and risk-averse comfort with humility. Sometimes I wish the young Christians that I teach were more ambitious, →
not just to make something of themselves but to live into the fullness of the gifts that God has called them to.

You write that even aged Augustine was tempted to get attention and adoration. And to receive the praise of men. But he says he won’t avoid that problem or temptation by not doing a good job: He’ll try to live into doing what he’s called to do for the sake of God, and learn how to receive the praise of men well. I would much rather see people risking that than just staying safe.

If Augustine still yearned for adoration, who then can be saved?

Happily, our salvation doesn’t depend on the purity of our intention. Part of the grace of God in my life will be the grace God gives me to be honest about that conflicted nature of my own ambition. If you ask Augustine, “Hey, are you writing Confessions to move people to God? Or are you writing so people pay attention to you?” His answer is, “Yes.” It’s always a conflicted mix, but he admits that and knows that God receives him, forgives him, and is bending his heart more toward what God desires for him.

He realizes that he’s posting on Facebook about his upcoming book on humility.

If somebody like Augustine can admit he still struggles with those things, I guess maybe God still loves me too since I struggle with those things. I love that Augustine has no hypocrisy—not because he is without guile, but because he’s honest about his own continued struggles. Better than pretended purity is his acknowledgment, “Pride lurks even in good works.”

He also refers to lunatic lust—and you write that promiscuity reduces us to organs and glands as a perverted way to feed a soul hunger. How do churches deal with that, since it is so rampant?

An Augustinian analysis begins with the realization that a disordered spiritual hunger motivates that. Lust is disordered love, so to re-apprentice our hungers we need to change our habits and adopt different rhythms and routines. We can live in community, worship together, and pursue spiritual disciplines and fellowship together.

Can we easily fall into rituals that don’t actually change us, but just let us feel good about ourselves without going through Augustinian thinking?

In Confessions, all of his intellectual convictions have been changed by Book 7, but in Book 8 he still confesses he doesn’t have the transformed will that’s needed. Few people think their way into holiness. We need to create porches where we can forge relationships with our neighbors that will help them taste and see, so Christianity becomes more plausible for them.

Are many churches also missing the mark internally? You write, “We have created youth ministry that confuses extroversion with faithfulness.”

Yes, we think entertaining young people will keep them in the building, as if keeping them in the building is keeping them in Christ. They’re not the same thing. The template for a youth pastor is this incredibly perky, energetic, rah-rah cheerleader for Jesus. If a young person is more contemplative, or struggling with doubt, he’ll start to conclude, I can never be that kind of person, so I couldn’t be a Christian.

You’re now the father of four.

It’s made me think one of the most powerful expressions of witness to God’s covenant faithfulness is being a father who stays.
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New albums accompany the Easter season
by Arsenio Orteza

New releases by the jazz double bassist Adam Booker, the late organist McNeil Robinson, and the Moscow Synodal Choir and Russian National Orchestra mark the arrival of what’s shaping up to be an inspiring and unusually diverse soundtrack to the Easter season.

The 13 selections constituting Adam Booker’s Seven Last Words (Shifting Paradigms) alternate between mournful David Heyes compositions for solo double bass, titled after Christ’s utterances from the cross (“Woman, Behold Your Son,” “I Thirst,” etc.), and sprightly, post-bop Booker originals for jazz trio and occasional trumpet and flugelhorn, titled after sections of traditional Christian liturgies (“Kyrie,” “Gloria,” “Credo,” “Agnus Dei”).

The effect of this juxtaposition of the sorrowful and the celebratory is akin to that of two parallel universes breaking into each other. There is, however, one problem: Either Booker or a Shifting Paradigm proofreader has bungled two of the titles, turning “Father, Forgive Them for They Know Not What They Do” into “Father, Forgive Them for They Know Not What to Do” and “Father, into Thy Hands I Command My Spirit” into “Father, into Thy Hands I Command Thy Spirit,” inadvertently giving new meaning to the expression “close enough for jazz.”

McNeil Robinson recorded his Stations of the Cross: Organ Improvisations (Delos) on the organ of New York City’s Episcopal Church of St. Mary the Virgin in March 2006, nine years before his death at the age of 72. Based on 14 crucial moments associated with Christ’s Passion (beginning with His sentencing and ending with the laying of His body in the tomb), the pieces find Robinson improvising on musical themes provided him by the American composer Ned Rorem.

An unidentified female narrator announces each station, freeing listeners from having to follow along in the accompanying booklet (though it’s well worth reading) and to make connections of their own between Robinson’s emotionally wide-ranging musical dramatizations and events such as “The Cross is laid on Simon of Cyrene” and “Jesus is nailed on the cross.” (Furiously roiling, the latter is the album’s most unmistakably programmatic piece.)

Richard Chartres is the narrator on the Moscow Synodal Choir and Russian National Orchestra’s magnificent new recording of Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev’s St. Matthew Passion (English Version) (Melodiya). A retired Anglican bishop, Chartres sounds a lot like the late Paul Scofield and is therefore ideal for declaiming the King James verses running throughout an oratorio that skillfully blends various Western traditions and is increasingly perceived as one of the 21st century’s finest large-scale sacred works.

Additionally, the opera luminaries Agunda Kulaeva (“Jesus at Gethsemane”), Nikolai Didenko (“Peter’s Denial. The End of Judas”), Olga Peretyako (“Earthquake. The Virgin Mary’s Lament”), and Dmitry Korchak (tenor, “Jesus Arrested,” “Sealing the Stone”) are equally well suited to their roles. But it’s the choir and the orchestra, conducted by Alfeyev himself, that drive and shape the longest stretches. And it’s they therefore to whom most of the credit belongs.
Promising signs

Noteworthy new and recent releases
by Arsenio Orteza

Changes by Justin Bieber: This musically slight, blue-eyed R&B will be of primary interest to those who care about Justin Bieber—his ups, his downs, his marriage, his faith. To this end, the lyrics paint a fairly encouraging picture. Only three of the 16 songs contain anything lewd or crude, and in two of those cases it’s guest rappers doing the offending. Of course, it was Bieber who did the inviting. So say that he still has some changing to do and that the title track’s spoken outro, “People change, circumstances change, / but God always remains the same,” is a promising sign—and that the verdict on which is more annoying, his flaunting of his tattoos or his flaunting of Auto-Tune, is still out.

All the Pleasures of the World (Deluxe) by Crayon Fields: The melancholy folk-pop of these Aussies might sound like something extracted from a time capsule buried in the ‘60s, yet there’s nothing hermetic about it, not with Geoffrey O’Connor’s breathy vocals and Chris Hung’s twinkling glockenspiel mapping out a spaciousness rendered luminous by judiciously administered reverb. All of which is to say that even though this album first came out 11 years ago, it doesn’t sound dated, making it ripe for discovery by the many who missed it the first time around. The few who didn’t miss it get rewarded as well, namely by three non-alternate-version bonus tracks as good as any of the official 10 and by two bonus covers that prove there’s nothing necessarily hermetic about ABBA or Roxette.

Texas Sun by Khuangbin & Leon Bridges: Here’s a curiosity: a four-song EP in which a guitar-bass-drums trio specializing in sparse, border-town psychedelia and an up-and-coming soul singer specializing in smooth, retro soul explore and test the limits of their compatibility. Even curiouser: If you like what they achieve together, you’ll like what they’ve already achieved on their own even more. Not that this mesh never takes. It’s just that about half of it sounds more tentative than a musical marriage made in heaven should. Where it gels the most is the nearly five-minute funky space reincarnation “C-Side.” Where it gels the deepest is the nearly seven-minute “Conversion,” Bridges’ brooding testimony to the power of God’s grace and to the joys of repurposing Isaac Watts’ “At the Cross.”

Shout About Love by John Swaim: The CD “album notes” in their entirety read as follows: “This is my latest CD release and you should buy one!” And you should! Is Swaim gospel? Texas swing? Country? Comedy? The answer is all of the above—pressed down, shaken together, and running over into songs that illustrate why he calls himself a “musicianary.” The cleverest refrain finds him “hank, hank, hank-in’ for heaven” while recalling the Hanks Williams and Thompson. The wisest verse finds him realizing that he’s his own biggest hurdle in the race he has to run (“Over Me”). He’s quite a storyteller too. His obviously unscripted spoken introduction to “Union Gospel Tabernacle” sounds like an outtake from Ken Burns’ Country Music that should’ve been left in.

The recent death of Joseph Shabalala has put Ladysmith Black Mambazo, the South African a cappella vocal group that he founded in 1960 at the age of 18 and led until he turned it over to his sons in 2008, back in the spotlight. Frankly, the spotlight should never have left it. After being featured on Paul Simon’s Graceland, the group, which had already recorded over 24 albums, became an international sensation. (The fascination with all things South African that developed alongside the world’s accelerating opposition to apartheid didn’t hurt either.)

The group’s membership numbers have fluctuated between six and 12 over the years, usually settling in at around eight or nine, with at least 20 different singers having come, gone, or stayed. But the Ladysmith Black Mambazo sound—a creamy, instantly recognizable concoction derived from the Zulu mbube and isicathamiya singing styles—remained (and remains) consistent. The main difference between the Joseph Shabalala–led group’s 1987 Warner Bros. album Shaka Zulu and the Tommy Shabalala–led group’s 2017 rerecording Shaka Zulu Revisited: 30th Anniversary Celebration is that the latter adds an 11th cut: “This Little Light of Mine.”

Joseph Shabalala didn’t become a Christian until his mid-30s. But once he did, gospel themes abounded. Even non-Zulu speakers oblivious to the meaning of 1985’s Ulwandile Olunc-gwele (“Red Sea”) couldn’t misinterpret the cover art’s baptismal imagery or the “Amens” and “Alleluia’s” concluding almost every track. And although Shabalala described his group’s message as one of “Peace, Love and Harmony,” what really came (and comes) through is joy.

Encore
“Putting a Band-Aid on a jugular vein”

War and unrest complicate battling a COVID-19 outbreak in the Middle East

RAN’S RAPIDLY EXPANDING coronavirus outbreak threatens not only Iranians but also a uniquely vulnerable population—the Middle East’s millions of refugees.

By early March Iran’s coronavirus death toll was the second highest outside China. A surge in cases across the Middle East—including Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, and the Gulf states—traces back to Iran. Neighboring states quickly moved to close borders and cut off travel to the country, while aid workers turned their attention to protecting the region’s victims of war and displacement.

At least 12 million refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) live between Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey—countries with ties to Iran via shared borders, military alliances, common religious observances, and frequent travel. Iran itself hosts nearly 1 million refugees, mostly from Afghanistan.

Within the last six months, new fighting between Turkey and Syrian forces has forced more than 1 million from their homes. Of 900,000 people displaced since December due to fighting in Idlib, more than half are children. The border with Turkey has been closed to them, and with the departure of most large relief groups, organized help is lacking.

Subzero temperatures and snow this winter made a difficult situation worse. Skeleton aid crews worked with locals to secure wind-whipped, non-winterized tents. They delivered food staples to families without cookstoves or heat, and children in flip-flops trudged through snow. At least seven children died due to the cold. Another 35 children, at least, died in airstrikes and ground attacks.

“We took in some sleeping bags and supplies,” reported Steve Gumaer, president of Michigan-based Partners Relief and Development, “but everything in this crisis feels like putting a Band-Aid on a jugular vein.”

Enter COVID-19, the respiratory disease that the novel coronavirus causes.

Following basic advice to protect against the disease—avoiding people who may be infected, stepping up hand-washing and personal hygiene, seeking medical care if symptoms occur—becomes difficult to impossible in the substandard conditions of a tent camp. “If coronavirus gets into these weakened populations, the death toll among the hungry and diminished people is going to be high,” said Gumaer.

Other obstacles await aid groups and world health officials. Besides open warfare and border closings, government upheaval and months of street protests have hampered banking in Lebanon and Iraq, the two main areas for staging relief work in Syria.

Limits on deposits and withdrawals mean workers sometimes must backpack cash into the region to purchase supplies. Lebanon this month faces key deadlines to repay billions of dollars in Eurobonds. A default, which seems likely, could lead to the collapse of its banking system.

Small, agile relief groups persist despite recent obstacles and the looming threat of COVID-19.

Partners Relief’s Gumaer was in Lebanon in March and sent a team into Syria’s Idlib province on March 4, along with equipment and supplies to outfit a “hospitaler,” a container-built mobile hospital designed to treat trauma and diseases in the war-torn region. Working with a church-based NGO in Syria, the hospitaler medical team will include surgeons and a pediatrician, all prepped to deal with COVID-19.

“We have good people and seasoned doctors because they are all out of employment as their hospitals have been destroyed in Syria,” said Gumaer.

Other groups also continue. “We have not changed our ministry process,” said Tom Atema, co-founder of Heart for Lebanon, a group working among Syrian refugees. The North Carolina–based group works through local churches to administer aid and services, and “we always have had a level of health and security and safety measures in place” to avoid the spread of diseases like COVID-19, he said.

By early March two cases had been diagnosed in Bekaa Valley camps in Lebanon, but Atema said work there continues: “We believe Heart for Lebanon was born in a crisis to help the people in crisis unconditionally. It’s during these crises that we have the unprecedented opportunity to share and show the love of Jesus Christ.”
Meet the team, hear from special guests, and find a listener community you didn’t even know you had.

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The once-full bracket of Democratic presidential candidates narrows to
MADNESS

a pair of contenders and a question about what makes a moderate

by Jamie Dean in South Carolina
On the morning after a bruising Democratic debate in Charleston, S.C., former Vice President Joe Biden stood in the fellowship hall of a local Baptist church with a dark smudge on his forehead.

It was Ash Wednesday, and Biden had dropped by a Catholic church earlier, where a priest applied ashes in the shape of a cross—a traditional symbol of repentance at the beginning of Lent. “Remember that you are dust,” a priest often says during the service. “And to dust you shall return.”

In the Democratic primaries, Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., was surging and Biden was losing at an embarrassing clip. The candidate was on the verge of a crushing end to his long political career.

On this rainy morning in Charleston, Biden sounded more nostalgic than enthusiastic at the pastors’ breakfast at Mt. Moriah Missionary Baptist Church. He told longtime Congressman James Clyburn, D.-S.C., “Even if I’m not around, you still have a lot of work to do.”

It turned out Biden still had a lot of work to do as well.

Three days later, he vanquished Sanders in the South Carolina primary. The win was a game-changer for his campaign. The landslide victory set him up for a spree of wins on Super Tuesday, and the lagging candidate raced past Sanders in the delegate count.

Longtime political analyst Henry Olsen predicted, “The nomination is Biden’s to lose.”

Biden’s surge is undeniable, but it comes with a caveat: Though Biden has endured plenty of heat in his primary run, he hasn’t faced the bright light a two-man race—and possibly a general election—will bring. Even for a former vice president, that’s a new kind of spotlight.

For now, the shape of the Democratic race reveals a battle for the identity of the Democratic Party.

Primary results show Democrats leaning away from Sanders’ socialist headwinds, but they also raise questions for Biden. He rejects Sanders’ democratic socialism, but his own positions show he’s not the Democratic moderate some media outlets suggest. Meanwhile, how will he hold up under the intense scrutiny blowing his way?

It’s a critical question, since history shows even the strongest campaigns can become dust in the wind.

Neither candidate plays the 1970s classic “Dust in the Wind” at rallies, but Biden’s campaign does favor easy listening.

On the night before South Carolina’s primary, Biden shook hands with supporters at a rally in Spartanburg, S.C., as Steve Winwood’s 1980s soft rock tune “Higher Love” played in the background.

It was music well suited for a crowd pushing 50 and older. For more than an hour, Biden gave long answers to short questions, and at one point told the sometimes-distracted crowd, “Look, I know this is boring, but it’s important.”

A few hours earlier, at a rally for Sanders, most of the crowd in Columbia, S.C., looked 40 and younger. Giant speakers blared the 2009 rock anthem “Uprising”: “Interchanging mind control / Come let the revolution take its toll.”

Before Sanders took the stage, a hip-hop duo from Austin, Texas, freestyled campaign lyrics while the crowd cheered: “We’re like Robin Hood, and we’re ready for war: We take from the rich and give to the poor.”
Donald Trump’s rallies still draw now, the vigor hasn’t always translated into votes as the bulk of the primaries unfold.

Back at Mt. Moriah Missionary Baptist Church in Charleston, the crowd of congregants from local black churches politely welcomed Biden and other Democratic candidates, but they held their warmest applause for when the host acknowledged the local pastors at the breakfast.

Still, black voters overwhelmingly picked Biden: In South Carolina, he won over 60 percent of African American votes. David Cakley, a member of Mt. Moriah, said he preferred Biden, and worried about Sanders. “I think he’s too far left,” he said. “His programs sound outlandish and unaffordable.”

“Outlandish and unaffordable” doesn’t make a great campaign slogan, and Biden will likely try to make such words stick to Sanders. But Biden faces questions about how affordable his plans are too.

He says he doesn’t favor Medicare for All, but he does propose an expansion of the Affordable Care Act (also known as Obamacare) that his campaign estimates would cost $750 billion over a decade. Biden proposes a $1.7 trillion climate change plan, and a higher education plan that would cost $750 billion a year. (The plan would include offering two years of free community college tuition.)

A Vox editorial praising Biden declared that if elected, “Biden would be the most progressive Democratic nominee in history.” While
Biden falls to the right of Sanders (who estimates his Medicare for All plan would cost at least $30 trillion over 10 years), he still lands to the left of President Barack Obama.

If the discussion of Sanders’ democratic socialism sucked the air out of the room for Democrats worried he’s too extreme to win a general election against Trump, Biden still must explain how we would fill the void in a palatable way, while facing a challenger with a formidable style.

At the breakfast in Charleston, Biden didn’t talk much about how he would pay for his plans, but he seemed at ease in the crowd of churchgoers from around the state. He mentioned his Catholicism and quoted from the book of James: “Faith without works is dead.”

But in the same state where a priest had just applied ashes to Biden’s forehead, another priest had denied communion to the candidate just a few months before.

Robert Morey, a Catholic priest in Florence, S.C., told a local newspaper he withheld communion from Biden during a late October visit because of Biden’s pro-abortion views: “Any public figure who advocates for abortion places himself or herself outside church teaching.”

During his decades as a senator from Delaware, Biden held a position that was once more common in the party: Abortion is a tragedy, but it should remain legal. For decades, the Democratic platform said abortion should be “safe, legal, and rare.” In 2012, party leaders said they supported “safe and legal abortion, regardless of ability to pay.”

In 2016, Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton called for the repeal of the Hyde Amendment—a measure that forbids federal funding for most abortions—and the party platform followed.

Biden didn’t publicly go along. At a public forum last June, he said he still supported Hyde. The backlash was swift: Pro-abortion groups and the other major Democratic candidates lambasted him for a position the party held for decades. Within 24 hours, Biden caved: He said he now supported approving federal funds for abortions. For Kristen Day, the longtime executive director of Democrats for Life, Biden’s reversal was an “extreme disappointment.” Day
Day says the candidates’ hard line on abortion is distressing. In a hotel conference room near downtown Charleston during the week before the South Carolina primary, Day led a press conference for the handful of journalists who showed up. She said Democratic candidates are alienating millions of pro-life Democratic voters.

A few other pro-life Democrats were on hand, including Terrisa Bukovinac (see “Unconventional ally,” Feb. 15, 2020). Bukovinac clutched a model of a 22-week-old unborn baby. The lifelike model had fully formed fingers, toes, ears, and facial features, and it felt heavy. (The pregnancy website What to Expect says a 22-week-old unborn baby is about the weight and length of a 1-pound bag of sugar.)

A few hours later, Senate Democrats defeated a bill to ban abortion after 20 weeks. They also blocked a bill that would have required physicians to extend life-saving medical care to babies who survive abortions.

Harriet Bradley, head of the Georgia chapter of Democrats for Life, told reporters she knows pro-life Democrats leaving the party over abortion: “They will leave for that one issue because the life of the unborn is so important to them. It’s important to me.”

The next few weeks will be crucially important for Biden and Sanders.

Though Sanders wasn’t far behind Biden in the delegate count after Super Tuesday, he faced another round of primaries with uphill battles over the coming weeks. Sanders likely would need major victories in at least a few states to regain his momentum. (After the massive turnaround on Super Tuesday, Biden shouldn’t think another reversal is impossible, but the path looks tough for Sanders.)

As the heat cranks up on Biden, he’ll likely face questions about lapses during some of his recent public appearances. He stumbled when he quoted the Declaration of Independence, and he also referenced “Super Thursday.” (Biden has acknowledged he struggles with a stuttering problem, and that could be affecting his speech in some cases.) He should also anticipate questions about Ukraine and impeachment.

In the meantime, talk of a contested convention has grown quieter, though it’s still mathematically possible one of the candidates may not reach the 1,991 delegates needed to secure the nomination ahead of the Democratic National Convention in July.

Still, Sanders didn’t appear to be winding down. His supporters are intensely loyal, and some have already discussed strategy for the convention if Biden doesn’t lock down the nomination ahead of the national meeting.

At the Columbia, S.C., rally, Sanders supporter Derrick Reeves tapped into the devotion many of Sanders’ followers express: “He’s the only candidate who’s ever really spoken to me, and I’m 42 years old.” If the party does head to a contested convention, Reeves said he’d like to go: “I’d like to see millions of us showing up and demanding a legitimate candidate.”

It’s the kind of dramatic showdown most Democratic leaders likely hope to avoid. Going into a general election battle against Trump, Democrats want to ditch an unofficial slogan that’s dogged them through the primary season: Divided we stand.
A DISEASE LIKE NO OTHER

Antibiotics stop symptoms, but a cure for leprosy’s long-standing stigma remains out of reach

BY KIM HENDERSON
IN BATON ROUGE, LA.
patients who spent the bulk of their lives at the now-closed 350-acre leprosarium witnessed one of the biggest medical breakthroughs of the 20th century: a drug that failed to work on tuberculosis could arrest, sometimes even reverse, leprosy’s symptoms. Even so, erasing the stigma of the disease remains a challenge almost 80 years later.

That’s obvious outside the elevator at the Ochsner Cancer Center in Baton Rouge. Even though the second floor is leased to the national epicenter of leprosy care, there’s no “L” word on the wall directory. Instead, visitors search for the National Hansen’s Disease Clinical Center, a name change initiated in the 1940s that represents much more than an attempt to honor a scientist.

Jackson’s across-the-aisle pro-life work gets attention when she appears at events like the March for Life in Washington, D.C., but valuing the vulnerable was an issue in her Catholic-heavy state long before Jackson, or even Roe v. Wade, made the news. For more than a century, another pro-life issue—human dignity—has been making waves behind the levees.

Where I grew up in north Mississippi, talk of a unique colony in Louisiana sometimes crossed state lines and made it into conversations. Leprosy? Really? Yes, with a quarantined community that only in 2015 lost its last members. But

along the Louisiana coastline, fresh water collides with the sea to form brackish bayous, the kind that breed blue crabs the size of a man’s hand and the marsh hens of John J. Audubon prints. But that salty gumbo isn’t the only improbable mix in Louisiana. In January, pro-life Democrat John Bel Edwards began a second term as governor of the red state, and state legislator Katrina Jackson, another Democrat, is helping to defend a pro-life bill she authored, the Unsafe Abortion Protection Act, from a challenge at the U.S. Supreme Court.

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knees, foot wounds, and spots where eyebrows used to be. A Houston hospital finally performed the test that uncovered the real cause of burns he suffered as a short-order cook. Leprosy’s nerve damage had left his fingers numb to pain.

“What’s going to happen with me in the future?” he recalls thinking as the pronouncement sunk in.

Betsy Wilks is a social worker with the National Hansen’s Disease Program (NHDP) who’s “offered a lot of Kleenex” at the Baton Rouge clinic. She says 14 years of misdiagnosed symptoms cost Simon dearly: “With early treatment, he would likely not have the handicaps he has to deal with now.”

It’s fitting that some of the staff interacting with Simon wear the tan uniforms of the U.S. Public Health Service, the little-known branch of the uniformed services that found a cure for this little-known disease. Since most American doctors have only encountered leprosy as a paragraph in a medical textbook, the Baton Rouge team conducts a yearly slate of seminars to teach signs of its slow-manifesting symptoms. Speakers clarify limbs don’t “drop off,” but, instead, tissue contracts when fingers and toes are repeatedly injured, producing natural amputation. They explain that an antibiotic triumvirate—dapsone, rifampin, and clofazimine—halts the disease and renders those infected noncontagious.

But if natural immunity means 95 percent of the population couldn’t get leprosy if they tried, and U.S. cases of infection seem to center on the Coastal South, why the push to educate a family practitioner in Oklahoma?

“One reason is a community of Marshallese living in the Enid area,” Wilks answers. “In the Marshall Islands, leprosy is endemic.”

Endemic may describe conditions for a fraction of the globe—pockets of Micronesia, Brazil, India, and sub-Saharan Africa—but with fewer than a thousand patients treated for leprosy in the United States last year, a budget of $13.7 million to run the Baton Rouge clinic and 11 ambulatory ones across the country seems substantial. Why do patients like Simon pay nothing for their treatment or medicines and get free trans-
end up in a cemetery tucked away in the back corner of its grounds. Even with Schexnnyder’s schematic and an open gate, though, finding the right headstone is hard. Each of some 750 government-issued markers bears a patient ID number and a death date, but the name curved along the top may have been changed to protect the families left behind. That was a common practice, according to Schexnnyder, and locals felt especially threatened: “One lady told me that after her brother was diagnosed and sent to Carville, she came to school and found her books and her desk thrown outside the building. They didn’t want her there anymore.”

With a leprosy legacy spanning both sides of her family tree, Anne Brett can top that story. When her mother was 12, she tested positive for the disease. Local authorities burned her family’s home to the ground.

Brett mentions that between bites of a club sandwich at DJ’s Grill, a lunch spot just across the river at Vacherie. Pointing to sugar cane fields outside the window, she smiles and says she grew up at the edge of one like them. Her parents paid a kind Cajun couple who couldn’t read or write to care for their children: “I got a journalism degree, and my brother is an engineer. I think they did all right.”

Brett’s parents had wed while quarantined at Carville despite a U.S. Surgeon General’s mandate that patients not “hold communication” with patients of the opposite sex. When her mother got pregnant, officials sent her to New Orleans for delivery to keep Carville—and its stigma—off the birth certificate. Brett’s brother arrived in 1951, and she came along the next year. Each time, doctors placed the baby in an isolation unit until the Cajun couple could collect their new ward.
“That’s the sad part,” Brett says. “Mom not only had to give us up. She wasn’t allowed to touch us.”

Early on, the family would meet for secret picnics outside Carville’s fence. Although her father’s symptoms were minimal, Brett remembers her mother showed more physical features of the disease. Even after their release, fear of being contagious kept her parents at a distance. Her father prepared for his children’s weekend visits by scrubbing the bathtub with Comet and Lysol until his fingers were raw. Brett’s mother remained standoffish toward her grandchildren until she died.

UCH MISCONCEPTIONS were understandable in the 1950s, but not now. Even though the effects of the disease may be chronic, leprosy isn’t a lifelong condition. After treatment, it’s part of a medical history. Repeating that refrain has helped a lawyer from New Orleans take his diagnosis in stride, and a young man from India break the news to his fiancée. After all, they only “bumped into some bacteria,” as their counselor puts it.

But leprosy is a disease with ancient implications. Even in a culture that rejects the teachings of the Bible, its references to leprosy—sidled up to words like cursed, outcast, and unclean—are well known. The question is, do they mean the same thing now?

Bill Simmons says no. When he took the reins at American Leprosy Missions’ Greenville, S.C., headquarters nine years ago, he studied books like Leviticus and 2 Kings for clarification. Everything hinged on the Hebrew word zaraath.

“Hansen’s disease just doesn’t mesh with the conditions described in the Old Testament,” he says. “Our patients don’t become white as snow, and their hair doesn’t turn white. Hansen’s disease doesn’t affect garments or walls of houses.”

While the New Testament focuses on healing leprosy rather than listing its symptoms, it uses the Greek word lepra to identify the malady. Simmons says it’s too bad Norwegian researcher Gerhard Hansen borrowed the term when in 1873 he named his bacillus M. leprae. Its microbes manufacture peripheral nerve-damaging Hansen’s disease, not the ancient variety of ailments known as leprosy.

Even so, Simmons stresses that Jesus wasn’t focused on what type of bacteria people had: “He was concerned that people were excluded.”

Exclusion is an assault on human dignity, the imago Dei. Some governments operated on limited knowledge of M. leprae’s capabilities, and they’ve paid for being overprotective. A Japanese court last year ordered the state to compensate relatives of leprosy patients it quarantined. Here in the United States, officials promised former Carville detainees lifelong care, either there or off-site. Fifteen are still living, and 14 receive an annual $52,275 stipend. Eight come to Baton Rouge for treatment—not for leprosy, but for its lasting effects.

NHDP division director Kevin Tracy is a captain with the Public Health Service. He’s the kind of guy who measures his words and checks them twice, especially when discussing money. Tracy doesn’t believe the size of his program’s budget is related to righting wrongs, but he admits the stigma attached to leprosy has financial leverage: “Our funding has downsized through the years, but there’s always a vocal outcry when further reductions are proposed. When our budget was cut in 2018, congressional inquiries motivated by public response reduced the cut from $3.6 million to $1.5 million.”

Long-range, Tracy says, he stands on the side of eradication. And if leprosy can one day be eradicated, maybe its stigma can, too.

Back at the clinic, that’s what Simon is hoping. The same goes for Amy Flynn a few doors down. When the nurse practitioner took the job as clinic manager last year, she wondered what her teenagers would think about their mom working around Hansen’s disease: “I don’t know if it’s necessarily generational, but I explained all about it to both my kids, and nothing. Not even any questions.” She pauses.

“There’s a lot of hope in that.”
Contractors and freelancers in California are finding themselves out of work as a state law destroys their jobs.

BY SOPHIA LEE IN LOS ANGELES
LIKE MANY OF THE OTHER HALF-MILLION CALIFORNIANS driving Uber and Lyft, Freddy Perez liked earning some extra cash as a rideshare driver to supplement his main income. He worked about 30 hours a week subcontracting as a fenestration testing technician, so on his off days, he would pick up Uber or Lyft passengers in his 2012 Honda Insight, earning about $18 to $20 an hour. ¶ Perez didn’t need Uber or Lyft to survive. He made about $2,500 a week in his subcontracting job, which was enough to pay his $1,850 rent in a Los Angeles suburb and live comfortably. So when he first caught wind of California’s newly enacted Assembly Bill 5 (AB 5)—or the so-called “gig worker bill” that targets companies that hire independent contractors—he paid little attention to it, assuming it only applied to gig workers. Then two weeks before Christmas, he received a rude shock: His contractors told him they could no longer subcontract him because of AB 5.
So that’s what he did. In an ironic twist of unintended consequences, Perez is now driving full time for Uber and Lyft because that’s what he could do at immediate notice. Instead of earning $2,500 a week, he’s now making about $600 a week. Perez and his girlfriend decided California is no longer a viable place to live. They bought a house in Florida and are selling whatever they can so they can move in April. Perez hasn’t found a job yet in Florida, and until he does he intends to drive Uber and Lyft.

**GIG COMPANIES ROSE FROM THE ASHES**

Of unemployment, foreclosures, and evictions after the last recession, offering people quick and easy ways to make money. Meanwhile, more and more industries relied on freelancers and contractors to survive, especially with rising regulations that made it challenging for businesses to afford employees.

But some politicians and labor groups say these companies are “misclassifying” workers, thereby depriving them of benefits and evading about $7 billion a year in payroll taxes.

Enter AB 5, which Gov. Gavin Newsom signed into law last September. To send a message on how seriously he regards the bill, Newsom designated $20 million of the state budget to enforcing AB 5. Bill author Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez, D-San Diego, has hailed AB 5 for “setting the global standard for worker protections for other states and countries to follow.” Democrats in other states are proposing similar bills, and most Democratic presidential candidates have voiced support for a federal version of AB 5.

With AB 5 taking effect on Jan. 1, 2020, many companies scrambled to figure out how to comply with the law. Few want to risk doing business as usual—penalties range from $5,000 to $25,000 in fines per violation, and that’s not including legal fees and back wages.

Since the new year, some businesses have reclassified all or some of their independent contractors as employees, often transferring the costs to their customers or cutting employee pay. Some are asking their contractors to set themselves up as independent businesses so they can qualify for the “business-to-business” exemption in AB 5. Some are paying under the table. Others have chosen not to work with California-based contractors at all.

Under AB 5, all workers in California are presumed to be employees unless the employer can prove that the worker meets a stringent set of criteria established in a unanimous 2017 California Supreme Court ruling known as the *Dynamex* decision. In this case, truck drivers sued their employer for lost wages when the employer abruptly reclassified them as independent contractors. To determine the legal standard for independent contractors, the *Dynamex* decision introduced the “ABC test.”

Though AB 5 was first introduced as a bill to force gig companies such as Uber and Lyft to reclassify their drivers from contractors to employees, critics say the law is so ambiguous and casts such a broad, arbitrary net that it’s shaking California’s entire independent contractor/freelancer workforce—including people, such as Perez, who choose to be self-employed. Some of those people are leaving the state. Others are starting to fight back in court.

For Perez, AB 5 basically obliterated his occupation. One of Perez’s contractors, an owner of a fenestration testing lab in San Bernardino County, offered to hire Perez as an employee at $20 an hour. It was a goodwill offer—the contractor admitted he didn’t have much for Perez to do full time. Taking that job would have meant swallowing a significant pay cut and making a daily 100-mile commute in LA traffic to do odd jobs such as sweeping the floors or filing reports. “That made no sense to me,” Perez told me: “That’s 10 hours of driving a week to basically do nothing. Literally, I could drive Uber and make that much.”
The test presumes that a worker is an employee unless the hiring company can show that (a) the worker is “free from the control and direction of the hiring entity”; (b) the worker “performs work that is outside the usual course of the hiring entity’s business”; and (c) the worker is “customarily engaged in an independently established trade, occupation, or business of the same nature as that involved in the work performed.”

Who meets all three prongs of the ABC test? It’s unclear. For example, a freelance cellist who has to show up at a certain time to play for a wedding and play a specific music set may not meet the “a” prong, or if subcontracting with a band, she might not meet the “b” prong—at least according to the strictest interpretation of the law. That’s the problem, said Lizelle Brandt, a Los Angeles–based attorney who specializes in entertainment and small business law: “The law as it’s written is not black and white.”

When her business clients asked her how to comply with AB 5, Brandt couldn’t give them a clear answer. Instead, she could only rate them as being at high, middle, or low risk of violation. For example, a person who forms an LLC to meet the “business-to-business” exemption under AB 5 would still have to meet all 12 criteria of another test.

More ambiguities in the law: AB 5 allows exemptions for certain professions but doesn’t clearly define those professions. Does “fine artists” include dancers, graphic designers, and cartoonists? The bill also sets an arbitrary cap of 35 submissions that freelance writers can submit to a single publication in a year, but it doesn’t define what “submission” means. All these definitions are based on the interpretation of California’s Employment Development Department (EDD), the state agency tasked to enforce AB 5.

“The practical effect of AB 5 is that lawyers will always give the safest answer to their clients,” Brandt said. That means even if someone might seem to meet the requirements of AB 5, “they’re viewed as toxic right now... The general advice among lawyers is, ‘Stay away from independent contractors.’”

VOX MEDIA WAS THE FIRST big media company to announce it would end contracts with its 200-plus freelance writers and editors in California who wrote for its sports blogging network SB Nation. To replace the freelancers, it’s hiring 20 new part-time and full-time staffers.

Tucker Partridge, a 24-year-old marketing specialist who managed one of the team blogs under SB Nation, told me he was “completely caught off guard” by Vox Media’s announcement: “The way AB 5 was advertised, it would affect gig economy people, but it didn’t occur to me that I’m part of the gig economy.” He had just moved from Arkansas to the Bay Area, where his rent increased sixfold, and he had relied on his freelance work to supplement his income. But he lost something more: “Not a lot brought me as much joy as writing for that site, and it was a heartbreak to let that go.”

For some writers who freelance full time, AB 5 broke not just their hearts but their careers and families. Jen Van Laar, a 47-year-old freelance journalist at RedState, a conservative political blog, said as a single mother of a son with a learning disability, she chose to freelance so she could attend parent-teacher conferences, volunteer at school, and help her son with his schoolwork. Then four days before the new year, her editor called and told her they couldn’t continue working with her unless she incorporated herself.

Setting herself up as an independent business would cost Van Laar at least $800 in taxes a year, and even that would not be a risk-free guarantee. With less than 96 hours to make a decision, Van Laar hurriedly moved to North Carolina, where she has family. There, she can continue freelancing for RedState, but her son remains in California with his adult brother because she doesn’t want to remove him from his special high-school program.

Some Californians are upset enough to fight back. Van Laar is planning to file a lawsuit with a group of other freelancers. The Facebook group “Freelancers Against AB5,” created last November, now has about 14,000 members sharing panicked questions, concerns, and stories on how the bill has impacted their lives. Other irate groups have spawned on social media—there’s “Freelancers & Gigging Musicians Fighting AB5,” “California Ride Share Drivers Against AB 5,” “California Independent Adjusters Against AB5,” and “Protect Freelance Court Reporting from AB 5.”

Writers, small-theater owners, yoga instructors, strippers, therapists, filmmakers, cartoonists, caterers, and many more Californians from every political lean-

“The way AB 5 was advertised, it would affect gig economy people, but it didn’t occur to me that I’m part of the gig economy.”
Meanwhile, others are struggling to find another way to survive. Jared Lutz, a 43-year-old father of two, used to subcontract with a home service company to clean residential windows in Palm Springs. When AB 5 went into effect, the company hired him as an employee. Overnight, Lutz went from earning $80,000 a year as a subcontractor to making $15 an hour—a barely livable wage in a high-cost area like Palm Springs. He tried to find other part-time jobs in his industry, but he said the market is already saturated with former contractors in the same boat.

“My family’s devastated,” Lutz told me: “We’re struggling to put groceries on the table now. We tried everything we could to figure out a way to exist within the law, and there isn’t a way.”

Like Freddy Perez, Lutz has decided to move out of state, but he’s currently undergoing a long custody battle with his ex-wife and cannot leave until they reach an agreement. Meanwhile, he’s living off his savings and a GoFundMe account. AB 5 turned Lutz into an employee, but that made his situation worse. “I don’t need the government to protect me from myself,” Lutz said. “I’m a big boy. And frankly, I can do a better job than the government.”
ABDUCTION

Someone kidnapped Pastor Raymond Koh three years ago. His family still wants answers but is trusting God.

BY ANGELA LU FULTON
in Petaling Jaya and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

PHOTOS BY MAX UNDERHILL
SUSANNA KOH, whose husband Raymond was kidnapped in February 2017; photographed at her home in Petaling Jaya.
The last time Susanna Koh saw her husband, Pastor Raymond Koh, was on the morning of Feb. 13, 2017.

She was babysitting for a friend when he dropped by to pick up a packet of shrimp paste to give to another friend.

Then as he drove down a leafy residential street in Petaling Jaya, a city west of Kuala Lumpur, three black SUVs surrounded his car. Several men wearing ski masks and black clothing forced Koh out of his Honda Accord and into their vehicle. Then they took off with his car. The whole abduction took less than a minute.

Eyewitness Roeshan Celestine Gomez said he saw a struggle as the men dragged Koh out of his car. As he tried to drive closer, a man stepped out of a gold Toyota Vios and instructed him to back up. Another man with the group recorded the entire abduction on his cell phone. Gomez later reported the incident to the local police, but they told him it sounded like a police operation.

Susanna began to panic later that night when her husband didn’t show up to a meeting and didn’t answer his phone. A family friend who owned the Honda Koh was driving alerted her son, Jonathan, that police had called to say the car was involved in a kidnapping. That night, Susanna and a lawyer friend went to the police station to file a missing person report.

Instead of investigating Koh’s disappearance, police interrogated Susanna for five hours, asking about Koh’s work with his aid organization, Harapan Komuniti. They focused on one question: Did Koh proselytize Muslims?

It became clear the police were more interested in investigating Koh than finding him. On Feb. 15, Jonathan and his sister, Esther, drove to the spot of their father’s abduction to investigate themselves. On the grass by the side of the road, they found shattered glass. They asked the owners of several nearby houses if their security cameras had captured anything the morning of the kidnapping.

One camera captured the black SUVs boxing in Koh’s car and forcing him to stop. Two other cars (including the Vios) and two motorcycles trailed behind. While trees block much of the scene, viewers can see men getting out of the SUVs and feet shuffling around Koh’s car before the entire convoy takes off.

When Susanna saw the footage, she couldn’t breathe. Three years later Koh is still missing, and his abductors haven’t faced any punishment. Last April, the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (known by its Malay acronym Suhakam), announced that Koh’s abductors were “state agents namely, the Special Branch,” referring to the intelligence agency attached to the Royal Malaysia Police.

After numerous prayer vigils, heavy media coverage, and even a book written about the case, the government continues to stall in seeking justice for Koh and three others abducted in a similar manner: social activist Amri Che Mat; Pastor Joshua Hilmy, a Muslim convert; and Ruth Sitepu, Hilmy’s Indonesian wife.

This type of enforced disappearance is unprecedented in Malaysia. Koh’s shocking case has unified the Malaysian church and awakened it to injustices in a country where Christians have remained contently within their bubble for some time. Many people I spoke to said it hit close to home: “If it could happen to Pastor Raymond Koh, it could happen to my pastor or even to me.” Even with a new political coalition in power and promises of further investigations, Koh’s family—and families of other abductees—still wait for answers.

MALAYSIA IS KNOWN for its diversity and multiculturalism: In Kuala Lumpur, blue-domed mosques, multicolored Hindu temples, colonial-style white churches, and bright red Buddhist temples sit side-by-side. Red lanterns hang in the city’s central station for Chinese New Year with Muslim prayer rooms—separated for men and women—by the bathrooms. With their hands, women in hijabs eat nasi lemak—rice cooked in coconut milk topped with crispy anchovies and spicy sambal sauce—next to a Chinese businessman and an Indian family.

Malays, whom the constitution defines as Muslim, are about half of the population, with Chinese 23 percent, other indigenous groups 12 percent, and Indians 7 percent. About 60 percent practice Islam, 20 percent are Buddhist, 9 percent are Christian, and 6 percent are Hindu.
Though Islam is Malaysia’s official religion, the constitution guarantees freedom of religion for all citizens. The country has a general civil code and an Islamic law that only applies to Muslims. In 10 of 13 states it is illegal for Malays to convert to any other religion and for Christians to proselytize Malays.

Those who do come to accept Christ face heavy persecution from religious authorities and their own communities. Authorities send some to rehabilitation centers and brainwash them to return to Islam. Malaysian Christians worship in homes. Christians engaged in ministry to Malays risk running afoul of the law.

Koh, who is ethnically Chinese, grew up in a poor neighborhood among Malay families. He professed faith in Christ in his 20s and later pastored a church plant. Ong Theng Soon, a lawyer in Kuala Lumpur, said Koh led him to Christ in the early 1990s. Koh showed him the love of God and was willing to answer his calls even in the middle of the night: “I consider him my spiritual father.”

After the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami hit parts of Malaysia, Koh aided tsunami victims. He stepped down from the pastorate and created the nonprofit Harapan Komuniti to help the poor.

The organization set up a reading room—a safe place for young people to go after school with access to computers, textbooks, and free tutoring in math and English. Often they would hold cultural events or play soccer. As Koh became more aware of the needs in the community, his nonprofit added a ministry for impoverished single mothers, teaching skills like sewing, cooking, or catering. Koh and others also opened two shelters for HIV patients and a drug rehab center.

“We [helped] those who have needs or are marginalized, people that others don’t want to help because of discrimination,” Susanna said.

She describes her husband as a simple and selfless man literally willing to give others the shirt off his back: Koh only owned three pairs of pants and three shirts and would donate the rest of the clothes Susanna bought him to people in need. His friend Pastor Ng Swee Ming, of Sungai Way-Subang Methodist Church, described Koh as a quiet man who was passionate about helping the downtrodden and a pioneer in his work.

Because his ministry served both non-Muslims and the Muslim Malay community, Koh’s work was risky. Yet through demonstrations of God’s love, some people Harapan helped eventually professed faith in Christ.
This angered the religious authorities and members of the Muslim community, who began to target Koh.

On Aug. 3, 2011, Harapan held a thanksgiving dinner at a Methodist church, inviting about 180 people, including donors and recipients of Harapan’s services. Suddenly members of the state’s Islamic Religious Department and 20 police officers stormed in.

Susanna and several others took them outside. They noted it was a private event, and the officers didn’t have a warrant. The authorities said someone had filed a complaint about the gathering and wanted to know if any Malays were present. Officers took the names of 12 Malay attendees and instructed them to attend religious counseling sessions.

The church filed a police report about the raid, complaining the officials didn’t follow proper procedures. Two months later, the Sultan of Selangor, the highest religious official of the state, issued a decree saying officers should drop their investigation: The department did not find enough evidence to prove Christians were proselytizing Muslims at the meeting.

But Muslim bloggers continued to make accusations about Koh and Harapan. One wrote that Koh received money for every person he converted from Islam. Koh’s family noticed people following them when they went out and received threatening phone calls day and night. One morning Jonathan found a package with a message written in red ink: “I will kill you. You wait and see who is stronger—Islam or Christianity.” Inside the package were two bullets.

“It was terrible, it was so unsettling,” Susanna said. “We felt afraid and intimidated.” Even after the decree, every time the couple traveled out of the country, police would interrogate them when they returned to Malaysia, asking about Harapan as well as the kindergarten Susanna used to run. This continued for about a year.

But Koh continued his work. A year before his disappearance, Koh published a book to help Christians pray for Malaysia. It broke the country down into 52 different sections and included background about the region, testimonies, and prayer items.

On Feb. 13, 2017, the masked men in black SUVs kidnapped Koh, and police began hampering the family’s search for justice. They claimed the surveillance cameras along the road didn’t work or didn’t pick up where the SUVs went. In June authorities announced they found photos of Koh, his car, and his residence in the home of a drug and arms smuggler they had killed in a shootout.
But during the Suhakam inquiry, which began in
October, Koh family lawyer Jerald Gomez pointed out
police hadn’t listed these items in the report of the raid
and they were not exhibited with the rest of the evi-
dence. Gomez argued the “photos were a red herring
to divert attention from the police and pin it on a de-
ceased person.” The panel concluded the items either
never existed or police planted them.

Suhakam does not have the power to make criminal
convictions, but it can make judgments on a “balance
of probability” and advise the government in its next
steps. Local human rights groups asked the commis-
ion to hold public inquiries to determine whether the
abductions of Koh, Amri, Hilmy, and Sitepu were en-
forced disappearances.

Eyewitnesses indicated Amri’s November 2016 ab-
duction was similar to Koh’s, including black SUVs that
boxed in his car. Religious authorities had targeted
Amri in the past because of his Shiite faith, which the
majority Sunni population considered apostasy. They
claimed his organization, Perlis Hope, was a front for
spreading Shiism.

A major break in the cases came in May 2018, when
a sergeant from the Special Branch visited Amri’s wife
and told her that the Special Branch had abducted her
husband. He also said the same gold Toyota Vios took
part in both Amri’s and Koh’s abductions. An eyewit-
ness jotted down its license plate: PFC 1623.

During the inquiry, police claimed they couldn’t
reveal the car’s owner because law made it confidential.
But lawyers found the owner worked as an administra-
tive assistant at the police training center and had
worked with the Royal Malaysia Police for the past 18
years. When Suhakam asked the police about this man,
they claimed he had resigned and they could not find
him. The whistleblower sergeant also denied ever
meeting with Amri’s wife.

On April 9, 2019, Suhakam finally released its judg-
ment: The Special Branch of the Royal Malaysia Police
was responsible for both Amri’s and Koh’s abductions.
The panel also noted the police did not thoroughly
investigate the disappearances.

Susanna and other advocates were surprised to see
the commission courageously call out the powerful
police force. The panel also recommended setting up an
“Independent Police Complaints and Misconduct
Commission” (IPCMC) and a Special Task Force to
reopen and reinvestigate Amri’s and Koh’s disappear-
ances. It also called for a clear separation between the
police and the religious authorities.

Many hoped that after the opposition Alliance of
Hope coalition won elections in 2018—beating the
National Front coalition, which has ruled the country
since independence—the new government, led by
Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, would investigate
properly and charge the perpetrators. But advocates
face more of the same.

The government did set up the Special Task Force,
but advocates argue several of its members have
conflicts of interest and will likely protect their own.
While the Task Force promised to update the Koh
family on its progress, Susanna said it hasn’t once noti-
fied her and has delayed its final ruling, which was
supposed to be in December. Since then, Susanna has
sued the former inspectors general of the police. The
drafted IPCMC bill turned out to be “toothless and
limbless,” with less investigative power than the pre-
vious system, said Citizens Against Enforced Disap-
pearances spokesman Rama Ramanathan.

AMANATHAN BELIEVES Koh’s abduction was
a wake-up call for the church to pay attention
to the government and the police’s abuse,
which includes cases of people dying in
custody.

After Koh’s disappearance, Christians and the larg-
er civil society gathered for candlelight vigils in cities
around Malaysia. The vigils also included concerned
Malaysians from different backgrounds, including
Sikhs, Buddhists, and Muslims, who stood in solidarity
in calling for authorities to search for Koh.

On the 50th day after Koh’s abduction, about 500
Christians from 71 churches joined for an ecumenical
prayer service. At the end, the leaders of different de-
nominations—including the Catholic archbishop, the
Anglican archbishop, the Methodist bishop, as well as
Baptist, Evangelical, and Methodist pastors—held
hands and prayed for the Koh family.

Susanna, whom the U.S. State Department named
a 2020 International Women of Courage Award recip-
ient, said she wouldn’t have made it through the past
three years without the church’s support. From the
beginning, friends and church members helped the
family plan next steps, provided emotional and finan-
cial support, and helped them advocate for Koh. Chris-
tians around the world have sent boxes of letters that
encourage her too.

In the weeks leading up to the abduction in 2017,
Susanna recalled her husband would spend more time
reading the Bible or go on extended prayer walks. She
wondered if he knew something would happen soon.
Esther remembered that a week or two before her
father’s abduction, she texted him about someone up-
setting her. Koh responded, “God knows.”

“That was our last conversation,” Esther said
through tears. “I don’t know why at that time I just
cried and cried. I didn’t know what was going to happen.
... It’s strange, after he was abducted I always remem-
ber those two words he said to me.

“Whatever happened to him, God knows.”
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INMATES FOR THE PRESS

For 133 years, *The Prison Mirror* has provided Minnesota prisoners a place for creativity, learning, and inspiration.

by Sharon Dierberger in Bayport, Minn.

INSIDE AN OFFICE ROOM in Bayport, three men in jeans and casual shirts swivel on rolling orange chairs, conferring with each other, answering questions, and occasionally turning back toward large computer screens. Books and periodicals surround them. Upbeat music plays softly in the background.

Outside the office, barred doors, massive exterior walls, and guard towers reveal its surprising location: the inside of a maximum security prison.
The three men are inmates. Still, they love their work: Once a month, they churn out *The Prison Mirror*, begun in 1887. It is the oldest continually running newspaper in the United States written, edited, and published by inmates, for inmates.

Here in the Minnesota Correctional Facility, aka Stillwater State Prison, the paper’s senior editor, L. Maurice Martin, and co-editors Jeffery Young and Ronald Greer are each 42 years old and serving life sentences for murder. They say writing the newspaper provides them an outlet for creativity, learning, and inspiring others.

Martin calls the paper “a source of light” for the prison’s approximately 1,500 inmates, whose average sentence is almost 10 years. “Prison can be overwhelming and discouraging,” he says. The editors want to “help others see opportunities [for improvement] … and deal with real issues.”

Editions of *The Prison Mirror* feature headlines like “Character First!” and “Angry Man Says ... ” (a column about controlling temper). “The Laws of Attraction” is a monthly column giving relationship advice.

Investigative stories cover topics like prison food and water quality. Editors critique prison policies and cover prison events, classes, graduations, and sports. They insert inspirational quotes such as “You don’t have to leave the same way you came in” or “Education is the key to success.”

Prison officials do not allow Martin, Young, and Greer unfettered internet access. To do research, the editors must search the prison library card catalog to locate shelved books or use encyclopedias. Writing snail mail to request an interview or other information may never bring a reply. The men just shrug. Getting anything done here is slow.

A recent issue explored the problem of prisoner assaults on staff members. The editors interviewed inmates willing to say why they’d attacked corrections officers in the past, and the resulting article described what might provoke a prisoner to violence. It’s an especially relevant topic: In July 2018 an inmate attacked and killed a corrections officer with a hammer in the prison’s workroom. Young says both staff and inmates gave surprisingly positive feedback on the *Mirror* story.

Associate warden Victor Wanchena says such stories encourage understanding and empathy between staff and inmates. He notes the writer-editors carry the burden of trying to handle difficult topics judiciously: “We try to give them lots of leeway but want them to be fair and use named sources.”

The paper is also a platform for lighter topics, such as personal writing and artwork. One issue’s back page shows a charcoal portrait with haunting eyes, a recent inmate submission. Occasionally a chaplain contributes, though the paper takes a neutral stand on religion.

Almost 133 years ago, outlaw brothers Cole, Robert, and Jim Younger helped found the *Mirror* while serving life sentences. Eleven years earlier, as members of the infamous (Jesse) James-Younger gang, they’d botched a bank robbery in Northfield, and the state held them additionally responsible for the shooting death of a cashier.

By their third issue, the brothers chose the paper’s motto: “It is never too late to mend!” The front page of each edition still carries it.

Several past writers for the paper went on to publish books after leaving prison, including Frank Elli, author of *The Riot*, published in 1966 and made into a movie.

Editing the paper brings perks, such as the quiet, air-conditioned office. By contrast, concrete cell blocks get hot
IKE AND PAT MEIERHENRY both grew up on farms. They met in college at a fraternity dance, where Pat asked her date why Mike was dancing with one hand in his pocket. Her date explained that Mike had lost the use of his left arm from polio—but he still went home to farm on the weekends. Pat wondered how he managed farm work with only one arm. Later, Pat and Mike double-dated, and in September 1960 they married, “between haying and corn-picking.”

The newlyweds moved to Mike’s family farm 2½ hours north of Lincoln, Neb. “Farming isn’t a business,” says Pat. “It’s something you either have to love doing or get out.” They loved it. The couple’s early married life was not always smooth, but they managed to compromise and work together. With four children and several full- or part-time farm hands to help Mike, their life together was good.
Then around 1980, the farm crisis hit Nebraska. Land values had steadily increased, and farmers across the country were taking massive loans, using their land as collateral. Farmers typically take out loans to cover the expenses of planting crops, then repay the loan after harvest. But during that crisis, banks encouraged farmers to take larger loans for more land, newer equipment, and additional livestock.

Meanwhile, interest rates rose. Pat said they initially paid about 5 percent interest, and by 1985 they were paying 15 percent or more. “No one can survive on borrowed money with that kind of interest,” said Pat. The financial pressure on the farmers became so severe that several of their neighbors went on to other jobs. The Meierhenrys had farm hands to pay and one child in college. The prospect of losing the farm—their lifestyle and their family heritage—put pressure on the couple’s marriage.

Mike and Pat both became depressed, and Mike was too stressed to sleep. Pat said her husband “became a person that I really didn’t recognize.” She worked as a nurse, and a divorced co-worker made singleness sound attractive to her. As Pat and Mike dealt with private stress, in public they pretended everything was fine, attending their kids’ sports games and working together on projects. But Mike at one point confessed to one of their sons, “I don’t even know if I’m going to stay married.”

Finally, a turning point came in 1985 when Pat insisted Mike see a local pastor for counseling. After that meeting, Mike came home and felt enough relief to sleep through the night. Pat noticed and decided to meet with the counselor too. The counselor encouraged them to confess their sins and forgive each other, and told them, “Before we save this farm, we have to save this family.”

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oncile, prioritizing their relationship. Meanwhile, the situation with the farm gradually improved. Mike found and applied for a government loan program that guaranteed the bank some interest if it cooperated. He joined a farm business association and learned many farmers were having financial problems like his. After a while, he began counseling some of them.

The Meierhenrys worked to get out of debt and finally paid off their last loan 10 years ago. They invited their former neighbors to a small party to celebrate.

When farming with post-polio syndrome became too much for Mike, the couple moved near Lincoln, where they ran a bed-and-breakfast and worked side jobs. Mike, 89, now spends most of his time at their townhouse, reading newspapers, watching TV sports and news, and playing chess. Pat, 81, cares for Mike and keeps busy with friend dates and church activities.

The Meierhenrys nearly lost both their farm and their marriage, but today, they’ve been married 59 years. And the farm? They rent it out to tenants—and still try to visit a couple of times a year.
THE RESEARCH ORGANIZATION Barna Group reported in February that two-thirds of American adults who attend church “do so largely because of personal enjoyment.” That claim may not be sensational, but it is misleading.

Barna’s State of the Church 2020 study highlights five trends “essential in understanding the Church’s place in the U.S. today.” It offers little new or noteworthy: Barna concluded that many Christians “church hop,” that church membership is common but declining among younger churchgoers, and that many non-Christians believe church to be irrelevant.

But Barna also reported that 65 percent of American churchgoers attend because they personally enjoy doing so. On the surface, this number seemingly reinforces a common notion that American Christians possess a consumer mentality—that they attend church not to worship the Lord but to satisfy self.

But Barna apparently did not intend to draw that conclusion. Digging deeper reveals more about Barna Group than about American Christians.

Barna asked survey respondents: “Do you usually attend church because you enjoy doing it, because you feel you have to do it, or you do it out of habit?” The question gave respondents no option to reply, “I attend church to worship God.” The best possible answer respondents could choose (as 65 percent did) paints them in a potentially narcissistic light. A bad question produced a misleading answer: It is inaccurate to conclude, as Barna did, “Those who frequent worship services do so largely because of personal enjoyment.”

The very structure of another survey question reinforced a self-oriented approach to worship. Barna asked: “Thinking about the worship services you attend at your church, how often do you leave the worship services feeling …” Respondents chose from nine possible answers, and while “inspired,” “encouraged,” and “forgiven” scored higher than “disappointed” or “guilty,” Barna focused on what worshippers felt they had received from worship, while giving them no opportunity to describe what they had given in worship.

Stranger still was Barna Group’s conclusion: “Today’s church leaders are tasked with meeting a diverse set of emotional expectations.” But data describing the emotional experiences of people during worship does not speak to the emotional expectations of those who enter worship. Nor does it imply church leaders must craft worship services primarily to satisfy emotional expectations.

Worship is for the Lord, and maybe American Christians know it. But Barna couldn’t tell you because Barna didn’t ask.
The forgetful life
Living with lapses in memory

RESIDENT COOLIDGE was a silent type. When it was announced that he had died, New York writer Dorothy Parker quipped, “How can they tell?”

I feel that way about my memory. Because I have had a poor one all my life, the worsenings of age are hardly noticeable. Everyone, of course, claims to have a bad memory—which makes it hard for the genuine article like yours truly to sound more than a narcissistic whiner. My husband and personal cheerleader once pooh-poohed my claim like all the rest but learned the truth in short order: “You’re right, you have a really bad memory.”

The first embarrassing lapse was ninth grade in a current events game. A baseball question arose, and I picked it because I knew the answer. All eyes were on me, and there was expectant silence—like the silence in the schoolhouse when Tom Sawyer was put on the spot by superintendent Walters to name the first two apostles. Mother Albert Marie hit the bell before I could get the words out: Sandy Koufax.

The disappearance into thin air of a thought you had a second ago is a quiet terror to the new arrival in the club. As is not being able to return to a well-developed conversation thread after only the slightest digression. Nowadays if I get, say, three good essay ideas at a time, I hurriedly jot three key words on a napkin, bank receipt, or car manual, not trusting even the most vivid revelations to be ladylike and wait around.

All life is affected. Because I don’t remember names—or at least fast enough—I have to settle for “Hi, how ya doin’?” You can only say, “Hi, how ya doin’?” so many times before even that falls away. There was a girl in our church who was born there, raised there, and grew to honorable womanhood there, with whom I never had a conversation. When the pulpit announced her marriage and departure to Connecticut, I came up to her and said, “Look, I realize I’ve been a cipher in your life” (she nodded in agreement) “but would it be OK if I stop and pray for you and your marriage?”

The miracle is that we remember things at all. How is it that by and large important dates and duties will erupt into consciousness ex nihilo and right on time? How does it happen? If you can answer that one, you can also tell us how it is that monarch butterflies with brains the size of a pinhead each September leave their homes in Canada and fly 2,000 miles to northern Mexico.

Sometimes the losing of things is necessary to the realizing of how miraculous life is under normal circumstances.

Take other losses. After my first husband died, I joined a softball team. I learned that the catching of a fly ball is not a unitary body function after all, but the quick (and, turns out, not quick enough at age 47) succession of separate bodily commands: from eye to brain, from brain to feet.

There’s a lot about memory in Scripture: When you get to the Promised Land, remember where you came from. Forget the past, except to learn from it. God Himself, who can do everything, can even choose to forget our confessed sins and cast them into the sea of forgetfulness. And this is so that you and I can walk into church on Sunday morning and see each brother and sister as a clean slate of endless possibilities, and not as that frozen-in-aspic so-and-so who said such-and-such to me 10 years ago at the church picnic.

Bible recall is the singular exception to my sorry memory. For the rest, the name of the game is compensation. We do the best with what we have; that’s all we can. And what we can’t do anymore is making us compassionate.
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S THE APOSTLE PAUL WROTE, we see through a glass darkly. J.I. Packer and others have noted that we don’t know what discussions in heaven are like, so I certainly am not saying the following dialogue actually happened—but it might have. I do think our coronavirus response should keep with what Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 1:7—“God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.” So, with those caveats in mind, please read on.

Many Christians in America feared God and tried to turn away from evil. They were blessed: Many children, many sheep and oxen, so their country was the most prosperous in all the earth.

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord. Satan also came among them. The Lord said to Satan, “From where have you come?” Satan answered, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.” The Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered the Christians? They are sinners like all on earth, but they fear God and try to turn away from evil.”

Then Satan answered the Lord: “Do they fear God for no reason? Have You not put a hedge around them? They are not immune to Adam’s fall but You have blessed the work of their hands, and they meet together to worship You and have community with each other. But stretch out Your hand and send among them a plague that people can have without showing signs of sickness, so they will distrust each other and quiver in their own homes with their own food and hand sanitizer.”

And the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, all they have is in your hands. Only do not stretch out your hand and kill more than two of each hundred.”

That could be Chapter 1 of our new book of Job. In the 1918 influenza pandemic, people became ill quickly and signs of illness were evident. This one is different in that people can be symptomless for up to three weeks as they transmit the virus to others. That’s why this could be a disease designed in hell, breaking the bonds of community as it creates fear of everyday encounters.

Why God allows this, or a Tennessee tornado that killed at least 25, is beyond us. Words translated in the English Standard Version as “disease” or “plague” appear 144 times. Sometimes this suffering arises from specific sins, but Jesus explained that a tower in Siloam fell and killed 18 not because they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem: He said, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

God’s sovereignty is always evident, as in Leviticus 14: “When you come into the land of Canaan, which I give you for a possession, and I put a case of leprous disease in a house ...” But taking precautions is wise. Those with leprosy went into quarantine for at least seven days, and sometimes much longer. Leviticus 13:46 says, “He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. ... His dwelling shall be outside the camp.”

What can be particularly sinful is our response to disease. As Martin Luther and others have argued, we should not be foolhardy: It was wise to cancel South by Southwest and other massive crowd events. Temporarily, it’s wise not to shake hands. But it’s not wise to shake with fear so we stay out of contact with each other. We are meant to serve each other.

We should not be so concerned about our own health that we’re afraid to be neighbors. Pay attention to the needs of the elderly. Take a meal to doctors or nurses working long hours. How we react to a crisis like this shows whether we are new creations—and the whole world is watching.

If we merely hunker down, that is Satan’s triumph. We always need to show God’s love. That’s especially true in the time of coronavirus.
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