FIGHTING HOMELESSNESS: What comes first?

This year’s social contagion infects teenagers and their doctors

Rapid-onset gender dysphoria

CHINA: Expelling missionaries
CITIES: Electric scooter invasion
VENEZUELA: On the brink
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ON THE COVER: Illustration by Krieg Barrie
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sbts.edu/world
On the day I write this, we have seven people on our relatively small staff who have worked at WORLD for more than 25 years. By the time you read it, retirements will reduce that number to five.

Two beloved staff/friends/WORLD family members are retiring at the end of the month, and, for me, the reality is just starting to settle in. It’s one thing to figure out how we’re going to cover the huge amount of work they both leave behind. But the real challenge will be arriving at the office and not seeing them there.

**Judy Russell** has been our accounting manager for just over 25 years. In that role, Judy has dealt with a lot of things the rest of us don’t think about. Most of us here are blissfully unaware of the many small details of making the business work, financially speaking. The reason we’re blissfully unaware, usually, is that Judy just handles those things.

Personally, for the first five years of my own employment here, I worked with Judy more closely than anyone else. She was WORLD to me, and I’m glad, because I’m not sure there’s any more positive expression of the culture of the place. Judy represents everything good about working here.

Now a word about **June McGraw**. Perhaps you’ve heard a longtime employee referred to as “an institution.” June was an institution before WORLD was. She came along 37 years ago, before Joel Belz was CEO, before WORLD Magazine was even an idea. Since then, she’s been holding the place together.

I say that only a little bit facetiously. It seems June does a thousand important things, and more than 900 of those things nobody else even knows about. And June set the standard at the office for reliability—arriving every day before 7:30 in the morning, even some days when the rest of the town was shut down with snow or ice.

It has been extraordinary to witness these two women so faithfully steward the gifts God gave them, and we are grateful that God called them to use their gifts here.

Judy and June, I don’t know what we’ll do without you. Don’t change your phone numbers.
Now that you’ve got your W-2 form in hand but are feeling increasingly guilty that you haven’t got around to your tax return yet (you still have two months to go!), take a fresh look at one of the Bible’s most famous passages about taxes—Matthew 22:15-22.

Except that I’d like to suggest here, as I have from time to time, that when Jesus delivered His short “Render unto Caesar” speech, He had something other than taxes or church-state relations in mind.

Instead of giving the Pharisees a tax table telling them what proportion of their income they could deduct for charitable giving for the calendar year A.D. 29, Jesus was telling them that they had to get their whole worldview straightened out.

In other words, don’t spend time on the details until you get the big picture in focus. Don’t fine-tune until you’re on the right channel.

The two main points Jesus was teaching as He flipped the denarius over in His palm were these:

First: Don’t pretend to be interested in the fine points of a God-centered worldview if your heart isn’t right.

Make no mistake. Jesus’ answer to the Pharisees was a put-down. He wasn’t really answering them at all. He knew the phoniness of their hearts, and He wasn’t going to give them the satisfaction of an answer so long as they had no intention of listening in the first place.

It’s easy for us to be in the same position. We go through the formalities of studying and discussing what a “Christian” position might be on a particular subject—when deep in our hearts we have no intention of adjusting our lives once we find the answer. We’re just intellectualizing. Like the Pharisees, we’re often much more interested in proving our own point of view than we are in discovering God’s truth on a matter.

When that’s our position, Jesus says He’s not interested in providing a response. He holds His wisdom for those who ask with sincerity.

Second: Jesus doesn’t offer cheap answers. What the Pharisees desperately wanted was a smartphone that would let them figure with certainty how much belonged to Caesar and how much to the Temple. Then they could add those calculations to all their other rules and regulations.

We’re still looking for that app that will crunch all the prophetic references of Daniel and Ezekiel, merge them with the price of oil futures in Iran, help us identify the Antichrist, and predict the exact date of Christ’s Second Coming. We want quick, quantified answers. We’re modern-day Pharisees.

But to us, as to the Pharisees, Jesus simply says: “OK, if that’s the kind of wisdom you want, I’ll give it. Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

You can almost hear the humiliated Pharisees as they sneak away. “We don’t know any more than we did before we asked! Now we have a whole slew of new questions. No way do we dare go back and ask Him how much belongs to Caesar and how much to God. How embarrassing!”

That’s the point. If you come with the wrong spirit, or come seeking simplistic answers, God keeps you klutzing around in your ignorance.

When you’re ready to bow before Him and express your willingness to expose yourself patiently to the marvelous complexities of His wisdom, then He answers. That’s when He expands your worldview, sending you away not with frustration but delight.
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NEWS FROM WASHINGTON GETS CURIOUSER AND CURIOUSER

by Marvin Olasky

How crazy have some of our media leaders become? With federal workers back in their offices, we can now pay even more attention to supposed scandals like the one revealed in this headline:

“Vice-president’s wife Karen Pence to teach at anti-LGBT school.”

CNN commentator Clay Cane on Jan. 20 was outraged: “Like a real-life setting for The Handmaid’s Tale, Immanuel Christian School insists applicants initial a pledge to ‘live a personal life of moral purity’” complete with the understanding that marriage means “the uniting of one man and one woman in a single, exclusive covenant union as delineated in Scripture.”

Cane snarled on: Immanuel “identifies ‘moral misconduct’ that would disqualify employees as premarital sex, cohabitation, extramarital sex, homosexual or lesbian sexual activity, polygamy, transgender identity, any other violation of the unique roles of male and female. This language is disgusting.” And so we label as unmentionable 4,000 years of Jewish and Christian teaching.

Also disgusting to some scribes was the 46th annual March for Life in Washington on Jan. 18—and leading newspapers protected us from knowing how many Americans showed up. USA Today reported that “more than a thousand anti-abortion
activists” marched. That’s like saying more than a thousand Allied soldiers landed at Normandy on D-Day: The actual D-Day number was 156,000. The March for Life typically draws 100,000-plus. Last year a study of digital images led to a crowd estimate of more than 200,000.

Astoundingly, the big news of Jan. 18 was not the execution of 3,000 unborn children that day (the average daily total in America) but the Lincoln Memorial standoff between an elderly Native American and a Catholic high-school student from Covington, Ky., wearing a “Make America Great Again” cap. The first wave of coverage, based on a 15-second video, slammed the student and his classmates. The second wave, based on longer videos, reported the chaotic complications and criticized the critics.

Since WORLD readers should not imitate much of the left by living only in our own bubble, I’m glad when they ask for names of secular journalists to follow. In this situation, one thoughtful analysis came from Megan McArdle, who redeems the editorial page of The Washington Post: She reported that chagrined defamers of the student, Nick Sandmann, have now downgraded their charge to “not knowing the proper response when a Native American activist bangs a drum in your face. And how many teenagers can be expected to have mastered that particular point of etiquette?”

McArdle added that the drummer, Nathan Phillips, did not “explain why he thought it would have a calming effect to bang a drum in the faces of the boys. This does not seem to be a technique generally recognized by experts in conflict resolution.”

Another reasonable sojourner in a liberal publication, Atlantic writer Caitlin Flanagan, wrote, “The full video reveals that these kids had wandered into a Tom Wolfe novel and had no idea how to get out of it.” Wolfe died last year and the four novels he wrote from 1987 to 2012—The Bonfire of the Vanities, A Man in Full, I Am Charlotte Simmons, and Back to Blood—are great guides to the hysteria summarized by sports broadcaster Dan McLaughlin: “In any given week, at least one major news controversy is likely to revolve around how much we are supposed to hate a person we’d never heard of the previous week.”

The actual anniversary of the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision came on Jan. 22 and offered a lesson in how far we’ve sunk. An Iowa judge struck down protections for unborn babies with detectable heartbeats, but the most remarkable example of degradation came in New York. In 1977 its state Senate voted 35-22 for a resolution asking Congress to call a constitutional convention for the purpose of adopting a pro-life amendment to the U.S. Constitution. This year the state Senate cemented its flip, voting 38-24 for a bill going even further than the Supreme Court: zero protection for babies up to the moment of birth.

WORLD European correspondent Jenny Lind Schmitt observed, “Europeans tend to think we Americans get too carried away in the fight over abortion. But when they understand what our laws actually are, they begin to understand why it’s a big deal. They think we’re barbarians.” Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed the bill without the slightest expression of the regret that his dad, former Gov. Mario Cuomo, sometimes suggested. Some defenders of abortion are still pro-choice, but it’s clear that Cuomo and Company are militantly pro-abortion.

What’s the solution? Trillia Newbell, director of community outreach for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, tweeted, “Many moons ago, before the Lord captured my heart by his grace, I interned at the New York State Assembly and I imagined I would have been among those cheering on new abortion bill. But God. God changed my heart, transformed my mind, gave me a love for the unborn. It took God.”

Amen. For, as Ephesians 6:12 states, “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”
In one of the most remarkable moments in Latin America’s modern history, thousands of Venezuelans packed a public square in Caracas on Jan. 23 and exulted as Juan Guaidó took the oath of presidency, declaring dictator Nicolás Maduro’s power illegitimate.

U.S. officials quickly declared support for the new leadership and urged Maduro to relinquish his brutal grip on a country suffering from one of the most severe economic and humanitarian crises in the world.

Decades of socialist rule have left the country staggering under food shortages and an inflation rate that has hit an estimated 1 million percent. Some 3 million Venezuelans have fled the country in the last five years.

Maduro has denied his country is starving, and he refuses outside aid. Last year, he claimed a reelection victory in a presidential contest considered fraudulent by many—including some members of his own government.

By early January, a 35-year-old first-term congressman had formed a bold plan to declare Maduro’s rule defunct.

Juan Guaidó grew up in a low-income neighborhood just north of Caracas, where government payments to needy families were popular in the days of former President Hugo Chávez. But as socialist policies failed and the economy has collapsed, suffering has deepened among those once loyal to Chávez and his protégé Maduro.

As head of the country’s National Assembly, Juan Guaidó invoked a clause in Venezuela’s constitution: If a president claims victory in a fraudulent election, the head of the National Assembly may become interim president until free elections are held.

U.S. officials told Guaidó they would back him if he moved ahead. On Jan. 22, Vice President Mike Pence released a video aimed at reaching the thousands planning mass protests against Maduro’s rule the next day: “We are with you.”

The next afternoon, Guaidó raised his hand in a Caracas public square and swore the oath of presidency. In a dramatic moment, thousands of supporters raised their hands in solidarity.

Ricardo Ball, a financial adviser and entrepreneur in Caracas, described the scene to Robert Sirico of the Acton Institute in a live-streamed video call a week later. “It’s not him alone taking the oath,” said Ball. “It’s everyone else taking the oath alongside him in support of the constitution.”
But not all Venezuelans rejoiced: Maduro called the events a coup, and the leader of the country’s armed forces declared the military’s loyalty to Maduro. The move was seen as a blow to hopes for a quick and peaceful transition of power.

On the Sunday after Guaidó took the oath of office in Caracas, state-run television stations aired footage of Maduro towering over dozens of kneeling soldiers at Fort Paramacay in central Venezuela. Maduro boomed: “Are you coup plotters?” The armed soldiers boomed back: “No!” The dictator responded: “Traitors never, loyalty, always.”

On the same morning, Guaidó attended Mass in a Catholic church in Caracas, flanked by his wife and mother. He later pleaded with the military, “Please, brothers, don’t attack our people.”

Potential violence is a deep-rooted fear for those facing a military that has cracked down on protests in the past. And some analysts note that turning against Maduro won’t be easy even if military members want to support nations that throw their support behind Guaidó, and some leaders of the European Union said they would back Guaidó if Maduro didn’t call for new elections by Feb. 3.

The entrenched Maduro did find support in a handful of nations, including China, Russia, Syria, Iran, and Turkey.

U.S. officials said they would try to increase economic pressure on Maduro by transferring control of oil revenues to Guaidó’s team, but the logistics of such a plan remained formidable and threatened to potentially worsen the economy.

It’s hard to imagine Venezuela’s economy growing worse. In his call with the Acton Institute, Ricardo Ball said the world was watching the end product of socialism unfold on a bleak stage. He noted Margaret Thatcher’s famous observation that the problem with socialist governments is that they eventually run out of other people’s money. “This is the moment,” said Ball. “This is the moment the money has run out.” He thinks Venezuelans are more willing to back a new government despite the dangers. “They fear more dying of hunger than the Maduro regime,” he said. “That’s where we are right now.”

(For Americans interested in learning lessons from Venezuela’s failed experiment, Ball noted that socialism can look appealing depending on when you take the picture. “If you take the picture early, it’s all beautiful,” he said. “If you take it later, it begins to fall apart.”)

Guaidó seemed to grasp the dangers he could face for pushing Venezuelans toward an era of freedom. Two days after taking the oath of office, he gave a speech that state-run television stations didn’t run: It was only accessible to citizens online over tenuous internet connections sometimes controlled by the government.

The interim leader noted the challenges ahead, and he urged his supporters to carry on if government officials detain him: “They can cut a flower, but they can’t hold back the spring.”

Advisers from Cuba head Maduro’s personal security, and they run intelligence operations to ferret out potential traitors in the military ranks.

For soldiers willing to back Guaidó, the interim president has underscored a law the National Assembly has passed to offer amnesty to military members who support the new government. The offer of amnesty could rankle Venezuelans who have endured military abuses, but Guaidó likely sees it as vital incentive to persuade soldiers to back his interim presidency.

In the days after his oath, Guaidó’s supporters made treks to military outposts to distribute copies of the amnesty law to soldiers patrolling on duty. Some reported that the soldiers threw the copies back at them or burned the papers while they looked on.

Still, pressure mounted on Maduro: Leaders in most Latin American
Sentenced
A Chinese court sentenced prominent human rights lawyer Wang Quanzhang to 4½ years in prison on charges of subverting state power following a closed-door trial. Wang was among approximately 300 lawyers and activists detained in 2015 as part of the so-called “709 crackdown,” named for the date, July 9, when it happened. He is likely one of the last among the group to be tried. Wang helped found the Chinese Urgent Action Working Group and was known for teaching Chinese villagers about their land and legal rights. “It’s outrageous that Wang Quanzhang is being punished for peacefully standing up for human rights in China,” Amnesty International China researcher Doriane Lau said in a statement. “He must be immediately and unconditionally released.”

Awarded
A Florida jury awarded a hotel dishwasher $21.5 million after her employer fired her for refusing to work on Sundays. Marie Jean Pierre, 60, told the hotel when she was hired that she did not work Sundays for religious reasons. They scheduled her anyway. Pierre threatened to resign and for some years they accommodated her. Then, in 2015, a kitchen manager began giving her Sunday shifts again. For a few months, Pierre managed to swap shifts with other workers so she could make it to church. Then, on March 31, 2016, she was fired for “unexcused absences,” according to the media. Pierre sued the hotel company, Park Hotels & Resorts, for discrimination on the basis of religion and won. However, a spokesperson for the hotel company has indicated they intend to appeal the verdict.

Refused
Two Christian artists in Phoenix, Ariz., are in court, asking for the freedom to refuse orders for same-sex wedding invitations. Phoenix has an anti-discrimination ordinance that states any business owner who refuses service on the basis of sexual orientation can receive a $2,500 penalty and six months in jail. Joanna Duke and Breanna Koski argue that complying with this law with regard to same-sex weddings would violate their religious faith, as they believe God made marriage between a man and a woman. They want to put a statement on their website stating they will only create art that doesn’t violate their religious convictions but need the ordinance changed if they are going to do so safely. Their case is currently before the Arizona Supreme Court.

Upheld
The Pakistani Supreme Court on Jan. 29 upheld the acquittal of Asia Bibi, the Catholic woman and mother of five sentenced to death in 2010 for blasphemy against Islam. The ruling finally clears Bibi to leave the country and seek asylum elsewhere. Pakistani Chief Justice Asif Saeed Khan Khosa said in court that Bibi’s accusers committed perjury, noting fabricated evidence and contradictory statements by accusing Islamic clerics. The high court dismissed a petition asking it to review its Oct. 31 acquittal of Bibi. Radical Islamists took to the streets to protest the decision, calling for the killing of the judges who issued the ruling and for the overthrow of Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Ended
A weeklong teacher strike in Los Angeles ended after the teachers union reached a deal with city officials. Tens of thousands of teachers had marched through the city and picketed schools for six school days, calling for accommodations that included caps on class sizes and fewer standardized tests. However, union members told the media the most significant victory involved the district’s charter schools. The school board agreed to bring forward a request to the state asking for a cap on the number of charter schools. These schools, publicly funded but privately managed, are generally not unionized and can compete with public schools for money and students. Currently, California has more than 1,100 charter schools and allows 100 new charters to open every year.
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NATHAN MORT, who has autism but now has a full-time job for the first time in many years. Those with disabilities have returned to the workforce at the highest level in years as the U.S. economy has rapidly created jobs.

‘Like some kind of modern-day Flat Earth Society.’

U.S. Rep. CHRIS SMITH, R-N.J., on the pro-abortion movement’s denial of the humanity of children in the womb. That movement, he said in an address at this year’s March for Life Rally, “continues to cling to outdated, indefensible arguments cloaked in euphemism.”

‘May almighty God have mercy on the state of New York.’

An UNIDENTIFIED PERSON who called out in the New York state Senate chamber after lawmakers cheered the passage of a law undermining protections for unborn children in the state.

‘I didn’t want to share it with anybody, and in the era of hashtag-MeToo survivors, I always believed that every person is different and they will confront their demons when they’re ready. And I was not ready.’

U.S. Sen. JONI ERNST, R-Iowa, after a court inadvertently made public sealed affidavits from her divorce in which she said her ex-husband physically abused her for years. Ernst said their troubled marriage is the reason she withdrew from consideration to be Donald Trump’s running mate in 2016.

‘3 million migrants, one million percent inflation, mass public protests—this is what Venezuelan socialism has done to its people.’

Former U.S. Ambassador to the UN NKIIKXI HALEY in a tweet on the crisis in Venezuela (see p. 9).
But I'm offering Medicare for all...

You wouldn't oppose me if I were a photogenic New York congresswoman...

We had to end the shutdown so we could negotiate the shutdown...

All I said was that if Netflix keeps raising rates, they may have to start binge-watching basic cable...

Abortion any time.

The Left.
Song in the sand
Somewhere in the Namib Desert, Toto’s song “Africa” is blaring from a set of speakers. Namibian-German artist Max Siedentopf spent December constructing a new art installation on the rugged desert landscape of his home country. His goal: that the sounds of Toto’s rock anthem “Africa” be heard in perpetuity. To that end, Siedentopf connected six speakers to an MP3 player loaded with the song set to play on a loop and placed it in an undisclosed location in the Namib Desert. According to the plan, the solar batteries hooked into the speakers and player will ensure perpetual power and allow “Africa” to play—at least until it rains.

Name dropper
Some criminals may consider breaking out of a police station. Yvelande Jean-Pierre of West Palm Beach, Fla., allegedly broke into one. Police say security footage showed Jean-Pierre, 29, break a window and come inside a police substation in Boynton Beach, Fla., at 1:25 a.m. on Jan. 3. Police say she then took two meals from the refrigerator, heated and ate one of them, and then departed the building at 2:12 a.m. It wasn’t hard for police to find the suspect. They say she left a bag outside the station that contained a Florida identification card and a State of Florida Security Officer card belonging to her.

Moose fight
The town of Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, seems to be facing an existential crisis. For 31 years, the Canadian town’s Mac the Moose statue has been the tallest moose statue in the world, measuring 32 feet tall. But officials in Stor-Elvdal, Norway, unveiled their 33-foot polished steel moose in 2015. On Jan. 16, Moose Jaw Mayor Fraser Tolmie announced it was time to put Mac the Moose back on top. “It’s personal for me,” Tolmie explained in a Facebook video. Two Saskatchewan YouTubers, Justin Reves and Greg Moore, launched an online fundraising campaign to explore the possibility of making Mac’s antlers larger. “How can we live in, or live next to a town that’s called Moose Jaw, who has the second largest moose in the world?” Reves told CBC Radio.

Big mac and cheese
Costco has a new offering for preppers. The big-box giant has begun selling a 27-pound bucket of macaroni and cheese. According to Costco, the bucket of food has a shelf life of 20 years. The bucket, which was listed in the emergency foods section at $89.99 before it sold out, offered 180 servings at 220 calories each. According to USDA guidelines, a 45-year-old sedentary male could live on the mac and cheese bucket alone for 18 days and fulfill his calorie requirements.
Building restrictions
Police in Boracay, Philippines, have begun kicking over sandcastles on local beaches after local officials put a new ordinance into effect. According to the law, beachgoers cannot create sandcastles as photogenic backdrops for tourist photography unless they first purchase a license from the local government. Officials say the sandcastles are disrupting the natural habitat of Boracay’s beaches. Critics, however, allege the license, which comes to nearly 18 cents per square foot of sandcastle, is simply a revenue-raising tool.

Remains of the day
The mayor of a Russian city didn’t send the message he meant to send when he took a public bus to work in Saratov, Russia, on Jan. 9. Mayor Mikhail Isayev’s goal was to boost public transportation ridership in Saratov, but he was two hours late to work. The delay was reportedly due to snow that city officials had not yet cleared from roadways. After missing a morning meeting, Isayev gave city workers a 10-day deadline to finish plowing the snow from the roads.

The cat’s meow
When Troy Good’s daughter left for college, he and his wife inherited her cats. The problem: His San Jose, Calif., apartment complex wouldn’t allow the animals. So rather than abandon the felines, Good and his wife found a studio apartment and hired the landlord to tend to the animals. The studio costs the Goods $1,500 per month. Good told the San Jose Mercury News the cats were comfortable with the arrangement: “They definitely have the nicest cat apartment in Silicon Valley.”

Getting carried away
Authorities in the United Kingdom are searching for a band of thieves with good backs. Police in Kent say someone stole a bronze hippopotamus statue that weighed 1,500 pounds on Jan. 11. The 6.5-foot statue had been housed on the property of a masonry workshop in Royal Tunbridge Wells southeast of London. Previous efforts to move the mammoth statue required five men. Kent Police Constable Nick Lingham took to social media to ask locals to keep a lookout for an out-of-place hippo and said he was hopeful the statue would be returned.

Dating games
Be careful when you brag to strangers. That’s the lesson one Oklahoma woman learned after accidentally confessing to poaching to a state game warden through an online dating app. Cannon Harrison, a 24-year-old game warden from McIntosh County, Okla., met the woman on Bumble, a dating app. According to Harrison, the woman bragged about killing a large deer. Knowing that deer season for rifle hunters had ended, Harrison asked the woman if she bagged the buck with a bow, which would have been legal. “Well we don’t need to talk about that,” the woman replied. Harrison also persuaded her to confess to spotlighting the deer, which is also illegal. Harrison tracked down the woman, and state authorities issued her a $2,400 fine.

Remains of the day
The mayor of a Russian city didn’t send the message he meant to send when he took a public bus to work in Saratov, Russia, on Jan. 9. Mayor Mikhail Isayev’s goal was to boost public transportation ridership in Saratov, but he was two hours late to work. The delay was reportedly due to snow that city officials had not yet cleared from roadways. After missing a morning meeting, Isayev gave city workers a 10-day deadline to finish plowing the snow from the roads.
No guarantees

PARENTING IS IMPORTANT, BUT GOD MADE CHILDREN TO GROW UP TO BE INDIVIDUAL INDEPENDENT SELVES

Headlines like “The Relentlessness of Modern Parenting” always grab my attention. The New York Times article spotlights a divorced, middle-income mother who feels daily pressure to be there for her 11-year-old son. “Being there” means nightly supervision of homework and daytime ferrying to piano lessons, soccer practice, swimming lessons, martial arts competitions, and enrichment classes of all kinds (starting at age 4).

She feels obligated to give her child every possible opportunity, and when he showed increased anxiety and sleep problems, she and her ex-husband added counseling sessions to the rotation. “I read all the child-care books,” she says, but she still wonders if she’s doing enough to ensure her son’s success.

Are you judging her now? I certainly did.

Here’s another headline from conservative commentator Matt Walsh: “Hollywood Director Whines About His Children, Compares Them to Dogs.” A bit sensationalistic, but after all, it’s a Hollywood director. Duncan Jones, the disillusioned dad, took to Twitter to confess that his two kids, both under 3 years old, aren’t fun. “They are exhausting, frustrating & life-destabilizing… it’s HARD and not obviously a good choice in life.” The canine comparison came in the follow-up tweet: “It’s like looking after a dog you can’t house train.”

Walsh reports that Mr. Jones got lots of affirming retweets of these sentiments, but I’m guessing most of my readers wouldn’t share them. So Mr. Hotshot Movie Guy got a taste of real, non-glitzsy life when two little barbarians invaded his home. Interfere with his lifestyle, do they? Shocker.

Judging again—this time, even judgier.

And yet—I can identify. I taught our children at home from 1984 to 1996, and difficult as it is to admit, my homeschooling friends and I shared some of the same anxieties and frustrations as these secular parents. Our “hovering” took place at home, but that made it even more intense. Lessons and lesson plans consumed our time; also sports and art lessons, support meetings and educational co-ops, making and enforcing chore charts, juggling multilevel teaching with toddlers and new babies. None of this was mistaken, or always burdensome. Many parents appeared to breeze through homeschooling with kids who turned out great. On the other hand, scores of websites run by our children’s generation testify to controlling parents who were so intent on preparing them for Christian family life they never prepared them for life in the world. Parents so convicted of what a Christian looked like that they forced their offspring into a mold.

From the kids’ perspective—which may not have fully matured yet—their upbringing was as “relentless” as any Harvard-bound yuppie’s.

All parents, regardless of conviction, tend to see their children as extensions of themselves. It’s understandable, especially for mothers: Our babies came from us, they depend on us, they obsess over us (“Mama! Mama! Mama!”)—they are us. Even as they grow up and apart, we see them as infinitely moldable, and if we do our job right, they will reflect well. On themselves? On God? No; on us.

For a progressive mom, children are a choice, so the responsibility is all on her if she decides to have one. That choice must be vindicated. For Christian moms, children are a calling, and a measure of success or failure. Whether choice or calling, children turn out to be their own individual independent selves, whether rewarding or disappointing. Even in the womb, they are mysteriously, wonderfully themselves. If humans ever manage to generate life artificially, the result will be a product, not a person. We know how to program, but God knows how to create, and children are His means of ongoing creation—not to mention ongoing sanctification and growth in the parent.

Christian parenting is “relentless” in a hostile culture, and we need all the sound, wise, Biblical advice we can get. But be wary of anything that promises a guaranteed outcome. Parents don’t create children of God—God Himself does that (John 1:12). Raising them is a hands-on enterprise, but when it’s time to take our hands off, they are their own. ⋆
One generation will declare your works to the next and will proclaim your mighty acts. —PSALM 145:4

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“Our long collective nightmare is finally over.”

That’s how critic Stuart Heritage of The Guardian celebrated the announcement by CBS that the current and 12th season of The Big Bang Theory would be its last. Yet the 15-20 million viewers who watch the half-hour sitcom each week likely feel otherwise.

The Big Bang Theory debuted in 2007 and originally focused on straight-man Leonard (Johnny Galecki) and narcissistic Sheldon (Jim Parsons), best friends and roommate geniuses who work at the California Institute of Technology with their friends, Howard (Simon Helberg) and Raj (Kunal Nayyar). The pals can hold their own when discussing particle physics, yet are clueless when it comes to relationships, particularly with women.

Though ratings were lackluster in its first season, eventually Big Bang thrived. And by its end, it will have run longer than the classic sitcoms Friends or Seinfeld.

It has been the top-rated comedy since 2010 and was the top-rated show overall the last two seasons. It’s also scored on the awards front, garnering 10 Emmys from 52 nominations, and has now spun off a popular prequel, Young Sheldon.

The show’s appeal isn’t limited to American audiences. Chinese video site Sohu bought the streaming rights for Big Bang in 2009, and it quickly became the country’s favorite foreign show. Citizens were outraged when the Chinese government suddenly censored it five years later. In 2011, The Guardian called Big Bang “the latest factor behind a remarkable resurgence of physics among university students” in the U.K.

Even the show’s reruns are ratings gems. Since TBS bought syndication rights for an unprecedented $1.5 million per episode in 2010, the network’s ratings with viewers under age 50 have soared, and Big Bang reruns sometimes beat first-run shows.
Some explain this phenomenal popularity by pointing to the show’s normalization of nerd culture. Yet it’s doubtful many viewers identify with its brainy geeks. More likely, their social awkwardness and outsider status resonate. That says less about the show than it does about the hyper-connected yet socially atomized world in which we live and work.

Throughout its run, Big Bang has incorporated religion in significant ways. Though none actively observe their faith, most characters have identifiable religious backgrounds: Howard is Jewish, his wife Bernadette is Catholic, Raj is Hindu, and Sheldon grew up in an evangelical Christian household. Sheldon’s mother, an occasional guest character on the show, typically makes laughably pious or politically insensitive remarks, but she shows genuine love for her son, and Sheldon’s friends like and admire her.

Analyzing Big Bang, researchers from Biola University concluded, “When writers make fun of the religious and spiritual diversity [of the characters] ... the by-product is clear acknowledgement of their importance.” In a show that celebrates misfits, religious difference at least finds a seat at the table.

Despite its casual overall attitude toward sex, the show has evolved to champion traditional marriage, with most characters eventually marrying or forming relationships headed toward marriage. Penny and Leonard, after romantic twists and turns, eloped at the end of the show’s ninth season. Sheldon, whose uniqueness made finding “a helper meet for him” a miracle of near-Biblical proportions, met his match in his neurobiologist wife, Amy. Howard, endlessly teased for “only” having a master’s from MIT, married microbiologist Bernadette, and they have two children. In the show’s final season, the writers seem to be planning happy endings for all the geeks: Perennially lovelorn Raj is dating Anu, a woman his parents matched him with for a potential arranged marriage. Even Stuart, owner of the comic book store where the guys regularly shop, has a serious girlfriend.

The Big Bang Theory offers no eternal solutions—just a stumbling-through-life search for happiness—yet does serve to make misfits endearing, an empathy that can be the precursor to love. It may even resonate with the misfit in us all.

### BOX OFFICE TOP 10

For the Weekend of Jan. 25-27

According to Box Office Mojo

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<th>Rating</th>
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<td>Escape Room PG-13</td>
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<td>Mary Poppins Returns* PG</td>
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*Reviewed by WORLD

### Television

**Brexit: The Uncivil War**

While not as balanced as advertised, HBO’s new movie, Brexit: The Uncivil War, offers fascinating insight into the political upheaval reverberating through the Western world.

The film (which features frequent, and, if hot mics have taught us anything, probably realistic, profanity) focuses almost wholly on Dominic Cummings, director of the successful Vote Leave campaign. Brash and uncouth, Cummings (Benedict Cumberbatch) manages to offend nearly every established political player on both sides of the aisle. “Doesn’t he know,” a member of the House of Lords grouses about Cummings’ rough tactics, “that there are things you don’t do?” Sound familiar?

Also familiar: accusations that Cummings’ slogan “Take Back Control” foments racism and that underhanded conspiring with data mining companies allow his side to pull out a win.

While the film gives us a complex, even likable character in Cummings, refraining from villainizing is not the same thing as offering a truly fair shake. We’re never clear, as we are with the Remainers, whether he really believes in what he’s selling. More frustrating, by giving Cummings so much credit, the movie itself manages to undermine the will of the voting public.

Still, the portrayal is instructive.

Whether it’s AggregateIQ or Cambridge Analytica or unknown Russian operations, it’s convenient to blame unseen wizards for delivering a win via technological sleight of hand. But that doesn’t explain why the same kind of previous nonvoters who turned out for Brexit turned out for Donald Trump. It doesn’t explain the yellow vests in France or National Front in Germany.

What these complaints ultimately convey is that the people didn’t mean it. They didn’t understand what they were voting for and were driven to pull certain levers merely because of buzzwords on a social media platform. Thus, their will can be ignored.

If anything is destroying the ideal of self-governance, it isn’t Cummings or Trump or anyone else smashing the old rules of campaigning; it is this.

—by MEGAN BASHAM
**Television**

**Valley of the Boom**

*Valley of the Boom* tells the story of the dot-com boom in Silicon Valley, but the show itself is a miserable bust.

In the early days of public investment in internet companies, anyone with a high-tech sounding name and confusing technology had an opportunity to bamboozle the public.

The first episodes focus on Netscape, the web browser company whose IPO (initial public offering on the stock market) sparked the investing mania that led to the dot-com bubble. Marc Andreessen, Netscape’s visionary programmer, was quirky but gifted, and Netscape’s browser was much better than the competition from Microsoft.

It may be hard to remember, but in the mid-1990s we paid for our web browsers. That is, we paid until Microsoft, perhaps seeing the threat from Netscape, began bundling Internet Explorer for free with its Windows software.

One of the themes of the series is that greed is bad, and greed was rampant in Silicon Valley. We learn the tale of Michael Fenne, founder of Pixelon, and an old-fashioned huckster. Fenne is one of those characters that make Christians wince: He’s the son of a preacher, and he can quote enough Scripture to gain the trust of believers, but at his core, he is rotten.

After lots of investment and a lavish launch party, Pixelon turned out to be a house of cards.

*Valley of the Boom* is told documentary style: Interviews with the real players of the time (people like Mark Cuban and Arianna Huffington) are interspersed with re-created scenes using actors. It’s these re-created scenes that drag down the series. In an effort to keep our interest, producers chose a very campy style, with narration by rappers, dream sequences, and dancing numbers. These scenes also feature some vulgar language and blasphemy.

The source material for *Valley of the Boom* was enough for a powerful lesson on the love of money, but it is wasted in this tedious production. The series airs Sunday nights on the National Geographic Channel.

—by MARTY VANDRIEL

**Movie**

**The Kid Who Would Be King**

Remember being a kid, charging through the woods, thrusting a plastic sword at imaginary foes? If not, the new film *The Kid Who Would Be King* will take you there. Set in present-day England and starring a middle schooler, the charming Arthur-legend update delivers a mixed bag of make-believe and modern boyhood.

Alex (**Louis Ashbourne Serkis**), a 12-year-old kid who doesn’t know he’s a king, already carries heavy burdens. His father abandoned both him and his mother years before, and school bullies harass him. It’s the camaraderie of a close friend, Bedders (Dean Chaumoo), that gets him through each day.

Walking through a construction site, Alex finds a sword protruding from a concrete slab. He can’t read the Latin words etched in the metal weapon.

“There’s something written on the guard. Put it into Google Translate,” Alex urges Bedders, who pulls out his smartphone.

Alex extracts Excalibur, thereby beginning a journey to discover his destiny, a quest that winds through Stonehenge and the school gym. Young Merlin (**Angus Imrie**) appears, dressed in a Led Zeppelin concert T-shirt (Patrick Stewart plays older Merlin). Merlin warns Alex that the evil sorceress Morgana (**Rebecca Ferguson**) will soon emerge from the underworld to take Excalibur and tyrannize England. Morgana sends a legion of undead knights in advance. To counter her invasion, Alex must raise an army from the school chums who mistreat him. He also searches for his father.

So, do you take the kids to this PG-rated film or send them outside to play? Misuses of God’s name, frightening images, practice of magic, and Morgana’s sensual garb are cautions. But the film gets thumbs up for beautiful landscapes, comical clashes of things medieval and modern, and messages promoting truth-telling and the befriending of enemies. Serkis and Chaumoo turn in strong performances. Some other young actors’ uncomfortable demeanors and stiff computer graphics at times give the film an unsophisticated feel.

But such were also, if you remember, our woody adventures.

—by BOB BROWN
Man-made notions
EXPLORING ACADEMIC PRETENSIONS by Marvin Olasky

When walking Greeley, my dog named after the 19th-century editor, I sometimes listen to Conversations With Tyler, a podcast featuring interviews by a smart George Mason U. economics professor who leans toward libertarianism. But Tyler Cowen’s Stubborn Attachments (Stripe, 2018) offers two philosophical starting points that cancel out each other. First, “’Right’ and ‘wrong’ are very real concepts which should possess great force,” and second, “We should be skeptical about the powers of the individual human mind.”

Say what? Since God is absent from Cowen’s universe, human minds define what is right and wrong, yet since we should be skeptical of those minds, shouldn’t we also be skeptical about the concepts those minds originate? What makes those man-made concepts “very real”? Cowen points out that in 1900 the high-school graduation rate was only 6 percent, and he’s glad that many more people now graduate not only high school but college—but once belief in God is gone, more education often leaves us with higher degrees but also higher levels of foolishness.

In 1994 Mark Noll, then a Wheaton professor, produced The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind, which in its opening line defined the scandal this way: “There is not much of an evangelical mind.” Now a book with essays by Noll and others, The State of the Evangelical Mind (IVP, 2018), is making the rounds: The verdict is still largely negative, and some suggestions—Ph.D. holders at Christian colleges should teach fewer classes and have more time to write academic articles—are the same old same old.

Only the last essay, by James K.A. Smith, proposes a real alternative: “The future of the evangelical mind needs a generation of careful Christian scholars who are willing to take up the cross of being ‘popularizers’—careful thinkers willing to forgo the typical academic ladder of success [by] taking up their scholarly work in a diaconal mode and putting their gifts and energies at the service of the wider Christian community.”

Let’s put aside academic arrogance. Yes, I have a Ph.D., so I can say from experience rather than covetousness that (except for university job-hunting) it’s worth what John Nance Garner, FDR’s vice president, said his position was worth: “a pitcher of warm spit.”

BOOKMARKS


Textual notes make the Africa Study Bible (Oasis International, 2016) a good correction to Eurocentric prejudices. John Frame’s Nature’s Case for God: A Brief Biblical Argument (Lexham, 2018) sees natural revelation as a real witness to the true God—but since sinners suppress that truth, only through the spectacles of Scripture will we be able to read that witness rightly.

Jonah Goldberg’s first sentence in his Suicide of the West (Crown Forum, 2018) is, “There is no God in this book.” Later, though, he writes, “The notion that God is watching you even when others are not is probably the most powerful civilizing force in all of human history.” If we have witnessed what Nietzsche called the death of God, then the suicide of the West cannot be far behind.

Two new biographies are surprisingly good reads that take us into different worlds. T. Martin Bennett’s Wounded Tiger (Onstad Press, 2016) is the slightly fictionalized, interwoven story of the pilot who led the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and an American flyer captured after the Doolittle Raid on Tokyo: Mitsuo Fuchida and Jacob DeShazer became brothers in Christ. Jeremy Smith’s Breaking and Entering (Houghton Mifflin, 2019) is the amusing and cautionary tale of “Alien,” a brilliant but anarchic hacker who moved from MIT to major league cybersecurity.—M.O.
Four recent mysteries
reviewed by Susan Olasky

CITY OF INK Elsa Hart
The setting: 18th-century Beijing. The problem: a double murder at a tile factory. The detective: a mid-level bureaucrat with a mysterious past. His sidekick: a wandering storyteller who enthralls local crowds. The timing: right before the annual state exam that determines future careers for ambitious young scholars. Hart weaves these elements into an atmospheric mystery that rewards patient reading, especially at the beginning. This is the third in a series featuring Li Du, so it might be better to start with the first book. Especially appropriate for those who enjoy clean, historical mysteries.

A GENTLEMAN’S MURDER Christopher Huang
Set in London just after WWI, this modern, “golden-age” mystery takes place at the Britannia, a club open to gentlemen army veterans. The protagonist, Eric Peterkin, is a member by inheritance (his father helped found it) and by military service—but fellow members hold him at arm’s length because he’s half Chinese, and so not quite one of them. When a murder happens at the club, he investigates because he’s drawn to puzzles. Before long the investigation becomes personal. Huang captures well the period, place, and fallout from war. His insider/outside detective provides a fresh take on old-school mysteries.

THE RECKONING John Grisham
The book opens with the murder of a minister. There’s no mystery about who did it: Prominent landowner and World War II hero Pete Banning did. The question is why—and he’s not telling. Grisham spends the rest of the book providing the backstory that explains the murder, and showing the devastating effects the crime has on Banning, his two children, his sister, and others in the community. It’s only in the last chapter that he reveals the why—the lie that set the whole mess in motion. Grisham’s plot-driven style keeps this a page-turner.

THE RULE OF LAW John Lescroart
Part of the fun of reading Lescroart’s legal thrillers is reading about really messed-up San Francisco government. In this entry in the long-running series, Lescroart’s usual cast of characters is in transition. Former District Attorney Wes Farrell lost his reelection bid. Defense attorney Dismas Hardy has a new case involving an illegal immigrant. Meanwhile, the newly elected DA may be guilty of murder, and when he catches wind that cops are looking into an old case, he tries to impede the investigation and find something incriminating against the good guys. This page-turner has lots of wisecracks, and some crudities and obscenities.

AFTERWORD
In Believe Me (Eerdmans, 2018) John Fea examines white evangelicals’ overwhelming support of President Donald Trump in the 2016 election. He attributes it to the “politics of fear” and a nostalgia for a past that never existed. Though polemical at points, the book offers timely reminders: The world watches Christian witness, power tends to corrupt, and Christians’ confidence should rest in the cross of Christ. —Harvest Prude

Infertile couples often suffer silently in their churches. Matthew Arbo’s Walking Through Infertility: Biblical, Theological, and Moral Counsel for Those Who Are Struggling (Crossway, 2018) could be the perfect tool to help such couples sustain their godly perspective during a painful trial. Arbo employs a fictional couple to illustrate the dilemmas and opportunities he covers in each chapter. He also provides a Christian perspective on top fertility treatments. While not groundbreaking, the book gives clear, Biblical counsel to an oft-forgotten audience. —Charissa Crotts
A walk with Laura

BOOKS FOR LITTLE HOUSE ON THE PRAIRIE FANS
reviewed by Rachel Lynn Aldrich

THE WORLD OF LAURA INGALLS WILDER
Marta McDowell

McDowell writes with lush description about the landscapes and historical developments of each season of the life of Laura Ingalls Wilder (1867-1957), author of the Little House stories. Replete with illustrations, the book tracks the different climates, plants, and animals that Wilder encountered on her travels, from the Big Woods of Wisconsin to the prairies and towns of her later books. McDowell dedicates many pages to ferreting out the botanical details of Wilder’s multiple gardens. Her book includes a guide to visiting the locations featured in Wilder’s stories, as well as instructions for planting your own Wilder-inspired garden. (Ages 10 & up)

THE WORLD OF LITTLE HOUSE
Carolyn Strom Collins & Christina Wyss Eriksson

With recipes, games, crafts, and other activities related to the Little House stories, The World of Little House is an ideal resource for history lessons to elementary-school children. The pages feature colorful illustrations, diagrams of Wilder’s houses, and simple recipes for the foods described in her novels (including molasses-on-snow candy). The book also includes historical context for each installment of Wilder’s series, with asides about the Homestead Act, the Pony Express, and general stores. Avid Little House readers will find this a worthy companion text for children. (Ages 8 & up)

LAURA INGALLS WILDER: A BIOGRAPHY
William Anderson

Anderson provides a thorough and engaging biography of Wilder’s life without sounding repetitive to those already familiar with her (autobiographical) novels. The book is easy to read, filling in gaps between Wilder’s stories and providing historical context. In cases where Wilder’s stories differed from her real life, the biography points out differences without conveying disenchantment. It is clear Anderson loves the original series, and his approach to documenting Wilder’s life—especially her later years—is warm and optimistic. The biography serves as a satisfying conclusion for those who want to know what happens after The First Four Years. (Ages 10 & up)

LAURA’S ALBUM
William Anderson

Like the other biographical books, Laura’s Album moves through the stages of Wilder’s life one chapter at a time. This one, though, includes copious illustrations featuring old photographs, letters she wrote, and pictures of artifacts from her life. It brings Wilder’s stories to life in a new way and is probably best read alongside the original series. It’s especially fun to see photographs of items that played key roles in her stories, like the name card she gave to Almanzo, the china box she won in a competition as a child, and, perhaps best of all, Pa’s fiddle. (Ages 8 & up)

AFTERWORD

A certain tension comes along with reading anything about Laura but not by Laura. To the extent the biographical details are the same, the companion texts seem unnecessary since Laura’s observations are the more enjoyable read. And to the extent they are different—her books are historical fiction, after all—it is almost always a disappointment.

Wendy McClure captures this tension of the Little House books in her memoir The Wilder Life (Riverhead Books, 2011), which chronicles McClure’s journeys from Wisconsin to the Dakotas and beyond looking for the “Laura World” that entranced her as a child. Her liberal worldview shines through at times, and she makes some snide comments about Laura’s conservative fan base, but overall the book is funny, good-natured, and a nostalgic read for young adults and adults who read the Little House books as children. (Cautions: some swearing and adult humor) —R.L.A.
Absurd.

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“It is absurd for the Evolutionist to complain that it is unthinkable for an admittedly unthinkable God to make everything out of nothing, and then pretend that it is more thinkable that nothing should turn itself into everything.”

...G.K. Chesterton

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Back to the future

Resurrecting yesterday’s values to meet the challenges of tomorrow

When Paul Ryan gave his farewell address as speaker of the House on Dec. 19, he called on future lawmakers to make poverty issues a greater priority. Ryan’s mentor on poverty-fighting, Bob Woodson, age 81, sat in the front row. While politicians have come and gone, Woodson has toiled on the front lines since the 1970s as the godfather of neighborhood-based organizations that help people help themselves. Here are edited excerpts of our conversation in Washington, D.C.

Think back 20 years, when compassion wasn’t such a dirty word. Do you think Republicans have less empathy for the poor now than they did? Yes. I do. They have been too narrowly focused on policy and politics. We’re in a cultural war. Conservatives are failing their own cause, and therefore the country, because they do not know how to properly defend the values of the Founders in the marketplace. Right now the strategy is to meet together in think tanks, celebrate some conservative pundit who has a best-selling book, and meet among themselves.

You think they’ve lost the common touch? They’ve lost the common touch. They don’t have a ground strategy. The left is in the universities, on school boards, at city council meetings. They’ve shut down free speech on campuses. That’s the ground strategy they have. Conservatives and Republicans have strictly an aerial strategy. They’re criticizing what the other side is doing without coming up with an alternative construct that speaks to the needs. The way you influence people’s belief on values is to demonstrate in their lives how these values improve their lives.

Do you think this aerial vs. ground strategy is costing Republicans the next generation and minorities? They’re not even attempting to speak to these demographics.

Have Democrats learned anything from the mistakes of the past? They’re happy if 70 cents of the dollar goes to those who serve poor people. Democrats ask not what problems are solvable but which are fundable. If your job depends on me being sick or dependent—that dictates more of your behavior than compassion.

For helping the homeless, what do you think of “Housing First”? No strategy is going to work without an investment in human capital development. If you just deal with brick and mortar and you don’t deal with flesh and blood first, it’s doomed. Not everybody is poor for the same reason. You cannot have a single approach to it. Some poor people are just broke, but their character is intact. For them, programs, housing, training opportunities work. They use the welfare system the way it was intended, as an ambulatory service, not a transportation system.

What about the others? Category two: people who tried to be independent but ran into barriers. There are a lot of perverse incentives against people being independent. Category three: people who are physically and mentally handicapped or disabled. We’ve got to help them. Category four: people who are homeless and they’re poor because of character flaws. They need redemption and transformation for any program to work. I have witnessed community development projects all my life, and the only ones I’ve seen work are when you develop human capacity first.

You took Paul Ryan on a learning tour in 2014: Now he’s retired. Do other policymakers have the kind of understanding he got from that experience? I haven’t seen any of them. Policymakers come up with some gimmick, give it a name, roll it out, then parachute it into a community, with great fanfare. It doesn’t really take seed, because the people there who are supposed to benefit haven’t been involved in the development of it.

So it’s a tug of war between Republicans and Democrats, between decreasing and increasing the budget, but it’s lacking bottom-up solutions? African proverb: When bull elephants fight, the grass always loses. And it’s always the poor. In states controlled by Republicans, the face of poverty looks the same as those controlled by Democrats.

Why does it look the same? Because of fundamental elitism on both the left and the right. We are imbued with this notion that somehow character is related to education and celebrity—which means people without those are discounted.

What do you think of President Trump? He has implemented the right policies in terms of national defense and Supreme Court appointees. Another strength—he’s not another guilty white man.

What do you mean by that? Most politicians both left and right of center who are white approach the question of race from a position of guilt. I don’t find that helpful. Trump doesn’t. It’s unfortunate that the president is so morally challenged. Character stands above all else: Setting a tone that if you’re opponents, you have to be enemies—that’s not helpful. He’s extreme in what he says and does, but that makes his intentions more obvious.

What do you think about Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer? They’re not serious people. They’re so preoccupied with defeating Trump or challenging
him that everything they do is just in opposition.

**What about Newt Gingrich and his impact on politics?** Gingrich is someone else who is morally challenged. He's a very smart guy, but he has become so partisan. On occasions he will challenge the president—but Newt Gingrich is so inside Washington.

**George W. Bush?** He never shifted out of campaign mode when it came to issues of faith. He hired John Dilulio, a liberal Democrat, to run the faith-based office. There’s an example of guilty white men. When it comes to the issues of race and poverty, they always have to make concessions to their opponents and concede to them.

**Barack Obama?** Instead of bringing us together on race he left it more polarized. Obama was all windup and no pitch.

Looking back, what do you consider your top accomplishment? Taking Republicanism into the inner city and creating a good image of it. Republicans have been doing everything since then to discourage that. They never built on it.

Looking back, what’s your top disappointment? Conservatives have not sought allies among the poor and minorities to defend traditional virtues. We’re in a cultural war. The only way we who believe in traditional values will win is by finding allies among the people who suffer most from it.

What’s the biggest challenge we face overall? Finding an answer to emptiness among young people is the biggest challenge that we face. There has to be a moral reformation in America. Whites who voted for Trump and live in trailer parks have more in common with black inner-city people confronting the drugs epidemic. They are not being represented by people on the left or the right. The embrace of the traditional values of our Founders is a life-and-death issue to people in these communities, as opposed to a foil in some intellectual contest.

**What does the new American dream look like?** A makeover of the old American dream—applying old values to a new reality. We spend so much time trying to give to our children the things we didn’t have that we fail to give them what we did have. What I’m trying to do in my work in communities is resurrect these old values—I’m trying to take us back to the future.
Republic Records’ various-artists soundtrack to Bob Persichetti, Peter Ramsey, and Rodney Rothman’s Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse does for state-of-the-art pop music what the film does for state-of-the-art pop cinema: prove that the hippest and coolest technological gimmickry can be put at the service of something other than low-balling tripe. Not one of its 13 cuts veers into profanity or celebrates greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, or sloth.

This accomplishment is especially impressive when one considers that the Who’s Who of contemporary hit-makers doing the rapping and the singing includes Post Malone (“Sunflower”), Nicki Minaj (“Familia”), Lil Wayne (“Scared of the Dark”), and Vince Staples (“Home”), each of whom has done more than his or her share to transform the streaming era’s lowest common denominator into a bottomless pit.

On Into the Spider-Verse, they extol heroism and laugh in the face of danger. They have the backs of their family, friends, and love interests and know that if “you sin and be on your high horse, we’re not so stable anymore.” In short—to quote the title of the DJ Khalil cut featuring Denzel Curry, YBN Cordae, SwaVay, and Trevor Rich—they “elevate.”

And the music keeps moving, from the busy and the dizzy to the ill and the chill. One can, in other words, tell the selections apart even though they’re all fracked from the same urban/hip-hop landscape. It turns out that there’s variety in them there hills.

There is, however, a problem, and it’s a big one: Every syllable, whether sung or rapped, is Auto-Tuned. Yes, voice-altering technology is all the rage. And, yes, every era boasts a predominant sound.

But unlike, say, the lead or background falsettos of the Bee Gees that saturated the Top 40 in the ’70s, Auto-Tune pulls the plug on one of pop music’s most attractive characteristics—namely, its capacity for showcasing the human voice in what Gerard Manley Hopkins might have called its counter, original, spare, and strange variety. Say what you will about “We Are the World,” there was something fascinating, maybe even inspirational, in hearing the heterogeneous likes of Stevie Wonder, Diana Ross, Ray Charles, Cyndi Lauper, Steve Perry, and Dionne Warwick taking turns going for broke.

Auto-Tune would’ve taken the “We” out of “We Are the World” by shellacking its many voices with a broad brush and making them all sound the way that Spider-Man’s fellow Marvel hero the Silver Surfer looks: sleek and cold.

Practically every song on Billboard’s Hot 100 features the treatment. And now even Paul McCartney, who only possesses one of the most popular singing voices in the world, has succumbed.

On New Year’s Day, McCartney released the stand-alone, heavily Auto-Tune single “Get Enough.” The ballad came as a surprise. Just 15 days earlier, he’d released “Who Cares,” the third single from his enthusiastically received, and Auto-Tune-free, Egypt Station.

Like the Egypt Station singles before it, “Who Cares” didn’t chart. So it’s easy to imagine McCartney racking his brains, wondering what a guy has to do these days to score a hit and being advised that anyone, even an ex-Beatle, who tries to enter the 21st-century Top 40 vocally naked had better abandon all hope.

He should’ve abandoned all hope. Somewhere there are androids listening to “Get Enough” and, on discovering how bad they really sound, deciding to put their choral ambitions on permanent hold.

Their sole consolation? The synthetic relief that they experience on learning that “Get Enough” hasn’t charted either. 🙄
New or recent albums
reviewed by Arsenio Orteza

WORKING THE LONG GAME  Bill Lloyd
Lloyd’s songwriting partners this time out include Graham Gouldman (10cc), Tom Petersson (Cheap Trick), Freedy Johnston, and Buddy Mondlock, each of whom Lloyd brings out the best in, and each of whom brings out the Marshall Crenshaw in him. And, no, you won’t be able to tell the collaborative efforts from the two songs that he came up with on his own. Lyrics that illuminate the commonplace are common to both, and sunny power-pop basics are sunny power-pop basics no matter who’s reshuffling the deck.

LIVE AT THE TROUBADOUR
Michael Nesmith & the First National Band Redux
“Just think,” says Nesmith six songs in, “it only took me half a century to get back!” Hearty cheers ensue. But while he may have intended this January 2018 concert to be a long-overdue gift to his patient fans, the quality of the performances as documented on this recording make it something else besides: proof that country-rock can be smarter and richer than anything dreamt of in the Eagles’ philosophy. Maybe not in the Byrds’ though, or—in the case of “Different Drum”—Linda Ronstadt’s.

WORLD ON STICKS  Sam Phillips
There are other instruments, but what you’ll notice most are the insistent drums, the taut strings, and the austere spaces that they create, spaces that symbolize Phillips’ vision of the ideally uncluttered heart, mind, and soul as unmistakably as her arid vocals do. There are other extremes—among them, obviousness (“American Landfill Kings,” “How Much Is Enough”) and overcompensation (“Teilhard”). Thus builds a tension eventually lanced by the sharpest line (which, climactically enough, occurs in the final song): “Having it all isn’t all we were meant to have.”

BELIEVE  Russ Taff
This partial tie-in with Rick Altizer’s recent Russ Taff: I Still Believe biodoc has been characterized as “praise and worship,” a tag that might imply something less musically and vocally intense and more thematically and emotionally contrived than what Taff actually delivers. In fact, rooted as it is in Taff’s recent revelation that he has spent years as a legacy alcoholic, it’s not contrived at all. And as far as intensity is concerned, Taff’s as convincing singing “We Will Stand” now as he was 36 years ago.

ENCORE
Bryan Ferry has re-recorded his music before, as far back as 1976, when he remade Roxy Music’s “Sea Breezes” and “Chance Meeting.” And there’ve been Roxy Music live albums aplenty. But with Bitter-Sweet (BMG), he has undertaken his most ambitious revisions to date, subjecting six Roxy Music tracks (“Sea Breezes” and “Chance Meeting” included) and seven of his solo songs to the jazzy sway of his sizable orchestra. Twice he forgoes singing altogether, a rather startling move for a vocalist.

The effect is to render ghostly songs that formerly embodied the art-rock and pop-rock aesthetics at their most sophisticated. Ferry’s suave croon has become diaphanously whispery, and the banjo, brass, and strings replacing the originals’ guitar, bass, drums, and keyboards wouldn’t have sounded out of place on the RMS Titanic. Most telling, many of the song lengths have shrunk significantly, suggesting a distillation without which Ferry, now 73, wouldn’t consider his life’s work complete. —A.O.
The persecution index is rising. If someone launched a futures market based on Christian believers getting killed and took a “long” position, they’d have a safe prospect of a return.

Instinctively you know this is true when you see headlines of major newspapers devoted to the latest Boko Haram violence against Christians in Nigeria, or Muslim mobs chasing a poor Christian family in Pakistan. But the monitoring group Open Doors puts statistics to the stories, and its 2019 World Watch List released on Jan. 16 confirms the troubling trend: Last year 1 in 9 Christians experienced serious persecution—a 14 percent increase over the previous year. Christians are enduring high levels of persecution in 73 countries, nearly half of those surveyed.

The rise of Christian persecution is significant not only for followers of Christ. It follows a rise in state authoritarianism in places like China and rising nationalism in India and elsewhere. Take a look at the Watch List’s Top 10 and you will see also countries whose repression impoverishes their own people and threatens neighbors, including the United States: North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Libya hold this year’s top four slots. The freedom to believe is the first freedom, making possible all the others for all people.

The obvious question, and one I’m frequently asked: What can we do?

I used to dodge this question—because the answers are long, and I’m just a reporter, a messenger. But Scripture is clear and compelling: The example of Christ means “we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers” (1 John 3:16). Here then, are some traditional ideas, as reminders:

Pray. Use a printable guide provided by Open Doors or others. A school project could be having students prepare a prayer guide for your school, church, or home (using news

resources like World Watch Monitor and WORLD Magazine).

Support missionaries and others who are standing against a persecution tide. Support the schools and seminaries equipping them. Support Christ-based aid and advocacy groups working among the persecuted. On our website is a list of such groups working in Iraq and Syria—where Christian populations face real extinction—just because we are so often asked about it. But I find the local church, perhaps your own, is a wonderful network for vetting and disseminating news and practical support for the global church.

Here are several nontraditional things to add to that list:

Befriend an other. Spend time with someone of a different religion and perhaps ethnicity as a way to learn to have conversations instead of confrontation about beliefs. When I travel overseas, stand-out moments occur when I have a Muslim driver or translator willing to show me Christian sites and discuss them. I learn so much from their outsider perspective and have an opportunity to be a “fragrant aroma” in return. At home, I’m grateful for weekly dinners with neighbors who don’t share my beliefs but love me still. Persecuted believers are rarely famous people, and small engagements on our own stage help us relate to them.

Receive. At the heart of the gospel is the call to receive the work Christ has done on the cross and add nothing to it. “It is finished” is a word for all time and for every day. Sometimes we need to receive news of persecution by allowing it to deepen our own appreciation for the cost of following Christ. We also need to receive the testimony of the persecuted church, recognizing it has so much to teach us.

Roughly 70 percent of the world’s Christians live without the right to worship freely, notes Karen Ellis, director at Reformed Theological Seminary’s Center for the Study of the Bible & Ethnicity. “Many of us are the world’s 30 percent, rich with religious privilege. The 70 percent isn’t the portion that’s isolated from the Body of Christ; it’s the 30 percent that’s isolated from the global persevering church.”

Any index of persecution, ultimately, is most helpful when it leads fellow believers to join that global persevering chorus.
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PRESSURE TO CONFORM
On an online forum for parents concerned about their teenagers’ sudden change in sexuality, one mother confesses: “I am desperate. My 14-year-old daughter just told me that she is trans. These past weeks have felt like a hundred years.”

Another grieving parent says that nothing in her 14-year-old daughter’s demeanor or history explains her sudden declaration of transgenderism. “She has exchanged her pointe shoes for a chest binder, her ballerina bun for a buzz cut,” the mother wrote. “All because some stranger on the internet told her that being uncomfortable in her developing body meant she must be a boy.”

Unlike the growing trend of children expressing gender confusion at a younger age, the teens these parents describe are part of a different phenomenon some therapists and researchers are calling rapid-onset gender dysphoria.

As the name suggests, the affected teenagers—usually girls—go from a seemingly normal gender expression to a sudden change in identity. The affected teens are often isolated and feel a sense of dysphoria, or discomfort, associated with their gender identity.

LGBT activists are dialing up the heat on parents and researchers who question transgender dogma, while peer influence may be leading some teens into life-changing hormone treatments.

**BY JAMIE DEAN**
declaration that they are in the wrong body. It usually happens at puberty or shortly after. Many of the teens request cross-sex hormones. Some ask for mastectomies.

Many clinicians and therapists oblige—at least with hormones—and they persuade parents to go along by using frightening leverage: They warn the alternative could be suicide. Terrified parents often give in.

But some researchers and physicians warn against the rush, and they point to another common thread among the teens: Sometimes their transgender declarations happen in clusters.

These researchers think the trend shares similarities with at least one other phenomenon therapists have observed for years: teenage girls in groups of friends who develop eating disorders suddenly and at the same time.

In a similar way, these experts say the influence of peers and social media can lead some girls to search for meaning in a transgender identity or to grasp for answers to other forms of distress by assuming their angst is rooted in dysphoria with their sex.

This isn’t a popular theory, and those who speak out about it—or even study it—often pay a price. But the price for staying quiet is far greater, as teenagers plunge into radical medical interventions often with irreversible effects.

Meanwhile, many parents—often from nonconservative backgrounds—express despair at what they see as a fad. “We are a progressive family caught in the teenage transgender wave,” wrote one commenter on the parental blog 4th Wave Now. “What we are seeing are pockets of teens... who are declaring themselves either non-binary [neither male nor female] or transgender. ... Peer influence is just so huge on these kids ... Very, very scary.”

Lisa Littman found out the price of raising questions firsthand. When the Brown University researcher published the first academic study exploring rapid-onset gender dysphoria (ROGD) last fall, the blowback was swift.

Some critics questioned Littman’s methods. Others said ROGD wasn’t a legitimate theory. Transgender activist Julia Serano called ROGD “scientifically specious” and an excuse for parents to “disbelieve and disaffirm their child’s gender identity.”

Eleven days after the academic journal PLOS One published Littman’s peer-reviewed study, the editors said they were looking into concerns about her methodology. The same day, Brown University removed a news release about the study from its website.

Critics of Littman’s methods noted she studied ROGD by surveying parents concerned about the phenomenon in their children. (Critics thought she should survey a wider sample.) But
the purpose of Littman’s research was to survey parents concerned about ROGD in their teens, not to study all parents of transgender children. And Littman acknowledged the study was a starting place in a field with no other formal research available.

Though editors at PLOS One mentioned Littman’s methods, they also responded to complaints from transgender activists. One person described as a transsexual dominatrix complained on Twitter: “The linked article was written using transphobic dogwhistles (sex observed at birth, for example), so it’s most likely they have a transphobic contributor who knows exactly what they’re doing.”

PLOS One replied and assured the activist the journal was looking into it.

Jeffrey Flier, a former dean of Harvard Medical School, openly questioned the move to sideline the study immediately: “In all my years in academia, I have never once seen a comparable reaction from a journal within days of publishing a paper that the journal already had subjected to peer review, accepted and published.”

Brown University officials said they weren’t squelching academic inquiry on a controversial topic by pulling the school’s news release about the study. But their statement also underscored “Brown is proud to be among the first universities to include medical care for gender reassignment in its student health plan.”

Meanwhile, beyond the publishing controversy, Littman’s findings were disturbing. She received 256 responses from a slew of parents concerned about their teenage children declaring transgenderism with no previous signs of gender dysphoria. More than 85 percent of the survey respondents said they support gay marriage—establishing that the parents likely weren’t concerned about transgenderism for religious or ideological reasons.

Instead, they worried about its onset in their children—mostly girls with an average age of 16 years old. Nearly 70 percent of the parents suspected their child used language they found online to explain their transgenderism, and many said their teens had spent an excessive amount of time on the internet before declaring they were transgender.

Indeed, thousands of videos and forums on popular networking sites feature teens documenting their attempted transition and sometimes offering guides for how to convince parents or physicians to prescribe hormones. One parent in the study said she overheard her teenager boasting about convincing a doctor to prescribe cross-sex hormones and proclaiming, “Easiest thing I ever did.”

When it comes to the theory of clusters, nearly 70 percent of the parents said their teen had been part of a friend group where one or more friends came out as transgender during a similar timeframe. That’s consistent with other comments from parents on 4th Wave Now—a site for parents skeptical of ROGD. (Some participants in Littman’s study learned about the survey from the 4th Wave site.)

In the comments section of the blog, one parent said her daughter was friends with some of the girls in her high school’s color guard team: “Last year my daughter told me that almost all of them felt they were lesbian. This year, most of them feel they are transgender, agender, or, at the very least, are questioning their gender identities.”

In Littman’s survey, 60 percent of the parents said they thought their teens’ declaration of transgenderism increased their child’s popularity at school. One parent wrote, “Being trans is a gold star in the eyes of other teens.”

If being trans is a gold star, being straight is unacceptable to some teenagers. “To be heterosexual, comfortable with the gender you were assigned at birth, and non-minority places you in the ‘most evil’ of categories with this group of friends,” one parent wrote.

Another common characteristic: More than 60 percent of the parents said their child had been diagnosed with a mental health disorder before claiming gender dysphoria, suggesting the teens do need help, but perhaps for other underlying problems.

Other parents said they thought their teens were using an extraordinary method to cope with a common experience: “I believe my child experiences what many kids experience on the cusp of puberty—uncomfortableness!—but there was an online world at the ready to tell her that those very normal feelings meant she’s in the wrong body.”

The pressure on parents to allow their children to take cross-sex hormones, or even undergo mastectomies, is often intense. The claim their child might commit suicide looms large, though some studies show the rate of suicide attempts among transgender people remains high, even after they attempt transition to the opposite sex. Still, Diane Ehrensaft, a psychologist who advocates letting small children dictate their gender, has called transgender interventions for children and teens “suicide prevention.”

That’s enough to leave some parents reeling.


tough some critics lambasted the study, Littman isn’t alone in her findings.

Lisa Marchiano, a secular therapist in Pennsylvania, wrote a blog post in 2016 cautioning parents about plunging into medical interventions with children and teens claiming to be transgender. Afterward, she began taking phone consultations with parents of teens experiencing ROGD. A year
later, she wrote, “I am overwhelmed by the sheer volume of parents who call me.”

Some parents plead with Marchiano to allow them to fly their children into town for therapy or to help them find a therapist who won’t push their teens to transition with cross-sex hormones.

“At times I am able to offer advice that helps a family steer clear of drastic medical intervention of dubious benefits or necessity,” she wrote. “But sometimes all I can do is stand helpless and watch the wreckage.”

Marchiano described working with a family whose daughter declared transgenderism at age 18. The young woman had experienced other mental health problems but hadn’t expressed a conflict with her sex until high school. The parents had taken her to a clinician, and after a 30-minute consult, a physician’s assistant made an appointment for the teen to begin testosterone injections the following week.

Her parents convinced her to wait, but by the end of her freshman year of college the teenager had begun taking cross-sex hormones and had undergone a mastectomy—paid for by student health insurance. (Eighty-six colleges nationwide have student health plans that include cross-sex hormones and cross-sex surgery.)

Marchiano says the parents reported the radical physical steps didn’t decrease their daughter’s mental anxiety. She had dropped out of college and remained mostly isolated in her home.

Some teenagers report feeling relief after taking hormones or pursuing surgery, and some transgender activists claim social acceptance is a key to transgender adolescents becoming happy. But given that many parents who worry about their teenagers’ decline after experiencing ROGD also expressed left-leaning views of sexuality, social conditions alone don’t account for the distress some adolescents and young adults still feel.

And short-term relief doesn’t negate the long-term consequences of a person rejecting his or her sex and beginning lifelong medical interventions. For example, cross-sex hormones can cause sterility, leaving teenagers to decide whether to forgo having biological children later in life.

Other experts say cross-sex hormones increase risk of stroke and that puberty blockers could decrease bone density in adolescents. And since the practice of giving cross-sex hormones to children is only about a decade old, even pro-transgender physicians admit they don’t know the long-term outcomes.

More studies make sense, including research into the dangers of pursuing such paths. But while studies like Littman’s are under fire, the federally funded National Institutes of Health has given more than $5 million in grants to a group of doctors and psychologists tasked in part with studying transgender children over a period of decades.

The views of at least some of the researchers seem clear from the outset: Norman Spack is a Boston physician who opened the nation’s first gender clinic for children. Johanna Olson-Kennedy is a pro-transgender pediatrician who sees hundreds of children at the Center for Transyouth Health and Development at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles.

Late last year, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) for the first time officially recommended that parents accept and encourage the preferred gender expression of their children.

That cuts across decades of therapists who argued parents should encourage their children to embrace their birth sex, knowing that some studies show as many as 80 percent of children who express gender dysphoria will outgrow those feelings by adulthood.

But in 2016, Cora Breuner, a pediatrician and head of the AAP’s committee on adolescence, told PBS she wanted to see gender clinics available to children all over the United States: “My goal is to make this absolutely mainstream.”
Research into alternate ideas doesn't promise to become mainstream again any time soon.

Michael Bailey is a psychologist at Northwestern University who faced intense criticism a decade ago for challenging the prevailing ideas about male transgenderism. He still raises questions: “Right now there's this bias for the narrative that all gender dysphoria is real and that it's great to transition—and against people who are concerned about this.”

He doubts he'd be able to get a government grant to study the issue. Instead, Bailey's working on a study similar to the one Littman released last year. He's conducting a survey in conjunction with the website Parents of Rapid-Onset Gender Dysphoria Kids. (He notes it’s possible some of the same parents may respond to his survey as responded to Littman's study.)

He says the study will likely be published later this year, but so far, he says the results are very similar to what Littman found. He thinks the reaction against her study was “clearly ideologically motivated” and that it communicated, “This is not valid... and let's punish anyone who tries to study this.”

Bailey says he knows other psychologists who are worried about the push to encourage children to pursue medical interventions, but who don't want to speak out for fear of retribution.

Paul Hruz, an endocrinologist at Washington University in St. Louis, says a substantial number of his colleagues feel the same way, but won't speak up either. “It’s one of the ways we’re failing our patients.”

Hruz notes that when children or teens come seeking cross-sex hormones, they are usually physically healthy, but entering into lifelong dependency on hormones. And he emphasizes the biologically obvious: No one can change his or her sex.

“Sex is biologically determined from at the moment of conception” says Hruz. “It's recognized at the time of birth, it's not assigned at the time of birth. And even if you modify the appearance of the body, you don't do anything to change the sex.”

Despite that biological reality and the many unknowns about the long-term consequences of cross-sex hormones (as well as the already-known side effects), he's dismayed to see physicians and psychologists pushing such medical procedures on children: “I've not in my career encountered another condition where we've moved ahead so rapidly and so vigorously to affirm one particular intervention with this level of evidence.” He hopes the medical community will wake up to the dangers: “But I don't know how many children will have been harmed by then.”

Andrew Walker, author of God and the Transgender Debate and a fellow at the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, thinks in a hundred years people will look back on this era of medicine the way we now look back on the eugenicist movements of the early 20th century.

While many obvious biological reasons exist for opposing the embrace of transgenderism, Walker says Christians also should be well-versed in the Biblical teaching about God creating people male and female in His image.

He says that's particularly important for parents talking with children about these issues: “And I err on the side of having the conversation sooner than later because if you don't have the conversation with your children, the culture will.”

(Walker says a parent can teach even a young child that some people are confused about the way God made them, and that we should have compassion on those who are suffering in this way and help when possible.)

The suffering is intense for many.

Hacsi Horvath, a lecturer in epidemiology and biostatistics at the University of California, San Francisco, has written about his own experience of trying to live as a woman for 13 years. He says he stopped taking estrogen in 2013 and “very rapidly came back to my senses.”

Today, he says he grapples with anger but writes about his experience because “I am far angrier that thousands of young people are being irreversibly altered and sterilized as they are inducted into a drug-dependent and medically maimed lifestyle.”

He hopes to spare others what he's suffered: “an inward bruise ... I have been badly harmed.”

— Michael Bailey
When a home

A resident at Huston Commons walks in his new apartment. Huston Commons is a housing first program in Portland for chronically homeless people.

BRIANNA SOUKUP/PORTLAND PRESS HERALD VIA GETTY IMAGES
Federal homeless policy is based on a flawed, one-size-fits-all approach, but one agency is ready to try a more intensive strategy

isn’t enough

by HARVEST PRUDE in Washington
WHEN PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP TOOK OFFICE AND nominated renowned brain surgeon Dr. Ben Carson to be secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), reformers believed it would bring a sea change in housing policy. “We were fist-pumping eight ways to Sunday,” said Chris Megison, CEO of Solutions for Change.

The nonprofit transitional housing program in San Diego, Calif., seeks to change the behaviors of homeless families, helping them to become independent. The program is time-intensive, but with good results: Since 1999, almost 950 formerly homeless families, including 2,300 children, have graduated from the three-year program with housing stability, employment, and reduced dependence on federal aid.

Carson’s trademark message of personal responsibility resonated well with Solutions’ mission. Before he went to HUD, Carson had criticized government programs that “really just kind of pat people on the head” and don’t help them improve themselves. “Yes they get a check ... and yes they have a housing subsidy and healthcare subsidy, but there’s nothing to incentivize them to move beyond that, and now we have that on a generational basis.”

Prior to speaking at a 2014 gala event for Solutions for Change, he had high praise for the organization’s approach to homelessness: “Solutions for Change looks for ways to allow people to actually improve themselves to take on some responsibility ... and to move out of that cycle.”

At the time, the federal government had been shifting taxpayer money away from shelters and transitional housing programs and toward a “Housing First” approach that grants housing to homeless persons without requiring changes in behavior—the type of “pat on the head” that Carson opposed.

But even after Carson’s appointment, the requirement to adopt Housing First principles remained for groups working with HUD. Megison says he flew to Washington, D.C., in June 2017 and tag-teamed with his congressman to deliver an appeal to Carson’s office, asking that it reconsider its Housing First policies. Despite the signed support of 23 lawmakers, he received a politely worded dismissal.

Solutions faced a choice: Drop its sobriety and work requirements or give up $600,000 in federal support. Solutions handed back the money. It meant closing down an emergency family shelter and letting some employees go. But Solutions’ supporters and its board of trustees believed converting to a Housing First approach would have been more destructive in the long run.

To the frustration of reformers, HUD remains committed to Housing First ideas. But recently, another federal agency began showing interest in Solutions’ method of addressing homelessness.

AROUND 554,000 PEOPLE LIVE ON THE STREETS IN THE United States, according to HUD’s 2017 annual assessment. That’s an undercount, though: It doesn’t include some homeless, such as those sheltering in their cars.

Homelessness is nothing new, but the scale of mass homelessness today has both the private and public sector scrambling to find solutions. Front-running strategies include the government’s Housing First approach, an increasingly trendy “community first” strategy, and “transformation first” programs like Solutions.
percent of families who participated in rapid rehousing were evicted or sued for eviction in 2016. Only 10 percent of families increased their income over a year, and only 2 out of 5 families were able to maintain their housing without federal aid. A similar look at New York in 2013 found the number of families returning to the streets and to shelters actually rose from 20 percent to over 50 percent after the push for rapid rehousing from 2005-2011.

Solutions for Change represents a transformation first approach. (WORLD will review a third approach, community first, in a future issue.) Advocates for this approach believe subsidies alone merely put a Band-Aid on deep, internal issues such as poverty, addiction, domestic violence, or broken families. “We don’t want to be symptom chasers,” Megison said. “Just putting a person behind a door doesn’t do anything to address what got them homeless.”

Transformation first rounds out housing with training, work requirements, and counseling aimed at addressing counterproductive behaviors. So families at Solutions must stay sober and work while going through the 1,000-day program that includes classes on topics like parenting, servant leadership, job training, and managing finances.

Sometimes transformation first organizations are explicitly “Jesus first,” emphasizing the gospel as the key to solving homelessness. Others focus on breaking old habits and establishing new routines. Solutions includes in its recovery steps a “spiritual call to action.” Some come to faith in Christ, but not all residents will become Christians on the road to housing stability.

It may not work for everyone, and Megison’s model only attempts to address homeless families. Solutions says on average, its residents report a tripling of annual incomes, from $7,400 to $21,400, and a decrease by half in dependence on federal aid like food stamps. But the percentage Megison is perhaps the most proud of is graduated parents who were able to reunite with their children—100 percent.

EIGHTEEN MONTHS AFTER LOSING ITS HUD FUNDING, Solutions had raised enough private donations—largely from churches—to reopen the shuttered family shelter and bulk up its staff. The results of the group’s program also caught the eye of another Trump administration official.

Clarence Carter, director of the Office of Family Assistance at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), reached out to Megison in June 2017 after learning they had lost HUD funding. He oversees the cash-assistance program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and others that deal with family poverty. He has been scoping out alternatives to Housing First for family homelessness, and believed Solutions offered one. Most impressive to Carter was that graduated residents increased their income and savings and reduced their dependence on public support, something he believed the current social safety net failed to do.

“The American social safety net should catch people when they fall—but act as a trampoline to allow them to bounce and function in society on their own,” he said.

He met with local politicians and graduates of Solutions to verify the group’s results, then decided to partner with Megison for a demonstration project on family homelessness, based on the Solutions model. With the support of HHS, Solutions hopes to replicate its model in around 10 other communities. The project is slated to roll out this spring. It will take time—a year and a half to three years, based on the time-intensive program Solutions has pioneered.

Carter said the intent is not to model every family homelessness program in the country after Solutions, adding that he thinks current one-size-fits-all prescriptions have done communities a disservice. “We don’t want the federal government to say — do it that way. We do want the federal government to say — achieve these results.”

Megison says he is once again optimistic: “What I thought would be possible with Ben Carson through HUD is now more than possible through Clarence Carter and HHS.”

Megison, CEO of Solutions for Change (below); Carter (right)
Missionaries say the Communist
Last Fall, missionary John Miller sat in the back row of an unregistered church in Sichuan province, worshipping as he had every Sunday morning for the past year and a half. Then eight police officers walked in. As the only foreigner in the room, Miller tried to sneak out of the building, but police noticed him and ran down the aisle to stop him. They asked for his passport and took down his information before allowing him to return to worship.

Two days later, Miller heard the police knocking on his door but didn’t answer. Miller had no idea how police had found him—he was staying in an apartment rented by local church member John Wu (for security reasons, I’ve given pseudonyms to Wu and the missionaries in this story), and Miller had not registered the address. He moved to another apartment owned by church members. One week later, police contacted Wu and insisted he bring Miller to the station the next morning to register his address.

Miller and Wu complied, arriving at the police station at 10:30 a.m. For the next nine hours, local police as well as officers of the Bureau of Ethnic and Religious Affairs interrogated Miller about what he was doing in China and why he attended the unregistered church. He refused to implicate the Chinese believers, but spoke openly about his faith. “I respect and obey the laws of China because God has given this authority to you,” Miller recalls telling the officer. “But if your laws contradict God’s laws, I must obey God’s laws.”

Eventually officers handed him a written statement that he would be fined RMB 2,000 ($296) for not registering his address. They gave him 10 days to leave the country. After ministering in China for five years with a focus on Christian education, Miller flew home to the United States. Since then, he’s continued teaching his students through video chat.

“When I went to the police station, [I felt] joy to be able to give witness to the gospel,” Miller said. “As a foreign worker, we spend all our time trying to avoid the religious affairs people... but here they were sitting across the table and I didn’t need to worry about saying the wrong thing... I could tell them to their faces that I’m a Christian and yes, Jesus is worth all this... I could openly identify myself as a brother to these persecuted Chinese Christians.”

Miller’s story is becoming increasingly common in China as the central government cracks down on foreign missionaries in the country. Beijing has made a targeted effort to rid the country of all foreign influences, especially Korean and Western missionaries who work with house churches. The government has even kicked out entire mission agencies—and missionaries who remain in the country recognize their time is limited.

Missionary James Young also experienced the new hostility. He had ministered to an unreached ethnic minority group in China for 13 years before taking a furlough two years ago for his children’s education. Young continued traveling to China to help mentor church leaders there: Last August, 11 officers showed up in the parking lot of the hotel where he was staying. They handcuffed him, placed him in the back of a minivan, then drove to his apartment in a neighboring city. Rummaging through his apartment, they found Bibles translated into a minority language and information regarding his international mission agency.

They took Young back to the station and for the next eight days interrogated him, keeping him inside a room at a hotel where they had booked every room on the floor to keep watch over him. For several hours each day, the agents repeatedly asked him about the work he was doing in the country, why he was interested in ministering to ethnic minorities, and who his co-workers were. He refused to answer the last question but provided information about his missionary endeavors.

Unbeknownst to him, the Ministry of State Security had also detained and interrogated eight other missionaries in his organization in order to compare answers and grill them if they differed. Although the authorities confiscated Young’s phone and laptop, he was able to hide a microchip that contained his most important information.

FROM CHINA
country is kicking them out, one by one by JUNE CHENG

photo by NG HAN GUAN/AP
Between grueling interrogation sessions, Young had the opportunity to chat with his head interrogator, who slowly began to open up about his personal life. As Young gained the officers’ trust, he was able to stay in the room by himself and make calls on the landline phone to his wife. Yet on the sixth day, a new head interrogator took over and yelled at Young, asking what he would do if the “good news” he brought the ethnic minorities caused them to rise up against the government. Would he take responsibility for that? Feeling physically and emotionally fatigued, Young began doubting his work. Back in his room, he wept.

One night he paced back and forth in his room, apprehensive that he might never get out. Talking to himself, he realized his biggest fear was what would happen to his family if he were to die. “But if you happen to die, who is still in charge?” he thought. “My life is in God’s hands, whether I die or continue to live, everything is up to God.” Suddenly, he felt enormous peace.

Officers forced Young to write a confession—a process that took four to five hours as they demanded rewrite after rewrite until it was satisfactory—then gave him his sentence: He could not return to China for five years. He had to pay a fine. He had to close down a small business that he had used to provide visas for short-term missionaries. He was finally allowed to leave, and the next day 20 officials, some with cameras and video recorders, met him at the airport to ensure that he left the country.

“I’m very confident that we have shown [the local believers] everything that we can offer,” Young said. “I really do have the conviction that it’s time for them to go at it alone, and I believe they can. That doesn’t mean they’ll do it all well, but I think even when they hit rock bottom that’s part of their journey.”

Young believes it would be naïve for missionaries to assume they could come into China without attracting the notice of authorities. Surveillance cameras equipped with facial recognition technology and set up along the streets and outside buildings make it hard to hide. Police detained one missionary after they caught on camera the license plate number of a vehicle they had seen going to remote villages where Christian literature had been handed out. They tracked down the plate, spotted the car parked outside the missionary’s house, and detained him after finding bags of illegally printed literature inside.

The experience of Miller and Young is part of Beijing’s plan to “Sinicize religion”—to place it under the authority of the Chinese Communist Party—as President Xi Jinping amasses power and tightens control over all aspects of Chinese society. Yet the expulsion of missionaries also provides an opportunity for local believers to step into the roles left behind and even step out into cross-cultural missions. Rather than despair, many point to the last time China expelled foreign missionaries from its shores, in 1949, and how by the grace of God the number of Protestants in China tripled during the oppressive 27-year rule of Chairman Mao Zedong.

The crackdown represents for China a radical left turn of the kind not seen since Mao’s reign. During China’s opening up and reforming period in the 1980s, it eagerly welcomed foreign English teachers, businessmen, and experts in various fields to come in and help aid China’s economic development. Even though China officially banned foreigners from evangelizing, many Christians jumped at the opportunity to go into China and teach at schools and universities. They developed relationships with students and fellow teachers, started Bible studies, and explained the gospel one-on-one.

Many first-generation Christians in China credit those missionaries with bringing them to Christ. The Chinese government quickly caught on to the dual purposes of these foreigners, and in some cases used visa denials to get rid of influential missionaries—yet often China’s desire for teaching, medical care, and business expertise outweighed religious
Concerns. As the Chinese church grew and matured, local believers successfully evangelized and planted churches. Foreign missionaries began to work in areas that required greater training or experience: theological education, Biblical counseling, ministry to ethnic minorities, Bible translation, and compassion ministries.

Now, though, a national security campaign is warning Chinese about “friends who wear masks,” foreign spies who come as tourists, journalists, researchers, or diplomats. Laws Widening definitions of punishable actions among foreigners include provisions that bar those deemed national security threats from entering or exiting China. A law about foreign non-governmental organizations has created crushing burdens for foreigners hoping to run charities inside China. Ying Fuk Tsang, director of the divinity school at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, says officials “view foreign missionaries as infiltrators... and will pressure them and expel them from the country.”

The Ministry of State Security, the country’s intelligence agency, has coordinated nationwide investigations to bring down entire networks of missionaries. In some cases the missionaries have been forced to leave, while others left on their own volition, knowing the government would soon find them. Politically sensitive areas such as Xinjiang have been largely cleared of foreign missionaries.

The pressure on missionaries goes along with demolishing crosses of state-sanctioned Three-Self churches and barring Communist Party members and minors from attending church services. Officials have shut down influential house churches such as Beijing’s Zion Church and Chengdu’s Early Rain Covenant Church and are cutting Chinese church ties with the global church. They want all house churches to register with the government.

The crackdown on South Korean missionaries has been even more severe, as the Chinese government is less afraid of diplomatic pushback. China first started to crack down on South Korean missionaries in 2014, targeting those working with North Korean refugees in northeast China. In 2015, authorities began to close churches built by Koreans by deporting missionaries and confiscating buildings. The spotlight on Korean missionaries intensified in 2017 after ISIS killed two young Chinese missionaries working in Pakistan with a Korean missions group (see “Eastern approaches,” March 31, 2018).

At their peak, Korean missionaries in China numbered in the thousands and were influential in both urban and rural areas through evangelism, church planting, and training of Chinese missionaries. Last April local religious affairs departments began a “special action plan to investigate and prosecute Korean Christian infiltration,” Hong Kong’s South China Morning Post reported. Officials canceled visas, interrogated missionaries, and in some cases even detained them for a week.

Isaac Kim’s experience was typical: He taught at an underground seminary in northern China for five years until one day last fall police contacted him through the language school where he studied. He and his family had one week to leave the country. Kim believes police know the whereabouts and activities of all missionaries in China, and simply kicked him out to meet a quota. Since leaving the country, Kim has continued his work training Chinese missionaries by meeting with them outside China.

The future for foreign missionaries in China looks bleak, and those who remain in the country are uncertain how much longer they’ll be able to stay. Some like Miller and Kim are able to continue their ministry from abroad by working online or gathering with Chinese believers outside of China. Kim said his expulsion left his family in deep sorrow and anger as they suddenly had to leave their home, school, and community.

Still, the expulsions provide an opportunity for foreign missionaries to help Chinese missionaries planning to minister in the Middle East or Southeast Asia. China has started its own mission movement, but Chinese missionaries often say the lack of training, education, and support hinders their work. Foreign missionaries with experience in China can welcome teams of Chinese missionaries into different countries around the world, helping them adjust and work in new settings.

New missionaries with teaching positions and business connections are still heading to China: Some who were unsure about going have decided to take the plunge after seeing so many workers expelled. For Miller, his interrogation experience helped him feel closer to his students and friends in the Chinese church. After returning to the United States, Miller framed the document that spelled out his official crime and hung it on his wall. “It’s a sign of God’s faithfulness, I take that as a great honor. I look back on that time with great fondness and joy.”

—Ying Fuk Tsang

‘[Officials] view foreign missionaries as infiltrators.’
For-hire electric scooters have arrived in many U.S. cities, and not everyone is happy about it

by ALYSSA JACKSON and World Journalism Institute mid-career students in Austin, Texas

Remember fun? Your nostalgic childhood memories probably involve some sort of toy on wheels: Big Wheels, roller skates, wagons, skateboards. The latest craze is scooters—for adults.

Public electric scooters for short-term rental first appeared in California, but now people can zoom around in more than 100 U.S. cities. In Austin, Texas, for example, riders rented 13,000 scooters 2.3 million times during the last nine months of 2018. Companies with names like Bird and Lime say they’re making money while reducing car traffic and improving air quality—but not everyone welcomes the new devices.

We did dozens of scooter-in-the-street interviews with Austinites such as cybersecurity specialist Abdul Pasha, 29. He wore a University of Texas baseball cap and straddled a chrome Bird electric scooter he picked up near a corner of South Congress Avenue by a stretch of patioed cafés and boho boutiques. As a steady stream of cars rushed by, Pasha praised the new urban trend: “As more people are moving into cities... these are gonna be really great.” He likes options. When his car had a flat, he used a scooter to go back and forth to the tire shop.

Visitors to Austin said scooters are “fun for a quick jaunt.” Houston resident Kristen, wearing a purple shirt and sunglasses, shared her enthusiasm for riding scooters: “We love it so much because... you can go really, really fast, and it’s awesome because you really don’t have to walk.” She admitted to “a little worry” about safety: “You just have to be vigilant. Be smart.”

Alan Gonzales, 28, a barista at Caffé Medici on the ground floor of the Austonian, a downtown high-rise, said riders parked on the sidewalk outside his café. That’s a convenience, given the shortage of downtown parking—but he worried that few people know the rules: “I personally... bumped into someone lightly because they were driving in the sidewalk instead of where they were supposed to be in the street... It’s a total blind spot for drivers.”

But varying regulations produce confusion on where to ride. Lyft, expanding from cars to scooter rentals, tells riders in Denver to “ride your scooter on the sidewalk—as according to current Denver law—and always yield to pedestrians.” In Austin, though, Lyft instructions say, “Please ride your scooter in the street or in a bike lane when
it’s available.” Though the scooter app lists many of these rules, most riders do not read user agreements.

East of downtown sits the Mueller district, a mixed-use community of row houses with steel-framed balconies, apartment buildings, and shops. Scooters are everywhere: One lay on the sidewalk atop a flattened metal tent sign promoting local attractions. Most stood soldierlike in groups of two or three on corner outposts or near parked cars.

Outside the Thinkery children’s museum, a pack of three riders on Bird scooters, then a cluster of two more, zipped by, while overhead a flock of the real thing—a V-shaped wedge of pigeons—dipped down. Endia Turney, 25, treated her nieces, ages 9 and 12, to their first scooter rides. Turney said the girls would ride only on sidewalks: “It feels a little like there’s not a space for it on the road just yet. People aren’t looking out for them the way they look for bikes and stuff.”

Jose Puente, 23, rode an electric scooter, trailed by his 2-year-old son, Ayden, a matching “mini-me” on his silver push scooter. Most days Puente walks and Ayden scoots, but Puente rented an electric scooter so they could ride together. Puente doesn’t think Ayden’s ready for an electric scooter: “Not right now, but maybe like in two years.”

Scooter riders Kelis Coleman and Alliah Swist, both 15, said they enjoy riding and have picked it up quickly. Swist said, “All you really have to do is stand there, and it’s easy to do, and you can go faster,” but riding on “bumpy sidewalks” can be challenging. Coleman said, “It’s cheap, too”: Five dollars covers her typical day of riding 5 miles.

Although riders are supposed to be at least 18 years old, and the Lime and Bird apps both ask if the user is 18, riders are good to go with just a push of the “yes” button. But pushing the “yes” button also means the rider takes on full liability for any accidents that may occur. Underage drivers may not realize what they agree to: “It’s like super-duper cool, so it’s like totally worth it,” Coleman said.

Barbara Archey, 76, does not think electric scooters are “super-duper cool.” She says they menace her toddler grandson and should not be allowed on sidewalks: “There are a lot of strollers,
a lot of toddlers, a lot of kids who are on those sidewalks, and I would rather not see scooters there. It could be very dangerous.”

All scooter companies list helmets as a requirement. In every picture on Bird’s website, a scooter rider wears a helmet, and Bird even offers a free helmet, with users paying only for shipping. Despite the recommendation, we counted one helmet worn by the 150 riders we saw in downtown Austin.

Archey, sporting orange-and-black Halloween spider earrings for the benefit of her grandchild, prefers bike-shares to scooters: “People should bike instead! Because that’s better for the environment and better for your body. But the scooters—It depends on how many there are. If they take over … I don’t know.”

Back on South Congress, a gray-haired man pounded drums, as frying-doughnut smells competed with those of steak on the grill. Allie McWilliams, 23, wearing torn jeans and a white T-shirt, said scooters are “great” and Austin is better for having them, but “they’re kinda dangerous, especially when people start drinking. … Someone was riding in the street and hit a pothole and literally flipped over the front of it … busted face. It wasn’t pretty.”

She confessed that when driving her car, “I almost hit scooters every day … because I come down a huge hill and always forget. There was a point where it was the same person every morning. … I was like, ‘Sorry.’”

Meanwhile, two well-groomed horses walked sedately down the middle of South Congress. The riders were Sam Grey Horse, a local musician who calls himself the 6th Street Cowboy, and Mateo Mares, who goes by Marijuana Sweet Tooth. Grey Horse, wearing a necklace strung with bear teeth and turquoise, said, “It’s the Wild, Wild West in the scooter world. … It’s an energy that came in too fast. … There should be more regulation on them. There are too many.” He said a scooter can’t compare to his 21-year-old rescue horse, Big Red: Riding horses is “medicine.”

Regardless of whether they are just for fun or a nuisance, who is responsible for damage that may occur in the scooter “Wild West”? The Texas Department of Insurance reminds riders: Most home or auto insurance coverage does not include two-wheeled vehicles. Lime “reserves the right to hold you fully responsible for all damage, losses, claims and liability arising from your use of any vehicle … to indemnify and hold harmless Lime from any tickets, citations, fines, penalties and administrative fees incurred as a result of your use of a vehicle.”

Scooter use does create jobs. Shawn Harris earns a second income by loading low-on-charge Birds into his SUV in the evening and recharging them at his home. An app directs him where to pick up and return them: “You can make $200 a night or more” by charging 40 Birds. The scooter company gives Harris a charger that he plugs in at his house. It costs about 15 cents to charge each Bird: “You can make from $5, $10, $16, $19 [per Bird]—it all depends on the battery life.”

Over the din of drills, hammers, and circular saws, construction worker Eric Warden said scooters give him an opportunity both to make and to save money: “If I can make a couple hundred dollars a week, that’s three-quarters of my rent.” Warden takes a scooter to his downtown work: “I can save money by not parking right here on this street. I can park under that bridge down there for free and catch me a scooter up here to this job.” If it rains? He laughs: “That’s when my wife drops me off.”

Danny Saenz sat in his wheelchair near a downtown bus stop facing a brightly painted wall reading “Peace. Love. Austin.” One man ambled down the sidewalk, yelling at someone who wasn’t there. Saenz took out his earbuds, clutched the backpack in his lap, and complained: Riders abandon scooters in the middle of the sidewalk and block the access ramps he needs. At night, riders race toward him on the sidewalk with their headlights shining straight into his eyes, temporarily blinding and disorienting him.

An Austin bus driver, Eddie, said electric scooters have made his job challenging: “I hate ‘em. … Messing with buses and cars, it’s kind of chaotic.” He idled at a light and admitted he once tangled with a scooter: “Not this light, but the next light right here.”

Two tattooed, bejeweled, malt-liquor-sipping men on Guadalupe Street vented their hatred of scooters. “They’re in the way. I don’t want them here,” said Waylon Doyle Barnes, 29. He said he lasted for one week picking up the scooters and recharging them: “I want to kick them all down.” Eyeing a row of a dozen scooters, he said, “I want
to do like a domino thing.” He compared scooters to cancer and AIDS: “People cut around corners, on sidewalks. We don’t appreciate it, people who walk.”

Standing in front of the bright red façade of Farm to Market Grocery, Officer Andre Porter of the Austin Police Department laughingly refused to answer questions about scooters that zip up and down the streets and sidewalks. Then he gave a meaningful look: “I don’t see why people can’t just walk.”

In some cities, people don’t have the option to scoot. Beverly Hills banned the scooters in July, and local police began impounding them. Last November Bird filed a lawsuit against that city for allegedly violating state law and constitutional rights. San Francisco also banned scooters last May, then held an e-scooter sweepstakes in which companies Scoot and Skip won licenses to release scooters in the city—at least through October.

Scooters, though, are already big business. Bird has undergone four rounds of funding, gathering $415 million and 19 investors. One of its five lead investors is Sequoia Capital, the venture capital partner that also invested in LinkedIn, YouTube, Instacart, PayPal, and Google. Bird had a $1.7 billion valuation last June and in November projected 2019 sales of $100 million.

How do scooter rentals at $1 to start, then 15-20 cents per minute, for an average ride cost of $3.65, add up to $100 million? Last May, Bird claimed a 19 percent gross profit after paying for charging, repairs, credit card processing, regulatory costs, and customer support and insurance. Beyond that, the math is fuzzy, but Bird is rolling out “Bird Platform,” essentially a franchise operation that grants local operators management of a fleet of scooters.

The scooter industry is accelerating. Bird pioneered dockless scooter rentals in September 2017, and companies like Lime and Jump that had previously only offered e-bikes or car services added scooters to their list in 2018. Another company, Skip, launched as a scooter-only company in 2018: It raised $31 million and has a $100 million valuation.

Government officials have raced to keep up. Robert Spillar, director of the Austin Transportation Department, said about scooters, “There’s clearly a demand for that kind of mobility,” so seven dockless mobility companies, six of which own scooters, now operate in Austin. Two new companies received permits from the city, but have not yet reported release of the scooters. City public information manager Marissa Monroy said the city has now granted 15,300 permits.

In the spring, the city plans to incorporate “dismount zones” designed to keep parked scooters out of the way of pedestrians. Safety remains a concern, but a study last October showed scooters to be safer than bicycles. And the future? Spillar said, “In the few short months that these have been in town we’ve two, three, four generations of technology change, so I’ve quit predicting what’s five years out.”

—with reporting by Carol Blair, Andrew Patrick Coleman, Sharon Dierberger, Collin Garbarino, Victoria Johnson, Joel Maas, Jenny Rough, Laura Singleton, Daniel Van Oudenaren, and Steve West
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TeachThemDiligently.net
Tomiwa Olatunji sat in a classroom with about a dozen other students, all dressed like pilots in white shirts and navy blue trousers. At the back of the room, a plastic foam model aircraft stood on a table, finished with wirings and wooden parts.

The project was the first for Olatunji and four of his classmates who started at the International College of Aeronautics in Nigeria's Lagos state in July. The group collaborated on the model's drawing and construction and on sourcing for the materials around Lagos.

“They teach us to apply what we're taught into a model plane or a real aircraft,” said Olatunji, who dreams of building and flying planes.

The college, which opened five years ago, is located inside a two-story building at the Lagos State Polytechnic school in Ikorodu. Aviation training in Nigeria is mostly limited to commercial piloting and to people who can either afford an expensive flight school or go abroad to study.

A U.S.-based Nigerian pilot started the two-year diploma program as a way of bridging the financial gap and
bringing innovation to Nigerian aviation training—including by allowing students to help build a short-distance airplane.

In the flight operations classroom, seven students sat in a circle as they listened to a licensed commercial pilot teach about cross-country flight planning. Other departments in the college include aircraft management and engineering, aviation management operations, and robotics.

The college has partnered with three U.S. aviation schools, which recognize its diploma. Partnerships with Lagos State Polytechnic and the Nigeria-based airline Aero Contractors allow the college access to their facilities.

Students who complete the program can either continue in specialized aircraft-building or flight attendant programs, or go on with their certificates to a partner institution in the United States to complete bachelor’s degrees or obtain other licenses.

Bukola Adenowo, a second-year student in the aircraft management department, decided to attend the college as an alternative to studying in the United States. She says many people react skeptically when they first hear of the college: “Most people say it’s not possible, not authentic, it’s probably a scam.”

He also expects the aircraft will allow students to branch into private aviation, which he says will create more jobs. The college is already in discussions with potential aircraft buyers, including government agencies, emergency services, and police.

Students would also be allowed to use the aircraft their class builds to launch business enterprises. “It’s very innovative because we’re not just training students to get certificates. We’re training them to be self-employed.”

The college has extended its innovation to the robotics department. In 2017, Lagos state Gov. Akinwunmi Ambode said the government would fund a locally built drone production program run by the college and State Polytechnic for aerial security surveillance.

Despite the growing interest, the college has had its challenges. Peter Ezediuno, an administrative staffer who also passed through the program, said many people have no knowledge of aviation besides commercial piloting and flight attendance. The college opted to appear on radio programs and distribute flyers, and the students also tell their friends about the school.

Since the college is building its own aircraft, it’s also working through understanding the certification procedure in Nigeria. The college is already working with the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority, but the aircraft will likely get certified first in the United States. “The reason is there’s no regulation [in Nigeria] to guide what we’re doing,” Adio said.

The school has inspired people like Oluwatimilehin Apolola, a second-year student in the flight operations department. Apolola already completed a degree in communications technology and worked in a Nigerian bank before pursuing his longtime aviation dream.

He plans to go to Spartan College, a U.S. partner school, to receive his flying license before returning to Nigeria to work. “The knowledge I’ll get over there in the States, I’m going to bring it back here to Nigeria ... and if it’s possible, let them introduce [aviation] into the curriculum from high schools.”

In contrast to other aviation schools in Nigeria that cost as much as $41,000 annually, the International College of Aeronautics charges a $413 fee, currently subsidized to $235. Joshua Ajibode, one of the commercially licensed pilots who leads the flight operations department, noted that piloting students need a minimum of about 250 flying hours to gain their license, but need 1,500 hours to qualify for a job with a commercial airline.

That gap has left more than 300 Nigerian pilots unemployed, despite a high demand for their services in the country. “There’s nowhere to build experience,” noted Solomon Adio, the college’s founder. “It’s one of the problems we have, and that’s why many jobs are taken by expatriates.”

For Adio, part of the solution is to build Nigerian aircraft. Nigeria imports its planes, and most of them are expensive to fly. In September, five of the college’s students who traveled to Missouri along with Adio completed building their first short-takeoff-and-landing aircraft at a U.S. partner, Zenith Aircraft Co.

Adio said the long-term goal is to build a fleet of Nigerian aircraft at the college. “It will make it cheaper to fly and affordable for the students.”
In 2011, using a simple weather balloon and some basic, off-the-shelf radio equipment, engineers at Alphabet’s research and development subsidiary, X, tried to show that balloons could provide internet and telecommunications coverage. By 2017 the technology of X’s Project Loon, as it was known, was mature enough to provide emergency internet service for hurricane-devastated Puerto Rico.

Last year Alphabet spun off Project Loon into its own division within the company, and this year Kenya’s telecommunications provider Telkom Kenya will use Alphabet’s Loon balloons to provide countrywide mobile phone service—a commercial first for Loon.

Kenya is an ideal candidate for this kind of technological challenge. Its 50 million citizens use nearly 43 million mobile phones, according to the CIA World Factbook. But outside of major cities such as Nairobi, no infrastructure exists for mobile telecommunications.

“High-altitude balloons are actually a very reasonable way to approach this problem,” Sal Candido, Loon’s head of engineering, told IEEE Spectrum. “They’re high, they cover a lot of ground, and there are no obstacles.”

According to Candido, the key technological challenge was keeping the balloons relatively stationary in the stratosphere for hundreds of days. Loon’s engineers solved this problem by developing a system to control automatically the balloon’s altitude, taking advantage of different wind directions at various altitudes. Loon’s engineers have become so good at navigating this system that the balloons to be used in the Kenyan system will be launched from Puerto Rico.

But even minor deviations in the balloons’ locations can affect coverage, so Loon developed a method for the balloons to transmit data between them using direct, high-bandwidth connections. As a result, the entire airborne system will only need ground stations in the cities, not the rural countryside.

Loon will spend the first six months of 2019 testing the system before handing it over to Telkom Kenya, according to IEEE Spectrum.

SMART SIGNS

A 25-year-old Kenyan inventor has developed a pair of gloves that convert physical sign language into audible speech in real time. Roy Allela’s invention, called Sign-IO (Sign Input/Output), uses sensors embedded in gloves that read the wearer’s finger and hand gestures. The system then compares those gestures to a database derived from American Sign Language.

Allela’s niece, who was born deaf, inspired him to create the gloves.

“As she was coming of age, we found it challenging to communicate with her and understand what she was saying,” Allela told the Cape Town, South Africa, radio station CapeTalk. “As she signs, we paired the gloves with a phone via Bluetooth and the signs would be vocalized on the phone with audio on the other end.”

Allela hopes to test two prototypes of his device in special-needs schools in Kenya prior to a commercial launch.

—M.C.

FIT FOR A FELINE

The 2019 Consumer Electronics Show in January had its share of goofy gadgets. Among them: an exercise treadmill—for cats. The Little Cat treadmill is a large ring that pet owners can set to rotate at different speeds, controlled by a smartphone app. An LED light that flickers just out of reach is designed to entice your cat to get on the treadmill and run. The app lets you watch your cat through a live camera feed when you’re not home and even records your pet’s running data like a fitness tracker. —M.C.
For Dalits—formerly known as “Untouchables”—in rural southern India, officially declaring their Christian faith comes with a cost: Leaving Hindu caste identity requires Dalit Christians to abandon government benefits such as free college tuition and potential job opportunities.

For more than 3,000 years India’s Dalits were oppressed and outcast, prohibited from even drinking water from the same wells as high-caste members. Today, Dalit Christians continue to face poverty and exploitation because of their low caste. At a local Baptist church where women wearing vibrant saris sat on felt mats, some gave rupees while others contributed a container of rice or an occasional egg. Many congregation members—mostly women—eagerly participated in a service featuring traditional drums and Telugu worship songs. Many read their Bibles daily. Yet according to government records, none of them identifies as Christian. Even most local pastors are “Hindu” on record.

Inspired, local church secretary G. Rajanikanth (Rajani) wanted to change his documents to reflect his Christian faith three years ago. This required altering his “SC” categorization to “BC-C,” a category created for Christian religious minorities in India. But he quickly ran into trouble.

Rajani’s job in the local government is reserved for Dalits. He’s received two promotions since he started 10 years ago and now earns nearly five times his entry-level salary—but abandoning his caste would mean losing his promotions: “I will be the junior-most on the BC-C roster,” the secretary explained. He would no longer generate enough income for his family. So Rajani remains “Hindu” on government records, but he’s encouraging his church’s younger generation to change their categorization to align with their faith. Some have come forward but face resistance from parents and elders: Rajani says they ask, “What will happen to our children?” When his nephew decided to change his categorization, relatives blamed Rajani for “ruining him” so he will “lose all benefits.”

Fearing for their families’ future, older generations remain content to keep their caste. Sudheer-Alexander laments how Dalit Christians lack resources and opportunities, but she believes they will make a greater impact by relinquishing caste identifiers: “If you are not taking a stand, then how can you witness Christ to others?”

For some, a choice between livelihood and Christian identity

by Sarah Holcomb in Telangana, India
On Jan. 16, elders at the Chicago-area megachurch Harvest Bible Chapel announced that Senior Pastor James MacDonald would take an “indefinite sabbatical.” The announcement came a month after WORLD detailed accusations by former elders and staff members that MacDonald and other leaders at the multicampus church had fostered a culture of deception and intimidation (see “Hard times at Harvest,” Dec. 29, 2018).

In a statement posted to Harvest’s website, the elders said they were launching a “peacemaking process.” An accompanying statement from MacDonald expressed remorse at having “battled cycles of injustice, hurt, anger, and fear which have wounded others without cause.” He welcomed the sabbatical and added that he might continue to preach at the church’s newly acquired campus in Naples, Fla., throughout the winter months.

But that news didn’t sit well with John Secrest, the lead pastor of the Naples campus. In a letter to Harvest elders the next day, Secrest complained that he had not been consulted and did not support the decision to allow MacDonald to preach in Naples during his sabbatical. Secrest also emailed his congregation, expressing his objection and his desire to return the Naples church to independent governance.

Hours later, Harvest leaders fired Secrest.

Secrest planted the Naples church in 2016 after attending a training program in the Chicago area with Harvest Bible Fellowship, Harvest’s former church planting network.

Within a year, Harvest Bible Chapel Naples had grown to about 100 people. Secrest told me that last June, MacDonald called him and said Harvest wanted to plant a church in Naples and suggested a merger.

Secrest said he had reservations about merging with Harvest but in September signed a ministry agreement making HBC Naples a wholly owned subsidiary of Harvest Bible Chapel.

Within three months, the congregation of 120 doubled, according to congregants who attended at the time.

On Jan. 5, when MacDonald preached in Naples, 350-400 people showed up, and the church had to add a second service.

Now, Secrest says he signed the merger agreement under false pretenses. In the email to his congregation, he wrote, “When we entered into this agreement there was not a disclosure of the investigative reporting which led to a lawsuit and the resulting fallout.” (The “lawsuit” was a defamation suit against me and four other defendants that Harvest filed last year and recently withdrew.)

Secrest told me that, hours after he emailed his congregation, Fred Ananias, an elder from the Naples campus who sits on Harvest Bible Chapel’s 34-member elder board, arrived at his home.

Holding a cell phone with Harvest Assistant Senior Pastor Rick Donald on the line, Ananias, reading from notes, informed Secrest that he was fired. Secrest said he was stunned because his contract stipulated that he could be fired only for moral failure.

After firing Secrest, Harvest sent its own email to the Naples congregation, calling Secrest’s earlier message to the congregation “insubordinate” and saying it was “clear that he no longer desires to work for Harvest Bible Chapel.”

In Chicago on the weekend of Jan. 19-20, elders addressed Harvest campuses during weekend services, admitting “shortcomings in the decision-making process” concerning Secrest’s termination. They also announced that MacDonald would not preach at any campuses during his sabbatical.

Harvest spokeswoman Sharon Kostal told me in a statement, “While the peacemaking process is underway, Harvest Bible Chapel does not presently intend to respond to further media inquiries.”

Secrest says he has no immediate plans, but he pledged not to abandon his former congregants in a Jan. 22 email to them: “There may come a time soon when we can gather to pray, to talk, and to clarify any questions and confusion.”

Secrest

Handout
2020 vision

GAINING SENATE CONTROL IN 2020 SEEMS AN UNLIKELY PROSPECT FOR DEMOCRATS by Henry Olsen

The furor over Brett Kavanaugh's Supreme Court appointment showed how important Senate control is to our ongoing culture war. In January, candidates were already announcing their bids for U.S. Senate seats up for election in 2020. While it's too early to make any strong predictions, an early glance at the 2020 Senate map suggests continued Republican control is the likeliest outcome.

Barring an unexpected resignation or death in office, the GOP will start the election holding 53 seats. The party is widely expected to gain the Alabama seat that Democrat Doug Jones won narrowly in 2017 against controversial Republican nominee Roy Moore. Jones surely would have lost the race against anyone else, and his vote against Kavanaugh's confirmation put him on the wrong side of that battle in his very Republican and socially conservative state. So long as Republicans nominate someone without scandal, Jones' seat should be an easy gain for the GOP.

Gaining this seat would force the Democrats to win a net four seats to obtain control if they defeat President Trump, or five if they do not. Although Republicans are defending 22 of the 34 seats that are scheduled to be up for reelection in 2020, most observers do not think it will be easy for Democrats to gain that many.

Colorado's Sen. Cory Gardner and Arizona's Sen. Martha McSally are widely predicted to be the most endangered Republican incumbents. Gardner won narrowly in the Republican wave of 2014 and represents a state that has voted for Democratic presidential nominees since 1988. Collins' vote in favor of Kavanaugh enraged Democratic activists, who will try to unseat her in retribution. She has beaten back strong challengers before, but in the current environment with low levels of split-ticket voting she will have to summon all of her personal appeal if a well-funded challenger does emerge.

After this, though, potential targets for Democrats get tougher to find. Sen. Joni Ernst, an Iowa Republican, represents a state that twice supported Barack Obama, but the Hawkeye State seems to have shifted well to the right since then. Republican Kim Reynolds won her race for governor last year, and Democrats won a narrow majority of the total House votes cast in the state only because of controversial Republican Rep. Steve King's weakness. Ernst is widely touted as a strong favorite heading into the year.

North Carolina's Sen. Thom Tillis and Georgia's Sen. David Perdue are other potential targets, but both states retain a Republican lean despite some recent suburban anti-Trump sentiment. While a strong Democratic contender like Stacey Abrams (in Georgia) or Roy Cooper (in North Carolina) could make either race a toss-up, both Republicans start the cycle as clear favorites to win a second term.

Attaining Senate control will be increasingly difficult for Democrats as long as they remain largely unattractive to America's rural and small-town voters. The constitutional design of the Senate combines with the demographic reality that Democratic-leaning constituencies tend to live in larger metropolitan areas, tilting the map in a Republican direction. Unless that changes, Democrats could be shut out of Senate control for most of the next decade until the continued growth of the liberal-leaning nonwhite population in places like Florida, Arizona, and Texas finally alters the partisan lean in those key states. ©
Traffic and a trafficker

A SMORGASBORD OF BLOCKBUSTER CASES IN NEW YORK CITY INCLUDES THAT OF NOTORIOUS CARTEL LEADER EL CHAPO by Emily Belz in New York

Outside the courtroom for the trial of drug cartel king Joaquín Guzmán, better known as El Chapo, Julio and Carmen Gaytán stood in the security line. The Gaytans flew from California just to see a few days of the trial—to glimpse El Chapo, who was once a billionaire and whose Sinaloa Cartel is responsible for the deaths of thousands.

“We know Chapito,” Carmen Gaytan said of Guzmán’s son. “Well, we don’t know him.”

The Gaytans are originally from Culiacán, the Mexican city that is the heart of the Sinaloa Cartel. Mexican reporters covering the trial explained to me that Guzmán is beloved there, as mafia bosses were loved in neighborhoods where they served as protection. The Gaytans described how they always heard about Guzmán, but had never seen him.

“To see him…” Carmen raised her eyebrows. “He’s a legend.”

Journalists covering the trial grumbled about all the tourists like the Gaytans invading the few precious seats in the courtroom, which are all first-come, first-served. Security guards grumbled about a journalist, obviously unfamiliar with court etiquette, setting up a workspace in a judge’s chair in an empty courtroom.

New York City is hosting an extraordinary number of blockbuster federal cases at the moment. The two big federal courts here have ongoing cases concerning Harvey Weinstein; the alleged mail bomber Cesar Sayoc; the alleged terrorist Sayfullo Saipov who drove down a Manhattan bike path killing eight; and the Russian lawyer Natalya Veselnitskaya accused of aiding a cover-up of Russian government corruption (and who met with the Trump campaign at one point).

New York federal prosecutors in the last few months also secured convictions against former Trump attorney Michael Cohen and a top Chinese energy official accused of bribing African officials. They are currently seeking extradition of a top Huawei executive whom Canadians arrested at the request of the United States, which led to a series of escalating diplomatic confrontations between Canada and China—including China’s sentencing of a Canadian to death in seeming retribution.

The most sensational case by far centers on Guzmán, who faces charges that include murder conspiracies and drug trafficking. The heavy security for the trial of the twice-escaped drug lord requires the city to shut down the Brooklyn Bridge once a week for an armored convoy to take Guzmán from his solitary cell in lower Manhattan to the Eastern District of New York court in Brooklyn.

Why Brooklyn? Guzmán faced federal charges in at least seven other U.S. cities, but the Justice Department chose the Eastern District likely because of the Brooklyn prosecutor’s long experience and record of success against cartels and terrorists, and because jails here have experience keeping track of high-value detainees.

Every day of the trial has been filled with tales of stunning U.S. operations to corner Guzmán and extreme corruption that kept him safe for so long—too many stories for even daily newspapers to retell. Consider one day of testimony alone from the young man who was once in line for the Sinaloa throne, Vicente Zambada, who flipped to testify against his godfather Guzmán.

A star witness who could switch between English and Spanish, Zambada knew every detail of the cartel operation. He named sicarios (hit men) and described how specific murders and tortures took place. He told stories about a purchase of $750,000 of wiretapping equipment from the Mexican military, about picking up tankers of ephedrine in Belize, and about finding a train route across the United States for shipping cocaine.

Throughout his testimony he referred to Guzmán affectionately as “mi compadre Chapo,” or “my godfather Chapo,” to the annoyance of the defense lawyers. It was three seasons of a television show in one day. The trial will likely conclude in February.
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News of the Year
[Dec. 29, p. 46] What this and every year should teach us is that no matter how nutty liberals seem to be this year, next year will be much worse. The secular, statist religion that tries to create heaven on earth leads to hell on earth.

—RICK FLANDERS on wng.org

2018 Deaths
[Dec. 29, p. 74] Perusing this list makes me wonder what they would write about my life. What are my priorities, values, and loves, and does my life reflect them?

—STEVE SHIVE on wng.org

Hard times at Harvest
[Dec. 29, p. 34] Your articles on James MacDonald of Harvest Bible Chapel and Mez McConnell (“Good news for wretches,” p. 28) reminded me of the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. I am saddened by MacDonald’s lack of humility but refreshed by the humility of McConnell. Thank you for this bold reminder of grace and the heartbreaking consequences of pride. I will be praying for both.

—LEE TAYLOR / Dade City, Fla.

As a member of a former Harvest Bible Fellowship church, I am glad we are no longer affiliated with a church that seems to foster a climate of intimidation and secrecy at the leadership level.

—SCOTT RHODES / Hickory, N.C.

Great research and reporting, with both sides given full opportunity to respond. The evidence of extreme pastoral authoritarianism seems pretty damning, especially the idea that disagreement equals disloyalty. Thank you for writing about hard topics both inside and outside the church.

—MATTHEW BELL / Seattle, Wash.

Maybe I’m reading too fast, but I can’t tell the difference between “Hard times at Harvest” and the next article, “State of surveillance” (p. 42). In both, the more loyal one is to the Great Leader, the more one benefits. Is MacDonald going to China to learn how to be more adept at keeping an eye on his sheep? Thanks for not sweeping things under the rug.

—JEFF GOODALL / Holly, Mich.

It’s hard to reconcile my experience every week at Harvest with these stories.

—ALEX HAGELI on wng.org

You took eight pages to tell us that MacDonald is a passionate but difficult person to deal with. This hardly seems like an issue that needs to be dragged out before the world.

—ALLEN E. BELTLE / Brick, N.J.

MacDonald worried it might be “misinterpreted” that he used pictures of colleagues for target practice? I can’t think of a context where that would be anything other than disturbing.

—ANN MARSHALL on wng.org

This article is absolutely heartbreaking. It’s what happens when you do not have adequately equipped and trained elders who have authority over the pastors. Pride destroys everything.

—KEITH THOMAS on Facebook

Every leader of a large group has these kinds of disputes with those he serves. This is just a hit piece about a pastor who, of course, is a sinner. I expect better from WORLD. Tearing down God’s church is never helpful!

—JOSH & CLAIRE AKIN on wng.org

Freedom on the wane
[Dec. 29, p. 5] This is a very informative column, not just about Tom Steyer but about socialism itself. Thank you for continuing to sound the trumpet!

—JULIE DAVENPORT on wng.org

The histories of socialism and communism show clearly how dangerously absurd they are. They promise things like social and economic equality but deliver oppression and class distinctions between the ruling elite and everyone else. A just society will come only when we at last love God with all our heart, might, mind, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves.

—THOMAS NALLY on wng.org

Venezuela shows what happens when you take other people’s money to pay...
for your desires. That country is in ruins, and it’s spilling over into the surrounding countries.

—MARK J. ANTHONY / Monument, Colo.

Checking it twice

[Dec. 29, p. 32] Thank you to Mindy Belz for reporting that World Vision is distributing aid through Muslim organizations, even ones that have supported terrorism. Sadly, World Vision is no longer following its roots or meeting the expectations it fosters among donors. Its website states, “Jesus’ love at the center. Always.” Apparently not always.

—H. CLAY MCDOWELL / Rising Sun, Md.

A rivalry is born

[Dec. 29, p. 91] My brother and I watched the World Chess Championship closely. We were rooting for American Fabiano Caruana. I was a little bit surprised to see this article in WORLD, but I was glad to see the background on Fabi.

—DANIEL STRANGE on wng.org

Here for a reason

[Dec. 29, p. 95] I have a third suggestion for how to react to evil days ahead: Do not make our present “persecutions” in the West bigger than they are. I recently heard a missionary who trains chaplains in the Southern Sudanese army describe brutality that should embarrass us into silence. We hardly suffer. We should advocate for a just society, but let us also teach a proper perspective.

—BRENDAN BOSSARD on wng.org

What price hope?

[Dec. 8, p. 42] Marvin Olasky’s review of the Accessible Theology Book of the Year, Therefore I Have Hope, was good grist for conversation with my wife and friends. His voracious reading appetite and ability to succinctly summarize Christian truths are enriching and encouraging.

—DAVID J. WATKINS / Fayetteville, Pa.

Correction


LETTERS and COMMENTS

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Entrepreneurial spirit
FROM THE TAPPAHAN ZEE BRIDGE TO THE APOSTLE PAUL

After a weather related stay of execution, the Tappan Zee Bridge on the Hudson River 25 miles north of Manhattan was dispatched on Jan. 15 by explosive charges courtesy of the Controlled Demolition Company.

Local riverside restaurants were ready. Before the original Jan. 9 send-off date, many eateries were roused to action with only a week's notice: The Half Moon in Dobbs Ferry advertised the “Big Bang Brunch”; Sambal Thai & Malay in Irvington came up with “Dim Sum-struction of the Tappan Zee.” Lyndhurst Castle in Tarrytown, normally closed for the season, quickly reopened with $100 tickets boasting a tower view.

You gotta love the American capitalist spirit—the notion that my need and your need can intersect to our mutual profit.

In September of 1999 my impecunious future husband was gifted with two tickets to the last Tiger Stadium game in Detroit. In the seventh inning he and his friend got the idea to leave the ballpark (you could re-enter at will for this one-time event), walk across the street to the pub, and resell their coveted passes at inflated prices.

Exiting the pub, they spotted a sidewalk vendor of commemorative T-shirts packing up his truck and bought as many souvenirs as proceeds from the aforementioned ticket resale would allow. People soon poured out of the slated-for-destruction venue, jonesing for a forever keepsake, and the young capitalist tripled his pub earnings, also infinitely enhancing his initial funds—which had been zero.

Adam Smith, 18th-century Scottish economist, wrote: “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.”

If you want to get religious about this, a debtor widow in the eighth century B.C., who owned nothing but a jar of oil, received advice from the prophet Elisha: “Go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbors—empty vessels and not too few. Then go in and shut the door behind yourself and your sons and pour into all these vessels. And when one is full, set it aside.’ So she went from him and shut the door behind herself and her sons. And as she poured they brought the vessels to her. When the vessels were full, she said to her son, ‘Bring me another vessel.’ And he said to her, ‘There is not another.’ Then the oil stopped flowing. She came and told the man of God, and he said, ‘Go sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your sons can live on the rest’” (2 Kings 4:1-7).

Inspiring.

The New World’s flirtation with socialism was a flop. Pilgrims in the first brutal year put the fruit of their labors into a common warehouse which was to be divided in equal shares. The outcome of the experiment was the epiphany that men will not trouble themselves to work very hard when production is allotted equally to the indolent and the industrious. To avoid famine in 1623, the community abandoned this system, and every man’s family was assigned a parcel of land. Three times the amount of corn was planted under the new method.

Turning a profit in this world’s kingdom is one thing. Turning a profit for a kingdom that will last is wiser still. “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and whoever captures souls is wise” (Proverbs 11:30). Comparing worldly entrepreneurs to spiritual, the Apostle Paul observes: “They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable” (1 Corinthians 9:25).

But the concept is the same: assessing needs around you, willingness to risk, and casting your bread upon the waters with the patient attitude that “you will find it after many days” (Ecclesiastes 11:1).

This present world of gleaming brick and steel is slated for destruction just as surely as the Tappan Zee and Tiger Stadium. Jesus told his inner circle to invest until he comes again: “Engage in business until I come” (Luke 19:13).

And as one great investor in the kingdom said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”
Missed pitches

NEW YORK TIMES VALENTINE OR STRIKEOUT?

At a memorial service for Eugene Peterson last November, his son Leif said the pastor/author for 50 years had one main message: “God loves you. He’s on your side. He’s coming after you. He’s relentless.”

I alternate New York Times (NYT) and Washington Post subscriptions because reading either of them illuminates the “progressive” agenda—and for two years their main message has been: We hate Donald Trump. We’re coming after him. We’re relentless.

On Jan. 14 I read the entire NYT because that day I was teaching a “webinar” about current journalism for 1,000 Colson Center sign-ups. I wanted to suggest they find an excellent NYT story that day or during the following weeks, and on Feb. 14 send a complimentary Valentine’s Day email to the reporter. Sadly, the NYT that day merely offered more justification for criticism. Since Feb. 14 is also when many major league teams begin spring training, maybe “three strikes—you’re out” is a truer metaphor.

Strike one: the NYT’s lead story, headlined “BOLTON’S REQUEST TO COUNTER IRAN ALARMS PENTAGON.” It included 10 references within the article designed to make readers believe they were taking in well-grounded fact rather than sky-is-falling concerns: “Senior Pentagon officials... Defense Department and senior American officials... these officials... a senior American official... a senior administration official... the senior American official... a former senior administration official... the senior American official... these officials... a senior administration official.”

Maybe the whole Pentagon was alarmed, but maybe not: Despite the headline, only the first two murky references involved Defense officials, and after that we had only the opinion of present or former non-Pentagon officials. WORLD does not run negative stories based entirely on “anonymice,” off-the-record sources that often nibble at truth but may also spit out falsehood. We’ll use pseudonyms for sources in totalitarian countries who might otherwise be killed or imprisoned, but a story as ungrounded as the NYT’s is likely to include big doses of journalistic ventriloquism.

Strike two: The second story at the right top of the Jan. 14 front page, “Trump Faces ‘Nonstop’ War for Survival,” had a problem different but equally severe. Here’s the lead: “So it has come to this: The president of the United States was asked over the weekend whether he is a Russian agent. And he refused to directly answer.”

With those sentences the NYT both split an infinitive and split from its own history: In the late 1940s and 1950s it attacked the House Un-American Activities Committee (and Sen. Joseph McCarthy) for asking whether writers and others were or ever had been members of the Communist Party USA—which certainly was a Russian agent. The NYT in 1973 called such questioning a “disgrace” and a lesson in “how easy it is for a governmental bureaucracy to vilify, damage and destroy people with an almost irrational vindictiveness.”

The Jan. 14 NYT front page story quoted Trump calling the question to him “the most insulting thing I’ve ever been asked.” But a reader needed to turn to that same day’s editorial page to read that Trump did answer the question directly: “Not only did I never work for Russia, I think it’s a disgrace that you asked that question, because it’s a whole big fat hoax.”

We may find out more about a Trump-Russia connection later this year. It’s disgraceful not for reporters to ask the question but to pretend they know the answer. How easy it is for a journalistic bureaucracy to vilify, damage, and destroy people with an almost irrational vindictiveness.

Strike three: NYT reporting about difficulties at the U.S.-Mexico border contradicted its previous stories. The problem: Poor, sick immigrants released from government detention are overwhelming local governments and charities. That sounds like a crisis, but previous NYT reporting had made Trump’s border concerns sound as though he was manufacturing a crisis. The NYT reported that California was doing little to help—but previously it had portrayed California as heroic for its sanctuary cities.

Some local newspapers aren’t as leftist as the NYT, and it’s still a good idea to take a reporter to lunch, but your valentine may have to refer to things unseen. I do want to end with a valentine to someone our readers may have met over the phone: June McGraw retired on Jan. 31 after 37 years as a WORLD administrative assistant. She’s been relentless in doing good.
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