HOME UNAFFORDABLE HOME

Inside California's crazy housing crisis

AFRICA: Alternatives to emigration
BROOKLYN: A church fights addiction
CHINA: Lawyers fight for human rights
“Medi-Share covered me in prayer in ways they didn’t even know.”
—Vanessa

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ON THE COVER: Illustration by Krieg Barrie
I’ve noted a few times in this space that WORLD grew out of a Presbyterian organization that began in 1942. Until we changed our name and our mission in 1981, every one of our board members was Presbyterian. It makes sense, then, that the board hired lifelong-Presbyterian Joel Belz to head the organization in the late 1970s.

But at the time of our name change, our board deliberately expanded its denominational representation to include non-Presbyterians, and Joel did the same with staff hires. This made sense, because the organization’s mission was no longer primarily ecclesiastical, and certainly not exclusively targeted to Presbyterians. The Biblically objective reporting of news, we believed, was good for all kinds of churchgoers and even for non-churchgoers. It was and still is a mission that works everywhere.

We still have a good number of Presbyterians here, but these days our staff looks a lot like our membership. And most of our members attend “Evangelical Protestant” churches from dozens of different denominations.

Today, about one-quarter of our members identify themselves as Baptist, with Southern Baptists making up most of those. Almost as many (23 percent) attend nondenominational churches.

Then here come the Presbyterians, who now make up just over 12 percent of our members. The largest single Presbyterian denomination among our membership is the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), but several others are represented.

Evangelical Free, Lutheran, and Reformed churches have strong representation among our members, as do the Christian and Missionary Alliance, Anglican and Episcopal, Methodist, and several Pentecostal denominations. A small fraction of our members do not attend church regularly.

Our primary calling, though, is to the Church. We are grateful to be able to pursue a mission that strengthens the Body of Christ as its members are transformed by the renewal of their minds.
His mighty acts

KNOWING THE DETAILS OF GOD’S WORK IS CRUCIAL TO GIVING HIM PRAISE

It’s pretty hard to remember something you didn’t know in the first place. That fact could, sooner or later, put a lot of people in jeopardy when they come face to face with God.

God tells us repeatedly in the Bible to remember His mighty acts. That involves two crucial steps: You have to know the acts themselves. And you have to recognize them as coming from God.

We live in a time when people’s ignorance on both fronts is profound. Most people are ignorant, first, of the simple facts of what is happening in the world. Even more people tend to be ignorant of the reality that what is happening is God’s doing.

That means that most people will never be able to praise God the way He wants them to.

All this involves one of the main tasks of a magazine like WORLD. For in a sense, our ultimate mission is to help people praise God as they ought.

So, following the simple two-step outline noted above, WORLD’s assignment has two key parts. First, we need to help readers know and be conversant with the details of what God is doing. That means, in good journalistic parlance, helping them know the who, the what, the when, the where, the why, and the how.

We find this repeatedly in Scripture. The psalmist, for example, knew the details of Israel’s frequent deliverances—and he knew those details so well he could rehearse them again and again hundreds of years later. Such remembering brought praise to God—but it would have been just theoretical and boring if the vivid details hadn’t been part of the account.

We can infer that it’s important to learn the significant details of world affairs and to pass them on to our children and others we teach. Such details might properly be seen as part of “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

A profound implication is that your acquaintance with people, with events, with geography, with history, and even with ethics and philosophy, are no longer just optional interests. All those categories take on new importance as you increasingly discover you can’t give God the praise He’s due until you’ve tucked away some real acquaintance with the details of His work.

Not that we’re all obligated to become Ph.D.s in esoteric subjects—but neither can we casually let ourselves off the hook by saying, “Well, I just was never very good with maps, you know.” Now you see a map as the geographic outline of something God has done, or one more reminder to remember.

Christians may well be just as deficient as the population at large on this score. There’s little evidence to suggest that believers take world affairs much more seriously than unbelievers do. But they should.

The second level of this approach, however, is even more important. A believer’s perpetual instinct should not so much be to ask, “I wonder what’s happening today,” as it is to ask, in effect, “I wonder what memorable things God is doing today.” In a profound way, the difference between those two expressions boils down to whether a person has a God-directed heart of praise.

It’s possible to cultivate such a heart. You can enhance your sense of praise, even in this secular age, by daring to give God public credit for what you believe deep in your heart He has actually done. That means, when you see a magnificent sunset, you specifically thank God instead of muttering a mealy-mouthed reference to Mother Nature. It means explicitly noting God’s involvement with current affairs rather than suggesting “that’s the way things seem to have worked out.”

It takes surprising courage to do something so simple in company where most people have only a secular bent of mind. We’re afraid of being known as zealots or religious fanatics.

Yet when we fail to mention our great God in such casual conversation, we do something worse than silencing the witness we ought to be giving. We reinforce, even in our own minds, the inclination that God is really just a distant force, an abstraction who doesn’t ultimately matter. That’s a bad enough way to think now. It will be much worse when, as we come before Him face to face and He challenges us to recall His mighty acts, we can’t remember what we never knew.
“For me, what’s next is law school. From there, I’m not sure if I’d like to be an attorney, an adoption lawyer, or work in a firm, but whatever I do, I really desire to take the knowledge of God that RBC has given me and apply it, letting it change me and letting it change the work that I do.”
Duck and run

Kenyan civilians flee for cover as security forces aim rifles at a luxury hotel and shopping complex in the capital city of Nairobi on Jan. 15. Several Islamic extremists affiliated with al-Shabaab bombed and stormed the complex, shooting and killing 14 people before security forces stopped them. All the attackers died. Al-Shabaab staged a similar attack in 2013 on the nearby Westgate Mall.

KHALIL SENOSI/AP
Battle lines and shutdowns
A FIRST-HALF-OF-JANUARY REPORT by Marvin Olasky

The year of our Lord 2019 began with a declaration of war by 2012 Republicans against 2016 Republicans. On Jan. 1 new U.S. Sen. (and 2012 presidential candidate) Mitt Romney declared in The Washington Post, “A president should demonstrate the essential qualities of honesty and integrity, and elevate the national discourse. ... With the nation so divided, resentful and angry, presidential leadership in qualities of character is indispensable. And it is in this province where the incumbent’s shortfall has been most glaring.”

That same day, the Post published an interview with Liberty University President Jerry Falwell Jr. The Post asked him, “Is there anything President Trump could do that would endanger that support from you or other evangelical leaders?” Falwell said, “No,” and added, “I can’t imagine him doing anything that’s not good for the country.”

As the United States shuffled toward the 46th miserable anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court’s Roe v. Wade decision, 2019 also began with New York Times lies about past and present: The newspaper played to its pro-abortion readers by attacking a supposedly “deep shift in American society, away from a centuries-long tradition in Western law and toward the embrace of a relatively new concept: that a fetus in the womb has the same rights as a fully formed person.”

A new concept? Not in law, medicine, or journalism. In Maryland in 1656, Francis Brooke “was brought before this court on suspicion of murder” when he caused an abortion. Doctors in 1871 declared that “the fetus is alive from conception, and all intentional killing of it is murder.” The Springfield Republican in 1880 attacked “child-murdering [by] respectable physicians.”

A truly new concept is “intersectionality,” the popular leftist theory that emphasizes the cumulative effect of three-way discrimination: class, sex, and race. On Jan. 3, Nancy Pelosi’s first day back as speaker of the House, Democrats unwittingly became intersectional villains by voting to have American taxpayers fund abortion:

Most of its tiny victims are poor, female, or black—or all three.

Failing public schools that victimize many inner-city schoolkids, often poor and black, should also be on the intersectionality watch. Instead, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) now says local public school officials should inspect religious and private schools to “ensure that the education received by non-public school students is substantially equivalent to that received in district public schools.”

In January the Council for American Private Education (CAPE), whose members teach 80 percent of students in religious and private schools, sent out an alarm. CAPE quoted the new stipulation: If a public school board finds a nonpublic school is marching to the beat of a different drummer, “the board will provide a reasonable timeframe (e.g., 30-45 days) for parents or persons in a parental relationship to identify and enroll their children in a different appropriate educational setting.” After that, “the students will be considered truant if they continue to attend that school.”

One CAPE board member, Rabbi David Zwiebel, noted with sad humor that parents often send their children to religious schools “precisely because they seek an education that is substantially inequivalent to that which is offered in the public schools.”

The biggest truant of January’s first half was either intersectionalist Pelosi or President Donald Trump, depending
on whether Americans watched Fox or
the other major networks. On Jan. 11
many federal workers missed a
paycheck. On Jan. 12 the shutdown set
a record for the longest in history,
beating the 1995-1996 record of 21 days.
On Jan. 15 Coast Guard employees
went without paychecks, but the Coast
Guard had sent out a “Managing your
finances during a furlough” pamphlet
that suggested they baby-sit or hold
garage sales.

But given housing costs—see Sophia
Lee’s cover story on page 30—will some
not have garages? And how many babies
will live to need baby sitters, given
Planned Parenthood’s killing spree?
The organization had been saying that
abortion was only a small part of its
activity, but Planned Parenthood’s new
president, Leana Wen, affirmed on Jan. 8
that abortion remains its “core mission.”

So let’s put in perspective the federal
shutdown that reached 25 days on Jan.
16. During that period Planned
Parenthood probably killed at least
20,000 babies: When will it shut down?
It’s 16,801 days from Jan. 22, 1973,
when the Supreme Court made up a
constitutional right to abortion, to Jan.
22, 2019. During those 46 years American
abortionists have killed probably 60
million human beings, made in God’s
image, with a right to life—yet the band
plays on.

Happily, pro-life Americans march
on, as tens of thousands planned to do
in D.C. on Jan. 18. We counsel on, at
several thousand crisis pregnancy and
pregnancy resource centers across the
United States. We legislate on, when
possible. We lament and pray on: How
long, O Lord, how long? ®
Found
Mexican archaeologists have discovered what they say is a whole temple dedicated to the pre-Hispanic god called the “Flayed Lord.” The Mexican National Institute of Anthropology and History says archaeologists had previously found only depictions of the god. The archaeologists believe the Popoloca Indians built the temple in the present-day state of Puebla between A.D. 1000 and 1260 to honor Xipe Totec, a god of fertility. Experts found a stone torso in the temple, carved with an extra hand hanging off its arm. They believe this to be Xipe Totec wearing the skin of a sacrificial victim since the Popoloca worshipped the god by skinning humans and then dressing the priests in these skins.

Died
Nancy Roman, the first woman in a leadership position at NASA, died at age 93 on Dec. 26. Roman showed an early interest in astronomy, receiving a doctorate in the subject from the University of Chicago in 1949. A year after NASA’s founding, the agency recruited Roman to become its first chief of astronomy. During her years at NASA, she became known as the “Mother of Hubble” after her work to make the Hubble Space Telescope possible. Though Roman retired from NASA in 1979, she continued to consult on the Hubble project. In her later years, she also worked in an elementary school, teaching fifth-grade girls about astronomy.

Announced
The elders of Harvest Bible Chapel announced in mid-January that pastor James MacDonald would take an “indefinite sabatical” from preaching and leadership while the Chicago megachurch works to reconcile with past critics. Earlier in the month MacDonald pulled his Walk in the Word program from radio and television while keeping it as a podcast, citing costs and changing demographics. The announcements follow recent criticism of the church’s financial and management practices (see “Hard times at Harvest,” Dec. 29, 2018).

Banned
A new law in California bans pet stores from selling dogs, cats, and rabbits unless they come from a rescue group or animal shelter. The law was intended to target breeding facilities such as puppy mills and kitten factories, often reported to subject animals to terrifying living conditions. The law carries a fine of $500 per animal if a seller is found in non-compliance. However, Californians can still buy directly from breeders. Other states appear to be considering following California’s lead, with lawmakers drafting similar measures in Washington state, New York, and New Jersey.

 Denied
The European Court of Human Rights ruled that German parents Dirk and Petra Wunderlich do not have a right to homeschool their children. German law bans homeschooling, and police raided the Wunderlichs home in 2013 and demanded they send their children to state schools. The Wunderlichs’ lawyers indicated the couple was considering an appeal to the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights.
At DTS we believe our 4-year Master of Theology (ThM) degree offers deeper and more integrated ministry preparation than a standard 3-year Master of Divinity (MDiv). Yet we don’t want students to bear the cost burden for the extra year, so we’re offering FREE TUITION for the final year to every student who enrolls in the ThM by summer 2020!
‘As Congressman King’s fellow citizens, let us hope and pray earnestly that this action will lead to greater reflection and ultimately change on his part.’

House Minority Leader KEVIN McCARTHY after the House Republican Steering Committee elected not to give U.S. Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, any committee assignments in the 116th Congress. The move came after King, in an interview with The New York Times, said, “White nationalist, white supremacist, Western civilization—how did that language become offensive?” King will be the only Republican without committee assignments.

‘We have to include sleep as one of the weapons we use to fight heart disease.’

Spanish medical researcher JOSÉ M. ORDOVÁS on results of a study finding that getting less than six hours of sleep per night is a risk factor for developing cardiovascular disease.

‘The hospitals are empty, the patients are being turned away to die somewhere else.’

PRINCE BUTAU, treasurer of the Zimbabwe Hospital Doctors Association, on the crippled medical system in Zimbabwe plagued by rampant shortages of basic medicines and equipment.

‘If I knew then what I know now, I wouldn’t have run for Congress in the first place.’

Former U.S. Rep. TREY GOWDY, R-S.C., on politics and being a congressman. Gowdy, after serving four terms in Congress, decided not to run for reelection in 2018. He vows not to return to Washington as a lobbyist: “If I enjoyed politics, I wouldn’t be leaving.”

‘5 eyes. 5 arms. 4 legs. All American.’

U.S. Rep. BRIAN MAST, R-Fla., an Army veteran who lost both of his legs in Afghanistan, in a tweet welcoming fellow wounded veterans and newly elected congressmen Jim Baird (left) and Dan Crenshaw (right) to Congress.
Lack of resolve
Want to avoid the New Year’s crowd at the gym next year? Just wait until Jan. 12. In a report published by Strava, a social networking website for athletes, researchers found most people have abandoned their health-related New Year’s resolutions by Jan. 12. A different study published by scientists at the University of Scranton found that only 8 percent of people were able to fulfill their New Year’s resolutions.

Auto destruction
Google’s bid to bring self-driving cars to the market is running into snags in its Chandler, Ariz., test city. By the end of 2018, local police reported 21 instances of harassment aimed at Google’s Waymo cars during the cars’ 24-month trial. According to Chandler police, incidents include a man flashing a handgun at one of the vehicles, people slashing Waymo cars’ tires, and a Jeep that apparently ran a self-driving car off the road six times. Each Waymo car has a Google employee sitting in the driver’s seat in case safety demands that a human take over.

Ears to the ground
TSA Administrator David Pekoske has an idea to make security checkpoints in airports less intimidating: floppy-eared dogs. Pekoske told the Washington Examiner that the agency believes floppy-eared dogs doing searches are less scary than pointy-eared dogs. “We find the passenger acceptance of floppy-ear dogs is just better,” he said. “It presents just a little bit less of a concern. Doesn’t scare children.” That means fewer German shepherds and Belgian Malinois and more Labrador retrievers, pointers, and Vizlas. There are over 900 detection dogs in the employ of the TSA.

Flying high
Citizens who observed birds stumbling around a Huntington Beach, Calif., park on Dec. 19 didn’t have to go far to find the problem. Someone had dumped hundreds of prescription medication pills at Carr Park and some of the local birds, apparently believing the pills to be grain, gobbled some of them up. The medication—a mix of antidepressant, anti-anxiety, and insomnia pills—stumbled a Canada goose and left a ring-billed gull on its back. Workers from the local Wetlands & Wildlife Care Center came to rescue the birds. After pushing IV fluids, the center said the intoxicated birds made a full recovery.

Harvard on the prairie
A Kansas teen is set to graduate from his high school at age 16 on May 19. Two weeks later, Braxton Moral will be graduating from Harvard University. After skipping fourth grade, Braxton enrolled in Harvard University’s extension program, which allowed him to take online courses during the school year and spend his summers in Cambridge, Mass., taking live classes. By day, he worked on his normal high-school curriculum at the public high school in tiny Ulysses, Kan. At night, he’d work on college coursework. Braxton told NPR he tried to play it down at his high school: “If I talk about it, it becomes a divide.”
An old trick?
The record holder for oldest woman of modern times was actually a 99-year-old fraud. That’s the claim of Nikolai Zak, a mathematician and researcher at Moscow University. Zak told the AFP news service that Jeanne Calment, a French woman who died in 1997 at the purported age of 122, was actually 23 years younger than she claimed. Calment’s official biography reports her daughter Yvonne died of pleurisy in 1934. After analyzing vital statistics and poring over photographs and other records, Zak said Jeanne Calment actually died in 1934, and that her daughter Yvonne took her identity in order to evade France’s inheritance tax. She would have been 99 when she died in 1997. A French demographer who helped Guinness verify Calment’s age when she died disputed Zak’s findings.

Cramped quarters
Some people go over Niagara Falls in a barrel. Jean-Jacques Savin wants to float across the Atlantic Ocean in one. The 71-year-old French adventurer departed from the Canary Islands on Dec. 26 hoping trade winds and ocean currents push his plywood capsule 2,800 miles into the Caribbean. Savin raised $65,000 from crowdfunding for the three-month journey. Most of the money went to constructing his high-tech barrel, which measures roughly 10 feet by 7 feet. On board, Savin has a simple kitchen, a bunk, and a solar panel to charge communication devices. The adventurer told the BBC that he hopes the craft comes to rest on a French Caribbean island like Martinique or Guadeloupe. “That would be easier for the paperwork and for bringing the barrel back.”

Helping hands and feet
A bit of quick thinking—and martial arts—helped one North Carolina woman stave off a would-be kidnapper. The unidentified woman said a man tried to force her into his car on Jan. 3 in Charlotte, N.C. The woman broke free, spotted a nearby karate dojo, and ran inside. “A young lady came through our doors and stated that someone was trying to harm her,” karate instructor Randall Ephraim told WSOC. “Shortly afterward, a big male entered the building.” Ephraim said the man wanted the woman to leave with him. When Ephraim told him to leave, the man began pushing and swinging. The martial arts expert subdued the attacker until police arrived. Officers escorted the assailant to the hospital after placing him under arrest.

Rough translations
Officials in a town in Northern Wales have been instructed to stop using Google’s translation tool. In November, Welsh Language Commissioner Meri Huws said she had received more than a dozen complaints about signs in Wrexham that contained misspellings and poor translations of the Welsh language, reportedly due to mistakes by Google. Signs in Wales must carry their messages in both English and Welsh. Just 19 percent of people living in Wales speak Welsh.
Past its prime

THE HISTORY MAJOR IS DYING OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS

I’ve discovered that if you live long enough, “history” is something you actually remember. In a sense, it’s you. When I entered high school, Churchill and Eisenhower (only recently deceased) were history, while JFK still seemed current. In my 40s, I was shocked to realize that the Vietnam War had become history. Wait a minute—I lived through that!

Almost 30 years ago, political scientist Francis Fukuyama announced “The End of History,” as he predicted the global triumph of liberal democracy and free-market capitalism. That didn’t happen, but we may be seeing the End of History Majors. Over the last 10 years, the number of university students majoring in the discipline has dropped 30 percent—a smaller share of bachelor’s degrees than at any time since 1950, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. This could be because the trend is overwhelmingly in favor of STEM courses and social sciences. That’s where the money is, or so we’re told.

But critics blame the profession itself for many of its problems. Like philosophy, literature, and the arts, history was once about the big picture: trends, revolutions, restorations, and innovations. It was about human personality, its failures and achievements, and how certain causes bring about predictable effects. As a publishing genre, history is still big-picture—and it sells. Scholars like David McCullough, “popularizers” like Brian Kilmeade and Bill O’Reilly, even dry analysts like Jared Diamond, leap to the top of the bestseller lists every time they roll out a new title. Some may be more sensational than others, but they all operate from a storytelling blueprint: central theme, fascinating personalities, consequential events.

Academic history, in contrast, has shrunk in its perspective. It focuses on minutia, novelty, and unclaimed niches. The drama of war and social change is out of fashion. Instead of cause and effect, the focus is on power and privilege: who has it, how to get it.

An article in The Atlantic in December sounded the warning when the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point announced plans to scrap six liberal-arts majors, including history. Professors and administrators blame the Republican-controlled Legislature for budget cuts. But the school provost admitted that facts were facts: Not enough students were enrolling in these majors to make them worth their cost. “And students are far more cost conscious than they used to be.”

No wonder: With costs above $8,000 per semester for tuition and on-campus housing, young people have to think hard about cost-benefit return. Even though academics and future employers still agree that the liberal arts are essential to a well-rounded graduate, history and the humanities have priced themselves out of the market. And at least some professors have painted themselves into a corner of irrelevance.

To take one small example, the chairman of the history department at UWSP fears important programs will be cut, such as “the spring seminar on the Holocaust and its major’s emphasis on race and ethnicity.” The university offers a history major in Race and Ethnicity, which is certainly part of humanity’s story. But is racism a cause or a symptom? And where does the Holocaust fit in the wider picture of World War II and the decades leading up to it? The school doesn’t appear to offer a course on WWII. UWSP’s proposed spring seminar, by the sound of it, focuses on a symptom rather than a cause—namely, the issue that obsesses us today.

Race and ethnicity, and the consequences thereof, never existed in a vacuum but form part of the mosaic of human evil. Evil shows up in every age and every race—in the Holocaust it exploded. Boiling that horror down to Exhibit A of racism inoculates students from its other lessons, such as the dangers of pride, both national and personal. Flattening history into one perspective also bores them, which is even worse.

As Chesterton said, human depravity is the one Christian doctrine empirically demonstrated. History lives when we see the faults, and the virtues, of our fathers reflected in ourselves. When it becomes prim and judgmental, it dies.
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A recent *New York Times* article titled “Why Traditional TV Is in Trouble” sifted through a variety of ratings data to figure out why the Big Four broadcast networks are losing ratings and becoming less culturally relevant. The authors might have saved themselves some trouble by simply analyzing Fox’s new drama *The Passage*.

The *Times* piece points out that the median age of a viewer for the highest-rated drama on broadcast, *This Is Us*, is 53 years. The median age for the second-highest-rated, *The Good Doctor*, is almost 60. And the median age for *Empire*, the soapy drama Fox pushes as young and edgy? Forty-eight.

Meanwhile, the cable and streaming dramas that have dominated water-cooler chatter over the last decade skew far younger. Think 36 for AMC’s *The Walking Dead*, 30 for Netflix’s *Stranger Things*, and 31 for Hulu’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*. The disparity has Fox, which trails its fellow Big Four outlets, eager to draw younger audiences to an event series. Unfortunately, the network appears to have learned all the wrong lessons in trying to marry the future of media to the past.

Fox has promoted *The Passage* for months now, teasing the sprawling, genre-subverting novels the show is based on (like *Game of Thrones!*), the mysterious monsters (like *The Walking Dead* and *Stranger Things!*), and the dystopian world (like *The Handmaid’s Tale!*). But in the end, all Fox seems to have seen in these complex series is a delivery method for jump scares, sex scenes, and bloody battles with vampires.

In the three episodes of *The Passage* previewed for critics, at least a dozen changes undermine Justin Cronin’s novel trilogy about government scientists who accidentally unleash a horde of vampirelike “virals” on humanity. Some of those changes trample
the books’ spiritual themes: Serious, prayerful Sister Lacey, survivor of a Sierra Leone massacre, is for some inexplicable reason reduced to an American combat specialist who insouciantly refers to God as “she.” Beyond that, we get no sense of a religious life from her or the other nuns who, despite their pettiness, are the only ones with enough discernment to sense early on that the world is about to change in very bad ways. 

The showrunners retained the name “Project NOAH” to describe the medical experiments that create the virals, but they scuttle other Biblical allusions. In the novels, we have 12 male virals who follow the lead of Zero, the first one created. No New Testament reader could miss the significance of this image. But apparently network executives can. One of the men is now a conveniently young, attractive woman, available to participate in steamy scenes. Also newly up for romance: two members of the NOAH team who barely had names in the book.

Meanwhile, someone apparently decided the setup of government researchers playing God required greater motivation than greed for acclaim, power, and money. Now they’re trying to stave off a pandemic.

Why undermine the wracked consciences these characters will eventually have to grapple with? If you can say to yourself, “Sure, I created vampires, but I was only trying to save the whole world,” then you can’t really be such a bad fellow, can you? FBI agent Brad Wolgast (Mark-Paul Gosselaar) is likewise taken from complex and relatable in the novel to flat and clichéd, from a pathetic figure who bothers his ex-wife with midnight calls to a traditional, iron-jawed hero whose ex is chasing him.

All of this, along with a ridiculously impatient, condensed approach to its source material, suggests that Fox misunderstands what’s drawing young audiences away from broadcast. It’s not because new-media dramas show more sex and violence. If that were the case, comparatively clean series like *Stranger Things* and *Downton Abbey* wouldn’t find surprising success.

Instead, it’s these dramas’ innovative narrative approaches, combined with more honest and deeply developed characters, that are spurring the cable/streaming revolution. Fox has squandered an enormous opportunity to follow their lead.

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**BOX OFFICE TOP 10**

**FOR THE WEEKEND OF JAN. 11-13**

according to Box Office Mojo

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

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*Reviewed by WORLD

**Movie**

**On the Basis of Sex**

Pro-lifers might find inspiration in the new biopic about liberal Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. *On the Basis of Sex* focuses on the 1972 landmark case *Moritz v. Commissioner of Internal Revenue* that Ginsburg, then a law professor, successfully argued. Ginsburg exposed how scores of federal laws discriminated against an entire class of people—women. Her brilliant tactic? The client she took on, Charles Moritz, was a man.

Moritz was caring for his dependent invalid mother, but wasn’t entitled to deduct expenses for her care from his taxes. Federal law allowed all women and some men to take the deduction, but not a single man who had never married—like Moritz. In short, Ginsburg’s win forced courts to recognize that sex discrimination existed and to declare it unconstitutional.

Ginsburg’s home life was unlike Moritz’s. She was married and had one of her two children before she entered Harvard Law School in 1956. Ginsburg (played by Felicity Jones) persevered through scorn at school and discrimination when job-hunting, as the film details at length. But she and her husband, Martin (Armie Hammer), if the film tells it right, enjoyed a sweet marriage. Martin, a tax attorney who served as co-counsel on Moritz, often cooked meals, was involved with their kids, and supported his wife’s aspirations. Watching, I wondered: If men treated women as Martin did Ruth, would women have fought to legalize abortion?

Given Ginsburg’s liberal track record, it’s surprising that nothing in *On the Basis of Sex* (rated PG-13 for some foul language and suggestive content) promotes abortion. The film ends with the Moritz decision, which came a year before *Roe v. Wade* and 35 years before Ginsburg defended partial-birth abortion in her dissenting opinion in *Gonzales v. Carhart*, the case that upheld a ban on the brutal procedure. Perhaps the film will inspire a young, pro-life Ruth (or Martin) to make the case Ginsburg didn’t and end (age? ability?) discrimination against another class of people: unborn children.

—by BOB BROWN
Watership Down

Tyranny, violence, heroism, self-sacrifice, and rabbits: Who knew these could blend together so well? Readers of the 1972 novel Watership Down might have anticipated that the latest adaptation, released by Netflix in December, would be much more than a nature story.

Richard Adams’ novel is required reading for many high-school and middle-school students. An animated film of the same name was released in 1978 to some controversy, as some British critics thought the “U” rating it received (deeming it suitable for all viewers) downplayed the movie’s violence.

The computer-animated Netflix reworking is impressive: The closing credits name dozens of “hair and fur” artists who managed to make hundreds of realistic rabbits all look different from one another.

The plot centers on a group of rabbits led by Hazel (voiced by James McAvoy) and his companion Fiver (Nicholas Hoult), who has had disturbing dreams of “something foul and fierce” coming to destroy their burrows and tunnels, and most of the rabbits who remained behind are killed. Fiver’s vision of hills filled with blood has come true.

A series of adventures brings the bedraggled rabbits to their new home, Watership Down. But their peace is short-lived: Neighboring warren Efrafa is ruled by the tyrannical despot Woundwort (Ben Kingsley), and he is determined to wipe out these new settlers.

Woundwort’s rule by intimidation and brute force contrasts with Hazel’s gentle, sacrificial leadership. In an epic final battle, his band of brave, cunning rabbits must defend themselves against Woundwort’s army of invaders.

The PG-rated series is too frightening, violent, and dark for younger children, and parents might want to discuss the pagan spirituality of the rabbits, who speak of the sun as the creator and of death as “the black rabbit.” But overall, Netflix’s Watership Down is an enjoyable adventure that might cause you to imagine another world the next time you see a rabbit in your garden.

—by MARTY VANDRIEL

A Dog’s Way Home

A Dog’s Way Home is a mostly family-friendly film about man’s best friend. But liberal dogmas drag down this otherwise sweet story.

If Bella the pit bull (voiced by Bryce Dallas Howard) is captured a second time on the streets of Denver, city ordinances dictate that she be euthanized. A dogged animal control officer (John Cassini) is obsessed with making that happen. So, Bella’s owner—sorry, Bella’s human—Lucas (Jonah Hauer-King), sends his beloved pet to stay with relatives of his girlfriend Olivia (Alexandra Shipp) in northern New Mexico until he can relocate outside of city limits.

Needless to say, Bella escapes and begins the 400-mile journey home. Along the way, she makes friends and faces obstacles. (Young children may find a few scenes a bit intense.) Bella evades a wolf pack, teams up with a (computer-animated) cougar, and is nearly buried in an avalanche. She crosses a busy highway, gets temporarily adopted by a gay couple, and winds up chained to a homeless veteran named Axel (Edward James Olmos). Positive interactions with American war veterans make up a significant portion of the film. When Axel dies, Bella declares that “he is no longer sad.” I knew dogs possessed a keen sense of hearing, but of the hereafter, too? Wow!

A Dog’s Way Home (rated PG for some peril and mild language) is full of beautiful scenery. Colorado’s rugged mountains, rushing streams, and rich forests make the state a great place to shoot a movie about an outdoor trek in Colorado, right? Colorado towns are even identified along the way: Durango, Gunnison, etc. But the entire film was shot in Canada.

Another curiosity: Megachurch pastor T.D. Jakes is listed as one of the film’s executive producers. Sure, the movie is mostly about cute (and remarkably well-trained) animals doing cute things: dogs rassling blankets, nuzzling cats, and “hunting” for food in trash cans. But a secular worldview becomes evident in the second half of the film. Parents, take note: Young viewers will see the gay domestic arrangement and unmarried Lucas and Olivia lying in bed together.

—by BOB BROWN
Empathy and understanding
BOOKS ABOUT BLACK LIVES MATTER
by Marvin Olasky

WORLD members have said my American history reading recommendations in our Dec. 29 issue are useful, so here’s one more column of suggestions as we head into February, Black History Month. As a white person with African-American family members and friends, I may have some gnosis, knowledge, about parts of the black experience, but not epignosis, intimate knowledge from having lived it—so I’ve learned more by reading 30 books that show individual struggles in often-toxic environments.

Before transatlantic slavery: Thomas Oden’s How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind shows the work of Augustine and many others. The Africa Study Bible, produced under John Jusu’s supervision, combines the New Living Translation with notes connecting the Bible and Africa. François-Xavier Fauvelle’s The Golden Rhinoceros synopsizes numerous histories of the African Middle Ages.

Coming to America: Alan Taylor’s The Internal Enemy is a good history of slavery and war in Virginia from 1772 to 1832. Ned and Constance Sublette’s The American Slave Coast is a painful history of the slave-breeding industry. Nicholas Guyatt’s Bind Us Apart shows how “enlightened” Americans invented racial segregation. Sven Beckert’s Empire of Cotton shows how slavery profited South, North, and England.

Anti-slavery efforts: Manisha Sinha’s The Slave’s Cause is a history of the abolitionists who fought the peculiar institution. Christopher Cameron’s To Plead Our Own Cause examines the specific role of African-Americans in Massachusetts, and Jared Brock’s The Road to Down tells the story of Josiah Henson, an escaped slave who was one of the inspirations for Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin, which in turn inspired the abolitionist movement.

Blind spots: Joel McDurmon’s The Problem of Slavery in Christian America documents the racism of many 19th-century churches and corrects “happy slave” romanticizing. McDurmon quotes Memphis preacher R.C. Grundy’s observation that “the southern rebel church...is worth more to Mr. Jeff Davis than an army of one hundred thousand drilled and equipped men.” Some of the worst racism emerged from the pen of noted theologian R.L. Dabney, whose three-volume Discussions has Himalayan heights and Dead Sea depths.

Post-Civil War: Matthew Harper’s The End of Days examines how Christian understanding helped some newly emancipated African-Americans leave behind a slave mentality. Sadly, many whites backlashed: Douglas Blackmon’s Slavery by Another Name describes the virtual re-enslavement of sharecroppers and others, and David Oshinsky’s Worse Than Slavery zeroes in on Mississippi’s Parchman Farm and Jim Crow justice. Booker T. Washington’s autobiography, Up From Slavery, is deservedly a classic of perseverance under pressure.

Into the 20th century: Gene Dattel’s Reckoning With Race starts in the 19th century and shows the Great Migration north during the 20th century and the urban ghettos that resulted. Timothy Tyson’s The Blood of Emmett Till examines the most notorious hate crime of the 1950s. Detroit 1967, edited by Joel Stone, shows what happened in one of America’s worst race riots. The Intersection, by Bridge Magazine and Detroit Journalism Cooperative members, contains up-close-and-personal riot remembering.

Into the 21st century: James Forman Jr’s Locking Up Our Own critiques the “war on crime” in African-American communities that began in the 1970s and continues to the present, with consequences for black families and cross-racial cooperation. Wesley Lowery’s They Can’t Kill Us All is a liberal view of recent racial conflicts. Sheriff David Clarke Jr’s A Cop Under Fire is a conservative view.

Two beautifully written books: James McBride’s The Color of Water is an African-American man’s tribute to his white mother, and Walter Wangerin Jr’s Father and Son tells of the Indiana pastor-author and his black adopted son. Jason Riley’s Please Stop Helping Us and False Black Power? criticize the conventional civil rights movement and explain “how liberals make it harder for blacks to succeed.”

Christian witness: Ismael Hernandez’s Not Tragically Colored rises above materialistic determinism and victimhood. John Perkins has risen above both for decades: Let Justice Roll Down was his 1976 memoir, and One Blood (2018) includes his “parting words to the church on race.” ©
Four novels from Christian publishers

reviewed by Sandy Barwick

THIEF OF CORINTH Tessa Afshar
Headstrong Ariadne flees her uncaring mother and controlling grandfather in Athens to live with her father in Corinth. Soon she learns her father’s secret: He is “The Honorable Thief,” a phantom who robs the rich and powerful as payback for their corruption and misdeeds. Her athletic skills prove valuable as she becomes her father’s accomplice. But, after meeting a traveler named Paul of Tarsus, they realize obeying God’s commands is more important than revenge. Concise writing and a twisty plot produce an engaging read. Cameos by Priscilla and Aquila (mentioned in Acts 18) add authenticity.

SAVING ERIC Joan Deneve
CIA agent Eric Templeton suffers life-threatening injuries during a bogus mission arranged by his corrupt superior. His friend flies him to a remote African mission hospital to receive care from Dr. Brock Whitfield and his daughter Ellie. As they work to revive him physically, they ponder his spiritual condition as well. A connection between Eric and Brock—unknown to everyone but Brock—adds a poignant twist. Although not action-packed, this character-driven novel is a hope-filled story showing how God redeems sinful and broken people and works all things together for our good and His glory.

HIDDEN PERIL Irene Hannon
Three mysterious deaths linked to Kristin Dane’s fair trade retail shop lead to a connection to a Syrian terrorist group. Local St. Louis authorities team up with the FBI to track down the mastermind behind the U.S.-based terror cell. The romance between Kristin and Detective Luke Carter feels formulaic—and the dialogue at times cheesy—but the mystery surrounding the terrorist-smuggling operation keeps the pages turning. Disappointingly, the bad guy turns out to be more of a caricature than a true villain. Faith and God are mentioned offhandedly in stressful moments.

A BOUND HEART Laura Frantz
Set in 1752 Scotland, A Bound Heart follows Lark, a humble lass, and Magnus, the laird of Kerrera Castle. Despite their close childhood friendship and mutual affection, their social stations dictate different paths into adulthood. A tragedy forces both into indentured servanthood, but their faith in God sustains them. They find themselves aboard a ship sailing across the Atlantic—she bound for Virginia and he for Jamaica. Romantic undertones ripple throughout, but this historical romance showcases more history than romance. The frequent Scottish dialect slows reading a bit, but the included glossary helps readers navigate unfamiliar phrases.

AFTERWORD

Why would a reclusive woman bequeath her Irish estate to people she barely knew? The reason unfolds slowly in Kristy Cambron’s Castle on the Rise (Thomas Nelson, 2019). This sweeping, multigenerational novel begins in the present. The Foley brothers must decide what to do with the inherited castle and its contents. The narrative reverts to 1915, on the eve of the Easter Rebellion, an Irish uprising against British rule. Issy Byrne and her photography play a vital role in the conflict—and in the plot. Rewinding further to 1797, the family saga includes Maeve Ashford’s first encounter with Eoin O’Byrne. Each mini-story contains a romantic relationship as well as intriguing details about Ireland’s history and fight for independence. Juggling various centuries requires concentration, but the reader reaps satisfaction when all the pieces fit in the end. —S.B.
CULTURE / Children's Books

Story hour

FOUR RECENT PICTURE BOOKS reviewed by Susan Olasky

ALL-OF-A-KIND FAMILY HANUKKAH Emily Jenkins & Paul O. Zelinsky

Based on the middle-grade novels by Sydney Taylor, this picture book offers a sweet story of a Jewish family living on Manhattan's Lower East Side in the early 20th century. Mama keeps telling Gertie, the youngest of five sisters, that she is too young to help prepare the latkes for Hanukkah. The peeler, grater, and knife are all too sharp. Angry about missing the fun, Gertie stumps off to her room and hides under the bed. That's where Papa finds her—and soothes her hurt feelings and lets her help light the first candle on the menorah. (Ages 3-7)

I REALLY WANT TO SEE YOU, GRANDMA Taro Gomi

This charming story has two characters, Yumi and her grandmother. One lives on a hill in a house with a pink roof. The other lives on a mountain in a house with an orange roof. They really want to see each other, so each sets out to visit the other, Yumi by bus and Grandma by train. But when they arrive, they're surprised to find the other missing. The mix-ups continue with less conventional forms of transportation, depicted with simple illustrations that express their determination to see each other. As a grandma, I love this book. (Ages 3-6)

CYCLE CITY Alison Farrell

As Cycle City gathers for its annual Starlight Parade, the organizing committee realizes it has failed to deliver eight invitations. The mayor agrees to deliver them, but first he needs to find the people and their wacky cycles. Young readers will have to search for critters like Chickadee and Frog. On every page, Farrell delivers quirky characters on unique bikes. There's the armadillo on a unicycle and a polar bear riding a gelato bike. The pages aren't as cluttered as the ones in Where's Waldo?, but fans of Richard Scarry's Busytown books will feel right at home. (Ages 4-7)

THERE'S A DINOSAUR ON THE 13TH FLOOR Wade Bradford

Readers whose taste runs to the silly will enjoy this story about one tired man's adventure at the Sharemore Hotel. Mr. Snore checks in and is very sleepy, but when he turns out the light, "about to lay his head upon the pillow, he heard a squeaking sound." And thus his troubles begin. First it's a mouse in his bed, then a pig, then a leak from the ocean room. None of these troubles surprises the bellhop, who gladly moves Mr. Snore from room to room. Kevin Hawkes' bright acrylic and pen illustrations offer hilarious detail. (Ages 3-8)

AFTERWORD

Publishers are putting out gorgeous nonfiction books for early elementary children. In Gecko by Raymond Huber (Candlewick, 2019), a blue gecko with orange spots tries to avoid danger. The narrative (told in a large font) unfolds on alternating pages. In smaller type, the book presents additional facts. Vivid watercolor, ink, and colored pencil illustrations complement the text and decorate the pages. Interesting facts flow throughout: Did you know geckos sometimes feast on their own tails or skin?

BEST COLLEGES
U.S. News & WORLD REPORT
REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES
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William Inboden is a Christian with sterling establishment credentials. Educated at Stanford and Oxford, he gained a history Ph.D. at Yale, worked as a congressional staff member, and gained George W. Bush administration appointments: Department of State policy planner, senior director on the National Security Council.

Inboden is now a professor at the University of Texas at Austin, where he directs the Clements Center for National Security. He is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the author of Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment.

He and his wife Rana have one child. I interviewed him in Austin.

Now that you’re 46, what’s the most important thing you know now that you did not know 20 years ago? I would start with the enduring value of family, since I didn’t get married until my 30s. Our first child is now 4. I’m very thankful for the time and experience I had in my 20s, but I don’t have any yearning to go back to so-called freedom.

How did your Christian faith influence your Washington work? I felt it very important to treat others with kindness and dignity and respect, to maintain my personal witness. That’s especially important when you’re involved in contentious legislation and some of the people you are working with are other Christians and many are non-Christians and very aware that you’re a Christian. I failed in all sorts of ways. At times I was too aggressive. Some of the political tactics we used to get the bill passed were not always honest with others. But there was also the level of thinking about Christianity and statecraft, and the Christian’s calling to use the power of the United States in ways that would produce benefits in the world.

You joined the Bush administration in 2002. My first few weeks at State I drafted a speech on North Korea human rights violations and had to have it cleared and edited throughout the departments. One State Department staff member I had not met in person sent it back with some vigorous and critical edits. I thought, “How dare she savage my beautiful prose?” I met her a few weeks later. A couple of years after that we got married. A word to all guys with big egos, which was certainly me at the time: Be humble in accepting edits. There might be a charming young woman at the other end.

Your book on religion and foreign policy showed how American leaders, in documents not designed for public consumption, thought about the Cold War. Scholars knew American political leaders sometimes used religious rhetoric in their speeches, but most thought the use was a cynical attempt to stir up public support. Thanks to personal letters, diaries, and newly declassified documents, I realized that most American political leaders genuinely believed the Cold War was a religious war, that the United States had a certain calling by God to resist Soviet communism and promote freedom.

A lot of them had read Whittaker Chambers? That’s right. Witness was helpful and was a very influential book for me when I first read it in high school. Policymakers really did see a conflict between the militant atheism of the Soviet Union and the Christian values of the United States and the Western world.

They didn’t see the separation of church and state as a mandate to try to banish God? Not at all. They certainly believed in religious liberty and religious disestablishment, but that did not preclude religious values in forming American foreign policy: They fought to defend that.

Let’s turn to the biggest current antagonist to religious liberty: Are we moving to a bipolar world with China? The U.S.-China relationship is the geopolitical story of the 21st century. China’s future ascendency is not necessarily inevitable. It has a strong and growing economy, a strong and modernizing military, but a very fragile and in some ways weak government. What Xi Jinping fears most is not necessarily the United States, but his own people. That’s why he has been trying to accrue more and more dictatorial powers to himself.

That’s a sign of internal weakness, not strength.
What's your assessment of the Chinese economy? It has tremendous imbalances and corruption. China's economic dynamism in the last 20 years may not necessarily continue. We are seeing a backlash against China. With China's growing aggression in the South China Sea, more and more countries want to partner with the U.S. against China.

Pope Francis could have negotiated a better deal, but in international diplomacy as in buying a used car you don't want to be the one who's desperate to make the sale: You give up all your leverage.

So, it's not inevitable that giving in to China is the only way to survive? We've seen this story before. The 1970s were a time of American decline but it was not inevitable, and American renewal came in the 1980s. I'm not saying that I believe in a cyclical pattern either. I'm wary of overall patterns in history.

How important was Ronald Reagan to renewal in the 1980s? I'm writing a book on President Reagan's foreign policy. He advocated free trade, invented NAFTA, and was deeply committed to our allies. He thought America had an important role to play in the world, and that's one reason he was so successful in helping bring down the Soviet Union and winning the Cold War peacefully. He was the complete antithesis of Donald Trump in every meaningful way in foreign policy.

Looking back now after 15 years, what do you think about the war in Iraq? I strongly supported the war in Iraq at the time. I believed Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and was a genuine security threat to the United States. I now think I was wrong to do so. Knowing what I know now, I certainly would not have encouraged or supported the war. That said, I have no regrets that Saddam Hussein is no longer in power. If he had stayed in power, he certainly was a very bad actor with very bad intentions, and we don't know what other bad things might have come out.

Do you think we are better off now because of that war than we otherwise would be? Iraq is now a fragile yet functioning democracy, and generally more aligned with the United States than other countries in the region. Iraq is not a threat to its neighbors, is not pursuing WMDs, is not supporting terrorism. The Iraqi economy has had its share of challenges but certainly with oil reserves is on a positive trajectory. We are worried about Iranian influence.

What should the U.S. do regarding Iran? I supported the withdrawal from the bad Iran nuclear deal that Barack Obama got us into—but it seems we withdrew from it without a viable backup plan in place. There would have been an opening to get the Europeans to support us in a new round of sanctions, but I think we blew that. I supported moving our embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and that had been effectively called for the last 20 years anyway—but the means was clumsy.

So on balance? The larger question is: Were all the costs in blood and treasure worth it? That's the one I have a harder time squaring. But we should applaud some very positive outcomes and not dismiss the war as a complete failure or disaster.
Unlikely though it seems, given how infrequently entertainers make headlines for keeping the Ten Commandments, the former “new Dylans” Loudon Wainwright III and Bruce Springsteen devote much of their latest albums—the eponymous soundtracks to their respective Netflix one-man-shows—Loudon Wainwright III: Surviving Twin and Springsteen on Broadway—to honoring their fathers.

Both albums include extended spoken passages interspersed with unplugged renditions of each man’s best-known songs. But while Springsteen’s simply comprises his 2½-hour special minus the visuals, Wainwright’s is a meticulous studio re-creation.

Among the drawbacks of the latter approach are the absence of an audience (Wainwright’s laugh lines often benefit from crowd reaction) and the reduction of Surviving Twin from 91 to 67 minutes, mainly due to the omission of a segment featuring footage shot at the private boys’ school attended by both Wainwright and his father, the late Life magazine correspondent Loudon Wainwright Jr.

Among the advantages: crystalline audio, reduced ad-libbing (hence reduced profanity), and narration so pitch-perfect that one needn’t see Wainwright’s facial expressions or his body language to understand what he’s saying or why.

What Wainwright is saying can be summed up by comments that Springsteen makes midway through his On Broadway performance of “My Father’s House”: “Those whose love we wanted but didn’t get, we emulate them. That’s the only way we have, in our power, to get the closeness and love that we needed and desired.

“So,” Springsteen continues, “when I was a young man looking for a voice to meld with mine, ... I chose my father’s voice—because there was something sacred in it to me. And when I went looking for something to wear, I put on a factory worker’s clothes, because they were my dad’s clothes.” It’s an observation echoed in the filmed version of Surviving Twin by Wainwright’s literally donning one of his father’s tailor-made suits.

On the soundtrack, the suit-donning portion is titled “Disguising the Man.” And like most of Wainwright’s Surviving Twin monologues, it’s a verbatim rendering of an essay from his father’s long-running Life column, “The View from Here.” In those essays, the elder Wainwright wrote eloquently in the first person on a variety of topics whose casual surfaces often mask moving insights regarding the intersection of family and identity. The seven that his son includes in Surviving Twin give the show its narrative and emotional arc.

About the profanity: It’s less of an issue for Wainwright, who frequently and wittily couches even his most-likely-to-offend-someone observances in a vocabulary commensurate with his well-heeled upbringing.

Springsteen, on the other hand, swears at a rate more in keeping with the blue-collar Everymen who populate many of his songs yet whose lives he admits he has only known secondhand. (He begins and ends On Broadway by referring to the camouflaging of this discrepancy as his “magic trick.”)

But there’s a bigger difference: Whereas Surviving Twin is really about Wainwright’s father even when it’s about himself (a paradox neatly summed up in the following line from the semi-Oedipal title cut: “I didn’t want to kill him, that would be suicide”), On Broadway—its generous helpings of fatherly content notwithstanding—is mostly about Springsteen.

Admittedly, fans of the Boss who haven’t already invested 18 hours in listening to him narrate the audiobook version of his autobiography Born to Run might enjoy hearing him tell such a relatively condensed version of his life.

Those who have heard the book, however, will likely conclude that Springsteen really likes to hear himself talk. 
New or recent albums
reviewed by Arsenio Orteza

**WAKE THE WORLD: THE FRIENDS SESSIONS** *The Beach Boys*

Unlike *Friends*, the 12-cut, 26-minute trifle that the Beach Boys hoped would halt their late-1960s slide, this 32-cut, 68-minute stack-o-tracks, a cappella mixes, out-takes, alternate versions, and demos sounds like the work of musicians who were determined to keep doing what they did best. They also sound determined to discover new best things to do. And whether it is the experimental vocals, the experimental instrumentation, or the experimental preponderance of snippet-length songs, this digital-only compilation sounds a lot like SMILE.

**THE BOOTLEG SERIES VOL. 14: MORE BLOOD, MORE TRACKS** *Bob Dylan*

For 44 years, critics and fans alike have ranked *Blood on the Tracks* among Bob Dylan’s finest achievements. This box demystifies it to a fault. First, by presenting the recordings at their actual speed (Dylan had them sped up a smidgen to boost their briskness), it risks making the familiar version seem inauthentic. Second, and more important, by supplying each of the 82 oh-so-slightly-different takes that Dylan recorded in New York, it risks making listeners never want to hear any of these excellent songs again.

**CIRCLES** *P.O.D.*

Circles represent infinity. They also represent aimlessness, as in “running around in.” P.O.D. circa 2018 embodies both senses: infinity in that Sonny Sandoval’s rapped-sung-shouted lyrics still attest to his faith, aimlessness in that no pop-music style—not even P.O.D.’s frequently interesting, sometimes fascinating mongrel-metal kind—is going anywhere, unless the Auto-Tune cul-de-sac counts. Sandoval doesn’t use Auto-Tune. The guitars, drums, and bass likewise rage against the machine. A good pummel-fest is had by all.

**TRENCH** *twenty one pilots*

There are good reasons to find twenty one pilots annoying: the lowercase “stylization” of their name, the millennial wimpiness of Tyler Joseph’s more “sensitive” vocal takes, the pointlessly complicated allegory in which they couch what they have to say. There’s no denying, however, that their rap-emo-electronica frappé is smoother than ever, or that their catcher songs (on this album “Chlorine,” “The Hype,” and “Morph”), do what good pop should—get inside your head and worm away until you find it playing of its own accord.

**ENCORE**

Besides *Wake the World: The Friends Sessions*, Capitol has recently released two other *Beach Boys* 50th-anniversary digital downloads: *I Can Hear Music: The 20/20 Sessions and Beach Boys on Tour: 1968*. Whatever the reason for such largesse—that in Europe unreleased recordings pass into the public domain after 50 years, that royalties can only be spent by their beneficiaries if those beneficiaries are alive—the recordings illuminate one of the Beach Boys’ dimmest periods.

*On Tour* documents eight nearly identical concerts (five in the United States, three in London) that find the Boys in surprisingly good spirits considering their Maharishi Mahesh Yogi tour debacle from earlier in the year. *I Can Hear Music*, meanwhile, raises interesting questions. Why, for instance, didn’t the “alternate take” of “The Nearest Faraway Place” make 20/20? And how differently might history have turned out if Charles Manson had gotten the co-writing credit on “Never Learn Not to Love” that he deserved? –A.O.
Good news wins
WE CAN DO MORE THAN LEAD WITH WHAT BLEEDS

You likely heard the news of unidentified drones at Gatwick and later Heathrow airports last month, forcing delays in flight takeoffs and landings while raising alarm bells for aviation safety monitors. Drones have the potential to wreak havoc but also bring good. Yet good news, we know, rarely makes headlines.

That same week thousands of miles away, health workers successfully deployed drones to deliver vaccines in Vanuatu, a far-flung country of 80 islands in the South Pacific. Twenty percent of Vanuatu’s children have never received vaccines, according to a report in Popular Mechanics, but a drone made possible the first immunizations for 1-month-old Joy Nowai, then others. Her mother otherwise would have had to walk 25 miles to reach a clinic.

As commercial drone companies perfect delivery of blood and medical supplies in Africa and remote areas of the United States, we want to hear these stories along with the threats and downsides.

We journalists can do more than lead with what bleeds. The world that is fallen is also in the midst of redemption, everywhere. Yet cynicism, even despair, easily can rule the day or the home page.

The book of Acts often reads like breaking news, giving us the sensational inside scoop on what happened to the early church following Jesus’ ascension. In detail it tells us who was present at Pentecost, what was said (on and off the record) leading to Stephen’s stoning, how bystanders became instigators, flinging their coats at the feet of some young man named Saul.

In the midst of gory news in Acts comes something unexpected. After the Sanhedrin (the Jews’ Supreme Court in Jerusalem) flogged the apostles, we read in Acts 5:41, they left the council, “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.” These men tended their wounds and kept right on working.

This kind of upside-down rejoicing is a good pattern for starting a new year, or a new day any day of the year. Not the isolationist’s joy I hear from friends sometimes, who say they don’t watch news anymore, or they read just the headlines. I understand that yearning to retreat, to watch home-improvement episodes or puppy antics. Too much of what passes for U.S. news coverage these days is actually news about news, full of angles instead of straight storytelling on what’s actually happening in the world.

But the upside-down rejoicing the apostles discovered is the deeper resilient joy that comes from cultivating first a realistic awareness of the world, then an appreciation for God at work in it. He orchestrates beauty and redemption in the midst of ugliness and evil. He takes those the world discards and calls them His. He is the kind of God who told Abram at age 99 he would be Abraham, “father of a multitude,” and his wife would bear a son named Isaac, “laughter.”

This God is at this moment raising churches out of squalid refugee camps, sending church leaders in China to prison with rejoicing, giving them songs in the night as He did for Job. It is not always headline work, but often hidden, inconspicuous, and unreported.

At the core of altered perspective we find Jesus ready to train our eyes to see, Jesus who endured, who suffered ultimately but saved abundantly, the pre-eminent resource and example of upside-down joy. This Jesus who conquered the biggest thing, death, also taught us to yearn over the smallest thing, like the one lost coin or the one lost sheep.

The Dutch Catholic priest and author Henri Nouwen said, “God rejoices. Not because the problems of the world have been solved, not because human pain and suffering have come to an end...but because one of His children who was lost has been found.”

Good news doesn’t have to be trending to be good. Anyone who has held a newborn knows it can be one child, 1 month old, finding new health and new life in faraway Vanuatu because someone made a way to rescue her.

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VOICES
Mindy Belz

Joy Nowai and her mother Julie
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A housing crisis is clamping down on middle-income workers—teachers like Renata Sanchez—in prosperous California.
there to live
RENATA SANCHEZ DIDN’T PLAN TO BE A TEACHER.

When Sanchez signed up for Teach For America after graduating from Stanford, the plan wasn’t to remain teaching but to save money for law school.

Sanchez didn’t make it to law school. Instead, she fell in love with teaching. Her first day at an elementary school in downtown San Jose, she looked at the students and saw herself in them. Like her, they had first-generation immigrant parents who worked long hours—mostly as gardeners, harvesters, and housekeepers—to provide a better life for their children. College opened a world of opportunities for her, and she wanted that for her students, too. So after the teaching program ended, Sanchez kept teaching. She knew she would never become rich on a teacher’s salary—but earning a middle-class income while doing what she loves? That didn’t sound too bad.

Today Sanchez is in her 12th year working for the San Jose Unified School District (SJUSD). She’s 33 years old, has two master’s degrees, and currently makes about $80,000 a year as an instructional coach for the Allen at Steinbeck Elementary School—yet she can’t even afford to rent a studio apartment by herself in her own district.

Here’s a sense of how bad housing affordability has become in San Jose, the heart of Silicon Valley: In 2007, Sanchez paid $750 a month to share a two-bedroom duplex in Santa Clara, a city near San Jose, with a law student. Now she pays $1,900 a month to share a small two-bedroom apartment in north San Jose with a college friend. That’s more than double what she used to pay, and the duplex was much nicer: “It’s just crazy. It feels like it all happened overnight.”

Sanchez knows she should consider herself fortunate—she has met teachers who make daily four-hour commutes or crash at their parents’ home or somebody’s backyard or couch or in their cars. She knows teachers who got kicked out of their home after a sudden rent hike in the middle of a busy school semester. But she also wonders why, as a graduate of an elite university earning decent pay, she still can’t afford to rent her own pad in the city where she works, let alone buy a house one day. Sanchez has had 11 different roommates in five different houses over the last 11 years. As she watches the best teachers leave her school in search of cheaper housing, she wonders when her time to leave will come.

California’s housing crisis is hurting not just the poor but also median-wage workers like Sanchez. While 130,000 homeless Californians sleep in shelters or the streets every night, millions more people suffer constant stress about their housing situations. The housing crisis has severe economic and social repercussions for the state: The middle class languishes, the level of poverty deepens, and droves of young people with talent leave for more affordable states such as Nevada, Oregon, and Texas. It’s provoking social unrest, shaking an economy that’s the fifth largest in the world, and creating a feudalistic society in a state that claims to champion progressive values.

To get a sense of how the housing crisis affects Californians, I had coffee with teachers in San Jose, where even well-paid Google and Apple engineers have trouble finding housing. I visited agricultural farms and nonprofits in the Salinas Valley, an agricultural Central Coast community that’s losing much-needed farmworkers due to exorbitant rents and poor living conditions. I also attended neighborhood council meetings in Venice, a beach town that’s both one of the most expensive neighborhoods in Los Angeles and a prime homeless destination.

What I found is a warning tale for the rest of the country: California is an extreme case, but other booming metros such as Seattle, New York, Denver, Indianapolis, Boston, and Atlanta are also facing “crisis level” housing shortages, according to Zillow.

Sanchez has been on a Zillow rabbit trail lately, which happens whenever she’s stressed out about rent. She
browsed around neighborhoods in other parts of the state, sighing, “Oh man, I could afford something so much better elsewhere.” Such is the housing situation in San Jose that a fire-gutted house—a useless wreck of charred roof, burned-out walls, and weeds—recently hit the market for $800,000. That’s because the house is located close to a neighborhood destined to be the next Googleville, escalating its raw property value. And herein lies a classic Silicon Valley conundrum: Google will soon build a million-square-foot office complex in downtown San Jose that could bring up to 20,000 new jobs into the area—a boost to local businesses and city coffers, but where would those new residents live when there’s barely enough housing for current residents?

“I think about moving away all the time,” Sanchez said with a laugh that died off as she considered the reality of that situation. San Jose has been her home for 15 years. All her friends are here. Moving would mean teaching at a district that pays less or finding a new job. She worries constantly about the future: Forty-five percent of her paycheck goes to rent, she’s still paying off her student loans, she doesn’t have any savings, and her 2002 Toyota Avalon is about to fall apart. “I don’t know how much longer I can keep going.”

OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS, a new idea has been floating around various parts of the nation: Since teachers are struggling to live in the communities they serve, why not provide affordable housing for them?

In May 2017, Sarah Chaffin approached the San Jose City Hall with that idea: She offered to build eight to 16 apartment units—all earmarked for local teachers—on a private lot she had bought years ago in San Jose. The idea: Teachers would pay $2,000 a month for a two-bedroom apartment (each tenant pays $1,000), and they would be required to put $1,000 into a savings account for a down payment for a house. When someone saved enough for a down payment, he or she would move out and another teacher would move in.

Chaffin plans to launch similar projects for other people in the “Missing Middle” such as firefighters, police officers, and nurses.

Chaffin has little experience in teaching or politics, but she’s well-versed in real estate and finances as a mortgage adviser living in Los Gatos, a residential town southwest of San Jose. Chaffin first became concerned over rising housing prices about three years ago when she found out that the mother of her daughter’s friend, who was making over $100,000 a year working for a tech company, couldn’t afford the down payment for a condo. Instead, she was paying $3,500 a month in rent, which is the median rent price in San Jose. Then one year, five teachers left Chaffin’s daughter’s school. Chaffin asked the principal why, and the principal said they moved out of the area because of housing costs.

That seemed “absurd” to Chaffin. So she did some research, and she found that the low-income housing tax credit program only serves people who make less than $55,000 in the Bay Area. Meanwhile, 88 percent of new housing built in the Silicon Valley is luxury-style for high-income households, and 10 percent is government-funded for low-income and very low-income households. Only about 2 percent of new housing caters to median earners, who make too much to qualify for housing subsidies yet not enough to buy a house.

When a nonprofit housing developer suggested to Chaffin that she come up with a housing model that doesn’t involve government intervention, she ran with it.

By the time Chaffin presented her proposal to the City Council, she had already done all the work—she had the land, her own funds, a financing model, and innovative technology that would slash construction cost by 20 percent. Her project doesn’t involve government intervention or public money—all she needed from the city was its blessing.

But she missed one necessity: political will. The council members said no to her proposal. Chaffin’s land is zoned for commercial use, they said, and the city needs more jobs. So they refused to change the zoning laws for Chaffin’s project. What they left unsaid is that commercial units bring in more tax dollars than residential units. Chaffin was flabbergasted. She stewed and tossed in bed for days until her then-8-year-old daughter rustled her awake: “Mommy,
don’t let them defeat you. You have to move forward with teacher housing.”

Since then, Chaffin founded Support Teacher Housing, a nonprofit that advocates for teacher housing in Silicon Valley. To raise awareness about the issue, she organized town halls and invited the school board members and elected officials to hear the real-life struggles of teachers in their district. Soon after, Los Gatos gave her a piece of underutilized public land to build four housing units so she can test her teacher housing model. She estimates it’ll cost less than $250,000 to build each unit (typically, one unit costs $350,000), and she’s mobilizing private companies to sponsor it to avoid relying on government money. Her plan also inspired Santa Clara County Supervisor Joe Simitian to spearhead a proposal to construct 60 to 120 affordable teacher housing units on a vacant plot of land in Palo Alto.

M E A N W H I L E , S J U S D also gained an incentive to create teacher housing. For years, SJUSD had been losing 200 of its teachers every year, mainly due to housing costs. The district’s budget is limited—82 percent already goes to salaries—so the district is unable to simply raise pay. But if this drain of teachers continues, “there won’t be classroom teachers in San Jose Unified,” warned SJUSD Deputy Superintendent Stephen McMahon, pointing out that the anticipated Google development in downtown San Jose will further drive up housing costs. They need to act—fast.

BUILDING BLOCKADES

WHY IS HOUSING SO CRAZY EXPENSIVE IN CALIFORNIA? It’s about supply and demand, but also government actions that restrict supply. According to a study between 2000 and 2015, out of the 23 states that underproduced homes, California had the biggest shortage: It created 3.4 million fewer homes than needed to keep up with demand and population growth. The vast majority of this housing shortage exists in coastal cities such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego.

Housing affordability is a problem in cities all across the nation, but the crisis is a lot worse in the Golden State due to factors unique to California:

- **Geography:** California’s coastal and mountainous geography means less suitable land for development.
- **Zoning:** The local finance structure incentivizes cities and counties to restrict residential and high-density development by using zoning laws and stringent approval processes. Each anti-growth policy adds about 3 to 5 percent more to housing costs. Some state legislators are trying to force underperforming cities to approve more housing with affordable units in areas already zoned for high-density development, but expect strong pushback from local communities.
- **Fees and costs:** Local governments enact higher government fees on development than other states. The average development fee amounts to over $22,000 per single-family home in California compared to $6,000 per single-family home in other states. Costs for construction labor and building materials are also much higher in California. Altogether, it costs about $50,000 to $75,000 more to build an average single-family home in California’s metros than outside of California.

- **Environmental policies:** California’s aggressive climate change policies add about $150,000 per unit to development costs and many, many more months of wait time for approval. One such policy is the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), a 1970 statute signed by then-Gov. Ronald Reagan that requires all state and local agencies to study and mitigate the environmental impact of any project should there be such concerns. CEQA forces projects to undergo onerous, time-consuming reviews to test for environmental effects involving such things as traffic, air and water quality, endangered species, and historical site preservation. CEQA is also the one avenue through which the public can weigh in on local land use decisions. Anyone can file a CEQA lawsuit, even if the complaints are minor, and they can do so anonymously—and many use it. Recently, an attorney filed a CEQA lawsuit against an affordable-housing project on a vacant lot in Redwood City, claiming the new 20-unit building could increase traffic and block the view from his home’s back windows. That lawsuit has cost the nonprofit developer both money and time. (A Legislative Analyst’s Office report found that local agencies took an average of about 2½ years to approve housing projects that required an environmental impact report.)

Meanwhile, a new bill requires the state to meet a “zero emission” goal by 2045. That policy is estimated to tack on an extra $25,000 to building costs.

- **Local opposition:** Developers tell me local resistance to housing—or NIMBYism, short for “Not In My Backyard”—is their greatest challenge. Local communities that fear change use whatever political clout and resources they have to clamp down on new housing developments, such as voting out elected officials and misusing CEQA. Such opposition lengthens the review period or prevents a project’s approval, which increases housing costs and discourages developers from building in that area in the future. —S.L.
Last October, SJUSD revealed a proposal to turn nine district-owned properties into new units of affordable housing for its teachers and employees. Officials identified eight schools with old buildings and declining enrollment and suggested bulldozing them and building hundreds of new housing units in their place. The schools would move to another location. Two of those schools, Leland High and Bret Harte Middle, are highly rated schools built in the 1960s in Almaden Valley, a wealthy residential neighborhood in south San Jose—and neighbors roared their displeasure over SJUSD’s proposal.

At the next district meeting, enough alarmed parents, students, and community members from Almaden Valley packed the room that some got locked out. The residents voiced concerns about increased taxes, traffic congestion, construction, their kids’ ability to walk to school, and decreased property values. Most had only just heard about the district’s plan a few days before. The residents felt left out of the decision process, and rumors spread across social media that SJUSD would shut down their schools. Nobody really knew what was going on.

What happened with SJUSD is a classic example of why California’s housing crisis is worsening: Jobs are increasing, but the number of housing units is stagnant. Wage increases are not keeping up with housing cost increases. Many cities are happy to vote for jobs, but not houses. And when officials finally decide to build more housing, they botch it—their typical idea for funding housing projects is to increase taxes or borrow money through bonds, and they fail to engage the community during the planning process. When community members find out about the plan, it comes as a shock. They then push back, fueled by misinformation, stereotypes, and fears, and in the face of such community opposition, city officials back down.

many others, Barr worried that the district would build high-rise complexes, thus changing the quiet, residential atmosphere of his neighborhood: “It certainly scares me to death.... Huge, huge communities would not fit into Almaden Valley. Look, I’m not trying to hide it—this is an affluent area. This is a very affluent part of the world that shouldn’t be punished because others have unfortunate lives.” Instead, Barr suggested the district should pay their employees more: “We want to support our teachers. This is just not the way to do it.”

Barr bought his house in 1985, just half a mile from Leland High. He saw his two children and two grandsons graduate from that school. Now that school could be demolished to make way for affordable housing, and he worries it would be “a horrific change to my way of life. It’s just going to change everything and make it difficult to enjoy living in Almaden Valley. That may sound superficial, but that’s what life is all about, isn’t it—happiness?”

But for teachers like Sanchez who were also present at that October meeting, the opposition felt more like discrimination. An older couple who sat behind her leaned forward and said to her, “You know the housing isn’t just for teachers, right? It’s for all employees.” As Sanchez sat at the meeting listening to neighbors shout and yell at school district officials, she felt hurt: “It’s like we’re good enough to teach your kids, but we’re not good enough to be your neighbors. That’s something I will remember forever, that that’s what these people feel about us, even though we work with their kids.”

For now, Sanchez sometimes daydreams of going to law school as she originally planned, but she says she doesn’t regret being a teacher: “I’m going to keep teaching as long as I can. If it gets to a point where I can’t do it anymore, I may have to look at something else, but I hope that day never happens.”
THE LOVE IS HERE
In our coverage of the drug crisis over the last few years, we’ve asked ourselves regularly: Where are churches? Why are there so few Christian resources for a crisis that is killing 72,000 Americans a year?

Kristen Gunn, a woman I interviewed last year who had become dependent on benzodiazepines, told me her church was “the hardest place to talk about any of this” (see “Beyond opioids,” Nov. 10, 2018).

In Brooklyn, we found a church where churchgoers feel comfortable talking about their addictions. Recovery House of Worship (RHOW) has few resources, but it is seeding church plants across the country focused on bringing the gospel to addicts. With a congregation of about 200 in Brooklyn, it now has plants in the Bronx, Staten Island, Pennsylvania, and California. Another is in the works in London.

“America is just now waking up to the opioid crisis that we’ve known about for the last 30 years in poor neighborhoods,” said Edwin Colon, a native Brooklynite and the senior pastor of RHOW. If Colon has a conversation long enough with anyone these days, regardless of economic status, he finds some connection to addiction—an uncle with a drinking problem, a mom taking pills, or an ex-boyfriend whose recreational drug habit went off the deep end. That’s why he feels an urgency in planting churches like RHOW.

Once called the Baptist Temple, the historic church changed its name to Recovery to adapt to the neighborhood’s needs and as Colon and his childhood friend Raymond Ramos moved in to pastor. The Baptist Temple had a history of reaching out to the unpopular, from offering Sunday school space to Chinese immigrants in the 1920s to purchasing and freeing slaves in the 1800s.

Today the church’s annual budget is small—$300,000—and its congregation is mostly the outcasts of a gentrified neighborhood. Colon does outside fundraising for his $39,900 salary, teaches at Redeemer City to City, and sublets his apartment for extra cash.

But RHOW shows what churches can accomplish purely through relationships and discipleship, without much of an official recovery program. The church hosts daily 12-step meetings in its building as well as breakfasts throughout the week, both of which create an open door for addicts. With a critical mass of recovering addicts in the congregation (even at 27 years clean, Colon describes himself as “in recovery”), the church has strong mentors for addicts trying to leave substances behind.

One rainy morning at the Brooklyn church, Colon was sitting in his office telling me his life story. He started smoking and drinking at age 11 after his dad left his family, moved to marijuana by 12, and then to coke by 13. He dropped out of school after sixth grade. At 17, his mother overdosed in front of him, and he cursed God. That same year he and his best friend Ramos went into a 12-step program together. Colon had just started reading Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance and wanted to become a Buddhist when... CRASH.

Colon paused.

“Let’s see what broke,” he said, stepping out to the hallway outside his office, where a piece of plaster had fallen from the heavy rain. The church is in an old building that burned in 2010 and has only been patched back together since. The renovation of the historic building would cost millions, so the church staff works with “bubble gum and duct tape” to keep the building running, said Colon.

Permanent marker covers sections of the walls with instructions for how to open a door or a warning not to touch something. Downstairs in the basement, which is more recently renovated and hosts the worship space, a half-dozen men in drug recovery are sleeping in dorm rooms. And church volunteers are cleaning up a community breakfast in the kitchen.

In a church of mostly addicts, many stories end in heartbreak. Chris Hook, a former opioid addict who is now Colon’s assistant, recalled a young man whom he met at a 12-step meeting a few years ago and who started coming to the church. The man eventually asked to be baptized, but he couldn’t stop drinking. He ended up in jail, and Hook went to his hearings, but the young man eventually drank himself to death. Even with support from...
RHOW, his mom, and counselors, all working together, “We weren’t able to serve him in the way he needed,” Hook said.

But there are miracles in bunches. Evelyn Ruiz, once an addict, manages the church finances. Pedro Rodriguez was a heroin addict until one of the pastors pulled him off the street; he is now 14 years clean. He serves as one of the volunteer pastors and works as a chef for his day job.

“In a lot of churches, you find one or two of those and you’re like, ‘Oh, this testimony is so powerful,’” said Colon. “We trip over them.”

Colon said churches tend to encounter addicts and try to solve their issues “programmatically.” But programs, while useful, don’t last forever. That’s why he thinks it’s essential for churches to incorporate addiction recovery into the regular work of the church. He meets regularly with recovering addicts in the church, and they memorize Scripture together.

Another key ingredient of RHOW is sending addicts to 12-step meetings, which provide a daily infrastructure and give a space where they can be outward-focused in sharing what saved them as well. Many found the church through Narcotics Anonymous meetings.

One of those, Evelyn Ruiz, was picking up a ginger tea on her way to a Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meeting as we talked.

Twenty-two years ago her husband died, leaving her with three children and a spiraling addiction. She lost her children to the state before eventually going through detox and rehab to win her kids back.

Now she’s been clean for “19 years, 6 months, and 7 days,” she says, and is a longtime member of RHOW. Her bookkeeping background helps her manage the church finances.

“NA showed me a lot of principles that translate to when you’re serving in church,” she said. “I didn’t come totally on empty. I came on a foundation of being of service to others. That’s just my experience.”

It’s an experience repeated over and over by members of the church, whom the pastors sought out, pulled off the street, and began mentoring as they started detox, rehab, and 12-step meetings. The RHOW mentality of moving those in recovery quickly to positions of service means that the person serving you breakfast or memorizing Scripture with you or leading worship has likely gone through recovery himself or herself.

The meals are the welcome mat for the addicted to begin to hear about the gospel. George Negron, a retired police officer
who runs the breakfasts at the church throughout the week, knows the name of every person who walks through the door. He runs around serving dishes, nodding to the kitchen for an extra plate, emptying the trash, listening to stories.

One regular at the breakfast reports to Negron that another regular in his 80s is losing his apartment because the rent is going up. One of the cooks in the kitchen had already been bringing food to the elderly man in question; he promised to check on his rent situation when he visited later. Some RHOW church planters from California appeared at the breakfast table too; they were staying in the church basement for a visit.

Off to the side, the Bronx-born Michael Ortiz was finishing a glass of orange juice. He had just completed his night shift as a doorman and was preparing for his day job in custodial maintenance. He found both jobs via the church, where he’s been coming for the last six years. Before, he had served time for dealing drugs, and said he should have been murdered by now. But here he is, even if he’s been on a roller coaster of addiction, recovery, and relapse. Now he’s been living in the church for eight months and has a “running buddy” at the church so they can hold each other accountable. Whenever he relapsed, the pastors “were always calling me.”

“It takes a lot of time... God’s grace and mercy is amazing,” said Ortiz. “Regular rehab—it’s just groups. But here, the love is here.”

A few evenings later Hook and Colon showed up to a Christian residential recovery center in Brooklyn that RHOW has recently started partnering with, called Anchor House. Colon teaches the men and women in the program, and some have started coming to RHOW services on Sundays.

Facing a room full of black, white, and Latino men and women, Colon began by briefly narrating his own struggle with addiction. Then he celebrated because this day was special. When the Colons adopted their youngest son of five children, he had been born 13 weeks early, so small he could fit in a hand, and addicted to crack and heroin. No one knew if he’d have brain damage, but today the healthy 5-year-old had his first day of school. Everyone clapped.

Then Colon quickly jumped into the evening’s study, reading 1 Corinthians 10:13: “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”


Then he asked: “Are you unique when you get tempted? Does it ever occur to you, that no one else understands you?... The Bible is saying, none of these things happen to you alone. They are common. You are precious, but you’re not unique.”

Then Colon went on with the passage: “He will provide a way out.” A woman raised her hand: “Can you talk about when you don’t see a way out?” The questions began to come thick and fast. Another man brought up that prayers to God often go unanswered for a long time: “It’s not instant like oatmeal.”

Colon shifted to teaching about the “creation-fall-redemption-consummation” framework of the Bible’s narrative. Apply that narrative to your life, and where are you right now? he asked. Lost, said one woman. Between fall and redemption, said another man. Feeling out of control, said another. More and more people began to crowd into the room.

Colon said his dad’s abandonment of his family was his “fall,” and how he started using. He talked about abuse he experienced. Someone else mentioned a parental breakup. In broken moments, Colon said, “You run to your Savior [Jesus] or you run to your savior. Maybe your savior is control.”

Others piped in about what can push them to use. “Anger.” “Isolation.” “A desire for significance.” Colon insisted that the men and women had to name those root causes in order to address substance abuse. He promised to continue the conversation at next month’s meeting. At the end of the night, a woman shouted from the back, “What time is your service?”
or three years after her husband’s disappearance, Li Wenzu had no idea where he was or whether he was even alive. Wang Quanzhang, a 42-year-old Chinese human rights lawyer who had represented political dissidents and the victims of land grabs, first went missing during a 2015 crackdown, when Communist agents detained more than 320 lawyers and activists.

One by one, the authorities released the other detainees, tried them in sham courts, or paraded them on television for forced confessions. But Li still had no word on her husband, except for a notice in February 2017 that he had been charged with “subversion of state power.” Li believed the radio silence from Wang meant he had resolutely resisted confessing and thus the government was punishing him.

A network of lawyers in China has led a bold effort to enforce the rule of law, but Communist opposition is formidable.

by JUNE CHENG
Out of desperation, Li and other lawyers’ wives became activists themselves: They petitioned the Chinese government, testified in a U.S. congressional hearing (Li by video), and protested outside the Tianjin detention center. In December 2018, Li and a few other wives shaved their heads outside a Beijing park. The Chinese word for hair (fa) sounds like the word for law: “We can do without our hair, but we can’t do without law,” they explained.

It was only last July that a government-appointed lawyer was allowed to meet with Wang. On the day of Wang’s Dec. 26 trial in Tianjin, police barred Li from leaving her home in Beijing, and the court barred the public—including reporters and foreign diplomats—from attending the proceeding. What went on inside the courtroom is unclear, but it seems Wang remained defiant: Li got word that he fired his government lawyer in court, meaning he likely forced an adjournment of the trial until authorities could find him a new attorney.

“This whole process has been illegal, so how could I expect an open and fair trial?” Li told The New York Times before the hearing.

Wang is the last lawyer facing prosecution as a direct consequence of the Chinese government’s 2015 sweep of weiquan (or rights defense) lawyers. The weiquan movement, in which lawyers and activists use China’s own laws to protect citizens’ rights, has for more than a decade represented what the Chinese Communist Party fears as a threat to its power: governance by
rule of law. While the party claims to uphold legal rights, it has fiercely opposed lawyers who seek to hold the government accountable, jailing them or driving them from the country. “China’s political system is at odds with providing citizens with basic rights,” says Teng Biao, an exiled human rights lawyer. “If everyone uses the law to defend the rights of citizens, then this political system could not survive.”

Despite the formidable opposition, courageous men and women in China have risked their lives and livelihoods to pursue justice in an unjust country. They have publicized their abusive treatment in detention and spoken truth to power. Although some are now disbarred or exiled, others are working to take their place. But under an increasingly oppressive Communist regime, is there any future for China’s human rights defenders?

Chairman Mao Zedong first implemented a Soviet-style legal system in China in 1954. But disruptive campaigns—the Anti-Rightist Movement, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution—kept it from taking hold. After Mao’s death in 1976, the central government began reforming its legal system, crafting extensive laws and judicial procedure to prevent a return to the chaos of the Cultural Revolution and to attract foreign investment. The government opened law schools to train legal professionals and allowed students to take the college entrance exam beginning in 1977.

The 1982 Chinese Constitution seemed to give citizens greater rights: It upheld the freedom of speech, religion, press, and assembly. Citizens had the right to vote and run for office, as well as the right to a public trial except in cases dealing with national security, sex offenses, or minors.

While much of it looked good on paper, many of the laws were never enforced. Courts lacked judicial independence and bent to the will of Communist Party officials. Corruption plagued lower-level courts, as bribes or party connections could keep criminals out of prison.

Teng Biao entered Peking University Law School in 1996, the year that lawyers became independent professionals rather than civil servants. At the time, Peking University was considered one of the most open schools in China, and some of Teng’s teachers taught Western legal theories that influenced him greatly. He also read Western books on democracy, and when he became a professor himself, he often discussed these sensitive topics with his students.

The weiquan movement took off in 2003 with the case of Sun Zhigang, a 27-year-old graphic designer from Wuhan. On March 17, 2003, Guangzhou police picked up Sun during a random identity card check. Because he had just started his job in the city, he had not yet applied for a temporary residence permit and had forgotten his ID at home. Police threw him into a “custody and repatriation center,” a detention center for migrants from other cities.

Three days later, Sun was dead. Doctors claimed he had died of stroke and a heart attack, but an official autopsy revealed he had been beaten to death while in detention.

Investigative journalists at China’s Southern Metropolis Daily newspaper reported on the case, and the news quickly spread on the internet, angering Chinese citizens. Three legal scholars—Teng, Xu Zhiyong, and Yu Jiang—sent an open letter to the National People’s Congress Standing Committee stating that “custody and repatriation centers” were unconstitutional because they violated citizens’ rights.

In response, Premier Wen Jiabao abolished the custody and repatriation system. Officials sentenced to death the two people responsible for Sun’s murder and sent their accomplices to prison. Sun’s family received a $53,000 settlement, and the government even named lawyer Teng “Ten People in Rule of Law in 2003.” Encouraged by the case’s success, more weiquan lawyers emerged, representing the victims of land grabs, forced abortions, and tainted-milk scandals, as well as house church leaders, Falun Gong practitioners, and political prisoners.

Teng co-founded the Open Constitution Initiative, providing a platform for lawyers, journalists, scholars, and bloggers to work together and ensure the government followed its own laws. He represented wrongly convicted death row inmates, helped draft Charter 08 calling for democracy and rule of law, and investigated the mistreatment of Tibetans.

Yet the Sun case was more of an outlier than the norm: In 2004, police arrested Southern Metropolis Daily’s editor-in-chief, Cheng Yizhong, and detained him for five months as punishment for the paper’s reporting. Authorities disbarred Teng in 2008 and shut down the Open Constitution Initiative a year later. They took Teng’s passport, monitored his movements, and detained and tortured him. He finally left for the United States in 2014 and has been unable to return home.

Before moving to the United States, Teng also represented Chen Guangcheng, a blind, self-taught lawyer who in 2005 sued the government of Shandong for forcibly aborting the babies of rural women under the government’s one-child policy. In retaliation, officials sentenced Chen to four years in prison.

After Chen’s release, authorities kept him under house arrest with his wife and young daughter. In 2012 he made a brazen escape, scrambling over walls and through his neighbors’ yards to a friend’s waiting car and then to the U.S. Embassy. He and his family eventually moved to the United States, where he is now a fellow at the Witherspoon Institute.
Chen said that although China has some “nice-sounding laws,” the government never intended to implement them. Thanks to the so-called Great Firewall of China, censors now constantly monitor and block blacklisted keywords, making it difficult for news of controversial cases to spread.

The government also revises bothersome laws, making them more vague, Chen said. To deal with human rights lawyers and activists, officials toss the law entirely aside and use mafia-style kidnapping, torture, and persecution of family members.

“I think today, China’s law is no longer law,” Chen said. “It doesn’t matter how well they write the law, if they want to follow it, they will. If they don’t want to, they won’t.”

Today there are 300,000 lawyers in China, but the legal system has taken large steps backward under President Xi Jinping, the most powerful Chinese leader since Mao. New laws ban the discussion of independent judiciary and civil society from law school classrooms. As Xi has tightened control of all aspects of society—religion, education, internet, and civil society—human rights lawyers have been a particular target.

The 2015 crackdown, known as the 709 Crackdown, began with the disappearance of Wang Yu (no relation to Wang Quanzhang) of Fengrui Law Firm in Beijing. As a human rights lawyer, Wang was known for representing jailed Uighur scholar Ilham Tohti, a group of elementary school students sexually abused by their principal, and the “Feminist Five” who protested sexual harassment. At 4 a.m. on July 9, 2015, Beijing Security Bureau officers broke into her house and carried her off to an undisclosed location. Her husband and son, who were on their way to the airport, were also taken into custody.

Wang recalls in the book Trial by Media how prison guards pressured her to give a televised confession, even placing a hood on her head and driving her to the CCTV building for the state-run media to film her. She at first refused to record anything, but relented after police revealed that her 16-year-old son had been caught trying to leave China. They claimed that if Wang would record a video for their superiors, they would treat her son well. She agreed on the assurance that no one else would see the video, but authorities still broadcast it on television.

Wang and her husband remained in detention for a year and were only released on the condition that she film another televised confession. Following a police-provided script, Wang accused fellow lawyers of pursuing wealth and fame and said she would no longer be used by foreign activists. After the taping, she was reunited with her husband and son, although they remained under house arrest for more than a year. Today Wang is disbarred and Fengrui Law Firm is closed.

During the 709 Crackdown, authorities also arrested other well-known figures. They included lawyer Xie Yang, who said he was tortured in prison before his December 2017 release; activist Wu Gan, sentenced to eight years in prison; and Christian lawyer Li Heping, who appeared emaciated at his release in May 2017.

Many in the human rights community were upset with Wang for agreeing to the confession. Human rights lawyer Jeremiah Tang (name changed for security purposes), who was also taken during the 709 Crackdown, said the government uses this tactic to stir up disunity within the weiquan community. He believes the Communist Party’s goal is to deter younger people from joining the movement.

Yet Chen believes more and more ordinary people in China are realizing something is wrong in society. While some of the most well-known human rights lawyers are heavily monitored or in prison, many more lawyers and activists are carrying on their human rights work. For instance, lawyer Zhang Peihong has taken up the case of Pastor Wang Yi, whom authorities charged with subversion after police raided his unregistered church, Early Rain Covenant Church of Chengdu, in December. After Zhang met with Wang’s mother and son Jan. 8, plainclothes officers brought the lawyer to a police station for six hours of interrogation. They refused to let him meet with his client. Wang was a human rights lawyer himself before going into full-time ministry.

Teng agrees that even though some young people may see the persecution and stick to safer professions, others are hearing about the weiquan movement for the first time and finding their consciences stirred.

“Even though the risk is greater, there are more people joining them,” he said.

In a May interview with The Epoch Times, Wang Yu said she felt hopeless about the future of China’s legal system, a feeling shared by many human rights lawyers. “The essence of the rule of law is the restriction of government power. Yet the Chinese Communist Party uses the law as an instrument to strengthen its rule,” she said. “If this system doesn’t change, China’s so-called rule of law is nothing but a sham.”

Yet even as their hope in the legal profession fades, some lawyers have set their hope elsewhere. About a quarter of China’s human rights defenders are Christians, including Wang.

In August Wang tweeted photos of herself holding flowers and a baptism certificate in front of Beijing’s Zion Church.

“Today is August 19, 2018, I participated Zion Church’s baptism ceremony in Beijing,” she wrote in a tweet. (Police shut down Zion Church in September, and members now meet in homes.)

According to Wang, when her pastor asked, “Are you willing to experience the trials and ridicule that our Lord faced on this earth? Are you willing to drop everything to follow our Lord Jesus Christ?” she responded tearfully, “I am willing!”

Wang tweeted: “From now on, Jesus is the Lord of my heart.”
Critics of Brazil’s new president unfavorably compare him to Donald Trump, but JAIRO BOLSONARO’s win also marks a move away from socialism and shows the rise of evangelical influence

BY JAMIE DEAN  photo by Andre Penner/AP

When Fabiane Maria de Jesus stopped to buy bananas on her way home from church on a May afternoon in the Brazilian resort town of Guarujá, the wife and mother of two didn’t know it would be one of the last acts of her life.

As she walked home, de Jesus tucked her Bible under one arm and offered a banana to a boy in the street. Within moments, a gang of locals descended on her, beating de Jesus to death. A crowd gathered to watch. She was 33.

The ruthless 2014 assault wasn’t the plot of drug lords or gangbangers. The crowd included ordinary locals reacting to a wild rumor: A tale had circulated about a blond woman carrying a satanic book and kidnapping children.
Flanked by first lady Michelle Bolsonaro, Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro waves to crowds after his swearing-in ceremony Jan. 1 in Brasília, Brazil.
The vigilante attack was part of a disturbing trend: Each day in Brazil, mobs kill or attempt to kill at least one suspected lawbreaker. That means Brazil has the highest number of known lynchings in the world, according to University of São Paulo sociologist José de Souza Martins. In many cases, the suspected crimes are as minor as stealing a phone.

Part of the mob mentality likely stems from the mass impunity for criminals: Ninety percent of murders in Brazil go unsolved. In some cities, many victims of armed robbery don’t bother reporting the crimes to authorities. Vigilantism is sometimes a brutal, last-straw response to a lack of law and order.

Police living through Brazil’s economic downturn say they’re underfunded and understaffed and often go unpaid. In 2016, some police officers in Rio de Janeiro greeted tourists arriving for the summer Olympics with signs warning, “Whoever Comes to Rio Will Not Be Safe.”

Indeed, lynchings are a small part of a bigger picture of violence in Brazil often driven by drugs and gang violence. The country of 209 million endured nearly 64,000 murders in 2017. That brings Brazil’s rate of homicide to 30 murders per 100,000 people. The U.S. rate in 2015 was 5 per 100,000.

Jair Bolsonaro—who became Brazil’s president on Jan. 1, 2019—offered a caustic response to the country’s dizzying violence during his presidential campaign last August: “If the government needs to hire someone to kill off criminals, I’ll do it for free.”

Two months later, Bolsonaro won the election in a landslide.

His often-bombastic language has earned Bolsonaro, 63, comparisons to President Donald Trump, including the nickname “Trump of the Tropics.” Bolsonaro relishes the comparison. He skewers “fake news,” taunts political opponents, and tells voters, “Just like [Trump] wants to make America great, I want to make Brazil great.”

Bolsonaro has also made sharply offensive comments in the past: In an interview with Playboy magazine in 2011, he said he wouldn’t be able to love a son he learned was homosexual. He’d rather his son be dead. In 2014, he said a congresswoman had called him a rapist, and he angrily responded by saying she wasn’t worthy for him to rape her.

The rhetoric wasn’t enough to cost Bolsonaro the election, likely because the majority of Brazilians loathed the alternative: a candidate committed to continuing with Marxist-infused policies that have proven toxic for a nation with a front-row seat to the calamitous collapse of socialist Venezuela.

The story of how Brazilians—including many evangelicals—came to embrace the controversial Bolsonaro includes boom and gloom: boom for the massive growth of Protestant evangelicals and their growing influence in politics, and gloom that voters saw in the socialist ideas once gripping the most influential nation in Latin America.

Many media outlets were apocalyptic about Bolsonaro’s victory.

They pointed to examples of the retired army captain’s sharply offensive rhetoric and his nostalgic regard for the country’s military dictatorship that ended in 1985. Despite over three decades of democratic government, some pundits predicted he’ll drag the country back to military rule.

Before he ever took office, Foreign Policy magazine compared Bolsonaro to Nazis. The New York Times declared Brazil had shifted to a dictatorship. And The Washington Post sought to explain: “How the unthinkable happened in Brazil.”

But the unthinkable had begun happening years ago. Decades of Marxist-infused, socialist-leaning rule have left the country in financial straits—thus the underpaid police officers, crippling recession, and 13 million unemployed. And it has also presided over monumental government corruption: One former president is in jail and another was impeached.

Bolsonaro promised an alternative: He said he would rein in government spending, clean up corruption, and restore public safety. James Roberts, an economic expert and Latin American analyst at the Heritage Foundation, thinks alarmism over Bolsonaro misses a bigger story.

“The bloom is off the rose of socialism in Latin America,” he says. “People have seen it for what it is—and it has been a disaster.”

Bolsonaro’s success also points to another big story: Evangelicals were pivotal to his victory. That’s significant in a nation with the highest population of Catholics in the world, but it’s also emblematic of the massive growth of evangelicals in Brazil over the last 30 years. The percentage of Brazilians identifying as evangelical has grown
from 6.6 percent in 1980 to more than 25 percent today.

In another decade, Catholics may be a religious minority in Brazil, marking one of the largest religious shifts in decades.

If Bolsonaro is the “most unlikely president of a major country in modern times,” as Walter Russell Mead of the Hudson Institute suggests, Brazil might once have seemed a most unlikely democracy.

Portuguese explorers landed in the territory in 1500, naming the land after the Brazil tree native to the region. The country eventually gained its independence from Portugal (which had also imported Catholicism), and it went through a series of governments.

In 1964, the country entered a military dictatorship that lasted for the next 20 years. Bolsonaro entered the country’s military academy in the 1970s, and he eventually rose to the rank of army captain.

The economy improved for a time, even as military leaders censored critics—sometimes with violence. The economy flagged in the early 1980s with global inflation, and after widespread protests the military allowed a transition to civilian rule in 1985.

Bolsonaro served in the military until 1988 and then pursued a career in politics: He served as a city councilman in Rio de Janeiro from 1989 to 1991, and then won a seat in the country’s legislature in 1991. He held it until he won the presidency in 2018.

Meanwhile, evangelicalism was booming in Brazil in the 1980s, particularly with the rapid expansion of the Pentecostal churches. Some churches were conservative. Others were liberal. Many embraced a so-called prosperity gospel that promised material wealth to its adherents.

For years, evangelicals had followed the informal slogan: “Believers don’t mess with politics.” But as they gained numbers in the 1980s and the country transitioned to civilian rule, influential pastors changed their minds. The Assembly of God churches began endorsing candidates to run for office as lawmakers started working on the country’s new constitution.

Eventually they formed a bloc of evangelical legislators that includes more than 90 lawmakers today.

But a socialist mindset was also on the rise, and as economic prosperity dipped again, the Marxist-infused Workers’ Party gained popularity and power in national politics, and it held the presidency from 2003 to 2016.

President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (known as “Lula”) vastly expanded government outlays, and his popularity grew. But with the massive spending, the economy suffered. Still, Lula’s hand-picked successor, Dilma Rousseff, won the presidency in 2010.

But a massive corruption scandal soon rocked the nation: Prosecutors uncovered a web of bribes and money laundering that ensnared dozens of politicians from across the political spectrum—including Lula. He reported to prison for a 12-year sentence in 2018.

Meanwhile, prosecutors charged Rousseff with corruption in a separate case, and the Brazilian legislature removed her from office in 2016.

The chaos roiled disillusioned Brazilian voters, and it wasn’t long before Bolsonaro took a step that would help launch him toward the nation’s highest office: He literally took a plunge.

On a May morning in 2016, Bolsonaro donned a white robe and waded into the murky, green waters of the Jordan River. Pastor Everaldo Pereira, a well-known minister and a politician in the Social Christian Party, dipped Bolsonaro under the water.

It wasn’t Bolsonaro’s first baptism: He grew up Catholic (and still identifies as Catholic), but he says he often attends an evangelical church with his wife. It’s

‘The bloom is off the rose of socialism in Latin America. People have seen it for what it is—and it has been a disaster.’

—James Roberts
also not Bolsonaro’s first marriage—he’s been divorced twice and has five children.

Some saw Bolsonaro’s baptism during his Israel trip as an attempt to impress evangelicals ahead of a presidential run. Whatever the case, evangelicals paid more attention to the agenda he proposed: He said he would oppose expanding legalized abortion and would press back against a homosexual agenda already well under way: Brazil legalized same-sex marriage in 2013.

When it comes to his offensive language, evangelicals confronted a dilemma similar to the one some Christians grappled with during Trump’s 2016 presidential contest. But Breno Macedo, a Brazilian and a Presbyterian pastor, said when evangelicals and other voters considered the alternative, “I think Brazilians woke up to the pit that Marxism is.”

Draining the pit won’t be easy. Reforming the economy will require cutting the nation’s out-of-control spending, including in its pension system. Bolsonaro has already tapped Paulo Guedes, an economist who worked on a team of University of Chicago–trained experts (known as “the Chicago boys”). The team helped the nation of Chile transform its economy into one of the most successful in Latin America.

On corruption, he’s tapped Sérgio Moro, the prosecutor who led the investigation that exposed dozens of politicians. Some see the appointment as revealing Moro’s sympathies toward Bolsonaro, but others say it’s notable Bolsonaro is tapping a prosecutor who has already brought down two presidents.

James Roberts from the Heritage Foundation thinks the recent corruption investigations and prosecutions should temper fears that Bolsonaro intends to pivot toward a military dictatorship, though Bolsonaro does speak with fondness about the era of military rule.

Curbing rampant crime may prove one of the most difficult tasks, but Brazilian voters ranked crime as their top concern ahead of the election. Bolsonaro proposed giving police more authority to shoot suspected criminals.

The idea has drawn scrutiny from those who fear police would abuse it. The president has also said he’ll relax gun laws and allow more Brazilian citizens to carry weapons legally. He says it’s an important way for citizens to protect themselves. Others worry it could deepen the cycle of organized crime and vigilantism.

Whatever the approach, the new president isn’t a stranger to violence. Last September, as Bolsonaro campaigned in the streets of Juiz de Fora a few weeks ahead of the election, an assailant stabbed a knife four inches into Bolsonaro’s abdomen. A handful of Bolsonaro’s supporters beat the attacker until police dragged him away.

Bolsonaro sustained life-threatening injuries and never returned to the campaign trail. Instead, he released videos on Facebook and Twitter as he recovered. But the stabbing stoked his popularity among many supporters who saw Bolsonaro’s recovery as miraculous and his street cred as established.

It wasn’t lost on some that his middle name is “Messias”—which means Messiah.

Bolsonaro isn’t a Messiah. Like others, he’s a deeply fallible man, and his country needs more than political and economic reform. Brazil’s deeper need is for cultural and spiritual reform, and on that count, Macedo, the Presbyterian pastor, says he’s encouraged to see the growth of evangelicalism.

While false theology still abounds, the pastor says he’s excited about a growing interest across denominations to study how the Bible applies to all areas of life: “There’s never been a time in Brazil when evangelicals have studied so much” about worldview.

Many evangelicals are hopeful about Bolsonaro’s agenda, but Macedo knows lasting change comes from a different source: “We want people to embrace faith in Jesus Christ, and that is the ministry of the church, not the state.”

—I think Brazilians woke up to the pit that Marxism is.

—Breno Macedo
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As Nigerian immigrants dream of better lives in Europe, aid groups work...
IN AUGUST 2016, ESTHER ANTHONY BOARDED A 16-SEATER BUS from Benin City, the capital of Edo state, to begin a journey to Italy. She paid an initial deposit of $966 to her smuggler, who assured her of an easy passage into Europe, despite the rumors she had heard to the contrary.

The irregular migratory route took her through Nigeria's northern Kano state to Niger, from which she crossed through the Sahara desert into Libya. She planned to continue on to Italy by crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

But despite covering more than 2,000 miles by land, she never made it across the Mediterranean. Instead, her smuggler handed her over to sex traffickers. “I spent one year in Libya with tears,” she says.

In 2018, over 116,000 migrants and refugees arrived in Europe through the Mediterranean. More than 2,000 others died along the way, the latest casualties of a seven-year migrant crisis fueled by war and economic instability.

More than 1 million migrants and refugees have arrived in Europe since 2014. Faced with a continued influx, some European nations have tightened their border controls, even refusing to give port to some rescue boats carrying migrants. In consequence, smugglers have opted for riskier routes, and many migrants like Anthony have found themselves stranded in war-torn Libya, where abuse and human trafficking thrive.

In Nigeria, most migrants decide to leave their homeland for economic reasons. In the most affected regions of the country, some organizations are working to provide support for returnees and to dissuade others from attempting the perilous journey.

Edo state is Nigeria’s migration hub, where traffickers and word of mouth keep the smuggling business alive.

Anthony, 25 at the time, was working as a saleswoman when her aunt made the travel arrangements. (Anthony later paid her smuggler a remaining balance of $1,790 through family contributions and her earnings from Libya.)

She said she spent three days crossing the desert along with about 26 other people stacked in the back of a Toyota Hilux.
Libyan coast guards have upped surveillance along the central Mediterranean route from Libya to Italy within the first half of 2018, according to the UN. At least 49,000 people entered Europe that year, with 311 mainly African migrants docked at a southern Spanish port after waiting a week at sea: Italy and Malta had denied it entry. In June, Spain accepted 630 migrants after Italy’s anti-immigration interior minister, Matteo Salvini, and Malta both refused to allow the boat to dock. The same month, a cargo ship owned by Maersk, the Danish shipping company, remained offshore for three days with 108 migrants it rescued before Rome accepted them.

Some of the European Union nations bearing the brunt of immigrant arrivals complain other members of the bloc have failed to share the burden. Amid the ongoing tension, Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, recently urged European leaders to remember that migrants are humans: “Debate is welcome—scapegoating refugees and migrants for political gain is not.” —O.O.

Anthony spent another month at a camp in Tunisia run by the United Nations migration agency. The agency worked with the Nigerian Embassy to organize a flight back to Nigeria for some of the willing migrants. Anthony returned to Nigeria in July 2017.
The center offers counseling and life skills sessions. Returnees and people at risk of making the journey also have access to a six-month business training session that covers tailoring, hairdressing, catering, computer studies, and other topics.

More than 4,000 people, including a thousand returnees, have completed the vocational program since it began in 2004. Anthony finished her tailoring training with an exhibition in December. “I’m happy now,” she says.

ONE AFTERNOON IN OCTOBER, MORE THAN 100 LIBYAN RETURNEES wearing name tags filled a hall at the Rafik hotel in Benin City. The group had just started the first day of a reintegration and rehabilitation program run by the UN’s International Organization for Migration (IOM).

The intensive, four-day skill-training program combines psychosocial support with business lectures to prepare returnees to set up their own businesses. IOM partners with national organizations to charter flights for returnees, then organizes counseling and medical support before inviting returnees for the business training.

In a joint project with the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, IOM opened an office in March at the Edo state secretariat building. The office assists returnees and also provides migratory information for walk-in guests interested in traveling abroad.

Osita Osemene, who leads the IOM training session for the returnees, uses his personal experiences to reach out to them: He tried to cross into Europe in 2004 in search of a better job. Instead of reaching Spain through Morocco, conflict along the route led him to Libya: “Life is easier in Europe, but we try to make them know you can create that life for yourself.”

IOM approves and then funds the migrants’ business ideas, usually placing them into groups of threes. Osemene calls the assistance a “seed”: “It’s not for them to eat. It’s to plant.”

More than 4,000 returnees have passed through the program and set up shop in businesses ranging from timber production to tailoring.

They include Victory Imasuen, who now runs a barbershop with three other returnees. Before leaving for Libya, Imasuen worked as a barber at a salon, where one of his regular clients was a smuggler. He decided to hire the smuggler, who assured him he would arrive in Europe within a month.

Imasuen paid him $1,380 and set out on the same route as Esther Anthony. Once he arrived in Sabhā, Libya, the smuggler sold him to a Ghanaian man, who held him for eight months.

“That’s where the slavery started,” said Imasuen. During his captivity, he received regular beatings and had little food to eat.

His elder sister tried to send the $552 necessary to free him, but her contact made off with the money. His mother was later able to gather the required amount and secure his release.

Imasuen continued to scramble for jobs, working as a barber and at a car park to pay his way to Tripoli. But authorities arrested him during clashes in the city, sent him to one of Libya’s notorious detention centers, and then deported him.

IOM helped Imasuen and his three partners open their barbershop in July. The financial challenges remain: Sometimes, only one customer strolls into the shop for the day. Five of Imasuen’s siblings have graduated from college but still have no jobs.

This time, though, his mindset is different. “We’re already here, there’s nothing we can do about it,” he said. For now, Imasuen is grateful he has even a modest job: “I believe with time, the bigger one [will] come.”

(1) Esther Anthony and other participants listen during a life skills session at the Idia Renaissance center.
(2) A participant sews clothes at the center.
(3) The Idia Renaissance cooking program
(4) Osita Osemene
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About a month after authorities raided Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, China, on Dec. 9 (see ‘Faithful disobedience,’ Dec. 29, 2018), police released seven church members on bail pending trial. Fifteen remain in criminal detention, including Pastor Wang Yi and his wife, Jiang Rong, as well as the church’s four elders.

On Jan. 6, authorities arrested 20 members of a Sunday school class as they studied the Bible and ate dinner at a restaurant, according to the church’s prayer bulletins. The police released all the class members around midnight after asking them to sign a pledge stating they would no longer attend Early Rain Bible studies or worship services.

According to the church’s update, one of the men arrested recalled: “When we got to the police station, I remembered those brothers and sisters who had worshipped and prayed here before. When I realized that we got to share with them in the bitter cup of the Lord, my heart was continually grateful.” Other recently released church members said fellow inmates and even some of the police officers were eager to hear the gospel and asked for Bibles to read.

A congregant dressed in black reads the Bible during a worship service at a church in Hong Kong. Members of the church wore black in solidarity with Early Rain and other persecuted churches in China.
On Christmas Eve, the authorities took over the Early Rain sanctuary, located on the 23rd floor of an office building, and converted it into a community police office space, even though the church had paid for the space. Police also took possession of two of Early Rain’s church plants, Linxishu Church and Enyue Church.

Church members have gathered in small groups inside homes for Sunday worship as well as Wednesday Bible studies. Police started monitoring some of these homes to prevent gatherings: On Dec. 23, they interrupted a meeting at the home of church elder Su Bingsen (currently in criminal detention) and took 20 people, including children, to the police station until 5:00 that afternoon.

On Jan. 13, police raided a college small group and urged everyone to register with their ID numbers. When the group refused to cooperate, the police brought all but two of the adult members to the station. Four of them were sentenced to 15 days in jail.

Before his arrest, Pastor Wang and his wife wrote their annual New Year’s family letter to the church. In it, they discuss the persecution the church faced in 2018, Wang’s resolution to devote his next 20 years to China’s gospel movement, and his plan for a three-month sabbatical in 2019. “If God is willing to put Wang Yi in prison for a prolonged sabbatical, we will also receive it as abundant grace,” they wrote.

“As long as God allows him to be free to move around, may the Lord use up this freedom until we no longer have this freedom.””

CHOOSING MY RELIGION

When newly elected Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., took her congressional oath of office on Jan. 3, she raised her right hand high and placed the other hand firmly on a law book. The book contained copies of the Arizona and U.S. constitutions.

Sinema wasn’t the only freshman in the 116th Congress taking an oath on something other than the Bible. Texts included the Quran, a Buddhist sutra, and the Hindu Vedas.

Members aren’t required to swear on any book or text, but the variety offered a glimpse into the array of religious beliefs in Congress. According to a Pew Research survey, only two of the 252 Republican members of Congress didn’t identify as Christian: Reps. Lee Zeldin, R-N.Y., and David Kustoff, R-Tenn., are Jewish.

Among Christian designations, 293 members identified as Protestant and 163 as Catholic. Mormons were listed under the Christian designation as well, with 10 members identifying with Mormonism. Five members identified as Orthodox Christians.

Among Protestant members, affiliations included Baptist, Methodist, Anglican/Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and seven other groups.

But the highest number of Protestants (80 members) checked “unspecified/other”—a designation that includes “those who say they are Christian, evangelical Christian, evangelical Protestant or Protestant, without specifying a denomination.” This was a separate category from “nondenominational Protestants.” Ten members checked that box.

The “unspecified/other” category included some members who do belong to denominations, but chose to identify apart from denominational lines. Since denominational categories didn’t offer breakdowns to differentiate between mainline churches and more conservative ones, it’s possible some members chose this category to make the distinction.

Whatever the case, the oath of office new members took includes a pledge to faithfully discharge their duties “so help me God.” —Jamie Dean
Every day, thousands of parents proudly post pictures and updates on social media about their kids and their kids’ activities. That information, which might include names, birthdays, or school locations, is increasingly ending up in the hands of big tech companies and identity thieves, according to a U.K. government report released in November.

Published by the Office of the Children’s Commissioner for England and titled “Who Knows What About Me?” the report documents how social media companies are collecting more information on children than ever before. The authors found that a child’s digital history begins long before he’s old enough to get his own smartphone or computer.

The report said that by the time a child turns 13, his parents will have posted an average of 1,300 photos and videos of him to social media. It noted children between the ages of 11 and 16 post on social media 26 times a day. By the time they reach adulthood, they will likely have posted 70,000 times.

Such an extensive amount of personal data on children can expose them to the possibility of identity theft, according to security experts at Barclays. Three key pieces of information in identity theft—name, birthdate, and home address—are “often given directly by parents, or can be deduced from photos or updates on social media accounts,” the report said. It cited criminal reports in which children’s data were stored until they turned 18, “at which point fraudulent loans and credit card applications were made.” The report said that Barclays “has forecast that by 2030 ‘sharenting’ will account for two-thirds of identity fraud facing young people over 18.”

The authors also documented how the proliferation of internet-connected devices contributes to the “datafication” of children.

“This is not just about parents and children sharing information on social media, even though that is part of the issue,” the report stated. “It is also increasingly about smart toys, speakers and other connected devices which are being brought into more and more homes.... And it is about information that is given away when children use essential public services such as schools and [doctors’ offices].”

Among their recommendations, the authors said tech companies should state their terms and conditions in more easily understood language and be more transparent about any trackers installed in apps, toys, and other products that could be capturing info about children.

For children and parents, the report’s top recommendation: Stop and think before posting. Even tagging a child at home during a birthday celebration gives away his or her date of birth and home address.

SHOCK TREATMENT

A team of scientists from the United States and China has demonstrated an efficient wound care system that could reduce healing times from weeks to days. The team’s bandage dressing contains tiny electrodes powered by a small generator—called a nanogenerator—worn on the torso that converts breathing motions into electricity. Experiments on rats showed skin wound healing in three days, compared with 12 days during a normal healing process.

Scientists have known since the late 20th century that electrical stimulation promotes rapid healing. The researchers believe a portable, self-powered wound care system could benefit the more than 6.5 million people in the United States with nonhealing skin wounds such as diabetic foot ulcers and surgical wounds. —M.C.

February 2, 2019 • WORLD Magazine 57
Australian researchers say they are ready to begin testing a promising new treatment for Alzheimer’s disease. The technique, which involves guided ultrasound, could hold out hope for the 44 million people worldwide who suffer from the progressive brain disorder.

Scientists are unsure what causes Alzheimer’s, but they know it involves plaques that form when abnormal amounts of beta-amyloid protein clump together and collect between brain cells. Developing a treatment is difficult because the blood-brain barrier, which protects the brain from infections and toxins, also keeps out many drugs. Also, Alzheimer’s impairs microglial cells in the brain that usually clean up harmful proteins, and the blood-brain barrier blocks components of the immune system that could stimulate the cells back into action.

In 2015 University of Queensland scientists discovered that guided ultrasound could open spots on the blood-brain barrier of mice with Alzheimer’s. The researchers injected harmless microbubbles of air into the bloodstream of the mice, then used MRI to guide ultrasound waves to specific regions of the barrier. The sound waves caused the microbubbles to vibrate and enlarge, temporarily opening up the targeted areas. The procedure cleared almost all of the plaque from 75 percent of the mice, whose memory subsequently improved, the website IFLScience reported.

Another study, published July 25 last year in *Nature*, tested the safety of the method in five human patients with early to moderate Alzheimer’s. In all five patients the researchers safely opened the blood-brain barrier for less than 24 hours without the use of drugs. The procedure allowed the body’s own natural antibodies to cross the barrier and stimulate glial cells to clean out plaques. The researchers also discovered that the focused ultrasound increased the number of new brain cells in the hippocampus, a brain region involved in learning and memory.

In December the University of Queensland announced that researchers had received Australian funding to test the effectiveness of this approach and planned to begin human trials later this year.
More equal than others

NCAA SHOWS LGBTQ FAVORITISM WITH CROWDFUNDING DECISION

by Ray Hacke

The NCAA has gone out of its way to prove itself LGBTQ-friendly in recent years.

Big-time college sports’ governing body clashed with the government of Indiana, where its headquarters are located, in 2014 over a law aimed at protecting religious business owners. The organization also pulled several championship events out of North Carolina two years later due to that state’s since-repealed “bathroom bill,” which required people to use restrooms associated with their biological sex.

The NCAA’s decision to allow a lesbian Division I athlete to accept money from a GoFundMe campaign without forfeiting her eligibility is the latest example of the organization’s kowtowing to the powerful LGBTQ lobby.

Emily Scheck runs cross country and track for Canisius College in western New York. She had just moved back to campus in August when her parents, having discovered her lesbian relationship with a teammate via social media, disowned her.

At the time, Scheck, 19, had a net worth of $20, and her partial athletic scholarship was nowhere near enough to cover her books, housing, and other expenses during the fall semester.

Scheck’s roommate started a fundraising campaign on the crowdfunding website GoFundMe.com. The campaign raised $25,000 in a matter of days—more than enough to cover Scheck’s needs for the fall semester and her tuition for the spring. By Thanksgiving, the campaign had raised more than $100,000.

The NCAA has concerns about agents and boosters providing money to athletes through crowdfunding websites. However, the NCAA lets student-athletes raise money via crowdfunding under certain circumstances: One is that, for individual athletes, the money raised must cover actual and necessary expenses related to an athletic event and practice immediately preceding it. A student-athlete may also participate in a crowdfunding campaign unrelated to sports so long as the campaign doesn’t mention athletics.

Scheck’s GoFundMe page violated both rules: It prominently mentioned that Scheck runs for Canisius, and it aimed to cover funding for the runner’s general college expenses as opposed to a particular athletic event.

When word of the campaign reached the NCAA, the organization gave Scheck a choice: Return the money, or forfeit her eligibility to compete. Unable to stay in school or even afford food without the money, Scheck chose the latter option.

In November, the NCAA backtracked, deciding Scheck could keep the money and maintain her eligibility. The NCAA never stated its reasons for doing so, but a line from the LGBTQ website Outsports.com provides a clue: “Headlines like ‘NCAA/LGBTQ website Outsports. com provides a clue: ‘Headlines like ‘NCAA and Catholic college force disowned gay athlete to return donations for food and books’ don’t bode well for either,” Cyd Zeigler wrote.

The NCAA changed its tune on the same day Outsports ran the story. The willingness to accommodate Scheck highlights major hypocrisy on the NCAA’s part: College football and men’s basketball players, African-Americans in particular, often come from poor families who cannot afford to assist with the expenses that college scholarships don’t cover—among them transportation, laundry money, and clothing. To meet these needs, or even to help provide for their families, athletes often take money under the table from agents or boosters or try to make money via other means, like selling autographed memorabilia online.

Such actions, of course, violate NCAA rules, and once they come to light, the athletes’ schools become embroiled in scandal. Many have to forfeit victories or even championships and get slapped with postseason bans due to the violations.

Occasionally, the NCAA grants exemptions, as it did with Clemson football player Ray Ray McElrathbey in 2006 when he took custody of his 11-year-old brother while their mother battled addiction. But such exemptions are rare.

Scheck certainly comes across as a sympathetic figure due to her disownment and subsequent financial struggles. However, the NCAA’s willingness to bend its rules for her and not for other athletes in need is an equally poor look.
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Peopling a war

[Dec. 8, p. 38] The human side of history, as Rania Abouzeid writes in No Turning Back, is what is all too often missing from today’s news. I wish we could see these nations and people as Jesus sees them, and may we extricate ourselves from the politicized and polarized news the pundits spew our way.

—STEVE SHIVE on wng.org

Beyond platform shoes
[Dec. 8, p. 32] Thank you so much for sifting out these book recommendations from among so many possibilities.

—KEVIN ABEGG on wng.org

What price hope?
[Dec. 8, p. 42] I just finished Jonathan Leeman’s The Rule of Love, which made your short list for Accessible Theology Book of the Year, and cannot say enough good things about it.

—JAMIE GREEN on Facebook

‘Nobody can hurt me’
[Dec. 8, p. 30] Thank you to Mindy Belz for her column on Asia Bibi. What a sad day for America if we are too fearful or don’t care enough to offer her asylum. It looks like Pakistan’s Supreme Court justices had more courage than our current administration.

—BILLY CURTIS / Lansdale, Pa.

Perhaps American officials look the other way because they worry that if the United States grants Bibi asylum, then Islamist political parties in Pakistan will gain influence. They should do the right thing anyway and grant her asylum. And we should put Christians from the Middle East, whose countries we destabilized, at the front of the immigration line.

—PAUL JAEDICKE on wng.org

Chosen and hated
[Dec. 8, p. 16] Four thousand years after God chose Abraham and his descendants, anti-Semitism is an unbroken plague. I pray regularly for our nation and for Israel, that God will save Jewish people and add them to the church. Lately my prayer has been, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”

—DOUG COMBS / Bunker Hill, WVa.

One day God will gather His own, Jew and Gentile alike, in Christ and “all Israel will be saved.” It’s the best story of all time.

—BETH McMICHEN / Meansville, Ga.

Memento mori
[Dec. 8, p. 50] Wonderful article. Our need for Christ is pre-eminent, but we also need community and an opportunity to express our emotions in art. I don’t care for tattoos, but I celebrated a little with the gentleman who had his dragon tattoo completed the day before being declared cancer-free. God is beautiful!

—DEBORAH O’BRIEN on wng.org

Hopefully, the woman who asked why everything has to end will understand one day that only that which is perfect can last forever. In a world where everything dies, Christmas brings the beautiful message that Jesus came to offer us a second chance at the world where everything lives.

—DAVID STAATS / Fort Collins, Colo.

Sizing up our hearts
[Dec. 8, p. 5] I loved Joel Belz’s column about applying the Golden Rule to our political divisions. I recall listening to my father, grandfather, and other relatives discussing politics, but none ever parted ways over their views. Today we are fractured by so much information that has nothing to do with our family, neighbors, or community, while social media fuels the fire by emphasizing the emotional aspect of any given topic.

—ANN WILLIAMS / Alpine, Calif.

We must stand firm against evil. At times that may come across as less than civil, but stand we must.

—TIM LEEVER / Fayetteville, N.C.

Dispatches
[Dec. 8, p. 10] Do the women suing Dartmouth College for sexual assault and harassment have any personal responsibility to refuse to drink or have sex with professors (who if guilty are beyond reprehensible) to get better grades or future jobs? What does this teach our young women about character, morality, and consequences?

—BILL RUSSELL / Brighton, Mich.

Two short items in the same issue made a striking contrast. For the first time ever, a female was selected to move forward in the Green Beret process, and a woman caught in the Borderline Bar shooting remarked in “Quotables” how the men made a human wall around the women. God has wired men and women differently, and if that female Green Beret comes under fire, the men in her unit will surround her, no matter how much feminism and gender-blending has infiltrated society.

—ELAINE NEUMEYER / Seacrest, Fla.
California apocalypse
[Dec. 8, p. 44] Great feature about people pulling together to help one another in tragedy.
—CHRISTINA WILSON on wng.org

Criminal speech
[Dec. 8, p. 19] I am bewildered by your review of The Crimes of Grindelwald. One message from the movie is that having a clear right and wrong side doesn’t mean things are always simple or easy. People on the right side are capable of evil acts themselves, especially if motivated by fear.
—ABIGAIL BIGGS / Murphys, Texas

Miles to go
[Dec. 8, p. 64] Thanks to Marvin Olasky and the rest of the WORLD staff for a truly remarkable magazine that stands in stark contrast to The Christian Century and the secular media. They seem to regard truth as whatever their agenda happens to be.
—RICK FLANDERS on wng.org

Science vs. Darwinism
[Dec. 8, p. 26] The purported 95-98 percent similarity between chimp and human DNA has recently been re-evaluated down to 87 percent or less in research by both Christian and secular scientists. As evolution dies, literal creation increasingly receives the support God provides in His Word and in His world.
—MICHAEL DuMEZ / Oostburg, Wis.

Calling Professor Corey
[Dec. 8, p. 63] I am always refreshed to read André Seu Peterson’s writing, but also deeply saddened by this topic, the corruption of language. Often we must laugh before we cry.

Thank you for this most excellent column.
—JUDY FARRINGTON on wng.org

Corrections

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ESTHER in the AGE of TRUMP

There are few books in the Bible, maybe no other book in the Bible, more relevant to Christian life in a dominant post-Christian culture, hostile to Christianity and powerful enough to enforce its hostility, than the book of Esther.

“Thank goodness Bob Case has broken Queen Esther out of her Sunday school prison! In Esther and Trump, we meet a woman who was flawed and not always brave . . . not a perfect believer and yet, in the providence of God, uniquely positioned to save her people. She faced the challenge, Dr. Case writes, ‘living a consequential life in a foreign and hostile environment as part of the social, political and economic dynamics of the unbelieving world.’ That makes Esther’s life searingly relevant for Christians in America today. Let us hope we can acquit ourselves as well as the compassionate young queen portrayed here—who, when it mattered, found her courage.”

—LYNN VINCENT, #1 New York Times bestselling author and Senior Writer, WORLD Magazine
Full body armor

FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT IN THE NEW YEAR

Life is warfare. If not, we are losing. Right up to the end Paul urges, “Fight the good fight” (1 Timothy 6:12), and signs off from this poor world with “I have fought the good fight” (2 Timothy 4:7). How vexed he would be if we thought this pretty poetry.

A journalist wrote: “Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside in a cloud of smoke, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming, ‘Wow, what a ride!’” (Hunter S. Thompson). The apostle could have better written that, to say nothing of Jesus, who resisted sin unto the shedding of His blood, and bids us do the same (Hebrews 12:4).

On one occasion the disciples fail to cast a demon from a mute boy. They ask Jesus privately, “Why could we not cast it out?” He answers, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer [some manuscripts add ‘and fasting’]” (Mark 9:28-29). This is where we learn, to our amazement, there are different “kinds” of demons, needing all at our disposal to evict. This also is not poetry.

For we are up against “the schemes of the devil... against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:11-12). These are as real, in the unseen dimension, as the person in the other room from where you’re reading this.

What “schemes” have demons employed to keep you stuck? Anger? Unforgiveness? Addiction? Will you let them hagride you into 2019 as in years before? Each article of armor is to “put on” (Ephesians 6:11), not admire in the armory.

Long ago a housewife listening to her radio hears Elisabeth Elliot say, “Is your husband your enemy?” The woman stops dead in her dish bubbles: Yes, her husband feels like her enemy. Elliot continues: “So what does God say to do to our enemies?” No! reacts the woman. That’s too hard! This marriage is dead as a doornail!

Then the woman thinks, well maybe she can manage one kind act per week toward her husband. She knows he likes Jewish apple cake, so she makes one and serves it. Hmm, he seems pleased. Next week, another small act of kindness, another positive reaction.

The weeks roll by, and the woman’s conscience smites her: How could she have been so hardhearted to dispense her kindnesses so sparingly? Had she used prayer alone, and only said, “Lord, help me not to be nasty to my husband,” and been done with it, she’d still be in defeat. But she puts on righteous deeds (v. 14). The fuller armor proves unbeatable. Acts of kindness have the unexpected effect of changing, not just her husband’s heart, but her own.

“Put on the whole armor of God” (v. 11), not à la carte or willy-nilly. Prayer, yes. But the combo of prayer and a breastplate of righteousness, deploying Jewish apple cakes if necessary, is formidable. No more chinks in the armor now, no places of vulnerability for the devil to wedge in. It’s weird only to pray, “Lord, help me not to be nasty to my husband.” We also have to not be nasty to our husbands.

This year let us skid in broadside in a cloud of smoke: girding our waist with Scripture truth to fend off stinking thinking (v. 14); doing righteous deeds that are the wedding raiment of the saints (v. 14); being at all times prepared to speak good news of peace with God (v. 15); holding up our shield of faith against demonic bluffs (v. 16); taking up the sword of verbal declarations of God’s Word that never comes back empty (v. 17); praying without ceasing (v. 18).

The demons (whatsoever kind they be) will not sleep in 2019. Above the door of God’s arsenal we read: “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might... able to stand against the schemes of the devil” (vv. 10-11).

Conspicuously absent on the list of body armor is a cover for the back. The future isn’t for the faint of heart. It never was. 🌟
A tale of two books

WITH GREAT LIBERTY COMES GREAT RESPONSIBILITY

I grew up in a Jewish household, went to six years of Hebrew school three days a week after public school, and chanted my way through a bar mitzvah service at age 13. I then started going evenings to a school for studying the Talmud, which is made up of ancient rabbinical debates. One edition runs 73 volumes.

Here’s an example of what’s in the Talmud about Sabbath-keeping: Chaim Saiman’s *Halakhah: The Rabbinic Idea of Law* (Princeton, 2018) summarizes 39 “categories of prohibited activities, one of which is writing. … A person who writes only one letter is exempt, one who writes two letters is liable for violating Shabbat. Use of ink, dye, or permanent liquids generates liability, while colored water or etchings in the dirt do not. Writing with the hand is a problem; writing with the foot, mouth, or elbow is not.” And that’s not all: The Talmud includes discussion of “writing one letter on the ceiling and another on the floor, or two single letters on separate pieces of paper that are later put together.” Other issues: Is it “permitted to piece together a puzzle on Shabbat (potentially problematic since it creates an intelligible picture)”? What about playing Scrabble? (That’s mostly OK, but in the deluxe edition the board’s grooves hold the letters in place, thus producing a potentially permanent “writing,” which is not OK.)

Such analysis made me a Talmud school dropout. At age 14 I abandoned Judaism and became lawless personally and philosophically, only to become enslaved to Marxism six years after that. Not until six more years later did statements like this one from the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Galatians attract me: “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”

Thankfully, I’ve been able—only through God’s mercy—to stand firm throughout the past 42 years: Christ-followers like me who rebel against childhood legalism often have the tendency to flop the other way, toward antinomianism, rejection of all laws. That’s especially so because so many cultural pressures push us toward absolute freedom, including even attempts to change our sex.

The alternative to both legalism and anarchy is the whole Bible, as Wayne Grudem shows in his excellent *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning* (Crossway, 2018). For example, regarding Sabbath-keeping, Grudem has a solid chapter examining the various positions. He concludes that it’s wise to have regular times of prayer, worship, learning, and fellowship and to have a day of rest, but coming to an almost-total stop is not obligatory.

Christians, of course, have the advantage of seeing how Jesus regarded the Sabbath and other Old Testament provisions. For example, some Christians say we should not respond to accusations, and others are ready to bring lawsuits at the drop of a disagreement, but Grudem describes “a general pattern in Jesus’s ministry: he always defended himself immediately and firmly against false accusations throughout his entire ministry … The only exception was the unique situation when he was on trial leading up to his crucifixion,” since Jesus knew He was to “submit to the Father’s plan that he would die as a criminal, under false accusation.”

Thus all of us can speak up when falsely accused—but we should be reluctant to take a fellow believer to court, if other paths to restitution are available. In short, God has proclaimed liberty throughout the land—liberty to use pens, pencils, or computers, to put together puzzles and play Scrabble—or liberty to speak up when falsely accused.

Grudem’s 1,296-page book is more reference work than bedtime reading, but its balance will often be useful. One more example: He writes that material prosperity is a plus but it’s also “a matter of secondary importance, and it carries dangers.” The good overall message: With great liberty comes great responsibility to use our time to glorify God and not ourselves.

My American history reading list in WORLD’s Dec. 29 issue skipped over the late 19th and early 20th century. One way to get a sense of that era is by looking at three illustrious leaders: Grover Cleveland, John D. Rockefeller, and Theodore Roosevelt. On the first Saturday of each month from February through July we’ll run essays I’ve written about them as part of our online Saturday Series. On the third Saturday of each month we run pieces by John Erickson of “Hank the Cowdog” fame, and on the second and fourth Saturdays excerpts from our books of the year. —M.O.
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"At the name of Aslan each one of the children felt something jump in its inside."

-C.S. Lewis
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