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NOTES FROM THE CEO

WORLD's business model is rare. Conventional journalistic enterprises rely on advertising, and many of the nonprofits lean heavily on government and major corporate foundation grants. WORLD relies on members, and you have come through for us year after year—providing 90 percent of our revenues.

Whereas the support you faithful members provide has risen at least the last five years, other journalistic endeavors have found ad revenues considerably more fickle and demanding. Some who wish to hang on to their ad dollars have found it necessary to jump through some pretty demeaning hoops, like click-bait headlines and “sponsored content”—which is advertising that masquerades as editorial content. With apologies to the president, that’s fake news!

I don’t like these trends, but I do understand the temptations if ad revenue is one’s biggest source of income. They’re not temptations at all if a relationship of integrity with one’s members is a high priority.

That is our priority, and it’s one reason we’ve limited our major fundraising appeals to twice a year, at the end of the calendar year and at the end of our 2017 income. They’re not temptations at all if a relationship of integrity with one’s members is a high priority.

Of course, it’s nearly June 30, so you have probably already received from us a direct request to support our work. Consider this note a follow-up to that request. The work of WORLD (and World Journalism Institute and our work with kids’ publications) is reliant on you. And we believe that’s the way it should be!

Kevin Martin
kevin@wng.org

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So right here, in full public view, I have a new addiction to confess. I find it hard—maybe even impossible—to make it through the day without tuning in to The World and Everything in It. WORLD Radio’s daily program is WORLD Magazine’s radio cousin.

Technically, The World and Everything in It is not a radio program but a podcast. Which means that you can pick it up almost wherever you are, on your smartphone. And you can pick it up any time of day—at your own convenience.

But right about there, I exhaust my ability to answer questions about The World and Everything in It. I’ll lean instead on my longtime colleague Nick Eicher, chief content officer for WORLD, who has pioneered this remarkable effort and assembled a gifted team of news professionals.

BELZ: What prompted you to think WORLD Magazine readers might be looking—or at least open to—still another sort of package for each day’s news?

EICHER: Probably just the nature of the daily routine. We’re busy, we have active minds, and we’re creatures of habit. Over the years, WORLD members have told us two big things: they devour books and they devour news every day. They’re also very much on the move, and The World and Everything in It is for the times when you’re just not able to sit down and read, but still want to think about important things.

How would you say The World and Everything in It fills in the spaces between the two-week cycles of WORLD’s paper-and-ink magazine?

One way is that we prepare a program for weekday mornings, so it’s immediate. We’re on every day. You might say we produce 260 “issues” a year.

But it’s so different from print, not really like a daily newspaper.

You’re right. Radio’s a highly personal, intimate medium. The way God designed us, I think of the human voice as unique as a fingerprint. You come to know the people in a very real way. Because radio podcasts go with you, they’re very much a companion. A lot of people tell me they listen when they’re driving to work or running errands, when they’re making breakfast or handling chores.

‘[Many people] listen to The World and Everything in It when they’re driving to work or running errands, when they’re making breakfast or handling chores.’

Of all the names I’ve come to know from WORLD, is there overlap in The World and Everything in It?

We have some exclusive-to-the-radio names, but we also draw on the expertise of our magazine and digital journalists: Susan Olasky, Mindy Belz, Jill Nelson, Jamie Dean, and Megan Basham are regulars on the program. They report differently on radio than they do in print, and they present different angles on stories. They’re all so well-read, such experienced journalists, that they can report on virtually anything. And they do. Mindy, for example, just returned from a trip overseas, and we were able to get her on the air right away, long before she can produce a print piece. And I know our members will be happy to hear about one more regular on the program: you.

So how much more does it cost a member to get the podcast?

It’s included in a WORLD membership. Not a penny more.

And if I’m a bit of a technical klutz, how hard is it for me to hear a sample of The World and Everything in It?

Honestly, not easy enough. We have an app for Apple and Android. But we’re going back to the drawing board, because technology has changed and we can build a more robust app. Meantime, we’ve made it widely available anywhere you get your podcasts: Overcast, Stitcher, Apple Podcasts, all the popularly used players.

But I know what you’re driving at: Although the popularity of podcasts is exploding, plenty of people have still never tried one. For iPhone owners, it’s fairly intuitive. Open the built-in Podcasts app, hit the search icon, type in “the world and everything in it,” and you’ll find us. Or just go to the wng.org website and listen there.

I wish every WORLD member could meet our board chairman, John Weiss. When he meets someone who doesn’t listen to The World and Everything in It, he says, “Hand me your phone and I’ll set it up for you. Just listen every day for a week, and you’ll never want to miss another.”

He’s right. That’s my story!
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Deadly fire
Firefighters battle a blaze engulfing a high-rise apartment building in West London on June 14. The fire swept through the building from the second floor upward early in the morning as hundreds of residents were inside.

RICK FINDLER/PA VIA AP
When President Donald Trump announced the United States would withdraw from the Paris climate accord, the president of France offered a sweeping assessment: Trump made a grave mistake for the future of the planet.

Trump’s assessment was less apocalyptic: He argued it would be a serious mistake for the United States to remain bound to an international agreement that burdened our nation more than it bolstered the future of humanity.

Cal Beisner of the Cornwall Alliance—a network of Christian scholars and scientists—pointed out the costs versus benefits: Fully implementing the Paris accord would cost the world about $1 trillion a year from 2030 to 2100. The United States would bear the highest financial burden.

The most optimistic outcome for spending tens of trillions of dollars: 0.3 degrees Fahrenheit of cooling. “It’s no bargain,” Beisner wrote. “It won’t slow sea level rise. It won’t reduce hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, droughts, or heat waves. It won’t save human lives.”

In some circles, that analysis is heretical. Rep. Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., asked how Trump would explain to his grandchildren “what he did to the air they breathe—assuming they breathe air.”

Such ironclad faith in fallible models designed to predict the future is ironic in an age of deep skepticism. Over the last decade, books trumpeting doubts about God skyrocketed on best-seller lists: Reviewers hailed biologist Richard Dawkins’ *The God Delusion* and Christopher Hitchens’ *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything. A few years later, they praised another bestseller: Darwin-follower Bill Nye’s *Undeniable: Evolution and the Science of Creation.* The message was clear: The existence of a Creator is refutable, but evolutionary theory is undeniable.

The same faulty logic seems to apply to climate change.

When conservative Bret Stephens wrote his first column for *The New York Times* in April, he noted that a modest, 1.5 degrees Fahrenheit of warming of the earth since 1880 is indisputable and that human activity influenced that warming. But Stephens added that models predicting the future effects of climate change are a matter of probabilities, not irrefutable science. “To say this isn’t to deny science,” he wrote. “It’s to acknowledge it honestly.”

It’s also to invite outrage: The newspaper met an avalanche of fury from readers demanding the *Times* fire Stephens for suggesting that predicting the future isn’t a sure bet.

Climate change isn’t the only area where scientific debate is anathema. When a group of physicians or psychologists questions whether it’s healthy to
give puberty blockers or cross-sex hormones to children confused about their birth sex, critics accuse them of bigotry and hatred.

That’s ironic given that the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recently published an excerpt of a study about the cognitive development of children: The report argued children under 14 aren’t cognitively capable of crossing a busy street because “children lack the perceptual judgment and physical skills needed to consistently get across safely.”

But the same group argues that children who can’t cross the street safely are capable of making monumental decisions about whether to live as a boy or a girl—and whether they’re willing to forgo biological children of their own in a grave transition process they surely can’t comprehend.

This selective defiance against skepticism has broad implications. For example, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services recently announced it wouldn’t place children in foster care homes with families that won’t affirm transgenderism.

Radical responses to climate change without debate have broad implications as well. Beisner points out that spending trillions of dollars uses money that could be spent on “providing electricity, pure drinking water, infectious disease control, sewage sanitation, industrialization, and lots of other things that lift people out of poverty, disease, and premature death and enable them to adapt to any future climate—warmer or cooler.”

Reasonable questions could lead to reasonable solutions. Ignoring reasonable questions could lead to disaster. (That’s why WORLD Editor in Chief Marvin Olasky trains writers to ask: How do you know you’re right? What happens if you’re wrong?)

For Christians, discussions about the environment shouldn’t provoke dread or disdain. We don’t panic over dire predictions of the future, but we also don’t dismiss our duty to take care of the creation the Creator has made for us to cultivate and enjoy. Even in the middle of the hot summer, we believe the Christmas hymn: “He comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found.”

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**BY THE NUMBERS**

12

The number of refugees the Czech Republic has resettled, far short of its 2,691 refugee quota outlined in a European Union agreement that expires in September.

7 months

The average wait time for a bill to be paid by the state of Illinois, which is suffering through a budget crisis.

328,348

The number of abortions performed by Planned Parenthood in fiscal year 2016, according to its recently released annual report.

19,967

The number of illegal aliens apprehended by U.S. Border Patrol in May this year, down from 55,442 in May 2016.

17

The years Richard Anthony Jones spent in prison before a judge threw out the Kansas man’s conviction in June. Jones’ lawyers have shown the crime was possibly committed by a lookalike.
Wounded
A shooter opened fire on Republican lawmakers and staffers as they practiced for a congressional baseball game at a park in Alexandria, Va., on June 14. The attack injured at least five people, including House Majority Whip Steve Scalise, R-La., and two Capitol Hill Police officers who were part of Scalise’s security detail. The officers reportedly returned fire and killed the shooter, stopping what would have become a “killing field,” according to U.S. Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky. “Had they not been there, it would have been a massacre.”

Failed
Every year freshmen and seniors from about 200 colleges around the country take a test measuring whether colleges increase students’ cognitive abilities. The results are terrible. The Wall Street Journal reviewed tests from schools that gave the exam in 2013 and 2016. At about half of the schools, at least a third of the seniors were unable to form a proper argument, assess evidence, or interpret a data table. Even at flagship universities, the test indicates an average graduate shows almost no improvement from his freshman year.

Hunted
The Florida Everglades have a new plague: the giant python. An estimated 100,000 pythons live in the area and prey on small animals. Even alligators cannot match the Burmese python. Pet owners introduced the pythons into the Everglades by ditching their snakes in the swamp, and the population has boomed. Miami-Dade County officials think they have an answer: professional python killers. The county has launched a two-month pilot program with 25 hunters. They are paid $8.10 an hour to find and wrestle the giants to their deaths. In seven weeks, the hunters killed and removed 149 pythons.

Died
Panama’s former leader, Manuel Noriega, died on May 29 at age 83, almost 30 years after a U.S. invasion removed him from office. Noriega, who grew up in the slums, became a leader in Panama and a power in the region with U.S. support. The CIA recruited Noriega when he was a military cadet, and he was on the CIA payroll from 1967 to 1988. He led Panama’s secret police and defense forces, giving him the power to perform assassinations, sabotage, and run cash and weapons to the Nicaraguan contras. But, Noriega also rigged the election to seize the presidency in 1984 and 1989, murdered political rivals, and threatened Americans in Panama, leading to the 1989 invasion. U.S. troops captured him, and he spent the last 17 years of his life in a U.S. prison. There, according to two Texas pastors, he became a Christian in 1990.

Offended
Harvard University has withdrawn admission offers to 10 incoming freshmen after the school discovered offensive messages the students had posted to social media. The student newspaper, The Harvard Crimson, obtained screenshots of the messages from a private Facebook chat in early December. The messages included images mocking the Holocaust, and threatened Americans in Panama, leading to the 1989 invasion. U.S. troops captured him, and he spent the last 17 years of his life in a U.S. prison. There, according to
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J. Warner Wallace is a cold-case homicide detective who has been featured on Dateline, FOX News, and Court TV. A former atheist, he is the author of Cold-Case Christianity and God's Crime Scene. Wallace has a master's degree in theology and lives in California with his wife and four children.

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'Nothing. I keep other people awake at night.'

U.S. Secretary of Defense JAMES “MAD DOG” MATTIS, when an interviewer asked him what keeps him awake at night.

'I was elected to represent the citizens of Pittsburgh, not Paris.'

President DONALD TRUMP on his decision to pull the United States out of the Paris climate accord.

'Dangerously close to crossing a clear constitutional line.'

U.S. Sen. JAMES LANKFORD, R-Okla., on Sen. Bernie Sanders' decision to vote against confirmation of Russell Vought to be deputy director of the Office of Management and Budget because Vought had written that Muslims “stand condemned” because they reject Christ.

'Maybe I shouldn’t stay up late watching the Diamondbacks night games.'

U.S. Sen. JOHN MCCAIN, R-Ariz., on his confusing line of questions during a Senate Intelligence Committee hearing with fired FBI Director James Comey.

'I guess you’re here about the opium.'

CODY XIONG, owner of a field of poppy plants in Catawba County, N.C., that could create $500 million worth of illegal opium, to a narcotics investigator who came to the man’s house on an unrelated matter. Authorities arrested Xiong on charges of manufacture and trafficking by possession.

'Nothing. I keep other people awake at night.'

U.S. Secretary of Defense JAMES “MAD DOG” MATTIS, when an interviewer asked him what keeps him awake at night.
Think, McFly, think!
Without a flux capacitor installed, Spencer White did not expect to engage in time travel when he sped down Highway 14 in Santa Clarita, Calif., in his DeLorean sports car on May 26. But he didn’t expect to get a speeding ticket either. Taking his mother for a drive in the Los Angeles suburbs, White noticed he was going 85 mph. Why not try to duplicate the famous scenes in *Back to the Future* in which a speeding DeLorean travels in time when it reaches 88 mph? That’s when officers with the California Highway Patrol stopped him and issued him a ticket.

Catch of the day
Dondi Mitchell knew he had caught something other than a fish on June 1 at Silver Lake in Athol, Mass. “I thought it was a rug,” he told *The Boston Globe*. But after he pulled his catch out of the water, he discovered it was a purse weighed down with rocks. That was only his first surprise. When he dug through the contents, he found a driver’s license and recognized the photo as being of Kim Flanders, a fellow member of the class of 1985 at Ralph C. Mahar Regional High School in Orange, Mass. Credit cards, a calculator, and rings from a previous marriage were also inside the purse, which Flanders lost in 1999. Flanders had since moved to Florida and remarried, but she and Mitchell were Facebook friends. He sent the purse to Flanders, who was shocked at the discovery. “I sent it insured,” Mitchell said, “just in case.”

Angry birds
An animal charity in Cork, Ireland, has managed to end a dayslong standoff between students of the Cork Institute of Technology and a pair of marauding crows. According to school officials, the birds had suddenly become aggressive, dive-bombing pedestrians on campus and attacking with talons and beaks. Several of the crow’s victims required tetanus shots. That’s when volunteers from the Cork Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals stepped in and discovered the two adult crows were trying to protect a juvenile crow that had fallen from its nest. The volunteers removed the baby bird from campus on May 30, and the crow attacks stopped.

Cycle of defeat
Cyclist Luka Pibernik may have pedaled the race of his life, but after he lost track of his lap count, it mattered little. Believing he had already won stage five of the Giro d’Italia race on May 10, Pibernik raised his hands in victory and slowed. When other cyclists started zooming past, Pibernik realized he had only completed the penultimate 4-mile lap. By that time he had lost too much ground. The 23-year-old finally finished the race in 148th place.

Long haul
Most Uber trips don’t require the driver to get approval from both Uber and the driver’s wife. But Texas driver Brent Pfieffer’s late-night trip on June 4 was the most unusual not only in his driving career but in the ride-sharing company’s history. When Pfieffer picked up three Chinese passengers at DFW Airport, they told him in broken English that they wanted him to take them from Dallas to Nashville, Tenn. The passengers had missed their connecting flight in Dallas and needed to make it to a lunch meeting in Nashville the next day. After speaking to the company and his wife, Pfieffer drove the passengers to their destination, a 690-mile trip that took 11½ hours. Uber says Pfieffer’s run was the longest ever for the company. The fare: $774.70.
Reckless mower
While most would be running for cover, Canadian Theunis Wessels had just one thing on his mind: finishing his lawn. The Three Hills, Alberta, resident was photographed by his wife cutting the grass June 2 even as a massive tornado swirled in the background. Later, Wessels explained that he was “keeping an eye on [the tornado]” and noted that the tornado warnings hadn’t started yet. Only after cutting the grass did Wessels and his wife Cecilia wait indoors for the threat to pass.

Motion to finesse
A judge in Springfield, Mass., denied an unusual request from a defendant in an attempted robbery case. Representing himself in the case, defendant Orlando Melendez argued May 25 that the court should allow him to juggle for the jury in his upcoming trial. According to the motion, Melendez says he must be able to make the case to the jury that he is an actual clown—because his defense is that he was just clowning around when he waved a toy gun in a local convenience store at 3:15 a.m. and demanded money from the cash register. Presiding Judge Robert Murphy responded to the motion in one word: “Denied.”

Airborne assault
Texans may soon be able to take to the skies stealthily for hunting. The Texas Legislature approved a bill on May 24 that would direct the state to issue hot air balloon hunting licenses for hunting feral hogs and coyotes. According to the state, nearly 2 million feral hogs in Texas cause massive damage to the state’s agricultural industry. Lawmakers in Texas had already approved helicopter hunting of the hogs, but the noise from the rotors tends to scare away the skittish animals.

High flight
Customs and border officials in Kuwait apprehended and arrested a homing pigeon attempting to smuggle drugs into the country from Iraq in May. Authorities observed the trained bird flying high overhead and noticed something suspicious on its back: a tiny backpack. Customs officials then followed the bird to its roost where they were able to apprehend the trafficker and confiscate the pigeon’s tiny backpack filled with 178 ecstasy pills.
They had a dream: a God-ordained dream. After years of service in a foreign land, where they met and married and learned to speak the language fluently, they were ready to establish themselves in one area that would become their home, perhaps for the rest of their lives. They would raise their kids, start a business, establish a church, and win souls to Christ. Their goals were admirable and honest, and all the early obstacles were overcome. Surely the Lord’s hand was on this enterprise—until it failed.

I can’t divulge any more details, but this is not a made-up scenario. Here’s another, closer to home: I live in an area with no denominational Reformed tradition, except the liberal mainline Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). For 25 years I’ve been involved with three Reformed startups, two of which fell apart and one is struggling. Though we’re seeing hopeful signs now, I’ll admit to feeling deeply discouraged at times. My children live far away, and regular family interaction is not part of my life. The local church is, in a very practical sense, my family. Isn’t it supposed to be? Don’t I want what God wants? Why has it been such a struggle for all these years?

I do plenty of preaching to myself: Haven’t we all heard of missionaries who labor in the field for a lifetime with little discernible fruit? Were we ever promised a rose garden? Jesus’ own ministry looked like a miserable failure when they laid Him in that tomb. But still—when we’re following God’s Word and seeking His will, why are we so often defeated?

My Bible reading schedule takes me to Judges this month: aside from Ecclesiastes, the most depressing book in the canon. Or maybe it even edges out Ecclesiastes, because at least the Preacher saw clearly what his problems were. Only 40 years removed from the “Greatest Generation” of Joshua’s time, the Israelites settling down in their Promised Land seem mind-blowing clueless. You know the drill: They merge worship of the Lord with sacrifices to Baal and other local big boys; the Lord takes His hand away; the people fall prey to neighboring tyrants; they cry out to God; He sends a deliverer. For the next 40 years or so life is good, then the miserable cycle starts all over again. Vanity of vanities.

At least Judges has some interesting stories and characters, which is why I often skip over the first two chapters. This time I took a closer look. Judges begins with failure: a list of the devil-worshipping pagans Israel did not drive out, followed by three reasons why. Those reasons are, first, their own sin: “You have not obeyed my voice,” and so the enemy “shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you” (Judges 2:2-3). Second, discipline: “to test Israel by them, whether they will take care to walk in the way of the Lord... or not” (2:22). Third, battle training, “in order that the generations of the people of Israel might know war, to teach war to those who had not known it before” (3:2).

This may seem contradictory. God is punishing His people, but He’s also testing them, but then He says, Oh by the way, you boys need to stay battle-ready, so I’m leaving some pagans behind for practice. Which is it? Given His flair for economy, all three.

Think how this applies today: The collapse of a ministry often involves some personal sin. Someone wasn’t careful, or watchful, and sin was allowed to fester. Failure should then lead us to examine ourselves and question whether we relied too much on our own resources. “Without me,” Jesus says, “you can do nothing”—remember that next time. Because spiritual warfare is real; we’re engaged, whether we like it or not, and unless we are trained in adversity, we’ll be defeated every time.

That doesn’t make failure any less discouraging or painful. But it’s not pointless. God also has a flair for creativity and will bring glory out of shame.
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Have you ever watched a TV show or movie that intellectually, by every artistic criterion, you knew was bad, and yet, on a guilty-pleasure level, you found entertaining? The plot is outlandish; the dialogue is cheesy; the characters are undeveloped and often do and say things that don’t jibe with the few broad, clichéd strokes of personality that have been drawn for them. But you still can’t say you didn’t have a good time. Such was my experience of Tom Cruise’s old-school monster movie, The Mummy.

While stretching its PG-13 rating to include plenty of blurry rear and profile nudity from actress Sofia Boutella as said mummy, the movie plays like a loose mashup of George Romero’s cult horror flicks and the B-rate Indiana Jones knockoff, King Solomon’s Mines. Yet thanks largely to the cast, this exercise in pure popcorn-munching diversion succeeds to some degree despite a tomb-full of deficiencies.

There’s a reason every good actor isn’t also a movie star. You can have the looks, the training, and all the Oscar-worthy talent in the world, yet lack that elusive quality that lights up the screen. Even after 30 years in the game, almost no one puts out as much wattage as Cruise. As Nick Morton, an Army reconnaissance specialist with a side hustle in grave robbing,
Cruise oozes his signature cocky charisma. It’s been a while since he’s played anything but a true-blue, solid-gold hero, but he returns to the role of anti-heroic rake as easily as if Top Gun were only yesterday.

When we meet him he’s being chastised by an implausibly young and beautiful Egyptologist for stealing her lead on the location of some antiquities and, worse, leaving her with no goodbye after a one-night stand. They continue to bicker and to build chemistry as they uncover the sarcophagus of a Pharaoh’s daughter mysteriously erased from history. Naturally, Nick’s recklessness awakens the creature’s long-buried plans to unleash Set, aka “the god of death,” aka Lucifer, on the world.

In all the twists and turns that follow, there’s a lot you won’t see coming—mostly because it doesn’t make sense. Like why would the corpses of Crusades warriors rise to serve an Egyptian sorceress? Or why does Nick’s ghost sidekick (that’s right, there’s a ghost sidekick) sometimes try to help him and other times lead him into trouble? It doesn’t matter. The point is that actor Jake Johnson brings plenty of dry humor that actor Jake Johnson brings plenty of dry humor that actor Jake Johnson brings plenty of dry humor.

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Dark Universe, as this connected series of releases will be called, doesn’t come close to Marvel’s or DC’s level. And though The Mummy plays the horror link more for spectacle than to inspire anything close to actual fear, the film has a distinct darkness that puts it out of step with its rivals. By treating evils like Satanic rituals and demonic possession as things to gawk and wink at, The Mummy buries the clear moral themes that make superhero movies so popular. Making light of darkness may curse this franchise.

Cruise oozes his signature cocky charisma. It’s been a while since he’s played anything but a true-blue, solid-gold hero, but he returns to the role of anti-heroic rake as easily as if Top Gun were only yesterday.

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On June 7, 1967, the commander of Israel’s Paratrooper Brigade 55, Col. Motta Gur, made a heady declaration to headquarters: “The Temple Mount is in our hands!” The newly released documentary In Our Hands: The Battle for Jerusalem commemorates the 50th anniversary of the Six-Day War, which handed a stunning victory to Israel in a battle between five Arab states and one outnumbered, outgunned fledgling nation.

The film’s title is deliberately and unapologetically pro-Israel: The Temple Mount—a contested, historic site sacred to Jews, Christians, and Muslims—is no longer in the hands of Israel but under an Islamic trust. But during that brief moment when Israel took over the Temple Mount, Jews who for 2,000 years had longed for that event rejoiced and wept, as many still do before the Western Wall.

For viewers who aren’t familiar with the Arab-Israeli conflict, In Our Hands does a decent job mapping out the historical context and explaining why the Six-Day War—an “insane, grandiose mission” for the Israeli Defense Forces, as one veteran put it—is so significant and how it still affects world affairs. What the film doesn’t do well is blend the firsthand interviews, voice-over narration, and dramatic re-enactments into a seamless, creative visual. Instead, it switches back and forth without much transition from documentary to drama performed by nice-looking but amateurish actors.

From the eyes of a Gentile like me, In Our Hands can sometimes seem cheesy. However, I watched this film in a Reform synagogue in Washington, D.C., with about 150 Jews whose theology ranged from Orthodoxy to the liberal Reform Judaism to secularity. I heard delighted laughter at the corny jokes, saw wiping of tears when the film showed (re-enacting) IDF soldiers lamenting and singing in front of the Western Wall. For these viewers, In Our Hands recreated that moment of awe, grief, and euphoria when Israel’s underdog victory proved to the world that the Jewish people had risen from the ashes of unforgettable tragedies.

—by SOPHIA LEE

A well-crafted plot, little objectionable material, and a luxurious production make My Cousin Rachel, based on Daphne du Maurier’s novel, a first-rate mystery. Orphaned at an early age, Philip (Sam Claflin) was raised by his rich, older cousin, Ambrose. Years later, while summering in Italy, Ambrose meets and marries Rachel (Rachel Weisz), a cousin to both. Ambrose dies unexpectedly, but not before penning a letter to Philip in which he describes his new, younger bride as a “tormentor.”

But the setting is 1830s England: Ambrose’s estate falls to Philip, his closest heir, not to his widow. When Philip meets Rachel for the first time, however, his hatred melts into infatuation. He discounts the cautions of his closest friends—such as Louise (Holliday Grainger), who’s in love with him—that Rachel is leading him on to get at his fortune. Philip drafts a document that gives Rachel the entire estate provided she never remarries. If she does, the estate returns to Philip. But he’s confident she will marry someone again—him.

At measured pace, My Cousin Rachel (rated PG-13 for some nonexplicit sexuality and brief strong language) twists, turns, and hits dead ends. Is Rachel a grieving widow or a conniving murderer? Is the homemade tea she brews balm for Philip’s sudden illness or the cause of it?

In scene after scene, Weisz masterfully flips a switch from passionate to cool, keeping the mystery afloat. The supporting cast shines in authentic period costumes, and gorgeous scenes almost distract: A candle’s light glows through a jar full of quills onto dark walnut-paneled walls. Delicate lavender flowers rim a high cliff rising from a gray sea.

The finale seems to settle the matter but teases an alternate explanation. Mystery solved or not, young men shouldn’t miss this warning (not a spoiler): A fool in love and his money are soon parted. —by BOB BROWN
Praiseworthy publishing

THOUGHTFUL BOOKS FROM CHRISTIAN PUBLISHING HOUSES

by Marvin Olasky

I’ve praised Crossway Books for generally avoiding both fluff and academic stuffiness, but here are efforts from five other publishers that also appeal to minds as well as hearts:

► P&R’s 2017 books include two thorough texts that readily explain the basics but can challenge those more advanced: Jason DeRouchie’s How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology and Andrew Naselli’s book with the same title except for one term: New Testament. (Some first-year seminary students drink so heavily from the plethora of theological fire hoses around them that they need a 12-step path to recovery.)

► The Weaver Book Company’s When Suffering Is Redemptive, ed. Larry Waters (2016), is painful to read as it describes the physical pain some live with every day, but it pushes us to compassion, not despair. Victor Kuligin’s Snubbing God (2017) clearly describes and valiantly defends Biblical standards concerning marriage and more. His chapter on Darwinism is valuable at a time when macroevolutionary thinking is making inroads even at Christian colleges.

► Broadman & Holman published David Croteau’s Urban Legends of the New Testament (2015), a fascinating and sprightly look at 40 assumptions that he says many make without Biblical warrant. Croteau argues that Jesus was a builder, not a carpenter, and Paul made other leather goods as well as tents. Croteau doubts that “Eye of the Needle” was a gate in Jerusalem, that synagogues seated men and women separately, and that we can do anything through Christ who strengthens us.

► David C. Cook, working with Summit Ministries head Jeff Myers, has published last year and this an updated Understanding the Times: A Survey of Competing Worldviews, along with two more 500-page textbooks, Understanding the Culture: A Survey of Social Engagement and Understanding the Faith: A Survey of Christian Apologetics. High-school seniors (and their parents) could benefit from working through the books before heading off to college: At Big State U. and even many Christian schools, professo- rial propaganda and STDs (student-transmitted doubts) are rampant.

► Baker Books this year published God Among Sages by Kenneth Samples, who compares Krishna, Confucius, Muhammad, and the Buddha with Christ and shows “why Jesus is not just another religious leader.” I wish this book had been around 10 to 20 years ago when I taught a comparative religion course at the University of Texas: It shows how extraordinary religious leaders were still broken and far from divine, while Christ both claimed to be God and showed that He is through His life and resurrection.

Baker’s The Complete Topical Guide to the Bible (2017) is also a useful reference: Opening one page at random, I could learn where the Bible refers to staffs (as personal property, symbols of authority, or ways in which God made manifest His miraculous power), sticks (used literally or figuratively), straw (as animal bedding and fodder, as something light and fragile, as something of little value), sycamore-fig trees (as plentiful, as worthless weeds, as tools of punishment, as symbols of authority, or ways in which God made manifest His miraculous power), sticks (used literally or figuratively), straw (as animal bedding and fodder, as something light and fragile, as something of little value), sycamore-fig trees (as plentiful, as worthless weeds, as tools of punishment, as symbols of authority, or ways in which God made manifest His miraculous power), sticks (used literally or figuratively), straw (as animal bedding and fodder, as something light and fragile, as something of little value), sycamore-fig trees (as plentiful, as worthless weeds, as tools of punishment, as symbols of authority, or ways in which God made manifest His miraculous power), sticks (used literally or figuratively), straw (as animal bedding and fodder, as something light and fragile, as something of little value), sycamore-fig trees (as plentiful, as worthless weeds, as tools of punishment, as symbols of authority, or ways in which God made manifest His miraculous power), sticks (used literally or figuratively), straw (as animal bedding and fodder, as something light and fragile, as something of little value), sycamore-fig trees (as plentiful, as worthless weeds, as tools of punishment, as symbols of authority, or ways in which God made manifest His miraculous power), sticks (used literally or figuratively), straw (as animal bedding and fodder, as something light and fragile, as something of little value), sycamore-fig trees (as plentiful, as worthless weeds, as tools of punishment, as symbols of authority, or ways in which God made manifest His miraculous power), sticks (used literally or figuratively), straw (as animal bedding and fodder, as something light and fragile, as something of little value), sycamore-fig trees (as plentiful, as worthless weeds, as tools of punishment, as symbols of authority, or ways in which God made manifest His miraculous power), sticks (used literally or...
THE MYSTERIES OF CHRISTIANITY: REVEALED TRUTHS EXPOUNDED AND DEFENDED
T.J. Crawford

Thomas Crawford (1812-1875) was a theology professor at the University of Edinburgh. He carefully proves the mystery inherent in Christian teachings arises from the nature of theological subjects, not from God’s failure to speak clearly. His treatment of the Trinity, the incarnation, and the atonement are superb examples of how to do theology carefully. Crawford invariably wrestles with the heart of the issue. Previously out of print since 1874, his book offers clear thinking, cogent arguments, and an inflexible commitment to saying only what is certainly known. Read him.

DEVOTED TO GOD: BLUEPRINTS FOR SANCTIFICATION Sinclair B. Ferguson

What does the Bible say about becoming holy? Ferguson carefully expounds 10 key New Testament passages that describe the believer’s union with Christ and shows repeatedly that the reality of being “put into” Christ is the basic factor in Christian holiness. The Bible calls Jesus-followers “Christians” three times but describes them as “in Christ” more than 120 times. Are you in Christ? Then you should be getting more obedient to God. Ferguson’s work contains powerful encouragement to become set apart exclusively for God by constantly elucidating the gospel’s logic: Live a holy life because God has completely saved you.

REFLECT: BECOMING YOURSELF BY MIRRORS THE GREATEST PERSON IN HISTORY Thaddeus J. Williams

If Jesus is really the way we Christians say He is, then shouldn’t we show that in how we speak about Him? Shouldn’t our books reason carefully? Shouldn’t they, like Jesus, be passionate, gracious, and artistic? That’s Williams’s plea, and that’s how he does theology. He describes Jesus in order to urge readers to reflect Jesus. Look at Christ’s creativity, His passion, His grace, His logic, says Williams. Don’t you see how beautiful He is? Appendix B is worth the price of the book. There Williams reveals his agenda. He wants to do his theology like it’s true (because it is).

KNOW WHY YOU BELIEVE K. Scott Oliphint

Instead of repeating philosophical arguments and dredging up historical facts, Oliphint relentlessly takes readers back to the gospel. Why believe in life after death? Because Jesus came back from the dead. Oliphint recognizes that unbelievers’ objections are fundamentally moral and relational, not intellectual, so he deals with the big questions along similar lines. He believes that people reject philosophical and historical evidence all the time, and more evidence isn’t the answer. The best approach is minimal argument and maximum evangelization (literally, “sharing good news”). That’s what Oliphint does, and he’ll make you want to do it too.

AFTERWORD

In The Imperfect Disciple: Grace for People Who Can’t Get Their Act Together (Baker, 2017), Jared Wilson puts his focus on Jesus rather than the spiritual disciplines and habits that books on discipleship usually cover. The book has a confessional tone, so he begins with a discussion of Romans Chapter 7: “I do things that I know are bad and I avoid doing things that I know are good.” That self-knowledge, he writes, “makes me uniquely and distinctly qualified for the hope Paul offers” in Romans 8: “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

While the book focuses on the grace of the gospel, it doesn’t have a cavalier attitude toward sin. In talking of his own struggle with porn, he writes, “What eventually served to cure my taste for this shiny death was not ‘getting my act together’ but finally, truly seeing the glory of my crucified Savior.” — Susan Olasky
FOUR BOOKS WITH LGBT STORYLINES PARENTS SHOULD BE AWARE OF

ASHES TO ASHEVILLE Sarah Dooley
Set at a time before legalized same-sex marriage, Dooley’s second novel has 12-year-old “Fella” mourning her mother’s death and the disintegration of the only family she has known: Two moms and sister Zany. After “Mama Lacy” dies of cancer, a judge orders Fella to live with her nearest blood relation, a grandmother she hardly knows. One night Zany arrives with a plan to fulfill Mama Lacy’s dying request to spread her ashes in Asheville. A wild road trip ensues, and the girls encounter danger and mishaps. The story emphasizes prejudice and unfriendly laws, but it speaks louder of brokenness and confusion. (Ages 14 and up)

THE BEST MAN Richard Peck
Growing up, Archer Magill had three role models: his dad, Uncle Paul, and Grandpa. Then his fifth-grade student teacher, Mr. McLeod, makes the list. Archer is slow to realize his teacher is gay and dating Archer’s uncle. Archer and those around him naïvely accept the relationship, which culminates in a wedding. The prolific and award-winning Peck writes with a lighthearted tone, presuming his readers will absorb same-sex relationships and marriage just as the characters do. Peck’s reputation, along with the book’s title and jacket, may mislead parents and kids about the nature of the story. (Ages 12 and up)

IN OUR MOTHERS’ HOUSE Patricia Polacco
Told from a child’s perspective, two mothers—Marmee and Meema—appear fully able to offer their three adopted children a loving home. Marmee plans block parties and prefers everything tidy. Pediatrician Meema keeps the children healthy and cooks Italian food. One neighbor snubs them and keeps her kids away, fuming, “I don’t appreciate what you two are!” This picture book veers from Polacco’s repertoire of warm family tales and delivers instead an inadequate picture of a family “living by its own rules.” A hateful neighbor, not the absence of a father, hurts them. (Ages 8 and up)

MAGNUS CHASE AND THE GODS OF ASGARD: THE HAMMER OF THOR Rick Riordan
Magnus Chase must retrieve the god Thor’s elusive hammer before giants wreak havoc on Midgard (earth). With sword fighting and fast-paced adventure, Magnus and his friends seek to thwart their enemies, including the menacing god of mischief, Loki. But parents of Riordan’s wildly popular books should know that this second installment in his Nordic-themed fantasy series introduces a transgender, “gender-fluid” character, Alex Fierro. A son of Loki with a tumultuous past, “she” spontaneously changes gender and pronouns on any given day. Riordan’s characters blithely comply, ignoring Alex’s brokenness, and Riordan expects readers to do the same. (Ages 10-13)

AFTERWORD
Many parents want their children to empathize with today’s refugee crisis, and these recent titles may help:

Mary Beth Leatherdale’s Stormy Seas: Stories of Young Boat Refugees (Annick Press, 2017) presents a historical overview of people groups that have fled their homes and sought asylum overseas. Leatherdale highlights five individuals from different countries who fled war as children and survived.

The Journey by Francesca Sanna (Flying Eye Books, 2016) appeals to younger children: a brave mother leading her children on a “great adventure” across borders where they will find safety.

Another story, Lost and Found Cat by Doug Kuntz and Amy Shrodes (Crow Books for Young Readers, 2017), follows a widow and her five children fleeing Mosul, Iraq. One child smuggles a cat, Kunkush, with her across mountains and sea. It disappears in Greece. Kuntz and Shrodes write themselves into this true story as they help reunite the cat with its family. —M.J.
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Charles Murray is an American Enterprise Institute fellow and the author of brilliant books including Losing Ground and Coming Apart. Here are edited excerpts of our interview in front of students at Patrick Henry College in Virginia.

**You’ve called yourself a Madisonian. What does that mean?** I believe in the Constitution that was passed with enumerated powers, so the federal government was not to do anything not listed as those powers. The Commerce Clause meant selling rice grown in South Carolina to people in Pennsylvania, a pretty restrictive definition.

**Is Madisonianism the classic American ideology?** There’s also egalitarianism, which in this case does not mean equality of incomes. It was that even if you became rich and powerful you weren’t supposed to get too big for your britches. That had a long persistence in the United States, especially in the Midwest and some of the South and the Mountain States.

**How does that manifest in those places?** People don’t build 15,000-square-foot homes even if they could, because that would be unseemly. When I grew up in Newton, Iowa, in the 1950s, none of the Maytag Company executives bought a Cadillac, even though any of them could have afforded it. Cadillac was too much of a symbol of wealth, and you did not want to look like you were lording it over your neighbors. So you had freedom, individualism, and egalitarianism.

**Who is for those now?** The left gave up on those three a long time ago. Until the 1960s, Democrats were pretty much on board with those concepts, but after, they weren’t. Last year, you also had the white middle working class give up on freedom and individualism aspects and even some of the egalitarianism aspect.

**One of my favorite novels is by Spanish author José Gironella: The Cypresses Believe in God is set in the five years from 1931 to 1936 before the Spanish Civil War. He shows people increasingly taking sides, so much so that he could tell the politics of a person by the shoes he wore. The result in Spain was 1 million dead. Are we becoming divided that way in the United States? It’s so palpable when you go into Washington, D.C., one of the centers of the elite bubble. They have nice mansions, but it’s the food they eat, the cars they drive that shows how we are coming apart. I decided to see the cars they drive, so I went out into the parking lot of the Whole Foods and other stores in Bethesda and just counted the percentage that were foreign. Then, I went out to the parking lot in Brunswick, Md., and counted how many were foreign. Huge difference.

**Please spell that out.** Out in working class America, people buy American cars. The elite in America buy foreign cars. A little thing all by itself, but it’s part of this way that the new upper class is living in a different culture. And the worst part of that is that they disdain ordinary Americans, and they let that disdain be known. If you go to a polite dinner party on the Upper East Side in New York City, you cannot use any slurs without getting immediate pushback. I’m glad that that happens. But evangelicals or rednecks—the rural white working class—are two groups you can get away with denigrating.

**You live out in the countryside, and your wife is a member of the Goose Creek Quaker Meeting?** Right down the road.

**And you are not.** I am a fellow traveler. I should go into more detail, because there are some Quakers who
believe in one God at most. Now, Catherine is a Christian Quaker who has become serious about it. I, myself, plan to get more serious about all of this myself.

As you get older? Catherine a year ago, when I was 73, said, “What if I could tell you that your next 10 years could be ones of enhancement instead of deterioration?” That really got my attention, because I have been following her spiritual journey very closely.

Since I’m asking prying questions, let me ask one more here. At the age of 74, is death getting your attention? Yes, it does have that tendency. Both of my parents died in their mid to late 90s. I don’t assume I’ve got that many years left. I haven’t led as healthy a lifestyle as my parents did. I understand more viscerally than I did 30 or 40 years ago that I am mortal, but I have never been afraid of it, not because of deeply held religious beliefs but because I find the literature on near-death experiences to be really fascinating, and so extensive that even as an agnostic, I’m not at all confident that death is still the end.

Many people, regardless of their theological beliefs or lack thereof, seem to have FOMO, fear of missing out. Cleveland Indians fans wonder if someday they will win the World Series. Historians who have written about the past 300 years are curious about the next 100. Do you have FOMO? I have a few friends who are scared to death of dying. In fact, my mentor Paul Schwartz, in the 1980s as he faced death, was very frightened of it.

Do smart people tend to say, “I’m so smart, I don’t need God”? Martin Luther said, “Sin boldly,” which did not mean he was in favor of sinning but he knew that when you sin boldly, you realize sooner you’re making a real mess of things and you need God. I sure hope so, but I’ll tell you something that is bothering me a lot as I try to look ahead: That is the degree to which it has become so easy to entertain yourself 24 hours a day, seven days a week, if you can stay up that long. I consider this a problem for myself. I can go on the internet at any time and constantly switch from thing to thing that I enjoy doing. I can play a game of chess. I can go from there to my Twitter feed and to all the places you can surf. What are your evenings like? My wife and I sit down in front of the TV at night, because there is a lot of really great TV out there, series that are beautifully acted and wonderfully constructed. They’re way beyond the quality we had 40 years ago and beyond the quality of most movies. With access to Netflix and Amazon and the rest of it, you have more than you could possibly watch. So I say to myself, to what extent is it a problem for society when you have lots of people who can avoid thinking about the bigger questions just because they can distract themselves? In the novel Brave New World, there’s a drug that is taken, “soma.” I wonder if the internet is the electronic equivalent of that drug.
According to at least one set of global-sales statistics, *Abbey Road*, not *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, is The Beatles’ most popular album. *Sgt. Pepper*’s is, however, their most famous. And, syllogistically speaking, if the Beatles are the world’s most famous band and *Sgt. Pepper* is their most famous album, then *Sgt. Pepper* is the most famous album ever.

Therefore, the celebrations attending *Sgt. Pepper*’s 50th anniversary (May 26 in England, June 2 in the United States) made perfect sense, as does Capitol’s marking the occasion with new single-CD, double-CD, quadruple-CD–with-DVDs, and double-vinyl editions, the common denominator of which is an improved stereo mix by Giles Martin, the son of the recordings’ original producer, the late George Martin.

About Giles’ version: One really can hear the difference. Whereas the old stereo mix sometimes panned instruments and even lead vocals hard left or hard right (a typical strategy in the ’60s) and therefore sounded diffuse, the new version spreads the music’s rich array of sounds and voices artfully across the sonic spectrum, giving the music a brightness, a depth, and a width that surpasses not only the original stereo mix but the original mono mix as well.

The latter, incidentally, is included on the six-disc edition’s fourth disc should anyone feel the need to compare. The second and third discs, meanwhile, comprise numerous isolated sections, flubbed takes, and trial run-throughs, most of which are pleasant if not particularly interesting.

Of greater interest is the inclusion of “Strawberry Fields Forever” and “Penny Lane” among the marginalia. Recorded during the *Sgt. Pepper* sessions but released separately, at the record-company’s insistence, as a double-sided single, the songs have long inspired debate among Beatlemaniacs intent on determining precisely where they would’ve fit into the album’s running order. Capitol has wisely refused to take sides, consigning both songs to the deluxe and the super-deluxe editions’ perimeters.

Another Beatlemaniac debate that the new editions won’t settle is whether *Sgt. Pepper* represents the pinnacle or the nadir of the music that the Fab Four made after their decision to forgo touring and to become what some would call effects-obsessed studio hermits.

Those who say “nadir” sometimes cite the lyrics, which with the exception of “A Day in the Life” exhibit a cozy whimsicality at odds with the Beatles’ reputation for witty and even revolutionary wordplay. Those who say “pinnacle” sometimes counter by insisting that, given the album’s genre-expanding instrumentation and technological innovation and the sheer charm of its most famous melodies, complaining about quaint lyrics amounts to little more than niggling. As for the many in between, they would probably say, were they honest, that their taking one side or the other (or neither) changes depending on their mood.

Perhaps more significant than the music itself is the sense accompanying its latest birthday that, from this moment on, there won’t likely be any more iconic-rock-and-roll-album milestones, no matter how elaborately festooned, worth getting worked up about. Both the Rolling Stones’ *Exile on Main Street* and Bruce Springsteen’s *Born to Run* have already had lavish anniversary treatments, and enough of the collateral arcana from Bob Dylan’s *Blood on the Tracks* has already come out to blunt the revelatory potential of whatever remains.

The critic Greil Marcus once described *Sgt. Pepper* as a “Day-Glo tombstone for its time.” Agree or disagree, it’s hard to shake the feeling that with the album’s golden anniversary an era has clearly come to an end.
NEW OR RECENT ALBUMS
reviewed by Arsenio Orteza

POLLINATOR Blondie
At first, you’ll marvel at how Debbie Harry and Chris Stein continue to make the excavation of musical and verbal hooks in keeping with their greatest hits seem easy. Then you’ll notice that this time they’ve farmed out most of the excavation to others. No matter. Whether young enough to be their children (Johnny Marr) or their grandchildren (Charli XCX), the hired hands obviously take writing for Blondie seriously. What does matter is the profanity to which Harry occasionally accedes in an unbecomingly desperate attempt to seem hip.

KICKIN’ CHILD: THE LOST ALBUM 1965 Dion
This album as a stand-alone folk-rock artifact may have been “lost” since 1965, but if you own Wonder Where I’m Bound and the compilations Bronx Blues and The Road I’m On, you already have 14 of its 15 tracks. So ignore any hype containing the term “missing link” (between Dion's pop youth and his singer-songwriter adulthood, lest you’ve forgotten), and ask yourself how much hearing such under-appreciated gems as “Time in My Heart for You” and “Now” in their original context means to you.

WHAT’S SO FUNNY ABOUT PEACE, LOVE AND ... LOS STRAITJACKETS Los Straitjackets
The Mil Máscaras—style wrestling masks behind which these non-Mexican purveyors of instrumental surf-rock perform will probably have the cultural appropriation police calling for their heads any day now, so you’d better enjoy them while you can. And they’ve never been easier to enjoy than in these affectionate transformations of Nick Lowe songs into themes from an imaginary beach-party film. Given Lowe’s verbal skills, it’s impressive how well his melodies hold up without lyrics—almost as impressive as how well these renditions double as karaoke.

ROCK AND ROLL MUSIC! THE SONGS OF CHUCK BERRY Various artists
Chuck Berry has been covered so often and by such a wide variety of musicians that no single-disc compilation of his homage payers will do justice to the scope of his influence. So appreciate this one for the light it shines into the obscure tunnels of secondhand Berrydom. Aside from the Beach Boys’ top-five version of the title track, none of these 24 tracks will be familiar to the casual consumer. And although a few miss their marks, the playlist never grinds to a halt.

ENCORE
Paul Shaffer & the World’s Most Dangerous Band were never all that dangerous. But, as David Letterman’s resident jukebox, they certainly proved themselves flexible, adapting night after night to whoever the musical guest might be and to the ceaseless demands of cranking out audience-priming segues. That chameleon-like quality permeates the group’s eponymous new release on Rhino Records, a mostly obscure-oldies-covers collection that Shaffer commissioned from himself and his colleagues lest the Letterman-retirement doldrums get the better of them.

The guest vocalists pretty much steal the show, especially Dion (singing Sam Cooke), Darius Rucker (singing Timmy Thomas), Jenny Lewis (singing the McCoys), Shaggy (toasting over Vince Guaraldi), and Bill Murray (feelin’ both groovy and goofy on “Happy Street”). A check of the credits, however, reveals that it’s the bassist Will Lee singing Orlando Napier’s “Enjoy the Ride” and none other than Shaffer himself knocking Georgie Fame’s “Yeh Yeh”—updated with a Netflix reference—out of the park. —A.O.
Lost and found
IN A LONG NIGHTMARE FOR IRAQ’S CHRISTIANS, ONE FAMILY’S DREAM HAS COME TRUE

It's a mother’s worst fear. Your young child disappears. You search high and low, but the child seems always to be just out of reach. It’s the sort of dream you don’t talk about because recounting it somehow might turn the unthinkable into reality.

This has been the waking nightmare of Aida Hana Noah for nearly three years. As ISIS invaded her town of Qaraqosh in August 2014, the 43-year-old mother sent her two sons and older daughter out to escape, but kept 3-year-old Christina with her as she stayed behind to assist her blind husband, Khader Abada. When ISIS hustled the three onto a bus, an ISIS “emir” suddenly snatched Christina from her mother’s lap. At gunpoint he forced a distraught Aida to remain while her toddler was carried away, crying.

Along with about 150,000 Iraqi Christians forced from Nineveh Plain that summer, Aida and her family found refuge in the northern city of Erbil. They have lived in a two-room trailer in Ashti, a camp for Iraq’s displaced run by church officers. There Aida and Khader spent sleepless nights sorting rumors about their daughter: They heard ISIS had put her in the care of a Christian woman also captured and taken to Mosul, then “married” the girl to a fighter, then gave her to a Muslim family.

Her brother found a photo of Christina on Facebook, posted just after her fifth birthday—proof of life but little more. Christina’s proximity to their family—maybe 30 miles away—was excruciating. “Without her, it’s like part of our heart is missing,” Aida told a friend, vowing she would never leave Iraq as long as her daughter was missing.

Then the also-unthinkable happened—a miracle.

When Iraqi special forces liberated a poor Mosul neighborhood, word reached Khader his daughter was there. The family soon reached the area, retrieving on June 9 a shocked and speechless Christina who appeared healthy but at first did not remember them.

“Thanks to God, thanks to Jesus, we are so happy so many people prayed for us,” an overcome Aida told journalist Steven Nabil.

There are thousands of other girls and women perhaps in ISIS captivity, but freedom for Christina is a dose of good news for a people enduring endless bad news. It reminds us of the personal dimension to warfighting, that coalition airstrikes and ground offensives matter to families on the ground we have grown to care about. May family reunifications continue, and may the Iraqi government fight and work to make them possible. Christina’s swift return to her loved ones stands in contrast to the kidnapped from Chibok in Nigeria, young Christian women also traumatized by ISIS-linked militants but kept in government custody upon release. Now there is precedence for forces fighting ISIS to restore families.

This is a moment for highlighting the relentless work of the Christian community on behalf of Iraq’s displaced. Christian advocacy groups like Open Doors followed Christina’s case, reminding the rest of us to pray. Her family lives in a camp supported by church aid, mostly from Catholic groups like Aid to the Church in Need and the Knights of Columbus. It receives no Iraqi, UN, EU, or U.S. government assistance.

And there are the persecuted themselves, whose perseverance and joy in their suffering is a daily testimony to me. The narrow lanes of Ashti filled as Christina returned, with drums and horns, singing and dancing in the streets. Handed war and destruction, they choose peace and charity, taking mustard seeds of faith and with them moving mountains.
Complete Christian Homeschool Curriculum
Where God’s Word is Always Central

GROW IN FAITH, LEARNING & LIFE

abortion advocates still use the old gibe about evangelicals being pro-life only up to birth, but that’s always been hype attempting to slime hope. Christians two centuries ago were in the forefront of the fight against slavery. Christians now are creating orphanages, foster care homes, and schools as well as pregnancy care centers—and even opioid recovery programs for those whose lives have gone sour.

The next 20 pages display features about the Final Five: our International, Southwest, Southeast, Northwest, and Northeast winners in the 12th annual Hope Awards for Effective Compassion competition. Suggestion: Don’t read them all at once. Please read about one ministry and pray that God will continue to bless it. Then come back later to the others, alternating reading and prayer.

Our previous 95 profilees came from 34 states plus China, Iraq, Ghana, Haiti, and Central America. This year
we looked for worthy organizations from places previously unrepresented, so our regional winners come from Zambia, New Mexico, Mississippi, Montana, and New Hampshire. Once again we did initial research by website and phone, and then sent reporters to see if ground-level reality reflects internet publicity.

Online voting for this year's overall winner has now begun and will continue until Sept. 1. Please go to wng.org/compassion and vote for whichever of the five ministries moves you the most. All are worthy. The one garnering the most votes will receive a $15,000 grand prize. Regional winners receive $2,000 each, plus lots of publicity and increased credibility that they often fruitfully use in their own areas to multiply those dollars.

And, thank you to all the WORLD members who have over the years nominated local Christian poverty-fighting groups that offer challenging, personal, and spiritual help and do not depend on government financing. All the winners do depend on God. As Psalm 127 declares, “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.”

The five ministries we’ve profiled are like arrows in the hands of poverty-fighting warriors. Blessed is the region that fills its quiver with them.
Students leave the Village of Hope school
On a windy Sunday morning at the Village of Hope—a 230-acre orphan village located 30 miles north of Zambia’s capital, Lusaka—dozens of children and a few adults gathered for worship at the VOH community center, which was surrounded by tall grass, pathways muddy from weeks of rainfall, and other brick buildings.

Inside, 17 children led the congregation in praise songs, backed by clapping and dancing. They stood in front: boys dressed in blue shirts, and girls with ankle-length chitenges (a multipurpose African skirt) tied at their waists. One of their songs in Zambia’s Bemba language translates to “Our Lord is great and merciful.”

“For many of the 83 children who live at the Village of Hope, the song rings true. The orphanage is home to children born in prisons, some who fled abusive homes, and others with extended families that couldn’t afford to care for them.”

Zambia is slightly larger than Texas in area, with a population of about 16 million. The United Nations children’s agency says 12 percent of the country’s child population are orphans, meaning they’ve lost one or both parents. They are children like 15-year-old Gift Mulayamba. I spoke to her outside the three-bedroom cottage where she lives with 10 other children and a house mother. The cottages are arranged in compounds surrounded by trees and flowers. A chart on the kitchen wall shows each child’s daily chores, including cooking.

Gift was loading charcoal into a small cylindrical brazier in preparation for boiling water. It was her turn to make supper for the house: She was making nshima, a staple meal made from dried corn. Gift said her mother went to prison when she was 2 years old: Before coming to VOH, she lived with an aunt who maltreated her and at another orphanage that shut down. She had asked her father to take in both her and her younger sister after he married another wife, but he refused.

“Sometimes it gives me great pain, but not as much as before,” Gift said. She calls VOH her family and says it has been a place of healing.

That’s what VOH executive director Benedict Schwartz and his wife Kathleen hoped for when they founded VOH in 2006 under the auspices of a Maryland-based nonprofit, All Kids Can Learn International. They were adoptive parents with experience helping their Maryland church develop an orphan home in Namibia. Benedict Schwartz’s business background gave him an entrepreneurial worldview, and they had the wisdom to work through Zambian leaders and authorities. From the beginning they partnered with Zambia’s Department of Social Welfare, which verifies the children’s cases before they enter VOH. That connection helped them establish trust with relatives and neighbors.

A decade along, the project has grown to include a school, restaurant, truck park, and other businesses designed to support the work. Last year the businesses provided about 60 percent of VOH’s revenue. The location helps: The property lies along Zambia’s Great North Road, a major trade highway between the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Africa. VOH employs 132 local people and provides part-time work for some of the children.

Schwartz said the goal of the village, beyond its wider outreach, is to give the children a Christian family experience: “In a family, you don’t age out. You may leave, but still have a place to come back to.”

VOH includes a working farm. The orchard surrounded by barbed wire has banana, guava, and orange trees. Maize covers about 30 acres, with some of it becoming feed for the farm’s 28 cows. The farm also includes 200 egg-laying chickens, 400 broilers, and 80 goats.

The agricultural products feed the children and supply the restaurant, which displays a sign promising “Fast Food.
Quick-In-Quick-Out.” Inside, scones, samosas, and other snacks fill display cases. Behind the counter, a chalkboard lists food items and their prices. The restaurant also includes a minimart with some toiletries and other amenities. Outside, unpaved land serves as a truck stop for drivers traveling along the busy highway. One night 26 trucks parked there. The businesses generate daily average sales of $200 in a country where the average daily wage is only $2.

As needs arise, VOH has established businesses to meet them. The village produces some of its own furniture and bricks used in building the cottages. Its tailor shop manufactures school uniforms for the children. The jobs have provided needed support for people like Anna Gatawa, a 58-year-old widow who works as the senior housemother. Her husband’s death left her the sole provider for her two children. Gatawa said her job at the village helped her send her two children to college: “I was very young, but God helped me manage.”

Children also develop business acumen. Some rear their own birds and gather eggs from the hens’ pen. Schwartz said VOH teaches the children a “45:45:10” money management policy. They save 45 percent of their earnings, spend another 45 percent, and tithe the last 10 percent.

Eighteen-year-old Shaibu Chanda works part time at the restaurant’s kitchen. Chanda used to herd cows to make money for his family before he came to the village with three of his siblings. He started to save money and sends some back to his widowed mother: “Every time I go there, she’s always happy.”

Career Day fell on a rainy Friday morning. Children who were dressed as nurses, lawyers, and other professionals skipped over rain puddles to reach the School of Hope, a three-quarter-mile walk from the cottages. By 10 minutes past 8, muddy shoes lined the wall at the front of each classroom. In the classrooms, children clapped and sang praise songs as they do every morning before Bible study.

The school, which started with about 10 students in a living room at the village, now has 610 students. It celebrated its first graduating class in December. Although Zambia has declared education free through seventh grade, expenses for books and uniforms keep more than 350,000 primary-school-aged children out of school. In rural parts of the country, children often work rather than attend school. The children who do attend often face crowded classrooms, absentee teachers, and a lack of textbooks.

The School of Hope follows a modified version of the national syllabus, but it doesn’t look or feel like a typical Zambian school: “We try to create an environment where kids are free to ask questions, think, and come up with answers,” said school director Kathleen Schwartz. Classes are smaller—typically 25 students per teacher. Brightly colored posters displaying Stephen Covey’s 7 Habits of Highly Effective People hang in each classroom. Students in grades five to seven, instead of listening to lectures, enjoy hands-on gardening and first-aid training during some class periods.

Students in the government schools must achieve a 40 percent grade to pass a subject. Last year School of Hope set a “6-60” pass system that required students to earn 60 percent in six subjects to continue to the next grade. Although the school eventually reduced it to 5-50, Kathleen said the more rigorous standard caused many students to increase their study efforts.
As with the VOH and its businesses, the School of Hope looks beyond the welfare of its own students. It provides daily meals for its teaching staff and the students four days a week. The school also hosts an in-service training day each year for teachers across the country. Last June, 160 teachers from 10 schools attended, and five volunteer educators from the United States helped. They organized workshops on topics like activities for early childhood classrooms and how to use science in the classroom. VOH plans to establish a teaching college that will follow Zambia’s curriculum but include computer classes and sessions on how to bring Bible truths into the classroom. It will offer a three-year diploma.

VOH plans to start a pregnancy resource center and safe house next year. Dr. Chipepo Chibesakunda, the village’s physician, said the rising number of teenage pregnancies prompted the idea. Last year, the family of one School of Hope student forced her to move in with the boy who got her pregnant. The 10-bedroom safe house would provide shelter for pregnant children around the country who get kicked out of their homes, while the resource center would provide helpful information to the children and counter pregnancy myths.

“It would be a place where we can not only teach but also show videos of what it’s like as the baby is growing, pray for the babies before they are born, and teach them to talk to their babies,” Chibesakunda said.

Gift Mulayamba, now in the 11th grade, dreamed of her mother’s release from prison, and on Dec. 25, 2013, it happened: Gift sees it as an answered prayer. At the village, she participated in Alpha, an international video and discussion series that explores the basics of Christianity. She now sings in the choir and runs a Bible study for some of the younger children during the summer. She would like to become a doctor and a mechanic, and adopt two children: “I think if I concentrate on my education and put God first, I’ll save other people’s lives.”

A 20-year-old, Monica Nkonga, has lived in VOH since 2013. She hugged and carried several of the younger children in her arms as we walked around the village, and said, “I want to love them the way I wasn’t loved.” She was raped as a child and repeatedly told she would never become anything better than a prostitute—but she spoke of how the village showed her she is capable of much more. Now a high-school graduate, Nkonga plans to study social work and come back to the village to help other children, especially girls who’ve been assaulted.

For Schwartz, the stories of ongoing healing map the way to the village’s future, with VOH kids who have become competent adults running “the whole operation at management level. Who knows better what it’s all about?”

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**MONEY BOX**

- **2016 revenue:** $495,837 (including $300,116 from the village’s businesses)
- **2016 expenses:** $432,349
- **2016 net revenue:** $63,488
- **Executive director’s salary and benefits:** $45,000
- **Staff:** 132
- **2017 budget:** $573,000
- **Website:** akcli-voh.org

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On a Thursday afternoon, Schwartz drove his Tundra truck through the village to round up some of the children for choir practice. The kids jumped into the back of the truck at each stop and easily joined the ongoing chatter. During the short drive, they broke into songs amid bouts of laughter: Schwartz calls that the village’s “smile index.”

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For Schwartz, the stories of ongoing healing map the way to the village’s future, with VOH kids who have become competent adults running “the whole operation at management level. Who knows better what it’s all about?”
The first time Taylor Benally made a snappy remark to his house parents, they silently pumped fists. Making snippy comebacks isn’t extraordinary teenage behavior, but it was a milestone for the 13-year-old Taylor. Like most other kids at Four Corners Home for Children, a childcare program mostly for Navajos in Farmington, N.M., Taylor came from a dysfunctional family. When he first arrived at Four Corners in 2013, the boy was so reserved and insecure that any time he showed signs of self-assertion, everyone cheered.

Taylor and his 17-year-old sister Jennifer entered the foster care system after their father showed up intoxicated to court. Their mother left the family years ago. After several stints with foster families, Taylor and Jennifer finally settled at Four Corners. At first, both were silent, aloof, and awkward: When the other kids played basketball or video games, the siblings stood back and watched. Today, both are honor roll students. Taylor, who once assumed he would become a sheepherder, now plans to be an engineer and is learning to play the ukulele and guitar. Jennifer plays the flute, sings in the choir, performs in color guard, and is applying to colleges.

“Here is home,” said Jennifer, who giggles easily and asks deep questions about faith that make staffers pause to think. “They feel like family.” Having that loving support taught her to trust God more: “Before, I felt like everything that happened was bad, and that God didn’t have a reason for it. But now I see that He does care, and that He does have a plan.”

Taylor and Jennifer are two of many such stories at Navajo Ministries, an interdenominational nonprofit that started in 1953 with a borrowed tent when founder Jack Drake saw a desperate need to care for neglected and abused Navajo kids. The president of a local bank donated $12,000 for Drake to purchase 12 acres of land in Farmington, a town bordering the reservation. Drake borrowed books from the local library to learn how to build a house and, with the help of several volunteers from the Midwest, erected the first children’s home on the property—a two-story, five-bedroom, cinder-block house with a shingled roof that quickly filled with 17 Navajo kids.

Sixty-four years later, the mission of Navajo Ministries stays the same: To help people through programs that instill hope, restoration, and Christian values. Throughout the decades, the ministry expanded and shrank depending on available funds and need. Today Navajo Ministries includes an after-school learning program, an award-winning Christian radio station, and an outreach program that provides material and spiritual help to the Navajo Nation through vacation Bible schools and support to Navajo churches.

Four Corners Home for Children, the organization’s oldest and largest program, offers 28 beds in three homes: House of Faith, an all-boys extended-care home; House of Love, an all-girls extended-care home; and House of Hope, a crisis placement home for children who need short-term placement.
Each year, Four Corners receives about 25 to 40 new kids of all ages who come and go. Tribal or state social services call at all times asking if there’s a bed available, sometimes for an emergency case, such as an alleged sexual abuse situation or a DUI arrest while the child was in the vehicle. Some children stay for a few days, some several months, others for years until they age out at 18. Many bounce back and forth between family members and Four Corners while state social workers exhaust every preferred placement option.

In addition to long-existing issues of alcoholism and poverty, meth use continues to spike among the Navajos, as do meth-related cases of abuse and neglect. One 3-year-old girl came with a deep gash on her forehead after her father flung her against a bookcase, fracturing her skull. Officials removed another 7-year-old girl from a trailer she shared with 11 other children and several registered sex offenders. Dirt and parasites had caked her face and body for so long she now bears permanent scars.

Three years later, this same girl who once cringed away from adults now looks people in the eye. She won an award for showing her three sheep at the county fair.

Navajo Ministries president Eric Fisher knows 28 beds are not enough, but said he prefers a “quality” program over “quantity.” And he sees evidences of quality through the visible changes in the kids—their first spontaneous smile, first eye contact, first voluntary hug. His favorite moment is when little children burst into his office after school to dig out cookies from the jar on his conference table. Some linger to chitchat and draw bunnies on his whiteboard. Not every child professes Christ during a stay, but many return as adults—some as teachers, social workers, ministers, healthcare workers—and say Navajo Ministries planted gospel seeds.

Projects assistant Rolanda Jeffrey is one of them. She was 16 when she knocked on the door of Navajo Ministries asking for a place to stay. Her mother was an alcoholic. Her father was absent. Jeffrey was a strong-willed teenager who didn’t appreciate rules. She clashed often with her house parents and tried to run away. When her house mom grabbed her hand,
Jeffrey broke it trying to twist away, yet her house parents—whom Jeffrey still calls “Mom” and “Dad”—forgave her, and Jeffrey found a stable home at Four Corners until she aged out at 18. At age 23, Jeffrey again knocked on the Navajo Ministries door, this time as a single mother with a baby daughter. Then 14 years later in September 2012, she returned as a house parent with her husband Randall Jeffrey (now campus and development manager).

The Jeffreys overnight moved from caring for two children to caring for 10 in the House of Love. Knowing how difficult she had once been, Rolanda wondered if she had what it took to handle someone like her. But she felt God telling her, Look to me.

It helped that, to Rolanda, returning to Navajo Ministries felt like “coming home” to “the family that God gave me.” She remembers observing the way her house parents loved God and thinking: “That’s what I want. I want that relationship with God these people have.”

At Four Corners, lives change through the ordinary routines of family—a very big family. Every morning, House of Faith—a flat-roofed, eight-bedroom house with a traditional Navajo log hogan entrance—rumbles with the groans and rustles of eight boys ages 4 to 13. At 6:15 a.m., house mom Kristine Young marches down the narrow hallway from room to room, flicking on the lights and chirping, “Good morning!” She and her husband Cliff then dash around making sure the boys get dressed, eat breakfast, and complete their morning chores before jetting off to school. Every evening, they sit at the same giant round table for a home-cooked dinner—one night it was barbecue ribs, the next a turkey chef’s salad and the best blueberry cobbler on earth.

The Youngs take care of more than the boys’ basic needs: They parent. When they found out that some kids smoke and pick fights on the school bus, they decided to drive the boys to school themselves instead. They call the boys’ teachers, check on their grades, and ground them when they disobey. They banter and pray with them, tend to their tummy aches and heartbreaks, and take them camping by lakes, canyons, and mountains. Every evening they have family devotions before bed, and every Sunday, they dress up for church.

Before Four Corners, the Youngs were house parents at a Methodist children’s home in Waco, Texas, but felt it was too big, too institutionalized. So the Youngs searched for a more intimate, homelike setting, and soon found themselves road-tripping to the Navajo Ministries campus. There, they visited the warmly decorated children’s homes; watched geese, miniature horses, and llamas amble about on the little farm; and waved at children racing on their bikes. That same year, in 2013, the Youngs gave up health insurance and other enviable benefits at the Methodist home to “work a lot more hours here for less,” half-joked Cliff Young: “I didn't have any gray in my beard when I first moved in.”

Even now, as the Youngs took a short break on their couch after the morning pandemonium, they each had one vigilant eye fixed on 4-year-old Thrice, an affectionate, chatty toddler who’s now best buddies with the Young’s 6-year-old son Max. The toddler had fallen sick yesterday, which is always alarming in a house full of boys. Even though house parents get a couple of days off per week, their work never stops. At one point, the Youngs’ full brood included four toddlers in diapers—that’s 12 diaper changes a day on very little sleep.

Most house parents around the United States last only six months on the job, but the Youngs have served four years at Four Corners and plan to stay at least six more years so they can watch their oldest boys graduate high school. “It’s not a job to us,” said Kristine Young, who was once also a foster child. “It’s a calling... God loves them, just like we do. The kids have become our family.”

MONEY BOX
Fiscal year 2016
revenue: $1,253,943
Fiscal year 2016 expenses: $1,285,618
Net assets as of September 2016: $1,955,784
President’s salary: $56,233 with no benefits package
Staff: 16 full-time, 14 part-time
Fiscal 2017 budget: $1,191,880
Website: navajoministries.org
CREATING A NEW PATTERN

DELTA STREETS ACADEMY FIGHTS DEEP POVERTY AND DESPAIR

by Marvin Olasky in Greenwood, Miss.
photos by Chuck Cook/Genesis

Dominick Brown, an 11th-grader at Delta Streets Academy, works on a math problem.
Our Hope Awards Southeast Region winner is Delta Streets Academy (DSA), a 5-year-old Christian school in Greenwood, Miss. You might wonder why: Hundreds of Christian schools exist south of the Mason-Dixon Line and east of the Mississippi. Some, born in the 1960s, are not five years but five decades old. So why spotlight a relative newcomer?

One reason: Some of those half-century-old Christian schools emerged while public schools desegregated. Some grew out of Christian belief but attained critical mass through a desire to have a new group of white-only institutions. The circumstances of their birth are not a reason to disown them, but they've contributed to a firm resolve among some younger white Christians to write a new chapter.

The author of Greenwood’s new educational chapter is Thomas McMillin Howard, 32. Known as T. Mac, he entered Mississippi State University in 2003 and spent the summer just before Hurricane Katrina teaching and tutoring at Desire Street Ministries in New Orleans, located in the poorest part of the city—the largely black and soon to be submerged 9th Ward. He read the Bible and wanted to help the poor.

In 2008 T. Mac moved to the largely poor Mississippi Delta and taught math at Greenwood High School, where he also coached baseball and was an assistant for football. Greenwood High is 98 percent black and the regular recipient of F grades from the state’s overseers of education. He found students there way behind and hindered by a lack of discipline. One-third were dropping out. Those who stuck around often arrived in classes 20 minutes late and suffered no consequences.

Mississippi state Sen. David Jordan, an 83-year-old African-American, gave me two years ago his view of Greenwood High: “Too much noise. Too little respect. Gotta have discipline. No substitute for it.” Jordan wrote in his memoir, From the Mississippi Cotton Fields to the State Senate, “Education is the only opportunity for black people’s advancement... they must learn to burn the midnight oil in order to obtain a good education.”

In 2012, T. Mac opened DSA with an immediate goal—get students burning some oil—and an ultimate one: “to equip the young men who walk through our doors daily with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the skills needed to live a life that honors God.” DSA now has 55 students, all African-American males, in grades seven through 12.

One reason for going all-guy: T. Mac has seen that girls are more likely to do what’s expected of them, but boys are naturally wild. Some of the ways DSA tries to civilize boys: They must tuck in their shirts, complete homework, and act respectfully toward adults and each other. They have a mandatory study hall period during the day and access to tutors after hours. And DSA is reluctantly willing to lose students who refuse discipline.
The process seems to be working with junior Dominick Brown, who started in DSA as a seventh-grader and understands how he and others have come to “understand our responsibilities. Now he [T. Mac] can trust us to do stuff, when back then he couldn’t because we always got in trouble.” He’s heavily involved in the youth program at First Baptist Church, which houses DSA. Dominick’s favorite subjects are math and science, and he scored 24 on the math part of the ACT test, which puts him in the 74th percentile, better than 3 of every 4 test-takers. He hopes to be an orthopedic surgeon and to increase his Christian understanding.

It’s also working with senior Jaylin Smith, who has the highest GPA at DSA. He says he is “way better at math than I used to be,” and has changed from being stumped by equations to now being able to “spit those out without a problem.” Chemistry is his favorite subject: He recalls “counting valence electrons and understanding electron configuration.” This fall he’s going to Mississippi State on a full ride, having received multiple scholarships and grants.

Huge problems remain. Half of the African-Americans in Greenwood live below the official poverty line, many literally on the other side of the railroad tracks from white neighborhoods. One DSA teacher, Allen Wood Jr., recalled that on Valentine’s Day, when Wood reminded students to hug their mothers, a 10th-grader said he hadn’t hugged his mother since the fourth grade: Given their relationship, it hurt too much. Another had gone to jail for assaulting his mother’s boyfriend, who was assaulting his mother.

DSA students need to learn the basics and also believe they are part of a broader world and can live in it, if they choose. Teachers try to expand students’ vocabulary, often asking, “Who knows what this word means?” For example, most students had no idea what a “peer group” is, and they thought “enigma” had something to do with the “N” word. The Delta was the cradle of great blues musicians like B.B. King, but students often don’t know the history of the blues and jazz, let alone the music of Beethoven or Tchaikovsky.

Wood described his students as “tough, resilient, and smart. Teaching them is akin to pouring water on the desert: They soak up practically everything.” For example, young men usually put on coats and ties for their senior pictures at high school throughout the United States, but only one DSA student had worn a tie of any type at any time. None of the students owned a coat or suit. They had a keen interest in learning more about clothing, how to tie ties, etc., so Wood showed them videos about sartorial matters, and every student soon was able to tie a tie.

That was just the start. Memphis hovers over the Delta, and some tailor shops there had created a charitable organization, the “Memphis Suit Project.” MSP asked customers to donate “gently worn” suits that would be cleaned and sorted by sizes. MSP selected DSA as a recipient organization, measured the students, tailored the suits to those measurements, embroidered the students’ names into the coats, and then presented the suits—along with shirts, ties, belts, and shoes—at a special ceremony.

The Greenwood Commonwealth told that story on March 3, 2017, and quoted Dominick Brown, the ACT high scorer, saying his new suit “makes me feel great. I feel like I am being The Man. I can take any job I want to.”

DSA has gained strong parental support, with many moms praising Howard. Deborah Harris, the mother of one of this year’s graduates, said, “Whenever there’s a concern about a student, T. Mac is always there for a one-
on-one conversation. He's very compassionate when it comes to his students and that makes me a proud parent to know that he cares.” T. Mac also knows the importance of sports in motivating students.


Unlike CEOs who tout their successes, T. Mac is harder on himself than some of his fans are: “We still are trying to figure out about equipping and encouraging the guys’ effort in the classroom. Because we have an open enrollment, a majority of our students come in with very little excitement about learning or wanting to grow. ... In a world where everything is at the tip of our fingertips, the idea of actually grinding out a problem or working hard for answers or to solve problems can be challenging.”

The difference between how DSA and Greenwood public schools encourage effort is huge. DSA had to dismiss one 10th-grader after a semester: He functioned at a fifth-grade level and Delta Streets is not equipped to provide remedial services that great. A DSA teacher saw the student in downtown Greenwood two months later and asked how he was doing. The student responded: “I love it. I’m making straight A’s!” That meant the school was following the general practice of social promotion and giving the student illusions of progress.

The unwillingness of DSA to play “let’s pretend” has won it broad community support, particularly among those who see, as local farmer Gary Dyksterhouse does, how “the educational disparity between those with financial means and those without is staggering.” Dyksterhouse contributes to DSA in part because he has seen “young men grow up without hope, without education, and predictably fall into hopeless endeavors. This pattern is reinforced in their children who in turn follow the same path. The cycle seems endless. I love Delta Streets because it is aimed at creating a new pattern.”
A 19-year-old girl with a nose ring and hair pulled tight into a ponytail walks into a waiting room, carrying a car seat. A gaggle of women swarms her. She lifts a blue-eyed, fair-haired baby out of the car seat, and the oohs and aahs turn into laughter.

“Sorry we bombarded you,” one nurse says. “You saved her life,” the young mother replies, looking down at her baby. “So I owe it to you guys.”

A year ago, Connor Delaney and her boyfriend found out she was pregnant. Scared and confused, her boyfriend pushed Delaney to have an abortion. Delaney, feeling pressure, agreed. Then her father suggested she visit Hope Pregnancy Ministries’ medical clinic in Kalispell, Mont., before making any decision.

At the clinic, the staff asked Delaney how she felt about being pregnant. She said she wanted to have the baby but was feeling pressured to have an abortion. Days later, when a staffer learned Delaney had scheduled an abortion, she suggested the young woman come in for an ultrasound. So Delaney did, yet she still left for Washington state to have the abortion. There she entered the abortion business and saw the drained faces of girls leaving it. Delaney turned around and left.

Now, a year later, she bounces 4-month-old Era on her knee. She credits Clear Choice Clinic, a branch of Hope Pregnancy Ministries, with helping her summon the courage to carry her daughter to term: “I felt more comfortable being in my predicament here than anywhere else because they let you talk to them about how you really feel.”

Delaney has told other friends with unplanned pregnancies to come to Clear Choice. They’ve all decided to continue their pregnancies. That’s what Pastor Daniel Lambert and a few women in his church, equipped only with a case of pregnancy tests and a cell phone, hoped for when they launched Hope Pregnancy Ministries 20 years ago.

Hope now operates two branches: Clear Choice Clinic and Hope Family Resource Center. Both are in Kalispell, a
city of 22,000 near Glacier National Park that is home to blue-collar coal miners and loggers, transient young people who work during the tourist season, and a growing population of wealthy West Coasters moving to the mountains.

Walk into Clear Choice Clinic and you’re ushered into a lobby that looks like a comfortable living room with wide cushy chairs and a couch. Sunlight streams through tall windows. That comfortable feel extends throughout the facility: When a woman arrives for her free appointment, she’s escorted into a cozy consultation room with two wide floral chairs, rather than into an exam room.

During the hourlong appointment a staff member talks a woman through each of her options—parenting, adoption, and abortion. The clinic wants women with unplanned pregnancies to reclaim the word “choice” from a culture that often says there is only one option when facing an unplanned pregnancy. The calligraphic art at the clinic entrance underscores the message: “Knowledge is Power.”

Clear Choice doesn’t stock Bibles in the waiting rooms, display Bible verses on the walls in client areas, or play Christian music through the speakers. Executive Director Michelle Reimer doesn’t want to alienate non-Christians, and the surveys clients fill out later typically include phrases like “respectful of my views” and “I feel like I have options.”

Much of the counseling is like what other pro-life counseling centers provide. The clinic offers ultrasounds to women who are six weeks pregnant, which makes them Medicaid eligible. It provides paperwork on the spot. If she wants, a woman can receive follow-up texts, further consultations, or an adoption agency referral.

But Clear Choice is different from some other pro-life centers in four ways.

First, if a woman asks where she can get an abortion, staff members don’t pretend not to know: They honestly say the nearest abortion business is an hour away. Clear Choice does not give information beyond that. “All she has to do is go to her cell phone and google ‘abortion Montana,’” Reimer says. “If she feels [misled], we may lose credibility in other areas.”

Credibility is important in a hostile pro-abortion culture. In 2014, the troubled son of a Hope Pregnancy Ministries board member vandalized Kalispell’s one abortion clinic. The story made local and national news, with one press headline associating Clear Choice with “anti-abortion extremists.” Despite the bad publicity, patient numbers didn’t drop and support didn’t waver. Reimer credits that to the strong relationship Hope

Pregnancy Ministries has with local churches. Seventy out of 100 churches in the Flathead Valley support Hope Pregnancy Ministries.

Second, when Clear Choice realized its vulnerability, it pursued medical accreditation from the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care (AAAHCH), a nonprofit leader in developing standards that promote patient safety. To achieve accreditation Clear Choice had to meet 550 procedural and safety standards, more than most abortion clinics and outpatient clinics meet.

Clear Choice became the first pregnancy medical center in the state to become AAAHC accredited. That has pushed other Montana pro-life clinics to do the same: Two others have gained accreditation, and several more are in the process. Reimer believes accreditation shows that faith-based clinics are providing good care and protects them from malpractice lawsuits: “Part of what we do with accreditation is take away ammunition from our opponents.”

Third, Clear Choice partners with Montana State University, which sends nursing students to the clinic to fulfill clinical hours there. While not all students become pro-life, they do leave with a different picture of what pro-life clinics are like. Clear Choice also partners with not only Christian schools but public schools by providing two-day seminars about healthy decision-making and abstinence.

Fourth, since 2013 Clear Choice has offered inexpensive STI (sexually transmitted infection) testing to both men and women, giving them an opportunity to hear a Biblical sexual ethic. Its patient numbers have doubled. In 2016, Clear Choice saw 714 patients, and more than half of those were STI patients. Since then 10 pro-life clinics have come to Clear Choice for free workshops on how to implement STI testing.

By the numbers, Clear Choice’s approach of empowering with information overwhelmingly leads women to choose life. Of 222 women with positive pregnancy tests, 182 of them chose to carry to full term—and 25 of those came abortion-minded and said they chose to have their babies as a direct result of their experience at Clear Choice.

Hope Family Resource Center is the other branch of Hope Pregnancy Ministries. It’s located in a yellow Victorian house about 10 minutes from Clear Choice Clinic. It’s the social services half of the ministry, offering post-abortion counseling, parenting classes, and mentoring from the time a woman becomes pregnant until her child is 2 years old.

Approximately 50 individuals come to the Hope Family Resource Center each month. In
exchange for attending classes or going to prenatal appointments and pediatric checkups, parents earn mommy and daddy dollars to spend in the center’s baby store. The first floor is stocked with gently used children’s clothes, diapers, formula, car seats, cribs, and anything else parents might need. The center goes through over 30,000 diapers a year.

Michelle Reimer said: “A lot of our critics in this industry would say all you care about is that baby being born and once that kid’s born you’re done with them. Instead we say, Let us walk alongside you.”

Upstairs in one of the meeting rooms, Layce Gean Ehlers, 16, and boyfriend Gabriel Avon Dreesman, also 16, meet with their mentor. Layce is eight months pregnant. She considered having an abortion until she realized she had sufficient support from family and the Hope Family Resource Center. Layce and Gabriel meet with their mentor once a week. They watch videos about prenatal development and review parenting curriculum homework. Their mentor prays for them. Gabriel said they want to keep meeting with their mentor after the baby is born: “I love that she prays for us. She’s just very helpful and supportive.”

Hope Family Resource Center has also formed a partnership with the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) at the Kalispell Regional Medical Center. Hope Family staffers hold a parenting class at the hospital every other Thursday evening for two to 10 parents who have babies in the NICU. Almost 1 in 3 babies in this NICU is going through opioid withdrawal since their mothers used drugs while they were pregnant. Many of these parents don’t know how to care for their babies while they are in the NICU. The classes teach the importance of skin-to-skin contact and eye contact to a developing baby.

The average stay in a NICU nationally is 24 days. Kalispell Regional’s average stay is only 14 days, saving families and the hospital hundreds of thousands of dollars. The doctors at Kalispell Regional credit the parenting classes for this shortened stay.

Now Hope Pregnancy Ministries is taking its model abroad. Next spring, Reimer will help churches in four South American countries start their own pregnancy resource centers.
Children’s laughter bouncing off the walls: New Life Home has that sound, and typical long-term drug recovery programs don’t. A shy, smiling 2-year-old runs around the white clapboard home with peanut butter on his chin: His mother had escaped a gang and planned to abort him before meeting a New Life graduate. The mom is now a graduate of the program and became a Christian in the process.

New Life Home, which helps primarily opioid-addicted women in an 18- to 24-month program, is the rare residential program that allows women to bring their children with them. The Duplo blocks on the basement floor, the stuffed animals meticulously lined up on a bed upstairs, and the 35 tricycles and bicycles lined up at the fence outside change the dynamics from that of strict dorm to home. The children’s presence gives mothers motivation every day to continue their recovery.

New Life’s approach has proven solid over its 38 years in New Hampshire: The graduation rate is 89 percent. Behind the statistics are stories of mothers reunited with children they had lost to the legal system. Shauna’s 2-year-old—a boy at one point scheduled for adoption—lives with her. After seeing her progress at New Life, the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families reversed its adoption decision. Her caseworker told her she had never seen a case go from adoption back to reunification.

Shauna (WORLD agreed to use the New Life women’s first names only, due to the physical threats and job-hunting obstacles they face) had been sexually assaulted as a teenager, and then again when she served in the military. She had turned to opioids and alcohol. On the drive home from her intake interview, she wept because she thought New Life would
never take her—the women she saw were so put together and happy, and she was a mess. But she’s now been in the home for 15 months, and her dad is so thrilled that when he visits he solicitously offers to get coffee for staffers.

Rachel, who escaped a violent gang situation and has been in the program for 22 months, now has her three children with her. Rachel’s parents found her living homeless on the street and pushed her to enter New Life and be a mom again—at that point she hadn’t seen her kids in 18 months. “God gave [my kids] to me for a reason, and He knew everything that was going to happen,” Rachel said. “I need to restore my life with my kids, that’s why I’m here. I’m not here just for myself.”

Brynn, a 30-year-old mother of two, grew up in rural Maine and plays trombone, clarinet, piano, saxophone, and guitar. She had gone from performing arts college studies to opioid addiction. She was sex-trafficked and had overdosed six times before arriving at New Life in January 2016. She didn’t believe in change then, but she wanted to win a chance to see her children before she died. At a low point in 2014, Brynn had left her two daughters at her mom’s house. Her children still live with her parents, but they come to stay at New Life for longer and longer periods of time.

George and Grace Rosado founded New Life Home 40 years ago with an eye for detail that has given their program success and longevity. George combed auctions from restaurants going out of business to find tasteful secondhand furniture that would keep the home from feeling institutional. Grace insisted on the women dressing professionally at the home unless they were doing chores.

Some of New Life’s unusual practices: The women aren’t allowed to share their backgrounds with each other unless staffers give the go-ahead, so that everyone is on equal ground. Staff members don’t want them to be defined by a past in the gang world or prison. The women also can’t talk to each other one-on-one without a staffer present: Sharing potential contacts and old friends could lead them to spiral into their old life. They are constantly supervised, and even ask permission to get a Kleenex.

Women don’t have to be Christians to enter the program, but during the intake interview, a staffer will ask if they are open to God working in their life. The women go each week to Bethany Covenant Church, a church that closely partners with the organization. The organization has support from about 50 churches, from charismatic to Reformed denominations. “Our focus is, number one, getting the women a good foundation in the Lord,” said Grace Rosado.

The residential program also has more traditional Christian recovery traits. Volunteers teach classes about the Bible, parenting, running a home, and developing Christian relationships. Quilts that the women have made for their children in quilting classes

Rachel (right), a resident at New Life Home, talks with her children after they return from school.
spread over the kids’ beds. The women study for their GED diploma or a college degree. One graduate is working on a Ph.D. at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

The program doesn’t have a firm timeline for graduation; Staff members decide together if a woman is ready to graduate. After a woman graduates, the staff evaluates her transition depending on her needs. Some women stay and join the staff. Others have a period of living in the transitional house while they complete schooling or find jobs. Meanwhile, they can enjoy graduate and chef Starla Hamill’s good cooking, with lots of fruits and vegetables: Following the neat pattern of everything in the house, vegetables in the pantry are lined up in tidy rows.

Part of the reason New Life is in such demand now is the opioid crisis. New Hampshire has the nation’s highest rate of deaths from fentanyl, an opioid more powerful than heroin. This past fall New Life had to stop taking interviews for the program because it had a long waiting list and no available beds. Right now 15 women and 20 children live in the home, and women graduates live in the transitional home across the street. In years past, most of the women in the New Life program were in their 30s and 40s. Now most of the women are younger, in their 20s.

Last fall a woman eight months pregnant and addicted to heroin called wanting to enter the program. The house was packed, but the receptionist set an intake interview for the next Tuesday. The woman was staying with her mom, who had searched her for drugs. Over the weekend the woman overdosed, and she and her baby died. That’s when the organization’s board talked about finding another house. New Life recently bought a beautiful old home around the corner and is in the midst of renovation to add more beds.

Staffers bear the weight of the opioid crisis in other ways. Grace Rosado is now New Life’s executive director. (Her husband George has retired while dealing with health issues.) In April, a probation officer came to Grace’s office in tears. A 22-year-old woman who had been in the officer’s caseload for 11 years had just died of a heroin overdose. The officer went to Grace because she was the only “God person” he knew; Grace agreed to visit the family and read Psalm 116 with them.

“I don’t want to do any more funerals,” Rosado said—and in 40 years she has never had to go to a funeral for a New Life graduate who overdosed. That success, along with the opioid crisis, brings others to study their model. Phyllis Phelps was one of the early graduates of New Life in the 1980s with her daughter, before she met her husband Bill. She later worked at a pregnancy resource center in Keene, where she counseled one of the women to keep her baby and come to New Life. The woman did, and graduated. Now the Phelps’ church in Keene has sent the couple to serve a yearlong apprenticeship at New Life, with the goal of setting up a similar home in Keene.

New Life is helping 30-year-old Brynn climb out of a deep hole. She graduated from a 30-day program and got a job; but when someone offered her crack, she tumbled even deeper into addiction. On heroin, crack, and alcohol, she was starving, beaten, and raped many times. She avoided contact with her family because “I didn’t have anything good. What am I going to say?” Eventually she went to jail and called her mom from jail. Her mom and dad had recently become Christians, and her mom told her about New Life.

When Brynn agreed to enter the New Life program, her parents told her that if she stuck with it for a month, they would bring the children to visit. The night before she began the program, her brother brought her to a hotel where her parents were waiting with her two daughters. Brynn hadn’t seen the kids in 18 months: She was so deep in addiction that she had forgotten what they looked like.

“I will never ever forget that feeling,” Brynn said, telling the story right after finishing vacuuming the home’s hallway. She began to cry. “[God] restored my kids to me and restored my family to me before I did anything... I just showed up and everything was waiting here for me.”

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**MONEY BOX**

- **2015 revenue:** $584,182
- **2015 expenses:** $621,222
- **Net assets at the end of 2015:** $335,664
- **Executive director’s salary:** $63,003
- **Staff:** 9
- **Volunteers:** 600
- **2017 budget:** $800,000
- **Website:** newlifehome.org
Over and over Christians in Syria find themselves on the losing end of the embattled region’s grand bargains. Will Trump administration support of rebel Kurdish forces deal them another hard blow?
Northern Syria has bled Christians a long time. Besieged by ISIS, or Islamic State, historic Christian villages witnessed hundreds of believers taken hostage in 2015. ISIS attacked 35 Christian towns in one day, taking more than 200 Christians captive overnight. Months later ISIS executed publicly three men, but released most of the others. Then Kurdish forces fought ISIS, wrested back the area, and have held it ever since.

Thousands of Christians fled the fighting, but many desperately want to hang on. Christians once dominated the region, and some of the earliest churches and monasteries in the world still function there. In the last century the Assyrian and Armenian Christians—surviving wave after wave of genocide from the Ottoman Turks—managed to hold out in the region, and today they regard it as perhaps the last historic stronghold for Christians in the Middle East.

Now the United States is stepping up support for Kurdish rebels who helped defeat ISIS. Rebels have christened the region Rojava, or the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria. U.S. support has been seen as crucial to defeating ISIS in its Syrian capital, Raqqa, where a

Syriac Christian women attend an Easter Mass in Qamishli on April 16.
A military assault was launched formally in early June. Quickly those rebel forces gained a “foothold” in Raqqa, according to American envoy Brett McGurk. “The Raqqa campaign from here will only accelerate,” he said.

Rojava means “the west,” and American and European leaders believe the Kurds represent the best friend of Western powers, with the best chance to defeat ISIS and bring Syria’s President Bashar al-Assad to a reckoning. But the new partnership could invest the Kurds with outsize influence in any post-war Syria. Further, they face stiff opposition from Turkey—a NATO ally—and more and more appear unlikely to preserve the non-Kurdish and non-Muslim population.

Church leaders and congregants in the historic Christian area, which includes parts of Iraq, Turkey, and Syria, say the Kurds discriminate against them, and have pressured young men to serve in their militias. The “annihilation tactics” promised by Secretary of Defense James Mattis to defeat ISIS could, these Christians fear, succeed in wiping them out too.

“Everyone is vying for control,” said Bassam Ishak, president of the Syriac National Council of Syria and an opposition activist. Intimidating minority populations in the conflict, he said, is “just another way to win the upper hand.”

In May the U.S. Defense Department announced plans to provide heavy weapons to the YPG (full name: Kurdish People’s Protection Units), the Kurdish forces controlling Rojava as part of the Syrian Democratic Forces.

Heavy weaponry under the Trump administration began showing up in quantity six weeks before the Raqqa assault began—with dozens of U.S. up-armored Humvees, MRAPs, and tanks arriving along the tense border area. Heavy weapons also include machine guns, mortars, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, and anti-tank weapons.

The support represents a major shift in U.S. policy. The Obama administration threw support to the Free Syrian Army, with a slew of guns and missile launchers falling into the hands of al-Qaeda-linked fighters as its forces dissolved into jihadist groups. Eventually U.S. support for any rebels dwindled.

Importantly, Rojava is a resource-rich region, with proven oil reserves and agricultural holdings that once earned it recognition as the breadbasket of Syria. The YPG with its political entity, the Democratic

YPG soldiers stand near U.S. eight-wheeled armored fighting vehicles in northern Syria.
Union Party, last year declared themselves a de facto autonomous region and passed a blueprint for governing that amounts to a constitution. They hope it will become a model for all Syria—although Rojava’s standing has yet to receive formal recognition from any outside entity or from the Assad government.

More than 200 miles across Rojava from Raqqa, where fighting currently is centered, the Kurds are creating a capital in Qamishli, a strategic outpost near the borders of Turkey and Iraq. Qamishli until recently was a majority Christian town that’s gradually come under the Kurds’ control. YPG forces control most of the city, though Syrian army units hold an area around the airport, according to Fabrice Balanche, a research director at the University of Lyon 2 who visited the area this spring. One section of the city is held by Christian militia operating under the name Sotoro, with pots of flowers blocking the streets to mark its boundaries. YPG and Sotoro have clashed—with one Sotoro member and eight YPGs killed in one 2016 incident—but locals say they can move freely among the militia-controlled areas.

The YPG has established a town hall at the Hotel Semiramis, a once-luxurious Art Deco hotel built and owned by Syriac Catholics. After World War I and the Armenian genocide, the French used land allotments to help repopulate the area with Christians—mostly Syriac (or Assyrian) believers and Armenians—as a buffer against encroachments from Turkey. The Christians vastly enriched their agricultural holdings, and by the 1950s Qamishli was the center of Syria’s grain and cotton trade. The Hotel Semiramis welcomed tradesmen and merchants from Aleppo and other industrial centers and served French wine and filet mignon, recalled Balanche.

Now many of the Syriac Catholics who ran the Semiramis have emigrated to Canada, and the hotel sits forlorn in a wrecked landscape. ISIS suicide bombers have repeatedly struck Qamishli. A truck bomb in the city a year ago killed 48. Fighting too has raged next door in the Turkish town of Nusaybin. The city of 100,000 has at its center the archaeological remains of St. Jacob Church, which dates to the third century, and a bishop from Nusaybin attended the Council of Nicaea. I visited the site in mid-2015, and the city was a bustling center of commerce, though fighting and smoke rising just across a border fence in Syria was visible.

Now Nusaybin is a war zone. Kurdish militias reportedly aligned with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party have fought the Turkish army since last year, turning once-busy shops into rubble and streets into sniper alleys—threatening, too, what few ancient sites like St. Jacob have survived six years of war. The swift destruction of a once-prosperous town—and its proximity to Qamishli—make clear the deadly intent of Kurdish forces and the difficulty for outsiders to distinguish good militias from bad.
With the outbreak of fighting in the area, locals say the Christian population in Rojava communities has been cut by half. “Migration has scattered us,” said Shemun Behnam, a resident of Derik, a mostly Syriac Orthodox community in Turkey, also across the border from Qamishli and west of Nusaybin.

Behnam blamed overall insecurity and lack of economic opportunities in Derik on the Syrian war, but he also blames the YPG. He said its militias closed schools and forced Christians to study in Kurdish, even though their first language usually is Syriac (a branch of Aramaic, the ancient language spoken by Jesus).

Behnam said YPG fighters pressured young Assyrian men to join their ranks, arresting or detaining them in some cases. He said the YPG in some communities in Syria and Turkey imposed compulsory duty on men ages 18 to 30 years old and required them to undertake six months of training.

“YPG is the decision-maker,” he said.

The YPG first took control of the cross-border area in 2014, when government forces abandoned the area. Even then, few locals trusted the new authorities, said Rayed Georgis, a car mechanic from Derik. The YPG and other rebel forces did not oppose ISIS militants when they first moved in, he added. When ISIS captured villages along the Khabur River and took Christians hostage en masse, none of those forces responded, for months.

In all, ISIS attacked 35 Assyrian villages along the Khabur in Hasakah province, now considered part of Rojava. The terrorist group struck on Feb. 23, 2015, at 4 a.m., and quickly YPG and government forces retreated.

Facing no armed opposition, ISIS forced at least 3,000 Assyrians from their homes and took 250 Assyrian Christians hostage. ISIS set fire to the church in Tel Hirmiz and bombed an Assyrian Catholic church in Tel Tamer, killing five residents. ISIS took down crosses, forbade religious symbols and ringing of bells, and imposed a tax on non-Muslim residents. The militants threatened to kill anyone who refused to obey their rules.

Those events earned international headlines, as did an ISIS videotape parading three Assyrian men in orange jumpsuits. All three were fathers and landowners and residents of Tel Tamer. On camera each man, one by one, was shot in the head.

Behind the headlines, the common feeling among residents was that both government and Kurdish forces had allowed ISIS in the area to grow stronger and did little to prevent ISIS atrocities. After the attacks, returning villagers had little confidence in the Kurdish forces controlling their areas.

“There were 46 families in our village before the war, there were 24 families after the war, but now our village is empty,” said Daniel Can from Tel Mesas. He said residents continued to flee, dodging snipers. They discovered that in their absence their houses had been looted. Many accused YPG and other units now operating under the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) of the looting, fueling overall distrust of the U.S.-backed SDF that persists to this day.

“Everything from the animals to the trees was plundered,” said Samuel Ushana, another resident.

The YPG operates as the armed wing of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) but denies it is the Syrian front of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). The PKK was founded in Turkey in 1978 by Abdullah Öcalan, and its ideology mixes Marxist-Leninism and Kurdish nationalism. Öcalan’s calls for separating from Turkey, and PKK terrorism, earned it a top spot on Turkey’s enemies list. Further, the PKK is a U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization and is also recognized as such by NATO and the European Union, among others.

Under cover of Syria’s prolonged civil war, PKK forces grew in Syria, where at one time they received training and assistance from the Assad regime and Russia, both willing to use the PKK to destabilize Turkey, a front-line NATO member state.

U.S. Central Command and State Department officials deny a connection between the YPG and PKK. They stress the United States is also working with the wider opposition umbrella group, the SDF, which includes Arab militias.

Those in the region, though, say the YPG and PKK are linked. Last year Massoud Barzani, president of the Kurdistan Regional Government and a U.S. ally, told journalists: “Any support to the PYD [political leadership of YPG] means support for the PKK. They are exactly one and the same thing.”

Former members of the YPG I spoke to in Iraq in 2015, including American recruits not named because they faced death threats and possible prosecution for fighting as so-called mercenaries, confirmed the Marxist leanings of YPG leadership and said they believed the group had links to the PKK.

The U.S. arming of the YPG risks “the regional stability necessary for the lasting defeat of the Islamic State,” argues Kyle W. Orton, a Middle East analyst and research fellow at the Henry Jackson Society, in a recent New York Times op-ed.

Orton argues it’s a mistake to focus only on defeating ISIS. “The narrowness of the focus on jihadist terrorists led to the U.S. disregarding wider political dynamics in the war in Syria—and to a
degree in Iraq, too—and partnering with forces that over the long term will undo even this narrow mission.”

Across the region the United States has relied broadly on Kurds to quell Islamist-led terrorism, but as the Kurds have grown stronger, so have complaints. “During my visits to the region, Assyrians and Yazidis have whispered carefully in my ear of the oppression they face from Kurdish groups,” Attiya Gamri, president of the Assyrian Confederation of Europe, told a European Parliament conference on June 6.

Netherlands’ lawmakers passed a resolution last year supporting Rojava and have hosted its groups on cultural exchanges, while Voorwind criticized the Obama administration for supporting the Free Syrian Army, which he said ultimately fed U.S.-provided weaponry to groups linked with al-Qaeda.

The U.S.-Kurdish partnership in Syria may speed military progress, but so far Turkey isn’t buying in. In April Turkey launched airstrikes on YPG posts in Derik, an apparent message for the YPG and its Western backers. But the attacks also hit in the area’s ancient Christian heartland and killed at least 18 people.

Turkish military jets carried out multiple airstrikes in Derik and that same day struck near Sinjar in Iraq, killing approximately 50 people. What could Sinjar, once the largest city for Yazidis, have in common with Derik? Besides their non-Muslim population, both had been scenes of grisly ISIS battles—with Islamic State fighters taking Sinjar in 2014 and killing or capturing thousands of Yazidis—and were liberated with support from the YPG units Turkey opposes.

For Turkey’s Assyrian Christian population, the bombings in Derik had “a demoralizing effect,” said Bassam Ishak of the Syriac National Council. The airstrikes coincided with an anniversary of the Armenian genocide in Turkey, which also led to the deaths of tens of thousands of Assyrian Christians. “We have this in our community’s memory,” he said, “but to see it happening in our lifetime again is shocking. We are trying very hard to convince people to stay—and now it is even harder.”

The Syriac Christian himself has become one of the leading opposition leaders American officials can talk to. He told me he’s been shuttling between Washington, the Kurdistan capital of Iraq in Erbil, and European capitals. He was diplomatic in answering whether the United States is right to support and arm the SDF with its large contingent of YPG forces: “We welcome military support by [the] U.S. to SDF. SDF has proved to be the only effective ally to [the] U.S. in its war against ISIS.”

Ishak has watched nearly a lifetime of disenfranchisement for the Syriac Christian population. His father, a member of parliament known as a devout Christian, opposed the Ba’ath Party before it came to power under Hafez al-Assad, father of the current Syrian president. When Ishak was 11 years old, the Assad regime seized 1,200 acres of land belonging to his family, rich croplands in the area marked out for Rojava. Ishak’s family lost everything and eventually was forced to leave the country.

Ishak says, “We are trying to work with the Kurds,” though without giving up essential rights as Christians. “Without achieving the full rights of all the minorities of Syria, no new Syria will emerge and no political actor will win.”
Faith-based child welfare agencies have mounted legal efforts to gain religious protections, as LGBT advocates cry discrimination. Meanwhile, thousands of children needing homes are left in the crosshairs. A new Texas bill—similar to laws passed in Virginia, Michigan, the Dakotas, and, just recently, Alabama—may ensure that faith-based agencies remain open to serve and recruit more foster and adoptive families. Will other states follow?

Conflicts concerning foster care and adoption are intense around the country. In the heat of battle, it’s easy to forget about Angie Galvan.

Galvan’s past includes sexual abuse, neglect, time in juvenile detention, crippling anxiety, and occasional homelessness, but she had it better off than many others who grew up in foster care: Galvan stayed in a long-term placement for all four years of high school. She’s now 25, single, childless, and making a modest income by taking maintenance requests on the night shift at a residential high-rise.

Still, after what she guesses may have been 22 placements, Galvan aged out of the Texas foster care system without a permanent home. In the seven years since her legal emancipation from state care, the depression and anxiety she experienced as a teenager have increased. She now faces adult challenges without having had an adult...
example to learn from or a consistent place to turn for comfort and care.

Galvan’s struggles aren’t unique. Texas, like virtually every other state in the country, faces a snowballing problem: Too many kids on foster rolls, too few licensed families to receive them. Social workers feel overburdened and underpaid, and in Texas up to half of all foster families drop out during their first year, largely for lack of training in dealing with vulnerable children.

That high turnover increases recruiting and training costs, and the biggest victims are children—already neglected, abused, and traumatized—who find little healing or relief in the state’s care. When overwhelmed foster parents bail, the state sends children to another home, and the cycle begins again. And those who age out of the foster system are far less likely than the general population to graduate high school. They go to jail more often, are homeless more often, and commit suicide more often.

You’d think that everyone could agree on this goal: Recruit, train, and equip as many foster parents as possible. But it’s not that easy, as a debate concerning a bill just passed by the Texas Legislature shows.

Unlike some states, Texas never barred gays and lesbians from adopting or fostering through state agencies, although it allowed private agencies to set their own rules. In the last two decades, as homosexuality became more accepted, most
private agencies in the state began to recruit and train gays and lesbians to foster and adopt—but some faith-based agencies still choose not to serve homosexuals, and that angers LGBT activists.

Those agencies make up about 25 percent of the state’s pool of providers. The activists demand that the agencies serve gay would-be parents or suffer consequences, ranging from lawsuits to a loss of state licensing. If state officials agree and require the agencies to compromise their Biblical standards on sexuality, marriage, and the sanctity of life, many of them—and many foster families that work with them—will leave the system.

That’s why Randy Daniels, vice president of Buckner Children and Family Services at Dallas-based Buckner International, one of the state’s largest Christian foster and adoption outlets, fought so hard for the new legislation. He testified multiple times as the bill made its way through the Texas Legislature. Daniels estimates Buckner spent $250,000 on its effort to advance religious liberty protections for agencies like his—money that could have gone toward hiring five caseworkers, each with a case load of 25 to 30 kids.

The spending was necessary because the American Civil Liberties Union, the Human Rights Campaign, and others lobbied to force Christian agencies to violate their convictions or close their doors. In California, Massachusetts, Illinois, and the District of Columbia, those groups have been successful in pushing anti-Christian policies that forced successful agencies to shut down. Catholic Charities, one of the largest providers of child welfare services in the nation, shut down such programs in Massachusetts in 2006 and in Illinois in 2011 after losing efforts to place kids exclusively in married mother-and-father homes.

Although foster children are not removed from homes when an agency closes, the disruption takes its toll. Steve Roach, executive director of Catholic Charities of Springfield, Ill., said: “We lost 70 staff members, some of whom had been with us for more than 40 years, helping to put children in homes with both a mom and a dad. Having to shut down those [child welfare] services was an unnecessary, traumatic situation, and it was no way in the best interest of kids.”

Not long ago, gays and lesbians in most states had trouble becoming foster or adoptive parents. Kim Ford and Amy Rasmus, lesbians who have fostered dozens of children and adopted three, talk of how their initial attempt to become Texas foster parents in 2001 failed. “I called every agency I could find in the phone book,” Rasmus said. “I identified myself as [part of a] lesbian couple, and you wouldn’t believe the horrible things people said to me.” Ford said a call to Child Protective Services (CPS) finally got them in the system, although she and Rasmus got “the cold shoulder” from some in the training class, including an instructor.

Buckner’s Randy Daniels acknowledges the history: “No denying the Christian community has made some mistakes in decades past. ... We’ve condemned gay people, ... saying, ‘You’re wrong, your lifestyle is deplorable, and you’re going to hell;’ [without explaining] the gracious truth that Jesus came to save us from our sin.”

Now, homosexuals and their allies are politically potent in some states, and it’s payback time. Sometimes they’ve advocated cutting off public funding of any group that won’t place kids with gay or lesbian couples. Sometimes they’ve lobbied to refuse licensure for private agencies that don’t toe the line on anti-discrimination policies. In many states, both licensure and governmental funding are crucial for private adoption and foster care agencies to operate.

It’s hard to know exactly what effect the shutdown of Catholic Charities child placement had on children in Massachusetts and Illinois: The states undertook other reforms at the same time. Still, it’s clear that religious charities have played a huge role in American child welfare services.

Why religious accommodation bills?

Texas’ new religious accommodation laws protecting child welfare providers is a “status quo” bill that allows faith-based agencies to continue operating according to their “sincerely held religious beliefs” while providing a shield from lawsuits and adverse actions. At issue in Texas, in particular: an agency’s right to refuse to provide abortions or contraceptives for girls in its charge, or to train homosexuals or unmarried couples. Similar bills have already been enacted in Virginia, Michigan, the Dakotas, and Alabama. In some states, agencies that decline to serve prospective parents must direct them to agencies that will.

Proponents of religious accommodation laws regarding adoption and foster care say they are more likely to pass than state religious freedom restoration acts (RFRA) and also give agencies more protection.

Attorney Troy Cumings, an adoptive father and Bethany Christian Services board member who has been instrumental in drafting legislation in several states, says: “RFRA laws apply broadly and can include private businesses and commerce. That makes them a target for people in opposition to these laws to unfairly poke holes in them by coming up with a parade of horrors of what the laws would hypothetically allow.”

Brantley Starr of the Texas Attorney General’s office says agencies using state or federal RFRA laws as a defense can be assured of a protracted legal battle—a fight most agencies say they cannot afford. Religious accommodation laws provide the legal clarity for faith-based agencies to operate and serve as a shield from financially ruinous lawsuits that opposition groups could bring.
Ursuline nuns in Mississippi opened the first U.S. orphanage in 1729. Two hundred and fifty-one years later, the “One Church, One Child” campaign began in an African-American church in Illinois, where Rev. George Clements asked pastors to call upon congregations across the state to find at least one African-American family to adopt one African-American child each year. Following the program’s implementation, the number of African-American children waiting for adoption dropped by 80 percent.

When Focus on the Family implemented its “Wait No More” adoption initiative in November 2008, Colorado had 8,000 children in foster care, with 800 of them eligible for adoption. A year after the Colorado Springs–based organization began encouraging adoption from foster care at church-based events, the number of available children had been cut in half.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court’s 2015 Obergefell decision that forced same-sex marriage on every state has increased pressure to limit the religious liberties of child welfare agencies. In response, legislators in 10 states have introduced bills designed to protect those groups. Backers of religious accommodation bills now typically say their goal is not to exclude same-sex couples but to allow Christian agencies to continue caring for children as they have done, in many cases, for more than a century.

Some Christian developers of achievable legislation have had to swallow hard.

James Frank, a member of the Texas House of Representatives from Wichita Falls, is an adoptive father and the author of the new bill providing protection for faith-based agencies. He is a pragmatist and recognized that homosexuals in recent years were fostering and adopting many hard-to-place children.

At a March legislative committee meeting in Austin, Brantly Starr of the Texas Attorney General’s office described the bill as a “license to participate” and a shield from future lawsuits. He said gays and lesbians are welcome at the foster and adoption table. The new Texas legislation requires agencies to refer prospective adoptive or foster parents to another provider if they are unable to serve them for religious reasons. Frank says, “People may not necessarily agree with that or like that, but there are LGBT couples doing fantastic work in foster homes.”

Christians are divided on that point, but Frank argues that without legislation protecting all agencies, some of those gay couples and their advocacy organizations are more likely to attempt to litigate out of existence the faith-based agencies.

“We’ve learned a lot,” Buckner’s Randy Daniels said. “Where Christians were the ones casting judgment before, it’s kind of flipped. [The LGBT lobby says] now, ‘If Christians won’t play by our rules—if we don’t accept same-sex relationships or abortions—then we’re out.’”

Being welcomed in, with Christian agencies referring gays and lesbians to other groups, is not sufficient for Kathy Miller, president of the pro-abortion and pro-LGBT Texas Freedom Network (TFN). At that March meeting, she argued passage of the bill would allow discrimination “in the name of religion” and would prevent gays and lesbians from fostering and adopting. When WORLD asked TFN and half a dozen gay-affirming Austin churches for examples of a gay or lesbian couple or individual who had been prevented from fostering or adopting as a result of agencies acting on their religious convictions, they could not give any.

The chair of the committee hearing, Rep. Byran Cook, scolded Miller: “If you care about
the kids, you’re going to figure out how to work with everybody and not be against. It’s easy to come in here and be against. It’s a lot harder to give solutions. We have kids who are suffering while we’re trying to figure this out.”

Proponents of religious accommodation laws argue they result in more foster and adoptive families—and reduce the number of lonely people like Galvan that the system fails each year. That’s because many families want to work with a like-minded agency. Dallas mom Ashley Leffers and her husband Matt adopted their 4-year-old son, Alex, from the Gladney Center for Adoption in Fort Worth. They chose it because the agency is pro-life not only up to birth but in supporting the life of the birth mother afterward. Agencies without a religious background didn’t offer the same support, Leffers said: “As an adoptive parent, it is an emotional roller coaster, and I’ve never been so vulnerable.”

Then, when her autoimmune disease did not allow her to carry the embryos she and her husband had frozen, Leffers wanted to know that a Bible-believing family would raise their offspring. Through Nightlight Christian Adoptions, the couple was even able to say they wanted a married, mother-and-father family to raise their child. Leffers said it was important to her to have “constant contact” with a caseworker with whom she had a common faith background: “We know that the Bible is true and life-giving, so for our embryo adoption, we needed to know that we were working with an agency whose applicant pool reflected our Christian values.”

Latest figures from the federal Department of Health and Human Services show an uptick in the number of kids entering the foster system from 2013 through 2015. Of the more than 400,000 kids in foster care nationwide, more than 100,000 are adoptable because parental rights have been terminated.

Aside from the demonstrable benefits of having a permanent home, a child gains intangible benefits from knowing he has a family to depend on. Bill Blacquiere of Bethany Christian Services emphasizes the importance of feeling that “I belong, I came from a family. … Most of us graduate from high school and feel pretty independent, but you still have parents around supporting you, celebrating holidays, birthdays, and your achievements,
Alternative solutions

In a broken system, church-based groups have spearheaded alternatives to state care. Here are some examples.

**SAFE FAMILIES FOR CHILDREN**

provides interim care to children of people who recognize they are in crisis—facing addiction issues, job loss, or inadequate housing, for example. The program, led by the Chicago-based Lydia Home Association, equips families within churches to take in children, with the goal of reuniting parents with their children without involving the state. Placements average six weeks but range from two days to as long as a year. Volunteers are screened and approved through background checks and home studies and serve without compensation.

Safe Families “case coaches” hear about families in crisis from a variety of referral sources—social workers, schools, medical providers, and churches—and then act as liaisons to connect families in crisis with host families. Since 2003, Safe Families hosts have cared for more than 22,000 children. Of that number, 93 percent of kids have been reunified with their families.

**ZOIE’S PLACE** in Dallas is as colorful as the woman who runs it. Walls in shades of periwinkle blue, mauve, and teal display hand-painted signs that say, “Welcome,” “Joy,” and “You’re stronger than you think,” an encouragement to the one, two, or three former foster children who live there at any given time.

The home is the brainchild of Brandy Coty, a one-time Texas CPS caseworker, who for years witnessed the damaging effects of aging out of the foster system without a permanent placement. Coty left her CPS job and now focuses on providing a home, teaching life skills, and sharing God’s love to women who may otherwise feel they don’t belong.

Coty saw firsthand the problems in the system. She remembers in 2014 when caseworkers removed 89 children from their homes in rural Palo Pinto County, Texas, making them wards of the state. Meanwhile, the county only had three licensed foster families. When that happens, the state places children in group homes, with families several counties away, or—worse—consigns them to sleeping in hotels or government offices.

To move into Zoie’s Place, prospective residents, usually referred by Coty’s former CPS colleagues, complete an application and in-person interview. Coty outlines the rules of the program and emphasizes that residents are expected to participate in Bible studies and prayer. If all parties are on board, final steps include a background check and a waiting period for applicants to consider whether they can truly comply with the requirements of Zoie’s Place. Coty knows of one similar home in North Texas, as well as three programs that are larger and less “individualized.” They are all for females.

Coty says grace and mercy are crucial in good foster care, and “as Christians, grace and mercy lead our heart of service. If I start getting empty on patience or grace, I know where in the Bible to turn to get filled back up to deal with the difficulties that can come with working with challenging young people.”

**“FOSTELS,”** short-term foster home and hostel hybrids, may meet another urgent need. Scott Sanford, a North Texas Baptist pastor and Texas state representative, mentored a fourth-grade child until social workers abruptly placed him in foster care and moved him six counties away, in a separate home from his twin sister: “My wife and I were willing and able to help, to host [the child] and his sister in our home, in his own city and school district, but it wasn’t legal for us to help.”

Sanford favors creating fostels in which at-risk kids may be placed with willing families who have not gone through CPS’ rigid licensing program, but who are otherwise in a position to provide a temporary home—from a single night up to two weeks—to children while the state seeks a more permanent home with the least amount of disruption to the child.

He hopes fostel families, after dipping their toes in the child welfare waters, will be emboldened to go through long-term foster licensing, thereby addressing the problem of a dwindling pool of foster homes. Sanford envisions churches leading the fostel family charge. Hampered by CPS concerns over child safety and confusion over how the program would be financed, the bill failed to pass during the just-ended Texas legislative session. Sanford insists he will reintroduce it next session.
The Islamic Society of Orange County mosque in many ways reflects the prosperous heart of Southern California where it’s located. As congregants waited for a guest imam to speak, grandmothers scolded noisy children and teenagers texted on their cell phones. Two teenage girls in the women’s prayer room said their favorite pastime is shopping. Another teen called a friend, trying to convince her to dig through her closet for an abaya, a loose-fitting garment, and join her at the mosque for the fundraising talk and dinner. The women and teenagers wore abayas and hijabs, Muslim head coverings that reveal a woman’s full face, while at least four women wore niqabs, which fully covered their faces.

Men and women who gathered were awaiting Siraj Wahhaj, a popular New York imam who arrived and spoke to hundreds of Muslims at Orange County’s oldest and largest mosque. A convert to Islam known for his trademark white robes, Wahhaj personifies the challenges for Western law enforcement and other outsiders to the Muslim world—a complex and sought-after figure seen as nonviolent but who also has had ties to prominent terrorist figures.
BY JILL NELSON in Garden Grove, Calif.

photo by Ting-Li Wang/The New York Times/Redux

wrong places
Wahhaj earned celebrity status in 1987, when his New York mosque helped launch an anti-drug campaign that shut down 15 drug houses, in part by going door to door and personally confronting known drug dealers. In 1991, Wahhaj became the first Muslim to give the opening prayer before Congress.

A popular Muslim fundraiser, Wahhaj’s March trip to the Orange County mosque involved fundraising for the people of Yemen through the Muslim American Society (MAS) and Islamic Relief USA (IR-USA), one of the largest Muslim charities in the West.

Wahhaj told the story of his drug-fighting and other work, and then issued a challenge to those Muslims in attendance: “You are the servant of Allah and nothing bothers you. You fear Allah... Our job is to make this country better for real!”

Not discussed was another side to the 67-year-old imam’s story: Prosecutors identified Wahhaj as an unindicted co-conspirator in the 1993 World Trade Center (WTC) bombing. In sworn testimony Wahhaj described Omar Abdel-Rahman, the “Blind Sheik” convicted of plotting the attacks and sentenced to life in prison, as a “respected scholar.”

Wahhaj also boasts connections to Muslim Brotherhood–linked groups. He has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and has been a keynote speaker at Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) conventions. ISNA and CAIR were among 245 organizations listed as unindicted co-conspirators in a 2008 court case involving the Holy Land Foundation, an Islamic charity convicted of funding terrorism.

That trial uncovered Muslim Brotherhood documents from 1991 detailing a strategic plan for the United States that involved “a grand Jihad in eliminating and destroying the Western civilization from within” through nonviolent means. Citing evidence of ties to the terrorist group Hamas, a federal judge later rejected an appeal by CAIR and ISNA to have their names stricken from the unindicted co-conspirators list.

Wahhaj’s fundraising for IR-USA raises questions, too. The financial statements of Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW), IR-USA’s parent organization, list two contributing groups with ties to Al-Qaeda: Al-Islah and Charitable Society for Social Welfare, both in Yemen. IRW also received contributions in 2013 and 2014 from World Assembly of Muslim Youth, a Saudi-based organization that has sponsored terrorism in Bosnia, Israel, and India.

All of this is in the context of Wahhaj’s own statements. Media reports have quoted him as calling for the replacement of the Constitution with Sharia law, and he has both advocated stoning as punishment for adultery and promoted amputation for theft. The New York Police Department (NYPD) has long placed Wahhaj’s Brooklyn mosque under scrutiny because of such teaching and potential terrorism ties.

Wahhaj’s popularity in American Islamic circles comes at a time when Western governments are giving increasing attention to the Muslim Brotherhood. A government-sanctioned study in Sweden launched a nationwide debate there in March with a report stating that the Brotherhood was secretly building a parallel society within the country, a conclusion similar to that of a recent British report. In the United States, Congress will soon vote on a renewed push to call on the State Department to designate the Muslim Brotherhood a foreign terrorist organization (FTO), a measure that would have ramifications for many of the groups Wahhaj and other imams like him support.

The legislation has 46 sponsors in the U.S. House of Representatives, and Rep. Louis Gohmert, R-Texas, is optimistic about its chances for approval under a new administration. A similar measure was introduced in the Senate, launching rigorous debate over the risks and benefits of the designation. If Congress passes the legislation and President Trump signs it, the State Department will have to produce a report either agreeing or disagreeing with the FTO recommendation.

Samuel Tadros, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and expert on Islamism, says the FTO designation is too broad and unsuitable for every branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (Tunisia’s Ennahda is one example of a moderate splinter group.) And if the State Department decides against the FTO designation—which he believes would happen—the Muslim Brotherhood will claim the decision implies approval of the group. That is why Tadros prefers the path through the Treasury Department—a lengthier process but one that would “target the splinter groups and through that, build each case.” The Muslim Brotherhood branches in Egypt, Syria and Yemen are a good start.

But most analysts agree with at least the premise behind the legislation: To fight global jihad, lawmakers and officials must better identify and combat those manufacturing the Islamist ideology feeding into the movement. The question is whether prominent figures like Imam Wahhaj are quietly stoking jihadists.
A fter Wahhaj finished his fundraising appeal at ISOC, he rushed to the men’s prayer room and paused to remove his shoes, providing an opportunity to ask him if he still believes Sharia law is superior to the U.S. Constitution: “Well, that’s tricky. But generally, Sharia is for a Muslim majority country, not a non-Muslim majority.” On the Sharia death penalty for adultery, he was equally cautious: “Again, it is so far from us. They can do that in their country but not here.”

Former Muslim Brotherhood member Pierre Durrani, one of the authors of the Swedish report on the group, heard Wahhaj speak several times in the ‘90s and describes him as a “Salafi light” imam who works closely with the Brotherhood. The Swedish native says it’s “better to have the Muslim Brotherhood in the mosques than al-Qaeda,” but notes their similar ideological roots. Both desire the rebirth of a Muslim caliphate and the decline of Western civilization.

Durrani lists ways to differentiate moderates from Islamists: Look at who they invite to conferences, the literature they promote, their political ideology, and the posts they “like” on social media. “You have to triangulate the movement, and it is difficult detective work.”

The Orange County mosque hosting Wahhaj shows the difficulty. The mosque’s imam, Muzammil Siddiqi, supported former President George W. Bush for his conservative stance on social issues and made a media appearance with him just three days after 9/11. But according to a 2007 New Yorker article, Siddiqi invited Abdel-Rahman to speak at his mosque in 1992 and translated as the sheik dismissed nonviolent interpretations of jihad as weak. And Adam Gadahn—a former al-Qaeda spokesman who died in 2015 during a U.S. drone strike in Afghanistan—attended Siddiqi’s mosque in the ‘90s.

For now, Wahhaj doesn’t need to worry about much detective work around his Brooklyn mosque. New York City this year settled a 2013 discrimination lawsuit charging the NYPD with unlawful surveillance of Muslim individuals and institutions. Wahhaj’s Brooklyn mosque, Masjid At-Taqwa, was one of six plaintiffs in the case. The plaintiffs succeeded in part by deploying public relations campaigns to promote their work as mainstream, casting anyone who opposes them, including the NYPD, as Islamophobic.

According to court papers, the NYPD listed Wahhaj’s “historical ties to terrorism” as grounds for the mosque’s surveillance. It also noted evidence of “survival training” paintball exercises conducted by members of the mosque’s security team that included instruction on disarming police officers. Trainees were referred to as “jihad warriors.” As part of the settlement, the city of New York is required to pay $1.6 million to the plaintiffs and remove the anti-terror report Radicalization in the West from the NYPD’s website, despite its accuracy in predicting radicalization trends. The city’s law enforcement has prevented more than 20 terrorist attacks since 2001.

The settlement leaves the United States scrambling to find legal means to counter Islamists and their organizations. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain have declared the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist group, and the United Arab Emirates went a step further in 2014 by adding CAIR and MAS to a terrorist list that includes the Brotherhood, al-Qaeda, and Islamic State.

Supporters of an FTO designation say it would help boost the voice of moderate Muslims who are weary of Islamist organizations stealing the spotlight and evangelizing their children. A poll conducted by the Abu Dhabi Gallup Center in 2011 revealed a low level of support among American Muslims for Islamist groups in the United States: Less than 13 percent believe CAIR and ISNA represent their interests.

Rep. Gohmert said any rhetoric that promotes replacing the Constitution with Sharia law amounts to treason: “If you’re a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, then you are supporting an organization that wants to bring down the United States Constitution and create a worldwide caliphate.” “Muslims are not trying to establish Sharia law here in the United States,” Wahhaj told me as the call to prayer summoned him again in the Orange County mosque. “Trust me on that one.” This may be true for most American Muslims, but Wahhaj, like the Muslim Brotherhood and its offshoots, will need to prove—with each deadly terrorist attack abroad—he no longer stands by prior claims and connections promoting the destruction of Western values and freedoms.
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Herbs and remedies

AS TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE GROWS IN POPULARITY, CHRISTIANS MUST WEIGH THE GOOD AND THE BAD  
by Angela Lu

Growing up, visits to the Chinese medicine doctor were as familiar to me as trips to the orthodontist or pediatrician. The office in a Chinese-majority suburb of Los Angeles reeked of pungent herbal curatives, and the wheelchair-bound doctor would check my tongue, feel my pulse, and ask a strangely specific question like, “Did you wake up with a runny nose last Wednesday?” Somehow, he’d always be right.

I never allowed him to do acupuncture on me—I had a fear of needles—but I’d watch in the examination room as my mom sat perfectly still with thin needles sticking out from her arms, legs, and ears. I wasn’t completely off the hook: The doctor would send me home with herbs and roots to be brewed in a clay pot. The drink was always dark, bitter, and disgusting, and I’d need a chaser of chocolate to rid my mouth of the foul taste.

I still visited my pediatrician for checkups or when I was sick but regularly visited the Chinese medicine doctor as an add-on for minor ailments. Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is widely practiced in Eastern Asia and is becoming more popular in the West. Last summer, spectators noticed purple circles on the shoulders of swimmer Michael Phelps during

A therapist performs fire cupping on the back of a local resident in Tianjin, China.
the Olympics—the result of cupping, a TCM therapy used to relieve muscle pain.

But Christians have debated whether to partake in TCM, which has roots in Taoism. While some aspects of TCM have clearly spiritual dimensions, others such as herbal medicine and acupuncture are not necessarily spiritual in nature and can help alleviate chronic pain. One Chinese-American missionary even uses acupuncture to make gospel inroads in Southeast Asian villages.

Many doctors believe Christians are free to participate in TCM practices that are disassociated from religious beliefs. Indiana doctor Mark Freije, who is part of the Christian Medical and Dental Associations and has visited a TCM hospital in China, said acupuncture itself doesn’t cross a line. But if the practitioner prescribes meditation or delves into “yin-yang philosophy, we should be wary of that.”

Dating from the first century B.C., TCM was based in the belief that everything in the universe can be divided into opposing forces, the yin and the yang, and that balance between the two is needed to maintain a healthy body. Each person has qi or energy that flows through the body along channels called meridians. According to TCM, pains and various diseases occur when the qi’s flow is blocked, and needles pricked at acupuncture points along the meridian can help regulate the flow and diminish the pain.

Researchers have yet to find a scientific explanation for how acupuncture works. A 2010 study by the University of California, Irvine, argued the needles could be stimulating underlying neural pathways to bring about pain relief. Studies have found acupuncture can ease chronic pains and reduce headaches, yet the National Institutes of Health noted the effects of acupuncture are little understood and that the placebo effect may play a role.

Samuel Cheung, a licensed Chinese medicine doctor and missionary, believes acupuncture and herbal medicine do not have innately spiritual components and are “just like getting a shot or taking a pill.” Secular TCM practitioners agree: The late Dr. Felix Mann, a British acupuncturist, told the U.K.’s Christian Medical Fellowship he believed the ancient Chinese found a way to treat patients that worked empirically and then created an explanation for it using their cultural beliefs.

Still, Cheung stays away from certain areas of TCM because of his Christian faith. For instance, he rejects the Taoist belief of yin and yang as well as qi gong, a TCM exercise and meditation technique.

In a case study published during a 2000 Lausanne Movement conference in Nairobi, a former qi gong master told of how his deep involvement in the technique healed him of rheumatism and enabled him to heal others and even engage in telepathy. Yet he said those supernatural powers came from demonic spirits who eventually enslaved him and commanded him to jump out a window. He was freed only after professing faith in Christ.

Cheung, who worked in the Western medical field for 25 years before becoming a missionary in Central and Southeast Asia, decided to learn TCM because he felt it would be a useful tool in his ministry. Many rural areas lacked the infrastructure for medical teams to haul heavy loads of equipment and medicine, but the only equipment needed for acupuncture are needles.

So at age 60, Cheung got a master’s degree in TCM in Los Angeles and returned to Asia, where he set up acupuncture clinics in rural villages and helped train more than 100 seminary students in the practice. Typically villagers would start out skeptical of acupuncture, but warm to it as they saw results.

In one Cambodian village, Cheung set up a clinic at a small church with only 10 congregants. The pastor and his wife faced hostility from the non-Christian villagers, who sometimes threw rocks at the couple. Yet as Cheung and his team helped locals deal with their physical pain, they started to view the church and its pastor in a different light. A year later, the church had 60 attendees.

“[Acupuncture] changes people’s attitude toward the gospel and God,” concluded Cheung. “It helps pastors make friends with the villagers.”
The first generation of cell phones provided only analog voice communication. Second-generation technology brought digital networks and texting capability. Third-generation networks let us view email and web pages. Today’s fourth-generation (4G) cellular networks can handle streaming audio and video.

But as an ever-increasing number of mobile users and the demand for data strain the capacity of 4G networks, telecommunications companies are planning the next generation of wireless technology—5G—that will carry more traffic at higher speeds. The result should move wireless networks closer to the capacities of fiber optic home internet.

Telecommunications providers are shooting for 5G download speeds of as much as 20 gigabits per second (Gbps), compared with a maximum of about 1 Gbps on 4G networks. They predict latency—delays in sending data packets—will drop from 70 milliseconds to 1 millisecond. Such blazingly fast networks would allow users to download a full-length high-definition movie in less than a second, compared with about 10 minutes on a 4G network, according to IEEE Spectrum.

But to handle the increase in user demand, 5G networks will have to use more of the radio frequency spectrum. All the traffic carried by today’s networks is crowded into a very narrow band of the radio spectrum just below 6 gigahertz. More and more users sharing the same slice of the spectrum leads to slower and less reliable service.

To solve this problem, 5G networks will likely use “millimeter wave” technology, which uses a much higher frequency range of the radio spectrum, between 30 and 300 gigahertz. Such high frequencies allow massive increases in bandwidth, but unlike current Wi-Fi signals, millimeter waves can’t travel through big obstacles such as buildings. So instead of large cell towers, 5G networks will use a dense infrastructure of thousands of small, low-power antennas placed on buildings throughout urban areas.

So when will 5G technology be available? The first official 5G launches could come as early as next year, with broad deployment in 2019, according to PCMag. You’ll have to buy a new 5G-capable phone, but equipment manufacturers already have 5G chips in the pipeline for U.S. smartphones. You may see 5G phones on sale within two years.

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**SPEEDY BATTERY**

With electric vehicles becoming more commonplace, charging stations have expanded as well. The U.S. Energy Department’s Alternative Fuels Data Center website lists 16,000 electric vehicle charging stations across the country.

Charging station availability may relieve electric vehicle owners’ anxieties about batteries dying on a long trip, but it doesn’t address another key drawback to electric automobiles: long charging times. Most electric vehicles take hours to fully charge at a standard charging station. Yet what if charging your electric vehicle was about as quick as a standard gasoline fill-up? StoreDot, an Israeli startup, believes it has found such a solution with a car battery it claims can fully charge in just five minutes with a range of 300 miles.

Current lithium-ion batteries can’t be charged too quickly because they can overheat and their electrodes wear out sooner. **StoreDot’s battery**, using proprietary nanomaterials and organic compounds, not only charges quickly but is safer than lithium-ion because it’s not flammable, the company claims.

“Fast charging is the critical missing link needed to make electric vehicles ubiquitous,” said Doron Myersdorf, the CEO of StoreDot. The company demonstrated the technology, still under development, in May at a Berlin technology fair. —M.C.
Swine-borne virus?

RESEARCHERS WONDER WHETHER TO BLAME PIGS FOR LATEST EBOLA OUTBREAK by Julie Borg

Are pigs spreading Ebola? Researchers are investigating the possibility. The latest Ebola outbreak was confirmed in a remote region of the northern Democratic Republic of Congo in mid-May, and around the same time, 84 pigs died in eight nearby villages. Officials learned that the first man to contract the virus was a hunter who had been in contact with a wild boar carcass.

The World Health Organization had confirmed five human cases of Ebola as of June 8 and was looking into three other probable cases. Four of those people had died. If pigs can indeed transmit Ebola, it adds new complexity to international efforts to stop the highly contagious and deadly disease.

Fabian Leendertz, a disease expert at the Robert Koch Institute in Berlin, told Science magazine he doubts the Congo pigs carried Ebola. Pig deaths are not unusual in Congo, where diseases such as African swine fever often wipe out large numbers. But scientists cannot entirely discount the possibility of Ebola infecting pigs. Science in 2009 reported that researchers in the Philippines found an Ebola strain in sick pigs. Although the strain has not been known to sicken humans, some of the pig farmers had antibodies to the virus, indicating they had come in contact with it.

And in 2011, according to the magazine, a team of scientists in Winnipeg discovered that “Ebola Zaire,” the strain found in both the current outbreak and the 2014-2016 outbreak in West Africa, can infect pigs in a lab and easily transmits between pigs sharing the same housing. Researchers later discovered the virus could also pass through the air from pigs to monkeys—leaving open the possibility that it might pass on to humans in the same way.

TUMOR TREATMENT

For the first time, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved a cancer treatment that is based on a genetic feature of the cancer rather than on the bodily location where it originated.

The drug, Keytruda, targets a type of solid tumor with genetic abnormalities that impede DNA repair inside cells. These tumors most often occur in colorectal, endometrial, and gastrointestinal cancers. In clinical trials of the drug involving 149 patients, tumors shrank or disappeared in nearly 40 percent of patients.

Dung Le, an oncologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg-Kimmel Institute for Cancer Immunotherapy, told MIT Technology Review that about 4 percent of all advanced cancers—up to 30,000 patients a year in the United States—have the genetic characteristics that Keytruda could treat. —J.B.
Donald Trump’s approval rating may be falling to record lows, but not among his backers. It doesn’t seem to matter what news comes out: turmoil among our allies, the Comey testimony, a dysfunctional White House. If you voted for Trump in November, polls show you are almost certain still to view him favorably. That is what is keeping him in power and out of danger of impeachment or a forced resignation.

This makes evangelical Christians incredibly important to him. The 2016 exit poll showed that he received a record high 81 percent of evangelical Christians’ votes, higher than Mitt Romney or even George W. Bush received. That in turn means that nearly half of his votes came from evangelicals. Lose them, and he begins to lose his grip on power.

Thus it was that in the midst of James Comey’s testimony in early June, President Trump made a scheduled speech to Ralph Reed’s evangelical-dominated Faith & Freedom Coalition conference. Telling attendees “we are under siege,” Trump promised to fight for religious freedom and immigration reduction and fight against Islamic terrorism. In short, he repledged his support for the evangelical community’s policy priorities.

It’s surely this siege mentality, the idea that any port is good in a storm, that accounts for the continued overwhelming support among evangelicals for the president. That drowns out the other news that in other times would surely have hurt the president among evangelicals.

Character used to be a big priority for evangelicals. Character concerns supposedly headlined their opposition to Bill Clinton and underlined their support for George W. Bush. As recently as 2011, only 30 percent of evangelicals said that a president who commits an immoral act in private life could fulfill his public commitments. By 2016, that number had risen to 72 percent.

These data suggest that character mattered until it didn’t. Which either means that character never really mattered at all, that it was always a cudgel to use in a partisan battle, or that the stakes are so high now that the faithful must look aside to obtain political salvation.

This tension will not go away for evangelicals during this presidency. Trump’s behavior in the Oval Office suggests that one will always question whether he tells the truth, that Trump will always treat subordinates in secretive and shockingly poor ways, that he will demand people give him their loyalty over fidelity to their conscience. The question evangelical Christians must ask is whether they are making the right choice.

Rumor has it that a second Supreme Court vacancy will open up after the current court term concludes in June. If true, whoever steps down is likely to be someone who has sided with court liberals on abortion or marriage issues in the recent past. Trump’s appointment of Neil Gorsuch met with strong acclaim, but was safely made in the knowledge that it would not change the court’s direction, since Gorsuch was replacing the late Justice Antonin Scalia. The next appointment will likely matter a lot.

Evangelicals will then see whether a man who tells them he loves them will remain committed when the storm hits. A port is only safe in a storm if the harbormaster keeps the ships tightly tied to the dock. Pray Trump doesn’t set them loose.

—Henry Olsen is a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center

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Boys against girls

TRANSGENDER VICTORIES RAISE QUESTIONS OF FAIRNESS IN GIRLS’ SPORTS by Ray Hacke

Transgender athletes are beginning to displace biological girls as state champions—or at least coming close—in high-school girls’ sports.

Two transgender athletes, runner Andraya Yearwood of Connecticut and wrestler Mack Beggs of Texas, garnered national attention after capturing state titles in 2017. A third, Nattaphon Wangyot, placed among the top five in two girls’ races at Alaska’s 2016 state track and field meet.

Most state athletic associations strive to accommodate transgender athletes in some way, and some states’ laws require it. Still, many have yet to figure out how to do that while ensuring that competition remains fair for biologically female athletes.

Connecticut’s is among them. Yearwood, a biologically male sprinter who has competed as a girl since April, won the girls’ 100- and 200-meter titles at Connecticut’s state track meet for mid-sized schools in late May. Yearwood’s times would have placed him last in the boys’ 100 and 200.

Yearwood did not undergo hormone therapy to compete as a girl, and did not have to: Connecticut’s governing body for high-school sports, like Alaska’s, lets individual school districts decide who can compete as male and female. Should Yearwood, a freshman, not begin transitioning—and thereby suppressing bodily testosterone levels—he will likely win more girls’ state titles as he becomes taller, stronger, and presumably faster.

There is some logic behind not requiring young transgender athletes to undergo hormone treatments: “We feel like students shouldn’t have to transition until they’re postadolescent,” explained Billy Strickland, the Alaska State Activities Association’s executive director: “We don’t want to force someone into a lifelong medical decision when they’re 14 years old.”

Transgender athletes’ feelings, however, should not be the sole determining factor in their gender classifications. Ohio, for instance, requires boys who have not undergone hormone treatments but wish to play on girls’ teams to prove, via medical evidence, that they do not possess significant physical advantages over similarly aged biological girls. Maine has an approval process that considers competitive balance and safety for other student athletes, and Oregon requires girls who begin transitioning to compete exclusively as boys throughout high school.

Maintaining fairness in girls’ sports while respecting transgender athletes’ dignity is thus a balance that state governing bodies can and should strike. Otherwise, states’ girls’ champions will more frequently be boys.

—Ray Hacke is a graduate of the World Journalism Institute mid-career course

COURT BATTLE

In response to Australian tennis legend Margaret Court’s vocal opposition to same-sex marriage, some of the sport’s past and present stars are demanding that the Australian Open no longer have a court named after Margaret.

Court, a 74-year-old pastor, won a record 24 Grand Slam singles titles in the 1960s and ’70s. Australian Open officials honored her achievements in 2003 by rechristening one of its showcase stadiums Margaret Court Arena.

Court has spoken out against same-sex marriage since 2012. However, some of tennis’s other big names volleyed back in the wake of Court’s statement in late May that she would boycott Qantas, Australia’s national airline, due to its support of same-sex marriage. Retired women’s great Martina Navratilova, who is gay, and reigning Wimbledon men’s champion Andy Murray have both called on Aussie Open officials to rename the arena that bears Court’s name.

Another tennis legend, John McEnroe, proposed a trade-off: “Keep the name, and when same-sex marriage becomes legal in Australia, I will personally call my good friend Elton John to host the biggest same-sex mass wedding ceremony ever seen in Margaret Court Arena.” —R.H.
With the GOP promising a “repeal and replace” of Obamacare, all eyes have turned to the U.S. Senate. The House passed a repeal-and-replace bill, the American Health Care Act, on May 4, and while the Senate is widely expected to make adjustments to the House plan, the reconciliation process gives senators a path to repeal and replace that requires only 51 votes, versus the 60 normally needed to prevent a filibuster.

One thing worrying advocates of this repeal-and-replace plan is that Senate votes could be swayed by the dire forecasts of the Congressional Budget Office. The CBO is a nonpartisan group whose job is to “score” various legislative proposals and predict their numerical impacts. CBO projections are known to scare some senators away on certain votes, and they also are known to provide cover for senators looking for a fiscal stamp of approval. That’s true whether the legislation be a spending bill, a tax proposal, or something more complex, like this healthcare legislation.

The Congressional Budget Office has forecast an additional 23 million uninsured Americans by 2026 if the House bill becomes law. It is ironic that such dire projections from the CBO could threaten a repeal and replace of Obamacare, since it was the CBO’s rosy projections about Obamacare that allowed the 2010 healthcare overhaul to pass in the first place. The office’s original projection was that 23 million Americans would have signed up on the exchanges by now, a figure nearly double that of the actual 12 million enrollment. Perhaps it was just too hard to project with accuracy seven years in advance?

Fair enough, but just last year the CBO projected 15 million enrollments on the exchange, a figure still 25 percent higher than the actual total proved to be. In its scoring of the present legislation, the CBO is not only going out 10 years to make its projection, despite a woeful record in both short- and long-term projections, but it is completely ignoring the waivers the new bill allows all 50 states to claim from certain parts of Obamacare. Each state could end up with a totally different mix of results, creating a landscape that makes enrollment projections impossible. In other words, there is no scientific way for the CBO to accurately forecast the bill’s effects.

Ironically, the same CBO report that predicted the House plan would leave 23 million additional Americans without insurance also scored the bill to be a deficit reducer (to the tune of $119 billion), a tax reducer (by just shy of $1 trillion), and a spending reducer (by well over $1 trillion over 10 years through the elimination of subsidies). These parts of the CBO projections apparently did not warrant much media coverage.

The CBO itself doesn’t deserve criticism for its consistent missing of the mark with things very difficult to predict. The nonpartisanship of the CBO is not really at question: The sheer viability of its task is.

But senators who let CBO reports dictate their vote deserve criticism, given the office’s historical track record and the impossibility of its objective.
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‘Taking prisoners’

MAY 13  Let’s hope that while President Donald Trump’s officials are publicly praising and working with China’s President Xi Jinping to take positive steps on North Korea, they are privately raising real concerns about the jailing of Americans, Christians, and human rights workers.

—STEVEN ARNOLD on wng.org

‘Under Big Brother’s eye’

MAY 13  Government cameras in churches? What a concept. This is an amazing opportunity to share the gospel with the Chinese government. When can American churches sign up?

—TODD TAYLOR / Riverside, Calif.

‘Wielding words’

MAY 13  I read Joel Belz’s column just as I finished former Fox News anchor Megyn Kelly’s book in which she touches on the network’s long-standing sleaziness. Perfect timing.

—PETER KUSHKOWSKI / Portland, Conn.

Belz asked for a word to describe Fox News instead of sleazy: fallen.

—JEFF DICKERSON / Morton, Ill.

The words that came to my mind were postmodern, carnal, and worldly. What can we expect of a business that majors in sensationalism?

—PHIL BLYCKER / Edinburg, Texas

“Sexually provocative” captures the image of Fox News.

—CARL R. JOHNSON / Bremerton, Wash.

“Sleazy” was an acceptable adjective given what we knew in August about Fox executives’ treatment of women. Today “fetid” is a better choice.

—CRAIG A. WHITE / Costa Mesa, Calif.

I am not a big Bill O’Reilly fan, but I would use words like “sleazy” very carefully. O’Reilly may be guilty, or perhaps the accusations are just an attempt to assassinate the character of a decent man who spoke his mind. We don’t know all the facts yet.

—KENNETH E. ISGRIGG / Valley Lee, Md.

‘The ISIS hostage crisis’

MAY 13  I really enjoy Mindy Belz’s articles about Iraq. I recently returned from a trip there to rebuild bomb-damaged homes. The ISIS crisis is opening the door for us to show Christ through love and compassion to those in need.

—BRANDON MILLER / LaGrange, Ind.

Mindy Belz’s long experience in the Middle East provides a breadth of understanding and Christian reflection I’m not getting anywhere else. She enables her readers’ hearts to share in the feelings of the people she meets, old friends, and those seeking to help.

—DWIGHT DOLBY / Venice, Fla.

Thank you for your article, but you didn’t mention that most of the Christians are Assyrians or Chaldeans, who are dying as people groups. I am Assyrian and my family fled Iraq and Iran. To label them simply as Christians doesn’t address our distinct cultural, language, and religious concerns.

—JOEL T. BADAL / Indianapolis, Ind.

‘From bad to worse’

MAY 13  It’s hard for those of us who grew up watching Lucy and Ricky Ricardo sleeping in twin beds to see the exponential growth in sexual and violent content on TV. The low wall between network and cable standards has been breached.

—ELAINE NEUMEYER / Seacrest, Fla.

Great article. The days of the family gathered around the living room TV watching TGIF are long gone. We need to teach our kids discernment and control, including what they consume on the screens in their hands.

—KEITH RUSSELL / Superior, Wis.

Being “in” but not “of” the world continues to be a challenge for all believers. Marvin Olasky’s rationale for covering movies and television, as he explained again on your website (“FAQ: Reviewing coarse cultural products,” May 3), is what appealed to me when a friend sent me a gift subscription a couple of years ago.

—RON E. TARLTON / Marietta, Ga.

“Trauma-filled city”

MAY 13  Nothing will solve the crime problems in Baltimore or any other city without the gospel of Jesus Christ. Young men must commit to becoming faithful fathers and husbands. Boys need fathers as role models to steer them from a life of crime and violence.

—PHILLIP WOECKENER / Tallahassee, Fla.

Where there is fear of God and the authority He ordained in governments and homes, there is the acceptance of
personal responsibility and the possibility of forgiveness.
—R. WAYNE ANDERSEN on wng.org

‘Pointing out potholes’
MAY 13 I admire Andrée Seu Peterson’s honesty in refusing to minimize the sins of her younger years. In saying that she “just believed my way was superior at obtaining what I wanted out of life,” she spoke for us all. Who but a redeemed one could be so candid?
—TRACY NELSON / Burnsville, Minn.

‘Singles and doubles’
MAY 13 I don’t know what Tim Tebow’s baseball future holds, but this article is a home run. I admire Tebow’s courage and approach.
—T. WILLIAMS on wng.org

‘Airliner alternative’
MAY 13 I hope I live long enough to see cheap flights on electric aircraft a reality. At age 67 and 400 miles from my family of origin, this would be a dream come true.
—ARIETTA C. WATSON / Atlanta, Ga.

‘Nuremberg now’
MAY 13 Why spoil a good column on the lessons of Nuremberg with derogatory comments about a border wall and “scuffles about irrelevant pundits”? Your dismissal of the wall shows your tone deafness to an issue of great concern to many Americans, and the threat of violence at Berkeley is symptomatic of a much greater problem.
—IGOR SHPUDEJKO / Goodyear, Ariz.

‘Power and purpose’
MAY 13 Missing from this column, which discusses whether American military intervention in other countries “makes it worse,” is any mention of Vietnam or Iraq. Those two certainly didn’t work out as planned.
—CARL PRICHARD / Tampa, Fla.

Corrections
Singapore’s mandatory health savings account is called Medisave (“Negative diagnosis,” April 15).
Lt. Carwile was in the truck commander seat (“‘Tell me they’re fine, tell me they’re hurt, tell me they’re dead, but tell me something!’” May 27).

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You have heard of being in love. Have you heard of being in hate? People who are in love generally know they are in love. People who are in hate, not so.

People in love are emotional and realize it. People in hate think they have never been so rational.

We speak of being in love as a state. One can often identify the onset of the condition (and sometimes the expiration of it). We say of a starry-eyed couple, “They are in love.” It is an acknowledgment that something real has overtaken their brains.

There is no comparable common expression for people in hate, because few acknowledge that hate is mind-altering.

But it is. Scripture gives a host of examples. Here we learn that hate invades the mind of its practitioner in very particular ways. Cain hated his brother, and it was suicidal. God tries to rescue him by posing searching questions: “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? ... sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it” (Genesis 4:6-7). Cain will not have it. As Screwtape observes, “There is always something they insist on keeping, even at the price of misery” (C.S. Lewis).

So consumed with hatred for the children of Israel is Pharaoh that he destroys his own country trying to harm them, crying, “Victory!” as he staggers, mud-splattered, son-bereft, and half insane, among the wreckage. His descent from reason to bestiality alarms even the royal court, who had joined him at first but disembarked from obsession a few exits earlier when they discerned the hand of God: “Do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?” (Exodus 10:7).

Haman’s hatred led him to a noose of his own making (Esther). Absalom was not the same man right after Tamar’s rape as two years later, when hate had bored like a cankerworm into his soul. It issued in the murder of his brother Amnon—with Absalom’s own royal aspirations also the casualty (2 Samuel 13).

People who are in hate don’t know what they have lost. What they have lost is their very humanity. Micro-choice by micro-choice it sees away—like Pinocchio and his friends, who begin to sprout donkey ears, a tail, and hideous guffaws unawares, as the wages of debauchery; like the depraved man of whom the Scripture says, “gray hairs are sprinkled upon him, and he knows it not” (Hosea 7:9). He imagines himself to be still his old vigorous self—physically, mentally, and spiritually. But he is deluded. He thinks of hate, “I got this!” Hate says of him, “I got this!”

In the final, drawing room scene of the 2001 movie Conspiracy about the fateful Wannsee Conference of Jan. 20, 1942, that produced the “final solution” for the problem of European Jewry, Gen. Reinhard Heydrich relates to two other SS officers a story told him by Friedrich Kritzinger during the break:

There was a man who loved his mother fiercely but hated his father. The mother had always been kind, but the father had been cruel. When his mother died, at the funeral the man tried to cry but could not. The father lived much longer, but when he finally withered away at an old age, the man was inconsolable.

“I don’t understand,” said one of the officers. “No?” said Heydrich. “The man had been driven all his life by hatred. When the mother died, that was a loss. When the hate had lost its object—then the man’s life was empty, over. ... That was Kritzinger’s warning.” “What? That we should not hate the Israelites?” “No, that it should not so fill our lives that when they are gone we have nothing left to live for.”

Our politics in America have become hate-driven. But there will be a cost for those who practice it: “Whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes” (1 John 2:11).

This is no analogy or metaphor, but the actual condition of the person “in hate.” It robs the sight of him who wields it.
The bigger news
LET’S NOT GET SO ABSORBED IN D.C. THAT WE IGNORE LIFE AND DEATH OUTSIDE HEARING ROOMS

As Washington newshounds wondered whether the Trump administration will crash, the June 19 issue of Current Biology unveiled a new study about the eyes and brains of unborn babies that should ratchet up the pressure on those committed to aborting a million of them each year.

Let’s back up a moment to explain. Charles Darwin wrote in 1859 as if cells were stackable blocks of wood rather than the intricate factories we now know they are. The Roe v. Wade decision in 1973 was the great-great-grandson of On the Origin of Species: It disregarded the origin of babies and decreed it legal in every state to treat unborn children as if they were Lego blocks.

Doctors then knew, and through ultrasounds we now all know, what Psalm 139 teaches: In our mothers’ wombs we are “fearfully and wonderfully made.”

Christians should never be anti-science: That’s especially true now, as science affirms Biblical truth in so many ways. Steve Meyer notes in Signature in the Cell and Darwin’s Doubt that discoveries are dooming Darwinism. Other studies—unborn babies moving their lips to sounds they hear, and choosing to watch lights that look like faces—should doom abortion lobby attempts to dehumanize them.

The June 19 journal article by Lancaster University’s Vincent Reid and his associates noted that the womb is not the dark place we often imagine it to be. It’s more like a room on a sunny afternoon with thin shades drawn: We probably cannot read, but we can still see. With mothers hooked up to top-notch 4-D ultrasound machines, researchers projected patterns of dots through the uterine wall and found that 39 third-trimester unborn babies were more likely to turn their heads toward facelike shapes than other shapes.

Bumper stickers rightly proclaim that abortion stops a beating heart, and we increasingly understand that it also stops a processing brain: As the Current Biology article proclaims, “Work on prenatal visual development suggests that visual perceptual capacities are analogous to newborn functionality well before term.” In other words, some may snicker at the tradition in eastern Mongolia of determining age by the number of full moons since conception for girls and the number of new moons since conception for boys, but counting a newborn as 9 months old is right.

Other studies show unborn babies bonding to the sounds of their moms. Responsiveness increases late in pregnancy, but researchers have found arm and leg movements beginning as soon as the ninth week after conception. By the end of the first trimester babies are reaching their hands toward their faces, eyes, and mouths, as if to quench doubts about whether they really exist. But some of this understanding is not new. The title of one journal article in 1986: “Prenatal maternal speech influences newborn’s perception of speech sounds.”

From such research two takeaways emerge. Pro-choice people tend to focus on what this means for babies their parents have chosen for survival. The Atlantic recently reported a 1980 experiment in which pregnant women “read The Cat in the Hat to their fetuses, again and again for the last 7 weeks of their pregnancies. As soon as the babies were born, [researchers] DeCasper and Fifer gave them pacifiers. The babies could then choose to hear a recording of either The Cat in the Hat or a different children’s story, by sucking at different times. And they sucked for the cat.”

1980—and yet every year from 1980 to 1991, U.S. abortionists killed about 1.6 million unborn children. Some would argue that most of those 1.6 million were first- or second-trimester deaths of those who could not yet recognize The Cat in the Hat—but several months’ patience, while a great virtue, is not too much to ask. It may seem too much to a young mother dumped by her boyfriend and left largely alone, but that’s why all of us should participate in or support the work of pregnancy resource centers. The same goes for efforts to promote adoption and to help single moms, and to help them get married, once children are born.

Now, thanks be to God and His servants, the enormity isn’t as great, yet we still have on our hands the blood of nearly a million children each year, and we still need to be pro-life and pro-science.
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