Back from the brink

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ON THE COVER: Tourists walk past a statue of Ho Chi Minh, founder of today’s Communist Vietnam, at a public park in the southern city of Can Tho; photo by Hoang Dinh Nam/AFP/Getty Images

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Give the gift of clarity: wng.org/giftofclarity
Notes from the CEO

A few weeks ago, we completed a member survey. To the many of you who participated—thank you.

Yes, surveys like these tend to confirm assumptions, but just as typically they offer a few surprises.

One of the biggest ones was the result of a question about our daily WORLD Radio podcast, The World and Everything in It. We have more than 30,000 regular listeners to that podcast, and our assumption was that almost all of the listeners are WORLD members.

Surprise!

It’s actually about half.

In the survey we asked, “How often do you listen to WORLD Radio’s daily program, The World and Everything in It?” Fifty-two percent of you told us you don’t listen to the program, and an additional 25 percent told us you have never even heard of it. That leaves just 23 percent of all our WORLD members who do listen.

Two pieces of good news we discovered from among all these statistics: First, those of you who do listen, listen a lot—on average, you listen to almost 16 of the roughly 22 daily episodes during the month. We’re grateful for your engagement.

Second, based on this data, we estimate that nearly half of our monthly listeners are not WORLD members. That was an unexpected finding, and a happy one.

If our program has that kind of following outside our membership right now, imagine what might happen if we made it a priority to promote it better among you WORLD members.

We’re thankful that God has provided the resources for us to produce our daily news program. We’re thankful for all our listeners, members and non-members alike.

And we strongly encourage you to start listening if you aren’t already.

Kevin Martin

kevin@wng.org

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I used to think that nothing brought me more delight than to hear someone respond to a story or column in WORLD by saying quite simply, “I didn’t know that.” Now I know I was much too easily satisfied. Real gratification comes, I’ve discovered, when someone reads, reflects, agrees—and then, as a result, changes his or her behavior in a significant manner.

Thirteen years ago, I used this space to introduce you to my friend Scott Brinkerhoff. I used him as an example of someone who had taken seriously what he read in WORLD about the needs of widows and orphans in Africa. Scott had for 28 years been a teacher and athletic director at a Christian school. Now, at 52, he was a widower looking earnestly for his next assignment somewhere in God’s kingdom. Energetically and sacrificially, he responded to those needs.

I come back to Scott Brinkerhoff now not because his story offers a magnificent and victorious ending. I come back instead because, from a human point of view, the story’s outcome is so much in doubt.

Scott spent many months exploring the details of where he might best serve. After reading in WORLD about a ministry in South Africa, he committed himself to a difficult term there. But it wasn’t a good fit, so he moved north to focus on needs in Uganda. There he learned of a tiny mission outreach on the northern-western side of South Sudan. Two or three families had banded together under the title of “Cush for Christ,” investing several years into planting a handful of small churches. They wanted Scott’s help in launching a radio station, and then a school—both of which seemed strategically necessary to strengthen the churches. He could help widows and orphans along the way. And he could build his own little tin cabin—as mosquito-proof and monkey-proof and snake-proof as possible.

Scott had never in his life touched a task having to do with radio. But he’s the kind of fellow who thrives on such assignments, and “Weer Bei Radio” (that means “Redemption” in the Dinka language) has now been on the air for 10 years. A weekly climb to the top of the transmitting tower gave him internet contact with us at home.

Next, the school. No plan, no curriculum, no staff, no materials, no blackboards, no building, no tables or desks. And no experience. About 30 students showed up for the first day of school four years ago. Some had no schooling at all behind them; those who had a little became his teaching assistants.

Buoyed by report cards (government issued) that showed the highest possible performance by the students, “Cush for Christ School” entered year two with 50 students, year three with 80, and year four with 130. Last month, 174 students registered for classes. Technically—if you count only those teachers who are professionally qualified—the student/faculty ratio this year is 174-to-1. But Scott spends a good bit of his time tutoring his teachers. “All my teachers are qualified for what they’re doing. That makes the ratio more like 15-to-1.”

So is “Cush for Christ School” a success or a failure? Was Scott Brinkerhoff’s response to the column in WORLD wise or foolish? Is there among WORLD’s members someone ready to spend the rest of 2018 helping this fledgling school in the middle of nowhere get its feet on the ground?

The qualifications are tough. No medical conditions. No obesity. Ready for 100 degrees in the afternoon shade. If my statistics are right, 200,000 or 300,000 people will read or hear this unusual job description. Out of all those, the people of South Sudan need only one right now to say, “I’m ready!”

Scott Brinkerhoff didn’t fully know what he was getting into. This person is now fully warned. If you want more details, call, write, or email me.
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Arctic evening

The aurora borealis displays above a Navy camp built on a sheet of ice in the Beaufort Sea during Ice Exercise (ICEX) 2018. ICEX18 is a five-week naval training and assessment exercise in the Arctic region conducted by the U.S. Navy and the Royal Navy.

MC 2ND CLASS MICHEAL H. LEE/U.S. NAVY VIA AP
President Donald Trump’s move in March to impose hefty tariffs on imports of steel and aluminum sparked fevered debates about the potential fallout of an international trade war.

Other kinds of war bring more certain dangers. A 2017 study estimated a nuclear war with North Korea could kill 2 million people in Seoul and Tokyo, if the North Korean regime detonated a nuclear missile over the massive cities.

Last fall, rumors of war escalated as North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un said the country had successfully tested a ballistic missile that could reach the continental United States. President Trump warned the United States would “totally destroy” North Korea if the regime forced America to defend itself or its allies.

The bellicose environment made a March announcement surprising: President Trump has accepted an invitation to meet with Kim Jong Un. Details on a date and location aren’t set, but if it happens, it would mark the first time a sitting American president has met with his North Korean counterpart.

Skeptics warn the presidential summit could serve to legitimize Kim Jong Un. They also wonder if Kim will offer some form of denuclearization in exchange for something the United States won’t give—like withdrawing troops from South Korea.

But attempting a conversation is usually more desirable than launching a war, and if Kim has been unnerved by Trump’s aggressive approach—or perhaps spooked at the prospect of dying in a targeted strike—it’s worth seeing where the discussion heads.

Wherever it goes, Kim is likely to focus squarely on protecting himself. The Kim ideology demands unswerving devotion from North Koreans who risk brutal punishment or death for any dissent.

Not provoking a nuclear strike by the United States could spare millions of North Koreans (and others) that terrible pain, but the population likely will continue to suffer from other forms of warfare: The Kim regime works to cut off North Koreans from the outside world and forbids any ideology that would compete with him—including news of a Savior who gave up His life to save people for their good. (For more on North Korea, see p. 24.)

On the other side of the world, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro persists in trying to protect another disastrous ideology: a failed socialist system destroying his own nation.

An estimated 3 million people have left Venezuela since late President Hugo Chávez introduced a form of socialism that has collapsed over the last several years. Shortages of food and medicine are epic, and researchers say Venezuelans lost an average of 19 pounds in 2016 from lack of food.

More than 1 million Venezuelans left in the last two years, and many seek shelter in neighboring Colombia. It’s a turn of affairs for the two countries: Colombians used to flee to Venezuela seeking refuge from decades of guerrilla warfare.

Now, the country tries to absorb thousands of hungry Venezuelans with few resources. Reuters reported a line to cross the border into Colombia in February backed up at least 8 miles.

In March, David Beasley, the director of the UN World Food Programme (and former Republican governor of South Carolina) said Colombia desperately needs international assistance to help Venezuelans: “This could turn into an absolute disaster in unprecedented proportions for the Western hemisphere.”

Maduro seems unfazed. He forbids outside humanitarian aid, saying it’s a ruse by the United States to invade Venezuela. And he gains weight as his citizens starve. Late last year, during a televised national address, Maduro slipped an empanada from behind
his desk and took a bite between remarks.

Protecting ideology isn’t just for nations. Closer to home, another destructive ideology gains ground: The medical journal *Pediatrics* published a study by the University of Minnesota saying far more teens identify as transgender than researchers previously thought. The study of ninth- and 11th-graders estimated 3 percent were “transgender or gender non-conforming.”

Daniel Shumer, a physician at the University of Michigan, said the study shows schools and physicians should abandon fixed ideas of gender: “Youth are rejecting this binary thinking and asking adults to keep up.”

But other studies have shown 80 percent of young people who express turmoil over their birth sex will grow past that conflict. Urging children or teens to use cross-sex hormones or surgery in a fruitless attempt to change their sex protects a popular ideology but harms vulnerable children in need of spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental help. (For more on transgenderism, see p. 36.)

Euthanasia is a popular ideology in Oregon, and it may grow romanticized with the release of a documentary that follows a Portland couple married for 66 years as they prepared to kill themselves together.

The couple suffered from serious health problems, but the wife especially appears alert, mobile, and articulate in the film. She said they wanted to end their suffering and their lives together. Their children were supportive. On April 20, 2017, they hugged their children goodbye and took lethal doses of medication obtained under the state’s Death with Dignity law.

End-of-life issues are difficult and painful, but advocates of life like Joni Eareckson Tada have reminded us in the past that a person’s choice to take his own life affects the society around him, not just himself or those closest to him. She quotes the Apostle Paul: “None of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone.”

In a hurting world, that’s an ideology worth protecting.

---

BY THE NUMBERS

$1.6 billion

The amount of state and federal tax dollars abortion providers used between 2013 and 2015, according to the Government Accountability Office.

1 in 8

The proportion of college and university presidents who believe their school may fold or merge with another institution within the next five years, according to *Inside Higher Ed*.

45 million

The number of iodine pills Belgium’s government recently ordered to defend citizens against the risk of its aging nuclear power plants.

201

The average number of people killed each year by animals in the United States, according to *Wilderness & Environmental Medicine*. Hornets, wasps, and bees are responsible for about 60 of those deaths.

23

The number of Russian diplomats British Prime Minister Theresa May expelled from the United Kingdom on March 14. She accused Moscow of involvement in the poisoning of former Russian spy Sergei V. Skripal on British soil.
Protected
A British family court banned a mother from flying her baby daughter back to India for genital mutilation (FGM) after a warning from social workers. The workers discovered the family had taken their first three daughters to India, ever before. Most people who catch Lassa will experience only mild symptoms, such as fever and a headache. But the fever can imitate Ebola, affecting organs and destroying blood vessels, causing bleeding from the nose, mouth, and other parts of the body. Lassa normally has a fatality rate of 1 percent, but in the outbreak in Nigeria almost 20 percent of confirmed victims have died, according to the country’s Centre for Disease Control.

Died
Roger Bannister, the first athlete to break the four-minute mile, died on March 3 at age 88. On May 6, 1954, Bannister was a 25-year-old medical student running against Oxford University on a windy day at Iffley Road. For almost 10 years, milers had been coming close to breaking four minutes, and many believed Bannister would do it. He broke into the lead with 300 yards remaining. “Those last few seconds seemed never ending,” he wrote later.

Bannister passed the tape at 3:59.4, reaching what The New York Times called “one of mankind’s hitherto unattainable goals.” Bannister later ran a mile in 3:58.8, his personal best, but he retired from running soon after his famous mile to pursue his medical career. In 1975, he was knighted by the queen.

Died
Stephen Hawking, the renowned Cambridge University physicist, died on March 14 at age 76. Hawking suffered from the debilitating effects of Lou Gehrig’s disease for more than five decades, but developed mind-boggling theories about the universe. He gained international fame for his ideas about the nature of black holes. Despite his profound scientific grasp on the immensities of the cosmos, Hawking flatly rejected the reality of a Creator God. In an interview with The Guardian in 2011, Hawking said: “I regard the brain as a computer which will stop working when its components fail. There is no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers; that is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark.”

Visited
Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman met the Coptic pope in Cairo during a landmark visit to Egypt’s largest Coptic cathedral. Prince Mohammed walked with Pope Tawadros II through St. Mark’s Cathedral as part of his three-day trip to the country. State media MENA said the meeting was the first of its kind. Egypt has suffered attacks by Islamic fanatics, whom critics say are influenced by Saudi Arabia, including a bombing near St. Mark’s Cathedral. The prince has promised his reign will usher in a new, more moderate form of Islam in Saudi Arabia.
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“...”
Girls like Becky were treated like criminals. I was crying out for help but it felt like I had nowhere to turn.’

TORRON WATSON on her daughter, Becky, who was raped multiple times by a Muslim gang in Telford, United Kingdom, beginning when she was 11 years old. An investigation by Britain’s Sunday Mirror found that Muslim gangs similarly groomed and raped up to 1,000 girls over a 40-year period in Telford. Authorities reportedly treated the girls as prostitutes and didn’t investigate the rapes for fear of being called racists.

‘The secretary did not speak to the president, and is unaware of the reason.’

State Department undersecretary STEVE GOLDSTEIN on President Donald Trump’s firing of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, on March 13. Soon after Goldstein’s comment, Trump also fired Goldstein.

‘We [Democrats] don’t do well with married white women. Part of that is… ongoing pressure to vote the way your husband, your boss, your son, whoever, believes you should.’

Former Democratic presidential nominee HILLARY CLINTON on one reason she thinks she lost the 2016 election. She made the remarks during a trip to India.

‘The NCAA is corrupt.’

NBA superstar LEBRON JAMES on the scandals plaguing college basketball. He said the NBA should develop a minor league system similar to baseball’s system in order to give young players an alternative to the NCAA.

‘This could destroy China and the Chinese people.’

Retired Chinese newspaper editor LI DATONG, in an open letter, on the vote by China’s National People’s Congress to abolish presidential term limits. The March 11 vote allows Chinese leader Xi Jinping to rule for many years to come.
IT’S THE ECONOMY STUPID

THAT SLOGAN ISN’T GOING TO WORK THIS TIME.

WHERE IS EVERYONE?

EVEN MORE LEFT...

EXCEPT SESSIONS.

2017:

THREATS AGAINST NORTH KOREA! TRUMP WANTS TO DRAG US INTO A NUCLEAR WAR!

2018:

DOESN’T TRUMP KNOW THAT NORTH KOREA PREFERD DIPLOMACY?

16-YEAR-OLDS AGAINST GUN SALES TO 18-YEAR-OLDS

THE GENERATION GAP HAS NARROWED.

WHAT GORILLA?

FEDERAL DEBT
Silence in the court

If you have a case in court and no jury is there to hear it, is it still a trial? Not in Forsyth County, N.C., where officials reportedly forgot to mail notices for jury duty to about 1,700 residents in late February, causing the court system to grind to a halt. Pleas for volunteers on a television station and at a shopping mall produced only 19 prospective jurors. Some trials were postponed up to a week.

A breed apart

Pablo Escobar may be dead, but his hippopotamuses are still causing havoc in Colombia. The drug kingpin whose cocaine trade made him one of the world’s richest men died in 1993. Now 25 years later, the herd of hippos he smuggled onto his ranch in northwest Colombia have seen their population increase tenfold. David Echeverri, a researcher with the Colombian government, said the massive mammals, which are native to Africa, have no natural predators in South America. “They are in a quiet area where they are reproducing,” he told Euronews, calling the animals an “invasive species.”

Echeverri said the government has considered sterilizing the growing herd, but calculated the cost at nearly $36,000 per animal.

Don’t drink the water

Some jokes fall flat. And then there’s the joke told by Egyptian pop star Sherine Abdel-Wahab. A video clip that emerged last year showed the popular singer making a joke about one of her song lyrics, which translates as “Have you drunk from the Nile?” In the clip, the singer answered her own question, saying that if you do, you’re bound to contract a disease called schistosomiasis. An Egyptian court convicted her on Feb. 27 on a charge of insulting the state, sentencing her to six months in prison.

Out of the frying pan

It may have looked like a chase scene in a movie, at first. Shoplifting suspects Marwan Al Ebadi, 28, and Salma Hourieh, 29, were reportedly on the run from police after an alleged shoplifting at a Peoria, Ariz., gas station when they jumped a fence—and landed in a secure area of a police station where several officers were conducting a training exercise. Hourieh tried to hide under a bench, and Al Ebadi jumped back over the fence. Both were quickly arrested.

Reality check

Short on B-roll footage, producers for a state-run television network in Russia apparently cribbed from a popular video game for their coverage of recent combat in Syria. During its Feb. 25 telecast, Channel One TV included a short clip of what appeared to be a Russian jet attacking a truck. But social media users in Russia quickly identified the footage as an animated clip from Arma 3, a combat video game. In a statement, Channel One acknowledged the mistake but denied it was intentional.
Real drill

A fire drill at a rural Egyptian school became all too real for students at the school. In an attempt to make the fire drill more lifelike, school employees set fire to some trash inside the school. Gusty wind whipped up the flames at the school located in Kom Obmo village in Aswan. Adults were eventually able to put the fire out, but not before students began falling ill due to smoke inhalation. The school said nine students required brief hospitalization as a result of the fire drill.

Runway flight

Now the robots are taking the models’ jobs. Fashion house Dolce & Gabbana upended Milan’s Fashion Week on Feb. 25 by using a fleet of drones to fly women’s handbags down the runway rather than using models. The surprise runway event led off the famous fashion show, but technical difficulties with the drones also caused a 45-minute delay. After flying up and down the runway, the drones were sent offstage, and then human models carried on as usual.

Easy rider

A penny-pinching man in England came up with an idea for a cheap ride to visit a friend in the hospital. The man, unidentified in reports, called emergency services in Manchester, U.K., complaining of pain and odd sensations in his legs. That call led to an ambulance ride to the hospital paid for by the U.K. socialized medicine system. “We took him to hospital for him to then get up and walk off on arrival,” Shaun Gerrard, an EMT with the North West Ambulance Service told the Stoke Sentinel. “He admitted he faked the whole lot just to get a lift to hospital to see his friend.” A spokesman for the ambulance service later said, “This is what we’re dealing with day in, day out.”

Along for the ride

In 2009, a museum in Marseille, France, reported that thieves had taken Les Choristes (The Chorus Singers), a work of art by impressionist Edgar Degas. More than eight years later, French customs agents in Marne-la-Vallee found the painting by surprise inside a suitcase during a search of luggage on a bus. The painting is reportedly worth nearly $1 million. Nobody on the bus claimed the suitcase.
Failure to yield
A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT LEADS TO A FATHER’S PLEA ABOUT HIS FATHER’S PROMISE

Many years ago, I attended two funerals within 10 months, both for young men I didn’t know. I went for their mothers’ sakes. One was a suicide, and the pastor did his best to hang his eulogy on the scattered pegs of hope the boy left behind. By the grace of God, there were some. The other was a motorcycle accident.

This young man—I’ll call him Jason—was not reckless or negligent. According to his obituary, the truck he ran into “failed to yield.”

Sudden, untimely death and failure to yield—most of us run up against it sooner or later, at least once in a lifetime. When Jason drove his bike into the pickup, he ran his family into a solid wall of grief. Stunned at first: This can’t be happening. Then the raging pain, the blackness, the feeling around desperately for any crack in the wall, but it will not yield.

On the day of the funeral Jason’s immediate family must have been exhausted, but they were very much in charge. First, they stood outside the doors of the chapel greeting people. Normally the funeral director does that, as the family is sequestered with their loved one. But besides the hearse, there was no evidence of standard “funeral arrangements”; even the coffin (not casket) was the plain pine box many of us say we want but seldom get. There was no piped-in music, just a couple of live songs. There was no pastor, because Jason’s father pastored his own family.

Jason’s oldest brother read the obituary and added some personal comments; his only sister spoke on “My Brother’s Life.” Typically, the subject of a funeral is presented as someone you wish you’d known, or should have known better. Jason was no exception: He was fun, outgoing, uncomplicated, with a gift of happiness. If he had to go so young, he probably went the best way: quickly.

Still, his oldest brother admitted it didn’t seem fair. God gave him two brothers as a gift: one was a suicide, and the other a motorcycle accident. The other was a motorcycle accident.

When Jason drove his bike into the pickup, he ran his family into a solid wall of grief.

Why take one away so soon? A simple equation rates a simple evaluation—it’s not fair. They had their memories, and some of them made us laugh. Laughter is not uncommon at funerals, especially when the death observed is neither a crime nor a suicide but an act of God. Such occasions almost demand a dash of comic relief.

But they end up against the hard unyielding fact. It happened, and there’s no way around it. Most of us in the pews would go our way shortly after and remember the family in our prayers for a few weeks, if that. Those closest to Jason would slam against that wall frequently in days to come. Less so as the weeks stretched to years, but it would stand as long as they lived, along with that stubborn failure to yield. Except for one thing. One vital, necessary, saving grace.

Jason’s father claimed it. In his talk he rambled a bit, even during the “prepared remarks” written on notecards. He was a part-time preacher, and his preachy use of emphasis and Bible-thumping emerged here and there. But mainly he was a hurting father, who pulled his hurt and hope together at the end with a wrenching prayer. Speaking frankly as father to Father, acknowledging their common grief, claiming the perfection of Christ as his own and the inheritance of Christ as his promise, he concluded with a ringing request that sounded like a demand, echoing through the chapel: “Resurrect my son!”

The pain and the triumph—is there anything like it? The baby in the manger and the baby of the family, both working their way into human history, gathering personhood, generating memories, exerting their will, accelerating their years, intensifying their mission, whether deliberately in Jesus’ case or much less so in Jason’s. Speeding through life, faster and faster; until the incarnate Word picks up the carnal son and hurls him at the wall—and it yields.

Resurrect my son!

“And He will,” Jason’s father concluded quietly, with all confidence. ♦
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I’ve enjoyed some Erwin Brothers productions—Christian-themed films helmed by Alabama brothers Jon and Andy Erwin—more than others. Their first effort, *October Baby* (2011), showed refreshing skill and attention to quality in a genre that too often earns easy praise from church-going audiences. The first half of their sophomore effort, *Moms’ Night Out* (2014), proved they could handle storytelling’s biggest challenge: making audiences laugh. While their third outing, *Woodlawn* (2015), was my least favorite, certain aspects still demonstrated their filmmaking chops. The brothers appear to be hitting their stride, though, with their fourth release, *I Can Only Imagine*.

The film tells the true story of how MercyMe lead singer Bart Millard came to write the most-played Christian song of all time, “I Can Only Imagine.” Anyone who’s been to church in the last decade probably knows or has sung it, but in a culture where un-Biblical heaven tourism books and movies abound, the song’s simple, sound reminder that no eye has seen what God has prepared for those who love Him is especially welcome.

In telling the story of how Bart watches God transform his abusive father from “a man [he] hated to a man [he] wanted to become,” the Erwins avoid the main problem that plagued *Woodlawn*. Rather than trying to flesh out too many plotlines, they focus solely on Bart and his relationship with his dad, giving us specific, believable characters. This restraint carries over to other production elements. For instance, for the lead they resisted the temptation to cast a familiar face and instead went with big-screen newcomer J. Michael Finley and Nicole DuPort.
**CULTURE**

**Movies & TV**

J. Michael Finley. Finley has multiple credits on Broadway, and his clear, strong singing voice brings added authenticity to the role.

Another good choice: opting for actors Nicole DuPort and Jake B. Miller to play well-known Christian singers Amy Grant and Michael W. Smith rather than having the stars play themselves. No doubt having Smith and Grant on the promotional tour would have drawn some attention, but it wouldn’t have served the film. The minute either appeared onscreen, we’d forget about Bart’s story and start dwelling on trivialities like how our old favorites are aging.

The real workhorse of the movie is veteran actor Dennis Quaid. As Bart’s abusive father, Quaid bears the heavy load of convincingly giving us both a monster and a repentant dad longing to connect with his son. Quaid impresses on both counts, drawing tears when he asks, “If God can forgive everybody else, why can’t he forgive me?”

Once Bart leaves for college and sets out on the road to CCM success, the story loses some steam and occasionally veers into schmaltz, as when Bart imagines his deceased father waving at him from a concert audience. And the film commits the common error of falling back on a montage where one or two fleshed-out, representative scenes would have had greater impact. But overall, *I Can Only Imagine* is an indie that does the song and its sentiments proud.

I’ve often witnessed Christian movies I don’t consider especially accomplished from an artistic standpoint strike a chord with moviegoers and put up impressive box office numbers. I’m usually glad enough to see it, but I’m thrilled when a well-done Christian film draws the audience it deserves. I hope I won’t have to only imagine this movie becoming one of those.

**Flint Town**

The media spotlight on Flint, Mich., during its water crisis largely dimmed after visiting presidential candidates delivered their promises to residents and departed. The new Netflix documentary series *Flint Town* renews attention for the beleaguered city, focusing not on the water crisis, but on police-community relations.

The current episodes span 2014 to late 2016. (Oddly, several segments are pieced together chronologically.) Comparisons to the classic (and still running) reality show *Cops* are inevitable, as *Flint Town* cameras ride along on patrols. From behind the wheel and in staged interviews, Flint police officers express concern with the city’s crime, racial tensions, and poverty. Strained relations between the understaffed police force (in the 10 prior years having dropped from 300 to 100 personnel) and the community lead some officers to admit to fears of patrolling alone.

Flint’s residents are experiencing these tensions, too, yet interviews with them are infrequent and brief. News anchors serve Flint—and towns like it. —by BOB BROWN

**BOX OFFICE TOP 10**

FOR THE WEEKEND OF MARCH 9-11

according to Box Office Mojo

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

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*Reviewed by WORLD
**Documentary**

**Summer in the Forest**

Washington Post editor Ruth Marcus recently argued in an op-ed that if she had been pregnant with a Down syndrome baby, she would have aborted the child. “That was not the child I wanted,” Marcus wrote. “You can call me selfish, or worse, but I am in good company. The evidence is clear that most women confronted with the same unhappy alternative would make the same decision.” She’s right that the majority of women, if they learn their baby has Down syndrome, abort.

Come find a reminder of the humanity and value of those with Down syndrome (or any other disability) in *Summer in the Forest*, a documentary about the worldwide L’Arche communities for those with disabilities. L’Arche communities are casual homes where people live and work to build “mutually transforming relationships” among the disabled and those without disabilities. The film follows a few disabled individuals in the original L’Arche community in Trosly-Breuil, France, but focuses chiefly on founder Jean Vanier.

Vanier, a Canadian, is a Mother Teresa figure for L’Arche residents, and the camera follows him as he sits in a room with a boy in a wheelchair who can’t talk or move and showers love on him, telling him how beautiful he is. Director Randall Wright, though, doesn’t explore Vanier’s Catholicism, the whole inspiration behind the operation. The L’Arche movement deeply influenced Catholic theologian Henri Nouwen, a connection Wright also leaves unmentioned.

“What is it to be a human being?” asks Vanier. “Is it power?” Vanier’s lifelong thesis is that the weak of the world teach us what it is to be truly human. The film is worthwhile for the simple summer barbecue at the end, where you see the joy of the L’Arche residents, being in each other’s company, being with their families, eating, and playing.

Standing to the side in that scene is a resident with Down syndrome who has taken on a responsibility brimming with irony, given the violence toward those with his condition: He is patrolling the perimeter of the home during the barbecue to make sure everyone is safe.

—by EMILY BELZ

**Movie**

**A Wrinkle in Time**

Part of what made Madeleine L’Engle’s 1962 book *A Wrinkle in Time* such a revelation for young readers is that, for many, it was their introduction to science fiction. Unlike most children’s stories where magic just happens, *Wrinkle* offered physical explanations for its wonders. The new film version of the story makes a brief attempt at this as we watch Meg Murray’s parents present their theories on a fifth dimension that can fold time. But L’Engle’s science, not to mention her serious philosophy, is lost throughout the rest of the film, replaced by unimaginative hocus-pocus.

The grand characters of Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which get the worst of director Ava DuVernay’s generic treatment. L’Engle’s book slowly introduced the weird sisters in the most hilarious and unlikely sequence. Here, they’re stock airy-fairy beings plopped down on the scene with no buildup. In the film we learn that Mrs. Whatsit was once a star who intentionally self-destructed in a cosmic battle. DuVernay instead gives us a glittery Reese Witherspoon who says only that the women are “warriors who serve the good.”

The flip side to the mesdames, the evil “IT” holding Meg’s father on a planet called Camazotz, is characterized by an all-purpose, postmodern badness. Where the book is clear that IT wants conformity and blind allegiance, the film says only that IT wants to cause “fear and prejudice” throughout the universe. We don’t even know what’s so especially threatening about IT. All we have are vague platitudes from Oprah Winfrey’s character that IT is dark and Meg’s light must overcome it.

The “light” refers to Meg’s natural goodness, not any external goodness she draws upon. To be fair, L’Engle’s books were never as explicitly—or soundly—Christian as C.S. Lewis’ Narnia trilogy, but DuVernay replaces her references to the Psalms and Romans with a popular, nebulous belief in the power within.

How ironic that Disney tamed L’Engle’s wild novel about the dangers of conformity by making it look and sound like everything else. —by MEGAN BASHAM

See all our movie reviews at wng.org/movies
Easter comes on April 1 this year, and March 31 is the first day of Passover, so this is a good time to review books that, like Christianity, have Jewish roots.

In *Reading the Bible with Rabbi Jesus* (Baker, 2018), Lois Tverberg explains well how our culture differs from Israel’s 2,000 years ago. Now, thin is beautiful and sunshine means happiness: Then, fat (an indication of wealth) was a blessing and rainfall brought joy. Now, fear of God sounds negative: Then, “fear” was closer to “revere.” Since Hebrew focuses on action rather than thought, when God “forgets” sins He still remembers them, but He does not act on that memory and forsake us.

From the beginning God inspired Bible writers to use concrete metaphors. When we learn in Genesis 2:7 that God formed man from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, we’re learning that man is lowly like dust but raised high by drawing life directly from God. Martin Goodman’s *A History of Judaism* (Princeton, 2018) is a readable 543-page (plus footnotes) introduction to a complex subject. The 18 pages about the most famous Jew in history, Jesus, recognize that He was real and this reality made the early Christians resilient: “Other groups had faded away once their leader was no more.” Too bad Goodman calls Christ’s birth in a Bethlehem manger probably a “patent fiction,” but he does point out the centrality of the resurrection account: “Nothing in the earlier history of Judaism had prepared for this. … The notion at the heart of Paul’s message, of the central significance of death and resurrection, was new within Judaism.”

Burton Visotzky’s *Aphrodite and the Rabbis* (St. Martin’s, 2016) is a fascinating historical account of (to quote the subtitle) *How the Jews Adapted Roman Culture to Create Judaism as We Know It.* Ancient synagogue mosaic floors depict Zeus-Helios, and other archaeological evidence indicates attempts to meld Jerusalem and Rome.

Gerald McDermott’s *Israel Matters* (Brazos, 2017) offers the strongest succinct argument I’ve seen against supersessionism, which holds that the promises God made to Old Testament Israel should now be applied only to the Christian church. Jim Melnick’s *Jewish Giftedness and World Redemption* (Lederer, 2017) documents Jewish success in a variety of fields and notes that Hitler’s murderous hatred of Jews lost him the opportunity to develop a nuclear bomb.

Yair Mintzker’s *The Many Deaths of Jew Süss* (Princeton, 2017) analyzes the most important 18th-century German anti-Semitic trial. Princeton has just come out with an 875-page, detail-filled, eight-authored *Hasidism: A New History* that is likely to be the definitive work on Judaism’s equivalent of charismatic Protestantism.

**BOOKMARKS**

Two dangers come with stories about Laura Ingalls Wilder: the Little House on the Prairie TV series downplays the Christian foundation in her pioneer life, and others portray her as an evangelical saint.

A good journalist, Stephen W. Hines avoids either pitfall in *A Prairie Girl’s Faith* (WaterBrook, 2018). He did his reporting and went to original sources, since Wilder got her start in writing as a newspaper columnist. He also portrays a mother-daughter team at work. Laura was a staunch Christian, but daughter Rose Wilder Lane was a modernist unbeliever. Laura had a great story to tell. Rose was a great editor. Hines doesn’t pick sides in this complicated relationship. He just reports how they made an incredible team.

Another Hines advantage—he grew up on a Kansas farm and milked cows. That helps when you write about farm life.

—Russ Pulliam
FOUR RECENT NOVELS reviewed by Susan Olasky

EVERY NOTE PLAYED Lisa Genova
Richard and Karina are gifted pianists who met in music school, married, had a daughter, betrayed each other, and divorced. Bitterness verging on hatred remains. Then Richard receives an ALS diagnosis, depriving him of his ability to play. Genova portrays the unrelenting course of the disease, the indignities it plays on Richard's body, and its cruelty. But she also shows how Richard and Karina suffer from a deeper malady. ALS forces them to confront their betrayals and seek forgiveness from each other—though not from God. The book includes graphic descriptions of Richard's failing body—and some R-rated language.

MILLARD SALTER’S LAST DAY Jacob M. Appel
This novel is not for everyone. Here's the premise: Millard Salter is a successful 75-year-old psychiatrist in New York City who plans to commit suicide tomorrow. But first he's going to help his 68-year-old, fatally ill lover to take her own life. And before that, he plans to go about his last day of work, reconcile with his estranged ex-wife, visit the building in which he grew up, visit his wife's grave, write recommendations, consult with patients, and have lunch with a 40-something son who hasn't yet launched. It's the sort of novel that would generate good discussion in a book club, though it has some obscenities.

SULFUR SPRINGS William Kent Krueger
Krueger usually sets his mysteries in northern Minnesota. But this novel takes private investigator Cork O'Connor to the Mexico-Arizona border in search of his stepson who has gone missing. The missing man has a history of drug addiction—law enforcement in Arizona assumes he's using again. But as Cork and his new wife Rainy investigate, they begin to suspect that the son has stirred up bad guys with connections to human trafficking and drug running. Corrupt police further complicate the issue. The novel portrays sympathetically the immigrants coming across from Mexico. Warning: Some R-rated language.

NOT A SOUND Heather Gudenkauf
Amelia Winn is an emergency room nurse who suffers a catastrophic injury that leaves her profoundly deaf. Alcohol becomes her way of coping with depression, but it costs her everything. A year and a half later, sober but unemployed, she comes across a dead body while rowing on a secluded stretch of river with her service dog. It turns out to be a fellow nurse and friend. Feeling guilty that she'd let the friendship lapse, Amelia seeks answers. Suspense builds as she faces the temptation to drink and deals with threats she can't hear. Warning: The book includes a few obscenities.

AFTERWORD
The 11 short stories included in Sit by Deborah Ellis (Groundwood Books, 2017) tell of children trying to understand or interact with the adult world. The first story is about Jafar, who works in a furniture factory and tries to avoid beatings by his boss. But he has a secret: At night he goes to school and has learned to read. One day he comes to work with a plan: to scratch on the underside of one of the crude wooden chairs his first poem.

“He heard his chair. It was singing.”

Other stories revolve around time-out chairs, chairs at social services, and even a long, many-seater, concentration camp latrine. Because Ellis wrote these stories for young adults, they have a straightforward style that doesn’t get in the way of the poignant tales she’s telling. –S.O.
On library shelves
TRENDING YOUNG ADULT HISTORICAL FICTION
reviewed by Rachel Lynn Aldrich

THE LOST GIRL OF ASTOR STREET
Stephanie Morrill
When her best friend Lydia disappears, 18-year-old Piper Sail sets out to find her. Along the way, the upper-class girl finds herself face-to-face with the underbelly of Chicago. This mystery novel, set in 1924, is more sophisticated than a Nancy Drew mystery but falls short of a real whodunit. The romantic triangle throughout the story at times overshadows the mystery. But with a fresh, exciting setting and the emotional depth provided by a detective who is personally involved in the case, this book is an exciting read. The author explores dark topics, including violence and murder. (Ages 16-19)

WHEN MORNING COMES
Arushi Raina
The lives of four teenagers from different races, cultures, and classes become entangled on the eve of a historic uprising in apartheid South Africa. Zanele is plotting against the government, her friend Thabo is a gang member, Meena is an Indian shopkeeper’s daughter, and Jack lives in the wealthy white suburbs and is preparing to leave for Oxford. Their story is compelling, if at times confusing, as the narrative rapidly switches perspectives. The ending is intentionally unresolved, but the story effectively confronts the tragedy of the Soweto uprising. Caution: Sexual activity between two teen characters. (Ages 17-plus)

THE CRYSTAL RIBBON
Celeste Lim
Lim’s story is set in ancient China but isn’t historical fiction so much as historical magical realism. Ancient Chinese religion—Buddhas, spirits, and ancestor worship—are key aspects to the story of a young girl navigating an unfriendly world. Though the main character is only 11 years old, elements of the story are more appropriate for older ages. When child bride Li Jing ends up at an upscale brothel, she enlists the help of spirits and does what she must to find her way back to safety. It’s an exciting story, but may not be suitable for all families. (Ages 16-19)

MIDNIGHT AT THE ELECTRIC
Jodi Lynn Anderson
Anderson tells the story of three intertwined lives—two in the past and one in the future. In the year 2065, Adri is preparing to leave for the new colony on Mars. But in the meantime, she becomes caught up in the stories of her old aunt and two women, one from Dust Bowl Oklahoma and the other from turn-of-the-century England. Longing for family, for a connection to the past, and for meaning fills this intensely nostalgic story, but ultimately the characters leave the past behind and fixate on the future. The ending is somewhat unsatisfying. Caution: Sexual activity between two characters. (Ages 17-plus)

AFTERWORD
In her breakout novel, Almost Autumn (Arthur A. Levine, 2017), translated from the original Norwegian by Rosie Hedger, Marianne Kaurin takes an event that has been retold dozens of times and writes a story that feels new and surprising. Ilse Stern and her family are worried about normal, relatable problems—the story opens with her disappointment about being stood up by the boy next door. Her sister is torn between taking the job she really wants and taking over her father’s shop. But nothing is as peaceful as it seems. The boy next door can’t come because he’s working with the Resistance helping Jews flee the country. The dark undercurrent of German occupation in Norway steadily flows beneath the day-to-day, and it’s only a matter of time before it breaks forth, interrupting the story and their lives. A tragic and deeply moving tale of the horrors of the Holocaust. (Ages 16-19)

—R.L.A.
Meet Southern Seminary’s professors and tour campus soon, whether at Preview Day on April 20, 2018, or through an individual visit at your convenience.

Register now at SBTS.EDU/PREVIEW
George Friedman, founder and chairman of Geopolitical Futures, has a worldwide reputation for strategic forecasting. At his home near Austin, I asked him to assess U.S.-Korea relations. Here are edited excerpts.

We often hear that Kim Jong Un is crazy. The people who say he’s crazy never cite what he’s crazy never cite what he’s crazy about. He has values and interests different from ours. The first assumption Americans often have regarding a Saddam Hussein or a Muammar Qaddafi is: He’s crazy. The second assumption: If we just get rid of him, it will be cool because he’ll be gone. That never turns out to be the case. We get something worse. We are too ready to declare the other side crazy.

So how do you view Kim? The No. 1 underestimated man over the past year. He has played an absolutely brilliant game. He has simultaneously held the United States at bay, while opening a relationship with South Korea, while threatening and building nuclear weapons and just stopping at the right point before actually delivering a nuclear weapon.

Stopping at the right point? He has nuclear bombs. But they need a missile to deliver a bomb. They need a guidance system so the missile will enter the atmosphere precisely at the right angle and not burn up. In the last test the guidance system failed—the missile came in at the wrong angle—so there is a lot of work to be done, and you can’t do that in secret. You’ve got to fire the missile to test it.

If another test comes and the guidance system works, how long would it take North Korea to have numerous nuclear missiles ready to go? There would have to be a time for construction, installation, testing, and so on. It’s one of those few things you can’t do in secret. It would take a lot longer to install than it takes for us to go to war. We are in Guam. We are in South Korea. We are in Japan. We are in position.

So you don’t think the failure of the guidance system was a real setback for Kim? I wonder very much if he didn’t want us to see it fail. We were uncertain whether they had the guidance system. He let us know he didn’t. It’s a beautiful move on his part. He doesn’t want a war. He wants to move the United States into a position where the U.S. scares South Korea to death.

So that’s what we’re doing? The American policy on Korea remains unchanged. We will not tolerate a nuclear weapon in his hands that can reach the United States. But Kim has avoided that. He wants to convince the South Koreans to diminish or break the relation with the United States. That’s a huge win for North Korea, and a win for South Korea because there’s nothing destroyed. It undermines the American position in the Western Pacific, which is also a win for the Chinese.

Wouldn’t the South Koreans be worried about North Korea eventually taking over and turning it dark? They have a series of worries. One worry: A war breaks out and their capital city and industrial heartland are destroyed. But North Korea, a Third World country, could really use a relationship with South Korea, an industrial giant. If the exchange were: We will respect your regime in the North. We will trade with you. You will reduce your military presence along the border. We will limit our relationship with the United States.

South Korea will make that deal? If you’re South Korean, you say we’ve been divided for a long time. The United States is prepared to destroy Seoul to protect Los Angeles. North and South are far better off working together.

What if North Korea launches another missile and the test guidance system works? Then we would have to make a very rapid decision. I suspect that decision has already been made: We would carry out an attack. I may be confident that Kim Jong Un doesn’t want to attack us, but the president of the United States is responsible for the American people. How much of a risk can you take—10 percent, 20 percent?
How much of a risk would Kim take by showing he has a workable guidance system? He knows if he crosses that line he risks the one thing that he doesn’t want, an American attack—because even if he can destroy Seoul, he loses. We’ve been very careful to make clear that we are putting drones into place that are designed to kill the leadership. We are letting him know that if he moves to that level he doesn’t live through it.

If he dies, do others carry on? The issue is how much intelligence we have on the command and control system in the south. If we cut communications, are generals authorized to fire on their own? Is there a point we could strike in the DMZ or just north of it that would cripple their tactical communication so they couldn’t talk to each other? What are their orders under those circumstances?

Do we know where all of North Korea’s missile facilities are, and how many of them are fakes? We can bomb anything, but we don’t know what we’ve hit. What’s inside that building? What’s inside that cave? It’s difficult to imagine that we, from aerial or satellite surveillance, would know what’s there.

We would have to send Special Forces on the ground to inspect the damage and call in additional strikes.

How long would combat last? If everything goes right (which it never does), it would be over in a week. It’s an unpredictable thing and we hate unpredictable wars, even though we get into them. This is what is being calculated right now in Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis’ office. He and his staff are gaming over and over again what the options are. He’s made it very clear he doesn’t want to go, but if forced into it and it’s the president’s decision, he stands ready.

So you have confidence in Mattis? I have a great deal of confidence in him because when Barack Obama wanted to do something in Iran, it was Mattis who was asking the hard questions: What are they going to do here? He didn’t like the unknowns and the no-other-options—and Obama fired him. He preferred being fired to letting his guys under his command take a mission that wouldn’t work.

There are very few senior officers who would do that.

Do you think Trump would greenlight an attack? Would he be willing to be the president who allowed North Korea to have a first strike at buildings in the United States? He took his oath to protect the United States. I suspect he would do what presidents constantly do and what they’re paid to do: make an awe-inspiring decision.

But you don’t think it will come to that. It might turn out that Kim never really wanted the nuclear weapon—he simply wanted to put South Korea in a position that it had to consider what was going on. If it’s just luck, it’s amazing.
When Brian Jones drowned in 1969, the Stones kept rolling. When Richard Manuel hanged himself in 1986, the Band played on. But when Mark E. Smith succumbed to cancer of the lungs and kidneys on Jan. 24, the Fall—the British post-punk band that he formed in 1976 and steered for the next four decades—fell for good.

It’s only a slight exaggeration to say that Smith was the Fall. He hired and fired (and sometimes re-hired and re-fired) each of the 60-plus musicians who ever played with the group. (Two of them were his wives during their tenures.) He also sang all of the songs, most of which he co-wrote or wrote.

His detractors sometimes pointed out that, technically speaking, Smith’s sneeringly ranting vocals didn’t qualify as “singing” if by “singing” one meant the carrying of a tune with both hands. And Smith, at least partially, agreed. “I can actually sing if I want to,” he wrote in his autobiography Renegade: The Lives and Tales of Mark E. Smith. “But the thing is, if people are saying you can’t sing, you end up shouting the lyrics out as hard as possible: when in doubt, shout.”

In a body of work that included over 30 studio albums, at least as many live albums, and even more compilations, Smith shouted about almost everything. And he did so amid, atop, and at times beneath a sound that, despite its having been made by an ever-shifting cast, remained surprisingly consistent in its deceptively primitive, rhythmically propulsive way.

Other than the absence of keyboards (a rarity on the Fall’s recordings) and Smith’s voice (which had begun to fray), New Facts Emerge, which came out last July, could’ve fit in almost anywhere along the Fall’s musical timeline. Smith rarely, however, touched on romance, calling love songs “sugared denial.” “Mostly I’d rather leave that to everybody else,” he said in Renegade. “It’s all been said before.”

Such heterodox plainspokenness characterized Smith’s overall approach toward life. Although reared working class, he considered the leaders of Britain’s Labour Party to be poseurs. Although seldom financially flush, he resisted lucrative shortcuts at odds with his artistic convictions. And although they certainly hastened his end and maybe killed him outright, he made no secret of his enjoyment of stimulants, legal and forbidden.

To call Smith post-punk’s last individualist would be premature. (John Lydon is still alive, after all.) But he was certainly one of its staunchest. And as such he will be missed.
NEW OR RECENT RELEASES
reviewed by Arsenio Orteza

CHINESE CELEBRATION Various artists
Owners of the Arc Music releases on which many of these 19 recordings by 12 different performers or ensembles have previously appeared might take a pass. Newcomers, however, will marvel at how much Oriental folk music has in common, thematically as well as formally, with its Occidental counterparts. The piercingly nasal female vocals that occasionally pop up take some getting used to. But the erhu, the guzheng, the yangqin, the pipa, the Chinese dulcimer, and the drums will focus the attention of folk-fest habitués the world over.

CHINESE BUTTERFLY The Chick Corea + Steve Gadd Band
Some mismatched titles aside (“Serenity,” for instance, is more of a wake-up call than “Wake-Up Call,” which is more serene than “Serenity”), this two-disc set containing over 1½ hours of effusive fusion played at an exhilarating level of virtuosity never falters. How far have Corea and Gadd come in their decades of playing? Corea's 46-year-old “Return to Forever” now lasts five minutes longer than before but makes you wish more than ever that it won’t draw to a close.

COME TO ME Wendell Kimbrough
“All songs are registered with CCLI,” read the liner notes, “and you are welcome to sing them in your church!” Kimbrough isn’t kidding. Getting communities of believers to sing these reverently colloquialized psalms (and a few other Scripture-based texts) is the whole reason he has written and recorded them in the first place. If the melodies stay within light-pop parameters, the overwhelmingly minor keys, simple instrumentation, and pensive tempos keep the emphasis on the lyrics—lyrics that, to Kimbrough’s credit, include an imprecation or two.

DREAMS Pretty Yende
Assuming that this South African soprano goes on to enjoy the long and rich career to which she has seemed destined ever since she began landing choice opera roles, this conservatively tailored album (the follow-up to her belatedly released 2016 debut, A Journey) will probably be regarded more as her way of having avoided the sophomore slump than as her way of making a major statement. Still, there are major moments. Donizetti and Bellini, whose operas supply 11 of the 13 selections, obviously become her.

ENCORE
Judging from their photos, the members of the 40-voice Oasis Chorale (Mennonite) and the 36-voice Acclamation Chorale (non- or interdenominational) are either relatively or downright youthful. And, as anyone who has ever been young can attest, where there’s youth there’s fire. Both ensembles have new albums, each of which fans or at least tends the flame of the North American sacred a cappella choral tradition.

The Acclamation Chorale’s I’m Gonna Sing features Negro spirituals in arrangements by the late Moses Hogan. More impressive than the attention to rhythmic detail that propels the majority of the performances is the attention to dynamic detail that imparts an aural nimbus to “Abide with Me” and “Amen.” The Oasis Chorale’s Eternal Mercies presents a more eclectic program, ranging from the incandescent (“Alleluia Incantation,” “Even When He Is Silent”) to the incandescently exotic (the Xhosa-language “Ndikhokhele Bawo”). A telling coincidence: Both albums contain Hogan’s vigorous arrangement of “I Can Tell the World.” –A.O.
The absence of presence
THE CHURCH IS WHAT THE WORLD IS HURTING FOR

The frankness of the Middle Eastern pastors is remarkable. They are learning, growing, reconciling, and repenting as their challenges deepen. The main reason? They can’t afford not to.

The assaults of the Syrian war—which enters its eighth year this month—and the ravages of Islamic State opened neighboring countries and their churches to new fears, new threats, and throngs of refugees at their doors.

Threats remain, they always do in this part of the world, but churches are finding new footing. In Lebanon, a nation of 4 million hosting 1.5 million mostly Syrian refugees, evangelical congregations of 50 have ballooned into churches of hundreds. Some have rows of Muslims in attendance. It started simply: churches giving out food packets and making home visits. Now years in, they are opening schools, counseling centers for deep trauma, and small business ventures.

One pastor from Jordan (also with a refugee population exceeding 1 million) explained to me: “We were living in a bubble. The church became divided from the community. We are trying to fix that.”

“We were living in a bubble.... We are trying to fix that.”

We in America need to fix that, too. It may look different, but our churches too have retreated.

For centuries the churches of the Middle East survived under Islam by laying aside evangelism, backing into their cloisters. Besides not calling men to repent and believe, a practice outlawed in most Muslim countries, Christians retreated from public life, their God-infused presence a growing absence. Severed from essential functions, the Middle East churches shriveled.

In America our communities may seem increasingly hostile. Common ground seems rare. We form enclaves of church activity walled from the life of a lost and hurting world. We grow to fear others—refugees, Muslims, mass shooters, dope dealers, the homeless—because we don’t have a presence among them, therefore don’t evangelize, therefore forget what lives transformed by the gospel look like. Yet it’s that transformation the world is hurting for.

Overseas, mass shootings and violence are coming to define America. It’s what the taxi drivers and clerks want to talk about upon learning I’m an American. In the United States I find it rarely the center of conversation, even in the days and weeks following the Parkland shooting, even though three of the deadliest mass shootings in U.S. history have occurred in the last five months. Until the Florida shooting, who was talking anymore about the Las Vegas shooting? Only four months ago, with its 58 dead and 500 wounded, it rivaled the largest suicide bombings in the Middle East.

The high-school students won’t let us forget. Besides marching and backing laws to stop school violence, organizers like admirable Kyle Kashuv demand deeper engagement. Yet the sight of the 16-year-old Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School survivor bent over his phone, showing senators and the first lady the ReachOut App to create alert networks among students, leaves so much wanting. Americans hunched over their phones deep in their own world is a piece of the problem. The smartphone generation needs also human touch and the church to bring connectivity. It needs happy gospel-bearers entering dark places and dark lives.

“Presence” from the Hebrew penae or peneme means “face.” Technology is a wonderful aid but not a replacement for getting in someone’s face.

In the Old Testament, God’s presence appeared in the wilderness Tabernacle and later the Jerusalem Temple. In the New Testament, we have the physical presence of Jesus Christ, followed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit for those who follow Him. These Christ-followers become the face, or presence, of God. As the Apostle Paul writes, “You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all” (2 Corinthians 3:2).

Evangelism can begin with presence, and it can begin simply, as my Middle Eastern friends have learned. By churches coming together despite differences for the sake of a community. By moving toward the hurting, despite hostilities, in simple ways—a meal or a regular visit. Tapping into deeper needs, the work will be overwhelming, and there God will supply both means and miracles.
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A worship service at an underground church in Vietnam

AFTER THE FALL

Relatively free in the cities but persecuted in the countryside, the church in Vietnam has grown rapidly in grace and numbers

by JUNE CHENG in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, Vietnam
Ho Chi Minh City, formerly Saigon, is a mix of the past and present. Motorbikes whizz past a French-colonial-style post office; a red banner with a yellow hammer and sickle hangs from a lamppost next to a sleek skyscraper; slender women in flowing ao dai (a traditional silk tunic) snap selfies in front of a bronze statue of Ho Chi Minh.

Because of Roman Catholicism’s long history in Vietnam, cathedrals like the historic red-brick Notre Dame Cathedral Basílica make striking statements throughout the city. Protestant churches are harder to find: American missionaries arrived in Vietnam four centuries after the Catholics and only had 64 years to take root before the Communist government took over South Vietnam in 1975.

Since then, the government has shuttered hundreds of churches and banned the construction of new ones, so many Christians meet in homes. Yet tucked in an alleyway off a main road is a white building with the sign “United Gospel Outreach Church.” Inside, the 200-seat sanctuary bustles with activity every day: various church services, interchurch gatherings, and outreach events.

The United Gospel Outreach Church’s building, which is open to all Christian groups in the city, is one of the few church buildings built since 1975 with the government’s tacit approval. For such a place to exist was unthinkable 15 years ago and is a sign of expanding religious freedom in the country’s big cities. Yet for believers belonging to ethnic minorities (who make up 75 percent of Vietnam’s evangelicals) or who live in the remote provinces, persecution remains a daily fact of life, even as Vietnam puts on a tolerant front for the international community.

Overall, since 1975, the evangelical population in Vietnam has multiplied nearly tenfold from 160,000 to 1.57 million, according to Operation World.

Christianity first came to Danang, Vietnam, in 1911 through missionaries from the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) denomination. France ruled Vietnam at the time, and the missionaries were free to work throughout the country. By 1929, the Vietnamese churches established the independent Evangelical Church of Vietnam (ECVN) only to have it split in 1954, when the Geneva Accords divided Vietnam into the Communist North and the nominally democratic South. Hundreds of thousands of Catholics and Protestants moved south to avoid persecution.

With the Fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975, the new Communist government kicked out foreign missionaries, commandeered Christian schools and hospitals, and closed churches. Some Vietnamese pastors fearfully fled the country on U.S. military planes, leaving their flocks without shepherds. Seventh-day Adventist Pastor Tran Thanh Truyen recalled every pastor in his denomination fled the country, forcing “laypeople to become pastors themselves.”

Pastor Huy Le of Grace Baptist Church, who was 7 years old at the time, recalls the hunger and suffering his family faced those first few years. The North plundered the resource-rich South and implemented collectivist rice farming, which led to extreme food shortages. Local officials often called in Le’s father, then the pastor at Grace Baptist Church, for interrogations. Authorities closed all the Baptist churches except for Grace Baptist (which only experienced a temporary closure). Le believes it was spared because of its location in Ho Chi Minh City and because his father decided to stay.

With the world around them in disarray, many in the South felt hopeless. “At the time, a lot of people just came to church with a pure heart to seek peace and hope,” Le said, “and they found love and salvation in God.” In those days, only a few dozen people filled the pews, yet the number grew steadily.

Restrictions for churches in the city eased in the late ’80s as Vietnam pursued market reforms and began to open up to the West. In 2001, the government officially recognized the ECVN (South) and then the Vietnam Baptist Convention in 2008. Today Grace Baptist Church has 500 members, and there are 70 Baptist churches in the country. The renovated church is located on a busy road with a cylindrical glass exterior and steps winding up to the front door.

In Le’s office, his young son runs in and out, insistently offering visitors water, cookies, and chocolate. On the wall is a photo of Le with five other human rights activists meeting with former President Barack Obama during his visit to Hanoi in 2016. Police initially barred Le from attending the meeting, yet lobbying from the U.S. Consulate pressured the government to relent.

Vietnamese government officials now invite Le and other church leaders to attend roundtable discussions when they are considering new religious decrees, including the new Law on Belief and Religion that went into effect this year. While the government only incorporated some of their suggestions into the final draft of the law, Le notes the government is making an effort to understand the church.

While Le’s church is registered with the government, United Gospel Outreach Church is not. Pastor Daniel Pham has applied for registration but has not yet received approval. That hasn’t stopped the church from meeting, evangelizing, and growing: Today the United Gospel Outreach Church has 300 house churches in 42 provinces in Vietnam.

Pham, who grew up in the Central Highlands, is also the son of a pastor. In 1977, officials imprisoned his father for seven years and closed up all the churches in the region serving the Montagnard ethnic group. A few years later, Pham entered the ministry himself, serving under the tutelage of a pastor in Ho Chi Minh City.

A house church movement arose in 1988 out of a conflict within the ECVN(S) that began in 1988: Some pastors grew suspicious of the denomination leaders’ ties to the government. At the same time, several fast-growing churches experienced spiritual revival, and members began speaking in tongues. As the churches grew more Pentecostal, their leaders butted heads with the more conservative ECVN(S).

These pastors broke off from the traditional church and started house church groups, which multiplied rapidly. At the time, Pham led a Bible study at his home, which he turned into
a house church. Police tried to intimidate church members, and it worked in some cases, yet the church continued to grow and plant new churches.

Although Vietnam was isolated from the rest of the world at the time, missionaries from Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines would periodically sneak into the country to train Pham and other church leaders. In 1996, several house church leaders met and wrote a letter to the Hanoi government asking for the freedom to worship openly. They never received a response.

Undeterred, the leaders created the Vietnam Evangelical Fellowship (VEF), which met monthly so pastors could join together to pray, share information, and encourage one another. The group, growing to include 30 church networks, developed relations with the U.S. Consulate and informed the consulate of cases of persecution toward house churches. “It’s better to stop the persecution,” Pham told local police. “Because as pastors we can’t lie.”

In 2006, the Vietnamese government gave the house churches permission to meet, albeit unofficially. By the time Pham raised funds to build the United Gospel Outreach Church building on a rented piece of land in 2011, he and the local police had developed a respectful relationship over the course of 25 years. When Pham announced that he would move his church group into the building, the officials kept silent, not officially approving but also not stopping him.

While it feels like summer in February in Ho Chi Minh City, fly two hours north to the capital of Hanoi and it’s overcast and drizzly. The seat of Communist power, the city relishes memories of the past: Ho Chi Minh’s preserved body lies in a cool mausoleum surrounded by soldiers in white uniforms. The crumbling Maison Centrale—a prison used first by the French to hold Vietnamese revolutionaries then by North Vietnam to hold U.S. prisoners of war—invites tourists to walk through its cells.

After the country split in 1954, Saigon flourished as a prosperous international city while Hanoi fell behind the Communist curtain and developed more slowly. Especially after the bitter Vietnam War, people in the North and the South resented one another.

Yet as the house church movement grew in the South, more and more pastors felt called to share the gospel with their kinsmen in the North. John Nguyen (we used a pseudonym to protect his identity), a house church pastor in Ho Chi Minh City, said that like most
Southerners, he grew up hating Northerners. Yet after hearing about miracles God performed in the lives of other pastors who moved north, Nguyen decided to move to Hanoi.

At the time, Hanoi only had one or two registered ECVN (North) churches and very few house churches. Evangelism was difficult as people bought into the propaganda that Christianity was an American religion and thus an enemy of the state. Nguyen and other Southern pastors faced harsh persecution: Authorities arrested Nguyen more than 20 times, usually releasing him after a few days. Yet a year after coming to Hanoi, Nguyen started a small seven-member house church. By 1998, it had grown to 20. Many times God kept Nguyen from getting caught: Police would show up at a Bible training minutes after he stepped out of the room. Once while walking to a training, he saw police rushing toward their meeting location, so he stayed back. For a time, Nguyen moved his Sunday service to 5 a.m. so it would be over by the time the police started their workday.

“After being persecuted severely, more churches have been planted,” Nguyen said. “Some places only had one church, but after persecution, it became five. Facing difficulties cannot deter the growth of the church.”

One ministry contributing to church growth in the North is a group of Christian drug rehab centers. Vietnam has a growing drug problem, and addicts in the 132 state-sponsored rehab centers are treated like criminals, according to rights groups. Almost all of them end up relapsing after leaving the centers. Christians opened their own drug rehab centers that rely on prayer, the Bible, and the love of Christians to help addicts. Many addicts profess faith at the centers, and about half stay off drugs after they leave. Their dramatic testimonies have led family members and friends to profess faith in Christ, and dozens of former drug addicts have started their own house churches and rehab centers: Today the country has 60 Christian drug rehab centers.

One drug-addict-turned-pastor, Nam Quoc Trung, was also a member of the delegation that met with Obama in 2016. Trung had been in and out of government rehabs 14 times, yet only found freedom from his addiction after professing Christ at a Christian rehab center. After leaving rehab, he started his own house church as well as a Christian rehab center that houses 90 addicts.

‘After being persecuted severely, more churches have been planted. … Facing difficulties cannot deter the growth of the church.’
While the center isn’t legally registered, Hanoi authorities acknowledge the effectiveness of his work: Officials invite him to speak at state-sponsored rehab centers and police training meetings. Each time, he shares the gospel.

Hearing stories from Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City gives the impression that religious freedom has come a long way in Vietnam. Yet Open Doors’ World Watch List places Vietnam as the 18th worst country for Christians, much worse than China, which ranks 43rd. That’s because the persecution of the church in Vietnam happens not in high-profile cities, but in the outer provinces and especially among ethnic minorities.

Vietnam is home to 54 ethnic groups, with many of the local ethnic minorities living in the mountains. The majority Kinh people have long looked down on them as poor, uneducated, “backward” people who follow folk religions.

While they make up 14 percent of the population, they account for 75 percent of the country’s Christians.

The ethnic group with the largest growth of Christianity is the Hmong people who live near Vietnam’s northern border: Today an estimated 400,000 Hmong have professed Christ. The gospel first reached the Hmong in the late ’80s through a Hmong-language program from the Far East Broadcasting Company. Traditionally, the Hmong are animists who engage in ancestor worship and constantly live in fear of facing the wrath of angry spirits. Yet once they believed in Jesus, they found they were freed from these fears. Village leaders and even former shamans came to profess Christ, yet they had no Bible and no church, only the radio to learn about their new faith.

The radio program instructed the Hmong believers to find churches in Hanoi, and Vietnamese pastors helped smuggle in Hmong Bibles and trained the church leaders in underground Bible schools. Yet the rapid growth of Christianity among the Hmong concerned the local government, who long viewed the Hmong with distrust: The Hmong in Laos sided with the United States in the Vietnam War, and they feared this mass conversion to an “American” religion would rally a Hmong independence movement. Officially, they claimed they wanted to prevent the Hmong from abandoning their traditional culture.

To deter conversions, authorities threw pastors into prison, tortured them, and left them for dead, while taking the land of Christians and kicking them out of villages. Police broke up church meetings and arrested Vietnamese Christians who dared travel to Hmong villages to preach—although that hasn’t stopped them from going.

Christianity transformed the Hmong communities: Twenty years ago it was difficult to find one Hmong villager who had graduated high school, while today most of the Hmong do, with some also earning their bachelor’s or master’s degree. Many Hmong Christians learned to read Vietnamese through reading the Bible. And because they no longer need to prepare expensive sacrifices to the spirits, the Hmong were able to raise their standard of living.

Hmong Christians have also gone on to share the gospel with neighboring tribes such as the Dao, who now have 24,000 believers in the ECVN(N) denomination alone. Today, about 400 of the 1,000 Hmong churches are registered, and existing churches face less harassment than in the past. However, the local government still persecutes new churches and churches in previously unreached areas.

On Jan. 1, the Vietnamese government enacted the Law on Belief and Religion, the first law to govern religion since the founding of Vietnam’s Communist government. Christian groups, especially those in remote areas, are concerned as the law requires all groups to register with authorities and report their activities or else face fines. The law includes a clause that prohibits groups from using religion to threaten “the national great unity, harm state defense, national security, public order, and social morale,” which Human Rights Watch believes the government can use as an excuse to persecute Christian groups.

The law could benefit registered churches as it allows churches to establish medical, educational, and social institutions. Former decrees required a church to exist for 20 years without breaking the law before it could register, but the new law shortens the time to five years (although the existence of an unregistered church is against this law). As always, the actual effects of the law on churches will depend on how local authorities implement it.

“Vietnam is an unpredictable country regarding its direction, its economy, its politics, and even [its view of] religion,” said Le, the Baptist pastor. “We’ve seen this so many times: We look at tomorrow and are expecting a better future, but then suddenly something happens that overshadows any positive changes.”

A Hmong woman on her way to church in Vietnam’s northern Lao Cai province

March 31, 2018 • WORLD Magazine
Robin Prather, a retired children’s librarian in Oregon and a Christian, volunteers at a school library in the district where she used to work. A fellow librarian pointed out a title to her in an upcoming popular reading competition for third- through fifth-graders: *George* by Alex Gino.

The story centers on a boy who is convinced he is a girl, and discusses genitalia, taking hormones, sexual orientation, and sex change surgeries. “We are talking about 8- to 11-year-old elementary students,” Prather wrote in an email. “Some of these children don’t even know about the facts of life yet.”

The competition is called Battle of the Books, a reading event that grew out of a Chicago radio show in the 1940s and is in school districts and libraries all over the country now. Once a year school teams meet to battle in a game show format, answering trivia questions about books on the Battle of the Books list.

*George* is on Oregon’s recently released Battle of the Books list for the 2018-2019 school year.

In one part of the book, George recounts watching a television interview with a transgender woman where they discussed sex change surgery. “So George knew it could be done,” the book says. “A boy could become a girl. She [George] had since read on the Internet that you could take girl hormones that would change your body, and you could get a bunch of different surgeries if you wanted them and had the money. This was called transitioning. You could even start before you were eighteen with pills called androgen blockers that stopped the boy hormones already inside you from turning your body into a man’s.”

The book is not just “raising awareness” for gender dysphoria or endorsing transgenderism for children—it is publishing risky health data. Pediatric hormone blocking is a relatively new practice (first undertaken in the United States in 2007), and the FDA hasn’t approved it. Giving cross-sex hormones like estrogen to a boy is also not FDA-approved.

A recent journal publication from a Washington University pediatric endocrinologist and two Johns Hopkins Medical School psychiatrists called hormone therapy in children “a drastic and experimental measure.” They argued that doctors often promise that the effects of hormone blockers are fully reversible when there is little
Transgender author Alex Gino

“Full of wonder, hope and the importance of getting to be who you are meant to be.”

David Levithan, author of Every Day and Looking at George

GEORGE

ALEX GINO
scientific evidence to confirm that. (Doctors across the spectrum agree that the vast majority of children diagnosed with gender dysphoria later identify with their biological sex.)

But books like George are gaining more acceptance, and publishers are putting out more of them. “The next frontier for authors writing about transgender people seems to be middle-grade literature, or books aimed at 8- to 12-year-olds,” asserted The New York Times in a 2015 piece.

A children’s book editor at Scholastic, and the editor of George, David Levithan, told Publisher’s Weekly that he had been seeing more transgender titles cross his desk and added, “Hopefully more trans writers will write them.” Levithan, himself a YA author, featured in his first book in 2003 “a homecoming queen who used to be a guy.” Scholastic didn’t return requests for comment.

As publishers publish, critics give accolades, which lead to awards—the award might be from an LGBT group, but it allows the book to be called “award-winning,” a description I heard several times in defense of George. In 2016, the American Library Association (ALA) presented Gino with the Children’s Stonewall Award, the first of that award ever given specifically for children’s literature. (There’s been an ALA award for LGBT young adult & children’s literature since 2010.)

Awards help titles onto reading lists like Battle of the Books. These elementary-aged titles on transgenderism or gender fluidity are still few and far between—several children’s librarians at public libraries I spoke with had never encountered books on this topic. But the numbers are slowly growing and gaining gatekeeper endorsements.

The ALA awards and review accolades put librarians on the ground in a bind. Pamela Palmer is a recently retired children’s librarian in southwest Virginia, where she served at the county library for 23 years. She was in charge of acquisitions for the children’s section and had about $500 a month to spend on new titles. She would order books requested by patrons and then select the rest herself.

To decide on new titles, she would read School Library Journal, the most complete catalogue of children’s book reviews. When George was published in 2015, she saw that SLJ gave it a starred review. SLJ called the book “a required purchase for any collection that serves a middle grade population.”

“Drat,” Palmer thought. An SLJ starred review means most larger library systems would stock the book. The SLJ reviewer, Ingrid Abrams, wrote in the review: “While children can have a sense of their gender identity as early as the age of three, children’s literature is shockingly bereft of trans protagonists, especially where middle grade literature is concerned.” Abrams was also at the time the director-at-large for the ALA’s Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Round Table.

Shortly after the book was published, Palmer said her boss emailed and asked her to order George. Her boss, Joseephine Clark, doesn’t remember asking her to buy it and doesn’t have an email record of the request to Palmer. Clark said she would regularly send reviews of notable new books, of which George was one, to the children’s librarians for possible acquisition.

Palmer said her boss asked “nicely, not realizing what a big deal it was to me.” Clark said she made no demand to buy the book, and when I asked her about it, she had to check the library’s shelves to see whether they had the book. Whatever the case, Palmer acquired the book despite her reservations.
Some bookworm kids live for Battle of the Books—I was one of those in middle school and high school, reading through every book on the list sometimes multiple times over. It allowed me to discover diverse books I never would have read on my own. Carly Brust is a mother of six in Wheaton, Ill., and her oldest daughter Calla, 10, is in her first year of Battle of the Books at Wheaton Christian, a local private school. Calla loves it. She doesn’t play sports, according to her mom—she reads books. Battle of the Books is her World Series.

Wheaton Public Library puts together the book list for Wheaton Christian and the 10 surrounding public schools and manages the battles. The schools do eight rounds of battles to determine a champion. Wheaton Christian’s team was in second place of the 12 schools contending, heading into the final round. The library posts the points each team receives, and Calla would go to the library daily to check the points. Her team meets four times a week.

“She is not messing around,” said Brust.

George isn’t on the list in Calla’s district, but Wheaton Christian’s librarian combs through the list to find any titles that might be of concern to Christian parents, and Brust largely leans on the librarian’s judgment. The librarian emailed parents this year to alert them to one title, Ghosts by Raina Telgemeier, that may not fit the “Christian worldview.”

The school emphasized to parents that the students did not have to read the book and suggested that parents read it first if their children were going to read it. Brust read Ghosts and then let her daughter read it. One other student read it too, so they are the designated hitters for Ghosts questions.

But with a book like George, Brust can see that approach falling short: “I wonder if that will scare people away from even having their kid on the team at all, from an exposure sense.” Her daughter hasn’t had sex education yet, so many of the graphic details in George would be new to her. For now Brust doesn’t see a book with that kind of controversial material making it onto a list in their conservative, largely Christian district.

Those books are going on other lists in Illinois, though. Lily and Dunkin by Donna Gephart won the state’s Rebecca Caudill Young Readers’ Book Award. In Lily and Dunkin, which the list says is for sixth to eighth grade, Tim is an eighth-grade boy who is certain he is a girl (Lily). It also talks about hormone blockers, sex change surgery, and taking estrogen. Tim narrates: “I need to start hormone blockers right now or things are going to happen that can’t be reversed.” One librarian told me the public school district in Lincolnshire, Ill., determines its Battle of the Books list from the Caudill awards list, so Lily and Dunkin will likely be on next year’s Battle of the Books list.

George won a similar state award in Kansas. Emporia State University hosts a committee of parents, teachers, and librarians who choose the master list for the William Allen White Children’s Book Award every year, which becomes a basis for many school library acquisitions. Last year they awarded George, putting it on the master list for third- to fifth-graders.

Despite the award and inclusion on the master list, Wichita public schools decided not to put George on its master list for elementary school shelves, with the supervising librarian Gail Becker telling The Wichita Eagle that the book was not age-appropriate. Becker pointed to the passages about porn, male genitalia, and sex change surgery, and said she didn’t think the “average 8-year-old” would be ready for those topics.

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Family homelessness is a growing problem, and the government’s
IN CRISIS

rapid rehousing policy may not be helping

BY SOPHIA LEE
Patience Merchant's 6-year-old son Kwama and 3-year-old daughter Aliyah don't remember ever having a stable home. When Kwama was 3 months old, Merchant left his father over what she says was domestic abuse. She and her children have been shuffling in and out of emergency shelters ever since.

At 25 years old, with wide, guileless eyes and smooth ebony skin, Merchant looks like a kid herself. When a new boyfriend sold Merchant a dream—let's pool our money, leave Minnesota, and fly off to California to start a new life—she dreamed along, imagining golden sunshine, palm-tree-shaded neighborhoods, and a happy family. That dream burned to a crisp, she said, when the boyfriend ran away with everything soon after they arrived in Los Angeles last August.

Once again, she and her two kids were back on the streets, this time in an unfamiliar city. For days they set up tents at the beach, in parks, or between alleys. Sometimes strangers yelled at her, demanding she leave the premises. One man got so belligerent that Merchant whipped out a knife and warned him to back away. The scariest moment, though, was when police officers approached her. She worried they might call Child Protective Services, so she fibbed: “We're camping, just having fun. We'll pack up and leave soon. Thank you, officers.”

Meanwhile, Kwama would ask, “What’s going on, Mama? What we gonna do now, Mama?”

“Don’t worry, baby, God is going to help us,” she assured the boy. But when he wasn't looking, she wept: “Oh God, please help. I’m lost. I don’t know where else to go.”

Merchant and her children are one of tens of thousands of America's homeless families—a population that has become more prevalent since the 1980s. The Merchants are a typical modern homeless family: a single mother with small children, fleeing domestic abuse and sinking into poverty. Most of these mothers have limited education and little or no job skills or work experience. About 90 percent say they've been physically or sexually abused, and many suffer from depression.

Out of an estimated 550,000 homeless people in the nation, about 35 percent are homeless families, according to 2016 federal data. But many more are “invisible”—tucked away in seedy motels and doubled up in friends’ or relatives’ homes. About 2.5 million American children, half of them under the age of 5, experience homelessness at some point each year. Many struggle to attend school regularly and display higher rates of mental health issues, behavioral problems, and delayed development.
In the last few years, federal and local agencies have been trying to solve the growing problem of family homelessness through rapid rehousing, which provides housing with as few preconditions as possible. This “Housing First” approach connects people to housing as quickly as possible, without requiring employment, sobriety, service participation, or absence of a criminal record. Instead of long-term housing support, rapid rehousing provides participants with short-term rental assistance and optional services, usually for about four to six months.

This novel approach, though, may be leaving some families in the lurch. Evidence from anti-poverty organizations and their clients suggests that rapid rehousing may not be an effective long-term solution for many homeless families.

The problem: The realities of family homelessness are complex, and the parents in these families often struggle with multiple issues that make it difficult to hold a job, pay monthly bills, and care for their children. Can a free but temporary apartment fix the issues that cause a family to be homeless in the first place?

As an example, take a single mother like Jennifer Pankey. At one time, she had never cooked a dinner for her two daughters, had never read them a bedtime story, and had never opened a bank account—because no one ever taught her how.

Pankey says she grew up in a family with an alcoholic father and a codependent mother. She’s been using meth and drinking since she was 11. After leaving an abusive boyfriend, Pankey became homeless: She crashed at her parents’ or current boyfriend’s house, spent six months cramped in a car, and sometimes passed out on the streets. She left her daughter with her mother so that CPS wouldn’t take her away.

Pankey once had a list of “I will nevers”—I will never abuse drugs while pregnant, I will never take my kids to a crack house, I will never go to jail, I will never sleep on the streets—then one day she realized she had broken all of them. After her newborn second daughter tested positive for drugs, CPS took both daughters away from her. Pankey finally decided that things had to change.

She spent 10 months in rehab. Then, a local service provider in San Diego offered her housing subsidies. At another time in her life, she would have taken the offer without hesitation. But by then, Pankey knew enough about herself to know she needed more than quick and easy housing: “I wasn’t ready. I wouldn’t have any reason to stay clean. I had been an addict for 29 years of my life, and that wasn’t going to change in 10 months.”

Research suggests Pankey may have been right: Many rapid rehousing participants cannot maintain housing for long because rapid rehousing doesn’t help them find employment, increase
income, or achieve long-term housing security, according to a 2017 study. Once their short-term subsidies end, many families move out or double up within a year.

Nevertheless, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) continue to promote rapid rehousing as a key national strategy to end family homelessness because of two main reasons: bottom line and ideology. Rapid rehousing is the least costly housing option, and many homeless advocates believe that family homelessness is primarily a housing affordability issue.

HUD’s preference for rapid rehousing has affected other programs. While federal funds for rapid rehousing have increased more than tenfold, from $13 million in 2012 to $198 million in 2015, funds for transitional housing decreased from $417 million in 2012 to $172 million in 2015.

Transitional housing, though, is what Pankey says helped get her back on her feet. At her rehab program, a counselor recommended she try a 1,000-day transitional housing program for homeless families in North County San Diego. There, for the first time in her life, people held Pankey accountable for her actions and encouraged her every step of the way. During 75 hours of coaching, three years of intensive job-readiness and life skills classes, and 160 support group meetings, Pankey learned how to parent, manage money, be a good employee, and serve others.

Today Pankey, 37, is eight years sober. She works as a manager at the program’s aquaponics farm, pays her rent and taxes, and is studying to become a radiation therapist. CPS returned her two daughters: McKenzie is a high-school senior who has a 4.0 GPA, plays the clarinet, and aims for college scholarships, and Maggie is in kindergarten.

Pankey remembers when she used to wake up “hating myself, disgusted with myself.” She felt paralyzed by her circumstances and saw herself as a victim: “I was just always like, ‘Give me, give me, give me.’ It was never my fault. I never took responsibility for anything.” When she faced the unbearable pain of possibly losing her kids, and decided to make a change, a program was available to help.

But last year that program, Solutions for Change, lost $600,000 worth of HUD funding because it refused to follow the “Housing First” approach and allow active drug users into its program. The sudden loss of funds forced Solutions to lay off employees and close an intake center, even though more than 300 families are on its waiting list.
With loss of funding, what happens to families like Pankey’s, who need a safe, drug-free, structured environment before they can attain housing stability and thrive? What happens to families like Patience Merchant and her two kids, who need immediate relief from the streets and need help finding a source of income?

For Merchant, help came through a couple who found her in a back alley and asked her if her kids were hungry. At first Merchant was wary, but her son Kwama yelled, “I want McDonald’s!” So the couple took them out to dinner, paid for a two-night stay at a motel, and gave Merchant information about available shelters and services in LA. Soon afterward, she took public transit to Union Rescue Mission (URM) in downtown LA.

The CEO of that mission, Andy Bales, says it’s not a coincidence that family homelessness has skyrocketed even as LA refocuses its resources on “one size fits all” rapid rehousing and “Housing First” programs. An emergency shelter cannot meet all the needs of the homeless, and in a homeless “epidemic” where people are losing homes faster than the city can house them, more alternative options are needed, not fewer, he says: “There is no reason to have women and children suffering on the streets while we build a few units at a time, thinking we’ll solve homelessness one day.... Meanwhile, we’re leaving kids on the streets, and they’ll be tomorrow’s sickest, tomorrow’s generation of chronically homeless adults.”

URM says it never turns a family away. On any given night, about one-third of the 1,300 people who sleep at URM are families. If the day room is full, URM clears out other rooms to set up cots and lay out blankets for people. Each family has a different story and different needs: One mother of five kids has the mental and social development of a child. Another woman, 23, said she’s never had a real home since she entered the foster system at age 4, and now the streets feel more like home.

During her first night at URM, Merchant lay down on a cot with her two children and couldn’t sleep—all the stress of surviving the streets avalanched on her, and she had to keep reminding herself that she and her children were safe. It took days to adjust. After two months at the mission, Merchant had made a promise to her son: “Baby, I’ll make sure this is our last stop.” This time, she says, she intends to keep that promise.
I

f you step onto the Staten Island Ferry, which connects the borough to Manhattan, you’ll see posters all along the walls that proclaim in all caps: “SEE AN OVERDOSE? CALL 911. YOU COULD SAVE A LIFE.” The overdose reversal drug Narcan (generically known as naloxone)—which many first responders now carry as a matter of course—saved 286 lives on the island in 2017.

The island has New York’s highest mortality rate from the opioid crisis and a spotty network of substance abuse facilities, one with the tagline, “THE FINE DINING OF TREATMENT.” But even with national attention and public funding, the opioid epidemic is worsening, and money is not making it to long-term residential recovery options. Instead, localities like New York are devoting their treatment funding to maintenance drugs like Suboxone.

By itself, this maintenance strategy so far is not working. The overdoses are increasing at a dramatic rate, even after previous years of overdose deaths already lowered U.S. life expectancy. Data for 2017 U.S. fatalities isn’t finalized yet, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently announced that drug overdoses were up 30 percent last year. In total, the CDC counted 142,000 drug overdoses in the United States last year. Overdoses are now the leading cause of death for Americans under the age of 50.

“We’re having a Vietnam War every nine or 10 months,” said addiction doctor Sandy Dettmann, a member of the Christian Medical and Dental Associations, referring to the number of overdose deaths. Dettmann laments the government’s meager approach to the crisis. “When do we put a four-way stop sign in? Do we do it after two people are killed, three people? Do we do it after the mayor’s kid is killed? I don’t know what we’re waiting for here.”

In New York, nearly 1,400 people died of drug overdoses in 2016, and partial numbers from 2017 showed an increase in deaths. I talked to a Staten Island cab driver who had a customer recently who, when he ducked into the car, explained that if he passed out there was Narcan in his coat pocket.

New York City last year set up an annual $38 million fund to fight the opioid crisis. About half of the funding goes to law enforcement efforts to fight the spread of drugs, and most of the rest goes to Narcan, the drug that reverses an overdose, and Suboxone.

Suboxone, generically called buprenorphine or “bupe,” is a synthetic opioid (like methadone) that counters opioid cravings. Currently 43,000 city residents are on daily opioid maintenance drugs—Suboxone (13,600) or methadone (30,000)—most of those through Medicaid. The city hopes to increase the

MOST PUBLIC FUNDING TO FIGHT OPIOID ADDICTION GOES TO MAINTENANCE DRUGS INSTEAD OF LONG-TERM RESIDENTIAL RECOVERY—AND OPIOID DEATHS KEEP INCREASING

BY EMILY BELZ IN NEW YORK
number of New Yorkers on Suboxone chiefly to 58,000 by 2022, since Suboxone is supposed to be less addictive and needed for a shorter time than methadone. The mayor’s office did not return requests for comment.

The city has also unveiled a $3 million public relations campaign for methadone and Suboxone, with personal stories from people who say the drugs have kept them alive. “I am living proof that buprenorphine treatment works,” says one ad testimonial from a woman named Chelle.

Luke Nasta, the executive director of a residential recovery facility on Staten Island called Camelot, said he isn’t against Suboxone but that the city was cherry-picking Suboxone success stories: “I can cherry-pick too.” He says he contacted the city to ask that it do PSAs about long-term residential recovery, too. He did not receive a response.

Used properly, Suboxone has a record of keeping addicts from overdosing. But the focus—locally and nationally—on funding Suboxone as the magic solution to the opioid epidemic shows some of the simplistic thinking that led to the epidemic in the first place, as unscrupulous doctors are overprescribing it in similar ways to the doctors who once overprescribed opioids.

“There is some bad medicine being practiced out there,” said Dettmann, who is a federally authorized Suboxone prescriber. “If I can get you addicted to Suboxone, you’re going to be my patient for quite some time. ... The problem is that we don’t have doctors to prescribe it the right way, who understand it’s an adjunct, it’s not a cure.” If one of her patients won’t do counseling alongside Suboxone, for example, Dettmann will force the patient to taper off the drug.

On the other hand, some Christian doctors like Dettmann say Christian recovery programs are making a mistake in nearly universally dismissing Suboxone. They say the drug can offer an overdose-free window for patients to do the real work of recovery like counseling or job training.

None of the Christian residential recovery programs in New York I contacted allow residents to be on methadone or Suboxone. Staffers at Christian recovery programs say they often receive people who have tried every other form of recovery and need something that gets at deeper spiritual needs. Opiate substitutes, they say, dull the ability to address the addiction.

Holistic long-term recovery options like residential programs are more expensive, have little funding, and are hard to come by. The number of beds on Staten Island for long-term recovery is “very small,” according to Dr. Janet Kim, who runs Beacon Christian Community Health Center on the island, serving a low-income population. Beacon refers patients with opioid addiction to Nasta’s Camelot, which is not faith-based but aligns with Beacon’s holistic approach to addiction.

Camelot is a beautiful historic building sitting on the grounds of a crumbling tuberculosis hospital. It has only 45 beds, which are full most of the time. That lonely residential program on the island receives state funding, but hasn’t seen funding from the city or the federal government.
At Camelot, nine of the men in the program are on Suboxone. The program will maintain clients if they’re already on methadone but doesn’t start anyone on methadone. Camelot does prescribe Suboxone at the facility but only in rare cases and with the requirement that it is part of “intensive counseling.” Nasta doesn’t see medication as the primary form of treatment.

Nasta grew up on Staten Island and became addicted to heroin as a young man more than 40 years ago. At the time the island had no residential rehab programs, so he went to a program in Spanish Harlem (Exodus House) for several years. He was on methadone for a time and said the daily dosage made him feel trapped and dependent on the government: “Liquid handcuffs.” It was years of therapy and drug abstinence that helped him.

A s the use of Suboxone has expanded, associated problems have expanded as well. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration reported that from 2005 to 2010, the number of individuals with buprenorphine prescriptions increased from 100,000 to 800,000. Over that same time period, the number of emergency room visits related to buprenorphine increased from 3,161 to 30,135.

Like methadone, buprenorphine can depress breathing—although so far the drug has a safer record. There are instances of buprenorphine overdoses, but New York rehab staffers I talked to said the more common situation is where someone tries to come off Suboxone and then overdoses on another drug like heroin.

The family of a Connecticut college student who overdosed and died in 2016 is suing the makers of Suboxone, saying that their son became “completely addicted to Suboxone.” Bradley Allen was 19 and had recently tried to come off Suboxone, even enrolling in a rehab program, but once off of the drug he overdosed on heroin and died.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention doesn’t track bup deaths. Medical examiners often don’t test for it when they’re dealing with an overdose death. Tennessee is one of the rare states with bupe data; in 2016 it showed 67 of the state’s 1,600 overdose deaths involved buprenorphine.

Doctors must get federal authorization to become authorized bup prescribers, but that only requires eight hours of training. There is evidence of shoddy doctors handling bupe prescriptions. A recent New York Times investigation found that federal bup prescribers have a higher rate of disciplinary action than the general doctor population.

One doctor in Pennsylvania, Thomas Radecki, was federally authorized to prescribe bupe despite having lost his license in Illinois and then having a disciplinary history in Pennsylvania. With the bupe authorization, he ran four all-cash clinics called “Doctors and Lawyers for a Drug-Free Youth” and began selling huge volumes of buprenorphine (specifically Subutex, the pill form of Suboxone). In 2016, he was sentenced to 11 to 22 years in prison for overprescribing the pills and trading drugs for sex with patients.

“An addiction bomb went off in Clarion County,” District Attorney Mark Aaron testified at the county sentencing hearing. “We’re still dealing with the effect of the actions of Dr. Radecki to this day.”

The Christian doctor in Michigan, Sandy Dettmann, said even as the government expands bupe funding, few doctors want to take on that unsavory patient population, which is perceived as manipulative and violent. Dr. Janet Kim confirmed that doctors are wary on Staten Island as well. As doctors are hesitant to become bupe prescribers, and as the crisis continues to worsen, Dettmann doesn’t see her caseload slowing down at all.

“I do this because I’m passionate, but it’s a lousy field to be in,” Dettmann said. She said she made $6,000 last year. Her voicemail is always full, with patients’ financial and spiritual needs. They’ve typically burned all their bridges and seek her out as a friend.

In her conversations with patients, Dettmann sees a “drift toward Jesus” that excites her. While she prescribes Suboxone, she sees the spiritual side as the answer to the underlying longing: “We’re looking for a substance, anything, to help us deal with the human condition.”

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A radically different approach

Twenty-five-year-old Tommy Van Warner tried Suboxone, but it did little to help him. Since high school, he struggled with addiction to opioids, beginning with pills that flowed through the school hallways. One year when he was in high school, Florida pharmacies doled out 650 million oxycodone pills. His parents didn’t notice any signs of addiction until he didn’t show up at school one day. They spent four days frantically searching for him before finding him on a concrete floor of an abandoned building in the fetal position, barely breathing.

His parents, Rick and Mary Van Warner, estimate they have spent at least $200,000 on his treatment. One rehab place in Utah cost about $6,000 a month. Their son has relapsed 13 times and been revived from overdoses. They haven’t received any public money to help with his care; insurance covered some pieces of his treatment early on, but that soon ended.

“Recovery is a big business, and it’s very difficult to distinguish between the centers that are in it for the money or … for the right reasons,” said Rick, a former journalist who wrote about the experience with his son in a new book, On Pins and Needles. When Tommy was on Suboxone, Rick found it was only a crutch.

“He ends up taking the Suboxone so much that he’s so doped out, it’s like he’s on opioids,” said Rick.

Rick and Mary found a more creative solution: detoxing their son at home. They include him in every family activity—they have three other children—and make sure he has time for therapy. Rick is convinced that the home treatment is why their son is still alive.

They have a room where he suffers through the withdrawal symptoms with blankets and a vomit bucket. The family dog curls up next to him for the duration. He’ll sleep a lot. Once he’s up for it, his mom will make him soup. Rick said during his recovery from the last relapse, he came back to himself much faster. Tommy is seeking an escape from “mental pain, emotional pain,” Rick said. Heroin is “a drug of isolation.” So for the Van Warners, the family has to be part of the fight against it.

“There’s no comprehensive approach anywhere,” said Rick.—E.B.
Despite the government’s misgivings, cross-cultural missions is not a foreign-led movement in China. House church networks are building indigenous sending organizations, church leaders are seeking ways to train aspiring missionaries, and believers are committing their lives to bringing the gospel to the unreached in China and around the world. Churches are excited about One Belt One Road’s outward focus that creates opportunities for the Chinese to enter into Muslim countries to work and evangelize.

And this is just the beginning, as multiple missions movements gain steam in China, including Mission China 2030, which aims to send out 20,000 Chinese missionaries by the year 2030. Each year the group puts on a conference—in July 1,200 Chinese university students gathered in Chiang Mai, Thailand, for an Urbana-like missions conference—with speakers from both the local and the international church. At the conference, 250 college students committed to going out as missionaries.

China still has a long way to go before it can become a major mission-sending country. Passionate missionaries, especially from rural areas, lack the training and language skills needed to be effective. Chinese churches don’t have an older generation of missionaries to learn from, yet international mission agencies are stepping in to impart knowledge and share their experiences. Beyond passion, the Chinese church also possesses a great evangelism tool: the church’s testimony of flourishing under persecution and suffering.

On the side of a busy road in Beijing sits a large nondescript office building, blending in with the apartments and mid-rise buildings around it. Walk up a
ent to send Chinese missionaries to Muslims // By June Cheng
few flights of stairs and suddenly you hear the sound of worship music mixed with pre-church chatter as congregants gather for a Sunday service at Zion Church, one of the largest unregistered churches in the country. Step inside and you might think you’ve entered a hip church in the Bible Belt: Chris Tomlin softly playing in the hallway, a bookstore/coffee shop churning out lattes, an auditorium with projection screens and plush seats, and even door handles in the shape of crosses.

The pastor of Zion Church is Ezra Jin, the co-founder of Mission China 2030, who has long called for the Chinese church to engage in missions. Jin is of Korean ancestry, one of the 2.3 million descendants of Korean immigrants with Chinese citizenship, and so his approach to missions follows the style of the South Korean church: passionate, fearless, and high-profile. He’s welcomed media coverage of his church, with even the government-backed Global Times interviewing a Zion Church pastor in a report on Chinese churches sending out missionaries to Muslim countries.

In 2015 I attended a Sunday service at Zion only to find Jin out of town and an elder preaching about his experience as a missionary in Pakistan. The audience sat in rapt attention as he described the struggles and the fruits of ministering in a foreign land, a concept familiar in the West but still novel in China.

David Ro, director of the J. Christy Wilson, Jr. Center for World Missions at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, said 1,000 Chinese missionaries currently serve overseas, with many still in the language-learning and relationship-building stages. He’s found that throughout missions history, missionary movements arise alongside the growth of the origin country’s economic and global influence. The Chinese church is doing the same as China’s status rises; “the difference with China is that the government is also cracking down on the church.”

This can be a plus for Chinese missionaries as they minister in Muslim countries where discretion is necessary and their testimony of growth amid persecution can be an encouragement to new converts. Ro, who is also the East Asia director for the Lausanne Movement, believes Chinese missionaries will influence churches in other regions, like India or the Middle East, to send out overseas missionaries of their own. “If they see that Chinese house churches can do missions under persecution, they’ll think, ‘Why can’t we do that?’” Ro said. “I think it’s going to change missions in the next 10 to 20 years.”

About 75 percent of Chinese missionaries are preparing to serve or already serving in the Middle East, Ro said, while others are looking at North Korea, Southeast Asia, and Africa. The idea to go west from China started in the 1920s with the Back to Jerusalem (BTJ) movement, whose adherents believed that since Pentecost, the gospel has moved west from Jerusalem to Antioch, then over to Europe, the United States, and now China. Now it’s time for Chinese Christians to bring the gospel west from China through the Middle East all the way back to Jerusalem, at which time the Great Commission would be fulfilled.

The vision gained momentum among Chinese Christians during World War II, yet before much work could be done, the Chinese Communist Party took control in China and kicked out foreign missionaries and imprisoned Chinese believers. Forty years later, officials finally released BTJ leader Simon Zhao from prison in the ’80s, and he spent the last years of his life sharing the BTJ vision with members of the Henan church network. The idea became popular among the Chinese in the ’90s, and the release of the book Heavenly Man by Brother Yun spread the BTJ vision to the larger Christian world.

Chinese church leaders aimed to send a whopping 100,000 Chinese missionaries out to the countries west of China, which happen to align with the 10/40 Window. Initial excitement over the vision led many overseas churches to donate to the BTJ movement, yet the Chinese church was unprepared to accomplish such a task, as it didn’t have adequate sending structures and training in place. Funds were abused, and churches sent out passionate missionaries without cross-cultural training or ongoing support from their church.

In some cases, churches handed missionaries one-way tickets and never contacted them again. John Hsieh, a worker at United Missions of Taiwan, recalls one mainland Chinese missionary who said that when he called home during Chinese New Year, the pastor asked, “And remind me, which country are you in right now?” Others struggle to make a living in the mission field and spend so much time working odd jobs that they have little energy left over to evangelize. (Because Hsieh’s work in China is sensitive, we have changed his and several other names in this story.)

Churches began to recognize their need for training in cross-cultural missions after the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, which killed 69,000 people and disproportionately affected ethnic minorities. Churches from all over the country sent people over to help with aid relief. When media attention and government aid moved on, Christians stayed to start schools, plant churches, and help the long rebuilding process. This great wave of missions was unprecedented among house churches, and the leaders asked international mission groups to help them train members eager to do missions.

Jeremy Zhu (name changed), who works at a large international missions agency, helped Chinese churches develop structures for screening and training missionaries and for ongoing care and...
menthorship for missionaries in the field. Zhu acknowledged that while Chinese Christians can learn much from foreign groups, his organization doesn’t plan on opening a sending office in the country. “We can’t just force [our organization’s] model on them; we want them to contextualize and indigenize it,” Zhu said. “We want them to adjust it to a Chinese mindset.”

Unlike in Western countries, the creation of local sending agencies is politically sensitive in China: The government fears churches working together and, as the deaths of the missionaries in Pakistan show, evangelism that could endanger China’s relations with allies. So agencies need to be kept low-key and unregistered, which makes transparency difficult. Major church networks and larger churches have created their own mission agencies, yet they remain underdeveloped.

Because China has so few Christians with missionary experience, indigenous mission agencies need to bring in foreign missionaries to help train missionaries, Zhu said. Ro also encourages aspiring missionaries who have studied abroad and can speak English to join established international mission agencies to learn the ropes. But these organizations can be difficult to join for those who do not speak English.

Joyce Shen (name changed), a missionary from Taiwan, spent more than a dozen years in China, most recently working in the Muslim-majority western region. China is home to 23 million Muslims, most of them part of the Hui and Uighur ethnic minority groups. As more house churches wanted to reach this population, Shen started to train missionaries intent on serving Muslims.

Most of the Chinese missionaries she taught were between 20 and 40 years old, a mix of singles, couples, and families. She’s found that many didn’t have much interaction with the world outside China, so it was challenging for them to understand other cultures. They struggle with becoming accustomed to new foods, and because many of the missionaries from rural areas have only a middle-school education or lower, it’s difficult for them to learn the local language and understand the importance of doing so. “It’s unrelated to how much passion they have for missions,” Shen said. “In training it’s difficult to teach them when they don’t have a grasp of general knowledge.” Shen mentioned that recently the number of college-educated missionaries has increased, which has helped with the problem.

One overseas group started a program that funds new graduates to train and then go into the mission field for two years. After that, if they believe they are called to become missionaries, they can continue to serve longer. Yet Zhu believes these types of programs are unsustainable in the long term, as most college students aren’t connected to local churches and therefore lack financial and prayer support. Also, he sees value in delegating “the support of missionaries to the local church because it allows the Chinese church to carry the responsibility for global missions.”

The leaders of Mission China 2030, which launched in 2013, are mainly urban churches with professional and highly educated congregants. It follows in the footsteps of the Korean church, which in the 1990s pledged to send out 10,000 missionaries within a decade. In 2000, they reached their goal and by 2010 had doubled that figure. Zhu said the movement’s Korean style rubs some Chinese churches the wrong way, especially those that wish to take a more low-key and conservative approach.

Movement leaders want to send out 20,000 missionaries in order to repay the “gospel debt” of 20,000 foreign missionaries who have brought the gospel to the Chinese people. To reach this goal, they have different phases starting with mobilizing churches, training, and sending out smaller batches of missionaries for both short- and long-term missions.

But can they really reach their goal of 20,000 missionaries by 2030? Hsieh thinks so: At the conferences he attends, he’s met many Chinese missionaries already in the field, and he sees many more Christians eager to head out. His concern isn’t about finding enough people to become missionaries but how they go about doing it and what the Chinese missionary movement will look like decades down the line. “Going out isn’t hard,” Hsieh said. “But are they able to continue to do ministry in a healthy way and can they come back healthy? This is what we care about.”

Other experts agreed that their concern wasn’t about the numbers but the type of missionaries China is sending out—although having a numerical goal in mind can compel the church to think about how to start preparing for the field now. Zhu fears that strong Chinese nationalism can hurt their witness especially as they enter areas in China that have long been oppressed by the majority Han people. Like missionaries of all ethnicities, Chinese missionaries need to go with a sense of humility, learning the culture and language and lovingly engaging with the local people, Zhu said.

In going out to other countries, some have argued that Chinese are more welcomed in Muslim countries than Westerners as the Chinese government cements its relationships with countries along the Silk Road through the One Belt One Road Initiative. Chinese people also don’t come with as much baggage, as China isn’t viewed as a “Christian nation.” Yet Zhu warns that while Chinese may be more tolerated now, shady business practices by Chinese businessmen and the unintended consequences of China’s policies could quickly change that impression. “Locals don’t see a difference between you and your government. Unless Chinese remain humble, they can lose that advantage.”

Ro believes that while China’s religious affairs bureau is concerned about the Chinese missionary movement, the upper tier of the government is taking a wait-and-see approach, as having Chinese citizens build connections and serve other countries is beneficial to them: “Chinese missionaries who are blessing other countries is in line with what the top tier wants.” This year, Chinese officials did not stop any mainland Christians from attending the Mission China 2030 youth conference in Chiang Mai.

Yet the church is also realistically preparing for the cost of spreading the gospel in hostile countries. After the death of Li and Meng in Pakistan, church leaders are discussing how to deal with future martyrdoms that are sure to come, Ro said. “The first two martyrs are Chinese Christians, and someday they will be written about in church history.”
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Chinyere Ujor was on a trip to Ghana in 2016 when she received an important text message from her sister. The message said the investment scheme Ujor had invested in had crashed. The 30-year-old Abuja resident had no job at the time, and the company, called the Mavrodi Mondial Movement, or MMM, served as her sole source of income.

MMM is a Russian-born scheme that promises participants 30 percent “interest” on their investment in 30 days. The organization announced in December 2016 that holiday traffic had crashed its website and promised to return the following month.

Ujor had paid $835 into the scheme and expected $278 in interest when the site crashed. She lost both her initial deposit and the interest. “It was all [the money] I had at that moment,” Ujor said.

MMM is a web-based Ponzi scheme, one of several that have drawn in millions of Nigerian participants. The networks run a cycle of cash investment and return by using new members’ investments to pay back older participants. In Nigeria, MMM members start with as low as $2 and choose either to offer or
receive financial “help.” The scheme describes itself on its website as a mutual fund, saying the goal is “to destroy the world’s unjust financial system.”

Ponzi schemes became increasingly popular at the peak of Nigeria’s recession two years ago, thriving under the nation’s high unemployment and a lack of government regulation. The catch is, the websites could crash and disappear at any time. The Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation said Nigerians lost more than $50 million when MMM crashed. Financial analysts warn that the high-risk investments could land the country’s troubled economy in more peril.

Sergei Mavrodi set up MMM in Russia in the 1990s, but it collapsed after losing about $100 million of its members’ money. Russian officials sentenced Mavrodi to four years in prison on fraud charges. Since then, the scheme has made its way to China, where the government banned it, and to African countries such as South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria.

MMM reopened early last year, but paid back losses in installments and only to some members who added more money into the cycle. Wale Yinkaoju, a 31-year-old Abuja resident, said he tried MMM for the second time in July. He expected his return in August, but the management informed members that the requests for help had exceeded the number of people offering it. “My money is still there,” he said.

The site crashed again in October and a month later announced it would restart its entire system. MMM in a statement said it froze all older investments until the system strengthened. Ujor said she received back only $139 from her initial deposit of $835. “I’m not sure it’s coming again, so it’s pointless just putting false hope.”

The initial success of MMM opened the door for other similar schemes. Ujor said she also took part in Ultimate Cash Cycler before it also crashed in 2016. The website promised double the amount invested within six hours. Chimdi Anyaehie, a 23-year-old business owner, said he has used MMM and also has a running account with Wealth Help Alliance, which promises 50 percent interest within 15 days. He also lost $55 to another scheme called Twinkas. Anyaehie uses the sites to make extra spending cash, but Ujor said the interest she earned paid for her needs: She used her earnings to cover personal expenses and to drill a well at her parents’ house.

Many of the schemes have no formal points of contact. Wealth Help Alliance lists an untraceable address and phone number used by several other companies online. MMM has only online agents and a message form with no published contact information. The secrecy means the schemes rely largely on referrals and word of mouth. Anyaehie said one of his friends earned more than $100 for uploading a video lauding MMM.

The Lagos-based Redeemed Christian Church of God last year released a national memo warning its pastors and members against patronizing Ponzi schemes. An assistant general overseer at the Pentecostal church, Pastor Johnson Odesola, said the leadership would penalize any pastor or member who used the church’s name as a platform to participate in such a program.

Financial Derivatives Company (FDC), an economic think tank based in Lagos state, said the schemes pose an economic threat despite the early participants who reap personal benefits or the banks that generate transfer fees when members send money online. “Money just exchanges hands with no kind of production or value creation taking place,” the group stated. “The capital that could have been deployed into productive ventures is lost.” The group said the Nigerian government has exerted no control mostly because the schemes operate online and sometimes use virtual currency, which is difficult to trace. Nigeria’s Central Bank and the Securities and Exchange Commission issued warnings against patronizing the schemes, but they have mostly gone unheeded.

Sitting in front of his tailoring shop at a mall in the city of Garki, Anyaehie agreed the websites pose a lot of risk, but he sees it as the risk that comes with making any investment. “They’ve given strict instructions to use your loose cash,” he said.

Ujor landed a job last year in April. Since then, she said her perspective on Ponzi schemes has changed. “I did it when I was not working,” she said. She now feels certain that nobody could talk her into such a racket again.
Most drivers typically glance at their sideview and rearview mirrors every few seconds. But automotive mirrors may become obsolete as manufacturers increasingly roll out mirrorless concept vehicles that rely instead on rear-facing cameras.

Many American drivers have grown familiar with the backup cameras that are a standard feature in most new vehicles. But a camera system that replaces mirrors can give drivers a complete view of the rear and sides of their vehicle, overcoming the problem of blind spots. Eliminating protruding sideview mirrors also decreases aerodynamic drag and improves fuel efficiency.

Brad Duncan of Exa Corp., a simulation software company that works with automakers, told Design News, “We’re looking for cars to have much lower drag in the near future, and mirrorless is a clear win.” Duncan noted that a typical car burns a tank of fuel each year just by transporting its mirrors.

BMW, Kia, and Tesla have all recently showcased concept vehicles with no sideview or rearview mirrors. The rear-facing cameras in the BMW i8, which debuted in 2016, project their images on a display suspended from the car’s windshield. Last month, Mitsubishi Electric introduced mirrorless technology that includes a motion detection system capable of sensing objects up to 328 feet away, according to IEEE Spectrum.

Both Japan and the European Union have approved mirrorless vehicles, and the first commercial mirrorless cars may hit Japanese streets as early as next year, the technology magazine reported. The U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has only approved a “hybrid” mirror and camera design on the Cadillac CT6 and has yet to endorse a completely mirrorless system.

Some U.S. automotive suppliers, though, advise caution in adopting mirrorless technology. They cite potential drawbacks, such as the two-dimensional image presented by a camera-based display, and the need for the driver’s eyes to constantly refocus.

“When you focus on a display, you’re focusing on a plane that’s 18 to 24 inches from your eye,” Craig Piersma of Gentex Corp., a supplier of automotive mirrors and camera-based vision systems, told Design News. “But when you focus on the plane of a mirror, you’re actually focusing on the reflection, which is hundreds of feet behind you. So with a mirror, your eye doesn’t have to refocus.”

If cameras eventually replace mirrors on vehicles, it will likely happen in stages, with the sideview mirrors being the first to go.

### SOUND AS SIGHT

A new iPhone app could help the visually impaired gain a greater awareness of their surroundings—by using sound. The Microsoft Soundscape app, free for iOS in the United States and the U.K., is part of a research project begun in 2014 to use “3-D audio” to enrich a pedestrian’s perception of his surroundings, according to Microsoft’s Accessibility Blog.

“Obstacle avoidance is not the problem, we have a dog, a cane and our blindness skills for that,” Erin Lauridsen, the access technology director at San Francisco’s LightHouse for the Blind, told Microsoft. “The gap is knowing where things are and being able to decide what’s of interest.”

Incorporating the phone’s navigation capabilities, the app lets the user set audio beacons at known destinations or landmarks. Through a stereo headset, audio cues emanate from these points of interest, allowing the user to develop a mental image based on the acoustic environment. —M.C.
Most news stories about the midterm elections focus on Republican weaknesses. President Donald Trump's approval ratings are low, Republicans trail in the generic ballot, and enthusiasm among Democrats seems likely to boost their turnout. Despite these factors, there is one ray of sunshine for the GOP: the U.S. Senate. Both polling and historical analysis suggest Republicans could gain seats there even as the party generally suffers a downturn.

GOP hopes in the Senate rest on the fact that an unusual number of Democrats up for reelection represent states Trump won in 2016. While five come from states that Trump won with less than 50 percent of the vote, the other five come from very strongly Republican places. Trump's margin in these states ranges from a low of 18.5 percent (Missouri) to a high of 42 percent (West Virginia). In as sharply polarized a political environment as ours, it is extremely difficult for a senator of one party to win enough votes from the other party's voters to surmount such large deficits.

The very same polls that show Republicans losing nationally bear this out. The Economist/YouGov poll, for example, shows that only 2 percent of 2016 Trump voters and 3 percent of 2016 Hillary Clinton voters intend to vote for a congressional candidate of the opposite party this fall. A February poll from Public Policy Polling shows essentially the same thing: 7 percent of Trump voters and 5 percent of Clinton voters intend to defect in the fall. If you apply those ratios to the Trump vote share in the five states mentioned above, Republicans would easily win them all.

The key for Democrats, then, is whether incumbents can run far enough ahead of Hillary Clinton's vote share to turn the partisan statistics around. This could happen, in theory. We know that incumbents can differentiate themselves from presidential candidates even in today's environment. Republican Sens. Pat Toomey and Ron Johnson, for example, ran ahead of Trump in winning their states in 2016. The question is whether it is possible for the Democrats to run far enough ahead of their party to win in the deeply red states that are in play this fall.

The available data suggest they probably won't. One way to measure the ability of an incumbent to outrun a presidential candidate is to divide the incumbent's share of the vote by that of the last presidential candidate to run in that state. Any total above 100 shows the incumbent outran the presidential candidate. So we could see whether Democrats can overcome deep partisan trends by examining how Democrats have done in the recent past when facing serious Republican challenges and then comparing those efforts with what they need to win this fall.

The results of this analysis are not good for Democrats. Looking at Democratic Senate races in deep red states since 2004, we find that Democrats have ratings ranging from 103 to 126. They do outrun their more liberal presidential candidates, but not by more than 26 percent of that candidate's total. Clinton, though, did so poorly that the most endangered five Democrats need to outrun the Clinton and Jill Stein vote share by between 29 and 83 percent. Unless they do better than any other Democrat has done in the past 14 years, each candidate looks like a loser.

Democratic partisan enthusiasm could save some of these people, as could Republicans nominating a terrible candidate as they did in some races in 2010 and 2012. But those factors probably won't save them all. The likelier outcome is that even as Republicans lose House seats and governors' mansions, they will pick up between one and four net Senate seats in the fall and maintain Senate control.

Given the importance many ascribe to the Supreme Court, that is a strong silver lining to what may otherwise be a very cloudy GOP election forecast.

Sights on the Senate

DEMOCRATS HOPING TO TAKE CONTROL OF THE U.S. SENATE FACE FORMIDABLE ODDS by Henry Olsen
Billy Graham's death (and his funeral on March 2) ends an era of evangelical revival that took off at the 1949 crusade in Los Angeles.


Strachan traces the lives of Boston pastor Harold Ockenga and Christianity Today Editor Carl Henry and how they pursued the lordship of Christ for higher education.

Billy Graham worked behind the scenes to help his friends pursue this unusual vision for Christ’s kingship over the world of colleges and universities. The academic world has its own subculture and customs, and Ockenga and Henry thought this world needed Jesus Christ just as much as the homeless men at a rescue mission.

They were swimming upstream against both the secularism of the intellectual world and an anti-intellectual bent among many Christians of the early 20th century. Billy Sunday, for example, was the Billy Graham of an earlier era, preaching in small towns, then in big cities after being a star base-stealing player in big-league baseball. Sunday was influential politically and socially but never had Graham’s ambitions for the academic world. “I don’t know any more about theology than a jack-rabbit does about ping-pong, but I’m on the way to glory,” he declared.

Graham never needed to be center stage in Ockenga’s and Henry’s efforts, as they launched a magazine and started Fuller Seminary on the West Coast and Gordon-Conwell Seminary near Boston. They encouraged young people to pursue doctorates to bring the influence of Christ to bear on an academic world that scoffed at the claims of Christ and the Bible.

Graham was often included in the middle of their efforts, lending his time, talent, and treasure, which included friendships with wealthy and influential business and political leaders across the country. The book sums up the trio’s accomplishments this way: “Led by pastor Harold Ockenga, theologian Carl F.H. Henry, and evangelist Billy Graham, the neo-evangelicals championed a freshly intellectual and culturally engaged brand of evangelicalism that broke with the separationist, preeminently defensive program of fundamentalism.”

Whether they were starting seminaries or a magazine, or helping a young student figure out where to get a doctorate, Graham’s name was often in the middle of their correspondence and counsel as Ockenga and Henry tried to renew the idea of a Christian mind.

Henry had an even more expansive vision for a Christian university that would have the academic standards of Harvard and strong personal piety. They thought young believers should see higher education as a mission field just as important as the countries that had heard little of the gospel.

Of course not all their visions and dreams came true, especially the university idea. Baylor University may come closest in recent years to what they were seeking.

They did much to encourage a little army of believers to take intellectual life seriously and obtain the credentials to serve in the academic world. Strachan’s book outlines their wins and losses and their remarkable influence and progress. “Graham, contrary to popular opinion, did not want only spiritual revival of the heart,” writes Strachan. “He wanted it spread to the mind.”

In this story Graham showed not just the capacity for a big vision for Christ’s kingdom but also the heart of a servant leader. He helped his friends with these projects and never needed to be in the limelight or take credit for what was being accomplished.

Billy Graham was the greatest evangelist of his generation. What helped him achieve that remarkable stature was his character as a servant leader. ☰
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‘Age of outrage’

Janie B. Cheaney’s article made vivid for me the destruction wreaked by progressive liberalism’s Culture of Death. Like the untold numbers of classic novels never written, we will never know how many world-changers were among the hundreds of millions murdered in the womb worldwide. Perhaps their absence is our punishment.

—MELVIN LEE / Dover, Pa.

‘Dissolving identities’

The Berenstain Bears book called He Bear, She Bear begins, “Every single bear we see is a he bear or a she.” Papa Bear says to Brother: “I’m a father, I’m a he. A father’s something you could be.” Mama Bear says to Sister: “A mother’s something you could be.” Some places might ban that book now for not endorsing gender fluidity.

—ANNA STEWART on Facebook

‘Kisses of regret’

I read I Kissed Dating Goodbye aloud to each of my kids. I’m sad for those who heard a legalistic message guaranteeing a blissful dating life and marriage, but it gave my family a workable mindset to navigate relationships. I’m grateful.

—BEVERLY PARRISH / League City, Texas

Harris is too hard on himself. There are always people who react in unhealthy ways to any teaching, but that doesn’t invalidate the truth of the message. I wish I could have read it before I played the dating game.

—LYNN LEWIS / Gainesville, Va.

‘Hindsight and hope’

It’s impressive that Harris is willing to dive into the impact of his book, but people should have to answer for what made them famous. I grew up in the thick of the courtship era; the book has plenty of holes in gospel and logic that we all missed.

—MELISSA DICKINSON on Facebook

Harris apologizing for a book he wrote 21 years ago about purity in relationships boggles my mind.

—KENNETH ISGRIGG on wng.org

Why are we castigating Josh Harris for calling Christians to live in purity and according to God’s standards? I was 22 when the book came out and recall vigorous debates over its principles. I still feel that people didn’t like it because it’s hard to do things God’s way.

—URSULA MACDOUGALL / Modesto, Calif.

The book reflects the seriousness of God’s Word regarding sex and marriage. The fact that some people felt awkward and had unmet expectations is not an indictment of the book but of our failings as sinful humans.

—JEB RICE / Fishers, Ind.

‘Tell Henny Youngman, please’

I loved your column about Henny Youngman. When I was an airline hostess for TWA in 1963, my crew was stuck in Vegas, so we went to one of his shows. His jokes were the funniest I’d ever heard, and clean. It was good to read that he had a wonderful marriage.

—ANN WILLIAMS / Alpine, Calif.

We enjoyed some laughs from this column and thought it was quite fitting as we celebrate 50 years of marriage this year. As Proverbs says, “A merry heart does good, like medicine.”

—TOM & RUTH LUCAS / Coopersville, Mich.

‘Politically correct persecution’

Democrats worry that Sam Brownback will “weaponize” the State Department against women and LGBT people, but perhaps Democrats see a threat where nobody else does because they had already weaponized the State Department.

—SCOTT PRINTZ / Abilene, Kan.

‘Take Henny Youngman, please’

The last hour of this movie is disturbing and gives a warped view of love and marriage. The ending was truly reprehensible.

—ROB MARTIN on wng.org

‘Once we’ve confessed’

I wouldn’t call it “crucifying” Andy Savage to keep him out of ministry. It might have given his family much less grief in the long run. Yes, Jesus’ blood covers all who repent, but different situations should be handled differently, depending on whether a ministry leader is involved and on the severity of the sexual sin.

—JULIE HORNOR on wng.org

‘Phantom Thread’

The last hour of this movie is disturbing and gives a warped view of love and marriage. The ending was truly reprehensible.

—TOM & RUTH LUCAS / Coopersville, Mich.
‘Not just noise’
How sad. Now that we finally have an administration that defends the preborn and Christian liberty, and seeks to limit an intrusive big government, WORLD concentrates on Trump’s faults.
—GRAYCE ABEL / Winfield, Kan.

‘Moody blues’
It’s difficult to expose a venerable Christian organization like Moody Bible Institute, but I think you uncovered some real red flags. Most disturbing for me are the possibilities of theological drift and political liberalism.
—Igor Shpudejko / Goodyear, Ariz.

‘Under the radar’
For the Gladney Center for Adoption to place a child in an immoral environment is a serious sin.
—Gene PomiaK / Hemet, Calif.

‘Physicians in white’
I think some form of maintenance of certification for physicians seems reasonable. I must renew my teaching license every three years and prove I have participated in continuing education. It would be comforting to know that my doctors are also required to keep abreast of new developments.
—Amy McClish / Milwaukie, Ore.

Comment
I started reading WORLD News Group in seventh grade for current events assignments, but now I read it to find hope in a dark world. Ever since the 2016 election, Fox and CNN have hit me with negative headline after negative headline. They do not have hope, but you infuse every story with the gospel.
—Carter Keller / Dallas, Texas

Clarification
Translators have provided New Testaments for hundreds of languages in Papua New Guinea (“Different world, same Word,” March 3, p. 56).

Read more Mailbag letters at wng.org
They didn’t know the rules

ETERNAL ANXIETY IS THE PRICE OF BEING PC

When tripping over yourself to be on the right side of history, the trouble you will run into is that you don’t know the rules. This is because the rules keep changing.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada, darling of the left (until February) didn’t know the rules. He supposed if he dressed like a Bombay bridegroom to visit India they would love him. They hated him. In India and in Canada. Now one can imagine being hated for wearing Armani suits and looking like a flaming colonialist. Turns out he would have been better off. Who knew? As Jesus said: “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn” (Matthew 11:17).

Eve Ensler, author of The Vagina Monologues, knew the rules at one time, but the rules ran ahead of her. Her stage play, once an annual religious rite on college campuses, was canceled this year at our local Temple University. Though she had shoehorned every age, race, and sexual orientation she could think of into her diatribe cum theater, it wasn’t enough to save her in the end, because she didn’t have “intersectionality.” Temple hath said she was “heterocentric and cisgender.” And surely, Temple (as Antony said of Brutus) is an honorable institution.

Milo Yiannopoulos is an interesting case. Though he’s flamboyantly gay, with a British accent, to boot, two points in his favor, he dislikes Islam. Worse than that, he doesn’t believe in climate change. He has to go too. Bye-bye U.C.-Berkeley.

PewDiePie is a 29-year-old Swedish YouTube comic with over 15 million Twitter followers. Last year he made a joke the rule-makers didn’t like—those guys who sit in a control room somewhere and change them every five minutes. Channeling Paula Deen and other fallen rule-transgressors, he apologized: “I’ve made some jokes that people don’t like. And you know what? If people don’t like my jokes, I fully respect that. I fully understand that. I acknowledge that I took things too far, and that’s something I definitely will keep in mind moving forward, but the reaction and the outrage has been nothing but insanity” (“My Response” video, February 2017).

It was a nimble blend of grovel and defiance, and it should have worked. But he’s probably toxic now. Too bad for PewDiePie, he didn’t know the rules.

James Damore, 28, soft-spoken and well-mannered, nerdy and apolitical engineer at Google, was fired last year after sending upper management solicited feedback following a company diversity training seminar. He thought they were having a conversation. “Conversation” is a leftist word; it’s what they always say they want. The company fired him over the phone, saying, “James, you’ve been terminated for perpetuating gender stereotypes.” In a 1970s college psych class they told us experimental rats experience rodent distress when placed in “approach-avoidance” situations where they are administered electronic shocks after taking the bait. Men are not rats, but they are at least rats. Men need to know the rules.

Cruella (to her employee): “Do you like spots, Fredric?” Fredric: “I don’t believe so, Madame. I thought we liked stripes this year.” Cruella: “What kind of sycophant are you?” Fredric: “What kind of sycophant would you like me to be?” (101 Dalmatians, 1996).

At the height of Germany’s economic hyperinflation in the 1920s, the mark-dollar exchange rate was falling so fast that restaurant waiters had to stand on tables and announce new menu prices. Cultural hyperinflation in 21st-century America needs the same hour-by-hour monitoring if you want to ensure you’re as PC this afternoon as you were when you woke up this morning.

I picture a boat on turbulent waters listing to port, and everyone aboard running in panic as one man to starboard. Then she lists to starboard, and a hundred pairs of feet scurry in unison to port. It’s all about staying in the inner ring. Wish we could anticipate where to run next.

God has two rules: “And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he commanded us” (1 John 3:23).

And those rules never change.
YouTuber views
UNDERSTANDING MILLENNIAL MEDIACRATS

We hear repeatedly that millennials are moving leftward and that Donald Trump is a political disaster because he’s losing a whole generation. Maybe yes, maybe no. This year I’ve dived into a strange new world of internet video and podcasting debate that I didn’t even know existed.

Oh, I knew about music videos that gain amazing popularity: Last year’s prime hit, “Despacito,” has had nearly 5 billion views on YouTube. But would you believe that some videos vigorously opposing feminists, social justice warriors, and stifling of campus speech have more than a million views each? And that some of them would fit under the political banner Holland’s Abraham Kuyper invented late in the 19th century: the Anti-Revolutionary Party?

This is important because the news battle among the elderly and middle-aged is not just mainstream media versus talk radio, and the battle among the young is not just waged on InstaFaceTwit. The alternative media sphere of video (particularly YouTube) and podcasting has become huge among millennials—and some of that programming makes fun of the left.

Let me introduce you to three kinds of millennial mediacrats.

First, I’ve listened to two who profess faith in Christ—Steven Crowder, 30, and a young woman who calls herself “Roaming Millennial.” Crowder, who worked for Fox News from 2009 until his criticism of Sean Hannity in 2013 left him temporarily unemployed, calls his show Louder with Crowder, and he is loud—but I’m impressed that he and the mysterious Roaming relish debate instead of hyperventilating about the need for trigger warnings and safe spaces.

Second, some popular YouTube non-Christians confuse free speech with dirty speech, using F-bombs as punctuation the way their elders might say “uh”—but they are thinking. I’ve picked out several mostly clean videos that can introduce you to the genre:

► “Come Be PC” and “We Didn’t Start the SocJus” are amusing mash-ups from Chris Ray Gun (actually, Chris Ray Maldonado). He is smart, funny, and potty-mouthed (minimal in these two). The YouTube world’s version of Romeo and Juliet is his dating of another millennial, Laci Green, who promotes a sexualized culture but now says she was wrong to see as evil everyone on the YouTube right: See “Taking the Red Pill?”

► “There Are Only 2 Genders” by Blaire White criticizes transgenderism and the LGBT agenda in general, as does another of her videos, “This Is Why I Don’t Like The LGBT Community.” Surprise: White is transgender. Another analysis that has received 1.5 million views, Karen Straughan’s “Feminism and the Disposable Male,” also makes sense.

► Two YouTubers with close to 1 million subscribers each have contrasting styles. “Submit, Puny Males!” by Sargon of Akkad (actually, Carl Benjamin, a Gen Xer popular among millennials) displays acidic British reaction to a UN presentation by Harry Potter actress Emma Watson. “Oppression Olympics” by ShoeOnHead (June Lapine) is all-American girl making fun of feminism.

Third, I recommend one podcaster/YouTuber who is far from a millennial—Canadian professor Jordan Peterson is 55—but has become a father figure for thousands of young men. Peterson defines himself as a Christian in a very loose, Jungian way, which means his recent lecture series on “The Psychological Significance of the Biblical Stories” is full of intriguing ideas but not God’s wisdom. Still, Peterson does get young people reading Genesis—and God can (and will) take it from there.

Watching and listening to these new developments makes me more aware of President Trump’s downside and upside. He’s thrown matches onto underbrush, alienated moderates, pushed the media world further toward coarseness, and made factual accuracy optional. And yet, he’s let dissenters from the dominant political orthodoxy, particularly millennial ones, know they can talk back. That’s something.

Does this column mean that I want these videos and podcasts to be primary listening/viewing for WORLD members? No. Susan and I on our Monday-through-Friday walks listen to The World and Everything in It followed by Albert Mohler’s The Briefing. On weekends we often listen to sermons by Kevin DeYoung.

Still, if you want to communicate with the millennials in your life, take some time for Peterson, Crowder, Roaming, and the others.
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