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DISASTERS:
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Beijing, 1989
N.C., 2018
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ON THE COVER: Photo illustration by Krieg Barrie; original photo by Syldavia/iStock
Notes from the CEO

We receive a lot of feedback from WORLD members and others who use the content we produce. Some of it comes via social-media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. It can come from anyone who wants to say something, and the tone of the comments reflects the unfiltered and often anonymous environment social-media enables.

In other words, the better part of wisdom oftentimes is not to take those comments too seriously.

We also receive feedback in the form of comments on our website. Those may come in “the heat of the moment,” but because comments are limited to logged-in members, we take them much more seriously. We don’t respond to comments on our website, because we view that space as a place for our members to interact with one another—but we do pay attention.

By the way, I am almost always encouraged to see the respectful way our members engage one another, even in disagreement.

What really gets our attention, even more so than the comments on our website, are the letters and emails you send us. We are thankful for those, even when you are highly critical of our work. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, after all. Almost always, you are writing to edify and encourage us.

Our goal is to respond to your letters and emails, because we do take them seriously and we are thankful for them. Our goal is to respond to everything, even if we sometimes fail or something slips through the cracks. I know I’ve failed to respond on several occasions, and I have been slow to respond on many occasions, always because of my own disorganization (don’t take it personally!).

But your letters always get our attention. We read all of them, so please keep sending them.
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It was one of those once-in-a-thousand-years things—at least not supposed to happen more than once in a lifetime.

But now it had happened twice. Indeed, for the second time in 25 years, the sober question posed by the prophet Isaiah suggested an altogether ill-fitting response. “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast,” Isaiah asked, “and have no compassion on the child she has borne?”

For the second time in 25 years, within an hour’s drive of my office, a young mother had brutally proven Isaiah wrong. Just 25 years ago, Susan Smith had stunned the nation when she deliberately drowned her two young sons by strapping them in their car seats and rolling them into a lake. Now, police said that Krista Madden, a mother here in Asheville with a troubled background not that different from Susan Smith’s, had wrapped her 7-week-old daughter in a thin blanket and pitched her down a steep ravine in a hard-to-access wooded area. There she was left to die.

“How could she?” we ask. But we flatter ourselves. Isaiah’s point was actually very different. We tend to truncate the quote from the prophet because we like to think better of ourselves than we ought to think. It may be comforting to distance ourselves from the Susan Smiths of this world, but it’s ultimately dishonest to do so.

For Isaiah didn’t stop where I stopped. “Though she may forget,” he reminded us soberly, relaying God’s words, “I will not forget you.” Only God is faithful. The rest of us are untrustworthy Susans.

Too harsh, you say?

Not if you consider seriously what’s been happening day after day, month after month, and year after year throughout our grisly society. You just can’t help comparing these headline grabbers with the champions of abortion rights in “clinics” all over the nation. No, this isn’t just another desperate attempt to discover some distant, dark, and theoretical linkage. The nexus is too real and the imagery too vivid for anyone to ignore.

Thousands of times every single day in North America, babies who enjoy the snug security of their mothers’ wombs are stunned to have that warm comfort interrupted by a violence even more repugnant than that inflicted on the three children I’ve already mentioned. Of course it’s terrifying to think of deliberate death by drowning or desertion. But how is it different in kind from death by chemicals or dissection?

Can a mother forget? The painful answer from Isaiah is that, yes, mothers of small children can and sometimes do forfeit their God-given propensity for serving as a small child’s last line of defense against violence. It should be an exceptional occurrence, and Isaiah implies that in normal, God-fearing cultures, it is.

But ours is less and less a God-fearing culture. For the last couple of generations, we’ve bent over backward to make it the norm rather than the exception for a mother to turn a chilly heart toward her own baby. When we do that, we’ve got no business acting surprised when we suddenly discover another Susan Smith.

Ever since the Fall in the Garden of Eden, we’ve selfishly wanted it both ways. We’ve wanted to eat the forbidden fruit and still live forever. We’ve wanted to have it all now, and also to have it later. To “have your cake and eat it too” was a notion unknown before the Fall, but common afterward.

Now, bluntly, we want to be able to kill our invisible babies, and still pretend that we’re a genteel and humane society. We want to be able to be compassionate with every woman who chooses an abortion and still to shake our heads in surprised disbelief when we hear of yet another Susan Smith.

But in God’s scheme of things, the simple erasure of such boundaries isn’t possible. That’s why He set flaming angels at the gates to the Garden of Eden when He banished Adam and Eve. He knew how hard they would try to go back and forth between the two kingdoms. He also knew how hard we, as their fallen children, would try to do the same thing.

But then, along comes another Susan Smith to remind us that God is not mocked. In the recent Asheville case, that 7-week-old baby girl was rescued before succumbing to the elements. Whether the nation where she lives also gets part of that is another matter.
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Health workers carry a coffin containing a victim of the Ebola virus to a burial plot in Butembo, Democratic Republic of Congo. More than 1,200 people in three countries have died in the current Ebola crisis in Africa, and health workers have also faced violence from armed groups in the unstable area of the outbreak.

JOHN WESSELS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES
Congratulations to the legislatures and governors of Alabama, Georgia, Ohio, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, and other states. Congratulations to Donald Trump, who has surprisingly spoken with clarity about what the left would obfuscate: He said accurately that a baby now can be “ripped from the mother’s womb moments from birth.”

The uneasiness of the left about new personhood and heartbeat laws is evident in the mid-May reactions of two New Yorkers: the wise guy named Stephen Colbert, and the newspaper that some readers consider the wisest, The New York Times.

Colbert last year told an interviewer that on one of his nervous days he flipped through a gift Bible and read Matthew 6:27, which asks, “Which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?” Colbert said he immediately read the rest of the Sermon on the Mount and returned to his childhood Catholicism.

Sadly, Colbert apparently did not back up three verses to Matthew 6:24, which notes, “No one can serve two masters, for... he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.” Colbert had to decide on May 15 whom he would serve: A liberal audience looking for yucks, or the truth (scientific and Biblical) that the preborn child is a human being.

Colbert on May 15 chose worldly popularity in a seven-minute run of bad jokes I won’t repeat here: They’re all over the internet. The audience laughed and Colbert smirked, but did I imagine that both were nervous? I disagree theologically with Roman Catholicism but respect Catholics, and you have to hope that Colbert knows better and is better than he showed. “You’re gonna have to serve somebody,” the Bible teaches and Bob Dylan sang.

Many reporters now serve false gods. Many have a simple job description—bury information the left doesn’t want us to have—but New York Times reporter Jeremy Peters acknowledged that the blackout is not succeeding: “With grisly claims that Democrats promote ‘birth day abortions’ and are ‘the party of death,’ the Republican Party and its conservative allies have aggressively reset the terms [of the abortion debate]… Surveys conducted for progressive groups in recent weeks found that more than half of Americans were aware of [Trump’s] ‘infanticide’ claims.”

Astoundingly, Peters gave the last word—I can’t remember the last time the Times did this—to a pro-life woman, Charmaine Yoest: “Democratic politicians constantly misunderstand the disconnect between their position and where the American people are…. People want abortion restrictions. And the more you reveal about the other side’s extremism, the more people say, ‘Wait a minute, I don’t support that.’"

While American media were giving pro-lifers more attention, Global Times, one of China’s government-run newspapers, was calling 13.5 million Chinese “untrustworthy.” Now, everything from not paying city fines, to changing jobs with “malicious intent,” to worshipping God rather than the Communist Party, can leave Chinese citizens with low “social credit” scores and unable to buy a high-speed rail or airplane ticket. Those with low scores must have ringtones on their phones that warn...
others a deplorable is in their midst. The eventual goal is to “allow the trustworthy to roam everywhere under heaven while making it hard for the discredited to take a single step.”

Back in the USA, the College Board announced it will assign each student who takes the SAT an “adversity score” calculated on the basis of 15 factors including housing prices and single-parent frequency in a student’s high school and neighborhood. The adversity scores will be based on group identity rather than individual situations: Students won’t be told their scores, but college admission officers will.

China’s social scores and the College Board’s adversity scores are different, but they both try to quantify qualities. In China, the malignant goal is to punish people who practice “uncivilized behavior.” In America the attempt is benevolent but the instrument is blunt: One high school may draw from many different areas, and students may come from loving or cruel homes.

Of course, lots of students will be better off if they don’t go through the university propaganda courses that are typical on both sides of the Pacific. In this college commencement season, it’s worth looking at online syllabi such as the one for Chad Shomura’s course on “American Political Thought” at the University of Colorado Denver. You won’t find anything from James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, or modern political theorists other than those on the radical left. You will find a promise to have class discussion about “big issues and tough questions” but on the same page a vow that “homophobic,” “colonialist,” and other points of view “lack intellectual merit and have no place in class.”

And some merry month of May good news: The leftist Salon.com, which 20 years ago had a valuation of $107 million, is now on sale for $5 million. The number of euthanasia cases in the killing zone pioneer, the Netherlands, dropped for the first time since 2006: The 7 percent decline (from 6,685 in 2017 to 6,126 in 2018) still meant 4 percent of all Dutch fatalities last year were supposedly “happy deaths.”

### BY THE NUMBERS

**23.1 million**

The number of missing baby girls around the world from 1970 to 2017 due to sex-selective abortions. A new *PNAS* study of the sex ratio imbalance found most missing female births occurred in China and India.

**$85,889**

The average teacher salary in New York—the highest in the United States—according to National Education Association estimates. Mississippi paid teachers $45,574 on average.

**1.7**

The number of children the average American woman will bear in her lifetime at current rates. Preliminary government figures released in May found that last year’s U.S. total fertility rate was 1,728 births per 1,000 women, an all-time low.

**16 pounds**

The weight of the 2-foot-tall golden crown used in the May 4 coronation of Thailand’s new King Maha Vajiralongkorn.

**$29,800**

The average debt balance held by U.S. college students who graduated in 2018 with the help of student loans.
Died

**Doris Day**, actress and singer, died on May 13 at age 97. Day, born Doris Kappelhoff in 1922, changed her name before launching her career in the big band era with Les Brown and His Band of Renown. Her first hit with the band was “Sentimental Journey” in 1945. She later signed a solo contract with Columbia Records in 1947, a partnership that lasted for 20 years and resulted in the recording of more than 650 songs. Day made her film debut in the well-received musical *Romance on the High Seas* in 1948. She brought emotion and power to a diverse selection of roles, from thrillers like *Storm Warning* to lighthearted romantic comedies such as *Pillow Talk* with Rock Hudson, for which she received her only Academy Award nomination. Day was married and divorced four times. She received a lifetime achievement Grammy Award in 2008.

**Died**

**Tim Conway**, Emmy-winning actor and a star of *The Carol Burnett Show*, died on May 14 at the age of 85. Conway began his career performing comedy spots on late-night TV during the 1950s. His first hit was the role of bumbling Ensign Charles Parker on the sitcom *McHale’s Navy*, but his biggest success was as a co-star on *The Carol Burnett Show*. Conway joined the comedy team in 1975 after years as a guest. He won three Emmys for his performances on the show and a fourth as a writer, becoming popular for his straight-faced humor and kind, innocent personality. Before his retirement, Conway won two more Emmys for guest appearances on *Coach* and *30 Rock*.

**Died**

Chinese-born American architect **I.M. Pei**, who designed the glass pyramid at the Louvre Museum in Paris, died on May 16 at age 102. Born in China in 1917, Pei moved to Boston in 1935 and studied design and structural engineering at MIT and Harvard. The communist revolution in the 1940s prevented Pei from returning to China, and he accepted a job with a real estate developer in New York, where he worked 10 years before establishing his own architectural firm. When Pei was still relatively unknown, Jacqueline Kennedy selected him to design the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library because of his simple, innovative style. He also worked commissions for the Bank of China in Hong Kong, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, and dozens of others.

**Died**

**Herman Wouk**, the Pulitzer Prize–winning author of *The Caine Mutiny*, died on May 17 at his home in Palm Springs, Calif. He was 103. Wouk aspired to be a satirist of American life, but his service as a naval officer in World War II inspired his best-loved works. He called upon his experience in the Pacific theater to write about a young naval lieutenant serving under a maniacal captain in *The Caine Mutiny*, which became an international bestseller and won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1951. U.S. Navy and Coast Guard senior leadership lists the book as recommended reading for all officers. Starting in 1962, Wouk dedicated 13 years to writing an epic retelling of World War II in *Winds of War* and its sequel, *War and Remembrance*. Both books became Emmy-winning television miniseries. Wouk wrote books in a variety of genres throughout his career: war fiction, satire, epic history, science fiction, and religious studies.
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‘I’m very upset about it. And we’re going to get to the bottom of it.’

U.S. Sen. LINDSEY GRAHAM, R-S.C., and chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, on the use of the Steele dossier to get a FISA warrant to spy on the Trump campaign in 2016. “So, the bottom line is the dossier has never been independently confirmed,” he said. “It was used to get a warrant. They knew the author of the dossier was on the Democrat Party payroll. He hated Trump; they got the warrant anyway. Most Americans should be very upset about that.”

‘We’ve all made mistakes, but our mistakes aren’t always the first thing people see and judge us by.’

JEFF GARNETT, co-owner of the tattoo removal company Clean Slate Laser in New York and New Jersey, on customers who regret having facial tattoos. Garnett says he is seeing an increase in the number of customers who want to remove tattoos from their faces. One customer, Mauricio Arias, told the New York Post, “As soon as I walk in for a job interview, they’re gonna think, ‘Who’s this guy trying to get a job looking like that?’”

‘That’s what I call fleecing the American taxpayer.’

U.S. Sen. CHUCK GRASSLEY, R-Iowa, on prices paid by the Pentagon. Grassley said recent expenditures include $1,280 for a coffee mug and $14,000 for a toilet seat lid. A recent inspector general report found defense contractor TransDigm had profit margins of more than 1,000 percent on 17 different parts it sold to the Pentagon.

‘We’ll take AOC’s carbon footprint for ourselves.’

TV host RACHEL CAMPOS-DUFFY, wife of U.S. Rep. Sean Duffy, R-Wis., on becoming pregnant with the couple’s ninth child. U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., earlier this year questioned whether it was moral for people to have children because of the supposed impact on the climate.

‘This “man vs. woman” messaging is not based in fact or reality.’

Associated Press reporter MEG KINNARD in response to U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren’s claim that men are trying to take away women’s right to abortion. Kinnard cited South Carolina, which consistently elects pro-life candidates, even though female voters outnumber male voters by more than 300,000.

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Acting like animals
In an attempt to prevent a class from closing, a French farmer has found 15 new students to enroll in a local school in the Alpine village of Crêts-en-Belledonne, but keeping them focused on their studies may be a problem. The reason: They are all sheep. Parents at the primary school were worried that with declining enrollment, the French government might reduce the number of classes at the school, leading to an increase in class size. So local herdsman Michel Girend decided to bolster the numbers by fabricating birth certificates for his sheep. Teachers and parents lined up outside the school to cheer the animals while young students held up signs protesting the possibility of closing down a class.

Working vacations
Bhutan’s prime minister isn’t just a smooth political operator. He also knows his way around an operating theater. Lotay Tshering, a trained doctor and surgeon, became the Asian country’s prime minister in November. But rather than stepping away from the hospital while fulfilling his political duties, Tshering decided to keep his medical practice. The urologist told the AFP news service that he enjoyed the work: “Some people play golf, some do archery, and I like to operate.”

Gator surprise
A Florida woman didn’t have a surprise up her sleeve during a traffic stop in Charlotte County on May 6, but she did have one in her pants. During routine questioning at the traffic stop, the sheriff’s deputy asked the woman, “Do you have anything else?” The 25-year-old woman answered in the affirmative—and then removed a 12-inch baby alligator out of her yoga pants. According to the deputy, she was also transporting 41 small turtles in the vehicle. The sheriff’s office turned the case over to Florida wildlife officials to determine whether the woman could legally possess and transport the animals.

Just a friendly visit
A runaway dog in Missouri knew just where to go after escaping his home in northern St. Louis County. Surveillance cameras at the Happy Tails Pet Hotel and Playland in nearby St. Ann captured images of Hugo slipping into the business’s building about a week after leaving home. According to employees of the doggy day care, Hugo’s owners frequently brought him to stay there. Workers at Happy Tails, who speculated that Hugo wanted to hang out with friends at the doggy day care, were able to reconnect him with his owners later that day.
Who is responsible?
A small typo is causing major headaches at the Reserve Bank of Australia. Australians are noticing a misspelling of the word “responsibility” on the nation’s newest 50 Australian dollar bank notes. In order to make their notes harder to forge, Australia’s Reserve Bank designs the bills with tiny text. In the case of the new bill, the bank left out the final ‘i’ from “responsibility” three times. Officials with the reserve bank said they will correct the error for the next printing run, but noted the government has already released 46 million bills with the typo.

Cutout cops
Police in Nottinghamshire, U.K., have a new idea to slow down speeders on local roads: cardboard police cars. Police Commissioner Paddy Tipping claimed his police force would be looking into placing cardboard cutouts made to look like police cruisers alongside roadways. In theory, the cutouts ought to make motorists instinctively slow down. Local police already use cutouts of officers in shops to try and deter shoplifting.

Squawking conspiracy
Authorities making a drug bust in Brazil have taken a green-and-white parrot into custody after the bird reportedly tried to warn the suspects about the raid. According to police, the bird squawked, “Mama, police!” in Portuguese when officers arrived at the house. Despite the warning, police arrested a couple and charged them with drug possession. Because the bird’s owners most likely trained the parrot to watch out for police cars, authorities took the bird into custody as well.

Walking in style
A baby giraffe at Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, Wash., now has what every animal needs: a new pair of shoes. The giraffe was born in early May and had to have his legs radiographed because his rear feet were out of alignment. Zoo workers put casts on his legs and made shoes out of high-density polyethylene and plywood to help him recover. The zoo expects the giraffe, which weighs over 170 pounds, to wear the therapeutic shoes for several months.

Food with a bite
Forty frozen, vacuum-sealed piranhas in a duffel bag apparently looked suspicious to security personnel at Los Angeles International Airport. Agents reportedly detained Peruvian chef Virgilio Martinez for five hours in an interrogation room before accepting his story that he planned to serve the sharp-toothed fish at a food festival in Los Angeles. According to the Los Angeles Times, Martinez used the fish on a salad and also served dried piranha skins inside the piranhas’ heads.
On April 27 in Poway, Calif., a young man with an AR-15 rifle entered a synagogue during a Passover service and began shooting. He wounded three people and killed one before two attendees at the service rushed him. Later, authorities identified the alleged shooter as a lifelong church member, the son of an Orthodox Presbyterian elder, who was homeschooled until ninth grade. How could this happen?

The details were no sooner out than predictable comments appeared on news websites: Obviously, the shooter was “schooled in hate” (because Christians are haters, don’t you know). Obviously, he was drawn to extreme right-wing websites, where his twisted white-supremacist views could slowly heat to boiling. He hated Muslims and Jews and was inspired by the Christchurch mosque shooting in New Zealand, because this is Trump’s America. Case closed.

But wait: Only three days later another young man walked into a classroom in Kennedy Hall at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. There he opened fire with a handgun, killing two and wounding four more. This time there was no discernible motive: no dark-web posting trail or Facebook rant, just a disturbed individual. What pushed him over the edge?

And then: Only a week later, two armed teens entered the STEM School at Highlands Ranch, Colo., and started shooting, killing one and wounding eight. Both were students at the school, one 18 and the other only 16. The younger teen was apparently female transitioning to male, and the other had posted some anti-Christian and anti-Trump Facebook screeds, but those factors don’t add up to a reason for storming their school. Some parents had earlier complained about the academic pressures, culture clashes, and bullying at Highlands Ranch STEM, any one of which could have triggered a pair of high-strung kids. But no one knows.

The case isn’t closed. Where the human heart is concerned, it never is.

The secret heart

WE DECEIVE CHILDREN IF WE DON’T TELL THEM ABOUT ORIGINAL SIN

On April 27 in Poway, Calif., a young man with an AR-15 rifle entered a synagogue during a Passover service and began shooting. He wounded three people and killed one before two attendees at the service rushed him. Later, authorities identified the alleged shooter as a lifelong church member, the son of an Orthodox Presbyterian elder, who was homeschooled until ninth grade. How could this happen?

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These alleged killers came from different backgrounds, held different ideologies (or none), dealt with different internal pressures. They held in common their youth, and their human nature. Most teens have been lied to about both.

As youth, they are told that they’re perfect “just as they are”—and responsible for correcting the mistakes the grown-ups have made. They are told that they have all the answers but need their elders to supply the right questions. They are told that the world is at their feet and they can be anything they want, but they’d better be socially responsible because the world is a hot mess.

As to their human nature, they are seldom told that, like the rest of us, are fundamentally flawed, that the seed of wickedness has already sprouted, that “following your heart” is the world’s worst advice because the heart is deceitful above all things. “Original sin” is a deceptively simple explanation that can sound too pat. It may not explain everything, but it explains a lot.

The Poway shooter undoubtedly received that message from his family and church but didn’t internalize it, or else allowed the thorns and thistles of extremist rhetoric to choke the truth. The others probably never heard it, because it’s not a popular doctrine these days. Pointing to some outside, amorphous “culture” (guns, hate, victimism, alarmism) lets us off the hook, while the heart remains a mystery.

But it’s not a lost cause. One positive takeaway from these mass-shooting incidents is that three of the four fatalities were people who interfered with the shooter before he could do his worst: Kendrick Castillo in Colorado, Riley Howell at UNC, and Lori Gilbert Kaye in Poway. They model what writer David French calls the “Hero Solution,” where one or more individuals boldly rush the shooter and bring him down, even at the cost of their own lives. Let their names and faces be seen in the media, not the miserable perpetrators.

But also teach the kids, as the Lord taught Cain, that sin is crouching at the door—not the next guy’s. They may stand a better chance of heroism if they understand their capacity for villainy. ©
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—KATHY BETH UNGER ’19
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Movie

Granting our wishes

SONG, DANCE, LAUGHTER, ROMANCE—DISNEY’S LIVE-ACTION ALADDIN IS ENTERTAINMENT FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

Think of them as Marvel movies for the younger set. After Cinderella (2015), The Jungle Book (2016), and Beauty and the Beast (2017) successively pounced on the box office like Shere Khan on poor little Mowgli, Disney executives are now rolling out remakes of their classic animated films nearly once a quarter, to varying results. Before the next two years are out, audiences will reportedly be treated to a live-action Lion King, Lady and the Tramp, Mulan, Sword in the Stone, and Pinocchio.

First, though, they have to decide if they’re up for a magic carpet ride with Aladdin. Let’s save the suspense—they should be. Aladdin the remake strikes just the right balance: It honors the original enough to feel pleasantly nostalgic while still offering enough new scenes, characters, and jokes to make this version worth our time.

Perhaps because of Dumbo’s tepid reception among U.S. audiences (see “Dumbo,” April 13, 2019), far more doubtful media reports have been part of the run-up to Aladdin’s release. Unlike Cinderella’s Lily James and Richard Madden and Beauty and the Beast’s Emma Watson and Dan Stevens, the leads here are virtually unknown. The only marquee name—Will Smith—has drawn skepticism from commentators wondering if he has the chops to fill the late Robin Williams’ shoes as Genie.

That’s the wrong way to look at it. True, Smith’s energy doesn’t match Williams’, but then again, probably no actor working today could match the late
comedian’s manic ability to fill a screen. The studio wisely held back from spoiling Smith’s funniest and most creative bits by featuring them in the advertisements. The earnest optimism Smith plays so well is enhanced with the addition of a new character—Princess Jasmine’s handmaid, played histrionically by SNL’s Nasim Pedrad.

But if Smith is quieter, the rest of the movie certainly isn’t. Director Guy Ritchie leans into the setting with bouncy Bollywood flair. The extravagant song-and-dance numbers are so fun, you can’t help wishing he had the space and budget to work in a few more. (Hint: Stay in your seat as the credits roll.)

It also must be said that somebody on Disney’s marketing team owes Mena Massoud and Naomi Scott an apology for criminally underselling them in the trailer. Massoud is the perfect embodiment of Aladdin, charming and cheeky. A million little girls will swoon at the chaste chemistry he has with Scott’s Jasmine (who, incidentally, developed her angelic pipes singing in the evangelical church her father pastors). She brings a likable feistiness to a new storyline, plus an addition to the soundtrack, that is appropriately female-empowering without megaphonning a feminist message. For once, it feels like someone took the time to make the girl power feel organic to the plot rather than tacked-on and pandering.

Perhaps most surprising of all is that a director once known for his raunchy R-rated comedies keeps this film so sweet and innocent. Aladdin’s wholesome humor and message—that to be great, one must be a servant—is far more in line with Cinderella than with the subversive Beauty and the Beast.

That’s not to say there aren’t a few downbeat aspects. Smith’s facial expressions have an uncanny Tom-Hanks-in-The-Polar-Express look whenever he’s in his blue-giant manifestation, and villain Jafar barely registers as a blip on the menace radar.

But these are minor complaints compared with the treasure Aladdin offers. Rather than a whole new world, it feels like a delightfully old one—romantic, exuberant, and entertaining for all ages.

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**Box Office Top 10**

FOR THE WEEKEND OF MAY 17-19

according to Box Office Mojo

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<td>John Wick: Parabellum R</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Avengers: Endgame* PG-13</td>
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<td>Pokémon Detective Pikachu PG</td>
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<td>A Dog’s Journey PG</td>
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<td>The Sun Is Also a Star PG-13</td>
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<td>Poms PG-13</td>
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*Reviewed by WORLD

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**Television**

**Line of Duty**

When police, who will bring them to justice? In the popular British TV drama Line of Duty, police anti-corruption unit AC-12 searches out rotten cops but finds that the decay has gone deep within the force. The long-running series, now with five seasons available on Amazon Prime, debuted in 2012 and is one of the BBC’s most highly rated crime shows.

Detective Sgt. Steve Arnott (Martin Compston) joins AC-12 when he refuses to cover up a botched police operation that resulted in an innocent man’s death. He teams up with Detective Inspector Kate Fleming (Vicky McClure), and both report to Superintendent Ted Hastings (Adrian Dunbar), who seems to be a straight arrow. Hastings even comes down hard on a star cop who accepted a free lunch from a waitress after a heroic rescue.

In previous seasons, the trio uncovered crime and corruption, sending crooked cops to jail while digging into layers of malfeasance. Each member of the AC-12 team proves to have weak points that the bad guys try to exploit to entice them to the other side.

In Season 5, police operation Pear Tree has embedded an undercover officer inside an organized crime ring. The gang hijacks a police convoy transporting heroin seized from a rival gang and murders several officers. Shortly afterward, the undercover officer goes silent. Has his identity been discovered, or has he gone rogue and joined the criminals?

During the investigation, Hastings’ financial and marital troubles make him vulnerable: Has the stalwart superintendent of AC-12 been compromised? Or is another member of the squad actually a “bent copper”?

Regrettably, violence, vulgarity, and blasphemy are prevalent in this crime drama. Filmed in gritty industrial locations in Birmingham (Season 1) and Northern Ireland, Line of Duty becomes increasingly dark and dreary as the episodes unfold. Even when good triumphs, the short-lived victories are tainted by evil.

—by MARTY VANDRIEL
The late Italian literary theorist and semiotics scholar Umberto Eco, though not a believer in any religious doctrine, gave serious treatment to spiritual things. Thus, his novels often pop up on Christians’ lists of favorites. Theologian Michael Horton, Southern Baptist Convention President J.D. Greear, and author and Liberty University English professor Karen Swallow Prior all count themselves fans. When Eco died in 2016, Marvin Olasky wrote an extended obituary dealing with the contradictions and complexities in his thinking.

And yet, like a cross between Marcel Proust and Dan Brown, Eco included in his fiction plenty of pot-boiling intrigue rarely associated with works classified as “literature.” So, in today’s “peak TV” environment of marrying twisty plots to intellectual pretension, it’s hard to imagine a book better suited for television adaptation than Eco’s best-selling medieval murder mystery, The Name of the Rose.

The classic Sherlockian plot of an uncannily observant detective (Friar William of Baskerville) solving a 14th-century “locked room” homicide with his faithful sidekick (the earnest and naïve novice, Adso of Melk) would be selling point enough. But the new SundanceTV series also capitalizes on the magnificent setting by filming on location at a mountaintop abbey in the Italian Alps—while trusting the audience’s intelligence and fleshing out Eco’s religious and philosophical themes. Almost shockingly for these days, the show allows appropriate historical attitudes to stand without accommodation for modern feelings. For example, when homosexual activity between two monks is mentioned (it is not shown), the protagonists never refer to it as anything but sinful.

In several ways, the series actually improves on the occasionally unwieldy novel, and it’s light years ahead of the 1986 Sean Connery film.

John Turturro’s self-deprecating humor gives more likable shading to William’s know-it-all lectures. And additional subplots deepen the story’s appeal. Young Adso still sins with a peasant girl, but in this case the encounter is preceded first by friendship and then by a blooming romance. It’s both more realistic and more respectful toward women to give the girl a motivation beyond randy anonymous opportunism.

Regrettably, the scene is as explicit as Eco wrote it and spoils an otherwise exceptional show (as do two other nonsexual scenes showing topless women). How many opportunities do Christian TV lovers have to see theological matters deeply debated, with the good guys making the more Biblical arguments? Where else is a viewer likely to hear the protagonist proclaim, “Christ did not come into the world to command but to be subject to the conditions He found”?

William’s Franciscan brothers, acting as Martin Luther precursors, contend that although Christ owned all things, He relinquished His claim to wealth and power, therefore His followers should do the same. Meanwhile, their antagonists—Dominican envoys of a corrupt pope hoping to assert control over the emperor—heap up for themselves treasures on earth by putting vulgar price tags on absolution.

Even Rupert Everett’s performance as Bishop Bernardo, who, with his slobbering and sneering at the foot of the crucifix, embodies the worst stereotypes of Christian zeal, can’t extinguish the light of those Franciscans. Their good-humored simplicity and deep Scriptural devotion proclaim a message: Though bad men abuse the gospel and roost in cathedrals for their own selfish ends, the true Church yet triumphs. It all makes those fleshly scenes even more disappointing. As William of Baskerville himself observes, “Learning does not consist only of knowing what we must or can do, but also of knowing what we could and perhaps should not do.”
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Celebrate the world through God’s eyes. Our comprehensive preschool through high school program thoroughly integrates Bible with the study of history, geography, science, literature, art, and music while helping children learn a biblical worldview.

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Nurture the joy of learning for the entire family as you share inspiring read-alouds, simple hands-on projects, and gurgling science experiments. Take a family outing or plan a historic vacation. Dad is encouraged to lead family devotions using the Bible texts in the daily lessons. Our curriculum can be taught to children at several different grade levels all at the same time, resolving the issue of how to split your time among your children and keep track of many different topics.

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Enhances Retention with Hands-On Activities
Wholesome Classic Literature
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Missions Heart Beat

My Father’s World is committed to the Lord of All, who tenderly searches for people from every tribe and language. A portion of our profits supports mission work overseas, especially Bible translation projects.

mfwbooks.com/WNG
The gut-punching photographs and stories in Chris Arnade’s Dignity: Seeking Respect in Back Row America (Penguin Random House, 2019) explain how Donald Trump won crucial Midwest states in 2016. Free trade has reduced the cost of many items but also led to many factory closures, and Arnade shows us some of the unemployed and despairing. It’s easy to say “move to places where jobs exist,” but many are neither readily mobile (for family reasons) or easily trainable for different occupations.

In Why Cities Lose (Basic, 2019), Jonathan Rodden shows how state legislatures as well as Congress and the Electoral College now have a built-in Republican edge, since Democratic votes are concentrated in cities. Some urban Democratic candidates win 90 percent of the vote in their districts, but Republicans who win 55 percent of the vote in theirs also gain a seat. Democrats can either change the rules or try to appeal more broadly.

Ian Haney López’s Dog Whistle Politics (Oxford, 2015) sees those statistics and is upset that lower-middle-class whites tend to vote Republican: They are supposedly “led astray by appeals to social concerns.” They supposedly do not “recognize their actual economic interests.” López sees “coded racial appeals” at play, but his index does not even include the word “abortion.”

Daniel Hill’s White Awake: An Honest Look at What It Means to Be White (IVP, 2017) is a superficial look. White privilege was across-the-board a half-century ago, but now it varies from sphere to sphere: Whites are certainly privileged in law enforcement, but blacks are clearly privileged in hiring within universities. White privilege because of college admission through legacies, contacts, and cheating is a reasonable defense for affirmative action, but quotas hurt poor white kids. And so it goes: “Check your privilege” makes sense at street level when we go sphere by sphere, but Hill follows the crowd in overgeneralizing.

Truth Decay by Jennifer Kavanagh and Michael Rich (Rand Corp., 2018) has a nicely humble subtitle: An Initial Exploration of the Diminishing Role of Facts and Analysis in American Public Life. I hope, in their fuller exploration, they’ll do more historical research before contending that in recent years we have seen “a blurring of the line between opinion and fact.” Such blurring is nothing new and is even inevitable, since which facts to emphasize, and even what a fact is, often depends on worldviews. America 50 years ago did not have a golden age when network news shows merely presented facts: Walter Cronkite’s CBS sign-off, “And that’s the way it is,” lacked humility.

In For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference (Brazos, 2019), Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun overuse the words “flourish” and “flourishing,” which they and others should retire. They do raise good questions about academic theology “composed of specialists in an unrespected discipline who write for specialists about topics that interest hardly anyone else.”

Rebecca McLaughlin’s Confronting Christianity (Crossway, 2019) is theology that could make a difference. She answers well 11 questions children who go to secular universities are likely to come out asking, including: “Doesn’t Christianity crush diversity?” “How can you say there’s only one true faith?” “Doesn’t religion cause violence?” “Doesn’t the Bible condone slavery?” She only falls short on “How could a loving God allow so much suffering?”—but that’s the toughest nut to crack.

The Power of Christian Contentment by Andrew Davis (Baker, 2019) is a solid 21st-century version of—and tribute to—The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment by Puritan Pastor Jeremiah Burroughs, which I have strongly recommended several times in WORLD. God, Greed, and the (Prosperity) Gospel (Zondervan, 2019) is a stinging, up-close critique of televangelist Benny Hinn by his nephew, Costi Hinn.

Wild Awakening: How a Raging Grizzly Healed My Wounded Heart by Greg Matthews (Howard, 2019) has some padding, but it’s a page-turner to the gripping part where a grizzly grips the author’s head. —M.O.
Books about authors
reviewed by Caleb Nelson

THE FLAME IMPERISHABLE: TOLKIEN, ST. THOMAS, AND THE METAPHYSICS OF FAËRIE
Jonathan S. McIntosh

This theological and philosophical account of the deepest foundations of Middle Earth will enthral Tolkien fans. McIntosh beautifully and succinctly expounds on creation, angels, evil, holiness, being and time, and the overruling providence of the God who is “never absent and never named,” as Tolkien put it. In Tolkien's stories, “faith and philosophy have met and mythos and logos have kissed.” McIntosh can be heavy-handed with his discussions about God’s power and evil’s origins, but readers will find here proof that Tolkien is as profound a philosopher-theologian as literary craftsman—and that good theology makes good stories.

MARINER: A THEOLOGICAL VOYAGE WITH SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE
Malcolm Guite

Guite writes a magnificent line-by-line exposition of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and deftly pairs it with Coleridge’s own life story. From “the kirk, the hill, the lighthouse top” of the poet’s youth, to his descent into the “Night-mare Life-in-Death” of opium addiction and subsequent recovery by returning to the Trinitarian faith of his childhood, Guite illustrates how Coleridge’s own voyage through life parallels that of his fictional Mariner. He also argues for Coleridge’s goal to unite faith and reason by tracing them “back to their single source in the holy Logos.”

GEORGE MACDONALD IN THE AGE OF MIRACLES: INCARNATION, DOUBT, AND REENCHANTMENT
Timothy Larsen

Larsen neither cheerleads for MacDonald’s theology nor critiques it, but rather explains its historical significance. One key insight: After 1850, British theologians began heavily emphasizing Christ’s incarnation at the expense of His atonement. Larsen persuasively links MacDonald’s work to this trend. Christmas—the celebration of Christ’s incarnation—was MacDonald’s favorite holiday, while Easter—the doctrine of atonement—held less importance to him. Another insight: Following Coleridge’s views, he believed that all creation, properly apprehended, points toward God. MacDonald, whom G.K. Chesterton called “Saint Francis of Aberdeen,” showed his greatest strength in revealing the spiritual dynamics of the everyday.

ON THE EDGE OF INFINITY: A BIOGRAPHY OF MICHAEL D. O’BRIEN
Clemens Cavallin

On the first page of his account of O’Brien’s life, Cavallin informs us, “The car was slightly unreliable.” Car trouble is a theme throughout the biography, as it symbolizes the difficult path O’Brien chose as a Christian painter and novelist. He supported six children while waiting 18 years for his first novel to be published, and continues to choose to follow God over mammon. O’Brien exemplifies both “the courage and persistence that a sincere religious life demands in late modern times.” And he proves that our Father always provides.

AFTERWORD

David Zahl’s Seculosity: How Career, Parenting, Technology, Food, Politics, and Romance Became Our New Religion and What to Do About It (Fortress Press, 2019) explains that we all seek righteousness, only now we do it by what we eat, how much we work, and how well we parent. We are on a performance treadmill, always striving for “enoughness.” Zahl explores various manifestations of this quest and ends with a call to a grace-based, Jesus-centric Christianity.

Justin Whitmel Earley’s encouraging book The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction (IVP Books, 2019) is a good complement to Zahl’s. Earley argues that we all live according to habits that shape our lives and form our hearts—and yet we are largely unaware of them. So he suggests “the common rule,” simple alternative habits—“Scripture before phone”—is one—to get us off the performance treadmill and orient us to loving God and our neighbor. —Susan Olasky
Far-off places
TWEEN AND TEEN FICTION reviewed by Rachel Lynn Aldrich

**THE RISE AND FALL OF MOUNT MAJESTIC**
*Jennifer Trafton*

This is a rollicking tale about what happens when people unwittingly build their country on top of a sleeping giant. When mischievous Persimmony discovers the truth about her home, she sets out to save it with the help of Theodore the Potter and Worvil the Worrier. Along the way, she meets a funny cast of characters and learns to open her eyes to the astonishing wonder of the world while choosing gratitude each day. Trafton's story is full of energy and fun, exploring themes of kindness, forgiveness, and humility. Equal measures heart and silliness, it’s an ideal adventure for middle-grade readers. (Ages 9-13)

**NAVIGATING EARLY**
*Clare Vanderpool*

Jack Baker is away at boarding school when he befriends an odd boy-savant named Early who believes the numbers of pi tell a story. The tale draws Jack into an adventure that transcends their imaginations and bursts into the real world when Early becomes convinced his brother, lost in World War II, is still alive. As the two set out to find him, the plot explores ideas of grief, forgiveness, and belonging. Vanderpool hints that Early has autism, and his story is about the beauty of seeing the world differently and recognizing meaning where others see only randomness. (Ages 10 & up)

**THE SONG FROM SOMEWHERE ELSE**
*A.F. Harrold*

A girl named Frank thinks her biggest problem of the summer will be dealing with neighborhood bullies. The problem changes when the school outcast, Nick, protects her from the bullies and they become unlikely friends. But when she starts hearing mysterious music from somewhere else, she has a much bigger problem to solve: how to save their reality. As Frank learns that the world and people are often not what they seem, she must discover how to overcome fear, build friendships, and become trustworthy. Note: Mild swearing and an unsympathetic view of Frank's parents mar this exciting and at times intense story. (Ages 12 & up)

**THE SPINDLERS**
*Lauren Oliver*

This book takes the form of a classic fairy tale: A girl journeys from her own world into a magical one to save her brother while learning life lessons along the way. Twelve-year-old Liza wakes up one morning to discover that the Spindlers have stolen her younger brother's soul. She finds a doorway in her basement that leads to the world of Below. With the help of a ridiculous rat named Mirabella she meets strange creatures and passes the Spindler queen's three tests in order to find and rescue her brother. Through her adventure, she learns to see the beauty and value in her normal life. (Ages 12 & up)

*AFTERWORD*

Often described as a 1940s Jane Austen novel, *Capture the Castle* by Dodie Smith (author of *The Hundred and One Dalmatians*) has gained a cultish following since its original publication in 1948. Cassandra and her eccentric family live in a run-down English castle while her father stews over the novel he can’t seem to write. Absurd high jinks ensue when the family tries to marry off Cassandra’s older sister to the rich American who has come to town.

The well-written book pairs lush descriptions with romantic melodrama of the distinctly teenage variety. It is best suited for older teens due to some inappropriate relationships and suspicions of infidelity, although Smith handles it far more discreetly than most modern young adult novels. Additionally, Cassandra’s juvenile dismissal of religion leaves something to be desired as she gives the down-to-earth and lovable vicar rather short shrift.

—R.A.
In May 2019, Geneva College dedicated the theological library and papers of Dr. John H. Gerstner, renowned American theologian and leading scholar who had an impact on a generation of Reformed pastors and teachers. Dr. Gerstner’s family donated his collection of works, private and published writings, study notes, video and extensive resources for public access at Geneva College.

The collection will greatly benefit Geneva students and faculty as well as theological scholars interested in Dr. Gerstner’s work in apologetics, Jonathan Edwards, and biblical inerrancy among other scholarly emphases. This valued collection is expected to benefit novices and advanced theologians alike, particularly those working in the Reformed tradition.

We invite those who would like to enter the thoughts, rigor and sheer delight of John Gerstner’s scholarly world to visit the John H. Gerstner Collection in McCartney Library on the Geneva College campus in Beaver Falls, PA. For more information visit Geneva.edu/gerstner.

“John Gerstner was an evangelist to academia – a respected scholar with the boldness of a reformer to speak the truth in love.”

– Dr. Stephen Nichols, President of Reformation Bible College and Chief Academic Officer of Ligonier Ministries
Kelly Shackelford heads First Liberty Institute, a Texas-based nonprofit dedicated to defending religious liberty. First Liberty has aided the American Legion in its fight to keep in place the Peace Cross, which stands 40 feet tall on state-owned land in Bladensburg, Md. The Supreme Court will be issuing an opinion on that case sometime in June. Here are edited segments of our Q&A in front of students at Patrick Henry College.

Before we get to the main event, the Bladensburg cross case, I can’t resist asking about a couple of odd cases. Tell us about the Charlie Brown Christmas censorship at a senior living center. A couple of elderly women who live in a government-run senior living facility had some kids come through. This facility is their home. One of them starts to read A Charlie Brown Christmas. Some official realizes that would eventually get to Linus mentioning Scripture, so he shuts down the event.

Just a one-time extreme reaction, or is this becoming common? We’re getting a lot of cases where senior citizens want to use their common room for a Bible study. One retired minister, 80 years old, asked permission to use the common room. The reaction: “Not if you are going to use it for religious reasons.” He thought, “A lot of these people can’t go out. I’ll just hold a Bible study in my apartment.” He received a letter saying he would be evicted if he does that.

And the case of the postage stamp? On the internet you can pay to turn a photo into a stamp to put on an envelope. One person had a family picture taken in front of Moscow’s famous St. Basil’s Cathedral. He was told he couldn’t use that picture because it shows a religious building. We are going after this regulation because it’s clearly unconstitutional—the kind of nonsense we see sometimes from people who think religion is not allowed in public in the United States.
That case impressed me because I went in St. Basil’s when the Soviet Union was still around and the Communist authorities had turned it into a museum of atheism. A photo then would have been OK. But let’s move on: Please tell us about the Bladensburg cross. It’s a memorial put up almost 100 years ago partly by mothers who lost their sons in World War I. At the bottom of the Bladensburg cross are the names of local men who died. One cool fact: Despite the segregated units back then, and the Ku Klux Klan about to march on D.C. with 30,000 people, the memorial has black and white soldiers listed in alphabetical order with no delineation.

The American Humanist Association doesn’t want it on state land. During the appeals court oral argument, one of the judges said, “Why don’t we just cut the arm off the cross because that way, we won’t have to destroy it and it won’t offend anybody?” This was the mindset we were dealing with as the appeals court said 2-1 it’s unconstitutional. So we’re off to the Supreme Court.

If the high court decides against you ... Not only this memorial will go down. They’d have to take down large free-standing crosses in Arlington National Cemetery. They would have to go into every community that has religious symbols.

Are you hoping the court will restore the “compelling interest” test regarding religious liberty? The normal approach in fundamental rights, whether speech or religion, had always been that if the government burdens your religion, the burden of proof shifts to the government. It has to show a compelling governmental interest requires it to burden your religion, and that the burden is the least restrictive means possible to meet that interest. It’s a heavy burden because we do treasure religious freedom. The Employment Division v. Smith case in 1990 threw out the “compelling interest” test and said any law or government action not specifically aimed at religion is neutral, unless you can prove something very special is at stake. The government no longer has the burden.

I’m optimistic because several justices have written that the religious liberty issue is in hopeless disarray. They said during the oral argument that this is a mess. The only issue to me is they’re not sure what the new solution is, but they’ve got to move away from the Lemon Test because if you’re a lower court judge you need a guideline, or else a local official might just shut down all the religious stuff. That creates a government hostile to religion, which is never what the Founders wanted.

Could this case also affect the Lemon Test and the “offended observer” approach? It is a lemon of a test for sure. It’s also called the endorsement test: If a passerby were to walk through your community and look up and see a religious symbol, and if that person felt like an outsider, that’s a violation of the Establishment Clause. We said to the court: Let’s go back to the Constitution. If a religious symbol is not establishing a national church, if the government isn’t coercing people regarding their religion, then it’s OK to have religious symbols through our landscape.

Let’s go back to the Constitution. If a religious symbol is not establishing a national church, if the government isn’t coercing people regarding their religion, then it’s OK to have religious symbols through our landscape.

Are we seeing a new problem as Google, Facebook, and Twitter act in religiously discriminatory ways? They currently have protection that doesn’t make them responsible for what people post or tweet. If they want the freedom to ban people because they’re conservative or religious, then that protection should be taken away. We need to be careful that all our information isn’t being funneled through a couple of companies: While we don’t want government regulation of private groups, we do want to make sure that people aren’t censoring by algorithm. If they don’t police themselves properly, I think the government will end up coming in.

—For Shackelford’s thoughts on several other issues, please go to wng.org/shackelford_extra

June 8, 2019 • WORLD Magazine
In the popular imagination, few musical instruments have become more closely associated with heaven than the harp. It’s a conception to which the latest releases by Anneleen Lenaerts, Helene Schütz, Rachel Talitman, and Vanessa Gerkens—their primarily secular intentions notwithstanding—pose little if any threat.

The most celestial of the four—in that it begins with a Bach partita and in that Bach dedicated his compositions to the glory of God—is Helene Schütz’s Saitenwechsel: Works for Solo Harp (Haenssler Classic). Composed for keyboard, the Partita No. 1 in B-flat as arranged, performed, and soft-miked by Schütz glistens corona-like as if through a mist gradually dispersing in the wake of the piece’s occasionally brisk pace. She devotes the subsequent 36 minutes to pieces by Scarlatti, Debussy, Rameau, and Liszt, inter-sequencing them for maximum contrast. She saves the most familiar of these, Debussy’s “Claire de lune,” for last, essentially turning it into an encore. Given the quality of the performances that have gone before, it’s a treat for which the audience will want to stick around.

Anneleen Lenaerts’ Nino Rota: Works for Harp (Warner Classics) also saves its best-known pieces for last. In the case of Nino Rota (the 10th anniversary of whose death Works for Harp commemorates), these pieces include his “Love Theme” from Zeffirelli’s Romeo and Juliet and suites of music that he composed for the soundtracks of Fellini’s La Dolce Vita and Coppola’s The Godfather. Accompanied but not overwhelmed by the Brussels Philharmonic under the direction of Adrien Perruchon, Lenaerts conveys the music’s wide-ranging moods (as well as those of Rota’s lesser-known contributions to John Guillermin’s Death on the Nile and Zeffirelli’s The Taming of the Shrew) with appropriate and authoritative sensitivity.

But, as his fans are quick to point out, Rota was much more than a film composer. And in devoting the first two thirds of Works for Harp to stimulating renditions of his Concerto for Harp and Orchestra (1947), his Sonata for Flute and Harp (1937), and his solo-harp showcase Sarabanda e Toccata (1945), Lenaerts goes a long way toward ensuring that Rota’s non-cinematic output gets its due.

On Stepan: Concertos for Harp (Harp & Company), Rachel Talitman, the violinists Laurent Houque and Sophie Ackermann, the cellist Johannes Burghoff, and the hornist Hubert Biebaut attempt to do something similar for the legacy of the 18th-century harpsichordist Josef Antonin Štěpán. But unlike Rota, whose creativity was apparently inexhaustible, and unlike many better-known Classical-era composers, Štěpán (whose name is also spelled Joseph Anton Steffan) had a rather pedestrian musical imagination.

His melodies, in other words, are pretty but not distinctive. One does not walk away humming them even after prolonged exposure. It’s to Talitman’s credit, therefore, that the prolonged exposure (an hour and 19 minutes to be exact) required to take in these four harp concertos passes quite pleasantly. If only it weren’t to Štěpán’s relative discredit that the longer one listens, the more his music seems best suited to the backgrounds of formal dinners or fancy-dress balls.

A similar effect arises from Vanessa Gerkens’ Secret d’Ayweline. The difference is that, were it to play in the background, people would eventually want to know what it is.

Gerkens, who cites Celtic inspiration and bills herself as a “fairy harpist,” writes and plays melodies that, for all their simplicity, focus the attention and stir the emotions. Doubters should start with the sprightly “Danse Korrigan”—and prepare to find themselves wanting to hear both it and the other 17 selections over and over.
New or recent albums
reviewed by Arsenio Orteza

I NEED A NEW WAR Craig Finn
The pleasures of these intimately observed vignettes are primarily verbal—"You travel your whole life / just to get out to the place you’re gonna die" is a real attention-getter. But the murky mix gives up details too—soulful horns, keening organs, telltale heartbeats. The stakes reach their peak in "Grant at Galena," in which a modern-day Ulysses S. fights a losing war of ontological attrition. The connection between that warfare and the cover art remains implicit. But that cross is a real attention-getter too.

IN LEAGUE WITH DRAGONS
The Mountain Goats
The guitars are back. Yet whether acoustic or pedal steel, they’re quiet enough not to encroach on the trials and tribulations of the latest cast of characters from whose points of view John Darnielle writes: Ozzy Osbourne, Dwight Gooden, a homicide detective with a strong stomach, and—in what’s surely a first—a possum as alert to the gospel as he is to the likelihood that he can end up as roadkill. The funniest lines are the saddest and vice versa. And somehow every single one rings true.

FEVER BREAKS Josh Ritter
Ritter’s own man and all, but, for what it’s worth, this commendable album’s weakest cut and its strongest bear more than a passing resemblance to Dylan’s "My Back Pages" and "It’s Alright, Ma" respectively. The weakest is "All Some Kind of Dream," a plea for immigration anarchy that, despite (or maybe because of) its allusion to Matthew 25:40, even Emma Lazarus might’ve considered heavy-handed. The strongest is "The Torch Committee." In it, a judge with a comatose conscience lays down the law. Kafka would’ve understood.

YOUNG IN MY HEAD Starflyer 59
If the data that Jason Martin provides in this album’s super-catchy title track is accurate, he’s 47. Hence his amazement at feeling “just 28" and, by extension, at having a son who, at 16, is now old enough to be his drummer. And he’s a good one, punching up the intimations of mortality that increasingly haunt his father’s songs. The overall effect is salutary as shoegaze goes. Only on “Crash," which borrows Blue Oyster Cult’s most famous melody, does Martin’s awareness of the Reaper taint with fear.

ENCORE
The composer-saxophonist Andy Mackay (pronounced McKye) is best known for having been a member of Roxy Music, a pop-savvy art-rock band whose albums and singles consistently occupied the upper reaches of the 1970s and ’80s British charts and whose music, even at its most ethereal, gave off a decidedly worldly-wise vibe. Against such a backdrop, the thoroughgoing sacredness of Mackay’s latest long-in-the-works project is not only surprising but perhaps miraculous as well.

For one thing, everything about it is Biblical, from its title (3 Psalms) and its contents (portions of Psalms 130, 90, and 150 sung mostly in English but with Hebrew and Latin mixed in) to its label (Good Deeds Music) and its running time (33 minutes). More importantly, every detail of Mackay’s multi-layered approach, from the friendly unpretentiousness of the singing (Harry Day-Lewis and south London’s Owl Parliament Choir) to the aspirational unpretentiousness of the music, serves the texts.

—A.O.
A need for literacy

A JEWISH RABBI HAS A WORD FOR A SECULAR AGE

So a rabbi walks into a room full of journalists, turns a light on—and it’s no joke.

Lord Jonathan Sacks, for 22 years the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, was the keynote speaker for London’s 2019 Religion Media Festival this spring, one of those unheralded events that signifies more than it advertises.

Sacks, a distinguished philosopher and member of the House of Lords, is a popular speaker on both sides of the Atlantic for his pungent take on religion in the 21st century. The 71-year-old rabbi hosted a BBC series on morality and has a TED talk on the meaning of worship with 1.8 million views. He’s not shy about confronting politicians or championing the cause of persecuted Christians.

To the journalists in London he said, “We have been living for some time in an age of de-secularization—the one thing that no Enlightenment thinker or post-Enlightenment thinker thought was possible.” He was speaking after Muslim worshippers came under attack in New Zealand this spring, followed by Christian worshippers in Sri Lanka and Jews at a synagogue in Southern California.

The headlines increasingly reflect religious conflict, including violence of the worst kind, yet journalists and others miss the cues, Sacks said. In 1989 with focus on the fall of the Berlin Wall, most of us failed to grasp the significance of two other events: the fatwa issued by Iranian clerics against author Salman Rushdie and Russia’s pullout from Afghanistan. “Osama bin Laden saw a handful of mujahedeen could defeat one of the two great superpowers of the world,” said Sacks, “and thus began the thought that became 9/11.”

Such events show “religion is a global phenomenon whereas governments are only national phenomenon,” Sacks said. Yet the pundits were “not reading the religious map or hearing the religious music.”

It’s important that journalists are getting a wake-up on the importance of faith. “Our aim was to explore the challenges in reporting and reflecting religious belief and life in the UK,” said Ruth Peacock of the Religion Media Centre, the group hosting the festival. It’s only the second year for such an event, and each has been well attended by top media leaders, she told me.

Besides “a worrying rise” in anti-Semitism in the UK and other headline stories, Peacock said there’s new interest in how local churches are helping refugees, running food banks, and other community-based efforts. She said, “There is an acknowledged need for greater religious literacy in the media and in fact, in all of society.”

In the United States promoting religious literacy among journalists has been the work of the Faith Angle Forum—a program of the Ethics & Public Policy Center—for much longer, since 1999. When Rabbi Sacks spoke to that group in 2015, the session went long because so many journalists, including legendary ones like Washington Post commentator E.J. Dionne, had questions.

At WORLD, as we commence our 21st annual World Journalism Institute college course, sharpening our skills at reporting and communicating from a Biblical perspective is a daily—often hourly—discipline. We remain apprentices, not experts.

This is a welcome challenge. Religious tension feeds national rancor. Our deeply held values feel under threat. Yet Christians, feeling besieged, can become known for their lack of love instead of their love, a love that makes a positive case for Christianity’s merits. We live inside a great story of redemption!

The popularity of a Lord Sacks or a Jordan Peterson rightly encourages and chastises us. They outside the Christian faith are tapping into the desperation of our age, asking the right questions. As did the “devout men from every nation under heaven” gathered in Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2), they say, simply and profoundly, “What does this mean?”

For all the conflict and violence running under the banner of religion, what a time to be alive—reading the religious map and hearing the religious music; exploring the connections between thought, belief, and practice; and seeing those who do not believe in God report as though He exists, because the stories of our time and the hunger in our souls demand it.
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FEATURES

Not fo
As aging Americans increasingly grapple with dementia, churches have a growing opportunity to minister to exhausted caregivers and to comfort the forgetful.

BY JAMIE DEAN / photo by Craig Litten/Genesis
When Patrick Mead took his father, Bill Mead, to live in a dementia care facility the week after Thanksgiving, he taped a note to his dad’s door. Mead wanted the staff members to know about the new resident in Room 14, even if his father couldn’t tell them himself.

“My name is Bill Mead,” the letter began. “I was born in abject poverty. I became a warrior (U.S. Navy, Korea War era). I then laid aside my weapons and became a minister and missionary. I traveled the world, spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. …

“I am slowly leaving this earth for my heavenly home. This may take a while. Thank you for remembering who I was and who I am. I am a man, a warrior, a missionary, a father, a friend, and so much more. And I have one more river to cross.”

Less than four months later, Bill Mead died at age 88.

The retired pastor had been suffering from dementia for about six years. His wife of 67 years had cared for him in an assisted living facility where they lived together until he needed more advanced help.

The elder Mead grew confused and sometimes agitated. Patrick Mead said his dad began living out dreams. He would wake up distressed and think he was in a wartime battle. Mead says he once calmed his father by giving him orders to rotate out of the battlefield: “He never recognized it was me.”

The week before his father died, Mead could tell his dad’s fragile health was failing. During a conversation, he would say a few sentences, and then be unable to speak. At one point the former sailor looked up at his son and asked: “Are we on a ship?”

Mead says he replied: “No, Dad, but we’re on a journey.”

Dementia is a journey no one wants to take. But more than 5 million Americans live with the condition, typically caused by diseases that progressively erode a patient’s mental and physical abilities, leading to debilitation. Alzheimer’s disease is the most common form of dementia.

Though dementia isn’t new, the growth rate is swelling: As Americans live longer and the population over age 65 explodes, researchers predict the number of patients with dementia will triple by 2050. With no known cure, it’s a daunting prediction for the aging and those who care for them.

It’s also a daunting prospect for the church. Benjamin Mast, a dementia researcher at the University of Louisville, says the reality of dementia will grow common in churches with members who are aging or caring for loved ones.

Mast has spent years interviewing dementia patients and caregivers with religious backgrounds, and he says a theme has emerged: Churches can be prone to forget those no longer in the pews. He says a pastor caring for his ailing father told him, “You know, sometimes I think the church has an Alzheimer’s disease of its own.”

While plenty of churches don’t forget aging members, the call to remember will only grow more acute. And for evangelicals with a robust pro-life ethic, the opportunities...
to protect and serve those at the end of life—and their loved ones—will only grow more urgent.

Every patient and every family are different, but Mast says the needs are the same: to be remembered by others and to be reminded of God—who remembers even those who fear they won’t remember Him.

K

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im Mitchell’s mother wasn’t forgetful right away. Her mom’s decline began more slowly (and in her 60s), but eventually the wife and mother who always kept meticulous records for her husband’s farming business began to slip. An early sign: The books were off.

Other things seemed off too: She didn’t want to go to Bible study anymore. She had trouble cooking familiar meals and started leaving items on the kitchen counter. (Mitchell now knows she was having trouble putting things away.) Her condition grew worse, and she lost her driver’s license after nearly hitting a police officer’s parked car.

Doctors eventually diagnosed her mother with a rare form of dementia that renders her functionally blind. Eventually, she moved into a memory care unit near Mitchell’s home in Fort Myers, Fla. Mitchell began learning about dementia and making every decision related to her mother’s medical care—all while being a wife and a mother to her three small children. Meanwhile, she grieved the gradual loss of the woman she considered a best friend.

She came across Benjamin Mast’s book *Second Forgetting* and became convinced churches should offer ministry to caregivers in similar situations. “I looked around and thought, ‘Well, who’s going to do something?’” she says. “And then I looked in the mirror.”

The pastors at McGregor Baptist Church saw the need and supported Mitchell’s request to plan an informational seminar on a Saturday morning, with speakers and information about dementia and caregiving. Mitchell thought a handful would attend.

On the morning of the seminar, 120 people showed up. It was an aha moment, and Mitchell expanded the effort under her church’s leadership: A 10-week course in the fall offered more information and featured speakers from the church and dementia experts in the community. A monthly support group followed, and it now offers prayer, encouragement, and a Biblical framework for thinking about suffering, human dignity, and end-of-life issues.

It’s been a relief for members. Mitchell says it can be difficult to talk about dementia or ask for help. “I don’t think dementia always looks like what people think it looks like,” she says. “I know my family was taken off guard when we encountered all that dementia was.”

What does dementia look like?
Experts say it depends on the specific disease and can look different in every patient. They also emphasize it’s different than other forms of less severe memory loss that are common with aging. (People growing older shouldn’t panic when their memory slips.)

Memory loss or confusion that regularly interferes with daily life is often a sign of something more serious, though other conditions can cause such symptoms as well. Physicians can treat the symptoms associated with dementia-related diseases, but there is no treatment to stop the progression. (The Alzheimer’s Association offers more information about dementia symptoms and care.)

For Mitchell, her mother’s confusion at times turns erratic and out-of-character. (For example, she might insult a caretaker and then say something pleasant the next moment.) She has the same conversations on a loop, and often says things that don’t make sense.

Greg Carlton, a longtime member of McGregor Baptist Church, attends the monthly support group and had similar experiences with his father, who died last Christmas Day. As his dad declined physically and mentally, Carlton placed him in a residential care facility. For a time, his father grew paranoid and accused Carlton of stealing from him. “When I visited, he’d scream and tell me, ‘I don’t want to see you again—don’t come back.’

“For of course, my response would be: ‘Dad, I love you, and I’ll see you tomorrow.”

For Carlton, who took over his father’s business affairs, it was a lot to manage: “You had to manage his medical care, you had to manage his business, and you had to manage your personal emotions.” His father’s hostility was deeply painful at times, but Carlton says, “We realized right off the bat, that wasn’t Dad.”

He also had to manage his responses to the people around him: Friends or family who didn’t spend as much time with his father initially questioned whether he needed to be in a facility or whether he was getting the proper care.

Mitchell said she experiences something similar in caring for her mother. “Every question can feel like an indictment,” she says. “But you have to make the best decision you can make when you make it.”

Carol Sinopoli makes painful decisions every day for her husband of 47 years. Another member of the McGregor support group, Sinopoli says her husband’s dementia came “like a brick on the head” five years ago. Shortly after her husband retired, she called him from work one day,
and he told her the air conditioner repairman would arrive on Saturday. He also told her a strange woman was sleeping in their bed and wearing a lot of makeup. “I said, ‘You see this?’” Sinopoli remembers. “He said, ‘Yeah, I see her.’ “And that was it.”

Her husband was diagnosed with Lewy body dementia, a form of dementia that includes hallucinations and physical decline. At first, he was able to stay at home mostly alone, but eventually Sinopoli took him to an adult day care program while she went to work. (Sinopoli is the assistant director of nurses at a residential facility that includes a memory care unit.)

Eventually, she hired a caregiver during the day. She works four days a week and also cares for her husband at home. His condition has severely deteriorated, and he’s now bedbound and nonverbal. She wakes up to turn him over every few hours during the night. He’s in the end stages of the disease.

But Sinopoli says his eyes still track her across the room, and when she bends down over her husband’s bed: “He’ll still give me a kiss.” As he lost his ability to speak, some of the last words he said to his wife as she cared for him were, “Thank you, thank you.”

The couple met when Sinopoli was 17 years old, and she describes him as “the love of my life.” They moved to Florida 25 years ago when her husband accepted a job teaching math at a local school. They raised five children. “He was an athlete, he was a runner, he was brilliant, he was witty—he was funny, funny, funny,” she says.

The slow loss has been painful. “I just miss him,” she says. “It’s a lonely journey.”

She’s found comfort in her church and the support group Mitchell started. She had once tried a secular support group in a nearby town. They raised five children. “He was an athlete, he was a runner, he was brilliant, he was witty—he was funny, funny, funny,” she says.

She’s found comfort in her church and the support group Mitchell started. She had once tried a secular support group in a nearby town, but didn’t feel much connection. She appreciates the Christian-based support: “At least in church, we have that commonality, we have the same faith. Something unites us besides the disease that we’re sharing.”

Still, it’s been hard for her to ask for outside help. She’s protective of her husband’s dignity and reluctant to bring in people who didn’t know him before his decline. She did recently speak with an elder at the church about coming to visit, and she’s found someone to stay with her husband while she attends church on Sunday.

When people ask how they can pray for her, she says she needs wisdom: “Because every time you think you’ve got it under control, the ground shifts.” Now she plans less and prays more that she’ll have wisdom for each day and contentment for the moment she’s in: “And that’s a good place to be.”

Offering support looks different for different families.

For churches with members still able to attend services in earlier stages of dementia, some practical considerations could help: For example, a family restroom can assist a wife who needs to help her husband to the washroom.

Hymns to remember

On a recent Friday afternoon, 30 elderly residents at an assisted living facility in Lafayette, Colo., gathered in a common room for a dementia-friendly worship service. The weekly event at the Peaks at Old Laramie Trail aims to meet the spiritual needs of residents unable to attend church off-site.

Chaplain Elisa Bosley handed out songbooks with 26 popular hymns printed in large, easy-to-read type. The service included Bible readings, prayer, and discussion. But the primary focus was music.

Some participants appeared to be sleeping, and others slumped over. But when the music started, many of the same residents perked up and sang the words to hymns such as “For the Beauty of the Earth,” “Amazing Grace,” and “The Old Rugged Cross.”

Bosley began volunteering at an Alzheimer’s unit after her father-in-law developed the disease, and she saw the need for more spiritual care for residents. She was certified through the International Fellowship of Chaplains and now volunteers at four senior care centers in the Denver and Boulder areas.

The part of the human brain responsible for music retention is often spared in Alzheimer’s patients. (The 2014 documentary Alive Inside demonstrated how music evokes memories in dementia patients.)

For her ministry, Bosley chose her hymns carefully, picking songs that appeared in the hymnals of most denominations and hiring professional musicians to record simple arrangements: low, slow, and short.

A Peaks resident named Larry used to be a deacon at Calvin Community Church in Denver. After a successful career at Dow Chemical, he developed vascular dementia and now is only marginally verbal. His wife, Mary Jo, sat next to him during the service and held his hand. Larry’s head drooped.

“You like to sing, don’t you?” she asked him. Larry cracked open his eyes. “You like to sing?” she asked again. He grunted a yes.

As Bosley closed the service with the doxology, many of the residents had no trouble expressing exactly what they wanted to say: “Praise God from whom all blessings flow.” —Jenny Rough

—Jenny Rough
Offering teaching on dementia in churches and seminaries can help members learn how to assist and empathize with others. Support groups can encourage caregivers inside and outside the church and help them connect with other local resources as logistical and financial challenges mount. (Charles Moore, pastor of First Baptist Paducah, says his Kentucky church moved its support group to a local hospital to reach more members of the community.)

When caring for a loved one at home, some caregivers need a friend to stay at the house while they run errands or attend church. Others are reluctant to leave their loved ones with people who don’t know them well, but they could use a hot meal. Offering specific forms of assistance can prevent caregivers from becoming overwhelmed with managing both their loved one and those who want to help their family.

Benjamin Mast says that in his research, many families said they needed the presence of other people. Just showing up and offering companionship can do as much as highly organized programs or plans.

And caregivers aren’t the only ones who need company. Dementia patients need visits too. Mast says research into emotional memory suggests even if a dementia patient doesn’t remember your visit later, he can still remember how you made him feel.

“It’s kind of like being in a dry and hot desert, and somebody comes up and offers you a cool cup of water,” Mast says. “When you had that in the moment, you would be incredibly grateful for it.”

He says God gives all Christians simple practices to help them remember Him, and those same means can help dementia patients remember and enjoy God as well: Familiar hymns, Scripture verses, prayer, and even the physical act of taking communion can all be routes into older memories that connect people to their Christian faith. Ministries in nursing homes can foster a vital connection between an aging believer and the Church, and can also extend the gospel to those who need to hear it.

Mast says that perhaps the most comforting message for ailing Christians who fear they will forget God is that God promises He won’t forget them: “Even a progressive neurological condition like Alzheimer’s disease cannot separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.”

Mitchell says though her mother is in advanced dementia, she can still sing a hymn. She recently read a Bible passage about heaven to her mother, and asked, “Mom, what are those gates made of?”

“They’re pearly,” she replied.

As the number of dementia cases grows, so will the population of patients with fewer options for caregiving.

A 2016 study by the National Academy of Sciences noted the caregiving challenges ahead, as “families have fewer children, older adults are more likely to have never married or be divorced, and adult children often live far away from their parents.”

It’s another opportunity for churches to connect with aging people (with or without dementia) who need advocates, basic forms of help, or simple companionship.

John Dunlop, a geriatrics physician and author of *Finding Grace in the Face of Dementia*, says it’s also an opportunity for the church to defend the dignity and inherent worth of every person made in the image of God, regardless of physical or mental capabilities.

Dunlop says that message will be even more critical as debates about assisted suicide continue in several states. (In the Netherlands, where euthanasia has been legal for decades, the number of patients seeking euthanasia because of early-onset dementia has grown.)

Back in Tennessee, Patrick Mead is thankful for how his parents’ local church helped as his father battled dementia. Church leaders lived close by and would show up in the middle of the night if his mother needed help.

Dementia is complicated and difficult, but Mead says in some ways the approach to caregiving is simple. “Just do your job, and create the kind of world you want waiting for you,” he says. “Treat them the way you want to be treated if it’s your turn.”

‘Even a progressive neurological condition like Alzheimer’s disease cannot separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.’

Benjamin Mast

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The 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre finds many leaders of the protest now laboring for Christ * by June Cheng
Thirty Years Ago on the predawn morning of June 4, 1989, tanks rolled down the streets of Beijing to Tiananmen Square, where tens of thousands of students had gathered for weeks pleading with the government for reform and democracy. The People’s Liberation Army opened fire on crowds of Beijing citizens who tried to block the troops, killing protesters, bystanders, and even residents inside their apartments. At 5 a.m., troops forced students off the square, sending tanks to pursue the retreating students and beating those who stayed behind.

A declassified U.S. cable placed the death toll at between 500 and 2,600 with up to 10,000 injured. The Chinese government has never acknowledged the massacre or rescinded its judgment that using force was justified. As the 30th anniversary approached, China took the precaution of blocking all language versions of Wikipedia, as the Chinese-language version and individual Wikipedia pages—like the one on the Tiananmen Square massacre—are already censored. Officials also sent dissidents on forced “vacations” to ensure the massacre is forgotten in a country of 1.38 billion people.

And yet, June 4 changed the course of Chinese history. It revealed the true face of the Communist government, unafraid to murder the best and brightest in the country for control. The disillusionment of Tiananmen also led many survivors of the massacre to find hope in Jesus Christ.

A surprisingly large number of protest leaders have become Christians since 1989, including Chai Ling, Zhang Boli, Yuan Zhiming, Zhou Fengsuo, and Xiong Yan, who is now a U.S. Army chaplain. (Many more people who watched the massacre unfold in person or heard of it through Western media point to the massacre as a turning point in their testimony.)

Here are the stories of three leaders who went on to find physical freedom in the West, as well as true freedom in Christ.

**Chai Ling, commander in chief of the Defend Tiananmen Square Headquarters:** Chai, a graduate student at Beijing Normal University in 1989, first became involved with the democracy protests because of her then-husband and fellow student leader Feng Congde. As Chinese officials ignored the students’ demands, she advocated a student hunger strike. While few were on board at first, she gave a rousing speech on the Peking University campus that encouraged 220 students to join her in the strike.

Later she became the commander in chief of the Defend Tiananmen Square Headquarters, where she was in charge of supplying food, shelter, water, sanitation, and medical care to the tens of thousands of people in the square. Early on June 4, she and the other leaders linked arms and led the demonstrators to retreat.

As two of the government’s 21 most-wanted, Chai and Feng escaped by train to Wuhan, where she recorded a statement describing the massacre at Tiananmen. The message was later widely broadcast by Voice of America. A network of devout Buddhists helped the couple hide from authorities for 10 months, and they eventually reached Hong Kong after being smuggled in a cargo box aboard a boat.

Chai and Feng escaped to France, yet their marriage fell apart as Feng left her for other women. Chai recalls in her autobiography, *A Heart for Freedom*, that she was filled with rage toward the Chinese government, sorrow from being separated from her homeland and abandoned by her husband, and guilt for surviving the massacre. She attended graduate school at Princeton but afterward found that finance companies wouldn’t hire her due to fears it would hurt their access to the Chinese market. She had to change her name and promise to halt her democracy activism in order to get a job.

She married Bain & Company partner Robert Maginn and started her own tech company, Jenzabar, which provides universities with learning management systems. In 2009, she met Reggie Littlejohn, a Christian who started Women’s Rights Without Frontiers, an NGO that works to end forced abortions in China. Littlejohn gave Chai a copy of *The Heavenly Man* by Brother Yuan, the testimony of a Chinese evangelist, and the book impacted her deeply. Through conversations with Littlejohn, Chai professed faith in Christ.

She was able to forgive those who wronged her, find freedom from survivor’s guilt, and finally discover an answer to the question of why the massacre happened: “The Tiananmen event was a milestone in God’s redemptive plan for China,” she wrote in her autobiography. “He allowed evil to happen—the massacre—to kill our belief in the Communist system.” Chai went on to create All Girls Allowed, a Christian ministry also focused on helping Chinese mothers who are forced to abort their babies.

**Yuan Zhiming, scriptwriter of River Elegy:** Yuan joined the Chinese army in 1973 before going on to get a master’s in Marxist philosophy at Renmin University. While working on his doctorate, he began writing articles in newspapers and magazines advocating for greater reform. In 1988, he wrote the script for *River Elegy*, a popular six-part TV series that noted the decline of Chinese traditional culture and urged China to open up to Western culture. After June 4, the Communist Party blamed the TV series for provoking the student protests and sought to arrest those who worked on it.
A wanted man, Yuan hid in China for a month and a half before escaping to Hong Kong and moving to Paris.

Yuan and other democracy activists set up the Federation for a Democratic China. Yet he witnessed infighting and power grabs within the diaspora democracy movement, and he felt disillusioned.

Yuan accepted an invitation to become a visiting scholar at Princeton, and during his stay, a Chinese student invited him and his friends to a “party,” which actually turned out to be a Bible study. Seeing overseas Chinese singing, jumping, and clapping to worship music seemed strange to Yuan, as it reminded him of the enthusiasm with which people praised Chairman Mao Zedong during the Cultural Revolution.

After that first Bible study, Yuan’s friends stopped attending, yet he decided to keep going because he liked the warmth and the love of the people. “This is something I had never seen in mainland China,” Yuan said in a recorded sermon. “Among the intellectual elites who think they are noble and want to save the country and the people, there has never been this kind of atmosphere or vitality.”

His new friends encouraged him to read the Gospels. While reading the Sermon on the Mount, he encountered a baffling passage: Jesus called His followers to love their enemies and pray for them, as God causes the sun to shine on the good and evil. Suddenly he began to understand God’s unconditional love, something so countercultural to everything he knew. He recognized his own sin and his need for a Savior and professed faith in Christ in 1991.

Yuan attended seminary, worked at the Chinese-language Christian magazine Overseas Campus, and started the ministry China Soul for Christ. He also went back to creating documentaries, including China’s Confession, about seeing traces of the gospel in Chinese history, and The Cross, about Christianity’s long history in China. The documentaries, along with his recorded sermons, were widely spread in China. Pastor Wang Yi, the imprisoned pastor of Chengdu’s Early Rain Covenant Church, noted that watching The Cross was a major influence that led him to profess faith in Christ.
Yet in recent years Yuan has been tangled in controversy. Chai said that in 2011, she approached Yuan to tell him that she had forgiven him for raping her in 1990 while they were both students at Princeton. Yuan insisted that while he had committed “extramarital sexual iniquity” with Chai before becoming a Christian, he did not rape her.

After his continued denials, Chai made the allegations public, saying Yuan had invited himself over and showed her a pornographic film. She says that when she asked him to leave, he pushed her on the floor and raped her. Still denying the rape, Yuan stepped down from China Soul for Christ in 2015.

A year later, a GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment) investigation reported that in 2013, Yuan invited a 23-year-old intern to his hotel room to watch a pornographic film, embraced her for two or three minutes, and asked her to stay the night. Five people corroborated her story, yet again Yuan denied any wrongdoing.

**Zhang Boli, deputy of the Defend Tiananmen Square Headquarters:** Zhang was a journalist before attending Peking University for a writer’s training program in 1989. During the protests, he founded the News Herald, the first nongovernmental newspaper in 40 years. The night before the crackdown, he announced the creation of Tiananmen Democracy University.

After the massacre, he escaped north to his home province of Heilongjiang, while his wife and young daughter stayed behind. Zhang was No. 17 on the most-wanted list and hid in the homes of relatives and close friends—some of whom were high-level cadres. While staying at the home of a childhood friend’s relative, his illiterate host asked him to read her a copy of the book of John, and he was moved reading about Jesus.

Zhang decided to escape across the border to the Soviet Union. Yet after crossing into the Soviet frontiers, he became caught in a heavy snowstorm and wolves began to circle. For warmth, he jumped into a bale of hay inside a shed. Certain of death, he started to pray, promising that if God saved him, he would give his life to Jesus.

The next morning Russian peasants found him, even though they only came to the frontier region once a month. They sent him to the KGB, which interrogated him, held him for a month, and then quietly dropped him off back at the Chinese border.

For the next year and a half, he lived in a small hut in the secluded woods by the Heilongjiang River, where he hunted, tended a field, and had minimal contact with friends in the area. In 1991, a friend and a sympathetic policewoman helped him escape to Hong Kong, where he found out from a news article that his wife had divorced him.

Zhang was granted asylum in the United States, yet doctors soon diagnosed him with severe kidney cancer. During this time, his church friends often came to visit him and he was baptized. After recovering, he attended seminary and is now the pastor of Harvest Chinese Christian Church, which has locations in Virginia, California, New York, Philadelphia, and Singapore.

“Many student leaders professed faith in Christ because we went through great hardship,” Zhang said. “Our desire to shape the future of China was crushed and we realized there was a limit to what we could do. ... After believing in God, we finally found the right path to take, rather than leaning on our own understanding.” 📝
An agnostic, liberal YouTube celebrity and a conservative evangelical journalist walked into a Mexican coffee shop in Los Angeles and did the seemingly impossible: They sat down and had a two-hour, civilized discussion about religion, politics, and sex.

I (the journalist) had asked Laci Green (the YouTuber) out for an interview, but I warned her that my publication is Christian. The meeting would be more like a casual conversation, I told her—one that I hoped would challenge perspectives.

“Great!” she chirped. “We have that in common.”

By the time we met in person, I had watched a dozen of her YouTube videos, so I recognized her at once—the wavy dark-blonde hair, the heart-shaped face, the black-rimmed glasses, the bright lipstick. She was as perky and self-assured as she is in her videos, with gleaming smiles and vivid facial expressions made to be on camera.

As a kid, Green was fascinated by the miracle of life. She decorated her room with diagrams of human cells and plastic models of human anatomy. At 8 years old, she sat in the corner of the public library, pretending to read children’s books while instead reading all she could about how babies were created.

Now 29, Green has made a career out of satisfying her curiosities about human sexuality: Her YouTube channel, in which she discusses all things sex from hymens to BDSM to sexual assault, has almost 1.5 million subscribers. She has worked with MTV, Discovery Channel, and Planned Parenthood to provide “sex positive” sex education via web series, panels, and lectures on college campuses. In 2016, *Time* named her one of the 30 most influential people on the internet and called her a “millennial Dr. Ruth.”

Clearly, Green sees the world differently from most conservative Christians. She’s a pro-abortion, pro-LGBT feminist who identifies as bisexual and believes sexuality is “diverse, expansive, and worth celebrating.” I, on the other hand, believe that women are equal to men but have complementary gender roles, that abortion is morally wrong, and that sex should be reserved for marriage, a sacred covenant between a man and a woman.

But we also have similarities: We’re both nerdy millennial women who were raised in religious households, and we’re both willing to hear opposing views. During our conversation over coffee, it became clear that we shared a common desire for community, purpose, and goodness—yet somehow we ended up on divergent paths.

Green grew up in a devout Mormon family in Portland, Ore., and Sacramento, Calif. Her father, an immigrant from Iran, was a Muslim before he converted to Mormonism and married the Mormon woman who became Green’s mother. Some of Green’s fondest childhood memories revolve around the Mormon religion: She remembers fun activities and Book of Mormon stories every Sunday and Wednesday night; arts, crafts, and archery classes at summer camp; and close friendships with other families in her ward.
Her views about Mormonism shifted once she turned 12: Suddenly, girls and boys weren’t allowed to be in the same classes anymore. While boys held leadership positions in the congregation and prepared for priesthood, girls learned to babysit, cook, and sew. Green also began doubting Mormon teachings, such as the stories about Joseph Smith and his golden plates and the angel Moroni. She couldn’t reconcile the supernatural elements with the science and history classes at school. She was also developing crushes on both boys and girls, which confused her, and she blamed her Mormon congregation’s emphasis on sexual purity for creating shame and hate toward her body and sexual desires. When her mother tried to talk to her about sex, Green felt so ashamed that she verbally lashed out and kicked her mother out of her room.

Of course, such internal conflict is common among many young adults, not just Mormons. I had my own struggles as a missionary’s kid who was expected at a young age to meet certain spiritual and moral standards. In my case, I turned inward to a prison of self-criticism. Green turned to YouTube.

Though she didn’t feel safe sharing her skepticism with her real-life community, Green felt comfortable turning on the webcam and rambling her thoughts and feelings to a virtual community. Her first video was about Westboro Baptist Church and its anti-gay protests: If God is all-loving, how can believers do such a hateful thing? To her surprise, people watched her videos and agreed with her.

“I finally found people who made me feel like I’m not crazy,” Green told me. “For a long time, I had wondered if there was something everyone was seeing that I wasn’t seeing.”

That was 2008, when Green was 18. People were still carrying Motorola flip phones and Blackberries without shame. YouTube wasn’t yet the huge, money-generating platform it is now, on which kids as young as 7 make millions of dollars creating endless video content. Green never intended to become an internet celebrity. She started video blogging simply because she desired a safe community where she could process her falling-out-of-faith journey.

2008 was also the year I discovered blogging as a 21-year-old college dropout recovering from anorexia. I first logged on desperately seeking a community that understood my personal demons. Like Green, I used the online platform to digest the faith I grew up swallowing: If God is all-loving, why does He allow me to suffer? If God is all-powerful, why doesn’t He heal me instantly? I knew what my parents taught me about God—but who was this God to me?

Both Green and I had intellectual and theological questions, but the emotions that drove us to those questions were deeply personal, tinged with loneliness and isolation. For whatever reason, we landed at opposite conclusions: She decided God didn’t exist and that organized religion is oppressive, judgmental, and hypocritical. I decided that though doctors could treat my body and therapists could treat my mind, I had no power even to desire treatment without the grace of God.

For better or worse, we found an audience willing to listen. Green began attracting up to 50,000 views per video. She used her burgeoning platform to champion issues such as transgender rights, abortion, and sexism, solidifying her identity as an atheist, feminist, social justice warrior (SJW). Sometimes she missed the close-knit Mormon community (“There was always a sense that you’ll be taken care of if things went off the rails”), but she enjoyed having a community of people who shared her worldview.

While a student at the University of California, Berkeley, Green shifted to vlogging about sex education. Rather than promoting abstinence, her idea was to make sex ed fun, approachable, and “sex positive.” At the time, nobody else online was talking seriously about topics such as body image, sexual identity, and female pleasures. Her videos drew intimate emails from young viewers:

Is it normal that my body does this?
How do I come out to my parents?
Is it normal for my boyfriend to treat me like this?

Green says she always pointed the girls to professional resources. My blog had its own loyal (but smaller) following. Unsurprisingly, the majority of my readers were fellow young women struggling with eating disorders. Some sent me essay-length emails, and one teenage girl began calling me unni—an endearing Korean term for “older sister.”
I found these interactions to be exhilarating at first. Suddenly, my meaningless suffering had a purpose: to encourage others in the same struggles. But over time, I felt more helpless than empowered. I was just another broken girl, leaning on God to pick up my pieces, and it made me uncomfortable that these young girls were looking to me as their savior.

Meanwhile, Green was at the peak of her YouTube career, making enough money to help pay her college tuition. She was also depressed and miserable. After graduation, she was on the road most days of the year, touring from school to school giving lectures, posting videos once a week, and dealing with constant criticism. The more popular she became, the more internet trolls she attracted—mostly angry men who called her sexually degrading names or sent her threats.

In 2012, with the online outrage culture in full bloom, people sent Green death threats and images of her home for using the word “tranny” in one of her older videos. During her speaking engagements, people occasionally threw objects at her or surrounded her to berate her. She was a favorite target of anti-SJW YouTubers who encouraged millions of followers to mock her, but oftentimes the outrage came from fellow liberal feminists. Gone were the days when she could semi-improvise her videos—now she was preparing a script and obsessing over every potentially offensive word. Gradually, Green retreated. She still posted videos but no longer was as vulnerable or open, and she dreaded logging on to YouTube. The internet was no longer her safe space.

Over time, Green says, she realized, “This is not what I signed up for. This is not fun anymore.” In 2017, as she considered quitting social media, Green decided she needed to do one last thing, something she hoped would allow her to forgive her detractors and move on: She contacted the right-wing critics who had made her life miserable and asked her to forgive her detractors and move on: She contacted the right-wing critics who had made her life miserable and asked them to forgive her. They all said yes.

In March 2017, Green appeared in a livestream video with Blaire White—a right-wing, Trump-supporting, transgender activist—to talk about feminism and trans issues. Two weeks later, Green posted a video announcing she’d been engaging with people who held alternate opinions and that she was willing to adjust her beliefs as she considered new viewpoints. She also began dating Chris Ray Gun, an anti-feminist YouTuber who had criticized Green in the past.

To the SJW crowd, she might as well be frolicking with the devil. Incensed left-wingers accused Green of embracing anti-feminism and of betraying her marginalized allies. Green soon lost many friends—real-life friends who had traveled with her and taken selfies with her at conferences. They unfriended her on Facebook, sent her vulgar text messages, and publicly disavowed her on social media.

It was an immensely painful experience, one that made Green realize she might not want to identify with left-wing activists anymore. She had embraced that group thinking they were tolerant, open-minded folks. Instead, she witnessed the same qualities for which she had fled Mormonism: “I can’t help but see this as another religious zealotry,” she said.

“I think you got a glimpse of human nature,” I suggested as we sat over coffee. Green tilted her head and pondered. “Hmm... perhaps, maybe, maybe. What do you mean?”

I explained that self-glorification and self-righteousness are inherently parts of human nature. It doesn’t matter whether we’re in church or not, we can’t escape our own human nature.

Green nodded: “OK, fair point. I agree with you. And I’d add that social media cranks that up.”

I had noticed the toxicity of social media in my five years of blogging as well. I was part of the food blogging community, but even there, I witnessed vicious gossiping, jealousy, and pettiness—and participated in some ways that I now regret. Also, my blog had become a form of idolatry for me: I was spending an extraordinary amount of time on it, and the page views I scored and the comments I received stoked both my pride and my insecurities.

Laci Green had embraced left-wing activists thinking they were tolerant, open-minded folks. Instead, she witnessed the same qualities for which she had fled Mormonism: ‘I can’t help but see this as another religious zealotry.’

So in 2013, I deleted my blog. It had served its purpose, helping me recover from anorexia and giving me a public space to remember God’s grace during the hardest period of my life. But God was calling me into the real world.

Green says she’s ready for the real world as well. Currently, she’s back in school to become an advanced practice clinician. She hasn’t posted a video on YouTube in six months, or tweeted in four months, and says she has softened her once-militant positions on many issues: “I’ve just accepted that our world is too complex, and some problems just don’t have obvious solutions.”

I asked if her views on God have also shifted. Green said she’s still not religious, but no longer describes herself as an atheist: “I guess technically, I’m agnostic, because I don’t think I can know everything.”

I then asked if she knows Christians who pray for her. Green hesitated: “Some people do say they pray for me, and I used to think it was so condescending. I guess it depends on what they’re praying for.”

“What if they’re genuinely praying for your soul?” I asked.

She smiled: “Well, then I find that sweet, and I accept that as a gesture of love and compassion.”

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n March 31, 1755, the curtain rose for the first time at Lisbon’s Casa da Opera, said to surpass “in magnitude and decorations all that modern times can boast,” with spectators gaping at “the richness of the house and all the gilded decorations.” Its stage was 180 feet long, twice the length of a modern NBA basketball court. King José had assembled “the greatest singers then existing”: Domenico Luciani, Giuseppi Morelli, Gaetano Majorano, and more.

The opera house was only one jewel of Lisbon, Portugal, then known as Queen of the Seas and the world’s most ostentatiously wealthy city. Mark Molesky notes in This Gulf of Fire (Knopf, 2015) that residents of Lisbon (Lisboetas) imported pepper from India, nutmeg from Indonesia, silks from China and Japan, and huge amounts of gold and precious gems from the Gold Coast of Ghana and the mines of central Brazil. In 1755 Portugal, which had pioneered in African slave kidnapping and trading, observed the 300th anniversary of the dire day when Pope Nicholas V blessed its slave trade.

Lisbon was a very religious city. Its churches had at least 20 images of Jesus that priests claimed had healing powers. Many Lisbon homes had wooden shrines with purported strands of Christ’s hair, splinters from the crucifixion cross, and teeth of ancient martyrs. Almost-daily processions featured acolytes carrying through the streets statues of their favorite saint. The royal family had just completed construction of a 1,000-room palace that included a convent from which King José took nuns as mistresses.

Noblemen imitated their monarch to such an extent that a French observer called nuns “cloistered prostitutes,” midwives called newborn babies “little canons of the Patriarchal Church,” and gourmands called a bulging pastry “a nun’s belly.” Venereal disease was rampant. Lisbon, in short, was a pit of corruption, but so were other European capitals: Near London, for instance, Chancellor of the Exchequer Francis Dashwood hosted parties at a former abbey where he and other cabinet members, dressed as monks, drank wine poured by naked women.

In Lisbon on Nov. 1, 1755, many who had frolicked the night before were in churches lighting candles as offerings to the santos and santas whom they hoped would intercede for them. At about 9:45 a.m., a “horrible subterranean noise” arose. The
sound soon became like that of “the loudest cannon.” Then the walls came tumbling down. British merchant Thomas Chase wrote to his mother of “every stone in the walls separating each from the other.” Falling ceilings and walls crushed worshippers, and “death in every shape soon grew familiar to the eye!”

Thousands died within the tall, collapsing churches and cathedrals. Survivors, like New Yorkers close to the fall of the twin towers on Sept. 11, 2001, were covered in dust. Some deaths were grotesque: One observer saw “the Palace of the Inquisition falling to the ground and with it the President of that institution caught in the ironwork of a window, where he died a miserable death.”

Historian Molesky has dug up varied reactions. One merchant “saw shops...with the shopkeepers buried with them, some alive crying out from under the ruins, others half buried, others with broken limbs, in vain begging for help.” Some trapped under rubble offered “great sums of money to whomever would liberate them.” Many wandered through the streets “crying out their sins and asking God repeatedly for mercy.” Some embraced their “worst enemies” and “asked for forgiveness...swearing from this day forward to be faithful friends.”

But the earthquake was only the first disaster of the day. Many survivors scurried to the safety of the waterfront—and were drowned by a tsunami wave. Others retreated inland, leaving behind votive and altar candles that set ablaze curtains and containers of holy oil. Strong winds spread the burning. One eyewitness wrote, “It was a tremendous sight. One saw merchants throwing their riches from the windows in order to save them from the flames.” Those trapped in rubble usually did not burn to death, though: They died of smoke inhalation first.

King José’s new opera house survived the earthquake but burned to the ground in the fire: Molesky writes, “Of all the losses suffered in the disaster, few were more heartbreaking for the king.” Tens of thousands of deaths broke other hearts. Across Europe and the Americas, news of the disaster made ears tingle and minds ask questions. Don Antonio de Barroeta, the archbishop of Lima, Peru, gave one answer: “Divine Justice. Our crimes are the true causes of earthquakes and the destruction of churches.”

De Barroeta was not a know-nothing. He knew one cause was “subterranean volcanic eruptions and fires,” but he said “the true subterranean force is the lascivious burning in men’s hearts.” The London Evening Post agreed that “Earthquakes are Effects of natural Causes,” but God is “the Author and the Lord of Nature, all these Causes are in his Hands, and his Providence is over all his Works.”

That idea insulted Enlightenment progressives. The Lisbon earthquake came at a time when Europe seemed finally on its way out of grinding poverty. In the 1600s, during the “Little Ice Age,” normally free-flowing rivers like the Thames froze over and food production fell—but 18th-century global warming along with farming improvements helped many escape poverty. Yet in 1755 “blind Nature,” as David Hume labeled it, seemed to be striking back.

François-Marie Arouet, who wrote under the name Voltaire, particularly questioned the idea of earthquake as God’s judgment: “Why had Lisbon been leveled? Was she more vicious than London [or] Paris, plunged in pleasures? Lisbon is shattered, and Paris dances.” Of course, Jesus more than 1,700 years earlier had answered in advance Voltaire’s question when some onlookers asked Him about residents of Galilee whom Pontius Pilate has slaughtered: Jesus said they weren’t worse sinners than others, “but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

Jesus drove that point home with His comment on another news event: “Those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” Methodist founder John Wesley reflected Biblical thinking in a book he quickly published, Serious Thoughts Occasioned by the Earthquake at Lisbon: It urged readers to repent “before London is as Lisbon.”

Enlightenment leaders minimized the need for repentance and emphasized the importance of new building codes. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who lived in a small house north of Paris
with his domestic partner Marie-Thérèse and sent all five of his children to the high-fatality Paris Foundling Hospital soon after their birth, argued that small is beautiful: He blamed Lisbon’s six-story houses and said if residents “had been more evenly dispersed and less densely housed, the losses would have been fewer or perhaps none at all.” Those last few words were factually inaccurate, but Immanuel Kant, in “On the Usefulness of Earthquakes,” also criticized tall buildings.

That architectural argument won the day: Downtown Lisbon’s skyline lacks the skyscrapers typical in other large cities. Buildings are often four stories. Still, an engineering study in 2009 noted that Lisbon has some reinforced concrete buildings but many masonry structures. Mortar decays over time and many Lisbon buildings are poorly maintained, so insurers expect another big earthquake—seismically possible—could lead to a 15 percent loss of masonry structures: That means many would be unsalvaged, but some would collapse.

Ego also triumphed. Lisbon’s front door is Praça do Comércio, Commerce Square. Its biggest feature is a 45-foot-high statue of King José that he commissioned following the earthquake to honor himself. The statue—the first cast bronze one in Portugal—depicts José on his horse, along with a crowned woman (representing “Royal Generosity”) and a winged boy (indicating “Love of Virtue”). Flanking the pediment are sculptures depicting Fame and Triumph: The latter shows a horse (representing Portugal) rearing over and almost trampling a man (representing America).

Another big winner was governmental corruption. It started right away. The German city of Hamburg, then an independent trading republic, sent four free shipments of lumber, tools, and casks of salted beef and pork. Historian Molesky notes that when the ships arrived in Lisbon, King José announced the supplies would be used for the construction of his new palace.

Temporary housing (in those days before FEMA trailers) included 9,000 barracas (wooden huts) that proved inadequate in winter temperatures. Some of the wealthy showed compassion, but King José used much of the skilled labor to build an enormous, low-slung Real Barraca (Royal Hut). The Inquisition also did well: One priest noted that its barraca is “beautifully made, very spacious.”

Today, many leading government officials work in Commerce Square’s symmetrical, arcaded buildings, now repainted in their original yellow color. Some of these public servants serve themselves first. José Sócrates, Portugal’s socialist prime minister from 2005 to 2011, was indicted in 2017 on corruption charges including bribery, money laundering, and tax fraud, and accused of pocketing $39 million. He may soon be going on trial.

Architecture, ego, corruption—but the biggest post-earthquake victor was Voltaire. Some historians have called Candide, the earthquake-based satire he published simultaneously in five countries in 1759, one of the world’s 100 most influential books. Voltaire’s main character, young Candide, initially believes in God but experiences random disasters, particularly the Lisbon earthquake where “whirlwinds of fire and ashes covered the streets and public places.” He loses his faith—thinking disasters disprove the existence of God, eventually giving up his belief that life makes sense—and so, eventually, do millions of Europeans.

Lisbon from the sea now looks like an urban fairyland of gold, peach, sky blue, and other pastel-colored buildings, with windows marching across their façades.

Close-up looks at street level, though, reveal graffiti, some colorful and others ugly both in verbiage and execution. Some wall messages, in English for the benefit of tourists, consist of two words about a sexual act followed by an exclamation point. One building contains both a boutique showing new fashions and an office of the Partido Comunista Português.

From a distance all looks peaceful, but those lumps in front of the shorefront Military Museum are homeless men in sleeping bags. A pocket park overlooking the National Pantheon, formerly a church, displays the strong smell of marijuana. An old immigrant begging for money that will help her gain legal status proclaims on a sign, “I just want peace. A decent life like yours.”

Much of post-Voltaire Europe has become a spiritual wasteland, and journalistic accounts indicate that Lisbon is no exception. Forbes last year described Lisbon as a “breathtakingly bonkers city” filled with “merriment and mayhem.” Big, mostly empty churches make ends meet by renting out their space for concerts, and a big sign at the Church of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception emphasizes the desire of its priests to raise 45,250 euros (about $50,000) for three altars, altarpieces, and statues: “Choose the altar you wish to restore.”

The one clear physical reminder of the 1755 earthquake is the skeleton of the Convent of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. The stone roof of the Gothic structure collapsed and was never rebuilt. Only the pointed arches between the pillars have survived. In the ruins sit some tombs and archaeological objects, but I saw no exhibits reminding Lisboetas and visitors of how close we might be to disaster and death on any given day. As Puritan Increase Mather once preached and WORLD has headlined some obituaries, “Man knows not his time.”

This lack of thought would sadden but not surprise the Boston Gazette writer who on Dec. 29, 1755, saw Lisbon’s earthquake as a warning to all: “The whole World is grown very corrupt... Earthquakes and Desolations... ought to be looked upon as powerful Remonstrances against the Wickedness of Mankind, but whether we have not so long accustomed ourselves to our sins, as to become deaf to every voice that would call off our Attention from them, is a Question that Time only can determine.” ☑
Eight months after Hurricane Florence hit, recovery efforts have stalled for thousands in North Carolina

by HARVEST PRUDE in Trenton, N.C.
FELTON AND GERALDINE EUBANKS DID NOT HAVE flood insurance. Their home of 53 years in rural Trenton, N.C., is in a low-risk area for flooding, according to state records. Prior to Hurricane Florence, they hadn’t needed flood insurance.

“We had never been flooded. Never,” Geraldine said. When the last two big hurricanes hit the state (Hurricane Floyd in 1999 and Matthew in 2016), nearby neighbors and family members whose homes weren’t as elevated found refuge in the Eubankses’ home.

When Florence hit last September, they assumed they would stay high and dry. On Friday night, Geraldine looked outside around midnight, but didn’t see any water, so she went to bed. “The next morning at 7 a.m. I got up and it was in our yard already. So we couldn’t get out at that point.” They also couldn’t call for help, because infrastructure damage from the storm had largely knocked out the area’s phone lines.

A neighbor who had evacuated Friday night attempted to come check on his house, but ran into flooded roads. He passed on the word about the Eubankses, and a volunteer rescue team from Georgia heard about their plight. When the rescue boats came Saturday night, responders plucked 14 people from the Eubankses’ home. A dozen neighbors and family members had migrated there from more dire situations. By that point, water had risen to the garage. When her son-in-law came back by boat on Monday, he found 18 inches of water inside.

Eight months later, the couple are still living with their daughter and trying to get their house repaired so they can go home. They are not alone. The state is currently caught in an impasse found in other disaster recovery areas, such as Houston, Texas, the Florida Panhandle, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

In North Carolina’s rural areas and coastal towns, tourist attractions open for business give signs that all is well, but houses with tarped roofs and gutted insides tell a different story. Displaced residents are still couch-surfing with friends and relatives, sheltering in trailers provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), or watching their savings dwindle from hotel and motel stays. (FEMA and state aid for hotel stays ended in March.)

With hurricane season set to begin June 1, it’s possible more storms could pile onto the state’s backlogged rebuild. Meanwhile, disaster funding has become the latest victim of partisan gridlock in Congress, leaving residents like the Eubankses to find their best hope for recovery in volunteer and faith-based organizations.

When Florence hit the Carolinas and part of Virginia on Sept. 14, 2018, she slowed to a crawl. Over the next six days, Florence dumped an estimated 10 trillion gallons of water across 14,000 square miles. Heavy winds peeled the roofs off houses, battered infrastructure, and downed trees, while a storm surge brought record-breaking river flooding. Florence
caused an estimated $22 billion in damages ($17 billion in North Carolina), knocked out power for over 1 million people, and resulted in 44 deaths.

North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper declared a state of emergency. Federal, state, and local officials mounted a strong first response: State troopers, the Marine Corps, National Guard soldiers, and volunteers rescued over 5,000 people from floodwaters. Volunteer groups partnered with area churches to set up distribution centers and food kitchens and to tarp roofs, muck out homes, and clear debris.

“Disaster relief trucks rolled in the day the storm rolled out,” said Chad Brewer, campus pastor of Port City Community Church in New Bern, N.C.

Congress initially approved $1.14 billion for North Carolina disaster relief in October 2018. U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., called the measure a “downpayment” of federal aid for long-term recovery. But recently, lawmakers failed to pass a fuller $13 billion disaster relief package that would have provided more relief for the state, as well as aid for Florida, Georgia, California, and the Midwest. Democrats rejected the package, arguing it did not include enough funding for Puerto Rico.

They introduced their own $17.2 billion disaster aid package that offers more funding for the territory. Republicans wary of passing anything President Donald Trump won’t sign have argued that the dispute over funding for Puerto Rico should not hold up aid for other areas hammered by disasters. Trump has accused Puerto Rican leaders of mismanaging the $11 billion in aid they have received so far. Unable to resolve the dispute, lawmakers left for a two-week spring recess in the middle of April. After reconvening on April 29, they are in the throes of hammering out a compromise.

North Carolina state legislators designated $400 million for initial recovery spending, with an additional $450 million for future recovery.

Keith Acree, spokesman for North Carolina Emergency Management, said the state has largely completed “small infrastructure” projects, such as clearing debris and getting power restored, but is still getting bigger projects, like road repairs, underway. “You’re trying to prepare for the next hurricane season, which is almost upon us, and are still trying to recover from the hurricane seasons of the past three years.”

North Carolina does not have a number for how many people Florence displaced, but an initial assessment estimated the storm damaged 74,400 homes and displaced tens of thousands of people as a result. Only around 21,000 of those homes had enough flood insurance for complete repairs, while another 1,800 homes could get enough for partial repairs.

The state partnered with FEMA to fund a program called Sheltering and Temporary Essential Power (STEP), a six-month program that offered partial repairs to get people back home as quickly as possible. Each home is mucked out and treated for mold; the flooring is replaced; unfinished drywall is put on the walls; one bathroom is partially repaired; and a sink, mini-fridge, hot plate, microwave, and a couple of doors are installed.

North Carolina partnered with private contractors and two faith-based groups, the North Carolina Baptist Men on Mission and the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church (UMC), to carry out the repairs.

By December 2018, FEMA identified 16,000 home owners who qualified for STEP, but Acree said the number eventually dwindled down to 4,000. When the April 2 deadline ended, they had helped 2,183 homes.
Flooded again and again

Flooding is the most common and the most costly natural disaster in the United States, according to FEMA. Compounding the cost to taxpayers is that the federal government subsidizes flood insurance, artificially lowering the cost of living in flood-prone areas.

As a result, thousands of properties, dubbed “repetitive loss properties,” that have flooded multiple times continue to be rebuilt under FEMA’s National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). These properties make up over 25 percent of flood claims and, as of 2016, had cost taxpayers more than $12.5 billion, according to the Pew Charitable Trusts.

NFIP is currently over $20 billion in debt, even after Congress forgave $15 billion it owed to the U.S. Treasury last year.

When the NFIP came up for reauthorization in 2017, the House of Representatives introduced a bill to address some of the program’s woes, but the Senate kicked reforms down the road. Since then, lawmakers have continued to pass short-term extensions funding the program. The House passed the 11th extension, which runs through Sept. 30, on May 14. It’s unclear whether the Senate will follow suit. But under the split Congress, drastic changes seem even less viable than they were two years ago.

In the meantime, the Trump administration is seeking to address reforms on its own. In March, FEMA announced it is updating how it assesses a property’s risk of flooding. The update will result in across-the-board rate changes, but ones that more accurately reflect the cost. The Risk Rating 2.0 program will use private sector data to assess the flooding risk of each individual property and assign cost of insurance accordingly.

The current model, in place since the 1970s, assesses risk and assigns price based on only one factor: whether the home is located inside or outside of a 100-year flood plain. According to the Congressional Budget Office, some counties had maps over 16 years old and in dire need of updating.

FEMA will announce the new rates under the Risk Rating 2.0 program next spring, and rates will take effect for single family homes in October 2020. —H.P.

Al Miller, director of disaster ministries for the UMC Conference, praised the STEP program for covering the cost of initial repairs, allowing the faith-based group’s resources to stretch further.

However, STEP only took on homes that had up to $17,000 in damages. Officials told homeowners with damages exceeding that amount to seek aid from faith-based and volunteer groups or other state programs.

But even residents who qualified for STEP faced long waits because “contractors are booked for the next one, two years,” Alex Hunt, a construction manager with UMC’s team, explained.

The Eubankses’ son, who lives next door, received STEP aid, as well as money from flood insurance. But he’s still waiting on long-term repairs because “it’s hard to find contractors to help because everybody is so busy,” Geraldine said.

The Eubankses noted that the stress and difficulty have caused some area families simply to move away. “We’ve understood there’s not gonna be but five or six families left,” Geraldine said of their immediate area. “Used to be 16.”

She said the family reached out to a lot of programs, “but the N.C. STEP program is the only one that really came and did anything. And I can’t recommend that.”

The contracting team STEP hired put in new flooring and a partial bathroom, but the pipes sprang a leak, causing rot in the floorboards. The bathroom had to be ripped out for a second time.

But in mid-April, Samaritan’s Purse began construction on their home after a member of the Eubankses’ church told the group about the family’s situation.

“If we hadn’t had faith, ... if we hadn’t had the Lord Jesus Christ on our side, we wouldn’t have made it,” Geraldine said. She added, “And we’ve got flood insurance now.”

State and volunteer groups estimate the rebuild efforts could take anywhere from two to five years.

“Hurricane recovery is not a six-month, not even a year, timeline,” Acree said. “Are we still going to be repairing things five years after the storm? Probably. Our hope is that we’re not hit with another big one in the meantime.”

While lawmakers are tied up in knots and state programs are still getting off the ground, the faith-based groups emphasized that their biggest need is not primarily dollars but people who will contribute their time and skill.

“We supply the materials, we supply the tools ... but we need hands,” Miller said. “We need people to be the hands and feet of Christ to come help us as we get our people home again. All our clients want to do is get back home again.”®
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Learn more at PhonicsMuseum.com
Seventy-five years ago on June 6, the Allied invasion of Normandy—D-Day—marked a turning point of World War II. It was also a turning point for Ken Jacobs, an American soldier in the second wave hitting Omaha Beach, code name for one of the five sectors of the invasion.

Just prior to the assault, the commanding officer of Company C, 112th Engineering Battalion, told Jacobs and fellow soldiers, “You’re expendable. You’re all expendable. If you go down, there are soldiers behind you. And soldiers behind them. And more soldiers. That beach is our mission. We must take that beach.” Jacobs said his CO continued to drive home that message while men prepared to leap from landing craft into the chill of the English Channel.
As he jumped out, the gangly young Jacobs turned to his best friend: “I’ll see you on the beach.” Germans killed that friend minutes later. Their mortars and machine guns took down other soldiers. Jacobs made it to shore behind an amphibious tank that protected him from gunfire. He crouched behind corpses on the pummeled beach, trying to advance while avoiding mines.

Then more seasoned Rangers arrived, spillover from those attempting to scale 150-foot cliffs further down the beach at Pointe du Hoc. The Rangers saw the infantry’s disarray and broken chain of command, so they directed Jacobs and other battered, overwhelmed young soldiers. Within six hours soldiers captured the plateaus above Omaha. Eventually, Jacobs made it to the French countryside.

More than 1,700 Americans were killed that day on Omaha Beach alone. Through August 1944 almost 30,000 Americans died liberating Normandy.

When Jacobs entered the Army at age 23, he sensed God telling him not to be afraid, that He would protect him. He believed God preserved his life at Normandy specifically for a higher purpose.

After the war, Jacobs enrolled at St. Paul Bible College. There he met his future wife, Elaine, who lost her first husband when Nazis shot down his plane. Wycliffe Bible Translators sent Ken and Elaine to the Chamula people of southern Mexico. Earlier missionaries had dubbed these descendants of the ancient Maya “The Impossible People” because of the difficulty reaching them.

The Chamulas had no written language. They practiced animism, sacrifice, and witchcraft. Alcoholism and poverty reigned in a system that kept people chained to tradition, ritualism, and fear. They distrusted outsiders and threatened to kill new faces.

The Jacobses spent 50 years among the Chamulas, gaining the trust of one person at a time. They created a written language and spent 23 years teaching it to the people and translating into it the New Testament. Jerry Jacobs, the Jacobses’ adopted Chamula son, then a young boy, now 61, remembers his dad sitting daily with orange 3 x 5 cards, pointing to objects, and writing phonetically what his Chamula friend uttered.

While Ken did most of the translation work, Elaine won over Chamulas by treating their diseases, especially parasitic illnesses. She shared the produce of her vegetable garden and conversed in Chamula. Previously, when someone professed faith in Christ, other Chamulas would treat him as an invader, ostracizing and sometimes killing him or a family member. They often burned down the homes of new believers or threw them in prison, believing they had violated sacred traditions.

Despite persecution, so many Chamulas came to Christ that Jacobs, with help from the Mexican Bible Society, began coordinating the translation of the Old Testament. They finished translating the entire Bible in 2001. Today, tens of thousands of Chamulas call Christ their Savior. More than 130 evangelical churches preach the gospel.

The Chamula people now thrive in their communities, having gone from little to no involvement in business, education, and politics, to leaders in every area. Jerry Jacobs said he can’t help but think of his homeland when he reads in Isaiah, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.”

Struggles remain. Some aren’t yet involved citizens. Racism between people groups occasionally arises. The third generation of Chamula Christians needs continued solid teaching, like all believers, to pass on their new legacy. But the transformation is real and widespread, permeating every aspect of society.

Elaine Jacobs died in January. Ken Jacobs, 97, lives in a senior center in Minnesota. When my husband Bill and I met Ken Jacobs, he got our attention by telling us what his commander at Normandy told him. Then he grabbed Bill’s lapels, looked him in the eye with a piercing gaze, and proclaimed, “Christ was expendable. He was expendable for you. YOU were His mission.”

—Sharon Dierberger is a World Journalism Institute mid-career course graduate
A tech cold war

THE U.S. BLACKLISTS CHINESE TECH GIANT HUAWEI AS A TRADE WAR INTENSIFIES

by June Cheng

Tensions between the United States and China rose in mid-May after the Trump administration placed Chinese telecom giant Huawei on a trade blacklist over espionage concerns. In response, Google said it would suspend business with the second-largest smartphone maker.

Two days later, the U.S. Commerce Department delayed the ban, giving tech companies permission to work with Huawei for another 90 days in order to keep smartphones up-to-date and secure.

Huawei smartphones are powered by Google’s Android system, with Google’s apps preloaded onto the phones Huawei sells internationally. Without an extension of the deadline, starting Aug. 19 Google will stop providing hardware, software, and technical support to Huawei phones. New versions of the phones will not access popular apps such as Google Play, Gmail, YouTube, and the Chrome browser. Huawei would only be allowed to use the public version of Android through an open-source license.

The ban would have little effect on Huawei users in China, as the country censors Google, but would affect Huawei’s large European market.

In a way, the United States is taking an approach China has long employed: China’s Great Firewall has blocked major U.S. tech companies from entering the country while spreading China’s homegrown tech companies overseas. Chinese tech companies still use American chips and software from companies such as Intel and Qualcomm, as Chinese companies are unable to make them.

The U.S. government is concerned that Huawei and other Chinese telecom companies could pass data from the 5G networks in other countries to the Chinese government, allowing Beijing to spy on the U.S. government, its citizens, and its companies. New Chinese security laws require companies to provide information to intelligence officials.

While Huawei claims it is a private company owned by its employees, a 2019 study found that Huawei is owned by a holding company that is 99 percent owned by a “trade union committee.” In China, these organizations are essentially owned and controlled by the government.

New Zealand and Australia have agreed to ban the company, but Britain, Germany, India, and the United Arab Emirates have refused U.S. efforts to persuade them to join the ban.

The Huawei ban comes after a breakdown in trade negotiations between the United States and China. The Trump administration increased tariffs to 25 percent on $200 billion worth of Chinese goods and made plans to tax another $325 billion worth of additional Chinese goods. Long-term frustration exists over China’s practice of stealing U.S. intellectual property and forcing U.S. companies to transfer technology to Chinese companies in exchange for access to the Chinese market.

As tensions heightened, Chinese state broadcaster CCTV canceled scheduled programming and instead showed anti-American movies that depict Chinese soldiers fighting Americans in the Korean War, according to Hong Kong news site Inkstone. China may retaliate against the Huawei ban by cutting U.S. access to rare earth minerals, used for high-tech electronics and military equipment.

On Monday, state media reported that President Xi Jinping visited a rare earth company in Jiangxi province.

Under Xi’s rule, the government has become more authoritarian, stifling religion, free speech, and dissent. Liberal economists who were once celebrated when China began to reform and open up are now silenced and barred from leaving the country.

“Ideology is what is really behind the trade war,” Zheng Yongnian, director of the East Asian Institute at the National University of Singapore, told the South China Morning Post.

“The West has lost its hope on China because they think China has given up on universal values. The trade war is only an illusion—it is about conflicts of ideologies and material interests.”

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A scandal afoot?

INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT SHOWING PASTORS IN EXPENSIVE SHOES GAINS ATTENTION by Jenny Rough

On March 18, a tech employee who goes by the alias Tyler started an Instagram account with the username @PreachersNSneakers and posted a photo of an American pastor in tennis shoes. Sounds harmless, but these weren’t scuffed-up lawn mowing shoes, they were Yeezys, and Tyler happened to be a sneakerhead.

For the uninitiated, Yeezys are a line of footwear that rapper Kanye West designed with Nike and then Adidas. The shoes often resell online for thousands of dollars. A sneakerhead, according to Urban Dictionary, is “a person who collects limited, rare … or exclusive kicks” or is knowledgeable about sneakers. Tyler posted another photo. And another.

Pastor Chad Veach of Zoe Church in $1,045 Saint Laurent Jodhpur boots.

Pastor John Gray of Relentless Church in a pair of red Air Yeezy 2s that resell for over $5,000.

Pastor Rich Wilkerson Jr. of Vous Church in a pair of red Air Yeezy 2s with a Neiman Marcus price tag of $995 (FoG stands for Fear of God).

Eight weeks later, @PreachersNSneakers had fewer than 40 pictures, but had gained over 160,000 followers.

The site set off alarm bells about consumerism, and followers were going nuts with comments: a wide mix of condemnation, chiding, and claims that it’s a sin to judge others because only God knows the heart.

Some of the photos show pastors in expensive clothes or accessories instead of shoes, like the one of televangelist Jesse DuPlantis in a $1,300 Louis Vuitton bomber jacket.

It raises an important question: Christians aren’t called to be paupers, but the Bible clearly commands against loving money. How should Christians hold that tension?

WORLD asked 15 pastors featured on the site to respond to that question.

Only one pastor responded: “How’d you get my email?” asked Nathan Finochio of Hillsong Church. Finochio had been snapped wearing a pair of $1,100 Gucci tiger slippers.

The silence of the pastors doesn’t mean Christians should assume the worst. But Christians are called to follow the Way, not the world, and serve a God who is into washing the feet of others, not adorning our own.

Sneaker collector Dre Copeland, 36, of Springfield, Va., wondered if his pastor wore “status shoes” to connect with others. Clergy robes or even a suit with loafers doesn’t relate well these days, Copeland says.

“Megachurch pastors try to appeal to a younger crowd, and a lot of young people emphasize what people wear,” he says. He thinks the real question is whether wealthy pastors are living out their life’s work: helping other people.

“I’m not sure why preachers need to wear any shoe that is like a light show and draws attention,” says Pastor Michael Easley, who hosts InContext, a radio show designed to help others understand and apply the Bible.

“What I’d love to hear is that men and women who are wealthy are also men and women who give generously, provide jobs, and live as good stewards.”

Easley isn’t a sneakerhead, but he recalled a time when he bought a $9,500 used car and caught flak from church leaders. They viewed his wheels, a 1971 Oldsmobile convertible, as a muscle car and wished he’d bought a Chrysler mini-van instead—for $15,000.

Even Tyler has struggled with the proper response to his posts. His photos suggest the pastors are hypocrites. But he knows to “judge not.” So on May 1, Tyler launched a podcast where he plans to talk about “culture, Christianity, preachers, sneakers, [and] materialism.”

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It’s up to every sovereign nation to define and enforce its own immigration policy, and it’s not the duty of the United States to admit every single would-be immigrant.
—HUNTER O’RYAN on Facebook

Thank you to Belz for her insightful and challenging report. Christians must push for national and global policy to help these millions of desperate people. We must search our own hearts, come to grips with our own fears, and awake to compassionate action.
—ALLEN JOHNSON on wng.org

Belz’s column on immigration had many insightful comments, but I don’t think she was fair to President Trump. We can’t have a real conversation about immigration until we have walls, border security, and other changes he has proposed.
—BOB SHILLINGSTAD / Hayden, Idaho

I grew up as a missionary kid in Taiwan and China, so I don’t expect people who are not raised in a Christian culture to care very much about foreigners and strangers. But I find it troubling when professing Christians care more about comfortable lifestyles than other human beings.
—WAYNE ASBURY on wng.org

The blame for the massive problem on the border belongs to the Mexican government for allowing these people to cross through its country.
—NORMAN FRIEDLAND / Clear Lake, Iowa

Thanks for this sensible and helpful column. Learning to look at immigration through the lens of migration seems to me a needed and useful correction.
—STEVE FROEHILICH / Ithaca, N.Y.

This was a jarring reminder of the necessity to “work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.” The road to sanctification is an uphill battle, even for those like Spafford who seem at the pinnacle of faith.
—DARLA DUKSTRA / Kansas City, Mo.

I don’t expect people who are not raised in a Christian culture to care very much about foreigners and strangers. But I find it troubling when professing Christians care more about comfortable lifestyles than other human beings.
—WILLIAM PECK on Facebook

God inspired the song is how I see it. It’s one of my favorites, and the story of how it came to be is, too. The song endures and comforts.
—WILLIAM PECK on Facebook

Some friends of Richard Baxter of Kidderminster reminded him how many and what useful books he had written for the instruction of the church. He replied, “I was but a pen in God’s hand, and what praise is due to a pen?”
—THOMAS CHRISTIANSEN / Seattle, Wash.

Happy and productive
[April 27, p. 59] This is a beautiful story. It’s so sad that people don’t understand how much joy a person with Down syndrome can bring into their family. My sister-in-law had DS. We look forward to seeing her in heaven and hearing her without the speech impediment. She will have much to tell.
—LOWELL WHITE on wng.org

My uncle Johnny, born about the same time as Chris Gargiulo, had DS and cerebral palsy. Back then it was remarkable that these families took their children home instead of institutionalizing them. But now our neighbor’s child has DS and is in her freshman year at college. What a great God we serve.
—LIBBY JOHNSON on Facebook

Georgia on my mind
[April 27, p. 10] The News Analysis is my new favorite feature. It’s a good recap of the latest news with just enough analysis to put the news into its Biblical context.
—PAUL GEBEL / Columbia, S.C.

Regarding the controversy in Georgia, I can’t get past the part where Alyssa Milano calls a law protecting unborn babies “so evil.”
—ELAINE NEUMEYER on wng.org

All joking aside
[April 27, p. 67] Humor has so much value in keeping dialogue open—
another reason totalitarian regimes seek to shut it down.
—JAMES TRICE on wng.org

I wonder if a culture that will not laugh at itself cannot truly cry about itself.
—NEIL EVANS on wng.org

Telescopes and theodicy [April 27, p. 68] Let me get this straight: Some scientists made up the words “dark matter” and “dark energy” to explain something they cannot otherwise explain. Without this dark stuff, the laws of physics may not be laws? So, the smarter humans become, the more they realize how dumb they are?
—BOB CREMER on wng.org

Mountain movers [April 27, p. 46] In my 30 years in Medellín, Colombia, in sports ministry, I have seen God do so much more to redeem this city beyond what you reported. There is still much to do, with carryovers from the cartel life, but Medellín is an example of God’s transforming power.
—MARK WITTIG / Medellín, Colombia

Code complexities [April 27, p. 6] Excellent column. Most of us are hardcore legalists.
—NATHAN CARPENTER on Facebook

—KEN PAXTON / Murphys, Calif.

Corrections The series of Easter Sunday bombings in Sri Lanka in April killed fewer than 300 people (“Shaken, but not broken,” May 11, p. 8).

Chabad adherents believe their religious observance will bring about the advent of the Messiah (“A house is not only a home,” April 13, p. 50).

David Reagan, author of The Jewish People: Rejected or Beloved?, is not Jewish (“Understanding Judaism,” April 13, p. 22).

LETTERS and COMMENTS
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Please include full name and address. Letters may be edited to yield brevity and clarity.
Saladin’s men
AN ALARMING SONG PROMPTS AN ODD RESPONSE FROM THE PRESS

Six miles from where I sit a school is teaching Arabic-speaking children to sing the following song, hand motions and all:

“We will sacrifice our souls without hesitation. We will chop off heads. … Those who accept humiliation—what is the point of their existence? Those who reject oppression are the ones who assert their existence and they eliminate injustice from the land of the Arabs. Rebels! Rebels! Rebels! Glorious steeds call us and lead us onto paths leading to the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The blood of martyrs protects us. Paradise needs real men! The land of the Prophet Muhammad’s night journey is calling us. Our Palestine must return to us. Oh Saladin, your men are among us…”

When the recitation surfaced on Facebook the second week of May, here is how The Philadelphia Inquirer headlined it, in an article buried in “The Region” section of the paper: “Muslim Leaders Report Threats.”

Huh?

Two related editorials bore these titles: “Security Alert Follows Posting of Video of Children Reciting Violent Poems, Songs”; and “What’s on the Video Is Wrong, But Don’t Use It to Smear All Muslims.”

I was reminded of a tongue-in-cheek Australian headline from two years ago: “Muslims Fear Backlash After Tomorrow’s Terrorist Attack.” How would they write up a burglary, one wonders: “Beleaguered burglar files lawsuit after injuring his ankle tripping over child’s monster truck while exiting burgled house with stolen heirlooms.” (Except it’s not a good analogy, come to think of it, because that craziness is a real thing too.)

The Muslim American Society Islamic Center, site of the chilling school performance, issued a press release the next day: “Not all songs were properly vetted. This was an unintended mistake and an oversight.” Pardon me but what was a “mistake” and “oversight”? The exposure of an agenda? Don’t ask. The non-apology apology is supposed to be enough to satisfy us—as it did evidently satisfy the Inquirer, which has never revisited the topic in subsequent issues. Nothing to see here.

Sometimes when I’m not busy wondering why glue doesn’t stick to the inside of the bottle, I ponder: Why are the good guys always so naïve? Virtue should be made of sterner stuff. If you returned from a business trip early and walked in on your wife with another man in your bed, would you buy the tale that he’s a tired cousin on a long journey? Fine, then I’ve got a bridge to sell you.

Many Muslims say the Quranic concept of taqiya sanctions lying to infidels in self-defense. Some extend that to lying in the goal of world domination. It is the reason Yasser Arafat in 1993 could sign his name to the Oslo Accords declaring the Palestinians’ peaceful intentions.

Continuing its poor-beleaguered-Muslims slant on the decapitation video revelation, the Inquirer writes that fear of reprisals “prompted the Philadelphia branch of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) to issue an advisory Monday to all Islamic institutions to increase security precautions throughout the month,” adding that “the CAIR office in Center City was itself threatened by a caller.” It chases down juicy Islamic statements, including this money quote from one Amir Qasim Rashad of the United Muslim Masjid in South Philadelphia, who laments that “places of worship used to be sacred, but now they are the target.”

By the end of the article you’re hopping mad—not at the Muslim video but at people who have the nerve to react negatively to it.

Meanwhile, back in realville, absent from the news piece is that CAIR was founded by two men with ties also to the Muslim Brotherhood, which funnels cash to Hamas and is dedicated to the annihilation of Israel. And that CAIR, which presents itself as a reputable civil rights group and has infiltrated American government social programs and agencies, was an unindicted co-conspirator in the Holy Land Foundation trial. The Holy Land Foundation in turn was the solution cooked up at a three-day meeting in Philadelphia in October 1993 to discuss, after the Oslo Accords, how to continue supporting Hamas while avoiding being viewed as terrorists.

And the children down the road sing on.
The cover story in our last issue showed the dangers of socialism—but New York Times columnist Paul Krugman pooh-poohs the notion that American socialism could lead to “Soviet-style central planning, or Venezuela-style nationalization of industry; ... there is essentially nobody in American political life who advocates such things. ... Scaremongering over socialism is both silly and dishonest.”

Hmm. When teenager Ioseb Jughashvili (he later changed his name to Stalin) became an atheist after reading Charles Darwin’s On the Origin of Species, I suspect he didn’t set out to murder at least 20 million people. Hugo Chávez wanted to soak the Venezuelan rich, but I suspect he did not want to starve the poor—yet he and Nicolás Maduro turned South America’s richest country into its poorest.

Chávez and Stalin both had a high DQ, Determination Quotient. They were initially democratic socialists, but when they ran into obstacles that led others to give up, they intensified their efforts. When Ukrainians resisted the forced collectivization of agriculture, Stalin’s agents seized their crops and created a famine that claimed at least 4 million lives. When some of Stalin’s comrades said the cost of socialism was too high, he doubled down by killing them too.

The problem is that democratic socialism does not work. Socialism goes against entrepreneurial and familial instincts: People work harder when they and their families profit by it, and people work smarter when they can run with creative ideas rather than shuffle through a bureaucracy. Ardent socialists in power soon see their locomotive stalling. What happens then?

Historically, some democratic socialists gave in and chose compromise over killing. Those with the highest DQ persevered, sacrificing democracy in the belief that a little more coal—then a lot more—will get the train moving again. Karl Marx mocked democratic socialists and developed what he called “scientific socialism.”

In 1873 he called himself “a true admirer” of Darwin and saw socialist revolution as a survival of the fittest, with the corpses of those formerly in charge left in the dust.

Bill Clinton in 1993 signed into law the Friendship Act, which authorized construction of a Victims of Communism Memorial in Washington, D.C. The act, adding up victims in China, Russia, Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, Cuba, and elsewhere, cited the deaths of over 100,000,000 and said we should remember them so “never again will nations and people allow so evil a tyranny to terrorize the world.”

Was such tyranny inevitable? Seems that way, since when revolutions leave a power vacuum, the most ruthless eventually fill it. The American Revolution was an amazing exception, but what Edmund Burke said about the French Revolution has been true of every socialist upheaval: “In the groves of their academy, at the end of every vista, you see nothing but the gallows.”

I know the endgames not only from reading history but living my life. I became an atheist after reading H.G. Wells’ A Short History of the World and Freud’s The Future of an Illusion. In 1968, at age 18, I was a democratic socialist. Then came frustrations. The war in Vietnam went on and on. As a columnist on my college newspaper, I walked through city slums, saw poor inner-city public schools, and interviewed prisoners. Nixon was president and Congress seemed a ship of fools. I went on a five-day hunger strike to support striking cafeteria workers.

Later, I realized those causes were justification for what I wanted to do anyway because of arrogance, covetousness, and hatred of God. Those sinful tendencies cascaded me into the Communist Party USA at age 22 and onto a Soviet freighter across the Pacific, into an inner office at the Soviet Embassy in Tokyo, and into a compartment on the Trans-Siberian Railroad for the 6,000-mile trip to Moscow.

I hadn’t planned for that long journey until the year it happened. I hadn’t planned to stand before the Kremlin in November, ready to enlist as a Russian propagandist. Leon Trotsky in 1940 did not expect to die with Stalin’s ice pick in his brain. Nor did Cuban democratic socialists think they would end up with Fidel Castro. But they did. The good news is that I did not plan to become a Christian in 1976. But God did. ♦
Jesus loves me, this I know.
Child sexual abusers gain access to children where the barriers are lowest.

Don’t let your ministry become an easy in for offender access.